

NEWBOROUGH TERRACE,
CONWY, GWYNEDD
ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Report No. 51

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Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

NEWBOROUGH TERRACE,
CONWY, GWYNEDD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

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REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF LAND AT NEWBOROUGH TERRACE, CONWY, GWYNEDD

1. THE SITE

The archaeological and historical importance of Conwy Town and Castle is firmly acknowledged, being designated a World Heritage Site containing several Scheduled Ancient Monuments and buildings of architectural or historic interest.

The assessment site lies within the western angle of the Town Walls and comprises a small plot of waste ground to the rear of Newborough Terrace, off Upper Gate Street.(Fig. 1). It is bounded on the north west by the Town Wall and one of its towers with the backs of properties in Watkin Street forming the south west boundary. Entry is through a narrow alley from Upper Gate Street and a rough path runs to the back of Newborough Terrace where a retaining wall has been built against the slope which drops eastwards across the site from the Town Wall.

The plot, apparently known as "Crown Land" or the "Bishop's Garden", is heavily overgrown with bramble scrub; but access and use is claimed to be shared in common between the adjoining properties in Newborough Terrace and Upper Gate Street. The west corner of the plot, including the interior of the adjacent tower had been, at the time of an initial site visit in June 1992, encroached upon by a garden adjoining the end house in Watkin Street.

There is no evidence that any structures stood on the site, it is shown open on the Holland Estate Map of Conwy (1776), and presumably remained so from the foundation of the town in the late thirteenth century.

Because of its situation next to the Town Wall and the possibility that it is one of the few pieces of ground to have remained open since Conwy's foundation, the plot was thought to contain a potentially valuable and complete sequence of archaeological deposits, including palaeo-environmental material, covering the town's history from its foundation to the present.

An open and freely accessible site would have been a convenient place to dump rubbish and domestic waste. A good depth of archaeological deposits might have therefore survived, whereas excavations elsewhere in Conwy have shown that, because of the slope, the closeness of bedrock and limited building space within the Town Wall, archaeological deposits have often been very badly disturbed and truncated, and consequently lost for study, particularly with regard to the earlier periods.

The natural profile of the ground beneath the present surface was unknown, but a considerable accumulation of material above bedrock was anticipated. The archaeological potential was therefore, considered to be high.

2. CIRCUMSTANCES AND REQUIREMENT FOR THE WORK

Project Conwy are proposing to landscape the area as part of the general initiative to enhance the town's visual amenities. Draft proposals involve terracing the plot's existing profile resulting in ground disturbance and consequent damage to potential archaeological deposits. There was, therefore, a clear need to assess fully the proposed scheme for its archaeological implications following methods outlined below (3.).

The prime objective of the assessment was to gather sufficient information to establish the presence or otherwise, date, character, extent, quality and condition of any surviving archaeological deposits (including palaeo-environmental evidence) within the area of the proposed scheme. A detailed brief for the work was prepared by the Gwynedd County Sites and Monuments Record.

