Archaeology Wales

Aberpergwm Colliery, Cae Capel Glyn-Neath

Archaeological Watching Brief



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Aberpergwm Colliery, Cae Capel Glyn-Neath

Archaeological Watching Brief

Prepared For: Industrial Archaeology Services

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Non-Technical Summary

This report results from work undertaken by Archaeology Wales Ltd (AW) for Michael Tutton on behalf of Industrial Archaeology Services. It draws upon the results gained by a watching brief carried out on all ground works during the redevelopment of the Cae Capel mine buildings, near Aberpergwm, Glyn-Neath, Wales. The watching brief was undertaken during topsoil stripping activities and reduction in ground levels on the site of the demolished mine buildings. A total of 11 features were located during the watching brief though all were seemingly late post-medieval or modern in date. They are likely to have been associated with the mine buildings that were previously located on the site. A culvert, likely to be 17th or early 18th century in date and associated with Aberpergwm House, was also located within the development area.

1 Introduction

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 Between January to April 2011 Archaeology Wales (AW) carried out an archaeological watching brief during topsoil stripping and reduction in ground levels at Aberpergwm Colliery, Cae Capel, NGR SN86542 06024 (Fig 1). The work forms part of a larger series of watching brief investigations undertaken at the colliery, the first phase of which concluded in 2009 (Jones 2009).
- 1.1.2 The watching brief was carried out at the request of Michael Tutton (Industrial Archaeology Services) as part of the planning conditions imposed by the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust.
- 1.1.3 A specification for the work (No 976) was drawn up by Mark Houliston (AW) which was subsequently approved by the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The underlying solid geology of the Aberpergwm area is primarily made up of Upper Westphalian limestone deposits, including Pennant Measures (British Geological Survey, 2001).
- 1.2.2 The site of Cae Capel sits some 500m to the south west of Glyn Neath and 500m northwest of the course of the A465. It is located at approximately 47m AOD on a relatively flat plateau at the base of the higher ground of Craig Clwyd which rises to 440m AOD to the northwest.
- 1.2.3 The main area of topsoil stripping comprised a large, relatively flat field to the east of the extant mine buildings.

1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

1.3.1 Aberpergwm is located within the parish of Cadoxton juxta Neath. The following is an extract from Carlisle's publication 'A Topographical Dictionary of the Dominion of Wales' (1811):

CADOXTON, or, LLAN CATWG, in the Cwmwd of Rhwng Nedd ac Afan, Cantref of Cron Nedd (now called the Hundred of Neath), County of GLAMORGAN, South Wales: a discharged Vicarage, with the Chapels of Aber Pergwn, and Crynant, and valued in the King's Books at £5.11.10 1/2: Patron, Capel Hanbury Leigh, Esq.; Church dedicated to St. Catwg. The resident Population of this Parish, in 1801, (consisting of the Hamlets of Blaen Honddan, Coed Ffrange, Dyffryn Clydach, Dylais Issa, Dylais Uwcha, Glynn Neath Canol, Glynn Neath Issa, Glynn Neath Uwcha, and Ynys y Mond) was 3482. The Money raised by the Parish Rates, in 1803, was, £1162.17.5. It is 1/2 m. N. from Neath. There were formerly two Chapels in this Parish, both of which are now demolished. It is a hilly District, and abounds with Coals; and has the advantage of the Neath Canal, which runs twelve miles Northwards to the Mountains. This Parish is remarkable for the Longevity of its Inhabitants; and present several fine Cascades. According to the Diocesan Report, in 1809, the yearly value of this Benefice, arising from Tythes, and Augmentation, was £79.15.3. "Richard de Grainville and Constance his wife gave their Chapel in the Castle at Neath, the Tythes belonging to it, a large Tract of waste Land, and other Possessions, in the reign of Henry the First, to the Abbot and Convent of Savigny near Lyons in France, that they might build an Abbey here. And a very fair Abbey (dedicated to The Holy Trinity) was built accordingly on the West side of the river, a little below the Town, for Monks of the Order of Savigny, or Fratres Grisei, who soon afterwards became Cistercians......"

