

DŴR CYMRU, TWYNLLANAN TRUNK MAIN REFURBISHMENT, LLANWRDA, CARMARTHENSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING AND WATCHING BRIEF



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Gan / By

Simon Ratty

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**DŴR CYMRU, TWYNLLANAN TRUNK MAIN REFURBISHMENT, LLANWRDA,
CARMARTHENSIRE:
ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING AND WATCHING BRIEF**

Summary

This report has been produced by Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Operations for Dŵr Cymru following the discovery of a possible Roman road during an ongoing archaeological watching brief on the Twynllanan Trunk Main refurbishment programme.

The feature was identified during topsoil stripping at the northern end of the water main pipeline easement between the A40 trunk road and railway line. This area was targeted for the archaeological watching brief because the easement crosses the projected line of a known Roman road. The identified feature consisted of a northeast-southwest aligned, linear spread of river gravels c. 6m wide. A trial trench was machine excavated through the feature to determine whether it represented part of the Roman road.

The results of this trial excavation were negative with only natural deposits observed.

An additional aspect to the project was the continuation of an archaeological watching brief on excavations being undertaken on the A40 during water main refurbishment works.

The archaeological watching brief identified archaeological deposits in the form of a possible road surface buried beneath the A40 trunk road, although it is inconclusive as to whether this represented the Roman road, as no dating evidence was recovered to enable a date to be ascribed to the deposit.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Commission

Water main refurbishment works at Twynllanan, Llanwrda, Carmarthenshire required an archaeological watching brief be undertaken due to the presence of the projected line of a Roman road. Topsoil stripping of the northern end of the easement between the A40 trunk road and the railway line revealed a linear northeast-southwest orientated spread of river gravels c.6m wide which initially appeared to be a possible Roman road. Dŵr Cymru commissioned Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services to undertake a programme of archaeological recording of the feature. In addition to this programme of archaeological recording a watching brief, as part of an ongoing watching brief, was undertaken during excavations on the A40 during water main refurbishment works.

1.2 Scope of the Project

The project was designed to achieve two objectives. Firstly to excavate a trial trench and record a possible Roman road identified during a previous archaeological watching brief and secondly to undertake an archaeological watching brief during excavations on the A40 as part of water main renewal works.

1.3 Report Outline

This report describes the location of the site along with its archaeological background (Section 2) before summarising the results of the trial excavation (Section 3) along with the watching brief results and the conclusions based on those results (Section 4).

1.4 Abbreviations

Sites recorded on the Regional Historic Environment Record (HER¹) are identified by their Primary Record Number (PRN) and located by their National Grid Reference (NGR).

1.5 Illustrations

Photographic images (Plates) are to be found at back of the report. Printed map extracts are not necessarily reproduced to their original scale and are illustrative only.

¹ Held and managed by Dyfed Archaeological Trust, The Shire Hall, Llandeilo.

