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# Abererch Church: **Pwllheli, Gwynedd**

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## Archaeological Watching Brief

GAT Project No. 2123

Report No. 851

March, 2010

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**Abererch Church, Pwllheli, Gwynedd**

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Prepared for the Rector  
and Parochial Church Council of Abererch Church

March 2010

By

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# ABERERCH CHURCH (G2123)

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

Project No. G2123

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### CONTENTS

	Page
Summary	
1. Introduction	3
2. Specification and Project Design	3
3. Methods and Techniques	3
4. Topography	4
5. Archaeological Background	4
6. Results of the Watching Brief	5
7. Conclusions	6
8. Sources Consulted	7

### FIGURES

**Fig. 1** Site Location Plan

**Fig. 2** Plan of south side of Abererch Church Nave, showing the location of the revealed grave slabs and outline of pew plinth. Location plan, with outline of planned area shown in red, taken from RCAHMMW 1964, page 10)

**Fig. 3** Kennedy's 1879 Plan of the interior of Abererch Church, showing the layout prior to alterations with box pews. Grave slabs are marked in light blue (NLW PD 9702).

**Fig. 4** Grave ledger slab 1, from the east. Scales 2 x 1m, with 50cm divisions

**Fig. 5** Grave ledger slab 2, from the east. Scale 1m, with 50cm divisions

**Fig. 6** Grave ledger slab 3, from the south. Scale 1m, with 50cm divisions

**Fig. 7** Grave ledger slab 4, from the east (oblique lighting used to help with the legibility of the inscription)

**Fig. 8** Grave ledger slab 5, from the east. Scale 1m with 50cm divisions

**Fig. 9** Detail showing character of brick flooring. Scale 1m with 50cm divisions

**Fig. 10** Interior of Abererch Church looking south-west. The area of investigation is in the boxed-in

part of the nave to the south.

**Fig. 11** General view of Abererch Church from the south east. The study area is immediately behind the south wall to the left of the picture.

**Fig. 12** Tudor stalls and desk at the east end of the north isle of the church

**Fig. 13** Abererch Church with curvilinear churchyard on the Tithe Map of the parish of Abererch 1846 (NLW). The churchyard is labelled 1905

## **ST. CAWRDAF'S CHURCH, ABERERCH (G2123)**

### **Archaeological Watching Brief**

#### *Summary*

*Gwynedd Archaeological Trust conducted an archaeological watching brief during the removal of 19<sup>th</sup> century pews along the south wall of the nave of Abererch Church. The pews were noted to be constructed on a boarded plinth overlying a floor of probable 18<sup>th</sup> century date, against which a quarry tiled floor was added, dating probably to restoration of the church in the 1880s.*

*The floor consisted of laid bricks, which abutted against five earlier grave slabs. Two of these could be dated, to 1722 and 1785 and traces of inscriptions could be noted on two others. The grave covers are thought to be likely to be amongst the last intra mural burials within the church, and that the brick floor surface is likely to date from the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> or earlier part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A plan of 1879 shows the floor prior to the laying of the quarry tile floor and the insertion of the current pews.*

*It is probable that the church had a beaten floor surface before that date, into which the graves were cut, although this cannot be demonstrated conclusively.*

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT) was asked by Adam and Frances Voelcker (Architects) on behalf of the Parochial Church Council to conduct an archaeological Watching Brief at St. Cawrdaf's Church, Abererch subsequent to the removal of 19<sup>th</sup> century pews along the south wall of the nave of the church.

#### **1.1 Acknowledgements**

Adam Voelker, the church architect, is especially thanked for his help and advice and for the provision of Kennedy's 1879 plan from the National Library of Wales (NLW), used in this report as figure 3. The Rev. Janice Gouldie, the Rector of the Parish is thanked for her assistance and for keeping the church open during this project.

