

Archaeological watching brief 2005

> GAT Project No. 1872 Report No. 596 January 2005

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Archaeological Watching Brief

Report No. 596

Prepared for Graham Holland Associates

January 2006

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Archaeological Watching Brief: St Deiniol's Cathedral, Bangor (G1872)

SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief has been undertaken in advance of renovation work in two areas of the Cathedral: the Presbytery and the Tower. In both instances, the depth of excavation was shallow and revealed little more than 19^{th} and 20^{th} century activity.

1 INTRODUCTION

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust has been asked by Graham Holland Associates to undertake an archaeological watching brief at the Cathedral of St Deiniol, Bangor, Gwynedd, to observe the excavation of two trenches: a trench in the Presbytery and a trench in the Bell Tower. The Cathedral is a listed building Grade I (Cadw reference 42/A/86) and is located at NGR SH580720. The PRN within the Historic Environment Record is 2305.

2 SPECIFICATION AND PROJECT DESIGN

The basic requirement was for a watching brief of the proposed area, in order to assess the impact of the proposals on the archaeological features within the area concerned. The importance and condition of known archaeological remains were to be assessed, and areas of archaeological potential identified. Measures to mitigate the effects of the construction work on the archaeological resource were to be suggested.

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust's proposals for filling these requirements were as follows:

- Watching brief
- Report

3 METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

The watching brief was undertaken on the 7th, 8th and 9th of November, 2005.

The aim of the watching brief was twofold; firstly, to monitor the excavation of a $12.0m^2$ rectangular trench within the presbytery of the Cathedral, over the site of the former twelfth century apse and, secondly, to monitor the excavation of a $2.25m^2$ square pit at the western end of the Cathedral, within the tower.

This report includes the information from the watching brief and information derived from secondary sources, concerning the history of the Cathedral.

4 TOPOGRAPHY

The Cathedral is located in the city of Bangor within a sloping oval churchyard north of the High Street on the southern side of the narrow valley of the Afon Adda, which now runs in a piped culvert. The Cathedral comprises a chancel, a nave with north and south aisles, north and south transepts, a central tower at the crossing, a western bell tower and an annexe to the chancel containing an organ-house and a vestry with the chapter house above. There are three main entrances, one each in the north and south walls of the nave and one in the west tower.

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

5.1 Archaeological and historical background

The site of Bangor Cathedral is located at the heart of the earliest development of Bangor which began in the sixth century with the founding of a church and monastic settlement dedicated to St. Deiniol at the location of the Cathedral. In the twelfth century, Bangor became a territorial diocese with the establishment of the cathedral church and parts of the present structure date from this period, including the south wall of the presbytery. The chancel was built in the early 13th century with further work completed under Bishop Anian (1267-1305) with the building of the crossing, the central tower and Lady Chapel. There were further modifications during the 14th and 15th centuries, with major reconstruction work continued in the 16th century under Bishop Skeffington (1509-34) that included the construction of the nave and the bell tower at the western end. The 19th century saw major restoration work within the Cathedral, firstly by John Hall in 1827 and then by Gilbert Scott in 1868. Gilbert Scott focussed mainly on the eastern half of the Cathedral and during the renovation work he produced a report detailing his observations of earlier phases of building, including the remains of the twelfth century apse (Scott 1870, 12 - 31).

5.2 Results of the Archaeological Watching Brief

The archive is held by GAT under the project number (G1872).

The Presbytery

A trench measuring 6.20m x 1.80m x 0.30m (1 x w x d) was excavated by hand within the presbytery at the eastern end of the Cathedral (see Figure 1). The trench was orientated east to west and was excavated to investigate the cause of the presbytery tiles rising up in the centre (Plate 1). The floor tiles had been removed in advance of the watching brief, exposing a layer of Victorian concrete. The concrete was c.0.25m thick and comprised a mixture of brick fragments, red sandstone and slate (Figure 2). The concrete had been laid as part of the 1866 renovation programme to provide a solid base for the floor tiles. Below the concrete was a 0.02 to 0.14m thick demolition/levelling layer that comprised building fragments (including flecks of limestone mortar) mixed into a sand/silt deposit, which contained three heavily oxidised iron nails and a fragment of clay pipe stem. This deposit was interpreted as the primary levelling layer for the concrete. The material may have been imported so the nails and pipe stem could have come from outside the Cathedral. The primary levelling layer sealed a silty brown deposit that was cut by two drainage culverts both constructed using brick and slate. Drain A (Figure 2) was orientated southwest to northeast and measured c.2.0m in length and 0.40m in width. The top of the culvert was built from slabs of slate 0.02m thick laid either across or along the length of the drain (Plate 2). The slabs were generally rectangular in shape but varied in size, with the largest example measuring 0.70m in length and the smallest, 0.30m in length. The sides of the culvert were built from brick with each side standing two courses high (0.24m in total). The bricks were handmade and bonded using limestone mortar (Plate 3). The slate was bonded to the bricks in a similar fashion. The materials used, especially the brick, suggested a 19th century date, but whether this work was part of the 1866 renovation or the previous stages of renovation in 1822 or 1770 was unclear. The second drain, Drain B, was orientated southeast to northwest and measured 2.10m in length and 0.50m in width (Plate 4). This drain was constructed in a similar fashion to Drain A, suggesting they were contemporary. The only difference was the greater width of Drain B, with slightly longer and wider slate slabs being used. It appeared that the drains were fed from outside the Cathedral, presumably channelling rainwater off the valley side into a soakaway and would have discharged onto the slopes below.

