

# ***Marches Archaeology***

## **St Mary's Church Sarnesfield Herefordshire**

### **A report on a programme of archaeological works**

October 2005

*Marches Archaeology Series 401*

**This report is produced by**

## ***Marches Archaeology***

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**St Mary's Church  
Sarnesfield  
Herefordshire**

**A report on a programme  
of archaeological works**

**NGR: SO 374 509**

**SMR: HSM 43038**

**Report by  
Jo Wainwright**

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*Summary*

*Remedial drainage works at St Mary's Church, Sarnesfield, Herefordshire necessitated the need for a programme of archaeological works. No significant archaeological features or deposits were excavated. The foundations of the church were exposed in places and these were generally of rough hewn sandstone and cobbles set in the natural clays. Some of the foundations had been repaired in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century or early 20<sup>th</sup> century when restoration works took place.*

## **1 Introduction**

Drainage work has been undertaken at St Mary's church, Sarnesfield, Herefordshire. The site is situated at NGR: SO 374 509 (Fig. 1). A Sites and Monument intervention number was obtained for the work (HSM: 43038).

The diocesan's archaeological advisor advised that in order that the archaeological resource was adequately protected an archaeological watching brief was to be carried out during ground works associated with the work.

Dennis Vickers (the architect), on behalf of the Parochial Church Council, commissioned Marches Archaeology to provide the archaeological services required for the project.

## **2 Aims and objectives**

The scope of the project was defined as:

1. Archaeological observation and recording of all ground-disturbing operations forming part of the development, excepting where it could have been proven in advance that such operations would have only affected manifestly modern deposits
2. Archaeological monitoring of all ground and below ground works forming part of the development.
3. Contingency for up to 4 days of full archaeological excavation if, and only if, significant archaeological entities were present.

4. Provision should have been made for the archaeological contractor to have unobstructed and uninterrupted access to the site for a period of up to 4 days if significant archaeological entities that would have been destroyed or severely damaged by ground-disturbing operations forming part of the development were present
5. If the chosen archaeological contractor had good reason for believing that such entities were present, he should have without delay consulted with Herefordshire Archaeology and the developer and/or the developer's agents to decide whether the contingency should have been activated. If a consensus was not achieved by such consultation Herefordshire Archaeology would have itself decided if the archaeological deposits and features that were present were "significant".
6. Full processing of archaeological materials and the production of an appropriate report

The purpose of an archaeological watching brief is defined by the Institute of Field Archaeologists as:

‘to allow, within the resources available, the preservation by record of archaeological deposits, the presence and nature of which could not be established (or established with sufficient accuracy) in advance of development or other potentially disruptive works’

and:

‘to provide an opportunity, if needed, for the watching archaeologist to signal to all interested parties, before the destruction of the material in question, that an archaeological find has been made for which the resources allocated to the watching brief itself are not sufficient to support a treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard’.

### **3 Methodology**

#### *Documentary research*

No documentary research was carried out for this project.

#### *Fieldwork*

Observations and appropriate recording was undertaken of all ground breaking activity in association with the proposed development (Fig. 2). An archaeologist was on site for four days in September and October 2005. However, on one of these days the work scheduled for the day did not take place and an archaeologist left the site after one hour.

The recording system included written, drawn and photographic data. The primary written record was by means of site notes, accompanied by sketches. Context numbers were allocated and trench record sheets were completed. A plan of the areas of excavation was made. The photographic record was made using black and white negative and colour transparency film. A digital photographic record was made of certain features. No artifacts were recovered from the excavations.

#### *Office work*

On completion of the fieldwork a site archive was prepared. The written, drawn and photographic data was catalogued and cross-referenced and a summary produced. Unfortunately one film of colour slides got mislaid in the postal system.

## **4 Site description**

St Mary's church stands in an isolated position within a belt of trees on the south-east side of the parish of Sarnsfield (Fig. 1, Plate 1). The irregular shaped churchyard is bounded by a stone wall.

## **5 Archaeological and historical background**

The nave of St Mary's Church was constructed in the early part of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the south aisle was added at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century (RCHM, 1934). In probably the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century the tower was added. Remodelling of the chancel was carried out in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the south chapel and porch were added. In the late 15<sup>th</sup> century the chancel-arch was rebuilt. Restoration work took place in 1870 and 1907.

## **6 The programme of works**

The excavations at St Mary's Church consisted of the excavation of a drainage trench around the church and two soakaways at the east end of the church (Fig. 2). To the north of the nave and chancel about 200mm of ground was removed to allow level access for the mini digger. The drainage trenches were a maximum of 600mm deep and the soakaways were a maximum 1.2 metres deep. Disarticulated human bone recovered from the excavations was reburied.

The general stratigraphy was of a topsoil, burial soil or a disturbed natural layer and the natural marls. Around the southern, western and northern sides of the church a concrete surface drain was removed [105]. In one place on the south side of the church the make-up [105] for the drain was left in.

The topsoil was about 200mm thick and was a mid red brown silty clay with occasional sandstone fragments [101]. North of the nave and chancel the topsoil contained 20% brick and sandstone fragments. This was probably construction rubble dumped here during the restoration works.

Underneath the topsoil was the burial soil which was a reddish marl with frequent sandstone fragments, large cobbles and occasional brick and tile flecks [103]. The burial soil varied in thickness but was about 500mm in the main. This deposit was not seen to the north of the church. At the west end of the tower a layer of sandstone fragments [104] was excavated which underlay the concrete drain [105]. This layer was probably associated with the restoration works on the church. The natural was a reddish marl with moderate sandstone fragments [102].

During the excavations parts of the foundations of the church were exposed. In places the footings were made of brick and concrete. Presumably these are the result of the restoration works carried out in 1870 and 1907. The foundations of the north wall of the nave, apart from the restoration works, are generally of rough hewn sandstone and large cobbles set into the natural clays and are about 500mm thick. Towards the east end of the nave the footings project outwards and a large sandstone block has been placed to form a plinth (Fig. 2, Plate 2). Perhaps this was placed here to give support to the window opening above. At the north-east corner of the nave a squared sandstone block forms the foundation.

The foundations of part of the south chapel were exposed. The foundations of the western corner of the chapel were of brick and must be associated with the restoration works but further to the east the foundations were of rough hewn sandstone and are about 300mm thick.

## **7 Discussion**

No features or deposits of archaeological significance were excavated. In places the foundations of the church were exposed some of which projected out from the church. Some of the foundations must have been repaired in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century when restoration works were carried out on the church. However, some of the exposed foundations must be contemporary with the original building. These are generally of rough hewn sandstone blocks and cobbles set into the natural clays. In the places where the foundations project out from the church it is likely that extra support was needed.

## **8 Acknowledgements**

Thanks must go to the site workers from I. J. Preece and son for their co-operation on site and to Francesca Bradley who carried out part of the site work and illustration work.

## **9 References**

### *Published references*

RCHME, 1934, *An inventory of the Historical Monuments in Herefordshire, Vol. III – north-west, Part 2*

Salter, M, 1990, *The Old Parish Churches of Herefordshire*

## **10 Archive**

The site code is MCSH05A. The archive consists of:

- 1 trench sheet
- 4 field drawings on 1 sheet
- 2 sheets of site diary and notes
- 4 photo record sheets
- 2 films of black and white photographic negatives
- 1 film of colour photographic transparencies
- 1 disc of digital colour photographs
- 1 report

The archive is currently held by Marches Archaeology awaiting transfer to Herefordshire Heritage Services.