

**CHURCH OF ST MARY MAGDALENE,
STOCKLAND BRISTOL, BRIDGWATER,
SOMERSET TA5 2PZ**

**Report on the Potential Impact of Proposed Reordering
Works on Below Ground Archaeological Deposits**



Prepared October 2023 for

The PCC of the Church of St Mary Magdalene, Stockland Bristol

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The photograph on the cover shows the church, viewed from the SE.

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Report on the Potential Impact of Proposed Reordering Works on Below Ground Archaeological Deposits.

Summary

The proposed reordering works include the installation of an external drainage system for a new WC and kitchenette inside the church, the removal of pews and pew platforms in the North Aisle and potentially underfloor heating in this area. The works also include the alteration of external ground levels to provide level access into the church.

The writer of this document was commissioned by the PCC in consultation with their architects to undertake a site visit to visually inspect the areas of the proposed works at this early consultation stage to assess the potential impact on below ground deposits.

The site was visited on Wednesday the 13th of September 2023 under dry sunny conditions.

Location

The site is located at NGR ST 2401 4362 Stockland Bristol, Bridgwater, Somerset TA5 2PZ.

Archaeological Background

The Church is Grade II Listed, List entry number 1059049 (Historic England 2023), It is recorded as a Parish church. 1865 from documents; on the site of an earlier parish church; for Daniel family of Stockland Manor (qv); by Arthur of Plymouth. Coursed and squared blue lias rubble, Bath Stone dressings, tile roofs with bracketed eaves, copings with cruciform finials.

Decorated style with much buttressing; nave with a north aisle and South porch, West tower, chancel with a heated north vestry and a South chapel. Three stage tower, diagonal buttresses to first and second stages, parapet pierced with quatrefoils, stair turret, 2-light bell chamber openings with louvres 3-light West window, West door, carved heads stops. Three bay nave, 2-light windows; single bay chancel, 2-light window and a lancet, 3-light West window; 3-light South window to short South chapel. Plain interior, plastered walls, tile floors wagon roofs to nave and chancel, that to nave un-ceiled; scissor braced roof to north aisle. Arcade on octagonal piers.

Both the octagonal font and the chancel screen are C15, reused from the earlier church; the latter restored and installed by F Bligh Bond c1920 as a memorial to the fallen of the Great War. Remainder of fittings of 1865; notable the stone pulpit with 10 detached Purbeck shafts, similarly the reredos. Much C19 stained glass, that to chancel by Clayton and Bell. Two re-sited C17 tablets to South chapel, 2 C19 tablets. Bells of

1865. Well balanced and precise copy of a Decorated building. Thomas Daniel was the rector.

The Somerset Historic Environment Record (SHER) Record No: 16062, Church of St Mary Magdalene (South West Heritage Trust 2023). gives the same description as the official listing.

SHER Record No: 10851, Church of St Mary Magdalene, churchyard, and cross records that the graveyard has been in use since at least medieval times and that a Buckler painting of 1843 shows the lower half of a cross shaft in a square socket stone, S of the S porch of the church. It had completely gone by 1877 and cannot be traced.

Fishponds are recorded in the field on the north side of the church SHER Record No: 10854 and have the following description, "Fishpond" field names recorded on the tithe map of c1840. A complex of earthworks in the ground immediately north of the church are visible on aerial photographs. Two substantial banks-oriented E to W at the N end of the site form dams on the downslope side. A series of ditched enclosures and platforms may represent settlement on the periphery of Stockland Bristol.

Methodology

The main excavation work for the project is likely to be the installation of drainage for the new WC and kitchenette. Various drainage options are being considered at this stage (Benjamin + Beauchamp Architects 2023), but the writer was informed that the preferred option would be to instal a Trench Arch System on the north side of the church as the other options involve excavation in neighbouring land or a long run of drainage to an existing cesspit west of the church. Therefore the focus of the site inspection was concentrated on the location of the proposed Trench Arch System (Fig. 1).

The areas were recorded by written descriptions; measured sketch plans and sections supplemented by a photographic record using digital photography and appropriate scales.

