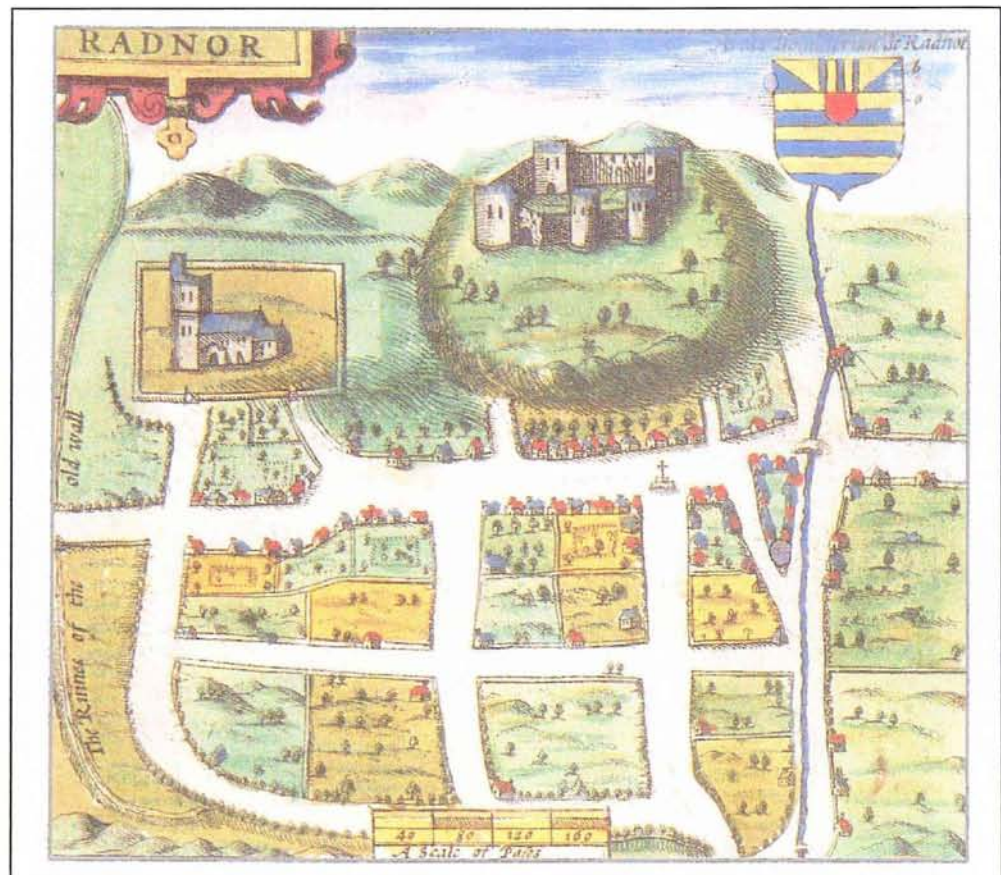


Church Street, New Radnor, Electricity Supply

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



CPAT Report No 829

Church Street, New Radnor, Electricity Supply

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

F Grant
December 2006

Report for Western Power

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CPAT Report Record

Report and status

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In November 2006 the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was invited by Mr Mark Turrell of Western Power Distribution to prepare a specification and quotation for undertaking an archaeological watching brief on a site at New Radnor in Powys, in connection with the provision of a new electricity supply. The watching brief was requested by Cadw as the works involved ground disturbance within a part of the medieval town which is protected as a scheduled ancient monument (Rd 152).

2 LOCATION

- 2.1 The site lies within the historic core of the medieval town, on the north side of Church Street, to the east of The Porth (SO 3210 2608). The field in question is now pasture but contains earthworks thought to relate to medieval occupation and consequently the area is statutorily designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM Rd 152) (Fig. 1).

