

CPAT Report No. 1693




# Caersws Playground, Main Street, Caersws, Powys

Archaeological Watching Brief



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Client name: Caersws Recreation Association  
 CPAT Project No: 2388  
 Project Name: Caersws Playground  
 Grid Reference: SO 0323 9194  
 County/LPA: Powys  
 Planning Application: N/A  
 CPAT Report No: 1693  
 HER Enquiry No: N/A  
 Event PRN: 140314  
 Report status: Draft  
 Confidential until: N/A

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17/01/2019	07/10/2019	07/10/2019

Bibliographic reference: Hankinson, R., 2019. *Caersws Playground, Main Street, Caersws, Powys: Archaeological Watching Brief*. Unpublished Report. CPAT Report No 1693.



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## Summary

In September 2019 the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological watching brief on behalf of the Caersws Recreation Association during groundworks associated with the erection of new equipment on the playground at Main Street, Caersws, Powys.

The field has been designated as is a Scheduled Monument (MG243) and contains part of the site of the Roman civilian settlement associated with the Caersws II fort.

The watching brief involved the examination of the excavations for the foundations of new playground features. A number of the pits revealed Roman deposits, including a stone surface, although generally the small scale of the work restricted the interpretation of the results.

## Crynodeb

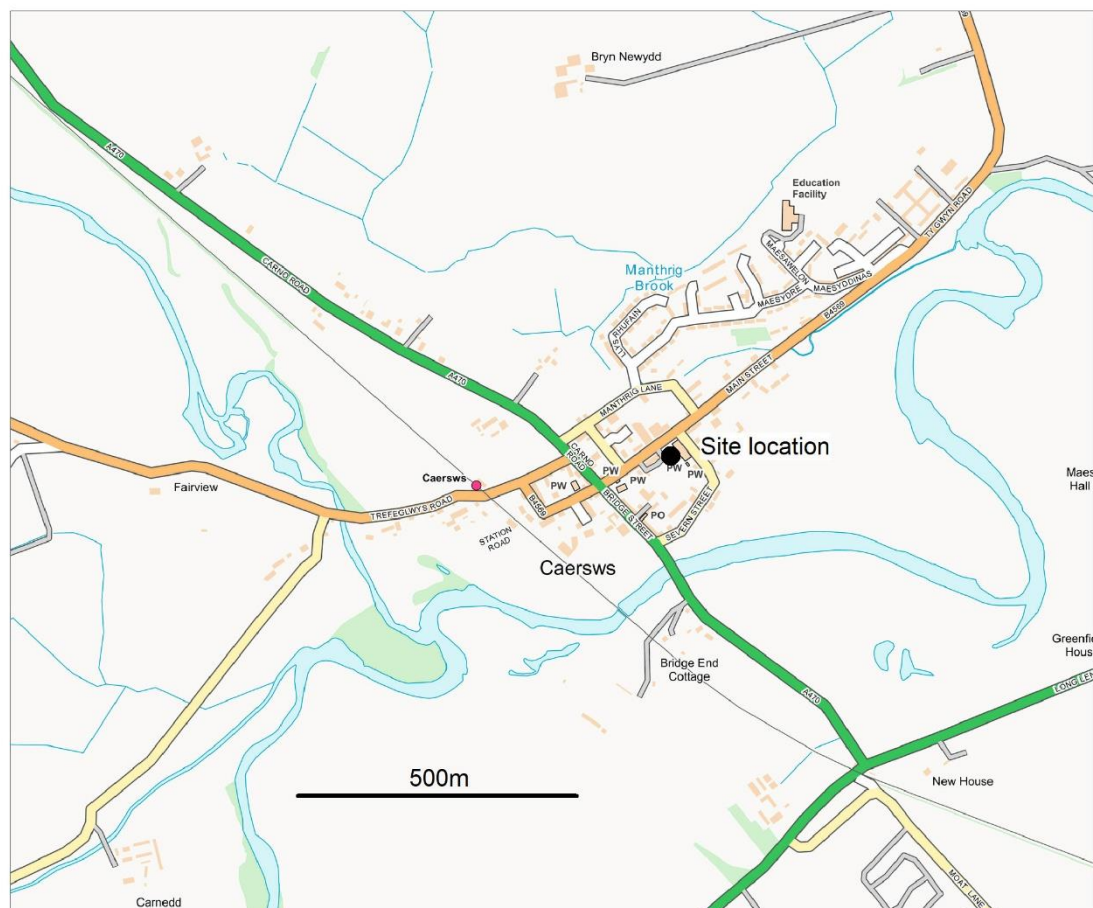
Ym mis Medi 2019, bu Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Clwyd-Powys yn cynnal briff gwylio archaeolegol ar ran Cymdeithas Adloniant Caersws yn ystod gwaith paratoi tir yn gysylltiedig â chodi offer newydd ar y maes chwarae ar Brif Stryd, Caersws, Powys.

