

HISTORIC BUILDING APPRAISAL
AT
ST JOHN'S CHURCH,
SUMMERFIELD, HARTLEBURY,
WORCESTERSHIRE

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Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

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Project 3016
Report 1548
WSM 36106

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Historic building appraisal at St John's Church, Summerfield, Hartlebury, Worcestershire

Georgina MacHugh and Simon Woodiwiss

Part 1 Project summary

A historic building appraisal was undertaken at St John's Church, Summerfield, Hartlebury, Worcestershire (SO 8416 7337). It was undertaken on behalf of Mr Paul Van Veen, who intends demolition of the existing church and the erection of a three-bedroom dwelling, garage and associated works, for which a planning application has been submitted. The project aimed to assess the structure's character, extent and significance. A photographic record was made of this simple timber-framed, corrugated iron clad, church. There is evidence for a small belfry to have previously existed.

Part 2 Detailed report

1. Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological historic building appraisal was undertaken at St John's Church, Summerfield, Hartlebury, Worcestershire (NGR SO 8416 7337; Fig 1), on behalf of Mr Paul Van Veen. The client intends demolition of the existing church and the erection of a three-bedroom dwelling, garage and associated works and has submitted a planning application to Wychavon District Council (reference W/06/1882), who consider that a site of archaeological interest may be affected (WSM 5845).

1.2 Project parameters

The project conforms to the *Standard and guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures* (IFA 1999).

The project also conforms to a brief prepared by the Planning Advisory Section, Historic Environment and Archaeology Service, Worcestershire County Council (HEAS 2006a) and for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (HEAS 2006b).

1.3 Aims

The aims of the historic building appraisal were to assess the structure's character, extent and significance (WHEAS 2006a). This report may be used to recommend an appropriate treatment which may then be integrated with the proposed development programme.

2. Methods

2.1 Documentary search

Prior to fieldwork commencing a search was made of the Historic Environment Record (HER). In addition to the sources listed in the bibliography, internet sources and directories held by the County Records Office are cited in the text, and the following were also consulted:

Cartographic sources

- Geological Survey of Great Britain, 1960, solid and drift, sheet 182, 1:66360.
- 1884 first edition Ordnance Survey, 1:2500.
- 1902 Ordnance Survey, 1:2500.

Documentary sources

- Plan and conveyance, 4 April 1895, kindly supplied by the client.
- Conveyance, 31 December 1895, kindly supplied by the client.
- Charity Commission order, 11 July 1913, kindly supplied by the client.
- Charity Commission order, 14 October 1913, kindly supplied by the client.

In addition a visit was made to Avoncroft Museum where a similar church from Bringsty Common is part of the collection, and contact made with museum staff.

2.2 **Building recording methodology**

The project conformed to the specification for a level 1 survey as defined by the English Heritage (2006).

A detailed specification has been prepared by the Service (HEAS 2006b).

The photographic record was made on 20 April 2007. The site reference number and site code is WSM 36106. All photographs were digital using a Nikon D70 camera. Digital photographs will be stored in an uncompressed TIFF preservation format for archive purposes. The camera position and direction has been marked on a plan (Figs 2-3). Elevations and plans were prepared by Engineering and Building Design (drawing 2390/1A) and these have been used as the basis of Figures 2-3.

2.3 **The methods in retrospect**

Though total access to the buildings was not available (the north-eastern room could not be entered), the methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

3. **Topographical and archaeological context**

The site lies on Upper Mottled Sandstone (soft red sandstone; Geological Survey of Great Britain). Little is known for the earlier periods of history and the HER records only three monuments earlier than the post-medieval in the vicinity. These are the place name Low Hill, where the “low” element may suggest the presence of a prehistoric barrow (burial mound; WSM 134/30236), a Roman occupation site (WSM 1256), and “de Hoo” a medieval settlement known from documents but of unknown location (WSM 15021). Summerfield is not near to any substantial medieval or earlier settlement.

The HER holds more records for the post-medieval period, including: trackways (WSM 31198, 31199, 31200, 31202, 31203, 31208, 31928, 31929, 31930), brick kiln (WSM 30237), windmill (WSM 30235), clay pit (WSM 30233), all identified from the 1821 inclosure and award (see Guyatt 1996). Various farms and related features are recorded in the general area, the nearest being Summerway Farm (WSM 34611), which is shown on the 1884 map. A cockpit is indicated at Low Hill (WSM 8128), and the Mare and Colt public house (WSM 25969) is also shown on the 1884 map. The Oxford Worcester and Wolverhampton railway runs just to the east of the site and was constructed between 1845 and 1854 (WSM 31664, 31666). Just to the west of the site lies the Summerfield Research Establishment (WSM 17126), established during the Second World War as a small arms factory. The church is not shown on the 1884 map.

