

WATCHING BRIEF AT THE BOTANIC GARDENS TROPICAL GLASSHOUSE. JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2007.



Prepared by Cambria Archaeology
For David Fisher, Meirion Howells
Project Management.



ARCHAEOLEG CAMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGY

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WATCHING BRIEF AT THE NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDEN OF WALES TROPICAL
GLASSHOUSE
JANUARY – FEBRUARY 2007

Gan / By

Philip Poucher

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have on the content or presentation of this report

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BOTANIC GARDENS TROPICAL GLASSHOUSE ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken within the walled garden of Middleton Hall, at the National Botanic Garden of Wales, SN 5195 1812. The work was undertaken by Cambria Archaeology on behalf of Meirion Howells Project Management in January and February 2007.

A watching brief was deemed necessary because the site was located within the late 18th century walled garden of Middleton Hall, now part of the National Botanic Gardens of Wales. The site was located adjacent to the Peach House which raised the possibility of further garden buildings built against the wall that had not previously been recorded. The plans are to construct a tropical glasshouse on the site (measuring roughly 36.5m by 10.5m), involving the removal of c300mm of topsoil prior to the excavation of foundation trenches for the glasshouse.

The topsoil was machine stripped using a toothless bucket across the whole site of the proposed glasshouse. Material was lifted straight into small dumpers and taken away from site, dumped outside the walled garden but within the grounds of the Botanic Gardens. An archaeologist was present throughout much of the topsoil strip and then once the topsoil had been removed to record any visible features. Following the topsoil strip several test pits were excavated, following which an archaeologist was again present on site to record revealed features. Following an examination of the site after the topsoil strip and excavation of the test pits it was deemed unnecessary for an archaeologist to be present during the excavation of the foundation trenches as any features had been revealed during the topsoil strip, and examined after the test pits.

The topsoil strip revealed a continuation of the original late 18th/early 19th century garden footpath picked up in previous archaeological work (Blockley 1997, Evans 2001) with remnants of a row of planting along its inner edge. Two small areas of rough brick hard-standing were revealed against the garden wall, possible contemporary with the walled garden. Several small rubble-filled pits were revealed throughout the area, which appeared to be fairly modern in date. The test pit revealed a slate-lined drain, contemporary with the garden, that ran at an angle across the site. No structural features were revealed during the works.

INTRODUCTION

Project Background

A planning application to construct a tropical glasshouse within the walled garden at the National Botanic Gardens (NGR SN 5195 1812), was approved with an attached condition that an archaeological watching brief be maintained during the groundworks required for its construction.

The applicant Meirion Howells Project Management commissioned Cambria Archaeology Field Services to carry out the watching brief.

The watching brief methodology and scope of the report

Construction of the tropical glasshouse required the removal of c300mm of topsoil over the proposed area (c36.5m by 10.5m). The topsoil removal was carried out by mechanical excavator with a toothless bucket. The spoil was lifted straight into small dumpers and removed from the walled garden but dumped within the grounds of the Botanic Gardens. After the removal of the topsoil several test pits were then excavated. Visits were made to the site during the removal of the topsoil and again after the excavation of the test pits to record any features or deposits of archaeological interest.

This report outlines the main watching brief results before discussing the impact of the works based on the on-site observations and the known archaeological potential of the area.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

There is little recorded evidence of early archaeological remains around the area of the walled gardens, although possible ridge and furrow remains on the hill-slopes to the northwest may indicate Medieval agricultural activity in the area around Middleton Hall. A mansion house is first thought to have been established here in the early 17th century by the Middleton family. This mansion is said to have contained 17 hearths in 1670 (Jones 1987, p132) which would have made it one of the largest mansions in the county, although this figure may also take into account an associated settlement. The remains of this early mansion are believed to lie to the east of the current hall. The estate passed through marriage to the Gwyn family in around 1740 but due to mounting debts the estate passed into receivership in 1776.

In 1789 the estate was bought by William Paxton who had made his fortune as a master of the Culcutta mint in India. Paxton then set about an ambitious and extensive improvement of both the mansion and grounds. The architect Samuel Pepys Cockerell was commissioned to design and build a new mansion, work starting in 1793 and completed two years later. Around the same period the surrounding landscape, noted for its chalybeate springs, was turned into a 'water park' by Paxton's surveyor Samuel Lapidge and engineer James Grier. The walled garden, lying to the south-west of the mansion house, was part of this designed landscape, and was constructed in the later years of the 18th century. Much of the work on the layout for the estate was complete by 1815 when the surveyor Thomas Horner produced an aerial plan of the estate, which also provides one of the earliest records of the walled garden and its layout.

