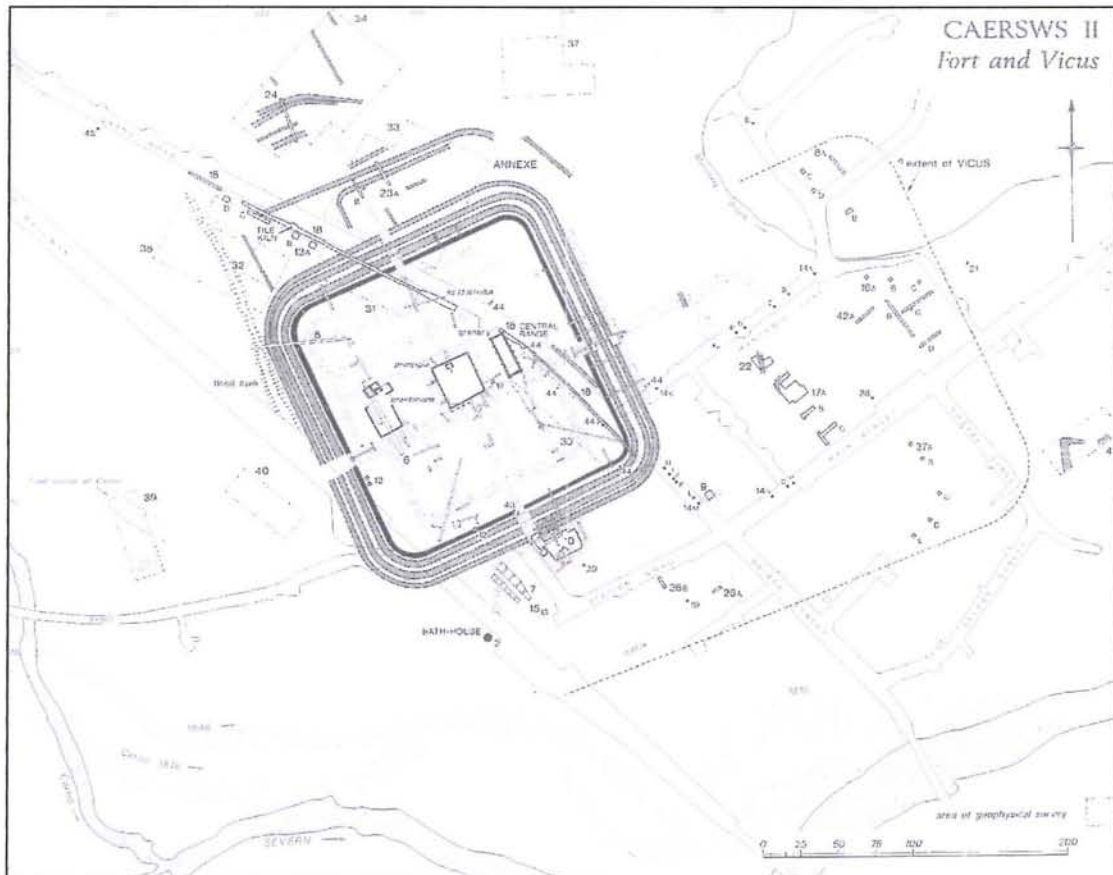


# Caersws Watermain Renewal, Powys

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



**CPAT Report No 884**

# **Caersws Watermain Renewal, Powys**

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

**R Hankinson**  
September 2007

Report for Severn Trent Water

**The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust**

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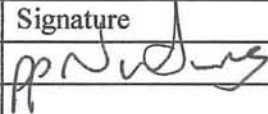
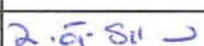
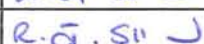
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## CPAT Report Record

