

CPAT Report No. 1474

St Mary's Church, Ruabon




Archaeological Watching Brief



YMDDIRIEDOLAETH ARCHAEOLEGOL CLWYD-POWYS

CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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Prepared by:	Checked by:	Approved by:
		
Richard Hankinson Senior Archaeologist	Nigel Jones Principal Archaeologist	Nigel Jones Principal Archaeologist
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Cover photo: St Mary's Church exterior, from the south-east. CPAT 4283-0011.



YMDDIRIEDOLAETH ARCHAEOLEGOL CLWYD-POWYS
 CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

41 Broad Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7RR, United Kingdom

+44 (0) 1938 553 670

trust@cpat.org.uk

www.cpat.org.uk

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Summary

A watching brief was undertaken by CPAT during works carried out in the interior of St Mary's Church, Ruabon in January 2017. The works observed included the construction of a new disabled access into the church, which involved the removal of a number of pews in the north aisle of the church and their repositioning, also the resetting of the font in the south aisle. Both involved taking up a portion of the wooden floors in these areas to reveal the underlying structure. It had originally been proposed that some sections of the tiled floors between the rows of pews would be taken up but this work was not carried out.

In both the north and south aisles, the removal of the flooring revealed that the boarded floors were of probable mid-20th- century date and were suspended over what seemed to be an earlier earthen floor by the use of low sleeper walls and a projecting course of masonry on the internal wall of the church. None of the early floor was affected by the work, although the presence of some bone fragments, indicative of disturbed burials, was noted. All of this material was left in-situ.

1 Introduction

- 1.1. The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) were engaged by Graham Holland Associates to undertake a watching brief during works on the interior of St Mary's Church, Ruabon (SJ 0276 43801).
- 1.2. St Mary's Church is a grade I listed building (ref 1622) and is first recorded in 1253, the church then being dedicated to St Collen. The tower is 14th-century in date and there is some perpendicular work. The south-east chapel dates from 1755, and the north-east chapel from 1769. The church was remodelled in 1769-70 by the Shrewsbury architect T F Pritchard, and was substantially rebuilt in 1870-2 by the London architect Benjamin Ferrey for Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn; the nave arcade, clerestory, aisles and most windows date from this phase. The interior has 15th-century wall paintings on the south wall, which were restored in 1870.



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Fig. 1: Location of St Mary's Church

- 1.3. The works observed included the construction of a new disabled access into the church, which involved the removal of a number of pews on the northern aisle of the church and their repositioning, as well as the resetting of the font in the southern aisle. Both involved taking up a portion of the wooden floors in these areas to reveal the underlying structure. It had originally been proposed that some sections of the tiled floors between the rows of pews would be taken up but this work was not carried out.

