

Caerloen Comprehensive School, Cold Bath Lane, Caerleon, Newport

Archaeological field evaluation

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A report for Newport City Council
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Summary

Newport City Council has proposed to construct an extension to the gymnasium of Caerleon Secondary School, Cold Bath Lane, Caerleon, Newport (Planning application no. 11/0571). The development lies just outside the Scheduled Ancient Monuments of Caerleon Civil Settlement (MM231/MM254) and Caerleon Legionary Fortress (MM230). However, archaeological investigations over a number of years has shown the survival of remains of buildings and building material, roads, and a variety of finds relating to the Roman occupation, in the vicinity of the school. Therefore, the archaeological advisor to the Local Planning Authority (LPA) recommended that an archaeological evaluation be conducted and that this work should consist of two archaeological evaluation trenches, each measuring 10m by 2m, excavated within the footprint of the proposed extension.

The Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust Projects Division (GGAT Projects) were commissioned by Newport City Council to undertake the archaeological field evaluation in advance of the development, the findings of which form the subject of this report.

During the course of the evaluation considerable amounts of asbestos were encountered which severely curtailed the size of the evaluated area. However, sufficient excavation was conducted to identify archaeologically significant deposits.

A deposit was encountered which is likely to represent a Roman occupation layer and contained Roman ceramics including decorated Samian bowl sherds, Caerleon ware flagon fragments and colour coat beaker. The dates of the ceramics are broad and range from mid 1st century AD to 4th century AD.

A levelling deposit was also encountered which contained a Post-medieval assemblage, which included ceramics dating to the 18th and 19th centuries.

Whilst no structures of Roman date were encountered during the course of the evaluation, it is possible that the proposed construction work will have an impact on the archaeological resource. The critical depth of the Roman deposit is 15.24m OD, and any ground intrusion works at this depth or deeper, will encounter this archaeologically significant deposit and require appropriate mitigation.

The archaeological works will be carried out to the professional standards laid down by the Institute for Archaeologists.

Acknowledgements

The project was managed by Richard Lewis BA MIFA (Head of Projects) and the fieldwork was undertaken by Rob Dunning BSc (Project Officer) and Charlotte Halford BA (Project Archaeologist) of GGAT Projects. The report and illustrations were prepared by Rob Dunning.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Project background and commission

Newport City Council have proposed to construct an extension to the gymnasium of Caerleon Secondary School, Cold Bath Lane, Caerleon, Newport (Planning application no. 11/0571). The development lies just outside the Scheduled Ancient Monuments of Caerleon Civil Settlement (MM231/MM254) and Caerleon Legionary Fortress (MM230). However, archaeological investigations over a number of years has shown the survival of remains of buildings and building material, roads, and a variety of finds relating to the Roman occupation, in the vicinity of the school. Therefore, the archaeological advisor to the Local Planning Authority recommended that an archaeological evaluation be conducted and that this work should consist of two archaeological evaluation trenches, each measuring 10m by 2m, excavated within the footprint of the proposed extension.

The Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust Projects Division (GGAT Projects) were commissioned by Newport City Council to undertake the archaeological field evaluation in advance of the development. Prior to the commencement of the evaluation, GGAT Projects submitted a project design (Dunning 2011), which was approved by the archaeological advisor to the LPA. All archaeological works were carried out to the professional standards laid down by the *Institute for Archaeologists*.

The results of the archaeological evaluation forms the subject of this report. The fieldwork was conducted between 12th and 14th October 2011.

1.2 Location and topography

The small town of Caerleon in the parish of the same name is sited upon a slight plateau above the flood plains of the River Usk and Afon Llwyd and is overlooked for the most part by the high ridges of Lodge Hill to the northwest, Christchurch to the south and St. Julians to the west. The valleys to the northeast and the west allow the combined courses of the tidal River Usk and the Afon Llwyd to flow toward the River Severn. Within this landscape the school is situated toward the west and southwest side of the town, with the River Usk forming a convenient natural curving boundary on one side and the railway line (01229.0w), originally the Great Western Railway, Newport, Abergavenny and Hereford Branch on the other. The proposed development area is bordered to the northeast, northwest and southwest sides by existing school buildings and to the southeast by a road. It is currently an open-area, composed of concrete paving slabs, at 15.85m OD.