- 1.3.2 The archaeological and historical background to the mine at Aberpergwm was included in a previous report (Jones, 2009) on work carried out at the mine. The following paragraphs are extracts from that report:
- 1.3.3 The Aberpergwm Mine is located in the Neath Valley, South Wales near to the villages of Glynneath and Blaengwrach just off the A465. The region around Aberpergwm has been mined for coal over several centuries, with early mining features extending over much of the mountain area. Supposedly there had been a small mine named Aberpergwm mentioned in records dating back to 1811, however it wasn't until the 1860s when one W. Williams opened another drift mine close by to Aberpergwm, named 'Pwllafon', that the mines drift history began. In 1880 the ownership of the mine changed to one Morgan Stuart Williams. From the Inspector of Mines List in 1896, there were 68 men employed at the Aberpergwm Mine and 172 at the Pwllafon, Both the mines were producing Anthracite.
- 1.3.4 A new drift was opened in 1906 and by 1908 the workforce had greatly increased to 741. The mine later came under the ownership of the Aberpergwm Collieries Co. Ltd., and in 1918 there were 520 men employed. In 1920 it was taken over by D.R. Llewellyn of the Vale of Neath Collieries Co. From a list 1923, there were

113 working a Aberpergwm drift, producing from the Brass seam. At Pwllfaron the workforce numbered 938, working the Nine Feet, Brass and Eighteen Feet seams.

- 1.3.5 Ten years later the mine was taken over by the Amalgamated Anthracite Collieriers Ltd, and in 1938 there were 1,539 men employed. Following nationalisation of the coal industry in 1947, the Aberpergwm Mine was owned and operated by the National Coal Board and subsequently British Coal. By 1969 severe geological problems threatened the pit's future and an exploratory heading was driven into the Eighteen Feet seam, to access pillars of coal left by earlier "pillar and stall" mining methods used 19th century. These pillars held sufficient high quality anthracite to justify the driving of a new 300 yard drift and immediate investment in new machinery.
- 1.3.6 During the 1970s a £750,000, improvement including installation of a Monorail (see photo) and extending the workings across the Pentreclwylla Fault. At this time 298 men were producing 120,000 tons of Anthracite yearly.
- 1.3.7 British Coal closed the Aberpergwm Mine on the 7th of October 1985 under their national closure programme, the entries being sealed and the surface infrastructure demolished. The underground workings were allowed to flood. The Aberpergwm Mine remained closed for 10 years until it reopened in 1996.
- 1.3.8 In October 2003 it became part of Energybuild Holdings Ltd ("EBH"). Over the following 18 months working capital was obtained for the development of the Aberpergwm Mine and opencast activity in the locality. This also enabled relevant restoration bonds to be put in place with the local council. During this period, sales contracts were entered into with Aberthaw power station and E.H Bennett & Company Limited and further opencast planning permits were secured with the local planning authority. Grants were obtained from the Department of Trade and Industry under the coal investment aid scheme and a program of development was embarked upon which was and still is overseen by independent mining consultants working for the Department of Trade and Industry (from The Welsh Coal Mines web site www.welshcoalmines.co.uk/GlanWest/Aberpergwm.htm).
- 1.3.9 The ruins of Aberpergwm House are located in a wooded area immediately adjacent the development area. Aberpergwm house belonged to the Williams family and was a remodelling of an earlier house on the site. The following paragraphs are extracts from the National Library of Wales Estate Records for Aberpergwm:
- 1.3.10 The Williams family of Aberpergwm was an old family with a very long association with the upper Neath Valley. The family pedigree can be traced back to one Morgan ap Caradoc ap Iestyn, the 12th century lord of Nedd-Afan. The family made Aberpergwm their home in the 16th century, and continued there until the 1950s. The estate consisted in the main of a large area in the parish of Cadoxton-juxta-Neath, principally in the hamlets of Neath Higher and Neath Middle, in the manor of Neath Ultra and Cilybebyll, and adjacent areas in Breconshire. Several members of the family were instrumental in cultivating Welsh poetry and music in

the Neath Valley, and the house once contained many important Welsh manuscripts.

