

WATCHING BRIEF AND BUILDING
RECORDING AT
ST ALBAN'S CHURCH
(NOW MAGGS DAY CENTRE),
WORCESTER

WCM 101944



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Watching brief and building recording at St Alban's Church (now Maggs day centre), Worcester WCM 101944

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1 Summary

A programme of archaeological recording was undertaken at the former St Alban's Church Worcester during alterations to the internal layout. The church is likely to be of Saxon foundation, but the present visible fabric is of later periods and several phases. In the 1930s the building became redundant, and has subsequently served several functions, the most recent major refurbishment was in the late 1980s when the Maggs daycentre for the homeless was opened. The 1980s works were drastic in their approach, new internal drainage provided for WCs and showers and much of the internal floor being replaced in cast concrete. The interior was subdivided with stud and plasterboard walls, ceilings of similar construction being inserted over the smaller compartments. The 2012 programme of works consisted of a re-arrangement of some of the 1980s partitions and the re-arrangement of the washing and toilet provision re-using where possible the existing underfloor drainage pipework.

The present refurbishment scheme was designed (by Lett & Sweetland Architects) to have minimal impact on the historic fabric, and as a result of this strategy the opportunities to observe previously hidden historic fabric or below ground deposits were very limited.

Removal of the existing stud partitions exposed a very small amount of the brickwork lining the interior face of the northern wall. The exposed fabric appeared to be of 18th C brick – the exterior face of the same wall is of stone ashlar on a slightly different alignment, and it is clear that the development sequence in this area is complex, as other (permanently) exposed brickwork in this area appears to be early 19th C. Where plasterwork covers the lower parts of the internal walls it appears to be 20th C in date and based on a cement-rich render coat. Some areas of 20th C tiling were also present – a small area of ceramic tiling “splash-back” was removed as it was only poorly adhering, and this revealed mid 20th C or later painted plasterwork behind. A larger section of rectangular ceramic tiles was left in situ on the northern wall as it appeared to be firmly bedded on a cement render backing. This area of tiling partially surrounds a wall monument, and removal would entail some risk of damage to the monument.

The temporary removal of some internal partitioning permitted photographic recording of the wall monuments that were previously viewed only from limited viewpoints. The removal of a stud partition at high level also permitted informal photographic recording of the interior of the western gable end, with a fine Victorian stained glass window that was covered over in the 1980s, but which will now be left exposed.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 The present report records archaeological mitigation works (WCM 101944) during internal alterations to St Albans Church, Deansway, Worcester (NGR SO 8492 5472: Fig 1). The former church is now occupied by the Maggs Day Centre for the homeless. Planning permission and Scheduled Monument Consent for alterations to the internal layout, and provision of additional washroom facilities and a glazed screen has been granted. For the present the permission for a glazed screen around the entrance

lobby has not been utilized, and the report therefore only covers the alterations to the showers, toilet layout and internal arrangement of the office.

3 Aims

- 3.1 The aims of the watching brief and building recording were to make a full record of deposits and interior features temporarily revealed during the course of the building works. Architectural features of intrinsic interest and those which related to the construction and subsequent uses of the building were individually noted and recorded. Below ground interventions were monitored to ensure that any archaeologically significant deposits or features exposed were fully recorded. A full re-assessment and record of the building lay outside the scope of this project.

4 Methodology

- 4.1 The present report consists of the results of a watching brief during internal alterations. A sketch-record was also made of those internal elevations most affected by the present works. A limited photographic record was also made of the affected areas of the building. The photographic survey is enclosed with hard copies of the report as a DVD.
- 4.2 The demolition of the internal partitioning archaeologically monitored with daily site visits. The demolition comprised the removal of 1980s and later stud and blockwork partitioning, and revealed very little of archaeological interest. Limited removal of the concrete floor slab was undertaken to facilitate access to existing drainage pipes and also to accommodate new shower tray recesses. None of the intrusions into the modern floor slab penetrated below deposits disturbed in the 1980s. The largest area of floor removed was that for the two contiguous shower trays – excavation in this area was limited to removal of the floor slab- the underlying plastic DPM was left in situ, to protect underlying deposits. Deposits over and around the existing drainage runs beneath the floor slab were loose and sandy, probably material disturbed by the 1980s drainage works. The new partitions are of stud and plasterboard construction fixed to floor and ceiling, re-using existing fixing holes in the exterior walls.

