

CPAT Report No. 1551

St Asaph Bridge, Denbighshire




ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



YMDDIRIEDOLAETH ARCHAEOLEGOL CLWYD-POWYS

CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Client name: Dawnus Construction Ltd
 CPAT Project No: 2247
 Project Name: St Asaph Bridge
 Grid Reference: SJ 0351 7440
 County/LPA: Denbighshire
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Cover: St. Asaph Bridge and location of the Watching Brief, viewed from the west. Photo CPAT 4443-0011



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Summary

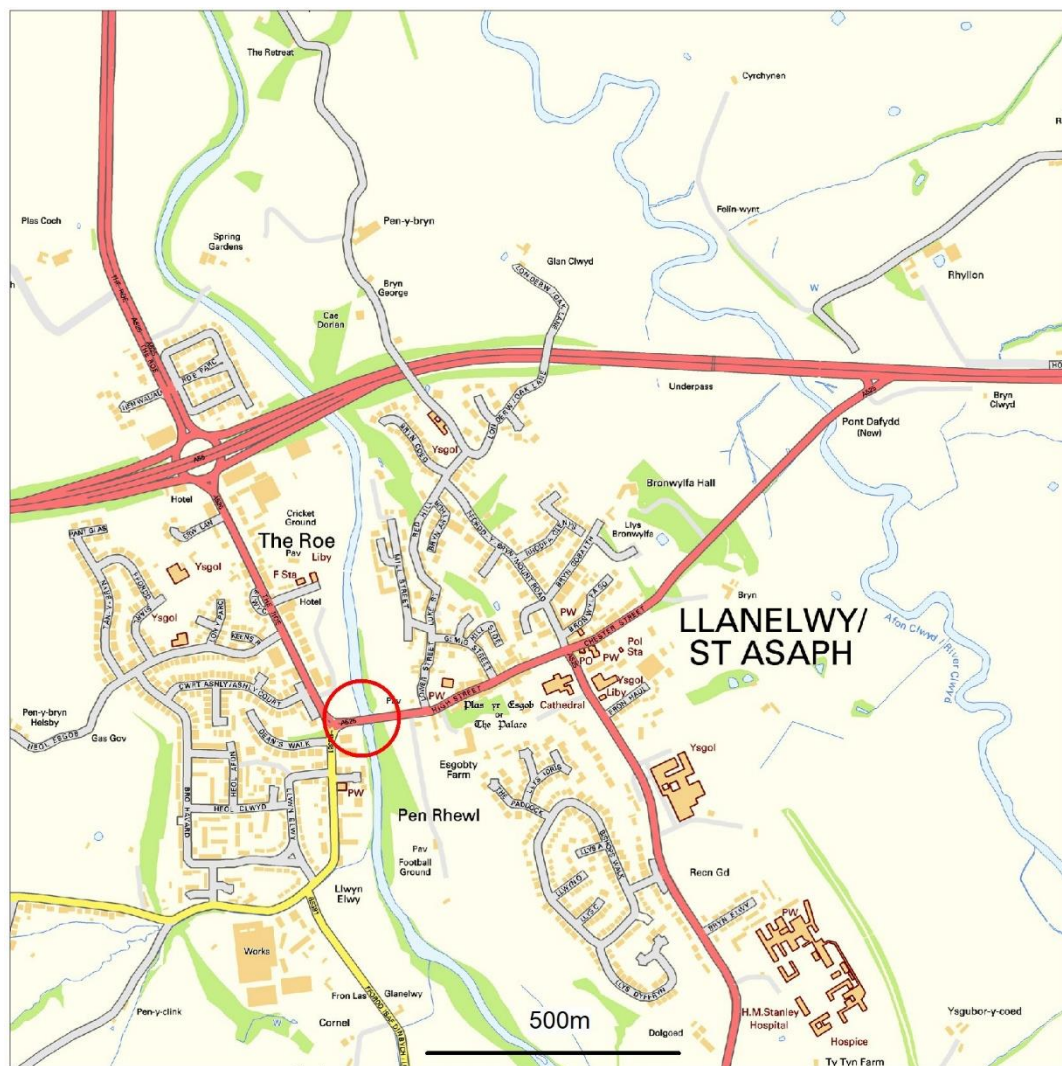
A watching brief was conducted during groundworks associated with the construction of a footpath underneath St Asaph Bridge as part of a flood alleviation scheme.

