

## Research design: Llantwit Major 2024 season

(GeoArch Report 2024/08)



*The Globe Field at the end of the 2023 season: the excavation location lies to the south of the Parish Church of St Illtud, close to the centre of what is believed to be the early medieval monastic enclosure.*

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*(provisional version, May 2024)*

## Summary

Llantwit Major has long been believed to be the site of a monastery associated with St Illtud in the late 5<sup>th</sup> and early 6<sup>th</sup> centuries and which became a royal burial ground in the 8<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> centuries (the Parish Church houses a remarkable collection of early medieval inscribed stones). The site seems to have waned in importance during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries and was granted to Tewkesbury Abbey around the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century by Robert Fitzhamon.

The archaeology department of Cardiff University, funded by the Dr D.G. Smith Memorial Project, is conducting work to place the interpretation of the monastery on a sounder footing by seeking the physical evidence that has previously been lacking. This work was initially desk-based and geophysical, but excavations were undertaken in 2022 at a related secular site in Boverton and in 2023 in 'The Globe Field' in the heart of Llantwit. A model for the monastic enclosure has been developed, employing an approach fostered in the historical town surveys of Ireland (Swan 1971, 1985, 1994; Prunty & Clarke 2011), in which the earthworks in the 'Great Ley' (commonly known as 'the Dovecote Field') may be a part of the early medieval monastic enclosure, rather than simply fields associated with the medieval Rectory (often referred to as the Grange). This substantial potential enclosure would be commensurate with other significant early medieval monastic sites, and measures 500m N-S and 300m E-W (10.8ha), with the inner enclosure (70m by 60m) around the church lying somewhat asymmetrically within its northern part. Surviving features within this enclosure, including the internal 'fields' at the rectory site and the churchyard, together with long-lived property boundaries in the village, suggest elements of its subdivision.

The summer 2023 field season started the testing of this model by examining the remains of drystone field walls that appear, in plan, to be part of this system of internal sub-division. Post-excavation work is on-going, but it appears most likely that these walls date from the late 11<sup>th</sup> or early 12<sup>th</sup> century. They may relate to a broader phase of refurbishment of Llantwit, including the Norman church and perhaps to the writing of the 'Life' of St Illtud.

The 2023 season in 'The Globe Field' also produced evidence for three phases of activity before construction of the drystone wall. The first of these includes cut-features associated with metalworking, one of which has produced a 14C date of cal. AD 596-664. The second is a period of inhumation burials, with 14C dates suggesting the period AD770-900. This was followed by a period of erosion with human remains being reworked into an environment that was probably heavily trampled by livestock.

In addition, two test-pits were dug in 2023 on the western side of the valley with the objective of testing the extent of a potential inhumation cemetery, evidenced by recent discovered of at least two inhumations dating to the period AD660-780 in the grounds of Chantry House. Further human remains were recovered, but they had been disturbed by later activity.

The programme of work for 2024 will focus on improving understanding of those earlier phases through excavation of a larger area adjacent to, and overlapping, the 2023 trench in The Globe Field.

The excavations will be delivered as part of the university's teaching programme, involving a core group of undergraduates, with additional graduate and local volunteers, managed by Dr Tim Young.

## Administrative background

A programme of research, funded by the Dr D.G. Smith Memorial Project, is being undertaken by the archaeology department of Cardiff University to attempt to clarify the nature and location of early medieval activity in Llantwit Major (Young 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b, 2022, 2023a, 2023b). The research has involved geophysical survey, together with an analysis of patterns of landholding from medieval and early post-medieval documentary sources and is moving into some focused excavation of key localities, starting with Boverton (December 2022; Young 2023b) and The Globe Field, Llantwit (August-September 2023; Young 2023a).

