

GLAMORGAN-GWENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION
VAN CASTLE, PHASE I

AUGUST 1992

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VAN CASTLE, PHASE I

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Summary

A small excavation was commissioned by Mr Raymond Jenkins in advance of proposed rebuilding work north of the Main Block at Van Castle (Castell-y-Van), in order to clarify elements in the site layout left uncertain by previous surveys. The excavation revealed a complex structural sequence, interpreted as a small building with a cobbled floor, a narrow Court wall, replaced by a more substantial Court wall. The excavation showed the site to have a high archaeological potential, and further archaeological work is recommended in advance of development.

Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by M Locock, MA (Cantab.), AIFA, (Assessment Officer, Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust), with the assistance of other GGAT staff. The fieldwork was carried out by A G Marvell (Principal Archaeological Officer (Contracts), Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust) and M Locock.

1. Introduction

1.1 Development proposal and commission

Mr Raymond Jenkins intends to submit a proposal for building a new North Wing at Van Castle, Van, Mid Glamorgan, and on his behalf Michael Davies Associates commissioned the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust Ltd (Contracts Section) to carry out an excavation in order to clarify elements of the past layout of the site.

1.2 Specification for the assessment

The specification is given in full in Appendix One. For Phase I, the works involved a 2m x 2m manually-excavated trial hole at the current termination of the wall running east-west north of the Main Block, in order to reveal the structural history of the area and to assess the need for further work.

1.3 Scope of the report

The report describes the physical environment of the site (Section 2), previous archaeological work on the site (Section 3), and the results of the excavations (Section 4). Recommendations are then made for further work (Section 5). Detailed evidence is given in the Appendices.

1.4 Abbreviations used in the report

References to documents and published works are given in brackets: the full titles will be found in the bibliography. Archaeological deposits are identified by their three-figure context numbers.

2. Physical environment

2.1 Topography

The site of Van Castle (Castell-y-Van) lies on the western slopes of a hill 1km to the east of Caerphilly, with clear views to the north and west. The standing buildings of Van Castle date back to the 17th century, and have been the subject of a detailed survey by the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales.

2.2 Surface geology

The natural subsoil was only exposed in a small part of the area investigated, where it was yellow-brown clay.

3. Previous archaeological work

The site of Van Castle, Castell-y-Van or Y Fan, has been the subject of a survey by the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW 1981, 191-203).

The standing buildings date mainly from the 16th-early 17th century, and were built using stone from Caerphilly Castle. The Royal Commission's phased plan (RCAHMW 1981, Fig. 59) shows the Main Block (Building A), with a projecting stairwell on the north, as early 16th century. The wall on the north side of the court, running from the West Range (Building G) on a line 30m N of the north wall of the Main Block, is ascribed to the late 16th century. The northeast corner of the court was then separated by the construction of an L-shaped wall in the early 17th century.

The north wall of the court is shown as a dashed line from a point in line with the west wall of the Porch (Building B), its further form and extent not being then definable.

4. Excavation results

4.1 Method

The previous survey had left the layout of the area north of the Porch in doubt. It was considered possible that the north wall of the Court continued to run west, enclosing the Main Block, or else that the wall turned south at this point to connect with a scar in the wall just east of the Porch. The trench was positioned to test these possibilities.

The 2m x 2m trench was excavated by hand, stratigraphically, and each layer was recorded as a context. When excavation was complete, measured drawings of the features were made, and a series of photographs was taken.

4.2 Structural sequence

The excavations revealed the remains of four walls and a cobbled surface, part of a complex sequence of building on the site. Although the relationships are difficult to interpret, the most probable phasing is:

Phase Ia and Ib

Building with cobbled floor (012) in SW of trench; north wall of Court (006) to north.

Phase II

Replacement of walls 013 and 006 by wall 004 (shown by Royal Commission).

Phase III

Robbing and abandonment.

