

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

St Mary's Church, Newtown

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

CPAT Report No 327

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September 1999




Report for Newtown Town Council

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Internal memo

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 The contracting division of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (henceforward CPAT Contracts) was commissioned by Newtown Town Council in June 1999 to carry out an archaeological watching brief during restoration works at St Mary's Church, Newtown (SO 109 918). The church is a Scheduled Ancient Monument of national importance, and it was a condition of granting Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) by the then Secretary of State for Wales that a watching brief was carried out during the restoration works.
- 1.2 St Mary's Church is located on the south bank of the River Severn as it flows through Newtown, within the loop of the meander which encompasses the core of the historic town (Silvester 1992).
- 1.3 The aims of the watching brief were to record the nature, condition, significance, and, where possible, the chronology of any archaeological deposits revealed by ground works. The excavation of a trench along the inside of the east wall of the chancel was the only element of the restoration which was likely to result in disturbance to sub-surface archaeological deposits, and the recording of any features revealed in this trench was the primary aim of the watching brief.
- 1.4 Following consultation between CPAT Contracts and Ian Snead, the site contractor, the watching brief was conducted on 8th July 1999. This report was written in August and September 1999.

2 Historical Background

- 2.1 As has been noted above the church falls within the core of the historic town, on the south bank of the river. Its proximity to the river, and the subsequent risk of flooding, led to its abandonment in the 1840s when St David's Church was built (Haslam 1979, 172-3), on New Road, 450m to the south.
- 2.2 The church tower, which is perhaps of 13th-century origin was restored in 1939 (Haslam 1979, 172) and is relatively well preserved. The remainder of the church is in a ruinous condition, although the south wall is believed to be of 14th-century date, with a priests doorway, a piscina, and gaping window openings (Haslam 1979, 172). In the interior of the church is a mausoleum for the Price family of Newtown, while outside the aisle is a monument of 1902 to Robert Owen (Haslam 1979, 173), who was born in Newtown, and is well-known for his social and educational approach to manufacturing at New Lanark in Scotland during the 19th century (Hay and Stell 1986, 78).

3 Watching Brief

- 3.1 The watching brief examined the excavation by the site contractors of a trench along the interior of the east wall of the chancel. The excavation was required to enable a line of re-set grave slabs, which rest on the internal face of the wall, to be removed in order that the wall could be repointed as part of the restoration. The grave slabs were to be relocated in their original positions following the completion of the pointing.
- 3.2 The trench was excavated by hand to a depth of 0.5m below the internal ground level, at which point the base of the grave slabs was reached. The general width of the trench was in the order of 0.6m-0.7m. Examination of the deposits revealed in the trench showed that they were of relatively recent date, incorporating brick, glass, and other modern material. It was evident that no original archaeological deposits relating to the chancel were disturbed by the excavation.
- 3.3 It is significant, in terms of the potential disturbance to original archaeological deposits, that the internal ground level of the chancel immediately adjacent to its east wall has been raised by the construction of a plinth, 0.6m high, which is faced and covered by re-used grave slabs. The plinth would appear to be of relatively recent origin, and the concrete steps which lead up onto it tend to confirm this. The

positioning of the grave slabs against the interior of the east wall of the chancel would appear to be contemporary with the construction of this plinth.

- 3.4 In the course of examining the trench in the chancel, the opportunity was taken to examine the repointing of the chancel wall. This included the partial removal of small sections of the wall face, which were then replaced and re-set in mortar. No additional ground disturbance resulted from any of the repointing work which was observed.

4 Conclusions

- 4.1 No original archaeological deposits relating to the church were disturbed during the course of the excavation of the trench in the chancel. The deposits which were affected would appear to be related to a recent phase of landscaping in the church grounds, when grave slabs were removed from their original locations and repositioned within the chancel.

5 Acknowledgments

- 5.1 The writer would like to thank the site staff of Ian Snead for their help and assistance.

6 References

Haslam, R., 1979, *The Buildings of Wales: Powys*, Penguin: Harmondsworth.

Hay, G.D., & Stell, G.P., 1986, *Monuments of Industry*, HMSO: Glasgow.

Silvester, R.J., 1992, *Montgomeryshire Historic Settlements (II)*, CPAT: Welshpool.

St MARY'S CHURCH, NEWTOWN, POWYS
SPECIFICATION FOR A CONDITIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
BY THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The proposed scheme of restoration at St Mary's Church, Newtown, involves an element of ground disturbance within the above named scheduled ancient monument.
- 1.2 The Inspectorate of Cadw:Welsh Historic Monuments, in their capacity as archaeological advisers to the Secretary of State for Wales, have determined that an archaeological response is necessary to record any archaeological deposits revealed by the scheme of works. Accordingly archaeological conditions have been incorporated within the Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) which describes the scheme of archaeological works required.
- 1.3 Condition 8 of the Consent stipulates that 'prior to works commencing in the north east corner of the chancel a professional archaeologist shall be appointed to undertake a watching brief of the trench being excavated. The excavations shall be carried out by hand and excavation shall cease if the archaeologist requires a period of time for recording purposes, or if it appears to him that continuation of the excavation would damage or destroy significant archaeological strata. In this eventuality, Cadw shall be informed'.

