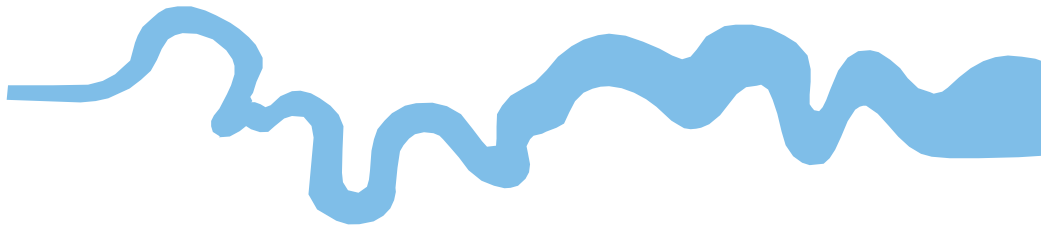


T V A S



NORTH MIDLANDS

**St Mary's Church, Swynnerton,
Stone, Staffordshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

by Helen Daniel

Site Code: SMS20/72

(SJ 8520 3549)

St Mary's Church, Swynnerton, Stone, Staffordshire

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
for Avalon Heritage Ltd.**

by Helen Daniel

TVAS (North Midlands)

Site Code SMS 20/72

June 2020

Summary

Site name: St Mary's Church, Swynnerton, Stone, Staffordshire

Grid reference: SJ 8520 3549

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 22 May – 1 June 2020

Project coordinator: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Helen Daniel

Site code: SMS 20/72

Summary of results: The watching brief was carried out as intended and located just one *in situ* burial during the intrusive groundworks. This burial was aligned west-east and in line with an extant row of grave markers. All disarticulated and articulated remains were returned to the church for reburial and all other finds were retained on site. No other deposits nor finds of archaeological interest were disturbed by the works.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at TVAS North Midlands, Stoke-on-Trent and will be deposited at Staffordshire County Museum Service or Archaeology Data Service in due course.

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www.tvas.co.uk/reports/reports.asp

Report edited/checked by: Steve Ford ✓19.06.20 Steve Preston ✓19.06.20

St Mary's Church, Swynnerton, Stone, Staffordshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Helen Daniel

Report 20/72

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at St Mary's Church, Swynnerton, Stone in Staffordshire (SJ 8520 3549) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Ms Helen Martin-Bacon of Avalon Heritage Ltd, on behalf of the Parochial Church Council of St Mary's Church.

A faculty has been granted by the Diocese of Lichfield for the installation of a new drain with a foul connection and two manholes within the churchyard. Given the location of the works within and on the boundary of a historic graveyard and therefore the potential for the works to disturb or destroy any below-ground archaeological remains, the Faculty is subject to a condition for archaeological monitoring during the groundworks. An archaeological watching brief was requested to facilitate this.

These works have been carried out in accordance with a specification provided by Avalon Heritage Ltd (Martin-Bacon 2020) and approved by the Diocesan Advisory Committee. The investigation was carried out by Helen Daniel between 22nd May and 1st June 2020 and the site code is SMS 20/72. The archive is presently held at TVAS North Midlands, Stoke-on-Trent and will be deposited at Staffordshire County Museum Service or Archaeology Data Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located in the churchyard of the church of St Mary, Swynnerton. The village is situated on a sandstone ridge between the Trent Valley to the east and its tributaries to the west. It is located around 5km north-west of the market town of Stone and c.10km south-west of the towns of Stoke-on-Trent (Fig. 1). The churchyard lies on an area of raised ground and occupies a prominent position on the eastern side of the village, adjacent to Swynnerton Estate, the seat of the Barons of Stafford (Pl. 1).

The underlying geology is recorded as Triassic sedimentary deposits of Chester Formation – Sandstone And Conglomerate Interbedded (BGS 2020). At its south-west corner, the church lies at a height of 178m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) sloping gently to the south-west to around 175m aOD.

