CPAT Report No 1243

Llysun Motte Mg072, Llanerfyl
Survey and Recording

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Cadw

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Client name:	Cadw
CPAT Project No:	1916
Project Name:	Llysun Motte Mg072
Grid Reference:	SJ03151007
County/LPA:	Llanerfyl
Report Title:	Llysun Motte Mg072, Llanerfyl, Survey and Recording
CPAT Report No:	1243
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Confidential:	No

Revised Report

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Contents

Summary

As a result of increasing stock erosion of Llysun Motte (SAM Mg 072) in Llanerfyl, Powys, Cadw commissioned the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) to conduct a survey of the monument, recording the surviving earthworks, and the extent of the current erosion. Limited archaeological excavation and recording was also undertaken to assess the nature of any exposed deposits and the likelihood of any surviving archaeological features that could be compromised should the erosion on the site worsen.

The results of the survey and excavation have demonstrated that around 950m^2 of the monument is under active erosion, as a result of stock (sheep), burrowing animals (rabbits) and natural weathering.

The work has allowed a detailed topographical survey of the surviving earthworks, as well as positioning the monument in its immediate surroundings. Limited excavation has allowed the identification and assessment of deposits that form part of the monument and some potential archaeological features including a possible post hole and deposits used to construct the motte have been identified.

1 Introduction

1.1 In December 2013 the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust was commissioned by Cadw to undertake a programme of limited excavation and survey on a scheduled motte and bailey, known as Llysun Motte (SAM Mg 072; PRN 756). The motte is located on a natural spur running east/west on the north side of the Banwy flood plain near Llanerfyl Powys at SJ 0315 1007 in a field of improved pasture. The combination of mature trees and grazing on the motte, associated platform and bailey have resulted in significant stock erosion in recent times exposing a number of features which are potentially contemporary. The purpose of the project was to produce an accurate record of quickly eroding archaeological deposits and a detailed plan of the monument prior to the planned conservation works under the Welsh Government's Glastir agri-environment scheme.

1.2 The project comprised a detailed topographical survey of the monument using a total station, recording both the surviving earthworks and the extent of the erosion. Furthermore, a number of eroded sections were cleaned and recorded by hand in order to identify the nature of the deposits and record any potential archaeological features.

Fig. 1 Location of Llysun Motte (SAM Mg 072)

1.3 The Royal Commission maintained that this was a Welsh motte and bailey as the area was undoubtedly under Welsh control in the 12th century, a view reinforced by the late Jack Spurgeon's research (RCAHMW 1911, 79; Spurgeon 1966, 8-9). Neither authority could cite any documentary sources that related specifically to the castle at Llysun.

1.4 There are no records to suggest that any previous archaeological work has been conducted on the site.

1.5 The name Llysun is a variation of *llys*, a 'court' or 'palace'. Though the precise location of the court, or indeed its date, is currently unknown, its clearly implies a Welsh rather than an Anglo-Norman context.

1.6 The motte is situated around 200m south of a former deer park, 'Llyssun Park', assumed to be of medieval origin, though there is no corroborative evidence. This is shown in its entirety on an estate map of 1734 with its pale in place, and was recorded by the surveyor as 444 acres in extent. The motte and bailey is not itself depicted on the estate map, but its proximity to the park highlights its situation within a much wider medieval landscape.

