



A.P.A.C. Ltd.

Archaeological Perspectives Analysis Consultancy

Watching Brief

REPORT

WB1/05



Llanfair Old Barn,

Powys

N. Phillips 04.03.2005

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Non Technical Summary

This report results from work undertaken by Archaeological Perspectives Analysis Consultancy Ltd (A.P.A.C.) on behalf Mr J Wright, Llanfair, Old Barn, Crickhowell, Powys, as part of Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, planning application No:PI7900. The watching brief had two objectives, the first concerned mechanical excavation of a drainage ditch from the south-east corner of the barn to the existing cess- pit, to the south and secondly to observe the removal of the ground surface within the barn. The outcome of the watching brief shows that no archaeology was disturbed in both cases.

Introduction

Location and scope of work

On the 1st February 2005 Neil Phillips of A.P.A.C. Ltd carried out a detailed archaeological watching brief during the mechanical excavation of a drainage ditch south-east of the Barn and removal of the internal ground surface within the barn at Llanfair Old Barn, Crickhowell Powys (Fig 1).

The barn, adjacent to the house, Llanfair Old Barn, is situated at NGR SO 2075 1952.

Geology and topography

The barn is located just to the north of a steep rise above the A 40 Brecon to Abergavenny road, west of Maescelyn Motte (SAM No: BR 055(POW)). It is possible that the steep bank may have some relevance to a supposed bailey associated to the motte.

According to the Solid and Drift Survey of England and Wales, 232 1980, the soil present on the site conforms to 'Fluvio-glacial sand and gravel', however, the area of excavation revealed a reddish sandy soil becoming increasingly more clayish with depth. The bottom of the drainage ditch at the base of the steep rise revealed a layer of rounded cobbles consistent with 'River Terrace Deposits'. The underlying geology is Lower Old Red Sandstone, predominantly of the 'Senni Beds'.

Archaeological and historical background

There is little historical evidence concerning the barn and the area of the field that was excavated for the drainage ditch. The portion of the field concerned also lies outside the schedule area which demarcates the possible bailey for the motte.

The earliest record for the barn can be seen on the first edition, 1891, 1:10,560, Ordnance Survey map (Fig 2) (www.old-maps.co.uk). An earlier map, electrotyped in 1890 but derived from earlier revisions dating back as far as 1813, however does not record its position (Fig 3) (Breconshire XLII SE 1986).

The barn itself which looks for the most part a 19th century build has some evidence of having re-used earlier architectural elements such as can be seen in (Plate 1) which shows the south windows in the background.

A topographical survey of the motte and possible bailey at Maescelyn was carried out in 2002 by A.P.A.C. Ltd (Phillips 2003. 149). The survey revealed that the western limit of the bailey extended to the modern house (Llanfair Old Barn) therefore suggesting the possibility of sub-surface remains which would be cut by the drainage ditch.

A chapel dedicated to St Mary is thought to have existed in the area and the SMR records 'Site of possible c.12th century chapel. Documented c.14th century. Used as farm building until 19th century when it was demolished (CPAT PRN 700). The exact whereabouts of the church are unknown but it is certainly possible that they could have been located in the immediate area of the excavation.

Aims and Objectives

Watching Brief

To establish the presence/absence of archaeological structures or other significant features within the works area, paying particular attention during the machine-cutting of service trenches, and during the reduction of ground levels.

Watching Brief Methodology

Scope of Fieldwork

The watching brief consisted of an archaeological fieldworker being present during the excavation a drainage trench from the south-east corner of the barn to an existing cess-pit and during the removal of rubble and the reduction of ground level inside the barn.

The drainage ditch was cleaned by hand at its contact with the fabric of the barn wall to ascertain the nature of the foundations. Both the drainage ditch and the interior of the barn during ground reduction were photographed using high-resolution digital photography.

All works were undertaken in accordance with both the IFA's *Standards and Guidance: for an archaeological watching brief* and current Health and Safety legislation.

Finds

No finds were recovered during the course of the excavation.

