

'Treasure' could be lost for ever

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DIGS AT Cowbridge have uncovered a wealth of Roman and medieval buildings but the Glamorgan/Gwent Archaeological Trust fear a potentially rich site could be developed before they have had time to investigate it thoroughly.

A lack of time and money could work against them and important historical evidence could be lost for ever.

The site they are anxious to excavate is the Bear Field at Cowbridge where Vale of Glamorgan Borough Council plan to provide a sports and leisure complex and football pitch.

The problem is that the purchase of the land by the council has not yet been finalised, the purchase of land for access to the complex is also under negotiation and detailed plans have yet to be approved.

But the council have included in their estimates for the coming financial year £8,150 for the football pitch and £200,000 for the start of the sports complex.

The money set aside in the capital programme will have to be spent before the end of the financial year and this would probably not allow enough time for the trust to investigate the site thoroughly. They would also have the problem of finding money to fund a dig there.

Since 1978 the trust have been involved in a series of excavations at Cowbridge. These have included trial digs in the Bear Field, to the north of the Bear Hotel, and geophysical surveys of part of the near five-and-a-half acre field.

Early last year they also excavated Bear Barn which, along with other investigations, showed that the entire area had been intensively occupied during the Roman period

from around the end of the First Century AD up to and including the middle of the Fourth Century AD.

Finds from these excavations included over 20 coins. The earliest was one of the Emperor Vespasian. There was also evidence to show the area had witnessed both domestic and industrial activity, including the smelting of iron, probably brought from the iron ore deposits near Llanharry.

Near surface

Mr Gareth Dowdell, director of the trust, said: "All of the various features, in the form of gulleys and trenches, seem to have been utilised as foundations for substantial timber buildings.

"However, the presence of finely dressed masonry from the Bear Barn excavations and from the Bear Field have convinced archaeologists that substantial stone buildings existed here in Roman times.

"Less than 100 yards away from the barn the massive Roman baths building was discovered in 1981. It is worth noting that the area to be developed by the Vale council is more than 15 times larger than the baths building area.

"What is particularly worrying to archaeologists is that all the Roman deposits in the Bear Field lie immediately below the turf, only about six to nine inches down.

"Since the 19th Century Cowbridge has been asso-

ciated with the missing Roman fort of Bovium which was first mentioned in a document in the Third Century AD.

"It was located between the Roman fort at Cardiff and that at Neath. Some experts have held that it was somewhere near Bridgend but the archaeological excavations carried out at Cowbridge over the past three years have swung the pendulum back in favour of it being in that area."

The trust have estimated that a minimum of 18 months would be needed thoroughly to investigate the area the council want to develop.

The trust had drawn attention to the potential archaeological richness of the Bear Field since before 1981, said Mr Dowdell.

"The Council for British Archaeology have designated Cowbridge an area of archaeological importance," he said.

"And the archaeological importance of sites like the Bear Field are referred to in the Vale council's Cowbridge District Plan.

"We must have a written record, at least, of what is beneath the surface of the Bear Field. If we do not have the opportunity to excavate it an archaeological treasure might be lost forever.

"The council are aware of the archaeological sensitivity of the area and they should not even be considering going ahead with developing the land without prior consultation with us and allowing time for the excavation."

Roman dig under threat

Get out, accused is told

A MAN, appearing on remand, was ordered out of court by Pontypridd magistrates after protesting that handcuffs he was wearing were too tight.

Carl Price, aged 22, was ordered to the cells after repeatedly interrupting proceedings and the hearing carried on in his absence. Price, of Cefn Lane, Glyncoch, was brought up from the cells for remand on a charge of being drunk.

As he leaned on the front of the dock, the magistrates' chairman, Mr W J Cheesman, told him to stand up.

Mr Cheesman warned Price about his behaviour but Price repeated his pleas to have the handcuffs loosened. After a further interruption, Price was sent to the cells.

As well as the drink charge, Price faces three theft charges involving property worth a total of £27.33 and an unknown quantity of coal. He was remanded in custody for a further seven days.

ARCHAEOLOGISTS COULD BE faced with a race against time to uncover important Roman treasures on land in South Wales. Excavations are taking place at Bear Field, Cowbridge, where the Vale of Glamorgan Borough Council propose to build a leisure centre.

