

ST.GILES CHURCH, OLLERTON

A Report on the Archaeological Watching Brief

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### SUMMARY

- Trent & Peak Archaeological Unit was commissioned by Revd Canon R.A.Kirton on behalf of Ollerton Parochial Church Council to conduct an archaeological watching brief during the laying of drains around the church of St.Giles in February 2000.
- The groundwork comprised the excavation of pipe trenches c.300mm wide and c.400mm deep, at locations on all four sides of the church, feeding into one existing and three new c.1000mm deep soakaways.
- Observation of the groundwork was followed by the recording of trench sections and inspection of the spoil for artefacts, both by hand and with the aid of a metal detector.
- Present throughout the groundwork was a basic stratigraphy of a topsoil 0001, overlying 0002 a disturbed subsoil or grave-earth. This grave-earth contained disarticulated human bone and at least one grave 0010, left undisturbed in one of the new soakaways.
- In those areas where the excavation was deepest, 0002 was found to be partly leached, forming a greyish-brown basal layer 0003.
- A number of artefacts were recovered from the grave-earth including sherds of medieval and post-medieval pottery.
- Further less substantial contexts of post-medieval to modern date were also identified including localized layers 0005,0007,0009,0011, two soakaways 0004 and 0008, and an existing pipe trench to the vestry 0006.
- No significant structural remains or readily identifiable archaeological features i.e. pits/ditches were encountered.
- The shallow nature of the groundwork limited the destructive impact upon the archaeological deposits present around the church.
- It is possible the absence of structural remains may indicate the church prior to c.1780 lay either largely along the same line or internal to the present ground plan.

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by L.Elliott

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## Acknowledgements

The project supervisor was L.Elliott, with help in the preparation of the report from M.Parnham. The project was monitored by Dr.C.Brooke (Diocesan Archaeological Advisor) and Ursilla Spence (Senior Archaeological Officer, Nottinghamshire County Council).



## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Trent & Peak Archaeological Unit was commissioned by Revd. Canon R.A. Kirton on behalf of Ollerton Parochial Church Council to conduct an archaeological watching brief at the church of St. Giles in February 2000, during renewal of the rainwater disposal system.

## **2. SITE BACKGROUND**

The church lies at the centre of old Ollerton village SK65406735, close to the River Maun on Bunter Pebble Beds (1:50,000 Geological Sheet. 113), at a height of c.44m.O.D. There is no mention of a church at Ollerton in the Domesday Survey c.1086 (Morris 1977, 9,17.17,3), although this omission does not signify the absence of a church. The earliest indication of a church occurs in c.1200 when William, a parson of Ollerton, witnessed a land grant (Train 1961,146). However, by the 18th century the church was described as much dilapidated and was rebuilt c.1780 (Pevsner 1979,281). The dedication is to St. Giles although this was originally ascribed to St. Leonard (Raine 1882,6).

## **3. OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the archaeological work was to observe the contractors excavations, recording as appropriate any archaeological stratigraphy, artefacts or palaeo-environmental remains found to be present. The groundwork comprised the excavation of pipe trenches c.300mm wide and c.400mm deep, at locations along all four sides of the church (Plate.1 & 2), feeding into one existing and three new c.1000mm deep soakaways.

## **4. METHODOLOGY**

The archaeological work was conducted as a watching brief, observing the contractors during hand excavation of the groundwork. Where possible the base and sections of the drainage trenches and soakaways were cleaned by hand, inspected for archaeological deposits, then recorded by both drawing and photograph. The pipe trench was notionally divided into separate stretches numbering from 01 to 05, and the soakaways 06 to 08. Limited excavation against the church foundations included 02a for a downpipe and 05a for a pipe through the west wall of the tower.

Each deposit present was given an individual four digit context number (e.g.0001), while each artefact was given a three character finds code (e.g. AAA). All artefacts visible in section were recorded on section drawings, while the contractors spoil was inspected for artefacts both by hand and with the aid of a metal detector, with finds location noted by stretch number.

