

Archaeological Watching Brief

at St Cybi's Church

Llangybi

Ceredigion



17 January and 1 February 2007

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at

The Church of St Cybi

Llangybi

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for

The PCC and Churchwardens

St Cybi's Church

Llangybi

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1. Location

The village of Llangybi in Ceredigion, lies on the A485 road between Lampeter and Tregaron some 6 kilometres northeast of Lampeter. Llangybi is a ribbon development with the Church of Saint Cybi, after which the settlement was named, lying at the eastern end of the village and to the north of the main road.

The village sits on a shallow valley floor created by the River Dulas, which runs past the church. The church is at approximately 130m OD while the surrounding hills and valley sides rise to no more than 200m OD.

The surrounding fields are mainly pasture with planted woodland dominating the higher ground.

The church is small and comprises three cells, a Nave, Chancel and west Porch. It is constructed from local rubble and internally it is rendered in plaster and the roof is local slate.

National Grid Reference: SN 6086 5318

2. Historical Background

There is some circumstantial evidence to suggest that the church is a pre-conquest foundation. It is dedicated to a Celtic saint, Cybi, the first cousin of Saint David. The churchyard is ovoid in shape and there is a holy well, Fynnon Wen at the western end of the village.

Of the surviving structures on the site, the Chancel and Nave probably date from the 13th or 14th century while the Porch dates from 1850.

The church was restored twice in the 19th century, once in 1850 when the Porch and Vestry were built and again at some point in the 1880s. This was certainly before 1888 when Willis-Bund commented on the works in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*. In both cases the works were minimal and it is currently estimated that some 60% of the original medieval core remains.

3. Work Required

3.1. Clear and renew French drains around the outside of the chancel east wall and nave north wall

3.2. Dig new drainage trench against the south nave wall and around the west Porch

3.3. Dig two soakaways in the churchyard to the north of the church

4. Observations

4.1 Observations relating to task 3.1

The previously cut French drains were re-excavated and the foundation footings exposed. The trench was between 75 and 80cm wide and varied between 100cm and 130cm deep, depending on the surrounding ground level. The footings below the north and south chancel walls contained large boulders and may belong to an earlier phase of building. Below the footings of the chancel east wall a layer of fine yellow/buff sand was noted. The footings below the east wall were different suggesting again a later phase of building. The ground immediately to the east of the chancel was disturbed and loose.

A variety of finds were collected from the area of the chancel and vestry and included numerous fragments of stone roof tile, fragments of a medieval ceramic roof tile, a large fragment of human skull, a pig humerus and a selection of modern ceramics and glass.

4.2 Observations relating to task 3.2

The trench along the south nave wall and around the west porch was 50cm wide and its depth gradually reduced towards the western end of the church as a result of falling ground. At the east end the depth was 85 – 90cm and consistent with the trench depth around the chancel. To the west of the church the depth was a consistent 40 – 45cm. Again the foundation footings were exposed but along the nave south wall they were flush with the wall above. This is consistent with a pronounced step in the wall

where the chancel joins the nave, the chancel wall appearing to be thinner than that of the nave (See photograph ?).

No finds of any archaeological significance were recovered from this trench and the ground would appear to have been undisturbed.

4.3 Observations relating to task 3.3

In order to assist with rainwater removal two soakaways were excavated, both to the north of the church.

Soakaway 1 was located some 310cm from the northwest corner of the nave and was 100cm square. The soil was a loose packed brown loam and was soft and sandy in texture, well mixed with small, rounded stones. The soil was remarkably clean of any finds from its upper layers but two fragments of human femur were recovered at 95cm below ground level.

At 130cm below ground level an inhumation was noted. The skeleton was badly degraded with only the lower limbs, pelvis and lumbar vertebrae remaining articulated. A number of ribs, some of the upper limb bones and a quantity of thoracic vertebrae were present but disarticulated. There was no sign of either the skull or the cervical vertebrae. Since this burial was at the lower limit for the soakaway it was covered with a layer of soil and a geotextile membrane and left in situ.

Soakaway 2 was sited 310cm north of the vestry wall to the northwest of the church. Again it was 100cm square. Further fragments of ceramic roof tile of a probable medieval date were recovered from the topsoil but below this the ground presented as undisturbed. The soil was again sandy in texture but well mixed with degraded limestone fragments. At 120cm below ground level a large natural rock outcrop of shale was noted in the south east corner of the soakaway. It was felt that the outcrop would not affect the function of the soakaway and it was left in situ.

With the exception of the roof tile noted above, no finds of any archaeological significance were observed.

5. Discussion

The drainage trenches re-excavated around the chancel were probably part of the 19th century remodelling of the church; it is known that the east window is an 1880s insertion into an earlier frame dating to at least 1850. The bell cote can also be shown to be of an 1880s date while the roof is likely to date from the 1850 work. It would seem probable that in any of these two phases some attention would have been paid to the drainage of the building. During the course of this current investigation it was noted that the ground around the chancel, in particular, was very wet a situation that probably existed in the 19th century. This concentration of damp around the eastern end of the church may explain why there was, apparently, no need to extend the drainage scheme to the west of the church during the 19th century; the current drainage trench being dug into undisturbed soil.

Finds recovered were largely 19th century in date and ranged from ceramic drainage pipes through to jam jar glass and blue on white ceramic plate fragments. However, two earlier sherds were recovered - both were roof tiles and both from the eastern, chancel end of the church.

