

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Pilleth Battlefield, Whitton, Powys

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AND METAL DETECTOR SURVEY



CPAT Report No 774

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AND METAL DETECTOR SURVEY

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Report for Energy Services – E.on UK

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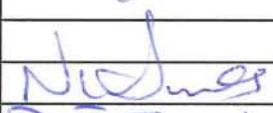
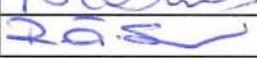
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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In November 2005 the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust was invited by Wayleave Survey and Engineering Ltd, acting on behalf of Energy Services (E.on UK), to provide a specification and quotation for undertaking a metal detector survey and watching brief within a plot of ground to the south-east of Pilleth Church.
- 1.2 The programme of archaeological work was associated with the installation of an underground cable from an existing electricity pole to Pilleth Church (SO 256682). The area is thought to be part of the medieval battlefield of Pilleth and the Curatorial Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust advised that a programme of archaeological work should be undertaken in advance of and during the development. Although no curatorial brief was produced a letter from Mr Walters (dated 11 October 2005) outlined the programme of work that should be adopted.

2 LOCATION AND GEOLOGY

- 2.1 Pilleth is located on the north side of the Lugg valley *c.* 5km south-west of Knighton. The Church of St Mary lies at the base of the eastern slope of Bryn Glas, with a small settlement to the east, centred around Pilleth Court.
- 2.2 The solid geology of the immediate area consists of undivided mudstones and siltstones belonging to the Ludfordian (Ludlow) period of rocks of Silurian age (1994 British Geological Survey map). The soils of the area consist of fine loamy and silty soils belonging to the Denbigh 1 Soil Association (1983 Soil Survey of England and Wales map).

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Prehistoric activity near Pilleth is represented by a number of flint flakes of Neolithic and Bronze Age date (PRNs 289, 6288) that were found in a field between the church and the River Lugg in the early 1950s. They were not precisely located, and are recorded as being in Knighton Secondary School Museum.
- 3.2 The name Pilleth is derived from 'Pelelei' of 1086, which may be a Celtic name, or perhaps an Old English compound meaning 'pool slope'.
- 3.3 Pilleth has a significance in the political history of the Middle Ages: Bryn Glas hill was the site of a battle (PRN 13196) where Owain Glyndŵr won a decisive victory over Sir Edmund Mortimer on 22 June (St. Alban's Day) 1402. Glyndŵr had led a force into Radnorshire and was intercepted by an English army under the command of Mortimer, which would have been largely made up of tenants from the Mortimer estates. The two armies met near the village of Pilleth, and the chronicles imply that the battle took place on Bryn Glas hill above Pilleth church. It is recorded that the church was burnt during the battle (Davies 1995).
- 3.4 It seems probable that Owain's forces took up a position on the hillside, and that Mortimer's army advanced up the hill to meet them. At the crucial moment, however, their own archers turned on them and they were utterly defeated. The slaughter was said to be horrendous, and accounts put the numbers killed at between 200 and 1,100. This was one of the most significant moments of the rebellion: an English county levy had been utterly overwhelmed by the Welsh. Reports also quickly circulated that the Welsh women accompanying Owain's army had 'obscenely mutilated' many of the bodies of the fallen. Mortimer was captured, and when the English government procrastinated over his ransom he threw his lot in with the Welsh, marrying

Owain's daughter on 30 November 1402. As his claim to the throne was arguably better than that of the king, Henry IV, this was a serious development. Local tradition indicates that the bodies were buried in mass graves on the hillside and six Wellingtonia trees were planted to indicate one of the sites, although no records exist to substantiate this claim. Glyndŵr's triumph at Pilleth is thought to have represented a watershed in the fortunes of the national uprising.

