

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING
BRIEF
AT
ST NICHOLAS' CHURCH,
CONDICOTE,
GLOUCESTERSHIRE



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Archaeological watching brief at St Nicholas' Church, Condicote, Gloucestershire

Andrew Walsh

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on behalf of the Parochial Church Council at St Nicholas' Church, Condicote, Gloucestershire (NGR SP 1517 2834). During the underpinning of the vestry five skeletons were excavated. Four were fully excavated; one was partially excavated. Three were determined to be prepubescent; one was an older juvenile or adult, the last was an adult, possibly male. Due to the nature of the excavations and the lack of any dateable finds it is not possible to assign an accurate date to the inhumations, other than to say that they probably all predate the construction of the vestry in 1888. There was no evidence for coffins, while the size and shape of the grave cuts, where visible, indicate that coffins were not used. No other archaeological deposits were observed.

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Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at St Nicholas' Church, Condicote, Gloucestershire (NGR SP 1517 2834). It was commissioned by the Parochial Church Council (PCC) of St Nicolas Church, Condicote, at the request of Gloucestershire Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC), during the underpinning of a vestry wall. The groundworks were required as the north wall of the vestry was detaching from the rest of the structure due to subsidence.

The project conforms to the Gloucestershire County Council standard brief for archaeological watching briefs (GCC 2007), the *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IfA 2008) and the *Guidance for best practice for treatment of human remains excavated from Christian burial grounds in England* (EH/C of E 2005). The work was undertaken to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012).

2 Aims

The aim of the watching brief was to rapidly identify, record and excavate any human remains revealed within the trench.

3 Methods

3.1 Personnel

The project was undertaken by Andrew Walsh (BSc MSc AlfA FSA Scot); who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2013 and has been practicing archaeology since 2004. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Vaughan (BA MA AlfA). Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt.

3.2 Fieldwork strategy

Fieldwork was undertaken in stages between 31 May 2013 and 7 June 2013. The WA site reference number is P4143.

One trench measuring 4.6m in length and 1.2m in width was excavated by contractors to a maximum depth of 1.5m along the north side of the vestry. The trench was then extended by 0.5m under the vestry wall giving a maximum width of 1.7m. To avoid excessive undermining of the wall the structural engineer required that the excavation under the wall was done in six separate sections, each measuring c 0.8m in length. No additional excavation was allowed so skeletons located across two or more sections were recorded and lifted section by section.

Surfaces were inspected and recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). Due to the nature of the excavation it was not possible to establish the stratigraphic relationship of the graves and only visible physical relationships were recorded. Skeletons were recorded by a unique skeleton number, and were only excavated if required. Once they had been excavated the skeletons were passed to Simon Chamberlain (the church warden) for safe keeping in the church, prior to reburial. It is anticipated that they will be reburied in the trench once the underpinning works are complete.

3.3 Structural analysis

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was effected through the structural evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

3.4 Topography, geology and archaeological context

The site was located on the north side of the medieval church of St Nicholas, Condicote, at a height of approximately 190m AOD. The underlying geology is mapped as limestone of the Hampen Formation (BGS 2013).

Little is known about Condicote prior to the Norman invasion. In 1086 the Domesday book records four estates in Condicote, with a resident population of four slaves. One of these estates was a berewick of Oddington Manor (to the south-east) which was supporting fourteen ploughs and sixteen villagers, four small holders and two riding men (Elrington 1965).

The earliest documentary reference to the church at Condicote is in 1291, although the fabric of the building may date to the 12th century. There is little evidence that the villagers were employed in anything other than agriculture, and the church was comparatively poor throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods. The fabric and plan of the church building appears to have undergone little change until 1888, when it was restored by Mark Hookham of Stow. The vestry was constructed as part of this work (Elrington 1965).

3.5 Current land-use

The site is currently the churchyard of St Nicholas' Church, Condicote. The churchyard is still in use.

4 Structural analysis

The trench and features recorded are shown in Fig 2. The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 1.

