
ST. BENEDICT'S CHURCH, GYFFIN



ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

GAT Project No. G1977

Report No. 739

May 2008

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Prepared for Prepared for Parochial Church Council

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By

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ST. BENEDICT'S CHURCH, GYFFIN

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ST. BENEDICT'S CHURCH, GYFFIN

Archaeological Watching Brief (G1977)

Summary

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust conducted an archaeological watching brief during drainage repair work at St. Benedict's Church, Gyffin. The watching brief identified evidence of the renovation work conducted between 1858 and 1927, including redundant and a soakaway/sump. No other archaeological activity was identified.

1 INTRODUCTION

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT) has been asked by the Parochial Church Council to conduct an archaeological Watching Brief at St. Benedict's Church, Conwy, Gwynedd (NGR SH77657694), during drainage work (Figure 01). The groundworks included the removal of the existing drainage trench around the west end of the church (from the porch, around the west gable and up to the first downpipe in the north side), filling the bottom of the trench with concrete to accommodate a drainage channel and then backfilling with gravel. A new drainage channel was also cut at from the downpipe, extending northwards for 5.0m into a grassed area next to the graveyard. Plaster to the reveals of the internal west window was also removed in order to fix support straps.

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust monitored the removal of the existing drainage trench around the west end of the church and the excavation of the new drainage channel extending from the downpipe. Particular attention was paid to the exposed sections within the drainage trenches for any archaeological activity associated with the church and the graveyard.

2 SPECIFICATION AND PROJECT DESIGN

No specific brief has been provided for this work. The basic requirement, as detailed in Gwynedd Archaeological Trust correspondence 1107adG1978 (7th November 2007), was for an archaeological watching brief during all works. The importance and condition of any 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, if necessary.

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust's proposals for fulfilling these requirements are:

- Watching Brief
- Report

3 METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

The watching brief was undertaken between the 02nd and 15th May 2008. The entire length of the existing drainage trench was monitored and photographed as well as the excavation of the new drainage channel.

The groundworks were undertaken by *Chester Masonry*. Both the existing drainage trench and the new drainage trench were excavated by hand.

The photographic record was maintained using a Nikon D40 DSLR. The archive is held by GAT under the project number **G1977**.

4 TOPOGRAPHY

St. Benedict's Church is located in the village of Gyffin, which is situated along the B5106 c500.0m to the southwest of central Conwy. The churchyard enclosing St. Benedict's Church is irregular in form with a curved stone-walled boundary from the northeast around north to the northwest. The churchyard is entered from the south side and there is a small entrance on the east side to a footbridge over the Afon Gyffin. The east side has been encroached by a property boundary, whilst the churchyard was

extended to the south in 1866 and the former linear boundary is now marked by a low bank to the south of the church.

The present church is T-shaped in plan consists of a long nave, a chancel, and north and south chapels.

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

5.1 General History

The church is assumed to be a foundation of 13th century date and built by the Monks of Aberconwy (Davidson, 2000: 226). The original church was a smaller rectangular structure now forming the east end of the nave. In the 15th century the nave was extended westwards, as evidenced by the segmental arched south doorway of that date. At this time the nave and chancel were roofed using nine arch-braced collar beam trusses: the painted celure is possibly contemporary with the re-roofing (*ibid.*). The celure was built in the shape of a barrel vault or canopy (Plate 09), extending over the sanctuary and includes sixteen painted panels (Richards, 1975: 63; see Plate 10). In the 16th century the south chapel with its parclose screen was added, with windows in the south and east walls and a widow inserted in the east wall of the chancel. The roof of the chapel and porch were built at this time. The former north isle, now rebuilt as the north chapel, may also date from this period. A bell-cote was added in the 17th century and there is a date stone of 1694 in the west wall. The west gable and the southeast and northwest angles appear to have been rebuilt possibly when the bell-cote was added.

5.2 Restoration

1858

The church was restored in 1858 when a larger north chapel replaced the north aisle, with a large cellar below entered by a north door (Davidson, 2000: 226). A vestry was also added. New windows were inserted in the north and west walls of the nave. The upper south gable of the south chapel was rebuilt when the south window was inserted. The west gallery was removed and the chancel arch was replaced. The porch was rebuilt with a timber framed east wall and a stone west wall that reused the window mullions from the church.

