

ST HELEN'S CHURCH, HEMSWORTH
WEST YORKSHIRE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



JB Archaeology Ltd

On behalf of

St Helen's PCC

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JB Archaeology Ltd

Rosebank, Newby Wiske, Northallerton, North Yorkshire, DL7 9EX

Tel: 01609 773764, Mobile: 07903 867160

Email: johnbuglass@yahoo.com Web: www.jbasarchaeology.co.uk

Company Number 10299372

VAT Registration Number 247354789

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**ST HELEN'S CHURCH, HEMSWORTH,
WEST YORKSHIRE**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on the various ground-works for a new drainage system in the churchyard at St Helen's Church, Hemsworth, West Yorkshire (NGR SE 42887 13256). Unsurprisingly the monitoring noted a very modest collection of disarticulated human bone along with a very small amount of pottery and butchered animal bone. No articulated human remains were encountered during the works. The few human bones that were encountered were passed to the incumbent for re-burial. The lack of any articulated burials is probably mainly due to the extensive re-building of the church in the 19th century and later 20th century drainage works

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document presents the results of an archaeological watching brief on the various ground works for a new toilet and kitchen at St Helen's Church, Wakefield Road, Hemsworth, West Yorkshire (NGR SE 442887 413256) (Figure 1). The church is in Hemsworth civil parish of Wakefield District.
- 1.2 The watching brief was undertaken by Simon Tomson for JB Archaeology Ltd on the 21st July 2017 on behalf of St Helen's PCC.

2.0 BACKGROUND

Historic Background

- 2.1 The place name for Hemsworth is first recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 as *Hamelesuurde* and then in the 12th century as *Hymeleswrde*. The name is derived from the Old English *worth* and a personal name and means 'enclosure of a man called Hymel' (Mills, 1998, 175).
- 2.2 The West Yorkshire Archaeology Advisory Service (WYAAS) have summarised the history of St. Helen's as follows:

The church of St Helen's is known to date at least the 14th century although its dedication to St. Helen may indicate a much earlier foundation. The church is located at the eastern end of the medieval planned village of Hemsworth. The church has an irregular plan and was subject to several stages of rebuilding during the 19th century. The church yard which falls to south and west had an irregular oval in plan (shown on the Ordnance Survey First Edition 6" to the mile map sheet 263). This map also appears to show the church yard extended further to the west (Wakefield Road) and burials may therefore be present in the footway here. The low retaining walls along Wakefield and Station Roads are thought to be 18th century in date and comprise coursed masonry with strap pointing and copings (National Heritage List for England No. 1,265,774 and West Yorkshire Historic Environment Record PRN 931). The walls are buttressed and a possible earlier entrance is suggested by a pair of pier like buttresses on Wakefield Road. Numerous grave markers are present in the churchyard the majority of which are early 19th century in date.

Geology and Soils

- 2.3 The underlying solid geology of the site is Upper Westphalian of the Upper Carboniferous limestone (British Geological Survey, 2001). The quaternary geology is unclassified by the British Geological Survey (British Geological Survey 1977). The soils that have weathered from this are the Rivington 1 association which are well drained coarse loamy soils (Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1983).

Topography and Land-use

- 2.4 The church sits on an area of high ground to the east of the settlement of Hemsworth. The land use around the site is urban in nature.

