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St Chad's Church, Montford, Shropshire:
Repairs to Churchyard Wall

Archaeological Monitoring

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Montford and Shrawardine
Parochial Church Council



Version: Rev 1

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In November 2012 SLR Consulting was commissioned by the Montford and Shrawardine Parochial Church Council to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the dismantling of part of the churchyard wall to St Chad's Church. The work was required in response to Faculty No. 3785 from the Consistory Court of the Diocese of Lichfield, and undertaken to comply with a brief from the Diocesan Advisory Archaeologist.

Repairs were undertaken to an eight metre length of the churchyard wall on the north-western side of the churchyard (Figures 1 and 2), which acts as the boundary between the churchyard and the driveway to a bungalow. The height of the churchyard deposits behind the wall had resulted in pressure against the wall in this location, destabilizing it so that it had bulged out and was likely to collapse in the near future. The design for the rebuilding of the wall and a specification for the engineering work is attached as Appendix A.

The National Grid Location was SJ41851480 (341851.314800).

2.0 RESULTS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING

Three visits were made to observe the wall before and during dismantling, and to record the excavation of soil from behind the wall. A pre-works meeting was held on site on 19th October 2012, and subsequent recording was undertaken on 5th and 6th November 2012.

The section of wall to be repaired was located 5m south-east from the north-western corner of the churchyard, extending a further 8m to the south-east. The churchyard itself sloped upwards at c.45° towards the north-east, to approximately 1m above the top of the wall, and 1m back from it. The wall was dismantled to a depth of 1m from its top on the first day (2nd November 2012), so the base of the area excavated behind the wall was c.2m deep from the ground level of the main churchyard. The site was left over the week-end and on the Monday (5th November) a monitoring visit was undertaken to record what was visible behind the dismantled wall (Figures 3, 4 and 9).

A mechanical excavator then removed rubble and soil 0.5m into the face of the churchyard deposits on the second day (6th November), and a 0.5m deep further excavation was due to be excavated below this level immediately before pouring concrete for the foundations on the third day (7th November). As this latter excavation for the foundations would have been into natural pebbles and silty-sand it was not monitored. Sufficient had been revealed by the second day to show that there were no archaeological features or artefacts present, and no burials had been disturbed by the works. The sequence was recorded and a series of photographs taken, which constituted an appropriate level of recording for these works.

The stratigraphic sequence that comprised the churchyard consisted of approximately 2m of sandy loam beneath the topsoil. This deposit had been disturbed by large roots to c.0.5m below the soil horizon. The sandy loam had accumulated above a 0.2m thick sandy-clay band, which undulated along the section, and overlay a loosely compacted deposit of rounded pebbles and gravels set in sandy-silt (Figures 5 – 8). These latter two layers were interpreted as river terrace deposits.

The original construction of the dismantled wall had included cutting back into these deposits and then building the wall with roughly-cut, irregular red sandstone blocks (25 x 30 x 25 – 25 x 45 x 25cm), mortared together. Shaped coping stones (30 x 35 x 50cm) had been re-used within this wall construction, similar to those still visible as capping the churchyard wall on its

western and northern sides (Figures 3 and 9). The void between the old wall and the churchyard deposits had been filled with broken bits of sandstone and other rubble, as well as backfilled with loose soil.

3.0 DISCUSSION

The repair works did not disturb any archaeological remains, and the exposed section has demonstrated that graves do not extend right to the edge of the churchyard (Figure 6 shows the proximity of gravestones). The stratigraphic sequence revealed a thick sandy loam that had accumulated above the natural river terrace deposits.

The position of St Chad's shows that it had been carefully chosen to exploit a local high point, at the eastern end of a ridge which provided views overlooking the Severn floodplain to the south. The road from Shrewsbury approaches the church in a straight line from the east-north-east (the same alignment as the nave and chancel (Figure 10)), and on the first edition OS mapping (Figure 11) a footpath would appear to extend this route to the west from the Montford Farm. The current road loops around the churchyard which has several yew trees lining the northern boundary. The shape of the boundary wall suggests that originally a smaller enclosure might have surrounded the church, which was extended to the north-west at a later time. The repaired wall would have formed part of this extension. The juncture between the wall beside the road and the repaired section at the north-western corner of the churchyard, shows the repaired wall had been butted on to the road-side wall, rather than built as a single, interlocking structure.

