

CPAT Report No 1052

Brecon Gaer, Aberyscir, Powys

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

Interim report



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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Interim report

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Report for Cadw

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Cover photo: Excavation of the oven/kiln in Trench 13 (Photo CPAT 3119-0034)

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In June and October 2010 the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) carried out investigations in the environs of the Roman fort at Brecon Gaer, Aberyscir, near Brecon in Powys, designed to explore further the extent of the *vicus*, with financial assistance from Cadw.
- 1.2 The excavations followed on from similar work done in 2009, when fourteen small trenches or sondages were excavated to the north and east of the fort. Some of these earlier trenches were positioned as a result of information gleaned from geophysical surveys (see Fig. 3) undertaken between 2005 and 2006 (Silvester, Hopewell and Grant 2005; Silvester and Hankinson 2006). These covered ground outside the west, south and east gates of the fort, together with ground a little further to the north which was close to part of the local Roman road network. Significant magnetic anomalies were identified up to 300m to the north of the fort, but the results on the west, south and east sides lacked any convincing traces of the presence of associated civilian settlement.
- 1.3 Metal detecting was carried out in the area of the *vicus* subsequent to the completion of the geophysics and this is referred to in outline in Section 4, for it was an additional reason for the programme of work described here. The material recovered by the detectorists suggested that the *vicus* extended over a wider area than had been initially apparent.
- 1.4 The work described below complements the 2009 excavations and was planned to investigate some of the other locations around the south, west and north-east sides of the fort, where either the magnetic response had been poor during the geophysics, or where anomalies had been identified which needed further work to elucidate their character. The work was carried out in two phases, in the months of June and October. The first phase comprised a series of eleven small trenches on the south and west sides of the fort, while the second involved the excavation of one small trench outside the south-west corner of the fort, eight small trenches in the field to the north-east of the fort, and a single machine excavated trench in the same field.

2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 2.1 The fort is centred at NGR SO 0033 2966, some 4km to the west of the town of Brecon, from which it takes its modern name, in southern Powys. The fort lies on a terrace which overlooks the confluence of the River Usk with its tributary the Afon Ysgir, at an altitude of about 170m OD. The ground around the fort slopes gently upwards to the north and east, but drops fairly abruptly on the south and west from the edge of the terrace down to the two watercourses, which are about 25m lower in altitude. A small part of the area of the fort and rather more of its *vicus* are occupied by the farm house of Y Gaer and its associated agricultural buildings, the remainder occupying a series of fields which, at the present time, are used entirely for pasture, with an occasional crop of hay. Some of the fields are known to have been in arable cultivation in the second half of the 20th century, and it seems likely that regular cultivation was carried out from at least the second half of the 19th century, although their previous cultivation history remains uncertain.
- 2.2 The soils of the locality are deep well-drained reddish loamy soils belonging to the Oglethorpe Soil Association (1983 Soil Survey map and legend), and these are derived from the underlying Old Red Sandstone rocks, which in this immediate locality belong to the Pridoli Series of the late Silurian period (1994 Geological Survey map).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Brecon Gaer fort extends over nearly 3ha in area with the surviving remains comprising an earthen rampart with stone facing, incorporating stone-built gates on the west, south and east sides. The north gate lay within the central yard of a post-medieval farm building. Full descriptions have been published in the Royal Commission's Inventory in 1986 and in the forthcoming revised version of the 'Roman Frontier in Wales' (Burnham & Davies, in preparation). Various inscriptions have been found at or near the fort which suggest the presence of a cavalry unit, specifically the *ala Hispanorum Vettonum civium Romanorum*, although it is not known if this was the primary garrison (Burnham and Davies, in preparation). Stamped bricks bearing the name of the *Legio II Augusta* have also been recovered from excavations, but this could represent the use of materials manufactured elsewhere.
- 3.2 The fort was apparently referred to in documents as early as the 12th century, and records of Roman finds from the area are known from the 17th century onwards (RCAHMW 1986, 137). The fort is depicted on the first edition Ordnance Survey map (Brecknock 27.11, dated 1889; Fig. 1) and it is worth noting that 'traces of foundations', no longer visible on the ground, are shown within the fort, as well as an undefined earthwork in the field to its north. The square farm building with a central courtyard still survives and occupies the position of the north gate, while the building to its west-north-west was the old farmhouse, subsequently demolished and replaced by a house to the north-east of the square building.

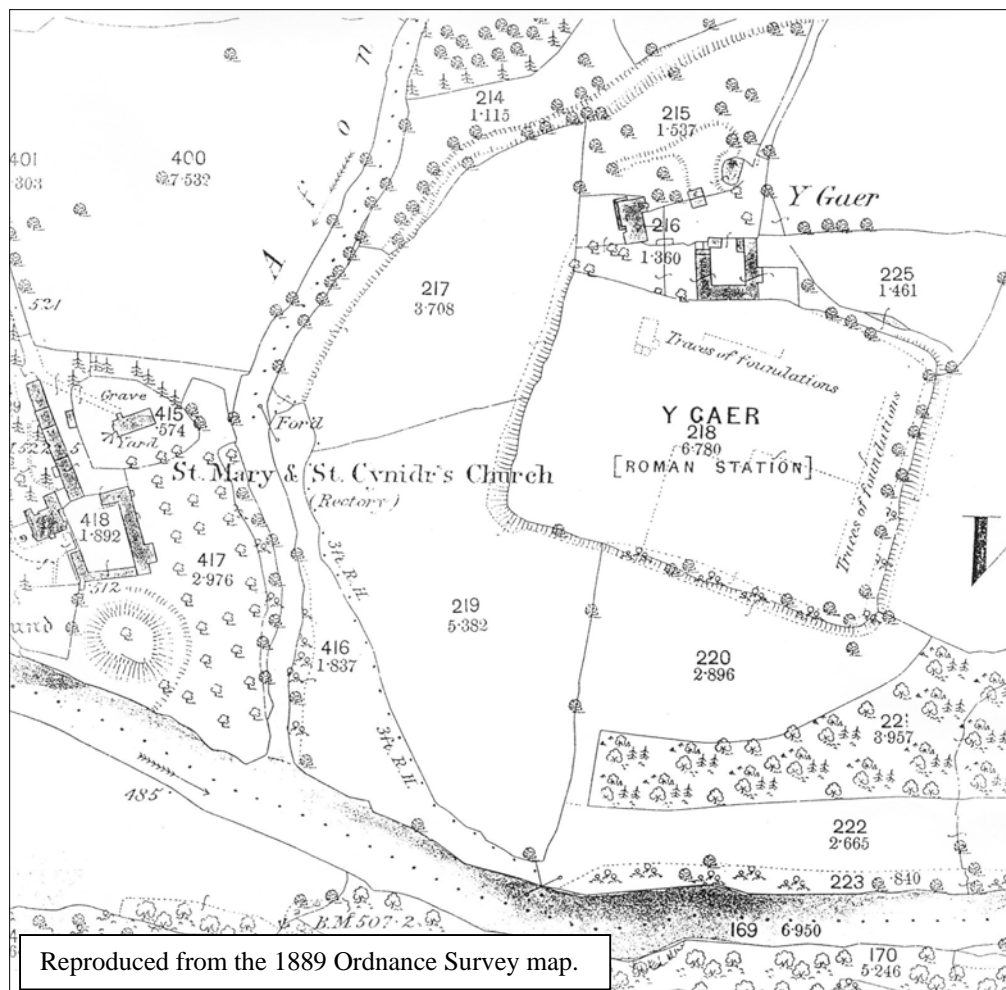


Fig. 1: Extract from the first edition Ordnance Survey map (Brecknock 27.11, of 1889)

- 3.3 The feature depicted on Fig. 1 in the north-west part of the fort is the second of two bath-houses believed to be present. This and other parts of the fort and its environs were the subject of the first detailed excavations carried out by Mortimer Wheeler in 1924-5 (see Fig 2). The excavations examined some of the interior and defensive structures of the fort, as well as the flanks of the road that emerged from its north gate, finding evidence of at least three extra-mural stone-walled buildings in addition to post-built structures and clay floors which were thought to indicate further examples of Roman occupation, thereby demonstrating that the vicus extended north along the road for about 300m (RCAHMW 1986, 141-143).

