

Archaeological Watching Brief
at
**LAWRENCE CRESCENT,
CAERWENT, GWENT.**
for
D & J Buildings (Gwent) Ltd.



Report No. 1016/2004



Bristol and Region Archaeological Services

Archaeological Watching Brief
at
**LAWRENCE CRESCENT,
CAERWENT, GWENT.**

Centred on
N.G.R. ST 4724 9071

Client: D & J Buildings (Gwent) Ltd.

CONTENTS

Summary

List of Illustrations

1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND	2
3.	THE WATCHING BRIEF	3
4.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	4
5.	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4

Appendix 1: Policy Statement

Appendix 2: Context list

Illustrations and plates

NOTE

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SUMMARY

Archaeological monitoring of groundworks during construction of houses at Lawrence Crescent, Caerwent revealed no archaeological features.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustrations

Fig.1 Site location plan featuring Cearwent and Caldicot, scale 1:50,000

Fig.2 1887 Ordnance Survey First Edition map

Fig.3 House plot layout, with Wessex Archaeological Trust trench plan overlaid

Plates

Plate 1 Possible cut feature 100, looking south

Plate 2 Excavation of Plot 7 in progress, looking south-west

Plate 3 Excavation of Plot 8 in progress, looking east

Plate 4 Excavation of Plot 9 in progress, looking north

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 An archaeological watching brief was carried out on land at No.2 Lawrence Crescent, Caerwent. The fieldwork was undertaken by Bristol and Region Archaeological Services (BaRAS) on behalf of D & J Buildings (Gwent) Ltd in response to a planning application to develop the land for residential use.
- 1.2 The site, centred on ST 4724 9071, covers a subrectangular area of 0.5ha to the north-east of Caerwent and immediately north of the A48 (**Fig.1**). The Police Section House was situated on the Lawrence Crescent frontage in the north of the site with former gardens to the rear.
- 1.3 The site lies around the 20m OD contour on deposits of Keuper Marl.

2. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Caerwent was founded as *Venta Silurum* (the market of the Silurians) in the AD70s, shortly after the territory of the Silurians was brought under the control of the Romans. It probably replaced the *oppidum* of Llanmelin, which overlooks the site from a hilltop 2km to the north-west. It lay astride the Roman road from Gloucester to Caerleon on the fertile coastal plain of south-east Wales. It had easy access to the Severn ferry and was protected from western incursions by the legionary fortress at Caerleon.
- 2.2 *Venta Silurum* was occupied from the 1st to 4th centuries. Originally it was no more than a sprawl along the road but in AD200 a street grid was established and an earthen rampart constructed. The rampart was faced with stone in AD330 and enclosed 18 hectares. During the 3rd and early 4th centuries, at the height of its prosperity, it had a population of 2,500, the largest in Wales until modern times.
- 2.3 By the 4th century AD Caerwent had spilled out from the walled town into suburbs, particularly to the east of the town. However, the increasing instability of the late 4th century led to decline and no Roman coins later than the 390s have been found at Caerwent. The town collapsed into ruin, although walls up to two metres high can still be seen. A polygonal temple and burials, part of a wider cemetery used from the 4th to the 8th centuries, have been recorded to the east of the town. Further cemeteries may flank the Roman road leading to the east gate.
- 2.4 Excavations from 1899 onwards have revealed much of the layout of the town and present visible remains include the town gates, a temple, part of the basilica and the forum, shops and courtyard houses (Fig.2). A statue base, discovered in 1903, bears the inscription *ex decretio ordinis respub[lica] civit[atis] Silurum* (by command of the council of the *civitas* of the Silurians). It commemorates an early 3rd century commandant of the second Augustan legion and is proof that Caerwent enjoyed the status of *civitas* or provincial capital. It is likely that the title was granted in AD120 when much of the garrison of south-east Wales became involved in the building of Hadrian's Wall. Caerwent may not have been the only *civitas* in Wales. It is possible that the privilege was also extended to *Maridunum* (Carmarthen), which developed town-like characteristics from its fortress origins.
- 2.5 The Site and Monuments Record shows no archaeological features within the study area. An evaluation carried out by Wessex Archaeology Ltd in 2000 found no archaeological features.

