

CPAT Report No 1024

St Michael's Church, Abergele
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS 2009



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

CPAT Report No 1024

St Michael's Church, Abergele
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS 2009

I Grant
February 2010

Report for:
Reverend Shirley Griffiths,
St Michael's Church
Abergele

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust

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


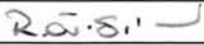
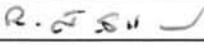
© CPAT 2010

CPAT Report Record

Report and status

CPAT Report Title St Michael's Church, Abergele: Archaeological Excavations 2009			
CPAT Project Name St Michael's, Abergele			
CPAT Project No 1625		CPAT Report No 1024	
Confidential (yes/no) Yes		draft/final	Final

Internal control

	Name	signature	date
prepared by	I. Grant		01/02/2010
checked by	R. J. Silvester		01/02/2010
approved by	R. J. Silvester		01/02/2010

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

CONTENTS

- 1 INTRODUCTION
- 2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
- 3 GRAVEYARD SURVEY
- 4 EXCAVATION
- 5 THE FINDS
- 6 CONCLUSIONS
- 7 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
- 8 REFERENCES

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was invited in the spring of 2005 to undertake limited research excavations at the church of St Michael in Abergele by the incumbent, the Reverend Shirley Griffiths. A faculty for the work was granted by the chancellor of the diocese of St Asaph in the summer of 2005 and two phases of excavation were conducted, in early September 2005 and in April 2006. The work was designed from the start as a training excavation for local volunteers and students from Abergele College.
- 1.2 The 2006 programme of work included some explorative excavation of an area of vaulted masonry, previously unrecorded until uncovered by workmen in 2005 when a stone was removed from the masonry surface to reveal an empty stone vault (Fig. 3 Area C). An outline plan of the 'barrel-vaulted' structure was revealed, the blocked entrance to which lay below ground along the eastern side of the vault. The restrictions in the work programme meant that at the end of the excavation basic archaeological questions remained unanswered. Although the vault remained undated it was thought that it could be contemporary with, if not earlier than, the adjacent portion of the post-13th century but medieval north chancel. It was evident that further work would be required in and around the immediate environs of the vault in order to establish its true nature. In late September 2009 CPAT, together with a small contingent of students from Abergele College, returned to St Michael's in order to continue their investigations of the vault.

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 St Michael's church lies in the centre of Abergele, (SH 9454 7764), a small market town which was formerly in the historic county of Denbighshire and is now in the eastern part of Conwy County Borough. The church is an imposing one with twin naves and a west tower, and there are good reasons to believe that the first building on the site may have been a *clas* or mother church, the most important in the district. In the fabric there is little to suggest how the church developed, although the tower appears to be of a different build to the body of the church. All have Perpendicular features, though most have been renewed or replaced. It is possible but far from proven that the naves are earlier than the tower, one or other of the former perhaps being 14th-century with Perpendicular remodelling, the tower is probably 16th-century. The church retains its medieval roofs, and contains some medieval sepulchral fragments and one 14th-century slab, a few fragments of medieval glass, the lower parts of the rood screen and a Perpendicular font stem. Later fittings include a 17th-century pulpit, a wooden chest and a good range of monuments. The churchyard is rectangular and raised on the east side, but there is a hint of an earlier curvilinear churchyard around the church.
- 2.2 There appears to be no known record pertaining to the origins of the 'barrel-vault' apart from a 'speculative' note in the church *P.C.C* minutes (dated 19/12/1933). During the meeting the vicar spoke of a crack at the north-end of the church that had appeared above a window. Whilst the committee deliberated the cause of the damage the following note was minuted:

'Someone saying an open vault built by the "Castle" years ago in the burial ground for the "Castle" people, then they built one at Llandulas. Mr Parry thought it was filled up when the church was re-built, the opening to the vault is generally from the outside.'

When referring to the "Castle" it is generally accepted that this is Gwrych Castle Estate in Abergele and by default they are referring to the Lloyd Bamford-Hesketh family, who were long standing patrons of St Michael's church and later went on to rebuild St Cynbryd's church at Llanddulas. It would therefore seem appropriate at this point to note a few key points in the history of their relationship with St Michael's, as they are central to some of the conclusions drawn from the 2009 excavations.

- 2.3 The Lloyds of Gwrych Castle can be traced back to David Lloyd of Plas yn Gwrych in 1608. In 1787 Frances Lloyd, daughter of the Rev. John Lloyd (of St. Michael's) and co-heiress of Henry Wrych, married Robert Bamford-Hesketh of Bamford Hall and Upton, Cheshire. The Rev. John Lloyd died in 1775 followed by his wife in 1804. There is a large obelisk memorial to them both at St Michael's church. The family maintained their association with the church by installing two brightly coloured stained glass windows within the north nave wall. The easternmost window is flanked by tablets to commemorate the family, with space left for inscriptions to future generations. Robert Bamford-Hesketh's heir, Lloyd Hesketh Bamford-Hesketh, was responsible for at least one of the stained glass windows (dated 1857). It was Lloyd Hesketh Bamford-Hesketh who was also responsible for the building of Gwrych Castle from 1819 to 1825. It is quite possible that he (or his father) may have been instrumental in creating a family vault, comparative with the medieval 'folly' design at Gwrych, within the churchyard at St Michael's. The 'barrel-vault' is sited along the north chancel wall, coincidentally once the location of the family pew within the church.
- 2.4 From 1858 St. Michael's underwent a major programme of restoration and repair, possibly sponsored by Lloyd Hesketh Bamford-Hesketh. In the same year that he died (1861) the church tower was raised and supporting buttresses were built along the east end of the church. The relationship between the family and the church is somewhat unclear at this point, although the Rev Shirley Griffiths has recently referred the author to a tradition telling of a dispute between Lloyd's son Robert Bamford-Hesketh and the church, concerning the restoration along the north-east chancel of St Michael's. It is clear that by 1868 Robert had chosen to end the family association with St Michael's and promptly sponsored the rebuild and became patron of St Cynbryd's church at Llanddulas.
- 2.5 In 1878-9 the whole of St Michael's was re-floored, partly because the floor was giving way owing to interments below it. It was re-seated with open benches, the chancel aisle adapted for the choir and a new church organ erected along the north chancel wall. The site of the church organ, upon the traditional site of the Hesketh's family pew, underscores the end of the family association with St Michael's.

