

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

The New Rectory, School Lane, New Radnor, Powys

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



CPAT Report No 737

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**The New Rectory, School Lane,
New Radnor, Powys**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

N W Jones
October 2005

Report for the Diocese of Swansea and Brecon

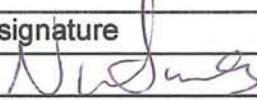
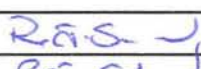
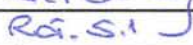
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Fig. 1	Plan of New Radnor showing location of watching brief
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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust was invited by Dewi Evans Architects Ltd, acting on behalf of the Diocese of Swansea and Brecon, to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the construction of a new rectory on School Lane in New Radnor, Powys. The Curatorial Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, in their capacity as archaeological advisors to the local planning authority, had determined that the watching brief should be undertaken owing to the proximity of the site to the medieval defences of the town, and as a result a design brief for the archaeological work (CWAT 575) was prepared by the Curatorial Section in March 2005.
- 1.2 The site lies outside the town defences on the south-east side of the town (SO 21502607; Fig. 1).

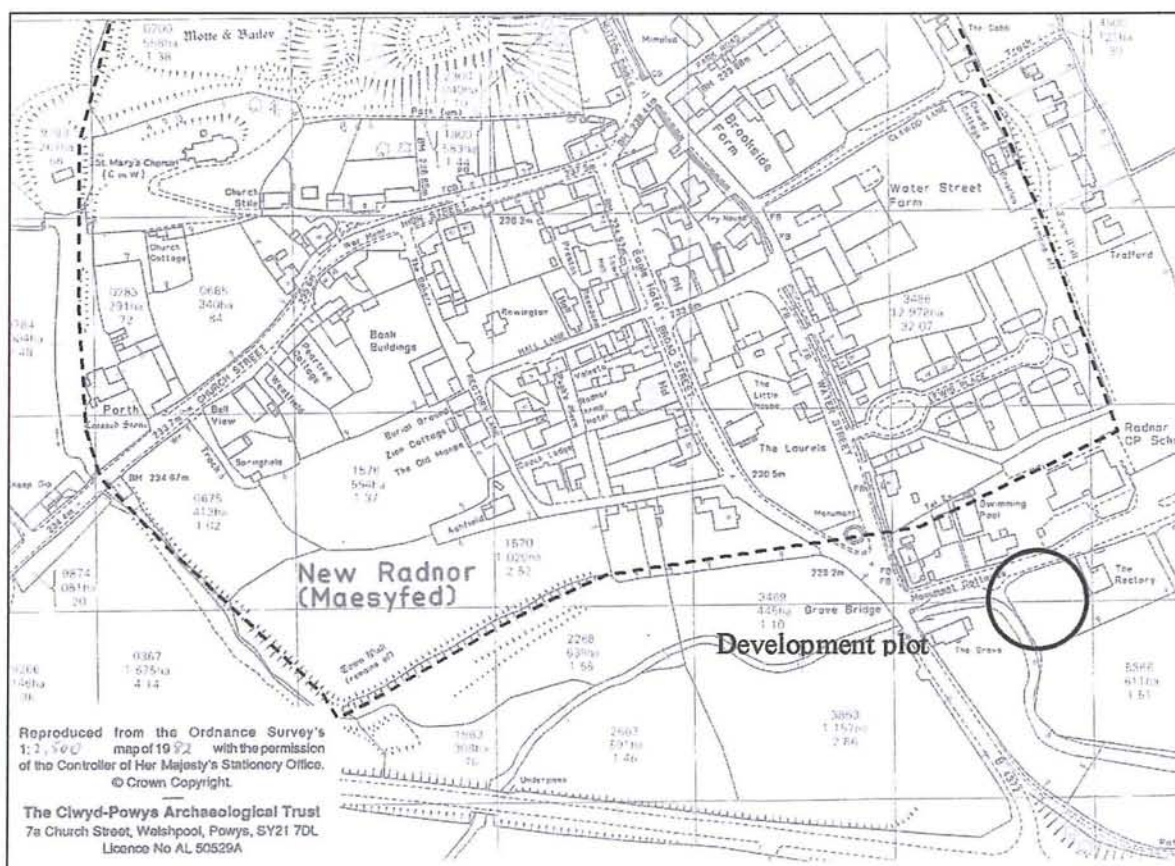


Fig. 1 Plan of New Radnor showing location of the development plot

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 New Radnor is a small and demonstrably shrunken settlement that originated in the Middle Ages on the eastern edge of the central Welsh uplands. For a brief period, early in the post-medieval era, it was the county town of the historic county of Radnorshire, but today it is smaller and relatively insignificant in comparison with other small and thriving towns in central Powys such as Knighton and Presteigne which occupied more favourable locations in the old county.
- 2.2 Notwithstanding its present obscurity, it played a particularly important and strategic role in earlier centuries, and arguably its archaeological potential is rather greater than that of its more successful neighbours.

