

wil I town

an archaeological and
historical perspective



Archaeological Contributions 27
the Charleston Museum

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Willtown:

An Archaeological and Historical Perspective

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Chapter v: 38Ch1661

The New Willtown Church

Introduction

Archaeological research began on the site of the new (1750s) Presbyterian Church with a visit to a neighboring tract, led by Mr. Hugh Lane on May 1, 1997. This property, also known as Willtown plantation, is located about three miles from Willtown Bluff, on the east side of County Highway 55 (Figure 26). The property is currently owned by the family of the late Northrup Knox of Buffalo, New York, who generously allowed access to the property and funded an initial testing project.

Research into the location of the second church began with the research of Suzanne Linder. Dr. Linder located a plat indicating the church location, with the distinctive landmark being the bend in the highway, and a straight avenue leading from it. She consulted with local historical expert and Charleston Museum board member Jack Boineau, who responded that he was familiar with the location. Willtown Plantation manager Dickie Godley then showed us a small cemetery, surrounded by fields and pine stands. This quarter-acre plot contained three gravestones and numerous unmarked depressions. A plowed fireline on the south side of the cemetery revealed brick fragments, window glass and hand wrought lath nails (Figure 43, 44).

A larger site south of this (38Ch1660) has been interpreted as the parsonage associated with the church. This site was visually impressive. Mr. Godley described it as the Indian Mound and indeed it was a mound, but one of Euro-American origin. The mound of soil conceals an intact brick foundation that is of respectable size and impressive construction. Intact walls along the north and south sides are visible in the mounded earth, and have been more fully exposed in the past by Mr. Godley. The brick and mortar suggest an 18th century date of construction and the mound of earth seems to have formed gradually, after the structure burned in an apparently hot fire; melted bottle glass and burned pottery was recovered from the mound. The area around the mound has been left wooded, and the ground in this half-acre area is littered with brick rubble. A substantial brick well was noted north of the mound.

Open ground around the mound revealed a quantity of colonial period artifacts. Those recovered from this site include early 18th century ceramics, such as Westerwald stoneware (1670–1770), delft (1670–1775), white saltglazed stoneware (1740–1760) and colono ware. Later refined earthenwares include creamwares (1760–1820) and pearlwares (1780–1830). Forty one ceramics were collected in the short time spent at the site. The proximity of this site to the church site, and the date of the artifacts (mid 18th to early 19th century) led to the interpretation of this site as the parsonage. The artifacts recovered are consistent with a house site, and the foundations suggest one of substance.



Figure 43. View of 38Ch1661, the Will town Church.

Fieldwork

Based on the positive results of the May 1 visit, we determined to return to the Church site with the 1997 field school for testing. Shovel testing was conducted on July 8, 1997 and test excavations on July 29 to 30. The site is accessed by a dirt road directly from highway 55, due east west. The site is located at the intersection of an ancillary road, and is thus located north and east of this intersection. The area south of the dirt road is woods, and the area west of the ancillary road and on the east side of the cemetery was planted in corn at the time of fieldwork (Figure 43, 44).

Site work began with establishment of a Chicago grid. A key stake was placed on the south side of the road, in the wooded area, and given an arbitrary designation of N200E200. Grid north was established parallel to the ancillary road, 25° east of magnetic north. Grid points were established 150 feet to the north and 100 feet to the east. Shovel tests were placed at 20 foot intervals along the west side of the cemetery and in the suspected footprint of the church, along the southern edge of the graveyard. This latter area measured approximately 40 feet north/south by 80 feet east/west. Fourteen shovel tests were excavated in this area (see Figure 44), and they yielded brick fragments, window glass and hand-wrought nails. The glass and nails were distributed between the E240 and E300 lines, while brick rubble began at the E220 line. The only other artifact retrieved was a kaolin pipestem. Six shovel tests along the west side of the cemetery (The E200 line from N230 to N350) yielded a single fragment of window glass. Three of these tests contained charcoal.

