

CPAT Report No. 1267

St Beuno's Church, Llanycil, Gwynedd

Archaeological Watching Brief



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Client name: The Bible Society
CPAT Project No: 1930
Project Name: Llanycil Church
Grid Reference: SH 9147 3485
County/LPA: Gwynedd/Snowdonia National Park Authority
CPAT Report No: 1267
Issue No: 1
Report status: Final
Confidential: Yes

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27 August 2014	28 August 2014	28 August 2014

Bibliographic reference:

Pack, K. and Mathews C., 2014. *St Beuno's Church, Llanycil, Gwynedd: Archaeological Watching Brief*. Welshpool: CPAT Report 1267.



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Summary

This report describes the results of the archaeological monitoring of groundworks at St Beuno's Church, Llanycil, near Bala, in Gwynedd (SH 9147 3485) by the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT), in March 2014. The church falls in the diocese of St Asaph and is located within Snowdonia National Park.

The monitoring was undertaken on behalf of The Bible Society during works within the church and exterior groundworks associated with the conversion of the church into a heritage centre.

Groundworks to reduce the surface levels in the nave revealed a re-used 17th-century grave slab levelling foundation for the present tiled floor surface of the 19th-century church.

The Snowdonia National Park Authority's archaeologist required three sondages to be excavated within the church beneath the suspended wooden floors, one in the nave and two in the chancel. The sondages revealed rubble levelling layers from the construction of the church in the 19th century with mixed grave loams beneath. At the base of sondage 3 a stone structure was revealed that was possibly a coffin.

The watching brief continued during service works in the churchyard. Here a number of graves and masonry structures were encountered, together with possible charnel pits and other features. Wherever possible the grave and pit contents were left *in situ*.

Surface works beyond the churchyard to the east for a new visitor centre were archaeologically monitored. In this eastern area no archaeology was identified.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This document describes the results of archaeological monitoring of groundworks by the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) from March to August 2014 during works in the church and in the surrounding churchyard, associated with the conversion of the church into a heritage centre by The Bible Society.
- 1.2 St Beuno's church at Llanycil, near Bala, in Gwynedd and within the Snowdonia National Park (SH 9147 3485) is a grade II listed building. It was closed on the 23rd December 2003 and officially declared redundant on 1st May 2004, at which point responsibility for its oversight passed from the Diocese of St Asaph to the Representative Body of the Church in Wales, together with control over any development and changes to the structure. Seeking an alternative use for the redundant building they sold the church to the Bible Society in late January 2007. The churchyard, however, continued to function as the burial place for Bala residents, and control remains in the hands of the parochial church council and the diocese.



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Fig. 1 Location of St Beuno's Church, Llanycil

- 1.3 Because the churchyard is still within the jurisdiction of the diocese, any developments are subject to scrutiny by the diocesan advisory committee through the faculty system who then advise the chancellor of the diocese and it is he who makes the final decision as to whether a development should take place by the granting of a faculty. Developments affecting the church comes under secular control, in this instance the planning authority of the Snowdonia National Park. Any developments beyond the boundary of the churchyard are also determined by the secular planning authority. From the archaeological perspective, Llanycil thus has two curators determining what needs to be done, the St Asaph Diocesan Advisory Committee's archaeologist and the Snowdonia National Park Authority's archaeologist.
- 1.4 A written scheme of investigation (WSI; no 1388) was prepared by CPAT on 9 January 2014 at the request of Creu Architecture of Denbigh on behalf of their clients the Bible Society. This focussed primarily on proposed works in the churchyard and was in response to archaeological conditions laid down by the diocese of St Asaph. Listed building consent was granted on 4 February 2014 with the local planning authority stipulating the need for a programme of archaeological work as a condition. Unfortunately some preliminary work inside the church went ahead without archaeological monitoring, but the discovery of a grave slab led to a meeting with the Snowdonia National Park Authority's archaeologist, John Roberts on 11 March 2014, and a further WSI (no 1408) was then prepared by CPAT.
- 1.5 Because of the likelihood that human remains would be uncovered and perhaps disturbed at some point in the works, a Ministry of Justice license for exhumation was applied for on behalf of the developer in advance of the works commencing. This was received on 31 March 2014.
- 1.6 Modifications and changes to the proposed works in the churchyard, specifically in the scale of the underground piping and cabling, led to further consultations with the diocesan advisory committee, and the changes were agreed through the mechanism of faculty variations.
- 1.7 Works beyond the churchyard, specifically the preparation of the ground for a new car park to the east of the church and for a new visitor centre were not subject to any archaeological planning conditions, but nevertheless a watching brief of the latter was implemented at the request of The Bible Society and their architect.
- 1.8 Work on the church and in the churchyard took place concurrently during the spring and summer of 2014. As far as we are aware virtually all significant groundworks have been monitored archaeologically.
- 1.9 This single report covers works in the church, the churchyard and beyond the churchyard. Despite the fact that two separate planning jurisdictions are involved, it was felt that a single report was more appropriate and simpler.

Mary Jones and the Bible Society

- 1.10 The churchyard at Llanycil contains the grave of the Reverend Thomas Charles (1755-1814) who was born in Bala and was originally a clergyman before leaving the church to join the Calvinistic Methodists. In 1800 15 year old Mary Jones visited Reverend Charles to buy a Welsh language Bible, having walked 25 miles across the mountains from her

home in Llanfihangel-y-Pennant. She had saved for six years to buy the Bible but when she reached Bala she found that there were no more Welsh Bibles for sale. However, Reverend Charles was so moved by her determination that he gave her one of his own bibles.

- 1.11 The incident spurred Reverend Charles to travel to a meeting of the Religious Tract Society in London at which he proposed forming a society to print Welsh Bibles in the same manner has had been undertaken previously by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, who had printed 2000 copies. The Reverend Joseph Hughes then asked, 'If for Wales, why not for the kingdom, and if for the kingdom, why not for the world?'. This meeting, held on 7 December 1802, lay the foundation for the formation of the British and Foreign Bible Society the following year. The Society was launched on 7 March 1804, in the London Tavern, Bishopsgate, in the presence of around 300 people.

2 The Church and Churchyard - background

- 2.1 A church at Llanycil was first documented in Pope Nicholas' Taxation of 1291, but by that date as an ecclesiastical site it was already ancient. It is highly probable, given its *llan* prefix, its dedication to St Beuno and its location, that a chapel was here in the later part of the early medieval period. The name of the saint was also given to a nearby well – a 'holy well' – now lost and this tends to reinforce the concept of an early origin. Its parish, again of long antiquity, included the borough town of Bala.
- 2.2 Of the medieval church little now remains to be seen. It underwent a major restoration in 1881 when its walls were rebuilt, windows renewed and the porch and vestry added, but even before that date, in 1856, its windows were said to be of 'modern' build.
- 2.3 The church as seen today comprises a continuous nave and chancel with a west bellcote, a north porch and a south vestry. It is assumed by the leading authority on the subject (Davidson 2001) that the building as it now appears is established on medieval foundations, even though much of the structure is late 19th century. Some earlier walling does survive: Roman bricks (from the fort at Caer-gai) are visible in the lower courses of the north wall where the porch butts against it, and the central part of the west wall also looks medieval. No medieval windows or roof timbers remain.
- 2.4 The original churchyard as shown in detail on the first edition of the large-scale Ordnance Survey map of 1888 was extended to the north in 1897 and to the east in 1944. Semi-circular stones built into the churchyard wall near the lychgate are thought to have been re-used from the medieval churchyard cross.
- 2.5 The church is dedicated to St Beuno (PRN 7040) and the present structure dates from the 19th century, replacing an earlier, medieval church. The church consists of a continuous nave and chancel with a west bell-cote, north porch and south vestry. It is thought likely that the medieval church followed the same plan as the current church and the foundations of the nave and chancel are probably medieval, while Roman bricks are visible in the lower masonry course where the porch meets the north wall.

- 2.6 The rectangular cemetery is bounded by a dry-stone wall, with an entrance via a renovated 19th-century lych-gate in the north-west corner. The churchyard was enlarged in 1897 and again in 1944. There are a number of semicircular stones in the boundary wall close to the entrance, thought to be the steps of a former cross and dial.

3 Watching brief

The Church

- 3.1 The internal watching brief was conducted intermittently between 17th and 25th March 2014.

