



CAMBRIAN  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
PROJECTS

# Gelligaer Church Hall, Gelligaer, Caerphilly

Archaeological Watching Brief



By  
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Report No. 631

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## Archaeological Watching Brief

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Report No: **631**

Date: **June 2010**



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## **Summary**

*In May 2010 Cambrian Archaeological Projects carried out an archaeological watching brief during development at Gelligaer Church Hall, Gelligaer in the Borough of Caerphilly. The site is located 150m to the south-east of a number of Roman forts, and immediately to the south of the modern Church where several Roman cremations have been found within the associated graveyard. It is also located 150m to the west of Twyn Castell Motte, a stronghold of the Princes of Senghennydd. Despite the proximity of known archaeology, no features or finds of archaeological interest were revealed. However, the lower subsoil was found to contain charcoal and fragments of fired clay, indicative of soil formation through the process of manuring in the Roman or medieval periods, although the final formation of this deposit is likely to have occurred in the post-medieval or modern period.*

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Location and scope of work**

In May 2010, Cambrian Archaeological Projects was commissioned to carry out a watching brief during groundworks at Gelligaer Church Hall, Gelligaer in the Borough of Caerphilly (NGR: ST 1353 9687; Fig. 1). The development comprised the construction of an extension to the rear of the Church Hall.

The development proposal has been submitted by Mr Andy McCaw of Andy McCaw Project Management, 2 Heol y Ffynnon, Efail Isaf, Pontypridd, CF38 1AU acting as agent for Neuadd St Cattwg Community Hall Management Committee, Church Hall, Church Road, Gelligaer, CF82 8FW. The local planning authority is Caerphilly County Borough Council and the planning application number is 09/0711. The authority obtains archaeological advice in respect of planning applications from Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust (GGAT). The archive for the project will be deposited with RCAHMW.

The development site lies within the village of Gelligaer, to the south of Gelligaer Common. Gelligaer Common is an area of archaeological significance, containing evidence of settlement and occupation spanning the Neolithic to post-medieval periods. Two Roman Forts are located 150m to the north of the development site, which are known to lie within an extensive area of settlement. A medieval Motte is also located 150m to the east of the site. As a result, Neil Maylan of the Curatorial Section of Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust (GGAT) recommended that a watching brief be carried out during groundworks on the site. The purpose of the watching brief was to determine whether archaeological remains were present on the site and to establish their character, distribution, extent, condition and relative significance. This follows the requirements set out in Planning Policy WALES, March 2002, section 6.5 and Welsh Office circular 60/96.

### **1.2 Geology and Topography**

The development site lies on flat ground at approximately 240m OD, in an area of Carboniferous Sandstone and Upper Carboniferous Coal Measures (British Geological Survey 2001).

## **2. Archaeological and Historical Background**

All information presented derives from the NMR records on Coflein ([www.coflein.gov.uk](http://www.coflein.gov.uk)). See individual NPRN numbers for sources.

The proposed development site lies 150m south of two Roman Auxiliary Forts. These forts date to the later 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, following the Roman conquest of the local Silures. Fort I, the northern-most of the two (NRPN 300144), is thought to have been the first fort constructed on the site. It was built with earth and timber walls enclosing an area of 2.2 hectares – the walls remain visible as a slight earthwork. Fort II, to the south (NRPN 93007), is thought to be later than Fort I. The fort survives as a roughly square platform measuring 100m by 100m with a bank and ditch visible on the south-eastern side. Initially constructed in earth and timber in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, the defences and internal buildings were later rebuilt in stone. An annexe containing a bathhouse and other stone buildings was added to the south-eastern side of the fort sometime after the walls were rebuilt in stone. A trackway connecting Forts I and II has been identified, indicating that they were in use contemporaneously. Evidence from excavations at Fort II revealed that its occupation continued until the end of the Roman period, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.

Two kilometres to the north of the Forts the remains of at least six practice camps have been identified. These would have been constructed as training exercises by soldiers garrisoned at the forts.

