

**Archaeological Watching Brief Report  
St Mary's Church, Church Hill  
Ringmer  
East Sussex, BN8 5JX**

**NGR: 544584 112516  
(TQ 4584 12516)**

**Faculty Consent: 2020 – 05423  
ASE Project No: 210055  
Site Code: SMR 22  
ASE Report No: 2022118  
OASIS ID: archaeol6-506802**



**By Teresa Vieira**

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**Abstract**

*Archaeology South-East (ASE) was commissioned by Paramount Architecture to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks at St Mary's Church, Church Hill, Ringmer, East Sussex (NGR 532875 108573). The groundworks were associated with the re-order of the chancel and east end of the nave.*

*A small excavation for the installation of a new tile floor under the frontal pews was monitored, revealing made ground deposits. The excavation partially exposed the bases of the adjacent columns that support the nave, revealing different architectural elements to the north and south, thus corroborating the already known different origin of these features.*

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Site Background**

- 1.1.1 Archaeology South-East (ASE) was commissioned by Paramount Architecture to undertake an archaeological watching brief at St Mary's Church, Ringmer, during groundworks associated with the re-order of the chancel and the east end of the nave (NGR 544584 112516; Figure 1).
- 1.1.2 St Mary's Church is a medieval and later Grade I listed building (List No. 1238690) situated in the historic core of the village of Ringmer behind the south-west corner of the village green. Faculty Consent (Ref 2020-054283) has been granted to create a Chancel with a flexible-use space. The scope of the works is detailed in a report by Peter Pritchett (Paramount Architecture) 2021. They include the removal of fixed raised choir-stalls, continuation of the stone-flagged floor of the chancel to areas of the choir stalls, extended stone chancel step and rationalisation of the ad-hoc flooring at the east end of the nave.
- 1.1.3 As the church is situated within an area of archaeological potential those parts of the works that involved ground disturbance were subject to an archaeological watching brief.

### **1.2 Geology and Topography**

- 1.2.2 According to the British Geological Survey 1:50,000 scale geological mapping available online, the church is situated in an area of the Gault Clay Vale, a linear strip of infertile clay forming part of the Greensand shelf which lies at the foot of the scarp slope of the South Downs (BGS 2022).

### **1.3 Scope of Report**

- 1.3.1 This current report provides the results of the archaeological watching brief undertaken at the site on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April 2022. It has been prepared in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (ASE 2022). The work was carried out by Teresa Vieira (Archaeologist). The fieldwork was managed by Leonie Pett, the post-excavation work by Dan Swift.

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## 2.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The following information has been paraphrased from the Written Scheme of Investigation (ASE 2022).

2.1.2 The following summarises the archaeological background of the site and is principally focussed on the church itself summarised from the Paramount Architecture report (Pritchett 2021) with due acknowledgement. A detailed history of the church is provided in that document and is not repeated here.

#### *Prehistoric and Roman*

2.1.3 Evidence for prehistoric activity around Ringmer is limited, the clay lithology, notoriously intractable, was disadvantageous to early settlement in comparison with the adjacent Caburn-Malling downland block, upon which much of the early occupation evidence is concentrated. Recorded evidence of Romano-British occupation in the village itself is limited, but there is some evidence of the Romano-British occupation in the wider area.

#### *Medieval*

2.1.4 The place name Ringmer is attested in 1275 and probably means 'circular pool', although it has been suggested that the first element may alternatively relate to a Saxon personal name 'Hringa' (Mawer & Stenton 1930, 335). There are also references to a vicar of Ringmer in the 1230s (e.g. ESRO/GLY/3371). Ringmer is notable in the medieval period for its pottery industry, mostly producing cheap domestic wares, at its peak around the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, but with evidence for origins in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The industry continued into the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Bleach 1982). The brick and tile making industry survived around Ringmer Green from the 15<sup>th</sup> century to the 18<sup>th</sup>.

