

1. Introduction

1.1 The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust was commissioned in September 1993 by CADW/Welsh Historic Monuments to carry out an excavation of an area affected by the construction of a new visitor centre and associated services at Valle Crucis Abbey, near Llangollen, Clwyd (SAM De3) (NGR SJ 204442).

1.2 The proposed development had previously been the subject of an archaeological evaluation carried out by CPAT in January 1993 (report dated 1:2:93) which had revealed the presence of four possible graves in the areas affected. The development proposals were subsequently altered to avoid some of the graves which would have been disturbed by the sewerage outflow, but a single grave was thought to lie in the area of the visitor centre itself. It was therefore considered necessary to fully excavate all available areas affected by this building. A trench was also excavated along the revised line of the sewerage outflow to the septic tank, to assess the nature and survival of any archaeological features or horizons affected. CPAT were also asked to excavate two small boxes against the retaining wall to the north so that engineers could assess the nature of the wall foundations.

2. EXCAVATIONS

2.1 All the excavations were carried out by hand with a team of 2 over a period of two weeks between the 4th and 15th of October 1993, and were funded by CADW/Welsh Historic Monuments. The space available for excavation in the area of the visitor centre was restricted by the present ticket hut, and access to it, and by the presence of services along the southern side of the wall to the north. Consequently two trenches, K and L (see fig 1) were excavated, totalling 18.32m². A 2x1m box, M, was excavated in the area of the septic tank. The trenches were designated Areas K-M, following on from those excavated in January 1993, and where appropriate the same context number was used for contexts where they related to those previously identified. The numbers in brackets in the following text refer to these context numbers. The two boxes excavated alongside the wall to the north (N-0) were examined by qualified engineers, and immediately backfilled. They were not excavated to a sufficient depth to disturb the level where archaeology may have been preserved.

2.2 AREA K

2.2.1 Area K was excavated in the eastern half of the area affected by the proposed visitor centre and totalled 15.39m². Part of the area had been previously excavated as Area B, which had revealed the presence of a feature possibly representing a grave (34). The present ground surface in this area consisted of a gravelled path which sloped from 105.181m OD at the northwestern end of the trench to 104.470m OD at the southeastern end.

2.2.2 The area was cleared of modern hardcore (2-6) which had provided the base for the present gravelled surface. The thickness of this hardcore varied from c0.48m at the northeastern end to c0.1m at the southeastern end. The hardcore consisted of a mixture of loose gravel, rounded river stones, large slate pieces, and blocks of sandstone. The sandstone, and perhaps some of the slate fragments, may have originally derived from the abbey building fabric.

2.2.3 The clearance of the hardcore revealed a hard gravelled surface (7), the presence of which had already been established from the earlier evalua-

tion. This gravelled surface sloped slightly from 104.70m OD at the north-western end of the trench to where it ended, c1m from the southwestern end of the trench, where it lay at 104.45m OD. There was no direct dating evidence from this surface, but it was very similar in make-up to the modern gravelled path which lay on the northern side of the abbey, so it is assumed that the gravelled surface (7) is part of the same path. A trench for a telephone cable (45) had been cut across the trench from east to west through the hardcore, and through this surface at the eastern end of the trench to a depth of c0.4m below the ground surface.

2.2.4 The removal of the gravelled surface (7) revealed the natural subsoil consisting of a yellow and grey gravel, with occasional larger water worn stones up to 0.3m in diameter at the western end of the trench (13). The surface of this gravel lay at c104.65m OD. As had been observed during the evaluation this natural gravel had been cut away towards the west to provide a level surface for the gravelled path. Further to the east, where the gravelled surface had not been cut into, a natural red-brown hillwash (10) was present, the surface of which lay at c104.37m OD. Subsequent excavation revealed that the hillwash layer overlay a pale-grey clay natural (43). The relationship between the natural clay and gravel was not observed.

2.2.5 The removal of the gravel surface revealed no features cutting the natural gravel or hillwash except the feature (34) which had been observed during the evaluation cutting through the hillwash. The evaluation had only revealed the western most end of the feature, which was not excavated. The suggestion that it was a grave was confirmed by its shape and east to west orientation when it had been fully exposed during these excavations, and it was subsequently excavated. The fill (33) consisted of a firm dark grey clay loam and contained occasional rounded gravel and larger stones, up to 50mm in diameter. The fill had been disturbed by a trench for electric cabling (44) at its northeastern corner, and by root action throughout. The fill also contained 30 fragments of iron, 11 of which are likely to be parts of coffin nails. The other fragments are too corroded to be readily identifiable, although one of these may be a small clasp.

2.2.6 The full excavation of the grave revealed that the base was cut to c0.35m below the surface of the hillwash (104.021m OD), down onto the surface of the underlying pale grey clay (43). The burial itself (42) lay just above the base of the grave on an east to west orientation, with the lower arms crossed over the area of the pelvis. The slightly corrosive nature of the soil meant that only the longbones and the base of the skull survived *in-situ*. Root action had also caused displacement of some fragments of bone. The remains were removed from the grave and are currently in the process of being prepared for examination.