- 3.5 St Mary's Church (PRN 16047; Grade II* listing) occupies a terrace cut across the contours. It has a 13th/14th-century tower with later modifications, a single-cell nave, a 14th-century south doorway, fragmentary window tracery of the 15th century and a stoup of c. 1200. Most of the building was destroyed by fire in 1894 and restored in 1911. A holy well (PRN 287) exists a few metres to the north of the church. It is rhombic in shape, stone-lined and a flight of five steps leads down into it. The churchyard (PRN 16259) is rectangular and shows some evidence of an extension on the east, but no element of curvilinearity.
- 3.6 Earthworks (PRN 4432; OS old plot 279), including platforms and banks to the north, east, and south-east of the churchyard appear to be the remains of a deserted medieval settlement. There are also earthworks in the small field (OS old plot 278) immediately behind the Court, but these may be the relics of a former orchard or gardens associated with the house. A further platform (PRN 16258; OS old plot 256) terraced into the slope just beyond the western edge of the churchyard is more likely to be the site of an earlier dwelling. The full extent of these earthworks has not been assessed.
- 3.7 Abandoned quarries on the western edge of the churchyard and a few metres to the south were presumably exploited in the construction of Pilleth Court and its outbuildings, and perhaps too at an earlier period when the church was built.

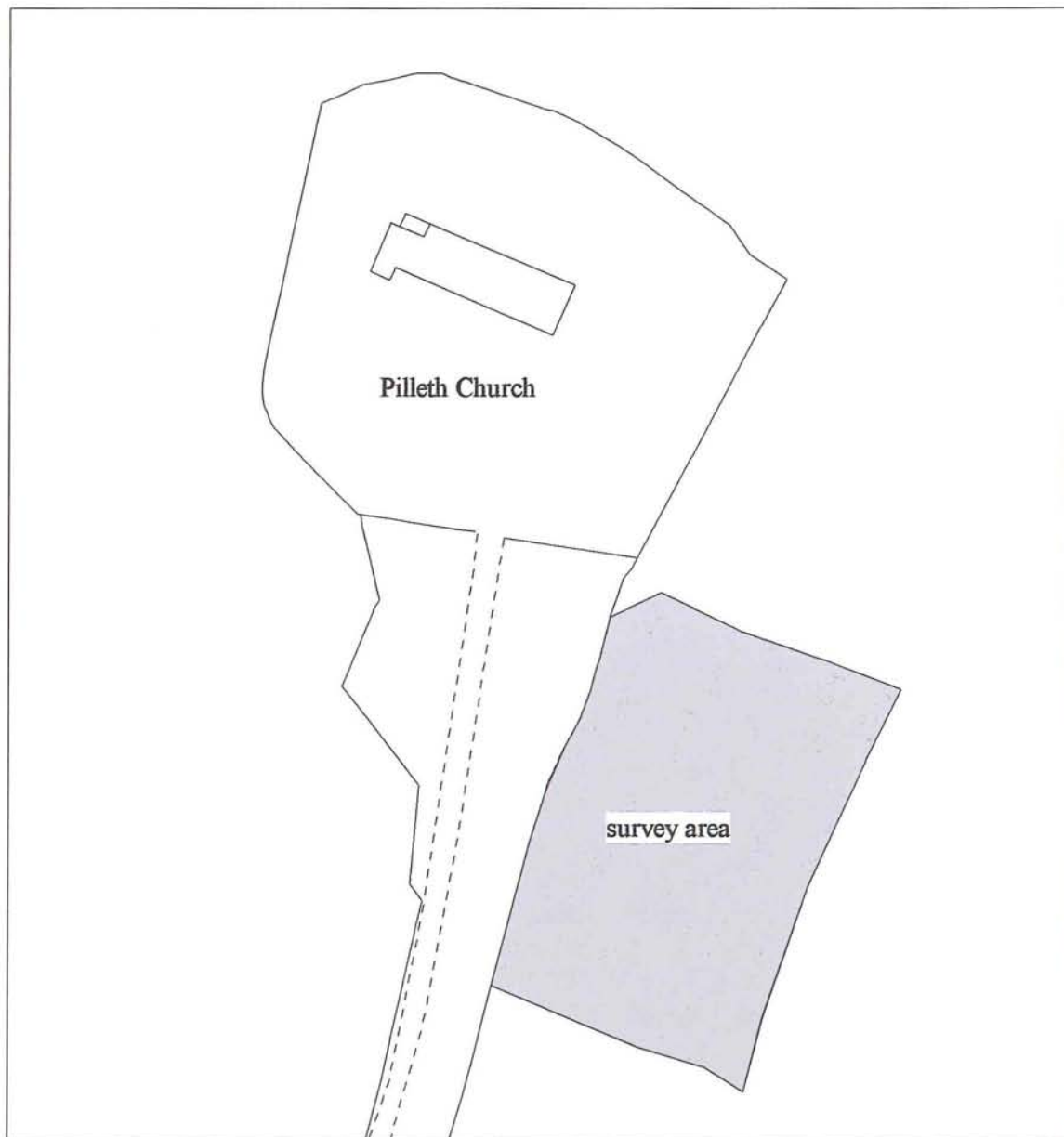


Fig. 1 Location of metal detector survey, scale 1:1,000

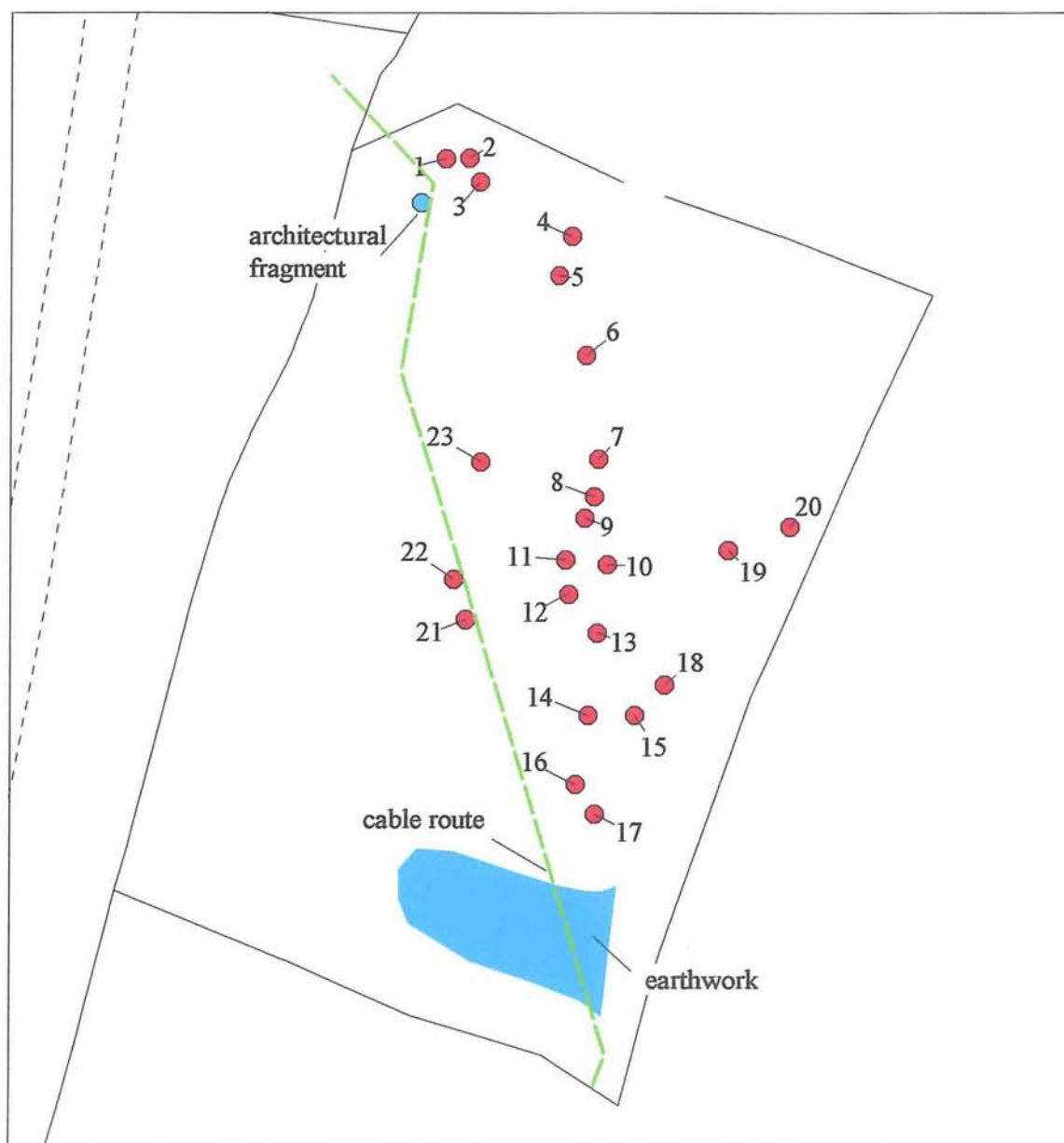


Fig. 2 Pilleth metal detector survey, January 2006: distribution of finds, scale 1:500

