

Archaeology Wales

St Dogmaels Abbey, Pembrokeshire

Archaeological Evaluation and Excavation



By
Dr Amelia Pannett MIfA

Report No. 1202



Archaeology Wales Limited,
Rhos Helyg, Cwm Belan,
Llanidloes, Powys SY18 6QF
Tel: +44 (0) 1686 440371
E-mail: admin@arch-wales.co.uk

Archaeology Wales

St Dogmaels Abbey, Pembrokeshire

Archaeological Evaluation and Excavation

Prepared For: Cadw

Edited by: Mark Houlston

Signed: *Mark Houlston*

Position: MD

Date: 4/2/2014

Authorised by: Mark Houlston

Signed: *Mark Houlston*

Position: MD

Date: 19/2/2014

By
Dr Amelia Pannett MIFA

Report No. 1193

January 2014



Archaeology Wales Limited,
Rhos Helyg, Cwm Belan,
Llanidloes, Powys SY18 6QF
Tel: +44 (0) 1686 440371
E-mail: admin@arch-wales.co.uk

Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Site Description	2
2.1 Location, Geology and Topography	2
2.2 Historical Background	2
3. Results of the Evaluation	3
4. Excavation Results	4
5. Finds	6
6. Standing Building recording of Nave Walls	6
7. Discussion and Interpretation	6
8. Bibliography and Sources	8

Appendix 1	Context Register
------------	------------------

List of Illustrations

Fig. 1	Location of Site
Fig. 2	Plan of the Abbey showing the location of the evaluation and excavation works
Fig. 3	Plan of the Nave, Choir, Presbytery and North Transept showing the layout of the medieval and post-medieval walls
Fig. 4	1792 watercolour of the North Transept at St Dogmaels showing the original medieval wall
Fig. 5	Location and overview of evaluation trench
Fig. 6	Post-ex view of evaluation trench
Fig. 7	Plan of evaluation trench
Fig. 8	Section of southern end of evaluation trench showing medieval wall
Fig. 9	Location and overview of excavation trench
Fig. 10	Post-excavation plan of excavation trench

- Fig. 11 In situ burial (124) and the associated dentures
- Fig. 12 Brick lined grave at the base of grave [115]
- Fig. 13 Plaster adhering to the inner face of wall {107}
- Fig. 14 Location of burial (117) cut into the top of the medieval wall and detail in plan
- Fig. 15 Burial (117) in situ
- Fig. 16 Medieval floor tiles in situ in the corner of the nave
- Fig. 17 Walls at the western end of the working area
- Fig. 18 South-facing wall elevations

Copyright Notice:

Archaeology Wales Ltd. retain copyright of this report under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, and have granted a licence to Cadw to use and reproduce the material contained within.

The Ordnance Survey has granted Archaeology Wales Ltd a Copyright Licence (No. 100055111) to reproduce map information; Copyright remains otherwise with the Ordnance Survey.

To the north of the diagonal wall the ground is approximately 2m higher than the medieval floor of the Priory Church, the result of landscaping within the churchyard. Three graves (one a double burial) were recorded on the parish register within the evaluation and excavation area:

Grave No.	Name of Deceased	Date of Burial
136	John Lewis	1843
136	Elizabeth Lewis	1848
137	Thomas Lewis	1822
139	Unknown	Unknown

Consequently an Exhumation Licence was acquired for the lifting of any burials that needed to be removed to facilitate the reconstruction work (licence number 13-0188). An arrangement was made with the Area Dean, acting Vicar for Thomas the Apostle Church, to rebury any exhumed remains within the excavation trench after the completion of the reconstruction works.

The evaluation and excavation work was carried out in August and October 2013 by Jerry Bond and Simon Reames. The project was managed by Dr Amelia Pannett. The reburial of the human remains was carried out on the 17th December 2013, by the Area Dean. The bones were laid at the base of the excavation trench prior to its backfilling, ensuring that they were located as close as possible to their original resting place.

