

LAND ADJACENT TO BRO FFION, CAERWEDROS, CEREDIGION: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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By

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REPORT NUMBER 2007/ 3

JANUARY 2007

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Signature Date 29/01/2007

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on behalf of Cambria Archaeology, Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

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LAND ADJACENT TO BRO FFION, CAERWEDROS, CEREDIGION: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

SUMMARY

Proposals to develop land adjacent to Bro Ffion in the village of Caerwedros, Cardiganshire (NGR SN 3766 5591) led to an archaeological evaluation being carried out prior to the determination of the planning application. The evaluation was undertaken by Cambria Archaeology Field Services on behalf of Bell Designs, the architects for the proposed development.

The objective of the evaluation was to test for the presence of any archaeologically significant features or deposits within the footprint of the proposed development and fully characterise and record them. The results would then help to inform decisions regarding determination of the planning application.

Seven trial trenches were machine excavated within the proposed development site, of which three contained only natural deposits. The remaining four trenches variously revealed evidence of former field boundaries, drainage arrangements, and features interpreted as being associated with a former building. None of the features were interpreted as being of medieval date and all associated pottery finds were dated as being 19th and early 20th century in date

Amongst its conclusions the report suggests that archaeological mitigation may be required in the case of the building remains in Trench 1 which are situated within the planned children's "play area" of the proposed development.

INTRODUCTION

Planning proposals (Planning Application A060610) were received by the local planning authority to develop a residential site on land adjacent to Bro Ffion, Caerwedros, Ceredigion, at NGR SN37665591. The application area lies within reasonably close proximity to the nationally important medieval castle of Caerwedros, PRN 1356, a scheduled ancient monument (CD086) at NGR SN37625576.

As archaeological advisors to Ceredigion County Council planning authority, Cambria Archaeology Heritage Management recommended that, in view of the potential impact of development on the archaeological resource, an archaeological field evaluation would be required prior to the determination of a planning application. This is in line with Government policy as contained in Planning Policy Wales, March 2002, Section 6.5, and Welsh Office Circular 60/96 – *'Planning and the Historic Environment: Archaeology'* paragraphs 11, 12, 13 and 14.

Mr. Roger Bell, of Bell Designs, architect for the proposed development, commissioned Cambria Archaeology field services to carry out the archaeological evaluation in January 2007.

The scope and aims of the evaluation

The main aim of the evaluation was to fully characterise the presence, extent, nature and date of any below ground archaeological remains within the proposed development area.

The project was also aimed at providing enough information on the archaeological resource to enable assessment of the likely impact of the development proposals on that resource, and to help inform future management decisions in areas that may require further archaeological work.

It is important to realise, however, that the trial excavations only represent a small percentage of the whole development area and that even though their choice of location was well informed their scope is somewhat limited. The presence of significant archaeological features being revealed elsewhere on the proposed development site cannot be ruled out.

Report outline

This report briefly describes the physical environment of the area before detailing the results of the evaluation excavations. The likely impacts of the development proposals are discussed and suggestions made for possible mitigation measures.

Abbreviations used in this report

Any references to sites in the text that are recorded on the county Historic Environment Record (HER) are identified by their Primary Record Number (PRN) and located by their National Grid Reference (NGR). References to cartographic and documentary evidence and published sources will be given in brackets throughout the text, with full details listed in the sources section at the rear of the report.

THE EVALUATION AREA

The proposed residential development site occupies an area of farmland centred on NGR SN37665591 (Figs. 2 & 3). The plot is irregular and defined on its southern side by Bro Ffion and the crossroads at the centre of Caerwedros. The east and northeast boundaries of the site are defined by adjacent council houses and open farmland respectively. Topographically, the development area slopes gently down to the northeast from higher ground centred on Caerwedros crossroads.

The regional Historic Environment Record (HER) holds very little documentary evidence relating to Caerwedros. The castle motte (PRN 1356) is the only formally recorded site currently on the HER database for the settlement. The castle is recorded as having been founded by the Anglo-Normans but was destroyed in 1137 (King 1959). Today the mound is flat topped, circular in shape, and measures about 24m in diameter by about 4m in height. It is surrounded by a well-defined ditch and counterscarp bank on all sides except the north and northwest where it has been compromised by modern buildings. Beyond the ditch there is no sign of a bailey, or larger defended enclosure, which, in castles of this type, would have contained the main settlement buildings. It is likely that if a bailey did exist it would have been situated where the modern buildings now are. During a small scale evaluation excavation carried out by Cambria Archaeology last year (Schlee 2006) evidence was unearthed which strongly suggests the former presence of at least a small bailey or annexe to the northeast of the motte. This is currently the only hard evidence that is known for medieval settlement beyond the motte itself. However, the very presence of the castle in this location suggests the strong possibility that medieval settlement could have been more extensive.

