

TALBENNY HALL FARM, LITTLE HAVEN, PEMBROKESHIRE: ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

June 2010



Prepared by Dyfed Archaeological Trust
For: Chris & Ingrid Harris



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Gan / By

JAMES MEEK

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SUMMARY

This report has been produced by Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services in response to a request from Mr & Mrs Harris, to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the conversion of outbuildings to residential use at Talbenny Hall Farm, Little Haven, Pembrokeshire (NGR SM 83755 11496).

The two buildings proposed for conversion include a stone built cart shed with brick detailing of probable 19th century date and a 1940s building built during the construction of RAF Talbenny between 1941 and 1942. The cart shed was a two-storey structure with cart entrances facing the road frontage on its western façade, with a brick built extension to the east. The original function of the 1940s building is uncertain, although it is thought locally to have been a barrack building.

The two drainage trenches which led from the two buildings converged at the eastern end of the site to feed into an existing septic tank. Both trenches were excavated to a depth of 0.6m, which deepened to 0.8m where they met with the septic tank.

The southern side of the site area was shown to have been heavily disturbed in the modern period, possibly during construction of the 1940s building. Modern concrete, metal sheeting and other debris was present throughout the drainage trench leading to the 1940s building.

The east-west aligned drain, leading to the former cart shed, demonstrated that this area had been far less disturbed. Excavation indicated a thin topsoil overlying undisturbed natural bedrock. A number of large stone blocks found within the topsoil which may have originated from a former structure in the vicinity. No significant archaeological finds or features were revealed within either of the two trenches.

The watching brief has demonstrated that no significant archaeological remains are present within the area of the proposed drains within the site area. No finds or features were revealed which may have indicated the presence of medieval structures or other activity associated with the documented medieval Talbenny Hall. It is considered more likely that any remains associated with the medieval Talbenny Hall would be present on the western side of the road.

INTRODUCTION

Project Commission

A planning application was submitted to Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (PCNPA) for the conversion of outbuildings to residential use at Talbenny Hall Farm, Little Haven, Pembrokeshire (NGR SM 83755 11496; Planning Application No. NP/05/267).

An archaeological condition was placed on the planning approval for the development as the site lies close to a post-medieval dwelling and a possible medieval hall and thus the potential for below ground archaeological remains associated with medieval and later settlement being present within the proposed development area is high. Such remains are likely to be present at a shallow depth below the ground surface and could thus be exposed, damaged or destroyed by groundworks associated with the development. The condition attached to the planning permission stated:

"No development shall take place until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority." Reason: To protect historic environment interests whilst enabling development of the site.

An approved written scheme of investigation (WSI) was prepared by Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services prior to works commencing on-site. A single visit was undertaken to the development area during excavation of drainage runs on 10th June 2010.

Scope of the Project

Archaeological attendance and recording during groundworks associated with conversion of the former outbuildings to residential use at Talbenny Hall Farm, Little Haven, Pembrokeshire which may expose, damage or destroy any underlying archaeological remains, if present. The project also included preparation of this report and an archive of the results.

Report Outline

This report describes the location of the site along with its archaeological background before summarising the watching brief results and the conclusions based on those results.

Abbreviations

Sites recorded on the Regional Historic Environment Record (HER) are identified by their Primary Record Number (PRN) and located by their National Grid Reference (NGR). The HER information comes from the Dyfed Archaeological Trust (DAT) HER. Scheduled Ancient Monuments - SAM.

Illustrations

Record photographs are included at back of the report. Printed map extracts are not necessarily reproduced to their original scale and are illustrative only.

THE SITE

Location and Topography

The development is located at Talbenny Hall Farm, Little Haven, Pembrokeshire (NGR SM 83755 11496).

The proposed works will involve the conversion of two former agricultural buildings to residential use. The archaeological watching brief was required for observation of below ground works that have the potential to expose, damage or destroy archaeological remains. The watching brief was undertaken during the excavation of two drainage runs leading from the two former farm buildings to an existing cess pit on the eastern boundary of the site area.

