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**INVESTIGATIONS AT CAER GYBI  
HOLYHEAD ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT SCHEME  
- PHASE 2**

A. Gruffydd

YMDDIRIEDOLAETH ARCHAEOLEGOL GWYNEDD  
GWYNEDD ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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**HOLYHEAD ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT SCHEME - PHASE 2**

by A. Gruffydd  
illustrations by H.F. Riley

for Gwynedd Archaeological Trust 1992

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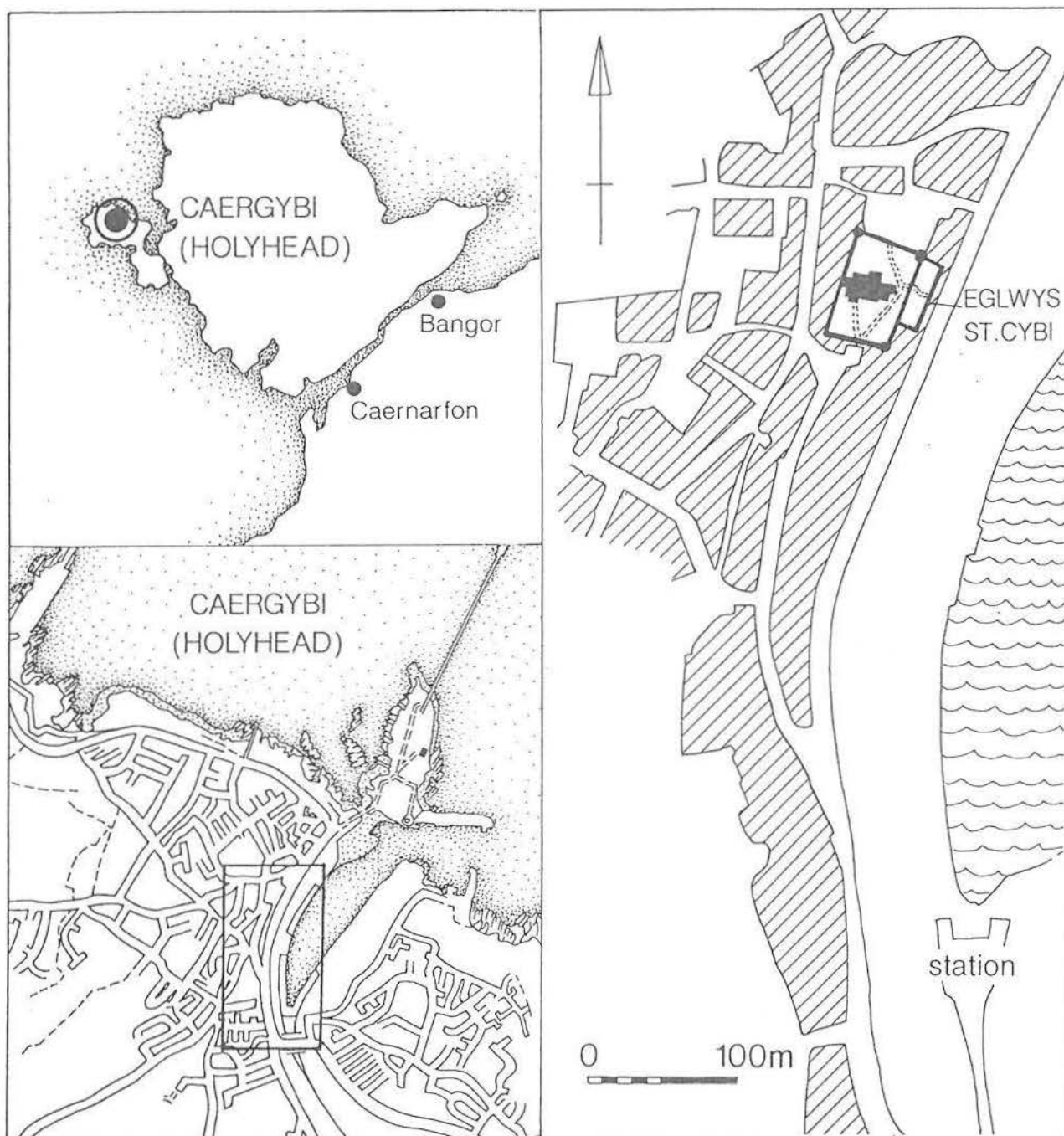


Fig.1 General Location Plan

## Background

The archaeological investigations at St. Cybi's churchyard, Caergybi, (SH 2471 8262), (fig. 1), were undertaken during phase 2 of an environmental upgrading/consolidation project in the town. The consolidation work within the churchyard formed part of the W.D.A's Town Improvement Grant Scheme and was sponsored by Ynys Môn Borough Council. TACP Architects acted as consultants for the project with the consolidation work contracted to Foster Davies Contractors Ltd. The phase 2 programme spanned over 15 weeks, from the end of June to mid October 1992.

Phase 1 of the scheme was completed in 8 weeks during February and March, 1992, and concentrated on the areas separating the upper and lower churchyards. Gwynedd Archaeological Trust were invited to conduct a watching brief and a small excavation within Phase 1. Details of these investigations have been reported on separately - ('Investigations at Holyhead, St. Cybi Environmental Improvement Scheme' A. Gruffydd 1992, for Gwynedd Archaeological Trust.)

## Archaeological and Historical Background

The area under consideration includes much of the Caer Gybi scheduled Roman fort as well as the Mediaeval church and churchyards of St. Cybi, (fig. 2.) The grounds of the churchyard are enclosed by the walls of the fort on the north, west and south sides, whereas the east side of the fort is open to the harbour, protected by a steep cliff leading down towards the quayside. The north and south walls would have originally run down to sea level, providing protected beaching for boats on the former shoreline. Modern disturbance has removed much of this evidence.

The walls of the fort have been considerably altered and repaired since their original construction, but much that is original survives. The fort has two gateways, in the middle of the north and south walls; the north gateway, however, being a modern insertion. Four circular towers, located at all four corners of the fort, remain in varying conditions. Both the north west and south west towers have suffered considerable damage, while the south east tower was completely rebuilt in the late 19th century. The north east tower has survived best of all, although its southern half was also rebuilt, possibly in the 17th century.

The only known excavation of the fort was undertaken by W.E. Griffiths in 1952. His main objectives were :

- a) to determine whether a ditch had ever been constructed along the outer face of the north wall.
- b) to examine the north west tower.

For a) he concluded, "apart from slight trenches and disturbances caused by the laying of drainage pipes in modern times, this [the general fill] was unbroken in the whole extent of the trench, and there was no trace of the former existence of a ditch." (Griffiths, 1954. p.114)

b) the north west tower was found to be a three quarter round tower, the south east quarter forming the right angled junction between the north and west walls of the fort. The northern half of the tower was hollow. Griffiths excavated a small area to the north of the tower where he discovered a possibly contemporary wall butted against the outer face of the tower. The wall ran northwards from the tower for about 2m before turning at a right angle eastwards for approximately 6m where modern disturbance had destroyed it.

No finds were retrieved as a result of Griffiths' investigations.

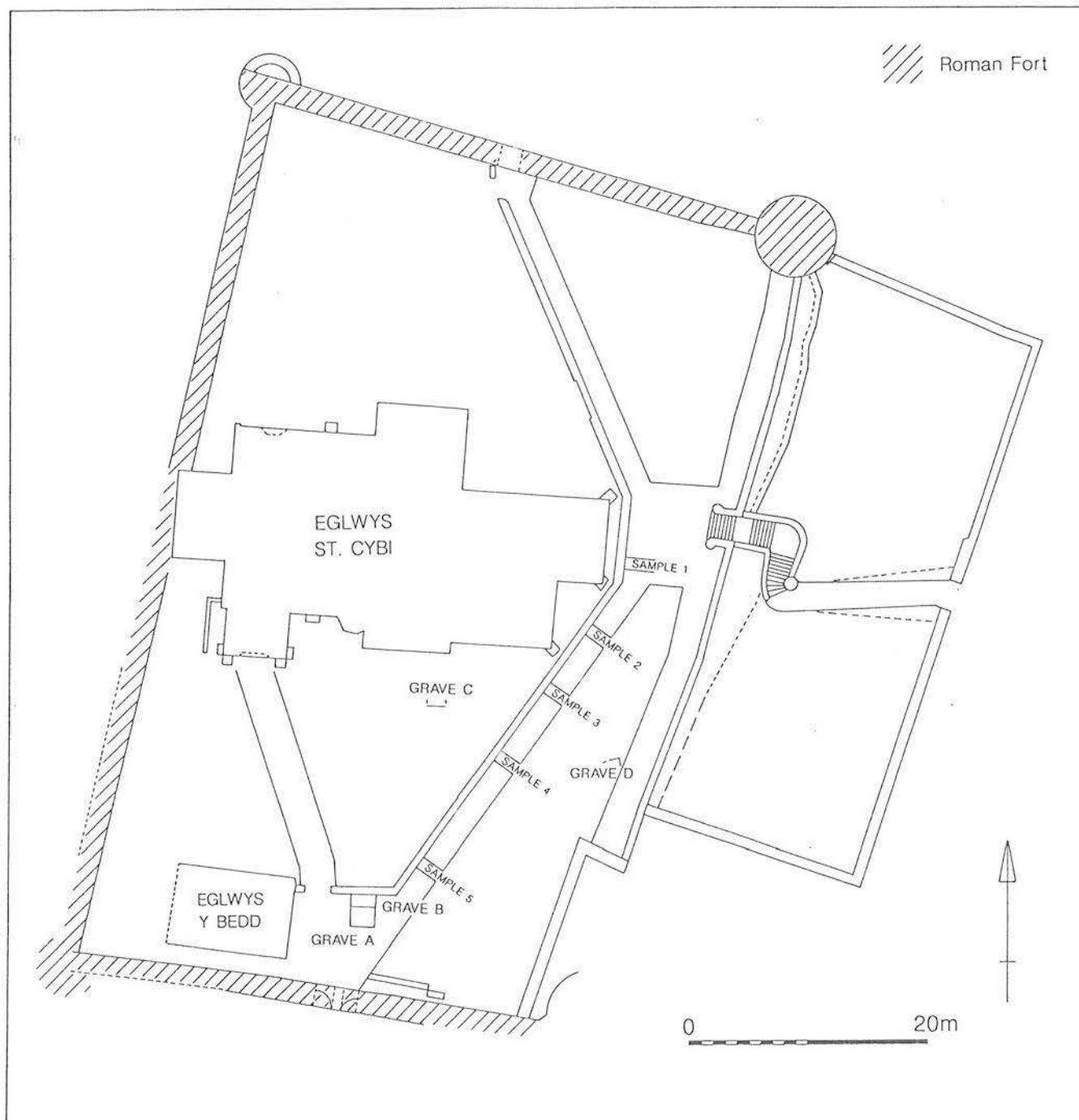


Fig. 2 Location plan of churchyard



Caer Gybi has been interpreted as a small late Roman coastal fort, operating in conjunction with a watch tower or signal station on the summit of Caer Twr, some 3Km distant.

The parish church of St. Cybi is located towards the west side of the churchyard. The earliest part of the building is the chancel which formed part of a 13th century church. The church was probably enlarged in the 15th century, resulting in the addition of the north and south transepts, with the north aisle and the arcade, the three arches of the crossing as well as the chancel arch being constructed some twenty years later. Late additions include the 17th century tower and the 19th century north vestry. The south chapel was also added in the 19th century.

An additional, much smaller church, Eglwys y Bedd, stands in the south west corner of the churchyard. Only the 14th century nave survives to this day, a facade having been constructed against the east wall where the blocked original chancel arch remains clearly visible. A probable 14th century mutilated window survives in the west wall, positioned above the segmental head and moulded label of a 15th or 16th century doorway. Eglwys y Bedd was converted into a school during the mid 18th century, but today the church is very much part of the continuing religious activity focused around St. Cybi's church.

