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WATCHING BRIEF AT ST PETERS CHURCH, HASGUARD



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Park Authority



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Watching Brief at Hasgurd Church

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SUMMARY

A watching brief was undertaken at St Peters Church, Hasguard (PRN 3012) whilst debris was removed from the interior of the church in order to put new flooring in. During the works it was revealed that the floor had undergone several phases of construction, and that these had involved considerable disturbance to the ground inside the church. Traces of a plaster floor were observed, as well as dwarf walls for supporting floorboards. Human bone was found very close to the floor surface. This was re-buried on site.

INTRODUCTION

St Peters Church, Hasguard (PRN 3012), is owned by the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (PCNPA) who are undertaking works to consolidate the building, and to maintain it as a stable ruin. As part of these works the roof of the church was removed to prevent a later collapse. This resulted in a large amount of debris and rubble falling into the building.

The building is thought to have medieval origins, but has been substantially altered. Most recently, in the late 19th century, substantial renovations were carried out and the chancel was re-built in limestone.

The interior of the building is divided into three sections. At the east end, in the chancel, the floor-level is higher than the rest of the church. The flooring here consists of black and white tiling. At the west end the floor consists of ceramic floor-tiles, with the aisle being laid in cement. In the nave, the flooring has been lost, but surviving dwarf walls attest to the previous presence of floorboards.

The watching brief was undertaken whilst the modern debris was removed from the church, and whilst the dust and earth which had accumulated whilst the building was empty was removed. This was necessary in order to provide a solid foundation for new flooring. The specifications detailed the new flooring to be a six inch depth of stone chippings, covered with a two-inch depth of limestone dust. This would be hard-wearing, but also free-draining, to avoid the interior of the church becoming waterlogged. At either end of the building, where flooring survived in good condition, it was decided that the remaining floor should be left, and not covered over with new material.

METHODOLOGY

The modern debris was removed by hand, and the compacted layer of earth and vegetation overlying the floor was removed using shovels. Work was carried out under archaeological supervision.

RESULTS

See plan in figure 1.

The gaps between the dwarf walls proved to be empty once the modern debris and vegetation was revealed. The ground level was around 650mm below the tops of the dwarf walls at the edges of the building, next to the exterior walls. It then sloped up towards the aisle, with the ground level in the aisle being less than 50mm below the tops of the dwarf walls.

Along the length of the aisle, there was a layer of accumulated earth and compacted building dust and rubble. This was removed using shovels.

During the works, several details of the building's construction were noted. The dwarf walls only butt loosely against the exterior walls, confirming that they were a later addition. The walls do not run all the way across the building, but appear to have been robbed out in the middle, making space for the aisle to run through. The ends of the walls are not neatly finished, but have been roughly removed – perhaps to allow new flooring to be laid in the aisle? This would coincide with the situation at the west end of the church, where the aisle is floored in cement and is slightly lower than the surrounding floor.

Slight traces of a plaster floor were noted along the length of the aisle, but only small patches of it survived. In one location, work accidentally went below the layer of modern debris. In this area of disturbance, human bone was noted. The bone appeared to be very densely packed, and was immediately underneath the plaster floor layer.

All of the bone appeared to be adult. Part of a pelvis, a collarbone, two ribs, and several long-bones were all noted. A high proportion of the bone had been broken in the past, with one of the long bones snapped in two. The bones were not an articulated burial, but appeared to be very 'jumbled', overlying each other, and embedded at angles into the ground. The bone was re-buried on site.

As a consequence of the very shallow depth of the archaeological layers in the centre of the church, the required depth was not reached. The depths of stone chippings and limestone dust have been adjusted accordingly.

