

Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust  
Thornwell Farm, Chepstow  
Archaeological Watching Brief

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## Acknowledgements.

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This report was compiled by Mrs J. Doyle with assistance from members of the Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1

The Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust was contracted by Alfred McAlpine Homes to conduct an archaeological watching brief on land to be developed at Thornwell Farm, Chepstow and to produce a report on the monitoring. The brief took place during May 1991.

### 1.2

The specification of the brief included the monitoring of the removal of topsoil and spoil during Phase 1 (road construction) of the development and over the sports pitch and environmental bund areas. Recording and assessment of any archaeological features and the recovery of any finds was also included in the work.

### 1.3

Contained in the report of the Archaeological Field Evaluation (Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust, March 1991) are details of archaeological features on the affected land. To the east of the site, a prehistoric long barrow is located down slope from a smaller round barrow, whilst further north is a Roman enclosure. A possible Mediaeval stockyard is also included. The archaeological monitoring was to ensure that these sites remained undisturbed.

## 2. Physical Environment.

### 2.1

Topography. The site extends over a dry valley bounded by low ridges. The base of the valley is c90m. above O.D. whilst the eastern promontory rises to 121m. above O.D. This ridge develops a promontory to the south which overlooks the estuary of the River Wye and its confluence with the River Severn. The land is used for farming, presently as pasture but at some earlier time had been under the plough. The spring that rises at ST 53859163 is called Thornwell, and is located at the junction of the lane from Thornwell Farm and Thornwell Road, which runs north-south along the valley floor.

### 2.2

Surface Geology. The soil of the area is mainly sandy loam, with greater amounts of silt on the lower slopes and stone spreads on higher ground. Patches of red clay loam occasionally occur, these are underlain by thin streaks of grey/yellow clays.

## 3. Archaeological Monitoring.

### 3.1

Valley areas. The Thornwell Road is roughly central to the development area. Between 5 and 10 metres either side of the road was cleared of hedging and other vegetation. A wider road along this layout was central to the new housing development; new roads were to be cut through the fields, to run down slope from both east and west to join Thornwell Road.

Around the area of Thornwell Farm at ST 5387 9170, 19th and 20th century outbuildings were to be demolished, these had become derelict in recent years. A modern bungalow to the north of the outbuildings was also to be pulled down.

After demolition, there were no signs of any earlier buildings below. The soil had been much disturbed and there were no signs remaining of any archaeological features. All finds that came from the vicinity were modern and comprised fragmented china, glass and iron work.

The layout of the roads can be seen in Figure 1. From the east, Road 1 began at the top of the western ridge, where the soil was thin, c0.10m, and had a high content of small stones. Modern rubble was spread throughout this area, but further downslope the rubble petered out. There was a higher content of silts, with occasional spreads of abraded stone; these were natural, probably accentuated by plough action. The only finds from this section were fragments of modern pottery and a lead bale seal, which probably dates from the 18th century.

Along the base of the valley, the soil was 0.50m thick and had a higher silt content. This is probably the result of the build up of hill wash over a long period of time. The soil was loose and friable. The entire length of the valley had been much disturbed, both from housing construction, road repair and the dumping of rubbish. One flint flake, which had signs of some working on it, was recovered from this section, however the remainder of the finds was exclusively from the last century onwards. As the area was so disturbed, there was no sign of any archaeological features.

To the south east of Thornwell Farm, Road 3 passed close to the long barrow. In this sector, the soil was a red clay loam, c.0.25m. thick, which was underlain by thin streaks of yellow/grey clays. A flint "thumbnail" scraper of possibly Neolithic date was recovered from the topsoil within 50m. of the barrow. A section at the side of the stripped area closest to the barrow was cleaned, this revealed only the natural soil structure.

As the land rose, the soil lost the high clay content, and became stony and shallower. The strip passed immediately to the north of the possible stockyard. Here, a small area (1.5m by 0.5m) of unstructured rubble was uncovered. None of the stones was worked, but the whole may have formed part of the walling associated with the stockyard.

Further to the north and east, this section of road produced fragments of post-Mediaeval and some modern pottery as well as glass and iron. The soil remained shallow, stony and without features.

### 3.2

Sports Area and Bund. The removal of topsoil in preparation for the construction of the bund and sports area covered an area approximately 1.5km. square; this included the promontory area overlooking the Wye Estuary. Excess material from the demolition of the farm buildings was used as land fill on the south eastern slope of the promontory.

An even distribution of small stones throughout the soil occurred again, and the depth of the soil on the whole did not exceed 0.20m. Close to the southern boundary of the site, a 30m. square area was covered with uneven mounds.

Investigation proved that this was modern spoil, probably connected with the nearby M4 motorway.

A quantity of fragmented modern pottery, glass, iron and globules of copper, iron and glass slag were spread over the site. The slag does not represent any metal working on site; the slag was most probably brought in to provide a firm ground surface.

Seven flint flakes, probably of Neolithic date were recovered from this area. None were in association with a feature or each other.

#### 4. Conclusion.

Monitoring ensured that areas of known archaeological interest were not disturbed during the topsoil work; no new features went unrecorded. Demolition of buildings did not reveal earlier buildings at all. The amount of prehistoric artefacts recovered clearly gives an indication of activity within the development site, but the extent is unknown.

Although the watching brief did not produce any surface evidence for archaeological features, due to the area having been disturbed, these may have been destroyed in the upper layers whilst leaving remains deeper in the soil.

#### 5. Recommendations.

As there are two prehistoric sites, an apparently well preserved Roman site and an enclosure/stockyard, provision should be made to allow for further archaeological work during construction. This may take the form of trial excavation trenches, wider excavation and/or a further watching brief on the further construction stages.

Appendix 1.

Finds From Thornwell Farm, Chepstow.

By S.H.Sell.

A total of ten pieces of flint were submitted, of which five displayed some evidence of man's attentions. Breakage to the others may have occurred in a variety of ways. Of the five, the following details were noted:

- a) A piece showing evidence for the removal of flakes; probably broken at an early stage. Well patinated.
- b) A waste flake, heavily patinated, with some slight evidence of retouching.
- c) What was probably intended as an end scraper, steeply angled, but broken longitudinally in the early stages of manufacture.
- d) A heavily patinated point/side scraper, finished on one side only.
- e) A faceted thumbnail scraper, unpatinated, perhaps from a core remnant.

All of the above may belong to the Neolithic or to a later period.

Other surface finds submitted belong exclusively to the 18th Century or later; most are relatively modern and do not warrant further discussion. A lead bale seal is to be examined by a specialist in this field.