

ST. DAVID'S CHURCH, MEIDRIM, CARMARTHENSHIRE (SN 2891 2086) ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

NOVEMBER 2009



Prepared by:
Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.
For:
Dorian Phillips and Partners Ltd /
Meidrim Church



ymddiriedolaeth archaeolegol
DYFED
archaeological trust

DYFED ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

RHIF YR ADRODDIAD / REPORT NO. 2009/84
RHIF Y PROSIECT / PROJECT RECORD NO. 98516

Chwefror 2010
February 2010

ST. DAVID'S CHURCH, MEIDRIM, CARMARTHENSHIRE (SN 2891 2086) ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

Gan / By

James Meek

Paratowyd yr adroddiad yma at ddefnydd y cwsmer yn unig. Ni dderbynnir cyfrifoldeb gan Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf am ei ddefnyddio gan unrhyw berson na phersonau eraill a fydd yn ei ddarllen neu ddibynnu ar y gwybodaeth y mae'n ei gynnwys

The report has been prepared for the specific use of the client. Dyfed Archaeological Trust Limited can accept no responsibility for its use by any other person or persons who may read it or rely on the information it contains.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE
BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf
Neuadd y Sir, Stryd Caerfyrddin, Llandeilo, Sir
Gaerfyrddin SA19 6AF
Ffon: Ymholiadau Cyffredinol 01558 823121
Adran Rheoli Treftadaeth 01558 823131
Ffacs: 01558 823133
Ebost: info@dyfedarchaeology.org.uk
Gwefan: www.archaeolegdyfed.org.uk

Dyfed Archaeological Trust Limited
The Shire Hall, Carmarthen Street, Llandeilo,
Carmarthenshire SA19 6AF
Tel: General Enquiries 01558 823121
Heritage Management Section 01558 823131
Fax: 01558 823133
Email: info@dyfedarchaeology.org.uk
Website: www.dyfedarchaeology.org.uk

ST. DAVID'S CHURCH, MEIDRIM, CARMARTHENSHIRE (SN 2891 2086) **ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

	CONTENTS	PAGE
	SUMMARY	1
1	INTRODUCTION	2
	1.1 Project Commission	2
	1.2 Scope of the Project	2
	1.3 Report Outline	2
	1.4 Abbreviations	2
2.	THE SITE	3
	2.1 Site Location	3
	2.2 Archaeological Background	3
3.	WATCHING BRIEF METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS	5
	3.1 Methodology	5
	3.2 Results of the Watching Brief	5
4.	CONCLUSIONS	7
5.	SOURCES	8

FIGURES

Figure 1:	Location map based on the Ordnance Survey.	9
Figure 2:	First Edition OS map showing location of church within village	10
Figure 3:	Second edition OS map showing location of church within village	11
Figure 4:	Plan of Chancel Floor following removal of concrete floor and rubble	12

PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo 1:	Former stairwell adjacent to, and predating vestry	13
Photo 2:	Window within stairwell wall, now blocked by vestry	14
Photo 3:	Stub of wall in area above stairwell, on side of north transept, with the catslide roof of the vestry visible in foreground of photo	15
Photo 4:	Chancel floor following removal of tiled floor	15
Photo 5:	Test pit excavated through chancel floor	16
Photo 6:	Eastern half of chancel floor following removal of concrete and rubble levelling	17
Photo 7:	Western half of chancel floor following removal of concrete and rubble levelling	17
Photo 8:	Slate slabs lying on or within clay and mortar floor	18

Photo 9:	Modern heating duct pit cut through earlier clay and mortar floor	18
Photo 10:	Area along southern wall, where clay and mortar floor was absent	19
Photo 11:	Line of root damage through clay and mortar floor, which caused damage during 20 th century to tiled floor above	20
Photo 12:	Overall view facing west of chancel following excavation of concrete floor and rubble, immediately prior to backfilling with material for new flooring	20

ST. DAVID'S CHURCH, MEIDRIM, CARMARTHENSHIRE (SN 2891 2086)
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

SUMMARY

The Church of St. David in Meidrim, Carmarthenshire (NGR SN 2891 2086), is a Grade II Listed Building, and has early medieval origins. The existing church itself is likely to be of medieval date, with 19th century restoration work and additions in the 20th century. The church lies on top of a topographic promontory, with an earthwork bank surrounding much of the churchyard. It is considered very likely that the site was originally an Iron Age defended settlement. Given that the site lies in an area with high archaeological potential, as part of an extensive programme of renovation works, the archaeological advisor to the Diocese, recommended that an archaeological watching brief should be undertaken on any intrusive groundworks.

Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services were commissioned to undertake the watching brief by Dorian Phillips and Partners Ltd. in November 2009 by Mr Paul Norman.

The archaeological watching brief was concentrated on the removal of the chancel floor within the church. The removed floor comprised a 20th century tiled floor laid upon a concrete base, which in turn lay upon a rubble levelling layer. Beneath the rubble a compact surface made of clay and mortar was revealed, which is considered likely to represent an earlier floor surface of the chancel, possibly of medieval date.

The site contractors were happy to use this level as the base of their excavations, onto which levelling material for the new floor was laid. The earlier floor remains preserved beneath the new floor of the chancel. A number of finds were recovered from the bedding layer, including fragments of human bone, glass, pottery and a possible Roman tessera.

The earthing rods for the church were excavated at the western end of the church. The holes were excavated without an archaeologist being present, as it was considered unlikely that the holes would disturb any archaeology, other than earlier burials within the churchyard. The holes did reveal an earlier burial., These bones, and others recovered from inside the church, were retained by the vicar for reburial.

No remains of early medieval date were revealed during the watching brief. Despite the church being located on the possible site of an Iron Age defended settlement, no remains of Iron Age date were identified. A tessera of possible Roman date was recovered from the make up layer for the floor. This find was probably imported onto the site from elsewhere – although the possibility that it was derived from rubble material from within the churchyard should not be discounted.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Commission

Permission has been granted by the Diocese of St. David's for renovation works at St David's Church, Meidrim, Carmarthenshire (NGR SN 2891 2086). The proposed works included re-pointing of the walls, reroofing of the entire building, installation of earthing rods and replacement of the chancel floor. Given that the site is located in an area of high archaeological potential, an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the renovation was recommended by the archaeological Diocesan advisor.

To comply with this recommendation Mr Paul Norman of Dorian Phillips and partners Ltd. commissioned Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services to undertake the archaeological watching brief in November 2009.

1.2 Scope of the Project

The project was designed to record any archaeological features or deposits exposed during episodes of earth moving and ground breaking within the area of the chancel floor within the church and in the areas of the earthing rods.

1.3 Report Outline

This report describes the location of the site along with its archaeological background before summarising the watching brief results and the conclusions based on those results.

1.4 Abbreviations

Sites recorded on the Regional Historic Environment Record (HER¹) are identified by their Primary Record Number (PRN) and located by their National Grid Reference (NGR).

1.5 Illustrations

Record photographs are included at back of the report. Printed map extracts are not necessarily reproduced to their original scale and are illustrative only.

¹ Held and managed by Dyfed Archaeological Trust, The Shire Hall, Llandeilo.

2. THE SITE

2.1 Site Location

- 2.1.1 The Church of St. David is located on the north side of the road to Llanboidy exiting west from Meidrim, Carmarthenshire (NGR SN 2891 2086; PRN 3972).
- 2.1.2 Topographically the site is set upon a spur promontory overlooking the Afon Dewi Fawr (river) at a height of c. 50m above ordnance datum.
- 2.1.3 The church is set within a roughly oval enclosure located on top of the promontory, with very steep drops to the north, east and south. The ground level rises to the west. The pathway into the churchyard leads in from the western end, direct from the road, passing through a lych gate and avenue of Yew trees to the church. The enclosed churchyard is relatively level.
- 2.1.4 The site lies on an outcrop of limestone bedrock, elevated above the surrounding shales and mudstones to the northeast, east and south (British Geological Survey information).

