

**Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust
(Contracts Section)**

**Archaeological Watching Brief
Gaer Hill, St Arvans, Gwent**

June 1995

Report prepared for National Transcom Ltd

GGAT Project No: A264

GGAT Site No: 295

GGAT Report No: 95/046

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Figure One: Location plan

SUMMARY

An Archaeological Watching Brief was undertaken for NTL by GGAT (Contracts) on construction work at Gaer Hill Radio Station, St Arvans, Gwent (ST 51707 98091).

No remains of archaeological significance were discovered.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Project background*

- 1.1.1 National Transcom Ltd (NTL) have been granted planning permission¹ by Monmouth Borough Council to erect a small building at Gaer Hill Radio Station, to the rear of Gaer Hill Farm, St Arvans, Gwent, at ST 51707 98091.
- 1.1.2 The application site lies adjacent to the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Gaer Hill Camp, an earthwork enclosure which is probably of late prehistoric date². Because of the proximity of the application site to these remains, Monmouth Borough Council required the developer to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the groundworks as a condition of the planning permission.
- 1.1.3 In June 1995, GGAT (Contracts) was commissioned by NTL to carry out the watching brief. The fieldwork was undertaken on 13 June 1995. This report summarises the results of the watching brief.

1.2 *Specification*

- 1.2.1 The Specification for the evaluation was prepared by GGAT (Contracts), in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*³. A copy of the full Specification will be deposited with the site archive.

1.3 *Acknowledgements*

- 1.3.1 This project has been managed for the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust (Contracts Section) by Andrew Marvell (Principal Archaeological Officer). The fieldwork was carried out by Martin Lawler, who also prepared the report. The Trust is grateful to Jon Butler (NTL Project Manager) and Gerry Duffy (NTL Project Engineer) for their ready co-operation and advice throughout the project, and to the site construction team (Rivendell Ltd). Information from the County Sites and Monuments Record has been kindly provided by Jan Allen (SMR Officer).

1.4 *Copyright*

- 1.4.1 The copyright of this report is held by the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust Ltd, who have granted an exclusive licence to NTL to use the material contained.

¹ Monmouth Borough Council Planning Application No A38460.

² PRN 745g; AM County No 25.

³ Institute of Field Archaeologists 1993.

2.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Topography

- 2.1.1 Gaer Hill is situated at 280m OD, on a low spur of Upper Old Red Sandstone¹, overlooking the River Wye. The local soil cover, described as a well-drained reddish coarse loamy soil over sandstone, is allied to the Eardiston series of typical brown earths².

2.2 Gaer Hill Camp

- 2.2.1 The earthwork enclosure (PRN 745g) is on a slight southerly slope, centred at ST 517 979; its northern perimeter (adjacent to the application site) lies just below the summit of the hill. The earthwork forms a concentric double enclosure. The small inner enclosure (0.48ha) is sub-rectangular, provided with double banks separated by a ditch; it appears to have had a single entrance on its southwest side. The outer enclosure (5.3ha) was provided with a ditch and outer bank, though inspection suggests that there may also have been a slight inner bank on the northwest side of the circuit.
- 2.2.2 The site falls into a general category recognised among the hillforts of Glamorgan as *Multivallate enclosures with wide-spaced ramparts, on inland sites*.³ These monuments are considered to be of relatively late Iron Age date (c 200 BC - 70 AD), though none has been fully investigated. The chance find of a barbed-and-tanged arrowhead in the central enclosure at Gaer Hill (PRN 749g) suggests that the site may also have been occupied in the early-to-mid Bronze Age (1600 BC - 1100 BC), though this does not imply such an early origin for the earthworks.
- 2.2.3 A characteristic of the inland multivallate enclosures with wide-spaced ramparts is that they are located on semi-permeable soils, more suitable for pastoral farming than agriculture. It is thought that the large outer circuits may have been used as cattle stockades, and that occupation was restricted to the more strongly-defended inner enclosures.⁴ The location of Gaer Hill on a broad plateau overlooking the Wye valley is of interest in this respect, and suggests that it may have utilised a complementary range of resources.
- 2.2.4 Much of the northwest quadrant of the outer defences has been ploughed flat. The radio station compound lies immediately outside the surviving section of the outer ditch and banks (covered by mixed deciduous woodland). Indeed, the south side of the compound fence lies along the outer bank for part of its length. The hut foundation for the present development, however, lies about 15m beyond the closest part of the outer bank.

