

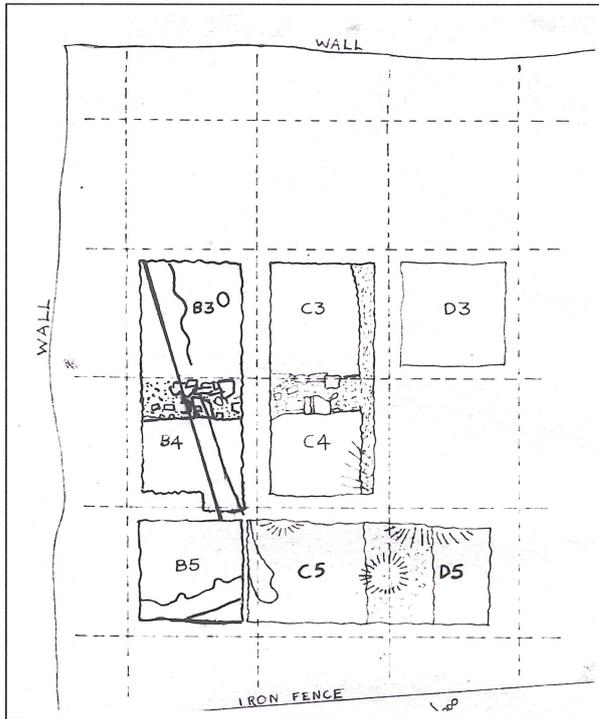
Excavations in "Ewers' Garden" 1969-72

The Society and the town are deeply indebted to Frank Olding for publishing 'ABERGAVENTNY an urban archaeology' which brings together so much of the town's history.

He mentions on page 6 that the Castle Street II site SO299140 which I started in 1969 was not fully published. I make no apology for this. Sadly, I was made redundant in 1972 and had suddenly to change myself into a schoolmaster in order to support my wife and children.

However, I handed all the finds to the museum which continues to display the important items. All my maps and detailed drawings are in the museum and the professionals have published the things which they felt were important

The story of this excavation is part of local history. The Archaeology Group founded by my wife Freda and Gwyn Jones, having dug Flannel Street in 1964 were digging on the Iron Age Hill Fort of Twyn-y-Gaer under Alan Probert. Alan became interested in archaeology while renovating the archaeology room in the museum and found the time to turn himself into a professional archaeologist. It was a long way up the



mountain and there was clamour for a dig in town. Alan found the site called "Ewers' Garden" and the committee, in the absence of any site directing volunteers, said that "Ken Key would do it!". I perused Mortimer Wheeler et al and in 1969 we opened a 6ft. square trench. We expected a lot of rubbish (which we got) and 'Natural' within a very short time. However, the foundation of a mediaeval wall appeared together with a collapsed stone tiled roof which had been insulated with straw and had probably burned down. The presence of potash glaze suggested a domestic chimney and daub without wattle suggested a wall.



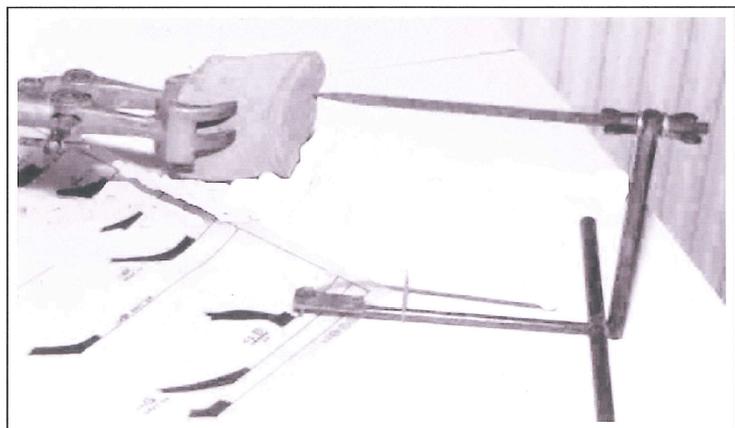
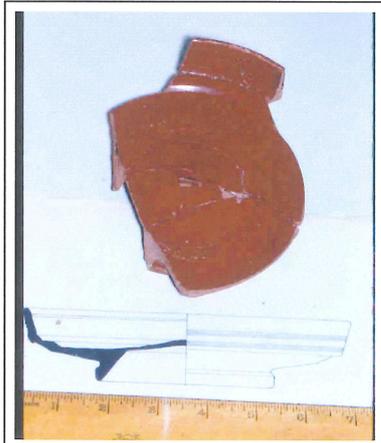
We learned quickly about mediaeval green glaze and slipware and various items imported from Holland and Germany which needed to be drawn. As one who failed matriculation art (they gave me a gas mask to draw) I found some difficulty. The classic method is to press cored solder

wire against the sherd and use this to trace an outline. This produced inconsistent results no better than my 'art' so I devised a jig for drawing pots accurately which I described in the Newsletter No. 7 1991.(right)