3. THE WATCHING BRIEF

- 3.1 The watching brief was carried out during groundworks in advance of the construction of 9 houses on the site (**Fig.3**). Each house would be built and sold before work began on the next house.
- 3.2 The site comprised topsoil deposits (105), 0.15m to 0.30m thick, overlying clay subsoil deposits (104). Trenches for house foundations and drainage pipes were excavated through these layers. Each trench was approximately 1.20m deep and excavated using a 360-degree mechanical digger with a 0.50m flat-bladed bucket.
- 3.3 A trench, oriented north-west to south-east was excavated for drainage across the site. At its eastern end, in the northern part of house plot 9, a possible ditch (100), oriented north to south, was visible in the section (**Plate 2**). No finds were recovered. It is more likely that this was a natural feature or tree throw cut into the natural subsoil.
- 3.4 Several modern ceramic land drains were identified during the evaluation, mostly in trenches located in the eastern half of the site. Two more were observed running northwest to southeast through house plots 7 and 9.

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5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Bristol and Region Archaeological Services (BaRAS) wishes to express its thanks to D & J Builders (Gwent) Ltd for their assistance during site visits. Ann Linge prepared the illustrations and produced the report. Site visits were carried out by Jens Samuel, Tim Longman, and Jeremy Mordue, who wrote this report.

APPENDIX 1: Policy Statement

This report is the result of work carried out in the light of national and local planning policies.

NATIONAL POLICIES

Statutory protection for archaeology is enshrined in national legislation, including the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979), amended by the National Heritage Act (1983). Nationally important sites are listed in the Schedule of Ancient Monuments (SAM). Scheduled Monument consent is required for any work which would affect a SAM.

Welsh Office Circular 60/96 – Planning and the Historic Environment: Archaeology

Paragraph 8 states that:

“Development plans should reconcile the need for development with the interests of conservation including archaeology. They should include policies for the protection, enhancement and preservation of sites of archaeological interest and their settings.”

Paragraph 10 states that:

“The desirability of preserving an ancient monument and its setting is a material consideration in determining a planning application whether that monument is scheduled or unscheduled.”

Paragraph 18 states that:

“There will be occasions, particularly when remains of lesser significance are involved, when planning authorities may decide that the significance of the archaeological remains is not sufficient when weighed against all other material considerations, including the need for development, to justify their physical preservation *in situ*, and that the proposed development should proceed. Planning authorities will, in such cases, need to satisfy themselves that the developer has made the appropriate and satisfactory arrangements for the excavation and recording, or other investigation, of the archaeological remains and the publication of the results.”

Paragraph 19 states that:

“From the archaeological point of view excavation should be regarded as a second best option.”

It also states that:

“The preservation *in situ* of important archaeological remains is therefore to be preferred.”

Paragraph 20 states that:

“Archaeological investigations, such as excavation and recording should be carried out before development commences, working to a project brief prepared by the planning authority (with reference to their archaeological advisors). Investigation can be achieved through agreements reached between the developer, the archaeologist and the planning authority. Such agreements should secure and implement an appropriate scheme of archaeological investigation, to an agreed timetable, and provide for the subsequent publication of its results.”

Planning Policy Wales (2002)

Planning Policy Wales (2002, section 6.5) indicates that archaeology forms a material consideration in the planning process and states that there should be the presumption in favour of the preservation of nationally important archaeological features and sites, whether scheduled or unscheduled. Where local authorities decide that preservation *in situ* is not justified and destruction of the archaeological remains may proceed, they must be satisfied that the developer has made appropriate provision for archaeological investigation, recording and publication (*ibid*, para, 6.5.3).

Paragraph 6.5.1 states that:

“The desirability of preserving an **ancient monument** and its setting is a material consideration in determining a planning application, whether that monument is scheduled or unscheduled. Where nationally

important **archaeological remains**, whether scheduled or not, and their settings are likely to be affected by proposed development, there should be a presumption in favour of their physical preservation *in situ*. In cases involving lesser archaeological remains, local planning authorities will need to weigh the relative importance of archaeology against other factors, including the need for the proposed development.”

Paragraph 6.5.7 states that:

“Where a development proposal affects a listed building or its setting, the primary consideration is the statutory requirement to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building, or its setting, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.”

Unitary Authority Policy

Monmouthshire County Council has included a policy regarding the Roman Town of Caerwent (Policy CH14) in its Unitary Development Plan.

Paragraph 10.17.1 states that:

“The greater part of the Roman town has been designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. There has been a presumption against development within the Roman Town walls or in their vicinity since the 1954 Monmouthshire County Development Plan.”