2.3 Other sites

- 2.3.1 Gaer Hill Camp lies in an area which is rich in archaeological remains of all periods, reflecting its favourable location along the corridor of the river Wye. The course of the probable Roman road from Chepstow to Monmouth lies slightly to the west of the fort, and a number of other sites lie along this route. The discovery of items of pre-Conquest metalwork in the field adjacent to the hillfort (PRN 4384g) suggests the potential significance of the site in the post-Roman period.

¹ *Tintern Sandstone Group: British Geological Survey 1981 1:50,000 Series, Sheet 250.*

² *Eardiston 1: Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983 1:250,000 Series, Sheet 2 (Wales).*

³ *RCAHMW 1976 An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Glamorgan: Volume I: Pre-Norman; Part II: the Iron Age and the Roman occupation, 14-15. (Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales: HMSO).*

⁴ *RCAHMW 1976 (ibid), 15.*

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 *The development*

- 3.1.1 The relevant part of the development comprised excavation for a foundation pad for a prefabricated steel hut, measuring 3.6m x 2.4m x 3.0m. The site for the hut was located within the compound, between the east mast and an adjacent brick building.
- 3.1.2 On its east side, the hut was to be sited on the existing concrete mast-base. The excavation for a new foundation pad, therefore, was restricted to the west side of the hut. An area of 3.7m x 1.5m of sloping ground on the west side of the concrete mast-base was excavated to the level of the concrete base, at a maximum depth of 0.25m. A narrow trench, 3.7m x 0.4m and 0.4m in depth, was excavated on the west side of this stripped area.
- 3.1.3 The excavation was carried out by hand. It was thus possible to be reasonably confident that any archaeological remains present were recovered.

3.2 *The stratigraphy*

- 3.2.1 The soil profile, recorded on the west face of the trench, was as follows:

Context No	Depth	Description
<u>002</u>	0m-0.35m	Light brown slightly sandy LOAM with occasional subangular fine sandstone pebbles and rare charcoal flecks. Contained two post-medieval sherds, including an impressed buffware plate, of early 18th century date. This deposit is probably at least partly made-ground.
<u>003</u>	0.35m-0.58m	Light brown soft, slightly sandy LOAM. As above, but becoming stonier, with frequent angular coarse sandstone fragments. A pocket of more substantial sandstone fragments (< 0.30m) was encountered mid-way down the length of the trench.
<u>004</u>	0.58m-0.65	Light reddish-brown slightly sandy CLAY with frequent decayed green sandstone tabular fragments. This deposit (which appears to be the weathered subsoil) rises on the north side of the trench.

3.3 *Discussion*

- 3.3.1 No features of obvious archaeological significance were identified. The upper deposit (Context 002) appears to be largely made-ground, associated with the construction of the adjacent brick building, whose foundations lie within a few centimetres of the trench face. The rather worn 18th century potsherds may have been introduced to the field during land improvement, probably from Gaer Hill Farm nearby.
- 3.3.2 The presence of quantities of rubble in Context 003 is of some interest. It was not possible, within the narrow confines of the trench, to confirm whether this material may have been a structural feature, such as a bank, or a more general spread of stones. The rubble spread occurred over a length of c 2m of the trench, and included some closely-packed coarse sandstone fragments. Sandstone rubble has also been noted loosely filling the adjacent ditch of the earthwork, and as incidental blocks on the edges of the field. This material has probably been derived by field clearance (ie by routinely depositing ploughed-up stones on the edge of the field); indeed, this type of land improvement is also suggested by the presence of the two 18th century sherds from Context 002.