Corrugated iron begins to be used in the first half of the 19th century and by way of example John Spenser is recorded as producing the item in West Bromwich (<http://www.corrugated-iron-club.info/dur02.html>, 16/04/07).

A number of other iron churches have been identified in the region from historic sources; Moor Court Estate, Pembridge, Herefordshire (Kelly's Directory for Herefordshire and Shropshire 1895), Bringsty Common, Whitbourne, Herefordshire (Littlebury's Directory of Worcester 1908), and Bouldon, Shropshire (Kelly's Directory of Shropshire 1891).

4. **Previous archaeological work at the church**

St John's Church itself is registered with the HER (WSM 5845), which records a survey in 1977 (though this appears to be confined to a photograph and a few words of description on the original record card) and its inclusion in archaeological surveys for the planned Birmingham Western Orbital and Kidderminster Blakedown and Hagley Bypass (Brown and Woodiwiss 1990 and 1992), though these add no significant details.

5. **History of the church**

The English Heritage online thesaurus defines a mission church as "A church established by a religious community to propagate its faith", and a mission hall as "A building used for meetings and worship by a religious community trying to propagate its faith in an area." (<http://thesaurus.english-heritage.org.uk> 19/4/07). Such churches are often seen as a reaction of the Church of England to the growth in non-conformity in the 19th and 20th centuries

The land was purchased for the church in 1895 (copy of conveyance supplied by the client). The church is shown in its present plan on the 1902 map, within the present triangular plot, and is identified as a "Mission Church". The VCH makes only cursory mention "There is a church mission room at Summerfield" (VCH III, 386).

The builder is unknown though a number of specialist companies have been identified during research for this project, William Harbor of South Bermondsey, London, Hemming and Co, London, Messrs Francis Morton and Co, Liverpool, FD Cowieson and Co, St Rollox, Glasgow (<http://www.corrugated-iron-club.info/dur02.html>, 16/04/07), John Harrison and Co, C Leather and Sons and Croggon and Co, all London (London Trades Directory 1908), and more locally Harrison Smith Buildings Co, Dollman Street, EC and J Keay Ltd, Corporation Street (Birmingham Trades and Traders 1914).

The last service was in May 1994 (Fry 2007).

6. **Description of the church**

6.1 **Location**

The church stands in a small settlement in an area of agricultural land on the A449, which links Worcester with Kidderminster and is aligned almost directly north to south but slightly inclined towards the west (Plate 1). The building stands on a triangle of land, separated from the road to the east by a metal gate and fencing, from a lane to the south by metal fencing and from neighbouring land to the north-west by trees and bushes (Plates 2 and 3). Prior to the building of the church the triangle was contained within the field to the south of the lane (1st Edition O.S. map and 1895 Conveyances). The church plot slopes downhill towards the west and now consists of garden land.

6.2 **Exterior**

The building is constructed of a brick plinth of English garden wall bond varying from three brick courses at the south-east corner to fourteen at the north-west, is built directly onto earth, and supports the timber frame of the building (Plate 4). The frame is clad in corrugated iron sheets, of variable size depending on location on the building but generally of 0.60m width (8 or 9 ridges). The corrugated sheets reach to the roofline, with additional sheets above at the gable ends, and are cut to fit around the windows (Plate 5). Fixing of the sheets to the frame consists of dome headed metal nails with washers, generally three equidistant along the length of the sheet at every fourth ridge (Plate 6). Around the windows fixture is adapted to the shape of the window and nails without washers are used. The roof covering is also of

corrugated iron sheeting. The guttering appears to be modern, probably plastic but the downpipes are metal with a distinctive "L" within a diamond surround (Plate 7).

The main body of the building is rectangular and of five bays with a projection to the east midway along the east wall indicating an internal alcove (Plate 8) and an extension to the south containing the main entrance to the church with a small room and secondary entrance to the west (Plate 9). Also to the west an additional two room timber-framed and corrugated iron clad structure has been added to the original building (Plate 10). The north and south ends of the building are gabled, as is the alcove projection (Plate 11).