2 Objectives

- 2.1 The objectives of the archaeological works are:
 - 2.1.1 to record the nature, condition, significance and, where possible, the chronology of any archaeological deposits and/or features revealed within the trench excavated adjacent to the north east corner of the chancel in so far as these aims are possible;
 - 2.1.2 to prepare a report outlining the results of the watching brief

3 Methods

- 3.1 The watching brief will be carried out according to the conditions contained within the SMC (condition 8) and will involve the examination of all the groundworks conducted by the contractors in the archaeologically sensitive area. CPAT does not undertake to engage in any excavation, but will restrict activity to monitoring the excavation of the trench adjacent to the chancel wall and undertaking any necessary cleaning and recording within that trench.
- 3.2 All archaeological deposits and/or features noted during the watching brief will be recorded by drawn section and/or photography as appropriate.
- 3.3 Following the on-site work an illustrated and bound report will be prepared. This will be in A4 format and contain conventional sections on: Site location, Topography and Geology; Historic Background; Watching Brief; Conclusions and Recommendations; References, together with appropriate appendices on archives and finds.
- 3.4 The site archive will be prepared to specifications laid out in Appendix 3 in the *Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage, 1991).

4 Resources and Programming

- 4.1 The watching brief will be undertaken by a skilled and experienced archaeologist. Overall supervision will be by Mr R.J.Silvester, a senior member of CPAT's staff who is also a member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

- 4.2 All report preparation will be completed by the same field archaeologist who conducted the watching brief.
- 4.3 It is anticipated that the watching brief will take no more than 3 days in all and that the subsequent report would be prepared immediately thereafter, dependent on the client's instructions and the arrangement of a suitable timetable. The date of commencement, at the time of writing, has yet to be agreed with the client.
- 4.4 Requirements relating to Health and Safety regulations will be adhered to by CPAT and its staff.
- 4.5 CPAT is covered by appropriate Public and Employer's Liability insurance.

N.W.Jones
6th May 1999

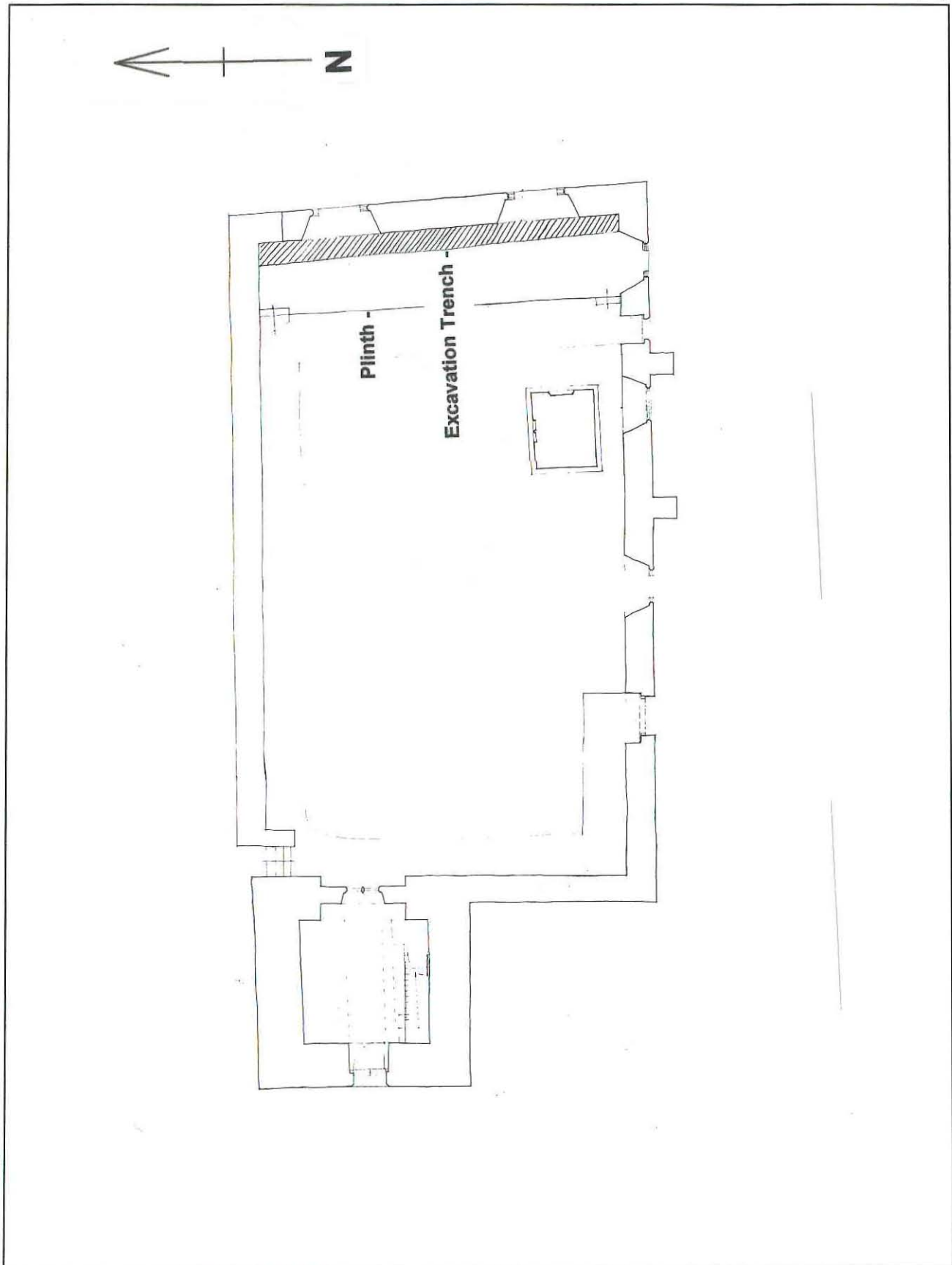


Fig 1 Plan of St Mary's Church Showing Trench in Interior of Chancel (Scale 1:200)