

1, STRYD Y LLAN, NEFYN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

G1163
REPORT NO. 72

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

1, STRYD Y LLAN, NEFYN

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

prepared for Mr T E Owen

Cyngor Dosbarth Dwyfor
Planning Application No. 2/22/228 'A'

Ward, M.

1993

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Report No. 72

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF SITE FOR ERECTION OF FOUR DWELLINGS AT 1, STRYD Y LLAN, NEFYN.

1. INTRODUCTION

The brief required the excavation of two trenches, Trench A, close to and parallel to the street frontage of Stryd y Llan and Trench B perpendicular to Trench A to evaluate the area behind the street frontage. The trenches were laid out as shown in Fig.1. The area excavated was 20 square metres. All excavation was carried out by hand. The work was started on Tuesday 22nd November 1993 and completed on Monday 29th November. The work was hampered by frozen ground on the first two days and by flooding with surface rainwater and rising ground water on the other three days.

2. PREVIOUS EVIDENCE

As described in the brief this was the first archaeological work to take place in Nefyn largely because of the density of existing settlement and the lack of recent development. Documentary evidence shows that in the medieval period Nefyn was one of the principal towns of Gwynedd, a regional administrative centre, a royal manor and a thriving commercial centre (Soulsby, 1982, 192-4). The topography of the town suggests that the main settlement in the medieval period would have been in the area between the motte and the church that is including the area of the present evaluation. However, despite being principally a Welsh settlement the town was effectively destroyed by Glyndwr's forces in 1400 and subsequently abandoned. The fortunes of the town did not recover for a long period and it appears that resettlement was haphazard and opportunistic which must have resulted in considerable change in tenure and settlement patterns (Jones Pierce, 1957, 44-6). The present settlement pattern may therefore be considerably different from that which existed prior to 1400. The first edition of the Ordnance Survey of 1840 (surveyed around 1820) shows no houses in the area of the present evaluation.

3. THE EXCAVATION

At present ground level the disturbed cobbled floor of the former garages was the first layer encountered (Fig 2, Layer 1), bounded at the rear by the footings of a stone wall. This wall was surprisingly well founded considering the otherwise flimsy nature of the wooden garages and so was probably a re-used pre-existing boundary wall. It was, however, quite a late feature, made of quarried stone and butting against the wall of the adjoining former bake-house to the north-east.

To the rear of the garages was a very deep, humic, well mixed cultivated soil which had already been truncated by machine. This layer was all basically of single phase but was divided into three on the basis of colour (Fig 2, Layers 7, 2 and 3). Lower down the profile it was lighter in colour with a greater proportion of grey silty clay and a smaller proportion of dark humus. Otherwise the three layers merged imperceptibly. This cultivated soil continued to a considerable depth, about 1000mm below the modern ground surface as well as extending beneath the former garage floor. This soil layer contained mainly 19th century pottery although including a few pieces of 16th century and 13th/14th century date.

The well-mixed garden soil lay over a grey, silty layer (Fig 2, Layer 4) averaging 200mm thick, which contained a considerable number of stones, mainly of broken shale but also included occasional beach pebbles and red sandstone fragments. Removal of this layer exposed a smooth, hard, well-defined layer (Fig 2, Layer 5), c. 100mm thick, of small grit, stones and iron pan. This was a natural layer formed by worm sorting and iron panning on the surface of the underlying natural, light grey clay subsoil (Fig 2, Layer 19).

In Trench A removal of **Layer 4** revealed three features cut into the iron-panned **Layer 5**. One was revealed only partially in the corner of the trench and so could not be fully understood but could be part of a small pit or gully (Figs 1 and 2, **Pit? 8**), with a depth of 280mm below the top of the subsoil surface. The only feature exposed sufficiently to allow interpretation was a narrow gully (Figs 1 and 2, **Gully 9**), c. 600mm wide and 200mm deep. Adjoining this in one place was a shallow scoop (Figs 1 and 2, **Scoop 12**). The fill of all three features was a mid grey silty loam very similar to, although less stony than, the general **Layer 4** and continuous with it as far as could be seen.