Archaeological background

The present layout of Swynnerton village is largely attributable to the development of the Swynnerton Estate from the 18th century onwards; although documentary evidence places its origins much earlier, in the Saxon period. The first mention occurs in Domesday Book, where *Sulvertone* is recorded as being situated in Pirehill Hundred, valued at 40s and owned by Robert de Stafford. Later recorded versions of the name include *Swineduna Helye* (1166-7) and *Swynforton* (1272). The etymology derives from the OE elements of *swin* + *ford* + *tun* meaning “farmstead by the pig ford” (Mills 2011, 449).

In the 12th century, the records of Stone Priory document their claim on Swynnerton church as a parochial chapel; this claim had been disputed by the church clerks for years but was finally avowed by the lord of the manor around 1157. A market charter was granted in 1306 by Edward I to Sir Roger de Swynnerton for the holding of an annual fair in the village (VCH 1970). The Grade I listed church of St Mary is constructed from local sandstone and has a 12th century core, although it likely stands either in the vicinity or on the site of an earlier Saxon church. The present church has been altered and added to a number of times over the centuries, most notably during the 13th-15th centuries and then again in the Victorian period (HE listing: 1374205).

An original manor house is believed to have been situated on lower ground to the south of the present village; while this does correspond with the place-name etymology it was more likely located nearer to the church, within historic core of the village. Wherever it was situated, this residence was destroyed during the Civil War and construction of a new house was begun during the Restoration on the site of the present hall. It appears that many of the buildings in the village were relocated at this time to make way for the new estate and those replaced were sited behind the new Hall to protect its views of the landscape (Martin-Bacon 2018).

The Swynnertons were descendants of Robert de Stafford and were Lords of the Manor from the time of the Conquest right through until the 16th century, when Elizabeth Swynnerton married Sir William Fitzherbert. The Fitzherberts, ancestors of the present Lord Stafford, are responsible for much of the appearance of the present hall, work on which was undertaken by Francis Smith of Warwick between 1725-29. Although plans for the park were drawn up by Capability Brown these were never completed, nevertheless enhancements to the grounds were made with major landscaping by Trubshaw in 1810 and with the commissioning of the Roman Catholic church in 1868. By this time, the core of the village was well established and has remained relatively unchanged until the modern period (SBC 2014).

Objectives and methodology

The general aims of the watching brief were:

- to determine the presence/absence of buried archaeological remains, including disarticulated or articulated human remains, within the area of intrusive groundworks;
- to determine the level of disturbance from any later activities and
- to inform upon appropriate mitigation measures should significant archaeological remains be encountered which require further investigation and/or preservation *in situ*.

This was to involve constant archaeological supervision during the installation of a drain with foul connection and includes; a new manhole outside the south porch; a pipe trench across the churchyard; a manhole with an inspection chamber near the churchyard wall and a trench across the road providing access to the main sewer

(Fig. 2, Pl. 2). More specific aims relate to the following:

- to identify and record any features or deposits within the groundworks associated with phases of activity pre-dating the current church;
- to identify any deposits or features associated with the medieval development of the church and graveyard;
- to define the date, nature, extent and potential significance of archaeological remains within the area of groundworks;
- to consider any relevant research objectives contributing to a wider understanding of the archaeological context, an understanding of the topography of the site and its environs;
- to ensure that any human remains exposed, either articulated or disarticulated are appropriately recorded and dealt with in accordance with the Faculty;
- to identify any research themes relevant to the nature of the site which are contained within the *West Midlands Regional Research Framework* (Watt 2011);
- to highlight relevant research aims should further archaeological work be required as a result of the watching brief;
- to disseminate the results of the fieldwork through an appropriate level of reporting including potentially in period relevant journals and/or journals dealing with historic industrial processes.

