

Archaeology Wales

Great House Farm, Caerwent Monmouthshire

Archaeological Watching Brief



By
Jerry Bond

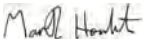
Report No. 1799

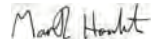
Archaeology Wales

Great House Farm, Caerwent Monmouthshire

Archaeological Watching Brief

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By
Jerry Bond

Report No. 1799

May 2019

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Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Jan Bailey of The Glamorgan, Gwent Archaeological Trust, Rhys Owain Griffiths, Management Surveyor for Monmouthshire County Council, A. Pannet and Mark Houliston, Project Managers for Archaeology Wales Ltd and also to the owners of Great House Farm, & to the company undertaking the groundworks represented by Morgan Baker.

The report was authored by Jerry Bond who also undertook the watching brief.

Summary

This report details the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during the installation of new service trenches, the work being associated with the conversion of an existing single storey stone barn to a 3-bedroom dwelling (Planning application reference: DC 2012/00178). The Archaeology Wales methodology (Writing Scheme of Investigation) for the work was originally commissioned by Monmouthshire County Council and subsequently approved by their archaeological advisors The Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust.

The watching brief took place to the southwest of Great House Farm and to the south of the barns that are due for conversion. The site lies within Insula XIV of the Roman town of Caerwent southwest of the centre of the settlement, in an area about which little is known.

Two archaeological deposits were exposed during the works: a possible yard surface (105) and a possible path (102). These may relate to the extant house and barn buildings located in the area, however the shallow depth at which the service trenches were cut meant that they were largely unexcavated, so this hypothesis could not be confirmed.

1. Introduction & planning background to the work

The proposed development (Planning application reference: DC 2012/00178) is for the conversion of a single storey barn into a 3-bedroom dwelling. The works involved the digging of a service trench connecting the new dwelling to the existing main sewer from the house.

The purpose of the watching brief was to provide the local planning authority with sufficient information regarding the nature of archaeological remains on the development site, the requirements for which are set out in Planning Policy WALES 2011. The work was to ensure that all buried artefacts and deposits were fully investigated and recorded if they were disturbed or revealed as a result of activities associated with the development.

The planning application was originally submitted to Monmouthshire County Council in 2012, whose archaeological advisors, Glamorgan & Gwent Archaeological Trust (GGAT), responded as outlined below.

GGAT's response to consultation was:

The application area is situated centrally within Caerwent Roman City, most of which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, Cadw Ref: MM001, and which has a history of complex development throughout the Roman period and remarkable preservation of remains of Roman date, with the buried remains less than 0.15m below current ground level in some areas. The village is a Conservation Area and a locally designated Archaeologically Sensitive Area, and Policy CH13 (10.16) of the Monmouthshire Unitary Development Plan states that the aim within Caerwent is to ensure that the archaeological remains are left undisturbed; the wording of CH13 states that;

“General development within or adjoining the walls and ditches of the Roman town at Caerwent will not be permitted.”

The supporting statement (10.16.1) goes on to explain that this policy;

“...aims to restrict new buildings within or adjoining the walls and ditches of the Roman Town to those allowed under permitted development rights, subject to other legislation e.g. Scheduled Monument Consent.”

We understand that in this particular case this may not apply, as the aim is to preserve the structure as a historic building without extension. However, the area to the north of and adjoining the stable forms part of the Scheduled Ancient Monument and the fact that the footprint of the building and access is not scheduled does not mean that that archaeological remains of national significance are not present; these areas were not designated due to their being an access road. It is our opinion that it can therefore be expected that archaeological features are located here, which will be impacted upon by the proposed development, and as such any groundwork will have a significant impact on the archaeological resource.

There are no detailed foundation or services details supplied with the supporting information and as we cannot determine the impact without the details of foundations and lines and depths of services, this information must be gained from an archaeological evaluation.

The proposed development has the potential to reveal and affect significant archaeological remains. Planning Policy Wales (Fourth Edition, February 2011) Section 6.5.1 notes that

“The desirability of preserving an ancient monument and its setting is a material consideration in determining a planning application whether that monument is scheduled or unscheduled.”

The more detailed advice in Welsh Office Circular 60/96, Section 13, recommends that

“where research indicates that important archaeological remains may exist, the planning authority should request the prospective developer to arrange for an archaeological field evaluation to be carried out before any decision on the planning application is taken.”

It is therefore our opinion in our role as the professionally retained archaeological advisors to your Members that the applicant should be requested to commission such an archaeological work.

Subsequently, details of the proposed development were submitted to the Planning Authority and an archaeological watching brief was commissioned on behalf of the applicant by Morgan Baker. Archaeology Wales Site Supervisor Jerry Bond BA (Hons) ACIfA undertook the watching brief on November 2nd 2017.

All work conformed to the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief (CIfA 2014).

2. Site Description and archaeological background

2.1 Description

The site lies to the southwest of the centre of the Roman town of Caerwent, in Insula XIV, an area of the town that has seen little previous archaeological investigation. Some small-scale excavations were undertaken by Wessex Archaeology further to the north within Insula XIV (Wessex 2009).

