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The Churchyard of the Parish Church of St Deinst, Llangarron: A Topographic Survey

Herefordshire Archaeology Report No. 135

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.

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Herefordshire Archaeology Report No. 135
Herefordshire Archaeology, July 2004

Summary

A topographic survey of the churchyard of the parish church of St Deinst, Llangarron (EHE48797) was undertaken by Herefordshire Archaeology in collaboration with the Caring for God's Acre project of the Diocese of Hereford. The aims of the survey were to produce an accurate plan of the churchyard, and to investigate 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 1:200. Based on field observations and archival research, an interpretation of topographic features is offered that identifies changes in the boundaries of the churchyard, and suggests a mid first millennium date for its 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 St Deinst, Llangarron is located in the village of Llangarron, Herefordshire, approximately 8km. to the south-west of Ross-on-Wye. The church is constructed of local sandstone and the roofs are covered with slates. The chancel, nave and west tower were reconstructed during the second quarter of the 14th century. The south porch was added in the 15th century and the chancel-arch was rebuilt in the 16th century. The north aisle was constructed during the late 17th century, and was rebuilt in 1841 (RCHME, 1931: 167). The foundation of the earliest church of Llangarron, however, is dated by the *Book of Llandaff* to the mid first millennium (Ray, 2001b).

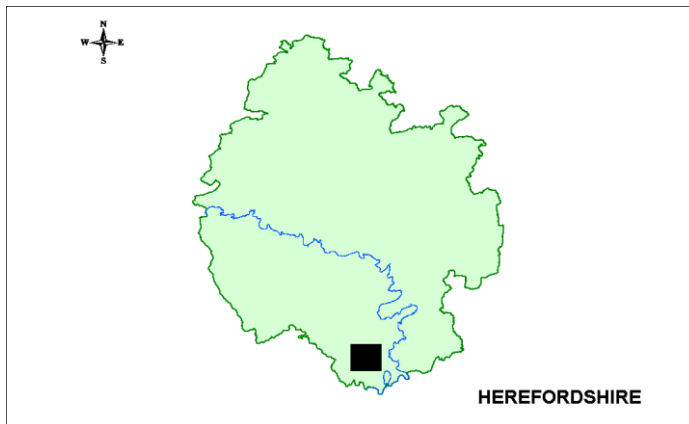
A topographic survey of the churchyard was undertaken on 25th May and 15th June 2004 by Herefordshire Archeaology staff in collaboration with the Caring for God's Acre project of the Diocese of Hereford.

Aims and Objectives

The aims of the survey were:

- To produce an accurate plan of the churchyard at a scale of 1:200.
- To record topographic features within and in the immediate environs of the churchyard and their relationship to the archaeology and geology of the surrounding area.
- To interpret significant features and discuss the historical development of the churchyard and its immediate surroundings.

Location and Geology



The parish church of St Deinst, Llangarron is located at NGR: SO 35304 22117, approximately 18km south of Hereford. The church and the village are sited on a south-east facing slope in the valley of the Garren Brook. The churchyard is located 125m west of the Garren at an elevation of approximately 55m OD (Ordnance Survey, 1998).

Figure 1: Site Location.

The underlying bedrock of the Llangarron area is the Brownstones Formation of the Brecon Series of the Lower Old Red Sandstone. The bedrock consists of drab red-brown pebbly sandstone, with red-brown mudstone and calcretes. To the east of the churchyard, the bedrock is covered by post-glacial alluvial sediments of the Garren Brook, which are composed mainly of clay (British Geological Survey, 2000; Earp and Hains, 1971). The soils of the Llangarron area are typical brown earths of the Eardiston 1 Series (Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1983).

Previous Records and Research

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

SMR	6766
Site Name	St Deinst, Llangarron
NGR	SO 5304 2117
Site Type	Church
Period	Medieval
SMR	6418
Site Name	Churchyard Cross, Llangarron
NGR	SO 5301 2116
Site Type	Cross-churchyard
Period	Medieval

A description of the parish church and its fittings can be found in:

RCHME (1931) *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in Herefordshire, Vol. I, South-West*. Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, England. London: HMSO. pp167-168

Previous research by Herefordshire Archaeology is discussed in:

Ray, K. (2001a) 'A stone figure carving at Llangarron Church'. Herefordshire Archaeology Report 24.

