

# Archaeological Evaluation

Land to the rear of  
No. 6 High Street  
Caerleon  
Newport

NGR: ST 3398 9057

## BORDER ARCHAEOLOGY

PO Box 36  
Leominster  
Herefordshire  
HR6 0YQ

**Technical Services**  
Chapel Walk  
Burgess Street  
Leominster  
Herefordshire  
HR6 8DE  
Tel: 01568 610101  
Tel/fax: 01568 616900  
E-mail: [borderarch@btconnect.com](mailto:borderarch@btconnect.com)



# Contents

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<b>1. NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1 SOILS & GEOLOGY .....	4
<b>3. BRIEF HISTORICAL &amp; ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4. METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>6</b>
4.1 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY .....	6
4.2 RECORDING METHODOLOGY .....	6
<b>5. EVALUATION RESULTS .....</b>	<b>7</b>
5.1 TRENCH 1.....	7
5.2 TRENCH 2A .....	10
5.3 TRENCH 2B .....	11
<b>6. SUMMARY &amp; CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>7. COPYRIGHT .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>8. BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT REGISTER .....</b>	<b>17</b>

**Report specification:**

*Project manager:* Gwynfor Maurice BA

*Report compilation:* Gwynfor Maurice BA

*Artwork:* Michelle Bithell BA AlfA

*Report editing:* George Children MA MifA

*Approved:* Neil Shurety

# 1. Non Technical Summary

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*The site at No 6 High Street Caerleon is situated between the Roman baths and the National Roman Legion Museum, near the junction of High Street and Museum Street. Remains of Roman date have been found at several locations within the immediate environs. These include stone foundations exposed at a depth of approximately 1.5m on the museum site, located 10-15m W of the proposed development area, with timber remains of earlier Roman occupation occurring at around 2m. Remains of the Roman bathhouse located 10-15m NE of the development site have been identified at approximately 1.5m.*

*Border Archaeology opened evaluation trenches running NE-SW (Trench 1) and NW-SE (Trench 2) to the rear of No 6. Trench 1 comprised a continuous area of trenching measuring 10m x 2m; Trench 2, however, was bisected by garden fencing and was thus divided into two smaller trenches (2a & 2b) separated by a baulk of approximately 1.0m wide. Trench 2a measured 6.30m x 2m and lay 1.5m NE of, and adjacent to, Trench 1 while Trench 2b measured 4m x 2m.*

*The results of the evaluation have demonstrated that the uppermost Roman layer, representing the latest phase of activity associated with the legionary fortress, occurs at varying depths across the site, ranging between c.0.80m below existing ground level at the SW end of Trench 1 and 1.40m below at the SE end of Trench 2a. These deposits appeared to comprise demolition material, characterised in Trench 2a by the presence of a number of large fragments of Roman roof tile, including a complete example of an antefix, a triangular tile attached to the gable end of a building, which bears the head of a gorgon and was intended to ward off evil. However, precisely when this demolition activity took place is unclear, as occupation of the fortress continued after Roman rule in Britain ended in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD.*

*Masonry remains probably associated with the removal of post-medieval outbuildings to the rear of the existing dwelling were revealed in Trench 1 at a depth of approximately 0.35m below the existing surface.*

## 2. Introduction

Border Archaeology was instructed by Howard Wookey Esq. to undertake an archaeological evaluation of land comprising a garden to the rear of No. 6 High Street Caerleon Newport Gwent (ST 3398 9057) to ascertain the impact of a proposed residential development on the archaeological resource, in pursuance of a brief prepared for Newport City Council by the Curatorial Division, Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust (GGAT).

Copies of this report will be sent to Mr Wookey, GGAT and the regional Heritage Environment Record.

### 2.1 Soils & Geology

The soils within this part of Caerleon are typical brown earths of the MILFORD series (541a) consisting of well-drained fine loamy reddish soils overlying Devonian sandstone, siltstone, mudstone and slate. These brown earths lie immediately N of the pelo-alluvial gley soils of the Lower Usk.

