

Archaeological Watching Brief at St Peter's Church, Abbots Morton, Worcestershire

Worcestershire Archaeology
for Nick Joyce Architects

February 2020



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ST PETER'S CHURCH, ABBOTS MORTON, WORCESTERSHIRE

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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SITE INFORMATION

Site name: St Peter's Church, Abbots Morton, Worcestershire
Local planning authority: Diocese Faculty
Planning reference: NA
Central NGR: SP 02675 54973
Commissioning client: Nick Joyce Architects
WA project number: P5635
WA report number: 2745
HER reference: NA
Oasis reference: fieldsec1-372237

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An archaeological watching brief at St Peter's Church, Abbots Morton, Worcestershire

By Graham Arnold

Illustrations by Laura Templeton

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at St Peter's Church, Abbots Morton, Worcestershire (NGR SP 02675 54973). It was commissioned by Nick Joyce Architects on behalf of St Peter's Abbots Morton Parish Council, in advance of proposed works to improve ground conditions against the church wall, for which a faculty was obtained.

The archaeological advisor to the diocese considered that the works had the potential to affect archaeological remains and requested an archaeological watching brief on the works.

The works involved the removal of concrete channels on the north, and south side of the church, up to the church porch. These were replaced with a gravel filled trench, acting as a French Drain. A trench was also excavated on the west side of the church tower in order to install the French Drain.

Excavation involved removal of the concrete drain, which was a maximum of 0.20m deep. Trenches were 0.50m wide and 0.20m deep, with two small trial holes around the north transept to check the church foundations, which were cut to 0.45m below ground level into the natural brownish red clay apart from the 5metre stretch on the southwest side of the bell tower between the buttresses, in which a mixed topsoil and graveyard soil with frequent stone fragments and pebbles was present. This trench was 0.35m wide and 0.30m deep and exposed the church foundation stones at 0.25m below the ground level. No finds, disarticulated human bones or significant archaeological deposits were observed during the works.

Despite the long use of the graveyard the foundations of the church are relatively shallow suggesting that the ground surrounding the Church has been reduced. There is evidence that renovations took place during the 1840s, in 1914-15 and early 20th Century and it is likely that some ground reduction formed a part of these works.

Report

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the project

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA) in October 2019 at St Peter's Church, Abbots Morton, Worcestershire (NGR SP 02675 54973). This comprised observation of the removal of concrete channels and the excavation of a trench surrounding the church walls, to improve drainage. The project was commissioned by Nick Joyce Architects on behalf of St Peter's Abbots Morton Parish Council. A faculty for the works was granted subject to a programme of archaeological works.

The archaeological advisor to the diocese considered that the development had the potential to disturb archaeological remains within the churchyard.

The project conforms to a brief prepared by Victoria Bryant, Archaeological Advisor to the Diocese. A WSI was prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2019) and approved by Victoria Bryant.

The watching brief conformed to industry guidelines and standards set out by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists in the *Standard and guidance: for an archaeological watching brief* (CIfA 2014) and the *Standards and guidelines for archaeological projects in Worcestershire* (WCC 2010).

1.2 Site location, topography and geology

St Peter's Church is located to the West of Abbots Morton. Works took place in the graveyard abutting the church walls.

The underlying geology comprises bedrock of the Mercia Mudstone Group formation, with no superficial deposits recorded (BGS 2019).

2 Archaeological and historical background

2.1 Introduction

Prior to fieldwork commencing, a search of the Worcestershire HER was completed. St Peter's Church, Abbots Morton is listed in *The Buildings of England – Worcestershire* (Brooks & Pevsner 2007) with the gazetteer providing a detailed description and date of the architectural features and the dates of any major refurbishment work.

3 Project aims

The aims of the watching brief were to observe and record archaeological deposits, and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible within the constraints of the Client's groundworks.

In particular post depositional processes were to be considered during the watching brief to ascertain, amongst other aspects, the effect of 19th Century renovations on the church.

4 Project methodology

A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2019). Fieldwork was undertaken between 4th October and 14th October 2019.

Trench 1 was excavated around the church to replace a concrete drainage channel with a gravel filled French drain. The location of the trenches is indicated in Figure 2.

