

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
at
St. Peters's Church
Staple Fitzpaine
Somerset
SFC 13**

Carried out for: Staple Fitzpaine Parish Council
Grid Reference: ST 2640 1826



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Summary

An archaeological watching brief undertaken during ground works for services associated with the installation of new facilities for St Peter's Church recorded several human skeletons and associated grave cuts dating from the 14th century onwards. The graves cut a shallow feature full of charcoal and 13th to 14th century fire blackened pottery. This has been interpreted as evidence of a churchyard fair.

An intact, well constructed stone culvert which might still carry water during wet periods was recorded close to the NW corner of the north aisle. The base of the western face of the north transept has been buried by a thick clay deposit due to raising of the churchyard.

Re-flooring of the western bays of the nave and north aisle allowed a view of the bases of the arcade piers. The northern piers were seen to be resting upon a stone and mortar deposit interpreted as the foundations of a former nave wall. Bedding for the new floor rested upon a hard-packed mortar layer interpreted as bedding for earlier floors. The archaeological deposits below the church remained undisturbed. The report finished with a rapid photographic survey of interesting features within the church.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 A small kitchen has been installed into the west end of the north aisle of the parish church of St. Peter in Staple Fitzpaine. This involved three distinct operations:

1. a trench for the supply of water was brought along the northern margin of the churchyard and into the western end of the north aisle;
2. an external inspection chamber was installed and the pipe taken into the north aisle;
3. the perished wooden floor in the most westerly bay of the nave was removed and new Blue Lias paving was installed, involving the removal of soil to the depth of ca. 43cm.

1.2 A faculty to carry out these works was granted by the diocese of Bath and Wells with the condition that appropriate archaeological monitoring of the works was undertaken in accordance with the specifications agreed by English Heritage.

1.3 Alan Smith of Smith Gamblin Architects, the architect in charge of the scheme, laid down the following brief for the archaeological investigations:

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SCHEME OF INVESTIGATION

An archaeologist will attend site whenever the ground within the churchyard is disturbed.

All works in relation to a watching brief will be carried out in accordance with specifications outlined in the '*Heritage Service Archaeological Handbook*' (Somerset County Council Historic Environment Service (2009))

Human remains, should they be encountered will be similarly treated in accordance with '*Guidance for best practice for treatment of human remains excavated from Christian burial grounds in England*' (EH2005).

All groundworks in association with the scheme will be monitored and recorded and all relevant information will be presented in a report with copies submitted to the PCC and Taunton Deane Borough Council. If archaeological finds or artefacts are recovered, then copies of the report will also be sent to the County Council Archaeology Department and the Somerset Records Office. Any finds will be cleaned, identified and marked and then donated to the County Museum.

1.4 The archaeological investigations were undertaken by C and N Hollinrake Consultant Archaeologists in compliance with a written scheme of investigation approved by the Diocesan Advisory Council and their archaeological advisor, R. A. Croft, the Somerset County Council Senior Archaeologist. The works proceeded in two phases:

- the monitoring of the new pipe trench and the construction of the inspection chamber was undertaken by Dr. John Davey between the 22nd of January and the 4th of February 2013;
- the foundation for the new flagstone floor in the most western bay of the nave was excavated and recorded by Charles and Nancy Hollinrake on the 9th to the 11th of September 2013.

2.0 Topography and Geology

2.1 The parish of Staple Fitzpaine, situated approximately 7km SSE of Taunton and 10km WNW of Ilminster, stretches from the crest, to the foot of, the north eastern slopes of the Blackdown Hills. Castle Neroche, a Norman castle, forms the south eastern parish boundary. The village itself lies on a narrow ridge between two streams; rising on the northeastern slopes of the Blackdown Hills and flowing east to the Fivehead River. This group of streams forms one of the two sources of the River Isle, which joins the Parret about three miles south of Langport¹. The settlement lies between the two streams within a NE-SW band of Jurassic clay and limestone with a thin band of Carboniferous shale to the north and Jurassic clay to the south. This supports soils of the Evesham 1 series: slowly permeable, clayey soils associated with shallow, well-drained, brashy, calcareous soils over limestone, best suited for grassland with winter cereals, stock raising and dairying.²



Figure 1. Staple Fitzpaine in its parish, marked by a red line. The church at Staple Fitzpaine is marked with a yellow star and Castle Neroche with a yellow CN. (Magic maps www.magic.defra.gov.uk)

¹ Collinson, 1791, *Antiquities of Somerset*, vol. I, 57.

² Soils of England and Wales; Sheet 5, SW England, 1:250,000S Sheet 5, 1996.

2.2 St Peter's Church forms the core of the settlement lying on the 110m contour in a fertile valley surrounded on three sides by the Blackdown Hills. (See Figure 1)

Five roads meet at Staple Fitzpaine. The north-south road linked the medieval castle of Castle Neroche with Taunton. Staple Fitzpaine lies on this road where it is crossed by roads to the east – to Langport, where Domesday records a fishery belonging to Staple Fitzpaine (see 4.1 below) – and two western roads leading to the tops of the Blackdown Hills. The county boundary with Devon winds its way across the highest part of the Blackdowns.

The village of Staple Fitzpaine lay at the northwestern corner of the Forest of Neroche (see Appendix 3).



Photograph 1 Sarsen stone on the roadside, Staple Fitzpaine. Looking SW

2.3 A number of large 'sarsen' stones lie by the roadside at the central crossroads in the village. A further, larger example lying by the roadside 400m south of the village is known as the 'Devil's Stone' because it was said to have been thrown by the devil from Castle Neroche towards St Peter's Church (see section 3.1 below; HER 43553). Another large 'sarsen' from Staple Fitzpaine now sits in the gardens of Taunton castle. These 'sarsens' are Tertiary silcretes that once formed on the Blackdown Plateau. They arrived at their present positions partly through periglacial mass movements in the Ice Age but also many have been subsequently moved by man³ to mark important routes. The old English *stapol* means a post or pillar of wood or stone⁴, often marking a road or crossing

³ Prudden H. 2004. *Somerset Geology; a good rock guide*. Somerset Geology Group, p.27 (no. 35).

⁴ Mills, A.D., 1998, *Oxford English Dictionary of English Place-Names*, OUP, 324.

and it is thought that the sarsens of Staple Fitzpaine are the features after which the settlement is named.⁵ Blue Lias limestone was formerly quarried in the parish⁶.

⁵ Collinson believed that the name referred to a market where staple commodities were available, but admitted that no sign of such a market was apparent. *ibid.*

⁶ Edmonds E.A. Mckeown M.C. Williams M. 1975. *British Regional Geology South-West England*. National Environment Research Council Institute of Geological Sciences, HMSO, 4th Edition, 62.

3.0 Archaeological Background

3.1 This archaeological background is taken from the online Somerset County Council Historic Environment Record (**HER**, formerly the **SMR**).

HER 43548 Church of St Peter and churchyard and cross, Staple Fitzpaine

Grid ref: ST 2638 1823

The church is mostly Perpendicular but with a Norman south doorway. Graveyard in use since at least medieval times. To the east of the church is the base of a C14 cross. "Pooley recorded this cross as one that had been heavily restored, although his depiction does not include the shaft and head, and only the ornate head appears to be modern. If a cross existed in the churchyard before, this has replaced it, not restored it". Tithe map records field to east [sic] at ST264182 as "Berryfield".

HER 41072 Cross in churchyard, about 18 m south-east of chancel, Church of St Peter, Staple Fitzpaine Village

Grid Ref: ST 2641 1824

Churchyard cross. C14, largely rebuilt probably c1894 when church restored. Ham stone. Original 2 stage calvary, upper stage with dripstone, oblong socket with chamfered plinth; shaft and cross C19, tapering shaft with filleted corners, angel abaci carrying 3 crocketed niches with crocketed top, carved figures of the Crucifixion, the Virgin and St Peter. (Pooley, Old Crosses of Somerset, 1877).

English Heritage Listed Building Number: 271110. First Listed on 25/02/1955. English Heritage Unified Designation System Asset Number: 1060277

HER 45622 Church field name, Staple Fitzpaine

Grid Ref: ST 263 182

Field named "Church Plat" located from tithe map as part of Blackdown Hills AONB survey. The church lies to the south

HER 43553 Standing stones, Staple Fitzpaine

Part of: HER 24595 18th century Turnpike Road, Chard to Staple Fitzpaine

Grid Ref: ST 2663 1794 ST 2640 1830 ST 2644 1835 ST 2648 1835

"Devils Stone" printed on Ordnance Survey map.

Measures 6ft by 5ft 4ins by 5ft Composed of hard sandstone of irregular shape, somewhat hollowed out on the sides and partly smoothed and rounded at the top. Several holes on the upper sides. Local legend has it that the devil gripped it at these holes and flung it at the nearby church, or that hearing of the intended building of the church here, gathered some stones as he approached but fell asleep and dropped the stones.

Overgrown and vulnerable to road improvements. There were at least five stones of similar type though smaller around the Staple Fitzpaine crossroads - four on the S side of the E-W route (two each side of the crossroads) and one on the N side of the corner of the N and E routes. Two more in the carpark of the Greyhound Inn (ST26441835) and 20+ found when building houses to the S of the Greyhound (ST26481836). These last were found mostly in one place about 9" below the

Staple Fitzpaine, St Peter's Church (SFC 13)

surface and consist of massive partly weathered cherty sandstone boulders. Local farmers report hitting similar stones in the area around.

Seven stones observed in 1992 although 2 appear to be recent arrivals

HER 45628 Burial site, SW of Staple Fitzpaine

Grid Ref: ST 261 180

Field named "Berryfield" located from tithe map as part of Blackdown Hills AONB survey.

HER 43563 Pound, Staple Fitzpaine

Grid Ref: ST 2638 1830

"Pound" printed on OS 25' map.

HER 41067 Almshouses, Staple Fitzpaine

Grid Ref: ST 2640 1829

Almshouse. Dated 1643. Donated by Sir William Portman

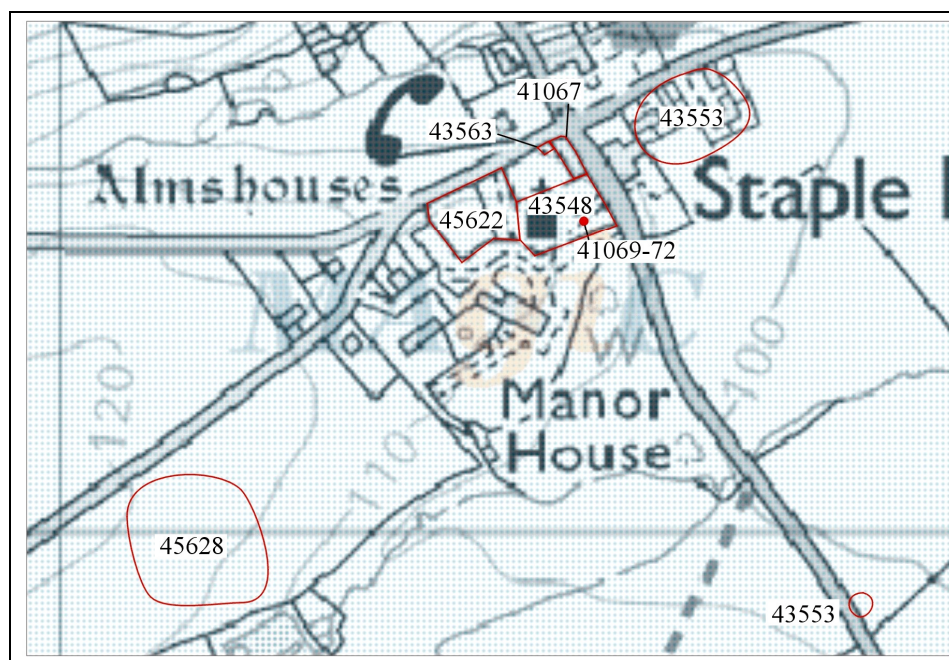


Figure 2. Location of archaeological sites mentioned in text. (Magic Maps www.magic.defra.gov.uk)

4.0 Historic Background⁷

4.1 The earliest mention of Staple Fitzpaine appears to be in the Domesday book where it is recorded as *Staple*, potentially referring to the large sarsen stones marking the crossroads here. The suffix Fitzpaine refers to the Fitzpaine family who held the manor during the 13th and 14th centuries.

4.2 In the **Domesday Book of 1086** Staple Fitzpaine is entered under the lands of the Count of Mortain, the greatest landowner in the county after the King. Entry 19:26 reads:

*The Count holds Staple (STAPLE) himself. Two thanes held it before 1066;
It paid tax for 10 hides. Land for 9 ploughs, of which 7 hides are in lordship;
3 ploughs there; 6 slaves; 20 villagers with 6 ploughs and 3 hides.
A mill which pays 30d; meadow, 24 acres; pasture ½ league long and 1
furlong wide; woodland 1 league long and 2 furlongs wide.
1 cob; 10 unbroken mares; 10 cattle; 50 sheep; 100 goats.
The value was £10; now £12.
A garden in Langport belongs to this manor; it pays 50 eels.*⁸

4.3 During the 12th century the right to appoint the priest at Staple Fitzpaine came into the possession of the Prior of the Cluniac Monastery of Bermondsey. Staple was valued at £5 6s 8d in the *Taxatio Ecclesiastica Angliae et Walliae* of 1291.⁹

4.4 The manor of Staple had come into the possession of Robert Lord Fitzpaine by the reign of Edward III. The original manor house was destroyed by fire during the reign of Henry VIII, although Collinson maintains that a part of the kitchen was converted into a poor house near the church and ruins of the manor were still visible in the orchard south of the church in the late 18th century.¹⁰

⁷ Staple Fitzpaine is not included in the most recent version of the Victoria County History for Somerset.

⁸ Thorn and Thorn 1980 *Domesday Book, Somerset*, Phillimore; Chester

⁹ Sixsmith R.A. 1958. *Staple Fitzpaine and the Forest of Neroche*, p. 27. Published privately

¹⁰ Collinson J. 1791. *The History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset. Vol I*, p. 59

4.5 The Exchequer Lay Subsidy for Somerset dated 1327 records 19 tax payers in the manors of Staple Fitzpaine and Curland. A number of the names recorded in this subsidy are suggestive of dispersed settlement; *atte Hysbere* and *De Boleford*.¹¹ These can be related to modern settlements; Hisbeer's Farm and Bulford.

4.6 The first church recorded on the site appears to have been constructed during the Norman period, although the only surviving structure from that period is a Norman doorway reset into the south porch (see **Photographs 19 to 23**). The chancel dates from the 14th century, the north aisle was added and the church refenestrated during the 15th century and the tower added c. 1500. The south aisle was added reusing nave windows, along with the south porch and vestry during 1841. The church was reseated and restored in 1894 and reroofed during the mid 20th century.¹²

4.7 The Portman family took possession of Staple Fitzpaine by 1604. Collinson tells us that in 1791 the church was a handsome gothic structure consisting of a nave, chancel and porch; tiled; an aisle on the north side; leaded and a west tower. The almshouse was endowed c. 1643 by Mrs Rachael Portman for 6 poor persons.¹³

⁶ Dickinson, F.H. 1889. *Kirby's Quest for Somerset*. P. 187. Harrison & sons; London

⁷ Statutory List - Fifty-first List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic interest: Borough of Taunton Deane (Somerset) (7/4/1986)

⁸ Collinson J. 1791. *The History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset. Vol I*, p. 59-61

5.0 Historic Maps

5.1 Plan of the Parish of Staple Fitzpaine in the County of Somerset 1829¹⁴

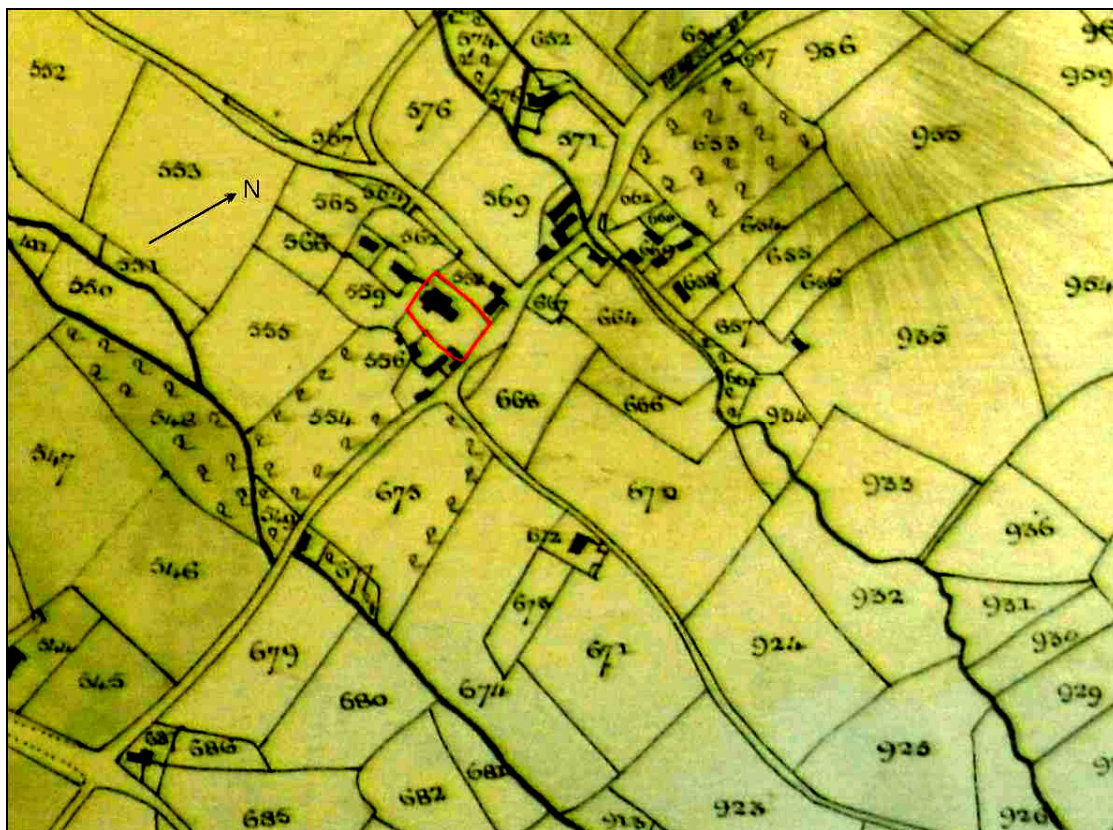


Figure 3. Plan of the Parish of Staple Fitzpaine in the County of Somerset 1829

Plot number	Field Name
552	Berryfield
553	Dixes Berry Field
557	Church and Churchyard
558	Almshouse and gardens
559	Old Orchard
560	Decayed cottage and garden (1853 – House, offices, garden and paddock. Rev. F.B. Portman occupier. Now Staple Manor)
561	Poor House
562	Church Plat
563	Encroachment
564	Encroachment
565	Wear Plat
566	Plat

Key to field names on the Portman Estate Map¹⁵:

¹⁴ Somerset Records Office reference: DD\PR/59

¹⁵ SRO DD\XSXM/1

The church yard, outlined in red, is smaller than the present churchyard, which has since been extended to the west. The crossroads at the centre of the village does not yet exist; the road approaching the village from the east joins the Taunton road at a point just south of the church. The church is set slightly apart from the rest of the village ranged along the stream. The settlement pattern is dispersed, not strongly nucleated, in contrast to the usual medieval settlement plan in the rest of the county.