### **2 SPECIFICATION AND PROJECT DESIGN**

No specific brief was provided for this work; however the Diocesan Advisory Committee advised that an archaeological photographic and drawn record be carried out. The basic requirement was for an archaeological record to be made of the floor surface and five grave slabs that had been revealed upon the removal of some 19<sup>th</sup> century pews. The importance and condition of these archaeological remains was to be assessed.

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust's proposals for fulfilling these requirements were:

- Watching Brief
- Report

### **3 METHODS AND TECHNIQUES**

A plan at a scale of 1:20 was drawn of the floor surface exposed after the removal of the pews, on which the location of the grave slabs noted and other detail was placed (Fig.2). All features revealed were described and notes taken. Individual archaeological events were given individual context numbers and there are referred to in the text.

A full photographic record was maintained using a Nikon D40x DSLR. The archive is held by GAT under the project number **G2123**.

## 4 TOPOGRAPHY

Abererch Church (NGR SH 3965 3657) is located within the village of Abererch, lying at a crossing point over the Afon Erch, consisting of a single main street (Fig. 1). The church is sited within a large partly rounded churchyard on the higher ground (16.74m OD) at the western end of the village. Considerable tracts of formerly arable land around Abererch extend from the south coast of the Llyn peninsula, extending inland to the foothills of *Yr Eifl*.

## 5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

### 5.1 Introduction

The church is situated in a large, partly rounded churchyard on the higher ground at the west end of the village of Abererch (Fig. 13). It is on favourable ground close to a good crossing point on the Afon Erch. This suggests that the site may have early medieval origins, although the earliest probable date for the surviving fabric of the building is 14<sup>th</sup> century, although a probably 13<sup>th</sup> century grave slab survives within the building (Gresham 1960, 75).

The village of Abererch contains a number of buildings of post-medieval date, such as Plas Hendre, of probable late 17<sup>th</sup> century date, although most of the village consists of estate building along a single main street by the Jones family of Broom Hall (Haslam *et al.* 2009, 230).

### 5.2 General History

Abererch Church has an undivided chancel and nave, and north aisle. The north aisle is shorter and slightly narrower, and is separated from the nave by an arcade of four bays. The walls are of uncoursed local rubble, with many larger quoin stones, and the dressed stonework is grit stone. It was described in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by Hyde-Hall as ‘tolerably spacious’ (Hyde Hall 1952, 257). The blocked north doorway to the nave has been suggested to be pre 15<sup>th</sup> century in date, this is due to the fact that a door in this position would be of little use once the 15<sup>th</sup> century west door was built, also that the wall is thicker at this point, implying it is the remnant of an earlier structure incorporated into the present one (Davidson 2000, 4; Haslam *et al.* 2009, 230). The church was extended eastwards in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, with a large five light east window (RCAHMW 1964, 9-11). The junction between the two phases of building is marked by the straight joint in the south wall of the building, and a change in the roof trusses – the trusses to the west are earlier and cusped, whilst those to the east are later. The north aisle was later constructed, possibly in two phases (the eastern part being earlier). The style of the arcade suggests this occurred c. 1520 to 1530 (Hague 1956, 155). A former screen divided the north aisle, and a slot into which it was inserted can be seen on the north pier. A corbel survives with the date 1615 inscribed.

A massive buttress supports the building at the east end, along with a section of walling between the gable ends (Fig. 11). This obscures the junction between the nave and north aisle, hindering the interpretation of the building fabric. The date of this buttress is unknown, but it was present in 1856 (Jones 1856, 305).

Late medieval fittings survive in the form of stall and a desk (Fig. 12), with misericords of water lilies and Tudor Roses, indicating a date of not earlier than c. 1490-1500 for them, which are described by Hyde-Hall as showing ‘the semi-barbarism of their contrivers’ (Hyde-Hall 1952, 257). The desk is carved at one end with standing figures. In 1879 (Fig.3) the stalls were located immediately east of the north doorway into the church, but was moved to the east end after Kennedy’s restoration. It is thought likely that the stalls form a reconstructed part of the former early 16<sup>th</sup> century rood screen, which originally had a form similar to that surviving at Clynnog Church (Davidson 2000, 5). Further fragments of the former screen can also be seen in the church, and it appears to have survived at least in part until 1856 (Jones 1856, 302).