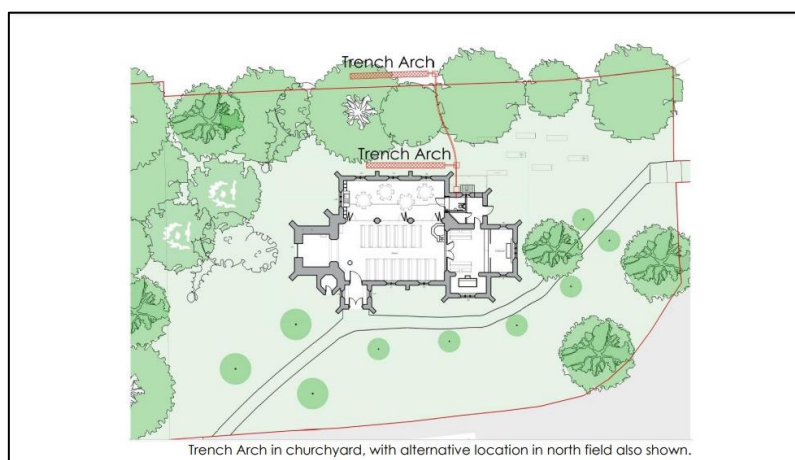


Figure 1. Trench Arch System Location (after B2 Architects)

Observations

- Trench Arch System Location

There are no upstanding headstones in the proposed Trench Arch System location (Fig. 2). The nearest ones are a Headstone for James Govett to the north of the Boiler Room entrance (Fig. 3) and a memorial stone to the Pearce family 2.8m north of the church wall, opposite the third buttress heading west along the North Aisle (Fig. 4).

A broken and eroded, decorated Ledger stone/Headstone, 1.8m long x 920mm wide has been laid against the north wall of the church in between the first and second buttresses running west, no inscription was visible (Figs. 5 & 6). A further stone slab, circa 1.3m long x 760mm wide is also visible between the second and third buttresses running north (Fig. 7). No inscription or decoration was visible on this stone, but it is possible that it may have been laid face down.



Figure 2. Proposed Trench Arch System Location, N side of Church: facing SE



Figure 3. James Govett Headstone: facing W



Figure 4. Pearce family memorial: facing E, 2m scale



Figure 5. Decorated Ledger stone: facing S, 2m scale



Figure 6. Ledger stone detail: facing W



Figure 7. Uninscribed stone slab: facing S, 2m scale

- Pathway re-profiling

The church would like to alter the ground levels to provide level access into the church, but it is unclear at this stage how this will be achieved.

The main entrance into the church is through the South Porch and is accessed by a gently sloping concrete path running SW to a stepped gateway out onto the road. The path in this location is approximately 500mm above the road (Fig. 8) and generally 150mm lower than the churchyard on either side as it runs NE towards the church (Fig. 9).



