

CAPEL ERBACH: BUILDING RECORDING SURVEY 2019



Prepared by Dyfed Archaeological Trust
For: Cadw



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Gan / By

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Cofnodir Capel Erbach fel "well-chapel" o'r 13eg ganrif a thynnwyd sylw Ymddiriedolaeth Archeolegol Dyfed at ei gyflwr braidd yn ansicr yn ystod astudiaeth gwmpasu o eglwysi canoloesol ac ôl-ganoloesol cynnar yn ne-orllewin Cymru. Wedi'i leoli ger pentref Porthyrhyd yn Sir Gaerfyrddin, mae holl olion y capel yn gragen heb do.

Darparodd Cadw grant arian i ganiatáu i Ymddiriedolaeth Archeolegol Dyfed gofnodi gweddillion hynafol Capel Erbach fel y gellid creu cofnod archif o'r safle a llywio rhaglenni adferiad yn y dyfodol.

Gyda chymorth gwirfoddolwyr mae Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed wedi cynhyrchu cofnod ysgrifenedig, ffotograffig (gan gynnwys ffotogrametreg) a chofnod lluniadu o'r gweddillion capel.

Mae sefydlogrwydd y capel dan fygythiad a gwnaed ymdrechion gan y perchennog presennol i ddarparu rhwymedïau tymor byr o leiaf, ond mae llystyfiant a thywydd didostur yn debygol o achosi mwy o ddifrod, efallai, ar cyflymder dychrynlyd. Argymhellir y dylai Capel Erbach gael ei ddiogelu'n gyfreithiol fel heneb gofrestredig. Gall hyn helpu i ddarparu mecanweithiau ar gyfer sicrhau arian ar gyfer cadwraeth yr adeilad.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Capel Erbach is recorded as a 13th century "well-chapel" and its rather precarious condition was brought to the attention of Dyfed Archaeological Trust during a scoping study of medieval and early post-medieval churches in southwest Wales. Located near to the village of Porthyrhyd in Carmarthenshire, all that remains of the chapel is a roofless shell.

Cadw provided grant funding to allow Dyfed Archaeological Trust to record the upstanding remains of Capel Erbach so that an archive record of the site could be created and inform future programmes of restoration.

Aided by volunteers Dyfed Archaeological Trust has produced a written, photographic (including photogrammetry) and drawn record of the chapel remains.

The stability of the chapel is under threat and efforts have been made by the current owner to provide at least short term remedies but encroaching vegetation and inclement weather is likely to cause further damage at, perhaps, an alarming rate. It is recommended that Capel Erbach should be given legal protection as a scheduled monument. This may assist in providing mechanisms for obtaining funds for conservation of the building.

CAPEL ERBACH: BUILDING RECORDING SURVEY 2019

CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	Project Commission	1
1.2	Scope of Project	1
1.3	Report Outline	1
1.4	Abbreviations	1
1.5	Illustrations	1
1.6	Timeline	1
2.	ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	4
2.1	General Information	4
3.	Methodology	6
4.	Results	7
4.1	General Description	7
4.2	Photogrammetry	16
5.	CONCLUSIONS	17
6.	SOURCES	17

FIGURES

Figure 1:	Site Location	3
Figure 2:	1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1890 showing Capel Erbach	5
Figure 3:	2 nd edition Ordnance Survey map of 1907 showing Capel Erbach	5
Figure 4:	Plan drawing of Capel Erbach	12
Figure 5:	Western wall exterior	13
Figure 6	Western wall interior	13
Figure 7	East wall interior	14
Figure 8:	South wall (interior)	15
Figure 9:	External views of the western and southern walls	16
Figure 10:	Internal view of the western and southern wall.	16
Figure 11	Raised view showing the western and southern wall and interior of the chapel	17

TABLES

Table 1:	Archaeological and Historical Timeline for Wales	2
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PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo 1:	DAT staff and volunteers recording the internal west wall of Capel Erbach	6
Photo 2:	Western wall (exterior view)	7
Photo 3:	Western wall (interior view)	8
Photo 4:	The arched doorway in the western wall	8
Photo 5:	Northern wall (interior view)	9
Photo 6:	Interior view of the eastern wall	10
Photo 7:	Interior view of the southern wall	11

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Commission

- 1.1.1 The precarious condition of Capel Erbach was brought to the attention of Dyfed Archaeological Trust during a scoping study (2011) of medieval and early post-medieval churches in southwest Wales. It consists of the remains of a ruined "well chapel" located near to the village of Porthyrhyd in Carmarthenshire (NGR SN 52940 14722; Figure 1).
- 1.1.2 Capel Erbach probably dates from the 13th century and all that remains now is a roofless shell.
- 1.1.3 In 2019 Cadw grant aided a project to record the upstanding remains of the Capel Erbach in order to create an archive record of the site and inform future programmes of restoration.
- 1.1.4 The project involved an element of community engagement allowing volunteers to participate in the recording process.

1.2. Project Aim and Objectives

- 1.2.1 The aims of the project were:

- To produce an archive record of the site.
- To promote the long-term conservation of the site.

The objectives of the project were:

- To make a record of the current condition of the site.
- To engage members of the local community in the project.
- To disseminate the results of the project to a wider audience.
- To conserve the site for future generations.

