AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF LAND AT CHURCH CLOSE, BEGELLY, PEMBROKESHIRE

December 2006

Paratowyd gan Archaeoleg Cambria
Ar gyfer Mr. Philip Morgan
Prepared by Cambria Archaeology
For Mr. Philip Morgan

REGISTERED IFA ORGANISATION

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Gan / By

Duncan Schlee

ARCHAEOLEG CAMBRIA
Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf
Neuadd y Sir, Stryd Caerfyrddin, Llandeilo, Sir Gaerfyrddin SA19 6AF
Ffon: Ymholiadau Cyffredinol 01558 823121
Adran Rheoli Treftadaeth 01558 823131
Ffacs: 01558 823133
Ebost: cambria@cambria.org.uk Gwefan: www.cambria.org.uk

CAMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGY
Dyfed Archaeological Trust Limited
The Shire Hall, Carmarthen Street, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire SA19 6AF
Tel: General Enquiries 01558 823121
Heritage Management Section 01558 823131
Fax: 01558 823133
Email: cambria@cambria.org.uk Website: www.cambria.org.uk

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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF LAND AT CHURCH CLOSE BEGELLY, PEMBROKESHIRE

SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Church Close, Begelly, Pembrokeshire, to evaluate the potential impact of a proposed housing development upon any archaeological features or deposits identified at the site. Seven trenches were machine excavated in order to characterise deposits and distribution of features across the site. A variety of features were identified within several trenches. A V-shaped ditch contained medieval pottery. Several worked flints found in close proximity to features containing charcoal, may indicate possible Neolithic activity. Other features contained no dating evidence. Following production of an interim report, a full report was produced which included the results of radiocarbon dates from samples taken during the excavation.

INTRODUCTION

Cambria Archaeology - Heritage Management (acting as advisors to Pembrokeshire County Council), prepared a detailed brief for an archaeological evaluation to assess the impact of the proposed development on the archaeological resource in order meet the archaeological planning condition. Cambria Archaeology (Field Services) was commissioned by Mr Philip Morgan to undertake the archaeological fieldwork. The site is located at Begelly, Pembrokeshire, on land to the south of St. Mary's church, adjacent to the existing development at Church Close (NGR SN1183807245).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The evaluation process aimed to evaluate the proposed development area, in order to ascertain the presence, absence, character, distribution and relative importance of archaeological features or deposits. This information will be used to inform the local authority of any archaeological mitigation that might be required as part of the planning process.

SITE HISTORY

A detailed research into the historical development of the site was not undertaken as part of the current project. Cartographic evidence indicates that coal mining was undertaken in the vicinity, but no shafts are indicated within the proposed development area. A motte and bailey earthwork castle (PRN 3640) was located close to the proposed development site, within the area of the churchyard. Although this was visible as an earthwork until fairly recently, the castle mound was flattened when the graveyard was extended.

METHODOLOGY

Seven trenches were excavated across the site. Their locations were largely dictated by practical constraints, but a satisfactory coverage was achieved. The trenches were hand cleaned to ascertain the presence or absence of any archaeological features, which were then partly excavated to ascertain their character. The trenches were recorded in plan and section where warranted, and their locations were surveyed.

RESULTS

Trench 1 (Figs 2 and 3, Photos 1, 7, 8 and 13)
This trench was cut to a length of 13.25m. Shallow linear ditch-like feature 103 (filled by 102) was identified running on a SW-NE alignment, at the western end of the trench. This has been tentatively identified as the remnant of a possible hedge-line (see figs 3 and 4). Another feature (106) was also excavated. From what was visible within the trench, this feature was at first thought to be a substantial linear ditch on north-south alignment. On excavation, however, the character of the fill deposits (105) suggested that this may be the remains of a 'tree throw' (see figs 3 and 4). The full extent of the feature could not be ascertained. No dating evidence was recovered from either feature.

Trench 2 (Figs 2 and 3, Photos 2, 5, 10 and 11)
This trench was cut to a length of 14.50m. Two features of archaeological significance were identified at the northern end of the trench. Feature 203 was a V-shaped linear ditch cut on an ENE-WSW alignment (see figs 3 and 4). Ceramic fragments recovered from the ditch fill (202) have been preliminarily dated to the medieval period (13th to 15th century AD). This ditch cut through an earlier oval feature (206) (see figs 3 and 4). The fills of this feature (204, 205) contained significant quantities of charcoal, but no dating evidence was recovered. The base of the pit appears to correspond to the top of a layer of a naturally deposited coal-rich deposit. It is uncertain whether this is of significance. Other possible features at the southern end of the trench were investigated but have been interpreted as being of natural origin.

