

A WATCHING BRIEF AT NORTH BEACH ABERAERON CEREDIGION

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A WATCHING BRIEF AT NORTH BEACH ABERAERON CEREDIGION

Gan / By

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SUMMARY

During groundworks undertaken as part of a coastal flood defence scheme at North Beach Aberaeron, Ceredigion (NGR SN45853 63323), an archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services

The excavations were considered to have the potential to expose, damage or destroy archaeological remains associated with a medieval ringwork (PRN1867) (a form of earthwork castle) located on the coast at SN45986340.

A number of visits to the site were undertaken during March and April 2009 to observe groundworks in the area of Castell Cadwgan, although no remains of the earthworks were identified.

From earlier cartographic evidence, it can be seen that the site had previously been significantly destroyed by coastal erosion. The fragmentary surviving eastern remains of the castle were completely destroyed or sealed during the installation of a sewer main in more recent years. To the east of the former castle site, a hollow way is present leading away from the coast to the south-east, which may suggest an earlier trackway that may have been contemporary with the castle, and has remained in use today.

A single cut feature was noted during the excavations, which could conceivably indicate an outer defensive ditch for Castell Cadwgan, although this remains speculation. No other features or deposits of archaeological significance were observed during the watching brief.

INTRODUCTION

Project Background

In response to a request from Jenny Higgins of CCW, and to satisfy a Grampian Condition placed on the North Beach Aberaeron Coastal Defence Scheme by the archaeological advisor to the Local Planning Authority¹, Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services, undertook an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with.

Although various features of possible archaeological significance are recorded along the coast in the location of the project, the main feature of concern was the site of Castell Cadwgan (PRN1867), a medieval ringwork (a form of earthwork castle) located on the coast at SN 4598 6340. Nothing is known of the history of this castle.

Although the site is recorded as having been substantially eroded, and there has been previous ground disturbance in the area (from the installation of a sewer main), it was considered possible that associated features beyond the mapped extent of the castle might be revealed. It was also considered possible that other previously unrecorded features may be discovered during the project.

Methodology

Intermittent visits were made at the request of the site contractors to observe deep excavations in the vicinity of the castle site to record any archaeologically significant discoveries that might be revealed.

Digital photographs were taken to record the deposits exposed during the watching brief, but the excavated trenches were too deep and unstable for close examination of the deposits to be possible.

Site visits were undertaken on 09/02/09, 09/03/09, 20/03/09 and 22/04/09.

¹ Dyfed Archaeological Trust Heritage Management

RESULTS

Two site visits were made to observe trenching associated with the installation of a sheet pile flood defence surrounding the adjacent caravan park along the side of the trackway leading to the beach in the vicinity of the castle site (photo 1 and 4).

A visit was also undertaken during the removal of an existing groyne (photo 2), close to the castle.

A visit was undertaken during the excavation of trenches for the flood defences adjacent to the former castle site (photos 5, 6 and 7).

The trenches associated with the sheet piling involved the excavation of a c.0.6m wide trench using a toothless ditching bucket to a varying depth. The trenches were hampered by the presence of large boulders within the underlying soils, which needed to be removed to allow the sheet piling to be inserted. These deposits were identified as being of geological rather than archaeological origin.

A possible cut was noticed in the side of the trench along the trackway (photo 1) in one area adjacent to the sea front and in close proximity to Castell Cadwgan. While this could have been part of an outer defensive ditch associated with the castle site, this possibility cannot be confirmed. No finds or other characteristics could be discerned to add more credence to this theory, and it is perhaps more likely to be a later feature.

The trackway leading from the beach and the former area of Castell Cadwgan is partially sunken, suggesting a Holloway (track worn deep through the passage of people over many years) and may indicate the location of an earlier trackway leading to the castle.

No features or deposits of proven archaeological significance were observed within the excavations of the sheet piling trenches.

A possible buried ground surface was exposed at the base of the excavation to remove the existing groyne (photo 3). No evidence of this deposit was apparent further inland, but the relative levels are not known. The depth of the deposit (at least 2.5m below the current height of the coast path), may suggest it pre-dates the construction of Castell Cadwgan. No artefacts were recovered and no environmental samples were taken during the removal of the groyne.

The excavation of the trenches for the flood defences involved a significant depth of material being removed from the beach by large tracked excavators with toothed buckets. This material comprised beach pebbles and very coarse sand layers (photo 7), although no detailed record of the deposits was possible, due to the depth of the trench and instability of the trench edges. The depth of the deposits would suggest that the majority would pre-date the construction of Castell Cadwgan.

