

HEREFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGY

A Programme of Archaeological Observation, Investigation and Recording at the Church of St. Dubricius, Hentland, Herefordshire



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Herefordshire Archaeology is Herefordshire Council's county archaeology service. It advises upon the conservation of archaeological and historic sites and landscapes and carries out conservation and investigative field projects.

Contents

Summary:	4
1. Introduction	4
2. Aims and Objectives.....	5
3. Policy and guidance	5
4. Site location	5
5. Geology	7
6. Historical and archaeological background.....	7
7. Map regression	7
8. Methodology.....	9
9. Results.....	10
10. Discussion.....	15
11. Acknowledgements.....	17
12. Bibliography	17
13. Site Archive	18

Summary:

Herefordshire archaeology conducted a programme of Archaeological observation, investigation and recording at The Church of St. Dubricius, Hentland, Herefordshire during August 2020. The work was conducted as part of improvement works associated with the re-roofing of the Chancel and Nave, and associated drainage works.

A series of replacement French Drains were excavated by hand together with two soakaways. Two "*in situ*" burials were noted within the soakaways but these both occurred at depths and locations that negated the need for excavation and removal.

A quantity of disarticulated human bone was recovered from the drainage runs together with a small number of coffin fittings and nails.

A number of sherds of glazed roof tile were recovered from the drainage runs. This comprised crested ridge tile as well as glazed rectangular roofing tiles and are of a fabric type which dates from the late 13th to early 15th centuries.

The buttress foundations were exposed and found to be of a different build and scale than the 19th century buttresses present today.

This provides a useful insight concerning the appearance of the medieval church.

Disclaimer: It should not be assumed that land referred to in this document is accessible to the public. Location plans are indicative only. National Grid References are accurate to approximately 5m. Measured dimensions are accurate to within 1m at a scale of 1:500, 0.1m at 1:50 and 0.02m at 1:20m

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 to locate the site in its environs.

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1. Introduction

This report (EHE 80443) provides an account of the archaeological investigation, recording and excavation of trenches for the provision of French Drains and associated soakaways around the north vestry and chancel within the churchyard of the Church of St. Dubricius, Hentland, Herefordshire.

Herefordshire Archaeology (Herefordshire Council's Archaeology Service) were contracted by Shuan Hester of Sally Strachey Historic Conservation, to excavate drainage runs and two soakaways. These works formed part of a Heritage Lottery funded project which covered the re-roofing of the Chancel and North Vestry, the conservation of internal plasterwork and wall paintings and the conservation of the church organ. The archaeological site works were undertaken between the 18th and 26th August 2020.

The Church of St. Dubricius, Hentland is located approximately 4 miles to the north-west of the market town of Ross-on-Wye in southern Herefordshire.

2. Aims and Objectives

The objectives of the program of works were as follows:

- To conduct a programme of archaeological excavation associated with the provision of French Drains and associated soakaways.

3. Policy and guidance

The Archaeological observation, investigation and recording at the Church of St. Dubricius, Hentland, Herefordshire has been undertaken with reference to relevant legislation, National Planning Policy and Guidance, and Regional and Local Planning Policy relating to Cultural Heritage.

4. Site location

The Church of St. Dubricius (HER 6826) is centred on National Grid Reference SO 5428 2639 at an elevation of approximately 69m OD. The site is unusual in the sense that the church is relatively isolated from any existing village, (See Figure 1).



Figure 1: Location of the Church of St. Dubricius, Hentland. © Herefordshire Council

5. Geology

The underlying solid geology within the area of works comprises Old Red Sandstone. This is part of the Brownstones Formation - Sandstone, Micaceous. Sedimentary Bedrock formed approximately 393 to 419 million years ago in the Devonian Period. Local environment previously dominated by rivers. These sedimentary rocks are fluvial in origin. They are detrital, ranging from coarse- to fine-grained and form beds and lenses of deposits reflecting the channels, floodplains and levees of a river. (British Geological Survey website, Accessed 20-08-2020; (<http://www.bgs.ac.uk>).

6. Historical and archaeological background

The place name of Hentland most likely originates from the Welsh “henllan” meaning “Old Church”, the first church on the site appears to have been dedicated to St. Teilio. The church, (or the site of the church), was later re-dedicated to St. Dyfrig (St. Dubricius). (Coplestone-Crow, 1989).

