

CPAT Report No 1136

Welshpool Marstons, Mill Lane, Welshpool

Archaeological Watching Brief



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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Archaeological Watching Brief

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Report for J Ross Developments Ltd
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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust was invited by J. Ross Developments Ltd, to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the construction of a new Marstons inn at Mill Lane, Weshpool, Powys (SJ 22870755). The Curatorial Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, in their capacity as archaeological advisors to the local authority, had previously determined that the watching brief was required in order to record any archaeological features or deposits which might be revealed during the initial stages of groundworks.

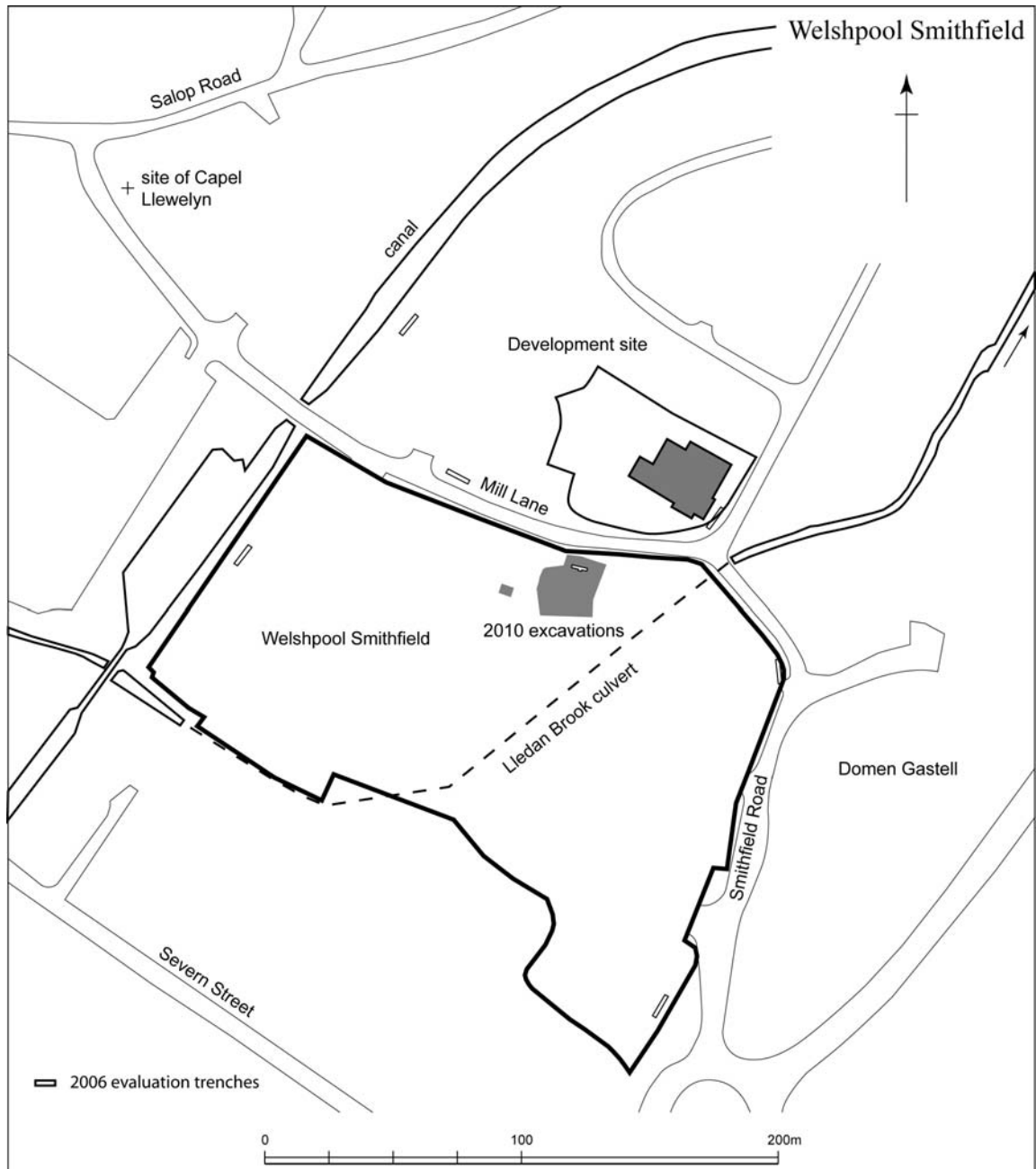


Fig. 1 The location of the development site, showing the position of the 2010 excavations

