

CPAT Report No 927

Electricity Supply Works at Caersws Roman Fort, Powys

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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April 2007

Report for SP PowerSystems

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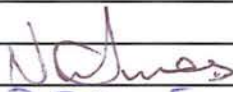
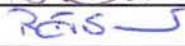
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CPAT Report Record

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In January 2008, the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust was invited by SP PowerSystems, at Aberystwyth to submit a quotation for carrying out an archaeological watching brief during the erection of a new electricity supply transformer and poles within the scheduled area of the Caersws II Roman fort in Powys (SAM Mg 001). The location was in the approximate position of the south gate of the fort, and it was therefore anticipated that significant buried archaeological deposits might survive within the area.
- 1.2 The requirement for an archaeologist to be present on site during the erection of the poles and the excavation of the associated groundworks was one of the conditions attached to Cadw's grant of scheduled monument consent for that part of the works which fell within the scheduled area. The CPAT quotation was accepted by SP PowerSystems in February 2008, and the work was carried out on 3 April 2008, with this report being written immediately thereafter.

2 GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Caersws II fort occupies a low terrace at 125m OD, just above the flood plain, close to the confluence of the rivers Severn and Carno. The location at which the poles were erected lies on the north side of Station Road at SO 02960 91898, only some 60m to the east of Caersws Railway Station. Most of the fort lies within pasture land, although it is crossed by the main A470 trunk road, and the railway which takes an approximately parallel course. A single farm occupies the interior.
- 2.2 The solid geology of the area consists of Telychian siltstones and mudstones belonging to the Llandovery Series of rocks that form the earliest division of the Silurian period (1994 British Geological Survey map). The soils of the immediate area consist of fine loamy soils over gravel belonging to the Rheidol Association, although there is also present nearby some deep silty river alluvium belonging to the Temе Association (1983 Soil Survey of England and Wales map).

