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**Archaeological Watching Brief
at
proposed residential dwelling of
the rear plot at Ystrad Fflur
Newport Pembrokeshire
NGR SN057395**

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Summary and Introduction

Due to the proximity of the property Ystrad Fflur at the front of the plot on Long Street to a concentration of medieval property boundaries and burgage plots on the opposite side of the road, archaeological reconnaissance was required prior to the building of the new dwelling to be situated at the rear of the plot.

Although the likelihood of archaeological material at the rear of the plot appears to be remote due to its distance from the road frontage of Long Street, investigations took the form of monitoring the stripping of the top soil in the area to be built on to a 1.20m foundation depth. In addition, photographic observation of the site, and section cleaning on two sides of the area opened by the JCB was worked over a period of one week. A thorough appraisal was made ensuring that no area was left unobserved. Soil samples were taken from the topsoil of the site, as well as the underlying clay level, which covers the entire plot. The heavy and sticky consistency of this clay throughout the area made a horizontal surface plan difficult to clean back due to the retention of the water level. However it was clear that there was no discolouration, structural remains or finds throughout the drop in levels.

The main objective of the watching brief was to record any archaeological evidence during the stripping of the topsoil and subsoil to a depth considered adequate of revealing local medieval levels. It is therefore potentially comparable to that of the medieval levels found at Newport Primary School, ca. 120m to the east-south-east of our site. The archaeology there was recorded underlying a minimum of 60cm of cultivated soil and at least another 20cm into the subsoil (after K. Murphy, DAT 1991). These levels were reached and observed at the rear of the Ystrad Fflur plot and no archaeology was found on the site.

The proposed dwelling is approximately 120m to the west of the Primary School, and as yet, no evidence has been found on other properties this far back from the road, on this western side of Long Street, or adjacent to the stream Afon Felin possibly due to the water course and wet areas (see plan).

During the ongoing excavation of the foundations, the heavy clay level continued, confirming that no archaeology existed at deeper levels.

1. The Site of the proposed dwelling

1.1 Ystrad Fflur

Ystrad Fflur is situated approximately 120m from the River Nevern estuary at the northern end of Long Street in Newport Pems. Prior to this house being built, no archaeological evidence had been found at the lower end (below the Primary School) of the western side of Long Street, although further up towards West Street and Market Street the medieval burgage plots fronted Long Street. However, the area to the east of Long Street is known to have been a built up area during the medieval period (after K. Murphy, DAT1991), and this was confirmed even further when a concentration of medieval structures were found during excavation of the new Primary School in 1991 (after K. Murphy). Thanks to the Town rental of 1434 (N. Bignall, Thesis 1991), it is known that the area between the Castle and the Church and down towards the estuary was a very built up area during this period.

Ystrad Fflur was built in 1985. Sherds of pottery were discovered during excavation for the foundation walls of the new bungalow, ca. 20m in from Long Street, and sent to Carmarthen Museum. No report or watching brief was produced based on these finds, and contact with the Museum produced no results as to their whereabouts. (Carmarthen Museum suggested that the finds could have been sent to Scolton Manor near Haverfordwest, and contact will be made regarding them). *Prior* to any building work adjacent to Ystrad Fflur, a thorough search of the front of the property failed to locate any physical evidence that the original owner Mrs Steadman discovered in 1985, and nothing is visible today. Although the evidence was found and confirmed by Mrs Steadman, there is some confusion as to its whereabouts, and no plans were passed to the present owner showing it's position. By the time the present owner bought the property in 1996 no surface evidence was visible, although it is possible that Mrs Steadman's landscaping covered it from view.

1.2 The proposed new dwelling

The new dwelling will be situated to the rear of the plot Ystrad Fflur backing on to the Old Mill stream, Afon Felin. This site is on a south-to-north slope down towards the Nevern Estuary. It is a very wet area and when it rains the ground saturates to a point of creating water pools on the north edge of the garden up to 10cm in depth.