1.3.11 The Williams family were deeply involved in the coal industry, encouraging the growth of the industry to such an extent that Morgan Stuart Williams is described in 1889 as colliery owner in preference to the usual esquire. William Williams (1788-1855) married Matilda Susannah Smith, only daughter and sole heiress of Col. Thomas Smith of Castellau, Glamorgan, and Rosamund, daughter of John Bush of Buscot, Oxfordshire. Matilda Susannah married secondly, Edward Lloyd of Ty'n-y-Rhyl, Flintshire, which may explain the presence of papers of the Lloyd family of Castellau and Aberpergwm. According to the 1873 return of owners of land, Morgan Stuart Williams (1846-1909) of Aberpergwm, Glamorgan, owned an estimated 3,917 acres in Wales (in Glamorgan and Breconshire), with an estimated rental of £3,690. He purchased the St Donat's Castle estate in 1899. His eldest son and heir, Godfrey Herbert Joseph Williams sold St Donat's Castle in 1922.

1.3.12 The house, despite suffering a disastrous fire, is currently Grade II* listed by Cadw.

1.3.13 The area of the watching brief would have once belonged to the Williams estate.

2 Aims and Objectives

2.1 Watching Brief

- 2.1.1 The aims of the watching brief, as defined by the IfA (2008, revised 2011) are:
 - To allow a rapid investigation and recording of any archaeological features that are uncovered during the proposed top soil removal from the application area.
 - To provide the 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 are not sufficient to support the treatment to a satisfactory or proper standard.

3 Methodology

3.1 Watching Brief

- 3.1.1 The area covered by the watching brief measured approximately 200m x 200m. All ground disturbing activities within this area (Fig 2) were undertaken by mechanical excavator using a wide toothless bucket under close archaeological supervision.
- 3.1.2 Project Assistants Sikko van der Brug, Iestyn Jones, Hywel Keen and Mark Bagwell each undertook various parts of the watching brief. All identified archaeological features were cleaned by hand with plans and sections being recorded and drawn at scales of 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50 as appropriate. All areas were photographed using high resolution (14MP) digital photography.

- 3.1.3 The locations of all features were recorded using a handheld Garmin Etrex GPS device.
- 3.1.4 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**

Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and bagged by context.

3.3 **Palaeo-environmental evidence**

No deposits suitable to environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the watching brief.

4 Watching Brief Results

4.1 Soils and ground conditions

- 4.1.1 The topsoil within the development area was composed of a relatively clean mid brown silt with an average depth of 0.2m. This was invariably located above a similarly clean subsoil of a lighter colour. Where natural deposits were located this was composed of a mid-light brown silt clay with occasional subrounded stone inclusions.
- 4.1.2 As the watching brief took place over a period of 3 months weather and ground conditions varied. Owing to the time of year, however, the ground was invariably wet or damp.

4.2 **Description**

- 4.2.1 For descriptive ease, the area covered by the watching brief has been broken down into ten smaller areas (See Figs 2&3). The details of each area will be discussed in turn.
- 4.2.2 <u>Area 1</u>. This area measured approximately 50m x 10m. Machine removal of soils showed the topsoil deposits to be an average of 0.2m deep with subsoil deposits a further 0.5m deep. The area was largely blank apart from one concentration of seemingly river washed (rounded) stones that formed an apparent dump or area of hardstanding (Plates 1-2). The dump measured approximately 4m x 3m and was located immediately adjacent to the south western end of Area 1 (SN 86557 06104).
- 4.2.3 The extent of the stone spread was initially uncovered by mechanical excavator then cleaned by hand. Although one edge was straight, suggesting a structure, the rest of the stone spread appeared dumped. The localised nature of the spread and its existence close to the entrance to a disused mine working are suggestive of 'hardstanding'. Finds from amongst the stones included developed White Ware fragments and clay tobacco pipes, suggestive of a 19/20th century date. A single unstratified piece of North Devon Gravel Tempered ware (1650-1750) was also recovered from above the stone spread. No further features were located within Area 1.