Test excavations followed in the suspected footprint of the church. Two 5 by 5 units, a 2.5 by 5 unit, and a 2 by 10 foot trench were excavated in a two day project. These excavations revealed a dark grey-brown loamy soil (10yr4/1) averaging .7 feet in depth, with extensive plow scars visible in the subsoil. Unit N255E240 revealed two distinct features intruding into subsoil. Feature 1 was a round posthole of brown sand mottled with white and grey sand, with a concentration of brick rubble in the center. The central posthole featured the light grey sand (10yr5/2) and areas of orange sand (10yr6/4), indicative of burning. Feature 2 was a rectangular post stain of mottled light brown-grey (10yr5/2) and white (10yr7/1) sand. Due to the limited nature of the project, these features were not excavated.

Unit N250E255 revealed similar stratigraphy. A dark area in the center of the unit, intruding into sterile subsoil, was tentatively interpreted as a post, but upon further inspection appeared ephemeral, and so was not designated. Like the previous unit, the subsoil here showed evidence of extensive damage and churning.

The third unit was excavated in the eastern area of architectural debris. Unit N255E282.5 was a 2.5 by 5 foot unit oriented north/south. This unit revealed a good bit of disturbance in the northern 2/3 of the trench, and a higher concentration of artifacts and dark soil in the southern third. The southern portion also featured an oval area of dark soil intruding into sterile; like features 1 and 2, this deposit contained brick and mortar fragments. Feature 3 is in the same north/south location as features 1 and 2.

The final excavation was a 2.0 by 10.0 foot trench extending from the northeast corner of N2250E255. The goal of this unit was to intersect any posts or other structural members which might align with the previously discovered features. None were located in this trench, which exhibited heavy disturbance intruding into subsoil.

The results of the testing, then, were somewhat disappointing. They revealed an area which had received a great deal of post-occupational disturbance. The relatively shallow plowzone/topsoil layer here was not extensive enough to prevent subsurface disturbance as well. The few possible postholes were the only subsurface evidence of the structure itself. Despite these modest results, however, we remain fairly certain that this small area contains the footprint of the church. This is supported by the recovered artifacts (Figure 44).

The artifact assemblage

The excavation units increased the relevant artifact assemblage significantly. The plowzone contained moderate amounts of brick rubble, handwrought nails, and window glass. The materials recovered conform to the suggested date of construction, as handwrought nails were the only type available until 1780; no post-1780 machine-cut nails were recovered. The handwrought nails were in excellent condition, as they had been hardened by a hot fire which delays oxidation. Those recovered include rose-head lath nails, between 20 and 30 mm in length, used for wall paneling or plaster lathing. The handwrought clasp nails, 50–80 mm in length, were likely from flooring.

The window glass also reflected the burning of the church, as much of it was melted or thermally altered to some degree. Unit N250E255 also yielded an iron item that may be a portion of a door lock. Distribution of these architectural materials is shown in the table below.

In addition to these, a very small number of domestic artifacts were recovered. Their principal significance lies in support of the date of occupation for this site. Recovered from the four excavation units were 3 fragments of colono ware, Yaughan variety and one of olive green bottle glass, and four tobacco pipe fragments, all typical of the 18th century. More specific were three fragments of Whieldon ware, manufactured between 1740 and 1760.

Table 7
Distribution of Excavated Artifacts

N255E240	N250E255
47 handwrought rose head nails	171 handwrought rose head nails
11 handwrought clasp nails	33 handwrought clasp nails
11 unidentifiable nail fragments	15 unidentifiable nail fragments
88 aqua window glass	38 aqua window glass
77 window glass, melted	19 window glass, melted
2 Whieldon ware	1 Whieldon ware
3 colono ware	1 door lock part
1 percussion cap	34 lbs. brick rubble
15 lbs brick rubble	
N255E282.5	N255E258
45 handwrought rose head nails	1 handwrought rose head nail
15 handwrought clasp nails	
45 aqua window glass	
101 window glass, melted	
1 olive green bottle glass fragment	
6.5 lbs brick rubble	

