

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**ST MATHEW'S CHURCH,
ST MATHEW'S CLOSE,
WALSALL
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

NGR SP 0163 9829

*On behalf of
Messenger Construction*

JUNE 2015

REPORT FOR Messenger Construction
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CONTENTS

	Page
SUMMARY	1
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Site Location	1
1.2 Planning Background	2
1.3 Archaeological Background	3
2. AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION	3
3. STRATEGY	3
3.1 Research Design	3
3.2 Methodology	4
4. RESULTS	4
5. FINDS	6
6. DISCUSSION	6
7. ARCHIVE	7
8. BIBLIOGRAPHY	7

FIGURES AND PLATES

	Page
Figure 1. Site Location	2
Figure 2. Plan and elevation	6
Plate 1. SSW view of walls 07 & 06 & Floor layers 04 & 02	8
Plate 2. ESE view of wall 06 and stanchion pad 09	8
Plate 3. Elevation of stanchion pad 09	9
Plate 4. NNE view of wall 05	9
Plate 5. NNE view of wall 08	10

SUMMARY

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological watching brief at the Church of St Matthew, Walsall, West Midlands. The excavation was located at the west end of the North aisle. The excavations revealed two stone walls which were perpendicular to each other. These walls may have been related to gallery structures dating to before 19th Century. The W-E wall had a construction of brick and stone built onto it which may have been later than the lower construction. The stone and brick pad which supported one of the iron stanchions, supporting the ceiling below the north aisle gallery, was also constructed on top of this wall. The other N-S wall did not appear to have any relationship with any present day structures but may have been a foundation to an earlier west gallery. Above these walls were layers of rubble and the fragmentary remains of stone slab floors and these were below the current stone slab floor.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The Church of St Mathew is situated on St Matthew's Close, Walsall, which is located at National Grid Reference SP 0163 9829. The underlying geology is Pennine Lower Coal Measures Formation - Mudstone, Siltstone and Sandstone. However the site is close to the boundaries of Lower Quarried Limestone Member to the north and east, with Nodular Limestone Member - Limestone and Mudstone to the west