4.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits

A light brownish yellow sandy silt clay natural was observed in the base of the trench at a depth of 1.2m to 1.5m below ground level.

4.2 Phase 2: Inhumations

Five graves containing inhumations were identified in the trench. Due to the constrained nature of the works and the similar nature of the fills it was not possible to establish the stratigraphic relationships between the burials. No finds, coffin furniture or other grave goods were found during the works.

Skeleton 1 was located towards the western end of the trench, about 0.5m north of the vestry wall (Plate 1). The skeleton measured approximately 1.2m in length and 0.22m in width. The head was located 1.15m below ground level. The body had been placed in a sub-rectangular grave cut [101] which had been backfilled with a mottled brownish yellow silty clay (102). During excavation it was noted that the knee, pelvis and arm joints were not fused and it is estimated that this individual was prepubescent.

Skeleton 3 was located between SK1 and the vestry wall (Plate 2). The relationship between SK1 and SK3 was not established as SK3 was partly truncated by the underpinning works. The skull, which was located 1.15m below ground level, had also been damaged by the construction of a pipe trench. The skeleton measured 1.75m in length and approximately 0.4m in width. Due to the disturbance by the pipe trench, and its position over another burial, it was not possible to see the grave cut [106] for this individual. It appeared to have been filled by a greyish brown clayey silt (107), although this was clearly subject to contamination from the pipe which had been leaking. During excavation it was noted that it had strong features on the skull and a narrow pelvis suggesting that this was the body of an adult male.

Skeleton 5 was located directly below SK3. It measured 1.25m in length and 0.25m in width (Plates 3 and 4). The head was located 1.25m below ground level. It was placed in an oval grave [108] which was filled with a light greyish brown clayey silt (109), although like deposit (107) it appears to have been contaminated by the leaking pipe. It was noted that knee, pelvis and arm joints were not fused indicating that the individual was prepubescent.

Skeleton 2 was located towards the eastern end of the trench under the vestry wall. The grave, including the lower legs and feet of the skeleton, had been partially truncated during the excavation of the underpinning trench. The skeleton would have measured an estimated 0.75m in length, and

was 0.2m in width (Plate 5). It is considered that the individual was a young child. Due to the truncation the size and shape of the grave [104] was not visible. It had been filled by a mottled grey brown sandy silty clay (105). The head was located 1.4m below ground level.

Skeleton 4 was located north of the vestry wall towards the eastern end of the trench. Most of the skeleton lay below and/or outside the required excavation area so only the head, upper arms and upper body were excavated (Plate 6). The rest of the skeleton remains preserved in situ. It measured 0.34m in width and was considered to be an older juvenile or adult. It had been placed in a grave [110] of undetermined size and shape, which had been filled by a light greyish brown clayey silt (111) with occasional lumps of redeposit natural. The head was located 1.38m below ground level.

4.3 Phase 3: Modern deposits

Overlying the graves was a deep homogenous reddish brown sandy silty clay (100) with frequent sub-angular limestone fragments, measuring up to 1.2m in depth. This was interpreted as a heavily reworked graveyard soil.

5 Synthesis

Five individual inhumations were exposed at depths between 1.15-1.40m below the present ground surface. Four were fully excavated; one was partially excavated. Three were determined to be prepubescent; one was an older juvenile or adult, the last was an adult, possibly male. Due to the nature of the excavations and the lack of any dateable finds it is not possible to assign an accurate date to the inhumations, other than to say that they probably all predate the construction of the vestry in 1888. There was no evidence for coffins, while the size and shape of the grave cuts, where visible, indicate that coffins were not used. No other archaeological deposits were observed.

6 Publication summary

Worcestershire Archaeology has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, Worcestershire Archaeology intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on behalf of Parochial Church Council of St Nicolas Church at St Nicholas Church, Condicote, Gloucestershire (NGR SP 1517 2834). During excavations for the underpinning of the vestry five skeletons were exposed and excavated at a depth of 1.15-1.40m below the present ground surface. Three were determined to be prepubescent; one was an older juvenile or adult, the last was an adult, possibly male. No dateable finds were recovered during the works, although the burials probably all pre-date the construction of the vestry in 1888 and appear not to have been lain in coffins. The skeletons were retained at the church for reburial.

