

MAES Y FFAIR, MATHRY, PEMBROKESHIRE:

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



Prepared by Dyfed Archaeological Trust
For: Mrs N Griffiths and Mr M Donald



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RHIF YR ADRODDIAD / REPORT NO. 2011/14
RHIF Y PROSIECT / PROJECT RECORD NO. 100558

Ebrill 2011
April 2011

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PEMBROKESHIRE:
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

Gan / By

Richard Ramsey

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE
BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf
Neuadd y Sir, Stryd Caerfyrddin, Llandeilo, Sir
Gaerfyrddin SA19 6AF
Ffon: Ymholiadau Cyffredinol 01558 823121
Adran Rheoli Treftadaeth 01558 823131
Ffacs: 01558 823133
Ebost: info@dyfedarchaeology.org.uk
Gwefan: www.archaeolegdyfed.org.uk

Dyfed Archaeological Trust Limited
The Shire Hall, Carmarthen Street, Llandeilo,
Carmarthenshire SA19 6AF
Tel: General Enquiries 01558 823121
Heritage Management Section 01558 823131
Fax: 01558 823133
Email: info@dyfedarchaeology.org.uk
Website: www.dyfedarchaeology.org.uk

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SUMMARY

Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services were commissioned by Mrs N Griffiths and Mr M Donald to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks for the erection of a residential building at Plot 2, Siop Fawr (to be known as Maes Y Ffair) in Mathry, Pembrokeshire. The watching brief was necessary to fulfil a condition placed on the planning consent (Planning No. 10/0599/PA) for the development that required the implementation of an approved scheme of archaeological works. The condition was placed on the development because of the close proximity of Plot 2 to the historic core of Mathry and the likelihood, therefore, that important archaeological features or deposits may be present on the site. The potential for medieval remains in this area was considered to be highest.

The development area had been cleared of dumped rubbish and other detritus some months before the latest planning application had been assessed and permission granted. That clearance work meant that the majority of the site area had been previously stripped of topsoil and some ground reduction had also taken place.

The resultant sections revealed during the latest groundworks showed that a series of extensive and deep modern rubbish pits had been dug into the plot and filled with building rubble, car parts and fragments of agricultural machinery. Where undisturbed topsoil was encountered during the groundworks, it lay to an average depth of 0.3m, directly upon undisturbed natural subsoil with the presence of no intervening archaeological features or deposits.

It seems likely, therefore, that if any medieval or earlier archaeological features or deposits were ever present on the site they would have been significantly disturbed or destroyed during modern dumping episodes and more recent landscaping works.

INTRODUCTION

Project Proposals and Commission

This project was carried out following a request from Mrs Nicola Griffiths to provide an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the proposed development for the erection of a new dwelling at Plot 2, Siop Fawr, Mathry (known as Maes Y Ffair; NGR SM 88021 31895). A planning application for the development was submitted to Pembrokeshire County Council (PCC), and permission was subsequently granted with a condition requiring the implementation of an approved scheme of archaeological works (Planning Application Reference 10/0599/PA).

The condition was placed on the development by the archaeological advisors¹ to the local planning authority as the site lies close to the historic core of Mathry to the south of the radial street leading east from the village centre. It was considered that the proposed development area has the potential for the presence of below ground archaeological remains associated with early medieval and later settlement. Such remains may comprise evidence for former timber buildings, plot boundaries or rubbish pits. Such archaeological features or deposits would most likely be present at a shallow depth below the ground surface at the interface between the topsoil and natural subsoils.

To comply with the planning condition Mrs Griffiths commissioned Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services to undertake the archaeological watching brief. An archaeological Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was completed and approved by the planning authority prior to the commencement of the groundworks associated with the development. The watching brief was carried out during groundworks undertaken at the Mathry site on March 21st 2011.

Abbreviations used in this report

All sites recorded on the regional Historic Environment Record (HER)² are identified by their Primary Record Number (PRN) and located by their National Grid Reference (NGR). Altitude is expressed to Ordnance Datum (OD).

