

WATCHING BRIEF  
AT  
ST LAURENCE'S CHURCH,  
ALVECHURCH,  
WORCESTERSHIRE

Adam Mindykowski  
With contributions from Laura Griffin

Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt and Adam Mindykowski

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Project 2529  
Report 1243  
WSM 33545



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## Archaeological watching brief at St Laurence's Church, Alvechurch, Worcestershire

**Adam Mindykowski**

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### Background information

<i>Client</i>	Alvechurch Parochial Church Council
<i>Site address</i>	St Laurence's, Alvechurch, Worcestershire
<i>National Grid reference</i>	SP 0265 7245
<i>Historic Environment Record reference</i>	WSM 33545
<i>Planning authority</i>	Bromsgrove District Council
<i>Planning authority reference</i>	B/02/0129
<i>Brief</i>	HEAS 2004a
<i>Project design</i>	HEAS 2004b
<i>Project parameters</i>	IFA 1999

### *Previous archaeological work on the site*

A broad assessment of the chronology and development of St Laurence's Church and churchyard was included in the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey for Alvechurch (Dalwood et al 1996). A targeted desk-based assessment was carried out as the preliminary phase of work to establish the archaeological significance of the site, and the likely impact of the proposed development (WSM 1830; Griffin 1999). Following this study, two stages of archaeological evaluation were undertaken to establish the extent and depth of any burials within the proposed development area (WSM 30531; Miller and Jones 2001; WSM 30937; Williams 2001). During Stage One, sixteen burials of medieval date were observed at a depth of 0.70m below the surface in addition to remnant boundary features dated to the medieval or post-medieval period. Stage Two concentrated on the northernmost area of the churchyard with the aim of determining the extent of medieval burials. No additional graves were encountered indicating burials did not extend beyond the area defined in Stage One (Williams 2001, 5).

### *Previous archaeological work on associated sites*

In 2001, a Geophysical survey was carried out in land adjacent to the south-east boundary of St Laurence's churchyard (WSM 30935; Masters 2001). The results identified the presence of ridge and furrow cultivation running on a north-east/south-west alignment. Following this survey an archaeological evaluation was carried out (WSM 30996; Williams 2001). With the exception of the ridge and furrow no further archaeological remains were discovered. However, a few abraded unstratified pottery sherds dating from the medieval and post-medieval centuries were recovered, suggesting the site had been under cultivation for some time with no obvious indicators of past settlement.

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### Aims

Following the results of the two evaluations, groundwork's for the development were limited to a depth of 0.45m in the area of known high significance. An archaeological watching brief was commissioned to mitigate for any disturbance of buried archaeological remains surviving at a depth less than that set in the specifications.

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## Methods

General specification for archaeological watching briefs	CAS 1995
Sources consulted	HER Sources cited by the HER VCH III
Date(s) of fieldwork	25 <sup>th</sup> – 26 <sup>th</sup> January and 2 <sup>nd</sup> – 4 <sup>th</sup> March 2004
Area of deposits observed	c 430m <sup>2</sup> . Indicated on Fig 2
Dimensions of excavated areas observed	Reduced ground length 23m width 19m depth 0.45-0.60m

### *Access to or visibility of the site*

Observation of the excavated areas was undertaken during and after machine excavation using a toothless bucket. The exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe if any deposits relating to burials or fragments of human bone were present. All recording of the 19<sup>th</sup> century vaults and burials was completed from the surface only.

### *Statement of confidence*

Access to, and visibility of, deposits allowed a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved. It was possible to record all exposed archaeological structures and deposits with a high level of detail.

