

Ancient Cwmbrân & the Cistercians Community Archaeology Project

Site One:
The Cistercian Way
Greenmeadow
Cwmbrân

NGR: ST 279 955

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1. Introduction

This report contains the results of an initial programme of archaeological excavation carried out as part of the Ancient Cwmbrân and the Cistercians Community Archaeology Project by Border Archaeology between November 4th and 7th 2009 on behalf of the Ancient Cwmbrân and the Cistercians Partnership Board.

The aim of the excavation was to facilitate community involvement in the investigation of an apparently undisturbed section of the Cistercian Way near Greenmeadow Community Farm (**Fig. 1**) and to provide professional training and supervision.

A copy of this report will be sent to Torfaen County Borough Council and Richard Davies Esq. for the Ancient Cwmbrân and the Cistercians Partnership Board and will form part of a final technical report to be compiled by Border Archaeology on completion of the Project.

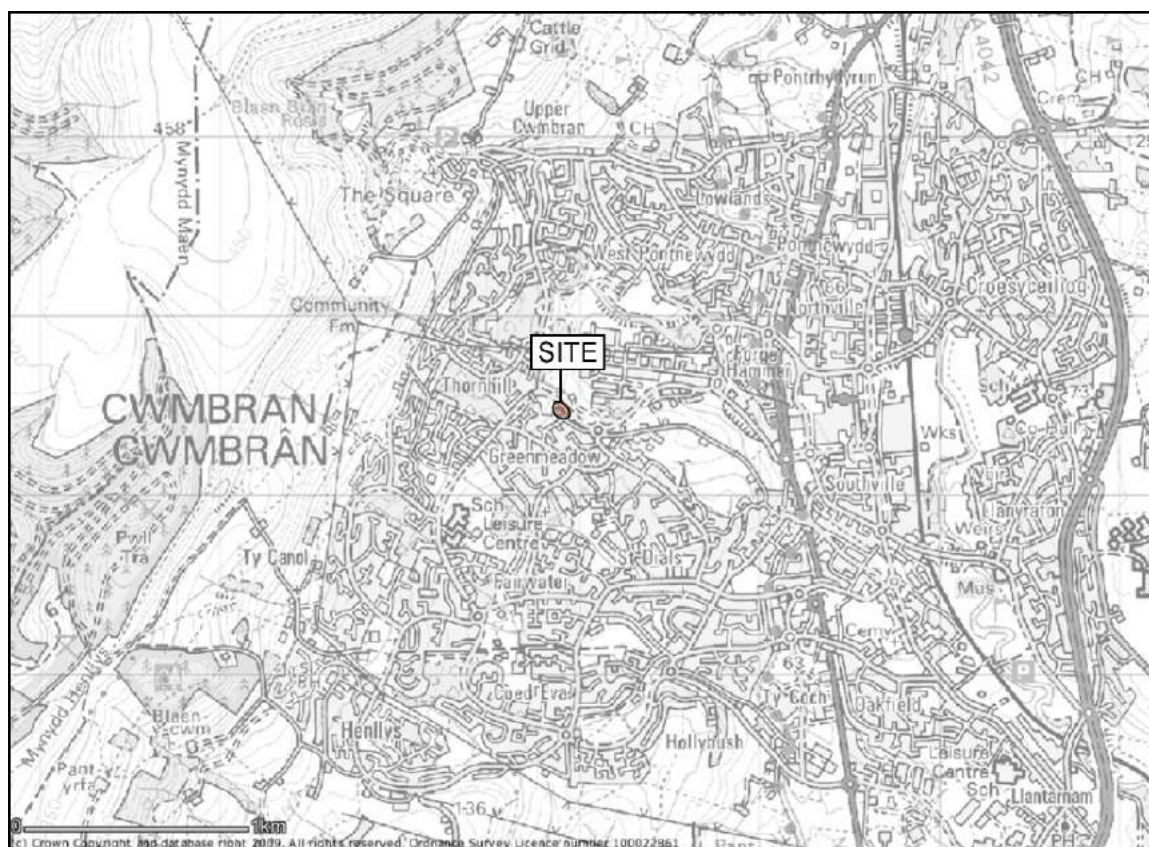


Fig. 1: Site location

1.1 Soils & Geology

Cwmbrân is classified as an unsurveyed urban/industrial area by the Soil Survey of England and Wales (SSEW, 1983). However, bordering Greenmeadow immediately to the W is an area of stagnogleyic brown earths of the MIDDLETON series (572b), consisting of reddish fine silty soils with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal waterlogging over Devonian reddish silty shale and siltstone.

2. Aims

1. To facilitate community involvement in the process of archaeological excavation and recording through the training and supervision of volunteers
2. To examine the archaeological resource within a designated section of the Cistercian Way within a framework of defined research objectives
3. To compile a permanent record of the archaeological resource
4. To analyse and interpret the results of the archaeological investigation and disseminate these results
5. To promote the overall aims of the Project

3. Methodology

The programme of archaeological excavation was carried out in accordance with archaeological practices set out in *Standard and Guidance for archaeological excavation* (Institute for Archaeologists 2001). Border Archaeology adheres to the *IfA Code of conduct* and *Code of approved practice for the regulation of contractual arrangements in field archaeology*.

Five trenches were opened at locations previously identified as offering potential to fulfil the aims of the investigation. These locations were a) at the junction of the main trackway and a spur leading off to the S, which appeared to respect a substantial earth mound, and b) in the vicinity of a stone 'marker' of quartz conglomerate, one of several situated along this section of the trackway. The mound itself was also investigated (**Fig. 2**).