There was another brick-built structure at the western end of the trench (Figure 2). The structure was only partially extant in the trench making an interpretation difficult, but it was a 1.20m long structure, one course high with the bricks laid on their side. The bricks were very narrow, only 0.05m wide (almost half the width of the bricks used in the drains), and were composed of an orange fabric similar to that used in domestic firebricks (Plate 8). Fragments of this brick were found in the grano-concrete layer, suggesting that the structure may have been higher but was partly demolished during the renovation work. There were fragments of mortar bonding attached to the brickwork, which was a reddish colour.

The structure was placed onto the silty brown deposit cut by the drains. No foundation cut was visible. The function of the structure was unclear but it was interpreted as a plinth.

The silty brown deposit was extant across the trench and contained patches of buff mortar and white limestone mortar flecks throughout. It was difficult to tell whether the buff mortar was the remnant of an earlier floor surface or whether it was material deposited during the building work. The limestone flecking suggested the latter.

The trench was not dug any deeper due to the specifications of the job design so no further information was recovered from this deposit.

The Bell Tower

A 2.25m square trench was dug to a mean depth of 1.15m at the eastern end of the tower to facilitate disabled access into the Cathedral (Plates 9 and 14). A late twentieth century concrete staircase (comprising four steps) was partly removed exposing a pipe duct on the northern side of the trench, which contained two metal pipes (modern) that were removed. Modern concrete and breezeblock stairs (four steps and a landing) have been removed for disabled access. It appears the steps may have been closer to the entrance as there is a tiled surface below the steps (possibly nineteenth century). Three elevations were exposed:

Southern Elevation (Plate 10)

This elevation has exposed stone and sandstone block-work with partly disturbed render; below the tiled surface is a layer of soft white lime-rich mortar atop a 0.30m thick layer of stone and sandstone, sitting atop a layer of silt with fragments of stone and sandstone and flecks of mortar. The block-work represents the structural material from the 14th century tower.

East Elevation (Plate 11)

Below the modern surface of concrete breezeblock is a 0.60m void filled with stone chippings (late twentieth century), covering the 19th century tiled surface. A pipe duct was visible on the right side, containing two metal pipes that had been truncated during the removal of the staircase. The duct was built from brick and breezeblock: the side closest to the southern elevation was built from modern aerated brick, whilst the opposite site was built from breezeblock. Rather curiously, a thin "skin" of sandstone block-work was attached to the breezeblock courses (Plate). This sandstone did not appear to serve any function and may have been decorative, and was probably used to disguise the pipe duct before the staircase was built.

North Elevation (Plate 13)

The north-facing elevation comprised the concrete and breezeblock steps. The tiled floor surface was not visible suggesting it was removed, but the layer of fragmented stone and slate was visible atop the brown silty layer.

6 CONCLUSION

The two trenches only provided a limited glimpse of the archaeology of the Cathedral. The trench in the Presbytery gave an indication of the nature of the 19th century renovation work, especially the depth of the levelling layer and the type of materials used below the floor surface. The exact purpose of the drains was unclear, but they were thought to carry surplus water from the south side and under the Cathedral to discharge onto the lower north side. There was no evidence for infilling using structural material from earlier building phases (as found by Scott during the restoration), but this is more a reflection of the limited depth of the works. Within the bell tower, the trench below the stairs revealed evidence for 20th century modernisation as well as a limited glimpse of the masonry of the tower. Below the tiled floor there was limited evidence for construction activity, represented by fragments of stone and sandstone and limestone mortar within a levelling layer. These layers were not excavated further as they were below the depth of the present works.

7 REFERENCES AND OTHER SOURCES CONSTULTED

References

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Figure 1. Location maps





Plate 1 View Looking East of the Nineteenth Century Drains



Plate 2 Birds' Eye View of Drain A



Plate 3 Close-up of Drain A



Plate 4 Birds' Eye View of Drain B



Plate 5 Internal View of Drain B



Plate 6 Side View of Drain B Detailing Brickwork



Plate 7 Close-up of Brick-Built Plinth



Plate 8 Birds' Eye View of Brick-Built Plinth



Plate 9 View Looking West of Trench within the Tower



Plate 10 South-Facing Elevation



Plate 11 East Facing Elevation



Plate 12 Close-up of East Elevation Detailing Sandstone/Breezeblock Wall and Redundant Floor Surface



Plate 13 North Elevation



Plate 14 Birds' Eye View of Trench



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