

HWA (Structural Engineers) Limited

20646/BGS- L -01

Tuesday, 7th July 2026

Vivien Wang
Parish Clerk & RFO
Hammerwich Parish Council

Dear Vivien

St John the Baptist Church, Hammerwich – Structural Inspection of Churchyard boundary walls and structures.

1.0 Introduction

We were requested by Vivien Wang to visit the above site and provide a non-intrusive structural condition survey of the graveyard, particularly the boundary retaining walls and other structures found. The report does not include the church nor retaining walls not in the ownership of the church. We understand the purpose of the report is to identify any structural issues as the council has been asked whether they would take over the maintenance of the graveyard.

Arrangements were made via Vivien to access the property and grounds of The Old Rectory. We duly visited on the morning of the 10th of June 2026.

We are required to state that we did not inspect parts of the structure which were covered, unexposed or inaccessible and we are therefore unable to report that any such part of the property is free from defect.

It should be noted that this report is limited to the elements of the structure of the property and is not a structural report in the sense used by a Building Surveyor or Architect. It is intended to deal with the strength, stiffness, stability, and durability of the structural elements of the building only. Reference is made to matters beyond that scope only where deficiencies have been found which ought to be dealt with in order to avoid problems with the structural elements of the property in the future.

2.0 Areas & Ownership

The boundary with the adjacent “Old Rectory” property and grounds to the north and northeast were identified as belonging to the church. The small section of “timber beam and steel post” wall with “Church Cottage” at the northwest near the entrance on Church Lane is understood to be in the ownership of that property and not the church. To the east and southeast are wooded areas the ownership was not known at the time of the visit. To the southwest the church yard boundary is with “Green Fields” property and gardens. It is unclear as to owner of this boundary. The west boundary is formed alongside Church Lane.

A series of photographs are appended to this report to help with the descriptions in each area.

Observations recorded for the structural condition survey are split into several sections under main titles below.

3.0 Summary of Main Items of Concern for maintenance

We would recommend that the report is read in its entirety, but the following areas appear to be the most pertinent for consideration.

- 3.1 The wall along Church Lane leans towards the road by up to 6.5° out of plumb maximum. There are some cracked masonry and slightly displaced sections. Whilst the wall has almost certainly been in this condition for some time and would not appear to be in imminent danger of collapse, should this movement become worse then there are only limited remedial actions. Several graves are close to the rear of the wall.
- 3.2 The bowing and extensive cracking to the boundary wall within an outbuilding of the Old Rectory and corner of Church Cottage is similarly difficult to remediate. With graves also present close to the rear of the wall. In order to not disturb graves would require support to be provided within the owner's property. Please note that the outbuilding whilst old may be younger than the retaining wall. The brick flooring has recently been dug up and replaced with a concrete floor in part.
- 3.3 The brick wall section at the NE corner of The Old Rectory garden has partially collapsed and is leaning on either side. The multitude of trees on either side of the wall at this location would appear to be the cause and, in this case, one on the neighbour's side being a main culprit. Whilst not directly in the vicinity of the general public it should be taken down to a lower level.
- 3.4 In conjunction with item 3.3 the trees and undergrowth are causing problems along boundary walls, especially with masonry walls that will have shallow foundations. A large branch section had fallen from a dead tree into the eastern grounds of The Old Vicarage.
- 3.5 The ownership of the retaining wall at the south boundary with Green Fields was unclear. Sections of the top have collapsed with vegetation growth, but we could not view the retained face due to the fence line directly beyond. The wall height is not expected to be particularly high at less than 1m but there are graves in the vicinity.

4.0 Church Cottage – Northwest Corner Retaining Structure.

- 4.1 We understand that this retaining wall is not owned by the church but retains a significant section of the churchyard, particularly a significant monumental grave above that shows some movement at its pedestal base.
- 4.2 The wall comprised steel column uprights embedded into the ground with horizontal timber sleepers between supporting the ground. The wall is leaning towards the house. It is unclear if this movement has stopped.
- 4.3 Whilst the responsibility for its maintenance may be with others it does support graves that show defects and some instability.

Refer to photographs 1-3.

5.0 The Old Rectory, North, and Northeast Boundaries.

- 5.1 Refer to photographs 4-25.
- 5.2 Masonry outbuildings and an open sided brick store back onto the churchyard boundary wall directly behind and attached to Church Cottage. The rear wall appears to be the original boundary retaining wall.
- 5.3 The wall bows inwards before rotating back where it is propped by the roof timber joists. The height of the wall leaning above the floor on the left hand side is approximately 1.67m. There is a near horizontal crack or opening up of the masonry at this level across the width of the wall although it does step slightly down towards the right. The crack was approximately 0.5-1mm at the centre, which is considered slight, but with the bowing of the wall the defects are more onerous.
- 5.4 Salts are present to the surface of the brickwork at and above the horizontal crack line indicating damp ingress.
- 5.5 Near the centre of the wall panel there are a series of stepped diagonal cracks from the horizontal crack that peter out lower down and two are only hairline in nature.
- 5.6 To the right-hand side, the brickwork has sheared just before the return forming a near vertical crack which does step and link to the horizontal crack. The return brickwork section is also cracked with light from the courtyard to Church Cottage visible through the wall.
- 5.7 The floor comprising brick sets has been taken up and a new concrete slab cast close to the wall retaining a few sets near the base of the wall.
- 5.8 The wall is failing due to the pressure from the retained earth of the churchyard.
- 5.9 The adjacent room does not show any significant defects as a new blockwork wall has been built in front of the retaining wall. That is not to say that there are similar defects to the original wall.
- 5.10 The open side store has two brick buttress walls at either end. There are few structural defects of any significance. Above the narrow-tiled roof there are a few cracks through the mortar courses and frost damage. The left-hand flank wall has a stepped diagonal crack beneath the roof, but this is still near the top of the wall.
- 5.11 The next section of boundary would appear to be an embankment which is highly overgrown with vegetation. Further to the east there is the start of a masonry wall that partly retains the churchyard. The wall soon reaches approximately 2.1m tall. It appears to be a brick thick at higher level, (approximately 228mm thick), and possibly thicker nearer to ground level.
- 5.12 There are a few relatively minor cracks interspaced along this northern wall. These are likely to be as result of ground movement from trees and vegetation growth either side of the wall. Lots of ivy has grown over from the churchyard but there are signs of previous growth having been cut back from The Old Rectory side.
- 5.13 There are some low-level buttresses present where the bottom of the wall appears to lean outward, (away from the churchyard). This would suggest that there may be an older section of wall lower down with a newer section built above, although there is not any obvious change in brickwork or mortar.
- 5.14 Prior to the NE corner, the wall reduces in height, but the curved corner is severely damaged with collapsing sections. There are several trees in close proximity, but a large tree grows very

St John the Baptist Church Yard, Hammerwich.

close to the base of the wall on The Old Vicarage side. The wall should be dismantled in this corner.