The possible remains of a Roman road are recorded in the NMR (NRPN 40145), running roughly north/south across Gelligaer Common. However, the width of the road and its irregular route has called this interpretation into question and it is possible that the road is post-medieval in date (Wiles 2007 in Coflein).

The area surrounding the forts would have contained extensive settlement occupied by the families of those garrisoned within and by industries supplying the needs of the forts and the soldiers. Cremations found within the graveyard of the current Church demonstrate the presence of contemporary cemeteries, which would have been located outside the main settlement areas.

Twyn Castell Motte is located 150 to the east of the development site. It survives as a steep-sided turf-covered mound, 27m in diameter and up to 7 high. The Castell is thought to have been built by the Lords of Senghennydd in the twelfth or thirteenth century during the Welsh resistance of Norman incursions. The Castell is likely to have formed the focus for settlement and occupation in the wider landscape.

### **3. Aims and Objectives**

The specific aim of the archaeological watching brief was to establish the nature of the archaeological resource existing on site.

### **4. Archaeological Watching Brief**

The archaeological watching brief was carried out in mid-May 2010 on a warm and sunny day.

The groundworks comprised the excavation of 1m wide footing trenches around an L-shaped area immediately behind the current Church Hall building – an area previously occupied by an extension. The construction area measured 13.2m in length, 6.2m wide at the eastern end and 3.3m wide at the western end (fig. 2 and plates 2 and 3). The trenches were excavated to a maximum depth of 0.7m.

The turf and topsoil had been removed across the western area of the site during the demolition and removal of the original extension. Where topsoil (001) survived it comprised a mid-brown clay silt containing large quantities of modern rubble, reaching a maximum depth of 0.24m (plates 1 and 4).

Underlying the turf and topsoil across the entire trench a mid brown clay silt subsoil (002) was revealed. This contained frequent charcoal inclusions and small angular stones. It extended to a depth of 0.28m (plate 4).

Underlying subsoil (002), a second subsoil deposit was revealed (003). This comprised a yellow brown clay silt containing frequent charcoal flecks and moderate inclusions of fired clay. This second subsoil deposit extended to a depth of 0.13m (plate 4).

Subsoil (002) directly overlay the yellow clay silt natural (004).

Several defunct water/sewerage pipes were identified within the footings trenches, generally orientated north-west/south-east.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusions**

No sub-surface features or non-modern finds were identified during the watching brief, despite the proximity of the site to the Roman Forts, settlement and burial areas and the medieval Motte. However, the lower subsoil, containing charcoal and fired clay, could date to the Roman or medieval periods and represent evidence for agricultural activities within the wider landscape – charcoal and fired clay are likely to have become incorporated in the cotemporary topsoil through manuring. The preservation of this soil deposit in an area that has been extensively developed in the post-medieval and modern period does demonstrate that evidence of Roman and medieval occupation probably still survives nearby.

## **6. Acknowledgements**

Thanks to Andy McCaw and the construction team.

## **7. Bibliography**

British Geological Survey 2001. /Solid Geology Map. UK South Sheet. 1:625000 Scale. 4th edition

Other Sources Consulted:

NMR via Coflein – [www.Coflein.gov.uk](http://www.Coflein.gov.uk) accessed 9<sup>th</sup> June 2010