2.2 Archaeological Background

- 2.2.1 The church of St David's, Meidrim (PRN 3972, NGR SN 28910 20864) is a medium sized church, which contains around 75% of pre 19th-century core fabric within its build.
- 2.2.2 The church is thought to have been built within an earlier Iron Age enclosure, as defined by the roughly oval churchyard enclosure on top of the promontory (PRN 3973). This theory is based on the topographic location of the church, and the presence of a larger bank around the churchyard close to the lych gate.,
- 2.2.3 It is considered very likely that the church has a pre-conquest (pre-c.1100) foundation due to its geographical location and its Celtic dedication (PRN 10196; Ludlow, 2000, p4).
- 2.2.4 The present day church consists of a "a 3-bayed chancel, a 4-bayed nave, single bayed north and south transepts, a south porch, and a single-bayed vestry north of the chancel. Construction is in mixed local rubble. There are some medieval openings but dressings are mainly from 1889, with extensive, good later 20th century re-pointing; the interior is plastered. Roofs are slated gables; the vestry has a slated lean-to roof" (Ludlow, 2000, p2).
- 2.2.5 It is considered likely that the oldest part of the church lies in the northern transept of the church, where a set of stairs is present leading up to an area which is no longer accessible (photo 1), but may have been to a leper's squint or to a rood screen (Rev. J Gainer, 2007). During the watching brief, the stair well was accessed and it could be seen that a window formerly lit the stairwell on its eastern side (now blocked by the vestry; photo 2). On the exterior of the church, a projecting lump of masonry is visible in the area of the stairwell, potentially indicating a former raised area of the church, now mostly covered by more recent alterations and roof lines (photo3). The presence of the later vestry on the northern side of the church and the rebuilding of the rooflines on the transept and vestry, has obscured much of the evidence of what this stairwell would have accessed.
- 2.2.6 The floor of the chancel which is being replaced as part of the current works, is thought to date from the later 19th or early 20th century.

Repairs to the floor were undertaken in the early 20th century following root disturbance which comprised concrete being poured into the void left by the removal of the tree root.

3. WATCHING BRIEF METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

3.1 Methodology

- 3.1.1 The watching brief methodology consisted of two site visits made to monitor the excavation within the chancel on the 3rd and 4th of November 2009. The removal of the chancel floor and the construction of the replacement was undertaken by hand.
- 3.1.2 The holes for the earthing rods were excavated to the west of the church by machine. Two holes had previously been opened for the earthing rods, but these were of insufficient size and needed to be enlarged. The new holes were excavated without an archaeologist being present, as it was considered unlikely that any remains, other than human bone from earlier burials, would be disturbed by the works (should anything of interest have been revealed, the archaeologist would have been called in).

3.2 Results of the Watching Brief

- 3.2.1 The tiled floor within the chancel had been removed prior to archaeological attendance (photo 4). The tiles were bedded onto a layer of concrete which ran from the altar to the east, to the nave floor to the west, and between the south wall of the church and the vestry wall to the north.
- 3.2.2 A small test pit was excavated under archaeological supervision, through the concrete layer and underlying material, down to the required depth for the construction of the new floor (c.0.25m below the existing floor level). The new floor layer, was to comprise c.0.10m of lime mortar laid over c.0.15m of leveling material.
- 3.2.3 The test pit (photo 5) indicated that the existing floor comprised a shallow depth of concrete surface (c.0.06m), onto which the tiled floor was laid. Below this was a c.0.15 – 0.20m depth of rubble used as leveling material. A compact mortar and clay layer was revealed across the base of the test pit, which was partially cut through by the excavation. This layer was c.0.02m thick, of mostly light brown colour and is presumed to represent an earlier floor surface. Beneath this layer was a dark brown soil containing small stones and occasional fragments of bone. Excavations did not continue below this level.
- 3.2.4 Following confirmation that no archaeologically significant deposits were present within the 0.25m depth required for the new floor surface, the remainder of the concrete and rubble hardcore was removed down to the top of the compact mortar and clay layer. Archaeological supervision continued during the majority of this exercise, to ensure that there were no changes in the underlying floor depths.
- 3.2.5 During removal of the concrete layer, a patch of deeper and harder concrete was noted, which is thought to represent the 20th century repair undertaken following disturbance to the floor from a tree root.
- 3.2.6 Following removal of the concrete and rubble from the entire area of the chancel, the earlier clay and mortar floor was found to be present across almost the entire area of the floor (fig. 3) except in one or two places where it had been previously disturbed.
- 3.2.7 A number of slate slabs were present set within the layer. These were located fairly randomly and did not appear to be structural or represent flooring (photo 8).
- 3.2.8 A brick lined pit was also present cutting through the floor. This was a former heating duct associated with an earlier heating system within the church (photo 9).