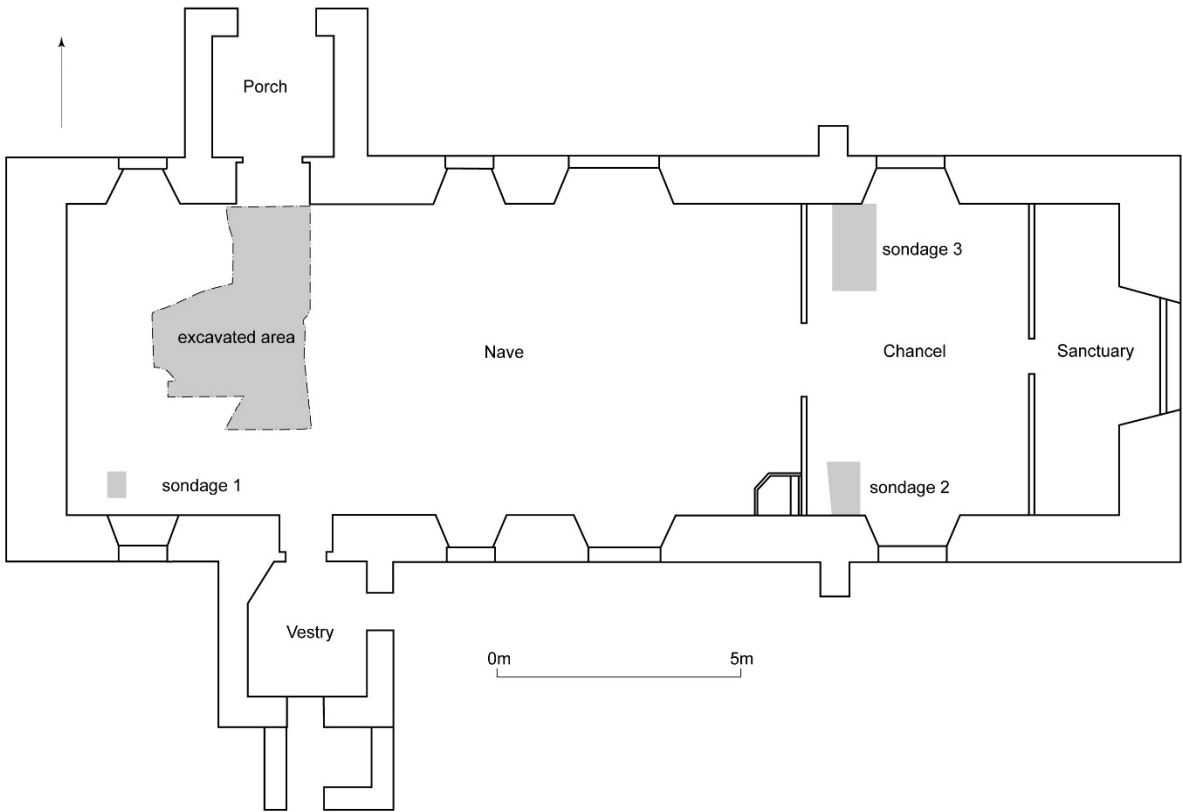


Fig. 2 Areas investigated within the church



Fig. 3 The re-used grave slabs in the nave as a levelling foundation. 1m scale. Photo CPAT 3805-0003

- 3.2 Ground works to reduce the surface levels in the nave had commenced prior the provision of archaeological monitoring. The removal of the tiled floor immediately inside the entrance to the church and the adjacent space where the font had been positioned revealed a 17th-century grave slab measuring 1.8m in length, 0.6m in width and up to 0.08m in thickness, placed 0.1m below the tiles. Once the grave slab was cleaned it was seen to have an inscription of EMK MAY 23 1675 with the initials E and M being only partially visible.
- 3.3 Further clearance in the church entrance revealed that the grave slab was part of a levelling foundation for the tiled floor surface of the 19th-century church. This foundation comprised four long stone slabs aligned north-south towards the entrance of the church, with a shorter overlying slab at right angles at the entrance itself (see Fig. 3). The two long slabs to the west, including that already described in para. 2.2 above, both carried late 17th-century dates. The second memorial slab measured 1.5m in length, 0.56m in width and 0.8m in thickness and was adjacent to the entrance. Its inscription was less clear, with F IANY 10 1673 being visible, presumably including an abbreviated form of January. The U in the month is represented by a V and has been run together with the Y by the engraver.
- 3.4 The two stone slabs to the east were narrower in width, being 0.52m in width and 1.62m and 1.38m in length, with the shorter slab adjacent to the entrance being inscribed with the Arabic 2. The two slabs nearest the entrance were roughly shortened in length from their original length to fit their new use, with their irregular edges positioned to the north.

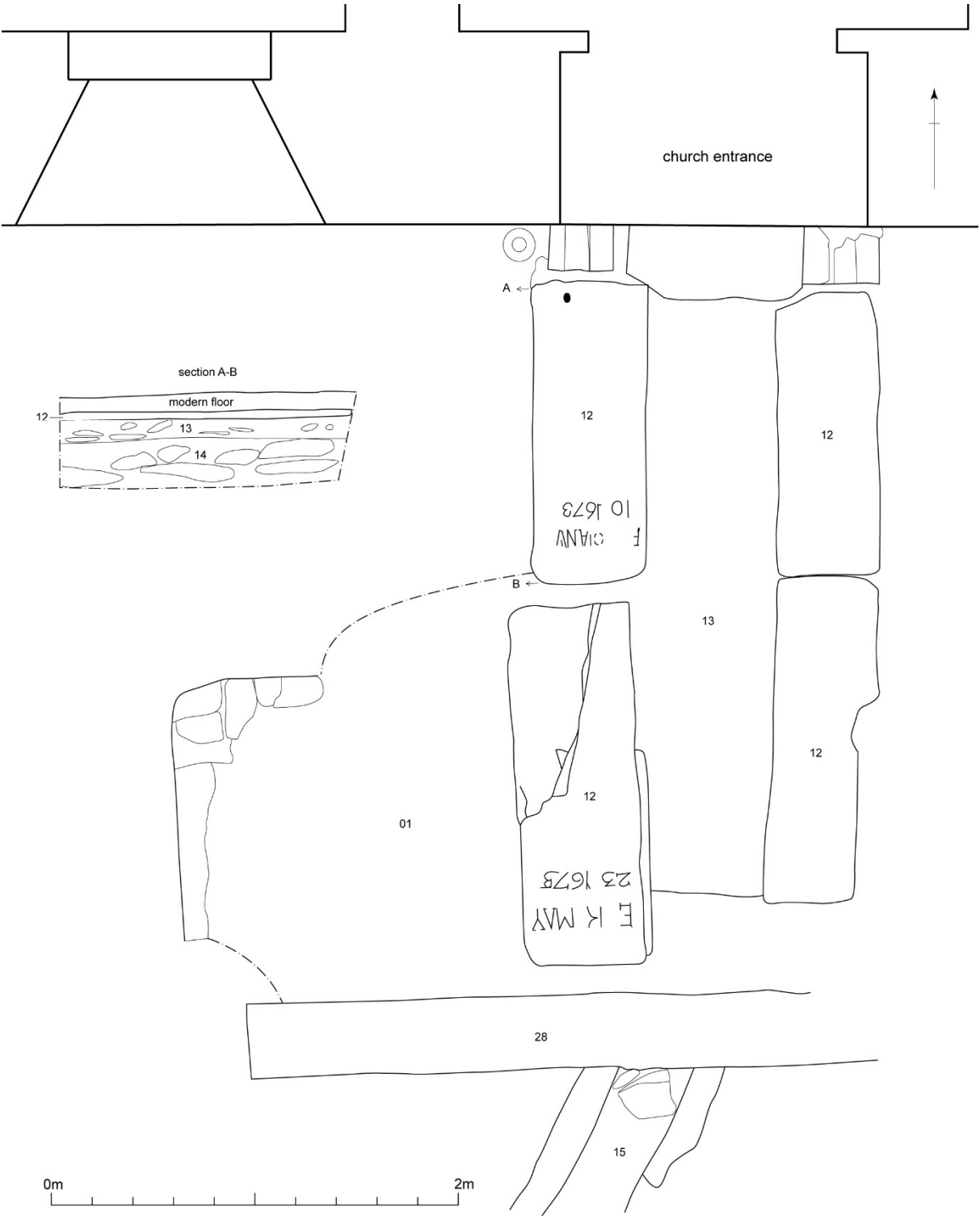


Fig. 4 Detail of the excavated area within the nave, showing the positions of the reused grave slabs

3.5 The stone slabs were laid on a bed of stone rubble and white mortar, within a make-up deposit (01) of mid-grey-brown sandy silt containing mortar fragments, a sherd of Buckley-type pottery and a few pieces of disarticulated human bone. This deposit extended for 2.0m from north to south and 3.0m from east to west and were contained

within retaining walls of mortared shale, 0.22m in height and 0.35m in width, which had been built in the 19th century. In sum as far as could be established the 19th-century works consisted of the solid make-up for the main footways down the aisle and around the font and entrance, with the pews were positioned to either side of the aisle on suspended timber floors.