Two significant finds have been retrieved from the grounds of the churchyard, firstly an Anglo-Saxon silver penny of King Edward the Martyr (975-78.) The coin was found in June 1952 whilst the walls of the fort were being conserved by the Ministry of Works. It was located near the inner face of the wall, immediately south of the north west angle at a depth of approximately 0.5m. M. Dolley and J.K. Knight propose that the coin may have been lost during the Scandinavian plunderings of the north Welsh coastline which resulted in the sacking of Clynnog Fawr and of Lleyn in 978, as well as the attack on Chester during 979/80.

The second find from the site was noted in 'Anglesey Antiquarian Society Transactions 1929'. The brief note explains that 10 or 12 gold coins of Constantine were found in 1820 on the east side of the fort. No further information is given concerning this vague reference, and the current location of these coins is unknown.

### Archaeological Implications

**Brief :** As with phase 1 of the scheme, it was agreed that Gwynedd Archaeological Trust would conduct a watching brief over the whole scheme, and a period of 2 weeks had been allocated to the Trust within the programme, to carry out excavation and recording work where necessary. Further, construction work was to be temporarily halted should any additional archaeological material be discovered and warrant detailed recording.

It soon became clear that the main archaeological implication would lie in the immediate vicinity of Eglwys y Bedd. From present day surface level, a 0.5m trench was to be excavated around the south, west and north walls of Eglwys y Bedd by the contractor in advance of the construction of an enclosing wall and gravel path.

Other archaeological implications would include :

- a) The construction of new walling and paving to replace all existing paths in the upper churchyard.
- b) The excavation of a lighting connection duct across the graveyard adjacent to several graves.

The archaeological implication of the fixing of new metal gates at the north and south gateways of the Roman fort was an issue examined by Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments, given the status of the fort as a scheduled monument.

## Methods and Procedures

Archaeological work around Eglwys y Bedd concentrated on three main areas in turn; the south, west and north walls (Areas A, B, and C.), (fig. 3.)

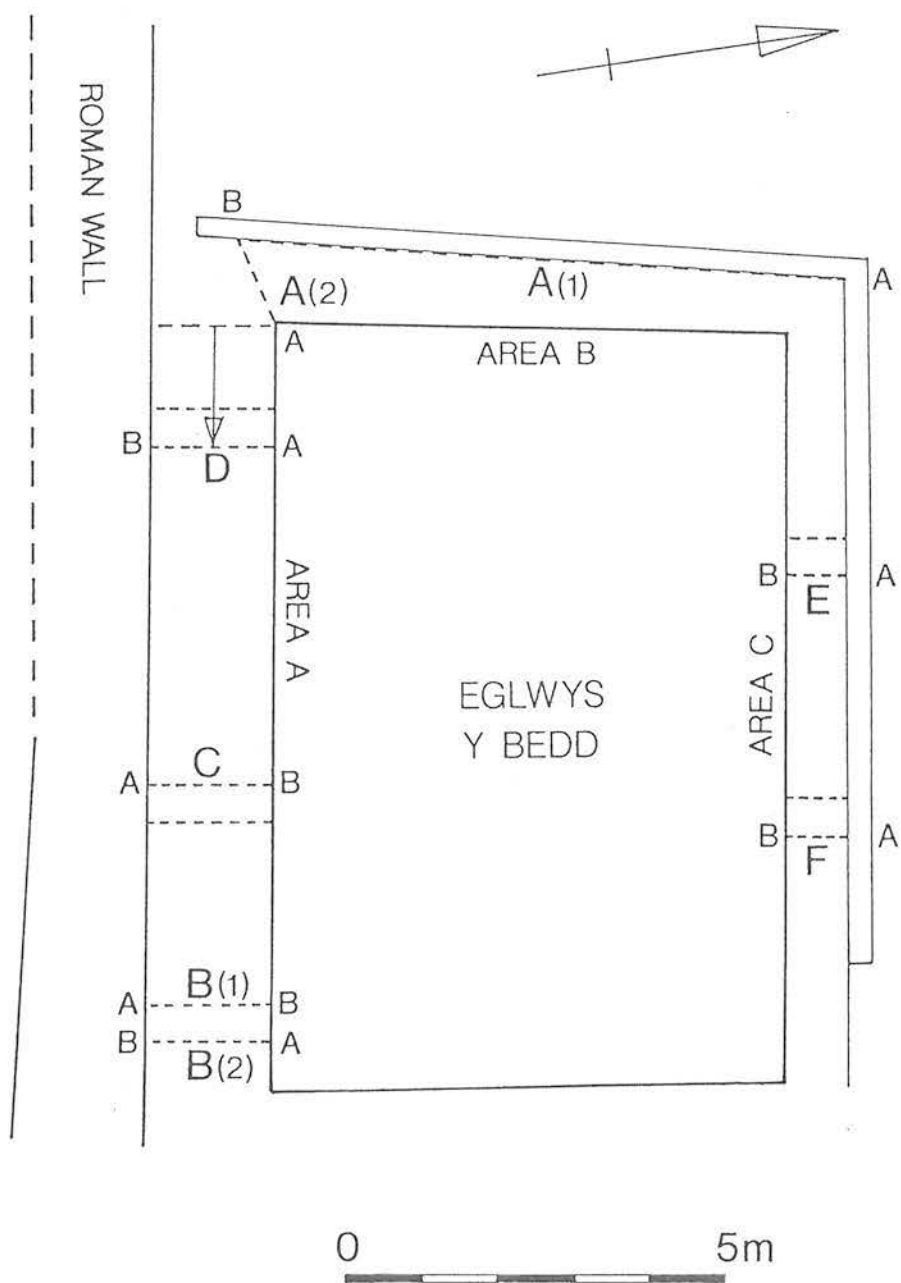


Fig. 3 Plan showing location of trenches around Eglwys y Bedd

### *South Wall : Area A*

The south wall of Eglwys y Bedd stands 1.60m north of the south wall of the Roman fort. The narrow 'corridor' between these two walls was examined in advance of the construction of a wall and gravel path along this corridor. Three trenches, approximately 0.5m wide, were excavated across the corridor by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, (Trenches B, C, D.)

The first trench, (B), situated 0.65m west of the south east corner of Eglwys y Bedd, was excavated perpendicular to Eglwys y Bedd and the Roman wall, to a depth of 0.4m from ground level. The east side of the trench was excavated flush with an undetermined course of walling set into and standing no higher than ground level. It was decided to excavate an 'L' shaped trench, leaving a baulk of soil on this east side which could hopefully lead to a determination of the relationship between the soil build up and the course of stones. The west section of the trench was examined in an attempt to establish the relationship between the Roman wall and the south wall of Eglwys y Bedd and the soil build up between them.

At a depth of 0.40m (bottom of trench), a substantial layer of large flat stones was reached, covering the whole floor of the trench and seemingly butted against both Eglwys y Bedd and the Roman wall. Given the fairly limited area excavated within this trench, the nature of these large stones could not be ascertained at this stage. Both the east and west sections of the trench were drawn to scale and the stone covered base of the trench was planned. All features were photographed, (figs. 4 and 5.)

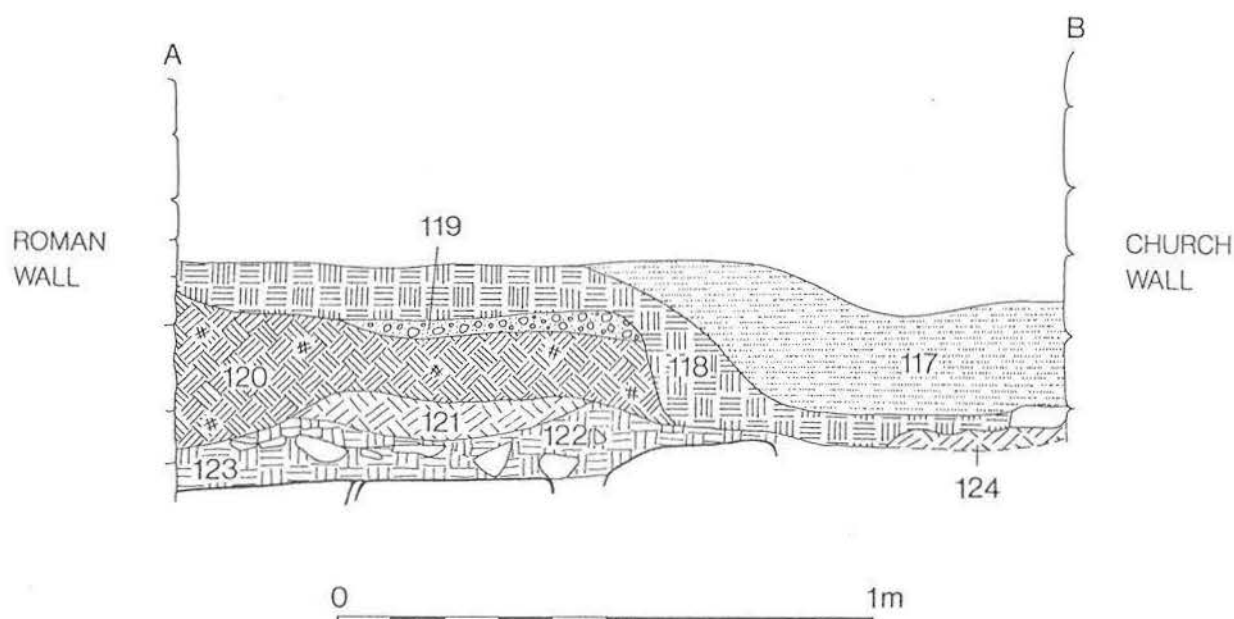


Fig. 4 Trench B(1) - East facing section

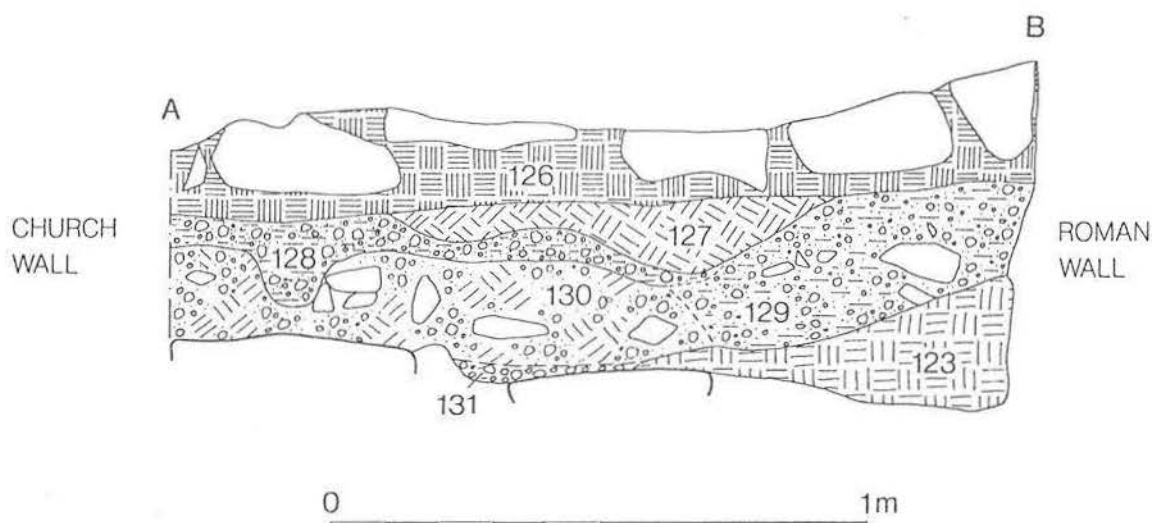


Fig. 5 Trench B(2) - West facing section

The second trench within the corridor, (C), was excavated 3.5m west of the south east corner of Eglwys y Bedd. Again, the trench was excavated perpendicular to Eglwys y Bedd and the Roman wall and was 0.5m wide. At a depth of 0.35m from ground level, the layer of large flat stones was again reached, similarly butted against the Roman wall and Eglwys y Bedd. The west section of the trench was drawn to scale and photographed, (fig. 6.)

