



A.P.A.C. Ltd.

Archaeological Perspectives Analysis Consultancy

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

WB3/TRE/10



Bedwelty House, Tredegar

PREPARED BY DR N PHILLIPS
14TH OCTOBER 2010



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Cover photograph DSCO7931 Overview.



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1 Non Technical Summary

In September 2010, Dr N Phillips of A.P.A.C. Ltd was contacted by F. Olding, of Blaenau Gwent Leisure Services; in relation to continuing restoration work being undertaken at Bedwellty House, Tredegar.

Mr Olding advised A.P.A.C. Ltd. that clearance work at the site, was about to start on an unrecorded brick structure, in parkland to the west of the main house.

Dr N Phillips, A.P.A.C. Ltd undertook a watching brief at the site during ground clearance and recorded it prior to removal.

The structure turned out to be three terraced areas built on stone and brick foundations, a use for which could not be determined from the archaeological evidence uncovered..

2 Introduction

2.1 Location and scope of work

The property: Bedwellty House, Morgan St, Tredegar, Gwent. NP22 3XN, is located at Grid Ref: SO 14320854, fig 01.

Bedwellty House, Tredegar, NPRN 36445, is Grade II listed, Cadw record no: 1862. It is a particularly important example of a surviving ironmaster's residence in Gwent, (ASL, 7 2008).

The property is undergoing extensive restoration, conservation and development in order to convert it to a multi-use facility (Tredegar Forum 2009). The project design for this outcome is outlined in Bedwellty House and Park, Tredegar, Conservation Plan, (*revised*) ASL 2008. As part of this document, an earlier recommendation by Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division, (GUARD), regarding archaeological concerns was included. The inclusion identifies strategies which should be employed during work on the house and grounds.

Bedwellty House is a Grade II listed building and Bedwellty Park a graded II registered historic garden and conservation area, and therefore of national importance. Archaeological monitoring of any future ground disturbance works in the vicinity of the building and within the site is recommended, as they may have direct and irreversible impacts on undiscovered archaeological remains.

(GUARDb. 10. 2006).

Specific to this project was a watching brief and recording of a terraced structure some 75m west of the main house. A.P.A.C. Ltd was contacted to undertake the work.

2.2 Geology and topography

Tredegar lies at the northern head of the Shirowy valley; one of a series of valleys draining NW-SE from the higher plateau of Mynydd Llangynidr. The site lies within a public park which itself encompasses approximately 26 acres of NW-SE sloping ground, to the south of Tredegar town centre.

The underlying drift geology is of glacial deposits of till (boulder clay), whilst the solid geology exposes Carboniferous Limestone and Millstone Grit (BGS 1990).



The more visible landscape however is made up from industrial waste derived from mining and iron production, for which Tredegar was a major centre during the 19th century.

2.3 Archaeological and historical background

'Both Bedwellty House and the landscaped park, in which it stands, are Grade II listed. The house is a good example of a large 19th century, ironmaster's residence whilst the park, itself early 19th century, contains many significant historic resources: an ice house, limestone rockwork, fishponds, a walled garden, a grotto, a long shelter, a bandstand a cast iron fountain and the remains of an orchid house' (RBWB/TRE/09).

'In 1900, the house and grounds were given to The Tredegar Urban District Council for public use, the house becoming the council offices in 1901. The house kept this role until 1974 when through government reorganisation it became the base for the Tredegar Town Council. Tredegar Town Council finally moved out of Bedwellty House in 1994 at which point the house has been in some structural decline' (RBWB/TRE/09).

This report details the forth piece of archaeological work undertaken by A.P.A.C. Ltd during the current works. The earlier undertakings were RBWB/TRE/09, relating to a former Orchid House at the main building. S/TRE/10, a survey of a culvert discovered to the north of the main house and WB2/TRE/10 a watching brief during the unearthing of further culverts in the same are as S/TRE/10.

