

St. Leonard's Church Birdingbury Warwickshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION AND RECORDING



understanding heritage matters

Archaeology Warwickshire Report No 1684
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*Working for
Warwickshire*

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Commissioned by:	Brian Lloyd on behalf of St Leonard's PPC
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National Grid Reference:	SP 4323 6863
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CONTENTS

	Page
Summary	2
1 Introduction	2
2 Site Location	2
3 Archaeological and Historical Background	2
4 Aims and Methods	3
5 Results	3
6 Conclusions	4
Acknowledgements	5
References	5

APPENDICES

A Listed Building citation	6
B List of Contexts	7

PHOTOGRAPHS

1 Church and soakaway	8
2 Excavated soakaway trench	8
3 Vestry floor (4) with iron access covers (7)	9
4 Wall foundation (9) and rubble layer (10)	9

FIGURES

1 Location of works observed	
2 Detail of works observed	

SUMMARY

A programme of archaeological observation and recording was undertaken on behalf of St Leonard's Parochial Church Council during floor reduction within the church and the excavation of a service trench across the churchyard. No previously unknown significant archaeological deposits were revealed during the works, no graves or monuments were disturbed and no finds were recovered.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Permission has been granted with a Faculty by Coventry Diocese (C137/2009) for alterations to the vestry, including a new disabled toilet and a server, at St Leonard's Church, Birdingbury, Warwickshire: the church is Listed Grade II. A condition of the Faculty required the implementation of a programme of archaeological work to be carried out in conjunction with the development.
- 1.2 Archaeology Warwickshire have been commissioned to undertake an archaeological Watching Brief, in conjunction with the groundworks phase of the approved scheme or development. Archaeological observation of the excavation of a service trench and floor reduction in the vestry was carried out in June and July 2016. This report presents the results of that work. The project archive will be stored at the Warwickshire Museum under Site Code BL16.

2 SITE LOCATION

- 2.1 The church is located in the northern part of the village and centred upon map reference SP 4323 6863 in the parish of Birdingbury. The church and churchyard were built on slightly elevated ground with rising ground to the north of the church.
- 2.2 The underlying geology of the area is Rugby Limestone Member and Gravel (British Geological Survey 1984).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Birdingbury, then *Derbingerie*, is mentioned in the Domesday survey of 1086 when it had an estimated population of c.70 people. Earl Leofric bestowed the manor to the Prior of Coventry before the Conquest and the Church of Coventry, and Henri de

Hastings held it after (VCH 1951). No mention is made of a priest at the time of the survey, but it is possible a church was in existence at that time.

- 3.2 St Leonard's Church is Birdingbury's parish church (Warwickshire Historic Environment Record No MWA 3186), a Grade II Listed building, which lies on the north side of the medieval settlement of Birdingbury (MWA 9609). The construction of the present church was probably started at the end of the 18th century and, when finished, consisted of the nave, choir and nave.
- 3.3 The church was considerably altered in 1873 when it was enlarged and "gothicized" with a new roof and apse (See Appendix A).
- 3.4 The church lies to the south of Birdingbury Hall (MWA 3187) built as a manor house in the 16th or 17th century. The Old Rectory (MWA 3191) built around the 1830s lies to the south of the church and gardens are recorded (MWA 12127 and MWA 12128) around these buildings.

4 AIMS AND METHODS

- 4.1 The main aim of the work was to record any archaeological remains that might be disturbed during the work, to collate the records in an archaeological archive and present the significant aspects of the archive in a report for dissemination.
- 4.2 The secondary aim was to form an understanding of the remains recorded in terms of their character and date, and to place the evidence in its local and regional context.
- 4.3 The objective of the work was a programme of observation and recording of excavation to development formation levels, or the geological natural, whichever the higher.

5 RESULTS

- 5.1 The ground reduction associated with the development included the excavation of a service trench and the reduction of the internal area of the vestry. These were undertaken by hand or with a 360° mini-excavator using a toothless ditching bucket. Excavations were observed by the supervising archaeologist and deposits were

removed down to the relevant development formation levels or to geological natural where no archaeological or human remains were present.