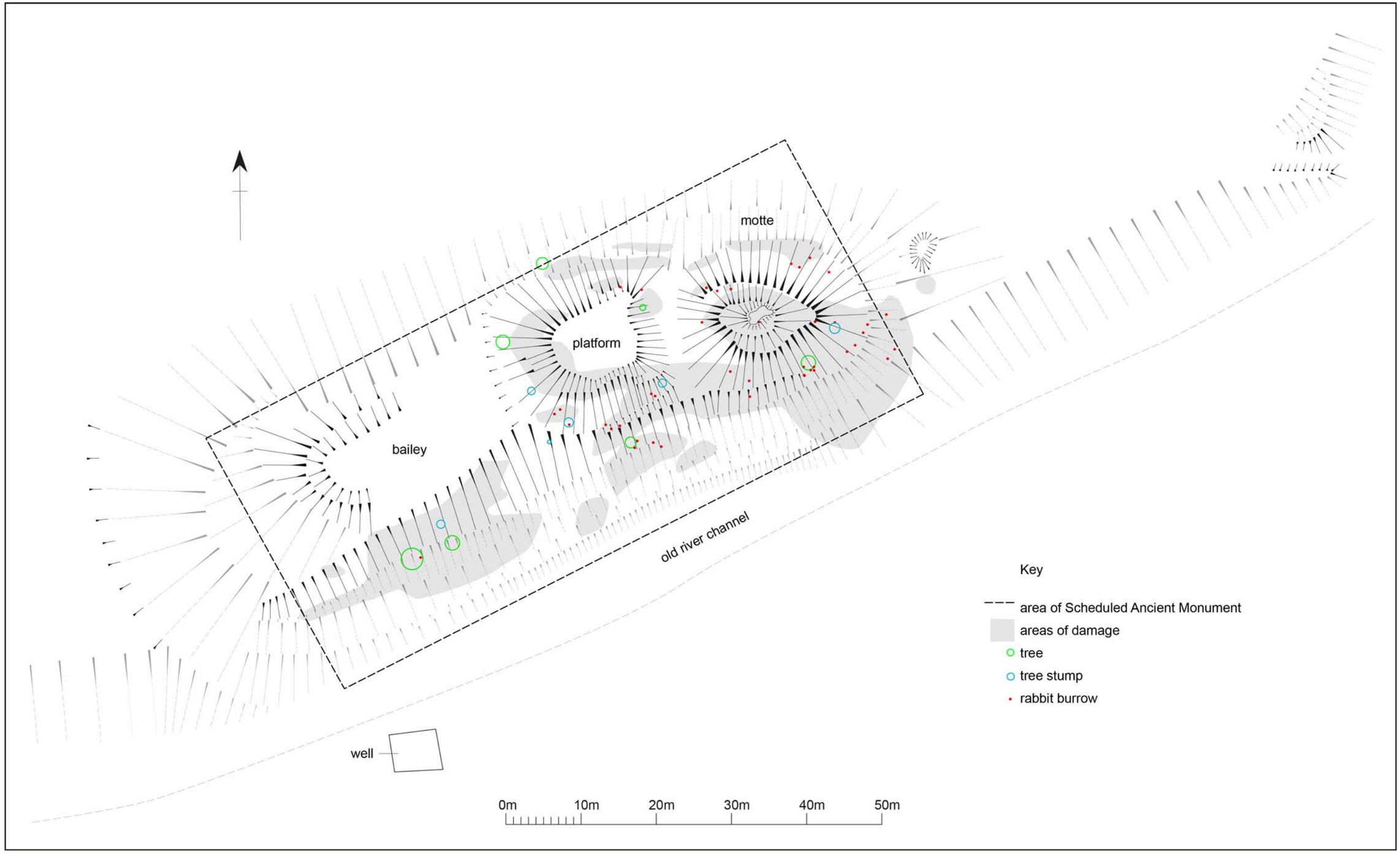

Fig. 2 Survey of Llysun Motte

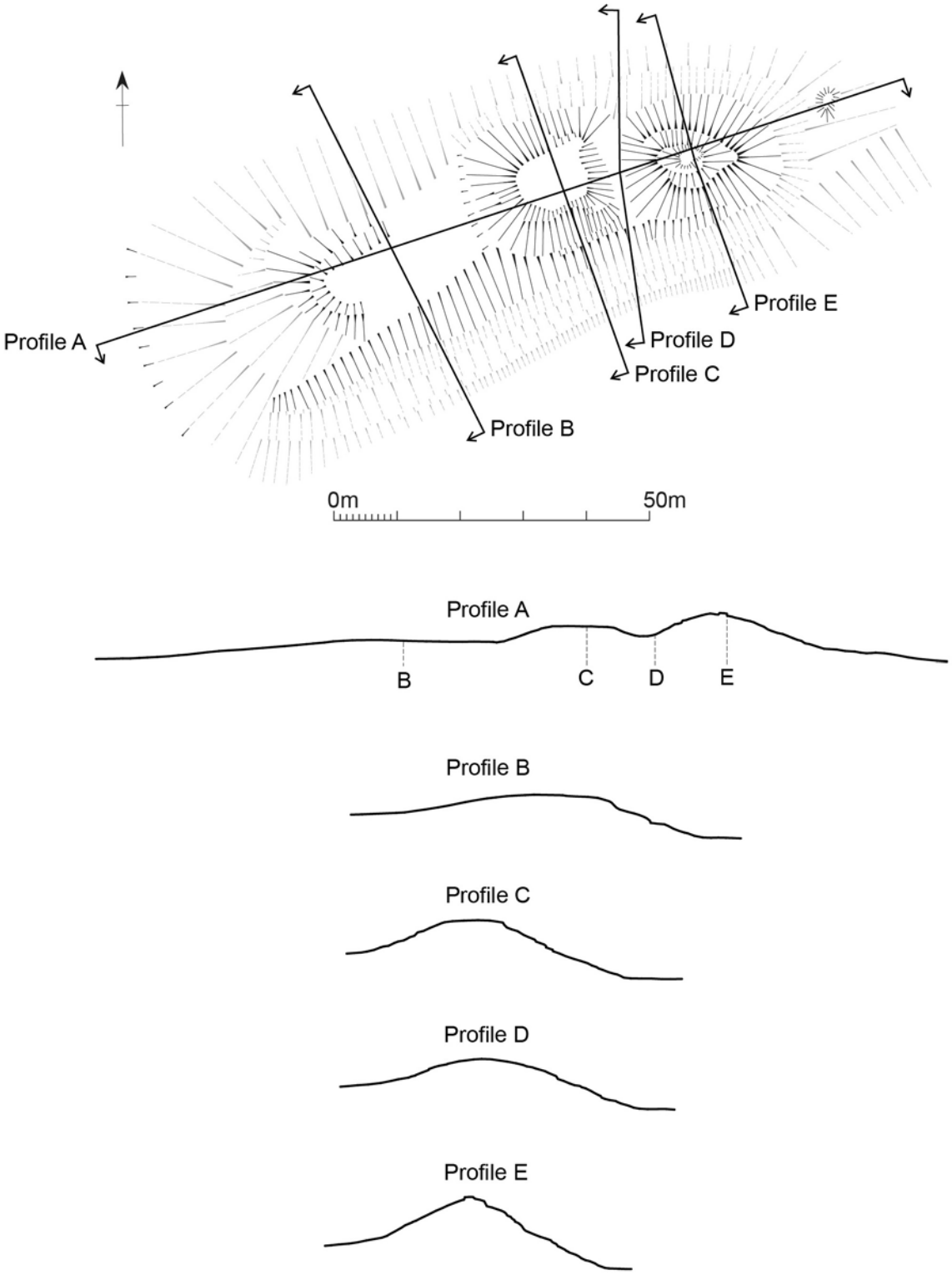

Fig. 3 Profile location and profile

1 Survey

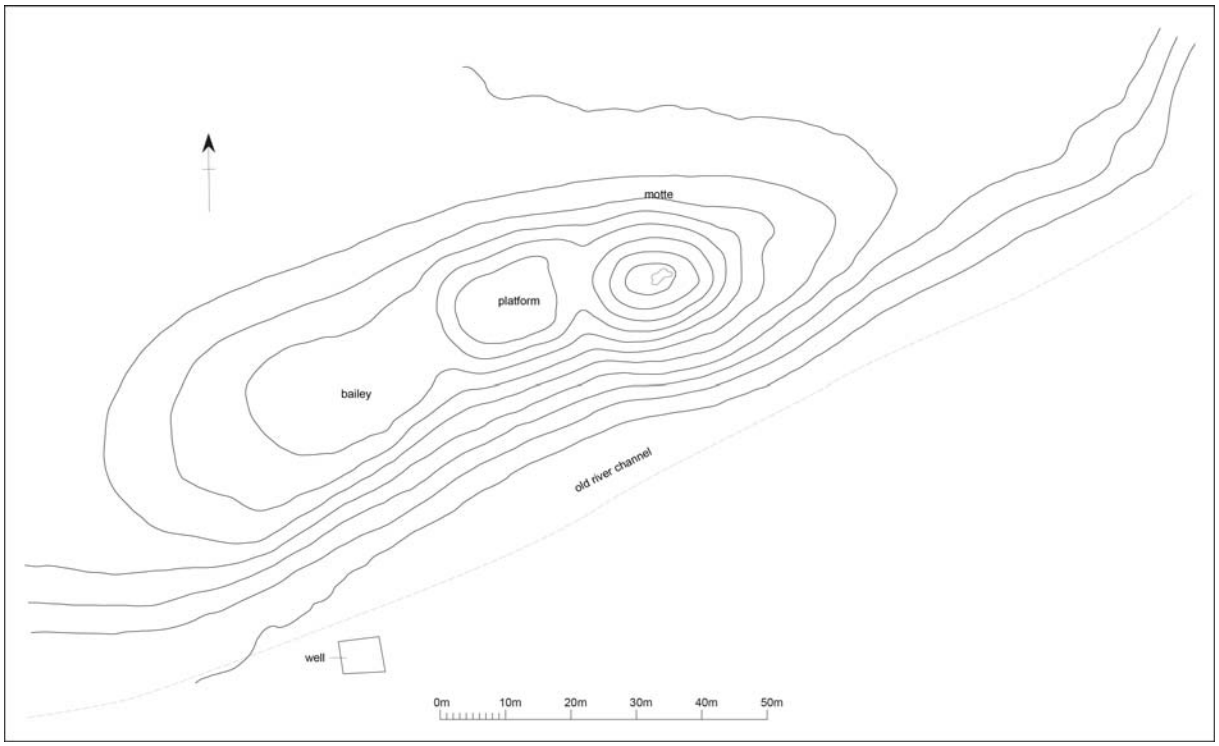

Fig. 4 Showing contours at 1m intervals (contours derived from LiDAR data) © Geomatics Group 2014

2.1 The survey was conducted between 9th and 11th December 2013 using a Leica TC500 in conjunction with Penmap survey software and the data processed using proprietary software, with the resulting illustrations being produced by Sophie Watson using Mapinfo and Adobe Illustrator. The survey recorded the earthworks of the motte, platform and bailey and potentially associated features, the extent of the eroded areas, and the natural topography in the immediate area (Figs. 2 and 3).

2.2 The motte is sited on a low but prominent natural ridge of a glacial moraine on the north side of the valley of the Afon Banwy (see Fig. 4 contour data). The ridge is aligned east-north-east to west-south-west with the motte at the east-north-eastern end, separated from an associated lower platform to the west by a distinct ditch. A large level area at the south-western end of the ridge may have acted as a bailey. There is no visible evidence for a moat, though it is possible that when the motte was first constructed, a former river channel (possibly a former route of the Banwy) on the southern side of the monument may have been utilized to aid the defensive capability of the site. There is a well, located 60m south-west of the motte (PRN 1323), though this is unlikely to be contemporary.

2.3 The survey also recorded a small rounded depression 8m north-east of the motte which may be a later feature (Fig. 2). Around 60m to the north-east of the motte, a narrow trackway rises up off the flood plain and onto the natural ridge. The feature is too narrow for a modern vehicle to pass. Assuming that the old river channel represents an earlier course of the River Banwy, it is possible that this feature is contemporary with the motte, possibly leading down to a ford across the river.

2.4 The main aim of the survey was to record areas of the monument that had been damaged by livestock. Overall, the extent of the damage surveyed equated to approximately 29% of the surface area defined as the Scheduled Ancient Monument (see Fig. 2). Several large areas were under active erosion, the turf cover having been removed to expose bare earth, caused and

exacerbated by a combination of sheep scrapes and tracks, animal burrows (rabbits) and natural weathering. Both the upstanding trees and redundant stumps have provided focal points for stock, resulting in the removal of the turf in the areas immediately surrounding the trees. These areas were certainly the worst affected on the site.