The present work relates to a site of a terraced area on ground beneath, and to the east of one of the former ponds, fig 02. There is no reference to the site on any of the known Ordnance Survey maps however; a 16m concreted path shows that the area was accessed from one of the paths shown in existence in 1886, Fig 02 (*inset*). Plate 01, shows the remains of the connecting path, fig 03, which was not included in the remit of this watching brief.

At the beginning of the work, some linear features of stone and brick revealed the sites possible importance but there was a lot of overgrowth and a covering of rubbish in the area which made the structure far from clear. It was also apparent that there had been some disturbance by vegetation, cover photograph & Plate 02.

3 Aims and Objectives

3.1 Watching Brief & Recording Work

The aim of the watching brief and recording work was to preserve by record, within the resources available, any archaeological deposits uncovered during groundwork.

The watching brief also ensured: that in the event of archaeological resources of significance being discovered and requiring treatment beyond the remit of the watching brief; then steps would be implemented to ensure that their treatment would be undertaken within the standards recommended by the IFA.

The record of the work will be presented in report form accompanied by an archive of digitised data.

The primary archive will remain with A.P.A.C. Ltd and a secondary archive will be kept at Bedwellty House.

4 Methodologies

4.1 Watching Brief

The groundwork at the site entailed the removal of surface vegetation and detritus that were obscuring the structure, thereby preventing its recording and any objective interpretation.



The removal of the majority of the overburden was undertaken by tracked mechanical digger, with further clearance by hand undertaken in the first instance by ground workers employed by (John Weaver Contractors Limited).

Care was taken not to damage any of the trees surrounding and included within the site.

Once the majority of the overburden had been removed, it fell to the archaeological contractor to clean off the site to a suitable level of clarity for recording purposes.

Due to the lack of artefactual evidence, it was necessary, as an aid to interpretation, to test pit some areas in order to examine any stratigraphic relationships.

During recording, and test pitting, the stratigraphic record and initial contexts were noted, with a brief description given where appropriate.

4.2 Recording

All recording of the site features took place during clearance work.

The topographic survey was undertaken using a Topcon GPT 3007, Reflectorless Total station and a level was included within the survey, of a known manhole cover to give the data an ordnance datum.

Correct positioning of the surveyed features was ensured by including the reference position of the east and south walls of the Icehouse.

Photographs were taken of exposed areas of the structure during excavation showing: setting, construction and direction of alignment.

Photographs were taken with a Sony Cybershot DSC-F828 digital camera.

4.3 Processing

All of the survey data was downloaded into CivilCad 6.7 for processing and adjustment to the National grid, using position and level data described above.

The finished data was imported into Autocad 2009 as a dxf file for interpretative alignment and finally exported into Adobe Illustrator for presentation. Copies of the CivilCad files, Autocad files and illustrator PDFs are included in the Archive.

The photographs were processed into data sheets in Quarkexpress 8 and saved in digital Pdf files for the archive. A complete excel database of all the photographs is included in the appendix of this document as well as for the archive.

The primary archive will be kept with A.P.A.C. Ltd with a secondary copy to Bedwellty House.

5 Results

5.1 Watching Brief Results

Soils and ground conditions

The site and weather conditions for the entire watching brief were dry.

The general area of the site was overgrown with vegetation and surrounded by trees one of which had grown through the centre of the site disrupting a large area of paved surface, figs 03 & 04, Plate 03.



There was also ample evidence that the site had become an area for dumping possibly during an earlier stage of pond clearance judging by the nature of the rubbish found; bottles, pots, plastic, ferrous metal etc.

The internal fills of the structure were clearly depositional levels to do with construction and later decay and completely different from that outside of structure boundary.

The whole site (where sampled) was on a mottled yellow/grey clay.

Description

The overall site

At the beginning of the watching brief, the site had undergone some minimal ground clearance which resulted in the discovery of the present area of interest.

The site is located below and east of a raised bank which surrounds the largest single pond in the park. This location seems to have been a deposition area for earlier pond clearance; hence, a surface spread of bottles cans lumps of wood and ferrous objects mentioned above.

Within the ground covering, it was possible to see areas of single brick walling, some of it tumbled, forming an enclosure of compacted soil with a lower masonry retaining wall. Further to the west and apparently parallel to the lower wall were two distinct areas of paving. The whole gave an impression of a possible building platform on two levels, Plate 02.