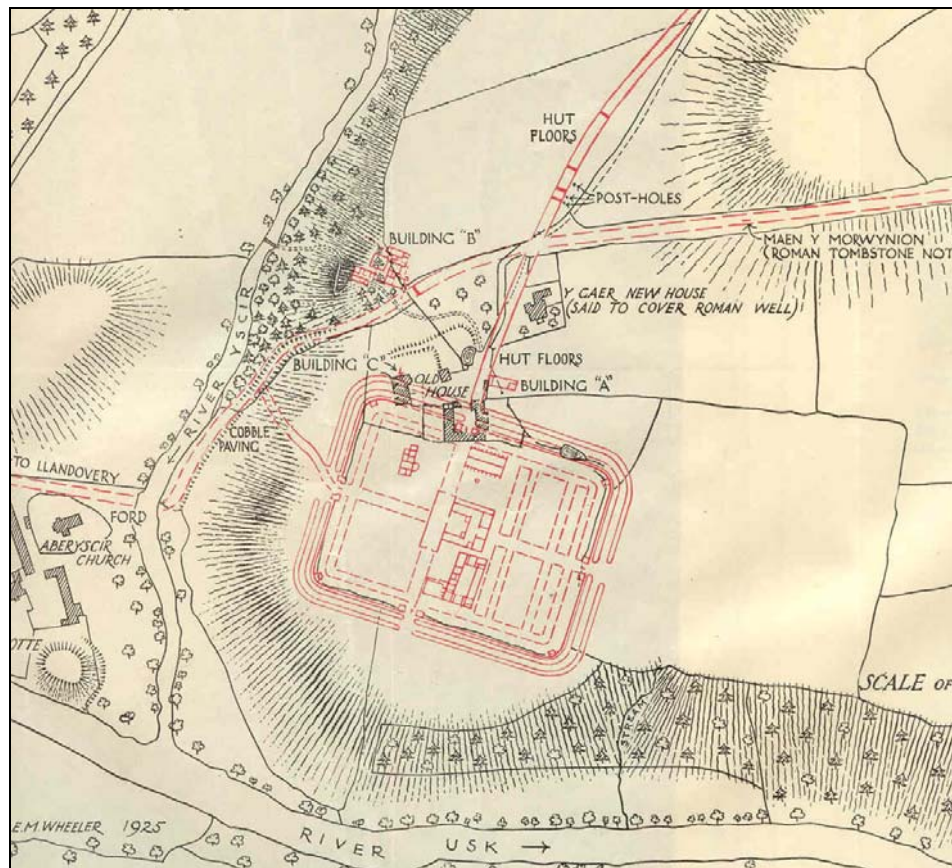


Fig. 2: Interpretative plan of the excavations at Brecon Gaer by Wheeler in 1924-5

- 3.4 Wheeler's excavations revealed physical traces of all four stone-built gates of the fort, with evidence for earlier post-built structures beneath the west and south gates. At least three main phases were identified, beginning with the creation of an earthen rampart. This was then replaced by the stone-built fort which is still a prominent landscape feature, itself supplanted by a rather more poorly constructed rubble rampart at a later period. Two ditches were identified by Wheeler, the outer on the east side apparently going out of use early in the second century AD.
- 3.5 Further important information was provided by excavations carried out by P.J. Casey in 1970, which examined the eastern defences of the fort and completed the investigative work begun by Wheeler on the north-east corner tower (Burnham and Davies, forthcoming). The results of the corner tower excavation suggested an Antonine dating (c. 140 AD) for the stone-built period II defences (RCAHMW 1986, 145). Outside the south-east corner of the fort, the opportunity to clean and record a section created by the machine excavation of a wildfowl pond in 1990 revealed a possible clay pit partially refilled with organic material and associated with fragments of Roman pottery and glass (Dorling 1990, 54).
- 3.6 Present knowledge suggests that the fort was constructed in 75-80 AD, with a bath-house apparently inserted in the north-western part of the fort about 100 AD, presumably

replacing an earlier extra-mural one (RCAHMW 1986, 144). The rampart was then faced in stone about 140 AD, but activity in the later second century and following periods remains somewhat obscure at present, although numismatic and ceramic evidence suggests that the occupation of the fort, perhaps with a reduced garrison, was more or less continuous through the second and third centuries and extended well into the fourth century (Burnham & Davies, forthcoming). It has been suggested that the fort was reoccupied by a small force late in the third century (Nash-Williams & Jarrett, 1969, 51), and the presence of activity in this period is supported by the find of a coin of Carausius (emperor in Britain and northern Gaul from 286-293 AD) in the field to the north-west of Y Gaer house by the detectorists mentioned in Section 4. The last phase of the defences apparently comprised the blocking of the south and east gates together with the re-casting of a substantial length of the defensive circuit (Burnham & Davies, forthcoming). This has been thought by some to belong to the post-Roman period, but remains undated.

