

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Ysgol Brynhyfryd, Ruthin, Denbighshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



CPAT Report No 890

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Ysgol Brynhyfryd, Ruthin, Denbighshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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Report for Denbighshire County Council

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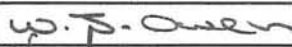
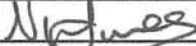
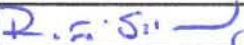

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In September 2007, the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was invited by Denbighshire County Council to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the initial groundworks associated with the construction of an extension to the Sixth Form Centre at Ysgol Brynhyfryd in Ruthin (Fig. 1).
- 1.2 A pre-planning evaluation had already been undertaken by Engineering Archaeology Services (EAS), an archaeological contractor based in Blaenau Ffestiniog, during May 2007, which revealed evidence for a lynchet, probably part of an undated field system, and two features which they suggested were footings for an undated timber structure. In addition to these archaeological features, two artefacts of note were recovered; a copper alloy buckle plate, probably of medieval date and a Late Mesolithic blade fragment. The watching brief was requested by Mrs Fiona Gale, County Archaeologist, Denbighshire County Council, in her capacity as archaeological curator for the region.

2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 2.1 Ysgol Brynhyfryd is located on the easternmost of two north to south glaciated ridges set within the Vale of Clwyd. The western ridge is occupied by the older parts of Ruthin, established around the medieval castle, while the eastern ridge is occupied by two schools and modern residential development.
- 2.2 The solid geology consists of weathered Permo-Triassic sandstone, overlain by boulder clay and fluvio-glacial deposits.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The development area lies c. 300m to the north-east of an area of prehistoric, Roman and early medieval activity, which was revealed during rescue excavations in advance of housing development at Brynhyfryd Park in 1989. However, the initial archaeological interest in this area relates to the discovery of a Roman cremation cemetery of Flavian/Trajanic date (late 1st century or early 2nd century AD) during building work at the nearby hospital in 1981, which led to the suggestion that a previously unknown Roman fort might be located in this general area (Waddelove 1982).
- 3.2 The main programme of excavation in 1989 was undertaken by CPAT, although other areas were also investigated by Mr Waddelove and Professor G D B Jones who produced an interim report on work carried out during late 1988 and early 1989, arguing that the evidence suggested the presence of a later 1st-century fort, and a civil settlement or *vicus* (Waddelove *et al* 1989; 1990). The results from CPAT's excavations, however, failed to reveal any features of an explicitly Roman military character, although the Flavian/Trajanic date of some of the pottery that was recovered strongly suggested military activity in the locality.
- 3.3 Evidence was produced, however, for multi-period occupation in the area, ranging from prehistoric to early medieval in date. Three curving ditches were identified, along with several other features, which produced a number of flint implements ranging in date from the Late Mesolithic to the Late Neolithic or early Bronze Age. Several sherds of Neolithic and Bronze Age pottery were also recovered.