2.1.5 St Mary's Church is of medieval date with later additions and alterations. It is Grade I listed and the list description is as follows:

*2. Church of England. Chancel with north and south chapels, nave with aisles, south porch and west tower. Chancel, nave (except the westernmost bay) and porch C15. North and south chapels early C16. The westernmost bay of the nave and the tower were rebuilt in 1884 at the expense of William Langham Cristie of Glyndebourne to replace the medieval tower which was burned down in the C15, Architect Ewan Christian. The gallery and organ were given by John Christie of Glyndebourne in 1922. (List No. 1238690).*

2.1.6 The key phasing of the church is summarised as follows (Pritchett 2021):

- Historical evidence of Norman church;
- Some Norman fragments set in south-west buttress (probably from elsewhere) and Norman shape bases to the columns supporting the arcade to the Nave;
- 14<sup>th</sup> century re-building;

- Chancel and Sanctuary, 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century;
- South Chapel (Springett Chapel) dates to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and incorporates a 14<sup>th</sup> century door and window;
- North Chapel (Lady Chapel) has a Jacobean plaster ceiling;
- 1872-3 re-seating scheme, including paving;
- New choir stalls, late 19<sup>th</sup> century;
- Tower built in 1884 with the west extension to the Nave;
- Church rooms on the north side of the church completed in 1999.

## **2.2 Project Aims and Objectives**

2.2.1 The main aim of the archaeological watching brief was to record archaeological deposits exposed by the construction work.

2.2.2 The watching brief also had the potential to address the following research objectives set out in the South-East Research Framework (The Medieval Period; KCC 2022):

- *The study of the chronology and typology of church buildings in the medieval period.*
- *Consideration of space within buildings and settlements generally in terms of their various functions and also as representations and expressions of social differentiation, vertical and horizontal*
- *Interdisciplinary studies of individual churches and regional synthesis, also taking into account the increasing number of studies carried out in a development control context (whether under a secular or ecclesiastical aegis), are to be encouraged*
- *Evidence of differential funerary practice, giving insights into social and cultural diversity in terms of ritual: this is another context to be compared with various aspects of medieval culture and society in a contextual archaeology.*

2.2.3 The watching brief may also have the potential to address some research objectives set out in the South-East Research Framework.

2.2.4 The research and monitoring strategy relating to the Brighton and Lewes Downs UNESCO World Biosphere Region should also be considered due to the site's position within its boundary (The Living Coast 2017). The research aims and objectives relating to the Biosphere are summarised below:

### *Aims*

*The aim of the strategy is to promote research and monitoring of the Brighton & Lewes Downs Biosphere to better understand its past, present and future environment, in particular human-environment relationships, to inform and assess interventions carried out through the Biosphere Programme Delivery Plan.*

### *Specific objectives are:*

1. *To foster the development of applied knowledge and public understanding of the environment to inform effective management of the Biosphere, and so drive better practice;*

*2. To develop and make generally available: i) an inventory of research studies, ii) baseline data and information, and iii) monitoring information and updates to baseline information, in order to be able to better understand and monitor changes and impacts to the state of the Biosphere, and to provide reliable baseline information for all who want to use it;*

*3. To provide direction and leadership in setting the agenda for future local applied research and monitoring; and*

*4. To identify the areas in which research in the Brighton & Lewes Downs Biosphere can best contribute to the delivery of the UNESCO Man & Biosphere (MAB) programme research objectives*



### 3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Fieldwork Methodology

- 3.1.1 The archaeological methodology for the watching brief was set out in a Written Scheme of Investigation (ASE 2022). All work was carried out in accordance with this document and in line with the relevant professional standards and guidelines of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA 2022).
- 3.1.2 Manual groundworks were monitored by a suitably qualified archaeologist. All stripped surfaces and all sections were examined for archaeological deposits and all spoil was scanned for the presence of archaeological artefacts.
- 3.1.3 All encountered deposits were recorded according to accepted professional standards using standard Archaeology South-East context record forms. Deposit colours were recorded by visual inspection and not by reference to a Munsell Colour chart. A full photographic record of the monitoring was maintained.

#### 3.2 The Site Archive

- 3.2.1 The site archive is currently held at the offices of ASE and will be offered to a suitable Museum or depository in due course.

Context sheets	3
Section sheets	0
Plans sheets	0
Digital photos	4
Context register	1
Drawing register	0
Watching brief forms	1
Trench Record forms	0

Table 1: Quantification of site paper archive

## 4.0 RESULTS

(Figure 2)

### 4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Monitoring was undertaken during groundworks associated with the re-order of the chancel and the east end of the nave of the church.