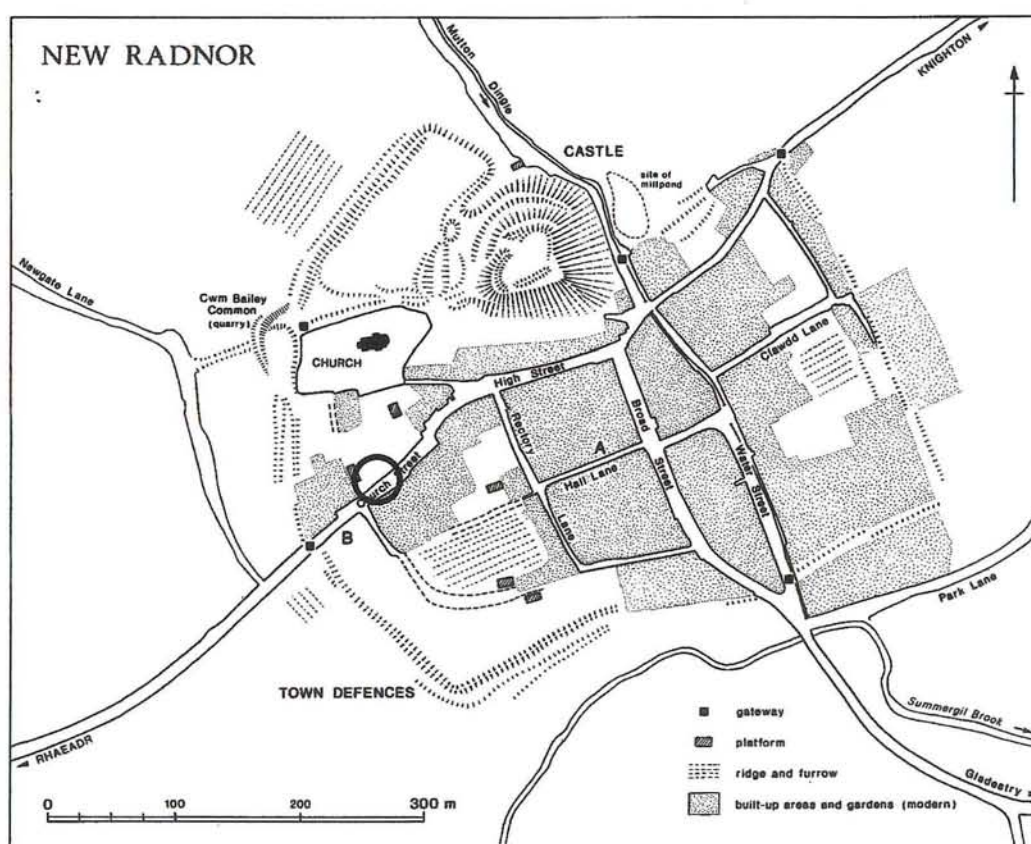


Fig. 1 Modern plan of New Radnor showing known earthworks (from Silvester 1997).
The area of the watching brief is indicated by the circle.

3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 New Radnor is a small and demonstrably shrunken settlement 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 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.

- 3.2 Notwithstanding its present obscurity, it played a particularly important and strategic role in earlier centuries, and arguably its archaeological potential is greater than that of its more successful neighbours.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 It has been the subject of a very detailed examination by the writer in 1994 and much of what follows has been adapted from relevant sections of those writings (see Silvester 1994a; 1994b; 1997)
- 3.5 New Radnor is fortunate in having a series of early maps which provide otherwise unobtainable background information. John Speed's plan of the town (Fig. 2) was published in 1611, but drawn probably in 1606. A recently identified map (Fig. 3), now in the Powis County Council Archives, probably dates from around the mid to late 18th century, and then in quick succession appeared a map to accompany the enclosure of the common lands in the parish, which incorporated, unusually, a plan of the town (1811), and secondly Le Keux's map prepared for Jonathan Williams' aborted *History of Radnorshire*, abandoned around 1818, and not published until the middle of the century (Williams 1859). Subsequently, the Tithe Map of 1846 (Fig. 4) and the earliest edition of the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map (1889; Fig. 5) provide valuable data. A full list of these sources can be found in Silvester 1994a, except for the new map in the Powys Archives.
- 3.6 New Radnor appears frequently in the Calendars of State Papers, usually with reference to the castle, less frequently to the town. Oblique aerial photographs of New Radnor have been taken almost annually since 1984 and provide information on the earthworks of the town.

