

Land off High Street, Bagillt, Flintshire

CPAT Report No 656

Land off High Street, Bagillt, Flintshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

R Silvester
August 2004

Report for Mr J Williams

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust

7a Church Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7DL
tel (01938) 553670, fax (01938) 552179

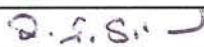
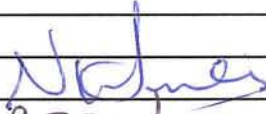
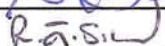
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CPAT Report Record

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The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust

7a Church Street Welshpool Powys SY21 7DL

tel (01938) 553670, fax 552179

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In July 2004 the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was invited by Mr J Williams on behalf of Harrow Homes Ltd of Holywell in Flintshire to prepare a specification and quotation for undertaking an archaeological assessment on land adjacent to Whitefield House in Bagillt on the Flintshire coast. The pre-construction assessment was the subject of a brief drawn up by Mr M Walters of the Curatorial Section of CPAT (dated 01 July 2004), acting in his capacity as archaeological curator for the region, which identified the need for a detailed desktop study and strategic on-site trenching to facilitate a full evaluation of the site where both a colliery and a pottery were thought to have existed.
- 1.2 A specification and quotation were submitted for consideration by the client, who pointed out that existing information suggested that the whole area had been heavily disturbed by colliery activity and that the pottery referred to in the curatorial brief lay outside the development area. As a consequence it was agreed that the desk-top assessment should be undertaken initially, and that any further work (i.e archaeological intervention) might be influenced by the results of that desk-top study.
- 1.3 The archaeological curator for the region was consulted on this proposed course of action and was content to accept it, subject to a consideration of the results.

2 LOCATION

- 2.1 The area of the assessment overlooks the Dee Estuary, some 800m to the south-east of the perceived centre of the village of Bagillt and a little under 4km to the north-west of Flint (SJ 22517469; Fig 1). It rises above the old coast road which has now been superseded by the modern A548 which runs parallel to it and a little to the north-east. The proposed development is bounded by the old road (now known as High Street) on the north-east, a minor lane to Pentre Halkyn on the north-west and open ground and houses in the other directions.

3 DESKTOP STUDY

- 3.1 The desk-top assessment involved the examination of all the readily available primary and secondary documentary, cartographic, pictorial, and photographic sources. Repositories consulted included: the Regional Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) held by CPAT in Welshpool; the National Monuments Record (NMR) held by the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW) in Aberystwyth; the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth and the Flintshire Record Office at Hawarden.
- 3.2 A search of the SMR and NMR identified few sites of archaeological and historic interest, but does assist in defining the assessment area, for there is a degree of continuity in the boundaries that function as perimeters to the area.
- 3.3 In the angle of High Street and the lane to Pentre Halkyn is the Methodist chapel which appears to have been built in 1905, superseding the earlier Wesleyan Chapel of 1860 which was located on the opposite side of High Street and has now disappeared with the modern changes to the road system and its surroundings. The

new chapel was built on the site of cottages and a malt-house which seem to have functioned throughout much of the 19th century, but had disappeared by 1899.

- 3.4 To the south-east of the Chapel is Whiteacre, the perimeter of whose gardens have been in places since the end of the 19th century, and which were formerly part of the land associated with the malt house.
- 3.5 To the south-west of the proposed development area is Whitefield Terrace. This row of houses has an interesting history for it is, at least in part, clearly the successor of what was in the 19th century known as Union Row (Fig 3), a line of cottages which presumably housed artisans and workers in the nearby collieries and other heavy industries of Bagillt. More significantly from the point of view of this report, in 1841 there was a pottery and yard on the site, reportedly producing whitewares between about 1800 and 1840, and in this context it may not be irrelevant that Union Row is now known as Whitefield Terrace (and see below, para 3.7). Tithe maps are never the most accurate of cartographic depictions, but taken at face value that of 1841 shows not only a building (the 'pottery') but also two features which must be pottery kilns. And if the Tithe map is accurate it can be inferred that those kilns lay under the gardens of later Union Row while the terrace may have overlain (or perhaps even incorporated) some of the earlier pottery. Figure 2 has attempted to plot the detail visible on the Tithe map against modern landscape features but the degree of accuracy is unknown because of the limitations of the tithe cartography. It is not possible to reproduce the Tithe map itself in this report because of copyright restrictions.
- 3.6 Whitefield is assumed – on the evidence of the map evidence – to be a modern property, but it occupies the site of a building which was there throughout the second half of the 19th century, albeit laid out on a completely different axis. Mrs Thomas of Whitefield has informed the writer that this was the old colliery building, most of which has now gone.
- 3.7 Lying between these several buildings was the colliery. Coal was being extracted in the Bagillt area from before 1616, and according to local historians there were at least eleven coalpits known by name in Bagillt during the 19th century. It has however proved difficult to identify which colliery this was. In the SMR it is termed the Neston View colliery yet this is a name that does not appear in the list of 19th century collieries. Citing the same source one of the shafts has been called the Bryn Merllyn shaft, but it is not known whether this name is authentic. The Nant y Moch smelting works and colliery lay immediately to the north-west on the other side of the lane edging the development area, and it is conceivable that the colliery was an extension of that operation. Finally, there was a Whitefield or Coetia Gwyn colliery in the 19th century, and this might be considered to be the best candidate name. However, the presence of the modern names of Whitefield Terrace, Whitefield and Whiteacre must be treated at best as circumstantial evidence, although further research might indicate their relevance. We might add that Mrs Thomas is not aware that any specific name was given to the colliery, but that it was part of a general complex of pits in the Bagillt known as the Coalhill Colliery. The local tradition is that the 'white' element in the names came from the prevalence of marine shells somewhere on the site.
- 3.8 The colliery here was in existence in 1871 when it was already called an 'old colliery' on the earliest maps, but its opening is not firmly dated. It is not impossible that the arrival of the railway at Connahs Quay in 1849 may have influenced its beginnings by facilitating the movement of the excavated coal. Detailed research in

