

## CPAT Report No 1168

# Land adjacent Henley Villas, Middletown, Powys

WORK EXPERIENCE PROJECT 2012



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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**CPAT**

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In late May 2012 Chris and Alexa Bartram reported the discovery of a large boulder on their land at Middletown in Powys (NGR SJ2994311935) to Jeff Spencer of CPAT. Whilst clearing stones from a corner of their field before mowing nettles Mr Bartram found that one of the rocks was embedded in the ground and upon attempting to dig it out discovered that it was considerably larger than anticipated. Concerned in case it should prove to be a fallen standing stone Mr & Mrs Bartram visited the CPAT office.
- 1.2 After visiting the site in June in the company of the Bartrams, it was agreed that it would make a suitable subject for investigation by students on work experience placement at CPAT the following month and a geophysical survey and small excavation were planned.
- 1.3 The Historic Environment Record showed no previously known sites of archaeological or historical interest at the site, but bounding it to the north and west was a sunken lane between tall banks and beyond a stream approximately 100m to the NW was a group of strip fields preserved by later field boundaries. The strip fields almost certainly date to the medieval period and the lane may also have its origin at a similar time.

## 2 GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY

- 2.1 A geophysical survey was undertaken on 12<sup>th</sup> July thanks to the kindness of Mr John Burman of Merionydd Geophysical Survey Team who volunteered to demonstrate the equipment required to undertake a resistivity survey and to let the students try their hands at taking readings themselves. It was undertaken over 2 survey grids measuring 20m x 20m arranged to cover the area of the exposed boulder and was aligned approximately NNW-SSE along the NE end of the field.
- 2.2 Unfortunately, the geophysical survey failed to locate any anomalies indicative of potential archaeological features. A large area of higher resistance at the SSE end of the survey area may have been caused by geological conditions or possibly by material dumped during construction of *Henley Villas* or the gravel track to *Hillcrest*. However, the main aim was to introduce the students to a geophysical survey technique and allow them to try it for themselves; in this respect it was a success.

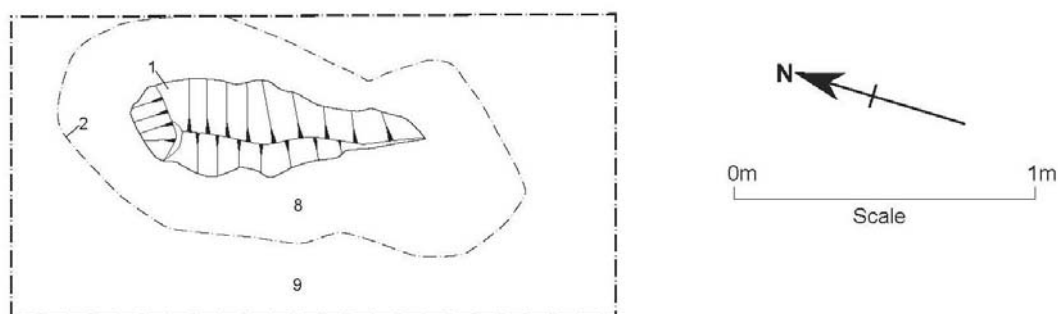
## 3 EXCAVATION

- 3.1 A single trench measuring 2m NNW by 1m SSE was positioned over the hole previously excavated by Mr Bartram to investigate the exposed boulder and discover whether it sat within a pit or foundation trench. Excavation was carried out between 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> July by the students using hand tools under the supervision of CPAT staff. All excavated material was stored adjacent to the trench for later reinstatement by CPAT staff. The boulder was of a grey sedimentary rock, relatively un-eroded by exposure to the elements. The part of the boulder visible at the time was approximately 1m long, 0.3m wide and stood approximately 0.3m tall. Numbers in brackets in the text that follows indicate the context number allocated by the students and CPAT staff during the excavation and recording process and relate to documentation in the project archive.
- 3.2 Gravel that had tumbled into the hole from the adjacent built-up track to *Hillcrest* was removed and turf cut back to form the edge of the excavation. Beneath the turf lay a dark brown topsoil.

