

Excavations at Whitford Church, Clwyd



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Report prepared for Cadw

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EXCAVATIONS AT WHITFORD CHURCH

1. Introduction

1.1 The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust was commissioned in June 1993 by Jones Associates (Architects) on behalf of the Parochial Church Council to undertake excavations at the church of St Mary and St Beuno, Whitford, Clwyd (SJ 146782). The work was necessitated by the laying of drainage along the western and northern walls of the north aisle to alleviate damp within the church, and was carried out over a period of 10 days by a team of 3-4 people funded by Cadw.

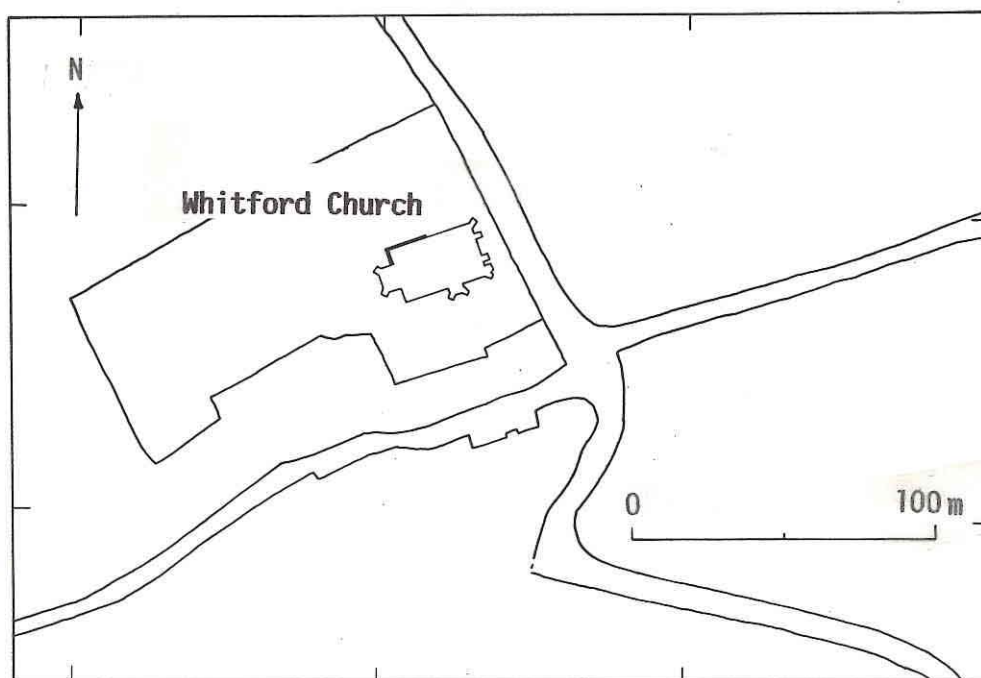


Fig 1. Site Location

2. Background

2.1 A church at Whitford is first mentioned in the Domesday book, but its dedication to St Beuno suggests a pre-Norman origin, as does the discovery of two pieces of 10th-11th century stonework, one within the churchyard, and the other in the east wall of the church. There are, however, no visible remains of this early church.

2.2 The oldest part of the present church building is the north aisle which is a survival of the early 16th-century church built in late perpendicular style, which is depicted in an illustration by Moses Griffiths dating from 1800 (Fig 2). The rest of the building is a

result of the remodelling of 1843 when the nave and tower were rebuilt and the south aisle added.