A worn 13<sup>th</sup> century grave slab of a coarse-textured brown conglomerate is situated in the sanctuary. It is decorated with an expanded-arm cross, with shield and diagonal sword behind (Gresham 1960, 73). Monuments to the Jones family of Broom Hall, are located on the south wall of the nave.

## 6 RESULTS OF THE WATCHING BRIEF

### 6.1 The nave floor

The pews in the south nave of the church (102), consisting of an area approximately 12.73m by 2.1m set against the south wall of the nave. Upon removal they were seen to be set on boards and a plinth over an earlier floor constructed of a mixture of irregular handmade bricks, and brick shape limestone blocks (101). There was evidence of patched repairs to this floor. Abutting the plinth to the north, and therefore laid afterwards, to the west and east of the plinth was a floor of alternate red and black quarry tiles, which is thought to overlie the earlier brick floor, and probably dates from *Kennedy's* late 19<sup>th</sup> century restoration of the church.

The bricks had an average dimension of 0.23m by 0.12m (Fig. 9). This floor abutted the south wall of the nave, and appeared to change in character just south (0.2m) of the pew plinth (Figs. 4 and 5), with a straight edge of bricks, laid in stretchers. Too little of this was visible for it to be possible to interpret this in any detail.

Into this brick floor were set five grave slabs, against which the bricks abutted, demonstrating that they were either of earlier date than the brick floor, or had been set within it.

### 6.2 The Grave slabs

#### 6.2.1 Introduction

Four of the grave slabs contained inscriptions of which traces were visible, although only two had legible dates. These have been given individual numbers and these are discussed in section 6.1. It is difficult to match the location of the identified grave slabs with those that appear to be depicted on *Kennedy's* 1879 plan (Fig. 3).

The grave slabs are flat slabs that probably completely cover the original grave cut, and are known as ledgers. They are typical in form and inscription styles of 18<sup>th</sup> century intra mural floor monuments (Mytum 2003), and all are oriented east west as would be expected within a church. They appear to be in their original locations, probably covering graves that were dug into a rough or beaten earth floor.

They are referred to by the numbers given to them on Fig. 2, numbering from west to east. Patches of damage where the inscription is not visible are indicated by dots. The line stops, any abbreviations, superscript lettering and punctuation are as noted on the stones. Any interpreted text is placed in square brackets.

#### 6.2.2 Number 1 (Figure 4)

Stone number 1 is a ledger slab of mid greyish brown shale/schist, and is somewhat flaked. It is rectangular and 1.9m long by 0.84m wide. The surface of the stone is somewhat damaged, however most of the inscription can be made out. The upper case lettering has straight serifs, and occupies the first 0.5m of the stone:

HERE L[IET]H° THE

BODYS O[F] ° 3 CHILD [ER?/REN?]

BY W C .... & R P HIS

WIFE ° W W

### 6.2.3 Number 2 (Figure 5)

Stone number 2 is situated immediately east of number 1. It is made of mid grey shale and is in a very decayed state, and is 1.6m long by 0.7m wide. The letter style suggests a late 18<sup>th</sup> century date (Shoemith 1980, Mytum and Evans 2002), although no date was visible on the stone.

.....TS D[epar]

.....

..... Marg

.....Who died

[Aug]ust 27.....

Aged.....

