

CPAT Report No. 1687

The Cloisters, Ruthin, Denbighshire

Archaeological Watching Brief



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Client name: Tony Cain
 CPAT Project No: 2403
 Project Name: The Cloisters, Ruthin
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 County/LPA: Denbighshire
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Summary

In August 2019 the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological watching brief on behalf of Tony Cain during groundworks associated with the erection of a new dwelling on land adjacent to The Old Cloisters, School Road, Ruthin, Denbighshire.

Although existing information suggests that the development is located within the northern periphery of the historic core of Ruthin, the watching brief produced no evidence for any activity predating the 19th century.

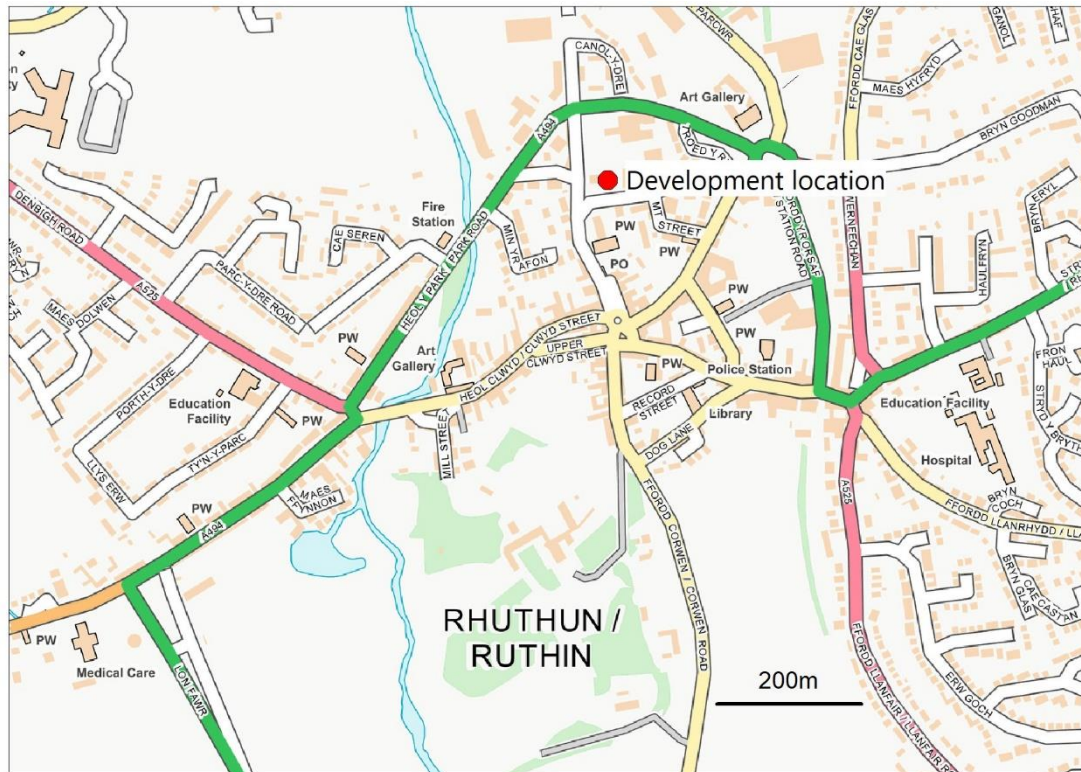
Crynodeb

Ym mis Awst 2019, bu Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Clwyd-Powys yn cynnal briff gwylio archaeolegol ar ran Tony Cain yn ystod gwaith paratoi tir yn gysylltiedig â chodi annedd newydd ar dir yn gyfagos at Yr Hen Glwystai, Ffordd yr Ysgol, Rhuthun, Sir Ddinbych.

Er bod y wybodaeth sy'n bodoli'n awgrymu bod y datblygiad o fewn perifferi gogleddol craidd hanesyddol Rhuthun, ni chynhyrchodd y briff gwylio dystiolaeth o unrhyw weithgarwch cyn y 19^{eg} ganrif.

