

LAND ADJACENT TO GARTH,
ST CADFAN'S WELLS, TYWYN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

Report No. 264

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

LAND ADJACENT TO GARTH,
ST CADFAN'S WELLS, TYWYN (G1489)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

prepared for Mrs. E. M. Watkins

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Archaeological Evaluation

1. INTRODUCTION

An archaeological evaluation was recommended by Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service in advance of residential development of a plot of land west of St Cadfan's Wells, Tywyn, at SH586009. The work was recommended because of the proximity of the site to both the church of Tywyn and the associated wells.

A brief for the work was provided by Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service on behalf of the Planning Authority. Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (Contracts Section) were contracted to carry out the evaluation.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The church at Tywyn became the principal church of Meirioneth in the middle ages, and a settlement is likely to have existed in the vicinity of the church. Tywyn was mentioned in the *Chronicle of the Princes* c. 963, when it was ravaged by the Vikings, and it was visited by Giraldus Cambrensis in the 12th century. It is unlikely that the town was ever very large, and only nine tax-payers are listed in the Lay Subsidy roll of 1292/3. The majority of the present town dates from the arrival of the railway in the mid 19th century, followed by the construction of the promenade and the development of the high street towards the sea.

The church was reputedly founded by St Cadfan in the 6th century, and by the 12th century it had established itself as a Clas or Mother church with an Abbot. The church contains some of the best 12th century architecture in Gwynedd, and is the only arcaded church of that date to remain. Inside the church is a stone bearing an early welsh inscription of 8th or 9th century date.

North-west of the church is the site of a holy well reputedly that of St Cadfan, which was used until the 19th century for curative purposes. The wells were enclosed and made into two baths with four dressing rooms sometime before 1850, but in 1894 the baths were filled in and the buildings converted to a coach-house and stables. The building is currently in use as a garage.

3. METHODOLOGY

The work was carried out according to the specifications laid down in the brief provided by Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service, and in the project design. The aims were to evaluate the archaeological potential of the site proposed for development by excavation, and to make recommendations based on the findings of the evaluation.

The area concerned is a rectangular area of land, bounded on the east by a road which formerly served the wells, and on the north and south by modern boundaries on the line of field boundaries of at least 19th century date, as they are marked on the 1901 ordnance survey map. The west boundary is shown as a curving boundary on the 1901 map, which may once have formed part of a large enclosure encircling the church (see discussion below).

The area available for excavation was constrained by existing buildings on the site, which consisted of a number of timber framed corrugated sheds which formerly formed part of a builders yard. The only area available for excavation lay between the buildings and the road: the area likely to be of greatest potential. Consequently two trenches were opened, one east-west measuring 6m by 1m, and one alongside the road orientated roughly north-south measuring 5m by 1.5m. The excavation took place on the 9 June, 1997.

4.0 RESULTS

Trench A

This trench was dug by machine to a depth of 1.5m, at which depth a layer of light grey clay was reached. The initial layers were made up of 19th and 20th century debris, with stone and soil, reflecting the use of the area as a builders yard. These layers were 60cm deep, and overlay a 22cm thick layer of clean brown silty clay, which in turn overlay an 8cm thick layer of yellow sand. Underneath the sand was a 60cm thick layer of dark humic peat with well preserved wood remains. The wood did not appear to form any distinct pattern, and was concluded to be the natural remains of small trees. Underneath this layer, at a depth of 1.5m below the topsoil was a layer of grey clay. All the layers below 60cm deep were considered to be natural, and they contained no archaeological evidence.

Trench B

This trench was positioned alongside the road, an area felt to contain the most archaeological potential. Once again, the upper levels contained a mixture of 19th and 20th century debris, although this time in two distinct layers. All the depths quoted are taken from the present ground surface. The upper layer consisted of relatively clean sand and stone to a depth of 0.5m, and appeared to be the remains of a sand pit, because the sand was imported, and not the natural sand found in Trench A. The lower layer between 0.5m and 0.8m deep was a dark fairly moist and malodorous clay layer with some pottery and iron remains, overlying a layer of mixed sand and peat with clay lumps. Into this layer was cut a stone-filled slot 50cm wide and 40cm deep, running approximately north-south, which was interpreted as a drain. Towards the north end of the trench the drain was overlain by a cobbled surface containing 19th century pottery fragments. The cobbled surface clearly overlay the drain, and did not appear to respect it.

