



Church of St. Mary, Barnard Castle

Archaeological Watching Brief

Stuart Noon and Ben Swain

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Project summary

DV project code and type	SMB20 Archaeological Watching Brief
National Grid Reference	NZ 0507 1627
County	County Durham
Title:	Church of St. Mary, Barnard Castle Archaeological Watching Brief
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Origination date:	04/09/20
Circulation:	Mr. Robert Stenlake
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Results summary

Fieldwork in the form of an archaeological watching brief was undertaken over four and a half days in July 2020 within the graveyard of the Church of St. Mary, Barnard Castle (hereafter "the site"). The site was considered to be of potential archaeological interest due to it being the location of a graveyard associated with a 12th century church, that was in continuous use until the closure of the graveyard in 1860 and an archaeological watching brief was required in order for the drainage works to comply with the Association of Diocesan and Cathedral Archaeologists Guidance Note 1 (2004).

The archaeological works comprised of an archaeological watching brief to establish the presence or absence of buried archaeological remains on the site pertaining to the Church of St Mary's graveyard. The construction works on site comprised the cleaning out of existing silted up drainage pipes, the re-direction and replacement of damaged sections of pipe, and the replacement of old brick-built sumps and manholes. All data was recorded by DigVentures staff using DigVentures pro forma recording system, supported by a photographic record (Table 1).

The relative absence of archaeological features and the discovery of a redeposited layer across the drainage works area containing mainly disarticulated human bone, indicates that the church graveyard is likely to have been disturbed by earlier construction works. Activity involving the use of the graveyard as a burial ground was recorded but was highly disturbed, and the only archaeological feature encountered was the original cut for a stone buttress at the south-east corner of the southern transept.

Table of contents

1	INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE	5
1.1	Project background	5
1.2	Project scope	5
1.3	Site description	5
2	WATCHING BRIEF AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND FRAMEWORK	6
2.1	Aim	6
2.2	Objectives	6
2.3	Framework	6
3	METHODOLOGY	7
3.1	Watching brief methodology	7
4	RESULTS	7
4.1	Stratigraphic sequence	7
5	FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL MATERIAL	8
5.1	Finds summary	8
6	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	8
6.1	Discussion	8
6.2	Conclusions and recommendations	8
7	ARCHIVE LOCATION	9
7.1	Preparation and deposition	9
8	BIBLIOGRAPHY	9

Figures

Figure 1: Site location.....	10
Figure 2: Site Plan with the Drainage Route	11

Tables

Table 1: Watching brief context descriptions	12
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1 INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

1.1 Project background

1.1.1 DigVentures was invited to undertake an archaeological watching brief on land located in the graveyard of the Church of St. Mary, Barnard Castle, DL12 8NQ (Figure 1), as an element of the 'Windows to the World' project (Ungemach (2018)). This was in response to proposed works for the clearing and repair of blocked drains along the route of earlier drainage from the 20th century (Figure 2). Robert Stenlake, Project Manager for the 'Windows to the World' project, provided a written understanding of the requirements of the watching brief in order to provide certainty and control. The church, founded in 1130, has always been in a central location in the town at the crossing of two important roads and the graveyard was used by nearly all of the town's inhabitants until its closure in 1860 (Ungemach and Forster 2019).

1.2 Project scope

1.2.1 The site was considered to be of archaeological interest due to its location in a graveyard associated with a 12th century church, that was in continuous use until its closure in 1860 and an archaeological watching brief was required in order for the drainage works to comply with the Association of Diocesan and Cathedral Archaeologists Guidance Note 1, (2004). A watching brief was therefore undertaken on drainage works considered to be on disturbed ground that might have impacted on archaeological features and deposits. Preliminary assessment by the architect John Barnes had revealed only a relatively low level of archaeological potential as the ground had been previously disturbed by the construction of the original drains.

1.3 Site description

1.3.1 The Site lies at grid reference NZ 0507 1627 located on an elevated position, visible from the surrounding countryside, at a central position in the town near the crossing point of two important roads. Its immediate vicinity to the marketplace and location opposite to the entrance of the castle also makes it one of the central landmarks of the town. Like the town itself, the church was adapted and expanded in the centuries following its construction, with significant improvements made in the late 15th century with money granted by Richard of Gloucester. In the 1530s St. Mary's broke from the Roman Catholic church as part of The Reformation and by the 19th century it faced competition to its congregation from the establishment of numerous non-conformist churches, sparking an expensive restoration and re-modelling project funded by the Anglican church to make it more attractive. Throughout its history, from the construction of the church until the mid 19th century, St. Mary's graveyard was used for the burial of nearly all of Barnard Castle's inhabitants until its closure in 1860. The intensive use of the graveyard over the centuries led to bones literally sticking out of the ground, resulting in its eventual expansion in the early 19th century. However, this expansion led to the contamination of drinking water with moribund matter for those people living downslope to the south of St. Marys. Consequently, a cholera outbreak followed in 1849, killing one hundred and forty-five people who were later buried in St. Mary's graveyard (Ungemach and Forster 2019).

