

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Trehelig argae reconstruction, Welshpool, Powys

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



CPAT Report No 897

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Welshpool, Powys**

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R Hankinson
November 2007

Report for Environment Agency

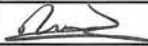
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CPAT Report Record

Report and status

CPAT Report Title	Trehelig argae reconstruction, Welshpool, Powys: Archaeological Watching Brief		
CPAT Project Name	Trehelig Argae		
CPAT Project No	1480	CPAT Report No	897
Confidential (yes/no)	No	draft/final	Final

Internal control

	name	Signature	date
prepared by	R. Hankinson		01/11/2007
checked by	R.J. Silvester	R.J.S.J.	01/11/2007
approved by	R.J. Silvester	R.J.S.J.	01/11/2007

Revisions

no	date	made by	checked by	approved by

Internal memo

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In July 2007, the Field Services section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (hereafter CPAT) was commissioned by the Environment Agency, based in Shelton, Shrewsbury to undertake a watching brief during argae (flood defence bank) reconstruction work at Trehelig, near Welshpool in Powys (SJ 21380250). The work had been requested by Mr M Walters of the Curatorial section of CPAT, acting in his role as the regional archaeological curator.
- 1.2 The flood defence bank is one of a number built on the flood plain of the River Severn in the vicinity of Welshpool in the late 18th to early 19th-century period. They seem to have been constructed as parts of various schemes of land enclosure and improvement designed to restrict seasonal flooding and increase the agricultural production of the area.
- 1.3 The first site visit was carried out on 17 August 2007, with further visits as reconstruction operations continued, where these were likely to reveal information relating either to the argae itself or to the former land surface on which it was constructed. The final visit was made on 24 September, and the schedule of visits is given in Appendix 2.

2 GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Trehelig lies on level ground at an elevation of 70m OD, and is adjacent to the river on the floor of the Severn valley, approximately 5km upstream from Welshpool in Powys. It is a dispersed settlement, comprising a small number of dwellings and farms, bounded by a combination of old and existing river meanders on the south, east and north-east sides and the main A483 trunk road on the north-west.
- 2.2 The watching brief encompassed a section of argae commencing at SJ 20870278, in the fields opposite Wernllwyd Farm, which ran in a generally east-south-east direction towards the dwelling known as 'The Gro' (SJ 21350260). From this point the course of the argae curved to run south-south-east up to SJ 21440227, where it began to change course to the east, then north-east, up to the end of the section at approximately SJ 21650231. Land-use along this section of the argae comprises a mixture of arable and pasture land, with the crest of the earthwork regularly being used as the base for a hedge or fence.
- 2.3 The solid geology of the area comprises a combination of Caradoc siltstones and mudstones belonging to the Ordovician period, and Ludlow and Wenlock siltstones and mudstones belonging to the Silurian period (1994 British Geological Survey map). In this particular locality, however, those country rocks are overlain by a significant thickness of glacial and river alluvium (Pocock and Whitehead, 1935). The soils in the immediate area consist of fine loamy and silty soils belonging to the Denbigh 1 Association, and deep silty river alluvium belonging to the Teme Association (1983 Soil Survey of England and Wales map).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 An evaluation was carried out in the immediate locality in 2006 (Dodd et al, 2006), in response to the planned reconstruction work. Evidence for a small cottage had been identified from the first edition Ordnance Survey mapping, and this was deemed to be under potential threat by machining operations. The evaluation comprised two trenches, with the north-eastern trench revealing surviving remains of the cottage. The report suggested the cottage might have been demolished in the mid-19th century, although this seems to be at odds with its depiction on the 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map of 1902, which is included within the report.

