

**CPAT Report No 952**

# **Commings Cottage, Trefeglwys, Powys**

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**



**THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**

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# **Commins Cottage, Trefeglwys, Powys**

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

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Report for Mrs A Hampson

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## CPAT Report Record

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In September 2008 the Field Services section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (hereafter CPAT) was commissioned by Mrs A Hampson of Oxshott, Surrey to undertake a watching brief during excavations associated with the underpinning and placement of a buttress on the south-west corner of Commins Cottage, near Trefeglwys, Powys at NGR SN 96619198.
- 1.2 The cottage has been listed (at Grade II) by Cadw, and the work was subject to a brief (CPAT EVB 711) produced by Mr M Walters of the Curatorial Section of CPAT, acting in his capacity as the archaeological curator for the region.
- 1.3 The watching brief was carried out on 13 October 2008, and this report prepared immediately thereafter.

## 2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Commins Cottage lies approximately 1.2km to the north-north-west of Trefeglwys, and is sited on an interfluvium between two tributary streams which flow southwards into Nant Gleiniant. A number of houses are present in the immediate locality, thereby forming a small dispersed settlement (see Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> edition 25" map, published in 1886

- 2.2 The house is partly constructed of stone, with timber-framing forming most of the south-facing elevation. It is almost certainly first depicted on the Ordnance Surveyors' drawing (No 321) of 1822, but is definitely shown on the Tithe map of 1848; no earlier sources were located. The listing information suggests that Commings has a 17<sup>th</sup>-century origin, but has been subject to some reconstruction and enlargement in both the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and it is interesting to note that it is named 'Commons' in 1886, perhaps suggesting that it and the adjoining dwellings were originally constructed in an area enclosed from the waste.



Plate 1 Commings Cottage from the south-west (Photo CPAT 2655-000)

- 2.3 The present west gable wall of the house was the one which required underpinning. This comprised a stone wall up to the height of the eaves with a weather-boarded upper portion, and it was the stone wall which appeared to have moved away from the timber frame of the south-facing elevation in a rotational movement centred at the base of the wall. The listing information suggested that this wall and the associated compartment was a later addition to the original dwelling.

### 3 WATCHING BRIEF

- 3.1 Groundworks consisted of the excavation of a hand-dug trench, 1.7m long (east-west) by 0.8m wide, which ran beneath the gable wall at its southern end. The base of the trench was level, but the steep west-facing slope of the ground adjoining the wall meant that trench depth varied from 0.5m to almost 1.2m.
- 3.2 Monitoring continued throughout the excavation of the trench, with particular attention being given to the possibility for earlier deposits or artefacts which might have provided useful



information relating to the construction methods used and the potential date of the house. Most of the excavated material was natural grey clay with iron-staining and a moderate stone content, this being of sufficient firmness to have apparently negated the requirement for strong foundations.

- 3.3 At the corner to be underpinned, the stone wall had already received some additional support from a cemented combination of concrete blocks and bricks which had probably been placed beneath it in the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Plate 2). Examination of the junction between this previous underpinning and the wall showed that the ground level had been lowered by about 0.3m at some point after the wall was constructed, and this has presumably been a contributory factor in its instability.



Plate 2 The corner of the cottage showing the previous attempt at underpinning beneath the original wall foundation (Photo CPAT 2655-000)

- 3.4 The final process in removing deposits prior to the installation of the new underpinning was to remove the material used in the earlier attempt. This revealed some orangey-brown silt, on which the original wall foundation appears to have rested, although it was difficult to be certain whether or not this material was infill contemporary with the old underpinning. One fact which did emerge from the removal of this material was that the foundation pad at the base of the wall was formed from stones set in a hard cement mortar, probably dating to no earlier than the 1930s; it can have done no more than rest on the old ground surface.
- 3.5 Discovery of the relatively recent nature of the foundation of the west wall of the cottage led to the need for some examination of the building to determine whether this was an anomalous situation limited to the southern end of the wall or whether it had any bearing on the age of the rest of the structure. The rear (north) of the cottage was examined and it became apparent that some old damp proofing was present at a similar level at the north-west corner of the building,



thereby confirming that the existing west wall of the cottage is 20<sup>th</sup>-century in date. Two butt-joints were also found in the north wall suggesting that the original cottage comprised only the central portion of the existing range and measured about 4.7m east-west by 4.3m, with additions measuring 3.3m east-west on its west end and 5.0m east-west on its east end. Despite the implications of this observation, examination of the 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 1) shows that in 1886 the cottage was about 16m long, which compares closely with the modern dimensions of the east-west range.



Plate 3 The trench excavated beneath the corner of the cottage prior to underpinning  
(Photo CPAT 2655-000)

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 No archaeologically significant features or artefacts relating to the early history of Commins Cottage were revealed by the watching brief, but some further possibilities can now be postulated. First must be that from the material which forms its base, the west wall of the cottage is plainly 20<sup>th</sup>-century in date, although map evidence suggests that this is probably a rebuild of a wall that was present in the 1880s. Its instability is highlighted by the previous attempt at underpinning and evidently is due to the lack of proper foundations, as a shallow pad at the base of the wall does no more than rest on the ground surface.
- 4.2 Examination of the north wall of the cottage further suggests that although the modern extent of the east-west range is broadly comparable with that depicted on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey map of 1886, it is actually of three different builds which abut each other. The central part includes the main entrance and the fireplace and is almost certainly the earliest, although it would only have covered an area of some 4.7m by 4.3m. Subsequent additions were then appended to its east and west ends to form the structure depicted in 1886.



## **5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

- 5.1 The writer would like to thank the staff of MJM Builders for their help and assistance during the watching brief and Mr J Spencer, HER Officer, CPAT for his assistance with the desk-top aspect of the study.

## **6 REFERENCES**

### **6.1 *Sources***

Cadw Listed building data - Listed Building No 83697.

### **6.2 *Cartographic Sources***

Ordnance Surveyors' drawing No 321, dated 1822

Trefeglwys Tithe map of 1848

Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> edition 25" map, Montgomeryshire 35.13, published 1886