2. THE SITE

2.1 Location

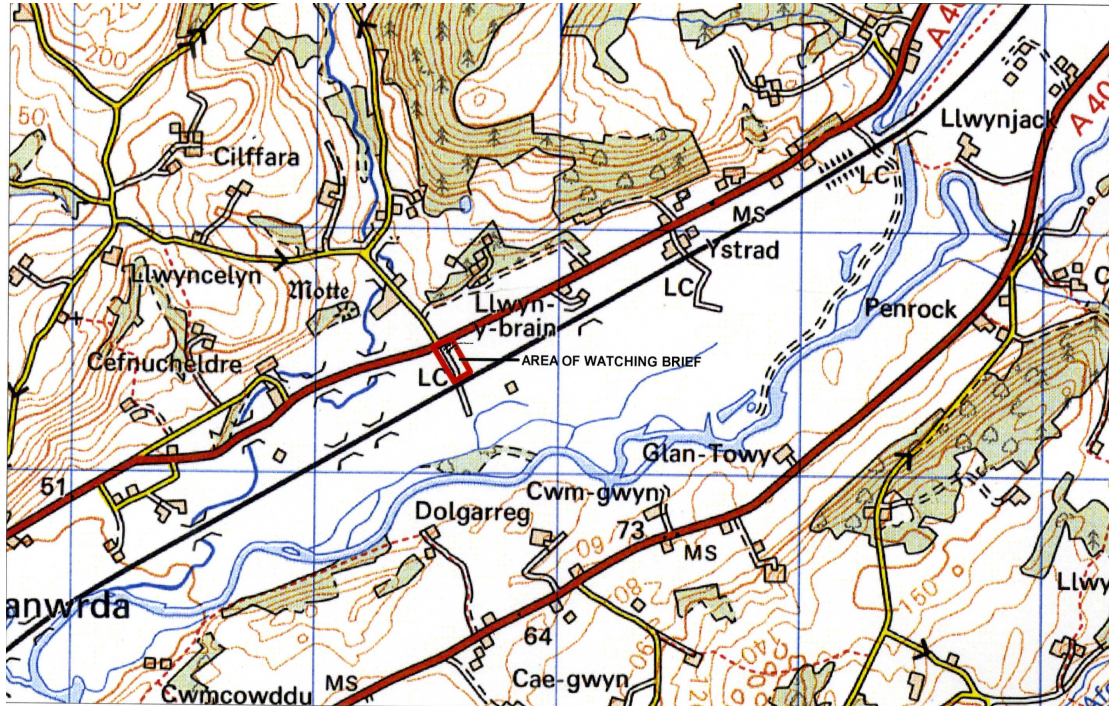


Figure 1. Location map, based on the Ordnance Survey.

Reproduced from the 2002 Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 scale Landranger Map with the permission of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright Cambria Archaeology, The Shire Hall, Carmarthen Street, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire SA19 6AF. Licence No AL51842A

The site is located at NGR SN 7356032480 on the floodplain of the River Towy between the A40 trunk road and Heart of Wales railway line. Topographically the area is broadly flat and at a height of c.50m above Ordnance Datum (OD). The underlying solid geology of the area is Ordovician shales of the Ashgill series with overlying alluvial drift deposits (British Geological Survey, 1994).

2.2 Archaeological Background

The Roman conquest of Britain began in 43AD but it was not until the AD 60s that military control had been established in northeast, central and southeast Wales. However, there is little archaeological evidence for a Roman presence in west Wales during this time. The generally accepted view being that the conquest was achieved during the Flavian campaigns of AD74-75 (Schlee, 2005, 3).

The conquest brought with it the development of a sophisticated communications system in the form of a network of all weather roads which provided the region with its first integrated communications network (Arnold & Davies, 2002, 35). Initially the roads would have been surveyed and constructed by the Roman army for the movement of troops and supplies between a network of forts which had been established in the region as part of the conquest. In the case of the possible Roman road encountered during the archaeological watching brief these would have been the forts at Llandovery, known to the Romans as *Alabum*, and the fort at Llandeilo and ultimately on to the fort and later *civitas* or tribal capital of *Moridunum*, now modern Carmarthen, the route being ascribed the number RR623 (Schlee, 2005).

Whilst the road network was designed primarily as a military tool of conquest it was instrumental in opening up the region and would also have been utilised for the transportation of materials and consumer goods (*ibid*). The reduction and withdrawal of many of the military garrisons in Wales by AD120, probably in many cases to the northern frontier and the construction of Hadrian's Wall, possibly resulted in the maintenance of the road network being transferred from the military to civilian administration. In the case of the road between Llandovery and Llandeilo this is likely to have been transferred to the *civitas* of *Moridunum* (James, 1991, 53).

The final withdrawal of the Roman army in the early in the 5th century, which led to the breakdown of centralised government, possibly led to a decline in the importance of long distance travel, communication and trade. As a result the integrity and coherence of the road network would have declined with some sections continuing in use into later periods whilst others fell out of use and were absorbed by subsequent landscape changes and land use (Schlee, 2005, 3).

Aerial photographic survey has identified much of the route of RR623 (James & James, 1984, 23-28). In the vicinity of the watching brief and recording site three separate stretches of Roman road have been identified from aerial photography.

PRN	NGR	SITE NAME
33976	NGR SN72383194	Glyn Hyfryd
33977	NGR SN73353245	Glan Mynys
33978	NGR SN75103337	Ystrad Cottage

Table 1: Known sections of Roman road in vicinity of site.

The precise route of the Roman road at the site of the water main renewal excavations is unclear at present. However, it is likely to be on the course of the modern A40 or relatively close to it.

3. SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING RESULTS

3.1 Methodology

An archaeological watching brief undertaken in May 2008 during topsoil stripping of the northern end of the easement between the A40 trunk road and Heart of Wales railway line identified a possible Roman road in the form of a linear spread of gravel aligned northeast - southwest (Plates 1 and 2). Following discussions between Dŵr Cymru contractors and Dyfed Archaeological Trust Heritage management a trial excavation of the feature was undertaken in June 2008 to determine whether it was the Roman road.

A c.9m long by 1m wide trench, aligned northwest-southeast, was excavated to a depth of 1.05m through the linear gravel spread.