This document provides a Research Design for a second season of work at 'The Globe Field', with the excavation planned for the period 20<sup>th</sup> May 2024 – 14<sup>th</sup> June 2024. Further details of the programme of work and its rationale are present with the Research Design for the 2023 season (Young 2023a) and this document is intended to be read alongside the 2023 design. As with the 2023 season, the excavation will be run as a training excavation for Cardiff University.

## Archaeological and historical background

The church of Llantwit Major has long been associated with the site of the monastery of Illtud (see Wooding 2017, 142-147 for a recent discussion of the identification). Illtud (Eltutus) was described in the *Vita Prima Samsonis* (probably dated to the last decades of the seventh century or the first of the eighth; Wooding 2107, 140) as a classical, not just religious, teacher. The detail provided in this 'Life', coupled with independent evidence for the presence at Samson at the Council of Paris AD556x573 (arguably AD561; Wood 2017, 103) enhances the credibility of a historical Illtud. Samson's biographer claimed to have visited Illtud's monastery, presumably at some point in the late-7<sup>th</sup> century, describing it as magnificent. The development of a royal burial ground and cult centre at Llantwit Major by the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century suggests that if the site was then identified as that of Illtud's monastery, it would likely be the same as the site identified as Illtud's when Samson's biographer visited in the late 7<sup>th</sup> century. In 2022 and 2023, human remains (discussed in more detail below) dated to between AD660 and AD780 were recovered from a badger sett approximately 120m south of the church, and the Globe Field excavations of 2023 produced features with metalworking evidence dated to cal. AD 596-664, providing additional confidence in the identification of Llantwit Major as the site of Illtud's monastery, with only short gaps in the chain of identification.

A model for the monastic enclosure has been developed (Young 2023a), employing an approach fostered in the historical town surveys of Ireland (Swan 1971, 1985, 1994; Prunty & Clarke 2011), in which the earthworks in the 'Great Ley' (commonly known as 'the Dovecote Field') may be a part of the early medieval monastic enclosure, rather than simply fields associated with the medieval Rectory (often referred to as the Grange). This substantial potential enclosure would be commensurate with significant early medieval monastic sites in Ireland and Scotland, and measures 500m N-S and 300m E-W (10.8ha), with the inner enclosure (70m by 60m) around the church lying somewhat asymmetrically within its northern part. Surviving features within this enclosure, including the internal 'fields' at the rectory site and the churchyard, together with long-lived property boundaries in the village, suggest elements of its subdivision. Such a rectilinear system of subdivision has not been noted at examples of early medieval monasteries in Ireland or Scotland.

The bounding bank and the internal sub-divisions seen as earthwork features in the 'Great Ley' form part of the scheduled monument GM142 'Llantwit Major Monastic Settlement', commonly referred to as Llantwit Grange (NPRN 307122; MG48 'The Grange of Abbot's Llantwit', RCAHMW 1982, 299-303). The initial field investigation therefore avoided this area; the summer 2023 field season started

the testing of the enclosure model by examining the remains of drystone field walls in 'The Globe Field' 40-50m S of the modern churchyard, that appear, in plan, to be part of this same system of internal sub-division. Post-excavation work is on-going, but it appears most likely that these walls date from late 11<sup>th</sup> or early 12<sup>th</sup> century (excavation Phase 5) and had passed out of use by the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. There is no evidence at present whether they follow any precursors.

This unexpected outcome suggests that the sub-division of the enclosure may relate to a broader phase of refurbishment of Llantwit, including the Norman church and perhaps to the writing of the 'Life' of St Illtud, probably in the period immediately following the Norman invasion (i.e. excavation Phase 5). Moreover, the 2023 excavations suggest that the areas in 'The Globe Field' previously used for metalworking and inhumation suffered livestock trampling and erosion in the 10<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> centuries (i.e. excavation Phases 3 and 4). This broadly corresponds to the period during which Llantwit is absent from the documentary record (although the carved stone pillars interpreted as perhaps supporting the screen in a wooden church, are of this period).