- 3.2 A reasonable proportion of the watching brief area was common land until it was enclosed in the early part of the 19th century. The 19th and early 20th-century maps of the area show a small settlement of three or four houses at Trehelig-gro, which presumably grew up on the common in the 18th century. It seems likely that the enclosure of the area was either related to the construction of the flood defence bank or provided the impetus for its construction. The bank is first depicted on the 1839 Tithe map of Castle Caereinion parish. Trehelig was once a detached part of Castle Caereinion, although it was subsequently transferred to Welshpool.
- 3.3 Little is known of the history of the area prior to the 18th century, but it was most probably used for seasonal grazing due to its exposure to flooding on a regular basis. This does not, however, preclude the possibility that the area saw some more intense activity in previous periods, and there is certainly a large body of evidence to suggest that the valley floor of the Severn was an area of significant importance for funerary and ritual activity at certain times in prehistory. Dyffryn Lane, only 1.5km to the south-west, and Sarn-y-bryn-caled, 2.5km to the north, were both centres of such activity towards the end of the Neolithic period.

4 WATCHING BRIEF

- 4.1 The flood defence bank, prior to reconstruction, averaged 6m in overall width, with its height in relation to local topography varying to provide a level crest. The reconstruction works generally involved cutting back one or both sides of the bank and replacing them with imported material to provide a more gentle slope to the earthwork. At the south-eastern end of the works, a new section of bank was built on a line further north than the original, and the existing bank was then removed.
- 4.2 The watching brief comprised a series of site visits during the soil removal stage of the reconstruction works. Additional visits were undertaken in the south-eastern part of the area, both to advise on the routing of the new section of bank to avoid an archaeological site and to record a section through the original argae prior to its removal.
- 4.3 Site visits commenced on 17 August, when lengths of the rear face (that facing away from the river) of the bank at the western end were in the process of being machined away. No finds or features related to the flood defences or earlier activity were identified.



Plate 1 Machining at the west end of the argae (Photo CPAT 2480-001)

- 4.4 Subsequent works to the west of 'The Gro' revealed a probable holloway, in the order of 4m wide, which appeared to have a metallated surface of grey gravel. The feature curved around between the flood defence bank and the boundary of land belonging to 'The Gro'. It seems not to have been picked up at the desk-top stage of the assessment, although part is depicted on the accompanying maps.



Plate 2 Location of former holloway (Photo CPAT 2480-006)

- 4.5 On 12 September, the south-eastern part of the scheme was visited to examine the new route of the flood defences, from which topsoil was in the process of being removed. No evidence of archaeological features or finds was forthcoming. In addition to the examination of topsoiled areas, the need for an acceptable route around the dwelling remains reported by Dodd *et al* (2006) was discussed with site staff.



Plate 3 Protective fencing around the site of the former dwelling (Photo CPAT 2480-012)

- 4.6 In Dodd's evaluation, Trench 2 had revealed evidence of the dwelling, but Trench 1, to the south-west, was reported to be devoid of archaeological features. Trench 1 was therefore taken as a suitable line on which to place a temporary fence designed to act as a barrier and prevent disturbance of the site during machining. This was put in place prior to the commencement of work on the rear face of the bank.
- 4.7 The machining of the rear face of this section was carried out on 13 September, and this included the field to the north, which was also occupied by buildings belonging to the Trehelig-gro settlement. A few sherds of 18th- to 19th-century slip-decorated earthenware were noted in the adjoining field, to the north-west of the dwelling; otherwise all finds were 19th century or later in date. No significant features were observed and the remains of the dwelling evaluated by Dodd (*et al*) were successfully avoided.
- 4.8 On 24 September, a section was cut under archaeological supervision, through the part of the argae which had become redundant. This provided an opportunity to record its construction and to evaluate the possibility of underlying features being present. The trench was 7.3m long and 1.6m wide, with the argae being 6.4m wide and 0.94m high at this point. The resulting section revealed that the argae was composed of a single layer of brown river silt, with some slag/clinker facing having been subsequently added to the front face, presumably to minimise the effects of erosion in flood conditions. The side facing the river was only 0.4m high in relation to ground level, demonstrating the amount of material (*c.*0.5m thick) which has been deposited between the river and the argae since it was constructed. The redundant section of argae was subsequently reduced to ground level; preliminary observations confirmed that the deposits preceding the argae would not be exposed by this work, at which point the watching brief was terminated.