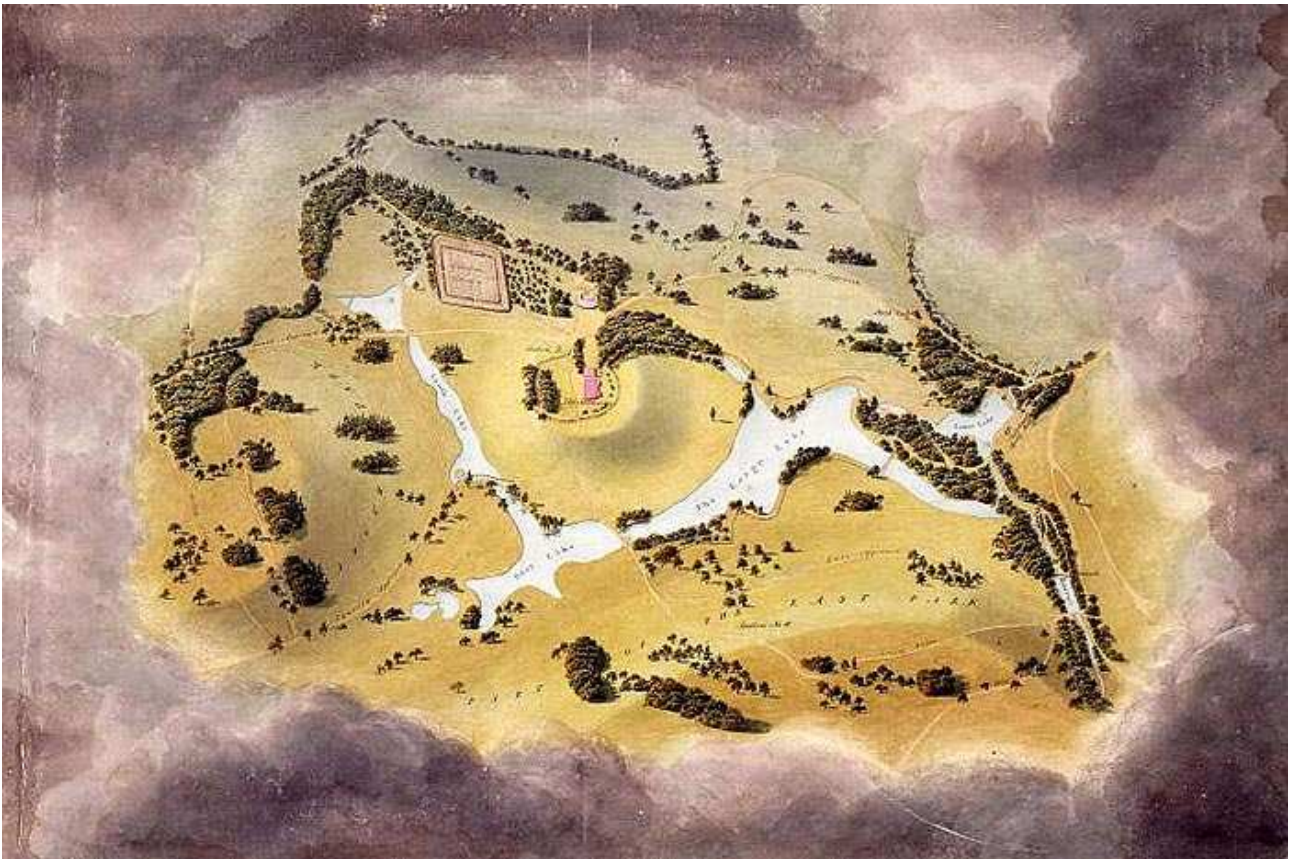


Fig.1. Aerial view of the estate by T.Horner, 1815.

The walled garden itself would have been placed both according to the current fashion for the 'Natural Landscape' and also to take advantage of the nature of the land for the practical necessities of horticulture. As can be seen from the early Horner plan the garden was probably originally laid out with two sets of walls, and included a building later known as the 'Peach House', a heated glasshouse, built on the line of the inner wall. Later maps and plans and archaeological excavations indicate the 'inner gardens' were laid out in a series of formal planting beds around a central water feature, divided by paths. A pathway and planting beds then lay in the space between the inner and outer walls, creating a 'slip garden' that is unusual in Britain. This provided areas for growing bush fruits and the more unsightly utilitarian functions such as compost making and storage. At some point between 1815 and 1824 the outer wall was extended northwards to incorporate an orchard. In the mid 19th century a glasshouse was added on the NW corner of the double walled garden and an engine house to power the furnaces in the Peach House. A more detailed record of the layout of the walled garden is illustrated on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of the area from 1888.

