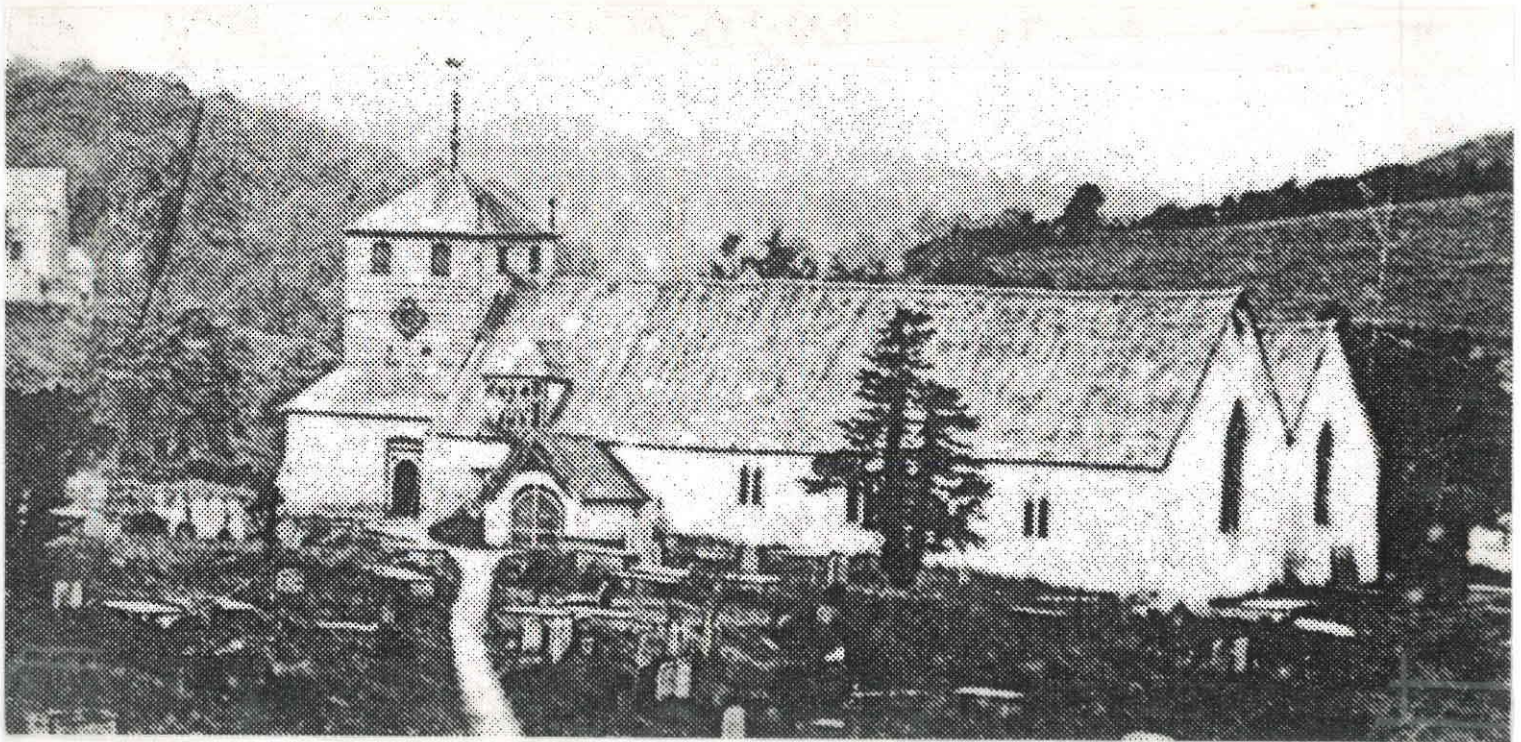


THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

*St Mary's Church, Llanfair Caereinion, Powys*

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON EXCAVATIONS IN FEBRUARY 1993



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**by N W Jones**  
February 1993



## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The following archaeological evaluation was carried out in response to a planning application for a proposed Church Hall extension to St Mary's Church, Llanfair Caereinion (Montgomeryshire District Council planning application M22512). The proposed development lies along the north side of the church (Fig 1), within an area of the graveyard which has been subject to landscaping. This has removed all grave-stones making the identification and dating of graves within the area difficult.
- 1.2 The church is thought to have been founded from the clas at Meifod and the churchyard shape and size, though not the dedication, imply an early foundation. The earliest record is of 1239 when it was granted by the Bishop of St Asaph to the Cistercian Nunnery at Llanllugan.
- 1.3 The church of St Mary (PAR 31089) was completely rebuilt in 1868, replacing an earlier medieval structure. The only surviving architecture from the earlier church is the south doorway, and inside is a font dating to c.1300. Given the close proximity of the development to the existing church, it was felt possible that the area might contain evidence for the medieval building, the location of which is indicated on a plan of 1867 (Fig 2), as well as graves belonging to any period of the church's history.

## 2 THE EXCAVATION

- 2.1 The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust undertook the excavations between February 8th and 12th 1993. In accordance with the evaluation brief (CPAT EVB 26 revised), a single trial trench was excavated to determine the extent of the surviving archaeology and to evaluate the significance and likely dating of any features revealed (Fig 2). The trench was excavated initially by machine, and subsequently investigated and extended by hand. The current report presents an interim statement on the excavations, and a full report will be published in a journal in the near future. The results from the excavations were as follows:
- 2.2 **Trench A** (13 x 2m. Fig 3). Numbers in brackets refer to Fig 3.
  - 2.2.1 An initial trench of 10 x 2m was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.40m by machine, and subsequently cleaned by hand. At this level it was evident that a large part of the area had been disturbed by at least six late burials, presumably dating from after the construction of the present church in 1868. As a result, the area under investigation was limited to one section of the trench measuring c.2 x 2.85m which was apparently undisturbed, and within which lay the remains of a masonry wall. This presumably belonged to the north aisle of the previous church demolished in 1867.
  - 2.2.2 The wall had been extensively disturbed to the west and east, but further excavation of the surviving section (c.3.60m in length) revealed two phases of construction (Fig 4). The initial phase consisted of clay bonded angular stone (2), well faced on the outer, northern side, and surviving to a maximum height of 0.33m. The wall was built on a foundation of apparently random clay bonded stone (31) within a construction trench (29) which was not investigated to its full depth. This had been cut through a layer of stone (28) c.0.10m thick. Sherds of pottery recovered from the fill of the construction trench and from the surface of the stone layer were typical of the 13th or 14th centuries. Removal of the stone layer revealed a layer



of silty loam (41) with evidence for possibly two early graves cut through it (42 and 44).

- 2.2.3 In the second phase of building the original wall appears to have been demolished down to the contemporary ground surface at the top of layer 8 (Fig 4). It would appear that the floor level was lower than the external ground surface, however, since the inner face of the wall had been demolished to a significantly lower level. Following the demolition, a new wall (3) was constructed consisting of an exterior facing of rounded mortared stone (48), an interior facing of mortared angular stone (50), and a central core of random voided stone and mortar (49). A hand excavated extension revealed the wall thickness to be 1.35m. The interior face still retained some plaster and limewash, but with no indication of the contemporary floor level, although this was possibly entirely disturbed at this point by a recent drainage trench (32). No dating evidence was recovered for this phase of construction.
- 2.2.4 Evidence from the plan of 1867 (Fig 2), contemporary with the construction of the present church, shows the relationship between the earlier demolished building and the new construction. This indicated that the former north aisle contained a doorway in approximately the same position as the connecting door for the proposed church hall. A hand excavated extension revealed that all trace of the earliest wall had been removed by graves on the northern side and the drainage trench (32) to the south. All that remained was the rubble core of the second phase wall (34), but with no evidence for a doorway.
- 2.2.5 A further hand excavated extension to the east failed to reveal further in situ walling. Three recent graves (10, 35 and 37) had disturbed much of the area, while the drainage trench (32) cut through the south east angle. An area of rubble and voided stone (40) may be the remnants of the second phase corework, and contained several burnt stones, some of which were glazed.