The trench bases were covered with a geo-textile membrane and then large boulders were placed upon this, banked up towards the end of the beach to create the sea defence. No archaeologically significant deposits could be identified within these excavations.

CONCLUSION

The requirement for an archaeological watching brief was placed upon the proposed sea defences at North Beach Aberaeron due to the potential for archaeological remains associated with the site of Castell Cadwgan. The earthwork remains of the castle are shown on early Ordnance Survey maps of the area (figs. 3 and 4). The earthworks are no longer present, having been substantially eroded by tidal action, and the subsequent installation of a large sewer main that would lie across the very south-eastern edge of the earthworks. The former location of the earthwork can be fairly accurately located using the locations of the remains of timber groynes, as shown on the 1905 Ordnance Survey map (fig. 4). The sewer main is located underneath a large bank that has been built up against the existing sea defences that were to be replaced. It is considered most unlikely that any further remains of the earthworks of Castell Cadwgan survive in the area.

Although a possible feature was seen in the area of proposed sheet piling flood defences to the southeast of the castle site, it was not possible to determine the extent, date or character of the feature. A trackway is present leading down to the beach from the southeast which has the appearance of a holloway in places (photo 4), which suggests it is of some antiquity, and may potentially be of medieval date. The presence of further remains of medieval date within the area to the southeast of the line of the sewer main cannot be discounted, although no such remains could be confirmed during the watching brief.

The area of the flood defences within the beach area, which will comprise the massive trenches filled with large boulders, is considered to have low archaeological potential. Following completion of the sea defences the area will have no archaeological potential.