1.3 The Field Evaluation

Archaeological works on the site included:

- Monitoring the stripping of the topsoil.
- Subsequent observation and recording of any differences with subsoil levels.
- The section cleaning of the small 1m opened area on the northwest and southeast of the site, with soil samples being taken from the same areas.
- Photographic reconnaissance of the work over one week.

There are three main reasons for archaeological observation on this plot:

- During the building of the Primary School on Long Street in 1991, a substantial amount of medieval activity was uncovered. This area lies ca. 120m to the east-southeast of Ystrad Fflur and on the opposite side of the road.
- During the building of Ystrad Fflur in 1985, some stonework was uncovered at the front of the property, although its location to date is not clear. Also some pottery sherds were found during the laying of the foundations only 20-30m in from the road.
- The close proximity of the Norman settlement on the edge of the Nevern Estuary directly north of the medieval finds at the Primary School (after N. Bignall 1991, *Newport (Trefdraeth) in West Wales; a study of a Norman New Town*. Thesis UCW Lampeter).

Note: A crucial factor to be noted is the substantial garden landscaping and distribution of soil to the *rear* of the plot during the building of Ystrad Fflur in 1985 up to a depth of 50cm; in addition some barbed wire was discovered ca. 30cm below the garden level.

2. Summary of Watching Brief Results

2.1 Location

The site occupies the western end of the plot NGR SN057395, on a slight north facing slope towards Nevern Estuary at a height of ca. 12m above Ordnance Datum.

A new dwelling is being constructed on the rear of the plot known as Ystrad Fflur, Long Street, Newport Pembrokeshire. A condition was attached to the consent that an archaeological watching brief was to be undertaken on the ground of the proposed dwelling. Archaeology on the site was hoped for based on the discovery of pottery during the building of Ystrad Fflur in 1985, and the concentration of medieval settlement evidence on the east side of Long Street. The old map of medieval strip burgages of the town (see plan), shows that much of the evidence found in support of the planning of medieval Newport, was along the main streets and roads. It appears therefore that any archaeology on this plot would be in evidence on the Long Street frontage rather than at the mill stream/ Afon Felin end of the plot, where the proposed dwelling is to be built.

2.2 Soil and Geology

At Ystrad Fflur in Newport Pembrokeshire the underlying yellow boulder clay is overlain with a covering of loam soil ca. 60cm deep. This underlying clay retains water extremely well and the whole area becomes saturated even after a minimum of rainfall due to its oily and sticky consistency.

2.3 Methodology

The stripping of the topsoil was worked using a JCB with a standard flat-bladed back-acting scoop measuring 2m wide by ca. 50cm deep. The depth of the stripping was 50cm on the south side of the slope and 1m on the north side of the site. These depths varied according to the drop in ground level. Once the horizontal plan was finished the area was visually examined and notes were taken on soil type and any evidence. Two test sections were cleaned as accurately as possible taking into account the sticky texture of the clay and the saturated ground. One 24 print film of photographs were taken using colour print and monochrome 35mm film (see Appendix I).

2.4 Objectives

To identify and record any archaeological features and deposits of interest exposed after the stripping of the topsoil.

2.5 Fieldwork Results

The soil sequences exposed by the stripping were consistent throughout the excavated area, and in general terms consisted of a middle brown loamy topsoil overlying a dense yellow boulder clay. No archaeological features were recorded in any areas of the proposed new dwelling or adjacent to it.

An item of modern disturbance was found along the west test section in the form of a small tangle of barbed wire ca. 30cm below the grass level, however it is plausible that this item came from the debris of the disturbed driveway running onto the property.

2.6 Conclusions

The information gained by this observation work over a period of a week has left no doubt that the area of medieval concentration in evidence on the Primary School side of Long Street cannot be reciprocated at the western end of the Ystrad Fflur plot. The evidence found at the front of the plot during the building of Ystrad Fflur itself remains in isolation on this particular strip of land.