The surface of **Layer 4** and the underlying iron panned **Layer 5** was fairly level except at the north west end of Trench B where the subsoil surface sloped gradually down. This was a natural, not man-made slope and showed the levelling up of the surface by build-up of topsoil.

4. INTERPRETATION

a. **Layers 7, 2 and 3** are cultivated garden soil of post-medieval date, well mixed and gradually increased in depth over time by addition of middening material.

b. The gritty iron-panned **Layer 5** is a natural product of water percolation, worm sorting and iron-panning onto the top of the underlying impervious clay subsoil.

c. The grey stony **Layer 4** lacks humus and with a high proportion of stones was unlikely to ever have been a topsoil layer. The presence of a variety of stones suggest that it was some kind of open yard surface with imported stones added to it. The shale was locally derived but some of the pebbles were from the beach although others as well as the sandstone may be derived from local natural glacial drift deposits. As a yard it lacked a well-defined surface but its nature meant that usage would have caused churning. An alternative explanation could be that the stony layer was a result of worm sorting of the deep overlying cultivated soil. However, if this was so then some of the post-medieval pottery of the overlying loam should have been sorted out too but this was not the case. The layer contained no post-medieval pottery but did produce two well-stratified pieces of medieval date, one, with rouletted decoration and of possible 12th/13th century date.

d. The features **8, 9 and 12** are all contemporary with **Layer 4** in terms of stratigraphy although they produced no finds. Only **Gully 9** was exposed sufficiently to allow interpretation. This appeared to have been a small open drain within the yard represented by **Layer 4**. On its base were some water-laid silt and sand. Its line was close to, but not quite parallel to, the present street-front property boundary. Before the construction of the present sewage system which is culverted beneath *Stryd y Llan* the immediate area had a network of open drains and surface culverts. The stream which would have fed and flushed these now seems to have been diverted around the contours to join another stream on the north side of *St Mary's church*. Previously the network of drains and culverts must have flowed northwards to join as a larger watercourse the line of which is now preserved as the still existing crooked property boundary between the plots of houses facing west onto *Stryd y Fynnon* and those facing east onto *Stryd y Llan*. The orientation of **Gully 9** therefore makes more sense as it runs towards this former main drain. Even so one would expect open drains either to follow property boundaries or to have followed close to the road line. **Gully 9** apparently does neither of these and suggests therefore that its line might be related to a former slightly different layout of property boundaries.

The lack of pottery of 15th/16th century date is consistent with the historical record of destruction of the town in 1400 although there is on the other hand no stratigraphic evidence for such a destruction layer. In an area without houses or other structures this would probably just be marked by a cessation of activity or at least a change from a yard to cultivation or grazing and a gradual accumulation of loamy topsoil as does seem to have occurred.

5. SUMMARY

In the medieval period the immediate area of the evaluation was an open yard with drains but with no structures, domestic or otherwise. This later became a cultivated garden plot which continued until the present day apart from the construction of the garages. The plot belonged to a house fronting on to Stryd y Plas, structurally one of the oldest houses on that street. This seems likely to have been a 'town' farm, the extended plot to the rear on to Stryd y Llan forming its yard, where there must have been outbuildings. This accords with the absence of houses from this plot on the 1840 edition of the Ordnance Survey. However, because of the likely density of occupation and activity in the medieval town it is still possible that there may be structures or evidence of activity in the other half of the plot to that investigated.

The Gwynedd Archaeological Trust gratefully acknowledges the co-operation of Mr K Francis in the present work.

