

# *Archaeology Wales*

## **Chapel Cottage, Kemeys Inferior, Gwent**

Archaeological Watching Brief



By

Dr Iestyn Jones

Report No. 1069

Archaeology Wales Limited,  
Rhos Helyg, Cwm Belan,  
Llanidloes, Powys SY18 6QF  
Telephone: 01686 440371  
E-mail: [admin@arch-wales.co.uk](mailto:admin@arch-wales.co.uk)

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## **Chapel Cottage, Kemeys Inferior, Gwent**

### Archaeological Watching Brief

Prepared For: Darren Worthing

Edited by:

Signed:

Position:

Date:

Authorised by:

Signed:

Position:

Date:

By

Dr Iestyn Jones

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## **Summary**

*An archaeological watching brief was carried out at Chapel Cottage, Kemeys Inferior, Gwent. The foundation trenches for a new dwelling were excavated on the site where a fire damaged house had recently been demolished. The south-facing site, enjoying extensive views of the Severn Estuary, lay in an abandoned quarry near the south-west corner of a field. Bedrock lay close to the surface in a number of places which would explain the lack of archaeological material discovered during the excavation. The remains of a stone foundation wall, presumably belonging to a phase of the demolished house, together with burnt building rubble was the only material discovered.*

## **1. Introduction**

The site of Chapel Cottage lies on the northern side of Caerau Lane, Kemeys Inferior, Gwent (NGR: ST 37498 91071) at a height of approximately 140m AOD. A two storey dwelling that had been fire damaged in November 2005 was demolished in late April 2012 and, in accordance with planning an archaeological watching was carried out during the excavation of ground-works for a new two storey dwelling. The purpose of the watching brief was to record any archaeological features uncovered during the excavation of the foundation trenches.

The watching brief was carried out on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 2012, by Dr Iestyn Jones.

## **2. Historic Background**

The site of Chapel Cottage lies 430m south-west of three earthwork enclosures of Iron Age or Roman date at Pen Toppen Ash (SAM Code MM042) and 300m north of a Roman road (fig. 1). The presence of these enclosures resonates locally and the road adjacent to Chapel Cottage is named Coed-y-Caerau (Wood of the Forts) lane.

The area lies with the parish of Kemeys-Inferior, an area of upland sandstone known in the past for its quarries of paving and tile stone (Lewis 1833). The Ordnance Survey 1886 map of Monmouthshire marks the site as that of a Methodist United Chapel constructed within an Old Quarry. Two other quarries are also marked nearby. The 3m to 4m drop in level along the rocky precipice on the north of the site of Chapel Cottage is evidence of this quarrying. The name Chapel Cottage refers to its use as a Methodist Chapel in the nineteenth century.

## **3. Watching Brief Results**

The previous fire-damaged dwelling had been demolished and the ground levelled and marked out prior to the commencement of ground works and the watching brief. The scatter of brick fragments and nineteenth and twentieth century pottery sherds lying on the surface of the site was clear evidence of a history of recent domestic settlement on the site. Some of the rubble of the demolished building had been temporarily cleared to the north-west corner of the site adjacent to the track way.

A number of north to south and east to west trenches were excavated to provide footings for the new dwelling, which is to be larger than the previous (demolished) building. Sections of bonded and dry stone walls were identified, incorporated into

the quarried rock face at the northern end of the site, presumably an attempt to avoid flooding and slippage in the past (fig. 6).

**Trench 1** marked the eastern extent of the new building. It was 0.9 to 1.0m wide, 13.4m long, north to south, and ran from the rock outcrop at the north of the site towards the hedgerow forming the southern boundary at Coed y Caerau Lane (fig. 2 and 3). The depth of the trench varied as the underlying geology dictated. The northern most extent comprised shallow bedrock that had to be partially cleared in order to facilitate excavation. The remainder of the trench was approximately 1.1m deep, although a section 1.5m from the southern end was excavated to a depth of 1.7m to remove a pit containing burnt modern building material, a plastic water pipe and tree roots (figs. 3 and 4). The uppermost context of this trench in section comprised 0.45m of a grey-brown silt comprising fragments of demolition debris. Underlying this was 0.75m-0.9m of a mid-brown gritty clay which did not contain any archaeological material. This clay deposit overlay the bedrock.