the British Coal archives might reveal colliery plans for the site but such intensive research is outside the scope of this desk-top assessment.

- 3.9 It appears from the early editions of the large-scale Ordnance Survey maps that colliery waste covered virtually all of the development area, although that would be difficult to confirm categorically without further work. The amount of waste that was dumped remains unknown, for much of it was removed about forty years ago by a firm manufacturing fire bricks. Mr Thomas has remarked, however, that the spoil tip was massive. Several shafts are shown on these early maps. At least one and possibly more capped shafts remain in the grounds of Whitefield, but from one of the plans accompanying the documentation in the curator's brief, one shaft may lie just within the development area, near its south-east corner. Whether colliery waste spread all over the development area is impossible to establish from cartographic evidence alone - although the large-scale Ordnance Survey maps hint that this may have been the case - and in view of the subsequent removal of the waste material, it is possible that only excavation would demonstrate the true state of the ground now.
- 3.10 It has proved difficult to establish the landscape development of this area, prior to the middle of the 19th century, for large-scale early cartography that would provide the platform on which to develop a picture of the area is, surprisingly, largely absent, the numerous smaller-scale maps which simply show the location of Bagillt being of little assistance.
- 3.11 The Tithe Map thus provides the first large-scale representation of this part of Bagillt and it can be stated with some certainty that by 1841 both the development area and the land immediately around it was populated with small cottages and crofts (i.e. the paddocks and enclosures attached to the cottages) and at the centre (over which most of the development area spreads) was what was classed as waste land, extending over more than one acre. From this we cannot disregard the possibility that the colliery was already in operation at this time - there were certainly a couple of buildings or structures of an unknown nature on this piece of land, and there is no reason to assume that a colliery would actually be distinguished as such on a tithe map. That it was signalled as waste land in 1841 should not be taken as an indicator that it was not utilised. The adjacent pottery would have required a readily available supply of potting clay as raw material and the waste land could well have provided this.
- 3.12 Beyond this we can only speculate. The landscape here in the earlier 19th century was more fragmented than the land further to the east, closer to Flint, and less suggestive of the fossilised medieval open-field systems that appeared there. It is possible, therefore, but as yet unproven that this strip of land beside the coast could have been unenclosed common (usually termed in contemporary documents, waste) in say the 17th or even 18th century.

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The nature of the pre-colliery landscape can only be guessed at. It was probably open space but amongst its possible agrarian uses it might also have been exploited for potting clay.
- 4.2 A pottery was established here in the first half of the 19th century. The evidence from the Tithe map indicates that this was located where Whitefield Terrace now stands and that the development area barely impinges on it. The possibility that wasters and

other debris from the pottery was dumped in the development area and later covered by colliery waste cannot be discounted.

- 4.3 It cannot be established when the colliery was opened or its lifespan, although it may well have been closed by 1871. Even its name is presently uncertain.
- 4.4 Virtually the entire development area was covered by colliery waste in the 19th century, although the colliery shafts and other associated workings may have been beyond its boundaries.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 5.1 The writer would like to thank the staff of the regional SMR in Welshpool, the NMR in Aberystwyth, the National Library of Wales, the Flintshire Record Office and the archives of the University of Wales, Bangor for the provision of material and general assistance. Special thanks are due to Mrs Thomas of Whitefield for answering the writer's queries.