These trenches were opened manually and excavation proceeded by hand using appropriate excavation techniques. Approximate trench dimensions were: 5m × 1.5m (Trench 1), 3.5m × 1.5m (Trench 2), 8m × 1m (Trench 3), 3m × 1m (Trench 4) and 2m × 1m (Trench 5). All removed material was scanned for artefactual evidence by an experienced metal detectorist.

Written, drawn and photographic records were compiled using *pro-forma* sheets and a 10.3MPX digital camera, in accordance with Border Archaeology's *Field Recording Manual*. Field drawings were made on gridded archivally stable polyester film, with plans, sections and elevations drawn at scales 1:50, 1:20 or 1:10, as appropriate. All drawings were registered and cross-referenced to the written record. A photographic record of contexts, samples and artefacts was made, together with a representative photographic record of the progress of the excavation. All such records were indexed and cross-referenced to the written record, with details of subject and direction of view maintained in a photographic register, indexed by frame number.

Any associated artefacts recovered have been retained, cleaned, labelled and stored according to *Standards and Guidance for the collection, documentation conservation and research of archaeological materials* (IFA 2001), the aim being to create a stable, ordered, well documented, accessible material archive forming a resource for current and future research (IFA 2001).

All artefacts were bagged and labelled with the site code and context number before being removed off site. In due course, where deemed appropriate and where funds permit, each assemblage will be examined according to typological or chronological criteria and any conservation needs identified. Conservation, if required, will be undertaken by approved conservators on advice provided by a suitable specialist and in accordance with United Kingdom Institute for Conservation (now part of the Institute of Conservation) guidelines. All processing of fieldwork finds will be carried out at the end of the project in pursuit of budgetary efficiency.

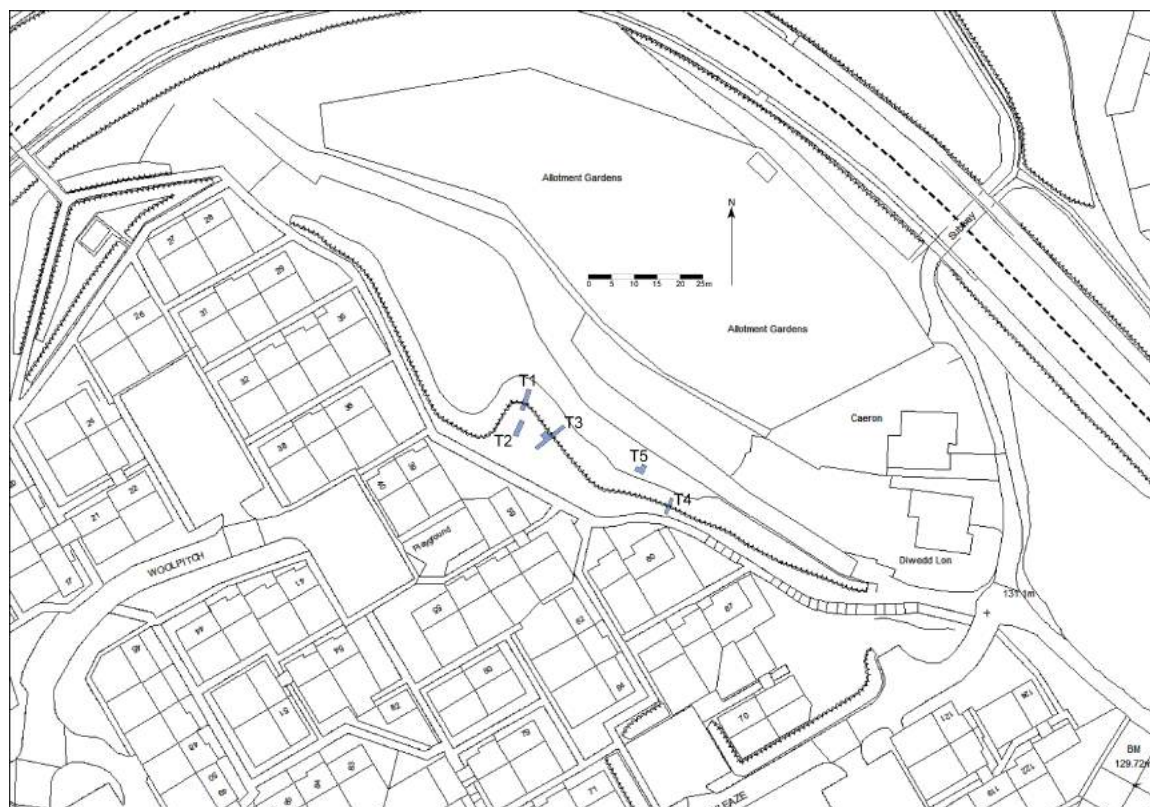


Fig. 2: Plan showing location of trenches

4. Historical background

The section of trackway under investigation represents a holloway of considerable antiquity. It forms part of the existing boundary between the parishes of Llanfrechfa (to the N) and Llanfihangel Llantarnam (to the S) and originally defined part of the substantial manor of Llantarnam which belonged to the Cistercian monks of Llantarnam Abbey, granted by its founder, Hywel ap Iorwerth lord of Caerleon, in about 1179 (Williams, 2001, 3).

The holloway also formed part of a long-distance routeway extending from Llantarnam Abbey to its grange at Penrhys in the Rhondda valley. A shrine dedicated to the Virgin Mary was established at Penrhys by no later than the middle of the 15th century; it became a significant pilgrimage centre during the late medieval period, commemorated by several Welsh bards, and flourished until its suppression by order of Henry VIII's chief minister, Thomas Cromwell, in 1538 (Gray, 1996, 10-32)

In spite of the suppression of Llantarnam Abbey and the destruction of the shrine at Penrhys, the holloway nevertheless remained an important local thoroughfare throughout the post-medieval period. The earliest accurate topographical representation of the route appears on the OS surveyors' drawing of 1813 (at a scale of 2 inches to the mile) which shows it extending NE from Llantarnam (following the line of present day Commercial Street and St Dials Road) crossing the Monmouthshire Canal and thence running NE towards St Dials, passing Greenmeadow Farm to the N and then continuing towards Troed-y-Rhiw Farm (now occupied by Park House Farm).