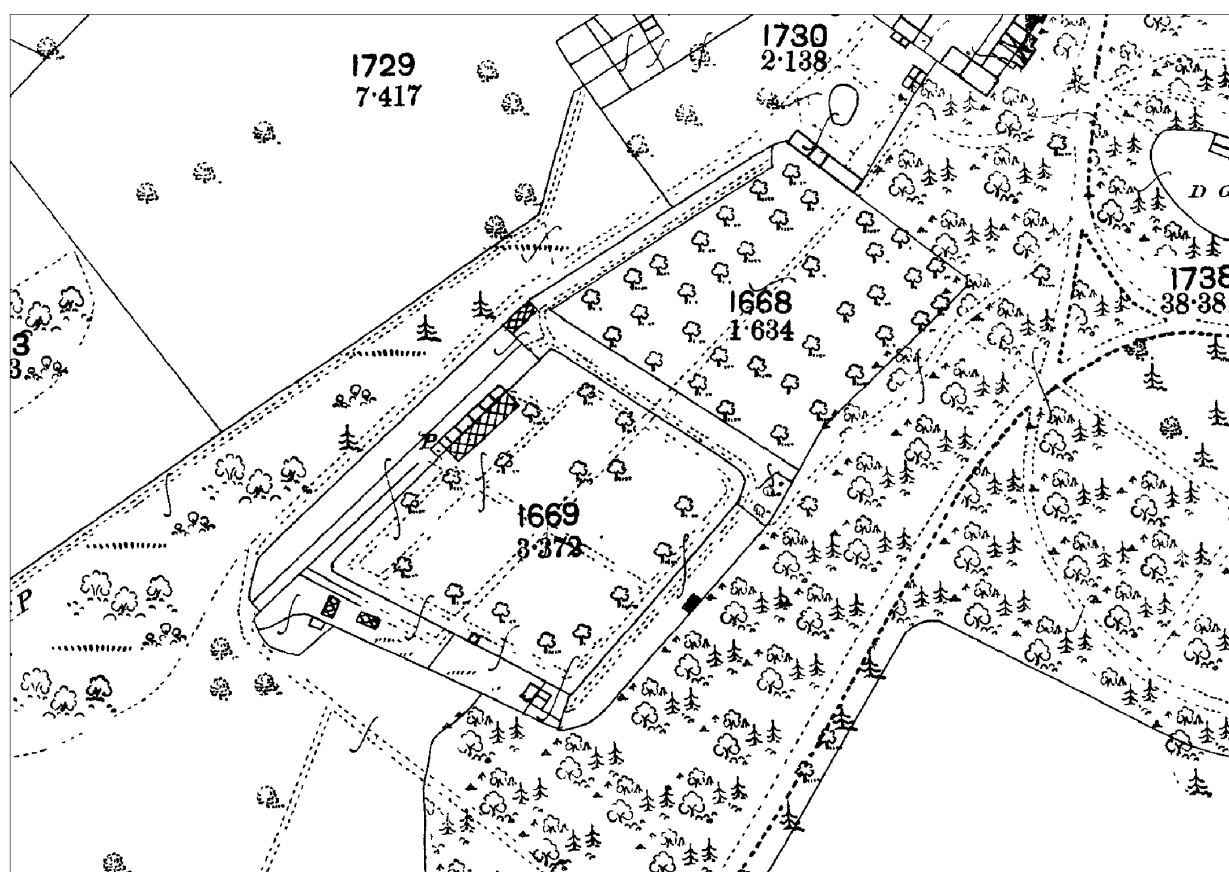


Fig.2. A copy of the 1;2500 1st edition Ordnance Survey map published in 1888.

William Paxton died in 1824 and the hall was purchased by Edward Hamlin Adams. After this point the grounds appears to have gone into a gradual decline and the working life of the garden appears to have come to an end in the early 20th century, although the Peach House and some of the glasshouses continued to function until the 1950s. The Hall itself was damaged by fire in 1931 and demolished in the early 1950s. The land was bought by Carmarthen County Council and after a period of decay the walls were partly 'restored' during a Manpower Services Commission Scheme in the 1970s, restoring parts of the park as well for public access. Further restoration work was carried out on the parkland in the 1980s and the area was finally transformed into the National Botanic Gardens of Wales, opened in 2000.

Previous Archaeological Work

There has been a variety of extensive archaeological studies carried out on the Middleton estate as a whole as a result of the restoration and building work undertaken in the creation of the National Botanic Gardens. This work includes an historic landscape assessment ahead of the development of the Botanic Gardens (Gallagher c1990) and an assessment of the archaeological implications of the proposed Botanic Gardens (Ludlow 1995). Building recording work has also been undertaken on various properties within the estate but these have not been consulted in the course of this report.

Further archaeological investigations and recording has also been undertaken within the area of the double walled garden. In 1997 Cambrian Archaeological Projects (Blockley 1997) excavated several evaluation trenches within the area of the walled garden and orchard, with one such trench (Trench G) along the northern edge of the proposed Tropical Glasshouse site.

This evaluation revealed traces of the pathways throughout the walled garden, as well as identifying the central garden water features and elements of the Peach House. Within the area of the Tropical Glasshouse site the northern end of the pathway was picked up, described as 1.3m wide consisting of a lower layer of grey sandstone chippings covered by an upper layer of cinders, and bounded along both edges by a single course of grey and yellow sandstone.