5.2 Staple Fitzpaine Tithe Map 1838

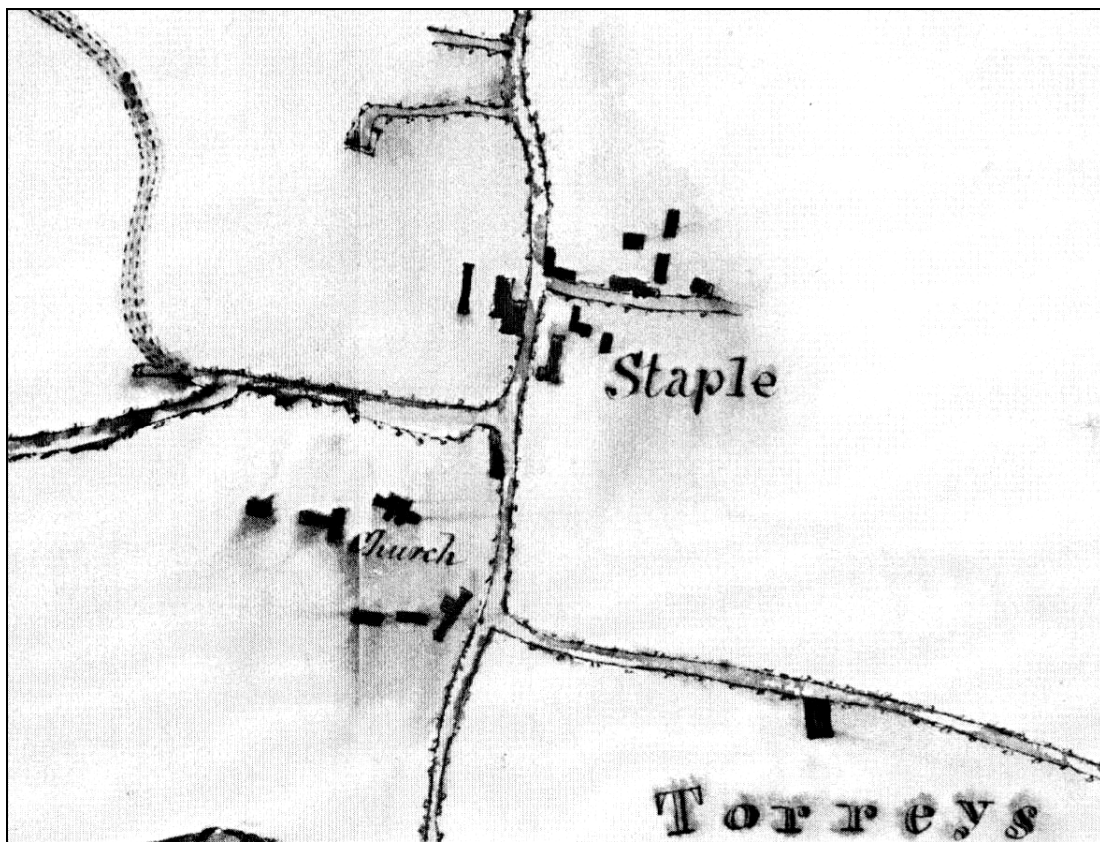


Figure 4. Staple Fitzpaine Tithe Map 1838

5.2.1 The Staple Fitzpaine tithe map is unusual in that it does not depict any individual field boundaries. It only distinguishes between the land owned by Lord Portman and Glebe land. This is most likely because the Portman estate map had only just been completed 9 years earlier and contained all the information normally held on the tithe map and accompanying apportionment. The apportionment tells us that Lord Portman owned 2,814 acres in the parish of which 779 acres were arable, 1,224 acres

were pasture, 163 acres were woodland and 627 acres were common land. The glebe comprised just over 50 acres.

5.3 Ordnance Survey First Edition map (c. 1886). 1:10,560 series

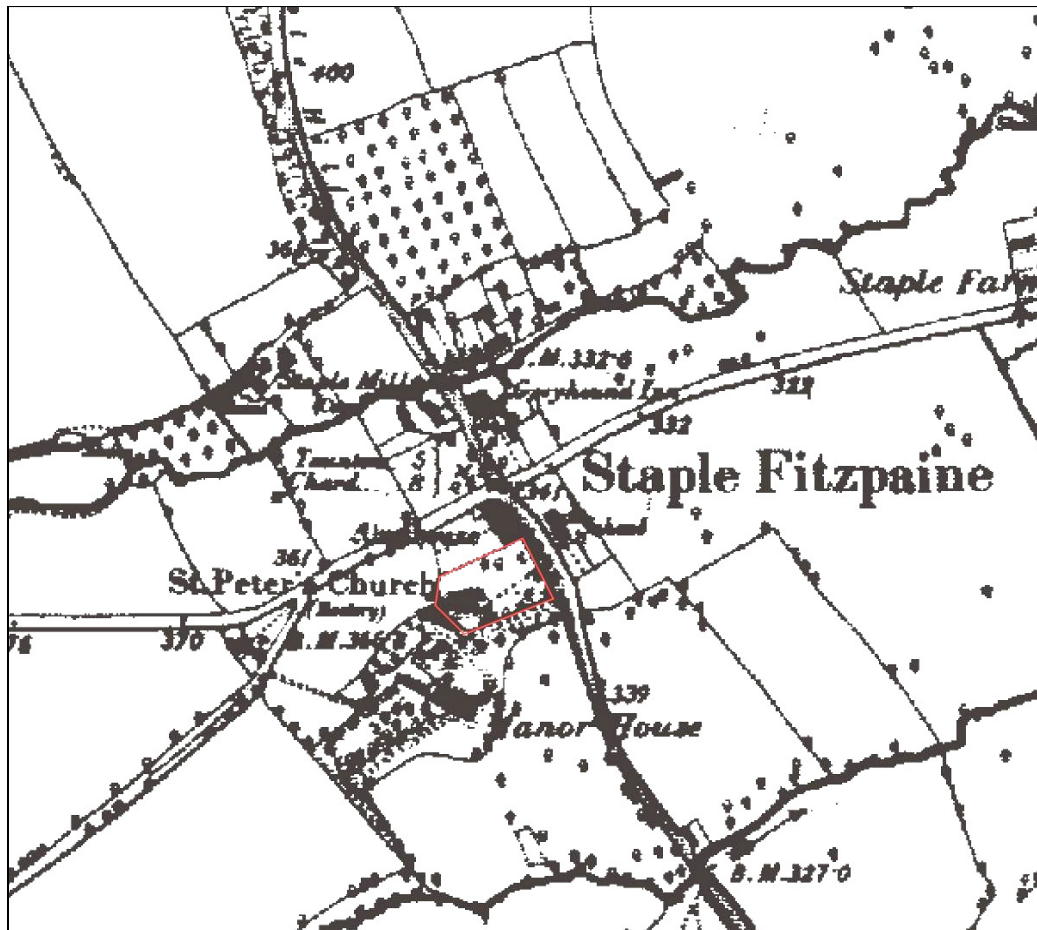


Figure 5. Ordnance Survey First Edition map (c. 1886). 1:10,560 series

5.3.1 This map shows the village plan in its current form, with central crossroads effectively bringing the two formerly separate elements together in a single nucleated settlement. The new manor house or rectory has been built, as has the south aisle and porch of the church. The churchyard however remains in its smaller early 19th century state.

5.4 Figure 6 Ordnance Survey Second Edition map (c. 1903). 1:10,560 series

There has been little change to the village or church that is visible on this map.

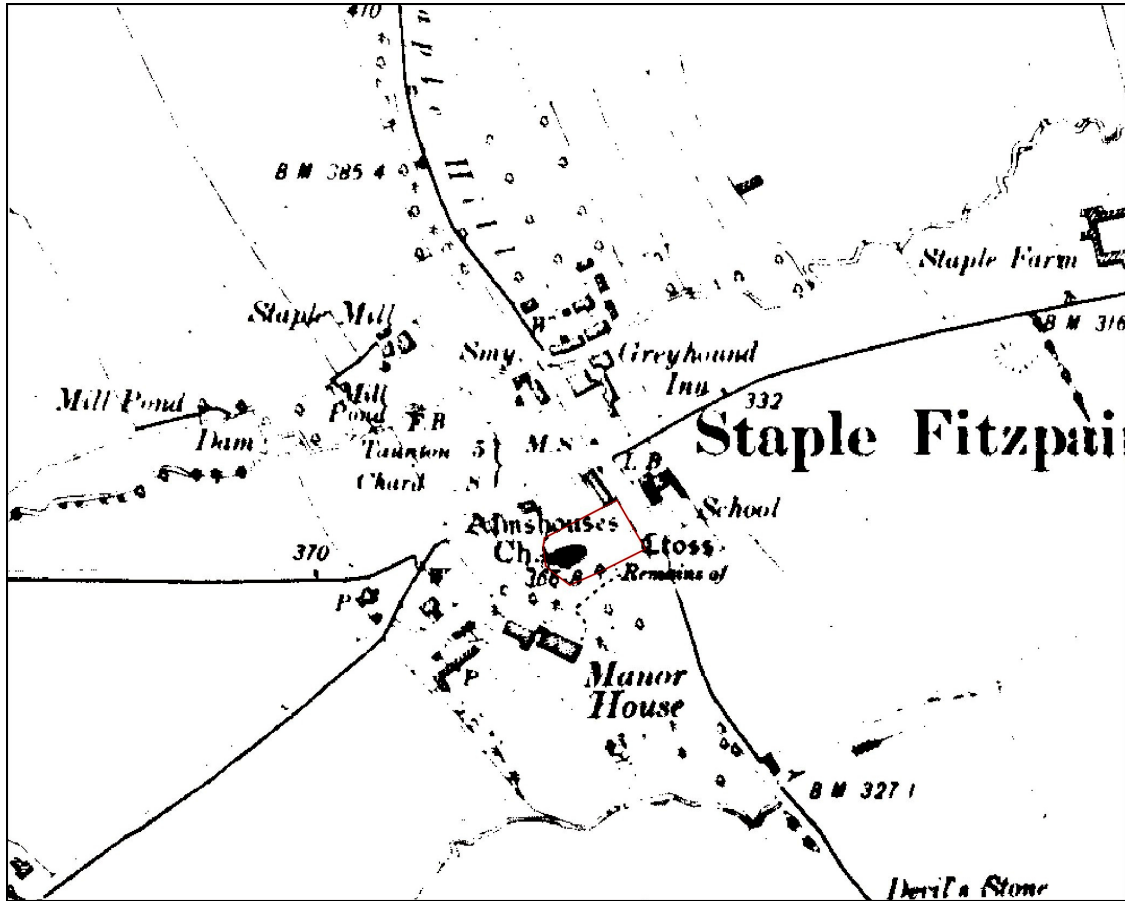


Figure 6. Ordnance Survey Second Edition map (c. 1903). 1:10,560 series

6.0 The Watching Brief – Introduction and Methods

6.1 The installation of a sink and other facilities within St Peter's Church required that mains water be brought to the west end of the church from the main road in a water pipe trench running approximately parallel to, and 3 to 4 metres south of, the north wall of the church yard. At its west end this trench turned south through 90° and ran along the west side of the north aisle, entering the church close to the angle with the west tower. An outflow drain and soak away were also to be excavated on the NW side of the north aisle, close to the northern churchyard wall. (Figure 7).

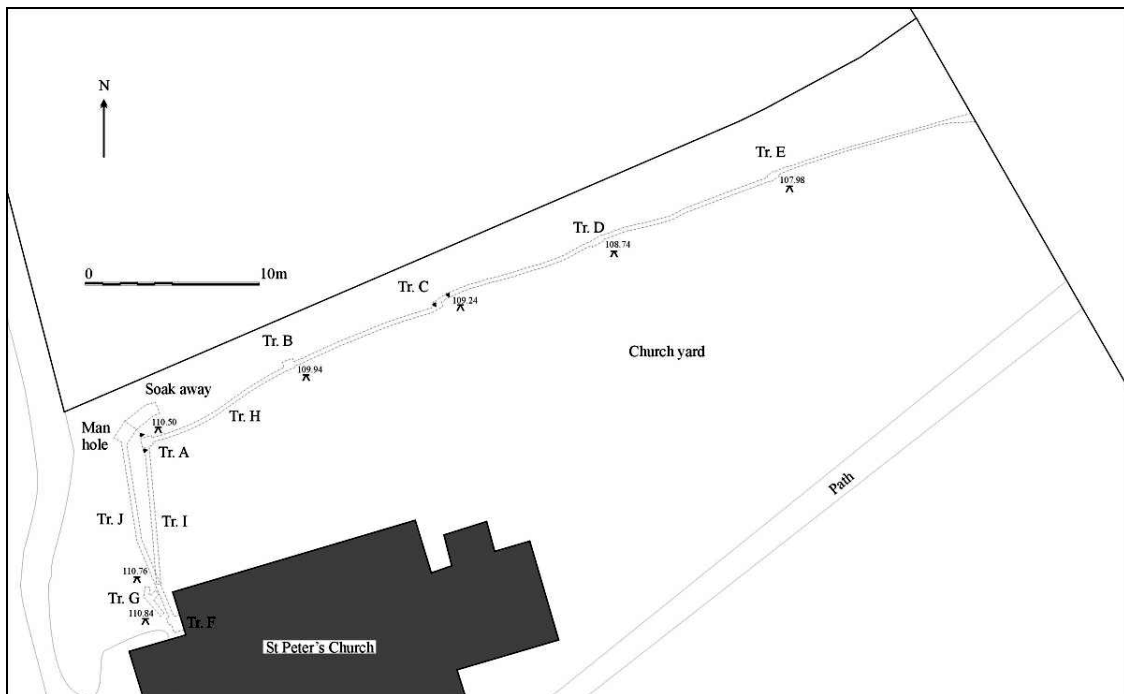


Figure 7. Trench Location plan

6.2 It was initially hoped that the mains water pipe could be installed through the use of a mechanical mole, measuring 45mm in diameter for a water pipe measuring 32mm in diameter, laid at a depth of approximately 700mm. This would have caused minimal damage to the church yard and any graves or other archaeological deposits. This procedure required the excavation of five hand dug access pits (**Trenches A to E**) each measuring slightly less than 1m long (E-W) x 0.6m wide x 0.7m deep set approximately 10m apart along the northern boundary of the churchyard. Two further pits (**Trenches F and G**) were excavated on the west side of the north aisle.

Unfortunately, geotechnical problems rendered the mole ineffective at the required depth and necessitated the excavation of an open trench along almost the entire course of the water pipe. **Trench H** ran along the north side of the churchyard linking **Trenches A to E**; **Trench I** ran south from **Trench A**, linking it to **Trench G** on the west side of the north aisle (Figure 7). The mole was still used to lay the water pipe between **Trenches G and F**. **Trenches H and I** were excavated by a mini digger using a 12 inch bucket and measured approximately 0.4-0.5m wide and 0.7m deep.

6.3 The same mini-digger was subsequently used to excavate **Trench J** for a drain running north from the west wall of the north aisle to the northern boundary of the churchyard. **Trench J** measured approximately 0.4-0.5m wide x 0.5m deep. It terminated at the northern end with a manhole trench measuring 1.0m x 0.7m x 0.45m deep and a soak away trench measuring 2.6m x 0.7m x 0.9m deep (Figure 7).

6.4 Method Statement

- All ground works were monitored by an archaeologist.
- All archaeological features and deposits were assigned context numbers corresponding to the trench in which they were recorded. Context numbers in Trench A ran from **(101)** through to **(04)** Trench B from **(201)** to **(202)**, etc. Fills and deposits are enclosed in (curved brackets) while cuts and masonry are enclosed in [squared brackets]. Context descriptions were entered onto *pro-forma* record sheets.
- Plans were drawn at a scale of 1:10 or 1:20 and listed on a *pro-forma* graphics register.
- A photographic record of the archaeological monitoring was taken throughout the works.
- Levels above Ordinance Datum were taken throughout and listed on *pro-forma* level sheets. The Ordinance Survey benchmark used, located on the west wall of St Peter's Church tower, has a value of 111.48m above mean Ordinance Datum (a.O.D).
- All human bone revealed during ground works was kept covered from general view. Loose bone was re-buried within the church yard (Trench G) on completion of the ground works. Intact skeletons were recorded, photographed and drawn at a scale of 1:10 in situ. Wherever possible they were left in place. If water supply regulations dictated that burials had to be disturbed, then skeletons were excavated by an archaeologist, following recording, and replaced as close as safely possible to their original position following completion of the ground works.