Trench 3 (Figs 2 and 3, Photos 4, 9, 12, 14)
This trench was cut to a length of 12.50m. Linear feature 303 (filled by 302) was identified at the western end of the trench on a NW-SE alignment. It appeared to be at right angles to feature 103, and, although 303 is slightly deeper and better defined (see figs 3 and 4), both features may be associated. A slot was excavated along the northern edge of the trench (see figs 3 and 4) to investigate some areas containing charcoal flecks. Deposit 304 was found to be a fill deposit overlying a substantial fragment of charred wood. This has been interpreted as a charred tree root located on the edge of a tree throw (310). This suggests that woodland clearance has occurred in this location. During investigation of the charcoal, two worked flint fragments were found within layer 307 a silty clay deposit through which all the features are cut. These flint artefacts have been provisionally dated to the Neolithic period (4500-2500 BC). Layer 307 may be a buried soil. Although not a fully understood phenomenon, the association of flint artefacts with tree throws has been recognised at other sites.

Further to the east, another charcoal-rich deposit (305) was investigated. This charcoal was contained within shallow cut feature 306. This feature may itself have been cut by feature 312, but this was only observed in section. Another flint flake was recovered from deposit 307 in the vicinity of these features. Deposit 307 (a possible buried soil) was found to overlie deposits 308 and 309 which appear to be more natural lower soil horizons (see figs 3 and 4).

Samples for Carbon 14 dating were taken from charcoal recovered from the fills of features 310 and 306. In an attempt to ascertain whether the features were of similar date. Context 304 (the fill of feature 310) was dated to 1880-1740 BC, a date consistent with the Early Bronze Age. Context 305 (the fill of feature 306) was dated to 960-1010 AD, a date consistent with the Early Medieval period. The results of the dating analysis are presented in Appendix 1 and are discussed below.

Trench 4 (Figs 2 and 3 Photo 6)
This trench was cut to a length of 6.25m. A linear feature up to 0.30m wide was observed at the northern end of the trench. On excavation of the fill, however, it eventually became apparent that this feature was a natural fissure that had become filled with soil containing anthropogenic material. The feature was too deep to excavate completely. It is assumed that the fissure was formed by an earth movement associated with coalmining in the area. It is therefore possible that a collapsed mining shaft may exist nearby. No other features of archaeological significance were identified.

Trench 5 (Figs 2 and 3)
This trench was cut to a length of 6.25m. Topsoil and subsoil were removed down to the top of natural silt deposits. Part of the trench was further reduced by hand. No features of archaeological significance were identified.

Trench 6 (Figs 2 and 3)
This trench was cut to a length of 3.50m. It was located to ascertain whether significant archaeological deposits survived in this location. The overburden appeared to be recently redeposited material directly overlying natural. The ground level would therefore appear to have been significantly reduced in this area. No features of archaeological significance were identified.

Trench 7 (Figs 2 and 3, Photo 3)
This trench was cut to a length of 7.50m. Topsoil deposits appeared to have been fairly recently dumped or disturbed. Underlying deposits consisted of blue-grey silty clay deposits. The area would appear to have been significantly wetter than elsewhere on the site, for some time. A stream runs along the eastern boundary of the site. This watercourse has been recently cleaned out. There was reportedly a pond in this location in the recent past. No bedrock was exposed within the trench. No archaeologically significant features were identified.

DISCUSSION

The natural geology in the area of the proposed development is complex and was found to vary considerably across the site. It is known that coal-mining activity occurred in the vicinity and it was expected that some evidence of this might be apparent from the presence of dumped spoil deposits. In the event, no features or deposits clearly associated with mining activity were identified. The partially excavated feature in Trench 4, however, was interpreted as a natural fissure. Whether this occurred naturally or is a consequence of mining activity in the immediate vicinity is not known.