**Trench 2** ran from the south-eastern end of trench 1, orientated directly east towards the western end of the site, it formed the southern most wall of the new dwelling (fig. 3). It was 14.7m long, 0.8m wide and was stepped to achieve the required depth. The eastern end was 1.1m deep, the middle section 1.3m deep, whilst the western end was 1.2m deep. The western end of this trench contained burnt timber and stone, presumably belonging to the fire damaged dwelling. A distinctive black burnt horizon, 1.5m long and 0.3m deep, was visible in the south facing section 0.4m below the prepared ground and 2m from the western end of trench 2 (fig. 3). The trench was cut into the bedrock.

**Trench 3** was 6.4 m long and ran east to west and parallel with the eastern end of trench 2. It was 0.80m wide and was 1.2-1.3m deep, and cut through the gritty clay to the surface of the bedrock. No archaeological material or features were observed within this trench.

**Trench 4** was located north of trench 3 and also ran east to west from trench 1 for a length of 15m, parallel with and 10m north of trench 2 (fig. 3). After the bedrock encountered in the west end of this trench was broken the trench was 1.1m-1.3m deep throughout its length. A 0.5m corner section of stone-wall (fig. 3) was observed in the north facing section, where the trench forms a junction with trench 6 (see below). The return was observed in trench 6. The 0.45m wide wall, comprising five courses of stone (0.06m-0.1m wide and 0.15m-0.2m long) was 0.4m deep and bonded by white/yellow lime mortar (see fig. 5). The base rested on flatter stones 0.4m below the prepared ground level. No further foundation levels were observed below this level. The fact that this wall was so near the current ground surface suggests that they must be associated with a phase of the previous house.

**Trench 5** was 7.2m long, located at the northern end of the new house, close to the rock face. Its eastern end had to be cut through the bedrock. West of the bedrock the softer gritty clay soil demanded a deeper cut in order to provide solid ground for the footings. The depth therefore varied between 1.3 and 1.7m. No archaeological features or materials were observed within this trench.

**Trench 6** which ran parallel with trench 1 (fig. 3), was 13.5m long, 1.1m deep, 0.8-0.9m wide and extended north to south from the rock face (trench 5) towards Coed y Caerau Lane (trench 2). It was intersected along its length by trenches 3, 4 and 7. A section of the stone wall (see above) was discovered at its junction with trench 4. The wall could be clearly seen along the east-facing section of this trench, especially between its junctions with trenches 4 and 7 (fig. 5). The wall was as described above. Less clearly preserved wall remains were observed along the southernmost 5m of trench 6.

**Trench 7** extended 7.7m east to west from trench 6 (fig. 3) towards trench 8 and was cut into the same bedrock encountered within the western end of trench 4. It was 0.9m deep in the western end and 1.1m deep at its eastern extent. No archaeological features were observed.

**Trench 8**, the final 10m long north to south footing (fig. 3), forming the south-western end of the new structure, was between 1.1m and 1.2m deep and 0.8m wide at its southern end. The northern end was extended in order to facilitate bedrock clearance. Apart from recently burnt timber and buried copper water pipes at the southern end of the trench no archaeological features were encountered.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The watching brief found debris associated with the recently demolished house, and buried remnants of its services. In addition to this a section of foundation and corner wall belonging to the original chapel cottage were uncovered. No further material of archaeological value was found and it is likely that no other structures existed here between the site's use as a quarry and the construction of the original dwelling/chapel sometime between the late eighteenth and nineteenth century.

#### **5. Acknowledgments**

Thanks to Mr. Gareth Lewis, acting project manager for Indigo 360 Ltd, and the digger operators for their kind assistance during the watching brief.