### 3 CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 The results from the excavation would suggest that the north aisle of the former church was originally constructed in the 13th or 14th century, and subsequently rebuilt at some later date before being finally demolished in 1867. Although the interior of this aisle did not retain any evidence for contemporary floor levels within the excavated area, it must be assumed that such could well survive beneath the existing church; the area between the excavation and the present north wall is likely to have been completely disturbed during the construction work in 1868 and the more recent drainage trench.
- 3.2 The existence of archaeological features of probable 13th or 14th century date within Trench A would suggest that the surrounding area may contain further evidence for the construction of the earlier church and the layout of the associated churchyard.

## **Acknowledgements**

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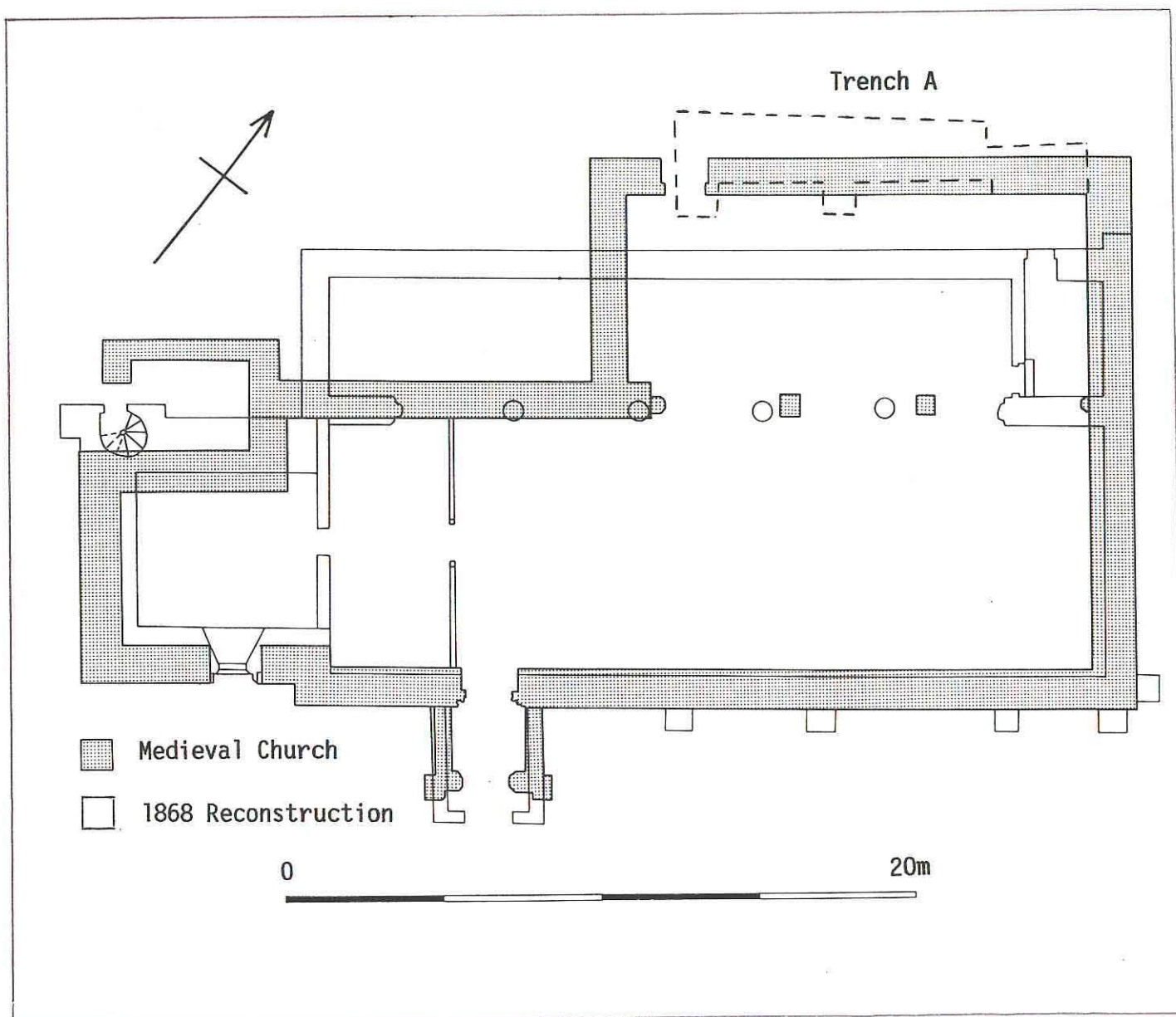