2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 2.1 The area of the development lies to the south-east of the present town centre of Welshpool, occupying a part of the former Smithfield livestock market, bounded to the south by Mill Lane and with Greenfields Road to the south-east and the Montgomery Canal to the north-west (Fig. 1; SJ 2287 0755).
- 2.2 The solid geology of the area consists mainly 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 comprise fine silty and loamy soils belonging to the Denbigh 1 Association (1983 Soil Survey of England and Wales map).

3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The archaeological interest in the Welshpool Smithfield area stems from the discovery of an important and unusual collection of Roman metalwork and other objects in 1959, which led to more recent excavations in advance of a new supermarket in 2010. The development site is also in close proximity to the medieval motte and bailey castle known as Domen Gastell, lying between this and the site of Capel Llewelyn (towards the head of Mill Lane), in an area where medieval activity has been postulated.

Prehistoric period

- 3.2 Excavations in 2010 on the opposite side of Mill Lane from the present development uncovered evidence for Mesolithic activity consisting of a small assemblage of worked chert and flint which appears to reflect a single phase of activity where knapping, including the manufacture of microliths, was undertaken on site. The landscape during the Mesolithic period would have been very different from the present day appearance of the area. A significant build-up of cultivation soil followed by the development of the Smithfield in the late 19th century have effectively masked the original contours of the area. Of particular relevance is the presence of the Lledan Brook, a tributary of the Severn which was culverted when the Smithfield was constructed. The Mesolithic activity lies around 20m to the north-west of the brook on what would have been gently sloping ground. The excavations also revealed that by the later prehistoric period the area of the Smithfield was used for agriculture, with evidence for two phases of field systems, each defined by small gullies. There was some evidence to suggest possible occupation on the site, perhaps during the later Iron Age or early Romano-British periods. Two curving gullies and a number of small pits or post-holes may represent the remains of a structure, although no obvious plan was forthcoming. The Iron Age activity is not dated closely as there was a general absence of cultural material, although radiocarbon dates from one of the second phase gullies and a post-hole for the postulated later structure indicate a range of between 390-50 BC (Jones 2011 and in prep.).

Romano-British period

- 3.3 The Roman finds were published in detail by George Boon (1961) and readers are directed to this source for a full description of the items. They were discovered in August 1959 during the installation of a drain on the north side of the Smithfield, adjacent to a former stables and office alongside Mill Lane. The objects were recovered by workmen, although their significance only came to light following the intervention of Mr George Shepherd who, on being shown one of the articles, persuaded the workmen to hand over the artefacts. These were later shown to the Director of Hull Museums (Mr Shepherd was a tutor in Hull at the time), who then informed the Department of Archaeology of the National Museum of Wales (NMW). The collection included a glass jar and bottle, two redware pottery vessels, three bronze *paterae* (a shallow dish with a

handle), a bronze ewer (jug) with a decorated handle depicting the young Bacchus, all of which had been placed into a bronze cauldron, after being wrapped in a linen cloth and then packed around with leaves and grasses. Other finds included a wooden bucket, an iron fire-dog and two ornate iron 'standards'. Ewers and *paterae* are common finds associated with rich Roman burials of the first and second centuries AD, while fire-dogs are sometimes part of native burial deposits. Boon therefore concluded that they were likely to be associated with the grave of a native Cornovian chieftain.

- 3.4 A small-scale excavation was conducted by Boon in July 1960 in the anticipation that more could be found out about regarding the context of the finds. It comprised two parallel trenches, each around 3.5m by 0.9m and 1.9m apart, together with a connecting trench between the two. The excavations recovered a further part of one of the iron standards from the 1959 drainage trench, together with a patch of wood ash, a small iron nail and a few sherds of pottery. There was, however, little information on the context of the finds.
- 3.5 The 2010 excavations identified further evidence for Romano-British settlement in the immediate area, although apparently with no structures within the site itself. The presence of agricultural activity is suggested by several features which may represent part of a field system, consisting of a gully which was roughly at right angles to a ditch running north-west to south-east, towards the Lledan Brook. This produced the only dateable pottery, although with a wide date range from the late 1st or early 2nd century into the 4th century. The gully had a possible entrance gap and was later replaced by a fenced boundary founded on individual posts.