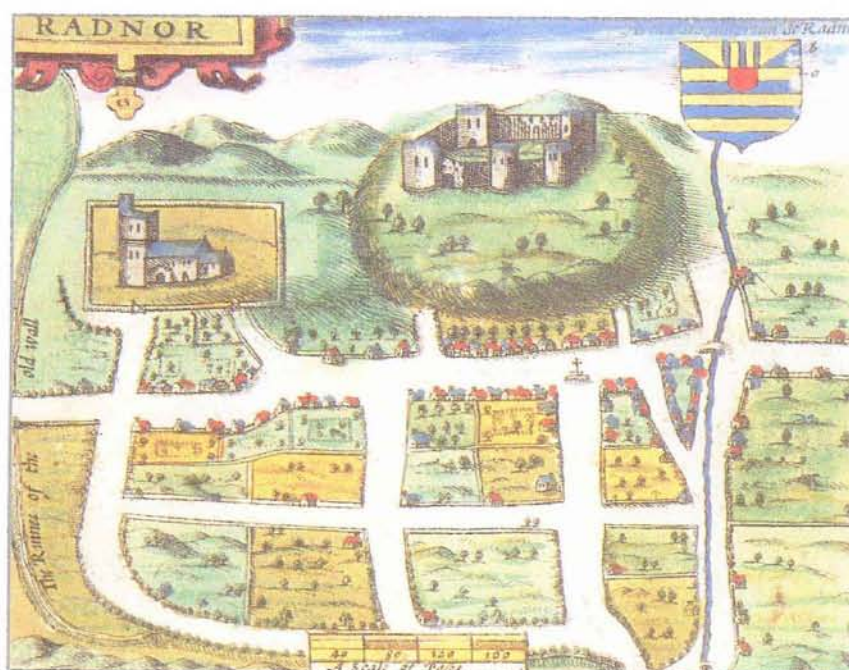


Fig 2. John Speed's map of New Radnor published in 1611

History

- 3.7 New Radnor first appears in the records specifically as 'Radenore Nova' in 1277. Though 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 a detailed description 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 New Radnor than 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.
- 3.8 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.
- 3.9 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.
- 3.10 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.