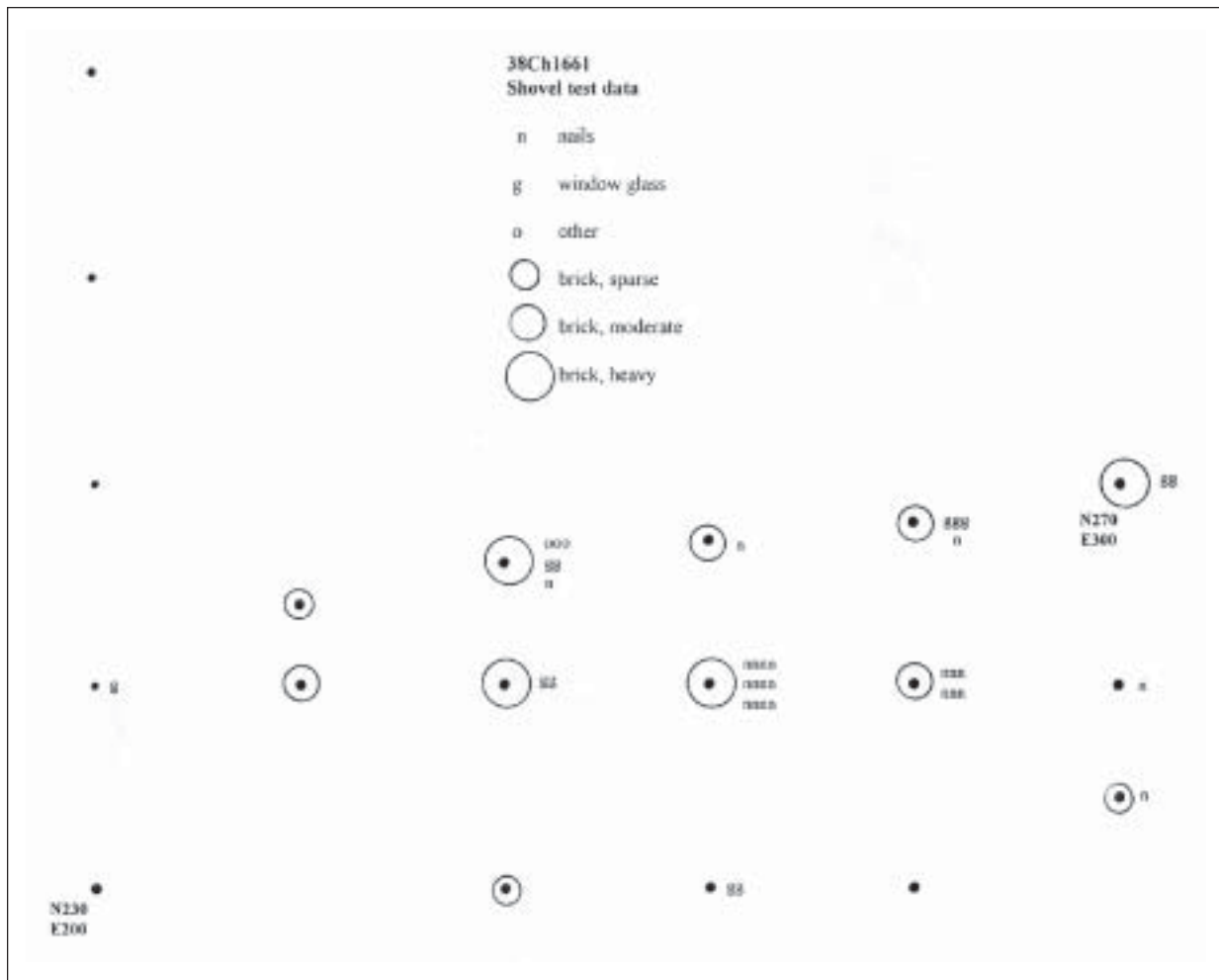


Figure 44. 38Ch 1661. Shovel test data.

The cemetery

No excavations were conducted in the cemetery. A map was produced with the transit, showing the extant limits of the cemetery, the extant markers, and the unmarked depressions (Figure 45). Measurements were taken by angle and distance from two transit stations, and two measurements were taken of each linear feature. The cemetery contains two upright headstones, and a horizontal slab placed on a 3' high foundation. Sixteen unmarked depressions were located and mapped; these clustered in the center of the tract and in the southwestern corner. The extant cemetery measures 90 feet east/west by 85 feet north/south.