5 Historical and archaeological background

- 5.1 The development site itself is registered on the Worcester City HER as WCM 94551. The adjoining church (WCM 96301) is listed Grade II and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (County Mon No. WT 331). The church lies within the original churchyard plot (WCM 96032), which was a small area between the church and Fish Street (Fig 2). The site is in the Historic core of the Roman and medieval city Archaeologically Sensitive Area and the Historic City Conservation Area. The church stands on the northern edge of the postulated Roman or Iron Age defences encircling the promontory on which the cathedral now stands. Nigel Baker suggested that the location of the church was determined by the presence of the Roman defences immediately to the north, and a probable passage through them for the escarpment-top road which eventually became Birdport (Baker and Holt, 2004, 233).
- 5.2 Building recording was undertaken in St Alban's Church in 1988 by Henry Gorst, prior to and during conversion to a day-centre for the needy (WCM 100068 : Fig 3) The survey is an architects record of the "as existing" layout together with a record of the decorative floor tile arrangement, no photographs seem to accompany the survey. No other archaeological fieldwork is thought to have taken place within the building, though a 1957 excavation lead by Peter Gelling occurred just to the west on the other side of Little Fish Street (WCM 96555 and WCM 100341), and this was followed by a watching brief in 1959 by P Ewence (WCM 100343; Richardson & Ewence, 1961, 226-234). The principal discoveries of these works was a major ditch, apparently of Roman date (WCM 96555), the deposits exposed on the southern edge of this ditch have been subsequently identified as remnants of a probable rampart in the light of Phil Barkers excavations at Lich Street in the 1960s. It is of interest that a 1957 excavation within the former porcelain factory at Little Fish St/Warmstry Slip reportedly "gave directly onto natural clay" (WCM100340), unfortunately the precise location is unrecorded, but it suggests the possibility that the clay was redeposited natural forming part of the postulated Roman rampart to the

south of Gelling's ditch. There is also a possibility that this reference may be a distorted version of the 1959 excavation (WCM 100189) within the same area that was dug from within a cellar, which would explain clay being encountered at a "high" level in the trench. Subsequent evaluation within the present property boundaries immediately north of the church has demonstrated that the church does appear to be sitting on a rampart (surviving to circa 23.80mAOD), which contained no dating material, but which certainly pre-dated the early medieval period (Napthan 2006; WCM 101278).

- 5.3 Other archaeological work in the immediate area, at the junction of Fish Street and Deansway, has identified the survival of medieval deposits (of 12th-14th C date) at 24.87mAOD, immediately below modern pavement and road surface (WCM 100820; Napthan, 2001). Cable trenching works along the southern pavement of Deansway, passing along the northern boundary of the present site did not encounter significant deposits in this area as the trenching was less than 0.6m deep. However from the entrance to the college car-park northwards to Copenhagen Street 19th C footings of both brick and stone and brick floors were encountered at a high level (WCM 100919; Napthan, 2002).
- 5.4 The detailed history of the church has previously been discussed in a number of publications, most notably that by Canon Buchanan-Dunlop in a 1950 article published in TWAS. Earlier antiquarian interest was limited to an article by J S Walker in 1858 (Assoc Architectural Soc 4, part II, 323-349 and a 1862 visit by the Archaeological Institute. The parishes of St Helens and St Albans were united (for civil administrative purposes) following a decision of the City Chamber on 24 September 1646 (Bond, 1974, 416), but the ecclesiastical parishes were not merged until 1883. The parishes of All Saints and St Andrews were merged with St Helens and St Albans as the mid 20th C clearance of the neighbourhood destroyed almost all of the residential property in the four parishes, relocating the population to out-of town estates. St Albans, being the smallest church, was apparently the earliest to fall into disuse, and services ceased before 1939 when its plate and ecclesiastical fittings were donated to other churches (WRO BA 4893 5 ref 899:81). Subsequently the church has been used for charitable purposes interspersed with periods of disuse.
- 5.5 It has been suggested that St Alban's church had an early pre-conquest foundation date, almost certainly prior to the establishment of a planned street grid over the levelled defensive earth-works (Baker and Holt, 2004 233). St Alban's was first recorded as a possession of Evesham Abbey during the Abbacy of Aethelwig (1059-1077), at which time it rendered 3s per annum. The abbey chronicle however claimed to have held the church from 721. The nearby church of St Margaret/St Marina (WCM 96056) was also a possession of Evesham, having been conveyed together as part of a grant of property within 20 years of the foundation of the Abbey. The grantor may have been the King of Mercia. The earliest visible fabric of the building as it presently stands is of 12th C date. By 1240 the parish of St Alban's had been combined with St Margaret/Marina, the latter church then fell into disuse and its site has been lost, though it probably lay close to the line of Warmstry Slip (WCM 96283), just to the west of St Alban's (Baker and Holt 2004, 201). The advowson of the church remained with the abbey until its dissolution, when it was granted to the Bishops of Worcester.
- 5.6 The original church was probably a small aisle-less building, with no structural division between nave and chancel. Towards the end of the 11th C the church was rebuilt in green Highley stone, and the following century the south wall was partially rebuilt in red sandstone. A little later in the 12th C the arcade and aisle were constructed (Buchanan-Dunlop, 1950, 2). An entry in the City Chamber Order book suggests that there was in the 17th C a gateway with rooms over abutting the western end of the church at the entrance to "Corsers Load" - (probably the later Warmstry Slip - Hughes, 1980, 317) "*I May 1629 Item at this chamber yt is agreed that Edward Parrie and Ann his wife shall after the decease of Johan Webb widow have the roome and chamber over the waie leading to Corsers Load being over against Saint Albons Church, paying therefore yearlie fowre pence*" (Bond, 1974, 229).
- 5.7 Valentine Green, writing in the 1760s was fairly dismissive of St Alban's church; "*St Alban's, a rectory in the disposal of the Bishop of Worcester. This church is situate at the bottom of the Fish Street, which is on its south, Mardyke on its west, Cooken Street on its north, and the High Street on its east. It is a very old structure, but being lately put in repair, looks decent; of which nothing more need be said*" (Green 1764, 223-4). Green was also the first to publish a detailed drawing of the church (Fig 2). Green's 1764 reference to "Mardyke" to the west of St Albans is of considerable interest as it appears to contain elements suggestive of "St Margarets dyke", the lost location of St Margaret's

church has been placed in this area (Baker and Holt, 2004, Fig 6.14, 182) on or immediately to the south of the Roman or Iron-Age rampart.