St Chad's is not a particularly ancient structure, but its dedication is very early, and many of the attributes of its location would fit comfortably with an ancient sacred site. In common with many other graveyards the churchyard is raised above the level of the surrounding land, often assumed to be due to the accumulation of burials and disturbed soil over many years.

4.0 CLOSURE

This report has been prepared by SLR Consulting Limited with all reasonable skill, care and diligence, and taking account of the manpower and resources devoted to it by agreement with the client. Information reported herein is based on the interpretation of data collected and has been accepted in good faith as being accurate and valid.

This report is for the exclusive use of Montford and Shrawardine Parochial Church Council; no warranties or guarantees are expressed or should be inferred by any third parties. This report may not be relied upon by other parties without written consent from SLR. SLR disclaims any responsibility to the client and others in respect of any matters outside the agreed scope of the work.

Acknowledgements

The archaeological monitoring and report were undertaken by Tim Malim of SLR Consulting. Thanks are given to Dr Paul Lowe of the PCC for commissioning the works, to Mark Newall (overseeing architect of Baart Harries Newall), to Graham Marsh (GR Marsh Stonemasonry), Ed Jones (groundworks), Mr and Mrs Roger Bright, and Dr Andy Wigley (Shropshire Council).

FIGURES

Figure 1 Location of churchyard wall repair in relation to St Chad's church



Figure 2 Detail of part of wall requiring repair 19/10/12



Figure 3 North-west end of dismantled wall section 5/11/12



View looking north showing part of wall which was not dismantled, with coping stone capping it. The backfill material behind the dismantled section of wall comprised loose sandy soil, with some root disturbance to c.0.5m depth from ground surface. This was then cut into by c.0.5m by mechanical excavator to form the foundation for the new wall construction (compare to Figure 8).

Figure 4 North-eastern end of dismantled wall section 5/11/12



Note some stone rubble infill behind the dismantled wall line, and loose backfilled soil matrix above and around the rubble, before the machine excavation of c.0.5m into the face of the deposit sequence (compare to Figures 5 and 6).

Figure 5 North-eastern end of excavated section 6/11/12



View looking south-east showing section of wall which was not dismantled, and sequence of deposits that form the churchyard behind it. This photograph also shows the relationship to ground surface, slope of ground down towards the wall, its relative proximity to the west end of the church, and how the repaired wall projects at an angle from the more curving boundary wall around the church itself.

Figure 6 North-eastern part of excavated section 6/11/12



This photograph, looking east, shows the scraped face of the excavation into the churchyard deposit sequence. Beneath the topsoil 2m of sandy loam has accumulated above a 0.2m band of clay, which capped the loose pebbly river terrace deposits beneath (compare to Figure 8).

Figure 7 Central part of excavated section looking north 6/11/12



Detail of deposit sequence, looking north. Note the layered pebbles (river terrace deposit) beneath the clay layer on right of photograph.

Figure 8 North-western part of excavated section 6/11/12



North-western end of dismantled wall showing less accumulation of the churchyard sequence above the river terrace pebbly deposit, than at the other end of the dismantle wall where c.2m of build-up has occurred.

