

ALL SAINTS' CHURCH, BASCHURCH, SHROPSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

**On behalf of the Parochial Church Council of
All Saints' Church, Baschurch**

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CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Scope.....	1
1.2 Purpose of report	1
1.3 Archaeological Potential.....	4
1.4 Groundwork specifics.....	4
1.5 General programme of work.....	6
2.0 RESULTS.....	9
2.1 Aims and Objectives	9
2.1.1 Aims.....	9
2.1.2 Objectives	9
2.2 Methodology and quality assurance.....	10
2.3 Existing wall construction details.....	11
2.4 Graveyard deposit description.....	12
2.5 Finds	13
3.0 CONCLUSIONS.....	15

FIGURES

Figure 1 Site Location.....	2
Figure 2 Detailed location and 2 nd edition Ordnance Survey map.....	3
Figure 3 Detailed location of works	5
Figure 4 View towards collapsed wall from south-west with church in background.....	6
Figure 5 Detailed specifics of groundworks required.....	7
Figure 6 Cross-section through wall of proposed works.....	8
Figure 7 Collapsed wall viewed from the east.....	9
Figure 8 Existing wall detailed section viewed from west.....	10
Figure 9 West end of wall showing plinth of soil and lower zone with large boulders.....	11
Figure 10 Deposit sequence	12
Figure 11 Finds from disturbed soil	13

Figure 12 Rebuilt graveyard wall..... 15

Status of report: Final

Author	Tim Malim BA, FSA, MCIfA
Date	2 nd September 2020
Reviewed	Michael Randall (client)
Date	3 rd September 2020
Comments	Further details over wall rebuild
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Michael Randall and the Rector Linda Cox, of All Saints' Church Baschurch Parochial Church Council, for commissioning this work and providing essential background details. Richard Bennett rebuilt the wall under instruction from Paul Davies of Davies & Fisher Construction Ltd, and assisted with preliminary site clearance of the loose material to expose the full section of the graveyard deposit sequence.

SLR is a Registered Organisation with the CIfA, an audited status which confirms that work is carried out to the highest standards of the profession. SLR operates a quality management system to help ensure all projects are managed in a professional and transparent manner, which enables it to qualify for ISO 9001. SLR is a member of the Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Scope

In March 2020 SLR was approached by Michael Randall, acting on behalf of the Parochial Church Council for All Saints Church, Baschurch, Shropshire, for assistance with the archaeological implications in relation to the repair of a graveyard retaining wall which collapsed into a neighbouring garden following storms earlier in the year. The site is centred at National Grid reference SJ 422 218 (Figures 1 and 2), and forms the southern boundary wall to the graveyard, which is a western extension to the churchyard surrounding the church. The graveyard is c.1.6m higher than the surrounding land (Figure 4), and the wall has collapsed into land that formerly formed part of the adjacent Moor Farm, recently converted into residential units as part of a development called Bassa Road.

The Diocesan Advisory Council (DAC) and their archaeological advisor have indicated that this work might reveal human remains from the graveyard, and that an appropriate level of archaeological response would be required as part of the overall project:

The DAC archaeological adviser recommends that the proposal requires a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) due to the potential that exists for human remains, to be undertaken by a professional archaeologist or heritage consultant. The WSI is required to be approved by the DAC archaeological adviser, prior to the commencement of works. Section f, of the Excluded Matters, Rule 3.5 of the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules 2015, does not permit the "exhumation or other disturbance of human remains", of which the DAC archaeology adviser feels may be probable in regards to your proposal.

A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for an archaeological watching brief¹ at All Saints' Church, Baschurch, Shropshire, SY4 2EB, was approved by the archaeological advisor for the DAC on the 14th April 2020. A faculty was issued by the Diocese of Lichfield on 16th June 2020 (reference number 2020-049038).