**Table 1 deposit/structure description**

Context	Description	Date	Interpretation	Depth of deposit and depth below ground surface (bgs)
101	Dark greyish brown clay loam with frequent small to medium sub-rounded stones and heavy rooting	Modern	Topsoil and turf mat	0.20 – 0.25m deep
102	Compact mid reddish brown sandy clay loam with frequent small to medium sub-rounded stones and moderate small fragments of CBM. 1 sherd of pottery (see table 2)	Medieval to modern	Subsoil developed over a long period from up-cast and landscaped material from grave digging.	0.25 – 0.50m deep; 0.20 – 0.25m bgs
103	Mid pinkish brown sandstone blocks bonded with light brown hard sandy mortar	Buttress: 14 <sup>th</sup> – 15 <sup>th</sup> c Mortar: modern	Buttress to wall 107 founded on reused grave slabs	N/A
104	Compact dark greyish brown sandy clay with moderate charcoal flecks and small sub-rounded	15 <sup>th</sup> century or earlier	Backfill of grave 106	0.05m deep; 0.31m bgs

Context	Description	Date	Interpretation	Depth of deposit and depth below ground surface (bgs)
	stones. 1 sherd of pottery (see table 2)			
105 See also Figure 3 and colour plates 1 to 3	Supine skeleton of an adult male estimated to have been over 25 years of age	15 <sup>th</sup> century or earlier	Medieval inhumation	1.60 m tall (estimated); up to 0.40m wide; 0.31m bgs
106	Sub-rectangular, tapered cut of NE/SW aligned grave. Heavily truncated.	15 <sup>th</sup> century or earlier	Medieval grave	1.70m long; up to 0.55m wide; 0.05m deep; 0.31m bgs
107	ENE/WSW aligned wall of mid pinkish brown sandstone blocks bonded with light brown hard sandy mortar	Wall: 14 <sup>th</sup> century Mortar: modern	North aisle wall	N/A
108	Compact light yellowish silty clay with frequent small sub-rounded stones. Only observed in the base of 106	Medieval	Earlier phase of made ground.	C 0.40m bgs
109	Small red brick built structure bonded with a course light reddish brown mortar. Straight sides with a shallow barrel vaulted roof. Original access at WSW end sealed with a slab of grey sandstone. Two sets of three slots on the long sides to support beams for later burials. Bones from two inhumations scattered about the base.	19 <sup>th</sup> century	19 <sup>th</sup> century vault	2.10m long x 0.82m wide x 1.0m deep.
110 See also Figure 5	Large red brick built structure bonded with light reddish brown course sandy mortar. Straight sided with a deep barrel vaulted roof and an arched SW bricked-up entrance. Sixteen individuals interred (13 adults, 1 juvenile and 2 neonates), in three tiers on an E/W alignment. Bottom layer: 7 lead coffins. Middle layer: 4 lead coffins, 2 ferrous metal coffins and 1 wooden	19 <sup>th</sup> – 20 <sup>th</sup> century	19 <sup>th</sup> – 20 <sup>th</sup> century burial vault	4.20m long x 2.45m wide

Context	Description	Date	Interpretation	Depth of deposit and depth below ground surface (bgs)
	coffin. Top layer: 1 wooden coffin.			

## Discussion

Burials from two separate periods were revealed during reduction of the ground level. A single medieval burial located close to the church and two 19<sup>th</sup> century burial vaults located down-slope of the church.

### Medieval inhumation

One medieval burial (105) was partially disturbed during works to reduce the ground level to a depth of 0.45m bgs. Only the upper part of the skull was truncated with the machine bucket during the strip, however, with a further small reduction of the ground level necessary, it was decided to excavate the skeleton archaeologically in order to minimise any potential damage.

The individual was observed to be an adult supine burial on a north-east/south-west alignment. Figure 4 illustrates how this burial matches the alignment of the similar examples recorded during the archaeological evaluation (Miller, D and Jones, L 2001, Fig 3). There was no evidence for a coffin or any other artefacts associated directly with the burial, however, one sherd of 12<sup>th</sup> to mid 14<sup>th</sup> century pottery was recovered from within the grave fill (see Table 2). The grave cut was not visible at the machined level, indeed, it only becoming clear once most of the skeleton had been uncovered. Once the skeleton had been uncovered, it became clear the burial pre-dated the 14<sup>th</sup> century north aisle of the church as the upper right arm was observed to be missing. This had clearly been truncated by the foundation cut for the wall (107). The buttress (103) that projects from the north aisle has been imposed on to the lower part of the grave covering the feet of the skeleton. This structure was observed to be later than the north aisle's external wall and may be part of a phase of 15<sup>th</sup> century additions to the north aisle (VCH 3, 255; Pevsner 1968, 69-70). The shallow depth of this burial and lack of visible grave cut above the skeleton suggests a process of landscaping took place prior to the north aisle's construction. Indeed, it is notable that both of the skeleton's hands appeared to be missing, which, given the posture of the individual, would be uppermost in the grave and may have been displaced by the apparent reduction in ground level.