1.3 Archaeological background

The hill ridges above Caerleon have indications of prehistoric activity. The nearest ridge to the north, the summit of Lodge Hill (SAM MM 023), has an Iron Age encampment and to the south, over the river, on the St. Julians and Christchurch ridges (00220g) is another earthwork of similar or earlier date. The importance of these prehistoric earthworks and later period events are surpassed by the remains of the Roman legionary fortress of *Isca*, the base of the Second Augustan Legion, founded around AD 75. The layout of the fortress is in the typical playing-card shape and occupies about 20.5ha on the slightly higher ground between the rivers. In the extramural area outside the defensive walls, an amphitheatre, road systems, quay and wharves, bath-houses and civil settlement (*canabae*), all typically Roman in nature, have been proven to exist. The area to the northwest and southwest along the Broadway is particularly rich in these Roman remains. The Roman presence began to decline in the 4th century and from the 5th to the 10th centuries the archaeological and historical record is sparse. This is not necessarily indicative of a lack of population or structures, it is more likely that the remains are of a more ephemeral nature and hence not easily distinguished. There are surviving historical sources that mention Caerleon during this period. A seat of the Welsh princes was set in Caerleon and *The Chronicle of the Princes* records that in AD 973 Edward, king of the Saxons gathered a huge fleet to Caerleon on Usk (Jones 1955). In the early 10th century, Danish raiders are said to have demolished the town (Hockey 1981).

Caerleon is twice mentioned in the Domesday Survey and the Norman period is also represented by a motte, extant in 1086, built just outside the eastern corner of the Roman wall and also the church of St. Cadoc built over the Headquarters building of the Roman fortress in the centre of the Town. In the 12th century the *Chronicle* records two occasions when Caerleon was attacked and burned or the lands ravaged, once in AD 1171 and again in AD 1173.

The exact extent of the castle and its defences is not clear, but the medieval town appears to have respected the Roman street plan with the four main roads into the town positioned on the four cardinal points (Newman 2000, 136-45). The circular tower incorporated into the Hanbury Arms (located on the north bank of the Usk at NGR ST 34166 90377) belonged to the bailey, and dates from the early 13th century, soon after the Norman castle at Caerleon was rebuilt in stone. The importance of the medieval town lay in its status as a thriving port before the rise of Newport, with the main quay located in the area of the Hanbury Arms, just to the west of the original river crossing point.

A borough charter of AD 1324 mentions the castle, two mills, a market, fair, fishery and weir and apart from Owain Glyndwr's attack on the town in AD 1402, its later history is largely uneventful and its long history of strategic importance diminished to the extent that the castle was allowed to fall into disrepair. A survey carried out in the 17th century suggests the town was a well-populated market town with a variety of trades and professions; this state would appear to be much the same until the time of the first census in AD 1801 where 228 houses were recorded with a population of 667 people (Soulsby 1983, 86-88).

In the 18th century a major tin-plate works on the Afon Llwyd provided a degree of prosperity for the town and its inhabitants and the quay was extended to the southwest, probably to serve the Caerleon Tramway, which was completed in 1794.

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Iron, and also tinsplate from the works at Ponthir itself, was transported on the tramway from Caerleon Forge, sited on the road to Ponthir, for transshipment. Caerleon continued to be a port of regional importance to the end of the 18th century. In 1796, however, the Monmouthshire Canal was opened, bypassing the town, and a new bridge across the Usk was built in Newport in 1800, along with a turnpike road to Caerleon. These circumstances led to its decline as a river port in favour of Newport.

Caerleon's history continues unbroken from the Roman period, leaving an imprint either still standing or buried, to the modern age as a fairly small town until recent times, where the pressure of housing has led to an expansion of its limits. The protection of the archaeological resource in Caerleon is of paramount importance and as such large areas have Scheduled Ancient Monument status.

