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The Churchyard of the Parish Church of SS Peter and Paul, Weobley: A Topographic Survey

Herefordshire Archaeology Report No.97

Report prepared by
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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.

The Churchyard of the Parish Church of SS Peter and Paul, Weobley: A Topographic Survey

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Herefordshire Archaeology, November 2003

Summary

A topographic survey of the churchyard of the parish church of SS Peter and Paul, Weobley (HSM 37023), was undertaken by Herefordshire Archaeology in partnership with the Caring for God's Acre project of the Diocese of Hereford and the local community. The aims of the survey were to produce an accurate plan of the churchyard, and to record topographic features and their relationship to the archaeology and geology of the churchyard and its environs.

A plan of the churchyard was produced at a scale of 1:500. Based on field observations and archival research, an interpretation of topographic features is offered that identifies changes in the boundaries of the churchyard, and the impact of natural processes, including geology and geomorphology.

In addition, an explanation is offered for the position and alignment of the north tower of the church that recognises problems faced by the builders in seeking a firm foundation.

Disclaimer

It should not be assumed that land referred to in this document is accessible to the public. Location plans are indicative only. NGRs 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 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. This material has been reproduced in order to locate the site in its environs.

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Introduction

The parish church of SS Peter and Paul, Weobley, is located in the village of Weobley, Herefordshire (Figure 1 and 2). The church is constructed of local sandstone, and much of the building dates to the 13th century, with some remnants of a 12th-century church (RCHME, 1935). Reconstruction was undertaken during the late 13th century, continuing into the 14th century. The north tower was built c. 1330-40. It is five storeys high, and at an angle to the north aisle. The spire was damaged by a storm, and rebuilt, in the late 17th century. The church was restored in 1865 (RCHME, 1935).

The churchyard is located on the north and south sides of the church, with a narrow strip on the east side. It is bordered on the north, east and west sides by Church Road, and to the south by private property. On the north side, the churchyard is up to 2m higher than the surrounding ground level on the north, east and west sides.

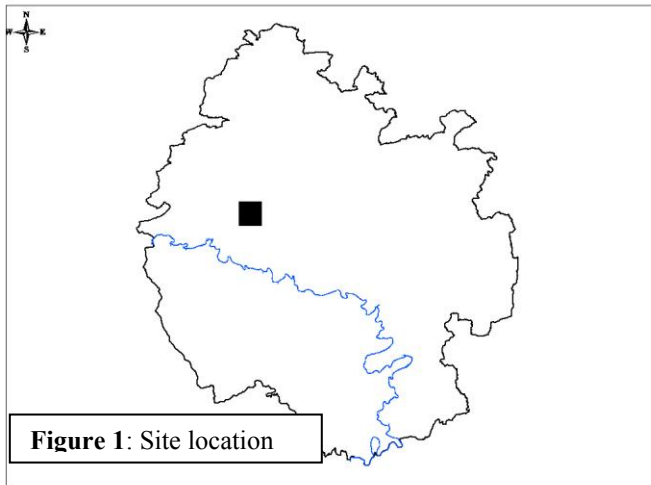
Herefordshire Archeology, in partnership with the Caring for God's Acre project of the Diocese of Hereford undertook a topographic survey of the churchyard on 10th and 11th April 2003. In addition a guided walk was conducted by Herefordshire Archaeology around the churchyard and its environs in order to explain the processes involved in producing a plan and how archaeologists 'read' the topography. This work was followed up by an evening lecture at the church at which the survey results and initial conclusions were presented.

Aims and Objectives

The aims of the survey were:

- To produce an accurate plan of the churchyard at a scale of 1:500, copies of which were to be made available to Caring for God's Acre community participants.
- To record topographic features of the churchyard and their relationship to the archaeology and geology of the surrounding area.
- To explain the 'off centre' location in relation to the present churchyard.
- To better understand the position of the church tower and attempt to explain why it is at an angle to the north aisle.