There is some evidence that ground levels may have been altered within the development area. The machine excavation of Trench 6 suggests that the topsoil, subsoil, and a considerable amount of the underlying natural deposits may have been removed between the southern edge of the development area and the existing topsoil dump. Elsewhere on the site, the contrast between the topsoil and the compact and homogenous subsoil suggests that the original soil profile has been truncated, possibly in the post-medieval period. All archaeological features are sealed by soil 'C' horizons and most are cut into the natural geology. This interpretation is supported by the Carbon 14 dating evidence recovered features in Trench 3, which suggests that Bronze-Age and Early Medieval deposits are both sealed by the same (later) horizon 302 (see figure 4).

A later, possibly Anglo-Norman phase (presumably associated with the motte and Bailey castle PRN 3640, that once stood in the church yard) is suggested by V-shaped linear feature 203 in Trench 2. This significant feature, which contained medieval pottery dated to the 13th-15th centuries, may represent the southern extent of archaeological features belonging to this phase.

Linear features 103 and 303 may represent the remains of a field or property boundary, but no dating evidence was recovered from their fills. They may therefore be earlier or later than the medieval period.

Ditch 203 cuts into an earlier feature (pit 206), suggesting there is another phase of activity that extends further to the south than the medieval phase. Although no dating evidence was recovered from feature 206, an Early Medieval date recovered from feature 306 in Trench 3, supports the idea that there is more than one phase of medieval activity in this location.

In addition to the medieval phases, features 106 and 310 (which have been interpreted as probable tree throws), suggest a phase of deliberate tree clearance in the vicinity. These features were originally thought to be of Neolithic origin, due to the presence of worked flint tools within layer 307. However, charcoal obtained from context 304 (the fill of 310), has been dated from 1880 to 1740 BC which lies within the accepted range for the Early Bronze Age.

There are two explanations for these results. Either the flint work recovered from context 307 is also dated to the Early Bronze Age, or else, since feature 310 cuts into (and is therefore later than) layer 307, both the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods are represented.

Layer 307 was also cut by feature 306 (itself cut by 312). Its stratigraphic associations and the character of its fill suggested that 306 might be a Neolithic feature associated with feature 310, and possibly indicative of settlement activity. However, a Carbon 14 date obtained from context 305 (the fill of 306) was dated 960 to 1010 AD, corresponding to the Early Medieval period. This result reduces the possibility of prehistoric settlement activity, while indicating the possible presence of Early Medieval settlement in the vicinity

CONCLUSIONS and RECCOMMENDATIONS

Although archaeological features were identified within the proposed development area, it was not possible within the limitations of an archaeological evaluation, to ascertain their full extent, or to suggest with any certainty what they represent. With the help of the evidence obtained from Carbon 14 dating, however, it has been possible to identify several phases of human activity of various kinds in the area, covering a considerable span of time.

Despite the presence of worked flint in layer 307, the likelihood of significant Neolithic archaeology within the development area has been reduced, and, while Bronze Age activity is now indicated, since the cut feature 306 (that suggested possible prehistoric settlement activity) has now been dated to the Early Medieval period, there is no longer evidence of significant prehistoric settlement activity in the proposed development area.

An Early Medieval date for feature 306 is, however, still of considerable significance, since archaeological evidence for settlement activity (which is suggested by the character of the fill of the feature) for this period is under represented in the archaeological record in west Wales. It also has the potential to add to our understanding of the origins and development of settlement at Begelly.

The archaeological features identified during this evaluation, appear to be located on the higher ground in the northern part of the site. The features seem to diminish southward, with distance from the present day graveyard wall, but due to the presence of dumped topsoil over much of the central part of the site, the full extent of archaeological features could not be ascertained. From the available evidence it would appear that there is little or no surviving archaeology in the southern part of the proposed development area.

To reduce the impact of development upon potentially significant archaeological deposits, consideration could be given to locating house footprints in the southern part of the site where the evaluation has not identified significant archaeology. If house foundations are to be located where the evaluation has demonstrated that an impact upon archaeological features is more likely, then further mitigation may be required.

The dating evidence suggests that several periods of archaeological activity are represented at the site, although features are not particularly concentrated and their extent and character are uncertain. Considering the evidence obtained from the evaluation that the upper soil horizons have been truncated, it seems that archaeological deposits are most likely to survive as the fills of features cut into natural soils.

If disturbance of the known archaeology by the proposed development is unavoidable, it is suggested that the archaeological features that have been identified would be best understood by stripping the area of impact down to the top of significant archaeological features, in order to clarify their extent in plan and to identify stratigraphic relationships where features of different periods intercut.

