CPAT Report No 1029

Brompton View, near Churchstoke, Shropshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF





THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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R Hankinson February 2010

Report for Mr and Mrs Ferguson

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In January 2010 the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was invited by Mr M R Edwards of McCartneys LLP, Kington, Herefordshire, acting on behalf of Mr & Mrs J Ferguson, Foggy Bottom Holiday Park, Brompton, Churchstoke, Shropshire, to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of three trial pits at Brompton View, near Pentreheyling, Churchstoke (NGR SO 2474 9320, see Fig. 1).
- 1.2 Brompton View lies in the extreme south-west portion of a scheduled area (Monument No SA 308) containing Roman camps, a round barrow and a section of Offa's Dyke. The watching brief was required by English Heritage to provide information which could be used in the determination of an application for scheduled monument consent for the construction of a proposed new dwelling at Brompton View. The trial pits were therefore designed to test the depth of the archaeologically significant deposits, thereby informing the planning process and aiding the design of the foundations for the proposed dwelling.
- 1.3 The watching brief was carried out on 26th January 2010 and this report written immediately thereafter.



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Fig. 1 Location of Brompton View

2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 2.1 Brompton View lies just within England, being some 250m to the north of the Caebitra stream, which here forms the border with Wales. The stream originates about 4km to the south-south-west of the village of Sarn in Powys and joins the River Camlad at Churchstoke, some 3km downstream of Brompton View. From Churchstoke, the combined river, now known as the Camlad, flows north through the incised gorge of Marrington Dingle, curving sharply west to its confluence with the River Severn.
- 2.2 Locally, the base of the valley has an undulating topography in the range of 120m OD to 170m OD, from which the ground rises to the north-west towards the high ground located on the south-west side of the town of Montgomery. To the south of the Caebitra, the ground rises more steeply to the heavily dissected plateau occupied by the Kerry Ridgeway, while to the north-east there are a group of individual hills, particularly Roundton, Todleth and Corndon, which overlook Churchstoke from that side.
- 2.3 The underlying geology of the locality is predominantly mudstones and siltstones belonging to the Homerian and Sheinwoodian phases of the Wenlock period of Silurian rocks (BGS map of Wales, 1994). Soils derived from these rocks form the main component of the surface deposits and include fine silty and clayey soils belonging to the Cegin Soil Association and similar soils belonging to the Denbigh 1 Association (Soil Survey of England and Wales map and legend, 1983).



Plate 1 Aerial photograph showing Brompton View, to lower left of centre, from the southwest (Photo CPAT 86-MB-721)

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The scheduled area within which Brompton View falls was primarily designated as a result of the presence of Roman marching camps (see below), but it is notable that it also contains the remains of an earthen round barrow probably dating to the Bronze Age period. This now survives as a double-ditched circular cropmark, in fields on the north-east side of the road to Montgomery.
- 3.2 Brompton is the site of at least two Roman marching camps and an auxiliary fort, which lie on the north bank of the Caebitra stream with commanding views east to the confluence of the Caebitra and Camlad at Churchstoke. The marching camps are sited in the fields to the north-east of Brompton View and are the earliest evidence of Roman occupation, relating to campaigning activity in the Welsh borders of the mid-1st century AD.
- 3.3 The auxiliary fort lies to the west of Brompton View and represents the consolidation of Roman control over the area; it is aligned roughly east-west, parallel with the Caebitra, and measures 180 metres by 150 metres, enclosing an area of 2.7 hectares (6.7 acres). All sides except the south were defined by a single ditch with simple entrances and a rampart of clay and gravel reinforced with timber. The first phase, commencing in the second half of the 1st century AD, represents a conventional auxiliary fort with evidence for timber-framed barrack blocks and a storehouse or granary, aligned north to south. A contemporary *vicus*, or civilian settlement, which provided services for the soldiers, lay on either side of the road leading east from the fort for a distance of at least 250 metres, within which there was considerable evidence for lead and iron smelting. After the apparent military abandonment of the fort from *c*. AD 120, industrial working spread into its interior. But both the lead and iron smelting appear to have ceased soon thereafter, in the Hadrianic period. A final phase of activity is indicated by the recutting of the south ditch, dated to the mid-4th century (Burnham & Davies, forthcoming).
- 3.4 Post-Roman activity is signalled by the presence of Offa's Dyke, an earthwork believed to have been constructed late in the 8th century AD, and which lies 300m to the east. It was probably intended as a boundary between the lands then under Mercian and Welsh control.
- 3.5 The area retained some importance into the medieval period as evidenced by the motte and bailey castle at Brompton Bridge, about 400m to the east, which is thought to be of late 11th or early 12th century origin, a period when Norman control was being consolidated in this locality. Later, conditions became rather more settled and towards the end of the medieval period and into the early post-medieval period the present landscape of farm holdings seems to have become well-established, typical examples in the local area being Rockley, 1.5km to the north, and The Lack, 1.9km to the east-north-east.