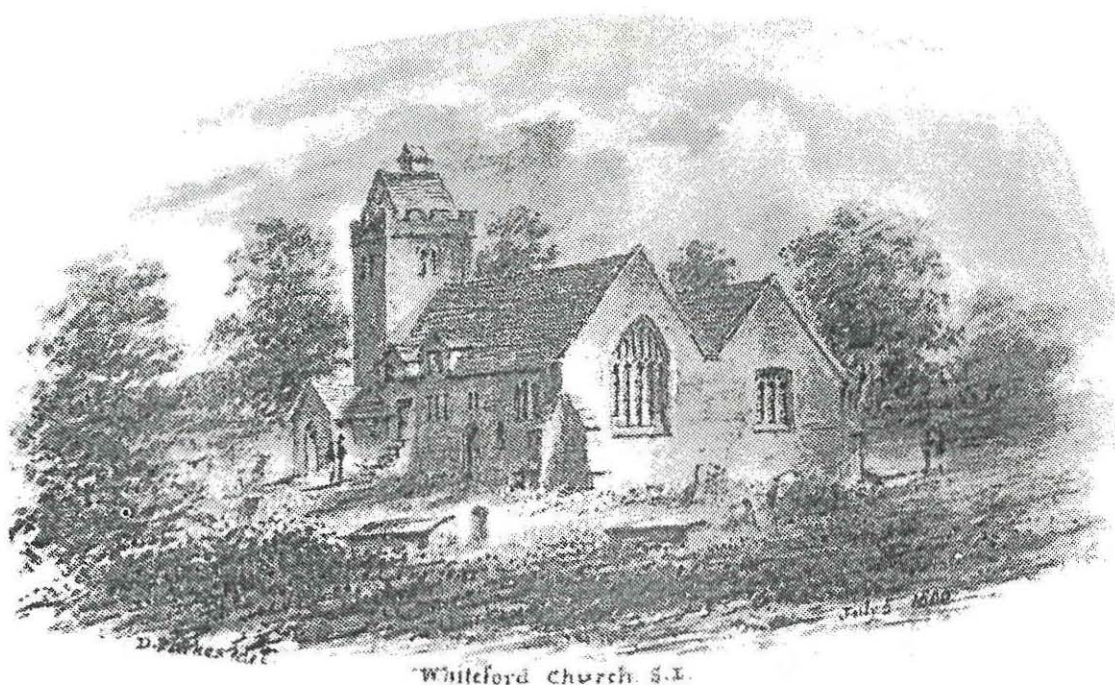


Fig 2. WHITFORD CHURCH c.1800, from Southeast. Copy of print by Moses Griffiths. (Taken from Davies (1953), pl. 3).

3.Excavation

3.1 The drainage scheme involved the cutting of a trench adjacent to the western wall of the aisle to a depth of 0.3m below the level of the vestry floor, with a 0.15m step at the north-west corner of the aisle to facilitate the necessary fall. The original brief for the excavation required a trench 1m wide to a maximum depth of 131.01m OD along the western wall of the aisle and a maximum depth of 130.86m OD along the northern wall. The depth of this trench varied according to the slope of the present ground level. The greatest depth occurred nearest the tower at 1.2m, while at the northwest corner the maximum depth was 1.15m. The bottom of the trench ran level along the northern wall until it met the ground surface 12.5m from the north-west corner.

3.2 The original brief for the excavation could not be carried out because of time and safety constraints. After initial stripping of the site and the removal of a drain (see below) the wall footings were encountered, and it was felt that undermining these to reveal the wall construction would have been unnecessarily dangerous and time consuming. Consultation with the architect meant that the excavation then concentrated on the investigation of the archaeology along a 0.5m strip 0.5m away from the wall, where the drainage trench would be cut. All features were excavated to the natural subsoil or to the maximum depth required for the drainage scheme.

3.3 Initial stripping of the turf and removal of the tarmac by hand revealed a modern drain of cobble and brick construction running around the church wall throughout the length of the trench (04) (Number in brackets refer to site context numbers.). This drain continues along the north wall to the east of the excavation area where it is still in use. A grave slab (06) also lay immediately underneath the turf at the north west corner of the aisle. No grave was found beneath this slab, indicating that it had been removed from its original position.