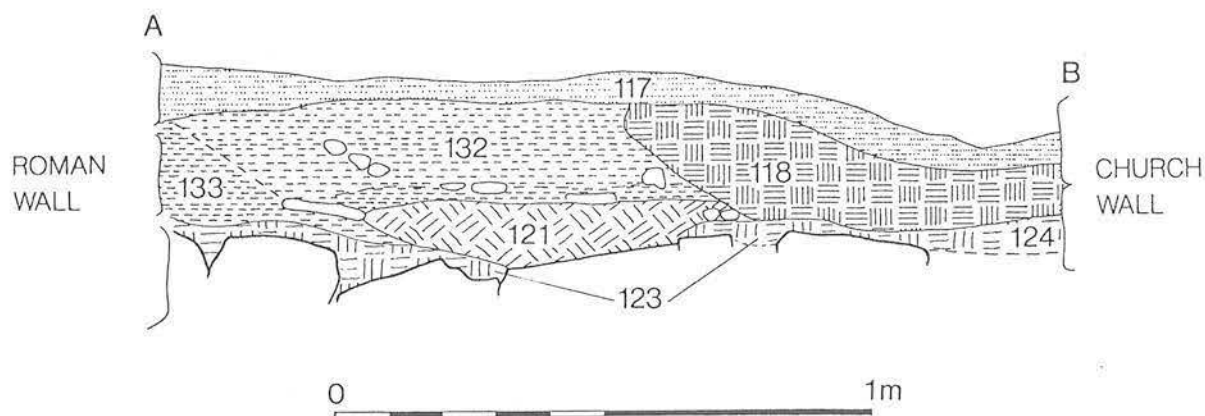


Fig. 6 Trench C - East facing section

The third trench, (D), was similarly excavated from Eglwys y Bedd across to the Roman wall 1.15m east of the south west corner of Eglwys y Bedd. Towards the Eglwys y Bedd side of the trench, the large flat stones were again reached at 0.4m below ground level. Towards the Roman wall however, a break in the paving revealed a similar course of large flat stones laid some 0.2m lower. The east section was drawn to scale and photographed, (fig. 7.)

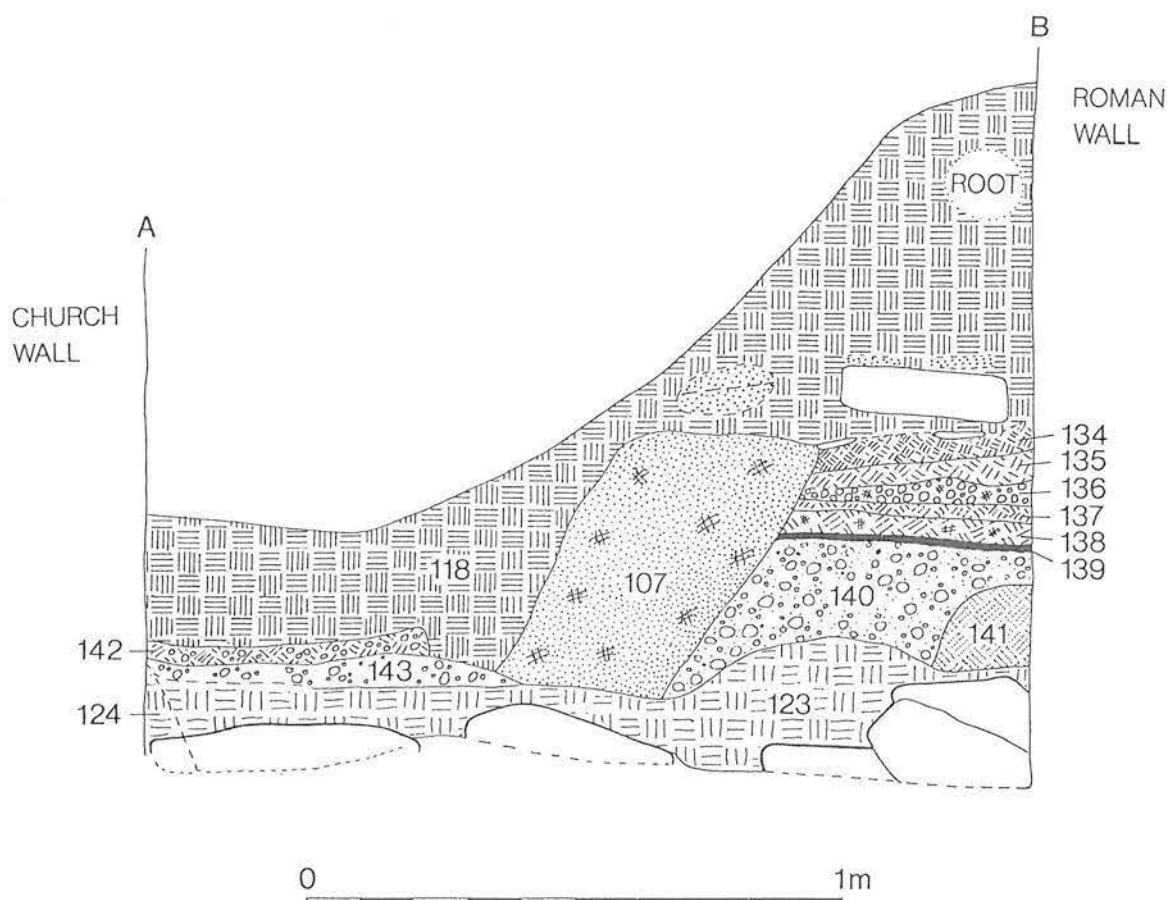


Fig. 7 Trench D - West facing section

Following the recording of all three trenches, the whole length of the corridor was excavated by the contractor down to the level of the large flat stones. Once cleared, it was apparent that the stones were laid along the whole length of the corridor. A detailed plan of the area was produced and a photographic record was obtained.

#### *West wall : Area B*

The build up of soil immediately adjacent to the west wall of Eglwys y Bedd was completely removed by the contractor down to a depth of 0.6m in advance of Gwynedd Archaeological Trust's involvement, and therefore no controlled excavation was possible. The excavation of this material meant that the previously buried lower courses of the west wall, as well as the apparent foundations, were exposed. The trench, (A), measured approximately 8m long and was 1.5m wide. The west section of the trench, running parallel with the west wall of the church was examined and recorded, as was the south section, extending 1.1m westwards from the south west corner of Eglwys y Bedd. It was later decided to extend the southern limit of this trench, which lay near the interface with trench D in Area A, in an attempt to establish a relationship with the large flat stones. The resulting section extended 1m southwards from the south west corner of Eglwys y Bedd (following the line of the west wall), (fig. 8.) The section was recorded. The complex masonry at the base of the west wall was drawn and planned to scale and a complete photographic record was obtained.

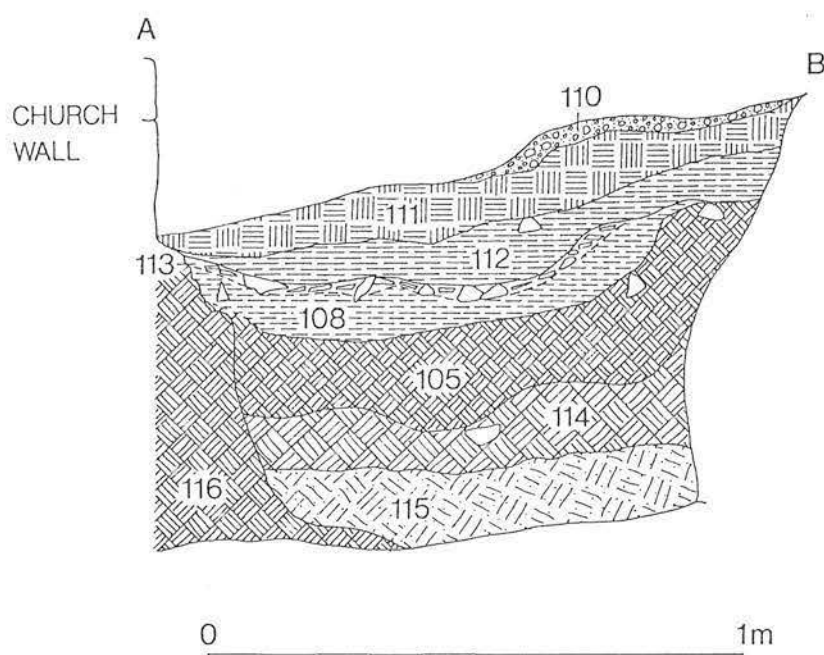


Fig. 8 Trench A(2) - North facing section

#### *North wall : Area C*

Two trenches, (E and F), were opened by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust against the north wall in advance of the excavation of the whole area by the contractor. Trench E, measuring 0.5m wide and 1.1m long, was positioned perpendicular to the north wall and lay 2.7m from the north west corner of the church. A depth of 0.5m was reached, yielding large foundation stones projecting out from the base of the north wall of Eglwys Y Bedd.

The second trench, (F), of the same dimensions, was located 2.9m further east, and the stone foundations were similarly reached.



As with Area A, following the examination of trenches E and F by the Trust, the whole area adjacent to the north wall of Eglwys Y Bedd was excavated to a depth of approximately 0.5m by the contractor down to the level of the foundation stones.

#### Existing Paths

The original main path and associated wall led from the north gateway, past the east side of St. Cybi's church, towards Eglwys y Bedd and the south gateway. An additional path ran from Eglwys y Bedd to the south porch of St. Cybi's church. The tarmac surface of the original main path and the associated wall were removed by the contractors, excavating down to a depth of approximately 0.2m. The resulting shallow trenches were examined for any archaeological features and a 13% sample of the removed soil from a 38m stretch of the path between St. Cybi's church and the south gateway was sieved.

#### Lighting Duct

A trench, 0.4m wide and 0.5m deep, was excavated from the upper/lower churchyard dividing wall to the east of St. Cybi's church, past the south side of St. Cybi's church towards the west wall of the fort. The trench was excavated by the contractors in preparation for the laying of an electrical lighting duct. The area was examined by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, and two previously hidden gravestones were discovered. One of these gravestones, situated immediately in front of the south wall of St. Cybi's church, was briefly examined in order to determine its extent.

### Results and Interpretation

#### Eglwys Y Bedd :

Trenches B,C,D,E and F around Eglwys Y Bedd revealed an identical feature towards the upper levels of the sections. A distinct cut could clearly be seen in all of the above mentioned trenches, filled by a dark brown / black organic sand containing modern pottery and rubbish. The cut did not extend across the whole length of the sections, but rather fell sharply from surface level near the middle of the section down until it butted against Eglwys Y Bedd. This feature probably represented a fairly modern backfilled path that once led around the church on the north and south sides.

#### South Wall : Area A

The most significant find along this narrow corridor between Eglwys Y Bedd and the south wall of the fort, was the stone paving. The paving, laid all the way along this corridor, was butted against both the south wall of Eglwys Y Bedd and the south wall of the fort, (fig. 9.) It was clear, therefore, that the paving could not have been constructed prior to the construction of the fort nor Eglwys Y Bedd. Further examination towards the west end of the corridor revealed that a second course of paving lay underneath. It was decided to remove part of the upper paving on this side in order to ascertain whether the lower course was similarly butted against the fort and church walls, or whether any lower paving stones ran underneath the south wall of the church. It was consequently proved that the lower paving was similarly butted against the church and fort walls. As previously described, in an attempt to understand the relationship between the paving courses and Eglwys Y Bedd, trench D was extended 0.5m westwards as far as the south west corner of Eglwys Y Bedd, forming an additional 1m section onto the west wall of Eglwys Y Bedd in trench A. Examination of this west section revealed no trace of the upper level of paving; however a stone slab clearly related to the lower course of paving was seen protruding out of this section. Given that this slab was still in its original position, it was hoped that the comparison between the soil make up around the slab and the composition of the soil underneath the church foundations / masonry on the exposed west side (Area B) would yield important information concerning the stratigraphical sequence.

