

CPAT Report No 1185

Castell Uchaf, Meifod, Powys

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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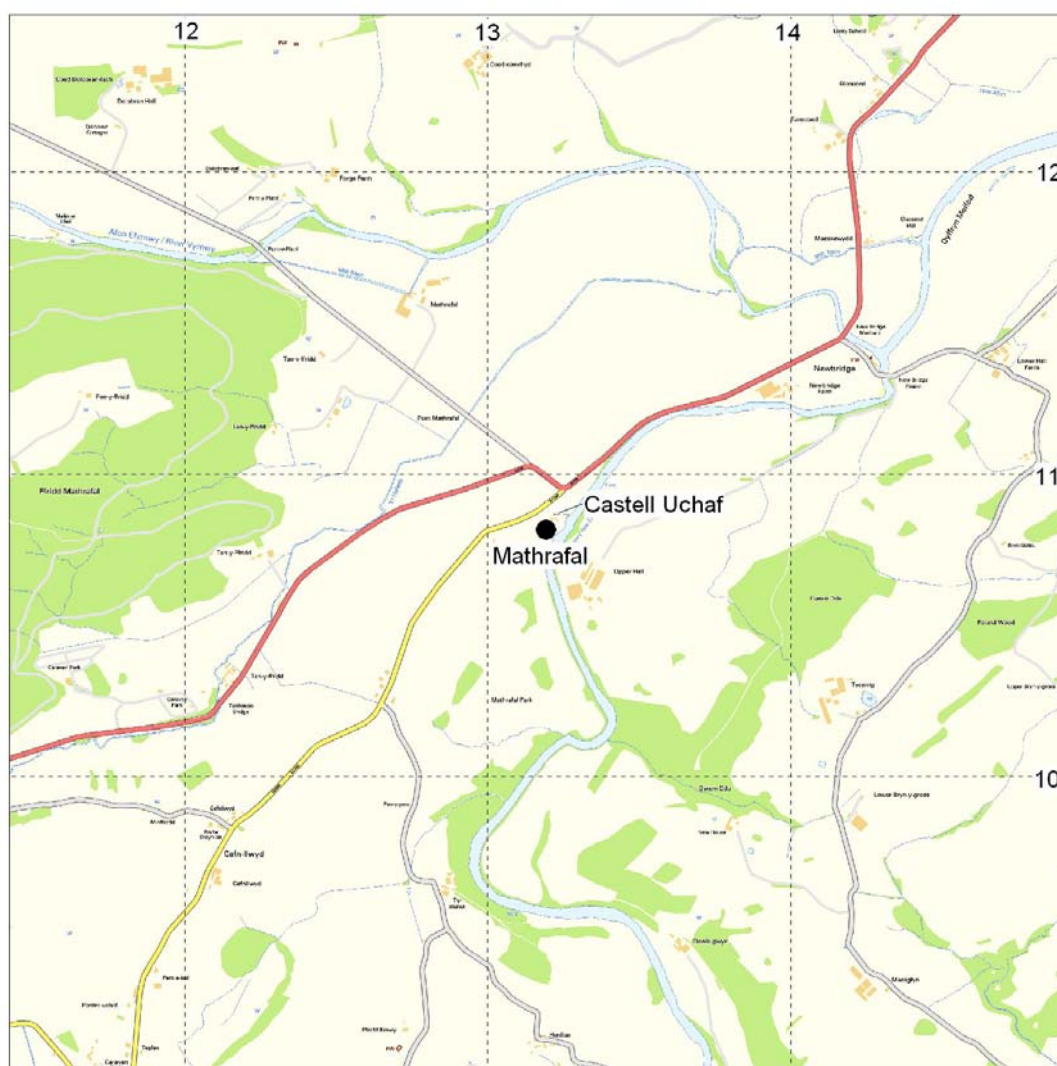
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Contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Watching Brief
- 3 Conclusions
- 4 Acknowledgements
- 5 References

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report details the results of a watching brief (conducted by the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) on behalf of Mr J Richardson of Tŷ Afal Ltd, Meifod) during the construction of a new stable block at Castell Uchaf, near Meifod, in northern Powys (SJ 1320 1069). The Curatorial Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, acting as archaeological advisors to the local planning authority, had determined that the watching brief should be undertaken to ensure the preservation by record of any archaeological remains revealed during the construction works. Full planning permission (P/2012/1074) was granted for the development which included a condition for the presence of a qualified archaeologist during groundworks.



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Fig. 1 Location of Castell Uchaf, near Meifod

- 1.2 The site lies adjacent to the motte and bailey castle of Mathrafal, which is a scheduled ancient monument (SAM Mg44). The motte and bailey is surrounded by a later rectangular enclosure. The earliest surviving documentary evidence for the site occurs in an elegy on Madog ap Maredudd, ruler of Powys (d. 1160), by Cynddelw, in which the poet refers to a battle 'on the field of Mathrafal', and the burning of a castle here is mentioned in a slightly later 12th-century poem by Llywarch ap Llywelyn. The defensive nature of the site appears to have become less

important by the 14th century, although the site continued to function as an important manorial complex. Occupation on the site continued right up until the 19th century, with a farmhouse standing in the north-west corner of the site.