Although the proposed development is located outside the Scheduled Areas, the sheer density of nearby remains indicates that any intrusive groundworks associated with the proposed development may encounter archaeological remains. Indeed, the nearest investigations within the Roman fortress were the Prysg Field Barracks, some 130m to the northeast of the proposed development. The excavations revealed centurions quarters, in addition to twelve pairs of rooms, grouped around a central corridor. The structure has been interpreted as a single phase construction, and was occupied c.105-200 AD (Evans 2004).

2 Methodology

The project design specified the excavation of two trenches, each measuring 10m by 2m (see Figure 1). However, during the evaluation significant amounts of asbestos were encountered which severely curtailed the size of the evaluated area. The trenches were dug using a three ton tracked excavator, using a 1.2m wide grading bucket. All archaeologically significant deposits and features were excavated by hand and recorded.

The archaeological works were carried out to the professional standards laid out in the Institute for Archaeologist's *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation Specifications* (1994, revised 2001 and 2008).

A written and photographic record was made of all archaeological features and deposits in accordance with the GGAT *Manual of Excavation Recording Techniques*. Contexts were recorded using a continuous numbering system, and are summarised in Appendix I. All significant contexts were photographed using a digital camera (with a minimum resolution of 14mp). The excavated areas were located by measurement in to standing, mapped buildings. All context depths were measured from the present ground surface and related to Ordnance Datum using the benchmark on Caerleon Town Hall (16.83m OD).

All classes of finds were retained, cleaned, and catalogued and remain in temporary store until arrangements for final deposition are agreed, in line with the requirements of the Institute for Archaeologist's *Standard and Guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (2001).

The site archive (including artefacts and ecofacts subject to the agreement of the site owners; excepting those that may be subject to the Treasure Act) will be deposited with an appropriate receiving organisation, in accordance with the ICON and IfA Guidelines (*Archaeological Archives: a guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation* (2007), and subject to the agreement of the legal landowner. A copy of the report and archive index will be deposited with the *National Monuments Record*, RCAHMW, Aberystwyth, and the *Regional Historic Environment Record*, curated by the Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust, Swansea.

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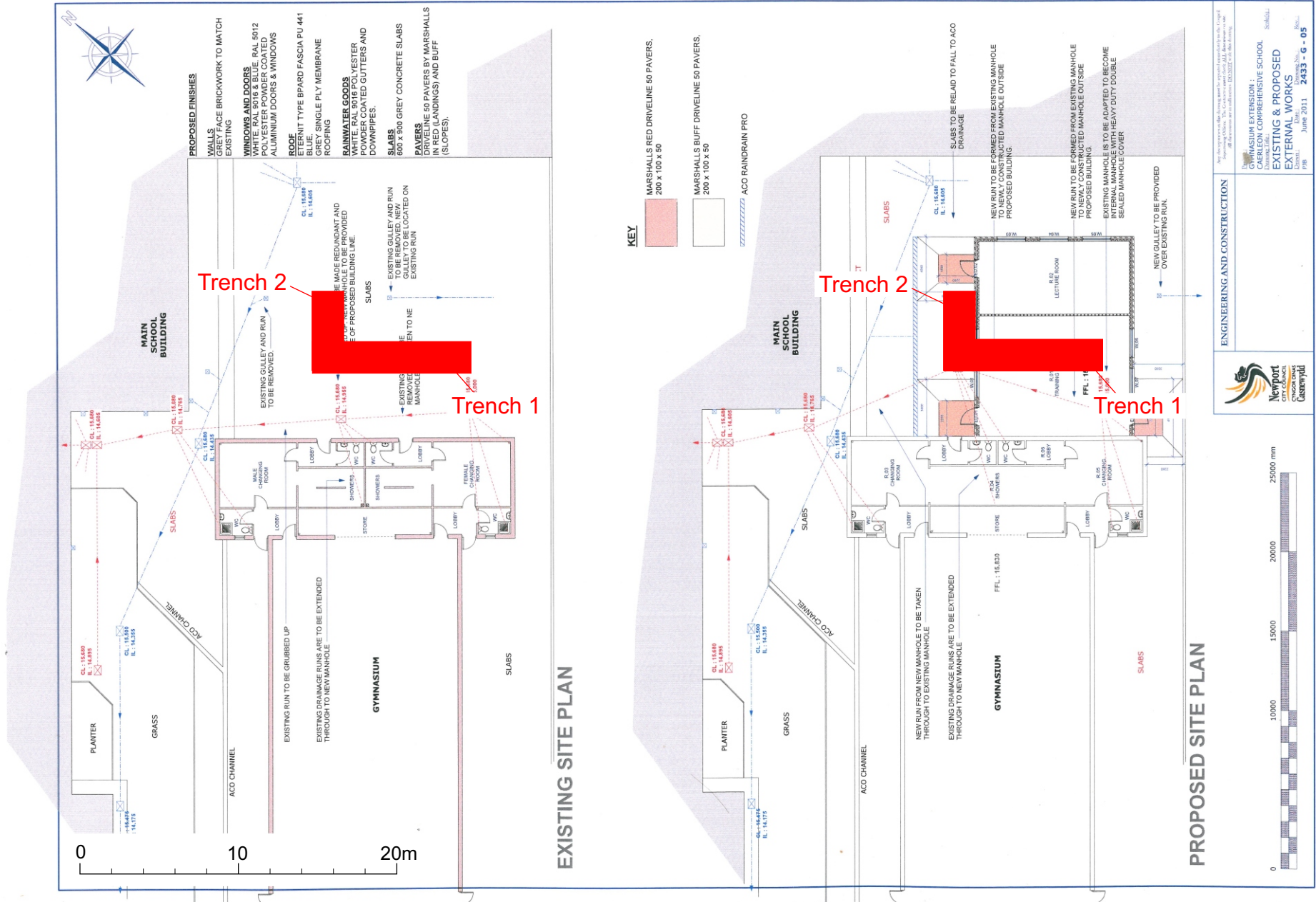


