

# Ambrey Archaeology

Watching Brief  
on the removal  
of a retaining wall  
at

St Gregory's Churchyard,  
Castlemorton, Malvern

WSM73297

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## Archaeological watching brief of removal of a boundary wall at Castlemorton Churchyard, Castlemorton, Malvern, Worcestershire

### Summary

A watching brief was undertaken by Ambrey Archaeology at the Church of St Gregory in Castlemorton as a condition of planning permission granted by Malvern Hills District Council for the demolition of a dilapidated stone boundary wall and its replacement with a reinforced brick wall. The works were carried out from 8<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

St Gregory's, a Grade I listed church about 50m to the south of the site, dates to the early 12th century with 13th and 14th century additions.

The Castle Tump, a Scheduled Monument, is located about 70m to the south of the churchyard boundary. The scheduling includes a 12<sup>th</sup> century motte castle probably built by a member of the Foliott family, a later moated enclosure and four fishponds. Until the 14th Century, Castlemorton was known as Morton Foliott.

The wall was about 0.44m thick, constructed of Malvern Stone rubble in two rows with a face to the south, bound with lime mortar. A possible re-used architectural fragment was recovered from the base.

The southern churchyard boundary wall is depicted on the 1840 tithe map of Castlemorton as a slightly convex line, with a possible gateway or entrance close to the road.

The school, immediately to the south of the churchyard, was built in 1849 and is shown on the OS first edition map. The graveyard wall has been straightened and follows its current line. A pathway is marked, leading from the church to the southern boundary, perhaps for access for the pupils from the school.

## Introduction

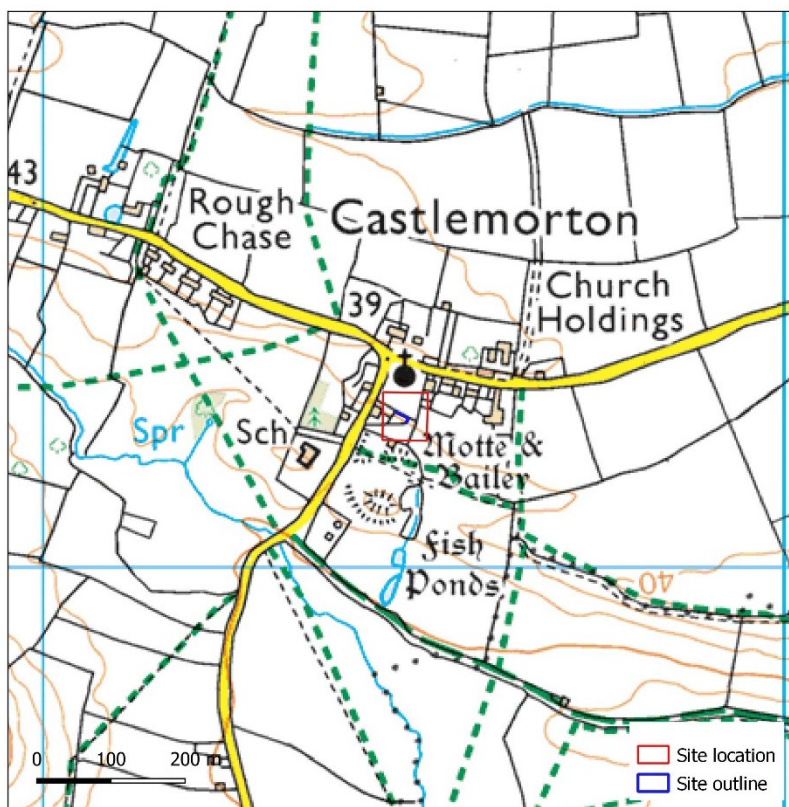
Ambrey Archaeology was commissioned by Andrea Burton of Nick Joyce Architects to carry out an archaeological watching brief at the Church of St Gregory in Castlemorton (SO 79492 37204). The watching brief was undertaken as a condition of planning permission granted by Malvern Hills District Council (20/00975/FUL) for the demolition of a dilapidated stone boundary wall and its replacement with a reinforced brick wall.

Archaeology and Planning advisor to Wychavon and Malvern Hills District Councils, Aidan Smyth, considered that the proposed development had the potential to impact on heritage assets. The level of the church yard is higher than the surrounding land, a common feature of medieval churchyards, suggesting that it is likely that human remains will be encountered during excavation into the earthen bank.

A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared (Ambrey Archaeology 2020) and approved by Malvern Hills District Council.

## Location, topography and geology

The Church of St Gregory is located to the south of Church Road in the hamlet of Castlemorton, in pastoral landscape approximately 4km to the south-east of Little Malvern in Worcestershire. The section of dilapidated churchyard wall to be removed and replaced formed a boundary between the



churchyard and the garden of The Old School House to the south.

The graveyard of the Church of St Gregory is situated at a height of 1.3m above the garden of the Old School House, to the south. The boundary wall to be removed, much of which had collapsed, was constructed of rubble known locally as Malvern stone. A grassy path runs between the graveyard and the wall.

Bedrock at the site is of the Branscombe Mudstone Formation, just to the north of a seam of Arden Sandstone (BGS, 2020).

