

Archaeological Monitoring
Abernyte Parish Church
Perth and Kinross

JH09



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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING,
ABERNYTE PARISH CHURCH,
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JH09**

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Illustration 1: Archaeological Monitoring, Abernyte Parish Church, Location

Illustration 2: Archaeological Monitoring, Abernyte Parish Church

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ABSTRACT

Alder Archaeology monitored the formation of an access ramp and rainwater soakaway at Abernyte Parish Church, site code JH09, in the period 13th – 16th December 2016.

The excavations for the ramp, to the N of the church, were shallow, confined in layers of relatively modern disturbance, including the insertion of previous drains and electricity cables and possible levelling up with demolition rubble. The soakaway, to the W of the church, was dug to a depth of 1.2 m through disturbed graveyard soil down to what appeared to be glacial sand and stone fragments. An articulated burial in a coffin, perhaps of 19th-century date, was left in place beneath the soakaway.

The present 18th and 19th-century church stands on a well-defined S-facing glacial terrace overlooking the Carse of Gowrie. Previous churches on the site probably occupied the same position, but were presumably aligned E – W, whereas the present church is aligned N – S, with the entrance at the N end and the chancel in the S.

1 Background

1.1 Introduction

Matthew Cowan Architecture & Design Services on behalf of Abernyte Parish Church commissioned Alder Archaeology to undertake archaeological monitoring of the formation of a disabled access ramp to the parish church. The development area covers about 8 m x 8 m between the N end of the church and the public road, from which it is separated by a high stone wall and two welded steel gates mounted on stone piers. The site is centred on NGR NO 2669 3112. The work (site code JH09) was undertaken during the period 13th – 16th December 2016, in winter weather conditions including light drizzle and failing light. The requirement was to monitor all below-ground excavations.

The work was designed to satisfy the archaeological condition on development application reference 16/00715/FLL.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The main aim of this investigation was to establish the presence/absence, date, character and quality of any archaeological remains surviving within the development area.

1.3 Reporting

The present document has been prepared as the final report on this monitoring exercise. Copies will be sent to the client, Historic Environment Scotland and Perth & Kinross Historic Environment Record.

1.4 Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust and Mr Wm White of Abernyte Parish Church for their assistance and guidance throughout this project. Abernyte Parish Church funded this monitoring.

2 Details of Work

2.1 The Site (Illus 1)

The village of Abernyte is located on the southern slopes of the Braes of the Carse, with extensive views southwards over the Carse of Gowrie and the Tay. The Parish Church (B listed, LB 5884) lies outwith the village, to the E, surrounded by a walled churchyard (C listed, LB 5885), to the S of the public road. The ground falls away to the W, and steeply to the S, leaving the church on a prominent S-facing plateau overlooking the Carse. To the S of the churchyard, on lower ground, is the modern cemetery, which is still in use. To the W of the churchyard, on lower ground, is the church car park, accessed from the public road.

The present church (B listed, LB 5884) is believed to be on or near the site of the medieval parish church, first recorded in the mid-15th century. The present church incorporates a 1672 date stone, but was rebuilt in 1736, and repaired in 1810 and in 1836 – 7. There are many 18th-century gravestones in the surrounding churchyard.

The church building is cruciform, aligned N – S, with the chancel at the S end and an entrance porch at the N end, entered from the E side. The church is generally built of red sandstone rubble, with steeply pitched slated roofs laid in even courses. The porch is of a slightly different build, with irregular squared sandstone, built to courses.

At the N end of the nave, the NE and NW corners of the nave have been walled off to form, on the E, a small office, and on the W a toilet, on either side of a central passage leading into the church. In the SE corner of the toilet, under a modern cleaner's cupboard, is a very small trapdoor in the floor, which gives access, by a narrow sandstone stair, to a small cellar. This is confined to the NW corner of the nave, and was formerly the boiler room. There is a flue, now disused, in the N wall, and a disused coal storage area at the S end, with a coal chute under the W wall of the nave, leading to a hatch accessed from the churchyard. There was no evidence of features pre-dating the present church.