**Table 2 Artefact analysis by Laura Griffin**

Context	Fabric Type	Description	Date Range	Number of sherds and weight
	(Hurst, J D, and Rees, H, 1992)			
102	Fabric 55	Worcester-type sandy unglazed ware. Displays burning and blackening on exterior surface. Form type: Deansway 64.3 inverted rim cooking pot (Bryant 2001, 59). A peak in occurrence of this form noted at Deansway (ibid),	12 <sup>th</sup> to mid 14 <sup>th</sup> century	1 sherd 45g

		Upwich in Droitwich (Lentowicz 1997, 80-84) and Friar Street and City Arcade, Worcester (Griffin and Jackson 2003, 37).		
104	Fabric 55	Worcester-type sandy unglazed ware. Cooking pot body sherd. Form type as above.	Late 11 <sup>th</sup> to mid 14 <sup>th</sup> century	1 sherd 19g

### 19<sup>th</sup> century vaulted burials

Two burial vaults were located within the development area. These were to remain in situ, however, the nature of the development required a reduction in the height of both structures to enable a consistent reduced ground level to be achieved.

#### Vault 109

The smaller of the two, vault 109 was a red brick built structure with two sets of three support holes for wooden beams located midway up the long sides. Two individuals were observed within the vault (see Table 3 for details). In addition, some fragments of coffin wood and coffin furniture were also observed. Access to the vault had originally been via an opening through the roof at the western end, sealed by a sandstone slab. Inscriptions from the associated gravestone were recorded and are presented in Table 3. No artefacts were removed from this context.

#### Vault 110

This much larger structure was also constructed from red brick and was surmounted by a substantial monumental sarcophagus. A bricked-up entrance in the western wall of the vault formed the original access. Sixteen individuals were observed following removal of the barrel vaulted roof; interred over a period spanning just over a century (see Table 3 for details). Two sets of three iron bars were set across the vault to provide support for the upper two layers of coffins. The wooden shells of the lead coffins had rotted, the remains of which were visible as a layer at the bottom of the vault. Similarly, the two coffins using only wood construction had largely degraded. The skulls from the interred individuals were observed among the wood debris on the vault floor. Some of the coffins had the remains of wreathes placed on top and several also had ornamental name-plates. As with 109, inscriptions from this vault were recorded (see Table 3), however, heavy erosion of the stonework has resulted in several incomplete entries. No artefacts were removed from this context.

#### Future preservation

The fabric of both vaults was still in generally good order, therefore with the appropriate ground level achieved, it was decided to re-cap both structures and preserve the remains in situ without further disturbance.

It was considered preferable, if possible, to leave the medieval inhumation in situ if a suitable mitigation strategy could be designed to ensure preservation of the remains. Following discussions with the Consultant, Architect and Developers, a suitable engineering solution was reached. This has resulted in the individual being preserved within a capped, low brick built structure. While the possibility of further medieval burials at a depth of less than 0.70m must be considered likely, the lack of additional human remains observed at the stripped level suggests there is a sufficient depth of soil to protect remains located below the new building.

