Report on

Archaeological Monitoring
of Ground Disturbance during floor repairs

All Saints' Church, Hemblington
Norfolk
ENF 128141

Prepared on behalf of

Hemblington PCC

Sarah Bates
March 2012
## Contents

**Summary**

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Geology and topography

3.0 Historical Background

4.0 Methodology

5.0 Results

6.0 The Finds

7.0 Conclusions

**References**

**Acknowledgements**

Appendix 1: List of contexts

Appendix 2 The finds

**Figures**

Fig.1 Site location

Fig.2 Trench location

Fig.3 Sections
Summary

Archaeological monitoring was carried out during repair work following subsidence to areas of the floor at Hemblington Church. Following the removal, by site contractors, of ledger slabs, pews and floor from the nave the excavation by the contractors of a number of small pits in areas of soft ground, was monitored and observations were recorded. The disturbed ground consisted almost entirely of redeposited sandy soil which had resulted from the repeated use of the area for burials. Occasional disarticulated human bone was found and two or three (possible) in situ burials were partly exposed (none of these were removed from the ground). A small area of stratified deposits was identified and may have represented make up for a former surface.

In the south-east part of the nave a short length of mortared flint masonry appeared to represent a wall which was aligned with that of the chancel to its east.

1.0 Introduction

All Saints’ Church, Hemblington is situated about 2km east of Blofield Heath to the east of Norwich (Fig. 1). It stands apart from other settlement; the closest buildings being at Hemblington Hall approximately 200m to its south. Repairs to the floor of the church were necessitated by its partial collapse following flooding to the church caused by a tap left running outside the north door. The flooding was in January 2010 with collapse of a ledger slab inside the building near the north door occurring in November 2010. The collapse was inspected by architect Nicholas Warns and remedial restoration work was undertaken by site contractors G & F Atthowe. In May 2011, a test pit and probing of the ground was carried out by structural engineer Mark Kitchen. Areas of soft ground were identified in the vicinity of the former flooding and in the central aisle. It was thought that the flooding had caused the floor to subside although a predisposition to collapse may have been due to buried obstructions or voids of an archaeological nature (such as burial features) (Kitchen 2011). The engineer recommended that the ground beneath the church floor in the areas of potential voids should be inspected and compacted and the floor re-laid.

The repair work was carried out by G&F Atthowe in January - February 2012 and the work was monitored by this writer. The archaeological monitoring accorded to a Project Design which was prepared by Sarah Bates to meet the requirements of a Brief set by Norfolk Historic Environment Service (NHES ref. CNF 43775).
The archaeological archive will, on completion of the project, be deposited with Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, following the relevant policy on archiving standards.

2.0 Geology and topography
The solid geology of the area of the site is chalk overlain by Norwich Crag which comprises marine deposits, laminated clays and gravels. This is overlain by Lowestoft formation chalky till and outwash sands and gravels, silts and clays from soils of the area derive (Funnell 2005).

The church lies at about 20m OD. The general slope of the land in the vicinity is downwards to the east and north. In the immediate area of the churchyard, however, the ground level is slightly higher to the north of the church and this will have exacerbated the flooding of the building caused by the running tap.

3.0 Historical Background
A search of the Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER) for the church has been undertaken and secondary records were consulted.

The round tower of All Saints’ Church includes Late Saxon stonework which might suggest that it is of Saxo-Norman date or that it was rebuilt using stone of this date. Norman stonework can also be seen built into the walls elsewhere in the church walls. The chancel dates to about 1300 and the nave was built during the 14th century while the roof and some windows are of 15th-century date. Walls paintings, also of 15th-century date, were discovered during the 1930s and show St Christopher with scenes from his life and martyrdom.

A service trench, running from outside the north door north-westwards to the edge of the churchyard, was dug in 2009 to bring water to the church, and allow the laying of cables. No burials were seen and nothing else of archaeological interest was found.

It has been suggested (by members of the local community to this writer) that a crack and traces of possible repair in the plaster on the west wall of the nave might relate to the line of a former wall. Possibly this relates in some way to the west tower.

The only other sites listed in the NHER in the vicinity of the church comprise cropmarks in surrounding fields which are described by the Norfolk Mapping Programme. These indicate field boundaries and ditches of possible late prehistoric, probable Romano-British and medieval and post-medieval date (NHER 18127, 49440, 49441, 49442, 49445, 45148).

4.0 Methodology
Archaeological monitoring aimed to observe and record the presence or absence, location, nature and date of any surviving archaeological deposits within the areas disturbed by the repairs to the floor.

