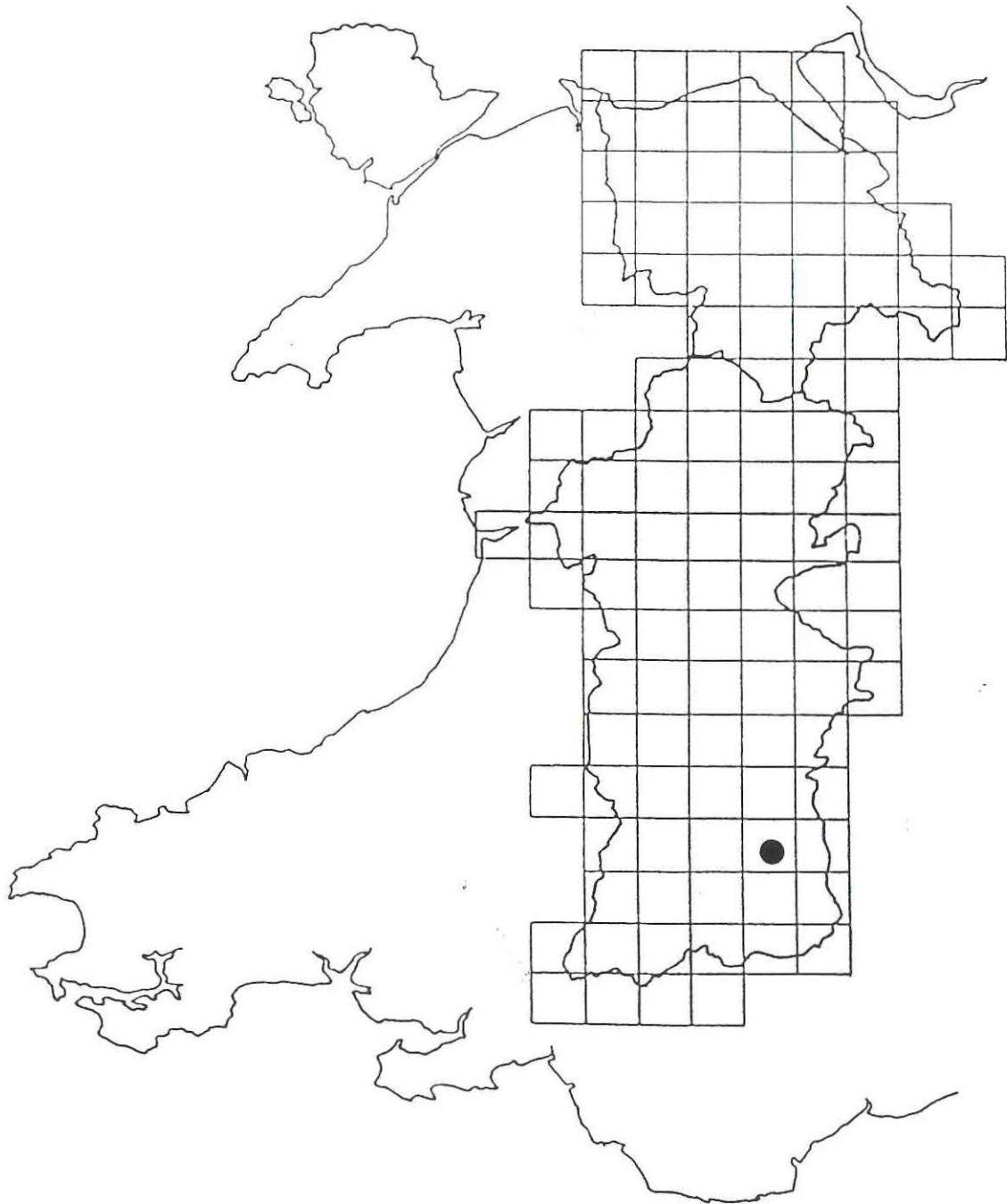


THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

# *Neuadd Felin, Talgarth, Powys*

## EVALUATION REPORT

September 1991



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## Introduction

The following archaeological evaluation was carried out in response to a planning application for a small-scale residential development (No K11594, received by Brecon Beacons National Park on 17 September 1990). The proposed development plot (Fig 1) lies within the medieval town of Talgarth between the church and the river, and it seemed probable that it contained the remains of medieval houses fronting onto the northern side of The Bank, a street which certainly dates back to the medieval period. A number of burgage plots associated with medieval town houses might also be expected, running south-north between The Bank and Back Lane. The town is reputed to have been the site of the chief royal residence of the kingdom of Brycheiniog prior to the Norman conquest (Lloyd, 1911, i, 249, 272; ii, 397), and there was a small chance that this residence may have been located on the higher ground above the river, just possibly in the area of the proposed development. Soulsby (1983, 247-248) mentions the possibility of there having once been a very early religious house in the vicinity of the present church. Given the proximity of the proposed development to the church the presence of early remains could not be discounted.