- 5.15 The wall reduces in height, (690mm below the top coping), not being particularly much higher than the churchyard ground on the other side.
- 5.16 A large bough of a dead tree in the churchyard has fallen into the adjacent property.
- 5.17 The boundary returns east but comprises a mixture of hedge rows and wire fencing.

6.0 Church Lane – West Boundary.

- 6.1 A brick wall of varying height forms the boundary to Church Lane. Refer to photographs 26-37.
- 6.2 Initially the wall is not particularly tall, stepping regularly up the hill towards the main entrance of the church. There is quite a steep bank behind it. Weep holes have been inserted into the wall above the road level. This section of wall was in good condition.
- 6.3 The entrance gates were being taken away to be refurbished at the time of our inspection.
- 6.4 To the south of the entrance the wall is taller and rapidly retains more earth of the churchyard. The height varies along its length from 1.3 to 1.46m above the road surface, retaining up to 1.2m of ground.
- 6.5 The wall leans outwards along its entire length up to 155mm out of plumb between a green “comms” metal box in the road and a lamppost. The top of the wall touches the edge of the lamppost.
- 6.6 Apart from the lean to the wall there are also near vertical or diagonal cracks to the masonry in a few areas. These occur where the lean becomes greater or in one case there is a large tree behind. The cracks are not large.
- 6.7 Further to the south there appears to be some mortar loss in the face of the wall although not tremendously deep.
- 6.8 Near the far south end a further crack has some displaced brickwork on either side although less visible at the coping.
- 6.9 Where the wall adjoins the front garden wall of the Green Field property the new wall appears to be toothed into the older wall. Above this level the joints have opened up in the existing wall with ivy growth. The new wall could have formed a hard spot in the ground with a new foundation and the existing wall settled slightly on either side. It is, however, stable.
- 6.10 The wall then curved east behind a timber fence in the front driveway of Green Fields.
- 6.11 There are no weepholes in the wall beyond the entrance gateway. There are, however, graves close to the rear of the wall in areas.
- 6.12 The difference in level either side of the road may be partly topographical with the church built on the high ground but may also be a result of raised levels from burials. We understand that the bedrock may be gravelly sands.
- 6.13 The lean to the wall is up to 6.5 degrees from plumb though generally less. The movement does appear to be historical and may not move much more. Weepholes may help and general maintenance and repairs including stitching across cracks with stainless steel Helibar type reinforcement 500mm each side would help its continuity. There are no movement joints as is expected of a wall of this age.

7.0 East boundary – Woods

7.1 This comprised iron metal fences and as such are not structural.

8.0 Boundary with Green Fields property.

8.1 The boundary along this southern elevation was only accessible from the churchyard side. There is typically a brick wall sometimes retaining but obscured in many areas by dense vegetation and viewing was difficult due to a paneled fence having been erected directly behind it on the neighbouring property side.

8.2 The wall is in poor condition in parts as seen in photo No 46. Where the top section has collapsed.

8.3 Further east the wall is replaced with a precast concrete post and panel wall for a short section before changing to an iron fence at the wood at the SE corner. (Photo No 47).

8.4 A tree had toppled over the top of the wall from the other side.

8.5 Ownership of these walls and the trees was unclear.

9.0 Church Yard

9.1 Refer to photographs 38 to 49.

9.2 Most headstones were relatively stable and posed no danger at present to the public.

9.3 Some headstones were leaning but still felt secure whilst giving them a firm push with one arm.

9.4 A few above ground “grave” structures were in a poor condition with cracked stonework but could only pose a particular danger if lying next to them for instance. These tended to be particularly old graves.

9.5 A few smaller headstones were not actually secured to the base and could be lifted.

9.6 One headstone had cracks through the cross but appeared to have been dowelled and resin fixed together.

9.7 The base of the tall monument grave at the NW corner has settled in part although the main tall stone was stable. This is adjacent to the Church Cottage retaining wall. Refer to Photographs 1-3.

9.8 Some areas were inaccessible, even after pulling away some vegetation, due to the dense tree, bramble, and stinging nettles particularly behind the church along the north boundary and opposite towards the south boundary with Greenfields.

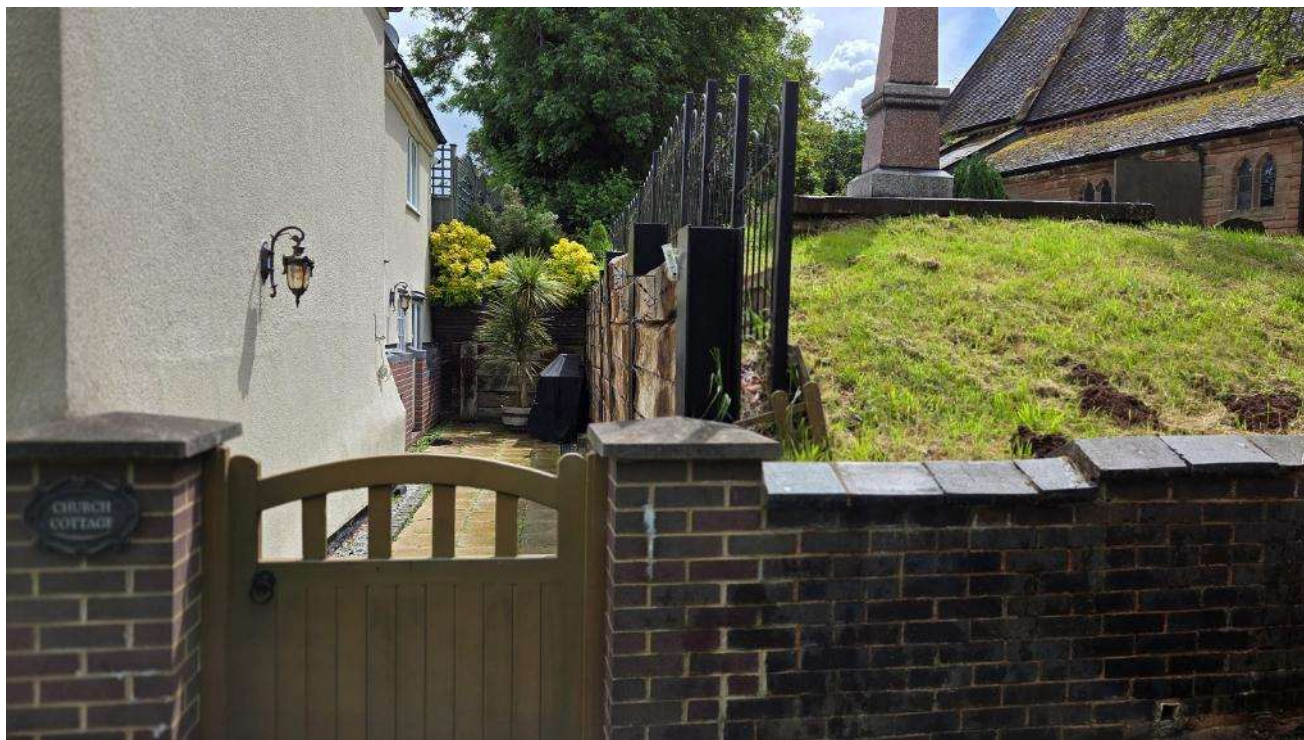
We trust the above is clear but if you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Ben Steward
HWA (Structural Engineers) Ltd

St John the Baptist Churchyard Hammerwich - Photographs



1) Steel post and timber sleeper retaining wall with monumental grave above.



