

# LAND AT WHITLAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVALUATION



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for  
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May 2007

**LAND AT WHITLAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVALUATION  
REPORT NO.2007/41  
PROJECT RECORD NO.62911**

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**LAND AT SPRING GARDENS, WHITLAND, CARMARTHENSHIRE  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

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## **LAND AT SPRING GARDENS, WHITLAND, CARMARTHENSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

### **SUMMARY**

*Proposals to develop farmland adjacent to Spring Gardens in Whitland, Carmarthenshire (NGR SN20851690), led to an archaeological evaluation being carried out prior to the preparation of a detailed design plan. The evaluation was undertaken by Cambria Archaeology Field Services on behalf of Langdale Development.*

*The primary objective of the evaluation was to target specifically the part of the site containing a rectangular crop-marked enclosure and to test the quality and preservation of any archaeologically significant features or deposits associated with it. The results would then help to inform decisions regarding any future developmental plan for the site.*

*Four trial trenches were machine excavated all of which contained archaeological features and deposits confirming the presence of a defended rectangular enclosure with an adjoining annexe.*

*Sections of the defensive ditches for the enclosure were encountered and test excavated. Test excavation within the interior of the enclosure and annexe suggests that little or no stratified occupation deposits have survived the subsequent centuries of agricultural activity on the site. It is likely that only features cut into the subsoil or bedrock, such as the defensive ditches, will have survived below ground.*

*Apart from the defensive ditches, modern field drains, and probable animal or root activity, no other archaeological features or deposits were revealed during the evaluation excavations. In addition, no artefacts or other dating evidence were encountered.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Langdale Development is currently considering purchasing a parcel of agricultural land to the rear of Spring Gardens, Whitland, Carmarthenshire, for residential development. The proposed development site contains a rectangular crop-marked enclosure site (PRN 11782) recorded in the regional Historic Environment Record as an archaeological site of regional importance (Category B).

In pursuance of their interest, Langdale Development contacted Cambria Archaeology Heritage Management who, as archaeological advisors to the Local Planning Authority, suggested that, in view of the potential impact of development on the archaeological resource, an archaeological field evaluation of the enclosure would be advisable prior to the presentation of a planning application.

Following these recommendations, Mr. Paul Fletcher of Langdale Development commissioned Cambria Archaeology Field Services to carry out the archaeological evaluation in May 2007.

### **The scope and aims of the evaluation**

The main aim of the evaluation was to target the area of the site that contained the crop-marked enclosure in order to characterise the presence, extent, nature and date of any below ground archaeological remains associated with it.

The project was also aimed at providing enough information on the archaeological resource to enable assessment of the likely impact of any 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 evaluation only represents a small percentage of the whole development area and that even though the choice of the trench locations was well informed its scope was somewhat limited. The presence of significant archaeological features or deposits being revealed elsewhere on the site cannot be ruled out.

### **Report outline**

This report briefly describes the physical environment of the area with a discussion and description of the known archaeological resource before detailing the results of the evaluation.

### **Abbreviations used in this report**

Any references to sites in the text that are recorded on the regional 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 end of the report.



## THE EVALUATION AREA

The proposed development site occupies an area of farmland centred on NGR SN20851690 (Fig. 1). The plot is irregularly shaped and defined on its southern side by garden boundaries of houses fronting on to Spring Gardens on the main road through Whitland. The eastern side of the site is bounded by a relatively modern housing development and cul-de-sac whilst the northern and western sides of the site are defined by a stream and agricultural land. Topographically, the development area slopes gently down to the northwest becoming steeper as it nears the stream on its northern boundary.

The solid geology in the study area is represented by Ordovician shales of the Arenig 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 Taf valley area is also characterised by extensive alluvial and clay deposits. The soils are typical brown earths of the Denbigh association (Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1983).