Clearance

Clearance by machine proved to be fairly limited due to the nature of the structure and the intensity of root presence; in particular, a central tree and root system, Plate 03 and another tree close to the northern end plate 04.

Although limited, the machine work was effective in clearly defining the limits of the structure and the depth of its foundation such as that shown in Plate 05.

The majority of the clearance was however undertaken by hand, with work starting in the south end of the site; progressing from the upper terrace, through the mid terrace to the lower terrace.

Once these were cleaned off and recorded the clearance moved to the upper north terrace, then the lower north terrace and finally the mid terrace where the majority of the structure survived but was engulfed in tree root.

Due to the paucity of any small finds and in an attempt to better understand the structure; four small test pits were excavated in the lower and mid terraces, figs 03 & 04, Plates 06, 07, 08, 09, 10 & 11. Placement of these test pits were arranged to examine discreet areas of construction to their foundation level.

Structures

Upper terrace

The upper terrace consisted of a double row of concrete flagstones laid roughly north south, measuring approx 0.6m x 0.77m each. These were laid in two separate lengths separated by a brick constructed step with a rise of 0.35m, figs 03 & 04, Plate 12.

The southern end of this paved upper terrace, figs 03 & 04, Plate 12, had a length of 4.7m and was built on levelled earth contained in a supporting enclosure wall. West, south and east supporting walls were cemented and of single skin and single course, stretcher construction. There was an additional wooden batten at the north west end which may have been part of the shuttering for the construction, fig 04, Plate 13.



The northern end of the paved structure was longer than the southern end at approx 9.3m. The supporting structure was as similar to that of the southern end except at the step where the difference in level was accounted for by non cemented and poorly tied three brick course. The effect of its poor construction can be seen from the subsidence in Plate 10.

The rest of the eastern support was also different to that of the southern lower section in that the bricks were not cemented, and were laid end on and side up with the occasional inclusion of angular stone blocks Plate 14.

Mid terrace

The mid terrace surface area was contained within a surround of single skin of cement bonded brick. Wider than that of the other two terraces at: 2.9m, the northern end was paved for some 5.5m, figs 03 & 04, Plate 14, whilst the southern section was made up of soil deposit. It should be noted: although there was no evidence to suggest that the paving originally extended to the south, there is nothing to suggest it didn't. In which case, the remaining unpaved area could have resulted from removal of paving and supporting fill.

East/west, the mid terrace was also some 0.22 m lower than the upper terrace as measured from a point where both upper terrace and lower terrace paving remained extant, figs 03 & 04. The difference in levels towards the south was greater but as explained above it is not clear if this was a design feature or a result of ground disturbance.

As with the upper terrace, the surrounding ground had a north/south slope amounting to a drop of 0.4m to the south, fig 03, which required some levelling for the internal terrace fill. However, unlike the single step solution used in the upper terrace the adjustment was made with a gradual step up of brick courses in the eastern retaining wall. The step up sequence from the south end was as follows: 1.6m, 1m, 1.8m, 1m, 1.5m, 2.2m, and 1.4m with no adjustment for the final 4.5m.

The brick courses remaining along this eastern wall were not intact and without doubt originally stood higher, Plates 05, 15 & 16; possibly supporting a missing run of flagstones.

One double skin, double course of brick ran from the east wall for a distance of 0.5m towards the west wall where it ended, figs 03 & 04, Plate 17.

The bricks at the north end all had "EBBEVALE" stamped frogs which were not found anywhere else in the structure; exposed during the watching brief and recording, Plate 18.

The paved area was rather undulating and damaged at the time of examination, due to the fairly extensive root disturbance, mentioned above, figs 03 & 04, Plate 03.

That said; the randomness of the layout with mismatched slab sizes can never have produced a very even or aesthetically pleasing floor, figs 03 & 04, Plates 19 & 20.

