

CPAT Report No 1170

Domen Gastell Motte and Bailey, Welshpool

Archaeological Evaluation



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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Archaeological Evaluation

I Grant

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Report for Powys County Council

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust

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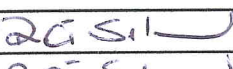
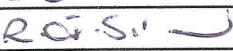
cover: aerial view of Domen Gastell Motte and Bailey. Photo CPAT 03-c-0452

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust was invited in August 2012 by Mr Simon Kendrick, on behalf of Powys County Council, to undertake an archaeological evaluation on land adjacent to Domen Gastell motte in Welshpool, in connection with proposals which form part of a wider environmental enhancement scheme linked to the regeneration of the town. The planned refurbishment will provide public access to the two adjacent scheduled ancient monuments (SAM Mg019 and Mg254) with an area for parking, information boards, associated services and landscaping on an area adjacent to the motte and the bowling green which occupies its bailey. The evaluation was requested by the Curatorial Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, acting as archaeological advisors to Powys County Council, and a brief was produced detailing the nature of the works required (EVB 802).
- 1.2 The development site is located in a triangle of land between the A483T Welshpool By-Pass and the Smithfield Road, on the outskirts of Welshpool town centre (SJ 2298 0738). The site is currently occupied by a disused gym, boundary wall, gated access to the north and a perimeter of trees.
- 1.3 The solid geology of the area consists mainly of undivided Ludlow and Wenlock Series siltstones and mudstones belonging to the Silurian period, though there is some local faulting which has exposed Caradoc Series siltstones and mudstones of the Ordovician period (1994 British Geological Survey map). The soils of the area generally comprise fine silty and loamy soils belonging to the Denbigh 1 Association (1983 Soil Survey of England and Wales map).



Fig. 1 Aerial view of Domen Gastell Motte from the south. Photo CPAT 03-c-0452

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prehistoric period

- 2.1 The earliest evidence for human activity in the area is evidenced by tools and debitage found during excavations on the site of the Tesco supermarket which reveal stone tool manufacture during the Mesolithic period. The scatter of chert and flint was found lying within a natural alluvial deposit. This small scatter probably reflects a single phase of activity and may represent a temporary and short-lived camp, where tool preparation and maintenance as well as other domestic processing tasks were undertaken.
- 2.2 The Tesco excavations also revealed that the area had been occupied during the Iron Age. At least two phases of a field system were identified, together with hints of associated structures, although without identifying any building plans (Jones forthcoming). Radiocarbon dates indicate activity between 390-50 cal. BC.

Romano-British period

- 2.3 The archaeological interest in the area around Welshpool Smithfield stems from the discovery of an important and unusual collection of Roman metalwork and other objects in 1959. The Roman finds were published in detail by George Boon (1961) and readers are directed to this source for a full description of the items. A small-scale excavation was conducted in July 1960 in the anticipation that more could be found out about regarding the context of the finds. Further excavations were undertaken by CPAT in 2010 in advance of the construction of the new Tesco supermarket and although further, limited evidence was forthcoming for Roman activity in the area it was not possible to elucidate further the nature of the previous discoveries. However, a subsequent review of the 1959 finds and their context has suggested that the objects may have been deposited between AD 120 and 150 and it is now thought that they may have been associated either with an unidentified burial, or perhaps a cenotaph (Jones forthcoming).

Early medieval period

- 2.4 Welshpool is said to have been the site of churches founded by St Cynfelyn and his brother Llywelyn in the 6th century AD; the foundation of the latter has since been associated, at least traditionally, with the 'Old Church' which is known formerly to have stood on the east side of Mill Lane, immediately to the south of Salop Road. The most recent church on the site was erected in 1587 but was destroyed by fire in 1659, though some of its masonry remains were still visible until the 19th century (Soulsby 1983, 265). Part of its associated graveyard was identified during rescue excavations by CPAT in 1986-7, when seventeen burials were located. Radiocarbon dates suggested that they belonged to the 13-14th century (Blockley 1987, 24-6). Further work in 1997 revealed the possible position of Capel Llewelyn (PRN 4438) in a garden to the rear of 37 Salop Road. It may be then that the line of Mill Lane broadly followed the western boundary of the graveyard (PRN 16386).

