

**CPAT Report No 1044**

# Chirk Castle Home Farm

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**



**THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**

**CPAT Report No 1044**

# **Chirk Castle Home Farm**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

**R Hankinson**

May 2010

Report for National Trust

**The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust**

7a Church Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7DL

tel (01938) 553670, fax (01938) 552179

© CPAT 2010

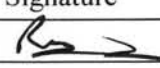
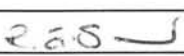
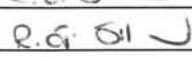
Cover photo: The excavations within the existing barn (CPAT 3083-0011)

## CPAT Report Record

### Report and status

CPAT Report Title	Chirk Castle Home Farm, Chirk, Wrexham: Archaeological Evaluation		
CPAT Project Name	Chirk Castle Home Farm		
CPAT Project No	1671	CPAT Report No	1044
Confidential (yes/no)	Yes	draft/final	Final

### Internal control

	name	Signature	date
prepared by	R. Hankinson		11/05/2010
checked by	R.J. Silvester		11/05/2010
approved by	R.J. Silvester		11/05/2010

### Revisions

no	date	made by	checked by	approved by

### Internal memo


## **CONTENTS**

- 1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND
- 2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY
- 3 EVALUATION
- 4 CONCLUSIONS
- 5 REFERENCES

## **1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 In April 2010 the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (henceforward CPAT) was asked to provide a specification and quotation for an evaluation at Chirk Castle Home Farm, near Chirk in Wrexham County Borough (NGR SJ 26713825) by Dr E Plunkett-Dillon, the National Trust archaeologist responsible for the property.
- 1.2 The evaluation area comprised the footprint of a mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century concrete-framed barn, part of which lay across the line of Offa's Dyke, and it was proposed that the work should attempt to determine whether any significant floor levels survived within the barn and also whether any physical remains of Offa's Dyke were overlain by it. The work was required as there is a proposal to alter the arrangements of the visitor facilities, and this would include demolition of the barn and the provision of an access route across the site leading to Chirk castle and gardens.
- 1.3 The castle was built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, but remodelled in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Home Farm comprises a series of buildings which are thought to belong to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with additions of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The 8<sup>th</sup>-century earthwork of Offa's Dyke, which separated the lands of Powys and Mercia, is cut by the Home Farm complex, leaving a gap of about 70m between the visible sections of the earthwork.
- 1.4 The CPAT specification and quotation was accepted by Dr Plunkett-Dillon on 23rd April and written into a proposed scheme of work. The evaluation was carried out at the end of April and this report written immediately thereafter.

## **2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY**

- 2.1 The Chirk Castle Home Farm lies at an elevation of about 190m OD, and is approximately 2km to the west of the village of Chirk, close to the eponymous castle which was constructed in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. At present, the Home Farm buildings are partially in use by the National Trust as the focus for entry into the castle by visitors. The castle itself lies on an eminence about 150m to the south-east of the farm, the ground beyond dropping away gently to the east, while to the south-west the ground drops down to the valley of the Rover Ceiriog, less than 1km distant. On the north-west, the ground rises gently towards the series of low hills which lie between the Ceiriog valley and that of the River Dee.
- 2.2 The local geology comprises a series of faulted sandstones, limestones, mustones and shales belonging to the Duckmantian, Langsettian, Namurian and Brigantian divisions of the Carboniferous period (BGS map of Wales, 1994). The soils of the locality are well-drained fine loamy soils of the Neath Soil Association, derived from some of the underlying rocks (Soil Survey of England and Wales map and legend).

## **3 EVALUATION**

- 3.1 The CPAT proposal was for two 1m by 1m sondages (Trenches 1 and 2) within the barn to assess the nature of its floor make-up and determine whether any significant levels were preserved beneath the existing surface. These formed the initial part of the work, with Trench 1 then being extended to the east-south-east to produce a 4m-long section at right-angles to the line of Offa's Dyke. On completion of the two trenches, a third (Trench 3) was excavated at the east-south-east end of the barn interior to determine whether the features seen in Trenches 1 and 2 continued into this area (See Fig. 1). The numbers in brackets in the following description refer to individual contexts identified during the excavations.