- 1.3 A watching brief in 2007 (CPAT Report 822) during the conversion of barns at Castell Uchaf into two dwellings, identified potential medieval deposits adjacent to the access road/drive, close to the location where the new stable is to be erected.

2 Watching brief

- 2.1 The watching brief, undertaken on the 17th December 2012, monitored the machine excavation of the foundation trenches for the proposed stable block (Fig. 2). Topsoil was removed from an area approximately 15.5m north-west to south-east by 8.8m north-east to south-west, to a depth of 0.2m. The foundation trench for the proposed building (10.3m x 4.6m) was then excavated within the stripped area. The trench, 0.7m wide, was excavated to a depth of approximately 0.7m along the eastern quadrant, gradually being reduced to 0.54m along the western edge.

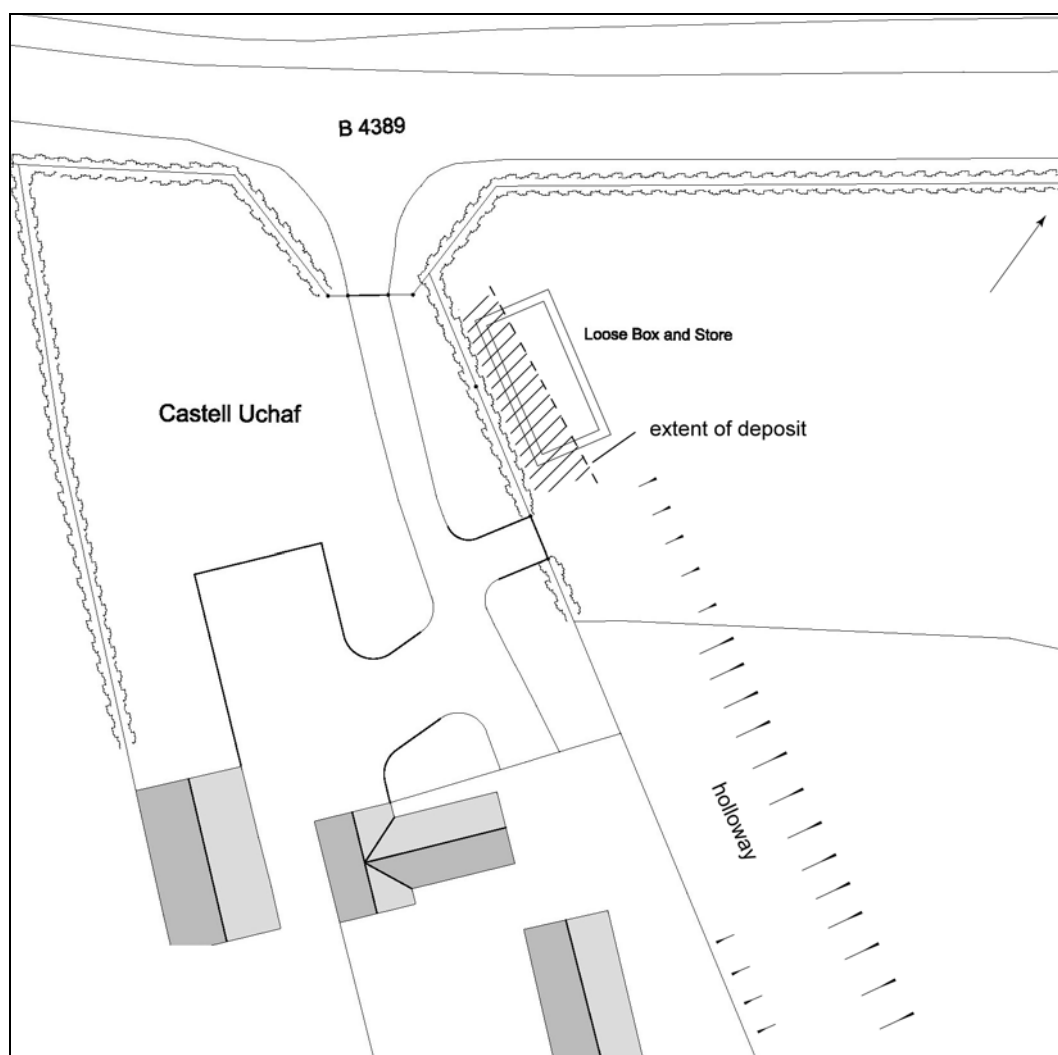


Fig. 2 Plan of the development showing extent of archaeological features and earthworks

- 2.2 Upon the removal of topsoil a large linear anomaly aligned north-west to south-east, was revealed along the south-western edge of the site. The feature, visible as a broad (2.9m) band of blue-grey discoloured silty clay, contained a series of waterlogged fills comprised of gleyed, mottled, silty clays with iron pan staining that sealed a well defined firm layer of river cobbles. The cobbles, recorded at a depth of approximately 0.5m, had been deliberately constructed upon a deposit of firm pale clay, subsequently forming a hard metallated surface that lay within a sunken track, otherwise known as a holloway (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3 Part of the Holloway exposed in the foundation trench for the new building, showing the cobbled surface at the base of the feature. Viewed from the west. Photo CPAT 3561-0004