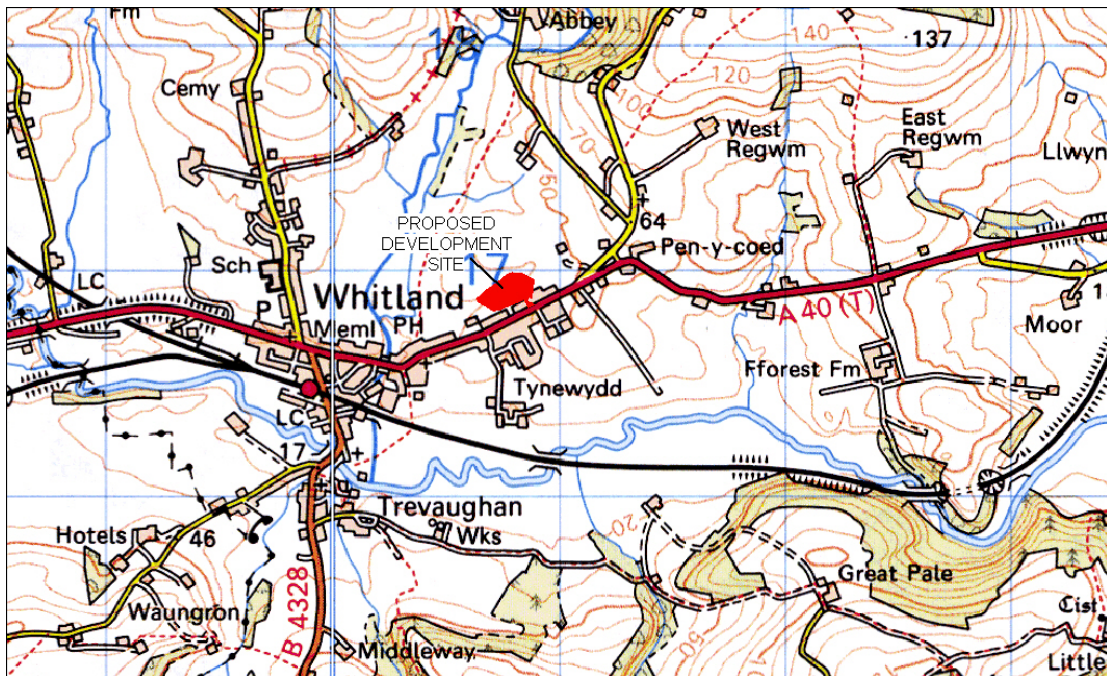


Figure 1: Location map of proposed development area

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The regional Historic Environment Record (HER) records only one site of archaeological importance within the proposed development area:

### PRN 11782- Spring Gardens Enclosure

The site, a rectangular crop-marked enclosure, was discovered during aerial photographic survey work undertaken by the Dyfed Archaeological Trust in the drought conditions of the very hot summer of 1983. The site was described at the time as

‘a faint cropmark in grazing land, forming a perfect rectangle, estimated to be 50m E-W by 82m N-S. About midway down the E side were two apparent post pits along the uninterrupted course of the cropmark, marking a probable gateway. The site was bisected by a

cross-ditch about one third from the north perimeter, and a gap in the west side of this may represent an entry. The northwest side of the enclosure was not at all clear. The function and date of this site cannot be ascertained without excavation; on present evidence it is probably best viewed as a Romano-British farmstead. Its size is comparable with the site discovered 1 mile north of Whitland Abbey, although it does not appear to be as complex' (James 1984,17).

On the ground today, in the proposed development area, there are faint undulations that appear to correspond with the western side of the crop-marked enclosure, but the evidence is rather vague.

Subsequent aerial photography has added further detail to the layout of the enclosure, which also includes an annex on its northern end

The Parish Tithe map for the area (1839) and early editions of Ordnance Survey 1:10560 maps (1891 and 1908<sup>1</sup>) show no evidence of the enclosure or any other features within the boundaries of the proposed development area.