2.5 Vertically eroding sections up to 1m high have also developed across the monument alongside well-trodden sheep tracks and as a result of sheep scrapes. In some cases, the resulting exposed faces have been further damaged by rabbit burrows, of which a total of 40 were recorded within the area of the Scheduled Ancient Monument.

3 Excavation and Recording

3.1 The programme of excavation and recording was undertaken between 17th and 19th December 2013 to investigate some of the damaged sections of the motte and platform. Following a site meeting with the Cadw Field Monument Warden, Dr Fiona Grant, it was decided that three of the eroded areas were to be subject to archaeological investigation, comprising hand excavation and recording (Fig. 5). The purpose of this work was to provide additional information about the extent of the damage and to assess the archaeological potential of the monument.

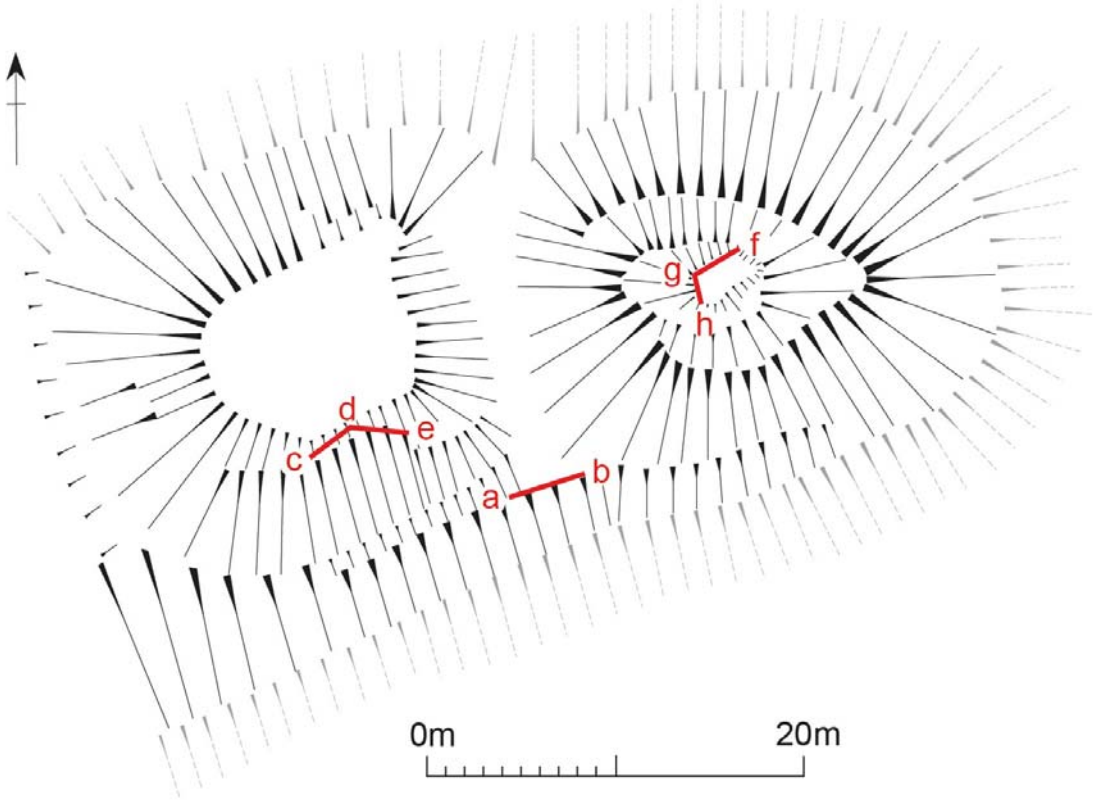

Fig. 5 The three areas of investigation

3.2 All spoil and disturbed material resulting from the hand cleaning of the eroded sections was removed and used as temporary infill on some of the actively eroding and exposed sections of the monument.

3.3 During the excavations a written, drawn and photographic record was maintained, in accordance with the IfA *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavation* (2013), details of which are included in Appendix 1. Context numbers are shown on the illustrations in this report, and are given in brackets in the text. The archive will be deposited with the Clwyd-Powys Historic Environment Record in Welshpool.

Area A (Fig. 6 (section a-b)

3.4 Area A was located on the south-eastern side of the monument to investigate a 0.72m-high exposed vertical section through the ditch separating the motte from the platform to the south-west. The topsoil (001), which survived to a thickness of between 0.1-0.15m, overlay two silt deposits (002) at the western end of the section and (003) at the eastern end. The former had

been disturbed by the roots of a tree, the stump of which was located some 2.5m to the north-west. In the middle of the section between (002) and (003) was a mid orangey brown silt with a darker brown clayey silt directly below (005). However, further investigation of (005) revealed a modern shotgun cartridge, suggesting these deposits reflect a relatively modern infilling event, quite possibly a by-product of the advanced erosion of the motte deposits over the past 20 years or so.