1.3 Report Outline

- 1.3.1 This report provides a summary and discussion of the survey and its results, and puts those results within their regional and national context.

1.4 Abbreviations

- 1.4.1 Sites recorded on the regional Historic Environment Record (HER) are identified by their Primary Record Number (PRN) and located by their National Grid Reference (NGR). Sites recorded on the National Monument Record (NMR) held by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW) are identified by their National Primary Record Number (NPRN). Scheduled Monument (SM). Altitude is expressed to Ordnance Datum (OD). References to cartographic and documentary evidence and published sources will be given in brackets throughout the text, with full details listed in the sources section at the rear of the report.

1.5 Illustrations

- 1.5.1 Printed map extracts are not necessarily produced to their original scale.

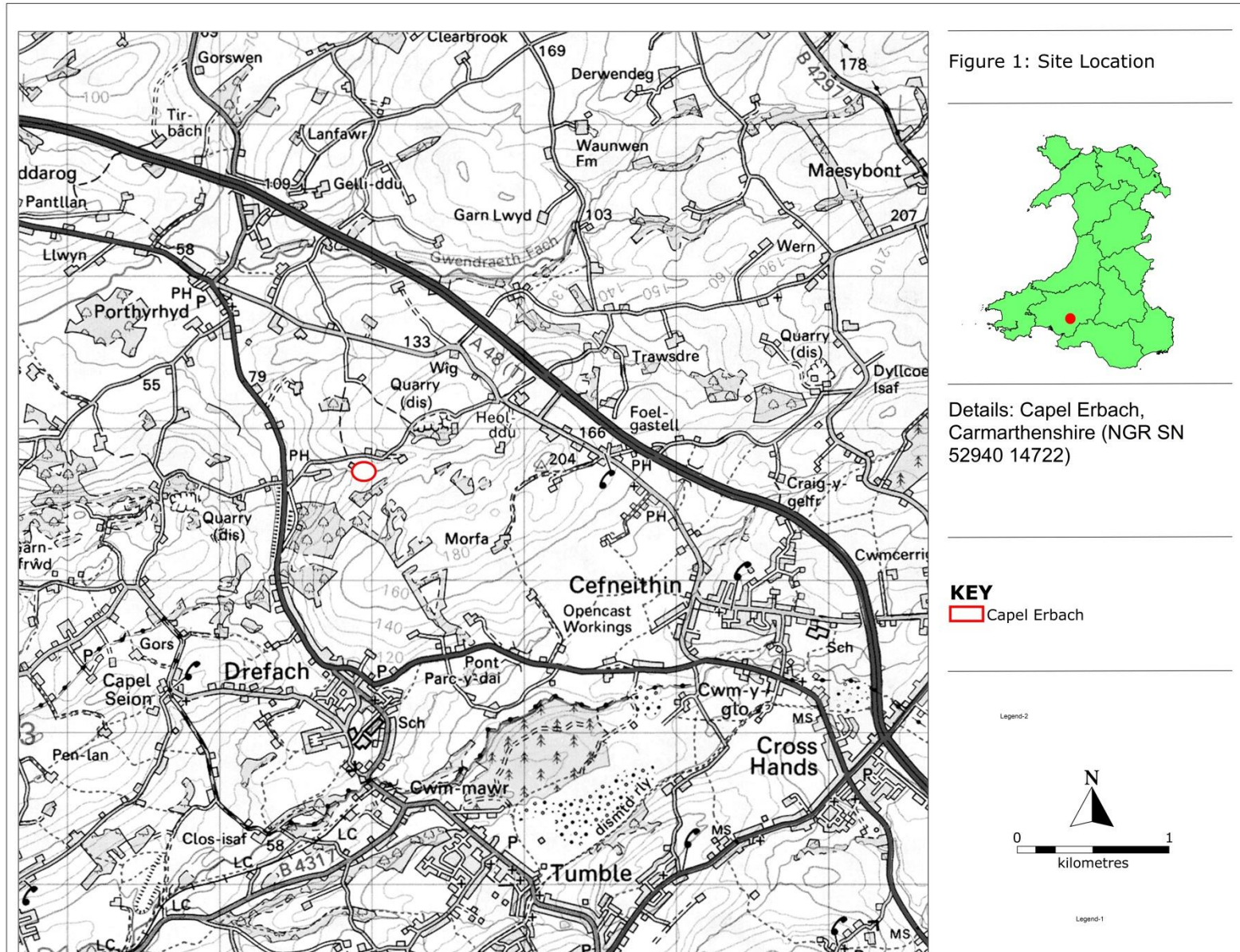
1.6 Timeline

- 1.6.1 The following timeline (Table 1) is used within this report to give date ranges for the various archaeological periods that may be mentioned within the text.

Period	Approximate date	
Palaeolithic –	c.450,000 – 10,000 BC	Prehistoric
Mesolithic –	c. 10,000 – 4400 BC	
Neolithic –	c.4400 – 2300 BC	
Bronze Age –	c.2300 – 700 BC	
Iron Age –	c.700 BC – AD 43	
Roman (Romano-British) Period –	AD 43 – c. AD 410	Historic
Post-Roman / Early Medieval Period –	c. AD 410 – AD 1086	
Medieval Period –	1086 – 1536	
Post-Medieval Period ¹ –	1536 – 1750	
Industrial Period –	1750 – 1899	
Modern –	20 th century onwards	

Table 1: Archaeological and Historical Timeline for Wales.

