

BEECH COURT, NEW MOAT PEMBROKESHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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Prepared
by
Dyfed Archaeological Trust
for
Mr & Mrs M Owen



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By

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**BEECH COURT, NEW MOAT, PEMBROKESHIRE
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SUMMARY

A planning application (No.07/0299/PA) was submitted by Mr and Mrs M Owen proposing to build a dwelling on a plot of land at the southern edge of Beech Court in New Moat, Pembrokeshire at NGR SN 06265 25355.

The site lies within the bounds of the medieval borough of New Moat in close proximity to the Norman motte and bailey castle, an earthwork with Scheduled Ancient Monument status. The potential for the preservation of significant archaeological features and deposits in such a location is high.

In order to protect the potential archaeological interests Dyfed Archaeological Trust Heritage Management, as advisors to the Planning Department of Pembrokeshire County Council, recommended that a predetermination archaeological evaluation condition be attached to the planning application.

Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services were commissioned to carry out the archaeological evaluation, and three trial trenches were excavated in order to assess the character and extent of significant archaeological features and deposits on the site.

The results of the evaluation showed that the site had undergone much disturbance during the construction of the Beech Court housing development and its services. That disturbance was particularly heavy along the street frontage, where it was thought that the bulk of the medieval activity might have been. No definite medieval features were present.

However, significant post-medieval archaeological features and deposits were shown to have survived in areas of the site, including the remains of a possible burnt building. The pottery recovered from the site suggests that the bulk of the activity occurred between the 16th and 18th centuries.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project background

A planning application (No.07/0299/PA) was submitted by Mr and Mrs M Owen to build a house on a small plot adjacent to the southern edge of Beech Court (next door to house No.8), New Moat, Pembrokeshire at NGR SN 06265 25355. The proposed building plot lies within the medieval borough of New Moat, in close proximity to a Norman motte and bailey castle (PRN 1320), which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM Pe 241).

Given the site location, Dyfed Archaeological Trust Heritage Management, as advisors to the Planning Department of Pembrokeshire County Council, recommended that an archaeological condition, in the form of a predetermination archaeological evaluation excavation, be attached to the planning application in order to provide enough information to enable a decision on the application.

To comply with the condition Mr and Mrs Owen commissioned Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services to carry out the archaeological evaluation excavations in June 2008.

1.2 The evaluation methodology, and scope of the report

The primary objective of the evaluation was to assess the character and extent of surviving deposits through archaeological trial trenching in order to ascertain the condition, distribution, extent and significance of any archaeological features within the proposed development area.

The evaluation comprised the excavation of four trial trenches, one of which was abandoned because of the presence of services. The trenches were opened up and stripped of topsoil by a JCB mechanical excavator, using a toothless bucket, under the guidance of an archaeologist. Once identifiable archaeological deposits or features were revealed these were cleaned by hand and some features were then test excavated by hand.

During the evaluation all archaeologically significant features and deposits were recorded and photographed, and, where relevant, measured plans were drawn. All finds were retained for analysis and one charcoal sample was retained for possible radiocarbon dating should that be thought necessary at some future time.

This report summarises the location and historical background to the site and discusses the results of the evaluation excavations.

Any archaeological sites mentioned in the text that are recorded in the Regional Historic Environment Record (HER) will be identified, for reference and location, by their Primary Record Number (PRN) and National Grid Reference (NGR). The HER is housed with Dyfed Archaeological Trust at its offices in Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire. Printed map extracts are not necessarily reproduced to their original scale.

2. SITE LOCATION AND BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Location

The small village of New Moat lies in the foothills south of Mynydd Preseli in north Pembrokeshire (Fig.1). The settlement is laid out on a 'T'-junction with the crossing road running east to west along the 165m contour and the adjoining road running downhill steadily towards council houses and St. Nicholas's church on the southern edge of the village at 158m above sea level. Buildings in the village are arranged linearly and front onto the roads. The area around New Moat is wholly rural in character with the nearest settlement of any size being Maenclochog some 2.6km to the northeast. Llys-y-fran reservoir, which was built in the late 1960s and covers 212 acres (86 hectares) lies 2km to the west. The land surrounding the village is characterised by the presence of a series of narrow and wooded small river valleys running north to south cutting across the landscape down towards the Eastern Cleddau river valley. Generally, the land displays all the signs of historic estate management in the form of regularly shaped fields and planted woodland, especially to the south and southwest of the village.