Service trench and pit

- 5.2 A trench and septic tank pit were machine-excavated, using a 0.4m wide toothless bucket. The trench extended for 18m north to south from the north-west corner of the church to the churchyard boundary. A 2.8m long and 2.2m wide pit for a tank was excavated at the north-west corner of the church.
- 5.3 A very simple deposit sequence was revealed. At the base of the trench and pit was natural clay (2). This was overlaid by a layer of yellowish brown clay loam (8) which contained occasional tile fragments and occasional small fragments of disarticulated human skeletal remains. The fragments identifiable by the supervising archaeologist were reburied. A layer of topsoil covered the area and at the northern end a brick path (3) extended around the church.

Vestry floor reduction

- 5.4 The vestry floor was recorded prior to being lifted. It was comprised of ten limestone slabs (4) with a small patch of concrete in the south-west corner (5) and two circular iron access covers (7) were recorded.
- 5.5 Below the floor was a layer of grey brown silty sand (10) with brick rubble including "Stourbridge" brick fragments and limestone fragments. No significant archaeological remains or human skeletal remains were revealed.
- 5.6 A small area, approximately 0.7m long and 0.6m wide, was reduced for the proposed waste pipe access. This revealed the sandstone foundations for the existing north wall (9) which were bonded with light brown sandy mortar.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The programme of archaeological observation was able to determine that no significant archaeological remains associated with the church or evidence for the earlier use of the site was disturbed by the programme of works. No graves or articulated human skeletal remains were encountered.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeology Warwickshire would like to thank Mr Peter Sheen for initiating the work and Mr Brian Lloyd for commissioning the work on behalf of St Leonard's PPC.

REFERENCES

British Geological Survey 1984 *Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales), Solid and Drift Geology, Warwick Sheet 184.*

Domesday Book 1976 *Warwickshire including Birmingham, Chichester.*

English Heritage 2013 *National Heritage List for England.*

VCH 1951 *The Victoria County History of Warwickshire Vol. VI, Knightlow Hundred, London.*

APPENDICES

A Listed Building Citation

The Historic England listing (LBS 1034963) records the site as follows-

Church of St. Leonard 06/10/60 GV II Church. Mid/late C18. Enlarged, altered and gothicised 1873. Limestone ashlar with plinth, and sill course and moulded cornice to north and south sides. Apse of rock-faced, regular coursed stone with ashlar dressings. Tile roof has coped gable parapets with moulded kneelers, and ridge cresting; cupola has lead roof. Apse, nave and chancel partly in one, narthex and west cupola. Classical and Gothic Revival styles. 3 bays, with one-bay apse. Classical west front of yellow stone has 4 Tuscan pilasters and pediment surmounted by cupola. Moulded fielded 6-panelled door in moulded stone architrave with cornice. Cupola has round-arched bell openings and finial with weathervane. Polygonal apse of 1873 has splayed plinth and sill course. 2-light windows have simple plate tracery with continuous hood mould. Hipped roof has metal finial. North and south sides have 2-light chancel window with plate tracery and hood mould. Paired lancets with continuous hood moulds. Narthex has small lancets, with small single light below on north side. Interior: Early English style chancel has triple shafts and stiff leaf sill frieze to apse. Elaborately painted rib vault has Christ in Majesty, angels, and patterns. Piscina and sedilia have trefoiled round arches and granite shafts. Apse arch of 2 moulded orders, the outer with shafts, the inner with colonnettes and stiff leaf and head capitals. Outer part of chancel has stiff leaf frieze. Windows throughout have attached shafts. Painted panelled deep coved and barrel vaulted roof has roof truss on colonnettes forming chancel arch. Nave has panelled crown post roof. West wall has 3 arches with gallery in upper part. Round arched double-leaf 6-panelled doors. Gallery fronts have 2 fielded panels and dentil cornice. Fittings: C18 stone font has baluster stem with gadrooned base and leaf-moulded bowl. C18 octagonal pulpit has marquetry and dentil cornice. Fielded panelled box pews. Screen, lectern, chancel stalls and altar rails of 1873. C18 carved and gilded royal arms panel on gallery. The rebuilding was at the expense of the Reverend R. Hickman. (V.C.H.: Warwickshire, Vol.6, 1892, p.38; Buildings of England: Warwickshire, p.96; Kelly's Directory of Warwickshire, p.38).