The trenches excavated for both the drains and the manholes were to be observed for archaeological deposits. Any archaeological deposits which were threatened by the groundworks were to be excavated and recorded. Sufficient time was to be allowed to carry this out within the groundworkers schedules without causing undue delay. Machine excavation was to be halted if any articulated human remains were encountered. These remains were to be recorded and if necessary, after consultation with the incumbent, lifted and handed over to the church for reburial. Spoil heaps were to be monitored for finds.

Results

Manhole 1 and Pipe Trench

The concrete step located outside the south porch of the church was removed to allow for the excavation of manhole 1 (Fig. 3). The rectangular manhole measured approximately 1m x 1.2m and was dug to a depth of

c.0.7m. The pipe trench ran south-west from manhole 1 for a total length of 31.8m and was 0.4m wide with an average depth of approximately 0.8m. The first third of its length followed the course of the churchyard path and then continued across the churchyard passing between extant grave markers toward the position of manhole 2, located at the boundary wall (Fig. 3). The stratigraphy of the manhole consisted of 0.10m of turf and topsoil over 0.25m of redeposited light orange sandy subsoil over 0.35m of mid-orange red sandy subsoil. The stratigraphy of the pipe trench consisted of 0.15m of turf and topsoil over 0.60-0.65m of mid-orange red sandy subsoil; the natural sandstone geology was not reached in either area. No *in situ* archaeological features or deposits were encountered. One large bag of disarticulated human bone was collected, mostly from the layer of redeposited subsoil in Manhole 1 but also from the spoil heap; this was returned to the church for reburial.

Manhole 2 and sewer access trench

The second manhole included an inspection chamber and was located within the graveyard to the south-west of the church, on the northern side of the boundary wall (Fig. 3). The trench measured 1.3m long by 1.3m wide at the surface and was excavated to a depth of 1.7m. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.2m of turf and topsoil over 0.3m of mid-orange red sandy subsoil over 0.7m of dark orange red clayey-sand; below this was a layer of brown gravesoil overlying the natural sandstone geology.

At a depth of approximately 1.28m and in line with an existing row of grave markers articulated human remains (SK1) were encountered (Fig. 4, Pl. 3) and machine excavation was halted. Due to the location of the manhole it was not possible to reposition it and so there was no chance of preserving the burial *in situ* or of avoiding it altogether. As a result, the Archdeacon was consulted and a decision was taken to record and then carefully excavate the remains, returning them to the church for later reburial.

The skeleton was laid supine and orientated with the head to the west. The condition of the bone was extremely poor and degraded, having become completely saturated in the very wet clayey-sand. This made it very difficult to clean and lift the bones as they easily disintegrated so areas containing smaller bones were lifted as small soil blocks. The skull had previously collapsed and these fragmented pieces and the lower jaw were removed by the machine. Both clavicles, scapulas and humeri were visible along with the bones of the lower right arm, most vertebrae and the pelvis. The majority of the small bones and the ribs had not survived the burial conditions and none of the bones survived well enough to allow measurements to be taken. The width of the sciatic notch on the pelvis indicated that the skeleton was an adult male, however the heads of the femurs were just visible within the eastern section of the trench wall and were therefore outside the area of excavation;

likewise the left arm was not observed, situated as it must be to the north and also outside the trench area. The excavated remains were returned to the church for reburial.

The sewer access trench was dug from the south side of the churchyard wall across the road to the main sewer. The trench was 2.5m long by 0.4m wide and 0.5m deep. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.05 of asphalt over 0.2m of made ground of crushed stone lying over 0.25m of redeposited dark orange red clayey-sand. There were no archaeological deposits and the natural substrate was not reached.