4.3 Finds

A small quantity of artefacts was recovered during the excavation, including coarse pottery, china, glass, leather, bone and iron. These finds were retrieved from the upper layers (Phase III), and none need be earlier than mid-19th century. The absence of earlier material in these deposits suggests that the stratigraphy has survived intact.

5. Recommendations

5.1

The excavations have shown the archaeological potential of the site to be very high, with evidence for a complex structural sequence surviving beneath the demolition debris.

5.2

The nature of the stratigraphy means that the Stage 2 works originally envisaged (see Appendix One: Specifications) would be less effective than the programme recommended here:

5.2.1

We recommend that in the area to the north of the Main Block, a machine working under direct archaeological supervision should be used to clear the modern overburden of loose rubble.

5.2.2

We recommend that the area exposed should then be investigated archaeologically by hand, and recorded by context records, drawings and photographs.

5.2.3

We recommend that the resulting finds and records should be analysed in order to produce reports for the client and for publication in an appropriate archaeological journal.

5.2.4

We recommend that the development proposals should take into account the nature and location of surviving archaeological features, preserving the deposits in situ whenever possible.

5.3

This work should be carried out by qualified personnel. Suitable personnel may be identified by reference to the Institute of Field Archaeologists, which publishes a Directory of Members.

Bibliography

- RCAHMW 1981 Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical
Monuments in Wales: An Inventory of the Ancient
Monuments in Glamorgan, Volume IV: Domestic
Architecture from the Reformation to the
Industrial Revolution, Part I: The Greater Houses
(HMSO, Cardiff).

Appendix One: Specification

1. Introduction

This specification has been prepared by the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust Ltd (Contracts Section) in response to a request from Michael Davies Associates.

2. Objectives

To carry out an investigation to ascertain the extent of structural remains in the area immediately to the north of the Porch of Castell-y-Van.

3. Methodology

3.1 The investigation will be in two stages. The results of Stage 1 will determine the need and/or extent of the Stage 2 works.

Stage 1 will consist of a 2m x 2m manually excavated trial section to locate the probable eastern return wall of a building located immediately to the northwest of the Porch. This section will be sited across the likely junction of this return wall with the continuation of the north wall of the courtyard, in order to attest whether further extensions exist on the north side of Castell-y-Van. In this event, a further series of trial sections (Stage 2) may be opened out to establish the range and extent of structural remains to the north of the main building complex.

3.2 Given the objectives above, it will only be necessary to excavate to the level of any surviving structural remains. It is envisaged that this exercise is therefore likely to comprise removal of modern overburden followed by removal of demolition debris. It is not intended to remove any other deposits but such remains as are exposed will need to be recorded.

3.3 All archaeological contexts will be recorded using a continuous numbered context system.

All significant contexts, in particular those relating to past structures or other principal uses of the site, will be photographed in both monochrome and colour using an appropriate format, drawn in plan and where appropriate in section at a scale no less than 1:20, and related to Ordnance Datum and National Grid.

3.4 Any finds recovered will be processed and recorded by Trust staff. All finds, except those deemed as Treasure Trove, are the property of the landowner. These should

ideally be donated to a suitable repository, subject to agreement being reached with the relevant landowner.

All archaeological artefacts will be treated in a manner appropriate to the materials involved, and recorded using a continuous numbered context system.

All finds identified as requiring conservation and/or other specialist treatment will be temporarily stored in a stable environment until they have been examined by appropriate specialists in the assessment phase to establish whether further analysis is required.

4. Post Excavation

4.1 Preparation of site archive of archaeological records relating to trial excavations to the specifications laid down in Management of Archaeological Projects (English Heritage, 1991), Appendix 3.

4.2 Arrangement of appropriate specialist services, as necessary.

4.3 Assessment of excavated archaeological data.

5. Report

5.1 To client - Synthesis of data gathered through the execution of 3-4, together with inclusions of supporting evidence in appendices as appropriate and identification of areas or features of archaeological interest onto scale drawings and/or listing of such features by eight-figure National Grid References.

