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**REPORT ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT
DINAS MAWDDWY, GWYNEDD.**



Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Ltd

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd Cyf

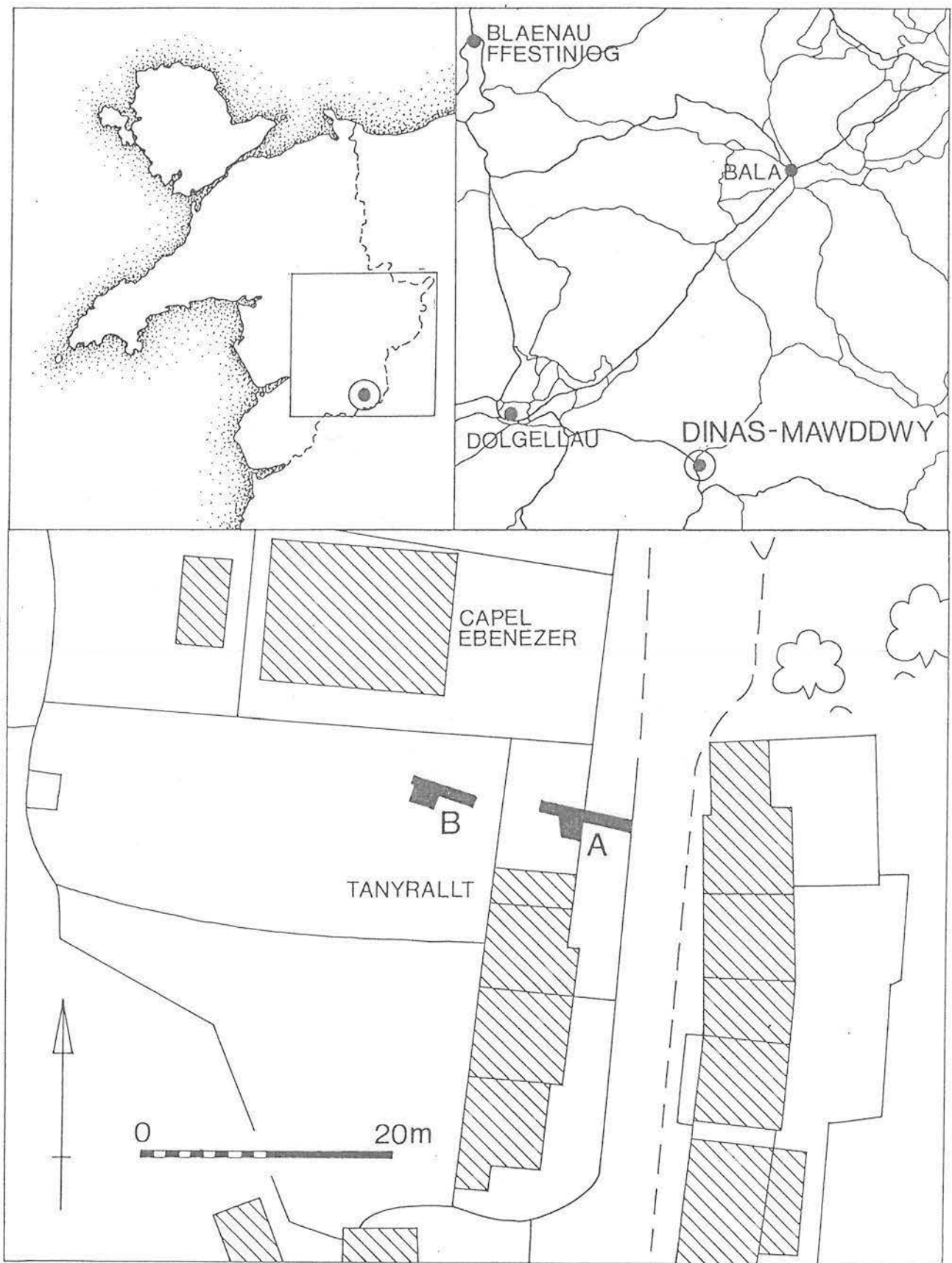


Fig. 1. Location map.

INTRODUCTION.

In response to a planning application submitted to Snowdonia National Park (NP5/74/94) for the erection of a dwelling house and domestic workshop, Gwynedd Archaeological Trust undertook an archaeological evaluation between Tan-yr-allt and Ebenezer Chapel, Dinas Mawddwy, in February 1992. The evaluation was funded by CADW in line with the recommendations of P.P.G. 16 paragraph 25 as the site lies within an area of archaeological sensitivity.

BRIEF.

The brief as drawn up by Gwynedd Sites and Monuments Record was as follows:

A. EXISTING DATA.

An examination of existing archive material such as S.M.R. information, tithe and estate maps and papers, accessible documents and previous developments on the site. This had already been carried out by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust.