The Parish Tithe map for the area (1843) and early editions of Ordnance Survey maps (1891 and 1906) show a generally curvilinear boundary enclosing land at the southern edge of the proposed development area and continuing to the west and south towards the motte. Whilst this cartographic evidence may simply reflect the natural topography and later settlement of the local high point around the Caerwedros crossroads it is worth bearing in mind as potential evidence for earlier, medieval, settlement associated with the castle. The earlier maps also show the presence of a former four-celled building that the present landowner says was a smithy, although the labelling on the maps does not make this clear. There is no other evidence of settlement pattern within the study area on the early maps.

The solid geology in the proposed development area is represented by Silurian shales of the undivided Llandovery series (British Geological Survey, 1994), and although drift deposits have been recorded for this area none were observed on the site during the evaluation. The soils are typical brown earths of the Denbigh association (Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1983).



Figure 1: Location map of proposed development area Reproduced from the 1: 50000 Landranger Map by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Crown Copyright. All rights reserved. Licence No.100043738.

METHODOLOGY

Seven trenches (Fig.3) of varying size were excavated using a tracked 360-degree excavator with a toothless grading bucket. In all trenches the turf and plough soil were removed by machine down to, at most, the top of the natural subsoil. Where archaeological features or deposits were revealed they were cleaned by hand, photographed, drawn to scale and then either wholly excavated or test excavated to establish as far as possible their true character. During excavation all revealed deposits and features were described and allocated their own individual context number. After excavation, all features were photographed again and then planned at 1:20 scale and, where relevant, sections were drawn to a scale of either 1:10 or 1:20.

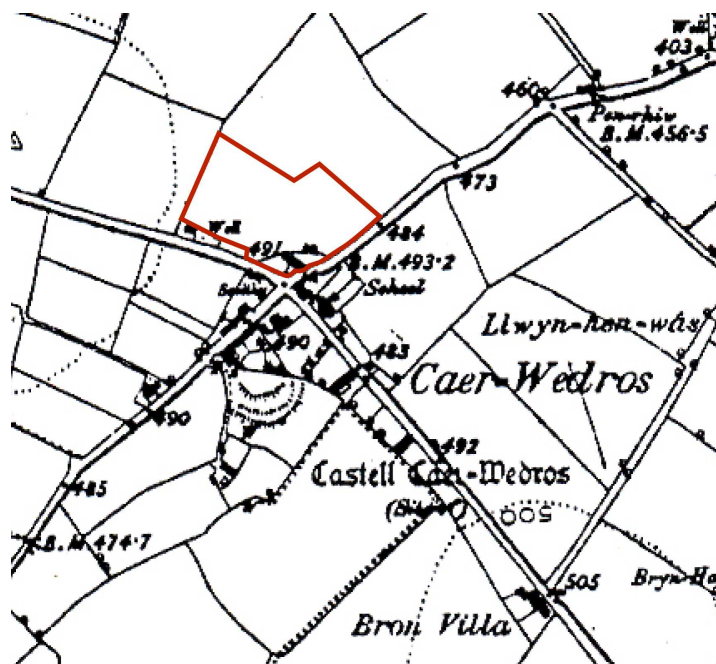


Figure 2: Extract from the 1891 6" Ordnance Survey map showing development site boundary