The Brecon Beacons National Park requested that an evaluation be undertaken to assess the archaeological potential in order that this might be taken into consideration when determining the planning application.

## The Evaluation

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust was commissioned to undertake the evaluation, which was carried out between 27 August and 5 September 1991. Two trenches were excavated in accordance with the project brief from the Brecon Beacons National Park to determine the presence of and to evaluate any features of archaeological significance. These trenches were situated parallel to Back Lane and The Bank and immediately adjacent to the proposed buildings (Fig 2). Both trenches were excavated by machine to remove the overburden of topsoil. Limited cleaning and further excavation was then carried out by hand.

The results from the trenches were as follows:

*Trench A (14.5 x 1.5m. Fig 3). Numbers in brackets refer to Fig 3.*

The top 40cm of dark brown, humic garden soil was removed by machine. Beneath this was a layer of brown silty loam, probably an older garden soil, containing both medieval and post-medieval pottery sherds. This layer was removed by hand to reveal the top of a wall (12), 60cm wide, built of flat angular stones, running north-south ie. at a right angle to The Bank. Immediately to the west of this wall was a layer of angular stones approximately 50cm thick, packed with brown silty soil similar to the layer above, but also containing a considerable amount of animal bone, nails and some micaceous sandstone roof-tile fragments. The best interpretation of this stone is that it is the "tumble" resulting from the demolition or collapse of the upper part of the adjacent wall. The wall itself still survived to a height of approximately 30cm.

Beneath the stone "tumble" at a depth of approximately 90 cm and overlying the reddish natural silty clay was an orange-brown compact silty layer with some smears of charcoal, which contained a few sherds of medieval pottery and small lumps of fired clay. Cut into this layer and therefore of a later date, was a small, undated pit (39) and a large pit (37) in excess



of 1.2m long and partly underlying the wall. The fill of the larger pit contained charcoal, small stones and exclusively medieval cooking pot sherds. The wall appeared to have been built immediately over the top of this obviously medieval pit with no layers of build-up in between, and this may indicate that no great length of time passed between the filling of the pit and the building of the wall. A section of the wall was dismantled, but the only find built into it was a roughly circular pierced stone, possibly a loomweight.

The brown silty soil to the east of the wall was removed and at approximately 55cm below the ground surface a stoney "dirty" reddish-brown silty-clay surface was revealed, not dissimilar to the "natural" silty clay to the west of the wall. It contained no datable finds, but a little charcoal. Although not an entirely undisturbed horizon, the small patches of silty soil and flecks of charcoal within this layer may well be due to root disturbance and the layer was not examined further. A "step" down of 28 cm in the level of this layer was observed c40cm to the east of the wall, which may have been cut as a foundation trench for the wall or may even pre-date it. A few possible small post holes were observed cut into this layer, but only one larger feature was noted: an undated roughly circular, fairly shallow stone-filled pit (19) with a diameter of c.60 cm. The function of this is uncertain, but it may have served as a foundation, perhaps for a timber post.

*Trench B (44m x 1.5m. Fig 3) Number in brackets refer to fig 3*

The top 40 cm of topsoil was removed by machine, together with the top 20cm or so of the layer beneath it (context 34), a compact silty layer with small stones, containing post-medieval pottery sherds. The surface was cleaned by hand and several features of post-medieval date were revealed. The westernmost 4m of the trench was taken up by a dark brown layer containing glass, coal and other fairly modern domestic debris. Over the length of the trench the level of the present day ground surface falls by around 2m from east to west, and it became evident that the level of the "natural" silty clay subsoil fell similarly, but by a greater amount. It is possible that this modern debris was dumped at the western end in an attempt to level out the slope of the land.

At 23m from the eastern end of the trench, a number of large, mostly flat stones appeared to form a line north-south across the trench and may have been the foundation of a wall. The relationship of these stones with context 34 was uncertain.

