

Archaeology Wales

Former Church of St David, Garthbrengy, Powys

Archaeological Evaluation



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Report No. 1267



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Summary

In June 2014, Archaeology Wales was commissioned to carry out an Archaeological Evaluation within the disused churchyard of the former Church of St David, Garthbrengy. The work was carried out pre-planning and was undertaken to establish the presence or absence of burials or other archaeological features on the proposed site of a new cess pit and outbuilding associated with the redevelopment of the church into a dwelling.

The former church of St David has its origins in the medieval period, although it is possible that an ecclesiastical foundation has existed on the site since the early Christian period. The section of the graveyard within which the outbuilding and cess pit are proposed lies outside what is thought to be the original ecclesiastical enclosure. The evaluation revealed no burials within the trenches and it is likely that this part of the site is largely devoid of graves. One of the test pits for the outbuilding revealed a possible paved surface however the small size of the test pit precluded full investigation and consequently its form and function are not known.

The archaeological potential of this part of the site is considered to be low despite its location within the graveyard.

1. Introduction

In August 2014, Archaeology Wales was commissioned by Katy Craddock to undertake an archaeological evaluation to investigate the archaeological potential of an area of ground within the disused graveyard of the former Church of St David at Garthbrengy, Powys (NGR: SO 04569 33523; fig. 1; Archaeology Wales Project No. 2262). The work was undertaken in advance of the submission of a planning application for the conversion of the former church into a dwelling. The section of graveyard under evaluation is proposed for the location of a new cess pit and outbuilding, and is currently grass covered with no visible grave markers. A line of ancient yew trees are located to the south of the evaluation area and are thought to define the boundary of the original Llan enclosure.

The location of the proposed cess pit and outbuilding, within the former graveyard and close to the presumed boundary of the early ecclesiastical enclosure, raised the possibility that burials and/or other features of archaeological significance could be disturbed by the development. As a consequence, Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust, in their capacity as advisors to the local planning authority, Powys County Council, recommended that an archaeological evaluation was carried out to inform any future planning applications.

The evaluation involved the excavation of nine trenches. The work was carried out in September 2014.

2. Site Description

2.1 Location, Geology and Topography

The proposed development site is located on the summit of the hill within the small hamlet of Garthbrengy, 5km north of Brecon, Powys. The site occupies level ground that is slightly raised above the surrounding land.

The underlying geology comprises Silurian Pridoli mudstone, siltstone and sandstone (BGS 2014).

2.2 Historical Background

The former Church of St David is a Grade II Listed Building that contains elements of medieval, seventeenth and nineteenth century architecture within the extant structure. The earliest records for the church date to the thirteenth century, but it is likely that the site was the focus for ecclesiastical activities prior to this date. Within the current graveyard a roughly oval setting of yew trees on a low earthen bank is thought to define the boundary of an early medieval Llan enclosure. The church sits centrally within this enclosure. The boundary of the modern, larger, graveyard dates to at least the 1830s as it is depicted on the 1841 tithe map. The extension of the graveyard could have been a necessary move to allow additional graves to be accommodated. The graveyard on the southern side of the church is still in active use and contains grave markers dating from the eighteenth century onwards, however no grave markers remain on the northern side of the church.

3. Results of the Evaluation

Nine trenches were excavated during the evaluation:

1. One trench measuring 5m by 5m in the proposed location of the cess pit
2. Eight trenches measuring 0.6m by 0.6m on the proposed locations of the footings for the new outbuilding.

The location of the trenches was informed by the architect's plans and the clients, who measured out the positions of the footings trenches for the outbuilding.

3.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was located in the north-eastern corner of the graveyard (fig. 2), in the proposed location of the new cess pit. It measured 5m by 5m and was excavated to a depth of 0.45m across much of the area (fig. 3), with a small sondage excavated to a depth of 1.1m in the north-eastern corner of the trench. The excavation of the trench was initially carried out by hand however a small mechanical excavator was used to remove the subsoil.

Below the turf the topsoil (1001) comprised a moderately loose mid brown/red sandy clay containing few sub-angular stones and two sherds of modern pottery (not retained). The topsoil depth varied between 0.15m and 0.2m across the extent of the trench. The topsoil was remarkably sterile with no evidence of anthropogenic disturbance. A layer of burning was identified in the south-eastern corner of the topsoil, comprising charcoal and heat affected clay. This occupied only the upper section of the topsoil and is modern in date.

The topsoil overlay a compact reddish brown silty clay subsoil (1002) that varied between 0.13m and 0.25m in depth. The subsoil contained several small concentrations of charcoal, with charcoal flecks identified throughout the subsoil horizon. No artefacts were recovered from the subsoil.