Finds

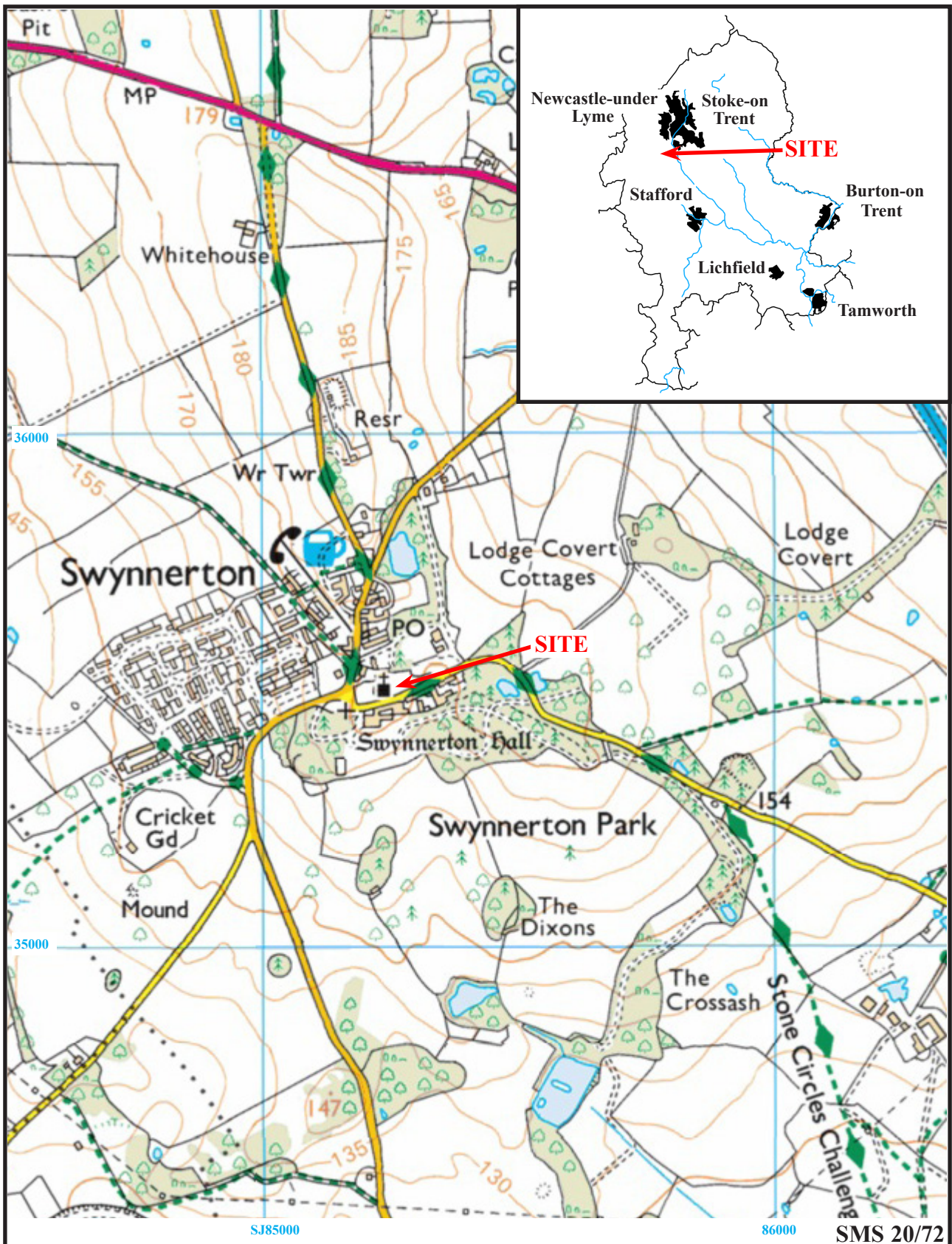
The only find from manhole 2 was a fragment of Staffordshire Slipware pottery, found just above the level of the burial, probably within the original grave fill. This fragment was extremely small but from the fabric most probably dates from the 19th century, this correlates with the mid-19th century dates on the nearest row of grave markers that are aligned with the burial. A variety of small fragments of pottery, one small glass bottle and a range of broken clay pipe sherds were found during the course of the works, all of which date from around the late-19th to early-20th century. All finds were retained on site.