Watching Brief Results

Soils and ground conditions

The site and weather conditions on the day of the watching brief were good.

Descriptions

Drainage ditch on the south-east corner of the chancel

The drainage ditch measuring 21.3m long by 0.45m wide was excavated by a mechanical digger to an average depth of 1m, (Plate 2) (Fig 4). The ground slopes to the south in three pitches with gradients of 1:19, 1:4, and 1:8 (Plate 3).

The topsoil (1) averaged 0.15m depth and comprised mid brown fine loam.

Below the topsoil was a layer of red sandy soil (2).

The red sandy layer gradually became more clayish with depth exhibiting no definite boundary (3).

At the change of slope from 1:4 to 1:8 a slightly greater depth was reached revealing an area of rounded cobbles in heavy clay (4). These were thought to be consistent with an old river terrace deposit (Plate 4).

At the north of the drainage ditch a layer of clay (5) was found on which the shallow foundation of the southern wall of the barn was built (Plate 5 & Fig 5).

Floor reduction inside the barn

Prior to work commencing inside the barn the interior floor was photographed. In the first (plate 6) the view to the north shows the floor littered with extensive building debris.

In the foreground it is possible to see a raised edge of a walkway which connected the east and west doors. The walkway was bounded to the south with courses of edged, flat stone, behind which was a compacted surface. The raised edge stood on average 0.3m above the south half of the barn floor.

At the north edge of the walkway the floor was raised some 0.15m and covered in places with a rough cobbled surface. Unfortunately the cobbling had not survived to any great extent.

The second (Plate 1) shows the south end of the barn interior prior to levelling work. Again a great deal of building debris obscured the floor but it is possible to see the two edges of the raised ground connecting the east and west doorways.

Once the building debris had been removed it was possible to see that the lower south end of the barn also had a floor that once had been cobbled. Unfortunately the survival of the cobbles was again fairly poor.

Ground reduction was carried out using a mechanical digger fitted with a toothless bucket. The raised northern portion of the barn floor was reduced by an average of 0.4m to bring it level with the southern end of the barn.

Underneath the building debris and the partial cobbling was a layer of compacted red soil. The objective for levelling and reduction work stopped at this layer therefore it is not known to what depth the compacted floor went (Plates 7 & 8).

Between the east and west doors a 1m by 2m pit was excavated to make a foundation for a central fireplace for the barn renovation. The pit reached a depth of approx 0.6m into the compacted red soil and no change of context was noted.

Discussion and Interpretation

Reliability of field investigation

The watching brief on the drainage ditch found no archaeological features or finds. The possibility of any structure related to the bailey in the vicinity of the western edge of the scarp can therefore be discounted.

The concentration of rounded stones at the base of the scarp would tend to suggest that the escarpment itself is of geological origin.

The watching brief on the ground reduction inside the barn also recorded no finds and therefore no dating evidence to suggest a construction period for the barn.

No evidence of the proposed chapel of St Mary's was found during the watching brief.

Overall interpretation

Neither the excavation of the drainage ditch nor the reduction of ground level within the barn had any impact on pre-existing archaeology at the site.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the building team who carried out the excavations in such a sympathetic way.