Location and Geology



The church of SS Peter and Paul is located at NGR: SO 4017 5185, at the north end of the village of Weobley, approximately 8km south-west of Leominster. The village lies to the south of the flood plain of the Newbridge Brook, a tributary of the Stretford Brook within the drainage basin of the River Arrow. The church, and much of the churchyard, is at an elevation of approximately 95m OD. The most northerly

part of the churchyard lies below the 95m contour (Ordnance Survey, 1998).

The underlying bedrock of the Weobley area is the Raglan Mudstone Formation of the Lower Old Red Sandstone. The bedrock is overlain by glacial till of the Newer Drift, but mudstone and sandstone outcrop on the west side of the village. To the north of the village, and immediately west of the church, the glacial till is covered by post-glacial alluvial sediments of the north-flowing Marl Brook and the east-flowing Newbridge Brook (British Geological Survey, 1989a, 1989b).

Previous Fieldwork and Records

A search of the Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) revealed the following records for the churchyard and its environs:

SMR	6911
Site Name	SS Peter and Paul, Weobley
NGR	SO 4017 5185
Site Type	Church
Period	Medieval

SMR	19485
Site Name	Churchyard, Weobley
NGR	SO 4019 5184
Site Type	Churchyard (Contains church and medieval churchyard cross)
Period	Medieval

SMR	12528
Site Name	House Platforms around Church, Weobley
NGR	SO 4020 5190
Site Type	House Platform
Period	Undated
SMR	31555
Site Name	Deer Park, Parkfields, Weobley
NGR	SO 4015 5690
Site Type	Deer Park
Period	Medieval
Event No.	30644
Event Type	Evaluation
Reason	Archaeological investigation as part of a planning condition prior to construction of a house and garage.
SMR	12475
Site Name	Planned Medieval Town, Weobley
NGR	SO 4025 5150
Site Type	Town
Period	Medieval
SMR	19462
Site Name	North West Corner of Town Defences
NGR	SO 4020 5195
Site Type	Ditch (May be a park pale associated with medieval deer park, SMR 31555)
Period	Medieval
SMR	31924
Site Name	Parkfields, Weobley
NGR	SO 4020 5192
Site Type	Building (16 th century timber frame farm house and barn)
Period	Post Medieval

Previous archaeological investigations undertaken in this area include:

- Excavation of a section through the borough boundary bank at Parkfields by R. Crosskey and members of the Weobley Local History Society in 1983 (Sherlock and Pikes, 2001).
- A survey of Weobley, as part of the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey, by Hereford and Worcester County Archaeological Service during the 1990s (Dalwood, 1996).
- Excavation at Parkfields (SMR event number 30644), as part of a planning condition prior to the construction of a house and garage, by Archenfield Archaeology in 2000 (Sherlock and Pikes, 2001).

Methods

A topographic survey of the churchyard and Church Road was undertaken using a Leica TCR 110 Electronic Distance Meter (EDM) with a reflective prism, and a plane table. Observations were recorded and a plan was produced in the field at a scale of 1:500 (Figure 4).

A ‘desk-top survey’ was undertaken to identify archaeological sites and features recorded in the immediate area of the churchyard, and previous archaeological fieldwork. Aspects of the geology and geomorphology of the Weobley area (Figure 3) were investigated by reference to the British Geological Survey Sheet 198, *Solid and Drift Geology—Hereford* and the accompanying memoir (British Geological Survey, 1989a, 1989b), and to the Ordnance Survey Explorer 202 map, *Leominster and Bromyard* (Ordnance Survey, 1998).

Results

A plan of the churchyard of the parish church of SS Peter and Paul, Weobley, was produced at a scale of 1:500, based on data recorded during the survey (Figure 4). Topographic features observed are described below, and their relationship to the archaeology and geology of the surrounding area is discussed. Archaeological sites, features and events are referred to by their unique Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Primary Record Numbers, prefixed by ‘HSM’.