5.2 Academic - Digest report of significant archaeological information in appropriate outlet (e.g. regional/national journal or bulletin).

6. Archive

6.1 Preparation of the research archive, to the specifications laid down in Management of Archaeological Projects (English Heritage, 1991), Appendix 6, should no further work be envisaged.

6.2 Deposition of the research archive with the county SMR and the National Monuments Record for Wales, should no further work be undertaken.

6.3 Deposition of artefacts/ecofacts, excepting those which may be subject to the laws of Treasure Trove, to an appropriate institution, subject to the agreement of the site owners.

7. Other

7.1 Staff - The project will be managed by the Trust's Principal Archaeological Officer (Contracts), A G Marvell, who is a member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, validated at Member grade.

7.2 Insurance - The Trust is fully insured (including substantial Public Liability and Professional Indemnity) to undertake projects of this kind.

7.3 Confidentiality - Whereas the Trust has an ethical and professional duty to report on any discoveries made during the course of works undertaken, the Trust is prepared to respect a period of confidentiality prior to making such reports provided that such a period does not exceed six calendar months from the date of the contract.

8. Timing

Given the scale of works envisaged, the Trust would be able to carry out the fieldwork within one week of notice of award of contract, with submission of a written report within one week of completion of fieldwork. It is not expected that the fieldwork will take more than one day to complete.

Between walls 007 and 013 there survived a well-made cobbled surface (012), made up of rounded pebbles up to 0.05m diameter.

The exact relationship between 004, 013 and 006 was unfortunately obscured by a mortar spread, connecting with 006, an east-west wall parallel to, and 0.05m north of, wall 004. This wall, 0.40m wide, survived as two courses in the east, but in the west was represented only by a general mortar spread with stone impressions.

In the north-west of the trench, the mortar spread was sealed by a loose layer of brown loam with mortar crumbs, to a depth of 0.3m (008), which was capped by a shallow (0.1m) layer of clay and mortar lumps (003).

East-west wall 004 was then built over 013 and 007. This wall was 0.6m wide and survived 0.5m tall. It was constructed of tabular stones in a pale yellow lime mortar. The south face retained traces of a surface skim of mortar. The wall's eastern end was removed by robbing event 005, which also damaged the earlier walls, obscuring their relationship.

The destruction of wall 004 was followed by the deposition of black loam 002, interpreted as a topsoil. This was the first layer to cover the cobbled surface 012.

Throughout the area there was 0.5m of modern rubble and loose soil (001).

Discussion

The excavation was intended to provide a simple answer relating to the north wall of the Court (numbered as 004). A structural sequence of some complexity was revealed instead, requiring interpretation. The most probable sequence is:

Phase Ia

Walls 007 and 013 enclose a building to the southwest with cobbled floor 012.

Phase Ib

Wall 006 is built running north of Phase Ia building (? north wall of Court).

Phase II

Walls 013 and 006 are replaced by wall 004. ? Building demolished.

Phase III

Robbing of walls 004, 007, 006 and demolition of structures.

