

CPAT Report No. 1775




Westbourne, Manthrig Lane, Caersws, Powys

Archaeological Watching Brief



YMDDIRIEDOLAETH ARCHAEOLEGOL CLWYD-POWYS
CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Client name: Graham Ottaway
 CPAT Project No: 2500
 Project Name: Westbourne, Manthrig Lane, Caersws
 Grid Reference: SO 0310 9199
 County/LPA: Powys
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Summary

In January 2021 the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust conducted a watching brief on behalf of Graham Ottaway at Westbourne, Manthrig Lane, Caersws, Powys. The watching brief was carried out as part of the planning process and monitored the excavation of the foundation trenches for a new extension to the existing house, which lies within an area known to contain sub-surface archaeological remains relating to the Roman civil settlement associated with the Caersws II Roman fort.

A number of features relating to the Roman occupation of the area were revealed by the trenching, including a road that had been previously seen in excavations along Manthrig Lane in 1988. Other Roman layers contemporary with the civil settlement were identified but their nature could not be determined in the small trenches that were excavated; it seems likely that they belonged to one of the later phases of settlement activity associated with the fort.

Crynodeb

Fis Ionawr 2021, bu Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Clwyd-Powys yn cynnal briff gwyllo ar ran Graham Ottaway yn Westbourne, Lôn Manthrig, Caersws, Powys. Cynhaliwyd y briff gwyllo fel rhan o'r broses gynllunio, gan fonitro gwaith cloddio rychau sylfeini ar gyfer estyniad newydd i'r tŷ presennol, sydd mewn ardal y mae'n hysbys ei bod yn cynnwys gweddillion archaeolegol o dan yr wyneb sy'n ymwneud â'r anheddiad sifil Rhufeinig sy'n gysylltiedig â chaer Rhufeinig Caersws II.

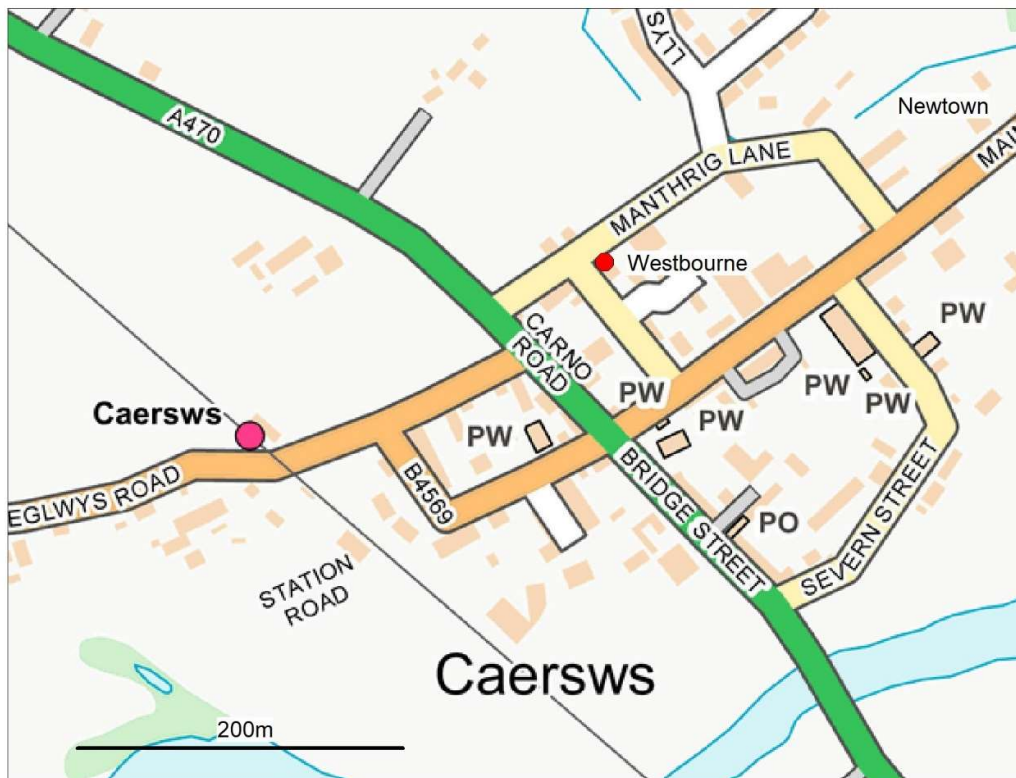
Datgelodd y gwaith cloddio nifer o nodweddion yn gysylltiedig ag anheddu gan y Rhufeiniaid yn yr ardal, gan gynnwys ffordd a oedd wedi'i gweld o'r blaen yn ystod gwaith cloddio ar hyd Lôn Manthrig ym 1988. Nodwyd haenau Rhufeinig eraill a oedd yn cyfoesi â'r anheddiad sifil ond nid oedd yn bosibl penderfynu ar eu natur yn y rychau bach a oedd yn cael eu cloddio; mae'n debygol eu bod wedi perthyn i un o gyfnodau diweddaraf y gweithgarwch anheddu a oedd yn gysylltiedig â'r gaer.