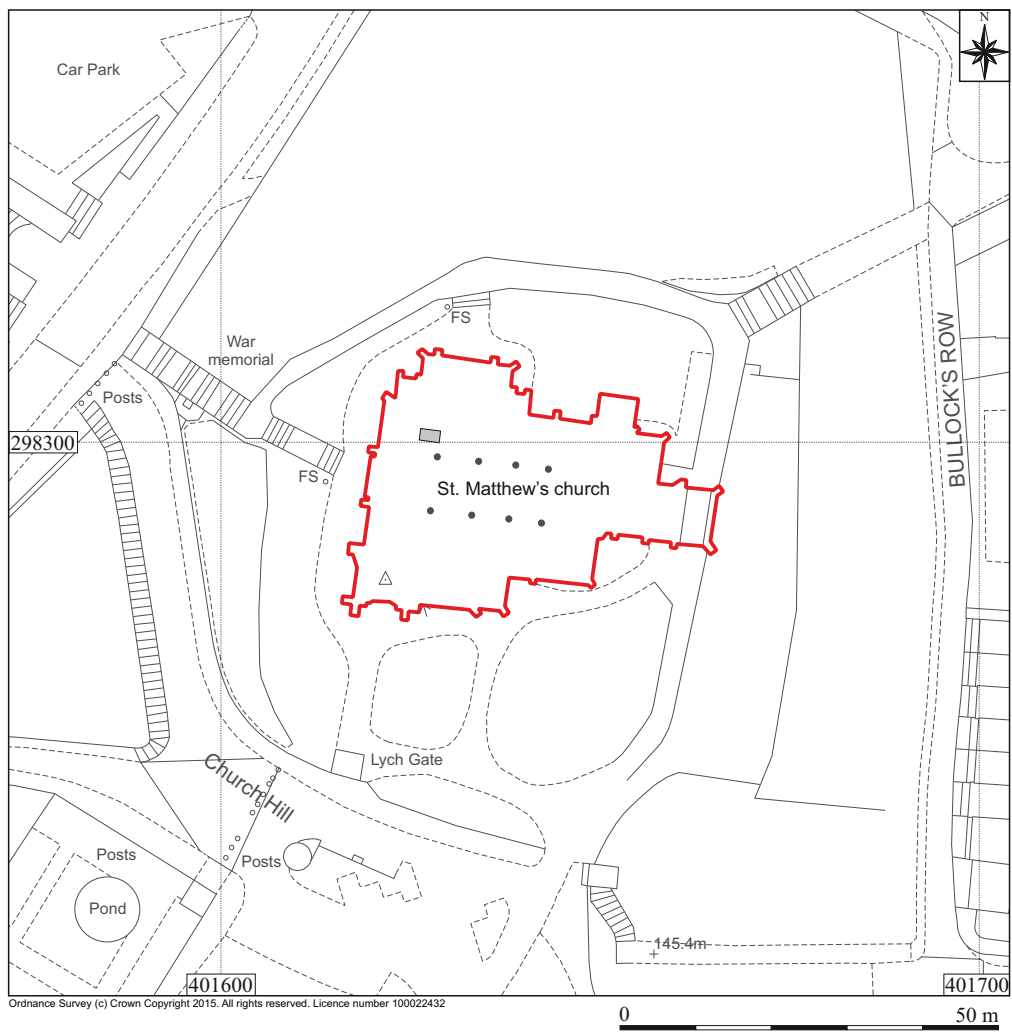
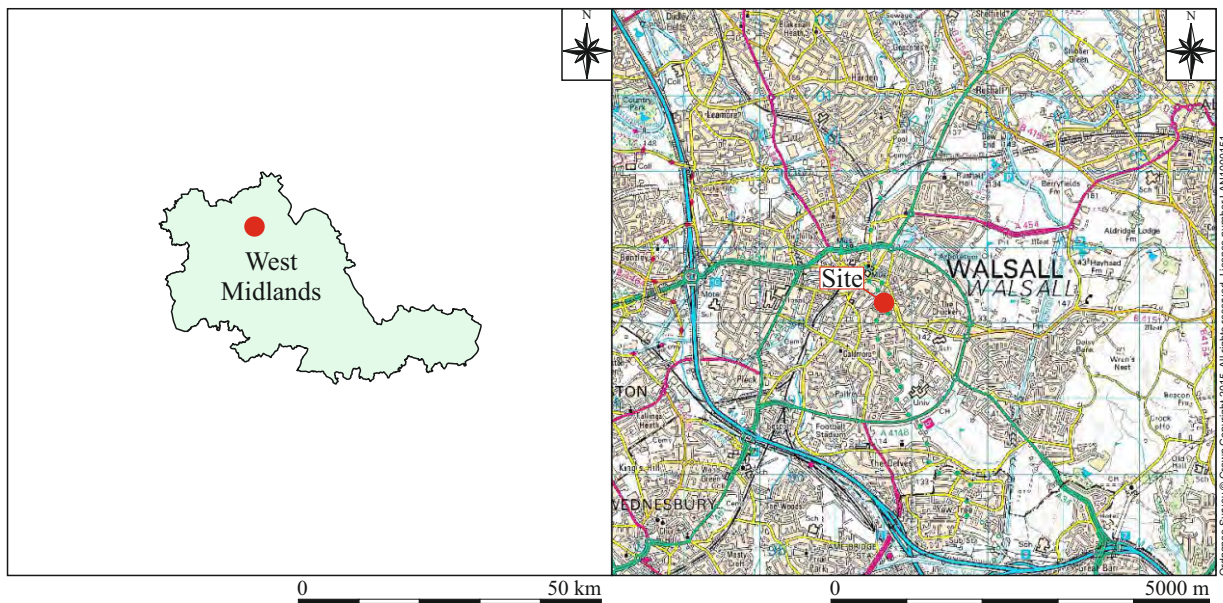
1.2 Planning Background