3 GRAVEYARD SURVEY

- 3.1 As part of the Abergele College training programme a survey was carried out on the 23rd Sept 2009 and consisted of the digital recording by EDM and Penmap software of all the in-situ burial monuments in the western part of the churchyard, in relation to the churchyard boundary (see Fig. 1). A polygon (almost exclusively rectangular) was created which defined the extent of each monument and plans at 1:250 and 1:500 scales were then produced showing these polygons in relation to the boundary and the Ordnance Survey grid lines at 10m intervals (see Fig. 2). This would then allow accurate grid references to be calculated for each monument by the volunteers for subsequent data entry into a database. Typical information to be held on the database could include details of the monument inscriptions. Originally it had been hoped that this information would be gathered and subsequently entered onto the database during the course of the vault excavation. However, the level of volunteer attendance during the project dictated that all their efforts were directed towards the completion of the excavation goals. It is hoped, therefore that the graveyard survey as part of an ongoing project can be completed by the students at a more appropriate time in the future.



Fig. 1 Surveying the western quadrant of the graveyard. Photo CPAT 2972-002

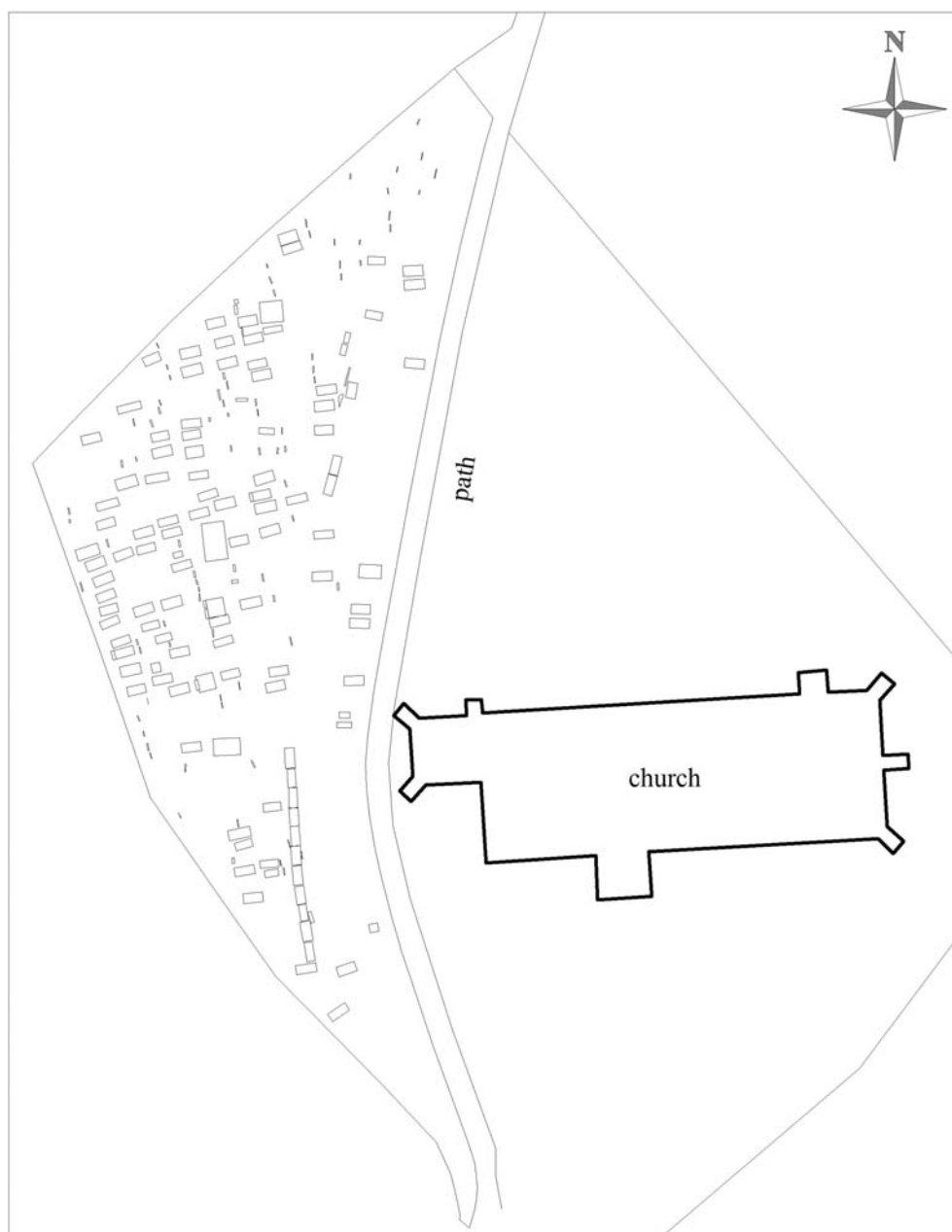


Fig. 2. Plan illustrating the extent of the graveyard survey.