Early medieval period

- 3.6 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. The most recent church on the site was erected in 1587 but was destroyed by fire in 1659, though some of its masonry remains were still visible until the 19th century (Soulsby 1983, 265). Part of its associated graveyard was identified during rescue excavations by CPAT in 1986-7, when seventeen burials were located. Radiocarbon dates suggested that they belonged to the 13-14th century (Blockley 1987, 24-6). Further work in 1997 revealed the possible position of Capel Llewelyn (PRN 4438; Fig. 1) in a garden to the rear of 37 Salop Road. It may be then that the line of Mill Lane broadly followed the western boundary of the graveyard (PRN 16386).

Medieval period

- 3.7 Domen Gastell, a motte and bailey castle (PRN 120; Fig. 1) lies immediately to the east of the development area. It may have been constructed as early as 1111, although the earliest possible documentary reference to it dates from 1196 (Silvester 1992, 167). There has been some suggestion that a settlement developed around the castle, but no firm evidence has yet been found to substantiate this hypothesis.
- 3.8 The present town of Welshpool resulted from a deliberate policy by Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn, Prince of Powys, to establish a new borough. 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 adopted 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' (Silvester 2008, Fig. 3). While this, the earliest map of Welshpool, does not show the area of the Smithfield development, it is clear that the location is within the general area of 'Welshe town', and it is conceivable that Mill Lane was part of an early Welsh settlement which grew up between the motte and bailey castle and Capel Llewelyn.

Post-medieval and modern period

- 3.9 A mapped survey of the Manor of Leighton, including parts of Welshpool, in 1663, shows Mill Lane and depicts the area later occupied by the Smithfield on the south side of the road as fields. Named as 'maes', this had become an area of open fields which would have originated in the medieval era. Interestingly, it does not indicate any buildings along Mill Lane. Almost a century later a survey of the Estate of Mrs Victoria Lloyd, surveyed by John Rocque in 1747, shows Mill Lane and Salop Road; again there are no indications of any buildings on the street frontage, though this could be because the area then was under different ownership and was thus not mapped in any detail.
- 3.10 The north-western boundary of the development area is formed by the waterway now known as the Montgomery Canal, which was built in stages between 1794 and 1821, and ran from the Shropshire Union Canal at Frankton Locks to Newtown. The canal was an agricultural rather than an industrial waterway and was primarily constructed to carry and distribute lime for agricultural purposes from the Llanymynech Quarries (Hughes 1988, 9).
- 3.11 It is not known precisely when the Smithfield was constructed although it was in existence by 1875 (Boon 1961, 14), and it is depicted on the large-scale Ordnance Survey (1:500) town map of Welshpool in 1885. The Smithfield has undergone some changes, particularly in more recent years, yet the overall layout of the main area remained largely unchanged from that depicted in 1885 until the site was cleared as part of the present development.

4 WATCHING BRIEF (Fig. 6)

- 4.1 The watching brief included the observation of relevant groundworks undertaken by an attending archaeologist from CPAT. The work programme began in October 2011 and ended upon completion of the initial groundworks in February 2012.
- 4.2 Throughout the programme of groundworks all of the machine-excavated building footings measured 0.6m wide and were between 1.2m and 1.3m deep. Without exception there was a general modern overburden of building rubble, gravels and waste aggregate across the site with an underlying thick, grey, silty clay, in total up to 0.6m thick. The first notable feature recorded appeared along the south-eastern perimeter of the site, running parallel with Greenfield Road. At a depth of 0.6m was a light grey clay material that appeared to have a definite sloping edge from west to east, suggesting it was the fill of an old water channel (see Fig. 2). The deposit, which was similar to material identified during the 2010 Smithfield excavations to the south of the development site, may be associated with an earlier course of the Lledan Brook which runs south-west to north-east, east of Greenfields Road (see Fig. 1).
- 4.3 To the immediate west of the channel, at a depth of 1m, a salt-glazed ceramic drainage pipe was encountered running north-east to south-west through the south-east quadrant of the site. The drain truncated a 0.7m-thick deposit of orange brown silty clay flecked with charcoal, possibly a relic ploughsoil, which was observed continuously within the excavated trenches and spreading west and north-west across the site, sealed the natural undisturbed subsoil, a pale greenish grey clay silt and stone.
- 4.4 As the excavations continued westwards another possible former watercourse channel or hollow was recorded, orientated south-west to north-east. The channel, approximately 5-8m wide and filled with a light grey silty clay, truncated the lower levels of the ploughsoil. Unfortunately no dateable artefactual evidence was recovered from either the channel or lower ploughsoil deposits.