- 3.6 The Snowdonia National Park Authority's archaeologist required three sondages to be excavated within the church beneath the suspended wooden floors, one in the nave and two in the chancel.

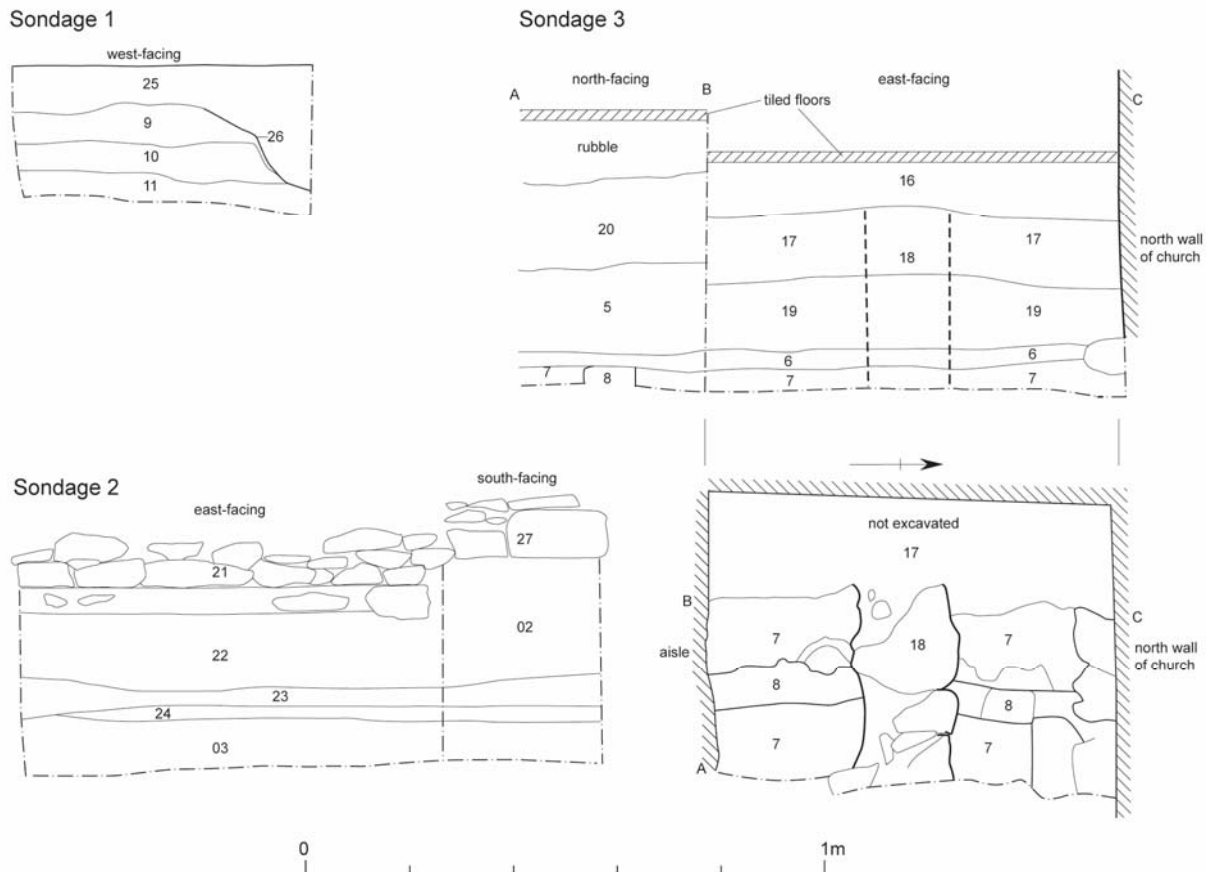


Fig.5 Sondages 1-3 within the church

- 3.7 Sondage 1 was located at the south-western corner of the nave, no more than 0.3m from the main south wall of the present church, and measured 1.0m in length north-west to south-east and was taken to a total depth of 0.55m. A layer (9) of mortar and brick rubble 0.3m in thickness, represented levelling material introduced during the 19th-century church construction. It sealed a dark loam (10), 0.15m in thickness, containing mortar lenses and occasional pieces of disarticulated human bone which we interpret as the upper level of a grave, disturbed and mixed during the 19th-century rebuilding works. Below this brown loam (11) was encountered with frequent disarticulated human bone and occasional window glass fragments; it was examined for a further 100mm before excavation ceased, as there were no indications that there was anything other than typical 'church earth'.



Fig. 6 Grave memorial slab engraved EMK MAY 23 1675. Photo CPAT 3805-0009



Fig. 7 Stone slab floor foundation at the entrance to the nave with one grave slab removed (and the photo scale introduced) to reveal the rubble make-up, viewed from the north. Photo CPAT 3805-0012

- 3.8 Sondage 2 was located directly by the south wall of the chancel, adjacent to the rood screen. It measured 1.65m in length from north-west to south-east and was 0.8m in total depth. The upper layer comprised 0.5m of mortared shale rubble make-up (o2) derived from the 19th- century building works, which overlay a compact 100mm-thick layer of roof slate and white plaster, with some of the latter exhibiting a smooth finished surface from the earlier church's internal decoration. Below this layer brown loam (o3) containing frequent fragments of disarticulated human bone was removed to a depth of 200mm; this was comparable with (11) in sondage 1 and was interpreted as 'church earth', probably derived from one or more graves.
- 3.9 Sondage 3 was located by the north wall of the chancel, adjacent to the rood screen, and measured 1.6m in length, north-west to south-east, and was 0.95m in depth. Beneath the supports of the 19th-century suspended floor was rubble make-up (o5) 0.6m thick containing roof slate and mortar. This overlay a layer (o6) of roof slate rubble, medieval stone fragments and white plaster, some of which showed a smooth finished surface with an ochre wash from the earlier church's internal decoration. Below was brown loam (o7),

excavated to a depth of 200mm, with some disarticulated human bone, iron coffin fittings and shroud pins.



Fig. 8 Sondage 2 showing 19th-century make-up and demolition deposits below, viewed from the west. Photo CPAT 3805-0020



Fig. 9 Sondage 3 with the stone feature, possibly a coffin rim, just visible in the base of the trench, viewed from the west. The traverse 'wall' crossing the sondage is a 19th-century feature. Photo CPAT 3805-0028

- 3.10 At the base of the sondage was a structure (o8) built of roughly finished stone about 150mm in thickness which extended beyond the limits of the sondage. At one end this stone 'rim' turned and extended for 0.4m. Possibly this was a lidless coffin or some comparable grave structure. The north wall of the chancel was exposed in the sondage, with a white mortar skim over the rough shale fabric resting on pitted weathered and smoothed boulders, with a brown clay bonding and the base of the wall. This was almost certainly the foundation of the earlier church, re-used by the Victorian builders.

New Visitor Centre

- 3.11 A watching brief, in May 2014, was maintained during topsoil stripping for the new visitor centre immediately to the north-east of the existing churchyard. The area was approximately rectangular, measuring about 35m north-west/south-east by 12m north-east/south-west. The subsoil consisted of natural orange to grey stony silt and was encountered at a depth of between 0.25m and 0.60m below the existing ground surface. It was overlain by 50-100mm of very stony mid grey-brown silt, with topsoil over it, a less stony version of the grey-brown silt, varying between 200mm and 500mm in thickness. No archaeological finds were recovered and no features were identified in the exposed soils.

