

ACSW12



PERSHORE ABBEY CHURCH, NORTH-EAST CHAPEL UNDERPINNING

Archaeological Evaluation

for the Vicar and Churchwardens of Pershore Abbey

April 2012

PERSHORE ABBEY CHURCH, NORTH-EAST CHAPEL UNDERPINNING

Archaeological Evaluation

for the Vicar and Churchwardens of Pershore Abbey

April 2012

HA Job no.: ACSW12

HAS no.: 929

NGR: SO 94807 45806

Parish: Pershore

Council: Worcestershire County

OASIS ref.: headland3-122251

SMR no.: WSM 46449

Archive will be deposited with Hartlebury Museum, Worcestershire

Project Manager

Mike Kimber

Author

Luke Craddock-Bennett

Fieldwork

Luke Craddock-Bennett, Kath Crooks

Graphics

Caroline Norrman & Anna Sztromwasser

Approved by

Mike Kimber – Project Manager



.....

Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd
© Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd 2012

Midlands & West

Headland Archaeology
Unit 1, Premier Business Park, Faraday Road
Hereford HR4 9NZ
01432 364 901

hereford@headlandarchaeology.com

www.headlandarchaeology.com

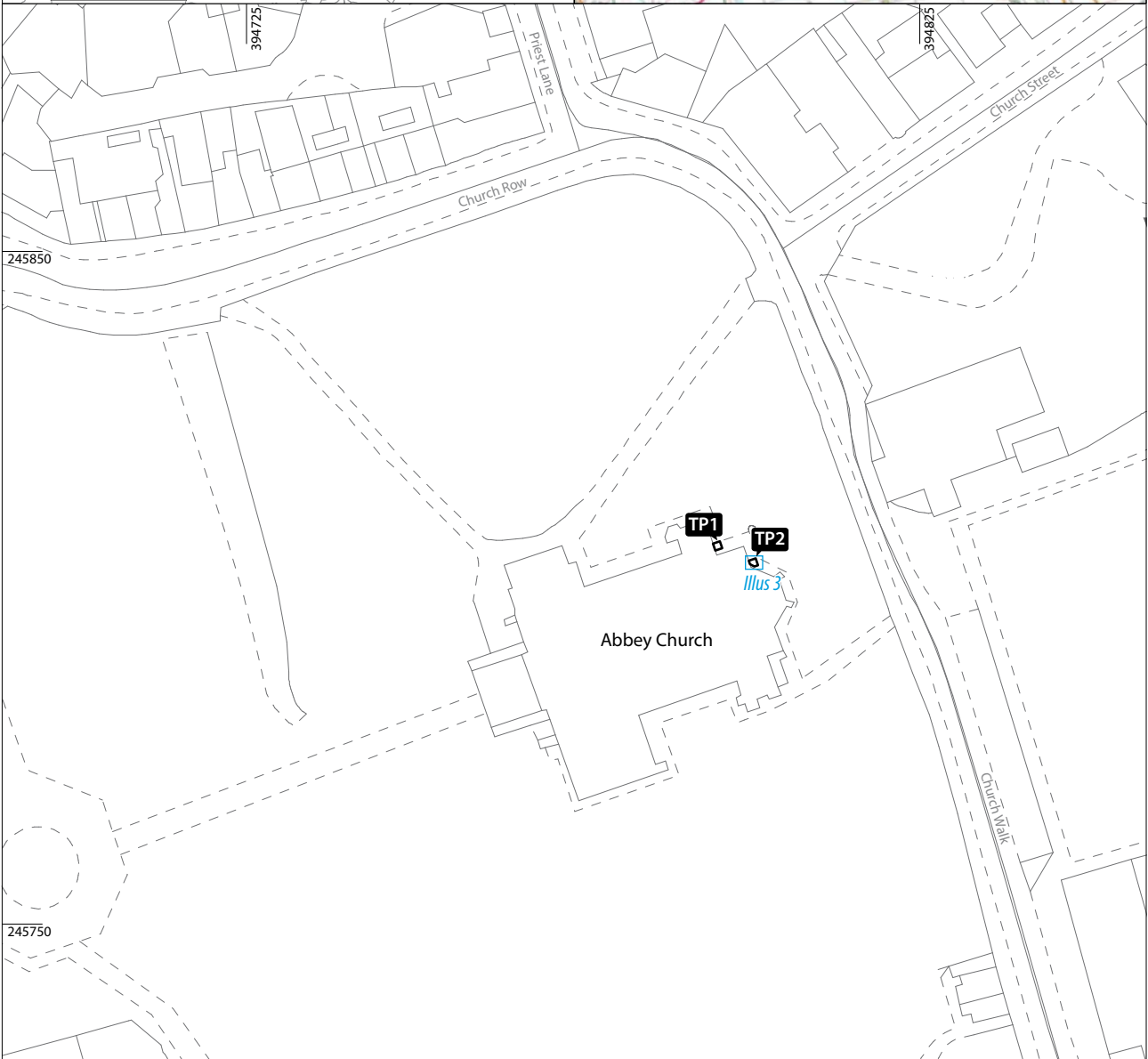
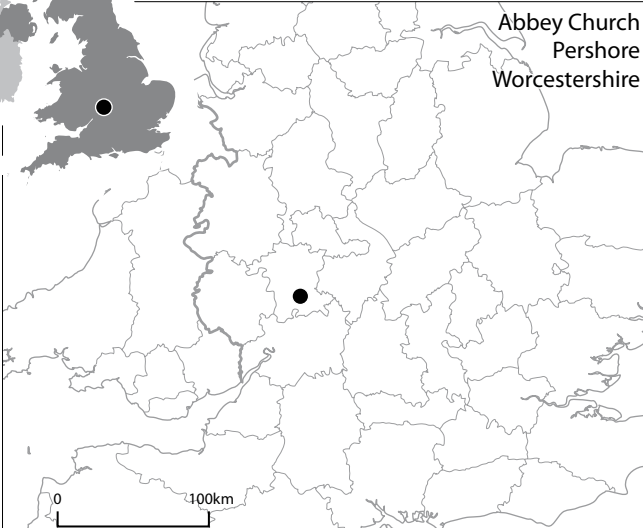


CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	Location	1
1.2	Archaeological background	1
	<i>North-East Chapel</i>	1
	<i>North Chapel</i>	2
	<i>Lady Chapel</i>	2
2.	METHOD	2
3.	RESULTS	2
3.1	Test Pit 1	2
3.2	Test Pit 2	3
4.	DISCUSSION	4
5.	CONCLUSION	4
6.	ARCHIVE	4
7.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	5
8.	APPENDICES	6
8.1	Appendix 1 – Site registers	6
	<i>Context register</i>	6
	<i>Photographic register</i>	7

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<i>Illus 1</i>		viii
	<i>Site location</i>	
<i>Illus 2</i>		2
	<i>Test Pit 1 showing foundations of north-east transept [103]</i>	
<i>Illus 3</i>		3
	<i>Plan of Test Pit 2 showing 'walls' [204] and [205]</i>	
<i>Illus 4</i>		3
	<i>Extract from plan of Abbey showing location of pre-dissolution Lady Chapel</i>	
<i>Illus 5</i>		4
	<i>SK 207 located between 'walls' [204] and [205]</i>	



Reproduced using 2011 OS 1:25,000 Explorer Series No. 190 and digital 1:2500 data supplied by Robert Kilgour Architects. Ordnance Survey © Crown copyright 2012. All rights reserved. Licence No. AL 100013329

Scale 1:1000 @ A4



0 50m

Illus 1

Site location

PERSHORE ABBEY CHURCH, NORTH-EAST CHAPEL UNDERPINNING

Archaeological Evaluation

Headland Archaeology excavated two test pits at the east end of Persnore Abbey. The North-East Chapel is suffering from subsidence and the test pits were excavated to inform the design of a program of underpinning. Two articulated human skeletons were revealed which predate the chapel, which has early 13th century origins. One of the burials was found within a masonry niche which may represent a cist or the remains of the 13th century Lady Chapel.

