

CPAT Report No 945

Land to the Rear of 7-9 Broad Street, Montgomery, Powys

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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Report for McCartneys LLP

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In July 2008 the Contracts and Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust was invited by Mr Geraint Jones of McCartneys LLP to undertake an archaeological evaluation in connection with proposals to construct a new dwelling on land to the rear of 7-9 Broad Street, Montgomery. The Curatorial Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, in their capacity as archaeological advisors to the local authority, determined that an archaeological evaluation was required to identify the potential impact on the archaeological resource. Accordingly, a brief (CPAT EVB 699) was prepared by Mr M Walters of the Curatorial Section, acting in his role as the archaeological curator, which detailed the works required.
- 1.2 It had been originally proposed that the evaluation should consist of two trenches within the area of the proposed development. However, the presence of a copper beech tree, subject to a tree protection order, in an adjoining plot led to the need for changes in the plans in order to protect the tree from disturbance. The main changes instituted by the developers involved the repositioning of the proposed dwelling to the southern part of the development area and the decision to limit ground disturbance in the northern part of the plot to the surface layer only. Accordingly, it was considered to be sufficient by the archaeological curator for a single trench to be excavated in the southern part of the plot to assess the deposits where the revised house location lay.
- 1.3 The evaluation commenced on 28 July and was completed at the end of that week. This report was written immediately thereafter.

2 GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The town of Montgomery is approximately equidistant from two of the major towns of mid-Wales, Newtown and Welshpool, the former lying about 10km to the west-south-west, while the latter is a similar distance to the north. It is set on the north-eastern slope of a range of hills, where they meet an area of undulating lowland bounded on its other sides by the Camlad and Caebitra rivers. The area of the assessment lies at NGR SO 22279638, towards the southern side of the town, where a lower saddle of ground links the two areas of raised ground on which the castle and church are sited (Fig. 1).
- 2.2 Geologically, Montgomery lies in a faulted area of mudstones and siltstones, where Ludlow series rocks of the Silurian period have been downthrust in relation to the adjoining Caradoc series rocks of the preceding Ordovician period (1994 British Geological Survey map). The differences in the underlying geology are, perhaps coincidentally, mirrored by the overlying soils, the Silurian rocks being overlain by fine silty and loamy soils of the Denbigh 1 Association, while the Ordovician rocks are overlain by fine silty and clayey soils of the Cegin Association (1983 Soil Survey of England and Wales map).

3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The background study involved the examination of all the readily available primary and secondary documentary, cartographic, pictorial, and photographic sources for the immediate area. Repositories consulted included the following: the Regional Historic Environment Record (HER), held by CPAT at Welshpool; the National Monuments Record, maintained by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW) in Aberystwyth; and the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth.

- 3.2 Known in Welsh as Trefaldwyn, both this and its English counterpart were given successively to Hen Domen (or Old Montgomery), the motte and bailey closer to the Severn, and to the present town of Montgomery. In Domesday Book the motte was called *Castrum Muntgumeri* after its lord, Roger de Montgomery, Earl of Shrewsbury, whose home across the Channel was Montgommery in Normandy. *Gastell baldwin* and hence Trefaldwyn is recorded in c.1170, a reference to Baldwin de Bollers who was granted possession of Montgomery in the early 12th century.
- 3.3 Montgomery (or New Montgomery) was developed by Henry III as a strategic and military stronghold on the Welsh border in 1223, its location commended by Mathew Paris as ideal 'for the erection of an impregnable castle'. The spot was rather less suitable for a town, however, but the king issued a safe conduct to all who would bring victuals for sale to the castle, promising the liberties enjoyed by the burgesses of the town of Shrewsbury to those who would stay and live in Montgomery. It was conceived as a planned town (or plantation) and received its charter in 1227.
- 3.4 The castle's strategic importance declined in the 14th century and it began to fall into decay, although later some of it was restored as a private residence. The town on the hand thrived to some degree, and the population of the borough expanded throughout the 13th and into the 14th century. A weekly market was held in Broad Street and there were four annual fairs. However, its strategic location hindered its accessibility and thus its commercial development for it was at some distance from the River Severn. The rise of Newtown and Welshpool, both on the river, created rival market towns in superior locations and in 1279 Welshpool's market and fairs were temporarily removed by royal charter because of the damage they were doing to Montgomery's prosperity.

