
Watching brief at Henllys Hall, Beaumaris



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Report No. 488

June 2003

**Henllys Hall, Beaumaris
Watching brief**

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Gwynedd Archaeological Trust
June 2003**

Henllys Hall, Beaumaris, Anglesey

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during earthmoving associated with construction work at Henllys Hall, Beaumaris, during the winter of 2002-03. Evidence in the form of linear mortar spreads was recorded in the area of the formal garden to the south-west of the present Hall, corroborating the suggestion made during a previous evaluation in 2001 that a structure associated with the Hall's precursor stood here. To the west of the Hall, the profile of the original ground surface was recorded, sloping both from south to north and from east to west. This was overlain by a demolition horizon relating to the removal of the 18th-19th century Hall buildings in 1852. A deep agricultural soil was identified beneath the demolition horizon, overlying cracked bedrock, to the west and to the south. No evidence was found to predate the 19th century. The local topography was altered in the mid 19th century when cellars were dug into rock at the basement level of the new Hall structures and artificial terraces were created on the west side. It is probable that the earlier hall buildings were constrained to a narrower spur of land projecting from the higher ground to the south and broadly commensurate with the main blocks of the later Hall.

Introduction

Construction works, including some demolition, were proposed at Henllys Hall, Beaumaris (Fig. 1). The location has archaeological potential as the possible site of the 'llys' or royal estate of the Medieval commote of Dindaethwy. An archaeological assessment and evaluation undertaken on the site by Lancaster University Archaeology Unit in 2001, identified limited evidence for structures pre-dating the substantial re-building programme of 1852-3. Their report concluded that medieval remains relating to the llys may have stood on the site now occupied by the present hall and may not have survived the 19th century building works. Nevertheless, a watching brief was recommended in areas of significant earthmoving and in areas where undated archaeological features had been identified in the 2001 assessment. The current phase of the archaeological works involved undertaking this watching brief while construction was in progress.

A brief for the archaeological works was prepared by Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service (D460), who monitored the project on behalf of the Local Authority. A copy of the project design in respect of this brief is included in Appendix 1. This project design conforms both to the brief and to IFA guidelines as given in *Standards and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching brief* (IFA 1994, revised 1999). In this a watching brief is defined as 'formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons. This will be within a specified area of site ... where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed. The programme will result in the preparation of a report and ordered archive'. The objective of this programme of archaeological works was to create a record of any archaeological deposits or structures that may be revealed through on-site construction activity.

Fig. 1



Archaeological and historical background

Llanfaes undoubtedly owed its origin and development to the presence there of a medieval royal estate (a *maerdref*), organised on traditional lines. This can be seen in the survival of agricultural works as elements of the tenants' obligations (Jones-Pierce, 1972, 280; Carr 1982, 233). During the 13th century, however, the *maerdref* of Llanfaes was transformed.

Commutation of labour services for cash payments and an encouragement of commerce created, at Llanfaes, an important trading town. It has been calculated that the revenues from trade passing through the port of Llanfaes amounted to seventy per cent of the total for the whole of Gwynedd (Carr 1982, 232). Burgage rents were assessed at Llanfaes and later documents refer to a new kind of tenancy – '*gwyr y farchnad*' – market men. The Llanfaes ferry was one of the important points of communication with the mainland. An early indication of the growing urbanisation of Llanfaes is the establishment there of a friary. This was founded in 1237 by Llywelyn ap Iorwerth in memory of his wife Joan and was one of the earliest Franciscan houses in England and Wales. St. Catherine's church at Llanfaes was the richest church on Anglesey in 1254.

In 1294 the demesne lands of Llanfaes were said to extend over 13 carucates (780 acres at 60 acres to the carrucate). There were also meadows: three and a half acres of meadow are described in 1305 as being 'under the Court of Llanfaes'; a garden and the significant resource of Coed Cadw or the 'Wood of Llanfaes'. During the age of the Princes the demesne land of the *maerdref* of Llanfaes was among the most productive on Anglesey.

During the 15th and 16th centuries the Hampton and Bulkeley families began to emerge as the major landholders in the area. By the 1630s the extent of Hampton lands in the parish of Llanfaes becomes clear (UWB, Henllys papers, 11,12). They ran from Tyddyn y Gwynt to Bodgylched and include tenements near the King's Wood, Henllys Mill and the demesne lands of Henllys itself. It would seem that the Hamptons had acquired a significant portion of the former township of Llanfaes and its hamlet of Bodgylched. The other major landowner in Llanfaes was the Bulkeley family of Baron Hill who held all the land between Beaumaris and Henllys and the coastal strip including Friars. During the 18th and 19th centuries exchanges of land saw some movement in the boundaries of

Henllys demesne, mostly, but not entirely, to the benefit of the Baron Hill estate. The patterning of fields in the present landscape is a creation of the early years of the nineteenth century. Fields are large and the boundaries are generally straight, a product of the amalgamation and straightening of earlier, smaller and irregular plots.