5.0 INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

No archaeological features pre-dating the use of the site as a builders yard in the 19th century were found in Trench A. In Trench B, the stone-filled drain clearly pre-dated the 19th century occupation, and appeared to have been dug prior to the use of the site as a builders yard. The tithe map of 1840 shows the site as a part of a large single field, with the wells in the north corner of the same field. The drain may be associated with a track built to gain access to the wells, perhaps in the mid-19th century when they were covered by the present building (Jones F 1954, 191-2).

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

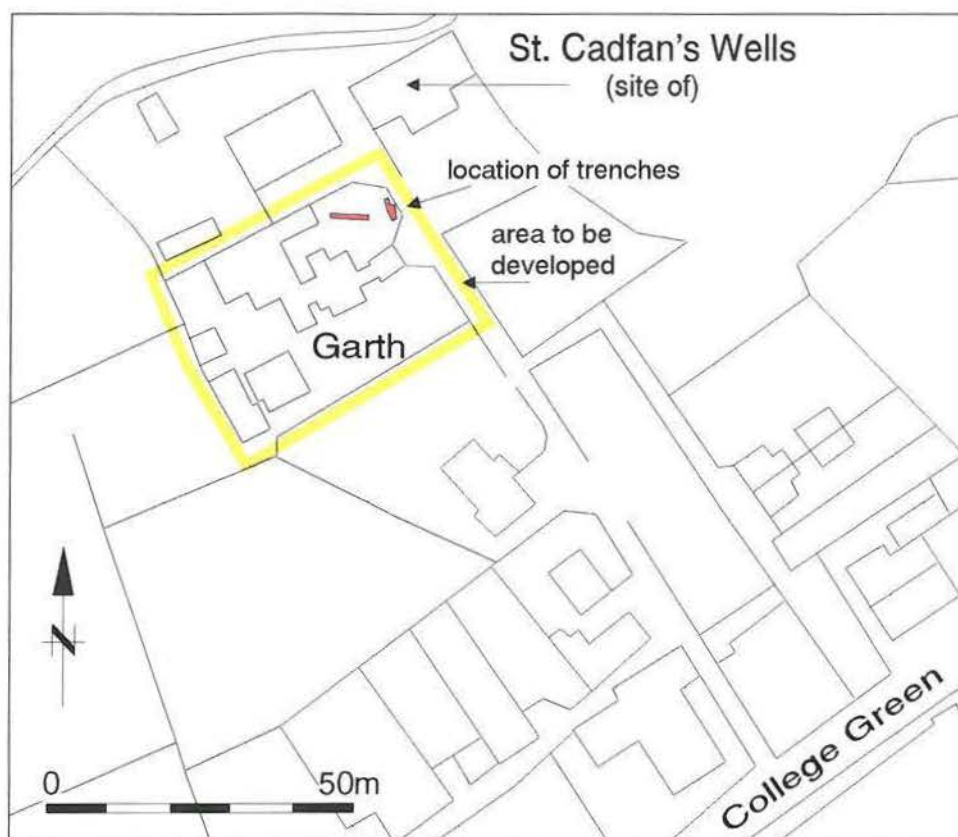
The evaluation excavations suggest there is little of archaeological potential on this site, despite the proximity to the well and church. It has been suggested the principal medieval settlement lay south of the church, which is certainly a more suitable location than the site in question. However the west boundary to the site is on an interesting alignment, which appears to curve round towards the present church boundary at the south end. This may mark the extents of a medieval Clas enclosure, a type of site which is recorded in a number of documents, and suspected to have existed at Bangor in Arfon, a site of comparative importance in the Early Medieval period. There may therefore be limited potential for research into the significance of this boundary.