- 5.8 By the time he wrote his “History” in the 1780s Valentine Green was more expansive; *“The parish of St Alban is, probably, one of the most ancient in this city. It is bounded on the east, by St Helen’s parish, and on the west by the Severn; on the north, by the parish of St Andrew, and on the south by St Michael’s. Its extent bears no proportion to the rest of the city parishes, the houses it contained in 1779, being only 27, and the inhabitants 124. It comprehends only the following parts of streets, not one entire street being found in it, viz the west part of Fish Street, leading to Warmstry Slip, and to the Severn. In this angle it includes the Royal China Manufactory, now carried on in an extensive mansion, formerly the residence of the family of the Warmstrys, members of the cathedral of Worcester; Palace Row, and part of Bishop’s street, leading to the College Grates, forms the whole traverse of St Albans parish. The church, which is a rectory, in the patronage of the Dean and Chapter, is situated at the north-west corner of Fish Street, where that street and Warmstry Slip intersect Little Fish Street and Palace Row. It is conjectured to have been founded by Egwine the third bishop of Worcester, about the beginning of the eighth century, he having given its patronage to the monks of his newly founded abbey at Evesham. [founded between 702 and 709 - Tindal, 1794, 2]. The structure of this church is very old, small and gloomy; and though not actually built by St Egwine, it may yet, in these respects, certainly lay claim to a Saxon origin. In its internal aspect affords nothing to remark upon, but its sombre hue; a modern repair has, however, secured to it a very decent appearance...The first incumbent, according to Heming’s Chartulary, p 527, was Alam, priest AD 1092. (Green, 1796, Vol II pp 48-9). Green lists several monuments subsequent to the year 1727 - in the south aisle John Greves (d 1773) and Elizabeth Greves (d 1779), together with George Lewis (middle of the aisle - d 1790). In the north aisle at the north end Ann (d 1754) and William (d 1767) Field. In the middle of the north aisle Mr Chew (d 1790) - Green 1796, Appendix XXIII. The published registers also indicate that there were regular burials at St Alban’s (within the church and outside in its tiny triangular graveyard from at least 1630 into the early 19th C (Registers of St Albans, Parish Register Society, 1893).*
- 5.9 By the early 19th Century there was still little antiquarian interest in St Alban’s. John Chambers, writing in 1819 described it as *“a rectory in the patronage of the Dean and Chapter....; its interior and outward appearance exhibit nothing but meanness. About the year 1815 this church was repaired and cleaned; near the middle of the south aisle, is the following inscription, on a flat stone, to the memory of ‘George Lewis, who departed this life the 29th day of September 1790, aged 57. He was the conductor of the printing business in the Porcelain Manufactory in this city upwards of 30 years, in which capacity his indefatigable attention and integrity were worthy of imitation’ About the middle of the south aisle, close to the wall, is an inscription to the memory of Mr Chew, organ builder, and one of the lay clerks of Worcester Cathedral, buried here in the year 1790 [nb Green 1794 places this grave in the north aisle, close to the north wall - Appendix No XXIII, p civ]. The present incumbent is the Rev Thomas Bedford MA”.* (Chambers, 1820, 245). The church was “restored” in part in 1851, and it is likely that the original bell turret was removed at this time as two bells of 1588 and 1630 were sold off and replaced with a single bell in a bell-cote (Buchanan-Dunlop 1950, 3).
- 5.10 During the 1920s there was extensive work to the church, including the stripping of the interior and opening out of previously blocked windows. St Alban’s church itself was fortunate to escape demolition, which was mooted together with the demolition of St Helen’s and St Andrew’s. A letter from the Bishop of Worcester to the incumbent (Canon Buchanan-Dunlop), dated 20th Nov 1937 clearly states the prevailing attitudes *“...St Alban’s is not regarded as a building upon which the church or the City would be prepared to spend any money, and consequently we are not going to bother about that.”* He goes on to indicate that any charitable group would be welcome to the building. After wartime use as a store, then by the TOC H organization the building fell into disuse, was reportedly used by the college for a period, and was converted to a day centre for the homeless in the late 1980s, the architect for the conversion being Henry Gorst.
- 6 **Description**
- 6.1 The only below ground deposits exposed were seen in three very small holes broken through the concrete slab to expose the existing drainage pipework and to facilitate the replacement of the drainage

connections. These holes (Figs 4,5 and 7) were too small for any meaningful interpretation of the underlying deposits, as they were excavated only into the disturbed material within the 1980s pipe trenches. The excavated material was a loose brown sand. This material could derive from the underlying stratigraphy (thought to be a rampart of sand and gravel construction) or possibly might be an imported “clean” trench fill. The concrete floor slab was variable in thickness, nominally 100mm, and overlaid a blue plastic damp-proof membrane (this had been punctured for the former drainage connections). The largest area of excavation was that for the new shower floor – no *in situ* deposits were seen as the slab was removed only down to the top of the plastic DPM, and the membrane left *in situ* to protect the underlying deposits.