Discussion

The churchyard (HSM 19485) is located on the north and south sides of the church of SS Peter and Paul (HSM 6911), with a narrow strip on the east side. The churchyard is bordered on the north, east and west sides by Church Road, and to the south by private property. Documentary and topographic evidence indicates that changes have occurred in the location and extent of the churchyard.

Boundary Changes

The northern part of the churchyard may have once extended further east to include a field recorded as Parkfield on the Parish of Weobley tithe map of 1838, and described as pasture or arable (Dalwood, 1996). It may however be that the church owned this land rather than it being part of an active churchyard as no burials have been recorded in this area. The field was sold to a private owner in the late 16th century, and a timber-framed building was constructed on the site (HSM 31924).

Parkfield was bordered on the east side by a ditch known as the Town Ditch (HSM 19462), described as part of the defences of the planned medieval town of Weobley (HSM 12475), or as possibly a park pale associated with an earlier medieval deer park (HSM 31555). An archaeological investigation of the ditch was undertaken in 1983, but

the function of the ditch was not determined (Sherlock and Pike, 2001). Parkfield was bordered on the north side by the Queen's Highway, now a trackway that extends north-east towards Dilwyn as a bridle-way, and on the west side by the churchyard. It is likely that the eastern section of Church Road did not exist during the 17th century (Sherlock and Pike, 2001). By 1835, Bryant's *Map of Herefordshire* records that the churchyard and Parkfield were separated by a road or track (Bryant, 1835).

The part of the churchyard to the south of the church is of a more recent date. Orchards are recorded at this location on the Ordnance Survey 1st edition map of 1890 (Ordnance Survey, 1890). During the survey of the area, a low bank (HSM 37024), aligned east to west, approximately 43m long, up to 0.80m wide and 0.20m high, was recorded (Figure 4., feature 'a'). The bank is within an area used for recent burials. It is located on the south side of, and parallel with, a pathway that gives access to the south porch of the church from the east and west sections of Church Road. The bank also marks the previous boundary between the church and the orchards on the south side.

Topographic Features

It has been proposed that the early medieval village of Weobley was centred on the church, at a different alignment than that of the later planned medieval town (HSM 12475) (Sherlock and Pikes, 2001). It has been further suggested that evidence for the earlier settlement is provided by a gully at Parkfield (excavated during archaeological investigations in 2000), by linear earthworks in a field to the north of Parkfield, and by house platforms recorded around the church (HSM 12528) (Sherlock and Pikes, 2001, p15).

Three topographic features were observed in the northern part of the churchyard during the present survey (Figure 4., features 'b', 'c' and 'd'). The most prominent feature is a terrace (feature 'b'), approximately 30m long, aligned east to west through the centre of the area, turning south-west towards the north-west corner of the church, but becoming indistinct. The terrace coincides with the 95m OD contour (Ordnance Survey, 1998), marking the limit of the flood plain of the Marl Brook and the Newbridge Brook (discussed below). It is likely that the terrace is a natural feature taking the form of a river terrace. The churchyard in this area is up to 2m higher than the surrounding ground level on the north, east and west sides. It is possible that the ground level north of the terrace has been built up artificially to raise the churchyard above the level of the flood plain.

Features 'c' and 'd' are shallow, sub-circular depressions to the north of the terrace. These may represent tree throws or areas of subsidence due to vaulted tombs. Feature 'd' in particular appears to be the result of recent disturbance or erosion.

The North Tower

The north tower of the church of SS Peter and Paul is located at the north-west corner of the church, adjoining the north aisle. The tower was built c. 1330-40; the church itself was built mainly during the 13th and early 14th centuries (RCHME, 1934). The tower, with its massive structure and small windows, may have served a defensive function, or as a refuge (RCHME, 1934, p192; Salt, 1954, p52).

