

A WATCHING BRIEF AT THE PADDOCKS, ST CLEARS CARMARTHENSHIRE

2009



Prepared by Dyfed Archaeological Trust
For: Mr Stephen Kirkwood



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A Watching Brief at The Paddocks, St Clears Carmarthenshire

Gan / By

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SUMMARY

A planning application (TMT/05113) was submitted Mr Kirkwood to develop land at 'The Paddocks', St Clears, Carmarthenshire at NGR SN28091552. The site lies to the north of the former defences of the medieval borough of St Clears and to the south of the site of the medieval Priory. The medieval motte and bailey castle of St Clears (PRN5054) lies 104 meters to the south of the proposed development, and is a scheduled ancient monument (SAM Carm no 95). It is also likely that the medieval town expanded beyond the earlier defended area. In December 1993 an archaeological evaluation occurred immediately to the west of the present proposed development (PRN29532) and concluded that this area contained medieval burgage plots. Also to the south of the proposed development there is a post medieval chapel called 'Capel Mair' which has now been converted to a garage (PRN22273). Given the potential for the presence of archaeological features or deposits on the site planning permission was granted with a condition that an archaeological watching brief be undertaken during the groundwork's for the new development.

In order to comply with the planning condition Mr Kirkwood commissioned Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services to carry out the watching brief in February 2009.

Topsoil stripping on the site, in preparation and the excavation of foundation trenches for a new dwelling, revealed only natural subsoil and shale bedrock.

Three post-medieval drains were encountered during the watching brief, but no other features of sufficient importance to warrant additional archaeological work.

INTRODUCTION

Project Background

A planning application (TMT/05113) was submitted by Mr Kirkwood to develop land at the paddocks, St Clears, Carmarthenshire NGR 2809 1552 (Figure 3).

The site is located close to the medieval motte and bailey castle of St Clears (PRN5054). In view of the archaeological sensitivity of the location, it was considered possible that significant medieval archaeological features and deposits might survive below ground on the site. Such remains might include evidence of settlement, industrial activity or the outer defences of the motte and bailey.

The archaeological advisors to the Planning Department of Carmarthenshire County Council, recommended that as a condition of consent, a watching brief should be undertaken during the groundworks for the new dwelling in order to mitigate any potential archaeological interests.

Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services undertook the watching brief in February 2009. This report summarises the background to the site before discussing the results of the watching brief.

Site Location and historical background

The proposed development area lies within the town of St Clears in Carmarthenshire NGR SN28091552. The new building is semicircular in shape, curving from the west to the northeast of the site. The town of St Clears is positioned at the junction between the river Taf and the river Cynin and is also at the limit of high water, allowing access to shallow drafted boats. Little is known of the early history of the town. The first reference to the town of St Clears occurs in the 11th century when the Cluniac Priory was founded (King, 1983, 5). The medieval town of St Clears was not very large and is described as being in the outer ring of Norman controlled towns (Davies, 1991, 272). Sources record that the town is generally dated to the second half of the twelfth century and was situated between the church and the castle (Delaney & Soulsby, 1975, 7.1.3.). Bridge Street and High Street are possibly the only streets of medieval origin. The castle and town has seen conflict many times in history. In 1135 Rhys ap Gruffyd is mentioned as capturing a castle called Ystrad Cyngen which could possibly be the castle at St Clears (King, 1983, 5). The castle is also mentioned in 1215 when it was captured by Llywelyn the Great. By the 14th century the castle was said to be in decay, however it did play a part in the Glyndwr rebellion and was presumably captured, as well as the castle at Carmarthen by Glyndwr's forces (Rees, 1992, 152). The tithe map 1838 shows that the town of St Clears was expanding northward along the main road (Delaney & Soulsby, 1975, 7.2.3.).

Methodology

An archaeologist was present during the groundwork excavations for the new dwelling. Topsoil was stripped from the area of the footprint of the building using a toothless ditching bucket, and foundation trenches were cut to the required depth. A basic record of all archaeologically significant features and deposits was made, including photographs and measured plans. The results of the watching brief are presented in this report. No additional archive material was generated by this project.

