

# **St. Aidan's Church Llawhaden Archaeological desk-based assessment**

Prepared by Cambria Archaeology  
For Christopher Thomas Architect on  
behalf of the Parish Church Committee  
of St. Aidan's Church, Llawhaden



## ARCHAEOLEG CAMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGY

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St. Aidan's Church, Llawhaden. Archeological Desk-Based Assessment

Gan / By

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Paratowyd yr adroddiad hwn gan / This report has been prepared by Helen Milne

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**St. Aidan's Church, Llawhaden  
Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment.**

**SUMMARY**

*Proposals for restoration works to St. Aidan's Church, Llawhaden (NGR SN0751 1747) devised by Christopher Thomas (Architect), required an archaeological impact assessment. Christopher Thomas Architect, on behalf of the Parish Church Council of St. Aidan's Church commissioned Cambria Archaeology Field Services to carry out the assessment in May 2007.*

*The planned schedule of works to the church includes roofing repairs to nave and chancel, renewal of rainwater goods, renewal of tower \nave roof gutter, and renewal of below ground drainage.*

*Llawhaden Parish Church (St. Aidan's) lies to the east of the village of Llawhaden, below the castle, on the flat valley floor of the Eastern Cleddau. The present church dates from the high medieval period, although evidence suggests that it may occupy the site of an earlier Christian establishment.*

*The proposed repair works to the upstanding church building have potential to uncover previously unrecorded elements of the church fabric, whilst below ground excavations may uncover deposits which contain significant information on the history and development of the church.*

*A programme of monitoring and recording has been recommended.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Project Background**

The Parish Church Committee of St. Aidan's Church, Llawhaden, through their agent Christopher Thomas Architect, have made an application to carry out restoration works to the roof, rainwater goods, and drainage at St. Aidan's Church, Llawhaden (NGR SN 0752 1747).

The Principal Archaeologist (Heritage Management Division) of Cambria Archaeology, as the Diocesan Advisory Committee's archaeological advisor, indicated that an archaeological impact assessment of the proposed development area (a Desk-Based Archaeological Assessment) should be undertaken prior to restoration work at St. Aidan's commencing.

The agent, Christopher Thomas Architect commissioned Cambria Archaeology Field Services to undertake the Desk-Based Assessment in May 2007.

### **Objectives**

The principal objective of the desk-based assessment is to provide a synopsis of the known archaeological and historical information currently held about St. Aidan's Church, and to make recommendations to ensure that adequate monitoring and recording is undertaken during the planned renovation work. The assessment will aim to highlight elements of the church fabric, which may be vulnerable to, or affected by the restoration work. It will also demonstrate the likely archaeological potential of the deposits within the associated churchyard, which will be disturbed during the planned excavations.

It should be noted that the potential for the survival of archaeological remains within the vicinity of the present church is extremely high. Excavation along the line of the proposed new drainage trenches are very likely to disturb burials containing human remains, and may also reveal deposits which relate to earlier phases of church construction.

An assessment is a thorough review of all existing archaeological information relating to an area potentially affected by proposals for development.

### **Methodology**

During the assessment, the following sources were consulted:

The Regional Historic Environment Record maintained by the curatorial section of Cambria Archaeology (formerly Dyfed Archaeological Trust), Llandeilo.

Databases compiled by the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW) and Cadw-Welsh Historic Monuments.

### **Abbreviations used in this report**

All sites recorded on the county Historic Environment Record (HER) are identified by their Primary Record Number (PRN), and all sites mentioned within this report are located by their National Grid Reference (NGR). 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.

## **THE STUDY AREA**

The village of Llawhaden occupies rising ground on the west side of the Eastern Cleddau River. St Aidan's Church (PRN 3582, NGR SN 0752 1747) lies on the flat valley floor of the Eastern Cleddau, to the east of the village, and below the castle.

Llawhaden churchyard is rectangular in shape, and enclosed on the north, south and west sides by a mortared, high limestone wall, whilst the river forms the eastern boundary. The church occupies the flat eastern part of the churchyard, and is very close to the river. The church does not lie within a cutting, or on a visible platform. The western area of the churchyard is at the foot of the hillside, which rises to the castle, and is steeply sloping. Most of the memorials lie in this west half of the churchyard. There are none in the northwest quarter, and none particularly close to the church, but many are propped against the church.

## THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE

### **The historical development of Llawhaden.**

#### *The early history of St. Aidan's Church and Llawhaden.*

Little is known with certainty about the early history of Llawhaden. The church is dedicated to St. Aidan, who is attributed with its foundation in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Aidan was a saint of the 'Celtic' church, who is said to have been of Irish origin, and a pupil of St. David. He later became Bishop of Lindisfarne.

Prior to the Norman invasion of Pembrokeshire, Llawhaden seems to have been an administrative centre for the cantref of Daugleddau. A circa 9<sup>th</sup> century text of the Welsh Laws mentions that one of the seven 'bishop-houses' of Dyfed was located here, and it has been argued that this could reflect an even earlier, 6<sup>th</sup> century situation (Ludlow 2003). At the arrival of the Normans, Llawhaden was part of the possessions of the community of St. David, and the See of the Bishop of St. David's was already the most powerful in Wales.

A small amount of physical evidence supports the idea of an early foundation. An inscribed stone (PRN 3583) of 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century date is built into the east wall of the chancel. Ludlow (2003) considers that this stone could be located close to its original position. A further early medieval inscribed stone is set in the west wall of Llawhaden House (PRN 6660). This may have been removed from its original position when Llawhaden House was built in the early seventeenth century. Masonry from the castle, and perhaps also from the church, was incorporated into the house.

Further circumstantial evidence may also support an early foundation date. It has been suggested that the regular rectangular shape of the churchyard may be late pre-conquest in origin (Ludlow, 2003). The church lies only a short distance south of the main Roman road running west from Carmarthen (proximity to a Roman road was often a factor in the distribution of early Christian sites).

This evidence supports the theory that the Christian establishment here pre-dates the Norman period, and Ludlow (2003) asserts that there is a high probability St. Aidan's church has early medieval origins.

#### *The medieval period*

The fortunes of St. Aidan's church have been fundamentally linked to the development of the settlement. The decision by the Norman Bishops of St. David's to site their principal residence at Llawhaden may have been based on the site's symbolic significance to the invaders, due to its role during pre-conquest times. The first Norman Bishop of St. David's, a marcher lord called Bernard, built his castle at Llawhaden in 1115. The castle's continued use by the bishops of St. David's determined the settlement's prominence during the high medieval period. Llawhaden was listed in the Taxatio of 1291, and was an important prebend of (ie. receiving a salary from) St. David's Cathedral. It is also said to have been a staging post on one of the pilgrimage routes to St. David's. This may be reflected in the name of a farm close to the church called 'Holgan', perhaps a corruption of "Heol y gan", meaning 'road of song'.

The castle built by Bishop Bernard was an earth and timber ring-work. Giraldus Cambrensis mentioned it in 1175, before it was captured and destroyed by the

Welsh in 1193. When the Normans regained control in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the earlier castle was replaced by a masonry structure, built within and upon the original ring-work bank. The castle was subsequently remodelled on numerous occasions. Bishop Thomas Beck (1280-93) styled it as a comfortable lordly residence, where he held a court, and had a prison.

The vast majority of the ruins which survive, date from between 1362 and 1389, when bishop Adam de Houghton commissioned the construction of the high stone curtain wall with multiangular towers around the southern half of the castle. He also added a lavish residential range inside the walls. The impressive gate house is thought to date from the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Perhaps the greatest single influence on the medieval development of Llawhaden was the work of Bishop Thomas Beck (see above) in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. As well as remodelling the castle, he established a borough outside the castle gates, which in 1281, was granted a royal licence for weekly markets and annual fairs. Settlers were attracted with promises of trading rights and other privileges. Beck also founded a hospice in 1287, the remains of which can still be seen at the western end of the village (PRN 3577). By 1326 Llawhaden was the richest estate belonging to St. David's, and with 174 burgesses, actually exceeded the settlement of St. David's in size.

#### *Later development*

Despite Llawhaden's prominence during the high medieval period, it suffered decline during the later middle ages. Llawhaden Castle was abandoned after the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The principal bishops' residence was moved to Abergwili near Carmarthen. Llawhaden Castle was stripped of saleable materials, and in 1616 Bishop Milbourne was granted a licence to demolish it.

The castle was quarried for building material, notably by the Skyrme family, who were landowners from Shropshire. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century they built Llawhaden House (PRN 6660), splitting the former medieval town in two. The house incorporates earlier masonry from the castle and apparently also the church. An early medieval inscribed stone is built into the west wall, described as 'long illegible' (Lloyd, Orbach and Scourfield: 2004).

