

St. Michaels Church, Trefeglwys, Powys

Archaeological Watching Brief



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Report No. 602



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Non-Technical Summary

This report results from work undertaken by Cambrian Archaeological Projects Ltd at St. Michael's church in Trefeglwys, Powys. A watching brief was undertaken on behalf of Charles Cowan Architects Ltd, Llanidloes, Powys. The watching brief was undertaken during reduction of floor levels within the church prior to the installation of a new under floor heating system. Reduction of floor levels revealed a previous heating system, likely nineteenth century in date, as well as a moderate amount of disarticulated human bone.

1. Introduction

1.1 Location and scope of work

1.1.1 In January 2010 Cambrian Archaeological Projects Ltd (CAP) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St. Michaels church, Trefeglwys, Powys (NGR SN9704490610 – see Fig 1), on behalf of their clients Charles Cowan Architects, Llanidloes.

1.1.2 The work was undertaken to satisfy a request within the Faculty grant that an archaeologist be present during groundworks. A works specification was drawn up by Chris Smith (MIFA) which was submitted to, and approved by, Mark Walters of the Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust, Welshpool.

1.1.3 The work involved monitoring the reduction of floor levels in the nave after removal of the pews, wooden plank flooring and joists. Floor levels on the transept up to the base of the pulpit were also reduced. All groundworks were subject to the watching brief.

1.2 Geology and Topography

1.2.1 The underlying solid geology of the area is mainly composed of Llandovery sedimentary formations of the Silurian era (British Geological Survey 2001). The overlying sub-soils are classified by the Soil Survey of England & Wales as Conway river alluvium. This is described as 'deep stoneless fine silty and clayey soils variably affected by groundwater' (Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983).

1.2.2 Trefeglwys is located adjacent to the River Trannon approximately 6km to the west of Caersws. The village itself is located on low, level ground. Higher ground rises to the north, north east and west. Woodland in the area is sparse with some patches on higher ground approximately 1km to the south.

1.3 Archaeological & Historical Background

1.3.1 The following is taken from the Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust website (CPAT 2010) regarding the history of the church:

1.3.2 St Michael's church in Trefeglwys, 9 miles to the west of Newtown, was founded in the 12thC but the present building dates only from 1863-5. The timber bell frame and supports (perhaps of the 17thC) were retained from the earlier church, as was a 15thC bell. But otherwise none of the early furnishings and fittings have been preserved. The building is set in a large, low-lying, sub-rectangular churchyard, with memorials from the late 18thC.

A Victorian rebuilding in 1863-5, though some earlier masonry re-used.

History

The church was founded by Bleddrws in the second quarter of the 12thC, when it was referred to as a 'monasterium', perhaps indicating some monastic link. It has been suggested that an earlier cemetery perhaps existed on the site prior to the foundation of the church and that the churchyard was enlarged to enhance the status of the new church. It was subsequently granted to the Augustinian Abbey of Haughmond, probably just before 1150.

The church is recorded in the Norwich Taxation of 1254 as 'Ecclesia de Treveglos' at a value of 13s 4d.

The church was rebuilt on the foundations of the old church by Poundley and Walker in 1864-5. The Perpendicular east window was retained, as were the old (reputedly 17thC) oak posts that support the turret. Considerable work at the west end of the church was required in 1932. The west wall was presumably rebuilt at this time and the bell-turret was much renewed. Further restoration took place in 1970.

Architecture

The church comprises a nave with a bell turret over the western end, a narrower chancel and a north-western porch. It is aligned north-east to south-west but for the purpose of description 'ecclesiastical east' is adopted.

Fabric 'A' consists of medium-sized blocks of quarry-cut grey sedimentary rock, perhaps a siltstone, some with quartz veins; irregular coursing; large blocks selected for quoins. Red and yellow sandstone dressings for architectural features. 'B' is similar to 'A' but in less regular masonry with some large pebblestones and some smaller, irregular lumps of stone as well as very infrequent lumps of red sandstone; occasional traces of limewash; irregular coursing.

'A' and 'B' are both restoration-period fabrics, but the latter incorporates re-used stone.