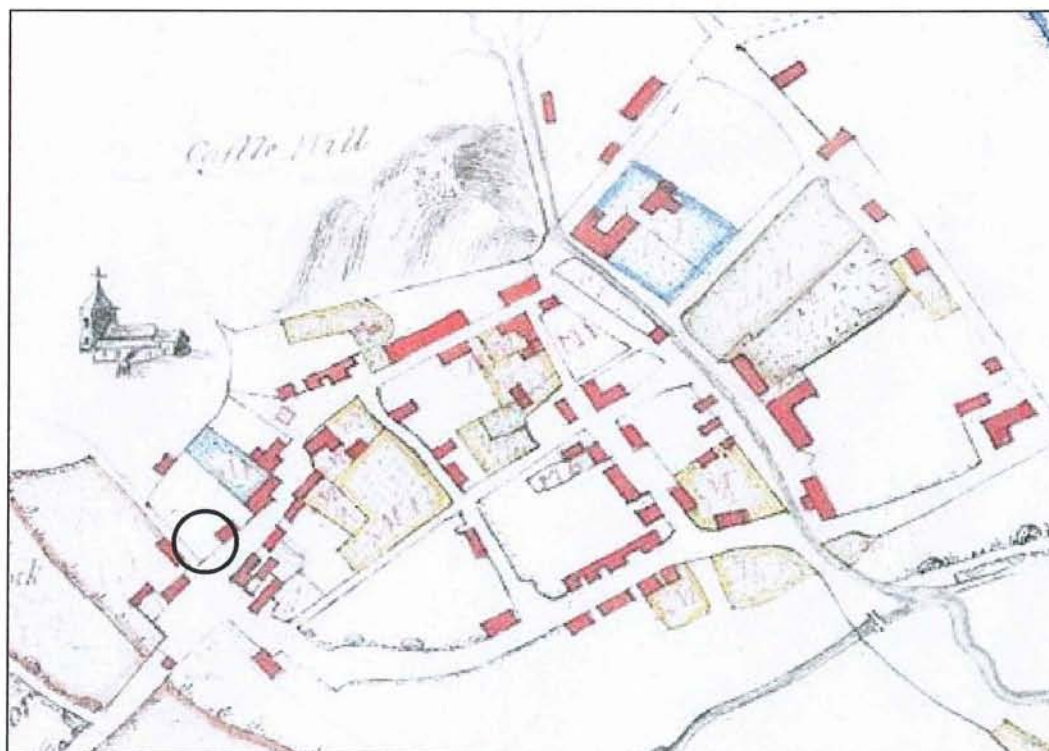


Fig. 3 Later 18th-century map of New Radnor (reproduced by permission of Powys County Archives). The area of the watching brief is indicated by the circle.

- 3.11 Speed's plan (Fig. 2) 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.

- 3.12 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).