#### **6. Bibliography**

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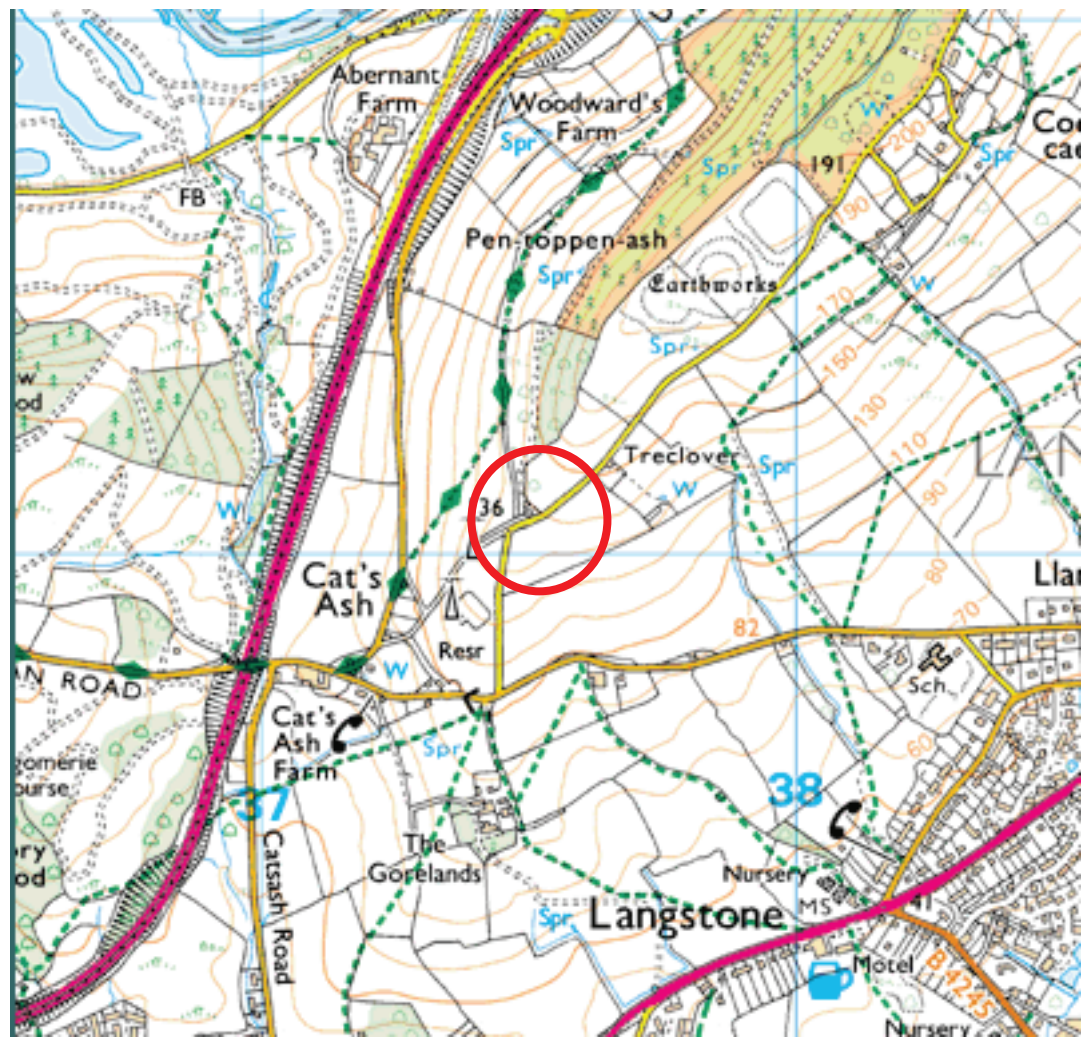