- 6.2 Removal of existing stud partitions revealed that some were inserted after the walls had been rendered, plastered and painted, but one partition (between the toilet and shower-rooms) had been erected prior to rendering and plastering. Temporary removal of the studwork (the wall has been rebuilt on the same position) revealed the painted brickwork inner skin of the northern wall of the aisle. Whilst only a 100mm wide strip of the original fabric was seen it appeared that the brickwork in this area may be of 18th C brick. This brickwork appears to continue only from the west end of the aisle as far as the wall monument – beyond the wall monument the upper part of the wall appears to be lined with painted early 19th C brick, slightly deeper than that to the west. The presence of the monument, and wall tiling, obscures the junction between these two areas of fabric. It would appear possible that the monument (dating to 1595) was left *in situ* when the brickwork to the east was replaced.
- 6.3 The other observed works revealed no additional historic fabric, but it was clear that the internal partitioning was of several phases, all later 20th C. The removal of partitioning at high level revealed the previously concealed 19th C circular stained glass light over the west end (Fig 8). The surrounding wall fabric could not be closely inspected, but appears to have been possibly rebuilt in the 19th Century.
- 6.4 The opportunity was taken to photograph the remaining wall monuments in those rooms most directly affected by the alterations (Fig 6). The monument within the shower room (to Mary wife of William Wyatt, dated 1595) shows some evidence of mould and fairly recent abrasion (resulting from its position actually within a shower enclosure). This monument was recorded by Habington as being positioned on the north side of the chancel (quoted by Nash Vol II Appendix cxxii). The surrounding painted brickwork also showed much evidence of mould. The memorial on the north side of the west end of the chancel is a memorial to Francis the son of Robert Warmstry, dated 1589 – this memorial was recorded by Habington as being at the east end of the north aisle. On the southern wall of the chancel, at the west end is an ornate mural monument to Edmund Wyatt, dated 1684 – this monument was recorded by Habington as positioned on the east wall of the chancel – it shows signs of several major cracks and has apparently been reconstructed from fragments. Towards the east end of the southern wall of the chancel there is a mural tablet, now mostly illegible but recognisable as the Drummond monument of 1622 which was fortunately transcribed in full by Habington (printed in Nash Vol II Appendix cxxiii). This monument may also have been removed from its original position, which Habington described as within the church (presumably the nave?) ‘almost opposite the reading desk’. A more recent (19th Century) brass plaque at high level between the two windows of the west end is a memorial to Henry Wilding, ‘priest of this parish’.
- 6.5 Very little could be deduced about the remainder of the fabric, which is almost entirely obscured internally by later finishes. The floors throughout the portion of the church affected by the works are of 1980s construction, though these do incorporate two relocated ledger slabs set within a quarry tile floor in the SE corner of the office. The northern part of the chancel, and the western end of the aisle had thermoplastic tile flooring.

7 Discussion and conclusions

- 7.1 The present works have, by contrast to the 1980s conversion of the building, been extremely sympathetic to the historic structure and the below ground archaeology. As a result of the low-impact design there has been relatively little disturbance of historic fabric. There were, as a result very few exposures of usually hidden areas of the structure, limiting the information gained by monitoring of the

works. A careful design, and skilled workmanship has ensured that there has been no physical impact on historically significant fabric during the alterations. The new layout will reduce the risk of ongoing deterioration of the 1595 Wyatt memorial, as this will no longer be within a shower cubicle. The alterations to the office layout have also improved the visibility of the wall monuments in this area. The exposure of the high level stained glass window at the west end adds considerably to the sense of space in the main body of the church, as well as adding natural light. Unfortunately the height and position of the existing office ceiling rather restricts views of the stained glass, which is only wholly visible from the extreme east end.

- 7.2 The presence of brickwork in all exposed areas of the northern wall of the aisle confirms previous interpretations that this wall has been extensively rebuilt. As sections of both 18th and 19th C brickwork are present, and the wall has several awkward changes of alignment and thickness it is very clear that the wall was rebuilt in several phases, which are also easily distinguishable on the exterior.