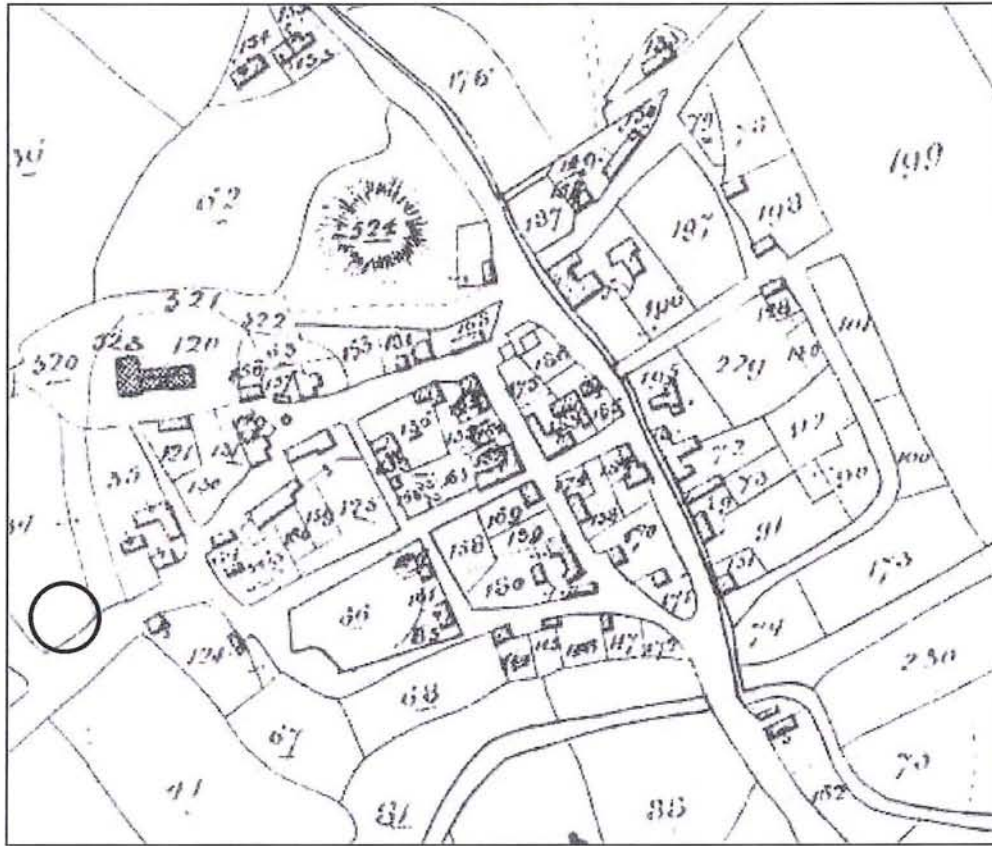


Fig. 4 Tithe Survey for New Radnor Parish, 1846

The setting of the watching brief

- 3.13 The plot of land that is the subject of this report lies within the town defences towards the western side of the town.
- 3.14 The modern street layout reveals the medieval grid plan that was imposed on gently sloping ground below the castle. Three streets ran on a west-south-west to east-north-east alignment: High Street, Hall Lane and the southern arm of Rectory Lane. Four others were aligned north-north-west to south-south-east.
- 3.15 Church Street represents one of the original streets in the town, leading to the west gate of the town. The sinuous line of Church Street as it curves to meet High Street represents an irregularity in the grid pattern. It is best explained by the presence of an earlier track approaching from the west and continuing on towards Presteigne and Knighton which had to link into a grid pattern on a different alignment. It does not seem to indicate that there was an earlier line to the route which would have been much very much closer to the evaluation plot.
- 3.16 A later 18th-century plan of the town (fig. 3) shows a building fronting onto Church Street immediately to the east of the watching brief area. By the time of the Tithe Survey for New Radnor in 1846 (fig. 4) the building had disappeared, a situation which is reinforced by the Ordnance Survey in 1889 (fig. 5).

