

# **ABERAERON TIDAL DEFENCE SCHEME, CEREDIGION: ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

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**ABERAERON TIDAL DEFENCE SCHEME,  
CEREDIGION: ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING  
BRIEF**

By

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## **ABERAERON TIDAL DEFENCE SCHEME, CEREDIGION ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

### **SUMMARY**

Geotechnical ground investigations were undertaken on the coast to the north of Aberaeron, Ceredigion, ahead of proposed improvements to the tidal defences. Some of the ground investigations were in, or close to, areas of potential archaeological interest. In order to observe, investigate and record any archaeological features or deposits that may have been revealed during the excavation of three trial pits, Atkins Heritage commissioned Cambria Archaeology to carry out a watching brief in June 2007.

One of the trial pits was excavated on the former site of a 12<sup>th</sup> Century earthwork enclosure, Castell Cadwgan, whilst the other two pits were dug in areas close to where relict timbers associated with former sea defences had previously been revealed.

No archaeologically significant features or deposits were encountered during the excavation of the trial pits.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Project background**

Following proposals by Ceredigion County Council (Planning Application A050128CD) to develop a new tidal defence scheme along the coast to the north of Aberaeron (National Grid Reference SN45986340), a cultural heritage assessment of the area was undertaken by Atkins Heritage in the autumn of 2006. The assessment, referring to sources from the regional Historic Environment Record (HER) held by Cambria Archaeology Heritage Management at their offices in Llandeilo, identified the location of a former medieval earthwork enclosure named as Castell Cadwgan (Primary Record Number 1867). Although there are no above ground remains of the earthwork now evident the possibility of encountering buried remains is high. Cartographic sources consulted during the assessment also revealed the presence of sea defences, in the form of breakwater groynes, which had been altered and added to some time after the publication of the 1<sup>st</sup> edition 25" Ordnance Survey map of 1890 and before the publication of the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of 1907.

Cambria Archaeology Heritage Management, as archaeological advisors to Ceredigion County Council planning department, recommended that an archaeological watching brief be undertaken during any groundworks in the potentially archaeologically sensitive areas identified by the cultural heritage assessment. Accordingly, Atkins Heritage commissioned Cambria Archaeology field services to carry out the watching brief in June 2007.

### **The watching brief methodology and scope of the report**

The watching brief consisted of the attendance on site of an archaeologist during the excavation of three geotechnical trial pits. The locations and dimensions of the trial pits were recorded along with any revealed deposits or features of archaeological interest. This report summarises the archaeological and historical background to the project area and discusses the results of the watching brief.

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Aberaeron lies at the mouth of the Afon Aeron on the Ceredigion coast at NGR SN45856280. It currently has a population of around 1500 and is this year celebrating its bicentenary as a formally laid out town built to a set plan. In 1807 Susannah and Thomas Jones of Ty-Glyn sought parliamentary permission to construct piers and a harbour at the mouth of the Aeron. Prior to this the place was a relatively unimportant fishing settlement, with Aberarth, one mile to the north, being the nearest coastal settlement of any note.

After 1807 the small town grew quite rapidly with the terraces, squares and houses of the Regency period that are so evident today being well established by the 1850s. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century Aberaeron became a busy shipbuilding centre with a good reputation, especially for the schooners built there by the master boat builder David Jones. The growth of the town was short-lived, however, and by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century the port itself went into decline when the arrival of the railways all but destroyed the coastal trade of west Wales. Today Aberaeron is an important tourist destination and residential town.



*Figure 1 Location plan of 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.

To the north of Aberaeron, on the coast, lies the site of Castell Cadwgan (PRN 1867) at NGR SN45986340. This medieval earthwork, of which little or nothing now remains above ground, is assumed to have been a coastal fortress of Cadwgan ap Bleddyn, an 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> century prince of Powys and the second son of Bleddyn ap Cynfyn who was king of Powys and Gwynedd (Lloyd JE, 1911). The Castell occupied a strategic position near the mouth of the Afon Aeron and commanded extensive views over Cardigan Bay. The first historic mention of Cadwgan is in 1088 when he was at war with Rhys ap Tewdwr. There followed many battles with both the Welsh and the Normans over the following years, with power continually changing hands, until finally Cadwgan was killed in battle at Welshpool, by Madog ap Rhiryd, in 1111.

Castell Cadwgan is shown on the 1st Edition 25" Ordnance Survey map where it appears that much of its fabric has suffered extensive erosion and been lost to the sea. Subsequent Ordnance Survey maps, up to and including the 1964 6" edition, show further extensive erosion and it appears that the earthwork has either been totally destroyed or, at best, incorporated into the pebble-built sea defence bank. A walkover survey undertaken during the watching brief failed to observe any above ground remains of the monument. One of the geophysical trial pits (TH04) was excavated on the site of Castell Cadwgan.

During the formal construction of the town and harbour at Aberaeron after 1807, piers, breakwaters, sea walls, and groynes were also constructed as utilities and defences for the port in the face of the oncoming tides. Again, map evidence shows that over the years their configuration and position changed as they were either abandoned, destroyed, renewed or strengthened. Two of the geophysical



trial pits (TH01 and TH02) were excavated close to areas where relict timbers from these structures were uncovered during groundworks for pipe laying by Dwr Cymru-Welsh Water. Unfortunately no record in the form of a written account exists, and it appears that no photographs of the timbers were taken, so their exact location is unknown.

## WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

Three site visits were made over a period of three days during the excavation of the geotechnical trial pits. All the pits were excavated by a wheeled mechanical digger (JCB).

