

For the SMDT web site

Encouraging words from the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC)

Our Church conservation architect, Chedburn Codd, continues to provide the DAC with information supporting the exciting plans for the future of St Mary's. In a communication from the DAC received earlier in December we received very positive comments; "This is an exemplar re-ordering scheme. The DAC committee were impressed by the detailed consultation checklist and the applicant's answers. All appropriate documentation has been submitted."

We know there are a number of more minor points still to be agreed but answers to these will become clearer as more detailed work is undertaken.

One thing we are all interested in is "what's under the floor?" and a summary of the work done by ContextOne can be found below. As far as the new external build is concerned it seems likely that a series of narrow supporting piles will provide the foundation for the steel structure of the extension, which will have the minimum impact on the archaeology of the churchyard. While inside the Nave the report helps in the design of the retractable staging and the new flooring.

Work is now going on in evaluating what and how heating should be provided in the church. Noting that the Bishop of Salisbury, Nick Holtam, is the Church of England's lead bishop on Environmental Affairs. He said: "Synod has set an ambitious target for the whole Church of England to respond to the urgency of the Climate Crisis by setting a 'net zero' target for 2030". We have the challenge and opportunity of addressing these issues right now.

One major expense will be the refurbishment of the historic 1855 Sweetland pipe organ as it is moved to its new location in the south west corner of the nave, very close to its original position on a gallery under the west tower. The last major work on this instrument was carried out in 1979.

What's under the floor in St Mary's?

Archaeological investigations in preparation for the renovation project.

As part of meeting Planning Condition 8, Context One Heritage & Archaeology recorded the excavation of twelve trial holes and two boreholes at the Church of St Mary the Virgin, New Park Street, Devizes, Wiltshire in November 2020

St Mary's is predominantly a combination of early 12th and later 15th century work, and must rank as one of the most important medieval Wiltshire churches. In the 17th century the chancel was probably re-roofed and in the 18th century a new gallery added, along with significant work to 'beautify' the churchyard in conjunction with several phases of levelling; this may explain the absence of pre 19th century burials. The 1854 restoration saw a succession of "improvement's", which included the removal of the box pews and galleries, replacing the pews and flooring, the installation of a central heating system, and construction of a vestry on the north side.



The **two bore holes** in the graveyard were within the area of the new extension and did not find evidence of cemetery soils or burials within this area, suggesting that this part of the graveyard was not intensively used. Nevertheless, if it reflects a similar burial pattern to that identified during the 2012 evaluation there may be about 300 articulated burials within the new building footprint, occupying a horizon between 0.95m and 1.30m below the ground surface

The **three exterior trial holes** exposed some of foundation to the church. The chancel, vestry and eastern wall of the north aisle had well-constructed foundations of c. 0.70-0.75m depth, whereas the north aisle foundation consisted of greensand and rubble to a depth of 0.65m. Reference to this can be found in the Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette 24th February 1898 report that 'important work was done in the way of concreting round, but not under the foundations'. It may be the case that no archaeological remains survive adjacent to this side of the church. Similarly, the construction trench for the vestry, built as part of the 1854 restoration, has removed any archaeological deposits immediately north of the chancel.



Figure 5. TH3 (looking S; 0.5m scale)



Figure 6. TH2 (looking E; 0.5m scale)

The **nine interior trial holes** were spread throughout the nave with one under the tower and varied in size between 0.45m x 0.75m and 0.85m x 1.10m. Excavations stopped either once natural deposits were reached - in some cases above the 0.60m target depth, or archaeological deposits that continued well below this depth. It was intended that trial hole by the chancel steps be taken down to 1.20m in order to investigate the implications of accommodating a raisable stage across the area in front of the chancel arch (at the east end of the nave). In the event natural deposits were encountered at a depth of 0.95m and further excavation was not necessary. Three trial holes were excavated beneath pew platforms and two beneath floorboards. Due to a deep void beneath these boards the trial holes had the least ground impact. Flagstones were removed above three other trial holes, one being abandoned as it met with a Victorian heating duct that runs from the boiler room under the north aisle and across the central aisle.

While the extensive 1854 restoration appears to have removed any earlier floors or horizons, cut features and structural remains have been identified within the proposed 0.60m impact zone. These mostly relate to burials at depths of 0.50m, however in most cases only the upper part of the grave cuts will be impacted and the fills have been previously disturbed. It is anticipated that most of the associated skeletons will lie deeper within the graves and will not require excavation, although the discovery of a single partially articulated skeleton at a depth of 0.40m may not be the only case of a burial within the impact zone. Crucially, the evidence for intercutting burials and a coffin burial in front of the chancel arch suggests that the proposed deeper groundworks at the east end of the nave will encounter intact burials. Under the tower excavations show an intact brick vault that is under a large 18th century ledger stone. This would mean the lowering of the vault walls and inverted excavation of the soil (containing coffin furniture) adhering to the vault roof. Also, given that the vault likely still contains the decayed coffins and remains of the four occupants it would be preferable to re-set the ledger stone in the same location. Finally, the identification of some possible pre-15th century foundations suggest there may be some potential for identifying evidence for the

phasing and historical development of the church fabric.



Figure 7. TH7 showing intercutting graves below hardstanding for former pulpit (looking W; 0.5m & 1m scales)



Figure 8. TH7 showing intercutting graves & intact coffin in S section (looking S; 0.50m & 1m scales)



Figure 9. TH8 showing vault & walls (looking S; 0.5m & 1m scales)



Figure 10. TH8 showing vault & walls (looking W; 0.5m scale)

For more detailed information please see the full Context-One report.