

TALBOT YARD, TREGARON, CEREDIGION

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVALUATION

April 2007



Prepared by Cambria Archaeology
For Dilwyn Roberts Architects



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Gan / By

Dr Nikki Cook MIFA

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ARCHAEOLEG CAMBRIA
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: cambria@cambria.org.uk
Gwefan: www.cambria.org.uk

CAMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGY
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: cambria@cambria.org.uk
Website: www.cambria.org.uk

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

Swydd / Position: Project Manager

Llofnod / Signature Dyddiad / Date

Mae'r adroddiad hwn wedi ei gael yn gywir a derbyn sêl bendith

This report has been checked and approved by Nigel Page

ar ran Archaeoleg Cambria, Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf.
on behalf of Cambria Archaeology, Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Swydd / Position: Senior Project Manager

Llofnod / Signature Dyddiad / Date

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TALBOT YARD, TREGARON, CEREDIGION
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SUMMARY

Proposals to develop a large plot of land at Talbot Yard, Tregaron, Ceredigion (SN68135965) led to a request from the Local Planning Authority for an archaeological field evaluation to be undertaken as part of a condition placed on Planning Application No.A061016/A061046.

A total of six trenches were excavated, but no features of significant archaeological interest were noted.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cambria Archaeology Field Services were commissioned by Dilwyn Roberts Architects to undertake an archaeological field evaluation of a large plot of land at Talbot Yard, Tregaron, Ceredigion (NGR SN68135965) in April 2007. This was part of a pre-application determination condition recommended by the Local Planning Authority, in advance of a decision being made for planning permission for a mixed use development on former agricultural land behind the Talbot Inn and an extension to the existing Town Car Park.

A specification was prepared in accordance with the *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994, revised 2001) and the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994, revised 2001), and was approved by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of works.

Scope and aims of the evaluation

The main aim of the evaluation was to characterise the extent of the potential below ground archaeological resource, in order to assess 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.

Report outline

This report briefly describes the physical and historic environment of the area before detailing the results of the evaluation excavations. Conclusions are then presented.

Abbreviations used in this report

Any references to sites recorded within the regional Historic Environment Record (HER) are identified by their Primary Record Number (PRN) and located by their National Grid Reference (NGR). Any published sources and other documentary or cartographic evidence used in writing this report are referenced within the text, with full details listed in the sources section at the end of the report.

2. THE SITE

The proposed mixed use development area and car park extension at Tregaron, shaded red in Figure 1, covers some 0.65 hectares, and is located within 100m of the early medieval church of St Caron. The evaluation area lies between two cores of medieval settlement known from documentary research to have existed around St Caron's Church to the west of the area, and that of Pentre, focussed around the mill a short distance to the north.