### 6.2.4 Number 3(Figure 6)

Stone number 3 situated immediately east of number 2, was a worn light yellowish brown limestone slab, of irregular shape, but approximately 1.53m along its northern edge and up to 0.4m wide. An angle along the southern edge of the stone divided that edge into lengths of 1.15m and 0.4m (Fig. 2, 6). The inscription, of Times New Roman type with serifs, ran east west along the length of the stone and was easily decipherable:

UNDERNEATH lie the Remains of *Mary*  
The wife of WILLIAM WILLIAMS of Bryngolau  
GENT. and only daughter of MARY ROBERTS  
Late of Hendre wen, who departed this life  
May the 9.th 1785 AGED 41 years

### 6.2.5 Number 4 (Figure 7)

Stone number 4 was situated 3.8m east of stone 3, and slightly to the south of it. It consists of a dark yellowish brown limestone slab 1.5m long by 0.5m wide, and the inscription, written on the eastern portion of the stone, was clearly visible:

I W

Ty ynyna<sup>n</sup>t

1722

The superscript 'n' was clearly a correction of the carver's transcription error.

### 6.2.6 Number 5 (Figure 8)

Stone 5 was adjacent to stone 4 to the south, although offset 0.7m west. It is a rectangular mid greyish brown shale slab 1.78m long by 0.6m wide. The surface of the stone was completely flaked and decayed, and no inscription was visible.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The brick floor surface, revealed by the removal of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century pews in the nave, is almost certainly the floor surface shown on Kennedy's 1879 plan of the church floor (Fig. 3). The dates on the two dateable gravestones 1722 and 1785, demonstrate intra mural burials within the church in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The manner in which the brick floor respects the grave slabs means that either they are contemporary or the brick floor post-dates the grave slabs.



The gravestones are interesting examples of their date and type, and probably represent the last intra mural burials within the church, set into what was possibly a beaten earth floor. Kennedy's plan shows irregular surfaces at the west end of the church, suggesting that parts were still earth at that date (Fig. 3). It is likely that the brick floor was laid prior to (and possibly immediately before) the insertion of the box pews and benches shown on Kennedy's plan. This must have taken place after 1785, the latest legible date on the grave slabs (Grave 3). However it has not been possible to fully correlate the location of the grave slabs with the grave slabs outlined on Kennedy's pre-restoration plan of the church.

Open pews replaced the box pews and benches as part of Kennedy's late 19<sup>th</sup> century restoration, which were laid on a boarded wooden plinth, and then surrounded by quarry tiles.

