



***Watching Brief at
St Mary Magdalene's Church,
Himbleton, Worcestershire***

A report for Himbleton Parochial Church Council

May 2008

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Project: PJ 211



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1. Project Background

1.1. Location of the Site

Himbleton lies around 10 kilometres to the north-east of Worcester and may be reached via unadopted lanes off the B4090 Droitwich to Feckenham Road, or from the A422 Worcester to Inkberrow Road (NGR SO 9498 5861; Figure 1). St Mary Magdalene's Church lies on the northern side of the village adjacent to Court Farm.

1.2. Development Details

The archaeological watching brief was suggested by the Diocesan Archaeological Advisor as the appropriate response to the threat posed to the archaeological site (church and churchyard) by the development process. This would involve the lowering of part of the vestry floor and excavation of a service trenches for a new water pipe and trench arch system, to facilitate the construction of a new WC and kitchenette.

A watching brief is defined as:

A formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons. This will be in a specified area on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater, where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed (IFA 2001).

A watching brief at the site was proposed in order that a record of any archaeological remains or deposits encountered during excavations associated with the development may be made and placed into context. It was also proposed, in order to best preserve the integrity of any articulated human remains, should they be encountered.

2. Methods and Process

2.1. Project Specification

- ❑ The archaeological project conforms to the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief* (IFA 2001).
- ❑ The project conforms to a brief prepared by The Planning Archaeologist, Worcestershire County Council (Brief MH/07/0673; WHEAS, September 2007), for which a project proposal and detailed specification was produced (Mercian Archaeology 2007).

- ❑ Mercian Archaeology adhere to the service practice and health and safety policy as contained within the *Mercian Archaeology Service Manual* (Williams 2003)
- ❑ The record archive will be offered to the appropriate museum after discussion with the client and / or archaeological curator.
- ❑ *The Code of Conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists* (1997) will be adhered to.
- ❑ *The Code of Approved Practice for the Regulation of Contractual Arrangements in Field Archaeology, Institute of Field Archaeologists* (1997) will also be followed
- ❑ *Guidelines for Finds Work, Institute of Field Archaeologists* (2001) will be followed.
- ❑ The project and any recommendations will conform to the government advice contained in *Planning Policy Guidance: Archaeology and Planning* (DoE, PPG 16 1990).
- ❑ The documentary research will follow the guidelines contained within the Institute of Field Archaeologists *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment* (2001)
- ❑ *Guidelines for the Preparation of Archives for Long-Term Storage* (Walker 1990) and *Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological Collections*, Museum and Galleries Commission (1992) will be followed.
- ❑ *Conservation Guidelines No 2*, United Kingdom Institute of Conservation.
- ❑ *Management of Archaeological Projects 2*, English Heritage 1991
- ❑ Environmental Archaeology and Archaeological Evaluations: Recommendation Regarding the Environmental Archaeology Component of *Archaeological Evaluations in England*, Association for Environmental Archaeology Working Paper Number 2 (1995)

2.2. Aims of the Project

The watching brief aimed to: -

- ❑ Use the results of the archaeological work to produce a report highlighting: -
 1. The survival and location of archaeological deposits from any period.
 2. Make an analysis and interpretation of all identified natural and cultural deposits
- ❑ Based on the above, establish the significance, survival, condition and period of the archaeological remains and place them within context at local, regional or national level where relevant.

2.3. Background Research

Prior to the commencement of fieldwork various available documentary and cartographic sources were consulted.

A search of the Worcestershire Historic Environment was commissioned. This identified an area of ridge and furrow agriculture to the east of Himbleton Church (WSM 05631), though the early map evidence suggests that this is more likely to be an area of former orchard; an earthwork bank (WSM 29954) and an Holloway (WSM 38511), both of unknown date.

