

CPAT Report No. 1802




Nercwys Church extension

Archaeological excavation



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Client name: The Vicar and Churchwardens of St Mary's Church, Nercwys
 CPAT Project No: 2547
 Project Name: Nercwys Church
 Grid Reference: SJ 2348 6042
 County/LPA: Flintshire
 Planning Application: 061884
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Summary

An archaeological excavation was carried out by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust on the site of a new extension to provide additional facilities at St Mary's Church, Nercwys, Flintshire (NGR SJ 2348 6042) in June 2021. The work was undertaken on behalf of the Vicar and Churchwardens of St Mary's and was a condition of the grant of planning permission for the development by Flintshire Council; it involved the archaeological excavation of the foundations of the extension, which lay on the north-east side of the church. A watching brief on the construction phase of the development was undertaken separately.

Only two soil layers were identified in the excavations, an upper surface soil and a lower deposit which was probably related to a phase of church restoration belonging to the 19th century. No earlier deposits were identified. An undated and broken grave marker was also present in the development area but it was sufficiently deep for it to be retained in-situ and there was no evidence of a corresponding grave cut in either of the layers.

Crynodeb

Bu Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Clwyd-Powys yn gwneud gwaith cloddio archaeolegol ar safle estyniad newydd i ddarparu cyfleusterau ychwanegol yn Eglwys y Santes Fair, Nercwys, Sir y Fflint (Cyfeirnod Grid Cenedlaethol SJ 2348 6042) ym mis Mehefin 2021. Gwnaed y gwaith ar ran Ficer ac Wardeiniaid Eglwys y Santes Fair ac roedd yn amod rhoi caniatâd cynllunio ar gyfer y datblygiad gan Gyngor Sir y Fflint; roedd yn galw am wneud gwaith cloddio archaeolegol ar sylfeini'r estyniad, a oedd ar ochr ogledd-ddwyreiniol yr eglwys. Cynhaliwyd briff gwyllo ar wahân yn ystod cyfnod adeiladu'r datblygiad.

Dim ond dwy haen o bridd a nodwyd yn y gwaith cloddio, sef uwchbridd ar yr arwyneb a dyddodyn is a oedd, mae'n debyg, yn gysylltiedig â chyfnod atgyweirio'r eglwys yn perthyn i'r 19^{eg} ganrif. Ni nodwyd unrhyw ddyddodion cynharach. Roedd marciwr bedd heb ei ddyddio ac wedi torri hefyd yn bresennol yn yr ardal ddatblygu ond roedd yn ddigon dwfn iddo allu aros yn ei le ac nid oedd yna unrhyw dystiolaeth o fedd cyfatebol wedi'i dorri yn unrhyw un o'r ddwy haen.

1 Introduction

- 1.1. The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was commissioned by John Pugh, acting on behalf of the Vicar and Churchwardens of St Mary's Church, Nercwys, to carry out an excavation on the site of an extension designed to provide additional facilities for the church. The extension was placed on the north-east side of the church at NGR SJ 2348 6042. (See Figs 1 and 2).



Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2018

Fig. 1 Location of Nercwys Church

- 1.2. The work was subject to both a Faculty and a planning application (Flintshire No 061884); permission being granted for the development subject to conditions requiring the archaeological excavation of the foundations of the extension and a watching brief during the construction phase. A Written Scheme of Investigation or WSI (Appendix 1) was produced by CPAT to specify the scope of the work and this was examined and commented on, prior to final approval, by Bob Silvester, the Archaeological Advisor to the DAC, and Mark Walters, the archaeological advisor to Flintshire Council, the local planning authority, collectively acting as the archaeological curators. The WSI was approved by the planning authority and the Diocesan Advisory Committee and the excavation was carried out in the week commencing 7th June 2021.
- 1.3. The subsequent watching brief during the construction phase of the work was carried out separately by Steve Greuter, Heritage and Archives Lead, Wrexham County Borough Council.