¹ The post-medieval and industrial periods are combined as the post-medieval period on the Regional Historic Environment Record as held by Dyfed Archaeological Trust



2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 General Information

2.1.1 The following information has been extracted from the HER:

The site sits on a levelled platform cut into a steep slope of a wooded valley above a stream.

The building, of well-dressed limestone blocks, is aligned approximately WSW-ENE. The western wall - with arched entrance doorway and trifoliated lancet window above - survives almost intact. Internal masonry to the left of the entrance suggests that there may have been steps, possibly up to the bellcote. The southern wall stands some three meters high for much of its length, within which there are three recesses, at the same level and of similar dimensions, but only the central one appears to be an aperture right through the wall and is a probable window. The eastern wall is built into the bank and incorporates a stone niche in the northern corner that presumably once housed an effigy. Little of the northern wall survives and now comprises some stonework at the base of the bank.

The features of the floor were obscured by a thick layer of fallen leaves, although it was evident that the eastern end is raised.

The chapel is recorded as a "well-chapel" and, although no well was evident, an exposed section of a fast-flowing, stone-lined water channel, below floor level, was located just within the entranceway, presumably emanating from a natural spring (M.Ings, 2011).

2.2 Historical Maps

2.2.1 The earliest mapping evidence of the site refers to it as Capel Erbach, which possibly translates to Chapel of Respect. In the 1890 1st edition OS map the site is referred to as Capel-hir-bach, which translates to long-small, but in the 2nd edition OS map it reverts back to the name Capel Erbach. This suggests a probable mispronunciation/misspelling in the 1st edition OS map.

2.2.2 The Parish tithe map (1849) depicts two buildings in the area of Capel Erbach and the associated apportionments refers to the area as "Capel Erbach Cottage" with the specific plot (plot number 2407) described as House yard and garden.

2.2.3 The 1st edition OS map (Figure 2; published in 1890) refers to the site as "Capel-hir-bach" and again shows two buildings but with an additional irregular shaped plot of land that was not shown on the tithe map. The rectangular building aligned WSE-ENE is presumably the chapel, the second building is possibly the cottage referred to in the apportionments along with a garden in the irregular shaped plot.

2.2.4 The 2nd edition OS map (Figure 3; published in 1907) now refers to the site as Capel Erbach and again shows two buildings along with a plot of land. The chapel building now appears to have an annex on its southern side that is not evident in the current remains.

2.2.5 The two buildings continue to be shown on maps in 1915 and 1921 but the irregular shaped plot of land is gone. By 1953 only one building is shown at the site of Capel Erbach.

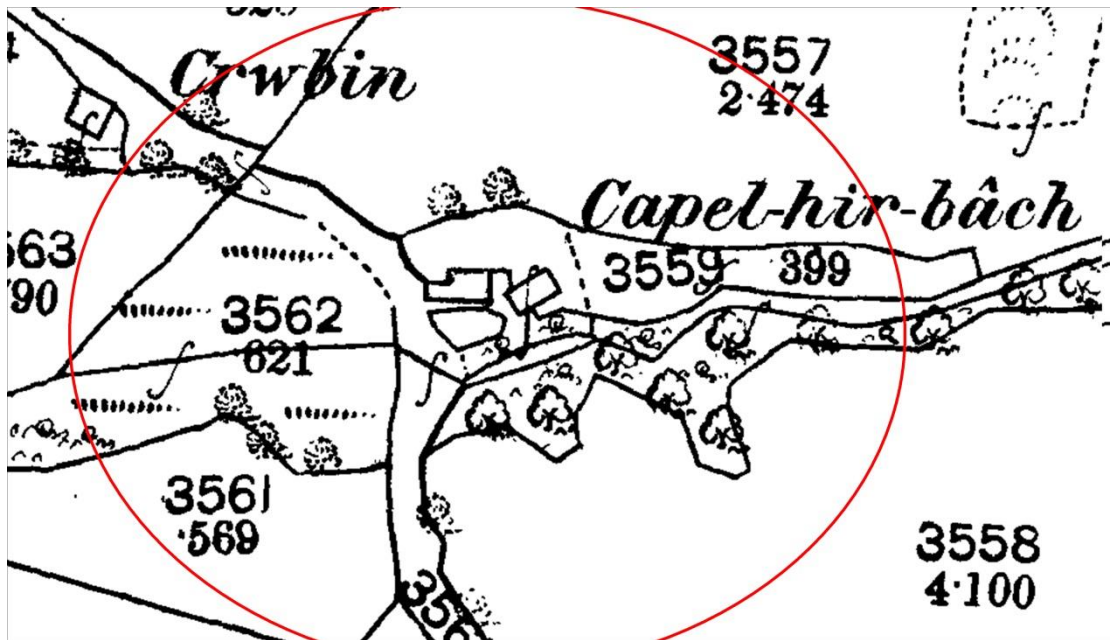


Figure 2: 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1890 showing Capel Erbach