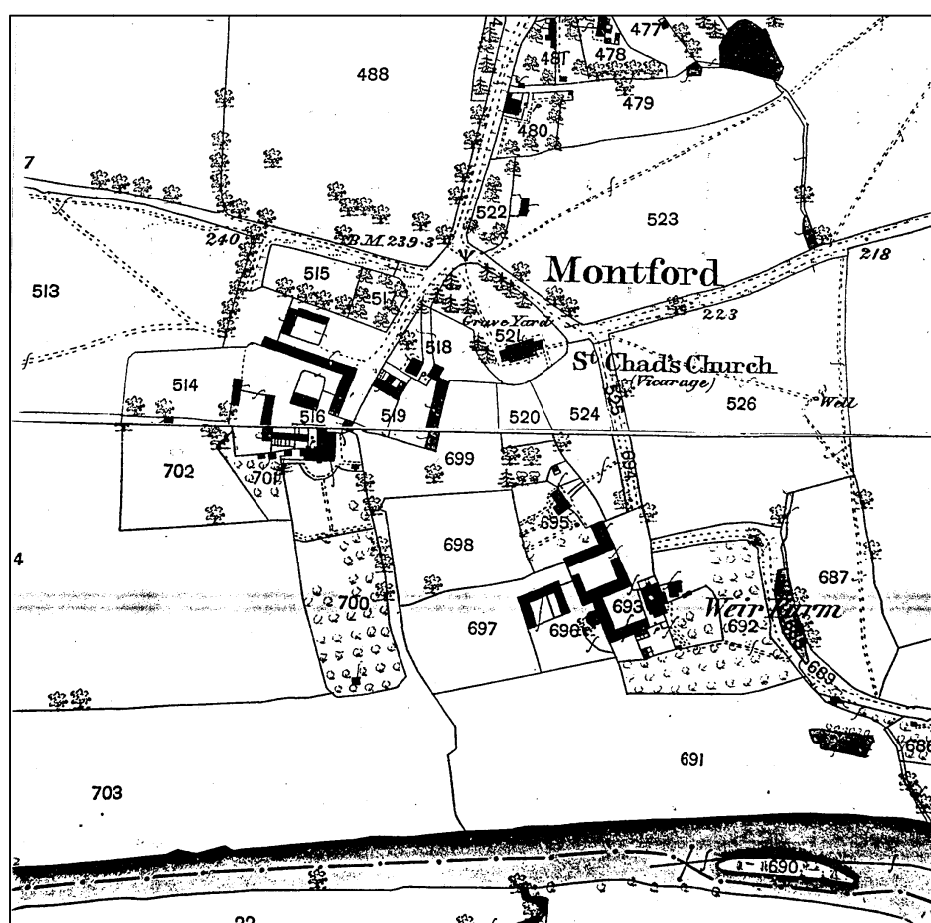
Figure 9 Carved coping stones reused as part of dismantled wall 5/11/12