Medieval period

- 2.5 Domen Gastell, a scheduled motte and bailey castle (SAM Mg019), may have been constructed as early as 1111, although the earliest possible documentary reference to it dates from 1196 (Silvester 1992, 167). There has been some suggestion that a settlement developed around the castle, but no firm evidence has yet been found to substantiate this hypothesis. The site comprises a motte up to 6.1m high with an adjoining embanked oval bailey with a levelled interior now used as a bowling green. This is possibly the castle referred to in the Welsh chronicles relating to 1196. In this year a castle in the township of Trallwng Llywelyn was attacked and besieged.
- 2.6 The present town of Welshpool resulted from a deliberate policy by Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn, Prince of Powys, to establish a new borough. As such, this was a planned town which owed little to any existing settlement (Soulsby 1983, 266). The burgesses received a foundation charter in the 1240s and a market was recorded there in 1252 (Silvester 1992, 167). The new town adopted a basically linear plan, centred on High Street and Broad Street, with some development also along Church Street, Berriew Street and Severn Street. Interestingly, the

parish church of St Mary's, which was refounded around 1250, lies further to the east, away from the centre of the town and in an area recorded by Humphrey Bleaze on his map of 1629 as 'Welshe town' (Silvester 2008). While this, the earliest map of Welshpool, does not show the area of the Smithfield development, it is clear that the location is within the general area of 'Welshe town', and it is conceivable that Mill Lane was part of an early Welsh settlement which grew up between the motte and bailey castle and Capel Llewelyn.

Post-medieval and modern period

- 2.7 A mapped survey of the Manor of Leighton, including parts of Welshpool, in 1663, shows Mill Lane and depicts the area later occupied by the Smithfield on the south side of the road as fields. Named as 'maes', this had become an area of open fields which would have originated in the medieval era. Interestingly, it does not indicate any buildings along Mill Lane. Almost a century later a survey of the Estate of Mrs Victoria Lloyd, surveyed by John Rocque in 1747, shows Mill Lane and Salop Road; again there are no indications of any buildings on the street frontage, though this could be because the area then was under different ownership and was thus not mapped in any detail.
- 2.8 The 1840 Tithe Survey for Pool parish, Lower Division, Trefnant Fechan, Town etc. depicts the area later occupied by the Smithfield, showing it as a series of fields. The Lledan Brook is shown crossing the area, and alongside it there is a small building. To the east is Domen Mill, with its feeder leat (or artificial feeder channel) running from the canal-side weir. This was also shown on Bleaze's map in the early 17th century, but is depicted in greater detail on a plan of 1854 (Fig. 2) which was produced for the Central Board of Health, possibly by the Ordnance Survey, following a cholera outbreak in 1848. This shows the mill with a linear mill pond and a bypass leat which crosses what later became Smithfield Road before turning south to feed a pond at the base of the motte. The mill itself is shown with a wheel on the southern side. The plan also shows the motte with a series of concentric paths and some steps leading to the summit, which is crowned by a circular structure, possibly a gazebo. The bowling green and pavilion are also shown, along with three adjacent circular features.

