

CPAT Report No 991

Mount Street, Welshpool

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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April 2009

Report for Mr M Broxton

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CPAT Report Record

Report and status

CPAT Report Title	Mount Street, Welshpool: Archaeological Evaluation		
CPAT Project Name	Mount Street		
CPAT Project No	1611	CPAT Report No	991
Confidential (yes/no)	Yes	draft/final	Final

Internal control

	name	Signature	date
prepared by	R. Hankinson		
checked by	R.J. Silvester		
approved by	R.J. Silvester		

Revisions

no	date	made by	checked by	approved by

Internal memo

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In March 2009 the Contracts and Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust were invited by Hughes Architects, acting on behalf of Mr M Broxton, to submit a tender for undertaking an archaeological evaluation in connection with proposals to construct a new office and residential building on land at Mount Close, Mount Street, Welshpool. The Curatorial Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, in their capacity as archaeological advisors to the local authority, had determined that an archaeological evaluation was required to establish the potential impact of the development on the archaeological resource. Accordingly, a brief was prepared by the archaeological advisors which detailed the works required (EVB 727). However, this was later revised in the light of further information on the nature of the site and the requirement for evaluation was reduced from two trenches totalling 20m in length to two 2m by 2m test pits.
- 1.2 Information held within the Regional Historic Environment Record indicated that the application falls within the medieval historic core of Welshpool, and it was anticipated that ground disturbance for the new development might impact upon medieval and later archaeology preserved as sub-surface deposits.

2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 2.1 The development plot is situated in the town of Welshpool in Powys at NGR SJ 2218807607; it lies on the south side of Mount Street, a continuation of High Street, immediately to the east of its junction with Mount Close (Fig. 1). The plot is effectively unused at present and this seems to have been the case for some time, although surface evidence of concrete block foundations was present within the plot.



Fig. 1 Location of the evaluation trenches

- 2.2 The solid geology of the area mainly consists of undivided Ludlow and Wenlock Series siltstones and mudstones belonging to the Silurian period, though there is some local faulting which has exposed Caradoc Series siltstones and mudstones of the Ordovician period (1994 British Geological Survey map). The soils of the area generally consist of fine silty and loamy soils belonging to the Denbigh 1 Association (1983 Soil Survey of England and Wales map).

3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Welshpool is said to have been the site of churches founded by St Cynfelyn and his brother Llywelyn in the 6th century AD; the foundation of the latter has since been associated, at least traditionally, with the 'Old Church' which is known formerly to have stood on the east side of Mill Lane, immediately to the south of Salop Road.
- 3.2 The present town of Welshpool resulted from a deliberate attempt by Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn, Prince of Powys, to establish a new borough in the first half of the 13th century. As such, this was a planned town which owed little to any existing settlement (Soulsby 1983, 266). The burgesses received a foundation charter in the 1240s and a market was recorded there in 1252 (Silvester 1992, 167). The new town followed a basically linear plan, centred on High Street and Broad Street, with some development also along Church Street, Berriew Street and Severn Street. Interestingly, the parish church of St Mary's, which was refounded around 1250, lies further to the east, away from the centre of the town and in an area recorded by Humphrey Bleaze on his map of 1629 as 'Welshe town' (Fig. 2, Silvester 2008). Although the map is not drawn with the accuracy later achieved by the Ordnance Survey it is apparent that there were houses on the High Street frontage in the locality of the plot at the time.