7.0 The Watching Brief - Results

7.1 Stratigraphy

Trenches A, B, C, D, E, H, J displayed the stratigraphy characteristic of the site as a whole. Trench E displayed this in its least disturbed form.

Trench E Contexts				
No.	Type	Description of Context	Interpretation	Date
501	Deposit	Loose, very dark grey brown to black clay (50%) loam (50%) with frequent tree roots, occasional fine grits and charcoal flecks. c18cm thick. Above 202;	Turf and topsoil same as 101, 201, 301, 401, 601, 701, 801	C19-20th
502	Deposit	Mid grey-brown fairly clean clay c20cm thick. Below 501; above 503; similar to 402.	clean subsoil	nd
503	Natural	Buff-brown Lias clay with occasional medium sub-rounded Lias stones.. Below 502.	Natural Lias clay	

7.2 Trench F

The west wall of the north aisle of St Peter's church was exposed in **Trench F** at a point approximately 0.3m north of the north wall of the tower. **Trench F** was excavated to a depth of 0.6m revealing a lower chamfered offset of three courses sitting upon another offset. These lower courses, originally exposed to public view, have been obscured by gradual build-up of the level of the graveyard from the fifteenth century.

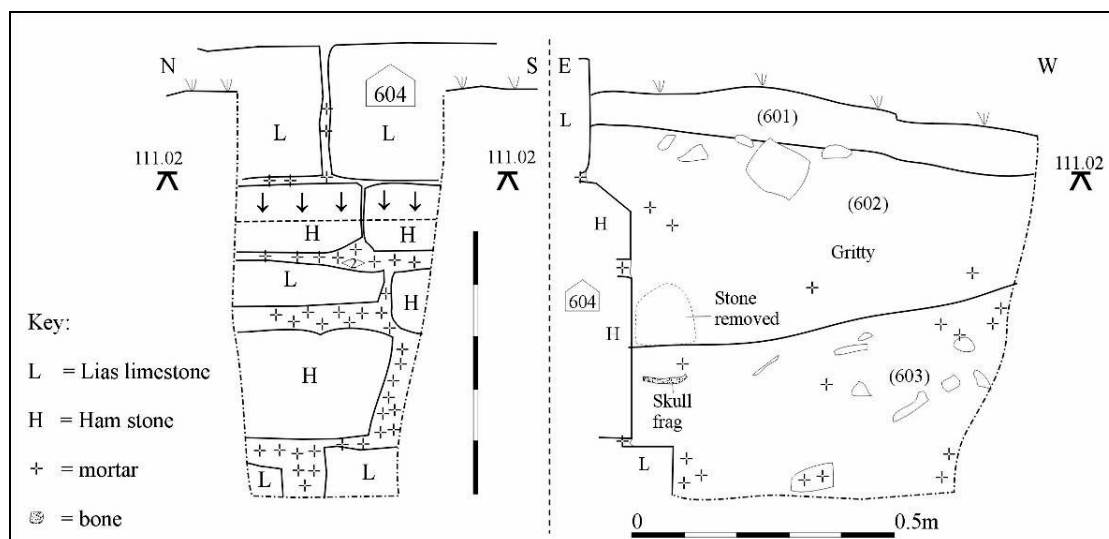


Figure 8. Trench F; west facing section (left) and north facing section (right) See Figures 7 and 9 for the plan).

Trench F Dimensions				
Approx. 0.6m deep x 0.8m E-W x 0.5m N-S. Later extended by approx 0.5m to the north.				
Context No.	Type	Description of Context	Interpretation	Date
601	Deposit	Very dark brown to black loamy topsoil with moderate small frags of Lias, Ham Stone, slate and mortar. c9-10cm thick. Above 602 .	Turf and topsoil	C19-20th
602	Deposit	Grey brown gritty loamy clay matrix with freq. small and medium Lias rubble, occ. frags of Ham stone, slate, mortar and human bone (including 3 rib and two skull frags). Up to c45cm thick against west wall of north aisle, tapering to 200mm thick at the west end of TR F. Below 601 ; above 603 .	grave earth built up against the church	C15th
603	Deposit	Buff brown silty clay containing frequent small Lias stone frags, abundant mortar lumps and flecks and occasional human bone frags (including a large skull frag in N facing section). Measures 20-40cm thick. Below 602 ; above 604, 605 .	possible construction deposit	C15th
604	Masonry	5 courses of dressed Lias and Ham stone blocks (up to 50cm x 25cm), bonded with a buff lime mortar (sample 2). Top course of Lias ashlar above Ham Stone chamfered offset course above unworked Lias and Ham stone courses. Lowest course offset. Below 605 .	west wall of the north aisle.	undated
605	Deposit	Mixed re-deposited Lias clay (60%) and Lias stone rubble (40%). Not excavated; only seen at base of Trench F but contains patches of mortar. Below 603 ; above 604 .	construction layer	undated



Photograph 2. Outer wall of north aisle, Trench F, looking South

7.3 Trench G

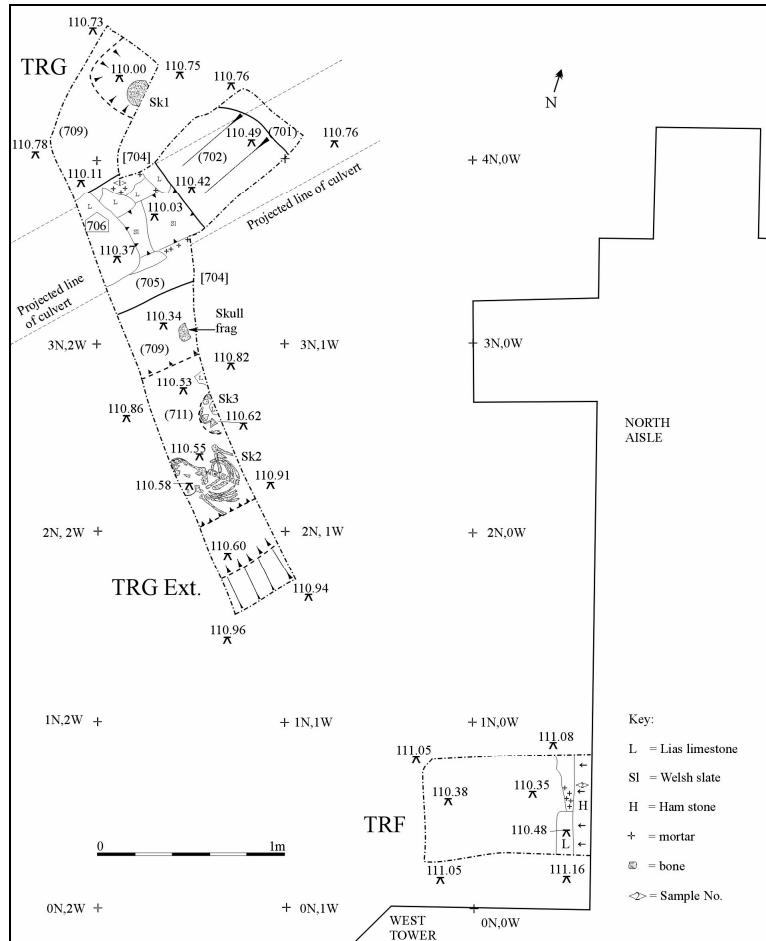


Figure 9. Plan of Trenches F and G

Trench G was excavated by hand as an entry/exit point for the mechanical mole. The number of significant archaeological features encountered and recorded necessitated the extension and subsequent abandonment of the trench.

7.3.1 Culvert (706) was the first of these features to be revealed. One of the capstones was removed in order to confirm that this feature represented a culvert. No dating evidence was recovered from the culvert or any associated deposits. Because culvert (706) was essentially intact (although no water was observed flowing within it despite the ground being saturated) it was necessary to leave it in place and mole beneath it. **Trench G** was subsequently extended by a further 2m to the SE in order to provide an exit point for the mole.

Staple Fitzpaine, St Peter's Church (SFC 13)

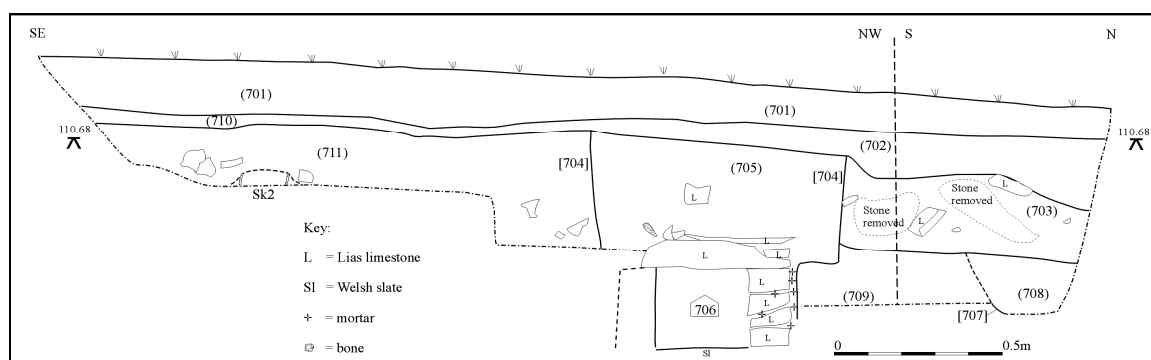


Figure 10. Trench G, East facing section

Trench G Contexts				
No.	Type	Description of Context	Interpretation	Date
701	Deposit	Loose, very dark brown to black loamy clay with occ. charcoal flecks, grits and freq. roots. Up to 14cm thick. Above 702, 710	Turf and topsoil	C17-20th
702	Deposit	Fairly loose grey to buff brown silty loamy clay with freq. mortar flecks and grits, small frags of Lias, Ham stone, slate and occ. degraded fired clay. c 10cm thick. Below 701 , above 703, 705 ; same as 710 .	construction deposit.	nd
703	Deposit	Moderately compact greenish to grey brown silty clay and 20% large Lias rubble (<250mm x 200mm x 150mm). with freq. re-deposited human bone frags and occ. medieval pottery. Up to 30cm thick north of culvert 706 . Apparently dips to north. Below 702 ; cut by 704 ; ?same as 711 ; above 708, 709, 803 .	Mixed rubble and graveyard soil.	C13-14th
704	cut	Linear (SW-NW). c 0.65m deep x 0.6-.07m wide x 1.3m in trench. Sharp break of slope top, vertical sides. A ledge half way down narrows the width by 90mm. Below 706 , filled by 705, 706 ; cuts 703, 711 .	Cut for stone lined culvert 706 .	nd
705	fill	Moderately compact light buff brown clay. <0.5m deep and 0.7m wide. Below 702 ; above 706 ; fills 704 .	Clean clay back fill of culvert cut 704	nd
706	Masonry	Undressed Lias limestone walls (internally faced, <20cm x 15cm x 6cm), slate base (30cm x 30cm x <10cm) and large undressed Lias limestone cap stones (<50cm x 30cm x 12cm. Side walls up to 4 courses. bonded with lime mortar (sample <1>). The whole structure measures 0.5m wide and 0.35m deep. Below 705 ; above 704 ; fills 704 .	Stone culvert. Intact and potentially functioning	nd
707	cut	Sub-rectangular with rounded corners. Steeply sloping sides and gradual break of slope on to a flattish base. The base has a head shaped niche at west end for the skull of SK1 (24cm N-S x 32cm E-W x 15cm deep. aligned W-E. Cuts 709, 804, 805 ; filled by 708 ; truncated by 704, 703 .	Grave cut for skeleton SK1/8 .	post C14-15th

Staple Fitzpaine, St Peter's Church (SFC 13)

708	fill	Moderately compact greenish to grey brown silty clay with occasional small and medium Lias stones. Below 703 ; fills 707 ; truncated by 703 ; cut by 704	Fill of grave cut 707 .	C14-15th
709	Natural	Moderately compact blue grey and buff grey natural Lias clay. Below 703 ; cut by 707	Natural Lias clay	
710	Deposit	Fairly loose grey brown silty clay (70%), gritty mortar (10%), fine Lias and slate frags (20%). with occ. charcoal, degraded fired clay and abundant Lias grits. c 10cm thick south of culvert 706 . Below 701 ; above 711 ; ?same as 702 .	Gritty layer similar to 702 but with more grits and stone frags.	nd
711	Deposit	Moderately compact greenish to grey brown silty clay containing occasional medium angular Lias stones (5-10cm), occ. disarticulated human bone. Contains SK2 and 3. Not fully exposed but at least 35cm thick on south side of culvert 706 . Below 710 ; cut by 704 ; same as 703 .	Grave earth. Contains SK2 and SK3. No grave cut visible.	nd



Photograph 3. Culvert (**706**) capstone removed. Looking East

7.3.2 Skeleton **SK1** was partially revealed in the base at the northern end of Trench G. Initially this comprised a few skull fragments exposed against the west facing section within grave cut [**707**]. The near complete skeleton was subsequently revealed within Trench I (see skeleton **SK1/8**, paragraph 7.5.1- 5 below).

Two infant burials **SK2** and **SK3** were also partially revealed in the southern end of Trench G extension. **SK2** comprised a skull, left and right clavicles and scapulae, left and right humerus, several vertebrae and upper rib cage. **SK3** comprised only a partially exposed and fragmented skull. Nevertheless, the pair of skeletons appeared to have been placed side by side in a shallow grave (c 30-35cm below the surface) in an extended supine position with their heads to the west. It was not possible to discern a clear grave

cut for these burials, although a frequent occurrence of medium and large Lias stones immediately above the skeletons suggested that they lay below a rubbly fill. Otherwise they appeared to lie within layer (711). An estimate of the age of the individual represented by **SK2** is provided by the presence of fully erupted deciduous, or baby, teeth but the near absence of any adult teeth except possibly an upper central incisor. This suggests the child was approximately 8 years old at the time of death. An estimate of height can be gauged from the length of the right humerus which was approximately 18cm long, giving a height of 118.45cm \pm 4.45cm suggesting an age of approximately 6-10 years.

The fact that these individuals were laid to rest within such a shallow grave might suggest that they were buried in a clandestine manner, perhaps because they were unbaptised and refused a full Christian burial in a graveyard. They were sealed by the 19th century layer of builder's detritus and therefore potentially less than 150 years old. As such there was a minor health risk associated with excavating the skeletons. It was decided that they should be fully recorded but then covered and left *in situ*. For this reason Trench G extension was abandoned and not excavated any further.

7.4 Trench H

Trench H, 0.4-0.5m wide, 0.7m deep and approximately 50m long, was an open pipe trench excavated by machine along the northern boundary of St Peter's church yard in order to link the hand dug pits (**Trenches A to E**). It was excavated following the failure to drive the mechanical mole between these pits at the required depth due to the presence of tightly jointed Lias Limestone bedrock at a depth of 0.4-0.5m below the surface in the vicinity of **Trench D**. No archaeological contexts were recorded other than those already seen in **Trenches A to E**.

Five sherds of 17th-19th century pottery, mortar, shell and a roof slate fragment with nail hole were recovered from the spoil heaps associated with **Trench H**.

The eastern end of Trench H extended beyond Trench E as far as the eastern wall of St Peter's church yard. At this point the foundations of the church yard wall were cleaned and photographed. The foundations comprised at least 6 courses of roughly squared Lias rubble stones measuring up to 400 x 120mm bonded with lime mortar (sample <3>). The wall was battered. The foundations were set within a 2m wide rubble filled cut. The surface of this rubble back fill stood slightly proud of the surrounding church yard ground level to produce a low earthwork parallel and adjacent to the wall.



Photograph 4. Trench H eastern church yard wall, looking East

7.5 Trench I

Trench I was an open water pipe trench excavated by machine between Trench A and the east side of Trench G. It was designed as a solution to the logistical problems posed by archaeological obstacles recorded in Trench G. It was to be extended south as far as culvert (706) at which point the water pipe was to be driven by mechanical mole under the culvert to Trench F.