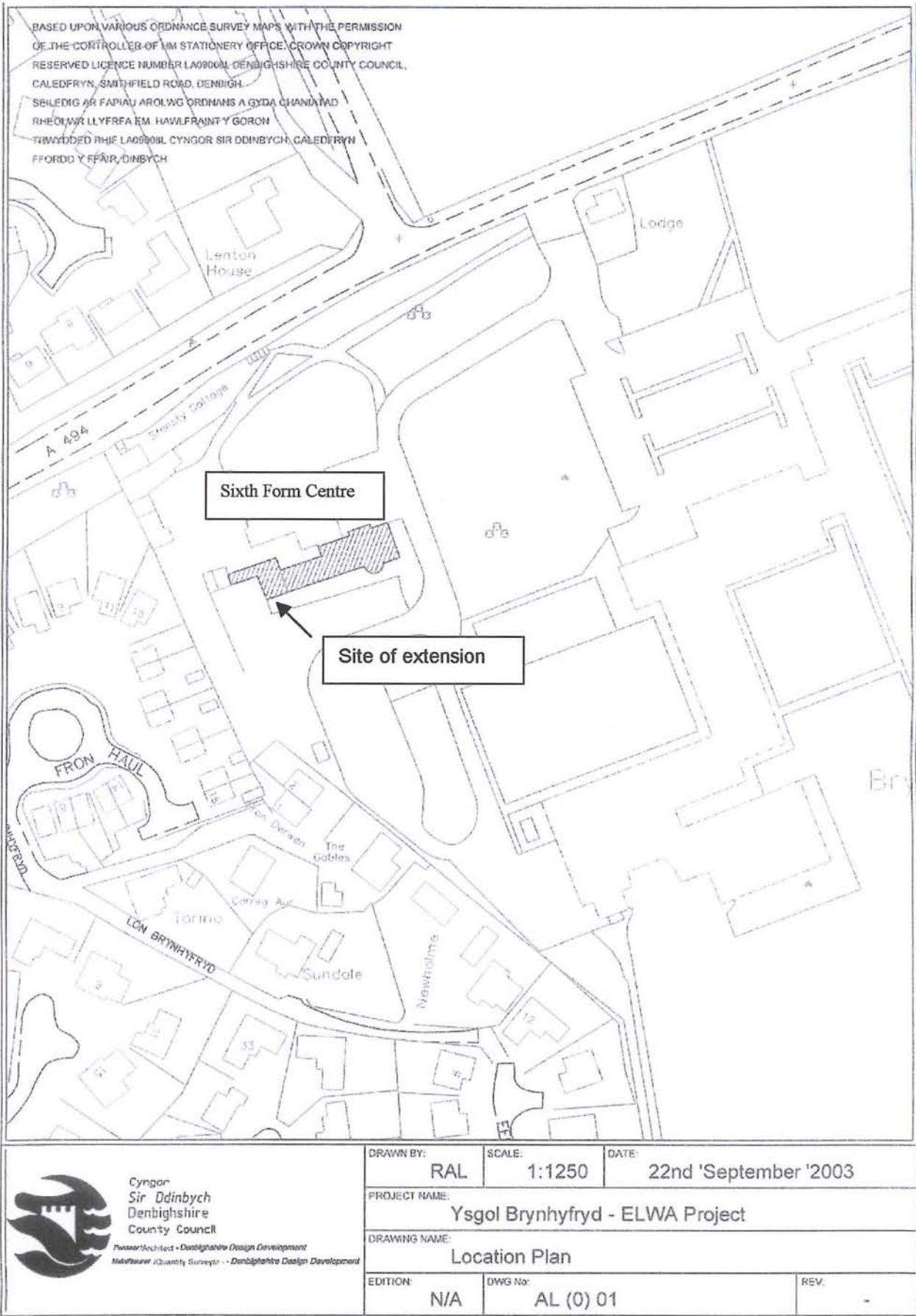


Fig. 1 Site Location

- 3.4 The excavations confirmed the presence of Romano-British occupation in the area which may have been part of a scattered civil settlement that developed along a trackway, in association with a possible fort further to the north. A small rectangular structure was identified, together with several cremations, which may be the remains of a mausoleum or *columbaria*. Cremation as a funerary practice belongs for the most part to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD and cemeteries are usually found alongside roads just outside forts or civil settlements. A number of post-holes and pits were also identified, although they did not form a sufficiently obvious pattern to suggest a building.
- 3.5 The latest phase of activity consisted of a small inhumation cemetery, comprising twelve graves aligned roughly east to west. Six graves had been cut through the fill of Romano-British features, and, although no secure dating was recovered from any of the graves, they were assumed to be early medieval in date.
- 3.6 An evaluation of an area on the west side of the school in January 2003 (Grant 2003) produced further evidence for prehistoric activity, consisting of a small pit containing sherds of Middle Bronze Age pottery, together with a small post-hole, also containing prehistoric pottery.
- 3.7 A pre-planning evaluation was undertaken by EAS during October and November 2006 on the area of new dining hall facilities, only 70m east of the Sixth Form Centre extension. This revealed a number of archaeological features, including a ditch, some possible lynchets, and a number of small pit and post hole features, all of which were undated.
- 3.8 A second pre-planning evaluation was undertaken by EAS during May 2007, on the site of the Sixth Form Centre extension, which revealed evidence for an undated lynchet running west-north-west to east-south-east, sealed by post-medieval plough soil. It was similar to those recorded in 2006, and probably formed part of an undated field system. Two other features filled with a clean, hard-packed, pinkish brown clayey deposit and sandstone fragments were suggested as footings for a timber structure. In addition, two artefacts of note were recovered; a copper alloy buckle plate, probably of medieval date and a Late Mesolithic blade fragment.