Roofs: slates, black ceramic toothed ridge tiles, and a metal cross finial to the east end of nave. Broken finial to chancel.

Drainage: Modern guttering and downspouts lead to soakaways. Hints of a gully on the north and south sides of the building.

Note: the church was completely rebuilt in the 19thC, what follows is thus a summary description.

Exterior

Bell turret. General. Square wooden turret rises from the nave roof at the west end. Four louvred apertures with unconventional cusped heads on each side; pyramidal slate roof topped by a metal cross.

Porch. General. Completely of stone with a high, sharply angled roof line. Two-centred sandstone arch on large Corinthian shafts and capitals; the outer order to the arch formed of alternating red and yellow sandstone voussoirs. Small, cusped, two-centred windows in the side walls. Angle buttresses with some decoration at north-west and north-east corners.

Nave. General. All in 'A'.

North wall: in 'A', but the north-west angle could be rebuilt. Four windows, alternating single and paired two-centred lights with plate tracery above. Each set under a two-centred arch of alternating red and yellow sandstone dressings. Two buttresses, one at the extreme east end of the nave which is more elaborately decorated, the other to the west of two of the windows. West of the porch is a single-light window.

South wall: in 'B'. The fenestration as the north wall with alternating paired and single lights. Three stepped buttresses.

West wall: gable end is completely slated (reportedly around 1987) and there is a concrete basal plinth. In 1932 the wall was reportedly rebuilt with a lancet window in it. Previously there had been a circular window.

Chancel. General. North wall in 'A', the east and south walls in 'B'. Fractionally narrower and lower than the nave. Also a more decorative finish.

North wall: two windows set below dormers which have grotesque gargoyles protruding from the base at either side. Both windows have a single cusped light with a quatrefoil in plate tracery above it; ringed shafts have small capitals supporting the two-centred arch of alternating red and yellow sandstone voussoirs.

East wall: largely in 'B'. Victorian window in Perpendicular style; a two-centred arch with three cinquefoiled, two-centred lights and panel tracery above; there is a hoodmould with head stops, and above this a relieving arch of voussoirs in pink sandstone.

South wall: fenestration and dormers as on the north side but the gargoyles are replaced by plain large sandstone blocks which support the guttering.

Interior

Porch. General. Two steps up from the path. Red and black tiled floor. Walls plastered and painted with wooden benches to either side. Ceiling plastered above the six scissor trusses. In the south wall a plain two-centred arch, also painted, with chamfers terminating in arrow stops.

West end. General. North door of the church leads into a 'hallway' with plastered walls and a red and black tiled floor. A brick wall, now plastered, forms a division with the nave to the east, and plaster board divides the vestry at the south end from this hallway. Access to the base of the bell turret through a large door on the west side of the hallway. A pair of double doors in a square-headed wooden frame lead east into the nave. On the south wall above the entrance to the vestry is a wooden Benefaction board.

Four large oak upright timbers support the bell-turret frame which is variously claimed to be medieval or 17thC in date.

Storage room. Formerly a school room and is now used for bell ringing and for storage. Carpeted floor; whitewashed walls on west and north with a brick fireplace in west wall; massive timber joists to the ceiling. Two massive upright timbers support the bell turret, both with chamfered edges. One slab - a gravemarker for Mary Jones (d.1844) rests against the south wall. A chest against the north wall.

Vestry. General. In the south-west corner of the church. It has a modern tiled floor, plastered walls and a lowered timber ceiling. The remaining two timber bell-turret

supports are here but one of them is a replacement. On a window sill an Incorporated Church Building Society plaque recording grants in 1863 and 1932.

Nave. General. Red and black tiles, with central aisle carpeted and heating vent grilles beneath; a raised wooden floor supports benches. Walls plastered and painted. Roof of four arch-braced collar trusses with king and arcing struts; intermediate trusses with collars and king struts; rafters and through purlins.

North wall: one memorial of 1809/1811.

East wall: a two-centred chancel arch, with ringed shafts and 'capitals carved with oak leaves, ears of corn, and two doves by Griffiths of Chester' (Haslam), the doves painted blue. The carvings on this arch are the only decorative features in an otherwise very plain church.