The inscribed stones of the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries form the tangible evidence for the earlier heyday of the cult centre, although they are also supplemented by contemporary references to the Abbot of Llantwit (*abbas Ilduti*) as a witness for charters in the Book of Llandaff (where the place appears as *Lanildut* or *Podum sancti Ilduti*). At least one of the stones has a reasonable provenance, for the Samson (or Illtud) Cross was moved with some archaeological observation in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century which suggested it had been *in situ* and associated with a cist burial (and post-dating even earlier burials; Halliday 1903). The 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century high status burial ground was thus reasonably certainly on the site of the modern church.

The recent work has demonstrated, however, a much wider extent of inhumation across the valley south of the church. To the east of the stream, remains of two individuals (an infant inhumation of Phase 2 at the northern end of the trench and disarticulated remains in a Phase 3 deposit at the southern end) from 2023 Trench 1 probably date to the period AD770-900. This range is approximately the same as the date range proposed for the inscribed stones at the church and so increases the area of potentially contemporaneous inhumation. Many other pieces of disarticulated human remains were also recovered from the ploughsoil in the trench, suggesting their derivation from upslope. In that direction, undated inhumations were reported from The Hayes Croft at some point before 1886 (Anon 1887; The Western Mail, 6<sup>th</sup> January 1886).

To the west of the stream, human remains from the badger sett at Chantry House (95m S of the churchyard) have an MNI of 4, with two individuals dated to the period AD660 to 780, slightly earlier than the burial evidence described above. Further south, Testpit 2 of 2023 (130m S of the churchyard), produced the reworked remains for two further individuals (radiocarbon dates awaited).

Although the dataset is currently very small, these findings suggest that in the late 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century heyday of the cult centre, burials took place across a wide area of the central part of the proposed monastic enclosure, yet (if the evidence for the dating of the drystone walls is also applicable to the churchyard enclosure), much of this area was excluded when the churchyard was enclosed in the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century, after the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century hiatus or reduction in activity.

Evidence for activity in the earlier 7<sup>th</sup> century includes a radiocarbon date on grain from a gully (also containing metalworking waste) that predated the infant burial in the 2023 excavations (Excavation Phase 1). The bulk of the recovered metalworking waste recovered in 2023 has not yet been dated directly and was reworked into agricultural soils of the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries, perhaps from a source

upslope of the excavation area. The fill of the infant grave (cal. AD 706-736 (4.9%), 770-894 (88.3%), 928-944 (2.1%)) contained slag.

### Planned fieldwork

The fieldwork to be undertaken in 2024 aims to further understanding of the early medieval monastic centre through an 'L-shaped excavation that will be conducted in the northern part of 'The Globe Field' in part wrapping around and in part overlapping Trench 1 of 2023.