The natural geology (1003) was identified below the subsoil (1002) and comprised a compact reddish clay silt with frequent stones. Two areas of burning, (1004) and (1005), were identified on the surface of the natural, both of which corresponded to a concentration of charcoal in the overlying subsoil (1002). The burning was identified as ephemeral spreads of heat affected clay and large chunks of charcoal, and is thought to be the result of tree stumps being burnt (fig. 3). No evidence for anthropogenic activity was associated with the charcoal and burnt clay. In the

north-eastern corner of the trench a cone-shaped cut [1006] into the natural was investigated (fig. 3). This contained topsoil (1002) and is thought to be the result of tree root penetration.

No finds or features of archaeological significance were identified in trench 1.

3.2 Test Pits

The test pits were located on the northern side of the graveyard, close to the northern access gate (fig. 2). They were excavated on the location of the concrete footings for the proposed new outbuilding, and all measured 0.6m by 0.6m (see figs. 5 and 6).

Test Pit 010

Below the turf the test pit contained a loose mid/dark brown silty loam topsoil (012) containing occasional sub-angular stones. The topsoil was 0.13m deep and contained no artefacts. The underlying subsoil (013) comprised a loose mid brown silty clay with occasional stones. It was 0.25m deep and contained no artefacts or evidence of disturbance. The subsoil overlay the natural bedrock (014).

Test Pit 020

Below the turf the test pit contained a loose mid/dark brown silty loam topsoil (022) containing frequent sub-angular stones. The topsoil was 0.34m deep and overlay a probable till deposit (023). The till comprised a compact reddish silty clay that was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.39m. The base of the till was not reached and this is thought to be a glacial deposit.

Test Pit 030

Below the turf the topsoil (032) comprised a loose mid brown silty loam, 0.18m deep. The topsoil overlay a loose mid/light brown silty clay subsoil (033) containing frequent sub-angular stones. The subsoil was 0.36m deep and overlay the natural bedrock (034).

Test Pit 040

Below the turf the topsoil (042) comprised a loose mid/light reddish brown silty loam with occasional sub-angular stones. The topsoil overlay a deposit of till (043) comprising compact reddish clay which was excavated to a depth of 0.4m. The base of the deposit was not reached and it is thought to be glacial in origin.

Test Pit 050

Below the turf the topsoil (052) comprised a loose dark/mid brown silty loam, 0.25m deep. The topsoil overlay the natural bedrock (053).

Test Pit 060

Below the turf the topsoil (062) comprised a loose dark brown silty loam 0.15m deep. A single piece of modern pottery (not retained) was recovered from the topsoil. The topsoil overlay a subsoil (063) comprising loose reddish brown silty clay containing occasional sub-angular stones. The subsoil was 0.16m deep and overlay the natural bedrock (064).

Test Pit 070

Below the turf the topsoil (072) comprised a loose mid brown silty loam containing occasional sub-angular stones. The topsoil was 0.35m deep and overlay the subsoil (073). The subsoil comprised a loose mid reddish brown silty clay containing occasional sub-angular stones. It was excavated to a depth of 0.4m but the base of the deposit was not reached.

Test Pit 080

Below the turf the topsoil (082) comprised a loose light brown silty clay containing occasional sub-angular stones. The topsoil was 0.17m deep and overlay a subsoil deposit (083) comprising a loose light reddish brown silty clay. The subsoil was 0.47m deep and overlay a loose light reddish brown silty clay (085) containing large flat stones that appear to have been laid across the top of the silty clay deposit. The stones and the silty clay sat within a shallow concave cut [084], which truncated the top of the natural. The cut was 0.04m deep, its other dimensions not possible to discern due to the small size of the test pit. The feature was not fully investigated during the evaluation, but is thought to be a roughly paved surface and may relate to the early ecclesiastical use of the site, perhaps functioning as a path into the enclosure.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The evaluation revealed no evidence for burials within any of the trenches. This is interesting and indicates that the northern side of the church, outwith the original Llan enclosure, was not intensively used for burials. This is in contrast to the southern side, where extant grave markers show closely spaced burials dating from the eighteenth century onwards. It is still possible that graves do exist within this area of the graveyard, outside the evaluated areas.

One of the test pits, test pit 080, revealed a possible roughly paved surface below the subsoil. This feature comprised a layer of flat stones laid over a shallow silt-filled cut. The small size of the test pit precluded full investigation of the feature, but it is postulated that it could be a path or a track associated with the early Christian use of the site. This test pit is located at the south-western end of the footprint for the proposed outbuilding and it is likely that the feature continues to the north and south of the pit.

