

TRIAL PITS, CONWY QUAY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

Report No. 216

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
(G1433)

prepared for Mott MacDonald

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Archaeological Watching Brief During Excavation of Trial Pits for Mussel Purification Unit, Porth Bach, Conwy Quay (G1433)

Introduction

In preparation for the construction of a mussel purification unit four trial pits were excavated by JCB on the present site of a car park at Porth Bach, on 8th August 1996. These pits were 2m by 0.75m in size and were excavated with the aim of discovering the depth of bed rock in the area. Their location was c. 0.5m from the four corners of the proposed building. Natural outcropping was visible on the seaward side of the present quay, at a depth of c. 2m from the top of the quay and also near the base of the town wall where a grass verge was located. This verge slope down in a south-east to north-west direction, so that the south-eastern end was c. 1.5m high and the north-western end sloped down to the level of the present car park surface. This slope and the visible outcropping would appear to reflect part of the original topography of the area, with the bedrock sloping down from the area of the castle towards the shore.

Results

Trial Pit 1

Trial pit 1 was located at the north-west corner of the proposed building (see fig. 1). The local dark grey shale bedrock was encountered at a depth of 0.8m. This was overlain by a layer of brownish yellow silty sand which contained fragments of decaying bedrock towards the base. At a depth of 0.68m this was overlain by a dark brown clayey silt and in turn by a band of redeposited brownish yellow silty sand containing some iron panning at a depth of 0.45m. Overlying this was a layer of black sandy silt which contained fragments of mortar, bone, nineteenth century pottery and rusted metal objects. This was overlain by the present tarmac surface.

Trial Pit 2

Trial pit 2 was located at the north-east corner of the proposed building (see fig. 1). The pit was excavated to a depth of 2.4m with the dark grey shale bedrock encountered at a depth of 1.95m. This was overlain by a brownish yellow silty sand at a depth of 1.45m. Overlying this at the southern end of the pit was a layer of burnt material which appear to consists mainly of metal working debris i.e slag, charcoal, coal/coke with some burnt bone, mortar and slate fragments also present. This burnt layer was overlain by a narrow band of mid brown sandy clay which contained fragments of mortar and was in turn urn overlain by another burnt layer containing slag and charcoal, but which ran the length of the section. Above this burnt layer was a mid brown sandy silt which contained fragments of slate, mortar, Buckley Ware and cobble stones. In turn this was overlain by a gritty brown/yellow sandy silt which also contained much nineteenth century cultural debris. A layer of white concrete sealed this nineteenth century fill with the present tarmac and pink stony footings completing the sections. All the contexts below the lower fill material (the mid brown sandy silt) sloped slightly in a south-east to north-west direction.

Trial Pit 3

Trial pit 3 was located at the south-east corner of the proposed building (see fig.1). Here bed rock was encountered at c. 1.7m from the present ground surface. As in the other pits this consisted of a dark grey shale, the upper region of which showed signs of natural decay. The two main sections were quite different.

The south-west facing section consisted of the bed rock overlain by a voided stony layer, which in turn was overlain by the yellowish brown footing material and tarmac surface. The stones in the voided layer were the local grey shale, between 0.4m by 0.2m in size to 1m by 0.4m in size. These made up c.

90% of the context, the remaining 10% consisted of a grey/brown silty sand containing fragments of mortar. Some of the stones had mortar residue on their faces, but none appeared to be *in situ*.

The north-east facing section consisted of layers of dumping. Directly above the bed rock here was a grey brown silty sand, c.30% of which consisted of white/creamy coloured mortar fragments. Directly over-lying this at a depth of 0.8m was a layer of reddish sand which became a band of mortar towards the northern end of the pit. At the southern overlying this was the voided rock layer found in the south-west facing section. Overlying this at a depth of c. 0.2m was a very stony and compact, yellow/brown sandy silt, which appeared to be footings for the tarmac surface.

The differences in the main sections was explained by evidence in the south-east facing section which confirmed the presence of a diagonal, north-south running interface between the dumped deposits of the north-east facing section and the voided stony fill found mainly in the south-east facing section. The voided stony layer appears to relate to a stony fill recorded in previous trial pits along the quay edge, it would, therefore, appear that stone dumping took place to level the area when the present quay side was constructed and that previous levelling had taken place to the west.

Trial Pit 4

Trial pit 4 was located at the south-west corner of the proposed building (see fig. 1). Bed rock was visible near this pit and it was anticipated that it lay near the present surface. This was indeed the case as it was located immediately below the present surface and undulating slightly to a depth of 0.4m.

Conclusion

The trial pits revealed that at some time in the late eighteenth or nineteenth centuries waste material, some of it possibly associated with metal working, was dumped on the sloping, rocky ground at Porth Bach to level the area. No earlier soil deposits were recorded. The deposition of the voided rocky material at the north-east of the area, probably relates to the construction of the present quay.

Amendment

A map of Conwy from 1776 ('Map of Conwy Town 1776' University of Wales (Bangor) Archives (Bangor MS. 2383)) identifies the area (labelled EE) to the east of Porth Bach as 'Limekiln adjoining the castle wall'. The burnt layer recorded in Test Pit 2 may relate to this feature.

Fig. 1

G1433: Mussel Purification Unit, Porth Bach, Conwy.



