

# *Archaeology Wales*

## **St Cadfans Church, Tywyn Merionethshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief



By  
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Report No. 1064

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### Archaeological Watching Brief

Prepared For: Meryl Gover, St Cadfans Church, Tywyn

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## Non-Technical Summary

*This report results from work undertaken by Archaeology Wales Ltd (AW) for Meryl Gover, Church Warden, St Cadfan's church, Tywyn, Merionethshire. This report draws upon the results gained by a watching brief during groundworks associated with the installation of a new lightning rod at the church. The earliest material within the current church dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> century though ecclesiastical use of the site may date back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The watching brief at St Cadfan's church revealed no significant finds or features.*

### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 Location and scope of work

In April 2012 Archaeology Wales Ltd (AW) carried out an archaeological watching brief at St Cadfan's church, Tywyn, Merionethshire, NGR SH 59667 00869 (Fig 1).

The work was carried out during the installation of a new lightning conductor strip. All groundworks were subject to the watching brief.

#### 1.2 Geology and topography

The underlying solid geology of the area is comprised of undifferentiated Caradoc rocks, including mudstone, siltstone and sandstone (Geological Survey Map, 2001).

The assessment area is located within the centre of the town of Tywyn. The site lies adjacent to the A493, the main road through Tywn. The site lies 1km to the east of the sea at a relatively low height of approximately 5m above ordnance datum. The town of Tywn is located on relatively low lying ground with the higher hills of Graig Fach Goch (210m) and Tal y Garreg (163m) lying to the east and north respectively.

#### 1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

The following is an extract from Samuel Lewis' 1833 Topographic Dictionary of Wales concerning Tywyn:

“TOWYN (TYWYN - MEIRIONYDD), a market town and parish in the hundred of ESTIMANER, county of MERIONETH, NORTH WALES, 16 miles (S. W.) from Dolgelley, and 221 (W. N. W.) from London, containing 2694 inhabitants. The parish, which comprises a wide tract of about thirty thousand acres, is bounded on the north by the river Dysynni, on the south by the Dovey, on the west by Cardigan bay, and on the east by the parishes of Talyllyn and Pennal. The town is beautifully situated at the distance of about a mile from the sea-coast, near the mouth of the river Dysynni, in a small and pleasant vale, watered by that stream, and on the verge of a tract which once formed a very extensive morass, but which has lately been secured by an

embankment from the inundation of the tide. The surrounding scenery, which is strikingly diversified, combines features of romantic grandeur with picturesque beauty : the town is sheltered in the rear by a distant chain of lofty mountains, among which the summits of Cader Idris appear with majestic grandeur ; and in front it commands a fine expansive view over the bay of Cardigan. The houses, which are of respectable appearance, are built principally of the coarse grey stone which is found in the neighbourhood; and the general appearance of the place is neat and prepossessing. The fine beach in front of the town, being remarkably convenient for sea-bathing, has made it the resort during the summer of numerous visitors, chiefly from Llanidloes, Newtown, Montgomery, &c. Valetudinarians are also attracted hither by a well, called St. Cadvan's, situated in a field below the church, and much celebrated for the cure of rheumatic, scrofulous, and cutaneous disorders. Formerly it was quite open, but for the better accommodation of the public it has been enclosed, and formed into two baths, each about six feet square, with four dressing-rooms attached: the whole is under the care of a person appointed for the purpose. Several improvements have taken place in the town within the last few years; some new houses have been erected, and a new line of road has been constructed, forming an easier approach : it is in contemplation also to form a road from this place to Barmouth, which would be productive of great advantage to the town. The sands are firm and smooth, and the ride or drive over them to Aberdovey, a rising place about four miles distant, especially at low water, is very pleasant. A beautiful line of road to that interesting village has been constructed under the auspices of Athelstan Corbet, Esq., whose seat is near the town, and is continued from that place to Pennal, affording an extensive ride through a tract of country abounding with picturesque and beautiful scenery, and commanding views of Snowdon, Aran Mowddwy, Cader Idris, and Plinlimmon. Races are held on the marsh below the town, near the mouth of the river Dysynni, on the 6th and 7th of September, and are in general well attended by the gentry of the neighbourhood, and by visitors at the watering-places on this part of the coast. The parish extends eight or nine miles in length, and from five to six in breadth, including, besides the vale of Dysynni, a large tract of land on the banks of the river Dovey, and reaching to within a very short distance of the church of Pennal. The surface is greatly diversified, and the high grounds above Talgarth, Penmaen Dovey, and the town, command fine views of the vales of Dovey, Pennal, and Dysynni, with the surrounding hills and Cardigan bay : the soil is various. Some copper and lead mines, within its limits, have been let by their proprietor, Mr. Corbet, to a company in London, but they are not at present worked. There are slate quarries near the port of Aberdovey, which is described under its appropriate head, and where it is in contemplation to build a chapel of ease, as that place is four miles distant from the parish church. Towyn is one of the places at which the poll is appointed to be taken in the election of the parliamentary representative of the county. Webs and flannels are manufactured in various parts of the parish, affording employment to a portion of the inhabitants. The market is on Friday; and fairs are held annually on March 16th, May 14th, September 17th, and November 18th.