6. APPENDIX: REPORT ON SUBSEQUENT WATCHING BRIEF

Supplementary to the above report, a watching brief was carried out when the house development area was stripped of topsoil on 3.12.93. This exposed only bare clay or gravel subsoil (**Layer 5**) except in one place where there was a linear feature. This was excavated and recorded on 4.12.93. It proved to be 3.20m long and 0.65m wide, with maximum depth of 0.20m (below the surface of **Layer 5**) tapering off in depth and width at each end. This seemed to be the remnant of the base of a small gully (**Gully? 17**, Figs 1 and 2) the majority of which was either machined away in the previous work or removed during cultivation of the overlying garden soil in antiquity. The gully contained one fragment of medieval pottery and two pieces of possible oven lining consisting of burnt clay vitrified on one face. The latter were similar to another piece found nearby in **Layer 4** in Trench B. Gully 17 is therefore likely to be contemporary with the possible medieval yard surface, **Layer 4** and the **Gully 9** already located, and therefore be part of the same drainage system flowing northwards towards the main drain suggested to exist in that direction.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The present evaluation covered only half of the building plot covered by the planning application since the other half is not to be developed immediately. The work described above showed that there were no structures in the area evaluated, however, because of the likely density of occupation and activity within the medieval town it is still quite possible that there are structures or evidence of other activity in the other half of the building plot to the south west. It is therefore recommended that a provision is made for a controlled watching brief when construction begins on the other half of the plot. This should consist of a watching brief during removal of the topsoil with allowance for a break in machining at the surface of **Layer 4** (the probable medieval ground surface) to allow archaeological recording. The time required for this recording would depend on what is uncovered but a minimum of one day should be allowed.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Jones Pierce, T., 1957. 'The Old Borough of Nefyn', *Trans Caernarfon Historical Soc*, 18, 36-53.

Lewis, S., 1833. *A Topographical Dictionary of Wales*.

Ordnance Survey, First Edition, 1840. *Sheet 31, Harlech and Bardsey*.

Pennant, T., Ed J. Rhys, 1883. *Tours in Wales, 1773-6*.

Soulsby, G., 1982. *The Medieval Towns of Wales*, .

8. ARCHIVE

The excavation records will be stored at G. A. T., Garth Road, Bangor.

Context records: 19.

Drawings: 11.

Photographs: Mono, 16. Colour, 16.

Artifacts: 4 bags: pottery, flint, burnt clay. Recent pottery, glass, clay pipe stems and building materials from layers 1, 2, 3 and 7 were discarded on site.

