

St. CLEARS FLOOD ALLEVIATION SCHEME

St. CLEARS, CARMARTHENSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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By

R Ramsey

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YMDDIRIEDOLAETH ARCHAEOLEGOL DYFED CYF

*Neuadd y Sir, Stryd Caerfyrddin, Llandeilo, Sir Gaerfyrddin SA19 6AF
Ffon: Ymholiadau Cyffredinol 01558 823121
Gwasanaethau Masnachol 01558 825986
Adran Rheoli Treftadaeth 01558 823131
Ffacs: 01558 823133
Ebost: info@dyfedarchaeology.org.uk
Gwefan: www.dyfedarchaeology.org.uk*

DYFED ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST LIMITED

*The Shire Hall, Carmarthen Street, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire SA19 6AF
Tel: General Enquiries 01558 823121
Commercial Services 01558 825986
Heritage Management Section 01558 823131
Fax: 01558 823133
Email: info@dyfedarchaeology.org.uk
Website: www.dyfedarchaeology.org.uk*

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SUMMARY

*A planning application (**W/13669**) was submitted by Environment Agency Wales to undertake a flood alleviation scheme on the Afon Cynin in St. Clears (NGR SN 27892 16461). Ground works undertaken at riverside locations in historic towns similar to St. Clears have the potential to reveal important archaeological remains, and map evidence for the town confirmed this potential. As a result, Cambria Archaeology Heritage Management, as advisors to the Planning Department of Carmarthenshire County Council, recommended that a watching brief condition should be attached to the planning application in order to protect potential archaeological interests.*

Planning permission was granted with a condition that an archaeological watching brief be undertaken during both the ground works and bridge scour protection renewal for the flood alleviation scheme.

To comply with the condition, Environment Agency Wales commissioned Cambria Archaeology Field Services to carry out the watching brief commencing August 2006.

The watching brief was to have covered works in several locations within the town, but not all of these areas were monitored. In those areas that were monitored, no significant archaeological features or deposits were revealed.

1.2 The watching brief methodology and scope of the report

The watching brief consisted of the attendance of an archaeologist on site, when requested by the contractors (both Atkins and Carillion), at various locations in St. Clears during the groundwork excavations undertaken over a period of several months. Unfortunately, work in some areas was carried out without an archaeologist being informed. Therefore, the watching brief was not as extensive as it should have been.

Where possible, all archaeologically significant features and deposits were recorded and photographed, and, where relevant, measured plans were drawn.

This report summarises the results of the watching brief.

Any archaeological sites mentioned in the text that are recorded in the Regional Historic Environment Record (HER) will be identified, for reference and location, by their Primary Record Number (PRN) and National Grid Reference (NGR). The HER is housed with Dyfed Archaeological Trust (Cambria Archaeology) at its offices in Llandeilo.

2. SITE LOCATION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The small town of St. Clears straddles the A40 trunk road some 8.5 miles west of Carmarthen (Figure 1). The town is effectively split into two parts by the A40 bypass, with Upper St. Clears lying to the north of the road and Lower St. Clears lying to the south. All the flood alleviation works were carried out on the banks of the Afon Cynin, a tributary of Afon Taf, where it flows through Upper St. Clears and which over a number of years has been susceptible to periodic flooding.

Lower St. Clears is the location of the oldest, medieval, part of the town where the Normans established a motte and bailey castle, a church, and a priory in the late 11th or early 12th century. The location was chosen to protect and control the confluence of Afon Cynin and Afon Taf, which would have been important strategic and commercial waterways in the middle ages. The motte and bailey castle (PRN 5054 at NGR SN28091542) survives as a substantial earthwork and sections of the original town defences (PRN 8462 at NGR SN28021546) have been revealed during building work. Records show that there was a port on the Afon Taf, just below the castle, which was capable of handling quite large ships; and even as late as the early 19th century a new 150 yard long new quay was constructed, close to the Taf bridge, which was capable of handling vessels of 55 tons and more. The coming of the railways to St. Clears in the mid to late 19th century effectively sounded the death knell for the port. The Priory Church of St. Mary Magdalene (PRN 3880 at NGR SN28151574) has a fine 12th century chancel arch which represents its earliest architectural phase and is notable for its rarity in west Wales. Little or nothing of the medieval Priory now remains above ground, but geophysical survey has indicated below ground features present in the Priory field immediately to the south of the extant church.