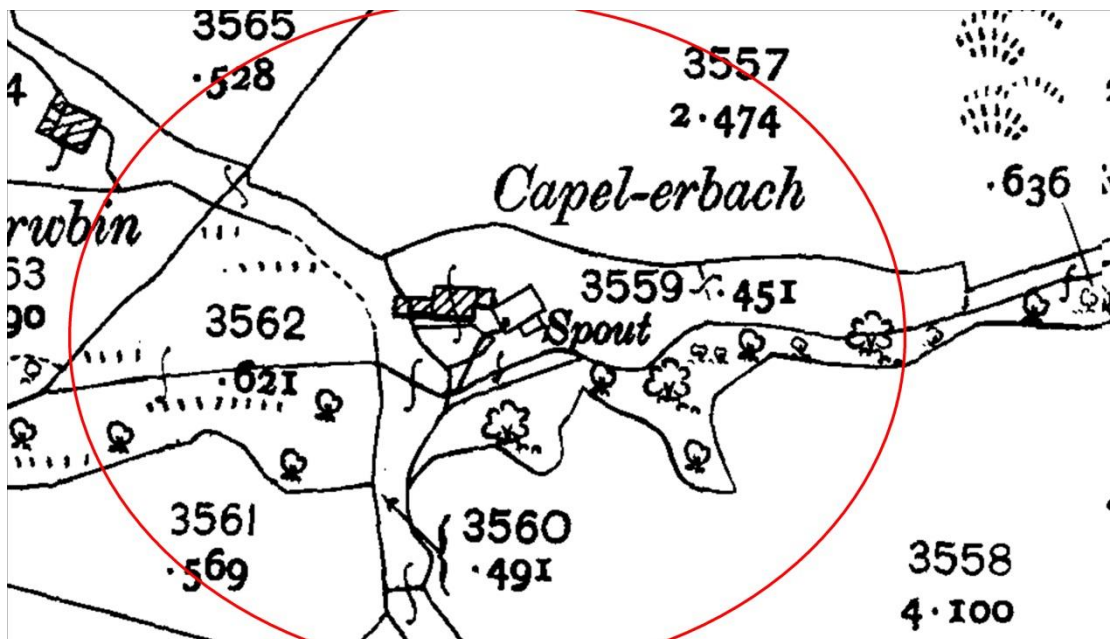


Figure 3: 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map of 1907 showing Capel Erbach

3. Methodology

- 3.1 The building recording survey involved documentation using written descriptions, elevation drawings (where possible) a site plan and photographic documentation – including photogrammetry.
- 3.2 The site plan was created using a Trimble TST and related the chapel remains to other structures, topographical features and other landscape elements. Elevation drawings of upstanding walls were drawn at an appropriate scale.
- 3.3 General views of the chapel and its wider setting/landscape were captured in photographic form. Externally, a series of oblique photographs show all external elevations and give an impression of the chapels overall size and shape.
- 3.4 A 3-dimensional model of the chapel has been created by capturing a series of overlapping high resolution images. Computer software was then used to undertake complex photogrammetric processing of digital images and generate a 3D spatial data model.
- 3.5 The survey was undertaken by two members of DAT staff who were assisted by two volunteers (Photo 1).



Photo 1: DAT staff and volunteers recording the internal west wall of Capel Erbach.

3.2 RESULTS

3.1 General Description

- 3.1.1 A plan and elevation drawings have been produced of Capel Erbach and can be seen in Figure 4 - 8. It may be useful to view these Figures alongside the following description of the Chapel.
- 3.1.2 The chapel sits at the base of a steep slope on the banks of a stream. The building is orientated roughly WSE-ENE and is 10.85m in length and 4.90m wide (externally). It is constructed of red sandstone blocks with walls measuring 0.70m – 0.80m thick (Figure 2). Extending northwards from the western wall are the remains of another wall, possibly associated to the second building that is shown in the historic maps.
- 3.1.3 Much of the chapel walls are covered with ivy and ash trees are growing very nearby which could be putting stress on the walls.

Western Wall (Photo 2 & 3; Figure 3 and 4)

- 3.1.2 The western wall is 6.85m high and houses the bellcote, arched entrance doorway and the trifoliated lancet window. A small water spout emanates from the chapel to the right of the arched doorway (on the outside). To the left of the doorway (on the inside) the internal masonry suggests that there may have been a staircase which led to the bellcote.
- 3.1.6 Internally, above the door way, a large crack is beginning to form in the stonework and the arch is currently being held in place by acrow props (Seen in Photo 4).



Photo 2: Western wall (exterior view) housing the bellcote, arched entrance doorway, trifoliated lancet window and water spout.



Photo 3: Western wall (interior view) housing the bellcote, arched entrance doorway, trifoliated lancet window.



Photo 4: The arched doorway in the western wall, currently being held up by acrow props. To the left of the door the masonry suggests a possible staircase once led to the bellcote.

Northern wall (Photo 5)

- 3.1.3 The northern wall only survives to a height of 1.50m at the base of a steep slope; it is mostly overgrown with vegetation and ash trees.



Photo 5: Northern wall (interior view).