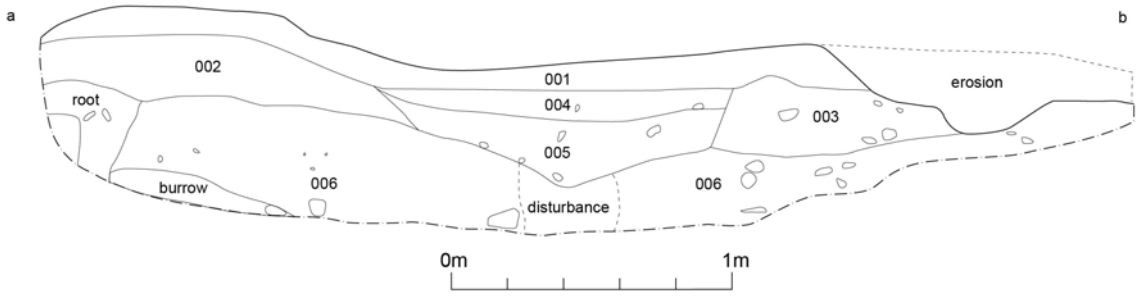

Fig. 6 Area A showing the drawn section a-b

3.5 Underlying the above deposits and visible at the base of the section was a mid orangey brown, loose, silty gravel (006). This had been disturbed by burrowing animals and also by root activity at the south-western extent of the section. As excavations were limited to the already eroded section at this location, it was not possible to determine the full extent of this deposit and its relationship to the ditch.

3.6 Although the north and south ends of the ditch dividing the motte from the platform were actively eroding, the central area is relatively stable, with good turf coverage.

Fig. 7 Area A showing the exposed section a-b, viewed from the south-south-east.
Photo CPAT 3749-0024

Area B (Fig. 8 (section c- d and d-e)

3.7 Area B was located on the south-eastern side of the platform where a sheep path had eroded a 0.86m high vertical section along the edge of the slope. Two adjacent sections were recorded at a 160-degree angle to one another (see Fig. 3). The topsoil (001) varied between 0.1-0.15m in thickness, below which a loose, orangey brown gritty deposit (007) was visible which had been completely eroded away to the south where the slope of the monument would originally have continued down towards the valley bottom. This layer lay immediately above a silty clay with frequent river cobbles (008), thought to be the natural glacial deposit from which the monument had been sculpted.

3.8 The investigations demonstrated that there is the potential for surviving archaeological deposits on this part of the monument, although the deposits are relatively thin and located close to the surface, making them extremely vulnerable to further erosion.

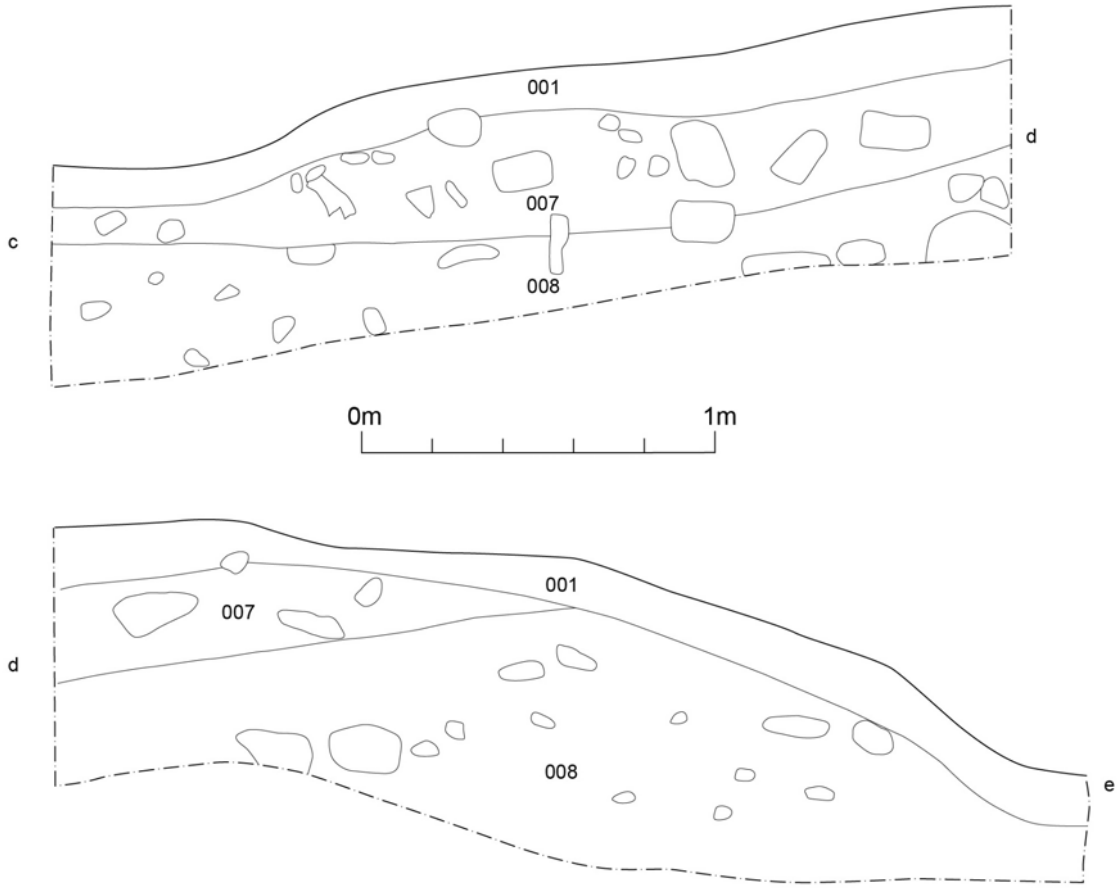

Fig. 8 Area B, showing drawn sections c-d and d-e

Fig. 9 Area B, section c-d, viewed from the south. Photo CPAT 3749-0033

Fig. 10 Area B, section d-e, viewed from the south-west. Photo CPAT 3749-0031

Area C (Fig. 12 (section F-G and G-H)

3.9 Area C investigated two sides of a small prominence measuring up to 3.5m by 1.7m, which stands at the highest point of the motte, and represents a block of in situ material which has been eroded on all sides. The rate of erosion is quite marked and was visibly advancing on a daily basis during the short period of time spent on the site. The summit of the motte was clearly an attractive place for sheep to clamber and indeed the Section g-h was being used as a step by the stock as the main access route up to the top of the motte. Any surviving archaeological deposits are therefore extremely vulnerable in this area.