- 4.2.4 <u>Area 2</u>. Area 2 measured approximately 45m x 45m. Machine removal of soils (Plate 3) showed the topsoil deposits to be an average of 0.2m deep with subsoil deposits a further 0.5m deep (Plate 4). Stripping in Area 2 revealed a total of five features.
- 4.2.5 The first feature identified was a north-south aligned linear cut [103] (Plates 5-6) running from SN 86647 06029 to SN 86672 06099). The feature survived in four sections across the site, the most southerly, 3.6m long, being the best preserved. The feature was composed of roughly hewn sandstone slabs within a 0.7m wide cut. The slabs may originally have formed the base and walls of a stone drain though subsequent truncation, presumably by ploughing has damaged the feature. No dateable material was found associated with the feature though a post-medieval date is assumed.
- 4.2.6 A further stone drain [106] was encountered within Area 2. This again ran north-south across Area 2 but differed from the previously discussed drain feature. The feature ran for approximately 30m (from SN 86637 06049 to SN 86652 06079) and was 0.85m wide. A 3m portion of its length was cleaned and hand excavated. It was found to be 0.3m deep and contain a single dark grey silt fill with frequent random stone inclusions. No dateable material was found associated with the feature though a post-medieval date is assumed (Plates 7-8).
- 4.2.7 A further, much larger, culvert was found running parallel to drain (106). This culvert (105) ran for a total of 50m (from SN 86617 05994 to SN 86652 06079) in a north south direction and was 1.3m wide. A 5m portion of the drain was hand cleaned and recorded (Plates 9-11). The drain was composed of stone slabs and river cobbles. It was found to have a concave base, vertical walls and an arched roof, all constructed from locally derived limestone and cobbles partially bonded with smooth, dark grey, clay silt. The internal dimensions of the drain were 0.5m wide by 0.4m high. Excavation around the outside of the structure proved that it sat in a vertically sided feature cut into the natural ground surface with external dimensions of 1.3m wide by 0.8m deep.
- 4.2.8 Located immediately adjacent to the 5m hand cleaned and recorded section of drain was a drain cover and inlet. This was also hand cleaned and recorded (Plates 12-13).
- 4.2.9 Located to the north of the initially cleaned section of drain two possible repairs were noted. In these areas the arched roof of the culvert was missing and had been replaced with reused sections of railway track braces and metal sheets laid over the top of the walls of the drain (Plate 14).
- 4.2.10 <u>Area 3</u>. Area 3 measured approximately 30m x 50m. The watching brief maintained on Area 3 observed no features of archaeological significance.
- 4.2.11 <u>Area 4</u>. Area 4 comprised a long and narrow cut across the site, excavated for the laying of a haul road. The cut measured approximately 150m in length by 6m in width (Plate 15). Within this a continuation of drain (106) was exposed. No further archaeological features were noted.
- 4.2.12 <u>Area 5</u>. Area 5 measured approximately 30m x 80m and was stripped for the erection of a new coal storage building. The average depth of the strip was 0.7m below the ground surface. Only a single feature was noted. A possible pit [108] was observed cut into the

subsoil horizon (Plate 16) (SN 86717 06139). It measured approximately 1.2m in diameter and was round in plan. Excavation proved it to be only 0.2m deep and contain only a single sandy clay fill with no finds (Plate 17).