2) View looking north with base of grave settling and displacing slightly.

St John the Baptist Church Yard, Hammerwich.



3) View looking west with graves close to retaining wall.



4) View from the Old Rectory, (Church Cottage to the right), with outbuildings below the fence and open sided store to the left.



5) Rear wall of outbuilding forms the boundary retaining wall. Wall is bowed and cracked.



6) Horizontal cracks to face of retaining wall.



7) Bulge in retaining wall looking west, with cracked buttress wall to Cottage.



8) Cracking and displacement of wall adjacent to return brickwork at west end of outbuilding



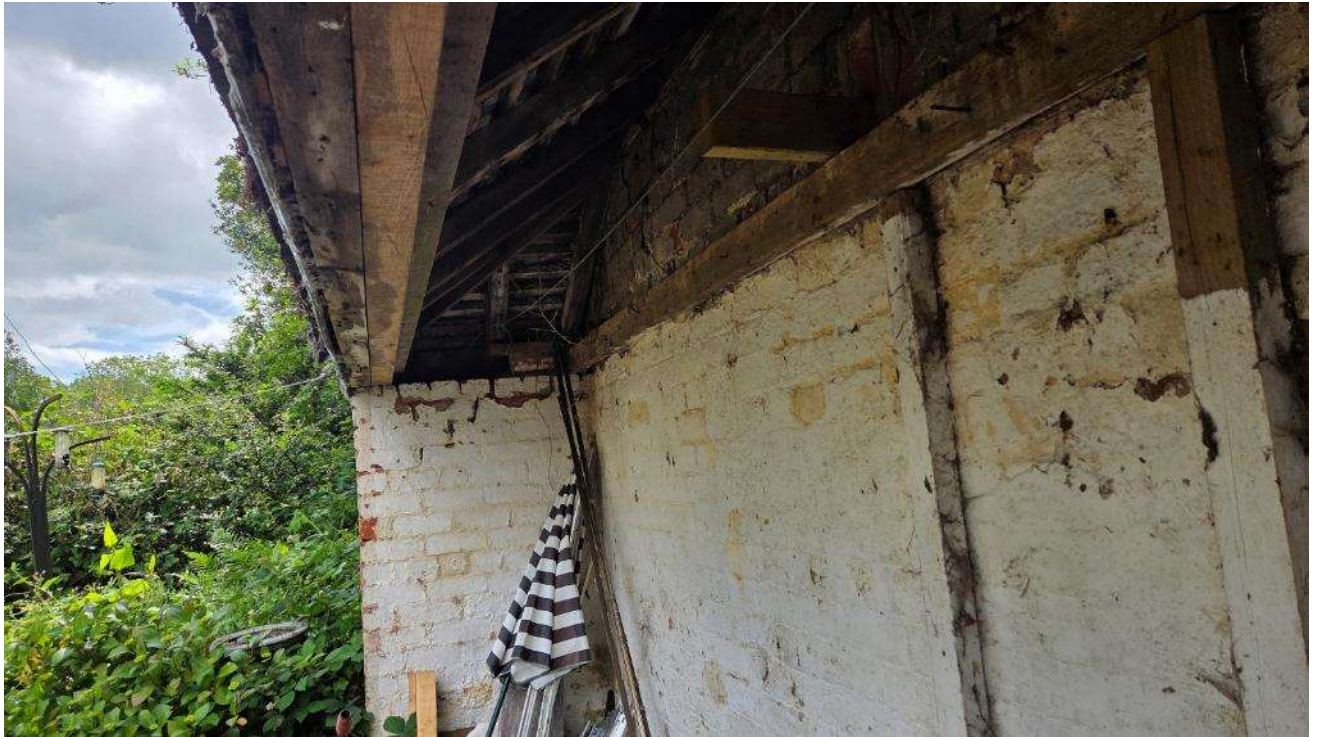
9) Further view of cracking and wall displacement at the west corner.



10) Eastern section of outbuilding; retaining wall obscured by new block wall built in front.



11) Open sided “store” with cracks to top of the wall by the fence.



12) Minor diagonal cracks to brickwork buttress at the store.



13) Potential brick counterfort to rear of the store at the end of the fence, (churchyard side).



14) Overgrow boundary to the east of outbuildings with first section of boundary wall seen in the distance.



15) Crack to base of wall the bottom section has displaced slightly into the garden.



16) Further cracks along wall to the east.



17) Minor crack through mortar joints and coping stone joints.