The site of the Roman Town is located at approximately 15mOD and the underlying geology consists of second and third terrace gravel deposits with some areas of red marl (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet 250, Chepstow).

The area of the site where the development was undertaken currently forms part of a residential garden area, specifically a lawn. It is located to the west of the farmhouse and to the south of the barn.

2.2 Archaeological Background

The town of Caerwent was located in the tribal territory of the Silures near to the site of Llanmelin Hill Fort, which is thought to have been their tribal capitol. The name Caerwent means the Town of Gwent and is derived from the Roman name Venta Silurum, which was the Civitas Capitol of the area that later became Gwent

It is known that a settlement started to form at Caerwent sometime in late AD70, although it would initially have been unlikely to have been of any great size. Its location astride a main east to west aligned Roman route-way meant that it probably grew quite quickly, though little evidence has been found predating the late 2nd century. The same route-way also connected the settlement to the fortress of Isca at Caerleon and was probably used to supplied goods and services to the fortress garrison and the surrounding area.

The site became the administrative capitol of the district in the 2nd century and the defensive walls were first constructed about the same time, initially being of built of earth with a timber palisade and an accompanying walkway. The dividing of the town into regular *insulae* or 'block' defined by a regular grid of roads started sometime in the 3rd century. Shops and town houses developed alongside public buildings such as temples and an amphitheatre. Notable remains within the town are the Forum Basilica, the main administrative and commercial centre, and the Romano British Temple.

A second phase of building works accompanied by the rebuilding in stone of the defences occurred in the late 3rd century, whilst a further period of new buildings within the town took place in the 4th century after which decline set in.

After the end of the Roman period there was some continuity of occupation and in particular a number of burials are known from the 4th to 9th centuries.

A Norman Motte was inserted into the walls at the southeast corner of the site, but little other activity is known from the period until the 13th Century Church of St Stephen and St Tathan, which is located in insula XIII just to the west of the development area.

The site covered an area of 16.5 hectares within the walls, which is now a scheduled Ancient Monument centred on map reference ST4691790591 in the county of Monmouthshire.

2.3 Previous Archaeological work.

The earliest known archaeological work took place in 1855 by Octavius Morgan and uncovered part of a bath house and another building in *insula XX* in the southeast of the town.

Excavations starting in 1899 by the Clifton antiquarian club of Bristol uncovered most of what is known of the layout of the town, although the results were largely of the later town as the excavations did not continue below the upper layers encountered.

Further limited excavations took place in 1923, 1925, 1946-47 and 1973, whilst a much larger program of works, by Cadw and the National Museum of Wales directed by Richard Brewer, ran from 1981 to 1995. These examined the Romano-Celtic Temple (*insula IX*), the Forum Basilica (*insula VIII*) and a large courtyard house (*insula I*). In addition, small-scale excavation were carried out in 1999 in the area of the entrance to the Forum, for Channel Archaeology. This latter work was undertaken in conjunction with Cadw as part of a scheme to aid the consolidation of the main entranceway.

3. Aims & Objectives

The purpose of the watching brief was to provide the local planning authority with sufficient information regarding the nature of any archaeological remains on the site of the development, the requirements for which are set out in Planning Policy WALES 2011. The work was to ensure that all buried artefacts and deposits were fully investigated and recorded if they were disturbed or revealed as a result of activities associated with the development.

4. Methodology

The excavations were undertaken using a Kubota 3ton tracked mini excavator equipped with a 0.3m wide bucket. All excavations were monitored by the Watching Brief archaeologist.

The excavations comprised a straight section running 10.5m east-northeast from the existing sewer main on the southwest corner of the house, that meet up with a large rectangular cut for a ground pump. This in turn continued for a further 8.0m to the northwest toward the southern edge of the barn. The trench was 0.3-0.4m wide and dug to a maximum depth of 0.5m, except in the area of the ground pump, which was excavated to a depth of 1.0m. The latter measured 1.4m x 1.4m in plan.

All contexts and features were recorded using a system of unique context numbers as well as being photographed and drawn using scale plans and sections.

Following an initial on-site examination artefacts considered “modern” were not retained

No objects of an older date were encountered.

5. The Results of the Watching brief.

5.1 Description (Figures 3 & 4)

The lowest layer encountered during the works was geological subsoil (104), it being a firm, pale reddish brown, sandy silt that was noted as being very dry during the excavation. It was greater than 0.5m thick and extended beyond the area of the ground pump where it was only partially excavated (Section 3).

The remainder of the site area can be conveniently split into two sectors, firstly to the east of the location of the ground pump and secondly to its north west.