Mae'r cae wedi'i ddynodi'n Heneb Gofrestredig (MG243) ac mae'n cynnwys rhan o safle anheddiad sifilaidd Rhufeinig yn gysylltiedig â chaer Caersws II.

Roedd y briff gwylio'n galw am archwilio gwaith cloddio sylfeini nodweddion newydd y maes chwarae. Datgelodd nifer o'r pyllau ddyddodion Rhufeinig, gan gynnwys arwyneb carreg, er bod graddfa fach y gwaith, ar y cyfan, yn cyfyngu ar y dehongliad o'r canlyniadau.

# 1 Introduction

- 1.1. In September 2019 the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust was engaged by the Caersws Recreation Association to carry out an archaeological watching brief during the installation of new playground equipment at the playing field off Main Street, Caersws, Powys (Fig. 1; NGR SO 0323 9194).
- 1.2. The field is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM MG243), which has been designated as part of the site of the Roman civilian settlement, or *vicus*, associated with the Caersws II fort. The field had been subject to trial excavation in 1991, which had revealed Roman deposits in its southern part, and it was this that led to its designation (Jones 1991).
- 1.3. The watching brief was required by Cadw owing to the scheduled status of the site. The report was delayed until a repository for the finds could be identified.



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*Fig. 1 Location of Caersws Playing Field*

# 2 Background

- 2.1. The first Roman fort to be built in the area, Caersws I, was located in a sound strategic position on a spur overlooking the River Sever to the north-east of the present village. This was

replaced by Caersws II, the prominent earthworks of which define a fort measuring 188m by 177m with the defences enclosing an area of 3.2 hectares. Three main phases of construction have been recognised, the earliest dating from the early Flavian period (AD 69-96), with a laminated clay rampart faced with turf and fronted by at least one ditch, with timber The second phase, probably Trajanic (AD 98-117) or Hadrianic (AD 117-138), saw enhancement of the defences, along with the addition of an annexe on the north side. The final phase, which may be Hadrianic or Antonine (AD 138-193) in date, saw the rampart fronted by a stone wall c. 2m thick, while the fort ditches adjacent to the annexe fell out of use.

- 2.2. Evidence for a civilian settlement, or *vicus*, associated with Caersws II fort has been derived almost exclusively as a result of excavations, although aerial reconnaissance and geophysical survey have played a minor role. At present the extra-mural settlement is known to lie on the south and east sides of the fort, occupying an area of around 7 hectares, focused on the roads issuing from the *porta praetoria* and *porta principalis sinistra*. As well as these major roads, a number of side roads have also been identified and their presence, together with the generally regular alignment of many of the excavated features, are highly suggestive of a degree of internal planning, rather than simple piecemeal development over time.