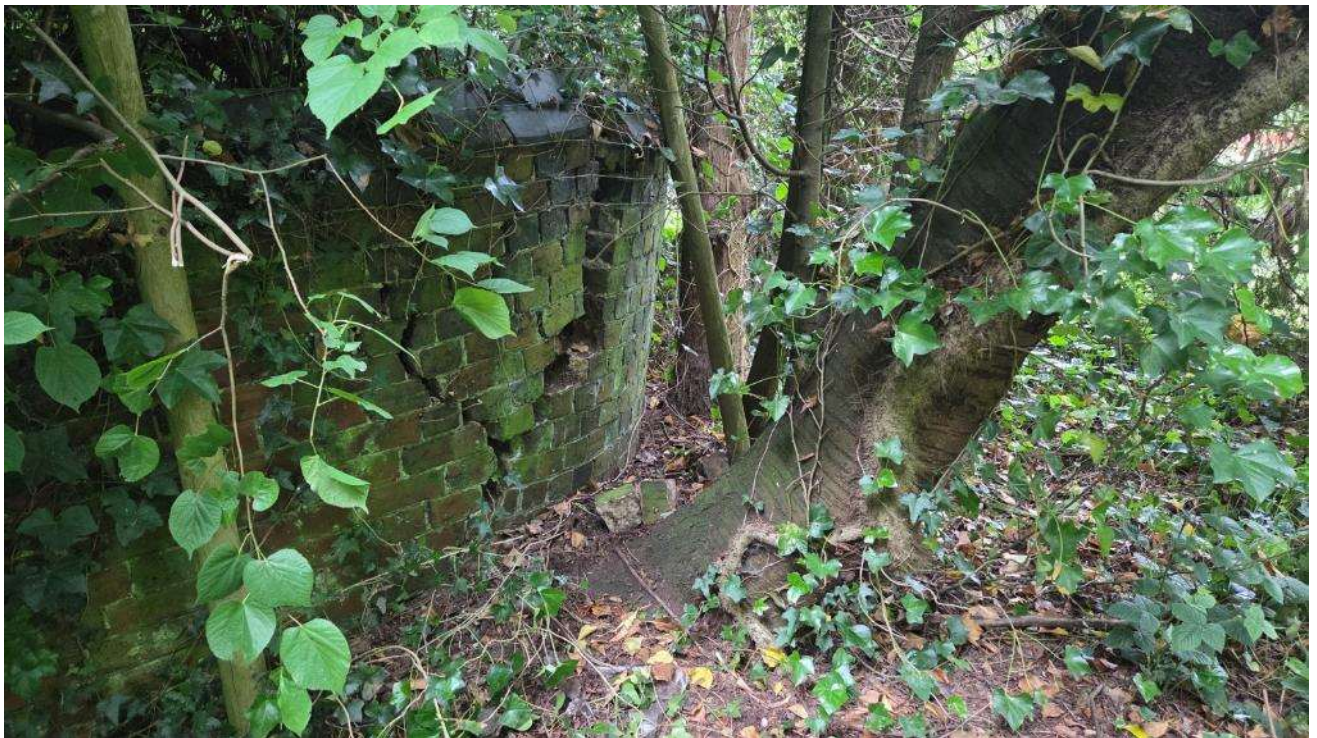
18) Small buttress with wall at base having rotated towards garden.



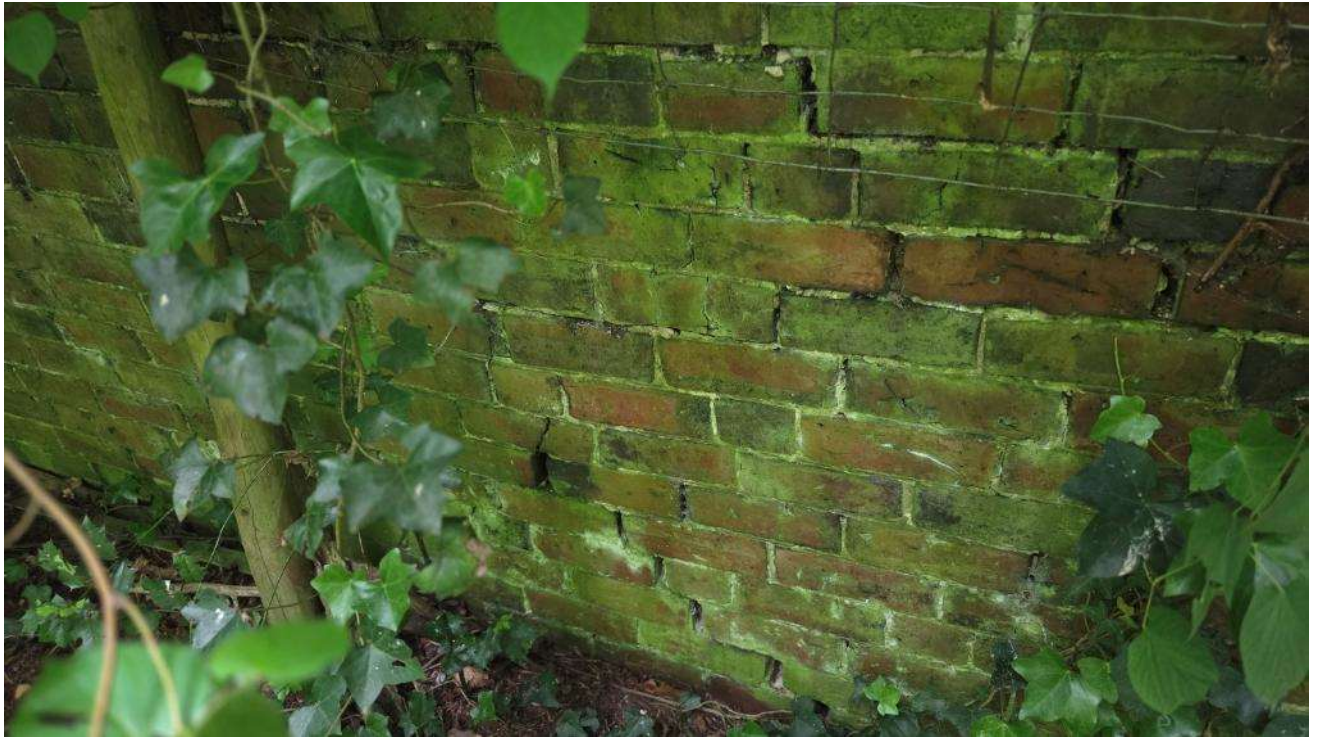
19) Typical vegetation growth from both churchyard side and garden with minor cracks and loos of mortar at cleared patch.