It also states that:

“Policy BC12 aims to restrict new buildings within or adjoining the walls and ditches of the Roman town to those allowed under permitted development rights, subject to other legislation e.g. Scheduled Monument Consent.”

APPENDIX 2: Context Table

Context No.	Type	Description	Depth
100	Cut	Feature in trench section	0.45m
101	Fill	Reddish brown silt clay filling 100	0.30m
102	Layer	Organic horizon between topsoil 105 and 101	0.05m
103	Fill	Reddish brown silt clay. Primary fill of 100	0.20m
104	Layer	Natural brownish red silt clay	
105	Layer	Topsoil deposit	0.25m

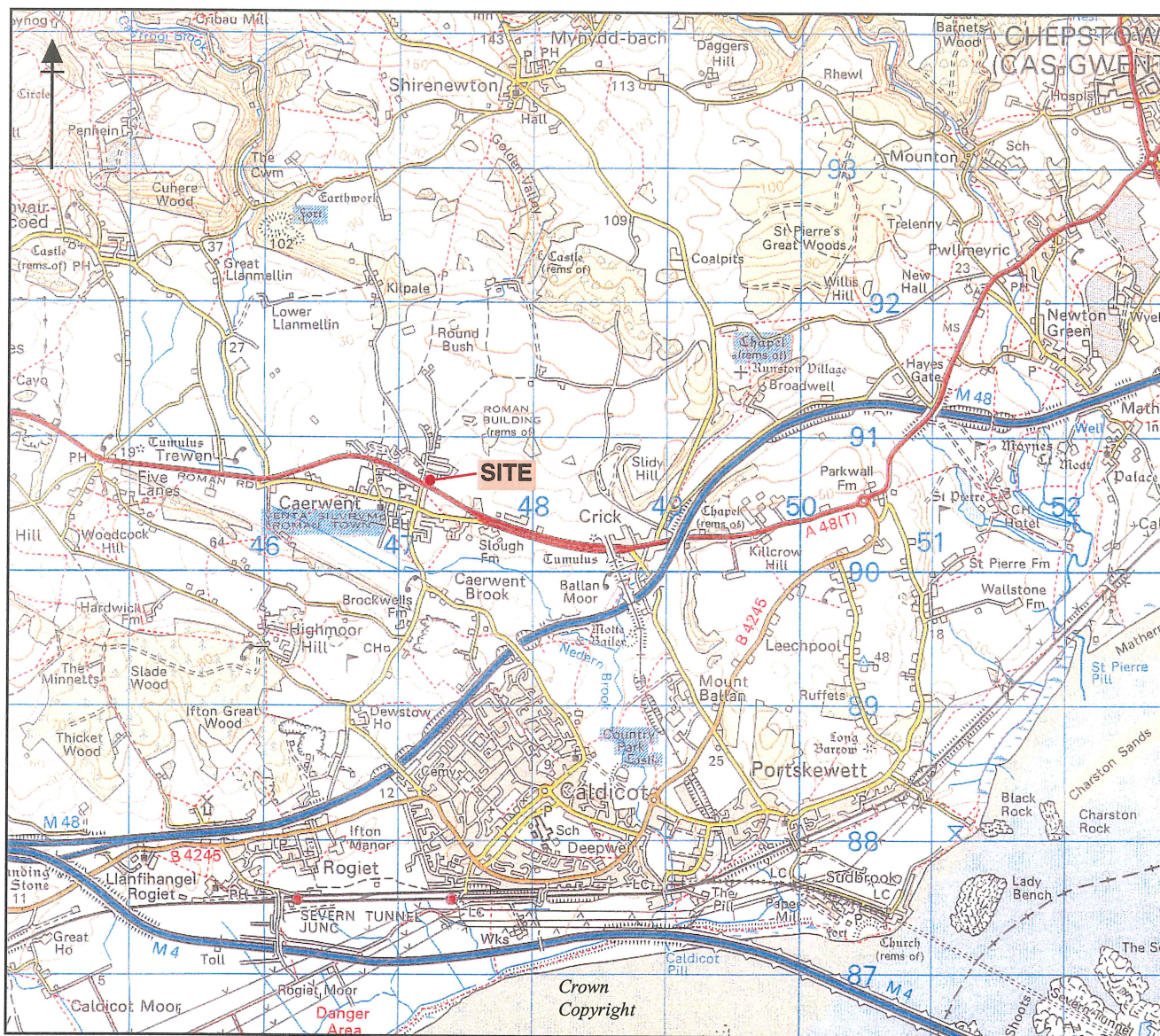


Fig.1 Site location plan featuring Caerwent and Caldicot, scale 1:50,000

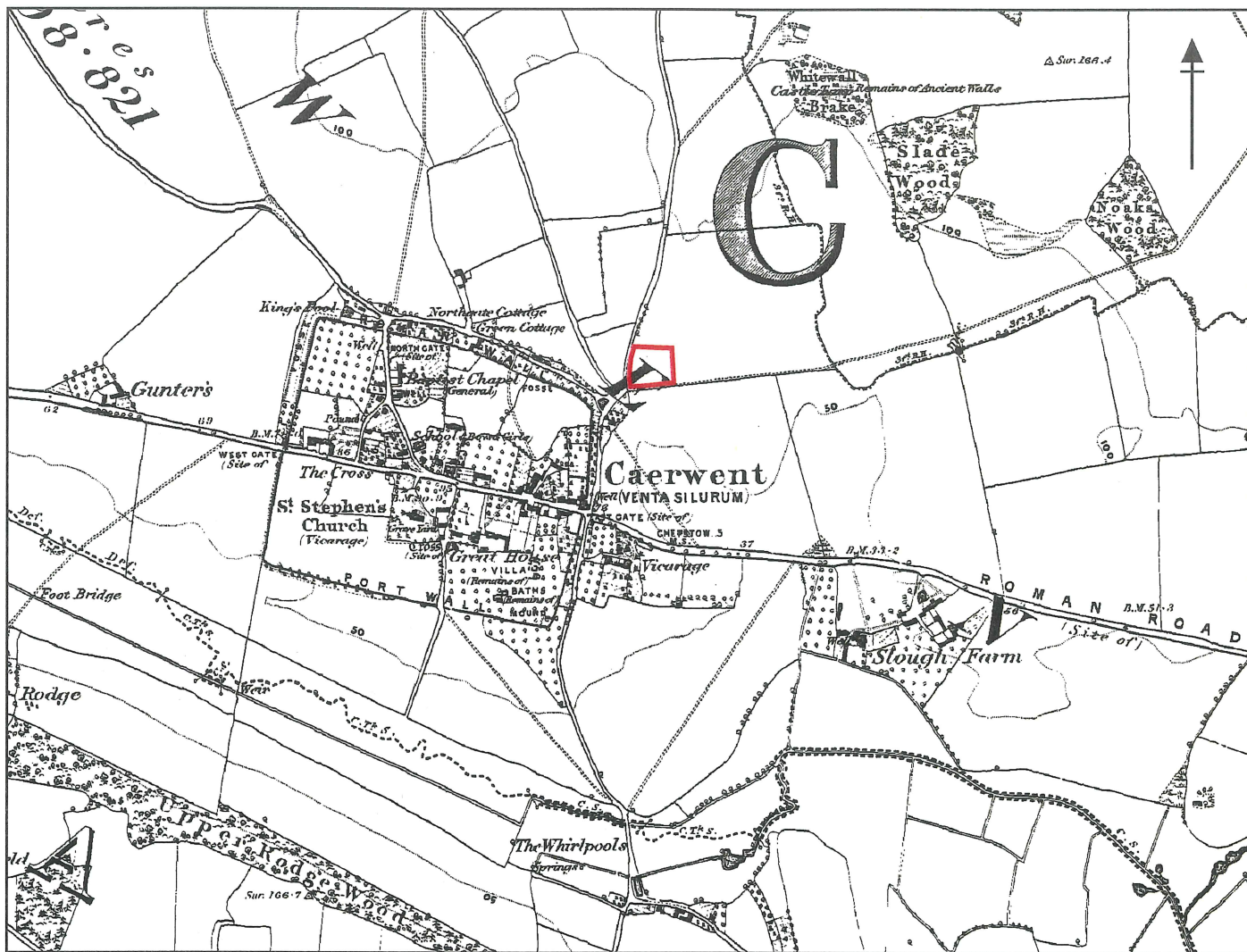


Fig.2 1887 Ordnance Survey First Edition map



Fig.3 House plot layout, with Wessex Archaeological Trust evaluation trench plan overlaid



Plate 1 Possible cut feature 100, looking south



Plate 2 Excavation of Plot 7 in progress, looking south-west



Plate 3 Excavation of Plot 8 in progress, looking east



Plate 4 Excavation of Plot 9 in progress, looking north