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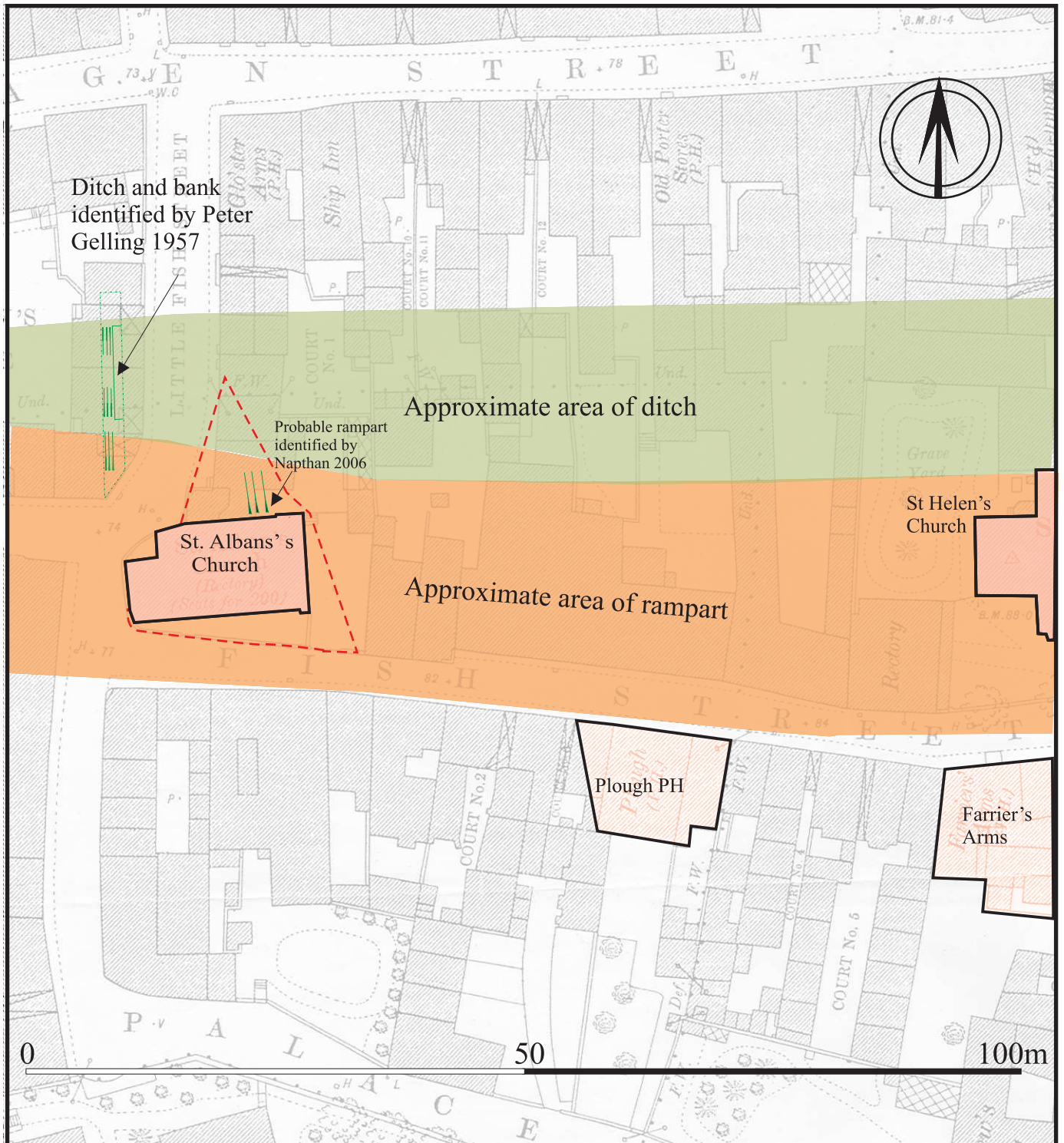


Figure 1: St Albans Church in relation to Iron Age/Roman defences and previous excavation in Little Fish Street (outlined in green), overlaid on 1880s Ordnance Survey mapping to show the extent of 20th Century redevelopment - surviving 19th C and earlier buildings shown in pink.