- 3.2.9 The clay and mortar floor was not clearly present along the inside of the southern wall of the chancel (photo 10). It is unclear if it had been worn away in this area, or had been truncated through by a later feature. In this area a small void opened up during the works, within which a number of fragments of human bone were noted, including a number of finger bones and a possible coffin nail. It is presumed a burial was present in the area adjacent to the southern wall, lying beneath the clay and mortar floor. The burial was not investigated further, and the void was carefully filled to prevent further collapse.
- 3.2.10 The clay and mortar floor had also been disturbed by the same root action that damaged the later tiled floor, and which was repaired in the 20th century by a thicker layer of concrete (photo 11).
- 3.2.11 A patch of lime mortar adjacent to a number of glass shards was noted in the northwestern corner of the chancel floor lying on the mortar floor beneath the rubble layer. It is presumed this debris originated when the north wall of the chancel was altered and the vestry added.
- 3.2.12 Several artefacts were recovered from the rubble layer, including later 20th century coins, 19th century pottery, a few animal bones, iron objects and some disarticulated human bone (small fragments including ribs, spine and a possible piece of pelvis). A single small square piece of limestone measuring approximately 2cm x 2cm and 1.5cm thick, was also recovered from this layer. The stone has the appearance of a Roman tessera (small squares of stone used to form a mosaic floor) and did have the remnants of mortar on some of its edges. However, such finds are difficult to date with certainty and no other artefacts of Roman date were recovered. The size of the tessera would be one that was used in a simple tessellated pavement as opposed to an intricate pattern or one used to create a picture.
- 3.2.13 Following the complete removal of the flooring, and after recording of the exposed surface (photo 12), leveling material was laid for the new floor. This comprised small stone aggregate, laid by hand before the new lime mortar floor was laid over the top.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The archaeological watching brief at St. David's Church, Meidrim, Carmarthenshire was undertaken during renovation works including the removal of the existing concrete and floor and rubble within the chancel area, prior to its replacement with a new lime mortar floor.
- 4.2 The floor to be removed comprised a tiled surface laid upon concrete, which was in turn laid upon a layer of mostly limestone rubble containing occasional ceramic fragments, glass, metal and fragments of human bone. A single possible tessera was also recovered from the rubble layer, although it is unclear from where it may have originated. It is possible that it is a fragment of limestone that was created during construction of the church or during one of its many additions or alterations.
- 4.3 Beneath the rubble layer a clay and mortar floor was revealed, representing an earlier floor to the chancel. The date of this floor is uncertain, as no dateable finds were recovered. The floor is considered to be of late medieval or post-medieval date, but such a floor could be earlier. This floor extended across the entire footprint of the chancel, truncated by a modern heating duct and by root disturbance.
- 4.4 A number of slate slabs were present on the floor surface, although not enough to suggest an earlier floor surface. A gap in the floor was present along the southern wall of the chancel, which may indicate either a cut feature or just an area where it had worn out. Fragments of human bone were noted in this area beneath the floor, and within a small test pit excavated at the beginning of the works. This suggests that burials are present beneath the chancel floor, although whether these were originally within the church, or represent earlier burials that were built over during construction of the chancel, is uncertain. A possible coffin nail was found within a void adjacent to the south wall of the chancel where a number of finger bones were recovered.
- 4.5 During renovation works a new roof was placed on the church, and new lightning conductors were installed. To earth the lightning conductors two pits were excavated to the west of the church within the graveyard. Human remains were revealed by the contractors during the excavation of the pits. These remains, and all other fragments of human bone recovered during the watching brief within the chancel were subsequently reburied by the vicar.
- 4.6 The archaeological watching brief has indicated the presence of earlier remains within the church, providing evidence for a number of phases of construction and development. The stairwell on the north side of the church, on the eastern side of the vestry indicates that a higher level was previously accessible within the church, though whether a tower, leper squint or other feature is uncertain. The clay and mortar floor revealed within the chancel indicates that a number of floors have been used in the church. It is possible that other floors may have been laid above the clay and mortar floor, although any evidence has been removed during construction of the later floor. Burials beneath the clay and mortar floor may predate the construction of the chancel, or may have been inserted through the floor layer at a later date.(perhaps indicating the reverential status of the individuals).