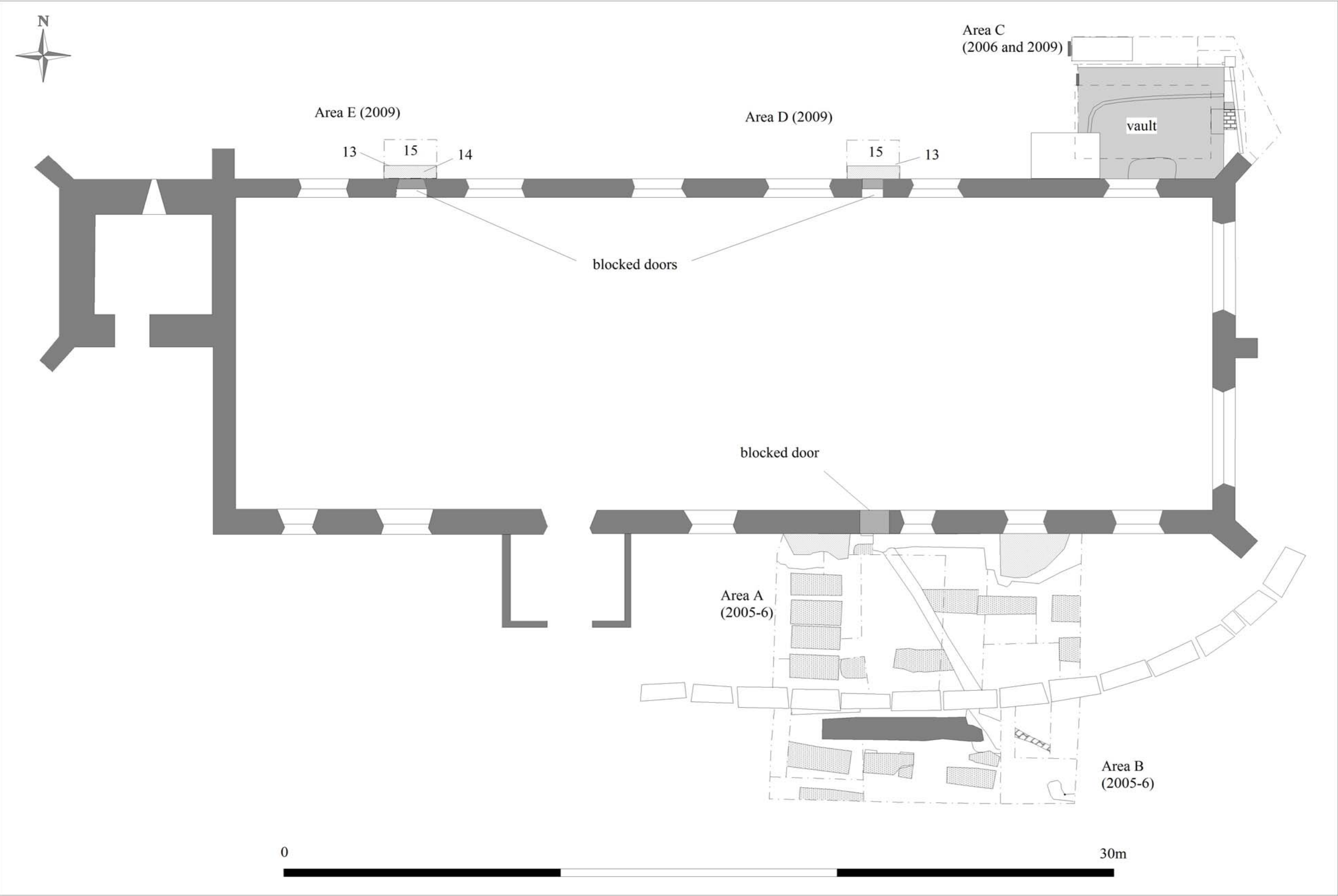


Fig. 3. Overall plan of St. Michael's Church locating the areas of excavation 2005-2009.

4 EXCAVATION (2009)

- 4.1 The excavations carried out at St. Michael's, totalling two weeks work on site, began on September 28th 2009. Three areas along the north wall of the church were to be investigated; Area C – the 'barrel-vaulted' structure and its immediate environs, Area D – a small-scale test trench adjacent to a blocked up doorway, and Area E – a similar trench alongside another blocked up doorway (see Fig. 3). During the project up to six students, coordinated by Mrs Sian James of Abergele College, took the opportunity to assist with the excavation. Under the direction of the writer and Mr Chris Watts (CPAT) the students were taught basic excavation techniques and finds identification, hopefully giving them an insight into how to record site stratigraphy and extract from that a 'timeline' of events.
- 4.2 The numbers in brackets illustrated on the site plans, and also included in the text that follows, refer to the individual contexts (or elements) that were either features, or layers within features, which were identified during the excavation.
- 4.3 As highlighted in the previous season's excavation report, the process of excavation within a churchyard can be quite sensitive owing to the obvious (and not so obvious) presence of human burials. Whilst conducting the earlier excavations, large quantities of disarticulated human bone were recovered (later re-buried on site). Consequently site etiquette required that all of the excavated material had to be removed by hand. This included the time-consuming task of removing and storing on site the turf and other excavated materials for reconsolidation.
- 4.4 The process of human burial, especially during the late post-medieval period (18th/19th-century) often disturbed earlier burials, structures and floor levels. As a consequence, many earlier dateable artefacts survive in the grave backfills and the subsequent overburden. The methodical excavation techniques of the previous excavations had proved rewarding, producing a number of medieval artefacts, ceramics and a 1st-century AD opaque glass bead of Roman origin, attesting to the earlier history of the site. The construction of a large sub-terranean burial vault would, it was assumed, have disturbed a large area of earlier deposits and so equal diligence would be required.
- 4.5 The small-scale test trenches located adjacent to the blocked doorways along the north wall (Areas D and E) were a response to the remarkable chance discovery of a late 13th-century inscribed medieval gravestone, found underpinning the blocked-up 'priest's doorway' in the south wall in 2006 (see Fig. 4). By exposing the footings of both doorways it was hoped that we would reveal at least the make-up of the earlier church footings whilst establishing the original ground level that existed during the 14th century along the north side of the church.