Plate 4 Trench cut through the redundant section of argae (Photo CPAT 2480-020)

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The watching brief comprised the examination of the machined areas related to the reconstruction of the argae at Trehelig. No evidence of any features predating the argae was revealed by the works.
- 5.2 At the south-eastern end of the argae, the alignment was changed and the original earthwork was levelled. The opportunity was taken to record a section through the original argae, in a trench excavated under archaeological supervision at SJ 21460225, prior to its levelling. This proved that the earthwork had been constructed of redeposited river silt with the subsequent addition of material on the river side of the bank to give added protection in times of flood. The excavation also demonstrated that silting on the river side of the argae had raised the ground surface by approximately 0.5m, in comparison to that on the opposite side.
- 5.3 The site of a dwelling dating to the 19th century, which had been evaluated by Dodd *et al* (2006), was marked out prior to the commencement of excavations in its immediate locality and was successfully avoided. Evidence of a minor trackway, probably belonging to the same period, was noted to the west of 'The Gro' during the watching brief.

6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 6.1 The writer would like to thank the following people for their assistance during the project: Mr J Bailey, Mr R Bentley and Mr A Grundy of the Environment Agency; and also his colleagues at CPAT, Mr B Silvester, and Mr I Grant, for their assistance with the watching brief.

7 REFERENCES

7.1 *Documentary sources*

Dodd, L J, Frost, P, Bognar, A, & Walker, W, 2006, *Proposed Renovation Works to Argae Flood Defence Banks at Trehelig, near Welshpool, Powys*, Earthworks Archaeology

Pocock, R W, & Whitehead, T H, 1935, *British Regional Geology: The Welsh Borderland*, London: HMSO

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

TREHELIG FLOOD EMBANKMENT

SPECIFICATION FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF BY THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) have been invited to tender for an archaeological watching brief on behalf of the Environment agency in connection with flood defence works at Trehelig, near Welshpool, Powys.
- 1.2 The watching brief has been recommended as it is thought that there is the potential for archaeological deposits within the area.

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 Monitoring of the groundworks will be undertaken by a qualified archaeologist positioned at a safe distance from the mechanical excavator. The archaeologist will wear appropriate clothing and equipment at all times, including a reflective jacket, hard hat and safety footwear. Depending on the nature of the works, and the presence of any archaeological deposits, it may be necessary for the archaeologist to inspect an area more closely, possibly including rapid cleaning and recording. Any significant deposits or features may need to be examined by limited excavation. Any archaeological works other than general monitoring will only be undertaken with the agreement and co-operation of the site contractors to ensure that the area concerned is a safe working environment. If necessary, an area will be temporarily fenced with orange barrier fencing to allow the archaeologist to work safely. No work of any nature will be undertaken in close proximity to any active machinery.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 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 minimize any disruption to the overall scheme of works.

- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 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

