

Archaeological Watching Brief  
of land at  
**CHURCH FARM, CALDICOT,  
MONMOUTHSHIRE.**  
for  
Crest Nicholson Residential Ltd.



Report No. 1165/2003  
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Bristol and Region Archaeological Services

Archaeological Watching Brief  
of land at  
**CHURCH FARM, CALDICOT,  
MONMOUTHSHIRE.**

Centred on  
N.G.R. ST 4850 8887

Client: Crest Nicholson Residential Ltd.

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### NOTE

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## **SUMMARY**

Archaeological monitoring of groundworks during construction of a housing development at Church Farm, Caldicot, which lies 500m to the northwest of Caldicot castle, revealed no archaeological features. A small quantity of medieval and Roman pottery was recovered.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 An archaeological watching brief was carried out on land at Church Farm in Caldicot in Monmouthshire (NGR ST 4830 8900). The fieldwork was carried out by Bristol and Region Archaeological Services (BaRAS) on behalf of Crest Nicholson Residential Ltd in response to a planning application for the construction of domestic houses on the site.
- 1.2 The watching brief area represents the final phase of development at Church Farm, and is analogous to Area D of the 1998 evaluation (BaRAS Report 371/1998). A desk-based assessment of the area undertaken by Oxford Archaeological Associates (OAA) in 1993 had suggested there was little chance of discovering significant archaeology on the site (OAA 1993), despite the area being considered of medium to high archaeological potential by the Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust (GGAT). The evaluation identified a Romano-British farmstead to the north west of the watching brief area, which was excavated in the autumn of 1998 (BaRAS Report 454/1998).
- 1.3 The watching brief area comprises 1 hectare of land to the south east of the current farm buildings (ST 4850 8887). The eastern part of the site lies below 10m OD within the flood plain of the River Nedern, with the remainder occupying a mid-slope terrace overlooking the flood plain (**Fig.2**).
- 1.4 The underlying geology varies across the site but is mostly Triassic Mercian Mudstone over sandstone. On the flood plain the underlying geology is alluvial silts, clays and organic beds similar to the Wentlooge Formation of the Severn Estuary.
- 1.5 No archaeological features were observed during the watching brief. However, pottery was recovered during the topsoil and subsoil strip.

## 2. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Caldicot lies within an area that is rich in archaeological remains; its position close to the Severn, the Forest of Dean and its industry has contributed to this becoming a highly significant area historically. The Nedern Valley is known to have attracted human activity at least as early as the Bronze Age while Caerwent and Caldicot castle stand as testimony for the continuation of human activity in the area throughout history up to the present day.
- 2.2 Excavations on the flood plain of the Nedern at the Caldicot castle lake site (ST 481 883), c.400m from the southern boundary of the site, recovered the organic remains of human activity preserved by waterlogging. Eight phases of river channels were recorded as well as wooden structures, such as a possible boat and bridge. The material recovered from this site has produced radiocarbon and dendrological dates of between 3750 BC and 989 BC (Nayling and Caseldine 1997).
- 2.3 There is a strong Romano-British presence in the area, including a low status farmstead 900m to the west of the site (Vyner and Allen 1988), another farmstead 400m to the north west of the watching brief area (BaRAS 1998b), the *Civitas Capital* Caerwent 1km to the north west, and several industrial sites notably the Caldicot pottery kilns excavated in 1965-1966 (Barnett, Stanley, Trett and Webster 1990)
- 2.4 Church Farm is likely to have a medieval origin especially as the original farm buildings which still survive on the opposite side of Church Road appear to be early post-medieval in date (SMR 3162). There are also substantial lynchets on the slopes going down to the Nedern which are possibly the result of continual ploughing in the medieval period, although an earlier date cannot be discounted. These lynchets and the original river channels of Nedern show up clearly in some of the air photographs, such as the RAF photographs of 1946, although no other earthworks are visible within the evaluated area.
- 2.5 A study of all the relevant maps, plans and air photographs has shown that the majority of the site has remained open land throughout documented history and that the field boundaries have survived largely unchanged since the first edition OS map of 1885 (**Fig.3**).