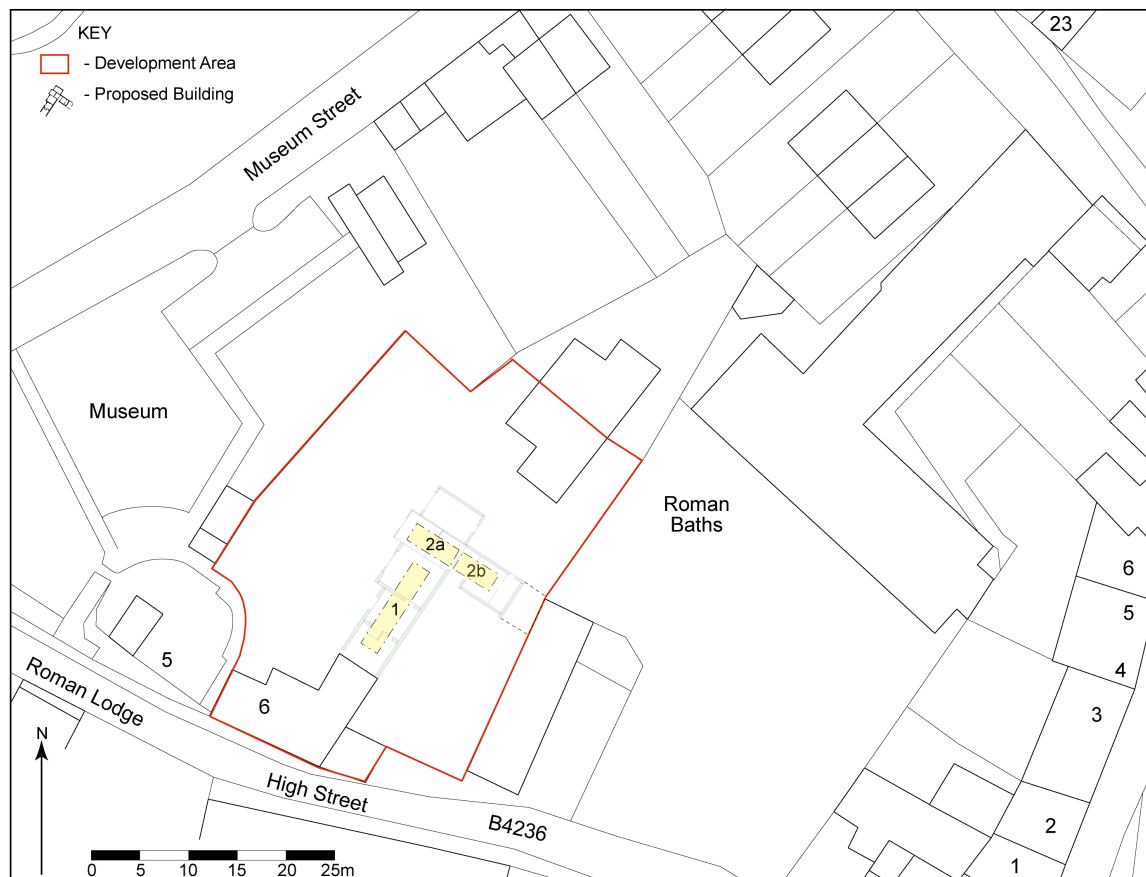


Fig. 1: Trench location plan



### 3. Brief historical & archaeological background

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The Roman remains at Caerleon (*Isca*) are regarded as being of international significance and have been subject to a long tradition of investigation and study. The remains represent one of only three permanent garrisons in the province and are of particular importance, as, unlike the situation at Chester and York, parts of Caerleon remain as open ground.

The fortress of *Isca* was constructed c.75AD as a successor to the legionary fortress at Usk, the site of which had several major disadvantages, namely that it could not be reached by large ships and was liable to flood. The site chosen for the new fortress occupied slightly raised ground at the confluence of the Afon Lwyd and the River Usk, which was less prone to flooding and was accessible to seagoing vessels.

The fortress, garrisoned by Legio II Augusta, covered an area of 20.5 ha and possessed turf and earth defences, with timber towers set c.30m apart. The internal buildings appear to have been mainly of timber, although the bathhouse and possibly the headquarters building were of stone. Rebuilding of various elements of the fortress in stone appears to have taken place over a protracted period commencing some time after 86AD, when a stone wall and towers were added to the defences. Outside the fortress itself, an area represented by Zone B, as defined by GGAT in *The Roman fortress at Caerleon and its environs: a framework for research* (GGAT, 2006), there was extensive civilian settlement, with cemeteries located on the lower slopes of Lodge Hill and along the road to Bulmore.

The fortress was previously thought to have been abandoned towards the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, when some of the major buildings, including the headquarters building, the baths and the hospital, were demolished; however, evidence from excavations carried out to the N of Backhall Street indicates that military activity continued into the 4<sup>th</sup> century, albeit on a reduced scale and that occupation of the fortress site probably extended well into the post-Roman period (Evans & Metcalf, 1992; Howell, 2004, 253)

Evidence of post-Roman occupation has been found, particularly in the NW part of the fortress, and some Roman structures appear to have survived into the medieval period. However, the history of the present town dates from the Norman invasion of South Wales, when a large motte measuring 61m in diameter at its base was constructed on the N bank of the Usk, to the SE of the fortress. Although, Caerleon had acquired borough status by the late 12<sup>th</sup> century and was also a port, it failed to develop as a major settlement and much of the western part of the fortress remains under meadow (Newman, 2000, 140-1)

A number of excavated sites are located in the immediate environs of the development area and these have revealed remains of Roman date at varying depths. Stone foundations were exposed at a depth of c.1.5m at the museum site located 10-15m W of the proposed development, with timber remains of the earlier Roman occupation occurring at around 2m. Remains of the bathhouse (now a display area) located 10-15m NE of the development site lie at approximately 1.5m (Zienkiewicz, 1993) while some 200m to the NE at The Hall, the site of the Roman hospital, Roman archaeology occurred at less than 0.5m below existing ground level. Investigations carried out by UCL and Cardiff University around 300m to the S of the site have revealed Roman remains at less than 0.4m.

