

25 HIGH STREET, CONWY
WATCHING BRIEF

REPORT NO. 146

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

25 HIGH STREET, CONWY WATCHING BRIEF (G1307)

prepared for Mr. Sayer

by S. Jones

illustrations by L. A. Dutton

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SUMMARY

Three foundation trenches were excavated at the rear of 25 High St. Conwy. Two of the trenches revealed modern ground surfaces and make-up overlying a cultivated soil, whilst a fragment of dressed sandstone similar to the stonework on the nearby church was retrieved from the rubble fill of a modern wall in the third trench.

1. INTRODUCTION

A planning application was made to Aberconwy Borough Council for an extension to the existing property at 25 High Street Conwy. The Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service (GAPS), in its role as archaeological advisor to the local planning authorities, provided comment on the proposed development. GAPS indicated that, considering the location of the proposed development within the walled medieval town and only some 30m from St. Mary's Church, it was possible that important archaeological remains would be disturbed. As a result, GAPS recommended that a formal archaeological evaluation be carried out before development commenced.

An archaeological condition was therefore attached to the grant of planning permission by Aberconwy Borough Council. GAPS produced a project brief for the applicant defining the nature of the work required.

Subsequently, the results of the watching brief carried out at 27 High Street appeared to indicate that the area had been heavily disturbed and that significant archaeological deposits may not have survived. Taking this into account, and in order not to hold up the development unnecessarily, it was agreed with GAPS and the applicant that it would be acceptable for the archaeological work to take the form of a watching brief for the initial ground disturbance. Provision would then be made for more intensive recording/excavation if justified before the later phases of ground disturbance.

The applicant subsequently commissioned the Trust's Contracts Section to carry out this work.

2. BACKGROUND

The site is located at the rear of the shops on the south side of the High Street (see figure 1) and approximately 30m north-west of St. Mary's Church (SH 7810 7754). Parts of this church have been dated to the twelfth century and it is, therefore, thought to be part of the Cistercian abbey of Aberconwy which was founded on the site in 1172. The exact lay-out of the abbey is still unclear and it was hoped that evidence for the extent or use of the abbey's lands may have been forthcoming.

Cartographical evidence from the seventeenth century suggests that the rear of 25 High St. (or Great Street as it was known) was undeveloped, appearing as gardens or open land. Indeed, the site of the present car parking area at the rear of No. 25 was a garden until the last three or four years. The date of the rectangular stone built building to the south-east is unknown, although a similar building in the same location does appear on a map of the eighteenth century, while a map from 1884 refers to it as 'stables'.

3. AIMS AND METHODS

The contractors excavated three foundation trenches by hand. Two (A and B) were located at the rear of No. 25 High St. while a third (C) was located at the rear of No. 27 (see figure 1). Trenches A and C were located in the same position as two recently demolished stone walls. Excavation of the trenches commenced on Monday 9th of January and continued over five days until Friday 13th of January. This work was monitored by a single member of GAT staff and consisted of seven site visits over the five days. Recording involved photography both black and white prints, and colour transparencies all at 35mm format, scaled drawings and written descriptions of the deposits and features encountered.

4. RESULTS

Trench B (Figure 2)

Excavation commenced with Trench B, a SW - NE orientated trench 5.5m long by 0.6m wide and between 0.6m and 0.8m deep (see figure 1).

The lowest context encountered was a black/brown silt (006) which contained (10%) fragments of charcoal, mortar, shells, animal bone, animal teeth and sherds of nineteenth century pottery (notably Bulkley Ware). At a depth of 0.5m this was overlain by a compacted, stony grey/brown sandy silt (005) which also contained fragments of charcoal, mortar, animal bone, animal teeth and sherds of nineteenth century pottery. This was sealed by a very compacted creamy yellow mortar layer 50mm to 60mm thick (004). Overlying this at a depth of 0.34m was a compacted, stony, dark brown sandy silt (003). Within this context were lenses of charcoal/ash, 10mm thick. The remaining 0.25m to 0.30m consisted of rubble footings (002) for the concrete surface (001).

The brick wall appeared to be have been constructed on top of a stone built wall orientated WSW - ENE, approximately 0.3m wide and surviving to between 0.2m and 0.3m high. A nineteenth century pottery sherd was retrieved from beneath this stone wall (figure 2). The trench for the stone wall cut through all the layers apart from the concrete and rubble footing.