5. SOURCES

Gainer, Rev. J., *A Short Guide to St. David's Church, Meidrim*, December 2007

Ludlow, 2000. *Cadw: Welsh Historic Churches 'Carmarthenshire Churches'*.
Cambria Archaeology.

Maps

Ordnance Survey 1889 1:10560 Carmarthenshire Sheet XXXXV SW.

Ordnance Survey 1906 1:10560 Carmarthenshire Sheet XXXXV SW.

Ordnance Survey 2002 1:50000. Cardigan and Mynydd Preselli

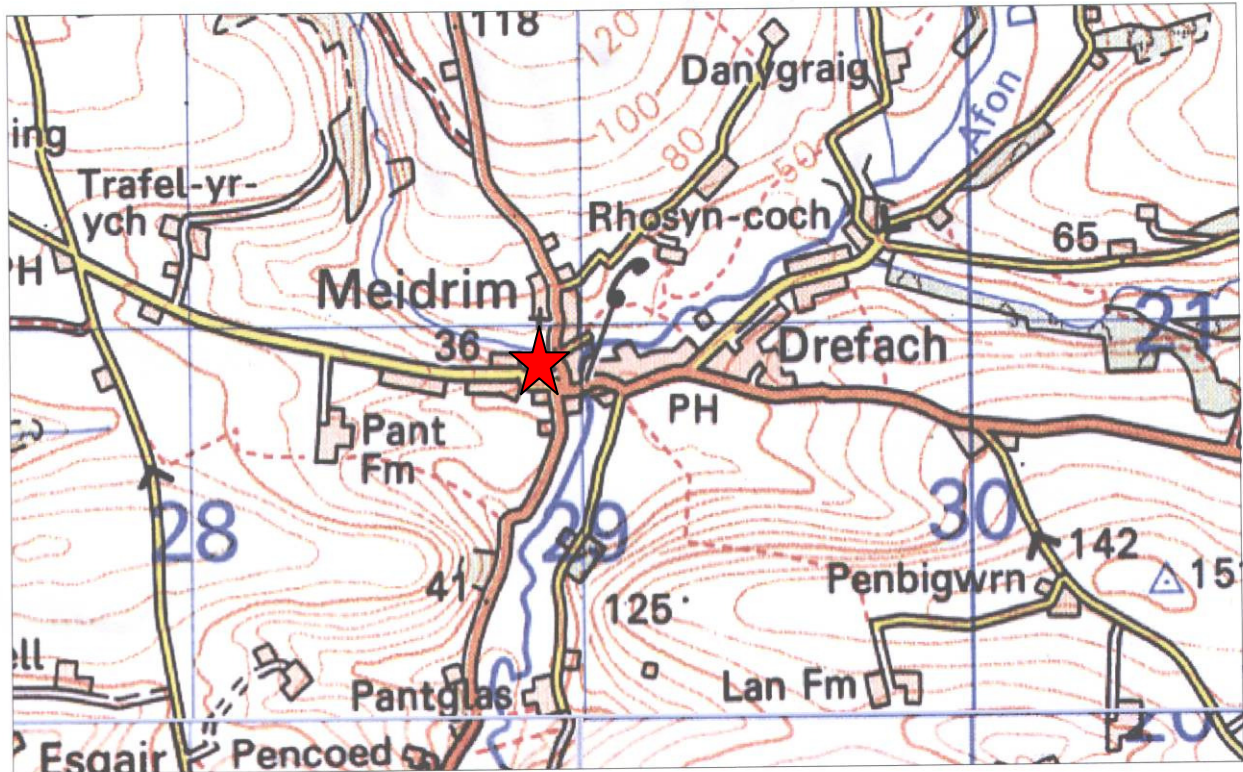


Figure 1: Location map, based on the Ordnance Survey.