To the east (Section 2) an area of small stones and mortar [103] & (102) was discovered and was tentatively considered to be the top of a wall or a surface (possibly part of a footpath). It was only visible for the width of the trench, 0.4m NE-SW but continued to NE and SW and was 1m in wide. It was, per the brief, not excavated but during cleaning it was noted as being very compact. (Plates 3 & 4)

To the west (Section 4) of the pit for the ground pump, deposit (105) overlay (104). It comprised another spread of compacted cobbles and mortar, was at least 6m wide and covered the width of the service trench. It was not excavated and therefore no thickness was established; none of its physical limits were defined. Its location adjacent to the barn and its nearness to the house suggests it was a cobbled yard surface of a similar date to these buildings, though this does not preclude the possibility of an earlier date. (Plate 5 & 6)

Above this deposit was a loose, very dark brown, fine grained silty clay (107), 0.06-0.08m in thickness, with a length of 1.4m, with a width of at least 0.4m (the width of the trench).

Situated above this was a deposit of loose, crushed, off white mortar (106), 0.06m thick, covering an area of 2.8m long and at least 0.4m wide (the width of the trench)

Overlying this was a moderately firm, very dark reddish brown, silty loam, with 15-20% gravel mixed with occasional larger, flattish sub angular stones (101). It ranged in thickness from 0.02-0.3m, covered the trench and was visible across the development area.

The uppermost deposit in both trenches, and extending across the development area, was a layer of grass covered topsoil/garden soil (100). The topsoil comprised moderately firm, very dark brown, silty loam with rooting and occasional small rounded stones and gravel. It was 0.18-0.2m thick and covered the entire area of the development site.

No artefacts were recovered during the watching brief.

5.2 Discussion of the Results.

The scale and scope of the excavations that comprised the development and hence this report were very small and have had a minimal impact on the buried archaeological resource that the site is renowned for. For the excavation area, the relatively shallow depth of 0.5m to 1.0m, meant that only the uppermost layers of potentially significant remains were uncovered, cleaned & recorded and no excavations continued below that level, except in the area of the ground pump, where no buried archaeological remains were encountered.

The two areas of compacted surfaces, probably a path to the east (102) and a yard surface (105) to the west, are considered most likely to be related to the farmhouse and the barn themselves, probably dating to some period concurrent with the construction or subsequent use of the buildings. The “footpath” is orientated SW-NE and heads in the general direction of the gable end and doorway of the house whilst the “yard” is directly in front of the barn and to its south where its entranceways are located.

Material observed in one of the excavated deposits (107) could be suggestive of demolition activity, possibly of an earlier date, although this could not be proven either way due to the limited nature of the excavations.

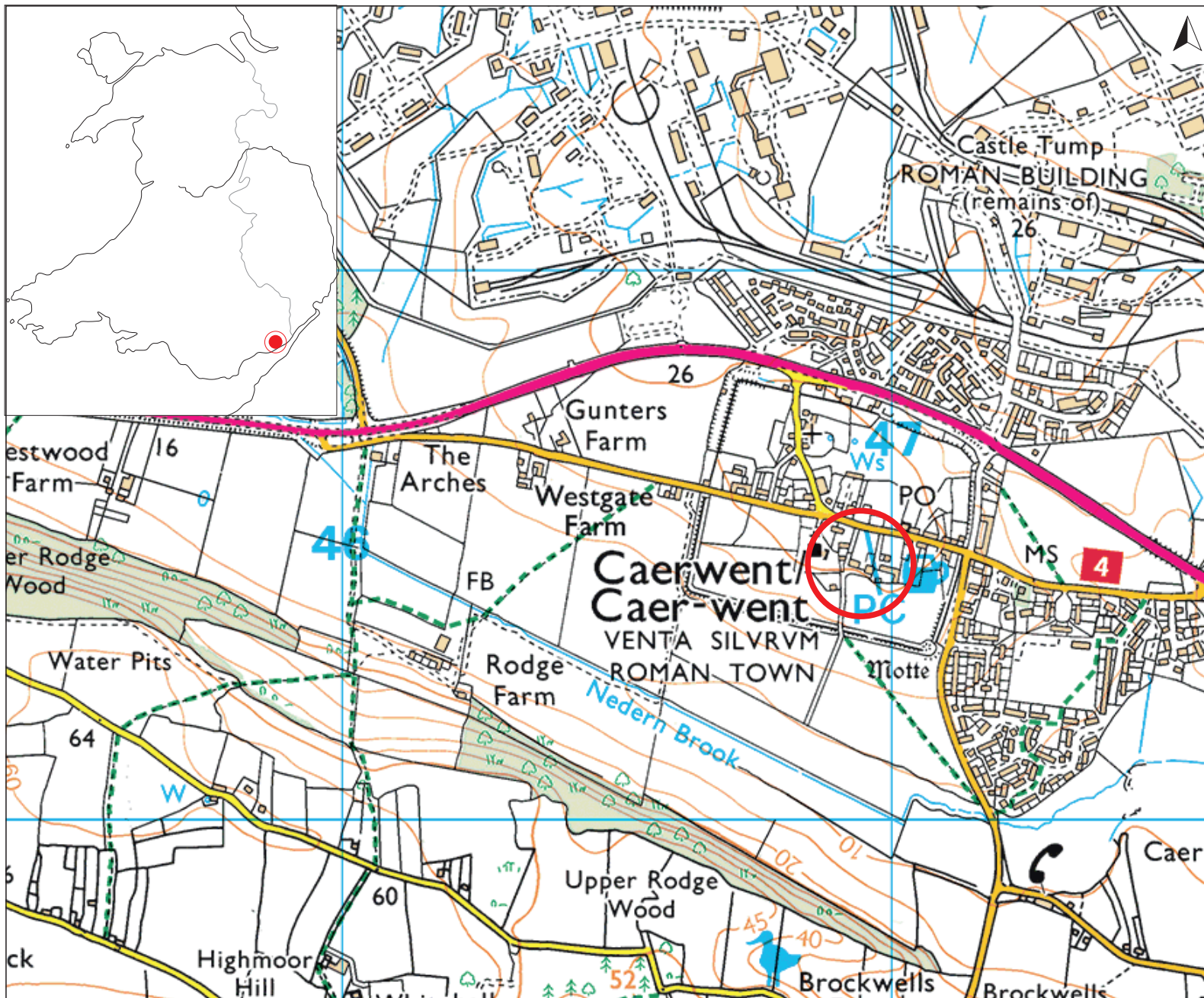
There is little in the results of the excavation that can be used to add to our understanding of the wider Romano British site at Caerwent. The information that was exposed relates specifically only to the development site, but even then, the results are somewhat ambiguous and are not going to alter, except in the most minor way that which was previously known.