The tithe map for Llanfihangel Llantarnam parish, dated 1843, provides more detail concerning the topography of the holloway. Of particular interest is the fact that it shows that the section currently under investigation meandered quite noticeably, respecting the banks immediately to the SW that are clearly depicted on the tithe map. In spite of landscaping activity associated with the modern housing estate, these banks still survive today and appear to be natural formations.

At some point before 1882, when the OS 1st edition 25 inch map was drawn up, it appears that the course of the section of the holloway under investigation had been moved slightly to the NE and re-established on a straighter alignment. This may simply have represented an attempt to improve access along the route (which still constituted an important local thoroughfare at that time), or it could have been associated with the regularisation of the boundary between the neighbouring parishes of Llanfihangel Llantarnam and Llanfrechfa.

This section of the holloway is still shown on the same alignment on the OS 2nd, 3rd and 4th edition maps of the area, and appears to have remained in use as a local thoroughfare at least until the late 1930s; however by the early 1950s the continuation of the route further to the NE (adjacent to Greenmeadow Wood) appears to have declined in use, becoming little more than a footpath.

5. Results

5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was located in the trackway and ran NNE/SSW. The first of 13 contexts revealed was an L horizon (101) consisting of little decomposed litter extending to an average thickness of 0.02m. Underlying this was an area of modern fire debris comprising moderately compact dark brown sandy silt containing burnt organic material, partially burnt wood, plastic, metal, pottery and glass (104). This was contained within a shallow pit [103] measuring 1.1m × 0.9m × 0.06m situated within the trackway. This pit was cut into a 0.08-0.38m thick build-up of loose reddish-brown sandy silt exhibiting patches of burning and root activity (102). This deposit contained a large amount of modern plastic, insulation material etc. and probably represents waste from construction activity relating to housing development within the vicinity.

Beneath (102) was a compact to weakly cemented deposit of stone, brick, gravel and sand (105) forming a crude trackway surface of probable 20th century date measuring 4.8m × >3m × 0.3m laid within linear cut [109] oriented NW/SE. This surface was cut into (106), a moderately compact mid brown sandy silt extending throughout the trench to a thickness of 0.08m, which produced pottery finds together with pieces of vitrified slag/tap slag. This deposit revealed none of the modern debris identified in the upper layers and

has thus been assigned a provisional post-medieval date. Cutting the natural clay (107) were possible contemporary linear cuts [110, 112].

Linear [110] (**Plate 1; Fig. 3**) was oriented NW/SE and measured $>1.2\text{m} \times 1.2\text{m} \times 0.23\text{m}$, revealing a sharp break of slope at the top of the profile, with sides sloping steeply on the SW and moderately on the NE and with a moderately sharp break of slope to a flat base sloping towards the NE. This was filled by (111), a strongly cemented dark greyish-brown mixture of sandy silt and rounded pebbles/cobbles with occasional pieces of vitrified slag, evidently forming an earlier trackway surface of post-medieval date.



Plate 1: View NW showing linear [110]

Possibly contemporary with this feature was a second linear cut [112] (**Plate 2; Fig. 3**) on a similar alignment measuring $>1.2\text{m} \times 0.57\text{m} \times 0.28\text{m}$, running along the base of the bank on the SW side of the trackway, which appeared to have been truncated by later trackway activity. This cut was more tapered in profile than [110] and may represent rutting associated with the use of the trackway by wheeled transport or a ditch feature. It was filled by a moderately compact/cohesive mixture of mid brown sandy silt and medium angular stones with frequent inclusions of smaller stones (113), possibly representing deliberate infilling. Indurated greyish-brown mudstone (108) was revealed at the base of the sequence comprising the natural bedrock within the area of the trackway.



Plate 2: View NW showing linear [112]