The position of the tower is unusual, since it adjoins the north aisle rather than the nave, and it is not aligned with the church. Salt observes “The tower is ... not detached, but askew”, and proposes “It was designed to economise space and is complete in itself” (Salt, 1954, p52). An alternative explanation is offered here, based on an interpretation of surface geology and geomorphology.

In the area of the church and churchyard, glacial till overlies the mudstone and sandstone bedrock. The till is composed of clayey to sandy silt with clasts ranging from small cobbles to boulders (British Geological Survey, 1989b). The sediments tend to fine upwards, and the larger, heavier clasts, ranging from large cobble size to boulders, are present towards the bottom of the depositional sequence (see, e.g., Williams, 2003).

To the north and west of the churchyard, glacial till is overlain by the fine alluvial sediments of the Marl Brook and the Newbridge Brook. The interface between till and alluvium is aligned north to south immediately west of the church and churchyard (Figures 3 and 4), changing alignment to north-east to south-west across the northern part of the churchyard (British Geological Survey, 1989a). The interface between sediments coincides with the 95m OD contour, marking the limit of the flood plain (Ordnance Survey, 1998).

The location of the north tower can be explained in terms of a decision, by the builders, to seek a firm foundation for this massive structure on solid glacial till, and to avoid the unstable alluvium immediately west of the nave. An example, perhaps, of a wise man who built his house upon the rock.

Conclusion

The topographic evidence from this survey suggests that the graveyard has expanded on at least two occasions. Once to the south in recent times, (This area was recorded as orchard in the 1890’s). This extension involved the incorporation of a plot of land lying immediately to the south of the church which had been previously separated from the churchyard by substantial hedge or boundary bank, (Figure 4, feature a).

The edge of the river terrace, (Figure 4, feature b), was recorded to the north of the church. This comprised a low lynchet running across the churchyard aligned roughly east – west with a ‘dog-leg’ in its centre. It is possible that part or parts of this natural feature were enhanced and used as the northern boundary of the churchyard in the early medieval period. If this were the case, this would make the early medieval churchyard approximately one third its present size and places the 13th century elements of the church close to its centre.

The area to the north of the river terrace appears to have been artificially built up to raise it above the flood plain. This may have occurred during the 13th or early 14th centuries, a period of expansion for both Weobley church and the market town. The re-modelling of the church during this period necessitated the loss of a significant area within the

churchyard to accommodate the north and south aisles, whilst the expansion of Weobley town may well have prohibited a southern churchyard extension at this time. This would only leave the possibility of extending the churchyard to the north.

Features c and d (Figure 4), are cut into this area of levelling to in the northern area of the churchyard. It is thought that both features represent either the earthwork remains of tree throws or subsidence associated with vaulted tombs.

The position of the church tower can be explained by the geomorphology. It appears that the builders of this structure went to great lengths to found the tower on the glacial till rather than the alluvial silts. This provides a valuable insight into the care taken by medieval builders and architects into the placing and construction of such huge monuments.

The preaching cross base has clearly been located within the churchyard for a considerable period of time. Whether this was its original location is not clear. It is quite possible that this monument could have been moved from the market area of the town in the late or Post-Medieval period.

<i>Archive</i>

1. Plan of Weobley Churchyard (Scale 1:500)
2. This Document

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Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the co-operation of the Caring for God's Acre project of the Diocese of Hereford.

I would like to thank Dr. Keith Ray, County Archaeologist, and Tim Hoverd, Archaeological Projects Officer, for their advice and editorial comments in the preparation of this report.