### 4.2 Monitoring

Context	Type	Description	Deposit Thickness m
01	Layer	Made ground	<0.01
02	Layer	Made ground	0.10
03	Layer	Made ground	0.10
04	Layer	Made ground	NA

Table 2: List of recorded contexts

4.2.1 The monitoring was focused on the area where the timber floor under the frontal pews will be replaced by tile.

4.2.2 An area of approximately 3.5m x 1.5m in plan, in each side of the nave, north and south, was excavated to a depth of c.0.10m.

4.2.3 In the north side, a light greyish white silty sand [01], with less than 0.01m was immediately above a dark greenish brown clay [02], excavated to a maximum of 0.10m in thickness. This clayey deposit contained frequent charcoal and clay flecks, but no finds were encountered.

4.2.4 In the south side, the excavation revealed a loose, mid-yellow-brown sand [03], with frequent, medium sized blocks of unworked sandstone. [03] was excavated up to 0.10m in thickness. Immediately below was [04], a chalky sandy silt deposit, which was not excavated.

4.2.5 The bases of the adjacent nave supporting pillars were partially exposed. The north pillar revealed an angular, hexagonal shaped base below the cylindrical column presently visible above ground, while the south pillar revealed an unworked, irregular stone foundation.

4.2.6 No finds were recovered and no archaeological deposits or features were encountered during the archaeological monitoring.

## **5.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.1 The archaeological watching brief successfully monitored groundworks at St Mary's Church, Ringmer, East Sussex. The groundworks were associated with the re-order of the chancel and the east end of the nave. A small excavation for the installation of a new tile floor under the frontal pews was monitored, revealing made ground deposits. The excavation partially exposed the bases of the adjacent columns that support the nave, revealing different architectural elements to the north and south, thus corroborating the already known different origin of these features.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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Pritchett, 2021 *St. Mary's Church, Church Hill, Ringmer, East Sussex. Proposals for the Re-Order of the Chancel and East End of the Nave*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

ASE would like to thank Paramount Architecture for commissioning the work and for their assistance throughout the project.

**HER Summary**

<b>Site code</b>	SMR 22				
<b>Project code</b>	210055				
<b>Planning reference</b>	NA				
<b>Site address</b>	St Mary's Church, Church Hill, Ringmer, BN8 5JX, East Sueex				
<b>District/Borough</b>	Lewes, East Sussex				
<b>NGR (12 figures)</b>	544578 112509				
<b>Geology</b>	Gault Formation - Mudstone				
<b>Fieldwork type</b>	WB				
<b>Date of fieldwork</b>	21.04.2022				
<b>Sponsor/client</b>	Paramount Architecture				
<b>Project manager</b>	Leonie Pett				
<b>Project supervisor</b>	Teresa Vieira				
<b>Period summary</b>					
					None
<b>Project summary</b>	<p>Archaeology South-East (ASE) was commissioned by Paramount Architecture to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks at St Mary's Church, Church Hill, Ringmer, East Sussex (NGR 532875 108573). The groundworks were associated with the re-order of the chancel and east end of the nave.</p> <p>A small excavation for the installation of a new tile floor under the frontal pews was monitored, revealing made ground deposits. The excavation partially exposed the bases of the adjacent columns that support the nave, revealing different architectural elements to the north and south, thus corroborating the already known different origin of these features.</p>				

**Oasis Form****OASIS ID (UID):** archaeol6-506802**Project Name:** Watching Brief at St Mary's Church, Church Hill Ringmer**Activity type:** Watching Brief**Project Identifier(s):** 210055**Planning Id:** [no data]**Reason for Investigation:** Ecclesiastical consent**Organisation Responsible for work:** Archaeology South-East**Project Dates:** 21-Apr-2022 - 21-Apr-2022**HER:** East Sussex HER**HER Identifiers:** [no data]

**Project Methodology:** The groundworks were associated with the re-order of the chancel and east end of the nave. A small excavation for the installation of a new tile floor under the frontal pews was monitored.

**Project Results:** A small excavation for the installation of a new tile floor under the frontal pews was monitored, revealing made ground deposits. The excavation partially exposed the bases of the adjacent columns that support the nave, revealing different architectural elements to the north and south, thus corroborating the already known different origin of these features.