Fig. 4. Detail of the inscribed medieval artwork (probably late 13th century in origin) on the memorial stone in the 'priest's doorway'.

Photo CPAT 2007-064

Area C – Excavation of the Vault (2009)

- 4.6 The main area of excavation focussed on the east end of the north side of the church along the north chancel wall. This was the area of vaulted masonry previously uncovered during the excavations of 2006 (see Fig. 3 Area C). It was always our intention to try to confirm the location of the vault entrance with a view to gaining access to the inner chamber. This would involve the removal of at least three repositioned graveslabs (part of a perimeter footpath through the graveyard) in order to gain access to the underlying deposits. At the same time the bounds of the previous 2006 excavations were



Fig. 5 South-east corner of the vault underlying the church buttress. Photo CPAT 2972-018

extended in order to encompass several burial memorials to the north and west of the vault. By extending the area of excavation to just over 30m² this would help to establish the full extent of the vaulted structure. One of the initial tasks was to establish the relationship between the north chancel wall and the vault. Upon removal of the 'french drain', located alongside the wall, it was possible to see that at the south-east corner of the vault part of the Victorian buttress (22), constructed during the restoration of c.1861, overlay the vault (29) (see Figs 6 and 10). Although this at least confirmed that the vault pre-dated 1861 it did not discount the possibility of Bamford-Hesketh ownership.



Fig. 6. Students excavating general graveyard overburden from around the vault.
Photo CPAT 2972-011

- 4.7 Adjacent to the chancel wall, the excavations of 2006 had highlighted an area of disturbance within the vault roof. The pit-like feature (30) backfilled with fragmented limestone appeared to be either a repair in the roof or possibly the result of earlier exploratory works. Upon removing part of the backfill (31) of the pit it became obvious that the vault roof was not tied into the chancel wall and in fact the structure abutted the earlier 14th century church wall (see Fig. 7). In order to maintain the integrity of the vault roof no further material was removed from the feature.



Fig. 7. Disturbance (31) in the vault roof alongside the nave wall.
Photo CPAT 2972-043

- 4.8 Whilst removing the topsoil (01) and the immediate underlying deposit (07), a loose greyish brown silt containing numerous fragments of limestone, the extent of the vault along the northern and eastern edges became better defined. The full extent of two memorials (09, 10), located at the north-west corner of the vault, was also exposed. The memorial 10, carrying dates of 1868 and 1879, had actually been re-erected within a shallow deposit (07) in the 20th century. Curiously, it's location placed it over the top of the vault



Fig. 8. Grave marker (10), dated 1868, overlying the vault roof. Photo CPAT 2972-029.

roof. No grave cut was identified and so we are unable to use this memorial to post-date the construction of the vault (see Fig. 8). The other memorial (09), orientated west to east and dated 1837 – 1870, came complete with a well-defined grave outline. The grave, which was located beyond the northern extent of the vault, had been enhanced with fairly modern stone work and paving slabs.

- 4.9 At this point during the excavation it became clear that if we were to achieve our principal project aim (locate the entrance and possibly access and date the vault) we needed to reduce the area of excavation to a manageable size. To this end a test trench, 1m in width, was located at the north-east and eastern end of the vault. Elsewhere the lower remains of the graveyard deposit 07 remained in situ (see Fig. 10). The electricity cable (11), installed in the 1950s and encountered during the 2006 excavation, continued to restrict our progress along the eastern edge of the vault. Whilst negotiating this hazard a number of deposits (16,17 and 20) were removed from around the vault. In general, this material was fairly loose and mortar-flecked and was characteristic of building debris. Eventually we were to discover that this was the backfill of an early 20th century service trench (21) that contained a 0.12m diameter salt-glazed ceramic water pipe (19) and brick-built junction box (18). The drain had been carefully directed along the northern edge of the vault, turning southwards to pass in front of the postulated vault entrance and around the Victorian church buttress (22) (see Fig. 9). Unfortunately, the modern pipe drain had to be left in situ, once again limiting the width of our test trench along the eastern face of the vault.



Fig. 9. Cable services and water drain (19) at east end of the vault. Photo CPAT 2972-035