The evaluation demonstrated that the locations chosen for the cess pit and the outbuilding do not contain burials or significant archaeological features that could be impacted by the development. The possible paved surface in test pit 080 is located at the base of the formation depth for the outbuilding foundations and consequently can be preserved in situ. Any additional excavation to be carried out in this area should, however, be subject to a watching brief.

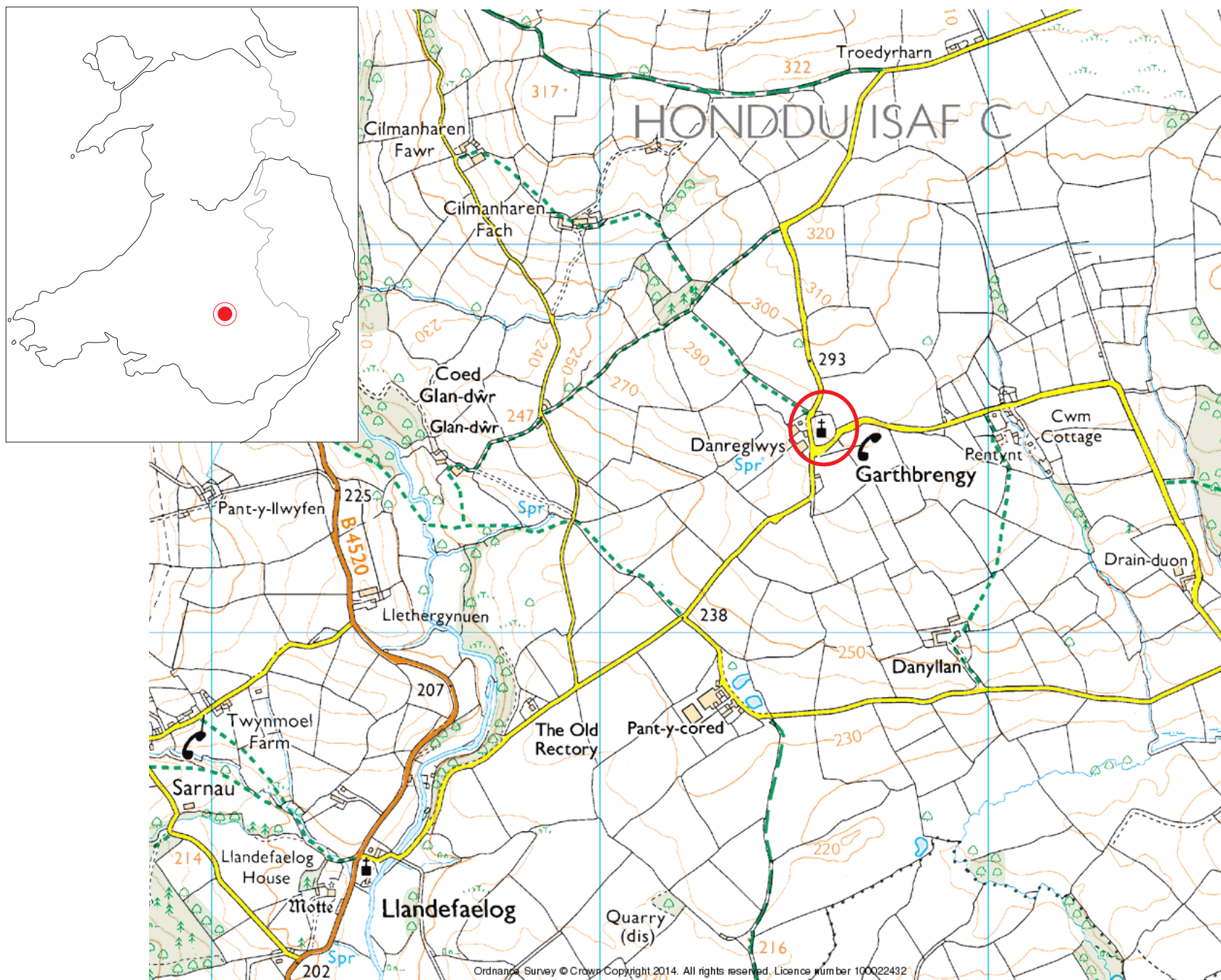
5. Acknowledgements

Thanks to Dr Iestyn Jones and Simon Reames for undertaking the evaluation, and to the Craddock family for their assistance and for providing cups of tea.