In 1999 Cambrian Archaeological Projects (Evans 1999) also undertook a watching brief on a service trench that ran from the NW corner of the orchard to the SE corner of the walled garden. The watching brief picked up several pathways, but it did not run through the area of the Tropical Glasshouse.

In 2001 more extensive archaeological evaluation of the walled garden area was again undertaken by Cambrian Archaeological Projects (Evans 2001). This included the excavation of numerous evaluation trenches, including three within the Tropical Glasshouse area (Trenches 10, 11 & 12), as well as the complete excavation of the central water feature, the Peach House and the NW glasshouse. As part of this study a metal detector survey was undertaken and prior to the excavation a resistivity geophysical survey was undertaken by Stratascan. A survey of the garden walls was also undertaken, and a pollen analysis made of the topsoil within the inner garden.

The geophysical survey picked out the rough lines of many of the garden pathways, including the north-south path through the Tropical Glasshouse area. The metal detector survey recovered numerous lead planting tags, including three for apple trees within the Tropical Glasshouse area. The wall survey recorded the condition of the walls, part of which had been covered by a protective render in the Tropical Glasshouse area during the 1970s, and has since been restored. The pollen survey revealed little of the original planting, much of the sampled topsoil containing evidence of its later use as a fallow area once the garden was out of use.

The excavations revealed much detail for the use and function of the Peach House, the NW glasshouse, the central water feature, the 'Melon Ground' in the south-west corner of the slip garden and a possible engine house against the south garden wall. The routes of many of the pathways were confirmed, both within the inner garden and in the slip gardens. The north-south pathway through the Tropical Glasshouse area was also recorded in two places, described as 1.2m wide, generally cambered and made of fine crushed red sandstone, with coarser sandstone below. No other features were recorded within the Tropical Glasshouse area.

RESULTS OF THE WATCHING BRIEF

Work on de-turfing the site began 30/01/07, revealing a consistent covering of dark-brown topsoil (1000), containing visible fragments of brick rubble, glass and various modern finds.

As work within the walled garden required the use of relatively small machinery the area was gradually stripped of topsoil down c300mm over the course of a week, from 31/01/07 onwards. Regular archaeological site visits were made throughout the week to watch the work in progress and record any features that emerged. During the removal of the topsoil it was clear that the north-south pathway (1001) survived, but very close to the surface and the excavation of the topsoil would also remove the remains of the pathway. As a result the first c2.5m of pathway was left in situ to allow more detailed archaeological recording. The remainder of the pathway was recorded as it was being removed, and periodically drawn in section, confirming both the line and make-up of the path. Two rough brick surfaces (1015 & 1016) were also revealed against the line of the garden wall, again not far below the current surface. These were also left in situ to allow archaeological recording before being removed to bring the area down to a consistent level. Other than the pathway and the brick features no

other archaeological features were apparent during the removal of the upper 300mm, however several features were subsequently visible in the subsoil, these features were recorded in plan. They included a row of possible planting holes (1006, 1008, 1010 & 1012) alongside the pathway, several rubble filled pits (1014, 1020, 1022 & 1024), a small trench (1018), a drainage ditch (1029) and a linear feature (1026) possibly associated with planting beds.

The final archaeological site visit during topsoil stripping was on the Friday afternoon, a strip of topsoil along the eastern edge, c2-3m wide, was removed over the weekend when an archaeologist was unable to be present but previously revealed sections and subsequent examination of this area indicated nothing of archaeological interest in this strip.

Work was then put on hold due to inclement weather and finalising of plans until the 06/03/07 when three test pits were excavated, each roughly 1.5m square and 0.7m deep. An archaeological site visit was made to record any features picked up. Two test pits revealed nothing of archaeological interest and were back-filled, the third was excavated through the drainage ditch (1029) revealing the slate-lined drain along its base, this test pit was left open to allow archaeological recording before being re-filled.

The features revealed in the subsoil after the topsoil strip could clearly be related to garden activity within the walled garden. Only one feature could not clearly be explained but this was revealed as the slate-lined drain during the test pitting. As a consequence it was clear that the subsequent foundations trenches would neither impact on any visible archaeological remains nor reveal any new archaeological features so it was agreed that the excavation of these trenches could go ahead without archaeological observation.

Descriptions of the various archaeological features mentioned are provided below.

Pathway 1001.