The style of the four windows in the east wall coincide with that of the large north window and those in the alcove projection (Plates 12 and 13). The five windows in the west wall and the three in the south coincide and appear to be of a more modern design in comparison (Plates 14 and 15). The east door is timber of four panels, and probably a recent replacement, with a stone step, the west door is dilapidated but appears to have been originally of timber boards (Plate 16), as do the two doors of the western addition. In the southern gable a square timber-framed window is visible (now boarded over; Plate 15) and at a similar height, within the east and west roofs, are four triangular dormer-style ventilation holes, now blocked but originally of a cusped design still visible in three of them (Plate 5).

6.3 Interior

The interior walls and the ceiling are of painted tongue and groove timber boarding with timber floorboards throughout the main church (not including the western addition). The walling and floorboards are consistent and seem contemporary with the original construction of the building (Plates 17 and 18). The floorboards are nailed, by metal nails, to floor joists running east to west across the building. The joists are supported on at least one further brick plinth, which appears to run the length of the building (Plate 19), although only a small part of the under floor area was exposed and not accessible. Some of the flooring in the south-western corner and along the western side of the main hall has been damaged by the collapse of part of the brick plinth here (Plate 4).

Each of the four exposed roof trusses consists of two principle rafters and a collar beam of timber with a vertical metal rod secured to the rafters at the ridge by two metal bolts and to the collar beam by a third bolt which also secures two horizontal metal rods to the collar beam (Plate 20). Each of these horizontal rods is attached to the top of the east and west walls (presumably through the panelling to the timber frame) by a further metal bolt (Plate 21). The trusses at the north and south gable ends are not exposed.

The building is wired for electricity and there are no visible traces of previous gas lighting.

6.3.1 The nave

The nave is rectangular, with a door leading from the south-east porch and an alcove midway along the eastern wall. At the north end of the building and attached to the north wall stands a platform, approximately 0.20m high, which is now covered in carpeting (Plate 22). The room has five windows to the west, six to the east, including two in the alcove and one to the north, and the mouldings of the outer frames are consistent in all, suggesting these are the original window locations. The eastern and northern windows are of the same design, that to the north is made up of eight panes of coloured and patterned glass, two each of blue, green, yellow and pink and the glass pattern is of an overall dimpled design. All windows but two have metal 'stops' against which the upper window is designed to rest when open and these fit the dimensions of the eastern and northern windows but not those to the west, suggesting that the western windows are later replacements (Plate 23). The windows in the south wall are similar to these replacements but those in the small room were not seen, as access to the room was not possible. Windows next to doors (south-east and south-west corners) do not have these 'stops' but probably for safety reasons.

Within the timber boarding of the ceiling four triangular pieces of board held by wooden strips probably coincide with the dormer ventilation holes visible from the exterior (Plate 24). A small, roughly square, piece of board in the ceiling west of the roof ridge at the south end, suggests a repair but there is also a similar patch in the corrugated iron cladding of the roof at this location (Plate 25). Also at the south end, midway along the south wall, a rectangular hatchway has been cut into the tongue and groove boarding (Plate 26). A hinge at the bottom right-hand corner coincides with broken boarding at the bottom left-hand corner, suggesting there were a pair of hinges. A wooden peg at the top also indicates that there may have been a hatch door opening downwards at this point. Two metal pulleys also at the top of the hatch (and a third between the hatchway and the door) suggest a type of string and pulley arrangement which may have linked with the blocked window in the south gable above (Plate 27). Alternatively, the square patch in the ceiling may be the site of a belfry and the string and pulley may have related to the operation of the bell. A belfry at this location on a similar church may be seen at Avoncroft Museum of Historic Buildings (Plate 28).

6.3.2 **The alcove**

The alcove is rectangular with windows to north and south and two steps leading up from the nave with a wooden moulded surround to the entrance. On top of the first step, at approximately the mid-point is a small circular hole, probably made for a vertical bolt, and associated scrape marks in the floorboard (Plates 29 and 30). These suggest that the alcove was at one point divided from the nave by a pair of doors, probably one of which was ill-fitting, secured by a bolt. In the timber at the roof ridge four regular circular holes have been made and from one now hangs an electric light.

