

CPAT Report No. 1624

# Tremeirchion Churchyard Wall, Denbighshire




Archaeological Watching Brief



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## Summary

An archaeological watching brief was conducted by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust during groundworks prior to the rebuilding of a section of churchyard wall at Tremeirchion in Denbighshire.

The work revealed a section through the churchyard deposits at the rear of the wall, which was cleaned and recorded in advance of the wall being rebuilt. Evidence for an early surface soil was found at depth, successively covered by material indicative of soil disturbance and demolition rubble that probably represents a phase of rebuilding at the church. No conclusive dating evidence for these three layers was identified.

## Crynodeb

Bu Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Clwyd-Powys yn cynnal briff gwyllo archaeolegol yn ystod gwaith paratoi tir cyn ailadeiladu adran o wal y fynwent yn Nhremeirchion yn Sir Ddinbych.

Fe ddatgelodd y gwaith adran trwy ddyddodion y fynwent y tu ôl i'r wal, a lanhawyd ac a gofnodwyd cyn ailadeiladu'r wal. Daethpwyd o hyd i dystiolaeth o bridd arwyneb cynnar yn ddwfn, gyda deunydd olynol drosto yn awgrymu aflonyddu ar y pridd a rwbel dymchwel sydd, mae'n debyg, yn cynrychioli cyfnod o ailadeiladu yn yr eglwys. Ni nodwyd unrhyw dystiolaeth bendant i allu dyddio'r tair haen hyn.

# 1 Introduction

- 1.1. The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was invited by Robin Wolley, the Architect acting on behalf of the Church in Wales, to submit a proposal for undertaking a watching brief at Corpus Christi Church, Tremeirchion, Denbighshire (Fig. 1; NGR SJ 0828 7310), during groundworks relating to the replacement of an approximately 30m-long section of the boundary wall defining the churchyard on the north side of the church. The wall had a marked lean towards the adjoining school grounds and concerns regarding its long-term safety led to the decision to demolish and rebuild the structure.



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Fig. 1: Location of Tremeirchion Church

- 1.2. The work had not been subject to Faculty, but one of the conditions of the Registrar's Determination was that the works not involve any disturbance below ground level, and it was clear to the Architect that some disturbance would be inevitable given the nature of the proposal. His concerns were taken up by CPAT on his behalf with the Archaeological Advisor to the DAC, who was of the same opinion, and a watching brief during ground disturbance was therefore deemed to be necessary.
- 1.3. CPAT were engaged to carry out the work by the Architect, through Grosvenor Construction of Kinnel Bay, the principal contractor responsible for the demolition and rebuilding works on behalf of the Church in Wales. The watching brief

commenced on 29 October 2018 and was completed by the end of the month; this report was written in November.