## 4. Methodology

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Fieldwork was carried out in accordance with archaeological practices set out in *Standard and Guidance for archaeological field evaluation* (Institute for Archaeologists, 2008). Border Archaeology adheres to the IfA *Code of conduct* and *Code of approved practice for the regulation of contractual arrangements in field archaeology*.

### 4.1 Evaluation methodology

Two evaluation trenches were opened by machine within the garden area to the rear of No 6 High Street. Trench 1 was orientated NE-SW and measured 10m × 2m. Trench 2 was orientated NW-SE; however, due to the presence of garden fencing, the trench was divided into two smaller trenches (2a & 2b) separated by a baulk of approximately 1.0m wide. Trench 2a measured 6.30m × 2m and lay 1.5m NE of, and adjacent to, Trench 1. Trench 2b measured 4m × 2m. A temporary benchmark (TBM) with a value of 16.73m AOD was established on the site.

Manual excavation of archaeological deposits was used for the recovery of stratigraphic data, with the extent and character (colour, texture, boundary characteristics etc) of each archaeological context being defined by trowelling prior to excavation. The excavation of pits and other non-structural intrusions allowed for their stratigraphic recording and for the identification of post-pipes, post-packing and any related material. All spoil and removed material were visually scanned for artefacts, which were recorded and, where appropriate, retained.

An environmental sampling strategy was in place to reflect current guidelines, whereby samples are taken from deposits rich in environmental indicators, such as shell and charcoal. All samples are numbered, these sample numbers being entered in a register and cross-referenced with context sheets.

### 4.2 Recording methodology

Full written, drawn and photographic records were made in accordance with IfA standards. The MoLas single-context planning system was used and a detailed stratigraphic record compiled using a context numbering system; a Harris matrix was constructed as a means of ordering the stratigraphy and understanding stratigraphic relationships.

The written record comprised detailed context descriptions using *pro forma* record sheets. The graphic record consisted of numbered plans, sections and elevations drawn at scales of 1:20 or 1:10, as appropriate, on *pro forma* gridded archivally stable polyester film. All such plans, elevations and sections contain grid and level data and are cross-referenced to written site records.

A photographic record of all stratigraphic units was compiled using a 10.3MPX digital camera. Photographs were indexed by frame number and cross-referenced to written site records.

## 5. Evaluation results

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### 5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 (**Fig. 2. Plate 1**) was orientated NE-SW and measured 10m × 2m. Eight contexts were revealed, of which three extended across both trenches. The uppermost of these was a 'garden soil' measuring up to 0.58m thick, which was still in cultivation and which comprised friable dark-brown humic/organic loam containing approximately five per cent gravels and pebbles (001). Contexts (002) and (003) were earlier, more compacted, garden soils with material reflecting this. Soil (002) consisted of dark greyish-brown gritty silt, with approximately 10 per cent gravels and pebbles, moderate flecks and fragments of mortar, CBM, coal and charcoal, and a scattering of typical post-medieval debris, including pottery, clay pipe, metal, glass and animal bone, and was up to 0.32m thick. Soil (003) was a mid greyish-brown gritty clay-silt up to 0.52m thick. This contained approximately 10 per cent gravels, pebbles and mainly small angular stones, together with moderate flecks and fragments of mortar, CBM, coal and charcoal. The assemblage included a modest amount of mixed medieval and post-medieval pottery, metal, glass, and animal bone.

At the SW end of Trench 1, (001) overlay post-medieval/modern features that cut into the earlier garden soil (002). A rubbish pit [011] (**Plate 2**) measuring approximately 1.50m across and 0.86m deep was filled with building rubble comprising mainly undressed (sand-) stone with a small amount of CBM, pottery and metal (012). This fill apparently comprised demolition material resulting from the removal of post-medieval outbuildings adjacent to contemporary structures, of which wall structure (010), visible at approximately 0.35m below the existing surface, was probably a remnant (**Plate 2**).

