

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



JB Archaeology Ltd

On behalf of

St Helen's PCC

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ST HELEN'S CHURCH, HEMSWORTH,

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on the ground-works for new drainage on the north and western side of St Helen's Church, Hemsworth, West Yorkshire (NGR SE 42887 13256). The monitoring, unsurprisingly, encountered a modest amount of disarticulated human bone along with the skull from what appeared to be an intact burial at the western end of the church. This burial was very shallow (c.0.3m deep) and unusual in that it appeared to be orientated with the head to the east with the remainder of the skeleton located in the unexcavated baulk under the adjacent path. The skull was reburied in its original position, along with the disarticulated human bone, once the new drain had been laid.

In addition to the human bone a short section of bricks laid on edge were exposed that ran parallel to the north wall of the church. These appear to be the remains of the edging for an earlier path.

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document presents the results of an archaeological watching brief on the ground works for a new drain run 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 JB Archaeology Ltd between 25-27th April 2023 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.

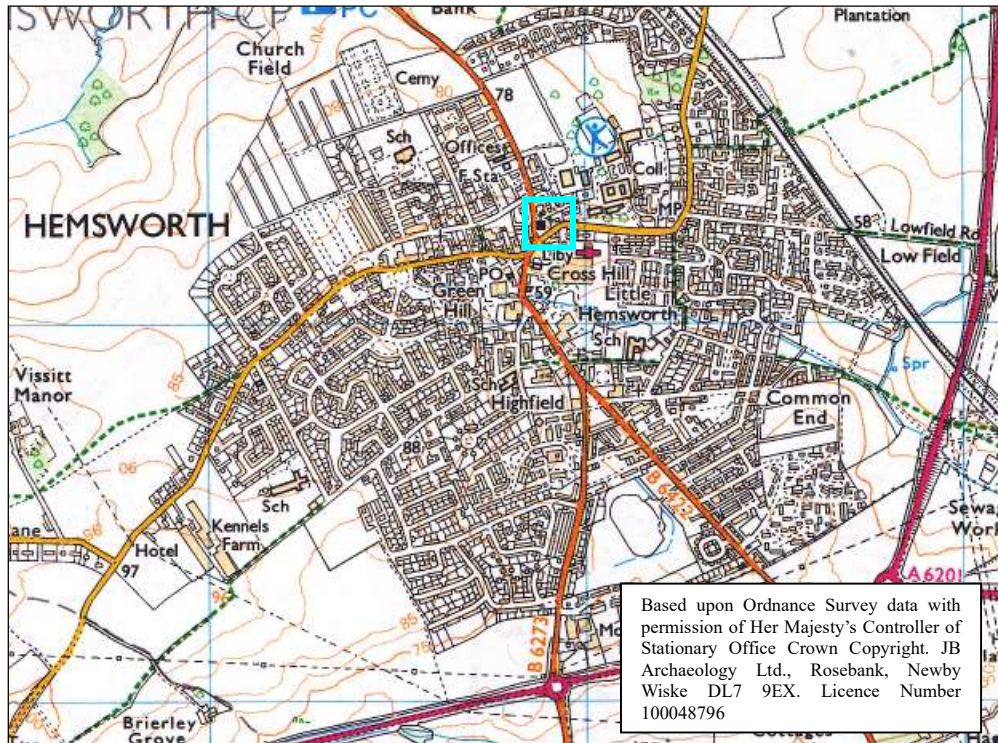


Figure 1. General Site Location

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, 2022).

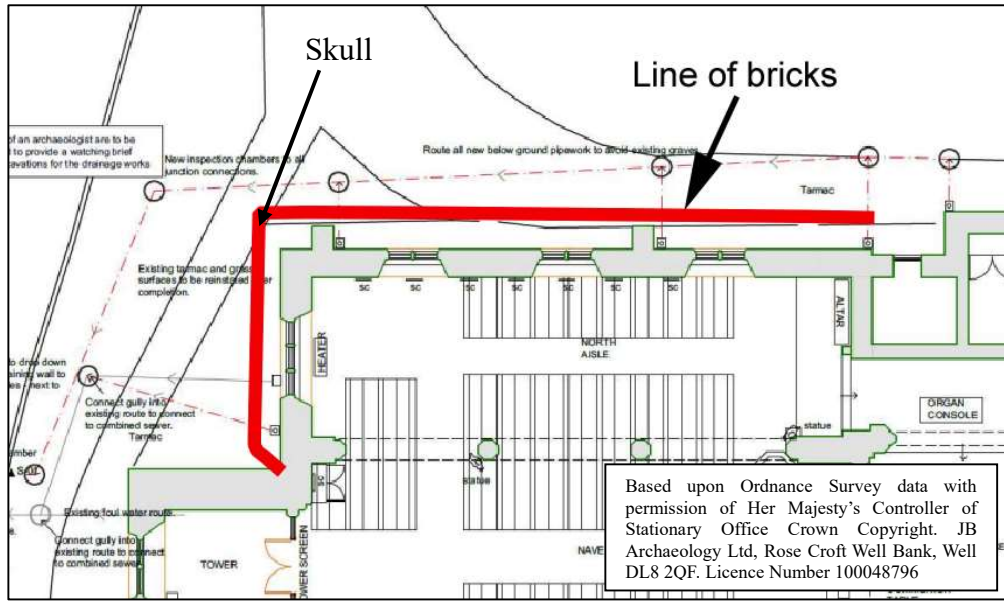


Figure 2. Location of works and features

(Drawing PPIY Architects)



Plate 1. Drain run to north of church, looking east

4.0 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Ground works consisted of the hand excavation by the contractors of the new drainage trench under direct and continuous archaeological supervision (Figure 2, Plate 1). The pipe trench was excavated to a depth of c.0.3-0.40m with an average width of 0.50m.

5.0 RESULTS

5.1 As would be expected from a church of this age the works encountered a modest amount of disarticulated human bone along the length of the excavations (Plates 1&2). In addition to the disarticulated remains, and slightly surprisingly due to the shallow nature of the works, a skull from what appeared to be an intact burial was encountered at the western end of the church (Plate 2).



Plate 2. Western section of drainage run, looking south, scale 2m

5.2 The burial was very shallow (c.0.3m deep) and was unusual in that it appeared to be orientated with the head to the east with the remainder of the skeleton

located in the unexcavated baulk as the articulated vertebra could be seen to be running to the west. The skull was briefly recovered to prevent damage during the pipelaying and was reburied in its original position, along with the disarticulated human bone, once the new drain had been laid.

- 5.3 In addition to the human bone a short section of edge laid bricks were exposed in a parallel line to the north wall of the church, this appear to be the remains of the earlier edging to a path (Plate 3). Further evidence for earlier paths was seen on the north-western corner of the drainage trench where a small area of compacted ash was observed (Plate 4).



Plate 3. On edge bricks, looking west, scale 1m



Plate 4. Area of compacted ash, probably former path

6.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 From the results described above it can be seen that the ground-works encountered one potentially *in situ* burial which had an unusual orientation for a Christian churchyard. In addition some evidence for earlier, probably Victorian or early 20th century, paths was also encountered.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Fr Robert Hart for inviting me to undertake the project and James Lyall for undertaking some of the on-site monitoring.

References

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