RESULTS

The topsoil was a probable garden soil of dark brown silty clay containing large amounts of post-medieval pottery. The subsoil, which also contained large amounts of post-medieval pottery, was a mid greyish-brown silty-clay with an average depth of 0.35m. The Natural horizon was a mid yellowish-brown silty clay, changing to a mid grey gley towards the northern edge of the site. The natural was generally encountered at 0.40m below the surface. Three post-medieval drains were discovered during the watching brief. Two of the drains were built of stone whilst the other contained large quantities of post-medieval tile and pottery. The subsoil in the southern half of the site consisted of re-deposited natural up to 1m deep and contained large amounts of post-medieval ceramics and other waste material. This deposit may represent a past attempt to reclaim the area by raising the ground level.

DISCUSSION

The three field drains (of probable post medieval date) appear to run from the back of an area of possible medieval burgage plots, into a shallow depression at the north end of the development. The edge of this depression is marked by the mid-yellowish-brown natural dropping away sharply, to be replaced by a deposit of mid-grey silty clay which fills the hollow.

The hollow was probably an area of marginal land, into which water from the surrounding area, or effluent from the settlement to the west or nearby industrial activity, was drained. The hollow may be the remains of a natural inlet or creek, leading off the river

This area of the town, located between the roadside dwellings in their burgage plots and the river, is likely to have been an area of riverside economic and industrial activity since the settlement was founded. It is therefore possible that the backfilled hollow represents the remains of a purposefully constructed mooring place, allowing access for boats from the river, closer into the settlement area. It was not, however, possible to prove this during the watching brief.

No evidence of buildings or defensive structures or earthworks was encountered.

CONCLUSION

Although the watching brief did not reveal any direct evidence of medieval settlement structures or defensive features, it has provided evidence that the location was marginal land in the post-medieval period. This area, between settlement and the river, is likely to contain evidence of economic and industrial activity, but it was not possible to reveal direct evidence of such activity within the current development location. The need for future archaeological investigation in this area cannot be discounted on the evidence of this watching brief.

SOURCES

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CARTOGRAPHIC SOURCES

- Ordnance Survey 1995 1:50,000 scale Landranger.
- Ordnance Survey 1907 Carmarthenshire Sheet XXXVIII SW 2nd edition 1:2500