South wall: one memorial of 1816 to 1837.

West wall: a two-centred arch in the rear partition gives access to the vestry.

Chancel. General. Narrower than the nave, accessed by two steps. Stepped sanctuary and one to the altar. 19thC tiled floor including encaustic tiles in the sanctuary, and longitudinal choir stalls. Walls plastered and painted. The roof has three bays formed by three arch-braced collar trusses with king struts reaching to shorter collars above. There is a fourth plain truss with a single collar against the west wall.

Churchyard

Trefeglwys churchyard is a large sub-rectangular enclosure of about 1.6 acres (0.65 hectares). The ground slopes down in the northern half of the churchyard but the church is sited on level ground on the south side of the yard. It is on the valley floor and a fluctuating water table creates problems for the church building.

Boundary: a stone wall on the north-west and south-west sides where the yard is edged by the road. On the south-east, north-east and part of the south-west it is hedged. On the south side it is embanked internally.

Monuments: all the burials are located on the north and west sides, where there is an even distribution of mainly 19thC graves; mainly slabs, some chests and railed graves and pillars. The earliest seen, near the west entrance, was a chest tomb to John Jones (d.1769) by T. Williams, and there are a few other late 18thC memorials. Modern burials are located on the west side. There is no evidence to suggest that there were ever any burials to the south and east of the church.

Furniture: none noted.

Earthworks: the church is set astride a very low platform, visible from most sides except the south. The external ground level is higher than the churchyard on the south-west and north-west.

Ancillary features: a pair of wrought iron gates are placed in from the north corner and a single gate is set in the west corner. Tarmac paths lead up to the north porch. A modern metal farm gate forms a recent entrance in the south-west corner with a new gravel path to the north porch.

Vegetation: five mature yew trees are sited around the north-west and south-west boundaries and a single mature yew is located outside the north porch.

2 Aims & Objectives

2.1 **Watching Brief**

- 2.1.1 The aims and objectives of the watching brief were to monitor all ground breaking activities undertaken on the site, and
- 2.1.2 to record any archaeological finds/features revealed during the course of the said groundworks, and
- 2.1.3 to accurately plot the locations of the archaeological features/finds.

3 Watching Brief Methodology

3.1 **Scope of fieldwork**

- 3.1.1 The work undertaken on site consisted of removing the wooden flooring and joists in the nave of the church and exposing the large open areas beneath, located on either side of the central aisle. The aisle of the church contained a heating flue, which originally fed warm air into the large open areas beneath the wooden floor. The floor level of the church aisle was reduced by approximately 0.3m. Floor levels on the transept, up to the base of the pulpit, were also reduced by 0.3m.
- 3.1.2 All work within the church was undertaken using a small mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket. All groundworks were subject to close archaeological supervision.
- 3.1.3 Project Manager Chris E Smith (MIFA) undertook the watching brief. All areas were photographed using high-resolution digital photography.
- 3.1.4 All works were undertaken in accordance with both the IfA's *Standards and Guidance: for an Archaeological Watching Brief* and current Health and Safety legislation.

3.2 **Finds**

- 3.2.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the watching brief and bagged by context.

3.3 **Palaeoenvironmental Evidence**

- 3.3.1 No deposits suited to environmental sampling were located during the watching brief.

4 Watching Brief Results

4.1 Soils and Ground Conditions

4.1.1 The site and weather conditions were extremely cold throughout the course of the watching brief. Heavy snow and freezing temperatures were prevalent prior to the commencement of the fieldwork.

4.2 Distribution of deposits

4.2.1 Overburden deposits consisted of cement and stone rubble. These were located throughout the watching brief area and, heating system aside, no other contexts were encountered.

4.3 Description (Plates 1-6)

4.3.1 Removal of the floorboards and joists beneath the pews on either side of the central aisle revealed the large open areas into which warm air was carried via a flue beneath the central aisle. These open areas measured approximately 10m in length by 3m in width. Removal of rubble and debris from these revealed a compacted, level, soil horizon at approximately 0.5m below the original floor level of the church. Mixed within the rubble and debris above the compacted soil horizon was a small amount of disarticulated human bone.