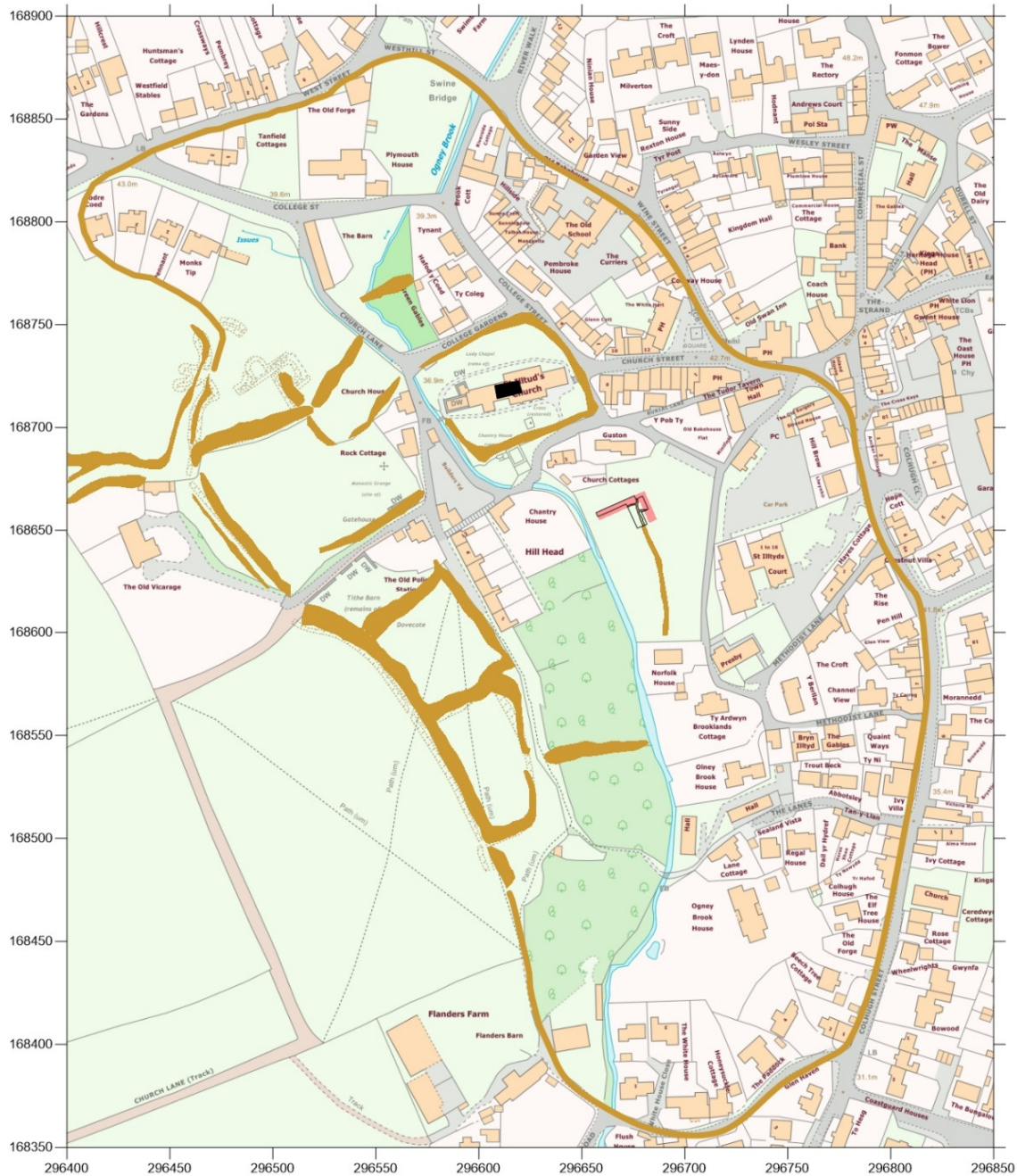


Figure 1: planned location for the main trench in The Globe Field (red) in relation to the proposed early medieval enclosure (brown) and to Trench 1 of 2023 (black outline).

The trench will be positioned (Figures 1-4) so that investigation of features below the agricultural soils may be undertaken without the requirement of removing large lengths of the drystone wall system investigated in 2023.

The NW-SE arm of the trench (4m x 15m) will be approximately parallel to the NE side of the 2023 excavations, allowing a section to be constructed spanning the deeper stratigraphy at the S of the trench and the shallower area with metalworking and burials at the N. The NE-SW arm of the trench (4m x 20m) will extend westwards towards the stream, including, but wider than, the NE-SW arm of the 2023 trench that was not fully excavated. This will provide a long section downslope of the lynchet, spanning the areas where early features were detected in 2023. An area between the arms of the trench encompassing an additional section of the 2023 trench will be included to cover an additional area around the inhumation and to provide evidence for the nature of the northern margin of the SW field.

