

Margam Country Park Hydro Grid Connection, Neath Port Talbot

Archaeological watching brief

March 2018

A report for Acanthus Holden Architects
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Cover: View towards the Chapter House, Margam Abbey (GGAT).

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Summary

Two trial pits were excavated by hand within the Scheduled Area of Margam Abbey (GM 005) under archaeological watching brief, in accordance with Condition 4 of the Class 7 Scheduled Monument Consent, in connection with the re-commissioning a hydro-electric generating system in the grounds of Margam Country Park, Neath Port Talbot.

No archaeological finds or features were noted within either of the trial pits and no archaeologically significant deposits were disturbed during the work.

The archaeological work was carried out to the professional standards laid down by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA 2014).

Acknowledgements

This project was managed by Martin Tuck MCIfA (Senior Project Manager) and the fieldwork undertaken by Johnny Crawford BSc MA (Assistant Project Manager). The report was prepared by Johnny Crawford. Illustrations prepared by Charlotte James-Martin BA ACIfA (Assistant Project Manager).

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Abbreviations

GGAT – Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust

HER – Historic Environment Record

NGR – National Grid Reference

NPRN – National Primary Record Number (in National Monuments Record)

OD – Ordnance Datum

OS – Ordnance Survey

PRN – Primary Record Number (in GGAT HER)

RCAHMW - Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales

SM – Scheduled Monument

1. Introduction

1.1. Project background and commission

Acanthus Holden Architects are in the process of re-commissioning a hydro-electric generating system in the grounds of Margam Country Park, Neath Port Talbot. Part of the scheme involves replacing an electrical cable that runs part of the way through the area occupied by remains associated with Margam Abbey, and which is designated as a Scheduled Monument (GM 005).

Class 7 Consent was granted by Cadw for the hand excavation of two trial pits within the Scheduled Area to locate the existing cable (GM 005/DH dated 14 December 2017). Condition 4 to the consent required the work to be undertaken under conditions of an archaeological watching brief. Acanthus Holden Architects commissioned the Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust (Archaeological Services) to undertake the watching brief, the results of which form the basis of this current report.

The watching brief was undertaken on 28 February 2018.

1.2. Location and geology

The area of the works lies entirely within tarmacked roadway within the Scheduled Area forming part of the polite landscape surrounding the Orangery within Margam Park (centred on NGR SS 80189 86222, Figure 1). The boundary of the Scheduled Area near the test pit locations is demarcated by a stone wall separating a car park from the gardens proper. The topography is generally flat as the Orangery lies at the base of the hill upon which Margam Castle was constructed, although there is a gentle rise in elevation from the gateway into the gardens towards the Orangery. The route of the existing electricity cable passes through an area occupied by both structural remains associated with Margam Abbey, and the later Orangery.

The solid geology of the area is formed by Lower Pennant Sandstones and Middle Coal Measures; predominantly Carboniferous sandstone of the Llynfi and Swansea beds and the Lower Pennant Measures, which is characterised by thick massive feldspathic and micaceous sandstones and grits (George 1970, 89-94).

The drift geology of the general area is divided between stagnohumic gleys including peat soils on the upland core and brown earths elsewhere (BGS 2018).

1.3. Previous investigations, archaeological and historical background

No previous archaeological work has been carried out in connection with the original electrical cable.

The earliest evidence from the surrounding area dates to the Mesolithic period, with finds of Mesolithic flint artefacts from west of Blaen Rhondda. More substantive evidence, dating to the Neolithic period, comes in the form of a chambered tombs, with the nearest example from Margam Moors, since lost to the construction of the Eglwys Nunnydd reservoir (although its capstone is preserved at Margam Abbey). It is thought to have been similar to that surviving at Penmaen Burrows, Gower. Other finds of Neolithic date from the wider area include the particularly significant find of an axe from Aberavon beach with its wooden haft more or less intact. The Bronze Age period shows a considerable intensification of occupation in the surrounding area, in the form of burial cairns and ridgeway routes, the ‘cefn ffyrdd’.