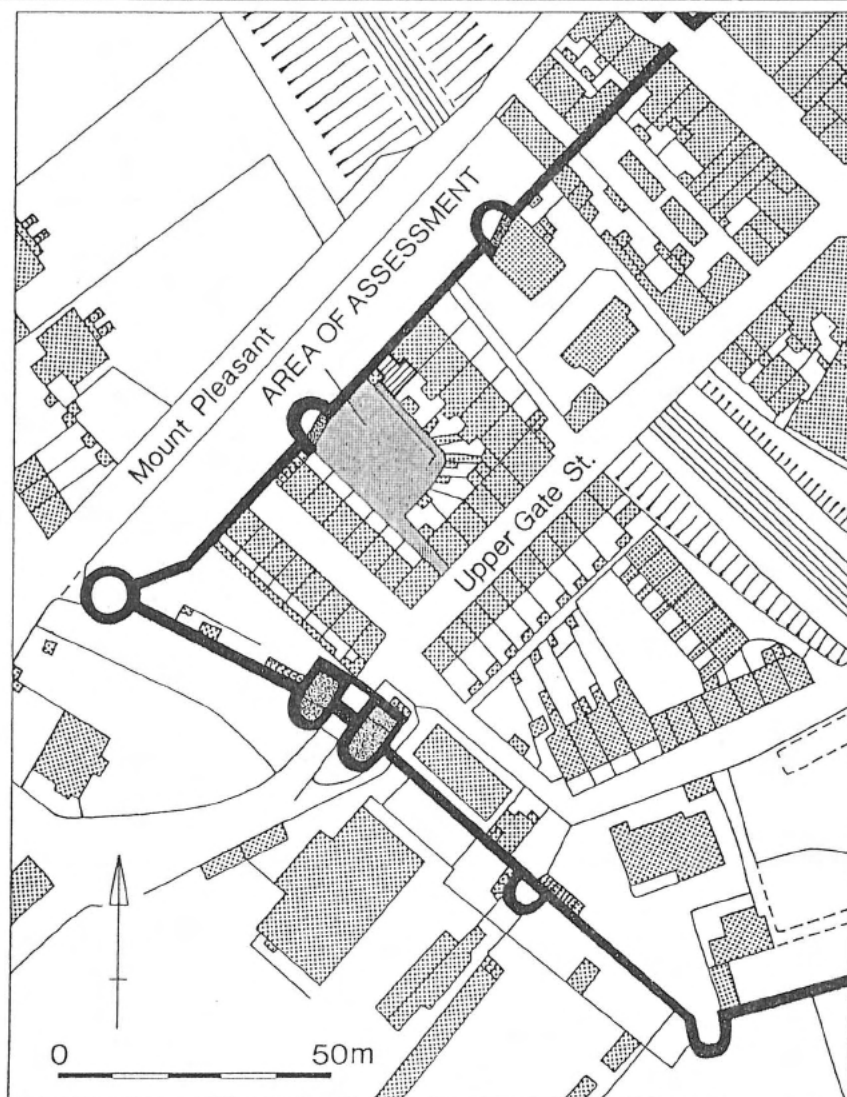
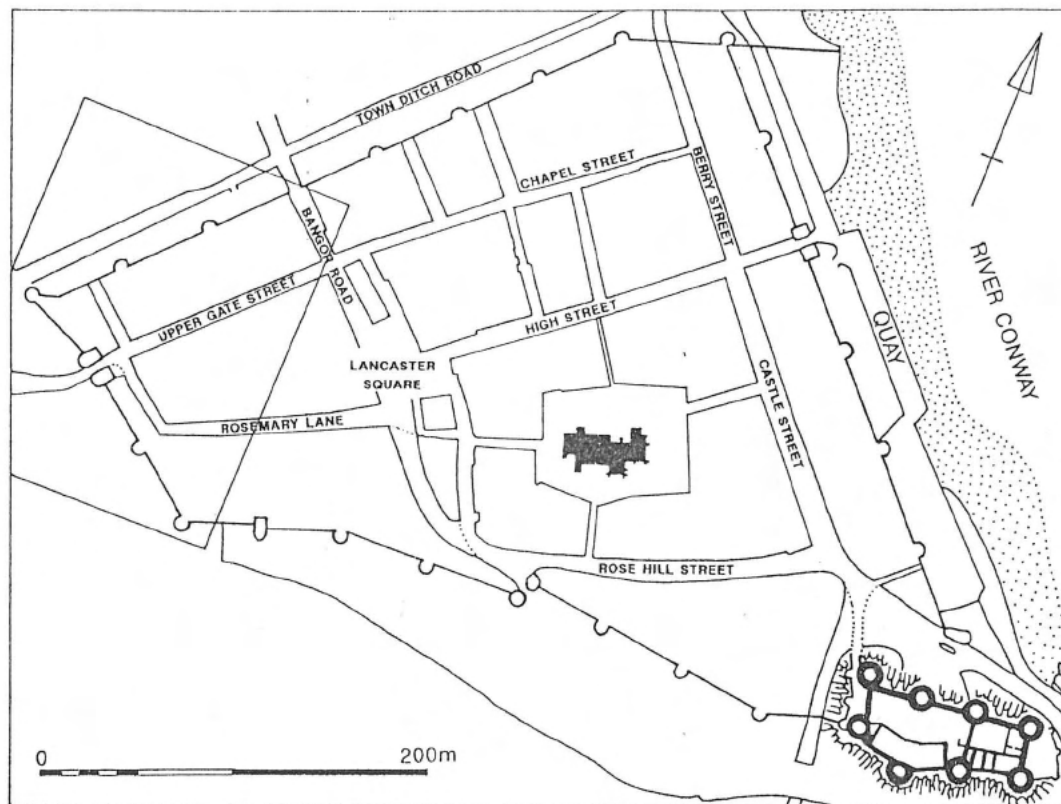


Fig 1 Site location.