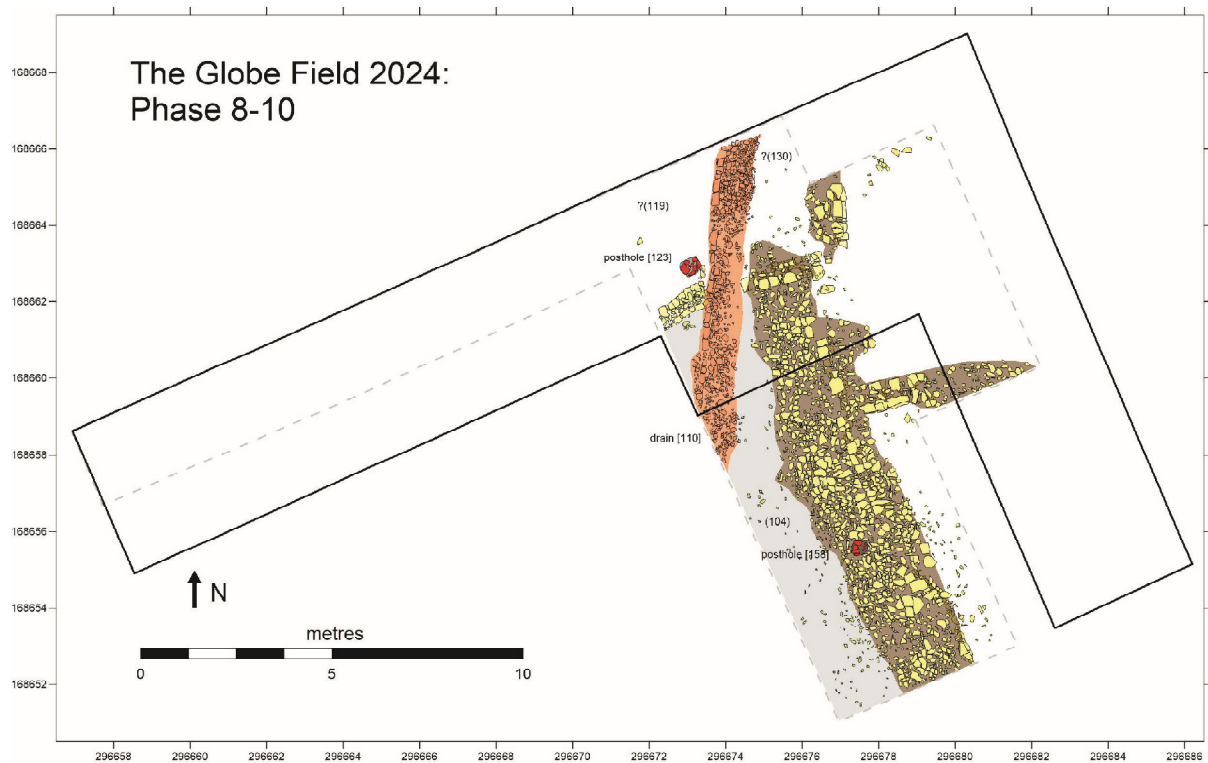


Figure 2: relationship of the 2024 proposed trench (Trench 4), to Trench 1 of 2023, showing the features uncovered in 2023 relating to Phase 8-10 (post medieval).