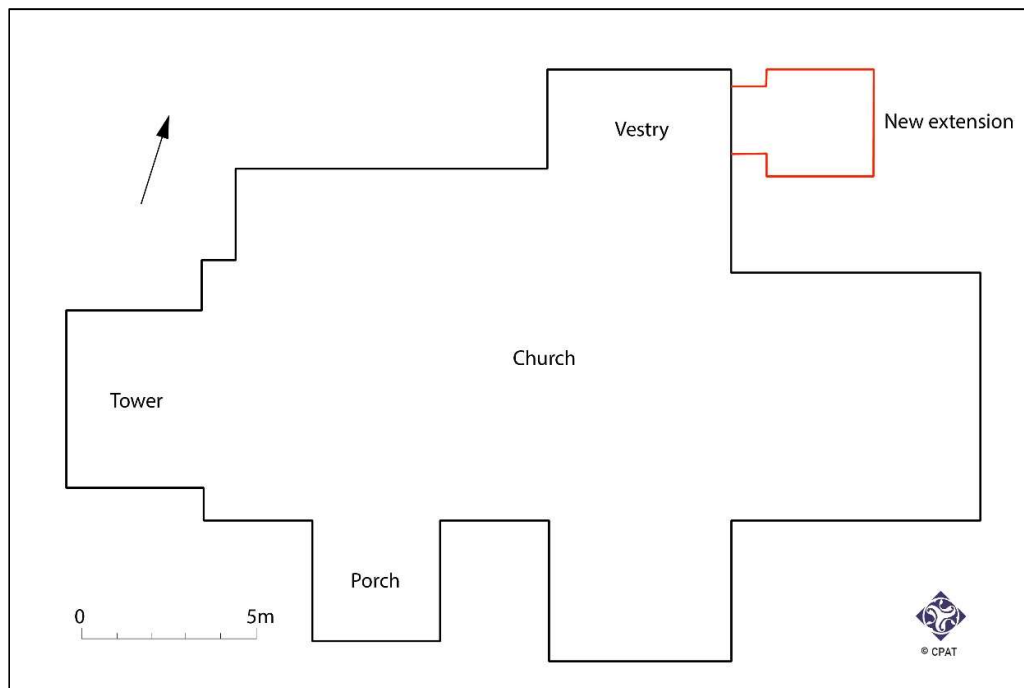


Fig. 2: The location of the new extension in relation to the church

2 Historical Background

- 2.1. This section provides a brief summary of the archaeology and history of the church to enable the findings of the excavation to be placed in a wider context.
- 2.2. St Mary's church lies towards the south end of Nercwys village, west of Ffordd y Pentre and north of Plas y Llan Farm and the crossroads (See Fig. 1). The church is first recorded in 1291 though parts of the structure suggest that it predates the mid-12th century. It was probably constructed as a single chamber with a low west tower. An arch-braced roof with cusped wind braces survives. Other historic features include the east window, which incorporates 15th century glass depicting the lion and boar of Richard III, and within the church is the elaborate remains of a rood screen (or stall work) rebuilt as a throne and painted and gilded.
- 2.3. The church was restored and enlarged in 1847 and 1883-4.

Churchyard

2.4. The church lies within an oval enclosure, which was extended a number of times in the 19th and 20th centuries. Figs 3 and 4 demonstrate how it was extended to the north between 1879 and 1912, when the course of the road was altered to suit. It is raised above the surrounding ground level with walls to the south and east, and a hedge to the west where the churchyard lies at the same height as the surrounding land. Within the churchyard there is an 18th century sundial and a range of monuments, the earliest of which dates to the first half of the 18th century. Many of the monuments in the original churchyard have been repositioned.