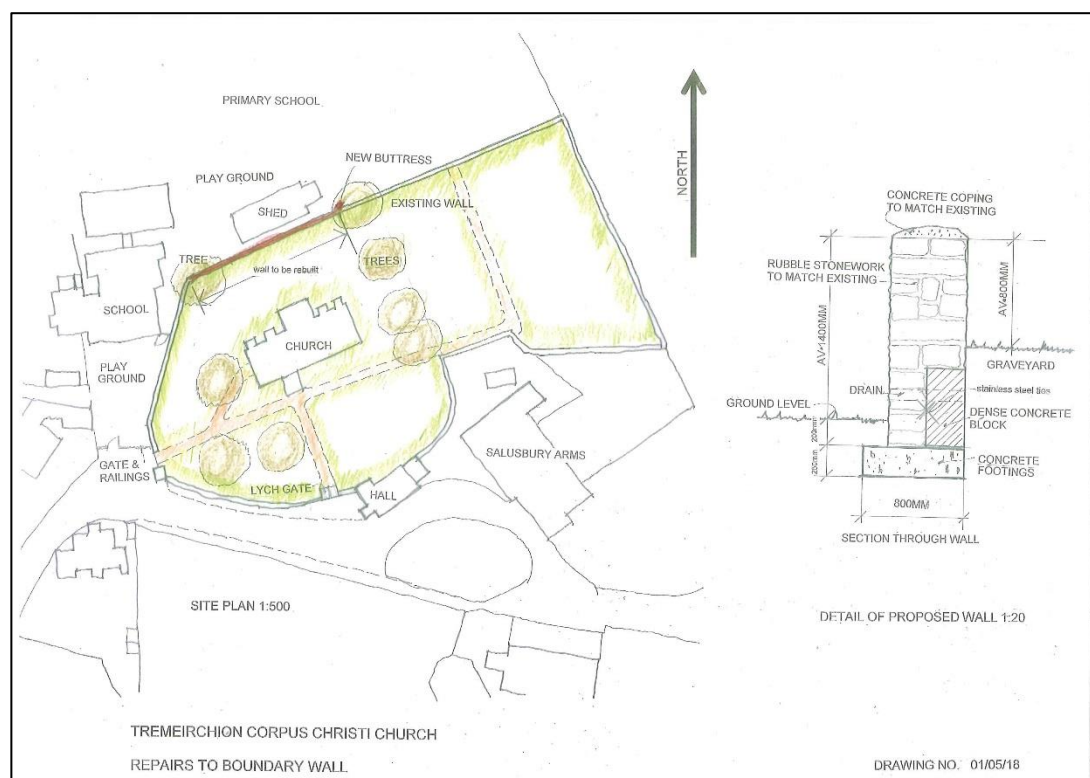


Fig. 2: Location plan showing the section of churchyard wall that was rebuilt to the north of the church (courtesy Robin Wolley Architect)

## 2 Historical Background (see Silvester 1998)

- 2.1. This is reputedly the only medieval church in Britain dedicated to Corpus Christi. Browne Willis suggested its original dedication was to the Holy Trinity with a possible rededication in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It has been proposed as the site of a cell founded in the 6<sup>th</sup> century by one of the followers of St Beuno, whose well is located approximately 500m away, but there is little of substance to indicate an early medieval foundation.
- 2.2. The manor of Tremeirchion was recorded in Domesday Book in 1086. The church was not mentioned in the Norwich Taxation of 1254, but first appears in the Lincoln Taxation of 1291 as the chapel of 'Dynmeychyaw'n', appropriated to St Asaph cathedral. Little is known of the medieval church other than what can be gleaned from the surviving architecture.
- 2.3. The church has a single chamber, the stonework of which has been attributed to the 14<sup>th</sup> century on the evidence of the south and west doors; one surviving medieval window to the west of the porch may be Perpendicular, though its arch looks 18<sup>th</sup>-century in date. Much of the south wall was probably rebuilt in 1726, and it is conceivable that some of the west wall was also rebuilt at this time. There were restorations at various times in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and again in 1913. Some windows



were replaced by grouped lancets, probably in 1858/1859. The date of the porch is uncertain but it could be as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

- 2.4. The church was centrally placed in what was originally a polygonal churchyard, though this was apparently extended a number of times, first in 1664 and again in 1910 and 1931. The earliest marked burial is covered by a slab dated to 1631. The boundary comprises a stone wall about 1.2m high around the old churchyard, with the Old School House (constructed 1835) on the south, though it should be noted that this includes a mounting block provided by the churchwardens and carrying a date of 1774. The most recent addition to the churchyard lies to the north-east of the church and covers about 0.15ha.

### 3 Methodology

- 3.1. The watching brief was conducted according to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CIfA) *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014).
- 3.2. The site works involved the demolition of the existing wall, over a length of approximately 30m on the north side of the church, and the storage of stone adjacent to the site for use in the rebuilding. This was followed by the machine excavation of a trench to allow for the laying the concrete foundation of the new wall (see Figs 3 and 4), which produced a section through the churchyard deposits up to a depth of 1.4m below the current ground surface; this was drawn, photographed and described. The stored stone from the wall was examined for any architectural fragments, although none were found.