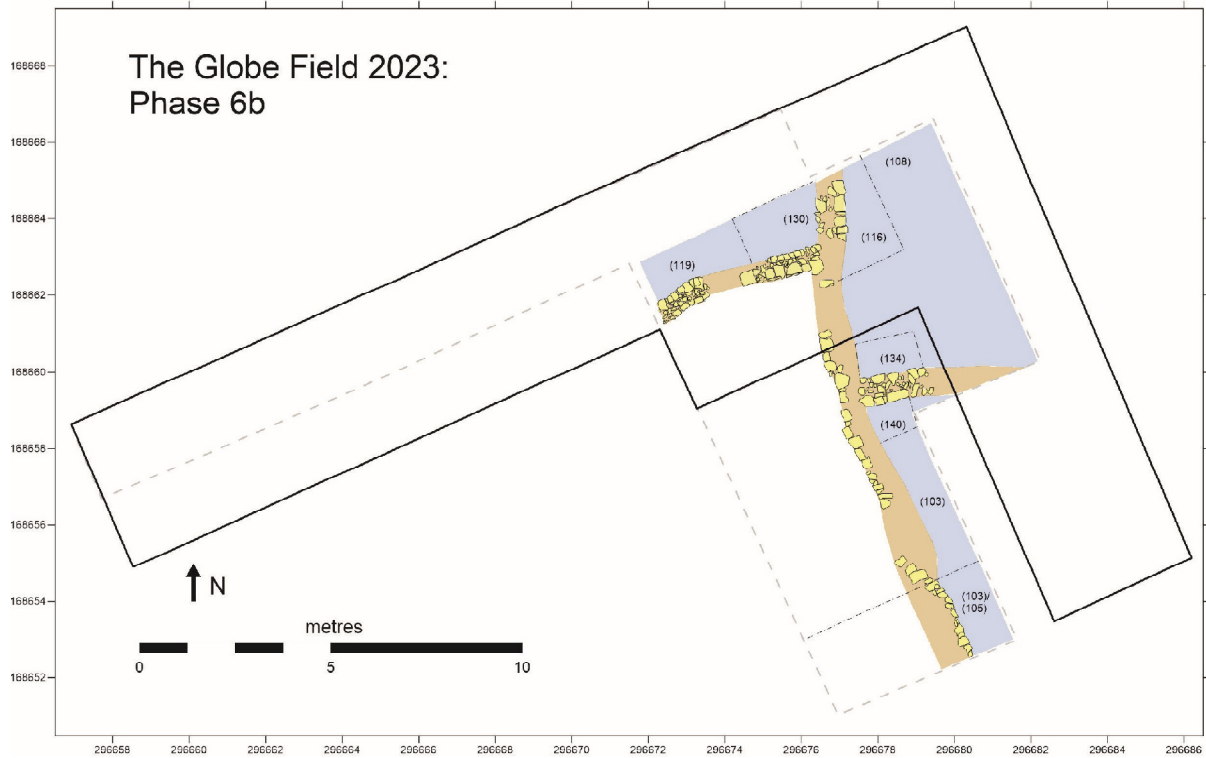


Figure 3: as Figure 2, but with features uncovered in 2023 relating to Phase 6b (later 12<sup>th</sup> century).