3.2 Results

Following excavation it became apparent that the feature comprised a uniform deposit (1007) of friable mid orange sandy clay containing 80% small to medium subrounded stone. No evidence of a stratified sequence of deposits that could be associated with the construction of a road were noted, which suggests that this was a natural deposit and therefore of no archaeological significance (Plates 3, 4 and 5).

The trial trench excavation produced negative results, the possible Roman road being a natural feature.

4. SUMMARY OF WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

4.1 Methodology

The watching brief undertaken during the course of the water main refurbishment works was undertaken in two stages, the northwest half of the road being undertaken prior to the southeast portion.

4.2 Results

The northwest trench was excavated to a depth of 1.38m by 0.5m wide. A substantial depth of 0.4m of tarmac (1000) was noted. This overlay a compact layer of compact small angular grey stone aggregate (1002). At the northwest end of the trench, where it continued into a lane leading to the property known as Glan Mynys, it was found that 1000 overlay a dark reddish brown clay silt of moderate compaction containing 40% medium to large angular stone (1001). Layer 1001 overlay 1002.

Beneath 1001 a 0.5m deep layer of compact mid yellowish brown clay silt containing 60% small subrounded stone was noted (1003). This layer was visible in section for 7.6m and was the fill of a cut (1004) with a depth of 0.48m into a buried soil horizon of firm mid reddish brown clay containing c 2% charcoal flecks (1005). In profile 1004 was U shaped with moderately sloping sides. Layer 1005 overlaid a natural horizon of loosely compacted mid greyish brown sandy clay containing 60% small subrounded stone (1006).

The southeast trench, cut to a depth of 1.4m, revealed broadly the same stratigraphic sequence as that found in the northwest trench. At the southeast end of the trench a layer (1007) of moderately compacted clay silt containing 10% small subangular stone was revealed. This layer appears to have been cut by 1004.

4.3 Discussion

The narrow nature of the trenches excavated resulted in a limited opportunity to observe the stratigraphic sequence of the construction of the A40 making it difficult to identify any vestiges of Roman road which may have survived. Cut feature 1004, with its associated fill 1003, appeared to be an earlier possible road surface. However, it was not possible to conclusively prove it was of Roman date due to lack of dating evidence. Additionally, comparisons made between the feature noted during the course of the watching brief and previous archaeological works undertaken on known Roman roads in West Wales (James *et al*, 2002; Schlee, 2004) reveal substantial differences in construction. Both the road excavated at Whitland, Carmarthenshire (James *et al*, 2002) and that recorded during an archaeological watching brief at Llwnfortune Farm, Carmarthenshire (Schlee, 2004) had substantial stone foundations which were absent in the feature observed during the water main renewal excavations. This may suggest that the feature may not be the Roman road, although it is not possible to conclusively prove this from the evidence revealed.

An alternative interpretation could be that the feature represents surviving evidence for the turnpike road between Llandeilo and Llandovery, which was constructed during the 18th century, its route being followed by the modern A40. It is equally possible that the feature may in fact be the sub-base of the modern A40 trunk road, although again this is uncertain.

4.4 Conclusions

The archaeological evidence observed during the course of the water main renewal excavations could not conclusively prove the presence of any physical evidence for the route of the Roman road between Llandeilo and Llandovery at this location. However, the lack of physical evidence does not mean that the road did not once follow this route. It is feasible to suggest that the construction of the 18th century turnpike road and the subsequent construction and development of the A40 trunk road may have destroyed any physical evidence of the Roman road at this location.

SOURCES

Map

Ordnance Survey 1891 1:2500 Carmarthenshire Sheet XXVI NE.

Ordnance Survey 1907 1:2500 Carmarthenshire Sheet XXVI NE.

Ordnance Survey 1995 1:50000 Landranger.