All the deposits above the black/brown silt (006) clearly butted the 'stable' wall, while 006 became stonier and more voided adjacent to the wall. However, no cut for the 'stable' wall was apparent (see figure 2).

Trench A (no figure)

Trench A was 7m long by 0.7m wide and 0.9m deep, orientated NW - SE in the same position as one of the previously demolished stone walls which divided a concrete surface from a tarmac surface (see figure 1). As the wall defined the limit of two separate areas the stratigraphy of the two sections differed.

Only 006 and 005 were present in both trenches A and B, and, therefore, predated the construction of the demolished stone wall (figure 2).

The SW facing section consisted of deposits 006 and 005 to a depth of 0.22m, overlying which was a dark brown stony sandy silt (008) below a pink gravel (009) and the tarmac surface (010). This surface and 009, both butted concrete steps which sealed approximately 4m of the NE end of the trench. A large clay sewage pipe ran across the trench in an E - W direction towards the man-hole to the SW, cutting through 006 to an approximate depth of 0.55m.

In the NE facing section, at a depth of 0.7m, a very stony yellowish brown gritty sand with lenses of orange/brown sandy silt (011) overlaid 006 and 005. The remaining 0.45m consisted of brick and sand make-up/footings for the concrete surface. The NW end of the trench was

disturbed by a man-hole and pipes leading to and from it.

Trench C

Trench C was 4.5m long by 0.7m wide, orientated NW - SE, in the same position as one of the demolished stone walls, the remains of which, tabular stones 0.2m by 0.3m in size, were removed to a depth of approximately 0.6m, as the trench was excavated. Again the wall defined the limit of two separated areas, hence the difference in the two recorded sections. Both sections had at their base a brownish yellow clayey silt, with flecks of charcoal (012).

South-West Facing Section (figure 3)

In the south-west facing section overlying 012, at a depth of 0.55m was a brownish yellow silty clay (013) which became stonier towards its base. Charcoal flecks were present. This was overlain by a greenish brown clayey silt (014) which again contained flecks of charcoal and fragments of white mortar. To the NW end of the trench these deposits had been cut by a large feature 'u'-shaped in profile some 1.8m wide, which was filled by a light brown clayey silt containing animal bone fragments (015) below a slightly darker silt with mortar and charcoal fragments (016). This feature and 014 had been sealed by a shale slab surface (017) from which a fragment of nineteenth century pottery was recovered. The remainder of the section consisted of another shale slab surface (018) which had been truncated by the insertion of a tile surface (019) at the NW end of the trench. The modern concrete surface (020) sealed the whole trench.

North-East Facing Section (no figure)

Above context 012 in the NE facing section was a grey brown clayey silt (021) which sloped down to the NW. This in turn was overlain by a burnt, black sandy silt rubble deposit (022) which appeared to be very similar to the blackish brown sandy silt and modern dump material recorded in the south-west end of the trench excavated during the previous watching brief carried out at the rear of 27 High St. (GAT 1289). In trench C this rubble was present in the south-east end of the trench and butted a red brick wall (orientated SW - NE, 0.4m high and 0.2m wide) 1.5m from the north-west end of the trench.

At the south-east end of the trench was a modern drain, whose cut and fill were sealed by the concrete surface (020). While at the NW end another cut, 'u'-shaped in profile, filled with redeposited natural (a yellowish clay - 023), in turn, cut two deposits of sandy silt which butted against the red brick wall. The concrete surface (020) completed the section.

At the bottom of the trench C, in its SW corner, beneath the demolished stone wall, a feature, semi-circular in plan, (0.6m by 0.5m) was noted cutting context 012 and was filled by context 014 and a number of shale stones (0.2m by 0.2m in size). No further investigation of this feature was undertaken.

The surviving stones of the NW - SE demolished wall butted the 'stable' wall, which at this point was constructed of bricks. A large brick fire place had been inserted into the NW stone wall of the stable at this point. At a depth of approximately 0.6m the brickwork ceased with the wall returning to a stone construction. The remains of the NW - SE wall now appeared to be bonded with this NW stone wall of the 'stable'. From the rubble fill of these lower courses of this bonded wall, a fragment of partly dressed pinky red sandstone was recovered. It is triangular in shape, with two sides partly covered in a white mortar. One side has been dressed, forming a curved surface with a small ledge (10mm wide) at the base of the curve. A second side may also have been dressed as a flat surface (see figure 4). Directly beneath this fragment was a sherd of eighteenth to nineteenth century pottery.