APPENDIX 1 Results of Carbon Dating

SAMPLE 1: (Context 304) Trench 3

CALIBRATION OF RADIOCARBON AGE TO CALENDAR YEARS

(Variables: C13/C12=-25.1:lab. mult=1)

Laboratory number: **Beta-222567**

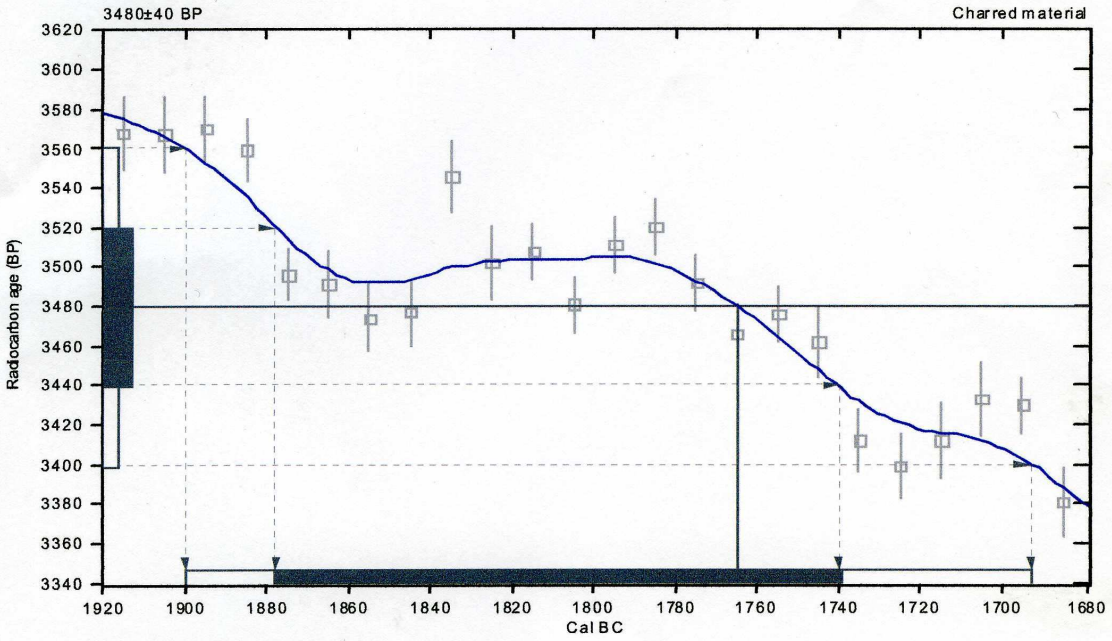
Conventional radiocarbon age: **3480±40 BP**

2 Sigma calibrated result: (95% probability) **Cal BC 1900 to 1690 (Cal BP 3850 to 3640)**

Intercept data

Intercept of radiocarbon age with calibration curve: Cal BC 1760 (Cal BP 3720)

1 Sigma calibrated result: (68% probability) Cal BC 1880 to 1740 (Cal BP 3830 to 3690)



References:

Database used
INTCAL98
Calibration Database
Editorial Comment
Stuiver, M., van der Plicht, H., 1998, Radiocarbon 40(3), pxii-xiii
INTCAL98 Radiocarbon Age Calibration
Stuiver, M., et. al., 1998, Radiocarbon 40(3), p1041-1083
Mathematics
A Simplified Approach to Calibrating C14 Dates
Talma, A. S., Vogel, J. C., 1993, Radiocarbon 35(2), p317-322

Beta Analytic Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory
4985 S.W. 74th Court, Miami, Florida 33155 • Tel: (305)667-5167 • Fax: (305)663-0964 • E-Mail: beta@radiocarbon.com

SAMPLE 2: (Context 305) Trench 3

CALIBRATION OF RADIOCARBON AGE TO CALENDAR YEARS

(Variables: C13/C12=-24.2:lab. mult=1)