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Iron Age occupation is highly visible in the surrounding area in the form of the hillforts including Mynydd-y-Castell (SM Gm162), an impressive univallate enclosure, measuring 260m north-south and 2.7ha in area. The fort is D shaped with a straight east side; the defences comprising ‘massive bank or scarp accompanied by ditch with a counterscarp bank’ with no visible revetment and a single entrance to the southwest (RCAHMW 1976b; Fox and Fox 1934). The massively defended Mynydd-y-Castell within Margam Park is at variance with the general hillslope enclosure type for the area, which is generally considered to have a pastoral function. The latter include the scheduled camp to the east of Ton Mawr (SM Gm090), Cwm Phillip West, (SM Gm056) and Halfmoon Camp (SM Gm477). The substantial ramparts at Mynydd-y-Castell enclose an isolated hill and commands extensive views over the surrounding landscape and coastal zones, while the sites location at an established administrative focal point (with ecclesiastic, parochial, commotal and possibly cantrefal importance) hint at the area’s wider significance (Roberts 2007).

The main indicator of the Roman period within the area are roads, such as that thought to underlie the route of the present A48 (01016.14), immediately west of Margam Park. A limited amount of buried remains and a number of Roman milestones mark the course of the main road west from Cardiff, which passes from Stormy Down, along the line of Water Street in Margam and probably along the line of the modern A48 to Neath. In addition, a definite Roman road with another potential Roman route was discovered to the northwest of Nursery Dywyll during works for the laying of a gas main between Port Talbot and Margam in 1990. The former is approximately aligned north-south between SS 80225 85529 and SS 80256 85857 (Marvell and Page 1994). The nearby focal points of Neath, with its fort and *vicus* slightly to the north, and Kenfig to the southwest with a settlement or conjectured fort, had considerable importance in the Roman period.

Documentary sources suggest that Glamorgan has its origins in an Early-medieval kingdom “Glywysing” named after a king Glywys. This later mutated to Morgannwg, from its ruler Morgan Hen (Pugh 1971). Putatively, the kingdom was divided into provinces or Cantrefi named for the sons of Glywys, but it is difficult to be precise as to their boundaries. Knight (1995) proposes a cantref of Margam (Afan), which extends from Merthyr Mawr to the River Tawe in the west.

Along with material from Hen Gastell and glass recovered from Mynydd-y-Castell, the principal archaeological evidence for pre-Norman activity derives from a large number of early Christian inscribed stones. Whilst some may represent burials alongside roads (following the Roman tradition), others seem to be associated with “monastic” ecclesiastical sites, suggesting that Margam Abbey was an ecclesiastical centre prior to the establishment of the medieval monastery (RCAHMW 1976; Pugh 1971 and Roberts 2003).

The Norman invasion of Morgannwg is thought to have taken place around 1093. Robert Fitzhamon, a favourite of William Rufus, and later Earl of Gloucester extended his existing territories in Gwent by the military destruction of the Kingdom of Morgannwg. It seems probable that he allocated parts of the conquered lands to his followers as grants of land for Neath Abbey was made by Richard de Granville. The conquest did not result in the complete removal of the Welsh elite. The upland areas to the east (and perhaps the west) of Neath were held as a lordship by Caradog ap Iestyn, son of the last Lord of Morgannwg, whilst the lands around Resolven (Rhys-solven) were held by Caradog’s brother Rhys. Moreover, in the 1180s, Caradog’s son Morgan

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led a rebellion against the Fitzhamons, which resulted in the destruction of a castle at Aberafan and the apparent reoccupation of Hen Gastell. This rebellion seems to have lasted for at least 40 years (Pugh 1971 and Roberts 2003).

Despite the periodic indigenous revolts, culminating in the Glyndwr rebellion, the medieval period marked the consolidation of power by the English lords. After the death of the last of the Fitzhamons in 1218, the Lordship of Glamorgan passed to the de Clare's and then in 1317, to the Despenser family. A century later the Lordship passed to the Earl of Warwick. In practical terms the structures of Lordship may have had limited impact on most people and on the landscape. Two boroughs were founded, that of Neath, held directly by the Lords of Glamorgan, and that of Aberafan which seems to have been under the power of the Welsh Lords of Afan. The lords of Afan clearly became anglicised, and by the 13th century the Lord of Afan styled himself John d'Avene.