The new access ramp follows three sides of a quadrilateral between the porch and the main gates in the churchyard wall, directly N of the church. In addition, a new rainwater drain and soakaway was dug to the S of the nave, because the new ramp is paved with slabs, whereas the old gravel path was self-draining. The old gravel path was separated from the N gutter of the public road by a high concrete sill across the main gateway. This obstructed wheelchair access, but prevented surface water on the road from running into the churchyard and flooding the entrance. The sill has been removed, and replaced with a surface drain which empties into the soakaway.

2.2 Archaeological Potential

Although the present church is of 18th-century and later date, it is known to be on or near the site of the medieval church, first recorded in the mid 15th century. The Aber- (equivalent to Gaelic Inver-) place-name suggests settlement from Pictish times onward, and the position of the church, on prominent high ground, is typical of early Christian church sites in eastern Scotland.

The excavations required for the ramp and drains were generally quite shallow, but it was possible that they might expose early graves (which can be very shallow), and structures associated with previous churches on the site.

2.3 Archaeological Method

Formation of the new ramp required removal of the previous gravel path, gate sill and entrance door sill, and reduction of the underlying deposits to form a continuous gradient between the main gate and the entrance porch. A new surface water drainage track was dug from the ramp to a new soakway pit, S of the church nave. All this was done under continuous archaeological supervision, using a very small micro-excavator with ditching bucket, and occasionally by hand. The process and the deposits exposed were recorded by digital photography and written notes.

2.4 Results of Investigations

The features and deposits exposed are recorded in detail in Appendices 1 (Context Register) and 2 (Photographic Register).

Access Ramp

The existing gravel path 001 was c 20 mm deep, over a bedding layer 002 of reddish-grey sand and silt, also about 20 mm deep. Under this was a similar layer, 005, with frequent sandstone fragments and occasional lime mortar, to a depth of about 150 mm below the modern surface, and below this a light brown sandy loam 006, with frequent sandstone fragments. Within 006, close to its E edge, was a concentration 009 of large, irregular sandstone blocks, not forming any obvious structure. There was another concentration of sandstone rubble 010 around the entrance, 0.3 m down.

At the E edge of the ramp area it was necessary to extend beyond the existing gravel path, removing a layer of turf 007, about 100 mm deep. At the N boundary of the ramp, the foundations 008 of the churchyard wall were exposed to a depth of about 0.3 m, and also the foundation 013 of the W gate pier. No foundation cuts were seen.

Passing through layer 006 was an electricity cable 012 leading to a light over the church car park, an earthenware drain pipe 011, and other drain pipes and cables. No cuts were visible.

Soakaway

The rainwater soakaway pit was rectangular, 1 m E – W by 0.85 m N – S, and was dug 5.5 m W of the nave, and 2 m S of its N end.

Beneath the turf and topsoil 015 was a stony subsoil 016, starting 0.2 m down and continuing to 1 m down. It became more stony with depth, generally sandstone, with some whinstone, and occasional small fragments of bone (not retained). Beneath this was a layer of orange sand 017 with whinstone fragments, apparently natural, but with some localised fragments of wooden boards, evidently a coffin lid. Under these was a long bone, aligned E – W, 1.2 m down, evidently part of an undisturbed burial. In the NE corner of the pit was a large stone 018, either a boulder or a solid outcrop.

Digging was stopped at this point, leaving the burial and the boulder in place. The soakaway pit was lined with a vertical double-walled corrugated plastic pipe 0.35 m diameter, and capped with a plastic lid.

A new drainage track was dug from the soakaway pit NE to the gate, generally about 0.3 m wide and 0.6 m deep, and lined with 100 mm plastic pipe connecting up with the new surface drains at the gate. This passed through deposits similar to 015 and 016.

3 Interpretation

3.1

Access Ramp

It appeared that the area of the access ramp to the N of the church had been extensively disturbed by previous drains and services, and also levelled up, perhaps with demolition rubble from previous buildings or construction waste from the present one, to create a reasonably level access between the road and the church. The working conditions, localised machine excavation in winter light and rain, would not have revealed very subtle features, but the absence of visible cuts associated with the services and wall foundations strongly reinforced the impression of general disturbance and reworking in relatively modern times.