Eastern Wall (Photo 6; Figure 5)

The eastern wall stands 2.70m high and in the northern corner there is a lancet stone niche (1.02m x 0.42m x 0.23m), presumably for housing an effigy. At the midsection of the wall there is a splay 0.38m deep, suggesting there was another larger niche or window present. At the south end of the wall there is subtle evidence of another possible niche similar to that seen towards the north. If so, this would suggest a symmetrical appearance to the east wall with two similarly sized niches either side of a larger one.



Photo 6: Interior view of the eastern wall with the small niche to the north of the wall.

Southern Wall (Photo 7; Figure 6).

- 3.1.4 The south wall stands at 3.0m height across most of its length, although some collapse has occurred at its eastern edge. Rendering appears to survive across much of the wall to approximately half way up. Towards the western edge of the wall are three recesses. Each recess is at the same height and of similar level. Only the middle recess has an aperture but this appears to be more likely that a stone has fallen out of place rather than a window. There was no surviving evidence of the annex seen in the historic maps adjoining this wall, but where the wall has collapsed at its western end it is possible it was once an opening that is no longer discernible.



Photo 7: Interior view of the southern wall

Interior

- 3.1.5 The floor of the chapel is covered in leaf mould, but evidence of a raised platform towards the rear of the chapel was visible. The spring enters the chapel in the northeast corner where it enters a stone lined channel below the floor level, with some exposed sections. It flows diagonally across the chapel towards the southwest corner where it leaves the chapel.

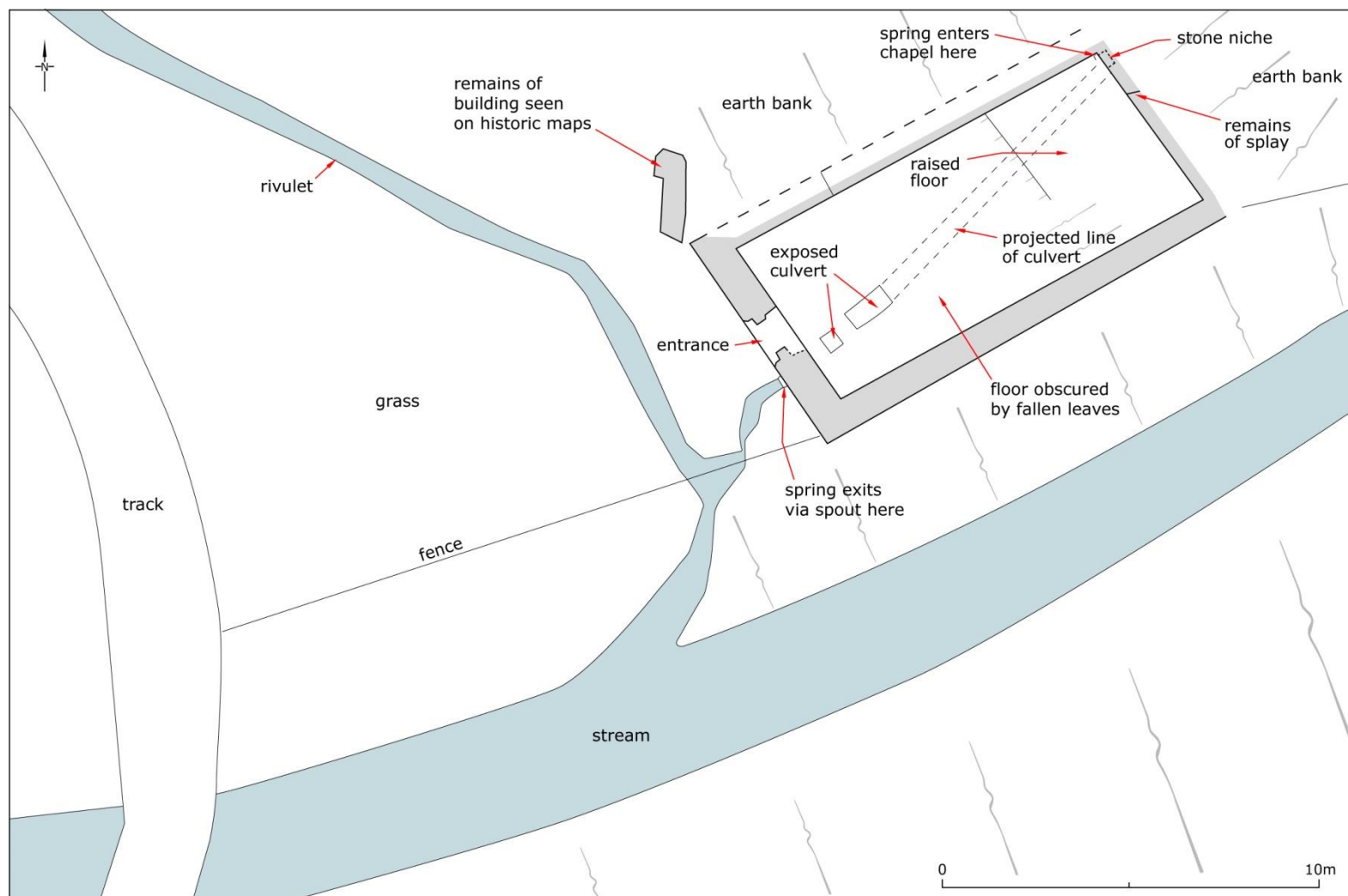


Figure 4: Plan drawing of Capel Erbach.