In 1147 the lands at Margam were granted by Robert of Gloucester Lord of Glamorgan, to St Bernards abbey of Clairvaux, for foundation of a new Cistercian house of Margam. The nave of the 12th century church survives, in use as the parish church. At the start of the 13th century the Abbey was re-constructed by Abbot Gilbert (1203-13) and the chapter house (standing but lacking its vault, which fell in 1799) and the eastern part of the church, presbytery, choir and transepts date from this time (Cowley 1986; Williams 1999 and 2001; Roberts, 2003 and Lewis 2004).

Margam Abbey had a particularly distinctive impact on the surrounding landscape, when the area to the south (Margam Moors) was granted to the monastery. Excavations at the grange of Eglwys Nunnydd suggest that there was substantial investment in drainage and other water management systems possibly even water meadows (Wessex Archaeology 1996 and 1997). The low lying "Margam Moors" would have been highly productive if sufficient investment was put into drainage and the location of the grange at Eglwys Nunnydd and of Theoderics Grange (whose remains were uncovered during the construction of Port Talbot Steel Works) suggests that the abbey did indeed make this investment. At the dissolution, Margam had become a major prize and was rapidly appropriated by the crown (Williams 1974; Williams 2001 and Roberts 2003).

Following the dissolution in 1536, Sir Rice Mansel of Oxwich and Old Beupre acquired most of the ex-monastic estates. By 1590 Rice Merrick recorded the house as a 'faire and sumptuous house,' incorporating some of the monastic buildings, and stables added during the late 17th century recorded in a sketch of Thomas Dingley dated to 1684. There are also two topographic paintings of the period, which depict the house and grounds at Margam, as they then appeared (Moore and Moore 1974). The Mansel family attained a baronetcy and then a peerage in the early 18th century; but by the mid 18th century the title became extinct and the family lands passed into the Talbot family of Wiltshire.

Under Thomas Mansel Talbot the mansion at Margam was abandoned in favour of Penrice Castle on Gower. From 1793 to 1835 there was no principal house at Margam and when the family visited the orangery and gardens they lodged at Margam cottage on the outskirts of the park.

Margam Park was developed as a pleasure garden from the late 18th century, being finalised by 1814, the design was dominated by an imposing Orangery in the Palladian style, the largest in Britain, built 1787-90 to designs by Anthony Keck. The present internal layout of the park is largely the work of C R M Talbot, who transformed it from

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1828 onwards, after returning the family seat to Margam. He was also responsible for the construction of the new Tudor-style house (1830-5 by Thomas Hopper; site architect Edward Haycock). The irregular plan and the pinnacled and castellated skyline of the house give it a Romantic appearance. It is built of local Pyle ashlar stone, arranged around three courtyards, one in the centre of the main block and two former service courts to the east. There are two main storeys, with a gabled third storey. The surfaces of the building are ornamented with carvings and sculpted heraldic panels. A dramatic two-storeyed octagonal tower with attached stair turret and surmounted by a viewing room is located at the centre of the building. The house is aligned east-west with its main entrance front on the north. Another interesting structure erected during the period is the 'temple of the four seasons', which incorporates the façade of the late 17th century Summer Banqueting House, re-erected in 1835.

The fortunes of the estate waned after 1890 when the male line died out with the death of C R M Talbot's son. The family estate then passed to his daughter Emily Charlotte Talbot, later upon her own death in 1918, transferring to her great nephew John Theodore Talbot Fletcher. In 1941 the contents of the house were sold and by 1942 the estate was sold to the Vale of Neath brewery owner Sir David Evans-Bevan. During the Second World War the house was put to military use. In 1977, following its acquisition by Glamorgan County Council, the house was extensively gutted by fire. Under its successor, West Glamorgan County Council, the house was consolidated and restored and the estate subsequently established as a Country Park. The park was eventually bought by Glamorgan County Council in 1973, and is now administered by Neath Talbot County Borough Council (Cadw 2000, 103-113).