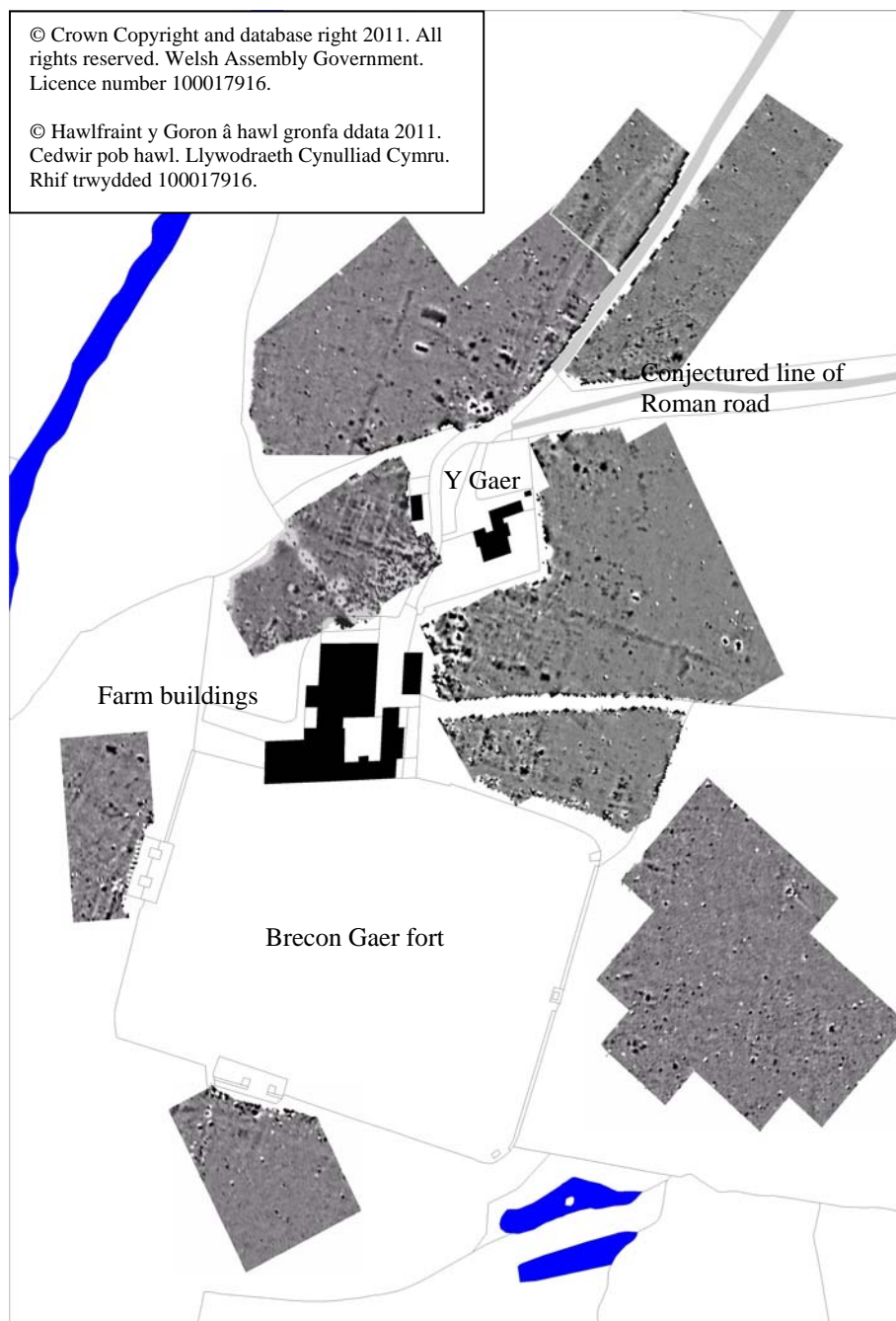


Fig. 3: Results of the 2005 and 2006 geophysics in relation to Brecon Gaer fort

- 3.7 The geophysics carried out in 2005 and 2006 is reported on in detail in Silvester, Hopewell and Grant 2005 and Silvester and Hankinson 2006, so no attempt to reproduce the discussion will be attempted here, but a composite plot of the results from both is reproduced above as Fig. 3, to enable the results to be more easily appreciated. In relation to the work described in this report, the most significant anomalies were those within the field to the south and east of Y Gaer house. Two significant linear anomalies can be identified here, both probably ditches of reasonable size, as well as a number of discrete anomalies which appear to represent thermo-remnant magnetism from fires, ovens or kilns. The major linear anomaly can be seen running in a west-north-west/east-south-east direction just to the south of the house, and continues into the field to the west of Y Gaer. The other appears to represent a section of curved ditch which approaches the above linear anomaly just to the south-east of the house and hints at the possibility of an earlier layout for the fort than that which is described in paragraph 3.1, perhaps representing the corner of an annexe on the north side of a fort layout which was significantly narrower (east-west) than the stone-built fort which is now visible. It is perhaps significant that the north and south gates of the stone-built fort are offset to the west in relation to the fort layout, whereas they would fall on the centre line of a layout which has the curving linear anomaly as the north-east corner of an annexe. The lack of evidence in Wheeler's excavations for a predecessor to the east gate is perhaps also relevant, given that he did find evidence for earlier timber-built structures beneath the west and south gates, presumably representing the gates of the first (earthen) phase of the fort.



Plate 1: Aerial photograph showing the possible structure (arrowed) to the north-east of the fort (Photo CPAT 05-C-0154)

- 3.8 In the report of work carried out in 2009 (Hankinson 2009) reference was made to a possible structure visible on a 2005 aerial photograph (CPAT 05-C-0154, above), and this also fell within the field examined in the second phase of the 2010 excavations. The feature appeared to measure approximately 75m west-north-west/east-south-east by 33m, but its uncertain nature and the fact that it lay beyond the areas examined by geophysics in 2005 and 2006 meant that it was felt that this should be rapidly assessed while access to the field was feasible. To this end, most of its apparent footprint was examined by geophysics and a small trench was excavated in its vicinity. A discussion of the results is included in Section 6, below. The photograph (Plate 1) is reproduced above with a plot (Fig. 4, below) of the marks in relation to the geophysics results.

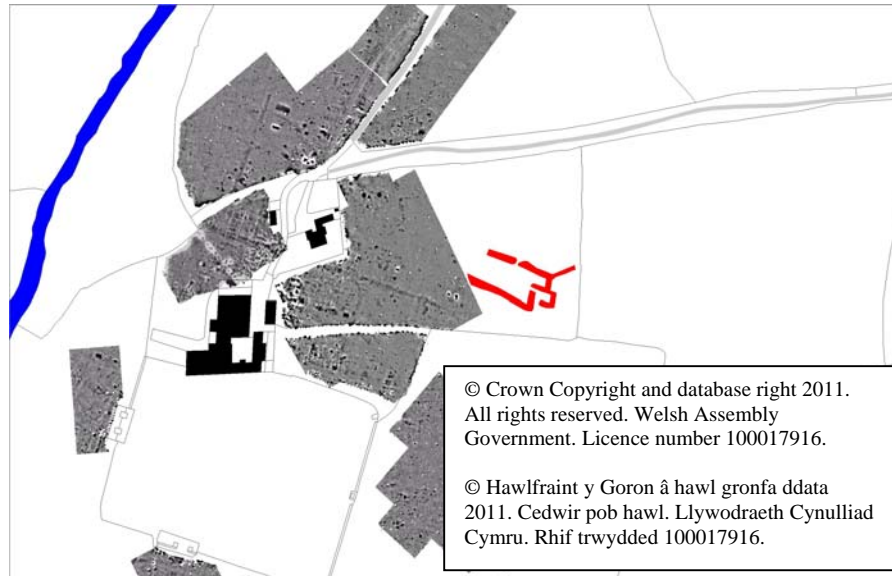


Fig. 4: Plot of the marks from the aerial photograph above in relation to the geophysics

- 3.9 The 2009 report also referred to metal detecting activity which had taken place around the fort after the geophysical surveys were completed in 2006. No additional information on the finds themselves has yet been forthcoming and it will not be discussed further in this report.
- 3.10 A number of Roman road alignments have been suggested in the vicinity of Brecon Gaer, some predicted and others which can be delineated with more certainty. This is apparent on Fig. 3, where the road extending from the north gate of the fort can be plainly seen in the geophysics results, curving to the north-east. The relationship of this road with the conjectured line also depicted on Fig 3 is uncertain, but it seems unlikely that there would be three routes heading generally east from the fort and it is reasonable to assume that the conjectured line represents a route of a later period. The third route is that which exited from the east gate, and it seems readily apparent on Plate 2, below. The road from the south gate presumably ran down to a crossing of the River Usk, while the first part of the road from the west gate can just be seen as a dark curving mark (arrowed) on Plate 2.



Plate 2: Brecon Gaer from the south-east showing the apparent road (arrowed) which exits from the west gate (Photo CPAT 05-C-0153)

- 3.11 The trial excavations carried out in 2009 revealed evidence of elements of the *vicus* in the fields immediately to the north and east of the fort, demonstrating that the civil settlement around the fort occupied a larger area than had been previously assumed. Significant quantities of Roman pottery and glassware, together with thin occupation layers, were discovered in the field to the east of the fort. The 2005 and 2006 geophysics had examined part of this field but the results were poor in contrast to the fields to the north of the fort, suggesting in hindsight that the soils on the east side of the fort are unfavourable for the recognition of magnetic anomalies.

