

**THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**

**Caerwys Churchyard Wall,  
Flintshire  
WATCHING BRIEF**

**CPAT Report No 589**

**CPAT Report No 589**

**Caerwys Churchyard Wall,  
Flintshire  
WATCHING BRIEF**

**R J Silvester**  
October 2003

Report for Mr R Wolley, B.Arch, RIBA

**The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust**

7a Church Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7DL  
tel (01938) 553670, fax (01938) 552179

© CPAT

## CPAT Report Record

### Report and status

CPAT Report Title	Caerwys Churchyard Wall		
CPAT Project Name	Caerwys Churchyard		
CPAT Project No	1120	CPAT Report No	589
Confidential (yes/no)	No	draft/final	Final

### Internal control

	name	signature	date
prepared by	R J Silvester	R.J.S.	31/10/03
checked by	N.W. Jones	N.W. Jones	03/11/03
approved by	R.J. Silvester	R.J.S.	03/11/03

### Revisions

no	date	made by	checked by	approved by

### Internal memo


**The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust**  
7a Church Street Welshpool Powys SY21 7DL  
tel (01938) 553670, fax 552179  
© CPAT

*Report on a Watching Brief**1) Background*

At the request of the architect, Mr R Woolley, a watching brief was undertaken during the reconstruction of a portion of the wall around the south-western side of the churchyard at Caerwys which lies some 9km to the east of St Asaph (Fig 1).

Church and churchyard lie in the south-western quadrant and away from the centre of the medieval planned settlement at Caerwys. The origins of Caerwys are shrouded in speculation: that it occupies a Roman fort, that there was a church here as early as 718 and that an early eisteddfod was held here in 1100. None of these beliefs can be substantiated. What can be said is that the church was chosen by the pope for a meeting of the English king and a Welsh prince in 1244 and that a charter was granted by Edward I to the settlement in 1290 (Silvester 1995, 13). At present it is probably best to follow Soulsby (1983, 94) in his argument that an existing small native vill was reorganised and laid out as a planned town with commercial potential in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century when more Welsh people were encouraged to settle there.

This abbreviated history does not, however, resolve the problem of the origins of the church. Is it essentially an old foundation of early medieval date, rebuilt in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, or a new foundation at that time? There is nothing in the church itself that indicates an early medieval origin, the earliest features being the tower, putatively of late 13<sup>th</sup>-century origin (Silvester and Frost 1999). Nor is the churchyard shape suggestive of early medieval beginnings. Nevertheless, a pre-Conquest origin remains a possibility, but one that is perhaps likely to be resolved only by extensive excavation.

*2) The Churchyard*

The churchyard is predominantly rectilinear, the only curvilinear section being that re-walled on the south-west. On the south side of the churchyard on either side of the lychgate the churchyard wall, which is essentially a retaining or revetment wall, sits atop a low bank. This is most obvious in the pasture field to the east of the lychgate where it is about 3m wide and about 0.5m high, but also continues for a short distance west of the lychgate before disappearing. It is probable that originally the bank continued further north, but that at some point in recent times it was cut back and the wall face carried down to road level to enhance the width of what is now Penycefn Road.

The removal of the old wall and the reconstruction of the new extended over at least two months, and was done in two stages, one in September the other in October, but it would have been wholly impracticable to conduct a watching brief throughout that period, and in the event only two visits were made to the churchyard, on the 5<sup>th</sup> September and the 13<sup>th</sup> October 2003. With hindsight the ideal times to have been on site would have been when the old wall was being removed whether by hand or machine, but on the two occasions when this work occurred, different reasons prevented the presence of an archaeologist.



### *3) The Watching Brief*

The wall itself consisted of rubble masonry set to a reasonably good face, with a backing of looser stone fill behind, giving a total width of about 0.7m. Where the wall projected above the internal ground level of the churchyard, it too had been faced, but below that level the stonework was much rougher.

Removal of the first and more northerly section of walling revealed what might in other circumstances be classed as the backfill of a foundation trench, but here where the wall is effectively a revetment, it is likely that the soil deposits in the churchyard were cut back, the wall built up and then the overcut backfilled. The backfill material comprised rubble in an earthen matrix with occasional mortar flecks to a maximum depth of c.0.95m. One or two artefacts, including a button and a pierced 'pearl' from a necklace, were found by the builders, together with a few fragments of bone but it is not clear whether these were derived from the rubble deposit or from lower levels. Below the rubble was a clean, brown, slightly clayey silt, almost sandy in places which dropped 0.45m to the base of the excavation and may have continued below that level. This contained small lumps and pebbles of limestone up to 0.2m in length. There was no sign of any artefacts or other intrusive material in it (Pl 1).

Removal of the second length of walling, together with the bank on which it sat revealed a slightly different sequence. The internal ground level of the churchyard where it curved to the south was slightly higher than further north and the reason for this became apparent in the exposed section. Beneath a superficial layer of turf and soil was a dump of mixed debris including slate and brick fragments, pieces of clay pipe, mortar lumps and occasional slivers of what may have been window glass. A second layer beneath this was similar but contained ash and/or cinder and the occasional bit of iron. Together these layers reached a maximum thickness of perhaps 0.25m (Pl 2).

Below these dumps was the layer of rubble in an earthen matrix identified behind the first length of wall to be removed, and then a slightly reddish silt with limestone lumps which equated with the lowest level seen further north.

About 7m from the lychgate the rubble layer disappeared to be replaced (below turf level) entirely by a fairly homogeneous deposit of rich brown loamy soil, with very occasional mortar flecks but generally of extremely clean appearance. The absence of the rubble layer which has been interpreted above as a backfill deposit, is due here to its complete removal, assuming it existed, by machine. The homogeneous loamy soil is accumulated graveyard material, darker and rather more earthy than the lowest levels seen further north. .

