

Archaeology Wales

Moat Lane, Caersws Powys

Archaeological Watching Brief



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Report No. 1060

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CONTENTS

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Location and scope of work	1
1.2	Geology and topography	1
1.3	Archaeological and Historical Background	1
2	Aims and Objectives	3
2.1	Watching Brief	3
3	Methodology	3
3.1	Watching Brief	3
3.2	Finds	3
3.3	Palaeo-environmental evidence.....	3
4	Watching Brief Results	4
4.1	Soils and ground conditions	4
4.2	Distribution of deposits	4
4.3	Descriptions – New road route.....	4
5	Discussion and Interpretation.....	4
5.1	Reliability of field investigation.....	4
5.2	Overall interpretation	5
5.3	Acknowledgements	5
6	Bibliography and references.....	6

List of Figures

- Figure 1 Location map
Figure 2 Detailed Location Map

List of Plates

- Plates 1-5 Views of road area under excavation during watching brief

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Non-Technical Summary

This report results from work undertaken by Archaeology Wales Ltd (AW) for Powys County Council, County Hall, Llandrindod Wells, Powys. It draws upon the results gained by a watching brief during groundworks associated with the provision of a new road layout at the junction of the A470 and Moat Lane, Caersws, Powys. Previous investigations in the surrounding area have located archaeological features of both prehistoric and Romano-British date. The watching brief at Moat Lane located no significant finds or features.

1 Introduction

1.1 Location and scope of work

In March 2012 Archaeology Wales Ltd (AW) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Moat Lane, Caersws, Powys NGR SO 03598 91428 (Fig 1).

The watching brief was carried out as part of the planning process at the request of Mark Walters (Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust). A works Specification was drawn up by Mark Houlston (Archaeology Wales Ltd) and approved by Mark Walters (CPAT).

1.2 Geology and topography

The underlying solid geology of the area is comprised of undifferentiated Llandovery rocks, including mudstone, siltstone and sandstone (Geological Survey Map, 2001).

The assessment area is located 700m to the south east of the centre of Caersws at approximately 122m above ordnance datum. The site lies adjacent to the A470 and the A489, and to the south east of the course of the River Severn. The assessment area is relatively flat and is bound by the A470 on its north-west edge and Moat Lane to the north-east (Fig 2).

1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

The following is an extract from Samuel Lewis' (1833) Topographic Dictionary of Wales concerning Caersws:

“CAER-SWS, a hamlet in the parish of LLANWNNOG, hundred of LLANIDLOES, county of MONTGOMERY, NORTH WALES, 5 miles (W.) from Newtown. The population is returned with the parish. This is said to have been a Roman city of considerable extent, though unnoticed as such by early writers: its Roman name is not even known, and few vestiges of its grandeur have been traced. In Mr. Pennant's time the fields in the vicinity were divided by lanes intersecting each other, which probably pointed out the places that had formed the ancient streets, but the exact size of the station is not known. A

Roman road, called *Sarn Swsan*, or *Swsog*, led from it in a direction northward, though whither it proceeded is doubtful, and but little of it can now be discovered. By the side of this road, on Gwyn-vynydd common, there is a small sub-oval encampment; and in a field adjacent to Rhos Ddiarbed, "the common where no quarter was given," is another Roman camp, of singular form. At the south side there is a vast conical mount, surrounded by a deep fosse, supposed to have been exploratory, to the north of which an oblong area, about seventy yards broad in the greatest diameter, is defended by a high rampart and outer ditch : in the lower part there is an entrance to a square camp, about two hundred yards in length, and above one hundred in breadth, opposite to which is another entrance : the whole is surrounded by a rampart and ditch. No coins have been discovered here, but, about the year 1777, some Roman bricks, and large blocks of cement, much indurated, and as porous as breccia, were dug up in the south-western angle of the camp: one of the bricks bore an inscription in bas relief, which has not been satisfactorily deciphered, and was placed in the back part of a chimney belonging to the apartment of an adjoining inn. Caer-Sws had formerly a castle also, and at least one church, and is said to have been the residence of the lords of Arwystli. It is situated on the northern bank of the river Severn, across which a new stone bridge of three arches was built a few years ago, and has been enlarged, within the last fifty years, by the erection of some decent houses and cottages: a new road, leading from Caer-Sws to Llanwnnog, was constructed in 1831. There are places of worship for Baptists and Calvinistic and Wesleyan Methodists”.

The earthworks of the Roman fort are still prominent in the village today and first became the subject of enquiry in the late eighteenth century when they were described by Thomas Pennant. In 1804 Sir Richard Colt-Hoare measured the earthworks and recorded several finds that had eroded out of the river bank, and further work was conducted by Revd. David Davies in 1854-5. The first modern excavation was undertaken by R.C. Bosanquet in 1909, and these were followed by a series of sporadic excavations the 1960s, 1980s and 1990s.