B. TRIAL TRENCHING.

A programme of trial trenching, by hand, to determine the depth, survival and extent of archaeological deposits. It was proposed to excavate 0.5-2% of the threatened area with two trenches.

PROCEDURES AND METHODS.

TRIAL TRENCHING.

Two trial trenches were excavated by hand to assess the depth, survival and extent of any archaeological deposits within the threatened area. One trench extended west from the roadway for 8m, whilst the second (2m sq) was located at the crest of the terrace 6m further west (Fig. 1).

RESULTS.

A. EXISTING DATA.

Dinas Mawddwy occupies a river valley site in the south-eastern corner of Meirionnydd, near the confluence of the Rivers Cerist and Dyfi, the whole bounded on the west by the pass of Bwlch Oer Ddrws and on the north-east by that of Bwlch-y-Groes. Although no more than a village today, the township was of greater importance during the Medieval period, when it served as the caput of the lordship of Mawddwy, with its weekly market and several annual fairs.

The origins of the town are obscure, through the absence of both historical and archaeological evidence, and its exact legal status has been viewed with uncertainty. It enjoyed a variety of corporate privileges until the late 19th century, but there is no record of it being granted borough privileges.

Since Mawddwy was not incorporated into Meirionnydd until 1536, nothing is forthcoming from documents such as the Subsidy Roll of 1292-3 which shed useful light on other boroughs in the county. There is, however, a 17th-century transcript made by Richard Vaughan of Hengwrt (1592-1667) of an inspeximus of 1423 by Hugh Burgh, Lord of Mawddwy, inspecting the charter of his father-in-law, John Mawddwy, granted in 1393. This specifically refers to Dinas Mawddwy as a borough and lists some 35 burgesses, or citizens, overwhelmingly Welsh, as already residing there. There seems no reason to doubt the authenticity of the transcript, but the matter was investigated by the Municipal Corporations Commissioners in 1834 and again in 1880, and as they were unable to confirm borough status all corporate privileges were withdrawn in 1886.

Although Medieval Dinas Mawddwy was an important local centre, with its commercial and administrative functions, it remained a small settlement, as indicated by the 35 burgesses recorded in 1393. This number could easily be accommodated within the area of the present village, and indeed traces of the former burgrave (house and garden) plots are visible at its southern end. Later there seems to have been some contraction, since only 14 burgesses were recorded as living within the liberty of the borough in 1592.

The settlement does not appear to have been defended, although there may have been a motte immediately to the south in a field known as Cae'r Bryn between the Buckley Arms Hotel and the old Minllyn Schoolroom.

As with other Welsh towns, both native and planted, the post-medieval period seems to have been a time of stagnation and decline for Dinas Mawddwy. While the corporation continued to exercise its various privileges, they had little real significance, and the town's decline is illustrated by the fact that by the early 19th century the market had ceased to function. Fenton described the place as 'a miserable collection of mean houses making one street', and it is unlikely ever to have been much larger than this.

The site of the proposed development was formerly occupied by two adjoining cottages which were demolished in recent years.