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APPENDIX I:
Figures



— Location of site

Figure 1
Location map

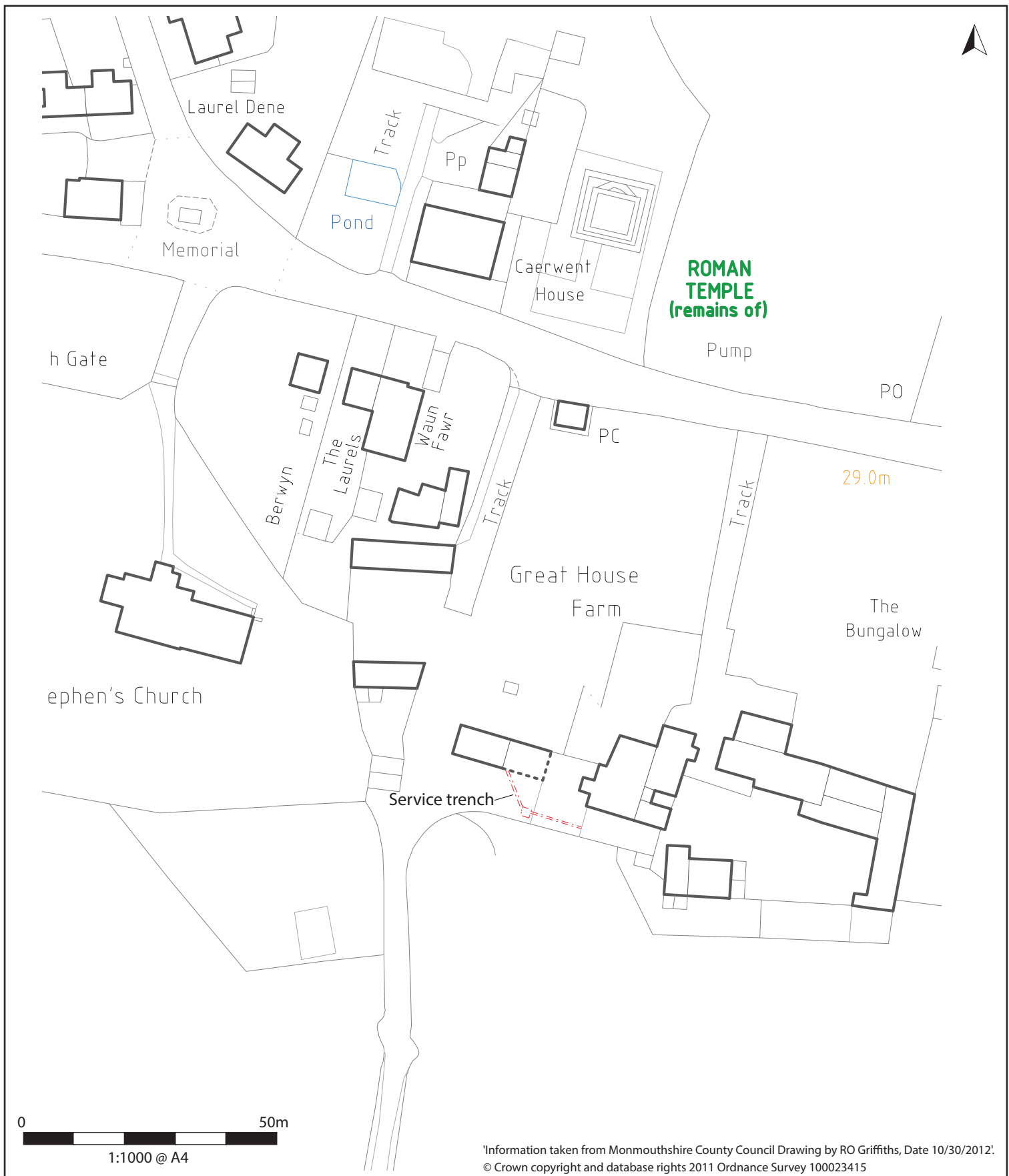