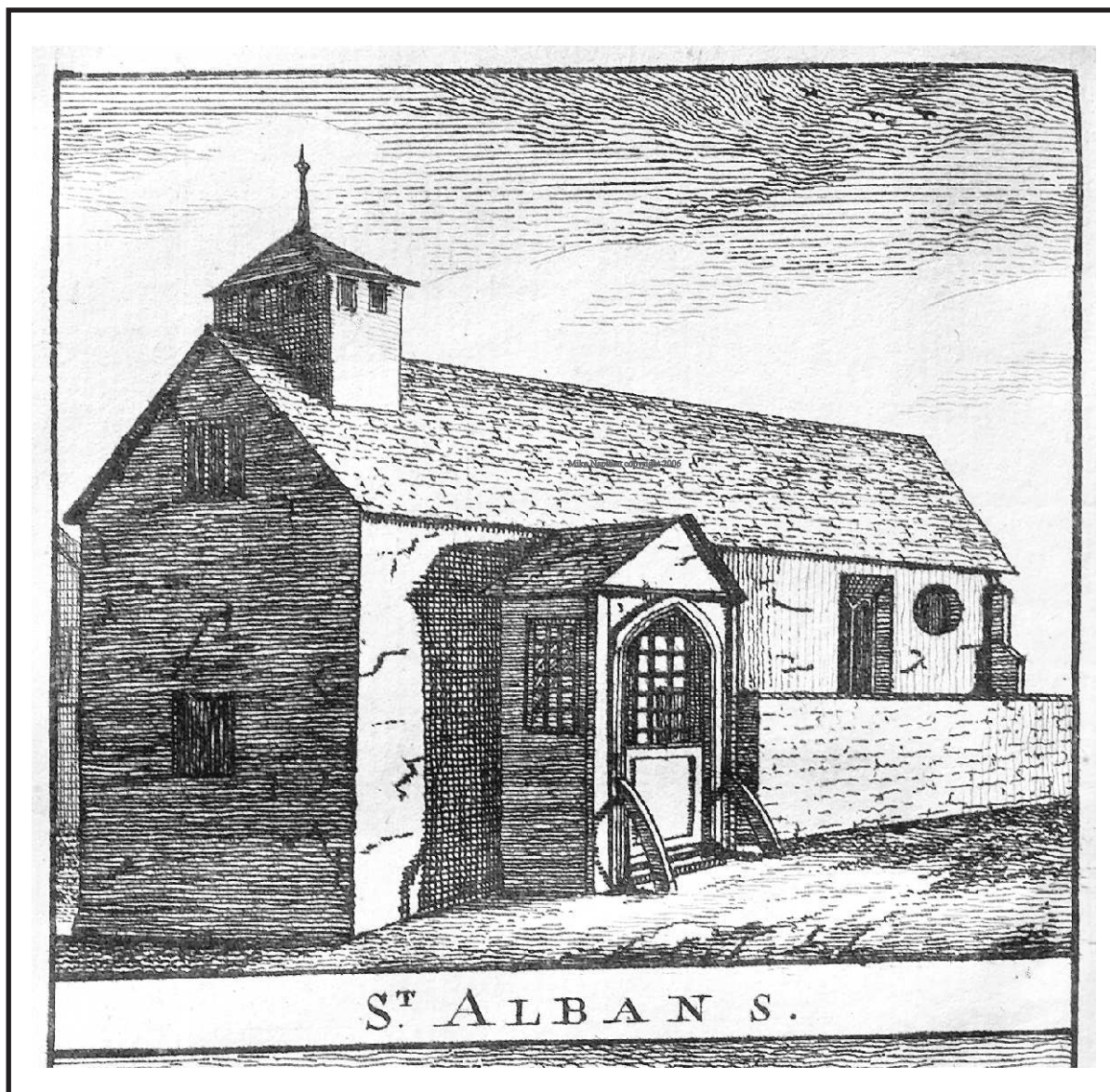


Figure 2: Valentine Green (1764) "A Survey of the City of Worcester" (facing page 223)
Engraving of St Alban's Church from south-west by Robert Hancock.