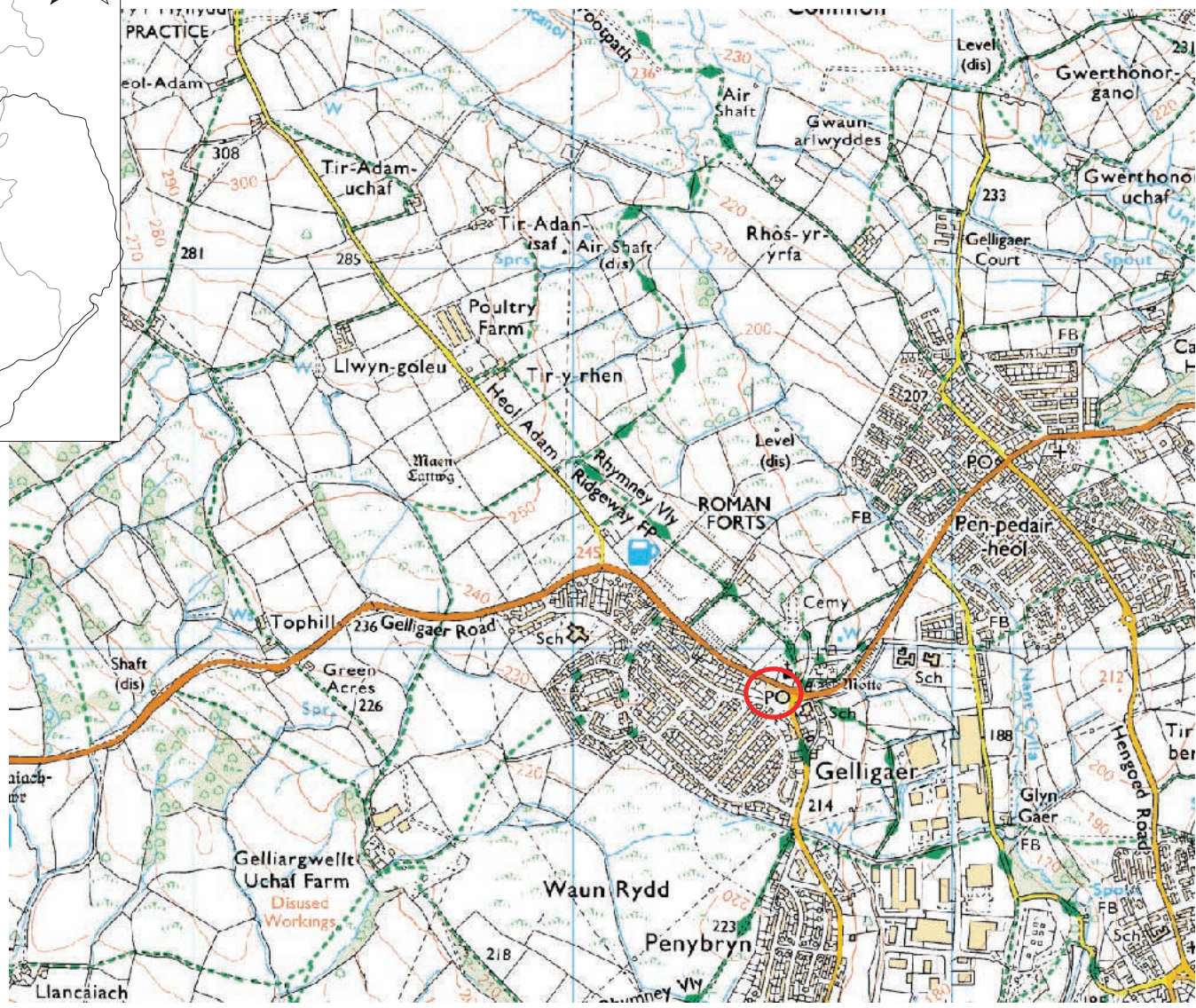
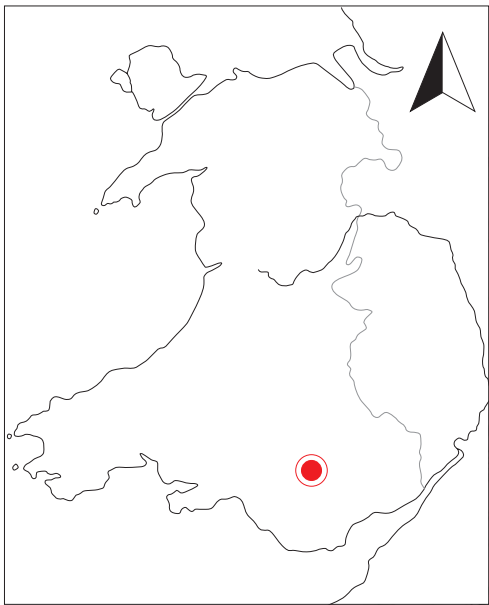