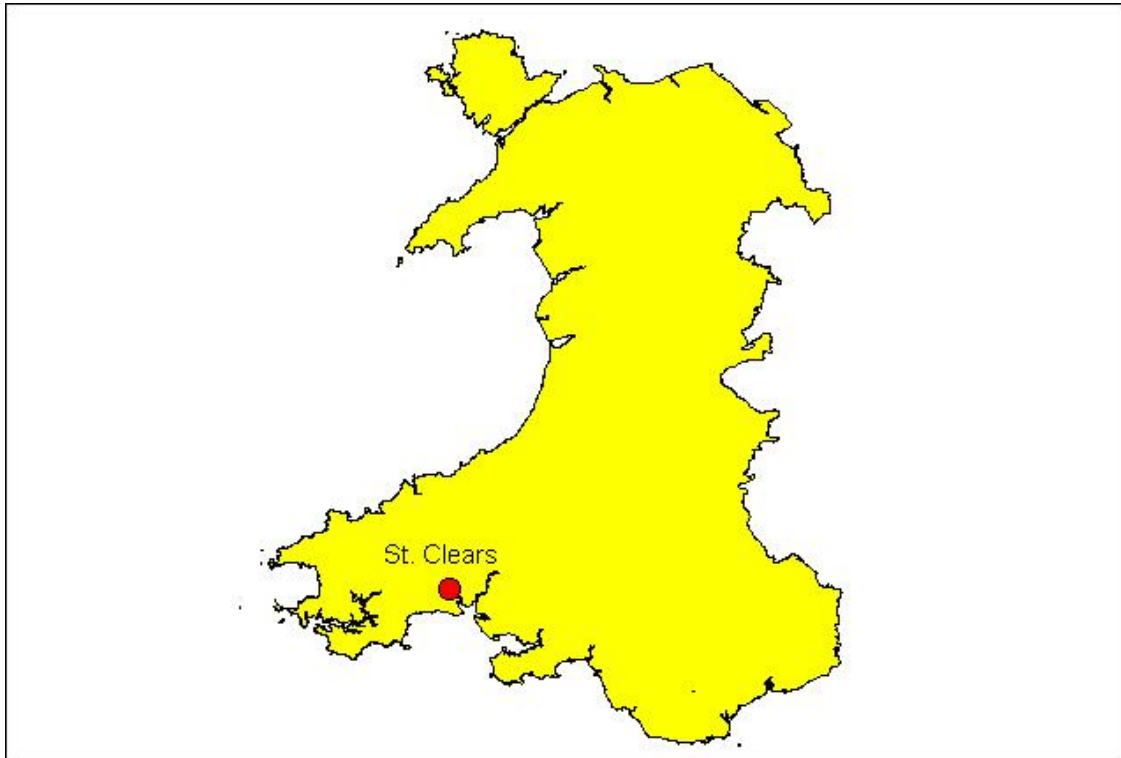


Figure 1: Location map



Figure 2: Site Location Map based on Ordnance Survey.

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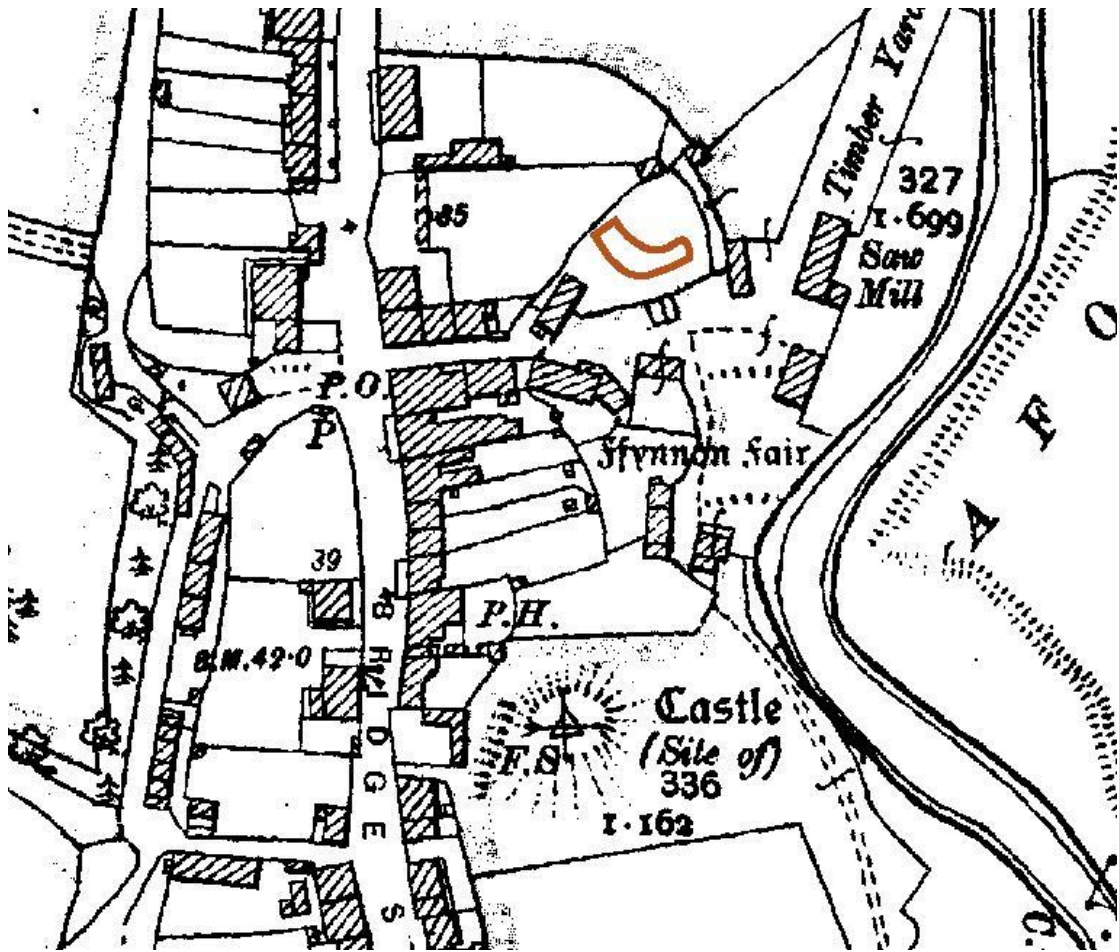