Fig. 11 Area C showing the small prominence on the summit of the motte, viewed from the south-west. Photo CPAT 3749-0021

3.10 Beneath the topsoil (001), which measured between 80-150mm in thickness, Section f-g showed that the exposed deposits consisted of a layer of loose, orangey brown silty clay, mixed with riverine pebbles (009), overlying a very compact and thin layer of greyish brown silty clay (013) which was only seen in plan. At the north-eastern extent, (009) had been disturbed by roots. Towards the south-western end of the section a mid to dark brown silty clay (010) was identified which appeared to lie within a small pit or post-hole though this was not considered to be of any great antiquity.

3.11 In Section g-h, the majority of the topsoil been completely eroded away where stock had worn a step up onto the top of the prominence. At the southern end of the section, a possible post-hole was identified (012), filled by a dark, reddish brown silty clay (011) with loose pea grit inclusions and occasional charcoal flecking. This feature is known to have eroded rapidly between early September and December 2013 and is clearly extremely vulnerable.

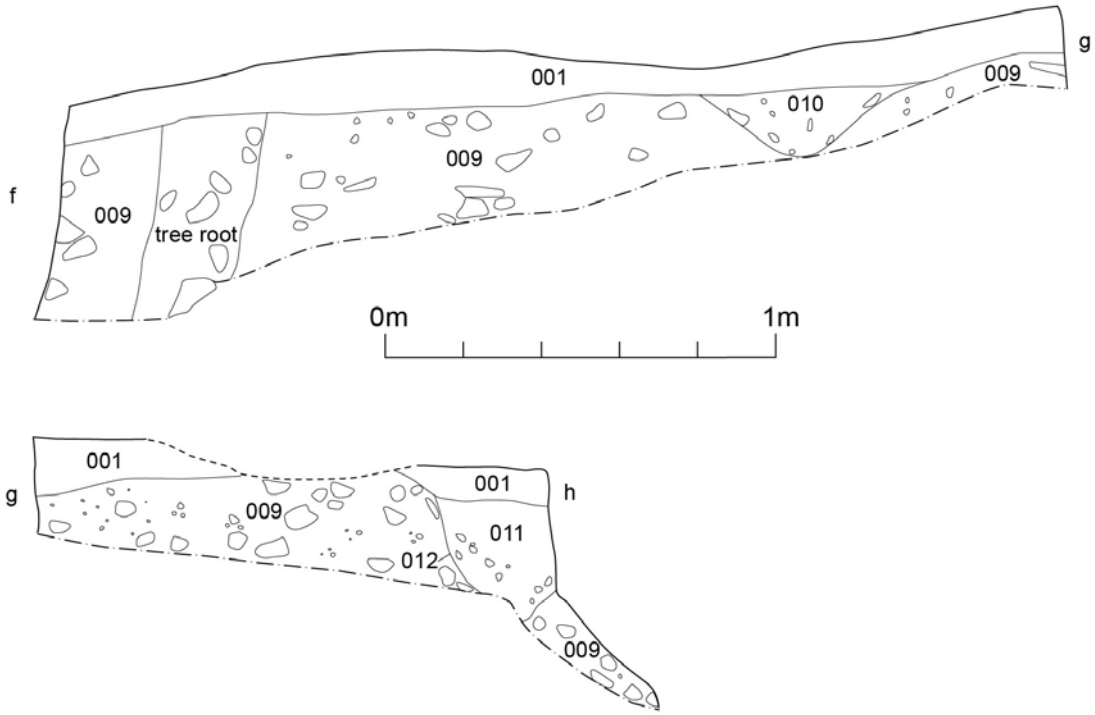

Fig. 12 Area C, showing drawn sections f-g and g-h

Fig. 13 Area C, section c-d, viewed from the north-north-west. Photo CPAT 3749-0039

Fig. 14 Area C, section c-d, viewed from the west. Photo CPAT 3749-0043

4 Conclusions

4.1 The survey and investigations at Llysun motte provide a detailed plan of the surviving earthworks and a record of the various erosion issues affecting the site, as well as identifying areas where potential archaeological deposits and features are currently exposed. The resulting data present a baseline for future monitoring and information which will assist in the general management of the monument.

4.2 The earthwork castle stands atop a natural glacial ridge with the motte at its eastern end, surviving to a height of around 4m and an overall diameter of around 20m. The level platform to the south-west measures 8m north-west/south-east by 12m north-east/south-west and is up to 2m high. This platform may have been occupied by a single large building, perhaps a hall, rather than a cluster of smaller buildings as one would expect to find on an adjoining bailey. A possible bailey lies at the south-west end of the ridge, measuring 13m north-west/south-east and 26m north-east/south-west. The ditch dividing the motte and platform presently survives to a depth of around 1.5m and is visible only on a north-north-west to south-south-east.