Figure 1 Site location

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## Archaeological background

No prehistoric finds or features are recorded within the search area although an area of Palaeolithic potential has been identified in head deposits in the bottom of the valley of a stream which runs about 280m to the south of the site.

Placename evidence suggests a Roman occupation site may have been located about 360m to the south at a location called Middle Millers Burn Ground on the 1840 tithe map of Castlemorton (WSM30852).

St Gregory's Church (HER WSM07663; Grade I listed, NHLE 1156879), about 50m to the south, dates to the early 12th century with 13th and 14th century additions. Recent archaeological work in the bell tower (Taylor & Harris 2012) found evidence of the making of church bells in or around the church at some pointing to the later 17<sup>th</sup> century, but possibly before 1684.

The Castle Tump (HER WSM00280; Scheduled Monument NHLE 1005505) is located about 70m to the south of the churchyard boundary. The scheduling includes a motte castle probably built in the 12th century by a member of the Folliott family (VCH 1924, 49), a later moated enclosure and four fishponds. Until the 14th Century, Castlemorton was known as Morton Folliet (ibid.).

On the 1840 tithe map of Castlemorton (Figure 2) the school is shown as open ground, with the church to the north and the oval area of Castlemorton Tump to the south. Fishponds are depicted to the east of the tump. The southern churchyard boundary wall is depicted as a slightly convex line, with a possible gateway or entrance close to the road, just to the north of where the road widens slightly.

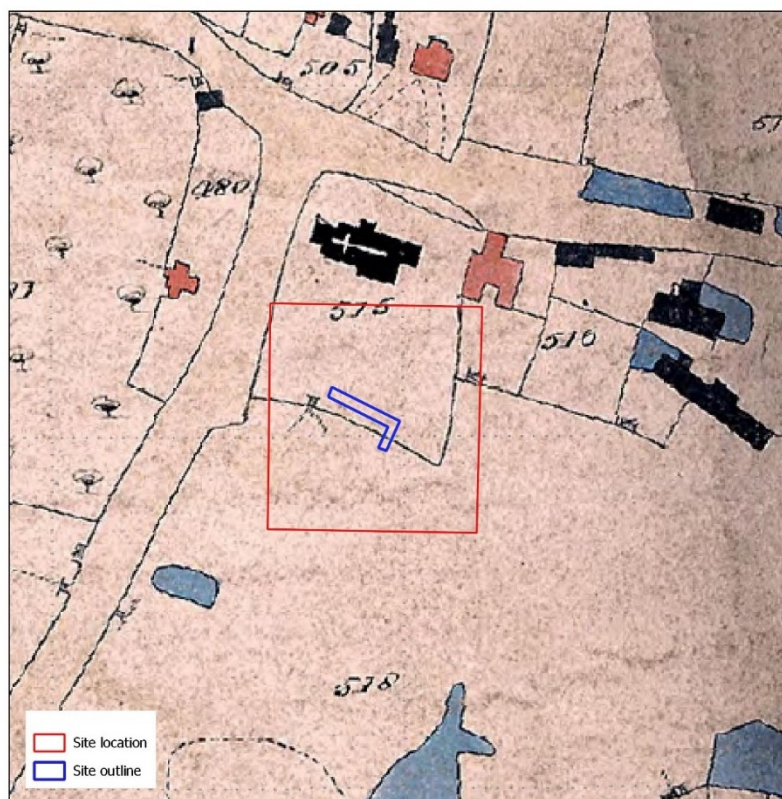


Figure 2 Extract of the 1840 tithe map of Castlemorton

The school, immediately to the south of the churchyard, was built in 1849 (Brooks & Pevsner 2007, 215) and is shown on the OS first edition map (Figure 3). The graveyard wall has been straightened and follows its current line. A pathway is marked, leading from the church to the southern boundary, perhaps for access for the pupils from the school.