Upper St. Clears is largely a 19th century and later settlement that has evolved as a ribbon development centred on the east-west A40 trunk road and its junctions with the A477 Pembroke road, the A4066 Laugharne road and the B4299 Newcastle Emlyn road to the north. The location of this part of the settlement, with its bridge spanning the Afon Cynin, close to such important road links led to it becoming the commercial centre for St. Clears. Nineteenth century map evidence shows the presence of a sawmill, two smithies, two named chapels and the Blue Boar Inn. The Old Series 1" Ordnance Survey map (published 1831) indicates the name of Upper St. Clears as simply Blue Boar, reflecting the

settlement's importance as a coaching place on a major routeway. Sometime between the publication of the Old Series map and the publication of the Ordnance Survey first edition 6 inch map in 1891 the area around the Pentre Road bridge became built up and the Afon Cynin partially diverted as a probable leat or mill race forming an island block on the bridge itself; an architectural configuration that exists to this day. The current bridge appears to be largely 19th century in date with major 20th century reconstruction, and ornate parapet replacement by local craft smithy David Petersen in the 1990s. There is no mill building standing that could be associated with the probable mill race and the map evidence does not definitively indicate that there was ever one there. Both Afon Taf and Afon Cynin are tidal and it is likely that small boats could navigate as far as the bridge at upper St. Clears. The only remaining evidence for a possible wharf, however, lies to the south of the bridge in the form of stone steps leading down to a stone built platform incorporated into the retaining wall of the river bank.