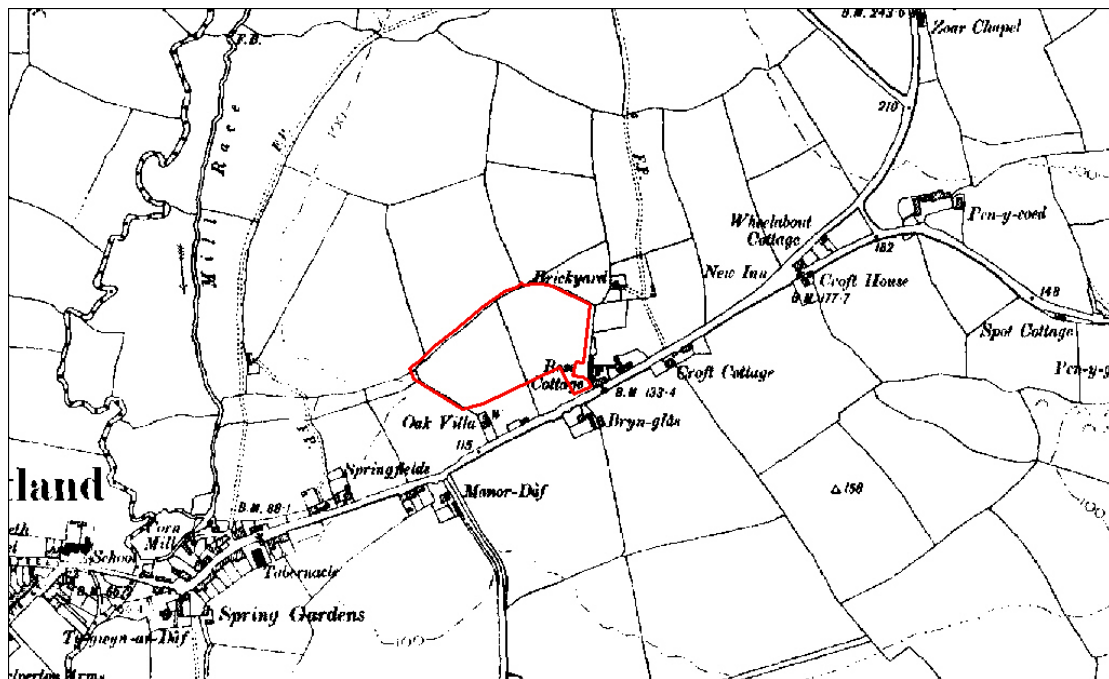


Figure 2: Extract from the 1908 Ordnance Survey 1:10560 map showing development site boundary.

<sup>1</sup> Copies available in the HER.



*Plate 1: Aerial photograph of cropmark PRN 11782, looking south.*  
(© Cambria Archaeology, DAT AP-84-113.2)



## THE EVALUATION

### Methodology

Four trenches (Fig.2) of varying size were excavated using a JCB excavator with a 1.6m wide toothless grading bucket. In all trenches the turf and topsoil was removed by machine down to the top of the natural subsoil or bedrock. 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 character. During excavation all exposed deposits and features were described and allocated their own individual context number. After excavation, all features were photographed and planned at 1:20 scale and, where relevant, sections were drawn to a scale of either 1:10 or 1:20.