The fort is located in a central position in the Roman military system controlling mid Wales, with roads leading east, north, north-west and west, with a further, as yet unlocated, road in the south leading towards Castell Collen. It measures 188m by 177m, enclosing an area of 3.2ha. It's earliest phase appears to be very early Flavian (c. AD 70), with subsequent Trajanic / Hadrianic (c. AD 120) and Hadrianic / Antonine (c. AD 140) phases, but the site appears to go out of military use in the early third century. An annex was added on the northern side in the early second century, and there was an extensive *vicus* on the south and east sides. This *vicus* had a developed series of streets, timber buildings, and the possible *temenos* of a temple was identified during excavations in the 1990s. A bathhouse discovered in 1854 lay to the south of the fort but what remains of this now lie beneath the railway (Wiles, 2002).

2 Aims and Objectives

2.1 Watching Brief

The watching brief was undertaken:

- To allow, within the resources available, the preservation by record of archaeological deposits, the presence and nature of which could not be established (or established with sufficient accuracy) in advance of development or other potentially disruptive works.
- To provide an opportunity, if needed, for the watching archaeologist to signal to all interested parties, before the destruction of the material in question, that an archaeological find has been made for which the resources allocated to the watching brief itself are not sufficient to support treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard.
- The main objective of a watching brief is to establish and make available information about the archaeological resource existing on a site.

3 Methodology

3.1 Watching Brief

The watching brief was carried out during groundworks associated with the provision of a new road layout at the junction of Moat Lane and the A470 (Fig 2). Excavation was carried out by a 360 degree mechanical excavator equipped with a large 'bladed' bucket under close archaeological supervision. Along the road corridor deposits were removed to a depth of 2.50m to 3.00m from the top of the contemporary ground surface. This provided the formation level from which the new road was constructed.

The on-site work was undertaken by watching brief archaeologist Pete Brown. The overall management of the project was undertaken by Chris E Smith (MIfA). All areas were photographed using high resolution digital photography.

All works were undertaken in accordance with the IfA's *Standards and Guidance: for an archaeological watching brief* and current Health and Safety legislation.

3.2 Finds

No finds were recovered during the course of the excavation.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental evidence

No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were encountered.

4 **Watching Brief Results**

4.1 **Soils and ground conditions**

Generally the ground conditions were dry as the ground of the assessment area was gravelly and well drained. A lack of rain in the period preceding the watching brief contributed to this.

4.2 **Distribution of deposits**

The topsoil was of a reasonably uniform distribution in all areas, varying little in depth, between 0.2m and 0.3m. It was mainly composed of a friable mid brown silt with occasional gravel inclusions.

The subsoil consisted of a relatively homogeneous mix of mid brown/orange clayey silt varying in depth from approximately 2.2m to at least 2.7m (the maximum depth exposed by the groundworks). Occasional bands and patches of gravel were noted within it. Beneath the silt were mixed deposits of grit, gravel and stone; these are assumed to have resulted from alluvial deposition.

4.3 **Descriptions – New road route**

- 4.3.1 An area measuring approximately 160m x 9m (Plates 1-5) was stripped of topsoil by mechanical excavator under close archaeological supervision.

Subsequently, subsoil deposits were removed to a total depth of 3.0m to 3.5m from the top of the contemporary ground surface. Underlying deposits of grit, gravel and stone were exposed in places along the base of the excavated area.

No discernible archaeological features or deposits were exposed, either at the top of the subsoil deposits or within them. No horizons of potential archaeological significance were observed within the subsoil; the occasional bands and patches of gravel noted appeared to be the result of deposition by natural processes. Sample sections were hand cleaned, but these confirmed the overall impression that the subsoil was largely homogeneous and undifferentiated.

4.3.2 **Drainage Swale**

A curvilinear trench measuring approximately 5m in length by a maximum depth of 1m was excavated as a drainage swale adjacent to where the new road route adjoins the existing route of Moat Lane. Comparable topsoil and subsoil deposits to those seen elsewhere were again noted within this trench. At a depth of 1m below the ground surface a gravel-rich grey clay was noted.

5 **Discussion and Interpretation**

5.1 **Reliability of field investigation**

The results, although negative, are likely to represent a reliable representation of the sequence across the whole of the field where the new road was located. As a caveat,

however, it should be noted that features of possible Romano-British date were found in similar ground conditions further to the north-east, north of the railway line (Jones, 2009), so it is possible that similar archaeology might be present closer to the new road. This may have been because archaeological features lay near to, but not along, the line of the road, or because their fills were indistinguishable from the surrounding subsoil and so invisible to the naked eye.

5.2 Overall interpretation

The overall interpretation is that archaeological features and deposits were not present along the line of the new road or in the area of the drainage swale.

Furthermore, it is unlikely that archaeological evidence survives nearby, either close to the line of the road or elsewhere in the same 'development' field. As mentioned above, features of possible Romano-British date were found further to the north-east following watching brief work associated with the construction of a new water main (Jones, 2009), but no archaeological features were identified during the same watching brief where the water main crossed the south-western edge of the development field (the line of the new, southern, water main is shown in blue on Figure 2). Unfortunately, no watching brief appears to have taken place during the construction of the gas main, the line of which is closer to that of the new road (this is also shown on Figure 2). However, the evidence of past and present investigations is that archaeological features and deposits are probably not present within the development field, but even if they are, they are unlikely to be visible to the naked eye.