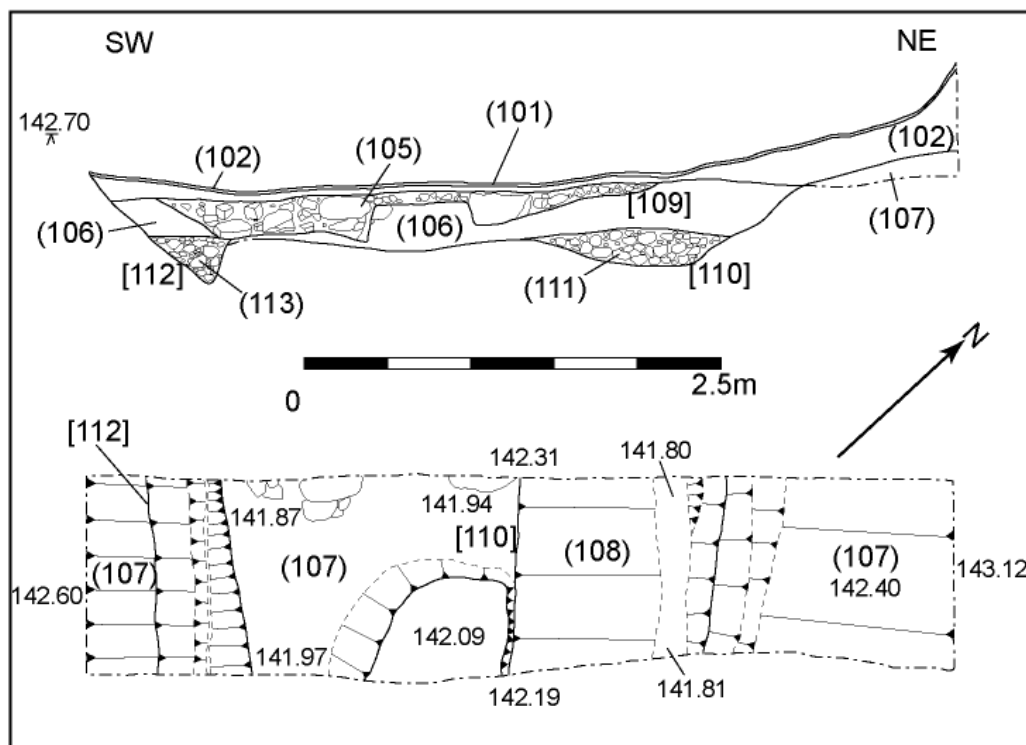


Fig. 3: Plan and SE-facing section of Trench 1

5.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 was located on a substantial mound above and to the S Trench 1 and was oriented NNE/SSW. Three contexts were revealed. Underlying the litter layer (201) was an A horizon consisting of firm dark reddish-brown silty clay containing occasional small and medium rounded, sub-rounded and subangular stones, with well incorporated organic matter (202), extending $>3.54\text{m} \times >1.5\text{m}$ to a maximum thickness of 0.1m. Underlying (202) was a natural subsoil horizon composed of friable mid brown silty clay containing frequent degraded stone fragments extending $>3.54\text{m} \times >1.5\text{m} \times >0.38\text{m}$ (203).



Plate 3: Post-excavation view of Trench 2, looking NE

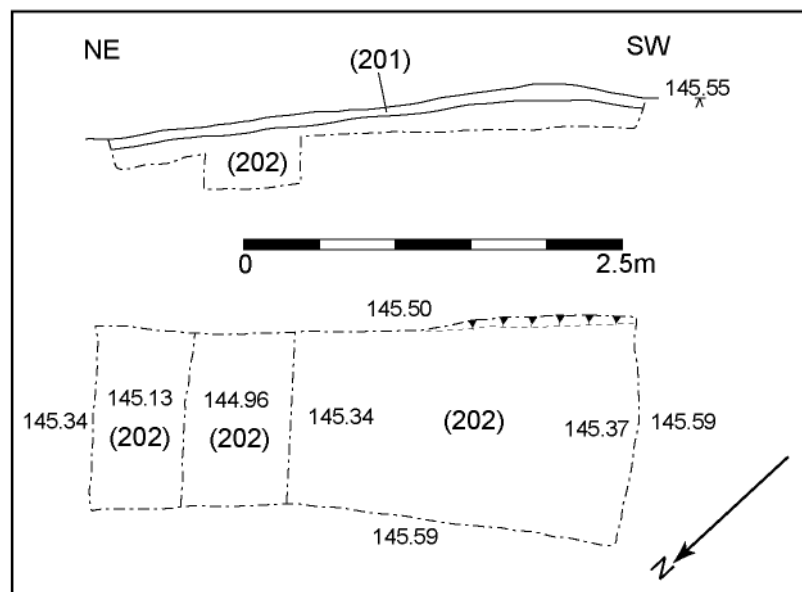


Fig. 4: Trench 5 plan and NW-facing section

5.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 was located to the SE of Trench 1 and ran NE/SW across the junction of the main trackway and a spur running off it to the NW. The uppermost layer of material (301) consisted of loose litter together with modern debris consisting of CBM, plastic, metal and glass. Underlying this was a surface horizon (302) composed of moderately compact dark reddish-brown silty clay containing moderate small sub-rounded stones together with fragments of modern CBM, glass, iron and occasional plastic extending $>7.8\text{m} \times >1\text{m}$ to an average thickness of 0.1m. Beneath (302) was the upper fill (303) of a substantial linear cut [305] running NW/SE along the main track (**Plates 4 & 5; Fig. 5**). This cut measured $>1\text{m} \times 2.7\text{m}$ with an average depth of 0.75m. The break of slope at the top of the profile was sharp to the SW and moderate to the NE, with steeply sloping sides breaking to a slightly undulating but essentially flat base. The base of the slope on the SW side revealed a stepped profile while on the NE side this was concave in form.

This feature was cut through natural deposits (306) and contained three fills. The basal fill (308) consisted of firm mid to dark grey clayey silt containing occasional CBM, iron and glass and medium sub-rounded stones, together with frequent small rounded stones. This deposit measured $1.6\text{m} \times 0.8\text{m} \times 0.2\text{m}$ (average thickness) and was of a more silty composition than the overlying fills, suggesting it had accumulated during the active life of the cut feature or after it went out of use and prior to subsequent backfilling. The finds in this deposit were likely to have been intrusive from the later overlying fills. Immediately overlying (308) was (304), a moderately compact to firm mixture of light greenish-grey/pinkish-brown silty clay and degraded stone containing frequent abraded CBM fragments and occasional iron measuring $2.5\text{m} \times 0.8\text{m} \times 0.5\text{m}$ (average thickness). The uppermost fill (303) consisted of a number of tipping deposits, all of which contained modern debris.

The fill generally comprised moderately compact to firm mid greyish-brown clayey silt containing frequent medium and large stones, glass fragments and CBM, moderate small stones and occasional iron objects measuring $>2.8\text{m} \times >0.8\text{m} \times 0.36\text{m}$ (average thickness). At the SW end of the trench, a natural limestone outcrop was encountered (309).



