

CPAT Report No. 1532

St Michael's Church, Caerwys, Flintshire

Archaeological Watching Brief



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CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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 CPAT Project No: 2234
 Project Name: Caerwys Church
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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out during the installation of a new septic tank at St Michaels Church, Caerwys. The work involved examining the excavation of both the large pit in which the tank was placed and an associated drain on the north side of the church.

The work revealed a brick structure, thought to be the remains of some type of drainage apparatus connected with a previous refurbishment on the church. There were indications within the structure of a possible brick-vaulted ceiling, which might be suggestive of a crypt, although this hypothesis could not be confirmed. An earlier cut feature was observed in the excavation which may have been a disturbed grave as it contained a fragment of human bone, although this could have been residual.

1 Introduction

- 1.1. The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) were invited by Robin Wolley, on behalf of the Church in Wales, to undertake a watching brief at St Michael's Church, Caerwys (NGR: SJ 12738 72860), during the installation of a septic tank within a tarmac path that crosses the churchyard immediately to the north of the church, heading towards the north-east lychgate. It was indicated by the client's representative that a Faculty had been granted for the work, with the requirement that the excavations were conducted under an archaeological watching brief.



Fig. 1: Location of St Michael's Church

- 1.2. CPAT were engaged to carry out the work in August 2017 and the watching brief was conducted over two days on 11 and 12 September 2017.

2 Methodology

- 2.1. The watching brief was conducted in accord with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CIfA) *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014).
- 2.2. Sufficient time was made available for the recording of any structural evidence or features that were revealed during the watching brief, in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI No 1831), produced by CPAT in advance of the work commencing. Any archaeological evidence that was revealed was drawn, photographed and described, as appropriate.

3 Background

- 3.1. The following background is taken from Silvester and Frost (1999). St Michael's church occupies an off-centre location in the medieval planned settlement of Caerwys, a little over 8 km to the east of St Asaph. It has a late 13th-century tower and nave, to which a chancel and a north aisle were later added. The building contains a 13th-century effigy, broken sepulchral slabs of 14th-century date, and a range of wooden furnishings of 17th-century date. The church is sited within a large level churchyard with two lychgates, one originally dating to the 15th century.
- 3.2. It has been suggested that the dedication to St Michael points to this being the site of an early 8th-century church, when the cult of St Michael became popular in Wales. There is also a well, more correctly a natural spring, less than 1 km to the west of the church known as 'Ffynnon Mihangel', which translated to 'Michael's Well'. As the earliest reference to the church is in 1244, when it was nominated as a meeting place between Prince David and King Henry III, and it was referred to again in 1284, when compensation was paid to the rector for damage done to the church during Edward I's incursion into Wales, it is evident that there was an existing settlement and church prior to the laying out of the planned town from 1290. Whether the church, however, can be taken back into early medieval times remains to be satisfactorily established. The church is not recorded in the Norwich taxation of 1254 but appears as 'capelle de Kerwys' in 1284 and subsequently in Pope Nicholas's Taxation of 1291 at a value of £8 1s 8d.
- 3.3. The town received a charter in 1290 and parts of the present building may date to this time. The tower, it has been claimed, was built on the site of a Roman observation tower, on the basis of the early fabric at its base, but there is no justification for such a view. The late 13th-century church was presumably a single-chambered building, with the tower linked to it on the north side at the west end.
- 3.4. Considerable restoration and rebuilding work took place during the late 15th/early 16th-century, and new east windows were inserted. Documentation refers to re-slating the roof in 1675, which involved the purchase of 3,000 slates and 600 laths, painting the building (presumably with limewash) in 1689, and flagging the church floor in 1760, perhaps as a replacement for the rushes that would have been strewn over an earlier earth floor. There is a reference to work on the top stage of the tower in 1769, perhaps an addition, though Hubbard thought this must be repair work.

- 3.5. In 1894/5, the original arcade supported on timber columns between the chancel and aisle was replaced by the present stone arcading. Other work carried out during the 1894 restoration by W. H. Spaul of Oswestry included re-slating the roofs; pulling down a vestry and building a south porch on its site; removing the west gallery and its stairs and replacing all the seating. The font, which is now sited in the west corner of the north aisle, was supposed to be moved near the new south porch, though whether this happened is not clear. Decayed window dressings were renewed and the body of the church was re-floored with tiles. Presumably, too, at this time the south nave and chancel roof was replaced. The present vestry and the west porch were added in 1904.

4 Watching Brief

- 4.1. The watching brief was carried out over the course of two days; on day one, a large pit intended to house the septic tank was excavated down to the natural substrate, to a depth of approximately 1.1m. The excavated pit was sub-rectangular and measured 2.3m by 2.0m. It was located between the northern wall of the church, and a tarmac pathway connecting the north-east Lychgate to a doorway into the Nave.
- 4.2. Following the cleaning of the sides of the pit, the general stratigraphic sequence of the southern section, indicated an upper topsoil (101), above a demolition deposit (102), containing fragments of mortar and burning, which overlay a brown, silty clay sub-soil (103), from which occasional small fragments of human bone were recovered. The natural subsoil comprised a firm, stony, sandy clay (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: The soil profile in the pit. Photo CPAT 4414-0006

- 4.3. Structural remains (Fig. 3) were revealed in the south-west corner of the pit. Initial assessment of these remains suggested a cone shaped brick structure, which

measured 0.7m wide at the top, tapering down to 0.3m wide at the base. The overall height of the structure was approximately 0.55m, and it was stratigraphically directly beneath the topsoil (101). The top of the feature was capped by a broken band of clay (109), measuring 0.06m thick. Approximately 0.10m below the clay band was what appeared to be a free standing arrangement of heat affected bricks, forming what seemed to be a small chamber (107).



