

# LLANBABO CHURCH, ANGLESEY

## WATCHING BRIEF

Report No. 225

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

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## WATCHING BRIEF (G1406)

prepared for Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments

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## **LLANBABO CHURCH, ANGLESEY - WATCHING BRIEF (G1406)**

### **Introduction**

As part of ongoing refurbishment works to St. Pabo's Church, Llanbabo (SH37808678) funded by the Historic Buildings Council, it was proposed that two drainage trenches be dug immediately outside the church and that damp plaster be removed from the interior of the north wall. It was known that numerous alterations to the church had occurred since the 12th century and it was thought probable that the structure had changed from a two-cell building with separate nave and chancel to its present single-cell form sometime in the 14th century, possibly at the same time as the rebuilding of the present east wall. Consequently, a watching brief was proposed and Gwynedd Archaeological Trust was contracted by Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments to carry out the work.

### **Historical Background**

In its present form, St Pabo's Church is of rectangular plan with a continuous nave and chancel set within a curvilinear churchyard, indicating a possible Celtic foundation. Its position, overlooking what would have been extensive marshland now occupied by the reservoir of Llyn Alaw, is reflected in a number of Anglesey churches, including the church of St Mary on the north side of Llyn Alaw and the church of Bodwrog which overlooks Cors Bodwrog. The earliest parts of the church date from the 12th century and include the west wall and the greater part of the north and south walls. A window in the south wall is of this date as are the fragments of chevron ornament reset above the modernised south doorway. The east wall appears to have been rebuilt in the 14th century and has a window of that date with a design which also appears at Rhodogeidio, Llandrygan and Tregaian.

The building was restored by Harold Hughes between 1906 and 1910, during which the church was re-roofed and parts of the walling were rebuilt. According to Hughes, the steep pitch of the roof had previously been lowered by the raising of the side walls, although it was not known when this occurred. He also noted indications of a cross wall about 25 feet (7.62m) from the west end of the church which he described as possibly the foundations of a former east wall or of a cross screen. However, Hughes believed the rectangular plan of the church to be typical of a small Anglesey church, in contrast with the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales who describe the normal plan of a lesser parish church as "a nave separated by a round arch from a rather narrower square chancel" (RCAHMW 1937).

The 14th century monument to St. Pabo, said to have been dug up from the graveyard in the second half of the 17th century, is now set upright against the north wall of the nave. The stone is the work of the sculptor responsible for the monuments to St. Iestyn, at Llaniestyn and Eva, at Bangor Cathedral, both of which are thought to have been presented by Gruffydd ap Gwilym around 1380. Gruffydd ap Gwilym, a descendant of Ednyfed Fychan, was the son of Eva and had inherited land in Llaniestyn from his uncle; it has been suggested that the Pabo Stone was also presented by him, although this would be difficult to confirm (Gresham 1968).

### **Aims and Methods**

The aims of the project were to record any information relating to the original layout of the church and churchyard visible in the two drainage trenches and to record the stonework exposed by the removal of damp plaster from the interior of the north wall.

The first trench was located on the north side of the church, running along the length of the building from west to east and continuing beyond the east end for 7.6m to end in a pit. The second was cut on the south side of the church, near the south east corner, and ran perpendicular to the south wall also ending in a pit next to the churchyard boundary, (*see fig.1a*). The sections were cleaned and recorded by written description and scaled black and white photographs. The excavation of the north trench had revealed the lower courses of the north wall of the church, down to foundation level, and the exposed stonework was also recorded by scaled drawings at 1:10. Recording was carried out by GAT staff on the 9th and 10th of July 1996. The plaster was removed on the 7th August 1996 exposing an area from the corner of the vestry to just beyond the western most window. Measured elevations of the exposed stonework were drawn at a scale of 1:10 and black and white photographs were also taken.

## Results

### North trench.

The north trench was 0.60m wide and c.0.65m deep, running the full length of the church. The upper 0.23m consisted of turf and topsoil followed by 0.17m of soil mixed with mortar and slate and 0.07m of shale. Below that lay c.0.20m of clay with stone and charcoal inclusions. To the east of the church, the trench became narrower and shallower, approximately 0.25m deep and 0.30m wide, terminating in a pit 1.30m x 0.90m x 0.90m deep. A small quantity of human bone was recovered from the trench but no features were apparent except the foundation stones of the east wall and the east end of the north wall.