Plate 4: View NW showing modern fills (303), (304) and (308) within linear feature [305]

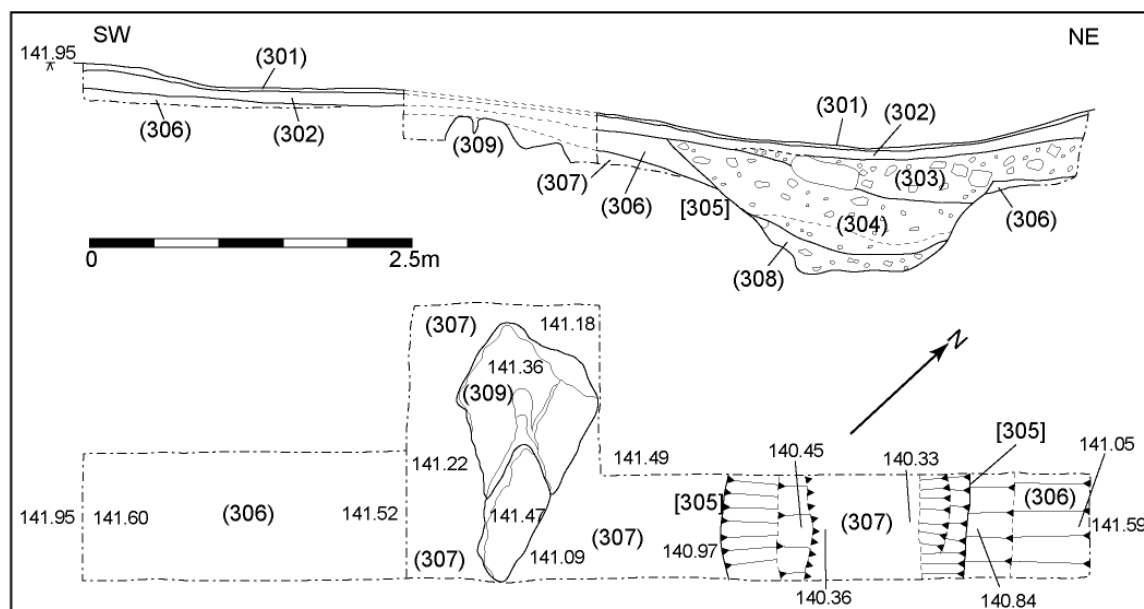


Fig. 5: Plan and SE-facing section of Trench 3



Plate 5: View SW showing linear feature [305]

5.4 Trench 4

Trench 4 was located to the SE of Trench 3 and extended NNE/SSW across the main trackway. The surface material (401) consisted of little decomposed litter and modern debris beneath which was a firm dark brown silty clay containing frequent modern detritus and partly decomposed organic matter extending $>3\text{m} \times >0.7\text{m} \times 0.05\text{m}$ (402). Underlying (402) was a dump of construction debris and assorted domestic/commercial waste associated with modern construction activity (403) consisting of loose dark brown clayey silt containing frequent glass, plastic, wire, CBM, metal and wood extending $>2.9\text{m} \times >0.7\text{m} \times 0.65\text{m}$ (maximum thickness). This material was contained within a linear cut [406] possibly forming a ditch or channel feature extending 1.66m (NE/SW) $\times >0.7\text{m}$ (NW/SE) $\times 0.56\text{m}$ (maximum depth). This feature revealed a sharp break of slope at the top of the profile, sides that sloped steeply on the NE and were near vertical on the SW, breaking sharply to an irregular base. This ditch/channel was cut through a natural clay deposit (404) and into the underlying bedrock (405).



Plate 6: View NE showing Trench 4



Plate 7: NW-facing section of Trench 4

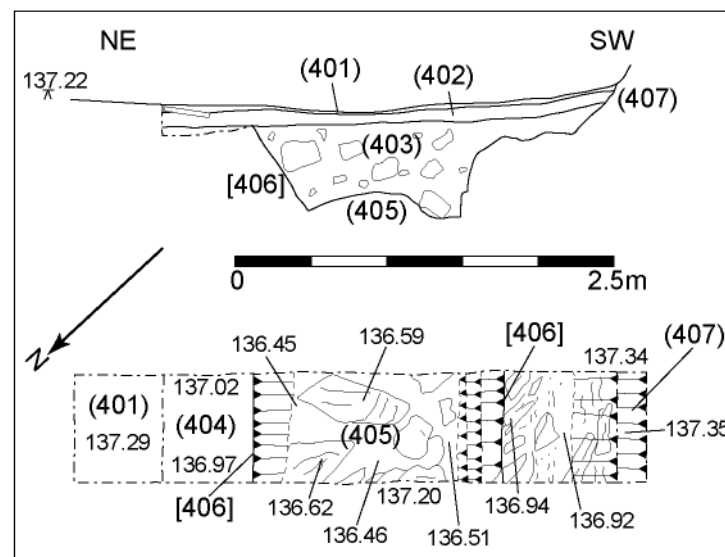


Fig 6: Trench 4 plan and NW-facing section

5.5 Trench 5

Trench 5 was located to the NW of Trench 4 on the northern bank of the trackway and revealed five contexts. The first of these was (501), a loose leaf-litter deposit containing frequent modern debris and measuring $>2\text{m} \times >1\text{m} \times 0.05\text{m}$. Underlying this was an A horizon (502), consisting of firm dark greyish-brown silt-clay-sand, with occasional charcoal and angular stones, roots and decomposed organic material, extending $>2\text{m} \times >1\text{m} \times 0.1\text{-}0.12\text{m}$.



Plate 8: View NE showing possible metallised surface identified at NE extent of Trench 5

Underlying this was a firm mid brownish-red clay-silt-sand subsoil, containing occasional charcoal fragments, angular stones, glass and CBM (503), extending >2m × >1m to an average thickness of 0.22m. Beneath this deposit was (504), a moderately compact, sterile, mid reddish-brown silty clay with occasional small and medium rounded and subangular stones, extending >2m × >1m × 0.6-0.7m.