Removal of the concrete channels and all excavation was undertaken by hand.

Observation of excavated areas was undertaken during and after excavation. The exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe well-differentiated archaeological deposits, Deposits were recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012) and were tied into scaled plans provided by developer and georeferenced in QGIS.

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

The project archive is currently held at the offices of Worcestershire Archaeology.

5 Archaeological results

5.1 Trench descriptions

Excavation involved removal of the concrete drain, which was a maximum of 0.20m deep. Trenches were 0.50m wide and 0.20m deep. Two small trial holes were also excavated around the north transept to check the church foundations, which were largely cut to 0.45m below ground level into the natural brownish red clay.

The only exception was a 5 metre stretch on the southwest side of the bell tower between the buttresses, in which a mixed topsoil and graveyard soil with frequent stone fragments and pebbles was observed. This trench was 0.35m wide and 0.30m deep and exposed the church foundation stones at 0.25m below the ground level. No finds or disarticulated human bones or significant archaeological deposits were observed during the works.

5.1.1 Model summary trench description table

Context	Brief description	Max depth (m)	Depth from ground surface (m)	Comments
100	Concrete drainage channel	0.20	0.00	Existing broken concrete drainage channel
101	Graveyard Topsoil	0.30	0.00	Friable, mixed dark grey brown silty clay with frequent mortar, sandstone fragments and sub-round stones. Backfill of church foundations overlaid with turf only seen in trench west of bell tower.
102	Natural substrate	0.25+	0.20	Firm cohesive brownish red clay. Mercian mudstone geology only seen in trial holes around north transept.

Table 1: Summary context descriptions

6 Artefactual evidence

Recovery of artefacts was undertaken according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). In the event, no artefacts were identified which were considered to be suitable for analysis.

7 Environmental evidence

Environmental sampling was approached using standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). In the event, no deposits were excavated which were considered to be suitable for environmental analysis.

8 Discussion and conclusion

Only modern concrete channels and topsoil around the west side of the bell tower were removed during the works. The stone foundations of the church and natural clay observed in two small trial holes.

This demonstrates that the foundations of the church lie at a relatively shallow depth. The earliest part of the church dates from the 12th Century and it would be expected that use of the burial ground would have raised the level in the intervening centuries. It is therefore likely that the ground level has been reduced at some point. Work is recorded as being undertaken at the church during the 1840s, with further work to the interior between 1914-1915 (Brooks & Pevsner, 2007, 103) and it is likely that the reduction took place during these periods.

The concrete drainage channel removed during this work was installed in the later 20th Century.

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved. Conditions were suitable in the trench to identify the presence or absence of archaeological features. The impact of the ground was so minimal that no remains or significant archaeological deposits were recorded or disturbed during the works.

9 Project personnel

The fieldwork was led by Graham Arnold PCIfA.

The project was managed by Tom Rogers MCIfA. The report was produced and collated by Graham Arnold. Illustrations were produced by Laura Templeton.

10 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following: John Middleton, Associate Director, Nick Joyce Architects for commissioning the project, Ian Bishop, Stone Mason and his staff for providing access and their help during the fieldwork.