2. Site Description

2.1 Location, Geology and Topography

The site is located at the southern end of the modern town of St Dogmaels, 300m south-west of the River Teifi. The site lies on the northern side of the medieval abbey buildings, within the graveyard of the modern parish church (Thomas the Apostle). The abbey and parish church lie at the base of a low rounded hill, on an east-facing slope, at 21m AOD. The underlying geology is Ordovician sedimentary sandstone/mudstone of the Dinas Island formation.

2.2 Historical Background

St Dogmaels Abbey is thought to have originated as a *clas* Church, or pre-Norman monastery, and may have been in existence as early as the sixth century BC. The Welsh Chronicles record that St Dogmaels Church at Llandudoch was one of several monastic Churches along the Welsh coast attacked by Vikings in AD 988, indicating that it was a wealthy and established monastery. A number of early Christian carved stones have been found within the Abbey precinct and below the Norman buildings, including one found below the Chapter House wall during excavations in 1949. The majority are of eighth or ninth century AD date and are thought to represent both grave markers and boundary stones.

The medieval Abbey of St Dogmaels was founded in the 1110s by Robert fitz Martin, the Norman Lord of Cemais. Initially, in 1113, he founded a priory with 13 monks and a Prior brought from the Abbey of Tiron in France. In 1118 he returned to France and brought a further 13 monks back to St Dogmaels and formally established the monastery as a daughter house of the Abbey of Tiron. In the early years of the Abbey's foundation construction work was concentrated on building a small church (the choir, part of the presbytery and an apsidal chapel) and accommodation areas (the western range) for the monks and it was only in the thirteenth century that the full extent of the nave and presbytery were built and the choir changed to its extant form. Building work

disturbed during the landscaping of the graveyard or the construction of the lined grave feature. It is probably post-medieval in date and was left in place in the base of the trench.

The medieval Nave wall {107} was identified 0.8m below the ground on the southern side of the trench (figs. 6, 7 and 8). It was only partly exposed but appears to have been constructed from rectangular stone blocks of varying size, bonded with a pale sandy brown mortar. It was exposed to a height of 0.4m, but the base was not revealed in the trench. The wall was substantial, 0.9m wide where visible in the section. The wall appeared to have been truncated by later activity on the site and was then buried under the landscaping deposit (102). The walls of the possible lined grave extended below the exposed section of medieval abbey walling, and it was considered that the alignment of the grave and the medieval wall meant that the medieval wall could be further truncated by any east/west orientated wall on the southern side of the grave structure.

4. Excavation Results

Following the evaluation, and the identification of the original Nave wall, an excavation was carried out to remove and investigate all the made ground deposits within the working area required to rebuild the graveyard wall. It was anticipated that burials would be encountered within this area, and consequently an Exhumation licence was issued by the Ministry of Justice on the 8th October 2013 (licence number 13-0188). The excavation was carried out over 16 days, between the 7th and 22nd October 2013.

An area measuring 6m (east/west) by 5m (north/south) was excavated (figs. 9 and 10), with the southern side of the trench abutting the original graveyard wall. The excavation area encompassed the area previously investigated during the evaluation, which had been left open. The remainder of the trench was covered by turf which overlay a loose dark grey silty clay topsoil (100), up to 0.1m deep. Below the topsoil, the landscaping deposit identified within the evaluation trench was revealed. This comprised a loose dark brown silty clay, (101) same as (102), with red clay inclusions and numerous stones, and comprises a mix of topsoil and natural glacial deposits laid down to raise the level of the graveyard, probably in the early nineteenth century. Within this deposit a substantial assemblage of finds was recovered, including animal bone, pottery, masonry rubble, slate fragments, brick fragments, tile fragments, metalwork and large quantities of fragmented disarticulated human bone.