4.3.2 Removal of the rubble and debris from the sub-floor cavities either side of the central aisle revealed the interior of the church wall foundations (Plates 1-6).

4.3.3 The level of the central aisle was reduced in height by approximately 0.3m in order to accommodate the new heating ducts. Removal of overburden composed of stone rubble and concrete/cement, via mechanical excavator revealed the top of the previous heating system. This consisted of a long brick flue running beneath the central aisle. Branches off the flue diverted hot air into the cavities either side of the central aisle. Towards the transept end of the central aisle, the brick flue terminated and joined a cast iron pipe.

4.3.4 Within the rubble and concrete/cement overburden of the central aisle a moderate amount of disarticulated human bone was located. This consisted primarily of long bones and skull fragments with no smaller bones apparently being present. Given the presence of the bones directly above a nineteenth or twentieth century heating system, and their entirely disarticulated nature, they are likely to have been redeposited during a construction phase within the church.

4.3.5 Reduction in the floor level in the transept revealed a yellow, sandy, rubble deposit beneath the cement. The base of the deposit was not revealed as it continued below the depth of the excavation (0.3m). No human bone, disarticulated or otherwise, was located within the overburden on the transept.

4.3.6 Areas exposed during the watching brief showed various types of masonry in different areas of the church (Plates 1-6) (Figs 3-4). The masonry of the central aisle, for example, was of a different finish to that of the church wall foundations. The masonry beneath the font looks very similar in its make up to the masonry of the transept either side of where it joins the central aisle. Masonry in the centre of the transept appears to be the same as that of the central aisle. It is possible therefore that

the central aisle, which houses the old heating ducts, was inserted through the transept sometime after its construction in the nineteenth century.

- 4.3.7 This would mean that the central aisle, or at least the heating aspect of it, post dates the 1860s rebuilding.
- 4.3.8 The wall at the west end of the nave was also finished in bricks and clearly butted against the load bearing outer walls. The lower courses of this wall were constructed in stone and appear tied into, and thus contemporary with, the outer walls of the church. The addition of bricks over this stone course may hint at a later addition. The bricks also appear to butt against the masonry beneath the font.
- 4.3.9 Aside from the previous heating system, clear evidence of phasing within the exposed masonry and occasional disarticulated human bone, nothing of archaeological significance was discovered.

5 Finds

- 5.1.1 Finds recovered during the watching brief consisted solely of disarticulated human long bones and skull fragments in varying states of preservation. All of these were located within the overburden deposits. None were retained as all were left in the care of the church for reburial.

6 Discussion & Interpretation

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 6.1.1 The excavation of groundworks was largely unhampered. The relatively low light conditions and freezing temperatures did little to effect progress.

6.2 Overall Interpretation

- 6.2.1 The watching brief has shown that, within the area investigated, the nineteenth century rebuilding of Trefeglwys church has left little or no trace of its medieval predecessor.
- 6.2.2 It has also shown that no burials are present within the nave, aisle or transept above a depth of c. 0.3 – 0.5m. This does not preclude the possibility of burials at lower depths however.
- 6.2.3 The work undertaken allows for a tentative chronology of the exposed masonry to be drawn up.

7 Bibliography & References

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<http://www.cpat.demon.co.uk/projects/longer/churches/montgom/16964.htm> - Accessed
12/01/2010

ARCHIVE COVER SHEET

Trefeglwys Church, Powys

Site Name:	St. Michaels Church, Trefeglwys
Site Code:	TFC/09/WB
PRN:	-
NPRN:	-
SAM:	-
Other Ref No:	Report No. 602
NGR:	NGR SN9704490610
Site Type:	Ecclesiastical
Project Type:	Watching Brief
Project Manager:	Chris E Smith
Project Dates:	December 2009
Categories Present:	Post medieval & Modern
Location of Original Archive:	CAPLtd
Location of duplicate Archives:	-
Number of Finds Boxes:	None
Location of Finds:	-
Museum Reference:	-
Copyright:	CAPLtd
Restrictions to access:	None



