



**Herefordshire
Council**

February 2011

St. David's Church, Little Dewchurch: THE MEASURED SURVEY OF THE REMAINS OF A MEDIEVAL PREACHING CROSS

Report prepared by
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Herefordshire Archaeology Report No. 291

Herefordshire Archaeology
Planning Policy
Environment, Planning and Waste
Sustainable Communities
Herefordshire Council



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St. David's Church, Little Dewchurch: The measured survey of the remains of a medieval preaching cross.

**NGR: SO 529 317
Event No. EHE 1840**

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Herefordshire Archaeology is Herefordshire Council's county archaeology service. It advises upon the conservation of archaeological and historic landscapes, maintains the county Sites and Monument Record, and carries out conservation and investigative field projects. The County Archaeologist is Dr. Keith Ray.

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Summary

This piece of fieldwork, (Event No. 1840), was undertaken by Herefordshire Archaeology in order to document and record the condition both above and below ground of the medieval preaching cross base prior to renovation work. The cross base is located within the churchyard of St. David's, Little Dewchurch.

The survey work comprised a measured survey of each elevation together with the production of a plan. In addition a small test pit was excavated by hand at the mid-point of each elevation in order to establish the type and condition of any foundations present.

The survey showed that the cross base has suffered considerable damage from vegetation growth. It would appear that a number of stones have been displaced on the eastern and western elevations by the action of roots. A number of stones are missing from the southern elevation, suggesting that these had been completely pushed out by vegetation growth and that their re-setting had been impeded by vegetation. It is likely that a tree had grown out of the southern side of the cross base, its roots displacing the stones on the eastern and western sides and its trunk dislodging stones from the southern side.

The eastern, western and southern sides of the cross base appear to be supported by a well coursed but un-bonded foundation to a depth of approximately 0.5m below the present ground surface. The northern side of the cross base has a layer of un-coursed and fairly loose rubble under it. This would suggest that the southern, eastern and northern sides are supported by a well constructed wall. It would appear that rubble was spread behind this three sided structure to form a base onto which the cross base was built.

Disclaimer: It should not be assumed that land referred to in this document is accessible to the public. Location plans are indicative only. NGR's are accurate to approximately 10m. Measured dimensions are accurate to within 1m at a scale of 1:500, 0.1m at 1:50, and 0.02m at 1:20.

Figures contained within this report contain material from the Ordnance Survey. The grid in this material is the National Grid taken from the Ordnance Survey map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (OS Licence 100024168). This material has been reproduced in order to locate the site in its environs.

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Introduction

This report (EHE 1840), provides an account of a detailed measured survey of the preaching cross within the churchyard of St. David's Church, Little Dewchurch, (NGR SO 529 317). The cross base is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 29851). The survey work was undertaken in order to document and record the condition both above and below ground of the medieval preaching cross base prior to renovation works.

The site work took place on Thursday 3rd February 2011. All fieldwork was undertaken by Herefordshire Archaeology staff. All excavation work was carried out by hand.

The standing remains of the cross base were recorded by measured survey at a scale of 1:20. Each elevation was surveyed and a plan produced. A test pit was excavated by hand down each side of the cross base in order to record the type, extent and condition of foundations.

Location

The Parish Church of St. David's, Little Dewchurch, (HSM 6478, SAM 29851), is situated at SO 529 317, approximately 7 miles southeast of Hereford city.