Fig. 1  
Location of site

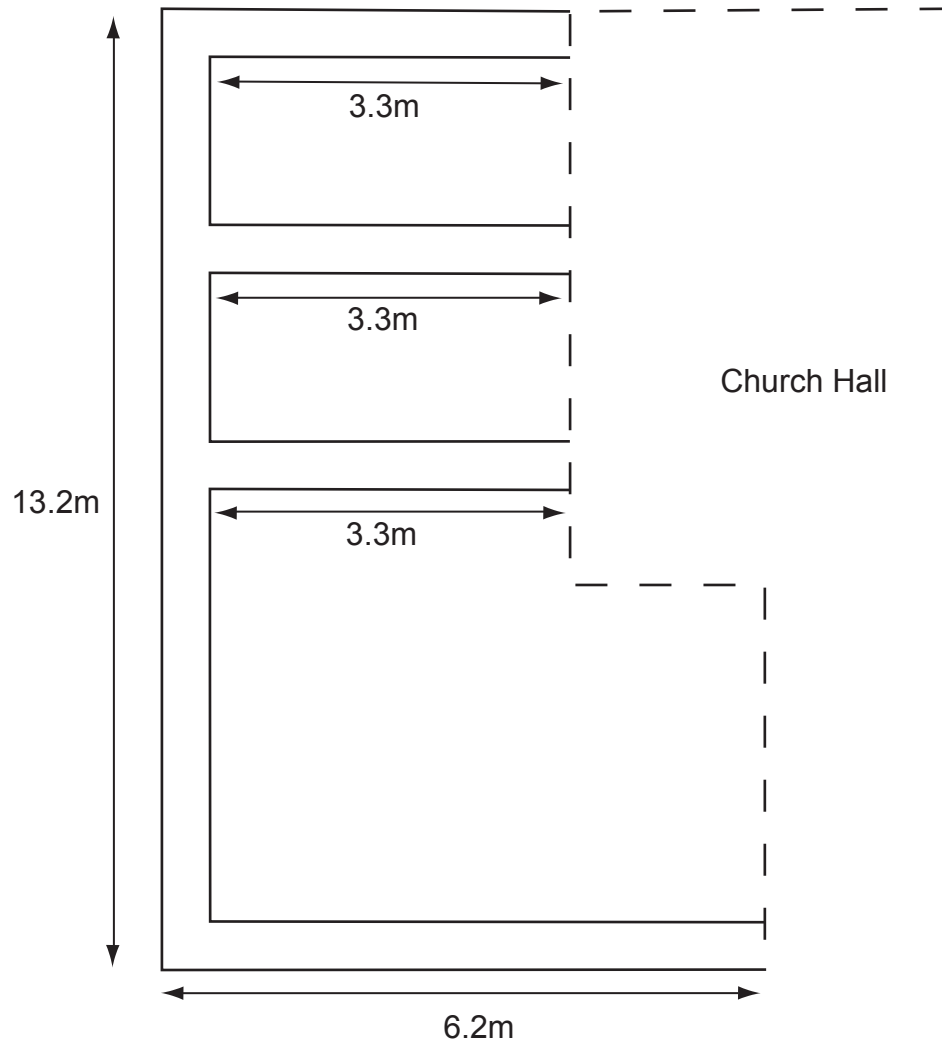
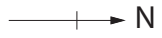