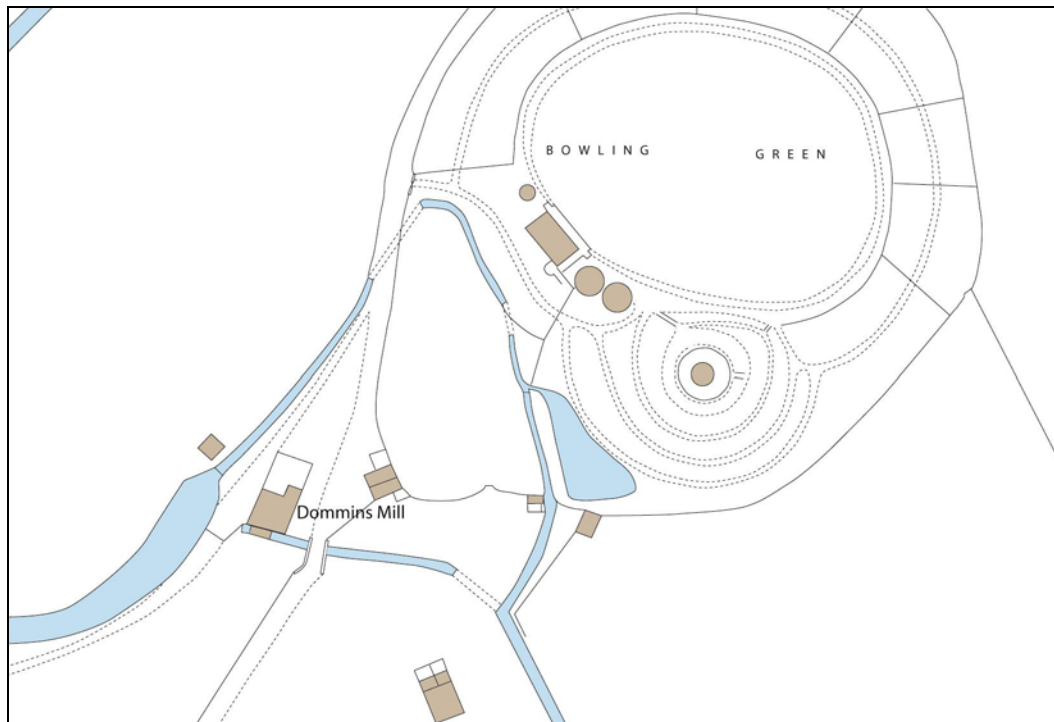


Fig. 2 Domen Gastell and Domen (Dommins) Mill, redrawn from a plan of 1854 held by Welshpool Town Council

- 2.9 The Smithfield opened in late 1863 (Brown 1997) and it is depicted on the large-scale Ordnance Survey (1:500) town map of Welshpool in 1885 (Fig. 3).