The present church is of 13th century origin and is a Grade II* Listed Building, (list entry No: 1288593). The church itself is built of local sandstone, the chancel, nave and north aisle being the oldest parts. They were partially rebuilt in the 15th century by Richard of Rotherham, Vicar of Lugwardine and Chancellor of the diocese, and during the same period the tower was added, and possibly the one medieval bell was installed. It is also believed that he inserted the figures in the window behind the main Altar, which is an interesting example of the Herefordshire type of three-stepped lancet lights. To the north of the church stands the remains of a medieval preaching cross which is Designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument, (Monument No: 1016339). Much of the fabric of the church was restored in 1853 by John Pollard Seddon.

It is possible that the church was associated with a small village / hamlet, the most likely location being approximately 100m to the north of the church and to the west of Church Cottage and Dason Cottage, where a pasture field shows signs of earthwork survival, (HER 6423). It is understood that an excavation was conducted approximately 40m due south of the church, within Pengethley Park, during the late 1970's and that the remains of a late medieval building were discovered. This excavation has not been formally published and the exact location and results are unclear.

7. Map regression

The earliest map extract available is the 1839 Tithe map (Figure 2). The map shows the church, almost on the edge of the parish boundary with “Church Common” immediately to its north.



Figure. 2: Extract from the Tithe Map 1839 © G. Gwatkin.

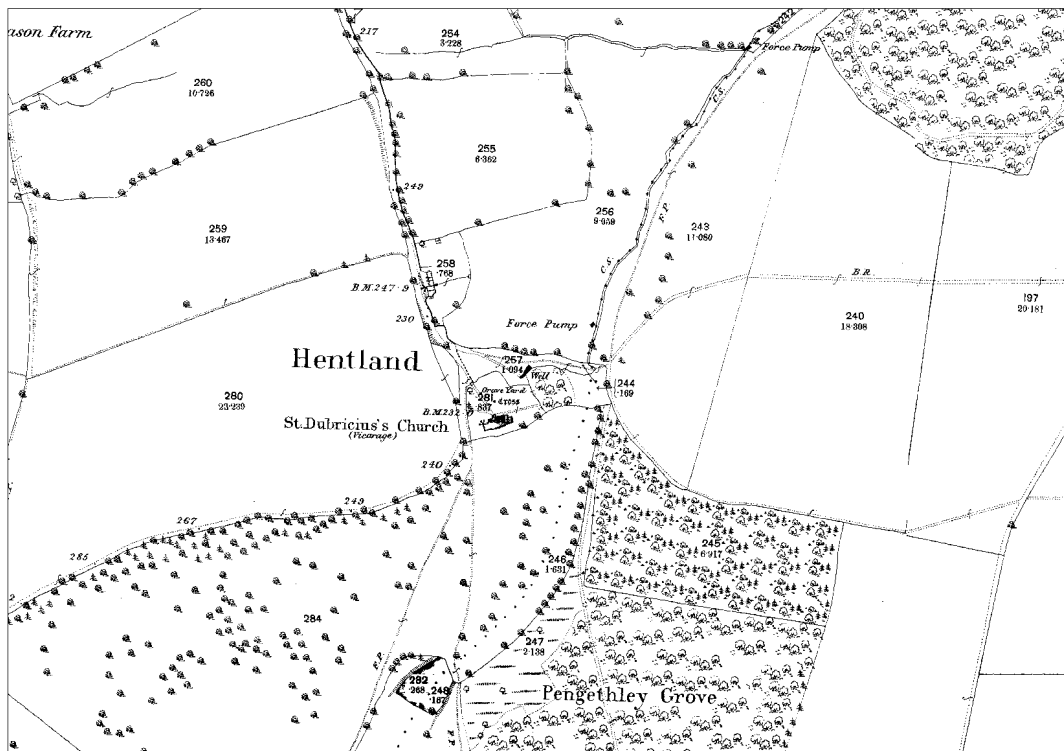


Figure 3: 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map 1886 ©Crown Copyright and database rights Ordnance Survey (100024168)

The 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map, (Figure 3), shows the extent of the landscape Park that was part of Pengethley Park forming the southern boundary to the churchyard.

8. Methodology

Approximately 50m of drainage run was excavated by hand around the chancel and north vestry. This comprised the removal of existing brick lined drains and excavation to a depth of 0.45m. In addition two soakaways were excavated off the north-west and south-west corners of the chancel. The drainage runs were 0.65m wide. The soakaways were 1.4m square and 1m deep and 0.95m deep and 1.4m wide and 1.6m long respectively.

All recording followed standard archaeological guidelines as set out by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA). All contexts were given unique numbers. All recording was undertaken on pro forma record cards that conform to accepted archaeological norms. Photographs of archaeological features, deposits and general area were taken using a 16mp digital camera.