Probably due to the shallow nature of the groundwork very little human skeletal material was encountered. The small quantity that was consisted largely of disarticulated material from the much deeper excavation of the soakaways. No human remains were removed from site, instead these were left at their point of discovery for subsequent reburial during backfilling.



#### 4. RESULTS

The stretch of pipe trench running along the north side of the church was excavated and backfilled by the main contractors without notifying the archaeological contractor. The affect on the archaeological deposits present is unknown.

Within the confines of the monitored pipe trenches and soakaways no significant structural remains or readily identifiable archaeological features (i.e. pits/ditches) were encountered. Present throughout both was a basic stratigraphy of two layers comprising 0001 a topsoil, overlying 0002 a disturbed subsoil or grave-earth. Sections of the pipe trenches containing little information beyond the presence of 0001 and 0002 have not been reproduced for the report. In those areas where the excavation was deepest 0002 was found to be partly leached, forming a greyish basal layer 0003. Further, less substantial contexts were also identified including localized layers 0005, 0007, 0009, 0011, grave 0010, an existing pipe trench 0006, and soakaways 0004 and 0008. Details of these results are described below.

##### **Existing Church Foundations (02a,05a).**

The existing church wall of the nave 02a (Figure.2), and the tower 05a (Figure.3, Plate.3), were exposed to a depth of c.400mm. This was insufficient to reveal anything beyond a further two courses of ashlar in the nave wall, and a single course of ashlar above a slightly protruding stone plinth in the tower wall.

##### **Grave-earth 0002/0003 and Grave 0010.**

Layer 0002 comprised a mid-brown loamy sand with a variable 5%-15% rounded stone content up to 0.10m in size. It appeared very mixed in nature apparently as a result of burial activity, accentuated in 08 by tree root disturbance (Figure.4, Plate.4). Disarticulated human skeletal material was present throughout 0002 with the greatest concentration found in 06 and 07. This included the articulated remains 0010, comprising pelvis and leg bones, which were left *insitu* in the south-east corner of 06 (Figure.5, Plate.5). Grave-earth such as 0002 is characteristic of churchyards subject to long periods of burial (Rodwell 1981, 146). The limitations of the groundwork concealed the full depth of 0002, however at its base in the deeper soakaways 06 and 07, it appeared to merge into a slightly more greyish-brown layer 0003 (Figure.6). This is unlikely to constitute a truly separate layer, but represents leaching of 0002 by groundwater, indicating little recent disturbance from burial. Overcrowding of the graveyard was recognized in a meeting of 1860, leading to the creation of a new cemetery in 1863 at Forest Road (Bradbury 1985,56).

A number of artefacts ranging from medieval to modern in date were recovered from the spoil of 0002, highlighting its disturbed character. Artefacts included 13 sherds of post-medieval pottery (dark slipped earthenwares and stoneware), clay pipe stems, a post-medieval dress pin and single fragments of brick, roof tile, roof slate and lead waste. Three small abraded sherds of medieval pottery were found, all in 01 on the north side of the chancel, this included the base fragment of a reduced green glazed vessel c. 13th century in date.

##### **Layers 0005,0007,0009,0011**

A small number of more localised layers were found to be present (Figure.7). The most substantial of these was 0005 and 0007 in 01. They comprised dark brown loamy sand up to 300mm deep containing an abundance of charcoal and ash, devoid of finds. Both of these deposits lay over the grave-earth 0002 immediately below the topsoil, which in conjunction with the presence of a layer of tarmac, suggests a late date for their formation. These probably redeposited layers maybe connected with past work on or around the church, such as existing pathways, the pipe trench 0006, soakaway 0004 or construction of the vestry.

Two more localised layers found in 06, 0009 and 0011, represent the foundation trench for the east retaining wall of the main churchyard steps. Of these layers 0009 was filled with large quantities of charcoal and ash, while 0011 contained fragments of disarticulated bone.

**Modern Features 0006,0004,0008,**

In 01 an existing water pipe and trench 0006 to the vestry, were present (Figure.7). The trench contained a dark brown fill undistinguishable from layer 0007, suggesting this layer may have been redeposited during construction of the pipe.