At the NE end of the trench, (001), (002), and (003) overlay a cohesive pinkish-brown silty-clay with occasional flecks and fragments of CBM, sandstone and charcoal (013), lying approximately 1.30m below the modern surface. This was of a similar character to (014) at the SW end of the trench - although at a higher level (c.0.82m below the contemporary surface) - (006) in Trench 2a and (015) in Trench 2b, which was adjacent to the probable line of a wall. All could have resulted from the collapse/demolition of wall structures incorporating plaster and/or daub.



Plate 1: Trench 1, view SW



Plate 2: View of NW-facing section of Trench 1 showing wall (010) and pit [011]

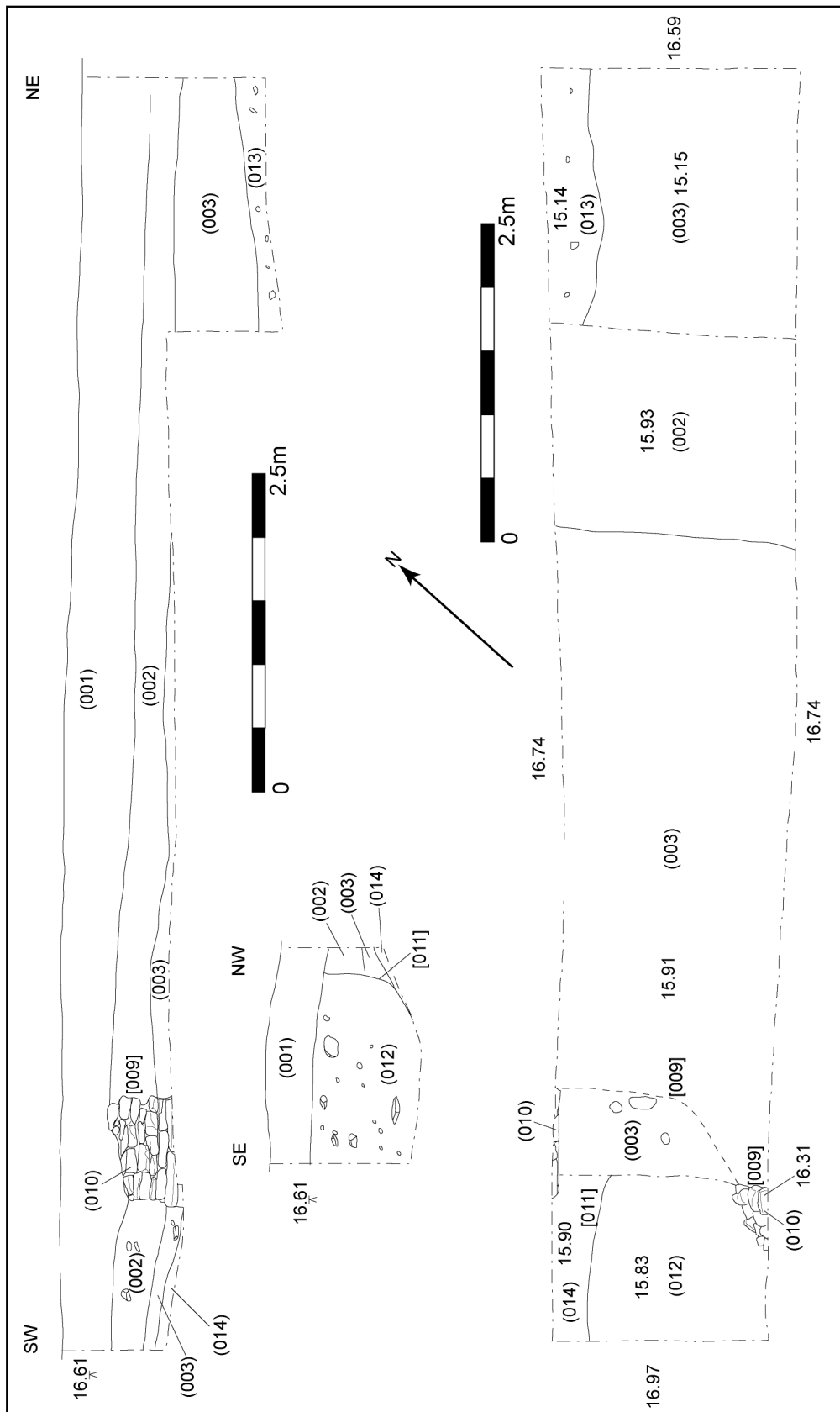


Fig. 2: Plan and sections of Trench 1



## 5.2 Trench 2a

Trench 2a (**Fig. 3. Plate 5**) was excavated to an approximate depth of 0.80m with *sondages* of approximately 1.25m and 1.50m at the NE and SW ends, respectively. Soil deposits (001), (002) & (003) overlay all features. At the SW end, at a depth of roughly 1.50m, (003) came down onto a spread of rubble (005), mainly consisting of large, relatively unabraded fragments of *tegula* and *imbrex* but also including a complete *antefix* tile with 'gorgon' design (SF2) (**Plate 3**) and (sand-) stone fragments within a matrix of cohesive mid greyish-brown clayey silt containing charcoal flecks and fragments.