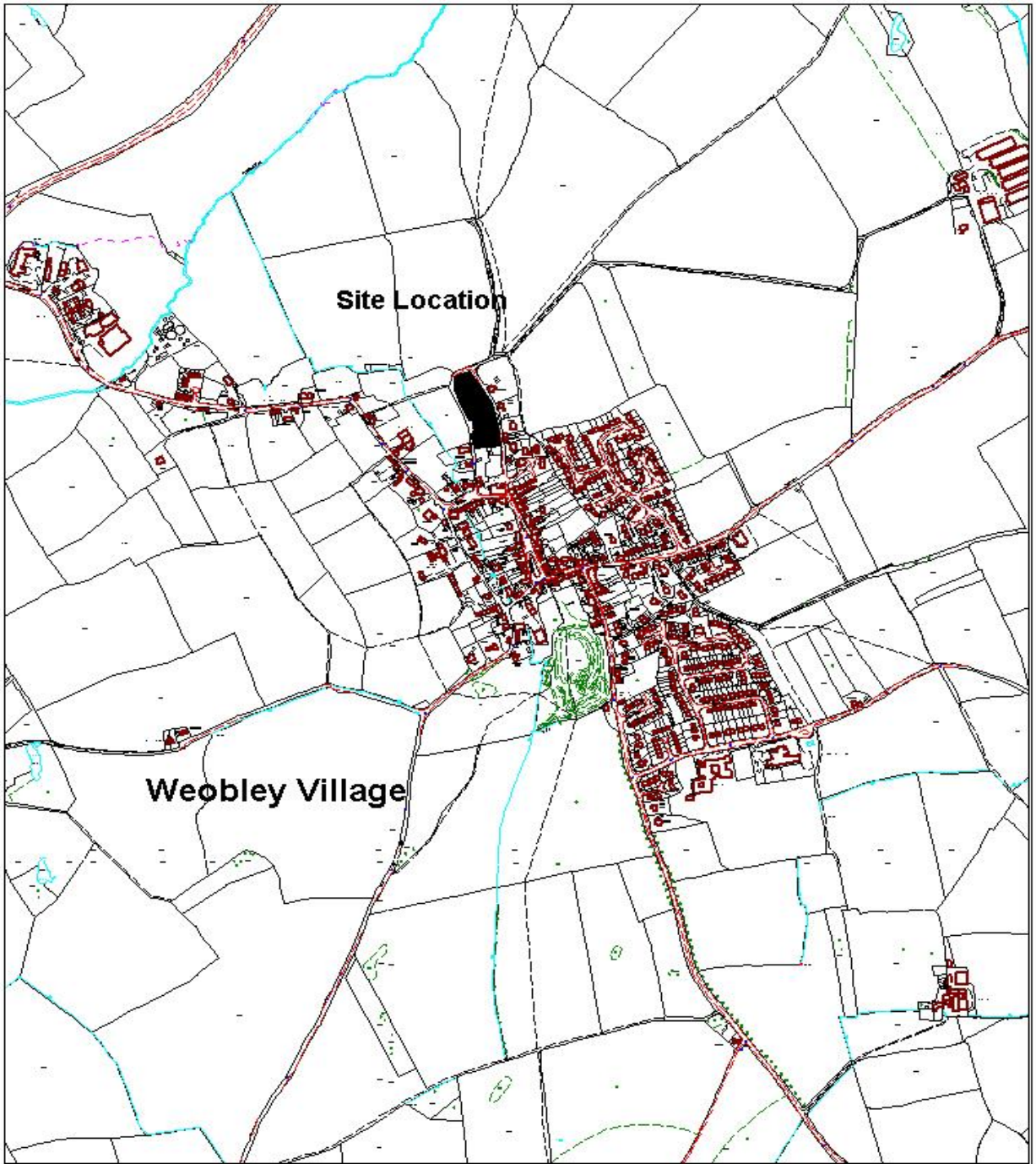


Figure 2: Site location plan



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