Documentary research was carried out at Worcestershire Record Office (WRO) and the following sources were specifically consulted and were of use:

Cartographic Sources Consulted

Source	Reference Number
Plan of Himbleton Parish by John Snape (1777)	WRO BA 1691/14, s971.12
Inclosure Plan of Himbleton by John Clarke (circa 1800)	WRO BA 1691/15, s971.12
Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 25". Worcestershire Sheet XXIX.12 (1904)	WRO
Ordnance Survey 25" edition. Worcestershire Sheet XXIX.12 (1928)	WRO

Other Primary Sources of Use

Source	Reference Number
Faculty to level grave mounds at Himbleton Church (1960)	WRO BA 9395/4, 850 Himbleton
History of Himbleton Church (booklet)	WRO BA 9395/5, 850 Himbleton

Other Primary Sources Consulted (of little use)

Source	Reference Number
Plans of Himbleton (1848)	WRO BA 12058, 971.2
Schedule of documents deposited by the Dean and Chapter of Worcester	WRO 2602/92, 009:1

Secondary sources used are referenced within the report.

2.4. The Fieldwork Methodology

The watching brief was undertaken in April 2008 following the progress of the ground workers.

The site photography was carried out using digital format. A 1 or 2-metre scale was used where possible.

Proforma Record Forms were used to record the site stratigraphy in tandem with site notes to produce the final record contained within this report.

The methodology adopted and the favourable working conditions meant that the aims and objectives of the brief could be fully met and the fieldwork was successfully concluded.

3. The Documentary Research

3.1. General Background

The parish of Himbleton extends to around 2,400 acres with its lands irrigated by the Dean Brook, which is a tributary of the Bow Brook, with a second tributary, the Little Brook, forming the southern parish boundary. The soils are predominantly of clay, ideally suited to the growing of wheat, barley and beans (VCH III) and horticulture (Pitt 1913).

The present village is laid out along the approach road to the church, with ribbon development along the east-west road at the southern side of the village. The buildings are predominantly 18-19th century, but many earlier timber-framed buildings survive. The principal buildings are the parish church of St Mary Magdalene, Court Farm, Manor Farm, Shell Manor Farm, Brook Farm and Himbleton Manor.

The earliest reference to Himbleton comes from a 9th century register of Worcester Priory, which states that the manor of Himbleton was given by Ceonwulf, King of Mercia, to the priory of Worcester. There are suggestions that the manor had an Anglo-Saxon church, probably of timber construction, but this has yet to be proven by archaeology.

It is recorded that the monks of Worcester held land at Himbleton as early as 1248 and that by 1378 the prior of Worcester leased the manor of Himbleton to William Hull for the term of thirty years at a rental of £14 2s. 8d (VCH III). The manor remained in the possession of the prior until the dissolution of the priory in 1539-40. The Dean and Chapter of Worcester were granted the manor following the dissolution, but they were relieved of it in 1654, when it was sold by order of Parliament to Nicholas Lockyer, a chaplain of Oliver Cromwell. It was returned to the Dean and Chapter in 1692 following the reformation and remained in their ownership until it passed to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in 1859, who held the manor into the 20th century (VCH III).

3.2. Cartographic Evidence

The earliest available map of Himbleton was the 1777 plan surveyed and drawn by John Snape (WRO BA 1691/14, s971.12). This shows the church, churchyard and vicarage within Church Close (fieldname), which extended to the watercourse on the eastern side, with an area of orchard between the parallel watercourses and the road. Lime Kilns are shown adjacent to the road. Unfortunately, the map could not be reproduced in this report due to copyright restrictions.

The map of Himbleton dating from around 1800 (WRO BA 1691/15, s971.12) shows the churchyard, but the church is not depicted. Unfortunately, the map could not be reproduced in this report due to copyright restrictions.

There was no 25" to 1 mile scale 1st edition Ordnance Survey plan of the area available at the records office, though a copy of the 6" to 1 mile 1885 map provided with the commissioned Historic Environment Record search shows that the churchyard had not shrunk or gained in size over the past century or so. Unfortunately, due to copyright restrictions this plan could not be reproduced.

The later 25" to 1 mile 1904 Ordnance Survey map shows the churchyard in a similar configuration as today, though the vestry, which was built in 1906, does not yet appear (Figure 2). The later edition of 1928 (Figure 3) shows the church and churchyard in a similar layout, as today.

3.3. Specific Background

The history of Himbleton Church is well documented and those interested should consult VCH III, or J.Ropers' study of 1978 (WRO 9395/5, 850 Himbleton) as a starting point. The history is summarised below.

The earliest remaining fabric of the church dates from the 12th century. This remains in the southern wall of the nave and the doorway. The church may well have been a single cell structure at this time. It has also been suggested that the font is 12th century (Roper 1978, 4).