7.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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8.0 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

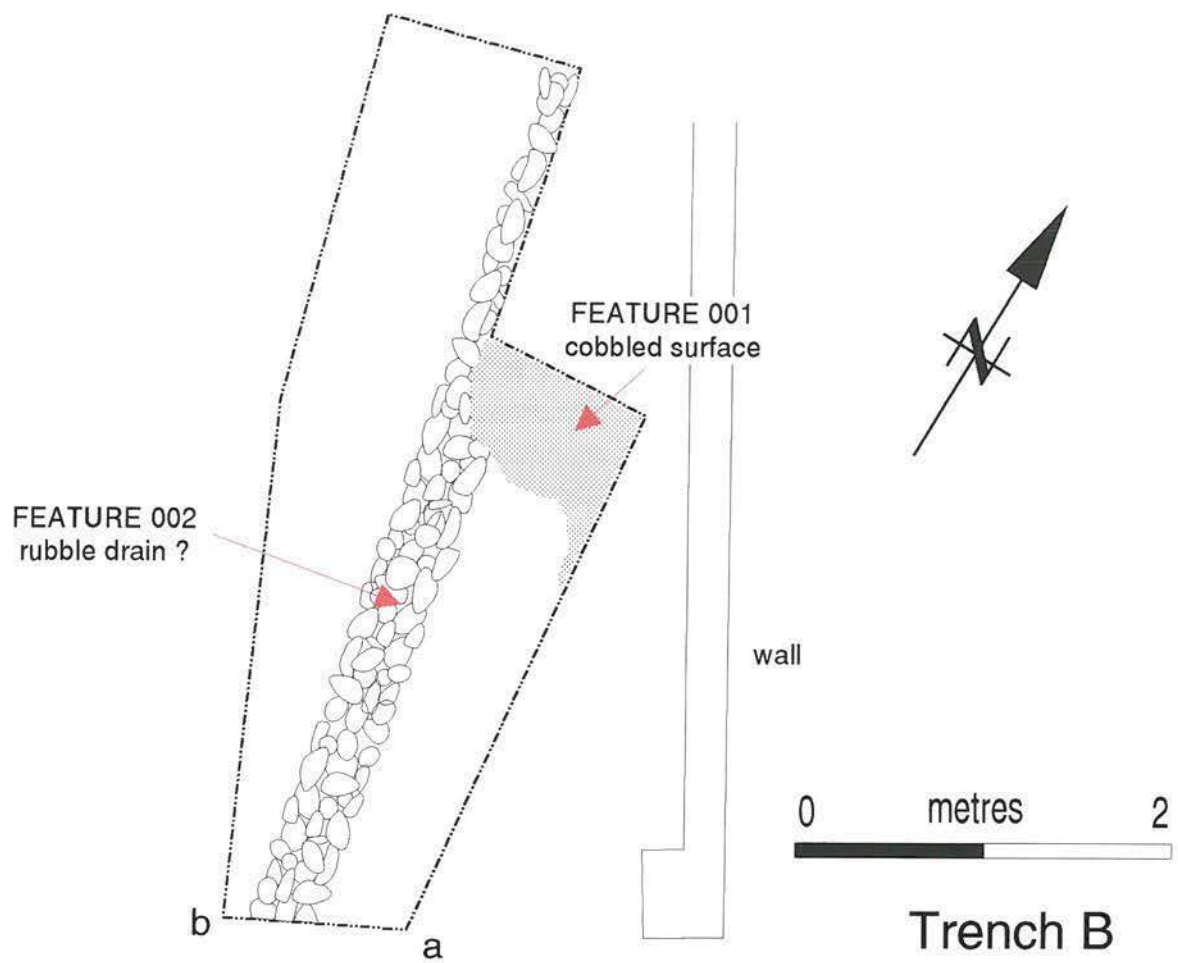
The help and encouragement shown by the owner Mrs Watkins and her son Mr Watkins is gratefully acknowledged.