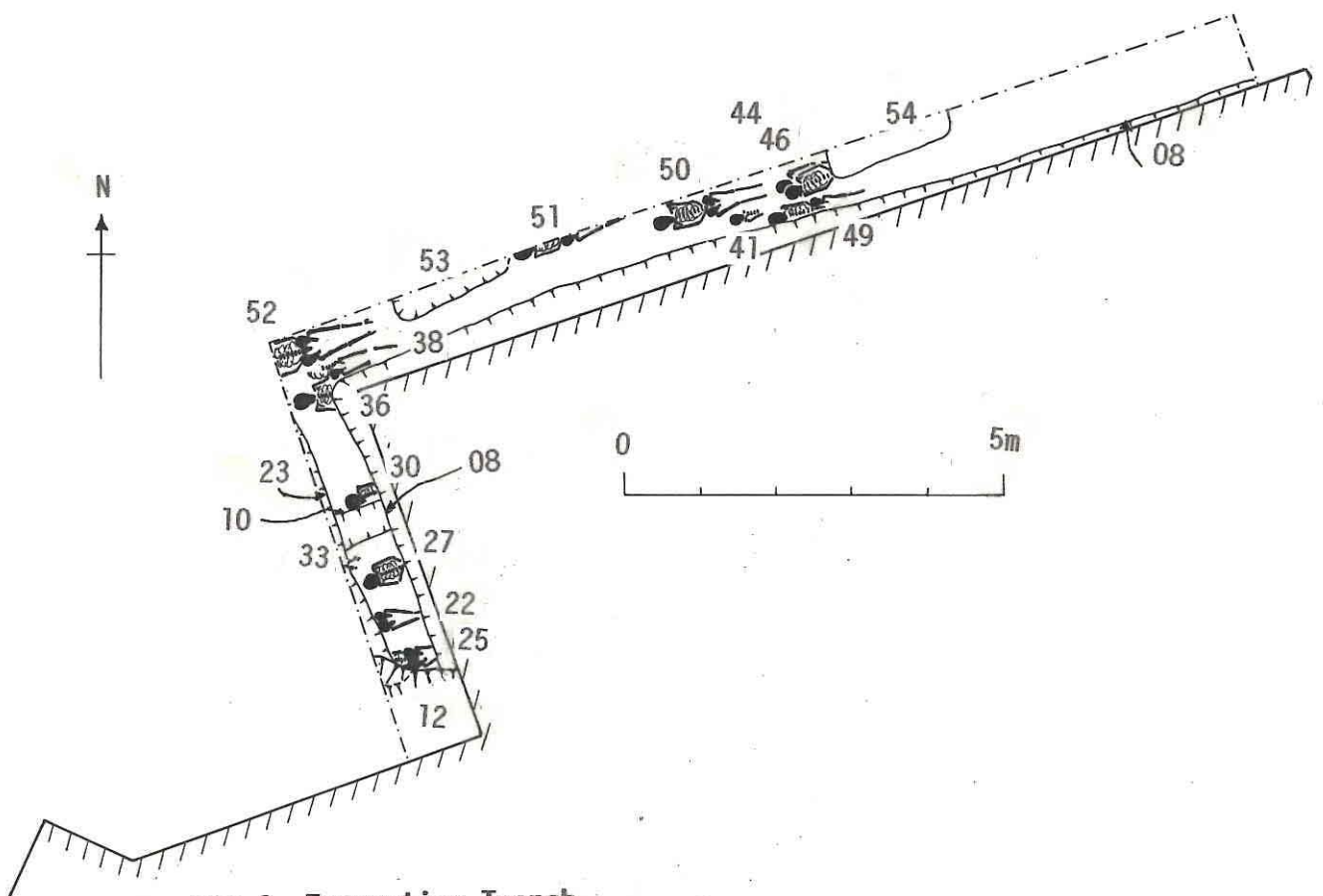


Fig 3. Excavation Trench.

3.4 The removal of the drain and other modern overburden revealed the deep construction trench for the 19th-century tower (12). Fragments of 19th-century pottery and clay-pipe were present within the fill (11), as were redeposited fragments of human skeletal remains. The fill was removed down to the maximum depth of excavation. Sections of the 19th and 16th-century walls were revealed which clearly showed that the

19th-century tower wall butted the earlier aisle wall. The 19th century construction trench cut through the construction trench (08) of the 16th-century wall of the northern aisle, which consisted of large stones in loamy soil. This feature was not fully excavated because of lack of time and safety considerations.

3.5 The natural subsoil (05) was also recognised after the removal of the modern overburden and consisted of an orange sandy-clay brickearth with underlying gravels. This had been cut through by the construction trenches and a number of graves.

3.6 A total of 14 graves were excavated. These fell into two distinct groups - those which had been cut through by the 16th-century construction trench and those which had not been and contained post-medieval material within their fill. All the burials were aligned from east to west. Those along the western wall (22;25;27;30;33;38) had all, excepting 33, been disturbed by the 16th-century construction trench and by a modern trench (23) running along the western edge of the excavation. All lay within 0.2-0.3m of the present ground surface. Pre-16th-century burials were also cut by the northern wall of the aisle (36;41;49). These had been further disturbed by later burials (44;46;50;51;52) which had been placed in a line approximately 60cm away from the aisle wall and contained 18th and 19th-century pottery and clay-pipe fragments within the grave fills. One of the later graves (43) contained two adult burials (44;46), suggesting a family relationship.

3.7 Two other features were excavated which appeared to be graves (10;53), but contained no burials. All contained 18th and 19th-century material, and are likely to represent deliberate removal of burials, although for what reason is unclear.

3.8 A further grave (54) was recognised at the eastern end of the excavation, but not fully excavated because it extended below the maximum depth of excavation. No features, except the 16th-century construction trench, were recognised beyond feature 54 because the trench was of insufficient depth.

4. Conclusions

4.1 No direct evidence of an earlier church was found during the excavations, although the pre-16th century burials confirm that an earlier church existed on the site. The fact that the burials are so close to the modern ground surface indicates that the natural slope of the ground was terraced around the north-western corner of the church to facilitate the rebuilding of the church in the early 16th century. The original site of the pre-Norman church may therefore lie further down the slope to the east.

4.2 All of the excavated burials and redeposited human skeletal remains were stored in the church after removal, and later reburied in the churchyard. The pre-16th century burials were given a burial using the pre-reformation liturgy performed by the vicar of Whitford church, the Reverend Richard Kilgour.

5.Acknowledgements

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust wishes to thank Mr Dennis Jones of Jones Associates, the Vicar of Whitford church, the Reverend Richard Kilgour, and the verger, Mr Tudor Williams for their practical help and advice during the excavation. Our thanks also go to Mary Kitchen and James Townsend for assisting in the excavation, and to Cadw for funding the work.

6.Bibliography

Davies Canon E. 1953 Whitford Church in Flintshire Historical Society Publications 13, 34-50

SITE ARCHIVE

The site archive is stored at the offices of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, 7a Church Street, Welshpool, Powys. SY21 7DL. It consists of the following:

1. A copy of this report.
2. A full context record.
3. All finds recovered from the excavations, excepting the human remains.
4. EDM site plans stored on disc.
5. A full photographic record consisting of 35mm black and white negatives and contact sheets, and supplementary colour slides.