Fig. 2 Possible edge of a former course of the Lledan Brook. Viewed from the west.
Photo CPAT 3365-0014

- 4.5 At a central point within the building footprint, at a depth of 1.1m, a burnt and charcoal-rich feature lay at the base of one of the excavated trenches, orientated east to west. Excavation of the feature, which was cut into a deposit of firm, reddish-brown, charcoal-flecked, silty clay, revealed the remains of a burnt timber or wooden trough 0.15-0.2m thick and 0.47m wide, with a rounded profile across the base. The timber had degraded somewhat, implying that it was not recent (see Figs. 3 and 4). Underlying the feature was a firm, broken, stony surface within a greenish-grey silty clay, presumed to be the undisturbed natural subsoil. Within the trench section it was possible to see a layer of small pebbles sealing the timber. This deposit was, in turn, sealed by the previously noted ploughsoils.
- 4.6 The north and western quadrants of the building footprint truncated an area containing deposits predominantly characterised by thick, firm, grey clays underlying up to 0.6m of general modern overburden (see Fig. 5). The lower deposit of grey clay, excavated to a depth of 1.2m, appeared to be infilling a large feature, 12m wide and orientated north-east to south-west, the final depth of which was not observed. The general extent of this large feature, possibly an in-filled pond or hollow of some antiquity, was confined to the central area of the site. Further trenching around the perimeters of the site identified undisturbed ploughsoil deposits in all directions together with a narrow gully, 0.4m wide and 0.2m deep, recorded at the base of a trench located along the south-west perimeter of the building footprint. Thereafter, no further deposits or features of archaeological significance were recorded.