Illustrations

Photographic images and printed map extracts are to be found at the back of the report. Note that the printed map extracts are not necessarily reproduced to their original scale and are illustrative only.

¹ Dyfed Archaeological Trust Heritage Management, Shire Hall, Llandeilo

² Housed at Dyfed Archaeological Trust, Shire Hall, Llandeilo

THE SITE

Site Location and Topography

The village of Mathry (Photo 1) is a hilltop rural settlement that lies 250m to the north of the A 487 Fishguard to St. David's road, centred on NGR SM 8790 3200. It is located some 9km southwest of Fishguard in north Pembrokeshire at a height of c.130m OD (Figure 1). The majority of the village settlement is situated on the eastern upper slope of the hilltop, radiating out from the church at its core, with linear building development along roads to the northwest, south and east. The whole settlement is surrounded by large enclosed fields. The coastal village and bay of Abercastle lie 3km to the northwest with the upper reaches of the Western Cleddau flowing as a small west to east stream downslope some 0.5km due south.

The development area (centred on NGR SM 88021 31895, at c.125m OD) comprises a rectangular plot of land (Figure 2) bounded on its northeast side by gardens to the rear of properties that front on to the main road of Mathry Hill. A relatively new property, Llwyn Haf, bounds the development area to the southwest with an enclosed pasture field forming the southeast boundary. Access to the development area is from its northwest end via a yet to be finished private access road. The site area is on a moderate southeast facing hillslope.

The underlying solid geology of the area is complex, with interfaces of Cambrian (Merioneth series) and Ordovician (both Arenig and Llanvirn series) sedimentary rock represented (British Geological Survey 1994). The bedrock exposed in the development area during the groundworks was a loosely bedded shale, probably Ordovician.

Archaeological and Historical Background

Mathry is a radial village built around the central parish church of the Holy Martyrs. The present church is of 19th century date (PRNs 4642 & 17338), and is a Grade II listed building (PRN 59091). The circular shape of the churchyard suggests quite strongly that it is likely to have been of early medieval origin (PRN 4578), indicating that an early medieval church and cemetery would have been located within the churchyard, with a probable associated settlement in the surrounding area. The churchyard walls are also Grade II listed (PRN 59092) and were rebuilt in the 19th century. The development area lies some 90m to the southeast of the church.

During the rebuilding of the churchyard wall two early medieval stone crosses, which were previously located on nearby farms, were taken to the church and incorporated into the fabric of the wall. These are the Rhoslanog Farm Stone (PRN 2860) and the Tregidreg Farm Stone (PRN 2861). They are together designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM PE 150). A third inscribed stone, also early medieval, is located within the porch of the Church; known as the Maccudicci Stone (PRN 2862), it has both Latin and ogam script carved upon it. The presence of these early Christian crosses is perhaps further evidence that the ecclesiastical settlement at Mathry has early medieval origins.

The village was granted a weekly market and an annual fair by letters patent during the reign of Edward III (Lewis, 1833). The annual fair was still being held within living memory (pers comm Nicola Griffiths) very close to the development area, hence the name Maes Y Ffair (The Fair Field) being given to the new building planned for the plot. Most of the surrounding land in Mathry was in the ownership of the Bishops of St. David's throughout the medieval period (Lloyd, T *et al*, 2004).

Other sites recorded on the Historic Environment Record (HER) relate to post-medieval buildings, such as the School (PRN 16342), The Cottage Nebo (PRN 16386), a blacksmith's workshop (PRN 16394, located 45m to the north) and a telephone box (PRN 59093) situated outside the General Stores.

A table of all the sites within a radius of 200m of the development area and recorded on the HER is included as Table 1 at the back of the report, this gives more detailed information for each site.

WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

The watching brief was carried out during the final machine clearance of the topsoil and footings excavation at the northwest, upslope, edge of the building footprint (see blue outline of building 'Plot 2' in Figure 2). Part of that area was covered by a concrete slab³ that lay above a sub-base of medium to small angular rubble to a depth of 0.5m; removal of these layers revealed a buried reddish brown silty clay topsoil to a depth of 0.2m (Photo 4).