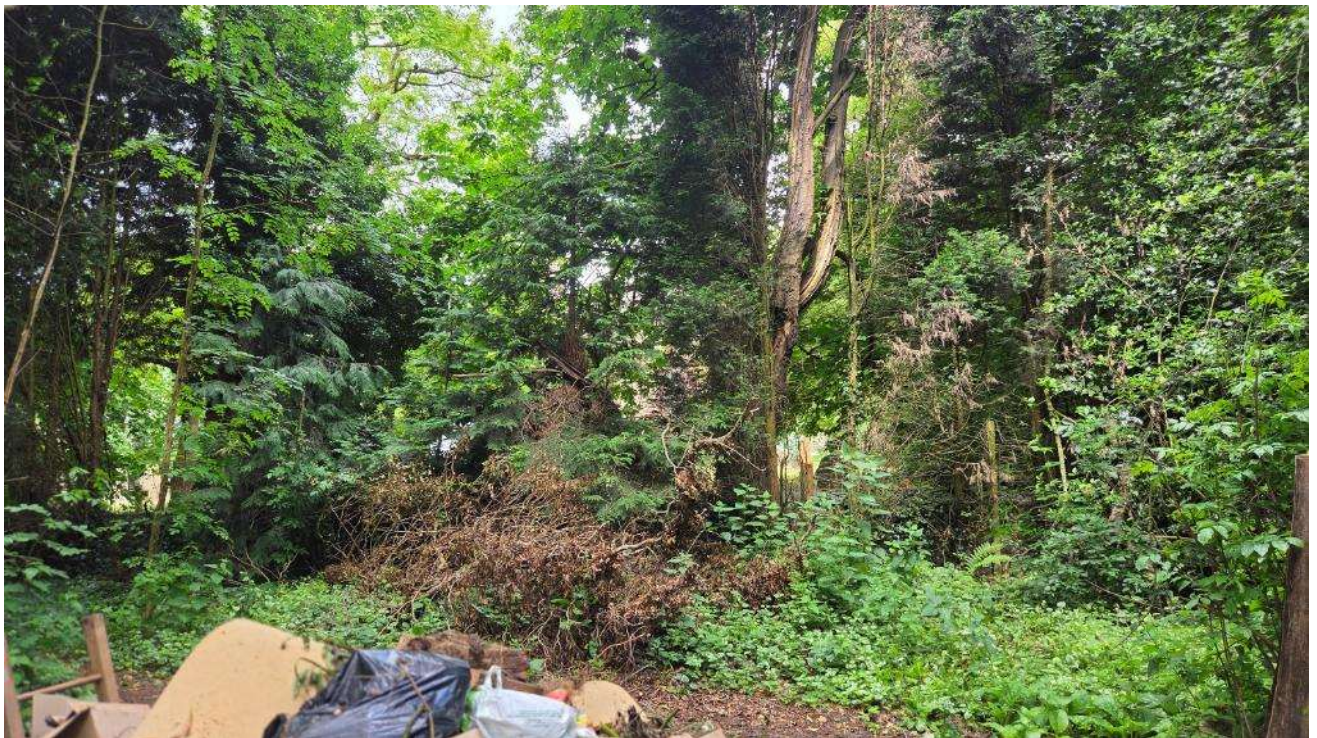
20) Severely cracked and rotated lower wall section at the NE corner.



21) Same corner as 20) with loose and rotated masonry. Tree base from garden side in foreground.



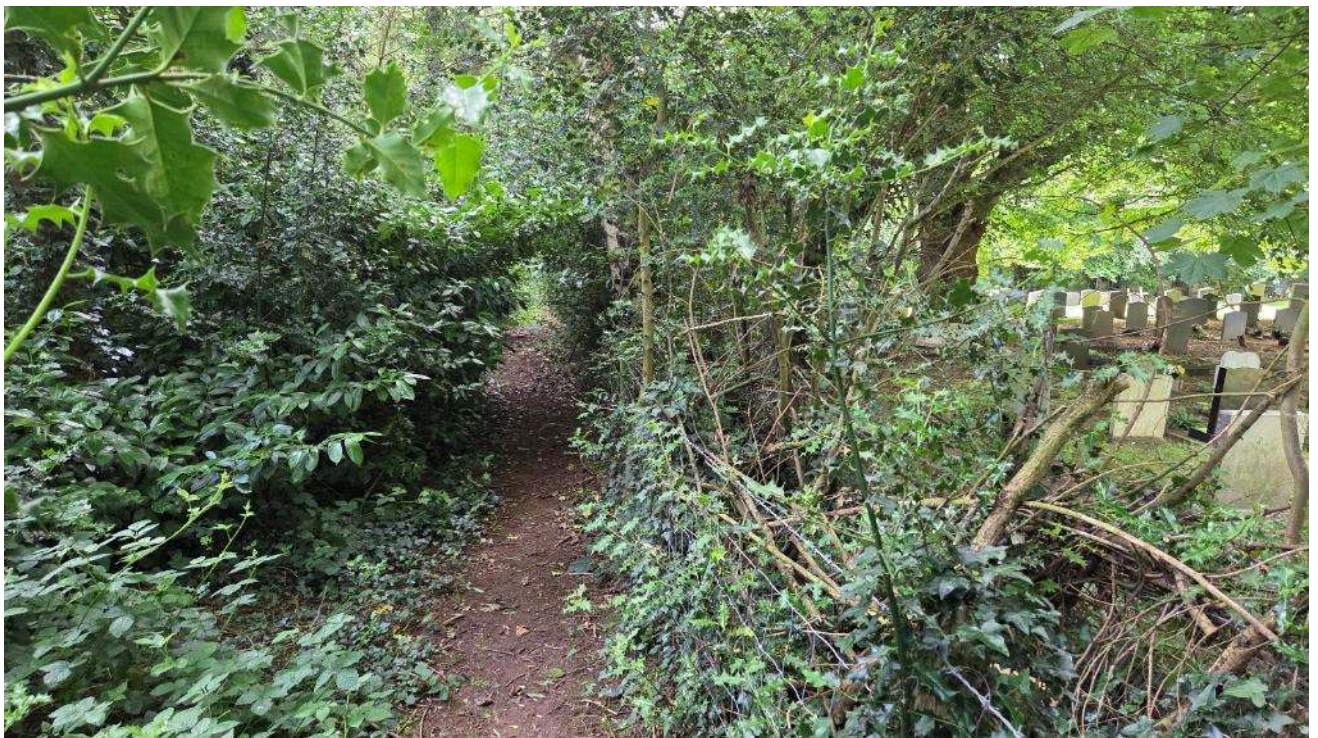
22) Near corner residual cracking from rotation.



23) Dense tree growth at east boundary with large branch section from churchyard side fallen onto property from churchyard side.



24) Low retaining wall section to east boundary.



25) Wire mesh fence section to far east boundary.

St John the Baptist Church Yard, Hammerwich.



26) Church Lane elevation northern section stepped brickwork with newer looking weepholes.



27) Gates being refurbished.



28) Entrance gateway with wall pushed by previous tree growth. Older iron strap bolted to end of the wall. Wall rapidly retains ground.