Fig 2: 1867 Plan of the earlier church and the proposed new building: detail of the new tower differs from that actually built.

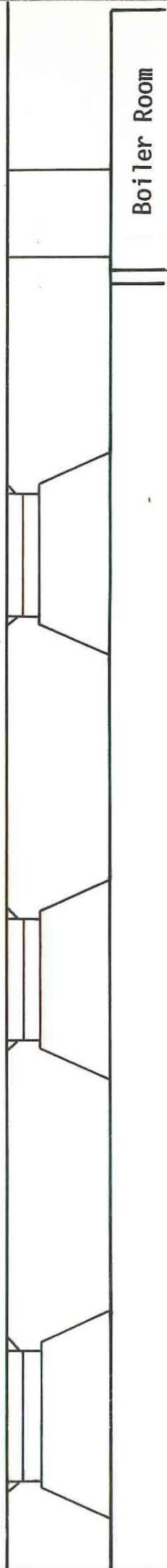
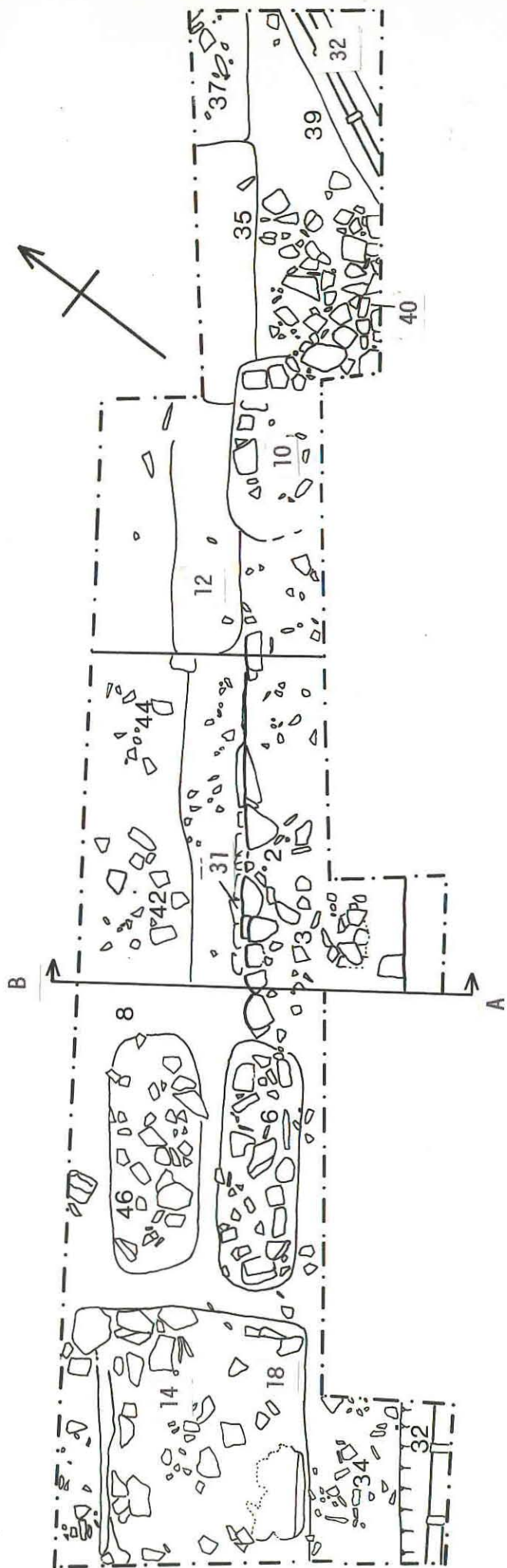