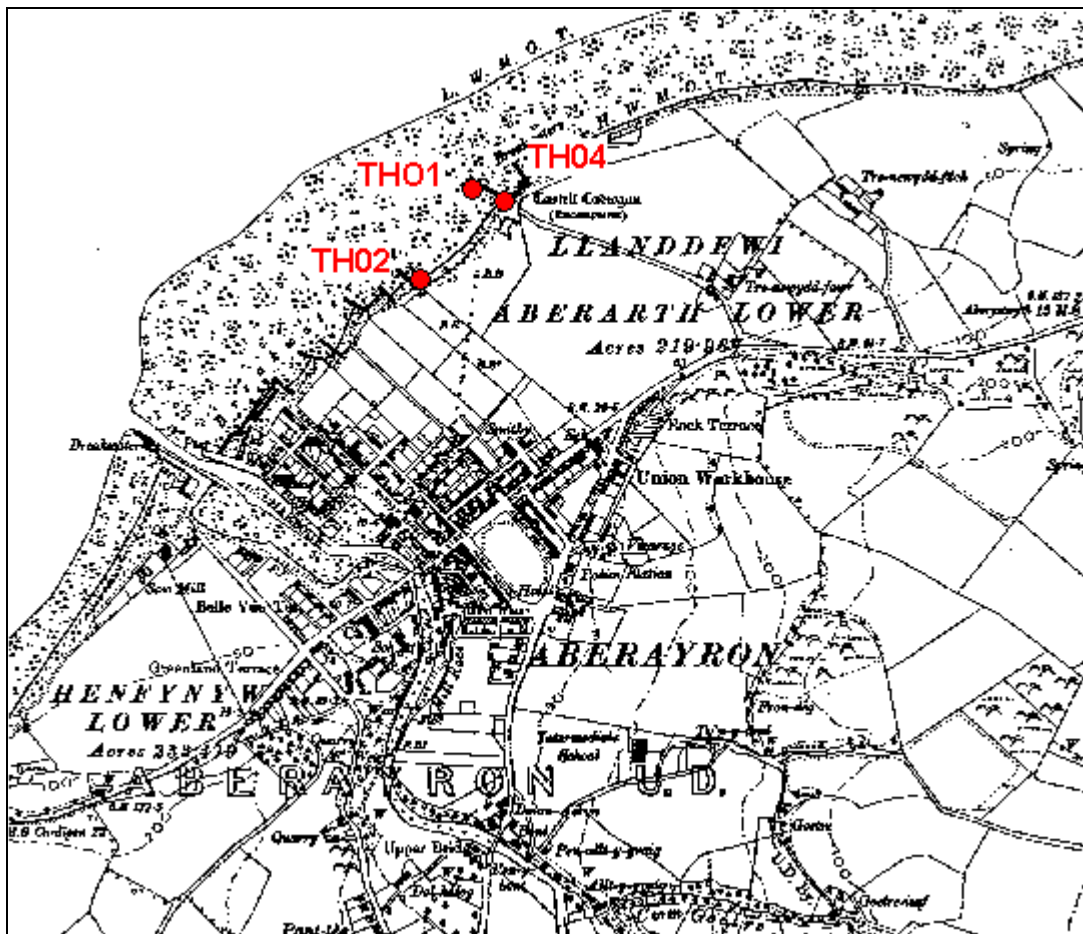


Figure 2 Location of trial pits in relation to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition OS 6" map 1906

### Trial Pit 01 (TH01)

This test pit was excavated on the south side of a breakwater groyne on the shoreline at the western tip of Castell Cadwgan as it appears on the Ordnance Survey 6" map of 1964 (GPS-derived NGR SN 4595663427). The pit was dug to a depth of 1.8m below the beach/ground level and revealed only natural deposits of sea-washed grey stony sand and gravel with discrete iron panning residues. No archaeological features or deposits were observed.



**Photo 1** View of TH01 looking north

### **Trial Pit 02 (TH02)**

This test pit was excavated on the top of the sea defence bank at NGR SN4583563289 (GPS-derived). The pit was dug to a depth of about 2.4m below the surface of the top of the bank and revealed bank make-up material in the form of sea-washed pebbles within a greyish sandy rounded gravel matrix. No archaeological features or deposits were observed.



**Photo 2** View of TH02 looking northeast



#### **Trial Pit 04 (TH04)**

This test pit was excavated on the top of the sea defence bank located at National Grid Reference SN4583563289 (GPS-derived) and on the site of Castell Cadwgan. The pit was dug to a depth of about 3.0m with the upper 0.5m or so of fill being a mixture of a reddish-brown sandy soil containing 60% small and medium-size pebbles and 30% dumped building rubble in the form shattered concrete, mortar, brick and tarmac. The remaining 2.5m or so depth of the pit revealed a loose grey stony sand and gravel matrix containing 70% small and medium size pebbles. No archaeological features or deposits were observed.



**Photo 3** View of Th04 looking east

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

Despite the potential presence of archaeologically significant features or layers in the areas where the trial pits were excavated none were found. This, of course, only represents a very small percentage of the total area of the development and does not preclude the possibility that significant archaeological features or deposits remain elsewhere.

## **REFERENCES**

Aberaeron 1807-2007 WEBSITE, <http://www.aberaeron.info/index.htm>

Lloyd, J.E., 1911 'A History of Wales' (Longmans)

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Ordnance Survey 6" 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Cardiganshire Sheet XVIII NE & SE, 1906

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