Recent flood erosion had previously revealed an area of limestone blockwork beneath the western archway of the bridge, and a programme of limited archaeological excavation was requested by Cadw to establish the significance of the structure. This revealed that the structure probably formed part of the sub-base associated with the addition of triangular buttresses on the southern face of the abutments. Despite the proximity to an important medieval town, no features or deposits of archaeological significance were encountered and any artefactual evidence recorded was of 19th- or 20th-century date.

Construction plans indicate that the proposed new footpath, which is to be elevated by up to 0.6m above the present ground levels, will have no detrimental impact upon the area of limestone blockwork, the majority of which will be covered by modern sub-base and block paving.

1 Introduction

- 1.1. In May 2017, the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was invited by Dawnus Construction Ltd to undertake a watching brief during groundworks associated with the St. Asaph Bridge, Denbighshire (Fig. 1, SJ 0351 7440). The bridge is statutorily protected as both a scheduled ancient monument (FL026) and a grade II listed building (No. 1445). The works form part of the ongoing St. Asaph Flood alleviation scheme, under the overall directive of Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru/Natural Resources Wales.



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Fig. 1 Location of St Asaph Bridge

- 1.2. In November 2016, Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru/Natural Resources Wales were granted scheduled monument consent by Cadw to install a new footpath under the westernmost arch of the St Asaph Bridge. The scheme of works was subject to the following conditions:

-
1. *that the Welsh Ministers shall be given adequate notice, in writing email is acceptable, of the date of the commencement of the work or of any subsequent adjustment to this date, to allow our representatives to monitor on site activity;*
 2. *that access to the site shall be afforded to our representatives;*
 3. *that the proposed scheme is that set out in the application. The Welsh Ministers shall give written approval in advance (e mail notification is acceptable) of any adjustments or modifications to this scheme;*
 4. *that any excavation works within the scheduled area shall be covered by an archaeological watching brief to be undertaken by a suitably qualified and experienced archaeological contractor; this is to be incorporated into a broader programme of archaeological recording specified by the local authority for the elements of the scheme that fall outside of the scheduled area;*
 5. *that the archaeological contractor shall be afforded sufficient time to record and deposits or features exposed during groundworks;*
 6. *that in the event that any unexpected archaeological remains are encountered during groundworks within the scheduled area all works shall cease and the Welsh Ministers be contacted immediately. The archaeologist undertaking the watching brief shall use their discretion in this instance;*
 7. *that digital copies of the resultant report shall be supplied to:*
 - *The Welsh Ministers (Cadw) (will.davies@wales.gsi.gov.uk)*
 - *The regional Historic Environment Record at the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (HER@CPAT.ORG.UK)*
 - *The National Monuments Record at the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales. These should conform to the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales digital archive standard Gareth.Edwards@rcahmw.gov.uk;*
 8. *that we shall be given written notice (e mail notification is acceptable) on the completion of works;*
 9. *that the site shall be left in a stable and tidy condition; and*
 10. *that we shall be informed of any subsequent deterioration of the site.*
- 1.3. Prior to the construction of the new footpath, Cadw's Regional Inspector of Ancient Monuments reported that recent flood water erosion had exposed a number of irregular limestone blocks in situ beneath the western archway. The stonework, which was adjacent to and potentially within the line of the proposed groundworks, appeared to be of archaeological significance. Cadw therefore determined that, as part of the ongoing watching brief, the area should be hand cleaned and recorded according to the normal principles of stratigraphic excavation and a photographic record maintained throughout.