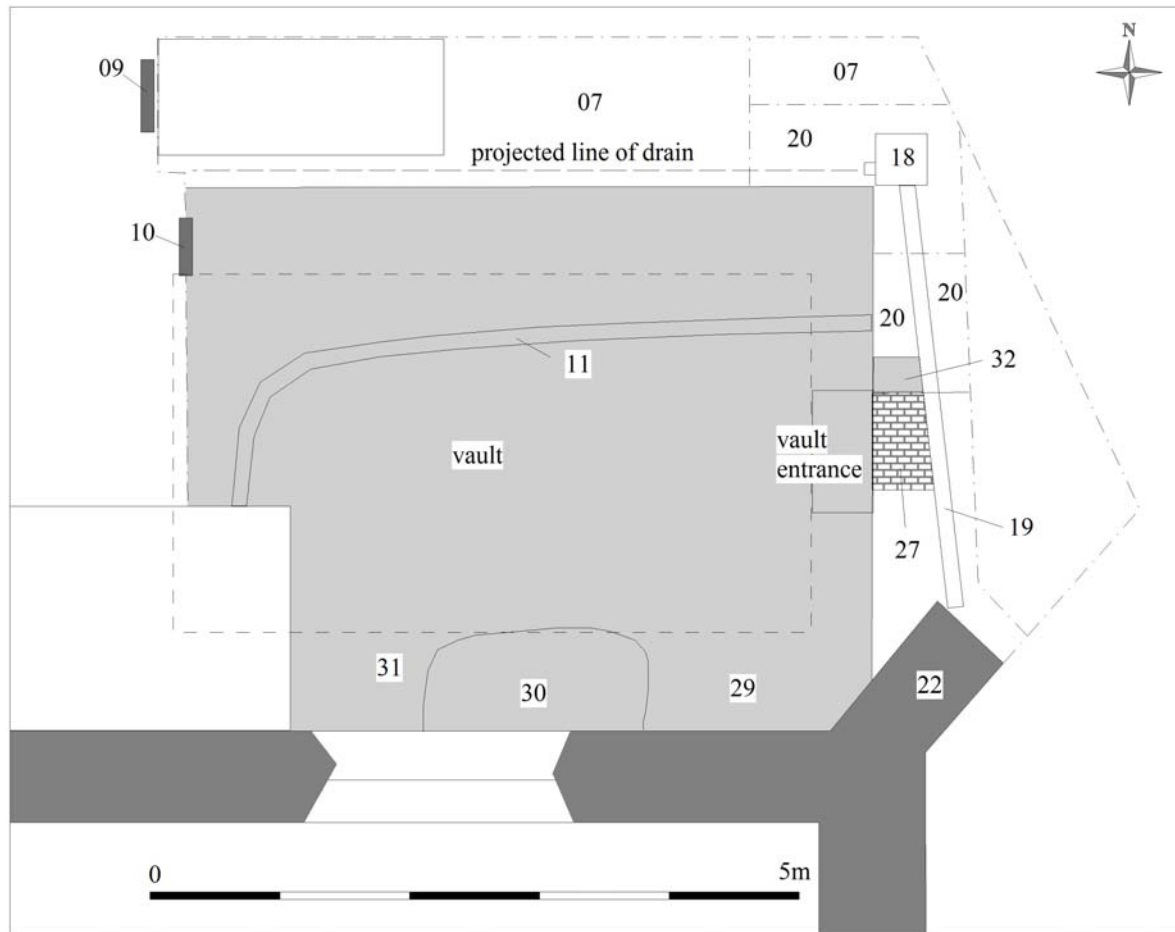


Fig. 10. Plan of the vault excavation, (Area C) 2009.

4.10 Whilst removing the remnants of the drainage backfill the location of the vault entrance was confirmed in the east-facing wall. In order to define the access point a deposit of thick pink clay and brick rubble (08) had to be removed from around the stone coursework. It was evident that this material had been used to maintain a watertight seal to the vault. Of note was a cemetery deposit (06), a firm greyish brown silt soil that in turn sealed the clay. The narrow dateline extracted from the recovered finds demonstrated that the deposit 06 was the first cemetery soil encountered that appeared to be undisturbed. The collection of ceramics such as green pearl-ware (dated *c.* 1815), Buckley-ware, white stone-ware and clay pipe suggests a deposition date of the early 19th century (see Fig. 11).



Fig. 11. Removing the clay seal used to secure the vault door. Photo CPAT 2972-048



Fig. 12. The author kneeling on the flanking wall (32) at the entrance to the vault. The polished red quarry tiled floor (27) runs eastwards away from the vault. Note the tiles that are missing as a result of the insertion of the later church buttress c. 1861. Photo CPAT 2972-062.

- 4.11 The entrance to the vault measured just over 1m², crowned by a large limestone lintel 1.26m in length and 0.2m wide. The access had been sealed tightly with a combination of two limestone blocks, 1m x 0.2m and 1m x 0.8m, and pink reddish clay (25) that had been rammed into the recesses between the coursework. At the foot of the doorway, external to the vault, a floor of red polished quarry tiles (27) defined the intended access point. To the north they were flanked by a low-lying limestone wall (32), 0.4m high and orientated east to west (see Fig. 12). Both the wall and the tiled flooring extended eastwards below the modern drain (19) and beyond the bounds of the excavation. To the south both the flanking wall and the floor had been removed by the foundation cut (24) of the Victorian ashlar and limestone buttress (22) (dated 1861). To maintain the integrity of the buttress, the foundation backfill (23) surrounding the south-east corner of the vault was left in-situ. The overall external height of the vault, from the tiled floor to the top of the barrel roof was 1.75m (see Fig. 13).