4 METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The primary aim of the investigations in 2010 was to assess the extent of the *vicus* in the fields on the west, south and north-east sides of the fort, whilst keeping ground disturbance down to acceptable levels. To this end, the methodology adopted in 2009 was continued, to allow the limits of Roman activity to be gauged without recourse to large-scale area excavation, although one longer trench was excavated across the line of the two anomalies mentioned in paragraph 3.7 to assess their nature. Geophysics was also carried out in a small area in the field to the north-east of the fort, both to assess marks seen on an aerial photograph (see paragraph 3.8) and to provide an accurate location for one of the thermoremanent anomalies recorded in 2005-6, thereby allowing a trench to be placed over it and its nature to be assessed.
- 4.2 The general methods adopted were:
- a. To cut a series of small trenches (each approximately 1m square) at intervals across selected fields in order to identify the presence or absence of layers and/or features of Roman origin. The emphasis here was on minimal disturbance to the archaeological resource.
 - b. To use an auger to generate sets of small samples to complement the evidence from the trenches.
 - c. To locate each trench and auger sample hole by EDM survey, thus establishing the precise position of each in relation to the local field boundaries, the accuracy of which is qualified only by the scale of the digital mapping available. This aside, it should be possible to relocate any trench and probably the augering positions in the future from the archived data. Ten-figure national grid references for both have been created from the digital data.
- 4.3 In the case of each of the small trenches, the topsoil and ploughsoil were removed by hand down to the first significant archaeological horizon, or the natural subsoil if no archaeological horizon was identified. The resulting surface was then cleaned and examined to assess its potential, dependant on which a small amount of investigation was then carried out to elucidate the deposits and recover material which could assist in their dating, while having a minimal impact on their integrity. With trenches of this size, there always needs to be some caution in making judgements about the nature of the features and deposits encountered, as the restricted view of the features makes interpretation problematical. The interpretations given in Section 5 of this report must therefore necessarily be provisional. Again, it should be understood that the aim of this part of the work was to define the extent of the *vicus*, rather than investigate its nature and dating.
- 4.4 The larger trench was located in the field to the north-east of the fort and was excavated by a machine using a toothless ditching bucket, under close archaeological supervision. The material removed represented only those soils which had been created by agricultural activity in the past, as excavation was terminated when in-situ archaeological deposits were

encountered and these were then cleaned by hand and recorded. No attempt was made to disturb any of the features and layers that were revealed as it was evident that these were of Roman origin.

- 4.5 The positions chosen for the trenches were guided by a number of factors, one of which was the geophysics results from 2005 and 2006. However, there was only a small area available for investigation on the west of the fort due to steep slopes leading down to the Afon Ysgir, so only two small trenches were excavated on that side. The ground to the south was rather more level and a further nine small trenches were excavated there, together with one outside the south-west corner of the fort. A further eight small trenches and the larger trench mentioned above were excavated in the field to the north-east of the fort. The locations of numbers 13, 17 and 18 were determined by the geophysics results as shown on Fig 5.

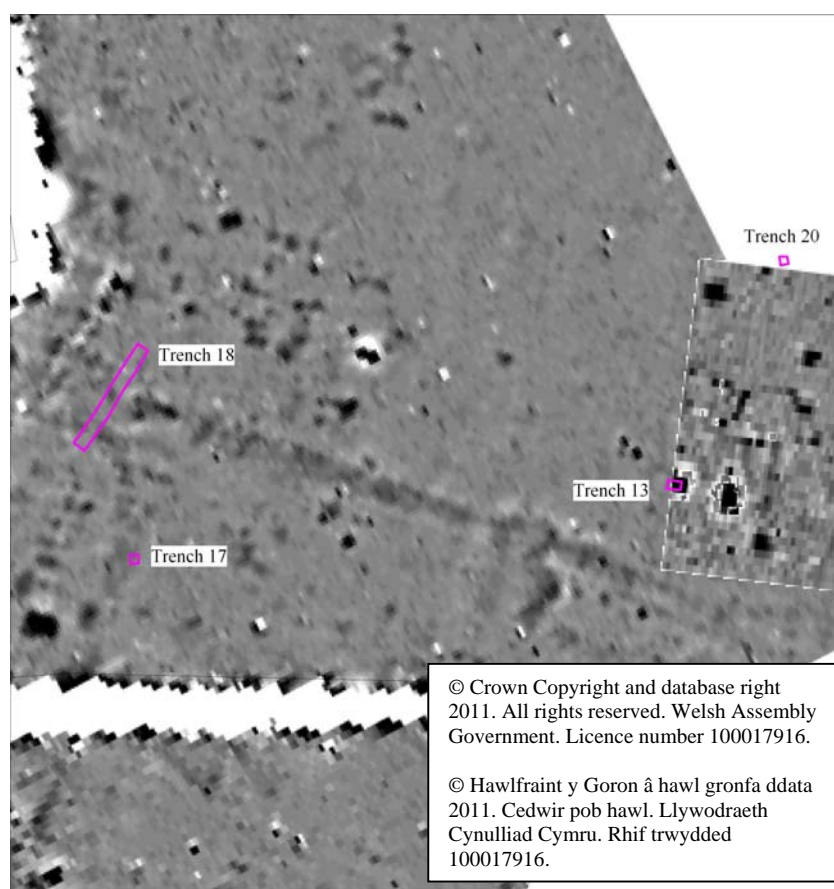


Fig. 5: Selected trench locations in the field to the north-east of the fort against the background of the geophysics results

5 THE EXCAVATIONS AND AUGER SAMPLING RESULTS

- 5.1 Each trench is considered separately in the descriptive text which follows, with the numbers in brackets referring to the context descriptions given to individual layers or features within the site archive. The trench locations and auger holes are depicted on the plan below, in relation to the fort and Y Gaer farm. Reasonable amounts of Roman material were revealed by the excavation, generally sufficient to confirm that the exposed deposits were of Roman origin, where this was the case. The material recovered had only been subject to an initial assessment at the time that this report was prepared.

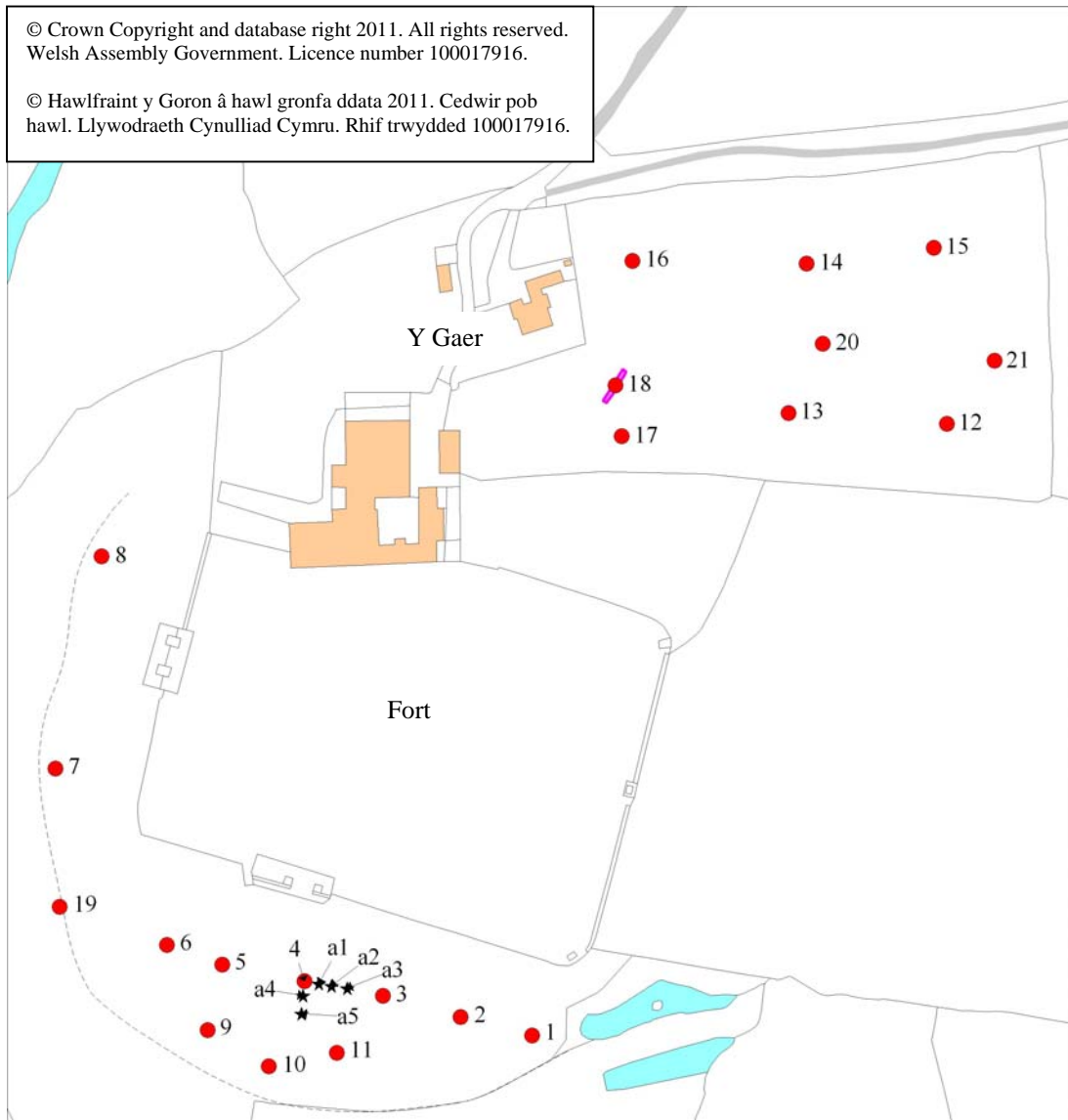


Fig. 6: Location of excavation trenches and auger sample holes. The dashed line marks the edge of the river terrace

