

CPAT Report No 990

Eagles Glen, Four Crosses, Powys

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION



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I Grant
April 2009

Report for Mr N Massey

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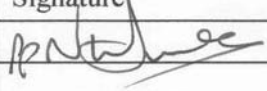
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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In January 2009 the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (henceforth CPAT) was invited by Mr N Massey, to undertake an archaeological evaluation in connection with proposals for the demolition and rebuilding of a fire-damaged house at Eagles Glen, Four Crosses (Powys CC planning application P2008/1350). The Curatorial Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, in their capacity as archaeological advisors to the local authority, had determined that an archaeological evaluation was required to identify the potential impact on the archaeological resource. Accordingly, a brief was prepared which detailed the works required (EVB 730).



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Fig. 1 Site location

- 1.2 Information held within the regional Historic Environment Record indicated that the development is situated directly over the line of the monument known as Offa's Dyke. Consequently, it was thought that sub-surface remains of the former rampart base might survive

which could be affected by the proposed development. In addition, the plot is surrounded on the north and east by fields which are known to contain prehistoric features related to funerary and ritual practices including a number of plough-levelled burial mounds.

2 LOCATION AND GEOLOGY

- 2.1 The development site is situated at the northern extent of the village of Four Crosses and 500m north of the main crossroads on the A483 (Fig. 1; SJ 26941893).
- 2.2 Four Crosses is situated on an outwash plain between the Rivers Severn and Vyrnwy which is composed of glacial or fluvioglacial deposits that form shallow depressions and low ridges overlying glacio-lacustrine alluvium. The ridges support well-drained brown earths, favourable to arable, dairy farming and beef farming. The soils to the north and south are unsuitable for arable production: to the north there is alluvium on the Vyrnwy floodplain and to the south are poorly drained stagnogleys (Owen and Britnell 1989, 27).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The line of Offa's Dyke crosses the development plot. The 8th-century earthwork, consisting of a large bank and a ditch to the west of it, is generally accepted to have formed the western boundary to the kingdom of Mercia. The Dyke survives as a substantial earthwork bank to the south of the school, some 200m from the development, and at that point is statutorily protected as a monument of national importance (Scheduled Ancient Monument Mg 033).
- 3.2 There is a significant concentration of Late Neolithic and Bronze Age burial mounds within the Four Crosses area, together with a series of pit alignments, all of which were initially recognized as cropmarks. In addition, recent excavations on the eastern side of the scheduled section of Dyke have revealed an extensive Romano-British field system.

4 EVALUATION

- 4.1 The evaluation process is essentially non-destructive and is designed to determine the depth at which any archaeologically sensitive deposits have survived, together with as much information as possible about their nature, condition and significance. A full drawn and written record was maintained throughout. Contexts were recorded on individual record forms and drawn and photographed as appropriate. Numbers in brackets in the following text refer to individual context records in the site archive, a summary of which is provided in Appendix 1.
- 4.2 The evaluation consisted of a single east-west trench, 1.5m wide and 10m long, excavated across the predicted line of the Offa's Dyke rampart and parallel with the northern wall of the present building (see Fig. 2). Modern and 19th-century overburden, consisting of topsoil and aggregate (1) 0.2m thick, 20th-century stony gravel and clay (6) 0.2m thick, and an underlying, thick (0.26 – 0.4m) post-medieval deposit (7) of firm mottled clay, was removed by machine onto the surface of the first significant archaeological horizon and thereafter all excavation was undertaken by hand.
- 4.3 During removal of the overburden two modern services were encountered. An electrical cable (3), orientated south-west to north-east, was recorded at a depth of 0.14m, located 4.7m from the east end of the trench. The second service, a modern water pipe, appeared at a depth of

0.82m below the present ground surface, within a broad trench (5), 0.4m wide x 0.8m deep and also orientated south-west to north-east, 2.4m from the east end of the trench.