Fig. 3: The 1879 Ordnance Survey 1:10,560 map

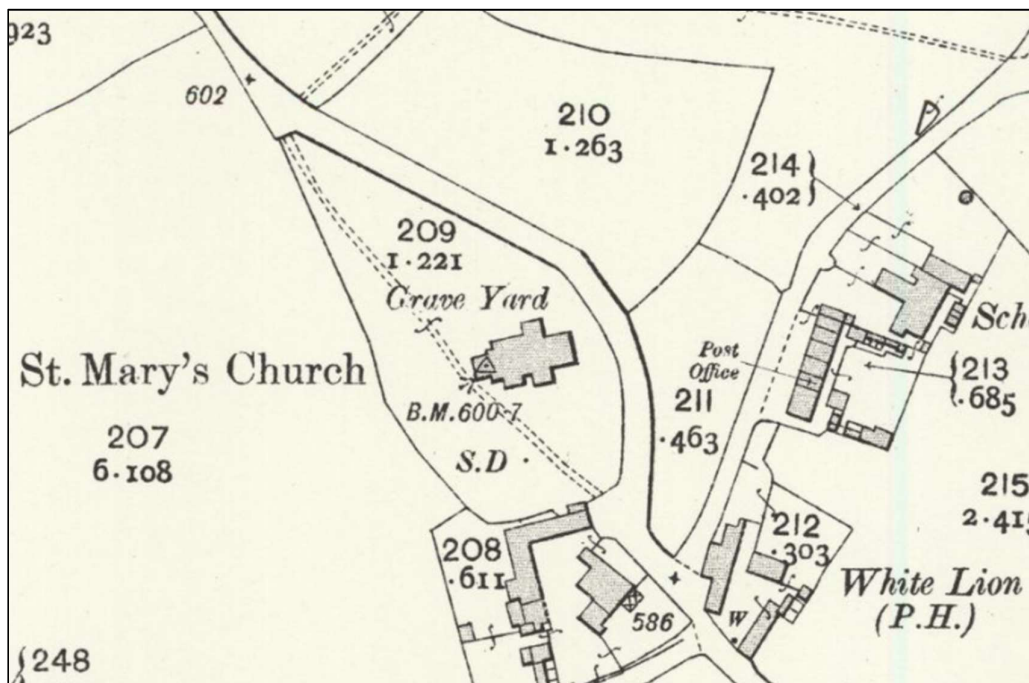


Fig. 4: The 1912 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map

3 Excavation

- 3.1. The excavation was conducted between 7-9 June 2021, in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CIfA) *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavation* (2020).
- 3.2. The excavation comprised the removal of all deposits in the area of the extension foundations, down to their planned maximum depth, which involved the reduction of the level in the interior (Fig. 5, A) by 0.15m and the reduction of the site of the ring beam foundation (Fig. 5, B) by a further 0.45m.