Fig. 3: The machine excavated trench for the new wall foundations, from the north-west. CPAT 4558-0009



Fig. 4: The machine-excavated trench for the new wall foundations, from the north-east. CPAT 4558-0012

## 4 Watching Brief

- 4.1. No architectural fragments were identified during the demolition of the existing wall (10), but a shot hole was found in one of the limestone blocks which signifies that it was deliberately quarried. The majority of the stone in the wall appeared to be of similar character, though no more shot holes were identified.
- 4.2. The section through the soils behind the churchyard wall revealed a sequence of deposits relating to the past history of that part of the churchyard and these are described in the following paragraphs and depicted on Figs 5 and 6. It should be noted that the thicknesses of the deposits vary and the maximum figures given do not all occur in one place; some are only present in part of the section.
- 4.3. Natural subsoil, here an orange-red sand (9) at least 0.1m thick, was found at a depth of about 1.25m below the current ground surface in the eastern half of the section. This was overlain by a deposit of grey-brown clay silt (8), up to 0.30m thick, which could represent an old surface soil, potentially belonging to or predating the early life of the churchyard. However, no finds were identified from the layer which could confirm this hypothesis and it was only visible in the eastern part of the section, dipping below the base of the trench about 14.5m from its east end.
- 4.4. A layer of reddish-grey clay silt (5), up to 0.45m thick, was identified overlying layer 8; the appearance of this layer suggested that it was formed by the mixing of material originally from layers 8 and 9. One of the possible causes could be that this is material left over from early grave digging and dumped on the periphery of the churchyard,



but other explanations are equally plausible. This layer was continuous throughout the section.

- 4.5. Layer 5 was covered by layer of dark grey silt (4), which was up to 0.6m thick and contained a large amount of stone rubble and lime mortar fragments. A single fragment of purple slate was recorded, presumably from the quarries in north-west Wales, but this is not particularly helpful in dating the deposit as it is known that purple slate was being quarried there in the medieval period. One stone was 0.8m in length, but otherwise the stones were less than 0.3m in size. Some disarticulated skeletal material was also present within this layer and any that was disturbed was retained for later reburial.



Fig. 5: A section through the main churchyard deposits, with natural subsoil at the base and including the layer of demolition rubble (4). CPAT 4558-0007

- 4.6. In the eastern half of the section, layer 4 was directly covered by the topsoil, a layer of dark grey silt (1), between 0.2m and 0.4m in thickness. The situation in the western half was different as the demolition rubble layer (4) was progressively truncated and eventually terminated approximately 3m from the west end of the section. It is possible that the truncation had been caused deliberately by the excavation of some form of broad hollow (3), up to 0.7m deep and at least 14.0m long (east/west). If so, the hollow was then filled by what seemed to be a dump of clay silt (2), which ranged from a reddish colour (on the east) to buff-brown (on the west), before being covered by the topsoil (1). A fragment of brick was seen in layer 2, which implied it was no earlier in date than the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- 4.7. At about 7m from the west end of the section, layers 2, 4 and 5 were cut by a drain (6), 0.55m wide and over 0.9m deep, which was filled by a mixture of clay silt and silt (7) from the layers which had been cut through. A ceramic drainage pipe was seen in the fill, partly below the base of the foundation excavation for the new wall.

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## 5 Conclusions

- 5.1. The watching brief identified three significant layers within the churchyard deposits to the rear of the wall, the earliest of which was a probable former surface soil (8) at a depth of at least 1.0m below the current ground level. The mixed layer (5) overlying layer 8 suggested that there had been some subsequent disturbance over the area of the churchyard, perhaps relating to grave digging or some similar activity. Of particular interest was the deposit of demolition rubble (4), which must be related to a phase of rebuilding at the church. Unfortunately, it was not possible to conclusively date any of these layers.
- 5.2. The source of the stone for the churchyard wall that was dismantled as part of this programme of work is not known, as limestone is widespread in this district, but its appearance tends to suggest that much of the stone came from a common source. Of particular interest was the presence of a shot hole in one of the stones which both signifies it as having been deliberately quarried and places the activity in the period following the advent of the use of gunpowder. The earliest use in Europe is thought to date to the late 16<sup>th</sup>-century (Hollister-Short 1994, 148) and it is believed that it was first introduced to Britain by German miners in 1638 (Earl 1978).
- 5.3. Some skeletal material was recovered during the excavation of the trench for the foundation of the replacement wall. This was boxed by CPAT and handed over to the contractor's site staff when the watching brief was completed, to be kept securely within the site accommodation awaiting reburial at the end of the project. No in-situ graves were found.