9. Results

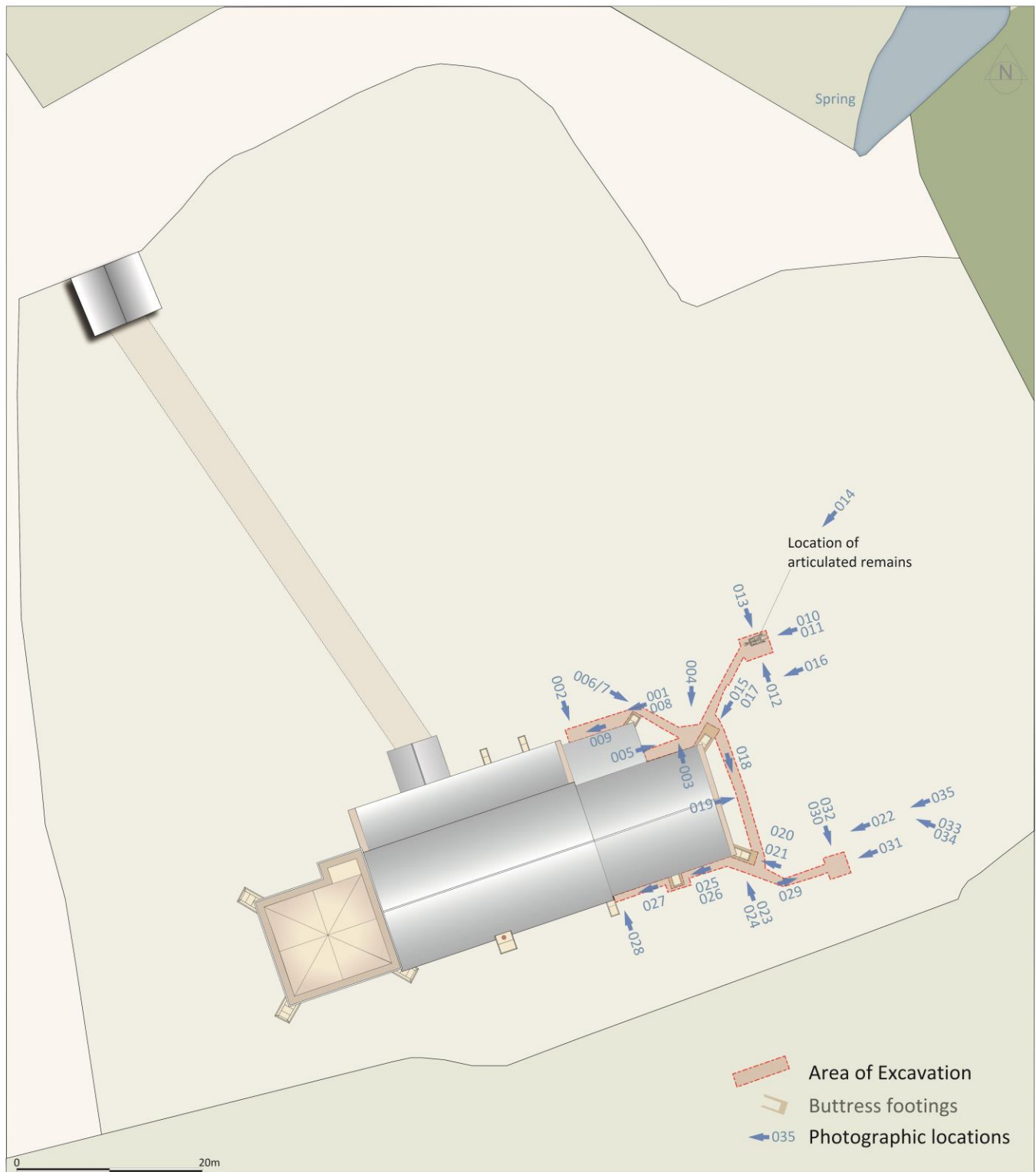


Figure 5: Location of of drainage runs and soakaways.

General stratigraphic sequence

The general stratigraphic sequence of the site comprised a well mixed, mid brown, stony, dark earth. This became more compacted with depth and contained fragments of eroded / degraded Old Red Sandstone.