Figure 1. Location of evaluation trenches (red) on the existing and proposed site plans

3 Results

Trench 1 (Figure 1-2 and Plates 1-2)

Trench 1 measured 10m by 1.8m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.24m.

The basal deposit encountered was a blue-grey alluvial clay natural (**1008**) with a minimum excavated depth of 0.2m, and containing isolated angular stones (less than 0.28m in diameter). Overlying this was a stony layer (**1007**), 0.07m in depth, composed of frequent sub-rounded and sub-angular stones (less than 0.06m in diameter), bound by a mid grey clay containing frequent charcoal flecking. This was overlain by a mid brown silty clay (**1006**), with a depth of 0.36m and containing isolated sub-rounded stones (less than 0.06m in diameter), occasional charcoal fragments (less than 0.01m in diameter), charcoal flecking and an assemblage of Roman ceramics (Appendix II). Contained within **1006** was a dark brown silty clay (**1010**) with a minimum diameter of 0.36m and a depth of 0.02m. It contained isolated patches of heat-affected clay (less than 0.02m in diameter), as well as frequent charcoal fragments (less than 0.02m in diameter) and flecking. Deposit **1006** was overlain by a clean dark grey clay (**1005**), with a depth of 0.1m. Overlying this was a levelling material (**1004**), with a depth of 0.22m and composed of a dark grey silty clay containing moderate sub-angular and sub-rounded stones (less than 0.06m in diameter), wire, slate, asbestos, wood fragments and a post-medieval finds assemblage (Appendix III).

In the eastern half of the trench was a cut [**1011**] was made into deposit 1004 measuring at least 4.4m in length and aligned north-south, having a minimum depth of 0.29m. The fill (**1009**) was composed of demolition rubble containing whole and fragmented machine-made bricks, concrete fragments and pieces of asbestos. The feature was not fully exposed due to the presence of asbestos.

The uppermost deposits were composed of a hardcore (**1003**), sand bedding (**1002**) and associated concrete paving slabs (**1001**).

Trench 2 (Figure 1-2 and Plate 3)

Trench 2 measured 3m by 1.8m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.91m.

