

CHURCH OF ST MARY THE BLESSED VIRGIN, SWAINSWICK

Report on the Archaeological monitoring of drainage works



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The PCC of St Mary the Blessed Virgin, Swainswick

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The photograph on the cover shows the excavated area: facing S.

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Archaeological monitoring of drainage works

Summary

Archaeological monitoring of a short length of new drainage on the west side of the church only recorded offset footings, an existing stone capped culvert and 19th - 20th Century deposits.

Location

The site is located at NGR ST 75652 68417 Upper Swainswick, Innox Lane, Bath, Somerset BA1 8DA.

Introduction

There was a possibility that archaeological remains may have existed on the site, but little was known of their extent or their state of preservation. The Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) advised that the archaeological deposits that may occur on the site should be recorded as they were encountered and therefore recommended that an archaeological Watching Brief was carried out during the works.

The PCC of St Mary in consultation with their architects Benjamin + Beauchamp Architects Ltd appointed the writer of this document to carry out the archaeological monitoring.

The subsequent monitoring was undertaken on the 5th of February 2018.

Archaeological Background

The Church is Grade II* Listed, List entry number 1232679, It is recorded as an Anglican Parish Church, constructed in the 12th Century, altered in the 14th and 15th Centuries and restored in the mid to late 19th Century by C.E Davis of Bath.

Methodology

The stone lined drainage channel on the north side of the church was up to 750mm below the existing ground surface in the proposed area for the new drain. The west end of this drain could be seen disappearing into a vegetation covered void (Fig, 1).

A trench approximately 2.8m long, 450mm wide and up to 700mm deep was excavated in a grass covered area on the west side of the church starting 350mm south of the drain on the north side of the church. The trench was excavated using a mini-digger and



Figure 1. Existing stone drainage channel & vegetation covered void.

finished off by hand (Fig,2). A further area approximately 2.2m long and 1m wide on the south side of the trench was also cleared of existing concrete and stone slabs to reveal the soakaway for the rainwater spout.

It was originally envisaged that once the new drainage trench had been excavated along the side of the church, that it may have been necessary to continue the trench around the west side of the church and form a new soakaway in the churchyard to the south. This was subsequently deemed unnecessary as the contractors were able to connect in to an existing drain.

The works were recorded by written descriptions; measured sketch plans and sections supplemented by a photographic record using digital photography and appropriate scales.



Figure 2. New drainage channel under excavation.

Results

The removal of up to 100mm of turf and topsoil revealed a deposit of mixed brown and grey silty clay containing 19th and 20th Century artefacts, this deposit was seen to continue for the full length and depth of the trench.

In the west side of the trench a stone capped culvert was uncovered at a depth of between 350mm and 500mm (Fig. 3). This feature appeared to be constructed from a combination of local limestone and Bath Stone slabs, between 100mm and 140mm high and at least 300mm wide. The full width and depth of this feature were not seen during these works as it was possible to fit the new drainage system around the east side of the culvert without causing any further disturbance.

The chamfered offset church footings were also revealed at a depth of 550mm in the east side of the trench and were seen to protrude up to 100mm away from the church wall (Fig. 3). Again, these were not disturbed as it was possible to locate the new drain in between these and the culvert.



Figure 3. Stone capped culvert in W side of trench: facing S, 1m scale.

Removal of the slabs surrounding the existing water spout drain and concrete slab to the south of the drain revealed a modern, loose rubble deposit (Figs. 4 & 5) which had been used to infill behind an existing retaining wall, located 1m west of the church wall. This feature was of drystone construction and comprised of roughly faced limestone blocks and was at least 500mm high (Fig. 6). Three courses were exposed, and each course was up to 120mm high, the full depth and width of this feature was not exposed during these works, but it would appear to be modern.



Figure 4. Existing drain: facing SE.



Figure 5. Rubble deposit: facing S, 1m scale.



Figure 6. Retaining wall: facing NW.

Conclusion

Although no exact dating evidence for the culvert was found during these works it is assumed to be associated with the restoration works carried out in the 19th Century. The access along this side of the church is very narrow and perhaps it was decided that it was safer to underground this section of drainage rather than have an open deep channel. Grave stones were also visible approximately 1m west of the church in this area so there is also the possibility that the ground surface may have been raised to accommodate more burials?

The rubble deposit at the south end of the area would appear to be recent and is probably associated with the construction of the boiler room.

Acknowledgements

The writer would like to thank St Mary`s PCC for commissioning him to undertake the archaeological monitoring. Michael Vaughan (Benjamin & Beauchamp Architects Ltd) is also gratefully acknowledged for coordinating the works. All the Ellis & Co staff that I met on site are also thanked for their interest and assistance during the works.

Keith Faxon, March 2018.