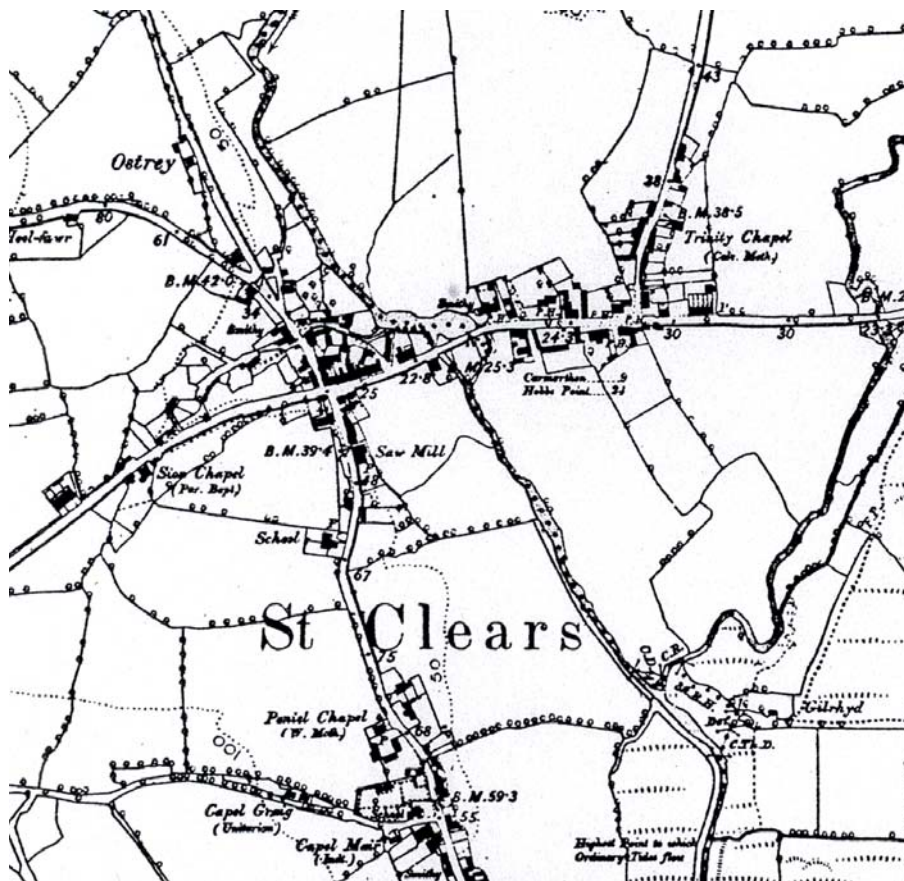


Figure 2. First edition 6" Ordnance Survey map extract 1891, Upper St. Clears

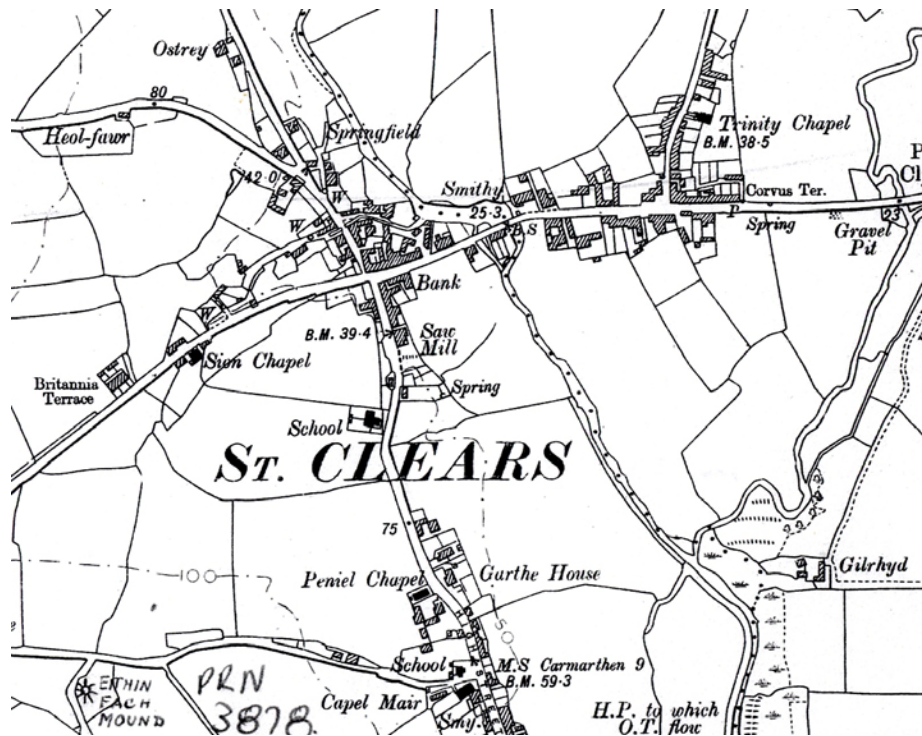


Figure 3. Second edition 6" Ordnance Survey map extract 1907, Upper St. Clears

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

During the course of the flood alleviation works the developers notified Dyfed Archaeological Trust on three occasions to attend the site to undertake watching brief duties:

1. Prior to the commencement of the development proper, a watching brief was carried out during the topsoil strip for a temporary car park to the south of the existing Council car park south of Pentre Road and west of the bridge.
2. During excavation of the foundation trench for part of the flood wall behind Island House.
3. During scour protection renewal on the western arch of Pentre Road Bridge.

3.1 St. Clears temporary car park topsoil strip

A temporary car parking area was required for use during the duration of the flood alleviation works in order to cater for the increase in plant and other traffic associated with the scheme.

An irregular, very approximately rectangular, plot of disused land adjacent to and south of the existing council car park, public toilets and pumping station was cleared and stripped of topsoil to an average depth of 150mm. The plot measured about 64.5m east to west maximum, by 23.5m wide at its western side and 47.5m wide at its eastern side.