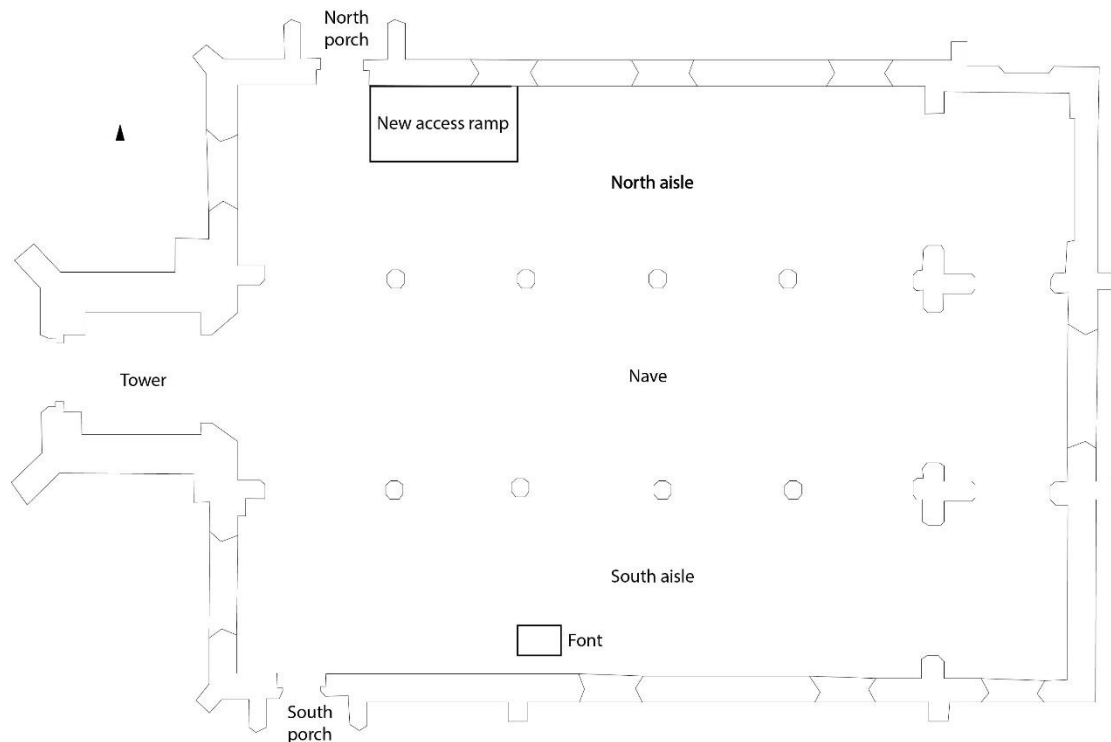


Fig. 2: Plan of the church (courtesy Graham Holland Associates, not to scale)

- 1.4. The watching brief was carried out on 9 January 2017; this report was written once it had been confirmed that work on the interior modifications had been completed. The watching brief was conducted according to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CIfA) *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014).

2 Watching Brief

- 2.1. The pews lining the south wall of the south aisle of the church are set on a wooden, boarded floor and a small section of this was removed to allow for the insertion of a supporting foundation beneath the font.
- 2.2. The area was limited but the overall nature of the structure underneath the existing floor was exposed; the floor here can best be described as being suspended on parallel sleeper walls constructed of brick and stone and running in an east/west direction, with the main axis of the church. One of these was presumed to have been placed against the wall of the church but this could not be readily seen owing to limited access. The supporting structure for the font was placed on top of a second wall, 0.25m wide, running below the centre of the boarded floor on the main axis of the

church, while on its northern side the floor was supported by a low wall which was presumably part of the structure of the tiled walkway running the length of the church on this side. The tiled walkway was at a level 0.14m below the surface of the boarded floor. In between the walls supporting the boarded floor, there was what may have been an earlier floor of the church comprising a reddish brown stony silt, at a level of 0.50m below the wooden floor, but this was not disturbed and was only subject to a brief examination; some disturbed human remains were evident, as might be expected.



Fig. 2: The new supporting structure for the font, from the north. CPAT 4283-0001

- 2.3. In the north aisle, work to create a new disabled access ramp immediately to the east of the entrance from the north porch involved the removal of five pews and the boarded floor on which they were placed to reveal the underlying structure in advance of the commencement of construction. The layout was essentially similar to that found in the south aisle, although the larger area of floor boards that were taken up allowed for a better understanding of the supporting structure.
- 2.4. Again, as in the south aisle, the floor had been built up from parallel, east/west aligned, walls of stone and brick. In this case, however, the north wall of the church could be seen and it appeared that there an internally projecting course of masonry formed the base on which a reused wooden beam had been laid. Similar wooden beams were present on the central sleeper wall and on a projecting part of the base for the adjoining tiled floor to the south of the area examined. The existing floor comprised sawn softwood beams running north/south on which the boarded floor had been laid. The softwood beams appeared to be relatively recent, probably dating to the second half of the 20th century.