6.3.3 **The south room**

This room was not accessible as the entrance was blocked and the floor unsafe. It is entered from the nave by a four-panel timber door in the south-west corner of the nave, similar to that leading from the south-east porch (Plate 24). An external door leads to the garden at the rear of the church (Plate 16) and there are two replacement windows in the south wall (Plate 15). The hatchway in the north wall of this room, mentioned above, is partly blocked by rough boarding and no details are known of its construction at this side of the wall.

6.3.4 **The south-east porch**

This ante-room to the nave is roughly square with the main entrance to the church in the east wall with a wood-stained timber four-panel door. In the north wall there is an internal, painted timber, four-panel door and a replacement window in the south wall (Plate 24).

6.3.5 **The western addition**

This structure appears to be an addition to the original church or mission room building. It seems to have originally consisted of two separate rooms, each with an external door. Approximately two thirds of the structure made up one room, indicated by a higher interior floor level and timber planking laid directly onto an earth surface here. Also, externally, the corrugated iron sheeting can be seen to extend to a lower ground level for the outer third of the structure, beyond the south door (Plates 10). A vertically opening window in the north wall, which design differs from other windows in the church would have lit this room (Plate 31). A second room with an earth floor, a west door opening onto the garden, and no window may have been used as a storeroom or shed.

The corrugated iron sheeting used on the exterior of the church building is visible inside this structure along the interior of the east wall (the external west wall of the church) and this suggests that the western addition was built onto the completed church building.

6.4 Condition

At the time of the site visit the church was being used for storage and interior access was somewhat restricted. Cracks are visible in all four corners of the brick plinth from floor to ground level and damage to the floor in the south-west corner has been detailed above. Externally the land was overgrown and also used for storage, restricting access to the north of the building and views of the building from the west.

7. Significance

A search of Listed Building Online (<http://lbonline.english-heritage.org.uk>) listed three corrugated iron-clad churches (Bailbrook Mission Church, Bath, dated 1892, grade II. St Saviour's Church, Faversham, Kent, dated 1885, grade II. Golders Green Mission Church, Hadlow, Kent, dated c 1914, grade II). A further three churches were described as having replaced "iron" or "caste-iron" churches in London, Merseyside and Portsmouth. A study of corrugated iron buildings in County Durham (<http://www.corrugated-iron-club.info/dur02.html>, 16/04/07) identified 65 of which 55 were churches, chapel or associated halls. There are clearly a great many other examples (see also Section 3 above) and others have been identified from the country during research for this project. Aside from the example at Avoncroft, another (dated 1908) is known in the Weald and Downland Museum (<http://www.wealddown.co.uk/magazine>, 25/04/07). Another is known at Bartley, Hampshire (dated 1900) and has received funding for restoration from The Millennium Commission (<http://www.hants.gov.uk/bartleytinchurch>, 16/04/07).

The church is understood to have some structural problems (see Section 6.4 above), damage from strong winds and vandalism has been documented (Fry 2007).

Though a relatively rare (but see the seemingly large number of examples in County Durham, above) form of church, there is little to suggest that it should be regarded as having any especial importance. The three Listed examples are more elaborate, at least with cusped or pointed headed windows, and there is some evidence to suggest that a belfry has been removed (see Section 6.3.1). Such insubstantial buildings require good maintenance, such as that afforded to the Brigsty Common example now at Avoncroft Museum.

8. Publication summary

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, the Service intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

Historic building recording was undertaken on behalf of Mr Paul Van Veen at St John's Church, Summerfield, just to the south of Kidderminster (NGR ref SO 8416 7337; SMR ref WSM 5845). A photographic record was made of this simple timber-framed, corrugated iron clad, church. There is evidence for a small belfry to have previously existed.

9. Acknowledgements

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Mr Paul Van Veen, the staff of Avoncroft Museum of Historic Buildings, Bromsgrove, and the staff of the County Record Office.

10. Personnel

The fieldwork and report preparation was led by Georgina MacHugh. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project and for some of the text was Simon Woodiwiss. Illustrations by Carolyn Hunt.