And councillors are in no mood to hold up the development to allow the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust to carry out their lengthy excavation work.

The council do not yet own the land. But they have made it clear that as soon as they do the archaeologists will be asked to leave.

The trust wrote to the Vale leisure services committee... expressing "deepest concern" at the leisure centre proposals on land which is "of extreme archaeological sensitivity".

They have asked for a meeting with the council to discuss the matter and this has been agreed.

And local resident Mr A J L Alden wrote to the committee saying: "I was rather concerned to read there is a possibility that the development of the sports complex in the Bear Field will proceed at such a pace that a full archaeological dig of the area will not be possible.

"As I was responsible for the initial discovery of the pottery which started

Echo Reporter

off the excavation, I am concerned that further knowledge of the Roman occupation of Cowbridge may be lost.

"There appears to be a strong likelihood that Cowbridge is the site of the 'lost' Roman fort of Bomium. It would be somewhat irresponsible to bury under bricks and mortar, or perhaps destroy, this historical evidence."

But the chairman of the finance and policies committee, Coun John Cotter, said they had been pressing for the leisure centre in Cowbridge for many years.

He said the archaeologists could continue working at their field until it came into the council's ownership. Then work would start immediately on the leisure centre and

the archaeologists would be asked to leave.

"Bear Field has been there for many years. If these people wanted to have a look at it why haven't they done it before? Why have they always got to wait until somebody wants to carry out development?"

But Coun David Eastwood said the trust had to cope with a lot of work and were short of funds.

They had strong evidence that the field would be of great archaeological importance. The people of Cowbridge would not like to see it destroyed for the sake of a leisure centre.

"They must be given time. It is deplorable that as soon as the land comes into the council's ownership building work will start. It's disgusting. I don't think the people of Cowbridge will thank us for destroying a part of their heritage."

'Don't bury our treasure'

PLANS to build a leisure centre on the Bear Field, Cowbridge, could destroy valuable archaeological information about the town in Roman times, it has been claimed.

And Mr. Gareth Dowdell, Director of the Glamorgan/Gwent Archaeological Trust, says the Vale of Glamorgan Borough Council are in direct contravention of their own policies by not consulting the Trust about the plans.

"We have already carried out trial excavations on the Bear Field, with the full co-operation of the present owner, Mr. Harry Thomas," said Mr. Dowdell.

"We know that there are archaeological deposits immediately below the surface, but we need time and money to do the work. The first we heard about the leisure centre was when the planning application was actually being made."

Efforts

He pointed out that Policy 37 of the Borough's Draft District Plan states: "Where proposals for development may affect areas of archaeological interest, efforts will be made to secure adequate time and access for survey, excavation and recording."

"The situation is complicated," said Mr. Dowdell. "Originally, the proposals for the Bear Field concerned only a sports complex, with a leisure centre being built at Aberthaw."

"What has happened now, is that they have combined the two developments, which are programmed for commencement some time in September," he added.

"We are not against the development," stressed Mr.

Dowdell, "because it would have considerable benefits for the community. What we want is adequate time and funding to carry out our investigations."

The Trust has already launched an appeal to raise some of the £35,000 needed to work the site. They hope that some of the work, which they estimate would last a minimum of twelve months, could be done under a Manpower Services Commission scheme.

The Trust also believes that the missing Roman fort of Bovium could be sited in Cowbridge, and that any finds

would be of "crucial importance" to their understanding of the development of Roman Cowbridge.

"We know that we have Roman occupation of the Bear Field dating from the late first century AD to the middle of the fourth century AD," said Mr. Dowdell.

Referred

"And we know from the finds that we have made that both domestic and industrial

activities were carried out in that area.

"Policy 7:21 of the Draft District Plan states that planning proposals will be referred to the Glamorgan/Gwent Archaeological Trust for observations," he added.

The Trust has circulated leaflets in Cowbridge outlining their case, and has written to every Vale of Glamorgan borough councillor.

"We are appalled that this development should go ahead without prior consultation," said Mr. Dowdell. "Now the matter rests in their hands."