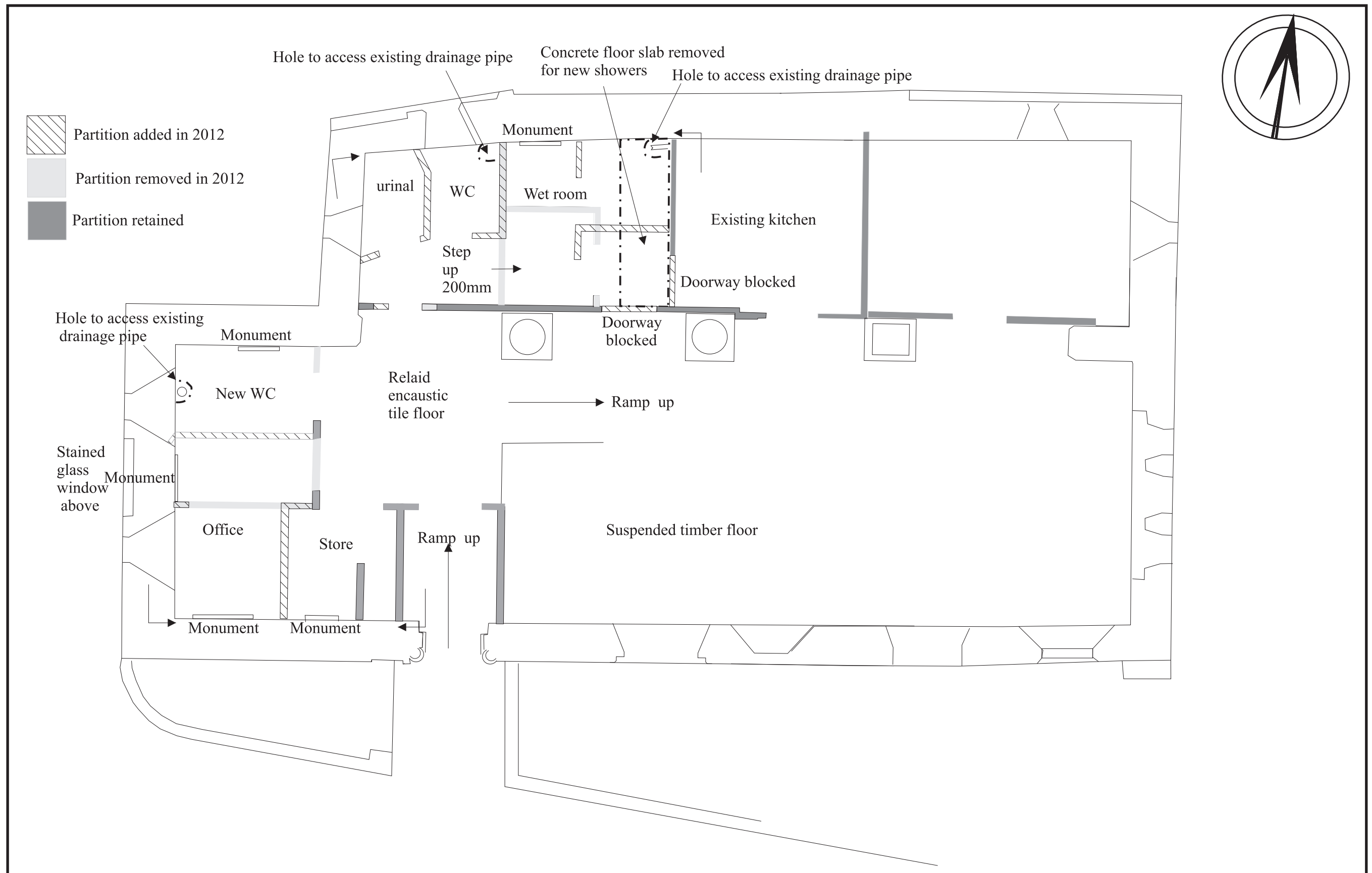


Figure 4: Floor plan and location of alterations (eastern end of church not recorded in detail)