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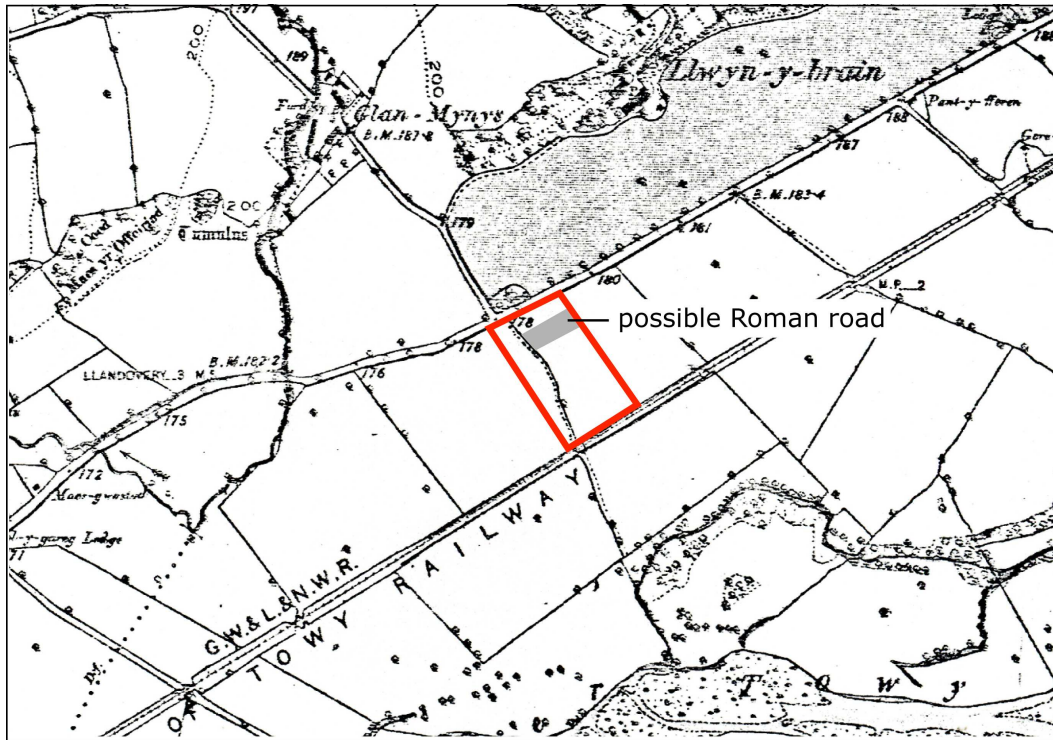


Figure 2: Location of site superimposed on 1st edition 1:2500 OS map.

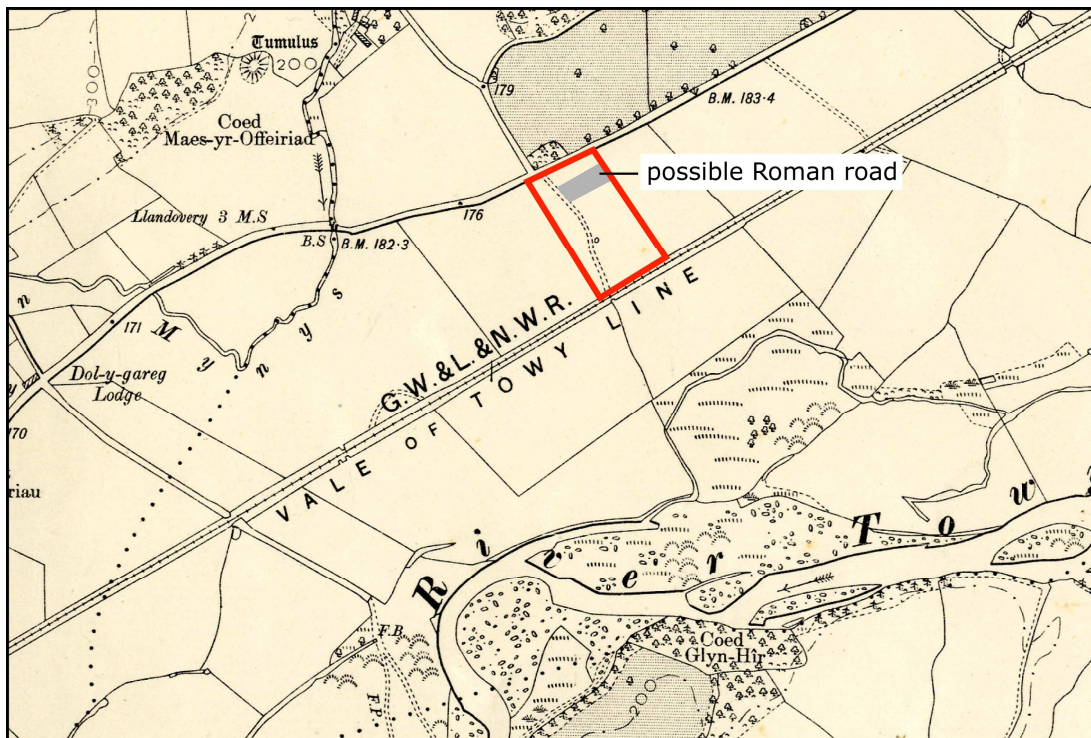


Figure 3: Location of site superimposed on 2nd edition 1:2500 OS map.