No archaeology was found on the site to be built on, and it is likely that the only zone of archaeological potential was at the front of the plot adjacent to Long Street. The garden landscaping that took place across the whole garden after the building of Ystrad Fflur, would only have destroyed deposits to a depth of 40-50cm, and observations have proven that any layer below this would have remained intact.

Therefore, a recommendation can be given that building work on the new dwelling can go ahead without jeopardising any potential archaeological deposits at the rear of the plot.

I.1 Plan of the site of proposed new dwelling



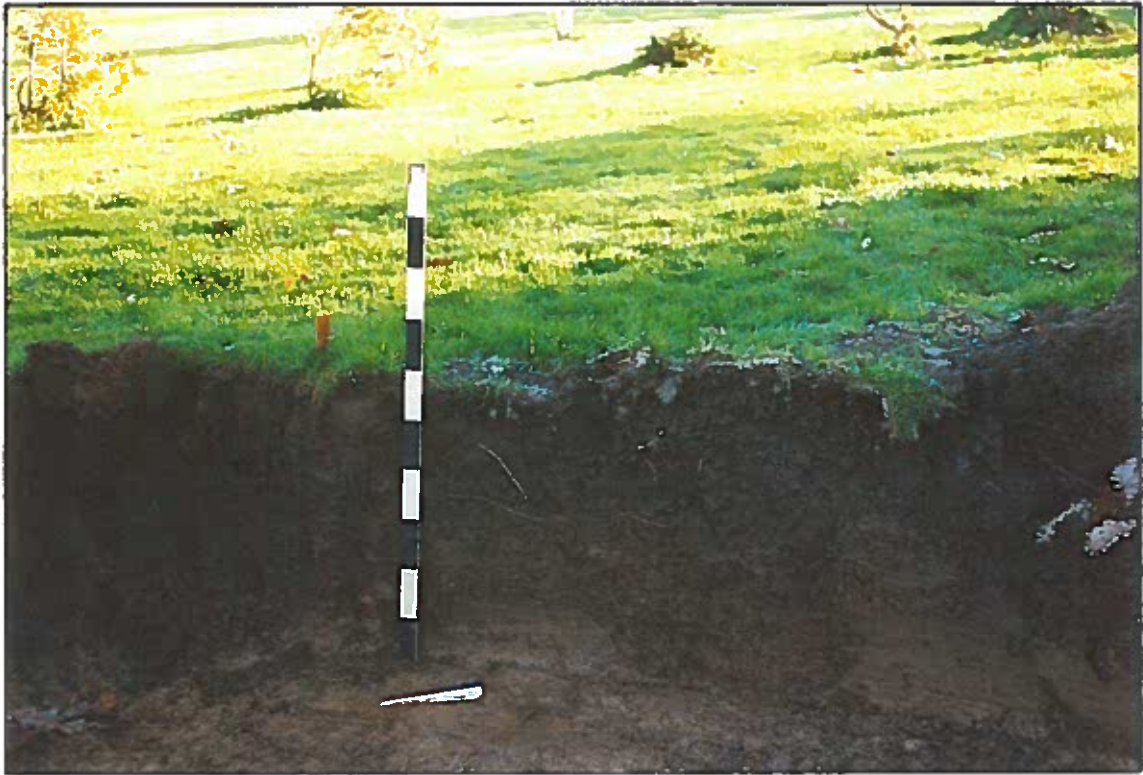
1.2 Photographs of the site



The site prior to building work



Test section looking east towards Ystrad Fflur



Two close ups of east section





Top: Test section looking west towards Afon Felin
Bottom: The same section to left of picture, looking north





Top: Horizontal Plan of site looking east
Bottom: Plan of site looking north-east from higher up





Top: Horizontal plan looking south-west
Bottom: The same plan looking north-east from JCB





Observation of the foundation trenches for the new dwelling



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Bibliography

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