5.2 *Trench 1* (NGR SO 00386 29533; 1.3m east-north-east/west-south-west by 1.3m north-north-east/south-south-west)

5.2.1 The trench was placed on the south side of the fort immediately to the west of the pond mentioned in paragraph 3.5, to assess the potential for further deposits similar to those examined in this area in 1990. The natural, pinkish-red, stony clay silt subsoil (05) was present at a depth of 0.31m, and was overlain by a layer of stone in a red-brown silty clay matrix (04), 0.08m thick. This was covered by a thin deposit of red-brown silty clay (03), 0.03m thick, which contained frequent small lumps of pinkish clay and a single sherd of samian ware and perhaps represents Roman activity.

5.2.2 The two remaining layers were a lower deposit of red-brown silty loam (02), 0.09m thick and the red-brown loamy topsoil (01), 0.11m thick which formed the ground surface. A small sherd of late medieval or early post-medieval pottery was recovered from layer 02.



Plate 3: Trench 1, surface of possible occupation layer (03), from south (photo CPAT 3119-001)

5.3 *Trench 2* (NGR SO 00357 29542; ; 1.25m east-north-east/west-south-west by 1.25m north-north-east/south-south-west)

5.3.1 The natural subsoil in this trench was the same as that encountered in Trench 1 (layer 05), and was here overlain by a 0.17m thick deposit of pinkish-brown loam (12) which included a fragment of clay pipe stem. A later deposit of pinkish brown silt (11), 0.06m thick, contained a single sherd of Roman pottery and was covered by light brown loamy topsoil (10), 0.16m thick. No Roman layers or features were observed in this trench.



Plate 4: Trench 2 after excavation, from south (photo CPAT 3119-004)

5.4 *Trench 3* (NGR SO 00325 29552; 1.2m east-north-east/west-south-west by 1.2m north-north-east/south-south-west)

- 5.4.1 The top of the natural, pinkish-red stony clay silt subsoil in this trench appeared at a depth of 0.49m below the ground surface. It was overlain by an almost stoneless deposit of brown clay silt (09), 0.07m thick, which was devoid of finds and was itself covered by a 0.20m thick layer of orangey-brown clay silt (08), again with no datable material. Above this a band of stone (07), 0.07m thick, was thought to represent mixed subsoil of the 19th or 20th century. The surface layer comprised reddish-brown silty loam (06), 0.15m thick. No Roman finds, layers or features were observed in this trench.



Plate 5: Trench 3 after excavation, from south (photo CPAT 3119-002)

5.5 *Trench 4* (SO 00293 29559; 1.2m east-north-east/west-south-west by 1.25m north-north-east/south-south-west)



Plate 6: Trench 4 after excavation, from south (photo CPAT 3119-007)

- 5.5.1 The natural subsoil was not found in this trench, the lowest layer comprising stony reddish clay (18), over 0.14m in thickness and containing a very small sherd of undated pottery and a glass fragment together with some flecks of charcoal. This was overlain by a 0.21m thick layer of clay silt (17) similar to layer 18 but with grey, green and brown mottling throughout and containing part of the rim of a post-medieval pottery vessel. The uppermost layer was the reddish-brown loam topsoil (16), 0.15m thick.
- 5.6 *Trench 5* (SO 00259 29567; 1.3m east-north-east/west-south-west by 1.25m north-north-east/south-south-west)
- 5.6.1 The natural subsoil in this trench appeared at a depth of 0.52m below the ground surface. It was overlain by a thin band of firm brownish-red clay silt (15), 0.07m thick, which contained some flecks of charcoal. Overlying this was a layer of reddish-brown stony silt (14), 0.30m thick, containing some random patches of stones (individually up to 0.12m maximum particle size) and occasional Roman finds, although none of these were in-situ. The surface soil layer was reddish-brown loamy silt (13), 0.15m thick.



Plate 7: Trench 5 after excavation, from south (photo CPAT 3119-006)

- 5.7 *Trench 6* (SO 00236 29576; 1.25m east-north-east/west-south-west by 1.25m north-north-east/south-south-west)
- 5.7.1 The natural subsoil was not conclusively found in this trench, although it was excavated to a depth of 0.85m and the lowest layer of stony reddish pink-brown silty clay (23), over 0.20m in thickness, was similar in nature to it. The top of the layer seemed to merge with the overlying gritty clay silt (22) of similar colour, which was at least 0.13m thick and contained an appreciable quantity of Roman pottery. The two layers were revealed in a deeper excavation on the north side of the trench, and at the base of this layer 23 appeared to be intersected by a possible gully (25), at least 0.22m deep and filled with stony grey-brown silt (24).



Plate 8: Trench 6 after excavation, from south (photo CPAT 3119-008)



Plate 9: The base of the sondage in Trench 6, from above (north to left)
(photo CPAT 3119-009)

- 5.7.2 The deeper excavation also revealed a layer of grey-brown clay silt (21), up to 0.20m thick and containing a significant quantity of Roman pottery sherds, some calcined bone and a fragment of Roman glass.
- 5.7.3 The uppermost layers in the trench were a layer of grey-brown stony silt (20), which overlay (21) and was 0.09m in thickness. It also contained sherds of Roman pottery, and was in turn covered by the reddish grey-brown silty loam topsoil (19), 0.23m in thickness, from which a sandstone sharpening stone was recovered.
- 5.8 *Trench 7* (SO 00193 29651; 1.3m east-north-east/west-south-west by 1.3m north-north-east/south-south-west)
- 5.8.1 This trench was one of the two excavated on the west side of the fort and was significant in revealing evidence of industrial activity. The natural subsoil was not exposed in the trench, which was excavated to a depth of 0.47m. The lowest layer recorded was a pale pink clay silt (30) whose thickness was not tested, but which had a hummocky, uneven surface on which grey-brown silty loam (29) had been deposited. This 0.27m thick deposit was notable for its significant slag content, and subsequent examination revealed this to be a residue of iron smelting, as it contained typologically distinct material, including tapped furnace slags and pieces of fused furnace lining, one of which retained evidence for the wattle structure of the furnace. The topsoil was reddish grey-brown silty loam (28), 0.20m thick.



Plate 10: Trench 7 after excavation, from south (photo CPAT 3119-0025)

- 5.9 *Trench 8* (SO 00216 29738; 1.2m east-north-east/west-south-west by 1.25m north-north-east/south-south-west)
- 5.9.1 This trench was the second of the two excavated on the west side of the fort. The natural subsoil appeared at a depth of 0.60m below the ground surface. It was overlain by a 0.40m thick layer of reddish-brown clay silt (27), which contained some stones (individually up to 0.10m maximum particle size), the largest of which seemed to define the interface of the layer with the natural subsoil. The overlying topsoil layer was a grey-brown silt (26), 0.20m thick.