4 WATCHING BRIEF

- 4.1 The watching brief was conducted on 26th January 2010. A written, drawn and photographic record was maintained, a summary of which is provided in Appendix 1. The trench locations are depicted on Fig. 2, below.
- 4.2 The trenches were initially excavated by a small machine under close archaeological supervision, down to the level of the first significant archaeological horizon or the natural subsoil, whichever was encountered first. Subsequent cleaning and examination of the deposits was done entirely by hand, with the proviso that any layers thought to be of Roman origin were to be left undisturbed.



Fig. 2 Location of the trial trenches in relation to the buildings at Brompton View

- 4.3 *Trench 1* (2.8m by 1.0m)
- 4.3.1 This trench was the northernmost of the three in the proposed development area and was excavated by machine to a depth of approximately 0.55m, at which point natural subsoil was encountered. The natural subsoil comprised yellowish stony clay (19), on top of which there was a layer of grey-brown stony clay silt (18), 0.4m in thickness. No finds were observed in

layer 18, so it remains undated, but comparison with the results from the other trenches suggests this is a soil accumulation belonging to the post-medieval or perhaps even medieval periods. Layer 18 was sealed by a modern dump of stone hardcore (17), 0.07m thick, which provided a base for a concrete yard (22), up to 0.10m in thickness.



Fig. 3 Trench 1 plan and section (Scale 1:25)

4.3.2 The only feature revealed in the trench was a single post-hole (21), up to 0.4m in diameter and approximately 0.48m in depth, that had been cut through layer 18 into the natural subsoil. Its fill of grey clay silt (20) was probably relatively recent in origin to judge from its texture and composition, but was devoid of finds.



Plate 2 Trench 1, from the north-north-west (Photo CPAT 3016-008)

- 4.4 *Trench 2* (2.5m by 1.0m)
- 4.4.1 This was the central of the three trenches and was excavated by machine down to the top of the natural subsoil at a depth of 0.58m below the ground surface. The identity of the subsoil, a deposit of milky brown clay silt (05), was not conclusive from its upper surface and so a 0.15m thickness of the material was removed which confirmed its natural origin.
- 4.4.2 Overlying the subsoil was a very dark grey layer of coke/cinders (04), approximately 0.05m thick and containing lumps of mortar. A deposit of mid-grey clay silt (03), up to 0.45m thick, sealed layer 4 and contained finds dating to the 19th century. The nature of the soils suggested that the soil profile in this trench had been truncated prior to the deposition of layers 3 and 4, but the reason for this was not clear within the area excavated. As was the case in Trench 1, the soils were sealed by a layer of hardcore (02), 0.05m thick, and concrete (01), which averaged 0.06m in thickness.
- 4.4.3 A single linear feature (06) was observed cutting through layers 3 & 4 and into the top of the natural subsoil. This appeared to be a relatively recent service trench, perhaps for a plastic water pipe (now removed), and measured approximately 0.50m deep and between 0.14m and 0.45m wide. The fill comprised mixed hardcore and grey clay silt (07).