Laboratory number: **Beta-222569**

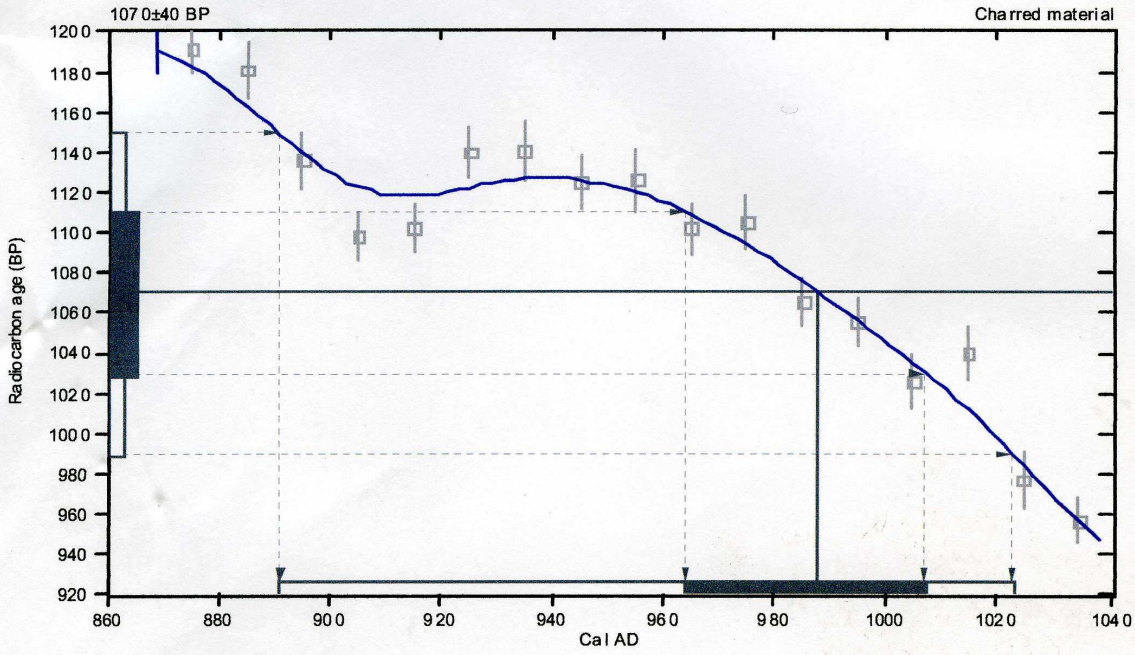
Conventional radiocarbon age: **1070±40 BP**

2 Sigma calibrated result: (95% probability) **Cal AD 890 to 1020 (Cal BP 1060 to 930)**

Intercept data

Intercept of radiocarbon age with calibration curve: Cal AD 990 (Cal BP 960)

1 Sigma calibrated result: (68% probability) Cal AD 960 to 1010 (Cal BP 990 to 940)



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4985 S.W. 74th Court, Miami, Florida 33155 • Tel: (305)667-5167 • Fax: (305)663-0964 • E-Mail: beta@radiocarbon.com

APPENDIX 2

Project Archive

An archive for this project has been compiled and is currently stored at the Cambria Archaeology offices in Llandeilo. The Archive contains:

A. REPORTS		
A.1	Final report	yes
A.2	Interim report	yes
B. SITE WRITTEN DATA		
B.1	Context records – paper	yes
C. DRAWINGS – NON-PUBLICATION		
C.2	Site drawings	yes
D. PHOTOGRAPHS		
D.7	Digital photographs – disk	yes
E. FINDS DATA		
E.1	Catalogue of boxed finds	yes
F. ENVIRONMENTAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL DATA		
F.5	C14 reports	yes
G. DOCUMENTARY DATA		no
H. HUMAN REMAINS		no
I. DRAFT REPORTS		no
J. PUBLICATION DRAWINGS		no
K. PUBLIC RELATIONS		no
L. PRE- AND POST- EXCAVATION DESIGN		no
M. CORRESPONDENCE		no
N. GENERAL MISCELLANEOUS		no