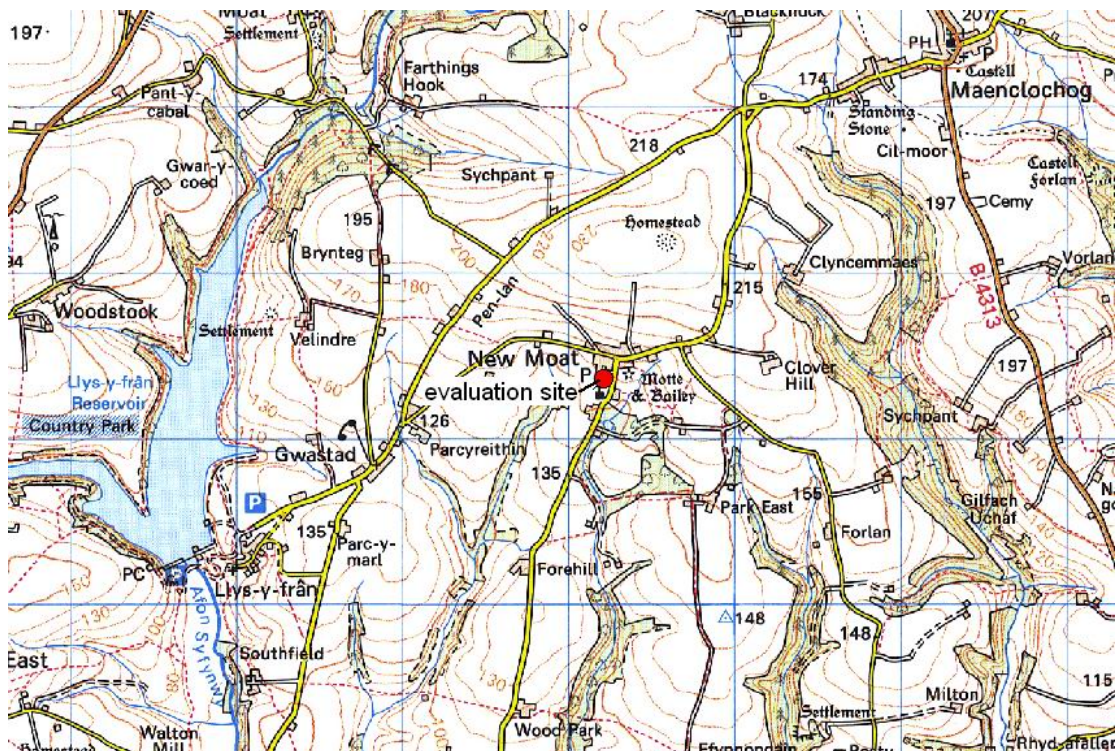


Figure 1. Location plan, based on Ordnance Survey

Reproduced from the 1995 Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 scale Landranger Map with the permission of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd., The Shire Hall, Carmarthen Street, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire SA19 6AF. Licence No AL51842A

The evaluation area is located on a small building plot adjacent to the south edge of Beech Court on the west side of the road halfway between the village crossroads and St. Nicholas church, centred on NGR SN 06265 25355. The land was until recently occupied by a shed and a caravan and several trees have also recently been removed from the site. Aerial photographs taken in 1989 and 1994 (DAT Oblique collection) show that during those times the plot was part of the garden of the adjoining property to the north (No.8 Beech Court). Beech Court itself is a late 20th century residential development: aerial photographs taken in

1955 (Meridian Airmaps) show the area as undeveloped, partially wooded, and under pasture at that time.

