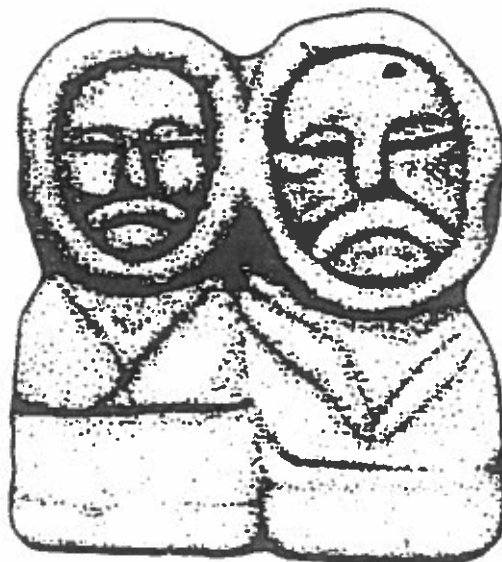


CAMBRIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECTS

**THE GATEHOUSE COURTYARD, ABERGLASNEY MANSION
CARMARTHENSHIRE**

INTERIM REPORT ON EXCAVATIONS

By Ian Halfpenney B.A(Hons.), AIFA



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Prepared for:
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ABERGLASNEY, GATEHOUSE COURTYARD: INTERIM REPORT

1. Introduction

Work started on the Gatehouse Courtyard on 6th September 1999 and was completed on the 17th September 1999.

The work involved the excavation of two Trenches:

Trench 1 was located in the south-east corner of the Gatehouse Courtyard (Fig. 1) and was designed to investigate the relationship between the north wall of the cloister garden and the north/south wall running beside the Yew Tunnel i.e. the east wall of the Gatehouse Courtyard.

Trench 2 was located in the north-east corner of the Gatehouse Courtyard (Fig. 1) and was designed to investigate the relationship between the north/south wall running beside the Yew Tunnel and the south wall of the Gatehouse. The area of excavation was covered by a considerable amount of overburden and dumped materials. In light of this it was necessary to remove these deposits by machine. This overburden was removed using a toothless ditching bucket.

The numbers in brackets refer to context numbers assigned to the various archaeological features and deposits encountered during the excavation work.

2. The Archaeological Phasing

1. 17th century
2. 18th century
3. Early 19th century
4. Later 19th century
5. 20th century

3. Results and Discussion of the Archaeological Phasing.

Trench 1 (Fig. 2+3)

Trench 1 measured 2m x 1m., the excavation of which was undertaken by hand, in order to prevent damaging any roots from the Yew Tree Tunnel.

Phase 1- 17th century

The excavation of Trench 1 revealed the east wall of the Gatehouse Courtyard (53) surviving up to 1m. in height, butting up to this wall were the remains of a pitched stone

surface (47). This surface appears likely to be a continuation of the Gatehouse Courtyard surface (18). The excavation of Trench 1 did not locate the remains of the north wall of the Cloister Garden, which suggests that the north wall of the Cloister Garden did not extend this far east. Alternatively, in this south-east corner of the Courtyard a doorway or arch may have existed allowing a smaller alternative access to the Mansion from the Gatehouse Courtyard.

Phase 3- Early 19th century

The pitched stone surface (47) had been cut through by a later culvert (48) (now inactive) which appears to be contemporary with the construction of the carriage driveway (45) in the early 19th century. A wall (54) 0.4m. in height, butting up to the east wall of the Gatehouse Courtyard (53) was uncovered during the excavation. Wall 54 was on a north-south alignment but appeared to be curving gradually towards the front of the mansion. Culvert 48 ran below wall 54 and it appears likely that this wall represents the remains of the eastern edge of the 19th century carriage driveway, as noted on the OS 1st and 2nd edition maps.

Phase 5 – 20th century

Unfortunately, later possibly 20th century disturbances (52) had removed any evidence of the pitched stone surface in the south of Trench 1 and at this time it is unclear how far this pitched stone surface would have extended.