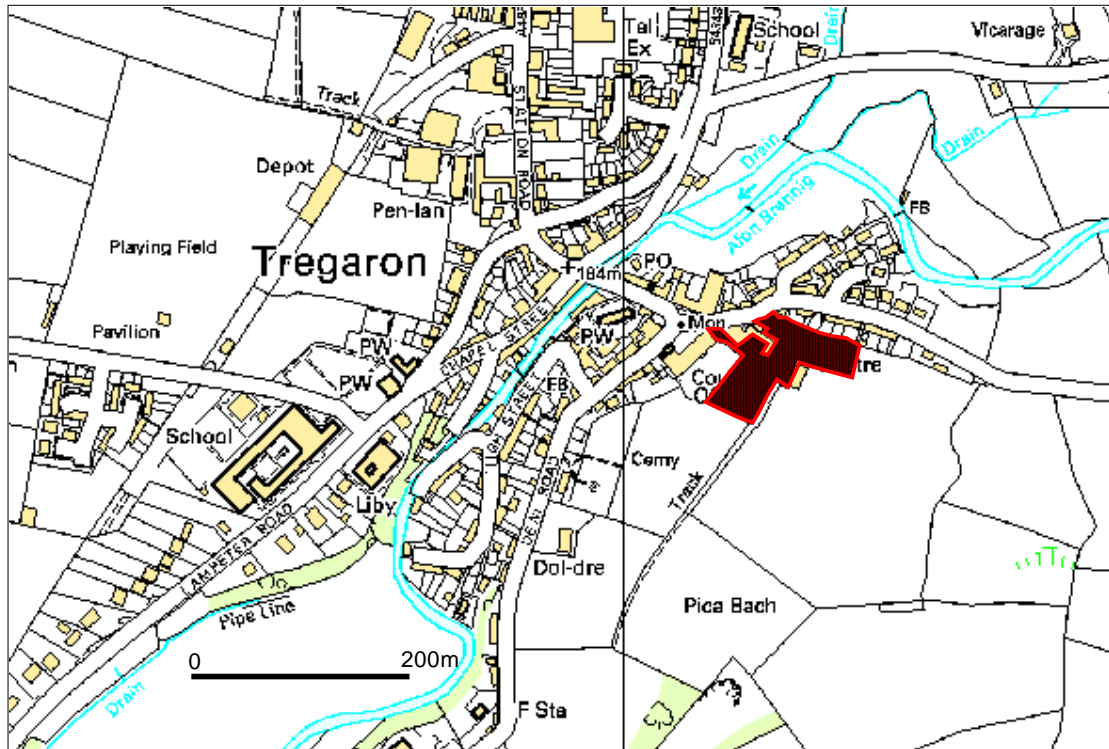


Figure 1 Location map of proposed development area at Tregaron (shaded red)
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Tregaron is a small market town, nestled at the foothills of the Cambrian mountains, and is located 11 miles north of Lampeter, 18 miles southeast of Aberystwyth and was once an important place of rest for drovers driving cattle and sheep over to England. It is located on the fringes of the Upland Ceredigion character area as recognised in the *Register of Landscapes of Historic Interest in Wales* (Cadw, *et al* 1998), which was one of only 36 'outstanding' landscapes identified in Wales (see Murphy 1999).

The historical development of the town owes much to its specific location at a crossroads, at a point of convergence of routes to the north, south, east and west, and as a crossing point over the river. There is a strong religious history attached to the town, which lies close to both Strata Florida and Llanddewi Brefi, both important religious centres in the medieval period, with Tregaron also playing a role in the spread of non-conformity and the Chapel movement in more recent times. From its earliest origins the town has largely enjoyed a peaceful history, and it seems fitting that one of Tregaron's most famous figures, Henry Richard, became known as 'the Apostle of Peace' for his moral and religious opposition to war in the Victorian period. Tregaron also lay on a Cistercian pilgrimage route linking Strata Florida with Llanillyr, and in many ways has depended on the 'tourist trade' for its economic survival for the last seven

hundred years, welcoming visitors to its market and fairs, and serving the needs of drovers and travellers passing through on their way to farther destinations. Various topographical writers have described the town during their tours, with John Leland commenting on the Church as 'standing upon a round coppe of cast yearth'. In his 'Itinerary through England and Wales' (undertaken between 1536 and 1539) Leland noted that Tregaron was the chief town in the Penarth Hundred, suggesting that it was well established and an important administrative centre by the 16th century, and he also noted the expanse of Cors Caron bog, 'out of which the Inhabitants ther about digge Turfes for Fier'.

Historical researches of the earliest foundations of the town suggest that Tregaron was an important local centre in the early Middle Ages, having been granted a Royal Charter in 1292 to hold a weekly market and an annual fair. This fair, the *Ffair Garon*, was once a three day event held on the 15th, 16th and 17th March, and was a major social and trading event for the sale of poultry, horses and pigs. The Talbot Hotel in the main square of the town boasts an origin as an old drover's inn dating to the 13th century, and has been serving the needs of travellers and the community ever since. It is likely, too, that the water-corn mill in the Pentre area of the town was also first established at this time, with small workers' cottages clustering around the mill, creating a small settlement separated from the rest of the town by the main market square.

The current layout of the town reveals a great deal about its medieval origins, which centred originally around the Church and the mill at Pentre. Stages in the development of the town are clearly defined architecturally as well as cartographically, and although much of the medieval fabric of the town has been replaced during phases of post-medieval rebuilding, nonetheless the present arrangement of streets and narrow lanes testify to the town's historic development.

However, hints of a much earlier foundation for the town are suggested by the early Christian inscribed stones found within the fabric of St Caron's Church in 1804, which suggests that there was a church occupying this site from as early as the 6th century. Moreover, the circular shape of the churchyard (found similarly in the neighbouring parish churches at Llanddewi Brefi, Llanyby, Llanfair Clydogau and elsewhere) suggests an even earlier, and possibly prehistoric, religious significance for the site prior to its appropriation by the Christian tradition. It has even been suggested that the current church is potentially built over a Bronze Age round barrow (Ludlow 2000), a type of prehistoric funerary and ritual monument dating to c. 1800BC, although local tradition instead favours the site as the burial place of St. Caron in the 3rd century AD.