Soakaway

The soakaway pit revealed a not unexpected undisturbed burial, perhaps of 19th-century date, to judge by the survival of coffin boards and the date of nearby gravestones, eg James Peebles 1861. The absence of a well-defined grave cut is not surprising in such a small machine excavation, as the grave did not go deeply into undisturbed natural, and would have been backfilled with the same material it was dug through. The presence of small bone fragments is evidence of previous grave digging in the area, to be expected in a long-lived churchyard, but the absence of substantial disturbed bones is interesting, suggesting the churchyard was not as crowded as some, or had been cleared out at some time in the past.

The natural 017 and the boulder 018 may well be of glacial origin, consistent with the appearance of the terrace on which the church stands.

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

The absence of substantial remains in the area of the ramp is inconclusive, given the shallowness of the excavations and the appearance of relatively modern disturbance and upfilling. Deeper excavations could have encountered significant remains.

The excavation of the soakaway gave a useful indication of the underlying geology, probably glacial, and the depth of undisturbed burials, about 1.2 m. This may well vary in different parts of the churchyard, and in different periods.

No further work is recommended in connection with the present access ramp project.

No trace of earlier church buildings was found. The raised terrace on which the present church stands is so obviously suitable, and so tightly defined, that it would be very difficult to have put an earlier church anywhere else. Any remains of earlier buildings are probably under the present one, and will probably remain undisturbed for the foreseeable future. If ever it became necessary to repair the church floor, or install a new heating system, interesting evidence might come to light.

Any previous buildings on the site were presumably oriented E – W to follow liturgical tradition. The present N – S alignment is obviously more practical on this site, as it places the main (N) entrance as close to the public road as possible, and gives as much daylight as possible to the S-facing windows behind the pulpit. It is not surprising that the 18th- and 19th-century building has been designed in this way from the outset.

Even where pre-Reformation buildings were retained, it was not unusual in Scotland to re-arrange them so as to place the pulpit as near the centre as possible, converting cruciform or T-shaped liturgical spaces into auditoriums for preaching and congregational worship.

5 Bibliography

Bowler, D P, 2016 Abernyte North Church, Archaeological Monitoring, Written Scheme of Investigation. Alder Archaeology Ltd, Perth.

Malone, S, 2016 Terms of Reference for a Programme of Archaeological Works, Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust, Perth.

Appendix 1 Context Register

No:	Description
001	Modern grey stone chip path. 20 mm deep.
002	Red/grey sand/silt bedding under 001. Dug about 20 mm
003	Modern stone chip soakaway at foot of cast-iron rhone pipe, under 001 in corner.
004	Stoneware drain pipe under 003 in corner, but not connected.
005	Like 002, and under. Fragments of red and green sandstone. Some frags lime mortar. To about 150 mm down.
006	Light red-brown silty loam with frequent sandstone frags.
007	Turf, 100 mm deep.
008	Foundations of graveyard wall. Exposed to 0.3 m down. No obvious cut.
009	Sandstone rubble blocks, not built together, just W of immortelle and red granite stone. 3 m S of wall.
010	Concentration of rubble around entrance, 0.3 m down.
011	Drain towards cover at wall.
012	Electric cable to car park light.
013	Founds of W pier.
014	Brown soft silty loam in sondage. Starts 0.3 m down from recent surface. Bottom 0.7 m down.
015	Turf and mid brown topsoil over soakaway.
016	Stony Subsoil under 015. Starts 0.2 m down. Frequent irregular small sandstone fragments. Grading to medium lower down. Stones angular and larger lower down. Occasional very small bone fragments. Whinstone fragments from about 1 m down. Graveyard soil plus demolition plus upcast natural.

017	Orange sand and whinstone fragments. Glacial deposits, natural and disturbed. From 1 m down. Some wooden fragments, coffin boards?
018	Large boulder or outcrop in NE corner of sondage.