The living consists of a rectory and a vicarage, in the archdeaconry of Merioneth, and diocese of Bangor: the rectory, which is an impropriation annexed to the bishoprick of Lichfield and Coventry, by a forced exchange in the reign of Edward VI., is rated in the king's books at £ 60. 13. 4. ; the vicarage, which is discharged, is rated at £ 6. 13. 4., and in the patronage of the Bishop of Bangor. The church, dedicated to St. Cadvan, a native of Armorica, who came to Britain, with other religious missionaries, about the commencement of the sixth century, and is said to have been afterwards abbot of Bardsey, is a spacious and ancient cruciform structure, in the Norman style of architecture : it contains some very old monuments, and on the north side of the chancel, under arched canopies, are the effigies of two persons, of whom one, wrapped in a winding sheet, is supposed to be St. Cadvan, and the other, in armour, is said to be that of Gruffydd ab Adda, of Dolgoch, in this parish. There is also a stone, seven feet and a half long, having sculptured upon it a cross and an inscription on each side, in very ancient characters, and so mutilated as to be illegible: it is called St. Cadvan's Stone, and formerly stood erect against a tomb in the churchyard, said to cover the remains of that saint. In the cemetery was also another upright stone rudely carved, which commemorated some warrior. There are places of worship for Independents and Calvinistic and Wesleyan Methodists. Lady Mayor, in 1717, gave £ 400 three and a half per cent. consols., for the foundation and endowment of a school, which was further endowed, in the same year, by Athelstan Owen, Esq., with £4 per annum : in this school twenty-one children are at present gratuitously instructed. A Sunday school belonging to the church is supported by subscription, and affords instruction to two hundred children; and there are also Sunday schools in connexion with the several dissenting congregations. Almshouses for five poor widows were founded and endowed with lands now producing £20 per annum, by Mrs. Anne Owen. An ancestor of the Vaughans, of Penmaen Dovey, bequeathed £25 per annum, issuing from a farm and lands in this parish, called Bwlch Llanerchydol and Abergroes, to the resident poor in the immediate vicinity of Penmaen Dovey, the proprietor of which estate was appointed trustee by John Vaughan, Esq, who proved the will of the testator in 1692.

On the contracted summit of an immense rock, rising to a considerable elevation from the vale in which the town is situated, are some remains of an ancient castle of great strength, the fortifications of which comprehended the entire summit of the eminence: one of the apartments, thirty-six feet in diameter, was hewn out of the solid rock. This fortification, which is called Tebeni, Mr. Pennant conjectures to have been the strong castle of Bere, fortified by Davydd ab Gruffydd, which was taken, in 1283, by William de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, a short time prior to the entire subjugation of the principality by Edward I., by which monarch it was committed to the custody of Robert Fitz-Walter, who at the same time obtained the privilege of hunting in the circumjacent country. The Roman road from Cevn Caer, a Roman station in the parish of Pennal, to the village of Carreg, on the opposite bank of the river Dovey, passes through this parish, near Talgarth. Near this place a battle was fought between the Welsh partisans of the house of Lancaster, under the command of Thomas ab Gruffydd ab Nicholas, of Dynevor, and those of the