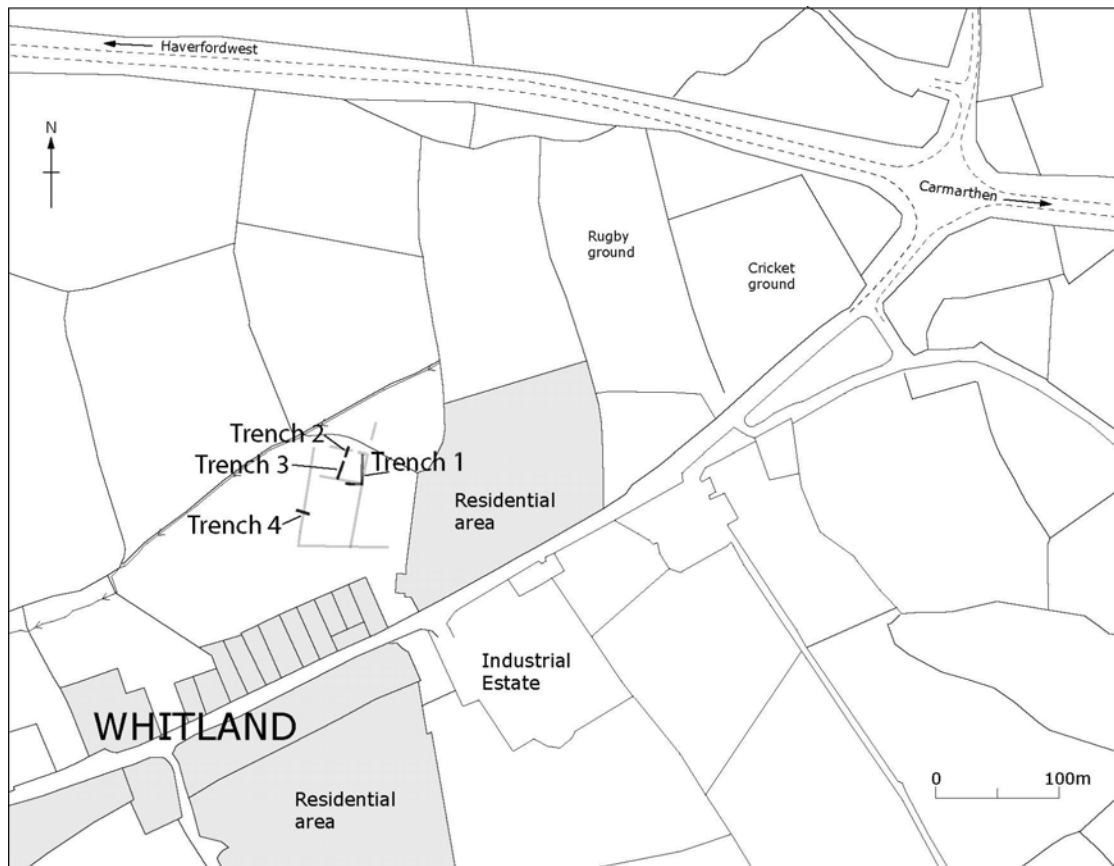


Figure 3: Plan showing the location of the trial trenches and the crop-marked enclosure.

## **Results**

All four of the excavation trenches contained archaeological features or deposits. The average depth of topsoil in all trenches was about 0.26m and consisted of a homogeneous friable mid brown silty clay soil containing less than 10% 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 subsoil sometimes exhibited a higher percentage of shale making it appear more orange in colour.

Figure 3 shows the location of all the excavation trenches. The results of the excavations are described below, trench-by-trench.

### ***Trench 1***

This ‘reverse L-shaped’ trench (T1), measured 25m long by 1.6m wide from north to south and 13.5m x 1.6m east to west. The trench was positioned in an attempt to test for the potential presence of the northern ditch of the possible annex and to establish whether any archaeological features or deposits were present in its interior. Removal of topsoil (100) to a depth of 0.29m at the north end of the trench down to the top of the natural subsoil revealed a 1.68m wide ditch (103) running WNW to ESE and continuing beyond both sides of the excavation.

#### **Ditch 103**

The ditch was cut into the subsoil to a depth of 0.2m and when test excavated was seen to contain two distinct fills. The upper fill (101) was 0.12m deep and comprised a friable mottled grey-brown silty clay soil containing less than 5% small angular fragments of shattered shale. The lower fill (102) of the ditch was an orange-brown stiff mouldable silty clay soil containing less than 5% small shattered shale fragments. The ditch had gently sloping sides with a slightly concave, nearly flat, bottom and appeared to have been truncated by plough action, although there was no trace of this in the exposed sections. This feature quite clearly represents a section of the northern ditch of the annex.