The basal deposit was a mid brown silty clay (**2006**), with a minimum depth of 0.3m and containing isolated sub-rounded stones (less than 0.06m in diameter), occasional charcoal fragments (less than 0.01m in diameter) and charcoal flecking. Deposit **2006** was overlain by a clean dark grey clay (**2005**), with a depth of 0.09m. Overlying this was a levelling material (**2004**), with a depth of 0.23m and composed of a dark grey silty clay containing moderate sub-angular and sub-rounded stones (less than 0.06m in diameter), wire, slate, asbestos and wood fragments. The uppermost deposits were composed of a hardcore (**2003**), sand bedding (**2002**) and associated concrete paving slabs (**2001**).

The trench was not fully excavated due to the presence of significant quantities of asbestos within deposit **2004**.

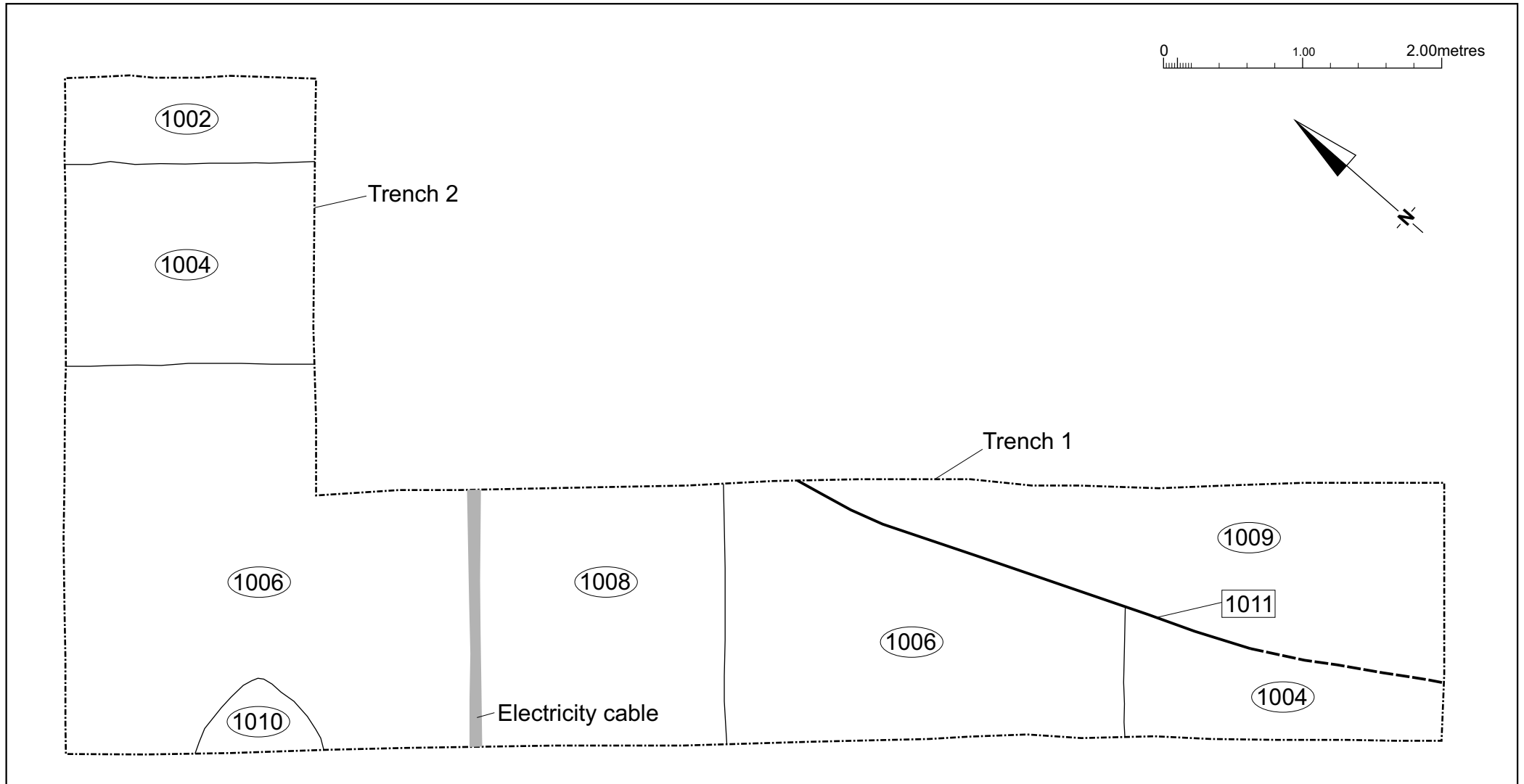


Figure 2. Plan of Trenches 1 and 2

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Plate 1. Southwest facing section of Trench 1