- 2.3 The town lies on the north side of the Summergil Brook where the stream breaks out of a narrow valley hemmed in by Radnor Forest on the north and Highgate Hill and The Smatcher on the south. Eastwards are the lower lands of the Walton Basin which open out into Herefordshire. A spur projecting into the valley from the southern slopes of Radnor Forest was adapted for the castle earthworks which guarded the approaches to and from one of the more accessible passes into mid Wales and subsequently the town was laid out on flatter ground below its defences.
- 2.4 New Radnor first appears in the records specifically as *Radenore Nova* in 1277. Although it is reasonable to assume that the town was founded at an earlier date, how much earlier remains an open question as all earlier written references are to Radnor alone (for detailed descriptions see Silvester 1994; 1997). To Radnor came Baldwin the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1188, his starting point in Wales for preaching the First Crusade, and this is more likely to have been the new town of New Radnor than the small settlement of Old Radnor. A Charter Roll entry of 1235 by which the Earl of Pembroke was granted custody of the de Breos lands mentions 'Radnor Castle and the town of the castle', and the first murage grant to enable the building of defences around the town was recorded in the Patent Roll of 1257.
- 2.5 The borough that emerged below the castle was undoubtedly a plantation, that is a deliberately founded settlement usually laid out to a regular pattern. Initially slow to establish itself, the town underwent a rapid population expansion in the 14th century. The 97 burgesses in the returns of 1301 had nearly doubled to 189 holding 262 and a half plots, in an *Inquisition Post Mortem* three years later. A return of £13 on rents and tolls in 1360 indicates a prosperous settlement by the standards of the day.
- 2.6 The murage grant obtained in 1257 was followed by further grants in 1280, 1283 and 1290. A weekly market was operating early in the 14th century, and a charter for a yearly fair was obtained in 1306.
- 2.7 The castle and town were sacked by Owain Glyndŵr in 1401, leaving the ruins seen by Leland, and the later Middle Ages also witnessed a decline in the prosperity of the town of New Radnor.
- 2.8 A plan of the town by John Speed, published in 1611, shows large open areas within the town, surely reflecting a considerable reduction in the number of burgage plots recorded in the early 14th century. It was, however, elevated to the rank of shire town for Radnorshire at the time of the Act of Union in 1536, perhaps because it was the only place in the county that preserved the semblance of a castle, and the only one that could be used as a prison.
- 2.9 Despite its status the town slipped into gradual decline, a result of its location which had little to offer the trader. The courts of Great Sessions had been transferred to Presteigne by the late 17th century and even the weekly market ceased. By 1731 only 7 burgesses were left. Economically it was a failure. Williams early in the 19th century noted 'its deserted streets, several of which have no buildings and others are now only footpaths, ... not more than 50 dwelling houses, and most of those of mean appearance ... (Davies 1905).

Earlier excavations in New Radnor

- 2.10 In 1988, examination of a street frontage site in Hall Street revealed a corn-drying kiln of late medieval/early post-medieval date damaged by what was probably an 18th-century ditch (Dorling 1988).
- 2.11 Excavations on a field opposite the Porth, at the western end of Church Street, took place in 1991-2. Traces of intensive medieval usage were found during the 1991/92 excavations, fronting onto Church Street in OS plot 0675; the ground had been levelled out by later land

use and no indications of this activity were revealed by geophysical survey. The partial plans of several stone and timber buildings were located, together with the residue from what may have been a medieval smithy, three small circular ovens, a corn-drying kiln and several large latrine pits (Jones 1998). Evidence was also revealed for prehistoric activity on the site, consisting of a small assemblage of flintwork, including a single piece of Upper Palaeolithic date and others dating to the Mesolithic and neolithic, as well as a series of pits containing Bronze Age pottery. Further excavations were conducted in the same field in 2001-02, and these served to emphasise the significance of this western portion of the town (Border Archaeology 2002).

- 2.12 Most recently, an evaluation conducted on a vacant plot along Rectory Lane revealed further evidence for medieval occupation. The stone foundations of a 13th or 14th-century building were uncovered, including an open hearth and an oven. Following the collapse of the building another structure was built on the same site during the early post-medieval period, although this appeared to be agricultural rather than domestic (Grant and Jones 2005).
- 2.13 A watching brief conducted immediately to the east of the present Rectory earlier in 2005 revealed some residual medieval pottery, although the only feature identified was interpreted as a palaeochannel (Wainwright 2005).