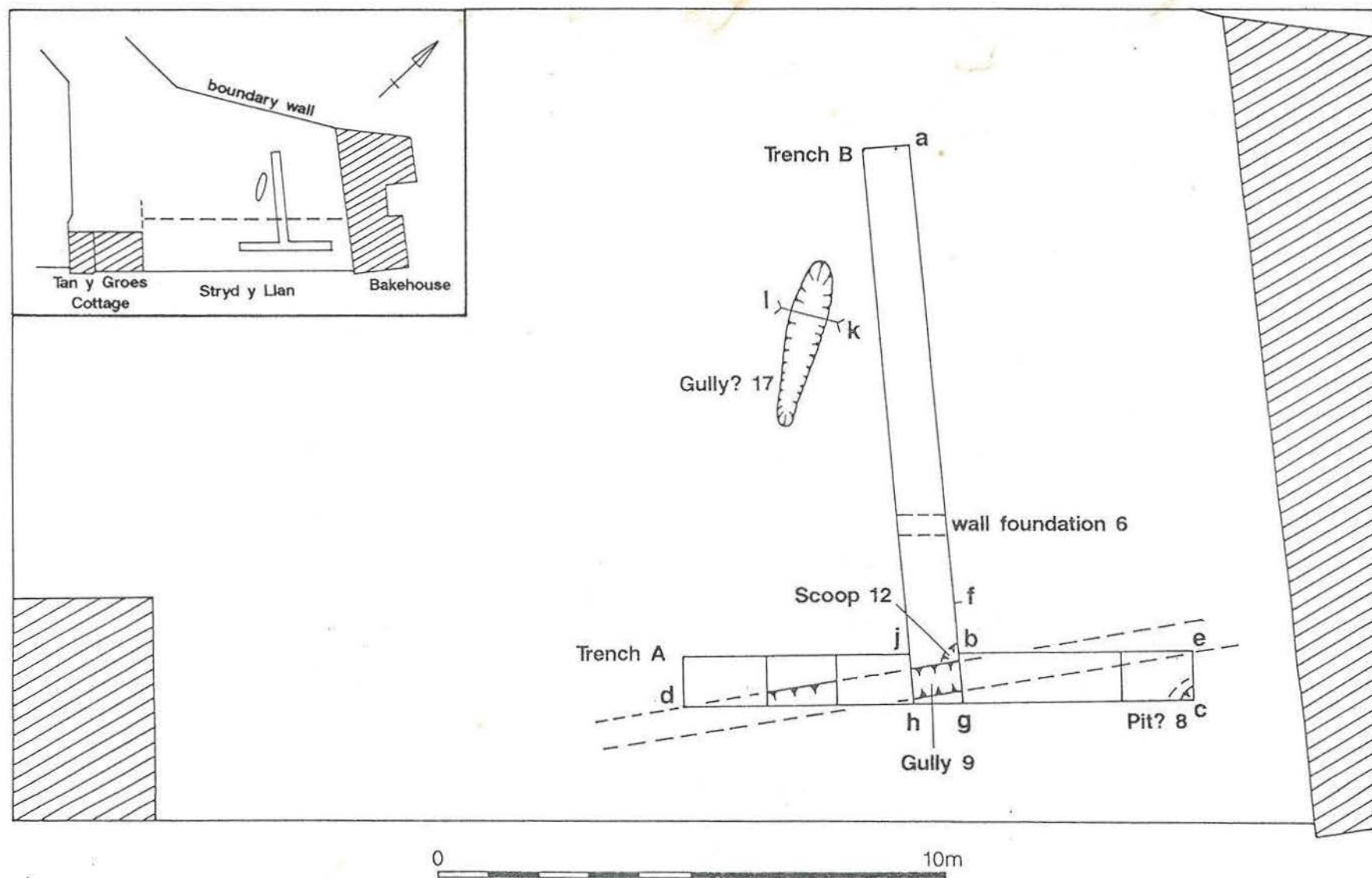
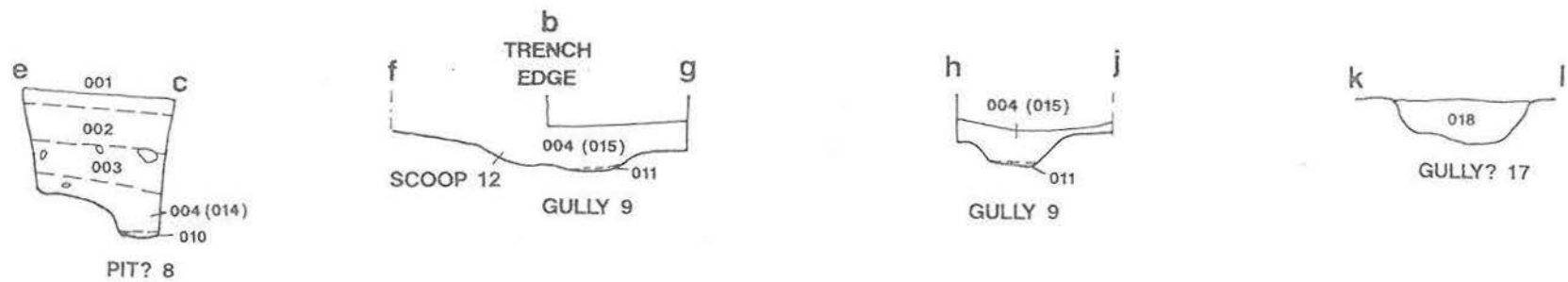