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APPENDIX I:

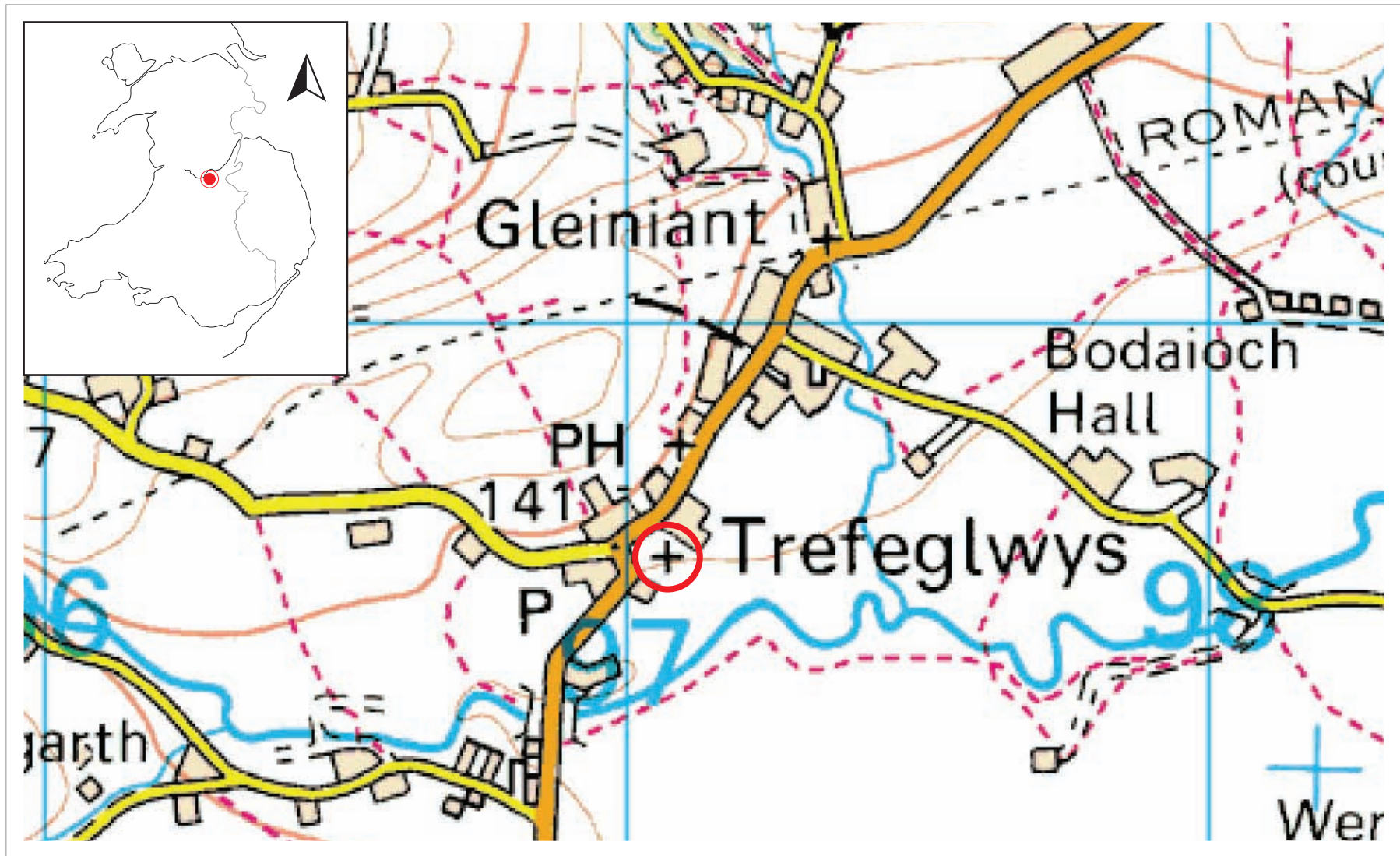