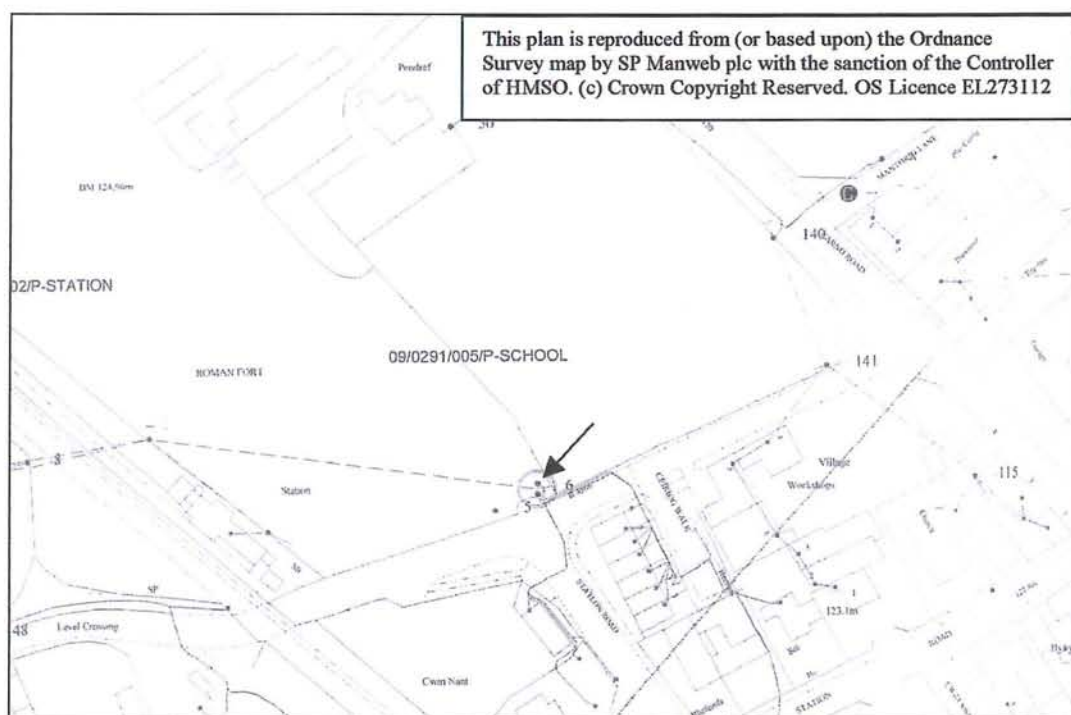


Fig 1 Location (arrowed) of the electricity pole works

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Caersws occupies a focal point in the system of Roman forts that controlled mid-Wales. As part of the early Roman campaigns a large auxiliary fort, Caersws I, was founded before AD 70 in a strongly defended position on a spur overlooking the River Severn, to the north-east of the present village. This fort was relatively short-lived and was replaced by a more permanent fort, Caersws II, during the 70s AD, situated on the flood plain near the confluence of the Severn and its tributary, the Carno. Caersws II has been the subject of a series of excavations, most recently during the 1990s, the results from which have suggested that the main phase of occupation lasted until the late 2nd century AD and that by the early 3rd century the military tenure was effectively at an end, even though some form of activity continued on the site into the early 4th century (Jones 1993, 87).
- 3.2 A civilian settlement, or *vicus*, emerged as a development dependent on Caersws II fort, and evidence from a series of excavations, geophysical survey and aerial reconnaissance suggests that it may have covered an area of at least seven hectares on the south and east sides of the fort (Fig. 1), much of which is overlain by the present village of Caersws. Excavations just outside the south gate of the fort in 1985-6 (Britnell 1989) identified part of a flourishing commercial centre, revealing timber buildings and associated finds that suggested a possible tavern, shops and metal working workshops (Fig. 1, No 10). This commercial activity appears to have continued until the 130s AD, its decline possibly being associated with a withdrawal of troops to the northern frontier, as elsewhere in Wales (Jones 1993, 88).

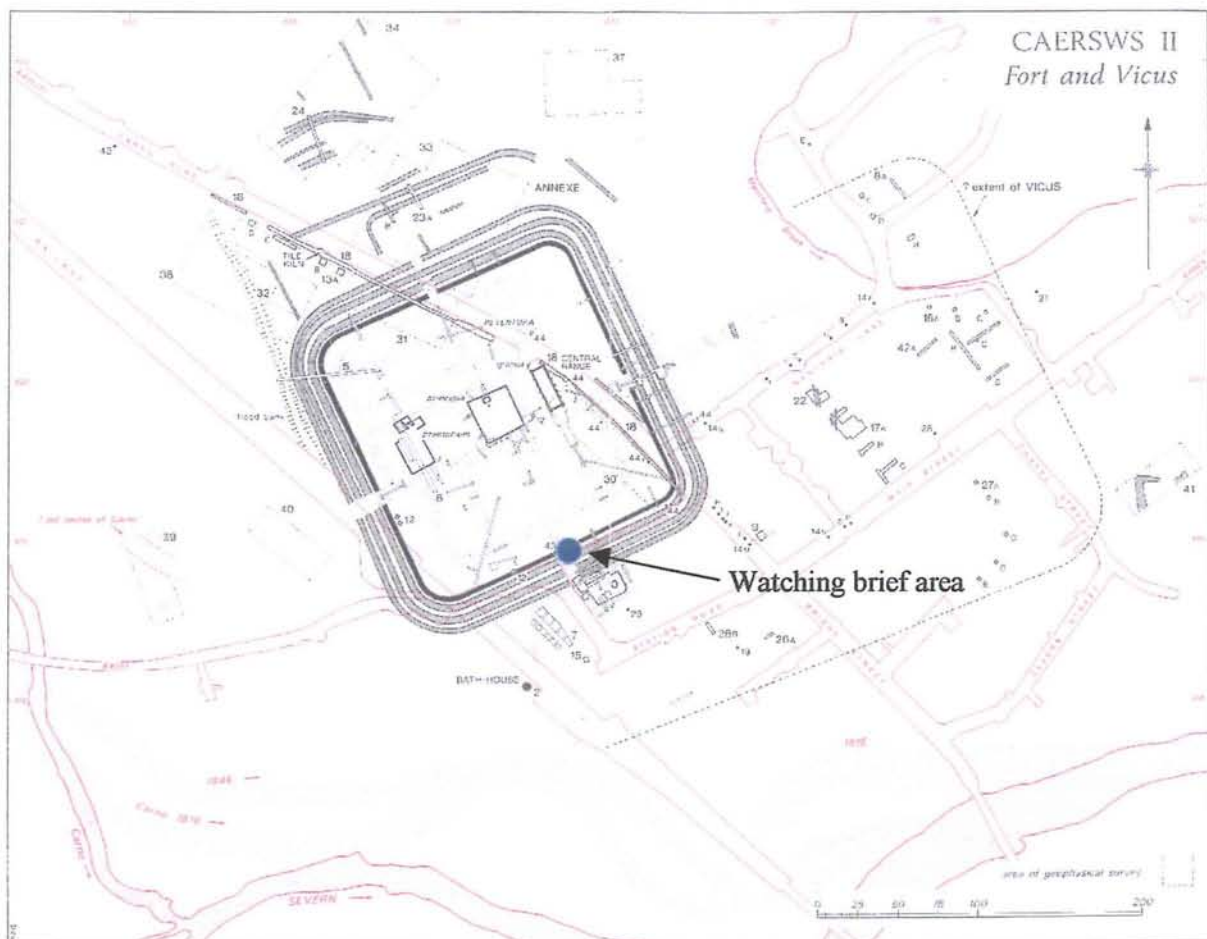


Fig 1 Caersws II Roman fort, showing the suggested extent of the associated *vicus*, with previous excavations and areas of geophysical survey (after Jones 1993)