The three stones were mostly legible, and were recorded in their entirety. The largest, the horizontal crypt, measures 5 feet by 2.5 feet, and is a tribute to John Berkeley, dated 1806. The lengthy inscription provides key proof to the site's identity:

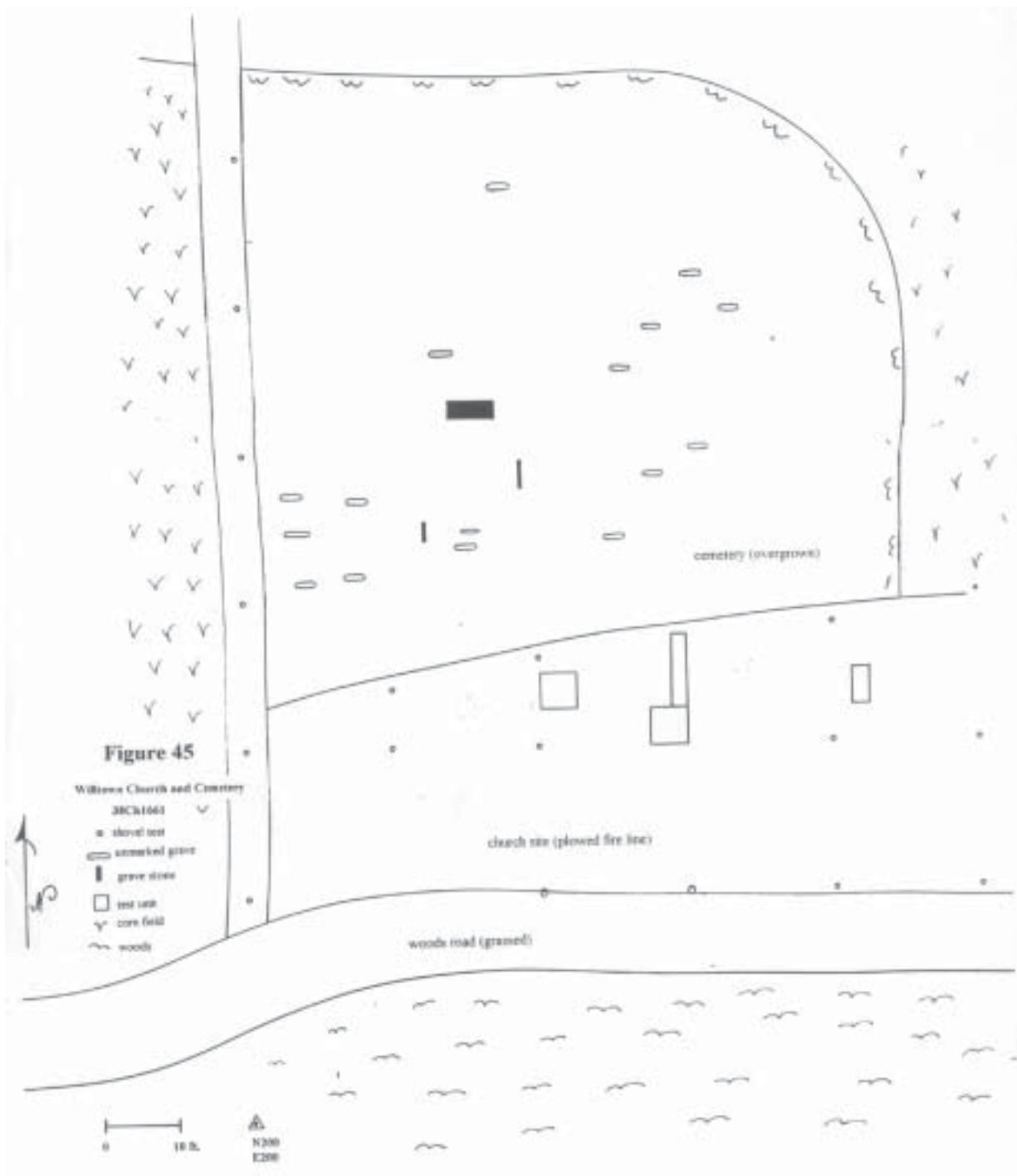


Figure 45. Will I town church and cemetery.