The solid geology of the area is represented by Ordovician sedimentary shales of the Arenig series with intrusive igneous basalts and dolerites close by on Mynydd Preseli (British Geological Survey). Little or nothing of the glacial drift deposits now remain in the locale but numerous erratic boulders, often quartz, litter the landscape with smaller ones buried within the soil. The soils in the area are described by the Soil Survey of England and Wales (1983) as typical brown podzolics of the Manod association.

2.2 Historical background

The regional HER contains no records of prehistoric sites within the evaluation area. Some 0.9km to the north, however, there is a circular Iron Age defended enclosure, Castell Parc Robert (PRN 1319), and many Bronze Age cairns and standing stones are recorded in the Mynydd Preseli landscape. Aerial photographs show an Iron Age defended enclosure (PRN 62205) as a crop mark situated in fields some 400m northwest of New Moat; a recent visit to the site by the Dyfed Archaeological Trust noted that it survives on the ground as a low spread earthwork bank up to 0.4m in height.

The Ordnance Survey first edition 6-inch map from 1891 shows a Roman camp within the evaluation area but this is a mistaken description or interpretation of the bailey enclosure of the Norman motte on the land on the opposite side of the road. The same map also refers to the Norman motte, mistakenly again, as a *Tumulus* implying that it is a funerary monument. The Ordnance Survey second edition 6-inch map repeats the mistakes but labels the Roman camp in a different position (Fig.2). The HER contains no records from the Roman period within the area of the evaluation or in the near vicinity.

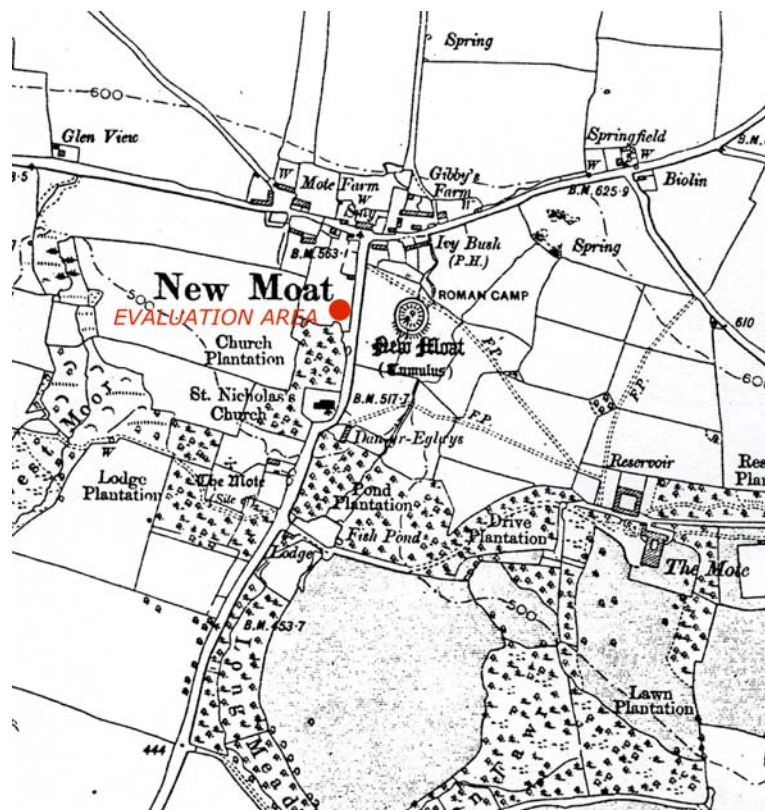


Figure 2. Site shown on 2nd edition 6" Ordnance Survey map extract, 1908

Two medieval sites are recorded in the HER close to the evaluation area. The aforementioned Norman motte and bailey castle (PRN 1320) at NGR SN 0636 2536 remains as a circular earthwork and St. Nicholas' medieval parish church (PRN 1318), 200m to the southwest, survives although it was largely rebuilt in 1755 and again in 1886, with the exception of the west tower.