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CPAT Project Name	Caersws Watermain		
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In April 2007, the Field Services section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (hereafter CPAT) was commissioned by Severn Trent Water to undertake a watching brief during watermain renewal work in the village of Caersws, Powys (SJ 33852095). CPAT provided a detailed specification for the watching brief, which was subsequently approved by Mr M Walters of the Curatorial section of CPAT, acting as the regional archaeological curator.
- 1.2 The village occupies the site of a Roman *vicus*, or civilian settlement, associated with the Roman fort that lies just to its north, with much of the village overlying buried archaeological deposits relating to this settlement. It was therefore anticipated that significant Roman deposits might be revealed and disturbed during the excavation of trenches for the installation of the new water pipes.
- 1.3 The first site visit was carried out on 12 June 2007, with further visits as the trenching operations continued, where these were likely to reveal information relating to either the fort or *vicus*. The final visit was made on 13 August, when it was determined that any further trenching work was unlikely to be archaeologically productive, although contact was maintained with site staff up to the beginning of September. The schedule of visits is given in Appendix 2.

## 2 GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Caersws lies on level ground at an elevation of 120m OD on the floor of the Severn valley, approximately 10km upstream from Newtown in Powys. Immediately to the west of the village, the Severn is joined by two tributaries, the Afon Carno and the Afon Trannon, and this contributes to the fort's strategic location at the point where the valleys meet.
- 2.2 The watching brief encompassed only those areas where pipes were being laid in open trenches, comprising Severn and Chapel Streets, Maesydre, Manthrig Lane, Station Road and Trefeglwys Road. With the exception of Maesydre, which is a more recent housing development on the edge of the village, these roads form part of a grid pattern of streets centred on the main A470 trunk road.
- 2.3 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 in the area of the village consist of fine loamy soils over gravel belonging to the Rheidol Association, and deep silty river alluvium belonging to the Teme Association (1983 Soil Survey of England and Wales map).

## 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 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD and that by the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century the military tenure was effectively at an end, even though some form of activity continued on the site into the early 4<sup>th</sup> century (Jones 1993, 87).
- 3.2 A civilian settlement, or *vicus*, emerged as a development dependent on Caersws II fort, and the 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).

- 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-2<sup>nd</sup> century (Grant 2004, 2).
- 3.4 More recently, the extent of the *vicus* has been further defined by two 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).