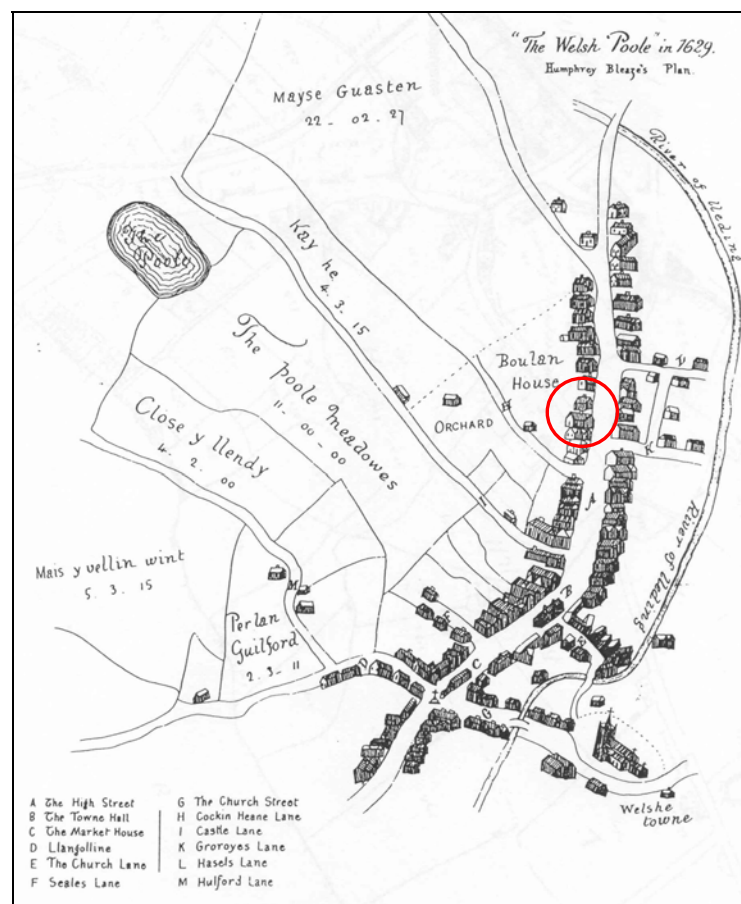


Fig. 2 Map of Welshpool by Humphrey Bleaze, 1629

- 3.3 Permission to reproduce a depiction of Welshpool by John Lewis (c. 1735-40) could not be obtained, but examination of a copy demonstrated that it shows buildings in this approximate location, although as viewed by Lewis from the north they are partially concealed behind the existing No 20 High Street and Nos 49-50 Mount Street.
- 3.4 The first accurate cartographic depiction of the locality is provided by a post-1780 map of Powis Estate (NLW/Powis Castle/M17-18); there is also a later version of this map dated 1800 (NLW/Powis Castle/M20). Neither are reproduced here, but both maps show the south side of Mount Street occupied by a continuous line of dwellings/buildings, confirming that the plot was occupied towards the end of the 18th century.
- 3.5 As the development plot was not subject to the payment of Tithes, no information has been gleaned from the Tithe survey for Welshpool. The next detailed source for the area is the 1:500 Ordnance Survey map (Montgomeryshire 23.7.20) of 1885 (Fig. 3), and this is more specific in its depiction of the plot, showing three buildings to the west of No 1 Mount Street. Discussions with a former local resident, whose family had occupied one of them in the early 20th century, revealed that the buildings formed a terrace of small cottages.