4 METAL DETECTOR SURVEY

- 4.1 The metal detector survey was undertaken on 23 January 2006, using a Fisher Research Laboratory Model M.95 M-Scope. The initial survey was along a 3m-wide corridor that encompassed the proposed route of the underground cable. The metal detector was set to a *non-discriminating* position in order to detect all metallic objects, and to a *ground* setting of up to 0.6m in depth. On completion of the initial sweep the survey was repeated with the *ground* setting increased to detect objects up to a depth of 1.5m. Because of the low number of objects recovered from the designated corridor, the survey was extended to include the whole of the field (SO 25666815; Fig. 1). The position of all significant finds was recorded using digital total station surveying (Fig. 2) after which all of the finds were removed.
- 4.2 A total of 26 metallic objects were recovered, together with three small sherds of medieval pottery (see Appendix 1). All of the artefacts were residual finds recovered from topsoil or old ploughsoil deposits. Although the field was pasture the area had become contaminated with large quantities of fencing wire, tacks, nails and agricultural machine debris. In addition, a portion of the south-eastern extent of the field had been set aside for burning waste timber, the remaining residue of which contained hundreds of modern nails. This effectively removed the burnt area from the initial survey, although the watching brief during trenching operations included the removal of the topsoil that allowed a re-assessment of this area to be undertaken.



Fig. 3 Metal detecting survey along the corridor of the proposed site works.
Photo CPAT 2077-008

- 4.3 The objects were mostly of heavily corroded iron, but included one piece of cut-lead sheet and one copper Victorian penny, dated *c.*1872. Identifiable iron objects included the following; horseshoes (presently undated), square sectioned nails, hooks and bolts and a bone-handled pocket-knife (20th-century date). None of the unidentifiable objects resembled battlefield debris such as strap-ends, buckles, scabbard chapes and broken blades. Furthermore, no arrowheads were recovered, special attention being given to the identification of a type commonly referred to as a *bodkin* (a plate and chain-mail armour piercing arrowhead of long square-sectioned form that is often mis-identified as a heavily corroded nail).

- 4.4 In addition, a fragment of worked (possibly machine cut) *oolite* stone was recovered which appears to be part of a window moulding, probably 19th-century date. It is assumed that this was discarded during past restoration works undertaken at St. Mary's Church.

5 WATCHING BRIEF

- 5.1 The watching brief was undertaken over a two-day period between 31 January and 1 February 2006, although arrangements had been made with CPAT for work to commence on 30 January. All of the trenching was undertaken under close archaeological supervision and the spoil was scanned using the same metal detector techniques, referred to in section 4.1. The groundworks consisted of a machine excavated trench 0.35m wide and up to 1.0m deep which extended for a distance of c. 70m (see Fig. 2). The cable laying commenced in the south-east corner of the field adjacent to an existing electricity pole. The watching brief revealed that in general there was a considerable depth of hill-wash, in places up to 0.8m deep. The topsoil, a dark brown silty sand and clay mix, averaged 0.15m in depth and contained a negligible number of finds. The underlying ploughsoil, a light brown silty sand clay up to 0.64m deep, contained a few pits of likely 19th-century date. Two sherds of medieval pottery were also retrieved from this deposit. Below the ploughsoil was a yellow-orange silty clay subsoil that had been disturbed in parts, evident by numerous inclusions of charcoal flecks.