A faculty for the work was granted by the Diocese of Lichfield to repair a brick wall to a Victorian service duct which had subsided due to a central heating leak. The subsidence had also caused settlement to a stone and brick pad which seats a supporting stanchion to the ceiling of the gallery above the North Aisle. Repairs were to include the supporting of the balcony seating area, re-building of the wall and installation of a suitable concrete foundation. The Archaeology and Historic Environment Officer was consulted regarding this work and recommended an Archaeological Watching Brief.

1.3 Archaeological Background

There was a church at Walsall by 1200. In the later medieval period the church was dedicated to All Saints but around the late 18th century its dedication was changed to St Matthew. The church occupies a prominent position at the end of a ridge of high land overlooking the medieval town and probably occupies the site of the earliest settled area.

The present church is largely of 1820-1 by Francis Goodwin. He encased the walls of the medieval nave and retained the Perpendicular chancel with an arched passage below the east bay. The chance was restored by Ewan Christian in 1877-80. Beneath the three west bays of the chancel is a crypt. The outer (east) part of this has an ashlar tunnel vault of the 15th century. The inner (west) crypt has a blocked opening to the outer part which seems to be Norman.



Key Site boundary Monitored area

Figure 1: Site location

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

- To make a record of any significant remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains.

In particular:

- to record any evidence relating to the medieval church.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with Wolverhampton and Walsall Historic Environment Service the archaeological advisors to the Diocese of Lichfield.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (2014).

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist was present on site during the course of any groundwork that had the potential to reveal or disturb archaeological remains.

Any archaeological deposits and features revealed were cleaned by hand and recorded in plan before being excavated and recorded at an appropriate level. Any archaeological features or other remains i.e. concentrations of artefacts, were recorded by written, drawn and photographic record. Where archaeological features were exposed during any ground reduction but otherwise would remain unaffected they were recorded only by plan and written description. Where remains were impacted on then they were to be sample excavated.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate. A photographic record was also produced.

4 RESULTS (Figure 2)

All layers, deposits and features were given a unique context number. Numbers in brackets represent layers, deposits and fills. Numbers in bold represent masonry features and number without brackets refer to cut features.

An area of stone slab 1.7m by 1.55m was removed so that the south wall to the Victorian service could be accessed and removed and a new foundation dug for the wall. The excavation was between 0.6 and 0.8m deep.

The lowest layer excavated was coarse dark red brown and black sandy layer (11). This was the lowest layer and was deeper than 0.25m. The cuts to several wall foundations were dug into this layer (Fig. 2, Trench plan).

Cut 12 was the proposed foundation cut to wall **07**. Wall **07** was around 0.4m high above the limit of the excavation and was 0.35m wide (plate 1). The revealed wall length was 1m and extended southwards beyond the limit of the excavation. The northern corner of the wall was constructed from two large, half square, smoothly dressed blocks. These blocks had been cut on the diagonal and then one block was laid on the other to form a square. The upper block measured 0.5m at its longest point and was 0.35m wide.

Above these blocks was a more roughly hewn large stone slab which was between 0.08 and 0.1m thick. Running perpendicular from the north corner of this wall, towards the east, was wall **06** (Plate 1 & 2). The height of this wall above the lower limit of the excavation was between 0.12 and 0.25m. The wall was greater than 1m in length and 0.65m wide. The wall was formed from rectangular blocks that had been cut on the diagonal and squared blocks. The wall was inclined towards its northern edge.

Built on top of the stone wall **06** was wall **05** (Plate 4). The wall was constructed from dark red bricks that had been laid on their faces across the width of the wall in a rowlock. They were bonded with lime mortar and topped by stone blocks that were laid along the length of the wall and secured to the bricks with mortar. The blocks were 0.35m to 0.4m in length and were 0.2m wide. The height of **05** was between 0.25m and 0.3m.

