

Cefn Graianog Quarry Extension

Archaeological Watching Brief (G1598)



Prepared for Tarmac Quarry Products Limited

by

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

Report No. 344

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CEFN GRAIANOG QUARRY

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1 INTRODUCTION

Tarmac Quarry Products Limited have extended the existing gravel quarry at Cefn Graianog near Caernarfon.

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (Contracts Section) were contracted by Tarmac to carry out a watching brief during the soil stripping of the area.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AIMS

The aims of the watching brief were to investigate and record all archaeological features revealed during the soil stripping operation.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Watching Brief*

The topsoil of the area was removed by a single bulldozer pushing the material into large tips for earth removers to place it into dumper trucks. This was then removed from site and deposited in an area of the open cast quarry to the north-east. The results from the archaeological assessment indicated that there was archaeological potential for associated features in the area due to its proximity to the hut group located to the east of Graianog Farm.

3.2 *Recording*

Features of interest were recorded photographically on Kodak 200 film (colour print) and Kodachrome 200 film (colour slide) and a written description was made.

4 TOPOGRAPHY

The area of the quarry extension consisted of an improved field, gently sloping in a north-south direction to a levelled area on which the hut group had been constructed. A break of slope was visible entering the field from the north-west and curving round in a south-easterly direction, circling the hut group. In the fields to the west of the quarry extension, a curving field bank had been built on this break of slope.

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

5.1 *Prehistoric*

The area of the watching brief is surrounded by a significant number of archaeological sites, the earliest sign of human activity being the standing stone south-west of Bwthyn Graianog, which occupies the summit of a low saddle, 250m north of the Cefn Graianog homestead. It may have been in place as early as the mid-third millennium BC (c. 2500 BC) and become the focus of ritual for the ensuing fifteen centuries. The two accompanying cairns would have been sited deliberately close to the stone and could be later additions to a larger multi-phase site, developing from the late Neolithic to the middle Bronze Age, of which only the stone and

the cairns survive above ground. The three sites are protected Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

One focus of contemporary settlement might have been near the Graianog burnt mound, excavated by the Trust in 1983. The mound lay on the eastern margin of the ridge, next to a former stream channel, and was one of a series of scattered burnt mounds occupying similar locations in the surrounding wetter areas.

A chance find of ring money, in 1970 by a farm worker, discovered in the adjacent field indicates evidence for Bronze Age activity in the immediate area.

The next major phase of human activity occurred within the Iron Age, when a significant number of small enclosed homesteads were built. Those which have been excavated: the Caerau hut groups (excavated in 1936), Cefn Graianog I (Hogg, 1959), Cefn Graianog II (White, 1977-79), and Graianog (Kelly, 1984-87), show that these enclosed homesteads flourished without a break for several centuries, usually through to the end of the Roman period.

There are at least three more known enclosed homestead sites around the Graianog ridge, none of which have been excavated, at Foel-uchaf (SH 45575046), north-west of Graianog (SH 45504945) and south-west of Bryn Gors (SH 46434985).

5.2 Romano-British

The round hut settlements mentioned in 5.1 above continued in use throughout this period, and the excavated settlement at Cefn Graianog I, Cefn Graianog II, Graianog and Caerau produced a quantity of pottery of Roman date.

5.3 Medieval

Occupation ceased at the homesteads about the end of the Roman period. Re-occupation began at the Graianog homestead at some stage between the eighth and eleventh centuries AD. Excavations in advance of gravel extraction at Cefn Graianog in 1977, revealed the remains of a substantial twelfth to thirteenth century farmstead, comprising a house, barn, stable and byre. The settlement appeared relatively prosperous, but was short-lived.

In addition there are a number of platform house sites, (SH 45344900, excavated 1977, and SH 46024978) and a homestead with a series of contemporary boundary walls at (SH 46154975). During the medieval period land in this area was alienated to the *Clas* (Church) of Clynnog Fawr, some 4km to the west. Medieval townships close to the study area are recorded at Llanllyfni, and Penarth.

5.4 Post Medieval

The present Graianog farm probably dates to the middle of the fifteenth century, and was certainly well established by the early seventeenth century. Graianog was the sole focus of settlement on the ridge until Cefn Graianog was founded as an off-shoot to settle a divided inheritance in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The field systems now visible, in all probability, date from the early nineteenth century when many boundaries were re-aligned to open up areas for progressive farming techniques.

5.5 Conclusion

The region around Graianog contains a number of sites of archaeological and historical interest, and excavations carried out ahead of previous gravel extractions have proved that the area is rich in archaeological material. There is potential for the survival of sites of all dates, from the prehistoric period through to the medieval period.

6 RESULTS OF THE WATCHING BRIEF

A watching brief was carried out on the 19th, 20th and 21st of October 1999.

Prior to work commencing on the site, fencing had been constructed around the hut group (approximately 30m from the site) and pegs located 5m to 9m in from the fence defining the edge of the area to be stripped.

The stripping process began with the construction of an access road from the foot of the existing quarry to the top of the area to be stripped. This was located at the north-eastern end of the area. No archaeological features were noted here.

The second phase consisted of the removal of a high (c.2m) and wide (3-4m) earth and gravel bank located along the eastern limits of the area near the present quarry face. This grassed over bank appears to have been constructed to define the western limits of the last quarry extension. It consisted of a mixture of topsoil, subsoil and gravel.