## **8 SOURCES CONSULTED**

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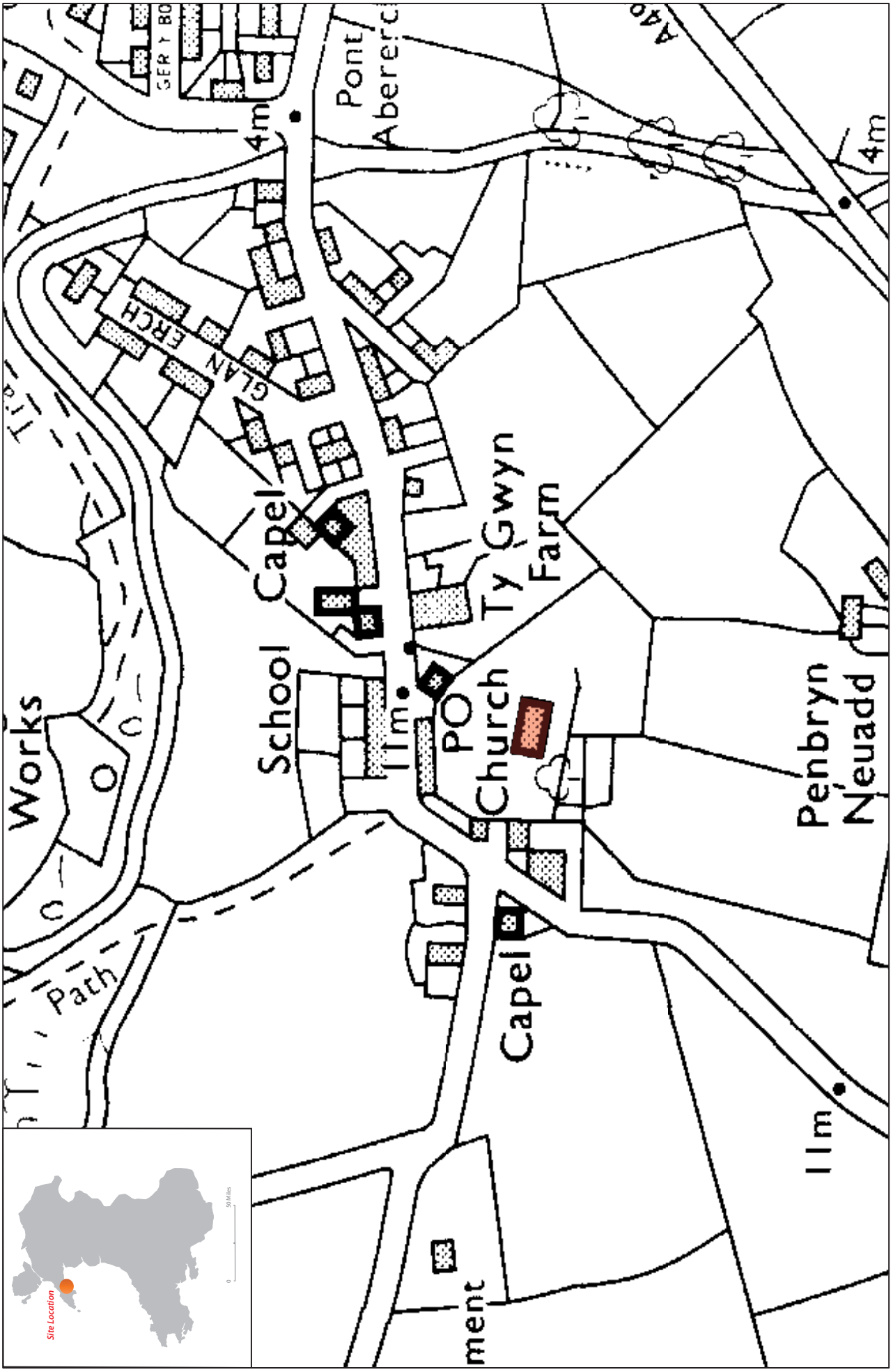
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### ***National Library of Wales***

1879 *Abererch Church- Plan showing pews &c as in 1879* (NLW PD 9702)