The pottery from context (101) is all post-medieval in date, including fragments of green and brown glazed earthenwares, white earthenwares, modern stonewares and blue and white transfer printed china. The tile fragments are similar to the in situ floor tiles within the nave of the abbey church and are likely to have derived from this building or elsewhere within the abbey. None of the tile fragments were decorated and all were abraded. The masonry rubble had lime mortar adhering to it in places and is clearly derived from a building. This and the slate fragments could originate from the abbey buildings or from the original parish church that was built alongside the remains of the medieval church in the early eighteenth century (Hilling 2000). The fragments of human bone are likely to have become incorporated into the mixed ground deposit as a result of the multiple phases of burial that have occurred within the graveyard. Indeed, at least one of the pieces of metalwork recovered from the deposit is a coffin handle, indicating that graves had been disturbed in this part of the graveyard, probably as a result of later burials.

nails, and three metal coffin handles were also recovered. The body is thought to be that of Thomas Lewis who was buried in this location in 1822, according to the plan of the graveyard supplied by the Church Warden. The remains were lifted and carefully stored prior to reburial.

In the triangular shaped area between the two medieval walls and the line of the diagonal graveyard wall a layer of in situ medieval floor tiles was found below the deposit of made ground (fig. 16). These would have lain inside the nave of the medieval church. The tiles were square, measuring 0.2m by 0.2m and had green glaze on their upper surface. They were set in a diamond pattern, similar to that seen elsewhere in the church. The tiles were set in a layer of lime mortar and were well preserved. A noticeable depression in the centre of the tiled area, orientated east/west, could mark the location of a burial, although there was nothing to confirm this on the surface. The tiles were left in situ, protected from the building work, and will hopefully be preserved.

5. Finds

Finds recovered during the evaluation and excavation comprised:

Artefact type	Quantity
Post-medieval pottery (sherds)	53
Building Rubble	2.6kg
Medieval tile fragments	16
Animal bone	722g
Iron coffin handles	6
Iron coffin nails	10+
Vulcanite Dentures	1
Glass fragments	4
Unidentified metalwork	305g

The human bone was not quantified as it was stored with the local undertaker prior to reburial and so was not subject to post-excavation assessment.

6. Standing Building Recording of Nave Walls

A photographic survey was undertaken on the the sections of medieval wall that were to be rebuilt. This included the sections of wall {107} that were revealed during the excavation, as well as adjacent sections of extant medieval wall that needed to be reduced in height in order to stabilise them. The photographs and the subsequent scaled plans (digitised from the photographs) are presented in figures 17 and 18.

7. Discussion and Interpretation

The evaluation and excavation have revealed that the section of the graveyard immediately to the north of the post-medieval graveyard wall had been landscaped, probably in the early nineteenth century, with the deposition of large quantities of mixed soil, demolition material and probably disturbed grave contents. It is considered likely that the medieval abbey walls were reduced in height and buried at this time, and the diagonal graveyard wall built. There is no record of the location of the graveyard associated with the abbey, however, the quantity of disturbed human remains identified within the landscaping deposit suggests that it could have

when Thomas Lewis was buried on the top of the truncated wall, the surviving walls on the north side of the nave were reduced and buried below a depth of soil, rubble, building debris, disturbed grave contents and general household waste. The stone and rubble wall that defined the southern side of the graveyard is likely to have been built at the same time. The construction of the wall and the deposition of the soil and other materials buried part of the medieval floor of the abbey. The tiles on the floor survive in remarkably good condition and it is likely that the original medieval floor had initially been buried soon after the buildings were abandoned. The reason for the deposition of large quantities of material and the raising of the ground level within the graveyard is not fully understood, although it is probable that the intention was to cover an earlier, full, graveyard (perhaps associated with the abbey) with sufficient depth of soil to allow new burials to be interred on top of earlier graves. This was not confirmed during the excavation, although the quantities of disarticulated, fragmented, human bone found within the depth of soil demonstrates that significant disturbance of graves had occurred prior to the landscaping of the graveyard.

The medieval walls revealed during the evaluation and excavation were considered to be substantial enough to be used as foundations for a modern wall built along the line of the original abbey structure.