1.3.2 The site is underlain by solid geology of the Stainmore formation, comprising of mudstone, siltstone and sandstone. The superficial geological deposits on site likely



comprise of a Till, or boulder clay, of the Devensian period of the last Ice Age (BGS, <http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk>).

2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND FRAMEWORK

2.1 Aim

2.1.1 The overarching aim of the archaeological watching brief was to record the archaeological resource during the drainage development within a specified area using appropriate methods and practices with a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons. The principal aim of the watching brief was to provide further information concerning the presence/absence, date, nature and extent of any buried archaeological remains and to investigate and record these within the area of the groundworks.

2.1.2 Building on the existing body of knowledge, combined with results from the various phases of investigation, proposals for fieldwork involved a watching brief during all groundwork that may have an impact on archaeological features and deposits. The aims of the project may be summarised as follows:

- to determine the presence or absence of any buried remains of archaeological interest within the proposed area of works and to observe their nature, extent and significance.
- to observe and record any features related to the burial of human remains, including any disarticulated human bone removed and subsequently re-interred for the purposes of facilitating the proposed works.
- to compile an archival record of any archaeological remains within the proposed area of works.

2.2 Objectives

2.2.1 The objective of the watching brief was to allow, within the resources available, the preservation by record of archaeological deposits, the presence and nature of which could not be established (or established with sufficient accuracy) in advance of the drainage works or other potentially disruptive works and to provide an opportunity, if needed, for the watching archaeologist to signal to all interested parties, before the destruction of the material in question, that an archaeological find has been made for which the resources allocated to the watching brief itself are not sufficient to support treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard.

2.3 Framework

2.3.1 The watching brief conformed with current best practice and to the guidance outlined the Management of Archaeological Research Projects in the Historic Environment (Historic England 2015a), the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief (2014) the North East Regional Research Framework for the Historic Environment (Petts and Gerrard 2006), the Association of



Diocesan and Cathedral Archaeologists, (2004), Guidance Note 1: Archaeological requirements for works on churches and churchyards, which complements Revealing the past, informing the future, guidance for parishes recently issued by the Council for the Care of Churches (Elders 2004).

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Watching brief methodology

- 3.1.1 Archaeological investigation in the form of a watching brief was undertaken on the 1st to the 28th July 2020 by Stuart Noon on all groundworks that may have impacted on potential archaeological features and deposits. Archaeological works involved monitoring ground disturbance works aimed located on existing drainage pipes to be cleaned out, replaced where broken along with the installation of sumps and new manhole covers. Ten interventions were excavated via mechanical excavator under archaeological supervision to the south of the main church building. These varied in length between 0.85m and 3.90m, in width between 0.55m and 1.50m and in depth between 0.60m and 1.0m.
- 3.1.2 Upon the discovery of any articulated human remains and/or within a grave cut, excavation was halted, and the remains were not excavated, but were photographed and then backfilled, with diversionary routes for the continuation of the drainage works advised and undertaken. All recording was undertaken using DigVentures pro forma recording system, supported by a photographic record that conforms with Historic England standards (Historic England 2015b). All relevant data is available in the appendices.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Stratigraphic sequence

- 4.1.1 Machining of the area followed the route of the original drainage to the horizon of the original early 20th century salt glazed pipe. A common stratigraphic sequence was observed across the site consisting of a topsoil layer of dark grey-brown silty-clay 0.10m deep (1001). This was followed by the dark yellowish brown sandy clay re-deposited natural layer at a maximum of 90cm deep with occasional small to medium sub-angular brick, concrete fragment and frequent disarticulated previously disturbed human remains inclusions (1002). There was a particularly concentrated deposit of disarticulated human bone (0.55m long and 0.45m wide) consisting mainly of arm bones, leg bones and skulls placed in a pile directly on top of a salt-glazed pipe at the bottom of the first trench, presumably deliberately placed after the original drainage excavation. These were removed and photographed before being returned to the ground before backfilling.
- 4.1.2 The original early 20th century salt glazed pipe was located at the bottom of all the trenches dug through a natural layer (1003) consisting of mid yellowish-brown sandy clay with occasional small sub-angular stone inclusions.