Historically the park at Margam was divided into three main areas, the low-lying ground to the south, bounded on the west by the main grounds and gardens and on the north by the steep ridge of Craig-y-Lodge; secondly the wooded valley, lake and hillfort at the west end of the park; and the northern part of the park, situated on a high, rolling plateau above the ridge, and bounded by the valley of Cwm Philip to its north-west. Each part differs slightly in character and use. Hall's estate map of 1814 shows these three varying areas and lists them as Little Park (the extent of the original pre 18th century grounds associated with Margam House), and the wider Great Park and Upper Park, respectively.

There are no archaeological events recorded on the Regional HER within vicinity of the trial pits.

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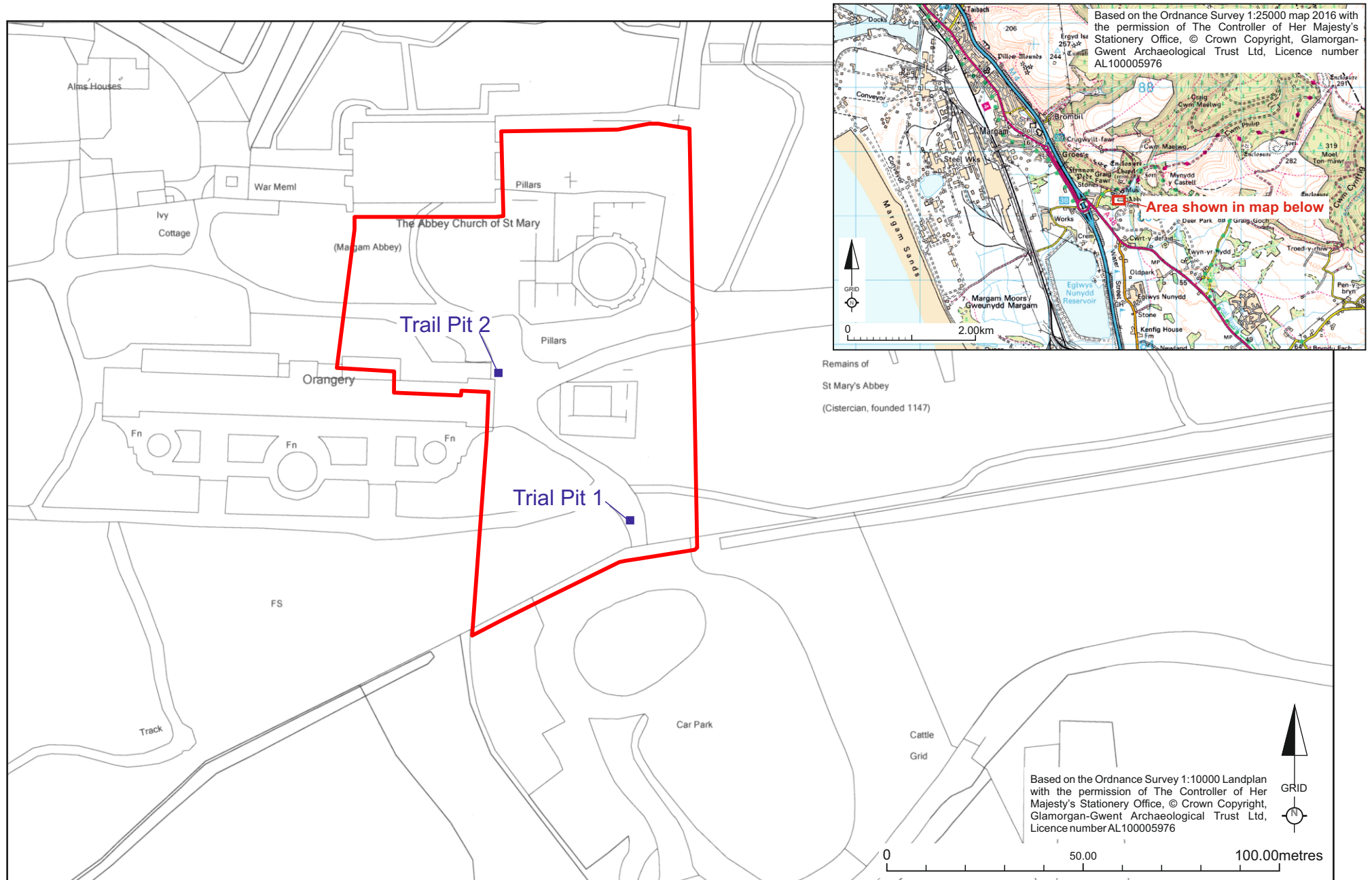