Appendix 2 Photographic Register

<i>Image No</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>View</i>
	13 Dec 2016	
001	Church Notice Board	S
002 – 4	General, church entrance porch and gates at start of work.	S
005	Work area, marking out in progress.	SSE
006	General view of church, W elevation. Cruciform plan, on gently rising ground.	E
007	General view, W transept and chancel. Ground rises to N.	NNE
008	General, sloping ground and slumping gravestones, S of chancel.	NE
009	S elevation, chancel and transepts.	N
010	E elevation, with chancel and E transept.	WNW
011	E elevation, with E transept, and entrance porch at N end.	WSW
012	Entrance porch and gates in churchyard wall. Marking out of ramp in progress on gravel path 001.	WNW
013	Modern cemetery to S of church. Ground falls away steeply to S.	NNW
014	View from modern cemetery. Church and old churchyard on plateau, ground falls away W and S.	NE
015	View from car park. Church and old churchyard on plateau, ground falls away W and S.	NNE
016	View from car park. W elevation of church and old churchyard on plateau. Ground falls away W and S.	E
017	View from car park. Church and old churchyard on plateau. Ground falls away W and S. N end of church roughly level with public road.	ESE
018	Digging E from Church Porch. Grey stone chip path 001.	S
019	Modern grey stone chip path 001. 20 mm deep. Bedding 002. Cast iron rhone pipe in corner.	S

020	Stoneware drain pipe 004 under soakaway 003 in corner, but not connected.	W
021 – 3	Digging N from church. Path 001 over bedding 002.	W
024	Starting second pass N from church. About 200 mm down from surface.	W
025	Starting parallel to churchyard wall.	W
026 – 7	Turf 007, 100 mm deep. Foundations 008 of churchyard wall.	W
029 – 30	Foundations 008 of churchyard wall. Exposed to 0.3 m down. No obvious cut.	NW
031	Foundations 008 of churchyard wall. Exposed to 0.3 m down. No obvious cut.	E
032	Digging W to gate	N
033	Detail of immortelle, just E of work area.	ENE
034	Detail of immortelle, just E of work area.	W
035	Work in progress around porch, after slight revision of marking out. Immortelle in foreground.	W
036	Work adjacent to churchyard wall. Revised marking enlarges E about 0.5 m. Actually 0.7 m	W
037	Detail, stripping enlarged area.	W
038	Detail, stripping enlarged area, adjacent to immortelle.	SW
039	Detail, stripping enlarged area, adjacent to immortelle. Sandstone rubble 009 coming into view.	S
040 – 1	Detail, rubble 009 on spoil heap.	NE
042 – 4	Stripping enlarged area, adjacent to immortelle. N towards churchyard wall.	N
045	Grading down E edge of path adjacent to churchyard wall.	N
	15 Dec 2016	
046 - 77	Selected gravestones.	
078	General, as left on Tuesday.	W
079	Isolated gravestone.	
080	Isolated gravestone.	
081	Digging W. Yellow warning tape.	W
082	Line of power cable. Yellow warning tape.	SW
083	Gate and wall founds. 0.35 m deep.	WNW
084	Drain 011 towards cover at wall. Exposed earth wire and warning tape.	W

085	Digging W past W gate pier.	W
086	Exposing founds of W gate pier. Black electric cable.	W
087	Detail, founds 013 of W pier.	NW
088	Continuing W in failing light.	W
089	Deepening in front of gate.	W
	16 Dec 2016	
090	Gravestone	
091	Gravestone	
092	Gate and N porch of church, showing relative positions (different from plan).	S
093	Detail	S
094	Detail	S
095	Detail	S
096	Gateway after removal of concrete sill.	NW
097 – 8	Sunrise over churchyard.	SE
099	Sunrise, ground sloping down S from church.	E
100 – 1	Sunrise over churchyard.	SSE
102	Sunrise over churchyard.	SE
103	19 th -cent graves on NW side of church.	SE
104	Sunrise over churchyard.	SSE
105	Chancel and transepts.	NNW
106 – 7	Nave Interior	S
108	Collection Box, interior	NE
109	View from toilet down into boiler room.	S
110	Boiler room interior. Spiral stair on R.	N
111	Detail, N end of boiler room. Disused flue in N wall.	N
112	Boiler room interior. Waste pipe exits through disused coal chute on R.	S
113	Boiler room interior. Waste pipe exits through disused coal chute.	W
114	Nave exterior with disused flue in roof, and cover of disused coal chute against wall.	E