house of York, under Henry ab Gwilym, of Court Henry, one of the Earl of Pembroke's captains, in which the former gained a decisive victory. Here also the same Thomas ab Gruffydd encountered in single combat David Gough, a near kinsman of Matthew Gough, a celebrated warrior in the reigns of Henry V. and VI., whom he slew. A tumulus in the grounds of Talgarth is said to have been raised over the body of Thomas ab Gruffydd, and some of his followers, who were murdered while asleep on the spot, by a party of the adherents of the vanquished. At a small distance from the town is Ynysymaengwyn, the seat of A. Corbet, Esq., a noble mansion pleasantly situated in grounds tastefully laid out, comprehending much beautiful scenery, and embellished with flourishing plantations and timber of ancient growth, among which is an evergreen oak, considered to be the finest tree of its kind in the kingdom. The gardens rank among the first in the principality, being very extensive, and containing numerous very curious rare trees and plants. This ancient seat, during the parliamentary war, was burnt to the ground, to prevent its affording any shelter to the parliament's forces; and on a farm in the immediate vicinity, called Bryn Castell, there is a circular mound of earth, near which, a few years since, the half of a cannon ball, weighing seven lb, was found: this is now in the possession of Mr. Corbet. At Dolgoch there is a small but very picturesque waterfall, Craig y Deryn, or "the Rock of Birds," about four miles from Towyn, up the vale of Dysynni, derives its name from the number of birds which shelter in its crevices during the night: the scenery around it is extremely wild and romantic, and the discordant clamour which announces their retreat to this sequestered spot adds greatly to the effect of the scene. Its summit was once occupied by an ancient fortress or strong hold, of which there are some vestiges; and several others of the same kind, occupying similar situations, are found near this part of the coast. The average annual expenditure for the support of the poor is £1466. 9".

The following are extracts from the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments (Wales) Coflein database regarding the church of St Cadfan at Tywn:

St Cadfan's is known to be the site of an early Clas church. A contemporary poet described it as a fine whitened church where relics were kept and miracles performed. The present church is situated within a rectilinear cemetery, whose south and east boundaries are delineated by roads. The southern churchyard wall was originally curvilinear, but was rebuilt in 1908 to accommodate road widening. The present lych gate dates to this time. The south and east churchyard boundaries appear to have originally delineated the south-eastern boundary of a larger curvilinear enclosure, whose shape can also be traced in the outline of the road to the north. A chantry chapel is documented as having been situated in the north-west of the churchyard. St Cadfan's well (NPRN 32397) is located a short distance to the west of the church. Two early medieval inscribed stones, one now lost, are recorded in the churchyard (NPRN 302689). An inscribed stone of seventh to ninth century date, presently standing upright in the north aisle of the church, bears the earliest known inscription in Welsh.



The cruciform church building consists of an aisled nave, north and south transepts, a central tower and a chancel. The nave, with its aisles, arcades and clerestory windows, are those of the original twelfth century building. The nave is unique in Gwynedd, and is consequently considered to be of special architectural significance. Three bays remain of an original four. The arcades both have three massive, squat, drum columns from which spring plain rounded arches. The clerestory has small, deeply splayed, round headed windows above the columns. The arch-braced roof of the nave dates to the fourteenth century. The font is octagonal and is thought to date to the fourteenth century. Two fourteenth century effigies are situated within modern niches in the north wall of the chancel and sanctuary. One of the effigies is of an unnamed priest. The other is of an unnamed knight, traditionally Gruffydd ab Adda of Dolgoch. The original tower collapsed in 1692, and was replaced with a tower over the west end of the nave. The present character of the church owes much to an extensive program of rebuilding, modernisation and other alterations, completed in 1884. It was at this time that the 1792 tower was removed and replaced with the present tower. A new west wall was built, excluding the previous fourth bay of the nave. A new south door and aisle windows were also added. The present chancel was also built at this time, although it appears to have been built on the foundations of its predecessor (RCAHMW, 2009).