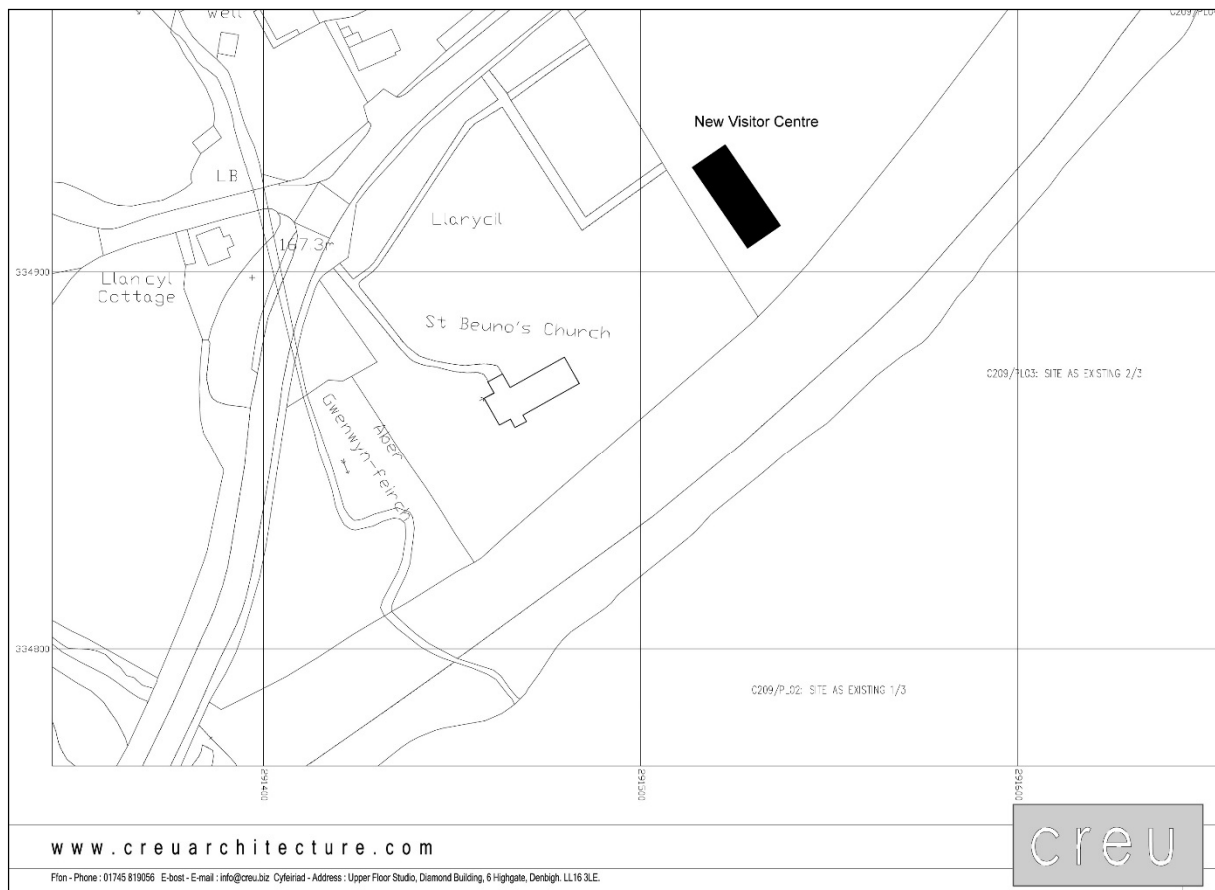


Fig. 10 The location of the new Visitor Centre



The Churchyard

- 3.12 In the churchyard, machine-excavated service trenches up to one metre in depth were monitored on an intermittent basis between late May and early August 2014. The route of these works are shown on fig.11. The trench to the west of the church was 0.8m in width and 1m in depth, where natural orange clay (34) or lake gravels (40) were revealed. To the south of the church the trench was 1m in width and 1m depth, where lake gravels were seen. The trench to the north west of the church was 0.7m in width and 0.8m in depth, with natural orange clay (34) at this level.

Churchyard trenching to the west and south of the church

- 3.13 Beyond the west wall of the church a cable trench ran southwards through the churchyard, following an earlier trench that carried a stoneware drain from the 19th-century church towards the lake. The trench had cut through earlier churchyard deposits and the fill of the earlier trench (29) was a loose mid-brown silty clay containing frequent shale fragments, fragments of brick, bits of tobacco pipe and frequent pieces of disarticulated human bone.



Fig. 12 Structure (45) exposed in the east facing section of the cable trench outside the west wall of the church. Photo CPAT 3843-0020

- 3.14 In the trench and nearly opposite the centre of the west wall of the church was structure (45) below 200mm of topsoil. Irregular limestone blocks were bonded with white mortar to a height of 0.8m and the feature was 1.4m wide externally from north to south; it had a base – not fully exposed – of large stone blocks up to 0.5m in length, some displaying a slightly sooty residue. The remains of this east to west-oriented structure with regularly faced sides on the north and south, might suggest a stone-lined grave but it was infilled with something very similar to the trench backfill (29) and appeared to be constructed with the similar materials to the 19th-century highlighting at least a possibility that it was not a burial feature but had some more mundane function. The

relationship between it and the west wall of the nave had been destroyed by the previous service trench, with the structure only evident in the east facing section of the trench.

- 3.15 South of the south-western corner of the nave a slate memorial slab (48) lay 100mm below the ground surface, sloping downwards towards the south-west. It was 1.8m in length, 0.76m in width and 0.15m in thickness. One face of the slab was bevelled and this, together with the absence of an inscription, suggests it was once the lid of a chest tomb, comparable with other examples still surviving in the churchyard. The stoneware drain ran below this slab indicating that it must have been disturbed during the earlier works.



Fig. 13 Featureless slate slab (48), perhaps from a chest tomb, viewed from the west.

Photo CPAT 3843-0011

- 3.16 Near the south-western corner of the nave a large feature (31) was exposed in the base of the trench at a depth of around 1m below the ground surface, cut into the natural clay and extending for approximately 8m from north to south. The fill was a mid-brown silty clay (30) with containing moderately sized pebbles and flecks of ceramic building material. The feature could not be investigated for safety reasons because of the loose nature of the trench sides, so its purpose and date remain unknown. Its size and proximity to the 19th-century church could indicate a relationship to the church construction works, but other, earlier, origins cannot be ruled out.
- 3.17 A further 2.3m metres to the south of feature (31) a linear feature (33) crossed the base of the service trench, cutting the natural clay and being aligned east to west and 1.3m wide. This feature exceeded the width of the trench and had a silty clay fill with small

shale fragments. It was left *in situ* as excavations had ceased at this level and it is likely to be a grave, although could be a ditch.

- 3.18 Along the service trench a further 3.3 metres to the south a series of three graves (36, 37 and 38) were evident in the east-facing section of the trench. No individual grave cuts were identified between the graves, although it appeared that all three had been cut through the general cemetery soil (41) and into the natural subsoil. The upper part of the graves was defined by edge-set shale slabs within which cobbles had been deliberately placed. In the case of graves 36 and 37 the cobbles were mostly quartz. Grave (36) was 0.53m in width and 0.2m in depth; grave (37) measured 0.44m in width and 0.2m in depth and grave (38) was 0.5m in width and 0.2m in depth. No dating evidence was recovered from these graves.