Wall **05** abutted a stone and brick platform **09** (Fig 2, Elevation; Plate 2 & 3). This was a platform to an iron stanchion which supported the ceiling on the underside of the north aisle gallery. The platform was constructed from seven layers of brick and stone slabs and stood 0.55 high. It was built directly onto wall **06** and the inclination of this wall appeared to have caused the platform to lean towards the north.

Across the northern part of the trench was the wall to the Victorian service which ran east to west, **08** (plate 5). It was six to seven courses deep and was laid in a third bond style. The wall was only one brick wide except in the middle of the wall where a buttress projected 0.11m out from the wall on its south face. The buttress was 0.33m wide and was built up to the northern end of wall **07**. Wall **08** was built along the Northern edge of the stone and brick pad **09** and was tied into the outer bricks of its construction. This wall was 0.6m high and appeared to be built directly onto the sand layer (11); any cut for the wall was shallow and not discernable.

Surrounding all the walls was a 0.3 to 0.4m thick, pink and grey brown deposit of sand and rubble with frequent stone inclusions (10). It is possible that this deposit represented several episodes of deposition but this was not visible. Deposited above this were the fragmentary remains of a stone slab floor **04**. The floor had been laid on

top of the rubble and was also visible laid on top of wall **07** (plate 1). The floor was around 0.1m thick and was fragmentary; it appeared to have been patched with stone. Above this layer was a 0.1m layer of pink sand and rubble (03). Above this was the remains of another fragmentary stone slab floor which was also very patchy (02). The layer was around 0.06m thick and had been in-filled with rubble and stone between the gaps. Above this was a 0.1m thick layer of sand and fine rubble (01), this layer was below the current slab flooring.

5 FINDS

No finds were recovered from the excavations and all the bricks, tiles and stones were left on site.