Methods

A topographic survey of the churchyard was undertaken using an Electronic Distance Meter (EDM) with a reflective prism, (Leica TCR 110). Observations were recorded and a plan was drawn in the field at a scale of 1:200 using a plane table, protractor and scale ruler.

A 'desk-top survey' was undertaken to identify archaeological sites and features recorded in the immediate area of the churchyard, and any previous archaeological research. General aspects of the geology, geomorphology and soils of the Llangarron area were investigated by reference to published literature of the British Geological Survey, the Ordnance Survey, and the Soil Survey of England and Wales.

Results

A plan of the churchyard was drawn at a scale of 1:200, based on data recorded during the survey (see figure 3). Topographic features observed are described below, and their relationship to the archaeology of the churchyard is discussed. Archaeological sites and features are referred to by their unique Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Primary Record Numbers, prefixed by 'HSM'.

Descriptive Analysis

The parish church of St Deinst, Llangarron (HSM 6766) is located near the centre of the churchyard. The boundaries of the present churchyard are curvilinear for the southern part, and rectilinear for the northern part. The boundaries are marked by a stone wall on the south side, and also for much of the west and south-east sides. The rectilinear boundaries are marked by a fence (north-west side) and hedges (north and north-east sides). The main entrance to the churchyard is on the west side, with a modern iron gate. A second entrance is at the south-east corner, with a flight of stone steps. A further entrance, presently sealed by a wooden fence, is located on the north-west side.

Within the churchyard, the land surface generally slopes gently downwards from north to south. The slope becomes very steep at the southern curvilinear boundary. The churchyard is bordered on the south side by a secondary road aligned north-west to south-east at the foot of the steep slope. On the west side, the churchyard is bordered by a minor road aligned north-east to south-west. A large field extends to the north and east of the churchyard. On the north side, the gentle slope continues from the churchyard into the field. On the south-east side, there is a terrace, or lynchet, with a vertical drop of 1m from the churchyard into the field, reinforced by a stone wall.

A car park is located on the west side of the churchyard. It is separated from the churchyard on the north and east sides by stone walls. On the west side, the boundary of the car park is marked by a wooden fence which follows the edge of a steep slope. At the foot of the steep slope a curvilinear stone-built retaining wall marks the edge of the churchyard precinct. The retaining wall continues to the south and east along the edge of the churchyard at the foot of the steep slope.

Discussion

Topographic Features

The most prominent topographic features observed during the survey are the steep slopes on the south and south-west sides which mark the curvilinear boundary of the southern part of the churchyard, and the 1m high terrace on the eastern side. These features are reinforced by stone-built retaining walls.

In the northern part of the churchyard, a terrace, or lynchet, was recorded aligned north-west to south-east. The terrace is approximately 30m long and up to 0.45m high, with a steep slope on the north-east facing side. Several exposed stones were observed on the upper edge of the terrace. At its south-east end, the terrace is obscured by disturbed ground, but is clearly aligned with the eastern boundary of the churchyard, which curves to the north-west towards the terrace. The eastern boundary of the churchyard at this location is marked by a terrace 0.5m high, reinforced by a stone wall.

On the north-west side of the churchyard, a trackway extends to the south-east from a modern gateway (presently sealed). The trackway is approximately 4m wide, and is aligned with the lower edge of the terrace running north-west to south-east.

Built Structures

Stone-built retaining walls mark the edge of the churchyard precinct at the foot of steep slopes on the south and south-west sides. There is evidence of several periods of building, some quite recent. The terrace on the east side of the churchyard is also reinforced by a modern stone wall. Stone steps at the south-east corner of the churchyard appear to be of modern construction.

Exposed stones were observed along the upper edge of the terrace marking the earlier northern boundary of the churchyard. These stones may be the remnants of a northern boundary wall, since dismantled.

The car park on the west side of the churchyard is bounded on its north and east sides by stone walls. A close examination of the walls reveals evidence of three periods of building. The western-most section of wall is aligned north-east to south-west, and is of modern construction. It is 1m long and 0.45m wide, and functions as a gatepost furnished with a modern iron gate. Abutting this section is a wall aligned north-west to south-east, 7m long, 0.45m wide and 1m high. At the south-east end the wall changes direction without a break, extending 4m to the south-west. Weathered plaster was observed on each side of these walls.