1 Introduction

- 1.1. The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was engaged by Graham Ottaway to undertake an archaeological watching brief during excavations for the foundations of a new extension at Westbourne, Manthrig Lane, Caersws, Powys (Fig. 1; SO 0310 9199).
- 1.2. The work was undertaken as a condition of the grant of planning consent (Application No 20/1075/HH) for the development by Powys County Council. The condition was specified by Sophie Watson, who provides advice on archaeological matters to Powys County Council and can be summarised as follows:

The developer shall ensure that a suitably qualified archaeological contractor is present during the undertaking of any ground works in the development area so that an archaeological watching brief can be conducted.

Reason: To secure preservation by record of any archaeological remains which may be revealed during ground excavations for the consented development



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Fig. 1: Location of Westbourne

- 1.3. The work was required as the area of the new extension lies within the civil settlement that was established outside the Roman fort at Caersws in the late 1st century AD and continued through to the late 3rd century AD. The extension also lay along the predicted line of one of the Roman roads, where flanking settlement, consisting of dwellings and workshops, has been noted in past fieldwork. The foundation excavations were thought likely to reveal this potential sub-surface archaeology, and the watching brief would allow any such remains to be

excavated and recorded. The watching brief was undertaken during the excavation of the foundations of the new extension on 14 January 2021.

2 Archaeological Background

- 2.1. This section provides a brief summary of the archaeology and history of the study area and its immediate surrounds, to enable the findings of the assessment to be placed in a wider context.
- 2.2. The first Roman fort to be built in the area, Caersws I, was located in a sound strategic position on a spur overlooking the River Severn to the north-east of the present village. This was replaced by Caersws II, the prominent earthworks of which define a fort measuring 188m by 177m with the defences enclosing an area of 3.2 hectares. Three main phases of construction have been recognised, the earliest dating from the early Flavian period (AD 69-96), with a laminated clay rampart faced with turf and fronted by at least one ditch. The second phase, probably Trajanic (AD 98-117) or Hadrianic (AD 117-138), saw enhancement of the defences, along with the addition of an annexe on the north side. The final phase, which may be Hadrianic or Antonine (AD 138-193) in date, saw the rampart fronted by a stone wall c. 2m thick, while the fort ditches adjacent to the annexe fell out of use.