Llawhaden was later famed for its cattle fairs, which were held in a large field by the river and church.

The loss of the bishop's palace in the 16<sup>th</sup> century removed what had undoubtedly been a major impetus for growth and development. Llawhaden did not continue to develop as a town. The present village is linear in form, and its small size belies its former significance within the wider history of Pembrokeshire.

The absence of later development at Llawhaden means that elements of the medieval plan can still be seen in the layout of village. To the west of the castle ruins is the site of the medieval market, now marked by an open triangular area and an overgrown pond. The sites of the dwellings of medieval burgesses can be seen in the form of earthwork platforms in the field to the southwest of a hollow-way, which runs down into the Cleddau valley. Remains of the 13<sup>th</sup> century hospice built by Bishop Beck, including the vaulted chapel that served it, lie at the western boundary of the medieval settlement, whilst St. Aidan's Church marks the settlement's eastern extent.



The fortunes of the church are not well documented, but may have mirrored closely those of the castle. It is likely that building projects were undertaken on both during the same time periods, by the resident bishops at Llawhaden.

Bishop Thomas Beck's building projects in the castle were undertaken between 1280-93. Bishop Beck probably also enlarged the church (SPARC leaflet). During the 14<sup>th</sup> century, a large new nave and chancel were added to the church, perhaps coinciding with Bishop Adam de Houghton's extensive works to the castle, between 1362 and 1389.

Despite restoration during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, St. Aidan's church did not attract large congregations at this time – much of the population now worshipped at the independent chapels in the area. To many the church was associated with the gentry and there was resentment over the payment of tithes, which ultimately led to the disestablishment of the church in Wales in 1922 (SPARC leaflet).

### **St. Aidan's Church (PRN 3582) – phasing and fabric.**

St Aidan's church comprises a Chancel with three bays, a Nave, also with three bays, a South chapel with two bays (now a vestry), and two towers (see fig. 2). Numerous phases of construction have contributed to the building that stands today. Evidence for the structural history of the church lies in the fabric of the building, in the form of joints and blocking. Each phase of construction has been dated on stylistic grounds. Ludlow (2003) provisionally phases the building as follows:

Phase 1	Nave (and earlier Chancel, a short length of which may survives), 12 <sup>th</sup> century (former south door 12 <sup>th</sup> century)
Phase 2	Chancel 13 <sup>th</sup> century? (joint to nave)
Phase 3	South Transept, skew passage and tower I at end (and former north transept?), 14 <sup>th</sup> century I (stylistic, gargoyles etc)
Phase 4	Tower II, 14 <sup>th</sup> century ii
Phase 5	South chapel (and west porch?), 15 <sup>th</sup> – 16 <sup>th</sup> century (style of arcade 15 <sup>th</sup> – 16 <sup>th</sup> century)

The earliest known element of the surviving fabric of the church is the inscribed stone (PRN 3583), which is set in the exterior east wall of the chancel.

A striking feature of Llawhaden church is the paired towers. The smaller tower is earlier and originally stood alone, at the south end of the south transept. It now projects out of the larger tower, which was built over the south transept, between the small tower and the nave in c. 1500. The small tower is tapered, with a spiral stair turret on the west side, and a 14<sup>th</sup> century gargoyle. The larger tower is three storeys high with a battered base. Both towers have battlements. A 19<sup>th</sup> century illustration seems to show gable roofs on the towers but these do not feature on any other sources (Ludlow 2003).

Ludlow (2003) notes internal structural evidence for a possible former north transept. There is however, no external evidence, and there are no external

earthworks. Lloyd, Orbach and Scourfield (2004) note that the north transept has been lost.

An estate map of 1815 appears to show a south porch, but again, this does not appear on any other sources.

### **Previous restoration to the church**

The church was restored in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, however the exact date is unknown. The date of restoration of the south chapel is known to be 1861 (the event is recorded on a plaque inside the chapel). At this time it was given a gable roof.

During the restoration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the church was re-roofed, refloored (with a void and underfloor heating), and reseated. The south door, south chancel window, the south windows in the nave, and west gable window in the nave were blocked, and new windows built. The north chancel window was set in an earlier embrasure. The west door and porch were largely rebuilt.

Repairs were carried out to the tower in 1930. In 1995 the east window was adapted and reglazed with stained glass from Slebech Church. In the same year the roofs were partly reslated.