1. INTRODUCTION

Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd. was commissioned by the client to undertake an archaeological evaluation within the grounds of Persnore Abbey (SAM 260).

The North-East Chapel is suffering from subsidence caused by desiccation of the surrounding soil by tree roots. It is proposed to underpin the chapel to prevent further movement. In order to inform the design of the underpinning, two engineering test pits were required to assess the depth of the chapel's foundations and their method of bonding to adjacent structures.

The Diocesan Advisory Committee was advised by Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service that in order to conform with best practice (PPS5: Planning for the Historic Environment) an archaeological evaluation of the area of the proposed work should be undertaken prior to design finalisation. The proposed works were to take place in an area known to contain human remains (Vaughan 2006).

A written scheme of investigation was produced by Headland Archaeology (Kimber 2012) in response to a brief prepared by the archaeological advisor to the Planning Authority (Glyde 2012) outlining the work required.

1.1 Location

The site is located at the east end of the Abbey Church in Persnore (NGR SO 94807 45806).

The site lies adjacent to the exterior walls of two chapels located at the eastern end of the north aisle and the apsidal end to the presbytery (previously the site of the Lady Chapel), at a height of c.21m OD. The underlying geology is Lower Lias formation of the Jurassic period overlain by alluvium.

1.2 Archaeological background

Persnore has Roman and Anglo-Saxon antecedents, with a minster church founded in c.AD 698, but the present town is likely to have grown in the main following the foundation of the Benedictine Abbey in c.AD 970 as a small rural settlement adjacent to its north gate (Dalwood 1996). Following its establishment as a burgh after 1065 Persnore became moderately prosperous via the wool trade, but declined towards the end of the medieval period.

The Abbey has had a long history, from Saxon religious house, via a Norman and later medieval structure to the rather truncated remnants now forming the present Abbey church. A Saxon foundation is preserved within the present-day nave (Blockley 1996), while Norman architecture is visible within the south transept.

Andrews (in Dalwood & Ratkai 1996) states that after the dissolution of the monasteries the Lady Chapel and nave were demolished and sold for building materials. The standing part of the Abbey (the crossing, transepts and chancel) was purchased from the crown by the parishioners of Holy Cross after the surrender of the monastery in 1534.

North-East Chapel

The north-east, or St John's chapel is thought to date from the early 13th century when the east end of the Abbey underwent alterations. The chapel has a restored lancet window in the east wall and an original window on the north side (Page 1924).

An archaeological watching brief carried out in 2005 at the north-east corner of the chapel revealed four articulated inhumations buried between 0.17m and 0.6m below ground level (Vaughan 2006). Two of these burials were truncated by the chapel structure, suggesting that



burials had been interred in this area of the churchyard both prior to and after the construction of the chapel in the early 13th century.

North Chapel

The eastern arm of the presbytery was burnt down in 1223 and the rebuilding of the presbytery was begun at the east end and completed by 1239. The standing masonry of the North Chapel was constructed at this time, although the existing eastern wall of the chapel dates to the 15th century. It is likely that the existing chapel was built on foundations pre-dating the 13th century.

Lady Chapel

The current apsidal end of the presbytery was built in 1847 on the site of the former Lady Chapel. The Lady Chapel, which previously extended c.4m further east than the current structure (Illus 4), was demolished shortly after the dissolution in 1539. The construction of the pre-dissolution building is likely to date to the early 13th century, but this may have replaced an earlier chapel. Leland writing in the early 16th century describes the life of an early benefactor of the Abbey, Earl Odda (died 1056) and records that:

Workmen digging in the Lady Chapel came upon a leaden coffin containing the bones of the 'founder' and inscribed with his epitaph, 'Odda, sometimes duke, in times past called Edwin in baptism, a worshipper of God and a monk before his death, lies here'. (Hearne 1745)

It is highly likely that a benefactor of such importance would be buried within the Abbey so it is probable that a building existed on the site from at least the mid-11th century.