Previous archaeological work (Evans 2001, Blockley 1997) within the area of the proposed Tropical Glasshouse had recorded the line of the pathway. This pathway is also recorded on the 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map of 1888 and would appear to be part of the original laying out of the garden in the late 18th/early 19th century. Excavations in 1997 (Blockley 1997) picked up the pathway at the northern end of this site, described as 1.3m wide, the edge being c2.6m from the garden wall, consisting of grey sandstone chippings covered by an upper layer of cinders, and bounded along both edges by a single course of grey and yellow sandstone. It was assumed this pathway then met an East-West path running from the nearby West entranceway to a water feature in the centre of the garden. Excavations in 2001 (Evans 2001) recorded the path in two further locations within this building site, recorded as c2.4m from the wall and described as 1.2m wide, cambered and made of crushed red sandstone. The turn of the pathway running parallel to the garden wall at the southern end, still 2.4m from the wall, was also revealed in the 2001 excavations.

The line of the pathway picked up during this watching brief puts it slightly further to the east by c0.5m, ie c2.9m from the garden wall, although topsoil stripping may have removed the outer edges of the pathway making it appear slightly further from the wall than it appeared in the previous excavations. The topsoil strip went down to a lower level than was apparently reached during the previous excavations, allowing a deeper section through the pathway to be recorded (see photo 2). At the northern end remnants of an upper layer of cinders (1002) was apparent, as suggested in the 1997 excavation although this was no longer observed towards the southern end of the pathway. The main element of the pathway consisted of a cambered layer of crushed angular red sandstone (1003) up to 0.16m thick and 1.8m wide (see photo 1). This deposit presumably incorporates the two distinct layers of red sandstone chippings recorded in the 2001 excavations. This sandstone deposit lay on a bed of clay (1004) 0.10m

thick and 1.6m wide. The turn of the pathway at the southern end was unfortunately excavated whilst the archaeologist was not present on site, but the return was visible in section and had previously been recorded during the 2001 excavations.

Possible Planting Holes 1006, 1008, 1010 & 1012.

Irregular features were visible cut into the subsoil running along the eastern (inner) edge of the pathway (1001). The fills of most of the features were very similar, suggesting they may have been contemporary with one another, and they all respected the line of the pathway. The features faded out towards the south, where it was also noted the pathway was appearing higher in the soil matrix, suggesting the features may have been removed during the topsoil strip.

The first feature (1006) was visible 5.6m south of the west entranceway, and 0.1m east of the pathway 1001. This was a small irregular pit measuring 0.35m by 0.4m with a single fill (1005) of grey-brown clayey-silt containing some small fragments of building rubble (bricks and mortar) and animal bone.

1.7m further south, and 0.05m east of the pathway 1001 was a small square pit (1008) measuring 0.95m by 0.95m and containing a single fill (1007) that appeared very similar in nature to the fill of 1006.

2.35m further south, 0.15m east of the pathway 1001 was another irregular pit (1012) measuring 0.75m by 0.90m. This also contained a single fill (1011) very similar in nature to the previous two pits (1006 & 1008). Cut into the north-west corner of this feature was a smaller sub-circular pit (1010) measuring 0.45m in diameter containing a single fill (1009) of loose dark-brown sandy-silt, containing a large amount of charcoal, brick fragments and cinder (see photo 5).

It is suggested that these features (1006, 1008, 1010 & 1012) represent the remains of planting holes due to their mostly irregular nature, consistent fills and their respect of the pathway.

Brick Surfaces 1015 & 1016.

Towards the northern end of the site, 2.35m south of the west entranceway, was a small area of laid and roughly mortared bricks (1015), forming a roughly flat surface (see photo 3). The surface covered a square area 0.80m wide and extending 0.65m from the garden wall, one layer of bricks thick. There is some evidence of a render on the garden wall at this point, possibly associated with this surface, although the render itself appears to bear some resemblance to the render used in the 1970s 'restoration' further to the south (now removed although photographed during the 2001 archaeological investigations).

17.40m further south, also butting the garden wall is another small brick surface (1016). This surface measures 1.15m wide and extends 0.75m from the garden wall. Also a single layer of bricks thick the bricks themselves are laid in a more irregular pattern and are not mortared in (see photo 4).

The function of these two brick surfaces is unclear, it is possible they may have been used as discrete areas of hard-standing associated with garden features such as plant pots, although their relatively rough nature suggests they were more utilitarian in function.

Trench 1018.

11.50m from the west entranceway, and lying in between the two brick surfaces 1015 & 1016 is a narrow trench (1018) butting against the garden wall. The trench measures 0.5m wide

and 2.3m long, containing a single loose fill (1017) of dark-brown clayey-silt with fragments of brick and mortar visible.

The very loose nature of the fill suggests this is a relatively recent feature. Originally it was assumed it related to a trench put in during the 2001 excavations but a closer examination of the plans and photographs from that excavation suggest this feature actually lies adjacent to the archaeological trench. It does however lie beneath a section of the garden wall where protective rendering was applied in the 1970s, suggesting it may be associated with that period of activity.

Pits 1014, 1020, 1022 & 1024.

Several pits were revealed after the topsoil strip, the generally dark nature of their fills being very similar in colour to the topsoil which meant they were not immediately obvious during the stripping of the topsoil. Pits 1020, 1022 and 1024 all lie against the garden wall, pit 1014 lies adjacent to the pathway 1001.