Figure 1: Site location plan

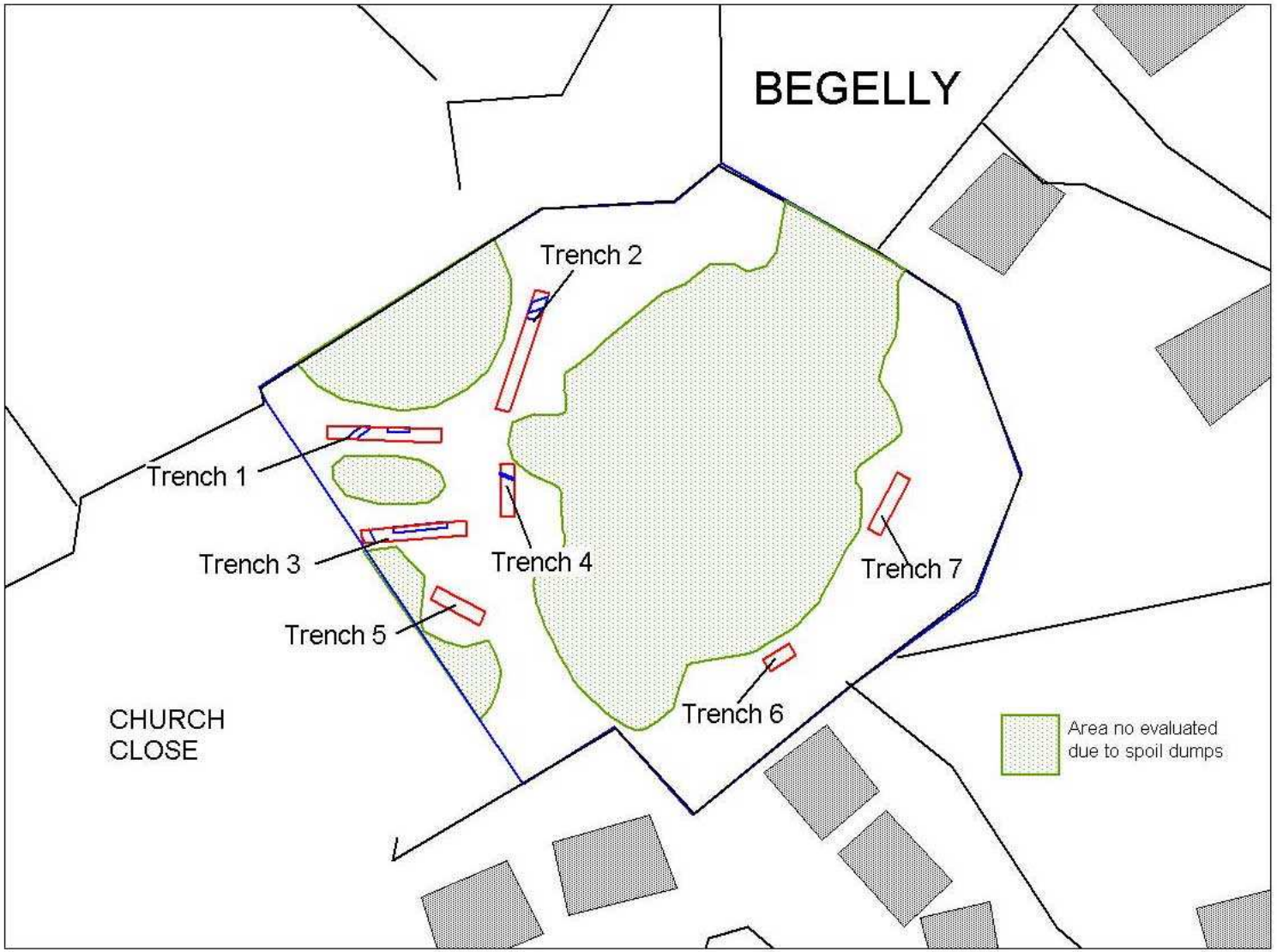

Figure 2: Trench location plan

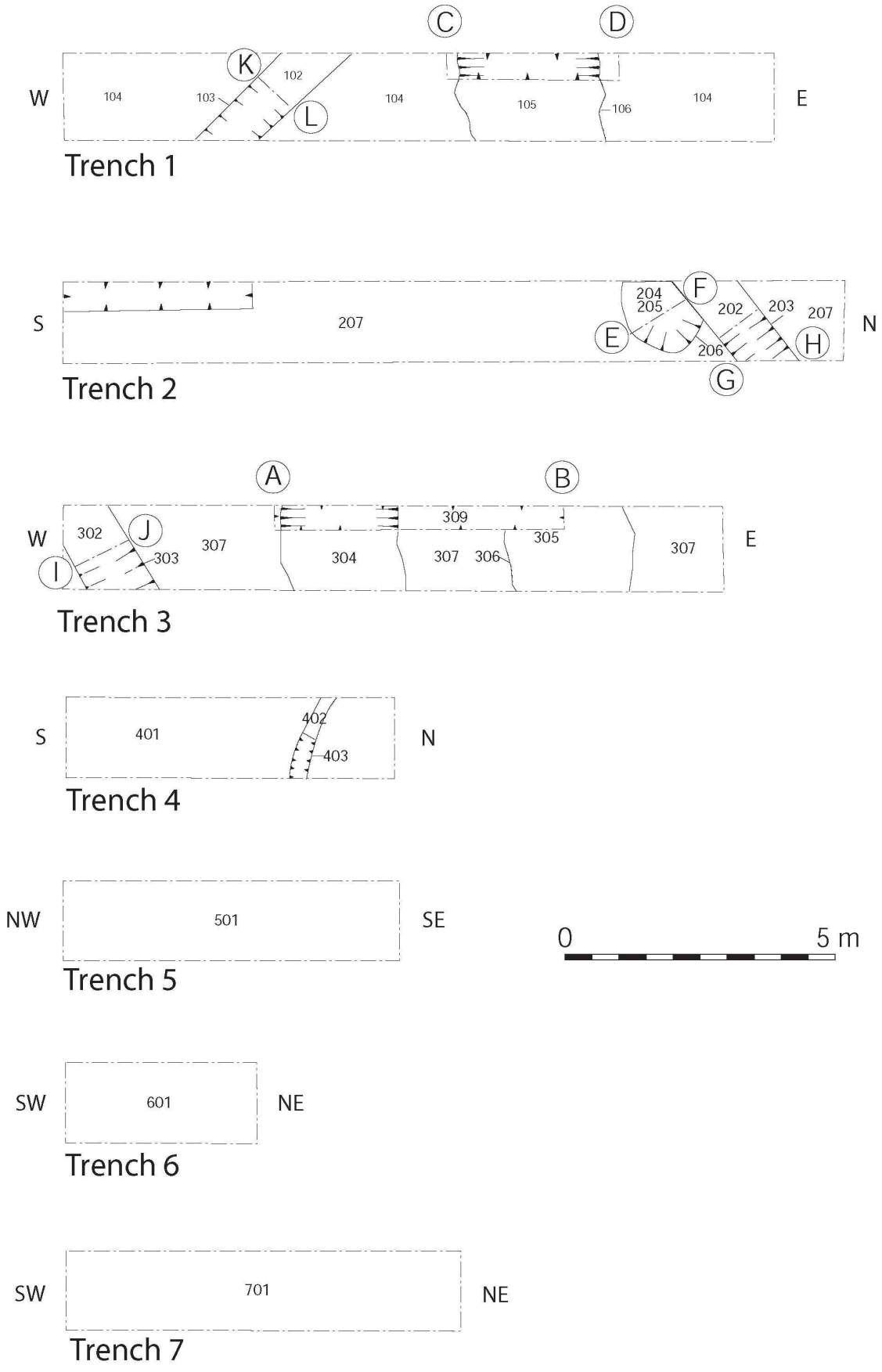

Figure 3: Trench plans

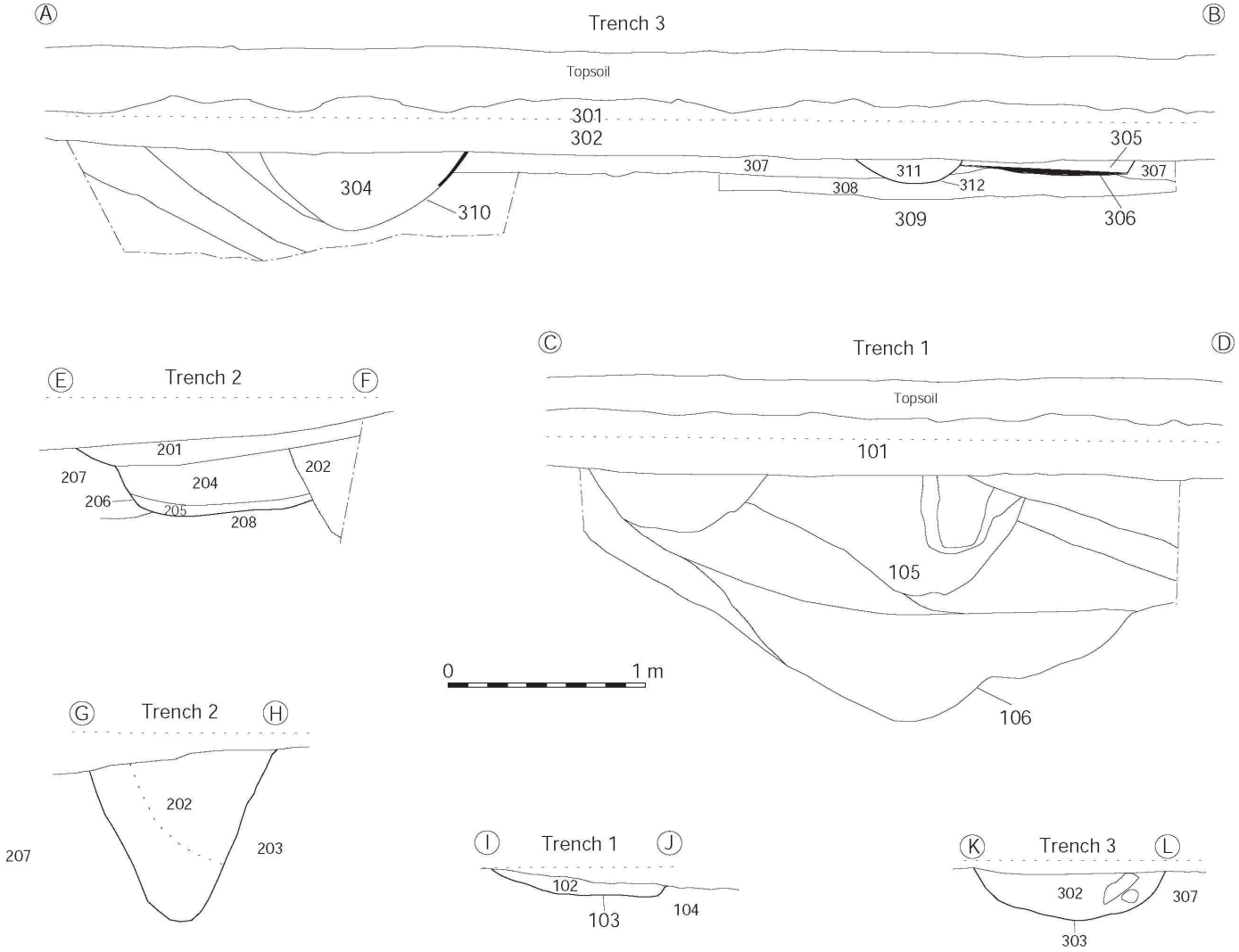

Figure 4: Sections through excavated features

Photo 1:
Trench 1 looking east

Photo 2:
Trench 2 looking southwest

Photo 3:
Trench 7 looking northeast

Photo 4:
Trench 3 looking west

Photo 5:
Trench 2 looking northeast

Photo 6:
Trench 4 natural fissure looking northwest

Photo 7: Trench 1 linear cut 103 looking northeast

Photo 8: Trench 1 fills of tree throw 106 in section

Photo 9: Trench 3 linear feature 303 looking northwest

Photo 10: Trench 2 ditch cut 303 looking west

Photo 11: Trench 2 pit 206 looking west (cut by ditch 203 to right)

Photo 12: Trench 3 possible tree throw 310 looking north. Note charcoal on edge of feature to right of the small scale

Photo 13: Trench 1 upper fills of possible tree throw 106 looking north

Photo 14: Trench 3 feature 306 (containing charcoal deposit 305) looking north

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Paratowyd yr adroddiad hwn gan:
This report has been prepared by:

Duncan Schlee

Swydd / Position: Archaeologist

Llofnod / Signature ..... Dyddiad / Date

Mae'r adroddiad hwn wedi ei gael yn gywir a derbyn sêl bendith
This report has been checked and approved by

Ken Murphy

Swydd / Position: Principle Archaeologist (Field Services)

Llofnod / Signature ..... Dyddiad / Date

ar ran Archaeoleg Cambria, Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf.
on behalf of Cambria Archaeology, Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Yn unol â'n nôd i roddi gwasanaeth o ansawdd uchel, croesawn unrhyw sylwadausydd gennych ar gynnwys neu strwythur yr adroddiad hwn

As part of our desire to provide a quality service we would welcome any comments you may have on the content or presentation of this report