

# Archaeological Watching Brief at St Mary's Church Castle Road, Studley

Worcestershire Archaeology  
*for parochial church council, St Mary's Church*

January 2019



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# ST MARY'S CHURCH CASTLE ROAD, STUDLEY WARWICKSHIRE

## Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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## SITE INFORMATION

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Site name:	St Mary's Church, Castle Road, Studley, Warwickshire
Local planning authority:	Diocese of Coventry
Planning reference:	2018 – 0202564
Central NGR:	SP 08137 63758
Commissioning client:	Parochial church council, St Mary's Church
WA project number:	P5429
WA report number:	2649
Oasis reference:	fieldsec1-336974

### DOCUMENT CONTROL PANEL

Version	Date	Author	Details	Approved by
1	20/12/2018	R Bradley	Draft for comment	T Rogers

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## An archaeological watching brief at St Mary's Church, Castle Road, Studley, Warwickshire

By Richard Bradley

Illustrations by Laura Templeton

### Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at St Mary's Church, Castle Road, Studley, Warwickshire (NGR SP 08137 63758). It was commissioned by David Volrath on behalf of the parochial church council (PCC) for St Mary's Church, in advance of installation of a servery and associated drainage system.

The watching brief observations covered a small area of groundworks around the northern and western side of St Mary's Church. Below a modern tarmac surface and mixed made ground were *in situ* articulated human remains within a graveyard soil: these were left unexcavated and covered over before installation of a drainage pipe. Disarticulated human remains were also collected and reburied on site. Elsewhere, parallel to the western wall of the church tower, was an undated wall foundation built with roughly shaped blocks, possibly the outer edge of a layer of foundations for the tower, or an additional church wall foundation pre- or post-dating the tower. These features were reflective of the expected site character, being consistent with previous archaeology located around the church.

## Report

### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 Background to the project

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA) in December 2018 at St Mary's Church, Castle Road, Studley, Warwickshire (NGR SP 08137 63758; Figure 1). This comprised observation during excavation of a service trench, tank and soakaway pit as part of groundworks undertaken in advance of installation of a servery and associated drainage system. The project was commissioned by David Volrath on behalf of the parochial church council (PCC) for St Mary's Church.

The Diocese of Coventry granted a petition for a faculty, subject to conditions which included the provision of an archaeological watching brief on the groundworks (ref 2018 – 0202564). This acted as a brief for the project, for which a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2018) and to which the project conformed.

The watching brief also conforms to the industry guidelines and standards set out by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists in the *Standard and guidance: for an archaeological watching brief* (CIfA 2014).

#### 1.2 Site location, topography and geology

St Mary's Church is located off Castle Road in the valley landscape of the River Arrow, approximately 700m east of the village of Studley (Figure 1). The ground is relatively flat at around 64m AOD. The underlying bedrock geology comprises sedimentary mudstone of the Mercia Mudstone Group (BGS 2018).

## 2 Archaeological and historical background

St Mary's Church, known as The Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is the Parish church for Studley, and is Grade II\* listed (NHLE 1024491; MWA571). It is considered to have Saxon origins, though the fabric of the present church is Norman and later, with a nave dating to the early twelfth century; an early fourteenth century south aisle and arcade; and a fifteenth century chancel and tower.

The Domesday Book records that there were nineteen villagers with a priest and twelve smallholders with nine ploughs at Studley, on lands owned by William Courbucion (Morris 1976). It is thought to have been known as *Stodlege* in the Saxon period (MWA6171). Immediately north of the church is a manor house (also Grade II\* listed; NHLE 1185815) that dates to the early sixteenth and seventeenth century. This is built on the site of a Norman castle (seat of the Courbucion family) and is surrounded by a twelfth century motte earthwork with v-shaped ditch, now a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 1013161; MWA570). An Augustinian priory was located 680m north-west of the castle (MWA572).

There are no associated houses surviving in the vicinity, with the village of Studley having migrated to the west of the River Arrow along Ryknild Street (MWA445), once a major Roman road and now the A435 Alcester/Birmingham Road. Earthworks identified nearby, west of the church, include a holloway and house platforms that may represent a deserted medieval settlement (MWA6171). Elements of this survived as a small hamlet, known as Church End, until the nineteenth century (MWA575).

#### 2.1 Previous archaeological work on the site

A watching brief was undertaken during the replacement of the surface outside the main entrance, on the south side of the church (Cook 2000; SWA17982). Two graves were identified, one of which was partially overlain by the remains of a stone wall. Adjacent to the south doorway were the foundations of the south aisle and a former floor surface.



Another watching brief did not locate any *in situ* features, though disturbed ground associated with a graveyard soil contained disarticulated human bone. A couple of fragments of thirteenth or fourteenth century encaustic tile were recovered (Cook 2012; SWA23398).