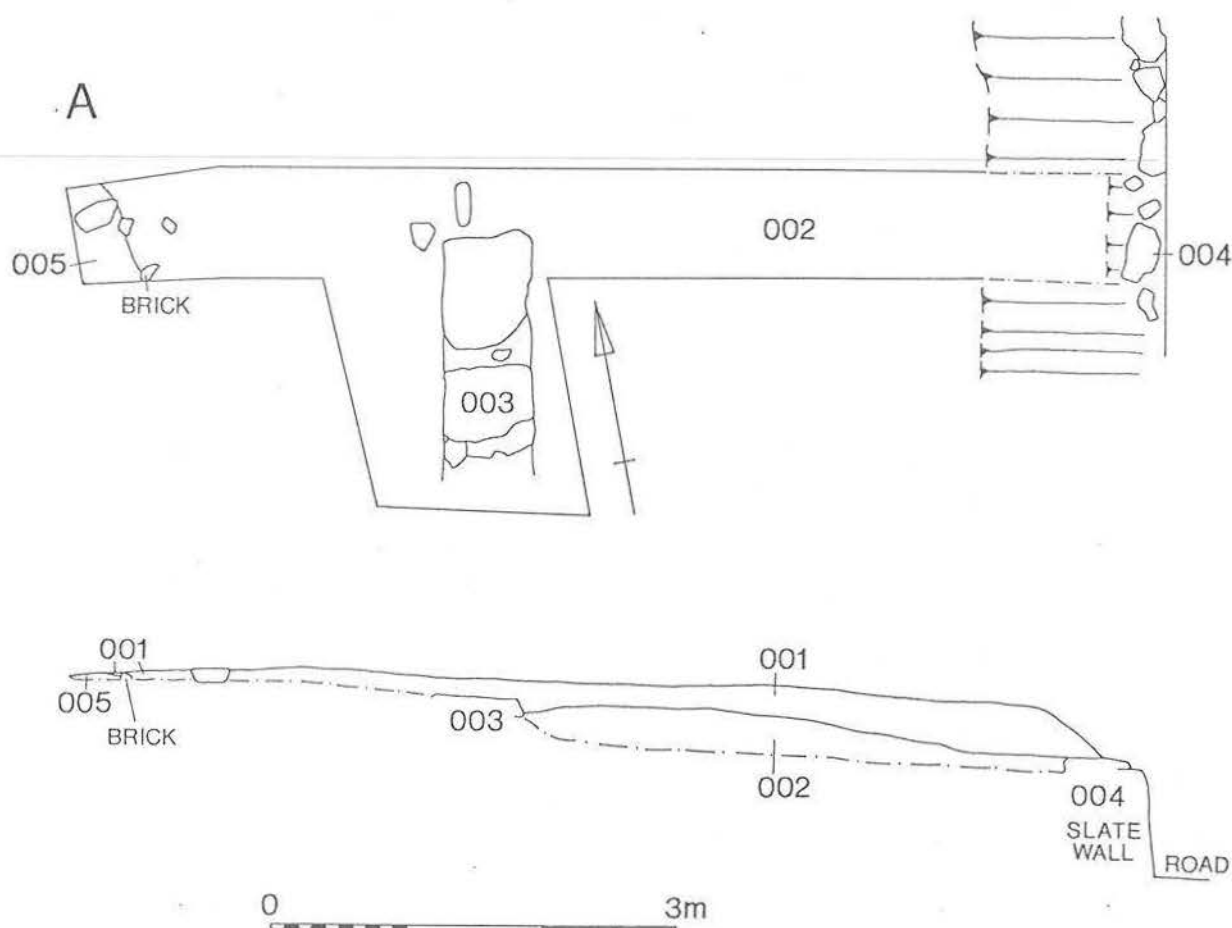


Fig. 2. Plan and section of Trench A.

B. TRIAL TRENCHES.

TRENCH A. (Fig. 2).

A trench 8m in length and 0.8m wide was excavated, by hand, to a depth of 0.1-0.5m. It extended west from a slate built wall flanking the main street. The removal of compact slate chippings (001) revealed a layer of gravel (002) which abutted the slate wall (004). The foundations of the east wall of the former cottages (003) were revealed lying on the gravel. The foundations consisted of large flat slate slabs bonded with mortar one course (0.1m) high. The trench was extended 1.5m to the south to record the alignment of the wall foundations. A spread of brick, slate and stone rubble (005) was recorded in the west end of the trench. Much of this demolition rubble from the cottages had been removed by machine recently. No associated floor levels survived and there was no evidence for earlier structures.

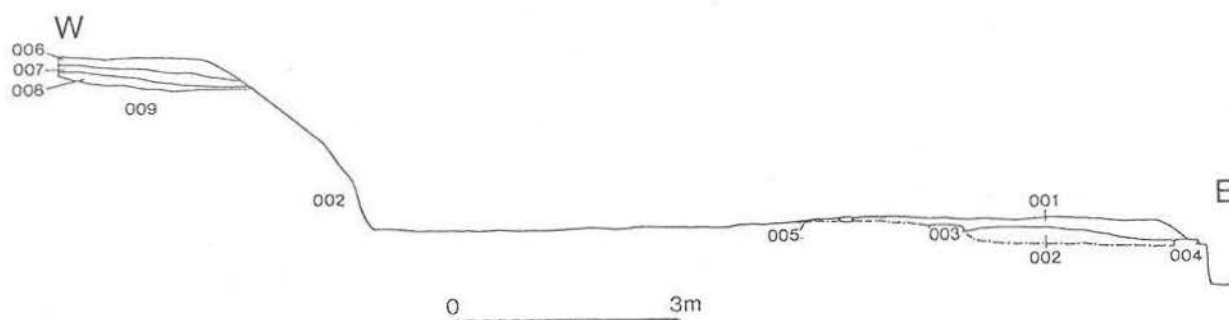


Fig. 3. Composite section of Trenches A and B.

TRENCH B. (Fig. 3).

A trench 2m sq. was excavated, by hand, to a depth of 0.4m behind the crest of the terrace. It was extended down the side of the terrace to facilitate the recording of its profile. The topsoil (006), which contained nineteenth century pottery, was removed revealing a horizon of lighter, stonier clayey silt (007). This overlay a deposit of yellowish/brown clayey silt (008). Below this was a deposit of yellow gravel/clay (009) into which a shallow square posthole (010) of modern date was cut. The terrace bank was recorded revealing that context 002 was at a considerable depth within the natural stratigraphy, the earlier cottages and recent machining having removed all the upper deposits in much of the area threatened by the proposed development.

CONCLUSIONS.

The evaluation revealed that the area of proposed development had already been severely disturbed by the erection and demolition of the cottages, the modern machine disturbance of the terrace and the cutting of the road into the natural slope of the ground surface.