Plate 11: Trench 8, showing the surface of the natural subsoil, from east (photo CPAT 3119-022)

5.10 *Trench 9* (SO 00252 29541; 1.2m east-north-east/west-south-west by 1.15m north-north-east/south-south-west)



Plate 12: Trench 9 after excavation, from west (photo CPAT 3119-0032)

5.10.1 The basal layer in the trench was a compact reddish-brown silty clay (38), of unknown thickness which may represent the natural subsoil. This was covered by a layer of red-brown stony silt (37), at least 0.20m thick, which was in turn overlain by reddish grey-brown silty loam (36), approximately 0.20m thick.

5.11 *Trench 10* (SO 00277 29529; 1.1m east-north-east/west-south-west by 1.2m north-north-east/south-south-west)

5.11.1 The trench was excavated to a depth of 0.27m, but natural subsoil was not conclusively revealed. The lowest layer encountered, in a deeper cut on the north side of the trench, was similar to the natural subsoil, being of firm reddish-brown silty clay (35), at least 0.1m thick. It was covered in turn by a thin layer of red-brown silty clay (34) containing patches of stones, and the uppermost layer of reddish grey-brown silty loam (33), 0.17m thick.



Plate 13: Trench 10 after excavation onto stony layer (43), from south (photo CPAT 3119-029)

5.12 *Trench 11* (SO 00305 29529; 1.2m east/west by 1.25m north/south)



Plate 14: Trench 11 after excavation, from north (photo CPAT 3119-028)

5.12.1 The natural subsoil in this trench appeared at a depth of about 0.30m below the ground surface. It was overlain by a band of compact red-brown clay silt (32), about 0.08m thick, which contained a single sherd of post-medieval pottery. Above this was a layer of reddish-brown stony silt (31), up to 0.05m thick, with some yellow mottling. The surface soil was a reddish grey-brown loam (39), 0.15m thick.

5.13 *Trench 12* (SO 00566 29778; 1.2m east/west by 1.2m north/south)

5.13.1 The natural subsoil in this trench appeared at a depth of about 0.38m below the ground surface. It was overlain by a band of pink gravelly clay silt (42), about 0.06m thick. Above this was a layer of pinkish-brown clay silt (41), up to 0.20m thick, containing some small stones and abraded pottery of post-medieval and earlier periods. The surface soil was a slightly pinkish-brown silt (40), 0.12m thick.



Plate 15: Trench 12 after excavation, from south (photo CPAT 3119-035)

5.14 *Trench 13* (SO 00500 29785; 1.8m east/west by 1.1m north/south)

5.14.1 The natural subsoil was not initially revealed in this trench, which was placed to investigate a marked geophysical anomaly thought to represent thermo-remnant magnetism created by burning. The base of the trench as it was initially excavated was largely composed of a burnt clay and sandstone structure (57), although only part of the feature was exposed and it was insufficiently well-preserved to determine whether it was a kiln or oven. No evidence of metal working was present. A 'halo' of pinkish-red clay (56), 0.07m thick, was present around the edge of the structure, representing the effects of heat on the adjoining soils.

5.14.2 A deposit of mid-brown silty clay (54), perhaps unburnt material of the same origin as deposit 56, lay to the south of the burnt area and this was examined by a deeper cut at the south-west corner of the trench (see Plate 17), where two gullies (58 and 59), each about 0.3m deep but of uncertain width, were cut into the natural subsoil and appeared to be at right-angles to each other. Gully (59) seemed to cut across gully 58, to judge from the stones in its fill (55) of yellow-brown sandy silt.



Plate 16: Trench 13 after cleaning to top of oven/kiln, from south (photo CPAT 3119-037)



Plate 17: Trench 13, cutting in south-west corner, from west (photo CPAT 3119-047)

5.14.3 The oven/kiln structure was sealed by a thin layer of buff-coloured silty clay (53), averaging 0.02m in thickness. The overlying soils comprised a pinkish-red silty clay (52), 0.14m thick and a surface horizon of pinkish-brown silty clay (51), 0.06, thick.

5.15 *Trench 14* (SO 00510 29846; 1.1m east/west by 1.1m north/south)

5.15.1 The natural subsoil appeared at a depth of about 0.37m below the ground surface. It was overlain by a band of pink stony clay silt (46), up to 0.05m thick, perhaps representing slightly disturbed natural subsoil. Over this was a layer of pinkish grey-brown clay silt (45), up to 0.22m thick, containing some local sandstone fragments and finds of 19th-century and earlier date. The surface soil was a slightly pinkish-brown clay silt (44), 0.12m thick.



Plate 18: Trench 14 after excavation, from south (photo CPAT 3119-050)

5.16 *Trench 15* (SO 00563 29851; 1.1m east/west by 1.1m north/south)

- 5.16.1 The natural subsoil appeared at a depth of about 0.32m below the ground surface, from where it had been cut by a broad, shallow gully (49), measuring approximately 1.0m wide (north/south) by up to 0.21m deep, and extending beyond the edges of the trench to the east and west. The gully was filled with greyish-brown clay silt (50), containing some patches of orange silt and plentiful amounts of charcoal but no datable finds. The gully fill was covered by a layer of pinkish-brown clay silt (48), 0.17m thick, with some small stones throughout and notably larger stones at the interface between it and the gully fill (see Plate 19). The surface soil above layer 48 was a layer of pinkish-brown silt (47), up to 0.15m in thickness.



Plate 19: Trench 15 after excavation, from west (photo CPAT 3119-053)

5.17 *Trench 16* (SO 00439 29850; 1.0m east/west by 1.0m north/south)

- 5.17.1 It is not clear whether the natural subsoil was reached in this trench. The lowest deposit encountered was a firm pink silty and gritty clay (73) with a hard surface containing flecks of charcoal, which appeared at a depth of 0.35m below the ground surface. This had some similarities with the natural subsoil, and it may be that the flecks were impressed into the surface of the layer, but its depth was not tested so this remains to be proven. A shallow scoop (71), up to 0.1m deep, appeared to have been cut through layer 73 and extended beyond the boundaries of the trench on the north, east and south, its western edge being just visible within the trench on that side. The fill of the scoop was a pinkish-brown clay silt (72), containing stones up to 0.1m across and seemingly unabraded finds that were exclusively of Roman date. The fill was sealed beneath a layer of pinkish grey-brown clay silt (70), 0.20m thick, containing small stones up to 0.05m in size. The surface soil above layer 70 was a layer of pinkish-grey clay silt (69), up to 0.15m in thickness.



Plate 20: Trench 16 after excavation, from west (photo CPAT 3119-062)

5.18 *Trench 17* (SO 00432 29778; 1.1m east/west by 1.1m north/south)

- 5.18.1 The natural subsoil was not reached in this trench, the lowest deposit encountered being a pinkish-grey silty clay (68), which appeared at a depth of 0.37m below the ground surface and was at least 0.40m in thickness. Examination of the geophysical survey of the area (see Fig 3) revealed that the trench had been placed over one of the linear anomalies mentioned in paragraph 3.7, specifically that which appears to represent a section of curved ditch. The deposit contained flecks of charcoal and Roman material, and it seems evident that it represents the fill of a ditch at least 0.4m deep.
- 5.18.2 The probable ditch fill was sealed by a layer of pinkish-brown clay silt (67), some 0.20m deep, itself covered by the surface soil (66), 0.17m in thickness, which was very similar in colour and nature, if a little less clayey.



Plate 21: Trench 17 after excavation, from south (photo CPAT 3119-061)

5.19 *Trench 18* (SO 00430 29800; 15.1m north-east/south-west by 1.7m north-west/south-east)

5.19.1 This trench was excavated by machine down to the level of the first recognisable archaeological horizon; thereafter all excavation was carried out entirely by hand. It became rapidly evident that almost all of the area of the trench was occupied by features and layers of Roman date, and it was therefore decided to restrict further work to the cleaning and recording of those features and layers, which would be left in-situ. The geophysics results from 2005/6 had suggested that there would be at least two substantial ditches crossing the trench (see Fig 5, above) but the precise nature of these linear anomalies remains unknown as their investigation would have caused significant disturbance to evidence which was undoubtedly of Roman origin.