Reproduced from the 1995 Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 scale Landranger Map with the permission of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright Cambria Archaeology, The Shire Hall, Carmarthen Street, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire SA19 6AF. Licence No AL51842A

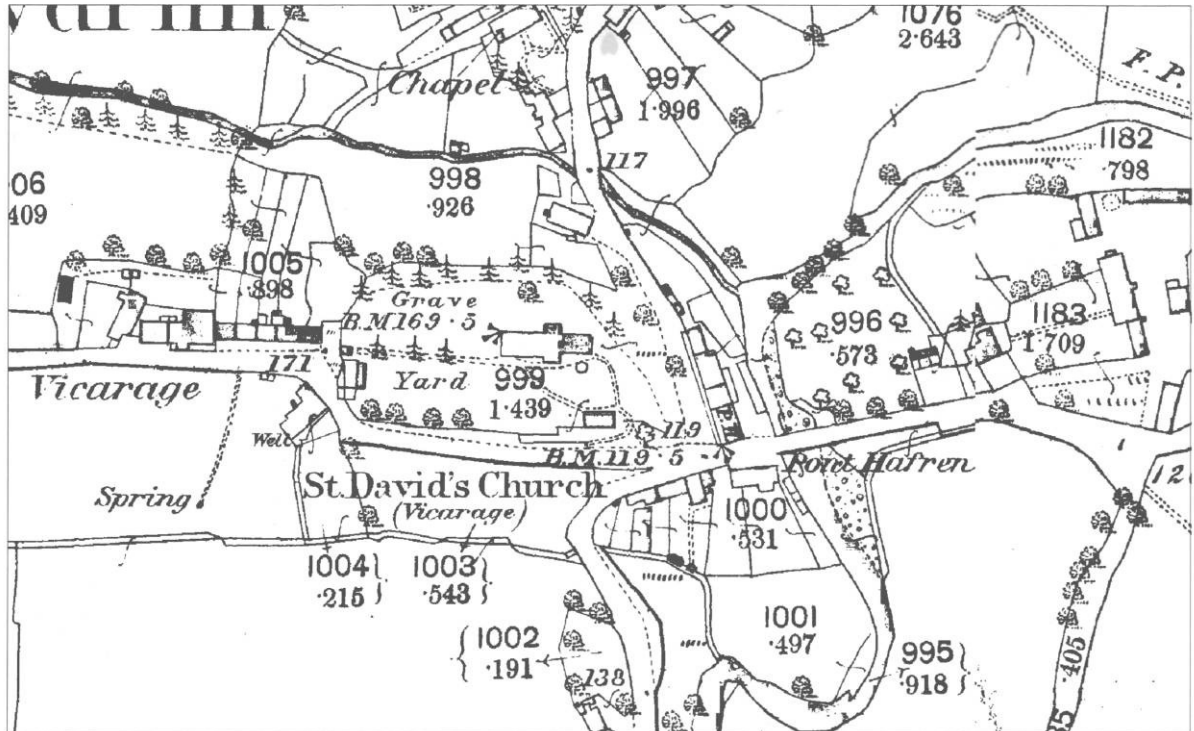


Figure 2: 1st edition Os map showing location of church within village.