The remainder of context 34 was removed by hand to an average depth of 60cm below ground surface over most of the trench. This revealed a slightly "dirty" red silty clay surface, still containing some charcoal, but with undisturbed, clean red silty clay beneath it. Several features were revealed cutting into this "dirty" red layer:

A pit (29), diameter c1.35m, depth c15cm, which contained exclusively medieval pottery, iron, fired clay, and micaceous sandstone fragments.

A gully (31) with sloping sides, c80cm wide at the top, running roughly N-S across the trench.

Two postholes (24 and 43), with diameters of 34cm and 20cm.

Further to the west of these features was an area of angular stones, some of them micaceous sandstone, set in a grey-brown silty soil. A grey-brown silty soil layer was



revealed beneath this, containing small lumps of charcoal, fired clay and burnt bone, and lower still was a layer of small angular close-set cobbles (23) forming a good surface, embedded in the natural red silty clay beneath. These layers may be best interpreted as a cobbled floor surface, perhaps of a yard, since there are no post holes present in the excavated area large enough to suggest the presence of a building. In time, a layer of dirt and burnt debris had built up, and had been subsequently covered with another layer of stone to form another hard surface.

None of these features were contaminated with modern finds. The pit is certainly medieval, and there is no reason to suppose that the other features are any later in date.

## **Conclusions**

The results of the evaluation work revealed evidence of medieval occupation in both areas examined within the area of the proposed development. It is felt that the features identified in Trench A are indicative of the presence of medieval domestic buildings fronting onto The Bank. The pits certainly suggest domestic activity and the substantial wall foundation uncovered may well be that of a medieval dwelling.

Features in Trench B, such as the gully and postholes, may indicate the boundaries between burgage plots. The presence of the medieval pit and stone surfaces in this area are indicative of some medieval activity, but perhaps not so intensive as that in the area of Trench A.

## **Recommendations**

Archaeological features are present within the development area and would undoubtedly be destroyed by any foundations or service trenches excavated to a depth greater than 50cm.

Although the features identified during the evaluation of this area do not in themselves appear to merit preservation in situ, they give an indication that further features of similar archaeological importance are likely to have survived in this vicinity. Preservation by record (ie excavation) of any such remains would be appropriate.

It is recommended that if planning consent is granted, a specific period of time should be allowed, preceding the commencement of the development, during which further archaeological excavation, of the areas of ground disturbance, must be carried out, in accordance with a programme of work approved by the local planning authority. If this recommendation should prove unacceptable the only alternative would appear to be the exclusion specific parts of the development area, including all of plot 6 (as defined in the application), from any sort of ground disturbance.

Either course might be achieved through the use of a suitable planning condition, or by means of a planning agreement (eg Section 106), drawn up by the planning authority with reference to their archaeological advisors.

W J Owen and R J Silvester  
16 September 1991

## References

- Lloyd, J E, 1911, *A History of Wales*, (2 vols).  
Soulsby, I, 1983, *The Towns Of Medieval Wales*.



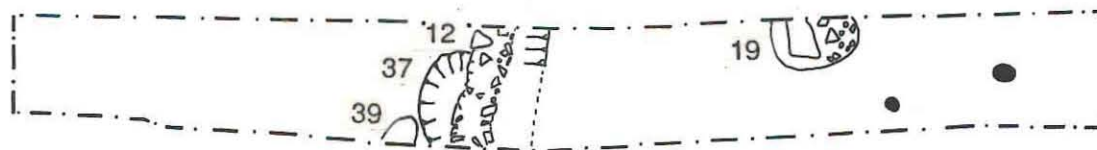




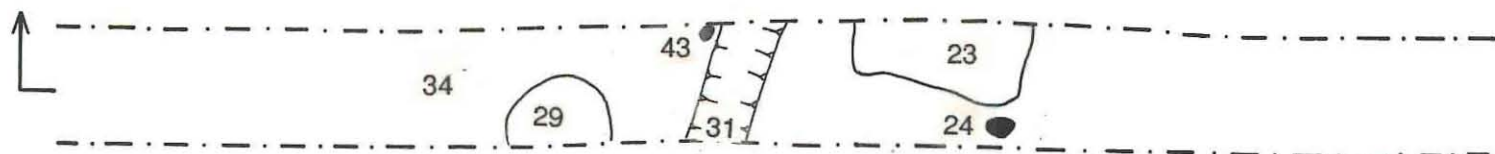


Fig 2 Neuadd Felin: location of excavation trenches September 1991

Trench A



Trench B



● posthole

Fig 3. Archaeological features