#### **Ditch 108**

Further south along the trench, a 1.43m wide linear feature (108), aligned NNE to SSW, was revealed cut into the natural subsoil and continuing beyond both sides of the north-south arm of the excavation. The feature re-emerged partially into the east-west return of the trench where it was noted in the resultant south-facing trench section.

Sample excavation showed this feature to be 0.46m, deep with sides sloping at roughly 40-degree angles and a 0.25m wide bottom that was slightly concave. The ditch was filled with four distinct fills. The lower, primary fill (107) comprised a friable yet mouldable yellowish silty-clay soil containing few coarse components of small shattered shale fragments to a maximum depth of 0.09m. This also contained what appeared to be possible organic material, representing vegetation growth in the infilling ditch.

The primary fill was overlain by a homogeneous friable greyish brown silty-clay deposit (106) containing less than 10% small fragments of shattered shale to a maximum depth of 0.15m. Overlying this deposit was a mixed friable greyish brown silty-clay layer (105) containing discrete inclusions of a clean grey clay and

less than 10% small fragments of shattered shale to a maximum depth of 0.12m. The upper fill (104) comprised a homogeneous friable mid brown silty-clay containing less than 10% fragments of shattered shale and was 0.1m thick. The general profile of these deposits, seen in the resultant section implies that the ditch silted up naturally over time rather than being purposely back-filled. Ditch 108 clearly represents part of the easterly ditch of the annex.



Plate 2: West-northwest facing section of ditch 103.



Plate 3: South-southwest facing section of ditch 108.

## Linear feature 112

Ditch 108 merged, rather nebulously, with a linear feature (112), that was also cut into the natural subsoil, running diagonally across the trench and aligned NW-SE. Test excavation of 112 showed that it was cut into the subsoil to a maximum depth of 0.86m and formed a ditch with gently sloping sides and a concave bottom. Only the southerly side of this feature was within the trench, so no true profile or dimensions could be recorded during the evaluation, although it was possible to record the four deposits it contained (contexts 113, 111, 110 up to 109 in order of deposition). The rather skewed section that resulted from the excavation of the ditch appeared to show that it was cut by ditch 108 but this was not totally clear. That said, all the evidence suggests that 112 represents the southerly side of part of the northern ditch of the main enclosure and that it was cut by the addition of the annex ditch 108 at a later date. Trench 1 appears to have been positioned at the conjunction of the two ditches.

Two modern field drains were uncovered during the excavation of Trench 1 but no other features or deposits of archaeological significance were revealed. Other than modern pottery found during the topsoil strip, no artefacts were encountered.

## ***Trench 2***

Trench 2 measured 8m by 1.6m and was positioned in order to establish whether or not the northern boundary of the annex continued further west and to test if any bank material or a buried soil horizon had been preserved. In the light of the findings in Trench 1 this trench was aligned NNE-SSW in the hope that it would cut across the footprint of the crop-marked enclosure at 90 degrees to enable more effective recording of features.

## Ditch 203

Removal of topsoil to a depth of 0.27m revealed a 2.5m wide linear feature (203) cut into the subsoil to a maximum depth of 0.39m and continuing beyond both sides of the excavation trench at a 90-degree angle. A half section test excavation of this feature showed it to be a ditch with gently sloping sides, with its more northerly side being slightly steeper. Both sides appeared to level out before dropping and forming a 0.8m wide concave base. There were two distinct deposits filling the ditch. The lower fill (202) consisted of a homogeneous friable orange-brown silty-clay soil containing less than 2% small fragments of shattered shale to a depth of 0.18m. The upper fill was a homogeneous friable mid-brown silty clay soil containing less than 10% small angular fragments of shattered shale with a maximum depth of 0.21m. The ditch represents a westerly continuation of the northern ditch (103) of the annex encountered in Trench 1.