The assessment also aimed to provide Project Conwy with sufficient information to take archaeological matters relating to the plot into account when considering future courses of action.

3. ASSESSMENT METHODS

Geophysical, remote sensing techniques were deemed to be of limited value on this site because of the small area involved. Limited access prevented the use of a machine to clear overburden.

Three hand-dug, trial trenches were initially planned in the locations indicated on Fig. 2 (A, B and C), as far as natural, undisturbed deposits, or if encountered, archaeological deposits, or potential archaeological deposits. In view of the results from trenches A and B and the stability and safety of the retaining wall next to the path, it was decided not to proceed with the excavation of trench C. The total area thus opened (11.25 sq m) represent a sample of about 3% of the area available for investigation.

All archaeological deposits and features identified were recorded by photographs, written descriptions, scale drawings (plans and sections), or a combination of these means. Excavation was limited mainly to defining the extent, nature and quality of the deposits and features revealed, consistent with the objectives of the evaluation (2. above), and to the collection of a sample of the pottery found. Where no archaeological features or deposits occurred, excavation proceeded as far as it was necessary to establish the presence of 'natural' undisturbed deposits, principally weathered bedrock on this site.

4. RESULTS

(a) Trench A (Fig. 3 top)

Trench A (7 x 1.25m) was located in the middle of the plot at right angles to the contours. The ground surface fell 2m between the upper, west end to the lower, east end. The trench was hand-dug down to a natural, orange-brown sandy silt, or dark grey clayey silt, interspersed with increasing amounts of weathered shale/mudstone bedrock towards the lower, east end (contexts 009 and 012 respectively). These deposits were sealed by a layer of light greyish brown friable, humic clayey silt, underneath a thin covering of dark brown/greyish brown topsoil comprising friable clayey silt. (contexts 002 and 001 respectively). Both contexts 001 and 002 contained numerous sherds of nineteenth and twentieth century glass, pottery and scraps of iron, samples of which have been retained.

The patches of redeposited natural material occurring within context 002 (Fig. 3, context 010) and its undulating, stepped lower boundary, with context 009 beneath, seem to indicate that an attempt to terrace the plot, possibly into a garden, had been made in relatively recent times.

(b) Trench B (Fig. 3. bottom)

Trench B (2.5 x 1.25m) was located just above the break of slope which runs parallel to the Town Wall along the north west side of the plot. The deposits comprised a similar sequence of material to that revealed in Trench A; however, in the west corner of the trench, part of a circular pit of about 0.75m diameter but of unknown depth containing a mixture of soil and modern rubbish had been cut (context 004). A band of lighter-coloured natural material (context 008) occurred on the south east side of the trench and could represent relatively recent terracing, similar to that noted in trench A.