A third section of wall is aligned north-east to south-west, extending for approximately 28m. The wall is in poor condition in places, and has the appearance of the oldest free standing wall in the churchyard. The alignment is irregular, curving towards the south after about 16m, and abutting a yew tree at its south-west end. The north-east end of this wall, which turns eastwards at its contact with the plastered wall, appears to have fallen down or to have been dismantled. Previously, it may have continued to the north-east along the south-east side of the plastered wall.

A building, (or perhaps range of buildings), is recorded on the Ordnance Survey 2nd edition map (Ordnance Survey, 1905) located on the west side of the churchyard. (See Figure 2). The plastered walls, aligned north-west to south-east and north-east to south-west, are surviving remains of this building, now utilised as part of the churchyard wall.

In the churchyard, located 8m south-west of the south-west corner of the west tower, is a sundial mounted on a stone column engraved, "TOP OF THE OLD SPIRE TAKEN DOWN 1911". The circular stone base of the structure, 1.3m in diameter, is reported to have been constructed from the foundations of the former churchyard cross (SMR 6418).

Boundary Changes

The northern part of the churchyard, delineated by a fence and hedges, is clearly a recent extension. Within this area the earliest grave marker is dated to 1954. The terrace aligned north-west to south-east, continuing to the north-west as a trackway, marks an earlier northern boundary, as recorded on the Ordnance Survey 2nd edition map of 1905.

An earlier churchyard boundary is recorded on the Parish of Llangarren Tithe Map of 1840,(see Figure 5). This shows the churchyard as more circular in shape, with the northern boundary turning to the south-west rather than continuing to the north-west as shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1905.

The parish tithe map of 1840 also records a building on the east side of the churchyard, as shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1905, (plot 913 see figure 5) In addition, the tithe map records an enclosure on the south side of the building in the area now used as a car park. These features may represent a cottage and garden. All that remains of this

building above ground level is its north and east wall, now part of the churchyard wall. The tithe awards record the owner of this plot as James Price but provide no details as to the use of this plot or his profession.

The Llangarron Figure

Within the parish church of St Deinst, attached to the south wall of the nave, is a sandstone slab bearing the carved figure of a man in high relief (Figure 4.) (also recorded as SMR 6418). The slab, 1m in length and 0.35m wide at its maximum width, has been interpreted as a child's coffin dated to the late 13th or early 14th century (RCHME, 1931: 168). The figure has been reassessed by Keith Ray, based on a stylistic analysis (Ray, 2001a, 2001b).

Dr Ray proposes that the representation is within the known traditions of Iron Age and Romano-British figure sculpture, and he draws attention particularly to the half-round figure sculpting, the tapering proportions of the body, the triangular-cut jaw, and the protruding lentoid-shaped eyes. The hair is represented in the classical and late Roman tradition. The figure is clothed in a simple clerical gown, gathered at the waist with a cord. Dr Ray concludes that this appears to be the representation of a priest of the early British Church, dated to the fifth or sixth century (Ray 2001b: 123-124). It is possible that the slab, onto which this figure has been carved, has been re-cut during the 13th or 14th century in order to make a child's coffin lid.

Conclusions

Topographic evidence recorded during the survey indicates that, at some time in the past, the churchyard of Llangarron expanded to the north. The evidence is in the form of a terrace, aligned north-west to south-east, which formed part of an earlier boundary. Documentary evidence of this earlier boundary is recorded on the Ordnance Survey 2nd edition map of 1905. The earliest grave marker in the northern part of the churchyard is dated 1954, further indicating that the churchyard expansion is of recent date.

Additional evidence from the Parish of Llangarren Tithe Map of 1840, (Figure 5), indicates an earlier expansion of the churchyard, on the north-west side, between 1840 and 1897, the date of the Ordnance Survey 1st edition map (Ordnance Survey, 1905). The evidence confirms that the earlier churchyard was circular in form, and that the 14th century church was previously closer to the centre of the churchyard than it is today. It should also be noted that the construction of the north aisle in the late 17th century resulted in the loss of a significant proportion of the churchyard.