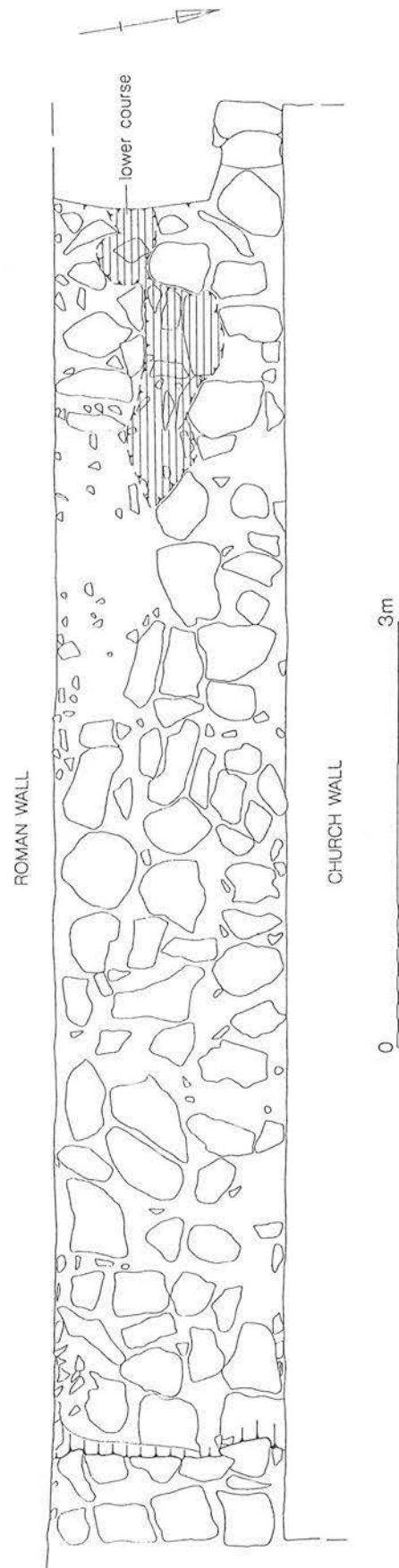


Fig. 9 Plan of paving courses in Area A

## West Wall : Area B

Following excavation of this area by the contractor, detailed recording was carried out within trench A. From the east facing section of the trench, a rounded depression could be seen towards the middle of the section, directly opposite the blocked doorway of the west wall of Eglwys Y Bedd, (fig. 10.) This 2m wide depression was predominantly filled with reddish / brown cinder, and the feature was probably the remains of a heavily trampled path leading towards the doorway in the west wall. Given that the doorway has been dated to the 15th or 16th Century, it may be suggested that the path, was a contemporary feature. The source of the cinder was almost certainly a blocked fireplace in the south wall of the fort, located towards the west end of Area A. It was not possible to ascertain how this entrance path into the church was related to the previously mentioned path which ran along the north and south walls of Eglwys Y Bedd (if at all.)

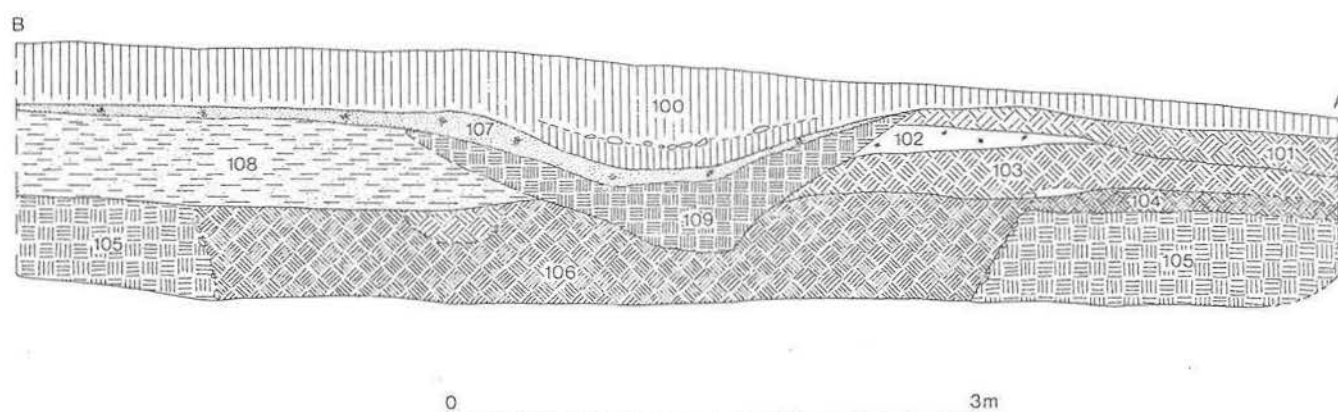


Fig. 10 Trench A(1) - East facing section

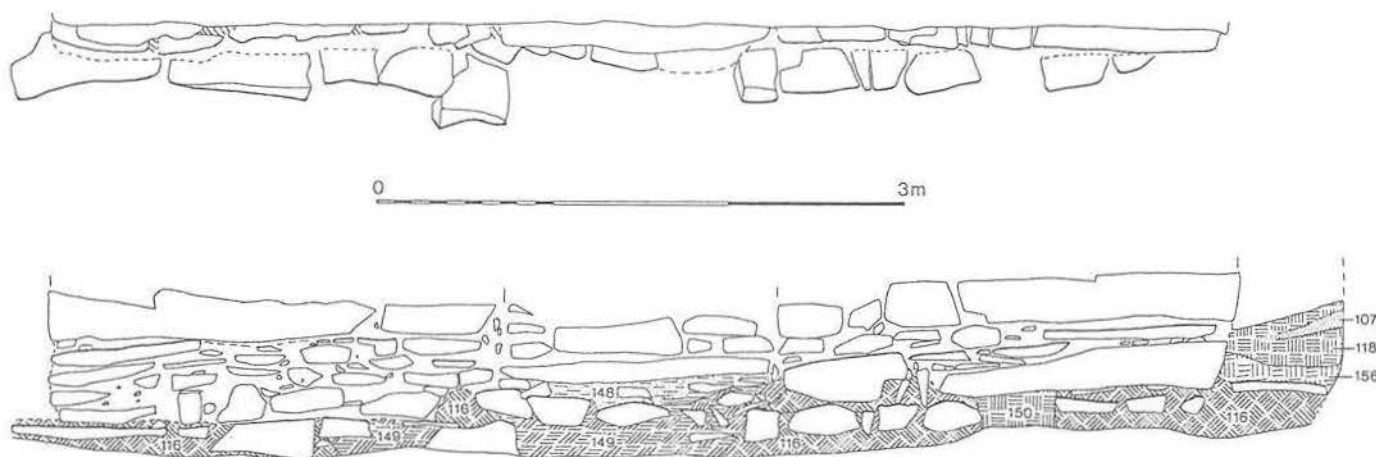


Fig. 11 Trench A - Plan and elevation of foundation courses of west wall of Eglwys y Bedd



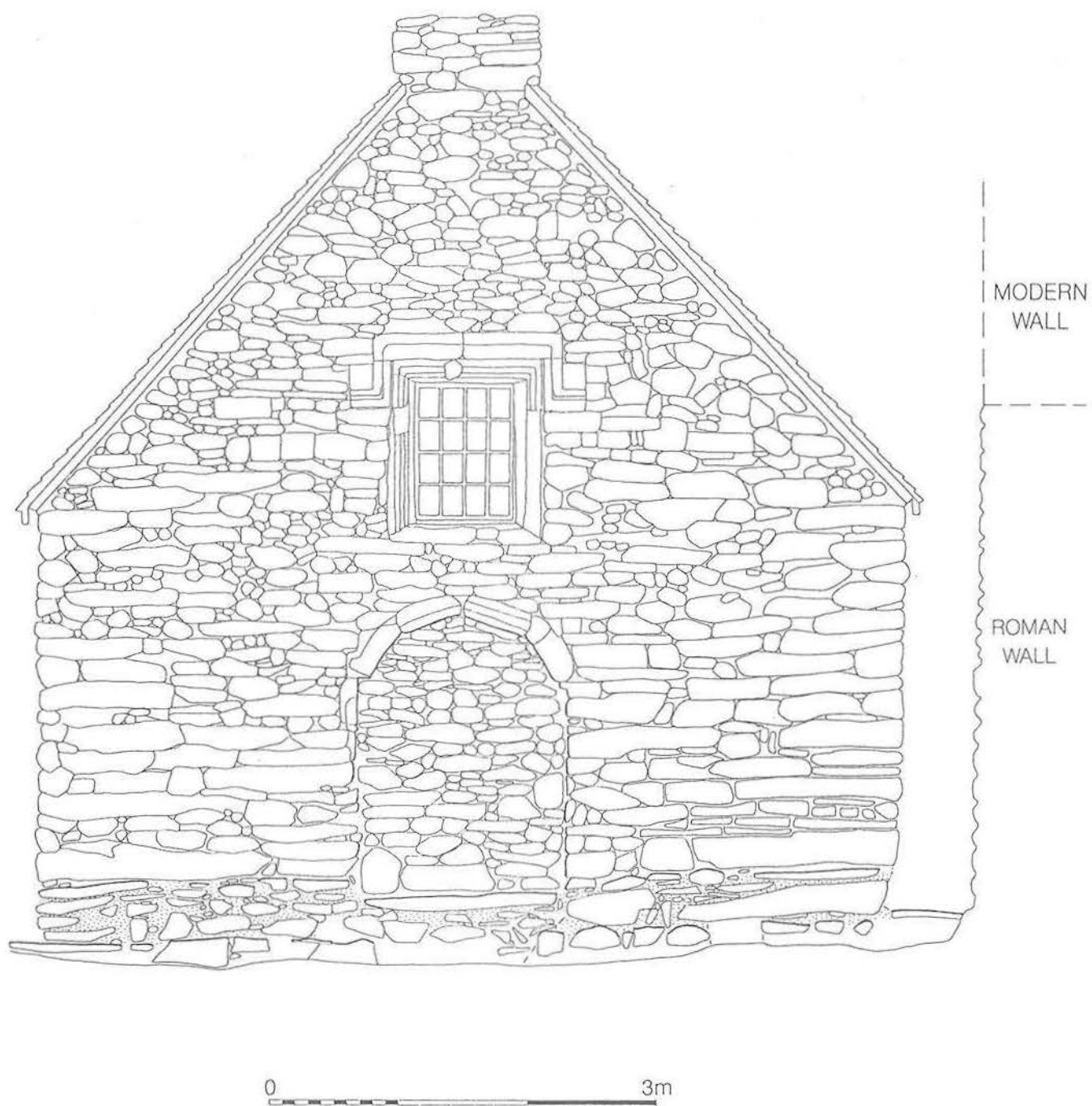


Fig. 12 Trench A - Elevation of West wall of Eglwys y Bedd

The west facing section revealed the west wall of Eglwys Y Bedd. Excavation of the area by the contractor had exposed a seemingly complex sequence of foundations under the wall, (figs 11, 12 and.) It was clear from the nature of the blocked doorway and its foundations that the general masonry at the base of the west wall may represent more than one phase of building. A large threshold plinth lying across the base of the doorway was clearly set on 5 distinct large rounded foundation stones. The plinth seemed to have been constructed at the same level and as part of a ledge of foundation plinths and stones (varying from one to two courses and up to 0.5m thick), running along the whole length of the west wall. The ledge formed a step protruding outwards some 0.2m from the straight edge of the west wall above. A markedly different style of foundation stones were set partly beneath the base of the wall, protruding out directly from beneath the ledge. This single course of foundation stones consisted of large rounded irregular boulders. Interestingly, this course was completely absent beneath the blocked doorway and its foundations. This suggests that the ledge and the contemporary blocked doorway were a later feature than the lower foundation course. The main arguments for this are as follows :

- a) there would be no reason to leave a hiatus in any foundation course in advance of a proposed doorway.
- b) the five foundation stones of the blocked doorway were set at a higher level than the lower course of foundations and seem to have been constructed to bridge an earlier gap deliberately.
- c) the ledge of foundations were set above a distinct light brown clayey silt, whereas the lower course of foundations lay within this silt.