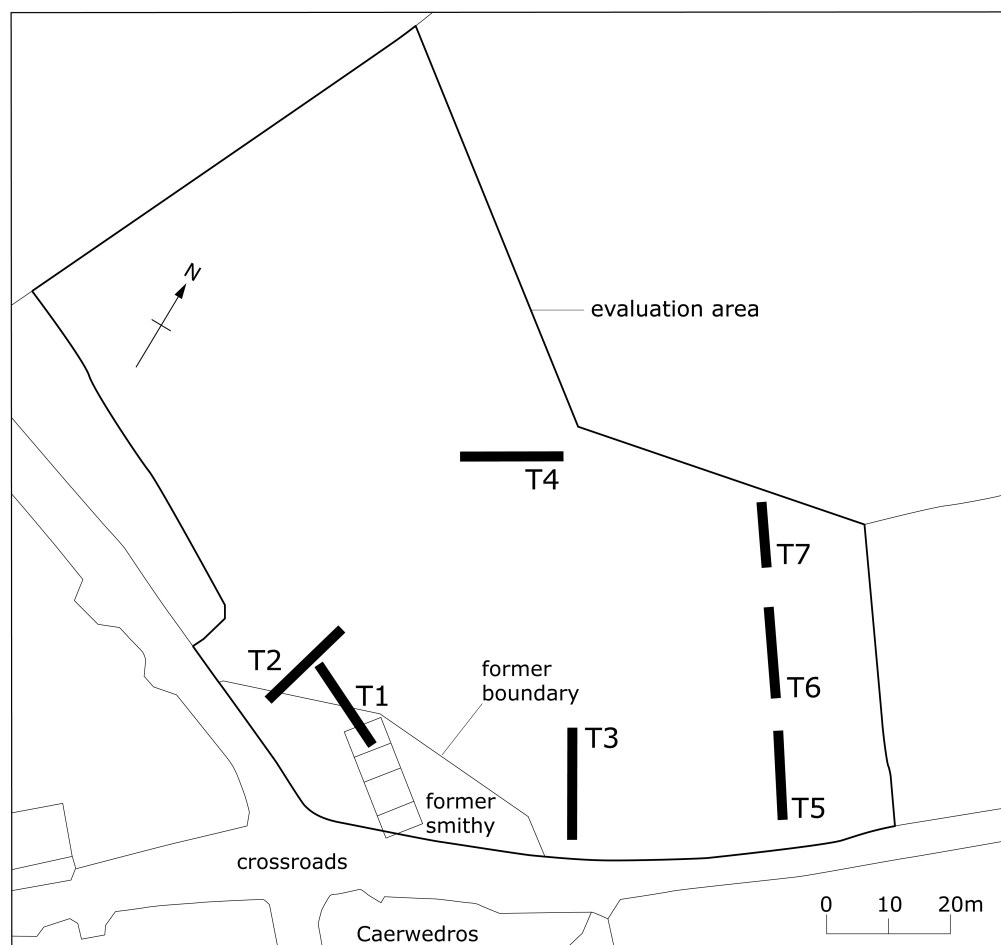


Figure 3: Location of trial trenches

RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION

Of the seven trenches excavated, Trench Numbers 4, 6 and 7 contained only natural deposits and nothing of archaeological importance. The average depth of topsoil in all trenches was about 0.30m and consisted of a friable reddish brown silty clay soil containing 25% coarse components of small angular fragments of shattered shale (often called "rab", locally). The natural subsoil generally comprised a friable orange brown silty clay soil containing 60% medium and small shattered fragments of shale, although there was some variation in colour both between and within the trenches where the soil sometimes exhibited a more yellowish hue.

Figure 3 shows the exact location and scaled dimensions of all the excavation trenches.

The findings in Trenches 1, 2, 3 and 5 are described below.

Trench 1

This trench (T1), *Figures 3 & 4*, measured 16m long by 1.9m wide and was positioned along the southern edge of the development area in an attempt to reveal any evidence of the features marked on the early Ordnance Survey maps which are no longer traceable above ground.

Removal of topsoil (101) to a depth of 0.20m at the southeast end of the trench revealed a dark reddish brown friable silty clay soil layer (102) containing 20% charcoal fragments, 20% angular shale fragments, several sherds of Victorian china pottery and a few fragments of glass. This deposit was seen to continue beyond the southeast end and both sides of the trench whilst gradually fading out fairly evenly at a distance of some 2.9m northwest along the length of the trench, where it gave way to a shale-rich orange brown natural subsoil (112).

Test excavation of deposit 102, average depth 0.05m, showed that it overlay a 1.0m wide linear configuration of formally laid pitched sub-angular stones (103), either side of which were very compacted mixed layers containing a high percentage of charcoal (104 and 105). These features, which were photographed, planned and left unexcavated (*Fig.4 and Photo. 1*), coincide almost exactly with the footprint of the northwest end of the four-celled building marked on the early Ordnance Survey maps. No specific interpretation of them is offered here other than it is highly likely, given the map evidence, that they represent an integral part of the building that the present landowner refers to as the smithy. Further excavation would be required to characterise the features more fully.