The location of the archive is yet to be determined, although the paper archive will be deposited with RCHAMW. The final location of the finds will be conveyed to the HER.

8. Bibliography and Sources

Hilling, J. B. 2000. *Cilgerran Castles, St Dogmaels Abbey and Pentre Ifan burial chamber*. Cardiff: Cadw

Sources Consulted:

1889 Ordnance Survey 1st Edition County Series map (Promap)

		handles (3)	
119	Rubble/make up N of east section of abbey wall 107	None	19 th century
120	South wall of grave setting 115	None	19 th century
121	Fill/make up of 112	One human skull fragment	19 th century
122	Tile floor within abbey	Medieval tiles	Medieval
123	Crypt setting within 115, 2x large slate slabs mortared on bricks	None	19 th century
124	Skeleton within 115 on top of 123	Human bone	19 th century
125	Demolished modern wall	None	Modern

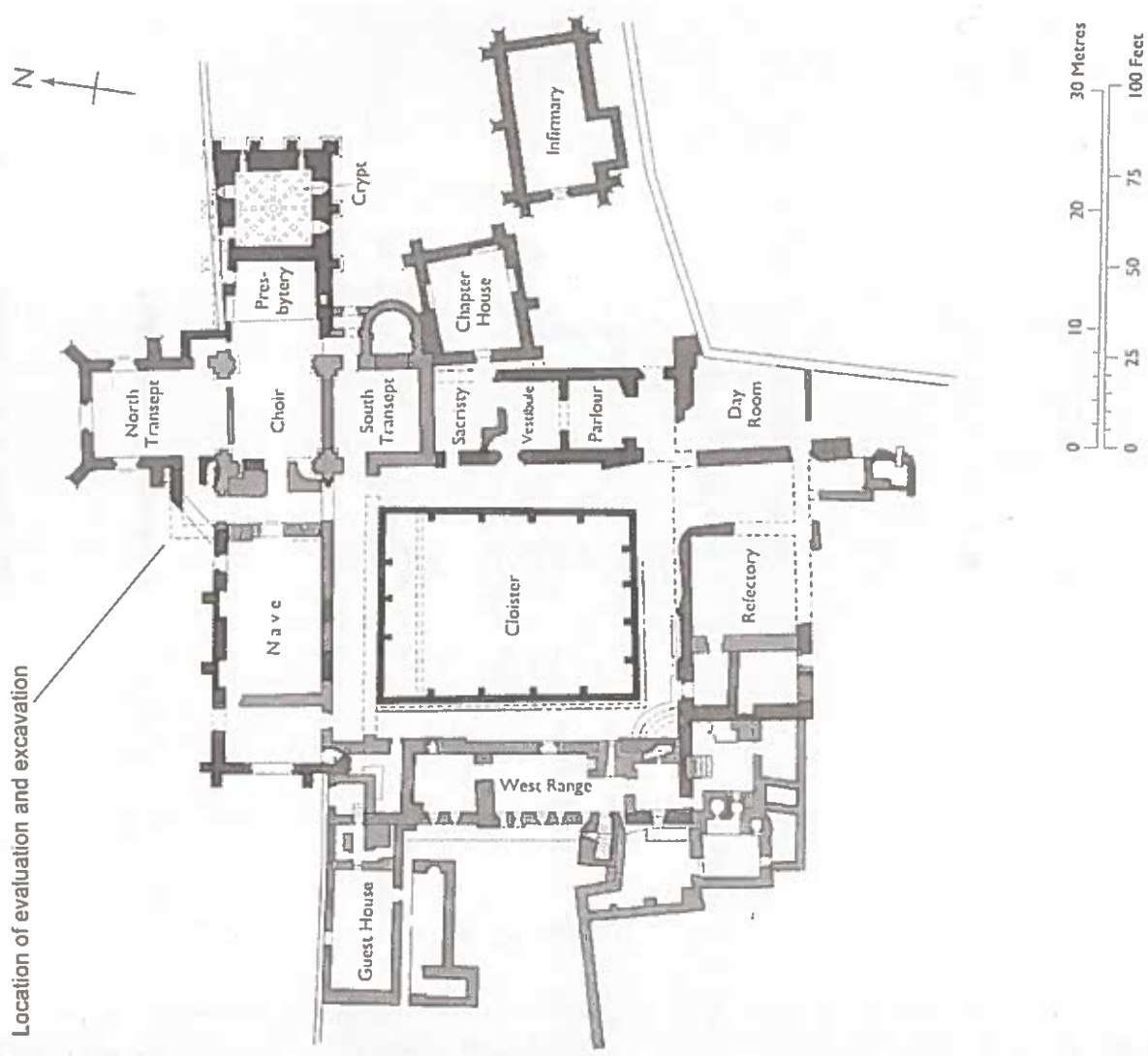


Fig. 2
Plan of the Abbey
showing the
location of the
evaluation and
excavation works

Original medieval wall



Fig. 4
1792 watercolour of
the north transept
at St Dogmaels
showing the original
medieval wall

(c) NLW



Fig. 6
Post-ex view of
evaluation trench

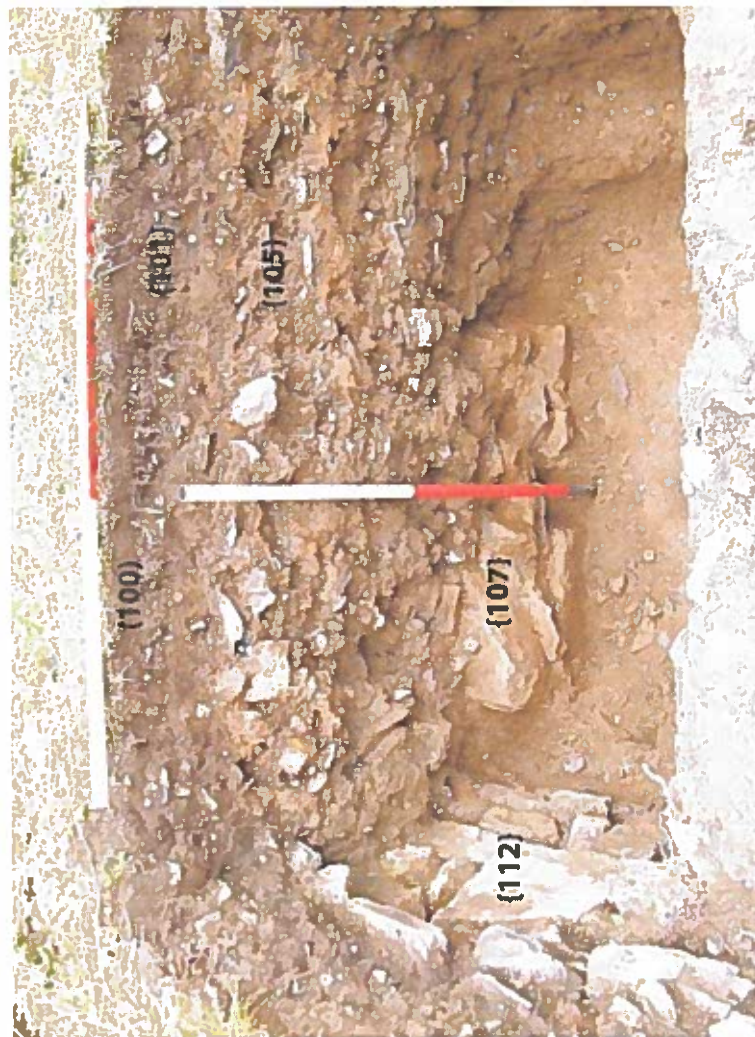
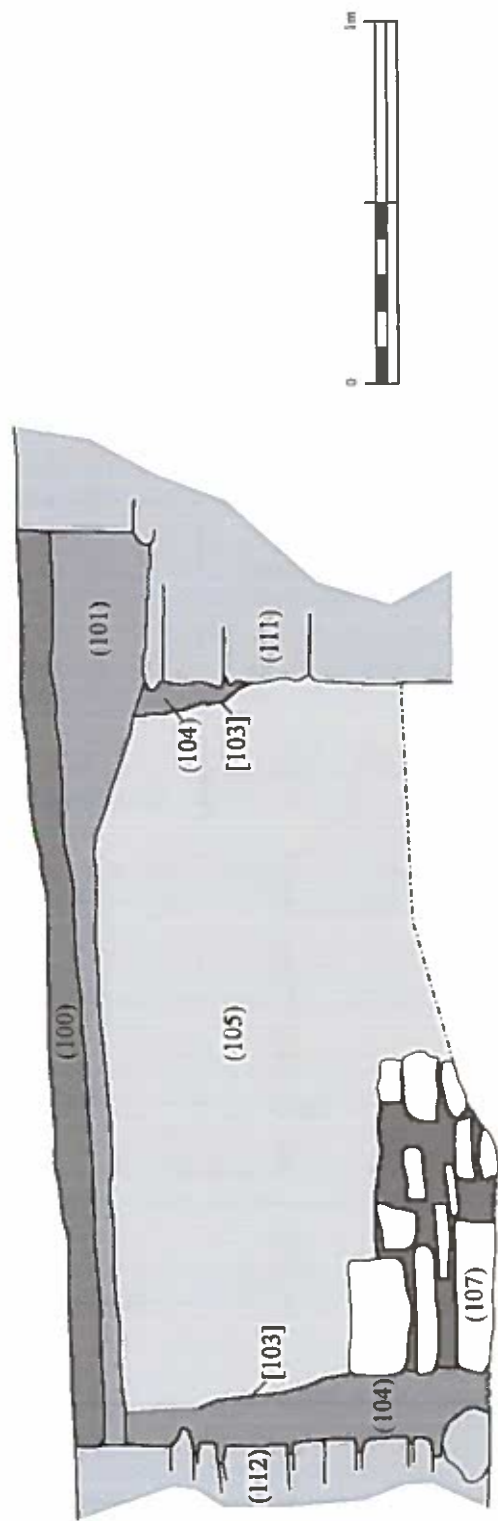