At the southern and eastern ends of the slab covered area, was a tumbled row of cemented bricks, some two courses high, which formed a right-angled corner, fig 04, Plate 21. A change in direction and shape of the slabs close to this wall suggests some distinct difference to other areas within the site.

Two test pits: TP2 and TP3, were excavated in the mid terrace, figs 03 & 04, Plates 07, 10 & 11.

TP2, Plates 07 & 10, against the east wall of the upper terrace was approximately 0.5m by 0.5m and reached a depth of 0.08m beneath the present floor level. It produced no finds but did reveal natural clay at a depth of 0.4m beneath the present surface and a thin 0.3 layer of cement in the foundation of the upper terrace wall.

TP3, figs 03 & 04, Plate 11, a 0.5m wide excavation against the west wall of the mid terrace and around the double skin brick course, (see above). This test pit; reaching a depth of 0.9m beneath the present surface, also produced no finds. The test pit stopped short of the clay layer but proved the existence of cement foundation to the double skin brick course.



Lower terrace

Unlike the other two terraces above, the lower terrace was contained within a surround of cement bonded masonry which included both rough finished and dressed stone, figs 03 & 04, Plates 05 & 22.

The surface created measured 1.2m wide making it the narrowest terrace and there was no suggestion of any paving.

The north/south ground slope was again dealt with by the inclusion of a step but this time made up of pre-cast concrete blocks, figs 03 & 04, Plates 06 & 16 on a base of cement and end laid bricks.

The southern end also had a partial fill of rough masonry, Plate 17.

It was not possible to uncover the southern half of the outer wall without causing damage to a nearby tree so the foundations at the northern end were not examined.

Two test pits: TP1 and TP4, were excavated in the lower terrace, figs 03 & 04, Plates 06, 08, & 09.

Test pit 1, figs 03 & 04, Plates 06, & 17, examined both north and south faces of the brick wall under the concrete step. The test pit reached a depth of 0.11m for a distance of 0.5m around the structure before interfacing with the clay layer. The test pit also proved the existence of a cement foundation to the walls but also provided no finds.

Test pit 4, figs 03 & 04, Plates 08, & 09, examined the internal fill behind the southern corner of the lower terrace. The test pit examined the entire width of the trench for the distance of 1m. The depth of this trench reached 0.8m before encountering the clay layer and also produced no finds. The test pit did show however, that the masonry wall had no cement foundation and had been laid directly on the clay.

Small Finds

As was stated above the site seemed to have acquired a certain amount of detritus, possibly from an earlier pond clearance or just as plausibly from casual discard, by people using the park. Certainly, the amount of glass spirits, beer and soft drinks bottles could be supported by this form of disposal.

Unfortunately, the surface deposition, in heavily rooted soils, did not help to secure the context of any small finds. The surface deposition itself had a range of glass fragments which clearly spanned back to the late 19th century; identifiable by colour and moulding marks.

Of those finds removed during trowelling were three shards of green tinged, 2mm, window glass. One piece of dark green, embossed, beer bottle, two shards of aqua glass bottles, two pieces of white china and one piece of willow pattern. These all came from the mid terrace, southern section, surface finds, Plate 23.

One 1912 half penny was found within the fill from behind the masonry wall of the lower terrace.

Just to the north of TP2, against the upper terrace wall was a small deposit of broken light bulbs, Plates 24 & 25.

6 Discussion and Interpretation

6.1 Reliability of field investigation

The archaeological resources uncovered during this part of the work were dealt with effectively within the restraints of time and costs.

The work has provided the opportunity for this archaeological resource to be recorded before it was removed. It is hoped that the record provided is complete enough to allow for future investigation to be able to reassess the site.



6.2 Overall interpretation

It was hoped that clearance work at this site would be able to establish a use and date for the structure. Unfortunately, neither the surviving remains nor the survival of artefactual evidence were able to help with this enigma.

Two of the most prominent theories for the site had been an aviary or a toilet block. Both of these suggestions seem more unlikely following the watching brief:

there were no organic remains, such as seeds husks, which would have been plentiful in the presence of an aviary.

there were no service connections nor subsurface collectors that would be expected for use as a toilet block

Its use as a domestic structure can also be discounted due to the lack of domestic debris.