1 Introduction

- 1.1. In August 2019 the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was engaged by Tony Cain, the landowner, to conduct an archaeological watching brief during groundworks relating to the erection of a new dwelling on the north side of School Road in Ruthin, Denbighshire (Fig. 1: NGR SJ 12364 58468). The plot was empty at the time of the watching brief, though it lies on the opposite side of School Lane to Ruthin School, which was refounded in 1574, before being rebuilt in about 1700 and partly again in the 19th century. The immediate locality has been identified as potentially lying within the historic core of the town.



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Fig. 1: Location of the development

- 1.2. Ruthin lies towards the southern end of the Vale of Clwyd, some 8km south-east of Denbigh, the county town. The historic core of the town occupies a low ridge to the east of the river Clwyd; the castle lies to the south and the church of St Peter lies within the north part of the historic core.
- 1.3. Planning permission for the development (Application number 02/2018/1199/PF) was granted by Denbighshire Council in March 2019, with the following condition.

No development or site clearance shall commence until the Local Planning Authority have been informed in writing of the name of a professionally qualified archaeologist who is present during the undertaking of any excavations in the development area so that a watching brief can be conducted. No work shall commence until the Local Planning Authority has confirmed in writing that the proposed archaeologist is suitable. A copy of the watching brief shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority and the Historic Environment Officer, Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust for inclusion in the regional

Historic Environment Record within 2 months of the archaeological fieldwork being completed.

Reason

In the interest of preservation of archaeological remains.

- 1.4. The work was initially granted to Aeon Archaeology, who submitted a written scheme of investigation (WSI) for the work, which was approved by Mark Walters, the Development Control Archaeologist dealing with the matter on behalf of the council. Subsequent events led to the delay of commencement of groundworks, whereby it became no longer possible for Aeon Archaeology to conduct the watching brief, at which point CPAT were engaged to replace them. The original WSI for the work was used, with the permission of Aeon Archaeology.



Fig. 2: The Development area from School Lane. CPAT 4680-0001

2 Historical Background

- 2.1. This section provides a brief summary of the archaeology and history of the study area and its immediate surroundings, to enable the findings of the work to be placed in a wider context. It is the medieval and later history of Ruthin that is significant in regard to the development location and this is what is recounted below, based on CPAT's study of the historic settlement, carried out in 2014.
- 2.2. Prior to the Edwardian Conquest in the second half of the 13th century, Ruthin is believed to have been a 'maerdref', the administrative centre of the commote of Dyffryn Clwyd; and a Welsh settlement of some size could have developed in the area of modern Well Street, formerly 'Welsh Street'. However this is speculative rather than substantiated. It is possible that a Welsh stronghold or llys, 'the Red Fort', existed beneath or close to the later castle, but this is not confirmed. It has been argued that the boundaries of the borough at Ruthin suggest