4 WATCHING BRIEF (Figs 2-3)

- 4.1 The watching brief was initially conducted between 18 and 20 September 2007 during the reduction of the general ground surface and the excavation of foundation trenches. A later visit was made on 1 October 2007 at the request of the client, following the discovery of a number of earlier features within the existing Sixth Form Centre. A drawn, written and photographic record was maintained throughout the archaeological works.
- 4.2 Numbers in brackets in the following text refer to individual contexts recorded on site and used in the site archive, most of which are illustrated on the accompanying plans and sections. The site archive will be deposited with the regional Historic Environment Record, maintained by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust at Welshpool.
- 4.3 The ground reduction works uncovered several dumps of relatively modern building rubble, but the final reduced ground level for the floor of the new building did not extend beneath the base of the plough soil. The backfilled EAS evaluation trench, which had been cut through the plough soil, was still clearly visible as a darker soil at the level reached by the ground reduction works.
- 4.4 The foundation trenches were mechanically excavated using a toothed bucket, cutting through a layer of dark humic topsoil (EAS context 100), the sandy plough soil beneath it (EAS context 103), and into the natural subsoil beneath by c. 0.2m. Within the foundation trenches, a possible feature was

observed in section near the south end of the foundation trench for the west wall. The feature, which may have been a small gully, was sealed beneath the plough soil and cut into the natural pink silty clay natural subsoil. It measured c. 0.3m wide and 0.22m deep, with almost vertical sides, and was filled with a pale yellow-buff silty clay containing some flaked stone but no artefactual evidence.