The hiatus in the lower course directly beneath the blocked doorway however, remains an unexplained feature. The coincidental loss of stone from this particular area of the west wall should be disregarded because the location of the hiatus is too precise with regard to both edges of the doorway. The most likely explanation lies in the probability that an earlier doorway once stood here, and that the lower course of stones were the structural remains of an earlier building. This probability could not be further investigated given that the permitted depth of excavation was restricted to the depth of the proposed new path and wall.

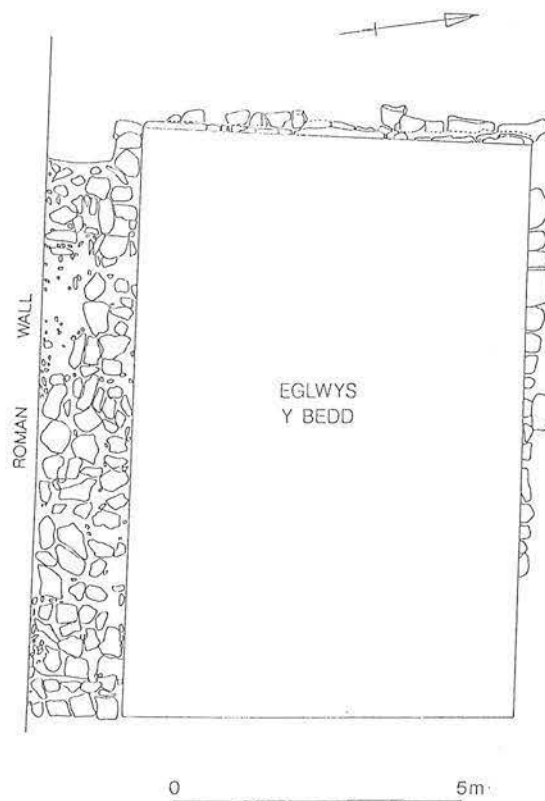


Fig. 13 General plan of foundation and paving courses associated with Eglwys y Bedd

It was noted earlier that the lower course of paving in Area A was seen protruding out of the section to the immediate south of the west wall of the church. Further examination revealed that this lower course of paving was contemporary with the ledge of foundations since the paving was similarly laid above the afore mentioned light brown clayey silt. Given that the ledge of foundations, the blocked doorway and the lower course of paving are contemporary features (the blocked doorway believed to be a 15th or 16th Century structure), related to the more recent occupation of the site, the upper paving in Area A can therefore be confidently regarded as an even later feature, (fig. 13.)

#### *North Wall : Area C*

Following the excavation of trenches E and F against the north wall of Eglwys Y Bedd, the whole area was excavated by the contractor, as with Area A, down to the level required for the construction of the new path. Once cleared, the foundation stones recorded in trenches E and F, (figs. 14 and 15), were found to be laid along the whole length of and partly underneath the north wall of Eglwys Y Bedd. These foundation stones were similar in style to the lowest course of stones at the base of the west wall, and were laid at the same level, strongly suggesting that they were part of the same structure. Curiously however, there was no trace of the ledge of foundations on this north side of the church, the wall seemingly laid straight on to the earliest foundations.

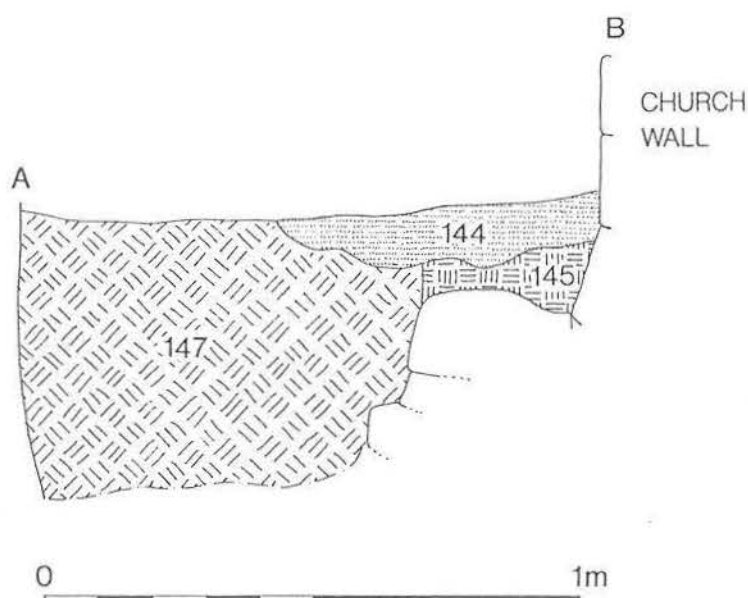


Fig. 14 Trench E - West facing section

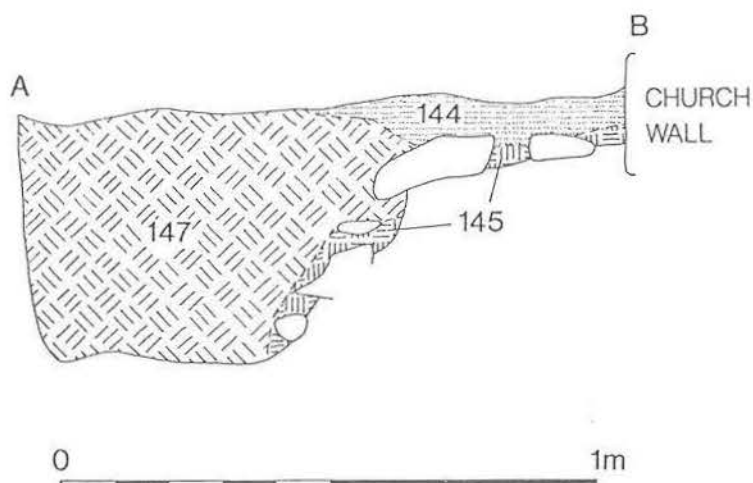


Fig. 15 Trench F - West facing section

## Existing Paths

The excavation of the main path by the contractors from the north gate of the fort past the east side of St. Cybi's church towards Eglwys Y Bedd did not yield any archaeological material of great antiquity. The excavation, in preparation of a new path, did not exceed 0.2m in depth; and a 13% sample of the path in this area only yielded occasional fragments of modern pottery and glass.

The second path, leading from Eglwys Y Bedd to the south porch of St. Cybi's church, was also examined during its excavation. Immediately to the east of Eglwys Y Bedd, two inscribed slate gravestones were unearthed (A and B), denoting a total of four 19th century burials (a single burial and a family communal burial of three.) The gravestone associated with the single burial, (A), was raised and laid flush at surface level with the new path. The gravestone of the communal burial, (B) could not easily be raised without disturbing it extensively. It was therefore decided to record the inscribed stone in its original position and insert a replica of the slate gravestone, complete with the inscription, within the new path.

## Lighting Duct

Both previously turfed-over gravestones (C and D), discovered during the excavation of the electricity connection duct were devoid of any inscriptions. The gravestone located to the immediate south of St. Cybi's church, (C), was briefly examined in order to find its maximum extent. The uninscribed slate gravestone was dressed along its edges and corners, but had weathered considerably resulting in numerous fragments of shattered slate bedded beneath the slab. The gravestone lay on top of a crudely shaped, and again uninscribed, flat 'rock', which, given the increase in the number of bone fragments encountered at this level (approximately 0.5m deep), presumably overlaid the burial. Given the possible recent date of this burial it was decided not to continue the examination any further, and the maximum extent of the burial was not ascertained.

The second gravestone, (D), located further east, near the dividing wall between the upper and lower churchyards, was not investigated further.

## Summary

The excavation at St. Cybi's churchyard succeeded in yielding valuable information probably related to more than one phase of activity at Eglwys Y Bedd. Although not accurately datable, the features encountered at the west and south sides of the church were successfully unravelled into a general stratigraphical sequence.

It was also hoped to retrieve some information related to the Roman occupation of the site, particularly between the south walls of both the fort and Eglwys Y Bedd. The foundations of the fort wall were not reached, and this along with any other features of this period, presumably lay a good deal deeper than the layers of paving that were reached.

The project also demonstrated how the general build up of the churchyard has occurred at such a rapid rate. The discovery of four 19th Century gravestones during the construction of the lighting duct and paths serves to show how many fairly recent gravestones have been gradually hidden from view, several of which are probably unrecorded.

## Acknowledgements

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust gratefully acknowledge the co-operation and assistance of TACP Architects, Foster Davies Contractors Ltd., and Ynys Môn Borough Council during the excavation and watching brief at St. Cybi's churchyard, Caergybi.

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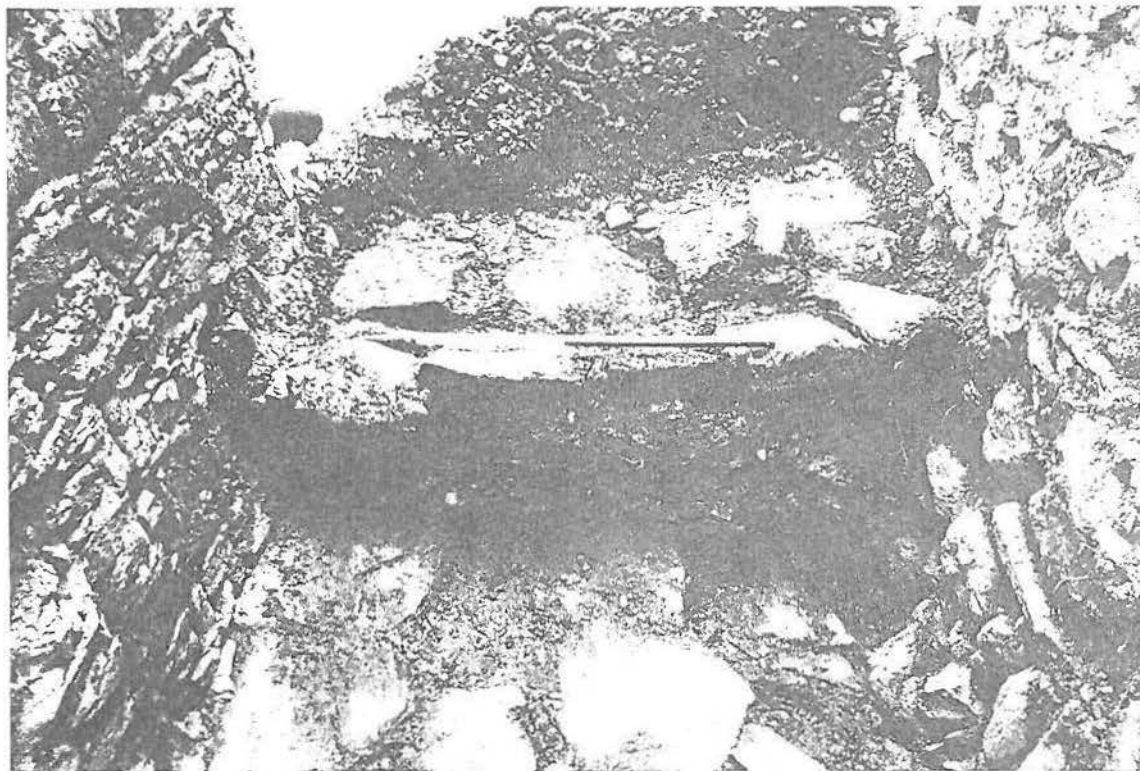