1.2 Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to present the results from implementation of that approved programme of archaeological monitoring. The site work and report was undertaken by Timothy Malim, an experienced archaeologist and a Member of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists.

¹ SLR Consulting April 2020 *All Saints' Church, Baschurch: Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching Brief*

Figure 1
Site Location

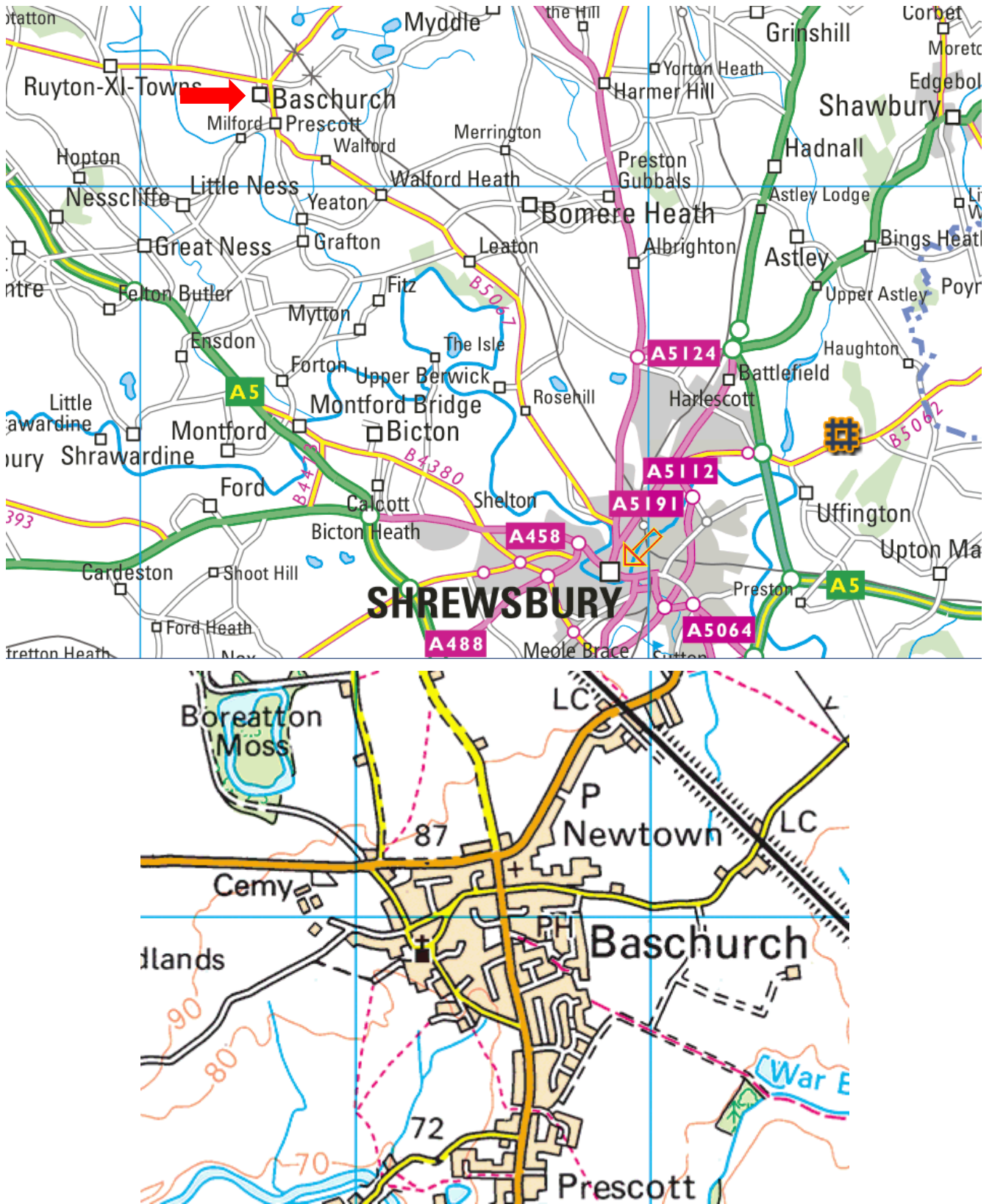
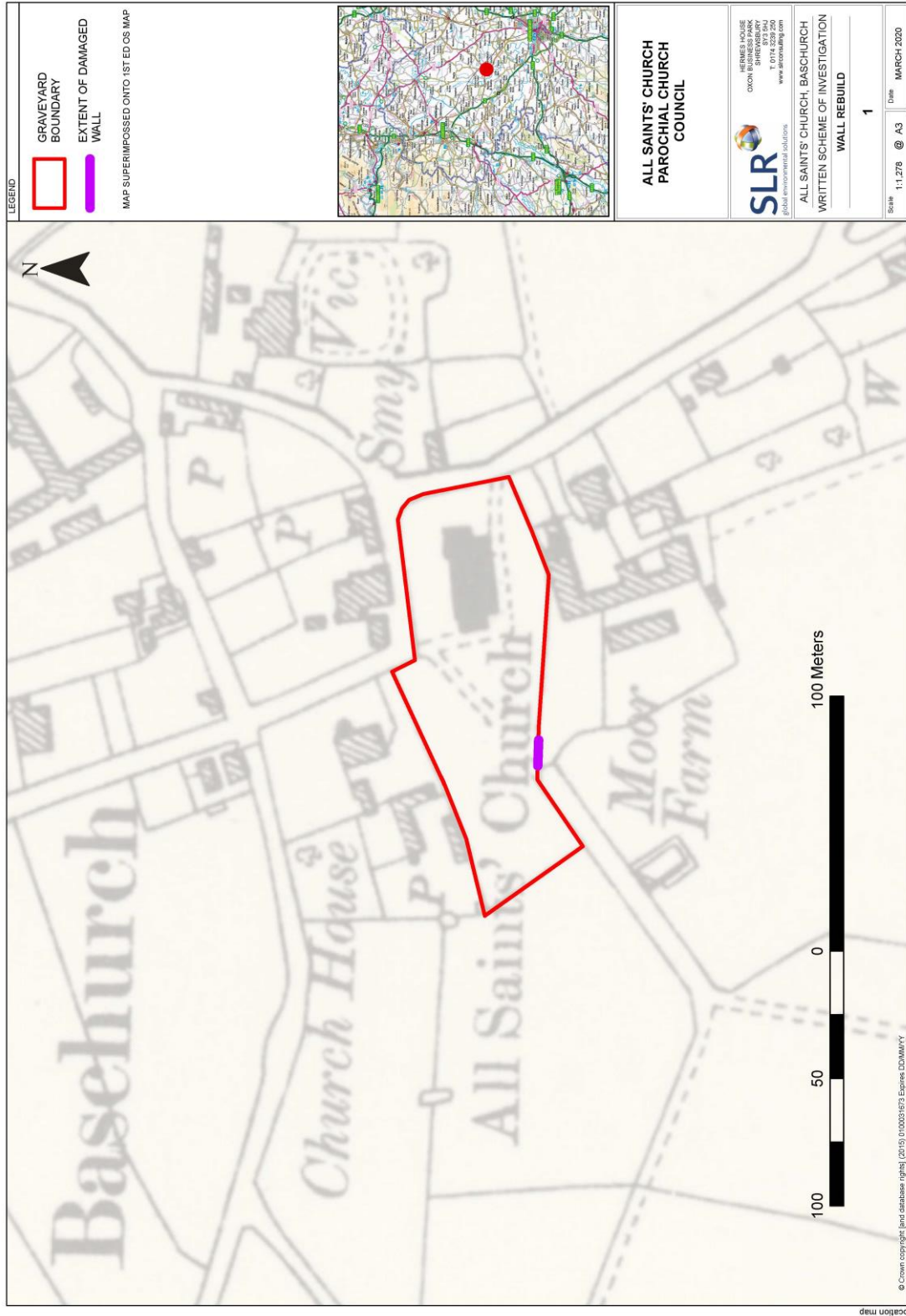