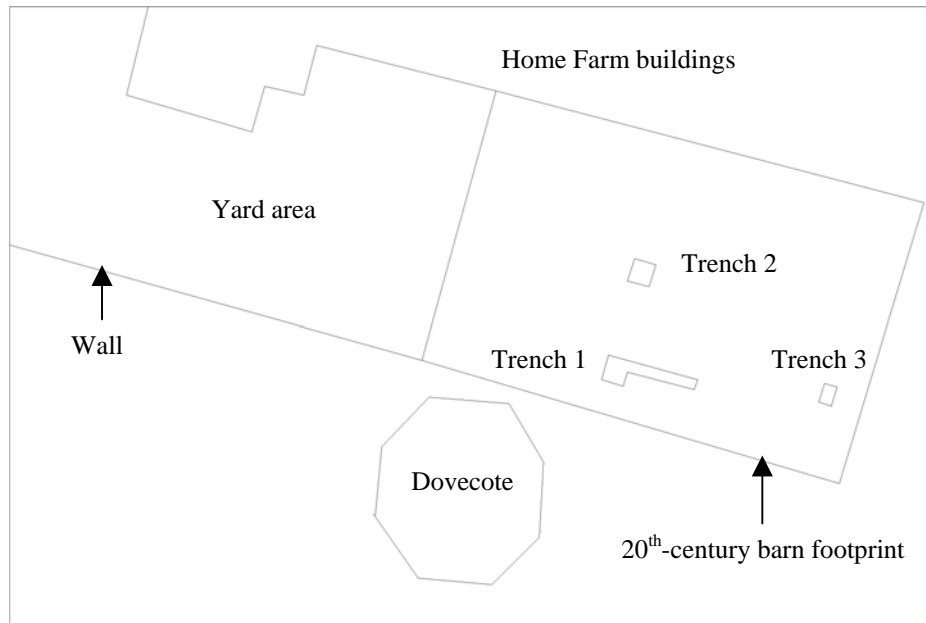


Fig. 1: Trench location plan, showing the trenches within the footprint of the barn

- 3.2 Trench 1 revealed a number of floor layers which predated the existing modern detritus surface (01) in the interior of the barn, the most recent comprising a deposit of concrete rubble (02) up to 0.05m thick, which overlay a layer of orangey-brown silt containing wood fragments (03), up to 0.1m in overall thickness. Earlier floor levels in Trench 1 were represented by two distinct reddish layers of compacted silts, clays and shale (04 and 06), both of which sloped down from the east-south-east to the west-north-west, such that 04 was the uppermost layer at the east-south-east end of the trench, dropping to 0.1m below the surface at the opposite end. Floor 06 had a similar fall, descending from 0.1m below the surface to 0.25m below it at the west-north-west end of the trench. Both floors were of relatively modern date, certainly no earlier than the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The excavation was halted at the upper surface of an uneven layer of rough cobbling (07), formed from pebble-sized stones and brick fragments, which increased in depth from 0.16m at the east-south-east end of the trench to a maximum of 0.32m at the opposite end.



Plate 1: Trench 1 after excavation, showing the roughly cobbled floor (CPAT 3083-0014)

- 3.3 Trench 2 had the same sequence of upper layers (01 to 03) as Trench 1, these sealing a layer of large stones and late 19<sup>th</sup>-century bricks (08), up to 0.15m in overall thickness. A concrete slab (09), 0.08m thick, was found below layer 08 and this sealed the same roughly cobbled floor surface (07) found in Trench 1, at a depth of 0.35m below the existing barn floor.



Plate 2: Trench 2 after excavation, showing the roughly cobbled floor (CPAT 3083-0022)

- 3.4 Trench 3 comprised a small sondage, measuring 0.8m by 0.6m, in the east-south-east part of the barn interior. Removal of the modern detritus (10), 0.04m thick, and a layer of stone hardcore (11), 0.1m thick and with a maximum particle size of 0.05m, revealed a layer of yellow-grey clay (12). This was not examined any further as it lay on the line of the bank of Offa's Dyke. It may well represent an undisturbed bank remnant, probably truncated when the barn was built, although this cannot be proved conclusively from the very small amount exposed.



Plate 3: Trench 3 after excavation, showing the clay deposit which may represent the remains of Offa's Dyke (CPAT 3083-0021)

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The west-north-west part of the barn contained at least three former floor levels, all of which had a marked slope down from the east-south-east. The earliest floor (07) comprised a roughly cobbled surface with a similar slope, and was perhaps a former outdoor yard. The floor was revealed in both Trenches 1 and 2, its depth below the modern ground surface increasing from 0.16m at the east-south-east end of Trench 1 to 0.32m at the west-north-west end. The slope of these layers may be a result of the influence of underlying elements of Offa's Dyke, in particular the slope down from the bank into the ditch of this early medieval earthwork.
- 4.2 The layers did not continue as far as Trench 3 in the east-south-east part of the barn interior, where it seemed possible that the clay layer (12) found beneath modern rubble and detritus may represent surviving evidence of the bank of Offa's Dyke, at a depth of less than 0.15m below the surface.
- 4.3 Overall, it appears likely that significant archaeological features survive beneath the existing floor of the barn. Their depth below the surface increases towards the west-north-west end of the barn, and it is therefore suggested that any earthmoving associated with the provision of the proposed new visitor facilities takes this into account. It would also be preferable for the cobbled surface identified in Trenches 1 and 2 to be left in-situ.

## 5 REFERENCES

### *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)