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- that it was cut out of the parish of Llanrhydd, which would imply that there was no early church here.
- 2.3. Dyffryn Clwyd was disputed by both the English and Welsh in the mid-13th century, but the area came under Edward I's control in 1277 and the construction of Ruthin Castle commenced immediately. The town was returned to David, brother of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, soon afterwards, but after the abortive Welsh uprising in 1282, Dyffryn Clwyd was bestowed on Reginald de Grey who continued the castle building programme and also commenced laying out a town which probably integrated the existing Welsh tref. Ruthin Castle became the 'caput' of a lordship extending over three commotes. A charter granted privileges to the newly established borough in 1282 or soon after, and in the words of Professor Ian Jack this 'reflected the prosperity of the town under the Welsh princes and the relatively peaceful transition into a marcher borough, where despite the initial number of English immigrants, a genuinely Anglo-Welsh community was created'.
 - 2.4. St Peter's church was founded as a chapel in 1282 or thereabouts, and subsequently rebuilt in 1310 as a collegiate church with seven priests. With the castle and the market place it represented one of the three focal points of the town. By 1324 there were 70 burgesses controlling 100 burgages, one third of them Welsh and concentrated mainly in the Well Street area. A weekly market and thrice-yearly fairs centred on the market place which was established properly in 1295-6. Ruthin was sacked by Glyndŵr in 1400 and again perhaps in 1402, and it was as a result of these attacks that town defences were added, a murage grant being recorded in 1407. This led to the construction of a ditch around the town, which is referred to obliquely in at least one 15th-century town record.
 - 2.5. The town recovered quickly and became the centre of an important cloth industry leading in the late medieval era (c.1447) to the formation of a guild of fullers and weavers. Shoemakers established a second craft-guild, late in the 15th century. The built-up area expanded westwards across the Clwyd towards Llanfwrog. By 1496 90 burgesses holding 209 burgages were recorded, suggesting to Ian Soulsby the emergence of an urban aristocracy, a non-uncommon situation in developing medieval boroughs.
 - 2.6. Henry VII purchased the lordship of Ruthin in 1508 and in the same year he granted a charter to the borough confirming market rights and other privileges. But the 16th century saw the rise of Shrewsbury as a cloth centre and the consequent decline of Ruthin. It was of little interest to John Leland travelling the country in the 1530s, but to William Camden at the end of the century it was 'the greatest market town in all the Vale, full of inhabitants and well replenished with buildings'. During the Civil War it was besieged in 1644 and again in 1646 by Parliamentary forces, and when it finally fell the castle was razed. From 1536 Ruthin functioned as one of the county towns of Denbighshire. Quarter Sessions and Great Sessions courts were held in the town, and in 1775 the county gaol was built there. We may suspect gradual rather than spectacular growth. Sir Richard Colt Hoare in 1801 found a 'town built on a hill and its declivities, chiefly of brick. The many porticos and penthouses give it an ancient and rather a picturesque appearance...The new Town Hall, erected in 1785, is a handsome and commodious building...Though there are considerable remains of the castle the ruins are by no means picturesque'.
 - 2.7. The 1839 Tithe map (Fig. 3) does not identify any divisions within the town but probably shows that the northern end of the Development Area was the town boundary at the time. When the first large scale Ordnance Survey map was produced in 1875 (Fig. 4), the Development Area

was occupied by what appears to have been a garden with a series of paths running both along and across it.



Fig. 3: The 1839 Tithe map, with the approximate location of the Development Area marked in blue

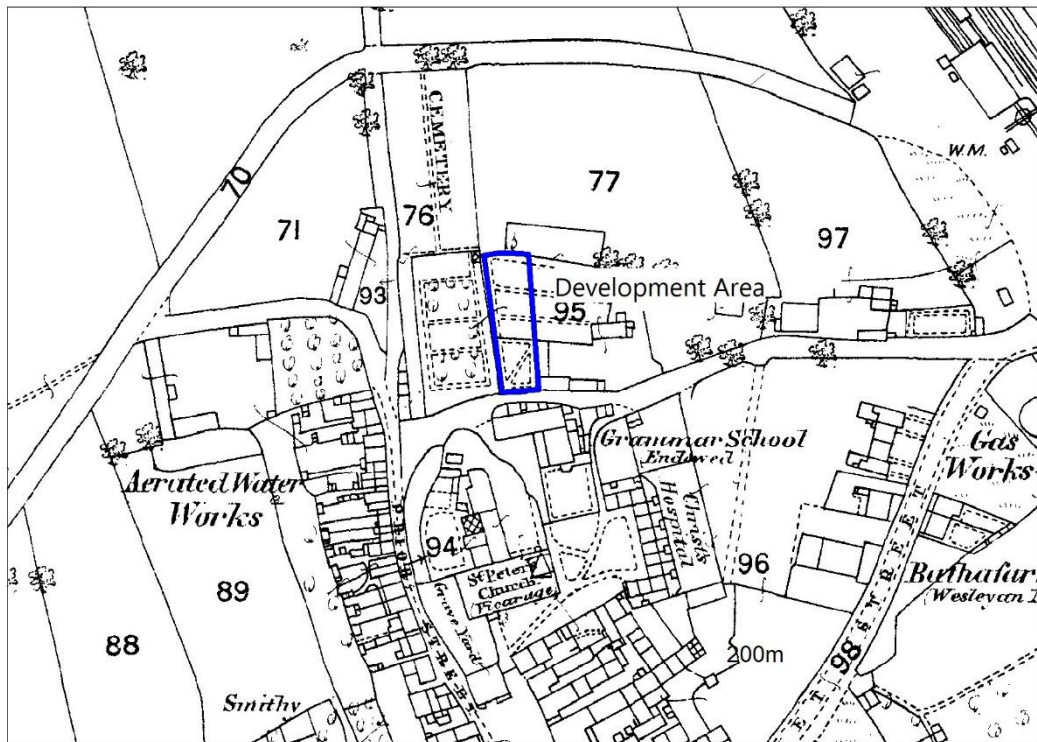


Fig. 4: The Development Area (in blue) in relation to the 1875 Ordnance Survey map