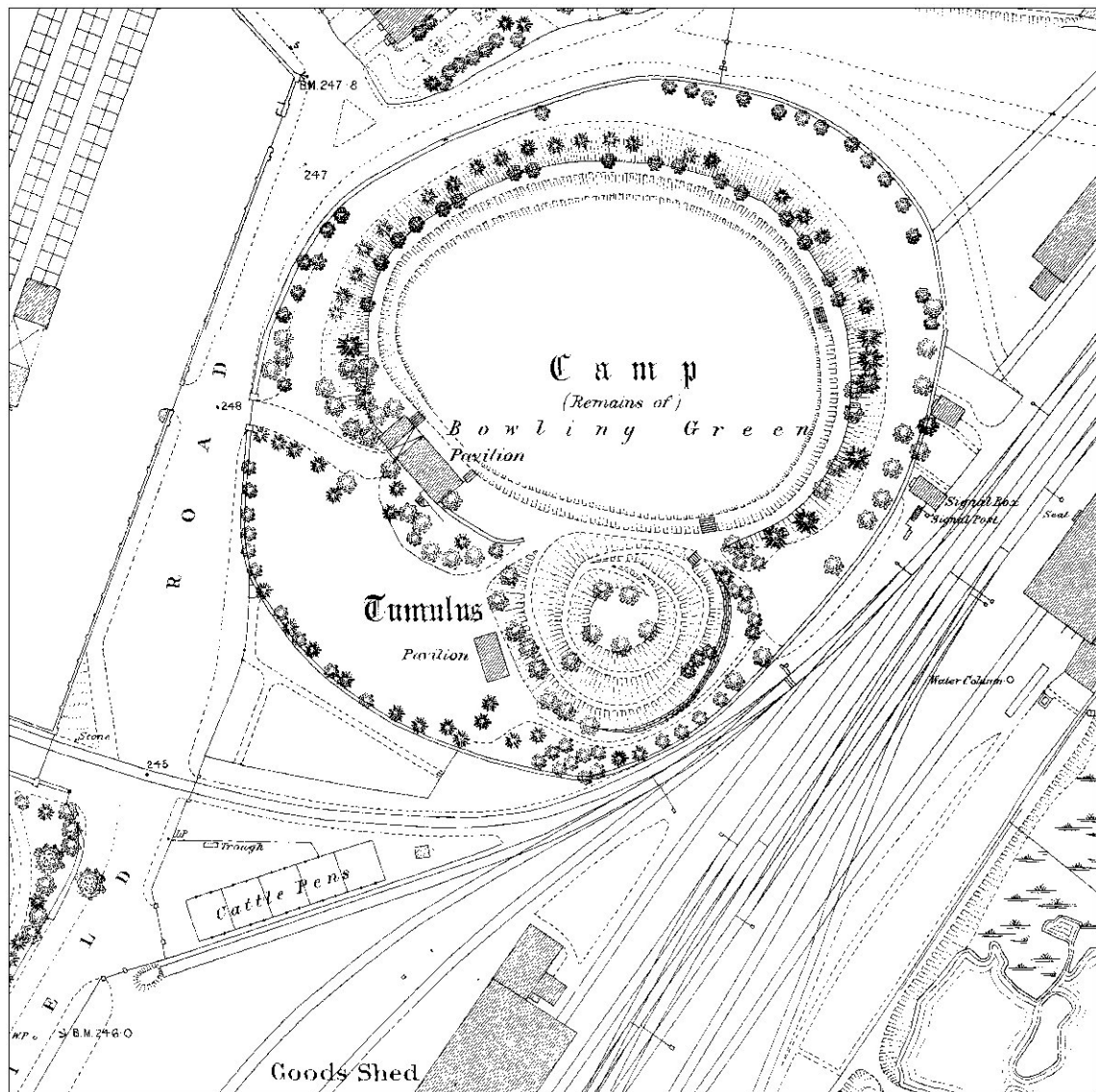


Fig. 3 Extract from the 1st edition 1:500 town plan of Welshpool, 1885

- 2.10 The area to the south of the motte is occupied by the Welshpool Railway Transfer Dock which was constructed in 1903 at the terminus of the Welshpool and Llanfair Light Railway. The site, which is a scheduled ancient monument (SAM Mg 254), comprises a triangular island platform of stone, brick and concrete, a single-storey, brick-built office, and two rows of cattle pens with iron fencing. This is possibly the last surviving example of a narrow gauge transfer dock in Britain.