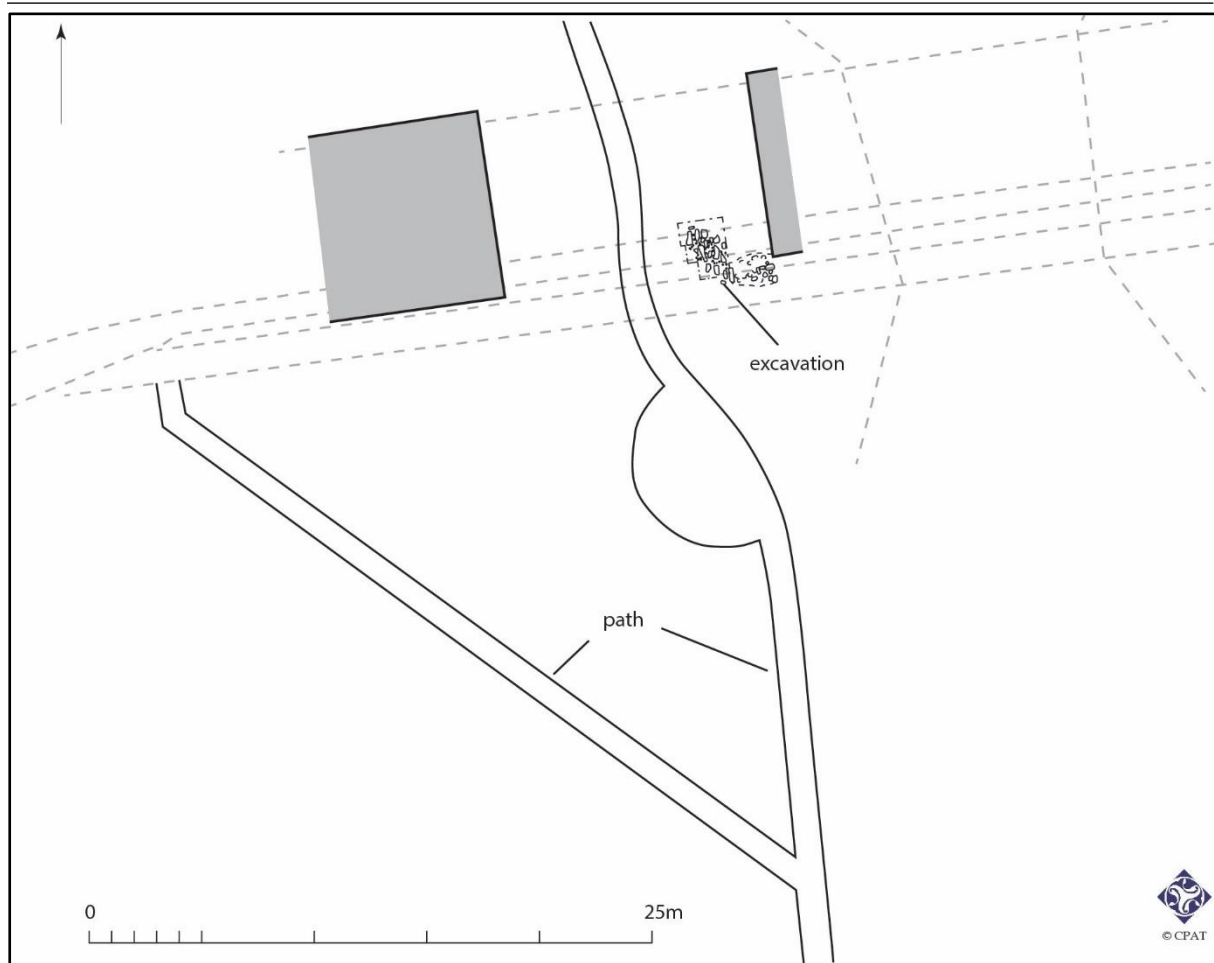


Fig. 2 Location of the archaeological investigations

2 Watching brief

- 2.1. The watching brief was conducted on 12 January 2018 in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CIfA) *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014).
- 2.2. An area approximately 3.4m by 5m, located east of the line of the proposed footpath, was hand cleaned revealing a number of roughly-hewn limestone blocks (5) set on edge, generally orientated north-north-west to south-south-east (see Figs 3 and 5). The gaps between the blocks had been infilled with river-rounded cobbles set in a pinkish limestone mortar (4). The blockwork extended eastwards forming part of a foundation sub-base (6) associated with a plinth and buttress attached to the bridge abutment. The mortar-bonded deposit (4), which probably extended beyond the excavated area northwards and westwards, remains undated.
- 2.3. The whole area was sealed by an alluvial deposit of fine river silt (3) containing 19th- and 20th-century artefacts. This was covered by a compacted deposit of pea gravels and mortar (2), sealed by a layer of modern limestone chippings (1).