- 4.1.3 One area of works, located near the east wall of the southern transept, aimed to locate a small section of pipe running off from the main drainage pipe and partially uncovered partial articulated human remains cut into the natural layer (1003) consisting of two arms crossed over a pelvis and a spine. This was left in-situ, photographed and backfilled with a diversionary route for the drainage works proposed and undertaken.
- 4.1.4 There was one archaeological feature discovered during the watching brief consisting of the foundation cut [1004], (1005), of one of the church buttresses, at the South-East corner of the southern transept, cut through the natural layer (1003). In all other ground works, no archaeological features were encountered before excavation ceased upon the discovery of the 20th century salt glazed pipe.

5 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL MATERIAL

5.1 Finds summary

- 5.1.1 A representative sample of archaeological finds consisting of pottery was recovered from the layer of disturbed ground across the site (1002) at the time of the watching brief. Most of the pottery was relatively modern in date, with a few abraded fragments of early post-medieval pottery and one very abraded fragment of late medieval pottery discovered. This supports the interpretation of relatively modern disturbed ground across the excavation area and does not contribute further to the research aims and objectives identified above (Section 2).

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Discussion

- 6.1.1 Due to the intensively used graveyard between the 12th century to mid-19th century a high potential for uncovering concentrated human burial related activity in the form of disarticulated human remains was identified. The high concentration of numerous pieces of disarticulated human bone within each ground disturbance area, and also the exposure of one small area of articulated human remains, confirmed this expectation. The potential of articulated remains was identified as low due to the likelihood of encountering disturbed ground from the original excavations for the early 20th century drainage pipes on the same alignment. This was confirmed by the discovery of highly disturbed ground across the excavation area with mainly early modern pottery recovered.

6.2 Conclusions and recommendations

This report represents compliance with the conditions laid out in the Association of Diocesan and Cathedral Archaeologists, (2004), Guidance Note 1. Whilst the church of St. Mary at Barnard castle is of local and national importance, the works carried out as part of this watching brief will not significantly add anything to answering local, regional and national research questions, defined in the North East Regional Research



Framework (Petts and Gerrard 2006). Given the discovery of highly disturbed ground no significant archaeological remains on the site, no further works are recommended.

7 ARCHIVE LOCATION

7.1 Preparation and deposition

- 7.1.1 The project archive consists of this report. A digital copy has been submitted to the Client and relevant Diocesan authority.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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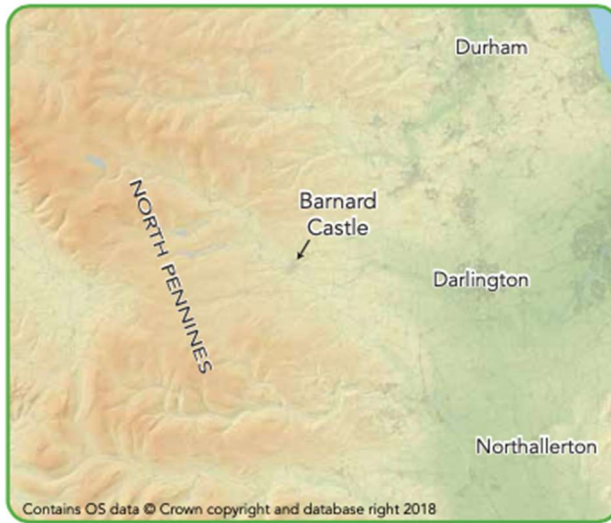