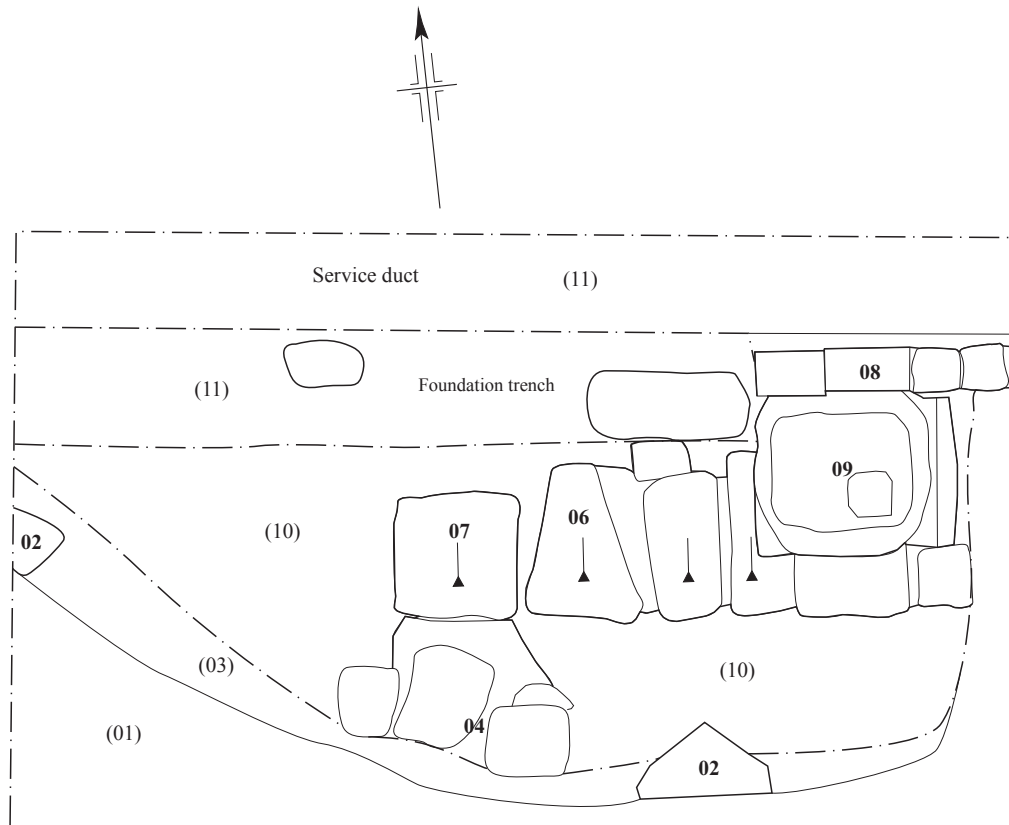
6 DISCUSSION

The excavations revealed two walls below the very fragmentary remains of two stone slab floors and rubble deposits. It is possible that the two walls might predate the 19th Century although the East–West wall may be contemporary with the present structures.

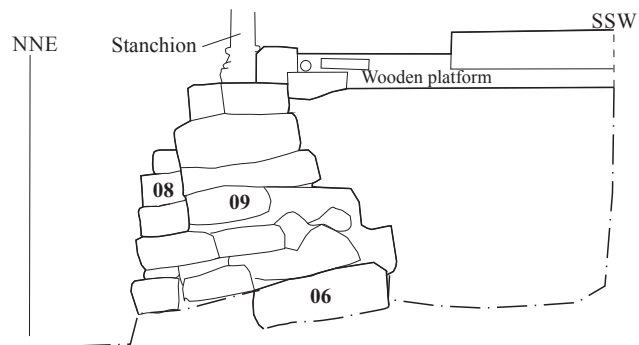
Wall **06** follows the E-W line of the present iron stanchions which support the ceiling below the gallery in the north aisle, and it is possible that it contemporary with this construction. The current galleries date to the reconstruction of 1819-21 (Baggs *et al.* 1976). This interpretation would suggest a stone foundation onto which a wall of brick and stone construction was built with stone and brick pads constructed at the point of each stanchion.

It is also possible that wall **06** is part of an earlier phase of construction and may be related to the construction of earlier galleries. Several private galleries had been erected in the 18th century and by 1819 there were irregular galleries on the four sides of the nave. During the reconstruction of 1819-21 the galleries in the nave and aisles were removed and replaced by new ones of regular design (Baggs *et al.* 1976). Wall **06** may relate to this earlier phase of gallery construction and was later reused as a foundation for the stanchions to the present north aisle gallery.

Running perpendicular N-S from the west corner of wall **06**, wall **07** was entirely of stone construction, or at least as far as had been excavated. Unlike wall **06** it did not align with any upstanding structures relating to the gallery above. It is suggested that **07** and **06** may both relate to gallery structures on the west and north sides of the nave probably dating to the 18th Century. In the case of the North aisle gallery, the stanchions of the new construction followed the line of wall **06**, whereas the stanchions of the present West gallery are set back from the position of Wall **07** and so this wall was not reused.



Trench Plan



Elevation of masonry structure 09

Figure 2: Plan and Elevation



7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper record

The project brief

Written scheme of investigation

The project report

The primary site record

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to the Walsall Museum.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chartered Institute for Archaeologists 2014 *Standards and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief*

A P Baggs, G C Baugh and Johnston D A, 'Walsall: Churches', in *A History of the County of Stafford: Volume 17, Offlow Hundred (Part)*, ed. M W Greenslade (London, 1976), pp. 226-239 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/staffs/vol17/pp226-239> [accessed 15 May 2015].



Plate 1. SSW view of walls 07 & 06 & Floor layers 04 and 02



Plate 2. ESE view of wall 06 and stanchion pad 09



Plate 3. Elevation of Stanchion pad 09



Plate 4. NNE view of wall 05.



Plate 5. NNE view of wall 08.