Trench 2 (Fig.4+5)

Phase 1-17th Century

Trench 2 revealed the remains of the southern wall (9) of the east wing of the Gatehouse abutting the east wall (10) of the Gatehouse Courtyard (i.e. the wall which runs north/south beside the Yew Tree Tunnel).

Butting up to both the Gatehouse Wall and the east wall of the Courtyard was a randomly patterned pitched stone surface (18), which would have formed the Courtyard surface.

Walls 9 and 10 are substantial walls both with a projected height of 2.6m., based on the Yew Tree scarring and the scar on the east face of the Gatehouse. Wall 10 measured 0.8m. wide and was constructed of various sizes of limestone blocks. Both the west and east elevations were constructed of faced stone with the eastern elevation retaining evidence of plasterwork, suggesting that this elevation had also been visible. This was reinforced by the discovery of the *in situ* remains of a pitched stone surface (12) running below an area of blocking (11) in the southern section of wall 10, possibly representing a doorway in the wall. This pitched stone surface (12) appears to be a continuation of the surface evident within the courtyard area (18), clearly pre-dating the planting of the Yew Tunnel and the laying out of the North lawn and possibly relating to an earlier garden adjoining the Gatehouse Courtyard to the east.

The pitched stone surface (18) uncovered in Trench 2 has no formal patterning to it, being composed of randomly laid limestone pieces which vary in length between 0.1-0.3m. This pitched stone surface (18) is in contrast to the formal path which runs between the Gatehouse and through the Cloister garden. This formal path is bounded on the east and west sides by open pitched stone gullies, which appeared to flow into a covered culvert which ran east/west across the northern end of the Courtyard. A similar pitched

stone drain was uncovered in Trench 2 running east/west into this covered culvert, however this open drain did not extend as far as the east Courtyard wall (10). The south wall (9) of the east wing of the Gatehouse has a small arch (35) built into the base of the wall which may originally have been designed to carry water from inside the east wing of the Gatehouse.

Phase 2 – 18th century

Phase 2 relates to the infilling of the area immediately to the east of the Gatehouse Courtyard and the creation of the North Lawn. These works involved the construction of a blocking wall (11) preventing access from the Gatehouse Courtyard into this eastern area. The blocking of this doorway on the west elevation was built immediately above the pitched stone surface, whereas on the east elevation the blocking did not reach down to the pitched stone surface being some 0.3m. above this level, indicating that the landscape level of the area to the east of the Gatehouse was being significantly raised. It is therefore probable that at the time when the North Lawn was being laid and possibly the Yews being planted, the Gatehouse Courtyard was still in use.

Phase 3 – Early 19th century

The silting deposit (17) lying immediately above the pitched stone surface attests to the gradual abandonment of this Courtyard area. The stratigraphy in Trench 2 subsequently shows a series of rubble/mortar deposits which presumably relate to the demolition of the west wing of the Gatehouse in the early 19th century in order to make way for the driveway. The OS Survey drawing of 1827 and the OS 1st edition map of 1831 show this change, with the new driveway being inserted and the west wing of the Gatehouse being removed. With the west wing of the Gatehouse removed the original function of the Courtyard would have been altered. Therefore it may be at this time that other changes within this area occurred, such as the blocking of access into the Cloister Garden.

At this time the east wing of the Gatehouse was still standing although make up deposits suggest that the area inside the Courtyard had been raised and landscaped. To facilitate the new driveway it may have been necessary to landscape the area in front of the Mansion altering the drainage system. Therefore it may be at this time that culvert 8 was constructed. This stone built culvert had been integrated into the pre-existing arch (35) which was part of the south wall (9) of the east wing of the Gatehouse. Originally this arch appears to have been designed to take water out from the Gatehouse. However, at this stage the slope of the culvert suggests that water was flowing from the direction of the Mansion and into the Gatehouse and possibly through into a drainage system on the north side of the Gatehouse, suggesting that the interior of the east wing of the Gatehouse was no longer in use.