**Keywords:****Archive:**

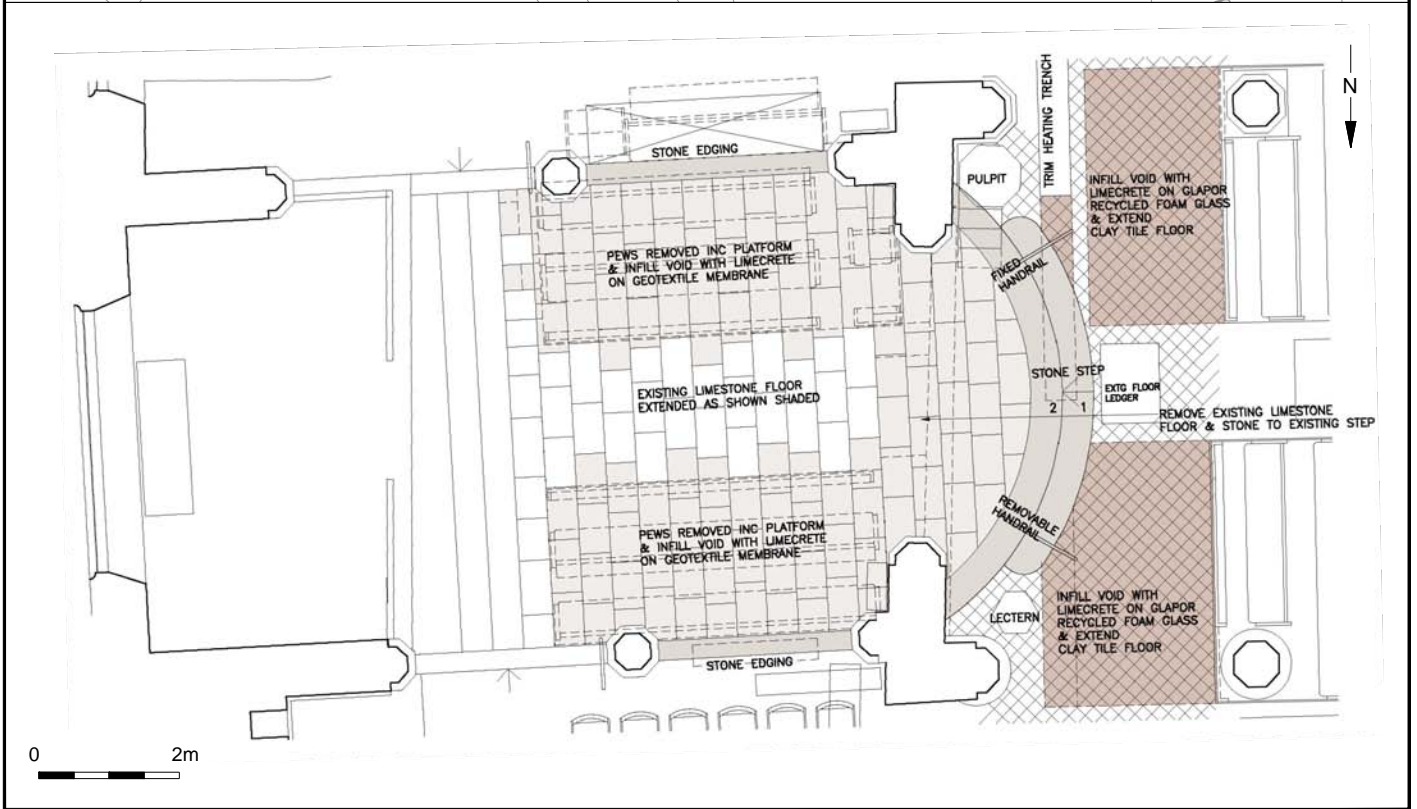
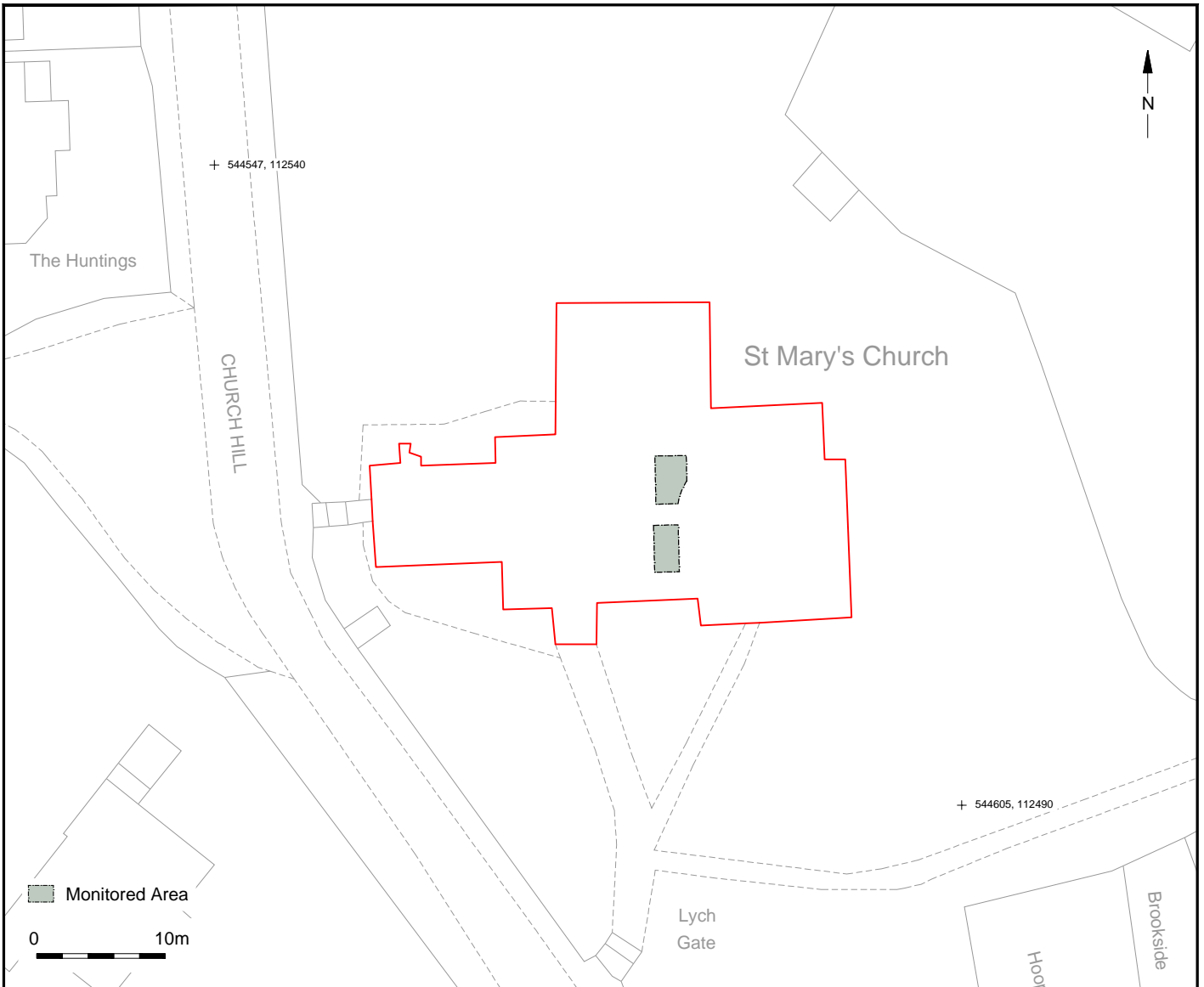
Documentary Archive, Digital Archive - to be deposited with Lewes Castle and Barbican House Museum;

**Reports in OASIS:**

Vieira, T., (2022). *Watching Brief at St Mary's Church, Church Hill Ringmer*. Portslade: Archaeology South-East. 2022118.



© Archaeology South-East		St Mary's Church, Ringmer	Fig. 1
Project Ref: 210055	May 2022	Site Location	
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© Archaeology South-East		St Mary's Church, Ringmer		Fig.2
Project Ref: 210055	May 2022	Site Plan with Location of Monitored Areas and Architects Floor Plan Detail		
Report Ref: 2022118	Drawn by: LG			





© Archaeology South-East		St Mary's Church, Ringmer	Fig.3
Project Ref: 210055	May 2022	Photographs of Monitored Areas	
Report Ref: 2022118	Drawn by: LG		

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