

E002287

SMR  
Report Number

452

96/04

**GLAMORGAN-GWENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST  
CONTRACTS DIVISION**

**OAK CREST, UNDY  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION**

November 1996

PROJECT No. A362  
REPORT No. 96/073

### *Summary*

An archaeological excavation was carried out by The Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust Ltd (Contracts Division) (hereafter GGAT Contracts) on behalf of David McLean Homes Ltd, following the discovery of a burial during groundworks as part of a housing development at Oak Crest, Undy (NGR ST 435 872). The work ensured that the burial of Roman origin was recorded *in situ* prior to its removal and transfer to the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff where the object and its contents will be conserved and eventually displayed.

### *Acknowledgments*

This report was prepared by AG Marvell BA MIFA (Principal Archaeological Officer - GGAT Contracts). The Trust is grateful for the assistance of the staff of David McLean Homes and the National Museum of Wales during the execution of this project.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Development proposal, location and commission

David McLean Homes (Southern Division) Ltd are developing land known as Oak Crest, Undy, Gwent (NGR ST 435 872) as housing. In granting consent, the planning authority attached no conditions regarding archaeological interests, as there was no evidence of such interests to support such a requirement. During groundworks the remains of a stone sarcophagus were exposed in a foundation trench, removal of part of the lid confirmed the presence of skeletal material. David McLean Homes (Southern Division) Ltd accordingly contacted the appropriate HM Coroner and Newport Museum. On establishing that the find was of archaeological interest, David McLean Homes (Southern Division) Ltd commissioned GGAT Contracts to undertake all necessary measures to ensure the safe removal of the find from site and to provide advice should further investigation be necessary.

### 1.2 Scope of report

The report describes the fieldwork results (section 2) and offers conclusions (section 3).

## 2. Fieldwork results

### 2.1 Extent of works

Following a preliminary site visit on Thursday 7th November 1996, the remains were recorded and removed from their place of burial on Monday 11th November to the site compound, with transfer to the National Museum of Wales being completed on the following day. The methodology adopted was to record the remains *in situ* by means of written context description, photographs and scale plan. Because of the form of the burial (see 2.2. below), sufficient working space to effect removal could only be achieved by cutting a trench through the bedrock on one side of the burial, using the soil in the grave as cushion against the effects of this work on the sarcophagus. Once sufficient depth had been achieved, the grave fill on all sides of the sarcophagus was removed. Because of the plane of the bedrock, it proved possible for sufficient space to be excavated at two points below the sarcophagus for two canvas straps to be passed through to form a double sling hoist. These straps were then attached to the back actor of a JCB 3x, which was used to lift the remains from the grave onto a pallet laid with protective padding. This process was photographically recorded.

### 2.3 Results

The sarcophagus was set in rectangular grave set on a north-south orient and cut through bedrock to a depth of at least 1m; the true size of the grave could not be established as the result of site clearance works, and the manner of the discovery of the find, but was probably not much greater than that of the sarcophagus (est dimensions are 2.2m x 0.9m x 1m). The sarcophagus was made from two pieces of bathstone, one for the lid and the other for the main container. The lid in three pieces, and likely to have been broken in antiquity, measured *c.* 1.9m x 0.72m x 0.08m thick. The container was 1.9m long. At the south end it was 0.43m wide, thereafter it gradually tapered out to a width of 0.65m at a point *c.* 0.3m from the north end of the coffin. This tapering was slightly asymmetric with the east side projecting further from the center than the west. At the north end the stone had been worked to form a half hexagon shape. The walls of the container were *c.* 0.06m

thick. The internal measurement was 1.77m x 0.31m (min) - 0.53m (max) x 0.27m.

The skeleton was in a prone position, with head at the north end. The lower limbs had been disturbed, almost certainly after deposition, by unknown agent. Only the larger bones (femur, tibia etc) survived relatively intact. Most of the skull was missing with only the upper cranium surviving. The pelvis was also reasonably intact, but as was the case with the arms and lower right leg bones had been disturbed. Of the smaller bones, a few vertebrae, part of a scapula, and fragments of ribs were recovered. All epiphyses are fused. Some mineralisation was noted on one femur, perhaps due to seepage as result of a crack in the lower part of the lid. There was no trace of coffin or shroud fastenings or grave goods.

The coffin contained a small amount of loose fill, probably arriving at time of discovery. In the southwest corner a thin <0.05m grey-grain silt sand deposit (0.55m x 0.2m) was noted. The grave fill, as found, consisted of a single layer of red brown clay loam containing frequent stone fragments, and the remains of a small animal of as yet unidentified species.

It is expected that conservation of the coffin and pathological study of the skeletal remains will refine this summary of the site record.

### **3. Conclusions**

The burial is a significant find and the actions of David McLean Homes (Southern Division) Ltd have ensured its secure future.

### **4. Further work**

Following conservation of the sarcophagus and a historical pathology study of the skeletal remains, a short report for academic publication on the burial will be produced by staff of GGAT and the National Museum. The archive of site records made by GGAT will be deposited with the National Museum.

It is not possible to state with confidence whether the burial is a single item or associated with other depositions. Given this it is recommended that a watching-brief should be carried out on any groundworks in adjacent areas. This work should be carried out by an archaeological organization with appropriately qualified staff.