3 WATCHING BRIEF (Fig. 2)

- 3.1 A watching brief was undertaken during the machine stripping of topsoil in the area of the new house and garage on 27 September 2005. An area of approximately 280m² was observed to the north-east of the existing driveway. The removal of between 0.3 and 0.35m of topsoil revealed undisturbed river gravels across the majority of the area.
- 3.2 The only feature identified cutting into the river gravels was a shallow linear gully aligned roughly north-west to south-east, and measuring between 0.75 and 0.9m in width and up to 0.12m deep. Two sections of the gully were excavated, revealing a single fill consisting of silty loam with some river gravel, from which a single sherd of a 13th or 14th-century glazed jug was recovered. The gully, which petered out to the north-west, is perhaps best interpreted as a shallow drainage feature.
- 3.3 There was a general paucity of artefacts from the topsoil and no further sherds of medieval pottery were recovered.
- 3.4 Following consultation with the curator it was agreed that there was no need to extend the watching brief to monitor the remaining topsoil stripping in the area to the south of the existing drive.

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The watching brief revealed a shallow gully of possible medieval date which is likely to have been a drainage feature and may have related to the strip field system that originated in the medieval period around the town of New Radnor. No evidence was revealed for any outworks associated with the medieval town defences, or for any occupation within the area investigated.
- 4.2 These results, together with those from the watching brief conducted to the east of the existing Rectory, suggest that the area to the south-east of the town defences remained unoccupied during the medieval period. This area lies close to the Summerhill Brook and is

likely to have been subject to periodic flooding, which is supported by the presence of a modern flood bank in the field immediately to the south of the development plot.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 5.1 The writer would like to thank Mr David Jenkinson and Mr David Bowen for their assistance during the project.

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APPENDIX 1

SPECIFICATION

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Contracting Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) have been invited by Dewi Evans Architects Ltd to prepare a specification for undertaking an archaeological watching brief in connection with the development of an area adjacent to the Rectory, School Lane, New Radnor, Powys (SO 21502607).
- 1.2 The site lies on the edge of the medieval town, to the south of the alignment of the town defences, and it is considered possible that buried deposits may survive relating to the defences or other occupation. The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, acting as advisors to the local planning authority, have determined that an archaeological watching brief should be carried out during groundworks and a brief for the work has been prepared by Mr M Walters (CWAT 575, 01/03/05).

2 Objectives

- 2.1 The objectives are:
 - 2.1.1 to record any archaeological features identified during the archaeological monitoring of relevant groundworks to ensure their preservation by record;
 - 2.1.2 to prepare a report outlining the results of the watching brief.

3 Methods

- 3.1 The watching brief will be undertaken during groundworks associated with the excavation of construction trenches, services, and access.
- 3.2 All archaeological deposits and/or features noted during the watching brief will be recorded and, where appropriate, excavated by hand and recorded by drawn section/plan and/or photography. All photography will be in digital format, minimum 3 mega pixels. All features identified will be tied in locationally to points which are identifiable on modern Ordnance Survey mapping.
- 3.3 The on-site contractors are required to allow sufficient opportunity for appropriate archaeological excavation and recording to be undertaken. Every effort will be made to minimise any disruption to the overall scheme of works.
- 3.4 Following the on-site work an illustrated and bound report will be prepared, if required. This will be in A4 format and contain, as necessary, conventional sections on: Site location, Topography and Geology; Historic Background; Watching Brief; Conclusions and References, together with any appropriate appendices on archives and finds.
- 3.5 The site archive will be prepared to specifications laid out in Appendix 3 in the Management of Archaeological Projects (English Heritage, 1991).

4 Resources and Programming

- 4.1 The watching brief will be undertaken by an experienced field archaeologist and overall supervision will be by Mr RJ Silvester, a senior member of CPAT's staff who is also a

member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists. The duration of the watching brief will be entirely determined by the contractor's programme of work.

- 4.2 All report preparation will be completed by or with the assistance of the same field archaeologist who conducted the fieldwork.
- 4.3 Copies of the report will be deposited with the client within two weeks of the completion of on-site works. If appropriate, a short report will be published in *Archaeology in Wales*.
- 4.4 Requirements relating to Health and Safety regulations will be adhered to by CPAT and its staff.
- 4.5 CPAT is covered by appropriate Public and Employer's Liability insurance.

N.W. Jones
28 July 2005



Plate 1. General view of the gully from the south-west.



Plate 2. Excavated section of the gully, viewed from the north-east.