The site comprises an overgrown yard area, between a former cart shed to the west on the road frontage, and a second more modern building along its eastern edge (Photo 1). A property boundary defines the northern edge with a gated field boundary to the west.

The cart shed is constructed of stone with brick detailing and a brick built extension on its eastern side (Photos 1 - 5). The stone built part of the structure is of two storeys, with two cart entrances on the road frontage (Photos 2, 4 & 5). A fireplace is located at the southern gable end of the building, with an opening at ground floor level (Photo 3). The building is in a poor state of repair, with the floor and roof timbers partially collapsed (Photo 3). The inside of the building was not entered.

The modern building on the southern side of the area was a single storey brick-built structure with corrugated asbestos cement gabled roof (Photo 6). The structure appears to be of 1940s date, and of military style, presumably associated with the adjacent airfield of RAF Talbenny. The building has two doorways on its northern façade, with a number of windows. The southern façade has no openings. A small extension is located at the eastern end of the building which blocked a doorway and one former window opening. It is not known what the original use of the building was, although local opinion suggests it was a small barracks. Since the military function of the building has ceased, it has been converted to agricultural use. A modern breeze block partition wall has been constructed within the building (Photo 7). The windows in the building are wooden framed, and appear to be original, although it was more common for metal framed windows to be used in buildings at this time due to the shortage of timber (Photo 8). An area of concrete slabs is present to the west of this building.

Archaeological Background

The regional HER, held by Dyfed Archaeological Trust, has records of two sites within close proximity to the proposed redevelopment area. These include the documented site of Talbenny Hall, a medieval building (PRN 11813) and the post-medieval building of Talbenny Hall (PRN 15476). Both sites lie within the locale of the existing Talbenny Hall Farm.

Three separate records are also held by the HER relating to military structures associated with RAF Talbenny which lie within a 225m radius of the centre of the site. These include a former workshop building (Ref 143/008; SM 8387 1167) located 225m to the north-north-west, a fuel compound (Ref 143/009; SM 8393 1161) located 220m to the north-north-west and a motor transport shed and office (Ref. 143/011; SM 8375 1161) located 135m to the north. The descriptions of the two buildings states that they were constructed of brick, with a corrugated asbestos cement gabled roof (the same as the structure on the southern side of the site area). A number of other structures associated with RAF

Talbenny are located in the wider area. The construction of RAF Talbenny commenced in early 1941 and the site was opened on 1st May 1942. The Royal Commission on the Archaeological and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW) records the site as follows:

Talbenny was built with three runways with a central intersection. Additional facilities included two T2 hangars and 36 frying-pan hard standings. Later in the war concrete aprons were added. The runways are intact. A few Maycrete and Nissen huts remain utilised for farm storage.

Event and Historical Information: Talbenny opened on 1 May 1942 as 19 Group Coastal Command station using Dale as a satellite landing ground. 4 Armament Practice Camp was part of 19 Group and gave training in anti-submarine bombing, air-air gunnery and air-surface firing and was based at Talbenny from the time the airfield opened until the airfield was placed into care and maintenance in August 1945. The Vickers Wellingtons of 311 Squadron, a Czech bomber squadron, arrived in June 1942, with Dale being occupied by 304 Squadron (Polish). Both units undertook anti-submarine patrol in the Bay of Biscay. Fighter cover for the Wellingtons was later supplied by detachments of Bristol Beaufighters from 235 and 248 Squadrons. By March 1943, these units had departed to be replaced by 303 Ferry Training Unit who prepared crews to fly Vickers Wellingtons, Warwick Bombers and Lockheed Venturas overseas. On 11 October 1943, the airfield were transferred from coastal to transport command. 16 Flight of transport command were used for transportation of VIPs. The flight was based at Talbenny with an assortment of Handley Page Halifaxes, Douglas C-47 Dakotas, Vickers Warwicks, Airspeed Oxfords and Avro Ansons until August 1945. 303 Ferry Training Unit (FTU) was joined by 3 Overseas Aircraft Preparation Unit (OAPU) in July 1944, to be brought under the umbrella of 11 Ferry Unit (FU) on September 1944. In August 1945, 11 FU was transferred to Dunkeswell and Talbenny was placed into care and maintenance to be finally closed on 23 December 1946. (RCAHMW NPRN Reference 308387)