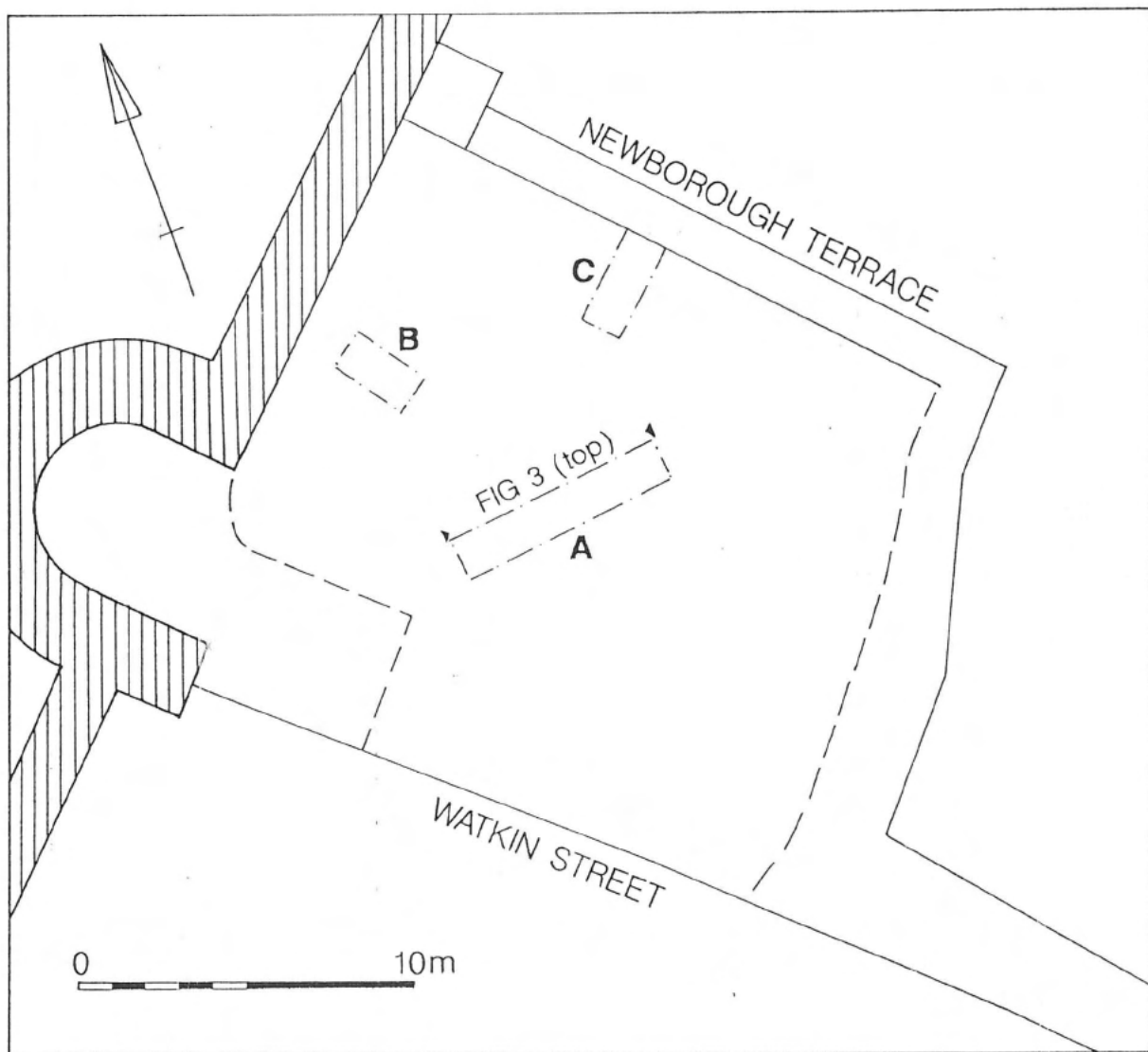
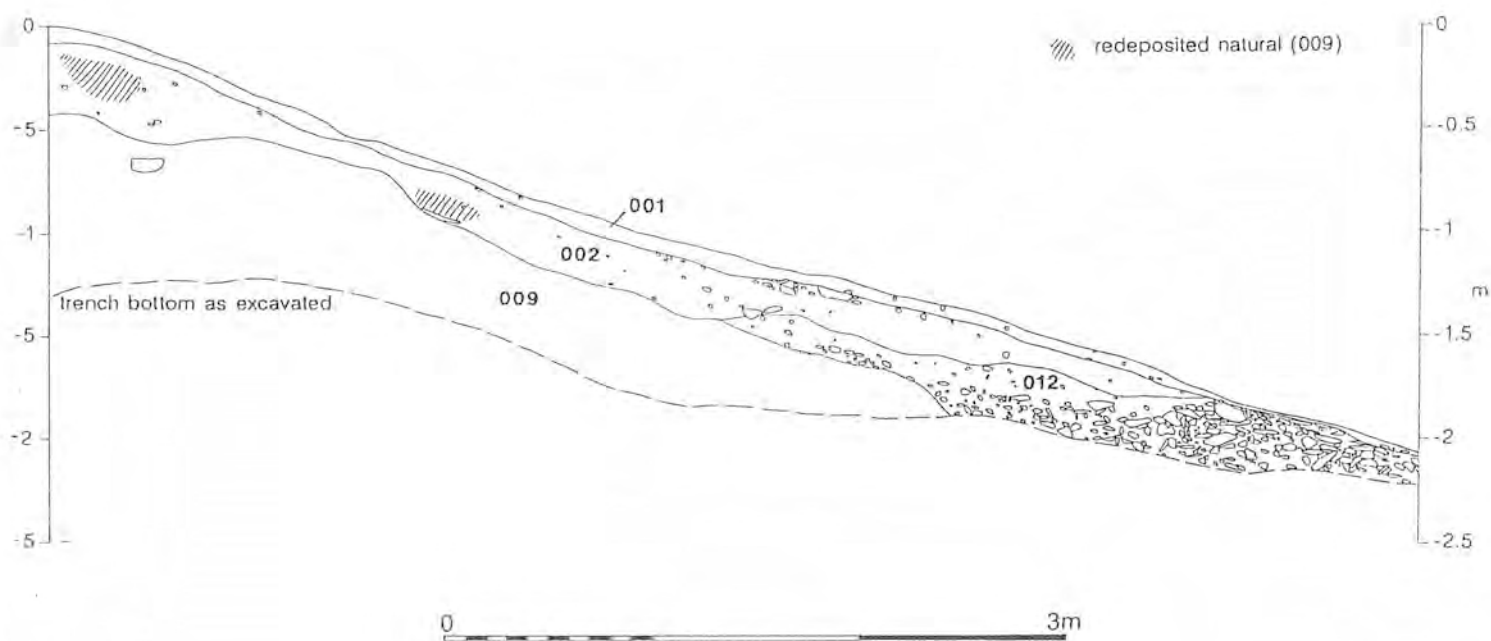