## **2 Aims and Objectives**

### **2.1 Watching Brief**

The watching brief was undertaken:

- To allow, within the resources available, the preservation by record of archaeological deposits, the presence and nature of which could not be established (or established with sufficient accuracy) in advance of development or other potentially disruptive works.
- To provide an opportunity, if needed, for the watching archaeologist to signal to all interested parties, before the destruction of the material in question, that an archaeological find has been made for which the resources allocated to the watching brief itself are not sufficient to support treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard.
- The main objective of a watching brief is to establish and make available information about the archaeological resource existing on a site.

### 3 Methodology

#### 3.1 Watching Brief

The watching brief was carried out during groundworks associated with the below ground installation of a new lightning conductor strip (Fig 2, Plate 1). Excavation was carried out by hand under close archaeological supervision.

The on-site work was undertaken by watching brief archaeologist Rob Blackburn. The overall management of the project was undertaken by Chris E Smith (MifA). All areas were photographed using high resolution digital photography.

All works were undertaken in accordance with the IfA's *Standards and Guidance: for an archaeological watching brief* and current Health and Safety legislation.

#### 3.2 Finds

Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and bagged by context.

#### 3.3 Palaeo-environmental evidence

No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the excavation.

### 4 Watching Brief Results

#### 4.1 Soils and ground conditions

Generally the ground conditions were dry, as the ground of the assessment area was gravelly and very well drained.

#### 4.2 Descriptions

The excavated area where the end of the lightning conductor strip was to be buried measured only 0.8m x 0.7m and was 0.5m deep.

After removal of turf only a single deposit was encountered. This was composed of dark brown, loose, silty sand containing abundant angular fragments of slate (Plates 2-3).

A single piece of worked stone, representing the only find, was recovered from the excavated area. It was cylindrical in shape, measured 10cm in length and approximately 5cm in width (Plate 4). This is likely to be a decorative piece which has come from the church. The stone was not retained and was left within the churchyard. No Further finds or features were located.

## **5 Discussion and Interpretation**

### **5.1 Reliability of field investigation**

The overall findings of the watching brief were consistent with any significant archaeological remains being located at a deeper depth within the subsoil.

### **5.2 Overall interpretation**

The relatively shallow and small-scale excavation undertaken for the installation of the new lightning conductor strip did not expose significant archaeological features or deposits; these are undoubtedly deeper.

### **5.3 Acknowledgements**

Thanks are due to Rob Blackburn (AW) for his on-site assistance.

## 6 Bibliography and references

British Geological Survey. 2001, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Solid Geology Map, UK South Sheet

Institute for Archaeologists. 2008. Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief.

Lewis, S. 1833. *A Topographical Dictionary of Wales* - [www.genuki.com](http://www.genuki.com) – Accessed 15/05/2012

<http://www.coflein.gov.uk/en/site/43861/details/ST+CADFAN%27S+CHURCH%2C+TYWYN/> - accessed 15/05/2012

1901 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 6 Inch OS Map sheet Merionethshire XLVI SW