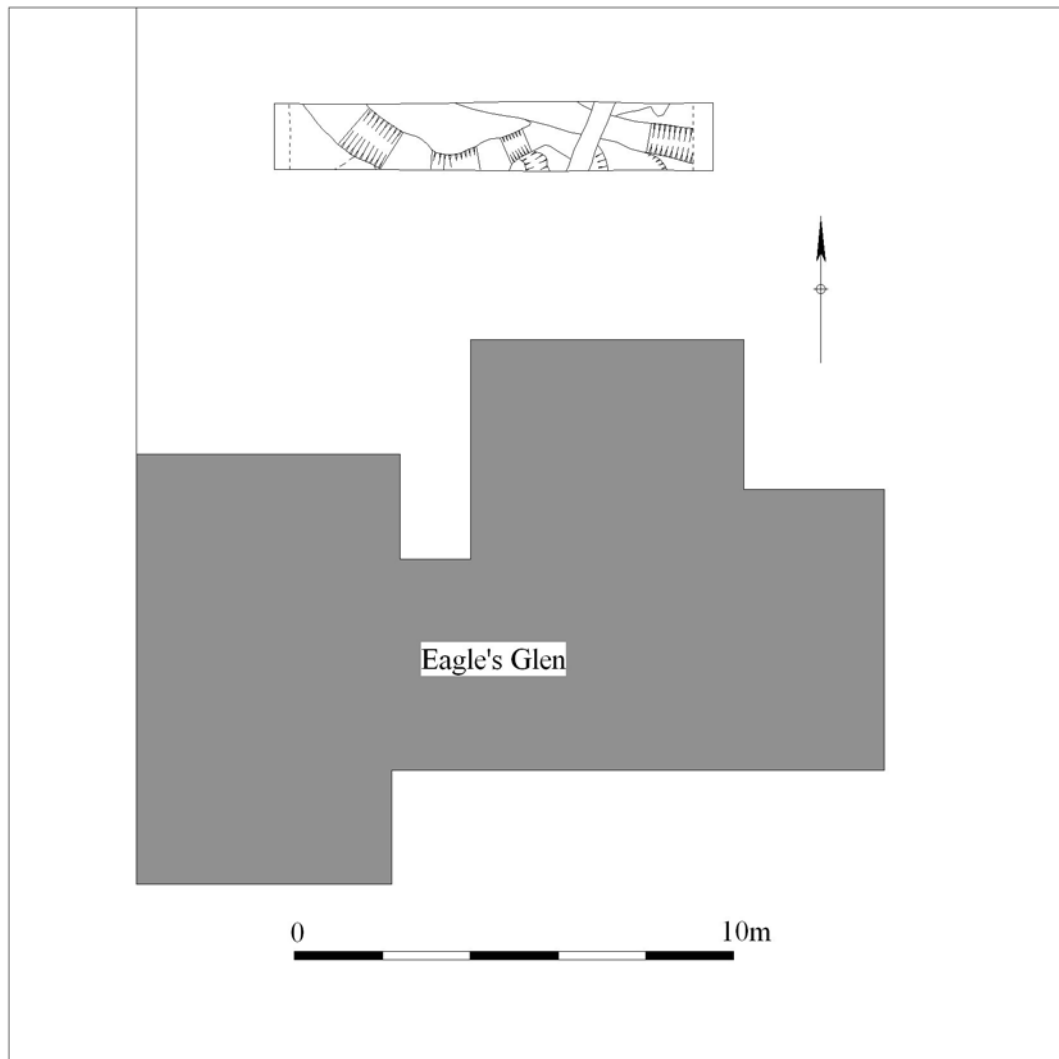


Fig. 2 Trench location

- 4.4 Across the base of the trench the natural subsoil (22) consisted of a firm, pale silty clay overlying loose greeny grey riverwashed gravels and patches of fine, pale sand (23) (see Plate 1). The lower subsoil (23) was observed in a sondage that was excavated at the western end of the trench. A number of linear features and earlier pits and deposits cut into the subsoil at this level (see Fig. 3).