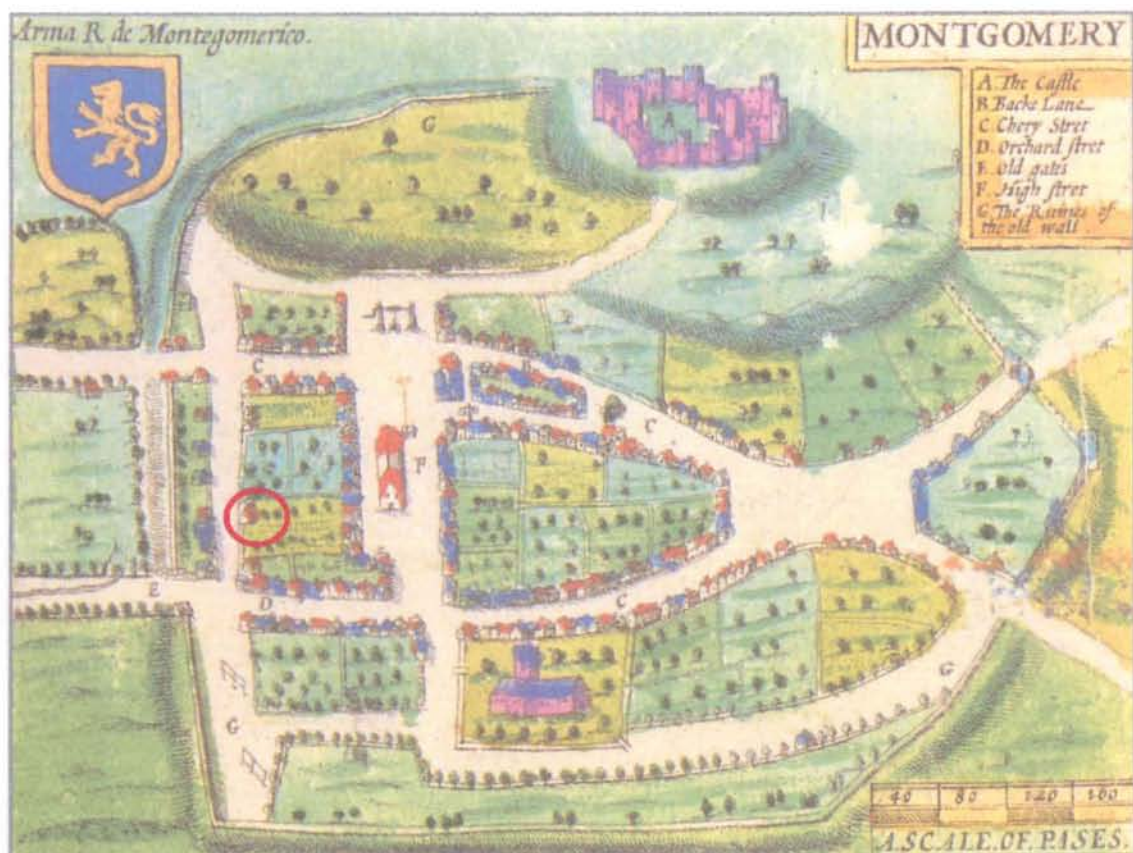


Fig. 1 John Speed's plan of Montgomery; early 17th century. North is to the right.

- 3.5 Not surprisingly, Montgomery went into decline in the late medieval period. Large areas of the town, particularly in the northern part, were devoid of buildings in 1610-11 when John Speed published his plan of the town (Fig. 1), although it was still ranked as one of the more important settlements in the Principality. This was no doubt partly because the town was accorded the status of county town to the newly created Montgomeryshire in the Act of Union between England and Wales instituted by Henry VIII in 1536. Unlike the other towns of Montgomeryshire it did not develop an industrial base during the post-medieval centuries and as a consequence its growth was stunted.
- 3.6 The grid pattern so typical in a planted town such as Newtown is recognisable only at the southern end of Montgomery in the vicinity of the church and market. Further north the natural landform necessitates a less regular layout. The nature of the medieval buildings and their accompanying plots is little known. Typically, long narrow burgage plots are still distinguishable in some parts of the town, notably off Princes Street and Broad Street. Excavations on a plot beside Pool Road in 1984 and again in 1987 revealed the superimposed plans of two timber houses with a yard behind. Occupation there began in the 13th century and seems to have ceased early in the 15th century after which the plot remained empty. Work in Bunner's Yard off Arthur Street in 1991 uncovered a possible building platform, and also a line of stakes which may have formed a division between plots or sub-divided a single plot.