Figure 3: Trench location plan (in red). The size of plot not necessarily to scale (based on Ordnance Survey 2nd edn. 1:25000)

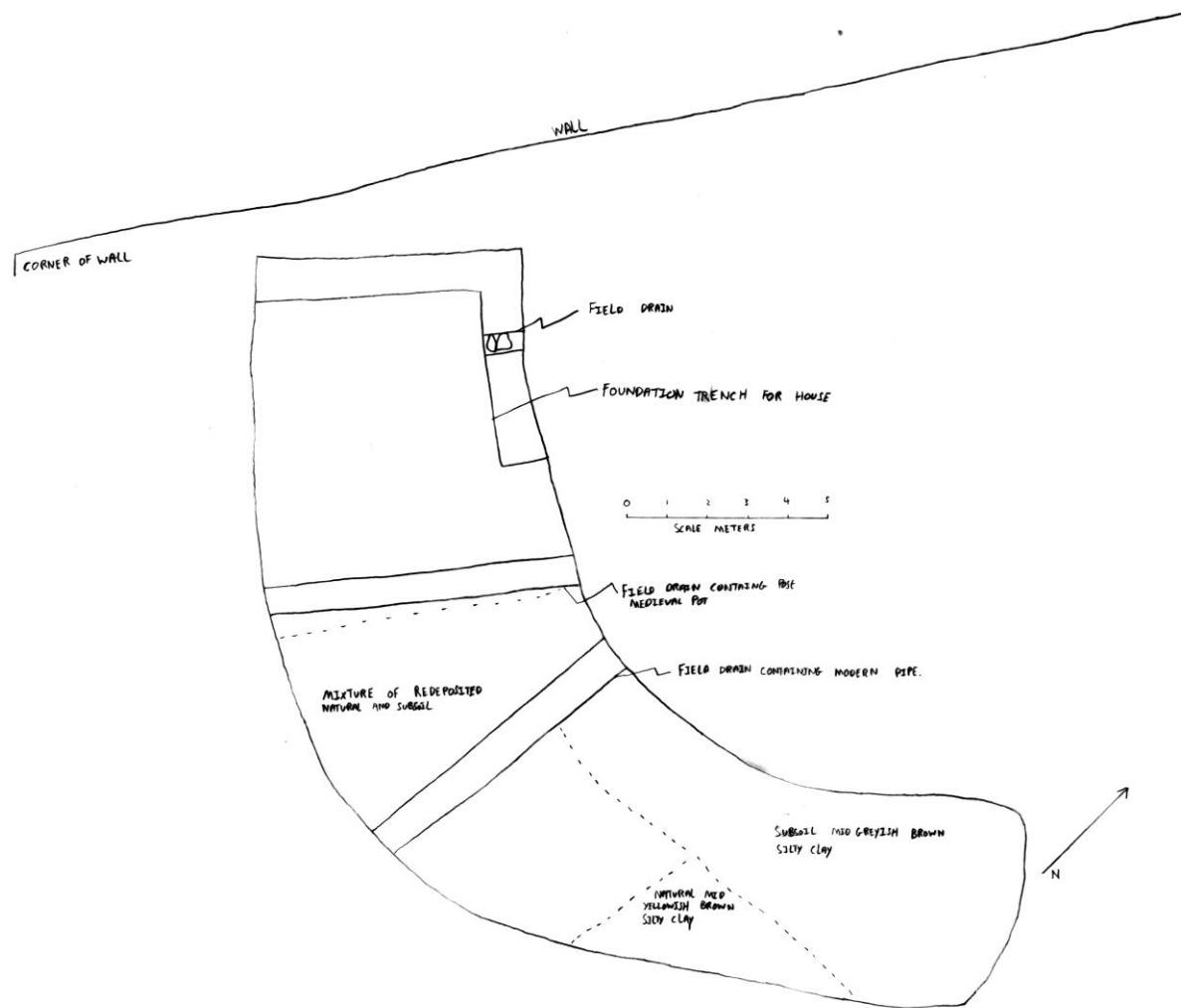


Figure 4: Plan of excavated area

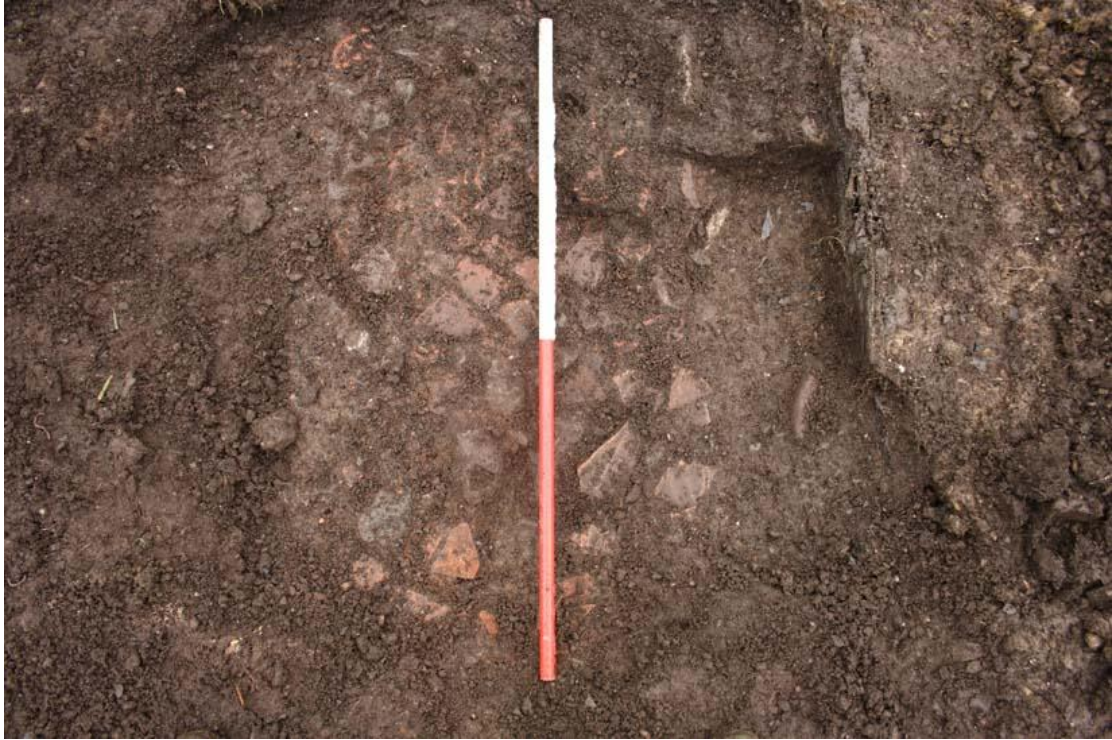


Photo 1: Post medieval field drain containing post medieval pot.



Photo 2: Shot of made ground.



Photo 3: Shot of grey clay. The natural horizon of mid yellowish brown can be viewed in the background.

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Yn unol â'n nôd i roddi gwasanaeth o ansawdd uchel, croesawn unrhyw sylwadau
sydd gennych ar gynnwys neu strwythur yr adroddiad hwn

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