The 1880s first edition (Figure 2) and 1906 (Figure 3) Ordnance Survey maps show the layout of Talbenny Hall Farm. The early map shows the site of the cart shed and other buildings to the south, all on the eastern side of the road. The 1906 map shows the main farmhouse on the western side of the road, which must have been built in the intervening years between the publication of the two maps, as well as the same buildings on the eastern side. The extant brick building on the southern side of the site is not shown on either of these maps, as it was not constructed until the 1940s.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

Methodology

The archaeological watching brief consisted of a single visit being made to the site to observe groundworks associated with the excavation of two drainage runs. The work was carried out on the 10th June 2010.

The drainage trenches were excavated using a tracked mini-excavator fitted with a 0.4m wide toothed bucket.

The drainage trenches ran from an existing septic tank at the eastern end of the site with one drainage run leading west towards the old cart shed (c.19m in length) and the other running south-west towards the modern building (c.10m in length).

Results

The excavations began at the site of the septic tank, with a short east-west stretch of trench being excavated from the concrete edge of the tank to the junction of the drainage trenches some 1.5m to the west (Photo 9). The soil removed from the trench was very mixed in this area, presumably the result of backfill from the original excavation to accommodate the septic tank. A number of modern artefacts were noted within the fill (glazed pottery, glass and iron) but these were not retained. The trench fill comprised large quantities of stone, from small to large blocks, with very little soil content. The stone appeared to be natural bedrock that had been disturbed during the installation of the septic tank. The trench was excavated to a depth of 0.8m maximum from ground level.

The drainage run towards the 1940s building was excavated through similar material at its northern end, but the excavated material got steadily more mixed towards the south-west (Photo 10). The soils contained considerable quantities of modern debris, including metal objects, corrugated iron and large concrete blocks. It is assumed that much of this material was deposited during construction of the building, perhaps as levelling material, or had been laid down later, perhaps during demolition of other 1940s structures that may have been present within this area. The trench was excavated to a maximum of 0.6m in depth.

The east to west drainage trench exposed natural bedrock underlying a very thin reddish brown topsoil, demonstrating that this area had been far less disturbed. The natural bedrock comprised areas of undisturbed rab (Photo 12) as well as more compact stone in blocks. Some metalwork was noted within the topsoil, including old hooks and racks, but they were considered to be modern and were not retained. The topsoil contained a few redeposited large stone blocks, which may have come from a former structure in the vicinity (Photo 13). The trench was excavated to a maximum of 0.6m in depth.

CONCLUSIONS

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during groundworks associated with drainage trenches associated with the conversion of two residential properties at Talbenny Hall Farm, Little Haven, Pembrokeshire.

The two buildings proposed for conversion include a stone-built cart shed with brick detailing. This was a two storey structure with cart entrances facing the road frontage on its western façade. The building is probably of 19th century date based on its form and construction.

The second building on the southern side of the site area would appear to date from the 1940s and is associated with RAF Talbenny. The building is constructed of brick with corrugated asbestos cement gabled roof. This method of construction is similar to a number of other military buildings in the vicinity constructed for the airfield between 1941 and 1942.

The two drainage trenches which led from the two buildings converged at the eastern end of the site to feed into an existing septic tank. Both trenches were excavated to a depth of 0.6m, which deepened to 0.8m where they met with the septic tank.

The drain running to the south-west was excavated through a depth of disturbed ground containing iron sheeting, concrete blocks and other modern debris. The base of the trench was excavated into the underlying natural geology (rab). The modern material may have originated from construction of the adjacent building in the 1940s. No significant archaeological finds or features were revealed within the trench.