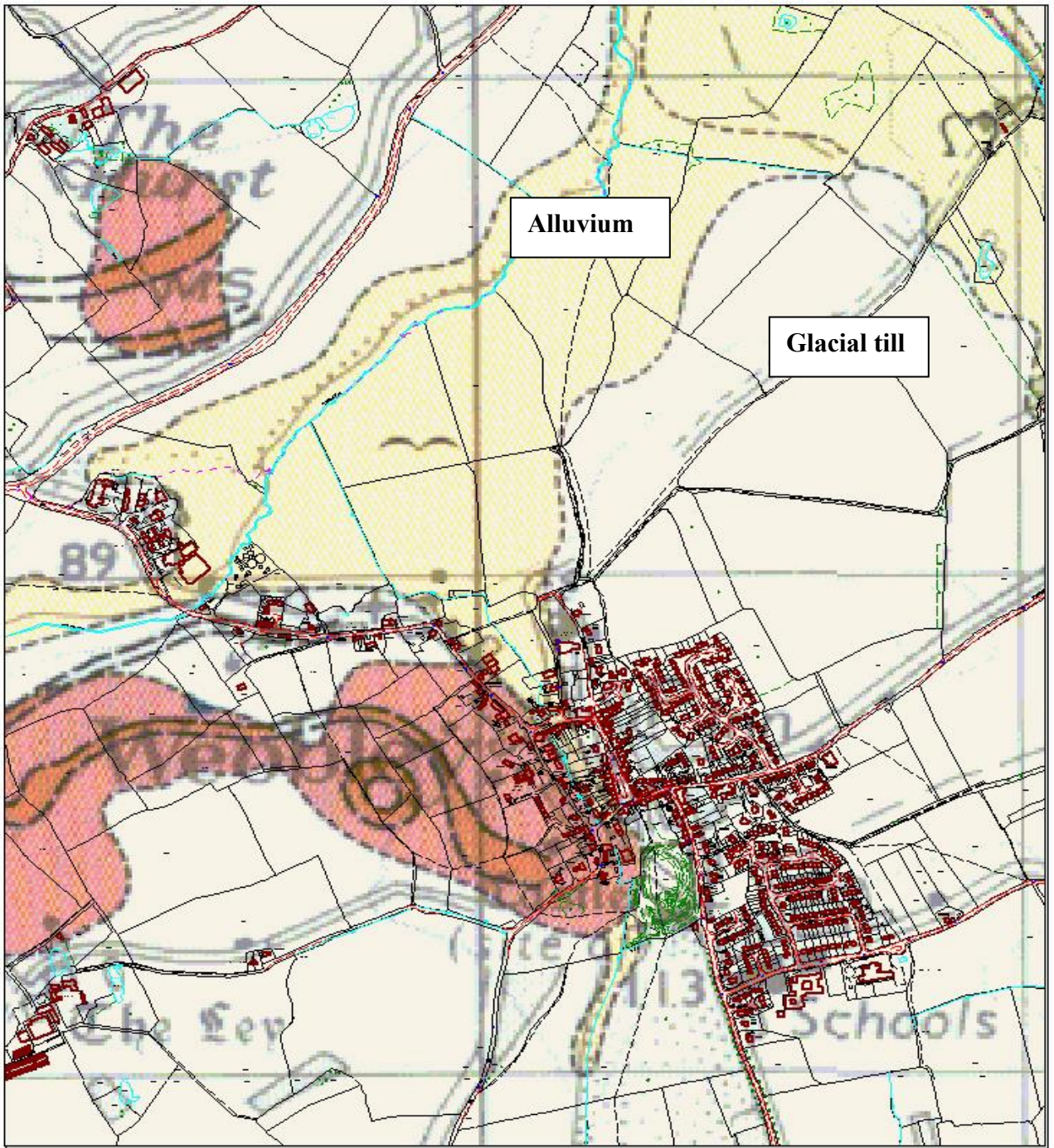


Figure 3: Geological distribution within and around the survey area.