Fig. 8
Section of southern
end of evaluation
trench showing
medieval wall {107}

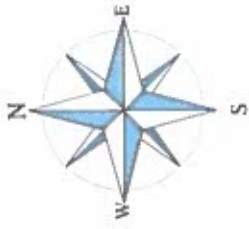


Fig. 10
Post-excavation plan
of excavation trench

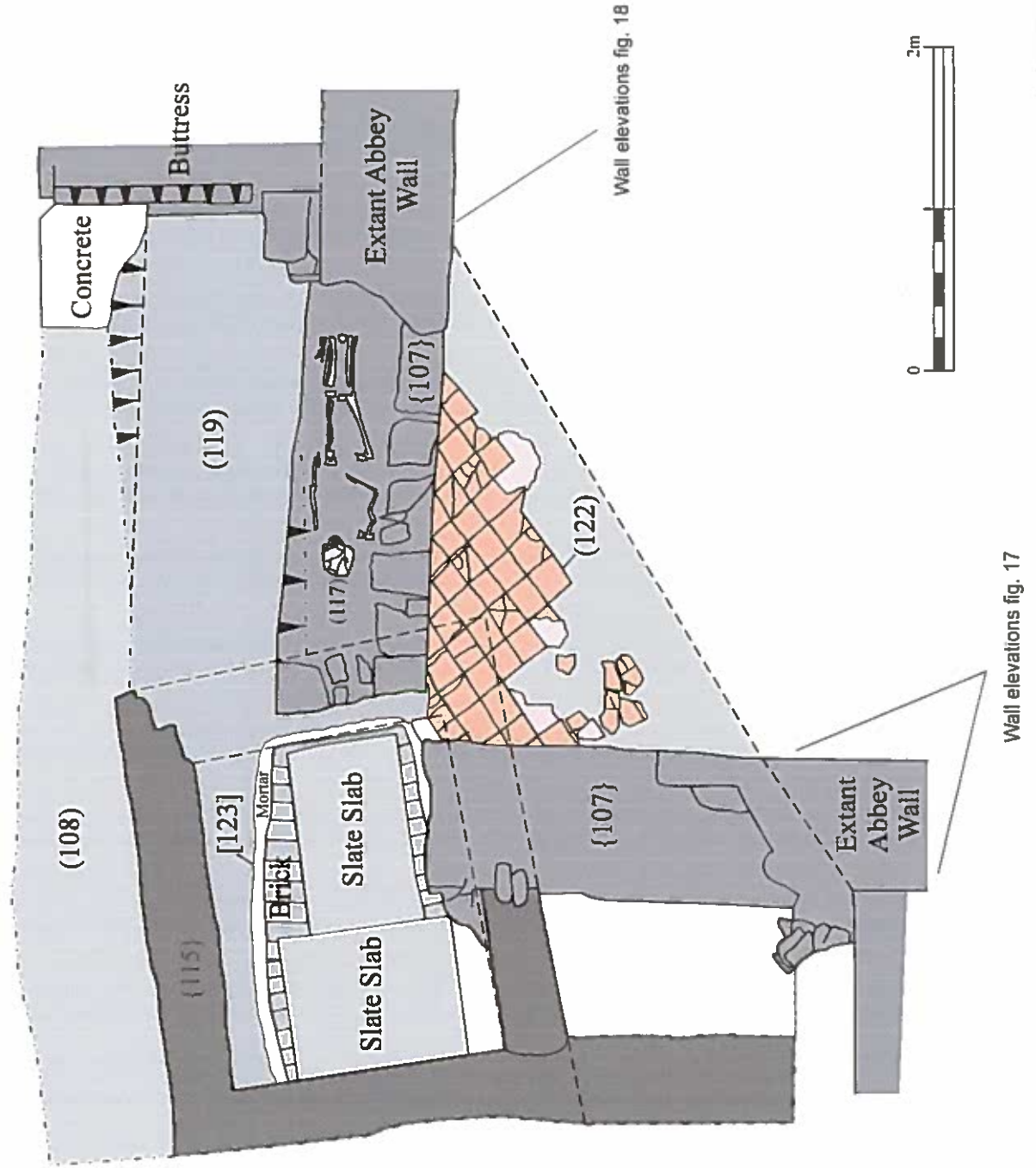




Fig. 12
Brick lined grave
at the base of grave
{115}

Looking west

Scale = 1m and 2m

Fig. 14
Location of burial
(117) cut into the top
of the medieval wall
and detail in plan

Looking east

Scale = 2m

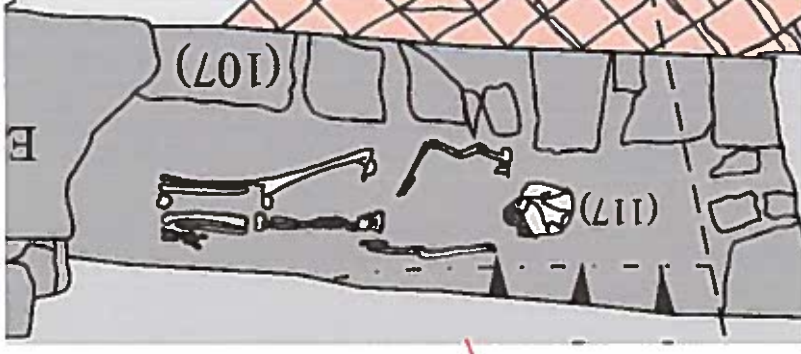




Fig. 16
Medieval floor tiles
in situ in the corner
of the nave

Looking north-west

Scale = 1m and 2m



Fig. 18
South-facing wall
elevations