Fig. 3 Burnt timber in situ. Viewed from the east.
Photo CPAT 3365-0003

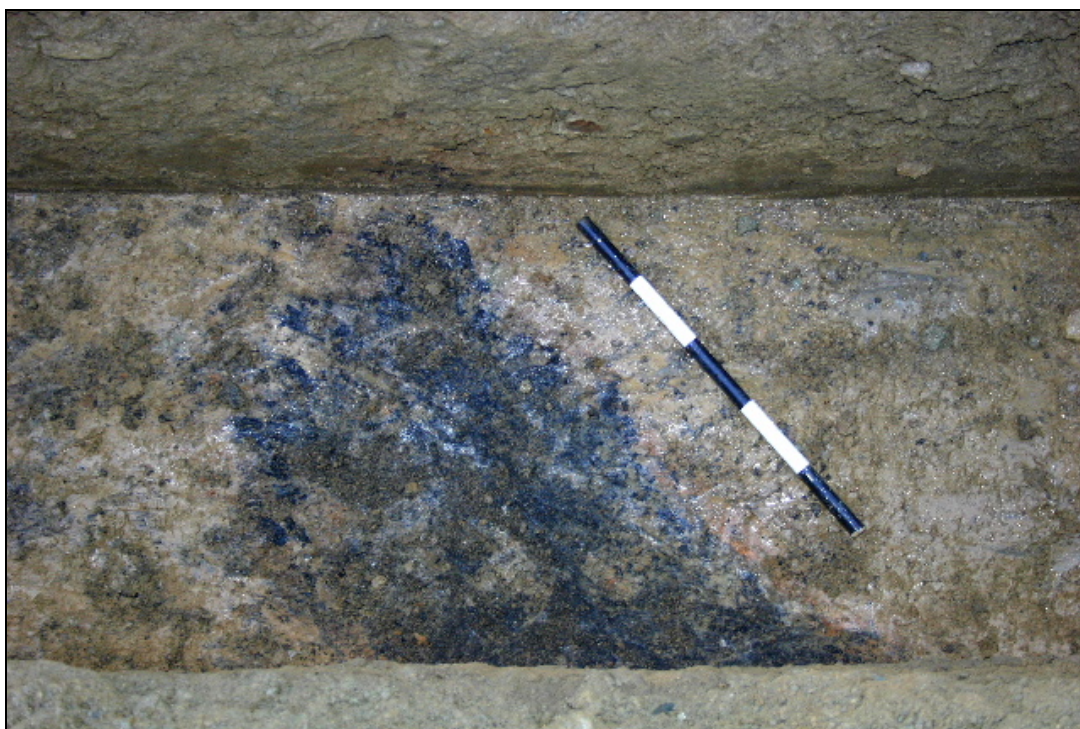


Fig. 4 Detail of burnt timber in situ, post excavation. Viewed from the west.
Photo CPAT 3365-0005



Fig. 5 General view of underlying post-medieval ‘ponding’ deposits along the northern perimeter. Viewed from the south. Photo CPAT 3365-0010

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The watching brief has provided evidence for a possible large pond in the centre of the site, along with at least two alluvial channels containing similar deposits, both of similar character and orientation. These latter could be old river meanders that have formed channels in the general vicinity, later to be filled with successive alluvial and/or agricultural plough deposits.
- 5.2 Identified along the eastern perimeter of the development site was a possible former channel of the Lleden Brook, a tributary of the Severn, which was culverted when the Smithfield was constructed in the late 19th century. The relic meanders of the brook contain alluvial deposits, examples of which excavated during the 2010 Smithfield excavations contained evidence of Mesolithic activity in the form of a small assemblage of worked flint and chert. The general distribution of the Mesolithic artefacts suggested the possibility of a temporary camp lying around 20m to the north-west of the brook on what would have been gently sloping ground. Although no prehistoric artefacts were recovered during the watching brief, it would not be unreasonable to assume that the river terrace upon which the ‘camp’ was located once extended northwards into the general area of the modern-day development.
- 5.3 As in the 2010 Smithfield excavations, the watching brief has shown that following the end of medieval activity on the site (possibly demonstrated by the presence of the burnt timber illustrated in Figs 3 and 4) the area appears to have been under cultivation for several centuries, leading to a significant accumulation of ploughsoil, the upper levels containing fragments of 17th- and 18th-century pottery which were subsequently sealed by successive layers of modern overburden.



Fig. 6 Site plan showing features identified during the watching brief

6 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- 6.1 The writer would like to thank the following for their assistance during the project: Richard Hankinson and Nigel Jones, CPAT; J. Ross Developments Ltd; Dan Jones, Malcolm Arthur, Colin Bather, of J. R Pickstocks Ltd.

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Maps

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- 1663 'The Mannor of Leighton with other lands and tenements in Welch Poole, Hope and Forden in the County of Montgomery', surveyed by William Fowler.
- 1747 Survey of The Estate of Mrs Victoria Lloyd in the parishes of Pool, Guilsfield and Buttington, surveyed and drawn by John Rocque, NLW M256.
- Post-1780 Powis Castle estate map, NLW Powis Castle M17-18.
- 1800 Powis Castle estate map, NLW Powis Castle M20.
- 1840 Tithe Survey and Apportionment for Welshpool parish.
- 1885 Ordnance Survey 1:500 first edition map of Welshpool.
- 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 WATCHING BRIEF SUMMARY

Date	Works monitored	Finds	Archaeology
17/10/2011	Machining of foundation trenches South east footprint	None	Possible line of original Lleden Brook and associated deposits
18/10/2011	Machining of foundation trenches South and north east footprint	C. 18/19 th ceramics (discarded)	Post Medieval pond/water course channel
19/10/2011	Machining of foundation trenches Northern footprint	C. 18/19 th ceramics (discarded)	Burnt timber in situ (possibly Medieval or earlier in origin)
20/10/2011	Machining of foundation trenches Northern footprint	C. 18/19 th ceramics (discarded)	Post Medieval pond/water course channel
21/10/2011	Machining of foundation trenches West and south west footprint	C. 18/19 th ceramics (discarded)	Narrow gully, south west corner of footprint. Origin unknown.
13/02/2012	Machining of drainage sump along the northern perimeter	None	None