*Tithe map of the parish of Abererch 1846*



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Fig. 1 Site Location

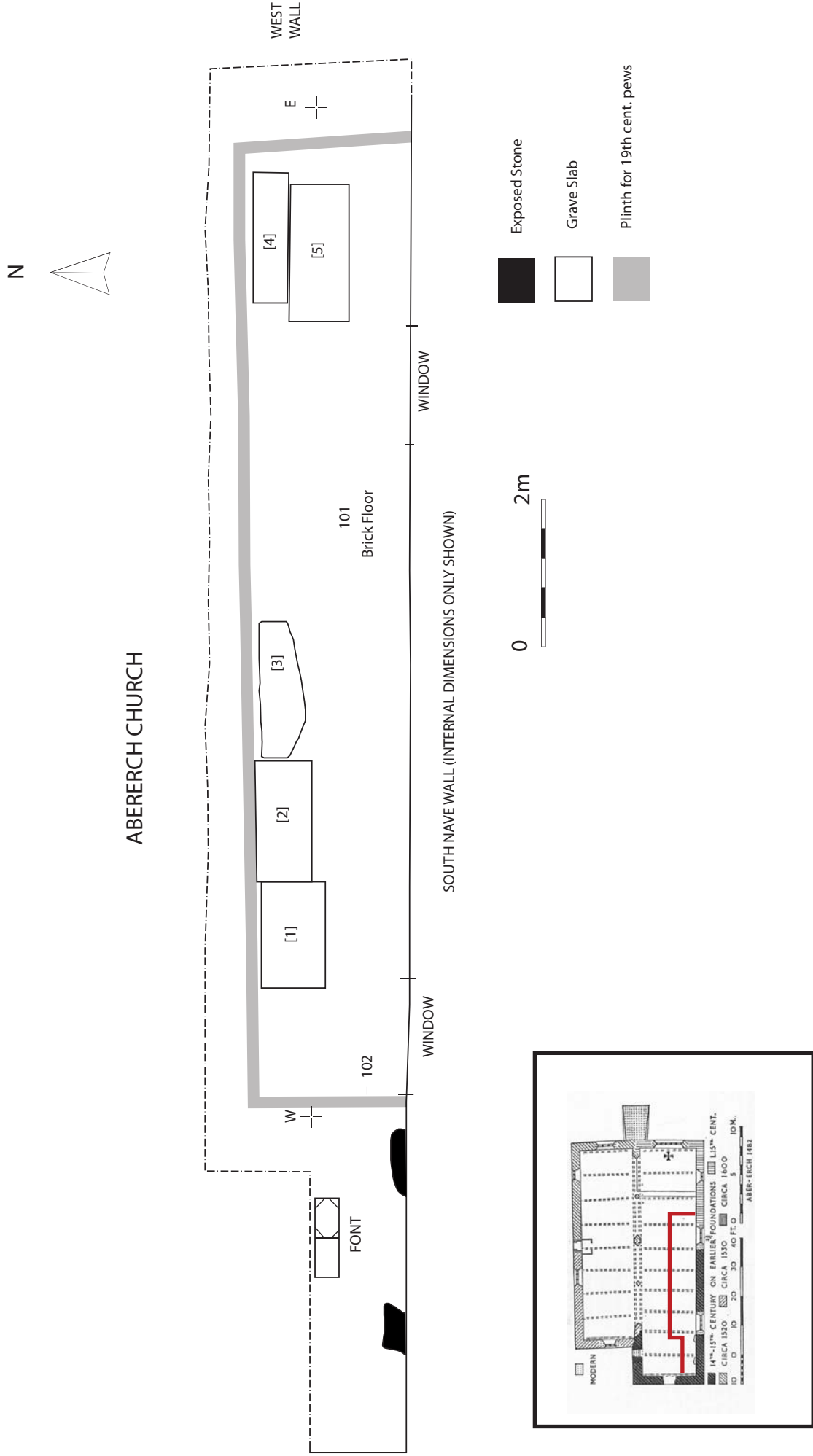


Fig. 2 Plan of south side of Abererch Church Nave, showing the location of the revealed grave slabs and outline of pew plinth. Location plan, with outline of planned area shown in red, taken from RCAI-IMW 1964, page 10

A.

# ABERERCH CHURCH

PLAN SHOWING PEWS &c, AS IN 1879.

SCALE  $\frac{1}{8}$ " OF AN INCH TO A FOOT.



Fig. 3 Kennedy's 1879 Plan of the interior of Abererch Church, showing the layout prior to alterations with box pews. Grave slabs are marked in light blue (NLW PD 9702). Approximate study area overlaid in red



**Fig. 4** Grave ledger slab 1, from the east. Scales 2 x 1m, with 50cm divisions



**Fig. 5** Grave ledger slab 2, from the east. Scale 1m, with 50cm divisions





**Fig. 6** Grave ledger slab 3, from the south. Scale 1m, with 50cm divisions



**Fig. 7** Grave ledger slab 4, from the east (oblique lighting used to help with the legibility of the inscription)



**Fig. 8** Grave ledger slab 5, from the east. Scale 1m with 50cm divisions



**Fig. 9** Detail showing character of brick flooring. Scale 1m with 50cm divisions





**Fig. 10** Interior of Abererch Church looking south-west. The area of investigation is in the boxed-in part of the nave to the south.



**Fig. 11** General view of Abererch Church from the south east. The study area is immediately behind the south wall to the left of the picture.