Fig. 3: The small chamber. Photo CPAT 4414-0018

- 4.4. The small chamber was 0.4m high by 0.3m wide, and appeared to be standing on a stone base or plinth, comprised of two limestone slabs (106), which measured 0.10m thick by 0.4m and 0.4m. Between the bricks of the chamber and the sloping outer edges of the feature, was a deposit of firm sandy clay, with evidence of burning particularly noticeable in the eastern edge.
- 4.5. Upon partial removal of the bricks of the chamber, four adjoining bricks were identified, arranged in a way suggestive of a possible vaulted roof, above what appeared to be a substantial void (Fig. 4). As far as could be investigated, the void extended in a southerly direction towards the northern wall of the church, for a distance of at least 0.5m metres, but its true extent could not be determined. The bricks imply an 18th- or 19th-century date for the structure.



Fig 4: The possible vaulted ceiling above the void mentioned above. Photo CPAT 4414-0020

- 4.6. Visible in the western section of the pit, and directly below the bricks and limestone slabs of the chamber, was what appeared to be a feature cut into the natural subsoil (108). It measured 0.28m wide by 0.2m deep, and displayed a U-shaped profile (see Fig. 4). It was filled by a brown, friable, silty clay deposit, and contained two small fragments of human bone which were recovered from the base of the exposed fill.



Fig. 5: The U-shaped cut feature. Photo CPAT 4414-0011

- 4.7. On day two of the watching brief, and as part of the groundworks, a narrow trench was excavated extending from the septic tank pit, parallel with the tarmac pathway for a distance of 5m. It measured approximately 0.4m wide by 0.5m deep; no archaeological remains were identified. A large drain pipe identified at a depth of 0.4m in the septic tank pit, and on the same alignment as the narrow trench, suggested that the ground in this part of the cemetery had been disturbed previously.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1. Initially, structure (107) appeared as a potential kiln structure, on which either pottery or bricks could be placed ready for firing. Subsequent investigation effectively ruled this out and it seemed more likely that the structure was related to some form of drainage, perhaps functioning as a collection chamber for run-off or ground water. The alignment of the ceramic drain upon the brick structure, seen during excavation of the septic tank pit, provided supporting evidence.
- 5.2. The other possibility was that the structure represented the remains of a small external crypt. The main evidence for this was the arched brick vaulting seen behind the small internal chamber, which was akin to a stone-built external crypt found by CPAT on the north side of Abergele church (Grant 2006). If it was such a structure, then given the nature of the materials of its construction, it would likely date to the 18th or 19th centuries. More extensive excavations, outwith the scope of this watching brief, would be needed to verify this possibility.
- 5.3. The most recent large scale renovation of the church took place in 1894, and it may be that the brick structure dates from around this time. Given that it appears to be cut from immediately below the topsoil and cuts through the lower subsoil, it would appear to be a relatively modern event. Any renovations would have involved landscaping and levelling of the surrounding ground, with bits of demolition debris being used in the backfilling process, and evidence for this can be seen in deposit (102), just below the topsoil.
- 5.4. Although a fragment of human bone was recovered from the fill of the exposed section of an earlier U-shaped feature (108), this could well have been residual, as other fragments were found in the lower fill generally. The section that was exposed would suggest an east/west orientation, supporting the possibility that this was a grave cut, though the possibility that this was some form of foundation trench or gully for the overlying brick structure cannot be ruled out.

6 Archive deposition Statement

- 6.1. The project archive has been prepared according to the CPAT Archive Policy and in line with the ClfA *Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives guidance* (2014). The digital archive only will be deposited with the Historic Environment Record, Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust and the paper/drawn/digital archive with the National Monuments Record (RCAHMW). No artefacts were recovered. A summary of the archive is provided below.

Archive Summary

CPAT Event PRN: 140202

2 Watching brief forms

21 digital photographs, CPAT Film 4414

Appendix 1: CPAT WSI 1831

1 Introduction

- 1.1. The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) have been invited by Robin Wolley, on behalf of the Church in Wales, to submit a proposal for undertaking a watching brief at St Michael's Church, Caerwys (NGR: SJ 12738 72860), during the installation of a septic tank within a tarmac path that crosses the churchyard immediately to the north of the church, heading towards the north-east lychgate.
- 1.2. It is understood that a Faculty has been granted for the work, with the requirement that excavations are conducted under an archaeological watching brief.