Fig. 3: The structure below the wooden flooring on the south side of the church, showing the possible earlier floor between the sleeper walls. CPAT 4283-0008

- 2.5. Between the walls on which the current floor has been laid was a further part of what appeared to be an earlier floor of the church, akin to that exposed in the south aisle. This comprised a reddish brown stony silt with a significant lime content, at a level of between 0.30m and 0.40m below the wooden floor. As was the case with the south aisle, this was not examined in detail, but again some disturbed human remains were evident.



Fig. 4: The location of the new disabled access ramp after the pews and existing floor were removed, showing the adjoining tiled walkways. CPAT 4283-0010



Fig. 5: The structure below the pews, showing the presumed earlier floor of the church between the sleeper walls and the north wall of the church. CPAT 4283-0009

3 Conclusions

- 3.1. The watching brief revealed evidence regarding the nature of the current floor within the church, together with what seemed to be an earlier, earthen, floor. The works that were undertaken involved modifications to the existing floor to construct a new disabled access to the church and the re-siting of the font.
- 3.2. The floor of the church was divided into tiled walkways, separating areas of pews that cover the centre and the north and south aisles. The pews were set on wooden boarded flooring covering a series of wooden beams that utilised low sleeper walls and a projecting masonry course on the internal face of the wall of the church for support. Between the sleeper walls were areas of what seemed to be an earlier earthen floor, although these were not disturbed during the course of the watching brief and their interpretation must remain unconfirmed. The materials used in the construction of the current floor suggested its appearance dated to the mid-20th century.

4 Archive deposition Statement

- 4.1. The project archive has been prepared according to the CPAT Archive Policy and in line with the CIfA *Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives guidance* (2014). The archive will be deposited with the regional Historic Environment Record, maintained by CPAT in Welshpool, no artefacts were recovered.

5 Site Archive

CPAT Event PRN: 140151

1 site visit recording form

11 Digital photographs, CPAT Film No 4283

Appendix 1: CPAT WSI 1623

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) have been invited Graham Holland Associates, to submit a proposal for undertaken a watching brief during the lifting and relaying of a tiled floor within St Mary's Church, Ruabon (SJ 0276 43801).
- 1.2 St Mary's Church is a grade I listed building (ref 1622) and is first recorded in 1253, the church then being dedicated to St Collen. The tower is 14th-century in date and there is some perpendicular work. The south-east chapel dates from 1755, and the north-east chapel from 1769. The church was remodelled in 1769-70 by the Shrewsbury architect T F Pritchard, and was substantially rebuilt in 1870-2 by the London architect Benjamin Ferrey for Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn; the nave arcade, clerestorey, aisles and most windows date from this phase. The interior has 15th-century wall paintings on the south wall, which were restored in 1870.
- 1.3 The tiled floor within the church is uneven and the present programme of works involves the lifting and relaying of the floor. A Faculty has been granted for the work on condition that the Parish contracts an accredited Archaeologist to undertake a watching brief during surface disturbance works within the church:

'The lifting of tiled floors and the levelling out of sub-surface deposits could expose features of an archaeological nature including earlier wall foundations, the tops of vaults, etc. The scale of these exposures will be dependent both on their frequency and the degree to which the sub-surface material is investigated and levelled out and/ or removed. Sufficient time must be allowed by the Contractor during the on-site works for the Archaeologist to record any significant remains that are exposed, including structural features, vaults and burials, though it is not anticipated that features dropping below the level of the groundworks will need to be examined. The Contractor should be made aware of the need to work closely with the Archaeologist during the on-site works; to this end the Contractor should give the Archaeologist a minimum of five days' notice as to when he wishes to start on the site, and maintain regular contact subsequently.

The Archaeologist shall also be responsible for collecting any human bone, fragmentary or complete, which is dug up, following any necessary legal procedures. In conjunction with the incumbent, the Archaeologist should make an appropriate decision as to how those bones or fragments are re-buried. Upon completion of the watching brief, the Archaeologist should produce a written report on the findings, positive or negative, including photographs, which will be lodged in an appropriate archive, with a copy being passed to the Churches Conservation and Development Officer of St Asaph Diocese in her capacity as secretary to the DAC.'