5. INTERPRETATION

Trenches A and B appear to confirm the cartographical evidence that this area was open and undeveloped during the last two hundred years, with the blackish silt (006) found at the base of these two trenches consistent with the cultivated soil of a garden or allotment. Pottery finds from this layer confirm the recent date.

Trench C was quite different demonstrating successive modern artificial surfaces on the east side of the demolished wall and what appears to be modern dumping or levelling on the west side against a brick wall. The trench appeared to confirm the continuation of the tile surface identified in the north-east end of the trench recorded during the previous watching brief (GAT 1289). Trench C also confirmed the presence of a similar dark brown dumped material (022) continuing to the south-east of the 1289 trench.

The now demolished wall in trench C appears to have been constructed in two phases. The earliest, from which the dressed sandstone block was retrieved, had been built as part of the north-west wall of the 'stables'. However, when the brick fire place was inserted, the existing stone wall was demolished to the ground level and replaced by the free-standing stone wall recently demolished. The location of the sandstone fragment suggests that it had been re-used in the construction of the earlier wall which due to the pottery evidence can not be earlier than the eighteenth century. The present state of the fragment, itself, does not allow for a diagnostic judgment on its date or purpose, however, its similarity to the decorative stonework on St. Mary's Church may suggest a possible origin and date for the fragment.