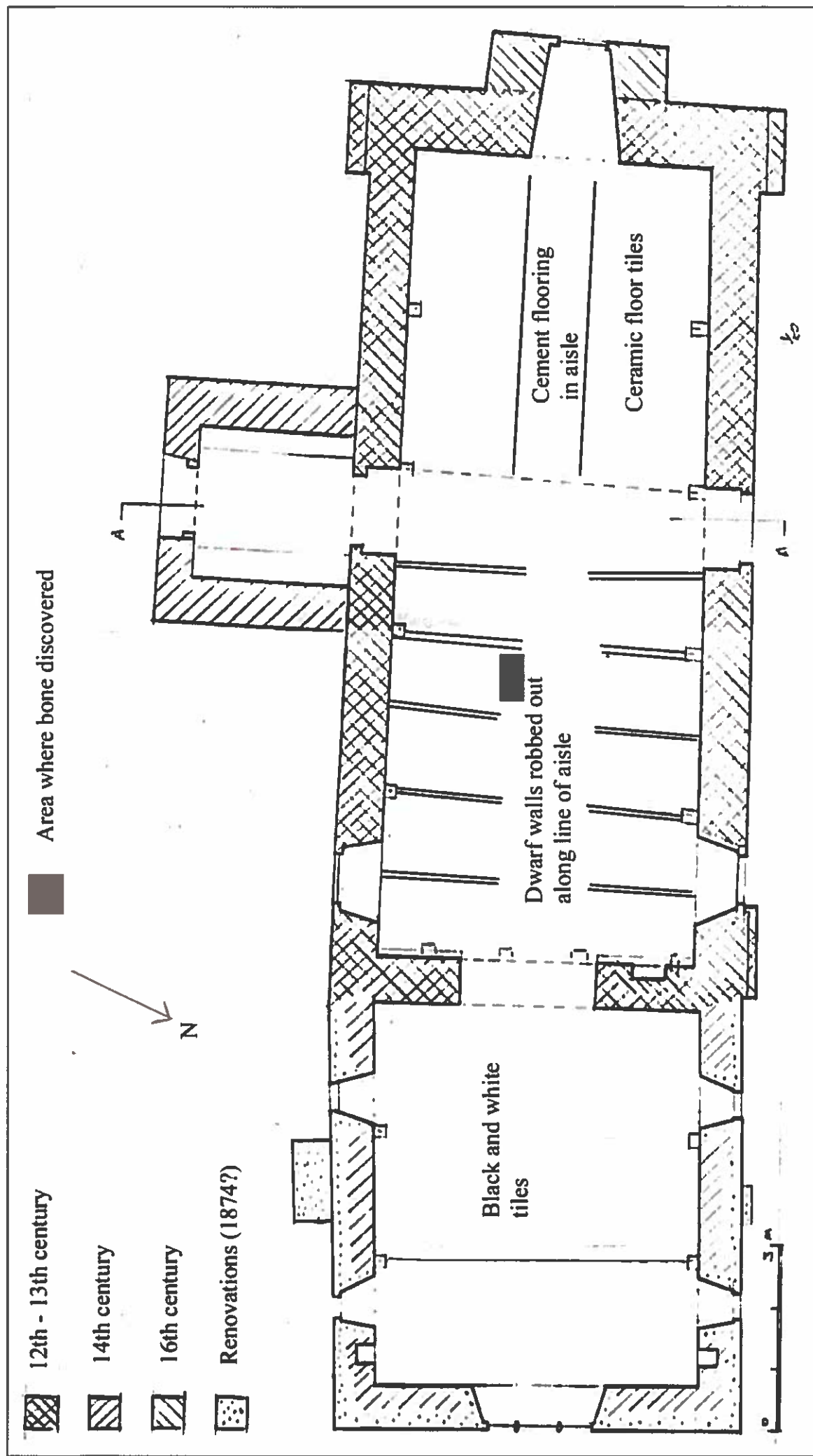


Figure 1: Plan of St Peters Church, Hasguard. After Parkinson, 1988 with additional annotations and information.



Figure 2 (above): Densely packed human bone close to the surface and immediately underneath the traces of a plaster floor. The bone was re-buried on site.

Figure 3 (below): Dwarf wall at the east end of the nave. These walls are roughly built, and butt up against the exterior walls of the church. The gaps between them were filled with modern debris from the removal of the roof and from the building standing empty. The walls are not finished neatly, but appear to have robbed out where the aisle passes through (left of picture).



INTERPRETATION

From a rapid photographic survey of the building (GP film no. DAT 2004-90) and from this watching brief, at least three phases of building can be identified. This is in line with records held by the RCAHMW and the regional Sites and Monuments Record (see Fig 1, Parkinson's 1988 plan of St Peters Church).

The earliest phase of building survives in what is currently the nave. This is roughly coursed red sandstone, bonded with lime mortar. The Pevsner guide to Pembrokeshire's buildings also identifies the chancel arch and the nave to be 13th century (Lloyd *et al*, 2004, 201), with later medieval additions of the porch and chancel (Parkinson dates these to the 14th century). Both sources agree that the bellcote at the west end dates to the 15th or 16th century. Finally, in 1874, the building was heavily renovated and the chancel largely re-built.

Internally, there are at least three phases of flooring. At the east and west ends of the church the current flooring has remained intact and there is no information available about what may be beneath the floors. In the nave, a suggested sequence of amendments may be as follows: an unknown medieval flooring, followed by the 19th century insertion of floorboards which were later removed along the length of the aisle, and a plaster floor put in place.

The nature of the original, medieval flooring is unknown, but the medieval ground level is likely to be similar to that seen today. The visible bases of the walls appear to be foundation walls, rather than interior walls and there is no trace of any plaster or render on them. Similarly, there is no indication of any floor levels higher than the present. The ground level in the surrounding churchyard is higher – on entering the church, there are three steps down into the building.

Another phase of flooring is represented by the insertion of the dwarf walls for carrying floorboards. These roughly built walls butt up against the exterior walls. If, as suggested, the medieval ground level was close to today's level, then there must have been considerable disturbance to it when the flooring was put in. This work is likely to have taken place during the 1874 renovations – the insertion of floors like this was common across the county as the era of Victorian church restorations got underway and the 'package' of pulpit, lectern and pews was delivered to countless parish churches. The black and white tiling in the chancel may well also date from this time.

A final phase of work appears to post-date this Victorian renovation, when the floorboards seem to have been removed from the aisle and replaced with a plaster floor. It also appears that earth was piled up along the length of the aisle, to provide a solid 'foundation' for the aisle and to raise it up to approximately correspond with the floor-levels either side of it. This must have involved considerable disturbance to ground inside the church, probably explaining the 'jumbled' nature of the human remains which were observed.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

There is no specific management proposed for St Peters Church once the new flooring is in place. The church will be maintained as a stable ruin, with occasional masonry consolidation being carried out if necessary.

There should be no ground disturbance inside the church building. Any disturbance will inevitably come down onto the archaeological layers and involve excavation of human remains.

SOURCES

Lloyd *et al*, 2004, The Buildings of Wales – Pembrokeshire.

Parkinson, 1988, plan of Hasguard Church. Held in Sites and Monuments Record, Cambria Archaeology, Llandeilo

Ordnance Survey first edition, 1887, sheet Pembrokeshire XXXII.NE

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Paratowyd yr adroddiad hwn gan / This report has been prepared by Polly Groom

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Mae'r adroddiad hwn wedi ei gael yn gywir a derbyn sêl bendith
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Yn unol â'n nôd i roddi gwasanaeth o ansawdd uchel, croesawn unrhyw sylwadau sydd gennych ar
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