6. Sources

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0m 500m

Fig. 1
Site Location

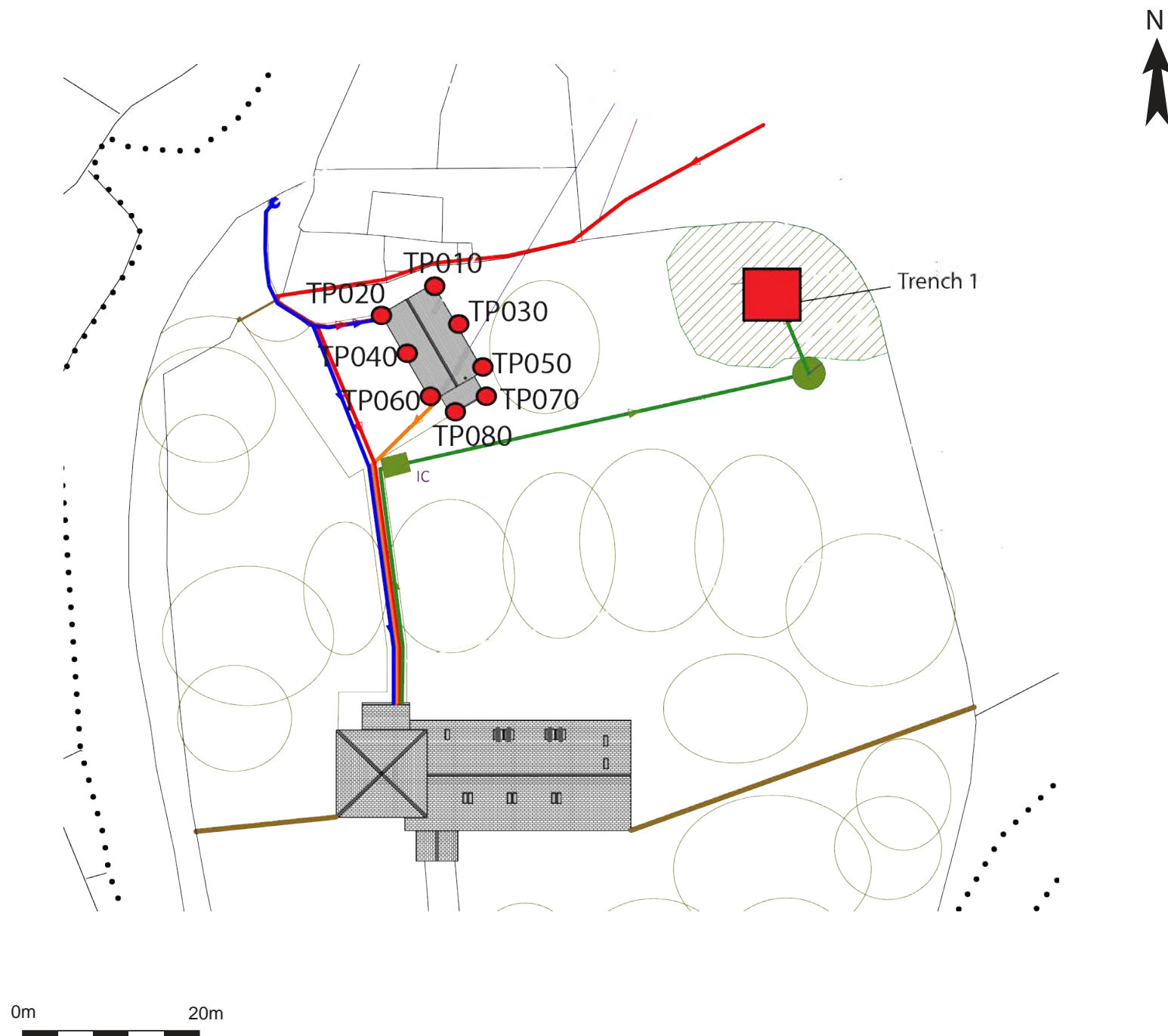


Fig. 2
Location of evaluation
trenches



Fig. 1
Trench 1 post-ex



Cone of topsoil produced by root activity
Scale 1m and 0.5m
Looking E



Concentration of charcoal and heat
affected clay in the top of the natural
Scale = 0.5m
Looking N

Fig. 4
Features within
Trench 1



TP 010
Scale = 0.5m
Looking N



TP 020
Scale = 0.5m
Looking N



TP 030
Scale = 1m and 0.5m
Looking N



TP 040
Scale = 0.5m
Looking N

Fig. 5
Test Pits post-ex



TP 050
Scale = 0.5m and 0.2m
Looking N



TP 060
Scale = 0.5m
Looking N



TP 070
Scale = 0.5m and 0.2m
Looking N



TP 080
Scale = 0.5m
Looking N

Fig. 6
Test Pits post-ex

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