Pit 1014 lies 22m south of the west entranceway, and 0.10m to the east of the pathway 1001. The pit is sub-circular, measuring 0.9m by 1.05m and contains a single fill (1013) of loose dark-grey clayey-silt with abundant remains of broken brick, stone and mortar fragments visible.

2.35m south of the southernmost brick surface (1016), and 24.15m south of the west entranceway, is a semi-circular pit (1020) dug against the garden wall. The pit measures 1.25m wide, and protrudes 1.10m from the garden wall. It contains a fill (1019) of loose dark grey-brown soil containing fragments of stone and mortar and the occasional broken brick.

1m to the south is a smaller sub-rectangular pit (1022) dug against the garden wall. This pit measures 0.55m wide and protrudes 0.65m from the garden wall. The fill (1021) is very similar to that of 1020, but with an apparent higher density of broken brick and mortar fragments (see photo 6).

10.20m further south is a circular pit (1024) dug 0.05m from the garden wall. The pit measures 1m in diameter, containing a similar fill (1023) but with large quantities of charcoal and broken roof tile present.

All these features contain similar fills containing significant amount of waste and broken building material. Feature 1014 appears to be dug in line with the possible planting holes (1006, 1008, 1010 & 1012) respecting the line of the pathway 1001 suggesting this feature may be contemporary with the operational period of the garden. The remaining features (1020, 1022 & 1024) may also be contemporary with this period but loose nature of their fills may also suggest they are more recent features, possible even associated with the restoration work undertaken in the 1970s. All these features appear to have been dug in order to dispose of waste building material.

Linear feature 1026.

After the removal of the topsoil at the northern end of the building site it was possible to trace the edge of a linear feature (1026) running parallel to the garden wall for c12.5m before becoming too indistinct to trace further. Only one edge of the feature was apparent running c1.8m from the garden wall. The upper fill (1025) consisted of an orange-brown silty clay with the occasional flecks of brick and mortar visible. A small section was excavated into the upper layer of the feature, which revealed the visible edge to be vertical.

The fact the edge runs parallel to the garden wall and the pathway indicates this is part of the walled garden arrangement. It would appear to be too far from the garden wall to represent

the construction cut for the wall itself. It is possible this may mark the edge of a planting bed against the garden wall. Similar features picked up in the slip gardens (the area between the inner and outer garden walls) during the 2001 excavation (Evans 2001) were interpreted as possible manure beds or cold frames, although these tended to be smaller and more complete features and in an area of the garden that was not on view.

Drainage Trench 1029.

After the removal of the topsoil a feature (1029) was visible at the northern end of the building site running for c11.25m in a NW to SE direction, at an angle to the other features on site. It was clear in plan that this feature was overlaid by the pathway 1001, although only the southern edge was visible at this stage, the northern edge possibly obscured by modern disturbance caused during the laying of the modern garden pathways. A test pit was excavated through a section of this feature which revealed it to be the cut (1029) of a slate-lined drain (1028).

The cut itself (1029) was 1.25m wide with very straight, almost vertical sides. The drain (1028) was built of flat piece of grey slate with straight sides and a flat top, 0.38m wide and was still channelling water. Above the drain the trench was filled with a deposit of mottled yellow-brown silty-clay (1027).

Despite running at an angle to the other features the well-made nature of the drain and the fact it would appear to cut through feature 1026 (although this relationship is at the very edge of the building site and was not definitively clear) suggests it is contemporary with the laying out of the garden. However, several other drains were picked up in the previous excavations with the walled garden area, but none of these were described as being slate-lined drainage channels.

CONCLUSIONS

The watching brief has revealed several features relating to activity within the walled garden during its active life from the late 18th century through to the early 20th century. The line and construction of the original walled garden pathway (1001) was revealed running north-south through the site. Several features were recorded alongside the pathway which have tentatively been interpreted as planting holes (1006, 1008, 1010 & 1012) for plants running alongside the path. The edge of a possible planting bed (1026) between the pathway and the wall was recorded, although it is difficult to conclusively interpret this feature. Two small areas of brick-laid hard-standings (1015 & 1016) were also revealed against the garden wall and a slate-lined drainage channel (1029) was also recorded running at an angle across the site. All of these features are believed to relate to the active working life of the walled garden. Several pits (1014, 1020, 1022 & 1024) and a small trench (1018) were recorded filled with a significant amount of construction debris, although also possibly related to gardening activity the nature of the deposits within these features suggests they may not be related to horticultural activity and therefore may relate to restoration work in the later 20th century. No evidence of any major structures were identified within the limits of the stripped area.