**Fig. 12** Tudor stalls and desk at the east end of the north isle of the church

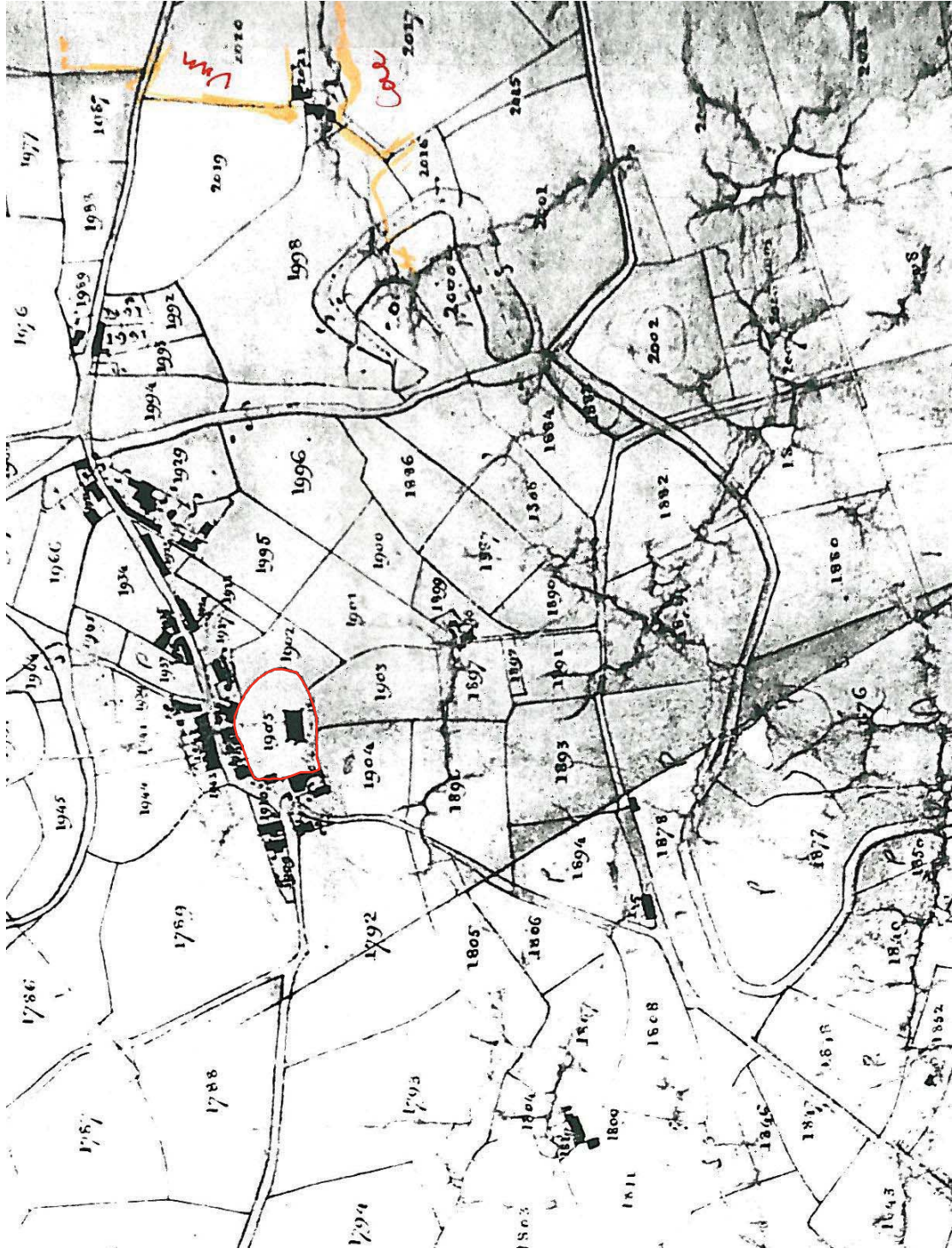


Fig. 13 Abererch Church with curvilinear churchyard on the Tithe Map of the parish of Abererch 1846 (NLW). The churchyard is labelled 1905, and outlined in red



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