1900

In 1900 the chancel was restored and the early 13th century south door was blocked and a doorway opened at the north end of the west wall of the south chapel (Davidson, 2000: 226). The 1858 vestry door was blocked and the door from the vestry to the north chapel was opened. The sanctuary was refloored and the pulpit and reading desk moved. The west wall was repointed and a 0.6m trench excavated against the wall and around part of the sides. The internal west wall was re-plastered. Sumps were excavated for the downpipes of the church.

1927

In 1927 the large cellar below the north chapel was reused as a heating chamber (Davidson, 2000: 226).

6 RESULTS OF THE WATCHING BRIEF

The groundworks included the removal of the existing drainage trench around the west end of the church (from the porch, around the west gable and up to the first downpipe in the north side; see Figure 01), filling the bottom of the trench with concrete to accommodate a drainage channel and then backfilling with gravel. A new drainage channel was also cut at from the downpipe, extending 45° northwards for 5.0m into a grassed area next to the graveyard.

Inspected some of the internal repair work conducted around the existing south window. The window was installed during the 1858 restoration and the repair work aimed to repair a cavity that had formed around the window. A photographic record was taken of the exposed masonry along with a general record of the internal church fittings (see Plates 06 to 08 for examples).

Existing drainage trench

The drainage channel ran along the western, southern and northern elevations (in the latter case as far as the entrance porch). The drainage channel measured 0.50m in width and up to 0.80m in depth and

was filled with modern gravel. It appeared that this channel was excavated during the renovation work in 1900, as part of the improved drainage.

The works programme included the removal of the gravel to accommodate a new drainage channel, which was to be sealed with concrete and the gravel replaced (Plate 01). No distinctive archaeological activity was identified: activity was limited to a thick deposit of bioturbated topsoil into which were mixed randomly sorted sub-rounded stone (provenance unknown). The foundation course for the church was identified within the trench and a photographic record was taken (Plate 02). The foundation course comprised irregular sub-angular stones. The alignment of the foundation course was slightly offset from the superstructure, extending up to 0.30m from the base of the superstructure.

New drainage trench

The new cut measured 5.0m in length, 0.50m in width and 0.80m in depth (maximum fall) and was excavated at a 45° to the existing trench (Plate 04). The trench cut through the northern portion of the graveyard in which there were no headstones and no visible topographical features, so the archaeological potential is unclear.

A stone-filled soakaway was identified at the junction of the new and existing trenches (northern elevation; see Plate 03). The soakaway comprised a 0.60m deep stone-filled pit. The stones were irregular in size and included sub-rounded and sub-angular examples. The provenance of the soakaway was unclear, but was assumed to be post-medieval in date and possibly part of the 1900 restoration. Within the new drainage trench, the exposed sections comprised mainly a thick demolition/rubble layer incorporating slate and stone fragments and pieces of plaster and/or mortar (Plate 05). This deposit was extant to a depth of 0.70m (the full depth of the trench was 0.80m). Below this deposit was a bioturbated soil. It appeared that the rubble layer was associated with the 1858 restoration.

7 CONCLUSION

The watching brief identified evidence of the renovation work conducted between 1858 and 1927: the new drainage trench contained a thick deposit of roofing material and the existing trench included a soakaway/sump constructed during the 1900 renovation. No other archaeological activity was identified.

8 SOURCES CONSULTED

Davidson, A. 2000 *Welsh Historic Churches project, Gazeteer of Churches, Diocese of Bangor*. Unpublished GAT Report no. 390

IFA. 2001. *Institute of Field Archaeologists 2001 Standard and Guidance for an archaeological Watching Brief*

Richards, G. 1975. "The Church and Parish of Gyffin", *Transactions of Caernarvonshire Historical Society Volume 36*, pp. 53-70.





Plate 01: View northeast of groundworks area along north facing elevation



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Plate 09: General Shot of Painted Celure



Plate 10: Detailed Shot of Painted Celure



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