Fig. 4 Trench 2 section (Scale 1:25)



Plate 2 Trench 2, from the north-north-west (Photo CPAT 3016-001)

- 4.5 *Trench 3* (1.4m by 1.0m)
- 4.5.1 This was the southern of the three trenches. As the east-north-east end of the trench was being excavated, the foundations of the corner of a wall (16) were revealed just beneath ground level, so this was left in-situ and machine excavations continued to a depth of 0.56m below the

surface. On completion of machining the wall was examined and found to survive as only a single course of shale blocks set into the top of layer 12 (see below), running east-north-east from the corner for over 0.70m and south-south-east for over 0.55m. At the base of the trench, the sinuous edge of a feature (14) was revealed, cutting the natural subsoil for a length of at least 1.4m in a north-east/south-west direction. The upper surface of its variegated fill of greyish-brown clay silt, darker greyish-brown silt and pale yellowish-grey clay silt (13) contained a sherd of Samian ware and some lead fragments, strongly suggesting the feature was of Roman date.



Fig. 5 Trench 3 plan and section (Scale 1:25)

4.5.2 The overlying deposit of greyish-brown clay silt (12), up to 0.40m thick, was devoid of datable material in its lower part, but the upper 0.2m contained finds of the 19th century, probably implying that it represented a gradual accumulation of soil during the post-medieval and perhaps medieval periods. At the western corner of the trench the succeeding layer of dark grey slate fragments (11), up to 0.04m in thickness, curved down into layer 12, potentially suggesting that some degree of subsidence had occurred in fill 13 following its deposition. A lens of mid-grey stony clay silt (10), containing brick fragments and up to 0.1m thick, occupied the hollow above layer 11. As in the previous two trenches the whole was sealed with successive layers of hardcore (09), up to 0.10m thick, and concrete (08), up to 0.14m thick.



Plate 2 Trench 3, showing the remains of the late 19th-century building on the right and the feature of Roman date visible in the base of the trench, from the south-south-east (Photo CPAT 3016-005)

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 It appears from the evidence of earlier excavations at Brompton that the remains and deposits relating to the Roman period have been levelled to the top of the natural subsoil by plough action (Allen 1988, 66). While the date of this agriculture remains unknown, it seems reasonable to assume that it was of post-medieval or perhaps even medieval origin, and this activity probably corresponds to layer 18 in Trench 1 and layer 12 in Trench 3, the corresponding layer in Trench 2 having been removed by later disturbance. Although the lower portions of these deposits have not been conclusively dated, the absence of Roman material in them seems to confirm their post-Roman origin.
- 5.2 Whether early ploughing was as destructive to the Roman deposits at Brompton View as later agricultural activity in the surrounding area remains to be proven but the overall implication is that where Roman layers occur, their upper surfaces should be at approximately the same level as the natural subsoil. The top of the subsoil was found at a depth of 0.55m below ground level in Trench 1, 0.58m in Trench 2 and 0.56m in Trench 3, giving a reasonably consistent level in relation to the concrete yard surfaces which are present between the buildings. Trench 3 was particularly significant in revealing evidence of Roman activity which appeared to coincide with the top of the subsoil.
- 5.3 A small number of later features were revealed in all three trenches, but these were generally of quite recent (probably late 20th-century) date, with the exception of the remains of a stone building that was exposed at the end of Trench 3. Examination of cartographic sources for the

locality suggests that this building dates to no earlier than the end of the 19th century, as it first seems to appear on the OS mapping of 1903 (Shropshire 53SE).

6 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

6.1 The writer would like to thank the following for their assistance: Mr N Jones, CPAT and Mr Ferguson for his help with the excavation of the trial trenches.

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Burnham, B & Davies, J, forthcoming. The Roman Frontier in Wales (Revised edition).

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7.2 Cartographic Sources

1994 British Geological Survey map of Wales (Solid edition)

1983 Soil Survey of England and Wales map and legend (Sheet 2 – Wales)

1903 OS 1:10,560 map Shropshire 53SE

1883 OS 1:2,500 map Montgomeryshire 37.12

7.3 Digital Sources

Shropshire online HER records

APPENDIX 1

PROJECT ARCHIVE

Site records

22 context record forms1 watching brief daily visit forms2 A4 site drawings09 digital photographs, CPAT film 3016Photographic register