3. Finds

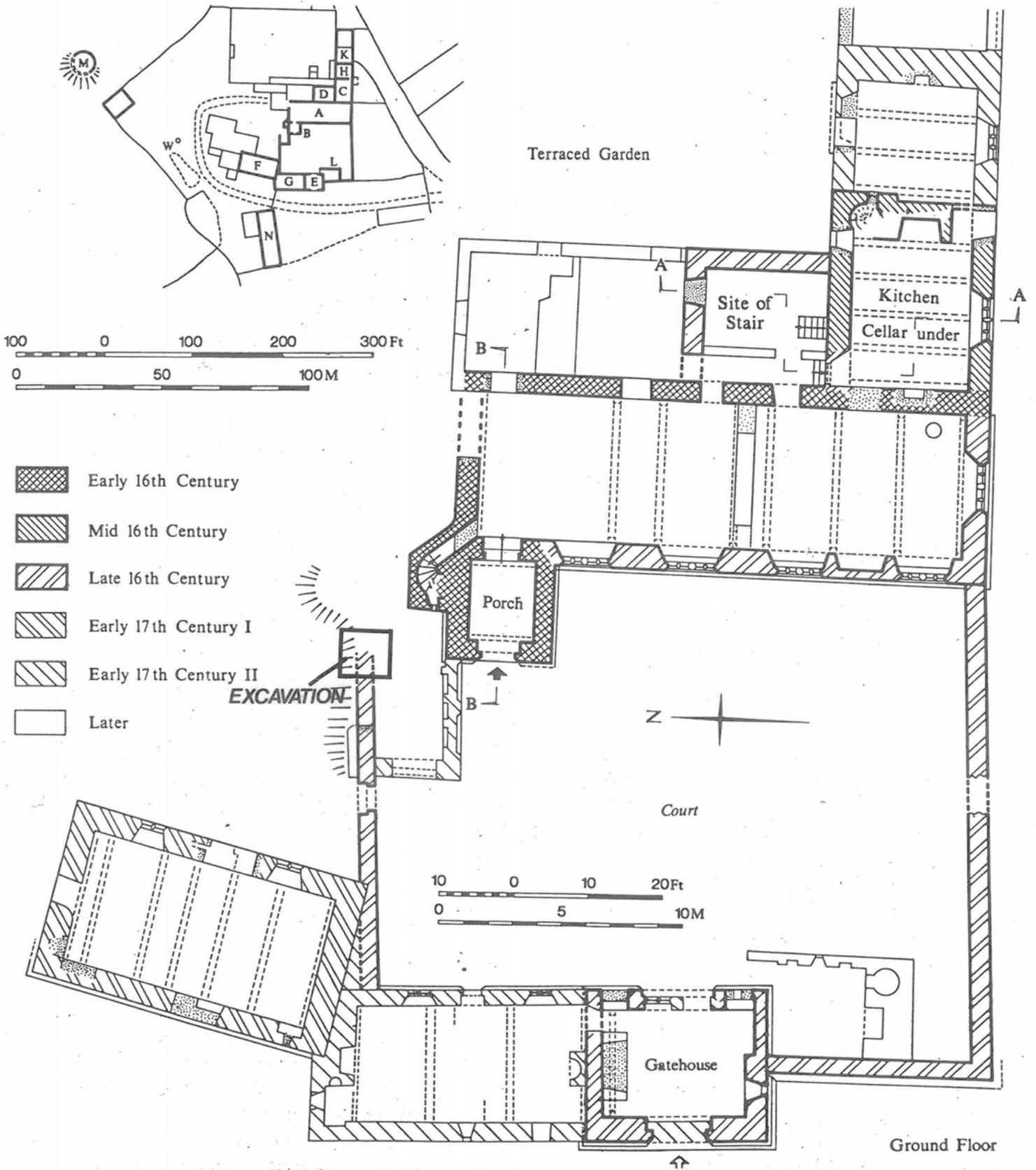
The finds were examined by S H Sell (Finds Officer, GGAT), who writes:

"Material from two contexts, 002 and 003, was presented for examination. Context 002 contained coarse red earthenware, white earthenwares and chinas, grey stoneware, parts of a land drain, fragments of clear vessel or bottle glass, a strip of leather and a piece of ?agricultural ironwork. Context 003 contained two joining fragments of a large red earthenware vessel and a fragment of bird bone. None of the finds from either context need be earlier than the mid 19th century, and many are probably of more recent date."

Appendix Three: Catalogue of research archive

The research archive for Castell-y-Fan (Site 203) is held at GGAT, Swansea, and includes the following:

1. Copy of the report
2. Context sheets, photograph catalogue, drawing catalogue
3. Finds report
4. Photographs taken during excavation
5. Plans and sections made during excavation



59 (above) Y Fan (20), ground-floor and block plans. The dismantling of Caerffili Castle to provide building material for this mansion of the Lewis family symbolised the end of one era and the beginning of another. The plan, having the entry at the end of the building, is unusual, but occurs in a number of Glamorgan houses. The main building period is late 16th-century.