Bibliography and references

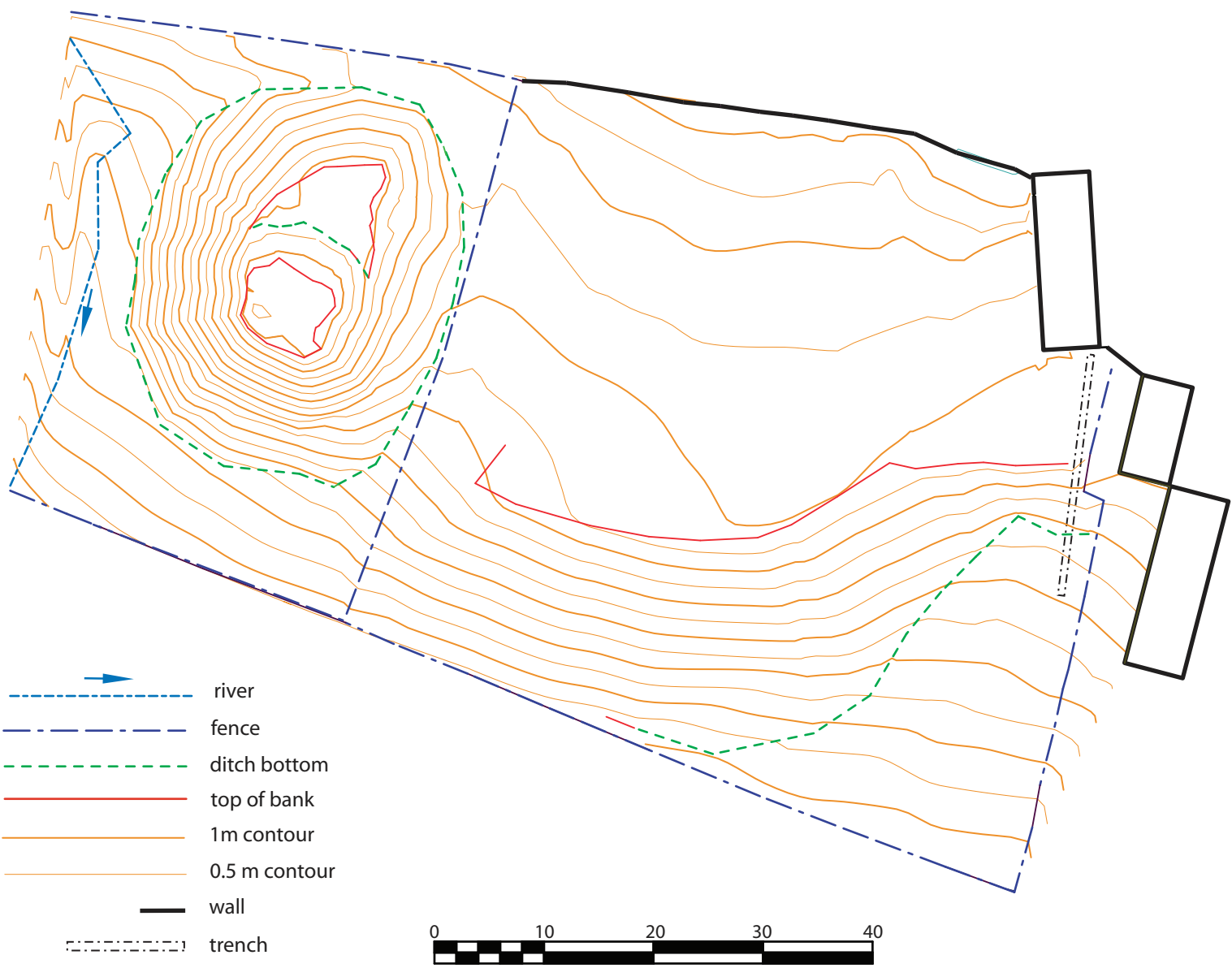
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ARCHIVE COVER SHEET

Llanfair Old Barn, Crickhowell, Powys

Site Name:	Llanfair Old Barn.
Site Code:	OB/05/WB
PRN:	-
NPRN :	-
SAM:	-
Other Ref No:	A.C.A.P. Ltd Report No. WB1/05
NGR:	SO 5890 7405
Site Type:	Modern
Project Type:	Watching Brief
Project Officer:	Neil Phillips
Project Dates:	February 2005
Categories Present:	N/A
Location of Original Archive:	C.P.A.T. SMR
Location of duplicate Archives:	N/A
Number of Finds Boxes:	N/A
Location of Finds:	N/A
Museum Reference:	N/A
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Restrictions to access:	None

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:



DRAWING TITLE:

Maescelyn
Motte and Bailey

Description:

Topographical survey

Date: 10/11/2003

Drawing Number: 1



A.P.A.C. Ltd

Drawn By: Neil Phillips

Fig 4: Trench location