The lack of foundations and the single skin wall remains; would tend to suggest that structure was never designed to support solid walls.

In terms of dating a vague late Victorian/early 20th century period can be inferred from the single course of "EBBWVALE" stamped bricks, although as they are an isolated part of construction these may have been a later repair using re-used bricks.

Similarly, the lower terrace is constructed from dressed and rough dressed stone some of which had obviously been carved for another use.

Along the west edge of the upper terrace is a length of planed wooden batten which looks fairly modern, probably late 20th c.

The site therefore remains as a 3 terraced area with at least one terrace level change. It may have been designed to be accessible by steps and a path from one of the park's leisure paths and therefore probably dates to the parks period of use as a public venue.

Its exclusion from the OS mapping is unusual although this could be explained if the site was never a building and its use was short lived between mapping revisions.

7 Acknowledgements

Thanks to John Weaver Contractors Limited, site staff for their help with the work. Thanks also to Frank Olding at BG Heritage for giving A.P.A.C. Ltd the opportunity to undertake this work.



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- Tredegar Forum 14/11/2009 <http://.tredegar.co.uk/forum/topic.asp?TOPIC-D=1150&which>
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974



ARCHIVE COVER SHEET

Site Name: Bedwellty House, Tredegar
Site Code: WB3/TRE/10
PRN: -
NPRN : N6445
SAM: -
Other Ref No: A.P.A.C. Ltd Report No. 118
NGR: S0 1432 0854
Site Type: 19th c
Project Type: Watching brief
Project Officer: Neil Phillips
Project Dates: Aug-Oct 2010
Categories Present: N/A
Location of Original Archive: A.P.A.C. Ltd
Location of duplicate Archives: Bedwellty House
Number of Finds Boxes: 0
Location of Finds: Bedwellty House
Museum Reference:
Copyright: A.P.A.C. Ltd
Restrictions to access: None