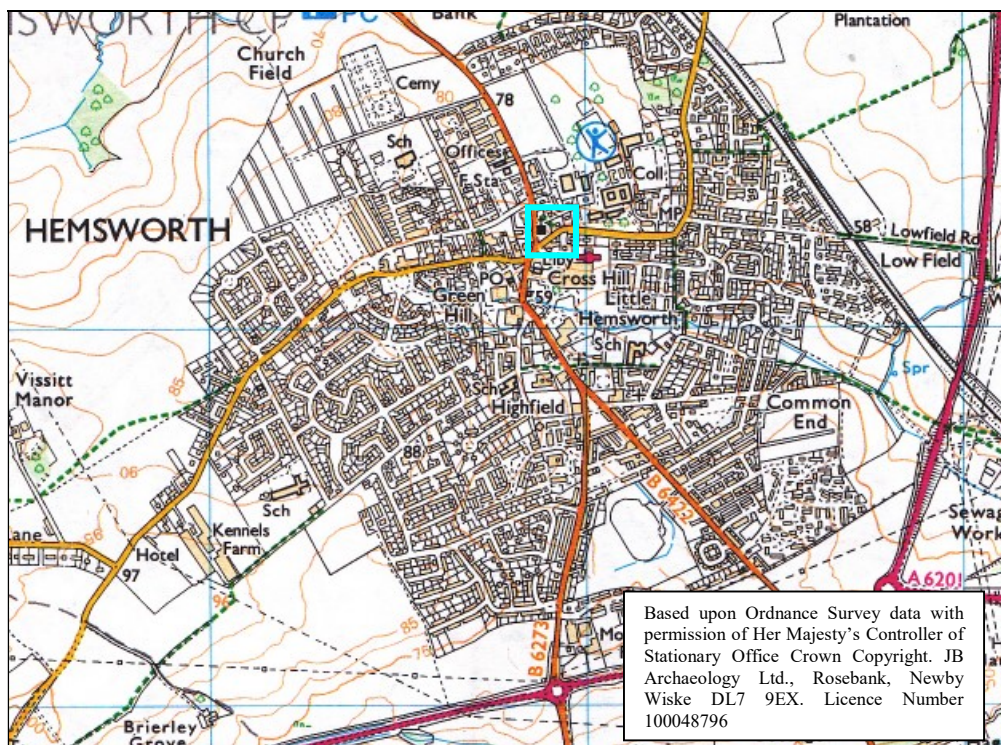


Figure 1. General Site Location

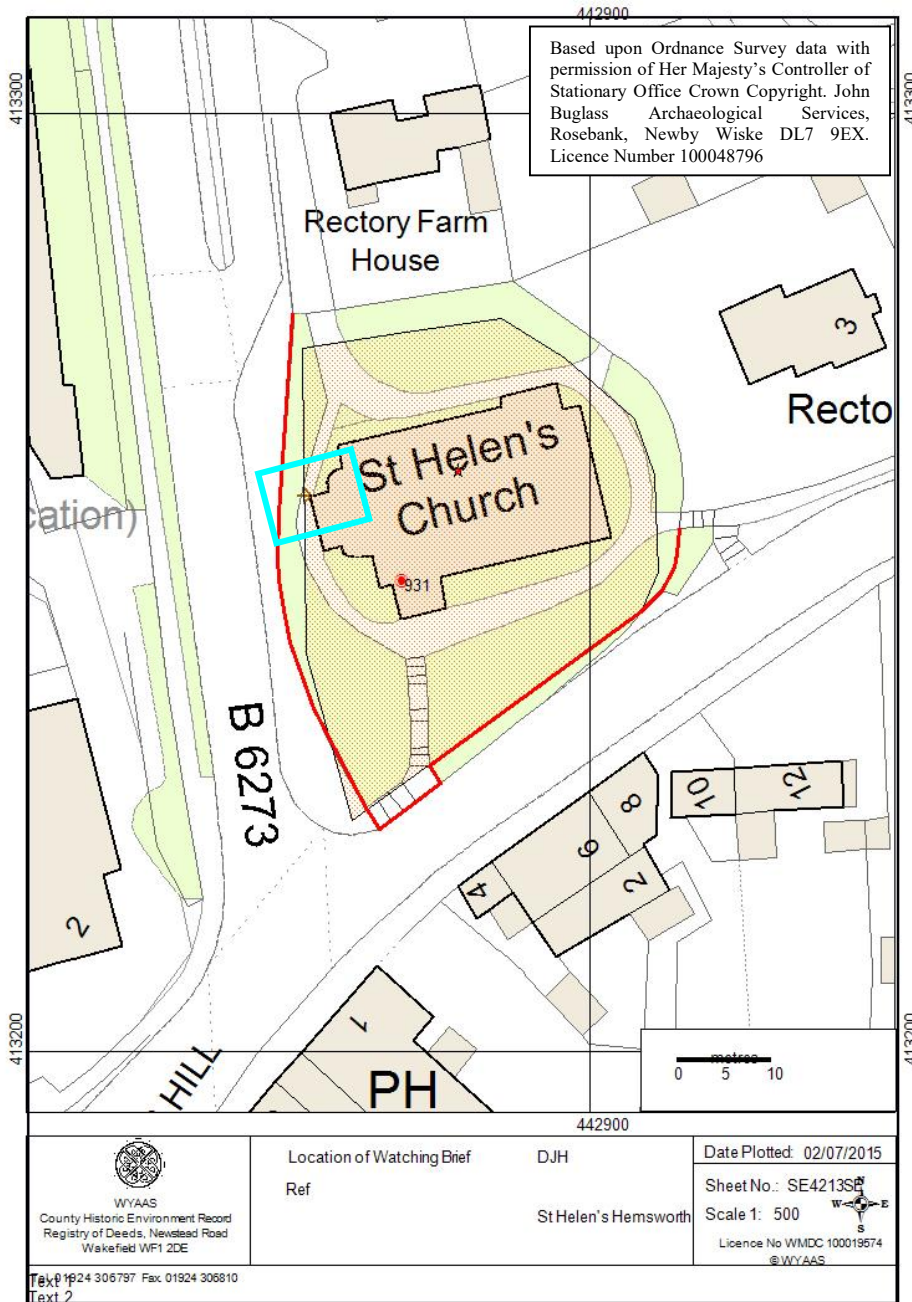


Figure 2. Detailed Site Location

Drawing AWYAS

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1 The objective of the watching brief was to identify, map, record and potentially sample excavate any features of archaeological interest revealed or damaged during the various ground works. The specific aims of the watching brief were to:

- archaeologically record (written, graphic, and photographic records) any archaeological features revealed by the ground works and as the result of any sample excavation
- recover any archaeological artefacts and environmental material exposed by the ground works

3.2 All archaeological works were carried out in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014) and a previously submitted Written Scheme of Investigation (Buglass, 2016).

4.0 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Ground works consisted of the hand excavation by the contractors of the 7m long service trench under direct archaeological supervision (Figure 3, Plate 1). The pipe trench was excavated to a depth of between 0.58 and 0.70m with an average width of 0.50m. The exposed ground surfaces were inspected for archaeological features and the resulting topsoil stockpiles were monitored for archaeological artefacts. The route of the new drainage had been amended from the one shown in the previously submitted and approved written scheme of investigation (Buglass, 2016). The revised route was approved by a Faculty dated 18th July 2016.