115	Detail, slabs covering disused coal chute.	E
116	Detail, position of disused flue in roof.	E
117	Small excavation against E gate pier, to receive rainwater drain trap.	WNW
118	Detail of small excavation, 0.5 m dia.	WNW
119	Start digging soakaway W of church.	E
120	Stony Subsoil 016 under Turf 015.	E
121 – 2	Digging into Subsoil 016.	E
123 – 4	Whinstone fragments in lower part of 016.	NE
125	Fragments of coffin wood on spoil heap.	-
126	Fragments of coffin wood in lower part of 016.	N
127	Small void 1.2 m down in soakaway, in sand 017.	E
128	Coffin wood and in-situ long bone in sand 017	E
129	Large boulder or outcrop 018 in soakaway.	NE
130	Digging drain track SW from E gate pier	NE
131 – 6	Digging from soakaway to gate, 0.6 m deep.	NE
137 – 8	James Peebles 1861 stone, with angel of resurrection. Adjacent to soakaway.	WNW
139	Pipe track from soakaway to W gate pier.	NE
140	Pipe track from W gate pier to soakaway. Yellow warning tape marks power cable.	SW
141	Track runs under pipes and cables. Fading light.	SW
142	Pipe track from soakaway to W gate pier. Fading light.	NE
143 – 6	View to churchyard wall N of porch. Removing spoil heap by grab.	ENE
147 – 8	New drain pipe from E gate pier, running under old pipe and cables.	NE
149	Tracks and cables around W pier.	N
150	Laying gravel fill around E pier.	NE
151	Laying gravel fill around E pier. Fading light.	SW
152 – 3	New drain pipe from E gate pier, running under old pipe and cables.	SW