Plate 3: Antefix tile with gorgon design found within Trench 2a rubble deposit (005)

All of this material was consistent with an episode of *in-situ* collapse/destruction of Roman structures. This layer was relatively thin (0.14m deep) and overlay (006) – a cohesive mid pinkish-brown silty clay and contained approximately 10 per cent mainly smaller, subangular (sand-) stone, and flecks and fragments of mortar, CBM and charcoal, similar to (013), (014) and (015), and again may result from the episodic collapse/demolition of Roman daub/plaster wall structures.

At the NE end was a rubble spread (004) of Roman material, although of a different character to (005), comprising, again, CBM fragments and subangular stones of varying sizes within a matrix of cohesive mid greyish-brown gritty clay silt with flecks and fragments of creamy-white mortar and charcoal. A probable gaming counter (SF1) was recovered from this material (**Plate 4**). Although at a similar level, this deposit differed from (005) in that the CBM fragments were much smaller and more abraded and had a

larger amount of stones. Furthermore, the deposit exhibited several patches of concreted mid orangey- brown gritty sandy mortar (008), which may have been part of the same deposit or another layer showing through, such as a floor base or some other structural remnant.

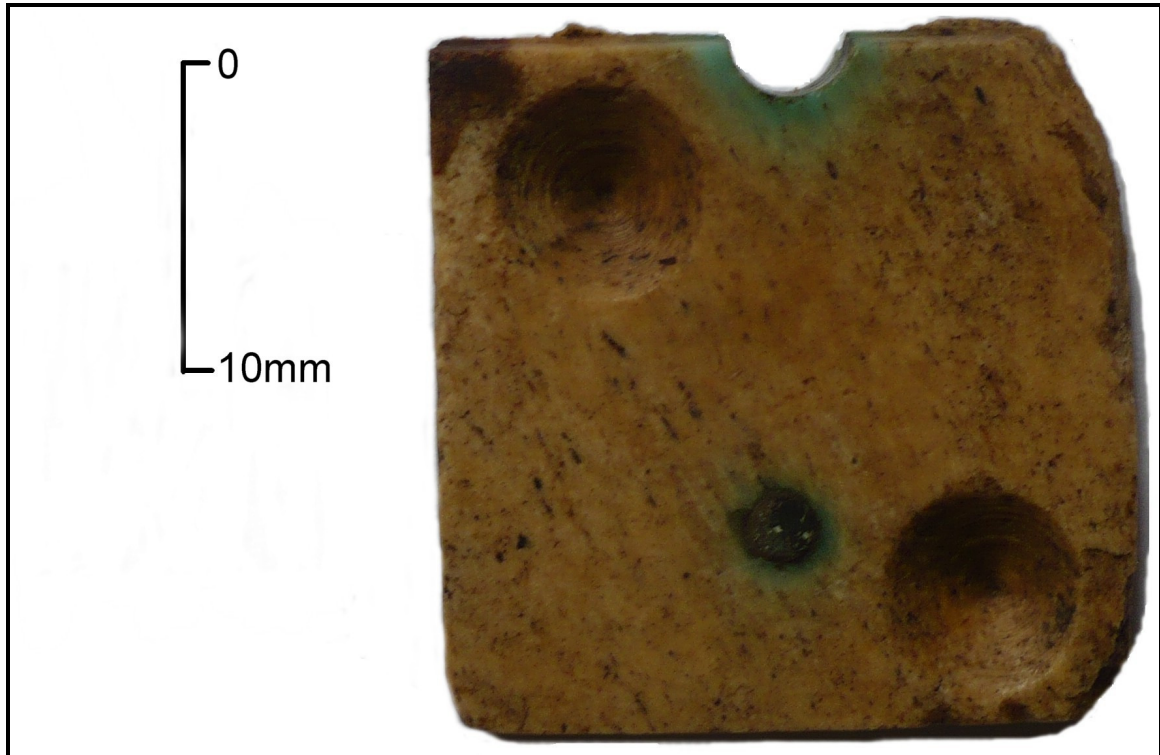


Plate 4: Probable 'gaming counter' recovered from (004)

### 5.3 Trench 2b

Again, (001), (002) and (003) uniformly overlay deposits of Roman origin – (007) and (015) (**Fig. 4, Plate 6**). The former comprised a mixed deposit of CBM fragments and flecks, subangular stones of varying sizes, patches of creamy-white mortar, large patches of charcoal and occasional patches of orange and red clay, all seemingly respecting an apparent edge running roughly NNW-SSE and according fairly well with extrapolated ground plans for an internal wall of the Roman bathhouse. Deposit (015) was similar to (006) - comprising a cohesive mid pinkish-brown silty-clay incorporating frequent flecks and fragments of CBM, mortar and charcoal - and may have been of similar genesis.