The east-west aligned drain, leading to the former cart shed, was excavated through a very thin topsoil and directly into underlying natural geological deposits. A number of large stone blocks found within the topsoil may have originated from a former structure in the vicinity, but no further information about these stones could be ascertained. No significant archaeological finds or features were revealed within the trench.

The watching brief has demonstrated that no significant archaeological remains are present within the area of the proposed drains. No finds or features were revealed that may have indicated the presence of medieval structures or other activity associated with the documented medieval Talbenny Hall. It is possible that significant archaeological remains exist in the areas outside of the drainage trenches within the development area, although this is considered unlikely (especially in the disturbed area on the southern side of the site adjacent to the 1940s building). It is considered more likely that remains associated with the medieval Talbenny Hall would be present on the western side of the road.

SOURCES

Map

Ordnance Survey 1880s 1:2500 – Pembrokeshire

Ordnance Survey 1906 1:12500 – Pembrokeshire

Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 Land Ranger No.157

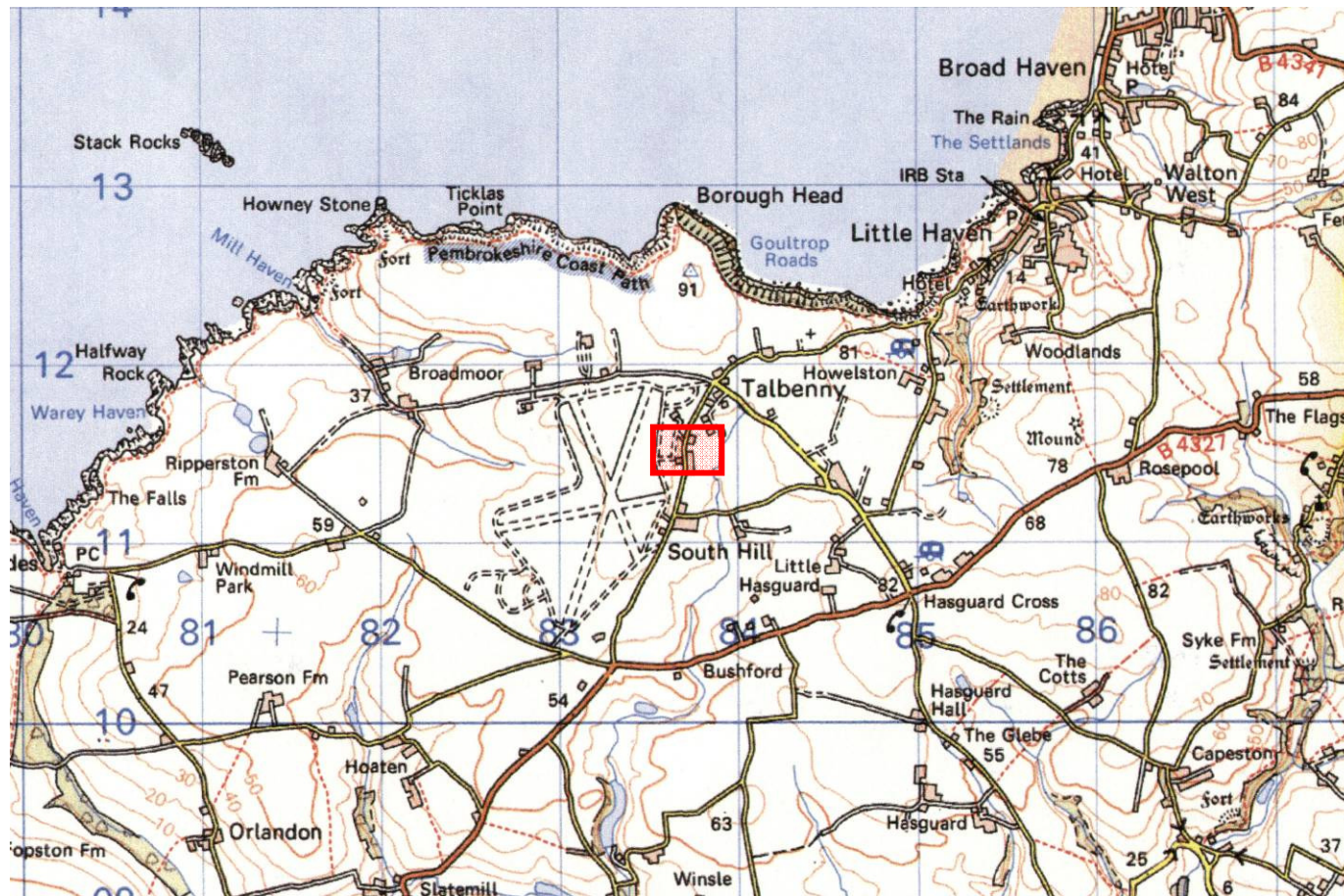


Figure 1: Location map of watching brief site based on Ordnance Survey.

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

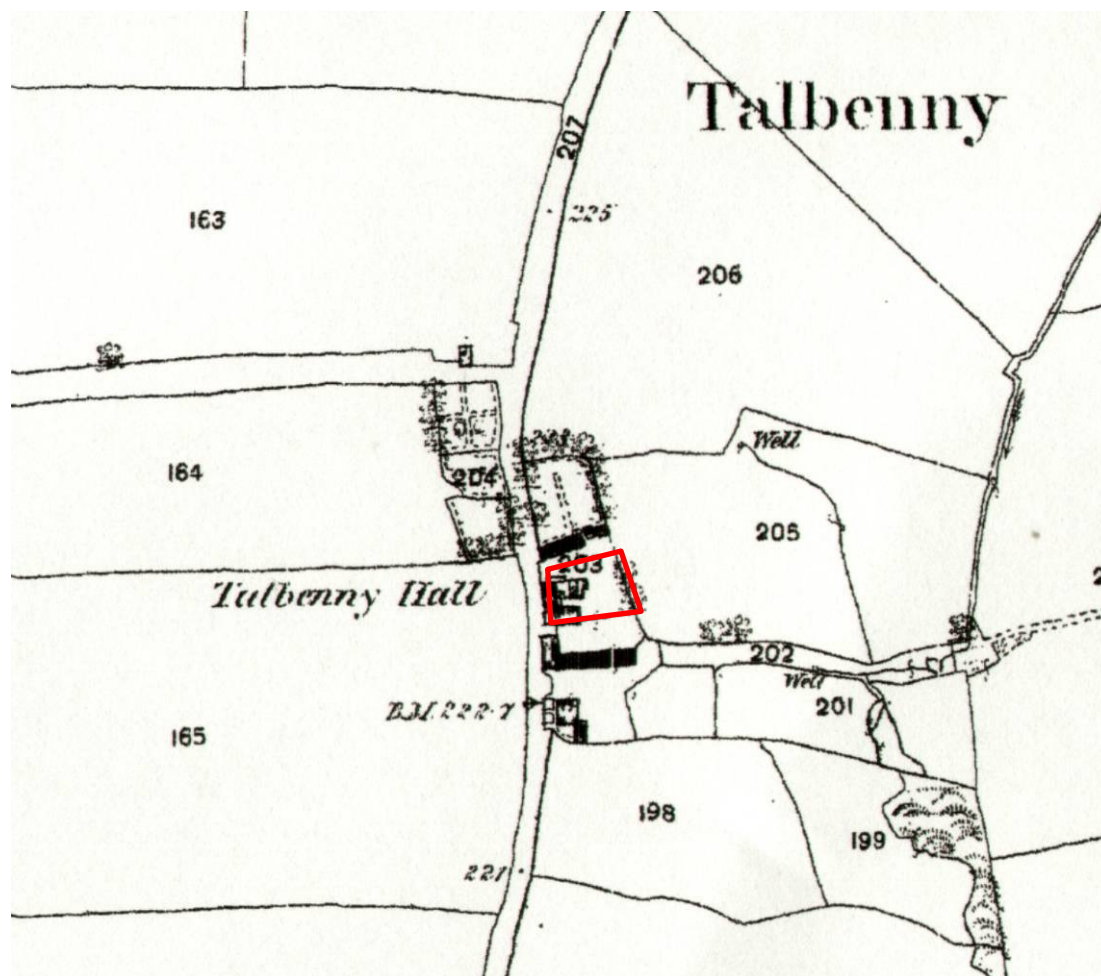


Figure 2: Extract of First Edition Ordnance Survey Map (1880s) showing Talbenny Hall Farm and development area (in red)