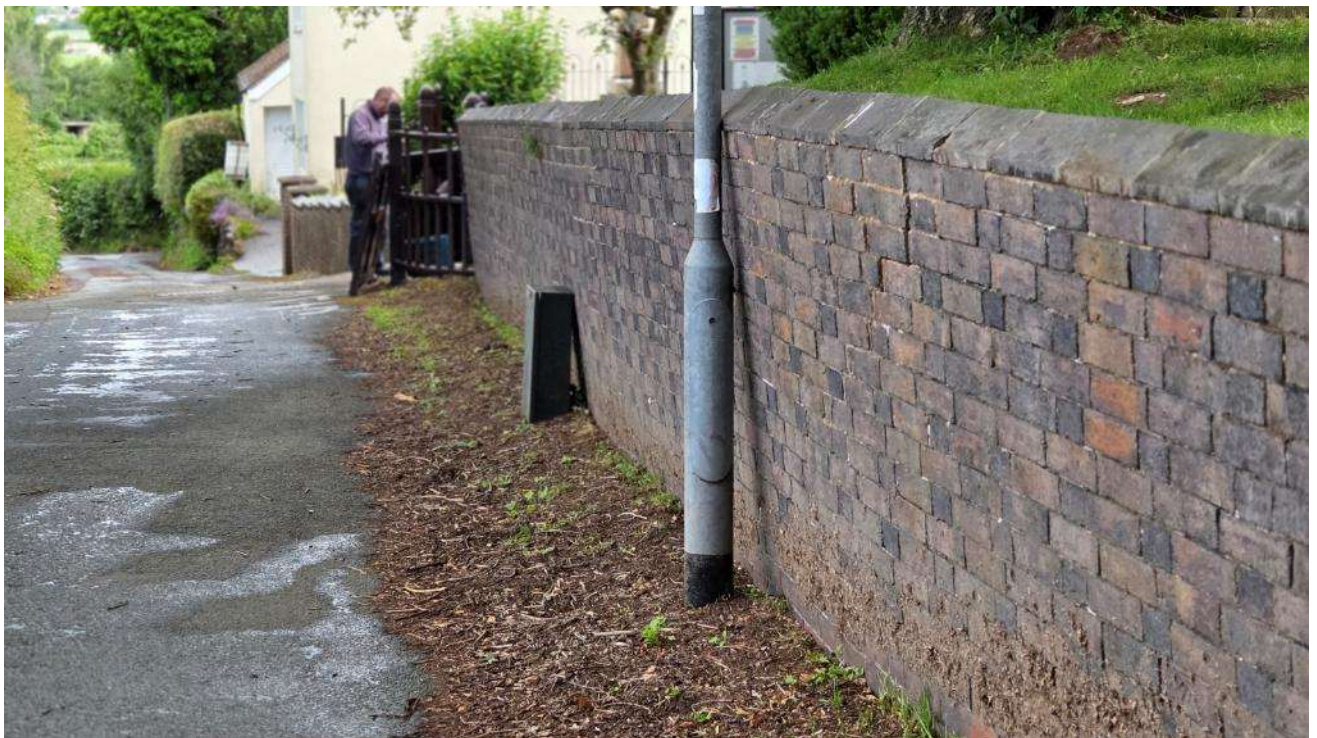


29) Retaining wall leaning towards lamppost leans further.

St John the Baptist Church Yard, Hammerwich.



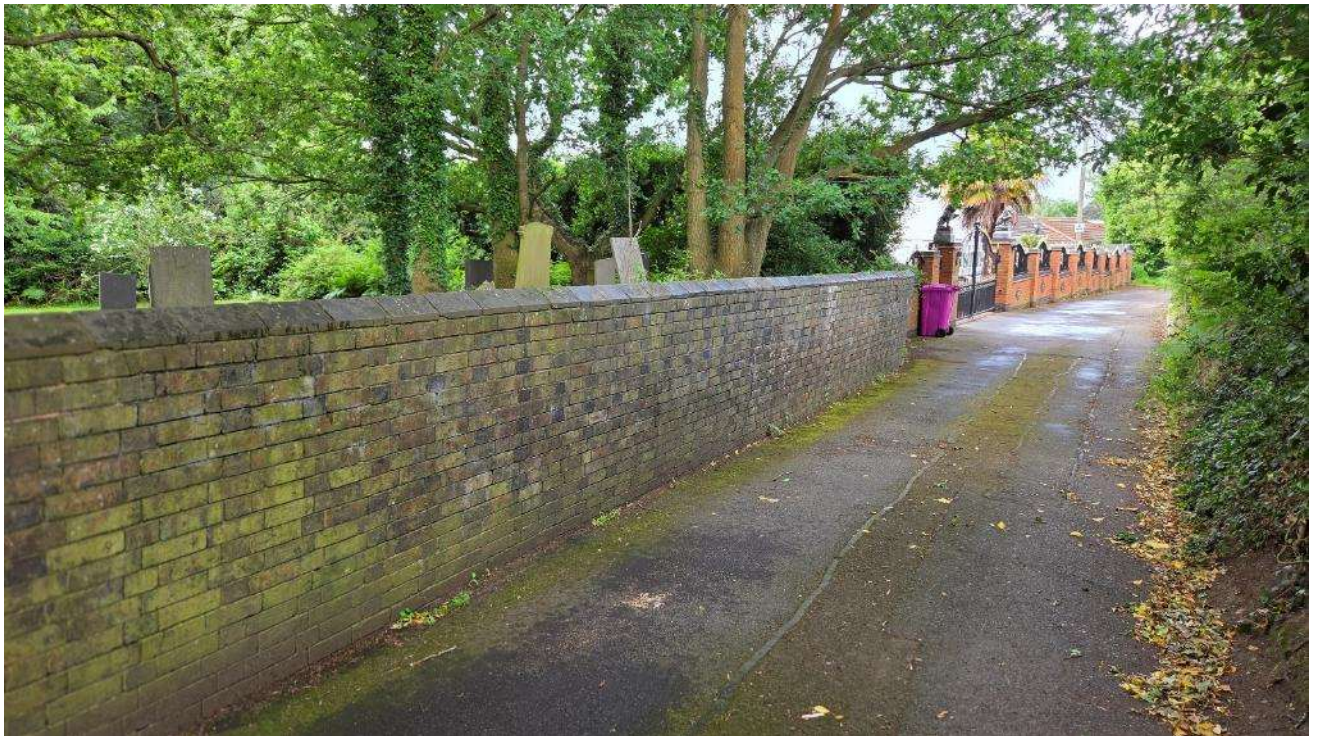
30) Leaning wall section with diagonal and vertical cracking from base as section to right and lamppost



31) Top of wall touching the lamppost with slight stepped crack seen to right at the top of the wall.