At approximately 8.0m, and beyond, northwesterly along the trench, removal of a 0.30m depth of topsoil (101), down to the natural subsoil (112), revealed three distinctly different coloured soils filling linear features cut into the subsoil. A dark reddish brown friable silty clay soil (106) containing 30% small angular shale fragments, frequent sherds of modern pottery and glass fragments with occasional pieces of coal and charcoal, was shown to fill a 0.80m wide by 0.12m deep ditch (107) which ran diagonally across the excavation (*Fig.4 & Photo.2*). This ditch was partly excavated and the revealed cut exhibited a flat bottom with sloping sides, gently on the south side and steeply on the north. The resultant sections showed that the northern side of ditch 107 was cut through the lighter reddish brown silty clay soil fill (109) of an earlier, approximately parallel, linear cut feature (108). Test excavation of soil deposit 109 showed that cut 108 was

also flat bottomed with its remaining side sloping very gently. The distance between the northern side of cut feature 108 and the southern side of the later re-cut 107 was approximately 2.10m. The approximately northeast-southwest alignment of these combined features and their position appear to conform very closely to the position of the former boundary marked on the early Ordnance Survey maps. It is likely, therefore, that they represent part of the grubbed-out former boundary.

Some 0.30m to the northwest of the probable former boundary the removal of a 0.38m depth of topsoil revealed a 0.70m wide linear ditch (111) cut into the subsoil (*Photo.3*). This feature ran at a right angle to the excavation and continued beyond both sides of the trench. Partial excavation of the ditch revealed it to be 0.25m deep with steep sides tapering to a flat 0.25m wide base. The fill of the ditch (110) was a homogeneous reddish brown silty clay soil containing 20% small angular fragments of shale and no other coarse components. There was no dating evidence in the fill and because of the limited extent of the excavations it was not possible to establish any stratigraphic relationship with 108 to enable even relative dating. The ditch displayed no evidence for silting up so it does not appear to have been left open over time. The fill (110) differs only from the overlying topsoil in the percentage of shale present (5% less), and the complete lack of finds and charcoal flecks. It is possible that the feature represents part of a former boundary ditch that was back-filled as soon as the boundary was removed. Further excavation may help to interpret this feature more fully.

No other features or deposits were revealed in this trench.

Trench 2

Trench 2 measured 17.4m by 1.9m and was positioned close to the southern boundary of the proposed development area at right angles to the boundary and T1 in order to test for the presence of any linear features that T1 may have missed.

The topsoil in this trench averaged a depth of 0.39m and was seen to directly overlie the orange brown silty clay natural subsoil for most of the excavation. The only feature revealed was a 2.4m wide linear cut that aligned perfectly with, and was a continuation of, features 107 and 108 and their fills from Trench 1. This feature was located towards the southern end of Trench 2 (*Photo.4*).

Trench 3

This trench measured 18.4m by 1.9m and was positioned to test for the potential presence of archaeological deposits or features close to the former field boundary on its outer western side.

The topsoil was machine excavated down to the natural subsoil, to an average depth of 0.23m. A linear feature (303), 0.30m wide by 0.08m deep, was revealed cutting the subsoil, and continuing beyond both sides of the excavation trench diagonally for 7.0m at its northwest end. Two sections of the feature were trial excavated and showed it to have a concave profile. The soil fill (302) was a homogeneous reddish grey-brown silty clay containing 5% small angular shale fragments and the occasional fleck of charcoal. A definitive interpretation of this feature is not possible given the limited amount of excavation, but it is likely to represent part of a drainage gully diverting excess water from the field to the roadside across the natural slope from the northwest to the southeast. No dating evidence was found in the feature.

At the southernmost end of Trench 3 one side of a linear feature cutting the subsoil across the excavation at a right angle was observed. Not enough of this feature was exposed to enable any test excavation but it may represent the cut for a modern pipe trench.

Trench 5

Trench 5 measured 9.5m by 1.9m and was positioned to test for the potential presence of archaeological features or deposits between Trench 3 and the boundary with the council houses to the east on Bro Ffion.