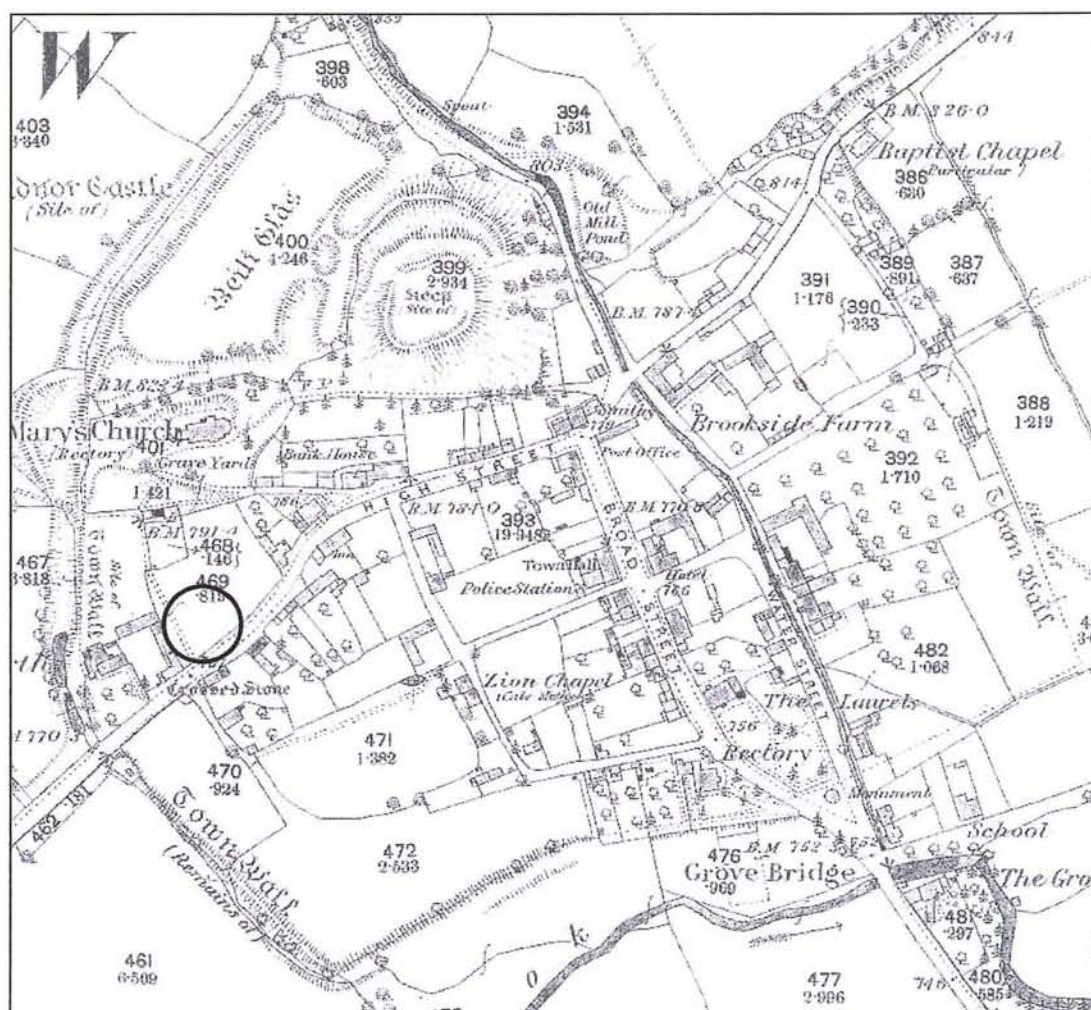


Fig. 5 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 1:2,500 map 1889

Earlier excavations in New Radnor

- 3.17 In 1988, examination of a street frontage site in Hall Street (Fig. 1, A; SO 2124 6084) revealed a corn-drying kiln of late medieval/early post-medieval date damaged by what was probably an 18th-century ditch (Dorling 1988).
- 3.18 Excavations on a field opposite The Porth took place in 1991-2 (Fig. 1, B). 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).
- 3.19 More recent excavations on a plot immediately to the north of Bank Buildings in Rectory Lane revealed significant evidence for occupation during the medieval and early post-medieval periods, together with indications of metalworking. The excavations uncovered the foundations for a stone

building of likely 13th or 14th-century date, which included a succession of open hearths and a small oven (Grant and Jones 2005).

- 3.20 The excavations conducted to date demonstrate the high archaeological potential of the town of New Radnor, but at the same time clearly indicate that surface traces (or, more accurately, the absence of them) are not an adequate guide to the archaeological reality.

4 WATCHING BRIEF

- 4.1 The watching brief was undertaken on 14th November 2006, during the mechanical excavation of new electrical cable trenches and a replacement telegraph pole setting. A full drawn, written and photographic record was maintained throughout. Numbers in brackets in the following text refer to individual records in the site archive.