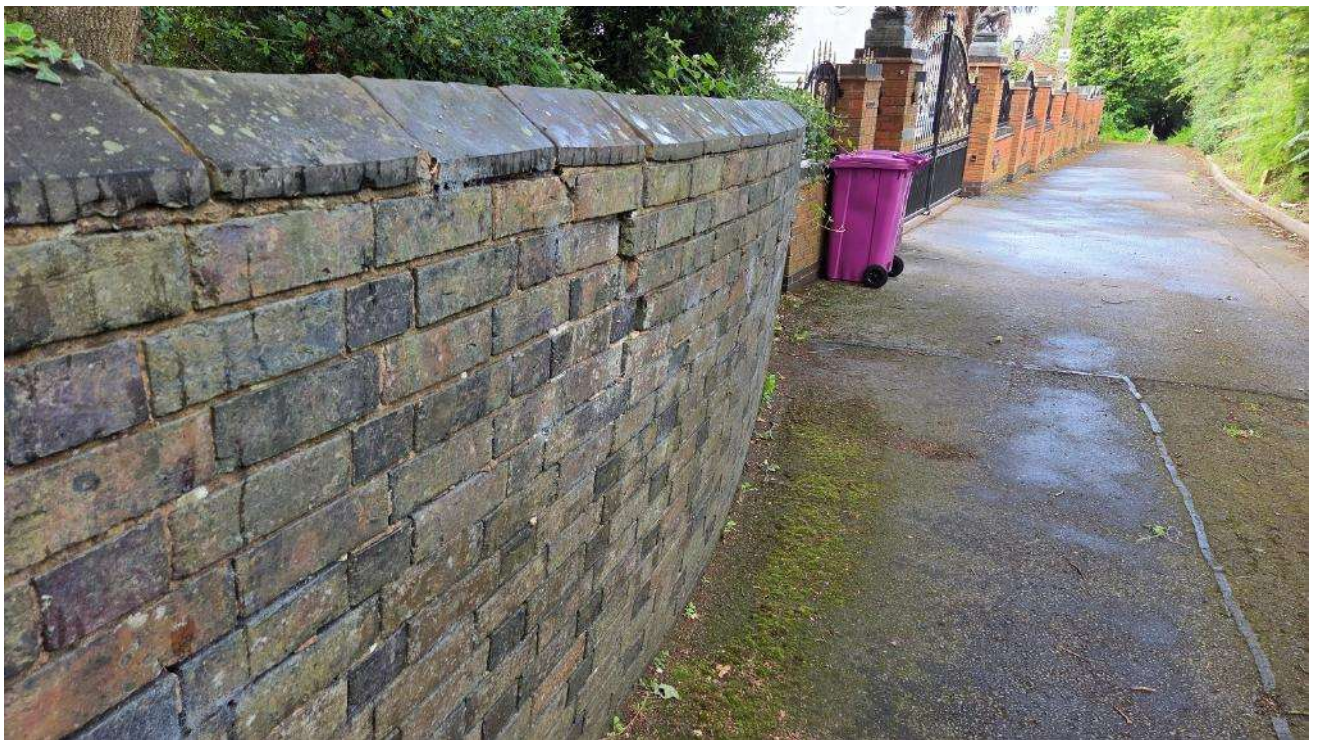
32) Near vertical crack further to the east in front of tree.



33) View further south towards Green Fields property. Graves are close behind the wall prior to the trees.



34) Typical open jointed section of wall to central and southern end.



35) Cracked and displaced wall section towards south end.



36) Open joints and slight movement where Green Fields wall is partly built into retaining wall.



37) View looking north back to lamppost. Retaining wall seen curving behind gates of the property and the first concrete post of a timber fence to the far right.



38) Cracked stonework to “tomb” facing Church Lane

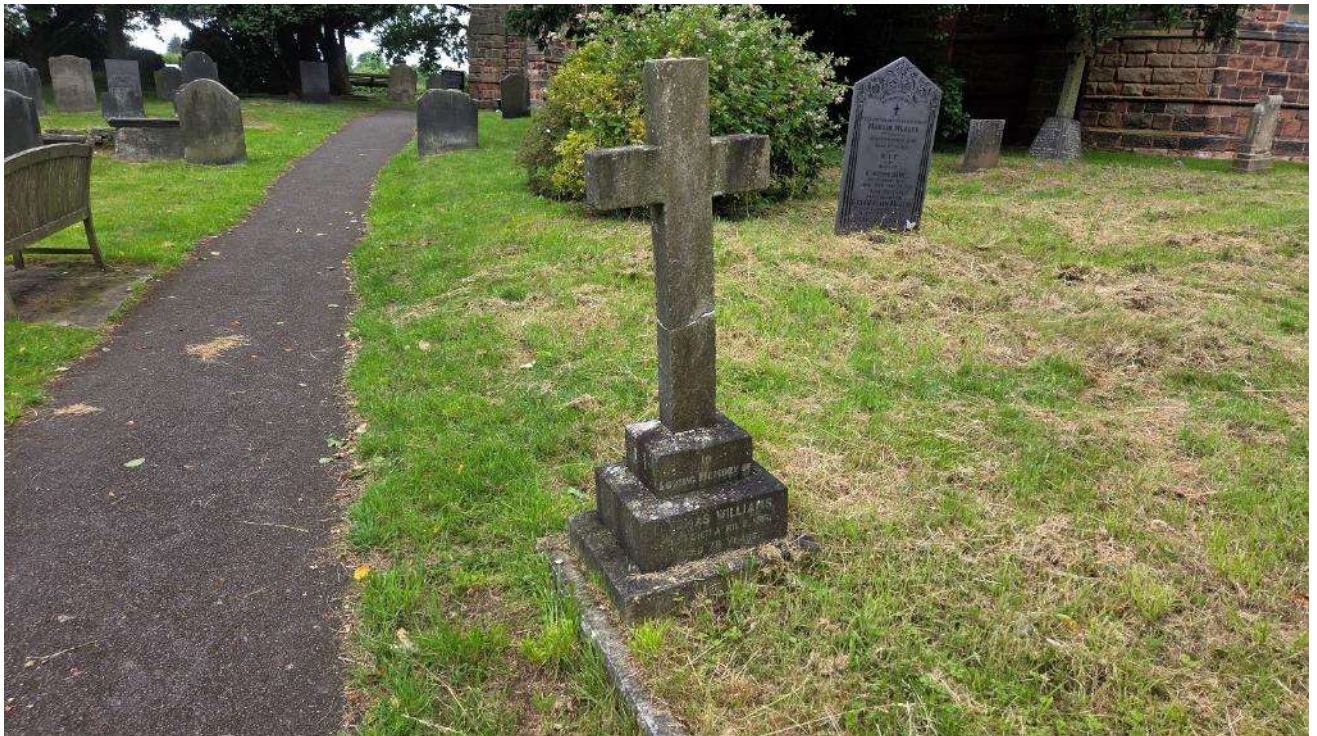


39) Overgrown vegetation innaccessible boundary facing north to the Old Rectory

St John the Baptist Church Yard, Hammerwich.



40) Below ground store accessed from staircase by church.