Figure 2
Detailed location and 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map



1.3 Archaeological Potential

The church has its origins in the late 12th century and is a Grade II Listed Building (National Heritage List for England No. 1176049). It has wide Romanesque arches between the nave and south aisle, and a very ancient yew tree in the graveyard which is probably older than the church. As with many medieval churches, All Saints' has undergone many changes over the years, with various additions and alterations between the 12th - 15th centuries. The north aisle of the church was demolished and redesigned by Thomas Telford in 1790, with further significant restoration conducted by George H. Birch in the late 19th century. The Shropshire HER record (05083) notes that the 19th century churchyard is a raised earthwork 0.25 to 1.5m above the height of the surrounding roads/fields, however, the extent of the medieval (or any earlier) churchyard is unknown.

In 1998 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at the site in advance of proposals to construct an extension at the south-west corner of the church. Disarticulated human bones were discovered but no archaeological deposits of significance were identified (Shropshire HER: ESA5084).

During repairs to the tower roof in 2017, fragments of a reused medieval stone coffin lid were recovered from the church tower. Analysis and interpretation suggested a date c1275-1325 and that the coffin lid may have been from the burial of an important priest. The fragments were un-weathered and are thought to have come from within the church (Shropshire HER: 00834).

In the broader area, significant archaeological remains include a Bronze Age barrow cemetery, located some 600m to the west of the church. This cemetery is a Scheduled Monument (No. 1016824) and comprises eight bowl barrows identified through examination of aerial photographs.

1.4 Groundwork specifics

The Schedule of Works, February 2020 includes the following details relevant to this WSI (further details shown in Figures 3, 5 and 6 below, courtesy of Michael Randall):

51: REMOVE collapsed stone and other materials from the garden. Take care to avoid disturbance to the retained earth. If necessary, provide temporary shoring. At each end of the collapse check adjacent stones remaining in the wall and remove any that are loose or where the mortar is not sound.

52: EXCAVATION AND CONCRETE FOUNDATION Remove stones within the lower level of the wall down to bare earth, but do not excavate back into the churchyard. If necessary, provide shoring to retain the churchyard earth.

Disturbance to the churchyard would be minimal, although any movement of stones or soils could reveal human remains or other archaeological deposits. The archaeological condition has therefore been placed on the works to ensure an adequate record is made of any such discoveries.