- 4.2.13 <u>Area 6</u>. Area 6 measured approximately 50m x 50m. The watching brief maintained on Area 6 observed no features of archaeological significance.
- 4.2.14 <u>Area 7</u>. Area 7 was comprised of 4 small (2x2m) mechanically excavated test pits (Located at: SN 86782 06069, 86777 06094, 86737 06179 & 86742 06189). The test pits were positioned so as to investigate a linear anomaly highlighted on a geophysical survey commissioned by Michael Tutton prior to the commencement of this phase of work. The linear anomaly proved to be a cast iron pipe and was observed in all four test pits (Plate 18-19). The following six paragraphs were provided by Michael Tutton re the pipes.
- 4.2.15 The pre-planning geophysical survey of an area in the vicinity of the Grange, a recorded feature, indicated a buried pipe column of approximately 190 metres length which appeared to be laid in a straight line from the grounds of Aberpergwm House, in a direction which would probably intercept the Neath Canal/Nant Pergwm Brook. A site walkover indicated the pipe system entering the grounds of Aberpergwm House and connecting to what appears to be a fire fighting system. Prior to entering the grounds the pipe system emerged from underground, at the field boundary, crossed over the main northern drainage open culvert and thus entered the grounds. The pipe system at this area comprised two 4 inch diameter pipes positioned vertically astride each other which appeared to be an unusual arrangement (Plate 20).
- 4.2.16 The planned groundworks associated with the site would not cause disturbance to the pipe system, however the Watching Brief recommended further investigation, by limited ground invasion, at each end of the pipe system indicated by the geophysical survey.
- 4.2.17 Two test pits were made by means of an excavator at the northern boundary of Cae Capel field in the vicinity of SN86745 06190. A further two test pits were excavated towards the southern boundary of the study area in the vicinity of SN86800 06070.
- 4.2.18 The four test pits revealed that the double pipe system discontinued and reverted to a single pipe column across the field. It was evident that the discontinued pipe had been used to carry an electric power cable across the open culvert the pipe protecting the cable from damage. The cable was buried alongside the single pipe and followed it across the field, the test pits towards the southern boundary confirmed this arrangement.
- 4.2.19 Local opinion suggested the pipe related to a small pumping station built in the vicinity of Nant Pergwm Brook in the 1950s. It was likely that the pump was a small electrically driven pump which would provide an emergency fire fighting supply via the 4 inch pipe to Aberpergwm House.
- 4.2.20 It is worth noting that in the early 1950s Aberpergwm House had been vacated for many years by the Williams family. It had been adopted for use by the National Coal Board as a Group Office, hence the need to provide a backup source of water supply for

emergency purposes. The 4inch pipe was a Victaulic Pipe in common use in the mines of the National Coal Board for underground pumping.

- 4.2.21 <u>Area 8</u>. Area 8 was a small area of land located between a proposed haul road and Area 10. The watching brief located two pits/large post-holes, [110] & [112], cut into the subsoil horizon.
- 4.2.22 Cut [110] (SN 86747 06084) was sub oval in plan with a length of 1.1m, a width of 0.65m and a depth of 0.7m, It contained a single fill, (111), which was a dark brown/grey silty clay. The pit/post hole had an abundance of large stones at the bottom, including a 19th century tile, suggesting that it contained a structural support (Plates 21-22).
- 4.2.23 Cut [112] (SN 86752 06079) was slightly smaller measuring 0.85m x 0.85m. Its total depth was 0.45m. It too contained a single fill and an arrangement of stones at its base (Plate 23).
- 4.2.24 It is likely that these features represent postholes rather than pits. Given that they appear cut into the subsoil, rather than the natural, combined with the presence of a 19th century tile amongst the packing material, a post-medieval date is assumed.
- 4.2.1 <u>Area 9</u>. Area 9 measured approximately 30m x 20m. The watching brief maintained on Area 9 observed no features of archaeological significance.
- 4.2.2 <u>Area 10</u>. Area 10 measured approximately 15m x 15m. The watching brief maintained on Area 10 observed no features of archaeological significance. The water pipe located by the geophysical was noted running along the northern edge of Area 10, as were the associated test pits.

5 **Finds**

- 5.1.1 Only a very small amount of finds were recovered during the watching brief and none were retained. The assemblage was composed of post-medieval and modern pottery fragments including industrially produced developed White Wares and porcelain (*c*.1720 to 1920) and 3 sherds of North Devon Gravel Tempered Wares (1650-1750).
- 5.1.2 Clay tobacco pipes were also present within the finds assemblage, including two diagnostic bowl fragments. Each dated from the mid to late 19th century.
- 5.1.3 Various corroded iron objects and pieces of vessel and window glass were also located.