Plate 1 Trench B - West facing section

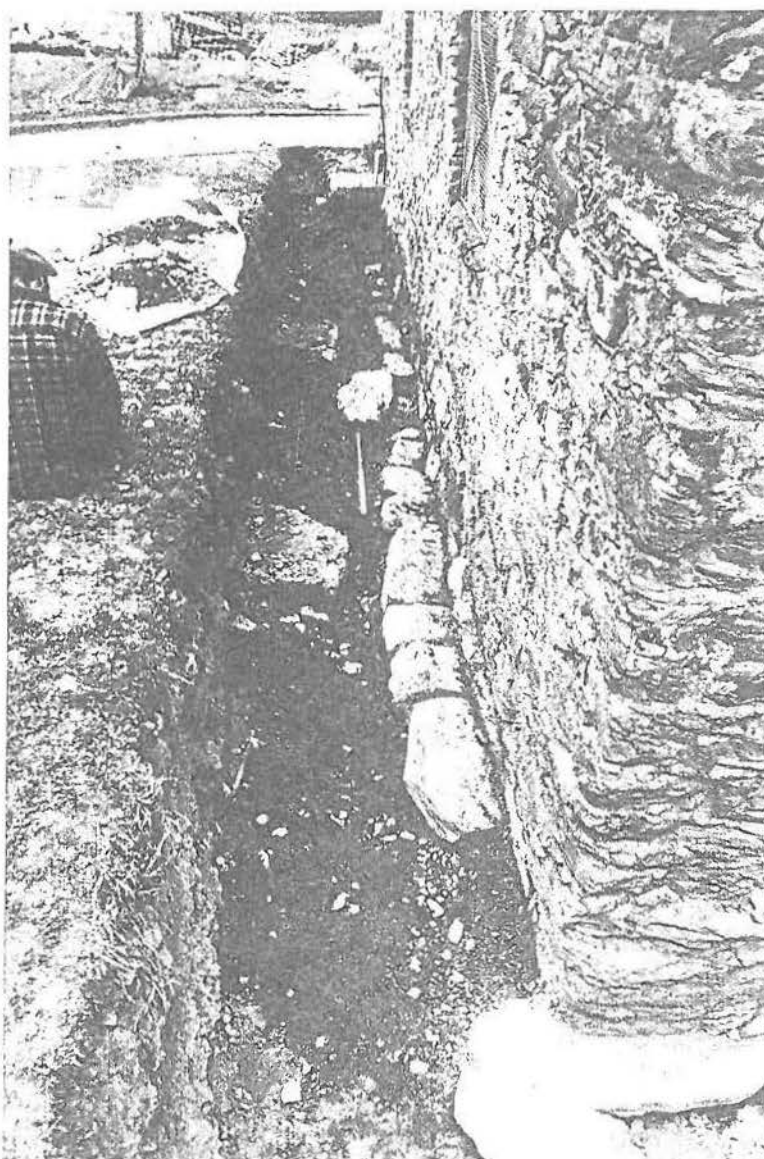


Plate 2 Area C (North Wall) - View along foundation course from west

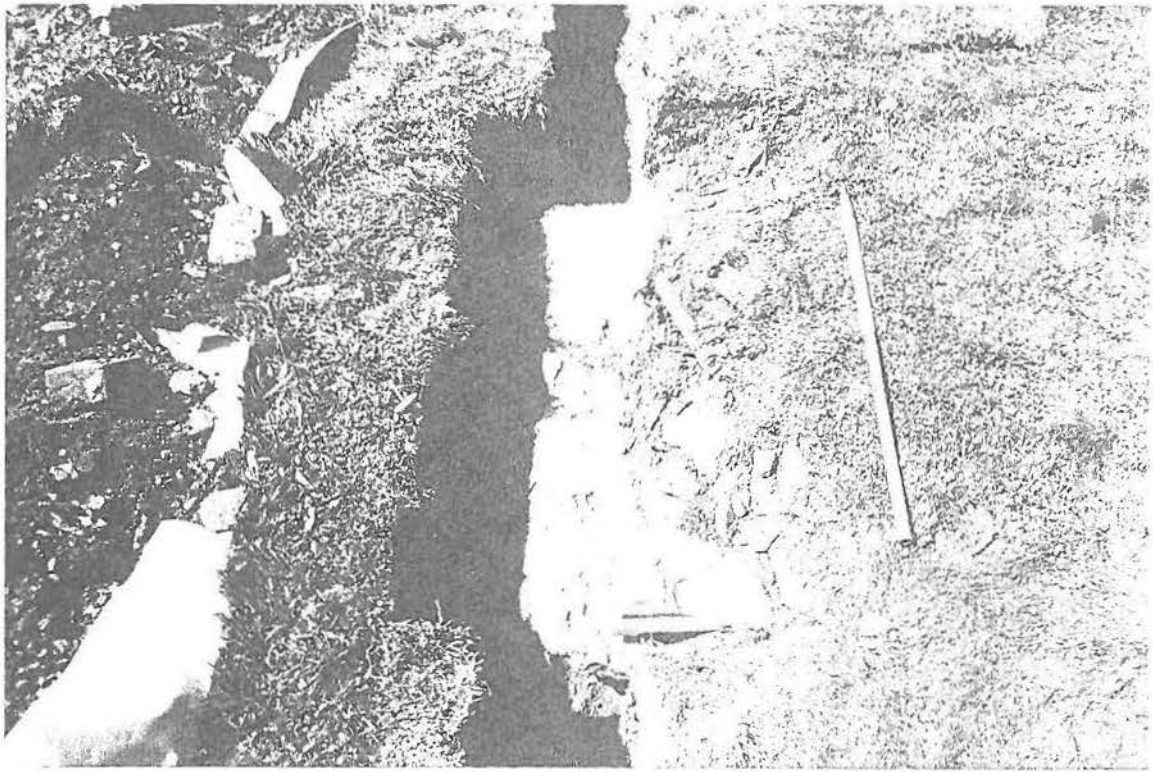


Plate 3 Grave C - View from East

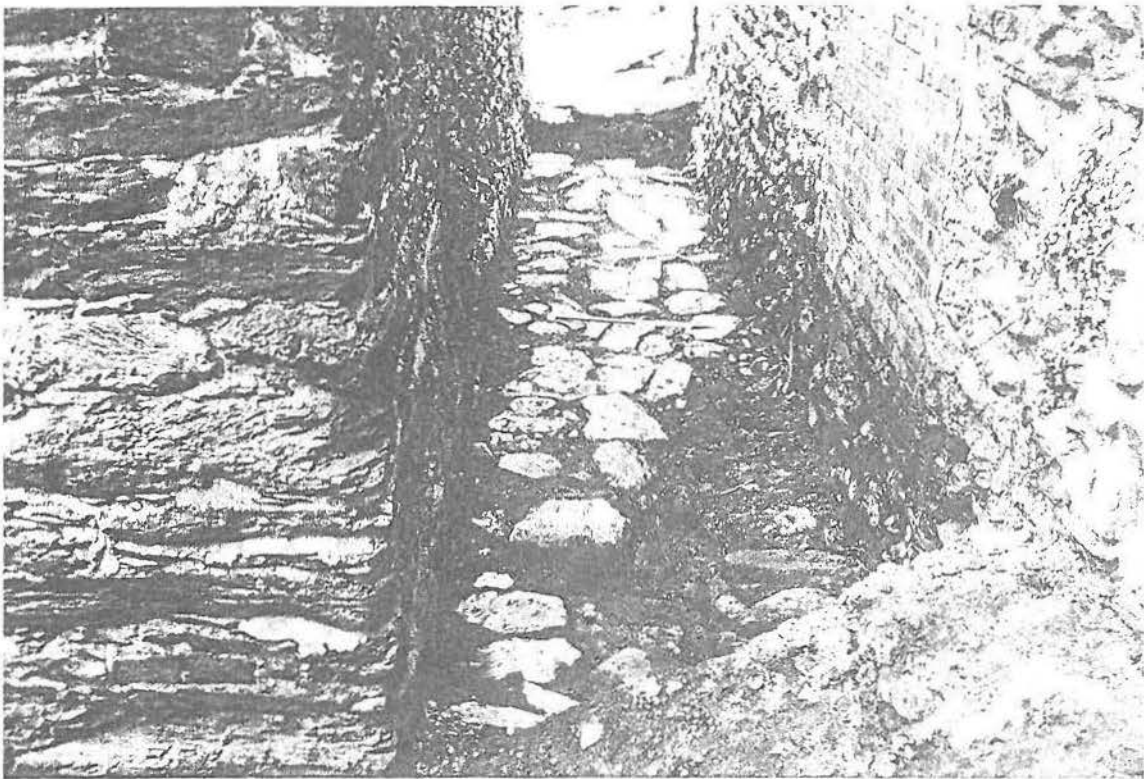


Plate 4 Area A - General view of paving from west

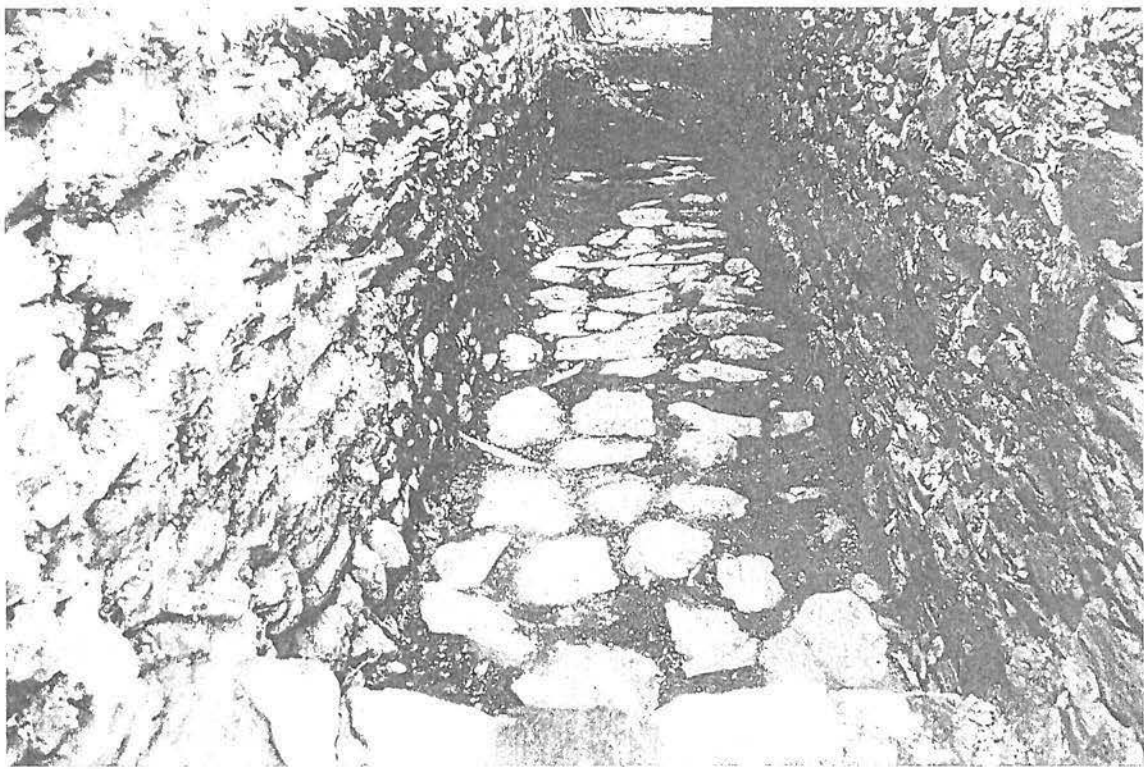


Plate 5 Area A - General view of paving from east

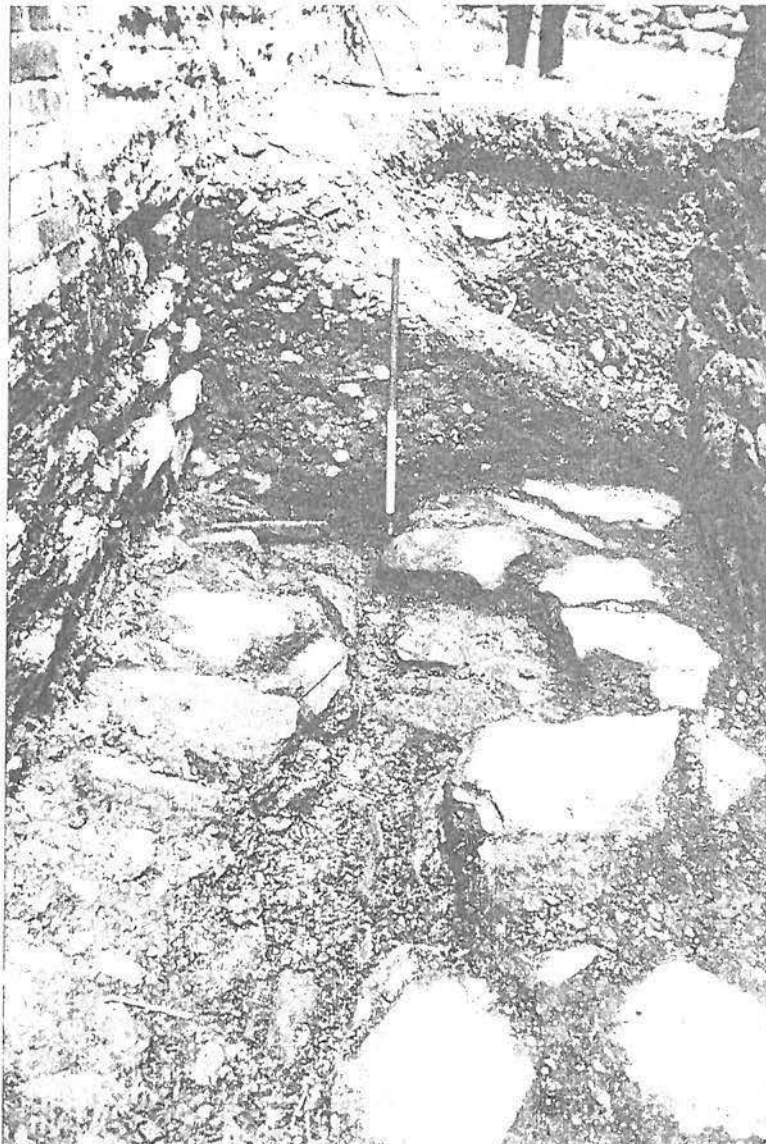


Plate 6 Area A - East facing section of Trench D, showing upper & lower paving courses.  