Figure 1: Site location

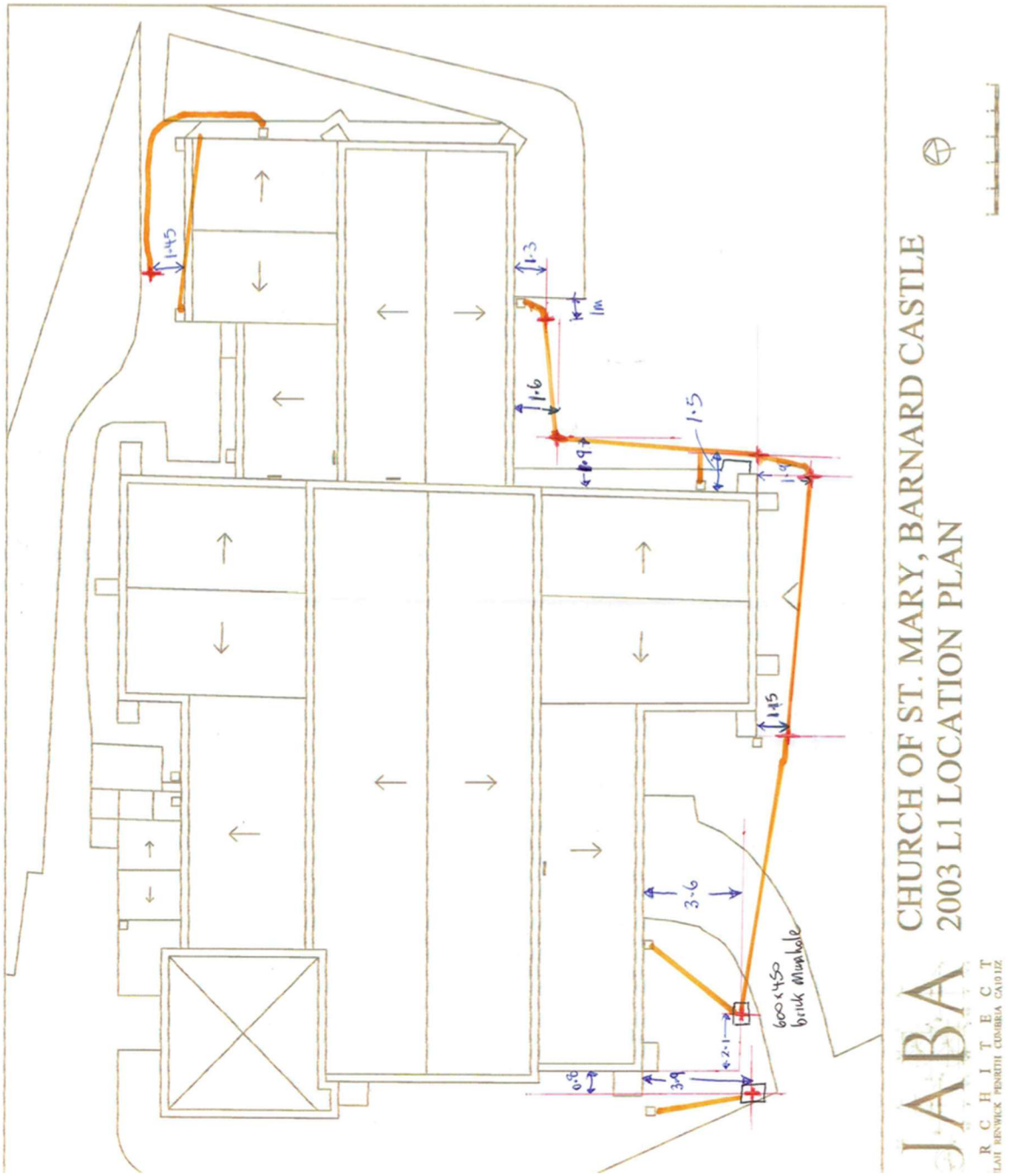


Figure 2: Site Plan with the Drainage Route

APPENDIX 1 – TRENCH TABLE

Table 1: Watching brief context descriptions

Watching Brief	Dimensions: n/a				
	Orientation: n/a				
	Reason for Watching Brief: Locating remains of Finchdale Cottage Farm				
Context	Description	Interpretation/ Process of deposition	Dimensions (m)		Feature
1001	Mid greyish-brown silty clay	Topsoil	Length	3.90m	/
			Width	1.50m	
			Depth	0.10m	
1002	Dark yellowish brown sandy clay with occasional small to medium sub-angular brick, concrete fragment and frequent disarticulated previously disturbed human remains inclusions.	Redeposited natural	Length	3.90m	/
			Width	1.50m	
			Depth	0.90m	
1003	Mid yellowish-brown sandy clay with small occasional sub-angular stone inclusions	Natural	Length	3.90m	/
			Width	1.50m	
			Depth	Not excavated	
1004	Linear cut with steep sides and a sharp break of slope at the top. Not fully excavated.	Cut of Buttress foundation	Length	0.80m	/
			Width	1.00m	
			Depth	1.00m	
1005	Dark grey brown silty clay with frequent inclusions of medium sized sub angular sandstone pieces	Fill of buttress foundation	Length	0.80m	/
			Width	1.00m	
			Depth	1.00m	