7 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project; Natalie Hill (Churches Officer, Gloucester Diocesan Advisory Committee), Simon Chamberlain and Christine Wynn (Church Wardens, Parochial Church Council, St Nicholas' Church).

8 Bibliography

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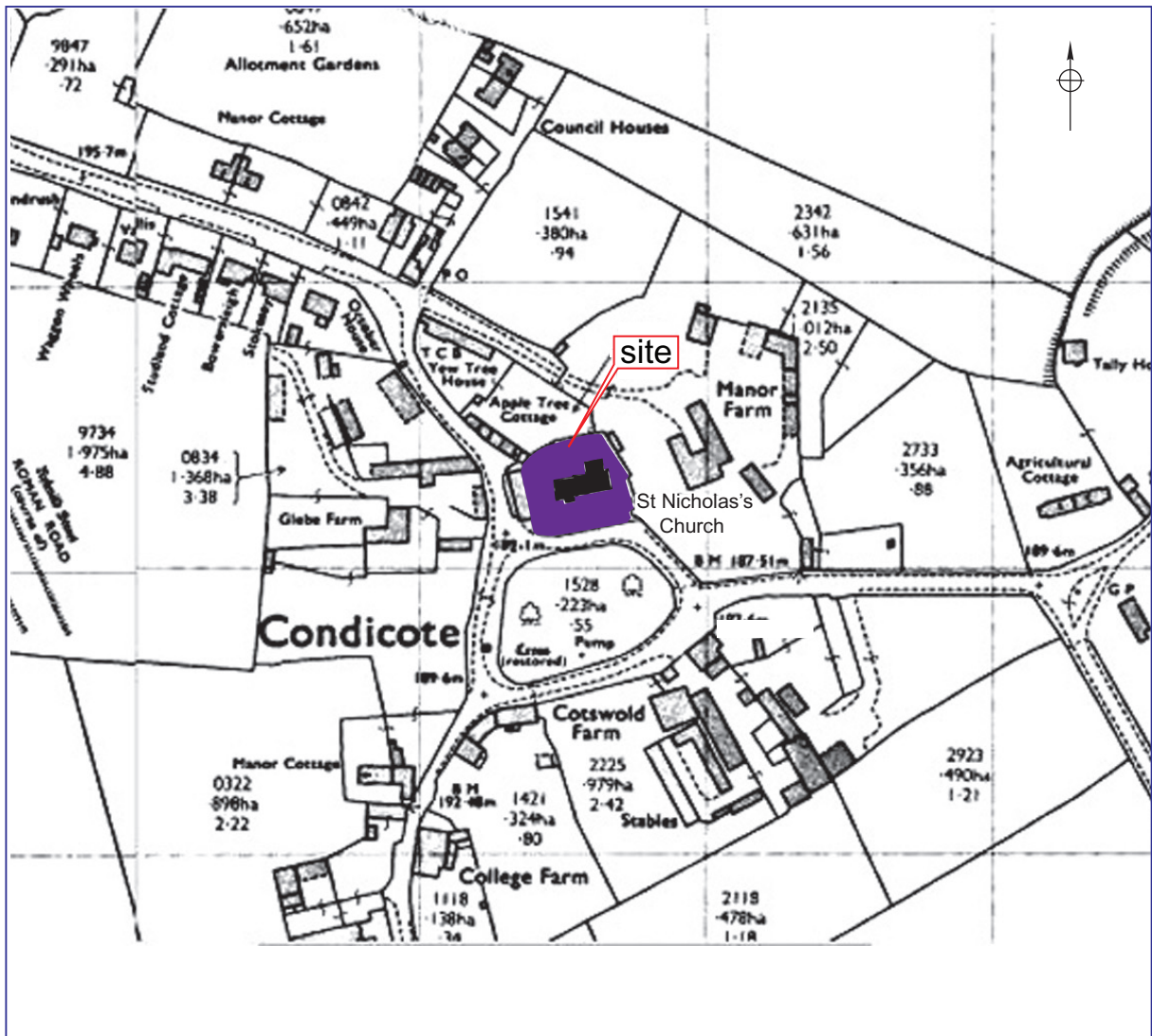
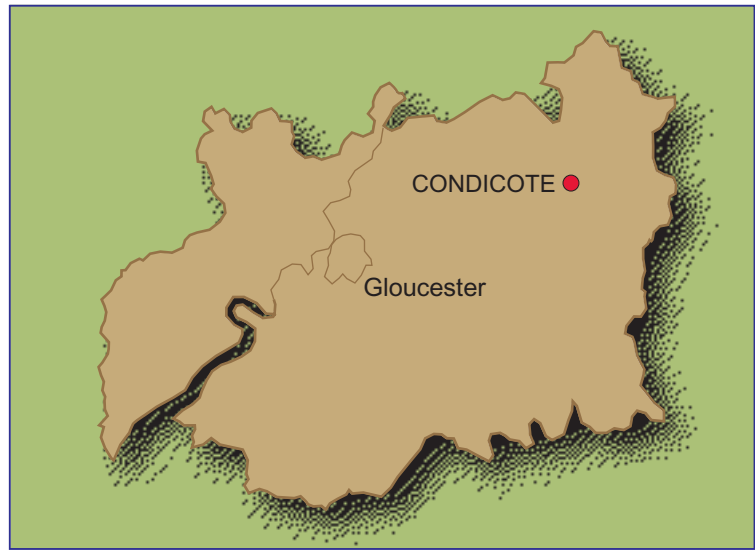
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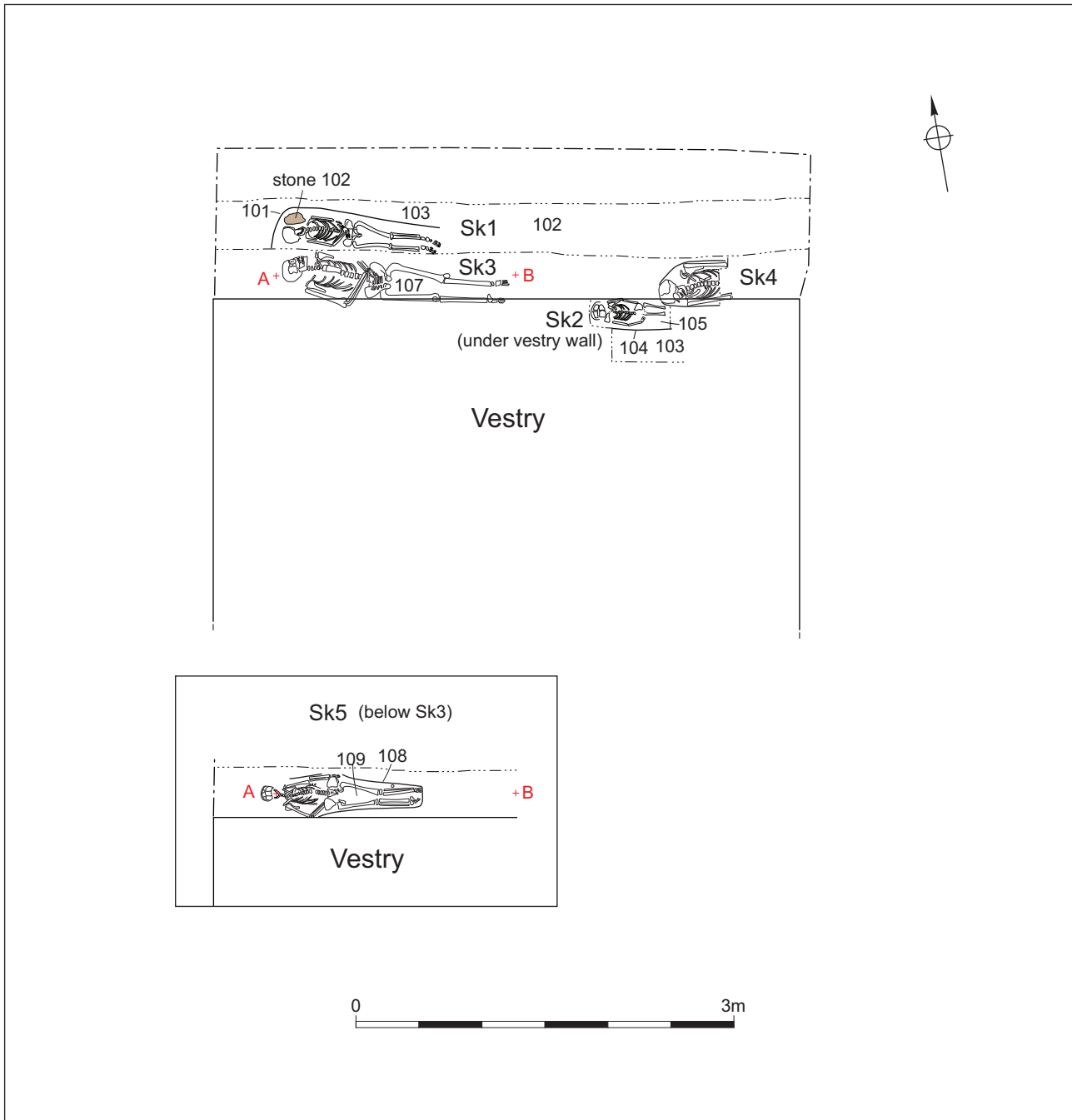
Figures