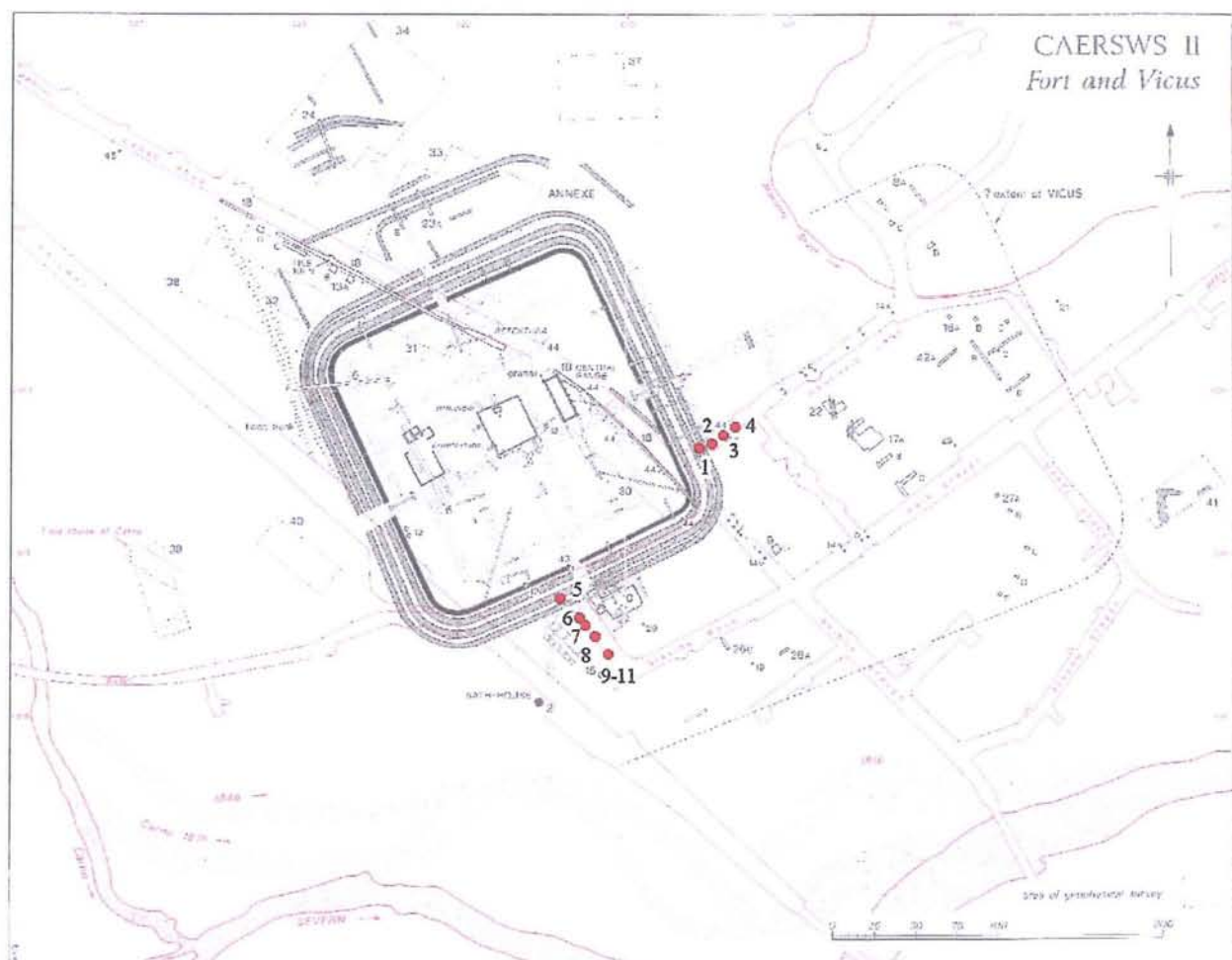


Fig. 1 The archaeology of Caersws II Roman fort and vicus, showing location of features identified during the watching brief (after Jones 1993, Fig. 2).

## 4 WATCHING BRIEF

4.1 The watching brief comprised a series of site visits during the excavation of the pipe trenches. Any archaeological features observed were located in relation to a large-scale map of the village and were photographed and described, as appropriate to their nature. Significant finds have been retained for examination and description. The various visits undertaken are presented in tabulated form in Appendix 2, while the results of the watching brief at each locality are described below in the chronological order in which the work was undertaken (see Fig. 1).

4.2 The depth of the trenches was consistently between 0.9m and 1.0m below the ground surface, which usually comprised the tarmac road surface. The line of the trench was normally just within the carriageway, but very occasionally encroached onto an adjacent grassy verge or footpath.

4.3 For convenience and future reference features and layers noted during the watching brief have been given consecutive context numbers which are shown in brackets in the text that follows.

### 4.4 *Severn Street and Chapel Street*

4.4.1 The watching brief commenced approximately half way along Severn Street (SO 03279183), with work progressing in a north-easterly direction to Chapel Street, which runs north-west to the junction with Main Street. There was some variation in the clay at the base of the trench at the north-east end of Severn Street (SO 03309188), which may have been a gully, but the age and function of the feature was not determined, and indeed its origin remains unclear.

4.4.2 Continuing north-west into Chapel Street, a thin layer of dark brown clay was identified 0.6m below the road surface, but again the origin or possible date of the deposit was not apparent. Some undated brick was recovered from a rubble layer at the same level in the trench, further to the north-west.

### 4.5 *Maesydre*

4.5.1 The trenching in Maesydre was observed from SO 03389219 to SO 03259217 and from SO 03279217 to SO 03269220. No evidence of any archaeological features was forthcoming from either trench and it appeared that the ground surface below the roads had been levelled and hardcore deposited at some time in the recent past, probably when the housing estate was built.