Fig. 4 East facing section illustrating black charcoal deposits underlying earthworks at the base of the trench. Photo CPAT 2077-011

- 5.2 As the excavation of the trench continued two water pipes were recorded at a depth of 0.6m, located in the southern gateway into the field, lying in a 2m-wide trench orientated south-west to north-east. Beyond the pipe trench there was a noticeable change in the soil deposition within the field. The topsoil now contained fragmented shale throughout and there were two discernable cultivation layers with a combined depth of 0.9m. At a point where the trench cut through an earthwork of probable post-medieval date a deposit of charcoal rich dark brown soil was observed in section underlying a large deposit of silt and shale (0.5m thick), which in turn

was below the ploughsoil. The deposit, 4m in width and 0.22m thick, consisted of a burnt reddish silt sandwiched between two charcoal rich lenses (Fig. 4). Underlying this layer was a yellowy brown clay from which a heavily corroded iron nail was recovered. Although the base of the trench was now 1.3m in depth the natural subsoil was not evident.

- 5.3 To the north-west of the earthworks, the trench extended to a depth of 1m with the exposed stratigraphy comprising the topsoil and two underlying cultivation layers as previously recorded. A few sherds of 18th-century pottery were recovered from the upper ploughsoil but the lower ploughsoil remained undated. Apart from the north-western extent of the field, where there was evidence of quarry waste (up to 0.7m thick) overlying the ploughsoils, the characteristics of the soil deposits remained consistent with those previously recorded.



Fig. 5. Extent of the excavation during the watching brief, looking south-east.
Photo CPAT 2077-020

- 5.4 Although all of the upcast material was scanned for displaced metal objects no relevant 'battlefield' artefacts were recovered. All of the material recovered during the Watching Brief excavations is listed in Table 2 of Appendix 1.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The metal detector survey and watching brief produced no finds or features which could definitely be identified as battlefield debris from the Battle of Pilleth. Although a small number of the unidentifiable iron objects resemble heavily corroded arrow *bodkins* and *piles*, it is unlikely that these items are medieval in origin as the context from which they were recovered contained large amounts of agricultural debris such as nails, hook ends and broken rakes.
- 6.2 A few small fragments of medieval pottery, of likely 14th/15th century date, were recovered from the ploughsoils testifying to medieval occupation within the vicinity. The fairly undisturbed lower ploughsoil was particularly noteworthy. It was devoid of post-medieval ceramics and was characterised by numerous inclusions of charcoal flecks, typical of a medieval cultivation layer. However, the north-western extent of the site, nearest to St Mary's Church, has been heavily disturbed. The topography in this area has been altered by extensive deposition of spoil from nearby quarrying which has increased the slope of the field.

7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 7.1 The writer would like to thank the following people for their assistance during the project: Nigel Jones, CPAT; Mr Mike Grant for assistance with the metal detector survey; and the on-site groundworks team of Balfour Beatty for their patience and diligence throughout the watching brief exercise.

8 REFERENCES

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Davies, R R, 1995. *The Revolt of Owain Glyndŵr*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Norris, J, 2004. *Welsh Castles at War*. Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing Ltd.

Cartographic sources

1983 Soil Survey of England and Wales map (Sheet 2 - Wales) and Legend (1:250,000 scale).

1994 British Geological Survey map of Wales (Solid edition at 1:250,000 scale).

APPENDIX 1 SITE ARCHIVE

Table 1

Artefacts recovered from the initial Metal Detecting Survey

Find no.	Material	Number	Type	Period	Easting	Northing
1	Iron	3	nails ?	Unknown	325656.49	268187.56
2	Iron	1	nail	Unknown	325658.13	268187.62
3	Pottery	3	mottled glazed body sherds	Medieval 14/15 th century	325658.88	268185.92
4	Iron	1	Horseshoe fragment	Unknown	325665.51	268182.09
5	Iron	1	nail / bolt	Unknown	325664.60	268179.29
6	Iron	3	nail & fragments	Unknown	325666.54	268173.63
7	Iron	1	nail ?	Unknown	325667.45	268166.27
8	Iron	1	nail	Unknown	325667.15	268163.60
9	Iron	1	hook ?	Unknown	325666.45	268162.08
10	Iron	1	Unknown	Unknown	325668.07	268158.78
11	Iron	1	nail	Unknown	325665.09	268159.11
12	Iron	1	Horseshoe fragment	Unknown	325665.32	268156.65
13	Lead	1	sheet (cut)	Unknown	325667.33	268153.94
14	Iron	1	nail	Unknown	325666.73	268148.10
15	Iron	1	sheet (folded)	Unknown	325670.00	268148.12
16	Iron	1	nail	Unknown	325665.84	268143.21
17	Iron	1	nail	Unknown	325667.20	268141.07
18	Iron	1	sheet (folded)	Unknown	325672.09	268150.25
19	Iron	1	nail / bolt	Unknown	325676.46	268159.80
20	Copper alloy	1	Victorian penny	c. 1872	325680.72	268161.42
21	Iron	1	Horseshoe	Unknown	325657.90	268154.89
22	Iron	1	nail	Unknown	325657.07	268157.73
23	Iron	1	Pocket-knife	20 th century	325658.98	268166.0