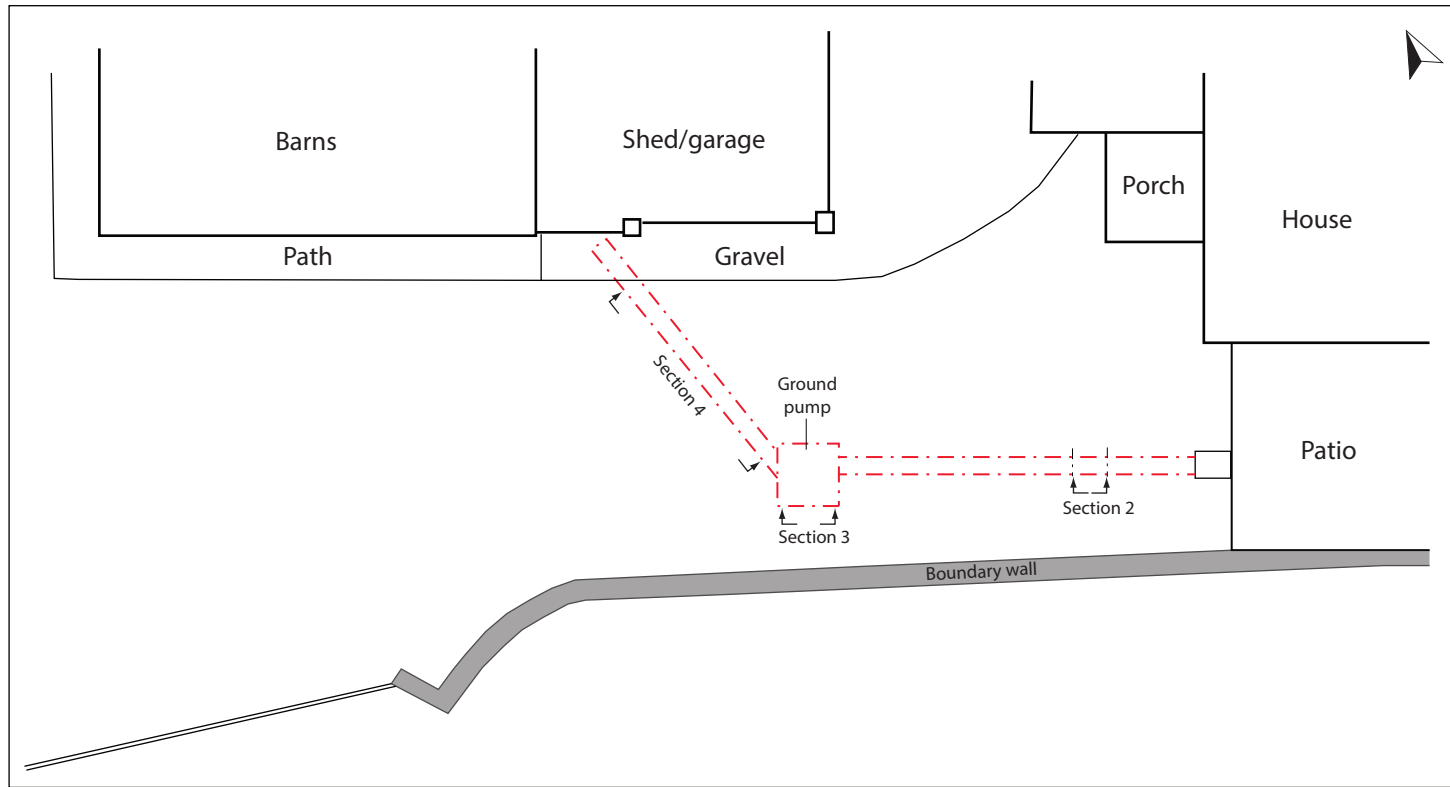


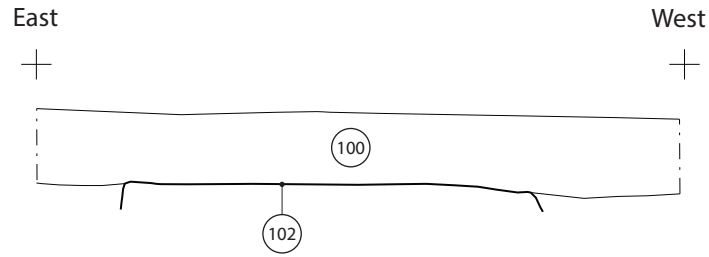
Figure 2
 Detailed site plan showing location
 of service trench