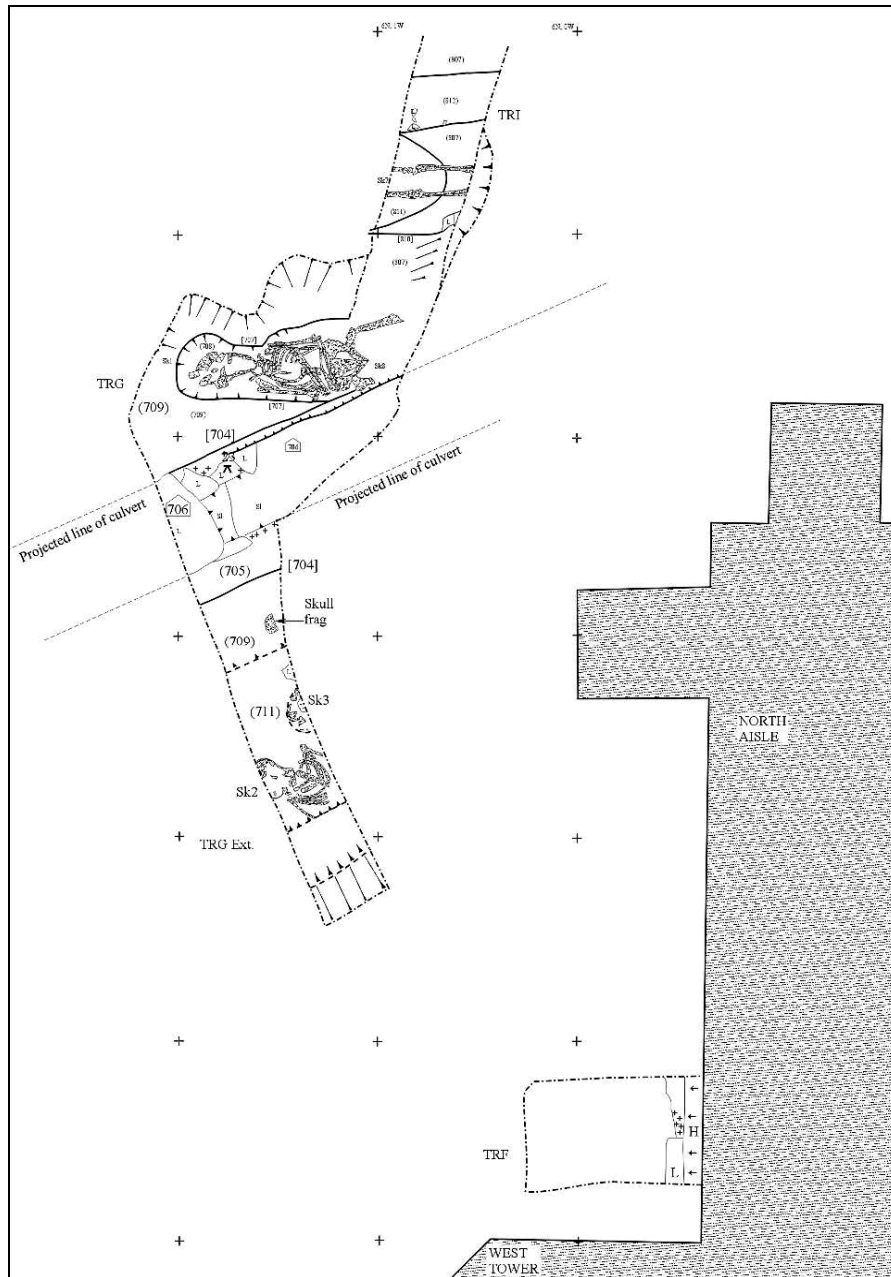


Figure 5. Trenches F, G and I, Skeletons SK1-3 & 7-8

Staple Fitzpaine, St Peter's Church (SFC 13)

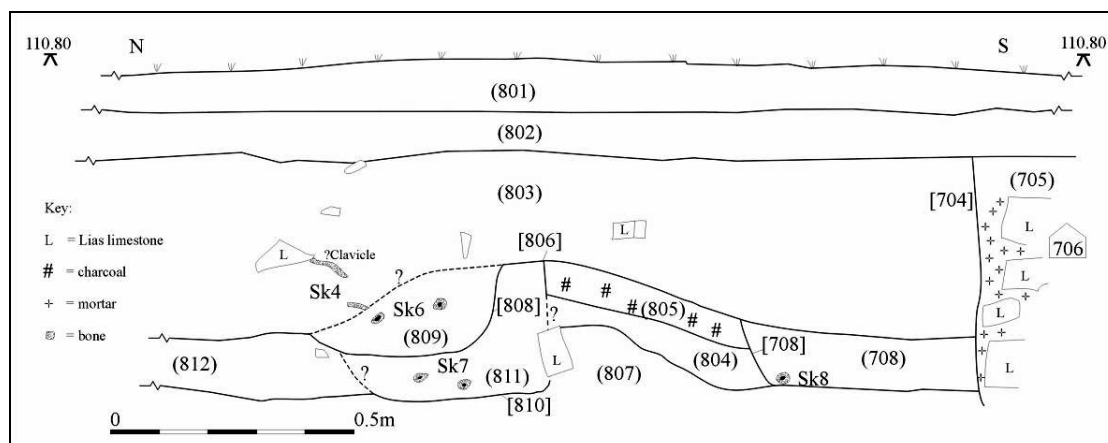


Figure 6. Trench I, West facing section (south end)

Trench I Contexts				
No.	Type	Description of Context	Interpretation	Date
801	Deposit	Loose, very dark brown to black loamy clay with occasional charcoal flecks, grits and frequent roots. Up to 12cm thick. Above 802	Turf and topsoil	C19-20th
802	Deposit	Fairly loose, dark grey brown silty loamy clay with freq. mortar flecks, occ. fine Lias, slate and Ham stone frags. Up to 8-9cm thick. Below 801 ; above 803, 705 ; same as 702 .	Similar to 702 but less gritty. Further from church than 702 so less builders' detritus.	C19th
803	Deposit	Moderately compact greenish grey brown silty clay with freq. medium angular Lias stones (5-10cm), occ. med pot and disarticulated human bone. Also contains skeletons SK4 and SK5 . Underlies 802 ; 703 overlies 708, 804, 805, 809, 812 ; cut by 704 .	grave earth.	
804	Deposit	Moderately compact greenish grey brown silty clay with freq. charcoal and occ. med pot. Only seen south of cut 808 . Up to 25cm thick. Below 803 ; cut by 806, 808, 708 ; above 807	Similar to 803 but containing more frequent charcoal. ?medieval graveyard soil.	
805	fill	Moderately compact dark greenish grey brown charcoal-rich silty clay with abundant charcoal flecks and lumps, moderate med pot, rare shell, burnt bone, burnt stone and fired clay. c0.4m long (N-S) x 0.35m wide (E-W) x 0.08m deep Below 803 ; fills 805 ; cut by 707 .	Fill of cut 806	C14th
806	cut	squared in plan as exposed. 40cm x 35cm x 8cm deep. Asymmetrical sides with a gentle slope on east side and sharp undercut slope on west, base dips towards the SW. Original shape of cut unknown as it is truncated on the south by 707 and not exposed to the east. Filled by 805 ; cuts 804 .	Original shape and function unclear but contains evidence for burning in fill including abundant charcoal, burnt stone, burnt bone, fired clay frags and medieval cook pot with external sooting.	C14th
807	Natural	Moderate to firm greenish grey to yellow clean clay. Below 804, 812 ; cut by 810 .	Probably natural clay, or transitional layer.	
808	cut	rectangular. Gradual break of slope top,	Grave cut containing	C14th

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		irregular steeply sloping sides, gradual break of slope on to an irregular flattish base. Aligned approx WSW-ENE. 450mm wide <190mm deep. Full length not seen. Truncated on north side, possibly by an indiscernible cut for SK4 . Filled by 809 , cuts 804 .	skeleton SK6 . Head to the WSW. Fill contained several sherds of 13th-14th century pottery.	
809	fill	Moderately compact greenish grey brown silty clay with occ. angular Lias stones (5-10cm), charcoal flecks, rare med pot, coffin nails. Also contains skeleton SK6 . 45cm wide x <19cm deep across full width of Trench. Below 803 ; fills 808 .	Fill of grave cut 808 , two coffin nails suggesting SK6 was coffined.	C14th
810	cut	rectangular. Gradual break of slope top with steeply sloping sides and gradual break of slope on to flat base. Aligned W-E. c 50cm wide x 15cm deep, length not fully exposed. Filled by 811 ; cuts 807 ; cut by 808 .	Grave cut containing skeleton SK7 . Head to the W..	C14th
811	fill	Moderately compact greenish grey brown silty clay containing patches of clean yellow re-deposited natural clay, occ. charcoal flecks, med pot and small-medium Lias stones. Also contains skeleton SK7 . 0.5m wide x 0.15m deep across full width of Trench I. Cut by 808 ; fills 810 .	Fill of grave cut 810 , contains med pot and skeleton SK7 W-E aligned with head to west.	C14th
812	Deposit	Moderately compact greenish grey brown silty clay containing patches of re-deposited natural yellow clay, charcoal flecks and small Lias stones. Approx 28cm wide (N-S) across the full width of Trench I. Unexcavated. Above 807 ; cut by 810 ; below 803 .	possibly a W-E aligned grave fill.	C14th

7.5.1 Five skeletons were partially revealed in **Trench I**, four of which needed to be recorded and then removed in order for the pipe trench to attain the necessary depth. These skeletons were re-buried within the abandoned **Trench G** at the end of the excavation.

1) The first skeleton to be revealed, in the central section of **Trench I**, was **SK5** in an extended supine position in a west-east alignment with the head to the west, first encountered c 0.7m below ground surface. **SK5** was photographed and then covered and left *in situ*.

2) The second skeleton to be partially revealed, at the south end of **Trench I**, was **SK4** (Figures 5 and 6), a tight bundle of disarticulated human bones¹⁶, potentially

¹⁶ Coccyx, 6 ribs or rib fragments, 1 broken end of ulna; 1 radius, 2 vertebrae, 1 large lumbar vertebra, 1 end of long bone (?leg), 1 lower fragment of pelvis (left side) with hip socket, several pelvis fragments, 1 large fragment of scapula with socket, 1 clavicle in two parts, 1 phalange (finger tip), 1 end of long bone (?arm), 3 small fragment of long bone, 1 large and near complete femur, 1 femur in two halves.

representing approximately 25% of a single individual, disturbed and subsequently re-deposited in this position. **SK4** was cleaned, photographed, drawn at a scale of 1:10 and then removed.

No grave cut was discernible for **SK4**, although the grave fill associated with **SK6** below it (**809**) does appear to be truncated on the north side, potentially by an otherwise invisible cut for **SK4** (Figure 6). However, it is clear that this does not represent a grave as such. The bones were grouped in a tight bundle, occupying a roughly circular space. It seems likely that a burial may have been disturbed and the bones removed and re-buried in a shallow pit at this point. **SK4** lies approximately 1m north of culvert (**706**).

SK4 is recorded as lying within context (**803**); greenish grey-brown silty clay interpreted as a late medieval or early post med graveyard soil. Within the immediate vicinity of **SK4** six sherds of medieval courseware were recovered dating from the 13th-14th centuries. This collection included an upright rim sherd, internally beveled and with external combed decoration in a swirling pattern; it bore external soot marks.

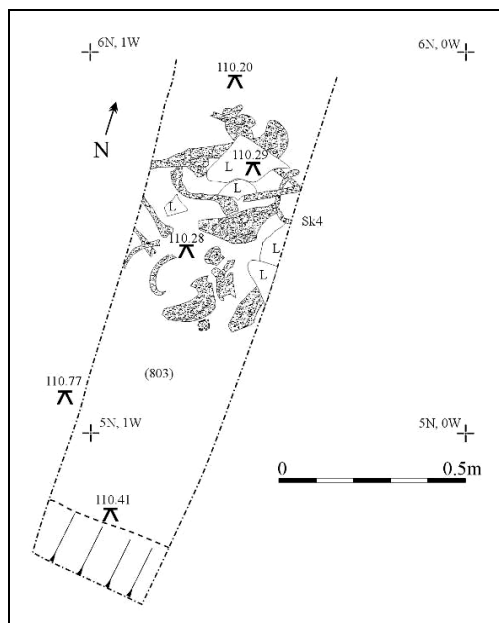


Figure 11. Plan of Trench I (south end) and SK4



Photograph 7. Trench I, SK4, looking south

3) **SK6** lay immediately below **SK4**.¹⁷

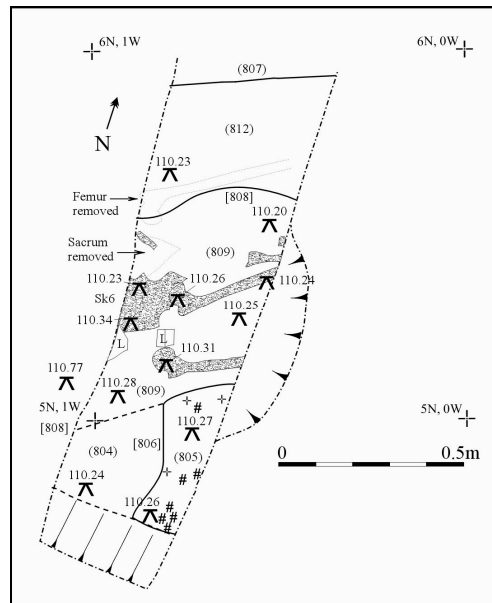


Figure 12. Plan of **Trench I** (south end) and **SK6**



Photograph 8. **Trench I** (south end), **SK6**. Looking south

¹⁷ Part of the pelvis, sacrum and coccyx of **SK6** were lifted before recording because it was assumed that they were part of the **SK4** assemblage. It is possible that the left femur of **SK6** had been removed during the 19th century when the pit for **SK4** was dug. This femur may then have been re-deposited within **SK4**. As recorded, **SK6** comprised the right pelvis and right femur in an extended supine position, aligned WSW-ENE, with the head to the west.

SK6 could be seen to lie within a grave cut **[808]**, although this cut was only visible where it penetrated the natural yellow Lias clay (**807**). The grave cut was filled with greenish clay (**809**) containing 7 medieval coarse ware pottery sherds dating from the 13th-14th centuries and 2 iron nails¹⁸. A few of the pot sherds were externally fire blackened.

4) **SK7** (Figure 13) was revealed immediately below cut **[808]**. The top of these bones lay 0.68m below the ground level, however, they were close to an entry point for the mechanical mole where it was required to go beneath culvert (**706**). For this reason skeleton **SK7** had to be cleaned, recorded, planned and photographed and then removed¹⁹.

SK7 lay within grave cut **[810]**. It was filled by (**811**); a greenish grey brown silty clay containing patches of clean yellow re-deposited natural clay, occasional charcoal flecks and small-medium Lias stones. It also contained 4 small abraded sherds of medieval pottery dating from the 13th-14th centuries.

5) **Trench I** was extended to the south as far as culvert (**706**). A further skeleton **SK8** was revealed in the southernmost corner of the trench, partially truncated by the culvert cut **[704]**. It was clear that this skeleton continued beyond **Trench I** to the west. Because the working area for mechanical moleing needed to be expanded at this point it was decided to expose the whole of **SK8** by enlarging the south end of **Trench I** and joining it with the north end of **Trench G**. At this point it became clear that **SK8** was the same skeleton as **SK1** and should be referred to as **SK1/8**.

SK1/8 was complete above mid-thigh level, in an extended supine position, aligned west-east, with the head to the west. The left arm was folded with the hand over the left side of the pelvis and the right arm was folded with the hand over the left humerus. The right femur was truncated during the construction of culvert (**706**), the left femur had been truncated by the machine during the excavation of **Trench I**. The skull had collapsed and fragmented, the upper jaw was very fragmentary and there was also

¹⁸ The nails were handmade with roughly squared cross sections to the shafts.

¹⁹ The lower part of the left and right femur, the left and right patellae, and the left and right tibia and fibula were exposed. The upper ankle bones were also revealed on removal.

deterioration in the chest area; some vertebrae were missing, others had been disturbed in antiquity and some ribs were very fragmentary.

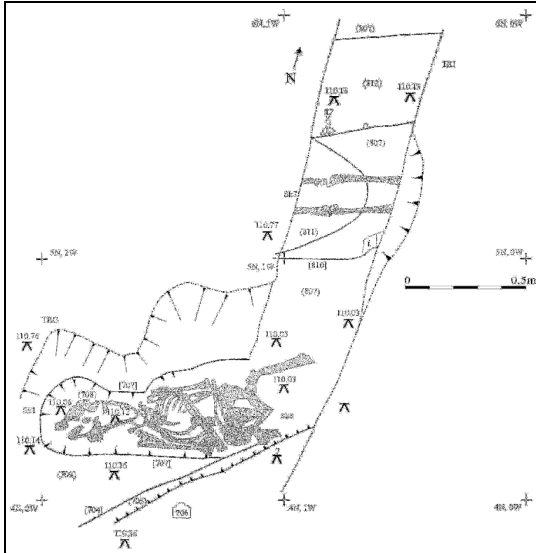


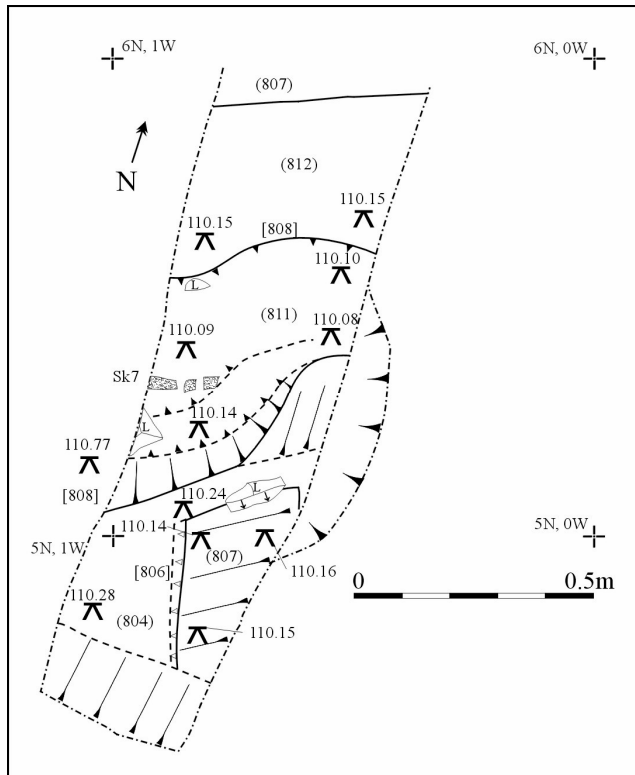
Figure 13. Plan of Trench I (south end) and Trench G (north end), SK7 and SK1/8



Photograph 9. Trenches I (south end) and G (north end), Skeleton SK1/8 and culvert (706). Looking west.



Photographs 10. Charcoal-rich fill (805) on the left and pit [806] on the right. Looking south.