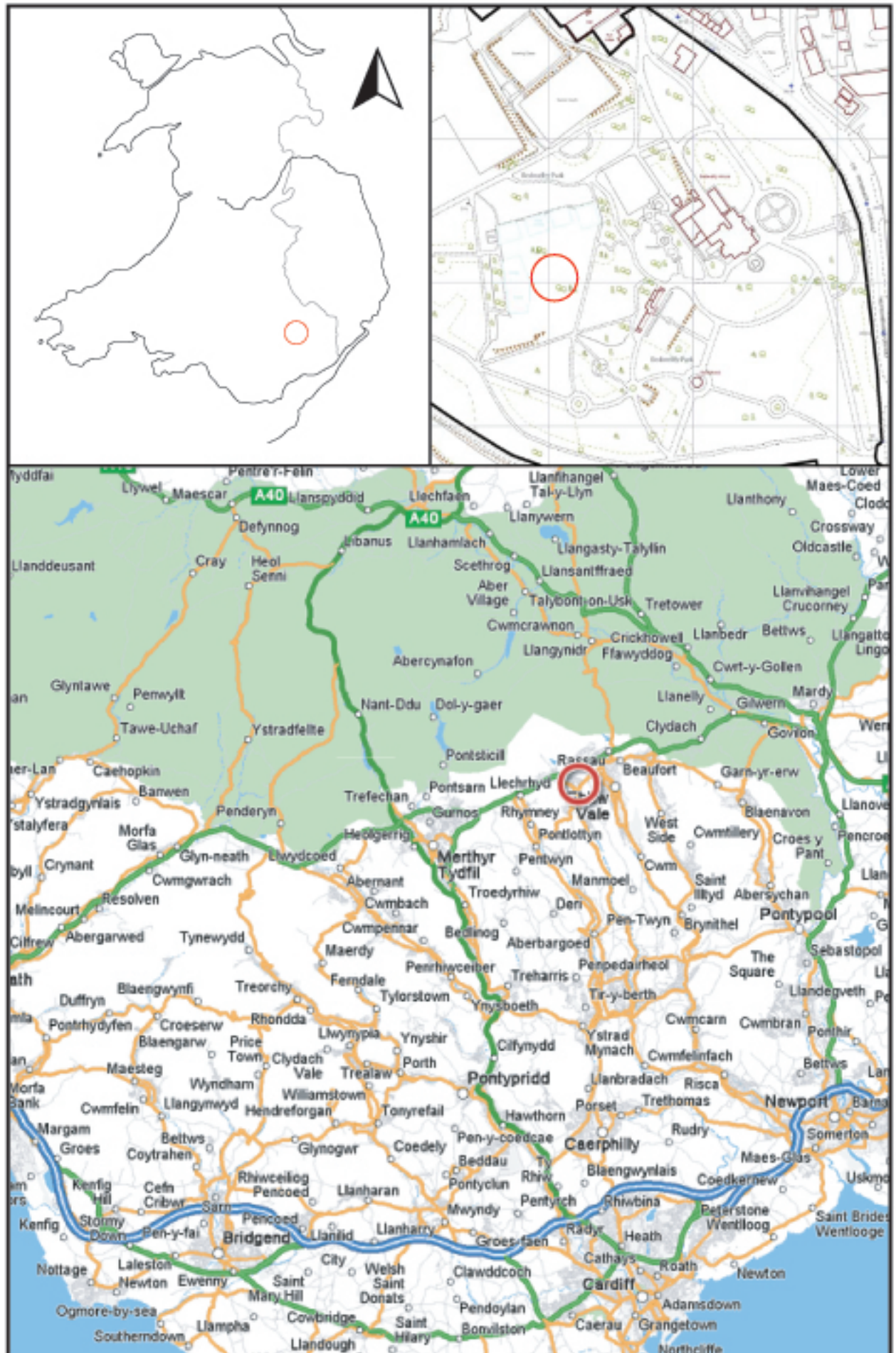


Fig 01: Location





Detail from: Ordnance Survey 1886 Monmouthshire.

[crosse AQ, 2006]



Structure

Length: 14.11m

Width: 5.5m

Upper terrace: 1.35m width

Middle terrace: 2.89m width

Lower terrace: 1.32m width

Notes:

North set at magnetic



Key:

Main building plan in grey supplied by ASL 2008.

Position of site

Location:

Bedwelty House
Tredegar

Type: Watching Brief

Stage: Terraced building
foundation

Period: May 2010

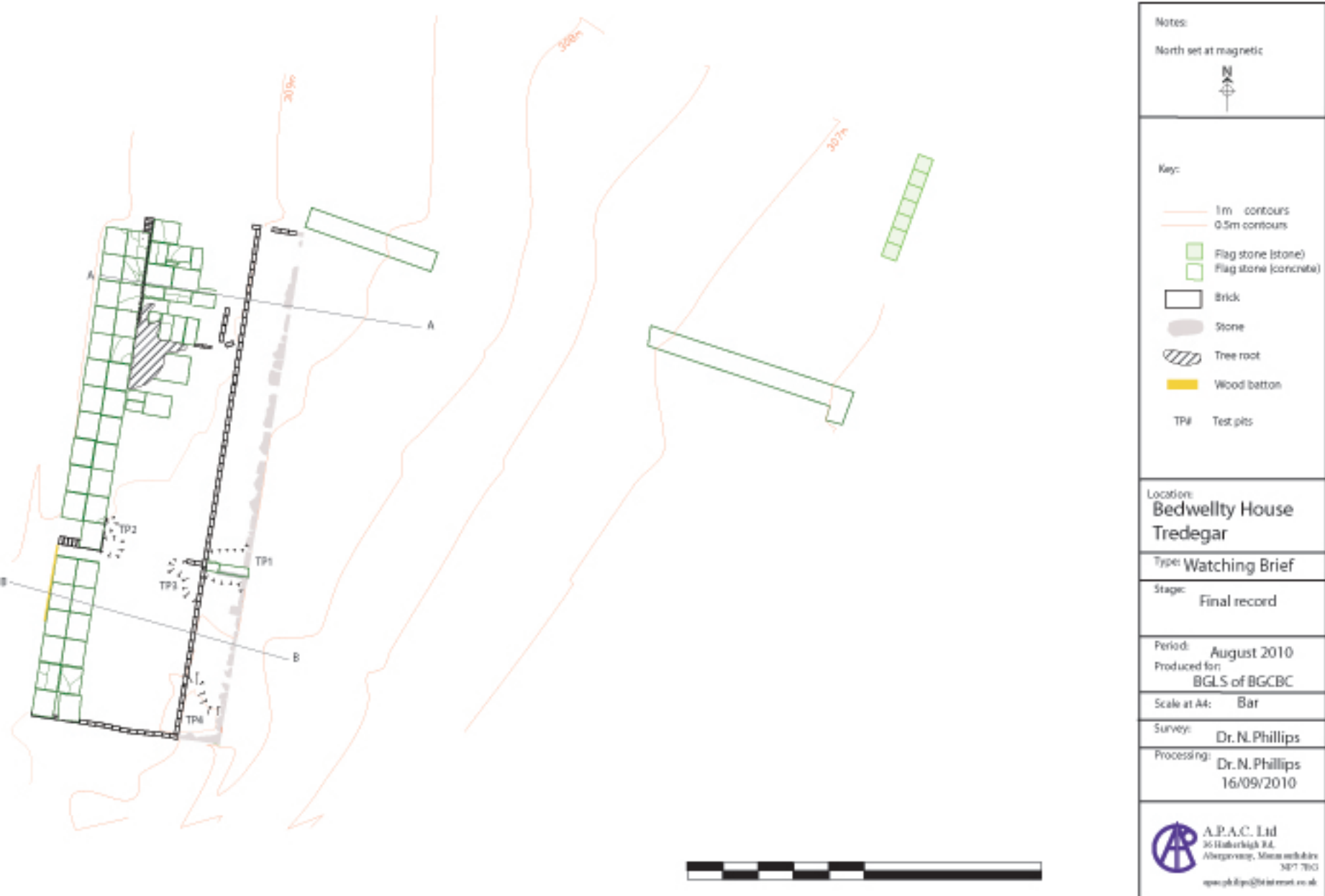
Produced for:
BGLS of BGCBC

Scale at A4: NA

Survey: Dr. N. Phillips

Processing:
Dr. N. Phillips
1/08/2010A.P.A.C. Ltd
50 Talbotridge Rd,
Abergavenny, Monmouthshire
NP23 7AG
apac.phillips@btinternet.co.uk