The motte, known as New Moat Castle, is a flat-topped earthen mound some 5m high and measuring 17m in diameter at the top. It has a ditch encircling the base and a low bailey bank enclosing a sub-rectangular area (125m by 80m) on its western side that runs parallel with the field boundary across the road from the evaluation plot. Historically, the castle represents the first phase of post-Conquest Norman settlement in the area, probably during the early 12th century. New Moat is a typical example of the type of planted Norman settlement on the northern frontier of land that they had wrested from the Welsh, the frontier commonly called (whether correctly or not) the Landsker. Typically these settlements comprise a motte and bailey castle built to consolidate and defend the newly acquired land from the Welsh and once this had been accomplished settlers were brought in to establish full colonisation. Between 1102 and 1138 control of the conquered land was forfeit from the Norman barons to the English Crown, and early in the century Henry I opened up lands to huge numbers of Flemish settlers. The historical evidence for the settlement of Flemings in the conquered parts of Pembrokeshire is plentiful with some of the settlements being named after their Norman founders or facilitators: Wiston, Letterston and Tancredston are examples. It is likely that New Moat was settled during this wave of immigration and with it eventually followed the establishment of the church, borough status, and planned settlement in the form of dwellings fronting onto the road with burgage plots to the rear. In medieval terms the settlement was highly successful. By the early 14th century New Moat was held in the barony of the Bishop of St. David's and in "The Black Book of St. David's" survey of 1326 New Moat was recorded as having "46 tenants holding 88 burgages.....each burgess had eight acres of land and the bishop had 118 acres of demesne arable, four acres of meadow and 50 of woodland" (Walker 2002, page 149).

Recent archaeological excavations on the church plantation land adjacent to the southern boundary of the evaluation area (Smith & Jones 2006) revealed building platforms fronting onto the road with early timber phases of construction overlain by stonework. Boundary features behind the platforms were tentatively interpreted as possible medieval burgage plot boundaries. The quality and quantity of archaeological features was found to be high.

The Tithe map and apportionment for the parish of New Moat, dated 1839, names the field covering the area of the evaluation as 'Smith's Field', numbered 33 and owned by William Henry Scourfield. No buildings are shown on the first and second edition or earlier Ordnance Survey maps to indicate the former presence of a smithy in that location but the name may have significance.

3. EVALUATION RESULTS

3.1 Abandoned Evaluation Trench

The original intention was to excavate two 2m by 10m trial trenches on the site; one on the road frontage of the plot aligned north-south in order to investigate for possible buildings fronting onto the road, with the second trench aligned approximately east-west to test for any features or deposits in working areas, or burgage plot boundaries, to the rear of any buildings. However, it became apparent after machine excavating part of the first trench at the northerly end of the road frontage (Fig.3) that there had been relatively recent ground disturbance through the topsoil and into the bedrock. The topsoil was an homogeneous dark reddish brown silty clay containing 25% small and medium angular fragments of shale and 15% modern building debris in the form of whole concrete breezeblocks, and frequent small and medium size fragments of red brick, slate and concrete. On the western side of the trench the mixed topsoil layer was seen to be 0.57m in depth and lying directly on natural shale bedrock. Some 0.15m into the trench from its west side the bedrock had been excavated away and a linear cut aligned parallel to the trench edge was revealed. The linear cut contained the same mixed building debris and dark topsoil deposit as just described. This feature was a modern service trench, possibly containing electric cables, and any archaeological deposits or features that may have been previously present would have been destroyed. It was decided that the evaluation trench, which measured 2.3m wide by 3.1m long, should be abandoned. Prior to the excavation all possible services checks were made but nothing was shown on any of the plans as being in that location on the site. However, a nearby electricity pole carrying overhead cables was marked as having a ground loop to the south of the trench.