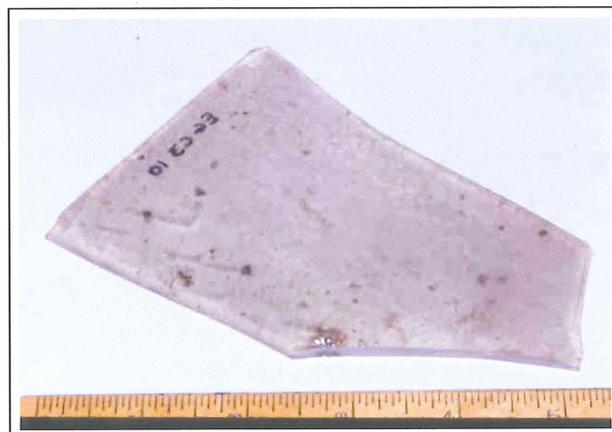
The most exciting find was a slight discolouration of the soil revealing the sleeper beam trench of a

Roman barrack block or granary. This led to further trenches where we discovered several pieces of Samian ware.(left)

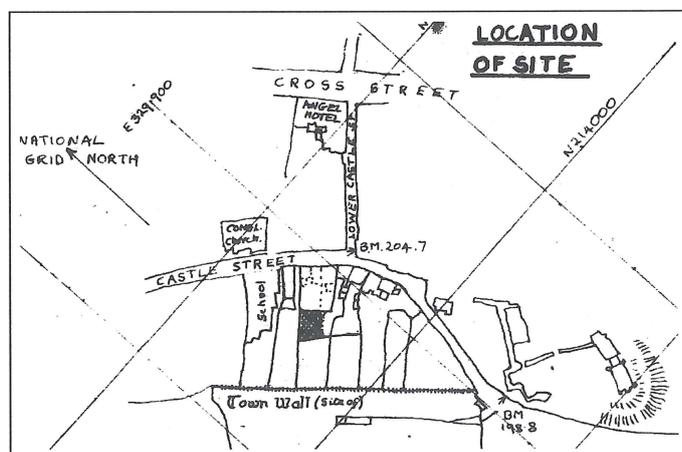
In the newsletter of 1996 I related how I got lost in Millau in France where recently a large new bridge has opened across the river Tarn. Down by the river I chanced on the place where Samian ware was made. All the moulds and stamps were in the museum and much of one of the kilns had survived for nearly 2000 years.



Among our other finds were oval slingstones, two brooches, a melon bead, some coins, the largest piece of Roman window glass found in Wales and many other things.



It was sad to have to leave the Ewers Garden site so suddenly as not to be able to fill back but no one wanted to take on the leadership. Fortunately, probably as a result of my excavation, money became available for Patrick Ashmore, a professional archaeologist, to excavate the adjacent "Orchard Site". I gave him all my drawings but unfortunately I could not spare the time to help him dig.



The map of my site included adjacent buildings and the National Grid lines. Its position was thus doubly certain. I commented on Patrick Ashmore's interim report in the newsletter of 1992 where I pointed out that either the Roman town was not rectangular or Patrick's drawing was wrong. It was left to Blockley to complete the Orchard Site final report some years later. Frank Olding, who was investigating which part of the ramparts had been excavated prior to building work, compared my drawing with that of Blockley who placed his site some 45 m from where it actually was. Bully for the amateurs!

I hope I have left recorded the parts of the excavation which are important. George Boon suggested I put the minor finds in a strong plastic bag and bury them. I did not take this advice. In fact even the most insignificant pieces have been washed and labelled and nothing has been thrown away. It was gratifying to find, quite recently, people studying my drawings and finds in the museum.

I am grateful to the professionals, Alan Probert, Mr Savory, George Boon, Jeremy Knight and dear Father Fabian Radcliff who, without so much as a Paternoster or Ave Maria, would cheerfully jump into an unsupported grave sized trench which could have buried him in a flash. These people willingly taught our bunch of amateur diggers a great deal and gave us opportunities which would not now be offered to us. Finally there were the diggers who turned out each weekend rain or shine. There was, of course, my dear wife Freda together with Ruth White and Gwyn Jones and many others whose names I ought to be able to recall and often meet in the town.

Ken Key.

ABERGAVENNY CASTLE'S NEW VICTORIAN GARDEN

A new garden is helping to brighten up the grounds of Abergavenny Castle. The society has been responsible for maintaining the garden - by the side of Abergavenny Museum – since the 1980s but it had become sadly overgrown over the past few years. Then it was based on a medieval herb garden but now it has been replanted with a Victorian theme.

So far, the society has been successful in winning three grants to restore the garden which is sited near the archway at the foot of the path to the museum's entrance.