2. METHOD

The objectives of the archaeological programme were to:

- ensure that any human remains encountered in the course of the works were recovered respectfully for appropriate reburial at a later date
- determine the presence or absence of significant archaeological remains that would be impacted by the proposed works
- establish the depths at which human remains occur, and the density of both *in situ* burials and disarticulated material
- establish whether or not any structural remains predating the North-East Chapel are present
- inform the design of any further archaeological

works that may be required by condition of faculty

- produce and deposit a satisfactory archive and disseminate the results of the work via grey-literature reporting and publication as appropriate.

Two test pits were excavated by hand by suitably qualified archaeologists. Test Pit 1 was located at the point where the North Chapel abuts the North-East Chapel. Test Pit 2 was positioned at the point where the North-East Chapel meets the apsidal end of the presbytery.

Modern concrete was removed over the position of the test pits prior to archaeological works being undertaken. Both test pits measured approximately 1m by 1m in plan and were to be excavated archaeologically to a depth of 1m. Below this depth excavation continued by machine under the supervision of a structural engineer and a qualified archaeologist.

All recording followed IfA Standards and Guidance. Recording was undertaken on Headland Archaeology pro forma trench record sheets. 35mm colour transparencies and black/white print photographs were taken, and a drawn section of each trench was recorded at a scale of 1:10.

All human bone recovered from the evaluation was retained by the church authorities for reburial at a later date.

3. RESULTS

Due to the encroachment of existing foundations into the trenches, the dimensions of the test pits were reduced in area.

3.1 Test Pit 1

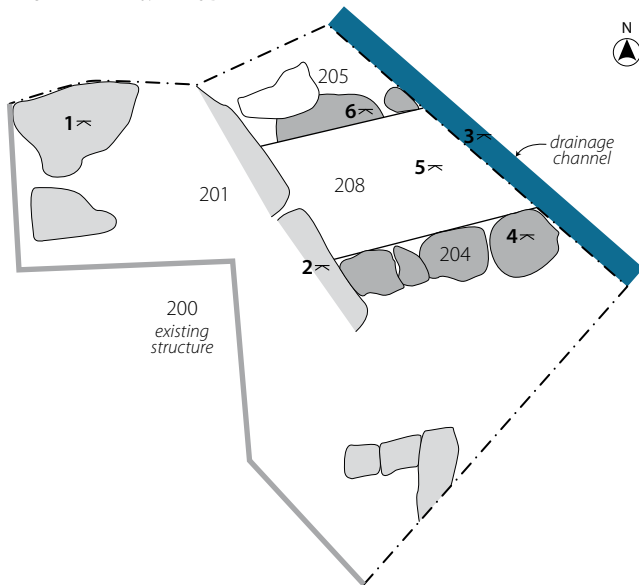
Test Pit 1 exposed 0.3m deep concrete foundations (apparently from a relatively modern attempt at



Illus 2

Test Pit 1 showing foundations of north-east transept [103]

Height	
1	20.99m OD
2	20.77m OD
3	21.06m OD
4	20.13m OD
5	20.03m OD
6	20.12m OD



Illus 3

Plan of Test Pit 2 showing 'walls' [204] and [205]

underpinning the North-East Chapel) in the south of the trench and foundations relating to the North Chapel in the west of the trench. The concrete and foundations which encroached into the trench were left *in situ* resulting in a reduced excavation area measuring 0.8m by 0.6m in plan.

The foundations beneath the North Chapel [103] consisted of large pieces of roughly coursed, unshaped stone, present to a depth of 20.47m OD (0.4m below ground level). Immediately beneath the foundation stones was a rubble deposit of mortar and stone within a brown clayey silt matrix [108]. This layer was 0.2m in depth and directly overlay a natural deposit of orange gravel.