Figure 8. Stepped gateway entrance: facing NE, 2m scale

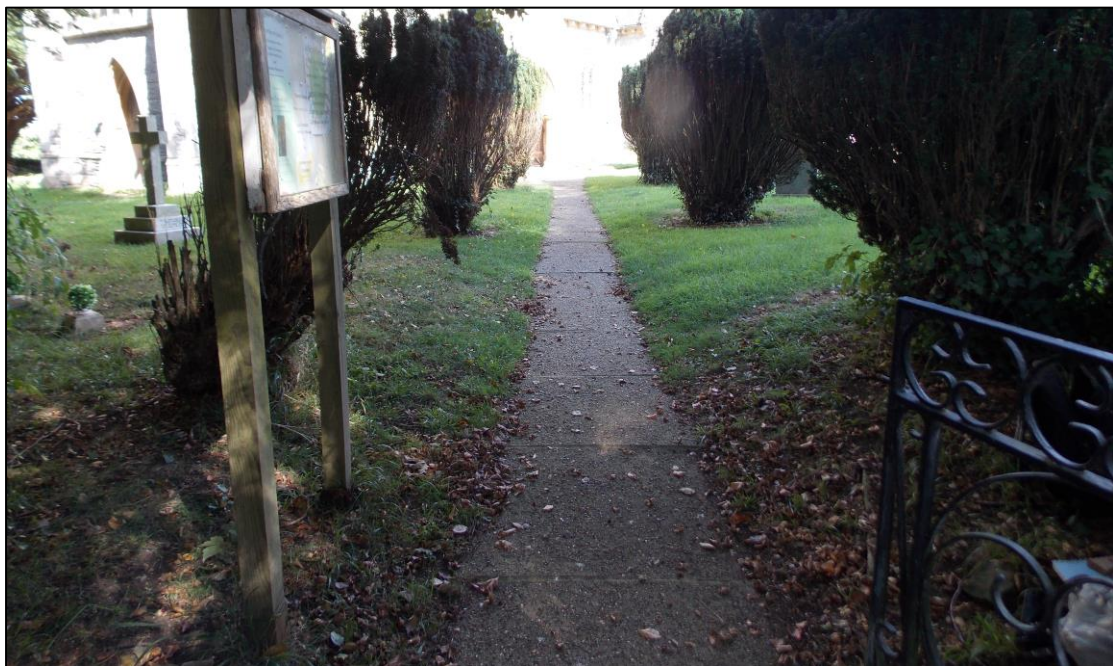


Figure 9. Pathway to South Porch: facing NE

The tiled floor within the South Porch is approximately 100mm higher than the outside path and is accessed by a single stone step (Fig. 10).



Figure 10. South Porch tiled floor & stone step: facing N, 2m scale

- Pew removal & Underfloor heating

The pews in the North Aisle appear to be 19th Century or later and are sat on a raised timber platform approximately 60mm above the tiled floor (Fig. 11). A cast iron grill runs along the south side of the pew platform at the east end (Fig. 12) and covers a 130mm wide x 1m deep service duct for the existing heating system.



Figure 11. North Aisle Pews: facing NE



Figure 12. Service duct at east end of pews: facing NW

A larger cast iron grill covers an area 1.22m long x 620mm wide and up to 880mm deep, SW of the pulpit (Fig 13).



Figure 13. Cast iron grill SW of pulpit: facing NE

Conclusion

If the Trench Arch System is installed on the north side of the church, it is unlikely to impact upon in-situ burials due to the shallowness of its construction being approximately 400mm in depth. There is however the possibility that the churchyard may have been reduced during the rebuild, but the churchyard in this area is approximately 1.4m higher than the field to the north suggesting that this area was probably built up in the 19th Century to accommodate more burials rather than being reduced.

The two memorial stones laid against the church wall have may have been moved from within the churchyard or church and are probably not in their original positions. The decorated one appears to be of an 18th Century design and is possibly a Ledger stone that was moved from inside the church during the rebuild. If this stone is in-situ potentially covering a brick constructed burial vault against the church wall, then this feature is likely to have been partially destroyed during the rebuild.

There is also the possibility that any excavation work close to the church may uncover the medieval foundations or earlier construction phases.

The entire field on the north side of the church is recorded on the SHER as a Heritage Asset (Fig. 14). Although the field was fairly overgrown with vegetation during the site visit earthworks were clearly visible (differing sheep levels) in the south end of this field opposite the west end of the churchyard (Fig. 15).

Because the field is recorded on the SHER and earthworks are clearly visible then the DACs archaeological advisor is likely to recommend against installing a drainage system within this area. If however they were to consider this option, then an archaeological evaluation would probably have to be undertaken in the form of trenching prior to any decisions being made thus increasing the projects costs considerably.



Figure 14. SHER Record No 10854 marked in field N of church (after SWHT)



Figure 15. Earthworks, south end of field on N side of church, grazing sheep for scale

It is assumed that the works to allow level access into the church would involve the raising of the path outside the South Porch and possibly a ramped entrance out on to the road. Depending on the depth of the excavation works associated with the re-profiling there is again a possibility that burials and earlier phases of the church's construction may be revealed.

Any excavation work within the churchyard is likely to uncover disarticulated human remains from the fills of numerous inter cutting graves and therefore these will need to be collected and reburied during the works.

If permission is granted for the pews and platform to be removed, then the DAC are likely to stipulate that a photographic and descriptive record is undertaken prior to their removal.

The removal of the pew platform may reveal an existing void deep enough to accommodate a new heating system without major excavation, however if the existing surface must be reduced further, then there is a strong possibility that 17th, 18th and 19th Century burial vaults may be uncovered at a fairly shallow depth. It is unclear at this stage how much of the original church floor was removed during the rebuild but service ducts have been excavated up to 1m below the existing floor surface.

Although the impact on burials is likely to be low there is still a strong possibility that the proposed works may uncover buried archaeological deposits and therefore the DAC will probably recommend that archaeological monitoring is required as a condition of any faculty granted. They may also require an archaeological Written Scheme of Investigation to be produced and approved prior to the commencement of the works.

Acknowledgements

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John McVerry (Project Manager) is also thanked for coordinating the works and for his interest and assistance on site.

Keith Faxon, October 2023

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