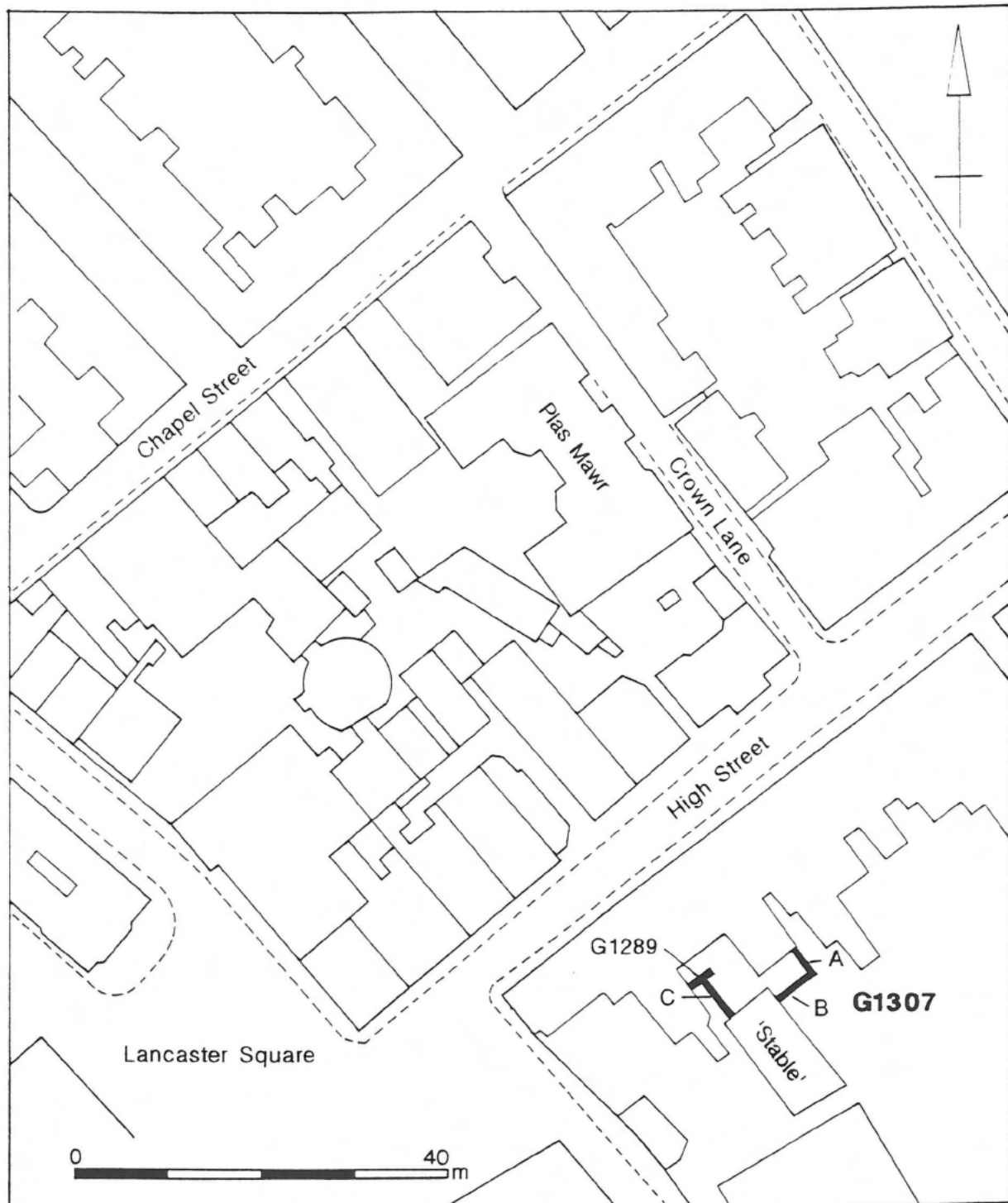
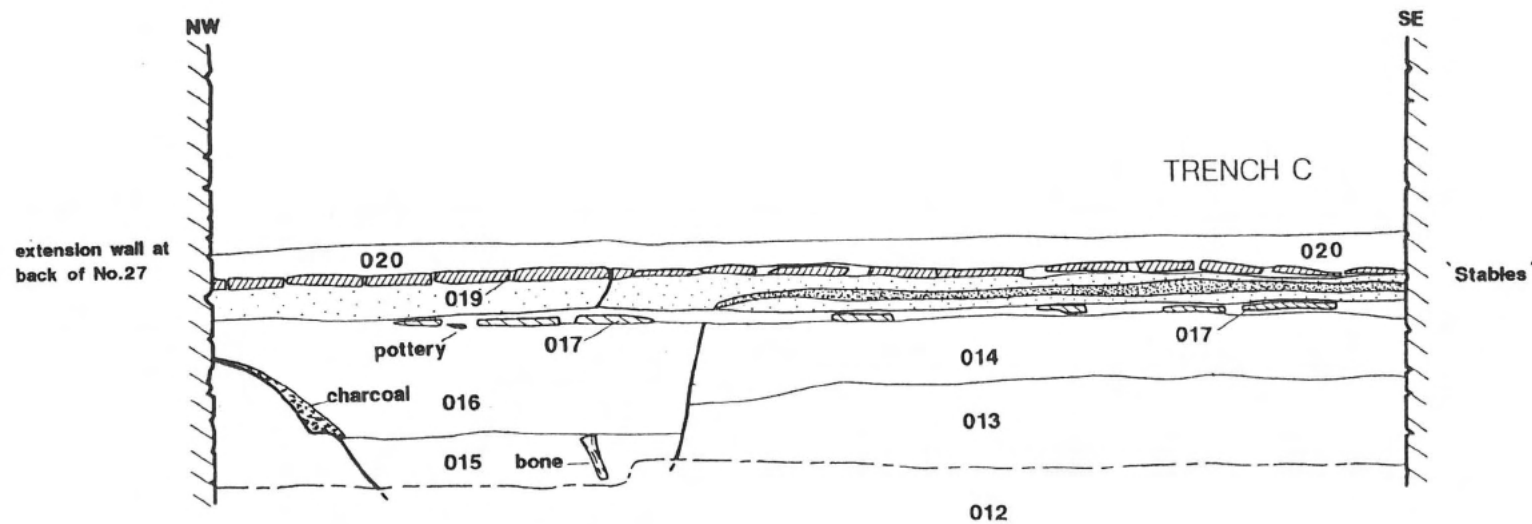
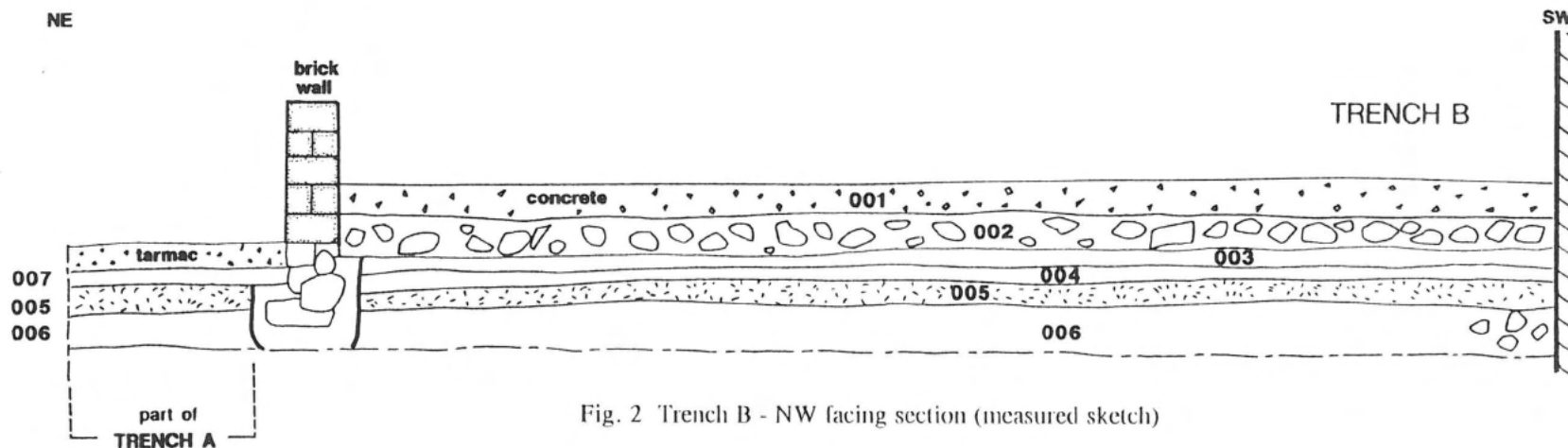