All that was visible of the cut [806] was a squared corner, c 8cm deep as exposed. It had asymmetrical sides with a gentle slope on east side and sharp undercut slope on west, and a base sloping gently down towards the SW. The original shape of cut is unknown as it is truncated on the south by grave cut [707], on the north side by grave cut [808] and not exposed to the east.

7.6 Trench J

Trench J (Figure 7) c 0.4-0.5m wide, 0.5m deep and approximately 10m long, was a drain pipe trench excavated by machine from the north side of Trench F in a northerly direction roughly parallel to and west of **Trench I**. Because the maximum depth of the drain trench was to be c0.5m below the ground surface, (approximately 100-200mm above the recorded level where skeletons had been encountered), it was hoped that there would be little further disturbance to skeletons **SK4-7**. No archaeological contexts were recorded other than those already seen in **Trenches A, F, G and I**.

A trench c 1.10m x 0.7m x 0.45m deep was excavated for an inspection chamber at the northern end of **Trench J**. The manhole was located less than 1m east of Trench A and had a comparable stratigraphic sequence of deposits within it.

A soak away next to the inspection chamber c 2.6m long (NE-SW) x 0.7m wide x 0.9m deep was excavated by machine.

No archaeological features were observed in any of the drain trenches. The only finds were sherds of post medieval red earthenware pottery (16th-17th centuries), mortar and an iron strap or bar from the spoil heaps. Fragments of loose human bone were recovered from the rubble and graveyard soil layers and reburied prior to backfilling.



Photograph 11. New service pipe entering the church in Trench F.

7.7 The Interior of the Church

7.7.1 Introduction

Part of the introduction of the new facilities into the church involved the removal of the pews from the western bays of the nave and north aisle. The pews in St. Peter's rest upon wooden platforms with the aisles and chapels paved with Blue Lias flagstones. The removal of the pews and their platforms exposed unpaved areas which needed to be paved with flagstones matching the existing stones already in position. The intention was to excavate the areas of new paving to a depth of up to 48cm to accommodate new foundations, as detailed in the proposed specifications in **Figure 15**.

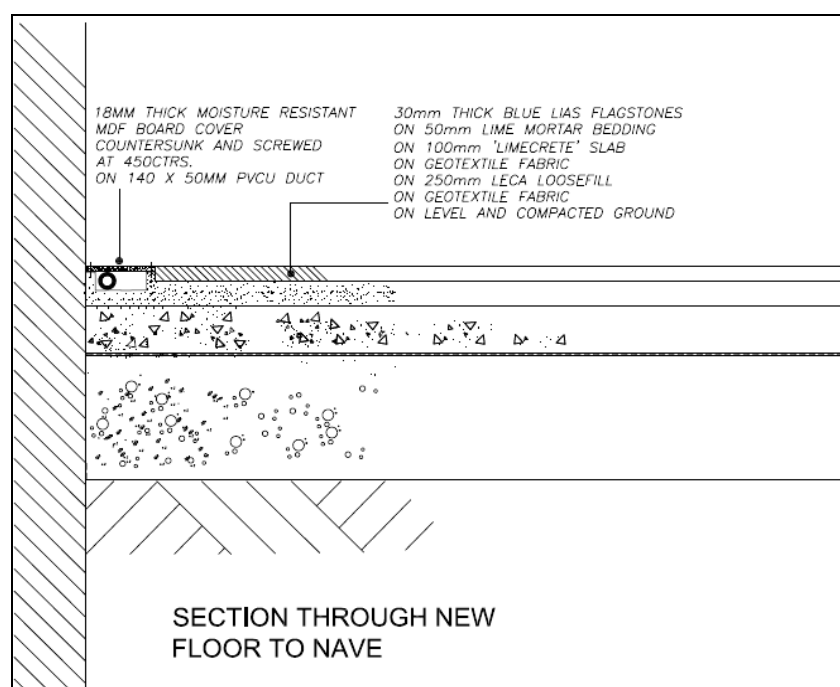


Figure 15. Proposed foundation specifications for new flooring in the nave and north aisle.

The recording of this operation was made using the plans provided by the architect, Alan Smith of Smith Gamblin architects. Unfortunately no complete plan of the church appears to exist; a search of the website Church Plans on Line reveals no plan of St. Peter's Staple Fitzpaine.

The archaeological monitoring of the new flooring was undertaken by Charles and Nancy Hollinrake between the 9th and the 11th of September 2013.

7.7.2 Observations

Removal of the timber pew platform revealed a shallow void (c12-16cm deep) in which dusty debris had accumulated over time, now supplemented by quantities of decaying wood. Removal of the debris revealed the following features and deposits (see Figure x and Photographs x below):

Church Interior Contexts				
No.	Type	Description of Context	Interpretation	Date
901	masonry	thins strips (c20-30cm wide, E-W following the alignment of the church) of unworked closely-spaced Lias fragments bonded with pale buff mortar, 9 strips recorded at c0.75-1.30m intervals; cuts hard-packed mortar deposit 902	slight sleeper walls to carry the pews and Lias flagstone aisles	modern
902	layer	rough hard-packed yellow lime mortar with freq. stones, not excavated, extends throughout trench; shallow disturbance near 904 revealed further random stones (up to c30cm)	floor bedding for a tile or stone floor	
903	masonry	pier of yellow (?Ham stone) freestone and companion half-pier attached to tower doorway; not excavated but appears to cut 902 ; pier rests on a Lias pad but the base of the half pier could not be seen	south pier for south arcade	1841
904	masonry	pier of yellow (?Ham stone) freestone and companion half-pier attached to tower doorway resting on large Lias pads (up to c90 x c165cm) above 905	north pier	C15th
905	layer	spread of yellow lime mortar with random stones (up to 20cm), stretches between the two northern piers, edges obscured by sleeper walls	foundations for former nave wall	
906	cut	shallow scoop north of 903 between sleeper walls exposing a well set dressed stone (43cm x 25cm); small oval patch of dark mortar with plentiful fuel ash clinker on sloping NW edge of cut; cleaning produced fragments of clear hand-made window glass similar to that of north aisle windows	small hearth associated with re-glazing the north aisle windows; east window signed 'John Rugg 1736'	1736

None of these features was excavated. The exposed hard bedding layer (**902**) was inspected by the architect, Alan Smith, upon which he came to the decision that it was sufficiently compact to be re-used as foundation for the new Lias floor slabs. The void in which the mortar layer (**902**) was exposed was of sufficient depth to accommodate any ducting which needed to be incorporated into the floor. All of these features were then covered with a geotextile protection layer before the new floor was installed.

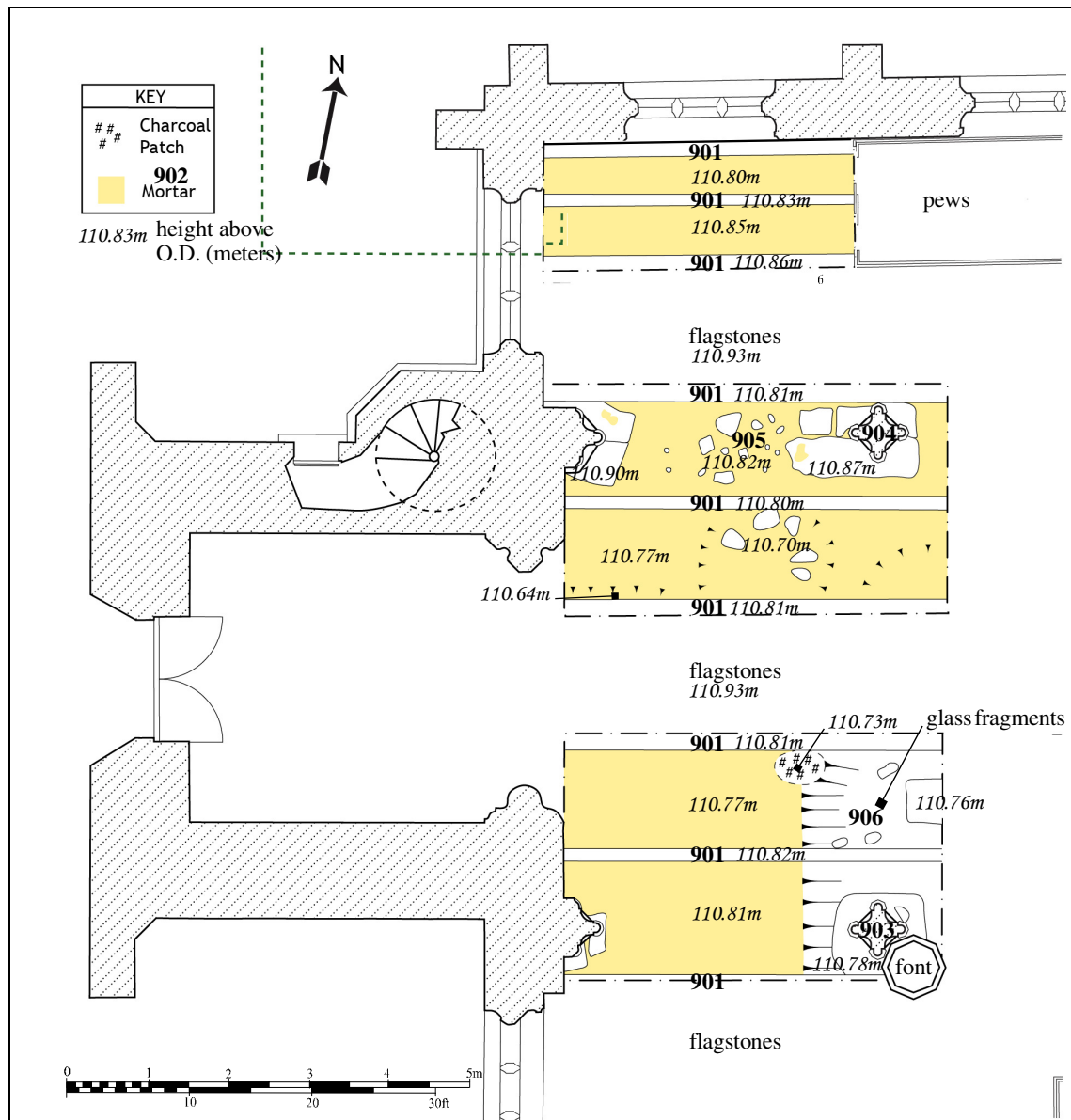


Figure 16. Features and deposits recorded during the watching brief inside the church.



Photograph 12. The exposed north arcade pier [904] and earlier nave foundation (905). The half-pier to the left has not been given a context number.



Photograph 13. North arcade pier [904] resting on large Lias slabs. Pew backings remain in the background. Foundations (905) lies below.



Photograph 14. North aisle half-pier resting upon a large Lias slab. This half-pier is attached to a small sliver of the pre-north aisle nave wall.



Photograph 15. South arcade pier [903] cutting through mortar bedding layer (902). The font is in the background.



Photographs 16 and 17. Glassworking area [906] excavated (left) with the hearth before excavation (right).



Photograph 18. South half-pier (not given a context number) and mortar bedding layer (902). The wall behind the half-pier displays two, and possibly three, phases of masonry.

7.7.3 Rapid Survey of other features

During the recording of the features revealed while the works for the new flooring were ongoing, interesting features in the standing fabric of the church were outside of the scope of the brief for the archaeological investigations (see, for example **Photograph 18**). A few of the more prominent features are recorded here in a rapid sketch survey in the hope that more intensive recording may be undertaken in the future; this is not intended to be a comprehensive survey of all of the interesting features of the church.

1) Norman doorway



Photograph 19. A doorway with Norman dog-tooth moulding was set into the porch as part of the construction of the north aisle and porch in 1841. The original location of the door has not been recorded, but the size and elaborate decoration suggests that it was the original main entrance into the church, probably through the south wall of the nave.



Photograph 20. A closer view of the arch shows that it is composed of three elements: an inner order of dog-tooth zig-zig moulding, an outer order of roundels interspaced with diaper panels, and the capitals with animal carvings. The crisp, unweathered appearance of the carvings demonstrates that they were never exposed to the elements. Rather, they seem to have always been inside the church.



Photograph 21. The left capital is composed of two carved blocks. The block on the right is a bird (facing to the left) with a long sinuous neck which passes through the bird's beak. The bird's beak and part of the neck are partly obscured by the other block, which carries a carving of a bearded face at the corner with a panel of diaper pattern carved on the outward facing side. These two carvings appear to have been re-used from an earlier arrangement.



Photograph 22. The right capital is also composed of two blocks. The inner block to the left carries a shell pattern on the chamfered corner while the outer block on the right is carved to represent a hoofed quadruped amongst further diaper patterns. The dog-tooth moulding does not match the stone with the shell pattern.



Photograph 23. A detail of the arch shows the two orders of decoration. The roundels, which display a wide range of styles and decorative motifs, are united through the use of the diaper pattern panels, which also echo the patterns on the outer elements of the capitals.

This is not the place for a detailed analysis of the Norman doorway, but even a rapid survey demonstrates what an interesting, complex feature this is. The capitals

would appear to have been constructed from salvaged carvings of indeterminate date and function, which were not originally designed to be in this arrangement. It is possible that they represent a pre-Norman phase of the church. They were retained for reasons which are now difficult to discern.

The outer order of the arch might have been designed for use with the capital carvings, judging from the adoption of the diaper pattern motif. The roundel-diaper motif is unusual in Somerset and, along with the capitals, probably bears witness to cultural affinities with areas outside of the county.

Taken as a whole, the doorway suggests that the Norman phase of the church was a highly decorated building serving a prosperous, important parish.

2) Grotesque carving



Photograph 39. In the northeast corner of the north aisle an elaborate canopied statuary niche is supported by a grotesque figure. Many similar carvings may be seen throughout the church, especially in the tower.

3) **Blocked doorway in the south wall of the chancel**



Photograph 25. The arch of the blocked doorway in the south wall of the chancel is obscured by a later memorial making it difficult to date the doorway itself. Its location is consistent with a priest's door.

4) **Chancel arch**



Photograph 26. The wall above the chancel arch shows signs of settlement, highlighted with the dashed line. This suggests that the present chancel arch replaces an earlier one. Each end of the line stops above a section of masonry made of rather smaller stones than the masonry above it. The left side shows a masonry line and irregular coursing caused by the demolition of the former north aisle wall and insertion of the north arcade. Slight signs such as these gives clues to the evolution of the present building.

8.0 DISCUSSION

8.1 The churchyard

The charcoal rich deposit [806] at the south end of Trench I was the only medieval archaeological feature not directly associated with graves (see 7.5.2). This feature was greatly truncated within the trench by later graves. However, the fact that it contained material associated with cooking (fragments of cook pot, charcoal, burnt bone and stone; see **Finds List, Appendix 2**), together with its apparently carefully constructed corner suggests that it may represent a cooking pit. The 13th to 14th century pottery recovered from grave fills in Trench I probably came from disturbance of the pit. Churchyard fairs were common during the medieval period, when the churchwardens brewed a batch of ale and baked cakes to raise funds for construction and maintenance of the church. This pit may well be a relic of such type of activity.

8.2 Trench F: The exterior of the north aisle west wall

The exposure of the north aisle wall in order to feed the new service pipes into the church demonstrated that the churchyard has been considerably raised in this area (see **Figure 8**). No datable finds were recovered from this trench, which produced quantities of finds in the form of rubble from different types of stone and abundant lumps of mortar suggestive of construction. The likeliest candidate for a construction project which was capable of creating this quantity of soil mixed with building materials is the building of the church tower in ca 1500. Foundations of this size would produce large quantities of spoil while spreading out the clay would build up the churchyard allowing for the excavation of graves without disturbing earlier burials.

If this scenario is accepted, it follows that the north aisle was already built by 1500. This is an important point because the size of a church at any time reflects the size of the congregation and is one of the few indications of the population and prosperity of a settlement through time.

8.3 The interior of the church

An important and richly decorated church stood in Staple Fitzpaine in the Norman period held personally by the Count of Mortain, who also held Castle Neroche²⁰. The Domesday Book (see 4.2) relates that the Count held Staple directly and he must have often been in residence in the manor house from where the estate was managed. Between 1066 and the 1087, the date of the collection of Domesday data, the estate's value rose from £10 to £12. A well balanced estate is recorded with arable, meadows, pasture and woodland augmented by a mill, a deer park and a stud farm of 10 unbroken mares. Cattle, sheep and goats grazed the pasture. The manor also owned a garden in Langport which paid 50 eels.

The beautiful Norman door in the church roughly dates to this period and suggests that the church at Staple might on occasion have served Castle Neroche. This would account for the exceptional richness of St. Peter's decorations, as indicated by the doorway, which is unlikely to have been the only ornamentation of the Norman church.

The castle seems to have fallen out of use by the early 12th century, with one other phase of activity, possibly during the Anarchy of King Stephen's reign²¹ although the church continued to be expanded and refurbished throughout the medieval period.

The Norman doorway seems to contain elements of another structure: the style of the capitals does not sit comfortably with the arches; the transition from the arch to the capitals seems to be abrupt (**Photograph 22**). If there were a pre-Conquest church at Staple Fitzpaine it would not be unduly surprising given the fertility of the valley and the crossroads of the transport network marked by the stones which gave the settlement its name (see 2.0).

There is clearly still much to learn about the background of St. Peter's church. The wealth of the surviving decoration suggests that it enjoyed a long history of prosperity and importance. Much of the evidence for this rests in the fabric of the building itself and in the surrounding landscape²². A survey of the Norman arch, including professional photographic record, would be a good place to start to collect and

²⁰ Dunning, Robert (1995). *Somerset Castles*. Tiverton: Somerset Books. pp.33–35

²¹ English Heritage Listing Description.

²² For example, was there a relationship between Staple, its parish church and the Forest of Neroche?

interpret this evidence, followed by a study of the fabric of the church. It is hoped that this report will be a launch pad for this work.