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## **APPENDIX I:** Figures

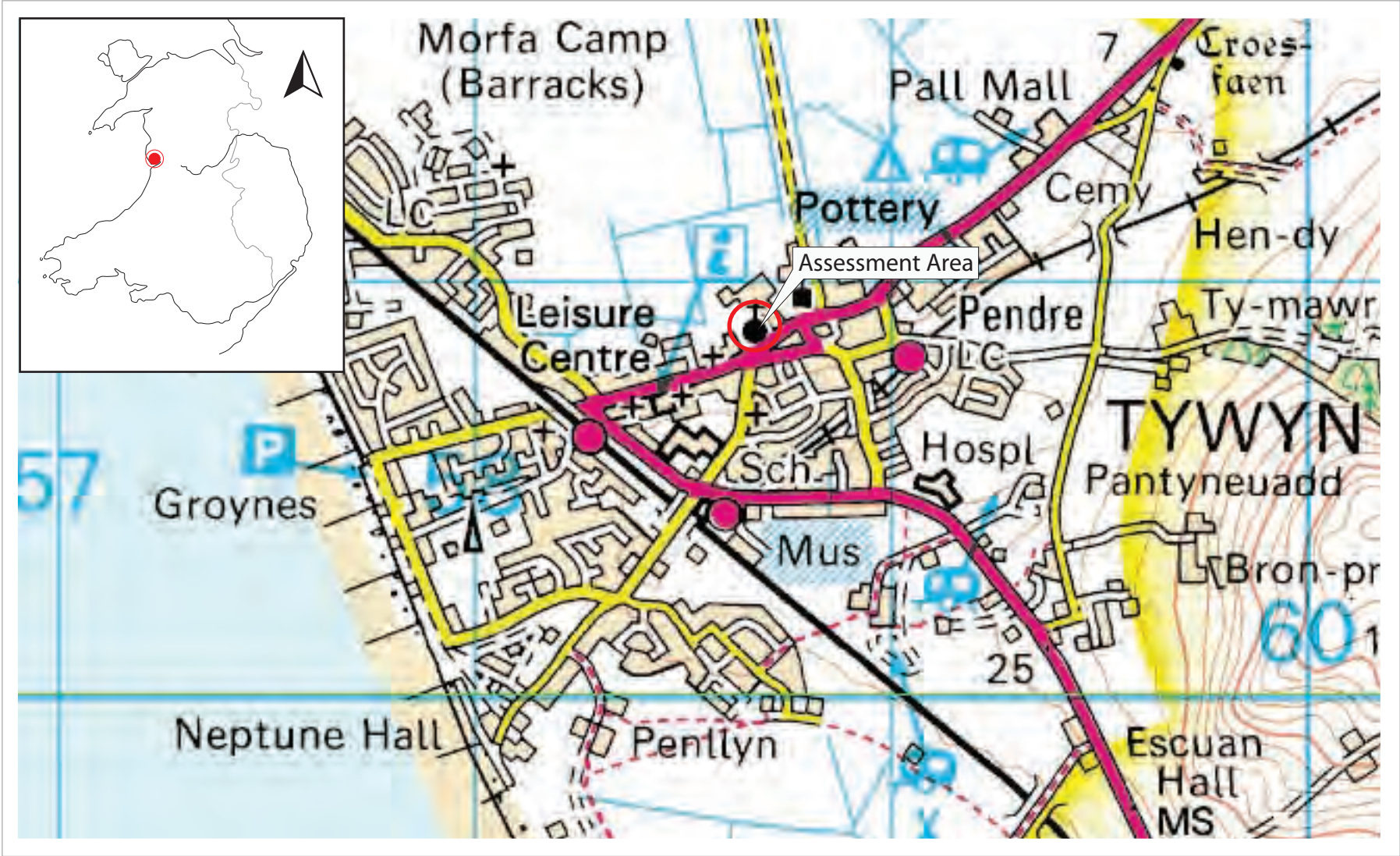


Fig 1: Map showing general location of assessment area





Fig 2: Second Edition 6 inch OS Map (1901) showing location of church within Tywyn.  
Enlarged section shows location of excavated area (red) for insertion of lightning conductor strip

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## **APPENDIX II:** Plates





Plate 1:View of external area of church, SW corner,where lightning rod was inserted



Plate 2:View of excavated area after removal of initial turf layer  
Scale 1x1m





Plate 3: Excavated area at full depth, approx 0.5m.  
Scale 1x1m



Plate 4: View of single piece of decorative worked stone recovered from within the excavated area, Scale 1x0.3m

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## **APPENDIX III:** Archive Cover Sheet

**ARCHIVE COVER SHEET**

**St Cadfans Church, Tywyn, Merionethshire**

Site Name:	St Cadfans Church
Site Code:	SCC/12/WB
PRN:	-
NPRN:	-
SAM:	-
Other Ref No:	-
NGR:	NGR SH 59667 00869
Site Type:	Church
Project Type:	Watching Brief
Project Manager:	Chris E Smith
Project Dates:	April 2012
Categories Present:	None
Location of Original Archive:	AW
Location of duplicate Archives:	-
Number of Finds Boxes:	-
Location of Finds:	-
Museum Reference:	-
Copyright:	AW
Restrictions to access:	None

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