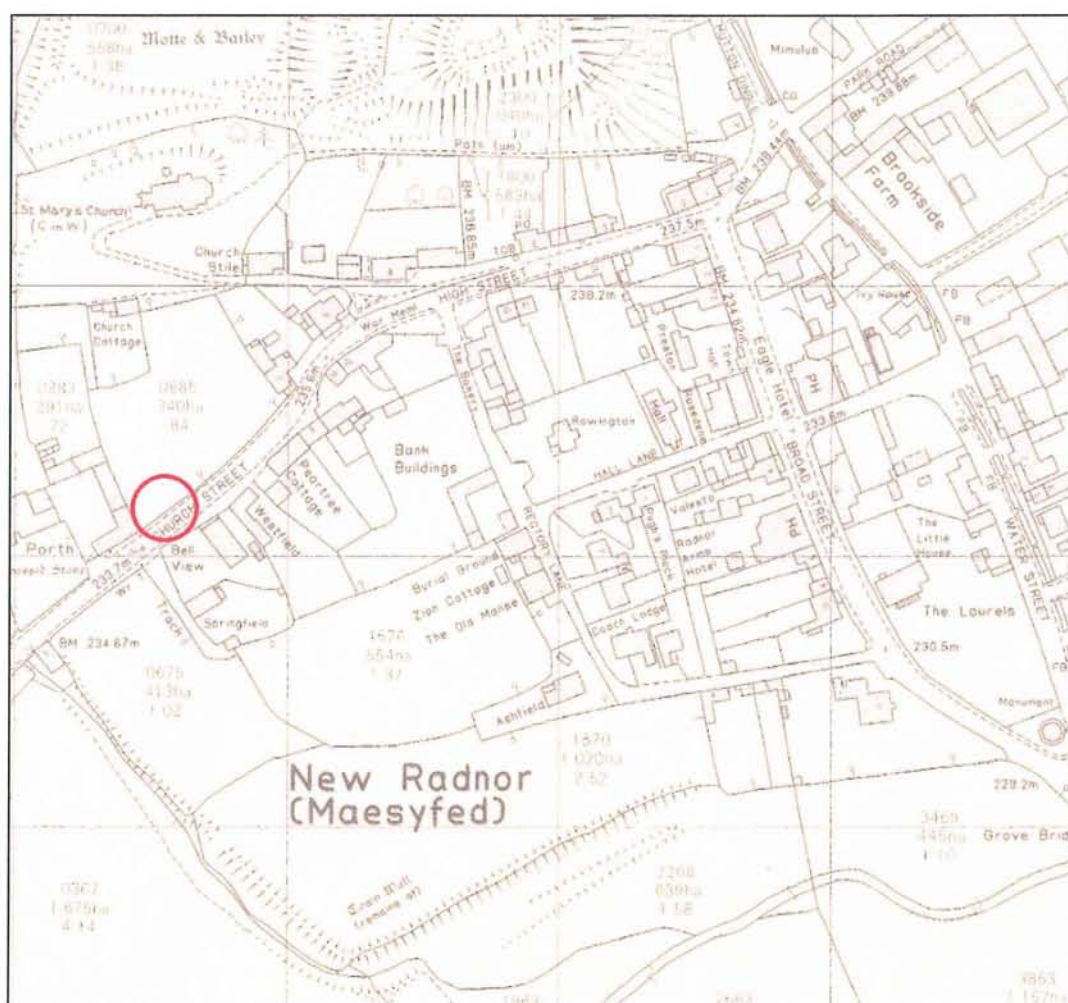


Fig. 6 Site location.

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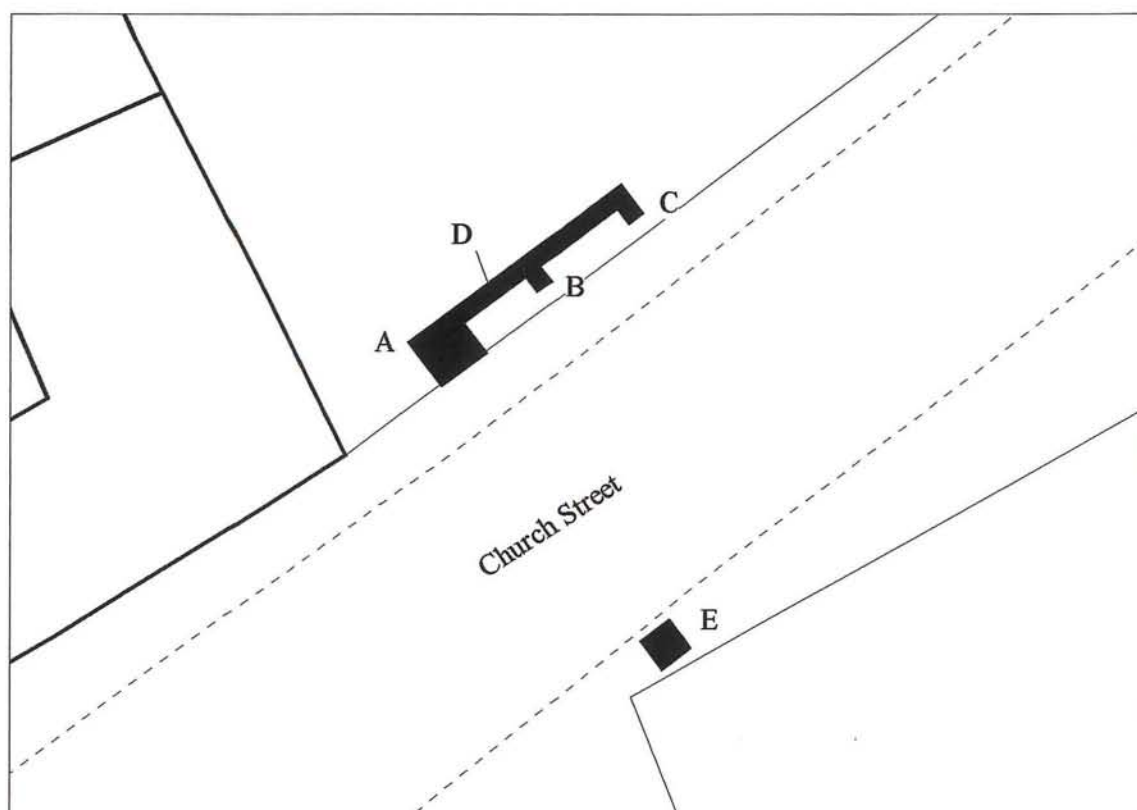