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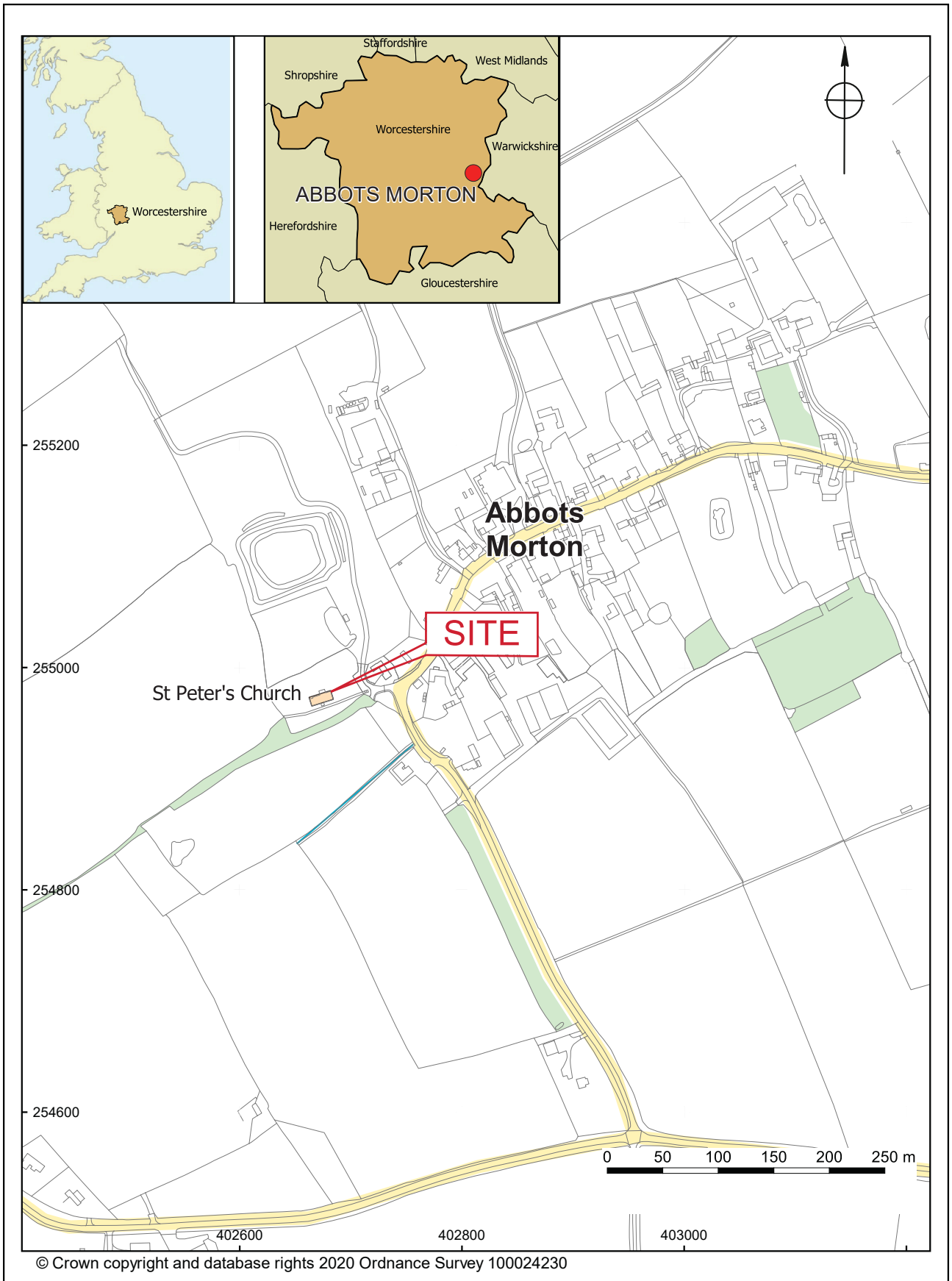
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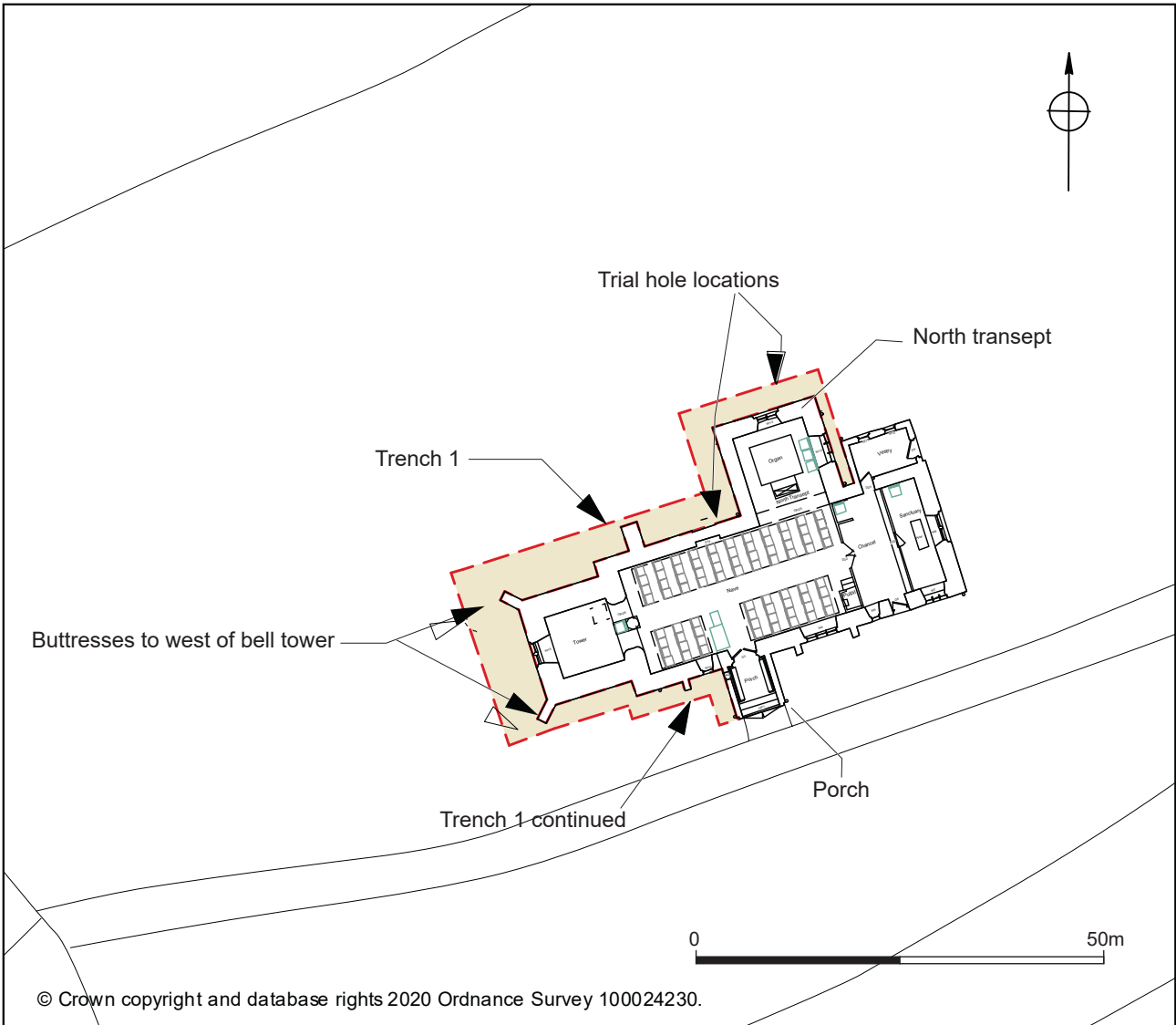
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Figures