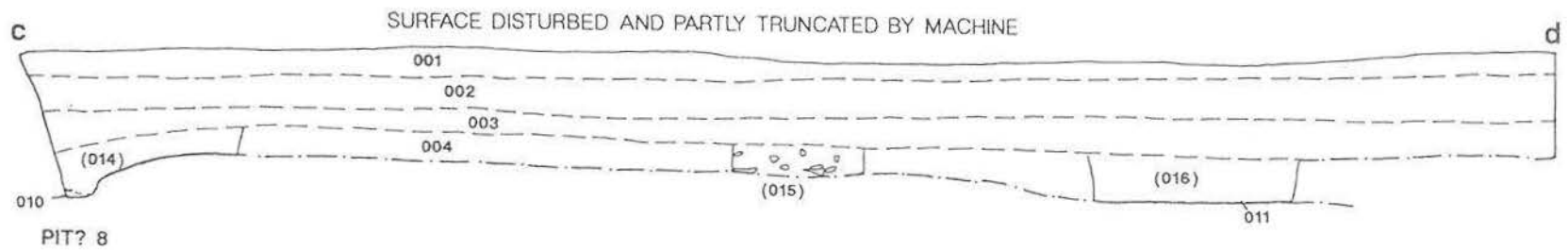
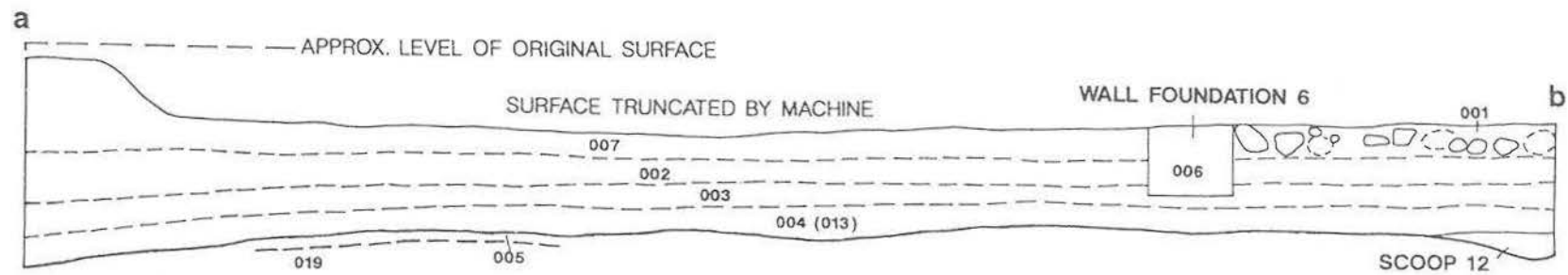