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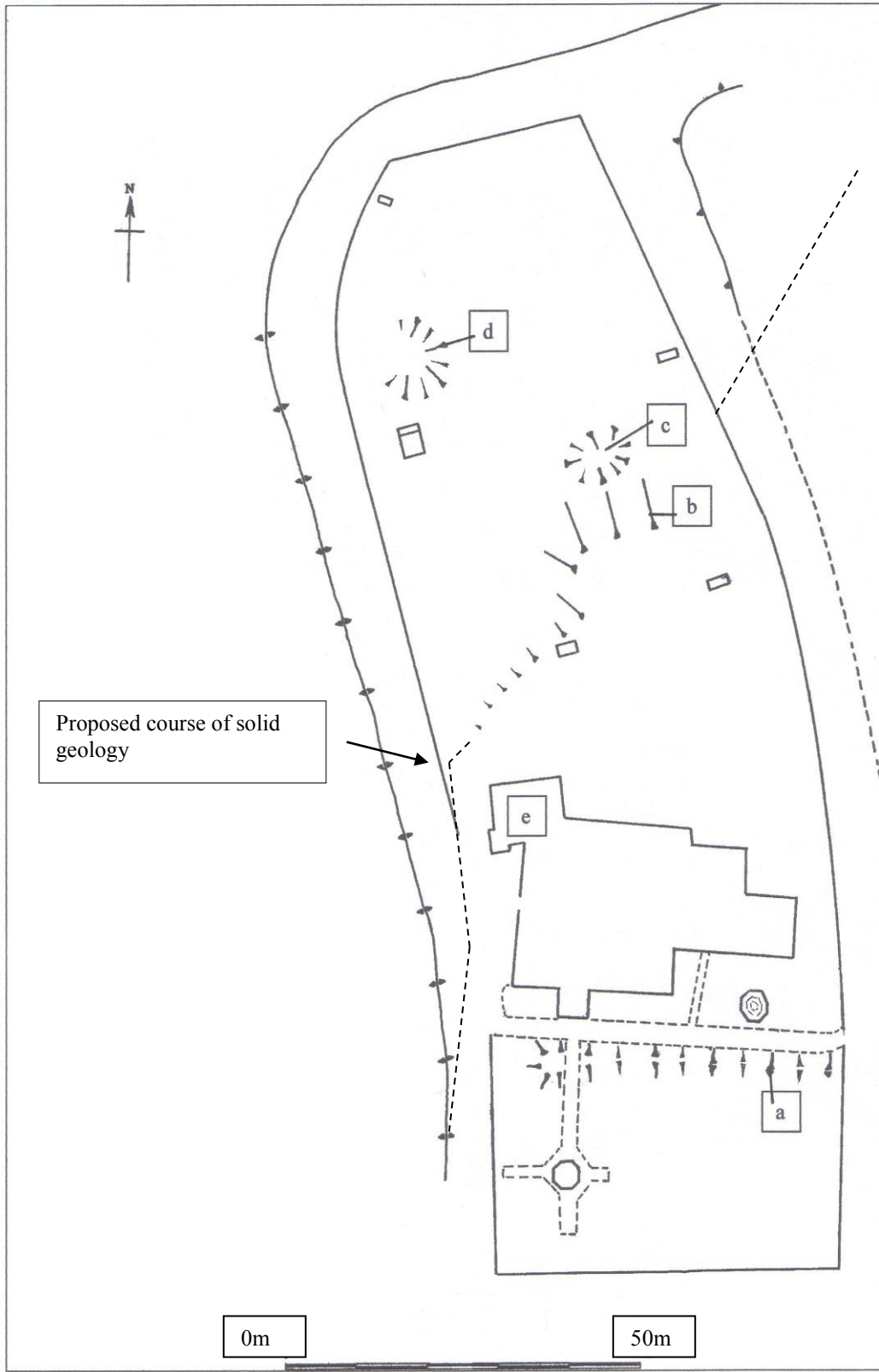


Figure 4: Weobley Churchyard Survey Plan (Herefordshire Archaeology 2003).

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