Fig. 1  
Location of  
site

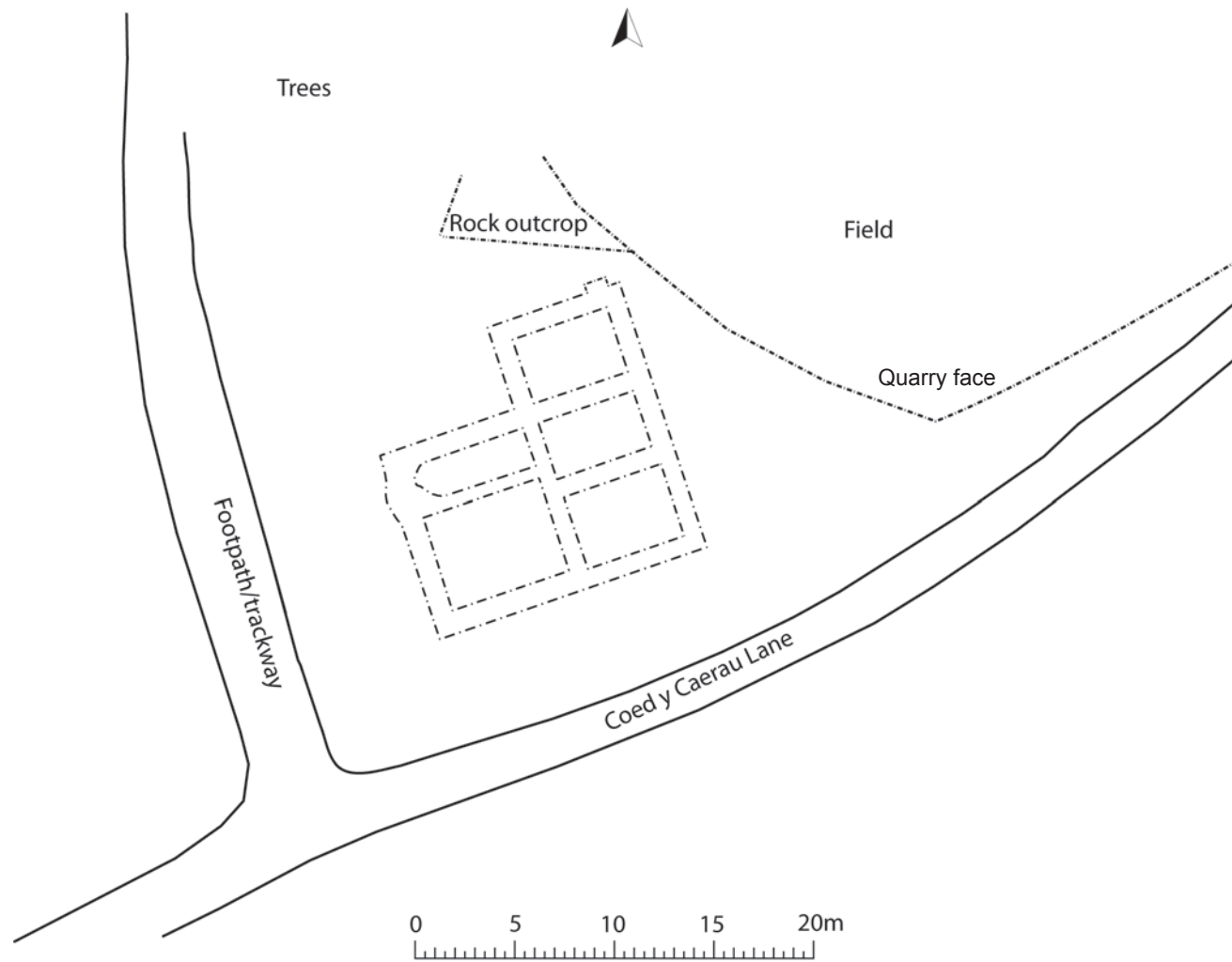


Fig. 2  
Plan of foundation  
trenches on the site



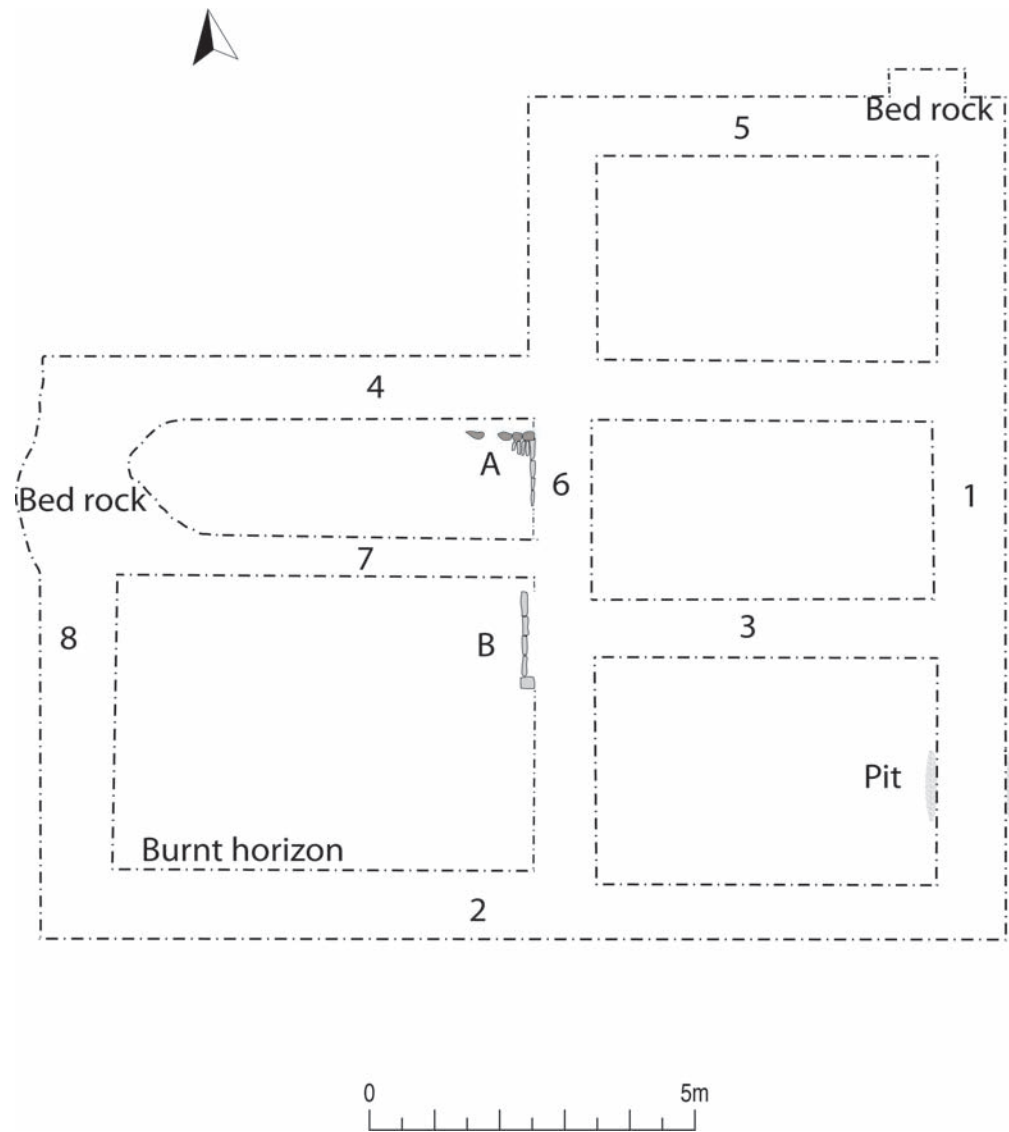


Fig. 3  
Plan of foundation  
trenches



Fig. 4  
Pit filled with modern  
materials at the  
southern end of  
Trench 1

Looking E  
Scale = 1m



Corner wall section A  
(Intersection of trench 6  
and 4). Looking SW



Wall section B (trench 6).  
Looking W

Fig. 5  
Wall sections A and  
B in trenches 4 and  
6.

Scale = 1m



Fig. 6  
Rock outcrop north  
of the dwelling with  
sections of  
incorporated walls

Looking N  
Scale = 1m

# *Archaeology Wales*

**Archaeology Wales Limited**

Rhos Helyg, Cwm Bân, Llanidloes, Powys SY18 6QF

**Tel: +44 (0) 1686 440371**

Email: [admin@arch-wales.co.uk](mailto:admin@arch-wales.co.uk)

Company Directors: Mark Houlston MIFA & Jill Houlston

Company Registered No. 7440770 (England & Wales).

Registered office: Morgan Griffiths LLP, Cross Chambers,  
9 High Street, Newtown, Powys, SY16 2NY