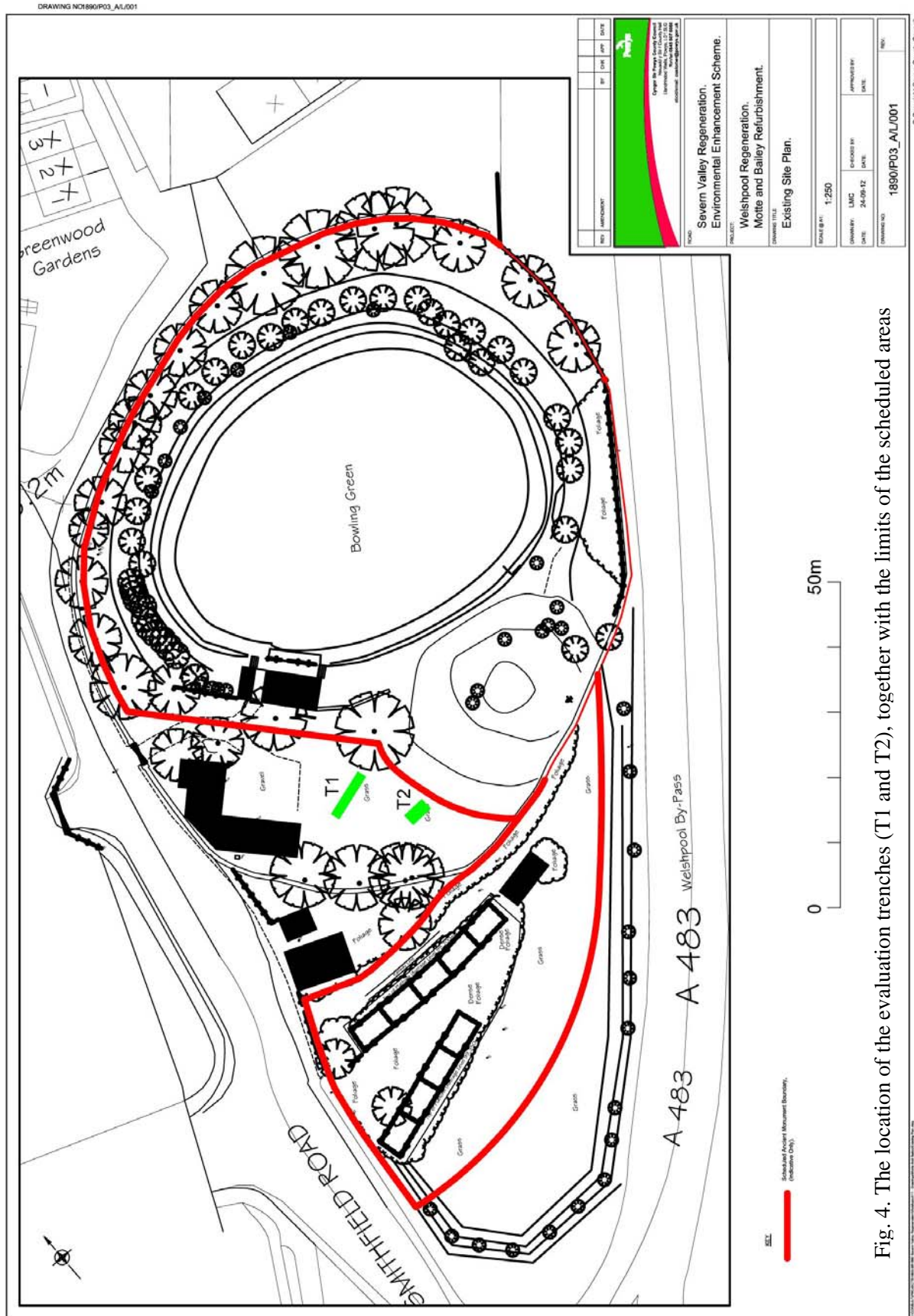


Fig. 4. The location of the evaluation trenches (T1 and T2), together with the limits of the scheduled areas

3 EVALUATION

- 3.1 The evaluation, conducted between the 10-11 September 2012, consisted of two trenches (Fig. 4, T1 and T2). Owing to the presence of existing buildings within the north-western and northern part of the development area the trench layout, which had been agreed in advance with the curator, was restricted to an area of rough grass wasteland adjacent and to the south-west of the scheduled motte. Within the proposed outline development plan this area has been designated as a car park.
- 3.2 In both of the trenches the modern overburden was removed by machine under close archaeological supervision down to the surface of the first recognisable archaeological horizon. Thereafter all excavation was undertaken by hand. The evaluation was essentially non-destructive and was designed to determine the depth at which archaeologically sensitive deposits survived, together with as much information as possible about their nature, condition and significance. During the excavation a written, drawn and photographic record was maintained, a summary of which is provided in Appendix 1. The numbers in brackets in the following text refer to individual context records that form part of the site archive. This will be deposited with the regional Historic Environment Record in Welshpool.