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Cartographic

1834/5 Ordnance Survey surveyors' drawing Sheet 342

1841 Tithe Survey of Holywell

1871 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 1:2500 map. Flintshire 6.15

1899 Ordnance Survey 2nd edition 1:2500 map. Flintshire 6.15

1912 Ordnance Survey 3rd edition 1:2500 map. Flintshire 6.15

Note: Manuscript estate maps for the Bagillt area from the early 18th century onwards survive in the Hawarden and Bangor archives but none has obvious relevance to this part of the parish.



Fig. 1 Site location, 1:25,000



Fig. 2 Proposed development site showing position of pottery, colliery, and tithe field boundaries

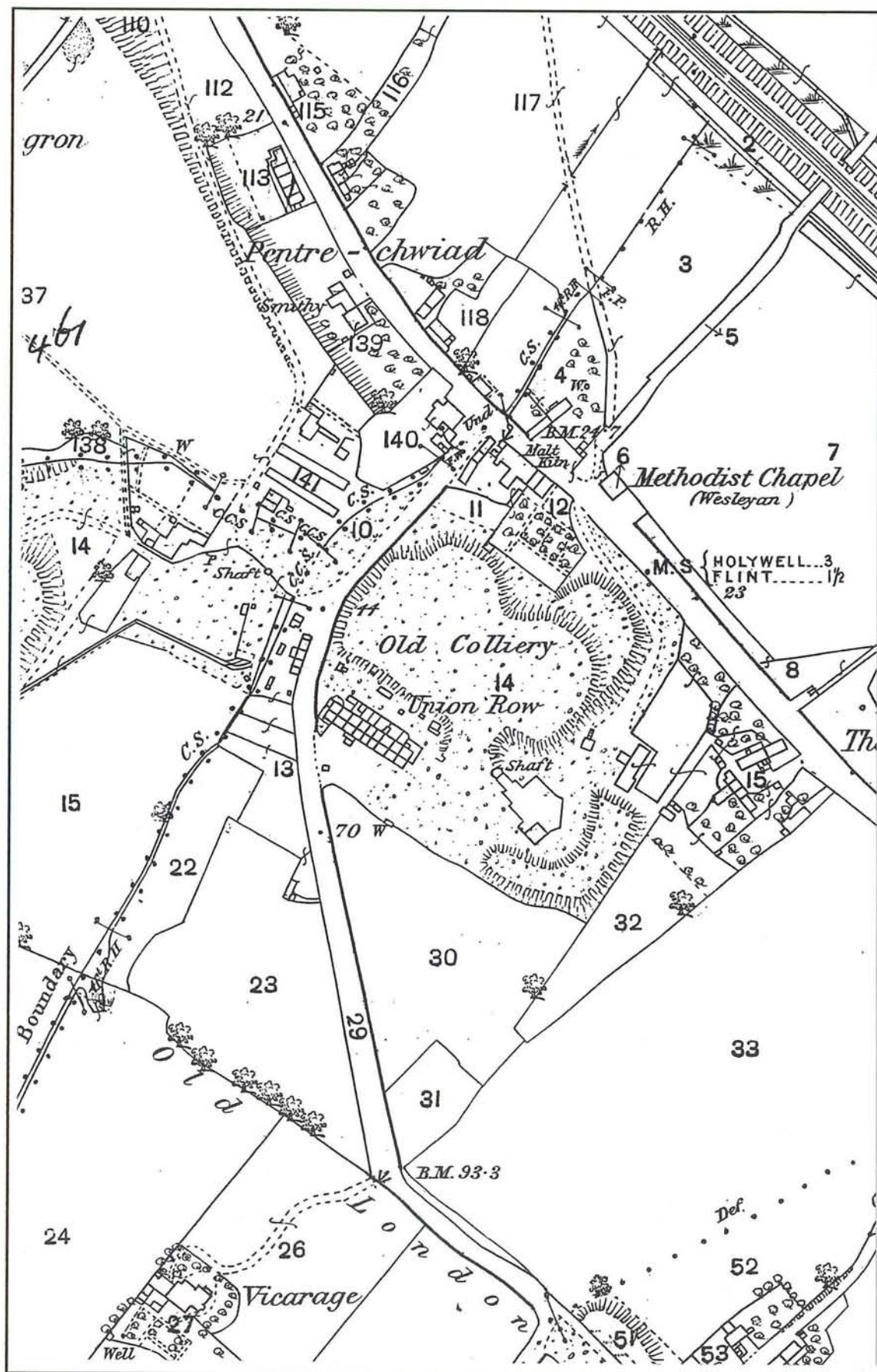


Fig. 3 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 1:2,500 map, 1871