Fig 1: Map showing general location of assessment area

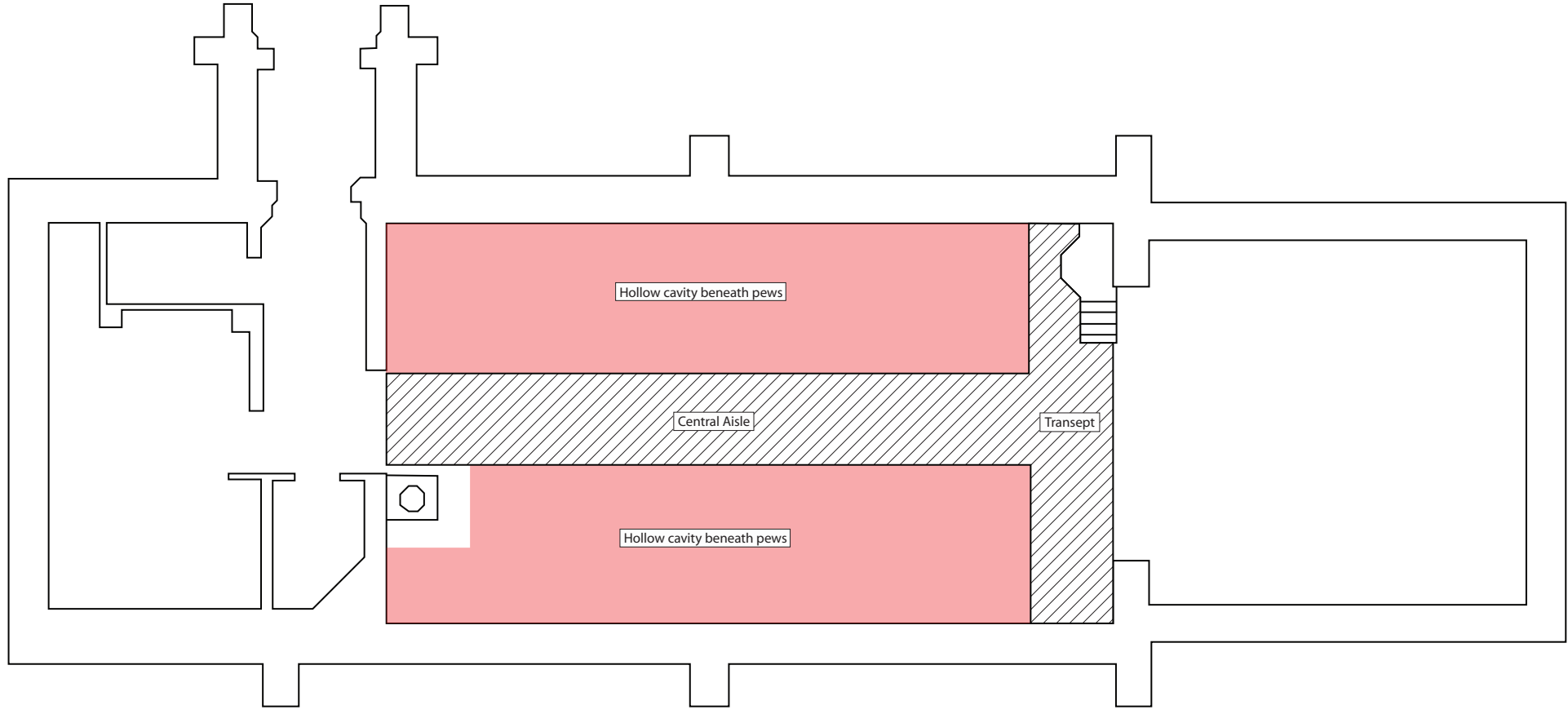
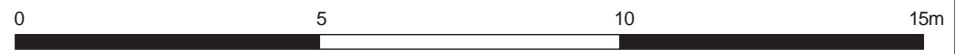