Tregaron as a town particularly flourished in the mid-19th century through its importance as a centre for droving. Animals bought in south Cardiganshire, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire converged on Tregaron, from whence they were driven across the mountains via Abergwesyn and Hereford, or via Llandovery and Brecon, to enter England and to graze on the lush pastures of Northamptonshire and the Home Counties (Moore-Colyer 2002). The animals were shod in a compound behind the Talbot Hotel, with Tregaron the last lowland station before the start of the arduous upland route across the mountains and to the English fairs.

Apart from non-intrusive building recording and survey, the only previous archaeological work known to have been carried out in Tregaron town relates to a watching brief undertaken during the demolition of Gelli Gron, formerly the Ivy Bush Hotel, which is located next to the Talbot and lies immediately adjacent to the proposed development area. This work was undertaken in 2000 as part of a

road widening scheme at the junction of the Abergwesyn road with the square by Ceredigion County Council (Jones 2000). On 10th July 1848 "Batty's Menagerie" visited Tregaron, and one of the circus elephants died in the stable at the Ivy Bush Inn, from drinking water contaminated with lead. The elephant is said to be buried 'behind the Talbot Hotel', although the exact site is unknown. However, it is possible that it lies in the area now currently utilised as the car-park for the Talbot.

During the watching brief on the demolition of the cottage at Gelli-Gron, during which a foundation trench was dug in the rear yard, it was noted that the house had been stone-built, of likely 18th century date, and of central-entry-stair-passage plan. No medieval features were observed during the supervision of the trench excavation, although the site falls within the medieval core of the early town. Medieval remains may be still preserved beneath part of the site. The former stable and cart-house of Gelli-Gron is currently used as a bottle store by the Talbot and fortunately was not included in the demolition plans. The site of the elephant's demise therefore remains extant, and offers potential as a quirky tourist feature.

A recent historic town survey of Tregaron undertaken by Cambria Archaeology led to the identification of three separate planning zones within the town, with the current proposed area for development falling within Zone 1, the Medieval Settlement Core (Cook and Poucher 2007), illustrated in Figure 2 below.

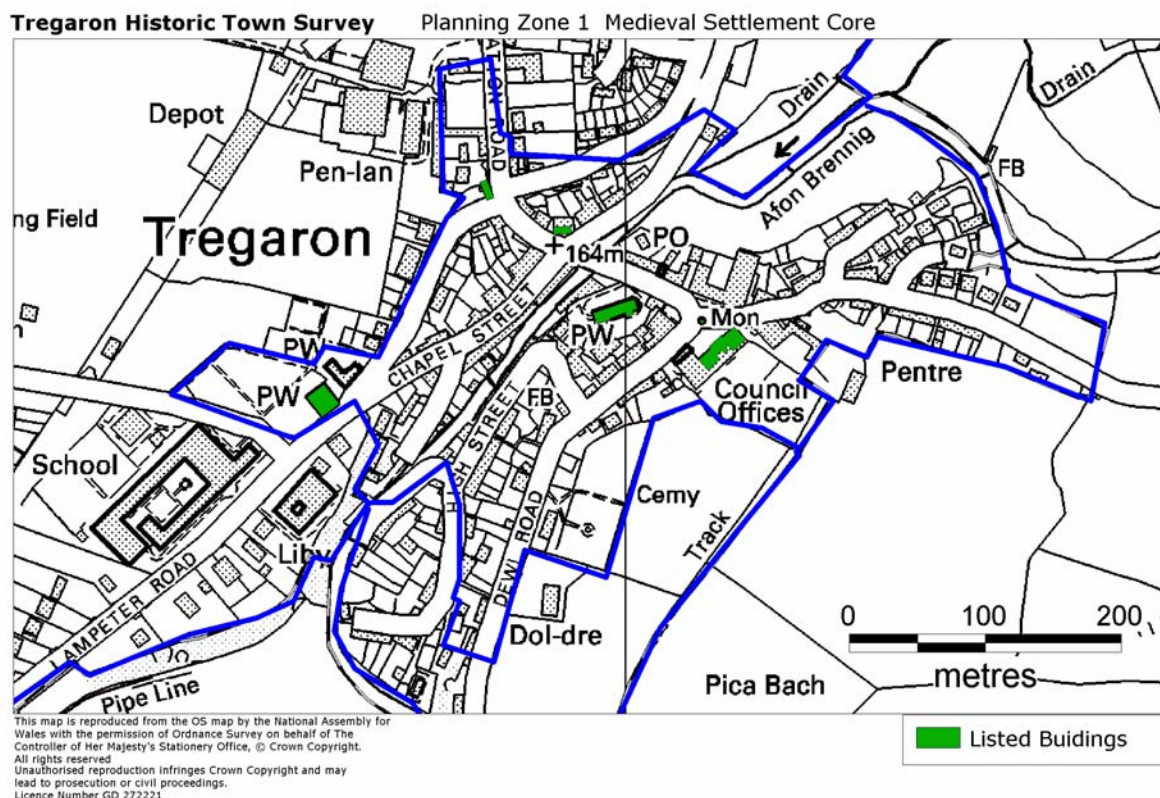


Figure 2 Extent of the Medieval Settlement Core (from Cook and Poucher 2007)

It is also known that Henry Richard was born in 1812 into a single-storey cottage of 18th century date, Ty Gwyn, within the proposed development area, although this dwelling was demolished to make room for the current town car park (Tregaron WI 1984: 8).