Fig. 4 General view of the site from the north-west. The northern edge of the holloway is marked by the aligned upright posts. Photo CPAT 3561-0008

- 2.3 The holloway appeared to be cut through a deep deposit of soft yellow-brown silty clay of an alluvial nature. This material, which formed a low-lying terrace all along the northern edge of the feature, contained numerous deposits of charcoal, possibly suggesting that this was redeposited upcast material from either the construction or maintenance of the holloway. No dating evidence was recovered from any of the excavated material and consequently the holloway and cobbled surface remain undated. No further excavation was undertaken.

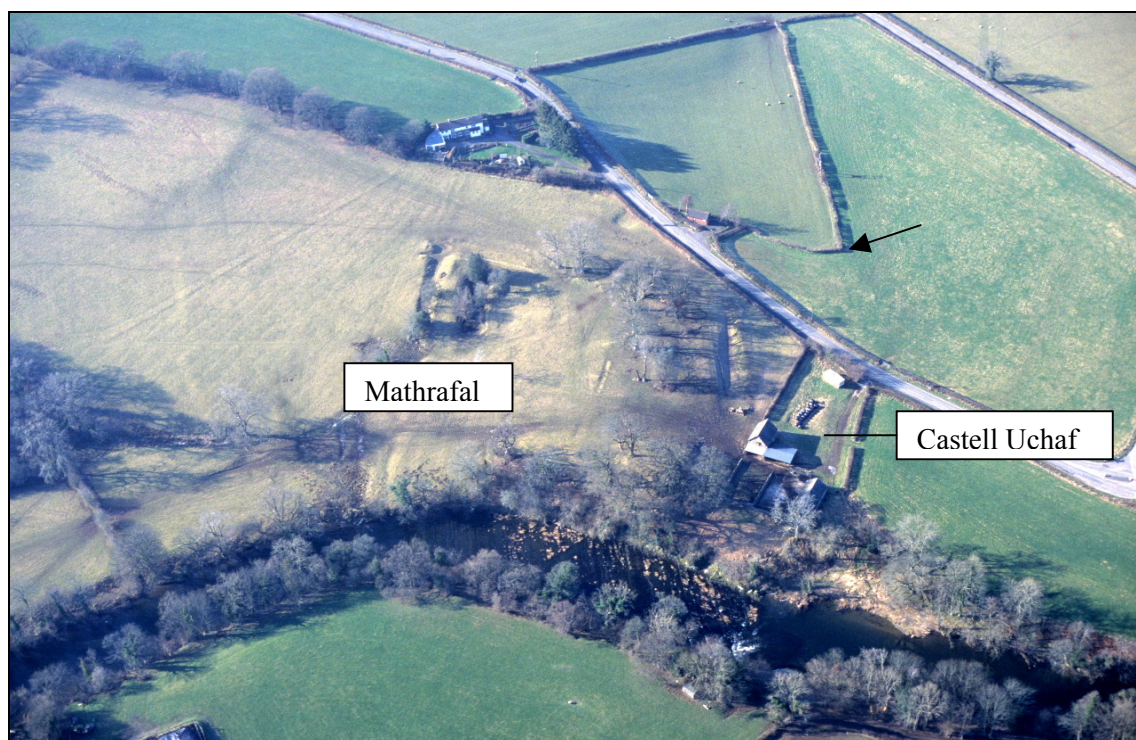


Fig. 5 Aerial view of Mathrafal from the south-east, showing the buildings at Castell Uchaf before conversion. The old road follows the hedgeline in the top left of the view, continuing across the modern road and turning where arrowed. Photo CPAT 03-c-0031

3 Conclusions

- 3.1 The watching brief in 2007 (CPAT Report 822) during the conversion of barns at Castell Uchaf identified potential medieval deposits in Trench 1 adjacent to the access road/drive, close to the location where the new stable is to be erected. Of particular note was a band of cobbled stones (context 5). Although the alignment of this metalled surface was north-east to south-west, the surface would appear to be similar to and possibly contemporary with the trackway recorded during the recent excavations.
- 3.2 It appears that the deposits identified during the watching brief, and the adjacent earthworks, are associated with the former line of the road between Meifod and Llanfair Caereinion which was replaced by the present turnpike road in the earlier part of the 19th century. The road is depicted on an estate plan of Mathrafal Farm dated 1774, which shows the road on the north-west side of Mathrafal, where it survives now as a holloway, and then turning south-eastwards through the development area, around the what was then Mathrafal Farm, and thence along the bank of the Afon Banwy towards Meifod. The position of the old road is depicted in the aerial view above (Fig. 5).

4 Acknowledgements

- 4.1 The writer would like to thank his colleagues Nigel Jones and Bob Silvester and also Mr Jamie Richardson of Tŷ Afal Ltd, for his assistance with all of the site groundworks.

5 References

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