Plate 1. Initial view of the trench from the east. Photo CPAT 2839-001

- 4.5 The earliest feature, at the east of the trench, was a deposit (21) of firm charcoal-stained orange brown silty clay, observed in section to be at least 0.2m thick. It had the appearance of the remains of a trampled ground surface, possibly of Romano-British origin. Overlying, or possibly cutting, the silty clay was a patch of soft orange brown silty clay (19). This was possibly the remains of a feature of undetermined nature, the extent of which lay beyond the northern edge of the trench.
- 4.6 South of deposit 21 a pit (28) was identified along the southern edge of the trench. The feature was at least 1.3m in diameter and was partially excavated in order to determine its nature. In section, two fills (26 & 27) were revealed. The lower fill (27) consisted of a firm orangey clay sealed by re-deposited river gravels (26). Deposit 21 and features 19 and 28 were all truncated by a broad linear gully (18), 0.7m wide by 0.12m deep, orientated west-north-west to east-south-east. The gully, visible for at least 5.6m in length, extended beyond the bounds of the excavation. The single fill (17), a mottled orange brown silty clay, contained inclusions of small rounded stones (see Plate 2). Artefacts of Roman date which were recovered from the gully consisted of a fragment of a jar with finely applied and impressed decoration, four abraded body sherds, and two small undiagnostic rims, all of Severn Valley Ware. In addition there were four small iron hobnails.



Plate 2. Romano-British gully (18) and earlier features, viewed from the east.
Photo CPAT 2839-028

- 4.7 The gully (18) also truncated an earlier curvilinear feature (14). This feature, 0.7m wide and recorded at a mid-point along the southern edge of the trench orientated south-west by north-east, contained a single fill (13) of a friable, orange-brown clay silt, 0.15m thick (see Plate 3). A sherd of abraded Severn Valley Ware, or possibly daub, was recovered from the fill, together with three abraded fragments of pottery in an orange sandy fabric with a matt buff surface, which could be of medieval date. However, gully 14 cut pit 28, and both were truncated by gully 18, suggesting that any medieval pottery must be intrusive. A smaller undefined gully (16), measuring 0.65m wide 0.12m deep and filled with a single fill (15) of orangey grey silty clay, was also truncated by gully 14.