Fig. 2 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 1:2,500 map of 1886. The evaluation plot is marked by a red circle

- 3.7 Speed's map (Fig. 1) depicts a dwelling fronting onto Back Lane (not named on his map, the same name being in use elsewhere) in the early 17th century, probably a little to the west of the present evaluation area, on the opposite side of the little lane that runs south to north and then terminates. An archaeological examination of this area in 1996 uncovered a yard surface,

gullies, a wall and at least two pits, one of which may have been medieval in date. There was however, no convincing evidence of a building. Speed's depiction has to be treated with caution for he seemingly added houses at random to some of his town maps. An estate map of 1785 shows the small lane with its dead end which lies to the west of the development plot, but nothing in the plot itself, and both this and 19th-century maps point to the area being used as gardens and back yards, probably related to properties fronting on to Bishops Castle Street. Even on the Tithe map of 1839 it was not occupied by any buildings, and only a single small structure, probably a shed, on the 1886 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 2). Discussions with local residents confirmed that the area was occupied by a larger building in the 20th century, which was apparently used for by a range of local craftspeople but has since been demolished; only a few bricks remain on its site.

4 EVALUATION (Fig. 4)

- 4.1 The evaluation consisted of a single trench, measuring 7.1m north-north-west/south-south-east by 1.7m, and was sited in the southern part of the plot, as discussed above in paragraph 1.2. The area was disused and heavily vegetated at the commencement of the excavation.
- 4.2 The evaluation process is essentially non-destructive and is designed to determine the depth at which any archaeologically sensitive deposits have survived, together with as much as possible about their nature, condition and significance. The modern overburden was removed by machine under close archaeological supervision, down to the surface of the first significant archaeological horizon. Thereafter, all excavation was undertaken by hand. Contexts were recorded on individual record forms and drawn and photographed as appropriate. Numbers in brackets in the following text refer to individual context records in the site archive, a summary of which is provided in Appendix 1.