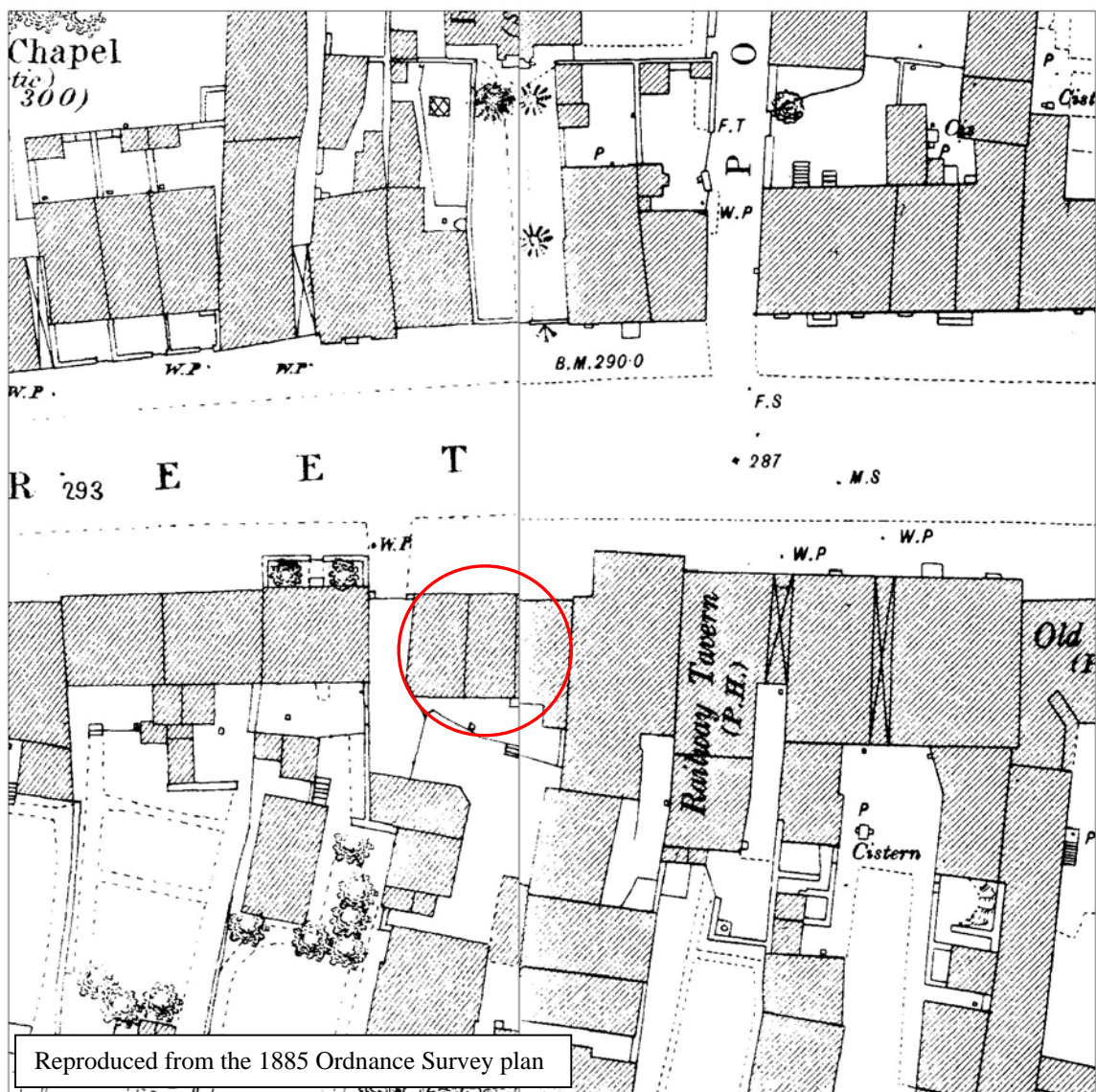


Fig. 3 1885 First edition Ordnance Survey 1:500 map (Montgomeryshire 23.7.20)

- 3.6 The locality was depicted on the second edition of the Ordnance Survey mapping at 1:2,500 scale (Montgomeryshire 23.7 of 1902), and this shows the same arrangement as depicted on the 1885 mapping.
- 3.7 In more recent times, an archaeological evaluation (Hankinson & Jones 2002) was carried out to the rear of Nos 21-22 High St, only some 50m distant from the plot, and this revealed evidence of medieval and post-medieval occupation, the earliest of which was considered to be 14th-century in date. Further archaeological work was carried out on the building (No 1 Mount Street) adjoining the plot in 2004 (Williams & Jones 2004), when a building survey was carried out during renovation works. The building appears to have originally been a two-bay timber-framed structure dating to the 16th century, with a rear wing and porch of similar construction added in the 17th-century.
- 3.8 The evidence presented in this section suggests that the plot is likely to have been occupied from at least the 14th century onwards, at which time Welshpool is known to have expanded into this locality. Definite proof of a building or buildings on this particular plot is, however, only available from the end of the 18th century.

4 EVALUATION

- 4.1 As mentioned in Section 1, above, the brief for the evaluation was revised to a requirement for the excavation of two 2m by 2m test pits. These were both excavated by machine down to the top of the first recognisable archaeological deposit or the natural subsoil, depending on which was first encountered.



Plate 1 Trench 1 after cleaning from north (Photo CPAT 2840-003)

4.2 *Trench 1* (2.4m north-south by 2.1m east-west; Fig. 4)

- 4.2.1 The natural subsoil (5), comprising orangey grey clay, at the base of the trench displayed a marked slope down to the north, from a depth of 0.6m below the ground surface at the south end of the trench up to a maximum depth of 0.9m. It was evident that this had been truncated by machining in the past as tooth marks from a machine bucket were found in its upper surface. At the south end of the trench the subsoil was overlain by grey-brown clay silt (4), up to 0.1m in thickness, which appeared to relate to some form of occupation or other human activity but only continued for 0.2m to the north of the southern end of the trench, at which point it had also been truncated by machining. A single prehistoric flint flake, with a marked bulb of percussion where it had been struck from a core, was recovered from the layer although this is not relevant in attempting to determine the age of the deposit, which is most probably medieval or post-medieval in origin.