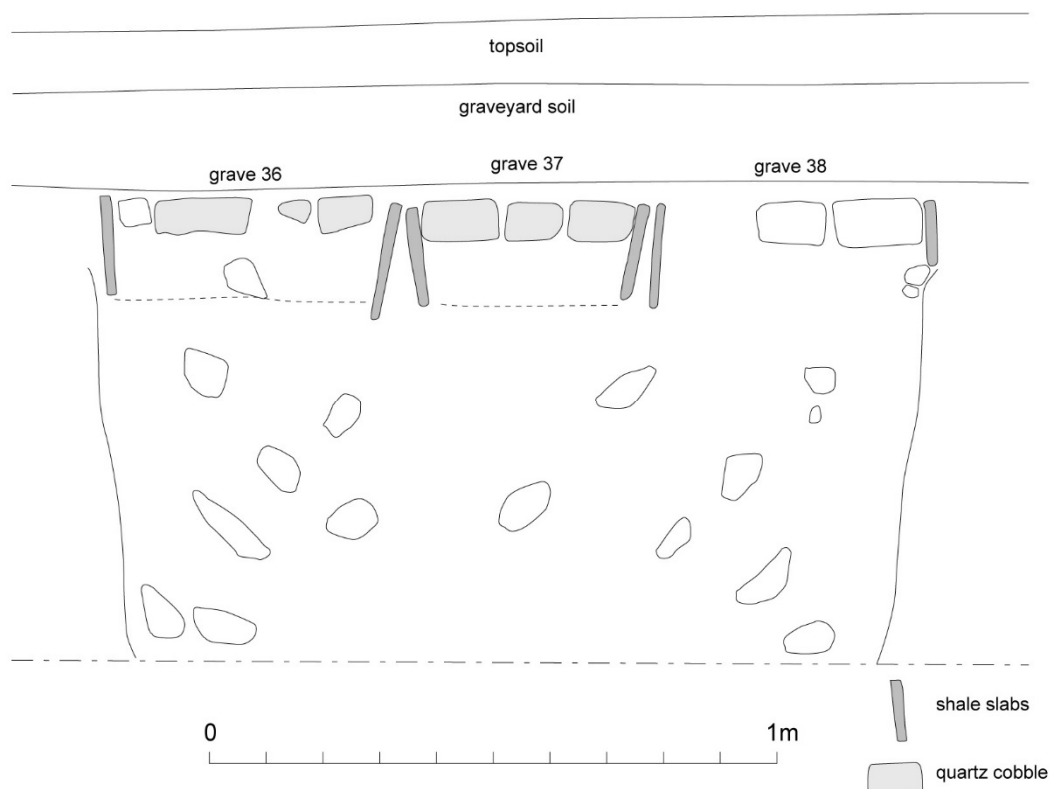


Fig. 14 East-facing section of Graves 36, 37 and 38

- 3.19 The western service trench stopped just inside the southern churchyard boundary and then turned to the east to run parallel to the churchyard wall and leaving the line of the earlier service trench. Below the topsoil was a mixed loose greyish-brown graveyard loam, 0.4m in thickness lying above fine, grey lacustrine gravels.
- 3.20 Near the western end of the southern service trench at 1.00m below the ground surface were the skull and shoulders of an articulated skeleton (42) oriented east to west, the associated grave cut being partially evident in the north-facing section of the trench. The grave fill was grey-brown clayey loam that became increasingly shale-rich towards the base, this material not surprisingly being very similar in character to the surrounding layers through which it was cut. Small fragments of 18th-century pottery were recovered from the light cleaning around the skeletal remains, from which it can be inferred that this grave was from the 18th century or later. The skeleton appeared to be that of an adult

in size, with moderate tooth wear visible on the one tooth remaining in the machine-truncated skull. Aside from this damage, the bones were in a good state of preservation. As the necessary depth for the pipe-laying had been reached, skeleton (42) was left *in situ* with a cover of hessian sacking.



Fig. 15 The partial cranium and upper skeleton revealed in grave 42, viewed from the north. Photo CPAT 3843-0016

- 3.21 Further eastward was a wooden coffin (44), lying 1.1m below the ground surface. It was constructed of light-coloured wood with a painted pitch lining. Buried within the lake shales, it was truncated by the machine at the point where the excavation was deepened to 2m for a length of 5m to insert a septic tank. The part of the coffin that was visible measured 0.65m in length from east to west, was up to 0.25m wide and 0.3m in high. A long bone was visible protruding from the coffin westwards. Access was inhibited by the loose collapsing sections.

Churchyard trenching to the north-west of the church

- 3.22 Two inscribed memorial slabs were encountered near the north-west corner of the nave, 100mm to 300mm below the ground surface. The earliest and closest to the church was (46), a slate memorial slab 1.7m in length, 0.77m in width and 0.08m in thickness, aligned north-east to south-west and slightly sloping downwards to the south-west. The inscription read:
 HERE LYETH THE BODY OF IOHN EVAN OF CLANLLAVAR WHO WAS
 INTERREDY 27 OF FEBR: AN DO¹¹ 1689



Fig. 16. Grave slabs 46 and 47, with a slab running beneath, viewed from the north.
Photo CPAT 3843-0026

- 3.23 A second memorial (47) lay 2.5m to the north of the first. It measured 1.6m in length, 0.79m in width and was 0.1m thick; aligned roughly east to west, it sloped downwards to the north-east. It was inscribed:
- Here Lyeth the Body of Roderick Thomas. Who died March 22^d 1762 Aged 70 In hopes of a Joyful Resurrection Here also Lyeth Interred the Body of Elenor the wife of Rodrick Thomas who departed this Life the 24th of August 1768 Aged 71
- 3.24 Immediately to the west of (47) was a slate slab that appeared to run under a ledger that was still exposed to view in the churchyard and inscribed and dated to 1804. Slabs (46) and (47) were carefully lifted with straps and laid between other graves of the churchyard. Subsequently they were erected in an upright position in the side of the trench running along the south side of the churchyard boundary.

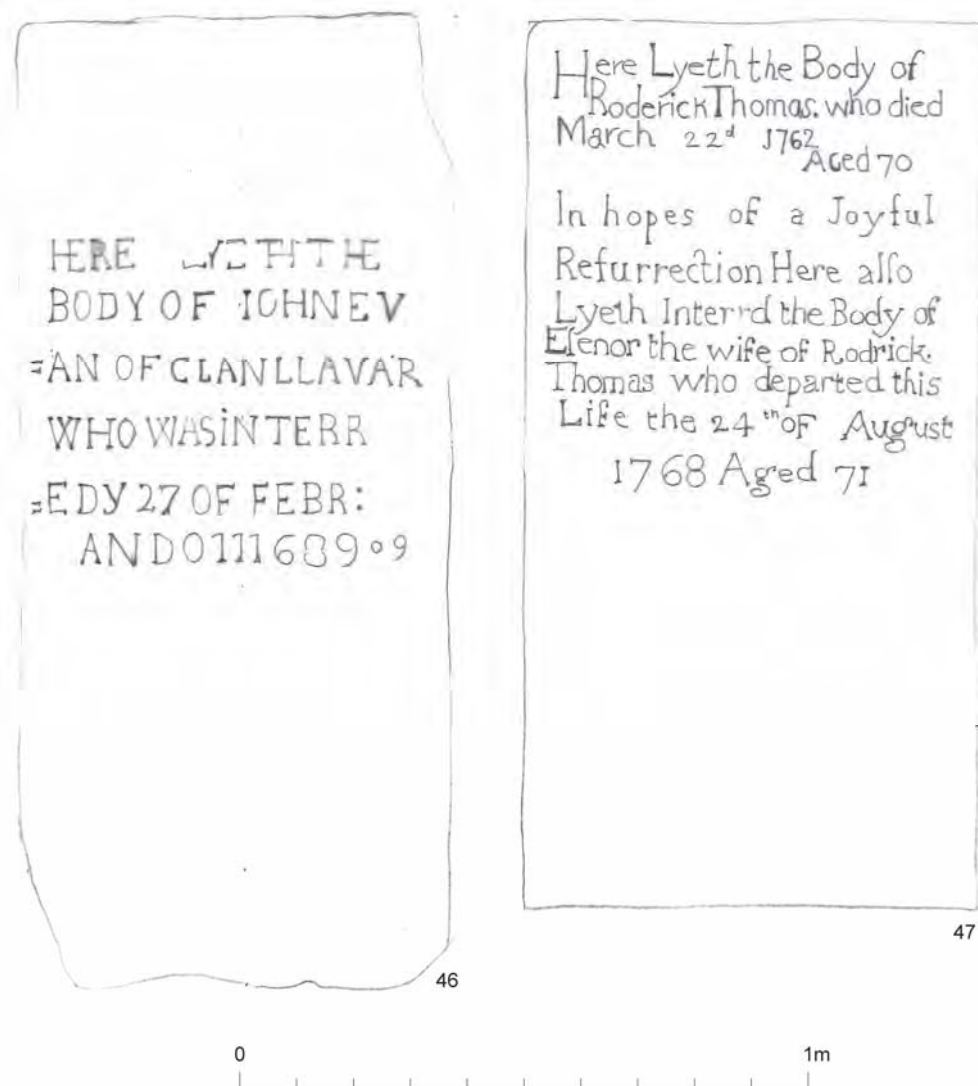


Fig. 17 Grave slabs 46 and 47

- 3.25 The service trench followed the present path from the north-west corner of the nave to the lychgate, and was excavated by machine to a depth of 0.8m with a width of 0.7m. At 0.8m below the surface of the path a single burial (49) was encountered though it was only partially visible. A grave cut, 0.54m in width and oriented north-east to south-west, was evident in the natural subsoil of yellowish grey shale and silt, and itself contained a fill of soft grey silt. Associated iron coffin nails were square and flat headed, but there was no trace of the coffin material itself. No evidence of the grave cut was apparent in overlying layers. This grave was left *in situ*. The location of the grave beneath the late post-medieval path implies it pre-dates the 19th-century works and that the original path to the church was located elsewhere.
- 3.26 Two metres to the west of and parallel with grave (49) were the remains of a wall (50) at 0.5m below the present ground surface. The structure was aligned north-east to south-west, and constructed of large cobbles, bonded with grey clay and orange silt. The wall was 1.3m in width at the base and 0.9m at the top, and was 0.4m in height. There was nothing that could help to date the structure. Extending to the west of the

wall for 2.3m was a compact layer of rubble and grey clay (51) at a depth of 0.5m below the surface. This possibly resulted from the deliberate demolition of the upper courses of wall (50), or could mark a platform associated with it, perhaps a memorial with a marker stone. A plain but incomplete stone (53), nearly 1m in length and width and 0.1m in thickness, was found in association with the upper levels of the wall and rubble. West of the rubble the remains of an 18th-century to 19th-century cobbled pathway (52) were uncovered 0.1m below the present surface. Within the matrix of the cobbles a few fragments of black- and brown-glazed coal measures ware and clay pipe were found. Features (50) to (53) were removed in the excavation works.