Fig. 1 Location plan.



- STONE
- ⊖ CAVITY

Fig. 2 Trench sections.

APPENDIX

GWYNEDD COUNTY SITES AND MONUMENTS RECORD

Brief for Archaeological Evaluation of

ERECTION OF 4 DWELLINGS,

1, STRYD Y LLAN, NEFYN.

Prepared for Mr T E Owen.

Cyngor Dosbarth Dwyfor Planning Application 2/22/228'A'

1. INTRODUCTION.

A planning application for the demolition of eight garages and subsequent erection of four dwellings at 1 Stryd y Llan, Nefyn, was referred to Gwynedd Sites and Monuments Record (henceforth SMR) for its comments at the beginning of September, 1993.

The SMR's response, in a letter dated 13th September, was that as the application lay within an archaeologically sensitive area, in this instance the presumed medieval town of Nefyn, an archaeological response was required. Ideally this would have taken the form of a pre-determination evaluation, but practically this was not deemed possible and so permission was granted with a number of conditions, including

No development shall take place in the area indicated (this would be the area of archaeological interest) until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved by the Planning Authority.

It was reported to the SMR on 8th November 1993 that work on site had started on demolition and topsoil disturbance on the northern half of the site in breach of this. The site was visited by members of staff on 10th November, when it was observed that a number of the garages had been demolished and an area behind them stripped to a depth of c. 0.65m. It was concluded that this disturbance should have had minimal effect on any buried archaeological deposits.

In its role as archaeological advisor to Cyngor Dosbarth Dwyfor, the SMR has prepared a brief for the programme of archaeological work which is required in this instance. This is in line with current Welsh Office advice on dealing with archaeological matters in the planning process as laid out in PPG 16.

2. THE SITE AND ITS ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND.

Nefyn is a small town on the north coast of the Llŷn, Gwynedd (centred on SH 308405). Its historical importance and development is well summarised in the enclosed document (appendix A) which was produced as part of Gwynedd Archaeological Trust's *Llys and Maerdref* project. Particular attention is drawn to paragraph 5 which emphasises that in the 13th century, under the Welsh Princes, Nefyn was among the principal towns of Gwynedd. Despite its acknowledged historical importance, no substantial archaeological information relating to the earlier periods of the town's occupation has yet come to light.

The current application area (see maps 1 and 2) comprises a roughly rectangular plot of land, c.

30m x 20m aligned north-west south-east, near the centre of the town, facing on to Stryd y Llan. Due to its central location and its relatively undisturbed nature (a number of small garages and a cottage have occupied the front of the plot, whilst the remainder has been garden) the site appears to represent one of the only areas where there could be good surviving archaeological evidence relating to the development of Nefyn from medieval times onwards. It is very important, therefore, that the site receives full and proper archaeological investigation before it is destroyed by development.

The contractor's attention is drawn to the fact that there may be services crossing the site (see Guidance for Archaeological Contractors, paragraph 5).

3. THE BRIEF.

The applicant has indicated that he wishes to secure a programme of archaeological work to meet the condition of his planning consent. It is suggested that a two-staged approach might be most appropriate, and that the first stage of work to be undertaken should act as an evaluation to establish what, if any, further action is required to safeguard the archaeological interest of the site.

The brief has been prepared by Gwynedd Sites and Monuments Record on behalf of Cyngor Dosbarth Dwyfor in order to set out a programme of archaeological work which allows a contractor to provide a costed specification for the client.

The brief is to carry out an archaeological evaluation of the area which has planning permission (see map 2). The aim of the evaluation is to gather sufficient information to establish the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of the archaeological deposits (if any) in the area, so that they can be safeguarded by a suitable mitigatory strategy before the development proceeds. The preferred option, wherever possible, is the preservation in situ of significant archaeological features. The possibility of achieving this through design modification or other mitigatory measures should be considered. Only where preservation in situ proves impracticable should a reserve option of preservation by record (i.e. rescue excavation) be considered.

The scope of the evaluation should be as follows:-

- 1) A brief appraisal of existing data relating to the area, such as SMR information, aerial photographs, tithe maps, estate surveys, local society records, geotechnical data, other accessible documents, oral evidence etc. as appropriate and available.
- 2) Trial trenching at an appropriate level. It is proposed that two trenches be dug, one along the supposed street front, and another running perpendicular to the rear. The precise location of the trenches will be decided by the contractor (in discussion with the SMR) on site, following the establishment of what services are present, but the following model (see map 2, A and B) is suggested:

Trench A. This should be c. 10m x 2m in size, set parallel to the street front in the area previously occupied by the garages. Garden topsoil and any other overburden can be removed by machine, but once archaeological features are encountered the trench must be cleaned by hand and inspected for features and then dug by hand. A representative sample of features should be half-sectioned (or otherwise sampled) and recorded to assess their depth, stratigraphy, nature, date and environmental potential.