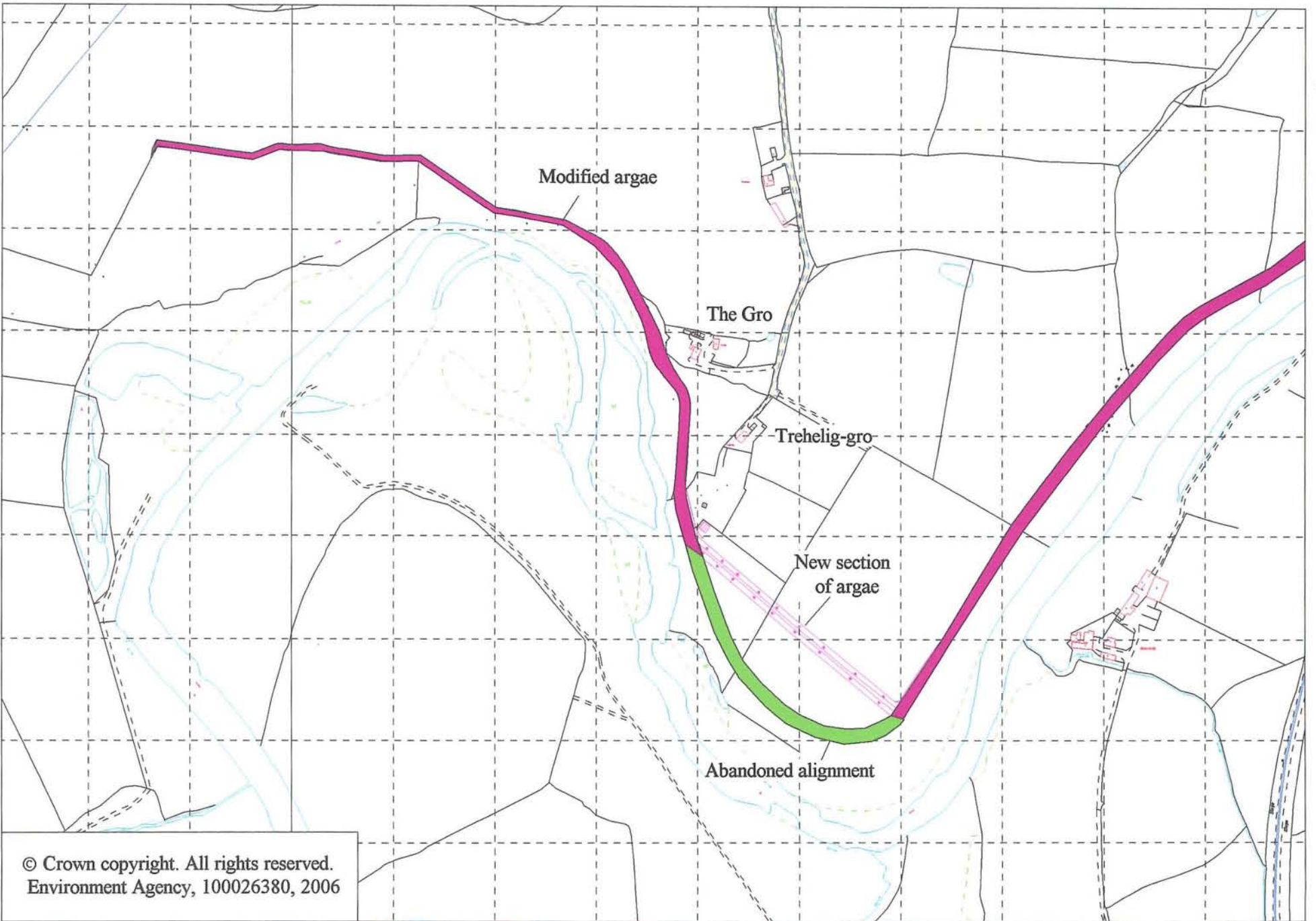
- 4.1 The watching brief will be undertaken by an experienced field archaeologist and overall supervision will be by Mr RJ Silvester, a senior member of CPAT's staff who is also a member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA). CPAT is an IFA Registered Organisation. The duration of the watching 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 and regional Historic Environment Officer 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
17 July 2007

APPENDIX 2

VISITS UNDERTAKEN DURING THE ARGAE RECONSTRUCTION

Visit date	Locality	Results
17/08/07	W end of argae	No archaeological finds or features observed
22/08/07	W end of argae	No archaeological finds or features observed
24/08/07	Area near 'The Gro'	Gravel surfaced holloway, up to 4m wide, observed between SJ 21370258 and SJ 21350263. Part of the holloway is depicted on the OS 1 st edition map
12/09/07	Revised line of the SE section of argae	No archaeological finds or features observed where topsoil had been removed from the new alignment. Advice was also given regarding fencing around the site of a former dwelling where the new line merged with the existing argae, and this was completed prior to the commencement of machining.
13/09/07	Area adjacent to former dwelling (NGR: SJ 21400241)	A few sherds of 18 th to 19 th -century pottery were noted in the field to the NW of the former dwelling, most probably related to the small settlement of Trehelig-gro. No archaeological features were observed during machining and the former dwelling was successfully avoided
24/09/07	Redundant alignment of the SE section of argae	Trench cut through argae by machine and the resulting section recorded. Levelling of redundant argae observed - no evidence that deposits predating the argae were being exposed so watching brief terminated



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Environment Agency, 100026380, 2006

Fig 1 Alignment of the existing and modified sections of argae at Trehelig Scale 1:5,000