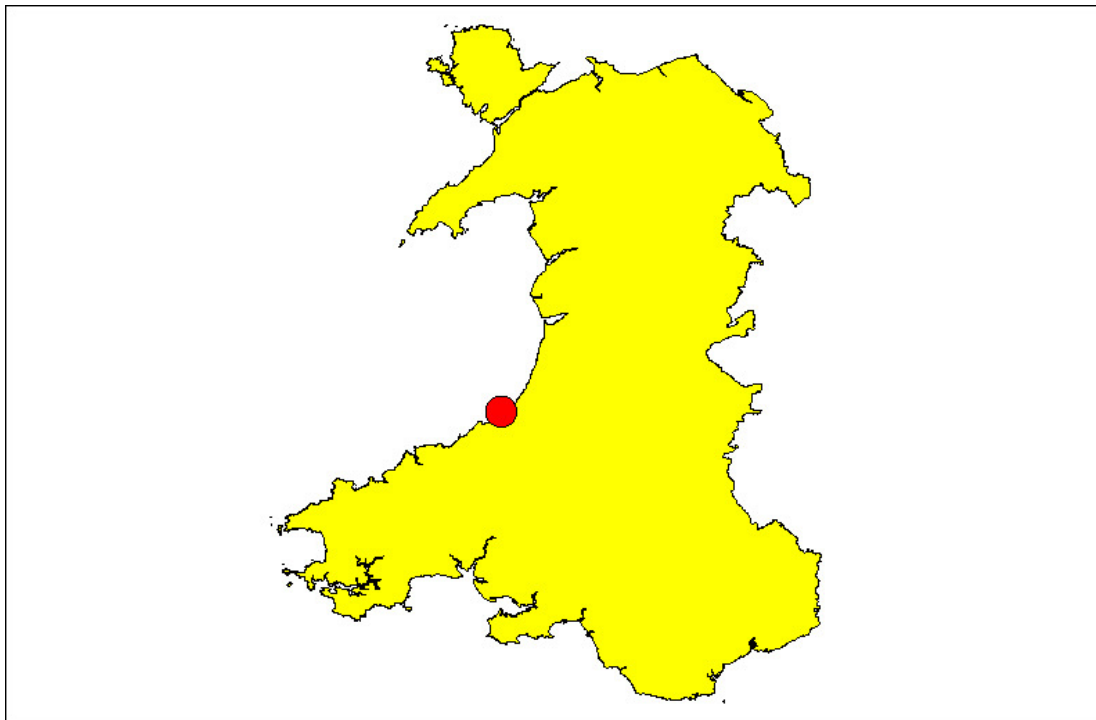


Figure 1: Location map

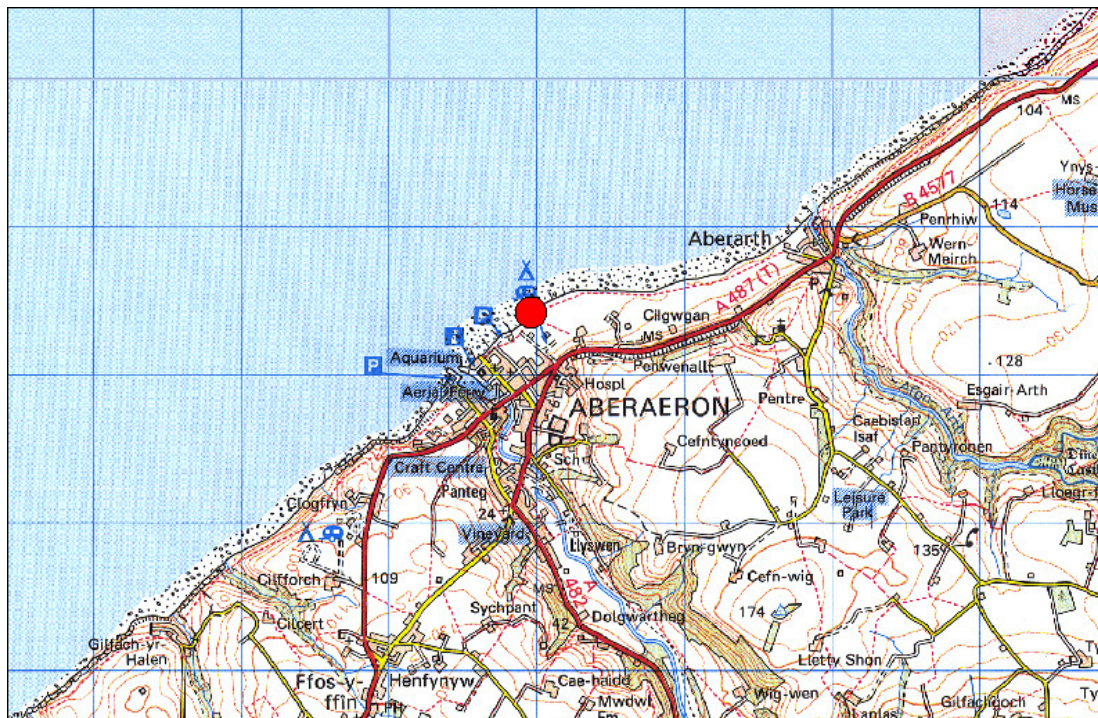


Figure 2: Site Location Map based on Ordnance Survey.

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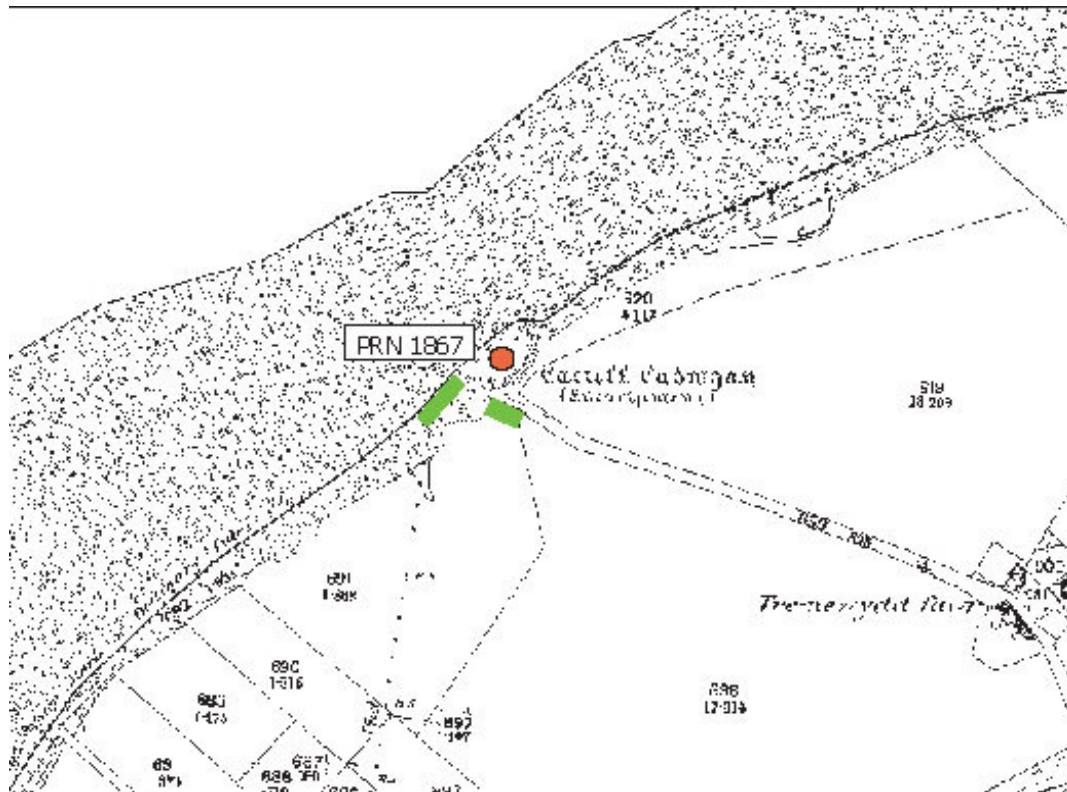