After this bank had been removed topsoil stripping of the area commenced. This was undertaken by an hydraulic earth moving machine which pushed the topsoil off in large sections. The topsoil was then collected by smaller machines and removed by trucks to the quarry below.

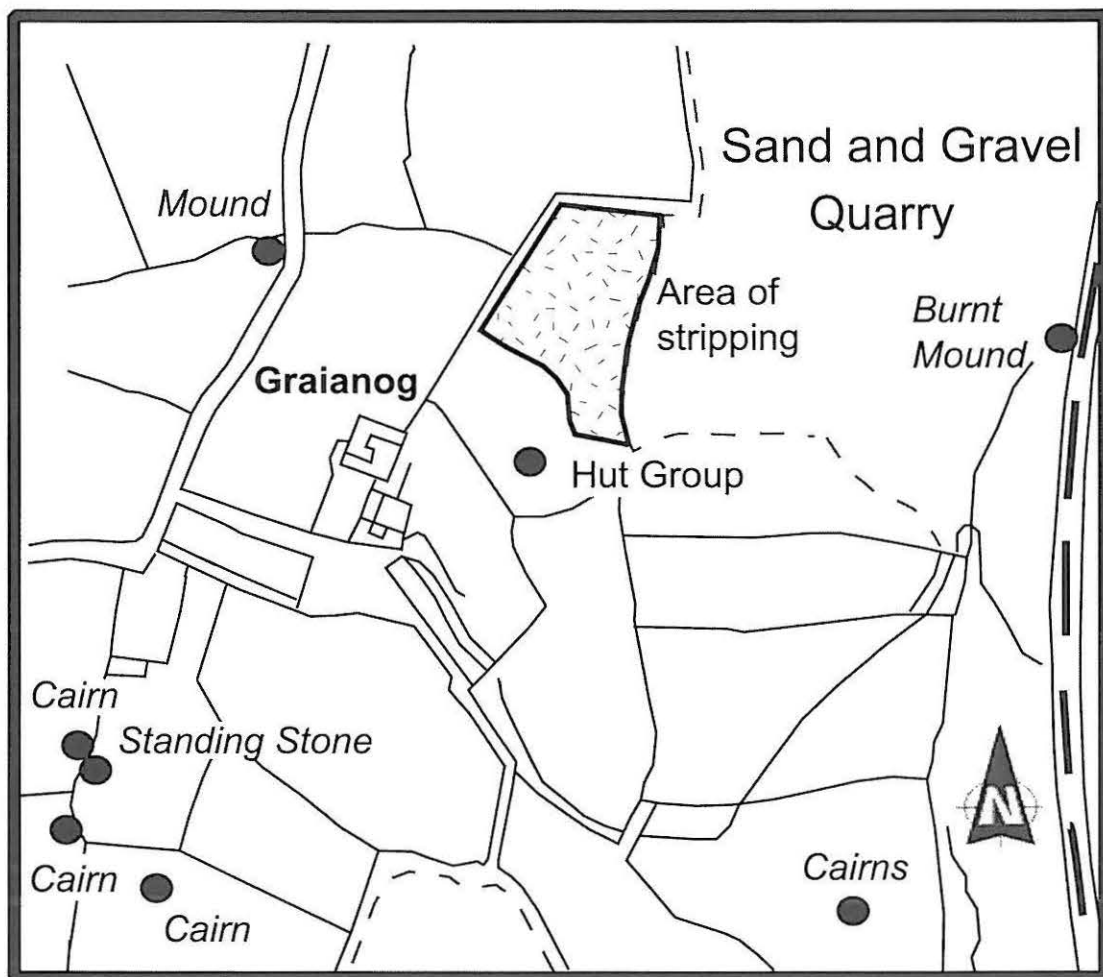
Topsoil stripping revealed a greyish brown subsoil of sandy clay, 80 - 90% of which was made up of gravel, sub-angular to well rounded in shape and on average between 200mm * 200mm in size and 10mm * 10mm. This is thought to have derived from a variety of natural fluvio-glacial deposits (Fasham *et al*, 117). In places lenses of an orange brown silty clay were identified above the subsoil. Overlaying the subsoil and in places the orange brown silty clay, was a light sandy-loam topsoil with a variable stone content. Small (<2mm * 2mm in size) fragments of charcoal were found in the topsoil across the whole area, but not in any notable concentrations. The depth of topsoil varied over the area, depending on the underlying topography, but on average was between 0.3m to 0.4m deep. The stony nature of the topsoil and subsoil made identification of archaeological features extremely difficult. A number of possible linear, stony features were initially identified, but on further investigation they appeared to be natural accumulations of stones at the base of break in slope noted prior to the stripping. No archaeological features were identified or recorded.

7 SUMMARY

A watching brief was conducted during top-soil stripping operations in preparation for the extension of the gravel quarry at Cefn Graianog. The area held archaeological potential due to the nearby location of a hut group, known to have been occupied in the Iron Age and Romano-British periods. However, the stony nature of the topsoil and subsoil made the identification of archaeological features extremely difficult and no archaeological features were recorded.

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Figure 1: The Hut Group at Graianog Farm, and the fence defining the southern edge of the area to be stripped.

Figure 2: The area of the quarry extension, prior to topsoil stripping (Graianog Farm in background).