Phase 4 – Later 19th century

Changes in the latter part of the 19th century are concerned mainly with the insertion of the carriage turning circle in front of the house. This turning circle appears to be an extension of the driveway inserted earlier in the 19th century. The major changes around the Gatehouse at this time appear to be the demolition of the east wing of the Gatehouse to accommodate the turning circle and the removal of the upper courses of the east wall of the Gatehouse Courtyard making the Yew Tunnel more visible. Again these works appear to have been accompanied by further drainage works as another culvert (7) was

evident in Trench 2 running parallel to culvert (8). Culvert 7 does not respect the south wall of the east wing of the Gatehouse and clearly the east wing at this time has been demolished to make way for the new driveway. Culvert 7 is still active and on-site tests have revealed that it takes water from the north side of the house through the Gatehouse.

A small test pit was excavated in the south-west corner of the east wing of the Gatehouse (adjoining Trench 2), this revealed the sequence of deposits within the gatehouse room. The earliest deposit (33) relates to the construction layer for the Gatehouse. Above this were the remains of red fired clay floor tiles, which butted the south wall and extended below the later blocking of the doorway. It is debatable whether these are the remains of the original flooring, but nevertheless they do represent a floor and indicate that preservation of the interior of this room may be very good further east where the Gatehouse wall survives to a greater height and the room is covered by a considerable depth of overburden. Subsequent deposits within this test pit relate to the various demolition episodes encountered within the main area of Trench 2.

4. Conclusions

The archaeological evaluation and assessment work so far undertaken in the Gatehouse Courtyard has revealed areas of archaeology which are extremely well preserved given the amount of changes the Aberglasney Gardens have undergone. Preservation within the Courtyard area has exceeded expectations and it is not unreasonable to assume that a well preserved 17th century Courtyard exists, buried below the present overburden. The recent excavations of Trenches 1+2, summarised in this report, have also enabled us to begin to obtain a much clearer picture of how this area would have functioned within the broader context of the Mansion and its immediate gardens.

Trench 1

The excavation of Trench 1 revealed that the pitched stone surface extended south possibly connecting up with the front of the mansion terrace through a door or archway in the wall. This trench also provided further evidence of the landscaping undertaken in order to establish the 19th century driveway.

Trench 2

Trench 2 revealed that the pitched stone surface continues up to the wall running beside the Yew Tree Tunnel and that this wall does form the east wall of the Gatehouse Courtyard clearly pre dating the North Lawn and the planting of the Yew Tunnel. This provides us with a much clearer picture of the Courtyard area and the walls enclosing it.

The potential preservation of the interior east wing of the Gatehouse was also investigated. Here partially intact flooring was uncovered. Further to the east, the Gatehouse wing is sealed by a significantly deeper covering of overburden. In this eastern area, the south wall of the gatehouse survived to a much greater height, therefore the potential preservation of the east wing of the Gatehouse in this area could be considerable.

Evidence for what may be a formal 17th century garden presently buried below the North Lawn was also uncovered, with access via the north-east corner of the Gatehouse Courtyard.

The dendrochronological dates of 1750 for the Yew Tunnel provide us with good relative dating, clearly demonstrating that the Gatehouse Courtyard (buried 2m. below the Yews) must be significantly earlier.