9.0 Finds and Archive

Finds and artefacts recovered during the watching brief were bagged by context or as unstratified. After the fieldwork had been completed, the finds were washed, dried, sorted and listed. Modern material, including factory-made pottery and modern building rubble were discarded after being listed.

Retained finds were marked with their respective context numbers and with the accession number. The finds will be deposited and curated in the Somerset County Museum at the Somerset Heritage Centre, Norton Fitzwarren under the **Taunton County Museum Accession Number: TTNCM 119/2013**.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Mr. Alan Smith architect with Smith Gamblin, Bridgewater, for commissioning the watching brief.

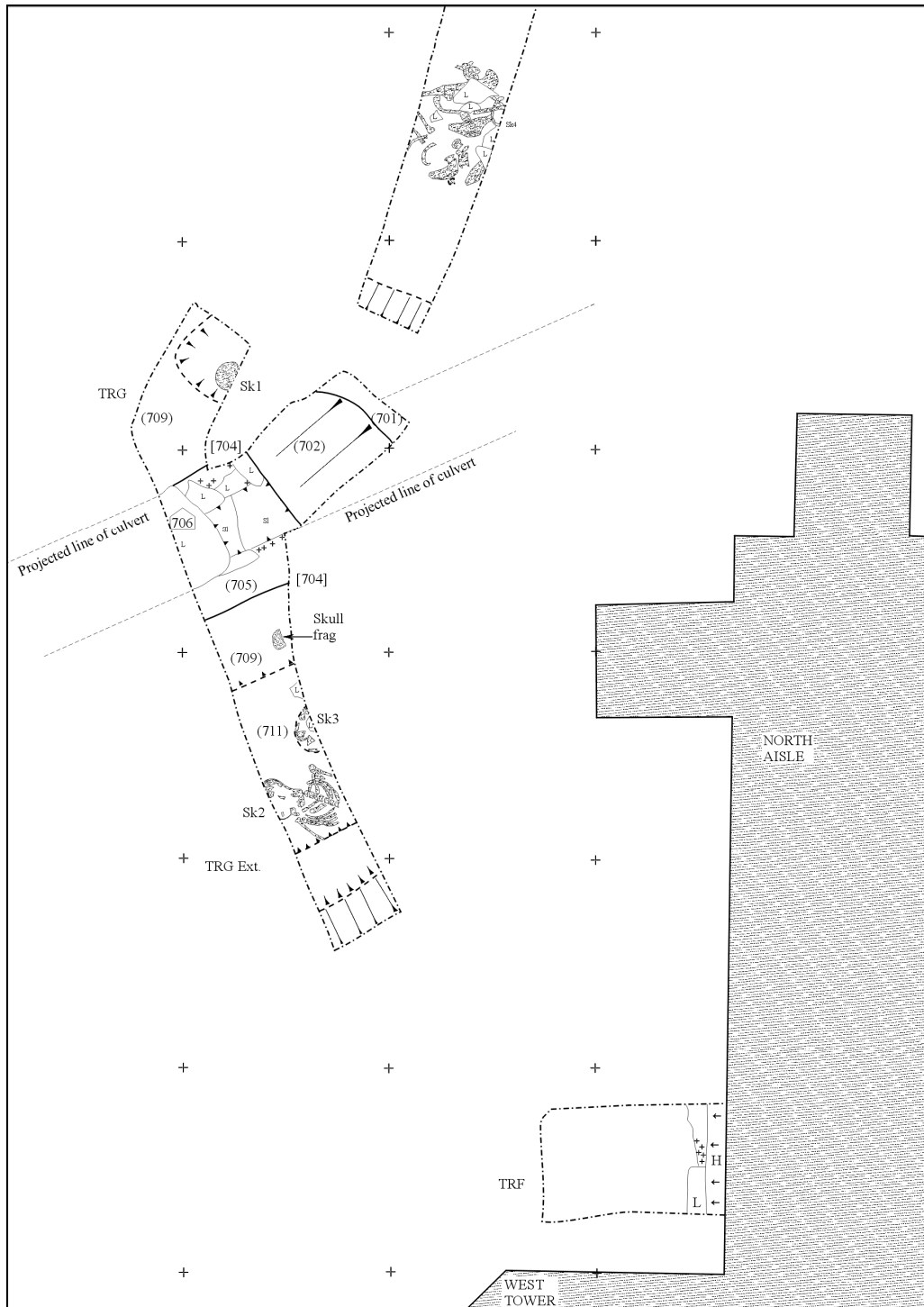
We would also like to express our gratitude to Messrs. Adrian Pritchard and Richard Norman of Pipefix Ltd, Dorchester; as well as Nick, Rich and Dave of Arlow and Haggett Ltd, Bridgewater, who undertook the groundworks for the soakaway on behalf of Woodlands Building Contractors, Hatch Beauchamp, Taunton, for their hard work, help, co-operation and interest during the ground-works. The works to the interior of the church was undertaken by Rich Mills and Dave Merritt of A & H Plant and Construction, Woolavington.

The watching brief in the churchyard was conducted by Dr. John Davey, assisted by Dave Roberts and Dawn Powell Roberts. The recording inside the church was undertaken by Charles and Nancy Hollinrake.

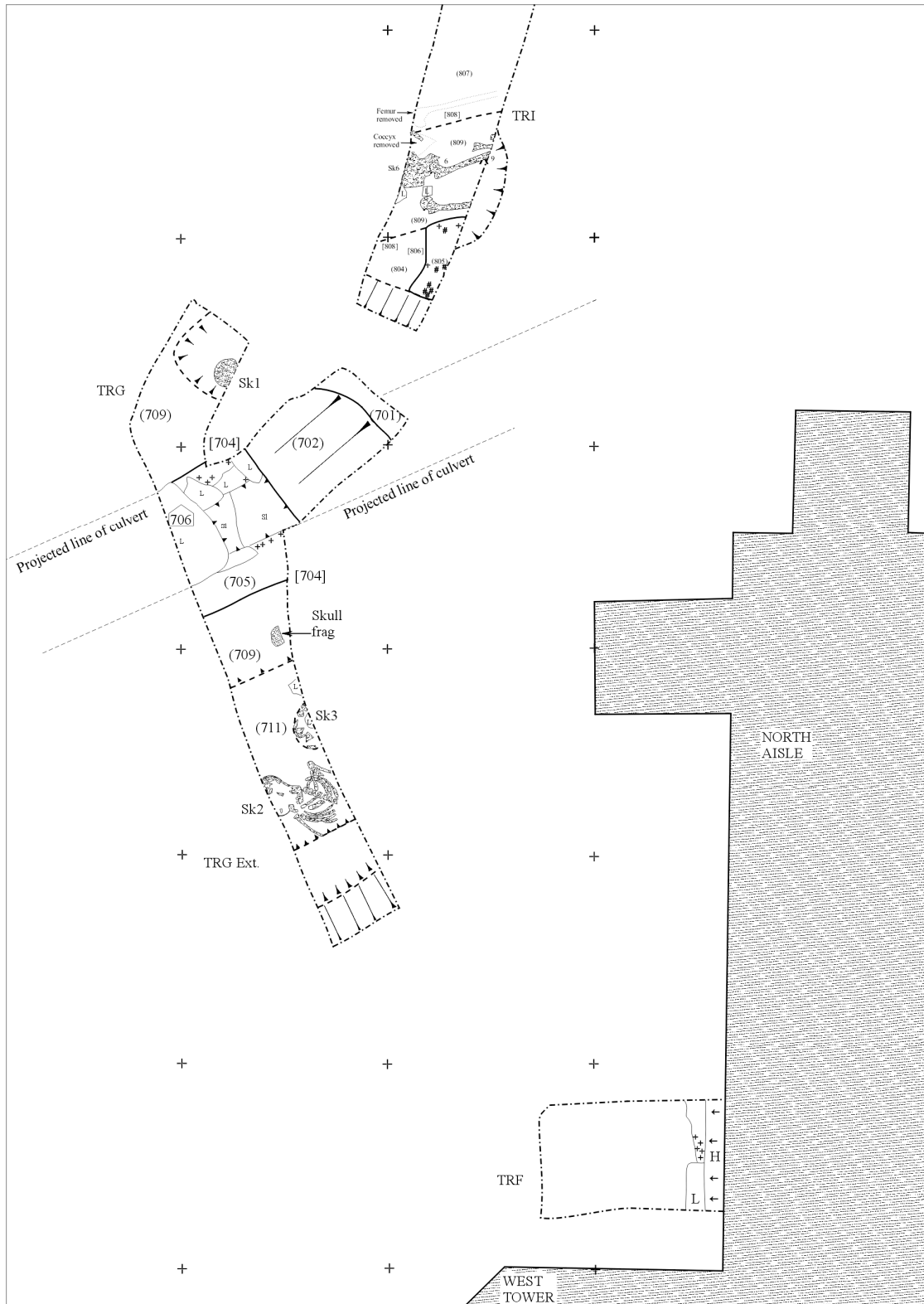
The Context List, Finds List, the digitized plans and the first draft of the text of works in the churchyard were compiled by John Davey. Dave Roberts digitized the plan of the interior of the church.

Nancy Hollinrake 15th April 2015

Appendix 1. Site drawings



Appendix 1; Figure 1 Trenches F, G and I, Skeletons SK1-4



Appendix 1; Figure 4 Trenches F, G and I, Skeletons SK1-3 & 6

Staple Fitzpaine, St Peter's Church (SFC 13)

Appendix 2:. Context List

Trench A Dimensions: Approx. 0.8m deep x 0.65m E-W x 0.8m N-S				
No.	Type	Description of Context	Interpretation	Date
101	Deposit	Loose, very dark grey brown to black clay (50%) loam (50%) with frequent tree roots, occasional fine grits and charcoal flecks. 190-200mm thick. Above 102 ;	Turf and topsoil same as 201, 301, 401, 501, 601, 701, 801	C19-20th
102	Deposit	Gritty yellow-buff brown clay (50%) silt (50%) with frequent fine orange grits (?mortar) occasional small rounded Lias, sarsen and Ham stone frags and roof slate frags. 50-100mm thick. Below 101 ; above 103 ;	builders detritus from re-pointing church walls, possibly during 19th century renovations possibly same as 202, 302, 602, 702, 802..	nd
103	Deposit	Lens of loose stones and rubble (30%) and dark grey brown charcoal rich loamy clay (70%). Lias up to 10cm x 2-3cm thick., occ. rounded sarsen stones, abundant charcoal. up to 25cm thick at the N end of TR A, petering out to almost nothing at the S end. Below 102 ; above 104 . Stratigraphically similar to 703 .	made ground. The original natural slope dips to the north and the northern churchyard wall now acts as a retaining wall holding back the raised and level graveyard.	nd
104	Deposit	Slightly gritty greenish-yellow brown clay subsoil containing occ. small Lias stones and human bone fragments. Up to 30cm thick, across whole of TR A. Below 103 ; above 105 ;	Original grave yard soil prior to levelling. No grave cuts were visible. similar to 303, 703, 803	nd
105	?Natural	Fairly clean yellow brown clay subsoil. Not fully exposed in base of trench. Diffuse transition from layer 104 above	Possible natural Lias clay subsoil	
Trench B Dimensions Approx 0.7m deep x 0.9m E-W x 0.6m N-S				
No.	Type	Description of Context	Interpretation	Date
201	Deposit	Loose, very dark grey brown to black clay (50%) loam (50%). Contained frequent tree roots occasional fine grits and charcoal flecks. 200mm thick across entire Trench B. Overlay 202 ;	Turf and topsoil same as 101, 301, 401, 501, 601, 701, 801	C19-20th
202	Deposit	Light buff-brown gritty silty clay. Contains abundant fine Lias grits, mortar frags and flecks, fine welsh roof slate frags, small Lias stones and occasional large worked Lias stones (<160mm x 60mm). Also contains occasional sherds of Somerset glazed red earthenware (Donyatt fabrics DPT7-9 c. C17-19). At least 500mm thick but not bottomed. Below 201 ; stratigraphically similar to 102 & 103, 302 .	Seems to represent a merging of layers 102 and 103 into a thick deposit of made ground.	nd

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Trench C Dimensions Approx. 0.65m deep x 0.8m E-W x 0.6m N-S. Later extended by an area measuring 0.8m E-W x 0.3m N-S adjoining on the SW side.				
No.	Type	Description of Context	Interpretation	Date
301	Deposit	Loose, very dark grey-brown to black clay (c.50%) loam (50%) with freq. tree roots, occ. fine grits and charcoal flecks. 20cm thick. Above 302 ; same as 101, 201, 401, 501, 601, 701, 801	Turf and topsoil	C19-20th
302	Deposit	Gritty buff-brown silty clay with abundant fine Lias, mortar and slate grits. Up to 20cm thick. Below 301 ; above 304 ; cut by 303 .	same as 202	nd
303	cut and fill	Dark grey brown loamy clay containing occ. small Lias stones and human bone frags. Fills a rounded cut or animal burrow. Cuts 302 .	Fill of disused animal burrow.	nd
304	?Natural	yellow clay with blue-grey patches.. Below 302 .	Natural Lias clay	
Trench D Dimensions Approx 0.7m deep x 1.0m E-W x 0.6m N-S				
No.	Type	Description of Context	Interpretation	Date
401	Deposit	Loose, very dark grey brown to black clay (50%) loam (50%) with freq. tree roots, occ. fine grits and charcoal flecks. Large base sherd of 17 th -19 th century amber glazed earthenware pottery. 20cm thick. Above 202 ; same as 101, 201, 301, 501, 601, 701, 801	Turf and topsoil	C19-20th
402	Deposit	Dark grey-brown silty clay matrix (90%) and small and medium angular Lias stone rubble (10%). Approx 200mm thick. Below 401 ; above 403 .	Mixed grave yard soil and rubble layer.	nd
403	Natural	Jointed Lias limestone bedrock, inter-banded with thin layers of clean Lias clay. Below 402 .	Lias limestone bedrock	
Trench E Dimensions Approx. 0.6m deep x 0.95m E-W x 0.6m N-S				
No.	Type	Description of Context	Interpretation	Date
501	Deposit	Loose, very dark grey brown to black clay (50%) loam (50%). Contained frequent tree roots occasional fine grits and charcoal flecks. Also contained a single rim sherd of a 17 th -18 th century salt glazed stoneware mug or bottle. Measured an even 180mm thickness across the whole of Trench B. Overlay 202 ; same as 101, 201, 301, 401, 601, 701, 801	Turf and topsoil	C19-20th
502	Deposit	Mid grey-brown clay subsoil, fairly clean. Measures 200mm thick. Below 501 ; above 503 ; stratigraphically similar to 402 .	clean subsoil	nd
503	Natural	Buff-brown Lias clay containing occasional medium sub-rounded Lias stones. Exposed in a 200mm thickness at base of trench, but not bottomed. Below 502 .	Natural Lias clay	

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Trench F Dimensions				
Approx. 0.6m deep x 0.8m E-W x 0.5m N-S. Later extended by approx 0.5m to the north				
No.	Type	Description of Context	Interpretation	Date
601	Deposit	Very dark brown to black loamy topsoil with moderate small frags of Lias, Ham Stone, slate and mortar. c9-10cm thick. Above 602 .	Turf and topsoil	C19-20th
602	Deposit	Grey brown gritty loamy clay matrix with freq. small and medium Lias rubble, occ. frags of Ham stone, slate, mortar and human bone. Up to c45cm thick against west wall of north aisle, tapering to 200mm thick at the west end of TR F. Below 601 ; above 603 .	grave earth built up against the church	C15th
603	Deposit	Buff brown silty clay containing frequent small Lias stone frags, abundant mortar lumps and flecks and occasional human bone. Measures 20-40cm thick. Below 602 ; above 604, 605 .	possible construction deposit	C15th
604	Masonry	5 courses of dressed Lias and Ham stone blocks (up to 50cm x 25cm), bonded with a buff lime mortar (sample 2). Top course of Lias ashlar above Ham Stone chamfered offset course above unworked Lias and Ham stone courses. Lowest course offset. Below 605 .	west wall of the north aisle	undated
605	Deposit	Mixed re-deposited Lias clay (60%) and Lias stone rubble (40%). Not excavated; only seen at base of Trench F but contains patches of mortar. Below 603 ; above 604 .	construction layer	undated
Trench G Dimensions				
Initially 0.7m long NW-SE and 0.7m long N-S x 0.5m wide and up to 0.65m deep; later extended to 2.75m long NW-SE and with a 1.2m x 1m irregular trapezoidal area at the north end				
No.	Type	Description of Context	Interpretation	Date
701	Deposit	Loose, very dark brown to black loamy clay with occ. charcoal flecks, grits and freq. roots. Up to 14cm thick. Above 702, 710	Turf and topsoil	C19-20th
702	Deposit	Fairly loose grey to buff brown silty loamy clay with freq. mortar flecks and grits, small frags of Lias, Ham stone, slate and occ. degraded fired clay. c.10cm thick at the N end of trench. Below 701 , above 703, 705 ; same as 710 .	construction deposit	nd
703	Deposit	Moderately compact greenish to grey brown silty clay matrix (80%) and 20% large Lias rubble (<25cm x 20cm x 15cm). with freq. re-deposited human bone frags and occ. medieval pottery. Up to 30cm thick north of culvert 706 . Apparently dips to north. Below 702 ; cut by 704 above 708, 709, 803 .	Mixed rubble and graveyard soil. ?same as 711	C13-14th
704	cut	Linear (SW-NE) c 0.65m deep x 0.6-.07m wide x 1.3m long. vertical sides. A ledge half way down narrows the width by 9cm. Below 706 , filled by 705, 706 ; cuts 703, 711 .	Cut for 19th century stone lined culvert 706 .	nd
705	fill	Moderately compact light buff brown clay. <0.5m deep and 0.7m wide. Below 702 ; above 706 ; fills 704 .	Clean clay back fill of culvert cut 704	nd