3 Watching Brief

- 3.1. The watching brief was conducted on 12 August 2019 in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (Cifa) (2014) *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief*.
- 3.2. A phase of ground clearance had been conducted in advance of the excavation of foundations without archaeological supervision. The impact of this work could not be conclusively determined, but it seemed that a general layer of surface soil had been removed, perhaps up to 0.3m in thickness; it did not appear that significant archaeological deposits had been impacted. Some stone walling (see Fig 6) had also been removed, which had formed a wall running east/west across the plot that was visible on the late 19th-century Ordnance Survey mapping (Fig. 4). Examination of the resulting pile of limestone rubble suggested that this was probably of 19th-century date.
- 3.3. At the rear (north) end of the plot, the ground was raised into a bank running east/west overall, though with a slight curve. This was approximately 3-4m wide and 1.0m high in relation to the ground to both north and south, but it was not possible to examine the ground outside the Development Area to assess the possibility of there being an associated ditch. It seems most likely that this was the boundary of the town as depicted on the Tithe map (Fig. 3). The crest of the bank was capped by a stone feature measuring 1.8m in width (north/south) which extended across the full width of the plot. There has apparently been some local speculation that this might have been the base of a wall, but it was clearly not the case as the feature was only a single thickness of stone high (0.15m) and its surface was level so could not have been the result of stone robbing. A path seems to be the most likely explanation for the feature, probably one of those depicted on the 1875 Ordnance Survey map (Fig 4).



Fig. 5: The stone feature on the crest of the bank forming the north end of the Development Area, from south. CPAT 4680-0006