Fig. 18 Wall remains (50) and associated rubble (51), viewed from the south-west.
Photo CPAT 3843-0043



Fig. 19 Cobbled path (52) viewed from the south-east
CPAT 3843-0039



Fig. 20 Slate flag stone and beam footing of cemetery lychgate.
Photo CPAT 3881-0005.



Fig. 21 Stone culvert capping (56) below the lychgate footing. Photo CPAT 3881-0008.

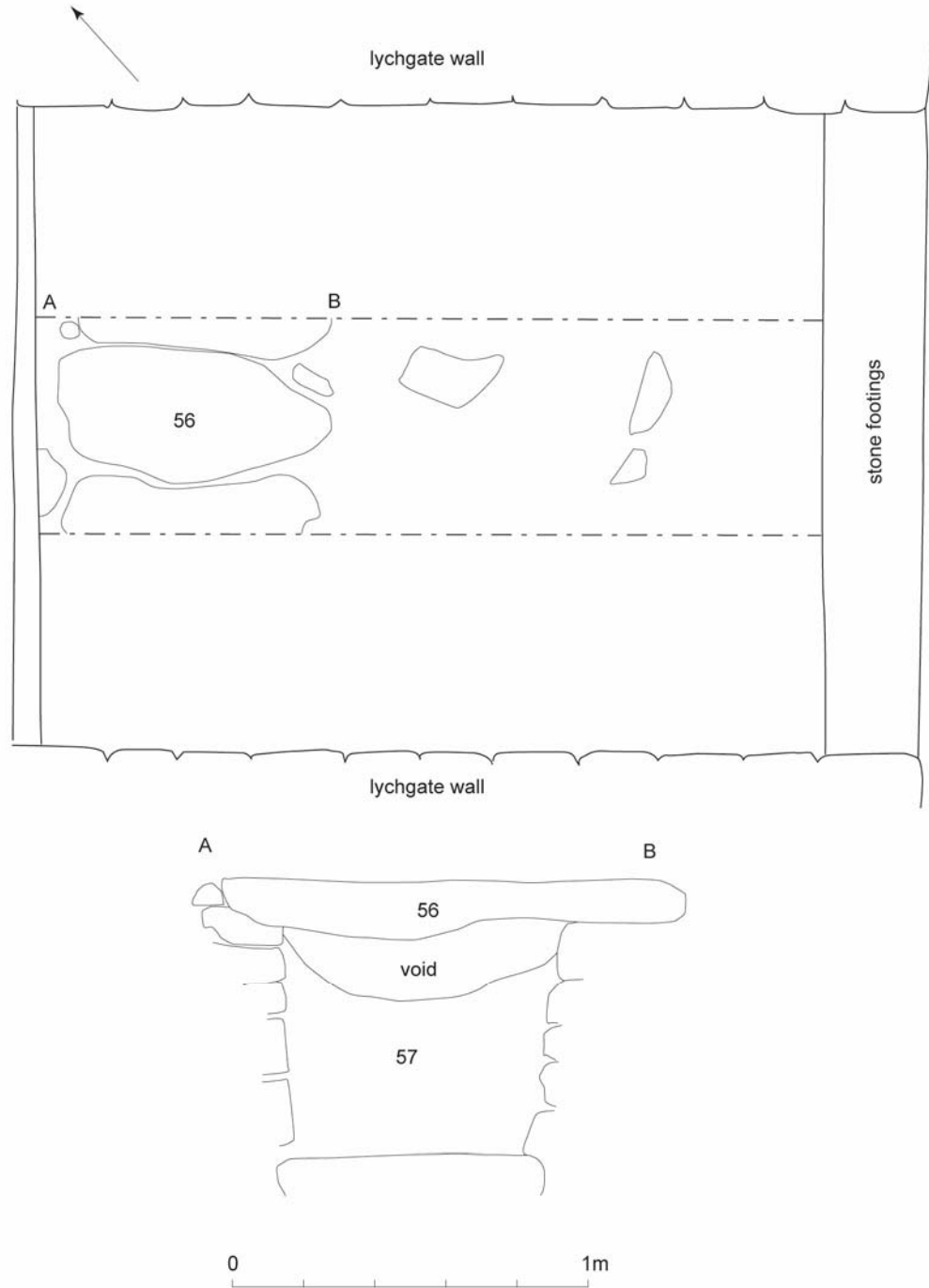


Fig. 22 Plan and section of the culvert (56) beneath the lychgate

- 3.27 The excavation of the service trench through the lychgate exposed an earlier footing and surface (55) which consisted of a rectangular stone, 600mm thick by 600mm wide and likely to be part of a foundation. In the centre of the lychgate was a slate flagstone surface less than 0.8m below the modern tarmac pathway. Removal of the slate flagstones revealed red sandy gravel used to create a level surface (part of (55)), and approximately 150mm below the slate footings lay the rough stone capping of an earlier culvert. The culvert beneath was 600mm deep with rough stone walls (of small stones less than 0.15m long) and a flagstone base. Up to 90% (in depth) of the culvert was filled up with a dark organic silty sand containing organic residues, small fragments of bone (not retained)

and sherds of post-medieval slipware pottery and clay pipe. There was no visible cut for the culvert and it appeared to be set into the same material that formed the footing for the flag stones.



Fig. 23 West end of grave 63 with skull, wooden coffin remains and copper alloy plates.
Photo CPAT 3881-0022.

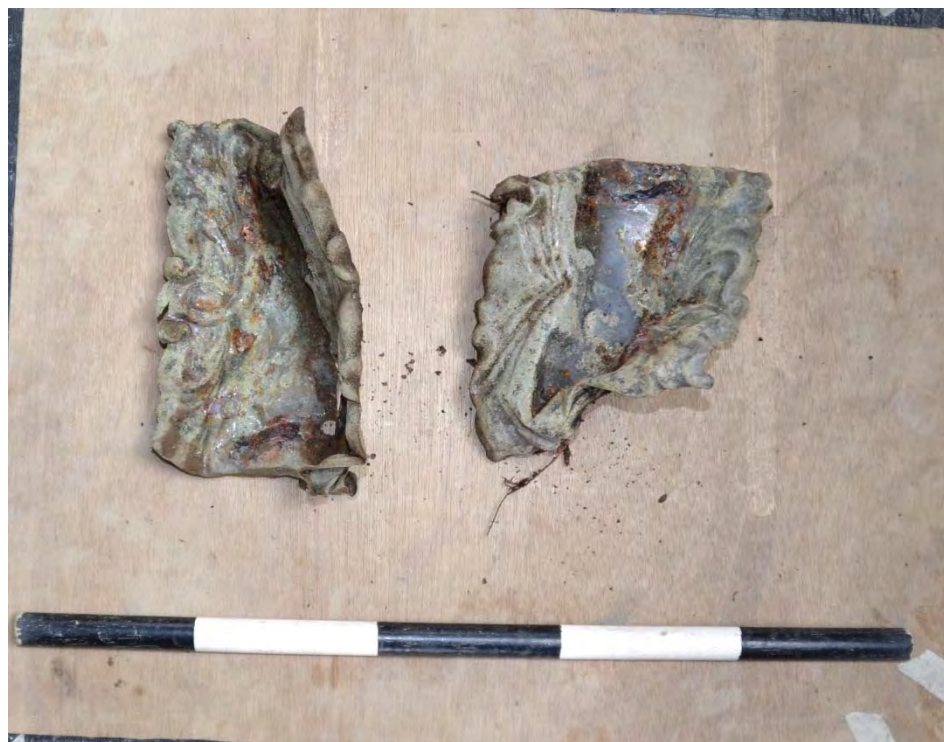


Fig.24 Copper alloy plates from the handles of coffin 58. Photo CPAT 3881-0017.