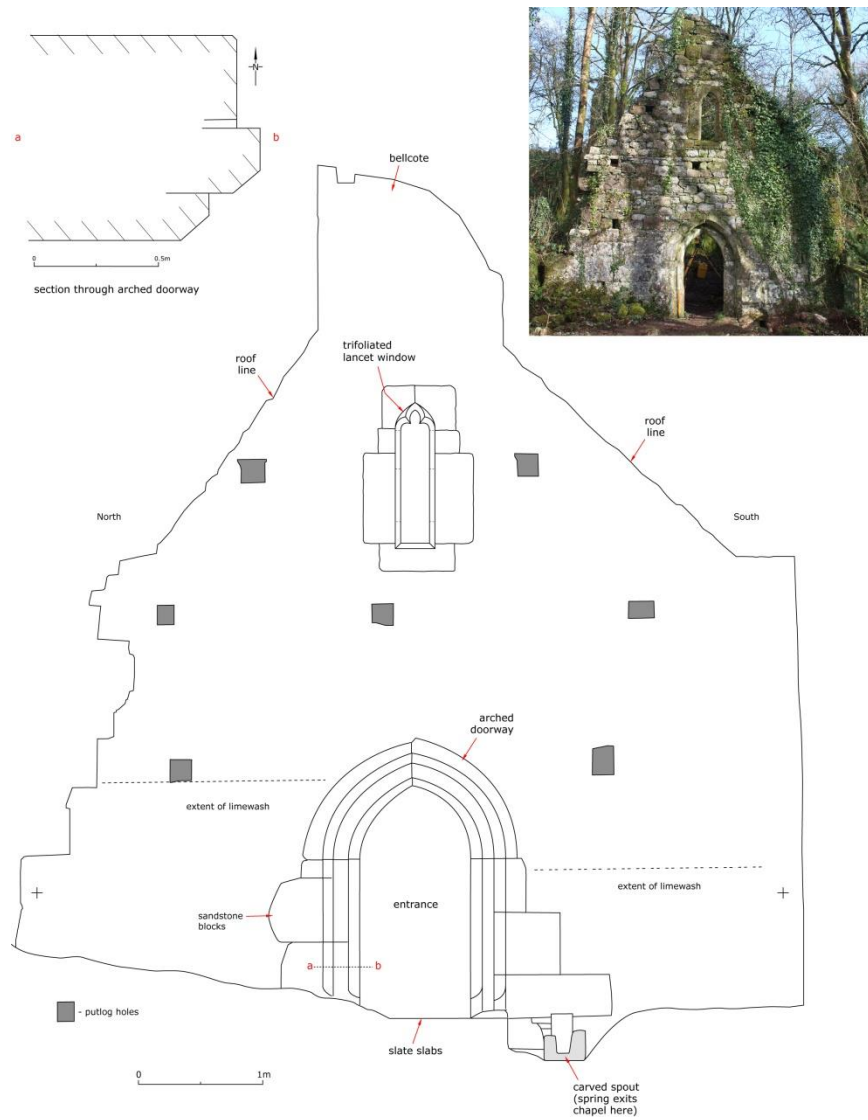


Figure 5: Western wall exterior

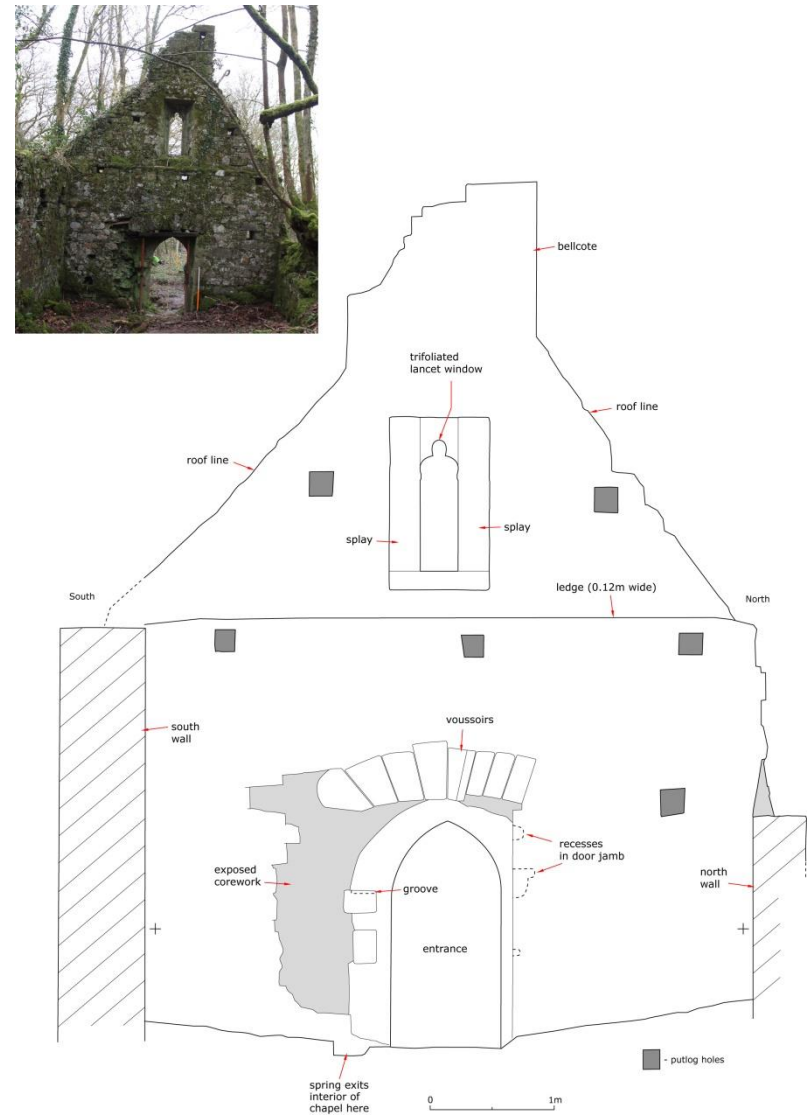