### 4.6 *Manthrig Lane*

4.6.1 At the south-western end of Manthrig Lane trenching commenced across the line of the three fort ditches (1). Inasmuch as the top fills of the ditches were a heterogeneous mix of material the position of the ditches were visible, but none of their profiles could be readily identified, nor could one be distinguished from another, because the trench did not go deep enough to reveal where they penetrated the natural silty clay subsoil, except for the outer lip of the outermost ditch. The extramural road running beside the outer ditch, and recognised in earlier work in the area could not be identified.

4.6.2 North-east of the ditches the trench cut through a layer of burnt clay (2) at a depth of 0.42m below the surface (SO 0305391970). It was no more than about 400mm long and 20-30mm thick, and had no obvious structure to it.

4.6.3 A feature, perhaps a pit (3), was recognised a little further to the north-east (SO 0306091974). It was about 1.1m wide in section and 380mm deep, but whether it was circular could not be established. Its silty clay fill contained numerous flecks of charcoal, occasional lumps of burnt clay, and a few small stones. The pit appears to have been sealed by a deposit of fairly clean silty clay, the purpose and date of which is uncertain, but may be comparable with similar deposits inside the fort during the Hadrianic/Antonine period, which deliberately raised the area above the flood level. The pit was clearly visible in the south-facing section, but barely discernible in the



north-facing one. One sherd of pottery was recovered from the upper fill of the pit (S3; see section 5).

- 4.6.4 A thick lens of material (4) lay between 470 and 600mm below the road surface. It contained many flecks of charcoal, some small lumps of burnt clay and what may have been burnt daub. As a band it ran for about 1.8m, its south-west end coinciding with a modern drainage pipe, but this appeared to be a coincidence. It was covered by natural silty clay – a riverine deposit – of light buff colour. Its NGR co-ordinates were SO 0306691978.
- 4.6.5 Further to the north-east, and past the surgery, the new trench was cut through deposits previously disturbed in the modern era. Along the north-east arm of Manthrig Lane (running north-west to south-east), in the vicinity of Glan-y-nant no archaeology could be discerned. Initially, this might be attributed to the heavily disturbed nature of the deposits through which the trench was cut, but opposite the entrance to Glan-y-nant, the natural silty clay began to appear at a depth of no more than 450mm below the surface of the tarmac.
- 4.7 *Station Road*
- 4.7.1 At the corner of Trefeglwys Road and Station Road the trench crossed the fort ditches (5), although they could not readily be discerned and no useful archaeological deposits were recorded.
- 4.7.2 At NGR SO 0296691866 a layer of burnt clay (6) was cut by the trench. This lay at a depth of 900mm to 940mm, below the tarmac surface, and was up to 80mm thick in places. Below it was a charcoally layer seemingly no more than 10mm thick, which in turn covered a creamy-buff layer of clay resting on a greyer one. Because the sequence of layers was at the very bottom of the new trench, it was rarely seen in its entirety, and indeed could be deeper than was recorded.
- 4.7.3 The layers constituting this deposit were then traced south-eastwards, but intermittently in one or two places because of the trench depth. Further to the south-east the charcoal and burnt clay became more intermixed. A grey-ware body sherd (S7), probably from a jar, was found in the layer at SO 0297391856. Beyond SO 0297491856 the layer became more variegated with gravelly wedges, flecks of charcoal and occasional clay bands. Again because of occasional dips it was not possible to confirm that it was continuous, though this seems likely.
- 4.7.4 At NGR SO 0296891865 a second archaeological layer (7) was identified at a depth of 570mm below the surface, this one a grey loamy clay with charcoal and burnt clay mixed in. It was generally less than 100mm thick and was traceable for about 5.6m.
- 4.7.5 A large stone (350mm length) was noted in section at NGR SO 0297391857, its top about 450mm below the surface, and there was a void on the opposite, west, side of the trench where another stone had been taken out (8). It would not be feasible to claim a wall here on the slight evidence but it is a possibility.
- 4.7.6 At NGR SO 0297991849, at a depth of 780mm, a wedge of burnt clay was observed no more than 200mm thick (9). A red-ware jar rim (S2) came from immediately above it. This was in an orange to light red fabric with a white slip and may be from a local source.
- 4.7.7 A thin band of charcoal (10) ran for about 400mm from NGR SO 0298091848 at a depth of 450mm below the surface. Beneath it was 320mm of very gravelly loam, and then clay.
- 4.7.8 A charcoal-rich layer (11) appeared at NGR SO 0297991848 at a depth of 840mm below the surface. This could be a continuation of (6) but cannot be proved to be such.
- 4.7.9 Beyond SO 02981 91846 the very mixed material cut by the trench suggests that the ground had been disturbed.