No other archaeologically significant features or deposits were encountered in this trench.

## ***Trench 3***

This trench, lying some 3m to the SSW of Trench 2 and on the same alignment, measured 15m by 1.6m and was positioned to test for any archaeological features or deposits that might remain in the interior of the annex.

A 0.29m depth of topsoil was removed down to the top of the natural subsoil and for some 12m from the northerly end of the trench no archaeological features or deposits were encountered.



### Ditch 303

At the southern end of the trench the northern edge of a linear feature (303), aligned seemingly E-W, was encountered crossing the excavation and continuing beyond both sides and the end of the trench. This feature was test excavated by half section and was shown to cut the natural subsoil and shale bedrock to a depth of 0.9m. The feature, a ditch, had a gently sloping northern side with its southern side, only partially revealed, appearing to become markedly steeper as it continued beyond the southern edge of the excavation trench. The ditch had two distinct fills. The lower fill (302), maximum depth 0.6m, was a homogeneous yellowish brown friable silty-clay soil containing less than 5% small angular fragments of shattered shale and the occasional fragment of charcoal. The overlying upper fill (301), maximum depth 0.3m, was a similar deposit differing only in the presence of a higher percentage of shale fragments (10%) with no charcoal present. Although the revealed alignment of the ditch is slightly at odds with the alignment of ditch 112 in Trench 1 it is reasonable to assume that this feature represents a continuation of the northern ditch of the main enclosure.

Other than a modern land drain that cut the edge of ditch 303, and crossed the excavation trench no other archaeologically significant features or deposits were encountered in this trench.

### **Trench 4**

Trench 4 was aligned approximately east-west, measured 17m by 1.6m and was positioned to test the extent of preservation of the west ditch of the main enclosure and to establish whether any archaeological features or deposits may be present in the interior of the enclosure. Removal of c.0.25m of topsoil revealed a roughly north-south ditch (402) towards the west end of the trench.

### Ditch 402

The ditch (402) was located 3.5m from the west end of the trench and cut into the shale bedrock. The ditch was c.4.5m wide, 1.4m deep and had fairly steep sloping sides with a slightly concave base. The west side had a narrow step towards its base.

The sides of the ditch showed signs of weathering as if it had been open for some time before being infilled. This suggestion is supported by the primary fill (406), which was a light yellow/brown silty clay containing c.15% small shattered shale fragments and a few larger stones. This layer also contained lenses of dark organic rich clay, which appeared to represent periodic vegetation growth in the base of the open ditch. The small fragments of shattered shale present throughout this deposit seem to have been washed in from the exposed ditch sides. This layer was c.0.5m deep and it contained at least three organic lenses.

Overlying the primary fills was a layer of homogenous yellow brown silty clay containing less than 5% shale fragments (405). The layer was up to 0.4m thick on its east side and 0.3m thick on its west side. Overlying 405 was a shallow, c.0.1m thick, layer of dark brown friable silty clay containing c.15% small shale fragments and frequent charcoal flecks (404). This layer appeared to be filling a hollow in the top surface of layer 405, which suggests that the partially infilled ditch was open for some time after the deposition of layer 405 to allow 404 to develop.

The upper fill was a layer of dark yellow brown silty clay containing between 5% and 10% small shale fragments (402). This layer also spread beyond the ditch

sides and it may represent a remnant ploughsoil that finally infilled and levelled up the top of the ditch.