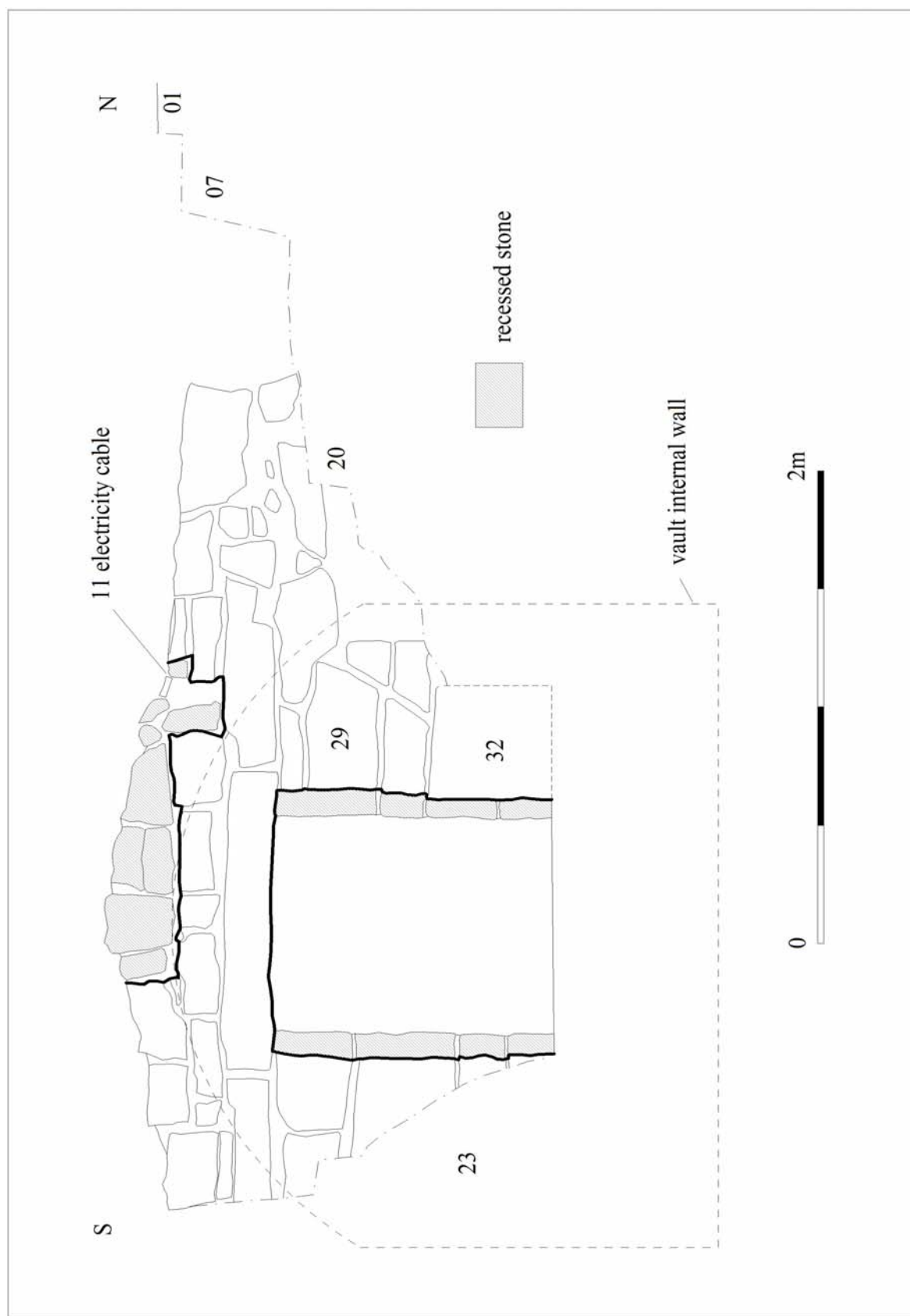


Fig. 13. East-facing elevation of the vault illustrating the entrance and internal chamber dimensions.



Fig. 14. Overall view of the vault, showing the blocked access in the east-facing wall. The graves 9 and 10 can be seen in the background. Photo CPAT 2972-061.

- 4.12 Removing the limestone doorway proved to be quite a task, especially as we needed to keep the weighty stonework nearby in order to reconsolidate and re-seal the vault doorway at the end of the excavation. Upon removal of the door, it became apparent that an elaborate recess/door jamb had been built into the entrance to prevent the door falling back into the inner chamber (see Fig. 15). The interior floor was approximately 0.65m below the base of the doorway (see Fig. 13). The interior of the vault was empty of any form of funerary fixtures and all that remained in-situ was the red-polished quarry tiled floor (28), identical to the exterior floor. The general impression was that the chamber had remained water-tight and the only residue



Fig. 15. East facing access with limestone block door in the foreground. Photo CPAT 2972-074.

was the calcified lime mortar that seeped from the barrel-vaulted roof and a thin deposit of silt that coated the tiled floor. In order to study the tiles in detail, 50% of the floor was hand cleaned, brushed and washed (see Fig. 16). The result was quite impressive with a good section of the floor restored to bright polished red tiling. A detailed photographic and measured survey of the interior walls was then undertaken.



Fig. 16. Students Gerry Cuthbert and Pete Pickering, cleaning a section of the interior tiled floor. Photo CPAT 2972-084.

- 4.13 The vault (29) had been constructed from dressed limestone blocks of irregular size and certainly appeared post-medieval in construction. The internal width was 2.76m (north to south) with a length of 4.91m (east to west). The height of the vertical walls on the north and south sides was 1.39m with a central height of 2.13m from the floor to the crown of the barrel roof. All of the walls were inspected for traces of alterations such as blocked up access points or modifications that would



Fig. 17. The author and Rev. Shirley Griffiths inspecting the coursework of the west wall of the vault. Photo CPAT 2972-075.

indicate different phases of build possibly relating to earlier construction associated with the adjacent north chancel wall of the church. It was concluded that all of the coursework was contemporary with a single post-medieval construction date. The east-facing wall, including the roof coursework, had eleven courses of stonework. Unlike the sides of the vault, which appeared to be approximately 0.95m thick, the eastern wall had been constructed two blocks wide with a thickness of 0.47m. Externally, the vault was 4.2m wide (north to south) and at least 5.2m long (east to west). The western extent of the vault was not seen but if we take the internal dimensions and add the thickness of the east wall then the overall length of the vault is approximately 6m (see Figs. 18, 19 and 20).