The chancel appears to have been added in the 13th century, though it is much altered by later restoration works. The south chapel appears to date from the late-14th century, with 15th and 16th century alterations; this is often referred to as the 'Shell chapel, as it was used by the parishioners from nearby Shell manor. It has been argued that the chapel was originally located at Shell and dismantled and rebuilt at Himbleton, but this appears to be incorrect as the antiquary Habington records Shell Chapel as 'being in a ruinous condition' in the 17th century.

The 15th and 16th century saw new barrel roofs over the nave and chancel, rebuilt north-aisle, new porch, tower and new painted glass, many of the alterations were made possible by the benefactors Roger and Elizabeth Winter of Huddington. Further major restoration took place in the 17th century with many of the windows altered and new bells to replace the three earlier ones, which dated from 1552.

There was little alteration during the 18th century other than a new set of pews being installed around 1800. A further programme of restoration was carried out in 1853 by the architect Ewan Christian (aptly named!) of London. The restoration was sponsored by Douglas Galton of Himbleton Manor, who is commemorated by a cruciform monument on the eastern side of the churchyard. Douglas Galton was an eminent engineer, scientist and pioneer of social reform. He joined the army in 1840 at the age of 18 and embarked upon a diverse military career, which included inventing an electric spark mechanism detonator for gunpowder charges, carrying out research into the use of iron for railway appliances, and developing an expertise in submarine telegraphy. Perhaps more importantly, he became a leading member of the Army Sanitary Committee who gave advice on improving sanitary conditions, both within military contexts and within the public domain. It therefore seems ironic that he died in 1899 at the age of 77, from blood poisoning.

In 1906 the present vestry was built; it was originally intended for the northern side of the church, but the scale of alterations that would have been required for its incorporation there meant that it was relocated to its present position. The vestry was built by the architect C. Ford-Whitcombe of Broadheath, near Worcester. The lych gate is a 20th century copy of the 15th century porch, much fabricated in re-used timber.

3. The Watching Brief

The watching brief was carried out on the groundworks associated with the development, following the progress of the groundworks team. The trenches were excavated by mini digger and hand-digging where necessary.

The wooden parquet floor inside the vestry was partially removed in order to accommodate the termination of the new service trench inside the building. The floor appeared to be original to the build and, therefore, dated from 1906. The block floor was set onto a concrete raft, which extended to around 16-centimetres below the floor level; only this layer was disturbed during the works and no archaeological features or deposits were observed.

Outside the vestry, a trench arch drainage system was utilised to carry away foul drainage from the new WC. The trench for the system measured 10 metres long by just over a metre wide, with a maximum depth of 80-centimetres. The top 28-centimetres comprised turf and greyish-brown silty-clay topsoil, which contained a small percentage of small to medium sized round and sub-round stones [100]. The topsoil sealed a 50-centimetre thick homogenous layer of medium brown silty-clay, again containing roundish stones [101]. The undisturbed glacial deposits of orange and grey clay-marl and gravel [102] were observed below this level.

The sub-soil [101] did not appear disturbed, or well mixed and unusually for a graveyard soil, contained little redeposited human bone; one fragment of very degraded skull was identified towards the eastern end of the trench, together with a small patch of very degraded unrecognisable bone. There was no visible grave cut associated with this material, which was located around 60-centimetres below the surface, and it is assumed that the bone was from a previously disturbed burial.

A new water main was connected from existing services in the adjacent road, to the vestry. This was 'moled' (drilled through) rather than excavated and no observations were made. The main generally followed the alignment of the churchyard path; the route is shown in Figure 4.

There were no significant archaeological features or deposits encountered during the watching brief and no artefacts were recovered from the trenching.

4. Comment

The watching brief outside the church encountered no significant archaeological deposits that could add to our knowledge of the development of the site. The evidence suggests that there were no medieval, or later burials located on the eastern side of the vestry; there was no evidence to suggest that the periodic restoration / alteration works at the church had disturbed this area of the graveyard.

5. Conclusion

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at St Mary Magdalene's Church, Himbleton, during groundwork associated with the insertion of a new disabled WC and kitchenette into the church vestry. No significant archaeological features or deposits were encountered during the excavations within the churchyard and vestry. This in itself, however, does not indicate that the church was not the site of an earlier Anglo-Saxon founded establishment, but it does indicate that such a church does not extend into the area of the new development.

6. Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Malcolm Jones of Stainburn Taylor Architects Ltd. The plans used for the basis of Figure 4 was supplied by Stainburn Taylor & Michael Reardon Architects. Thanks are also due to Steve Rendle of Wentworth Restoration, who excavated the trench, Mr C.D.Wilson and the PCC of Himbleton Church and the staff of Worcestershire Historic Environment Record and Worcester Records Office.

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Plate 1: Work in progress, view to the south-west



Plate 2: The trench during excavation, view to the north-east

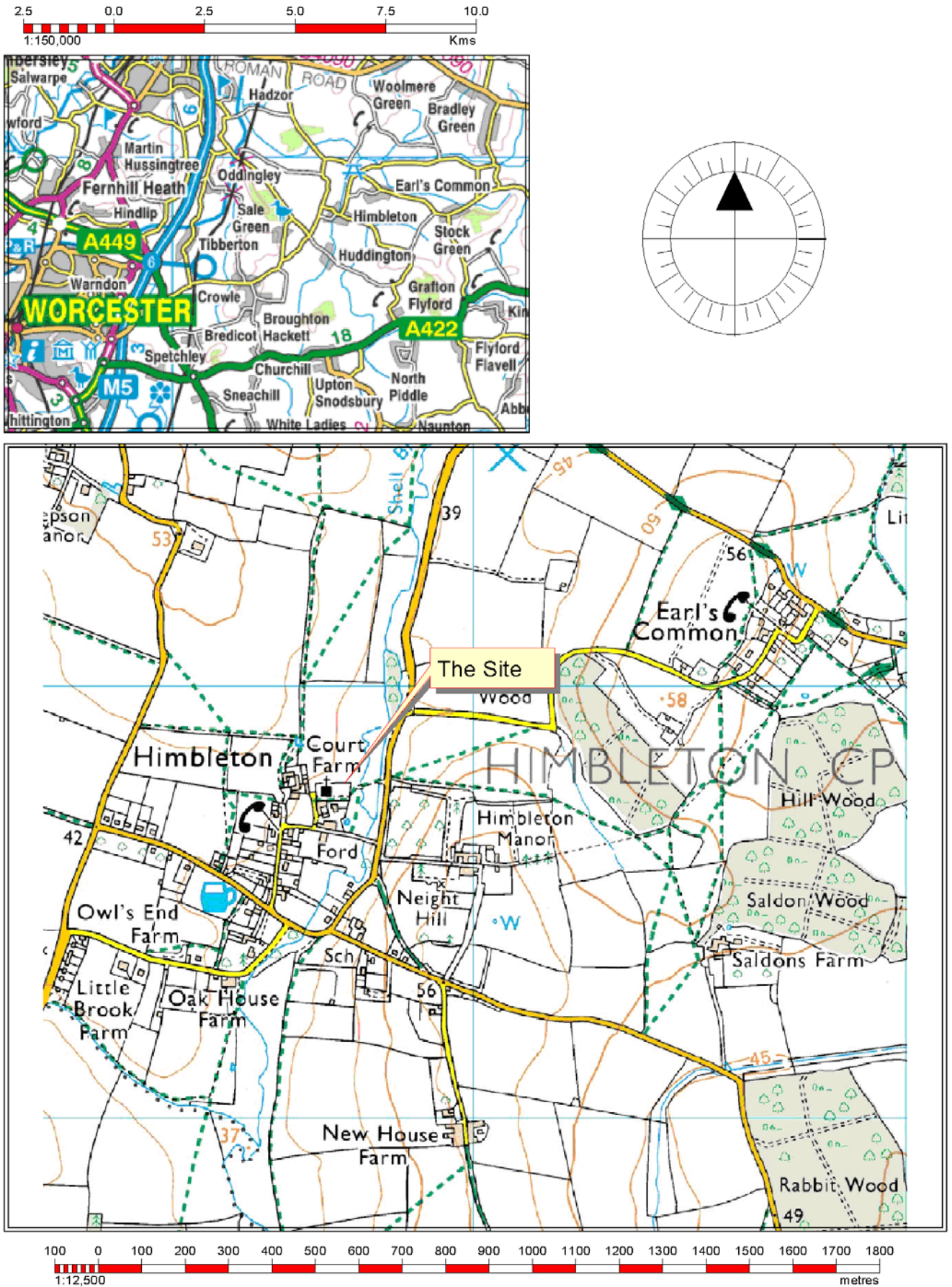


Plate 3: the soil profile (Scale 1-metre)