## 6 Sources

### Published sources

Earl, B., 1978. *Cornish Explosives*, Cornwall: The Trevithick Society

Hollister-Short, G., 1994. 'The Introduction of Powder', *Mining Before Powder*, Historical Metallurgy Society Special Publication/Peak District Mines Historical Society Bulletin, 12, No 3.

Hubbard, E., 1986. *The Buildings of Wales: Clwyd*, London: Penguin.

### Unpublished sources

Silvester, R. J., 1999. *Welsh Historic Churches Project. The Historic Churches of Denbighshire: church survey*, Unpublished CPAT Report No 312.

### Cartographic sources

1841 Tithe map for Tremeirchion Parish

1871 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 1<sup>st</sup> edition Flintshire 08.01

1899 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 2<sup>nd</sup> edition Flintshire 08.01

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## 7 Archive deposition Statement

- 7.1. 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 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.

### **Archive summary**

**CPAT Event PRN:** 140264

2 site visit recording forms

10 context record forms

17 digital photographs, CPAT film no 4558

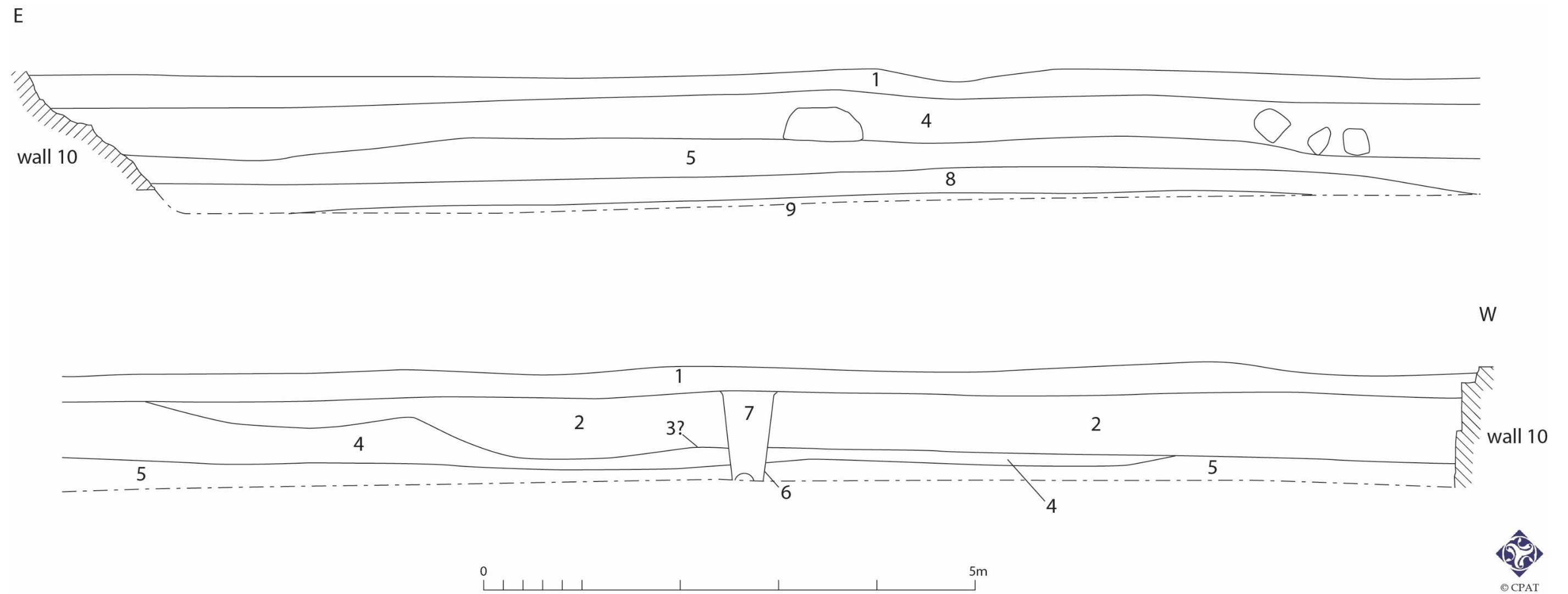


Fig. 6: The section through the churchyard deposits revealed by the demolition of the existing boundary wall