- 4.14 To establish the date of the internal (and external) floor, a small number of the quarry tiles were removed. Each individual tile was 20cm² and 4cm thick. They had been hand-made and constructed from a reddish coal measures clay, as found in north-east Wales, and highly polished on one face. The underside had been left course and was somewhat uneven. This type of quarry tile is typical of the early to mid-19th century. The tiled floor had been laid on a thin deposit of shattered limestone bedding. Underlying the limestone was the natural subsoil, a soft waterlogged pale buff fine-grained sand that contained tiny fragments of marine shells. A single fragment of human rib-bone was recovered from the sand. No further dating evidence was recovered.
- 4.15 This concluded the excavation of the vault and the doorway was placed back in-situ, resealed with clay and the external trial trench was backfilled up to the level of the ceramic water drain (19). On completion of the excavation further ground-works were to be undertaken consolidating the water drainage in the general vicinity of the vault. The reconsolidation/display of the external vault stonework is subject to this work.



Fig. 18. The interior west wall of the vault, viewed from the east. Photo CPAT 2972-018.



Fig. 19. The vault entrance and east wall, viewed from the west. Photo CPAT 2972-097.

Fig. 20. The north and west walls of the vault, illustrating the section of quarry tiled floor that was cleaned. Viewed from the east. Photo CPAT 2972-105.



Area D – Excavation of test pit below east doorway.

- 4.16 At a point 4.7m west of the modern outbuilding attached to the north chancel wall, a test pit was excavated below a blocked-up doorway (see Fig. 3). The 'east' doorway, 1.66m high and 0.76m wide, is believed to be of 14th or 15th-century origin. It was hoped that by exposing the footings it might be possible to record evidence of the earlier church foundations and ground levels from the medieval period. The test pit measured 1.92m east to west by 1.43m. A 'french' drain of lime chippings (13), 0.5m wide and 0.35m deep (12), was first removed from alongside the nave wall at the base of the doorway (see Fig. 21). After isolating the modern drain cut, the modern churchyard topsoil was removed (0.14m thick) down onto a uniform layer of dark grey-brown silt and rubble (15). This deposit contained numerous fragments of disarticulated human



Fig. 21. The east doorway (Area D) with the modern drain removed from the base. Photo CPAT 2972-114.

bone, 19th century ceramic and clay pipe.

- 4.17 Underlying the threshold of the blocked doorway was a layer of fragmented limestone and sandstone rubble (34). This deposit, similar to the material underlying the doorway in the south wall recorded in 2006, could possibly be demolition material associated with an earlier phase of St. Michael's (see Fig. 22). The principal aim of the excavation was to follow this deposit northwards across the test pit. This would have allowed us to locate the cut for a medieval foundation trench and possibly recover some dateable artefactual evidence. Due to time constraints all of our labour resource was diverted to the vault excavation in Area C and no further progress was made with the excavation in this area. The trench was backfilled, the drain reconsolidated and the turf was replaced.



Fig. 22. Deposit of medieval rubble (34) underpinning the east door. Viewed from the north.
Photo CPAT 2972-118.

Area E – Excavation of test pit below west doorway.

- 4.8.1 At a point 15.5m west of the test pit in Area D another test pit was excavated below a similar blocked-up doorway (see Fig. 3). The 'west' doorway, 1.72m high and 0.91m wide, is also believed to be of 14th or 15th-century origin. The aims of the excavation were identical to those in Area D. The test pit measured 1.85m east to west by 1.47m. The process of excavation was repeated; the 'french' drain (13) was first removed from alongside the nave wall and the modern churchyard topsoil was removed (0.1m thick) down onto the same uniform layer of dark grey brown silt and rubble (15). Unfortunately, a modern salt-glazed ceramic pipe (14), was encountered traversing the base of the wall. The pipe was part of the water drainage system for the church tower and roof and so it was

imperative that it remained in-situ. This effectively prevented any further excavation alongside the blocked doorway (see Fig. 23). Further excavation throughout the trench would probably have located the medieval layers but once again time constraints and limited resources signalled the end of excavation in this area.