Plate 4: Interior of the vestry following reinstatement of concrete floor raft

Figure 1: Location of the Site

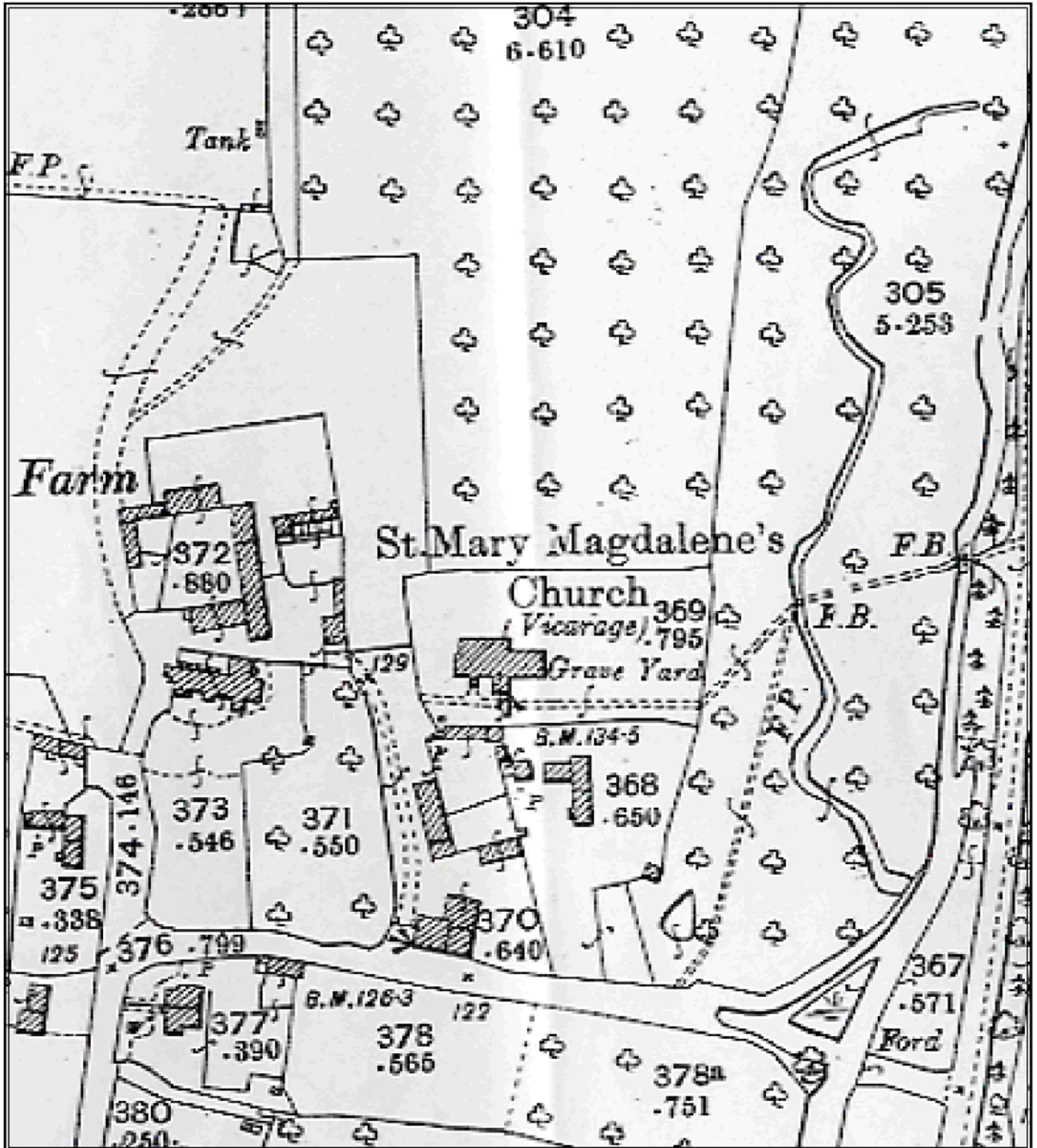


Location of the site at Himbleton,
Worcestershire

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Figure 2: 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey (1904)