The drainage runs

A series of drainage runs were excavated around the north, south and eastern walls of the chancel and north vestry. These were excavated to a depth of 0.45m and where practicable, a maximum width of 0.65m. There were localised sections of drainage run where the width was restricted by the location of headstones and chest tombs. Along the southern and northern walls of the chancel and northern vestry the existing, brick lined drainage gullies were removed together with a 5cm thick bedding layer of concrete. This directly overlay a thin layer of mixed earth with small fragments of stone, disarticulated human bone and occasional nails and other fragments of coffin furniture. At a depth of 0.4m below the present ground surface, the soil became a redder, sandy clay, (see Plate 1). At the interface between these two layers a quantity (17 sherds) of glazed roof tile were recovered, (see plate 3). These were found within trenching immediately to the north, south and east of the chancel suggesting that these represent debris from a phase of re-roofing or re-tiling. The fabric type for this assemblage has been provisionally identified as A7b, (Herefordshire Pottery Type Series, A. Vince). This fabric is common in Herefordshire between the early 13th and late 15th centuries and was used to make many types of ceramics including jugs, cups and roof furniture.

Due to the route of the drainage trenches the original foundations of the buttresses were exposed. These were significantly larger than the present buttresses, possibly suggesting that the medieval buttresses were considerably larger than the present ones, (see figure 2).



Plate 1: Typical section of drainage trench



Plate 2: Detail of foundations for the north-western corner buttress for the chancel.



Plate 3: A selection of glazed roof tile recovered from the excavations.

The soakaways

Two soakaways were excavated approximately 5m from the eastern end of the chancel (see figure 6). These were initially designed to be 1m square and 1.4m in depth, however, due to the “crowded” nature of the historic churchyard, it was agreed that in order to minimise the disturbance of articulated burials, they would be excavated to a depth of 1m but be 1.4m square.

The soakaway off the north-western corner of the chancel, (plate 4), was excavated in a gap between standing headstones, currently used as wide pathway leading to the western edge of the churchyard. The soil profile comprised a red, sandy but well mixed subsoil containing small stones and occasional bone fragments. At a depth of 0.95m a coffin handle was observed together with the top of a semi-collapsed skull. It was agreed that the burial should remain undisturbed and in order for the soakaway to be of the required volume the excavated area should be made 1.4m wide by 1.6m long.