Conclusion

The watching brief was carried out as intended and located a single *in situ* burial during the intrusive groundworks, which was situated around 1m from the church's boundary wall. The burial was aligned west-east and in line with an extant row of grave markers. Whilst the watching brief did identify human remains, no further archaeological features or deposits were encountered that would contribute to any of the project research aims specified above. All disarticulated and articulated remains were returned to the church for reburial and all other finds were retained on site.

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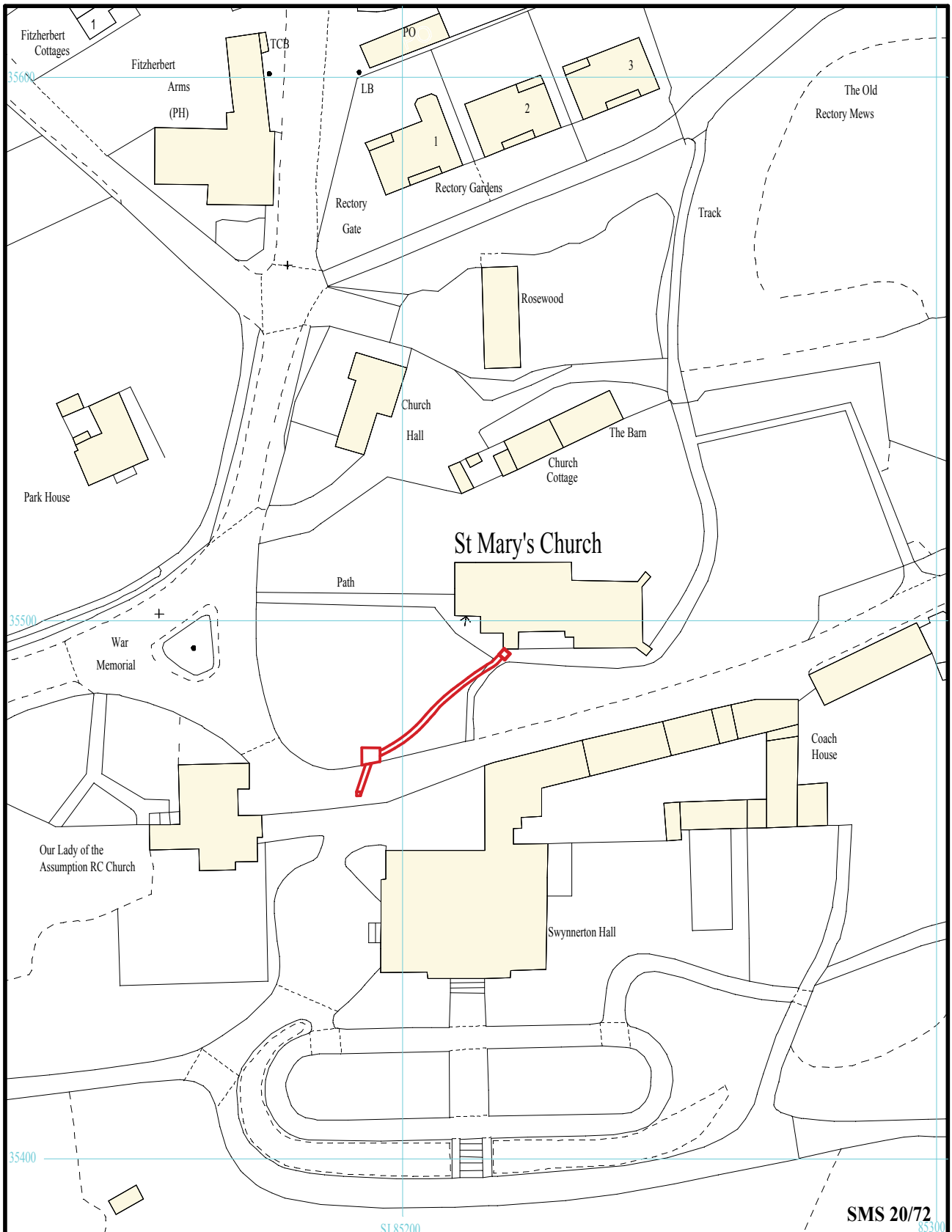


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Figure 1. Location of site within Swynnerton and Staffordshire.