Figure 6: Western wall interior



Figure 7: East wall interior.

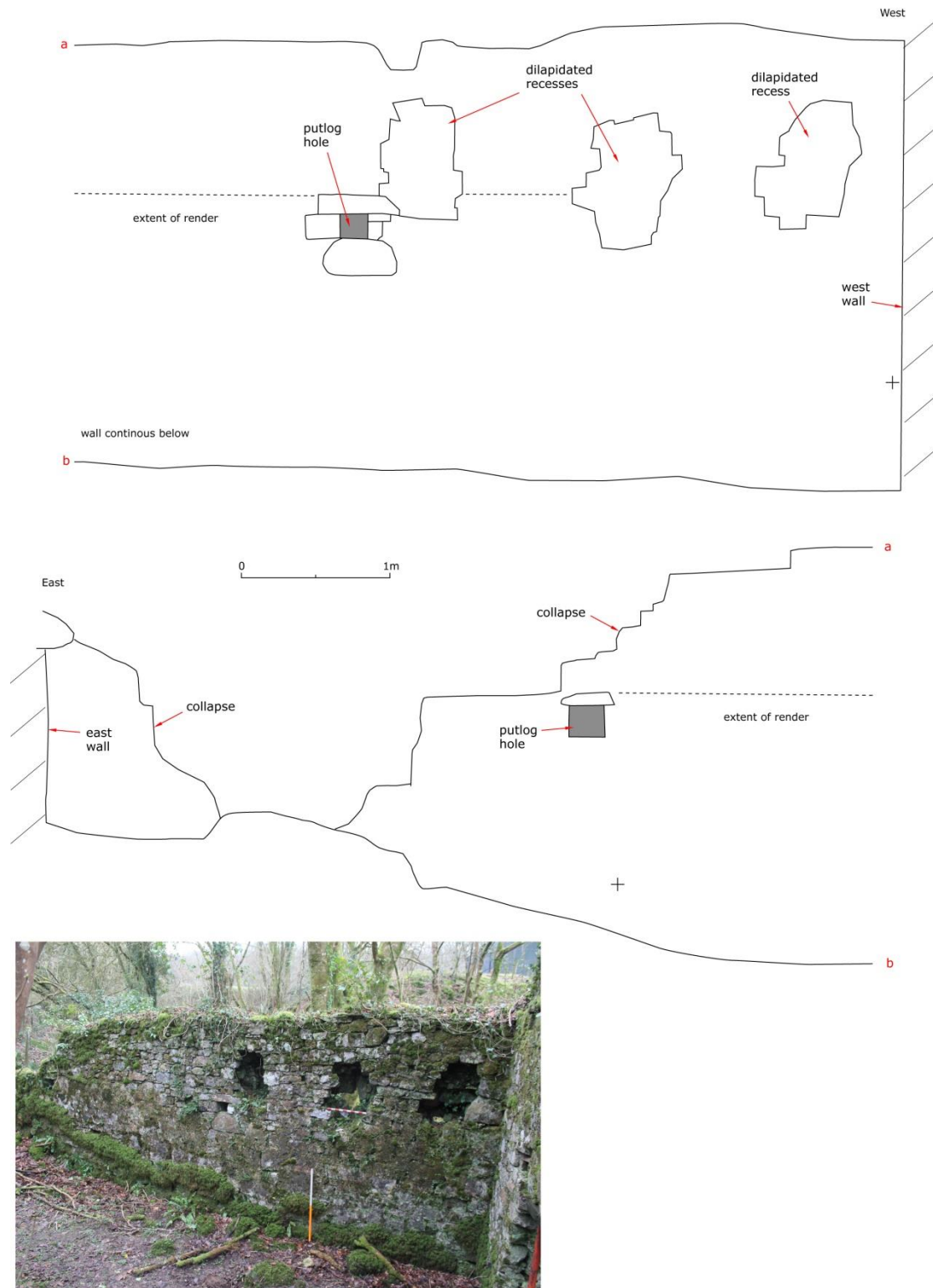


Figure 8: South wall (interior).