**Table 3 record of identifiable inscriptions on grave furniture associated with vaults 109 and 110**

Context	List of inscriptions
109	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sacred</li> <li>• Thomas Horton who departed this life Oct 20<sup>th</sup> 1823 aged 32 years.</li> <li>• John son of Tho<sup>s</sup> and Sarah Horton died March 31<sup>st</sup> 1836 Aged 12 years.</li> </ul>
110	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In memory of --- Moore, late of C---- (Callow Hill) Parish who died Jan -- 181- 25/3 years.</li> <li>• Also of Robert Moore late of Callow Hill who died March 28<sup>th</sup> 1825 aged 24 years</li> <li>• Also of Mar--- late of Callow Hill who --- --- 5<sup>th</sup> 1816 aged 62 years</li> <li>• Also of Callow Hill --- --- aged 32 years</li> <li>• --- Moore --- 183- (aged) 45 years</li> <li>• Also of Te --- oi --- coot who died</li> <li>• Also of Man --- who</li> <li>• Also ---</li> <li>• In memory of Robert Moore late of --- who died M--- --- years</li> <li>• Also of --- --- son of Edward and Emma (?) More who died April 26<sup>th</sup> 1855 aged 8 months</li> <li>• Also of Ada daughter of the above who died May 4<sup>th</sup> 1853 aged 2 years and 6 months</li> <li>• Also of Sarah Hannah --- daughter of the above (who died) March 16<sup>th</sup> 1914 aged 65 years buried at Montgomery</li> <li>• In memory of Edward Moore formerly of Lea End House in this Parish who died October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1889 at Brynderwen, Abermule, Montgomeryshire aged 78 years interred in this vault</li> <li>• Also of Emma relict of the --- who died June 12<sup>th</sup> 1891 at Brynderwen, Abermule, Montgomeryshire aged 79 years interred in this vault</li> <li>• In memory of Jenny Mary the beloved wife of Frederick Moore of Kingheath and Lea End House in this Parish who died June 26<sup>th</sup> 1914 aged 51 years</li> <li>• Frederica Moore of Kingheath who died Dec 28<sup>th</sup> 1919 aged 65 years Peace Perfect Peace</li> </ul>



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## Conclusions

It was unclear whether further modern burials exist either within the development area or in its immediate vicinity. Nonetheless, this can not be ruled out.

The discovery of an additional medieval burial at a depth significantly less than the datum established in the first evaluation suggests either: that a phase of landscaping prior to construction of the north aisle has reduced the level of overburden, or, that pressure on the past availability of space within the churchyard has resulted in burials being effectively stacked. It is, therefore, unlikely that burial 105 is an isolated example with a clear possibility that further examples may survive at a depth of no more than *circa* 0.30 m below ground level in the immediate vicinity of the church. Any future groundwork's associated with either the church or the new development should consider this of high significance.

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## 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.

*An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on behalf of the Alvechurch Parochial Church Council at St Laurence's Church, Alvechurch, Worcestershire (NGR ref SP 0265 7245; SMR ref WSM 33545). An area adjacent to the north aisle of the church was stripped revealing a single inhumation of an adult male, dated to at least the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The burial was un-coffined with no associated burial artefacts. The individual was exposed and recorded, but not removed from its grave. The remains were then re-interred in situ. Two 19<sup>th</sup> century burial vaults were also partially uncovered and recorded. These were also preserved in situ. The medieval burial adds further evidence to support the existence of a pre-12th century church on a different alignment to the present church.*

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## Archive

Abbreviated context records AS40	15
Skeleton record AS6	1
Fieldwork progress records AS2	4
Photographic records AS3	3
Digital photographs	78
Sample records AS18	1
Levels record AS19	1
Drawing number catalogue AS4	1
Drawings	5
Bags of finds	2
CD	1

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Worcestershire County Museum  
Hartlebury Castle, Hartlebury  
Near Kidderminster  
Worcestershire DY11 7XZ  
01299 250416

telephone

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## Personnel

The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Simon Griffin. The report preparation was led by Adam Mindykowski, with comments on the finds by Laura Griffin. Fieldwork was undertaken by Adam Mindykowski, Anna Deeks and Marc Steinmetzer.

## Acknowledgements

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Alvechurch Parochial Church Council, Ron Shoesmith (archaeological adviser to PCC), Graeme Beamish of Michael Reardon and Associates (Architects), Steve Lambourne and the on-site contractors for their kind assistance.

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