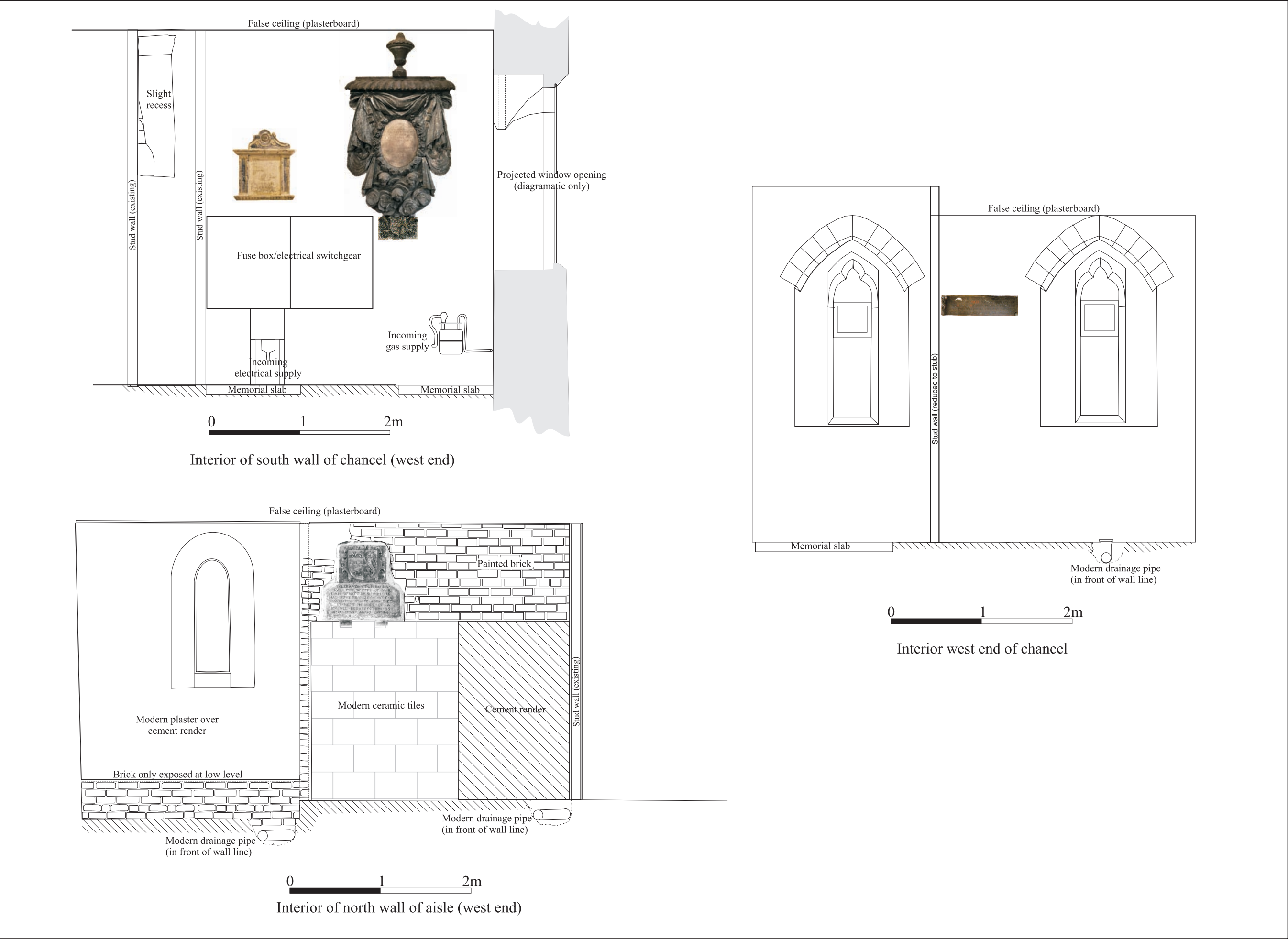
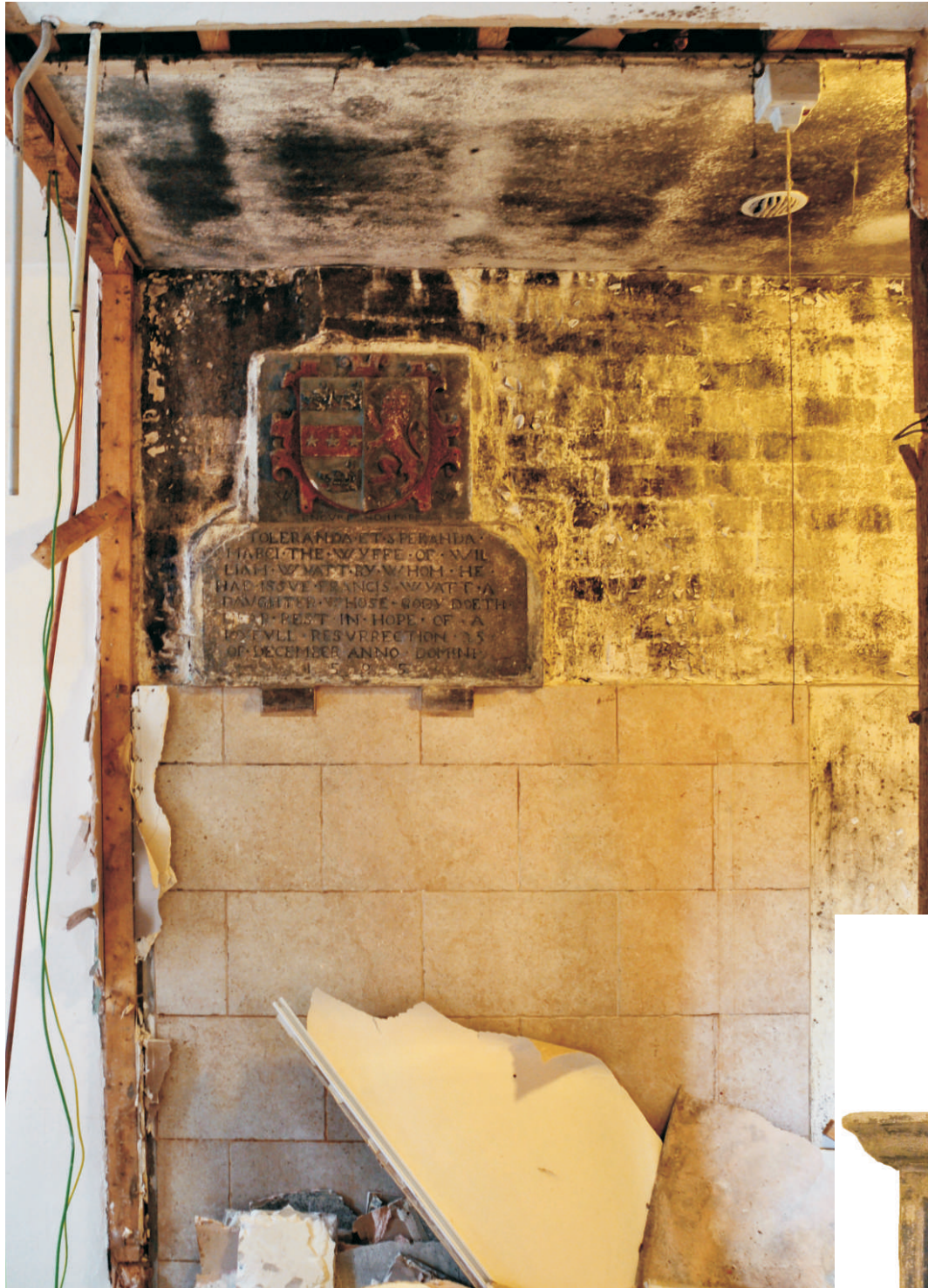


Figure 5: Partial sketch elevations of the original walls most affected by the alterations to the interior layout, showing position of monuments



1595 Wyatt memorial within former shower cubicle - note extensive mould growth



Drummond monument of 1622 (now largely illegible), located over electrical cupboard, south side of chancel



Memorial to Edmund Wyatt (1684) showing signs of extensive historic damage (cracking and abrasion)

Figure 6: Monuments within the area of the church most affected by alterations



Breaking through slab in NW corner of aisle after removal of partition walls



Excavations in central portion of aisle prior to construction of new shower cubicles (1980s membrane left in situ) Scale 0.5m long

Excavation for drain connection in NW corner of aisle



Figure 7: General views of excavations into concrete floor slab



West end window exposed by removal of partition wall over office



View facing west prior to removal of upper portion of partition wall Vabove office ceiling



View facing east



Figure 8: General views of building and newly exposed window