3.2 Photogrammetry

- 3.2.1 A 3D model of Capel Erbach was created by stitching together 792 captured still framed images. Figures 9 – 11 show examples of the 3D model.



Figure 9: External views of the western and southern walls.



Figure 10: Internal view of the western and southern wall.

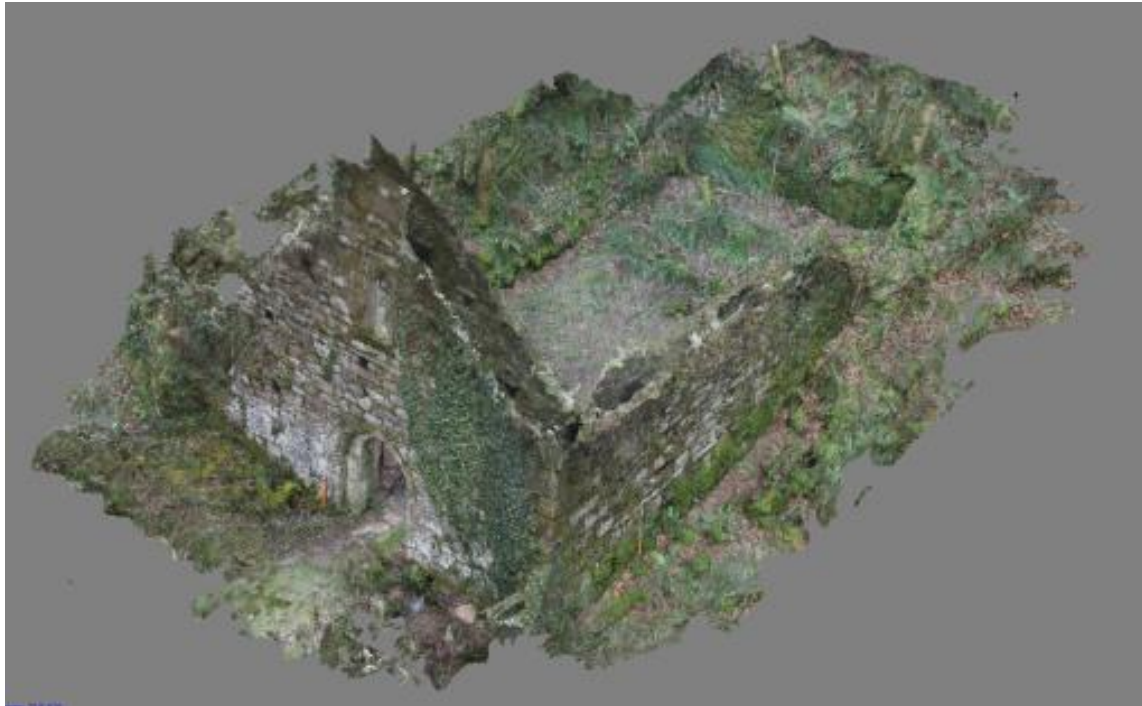


Figure 11: Raised view showing the western and southern wall and interior of the chapel.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 Over the course of the fieldwork DAT archaeologists, with the help of volunteers, created a written, drawn and photographic record (including photogrammetry) of Capel Erbach – a probable 13th century “well chapel”.
- 4.2 The chapel survives as a roofless shell on a levelled platform at the base of a steep slope above a stream. The western wall of the chapel stands the highest at 6.85m and houses the bellcote, the arched entrance and a trifoliated lancet window.
- 4.3 Generally the stability of Capel Erbach is under threat, ash trees grow in very close proximity – potentially putting stress on the walls which are already largely covered in vegetation and moss, and the arched doorway is beginning to collapse and currently held in place by acrow props. The chapel is certainly in need of some remedial work to at least stabilise its current condition before further damage occurs.
- 4.4 Overall this project has achieved the predefined aims in that it has produced an archive record of the site (written, photographic and drawn) and promoted the long term conservation of the site by identifying potential risks.
- 4.5 The current owner has made attempts to preserve the current condition of the chapel and expressed an interest in carrying out further remedial work for longer term solutions i.e. repairing the arched doorway and removing the nearby ash trees.
- 4.6 Given its current condition and vulnerability Capel Erbach is worthy of scheduling, this would afford the owner the opportunity to apply for grant funding from Cadw so that the chapel can continue to be preserved.

5. SOURCES

Publications

Brown, D H, 2011 *Archaeological Archives: A guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation*. Chartered Institute of Field Archaeologists.

CIFA, 2014 *Chartered Institute of Field Archaeologists Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation*.

Database

Dyfed Archaeological Trust Historic Environment Record

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Mae'r adroddiad hwn wedi ei gael yn gywir a derbyn sêl bendith
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on behalf of Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Swydd / Position: **Director Dyfed Archaeological Trust**

Llofnod / Signature.

... Dyddiad / Date 27/02/19

Yn unol â'n nôd i roddi gwasanaeth o ansawdd uchel, croesawn unrhyw sylwadau sydd
gennych ar gynnwys neu strwythur yr adroddiad hwn

As part of our desire to provide a quality service we would welcome any comments you
may have on the content or presentation of this report