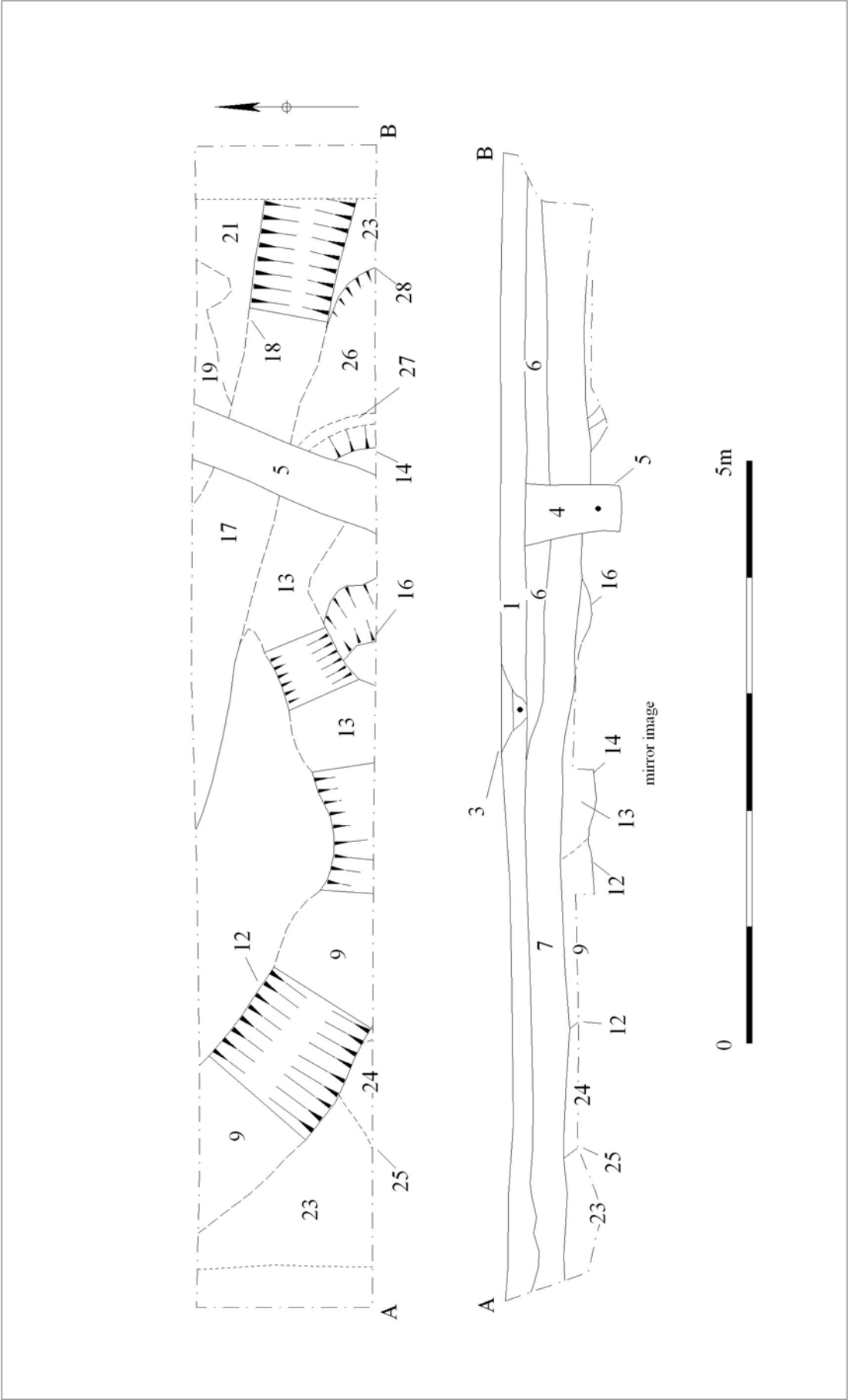


Fig. 3 Trench plan and section



Plate 3. Romano-British gully (14), viewed from the east.
Photo CPAT 2839-018

- 4.8 Towards the western end of the trench the gully appeared to join a much larger, contemporary linear feature (12). Extending beyond the bounds of the excavation, this broad ditch, 1.11m wide 0.63m deep and orientated north-west to south-east, had steep well-defined concave sides. Towards the base the ditch narrowed into a near vertically sided trough 0.2m wide and 0.2m deep (see Plates 4 & 5, Fig. 4). The ditch was possibly re-cut as there is evidence of an earlier primary fill (11), in the form of a thin band of firm buff-coloured silt along the south-western side of the ditch. The later ditch cut (12) contained two fills, a gravel silt (10) 0.12m deep sealed by an orange-brown 'greasy' silty clay (9), 0.51m thick. The base of the latter fill (9) was sampled for its high charcoal content. Artefactual evidence was recovered from this fill in the form of a small rim sherd of Roman Samian ware, a body sherd of an orange-buff fabric, an iron nail and a small faceted quartz crystal. All of these finds are believed to be of Romano-British date.



Plate 4. South-west facing section through Romano-British ditch 12.
Photo CPAT 2839-010