### 3. THE WATCHING BRIEF

- 3.1 Topsoil deposits covering the site were stripped using a bulldozer to a depth of c.0.30m below ground level across the site. Ground reduction works to level the terrace in advance of constructing rafts removed 1.0m of subsoil at the south western end of site adjacent to Church Road, and less than 0.20m at the south eastern end. These subsoil deposits were removed using a 360° mechanical excavator (**Plates 1 and 2**). Trenches for drains were excavated using a 1.0m toothed bucket and a 0.50m flat-bladed bucket to a maximum depth of c.3.5m below ground level.
- 3.2 The topsoil strip revealed no archaeological features. Although several variations in the natural subsoil were evident, these were probably due to tree root activity. Natural subsoil deposits were generally clayey to the south and sandy to the north. All finds from the topsoil were recovered for analysis.
- 3.3 A widespread horizon of dark brown silt 104 was observed on the terrace at the southern end of the site. This layer was approximately 0.75m thick and extended for roughly 30m to the north and 30m to the east. This may represent a relict topsoil. A small quantity of early medieval, post-medieval and Roman pottery was recovered from this layer.
- 3.4 Excavation of drainage trenches across the terrace and down into the flood plain showed a 4.0m-deep sequence of natural deposit (**Plate 4**). A section through the slope showed that beneath the buried soil lay approximately 1.0m of orange alluvial silt-clay, overlying alternating layers of yellow windblown sand and black organic beds each achieving a maximum depth of 0.30m. Beneath these was an extensive black organic bed, which contained the compressed remains of plant stems and well-preserved small branches from birch trees. This layer was not fully bottomed; although after 1.0m a dark grey clay began to show through (**Plate 3**).
- 3.5 On the flood plain this extensive organic layer was immediately beneath a thin topsoil deposit. The topsoil here, 110, produced several sherds of post-medieval pottery. Further stripping by bulldozer to construct flood defence embankments did not ascertain the depth of the organic layer. The interface deposit between the topsoil and organic bed, 112, produced largely Roman wares, as well as a small quantity of post-medieval pottery. At the northern end, as the ground slopes up, the underlying yellow sand was exposed. The relationship between the yellow sand and the grey clay was not observed.
- 3.6 Several field drains crossed the site. These were occasionally backfilled using lumps of the natural sandstone bedrock. Outcrops of sandstone were apparent across the site within the topsoil and subsoil. It is not clear whether these were deposited naturally or as a result of clearance.



#### 4. THE POTTERY

by Rod Burchill

- 4.1 A small assemblage of 110 sherds of pottery weighing 1,527 gms was examined to identify the pottery types present and to provide an indication of the date of the material. All the pottery was very abraded
- 4.2 The assemblage included five sherds of Roman pottery: the base of a Samian bowl, probably a Dragendorff 18/31; two sherds of grey ware in a fabric similar to the Caldicot kiln material (Barnett 1990) and two sherds of micaceous orangeware probably from the Gloucester area.
- 4.3 Locally produced coarseware of probable 12th- and 13th-century date dominated the assemblage at 47%. The sherds were all heavily abraded and could not be identified with certainty; however, all contained varying amounts of quartz and mica and all appeared to fall within Vince's H group of coarse wares from Chepstow (Vince 1991). Vince identified this group as being produced at various sites in the Vale of Glamorgan and the Forest of Dean. Fragments of Ham Green jug and Bristol/Redcliffe jug fabrics were also present but probably represented a single vessel of each. A jar in a limestone and iron ore tempered fabric with a right angle rim is similar to vessels found in west Wiltshire and possibly dates to the 12th century.
- 4.4 Post-medieval red ware from the kilns at Stroat near Tidenham accounted for 24% of the assemblage. Mostly bowls, the Stroat vessels also included at least one jug: all were probably 17th-century in date. The small number of redwares that could not be attributed to Stroat are likely to have been produced in south-east Wales where a number of 17th-century redware potteries are known (Vince 1991).
- 4.5 The assemblage contained no pottery that dated to after the later 17th century.

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## 6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## APPENDIX 1: Context Table

Context No.	Type	Description	Depth
101	Layer	Modern make-up	0.80m
102	Layer	Topsoil at south end of site	0.30m
103	Layer	Buried topsoil beneath bank 101	0.30m
104	Layer	Grey brown subsoil	0.60m
105	Layer	Stony horizon beneath 104	0.20m
106	Layer	Orange silt-clay (natural)	0.45m
107	Layer	Black organic layer (natural)	0.10m
108	Layer	Orange clay (natural)	1.0m
109	Layer	Orange-yellow sand (natural)	0.30m
110	Layer	Topsoil at north end of site	0.10m
111	Layer	Natural black organic beds	>1.0m
112	Layer	Subsoil interface between 111 and 110	0.10m

## APPENDIX 2: The Pottery Types Present by Context

Context	Pottery Type (Sherds Present)	Sherd Numbers	Date Range
104	Post-medieval Redware	2 Body	17th century
	Ham Green A	2 Body	1120-1170
	Bristol/Redcliffe	5 Body	1240s-1350
	Green Glaze Quartz-Gritted Fabric	1 Rim (jug)	N/D
	Stroat	12 Body; 2 Base; 1 Handle Root	17th Century
	Miscellaneous Jug	1 Rim	N/D
	Grey Ware (Caldicot Type)	1 Body	2nd/3rd century
	Micaceous Orangeware	1 Body	2nd Century?
	Local Quartz Gritted Ware	42 Body; 3 Base; 4 Rim	12th/13th century
	Pitted Coarseware	1 Body	N/D
110	Stroat	14 Body	17th century
	Local Quartz Gritted Ware	1 Body	12th
112	Samian	1 Base	2nd century
	Stroat	2 Rim; 8 Body;	17th century
	Local Quartz-Gritted Ware	1 Body	17th century
	Grey Ware (Caldicot Type)	1 Rim	3rd century
	Micaceous Orangeware	1 Rim	2nd century
	Sandy Buff/Grey ware	1 Base	N/D
	Limestone & Iron Ore-Tempered Fabric Jars	1 rim	Possibly 12th century

### **APPENDIX 3: Policy Statement**

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

#### **NATIONAL POLICIES**

Statutory protection for archaeology is enshrined in 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.