Appendix 3 Discovery & Excavation in Scotland Entry

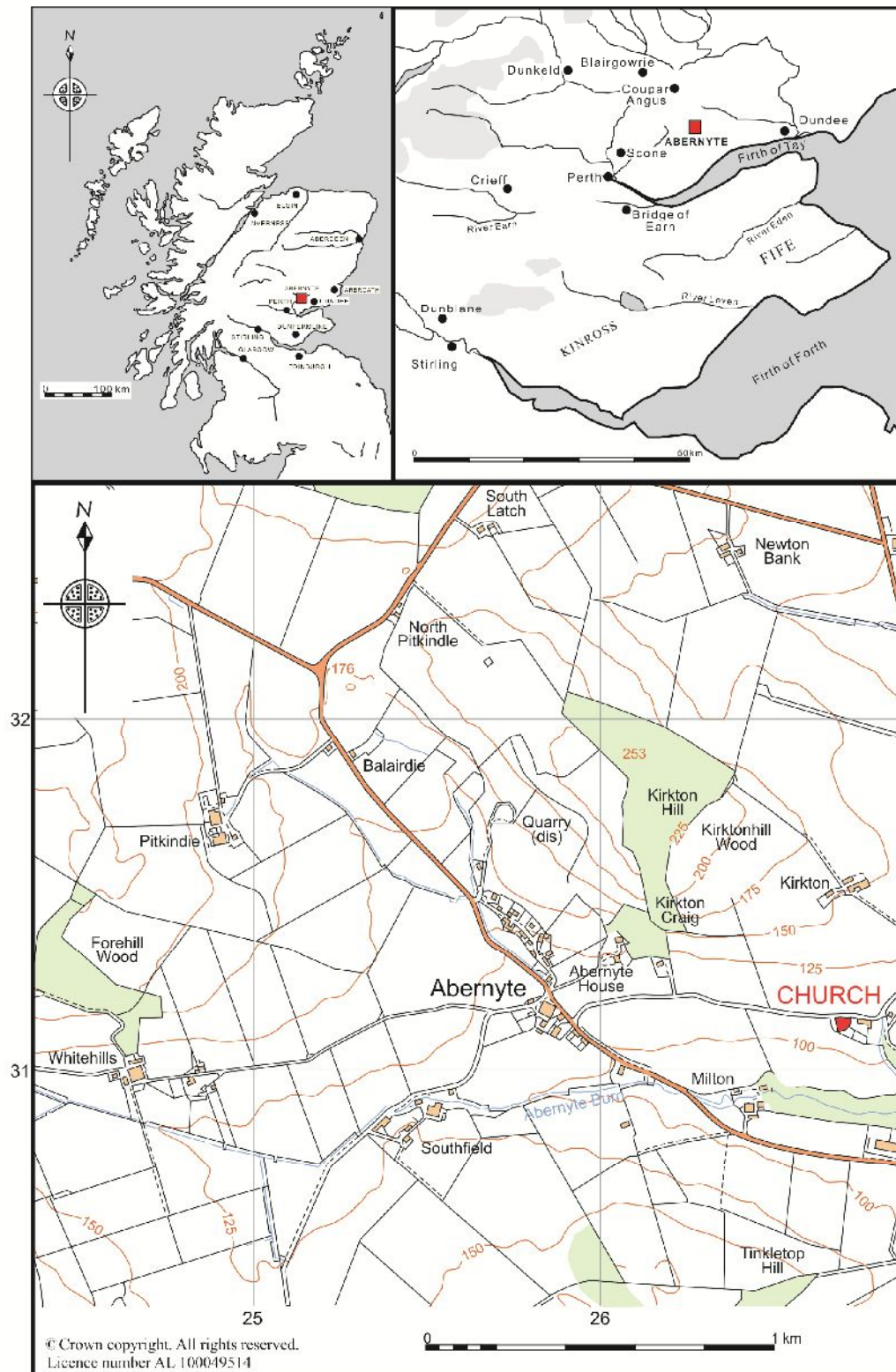
LOCAL AUTHORITY:	Perth & Kinross
PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:	Abernyte Parish Church
PROJECT CODE:	JH09
PARISH:	Abernyte
NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:	David Bowler
NAME OF ORGANISATION:	Alder Archaeology Ltd
TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:	Archaeological Monitoring
NMRS NO(S):	-
SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):	Church
SIGNIFICANT FINDS:	None
NGR (2 letters, 8 or 10 figures)	NO 2669 3112
START DATE (this season)	13 Dec 2016
END DATE (this season)	16 Dec 2016
PREVIOUS WORK (incl. DES ref.)	n/a
MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION: (May include information from other fields)	<p>Alder Archaeology monitored the formation of an access ramp and rainwater soakaway at Abernyte Parish Church, site code JH09, in the period 13th – 16th December 2016.</p> <p>The excavations for the ramp, to the N of the church, were shallow, confined in layers of relatively modern disturbance, including the insertion of previous drains and electricity cables and possible levelling up with demolition rubble. The soakaway, to the W of the church, was dug to a depth of 1.2 m through disturbed graveyard soil down to what appeared to be glacial sand and stone fragments. An articulated burial in a coffin, perhaps of 19th-century date, was left in place beneath the soakaway.</p> <p>The present 18th and 19th-century church stands on a well-defined S-facing glacial terrace overlooking the Carse of Gowrie. Previous churches on the site probably occupied the same position, but were presumably aligned E – W, whereas the present church is aligned N – S, with the entrance at the N end and the chancel in the S.</p>
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ARCHIVE (intended/deposited) LOCATION	HES (intended)

Illus 1

Archaeological Monitoring, Abernyte Parish Church, Location

JH09



Illus 2

Archaeological Monitoring, Abernyte Parish Church

J11109