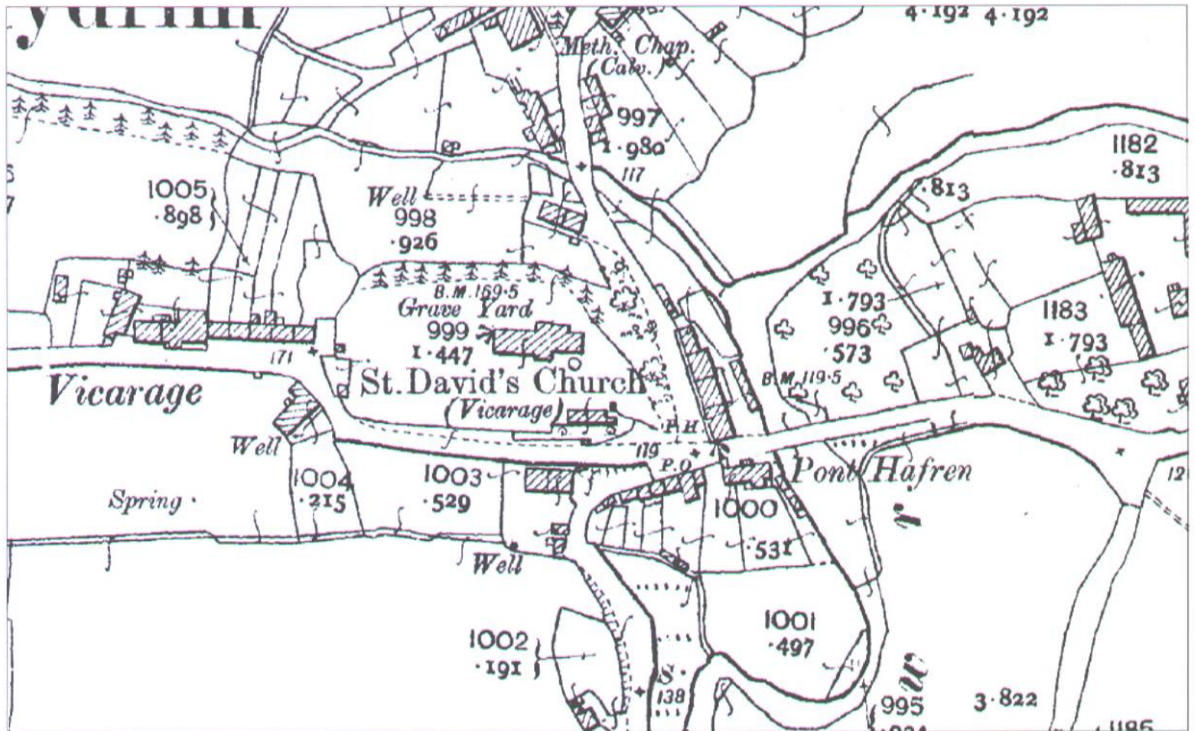


Figure 3: Second edition OS map showing location of church within village.