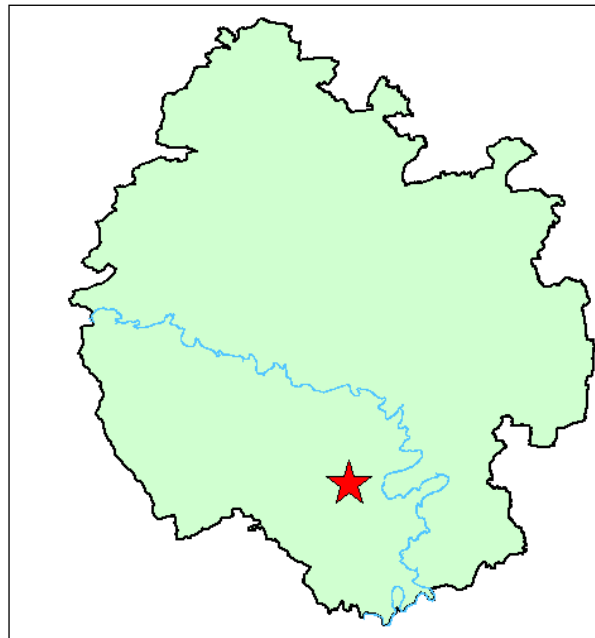


Figure 1: Map showing the location of Little Dewchurch within the county

The predominant rocks of the area are the Devonian Sandstones (Bartlett 1984, 1 (Soil Survey 1983), These are overlain by the Newnham Series of soils, coarse, loamy soils, (Soil Survey of England and Wales, Ordnance Survey Sheet 53). The Historic Landscape Characterisation for the area surrounding the site is listed as L1.1, an adaptive landscape of former common arable fields characterised by boundary re-configuration with minimal insertion of boundaries, (K.Ray & P.White, 2003).

Historical Background

The village of Little Dewchurch is first mentioned by name in 1397 as “Lytel Deuchurche”, (Coplestone-Crow, 1989), the affix “Little” is to distinguish it from Much Dewchurch. However it is clear that a settlement and church existed here well before this date. The medieval village was probably located to the north of the church close to the old Hereford to Ross road, much of which is now a footpath.

The Parish Church of St. David’s is located close to the valley bottom near to a stream and has been built in the centre of a sub-triangular churchyard. The shape and location of the churchyard is interesting in that it would appear to have been purposefully constructed over a spring or small watercourse (a tributary of the Wriggle Brook). The location together with the dedication to St. David may well suggest a pre-Norman foundation here. The oldest element of the church is the west tower which can be dated by its architectural style to the second half of the 14th century. The remainder of the church was re-built in 1869-70, (RCHME 1931).

The Churchyard cross is located approximately 10m south of the southern wall of the church and comprises a square chamfered base with ogee headed niche in the west face. This sits on three steps on each side. The lower part of a square shaft with chamfered angles survives. (RCHME, 1931). It is made of local sandstone blocks.



Figure 2: Extract from the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map 1887

Survey method and results

After the removal of ivy and other small plants from all faces of the cross base, the structure was recorded by measured survey at a scale of 1:20. A level was used to lay out a series of vertical and horizontal lines on each elevation and this was tied in to the bench mark on the northern face of the southern buttress on the south-west corner of the church tower.

A 3m square was laid out around the cross base in order to provide a series of base lines from which a plan at 1:20 scale was produced.

All elevations and specific features were photographed.

At the mid point of each elevation a test pit was excavated by hand. These varied in size due to the location of other monuments surrounding the cross base but were all approximately 0.5m square.



Plate 1: Northern elevation of Cross base. looking south.

The Northern elevation comprised the upslope side of the cross base and as such was originally made up of two steps rather than three. The stone (or stones) making up the lower step have been removed and this has led to the top step on the eastern elevation collapsing at its northern end.

