

St Mary's Church, Stoke Mandeville

Project Profile

Client: Fusion/HS2

Designer: JNP Group

Date: July 20—Nov 21

Value: £5.7m



The old church site of St Mary's is located off the A4010, half a mile south of Stoke Mandeville and is within the HS2 Construction Boundary, with the church and graveyard site being fully encompassed by the HS2 route. The church site had been abandoned circa 1900 and the building was eventually demolished in the 1960's.

This scheme was carried out as part of the HS2 enabling works in order to facilitate and support the archaeological excavations of the Church, graveyard and wider site area before the land was handed over to the HS2 main works civil contractors. It required the installation of extensive site infrastructure and the provision of an 80m x 50m temporary building that covered the full extent of the Archaeological dig for the excavation of the remaining church foundations and the careful uncovering, removal, recording and relocation of an expected 4,000 - 7,000 burials from the graveyard. Up to 60 archaeologists were involved in the excavation works which was carried out over a 6 month period.

The site enabling works included:

- Establishment of a temporary site compound accessed via an existing single lane farmer's access track and 300m of temporary Trakway road.
- Construction of a new tarmac surfaced site access bellmouth off the A4010 with signing and lining.
- Design and construction of:
 - ◇ A 500m x 3.6m wide access road which included multiple watercourse and ditch crossings
 - ◇ A 10,000m² main site compound to provide access, welfare and processing facilities for the archaeological works
 - ◇ Importing 22,000 tonnes of Type 1 stone for the access roads, compound, crane hardstand and maintenance track
 - ◇ Installing concrete foundations and temporary Trakway access matting to allow the installation of the 80m x 50m temporary tented structure by Arena Structures to cover the exhumation works.
 - ◇ Installing an 80m x 12m crane hardstand to accommodate the 200t crane required to erect and dismantle the temporary building
 - ◇ Establishment of a grey water collection system to provide washing water for the archaeological works
 - ◇ Temporary site SUDS drainage
- Removal of the compound hardstand on completion



St Mary's Church, Stoke Mandeville (cont'd)

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- Due to the nature and location of the scheme, HGV deliveries were restricted to 12 per day and we stockpiled type 1 stone in advance to mitigate any potential delay to the works programme.
- Topsoil and subsoil strip for roads and compounds was carried out under an archaeological watching brief.
- We supported and supervised the Archaeological Subcontractor, carried out excavation and soils removal from the archaeological dig and managed all lifting operations.
- A field museum and viewing area were established within the building to allow local people to visit and view the archaeological works and the artefacts found.
- Within the main compound we established processing cabins for the archaeologists to wash, dry, record and store excavated burials before removal from site.
- Archaeological excavation work was also carried out across the whole site and pedestrian routes and crossings were managed and maintained throughout the construction period to ensure both the safety of the public and the archaeology team during these works.
- We worked closely with ecologists to ensure surveys were conducted in a timely manner and installed Newt fencing around the compound and church field.
- The archaeological excavations revealed that the Norman church had been built over a pre-Norman, possibly Saxon building, which was itself underlain by Roman remains. Some of the final excavations also unearthed 3 very rare Roman busts in very good condition and also a large well preserved, glass vessel, an extremely rare example of Roman glassware, suggesting the site had been a Roman family Mausoleum.

Due to the sensitive nature of the works, we worked closely with the local community and the vicar of the new St Mary's Church who blessed the works and church yard.

The project was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic with the site being set up and all work carried out under the CLC Safe Operating Procedures. This included redesigning the main compound to allow adequate and safe social distancing.

There are a number of HS2 videos of the archaeological works at the St Mary's Church site which can be viewed by searching YouTube for 'St Mary's church Stoke Mandeville hs2'. The project was also featured on the 'Digging for Britain' archaeology programme on BBC2, Series 9, Episode 2 which is available on catch-up TV or I-player.