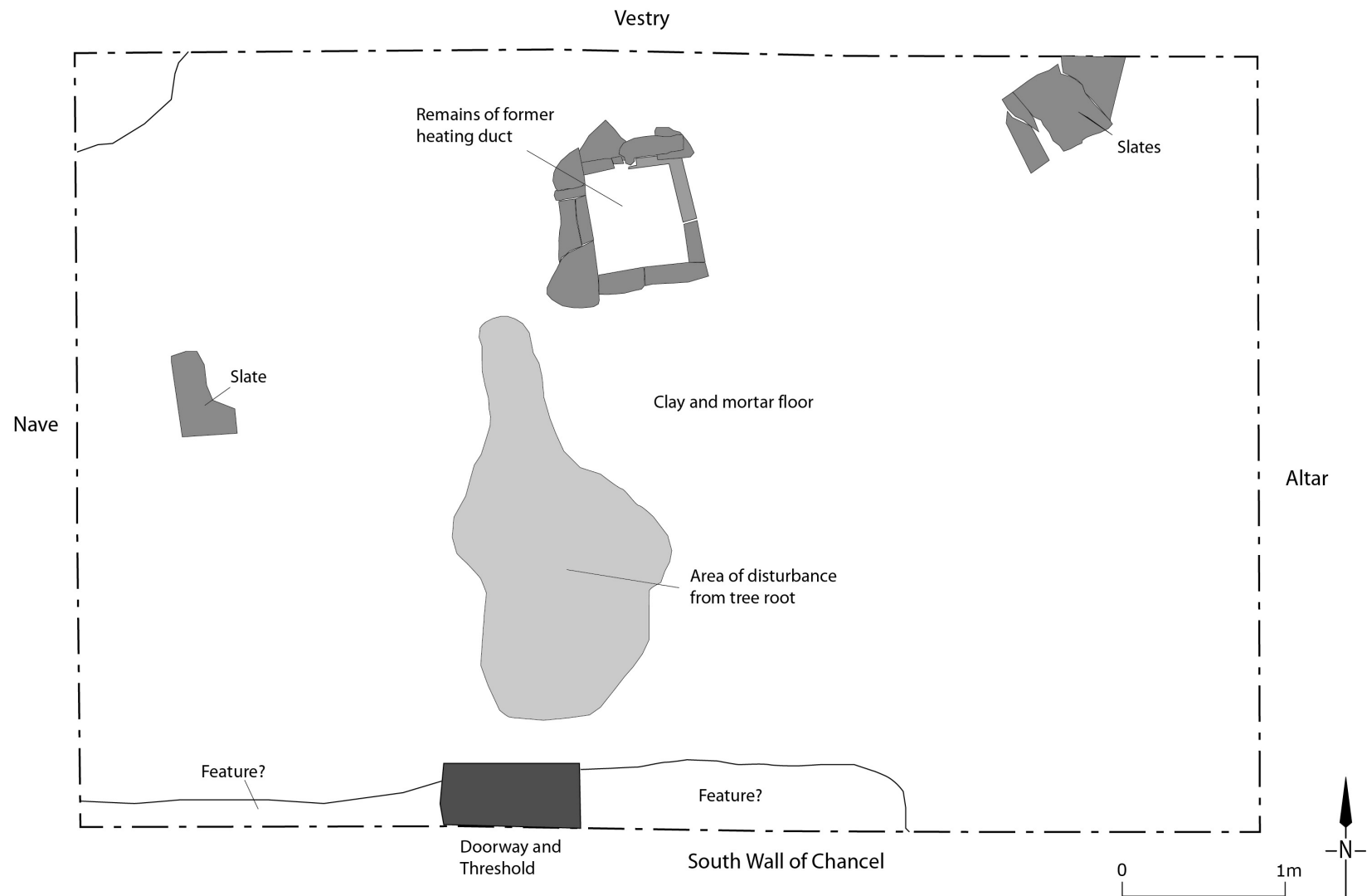


Figure 4: Plan of Chancel Floor following removal of concrete floor and rubble



Photo 1: Former stairwell adjacent to and predating vestry



Photo 2: Window within stairwell wall, now blocked by vestry



Photo 3: Stub of wall in area above stairwell, on side of north transept, with the catslide roof of the vestry visible in foreground of photo



Photo 4: Chancel floor following removal of tiled floor



Photo 5: Test pit excavated through chancel floor



Photo 6: Eastern half of chancel floor following removal of concrete and rubble levelling



Photo 7: Western half of chancel floor following removal of concrete and rubble levelling



Photo 8: Slate slabs lying on or within clay and mortar floor



Photo 9: Modern heating duct pit cut through earlier clay and mortar floor



Photo 10: Area along southern wall, where clay and mortar floor was absent



Photo 11: Line of root damage through clay and mortar floor, which caused damage during 20th century to tiled floor above



Photo 12: Overall view facing west of chancel following excavation of concrete floor and rubble, immediately prior to backfilling with material for new flooring

Period	Approximate Date
Palaeolithic	c.225,000 BC – 10,000 BC
Mesolithic	c.10,000 BC – c.3500 BC
Neolithic	c.3500 BC – c.2000 BC
Bronze Age	c.2000 BC – c.600 BC
Iron Age	c.600 BC – 43 AD
Roman	43 AD – 410 AD
Early Medieval	410 AD - 1066
Medieval	1066 - 1485
Post Medieval	1485 – c.1900
Modern	c.1900 onwards

Table 1: Archaeological and Historical Timeline for the area, as defined by the Dyfed Archaeological Trust Historic Environment Record.

ST. DAVID'S CHURCH, MEIDRIM, CARMARTHENSHIRE (SN 2891 2086) ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

RHIF YR ADRODDIAD / REPORT NO. 2009/84
RHIF Y PROSIECT / PROJECT RECORD NO. 98516

Chwefror 2010
February 2010

Paratowyd yr adroddiad hwn gan /
This report has been prepared by: **James Meek**

Swydd / Position: **Head of Field Services**

Llofnod / Signature Dyddiad / Date

Mae'r adroddiad hwn wedi ei gael yn gywir a derbyn sêl bendith /
This report has been checked and approved by: **Duncan Schlee**

ar ran Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf. /
on behalf of Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Swydd / Position: **Project Manager**

Llofnod / Signature Dyddiad / Date

*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*