The 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map showing Himbleton Church

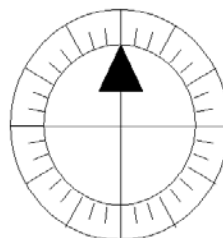
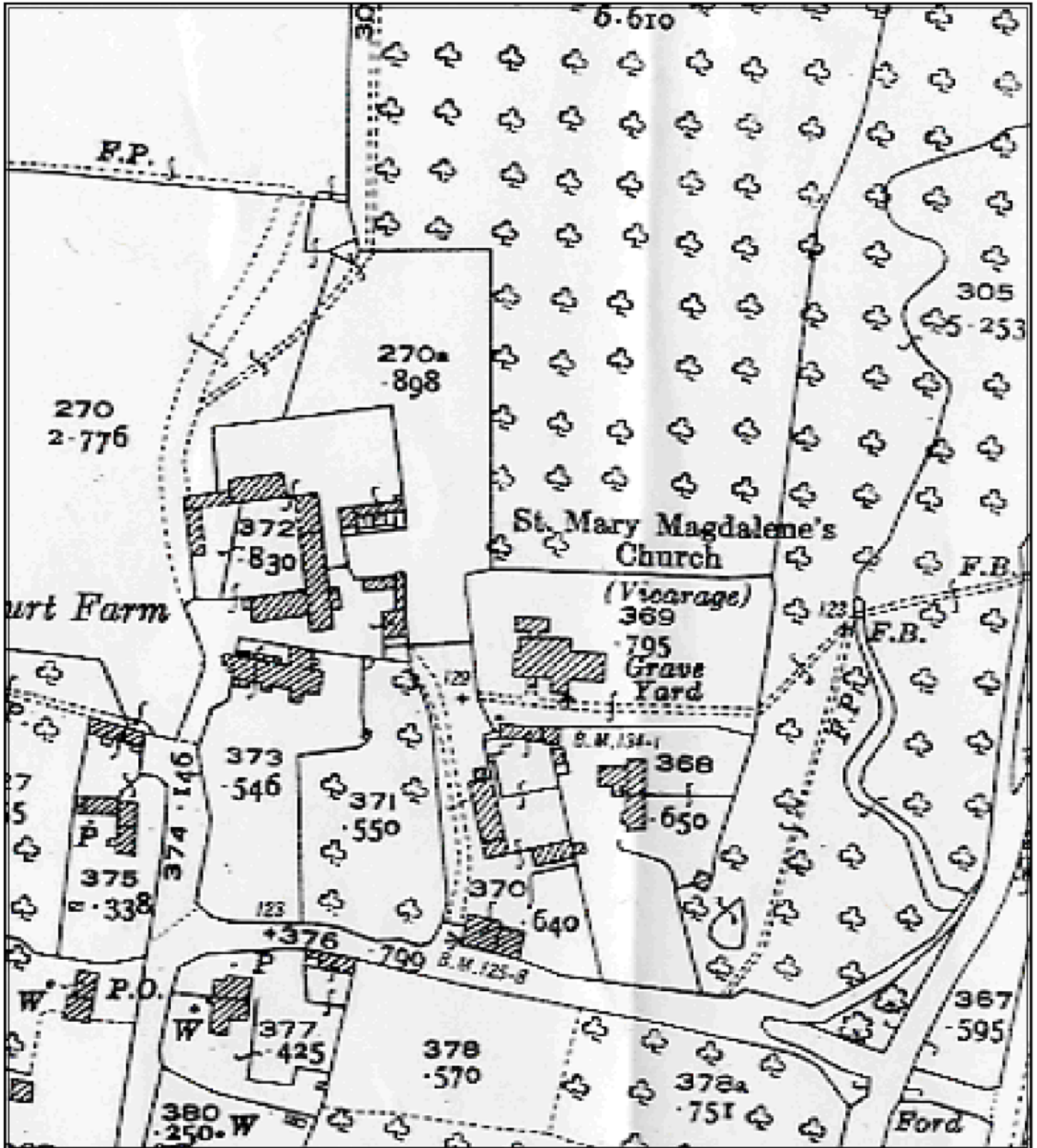
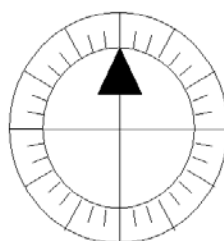