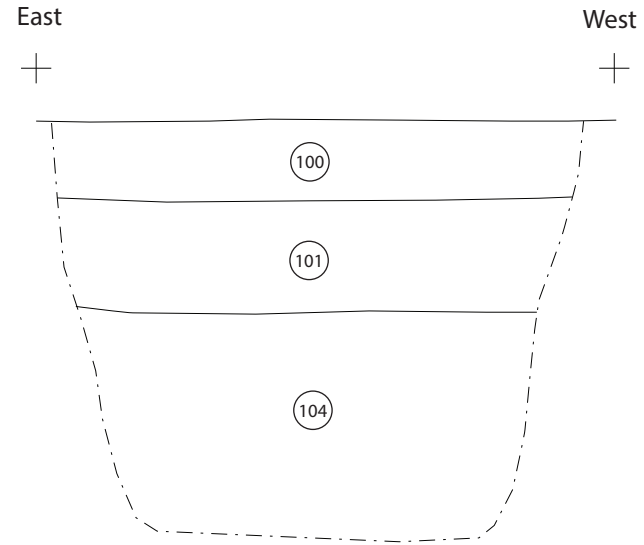
--- Service trench

Figure 3
Plan of service trench
showing location of
archaeological features

Section 2 showing 'path' (102)



Section 3 of pump location



Section 4 showing floor surface (105)

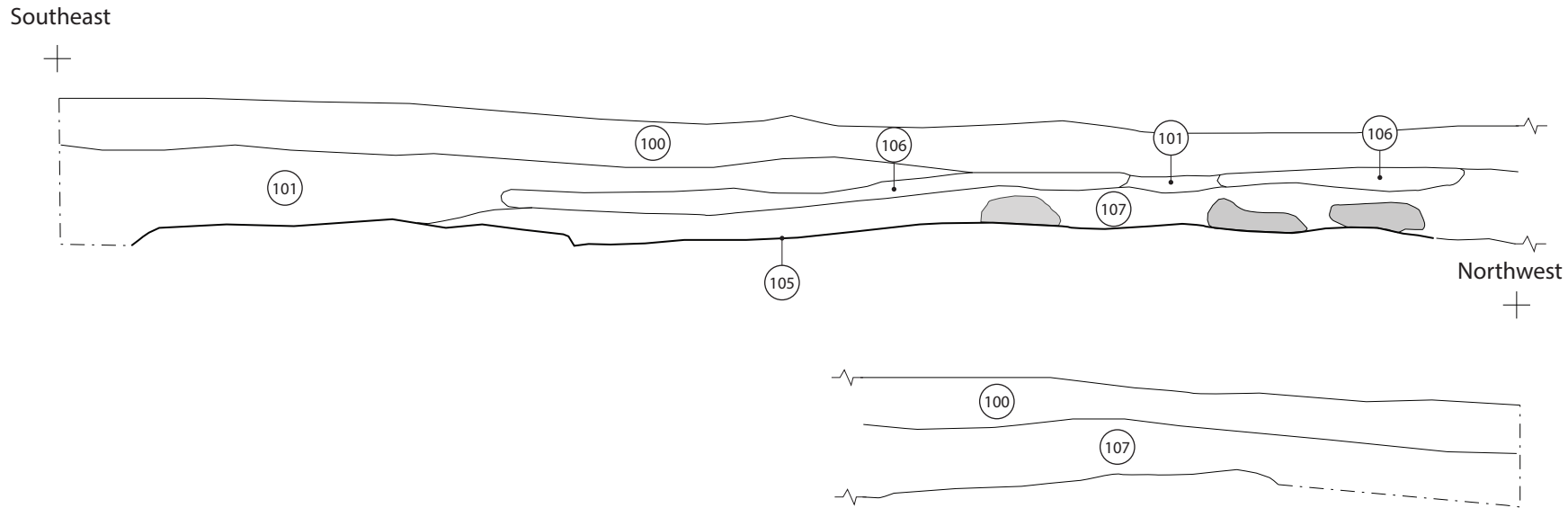


Figure 4
Sections 2, 3 & 4 within
service trench

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APPENDIX II:
Plates



Plate 1. The site looking east from near the site entrance. Scales 2 x 2m



Plate 2. The site looking west toward the entrance. Scales 2 x 2m



Plate 3. The 'path' (102) viewed from the northwest. Scales 1m & 0.3m



Plate 4. Plan view of the 'path'. Scales 1m & 0.3m



Plate 5. The 'yard' surface (105) viewed from the west. Scales 2m & 0.5m



Plate 6. Plan view of a detail of part of the 'yard' (105). Scale 1m



Plate 7. View of section 03 within service trench, looking south. Scales 2 x 1m

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**APPENDIX III:
Written Scheme of Investigation**

Archaeology Wales

Written Scheme of Investigation

For Archaeological Watching Brief at Great House Farm, Caerwent

**Prepared for:
Monmouthshire County Council**

Project No: 2085

Date: 29th November 2012

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NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY

This specification details the proposal for archaeological watching brief during groundworks for the insertion of services at Great House Farm, Caerwent, Monmouthshire. The specification has been prepared by Archaeology Wales for Monmouthshire County Council.