Fig 2 Plan of site and location of trenches (based on OS information and EDM ground survey).



Trench A - south facing section.

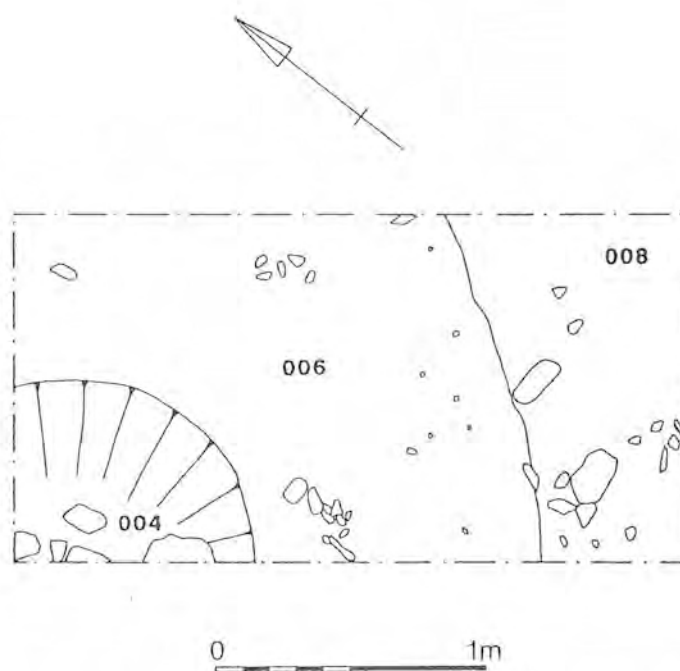


Fig 3 Trench B.

5. CONCLUSION

Contrary to initial expectations, nothing was found to suggest any activity on the site before the nineteenth century, presumably when the present configuration of houses in Newborough Terrace, Upper Gate Street and Watkin Street were built and superficial attempts were made possibly to model the plot into a terraced garden area. No further archaeological work would therefore seem to be required.

6. ARCHIVE

The full archive of original site records, drawn plans, photographs and sample collections of pottery sherds have been retained by the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, whilst copies of this report have been deposited with the Gwynedd County Sites and Monuments Record. A short note of the work will be submitted for publication in *Archaeology in Wales*.

R.S. Kelly
March 1993