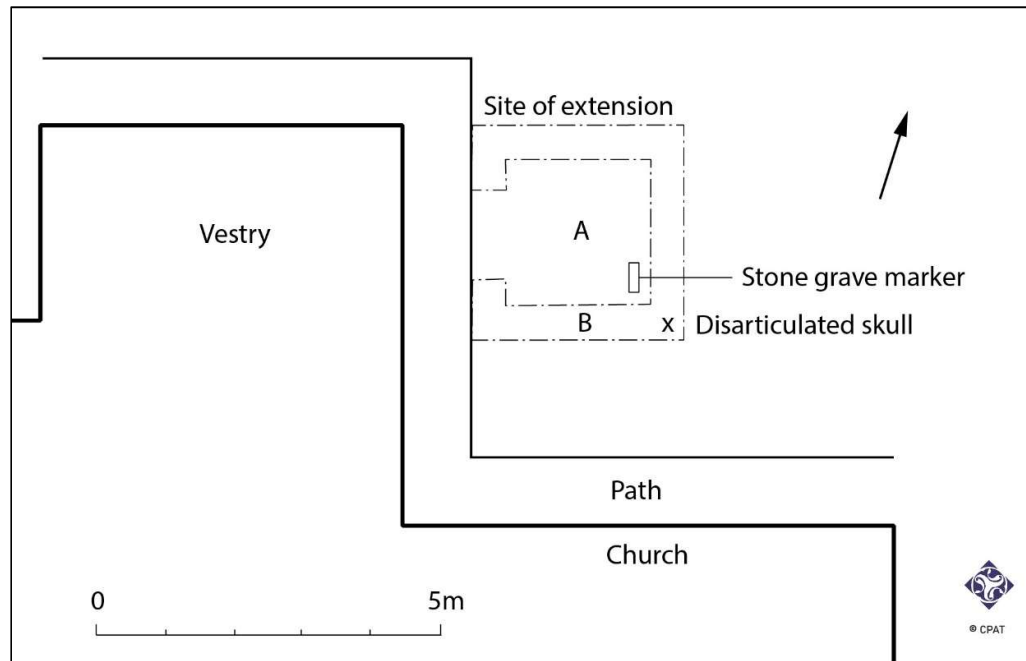


Fig. 5: Plan showing the excavation of the extension foundations

- 3.3. Only two deposits were revealed by the excavation, an upper layer of dark grey silt topsoil, 0.30m thick, and an underlying layer of grey-brown sandy silt which was over 0.30m thick and extended below the base of the excavation. The topsoil was of relatively recent date, while the lower layer was a mixed deposit containing mortar, plaster, sandstone and slate fragments and post-medieval pottery. Some disarticulated bone was also found in the lower layer, including a skull (Fig. 6), and these remains were recovered and placed in the church under the care of the Vicar for reburial at a later date. None of the other artefacts were retained.
- 3.4. Although some of the material within the lower layer clearly originated from the demolition of an earlier structure, and one large stone (top left of Fig. 6 and top right Fig. 7) was found extending beyond the boundary of the deeper trench (Fig. 5, B) there was no evidence that any of this material represented in-situ walling. It seems likely that the deposit had formed around the church during works relating to one of the 19th-century restorations.
- 3.5. A sandstone grave marker (see Figs 6 and 7) was revealed in area A, but in consultation with the architect it was agreed that this was at a sufficient depth to allow for its retention within the foundations so it was left in-situ. No inscription was visible and it seemed to have been

broken off near ground level; there was also no trace of a corresponding cut in the lower deposit for an associated grave.



Fig. 6: The broken grave marker and the disarticulated skull within the lower deposit, viewed from the east. Photo CPAT 4928-0007



Fig. 7: The completed excavation of the extension foundations, viewed from the west. Photo CPAT 4928-0012

4 Conclusions

- 4.1. The excavations revealed only two layers within the area and to the maximum depth of the foundations, both of which were no earlier than the 19th century to judge from the material within them.
- 4.2. The upper layer was a relatively recent topsoil, while the lower was clearly indicative of a phase of demolition and rebuilding at the church and contained material related to this activity. It is very probable that it belongs to one of the two 19th-century restorations, dated to 1847 and 1883-4.
- 4.3. The fragment of sandstone grave marker was revealed at a depth that allowed for its retention in-situ within the foundations of the extension. This course of action was agreed with the architect during a site meeting. A human skull and a small amount of similarly disarticulated remains were left in the care of the church for reburial at the end of construction work.

5 Sources

Cartographic sources

1879 Ordnance Survey 1:10560 1st edition Flintshire 16

1912 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 3rd edition Flintshire 16.4

6 Archive deposition Statement

- 6.1. The project archive has been prepared according to the CPAT Archive Policy and in line with the CIfA *Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives guidance* (2020). The archive is entirely digital and will be deposited jointly with the Historic Environment Record, Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust and the National Monuments Record (RCAHMW). No artefacts were retained.

Archive summary

CPAT Event PRN: 140371

1 CPAT trench recording form

12 digital photographs, CPAT film no 4928

2 BACKGROUND (from the Coflein website)

- 2.1. St Mary's church lies towards the south end of Nercwys village, to the west of Ffordd y Pentre and north of Plas y Llan Farm and the crossroads (Figure 1). It has rising land to the west St Mary's church, Nercwys is a medieval church, probably a single chamber originally with a low west tower. An arch-braced roof with cusped wind braces survives.
- 2.2. The east window incorporates 15th century glass depicting the lion and boar of Richard III. The church contains a reredos known as the Cadr Fawr or Great Chair, the elaborate remains of a rood screen (or stall work) rebuilt as a throne and painted and gilded.
- 2.3. The church was restored and enlarged in 1847 and 1884.

Churchyard

- 2.4. The church lies within an elongated enclosure, oriented north – south, with an extension to the north-west. It is raised above surrounding ground level with walls to south and east, and a hedge to the west where the churchyard lies at the same height as the surrounding land.