Recent work (1993) renewed the vestry roof, and the south side of the chancel roof. The lead valley between the vestry and the chancel was also replaced. Works were carried out in 1994, to re-enforce the riverbank at the east end of the church, which was being eroded by the Cleddau.

(Information above recorded in 2003 by Neil Ludlow of Cambria Archaeology [formerly Dyfed Archaeological Trust]).

### **Previous archaeological work**

St. Aidan's was visited and recorded in 2003 by Cambria Archaeology (see above) during the Cadw funded Churches project. This led to the inclusion of St. Aidan's in a report (Ludlow 2003), and the generation of an archive, including a non-specific photographic record of the exterior and interior of the church.

### **Assessment of archaeological potential within the study area.**

The history of the church is not as well documented or researched as that of the castle, which has received a great deal of attention. Llawhaden's small size belies its former significance within the wider history of Pembrokeshire. St. Aidan's church is an important part of this.

The archaeological potential of the church is fair (Ludlow 2003). Restoration of the church during the 19<sup>th</sup> replaced a large amount of original fabric. The church does not lie within a cutting, or on a visible platform (Ludlow 2003). Most memorials lie in the west half of the churchyard. There are no memorials in the northwest quarter, and none particularly close to the church, but many are propped against the church. Absence of memorials does not necessarily preclude the presence of burials in these areas, and burials may be encountered throughout the areas to be excavated for drainage.

## **POTENTIAL IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED RENOVATION WORK**

Renovation work will affect the fabric of the church building. The nave roof, and the north roof of the chancel are to be reslated. Rainwater goods are to be renewed around the exterior of the church, to include renewal of tower and nave roof gutters. Within the churchyard, below ground drainage will be renewed, and new ground-breaking works will be carried out to the north and north-east of the church, where a 100mm diameter drain will be inserted.

Excavations may uncover deposits that contain significant information on the history and development of the church. Ludlow (2003) notes internal structural evidence for a possible former north transept. There is however, no external evidence, and there are no external earthworks visible. An estate map of 1815 appears to show a south porch, but this does not appear on any other sources. Excavations close to the church could potentially shed light on these issues.

The opportunity could be taken during renovation works to further the understanding of the church building and its significance. Dating and phasing of the church has been done typologically, and the renovation may provide opportunities for further investigation into the fabric of the church. Restoration of the church during the 19<sup>th</sup> century may mean that much of the original fabric has been replaced, however, some elements of the original fabric may survive in situ, or have been re-used.

## **SUGGESTED MITIGATION**

A programme of monitoring and recording should be carried out during all works on site by a qualified archaeologist.

The archaeologist should be present immediately prior to, and during works that remove, reveal or affect in any way, the fabric of the church building.

The archaeologist should also be present to monitor the site during excavation of drainage trenches, to record any deposits and features revealed.

A photographic record should be generated to record elements of the building that are revealed by work to the roof, accompanied by a drawn record of notable features.

If beams or sections of timbers need to be removed or replaced, there may be an opportunity to produce dendrochronological samples for dating.

An archaeological report should be produced to document findings, and to assess their nature and significance.

## **APPENDIX I**

### **Archaeological records within the study area**

PRN 3582 - Llawhaden Parish Church.

Medieval, Postmedieval building.

Tower; Chapel; effigy; aumbrey?; cross; parish church.

Medieval parish church, medium sized, comprising chancel, nave, south chapel, south transeptal tower absorbing earlier south tower, and west porch. Former north transept?, and south porch?.

PRN 46827 - churchyard

Early medieval A site, ie. high-probability early medieval origins. Large, rectangular churchyard - which may be early - occupied by the medieval Llawhaden parish church (PRN 3582), which was the site (and location?) of an early medieval 'bishop-house', mentioned in the 9th century text of the 'Welsh Laws'. Possibly within 500m of the main Roman road W of Carmarthen. Associated with Group III ECM (PRN 3583), possibly +/- in situ.

PRN 3583 – Inscribed stone

Inscribed stone in church E wall of chancel, Group III Early Christian Monument (incomplete cross-carved pillar and base), of 9th or 10th century date. Pillar stone, with Latin ring-cross and shaft, both with roll-mouldings. Now built into E wall of Llawhaden Church (PRN 3582). There is also a small fragment at Scolton Manor Museum. First recorded in 1876-9 when it was in its present location. Given the high-probability of the early medieval origins of the site it may be +/- in situ.

## **SOURCES**

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