Figure 1. Location map showing the Scheduled Area (red outline) and the location of Trial Pit 1 and Trial Pit 2 (blue)

2. Methodology

The watching brief was carried out on the hand excavation of two trial pits within the Scheduled Area. The location of the existing cable had been plotted previously and the position of the pits agreed between Cadw and Acanthus Holden Architects. The presence of the cable was confirmed using a CAT scanner and the tarmac cut with a road saw prior to hand excavation onto the ducting for the cable. The excavation stopped once the nature and position of the cable had been confirmed and the pits were backfilled after recording.

No finds were noted during the excavation work and no samples were taken.

A written, drawn and photographic record was made of all archaeological contexts, in accordance with the *GGAT Manual of Excavation Recording Techniques*. Contexts were recorded using a single continuous numbering system, and are summarised in Appendix I. All significant contexts were photographed digitally at a resolution of not less than 10 megapixels.

An archive of archaeological records relating to the fieldwork will be prepared to the specifications in *The National Standard and Guidance to Best Practice for Collecting and Depositing Archaeological Archives in Wales 2017* (National Panel for Archaeological Archived in Wales 2017) and CIfA's Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives (2014).

After an appropriate period has elapsed, copies of the report and archive index will be deposited with the regional Historic Environment Record (HER). A digital copy of the report and archive will also be deposited with the National Monuments Record, RCAHMW, Aberystwyth.

3. Results

Trial Pit 1(Figure 1, Plate 1)

This pit was excavated 6.5 m inside the Scheduled Area, in the tarmac roadway from the main Orangery car parking area. The pit measured 0.62m by 0.32m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.3m below the ground. The service ducts (104) were discovered at a depth of 0.4m below the roadway and were the lowest excavated feature. A deposit of loose and friable black/grey coloured loam (103) overlay the ducting, being encountered at 0.24m below the road surface. The final two deposits consisted of a 0.14m thick layer of stony rubble sub-base (102) for the overlying tarmac roadway (101).

Trial Pit 2 (Figure 1, Plates 2 and 3)

This pit was excavated 1.9m from the north east corner of the Orangery, within the Scheduled Area. The pit measured 0.62m by 3.2m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.3m. The service ducts (204) consisted of twin plastic pipes encountered at a depth of 0.3m below the road surface. Overlaying the pipes was a deposit of loose grey black coloured loam containing stone (203) which was encountered at a depth of 0.16m below the ground. The two uppermost deposits consisted of an old tarmac road surface (202) at a depth of 0.09 and the current road surface (201) which was 0.09m thick.

No archaeological finds or features of archaeological significance were noted in either of the trial pits.

Table of contexts

Context	Type	Description	Depth BGL (m)	Period
101	D	Tarmac roadway	0-0.1	Modern
102	D	Rubble sub-base for road	0.1-0.24	Modern
103	D	Black/grey coloured loose loam with gravel	0.24-0.4	Modern
104	S	Twin plastic service ducts	0.4 n.b	Modern
201	D	Tarmac road	0-0.09	Modern
202	D	Tarmac (old road)	0.09-0.16	Modern
203	D	Loose black/grey coloured loam with stones	0.16-0.3	Modern
204	S	Twin plastic service ducts	0.3 n.b	Modern

Key

D Deposit

BGL Below Ground Level

S Structure

n.b. Not bottomed

4. Conclusion

No archaeological finds or features of archaeological significance were noted during the course of the excavation and no disturbance of archaeologically significant deposits was occasioned by the work.

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6. Plates



Plate 1. Plan view of Trial pit 1 showing the twin service ducts (104) underlying deposit 103. Scale divisions 0.5m



Plate 2. Plan view of Trial Pit 2 showing twin service ducts (204). Scale divisions are 0.5m.

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Plate 3. Oblique view of a section through Trial Pit 2 showing service pipes (204) and deposits 201-203. View to south, scale division 0.5m.



**Glamorgan-Gwent
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QUALITY CONTROL

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As part of our desire to provide a quality service we would welcome any comments you may wish to make on the content or presentation of this report.