Plate 2 Trench 1 after cleaning, from south-west (Photo CPAT 2840-008)

- 4.2.2 The overlying layers contained much disturbed material resulting from the machining noted in the previous paragraph and plastic was recovered from the base of the lowest deposit of dark grey-brown silt (7), which was up to 0.55m thick but became thinner to the south and disappeared just before reaching the southern end of the trench. An overlying layer of mixed orange-grey clay (3), up to 0.25m thick, was almost certainly contemporary with layer 7 and continued beyond the southern end of the trench. Both layers 3 and 7 and the subsoil (5) had been cut at the northern and eastern sides of the trench by a foundation trench (9), at least 0.55m deep, for a breeze-block wall (6), itself at least 0.8m high. The trench was then infilled with grey rubble (2), which was also used to level off the ground to about the same level as the top of the wall. A thin layer of recent topsoil (1), averaging about 0.07m in thickness, was present above the rubble deposit.

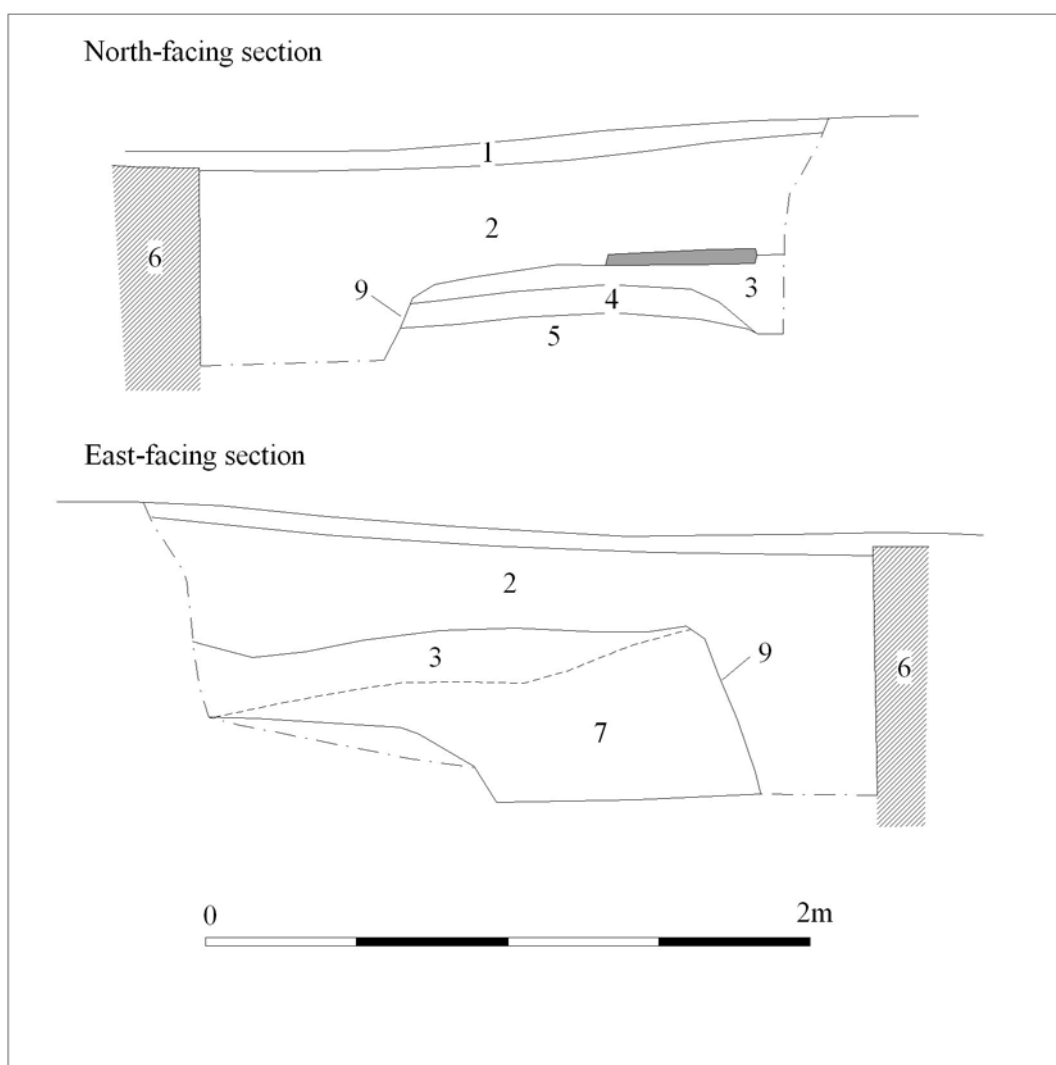


Fig. 4 Trench 1 section drawings

4.3 Trench 2 (2.6m north-south by 2.1m east-west)

- 4.3.1 A small area of orangey grey natural subsoil (5) was present at the base of the trench, at a depth of about 1.1m below the ground surface. It was evident that any medieval or post-medieval deposits which might once have been present had been removed by past machining work on the plot.
- 4.3.2 The base of the southern half of the trench was occupied by a disturbed layer of sticky orange-grey clay (8), above which grey rubble (2), up to 1.2m in thickness and the same as found in Trench 1, continued up to the base of the topsoil (1) on the plot. On the eastern side of the trench the footings and structure of a continuation of the breeze-block wall (6) were revealed, and the wall probably continued immediately to the north of the trench as there appeared to be a continuation of the foundation cut (9) on the north side of the natural subsoil.



Plate 3 Trench 2 after cleaning, from south (Photo CPAT 2840-013)