### South trench.

The south trench, which ran from the south east corner of the church to the boundary of the churchyard was c.0.30m wide and 0.50m deep. It also terminated in a pit 0.90m x 1.10m x 0.90m deep, dug adjacent to the boundary wall. The original ground surface of the churchyard sloped down to the southern boundary but it had been levelled by tipping building waste, including slate and lime mortar, down the slope. This layer of slate appeared in the pit 0.40m below the surface. Beneath this lay c.0.20m of mortar followed by a further c.0.20m of slate and shale which lay on clay with mortar inclusions. This was interpreted as disturbed natural clay and continued deeper than the 0.30m visible in the pit. A cut located at the base of the pit probably represented a burial.

### North wall - exterior face.

The north wall of the church contained a narrow doorway c.0.65m wide, blocked to form a small window. The lintel had the letters R S inscribed into the mortar face. The lower levels of the blocking material, exposed by the drainage trench, were seen to protrude outwards suggesting that the door had been blocked from the inside. The opening for the door continued below the turf line to a level equal to the interior floor which was 0.35m lower than the external ground surface. To the west of the doorway was a vertical line in the masonry which may indicate the extent of disturbance relating to the insertion of the door or it may suggest the extent of the original nave. To the east of this line, the stones had a distinct pinky-red colour whereas those to the west in the wall of the nave were grey. Also visible in the drainage trench were the foundation stones of the chancel, extending 0.10 - 0.15m beyond the line of the wall. The foundation stones of the nave did not appear to protrude but the nave wall may have been deeper and the foundation stones consequently not visible. A change in the nature of the masonry and, more particularly the rendering, of the upper courses of the north wall may reflect the raising of the side walls as mentioned by Harold Hughes, although this was more obviously visible in the south wall, (*fig.1b*).

### North wall - interior face.

The removal of the plaster exposed an area of stonework 6.35m in length and 1.41m in height, constructed of rough coursed rubble with some large boulders, (*see fig.1c*). At a point approximately 5.5m from the corner of the vestry the coursing ended and the wall continued of smaller, uncoursed rubble to the end of the exposed

distance of 0.80m. The plaster was not removed beyond this point and it was not possible on this occasion to determine whether the change in construction continued for the rest of its length.

## Conclusions

The excavation of the drainage trenches and the recording of the exterior and part of the interior faces of the north wall revealed evidence of the numerous alterations to the church since the 12th century. The layers of building waste encountered in the south trench suggested that an originally sloping churchyard had been levelled, probably at the time of the last refurbishment. The line observed in the masonry of the exterior face of the north wall may have indicated the extent of the original nave, corresponding as it did with the change in foundation stones at that point. However, it did not relate to the possible cross wall traces identified by Harold Hughes and could also be explained as delineating the area of disturbance caused by the insertion of the now blocked doorway. Unfortunately, the area of stonework revealed by the removal of plaster from the interior of the church was too small to resolve this question and the only feature observed inside was the change from roughly coursed to uncoursed rubble construction of the wall. This change could not be related to any similar feature in the exterior face of the wall. Because the drainage trenches terminated inside the boundary wall, it was not possible to gain any information relating to the layout of the original churchyard.