Abutting the North Chapel, a deposit of modern hardcore sealed a dark brown, sandy clay loam [105]. The top of this 'graveyard' deposit was present at a depth of 20.57m OD and continued down to a depth of 20.27m OD where it overlay natural gravels. Within deposit [105] the lower left leg of an adult skeleton [SK 101] was revealed at a depth of 20.32m OD on an east-west alignment. The foundation

cut for the North-East Chapel had truncated the burial towards the lower end of the femur.

3.2 Test Pit 2

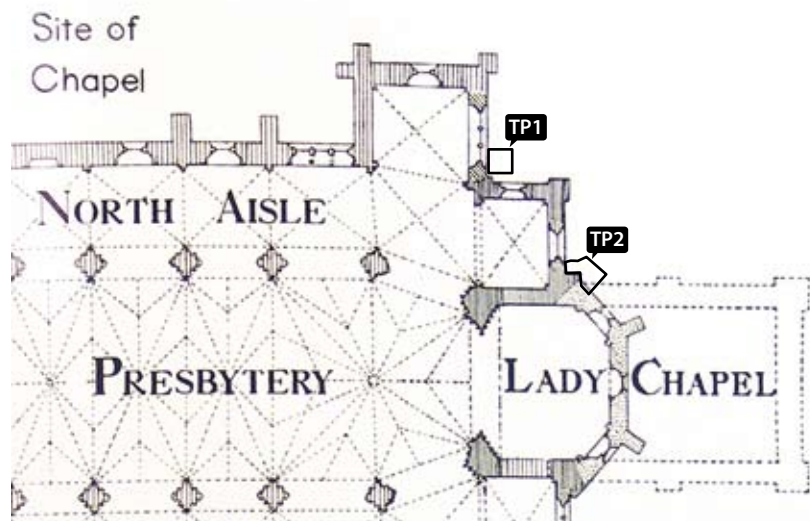
The area of the Test Pit available for excavation had previously been excavated. Large lumps of concrete and a black bin bag containing disarticulated human remains were present to a depth of 20.26m OD (0.8m below ground level).

The stone foundations of the apsidal end of the presbytery encroached into Test Pit 2 and reduced the working area to approximately 0.9m by 0.4m. The foundations [201] were composed of un-worked, un-bonded stones of various sizes and were present to a depth of 20.44m OD. Beneath the foundations was a layer of rounded stones within an orange silt matrix [202]. A dark brown fine silty loam [203] beneath the rounded stones contained a large amount of disarticulated human remains and was present to a depth of 20.13m OD.

Beneath the disturbance caused by previous excavation, deposit [203] sealed two masonry features.

Wall [204] was encountered at a depth of 20.13m OD. It was orientated on an approximate east-west alignment and was formed from stones of various sizes that were squared on the northern face. The stones were mortared with orange sand and formed a flat surface to the top of the wall. The wall continued into the southern section of the trench, suggesting a width for the feature in excess of 0.3m.

Parallel and 0.33m to the north of wall [204] was a further line of stones. Wall [205] was not as substantial as wall [204], being only 0.12m wide and unmortared, but



Illus 4

*Extract from plan of Abbey showing location of pre-dissolution Lady Chapel
Reproduced from Page (1924)*



Illus 5

SK 207 located between 'walls' [204] and [205]

5. CONCLUSION

The burials revealed during excavation are likely to pre-date the 13th century. Both burials have been truncated or overlain by existing Abbey buildings. The northernmost Test Pit (1) revealed no archaeological deposits below 0.6m below ground level.

Archaeological deposits are present to a greater depth in the south of the site. An articulated burial was encountered at a depth of 1.16m below ground level within Test Pit 2. Excavation did not continue below this depth and natural deposits were not observed, suggesting a continuation of archaeological deposits. The presence of archaeological deposits at a greater depth in the south of the site may relate to the remains of the former Lady Chapel in this location.