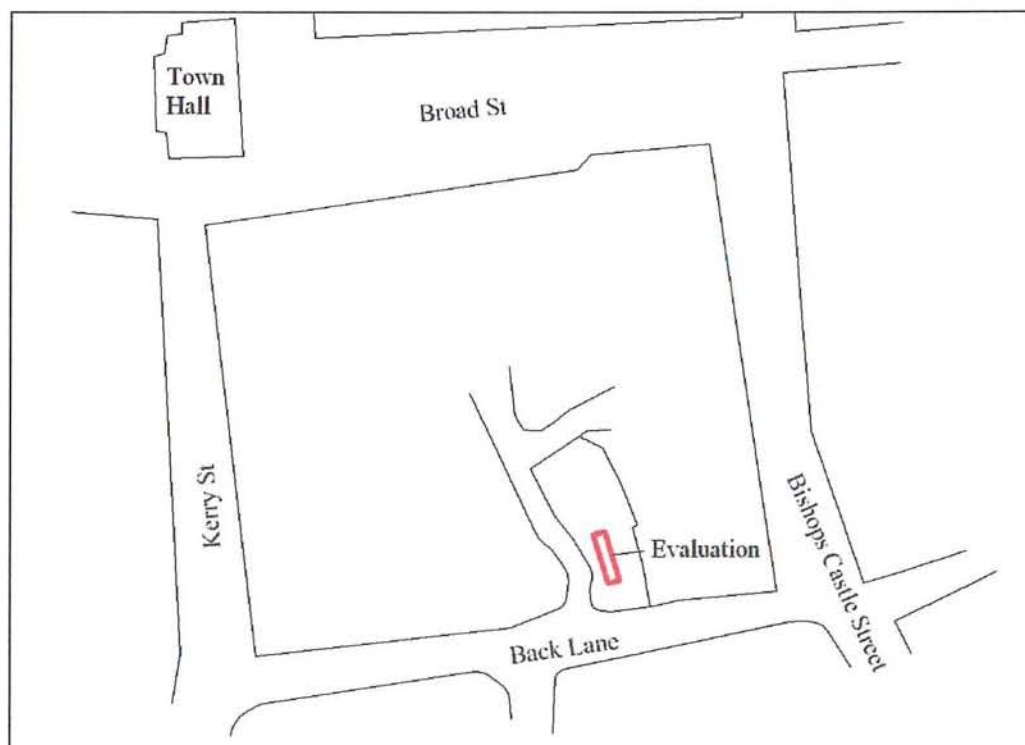


Fig. 3 Location of the evaluation trench Scale 1:1,000

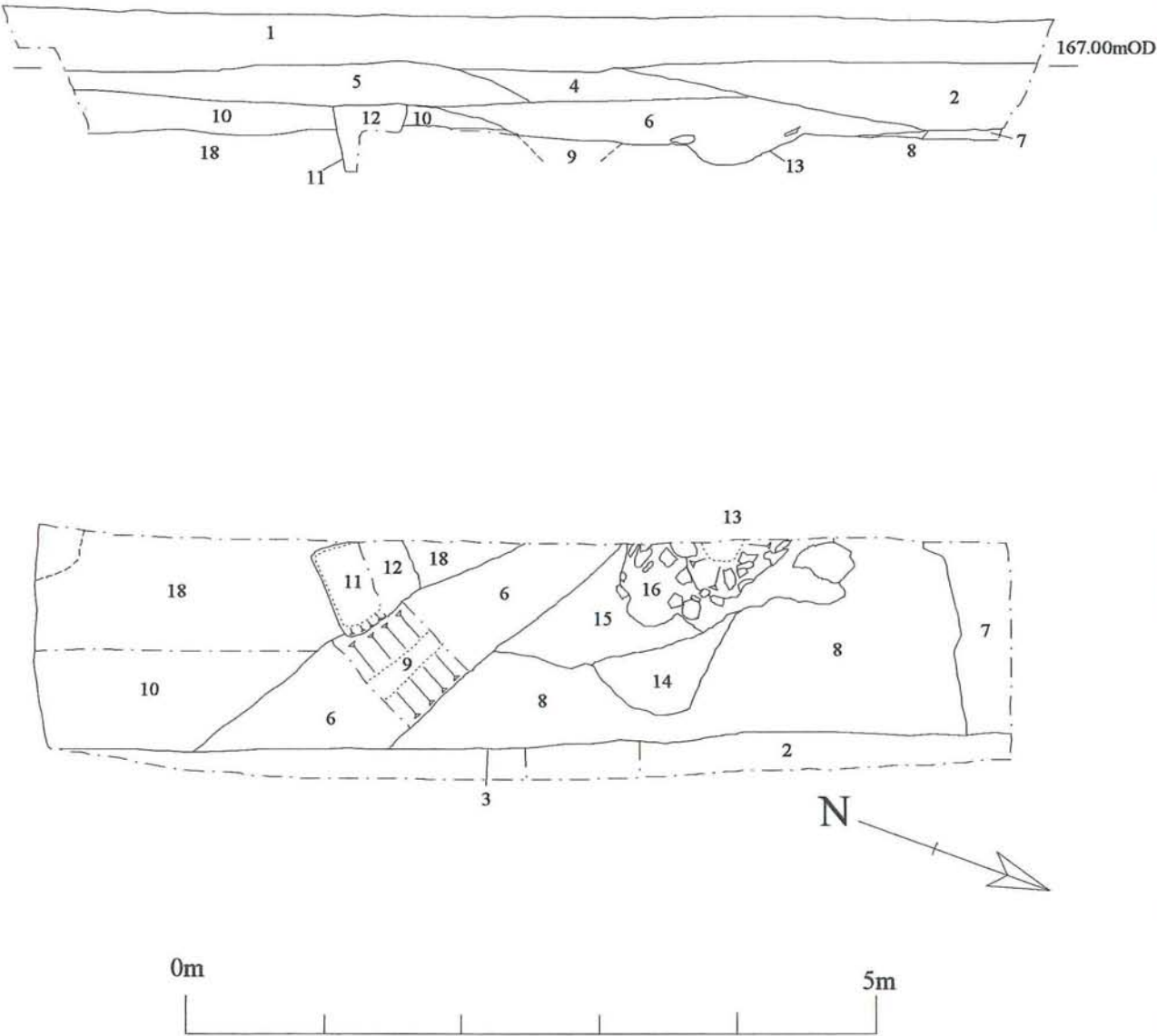


Fig. 4 Trench plan and section Scale 1:50

- 4.3 The natural subsoil (17), consisting of brown mottled yellowish-grey clay, was only identified when part of the fill (2) of a relatively modern, probably machine cut, trench (3) was removed. The western edge of trench 3 fell just within the eastern side of the evaluation trench.
- 4.4 It is difficult to be certain about the layer or layers which immediately overlay the natural subsoil; these were not investigated to preserve the succeeding archaeological deposits. The following layers were observed in the base of the northern part of the trench, although, as they were only seen in plan, their relationships remain to be confirmed. As a result of cleaning out a later pit/post-hole (see paragraph 4.7, below) it was possible to determine that the earliest deposit here was almost certainly a layer of pale grey clay (16) which incorporated a significant quantity of shaly stones, one of which had a peg-hole denoting it had once been used as a roof tile. Adjoining this layer, and presumably overlying it, were bands of yellowish-orange clay (15) and pale grey clay with plentiful charcoal fragments (14).



Plate 1 The trench, after cleaning, from the south-south-east; gully 9 on the near side of the angled ranging pole (Photo CPAT 2619-005)

- 4.5 In the north and north-east parts of the trench layers 14 to 16 were overlain by a probable yard or floor deposit consisting of a layer of highly compacted small stones set in yellowish clay silt (8), approximately 0.05m in thickness, from which a small number of medieval pottery sherds were recovered. This was, in turn, overlain by a less firmly consolidated surface of larger stones set in mid-grey-brown silt (7), 0.05m thick, which probably represents a poorer quality resurfacing of the original yard/floor.



Plate 2 The deposits at the southern end of the trench, from north-north-west
(Photo CPAT 2619-017)

- 4.6 The deposits in the northern part of the trench were separated from those in the southern part by a gully (9) running in a north-west/south-east direction, which varied from 0.9m to 0.5m in width and was about 0.25m deep. Its fill is described in the following paragraph. On the south side of the gully, machining was terminated at a layer of orange clay silt with small stones (10), which was up to 0.3m in thickness and contained a single old roof tile of the same type found in