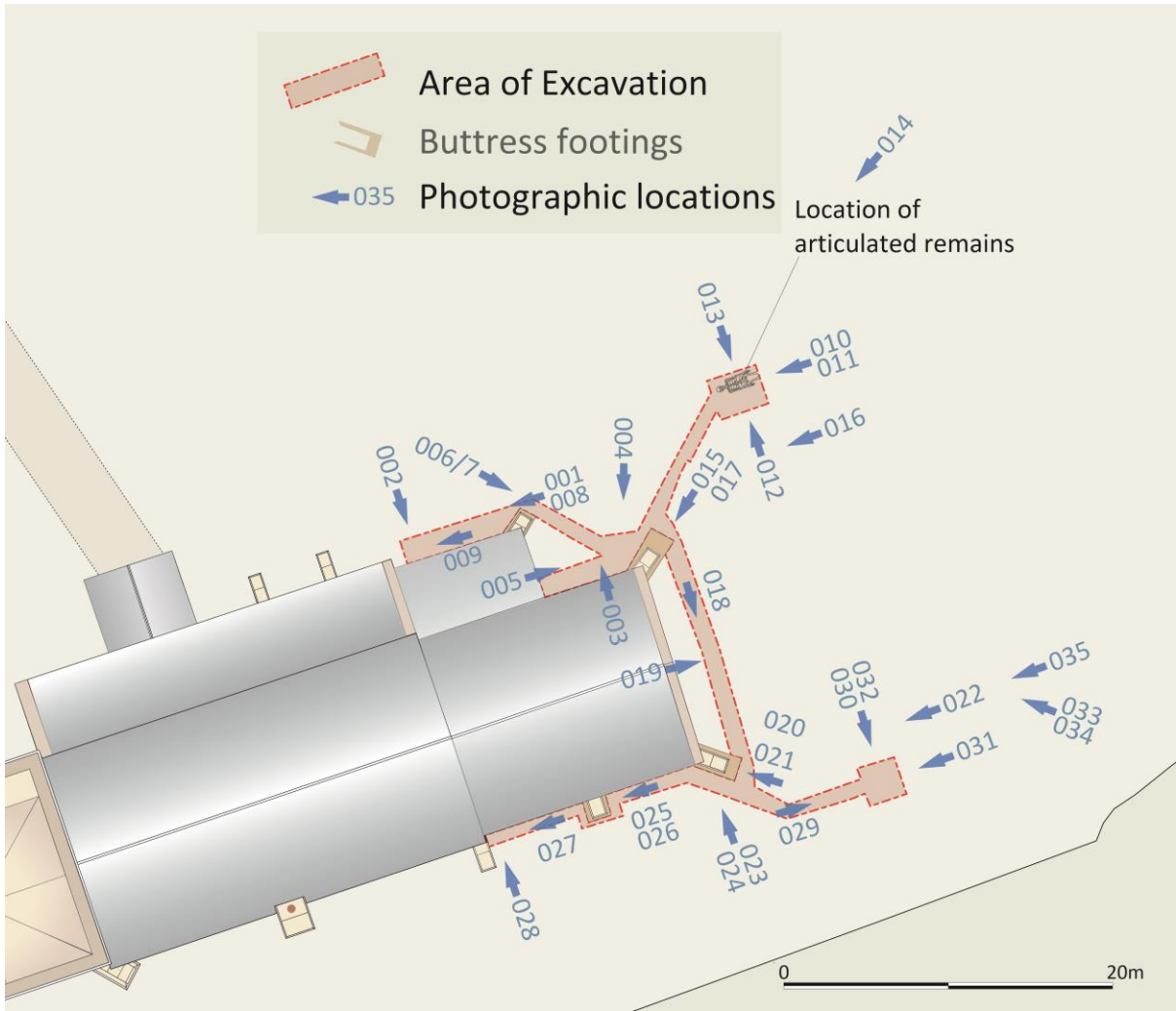


Figure 6: Detailed plan of drainage runs, soakaways and location / direction of photographic record.



Plate 4: North-western soakaway

The soakaway off the south-western corner of the chancel comprised a 1.4m square trench that was excavated to a depth 1m. The soil profile comprised a well mixed, red sandy clay with frequent with significant tree roots to a depth of 0.6m. Below this there was a 0.2m thick layer of small stone fragments within which was the edge of what appears to have been a vertically set stone. At a depth of 0.85m the edge of a pelvis was noted within the southern section of the trench (see plate 5).



Plate 5: the southern section of the south-western soakaway showing the extent of root disturbance, the layer of stone and the vertically set stone.

10. Discussion

Whist confined to the eastern end of the church and dictated by drainage requirements rather than archaeological research, these works have provided some useful information regarding the historic appearance of the church and the depth of burials in relation to the present ground surface.

The recovery of the glazed roof tile fragments from the trenches in close proximity to the chancel indicates that the church roof, (or at least the chancel roof), was tiled during at least part of the medieval period.

The foundations of the buttresses appear to predate the present buttresses. The foundations are larger and the present buttresses are not constructed in the centre of the foundations. The foundations are bonded with a white, lime mortar which is different from

the mortar used in the upstanding masonry. This suggests that the medieval buttresses may have been wider than the present ones which form part of Seddon's major rebuild in 1853.

The excavation of the soakaways has shown that articulated burials occur less than 1m below the present ground surface. The burial with coffin handle within the northern soakaway appears to have been relatively modern (18th or 19th century). It is assumed that any headstone belonging to this burial was removed either when the earlier drainage was undertaken or to make room for the pathway.

The excavation of the southern soakaway revealed a stony layer comprising small, angular fragments of sandstone. It is possible that this represents debris from a phase of re-building but whether this was from the Seddon works or earlier is unclear. Within this layer is a vertically set sandstone fragment. It could not be established whether this formed part of a grave – either as the base of a marker or part of a cist, or whether this formed part of the “debris deposit” and its vertical appearance is pure chance.

The pelvis which was noted below the stony layer may relate to an *in-situ* burial, however it was not disturbed as it was only just showing in the southern section of the soakaway. The difference in depths between the pelvis and the vertical stone suggest that they are not related.

These limited works have therefore provided some useful information concerning the development of the church, the depth of burials and the appearance of the church roof during the medieval period.

11. Acknowledgements

Herefordshire Archaeology would like to thank Shaun Hester of Sally Strachey Historic Conservation, David Arnold of Arnold Bartosch and Robin Symonds, (Churchwarden).

12. Bibliography

Data sources:

The following sources of information were referred to:

- Digital data for nationally designated heritage assets, from the National Heritage List for England (held by English Heritage)
- Archaeological records held by Herefordshire HER
- MAGIC (Multi-Agency Geographical Information for the Countryside, (www.magic.defra.gov.uk), Heritage Gateway (www.heritagegateway.org.uk),
- British Geological Survey (Website) <http://bgs.ac.uk>.
- Past Scape Heritage gateway [online] Available from <http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results.aspx> [Accessed 20th August 2017]

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13. Site Archive

- 30 digital photographs.
- 56 fragments of human bone
- 17 sherds of ceramic
- 2 pierced lead sheets
- 3 coffin nails (fe)
- 1 coffin handle (fe)
- 2 fragments unidentified (fe)
- 1 alloy coffin plaque with shield decoration.
- This Document