N.B. Identifiable iron nails and bolts were of square section in form.

APPENDIX 1 SITE ARCHIVE

Table 2
Catalogue of material recovered during the watching brief

Deposit	Material	Number	Type	Period
Upper ploughsoil	Iron	5	nails of various form	Unknown
Upper ploughsoil	Iron	1	fragment of large horseshoe	Unknown
Upper ploughsoil	Iron	1	Part of an animal trap	Unknown
Upper ploughsoil	Pottery	1	Body sherd of red sandyware	18/19 th century
Upper ploughsoil	Pottery	1	Rim of a Panchen bowl Staffordshire ware	18/19 th century
Upper ploughsoil	Pottery	1	Body sherd, black glazed, from a Staffordshire ware jar	18/19 th century
Upper ploughsoil	Pottery	1	orange/red sandyware, mottled yellow glaze. rim of a jar?	14/15 th century
Lower ploughsoil	Iron	1	Fragment of a possible blade	Unknown
Charcoal rich deposit at base of trench, south-east extent.	Iron	1	Unidentifiable object, possibly a nail.	Unknown, pre- dates lower ploughsoil

APPENDIX 2 SPECIFICATION

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The proposed development involves the installation of an underground cable from an existing electricity pole to Pilleth Church (SO 256682). The area is part of the medieval battlefield of Pilleth and the Curatorial Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust have advised that a programme of archaeological work should be undertaken in advance of and during the development. Although no curatorial brief has been produced a letter from Mr Mark Walters (dated 11 October 2005) outlines the programme of work which should be adopted and this have been used as a basis for the following specification.

2 Objectives

- 2.1 The objectives are:
- 2.1.1 to recover, by means of a metal detector survey, all metallic artefacts within the development area prior to the commencement of the development, in so far as this is possible.
- 2.1.2 to record any archaeological features identified as a result of an archaeological watching brief during groundworks;
- 2.1.3 to prepare a report outlining the results of the survey, incorporating sufficient information on the archaeological resource for a reasonable planning decision to be taken regarding the future management of the archaeology.

3 Methods

- 3.1 Stage one will consist of a systematic metal detector survey undertaken using a discriminator enabled detection unit, under archaeological supervision, to locate and recover all artefacts revealed during a systematic transect survey of the area of the cable trench, with transects at no more than 4m intervals. The finds will be individually numbered and accurately located using total station survey. All artefacts will be temporarily stored in a manner appropriate to their composition. The post-survey treatment of artefacts will be determined following discussions between CPAT, the client and the curator. A contingency sum has been allowed for conservation or specialist reporting as, if required, these will depend on the number and nature of the artefacts recovered. An indication has, however, been given to the client of the potential costs although this should only be regarded as a guide figure which may be either higher or lower, depending on the nature of the artefacts and the results of the discussions.
- 3.2 The watching brief will be maintained during the initial topsoil stripping, foundation and service trench excavation, together with any other related groundworks. Contingency sums have been allowed for 1 radiocarbon date and 1 archaeomagnetic date.
- 3.3 All archaeological deposits and/or features noted during the watching brief will be excavated by hand and recorded by drawn section/plan and/or photography as appropriate. 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.
- 3.4 Following the on-site work an illustrated and bound report will be prepared according to the principles laid out in the Curatorial Brief. This will be in A4 format and contain conventional sections on: Site location, Topography and Geology; Historic Background; Metal Detector