2.3 AREA L

2.3.1 Area L was excavated at the western end of the area affected by the proposed visitor centre, and covered an area of 2.93m². Part of the area had previously been excavated as Area A in the evaluation, and although this had revealed the possible presence of a shallow ditch (35), this lay outside the proposed visitor centre. The modern ground surface again consisted of a gravelled path and lay between c105.39m OD and c105.25m OD. A depth of 0.5m of hardcore (2-6) was removed to reveal the same gravel surface as in Area K, the removal of which revealed the underlying natural gravel (13), which lay at 104.81m OD. No archaeological features or horizons were present in this area.

2.4 AREA M

2.4.1 Area M was excavated to assess the archaeological potential of the area affected by the revised line of the sewerage outflow and septic tank. The modern ground surface consisted of grass, and lay between $\underline{c}105.35\text{m OD}$ and $\underline{c}105.21\text{m OD}$. The removal of the turf and modern topsoil (9) revealed the natural hillwash layer (10), the surface of which lay at $\underline{c}105.05\text{m OD}$. No archaeological features or horizons were present.

3 Conclusions

3.1 The excavation has positively demonstrated that archaeological activity exists in the area of the proposed visitor centre. Where possible this has been recorded and removed. There does however remain the possibility of features being present in areas unavailable for excavation such as the current site of the ticket office, and the area immediately adjacent to the wall to the north.

3.2 The excavation of Area M has suggested that the proposed position of the septic tank and line of sewerage outflow is not archaeologically sensitive, but again the possibility exists that the random positioning of the trench has missed some archaeological remains.

3.3 A full report on the project will be prepared later in the year, and will include a report on the human skeletal remains, associated ironwork and the pottery recovered during the earlier evaluation. No pottery was recovered from this excavation.

4 Archive and Finds

4.1 The excavation archive and finds have been added to those from the earlier evaluation and rests at CPAT. It consists of the following.

4.2 SITE ARCHIVE

4.2.1 A full catalogue and description of contexts.

4.2.2 A photographic record on 35mm colour transparencies and 35mm black and white negatives with contact print.

4.2.3 An EDM and Gridpad generated location and feature plan stored on disk, including OD values of the excavated trenches and various features.

4.3 FINDS

4.3.1 30 fragments of iron from context 33.

4.3.2 Human skeletal remains from burial 42.

5 Acknowledgements

5.1 Thanks are due to Brian Hart of CPAT for his assistance and hard work throughout the excavations, and to Sian Rees, and Michael Hopkins of CADW for their help and advice.

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CPAT 25.10.93

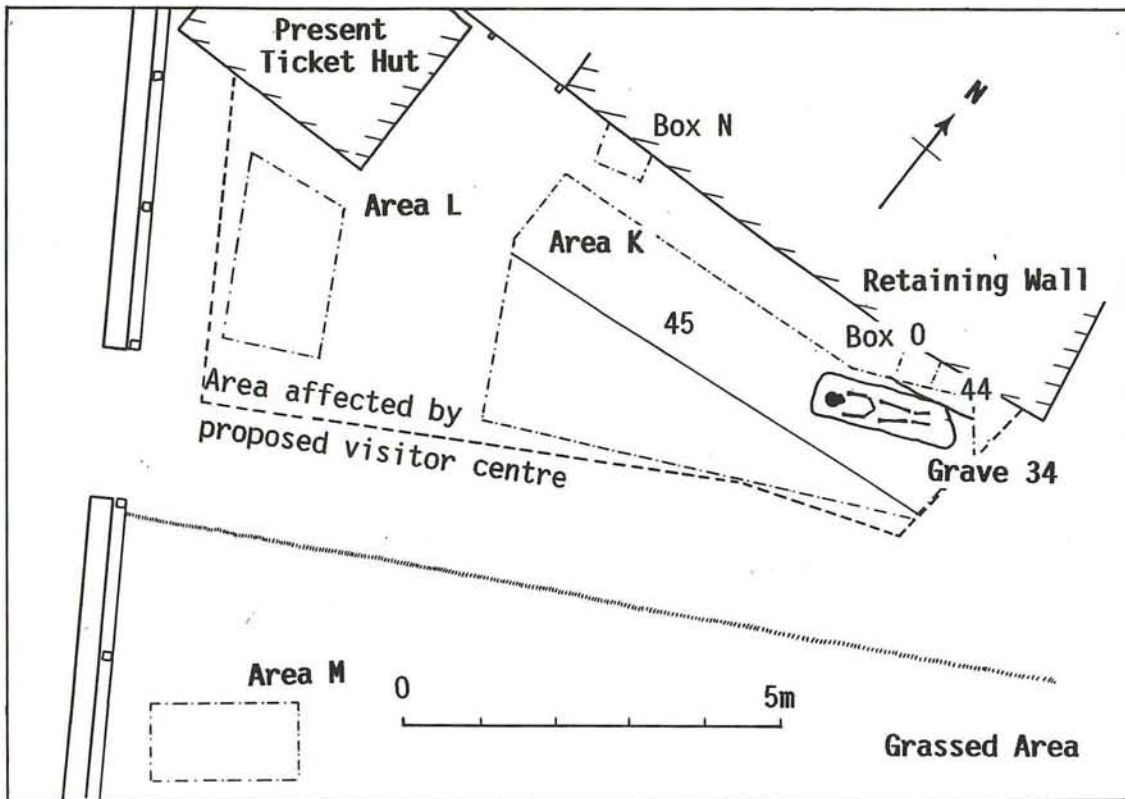


FIG 1 LOCATION OF TRENCHES AND EXCAVATED FEATURES (1:100)