5. Acknowledgements

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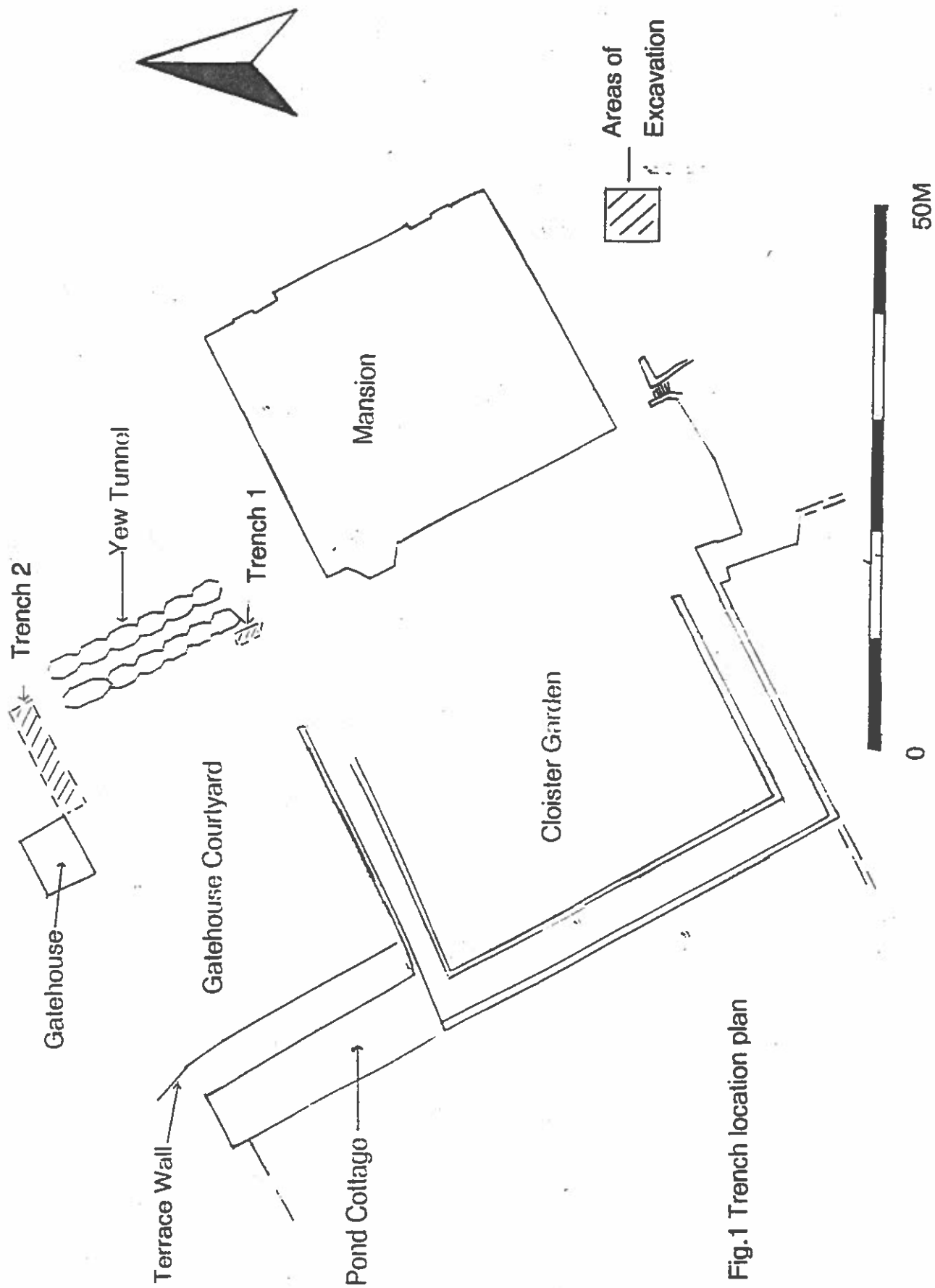