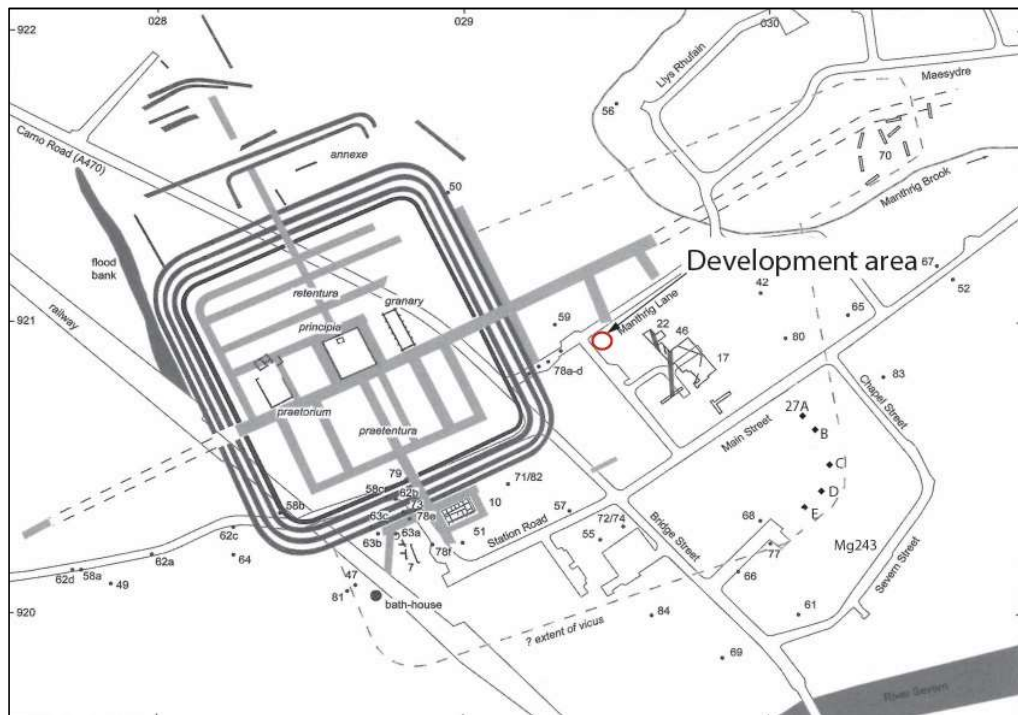


Fig. 2: Roman Caersws, showing the location of the development circled in red (from Jones 1996)

- 2.3. Evidence for a civilian settlement, or *vicus*, associated with Caersws II fort has been derived almost exclusively as a result of excavations, although aerial reconnaissance and geophysical survey have played a minor role. At present the extra-mural settlement is known to lie on the south and east sides of the fort, occupying an area of around 7 hectares, focused on the roads issuing from the *porta praetoria* and *porta principalis sinistra*. As well as these major roads, a number of side roads have also been identified and their presence, together with the generally regular alignment of many of the excavated features, are highly suggestive of a degree of internal planning, rather than simple piecemeal development over time.

- 2.4. Westbourne is sited on a projection of the line of one of these roads, which had been identified by a watching brief during storm drain installation works along Manthrig Lane in 1988 and is known to continue into the field to the north. Evidence recovered at the time suggested that the road was probably 2nd-century in date. Close by to the east is an area where significant evidence of the Roman civil settlement has been identified in previous large-scale excavations (numbered 17, 22 and 46 on Fig. 2), comprising a number of buildings and other features covering a sequence of phases that are thought to encompass the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD.

3 Watching Brief

- 3.1. The watching brief was conducted on 14 January 2021 in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CIfA) (2020) *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief*. The results of the excavations are described below and depicted on the following Figures.
- 3.2. The new extension was placed on the north-west side of the house and its foundations covered an area measuring approximately 12m north-east/south-west by 5m. The trench averaged 0.7m wide and was excavated to a depth of up to 1.2m below the previous ground surface.
- 3.3. Traces of a Roman road were seen in the north-east part of the development area, where the trench cut through a cambered gravel layer (6), up to 0.15m thick, with an obvious metallised surface. The alignment of the road could not be conclusively determined owing to the limited width of the trench but it was seen to continue at least up to the foundations of the house and the shape of the cambering confirmed beyond reasonable doubt that it was the road which had been expected from the observation of storm drain trenching along Manthrig Lane.