Plate 22: Trench 18 after cleaning, from north-east (photo CPAT 3119-067)

- 5.19.2 At the north-east end of the trench, a pinkish-brown silty clay (64) contained plentiful flecks of charcoal and numerous Roman ceramics. Just over 2.0m from the end of the trench the edge of the deposit was marked by two large sandstone slabs (65), up to 0.85m across, which might represent the remains of a wall or other structure that once extended across the line of the trench. On the south-west side of the stones, and partially covering them, was a deposit of grey-brown silty clay (63), again of Roman origin. This also seemed to overlie traces of a possible structure (81), 1.5m east/west by 0.8m north/south, defined by an arc of sandstone rubble with a thin covering of brown silty clay (80).
- 5.19.3 Immediately to the south-west of the possible structure was an uncompacted layer (82) of rounded pebbles set in a matrix of pinkish clay, extending for about 0.8m north-east/south-west. To the south-west of layer 82, an area of rather larger and generally angular sandstone fragments (83) occupied the whole width of the trench for a distance of approximately 6.0m (north-east/south-west). The origin of this deposit of stone remains uncertain, but it may represent the deliberate infill of one of the ditches revealed by the geophysics; apart from a single small fragment of clay pipe which may have been moved into the top of the stones by ploughing, the material found in association with the stones seemed to be entirely Roman in origin.
- 5.19.4 Further to the south-west, the area of stone gave way to a deposit of pink-buff coloured silty clay (86), containing a significant quantity of Roman ceramic material. It was thought possible that it might be related to one of the deposits at the north-east end of the trench, but this was not investigated and remains uncertain. A probable gully (85), averaging about 0.35m wide, curved across the trench near its south-west end and appeared to be filled with pink clay (84), perhaps redeposited natural subsoil.



Plate 23: Trench 18 after cleaning, from south-west (photo CPAT 3119-065)

- 5.19.5 The Roman deposits were covered by pink clay silt (62), between 0.20m and 0.22m in thickness, itself lying beneath the surface soil pinkish-brown silty clay (61), between 0.06m and 0.10m in thickness.

5.20 *Trench 19* (SO 00193 29594; 1.2m east/west by 1.2m north/south)

5.20.1 This trench was excavated outside the south-west corner of the fort, approximately equidistant from trenches 6 and 7, and was placed to establish the continuation of the deposits in the locality given that both of the earlier trenches had revealed Roman material. The natural subsoil was revealed at a depth of up to 0.37m below the ground surface and was covered by a layer of pinkish-grey silt and gritty gravel (77), 0.20m thick. The overlying pinkish-brown clay silt (76) formed the surface soil horizon and varied from 0.13m to 0.17m in thickness. However, no in-situ Roman deposits were found.



Plate 24: Trench 19 after excavation, from west (photo CPAT 3119-076)

5.21 *Trench 20* (SO 00516 29813; 1.0m east/west by 1.0m north/south)

Plate 25: Trench 20 after excavation, from south (photo CPAT 3119-078)

5.21.1 The natural subsoil appeared at a depth of about 0.30m below the ground surface. It was overlain by a band of pinkish-grey clay silt (79), measuring 0.20m in overall thickness and containing stones up to 0.1m in size together with Roman and post-medieval material. Overlying this was the surface soil, comprising a layer of pinkish-brown clay silt (78), up to 0.10m thick, containing a few stones and two fragments of slate; the latter were not retained.

5.22 *Trench 21* (SO 00587 29803; 1.0m east/west by 1.0m north/south)

5.22.1 The natural subsoil appeared at a depth of about 0.30m below ground level and had an uneven surface with projecting stones. It was overlain by a layer of pinkish-grey clay silt (75), measuring 0.18m in overall thickness, which was slightly orangey in places but was devoid of any finds. Above this was the surface soil, comprising a layer of pinkish-brown clay silt (78), which was approximately 0.12m thick and contained a few small stones up to 0.05m in size.



Plate 26: Trench 21 after excavation, from west (photo CPAT 3119-075)

5.23 AUGER SAMPLING RESULTS

5.23.1 The potential for using auger sampling to define the spread of layers revealed by trial trenches had been highlighted by the work carried out on the north and east of the fort in 2009, but the nature of the deposits was rather more localised than those encountered in 2010 and was therefore less suitable for this type of examination.

5.23.2 In the event, auger samples were only taken in the field to the south of the fort (see Fig 6, above), where five samples (Table 1) were examined to the east and south of Trench 4. These were placed to elucidate the nature and extent of the deposits which had been observed in the trench, primarily a layer (18) which could represent occupation of the Roman period (see paragraph 5.5.1). Layer 3 in auger hole a1 may represent the same layer, but it is unlikely that this is the case with a5, despite the similar nature of the deposit, as no evidence of occupation was found in a4, which lies between a5 and the trench. The results

do imply that the occupation in this area is more in the form of discrete areas than the widespread evidence found in the field to the east of the fort in 2009.

5.23.3 Table 1 Auger sampling results

Auger hole	Layer 1	Layer 2	Layer 3	Layer 4
a1 (SO 00299 29558)	0-0.20m Grey-brown silt (Topsoil)	0.20-0.35m Reddish-brown silt with stones	0.35-0.50m Brownish-red clay silt (Possible Roman occupation)	0.50m+ Rock
a2 (SO 00304 29557)	0-0.17m Grey-brown silt (Topsoil)	0.17-0.37m Reddish-brown silt with stones	0.37-0.47m Pinkish-red clay silt	0.47-0.50m+ Gritty red clay silt (Natural subsoil)
a3 (SO 00310 29556)	0-0.18m Grey-brown silt (Topsoil)	0.18-0.50m+ Reddish-brown silt with stones		
a4 (SO 00292 29553)	0-0.20m Grey-brown silt (Topsoil)	0.20-0.31m Reddish-brown silt with stones	0.31-0.50m+ Pinkish-red clay silt	
a5 (SO 00291 29546)	0-0.18m Grey-brown silt (Topsoil)	0.18-0.31m Reddish-brown silt with stones	0.31-0.34m Brownish-red clay silt (Possible Roman occupation)	0.34-0.50m+ Gritty red clay silt (Natural subsoil)

6 ADDITIONAL GEOPHYSICS

6.1 The possible structure seen on a 2005 aerial photograph has been mentioned above (para 3.8) and an area of 0.4ha was examined by geophysics to assess its authenticity. The results are shown below, with the apparent marks on the photograph outlined in red.

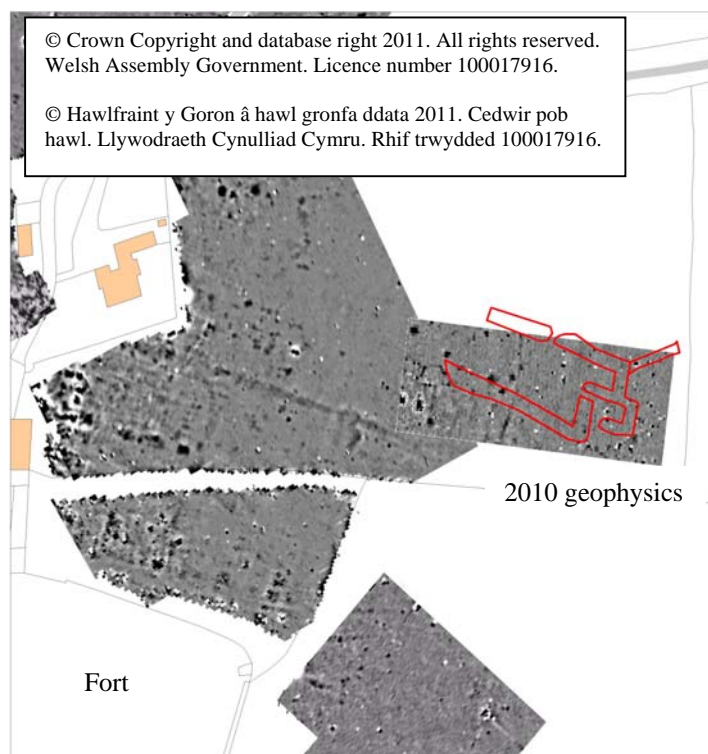


Fig. 7: The additional geophysics carried out in 2010, compared to the proposed structure

- 6.2 It can be seen from the results depicted on Fig 7 that there were no anomalies present that matched the apparent marks visible on the aerial photograph. Although this can sometimes be a function of the lack of magnetic response, that does not seem to be the case here, as features are visible within the area examined by geophysics, so it appears that the marks were probably false. This is corroborated by the absence of evidence from the trenches that were excavated in fairly close proximity to the alleged feature, none of which revealed any in-situ Roman material or other significant finds.
- 6.3 The geophysics revealed one linear feature that had not previously been recognised, a probable ditch, 40m long and about 1.0m wide, running between SO 00538 29768 and SO 00547 29808. A series of pits, each about 2.0m in diameter, were revealed at SO 00544 29792, SO 00540 29787, SO 00519 29801, and SO 00534 29807, while a larger pit, about 4.5m in diameter, was noted at SO 00536 29792.