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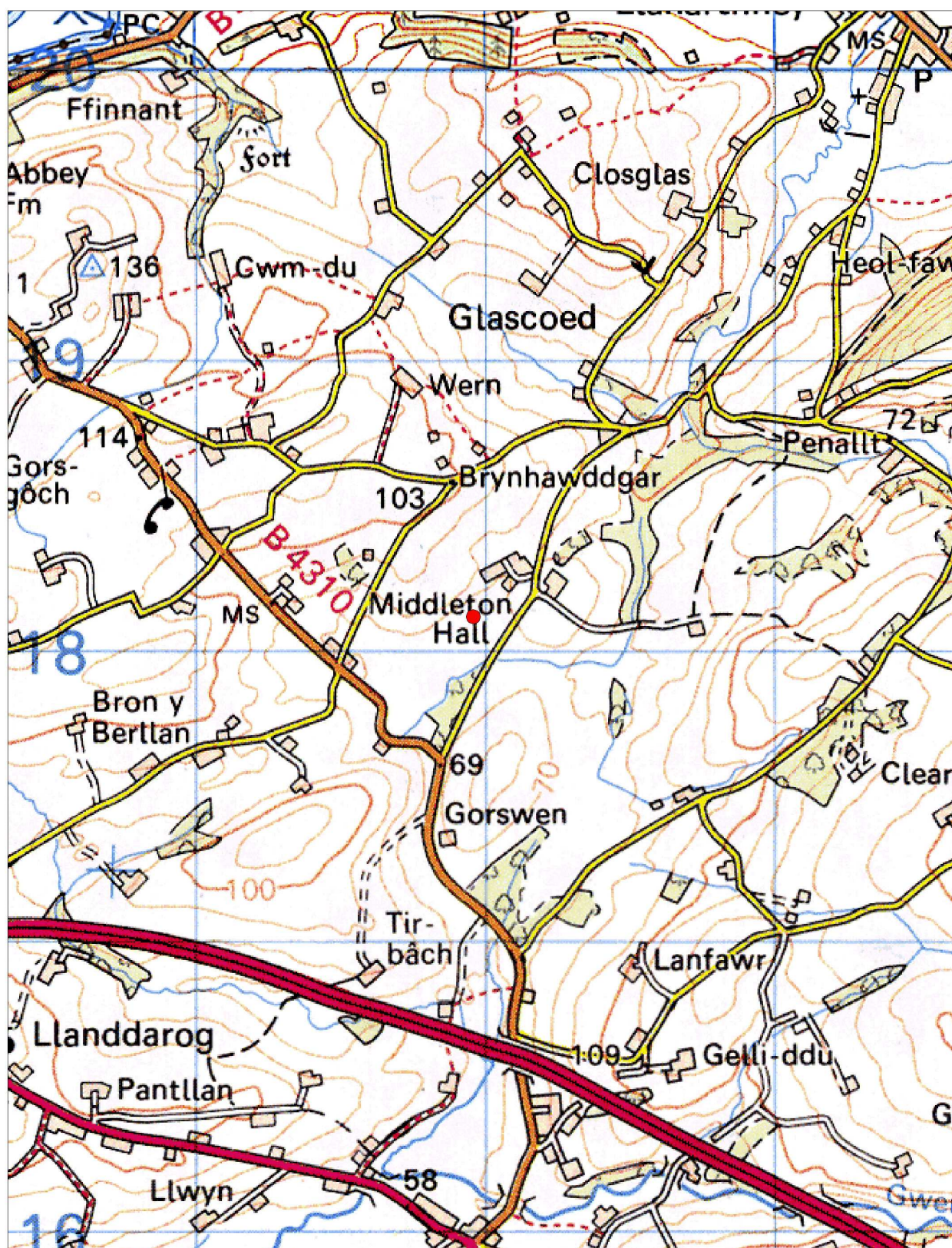
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Figure 3. Location map, based on the Ordnance Survey.