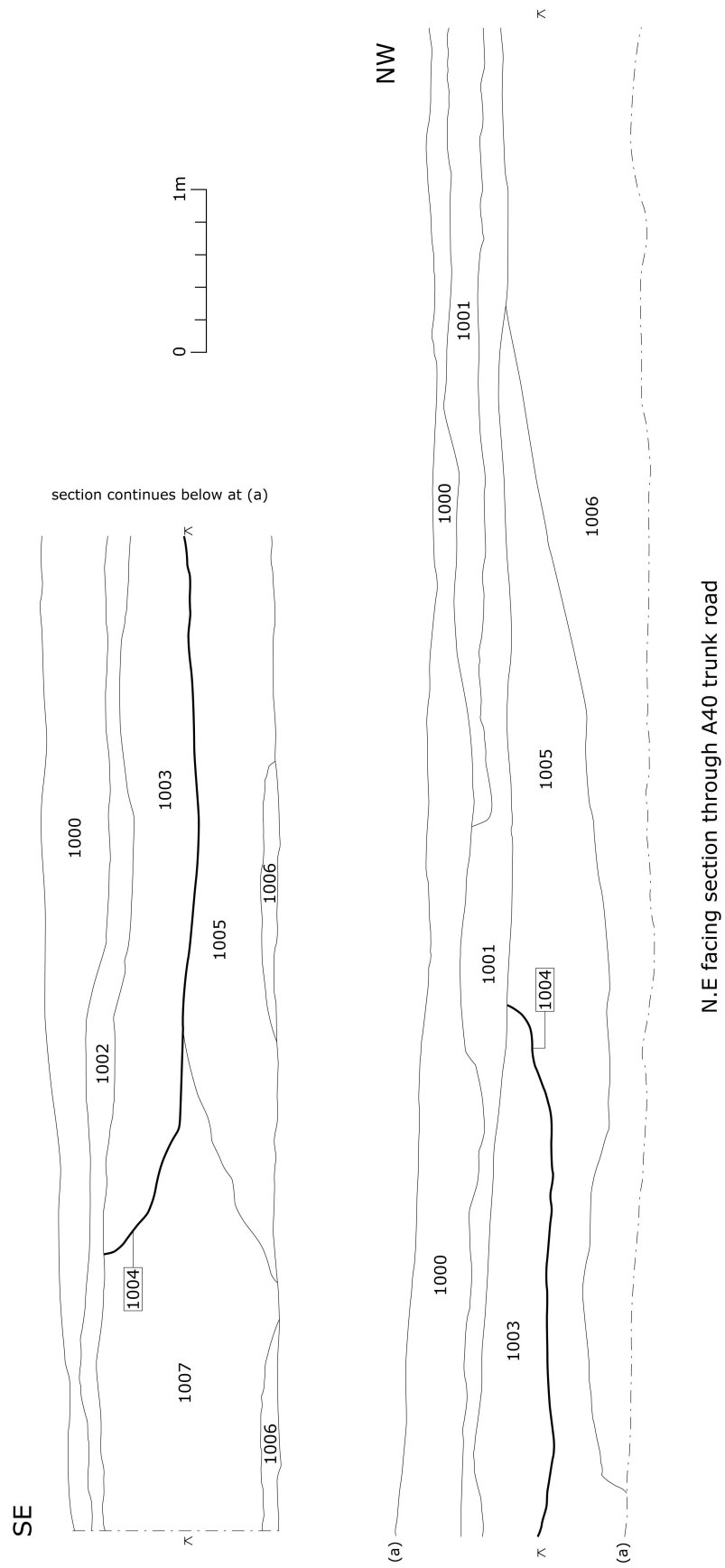


Figure 4: Northeast facing section through A40 trunk road



Plate 1: Northwest facing pre excavation shot of possible Roman road.



Plate 2: Southeast facing pre excavation shot of possible Roman road.



Plate 3: Southeast facing post excavation shot of natural feature originally thought to be Roman road.



Plate 4: Northeast facing section of natural feature originally thought to be Roman road.



Plate 5: Detail of northeast facing section through natural feature.



Plate 6: Northeast facing section through A40 possible Roman road visible in lower trench to left of scale.



Plate 7: Northeast facing section through A40, possible Roman road visible to lower left.



Plate 8: Southeast facing section through A40, possible Roman road visible to left of scale.



Plate 9: Northeast facing section through A40 possible Roman road visible to right of scale.



Plate 10: Northeast facing section through A40.



Plate 11: North east facing section through A40, possible Roman road in upper right of image.