Previous excavations at the mid point between the two latest test pits (Vaughan 2006) revealed burials to a depth of 0.6m below ground level, which is comparable with the results of Test Pit 1.

Due to the disturbance caused by the current foundations, it seems likely that the density of *in situ* archaeology will increase with distance from the existing buildings.

The proposed methodology for underpinning the North-East Chapel involves the excavation of a series of 1m by 1m holes adjacent to the foundations of the structure. Due to the instability of the structure it is proposed to excavate, underpin and backfill each hole before excavating adjacent holes.

Although excavation of all archaeological material in one continuous phase of works would be desirable, it is clearly impractical due to the proximity of the excavations to failing foundations. A scheme of interrupted excavation in line with the methodology implemented for the current phase of works is the most practical approach in this instance.

6. ARCHIVE

The archive will be deposited at Worcestershire County Museum within one year of the completion of fieldwork.

was faced on its southern edge, suggesting a relationship between the two features.

Excavation of the fine silt loam [208] between the two walls revealed the lower limbs of a human burial, buried on an east-west alignment [SK 207]. The burial continued beneath the foundations for the apse. Due to difficulties in excavating such a constrained area, excavation ceased at a depth of 19.9m OD. The burial was covered and left *in situ*. Due to the constraints of the trench no attempt was made to excavate further.

4. DISCUSSION

Both burials revealed during the archaeological works pre-date the current structures on site. In the case of [SK 101], the burial had been cut by the foundations for the North Chapel which are likely to pre-date the 13th century.

The stone 'walls' associated with burial [SK 207] raise a number of possibilities. The presence of the burial between the two walls suggests that they may form a stone-lined grave or 'cist', a tradition dated to the 12–13th century in the neighbouring county of Herefordshire. However, wall [204] seems too substantial to relate to a burial, and occupies the correct position to relate to the pre-1539 Lady Chapel that extended to the east of the current Abbey. The wall does not entirely match the orientation of the main axis of the Abbey, but this may be the result of observations within a small area distorting the true orientation of the wall. It is possible that the exterior wall of the Lady Chapel has been used as one side of a grave and a less substantial line of stones [205] has been inserted to form the other.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2010 *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment*.
- Blockley, K 1996 *Pershore Abbey Excavations 1996. Interim Report*, Cambrian Archaeological Associates.
- Dalwood, H 1996 *Archaeological Assessment of Pershore, Hereford and Worcester*, Hereford and Worcester County Council, Report 335.
- Dalwood, H & Ratkai, S 1996 *Evaluation at the West End of the Nave, Pershore Abbey*, County Archaeology Service, Hereford and Worcester County Council, Report 476.
- Glyde, M 2012 *Requirements for an Archaeological Evaluation in Advance of Groundworks at Abbey Church of the Holy Cross, Pershore, Worcestershire*, Worcestershire County Council, WSM 05407.
- Hearne, T 1745 (ed.) *The Itinerary of John Leland the Antiquary*, Oxford University Press.
- Kimber, M 2012 *North-East Chapel Underpinning, Pershore Abbey Church, Worcestershire*, Project Design for Archaeological Evaluation, Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd.
- Page, W 1924 (ed.) *The Victoria History of the County of Worcester. Volume IV*, The St. Catherine Press, London.
- Vaughan, T 2006 *Archaeological Watching Brief at Pershore Abbey, Holy Cross, Pershore, Worcestershire*, WHEAS Report 1439.