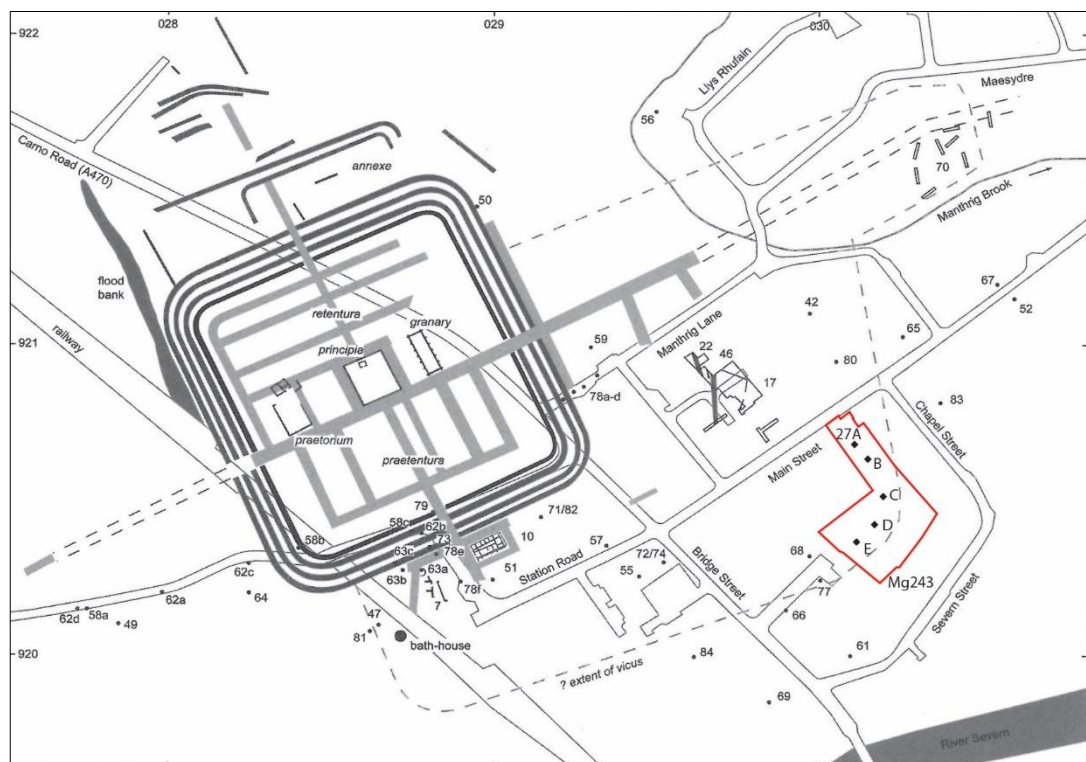


Fig. 2 Roman Caersws, showing the location of MG243

- 2.3. The area now occupied by the playing field, lying to the south of Main Street, was evaluated in 1991, comprising five trial pits, each 2m by 2m. The two northernmost pits produced no clear evidence for Roman occupation, but the remaining three all contained some evidence in the form of soil or stone layers, postholes or pits (Jones 1991, 42).

### 3 Watching Brief

- 3.1. The watching brief was conducted on 29 August 2019 in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CIfA) *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014).
- 3.2. The description which follows describes only those foundation pits which produced material or features of archaeological interest, or were in some way relevant. The others were either of insufficient depth for layers of Roman stratigraphy to be present or exposed layers that did not seem to be of potential Roman origin.

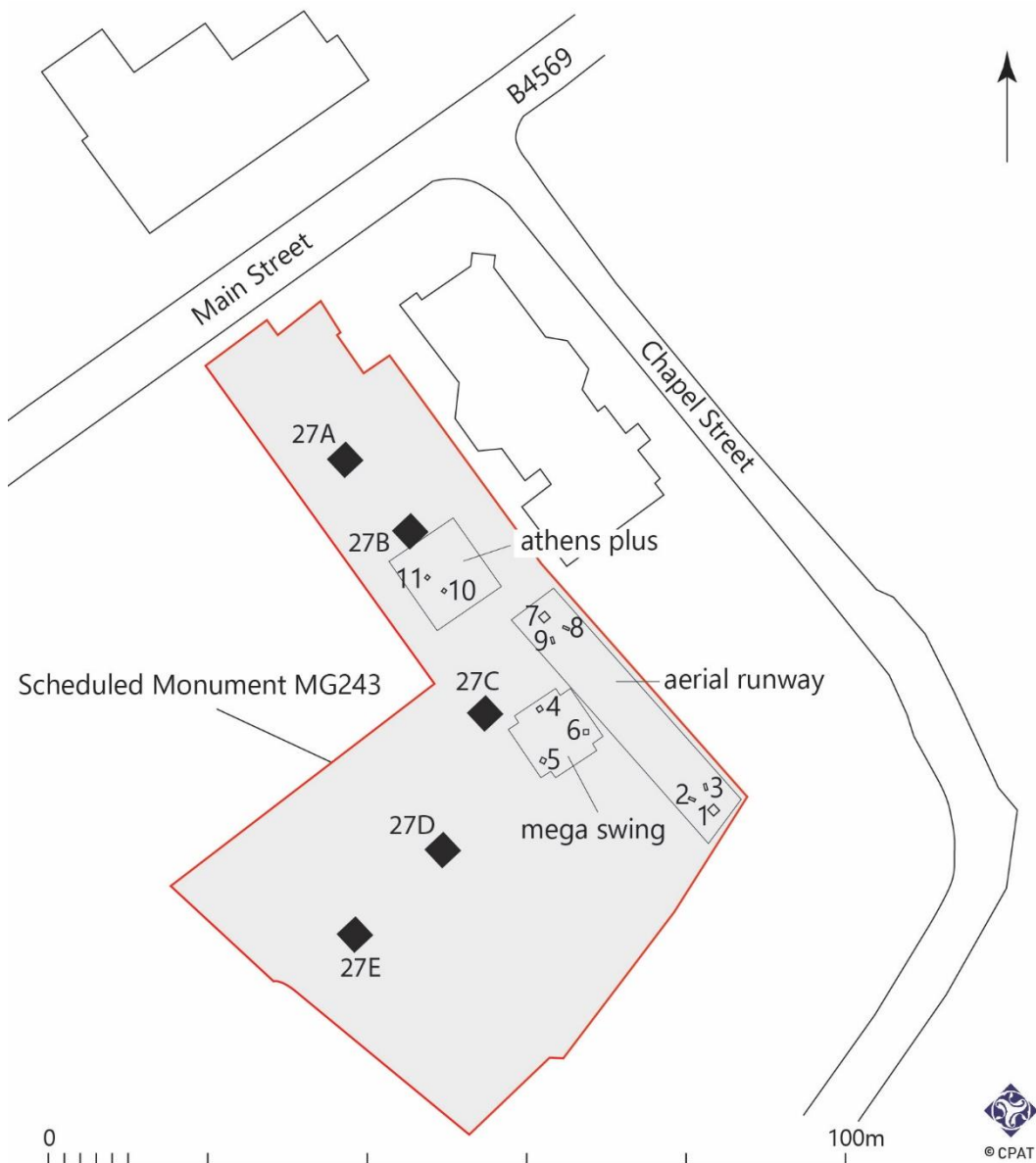


Fig. 3: Location of significant excavations/pits, showing the position of the 1991 evaluation (27A-E)