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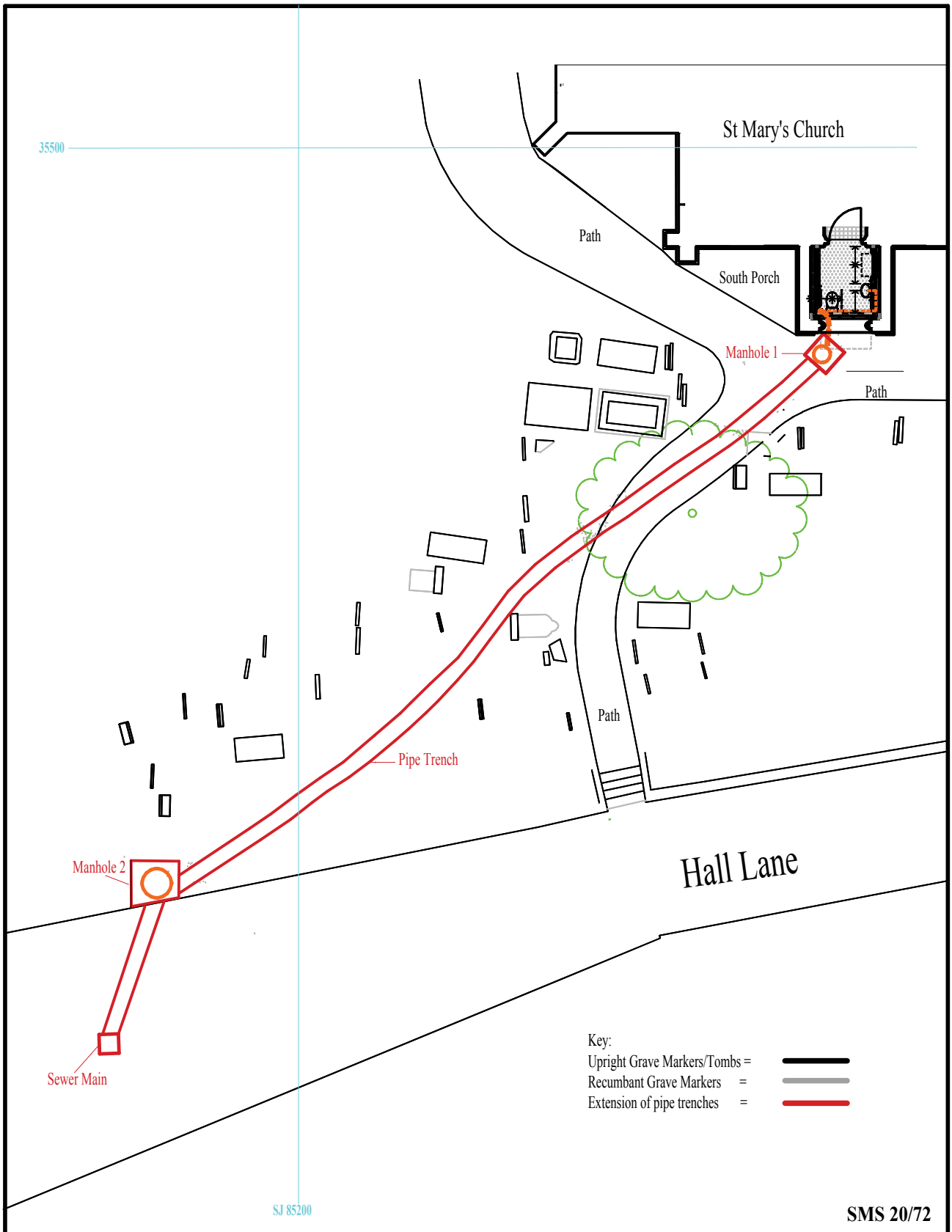




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Figure 2. Site plan.