The position of the ledger slabs in the central aisle and to either side of the font at the west end of the nave was recorded by the writer. The pews, and the raised timber flooring and concrete slab on which they sat, were removed by the site contractors along with the ledger slabs in the central aisle and at the back of the
church. (The pews and ledger slabs were to be replaced by the contractors in their original positions after the repair work was completed).

A deposit of loose, very sandy soil was revealed immediately beneath the floor and the ground was probed with steel rods by the site engineer to identify areas of underlying soft ground and potential subsidence. These soft areas were hand-excavated by the site contractors under the observation of the writer (Fig. 2, Areas A-J). The contractors removed soft soil until the ground was considered firm enough to support consolidation. The probing also identified a hard area immediately below the surface in the south-east part of the nave and this was also investigated (Fig. 2, Area K).

Archaeological features and deposits were recorded using pro forma context sheets. The location of the hand-excavated areas was recorded and plans and sections were drawn as necessary at appropriate scales. Digital and black and white film photographs were taken of the archaeological deposits and to record generally the work at the site.

No deposits required sampling for environmental purposes.

Being inside the church meant that conditions were dry (although towards the northwest corner of the church, in the area of the worst flooding, the soil was slightly damper). It also meant that the light was quite poor; in a few of the deeper pits an electric inspection light was used to aid observation.

On completion of archaeological recording, the excavated areas were consolidated by hand tamping and backfilling by the contractors.

5.0 Results
(Figs 2 and 3)
(Context numbers are listed in Appendix 1 and shown in italics below).

A mid to light creamy grey brown silty sand 1 was seen beneath the church floor in all areas. It included occasional, mostly small, flints and rare or occasional fragments of tile. It was dry and loose and was interpreted as a mix of floor make up material and, probably, the upper fills of various burial features. At this upper level, however, cut features were not identifiable.

**Trench A**
(Fig. 3, Plate 1)

| Location: | immediately to the east of the font |
| Size:      | 1.30 x 0.80m                        |
| Depth:     | 0.55m                               |

In the north-facing section a stratified series of deposits and one side of a probable grave cut were recorded (Fig. 3) (these were not seen in plan).

At the west side of Trench A a layer of mixed grey brown silt and pale yellow fine sand 8 was seen in the lowest part of the exposed section. Possibly, it represented the top of, slightly disturbed, natural sand. It was overlaid by a thick deposit of homogenous brownish grey very fine silt with sparse charcoal flecks and very sparse
small flints 7. On top of that was a layer of dark red silt 6, and some thin, well-defined, lenses of orange sand, greyish mortary material and charcoal 5. These were overlaid by a layer of yellowish orange very slightly clayey silt 4. The horizontal nature of the upper layers suggested they were associated with a former surface of some kind. The red silt was probably burnt and its well-defined upper surface with the intensity of colour fading towards the bottom of the deposit suggested the burning might have been in situ. The sand and charcoal lenses probably represented the spreading of material to level the area. These deposits may have been protected from later disturbance by grave digging due to their proximity to the font. To their east a vertical cut had been made through the deposits – presumably this was the side, or end, of a grave 2. Its fill consisted of a series of brown silty sand and yellow sand deposits 3 which tipped downwards into the features from its side. A short 'line' of dark brown staining which followed the same tip-line represented organic material incorporated into the grave backfill.

The extent of the probable grave cut was uncertain but deposits similar to the tipped fills were seen in the north end of Trench A and disturbance appeared to be extensive.

Some clean yellow sand 14 seen in the top of the trench at its north end was laid recently (subsequent to the flooding and floor collapse – pers com, site contractors).

Subsequently, a small 'extension' to Trench A was dug at its south end. The writer was not present but it was reported by the contractors that 'nothing different' was seen here.

**Trench B**

Location: near east end of central aisle  
Size: 2.00 x 1.10m  
Depth: 0.65m

A few disarticulated human bones (long-bones) were exposed in the bottom of the excavated trench. They were mostly complete, some projected downwards into the unexcavated soil and some dark stained lines of almost decomposed ?wood appeared to represent the sides of a coffin/coffins. Above this level was soft and loose greyish brown silty sand (<0.50m deep) with occasional flints and a few pieces of tile and small fragments of human bone 9. No cut features were identified but the trench was dug in an area of disturbed burials. On top of the disturbed fills, some clean orange sand 10, which appeared to infill a hollow had almost certainly been used to infill a previous slump of the graves fills. It was overlaid by the loose sandy floor make-up 1.