3 METHODOLOGY

Fieldwork investigation and recording

- 3.1. The work will be conducted according to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CIfA) *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014) and their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavation* (2014). A WSI designed by Stephen Greuter provides overall requirements including watching brief on utility service trenches and a cesspit which will be undertaken by himself, and so this supplementary CPAT WSI acts as a method statement for the part of the work that covers only the area of the proposed building extension. This will comprise an initial 'strip, map, excavate' exercise to allow the nature of the archaeology to be assessed and recorded prior to the commencement of construction.
- 3.2. The accurate location and recording of any grave markers and tombs/enclosures that will be moved to facilitate the development will be required in advance of their removal and repositioning.
- 3.3. Groundworks on the footprint of the extension will comprise an initial manual strip of the surface material down to the first significant archaeological horizon under archaeological supervision and control, followed by careful cleaning of the exposed surface and the recording of any features that are identified. At this stage the area will be examined by the Archaeological Curators to allow a decision to be made on how to proceed, and it may be possible to adjust the foundation design to reduce the potential impact on any archaeological features that have been identified, though this will be a matter for discussion and agreement between the relevant parties. It is known that there is a subterranean room beneath part of the proposed Development Area and it is envisaged that this area will have already been disturbed.
- 3.4. The Archaeological Curators will then provide an opinion on the extent of archaeological investigation that is required to provide an appropriate understanding of the nature and potential date of any features and deposits that have been identified. This work will be carried out by the contracting archaeologist (CPAT) in advance of any construction and to the appropriate CIfA standard and guidance.
- 3.5. Once the archaeological excavations are completed to the Archaeological Curators satisfaction the site will be handed over to the Principal Contractor to allow for the excavation of foundations for the extension. These works will be subject to an archaeological watching brief, and sufficient time must be allowed for Stephen Greuter to record any significant remains that are exposed, including structural features and burials. The Principal Contractor should be made aware of the need to work closely with the Archaeologist during this part of the on-site works; to this end the Principal Contractor should give the Archaeologist reasonable notice as to when he wishes to carry out relevant work and maintain regular contact subsequently.
- 3.6. CPAT will be responsible for collecting any artefacts that are disturbed and any human bone, fragmentary or complete, which is dug up during the archaeological works for the extension, following the implementation of the necessary legal procedures. Given the expectation that human remains will be revealed by the proposed development, a licence from the Ministry of Justice will be required to comply with the 1857 Burial Act (as it pertains to Wales) and it has been suggested by the Archaeological Curators that this should be obtained by the architect as the person responsible for oversight of the development as a whole. Where at all possible intact burials should be avoided by the works, but any disturbed skeletal material that is

encountered should be stored appropriately in a secure place within the church while the development is ongoing.

- 3.7. In conjunction with the incumbent, CPAT will make an appropriate decision as to how and where the bones or fragments are re-buried. Upon completion of the archaeological works, the Archaeologist should produce a draft version of the report which will allow the Archaeological Curators to assess and approve its findings. A final version of the report will be lodged in an appropriate archive, with a copy being passed to the Churches Conservation and Development Officer of St Asaph Diocese in her capacity as Secretary to the DAC.
- 3.8. The excavation of any archaeological features or deposits will be undertaken by hand using the conventional techniques for archaeological excavation:
- The presence or absence of archaeological features encountered during the ground works will be noted.
 - Where features of archaeological interest are identified during the ground works they will be investigated by hand with sufficient work being undertaken to determine their date, character and function, if that is possible, using the conventional techniques for archaeological excavation and in accordance with ClfA Standard and Guidance. Owing to the poor stability of the soils it will not be possible to cut back significantly the surface exposed by the removal of the existing wall.
 - All features will be located as accurately as possible on an overall plan of the work at an appropriate scale, showing boundaries depicted on Ordnance Survey mapping.
 - Contexts will be recorded on individual record forms, using a continuous numbering system, and be drawn and photographed as appropriate.
 - Plans will be drawn on permatrace to a scale of 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50, as appropriate.
 - All photography will be taken using a digital SLR camera with a minimum resolution of 12 mega pixels, including a metric scale in each view, with views logged in a photographic register.
 - In the event of finding any artefacts covered by the provisions of the Treasures Act 1996, the appropriate procedures under this legislation will be followed.
- 3.9. All artefacts and environmental samples will be treated in a manner appropriate to their composition and a sampling strategy will be developed as appropriate:
- All stratified finds will be collected by context, or where appropriate, individually recorded in three dimensions. Unstratified finds will only be collected where they contribute significantly to the project objectives or are of particular intrinsic interest.
 - All finds and samples, with the exception of any human bone which is encountered, will be collected, processed, sorted, quantified, recorded, labelled, packed, stored, marked, assessed, analysed and conserved in a manner appropriate to their composition and in line with appropriate guidance. Human bone will be kept in an appropriate place within the church until such time as the work is complete and will then be reburied within the churchyard.
 - Arrangements will be made to assess and study any artefacts, assemblages and environment samples, if required.
 - Any artefacts recovered during the works will be deposited with an appropriate museum, subject to the permission of the owner.