Fig.1 Trench location plan

Fig.2 West facing section Trench 1

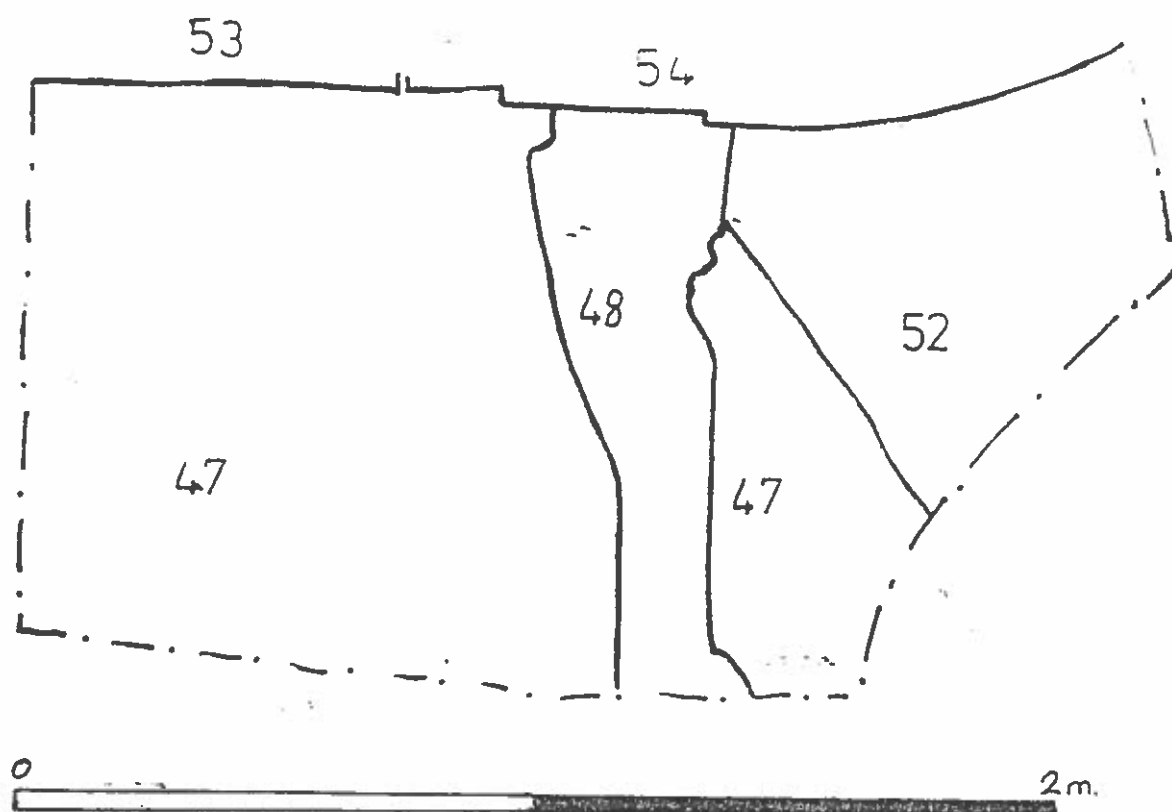
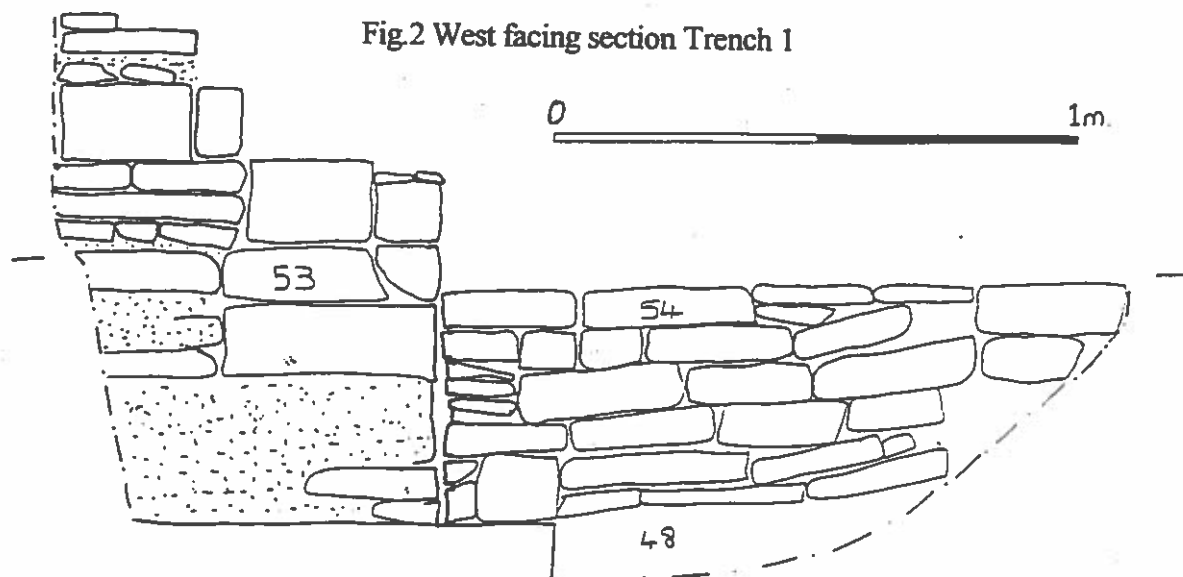


Fig.3 Plan of trench 1