1. Introduction

The proposed development is located in the centre of the Roman town of Caerwent, Monmouthshire (NGR: ST 4686 9049), immediately south of the Temple and within an area of known archaeological significance. The development involves the excavation of a new service trench along the route of the drive way leading to the property. This WSI has been written pre-planning.

It is proposed that an archaeological watching brief is carried out during the excavation of the service trench on the proposed development site.

This specification has been prepared by Dr Amelia Pannett (MifA), Project Manager, Archaeology Wales Ltd (henceforth - AW) at the request of Monmouthshire County Council. It provides information on the methodology that will be employed by AW during the archaeological watching brief at the site.

The purpose of the watching brief is to provide the local planning authority with sufficient information regarding the nature of archaeological remains on the site of the development, the requirements for which are set out in Planning Policy WALES 2011. The work is to ensure that all buried artefacts and deposits are fully investigated and recorded if they are disturbed or revealed as a result of activities associated with the development.

All work will conform to Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief (IfA 2008), and be undertaken by suitably qualified staff to the highest professional standards.

2 Site description

The site lies near the centre of the Roman town of Caerwent, close to the site of the Roman Temple and within an area known to contain structures of Roman date. The site is also located 50m to the east of St Stephens Church, a building dating from at least the thirteenth century.

3 Site specific objectives

The primary objectives of the work will be to locate and describe, by means of an archaeological watching brief, all archaeological features that may be present within the development area. The work will elucidate the presence or absence of archaeological material, its character, distribution, extent, condition and relative significance.

The work will include a comprehensive assessment of regional context within which the archaeological evidence rests and will aim to highlight any relevant research issues within national and regional research frameworks.

The work will result in a report that will provide information of sufficient detail to allow informed planning decisions to be made which can safeguard the archaeological resource. Preservation *in situ* will be advocated where at all possible, but where engineering or other factors result in loss of archaeological deposits, preservation by record will be recommended.

4 The proposed archaeological work

The proposed archaeological monitoring will be carried out during all phases of groundbreaking work on the site.

The aim of the work will be to establish and make available information about the archaeological resource existing on the site. The work will include the following elements:

- A watching brief (Stage 1).
- The production of an illustrated report and the deposition of the site archive (Stage 2)

5 Method Statement for a Watching Brief (Stage 1)

A watching brief complying with the IfA Standards and Guidance on Watching Briefs (October 2008) will be completed during all ground disturbances on the site.

The watching brief is intended to identify any buried remains that exist within the development area and to ensure they are fully investigated and recorded.

As defined by the IfA (2008) 'the Watching Brief will provide an opportunity for the archaeologists present to signal to all interested parties, before the destruction of the material in question, that an archaeological find has been made for which the resources allocated to the watching brief itself are not sufficient to support treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard'.

If such a find is made representatives of GGAT and Monmouthshire County Council will be informed and a site meeting organised as appropriate. If, as a result of the meeting, GGAT recommend that further work is undertaken, for example the excavation of specific areas or features, AW will prepare a Specification for the work and an estimate of all associated costs.

Monitoring

GGAT will be contacted approximately two weeks prior to the commencement of the watching brief, and subsequently once the work is underway.

Any changes to the specification that AW may wish to make after approval will be communicated to GGAT for approval on behalf of Planning Authority.

Representatives of GGAT will be given access to the site so that they may monitor the progress of the watching brief. GGAT will be kept regularly informed about developments, both during the site works and subsequently during the post-fieldwork programme.

6 Method statement for the production of an illustrated report and the deposition of the site archive (Stage 2)

Report preparation

The report will contain the following:

- A fully representative description of the information gained from Stages 1-2 above, even if there should be negative evidence.
- A concise non-technical summary of the project results. This can be presented in Welsh to meet any Welsh language policy requirements.
- At least one plan showing the site's location in respect to the local topography, as well as the position of all excavated areas.
- Suitably selected plans and sections of significant archaeological features. All plans and sections should be related to Ordnance Datum.
- Written descriptions of all features and deposits excavated and their considered interpretation.
- A summary report on the artefactual and ecofactual assemblage and an assessment of its potential for further study, prepared by suitably qualified individuals or specialists.
- A statement of the local and regional context of the archaeological remains identified.

Copies of the report will be sent to Monmouthshire County Council and to GGAT for inclusion in the HER. Digital copies will be provided in pdf format if required.

A summary report of the work will be submitted for publication to a national journal (eg Archaeology in Wales) no later than one year after the completion of the work.

The site archive

A project archive will be prepared in accordance with the National Monuments Record (Wales) agreed structure and be deposited within an appropriate local museum on completion of site analysis and report production. It will also conform to the guidelines set out in 'Management of Archaeological Projects Two, Appendix 3' (English Heritage 1991).

Arrangements will be made with the local museum before work starts. Wherever the archive is deposited, this information will be relayed to the HER.