Figure 3: 1928 Edition Ordnance Survey Map



The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map showing Himbleton Church



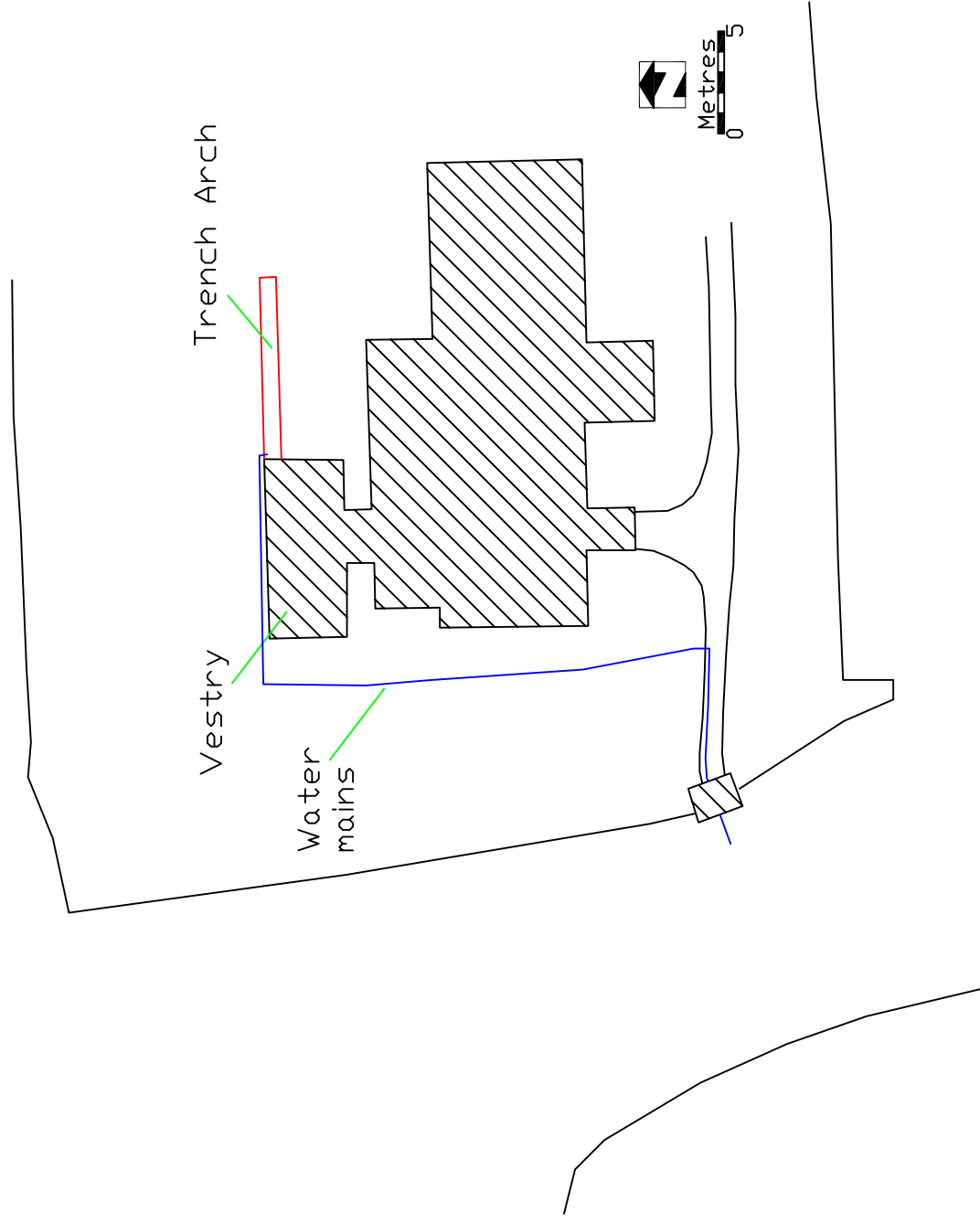


Figure 4: Monitored Area (see text)