6 **Discussion and Interpretation**

6.1 **Overall interpretation**

6.1.1 The overall interpretation gained from the watching brief is that very little in the way of significant archaeological remains exist within this area of Cae Capel.

- 6.1.2 Though Aberpergwm house may be the site of an earlier, medieval, house, and a medieval church is located within the grounds, no features of medieval date were noted within the areas subject to the watching brief.
- 6.1.3 The majority of the features located during the watching brief appear to date to the postmedieval period and are most likely associated with drainage/services pertaining to Aberpergwm House and previous mining activities on the site.
- 6.1.4 Some structural evidence was noted, with the presence of post holes in Area 8, though this too was of a relatively modern date.
- 6.1.5 The large culvert (105) located within Area 2 is likely to be associated with the nearby Aberpergwm House and appears to be of mid-17th or 18th century date based on associated finds. This may, therefore, have acted as the main drain for the house until it went out use in mid-20th century.

7 Acknowledgements

7.1.1 Thanks are due to Sikko van der Brug, Iestyn Jones, Hywel Keen and Mark Bagwell (AW) for undertaking the watching brief and to Michael Tutton of Industrial Archaeology Services for his help in liaising with the developer.

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Fig 01: Map showing location of assessment area







Plate 1:View of cobblestone dump/hardstanding at south western end of Area 1.Looking west, Scale 1x1m



Plate 2:View of cobblestone dump/hardstanding at south western end of Area 1.Looking west, Scale 1x1m



Plate 3: Area 2 under excavation



Plate 4: View of deposits within section of Area 2. Scales 2x0.5m



Plate 5:View of linear cut [103] Looking north Scales 1x1m & 1x0.5m



Plate 6:View of linear cut [103] Looking south Scales 1x1m & 1x0.5m



Plate 7:View of linear feature [106], Looking south Scales 1x1m & 1x0.5m



Plate 8: View of section across feature [106] Scales 1x1m & 1x0.5m



Plate 9: View of entrance to culvert [105], Looking north, Scale 1x1m



Plate 10:View of culvert [105] structure Looking north, Scale 1x1m



Plate 11: Section through culvert [105], Scale 1x1m



Plate 12: View of culvert [105] adjacent to surface inlet Looking north, Scale 1x1m



Plate 13: View of culvert [105] adjacent to surface inlet, Looking south Scales 1x1m &1x0.5m



Plate 14: View of steel repairs to surface of culvert [105] Scale 1x1m



Plate 15: View north west along Area 4 during excavation



Plate 16: View of pit [108] within Area 5. Looking north west



Plate 17: Post excavation view of pit [108] within Area 5 Scale 1x0.5m



Plate 18: View of cast iron pipe within test pit 1, Area 7 Scale 1x1m



Plate 19: View of cast iron pipe within test pit 3, Area 7 Scale 1x0.5m



Plate 20: View of cast iron pipes entering assessment area, provided by M Tutton



Plate 21: Mid excavation view of cut [110] prior to removal of likely packing material including 19th century tile. Scale 1x0.5m



Plate 22: Post excavation view of cut [110]. Scale 1x0.5m



Plate 23: Post excavation view of cut [112], scale 1x0.5m

Archaeology Wales APPENDIX I: Archive Cover Sheet

ARCHIVE COVER SHEET

Aberpergwm Colliery, Cae Capel, Glyn-Neath

Site Name:	Cae Capel
Site Code:	AMG-CC/10/WB
PRN:	-
NPRN:	-
SAM:	-
Other Ref No:	-
NGR:	SN 86542 06024
Site Type:	Industrial
Project Type:	Watching Brief
Project Manager:	Chris E Smith
Project Dates:	Jan-April 2011
Categories Present:	Post med - Modern
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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