Revealed at the base of the trench at its NE extent was a firm light brown clay-silt-sand (**Plate 8**), containing frequent tightly compacted medium rounded, sub-rounded and angular stones, together with occasional subangular and angular larger stones (505), extending >2m × >1m and possibly representing the remains of metalling associated with an earlier trackway surface.

6. Summary & Conclusion

Five trenches were excavated at or close to the junction of the main trackway and a spur leading off to the NW, both of which extend around the base of a substantial earth mound some 3m in height. Three of these trenches were located within the trackway itself, one on top of the large mound and a fifth just off the main track, on an embanked area to the N.

Much of the material identified was of recent origin and probably associated with mid to late 20th century housing development; however, several features were revealed that appear to predate the modern town. These included the possible remains of an earlier trackway surface represented by areas of 'metalling' or 'cobbling' in Trench 1 and Trench 5 and, in Trenches 1, 3 and 4, what appeared to be an engineered section of trackway forming a linear 'channel' cut into the bedrock.

The 'channel' had been infilled with a substantial quantity of modern debris but clearly predated this material, although no conclusive dating evidence was recovered. Its form suggests some kind of drainage feature or linear boundary marker and it may have been associated with the regularisation of the boundary between the neighbouring parishes of Llanfihangel Llantarnam and Llanfrechfa at some point during the 19th century; however, interpretations at this stage remain provisional.

At some point before 1882, when the OS 1st edition 25-inch map was drawn up, it appears that the course of the section of the holloway under investigation had been moved slightly to the NE and re-established on a straighter alignment. Significantly, the evidence of possible cobbling/metalling found in Trench 1 and Trench 5 would appear to be associated with the course of the earlier holloway alignment shown on the 1843 tithe map, as these 'cobbled' areas appear to be located 5-10m SW of the alignment depicted on the OS 1st edition 25-inch map of 1882.

7. Copyright

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8. References

8.1 Bibliography

GGAT Historic Environment Record

National Monuments Record of Wales

Gray, M., 1996, 'Penrhys: The archaeological history of a pilgrimage', in *Morgannwg*, **40**, pp10-32

SSEW, 1983, *Soil Survey of England and Wales*, Silsoe

Williams, D.H., 1976, *White Monks in Gwent and the Border*, Pontypool

Williams, D.H., 2001, *The Welsh Cistercians*, Leominster

8.2 Cartography

Tithe map for the parish Llanfrechfa 1840

Tithe map for the parish of Llanfihangel Llantarnam 1843

OS Surveyors' drawing (scale of 2 inches to the mile) 1813

OS 1st edition 6-inch map 1886

OS 1st edition 25-inch map 1882

OS 2nd edition 6-inch map 1902

OS 2nd edition 25-inch map 1901

OS 3rd edition 6-inch map 1922

OS 3rd edition 25-inch map 1920

OS 4th edition 6-inch map 1954

9. Appendix 1: Context Register

9.1 Trench 1

CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION
(101)	Loose, light brown humic material consisting of little decomposed litter extending >5.2m × >3m × 0.02 m. Overlies (102)
INTERPRETATION	<i>Leaf litter (L horizon)</i>
(102)	Loose reddish-brown fine sandy silt, occasional burnt humic patches, root disturbance, frequent glass, CBM and plastic. Extends >5.2m × >3m × 0.08-0.38m. Overlies (105). Cut by [103]
INTERPRETATION	<i>Late C20 soil accumulation</i>
[103]	Cut - sub-circular in plan measuring 1.1m × 0.9m × 0.06m, break of slope top imperceptible, sides gently sloping, break of slope base imperceptible, base irregular. Cuts (102), filled by (104)
INTERPRETATION	<i>Cut of shallow pit in SW extent of Trench 1 filled by (104)</i>
(104)	Moderately compact dark brown sandy silt and burnt organic material containing partially burnt wood and plastic, metal, pottery and glass. 1.1m × 0.9m × 0.06m. Fills [103]
INTERPRETATION	<i>Modern burnt material filling shallow pit [103]</i>
(105)	Weakly cemented surface of stone, brick, sand, gravel and cement containing occasional pebble inclusions. 4.8m × >3m × 0.3m. Fills [109]
INTERPRETATION	<i>C20 trackway surface</i>
(106)	Moderately compact mid brown sandy silt, frequent root disturbance, moderate pottery, tap slag. 4.16m × >1.2m × 0.08m. Underlies (102), overlies (107), cut by [109]
INTERPRETATION	<i>Post-medieval soil build-up across trackway</i>
(107)	Moderately compact/firm, predominantly mid red silty clay, moderate inclusions of degraded stone, extending >5.2m × >1.2m. Underlies (106), overlies (108). Cut by [110] and [112]
INTERPRETATION	<i>Natural deposit extending across Trench 1</i>
(108)	Indurated/strongly cemented greyish-brown bedrock. Extends 1m × >1.2m. Underlies (107)
INTERPRETATION	<i>Natural bedrock visible in Trench 1</i>
[109]	Cut - linear in plan measuring 3m × >3m × 0.3m, break of slope top imperceptible, sides irregular, break of slope base imperceptible, base irregular. Oriented NW-SE. Cuts (106), filled by (105)
INTERPRETATION	<i>Cut for modern trackway surface (105)</i>
[110]	Cut - linear in plan measuring >1.2m × 1.2m × 0.23m, break of slope top sharp, SW side steeply sloping, NE side moderately sloping, break of slope base moderate, base flat sloping NE. Oriented NW-SE. Cuts (107) (108), filled by (111)
INTERPRETATION	<i>Cut for post-medieval trackway running NW-SE in Trench 1</i>
(111)	Strongly cemented, dark greyish-brown sandy silt and cobbles, measures >1.2m × 1.2m × 0.23m. Fills [110]
INTERPRETATION	<i>Post-medieval trackway surface within [110]</i>
[112]	Cut - linear in plan measuring >1.2m × 0.57m × 0.28m, break of slope top indistinguishable from SW bank of trackway and truncated by [109] on NE side. SW side steeply sloping, NE side