Raised by the hand
of
Filial Piety
This stone transmits to the posterity
The Memory
of
JOHN BERKLEY ESQ^R

Who died February 8th 1806
Berkley was the last male member
and Deacon
of the Church of Christ in this place
and lived to see it pass through successive changes
From its most flourishing state to its almost
intire extinction
In him to benevolence of heart politeness of manners
and the candor of a liberal mind
was united
the sincerity of the Christian
through a long life, his exemplary uniform undissembled
piety evinced the excellency and
the energy of the Religion he professed recommended
him to universal And secured to him the
friendship of the worthy and the good
He met the King of Terrors with the meekness and
tranquillity for which he was distinguished in life
and died in the joyful hope of a blissful immortality
in the 76th year of his age.

The two upright stones are less elaborate. The later of the two is the most difficult to decipher, and particularly difficult is the last name of the deceased:

In
Memory of
Henry Veitch
Who Died February
the 10 1811 Aged 23
plus 3 months and
15 days

The third stone is for a mother and daughter:

Here lies the Mortal Part ^{of}
M^{RS.} SUSANNA MALTBY
Wife of
The Rev. John Maltby,
She was born in Bermuda
January 1st 1739.



This page and opposite page:

figure 46.

1815 plat of swamp on penny creek,



showing location of Will town Church and parsonage.

(RMC0, McCrady Plats #4451.)

And died August 9th 1770.
Aged 31 years 7 months
and 8 Days
Likewise of SUSANNA
their Daughter
born in Bermuda
July 9th 1769
and died July 17th 1770
Aged 1 year and
8 Days

The documentary evidence

The information contained on these stones collaborate the history of the church here, written by Slann Legare Clement Simmons in 1960. At that time Mrs. Simmons was Secretary of the Huguenot Society of South Carolina, and she provides the following summary:

Following the death of Minister Archibald Stobo in 1741, the Presbyterian Meeting House “at Wilton” stood vacant. The Reverend Archibald Simpson noted in 1754 that a “chapel of ease had been built in the upper part of the congregation.” Dissention between members in the ‘south district’ who preferred to remain at Willtown, and the ‘north district’ ensued during this time. Reverend Simpson noted continued contention during the subsequent decade, when he and Mr. John Alison served the church during a vacancy. Mr. James Stobo seemed to be a leader of the contentious group.

The new church, “now abuilding” in July 1767, was complete the following month when Mr. Simpson preached a sermon there. He mentions that the new Meeting house was “about four miles from the old one (at Willtown Bluff), and about three miles from the public path (Willtown Road), so that it is very convenient and central; it is a large handsome and very well built house—the pulpit and pews the same which used to be in the old brick meeting house.” The contrasting remark about the “old brick” house suggests the new one was of wood. Mrs. Simmons notes incidentally that “Mr. Stobo had moved out of the parish, and all differences were made up” (Simmons 1960:151; Figure 46).

The new minister was the Reverend John Maltby from Bermuda, installed in December 1769. Only a year later his daughter and wife died, and Simmons notes that they are buried in the churchyard of the “Burnt Church.” She cites a manuscript of J. L. Girardeau, which states that “the remains of the ruins and a few grave stones which still stand in tolerable preservation. On one of these is the name of John Berkeley, of honored memory, who was one of the deacons of the church, and on another that of mrs Maltby. . . . and nearby signs of the place where the parsonage stood.”

Rev. Maltby died one year after his wife and was buried in Dartmouth, New Hampshire. There followed a rapid succession of ministers, some who died and others who moved on after a short tenure. On May 1, 1807, the congregation was asked to assemble at “the ruins of the church lately burnt.” (Simmons 1960:152) A number of subscribers pledged money for the purpose “of rebuilding the Wilton Church, situate at Willtown Bluff.” Those signing included Charles Freer, John Ashe, Paul Hamilton, and William Hayne. Simmons concludes that the abandoned church at Willtown was repaired for temporary use, before a new church was built in the Adams Run area. The above historical summary, then, agrees well with the archaeological evidence.