Figure 3
Detailed location of works

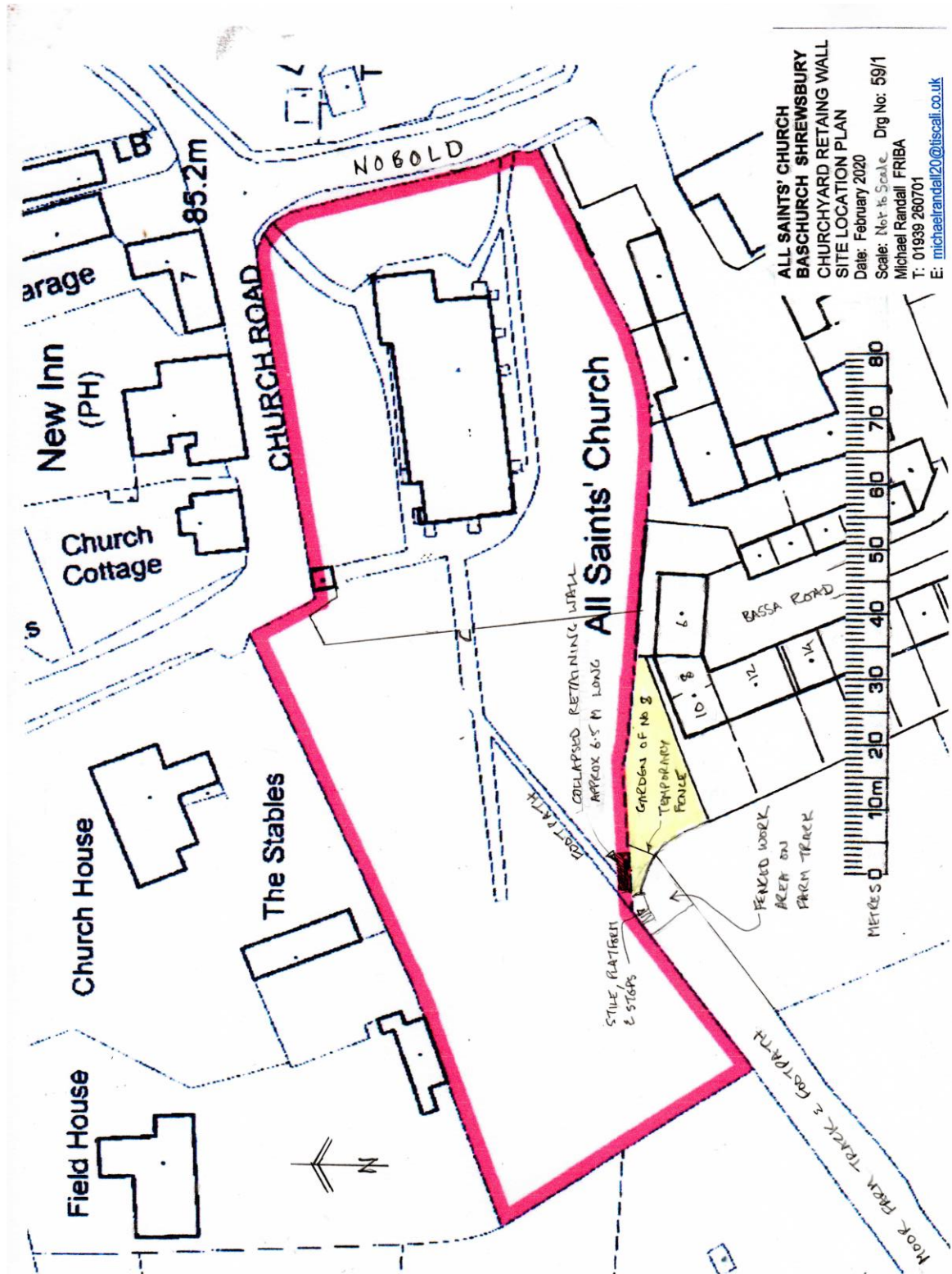


Figure 4
View towards collapsed wall from south-west with church in background



1.5 General programme of work

- 19-20 August excavation of loose deposits and wall foundation, pouring the concrete foundation
- 24-28 August rebuilding of the wall, commencing with the new blockwork backing against the churchyard and then rebuilding the stonework on the garden side, and finally stone the full width of the wall above churchyard level.
- 1 September the coping stones were lifted by the Moor Farm telehandler onto the churchyard and finally laid to finish the wall.