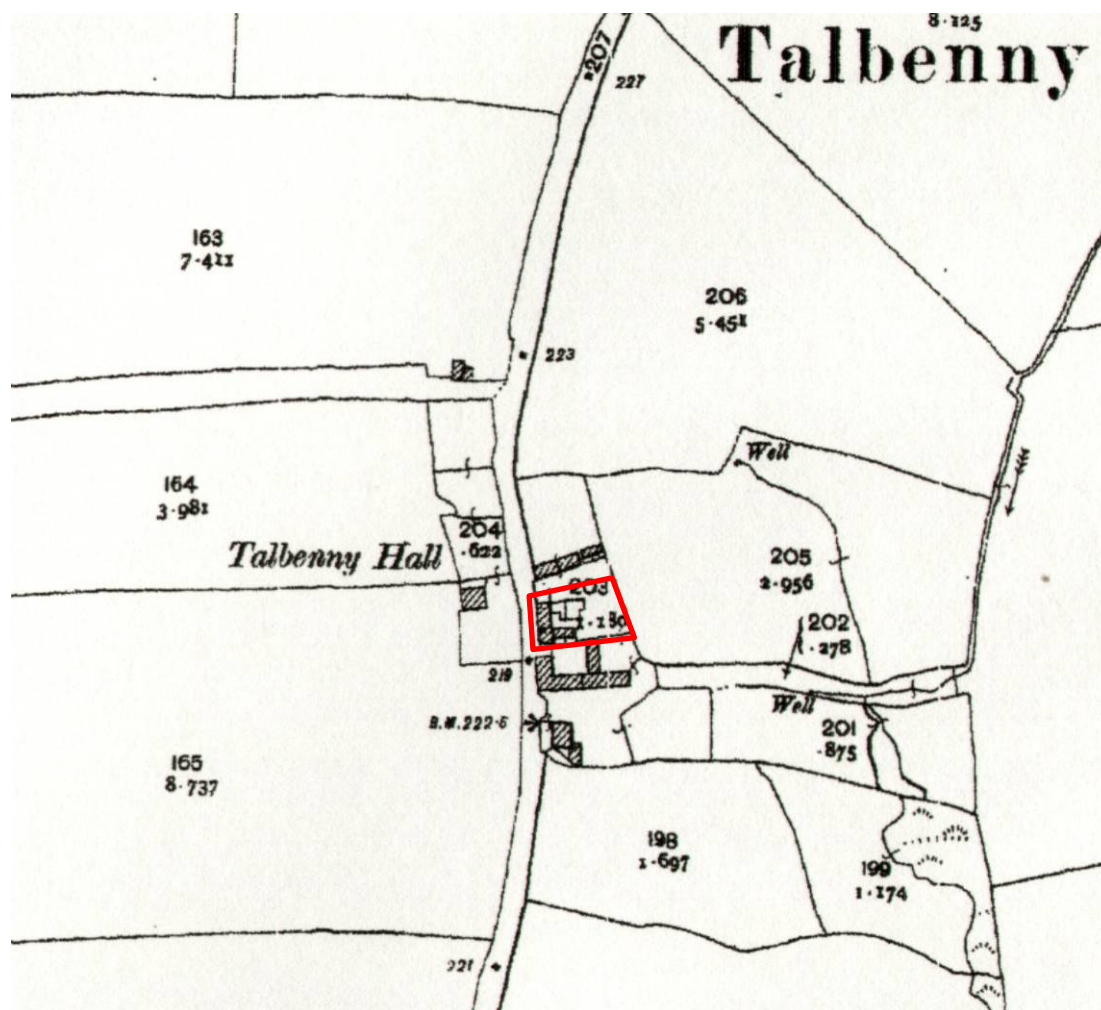


Figure 3: Extract of Ordnance Survey Map of 1906 showing Talbenny Hall Farm and development area (in red)