Plate 2. View of Trench 1, looking southeast

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Plate 3. View of Trench 2, looking northeast

4 Conclusions

During the course of the evaluation considerable amounts of asbestos were encountered which severely curtailed the size of the evaluated area and will need appropriate mitigation measures during the construction phase. However, sufficient excavation was conducted to identify archaeologically significant deposits.

Deposit **1006**, which is likely to represent a roman occupation layer, contained Roman cermaics including decorated Samian bowl sherds, Caerleon ware flagon fragments and colour coat beaker fragments. The dates of the ceramics are broad and range from mid 1st century AD to 4th century AD. It is likely that deposit **2006** is equal to **1006** as a continuation of the occupation layer however no finds were encountered to date the deposit.

Deposit **1004** was a levelling deposit, which contained a Post-medieval assemblage, which included ceramics dating to the 18th and 19th centuries.

Whilst no structures of Roman date were encountered during the course of the evaluation, it is possible that the proposed construction work will have an impact on the archaeological resource. The critical depth of the Roman deposit is 15.24m OD, and any ground intrusion works at this depth or deeper, will encounter this archaeologically significant deposit and require appropriate mitigation.

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Appendix I: Inventory of contexts

Context	Type	Depth below ground surface(m)	Description	Period
1001	S	0-0.05	Concrete paving slabs	Modern
1002	D	0.05-0.1	Yellow sand bedding	Modern
1003	D	0.1-0.29	Hardcore, composed of angular red chippings (<0.05m in diameter)	Modern
1004	D	0.29-0.51	Levelling material, composed of a dark grey silty clay containing moderate sub-angular and sub-rounded stones (<0.06m in diameter), wire, slate, asbestos and wood fragments. Contained a finds assemblage	Modern
1005	D	0.51-0.61	Clean dark grey clay	Unknown
1006	D	0.61-0.97	Mid brown silty clay, containing isolated sub-rounded stones (< 0.06m in diameter), occasional charcoal fragments (< 0.01m in diameter) and charcoal flecking. Contained a finds assemblage	Roman
1007	D	0.97-1.04	Stony layer, composed of frequent sub-rounded and sub-angular stones (<0.06m in diameter), bound by a mid grey clay containing frequent charcoal flecking	Roman
1008	D	1.04-1.24 n.b.	Blue-grey alluvial clay natural, containing isolated angular stones (< 0.28m in diameter)	Natural
1009	D	0.29	Fill of 1011 , composed of demolition rubble containing whole and fragmented machine-made bricks, concrete fragments and pieces of asbestos	Modern
1010	D	0.97-0.99	Dark brown silty clay, with a minimum diameter of 0.36m. It contained isolated patches of heat-affected clay (<0.02m in diameter), as well as frequent charcoal fragments (<0.02m in diameter) and flecking	Roman
1011	C	0.29	Large pit, measuring at least 4.4m in diameter and with a minimum depth of 0.29m	Modern
2001	S	0-0.05	Concrete paving slabs	Modern
2002	D	0.05-0.1	Yellow sand bedding	Modern
2003	D	0.1-0.29	Hardcore, composed of angular red chippings (<0.05m in diameter)	Modern
2004	D	0.29-0.52	Levelling material, composed of a dark grey silty clay containing moderate sub-angular and sub-rounded stones (<0.06m in diameter), wire, slate, asbestos and wood fragments	Modern
2005	D	0.52-0.61	Clean dark grey clay	Unknown
2006	D	0.61-0.91 n.b.	Mid brown silty clay, containing isolated sub-rounded stones (< 0.06m in diameter), occasional charcoal fragments (< 0.01m in diameter) and charcoal flecking	Roman

n.b.: not bottomed; S: Structure; C: Cut; D: Deposit

Appendix II: Inventory of Roman finds (Rowena Hart)