In the south end of Trench B some rubble and a wooden stake set into a hole, both in the upper edge of the trench, probably related to the construction of the base for the pews.
**Trench C**
Location: to the south of the font  
Size: 1.20 x 0.70m  
Depth: 0.85m  

This area was very dark and it was difficult to see the deposits in the deep trench. Most of the soil removed from the trench, loose soft grey brown silty sand 11, represented the disturbed fills of graves. In the bottom of the trench at its south end the edge of a probable grave was seen with part of a human skull within it. Two iron coffin handles were also found in the area. Part of another skull protruded from the west facing trench section at the same level. It was unknown as to whether this skull was complete or in situ but its position correlated with an east-facing burial extending to the east. Also in the bottom of the trench was a short north–to south line of organic staining/wood, probably part of a coffin.

In the upper part of Trench C, at its north end, the rubble base or footing for the font was revealed 13. It extended about 0.25m southwards into the excavated area.

**Trench D**
Location: to the north of the font  
Size: 0.80 x 0.50m  
Depth: 1.50m at north end, 0.80m at south end  

The full depth was reported by the site contractors. The upper 0.65m was seen by the writer and the soil here was quite loose and sandy with tip-lines sloping down to the south 12. No cut features were seen. Near the top of the trench, a deposit of clean yellow sand 14 represented the infilling of the slumped area (after the recent flooding).

**Trench E**
Location: at east end of central aisle  
Size: 0.70 x 0.70m  
Depth: 0.60m  

Soft orangey brown sand with very sparse fragments of tile and occasional flints 15 was removed from this trench. No cut features were seen. A few fragments of human bone and an iron coffin handle were found. Some traces of decayed wood were seen in the lower part of the trench. The soil was very soft in this area but firmer ground was identified by probing, about 0.20m below its base and the soft soil was hand-compacted (by the contractors).
Trench F
Location: within central aisle.
Size: 0.80 x 0.45m
Depth: 0.85m.

The east-facing trench section showed a deposit of firm brownish grey silt 16 (Fig. 3) (very similar to deposit 7 in Trench A). This was cut by grave 17 which contained a fill of loose grey brown silty sand 33 with lighter grey brown very soft silty sand above this 18. Probing by the engineer to ascertain the ground conditions identified a hard object about 0.15m beneath the bottom of excavated trench. This was investigated by trowel in a small area and was seen to be a bone (probably a femur or humerus) which lay, orientated east-to-west, on firm yellowish orange sand (probably the undisturbed natural sand). A skull was seen in the east facing section about 0.20m above the bottom of the trench. The fill of this grave appeared to be cut by another possible burial 19 that contained darker orange brown sandy silt 20 which was very compacted in its upper part. Another skull protruded slightly from the same section near the bottom of this upper 'cut'.

It seems likely that the long bone seen beneath the excavated area represented an in situ burial. It is unknown whether the two skulls were in situ (it seems unlikely that the lower one was in its original position if it was within the same grave as the bone beneath it). If in situ, however, the skulls represent further phases of burial and their position would suggest that they were buried facing to the west.

Trench G
Location: within central aisle.
Size: 0.50 x 0.70m
Depth: 0.75m

Loose brown silty sand was removed from this trench 32. A few small fragments of human bone were found. No cut features were seen.

Trench H
Location: within central aisle.
Size: 0.80 x 0.60m
Depth: <1.00m

In the south side of this trench some mixed orange and grey brown sand and silty sand soil 21 was cut by the south side of a probable grave 22 which contained a slightly darker coloured, but similar, deposit 23. A few fragments of human bone were found in the fill and a disarticulated femur and another long-bone protruded from the west-facing section (they were left in place). Above the infilled and disturbed grave were various deposits of sand, silty sand, and, near the top of the section, a thin layer of mortar which together formed between .35 – 0.55m of 'made' ground 24.
Trench J
Location: within central aisle.
Size: 0.60 x 0.70m
Depth: 0.95m

Firm brownish grey silt seen in the lower north side of this trench was similar to that seen in Trenches A and F. It was cut by probable grave. In the bottom of the excavated trench a trace of decayed organic material may have represented a part of a coffin. The 'cut' contained firmer more silty soil near the side in its lower part with yellow sand above that in the side of the feature and mixed grey brown silty sand forming the main fill. These fills may have represented the infilling of the grave around a coffin or burial. No bone or was recovered from this trench but one or two pieces of tile were found. Some sand seen in the top of the trench had been deposited recently to support a collapsing ledger slab.

Area K
(Fig. 3, Plate 2)
In the south-east part of the nave ground probing identified a hard obstruction just below the surface. A small area was hand-cleaned by the writer. Part of a probable wall was revealed. It was not fully excavated and a construction cut was not identified. However, a deposit of mid to dark orange brown silty sand with a thin band of chalky material within it was recorded to its north side and may be represent make up material or a surface associated with the masonry. The 'wall' itself comprised flints set in a cream lime mortar and its north side was well defined.