Southern service trench beside the churchyard wall

- 3.28 The excavation of the service trench running beside the south boundary wall of the churchyard yielded a fairly large amount of disarticulated bone generally at depths up to 500mm below the ground surface, most of which was in poor condition and fragmented. Towards the elm trees located south east of the church, an east/west-aligned grave (63) was uncovered by the machine. The grave held the remnants of a wooden coffin (58) which had ornate copper alloy and cast iron attachments that were largely disturbed during the machining. During hand-cleaning, a skull (59) became visible within the coffin as well as copper-alloy plating protruding from the section. The uppermost remains of the coffin visible in the section lay 800mm below the modern surface with the skull at just over one metre. The position of the grave placed it in line with nearby grave markers that dated from the mid- to late 1800s.
- 3.29 Further eastwards along the service trench was a large pit containing a random scatter of bone in a soil matrix together with a larger concentration of mixed human bone around 600mm below the modern surface. The concentration of human bone consisted of halves of two different pelvises, several long bones and a mandible. This material sat within a darker organic soil and was capped with a thin lens of lime. The upper layers of the pit contained re-deposited topsoil with a high concentration of small bone fragments, and the pit also contained fragments of plaster or mortar as well as rubble, perhaps associated with the Victorian reconstruction of the church. The pit showed mostly in section with only a relatively small part of it visible within the trench; it was up to 4m in length, but neither its depth nor width could be gauged from the exposures within the trench.
- 3.30 A further possible east/west grave (74) was visible during the machining of the upper 500mm of the trench. However, the feature lost definition at a depth of about 1m and no coffin or human remains were detected. After excavation and recording were completed, the grave was carefully covered and reburied under geotextile sheeting and fine soil.

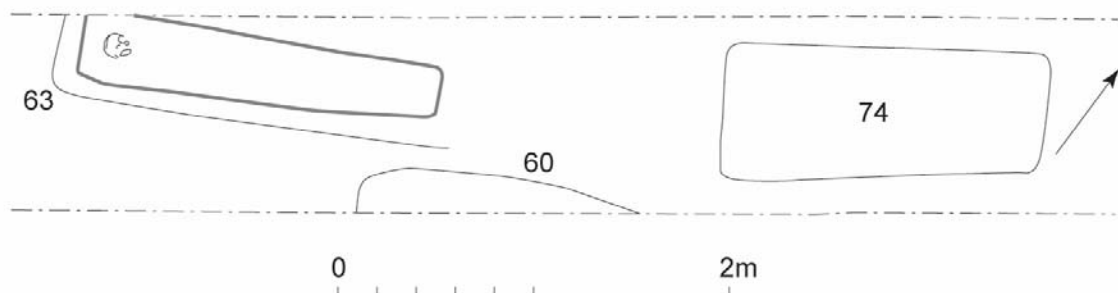


Fig.25 Graves 63 and 74, with Pit 60



Fig. 26 Lime-bonded stone wall footing (64); the earlier line of the churchyard wall.
Photo CPAT 3880-0011.

- 3.31 At the point where the service trench crossed from the old cemetery into the modern cemetery, the footings (64) of what can be assumed to be the former boundary wall of the churchyard became visible at a depth of 200mm below the present surface. The wall appears to run below the present day pathway that now separates the old churchyard from the new cemetery, with the ancient yew trees just inside it. The wall itself was 800mm wide and consisted of large sub-angular stones bonded with a now degraded lime mortar, the makeup and dimensions of the footings matching that of the upstanding rough stone wall that forms the southern and western extent of the churchyard. The soils on the eastern side of the wall were a great contrast to the western soils within the churchyard; within what appeared to be a shallow, sloped cut for the wall, a spread of organic material, silt and orange clay had been deposited which contained fragments of modern glass, plastic and an early 1900s corked bottle.
- 3.32 The remainder of the service trench exposed what appeared to be lake gravels and three large boulders, being 1m in diameter. There was a notable difference in the natural subsoil through the trench with a clear distinction between the yellow/orange sandy gravels (70) that predominated across the majority of the site and loose gravel (71). At the interface between these two soils were the large boulders, one isolated within the centre of the trench and two adjacent apparent within the face of the trench. It was not clear whether these boulders defined a man-made feature or a natural glacial deposit. However, owing to their relationship with the gravel, it is conceivable that they mark an earlier shoreline of Llyn Tegid.



Fig. 27 Shallow grave with remains of child burial (65). Photo CPAT 3882-0008.

Service trench to the north-west of the church

- 3.33 The excavation of the service trench running close to the north-west face of the church uncovered several graves and grave markers. The upper layer within the trench consisted of a fine orange gravel from a former pathway over typical churchyard soil which contained a scatter of disturbed human bone. Approximately 2.5m from the church wall and 6m east of the porch was a shallow grave, 450mm below the present surface. At first this seemed to be a jumble of bone in a pit, but further inspection revealed a probable child burial (65) lying in an unusual position, the body orientated east to west with the head to the east, and one leg lifted with the knee by its chest. Coffin nails were present and appeared to be *in situ* beside the burial. The identifiable bones consisted of the skull, two humeri, two femurs, a partially exposed pelvis, the degraded remains of the spinal column and a spread of long-bone fragments. The grave had been badly disturbed during the construction of the earlier pathway, which had displaced parts of the skull and the long bones. The bones appear to be those of an older child, possibly in the age range of 9-13. After excavation and recording was completed, the grave was carefully covered with geotextile sheeting and reburied with fine soil and chipboard planks to protect the exposed bone from the laying of pipes.

- 3.34 A second possible shallow grave (69) was exposed in section just outside the church door (69). This showed as an articulated set of long bones (likely to be an arm). No grave cut was visible nor was there any sign of coffin nails. The bones were orientated east to west and at a similar depth to the nearby shallow burial (65).



Fig.28 Buried elements of a chest tomb (67), near the north-east corner of the church building. Photo CPAT 3882-0012

- 3.35 No more than one metre from the north-east corner of the church, the remnants of a probable chest tomb (67) lay about 50mm below the present ground surface. What was probably the tomb's rectangular rubble footing was still *in situ*, but to the north its finely carved lid had been upturned to the side. Orientated east to west, the rubble stone base measured 1.6m in length and 650mm in width. The chest tomb was in close proximity to the main concentration of chest tombs in the churchyard which dated to the mid to late 1800s. The tomb's position was underneath the gravel pathway, but it can be no more than speculation that the tomb was flattened in order to allow a clear line for the pathway.



Fig.29 Buried stone slab (68), north east corner of church building.
Photo CPAT 3882-0019

- 3.36 Near the tree line to the east of the church an unmarked slab (68) was uncovered 300mm below the modern ground surface. A roughly dressed rectangular slab, it was orientated east to west. The slab measured 1.6m in length, 600mm in width and had a thickness of 100mm. There was no visible markings on either side of the stone. When lifted there was no visible grave cut below the slab, but the trench depth reached only 400mm. The grave marker, assuming this is what it was, lay close to some of the oldest marked graves in the churchyard, dating to the late 1700s.

Soakaway on south side of churchyard

- 3.37 A soakaway trench, measuring 1m wide and 1m deep, was monitored running south-westwards beside the churchyard wall. It ran from the trench running south-eastwards past the west end of the church to the southern corner of the churchyard (Fig.11). Trenching exposed a large quantity of disturbed human bone (60) scattered in the top 400mm of soil. None of the bone appeared to be articulated and the fragments exhibited varying degrees of preservation. It is conceivable that the relatively large quantities of scattered bone could signal further charnel pits near the churchyard boundary, but this remains to be proved.

Signage locations

- 3.38 The excavation of two 1.0m by 600mm pits for positioning signage to the east of the church exposed a very large quantity of human bone within the more southerly pit, indicative of another charnel or reburial pit (66) close to that found in the south service trench (60), and similarly close to the old churchyard boundary. The skeletal material consisted of a mix of complete long bones and fragments of skulls. Owing to the quantity of the bone being exposed, the proposed depth of the pit was reduced from 1.0m to 500mm to avoid the need to remove further large quantities of human remains. Both pits lay close to gravemarkers below one of the yew trees, and the graves associated with

these markers could have been disturbed during the machine excavation. No signs of coffin remains or articulated burials were visible. Yet it is possible that the graves did cut through the charnel pit as there was a slight change in soil colouration, distinguishable from the darker soils that covered the bone dump. The pits contained both complete and fragmented pieces of undressed, punched slate roof tile, presumably relating to the earlier church.