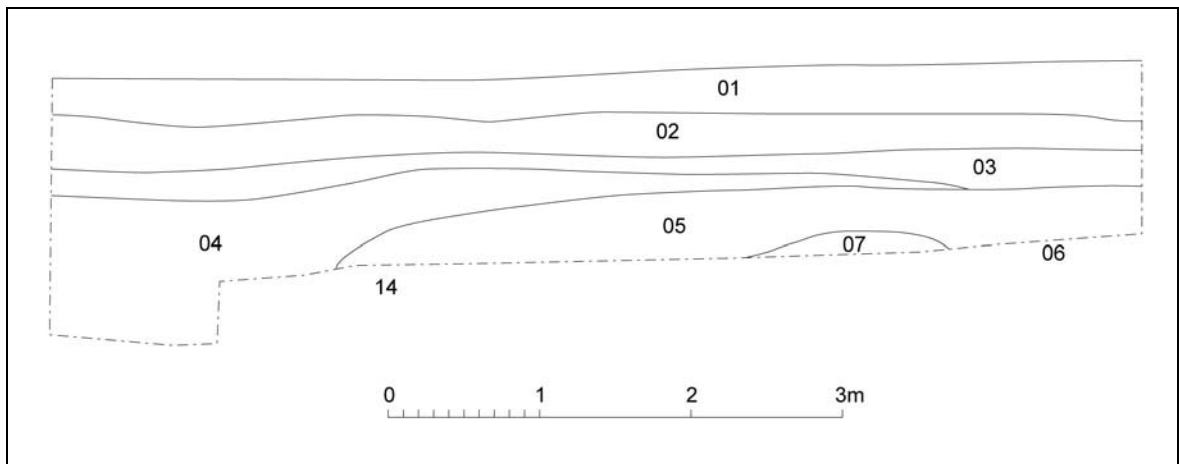


Fig. 5 South-west-facing section of Trench 1

Trench 1 (Figs 5-6)

- 3.3 Trench 1, measuring 7.5m by 1.2m and aligned north-east to south-west, was located approximately 10m south of the bowling green pavilion and excavated to a maximum depth of 1.2m. A series of deposits were identified in the base of the trench which are likely to represent the upper fills within the ditch surrounding the motte and bailey. The earliest deposit, a yellow-brown silty clay (07) was sealed beneath a layer of dark greyish brown silty clay (05) which contained a small amount of animal bone, several clay pipe stems and late 18th-century pottery. At the south-eastern end of the trench layer 07 was sealed beneath a deposit of dark brown silty clay (06), the nature of which seemed to indicate the present of a large feature extending beyond the limits of excavation.



Fig. 5 Trench 1 viewed from the south. Photo CPAT 3484-0005

- 3.4 At the north-western end of the trench deposit 05 had been truncated by a large linear feature (14), orientated north-east to south-west, which extended beyond the limits of the excavation. A 0.9m-deep sondage was excavated by machine through the upper fill (04), a mid orange brown silty clay, but failed to identify the base of the feature, which lay beyond safe working limits. Comparison with the 1854 plan of Welshpool (Fig. 2) suggests that this is likely to be part of the bypass leat associated with Domen Mill.
- 3.5 At some point during the 20th century the site appears to have been subjected to deliberate levelling revealed by two very firm and compacted deposits of imported material (03 and 02) with a combined thickness of 0.5m. These deposits were sealed by a 0.3m-thick deposit of dark brownish grey, clayey silt topsoil.

Trench 2 (Fig. 7-8)

- 3.6 Trench 2, measuring 3.5m by 3m and aligned east to west, was located 8m south-east of Trench 1, and was excavated to a maximum safe working depth of 1.3m. A sequence of deposits were observed dating from the early 18th to the 20th centuries. The basal deposit (13), a greyish silty clay containing shale and mudstone, was sealed by a 0.44m-thick layer of pale yellow silty clay (12) which had the appearance of having been deliberately dumped. This in turn was sealed by a layer of dark grey silty clay (11), 0.18m thick, which may be the same as deposit (05) recorded in Trench 1. Pottery recovered from both deposits suggests deposition during the 18th century, pre-dating the construction of the bowling green and its associated pavilion.
- 3.7 The latest activity appears to have been an episode of deliberate levelling with the deposition of two very firm, compacted deposits (10 and 09) with a combined thickness of up to 0.74m, which were similar to deposits 02 and 03 in Trench 1. Also as in Trench 1, these were sealed by a 0.12m deposit of dark brownish grey clayey silt topsoil.