3.2 The Evaluation Trenches

Modern sewage services, from a covered cesspit situated in the southwest corner of the site, crossed the site from north to south between the road frontage and an area some 12m west into the evaluation area (Fig.3). This restricted the areas in which the trenches could be positioned. In the event, it was decided to dig an approximately 10m by 2m trench (Trench 1) aligned north to south with two approximately 2m by 5m trenches (Trench 2 and Trench 3) aligned east to west branching off from main trench's west side at a right angle, forming a reverse 'F' shape (Fig. 3). Throughout the descriptions that follow, the three trenches will be treated as one overall excavation but the trench numbers will be used to refer to the location of specific deposits and features within the excavations. The site sloped gently down from north to south; the present ground surface at the northern end of Trench 1 measured 162.52mOD whilst that at its southern end measured 161.98mOD.

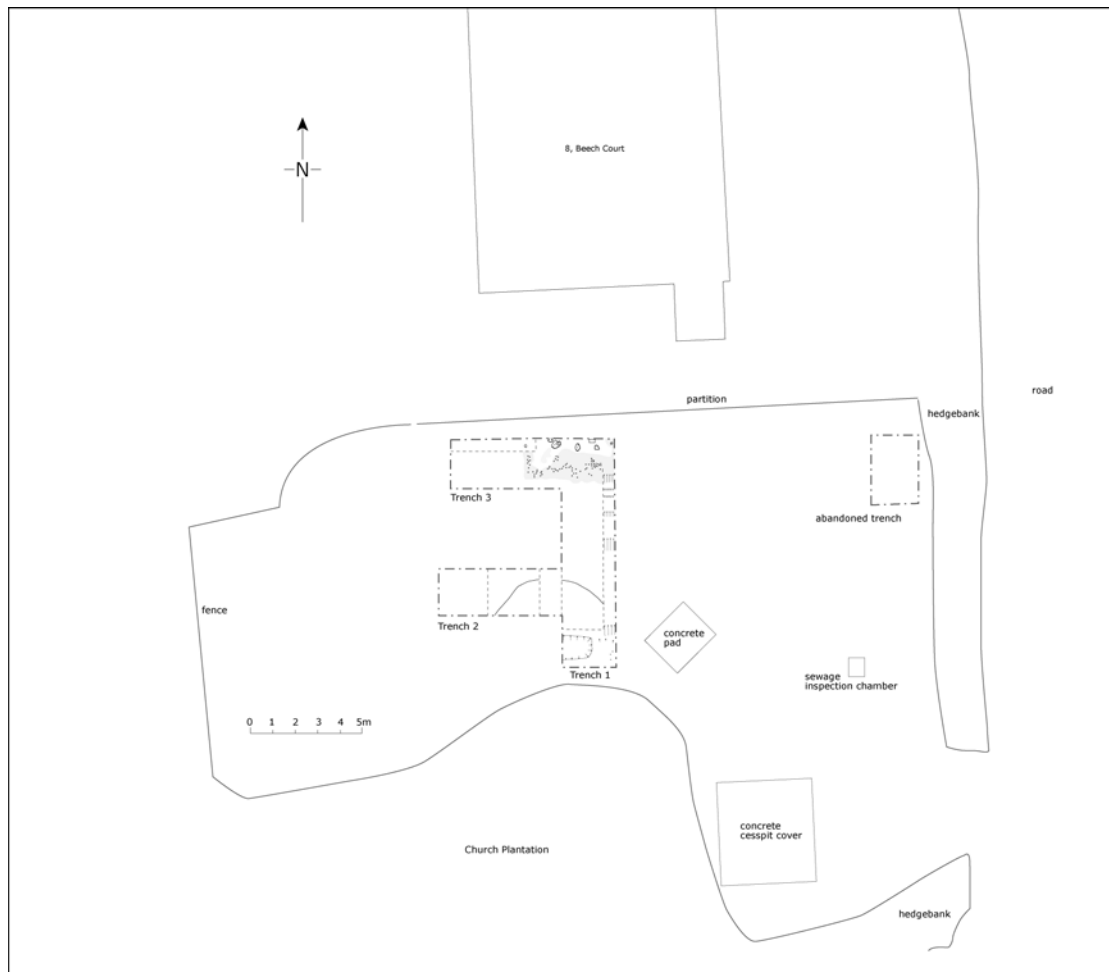


Figure 3. Plan showing location of evaluation trenches

3.3 Descriptions of revealed deposits and features

A dark reddish brown silty clay topsoil (context 100) to a uniform depth of 0.2m was removed by machine from all trenches. The soil was loose and friable with occasional inclusions or tip-lines of disturbed subsoil and degraded bedrock, suggesting relatively recent disturbance or landscaping. The percentage of coarse components within the topsoil varied across the site but generally 10% of the deposit comprised small angular stone fragments with a frequent presence of organic root material throughout.

Underlying the topsoil at the southern end of Trench 1 and the eastern end of Trench 2 was a spread of loose yellowish brown silty clay containing 65% angular fragments of shattered shale (context 101). In plan this layer appeared circular in shape (Fig. 4; Plate 1) and continued beyond the southern edge of Trench 2 and the eastern edge of Trench 1. Test excavations through the layer revealed it in section to be sloping gently down from north to south to a maximum depth of 0.45m before rising up again steeply at its southern extent close to the boundary bank at the south side of the evaluation area. The deposit appeared to be filling a large sub-circular cut feature of some significance but excavation revealed a modern potato crisp packet and fragment of aluminium lying on the underlying deposit (context 116) at the bottom of the "feature"! A few sherds of much abraded pottery, ranging in date from the 17th to the 19th centuries, were found within deposit 101. The deposit obviously represents recently redeposited material, perhaps dumped into a hollow part of a silted up boundary ditch in

order to level-up the ground during landscaping work at the time Beech Court was under construction.