Topsoil to an average depth of 0.25m was machine excavated down to the yellowish brown shale-rich natural subsoil. A 1.0m wide linear ditch (505) was exposed cutting the subsoil and aligned northeast to southwest continuing beyond both sides of the trench (*Photo.5*). Partial excavation of this feature showed it to have steep irregularly sloping sides to a depth of 0.43m before it bottomed out to a nearly flat base 0.40m wide. The resultant section showed a primary fill deposit (506) of orange brown silty clay containing 5% medium angular stones and 10% very small angular stones to a depth of 0.05m. This was overlain by an 0.11m depth of grey brown silty clay soil (504) containing 20% small to medium size angular shale fragments. Overlying 504 was a 0.05m thick lens of mixed light grey orange-brown silty clay soil (503) containing 20% small angular stones. An upper fill of reddish grey-brown silty clay soil (502) containing 20% small angular shale fragments and occasional charcoal flecks overlay 503 and was itself sealed by the topsoil (501). All these deposits exhibited sloping lines of deposition consistent with the ditch having been left open and exposed over time rather than being back filled in a single episode.

The full extent of ditch 505 is unknown but a tentative interpretation is that it may represent a former boundary ditch, given its alignment parallel to the road. Further excavation would be necessary to allow the opportunity for a more definite interpretation. No dating evidence was recovered during the excavation of the ditch.

At the southernmost end of Trench 5, as was the case in Trench 3, one side of a linear feature cutting the subsoil across the excavation at a right angle was observed. Not enough of this feature was exposed to enable any test excavation but it may represent the cut for a modern pipe trench leading to the council houses on Bro Ffion.

DISCUSSION

The results of the evaluation have shown that there are archaeological features present in the proposed development area but that these are confined to the more southerly edge of the site with nothing being found in trenches 4, 6 and 7.

Of all the features and deposits uncovered in the remaining trenches none of them appear to be of medieval origin. The evidence for the former curving boundary (107 and 108) in Trenches 1 and 2, noted from cartographic sources initially, does not point to this as having been in any way defensive and therefore probably not an outer defence, or bailey, for the settlement beyond Caerwedros motte.

The features unearthed relating to the former building, the pitched stone linear feature (103) and the compacted former possible floor surfaces (105 and 104), in

Trench 1, had only nineteenth or early twentieth century dating evidence associated with them. However, these are still valid and positive archaeological features and are therefore an integral part of the archaeological resource of Caerwedros.

CONCLUSIONS

Evaluation Trenches 1 and 2 have been successful in revealing features identified on the early edition Ordnance Survey maps. Trenches 3 and 5 revealed probable former field boundaries and possible drainage arrangements.

None of the evaluation trenches revealed any evidence within the proposed development area of features or deposits associated with the medieval castle or its settlement.

The features uncovered in Trenches 1 and 2 do not lie directly within the footprint of any of the proposed dwellings in the development area. They lie in an area that will be set aside as a “play area” and that could mean that damage to them could be avoided, should the development go ahead, and mitigation measures put in place prior to any ground works being carried out.

The possible drainage gully (303) in Trench 3 lies within the footprint of the proposed building in Plot 8.

The ditch uncovered in Trench 5 lies within the footprint of the proposed building in Plot 1.

As stated earlier, it is important to realise that the trial excavations that have been undertaken only cover a very small percentage of the total area of the proposed development. The possibility of significant archaeological features being revealed elsewhere on the proposed development site cannot be ruled out.

SOURCES

Database

The Regional Historic Environment Record, housed with Cambria Archaeology

Published sources

King DJC 1956-59, Castles of Cardiganshire, *Ceredigion* 3 pp 59-60

Unpublished sources

Schlee D 2006 'An Archaeological Evaluation at Brynheulog, Caerwedros, Ceredigion' (Unpublished report for Cambria Archaeology, copy held in HER)

Cartographic

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

Ordnance Survey, 1:10560 Cardiganshire Sheet XXIV SW 1st Edition 1891

Ordnance Survey, 1:10560 Cardiganshire Sheet XXIV SW 2nd Edition 1906

Ordnance Survey, 1:10560 Quarter Sheet SN35NE 1964

Soil Survey of England and Wales, Sheet 2 Wales: 1:250000 1st Edition 1983

Tithe Map of the Parish of Llandissiliogogo 1843

Photographs



Photo.1 Features 103, 104 and 105 in Trench 1, looking southwest



Photo.2 View of probable former boundary 107-108, Trench 1, looking southwest



Photo.3 View of ditch 111 in Trench 1, looking southeast



Photo.4 View of probable former boundary 107-108, in Trench 2, looking east



Photo.5 View of ditch 505 in Trench 5, looking WSW