	almost vertical. Base concave or v-shaped. Oriented NW-SE. Cuts (107) filled by (113)
<i>INTERPRETATION</i>	<i>Cut of tapered linear feature in SW extent of Trench 1</i>
(113)	Moderately compacted (cohesive) deposit containing 60% grey angular stones and 40% mid brown sandy silt and frequent small stones. Extends >1.2m × 0.57m × 0.28m. Fills [112]
<i>INTERPRETATION</i>	<i>Stony fill of linear feature [112]</i>

9.2 Trench 2

CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION
(201)	Loose, light brown humic material consisting of little decomposed litter extending >3.54m × >1.5m × 0.02 m. Overlies (202)
<i>INTERPRETATION</i>	<i>Leaf litter (L horizon)</i>
(202)	Firm dark reddish-brown silty clay, occasional small and medium rounded, sub-rounded and subangular stones and frequent organic material. Extends >3.54m × >1.5m × 0.1m (maximum thickness). Underlies (201), overlies (203)
<i>INTERPRETATION</i>	<i>Topsoil deposit</i>
(203)	Friable mid brown silty clay, frequent degraded stone fragments. Extends >3.54m × >1.5m × >0.38m. Underlies (202)
<i>INTERPRETATION</i>	<i>Natural clay subsoil deposit in Trench 2</i>

9.3 Trench 3

CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION
(301)	Loose mid greyish-brown humic clay/silt and little decomposed litter containing moderate CBM, Fe, plastic and glass, frequent organic material and moderate small sub-rounded stones measuring >7.8m × >1m × 0.02m. Overlies (302)
<i>INTERPRETATION</i>	<i>Leaf litter (L horizon)</i>
(302)	Moderately compact dark reddish-brown silty clay, moderate CBM, glass, Fe and sub-rounded stones, occasional plastic extending >7.8m × >1m × 0.1m (average thickness). Underlies (301), overlies (303)
<i>INTERPRETATION</i>	<i>Late C20 soil accumulation</i>
(303)	Moderately compact/firm mid greyish-brown clayey silt, frequent medium and large stones, CBM, glass, moderate small stones and occasional Fe. Measures >2.8m × >0.8m × 0.36m (average thickness). Underlies (302), overlies (304), fills [305]
<i>INTERPRETATION</i>	<i>Uppermost fill within [305]</i>
(304)	Moderately compact/firm light greenish-grey/pinkish-brown silty clay, frequent degraded stone and CBM fragments and occasional CBM and Fe. Extends 2.5m × >0.8m × 0.5m (average thickness). Underlies (303), overlies (308), fills [305]
<i>INTERPRETATION</i>	<i>Redeposited natural fill of [305]</i>
[305]	Cut – linear in plan measuring 2.7m × >1m × 0.75m (average depth). Break of slope top sharp on the SW side, moderate on the NE side. Sides steeply sloping, break of slope base vertically stepped on the SW side, concave on the NE side, base flat slightly undulating. Cuts (306), filled by (303), (304), (308)

INTERPRETATION	<i>Linear channel of unknown date and function</i>
(306)	Firm/friable light reddish-brown silty clay/marl, frequent degraded stone. Extends >7.8m × >1m × 0.16m. Overlies (307), cut by [305]
INTERPRETATION	<i>Natural clay and degraded stone deposition</i>
(307)	Firm mid pinkish-brown clay extending >7.8m × >1m × >0.18m Underlies (306), overlies (309)
INTERPRETATION	<i>Natural clay deposit</i>
(308)	Firm mid to dark grey clayey silt, frequent small rounded stones, occasional CBM, Fe, glass and medium sub-rounded stones measuring 1.6m × >0.8m × 0.2m (average thickness). Underlies (304), fills [305]
INTERPRETATION	<i>Primary fill of linear feature [305]</i>
(309)	Compact light greenish-grey limestone extending 2m × 1.1m × 0.2m. Underlies (307)
INTERPRETATION	<i>Natural limestone outcrop in Trench 3</i>

9.4 Trench 4

CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION
(401)	Loose humic material and little decomposed litter containing frequent modern debris measuring >3m × >0.7m × 0.05m. Overlies (402)
INTERPRETATION	<i>Leaf litter (L horizon)</i>
(402)	Firm dark brown silty clay, frequent modern debris, roots and decomposing organic material. Extends >3m × >0.7m × 0.2m. Underlies (401), overlies (403)
INTERPRETATION	<i>Late C20 soil accumulation</i>
(403)	Loose dark brown clayey silt, frequent glass, plastic, metal, wood and CBM, extends >2.9m × >0.7m × 0.65m (maximum thickness). Underlies (402), fills [406]
INTERPRETATION	<i>Deposit containing large quantities of C20 commercial and domestic waste/debris</i>
(404)	Firm dark orangey-brown silty clay, frequent mudstone, extends >0.6m × >0.7m × >0.06m. Overlies (405), cut by [406]
INTERPRETATION	<i>Natural clay deposit visible at NE extent of Trench 4</i>
(405)	Strongly cemented reddish siltstone extending >2.18m × >0.7m. Underlies (404), (407)
INTERPRETATION	<i>Natural bedrock visible in Trench 4</i>
[406]	Cut – linear, measuring 1.66m × >0.7m × 0.56m (maximum depth). Break of slope top sharp, sides smooth, steeply sloping on the NE, steeply sloping to almost vertical on the SW, break of slope base sharp, base convex, irregular. Cuts (404), filled by (403)
INTERPRETATION	<i>Cut of channel oriented NW-SE in Trench 4</i>
(407)	Friable light reddish-brown clayey silt, occasional medium subangular and small rounded stones, extends >0.22m × >0.7m. Overlies (405)
INTERPRETATION	<i>Natural deposit forming part of the bank at SW extent of Trench 4</i>