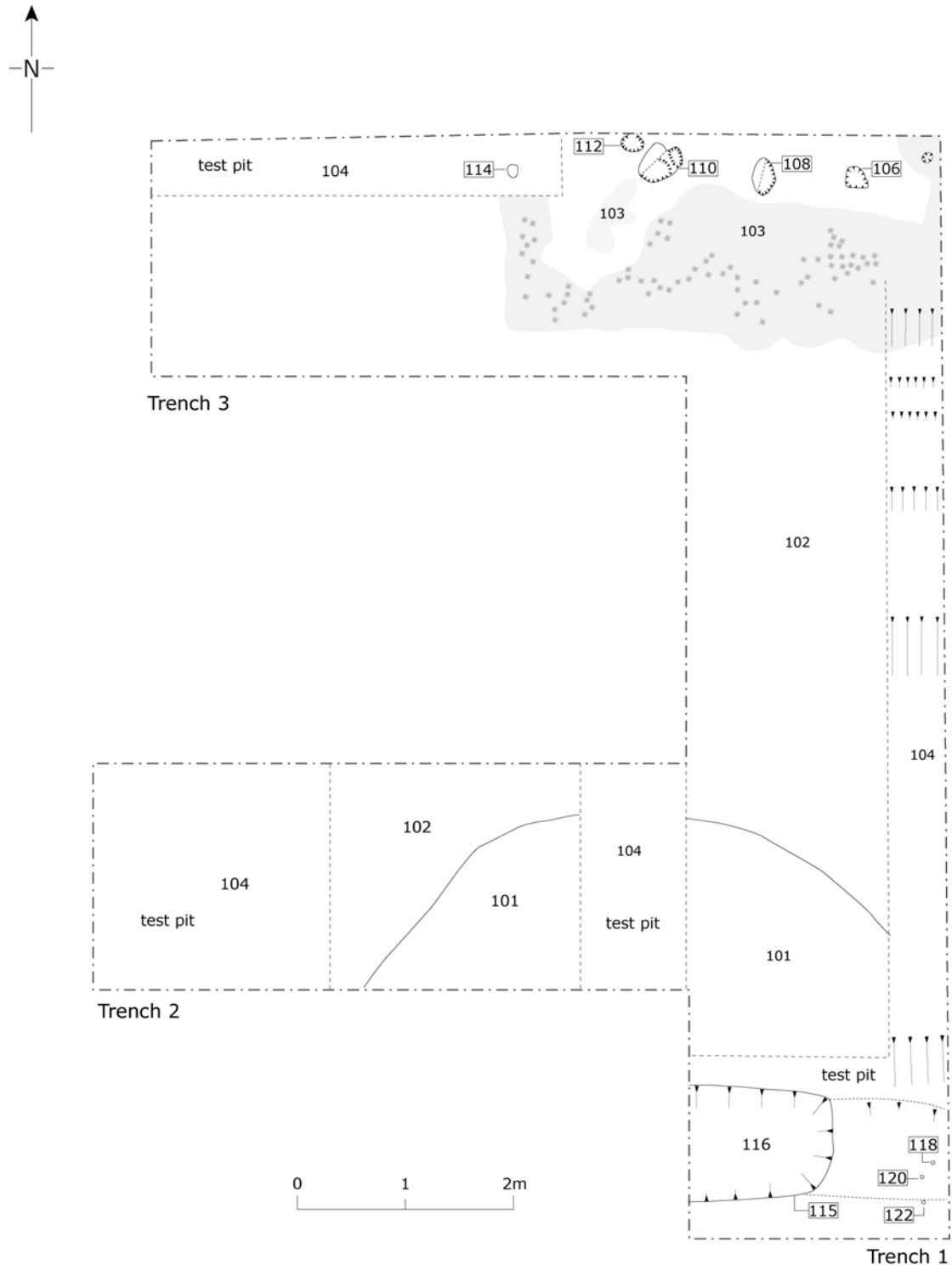


Figure 4. Evaluation trenches with revealed features and deposits by context

Underlying the topsoil beyond the northern edge of 101 in Trench 1, the western edge of 101 in Trench 2, and the western end of Trench 3 was an homogeneous dark reddish brown silty clay soil deposit (context 102) containing 30% small angular fragments of shattered shale, and several large and medium sized quartz boulders (Fig.4). Test excavation in all trenches showed this layer to be

moderately compacted and varying in depth from 0.22m throughout Trench 3 and to a maximum depth of 0.4m in Trenches 1 and 2. In all the locations where this deposit was test excavated it was seen to directly overlie the degrading natural shale bedrock (context 104), and appeared uniform in quality throughout the excavations. A heavily abraded, possibly medieval, yellow-glazed tile fragment was found in this deposit along with potsherds of 16th or 17th century North Devon gravel tempered ware, one sherd of blue glazed 17th century Westerwald stoneware, and two fragments of 16th or 17th century white clay tobacco pipe.

At the north end of Trench 1, and extending into the east end of Trench 3, removal of the topsoil revealed a rectangular shaped area of burning (context 103). This layer, which merged with deposit 102, measured 3.5m east to west by 1.75m north to south and continued beyond the northern and eastern edges of the excavation. Test excavation of the deposit showed it to be a dark reddish brown friable silty clay deposit containing 45% fragments of charcoal and 30% small angular fragments of shale. In section the layer ranged in depth from 0.2m at its southern edge to 0.1m elsewhere; in plan there was a greater intensity of charcoal at the edges of the feature (Plate 2).

A group of possible postholes (contexts 106, 108, 110, 112 and 114) aligned with the east-west axis of layer 103 were revealed cutting the natural bedrock at the northern edge of the excavations (Fig.4; Plate 3). Feature 106 was very shallow and may simply represent a natural weakness in the underlying bedrock, but excavation of three of the others showed them to be cut features containing fills suggesting the presence of post packing material. The diminutive size of feature 114 suggests that the term stakehole may be more appropriate; on excavation it had a uniform silty clay soil fill with no packing stones. The congruent alignment of the postholes and stakehole with 103 suggests that they are in association, possibly representing a former timber building structure destroyed by fire. None of the posthole fills, however, contained evidence of charcoal. A sherd of North Devon gravel tempered ware pottery, much heat affected, was found sealed between 103 and the natural bedrock, implying a date for a fire of no earlier than the late 16th century.