2 Background (from Silvester and Frost 1999)

- 2.1. St Michael's church occupies an off-centre location in the medieval planned settlement of Caerwys, a little over 5 miles to the east of St Asaph. It has a late 13th-century tower and nave, to which a chancel and a north aisle were later added. The building contains a 13th-century effigy, broken sepulchral slabs of 14th-century date, and a range of wooden furnishings of 17th-century date. The church is sited within a large level churchyard with two lychgates, one originally dating to the 15th century.
- 2.2. It has been suggested that the dedication to St Michael points to an early 8th-century church, when the cult of St Michael became popular in Wales, and there is a well, more correctly a natural spring, about half a mile to the west of the church known as 'Ffynnon Mihangel'. As the earliest reference to the church is in 1244, when it was nominated as a meeting place between Prince David and King Henry III, and it was referred to again in 1284, when compensation was paid to the rector for damage done to the church during Edward I's incursion into Wales, it is evident that there was an existing settlement and church prior to the laying out of the planned town from 1290. Whether the church, however, can be taken back into early medieval times remains to be satisfactorily established. The church is not recorded in the Norwich taxation of 1254 but appears as 'capelle de Kerwys' in 1284 and subsequently in Pope Nicholas's Taxation of 1291 at a value of £8 1s 8d.
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- 2.4. Considerable restoration and rebuilding work took place during the late 15th/early 16th-century, and new east windows were inserted. Documentation refers to re-slating the roof in 1675, which involved the purchase of 3,000 slates and 600 laths, painting the building (presumably with limewash) in 1689, and flagging the church floor in 1760, perhaps as a replacement for the rushes that were strewn over the earlier earth floor. There is a reference to work on the top stage of the tower in 1769, perhaps an addition, though Hubbard thought this must be repair work.

- 2.5. In 1894/5, the original arcade supported on timber columns between the chancel and aisle was replaced by the present stone arcading. Other work carried out during the 1894 restoration by W. H. Spaul of Oswestry, included re-slatting the roofs, pulling down a vestry and building a south porch on its site, removing the west gallery and its stairs and replacing all the seating. The font, which is now sited in the west corner of the north aisle was supposed to be moved near the new south porch, though whether this happened is not clear. Decayed window dressings were renewed and the body of the church was re-floored with tiles. Presumably, too, at this time the south nave and chancel roof was replaced. The present vestry and the west porch were added in 1904.

3 Methodology

- 3.1. The watching brief will be conducted according to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (Cifa) *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014).
- 3.2. Sufficient time must be allowed by the Contractor during the on-site works for the Archaeologist to record any significant remains that are thus exposed, including structural features and burials. 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 reasonable notice as to when he wishes to start on the site, and maintain regular contact subsequently.
- 3.3. The Archaeologist will be responsible for collecting any human bone, fragmentary or complete, which is dug up, following the implementation of any necessary legal procedures. In conjunction with the incumbent, the Archaeologist will make an appropriate decision as to how the bones or fragments are re-buried. Upon completion of the archaeological works, 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.'
- 3.4. 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 development at an appropriate scale, showing boundaries depicted on Ordnance Survey mapping.
 - Contexts will be recorded on individual record forms, using a continuous numbering system, and be drawn and photographed as appropriate.

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- 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 12 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 licence 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.
- 3.5. 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 will be made to assess and study any artefacts, assemblages and environment samples, if required.
 - Any artefacts recovered during the evaluation will be deposited with an appropriate museum, subject to the permission of the owner.
- 3.6. Following the on-site work an illustrated report will be prepared containing conventional sections to include:
- Non-technical summary
 - Introduction
 - Site location
 - Historical Background
 - Watching brief
 - Conclusions
 - References
 - Appropriate appendices on archives and finds
- 3.7. A copy of the report will be provided to the client, the regional Historic Environment Record and the Churches Conservation and Development Officer of St Asaph Diocese in her capacity as Secretary to the DAC.
- 3.8. The site archive will be prepared to specifications in English Heritage's Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE) system and the CifA *Standard and Guidance for the Creation, Compilation, Transfer and Deposition of Archaeological Archives* (2014), to be deposited with the regional Historic Environment Record (HER).

4 Sources

Silvester, B., and Frost, P., 1999. *Welsh Historic Churches Project: The Churches of Flintshire and Wrexham County Borough*, Unpublished CPAT Report No 313.

5 Resources and programming

- 5.1. The watching brief will be undertaken by a skilled archaeologist under the overall supervision of Nigel Jones, a senior member of CPAT's staff who is also a member of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA). CPAT is also a CIfA Registered Organisation (RAO No 6) and as such agrees to abide by their *Code of Conduct (2014)* and the *Code of Approved Practice for the Regulation of Contractual Arrangements in Field Archaeology (2014)*.
- 5.2. All report preparation will be completed by or with the assistance of the same field archaeologist(s) who conducted the site work. If appropriate, a short report will be published in *Archaeology in Wales*.
- 5.3. Requirements relating to Health and Safety regulations will be adhered to by CPAT and its staff.
- 5.4. CPAT is covered by appropriate Public and Employer's Liability insurance, as well as Professional Indemnity insurance.

N W Jones

9 August 2017