- 3.3 The contemporary road leading east from the fort has been identified through aerial reconnaissance together with a side road leading from it to the south (Fig. 1). Excavations between Manthrig Lane and Main Street between 1989 and 1993 identified further elements of the *vicus*, comprising post-holes and beam slots for a series of timber buildings, including a likely Romano-British temple, or *temenos*, one phase of which was dated to the mid-2nd century (Grant 2004, 2).
- 3.4 More recently, the extent of the *vicus* has been further clarified by a number of excavations, which lay outside the settlement boundary previously suggested by Jones (1993, fig.2). No evidence of Roman occupation was revealed in excavations on the north side of Severn Street (Hankinson 2003), but at Glan y Nant, which lies next to the Manthrig Brook in the eastern part of the modern village, traces of settlement and a Roman road were recorded (Grant 2004).

4 WATCHING BRIEF

- 4.1 Work overseen by the watching brief comprised the excavation, by auger and mechanical excavator, of the holes for two posts erected to support a transformer, together with two trenches which linked the transformer to the nearby existing electricity pole and the mains feed which runs along Station Road. At the point where the works were carried out, an abandoned trackway of perhaps 18th or 19th-century date cuts through the main rampart of the fort, heading towards Pendref Farm.
- 4.2 The hole for the first pole of the structure to support the transformer was excavated by auger and no real evidence of Roman activity was recognised owing to the restricted visibility. The spoil produced was checked for Roman material, but nothing was found.



Plate 1 The layout of the trenches linking the transformer poles with the existing poles and the mains feed along Station Road

- 4.3 Excavation of the second pole was by mechanical excavator which allowed a better view of the deposits, but again, little could be seen. The only material of interest was a layer composed entirely of small fragments of friable red sandstone about 0.1m in overall thickness, at a depth of about 0.3m below the ground surface. This probably represents evidence for the robbing of the sandstone facing blocks which fronted the third phase of the fort rampart, activity noted previously at the south-east corner of the fort (Jones 1993, 23).
- 4.4 Further evidence of this sandstone layer was exposed in the trenches linking the new pole to both the existing pole and the mains feed along Station Road, where its nature could be more readily appreciated. The layer emerged about 4m north of the fence along Station Road, a point which coincided with the outer edge of the main rampart, and was covered throughout by 0.3m to 0.5m of soil and stone which was obviously of relatively late origin, perhaps 18th to 19th-century in date. The material beneath the sandstone layer comprised fist-sized cobbles set in pale yellow-grey clay and was presumably the remains of the rampart. No significant material was revealed closer to Station Road than the edge of the rampart, where only very late ditch fill was encountered, to a depth of about 0.8m.
- 4.5 A single fragment of Roman material, a short length of amphora handle, was recovered from the later material overlying the sandstone layer. Although of interest, this is effectively unstratified, owing to the disturbed nature of the upper layer, and is therefore of limited significance.

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The watching brief successfully examined all groundworks related to the erection of the new transformer. Written and photographic records were made during the progress of the watching brief.
- 5.2 The only significant archaeological material observed appeared to represent the base of the rampart, although this had been heavily truncated where it had been cut through by a former access road to Pendref Farm in the 18th or 19th century. Evidence for the robbing of the sandstone facing for the third phase of the rampart was also encountered, but the only find of Roman date came from a relatively modern layer of disturbance.

6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 6.1 The writer would like to thank the on-site staff of SP PowerSystems for their help and co-operation with the watching brief.

7 SOURCES

References

Britnell, J E, 1989. *Caersws Vicus, Powys: excavations at the old primary school, 1985-86*. Oxford: British Archaeological Reports 205.

Grant, I, 2004, *Glan y Nant, Caersws, Powys*, Welshpool: CPAT Report No 632

Hankinson, R, 2003, *Land adjacent to Bridge End House, Caersws, Powys*, Welshpool: CPAT Report No 537

Jones, N W, 1993, Caersws Roman fort and vicus, Montgomeryshire, Powys, 1984-92,
Montgomeryshire Collections, 81, 15-96

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**ELECTRICITY SUPPLY WORKS AT CAERSWS ROMAN FORT**
SPECIFICATION FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
BY THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) have been invited to prepare a specification for undertaking an archaeological watching brief in connection with the erection of electricity supply poles within the scheduled area of Caersws Roman Fort (SAM Mg 001). Scheduled Monument Consent has been granted for the works with the condition that an archaeologist shall be appointed, subject to the prior approval of Cadw, in order to undertake a watching brief during the works.
- 1.2 Caersws II Roman fort and its associated civilian settlement, or *vicus*, occupied a focal point in the network of Roman forts and roads in mid Wales. It is anticipated that previously unrecorded buried archaeological remains will be present within the area which may be disturbed during the groundworks.

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 6 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).

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, Cadw, National Monument Record and regional HER 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
22 January 2008