Two soakaways were uncovered, 0004 to the north of the chancel and 0008 close to the south porch. In 01, 0004 consisted of a roughly rectangular 800mm x 600mm capstone, 300mm below ground surface (Plate.6). Removal of the capstone revealed the soakaway to be still functioning, and consist of a six sided brick structure with a bell shaped profile c.2.5m deep (Figure.7). This was re-used for the new drainage system, reducing the need for a fourth new soakaway. In contrast the other soakaway 0008 was more crudely constructed comprising a void randomly filled with brick and stone (Figure.8). The brick present in both soakaways suggests a late 19th/20th century date for their construction.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The shallow nature of the groundwork limited the destructive impact upon the archaeological deposits present around the church. As a result findings were confined to exposure of the grave-earth and the recovery of a small number of residual artefacts from within it, including medieval pottery. It is possible the absence of structural remains may indicate the church prior to c.1780 lay either largely along the same line or internal to the present ground plan.



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Plate 1: 01, the pipe trench running north-east of the chancel.



Plate 2: 02, the pipe trench running along the south side of the nave and chancel.





Plate 3: 05a, the partially exposed foundation of the tower with pipe inserted through the wall.



Plate 4: 08, showing grave-earth 0002 and the presence of root disturbance.



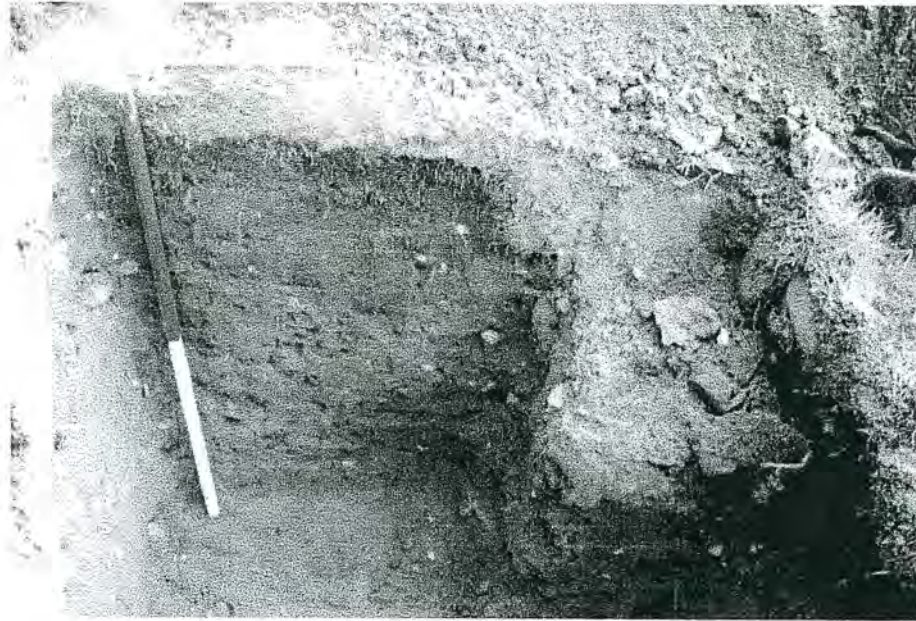


Plate 5: 06, west facing section largely comprising grave-earth 0002, the north-east corner is not excavated due to the presence of *insitu* human remains.



Plate 6: 01, the capstone of soakaway 0004, lifted to reveal a six-sided brick structure.



Figure 7: 01, west facing section. Scale 1:50.