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No.	Type	Description of Context	Interpretation	Date
706	Masonry	Undressed Lias limestone walls(c 20cm x 15cm x 6cm), roughly squared slate base (c 30cm x 30cm x <1cm) and large undressed Lias limestone cap stones. (c. 50cm x 30cm x 12cm). Side walls comprise up to 4 courses. bonded with lime mortar (sample <1>). The whole measures c 0.5m wide and 0.35m deep. Below 705 ; above 704 ; fills 704 .	Stone lined culvert. Intact and potentially functioning.	nd
707	cut	Rectangular in plan with rounded corners. Fairly sharp break of slope top with steeply sloping sides and gradual break of slope on to a flattish base. c 1.25m (E-W) x 0.75m (N-S) x 0.15m deep, continues to east beyond the confines of Trench I; aligned W-E. Cuts 709 ; filled by 708 ; truncated by 704 , 703 .	Grave cut for skeleton SK1/8 ..	
708	fill	Moderately compact greenish to grey brown silty clay containing occasional small and medium Lias stones. Below 703 ; fills 707 ; truncated by 703 ; cut by 704	Fill of grave cut 707 , contains SK1/8 .	post C14-15th
709	Natural	Moderately compact blue grey and buff grey natural Lias clay. Below 703 ; cut by 707	Natural Lias clay	
710	Deposit	Fairly loose grey brown silty clay (70%), gritty mortar (10%), fine Lias and slate frags (20%). with occ. charcoal, degraded fired clay and abundant Lias grits. S of culvert 706 c 10cm thick. Below 701 ; above 711 .	Gritty layer similar to 702 but with more grits and stone frags.	nd
711	Deposit	Moderately compact greenish to grey brown silty clay containing occasional medium angular Lias stones (c 5-10cm), occasional disarticulated human bone and pottery. Contains SK2 and 3 . Not fully exposed but at least 350mm thick on south side of culvert 706 . Below 710 ; cut by 704 ; same as 703 .	grave earth.. No grave cut visible.	nd
Trench I Dimensions Approx 0.7m deep; 0.45m wide (E-W); 9.25m long (N-S)				
No.	Type	Description of Context	Interpretation	Date
801	Deposit	Loose, very dark brown to black loamy clay with occ. charcoal flecks, grits and freq. roots. Up to 12cm thick across entire Trench I. Above 802	Turf and topsoil	C19-20th
802	Deposit	Fairly loose, dark grey brown silty loamy clay with freq. flecks of mortar, occasional fine Lias, slate and Ham stone fragments. Up to 8-9cm thick. Below 801 ; above 803 , 705 ; same as 702 .	Similar to 702 but less gritty.	nd
803	Deposit	Moderately compact greenish grey brown silty clay with freq. medium angular Lias stones (5-10cm), occ. med pot and human bone. Also contains skeletons SK4 and SK5 . Below 802 ; 703 above 708 , 804 , 805 , 809 , 812 ; cut by 704 .	grave earth.	
804	Deposit	Moderately compact greenish grey brown silty clay with freq. charcoal and occ. med pot. Only seen south of cut 808 . Up to 250mm thick. Underlies 803 but containing more frequent charcoal; cut by 806 , 808 , 708 ; overlies 807	Similar to 803 . ?medieval graveyard soil.	

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Context No.	Type	Description of Context	Interpretation	Date
805	fill	Moderately compact dark greenish grey brown charcoal rich silty clay with abundant charcoal flecks and lumps, moderate med pot, rare shell, burnt bone, burnt stone and fired clay. c 0.4m long (N-S) x 0.35m wide (E-W) x 0.08m deep,. Below 803 ; fills 805 ; cut by 707 .	Fill of cut 806	C14th
806	cut	squared in plan as exposed. 40cm x 35cm x 8cm deep. Asymmetrical sides with a gentle slope on east side and sharp undercut slope on west, base dips towards the SW. Original shape of cut unknown as it is truncated on the south by 707 and not exposed to the east. Filled by 805 ; cuts 804 .	Original shape and function unclear but contains evidence for burning in fill including abundant charcoal, burnt stone, burnt bone, fired clay frags and medieval cook pot with external sooting.	C14th
807	Natural	Moderate to firm greenish grey to yellow clean clay. Underlies 804 , 812 ; cut by 810 .	Probably natural clay, or transitional layer.	
808	cut	Gradual break of slope top, irregular steeply sloping sides, gradual break of slope on to an irregular flattish base. Aligned approx WSW-ENE. 45cm wide <19cm deep. Full length not seen. Truncated on north side, possibly by an indiscernible cut for SK4 . Filled by 809 , cuts 804 .	Grave cut containing skeleton SK6 . Head to the WSW. Fill contained several sherds of 13th-14th century pottery.	C14th
809	fill	Moderately compact greenish grey brown silty clay with occasional angular Lias stones (5-10cm), charcoal flecks, rare med pot, coffin nails. Also contains skeleton SK6 . 45cm wide, <19cm deep across full width of Trench . Below 803 ; fills 808 .	Fill of grave cut 808 , contains med pot and two coffin nails suggesting SK6 was coffined.	C14th
810	cut	rectangular. Gradual break of slope top with steeply sloping sides and gradual break of slope on to flat base. Aligned W-E. c 50cm wide x 15cm deep, length not fully exposed. Filled by 811 ; cuts 807 ; cut by 808 .	Grave cut containing skeleton SK7 . Head to the W. Fill contained sherds of 13th-14th century pottery.	C14th
811	fill	Moderately compact greenish grey brown silty clay with patches of clean yellow re-deposited natural clay, occ. charcoal flecks, med pot and small-medium Lias stones. Also contains skeleton SK7 . 0.5m wide x 0.15m deep across full width of Trench I. Cut by 808 ; fills 810 .	Fill of grave cut 810 , contains med pot and skeleton SK7 W-E aligned with head to west.	C14th
812	Deposit	Moderately compact greenish grey brown silty clay containing patches of re-deposited natural yellow clay, charcoal flecks and small Lias stones. Approx 280mm wide (N-S) across the full width of Trench I. Unexcavated. Above 807 ; cut by 810 ; below 803 .	Unexcavated but is possibly a W-E aligned grave fill.	C14th

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Appendix 3. Finds List

context	Pottery				Building materials		miscellaneous
	qty	fabric & weight	surface	date	qty	description	
Trench D							
401	1	oxidised surfaces reduced blue grey core DPT7-9, 96g	internal patchy amber glaze, ,	C17- 19			
Trench E							
501	1	rim pale grey fabric sherd, 23g	blue and grey salt glazed stoneware	C17- 18			
Trench F							
601					1	frag roof slate frag with poss. nail hole, 4g	
TR F U/S					1	small frag roof slate, 2g	2 x Fe frags, ?nail, coated in lime mortar, 4g, 2g
Trench G							
701	1	orange fabric DPT7-9, 4g	amber glaze	C17- 19			
	1	bodysherd creamware, 6g	blue transfer	C18- 19			
703	1	pale grey fabric DPT1-2, 10g	oxidised orange external surface,	C13- 14			
708	1	reduced dark grey core with fine quartz temper, occ. limestone and iron inclusions, abraded, ? DPT4, 2g	oxidised orange surface,. Thick walled vessel	C14			
TR G U/S	1	rim, oxidised orange DPT7-9, 18g	amber glaze over white trailed slip decoration	C17- 19			
	1	oxidised orange surfaces, reduced grey core knife slashed handle, DPT4-5, 25g	patchy green glaze	C14- 15			
	1	cream rim white stoneware, 36g	white alkaline glaze	C18- 20			
	1	fine orange fabric DPT8-9, 6g	internal amber glaze	C18- 19			

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Trench H							
TR H U/S	5	oxidised orange DPT7-9, 26g, 22g, 13g, 9g, 5g	amber glaze	C17- 19	1	frag mortar, 4g	1 x oyster shell, 35g
					1	roof slate frag with nail hole, 58g	
Trench I							
803 (close to SK4)	2	v small, fairly fine fabric oxidised orange surface, reduced dark grey core with fine quartz temper, occasional limestone and iron inclusions, <1g, <1g		C14			
	3	oxidised buff or orange surfaces, blue grey core DPT1-2, 4g, 3g, 1g		C13- 14			
	1	rim bevel, DPT1- 2, 22g	external combed circle decoration	C13- 14			
804	1	Oxidised orange DPT2, 4g		C14			
805	1	abraded oxidised orange, reduced dark grey core, fine quartz temper, occ. limestone and iron, <1g,	.	C14	1	lime mortar frag, yellowish, quartz and grog filler, 7g	1 x v small burnt bone frag, <1g
	1	rim, DPT1-2, 3g see Coleman Smith and Pearson, 1988, 109 (1/25)	oxidised orange internal surface, externally fire blackened	C13- 14			1 x burnt chert frag, 11g
	1	abraded rim, buff fabric internal bevel, DPT1-2, 1g		C13- 14			1 x mussel shell frag, <1g
	2	base dark grey fabric. DPT1-2, 13g, 11g	internal oxidised orange surface, externally fire blackened	C13- 14			

Staple Fitzpaine, St Peter's Church (SFC 13)

	8	grey fabrics coarseware, DPT1-2, 14g, 5g, 5g, 5g, 4g, 2g, 2g, 2g	oxidised orange surfaces, some externally fire blackened	C13-14			
809	2	oxidised orange surface, reduced dark grey core, fairly fine with fine quartz temper occ. limestone and iron inclusions, 1g, <1g	.	C14			2 x Fe nails, roughly square x section, ?coffin nails
	1	base, blue-grey core, orange surfaces, DPT1-2, 5g	slightly externally fire blackened	C13-14			
	4	grey body sherds, oxidised orange surfaces DPT1-2, 8g, 6g, 3g, <1g	some sherds externally fire blackened	C13-14			
811	1	oxidised orange surface, reduced dark grey core, thick walled vessel, abraded, fairly fine fabric with fine quartz temper, occasional limestone and iron inclusions, 1g		C14			
	3	small body sherds medieval coarseware, Donyatt fabric DPT1-2, 4g, 2g, 1g	oxidised orange surfaces and dark blue-grey core. Harsh surfaces with blocky fracture	C13-14			
Trench J							
TR J U/S	2	Donyatt fabric DPT6-7, 22g, 15g	amber glaze with patches of green where fabric is partially reduced beneath	C16-17	1	small frag mortar 2g	1 x Fe strap or bar, rectangular x-section, 90 degree returns at both ends, 85mm long, 15mm wide, 5mm thick, corroded, 39g
	1		external amber glaze	C16-17		Large ridge tile, DPT6-7, 177g. Sim. to Coleman Smith and Pearson 1988, 322-3	

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						(33/19)	
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Appendix 4. Listing descriptions

41068 **Listed Building Description (Grade I)**

Parish church. Norman in origin, Norman doorway reset in south aisle, chancel C14, north aisle added and church refenestrated C15, tower c1500, south aisle added reusing nave windows, south porch and vestry 1841, church reseated and restored 1894, reroofed mid C20. Squared and coursed blue lias, Ham stone dressings, slate roofs, behind plain parapets, coped verges. Three and a half bay aisled nave, west tower, south porch, chancel, north-east vestry. Crenellated 3-stage tower, merlons pierced with trefoil headed arches set on quatrefoil pierced parapet, crocketed finials with detached pinnacles and corbelled out pinnacles in the centre of each face, string courses, gargoyles, set back buttresses terminating in pinnacles with pinnacles rising in between, two 2-light mullioned and transomed bell-openings, Somerset tracery, flanked by pinnacles rising from string course, second stage 4-light mullioned and transomed window sill supported by angel corbels, empty crocketed niches with angel corbels, string course, 4-light west window above strongly moulded Tudor arch head west door, decorative spandrels with coats of arms (possibly of the Earls of Northumberland who had the gift of the living), C19 door, flanking niches, stone spire to north-east stair turret with crocketed pinnacles, 4-centred arch doorway and blind niches; 3-light west window to south aisle, set back buttresses, 3-light windows flanking single storey gabled porch, coped verges, moulded arched doorway, Norman inner door, decorated arch and abaci with oxen's face, bird and palmette, no columns, C19 ribbed door, 3-light window east end, two 3-light to south wall of chancel, setback buttresses, 3-light east window, vestry with door on east front and 2-light north window, 3-light north window to chancel, 3-light at east end of north aisle, statues set in niches south-west and north-east corners, three 3-light windows north face, stepped buttresses between, 3-light west end. Interior: exposed blue lias rubble. Standard Perpendicular arcade with half bay at chancel end, copied in north aisle. Pointed chancel arch chamfered in 2 orders, strongly moulded 4-centred tower arch. Chamfered round arched piscina in chancel. Grotesque figure corbel supporting statue niche in north-west corner of north aisle. Roofs: chancel, restored ceiled wagon roof, bosses and wall plate, resting on cavetto moulded stone cornice, nave similar without stone cornice; north aisle renewed moulded compartment ceiling to monopitch roof, angel corbels with shields, copied in south aisle; tower 4-panel compartment ceiling. Restored 2:1:2 bay rood screen imported from the demolished Bickenhall Church. Perpendicular font. Four C18 slate slabs on sanctuary floor; kneeling effigy of Rachel Portman, daughter of Henry Portman, died 1632 also from Bickenhall Church, (demolished 1849). Convex lias panel to William Crosse of Parke Lodge died 1702, the columns, heavy cornice and weeping putti described by Collinson were destroyed during 1841 restoration. Oval grey and white marble tablet to Robert Barker, died 1785, and his wife Ann. The restoration of 1841 was carried out at the expense of the Rector, the Rev F B Portman; prior to this the church is said to have comprised a nave and chancel north aisle, porch and south chapel. A particularly splendid tower, similar to those at Kingston St Mary and Isle Abbots. (Photographs in NMR; Sixsmith, Staple Fitzpaine and the Forest of Neroche, 1958; Pevsner, Buildings of England, South and West Somerset, 1958).

English Heritage Listed Building Number: 271106. First Listed on 25/02/1955. English Heritage Unified Designation System Asset Number: 1060274

HER 41067 Almshouses, Staple Fitzpaine

Grid Ref: ST 2640 1829

Almshouse. Dated 1643. Donated by Sir William Portman

Almshouse. Dated 1643, restored 1970 when altered internally and new windows in similar style to front inserted on rear elevation. Donated by Sir William Portman, restored by Mr Clementoy. Squared and coursed blue lias, rendered rear elevation, Ham stone dressings, slate roofs, coped verges, gable ends and between first and second bays left and right. Plan: formerly 4 rooms on each floor opening off corridor along rear elevation, dogleg stairs at either end, now four 2-room flats, 2 on each floor, central stair inserted in entrance hall. One and a half storeys, 4 bays, all 3-light hollow chamfered stone mullioned windows on facade, in upper storey rising from eaves set in gabled dormers with coped verges and hood moulds, string course with ground floor windows set below, 2 either side of central door with plaque above 'Founded by Sir William Portman 1643, Restored 1973', C19 door with decorative hinges, coeval lean-to on right return,

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reroofed and extended with string course continued, square headed doorway with chamfered architrave and stops, C17 door; lean-to on left return rebuilt. Three gabled dormers on rear elevation looking towards churchyard of St Peters Church (qv). Interior not sighted, said to contain original post and panel partitions and roof trusses. The alms houses was originally founded to provide shelter for '6 poor people'. (Photograph in NMR; Almshouse Gazette No 75, 1970; Sixsmith, Staple Fitzpaine and the Forest of Neroche, 1958).