The piles of limestone rubble set aside for rebuilding the wall were examined on both occasions but no obviously worked pieces were identified.

### *Conclusions*

The removal of the retaining wall around the churchyard exposed the backfill of the cutback that was created when the wall was built. Although artefacts were few, the material incorporated within this backfill implied a relatively recent date for the wall, probably within the last two to three hundred years. Strictly speaking, however, there could have been an earlier wall of which no trace remains. The churchyard deposits had been cutback to receive the wall, but were apparent in the bottom of the more northerly section of the removed wall and formed almost all of the exposed section near the lychgate. No trace of an original churchyard bank was identified, and on face value it appears that the bank along the south side of the churchyard on which the wall sits is material spreading out from the churchyard rather than a bank in its own right. Material from the church, possibly both ashes from the boiler, and rubbish from a church restoration, was dumped in localized areas behind the wall after its construction.

### *References*

Silvester, R J, 1995, *Delyn Borough Historic Settlements*, CPAT Report 145, Welshpool

Silvester, R J, and Frost, P, 1999, *The historic churches of Flintshire and Wrexham County Borough*, Welshpool: CPAT

Soulsby, I, 1983 *The towns of medieval Wales*. Chichester, Sussex: Phillimore

Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey's  
1:2,500 map of 1972 with the permission  
of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.  
© Crown Copyright.

**The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust**  
7a Church Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7DL  
Licence No AL 50529A

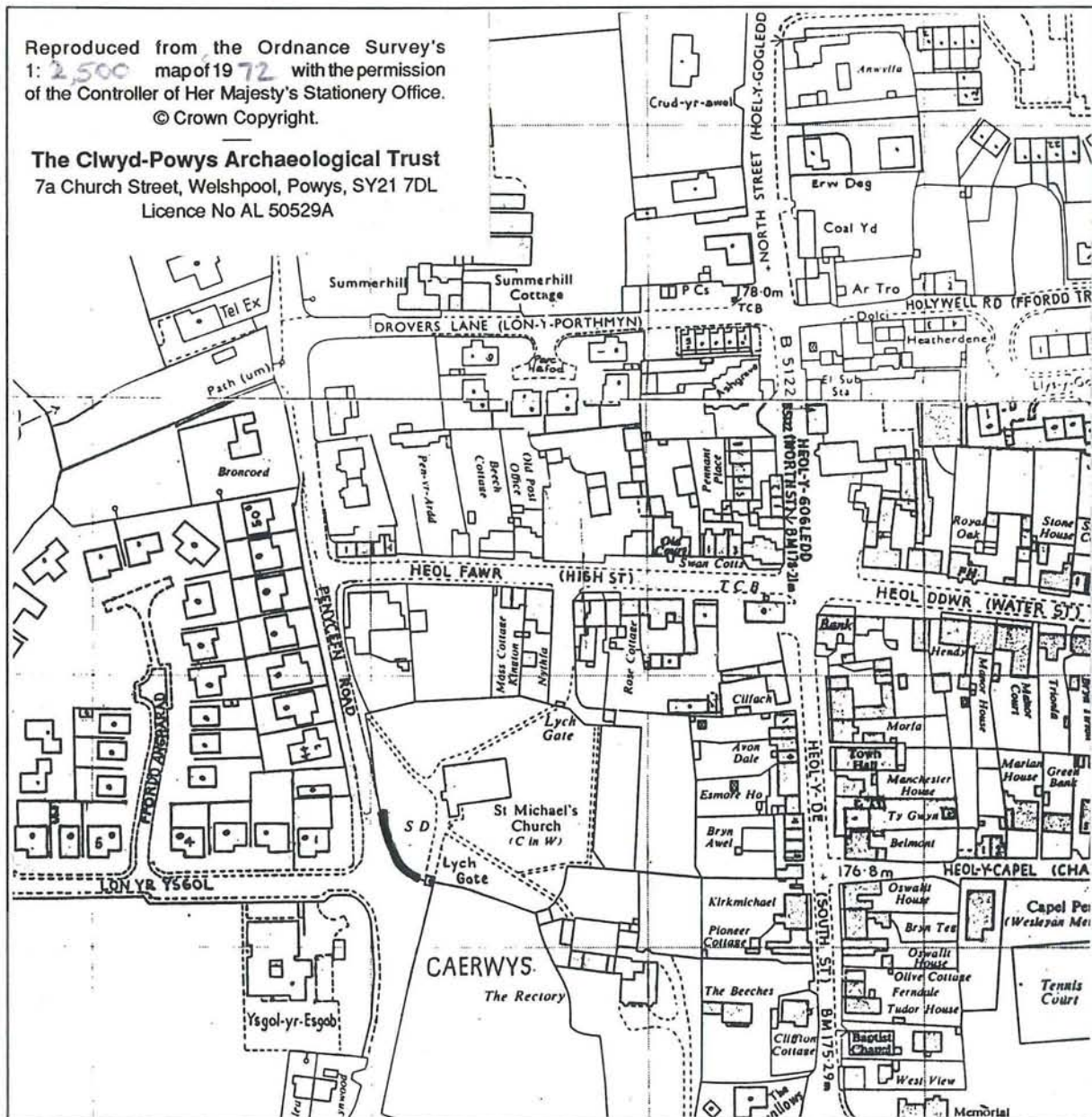


Fig. 1 Caerwys Churchyard. The rebuilt section of wall is shown as a thick line to the south-west of the church. Scale 1:2,500





Plate 1 Caerwys churchyard wall, north section (Photo CPAT CS03/51/08)



Plate 2 Caerwys churchyard wall, south section (Photo CPAT CS03/51/25)