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IFA, 1999 *Standard and guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures*, Institute of Field Archaeologists

English Heritage 2006 Understanding historic buildings: a guide to good recording practice, English Heritage

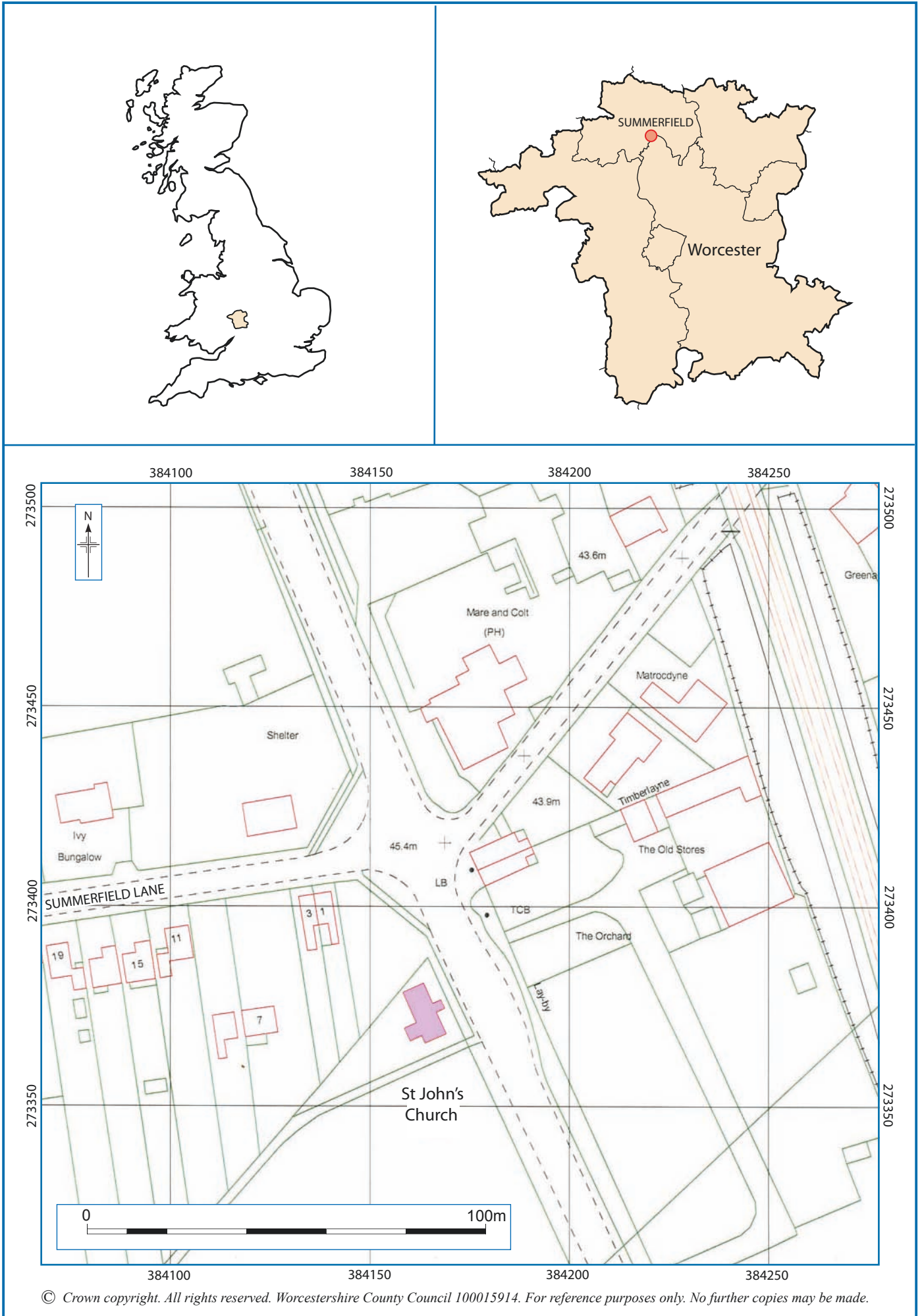
Appendix 1 Technical information

The archive

The archive consists of:

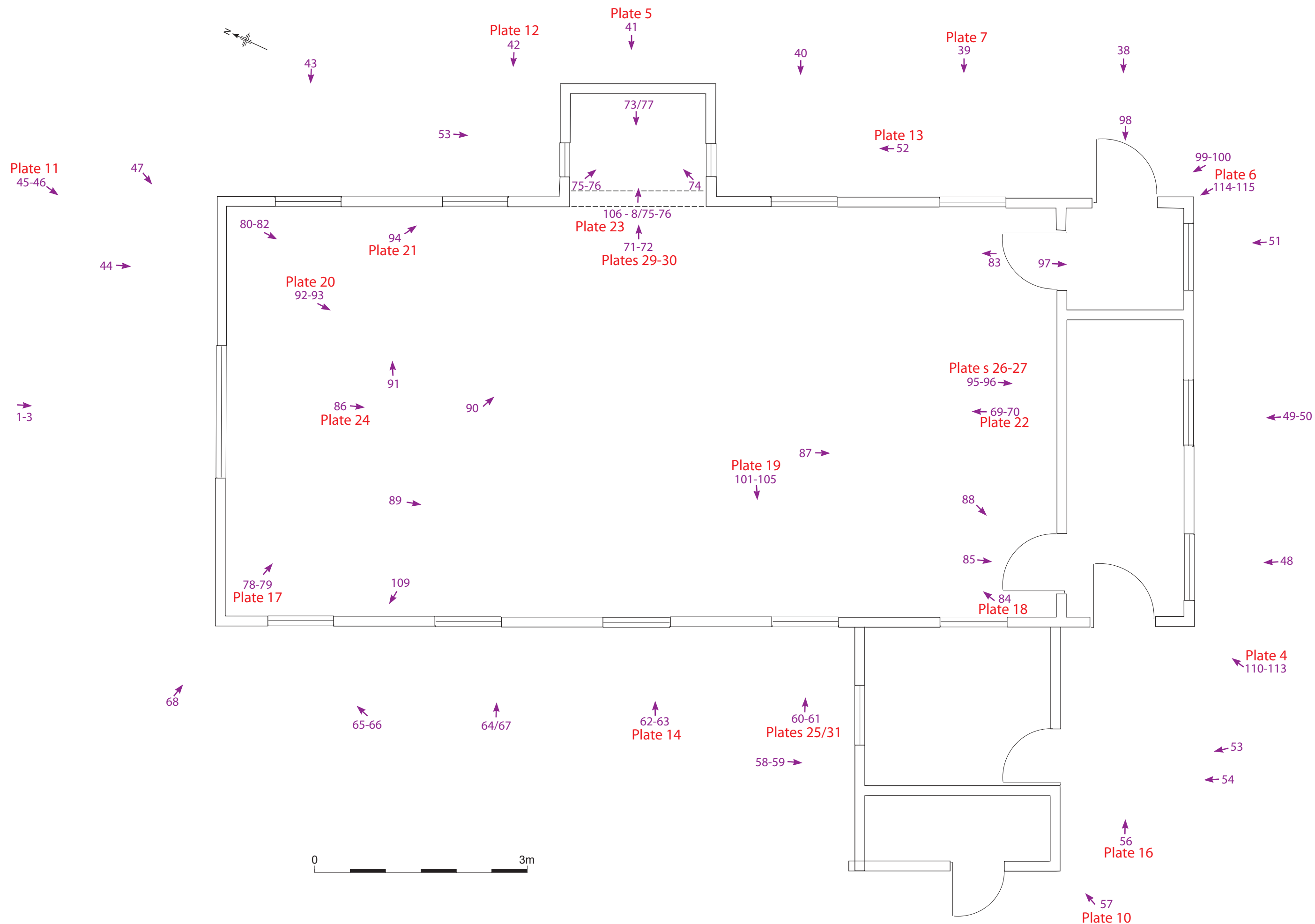
- 1 Fieldwork progress records AS2
- 121 Digital photographs