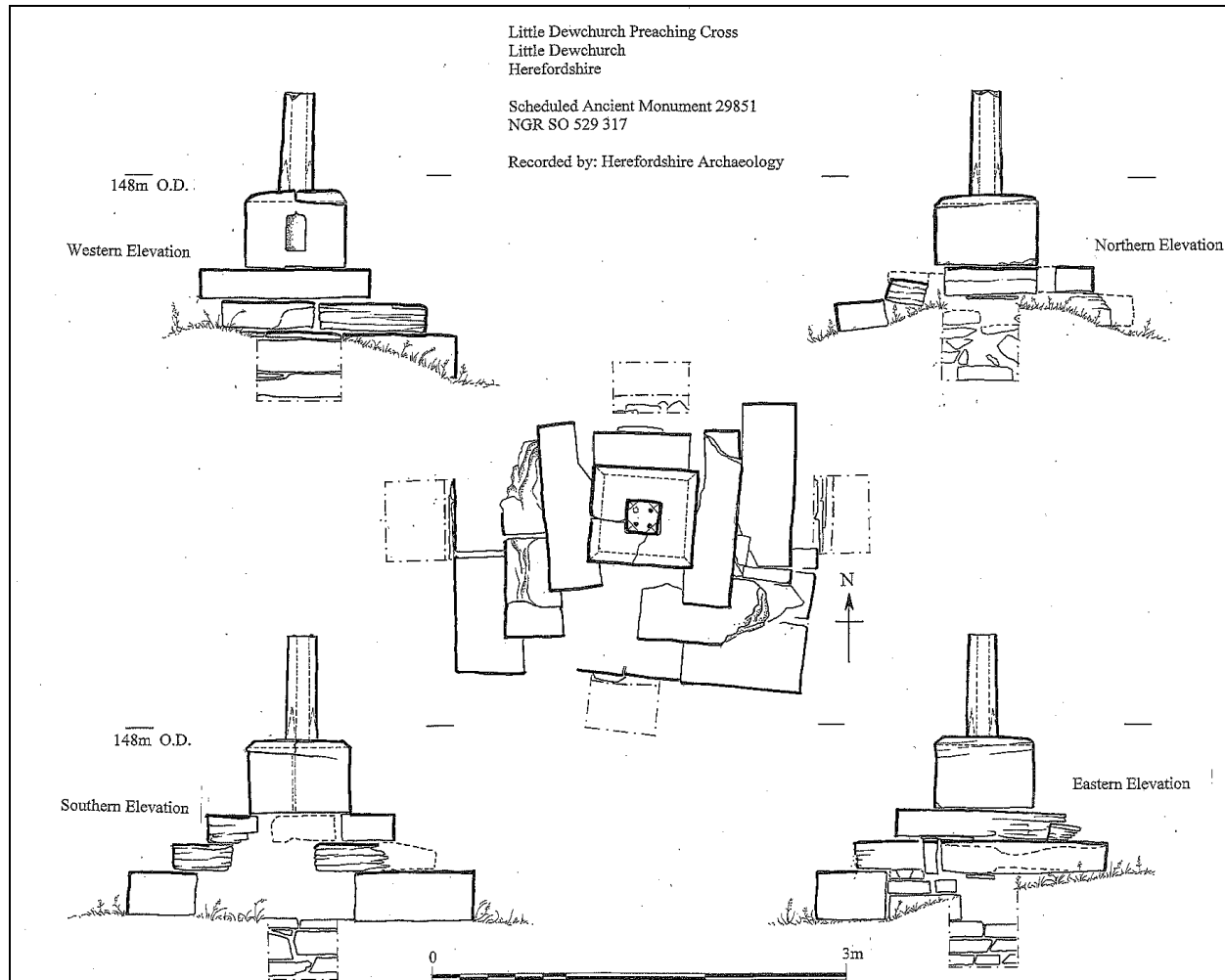


Figure 3: Plan and elevations of Little Dewchurch preaching cross base.



Plate 2: Northern face of cross base, looking south, showing un-coursed rubble foundation.

The foundations of the northern elevation comprised un-coursed and un-bonded rubble to a depth of 0.47m below the present ground surface. A vertical cut for this material was recorded approximately 0.35m below present ground surface.



Plate 3: Eastern face of cross base, looking west.

The eastern elevation comprised three steps, with the lowest step running back into the hill slope. The northern end of the top step has fractured and the entire stone has begun to laminate badly. The second step is partially displaced, its front edge having subsided. The southern corner stone of the second step has broken / eroded away so that this corner of the step is missing.



Plate 4: Eastern face of cross base looking west, showing well coursed, but thin, foundation material.

The foundations for the eastern elevation comprised well coursed, slab-like stones. The top of the foundations began at 0.2m below the present ground surface and extended to a depth of 0.5m below the present ground surface. The northern stone or stones of the lower step are missing, which has adversely affected the stone above, causing it to subside. The remaining stones appear to be in their original positions and in good condition. A vertical cut was observed for the foundation. This was cut from approximately 0.3m below the present ground surface.



Plate 5: Southern face of cross base, looking north.

The southern elevation comprised three steps, although the central stone of the top step is absent as is the central stone of the second and lower steps. The displaced stone next to the ranging pole in Plate 5 appears to originate from beneath the top stone and for the purposes of this survey its location was not recorded. The eastern stone of the middle step is eroded and badly laminated.



Plate 6: Southern face of cross base, looking north-west, showing first course of foundation.