9.5 Trench 5

CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION
(501)	Loose humic material containing frequent modern debris measuring >2m × >1m × 0.05m. Overlies (502)
INTERPRETATION	<i>Leaf litter (L horizon)</i>
(502)	Firm dark brown silt-clay-sand, occasional charcoal and angular stones, roots and decomposed organic material. Extends >2m × >1m × 0.1-0.12m. Underlies (501), overlies (503)
INTERPRETATION	<i>Mineral surface horizon with well incorporated organic matter (A horizon)</i>
(503)	Firm mid brownish-red clay-silt-sand, occasional charcoal fragments, angular stones, glass and CBM, extending >2m × >1m × 0.22m (average thickness). Underlies (502), overlies (504)
INTERPRETATION	<i>Subsoil</i>
(504)	Moderately compact, sterile, mid reddish-brown silty clay, occasional small and medium rounded and subangular stones, extends >2m × >1m × 0.6-0.7m. Underlies (503), overlies (505)
INTERPRETATION	<i>Sterile natural clay deposit in Trench 5</i>
(505)	Firm light brown clay-silt-sand, frequent medium rounded, sub-rounded and angular stones, occasional subangular and angular large stones, extending >2m × >1m. Underlies (504)
INTERPRETATION	<i>Possible remains of metalling associated with earlier trackway</i>

10. Volunteer participation

The first of a series of excavations investigating ancient Cwmbrân saw an eager group of volunteers assemble on the Cistercian Way near Greenmeadow Community Farm to begin the task of unearthing the history of this ancient pilgrimage route leading from Llantarnam Abbey, within modern Cwmbrân, to the shrine of the Virgin Mary at Penrhys in the Rhondda Valley.

Known to have been in use during the Middle Ages, when it defined part of the substantial manor of Llantarnam which belonged to the Cistercian monks of Llantarnam Abbey, the origins of this old sunken track or holloway are probably much earlier and one of the aims of the project was to identify any clues that might shed light on its true antiquity. Others were to clarify whether any sections had been engineered, perhaps to allow the passage of wheeled transport, such as carts or wagons, and to find any objects of value that may have been lost by hapless pilgrims on their travels to and from the Penrhys shrine, a significant pilgrimage centre during the late medieval period, which was commemorated by several Welsh bards.

A location for the 'dig' was selected at the junction of the main trackway and a spur leading off to the northwest, both of which skirt around the base of a substantial earth mound some 3m in height, and, following an introductory presentation by Border Archaeology, aimed particularly at those with little or no previous archaeological experience, the four-day field investigation got off to a flying start, with the Cwmbrân 'time team' working enthusiastically under the guidance of Border's experienced field staff. The volunteers' commitment was particularly impressive given the generally adverse weather conditions under which the tasks of excavating and recording were carried out.

Five trenches were opened (three in the trackway itself, one on top of the large mound and a fifth just off the main track on an embanked area to the north) and the layers of accumulated material representing decade upon decade of past human activity painstakingly removed with mattock and trowel.

Much of the material identified was of recent origin and probably associated with modern housing development. However, some interesting earlier features were also revealed, which appeared to predate the modern town, possibly by centuries, and our interpretations to date can be found in the conclusion section within this document.

In terms of the enthusiasm shown, skills learned and features revealed, the Cistercian Way dig proved a resounding success, although admittedly resulting in more questions than answers! There is thus much to ponder and the results offer plenty of scope for further research to help piece together the history of this old and hitherto neglected corner of modern Cwmbrân.

The following volunteers made a substantial contribution to the excavation of the site and Border Archaeology are grateful for their assistance in making a successful community 'dig':

Anne Arnold
Sue Baugh
Jade Brann
Sarah Campbell-Horner
John Challingsworth

Steve Chamberlain
Dave Clark
Richard Davies
Richard Dowle
Frances English

Sam Grainger
Glyn Hankins
Beverley Huish
Heather Huish
Chris Huish



*Dave Hyde
Linda Jones
Nigel Jones
Carole Lewis
Alan Lewis*

*Bradley Mitchell
Dorothy Morland
Jim Munn
Bethany Parnham
Rebecca Parnham*

*Elaine Preece
Mike Price
Paul Robinson
Aaron Shephard
Luke Shephard*

*Dennis Simmons
Matthew Smith
David Standing
Roger Stevenson
Nigel Thomas*

*Hannah Tuck
Bethan Vincent
Bob Wellington
Robert Wells
Laura Wheeler*

*Victoria Wheeler
Mark Wheeler
Daniel Wheeler
Anne Whitcombe-Sterry
David Williams*

Torfaen County Borough Council's wholehearted commitment to the Ancient Cwmbrân and the Cistercians Project was underscored by a visit from the Council Leader and County Borough Councillor for Greenmeadow Ward, Cllr Bob Wellington, who showed considerable interest in the progress of the excavation and offered some interesting interpretations of the 'channel' feature revealed in three of the trenches. Everyone involved also received much encouragement from the very positive press coverage that the project attracted from the start.