Plate 3 Pit/post-hole (13) from above, note the peg-hole in an old roof tile to upper right
(Photo CPAT 2619-013)

layer 16. The western part of this layer was removed to reveal a deposit of mid-grey clay silt (18), with plentiful charcoal and occasional flattish stones. It was difficult to see a continuation of the layer on the opposite side of gully 9, yet the similar frequency and appearance of the charcoal in layer 14 may suggest that the layers were broadly contemporary. A square pit (11), measuring 0.65m by 0.65m and 0.5m deep had been cut through layer 10 and into layer 18, but its fill of mid-grey-brown silt (12) contained finds of 19th-century date.

- 4.7 Gully 9 had a fill of fairly soft mid-grey-brown silt (6) which averaged about 0.3m in thickness and whose upper surface seemed to continue at the same level as the top of layer 10. The finds recovered from 6 included some medieval pottery, but this was presumably residual material, as post-medieval material was also present in the deposit. On the north side of the gully, deposit 6 also filled a shallow pit or post-hole (13), 0.75m across and 0.2m deep, which had been cut into layer 16.
- 4.8 The remaining deposits were of more recent origin, the lowest of which consisted of a layer of mid-grey-brown sandy silt (5), which was up to 0.3m in thickness and ran northwards from the south end of the trench for about 3.5m. A further, overlying, deposit of mixed grey and yellowish-brown clay silt (4), up to 0.25m thick, extended a further 1.5m to the north of the end of layer 5, where it appeared to be truncated by a past excavation (3), probably undertaken by machine, which sloped down towards the eastern section of the trench until it met the vertical cut noted in paragraph 4.3. The fill (2) of this feature was very varied, including yellow-orange clay, large stones, bricks and mid-grey stony silt. It seems probable that the feature was dug to install some form of drain or other service relating to the properties fronting Broad Street; it may even have drained a pond which local residents are aware once existed to the north of the proposed development.
- 4.9 The modern topsoil consisting of very dark grey to black gritty silt (1) was up to 0.45m thick. In summary, the trench encountered deposits of 19th-century date below about 167.00mOD, the potential medieval layers and features ranging from the upper surface of the natural subsoil at 166.29m OD to the top of layer 10, at approximately 166.90m OD.