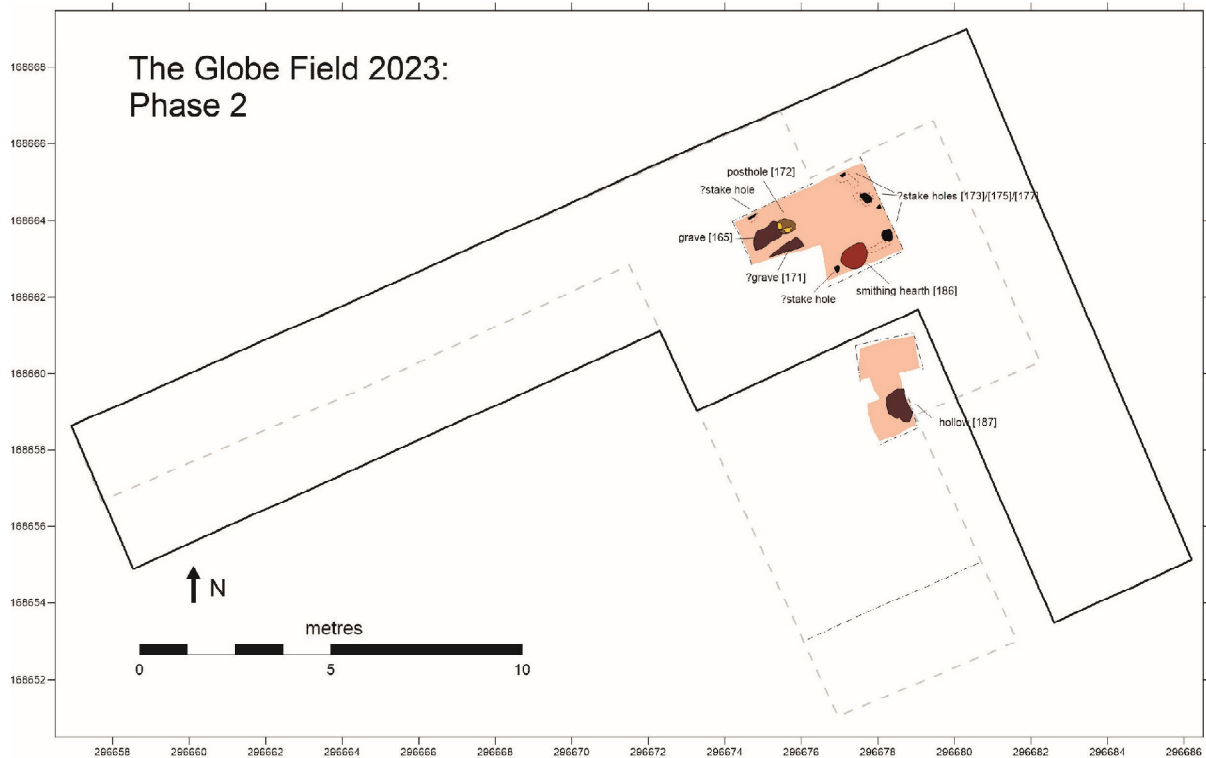


Figure 4: as Figure 2, but with features uncovered in 2023 relating to Phase 2 (8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries).