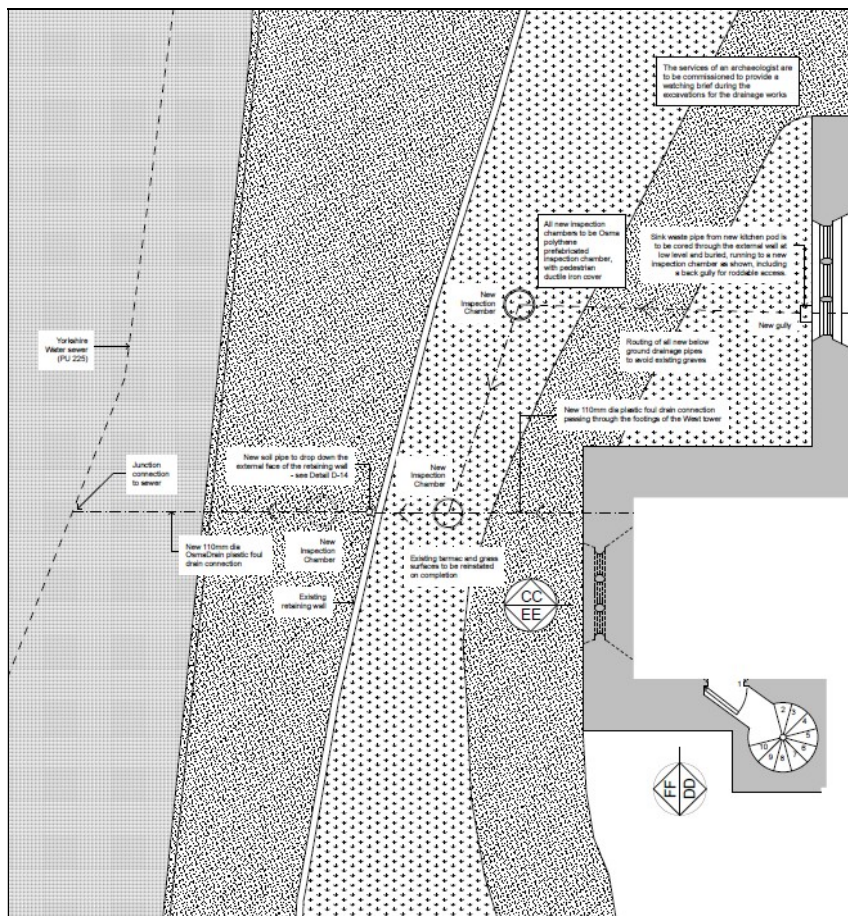


Figure 3. Location of New Drainage Works (Drawing PPIY Architects)

5.0 RESULTS – *Simon Tomson*

- 5.1 Works were undertaken at St Helen's Church Hemsworth by Furness & Sons as part of a scheme of upgrading and refurbishment to the building for St Helen's PCC. The specific ground-works, which were subject to archaeological monitoring, involved the excavation of a pipe trench from the west wall of the north aisle, skirting the northern wall of the west tower through the footpath westwards to the boundary revetment wall of the churchyard. The pipe trench was hand excavated for a length of 6.7m, at a depth of between 0.58 and 0.70m and at an average width of 0.50m. The 4" diameter sewage pipe and its connections from the north aisle and ground floor of the tower ringing chamber were laid in a pea-gravel bed and backfilled in one day (Plate 1).



Plate 1. Area of excavation in vestry, looking north-east

- 5.2 All the soils observed in proximity to the north aisle, west wall and west tower, north wall were a fine, black, silty, humic topsoil mixed with pea-gravel. These represented the disturbed remains of a French drain created along the wall edges in the 1960s. The offset dressed courses of the tower's north wall were exposed down to the un-dressed sandstone ashlar onto which the dressed face is bonded. The walling all appeared to be from the 19th century tower re-construction.
- 5.3 The adjoining north-south tarmac path to the west was 0.03m thick, retained within concrete kerbs and bedded onto a foundation of crushed red shale 0.06m deep. Below the path a 0.72m thickness of compact, dull yellow, flecky, clay, soft siltstone and sandstone material was observed. This accumulation appeared to be derived from the local geological sequence and was probably part of the upcast from the 19th century west tower foundation

digging (Plates 2 & 3). Recovered from this layer were: one sherd of 19th century Burmantofts black glazed earthenware; two clay tobacco pipe stem fragments - one with a moulded 'THE WORKMAN' inscription; two butchered large mammal bones (cow bone with butcher's saw cuts) and eight small fragments of probable human bone (single fragments of skull and femur were identifiable). All bones were single fragments distributed throughout the layer, none were found in articulation.

- 5.4 Within, and at the base of, the flecky re-deposited natural layer a live stoneware (surface water) drainpipe and an armoured electricity cable both lay along a north-south axis. Below the services and re-deposited natural was a compact horizontal surface of firm, yellow, siltstone – probably the surface of undisturbed bedrock. This was not penetrated by the pipe-trench.
- 5.5 The back-face of the churchyard retaining wall was exposed. The wall is 0.75m thick, with an irregular un-faced internal finish and, where seen, was constructed from quarried, irregular sandstone blocks. Topsoil obscures the eastern part of the top surface.
- 5.6 The human remains and artefacts were returned to the parish priest for re-interment at his convenience.



Plate 2. Typical deposits along the drainage run



Plate 3. Typical deposits along the drainage run

6.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 As can be seen from the results described above, the ground-works at St Helen's Church did not produce evidence for intact inhumations. They mainly encountered re-deposited natural sediments. This is probably mainly due to the extensive re-building of the church in the 19th century and later 20th century drainage works.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Fr Robert Hart for inviting me to undertake the project and Simon Tomson for undertaking the on-site monitoring.

References

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