In the light of this knowledge, and with the proximity of the development area to the known archaeological resource, an archaeological field evaluation was requested for the proposed plot of development land at Tregaron, in order to assess the presence of any archaeological features which might be associated with the medieval origins of the town and its later expansion and development, especially during its heyday as a droving station.

3. SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS

A total of 6 trenches were excavated within the proposed development area, and were positioned to maximise the potential retrieval of information based on the results of an initial desk-based assessment of the site. The location of the trenches is illustrated in Figure 3.

Each trench was initially machine-excavated using a toothless grading bucket, 2.5m in width. Trenches ranged between 10m and 20m in length, with a total of 205 square metres of the plot excavated, thus giving an average coverage of 4% of the site¹. The excavation of these trenches conformed to the written scheme of investigation as detailed within the field evaluation specification. Following machine excavation each trench was hand cleaned to determine the presence or absence of any archaeological deposits.



Figure 3 Trench location plan, with the available area for evaluation shaded green

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¹ The plot of land itself totalled c.6567 square metres, i.e. roughly 0.65 hectares, but due to continuity of use and reinstatement issues in the current town car-park, the available area for evaluation actually totalled c.0.52 hectares.

Trench 1

12m x 2.5m. Orientated NNE-SSW.

This trench was machine excavated and hand cleaned to a depth of 0.6m. The fill consisted of a disturbed cobbled surface, of which only remnants were left, and comprised a mix of rounded small, medium and large dislodged cobble stones and glacial gravels. This cobbled surface had been laid directly onto the bedrock, and was clearly an area of hard standing.

No other features of archaeological interest were noted.

Trench 2

15m x 2.5m. Orientated NNE-SSW.

Machining and hand-cleaning revealed a depth of stone-free topsoil (0.1m) and homogenous ploughsoil to a depth of 0.5m, comprising a friable, dark brown, sandy silt loam containing c.20% small angular and rounded stones, with occasional coal and charcoal fragments. Fluvio-glacial deposits (the natural horizon) were reached at a depth of 0.6m.

Within the Trench 2 a linear, steep-sided cut measuring 0.83m wide and 0.6m deep was recorded (context 203). This apparent ditch was visible across the entire width of the trench, and ran in a west-northwest direction. Similar ditches was also encountered in Trench 4 (contexts 403 and 405), with these features considered to represent the remains of a former hedgerow boundary running across the field.

A second small cut, 0.8m wide and 0.4m deep (context 205) was encountered cutting the fill of this former boundary ditch, and ran for the remaining length of the trench in a northerly direction. This was shown to be a modern pipe trench, which linked with a similar cut in Trench 3, with the small alkathene pipe visible.



Plate 1 Excavated section of boundary ditch 203 looking SSW. This was cut by trench 205 containing modern alkathene pipe (visible left of picture)

However it is interesting to note that cartographic evidence appears to show this modern pipe following an earlier boundary line depicted on the 2nd Edition OS 6" map (revised 1900-1904) (see Figure 3). This boundary does not appear on any earlier maps (e.g. the Tithe Map of 1842, the 1st Edition OS 6" map 1889) which suggests it was laid some time between the publication of the 1st Edition map in 1889 and its revision in 1900. It is presumed that the modern pipe was laid when the boundary was still visible above ground, although no traces remain today.



Figure 4 Extract from the 2nd Edition OS 6" map showing boundary encountered in Trenches 2 and 3

There is no cartographic evidence depicting the old east-west boundary ditch recorded in Trenches 2 and 4, suggesting that this boundary must have disappeared before the area was originally surveyed by the Ordnance Survey in 1820-21 and subsequently mapped for the Tithe and OS 6" maps. No finds were recorded from the ditch fills (contexts 202, 402 and 404), which comprised a mix of topsoil and glacial gravel, and therefore no secure date can be placed on the boundary, although it clearly pre-dates the 19th century.

No other features of archaeological interest were noted.