It is noted that the north side of this 'wall' aligns almost exactly with the wall of the existing chancel to the east.

Probing the ground to the west, on the line of this wall, did show that the ground was firm in that area but it was beyond the scope of the present work to investigate any further.

6.0 The Finds
(Appendix 2)
A few fragments of ceramic building material were found. These include floor and roof tile, the latter glazed (although mostly the glaze survives only in very small areas). The floor tile is likely to be locally produced and date to the 16th or 17th centuries. The roof tile appears to be of 18th or 19th-century date. All of the tile was found in the disturbed fills of burial features and could have originated from the church building.

Bones, or fragments of human bone were found in most area and reburied within the areas they were found. Three iron coffin handles were found (two in Trench C, 11 and one in Trench E, 15); these were also reburied where they were found.
7.0 Conclusions

A deposit of fairly 'clean' yellowish sand seen in Trench A was thought possibly to be of natural derivation (although it had some slightly greyish brown silty sand within it and may have been slightly disturbed. On top of this, and seen in two other areas, was brownish grey fine sandy silt with few inclusions and quite firm. This may have been a 'stratified' deposit which pre-dated the church or activities associated with it.

In the south-east area of the nave part of a mortared flint wall was identified. Its north 'face' aligned with that of the chancel wall to its east. Probing of the ground suggested that the wall continued to the west. The alignment of this wall suggests its association with the chancel. It is possible that these represent an early (Saxon-Norman) phase of the church, contemporary with the west tower, with the nave area being extended during the medieval period. The evidence might also support the suggestion that the crack appearing in the west wall of the nave relates to the former position of a wall. The reuse of early stonework in the walls of the existing church also supports this interpretation.

In Trench A, stratified deposits of silt, sand and charcoal were interpreted as representing a former surface or make-up for a surface. They included some red silt which appeared to represent in situ burning. The deposits were seen in a very small area and were cut by burial features. They may be of relatively early date and their survival is probably due to their position near the font.

A number of graves were identified cutting the stratified deposits. Due to the small size of the excavated areas, none of these was seen in entirety and the extent of the burial features was unknown. Possibly in situ human skeletal remains were seen, however, in the sides (or in one case below the bottom) of a few trenches. These remains were not disturbed. Disarticulated bone found in the trenches was reburied in the trenches when they were backfilled. Two skulls seen in the west side of Trench F, if in situ appear to have been buried facing west. Such practice might indicate the burial of a priest (Rodwell 1989, 168).

Most of the soil removed from the trenches comprised disturbed deposits representing material backfilled during different phases of burials within the area of the church.
References:
Kitchen, M., 2011  
*Hemblington Church, Norfolk, Report on subsidence in floor in November 2010 (Engineer’s report)*

Funnell, B., 2005  

Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1973  
‘Soils of Norfolk’ 1:100,000

*Rodwell, W. 1989*  
*Church Archaeology* English Heritage

Acknowledgements
The work was commissioned and funded by Hemblington PCC. The interest and advice of Reverend Paul Cubitt, Mark Kitchen (Structural Engineer) and the site contractors G & F Atthowe is gratefully acknowledged.

James Albone and Sarah Howard (Norfolk Historic Environment Service) gave helpful advice and this report is illustrated by Heather Wallis.
**Appendix 1: List of contexts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Trench</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>floor make-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>grave cut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>fill of grave 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>make up layer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>layer (sand and charcoal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>layer (?burnt silt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>layer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>possible natural deposit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>disturbed fills and soil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>?modern sand make-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>disturbed fills and soil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>disturbed fills and soil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>rubble footing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>A, D &amp;</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>modern sand make-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>J</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>disturbed fills and soil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>layer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>grave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>upper fill of grave 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>?grave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>fill of ?grave 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>layer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>grave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>fill of grave 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>disturbed fills and soil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>layer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>grave cut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>fill of grave 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>masonry wall or footing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>make-up or surface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>demolition material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>layer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>disturbed fills and soil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Lower fill of grave 17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendix 2: The finds**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number.</th>
<th>Weight(g)</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Floor tile</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>Post-medieval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Roof tile</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>Post-medieval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Floor tile</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>Post-medieval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Roof tile</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>Post-medieval</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Plate 1: Trench A; north-facing section, grave 2 cutting stratified deposits to its west (base of font to right), 0.5m scale

Plate 2: Trench: Area J; wall 28, looking south-west (wall of nave behind), 0.5m scale
Figure 1. Site Location. Scale 1:25 000
Figure 2. Site plan. Scale 1:100.

Illustrated sections, see Fig. 3
Trench A. North facing section.

Trench F. East facing section.

Trench K. East facing section.

Figure 3 Sections. Scale 1:10.