Figure 5
Detailed specifics of groundworks required

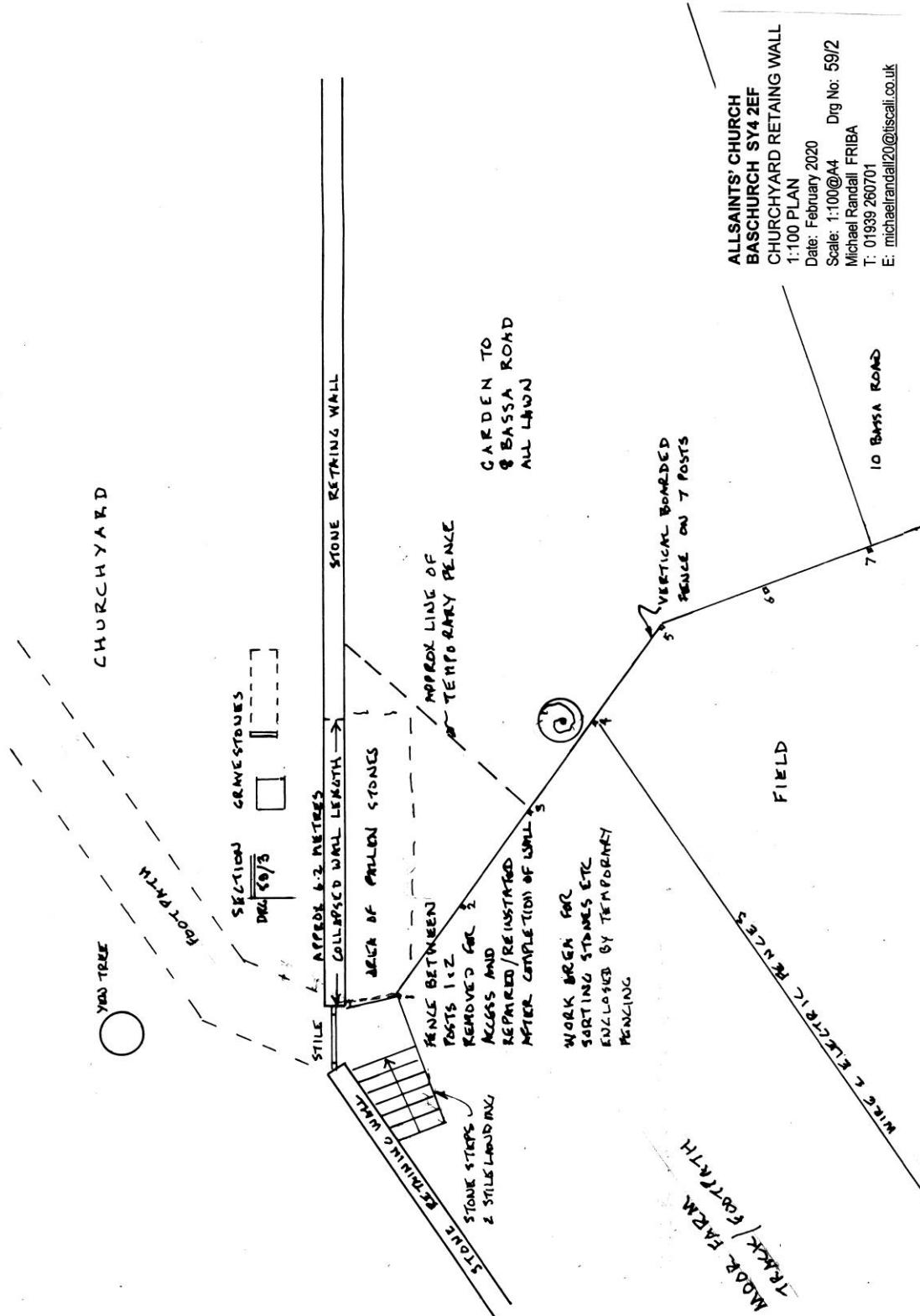
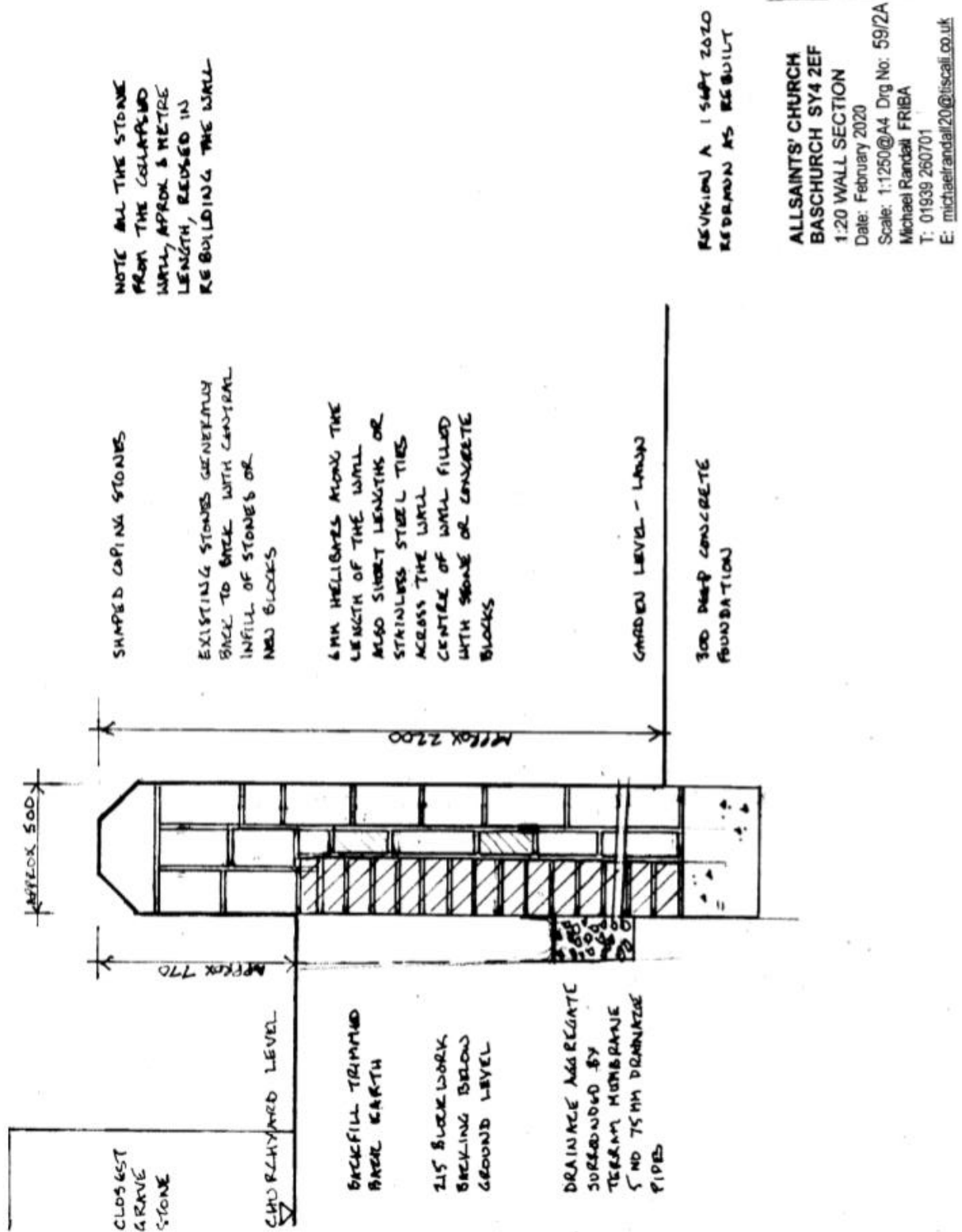