B List of contexts

<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Width (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	Dark grey brown silty loam		0.2m	Topsoil
2	Olive yellow clay		>2m	Natural
3	Brick path			Existing path
4	Limestone slabs			Vestry floor
5	Concrete			Modern floor
6	Fire brick			
7	Iron plates	0.12m dia		Iron access plate
8	Yellowish brown clay loam		0.25m	
9	Masonry wall foundation			North vestry wall
10	Layer			Brick rubble



1. Church and soakaway



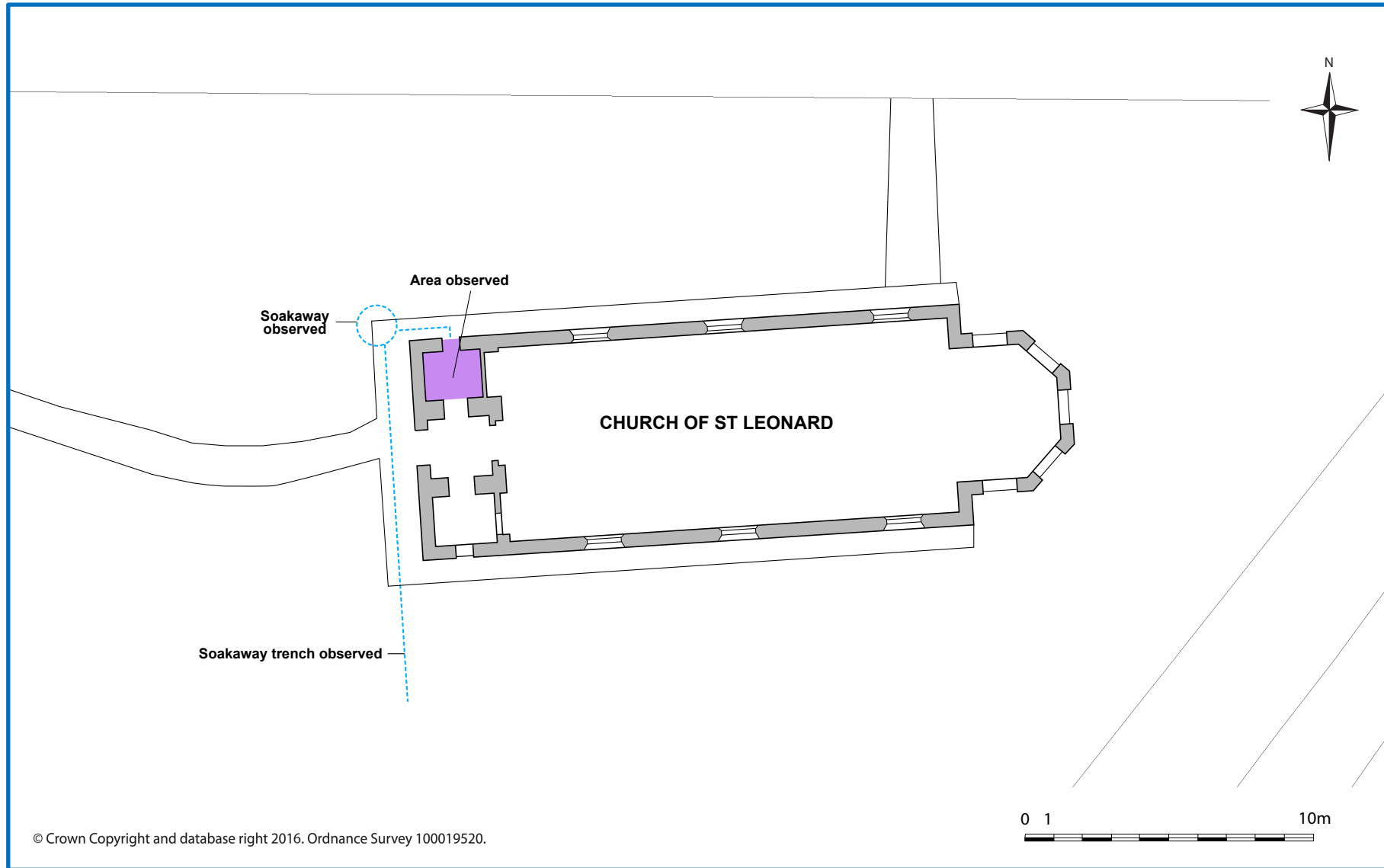
2. Excavated soakaway trench



3. Vestry floor (4) with iron access covers (7)



4. Wall foundation (9) and rubble layer (10)



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Fig 1: Location of works observed