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 Examination of the available sources for the plot revealed that it was probably occupied from the 14th century onwards, when the town of Welshpool is known to have expanded into this locality. Bleaze's map of Welshpool, dated to 1629, confirms that buildings were present on the street frontage nearby, although the lack of accuracy of the map means that the exact location of the buildings depicted cannot be confirmed. Definite proof of buildings on the plot dates from the 18th century and three cottages are shown on the detailed Ordnance Survey map of 1885.
- 5.2 Although the deposits in Trench 1 were heavily disturbed by past machining of the plot, some evidence of an occupation deposit (4) was found at the southern end of the trench, at a depth of between 0.5m and 0.6m below the ground surface. This and the underlying natural subsoil (5) had been truncated by machining work on the plot in the past. All the remaining layers in the trench appeared to relate to the levelling of the plot and work carried out in relation to the installation of a breeze-block wall (6) and its foundations.
- 5.3 The layers in Trench 2 were more heavily affected by machining than those in Trench 1, the only undisturbed material being natural subsoil (5), which was encountered at a depth of 1.1m below the surface. No occupation deposits were found in this trench. Again, all the other layers appeared to relate to the levelling of the plot and work carried out in relation to the installation of a breeze-block wall (6) and its foundations.

6 REFERENCES

Published sources

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Soulsby, I, 1983. *The Towns of Medieval Wales*. Chichester: Phillimore & Co.

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Silvester, R J, 1992. *Montgomeryshire Historic Settlements*. CPAT Report No. 40.

Hankinson, R, & Jones, N W, 2002. *Land off Bowling Green Lane, Welshpool, Powys: Archaeological Evaluation*. CPAT Report No. 476

Williams, B, & Jones, N W, 2004. *1 Mount Street, Welshpool, Powys: Building Survey*. CPAT Report No. 617

Drawings

Early 18th-century (c.1735-40) drawing of Welshpool by J. Lewis held by the Bodleian Library, Oxford (not reproduced)

Cartographic Sources

1629 Humfrey Bleaze's map of Welshpool (NLW Powis Castle M257; Fig. 2)

Post-1780 Powis Castle estate map (NLW Powis Castle M17-18)

1800 Powis Castle estate map (NLW Powis Castle M20)

1885 First edition Ordnance Survey 1:500 map (Montgomeryshire 23.7.20; Fig. 3)

1902 Second edition Ordnance Survey 1:2,500 map (Montgomeryshire 23.7)

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)