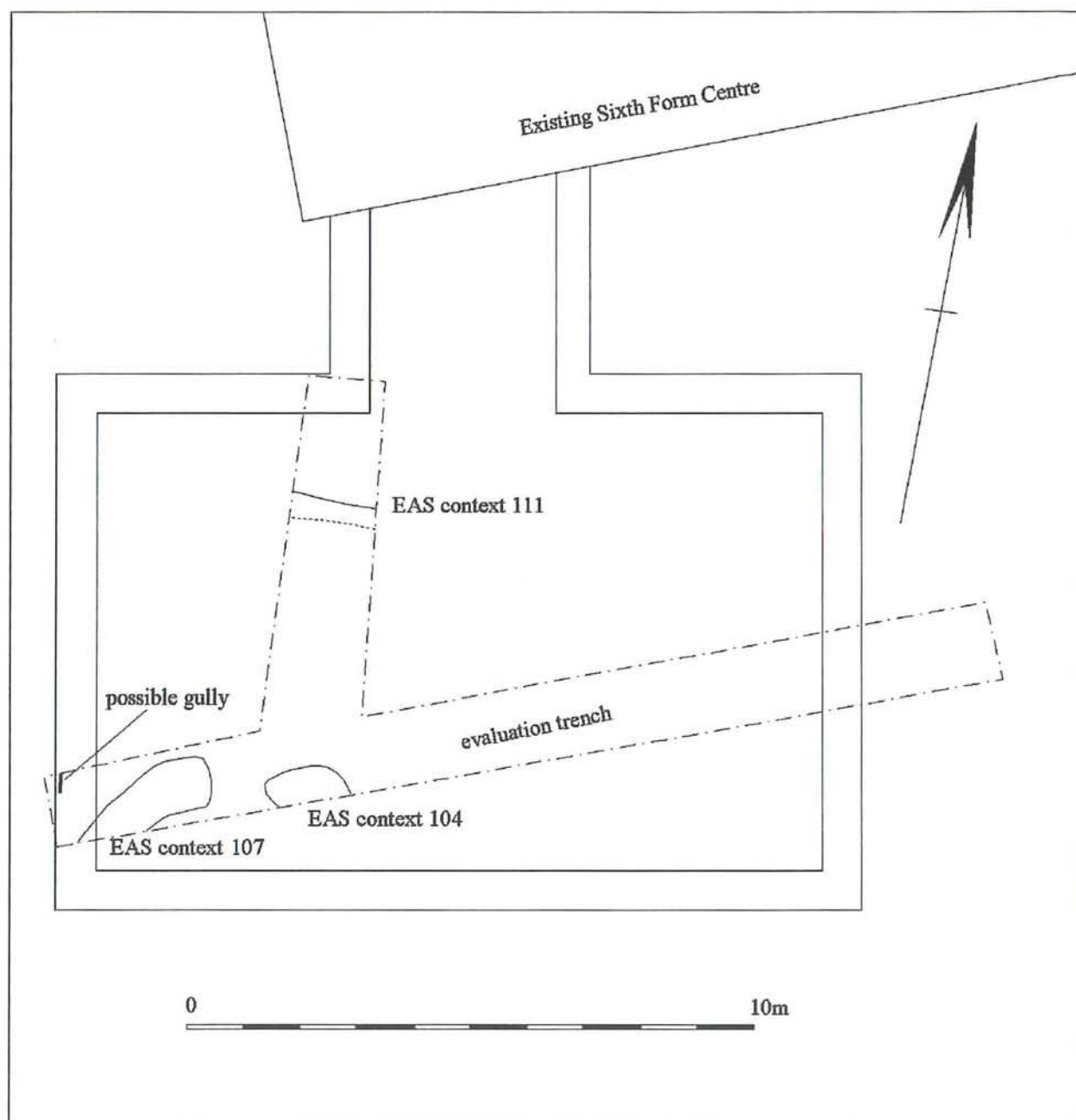


Fig. 2 Plan of foundation trenches showing EAS evaluation and location of a possible gully noted in section

- 4.5 During the remodelling of the existing Sixth Form Centre an earlier chimney with an associated 'copper', or boiler, was revealed in one of the rooms. Following discussions between the client and the County Archaeologist it was agreed that a further visit by CPAT was required in order to record this, and any other features which might come to light. Unfortunately, the copper had been removed by the time of the visit, although its position could still be readily identified. However, a number of other features had also been revealed, for which a rapid drawn, photographic and written description was made (see Fig. 3).