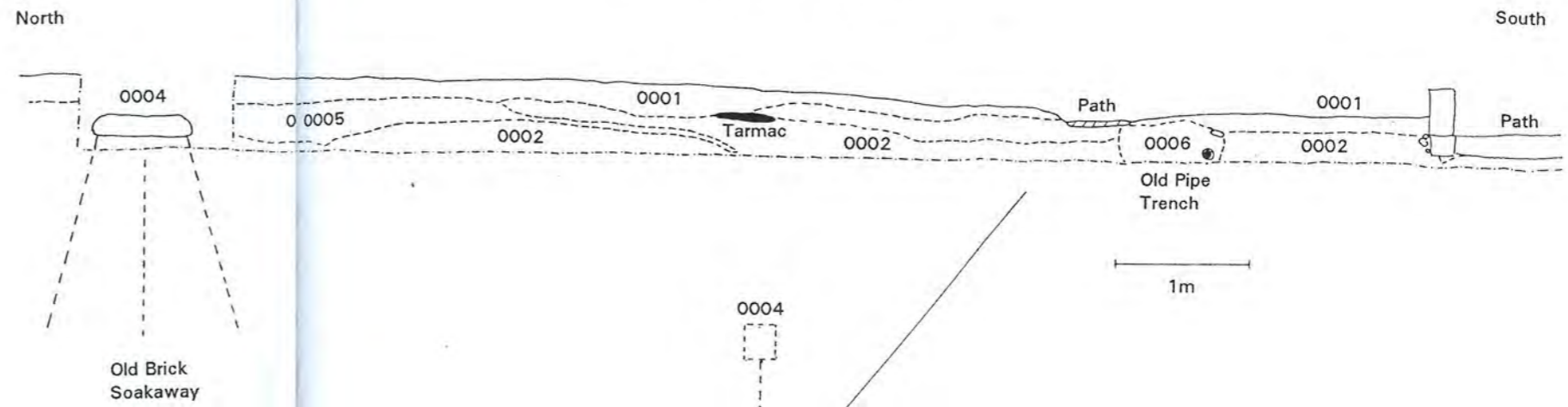


Figure 4: 08, south facing section. Scale 1:50.

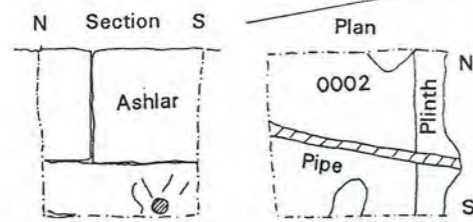
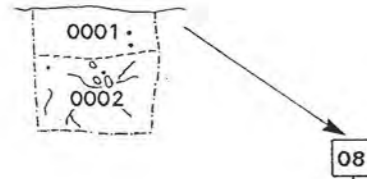


Figure 3: 05a, west facing section and plan of exposed tower foundation. Scale 1:20.

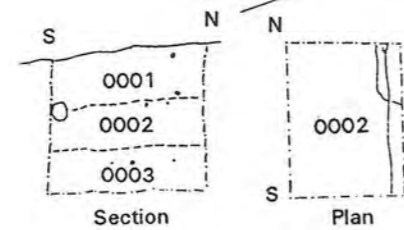


Figure 6: 07, east facing section and plan. Scale 1:50.

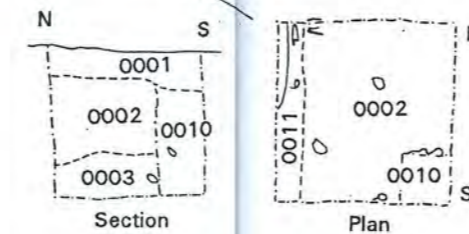


Figure 5: 06, west facing section and plan. Scale 1:50.

Figure 8: 02, plan of 0008. Scale 1:50.

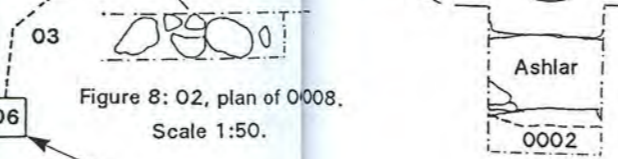


Figure 2: 02a, south facing section of exposed nave foundation. Scale 1:20.

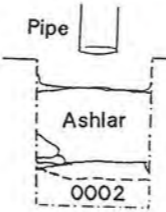
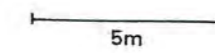


Figure 1: Location of groundwork. Scale 1:200.



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= Monitored Pipe Trench