Fig 3: Trench A



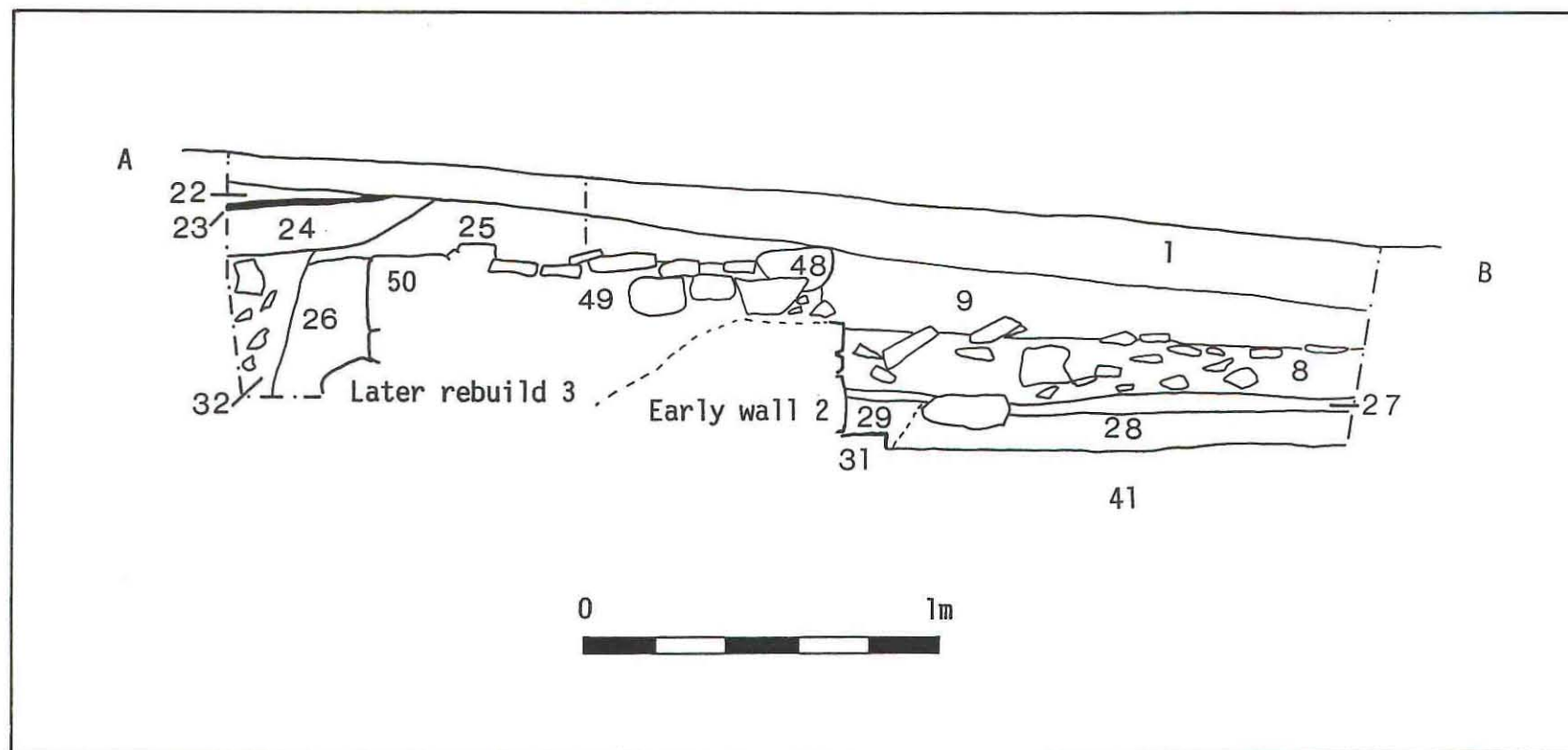


Fig 4: Section A-B