

**CPAT Report No 1091**

# Ystradgynlais Flood Prevention Scheme Assessment

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**



**THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

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March 2011

**Report for the Environment Agency**

**The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust**

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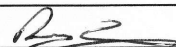
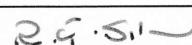
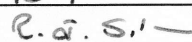
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## CPAT Report Record

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was appointed by the Environment Agency in February 2011, to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of test pits in connection with the assessment of a proposal for a flood prevention scheme in Ystradgynlais in the extreme south of Powys. The test pits in question were planned to provide information on the nature of the soils and structures immediately alongside the River Tawe, which passes through the centre of the town.
- 1.2 The archaeological watching brief herein described was carried out on 25 February and 04 March 2011 and this report was compiled soon after, once it was confirmed that no further examination of the works was needed.

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

- 2.1 The study area covers a stretch, 1.8km in length, of the upper reaches of the River Tawe in the area of Ystradgynlais, about 1.5km upstream of its confluence with the River Twrch. The southernmost pit examined was at NGR SN 7850 0913, while that in the north was at NGR SN 7893 1068. All works were carried out in close proximity to the course of the river.
- 2.2 The geological background described below is based on the initial geological appraisal report carried out as part of the Ystradgynlais flood prevention scheme pre-feasibility study by Atkins in March 2009.
- 2.3 All of the study area is believed to be underlain by alluvial deposits. Owing to the nature of the river in this area, alluvial material is expected to consist predominantly of sands and gravel, but there is some potential for the presence of soft to firm consolidated, compressible silty clay. Alluvial deposits are shown to be underlain by Devensian Glacial Tills. These are often characterised by a variable lithology, containing both cohesive and coarse granular material.
- 2.4 The solid geology comprises rocks of the South Wales Middle Coal Measures Formation, which underlie the superficial deposits. These are thought to be grey (productive) coal-bearing mudstones/siltstones, with seatearths and minor sandstones. On a regional scale, the study area is positioned on the northern limb of the large synclinal structure of the South Wales Coal Field. A series of three north-east/south-west trending faults intersect the River Tawe at various points in this locality, with an overall downthrow in a southerly direction.

## **3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Ystradgynlais is a substantial settlement in the south-western part of Powys, through which the River Tawe flows on its way to the coast at Swansea. As seen today, it is effectively a modern creation arising initially from the rapid increase in mining and iron working in the area in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and is typical of many such settlements on the fringes of the south Wales valleys.
- 3.2 The settlement supposedly derives its name from Gunleus ap Glewissig, an early medieval prince of Gwent, and the fabric of the church contains two early Christian stones which are thought to be of local origin. Although the present church (sited at NGR SN 78711 10051) is relatively modern, dating to 1861, it is believed that it replaced a Norman building, whose foundations can be recognised 50m to the north. There is therefore some potential for medieval settlement underlying the current settlement, and the area to the north of the church has been suggested in the past as a likely location.

- 3.3 Without exception, the buildings of Ystradgynlais appear to date from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the earlier parts being typical of the terraced brick housing found in most industrial settlements, while the later parts are equally typical modern brick-built estates.
- 3.4 There are extensive industrial archaeological remains in the surrounding area, many of which are of considerable importance. These include early coal mines and quarries, numerous iron works and furnaces, and various associated factories and processing plants, as well as the Swansea canal and a number of early railways and tramroads. Each of these sites has had an effect on the development of Ystradgynlais, and together they are largely responsible for the settlement's present morphology.

#### **4 WATCHING BRIEF**

- 4.1 The watching brief comprised two visits, which were used to observe the excavation of test pits alongside the Tawe as part of the background assessment for a possible flood prevention scheme. The first visit was on 25 February 2011, when five hand-dug pits were examined on the east bank of the river between SN 78590 10070 and SN 78620 09839. These were recorded on Drawing No 002b (Fig. 3) in the group HDTP24 to HDTP31, which extend over a combined distance of about 240m of the riverside. The pits examined were Nos HDTP27 to HDTP31, and each pit was approximately 1m square and 1.2m deep. In all cases, the material removed was of relatively recent origin and comprised the backfill of the area behind the retaining wall which rises from the edge of the river to form the west side of Pantyffynnon Road. The appearance of the wall suggested that it was created in the period encompassing the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This was confirmed by the material that was observed in the test pits. No natural subsoils were observed in any of these trenches, and it is likely that they are least another 1m deeper than the base of the test pits at this location.
- 4.2 The second visit was undertaken on 04 March 2011 when a further five pits were examined in the group recorded on Drawing Nos 002b (Fig. 3), 002c (Fig.4) and 002d (Fig. 5) as TP01 to TP12, between SN 78572 09775 and SN 78504 09134. In the case of this group, the excavation was by a small machine excavator in the form of short trenches which averaged 1.5m long by 0.5m wide and were up to 2.0m deep. Some protective reinforcement of the bank was evident in most of this section but this was modern and is most likely to be related to the construction of the Tawe Park and Pont Aur housing developments, probably in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. No archaeological features were seen in any of the pits that were observed, the profiles generally comprising a mixture of soils and silts to a depth of 0.5m to 0.8m below the surface, below which natural river cobbles and gravel were seen up to the maximum depth of the trench. Only TP01, at the northern end, was different and this contained modern dumped material down to the base of the excavation.
- 4.3 The sites of the remainder of the test pits in the two areas were examined but there was nothing to suggest that the results would be any different, so it was decided that there was no need for any further observation of the excavations to assist in understanding the potential for archaeological features or structures in these localities. Pits HDTP24 to HDTP26 were in a similar location to Nos HDTP27 to HDTP31, immediately to the east of the retaining wall for Pantyffynnon Road, while TP 06 to TP12 were placed on the edge of the riverbank, on ground just to the east of the gardens for houses in Tawe Park and Pont Aur.
- 4.4 In addition to the test pits that were examined during the watching brief, the records and photographs taken during the excavation of the other test pits were also examined. As far as could be determined from these records, no significant archaeological deposits were disturbed.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 It can reasonably be suggested from the available evidence that the areas examined by the watching brief contain no significant archaeological remains which are likely to be affected by any proposed flood prevention scheme. This seems also to be the case in the northern part of the scheme, depicted on Drawing No 002a, where the records and photographs taken by during test pit excavations showed no evidence of significant archaeological features.
- 5.2 In all cases, the excavations were in close proximity to the River Tawe, and as long as this holds true for the proposed scheme then the potential archaeological impact should be negligible. The nature of the riverside deposits was of two types; firstly where the river is edged by a revetment/retaining wall, when the deposits were generally the backfill behind the wall and of late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup>-century date. Secondly, in the lower reaches of the study area there had been some attempt at armouring the riverbank in the past and here there was generally a variable depth of this material of relatively recent origin, overlying natural river gravels and cobbles. None of these deposits is considered to be archaeologically significant.

## 6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 6.1 The writer would like to thank Mr R Campbell and Mr E Wilson of the Environment Agency, Mr L Taylor and Mr M Cooper of Arup, and Mr N Booner of White Young Green for their help and assistance with the watching brief and providing the records taken at the test pits.

## 7 SOURCES

Initial Geological Appraisal Report (part of the Ystradgynlais flood prevention scheme pre-feasibility study) compiled by Atkins in March 2009.

Martin, C H R & Walters, M J, 1993. *Brecknock Borough Historic Settlements*, Welshpool: CPAT Report.

### Cartographic Sources

1878, 1904, 1905 and 1918 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 maps of Ystradgynlais

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).