

INVESTIGATIONS AT BARLAND'S FARM, MAGOR, 1993

by Martin Lawler and Nigel Nayling

Gwent Europark is one of a number of new developments for offices or warehousing and light industry being proposed on both sides of the Severn Levels. The first stage of the Europark scheme is a 15ha area to the west of Llandevenny village and east of Llanwern Steelworks. This land at Barland's Farm, Magor is being developed by Tesco Stores Ltd as a dry goods distribution centre.

Preliminary field evaluation on the Barland's Farm site was undertaken in April 1993 by Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust (Contracts Section) on behalf of Tesco Stores Ltd, to a brief prepared by Alison Borthwick (as consultant to Tesco Stores Ltd) and the Curatorial Section of the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological

Trust. The initial evaluation comprised a borehole survey. A total of forty-nine cable-tool boreholes were sunk on a 100m grid basis across the development area, and were logged on site by archaeological staff. The boreholes, in conjunction with previous geotechnical investigations on the site, revealed a relatively simple alluvial stratigraphy across the entire area. This consisted of a lower band of sediments overlain by a peat bed which was in turn overlain by the upper silt clays. Sands and gravels of probable interglacial origin occurred at the base of the estuarine deposits, sealing the underlying Keuper Marl bedrock platform. On the western side of the site, the peat deposits become progressively thinner and with a scarcer

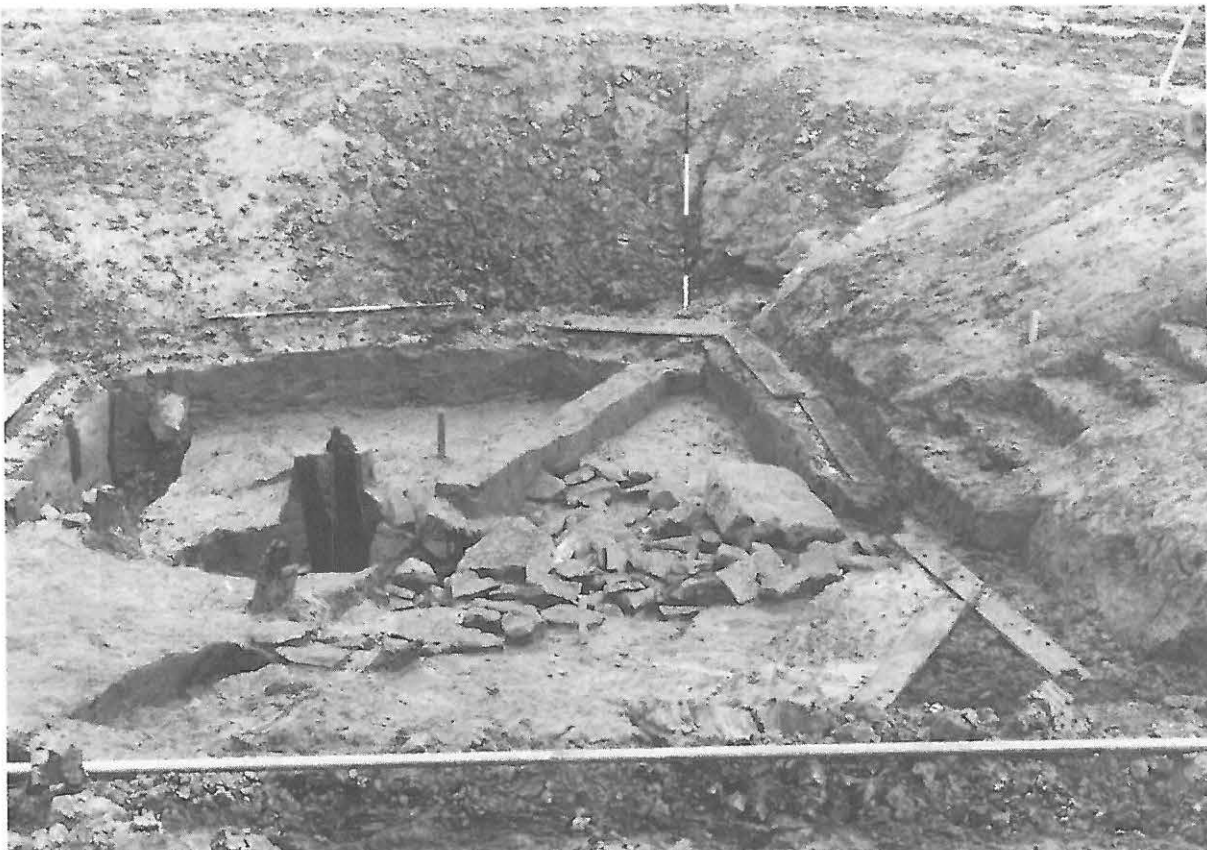


Figure 43. Barland's Farm, Magor: stone and timber structure in Area 050 looking west.



Figure 44. Barland's Farm, Magor: Timber piles for structure in Area 050; note squaring on timber on right.

wood content, and it is likely that the Barland's Farm site perches on the eastern edge of an ancient channel floodplain between the steelworks and Barland's Farm.

A second stage of fieldwork was undertaken on behalf of Tesco Stores Ltd by Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust over a six week period in June and July. The fieldwork was carried out with the assistance of Wimpey Construction UK Ltd. Four sites were selected for further investigation at this stage. At three locations, the peats were examined by means of deep sections cut within coffer dams. The peats within the coffer dams were excavated by hand to a depth of 7m below the surface and were recorded and sampled.