Further southwest towards the adjacent property, Llwyn Haf, the concrete slab gave way to a 0.1m deep layer of ornamental gravel which overlay a 0.5m deep sub-base of medium size shattered shale fragments; removal of these layers again revealed a c.0.2m deep buried topsoil. Gentle machine removal of the topsoil layer revealed only undisturbed compact orange-brown natural subsoil with no archaeological features or deposits present within the layer or cut into the subsoil (Photo 5).

Prior to the current work, the rest of the site, up to the field boundary at the easterly end of the plot, had been cleared of overlying dumped building debris and the contents of several fairly deep modern rubbish pits had been removed. This previous clearance work meant that much of the topsoil on the site, already heavily disturbed, had been removed, leaving only the exposed undisturbed natural subsoil or shale bedrock; no archaeological features were present at these levels.

Additional machining down to the formation level for the building footings undertaken during the watching brief revealed no archaeological features or deposits.

The exposed vertical sections on the northeast and southwest sides of the excavations are the only record that we have of the general stratigraphy across the sloping site (Photos 3, 6 and 7) prior to the site clearance. The topsoil, where present in either section, had an average depth of 0.45m and overlay a compact yellowish brown natural subsoil to an average depth of 0.35m. The subsoil overlay natural loosely bedded shale bedrock. Both sections showed that building rubble had been dumped over the topsoil in discrete areas, probably during the relatively recent construction of both Pencerrig to the north and Llwyn Haf to the south of the development area. Also apparent in the sections were a number of fairly large pits, all of which contained building debris and other modern rubbish. At the east end of the southwest facing section the dark brown soil profile of the former field boundary could be seen (Photo 7).

No archaeological features, other than the modern disturbance noted above, were apparent in the revealed sections.

³ Possibly the remnants of a hard standing area for a temporary static building which was present on the site in the late 1980s but removed by 1994 (DAT oblique aerial photographs).

CONCLUSION

The development area had been cleared of dumped rubbish and other detritus some months before the latest planning application had been assessed and permission granted. That clearance work meant that the majority of the site area's topsoil, and much of the underlying natural subsoil, had already been stripped prior to the watching brief taking place.

The resultant sections revealed during the latest groundworks showed that a series of extensive and deep modern rubbish pits had been dug into the plot and filled with building rubble, car parts and fragments of agricultural machinery.

Where undisturbed topsoil was encountered during the groundworks, it lay, to an average depth of 0.3m, directly upon undisturbed natural subsoil with the presence of no intervening archaeological features or deposits.

It seems likely, therefore, that if indeed any medieval or earlier archaeological features or deposits were ever present on the site they had subsequently been destroyed during modern landscaping or dumping episodes.

SOURCES

Database

Dyfed Archaeological Trust Historic Environment Record, housed with Dyfed Archaeological Trust in The Shire Hall, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire, SA19 6AF

Cartographic

Bowen, E., *A New and Accurate Map of South Wales* 1729

British Geological Survey, 1:250000 Geological Map of Wales 1st Edition Solid 1994