Trench 3

20m x 2.5m. Orientated WNW/NW-ESE/SE.

This trench was machine-excavated and hand cleaned to a depth of 0.4m, which was the depth of the topsoil/ploughsoil down to the natural. No archaeological features were present within the excavated area, other than a 0.4m wide modern service ditch running the length of the trench, and the modern alkathene water pipe continuing along the former boundary line as mentioned in Trench 2 above.

No other features of archaeological interest were noted.

Trench 4

10m x 2.5m. Orientated NE-SW.

Machine excavated and hand cleaned to a depth of 0.6m. A topsoil layer of homogenous, dark brown, friable sandy silt loam was deposited to a depth of 0.36m (context 400), and contained high organic root content down to the underlying fluvio-glacial deposits (context 401). Context 401 consisted of an orange-brown friable sandy silt, containing 60% rounded and sub-rounded small and medium-sized stones, which was excavated to a minimum depth of 0.23m. Features 403 and 405 were cut into this fluvio-glacial layer.

Context 403 consisted of a vertical-sided, flat-bottomed linear cut 0.6m wide and 0.6m deep, running in an east-west direction, with a visible length of 2.2m in the excavated area. The ditch continued beyond the edge of the excavated trench on its eastern side, whilst a terminus was encountered for the ditch within the excavated area.

Some 2.7m to the north of this ditch there was another linear cut, also 0.63m wide and 0.6m deep, which extended the full width of the trench and continued beyond the edge of the excavation on both sides (context 405). This ran parallel to context 403, and it is possible that both ditches originally flanked a boundary bank, which is no longer extant.

Finds recovered from topsoil layer in the trench (context 400) included some modern ceramic pot and glass, with occasional clay pipe stem fragments. No other features of archaeological interest were noted.

Trench 5

15m x 2.5m. Orientated E-W.

This trench was machine and hand-cleaned to a maximum depth of 0.6m, when the natural glacial gravels were reached. Plough lines showed up within the ploughsoil at a depth of c.0.4m. No finds were recovered from the trench.

No further features of archaeological interest were noted within Trench 5.

Trench 6

10m x 2.5m. Orientated NE-SW.

This trench was excavated in the area designated for the proposed car park extension, and was located in grassy field to the rear of Maes y Coed, Isfryn, Lletty Meurig, Pendine and Alwyn cottages which front the Abergwesyn road in the Pentre area of Tregaron.

No archaeological features were present within the excavated area, which consisted of natural deposits only of thin glacial gravels below the turf.

4. CONCLUSIONS

No significant archaeological remains were encountered within any of the trenches excavated within the evaluation area. The only features of curiosity were the parallel east-west running ditches in Trench 4 (contexts 403 and 405), which appeared similar to context 203 in Trench 2. These were interesting from the point of view that if they did indeed represent ditches flanking a boundary bank, this bank has clearly disappeared before the first detailed mapping of the area took place in the early 19th century. The definite terminus of the southernmost ditch in Trench 4 could have been mirrored by the parallel northern ditch, which may have terminated immediately beyond the edge of the excavated area on the western side of the trench. The relation between either of these ditches and the comparably-sized ditch in Trench 2 is uncertain, although it is possible that they are linked in some way. However a similar parallel arrangement was not revealed within Trench 2, which would perhaps have more firmly linked the two.

It is considered that the impact of the proposed development on the known archaeological resource is likely to be low.

Acknowledgements

Fieldwork was conducted by Richard Ramsay and Gwilym Bere. Machining was undertaken by Bill Lloyd, landowner.

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Maps:

Original surveyors' drawings, 1820-1821, sheets 308 and 310

Ordnance Survey First Series map, 1834

Tithe Map (1842) and Apportionment (1839), Part of the Parish of Caron, Cardiganshire, Section A

Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 6", surveyed 1887, published 1889, Sheets XXISW and XXVIINW

Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 6", surveyed 1887, revised 1904, published 1906, Sheets XXISW and XXVIINW

APPENDIX 1 CATALOGUE OF EVALUATION ARCHIVE

The project archive has been indexed and catalogued according to National Monument Record (NMR) categories and contains the following:

- A.** Copy of final report
- B.** Records made during fieldwork, including context record sheets and site notes.
- C.** Site drawings.
- D.** Site photographs – catalogue, digital photos on CD, indexed by frame number with another copy in trench order.
- I.** Archive report, draft copies of final report.
- L.** Project specification.
- M.** Miscellaneous correspondence.

There is no material for classes **E, F, G, H, K, and N.**

The archive is currently held by Cambria Archaeology Field Services, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire, as project number 62910.