Figures



Location of St John's Church

Figure 1



Plan of photo locations

Figure 2

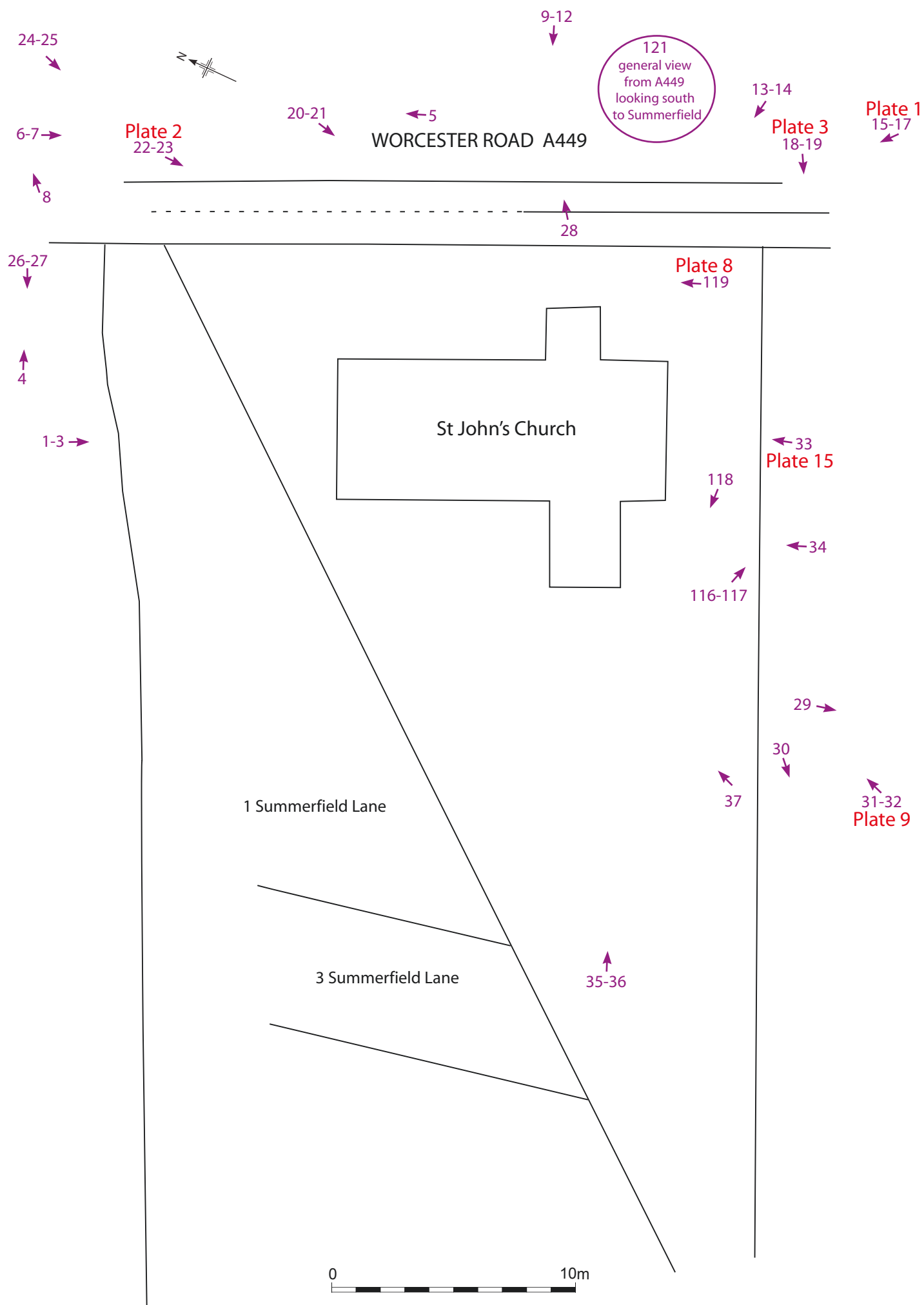


Photo locations (continued)

Figure 3

Plates



Plate 1 From south-east



Plate 2 From north-east



Plate 3 Lane to south, from east



Plate 4 Support for timber frame



Plate 5 Example of sheeting for gable ends, from east



Plate 6 Fixing for sheets



Plate 7 "L" mark on down pipe



Plate 8 External view of internal alcove, facing north



Plate 9 From south-west



Plate 10 Additional structure to west, from south-west



Plate 11 North gable



Plate 12 Example of window (to north of alcove projection), facing west



Plate 13 Window of alcove projection, facing north



Plate 14 More modern windows, facing east



Plate 15 More modern window, facing north



Plate 16 Original west door



Plate 17 Nave, facing south-east



Plate 18 Nave, facing north –east



Plate 19 Joists supported on brick plinth



Plate 20 Trusses facing south



Plate 21 Fixing of truss to wall



Plate 22 Alter platform, facing north



Plate 23 Window stops



Plate 24 Triangular boards in ceiling covering ventilation holes (top, facing south)



Plate 25 Patch in roof showing possible site of former belfry (top right), facing east



Plate 26 Hatch, facing south



Plate 27 Blocked window in south gable



Plate 28 Brigsty tin-church now at Avoncroft



Plate 29 Bolt hole in alcove floor



Plate 30 Bolt hole in alcove floor



Plate 31 North window (right) of additional structure (facing east)