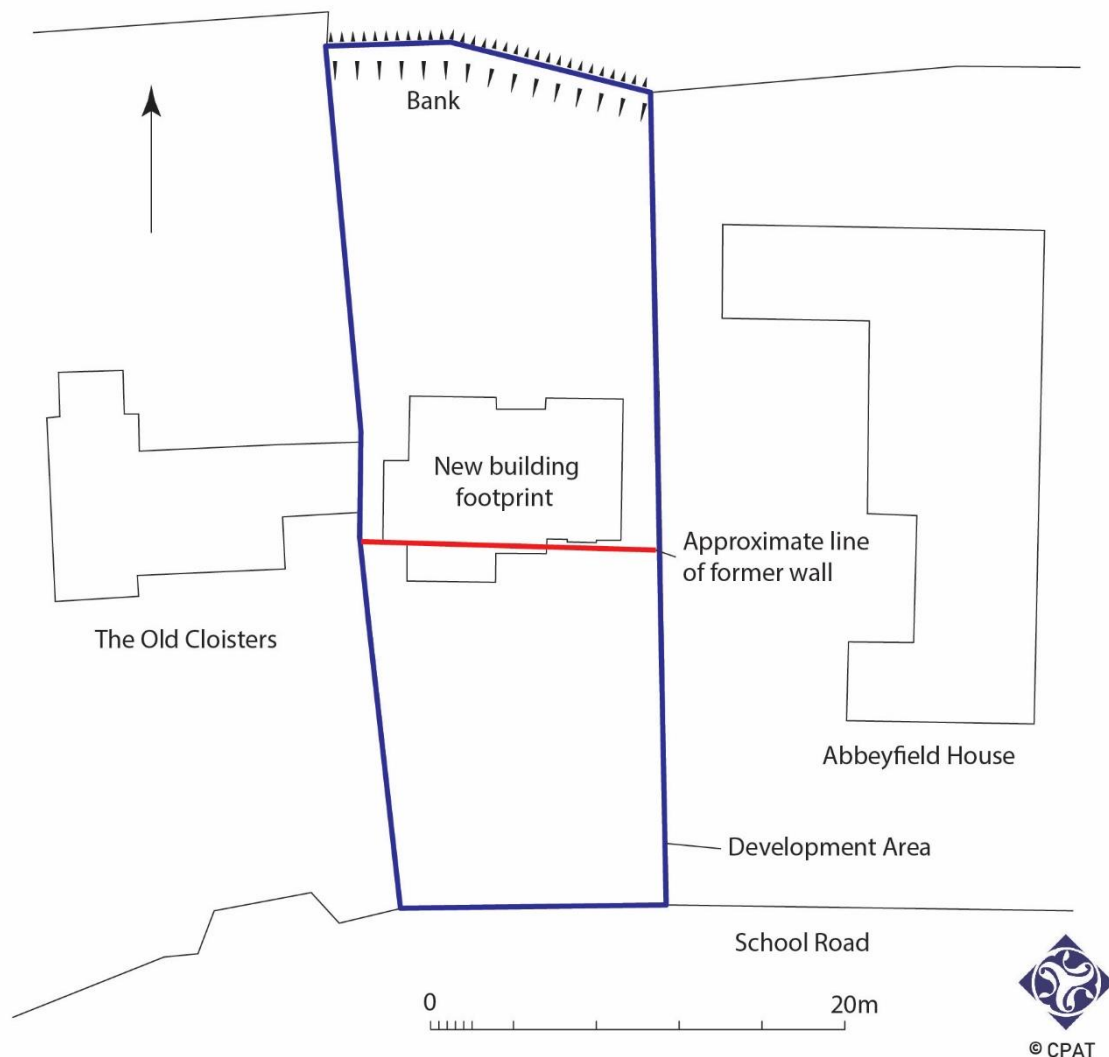


Fig. 6: The Development Area showing the footprint of the new dwelling and other features

- 3.4. The excavation of the foundations for the new dwelling was observed throughout and involved machine excavation of trenches varying from 0.45m to 0.9m in width and averaging 0.8m in depth. The upper soil layers comprised dark grey silt and an underlying grey-brown silt, collectively up to 0.3m in thickness, all of which appeared to be of 19th-century or later date to judge from the included material; no finds of medieval or early post-medieval date were seen. Beneath these soils was a reddish boulder clay of natural origin.
- 3.5. Apart from traces of the wall foundations (see para 3.2), only a single feature was observed in the foundation trenches. This comprised what is assumed to be a linear drain running in a north/south direction along the east side of the footprint of the new dwelling and measuring approximately 0.6m wide. Material filling the feature included bricks and 19th-century pottery, suggesting a relatively recent date.
- 3.6. On completion of the foundation trenches, the results of the work thus far were discussed with Mark Walters, the Development Control Archaeologist. It was concluded by Mr Walters that as there was no evidence that the Development Area contained any traces of settlement predating the 19th century, the watching brief should be terminated at that point rather than extending it to cover the excavation of service trenches and other infrastructure.



Fig. 7: The completed foundation trenches, from north-west. CPAT 4680-0010

4 Conclusions

- 4.1. Although it has been thought that this area lay within the historic core of the medieval town and the Tithe map points to it having been part of the town in the mid-19th century, no evidence of early settlement was forthcoming from the observed excavations. All of the material and features within the footprint of the new dwelling were of 19th-century or later date. This seems to be related to the fact that the plot was a garden in the late 19th century.
- 4.2. The bank forming the northern boundary of the Development Area probably identifies the boundary of the town as it is depicted on the 1839 Tithe map. Whether it also formed part of the early defences of the town which were discussed by Evans is not known and would require further investigation to ascertain. CPAT have been assured that this feature will be retained as part of the development.
- 4.3. The stone feature which caps the bank is clearly not part of a defensive wall subject to later robbing, but one of the paths depicted on the 1875 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 4).

5 Sources

Published sources

Evans, D. G., 2011. 'The medieval defences of Rhuthun', *Clwyd Historian*, 64, 34-41.

Websites

<http://sdr.lib.uiowa.edu/patentrolls/h4v3/body/Henry4vol3page0375.pdf> (1407 murage grant of Henry IV)

Cartographic sources

1839 Tithe map for Ruthin Parish

1875 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 1st edition Denbighshire 19.7

1900 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 2nd edition Denbighshire 19.7

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 archive is entirely digital and will be deposited jointly with the Historic Environment Record, Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust and the National Monuments Record (RCAHMW). No artefacts were recovered.

Archive summary

CPAT Event PRN: 140310

13 digital photographs, CPAT film no 4680

1 watching brief daily record form