Plate 5. Ditch 12 and associated gully 14 (background).
Photo CPAT 2839-015

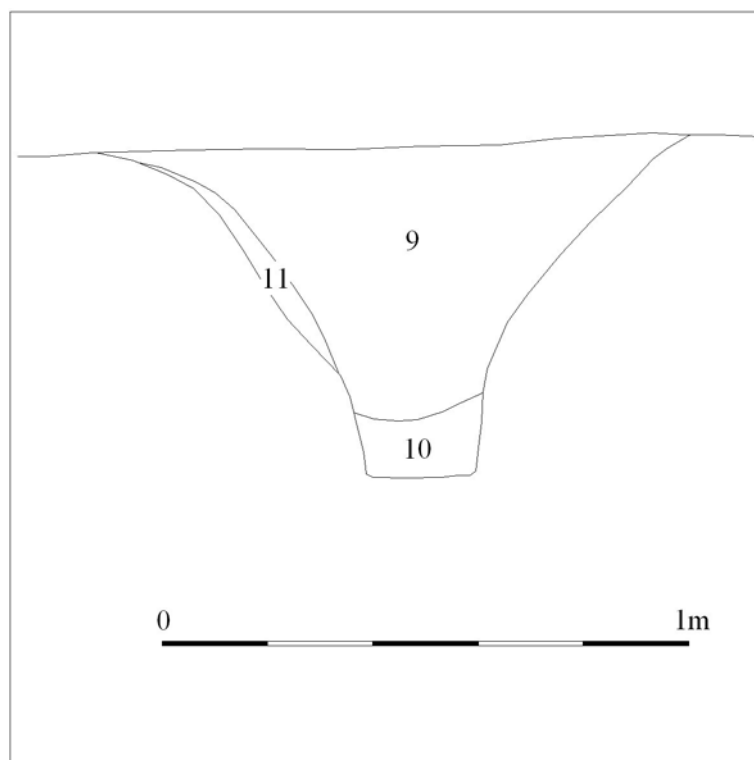


Fig. 4 Section of ditch 12

- 4.9 Finally, there was possible evidence of an earlier truncated feature (25), on the south-west edge of the ditch (12). A fill of 'burnt' reddish brown silty clay (24) was recorded in section and plan (see Fig. 3). The feature was not excavated but it is presumed that it is of Romano-British or earlier origin.

5 FINDS

- 5.1 The evaluation produced ten sherds of Romano-British pottery, eight sherds from gully 18 and two sherds from fill 9 of ditch 12. The majority of the sherds were from Severn Valley Ware vessels, including the applied/impressed decorated rim of a jar, together with a single rim sherd of Samian ware from the ditch 12. None of the pottery was particularly diagnostic and cannot be closely dated. Ditch 18 also produced four iron hobnails and context 9 contained a single iron nail. In addition, there were three small sherds of possible medieval pottery from gully 14 which may be part of the strap handle from a jug.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The evaluation produced no evidence for the survival of deposits associated with Offa's Dyke. However, there is evidence, in the form of ditches, gullies and surviving ground surfaces, to suggest significant Romano-British activity in the immediate area of Eagles Glen. The orientation of the ditches and gullies found during the excavations imply further archaeological deposits will also survive to the north and north-east in the adjacent pasture fields. It seems likely that these features are associated with similar discoveries in the fields around 150m to the south-east, which are assumed to be part of a Romano-British field system.

- 6.2 The level of post medieval and modern overburden across the site varied in depth from 0.48m to the west of the property to 0.76m to the east. The archaeological deposits survive below this horizon throughout the trench and consequently the archaeology is more vulnerable towards the western side of the property.

7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 7.1 The writer would like to thank Richard Hankinson of CPAT, for his help and assistance with the evaluation, as well as the staff of the following repositories: the Historic Environment Record, CPAT; the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth; and the National Monuments Record, Aberystwyth

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1799 Enclosure Award for Llandrinio, Llandysilio and Llansantffraid (NLW, Aberystwyth).

1842 Tithe Survey and Apportionment (1839) for Llandysilio parish

1886 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25", Montgomery 11.9, surveyed 1883

1983 Soil Survey of England and Wales map (Sheet 2 - Wales) and Legend (1:250,000 scale)

1994 British Geological Survey map of Wales (Solid edition at 1:250,000 scale)

APPENDIX 1**PROJECT ARCHIVE****SITE ARCHIVE**

28 context record forms
01 A1 site plans
01 A4 section drawings
35 Digital images
Photographic catalogue

Romano British pottery catalogue

Context	Sherds	Comment
9	1	Samian ware rim sherd
9	1	body sherds Severn Valley ware
17	5	body sherds, Severn Valley ware
17	2	Abraded rim sherds , Severn Valley ware
17	1	Decorated rim sherd of Severn Valley ware

Medieval (?) pottery catalogue

Context	Sherds	Comment
13	3	body sherd, unglazed buff sandy ware. Slight 'colour coat' (?)
13	1	Abraded body sherd or daub. Severn Valley ware.

Miscellaneous finds catalogue

Context	No.	Comment
7	2	Pipeclay stems, 18/19 th century
7	1	body sherd of decorated slipware. 18 th century
9	1	Charcoal sample
9	1	Faceted quartz crystal
9	1	Iron nail, Romano British
17	4	Iron hobnails, Romano British