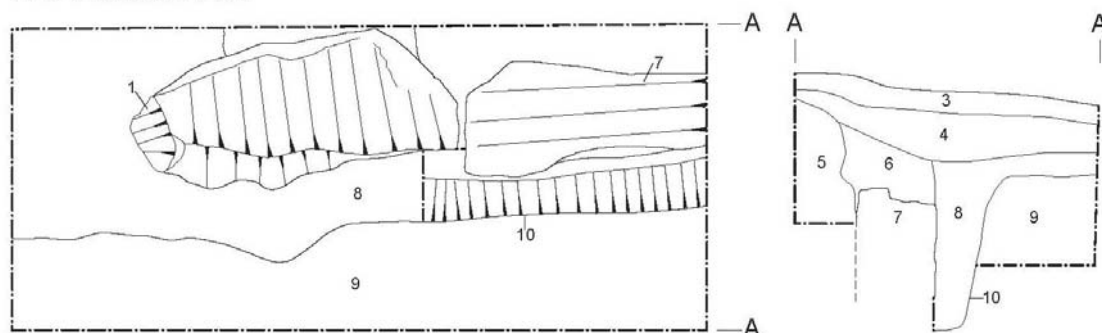
- 3.3 Once the topsoil had been removed a mid brown, compacted stony clay (4) with occasional lenses and lumps of light brown/orange clay was revealed. As the excavation proceeded differences in soil colour and texture were noted and spoil was sieved to recover any finds missed by the excavators.
- 3.4 Part of a second large boulder (7) lying to the SSE and within 0.1m of the first was revealed. Like the first, it appeared to be of a grey sedimentary rock and was relatively unworn; its flat faces being smooth and edges quite sharp.
- 3.5 At a depth of approximately 0.2m a slightly darker deposit, with fewer stones in it was recognised abutting the second boulder. A small slot was excavated in it to a depth of approximately 0.15 m to determine whether or not this was a fill of a foundation trench in which the boulders sat. Unfortunately, before a definite conclusion could be reached, time on site with the students came to an end, so at this point excavation was temporarily halted and with the agreement of Mr and Mrs Bartram the trench was left open and protected from their flock of sheep by temporary fencing.
- 3.6 Jeff Spencer and Sophie Watson returned on 19<sup>th</sup> September to finish the excavation and decided to extend it by approximately 0.3m to the SSE in order to establish a fresh section to study and draw.
- 3.7 The base of the excavation was also cleaned after having been exposed to the elements for over a month. The possible foundation trench (10) adjacent to the second boulder (see 3.5) was traced along much of the base of the excavation so it was decided to remove a block of the fill between the 2 boulders, against the southernmost of the two (7) and the SSE section to determine the shape and depth of the feature. This resolved itself into the base of a steep sided trench, the edge and bottom of which were discernable from the fill as a firm orange and grey stony clay.
- 3.8 The exposed part of the second boulder (7) measured 0.8m in length, 0.25m in width and 0.3m in depth, but it disappeared into the SSE section of the excavation so its overall dimensions could not be determined. While it could not be ascertained with certainty, both boulders appeared to sit on or just above the bottom of the foundation trench.
- 3.9 The SSE section of the excavation revealed at least 3 visible fills within the possible foundation trench (10) containing the boulders. The primary fill was a dark brown silty deposit (8), which was seen primarily in section to the west of the boulders. Though the full eastern extent of the possible foundation trench (10) was not revealed due to the close proximity of the Hillcrest trackway, it is possible that a similar deposit (5), which was only partially exposed, sat in its eastern side. In section immediately above the second boulder was a yellowish brown silty clay (6) - possibly re-deposited natural that had been thrown back in over the boulders after they had been placed in the foundation trench (10).

## PLAN AND SECTION

Pre-excavation Plan



Post-excavation Plan



## 4 FINDS

- 4.1 Fragments of clear and brown glass, coal, coke or cinders from a domestic fire, bone and brick were recovered from the ditch fills, one of the brick fragments had white painted plaster attached. None were felt to be of significant age and were not retained.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 Study of the tithe map of 1849 and historical Ordnance Survey mapping (both the first edition of 1885 and the second edition of 1902), does not provide any clues towards interpreting the evidence on the ground. There are no field boundaries (or any other features) indicated at this location on any of the maps, the study area being in the middle of a large field. While it is possible that the boulders are the foundation of a wall or bank, if so it would be unlike any other boundary in the area. The relative absence of other stone in the area of the excavation is also telling. The un-weathered nature of the boulders makes it unlikely that the feature is prehistoric.
- 5.2 It can be said with some confidence that the boulders were deliberately placed in a foundation trench that was then backfilled. Study of the section at the SSE end of the trench appears to show that spoil was tipped from the uphill side of the excavation to backfill the trench.



- 5.3 The depth to which the boulders were buried suggests they were positioned before the construction of the track to *Hillcrest* and the planting of the hawthorn hedge, which along with a post and wire fence serves as the present field boundary. The finds recovered and the nature of the deposits encountered do not suggest that the boulders, or the foundation trench in which they sit, are of any great age. According to Mr and Mrs Bartram the track and hedge were established about 30 years ago, therefore the boulders were most likely positioned before the 1980s, but how long before cannot be stated with any confidence at the present time. While it is just possible the boulders were buried in order to clear them from the surface of the field, it may not be a coincidence that they lie parallel to and within 3m of the hedge and track.



Fig.1 – The completed excavation trench viewed from the south. Photo CPAT 3646-0020



Fig.2 – The section at the southern end of the trench. Photo CPAT 3646-0011

## 6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writers would like to thank Chris and Alexa Bartram for their enthusiastic support of the project and for their sharing of local knowledge about the area of Middletown around the site of the excavation. Also of help and assistance were John Burman and Rod Trevaskus and of course the work experience students – Jacob Griffiths, Beth Harding, Lauren Jones, Olly Jones, Steph Orton, and Michael Riffel.

## 9 REFERENCES

Trevaskus, Rod, 2008. A Brief History of Middletown From the Neolithic to the Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Gt Wollaston & Middletown Parochial Church Council.

1849 – Tithe Map. Township of Middletown

1885 – First edition Ordnance Survey map, scale 1:2500

1902 – Second edition Ordnance Survey map, scale 1:2500

1954 – Ordnance Survey map of Shropshire, scale 1:10,560 accessed at [old-maps.co.uk](http://old-maps.co.uk).