View from east



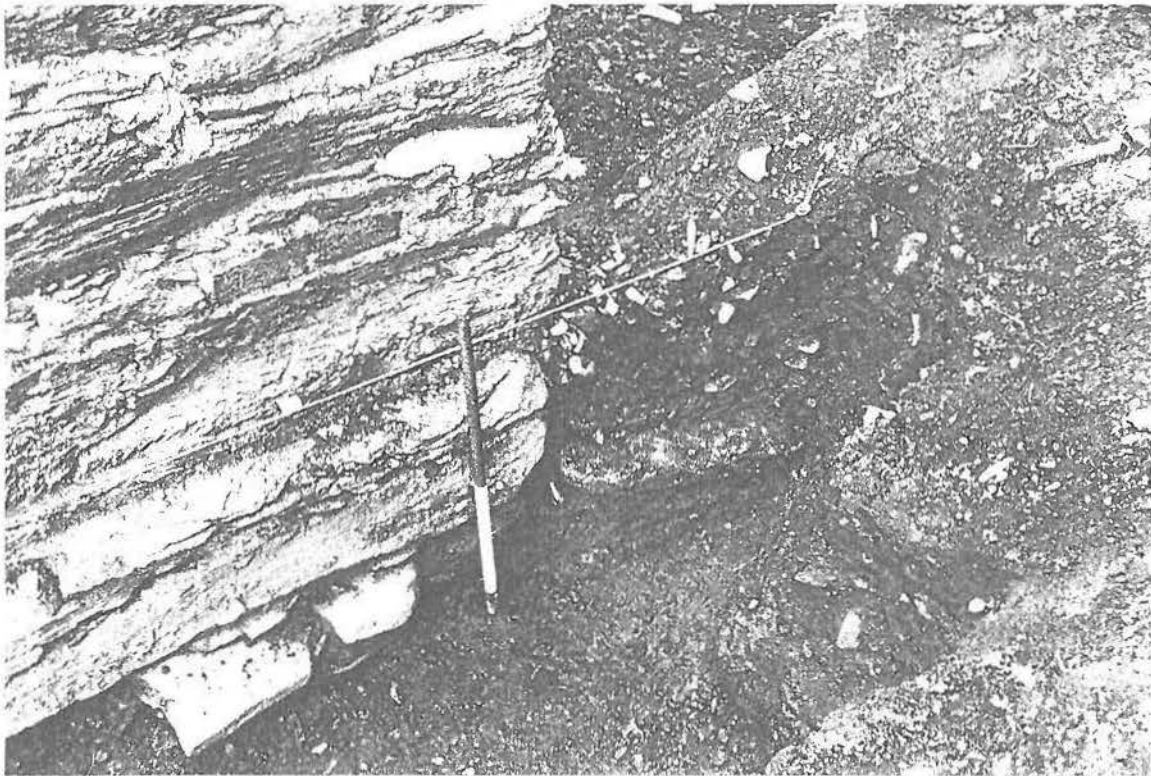


Plate 7 Area B - Relationship between lower paving course and west wall of Eglwys y Bedd  
View from north-west

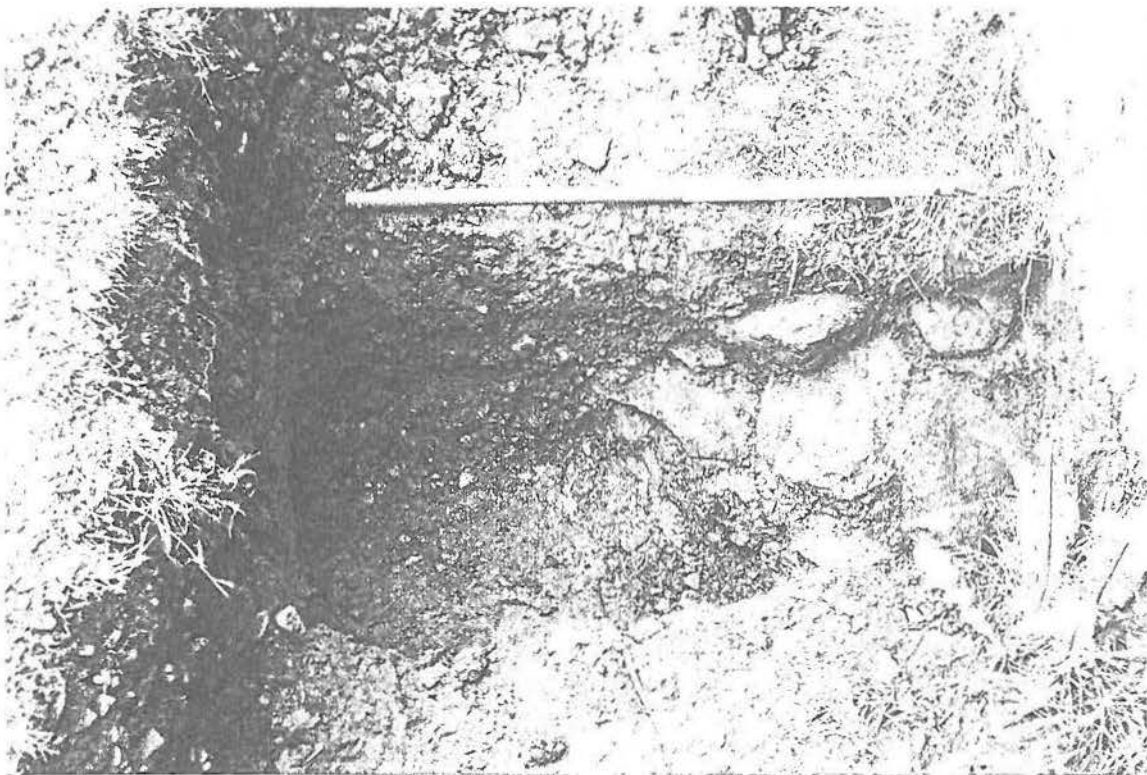


Plate 8 Area C - Trench F - West facing section

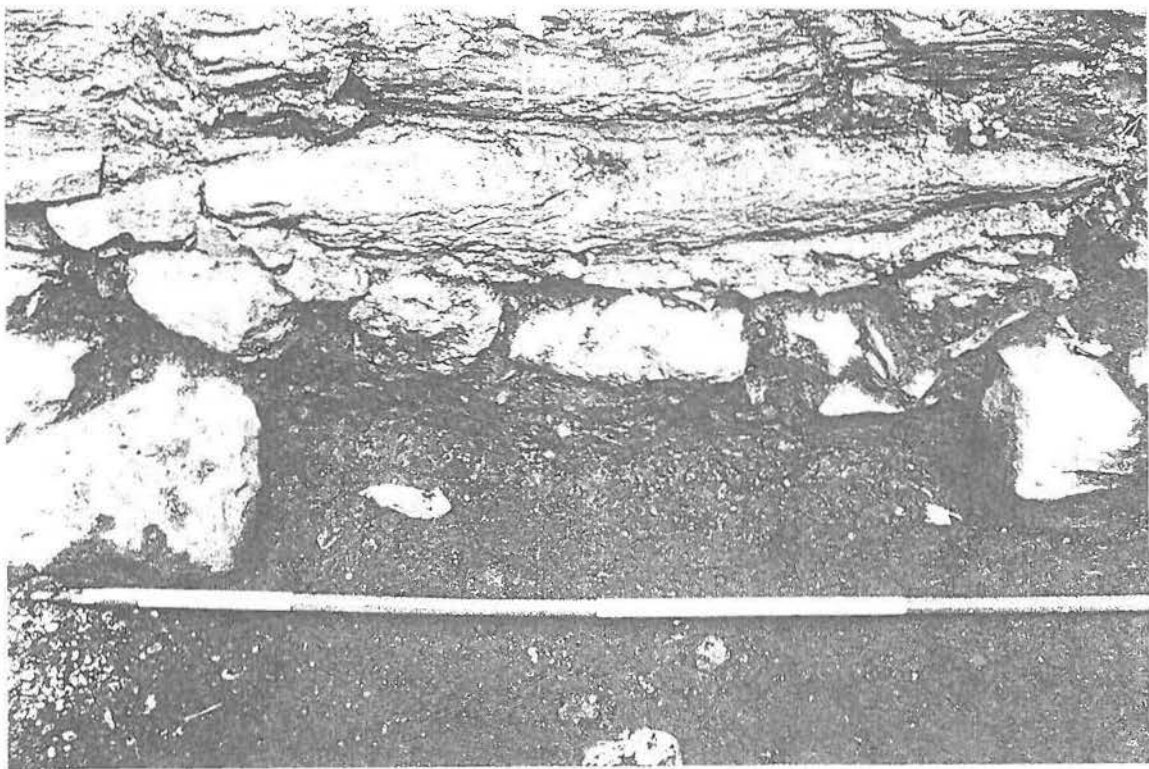


Plate 9 Area B - Trench A - Threshold plinth and foundation stones beneath west wall of Eglwys y Bedd  
Also showing hiatus in lower foundations beneath doorway - view from west