Plate 5: Deposit (004) and NE-facing section of sondage at NW end of Trench 2a





Plate 6: Overview of sondage at SE end of Trench 2a

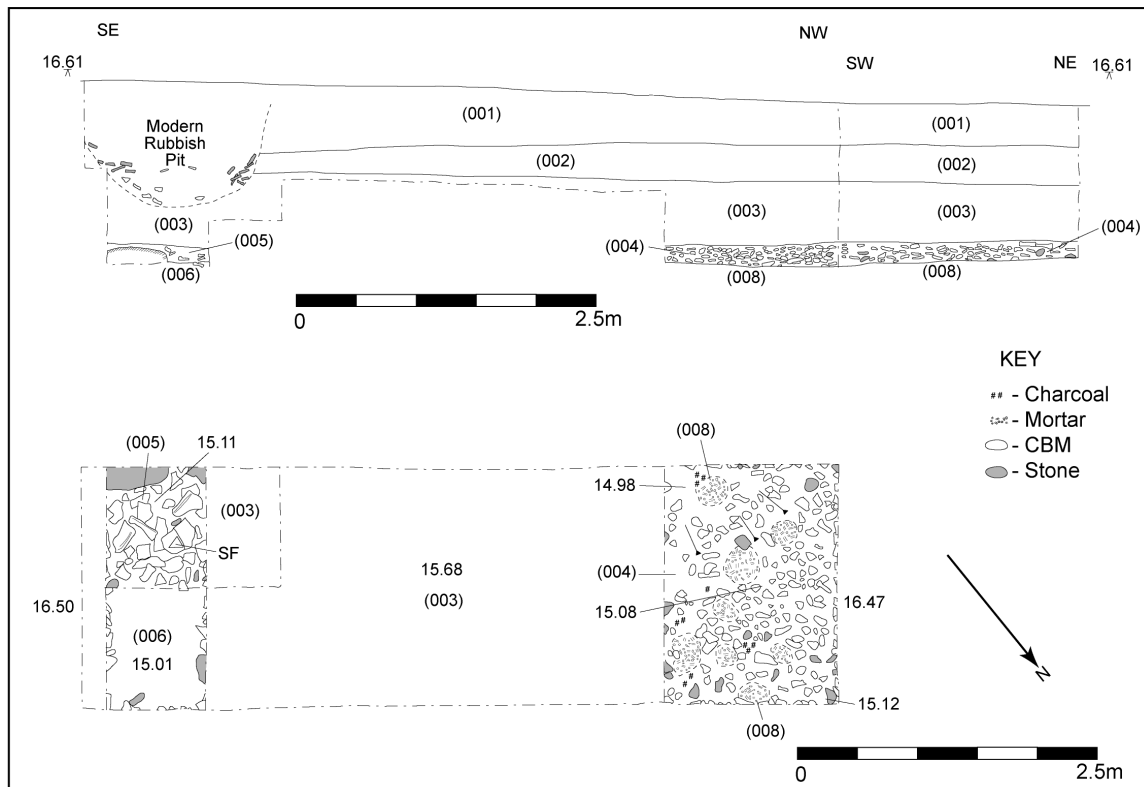


Fig. 3: Plan and sections of Trench 2a



Plate 6: Sondage at SE end of Trench 2b showing (007) and (015)