The fourth investigation was intended to examine a reported sandstone rubble deposit buried at a depth of 2.5m, which had been located by a geotechnical trial pit. An open

area excavation was undertaken on the site of the geotechnical trial pit. This revealed a number of features located within a minor palaeochannel, whose base, truncated by the trench, was about 4m across. On the western side of the channel was a small platform of rubble, including some substantial blocks (Figure 43). A number of vertical timber piles (Figures 44 and 45) had been driven into the bed of the channel in the vicinity of the rubble platform. The piles included paired arrangements of squared oak timbers and ash roundwood pieces. At least one of the squared oak piles had been re-used from elsewhere, and featured a redundant sawn-off peg set in a square mortise hole. Pottery recovered from the rubble suggested a late third or early fourth century AD date for the structure. Its purpose is uncertain but it does not appear to have been intended as a causeway or bridge, and may be interpreted as a small landing stage or a fishweir.

A range of environmental samples was taken at each of the four sites investigated. A programme of analysis is currently being undertaken, principally by staff of the Palaeoenvironmental Research Centre, Saint David's University College, Lampeter and other specialists.

Construction works were periodically monitored by Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust staff and in November 1993 a further stone and timber structure was observed to the south-west of the earlier find. During limited excavation, recording and sampling, a presumed pile proved to be a curved timber nailed to horizontal planking suggesting the presence of at least part of a contemporary boat. Following discussions with Alison Borthwick and Tesco Stores Ltd, funds were provided for the excavation, *in situ* recording and lifting of the boat along with further investigation of the associated structure which may be a jetty or bridge. Artefactual material, including a small collection of leather

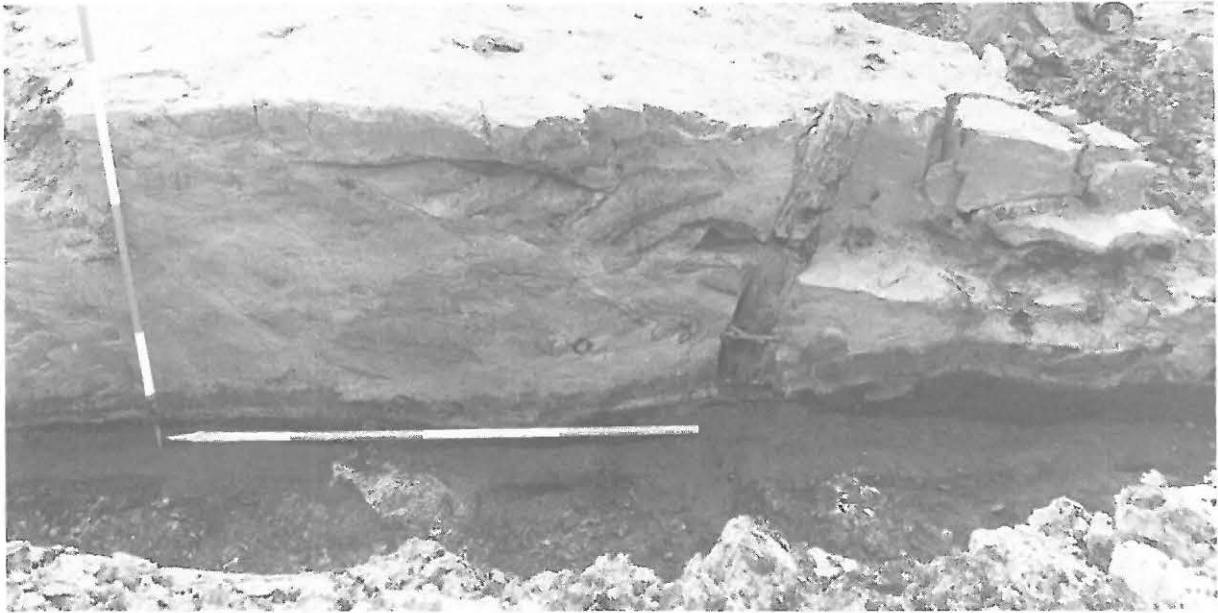


Figure 45. Barland's Farm, Magor: Cross section through silts in Area 050 showing complex stratification caused by water flow around timbers.

shoes, suggests a late third or early fourth century date.

The boat itself (cover photograph) shows many similarities to the Blackfriar's Ship and the St. Peterport Wreck and may represent the same Romano-Celtic tradition. It survived to a length of 9.5m comprising a flat bottom of four massive tangential oak planks nailed to oak floor timbers with iron nails, thinner side planking similarly attached to both the floor timbers and side-frames and a fragmented prow with stem-post. Planks were butted against one another with plant material acting as caulking. The stern was absent. A small mast-step timber may have housed either a towing mast or sail mast. Detailed *in situ* recording included photogrammetric recording after which the boat was dismantled and taken to Newport Museum stores.

The associated structure comprised a vertical face of massive stone blocks apparently on a palaeochannel edge revetted by squared oak uprights and

horizontals, from which three parallel lines of piles ran out into the channel. Dumps of stone had been placed around the piles presumably to consolidate the structure, which is tentatively interpreted as a jetty or bridge. Its full extent is unknown as it is truncated by a post-medieval reën.

An assessment of this second phase of fieldwork is ongoing, after which more recording and analysis of the boat will be carried out prior to conservation. It is hoped that Newport Museum will be able to find the funds necessary for its treatment and eventual display. It is intended that the results of all the fieldwork and palaeoenvironmental studies will be published as a monograph in 1994.

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