### 3 Project aims

In general, the watching brief aimed to observe and record archaeological deposits, and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible within the constraints of the groundworks.

As the work was taking place in a churchyard, the faculty granted by the Diocese of Coventry made it clear that if disarticulated human remains were discovered these should be retained and then reinterred as quickly as reasonably practical in a place close to that from which they were retrieved. Articulated remains were to be covered and left *in situ*; if it was necessary to remove these then they also needed to be reinterred as quickly as reasonably practical in a place close to that from which they came.

Therefore, more specifically, the project aimed to avoid any disturbance of articulated human remains and to allow rapid reburial of any disarticulated remains encountered during the course of groundworks.

### 4 Project methodology

As noted above, a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2018). Fieldwork was undertaken on 12 December 2018.

A single pipe trench with associated drainage tank and soakaway pit, approximately 18m in total length, was excavated. The location of the trench is indicated in Figure 2 and Plates 1 and 2.

Deposits were removed under constant archaeological supervision using a 360° tracked excavator, using both a toothless grading bucket and a toothed bucket where surfaces needed breaking up. Observation of the excavated trench was undertaken during and after machine excavation. The exposed trench areas were sufficiently clean to observe well-differentiated archaeological deposits, though any less clear may have not been identified. Access to deep trenches was not made for safety reasons.

Deposits were recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012) and the trench location was planned and tied into fixed objects recorded on OS MasterMap. All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was undertaken using the structural evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

The project archive is currently held at the offices of Worcestershire Archaeology. Subject to the agreement of the landowner it is anticipated that it will be deposited at Warwickshire Museum.

### 5 Archaeological results

#### 5.1 Trench description

The natural Mercian mudstone geology (105) was encountered in deeper parts of the trench, during excavation of both a drainage tank and soakaway pit. This was overlain by a mixed layer containing numerous cobbles (104), perhaps made ground derived from or associated with construction of the church (Plate 3). Within the excavation area for the drainage tank, a wall foundation was located (103): this survived for three courses and was found 2m west of and parallel to the western wall of the fifteenth century church tower. There was no dating evidence recovered. The wall was sealed by hardcore and tarmac for the current entrance pathway (102).

Elsewhere in the trench, excavation for the drainage pipe was less intrusive, but encountered a graveyard soil at only 0.45m below the current surface (101; Plate 4). Within this were disturbed and disarticulated human remains, as well as articulated *in situ* inhumations which were covered and left unexcavated. In one example, corroded iron nails around the edge of the burial were visible. The burials were sealed by a mixed made ground layer of sand and topsoil (100), previously disturbed by a drainage pipe.

The table below presents a summary of the deposits identified within the trench.

Context	Brief description	Max depth (m)	Depth from ground surface (m)	Comments
100	Made ground	0.45	0.00	Stone paving slabs on top of mixed loose light orange-grey gravelly sand and topsoil. Frequent rubble, with previous drainage visible.
101	Graveyard soil	Unexc.	0.45	Firm, mixed dark grey brown silty clay with rubble and sub-round stones. Articulated human remains clearly visible in graves cut into this layer. Disarticulated human remains also identified.
102	Tarmac pathway	0.23	0.00	Black tarmacadam pathway and hardcore bedding above wall foundation (103).
103	Wall foundation	0.40	0.23	Whiteish-green roughly shaped sandstone blocks with orange sand bonding. Av. 270mm wide, 120mm deep. Three courses visible. Potential foundation for tower.
104	Stone layer	0.40	0.63	Firm dark grey and red-brown clay with medium sub-round cobbles. Mixed re-deposited natural material.
105	Natural substrate	0.30+	1.03	Firm red-brown clay. Mercian mudstone geology.

Table 1: Context descriptions

## 6 Artefactual evidence

Recovery of artefacts was approached following standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). In the event, no artefacts were identified that were considered necessary for retention or suitable for analysis.

## 7 Environmental evidence

Environmental sampling was approached using standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). In the event, no deposits were excavated which were considered to be suitable for environmental analysis. Articulated human remains were left *in situ* and disarticulated remains were collected and reburied on site.

## 8 Discussion and conclusions

The watching brief observations covered a small area of groundworks around the northern and western side of St Mary's Church, involving excavation of a service trench, tank and soakaway pit.

Identified below a modern tarmac surface and mixed made ground were *in situ* human remains within a graveyard soil: these were left unexcavated and covered over before installation of a drainage pipe. The presence of corroded nails around the edge of the burial suggested that at least one individual had been placed in a coffin and could potentially be dated to the post-medieval period. Disarticulated human remains were also collected and reburied on site.