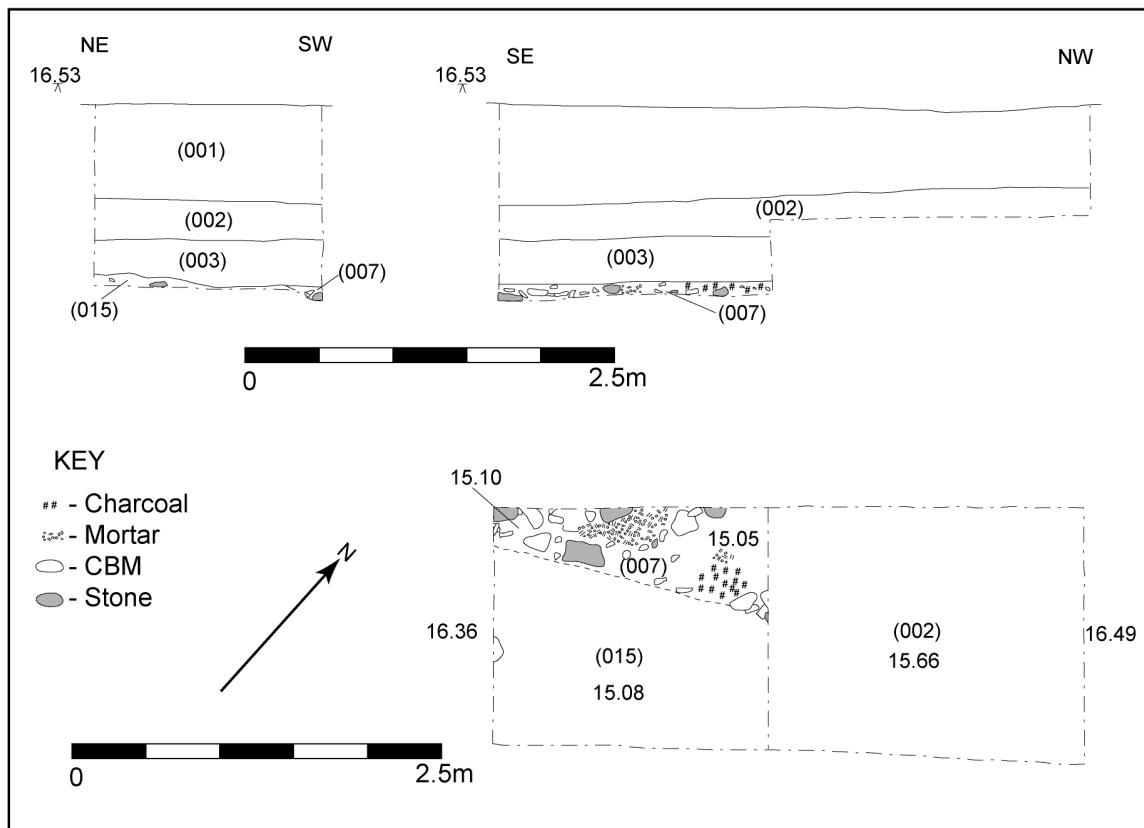


Fig. 4: Plan and sections of Trench 2b



## 6. Summary & Conclusion

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The archaeological evaluation, comprising two trenches running NE-SW and NW-SE to the rear of No 6 High Street Caerleon, has established that the Roman horizon occurs at varying depths across the site, ranging between c.0.80m below existing ground level at the SW end of Trench 1 and 1.40m below at the SE end of Trench 2a. These deposits comprised demolition material characterised in Trench 2a by a number of large, relatively unabraded fragments of *tegula* and *imbrex* together with a complete *antefix* tile with apotropaic 'gorgon' design (SF2) (**Plate 3**).

Deposits (006), (013), (104 and (015) could all have resulted from the collapse/demolition of wall structures incorporating plaster and/or daub; however, the precise dating of this demolition event is unclear. The Roman horizon was uniformly overlaid by a deposit of mid greyish-brown gritty clayey silt (003) measuring up to 0.52m thick.

Trench 1, which ran NE-SW and measured 10m × 2m revealed masonry remains (010) probably associated with the removal of post-medieval outbuildings adjacent to contemporary structures, at a depth of approximately 0.35m below the existing surface.

## 7. Copyright

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Border Archaeology shall retain full copyright of any commissioned reports, tender documents or other project documents, under the Copyright, Designs & Patents Act 1988 with all rights reserved; excepting that it hereby provides an exclusive licence to the client for the use of the report by the client in all matters directly relating to the project as described in the Project Specification.

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## Appendix 1: Context Register