4.3 The castle is likely to have been constructed largely by remodelling the glacial ridge, enhanced by the redeposition of glacial deposits to strengthen the motte. There is no obvious ditch which could have acted as a quarry ditch and it is possible that some of the redeposited material may have been derived from the notably level, large area to the south-west that could have formed a bailey. The defences consist of a series of natural and modified slopes that would probably have been surmounted by a timber palisade. A former river channel of the Afon Banwy runs along the southern side of the monument, perhaps accounting for the sharpness of the slope on this side of the ridge and providing a natural defence for the motte. This can be seen at its best on the LiDAR data (Fig 15 below). Although it is not possible to determine whether the channel was active when the motte was constructed, this remains a possibility. A narrow track was recorded by the survey to the east of the motte, leading down into the channel and it is tempting to see this as being associated with a ford.

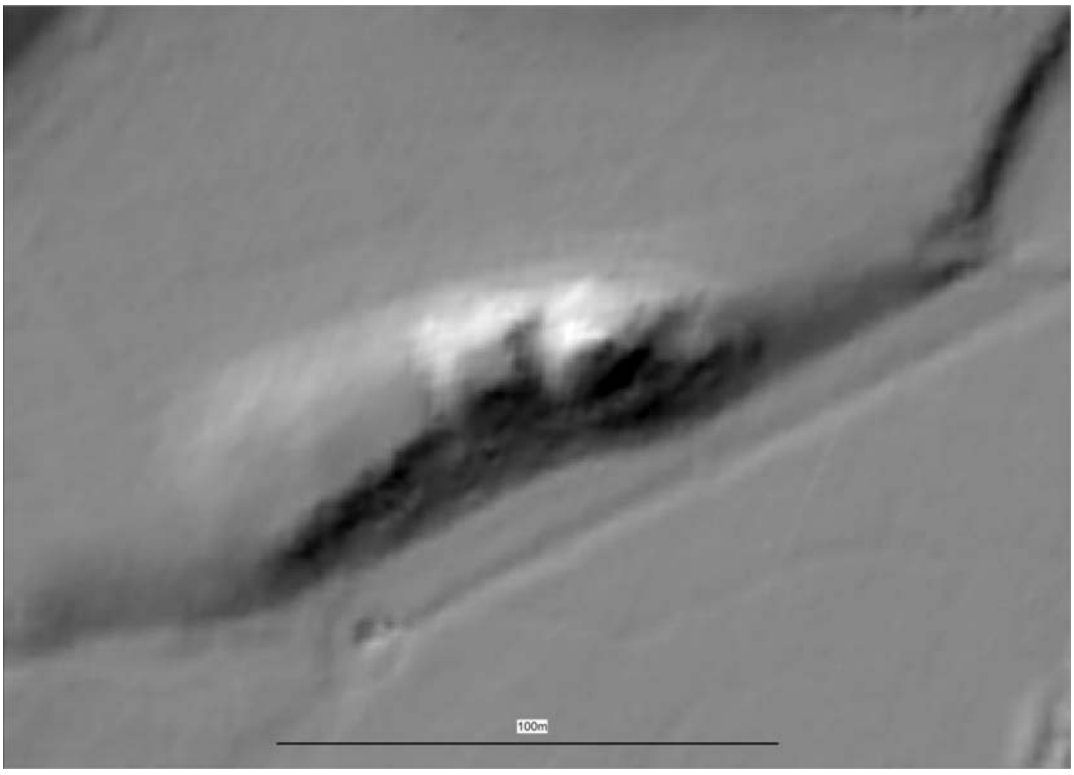

Fig. 15 Hill shade relief model derived from 2m resolution LiDAR data © Geomatic Group

4.4 The survey has demonstrated that an area of around 950m^2 has been affected by stock erosion, which equates to 29% of the Scheduled Ancient Monument.

4.5 In Area B, the sections recorded showed at least 0.48m of overburden thought to comprise archaeological deposits sitting above the natural glacial moraine. Though it was difficult to determine exactly, it is possible that the upper 2m of the motte are man-made. It is possible that archaeological deposits may also survive in the area of the bailey although this area of the monument is in a relatively stable condition at present when compared to the condition of the platform and motte.

4.6 Livestock, particularly sheep, appear have been the main cause of damage through the creation of a network of tracks across the monument which have exposed several vertical sections some of which stand up to 1m high. Erosion by sheep scrapes is also evident on the site, exposing bare earth and in some areas, as highlighted by the sections recorded in Area A, B and C, exposing archaeological deposits.

4.7 Eroded vertical sections have attracted rabbits, causing further damage and almost certainly disturbance within the body of the monument that cannot currently be seen.

4.8 The trees growing on site have provided a focal point for livestock and rabbits, in addition to which, there is obvious disturbance to archaeological deposits through root damage.

4.9 Where damage has occurred, the areas that have been exposed are open to the weather and the nature of the deposits used to construct the monument are such that, once exposed, are easily eroded simply through natural weathering. It was evident during the time spent on site that the southern side of the monument is more vulnerable to the effects of the weather and during wetter days it was noted how easily the exposed deposits were disturbed underfoot.