5.3 Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Pete Brown (AW) for his on-site assistance.

6 Bibliography and references

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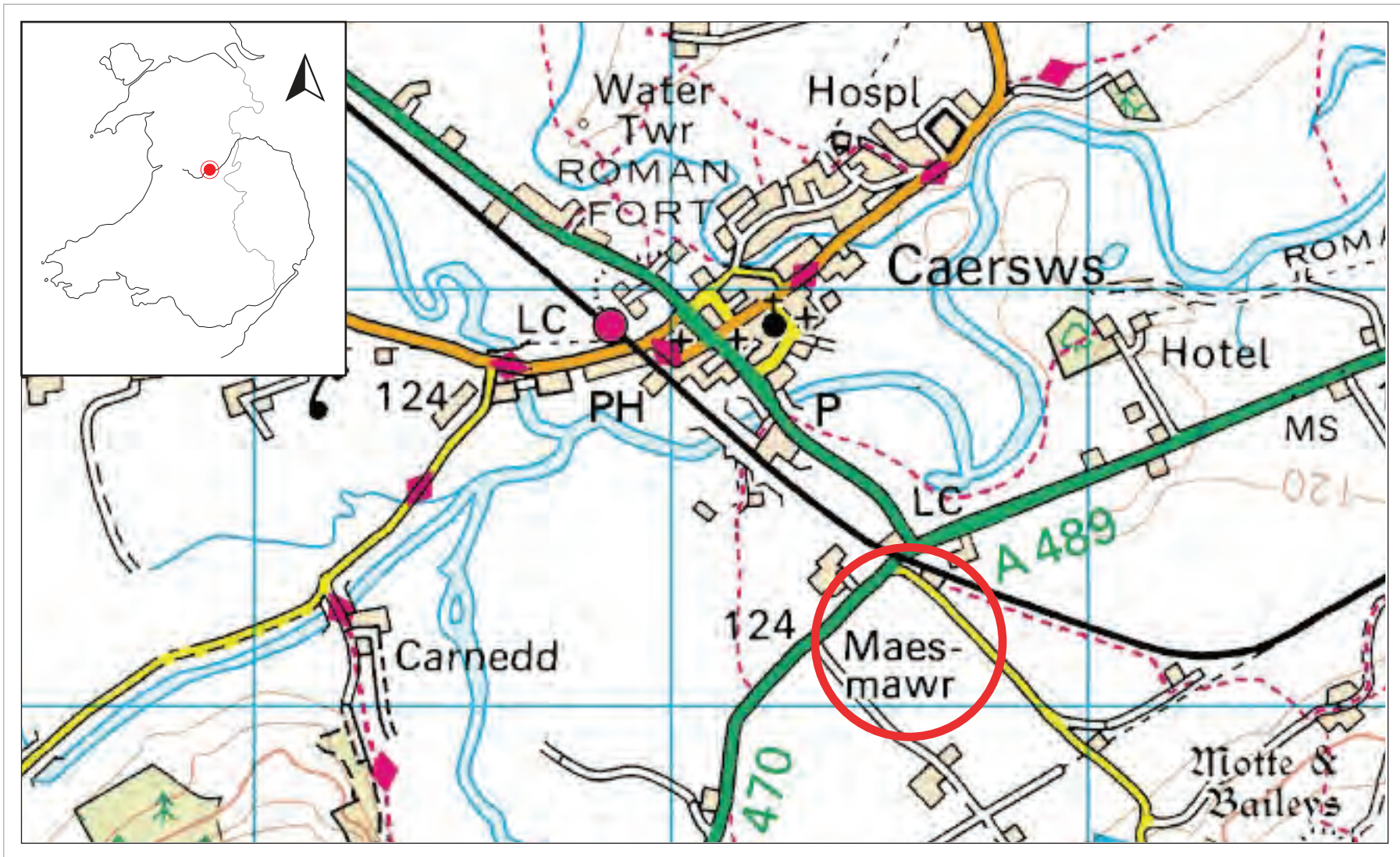


Fig 01: Map showing location of assessment area



Plate 1: View across watching brief area of new road, looking east



Plate 2: View across watching brief area of new road, looking east



Plate 3: View of road excavation underway. Note patch of gravel banding within surface of subsoil



Plate 4: View across road area of watching brief, looking north east



Plate 5: View of road area under excavation, looking east

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APPENDIX I: Archive Cover Sheet

ARCHIVE COVER SHEET

Moat Lane, Caersws, Powys

Site Name:	Moat Lane
Site Code:	MLC/12/WB
PRN:	-
NPRN:	-
SAM:	-
Other Ref No:	-
NGR:	NGR SO 03598 91428
Site Type:	Multiperiod
Project Type:	Watching Brief
Project Manager:	Chris E Smith
Project Dates:	March 2012
Categories Present:	None
Location of Original Archive:	AW
Location of duplicate Archives:	-
Number of Finds Boxes:	-
Location of Finds:	-
Museum Reference:	-
Copyright:	AW
Restrictions to access:	None

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