Summary

38 objects from context 1006 were presented for analysis from excavation in the grounds of Caerleon Secondary School, Cold Bath Lane, Caerleon, Newport. The assemblage contained a single undiagnostic fragment of Roman glass and a quantity of brick and tile. The ceramics in the assemblage totalled 25 fragments. 16 of the fragments were coursewares including Caerleon ware flagon neck fragments and a fragment of local grey ware. Nine fragments were fine wares which included seven fragments of Samian ware comprised of fragments of a decorated bowl (Dragondorff 30) dating from 60-110AD and a second decorated vessel dated to 120-200AD. A colour coat beaker (Young 1977 C23) dating to the late 3rd-4th century AD completed the assemblage. This assemblage is in keeping with types of ceramics already known from Caerleon and environs and the limited number of dateable pieces indicates a mixed deposit pointing toward an ancient dumping ground or an area of more modern disturbance.

Catalogue

Glass

A single fragment of undiagnostic Roman vessel glass in green-blue.

Brick/Tile

Three brick fragments.

Two undiagnostic tile fragments.

Seven undiagnostic brick/tile fragments.

Ceramic- Samian Ware

5 fragments of Southern Gaulish (La Graufenesque) decorated bowl (probably Dragondorff 30) and dated to 60-110AD. The surface of each fragment is heavily degraded with very little of the slip remaining. The decoration can be summarised as a bead rim, which overlies a horizontal zone of ovolo decoration, which in turn overlies a horizontal chevron zone. This overlies an undecipherable main body of decoration.

2 undiagnostic fragments of Central Gaulish (Les Matre-de-Verve) 120-200AD. The only clear decoration remaining is a horizontal chevron band. Minimal slip surviving.

Ceramic- other fine wares

Two adjoining fragments in light orange fabric with a dark red-brown colour-coat and slight evidence of rouletting. This is probably from a beaker such as Young 1977 C23 type. Late 3rd-4th century AD.

Ceramic- coursewares

Two adjoining fragments of a ring necked flagon in Caerleon ware. It has parallels on the continent at Bad Nauheim (Simon 1959-60 Abb14 No.s 27-9) and with a legionary form at Usk (Greene 1979 I No.4).

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A single fragment of a ring necked flagon with everted rim in orange-buff Caerleon ware. The prominent upper ring suggests a late 1st Century AD to early 2nd Century AD date.

Two fragments of flagon neck in orange-buff fabric with visible calcite inclusions.

Ten fragments of undiagnostic Caerleon ware.

A single fragment of undiagnostic local grey ware.

References

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Young, CG, 1977 *Oxfordshire Roman Pottery*, *BAR Brit ser* **43**, Oxford

Appendix III: Inventory of Post-medieval finds (Rob Dunning)

Summary

The entire assemblage recovered from this site can be dated to between the early-18th and 20th centuries and is typical of that recovered from in and around a Post-medieval settlement site.

Table 1: Finds assemblage recorded by material type and fabric type

Context	Material type	Description	Quantity	Weight (g)	Period
1004	Brick	Fragment of machine-made brick, stamped with 'NEWPOR'	1	125.47	Modern
1004	Ceramic	Fragment of ceramic drain	1	151.43	Modern
1004	Clay pipe	Clay pipe stem fragment	1	5.94	Post-medieval
1004	Fe object	Fe object, heavily corroded	1	352	U/D
1004	Geological	Coal	1	11.70	Natural
1004	Glass	Clear bottle glass	8	52.31	Modern
1004	Glass	Green bottle glass	2	48.03	Modern
1004	Pottery	Local coarse ware	2	66.17	Post-medieval
1004	Pottery	Modern ceramic	1	4.16	Modern
1004	Pottery	Transfer-printed white earthenware	2	6.64	Post-medieval (mid 18th century)
1004	Pottery	Yellow-glazed buffware rim	1	58.41	Post-medieval (early 18th century)
1004	Tile	Tile fragments	2	10.30	U/D

U/D: Undiagnostic



**Glamorgan-Gwent
Archaeological Trust Ltd
(Projects Division)**



QUALITY CONTROL

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