Figure 10 St Chad's from the east

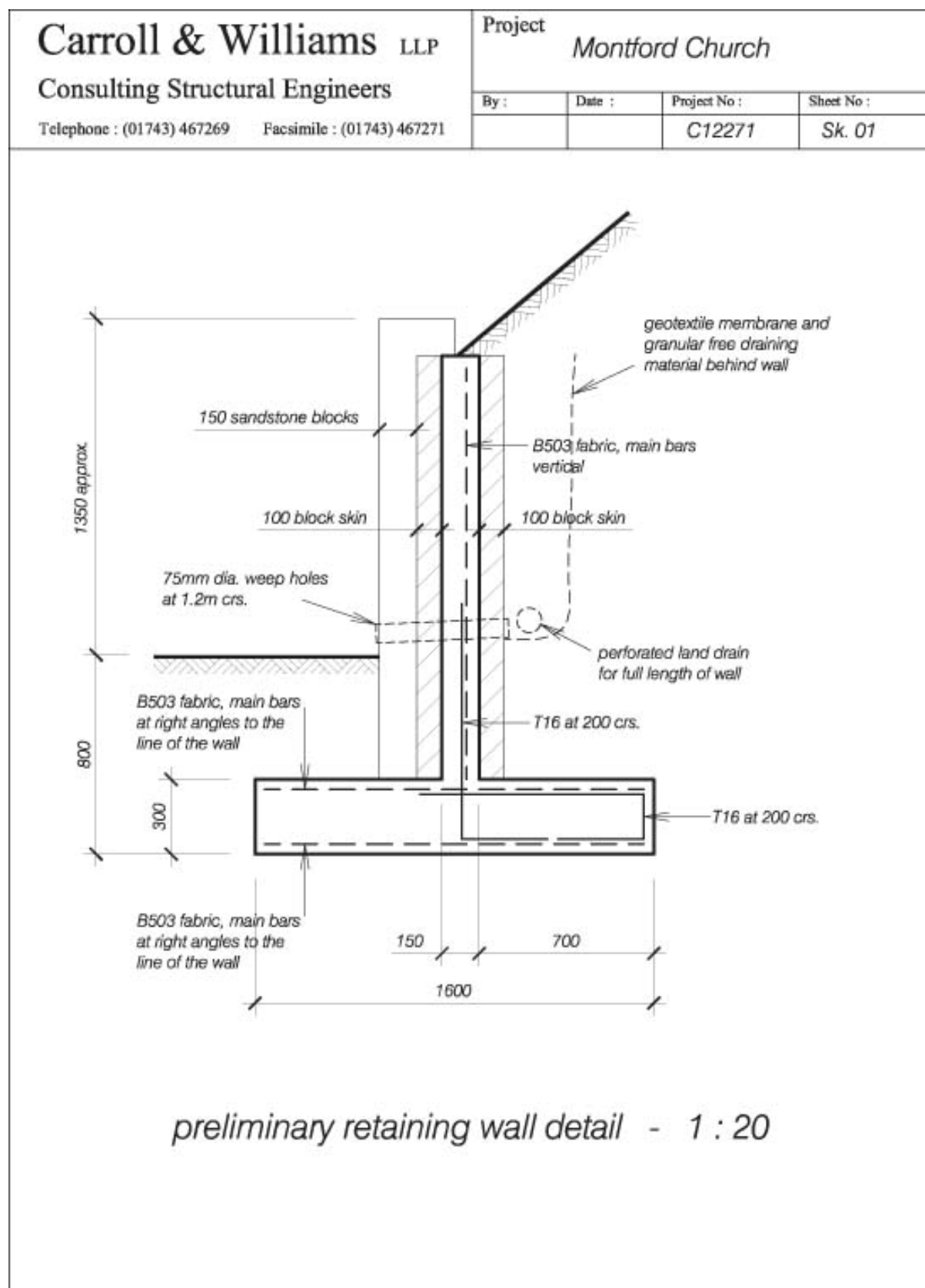


Figure 11 The 1882 1st edition OS map showing churchyard boundary



Note sub-rectangular enclosure around church, and extension of graveyard to north-west

APPENDIX A



ST CHAD'S CHURCH, MONTFORD : CHURCHYARD WALL

OUTLINE SPEC

Architects :

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1. An 8m long section of the churchyard retaining wall is leaning badly into the neighbouring property. This needs to be taken down and rebuilt. See attached photograph.
2. Liase with the neighbouring owner, Mr Bright, before entering the property to inspect the wall or to carry out any work.
3. Carefully lift the neighbours plants, and temporarily plant these into another bed whilst the works are in progress.
4. Carefully take down the sandstone wall, clean and set aside the sandstone for rebuilding.
5. Excavate for foundations and cut back bank as shown in Carroll & Williams detail C12271.SK01. Stockpile enough top soil on site to make good levels in the neighbour's garden bed, and remove the remaining spoil from site.
6. Install reinforced concrete foundation and blockwork wall with reinforced concrete filled cavity, and drainage pipes, as shown in Carroll & Williams detail C12271.SK01.
7. Install Geotextile membrane and back fill with granular free-draining material, eg. pea shingle, as shown in Carroll & Williams detail C12271.SK01.
8. Face the wall with sandstone facing skin, to match the surface of adjacent existing wall. Bedded and pointed with NHL 3.5 lime mortar.
9. Include for fitting a sandstone capping course over the top of the concrete retaining wall, to match adjacent existing wall.
10. Fill the top of the backfill with 300mm of top soil, and seed with a meadow grass mix.
11. Backfill the neighbours garden with saved topsoil, and reinstate planting removed in 3 above.
12. Clean and leave site tidy upon completion.



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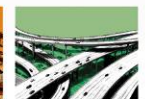
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