Fig. 3: The road, visible in section as a cambered gravel layer, from south-east. Photo CPAT 4850-0006

- 3.4. The south-west side of the gravel in section appeared to define the edge of the road as it did not continue below the base of the trench. It had been laid on top of a pale yellow-grey clay (7), whose surface colour at the south-west side of the road had been discoloured, by heating, to a reddish hue; it was clearly an artificial horizon. Throughout the visible section of the road surface it had subsequently been covered by a layer of dark grey silt (5), up to 0.1m thick. All of these layers were clearly of Roman origin, though no typologically distinct material was recovered.



Fig. 4: Foundation trench from north-east, showing the heated clay (7) in the foreground overlain by dark grey silt (5), both of which were cut by the later service trench (4). CPAT 4850-0008

- 3.5. The dark grey silt appeared to have been descending into a roadside ditch but this could not be confirmed as a relatively recent service trench (3), aligned approximately east/west and up to 0.5m wide, had cut across the Roman layers and the relationship with other layers further south-west had been lost. The service trench was filled by brown stony silt (4), while the base of the trench further south-west was occupied by a grey stony clay (8), which contained some charcoal.
- 3.6. Approximately 4.0m to the south-west, a small triangular area of yellowish clay (9) was encountered at the base of the trench. Again this was of artificial origin, but it soon gave way to a second deposit of grey stony clay (12) which contained charcoal and was probably the same deposit as context 8 which had been truncated in post-Roman times. Layers 9 and 12 had both been cut by a later pit (10), approximately 1.0m in diameter, filled with brown clay (11).
- 3.7. Approximately 1.5m to the south-west of the pit the soil at the base of the trench turned back from grey stony clay to yellowish clay (13). Both this and layer 9 seemed to be overlain by the grey stony clay layers, suggesting that the latter had possibly been deposited in some kind of linear hollow in the clay. Obviously, given the constraints of the trench size, it was not possible to confirm this or indicate a possible direction.