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Location of the site

Figure 1



Location of graves and human remains

Figure 2

Plates



Plate 1, Skeleton 1



Plate 2, Skeleton 3



Plate 3, Skeleton 5, the head was not excavated until a later phase of work (Plate 4)



Plate 4, The head and shoulders of Skeleton 5



Plate 5, Skeleton 2



Plate 6, Skeleton 4, only the exposed parts of this skeleton were excavated. The rest was left in situ.

Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Maximum dimensions: Length: 4.6m Width: 1.7m Depth: 1.5m

Orientation: east to west

Main deposit description

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
100	Topsoil	Homogenous reddish brown silty clay. Contains frequent sub-angular limestone fragments	0-1.2m
101	Cut	Cut of grave	1.15-1.25m
102	Fill	Mottled brownish yellow silty clay fill of grave 101. Contains SK1. No finds	1.15-1.25m
103	Natural	Light brownish yellow sandy silty clay natural deposit	1.2m+
104	Cut	Cut of grave	1.4-1.5m
105	Fill	Mottled grey brown sandy silty clay fill of grave 104. Contains SK2. No finds	1.4-1.5m
106	Cut	Cut of grave	1.15-1.25m
107	Fill	Greyish brown clayey silt fill of grave 106. Contains SK3. No finds	1.15-1.25m
108	Cut	Cut of grave	1.25-1.35m
109	Fill	Greyish brown clayey silt fill of grave 108. Contains SK5. No finds	1.25-1.35m
110	Cut	Cut of grave	1.35-1.5m+
111	Fill	Light greyish brown clayey silt with occasional lumps of deposited natural. Fill of grave 110. Contains SK4. No finds	1.35-1.5m+

Appendix 2 Technical information

The archive (project code: P4143)

The archive consists of:

- 4 Field progress reports AS2
- 2 Photographic records AS3
- 68 Digital photographs
- 1 Drawing number catalogues AS4
- 1 A4 Scale drawing sheet
- 5 Skeleton records AS6
- 4 Trench record sheets AS41
- 1 CD-Rom/DVDs
- 1 Copy of this report (bound hard copy)

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Corinium Museum
Park Street
Cirencester
Gloucestershire
GL7 2BX
Tel (01285) 655611