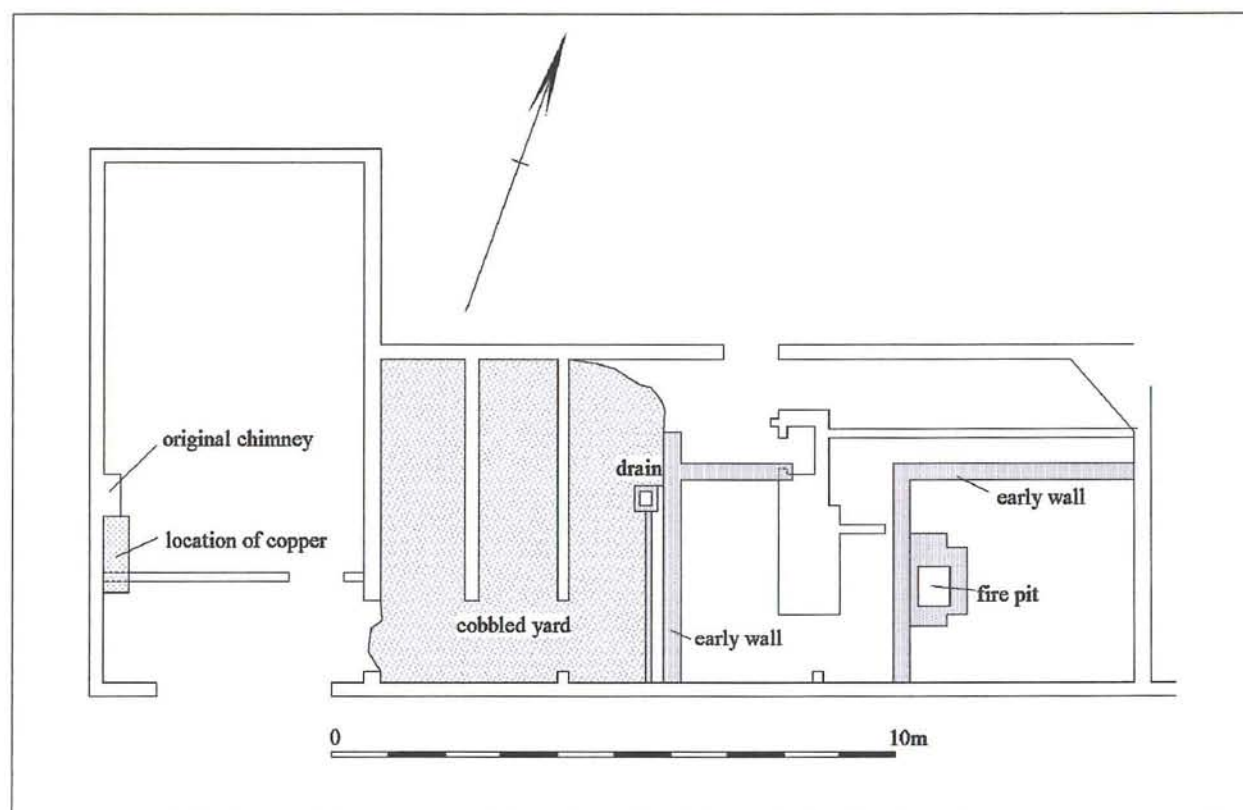


Fig. 3 Plan of existing Sixth Form Centre showing evidence for earlier building

- 4.6 The basal courses of several brick walls were revealed, presumably associated with an earlier building. A small fire pit was identified in one room of this building, comprising a low brick wall, two bricks wide, enclosing an area of around 0.6 by 0.55m and up to 0.8m deep. The pit itself extended for 0.2m below the lower course of brickwork, and two fragments of clay pipe were recovered from its base.



Plate 1 Remains of chimney and position of copper. Photo CPAT 2474.043



Plate 2 View of fire pit and walls belonging to earlier building. Photo CPAT 2474.031

- 4.7 Further to the west two more walls were identified, possibly part of the same building, with a cobbled surface, possibly a yard, extending to the west of the north/south wall. A brick-built drain was set into the cobbles along the western side of the wall.



Plate 3 View of brick walls and external drain belonging to earlier building. Photo CPAT 2474.037



Plate 4 View of cobbled surface pre-dating existing Sixth Form Centre. Photo CPAT 2474.041

5 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The monitoring of ground reduction works during the construction of the new extension to the Sixth Form Centre revealed no evidence for any archaeological features as the final reduced ground level did not penetrate beneath the base of the ploughsoil. Further monitoring during the excavation of foundation trenches revealed a possible gully, visible in one section, although with no associated artefactual evidence. A number of artefacts were identified during the removal of the ploughsoil, including a range of 18th- and 19th-century ceramics, although none were retained.
- 5.2 Recording work on the interior of the existing Sixth Form Centre revealed significant evidence for an earlier brick-built building, comprising several wall lines, a fire pit and a cobbled yard. Although no dating evidence was recovered it seems likely that the remains are associated with an earlier version of Brynhyfryd House, possibly dating to the later 18th century or the first half of the 19th century.

6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 6.1 The writers would like to thank the following for their assistance and co-operation: Mr Ian Grant, CPAT; Mr D Whieldon, Denbighshire County Council; and Mr R Smart, Read Construction.

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APPENDIX 1

SPECIFICATION

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) have been invited to tender for an archaeological watching brief in connection with the construction of a new Sixth Form Centre extension at Ysgol Brynhyfryd, Ruthin. Planning permission has been granted with the inclusion of a Condition which requires an archaeological watching brief during the initial stages of ground disturbance.
- 1.2 The site was the subject of an archaeological evaluation by Engineering Archaeological Services Ltd in May 2007, the results from which revealed possible post-pads for a timber-framed structure, as well as a Late Mesolithic flint blade and a medieval buckle.

2 Objectives

- 2.1 The objectives are:
 - 2.1.1 to record any archaeological features identified during the archaeological monitoring of 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 Archaeological supervision of all relevant groundworks to include: the inspection of revealed surfaces for archaeological features; recording of archaeological features; limited excavation of features, where appropriate.
- 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 to a minimum resolution of 4 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. 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), to be deposited with the County Museums Service.

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 (IFA). CPAT is an IFA Registered Organisation. 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 and regional Historic Environment Officer within one month of the completion of on-site works. If appropriate, a short report will be published in an appropriate regional or national journal.
- 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
11 September 2007