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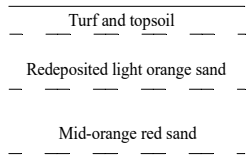
Figure 3. Detailed site plan showing pipetrench and manholes.

0 10m

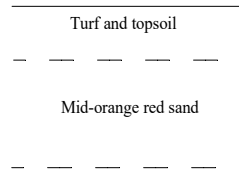
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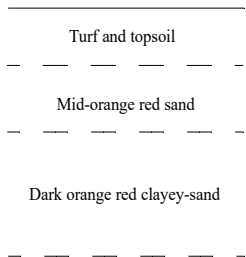
Manhole 1



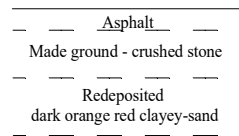
Pipe Trench



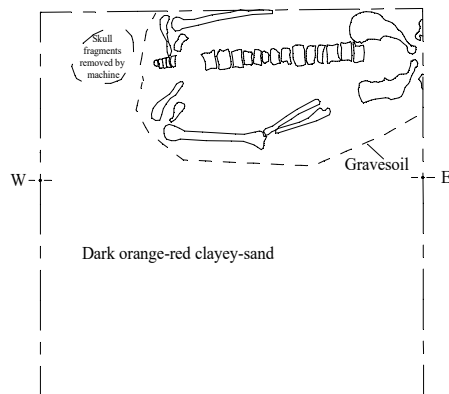
Manhole 2



Sewer Access



Manhole 2 - Plan of Skeleton 1



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Figure 4. Representative sections and trench plan.



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Plate 1. Churchyard of St Mary showing course of pipe trench, looking NE from boundary.



Plate 2. Plan image of skeleton 1 found during excavation of Manhole 2.
Scales 0.5m, 0.3m and 0.1m

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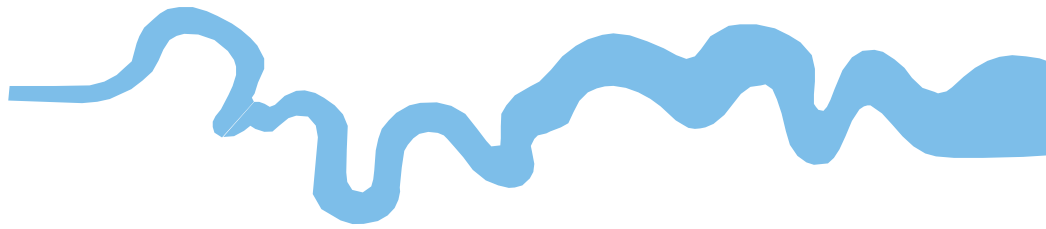
St Mary's Church, Swynnerton
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Plates 1 and 2.



TIME CHART

	Calendar Years
Modern _____	AD 1901
Victorian _____	AD 1837
Post Medieval _____	AD 1500
Medieval _____	AD 1066
Saxon _____	AD 410
Roman _____	AD 43
Iron Age _____	BC/AD 750 BC
Bronze Age: Late -----	1300 BC
Bronze Age: Middle -----	1700 BC
Bronze Age: Early -----	2100 BC
Neolithic: Late	3300 BC
Neolithic: Early	4300 BC
Mesolithic: Late	6000 BC
Mesolithic: Early	10000 BC
Palaeolithic: Upper	30000 BC
Palaeolithic: Middle	70000 BC
Palaeolithic: Lower	2,000,000 BC





**TVAS (North Midlands),
2B Stanton Road, Meir
Stoke-on-Trent, ST3 6DD**

**Tel: 01782 595648
Email: northmidlands@tvas.co.uk
Web: www.tvas.co.uk/northmidlands**