Selection Strategy

3.10. Unstratified finds will only be collected where they contribute significantly to the project objectives or are of particular intrinsic interest. All artefacts will be retained from stratigraphically secure contexts of 18th-century date or earlier. In the case of later or disturbed contexts, all 18th-century or earlier material will be retained, together with a sample of later finds to assist with dating and phasing, unless later deposits/artefacts are deemed to be of high archaeological value.

3.11. CPAT has a retention policy for artefacts which prioritises as follows:

High priority for retention

- Rare finds from stratified and unstratified contexts
- Prehistoric and early medieval assemblages
- Key stratigraphic dating assemblages crucial to the structural development of the site
- Assemblages which are not well represented in museum collections

High priority for disposal

- Unstratified material unless intrinsically dateable and unusual/rare
- Artefacts from residual/intrusive contexts unless of key stratigraphic importance to the site
- Assemblages already well represented in museum collections
- Unprocessed environmental/soil samples

Post-excavation assessment and reporting

3.12. Following the on-site work an illustrated report will be prepared combining both the extension excavation, and also the results of the watching brief by Stephen Greuter. Conventional sections would include:

- Non-technical summary
- Introduction
- Site location
- Historical Background
- Excavation (strip, map, excavate)
- Watching brief
- Conclusions
- References
- Appropriate appendices on archives and finds

3.13. The site archive will be prepared to specifications in English Heritage's Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE) system and the CIfA *Standard and Guidance for the Creation, Compilation, Transfer and Deposition of Archaeological Archives* (2014).

3.14. The paper and digital archive will be deposited with the National Monuments Record (NMR), RCAHMW, including a copy of the final report. This archive will include all written, drawn, survey and photographic records relating directly to the investigations undertaken. NMR Digital archives will follow the standard required by the RCAHMW (RCAHMW 2015). A copy of the digital archive only will also be lodged with the Historic Environment Record, Clwyd-

Powys Archaeological Trust and the stipulations of the 'Guidance for the Submission of Data to the Welsh Historic Environment Records (HERs) V1, July 2018', will therefore be adhered to. It should be noted that this includes an undertaking for the report summary to be provided in Welsh and English.

Data management

- 3.15. The project will be conducted in accordance with CPAT's data management policy. All paper records will be collated, catalogued and labelled with the unique project code. All digital data will follow strict file naming, to include the unique project code, and be sorted into a standard series of sub-folders. The digital data will be catalogued, including a list of file types and relevant software.

4 RESOURCES AND PROGRAMMING

- 4.1. The strip, map and sample excavation will be undertaken by a team of skilled archaeologists under the overall supervision of Tim Malim, a senior member of CPAT's staff who is also a member of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA). CPAT is also a CIfA Registered Organisation (RO No 6) and as such agrees to abide by their *Code of Conduct* (2014) and the *Code of Approved Practice for the Regulation of Contractual Arrangements in Field Archaeology* (2014).
- 4.2. All report preparation will be completed by or with the assistance of the same field archaeologist(s) who conducted the site work. If appropriate, a short report will be published in *Archaeology in Wales*.
- 4.3. Requirements relating to Health and Safety regulations will be adhered to by CPAT and its staff.
- 4.4. CPAT is covered by appropriate Public and Employer's Liability insurance, as well as Professional Indemnity insurance.

R Hankinson (November 2018)

Revised Tim Malim 13th May 2021