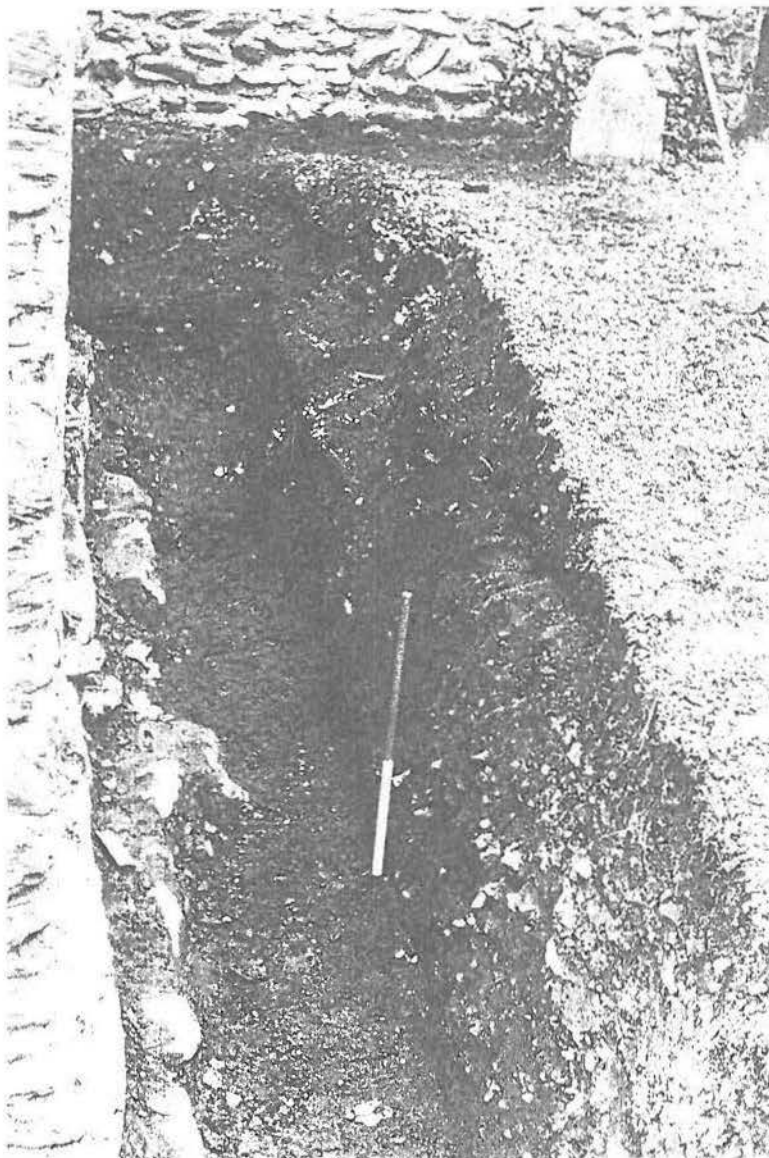


Plate 10 Area B - Trench A - East facing section and view along foundations of west wall

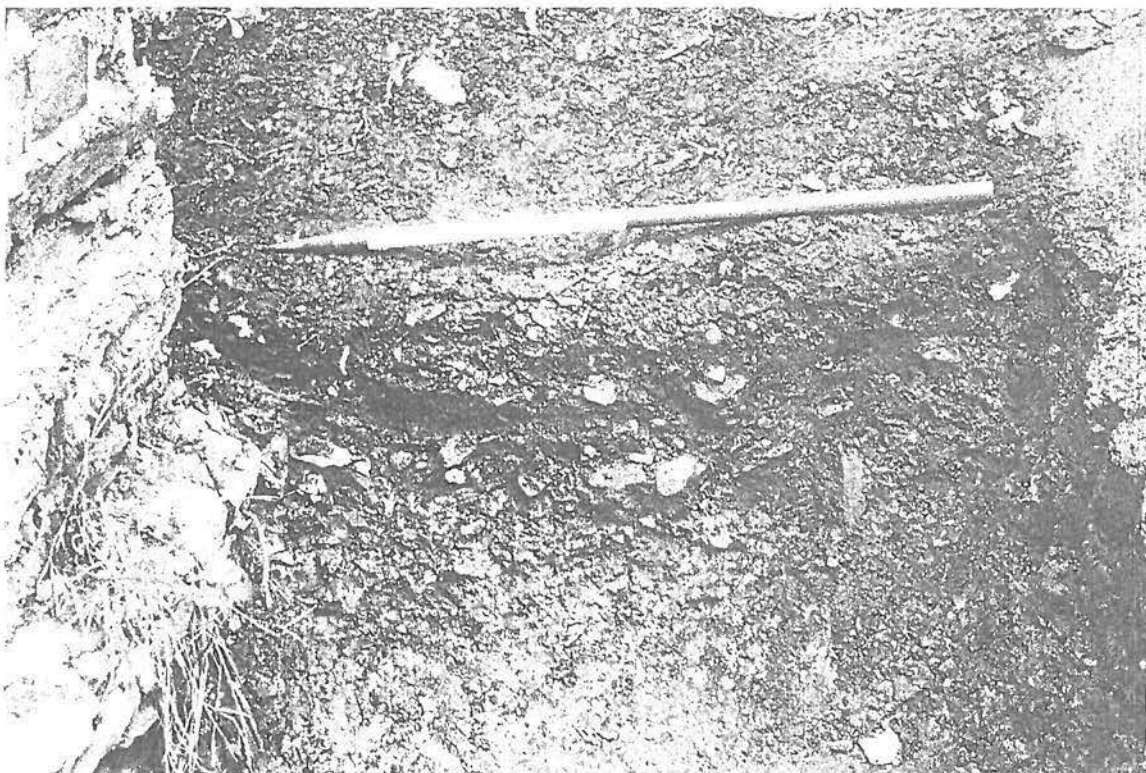


Plate 11 Area B - Trench A - North facing section (A2)

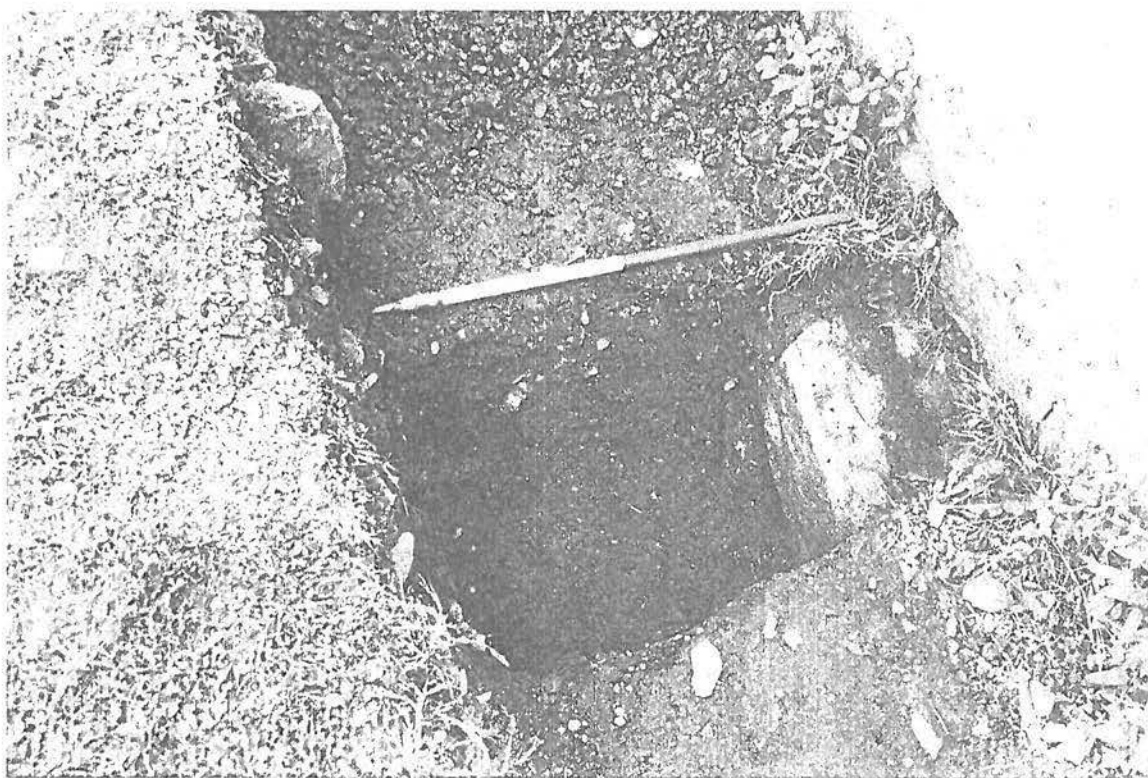


Plate 12 Area C - Trench E - West facing section



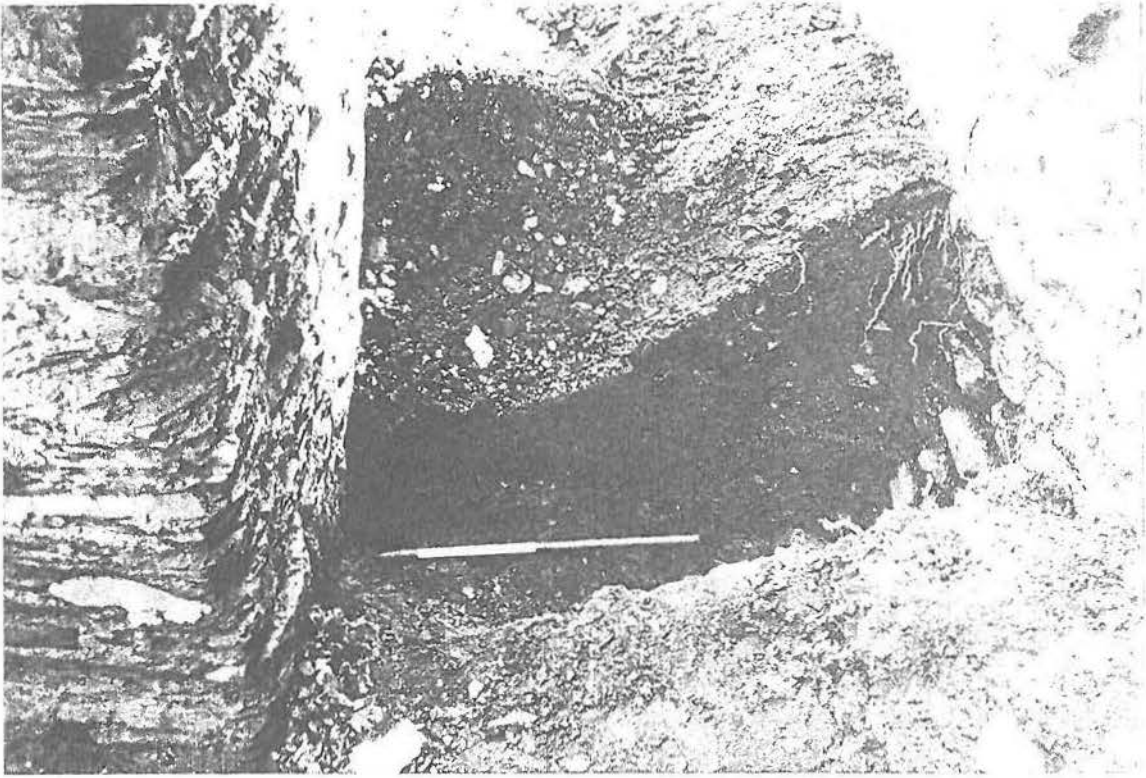


Plate 13 Area A - Trench D - West facing section