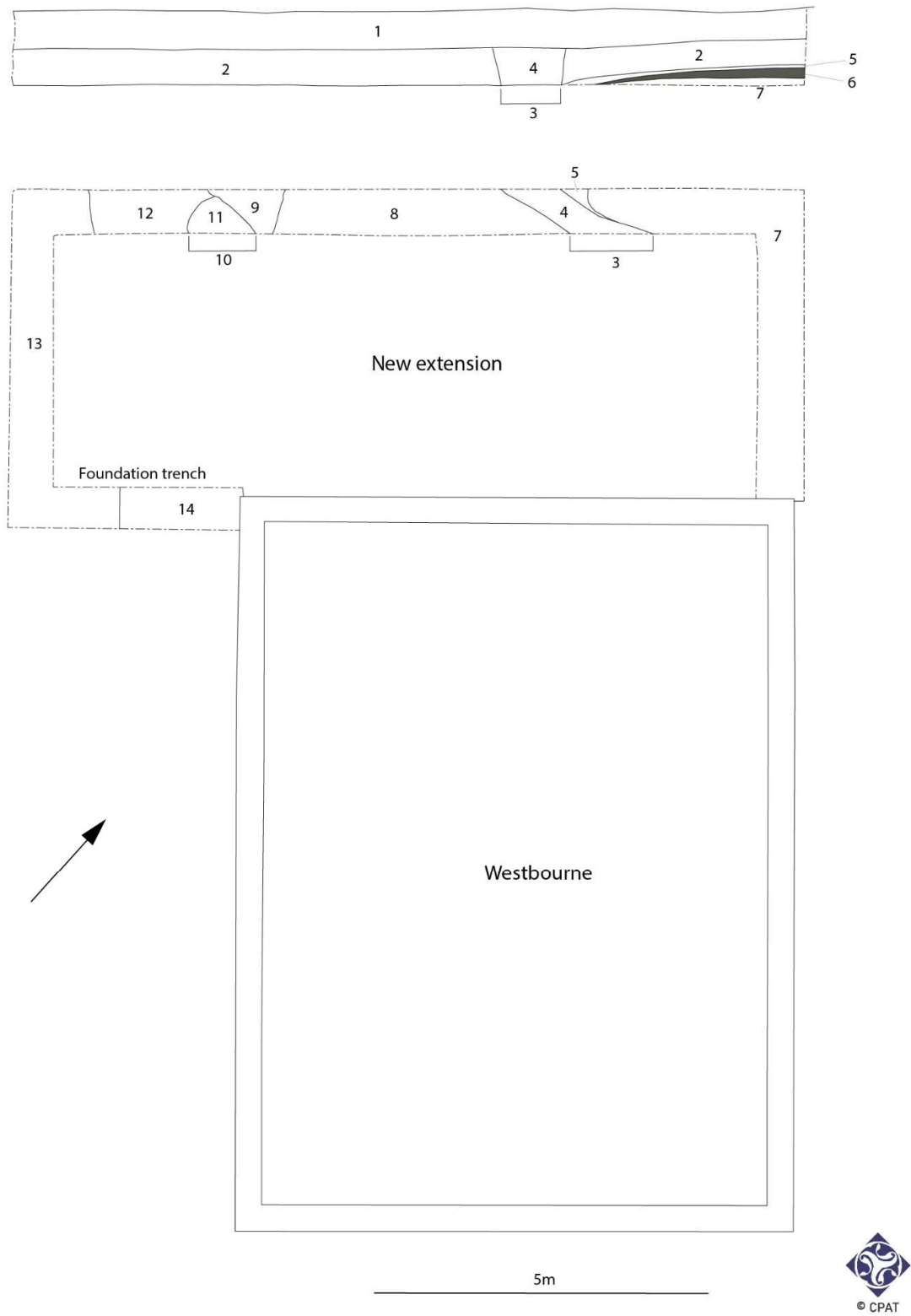


Fig. 5: Plan and section of the foundation excavation

- 3.8. The yellowish clay continued throughout the remainder of the south-west part of the trench, with the exception of some disturbed modern material (14), which was closer to Westbourne and was probably associated with the construction of the house.



Fig. 6: The yellowish clay deposit (13), representing the top of the Roman layers at the base of the trench on the south-west. CPAT 4850-0014

- 3.9. The soil layer immediately overlying the Roman layers was a grey-brown stony silt (2), up to 0.6m thick, and covered by a layer of grey silt topsoil, also up to 0.6m thick. Both of these were of post-medieval origin.

4 Conclusions

- 4.1. Apart from a few places where there had been later disturbance, the foundation trenching revealed Roman deposits throughout the area of the extension, either at or near the base of the trench. It seemed possible that some of these layers had been truncated by post-Roman activity.
- 4.2. The main feature revealed was a Roman road which had been identified during excavations for a new storm drain within Manthrig Lane in 1988 (Jones 1993, 38) and is known to have continued into the fields on the opposite side of the lane. It was one of a network which served the Roman civilian settlement in Caersws; collectively, these suggest a degree of deliberate planning in the layout of the settlement rather than the more informal arrangement that seems to have prevailed at other similar settlements on the fringes of Roman forts in the district.
- 4.3. No evidence that could conclusively date the observed layers was forthcoming, but it seems likely from a stratigraphic point of view that the features seen were associated with the later activity in the settlement, perhaps in the later 2nd or 3rd century. It is highly likely that earlier Roman features and layers survive below the level of the foundations for the extension.

5 Sources

Jones, N. W., 1993. Caersws Roman Fort and Vicus, Montgomeryshire, Powys, 1984-92. *Montgomeryshire Collections* 81, 15-96.

Jones, N. W., 1996. Excavations within the Roman Vicus at Caersws, 1989-93. *Montgomeryshire Collections* 84, 1-36.

6 Archive deposition Statement

- 6.1. The project archive has been prepared according to the CPAT Archive Policy and in line with the CIfA *Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives guidance* (2020). The archive is entirely digital and will be deposited jointly with the Historic Environment Record, Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust and the National Monuments Record (RCAHMW). No artefacts were retained.

Archive summary

CPAT Event PRN: 140359

1 A3 site drawing (scanned)

1 Trench recording form, including photo register (scanned)

14 digital photographs, CPAT film no 4850