8. APPENDICES

8.1 Appendix 1 – Site registers

Context register

TP 1 ground surface = 20.87m OD

TP 2 ground surface = 21.06m OD

Test Pit	Context	Description	Depth (below surface m)
1	SK 101	Articulated adult skeleton. Left tibia, fibula and patella revealed. Burial appears to be truncated by north-east transept.	0.55–0.6
1	102	Deposit of concrete in south of trench relating to previous episode of underpinning.	0–0.3
1	103	Foundation of existing north-east transept. Large pieces of un-shaped stone, roughly coursed, beneath more evenly coursed layer (0.1m deep).	0–0.4
1	104	Hardcore deposit. Abuts foundation [103]. Lies beneath concrete capping surface. Northern side of the trench only.	0–0.3
1	105	Dark brown sandy clay loam. Contains frequent disarticulated human bone. Gravel, flint, mortar, stone inclusions. Graveyard deposit.	0.3–0.6
1	106	Hypothetical grave cut for [SK 101]. Not visible in plan or section.	0.55–0.6
1	107	Hypothetical fill of grave [106]. Not visible.	0.55–0.6
1	108	Lower fill/consolidation in foundation trench beneath footing [103]. Rubble – mortar and stone deposited within a brown clayey silt matrix.	0.4–0.6
1	109	Presumed cut for foundation trench of transept.	0.6–0.6
2	200	Existing apsidal end to presbytery (above ground masonry).	0
6	201	Foundation of existing apse. Rubble, stones vary in size, no bonding, yellow stone common to Abbey predominates.	0–0.62
2	202	Layer of cobbles/rounded stones deposited sparsely throughout an orange and black silt. Beneath [201].	0.62–0.72
2	203	Dark brown (with reddish hue) fine silty loam. Contains disarticulated bone. Graveyard soil.	0.72–0.93
2	204	Line of mortared stones. Faced on north side. E-W alignment. Mortared with orange sand. Either foundation for east end which previously extended through this area, or the side of a cist?	0.93–1.16+
2	205	Line of un-mortared stones parallel to [204]. White stone, un-mortared. Side of a cist or related to former east end?	0.93–1.16+
2	206	Modern backfill of previous excavation. Lumps of concrete, 'Monster munch' wrapper, 1 bin bag full of charnel (apparently relating to 1996 excavation, R. Hancox. pers. comm.)	0–0.8
2	SK207	Articulated lower legs. Look to be a child's, but difficult to tell without further excav. No evidence for a coffin. Running into western section (beneath Abbey foundations). Ankles and feet disturbed during excavation. Not fully excavated. Left <i>in situ</i> .	1.16–1.16+
2	208	Fill over [SK 207]. Indistinguishable from deposit [203].	0.93–1.16+

Photographic register

Photo no.	Colour slide	B&W	Digital	Direction	Description
01	624/17	657/17	21	–	ID Shot – ACSW12
02	–	–	22	S	Charnel bag <i>in situ</i> within deposit [206]
03	624/18	657/18	23	N	[SK 101]
04	624/19	657/19	24	S	Test Pit 2 after removal of [206]. Deposit [203] in base of trench
05	624/20	657/20	25	S	Walls [204] & [205]
06	624/21	657/21	26	N	Walls [204] & [205]
07	624/22	657/22	27	W	Test Pit 1 – post-ex, footing [103]
08	–	–	28	W	Test Pit 1 – post-ex
09	624/23	657/23	29	S	Test Pit 1 – post-ex
10	–	–	30	N	Test Pit 1 – post-ex
11	–	–	31	E	Test Pit 2 – general shot
12	–	–	32	W	Test Pit 2 – general shot
13	624/25	657/25	33	S	Burial [SK 207]
14	–	–	34	W	Test Pit 1 – excavation by structural engineer to depth of 1.7m



Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd
© Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd 2012

Midlands & West

Headland Archaeology
Unit 1, Premier Business Park, Faraday Road
Hereford HR4 9NZ
01432 364 901
hereford@headlandarchaeology.com

South & East

Headland Archaeology
Technology Centre, Stanbridge Road
Leighton Buzzard LU7 4QH
01525 850878
leighton.buzzard@headlandarchaeology.com

North East

Headland Archaeology
13 Jane Street
Edinburgh EH6 5HE
0131 467 7705
office@headlandarchaeology.com

North West

Headland Archaeology
10 Payne Street
Glasgow G4 0LF
0141 354 8100
glasgowoffice@headlandarchaeology.com

www.headlandarchaeology.com