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CONTEXT NO	DESCRIPTION
(001)	Friable dark-brown humic/organic loam containing approximately five per cent gravels and pebbles and measuring was up to 0.58m thick. Overlies (002)
<i>INTERPRETATION:</i>	<i>Modern garden soil which was still in cultivation</i>
(002)	Soil (002) consisted of dark greyish-brown gritty silt, with approximately 10 per cent gravels and pebbles, moderate flecks and fragments of mortar, CBM, coal and charcoal, and a scattering of typical post-medieval debris, including pottery, clay pipe, metal, glass and animal bone, and was up to 0.32m thick. Overlies (003), underlies (001)
<i>INTERPRETATION:</i>	<i>Earlier (post-medieval), more compacted, garden soil</i>
(003)	Mid greyish-brown gritty clayey silt up to 0.52m thick. Approximately 10 per cent gravels, pebbles and mainly small angular stones, together with moderate flecks and fragments of mortar, CBM, coal and charcoal. Overlies (013), (005), (004), (007), underlies (002)
<i>INTERPRETATION:</i>	<i>Earlier (post-medieval), more compacted, garden soil</i>
(004)	Cohesive mid greyish-brown gritty clayey silt with flecks and fragments of creamy-white mortar and charcoal, CBM fragments and subangular stones of varying sizes. A probable gaming counter (SF1) was recovered from this material. Underlies ((003), overlies (008)
<i>INTERPRETATION:</i>	<i>Deposit of Roman rubble that may have resulted from collapse/demolition at any time up to the later medieval period</i>
(005)	Cohesive mid greyish-brown clayey silt containing charcoal flecks and fragments, together with large, relatively unabraded fragments of <i>tegula</i> and <i>imbrex</i> , and sandstone fragments, extending to a depth of roughly 1.50m below the existing ground level. A complete <i>antefix</i> tile with 'gorgon' design (SF2) was recovered from this deposit. Underlies (003), overlies (006)
<i>INTERPRETATION:</i>	<i>Rubble spread located at the SW end of Trench 2a resulting from collapse/demolition of structure(s) within the vicinity</i>
(006)	Cohesive mid pinkish-brown gritty silty clay with c.10 % smaller, mainly subangular stones, frequent fleck and moderate fragments of BBM, moderate flecks of mortar and charcoal, thickness and extent unknown as only revealed in plan in sondages. Underlies (005).
<i>INTERPRETATION:</i>	<i>Deposit of collapsed building material within Trench 2a, possible representing walls or floors</i>
(007)	Friable mid greyish-brown clayey silt with c.10% grit and gravel, moderate angular/subangular stones of varying size, moderate CBM fragments of similar size to (005) in Trench 2a, patches of orange and red clay, spread of creamy coloured mortar in mid section, large lens of charcoal through upper and NW end. Deposit revealed only in one side of sondage at SE end of Trench 2b and only in plan. Underlies (003), overlies (015)

<i>INTERPRETATION:</i>	<i>Building rubble that appears approximately to respect an original wall line</i>
(008)	Concreted mid orangey-brown gritty sandy mortar with c.10% gravels & moderate charcoal flecks, revealed only in plan in sondage at NW end of Trench 2a. Underlies (004)
<i>INTERPRETATION:</i>	<i>Spread of mortar material possibly forming part of deposit (004) or another layer showing through, such as a floor base or other structural remnant.</i>
[009]	Cut, oriented NW-SE, sub linear in form measuring 1.8m (NW-SE) × 0.8m (NE-SW) × <0.5m, break of slope top sharp, sides vertical, break of slope base undefined, base undefined. Cuts (002), filled by (010).
<i>INTERPRETATION:</i>	<i>Cut of wall associated with now demolished post-medieval outbuildings to the rear of No 6</i>
(010)	Sandstone masonry wall oriented NW-SE measuring >1.8m (NW-SE) × 0.8m (NE-SW) × >0.5m. Average size of materials 200mm × 150mm × 60mm. 4 courses visible. Blackish/dark brown clayey silt bonding. Underlies (001), fills [009].
<i>INTERPRETATION:</i>	<i>Masonry wall remains of demolished post-medieval outbuilding attached to rear of existing dwelling.</i>
[011]	Cut, shape in plan not determined although probably sub-circular, measuring > 1.48m × > 1.28m × 0.84m, break of slope top sharp, sides steeply sloping, break of slope base moderate, base not determined. Truncates (010), filled by (012).
<i>INTERPRETATION:</i>	<i>Cut of large pit partially visible at SW end of Trench 1</i>
(012)	Loose greyish sandy/gritty silt/sandstone building rubble, very frequent mortar and CBM, measures >1.48m × >1.28m × >0.84m
<i>INTERPRETATION:</i>	<i>Rubble fill of pit [011] at SW end of Trench 1</i>
(013)	Cohesive pinkish-brown silty clay with occasional flecks and fragments of CBM, sandstone and charcoal, measured >2m (NE-SW) × 0.42m (NW-SE) × >0.25m. Underlies (003), (possibly) same as (006), (014).
<i>INTERPRETATION:</i>	<i>Visible in NE sondages of Trench 1. This deposit was of a similar character to (014) at the SW end of the trench - although at a higher level (c.0.82m below the contemporary surface) - (006) in Trench 2a and (015) in Trench 2b, which was adjacent to the probable line of a wall. All of these deposits could have resulted from the collapse/demolition of wall structures incorporating plaster and/or daub.</i>
(014)	Cohesive pinkish-brown silty clay, occasional CBM, moderate small angular sandstone fragments, measures >1.3m × 0.4m × >0.1m. Underlies (003), (possibly) same as (006), (013)
<i>INTERPRETATION:</i>	<i>Deposit of possible demolition material visible in sondages at SW end of Trench 1.</i>
(015)	Cohesive mid pinkish-brown silty-clay incorporating frequent flecks and fragments of CBM and charcoal, moderate flecks of mortar, revealed only in plan in sondages. Underlies (007), (possibly) same as (006)
<i>INTERPRETATION:</i>	<i>Collapsed building material</i>



## Document Control

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<b>Report edited by</b>	<i>George Children MA MifA</i>		
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