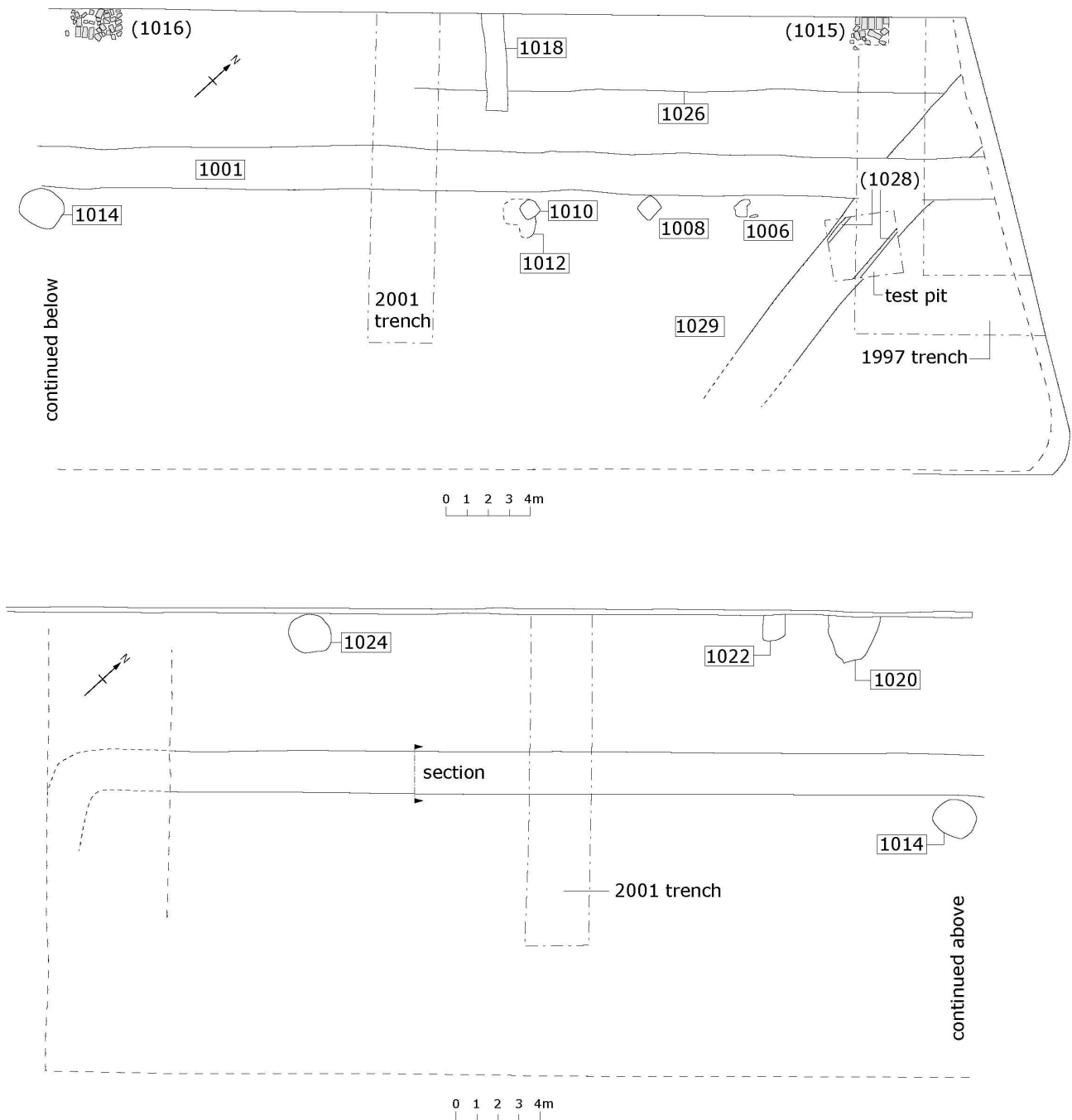


Fig 4. Sketch plan of building site, showing recorded archaeological features.

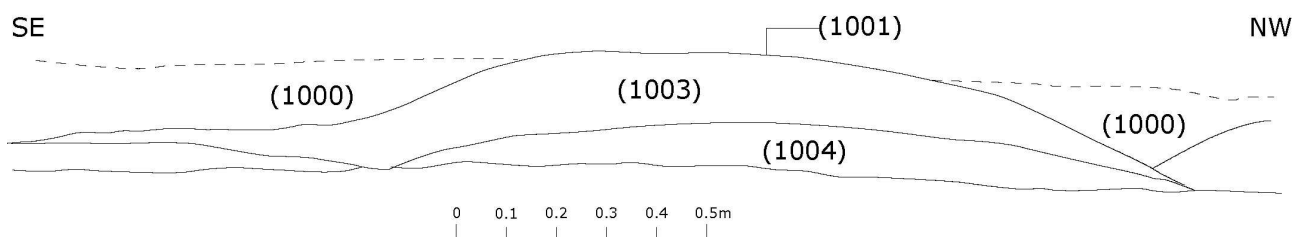


Fig 5. Section through pathway 1001, showing the lower bed of clay 1004 and the main cambered deposit of crushed red sandstone 1003.



Photo 1: Left, south facing shot of pathway 1001. 1x0.5m scale.

Photo 2: Below, section through pathway 1001. 1x0.5m scale.





Photo 3: Above, partly revealed brick surface 1015. 1x0.5m scale

Photo 4: Below, brick surface 1016. 1x1m scale & 1x0.5m scale.





Photo 5: Above, East facing shot of possible planting holes 1010 & 1012. 1x0.5m scale.

Photo 6: Below, West facing shot of pit 1022. 1x1m & 1x0.5m scale.





Photo 7: Above, South facing shot showing feature 1026 running parallel to the wall, and drain cut 1029 running off at an angle.

Photo 8: Below, Slate lined drained 1028 with it's construction cut 1029 and fill 1027 visible in section. 1x1m & 1x0.5m scale.