Fig. 7 Plan of trenches (not to scale)

- 4.2 The excavation consisted of two mechanical mole access pits (A and E) on opposite sides of Church Street, a new setting for the telegraph pole (B) and its associated fastenings (C), and a connecting trench for the electricity cable (D). The current ground surface on the north-western side of Church Street undulates quite considerably, dropping to pavement level in the vicinity of the access gate where Pit A was located, and rising to *c.*0.80m above the pavement level in the area of the telegraph pole and the siting of Pits B and C. Pit D, in the pavement on the south-eastern side of the road revealed only very disturbed ground and a variety of service pipes, and was therefore not recorded. Pits A-C and connecting Trench D on the north-western side of the road revealed a relatively uniform sequence of deposits, albeit with some variation relating to the differences in slope of the current ground surface.
- 4.3 Pit A measured 1.5m x 1.5m x 1.30m deep and was located directly opposite Pit E in order to allow access to the mechanical mole. In the base of the pit the natural grey clay (05) was revealed, overlain by a 0.30m-thick deposit of yellowish grey sandy clay (04) containing up to 20% sub-angular and rounded pebbles. Above this was a 0.60m-thick deposit of distinctly stony, greyish yellow gritty, sandy clay (03) of relatively loose texture and containing *c.*30% shattered stones up to 0.30m in diameter. This was interpreted as a possible early post-medieval demolition layer, as identified in previous excavations in the town (see for example Grant and Jones, 2005, 7). This material was sealed by a thin band of pebble-rich material (02) beneath the current dark blackish-brown topsoil (01).



Plate 1 Location of excavations



Plate 2 Pit A from south-west

- 4.4 Pit B was dug to allow replacement of the telegraph pole and was located approximately 5.7m to the north-east of Pit A. Pit C was dug part way between the pole and Pit A to allow the insertion of a fastening hawser. Both pits were 0.70m wide x 1.50m in length and 1.50-1.60m deep. Although some disturbance was obvious in the upper area of Pit B owing to previous insertion of earlier poles, both

pits generally displayed similar characteristics in their stratigraphy. The base of each pit comprised the upper surface of flat, possibly slab-like stones (08) and (09), which were left undisturbed. It was not possible to tell within the limits of the excavation if the stones were part of a structure or naturally deposited material, but they appear to lie at the approximate level of the base of deposit (03) in Pit A, which was interpreted as a probable demolition layer. Indeed, the stones in both Pits B and C were overlain by a 0.85m-thick deposit of similar, stony material (07). An intermediate deposit (06) of dark soil containing up to 60% fragmented stones and sub-angular pebbles separated this material from the topsoil (01), and may be related to (02) in Pit A. The depth of Trench D (0.70m) meant only the topsoil (01) and demolition deposit (03)/(06) was disturbed.

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 Limited excavation carried out for the new electrical cable trenches and a replacement telegraph pole setting revealed a depth of material which would appear to represent demolition debris. Similar material has been identified elsewhere in New Radnor during earlier excavations. The presence of stone in the base of part of the excavations may relate to the remains of medieval buildings located on the street frontage, but much further investigation would be required to confirm this. No finds were retrieved during the procedure.

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APPENDIX 1

PROJECT ARCHIVE

9 context record forms
1 A4 site sketch plans
6 Digital images
Photographic catalogue
Context Register

APPENDIX 2

SPECIFICATION

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) have been invited by Western Power to prepare a specification for undertaking a programme of archaeological work in connection with the provision of a new electricity supply within the scheduled area of New Radnor Medieval Town (Rd152). Scheduled Monument Consent has been granted by Cadw with a condition requiring that intrusive works be carried out under the supervision of a suitably qualified archaeologist.
- 1.2 The following specification of works details the methodology for undertaking the required watching brief.

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 The watching brief will be undertaken to include: the archaeological supervision of all relevant groundworks and appropriate archaeological excavation and recording of any significant features or deposits which may be revealed.
- 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 megapixels. 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).

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 also 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 Cadw within one month 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

9 November 2006