4.10 The survey has shown that the extent of the damage through erosion is considerable. The surface of the motte has been significantly eroded and has very little surviving turf cover. Archaeological deposits and features have undoubtedly been lost as a result of the advanced erosion. The excavation on the site has shown that there are deposits of potential archaeological significance on the area of the platform and the motte. The possible post-hole identified on the top of the motte may be significant, but this feature is currently extremely vulnerable considering its position on the motte and current rate of erosion on the site.

5 Acknowledgements

Fieldwork was undertaken by Ian Grant and Sophie Watson. Post-excavation assessment and reporting has been undertaken by Sophie Watson and Nigel Jones.

CPAT would like to thank Will Davies and Dr Fiona Grant (Cadw) for their support during the project and to the landowner Mr Richard Tudor for permission to undertake the site work.

6 Sources

Published Sources

RCAHMW 1911 *An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Wales and Monmouthshire. I County of Montgomery,* London: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, London

Spurgeon, C.J. 1966 'The castles of Montgomeryshire', *Montgomery Collections* 59, 1-59

Unpublished sources

Grant, F, 2013, *Scheduled Ancient Monument Management Plan, Llysun Motte and Bailey (MG072)*

Cartographic sources

1734 An exact survey of the lands belonging to the Honble Henry Arthur Esgr in the parish of Llanervill in Montgomeryshire: Powis Castle NLW Reference: M1S1A 036/9, Scale ca 1:3960

1850 Tithe Survey for Llanerfyl

1887 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25” map (Montgomeryshire 21.03)

APPENDIX 1

PROJECT ARCHIVE
CPAT PROJECT No 1243

Site records
13 context record forms
Context Register
Drawing Register
02 A2 site drawing
01 A4 site drawing
49 digital photographs, CPAT film 3749
Photographic register
EDM digital survey and plan

Table 1: Context Register

Cont	Section	Drawing	Comment
001	All	01,02, 03	Topsoil.
002	A-B	01	Deposit - reddish brown, sandy silt, below 001
003	A-B	01	Deposit - light brown silt below 001
004	A-B	01	Deposit - dark orangey brown silt below 001
005	A-B	01	Deposit - dark brown, clayey silt below 004
006	A-B	01	Deposit - mid orangey brown, gravel below 002, 003, 005
007	C-D, D-E	02	Deposit - orangey brown, fine, gritty, gravel below 001
008	C-D, D-E	02	Deposit - mid orangey brown stoney silty clay natural below 007
009	F-G G-H	03	Motte deposit - loose orangey brown silty clay mixed with riverine stones, below 001
010	F-G G-H	03	Deposit mid-dark brown silty clay – possible animal burrow
011	F-G G-H	03	Post-hole deposit – dark reddish brown silty clay with pea grit inclusions, below 001
012	F-G G-H	03	Post-hole – below 001, cuts 009
013	F-G G-H	03	Motte deposit – compact greyish brown silty clay

APPENDIX 2

PROJECT DESIGN

1 Llyssun Motte and Bailey

2 Location: NGR, Community, SAM no/HER no
SJ03151007; Llanerfyl; SAM Mg 072; PRN 756

3 Summary of proposals in current/forthcoming year
A programme of limited excavation and survey to investigate and record features associated with the motte which are under active stock erosion. The excavations will require scheduled monument consent.

4 Description of the site(s), area, material etc and assessment of archaeological importance
Llyssun Motte and Bailey is sited on a natural spur which runs east-west on the north side of the Banwy flood plain. The motte is 4.0m high and has a diameter of 9.0m. It is separated from the bailey to the west by a distinct ditch which is badly eroded. The bailey is 16.0m east to west, 10.0m wide and 3.0m high.

The site is currently under significant threat from stock erosion which has exposed a number of potentially medieval features contemporary with the motte and bailey. The proposal includes a detailed topographical survey of the earthworks together with appropriate hand excavation to investigate those areas where features/structures have been revealed by stock erosion. The excavations will generally be restricted to the removal of topsoil/overburden within an area which is sufficient to investigate the form, condition and significance of those features which are under immediate threat. Limited excavation of features/deposits may be undertaken in order to fulfil the project aims.

5 Nature of threat, the likely extent of timing and destruction
Stock erosion

6 Research objectives
Enhancement of the regional HER with the potential for assisting with regional research objectives and informing future management decisions.

7 Proposed work programme

1 **Administration**
Project Management; AMI monitoring; Financial statements; Audited statement; CPAT Committee Reports; Half-Year/Annual Reports.

2 **Survey**
Total station topographical survey of the earthworks relating to the motte and bailey.

3 **Excavation and recording**
Limited excavation and recording of exposed features and structures.

4 **Reporting**
Production of a project report in the CPAT series summarising the results from the investigations which will help to inform decisions regarding the future management of the site.

8 Specialist requirements
Not anticipated

9 Proposed timing of work programme
To be completed during course of financial year. See Project Management Plan Timetable.

10 Presentation of results
See section 11

11 End products

a during the present fincancial year
- Summary report in *Archaeology in Wales*
- Report in CPAT series
- Report on CPAT website
- HER record enhancement

b Year by year until the completion of the project
Not applicable

12 Progress
Not applicable

13 Project supervisor
a Name
Nigel Jones

b Qualifications
BA, MifA

c Position in organisation
Senior Project Archaeologist

d List of unpublished excavations
Pen-y-gaer Roman vicus
Strata Marcella survey and recording

e Details of other commitments during the coming year
To be determined