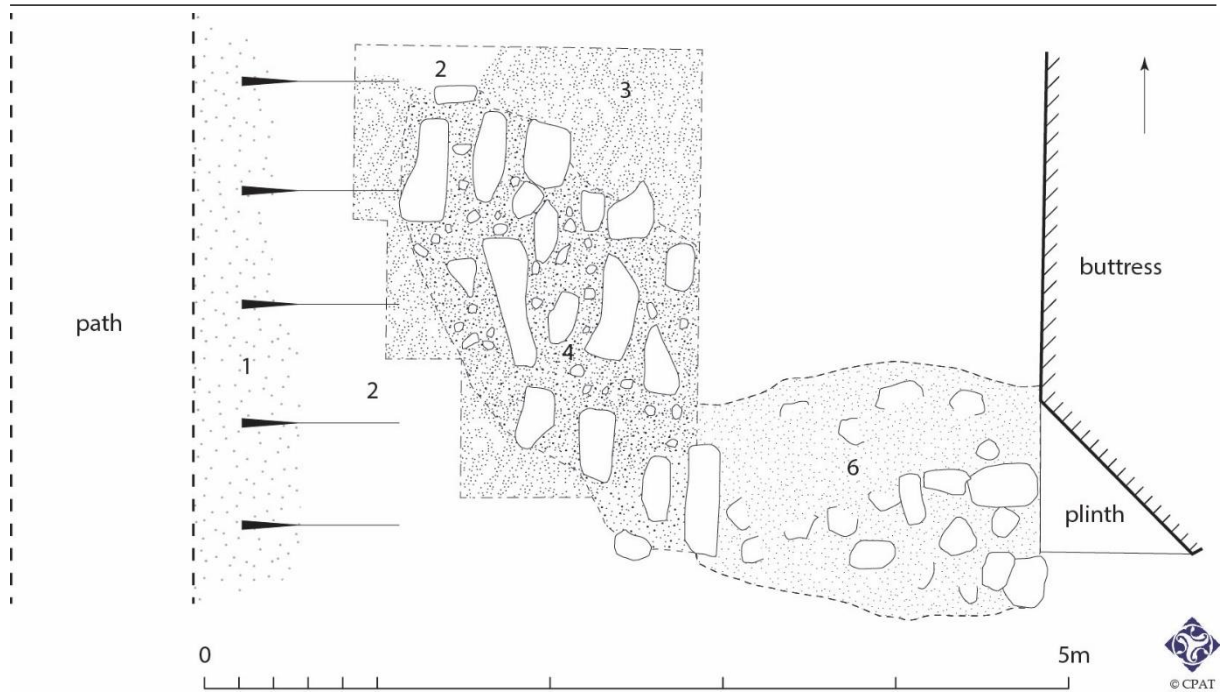


Fig. 3 Plan of the excavated area



Fig. 4 Limestone blocks (5) and mortar bond (4). Viewed from the south. Photo CPAT 4443-0010



Fig. 5 Area of excavation viewed from the north-west. Photo CPAT 4443-0004

3 Conclusions

- 3.1. St Asaph Bridge was built in the late 17th century, replacing an earlier bridge located approximately 375m downstream, which is depicted on a plan of the town by John Speed, dated c.1611. The bridge was constructed primarily using red sandstone for the archways and the upper coursework finished in limestone. Sometime after the initial construction triangular buttresses, constructed from dressed limestone, were added to the bridge abutments on the upstream (southern) face. The results from the archaeological works demonstrated that the deposit of limestone blocks probably formed part of the sub-base associated with this latter phase of bridge construction and were designed to reduce water erosion at the base of the abutment. Any artefactual evidence, especially from the overlying silt (3) was consistently of late 19th-century date.
- 3.2. The line of the new footpath is located approximately 1m to the west of the excavated area. Proposed construction plans indicate that the path is to be elevated by up to 0.6m above the present ground levels. The general area will be block paved, this set onto a sub-base that will cover and protect the exposed limestone blocking (5) in situ.

4 Acknowledgments

- 4.1. The writer would like to thank the following for their assistance during the project: Nigel Jones, CPAT, Morgan Lloyd, Dawnus Construction Limited and Will Davies, Cadw.

5 References

Grant, I., 2016. *St Asaph Flood Alleviation Scheme: Archaeological Watching Brief*. Unpublished report. CPAT Report No. 1414.

Pannet, A., 2014. *St Asaph Flood Alleviation Scheme: Archaeological desk-based assessment*. Unpublished report. Archaeology Wales Report No. 1289

Cartographic sources

c.1611 Plan of St Asaph by John Speed

6 Archive deposition Statement

- 6.1. The project archive has been prepared according to the CPAT Archive Policy and in line with the Cifa *Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives guidance* (2014). The digital archive only will be deposited with the Historic Environment Record, Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust and the paper/drawn/digital archive with the National Monuments Record (RCAHMW).

Archive Summary

CPAT Event PRN: 140219

1 watching brief record form

1 A3 site drawing

11 digital images, CPAT film no. 4443