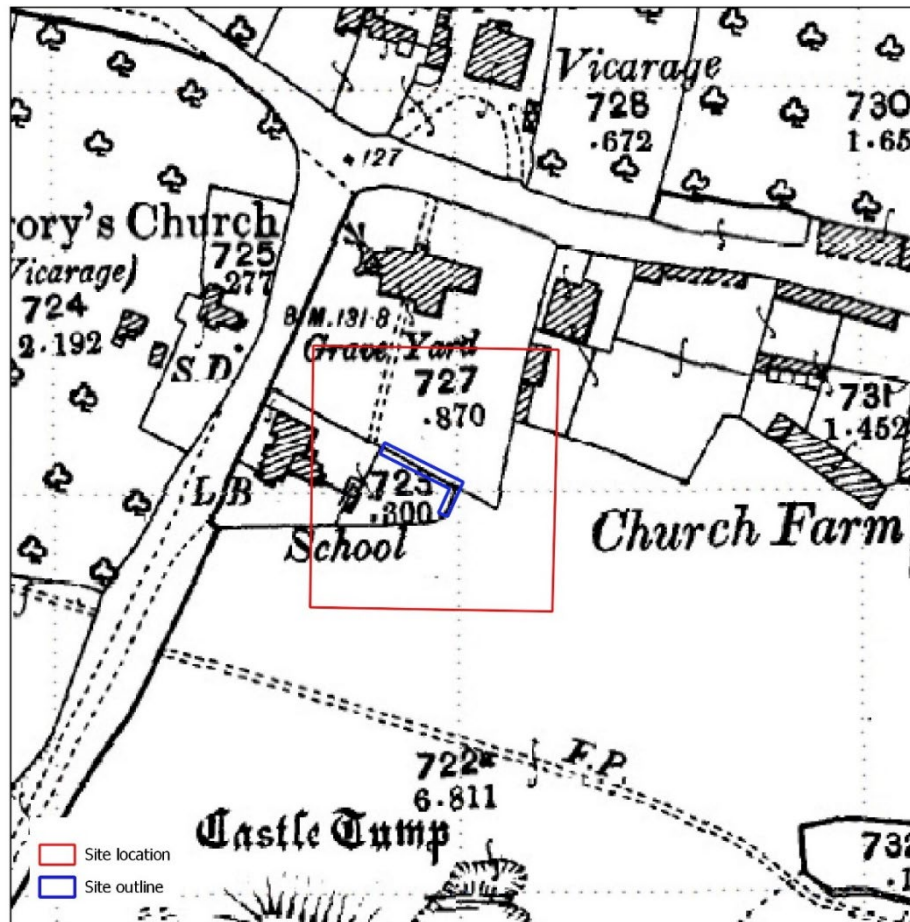


Figure 3 Extract of the 1885 Ordnance Survey map

It seems likely that during the construction of the school, the grave yard boundary was cut back and straightened, suggesting that the wall which was partially demolished in the course of this project dated to around 1849.

The site is now surrounded by the Church Farm smallholding (WSM70666) a 20<sup>th</sup> century smallholding asset of Worcestershire County Council.

## Objectives

In accordance with the requirements of The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA 2014), the objective of a watching brief is to allow a rapid investigation and recording of any archaeological features that are uncovered during the groundworks within the application area to establish their nature function, date and significance where possible.



## Methodology

A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared by Ambrey Archaeology (AA 2020).

Prior to commencing fieldwork, a search of the Historic Environment Record (500m radius from the centre of the site) was obtained. Relevant historic sources including the first edition Ordnance Survey and the tithe map of Castlemorton Parish were also consulted. The results of the HER search are presented in Figure 4, Appendix 2 and Historic maps are depicted in Figures 2 to 3.

Fieldwork took place from 8<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> October 2020. The removal, using a mechanical excavator, of vegetation and rubble overlying the wall as well as tree stumps was observed, following which excavation of the wall foundations and excavation of the bank in which the former wall was set were also observed.

## Results

Details of the contexts recorded are presented in the Appendix.

The wall before demolition was topped by a layer of collapsed stone and in the north-east of the site, a mixture of stone and rubbish. It was covered with a layer of scrub and vegetation including trees and shrubs (Plates 1 and 2).

Following removal of scrub and vegetation, a layer of collapse and rubble along the line of the revetment wall was removed. This was mixed in the eastern corner with modern waste - glass and china fragments, as well as brick and metal finds, all of mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> century date. Some indeterminate bone fragments were recovered both in the 20<sup>th</sup> century waste and in looser areas of subsoil around tree and shrub roots, these were reburied on site (Plate 3).

The wall measured about 0.44m thick and was constructed of Malvern Stone rubble in two rows with a face to the south, bound with lime mortar. It was removed to a depth of 1.1m to 1.4m below the graveyard present ground level. The base remained unexcavated.

The wall was cut into the natural substrate, a compact, grey silty clay which was overlain by a reddish silty clay deposit, much disturbed by rooting (Plates 4-7).

A single possible architectural fragment was found reused at the base of the excavations of the boundary wall. The fragment appears to have been partially shaped (Plate 8) and may have been rejected or unfinished.

## Conclusion

Archaeological observation of the demolition of the southern boundary wall of the graveyard of the Church of St Gregory revealed that the wall was constructed to revet a bank of natural clay and continues below the depth excavated.

The wall forms the northern garden boundary of the Old School House, the former Castlemorton School. The wall may have been constructed in 1846 when the school was built, as map evidence suggests that the previous graveyard boundary had been modified.

It is likely that the wall was rebuilt in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century using material from the previous graveyard wall. The possible rejected architectural fragment recovered may have been salvaged from a period of reconstruction at the church and used in the construction of the previous wall.

## Bibliography

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## Cartography

1840 Tithe map of Castlemorton

1885 OS map of Worcestershire, scale 1:2500

Photos



*Plate 1 Site before excavation, from south-west*



*Plate 2 Wall before excavation, from south-west*





*Plate 3 Western extent of demolition and excavation, by modern garden shed*



*Plate 4 South-west facing section following removal of revetment wall*





*Plate 5 South-facing section following  
removal of revetment wall*



*Plate 6 foundation trench for  
replacement wall, from north-west*



*Plate 7 Site fully excavated from south*



*Plate 8 Possible shaped architectural fragment*