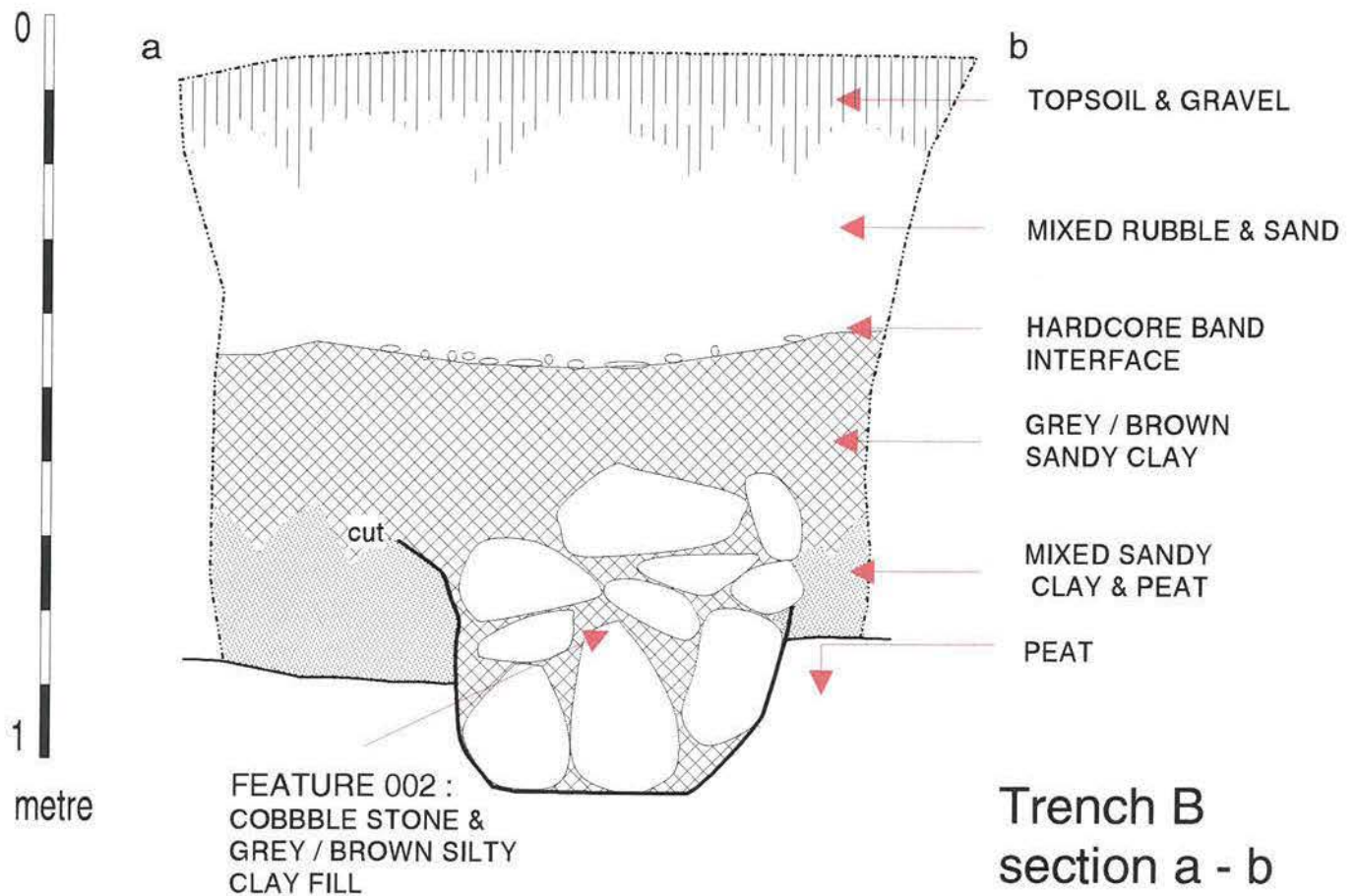
Project no. G1489

Project name : Archaeological assessment in advance of building development adjacent to the site of St. Cadfan's Well, Tywyn, Meirionnydd

Title : Location of plot and assessment trenches. Scale : 1:1250



Trench B
plan view



Trench B
section a - b



Trench B: Drain

YMDDIRIEDOLAETH ARCHAEOLEGOL *GWYNEDD* ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Craig Beuno - Ffordd y Garth - Bangor - Gwynedd - LL57 2RT. Phone (01248) 352535 ; Ffacs/Fax (01248) 370925