These have been identified by Steve Clarke of Monmouth Archaeology as being manufactured in Malvern Chase, Upton on Severn, Herefordshire and classified as belonging to the Hereford B4 fabric group. This fabric has a date range from the late 14th century through to the early 17th century but the sherds in this sample are more likely to be late medieval in date. Their presence here at Llangybi would, at first glance, appear to be some way west of their normal distribution range and it would be reasonable to assume that a more local source of ceramic tile could have been obtained. It can be demonstrated, however, that roof tile was often exported alongside more expensive floor tiles manufactured by the same tilers (Vince; 1998), a commodity which could not have been sourced locally. It would seem reasonable to conclude then that a ceramic floor, not necessarily destined for the church at Llangybi, was shipped to Ceredigion and these roof tiles travelled with it.

As noted above, the solitary inhumation unearthed during these groundworks was left in situ, elsewhere only scattered bone fragments were noted. The lack of any ground disturbance during the excavation of Soakaway 2, in particular, was unexpected but

given the presence of a substantial stone outcrop in the bottom of the pit, an element of local knowledge may be at play and this part of the churchyard simply not used for burials.

6. Bibliography

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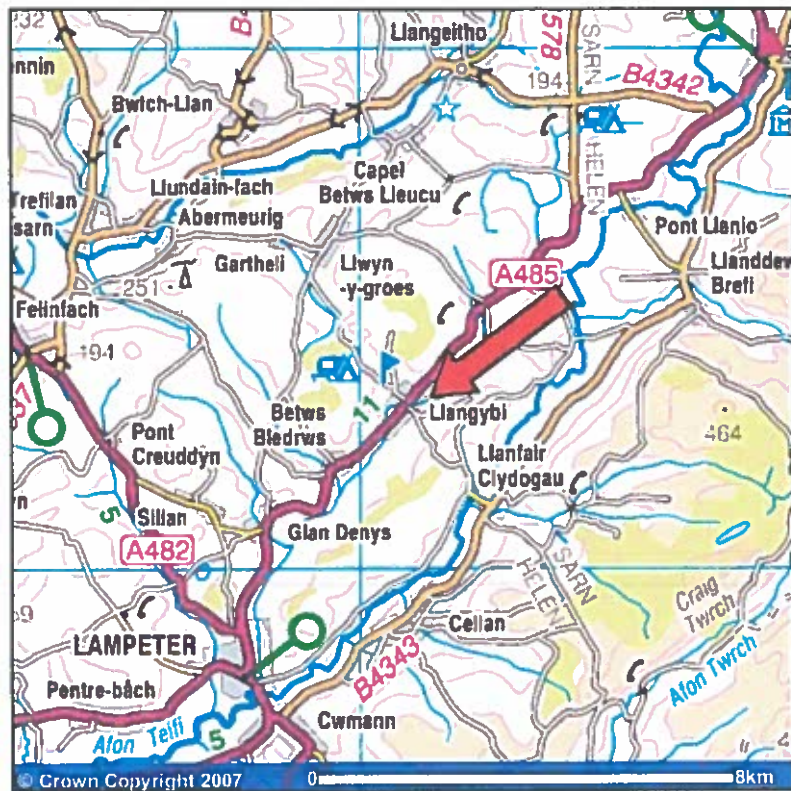
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7. Acknowledgements

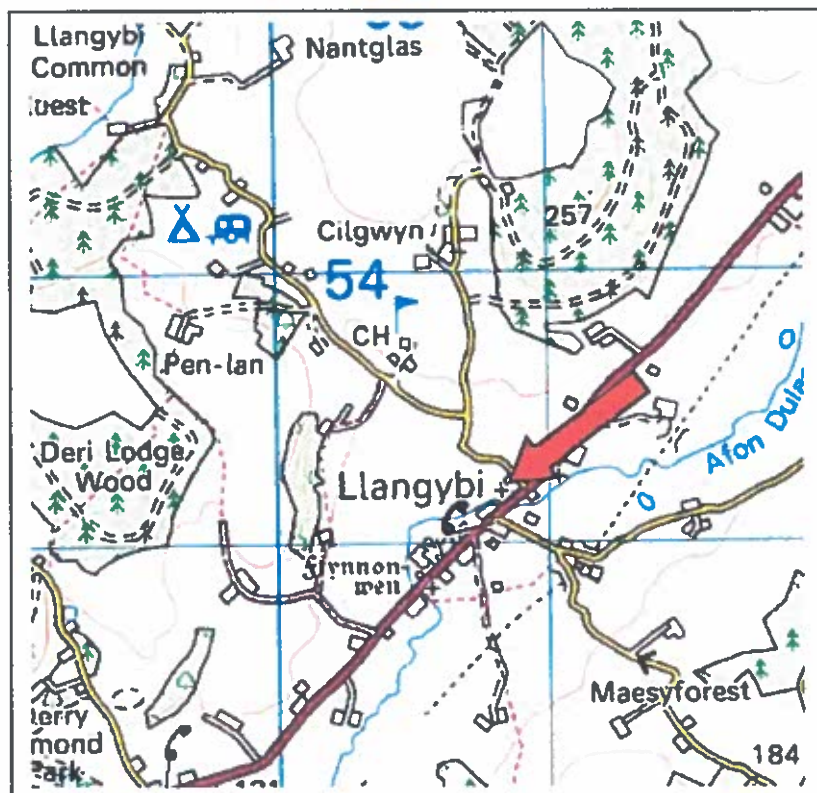
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Cover aerial photograph courtesy of Google Earth™

Maps



Map1: Location of Llangybi between Lampeter and Tregaron



Map 2: Llangybi village showing the church to the north east
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9. Plates



Plate 1: General view of church



Plate 2: South wall of chancel



Plate 3: East wall of chancel



Plate 4: South corner of chancel showing early boulder foundation along south wall and 19th century foundations below east wall



Plate 5: Soakaway 1



Plate 6: Soakaway 2