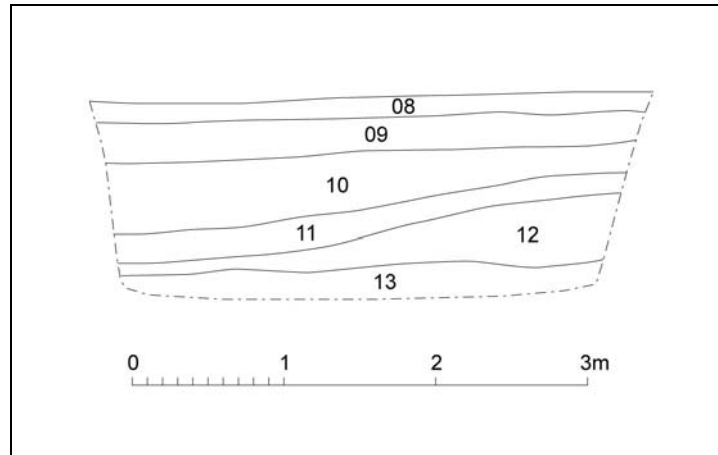


Fig. 7 South-west-facing section of trench 2



Fig. 8 Trench 2 viewed from the south. Photo CPAT 3518-0005

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The evaluation identified archaeological deposits in both trenches which extended to depths in excess of 1.2m. In Trench 1 it is likely that some of the deposits represent later infilling in the top of the ditch which would have surrounded Domen Gastell motte and bailey, although the restricted scale of the evaluation prevented any certainty on this interpretation. What is perhaps more certain is that a linear feature at the north-western end of the trench corresponds with the position of a bypass leat associated with Domen Mill, which is depicted on a plan of the town in 1854 (Fig. 2). The leat is shown feeding a pond at the base of the motte in the approximate position of Trench 2, so that deposits identified at the lowest level in the trench could be fills associated with this pond.

- 4.2 Evidence from both trenches indicates that the area was subject to deliberate levelling, perhaps by the beginning of the 20th century. The uniform nature of the levelling material, which was devoid of dateable finds, suggests that this was either imported onto the site, or could possibly have been derived from the medieval earthworks of the motte and bailey, perhaps at the time of the construction of the Welshpool and Llanfair Light Railway.
- 4.3 The evaluation has demonstrated that undisturbed archaeological deposits survive within the area at a depth of around 0.8m below the present ground level, and are sealed beneath material imported onto the site during the 20th century. Any ground disturbance below this level is therefore likely to impact on potentially significant remains associated with the medieval motte and post-medieval activity relating to Domen Mill.

5 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- 5.1 The writer would like to thank the following people for their assistance during the project: Nigel Jones, Chris Martin, Bob Silvester and Sophie Watson CPAT; Tom Till of Powis Estates and Colin Benbow of Benbow Garden Services, Four Crosses, who undertook the machining.

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Cartographic sources

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- 1663 'The Mannor of Leighton with other lands and tenements in Welch Poole, Hope and Forden in the County of Montgomery', surveyed by William Fowler.
- 1747 Survey of The Estate of Mrs Victoria Lloyd in the parishes of Pool, Guilsfield and Buttington, surveyed and drawn by John Rocque, NLW M256.
- Post-1780 Powis Castle estate map, NLW Powis Castle M17-18.
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- 1840 Tithe Survey and Apportionment for Welshpool parish.
- 1854 Plan of Welshpool for the Central Board of Health
- 1885 Ordnance Survey 1:500 first edition map of Welshpool.
- 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

PROJECT ARCHIVE

Site records

14 context record forms

Context Register

Drawing Register

1 A3 site drawing

1 A4 site drawing

18 digital photographs, CPAT film 3518

Photographic register