## Bibliography

### Published Sources

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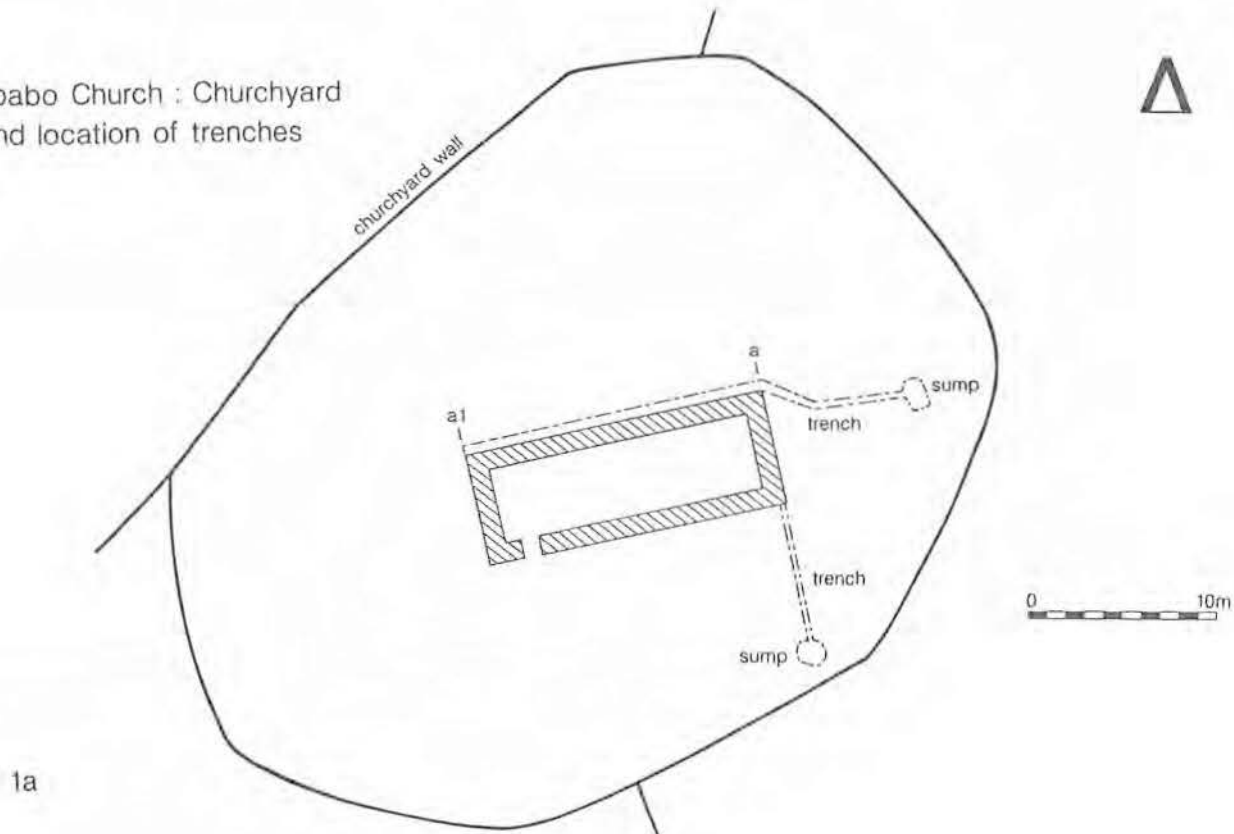
### Unpublished Sources

OS 1900 25 inch map

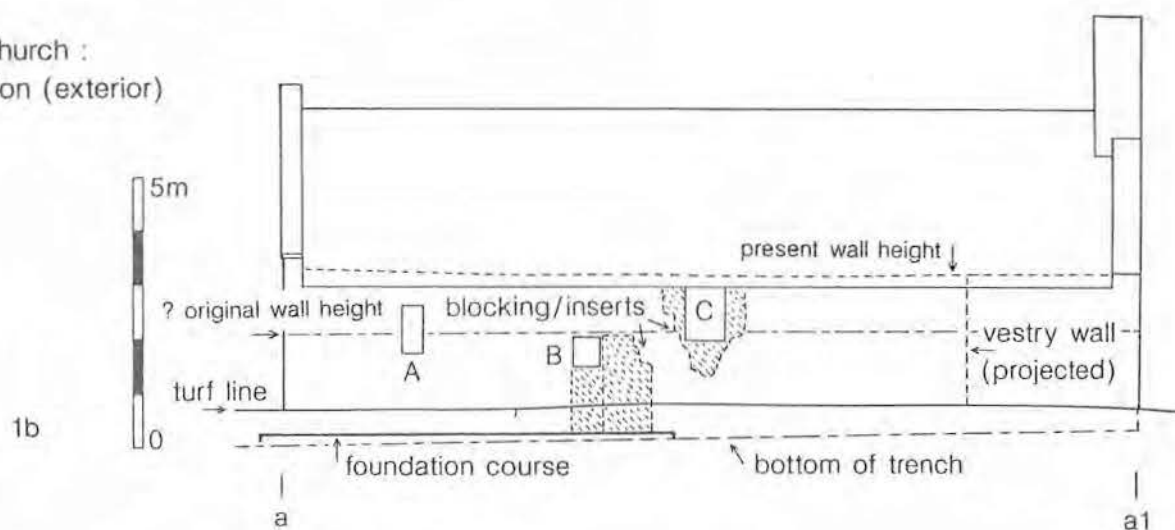
Hughes, H. 1906 *Plans of Llanbabo Church*

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust: SMR information

Llanbabo Church : Churchyard  
and location of trenches



Llanbabo Church :  
North Wall Elevation (exterior)



Llanbabo Church :  
North Wall Elevation (interior)