Figure 6
 Cross-section through wall of proposed works



2.0 Results

2.1 Aims and Objectives

2.1.1 Aims

- Identify, investigate, understand, record, and report the extent, nature and significance of any surviving archaeological remains within the development area with specific focus on retrieving human bone.

2.1.2 Objectives

- To ensure that the working area was monitored during the contractors' groundworks so that archaeological and human remains were recorded and recovered with minimal damage;
- all archaeological features / deposits to be identified and recorded;
- a sufficient sample of any features recorded to understand the nature, sequence, date and significance of the archaeological remains present within the excavated area; and
- to undertake assessment, analysis, archiving and reporting as appropriate to the significance of the results, to be disseminated in an appropriate format

Figure 7
Collapsed wall viewed from the east



2.2 Methodology and quality assurance

A site inspection was carried out prior to groundworks beginning on 19th August and an archaeologist examined the loose soils and rubble for archaeological deposits or features, specifically human remains (Figure 7).

Removal of loose material and excavation of surviving wall elements was then carried out, during which archaeological supervision was conducted. Field notes and photographs recorded the stratigraphy and main elements of the existing wall construction, before restoration work began.

SLR Archaeology and Heritage is a Registered Organisation with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists. Their work is accordingly undertaken to the highest professional standards. All archaeological fieldwork and reporting will be carried out in accordance with the relevant Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' guidance².

Figure 8
Existing wall detailed section viewed from west



² Chartered Institute for Archaeologists 2014: *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching-Brief*

2.3 Existing wall construction details

The existing wall which had not collapsed was c.2m in height on the external face, and 0.6m wide, constructed of large sandstone blocks and lime mortar with small stones and charcoal inclusions, capped with triangular worked coping stones (Figure 8). During the rebuilding work it was clear that the original wall had two external good stone faces and very poor bits of stone and mortar between. The sandstone blocks used for the wall where it had collapsed ranged in size and shape considerably, from c. 700 x 400 x 200mm to 1200 x 600mm (Figure 7).

At the west end the wall, which was adjacent to the steps leading from a footpath to the higher graveyard, extended externally to 1.6m depth from the ground surface. Internally a soil plinth or step was found at 0.9m depth which coincided with a band of boulders in the exposed section (Figure 9). This suggests that a deliberate infill of sandstone pieces and large river cobblestones formed a support to the rear of the lower section of the wall, but that only soil infill was used for the higher section behind the wall and the undisturbed graveyard.

At the east end the external face was 2.1m high (top of coping stone) and on the graveyard side it was 0.8m from the ground surface to the top of the wall.

Figure 9
West end of wall showing plinth of soil and lower zone with large boulders



2.4 Graveyard deposit description

The deposit sequence (Figures 9 and 10) revealed by the collapsed wall with depths below ground surface (bgs):

- 0 – 0.5m bgs Topsoil – dark slightly humic earth with roots
- 0.5 – 0.9m bgs B horizon – slightly dark brown silty sand with (worm-sorted) pebbles and sandstone pieces
- 0.9 – 1.3m bgs Subsoil – brown silty sand loam with pebbles (including large boulders and sandstone rubble)
- 1.3 – 1.5m bgs Subsoil – yellow silty sand
- 1.5 – 1.9m bgs Natural – pebbly sand with peagrit (these natural deposits continued beneath the base of foundations at 1.9m bgs)

Figure 10
Deposit sequence



2.5 Finds

No human bone was visible prior to start of work, but during removal of loose material and cleaning of the exposed soil section some fragments were recovered which will be reinterred (Figure 11). In addition, a single piece of pottery was also found, which was well-fired and had a green glaze on one side, of early post-medieval date (Figure 11). A potential artefact of a large oblong smoothed stone was found, but this is probably of fluvio-glacial origin rather than manufactured and polished by human agency (Figure 11).

Figure 11
Finds from disturbed soil





3.0 Conclusions

The rebuild used all the existing stones and did not need use any additional stones stored on the other side of the churchyard. As part of the wall rebuild the middle between the stone faces was filled with a mix of new blocks and smaller stones, so the wall is now a much better construction (Figure 12).

The archaeological watching brief has ensured no human remains or archaeological features were disturbed without record. The graveyard sedimentary sequence and the composition of the boundary retaining wall have been described, and this report forms the output and archive of the project. No further assessment is required and the Faculty's archaeological requirements can be discharged on the basis of this report.

Figure 12
Rebuilt graveyard wall



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