The foundations of the southern elevation comprised well coursed stones of varying thickness. The top course was made up of relatively thin slabs. The foundation continued to a depth of 0.45m below the present ground surface and appeared to be contained within a cut from a depth of 0.2m below the present ground surface.



Plate 7: Western face of cross base, looking east.

The western elevation comprised three steps with the lowest step running back into the hill slope. Both of the remaining stones, which form the middle step are badly laminated / eroded. The single stone that forms the top step is displaced and has been pushed out of position at its northern end. The top stone, into which the cross shaft fits, is fractured on its south-western corner.



Plate 8: Western face of cross base, looking east, showing well coursed large block foundation

The foundations of the Western elevation comprised well coursed stones of varying thickness. The top course was made up of relatively thin slabs. The lower courses are made of far larger stones with thin fillers stones between. The foundation continued to a depth of 0.45m below the present ground surface and appeared to be contained within a cut from a depth of 0.2m below the present ground surface.

Discussion

The results of the measured survey illustrate that the structure of the cross base is in generally poor condition. It appears that a considerable amount of damage has occurred in the past resulting in a significant loss of masonry from both the northern elevation and, in particular the southern elevation of the structure. This has resulted in the exposure of the central core of the structure on the southern side resulting in further erosion. The nature of the disturbance is characteristic of a tree having been formerly present in the southern elevation and that this displaced many of the stones, either as it grew or upon its removal. This tree growth, would also account for the side-ways displacement of the top steps on the eastern and western elevations. It was noted that whilst there has been significant side-ways movement of the eastern and western top steps, most of the large blocks of masonry are still on or close to horizontal suggesting gradual movement consistent with root pressure. The location of the missing stones has not been established. The exposed internal core work of the structure is loose and may well have been bonded with a lime mortar which has now decayed.

The top of the shaft may have formerly had a sundial fixed to the top, as there are three out of the original four lead plugs still present on the top of the shaft. A sundial is suggested as these fixings appear to be too small for the joining of the upper shaft section. There is a 40mm wide groove down the centre of the southern face of the top stone; this is off centre and its purpose unknown.

The foundations for the structure appear to be in good condition. The recorded evidence suggests that the original construction of the cross base involved the excavation of a rectangular hole, cut into the subsoil to a depth of approximately 0.2m. This was then lined on the southern, eastern and western sides with well coursed, possibly clay bonded walling behind which rubble was tipped in order to create a platform onto which the structure was built.

The soil overlying the subsoil is relatively shallow, (0.2-0.3m thick), and whilst containing a large quantity of glass and ceramic marmalade jar fragments, contains little else. This may indicate that the cross is not in its original (14th century) location and may have been moved to this spot in the post-medieval period. It may however suggest that very little disturbance has taken place in the immediate environs of the cross base.

Site Archive

Archive resulting from this piece of fieldwork:

21 digital images
1 field drawing
1 inked drawing

This document.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the support of Mr. Richard King, Little Dewchurch Parish Council, and English Heritage.

List of Illustrations

Figure 1: Map showing the location of Little Dewchurch within the county.

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Figure 2: Extract from the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map 1887.

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Figure 3: Plan and elevations of Little Dewchurch Preaching Cross base.

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Plate 1: Northern elevation of cross base, looking south.

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Plate 2: Northern face of cross base, looking south, showing un-coursed rubble foundation. © Herefordshire Archaeology

Plate 3: Eastern Face of cross base, looking west. © Herefordshire Archaeology

Plate 4: Eastern face of cross base looking west, showing well coursed, but thin, foundation material. © Herefordshire Archaeology

Plate 5: Southern face of cross base, looking north. © Herefordshire Archaeology

Plate 6: Southern face of cross base, looking north-west, showing first course of foundation. © Herefordshire Archaeology

Plate 7: Western face of cross base, looking east. © Herefordshire Archaeology

Plate 8: Western face of cross base, looking east, showing well coursed large block foundation. © Herefordshire Archaeology

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Validation

Herefordshire Archaeology operates a validation system for its reports, to provide quality assurance and to comply with Best Value procedures.

This report has been checked for accuracy and clarity of statements of procedure and results.

Dr. Keith Ray, County Archaeologist