A 0.5m wide sondage (Fig.4) was excavated by hand along the entire length of the east side of Trench 1 to act as a control and to enable the recording of a representative section across the excavation down to natural deposits. This test excavation confirmed the general stratigraphic succession of topsoil overlying 102 that in turn overlay the natural bedrock (context 104). At the southern end of Trench 1 where the sondage removed the redeposited material 101 it was shown to overlie a dark reddish brown silty clay soil deposit (context 116) containing 50% small angular fragments of shale and a high content of organic root material. In plan, the lower levels of this 0.5m deep deposit appeared to fill a linear feature (context 115) cut into the natural bedrock. During a site visit to monitor the evaluation the archaeological advisor to the LPA, Mr. Charles Hill - Dyfed Archaeological Trust Heritage Management, advised that this area of the site should be machine excavated to more fully characterise this feature. After discussions between, Mr. and Mrs. Owen and Mr. Hill it was agreed by all to go ahead with the machine excavation.

An approximately 1.5m wide trench was excavated by machine down to the top of the shale bedrock across the southern end of Trench 1 exposing the cut feature 115. After hand cleaning and recording (Plate 4), the fill (116) was excavated revealing a 1.1m wide by 0.3m deep rock-cut linear feature aligned east-west and continuing at the same depth beyond the western edge of the excavation. At its eastern end the feature gradually narrowed to 0.5m wide by only 0.07m deep and continued beyond the eastern edge of the excavation. The fill (116)

contained a very mixed assemblage of pottery mostly of 16th to 18th century in date but one sherd of late 18th or early 19th century cream coloured tin glaze ware was found lying on the bedrock at the base of the feature. The east facing section of the excavation (Plate 5) showed 116 to rise up nearly to the present ground surface at the southern end of the trench and overlain by a 0.1m depth of topsoil. The southern boundary bank of the evaluation area lies less than 1m away from the southern end of Trench 1 and appeared to have been quite recently cut vertically back by machine. Investigation of the boundary bank material, where it had been exposed, showed that it bore a marked resemblance to deposit 116 suggesting that 116 may be a later phase of boundary bank with cut feature 115 representing part of an earlier boundary ditch.

Three possible stakeholes (contexts 118, 120 and 122) were revealed beneath 116 and cut into the bedrock in the southeast corner of Trench 1 (Fig.4; Plate 6). Only one of these was excavated (122); it had vertically cut sides to a depth of 0.3m and was filled with an homogeneous orange brown silty clay soil with less than 5% small angular shale fragments. The three stakeholes appeared to be associated with each other but the restricted extent of the excavation trench allowed little scope for their interpretation.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation excavations showed that archaeological features do survive on the site, however, the modern housing development of Beech Court and its attendant services appear to have severely compromised, if not entirely removed, any medieval features or deposits that may have existed on or close to the road frontage. The results of recent archaeological excavations carried out on the road frontage of the church plantation land south of the Beech Court evaluation area showed that most of the medieval features were revealed within 10m of the road.

However, the evaluation did recover significant evidence of post-medieval activity on the site, including the possible burnt building and pottery assemblage. That activity appears to have been domestic and to have occurred between the 16th and 18th centuries.

All of the archaeological features and deposits encountered extended beyond the limits of the evaluation trenches and are vulnerable to development. Therefore, it is recommended that an archaeological watching brief be maintained during the early phases of construction in order to fully record those features and deposits that will be damaged or destroyed.

PHOTOGRAPHS



Plate 1: View of circular spread deposit 101, looking northwest



Plate 2: Area of burning (103), looking west



Plate 3: The postholes and their alignment with 103, looking west



Plate 4: Cut feature 115 with fill 116, looking west



Plate 5: East facing section showing fill 116



Plate 6: Stakeholes 118, 120 and 122, bottom left of picture

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Signature Date

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comments you may have on the content or presentation of this report