Fig. 1 Location of foundation trenches & previous Watching Brief - G1289



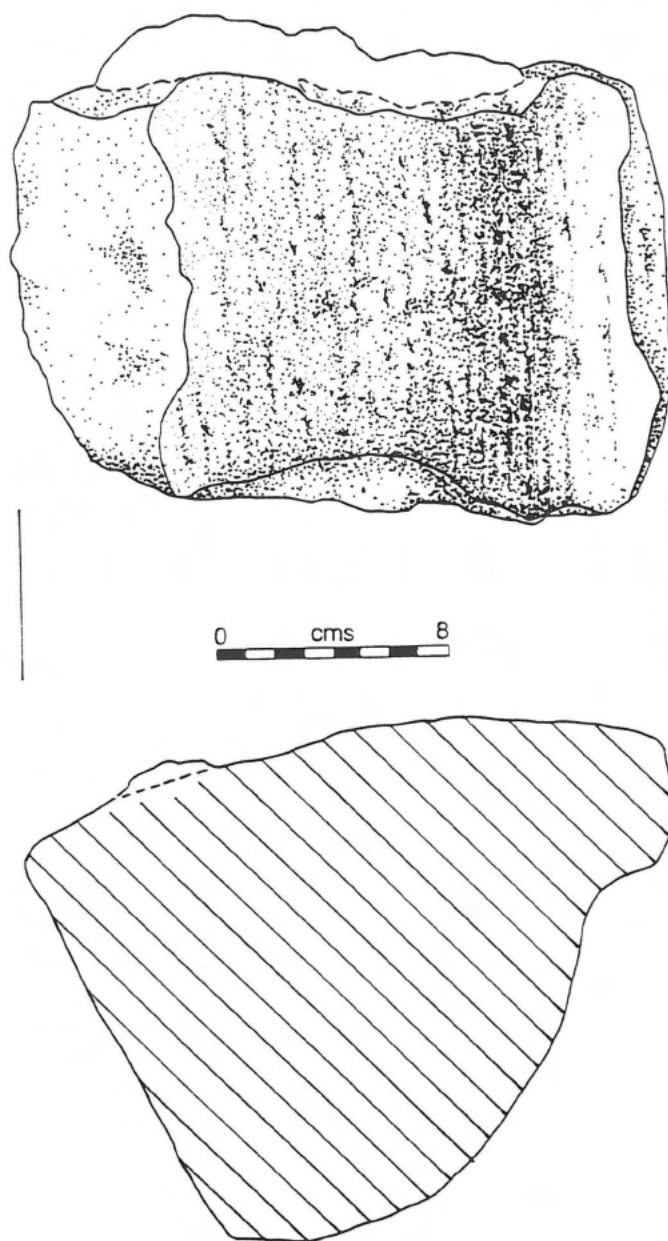


Fig. 4 Fragment of dressed sandstone from Trench C.