Ordnance Survey Original Surveyors Drawings 2" to 1 mile sheet 180 1809-10

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Aerial Photographs

DAT SM8731 Neg.Ref=AP92-21.21 1992 oblique

DAT SM8732 Neg.Ref=AP88-48.29 1988 oblique

Meridian Airmaps SM83SE 180-230; 12612-3 1955 vertical

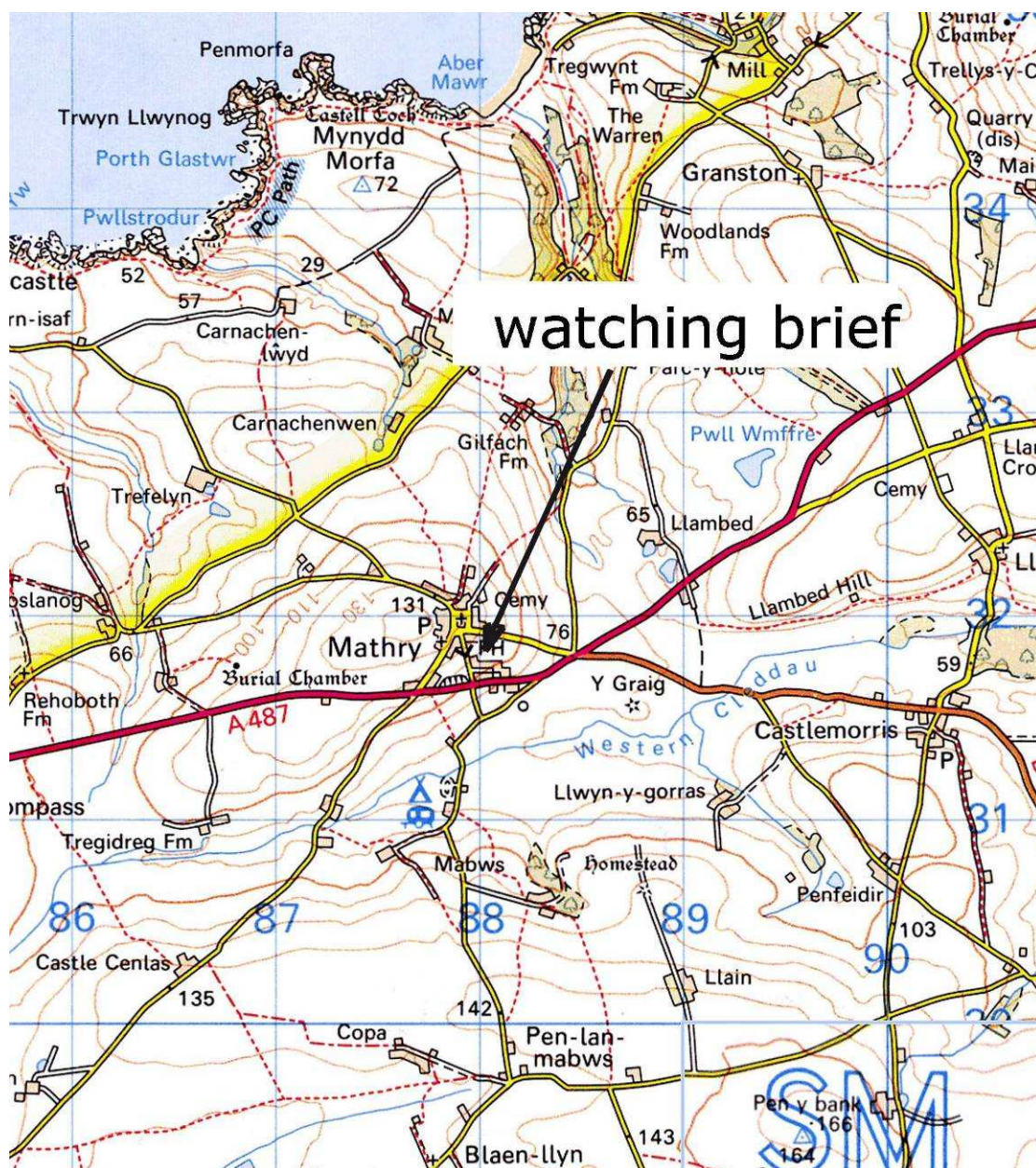


Figure 1: Location Map based on the Ordnance Survey.

Reproduced from the 1987 Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 scale Landranger Map with the permission of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd., The Shire Hall, Carmarthen Street, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire SA19 6AF. Licence No AL51842A



Figure 2: Plan showing location of Plot 2, Maes Y Ffair, area of the watching brief. Based on the client's site plan.

PHOTOGRAPHS



Photo 1: View west showing the east side of the village, Mathry Hill main road in centre ground



Photo 2: General view across the site, looking southeast



Photo 3: View southwest showing revealed section, the 2 x 1m scales are positioned in front of the profile of a deep modern rubbish pit.