Figure One: Location plan

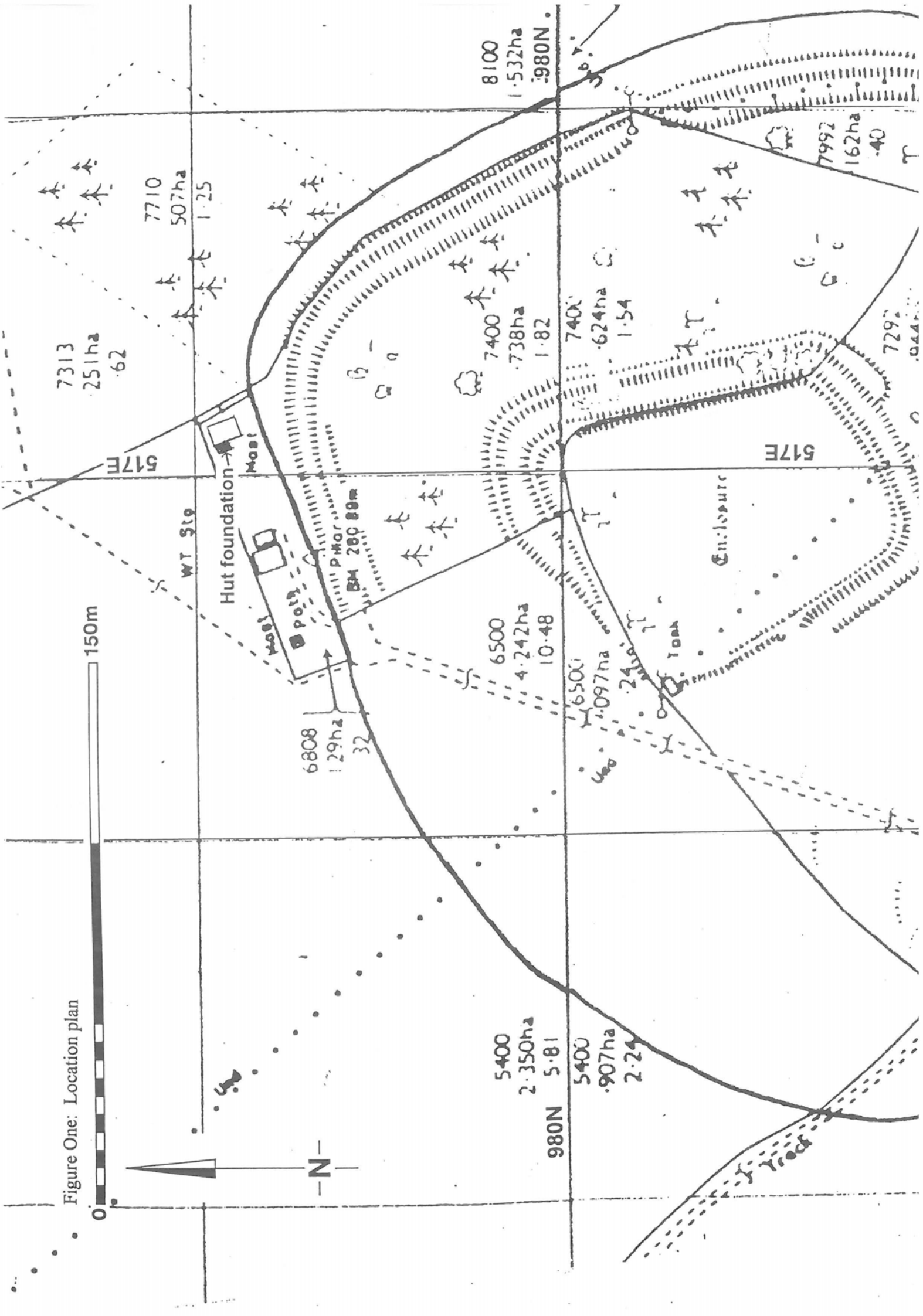
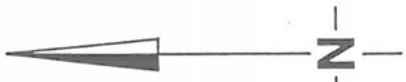


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