- 4.7.10 On the south-east arm of Station Road, the material cut by the trench was almost invariably a heterogeneous mix of disturbed material, with natural clay showing at a depth of around 800mm below the surface, though there were some minor variations in this. A few sherds of pottery and tile (S6) came from this mixed material, but no in-situ archaeology was recognised.

#### 4.8 *Trefeglwys Road*

- 4.8.1 Examination of the trenching at the west end of the pipeline only revealed a relatively modern sequence of road layers. The remaining part of the trench, up to the point where it met the railway line, was excavated in ground disturbed by the installation of previous pipelines and services. No evidence of any Roman activity was observed.

## 5 FINDS

- 5.1 A small collection of Roman pottery was recovered during the watching brief which was initially identified by Wendy Owen, with several sherds (S1-4) subsequently being examined by Peter Webster who was able to provide a more detailed identification. The following presents a summary of the pottery:

#### S1 Unstratified finds from Manthrig Lane:

- A single sherd from a South Gaulish Samian plate, probably form 1831 dating to around 90-110 AD.
- A small sherd from a Dressel 20 South Spanish oil amphora.
- A rim sherd from a mortarium in an orange to light red fabric with a white slip, probably from a local source; cf. Hartley in Britnell 1989, Caersws mortarium fabric 3. The rim form suggests a date in the mid 1<sup>st</sup> to early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. Diameter c. 30cm.

#### S2 Unstratified find from Manthrig Lane:

- A rim sherd with from a jar in a similar fabric to the mortarium S1. Diameter c. 16cm

#### S3 Station Road, stratified at a depth of 550mm:

- A single sherd from a South Gaulish Samian dish or plate, c. 70-110 AD.

#### S4 Unstratified find from Station Road:

- Rim sherd from a South Gaulish Samian vessel, form 35/6, c. 70-110 AD.

#### S5 Possible pit, feature 3, along Manthrig Lane:

- Small rim fragment from a black burnished ware cooking pot or jar.

#### S6 Unstratified finds from Station Road:

- Rim sherd from a Dressel 20 South Spanish oil amphora.
- Base of a jar or flagon in an orange sandy fabric, with cream slip on the interior and exterior surfaces. The fabric suggests a source on the Cheshire or Lancashire Plain.
- A single body sherd, probably from a jar, in an orange fabric with micaceous surfaces, perhaps Severn Valley ware.
- A small body sherd in an orange micaceous fabric with traces of external cream slip.

#### S7 Base of burnt layer identified in Station Road:

- A body sherd in a mid-grey fabric, probably from a jar.

#### S8 Unstratified find from Manthrig Lane:

- A small body sherd in an orange-brown fabric with decoration of horizontal double-grooves, possibly Severn Valley ware.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The watching brief has produced further evidence for the civilian settlement, or *vicus*, associated with Caersws II Roman fort. Evidence of archaeological features which could be confirmed to date to the Roman period was forthcoming in both Manthrig Lane and Station Road, with a range of features and artefacts having been recognised, including the upper part of the fort ditches. However, past disturbance associated with the installation of services meant that significant sections of trenching throughout the scheme produced little or no positive archaeological return. Essentially, the results have provided further confirmation that significant occupation deposits exist to the south and east of the fort. What is of particular interest, however, is the nature of the deposits observed along Station Road where layers of charcoal and burnt clay were identified, suggesting some form of destruction deposit, although there was no evidence for the date of this event.
- 6.2 Layers observed in the base of the trench along Severn Street and Chapel Street might suggest some form of earlier activity, although there was no associated dating evidence. Previous archaeological investigations have indicated that this area lies on the edge of the Roman settlement and it is therefore possible that the deposits are associated with Roman occupation.
- 6.3 No evidence of Roman activity was revealed along Trefeglwys Road, mainly owing to the trench following the line of other services. It is also likely, on the basis of existing evidence, that the course of the Afon Garo was considerably closer to the fort during the Roman period which may have influenced the extent of the *vicus* in this area.
- 6.4 In Maesydre, it appeared that the upper part of the soil profile had been removed when the housing estate was constructed and no evidence of Roman finds or features was forthcoming.