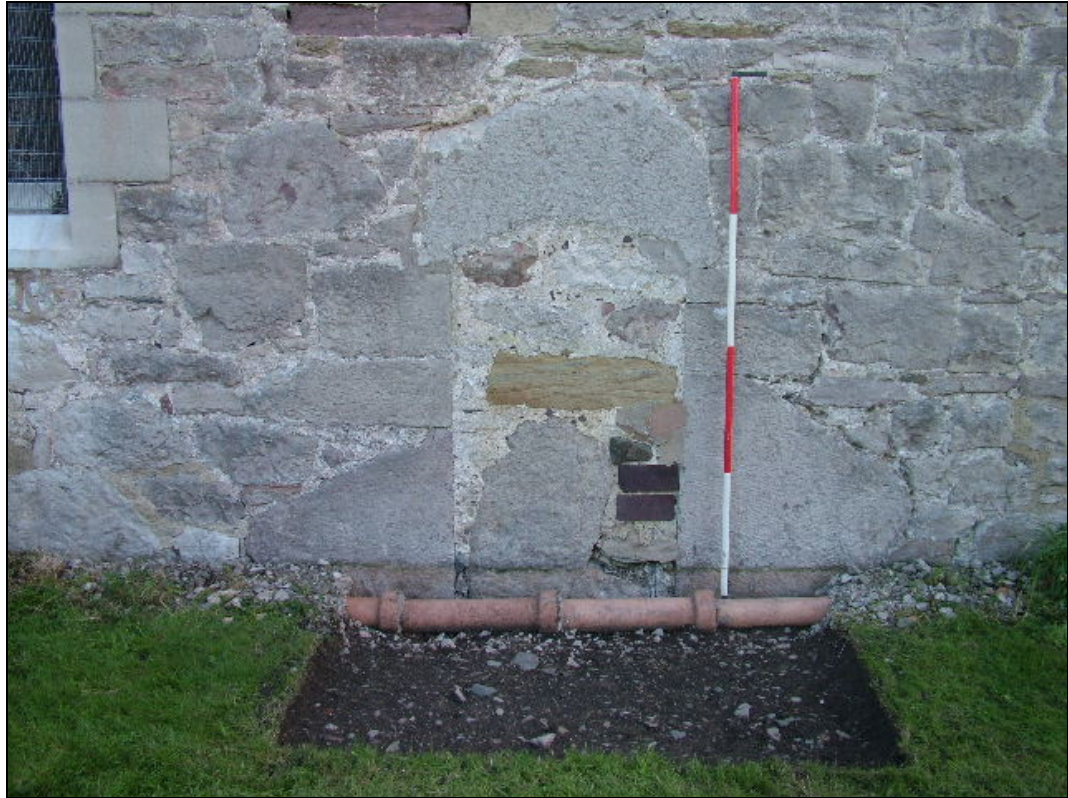


Fig. 23. The west doorway (Area E) viewed from the north. Photo CPAT 2972-106.

5 THE FINDS

- 5.1 Consistent with the previous excavations, the general overburden deposits in Areas C, D and E produced an assemblage of 19th-century ceramics and bottle-glass. Typical examples were coal measures Buckley wares, in either red or cream fabric, transfer printed white-wares, industrial wares and stone-wares. Late 19th-century artefacts were absent from the earlier deposits associated with the vault backfill (08 and 06) but isolated fragments of pearl-ware (c.1815) and clay pipe suggest these deposits are of early 19th-century origin. Earlier examples of pottery from the 16th and 17th centuries were absent and, unlike the excavations of 2006, no medieval or Roman pottery was recovered.
- 5.2 Building debris, in the form of roofing slates and nails, together with occasional fragments of clay pipe and funerary nails, were typical of the other artefactual evidence retained. Disarticulated human remains were recovered from all of the excavated deposits. These were not retained and were subject to reburial within the test trench adjacent to the east wall of the vault.
- 5.3 Apart from a single copper alloy button and several fragments of a pewter 'leaf-shaped' brooch (both of 19th-century origin), only one other artefact, a playing die recovered from the topsoil, is of further note. The die, carved from bone, has opposite facing sides that total to seven as with all traditional late post-medieval die. However the 'crude' nature of the

craftsmanship suggests an earlier date and it has been recorded that some Roman dice are of similar design. Further analysis of the die, which is beyond the remit of the 2009 project, is possibly required.

- 5.4 As previously mentioned, the red quarry tiles recovered from inside the vault are possibly key (when presented with the stratigraphic and ceramic evidence) to the date of the construction of the vault. They are typical of a late Georgian and Victorian form, regionally manufactured in north-east Wales.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The overall aim of the 2009 project was to ascertain the nature, date and extent of the vault located alongside the north chancel wall. We now have a detailed survey of the structure together with some knowledge of its relationship to the surrounding churchyard environs and, more importantly, the north chancel wall of St Michael's church. It appears that the vault is a 'stand alone' structure and is not keyed into the fabric of the church. The nature of the limestone stonework used in the construction of the vault is typical of the early 19th-century renaissance interest in 'folly' medieval architecture. If this is compared with the architecture of Gwrych Castle Estate, similarities can be found. As previously noted in section 2.2 – 2.5, Lloyd Bamford-Hesketh's interest in this architectural concept is quite evident in his investment in the building of Gwrych Castle from 1819 to 1825. The family's association with St. Michael's is well documented within this report and therefore the author concludes that the vault was probably constructed by either Lloyd, as part of the general restoration before his death in 1861, or by his father Robert at the turn of the 19th century.
- 6.2 Stratigraphically, there are a number of pieces of evidence recovered from the excavations that support the period of construction, if not the ownership or the occupants. The church buttresses (built in 1861) post-date the vault, as is demonstrated by the north-east buttress having been constructed over the top of the south-east corner of the vault. Additionally, the clay backfill to the vault had been truncated by the foundation cuts for the buttresses. A number of the red quarry tiles, part of the external floor to the vault, were also missing as a result of the buttress foundation cut. If the two, the vault and the buttress, had been contemporary this would not have been allowed to happen by the owners of the vault. This also implies, therefore, that the vault must have been emptied and resealed prior to Lloyd's death in 1861. Finally, the clay and backfill used to seal the doorway of the vault contained fragments of green pearl-ware ceramic that is generally associated with a short period of time around the early 19th century.
- 6.3 The results of the test pit excavations undertaken at the base of, and opposite to, the two blocked up doorways in Area D and E proved to be inconclusive purely because the excavations were not finished owing to time constraints. The underpinning limestone and sandstone rubble beneath the doorway in Area D has established the existence of medieval archaeology that pre-dates the late 14th century. Any further archaeological investigations in this area would be able to relate this ground surface to surrounding inhumations (burials) in the immediate vicinity. It is to be assumed that the same conclusions can be applied to the test pit in Area E.

7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 7.1 The writer would like to thank the following for their assistance during the project: Nigel Jones, Bob Silvester and Chris Watts, CPAT; The National Library of Wales; Reverend Shirley Griffiths and 'The Friends of the Elfod Heritage Group'; Sian James of Abergele College for co-ordination of the student training programme and finally the students: Hannah Biggerstaff, Gerry Cuthbert, Jason Gregory, Pippa Hutchinson, Pauline Jones, Pete Pickering, Bryn Powell, Cassie Sherriff and Helen Taylor.

8 REFERENCES

Grant, I., 2006. *St Michael's Church, Abergele. Report on Archaeological Excavations.* CPAT Report 775, June 2006.

Silvester, R. J., 1999. *Welsh Historic Churches Project. The Historic Churches of Conwy County Borough: church survey*, CPAT Report 311, January 1999.

Extract from the minutes of St Michael's Parish Church Council, 19/12/1933.