Although there may be a period during which client confidentiality will need to be maintained, the report and the archive will be deposited not later than six months after completion of the work.

Other significant digital data generated by the survey (ie AP plots, EDM surveys, CAD drawings, GIS maps, etc) will be presented as part of the report on a CD/DVD. The format of this presented data will be agreed with the curator in advance of its preparation.

7 Resources and timetable

Standards

The field evaluation will be undertaken by AW staff using current best practice.

AW is in the process of registering as an IfA Registered Archaeological Organisation and consequently all work will be undertaken to the standards and guidelines of the IfA.

Staff

The project will be managed by Dr Amelia Pannett (a CV is available upon request) and carried out by suitably qualified AW staff.

Equipment

The project will use existing AW equipment.

Timetable of archaeological works

The work will start at the convenience of the client. No start date has yet been agreed.

Insurance

AW is an affiliated member of the CBA, and holds Insurance through the CBA insurance service.

Health and safety

All members of staff will adhere to the requirements of the *Health & Safety at Work Act, 1974*, and the Health and Safety Policy Statement of AW.

If AW has sole possession of the site, then AW will produce a detailed Risk Assessment for approval by the client before any work is undertaken. If another organisation has responsibility for site safety, then AW employees will be briefed on the contents of all existing Risk Assessments, and all other health and safety requirements that may be in place.

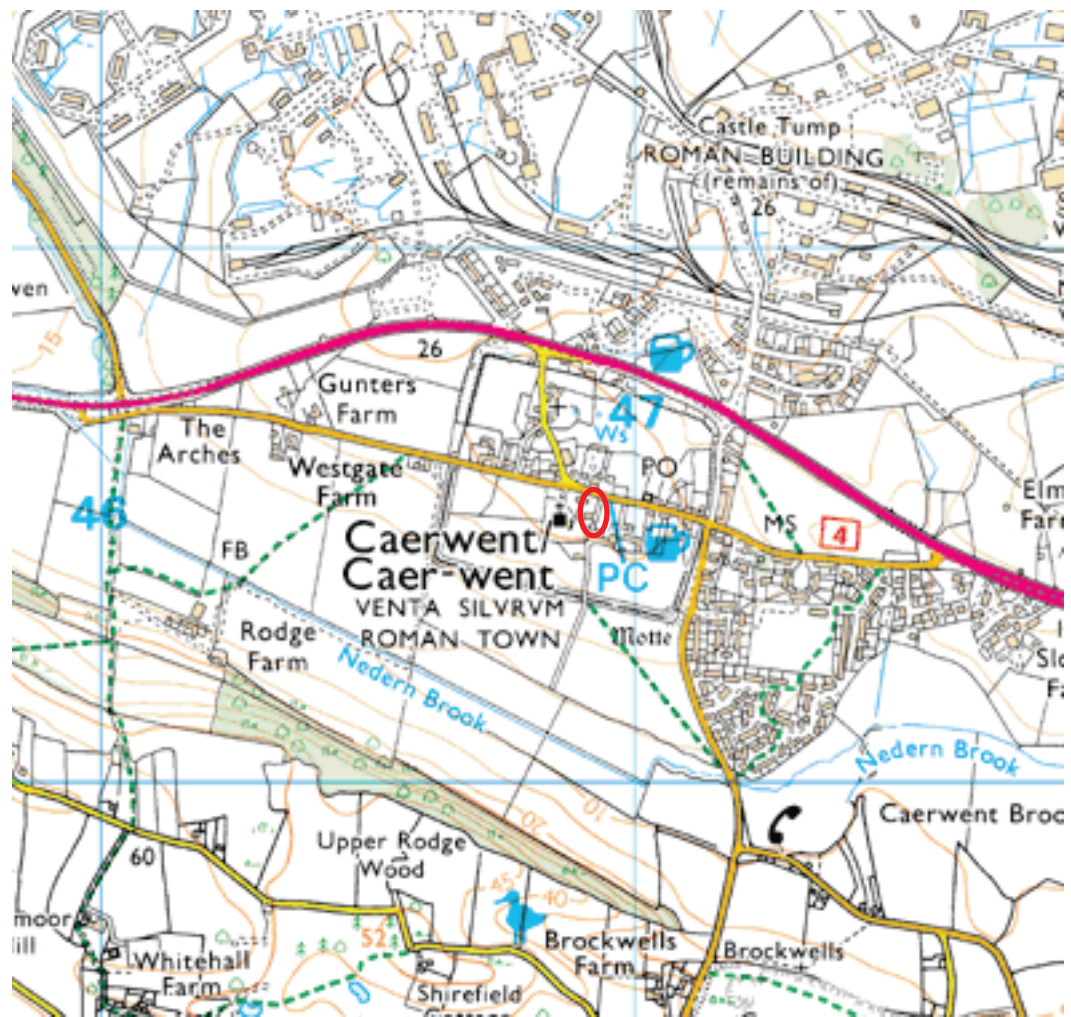


Fig. 1
Location of
proposed
development
site



Fig. 2
Plan of proposed
groundworks on the
site

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