## 7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 7.1 The writer would like to thank the following people for their assistance during the project: Mr R Hadley and Mr M Washington of Severn Trent Water; Mr N Williams of Heartlands, the pipe installation contractors; Dr P Webster for identifying the pottery; and also his colleagues at CPAT, Mr B Silvester, Mr N W Jones and Mr D Bull, for their assistance with the watching brief.

## 8 REFERENCES

### 8.1 *Documentary sources*

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.

## 7.2 *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 SPECIFICATION**

### **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) have been invited to undertake an archaeological watching brief on behalf of Severn Trent Water in connection with the renewal of a water main in Caersws, Powys (SJ 33852095).
- 1.2 The scheme is being undertaken by Heartland Design Services LTD, on behalf of Severn Trent Water, who have already discussed the archaeological requirements with the regional archaeological curator, Mr Mark Walters, CPAT Curatorial Section. As no curatorial brief has been prepared, the following specification will act in its stead, subject to approval by Mr Walters.
- 1.3 The present village of Caersws overlies an important Roman fort and civilian settlement and it is considered likely that buried archaeological remains will be disturbed during the construction process. This is most likely to occur along stretches where the open cut construction technique is used. Available plans indicate that the areas of known archaeology which are most likely to be affected are along Station Road and Manthrig Lane, although Roman deposits have also been identified close to Maesydre. On the basis of existing evidence it is considered unlikely that significant deposits will be encountered along the north-eastern end of Main Street, although this does not necessarily negate the need for a watching brief in this area. Significant remains are also known within areas where the mains bursting technique is the preferred means of construction and should the construction method be revised, a watching brief may be required.

### **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 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  
4 April 2007

## APPENDIX 2

## VISITS UNDERTAKEN DURING THE WATERMAIN RENEWAL

Visit date	Locality	Results
12/06/07	Severn Street & Chapel Street (S end)	Possibility of features in base of trench but not confirmed to be of Roman date
18/06/07	Chapel Street	Possible archaeological deposit 0.6m below surface, but not confirmed to be of Roman date
19/06/07	Chapel Street (N end)	As 18/06/07
26/06/07	Maesydre	No finds or features observed
28/06/07	Maesydre	Area heavily disturbed, no finds or features observed
09/07/07	Manthrig Lane (SW end)	SW end of this section revealed the upper layers of the Roman fort ditch fills. Edge of outer ditch corresponds closely with Jones 1993. Also an area of intense burning on outer side of ditch
10/07/07	Manthrig Lane	Pit and further areas of burning recorded to the NE of the previous area
12/07/07	Manthrig Lane	Trench excavated in disturbed ground, no finds or features observed
13/07/07	Manthrig Lane	Trench continued in disturbed ground
24/07/07	Manthrig Lane (NE end)	Sequence of deposits revealed which were believed to be either modern or of natural origin
31/07/07	Station Road (W end)	No archaeological features observed, probably due to previous disturbance
01/08/07	Station Road	Sequence of Roman deposits observed in the area to the south of the fort, sherds of Roman pottery recovered
03/08/07	Station Road	Trench excavated in disturbed ground and no Roman finds or features were observed
08/08/07	Station Road (E end)	Disturbed deposits containing some Roman pottery. Trench probably on the line of earlier services
13/08/07	Trefeglwys Road (W end)	Sequence of previous road surfaces observed, but all of relatively modern date