4 Finds

- 4.1 The finds assemblage comprised a selection of 18th and 19th century pottery and tobacco pipe stems. The earlier church was represented by a selection of roof slates, white plaster rubble, window glass and worked stone. There was a large quantity of disarticulated human bone and iron coffin nails. Sondage 3 also produced two shroud pins.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The watching brief, conducted over several months during groundworks associated with the conversion of the St Beuno's Church at Llanycil into a heritage centre, identified a significant number of burials and grave furniture. These were all recorded to an appropriate level and the human skeletal material was carefully collected and stored in the church, awaiting reburial. From the collected data, various points emerge.
- 5.2 Extensive use was made of old gravemarkers to stabilise the new floor surfaces when the church was restored in 1881. Late 17th-century gravestones were found in the entrance to the church, and it is likely that others exist below the tiles of the central aisle which were not lifted during the present refurbishment works. Other gravestones of similar and later date were found buried in the churchyard during the trench cutting and it seems likely that at some point there was a deliberate policy of clearing old gravemarkers within the churchyard. There are now very few ordinary gravestones of 18th-century date visible in the churchyard with a couple of exceptions only, near the south-east corner of the church. This hints at the possibility that this deliberate clearance probably occurred in the first half of the 19th century, well before the church's restoration.
- 5.3 The appearance of quartz stones used as covering in two of the graves is interesting in as much as it brings to mind a similar occurrence at Pennant Melangell in the Tanat Valley (Britnell 1994).
- 5.4 The three sondages within the church each encountered what appear to be grave fill deposits, encouraging the view that much of the interior of the church was used for burial at some time or other. This was a common practice throughout medieval and later centuries but was gradually discontinued in the churches of Wales during the 18th and early 19th centuries for health and hygiene reasons, before the practice was effectively stopped by law in the 1850s.
- 5.5 There are assumptions that much of the church was demolished in the 19th century leaving only parts of the west wall standing, but also that the footprint of the old church was adopted for the new building. In so far as a single sondage allows, this seems to have

been confirmed by the nature of the foundations in the excavation of sondage 3 against the north wall of the chancel.

- 5.6 The truncation of two dumps of bone, best described as charnel or reburial pits, close to the south-eastern arc of the old churchyard boundary, leads to a consideration of where these might have come from. Seemingly not random spreads, and one with a layer of lime that perhaps reveals the deliberate use of quicklime, the bones are not likely to have been exhumed from the churchyard. The presence of mortar, plaster and stone in one points to the reconstruction work on the church in the 19th century, as does the presence of roof tile in the other. The most likely explanation is that these represent skeletal remains encountered during the floor works in the church and taken outside for disposal in a distant part of the churchyard.
- 5.7 The appearance of a unmarked child's burial on the north side of the church brings to mind the fact that this was the unofficially designated part of the churchyard where unbaptised infants were buried (see Silvester 2012) and it is possible that this mode of burial was extended to older children who for whatever reason had not been baptised immediately after their birth.
- 5.8 The depth of soil that can accumulate within an historic churchyard over many centuries is rarely recorded scientifically, and comments that do appear in print are often apocryphal based on general observations of raised churchyards. Llanycil until the late 19th century had a relatively small churchyard but may have been the burial ground for Bala from the 17th century when the town's own medieval chapel and cemetery is said to have gone out of use. As a consequence a considerable build of churchyard soil might have been anticipated so it is something of a surprise to find that even on the south side of the church, the favoured area for burial, the depth of soil above the natural subsoil was generally less than one metre.

6 Acknowledgements

- 6.1 The authors would like to thank Mr Allan Richards of the Bible Society, the architect, Mr Alwyn Rowlands, Mr Peter Griffiths and the site staff for their help and co-operation during the watching brief. Dr R J Silvester provided advice on some of the discoveries made during the watching brief.

7 Sources

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Appendix 1: Site Archive

Site records

74 context record forms

27 daily watching brief sheets

Levels Register

Drawing Register

8 Photographic Registers

12 A4 site drawings sheets

4 A3 site drawings sheets

2 A2 site drawings sheets

CPAT film 3805, 37 digital photographs

CPAT film 3810, 59 digital photographs

CPAT film 3843, 44 digital photographs

CPAT film 3880, 18 digital photographs

CPAT film 3881, 23 digital photographs

CPAT film 3882, 19 digital photographs

Context Register

Context No	Type	Comment
1	Deposit	Makeup of Nave floor
2	Deposit	Sondage 2. Rubble levelling of 19 th century church construction
3	Deposit	Sondage 2. Silty clay mixed grave deposit 19 th century
4	Deposit	Sondage 3. Mortar rubble, 19 th century church construction
5	Deposit	Sondage 3. Slate and mortar demolition rubble
6	Deposit	Sondage 3. White plaster rubble from earlier church demo.
7	Deposit	Sondage 3. Loam mixed grave deposit
8	Deposit	Sondage 3. Stone structure, possible coffin, pre-dates church
9	Deposit	Sondage 1. Mortar and rubble 19 th century levelling
10	Deposit	Sondage 1. Loam mixed grave deposit with mortar
11	Deposit	Sondage 1. Loam mixed grave deposit disturbed

12	Slab Foundation	Nave. 17 th century memorial slabs reused as floor foundation
13	Deposit	Nave. Rubble makeup for 12.
14	Deposit	Nave. Coarse rubble makeup for 12.
15	Stone drain	Nave. 19 th century drain of church.
16	Deposit	Sondage 3. Shale floor makeup, 19 th century church
17	Wall	Sondage 3. 19 th century church wall support below rood screen.
18	Wall	Sondage 3. 19 th century church wall support of suspended floor
19	Deposit	Sondage 3. Shale makeup for wall 17.
20	Wall	Sondage 3. 19 th century church wall support of suspended floor
21	Wall	Sondage 2. Same as 17
22	Deposit	Sondage 2. Same as 19
23	Deposit	Sondage 2. Demolition rubble of earlier church
24	Deposit	Sondage 2. Silty clay soil horizon, possible early topsoil
25	Deposit	Sondage 1. Mortar rubble 19 th century church levelling
26	Construction cut	Sondage 1. Cut parallel to wall of nave
27	Wall	Sondage 2. Same as 20.
28	Wall	Nave. 19 th century church construction support wall
29	Deposit	19 th century church construction backfill
30	Fill of 31	Silty clay
31	Pit/quarry	8m long feature cuts natural. Unexcavated.
32	Fill of 33	Silty clay
33	Grave	Unexcavated
34	Natural clay	Orange brown
35	Deposit	Demolition
36	Grave	Shale lined with quartz cobbles
37	Grave	Shale lined with quartz cobbles
38	Grave	Shale lined with quartz cobbles
39	Deposit	Brown silty clay with shale
40	Natural fine shale	Lake gravels
41	Deposit	Graveyard loam
42	Skeleton in 43	Unexcavated
43	Grave	South service trench
44	Coffin	South service trench
45	Wall	West service trench adjacent to nave
46	Memorial slab	John Evans 1689
47	Memorial slab	Roderick Thomas 1768
48	Memorial slab	Cap of chest grave
49	Fill of Grave 74	Silt
50	Wall?	Early Church yard wall
51	Wall demolition	Levelling of 50
52	Path	Cobbled path to lychgate

53	Memorial slab	Plain broken slab
54	Deposit	Rubble track makeup
55	Footing	Lychgate footing
56	Culvert	Below lychgate
57	Fill of 56	Silty sand
58	Fill of 63	Coffin with ornate copper and iron
59	Skeleton of 63	Skull visible, not excavated
60	Pit	Bone pit
61	Fill of 60	Lime, human bones
62	Deposit	Graveyard soils
63	Grave	Contains 58,59
64	Wall	Lime bonded stone wall, early cemetery boundary
65	Grave	Child burial, north side of church
66	Pit	Dump of human bone
67	Chest grave remains	Stone chest remains levelled and buried
68	Memorial slab	Plain stone
69	Grave	Articulated grave near church entrance
70	Natural	Orange sandy gravel south boundary service trench
71	Deposit	Lake gravel
72	Grave	Fill 49. Unexcavated
73	Fill of 74	Brown loam
74	Grave	Unexcavated