Figure 4. The Llangarron figure. Drawn by Tim Hoverd.
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A section of stone wall, 28m long, is located on the west side of the churchyard. The wall is aligned north-east to south-west, curving to the south at its south-west end and turning eastwards at its north-east end. The wall conforms to the churchyard boundary recorded by the parish tithe map of 1840, and may have continued to the east and south-east, following the earlier boundary associated with the north terrace. Exposed stones on the upper edge of the terrace may be the remnants of the boundary wall.

The sundial located in the southern part of the churchyard is of modern construction. It is mounted on the former capping of the spire. The circular stone base of the sundial may be part of the foundations of an earlier preaching cross. The date of construction and original location of the preaching cross is not known.

The foundation of the earliest church of Llangarron is dated to the mid first millennium by the *Book of Llandaff*, a 12th century collection of earlier charters (Ray 2001b: 116, figure 26). The location of this church is not known, but several lines of evidence link the earliest church to the site of the present churchyard.

In the Llandaff charters the term “Llan” refers to a church enclosure and its accompanying estate, usually the gift of a secular authority to a bishop or other church leader. In the Garren valley there is a concentration of sites bearing the prefix llan. Only one of these sites bears the name Llangarron; this is both the location of the contemporary church and churchyard, and the subject of a charter recorded in the *Book of Llandaff* (Ray 2001b).

Early British churches were dedicated to several saints, later reduced to a principal or local saint (Ray 2001b: 114). The parish church of Llangarron is dedicated to St Deinst, a local, mid first millennium saint. The only other known dedication to St Deinst is at Itton, 16km south of Monmouth.

A further link is the form of the churchyard itself. A characteristic feature of early British churches was the enclosed circular churchyard or burial yard (Ray 2001b: 110). The topographic survey, supported by the documentary evidence of the Ordnance Survey map of 1905 and the Parish of Llangarron Tithe Map of 1840, demonstrates that the churchyard at Llangarron was previously circular in shape. (Figure 5). This can be seen clearly in the form of the steep slopes on the south and west sides, and in the alignment of the terrace on the north and east sides.

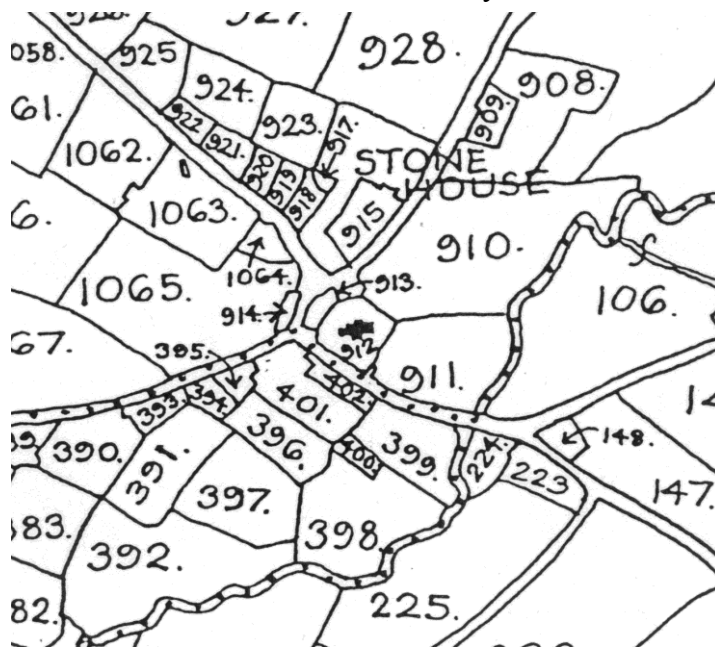


Figure 5: Extract from the 1840 Tithe Map showing the extent of the churchyard and plot 913.

The final piece of evidence that may link the churchyard of Llangarron with the site of the early British church is the Llangarron figure. The stylistic attributes of the carved stone figure appear to date it to the mid first millennium, and to place it in the context of the early British Church in south Herefordshire.

Archive

1. Plan of Llangarron Churchyard (Scale 1:200)
2. Inked publication plan
3. This Document

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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