The removed topsoil was a mid brown silty sandy loam containing very occasional coarse components comprising small and medium size angular stone fragments. A recently excavated service trench and two modern double manhole structures were revealed running across the site from a new building development beyond the western side of the site down towards the Afon Cynin at the eastern side of the site. These were the only features encountered during the topsoil strip; nothing of archaeological significance was uncovered or disturbed. No further excavation took place on the plot and a geo-textile covering was laid over the site, which was then covered with limestone chippings prior to being covered with tarmac.

3.2 The flood defence wall foundation trench behind Island House

A 9m long by 3m wide foundation trench for a flood wall was excavated to the north of Island House to a depth of 1.4m. Turf and topsoil to a depth of approximately 0.25m was shown to overlie a natural deposit of homogeneous yellowish brown silty clay subsoil, containing the occasional small and medium sized sub rounded stone fragment. This natural subsoil deposit continued below the bottom of the trench and no archaeological features or deposits were revealed in the excavation.

3.3 Pentre Road Bridge scour defence renewal

During removal of the approximately thirty-year-old concrete scour protection from the westerly arch of the Pentre Road Bridge a number of upright timbers were revealed at the foot of and along each side of the arch. The timbers on the west side, approximately square-cut pegs, ran along the length of the arch and appeared to respect the concrete shuttering lines for the old scour protection (Plates 3 and 4). It seems that these were probably part of the shuttering utilised during the construction of the previous scour protection. The timbers revealed on the eastern side of the arch were also square-cut pegs and they too ran along the length of the arch and appeared to respect the concrete shuttering lines for the old scour protection. Again, it is likely that they were also part of the shuttering utilised during the construction of the earlier scour protection.

All the revealed timbers were left *in situ* and incorporated into the new bridge arch scour protection.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Assessment of the watching brief methodology

An important aspect of the methodology for the watching brief was that the Environment Agency, or their agents/contractors, would inform Cambria Archaeology Field Services when work in new areas was to commence so that monitoring visits could be timetabled to maximise the opportunity to recover any archaeological information and avoid delays. In the event, this methodology was not always followed and work in some areas was carried out with no archaeological monitoring, which may have led to significant archaeological information being lost.

Even though in this case it is not thought likely that significant information has been lost, a failing in procedure has been highlighted that could have had significant archaeological implications. For fairly long-term projects of this type it is important that the visiting archaeologists are kept informed of the working timetable and any changes to that timetable as early as possible to ensure that site visits are coordinated to provide the maximum time for recovery of archaeological information and to minimise potential delays to the project.

4.2 The watching brief results

In the three areas where the watching brief took place no significant archaeological features or deposits were revealed.

PHOTOGRAPHS



Plate 1: During topsoil strip for temporary car park



Plate 2: Excavation of flood wall footing, Island House



Plate 3: Exposed upright timber pegs on west side of bridge arch, looking west



Plate 4: Close-up of timber pegs on west side of bridge arch, looking west

SOURCES CONSULTED

Database

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

Cartographic

Ordnance Survey, 1:10560 Quarter Sheet SN42SW 1964

Ordnance Survey, 1:10560 1st Edition Carmarthenshire Sheet XXXVIII S.W 1891

Ordnance Survey, 1:10560 2nd Edition Carmarthenshire Sheet XXXVIII S.W 1907

Ordnance Survey, 1:10560 1st Edition Carmarthenshire Sheet XLV N.W 1891

Ordnance Survey, 1:10560 2nd Edition Carmarthenshire Sheet XLV N.W 1907

Ordnance Survey Old Series 1 inch to 1 Mile Sheet 41 1831

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This report has been prepared by R Ramsey

Position: Archaeologist

Signature Date

This report has been checked and approved by N Page

on behalf of Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Position: Head of Field Services

Signature Date

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