Photo 4: The top of the buried soil horizon revealed at the northwest edge of the plot after the removal of layers of concrete, ornamental gravel and hardcore rubble/shale sub-bases. View southwest, 2 x 1m scales.



Photo 5: View of the northwest edge of the plot after the removal of the buried topsoil layer. Looking south, 1x1m scale.



Photo 6: Section showing deposits exposed along the west end of northeast edge of the development area. 2 x 1m scales



Photo 7: Section showing deposits exposed along the east end of the northeast edge of the development area. Note the dark soil profile of the former field boundary at the east end of the section, with the newly remodelled field boundary in front of it (right side of photograph). 2 x 1m scales



Photo 8: View east across the development area during the finishing touches to the groundworks.

PRN	Site Name	Description	Grid reference
2860	Rhoslanog Farm Stone	Early Medieval Inscribed Stone, Group II ECM (cross-carved stone), of possible late 6th - 9th century date, from Rhoslanog Farm and now built into the churchyard wall at Mathry Parish Church; SAM PE150	SM 8790 3199
2861	Tregidreg Farm Stone	Early Medieval Inscribed Stone Group II ECM (cross-carved stone), of possible late 6th - 9th century date, from Tregidreg Farm and now built into the churchyard wall at Mathry Parish Church; SAM PE150	SM 8790 3199
2862	Maccudiccl Stone	Early Medieval Inscribed Stone Group I ECM (incomplete Latin- and ogam-inscribed stone), of 5th - early 6th century date. Now set into the porch floor at Mathry parish church	SM 8793 3200
4578	Church of the Holy Martyrs	Early medieval site, Ecclesiastical Enclosure, Churchyard, Cemetery with high-probability it has early medieval origins. Site mentioned in 6th century.	SM 8793 3200
4642	Church of the Holy Martyrs	Medieval parish church, entirely rebuilt in the 19th century as post-medieval PRN 17338.	SM 8793 3200
7856	The Cottage	A small, derelict Post-medieval cottage in 1977.	SM 8792 3206
11103	Mathry	Find spot. The butt end of a Neolithic polished stone axe. The provenance of the axe is unknown. NAP 2004.	SM 88 32
16342	School	Post-medieval School, built in 1870. Lintels on this building bear the bishopric arms.	SM 8799 3204
16386	Capel Nebo	Post-medieval Chapel	SM 8785 3190
16394	Blacksmiths	Post-medieval Blacksmiths Workshop	SM 8804 3194
17338	Holy Martyr's	Post-medieval Church	SM 8793 3200
59091	Church of the Holy Martyrs	Grade II listed Church of the Holy Martyrs; Post-medieval, totally re-built between 1868 & 1869 by architect R K Penson.	SM 87933 32003
59092	Churchyard Wall	Grade II listed churchyard wall at Church of the Holy Martyrs; Post-medieval	SM 87909 31973
59093	Telephone Call-Box	Grade II listed telephone call-box at the General Stores, Post-medieval	SM 87895 32033

Table 1: Sites of Archaeological and Historical interest recorded on the Historic Environment Record within a 200m radius of the centre of the site.

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Ebrill 2011
April 2011



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Paratowyd yr adroddiad hwn gan / This report has been prepared by

Richard Ramsey

Swydd / Position: Archaeologist

Llofnod / Signature Date 11/04/2011

Mae'r adroddiad hwn wedi ei gael yn gywir a derbyn sêl bendith
This report has been checked and approved by

James Meek

ar ran Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf.
on behalf of Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Swydd / Position: Head of Field Services

Llofnod / Signature Date 11/04/2011

*Yn unol â'n nôd i roddi gwasanaeth o ansawdd uchel, croesawn unrhyw sylwadau
sydd gennych ar gynnwys neu strwythur yr adroddiad hwn*

*As part of our desire to provide a quality service we would welcome any
comments you may have on the content or presentation of this report*