Figure One: Plan of site showing area excavated

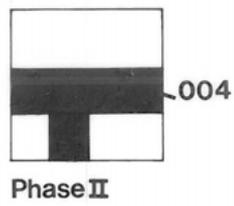
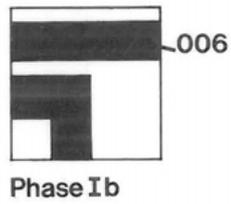
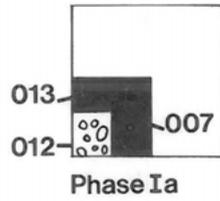


Figure Two: Phase plans

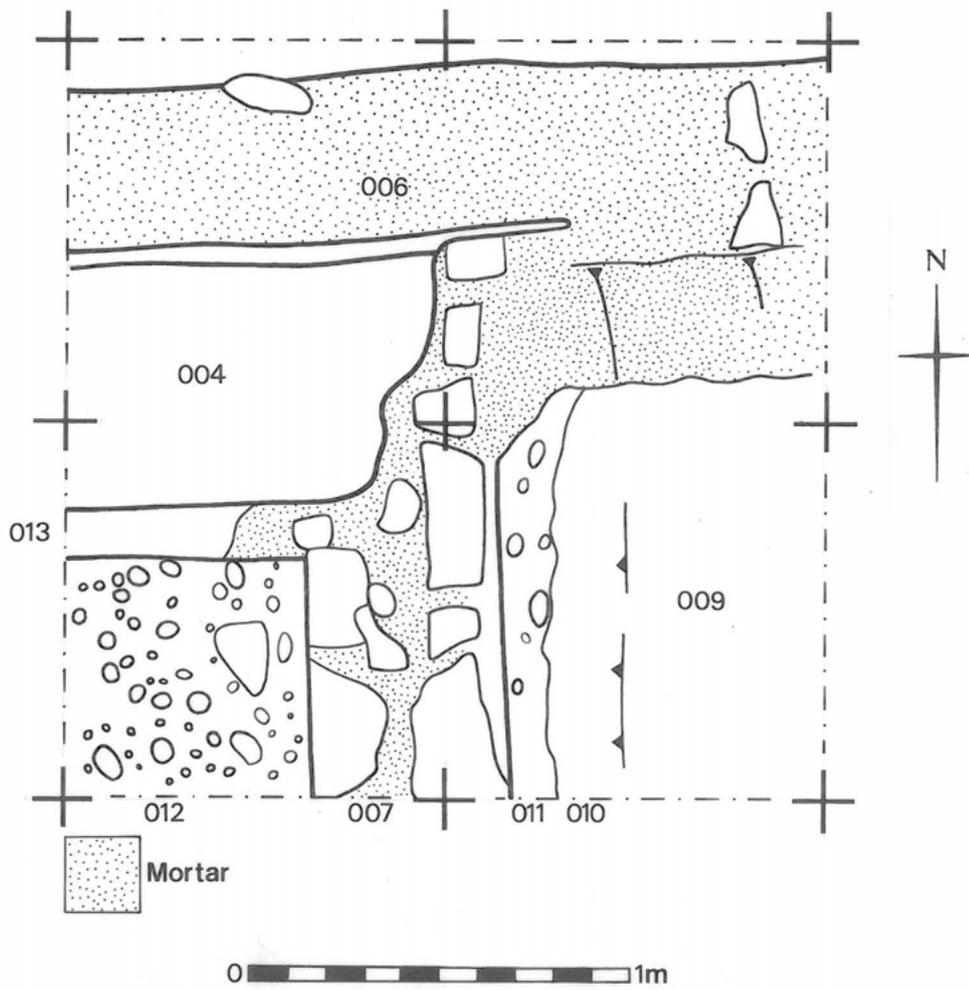


Figure Three: Detailed plan of excavated features