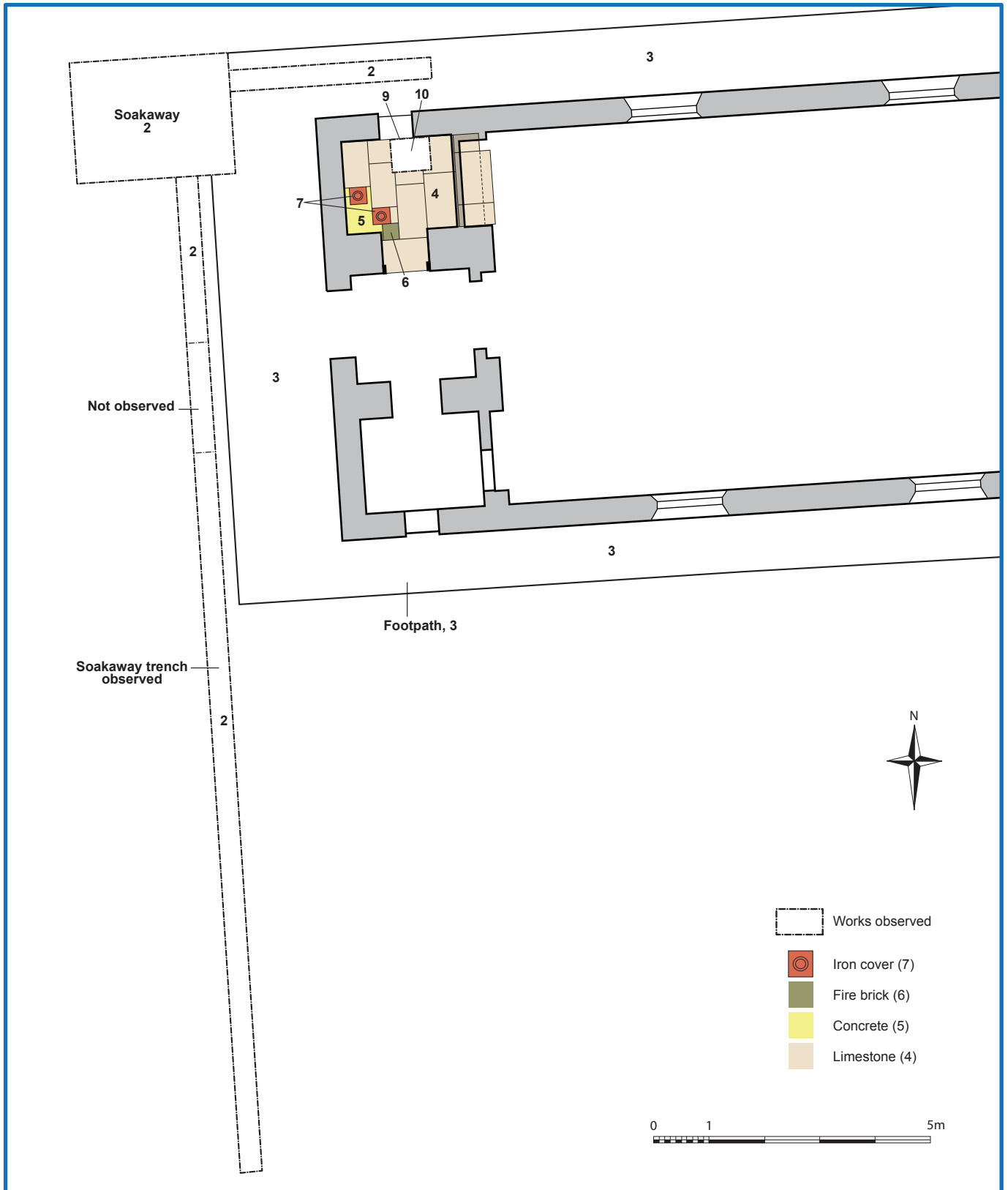


Fig 2: Detail of works observed