PERIOD	APPROXIMATE DATE
Palaeolithic	c.225,000 BC – 10,000 BC
Mesolithic	c.10,000 BC – c.3500 BC
Neolithic	c.3500 BC – c.2000 BC
Bronze Age	c.2000 BC – c.600 BC
Iron Age	c.600 BC – 43 AD
Roman	43 AD – 410 AD
Early Medieval	410 AD - 1066
Medieval	1066 - 1485
Post Medieval	1485 – c.1900
Modern	c.1900 onwards

Table 1: Archaeological and Historical Timeline for Wales.



Photo 1: View west across site area before excavation of drainage trenches, showing the eastern brick built extension of the cart shed



Photo 2: The western façade of the cart shed



Photo 3: Fireplace on southern gable end of building at ground floor level, showing collapsed roof and floor joists within cart shed



Photo 4: Northern cart entrance (2.6m wide and 2.18m in height)



Photo 5: Southern cart entrance (2.8m in width and 2.14m in height)



Photo 6: 1940s building along southern edge of site



Photo 7: Internal view of 1940s building showing recent breeze block partition

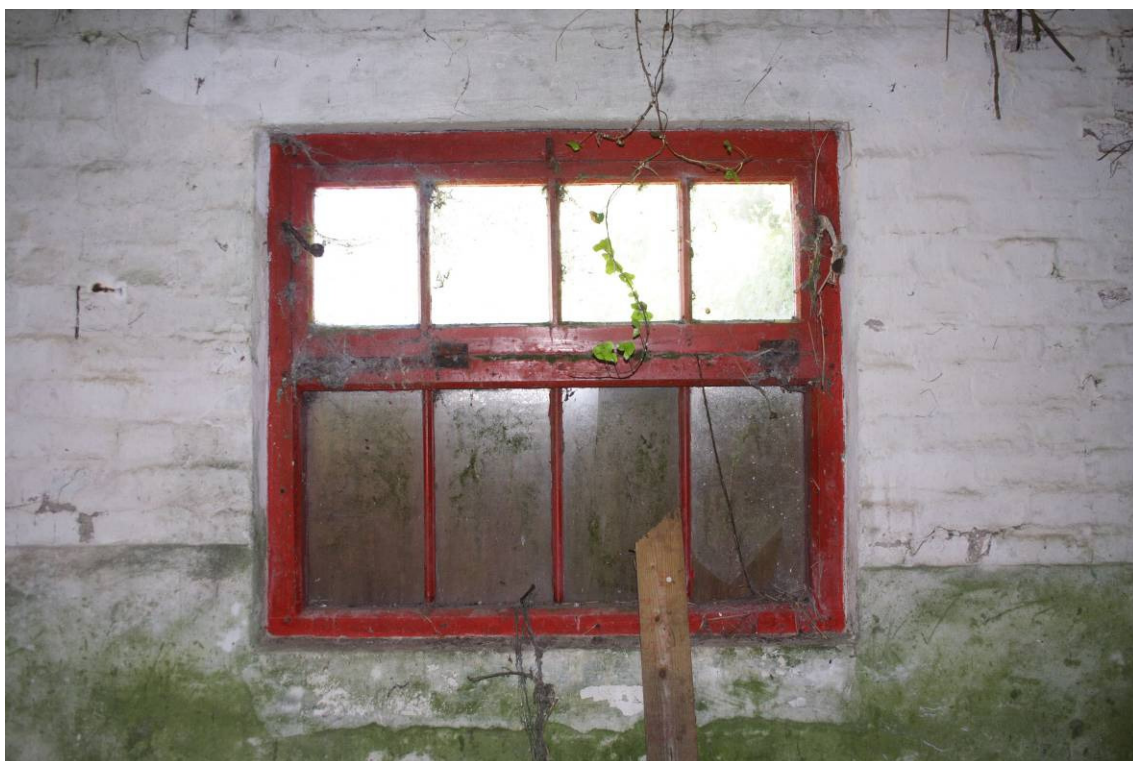


Photo 8: Detail of wooden framed window within 1940s building



Photo 9: View north-west showing start of drainage trenches at the location of the existing septic tank