Fig 2: Plan of Trefeglwys church showing areas subject to watching brief



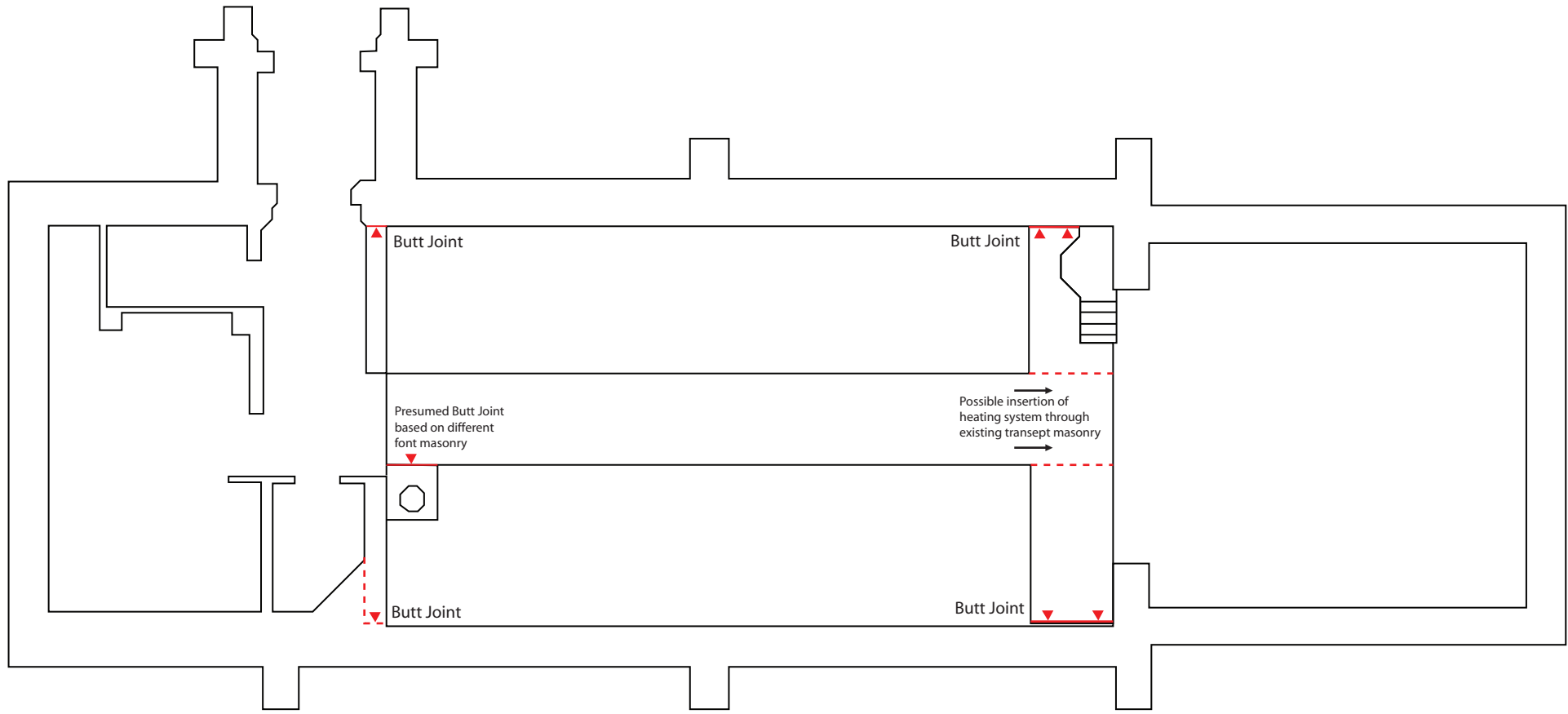
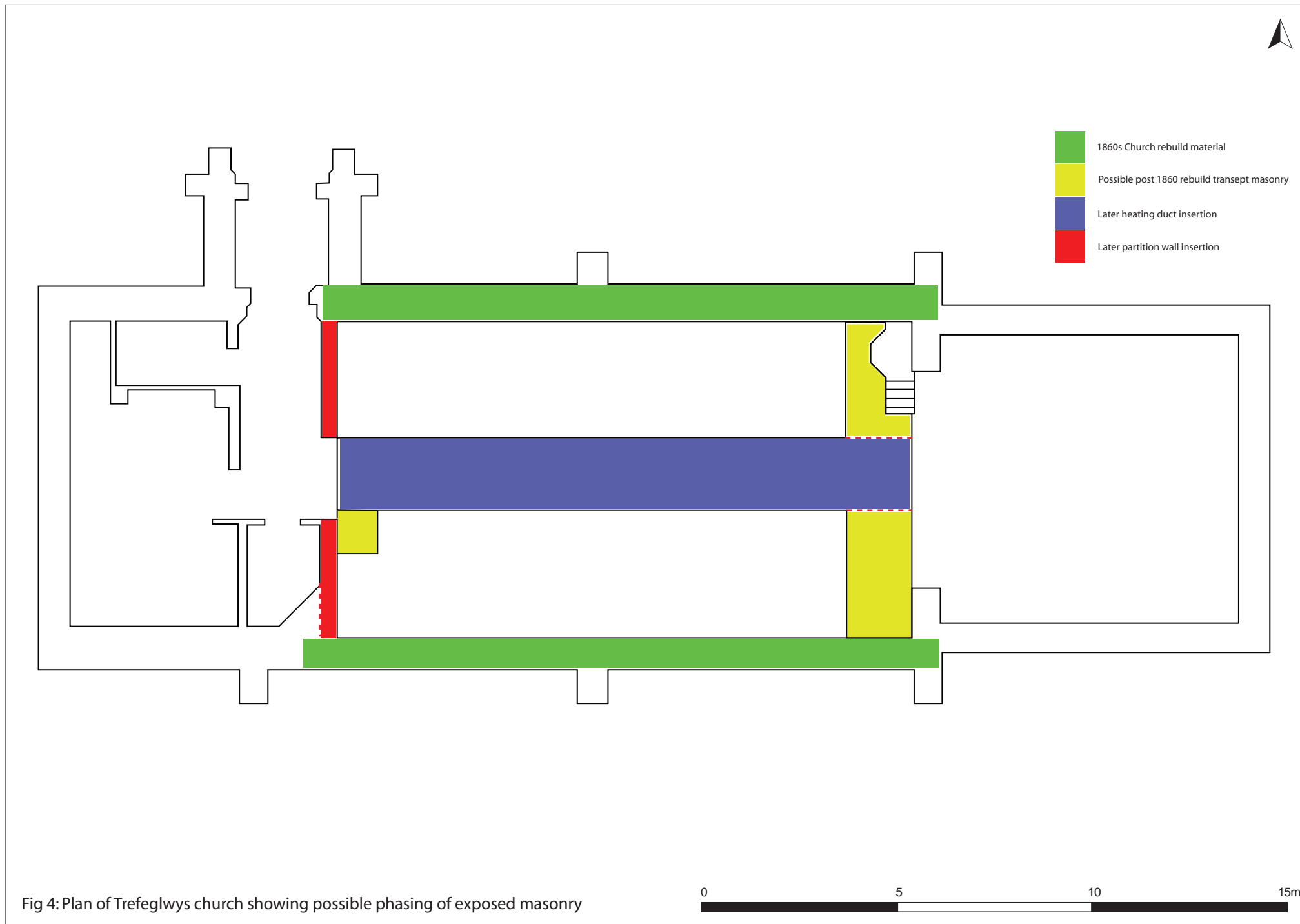


Fig 3: Plan of church showing possible relationships between differing areas of masonry







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APPENDIX II:



Plate 1: View of hollow areas (cavities) in nave located either side of the central aisle. Note heating grills in foreground located directly above flu in central aisle. Scale 1x1m



Plate 2: View of church wall foundation level, exposed after removal of floorboards, joists and rubble fill from hollow area. Scale 1x1m



Plate 3: View of central aisle containing heating flue, Scale 1x1m



Plate 4: View of exposed foundations around font. Scale 1x1m



Plate 5: View of exposed foundation masonry below pulpit. Scale 1x1m



Plate 6: View of transept from pulpit after reduction in levels. Scale 1x1m



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