In addition, parallel to the western wall of the church tower, was an undated wall foundation built with roughly shaped blocks. It is uncertain where this fits in the sequence of construction on the site, but it is possible this is the outer edge of a layer of foundations for the tower, or could be an additional church wall foundation pre- or post-dating this structure. Due to the limited area observed, this remains unclear.

Overall, the methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved. Conditions were suitable to identify the presence or absence of archaeological remains and these were reflective of the general site character, being consistent with previous archaeology located around the church (see Cook 2000; Cook 2012).

## 9 Project personnel

The fieldwork was undertaken by Richard Bradley.

The project was managed by Tom Rogers. The report was produced and collated by Richard Bradley, with illustrations by Laura Templeton.

## 10 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following:

David Volrath (St Mary's Church parochial church council)

Melanie Millward (Warwickshire Historic Environment Record)

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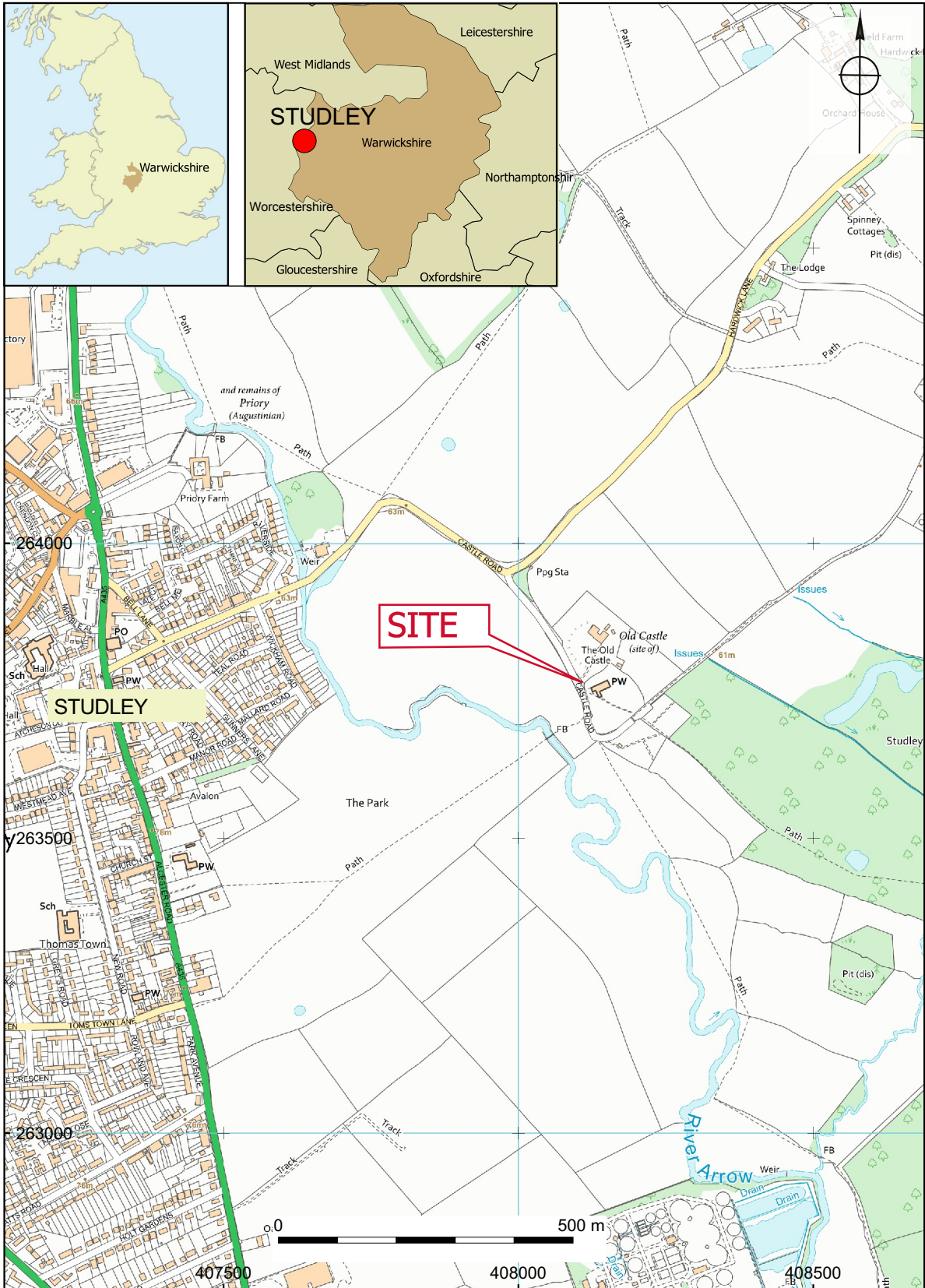
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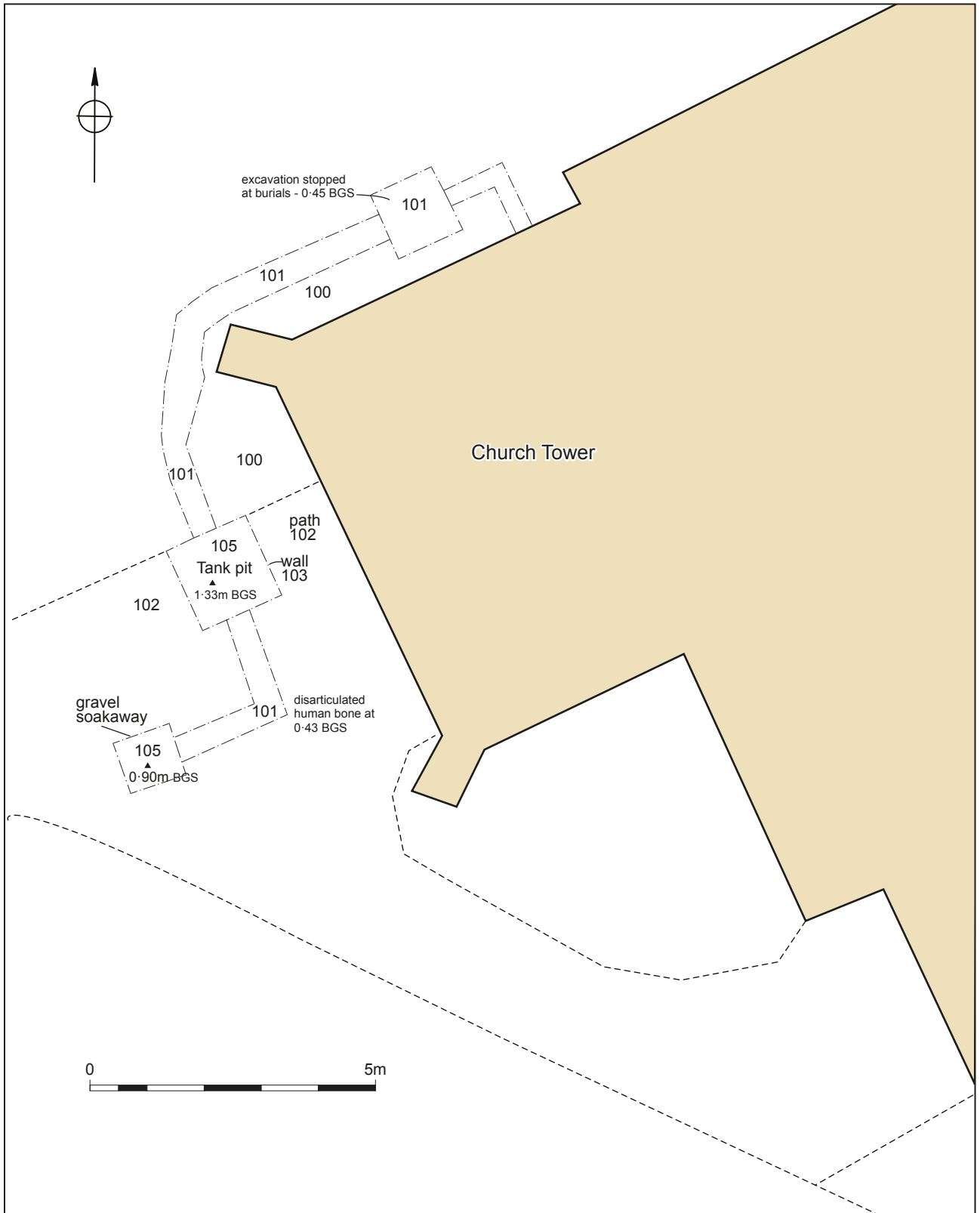
## Figures



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Location of the site

Figure 1



Location of archaeological observations

Figure 2



## Plates



*Plate 1: Pre-excavation view of drainage route on north side of church*



*Plate 2: Working shot of drainage route on west side of church*





*Plate 3: Wall foundation (103) below tarmac (102) west of church tower, facing east (scale 1m)*



*Plate 4: In situ human remains within graveyard soil (101), facing north (scale 0.5m)*

## Appendix 1: Summary of project archive

TYPE	DETAILS*
Artefacts and Environmental	None
Paper	Context sheet, Diary (Field progress form), Drawing, Plan
Digital	Digital photography, Text, Report

\*OASIS terminology