Location of the site

Figure 1



Trench plan

Figure 2

Plates



Plate 1: General shot of St Peter's Church Abbots Morton looking northwest



Plate 2: General shot of the St Peter's Church, looking south towards the bell tower and porch



Plate 3: Trial hole on the North side of the North transept. 0.5m and 0.2m scales looking southwest



Plate 4: Trench around north transept looking southeast, 1m scales



Plate 5: Blocked doorway and trial hole on west side of north transept. 1m and 0.2m scales. Looking South



Plate 6: Northwest corner of church. 1m and 0.5m scales. Looking southeast



Plate 7: The church bell tower and porch looking East



Plate 8: Example of width and depth of trench to West of bell tower. 1m and 0.2m scales, looking East



Plate 9: Trench adjacent to the porch, looking North with 1m and 0.5m scales



Plate 10: Trench along southern wall of church, looking East towards the porch. 1m and 0.5m scales visible



Plate 11: Example of the trench on the South side of the bell tower. 1m scales looking North

Appendix 1: Summary of project archive

TYPE	DETAILS*
Artefacts and Environmental	none
Paper	Context sheet, Diary (Field progress form), Drawing,
Digital	Database, GIS, Geophysics, Images raster/digital photography , Spreadsheets, Survey, Text

*OASIS terminology