Figure 02: Position of site to main house



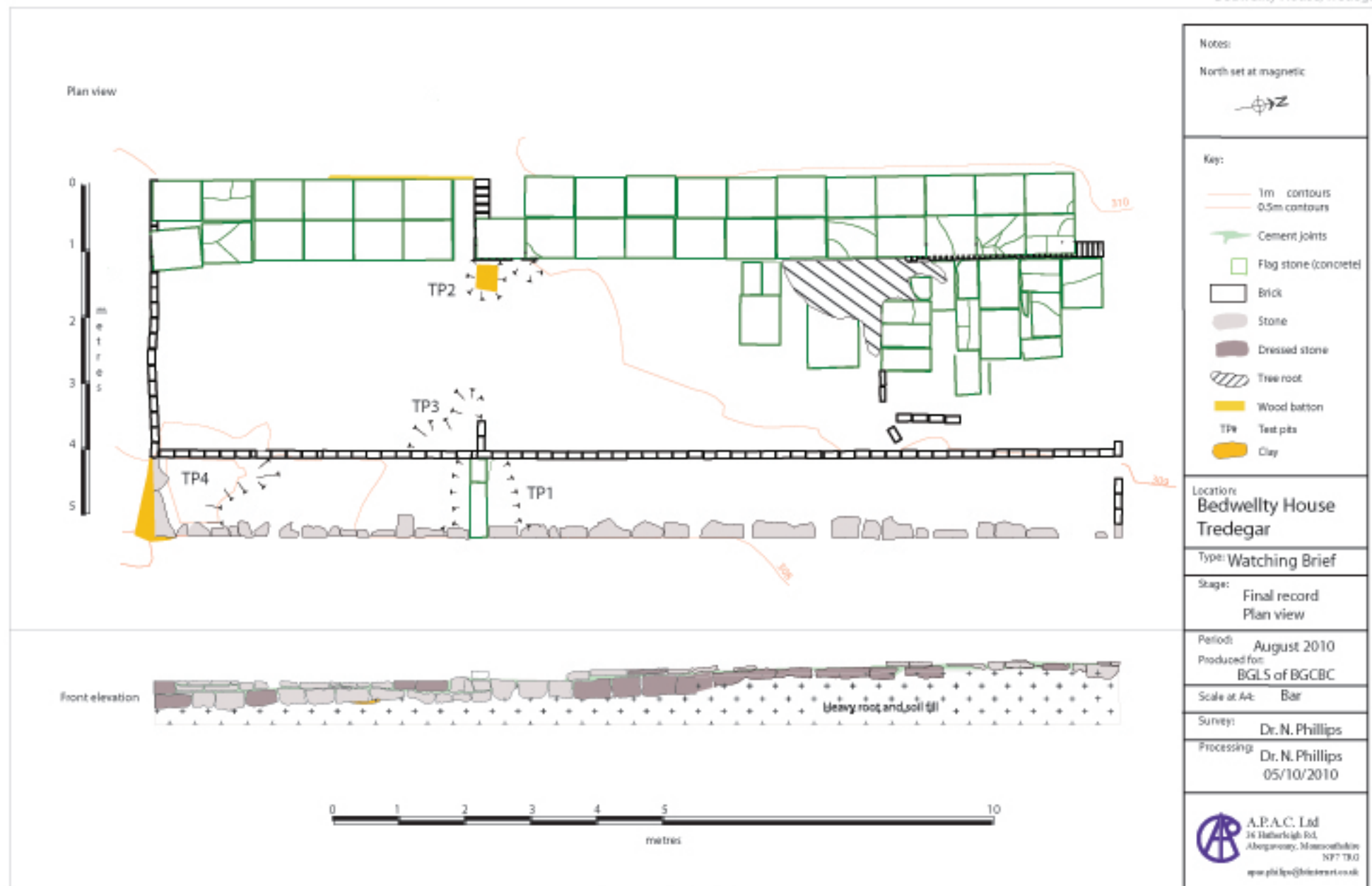


Figure 04: Plan & elevation



Plate 01: Concrete path to steps and then further to site



Plate 02: General view of structure before excavation



Plate 03: Mid and upper terraces.



Plate 04: North edge of mid and lower terrace



Plate 05: External wall at lower terrace SE corner showing dressed stone



Plate 06: Exposed cross wall



Plate 07: Exploratory trench in mid terrace abutting upper terrace and step





Plate 08: Exploratory trench in lower terrace at south east corner



Plate 09: Exploratory trench in lower terrace at south east corner



Plate 10: Exploratory trench TP2



Plate 11: Upper terrace, mid point with step to the north mid & lower terraces shown





Plate 12: Upper terrace, southern end showing mid point rise in level



Plate 13: Upper terrace, mid point with step to the north



Plate 14: Mid and upper terraces.



DSC07988

S 242PH

Plate 15: Mid and lower terrace with brick structure



DSC08001

S 242PH

Plate 16: Lower terrace, wall face



DSC07959

S 242PH

Plate 17: Overview along lower terrace after clearing





Plate 18: North edge of mid terrace showing brick construction "EBBW VALE" frogs



Plate 19: Lower, mid and upper terraces.



Plate 20: Mid terrace showing tree root damage



Plate 21: Mid terrace & brick structure cleared



Plate 22: External wall at lower terrace SE corner showing dressed stone



Plate 23: Small finds



Plate 24: Fill of broken light bulbs, mid terrace abutting upper terrace



Plate 25: Fill of broken light bulbs, mid terrace abutting upper terrace, (close up)