#### **DOE PLANNING POLICY GUIDANCE**

The Planning Policy Guidance of Archaeology and Planning (PPG 16) consolidates advice to planning authorities. The Guidance stresses the non-renewable nature of the archaeological resource, details the role of the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), encourages early consultation with county and district archaeological officers and sets out the requirement for developers to provide sufficient information on the archaeological impact of development to enable a reasonable planning decision to be made.

PPG 16 also indicates the circumstances where further work would be necessary and outlines the use of agreements and conditions to protect the archaeological resource.

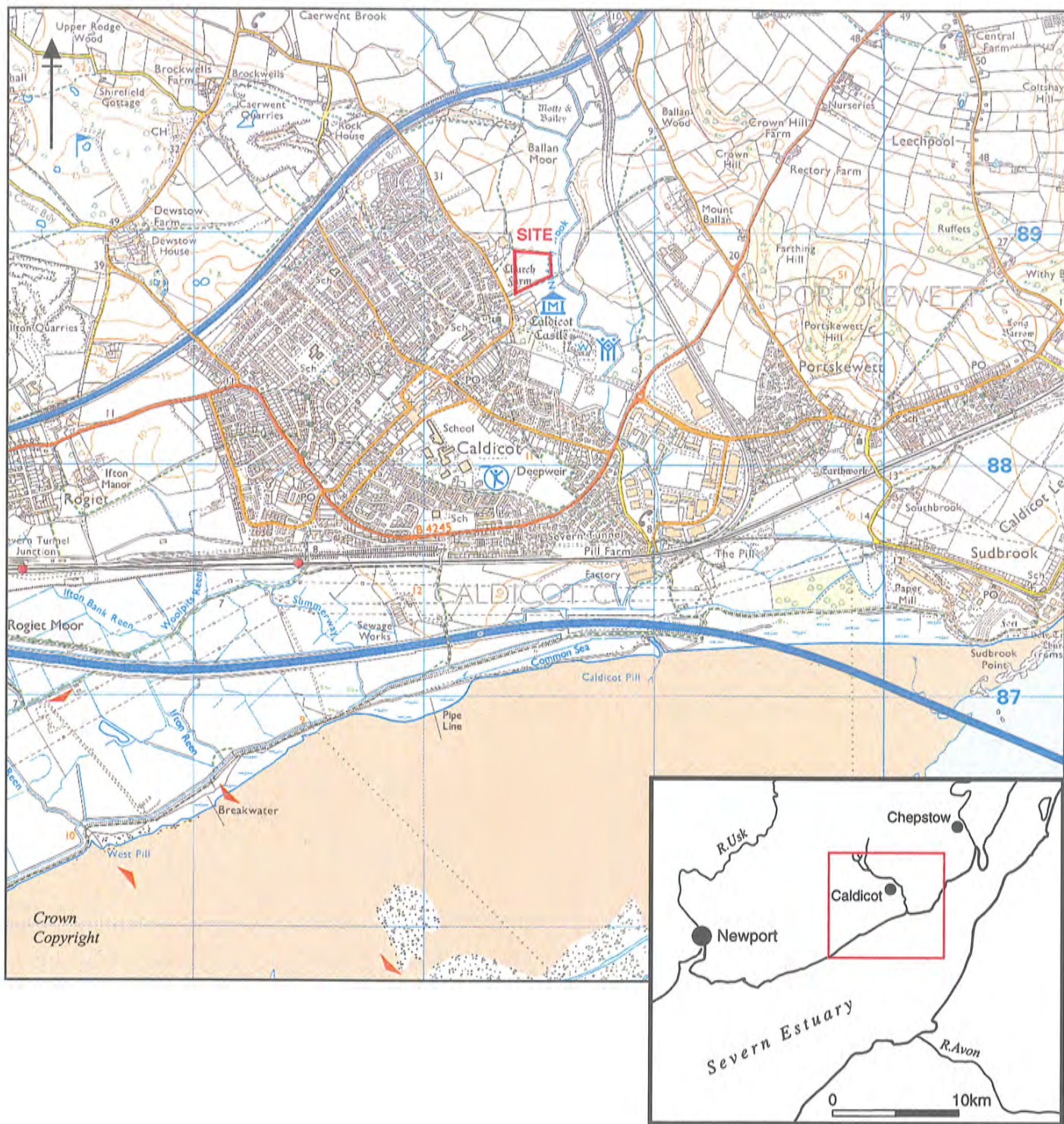


Fig.1 Site location map featuring the site in relation to Caldicot, scale 1:25,000.











Plate 1 South end of site looking south-west towards St. Mary's Church.



Plate 2 South-west part of the site looking south towards Church Farm.





Plate 3 Organic beds beneath alluvial silt, looking north-east.



Plate 4 Stratified deposits in drainage trench, looking north.