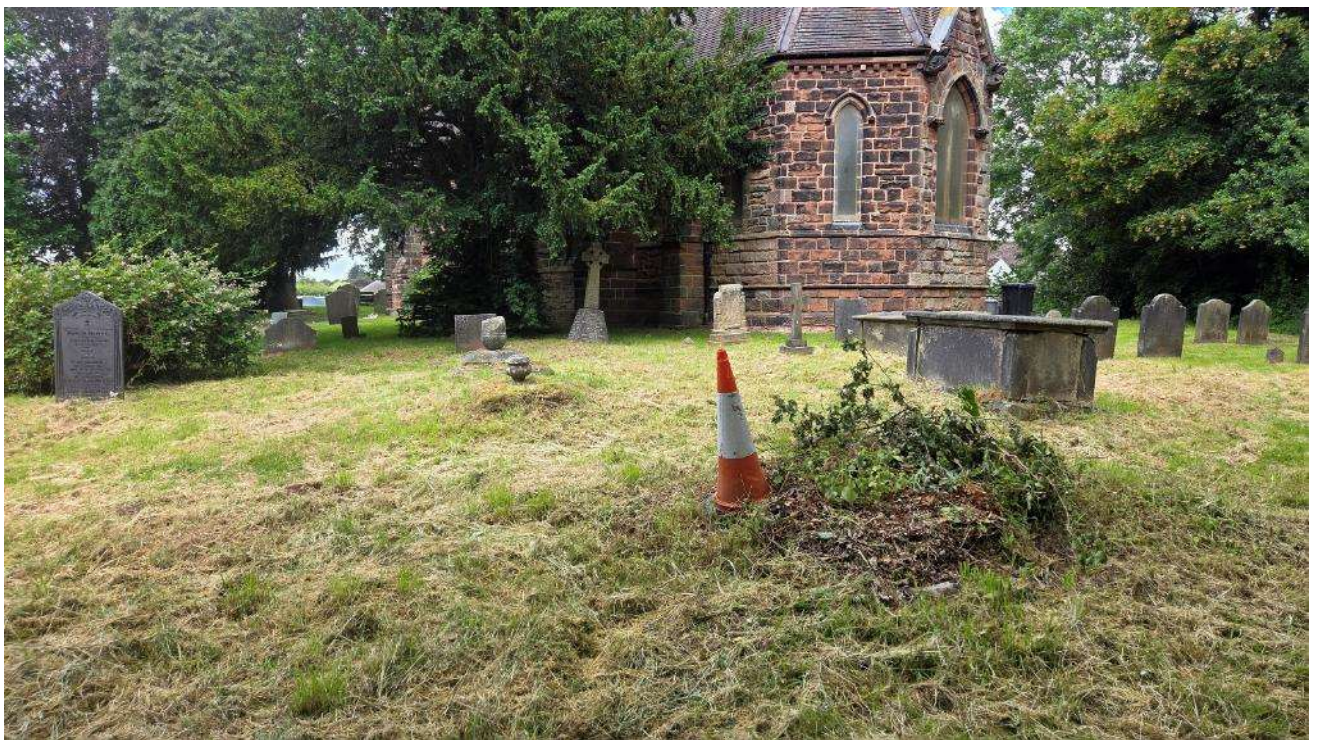


41) Cracked through cross presumably fixed together with a steel dowel.

St John the Baptist Church Yard, Hammerwich.

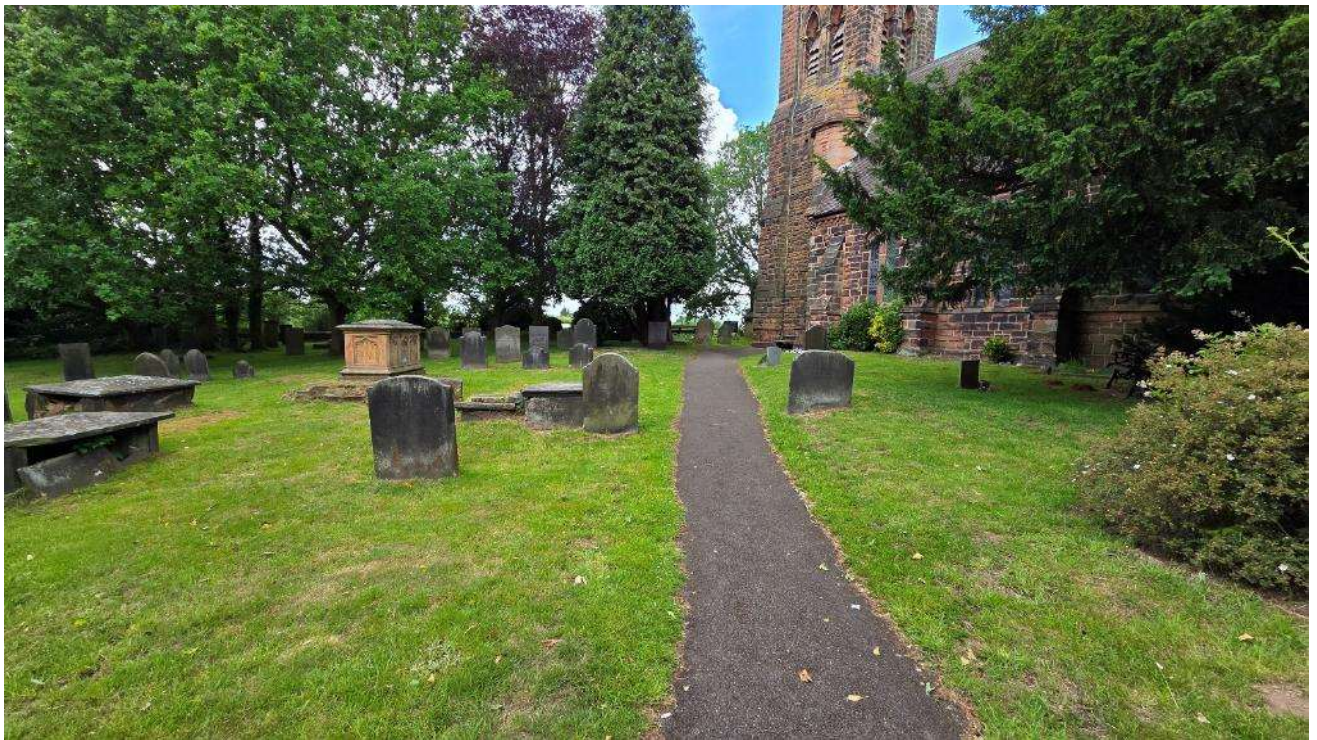


42) Small loose headstone towards NE boundary.



43) Unknown reason for cone marker with leaning cross in background.

St John the Baptist Church Yard, Hammerwich.



44) Cracked stonework above to above ground graves to the left.



45) Overgrown boundary to the south making inspection very difficult.



46) Collapsed top section boundary wall to the south retaining some ground with fence line of adjacent Green Fields close to the rear of the wall.



47) End of the south brick boundary wall with new precast wall section to the left (further east).

St John the Baptist Church Yard, Hammerwich.



48) Typical example of more recent leaning headstones to the east.



49) Far eastern boundary steel fence. Similar fence at SE corner behind benches in the background