English Heritage Listed Building Number: 271105. First Listed on 25/02/1955. English Heritage Unified Designation System Asset Number: 1060273

HER 43844 Castle Neroche, Curland

SCHEDULED MONUMENT No:24006 Castle Neroche: a motte and bailey castle and earlier defences above Castle Plantation
Grid Ref: ST 272 158 (ST 21 NE)

Comprises: [PRN 16497](#) Earthwork survey (2002-3), Castle Neroche
[PRN 28551](#) Excavation (1961, 1962, 1963, 1964), Castle Neroche, Curland
[PRN 28666](#) Watching brief (2009), footpath improvements, Staple Fitzpaine area
[PRN 28765](#) Watching brief (2009), Castle Neroche, Curland
[PRN 29901](#) Geophysical survey (c.2008), Castle Neroche

Public access:

As far as we are aware this site is open to the public at certain times. [Information last updated on 16 December 2002]

Details:

Castle Neroche, known locally as Castle Rache (and the summit is known as the Beacon), has been described as a prehistoric earthwork later formed into a medieval castle. It occupies a promontory and there are four concentric lines of earthwork defences with a small motte (possibly with a stone shell keep) and bailey set into a corner of an earlier enclosure. A C19 farmhouse and garden occupy part of the area. {1}

Iron arrowheads, an iron sword blade and inhumation burials (one said to have been in a wooden coffin) were found before 1854. Warre's plan shows the burials at ST 2713 1580 under the northern farmbuildings (which are not on Warre's plan). The sword findspot is shown at the crest of the hill to the east close to some pits which are described as having an inverted cone shape 8-10 feet in diameter and 7-8 feet deep and filled with lighter coloured soil. Warre also states that "round the summit of the beacon traces remain of a massive wall of strongly cemented masonry". {2}

In 1903 excavations by H. St George Gray produced Norman and medieval potsherds and finds, now in Taunton Museum, but nothing iron age or Roman. Gray excavated a medieval pit which may be one of the features described by Warre as conical pits, 8-10ft in diameter and 7-8ft deep, discounted as hut circles but possibly storage pits. {3}

The motte, at ST 2711 1586, is a natural hill steepened by scarping and with vestiges of two defences on the north, now shallow ditches and berms. The small bailey is at ST 2712 1581. To the north of the motte there is a low lying complex of banks and ditches in a dense forestry plantation. These were first noticed by Warre in 1854, but were ignored

by Gray in his report of 1903 and have not been investigated since. They appear to be merely a combination of natural scarps, terraced tracks, old field banks and sand diggings. The main ramparts to the SE of the motte and bailey are of uncertain origin although of Iron age appearance. The utilisation of the innermost rampart in the C12 indicates a second bailey, centred at ST 2716 1577 There is also an apparently original entrance in the second rampart at ST 2724 1569 No certain evidence has been found for the existence of the beacon, but a low mound on the south-east edge of the motte's level summit may be significant. The site does command a very extensive view. There is a pillow mound in the area between the outer ramparts. {5}

Excavation (PRN [28551](#)) in 1961-4 distinguished four main phases of construction. In Period I (undated) a rampart was thrown up, enclosing an area c7.5 acres Period II, soon after the Norman Conquest, is defined by the construction of a smaller enclosure within the earlier defences forming a ringwork. This may have served as a base for troops engaged in suppressing the 1067-69 disturbances, and is marked by the local production of pottery of distinctively Northern French type. Later, in Period III, the site was converted into a motte and bailey castle by building a motte astride the Period II enclosure, one corner of which was subdivided to serve as a barbican, and by adding an outer line of defence. The motte was 20-25ft high and was for residential use. The likely builder was Robert of Mortain. The new castle appears to have passed out of permanent use by the early C12, but was refurbished for a brief period during the Anarchy. {7}

Scheduled area reduced in 1982. {9}

Site contained within Castle Neroche forest trail. {10}

Clearance of the trees in the area to the north of the motte during 1993 showed clearly that the earthworks are in fact a bailey associated with the castle. {11}

A motte and bailey castle associated with multi-phase defensive enclosures, on a spur of land. As above, but additional bailey below motte to north encloses 0.18ha. It is lobe-shaped or sub-rectangular, with an internal dividing bank. Defences are a steeply scarped face up to 2m high with a bank 0.5m high on top, and a ditch 0.5m deep at the foot with a counterscarp 0.5m high. {12}

Scheduled area revised with new national number on 20/4/1994 (was Somerset 19). {13}

Topography was certainly crucial in the choice of location, though the reasons behind this choice may have changed from one of security and defence of a community to one of a visible symbol of control over the community. A strong argument can now be put forward for several elements of the site having prehistoric origins, though a refined sequence for these earthworks is not yet possible. The banks and ditches of the three lines of defence would be freely accepted as of a type known in the 1st millennium BC, had excavated evidence produced some finds of that date, rather than the overwhelming quantity of medieval pottery. In this case however, the dearth of excavated items does not provide sufficient grounds to be dismissive of the idea. Firstly because no modern excavation has explored the bottom of the heavily silted ditches where much diagnostic material is likely to be found. Secondly, there has been no serious attempt to explore the interiors of the inner or outer enclosures. It is also the case that some earthwork elements previously assumed to be medieval, were only thought so because of the presence of medieval finds excavated elsewhere on the site; no direct association between the finds and the earthworks was identified.

Complicated and massive ramparts of the type witnessed here seem excessive for an 11th/12th century castle which was apparently occupied only for short periods of time and was not important enough to have any surviving documentation. It may be that the medieval castle took the form that it did because the defences already existed and could be adapted; the end result being dictated by an existing layout. Had it been built from scratch then a more modest castle may have resulted.

The positions of the entrances for all periods remain the biggest enigma. It has and is suggested that the location of the Castle Neroche may be linked to its location on the natural route between Chard and Taunton. Although other routes have since been adopted, the gentle gradient of the easy ascent up the north escarpment makes an obvious route for a primary route for foot traffic with origins probably in prehistory. The eastern escarpment of the Blackdowns is approached by hare lane, another probable early track which takes advantage of a similar graded spur in the escarpment. Hare Lane and the Castle Neroche track converge only 160m from the outer ramparts, so the site is ideally positioned to give access to these routes. Its significance for travellers approaching from at least three points of the compass cannot be underestimated, with all the implications of trade, politics, social and economic factors coming into play.

150m east of the outer earthworks is a steep deeply cut holloway also giving access up the escarpment, though not with such ease as with the Castle track. The origins of this track are obscure but the existence of a more arduous alternative route so close to the other suggest that the earlier route was not available or access was restricted for a period of time. It is suggested that a likely episode is was when the medieval castle was under construction after the conquest and access was halted by the motte being built across the route.

See PRN [16497](#) for details of the earthwork survey from which these conclusion are drawn. {14}

References:

- 1 Mention - Page, W. *Victoria History of the County of Somerset*. Vol. 2 (1911), 519. Copy held in Local Studies collection at Somerset Heritage Centre.
- 2 Mention - Warre, F. Castle Neroche. *Somerset Archaeology and Natural History* **5** (1854), 29-48. Copy available in Local Studies collection at Somerset Heritage Centre.
- 3 Excavation report - Gray, H St G. Excavations at Castle Neroche, Somerset: June-July 1903. *Somerset Archaeology and Natural History* **49** (1903), 23-53 (page 23ff) Copy available in Local studies collection at Somerset Heritage Centre.
- 4 Description - Spencer, JH. Castle Neroche: its position with relation to neighbouring earthworks. *Somerset Archaeology and Natural History* **49** (1903), 54-4 Copy available in Local studies collection at Somerset Heritage Centre.
- 5 Detailed records - Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division record card. Record ID: ST 21 NE 8 (1965) Location: HER files. HER digital source: 1005.
- 6 Mention - Pevsner, N. *The Buildings of England: South and West Somerset*. (1958), 252.
- 7 Excavation report - Davidson, BK. Castle Neroche: an abandoned Norman fortress in South Somerset. *Somerset Archaeology and Natural History* **116** (1972), 16-58 and

Staple Fitzpaine, St Peter's Church (SFC 13)

- plates at end. Copy available in Local Studies collection at Somerset Heritage Centre.
- 8 Illustration - Aston, M. Photocopy of reconstruction drawing of Castle Neroche. (March 1976) Location: HER file. HER digital source: 38353.
- 9 Correspondence - Department of the Environment to Somerset County Council. (25/1/1982) with maplet. Location: HER files. HER digital source: 13718.
- 10 Verbal communication - Dennison, E [Ed]. Somerset County Council, Sites and Monuments Record (20/06/1988). Location: Verbal, electronic or direct entry, no source retained
- 11 Verbal communication - Preece, AE. Somerset County Council, Heritage Service (20/01/1994). Location: Verbal, electronic or direct entry, no source retained
- 12 Detailed records - Preece, A. *Castle Neroche: A Motte and Bailey Castle and Earlier Defences*. (1993) unpublished Monuments Protection Programme fieldwork report for English Heritage. Location: HER files. HER digital source: 21464.
- 13 Correspondence - English Heritage to Somerset County Council. (28/4/1994) Location: HER files. HER digital source: 13719.
- 14 Detailed records - Newman, P. *Castle Neroche, Staple Fitzpaine, Somerset: An Earthwork Survey*. Unpublished English Heritage report No: AI/12/2003 (2003) Location: HER file 16497. HER digital source: 15453.

Record created in June 1988

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Name: Castle Neroche: a motte and bailey castle and earlier defences above Castle Plantation

List Entry Number: 1008252

Location

County: Somerset

District: South Somerset

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Buckland St. Mary

County: Somerset

District: Taunton Deane

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Curland

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: Not applicable to this List entry.

Date first scheduled: 12-Feb-1925

Date of most recent amendment: 20-Apr-1994

Legacy System: RSM

UID: 24006

List Entry Description

Summary of Monument

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

Reasons for Designation

Motte and bailey castles are medieval fortifications introduced into Britain by the Normans. They comprised a large conical mound of earth or rubble, the motte, surmounted by a palisade and a stone or timber tower. In a majority of examples an embanked enclosure containing additional buildings, the bailey, adjoined the motte. Motte castles and motte-and-bailey castles acted as garrison forts during offensive military operations, as strongholds, and, in many cases, as aristocratic residences and as centres of local or royal administration. Built in towns, villages and open countryside, motte and bailey castles generally occupied strategic positions dominating their immediate locality and, as a result, are the most visually impressive monuments of the early post-Conquest period surviving in the modern landscape. Over 600 motte castles or motte-and-bailey castles are recorded nationally, with examples known from most regions. As one of a restricted range of recognised early post-Conquest monuments, they are particularly important for the study of Norman Britain and the development of the feudal system. Although many were occupied for only a short period of time, motte castles continued to be built and occupied from the 11th to the 13th centuries, after which they were superseded by other types of castle.

Castle Neroche survives as a fine example of its class and is of interest as excavations have shown its development from an earlier Norman ringwork and perhaps originally from an Iron Age or Saxon fortification.

History

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

Details

The monument includes a motte and bailey castle associated with multi-phase defensive enclosures on a spur of land protruding from the Blackdown escarpment. The site commands extensive views northwards over the Vale of Taunton Deane. Partial excavation has identified four phases of construction. The outer defence consisting of a rampart 1.6m high and a ditch c.0.5m deep is undated but considered to be earliest, part of either an Iron Age hillfort or perhaps an Anglo-Saxon work. The second phase was the construction of a ringwork, probably early Norman, within this enclosure. The ramparts of this have been heightened by later works. An unfinished outer work associated with it, consisting of a rampart 1m high and a ditch 0.7m deep, was seen by the excavator as an attempt to reduce the area of the old enclosure. The next phase saw the construction of a motte and ditch over the north edge of the ringwork, the remainder of which was heightened to form a bank 3m-4m high and became a sub-rectangular bailey. At some stage a second line of ramparts 1.3m high with ditches 1.7m deep was added around this, creating three lines of ramparts. One corner of the bailey was subdivided to form a barbican. Down the north tip of the spur in an area not investigated by excavation, below the motte, are two lines of scarps, with a lobed or sub-rectangular bailey at the foot. This bailey encloses 0.18 ha., with an internal bank dividing it into two, and is defended by a steeply scarped face up to 2m high with a bank 0.5m high on top, a ditch 0.5m deep at the bottom, and a counterscarp bank 0.5m high outside the ditch. In the final phase a stone shell keep and curtain wall were added to the top of the motte, and the ruins of these were noted in 1854. There is a pillow mound - a low linear mound for keeping rabbits - within the outer defences. The construction of the ringwork took place soon after the Norman Conquest and it may have been used in the suppression of local disturbances in 1067-9. The later building of the motte and bailey castle is likely to have taken place under Robert de Mortain, a major landowner in the west country from the Conquest to 1103. The castle seems to have passed out of use by the early C12 but was refurbished for a time, probably during the Anarchy of King Stephen's reign, by the construction of the curtain wall and keep on the motte. Excavations within the castle have produced evidence of cobbled building footings, post-holes and local pottery of northern French style. In the 19th century, a farm was constructed within the inner bailey, and this continues in use today. Sand diggings have left deep hollows in the outer areas of the site, which on the surface can be confused with the castle ditches. The extent of the area of the scheduling is indicated on the mapped depiction, and includes a 10m wide strip in the field on the south-west. Excluded from the scheduling are all modern buildings, structures, fences and posts, though the ground beneath is included.

Selected Sources

Books and journals

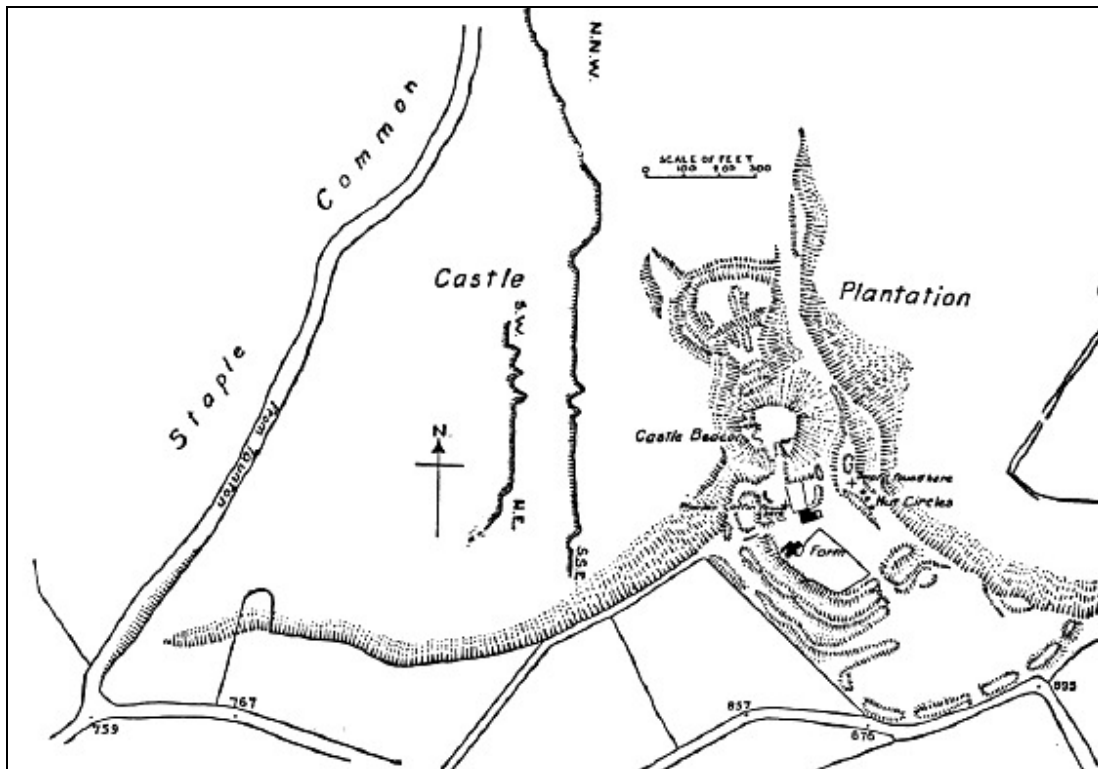
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Other

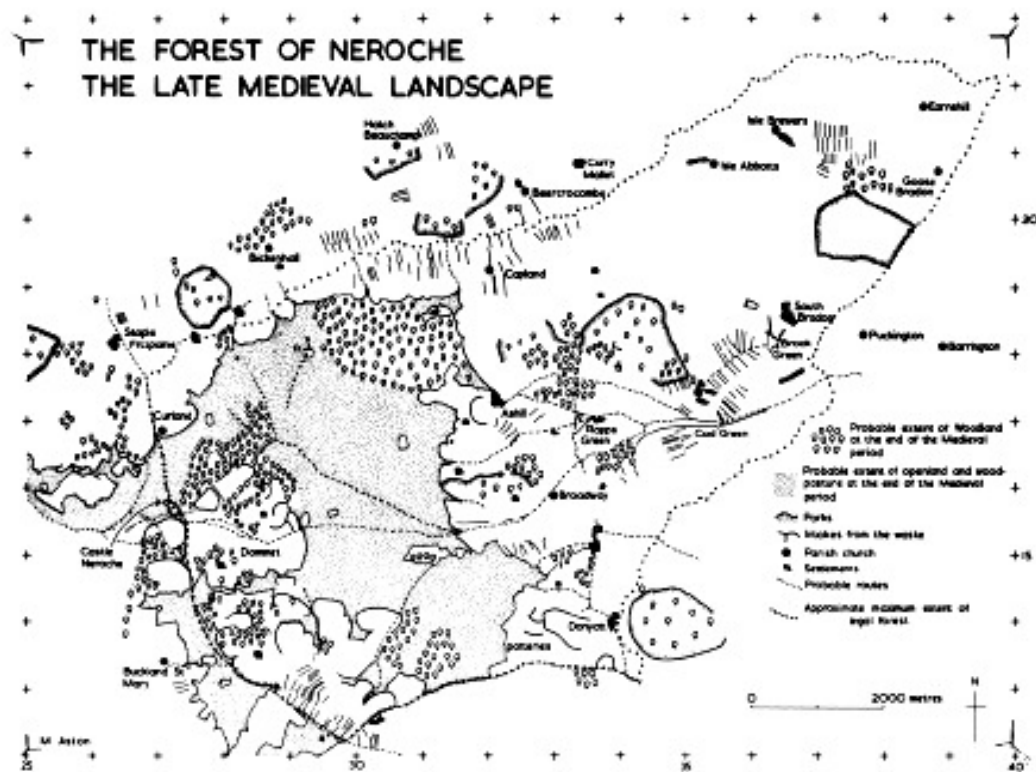
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Map of earthworks at Castle Neroche, Staple Fitzpaine, Somerset, England, 1911
The Victoria History of the Counties of England, A History Of Somerset, Volume 2.
Editor - W.Page; Chapter on Ancient Earthworks - C.H.Bothamley

Forest of Neroche

Although the Forest of Neroche is not recorded in the Domesday Book it is thought to have been a royal forest before the conquest, being closely associated with King Ina who had a royal palace at South Petherton. Royal Forests tend to be found near concentrations of Crown Land.



This map is shown courtesy of Mick Aston and shows the extents of the Forest of Neroche.

Forests were areas of common land which were subject to Forest Law. Although the crown rarely owned the forest, the King held exclusive privileges under Forest Law. These include the rights of *vert* (rights over all the timber and other forest produce as well as rights to pasturage for deer) and rights of *venery* (the deer themselves). Forest were deeply unpopular with the local inhabitants who struggled to maintain their rights against the kings passion for hunting and their greed for money.

Charles I abolished the Forest in 1633 in an attempt to raise funds. It was a deal which enriched both the crown and local private landowners at the expense of the commoners who lost the majority of their common law rights.

<http://www.nerochescheme.org/archaeologyPlaces.php>

14/04/2015