7 CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 The results of the investigations carried out in 2009 and 2010, from a total of thirty-five trenches and twelve auger samples, provide an overall picture of the extent of the *vicus* in the area around Brecon Gaer. Figure 8 shows those trenches and auger holes where in-situ evidence for Roman occupation was found, and demonstrates that there were other areas that were apparently devoid of Roman occupation.
- 7.2 No trenches were excavated in the field to the north-west of Y Gaer farm, where the Roman road leaving the north gate of the fort was revealed by geophysics in 2005 and 2006, primarily because the geophysics results were exceptionally clear and individual features and structures could be seen alongside the road up to about 300m north of the fort. This is also the area in which Wheeler noted post-holes and hut floors alongside the road in his excavations in the 1920s (see Fig. 2).
- 7.3 Although mapping of the *vicus* is a somewhat subjective exercise, the overall picture can be established from Fig 8, and the results of the work imply a total area of contemporary occupation outside the Roman fort of up to about 10ha, a figure which is in a similar range to the overall extent of about 7ha for the *vicus* around the Caersws II fort in northern Powys (Jones, forthcoming). At Brecon, there appear to be lobes of occupation extending out on the north and east sides of the fort, where the ground is more favourable for settlement, but the traces are rather more sporadic on the south and west, where the more difficult topography has inevitably had an influence.
- 7.4 The nature of the Roman occupation which was identified in the excavations was reasonably typical in terms of what might be expected. Features included evidence of iron smelting, a probable oven or kiln, and the robbed-out walling of a probable building, together with a series of pits, gullies and layers.
- 7.5 Although a large number of trenches were excavated, the actual extent of each has generally been very small, and only minimal examination has been carried out of those features that were revealed. The primary aim in this has been to minimise the impact on the surviving archaeological resource of the *vicus* while providing sufficient information to determine whether in-situ Roman occupation was present and give some guidance on the future management of the site. As a result, the overall impact of the work on the surviving evidence of Roman occupation is believed to be insignificant.

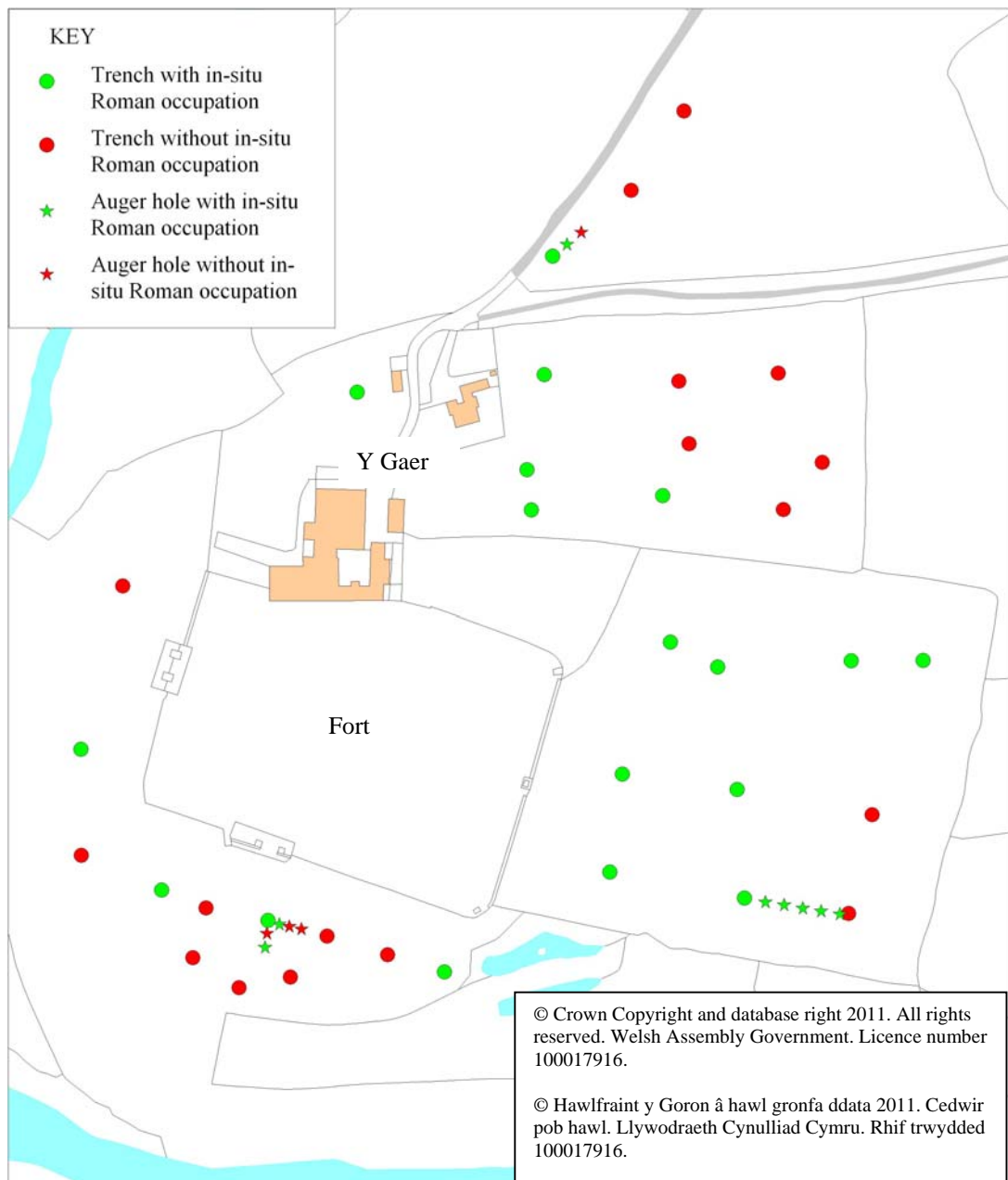


Fig. 8: Plan showing the distribution of trenches and auger holes where in-situ Roman material was encountered in 2009 and 2010

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 8.1 The writer would like to thank his colleagues at CPAT – Mr I Grant, Ms W Owen and Mr R Trevaskus - for their assistance during the excavation and to Ms Owen also for the preparation of a preliminary catalogue of the finds.
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- 8.3 The writer would particularly like to thank Mr E Jones, the landowner, for his kind interest in the work and his permission to carry out the excavation.

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9.2 Cartographic sources

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

SITE ARCHIVE

78 digital photographs, CPAT Film No 3119

Photographic catalogue

86 context description forms

5 A4 site drawings, Trenches 6, 13, 15, 16

1 A1 site drawing, Trench 18

Auger sample hole descriptions

Correspondence

Digital data

Topographical surveys to locate trenches (Penmap survey software)

Finds

At the time of writing, the finds had only been subject to an initial assessment, further details will be included in the final site archive on completion.