5 FINDS

- 5.1 Medieval pottery was recovered from four contexts, specifically those numbered 6, 8, 12 and 18. The presence of later finds within contexts 6 and 12 suggest that only context 8, the compacted stone floor/yard, and context 18, the charcoal-rich deposit at the south end of the trench are likely to be of medieval origin. This does have greater significance, in that context 8 seals a number of largely undisturbed deposits for which no dating evidence was recovered but which can therefore be assumed to have a medieval origin.
- 5.2 A range of post-medieval pottery was also recovered, though little of this was of 19th-century or later date. Examination of the sherds suggested that both stone layer 7 and deposit 6 which fills both gully 9 and post-hole/pit 13 were of 17th to 18th-century date.
- 5.3 In addition to the ceramic finds, three fragments of stone roofing tile were recognised, and are instructive in assessing the nature of the buildings in the locality. One fragment (that from context 6) was only recognised from the dressing marks created when it was split and shaped. More interestingly, that from context 10 had a nail-hole punched through one corner, while the fragment from context 16 had a larger hole designed for a wooden peg, presumably an earlier (medieval) fixing method.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 Although the area available for evaluation was restricted by the presence of a copper beech subject to a tree protection order, the excavation has revealed evidence of medieval occupation in the area immediately to the north of Back Lane.
- 6.2 A number of layers were revealed which are likely to date to the medieval period, totalling about 0.6m in maximum thickness. These included a probable floor or yard, which appeared to have been resurfaced at some point in the 17th or early 18th centuries, activity that may have been related to a building shown in this approximate location on Speed's map of Montgomery, dating to 1610. The presumed yard overlay further layers which are assumed to be medieval, including the earliest exposed in the base of the trench, which contained an old stone roof tile with a hole where it would have been suspended from a wooden peg.
- 6.3 Despite the evidence of building debris in the medieval layers, no features which could be conclusively related to a building of that period were revealed. It is possible, however, that structures could have been sited on the edge of Back Lane, just to the south of the trench.
- 6.4 Activity continued on the site into the post-medieval period, as evidenced by a number of layers and a gully running north-west/south-east across the trench, but this activity seems to have declined around the beginning of the 19th century and the plot was probably used as a garden until a building, known to have been subsequently used by local craftspeople, was erected on the northern part of the plot in the 20th century. This has subsequently been demolished and the site is unused at the time of writing.

7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 7.1 The writer would like to thank Wendy Owen of CPAT, for her help and assistance with the evaluation, and also Eleri Farley and Bob Silvester of CPAT for their contributions to the report.
- 7.2 The writer would also like to thank the staff of the following repositories: The Historic Environment Record, CPAT; the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth; and the National Monuments Record, Aberystwyth.

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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**PROJECT ARCHIVE****SITE ARCHIVE**

31 context record forms

2 A1 site plans

26 Digital images

Photographic catalogue

FINDS CATALOGUES**Medieval pottery catalogue**

Context	Sherds	Comment
6	6	Possibly late medieval
8	2	
12	2	
18	1	

Post-medieval pottery catalogue

Context	Sherds	Comment
2	10	5 slip decorated; 3 19 th -century white ware
6	5	3 slip decorated
7	3	1 ?mottled ware (1690-1760); 1 marbled slipware
12	4	1 19 th -century white ware

Miscellaneous finds catalogue

Context	Type	No	Comment
2	Brick	1	Fragment
6	Animal bone	7	
6	Clay pipe	1	Stem fragment
6	Lime mortar	2	Lumps
6	Fe object	2	Possibly one buckle
6	Brick	2	Fragments
6	?Ceramic floor tile	1	Fragment
6	Stone roof tile	1	Probable fragment
7	Clay pipe	1	Stem fragment
10	Stone roof tile	1	With nail-hole
16	Stone roof tile	1	With hole for wooden peg