Fig. 2  
Layout of  
footings trenches





Plate 1  
The site prior to  
the excavation of  
footings trenches

Looking West



Plate 2  
View across the  
footings trenches

Looking East



Plate 3  
Footings trench  
cut down to natural

Looking North

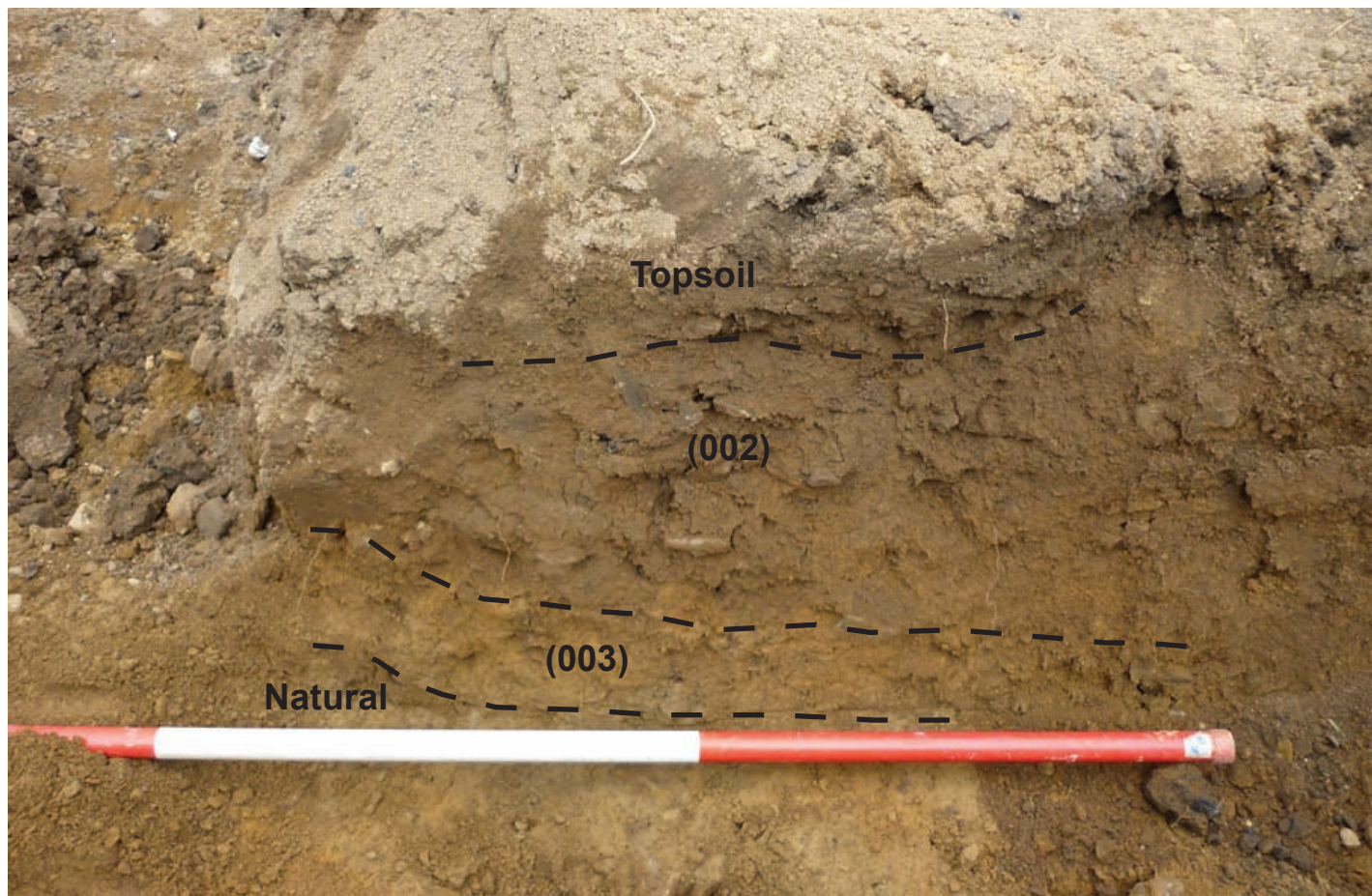


Plate 4  
South-facing  
section through  
subsoil (002) and  
(003)



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