#### Interior features

To the east of the ditch, in the enclosure interior, a sinuous gully was exposed (407). The gully was on average 0.35m wide and 0.2m deep with straight sides and a rounded base. It was filled by a single deposit of dark brown silty clay with a very high, c.70%, shale content towards the top (408). Gully 407 appeared to cut two ephemeral features that were difficult to trace in plan with any certainty. The sinuous and irregular nature of gully 407 is suggestive of animal actions and may be the remains of a badger set or rabbit burrow that existed in the former defensive ditch that probably stood along the inner edge of the ditch 402.



Plate 4: Southeast facing section of ditch 402.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of the evaluation have shown that the ditches of both the annex and the main enclosure have survived in good condition. The evaluation has confirmed that the layout of the enclosure conforms to that shown on aerial photographs. Therefore, even though only selected sections of the ditches were investigated it is reasonable to assume that the unevaluated sections survive in similar condition. There was no conclusive evidence for activity in the interior of either the main enclosure or the annex.

Excavation of similar ditched enclosures has shown them to be Romano-British in date and it is likely that the Whitland enclosure is also Romano British (Murphy and Mytum 2005). This suggestion is tentatively supported at Whitland by the lack of artefacts, which tends to indicate a Romano-British rather than Roman date, as Roman sites generally contain large quantities of artefacts.

Generally speaking the Romano-British, or late prehistoric, settlement of southwest Wales is characterised by hill forts and smaller defended enclosures or farmsteads which tend, more often than not, to be circular or sub-circular in shape. However, recent studies and excavation of crop-marked enclosure sites undertaken by York University and Cambria Archaeology (Murphy & Mytum 2005) has shown a high proportion of them to be rectangular, conforming to a definite pattern and with dimensions much the same as the site at Whitland described above.

It has been suggested that not all ditched enclosures were necessarily defensive in nature because of their location (Murphy and Mytum 2005, 4). However, the size and depth of the main enclosure ditches at Whitland does indicate a possible defensive function, with the material from the ditch probably being used to form an internal bank. In the case of the annex the shallow depth of the ditches may suggest that they were not primarily defensive and served only as boundaries for the annex, which may have served as an animal enclosure. There was no direct evidence for any banks at Whitland, although they may have been ploughed away by subsequent agricultural activity. The possible animal burrow recorded in Trench 4 (407) may have originally been dug into the standing remains of a bank, but this is speculative at best.

The lenses of organic material in the primary fill of the western ditch of the main enclosure in Trench 4 showed that the ditch was open for some time as vegetation began to colonise the gradually infilling ditch. The sides of the ditch showed signs of weathering and some of the contained shale fragments that had apparently washed in from the sides of the open ditch further suggesting that the ditch was open for some time and at least at first infilled gradually. There were no signs of recutting or cleaning in any of the ditches. Similarly the eastern ditch (108) of the annex recorded in Trench 1 had also apparently been allowed to silt up naturally, indicating that the ditches were left open without being recut or cleaned. This possibly occurred after the enclosure was abandoned.

The presence of the possible organic material in the base of the ditch in Trench 4 may provide an opportunity to date the infilling of the base of the ditch in order to determine if it was occurring during the life of the enclosure, or whether it was post abandonment.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The evaluation was successful in revealing features associated with the crop-marked enclosure. However, it is important to realise that the evaluation concentrated on a very small percentage of the total area of the proposed development, therefore, the possibility of significant archaeological features or deposits being revealed elsewhere on the proposed development site cannot be ruled out.

The evaluation has shown that the main enclosure survives as a series of deep cut ditches, with shallower ditches defining the annex. There was no clear evidence for internal features. Although no dating evidence was recovered during the evaluation, results from work on similar rectangular ditch enclosures elsewhere in southwest Wales suggests that it may be of Romano-British date.



## **SOURCES**

### **Database**

The Regional Historic Environment Record, curated by Cambria Archaeology

### **Published sources**

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### **Cartographic**

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Ordnance Survey, 1:10560 Carmarthenshire Sheet XXXVII SW 1<sup>st</sup> Edition 1891

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Tithe Map and Apportionment of the Parish of Llanboidy 1839