Photo 10: Excavation of south-west aligned drainage trench showing mixed nature of soils containing fragments of stone, metal and other detritus



Photo 11: View west along drainage trench towards former cart shed

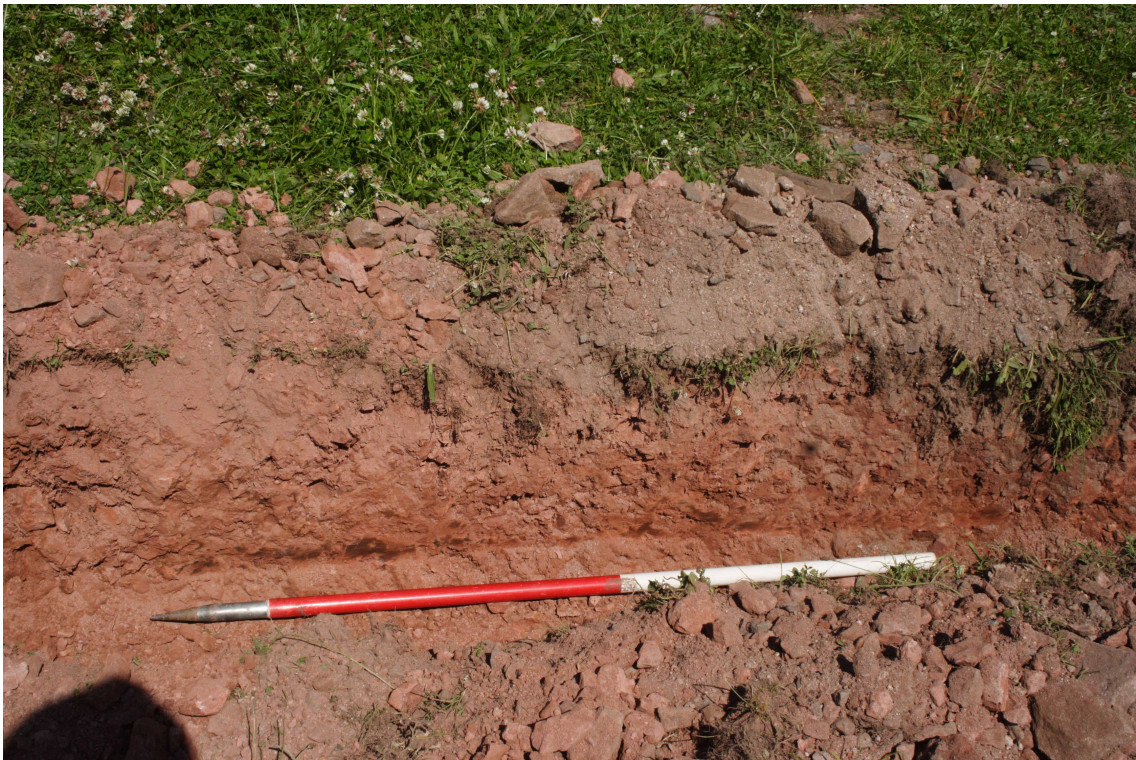


Photo 12: Section through east-west drainage trench showing thin depth of topsoil and undisturbed rab beneath



Photo 13: Large stone blocks recovered from topsoil of east to west drainage trench

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Medi 2010
September 2010

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

James Meek

Swydd / Position: Head of Field Services

Llofnod / Signature Date

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

Richard Ramsey

ar ran Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf.
on behalf of Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Swydd / Position: Senior Archaeologist

Llofnod / Signature Date

*Yn unol â'n nôd i roddi gwasanaeth o ansawdd uchel, croesawn unrhyw sylwadau sydd
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*