Figure 3: First edition Ordnance Survey map of 1890 showing location of Castell Cadwgan (PRN 1867) and the watching brief locations (in green)

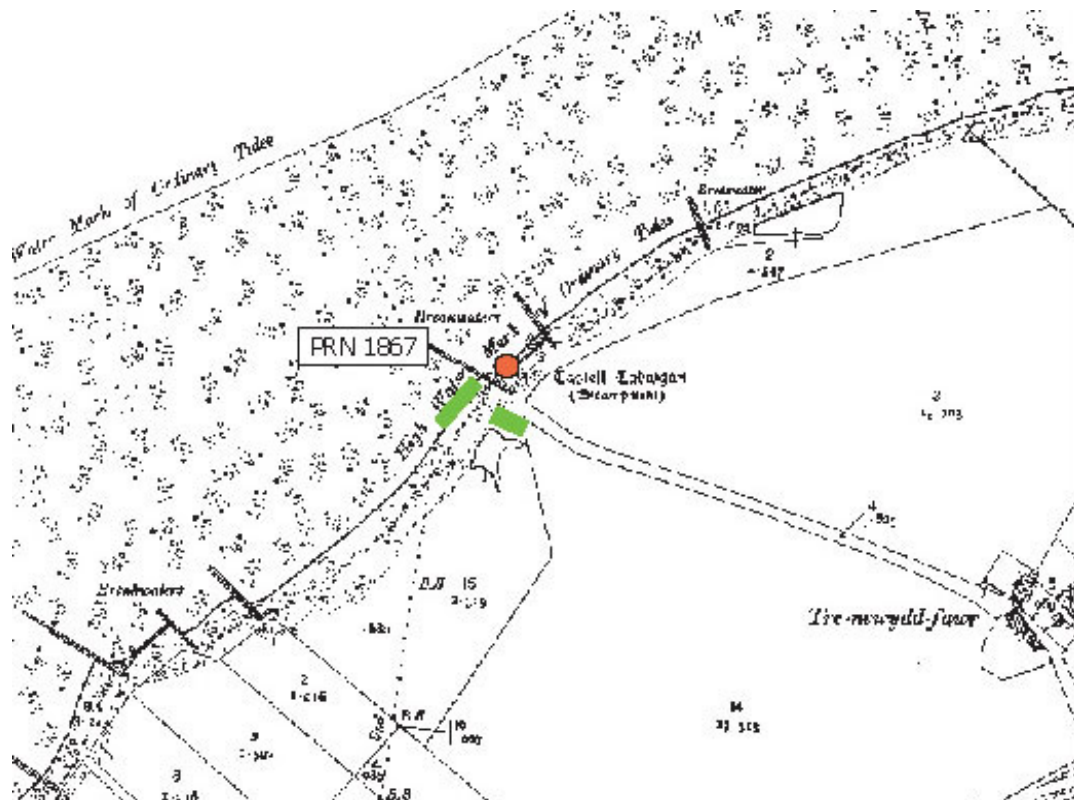


Figure 4: First edition Ordnance Survey map of 1905 showing location of Castell Cadwgan (PRN 1867) and the watching brief locations (in green)



Photo 1: Excavation along edge of trackway showing possible ditch (indicated by change in soil colour)



Photo 2: Exposure of existing groyne prior to removal



Photo 3: Possible paleo-soil exposed during removal of groyne posts



Photo 4: Possible holloway leading from former site of Castell Cadwgan



Photo 5: Excavation of trench close to Castell Cadwgan to lay new sea defences



Photo 6: Strata of beach deposits in southern side of excavated trench



Photo 7: Laying boulders to form sea defences within trench



Photo 8: Remains of timber groynes shown on the 1905 Ordnance Survey map located to the north-east of the former site of Castell Cadwgan

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Yn unol â'n nôd i roddi gwasanaeth o ansawdd uchel, croesawn unrhyw sylwadau
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