## Pits 1 to 3

- 3.3. Pits 1 to 3 (Figs 4-6) were located in the south-eastern corner of the area, at the south-east end of the new aerial runway. In Pit 1 the removal of 0.55m of the grey-brown clay silt topsoil revealed a 0.25m-thick layer of cobbles set in brown clay, which contained two joining sherds of Samian and three fragments of imbrex roof tile. In Pit 2 the overburden was up to 0.45m thick, beneath which was a 0.2m-thick layer of river gravel containing a total of 8 sherds of mortaria (some joining), and a small sherd of Samian.



*Fig. 4: Pit 1, showing a fragment of roof tile visible in the section*



*Fig. 5: Pit 2, showing the gravel layer*



- 3.4. Beneath 0.4m of overburden in Pit 3, was a 0.25m-thick layer of river gravel containing a sherd of mortaria, potentially the same vessel as that recovered from Pit 2.



*Fig. 6: Pit 3, showing the gravel layer*

## **Pits 4 to 6**

- 3.5. Pits 4-6 were located in the area of the new mega swing. In Pit 4 the removal of 0.4m of topsoil revealed a 0.1m-thick layer of brown stony silt, which contained one fragment of brick, probably Roman. Pit 5 contained 0.5m of topsoil overlying a 0.1m-thick layer of rounded river gravel, similar to the deposit found in Pit 2 and therefore potentially of Roman date, although no artefacts were recovered. In Pit 6 the natural subsoil was identified at a depth of 0.4m, and no potentially significant deposits were identified.

## **Pit 7**

- 3.6. Pit 7 was located at the north-west end of the new aerial runway. Beneath 0.5m of topsoil there was a layer of grey-brown clay silt with charcoal flecks which contained two sherds of Samian pottery. This layer was 0.1m thick and covered a metalled surface in the south-west corner of the pit and grey-brown gritty clay silt elsewhere; the latter contained an iron object and was probably also of Roman date. The metalling was 0.1m thick and covered a further metalled surface which occupied the entire area of the pit – this was left in-situ as the base of the required foundation had been reached.
- 3.7. Both Pits 8 and 9 were of insufficient depth to reveal any Roman deposits.



*Fig. 7: Pit 7, showing the lower of the two metalled surfaces*

### **Pits 10 and 11**

- 3.8. Pits 10 and 11 were located in the new 'athens plus' area. In Pit 10 the removal of 0.5m of topsoil revealed a layer of brown clay, while in Pit 11 a 0.15m-thick layer of charcoal-rich, grey-brown silt was revealed beneath 0.55m of topsoil. Neither pit produced any artefactual evidence, although it seems likely that the deposits beneath the topsoil may have been of Roman date.



*Fig. 8: Some of the Roman pottery recovered during the watching brief. Top – mortaria from Pit 2;  
Bottom – decorated samian from Pit 7*

## 4 Conclusions

- 4.1. The watching brief conducted during the installation of new equipment in the playing field produced further limited evidence for Roman activity in this part of the vicus, adding to the results of previous work conducted in 1991. Metalled surfaces, probably associated with either a road or yard, were identified in two pits, while a small collection of Roman pottery was recovered from four pits.

## 5 Sources

- Jones, N. W., 1993. Caersws Roman Fort and Vicus, Montgomeryshire, Powys, 1984-92. *Montgomeryshire Collections* 81, 15-96.
- Jones, N. W., 1996. Excavations within the Roman Vicus at Caersws, 1989-93. *Montgomeryshire Collections* 84, 1-36.

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## 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). The artefacts will be kept at Caersws Village Hall, under the control of the managing committee, for display.

### **Archive summary**

CPAT Event PRN: 140314

10 digital photographs, CPAT film no 4696

### **Finds**

#### *Pit 1*

3 fragments of imbrex roof tile

2 sherds of Samian pottery

#### *Pit 2*

8 sherds of Roman mortaria (white fabric). Probably the same vessel.

#### *Pit 3*

1 sherd of Roman mortaria (white fabric)

#### *Pit 4*

Roman brick fragment

#### *Pit 7*

Grey brown clay silt – 2 sherds of Samian pottery, one decorated

Grey brown gritty clay silt – Iron object