2 Methodology

2.1 The watching brief will be conducted according to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CIfA) *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014). The watching brief will be undertaken to monitor the lifting of the existing tiled floor and any other internal groundworks likely to impact on potential buried archaeological deposits. The excavation of any archaeological features or deposits will be undertaken by hand using the conventional techniques for archaeological excavation:

- The presence or absence of archaeological features encountered during the ground works will be noted.
- Where features of archaeological interest are identified during the ground works they will be systematically investigated by hand with sufficient work being undertaken to determine their date, character and function, using the conventional techniques for archaeological excavation and in accordance with CIfA Standard and Guidance.
- All features will be located as accurately as possible on an overall plan of the church at an appropriate scale.
- Contexts will be recorded on individual record forms, using a continuous numbering system, and be drawn and photographed as appropriate.
- Plans will be drawn on permatrace to a scale of 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50, as appropriate.
- All photography will be taken using a digital SLR camera with a minimum resolution of 10 mega pixels, including a metric scale in each view, with views logged in a photographic register.
- In the event of human burials being discovered the Ministry of Justice will be informed. The remains will initially be left *in situ*, and if removal is required, a MoJ licences will be applied for under the Burial Act 1857.
- In the event of finding any artefacts covered by the provisions of the Treasures Act 1996, the appropriate procedures under this legislation will be followed.

2.2 All artefacts and environmental samples will be treated in a manner appropriate to their composition and a sampling strategy will be developed as appropriate:

- All stratified finds will be collected by context, or where appropriate, individually recorded in three dimensions. Unstratified finds will only be collected where they contribute significantly to the project objectives or are of particular intrinsic interest.
- All finds and samples will be collected, processed, sorted, quantified, recorded, labelled, packed, stored, marked, assessed, analysed and conserved in a manner appropriate to their composition and in line with appropriate guidance.
- arrangements to assess and study any artefacts, assemblages and environment samples.
- Any artefacts recovered during the evaluation will be deposited with an appropriate museum, subject to the permission of the owner.
- The site archaeologist will be responsible for collecting any human bone, fragmentary or complete, which is revealed, following any necessary legal procedures. An appropriate decision will be made in conjunction with the incumbent as to how and where bones will be stored and subsequently re-buried.

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- 2.3 Following the on-site work an illustrated report will be prepared containing sections on: Site location; Archaeological Background; Watching Brief; Conclusions and References, together with appropriate appendices on archives and finds.
- 2.4 The site archive will be prepared to specifications in English Heritage's Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE) system and the IfA *Standard and Guidance for the Creation, Compilation, Transfer and Deposition of Archaeological Archives* (2008), to be deposited with the regional Historic Environment Record (HER).

3 Resources and Programming

- 3.1 The watching brief will be undertaken by a skilled archaeologist under the overall supervision of Nigel Jones MCIfA, CPAT's Principal Archaeologist. CPAT is also a CIfA Registered Organisation (RAO No 6) and as such agrees to abide by their *Code of Conduct* (2010) and the *Code of Approved Practice for the Regulation of Contractual Arrangements in Field Archaeology* (2014).
- 3.2 All report preparation will be completed by or with the assistance of the same field archaeologist(s) who conducted the site work. Copies of the report will be deposited with the client and the regional Historic Environment Record within one month of the completion of on-site works. If appropriate, a short report will be published in *Archaeology in Wales*.
- 3.3 The client should be aware that in the event that significant archaeological remains are revealed there may be a requirement for more detailed excavation and specialist services which would be the subject of separate costings. A programme of post-excavation analysis and publication is already underway on the results from the previous season of excavation and should significant archaeology be revealed during the watching brief this is likely to add to the overall post-excavation costs.
- 3.4 Requirements relating to Health and Safety regulations will be adhered to by CPAT and its staff.
- 3.5 CPAT is covered by appropriate Public and Employer's Liability insurance, as well as Professional Indemnity insurance.

N W Jones

20 October 2015