The three grants are:

- £1000 from Rural Community Action.
- £1,950 from Monmouthshire County Council's Community and Economic Development Scheme
- £1,000 through the Council's Article 21 scheme

The money will help to pay for clearing the ground, buying tools, plants, seating plus the design and production of information leaflets and garden information boards.

Others involved are Abergavenny Museum, Coleg Gwent and Monmouthshire Youth Service. Local schools will be asked to take part during the autumn planting.

The garden is an added attraction at the castle for visitors and townspeople alike. It will be used for outdoor museum displays, educational activities – and as an area where people can sit and relax.

If anyone would like more information, please contact the Curator Rachael Rogers at Abergavenny Museum on 01873 854282, or garden volunteers, Paddy Beynon, 01873 854725 and Anne Morgan tel 01873 856275.



ABERGAVENNY VE DAY

Abergavenny's VE Day commemorations in May saw a Sherman tank roll through the streets, Spam sandwiches served up in a children's street party outside the Town Hall and one of the biggest parades the town has ever staged.



Many members of the history society took part in the events to celebrate the 60th anniversary either by walking in the parade from Bailey Park to Cross Street or by manning the stall organised by the society and Abergavenny Museum as part of a Market Hall display of memorabilia.



War veterans were among those marching as well as standard bearers and members of the Royal British Legion, SSAFA, Welsh Guards, Red Cross and WRVS, plus the Powys Army Cadet Band, the Abergavenny Air Training Corps Band and the Abergavenny Borough Band. These were followed by the tank, vintage tractors, jeeps, motorcycles and fire engines.



Others dressed up as soldiers, nurses, the Home Guard, air raid wardens and land army girls. Youth groups were represented and more than 50 schoolchildren dressed as evacuees.



The day was organised by the events committee of Abergavenny Town Council with the help of lottery funding. The Rev Canon Jeremy Winston and the Rev. Malcolm Lane led a service of remembrance outside the Town Hall.

SUMMER VISITS.

Amazing good fortune -is how the organiser describes this summer, and the previous two, since they have been blessed with fine weather. Indeed, constant sun and high temperatures have characterised the vast majority of our visits. Even on the very few occasions when luck has deserted us, the rain has lifted on alighting from the coach or started on re-embarking.

To have mentioned this will now surely bring forth downpours galore! It does emphasise, however, how dependent we are on the weather. Trust to the fates, keep your fingers crossed and don't forget your umbrellas.

The many members who booked to go to Tyntesfield last May were no doubt disappointed when that visit had to be cancelled. The Society is on the waiting list for 2006.

Looking back, we have been most fortunate to benefit from the services of such expert guides as Arthur Peplow and Bill Rutter, as well as others provided at various venues. They will feature again in future.

Looking forward, we shall continue to make good use of two innovations -the National Trust Link Pass which enables non-NT members to access NT properties at half the adult entrance fee and, secondly, our contracted coach firm now books our hotel for the annual weekend trip from a range of hotels the firm regularly utilises. The latter innovation, under trial this year, obviates the need for the visits' organiser to spend his time and your money on prior reconnaissance. But this requires the payment of an early deposit, possible forfeiture, etc., which stresses the importance of having personal insurance cover. We shall evaluate the new arrangement



To discuss or query the contents of this article, kindly ring John Skinner on 853998.

River Teifi at
Cilgerran

IMPORTANT

A tentative, outline programme for next summer is taking shape and the organiser would be grateful if members interested in participating in 2006 would complete the loose sheet and return it to him as soon as possible at 19 Fosterville Crescent, Abergavenny: NP7 5HG.

Your expressed interest in participating in next year's programme is in no way binding, but will help with organising future visits. .

Your suggestions will be much appreciated.

Many thanks.

John Skinner



Llandovery

Please return this slip to John Skinner , 19 Fosterville Crescent
Abergavenny NP7 5HG

From:(Name(s) and Tel No)

SUMMER VISITS -2006

Subject to cost and confirmation, I/we may wish to visit (tick):

Tyntesfield in May (afternoon) -dependent on waiting list success.

Dunster Castle, Cleeve Abbey and Wells Cathedral with Arthur Peplow on 13th June (all day).

Llancaiach Fawr Manor* and St Fagans on 29th June (all day).
(*Follow-up visit to Society's winter lecture on 20th April 2006)

Local historical site visit and pub supper on 11th July (evening). * *

Three nights half-board at Hilton Hotel, Peterborough, visit Burghley House, Ely Cathedral, etc., from 28th to 31st July (weekend).

Tour nearby churches with Bill Rutter on 17th August (afternoon).* *

** Members' suggestions gratefully received.

P.S. Several members have requested an Oxford visit. The Society toured the University in 2003 and 2004. Are you interested in a 2007 trip?