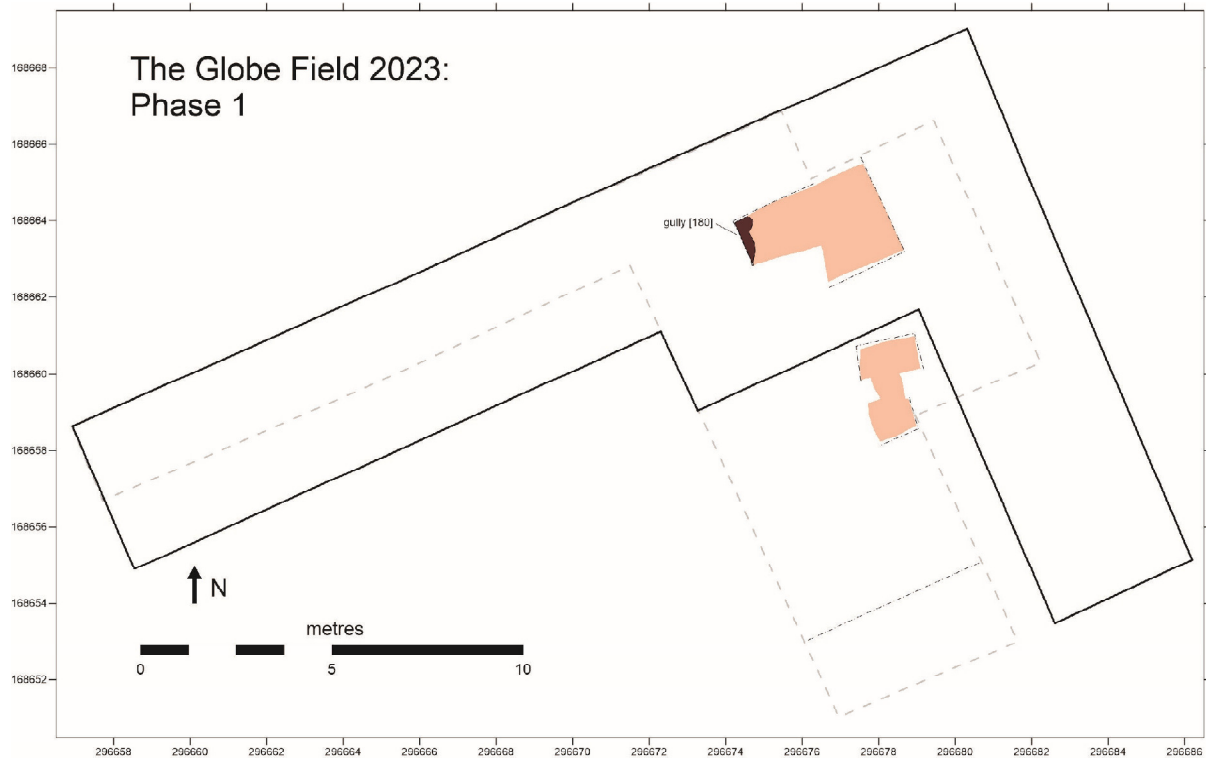


Figure 4: as Figure 2, but with features uncovered in 2023 relating to Phase 1 (6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries).

The 2024 work will thus involve reopening parts of the 2023 trench. The specific goals here include clarifying the nature the nature of the Phase 1 (6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century) occupation, locating any further inhumations that may have accompanied the Phase 2 infant burial and attempting to clarify the context for the smithing hearth (was this really an early feature, or could it have been dug through the overlying agricultural soils as some provisional 14C evidence might suggest?).

### Methodology

1. The excavations will be undertaken by members of Cardiff University, together with volunteers, with appropriate levels of supervision from suitably experienced supervisors.
2. The topsoil will be removed from both the main trench and the test pits by hand to avoid disturbance to the field and to the badgers.
3. All discrete features to be defined and planned. All discrete cut features to be half-sectioned, as a minimum, and recorded.
4. All linear cut features to be defined, planned and a minimum of 50% excavated; sections to be recorded. All drawings and plans to be recorded at scales appropriate for purpose (1:10, 1:20).
5. Built features will be defined, planned and sectioned where appropriate.
6. A full digital photographic archive of the work required will be maintained, with photographs of at least 16MP.
7. A vertical digital photographic archive will be maintained, with a minimum of 27MP, subject to appropriate weather conditions for drone use.
8. All planning and height data will be tied-in directly to National Grid using high-resolution RTK GPS within the main site and indirectly to National Grid using an EDM for the test-pits where tree cover precludes the use of GPS directly.



9. Any articulated human remains encountered will be fully recorded in situ and specific remains may be lifted under license and placed in the registered repository in Cardiff University for further research under the aims and objectives as outlined above.
10. Any finds will be retained, cleaned, catalogued and stored under the supervision of a qualified conservator, in accordance with standards set in the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials (2014).
11. Finds recovered that are regarded as Treasure under The Treasure Act (1996) will be reported to HM Coroner for the local area.
12. The fills of all potentially early features will be sampled, since the recognition of early medieval contexts is likely to be entirely by means of scientific dating.
13. Deposits with a significant potential for the preservation of palaeoenvironmental material will be sampled. Should significant potential be established for enhancement of understanding of the site through palaeoenvironmental work, the advice will be sought of a specialist environmental archaeologist. All environmental sampling and recording will follow English Heritage's Guidelines for Environmental Archaeology (2011).
14. Specialist input on any finds arising from the works will be provided by specialist colleagues from Cardiff University and NMW as required.
15. All excavations will be made secure using Heras fencing (or equivalent) outside working hours. Importantly, the excavations must be left at night with a means of escape, should a badger (or other mammal) fall into them.
16. The site archive (excluding human remains) will be housed in the first instance at the offices of GeoArch.
17. Large volumes of metallurgical waste are expected. These will be 'power-washed' on site, sorted, quantified, and then reburied, with only selected materials being retained.

## References

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A translation of the *Vita Prima Samsonis* may be found at:

<https://archive.org/details/lifeofstsamsonof00sams>

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