Trench B. This should be c. 10m x 2m in size, offset from the centre of and perpendicular to trench A, across the rear of the area formerly occupied by the garages. Topsoil and other overburden can be removed by machine, but once archaeological features are encountered the trench must be cleaned by hand and inspected for features and then dug by hand. A representative sample of features should be half-sectioned (or otherwise sampled) and recorded to assess their stratigraphy, nature, date and environmental potential.

The combination of the two trenches should allow an assessment of the complexity, distribution and density of archaeological remains across the application area.

N.B. The excavations are to be undertaken with the proviso that they avoid damage or disturbance to any archaeological deposits other than that which is strictly necessary to achieve the aims of the evaluation. Trenches are to be recorded according to the normal principles of stratigraphic excavation (even where no archaeological deposits have been identified), and artefacts should be related to their contexts: any closely datable or typologically distinct items should be recorded three-dimensionally. Please refer to General Requirements for Archaeological Projects in Gwynedd - Guidelines for Contractors, a copy of which is enclosed.

3) The production of a report (see below).

4. REPORT.

The assessment will lead to the production of a report which will present a summary analysis of all field data, incorporate this with previously available information about the archaeology of the area, and assess the archaeological resource and the implications of the proposed scheme.

The report should be produced to an adequate publication standard and should specifically include the following:

- 1) A copy of the agreed Project Brief, probably as an appendix.
- 2) A summary of the results of the field evaluation, including the archaeological features identified, along with artefactual evidence (if any).
- 3) An interpretation of the results, placing them in their national and local context, and a clear statement of the potential archaeological importance of the site and associated features. This to be separate from 2).
- 4) Plans at an appropriate scale showing the trench layout (as excavated), and the features located. Section drawings should also be included.
- 5) A full bibliography of sources consulted.
- 6) Other archaeological information which is considered relevant to the application.
- 7) Recommendations for what further work (e.g. further excavation, watching brief) is required to safeguard the archaeological interest of the area.

A copy (or copies) of the report will be submitted to the client within a mutually agreed time-scale. In addition four copies should be lodged with the County Sites and Monuments Record at the same time on the understanding that this will become a public document after an appropriate period of time (generally not exceeding six months).

5. ARCHIVE.

A full archive including plans, photographs, photocopies, written material and any other material resulting from the project will be prepared. All plans, photographs and descriptions will be labelled and cross-referenced, and lodged in an appropriate place (to be decided in consultation with the Sites and Monuments Record) within six months of the completion of the project.

6. TENDERING AND PROJECT DESIGN.

All parts of the archaeological work outlined here should be carried out by a suitably qualified

archaeological practitioner, in accordance with the By-laws of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, to an agreed timetable.

A written Project Design should be submitted to and accepted by Gwynedd Sites and Monuments Record acting for Cyngor Dosbarth Dwyfor before any work commences. This should be based on the model set out in Management of Archaeological Projects 2 (English Heritage 1991), and contractors are expected to conform to the conditions set out in General Requirements for Archaeological Projects in Gwynedd - Guidelines for Contractors, a copy of which is appended. It is assumed that all potential contractors will have read and agreed to follow these guidelines. Specifically the Project Design should detail the following:

1. The name and suitability of the Project Director.
2. The proposed staffing levels.
3. The proposed programme of work, including projected timetable on site.
4. An itemised estimate of cost under the following headings:
staff time; travel and subsistence; equipment; other project costs;
report preparation; overheads.

7. MONITORING.

The project will be monitored by the Gwynedd Sites and Monuments Record. The contractor must ensure this by arranging monitoring meetings as follows:

1. A preliminary meeting at the start of the contract.
2. A progress meeting during the evaluation.
3. A meeting to discuss the draft before final submission.

8. FURTHER INFORMATION.

Before submitting a project design, it is recommended that potential contractors discuss the matter with the Gwynedd Sites and Monuments Record, from which source further details for clarification of any aspects of the brief may be obtained.

Gwynedd Sites and Monuments Record,
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust,
Garth Road,
Bangor,
Gwynedd.
LL57 2SE.
Tel: (0248) 370926