Location

Although nothing now survives above the surface of the ground to suggest the very considerable importance of Llanfaes in the Age of the Princes, certain elements of the *maerdref* can be located with some confidence. These include the ferry (now the castle green, Beaumaris), the friary (on the shoreline, within the grounds of the former Lairds engineering works), the church of St. Catherine (north-east of Henllys Hall, the tenements of the bond township (concentrated around the church) and the *llys* - the royal estate centre (probably on the site of Henllys Hall). It is the probable former presence of the *llys* at the site of Henllys that has occasioned the archaeological response which forms the basis of this report.

Llys

The *llys* was the nucleus of the *maerdref* of Llanfaes. Unfortunately the suppression of the township and the transference of the community to Newborough c.1302-3 has meant that Llanfaes lacks the documentary detail applied to the other Anglesey *maerdrefi* in the second great royal extent, or survey, of 1352. There are no references to the building works required at the *maerdref* and the only acknowledgement of its former importance is a reference to the labour services owed by the tenants of Dinsilwy Rys in making the ditch and watercourse of the mill. An earlier extent of 1294 contains useful information on the agricultural and commercial life of Llanfaes but is silent on the buildings of the *llys*.

The place name Henllys – 'the old, or former *llys*' – is very suggestive but may not be accepted uncritically. The name, however, does not appear to be an antiquarian back-formation. While Hamptons were holding land in the area as early as 1414, the first recorded occurrence of 'Henllys' can be found in a release of 20th January 1584 by William Hampton of 'Henllys' concerning a messuage in Rotten Row.

The *llys* of Llanfaes might be expected to be on a more or less direct line of communication with other commotal centres on the island. In addition to administrative circuits the obligations of tenants

are often expressed in terms of carriage of materials. This was the case for the tenants of Dinsilwy Rys who 'carry for the lord from Llanfaes as far as Caernarfon or Penrhos or Conwy or anywhere the lord may require with a man and a horse hired at 2d. daily'.

There are two immediately obvious approaches to Henllys. One along Henllys Lane from Beaumaris, past West Lodge to approach Henllys at its south-east corner. Henllys Lane represents the alignment and re-alignment of an original route from the ferry swinging, via relict stretches of track and continuous field boundaries. The other is the old established track through the

fields from East Lodge and the church. Closer examination of the earliest detailed plan of the complex (1830), however, suggests another possibility. A track from the convergence with Henllys Lane led south-west into Cae Glas Uchaf, where it is identified as 'the old road'. Examination of eighteenth century surveys in the properties to the south and west of Henllys reveal a relict portion of this 'old road' in a field two hundred metres to the south. The road may then be traced almost continuously across southern Anglesey to Rhosyr, the royal llys in the adjacent commote of Menai. This 'ghost' road could be corroboration, in part, of the former, and early, significance of Henllys.

Watching Brief

Methods and Techniques

The Gwynedd Archaeological Trust was notified when earthmoving was due to take place in those areas which required to be monitored. The evaluation report of 2001 identified the following areas and consequent recommendations (fig. 3).

1. Ground works associated with the removal of the swimming pool and associated landscaping between the pool and the hall. This area was identified as requiring an archaeological watching brief with archaeological features to be recorded if present.

2a. Ground works in the area south-west of the hall where an undated rock-cut feature had been recorded in the evaluation excavation of 2001. This area was identified as requiring an archaeological watching brief.

2b. Areas A to H, in the lower area east of the hall where several undated ditches were recorded. This area was identified as requiring an archaeological watching brief.

In addition, significant demolition and earthmoving was to be undertaken immediately west of the hall and a watching brief was undertaken in the area.

All exposed surfaces (in plan and profile) were observed, and further cleaned by trowel where necessary, and recorded by measured sketch-planning and photographed using a digital camera.

Areas A-H

Construction work was scheduled in the area of blocks A – H at the base of the steep slope to the east of Henllys Hall and block J adjacent to the boss of rock on which Henllys Hall was built, on its south-eastern side. Investigation was made of the sections and exposed surfaces of the foundation trenches in areas A – H. No archaeological features were identified.

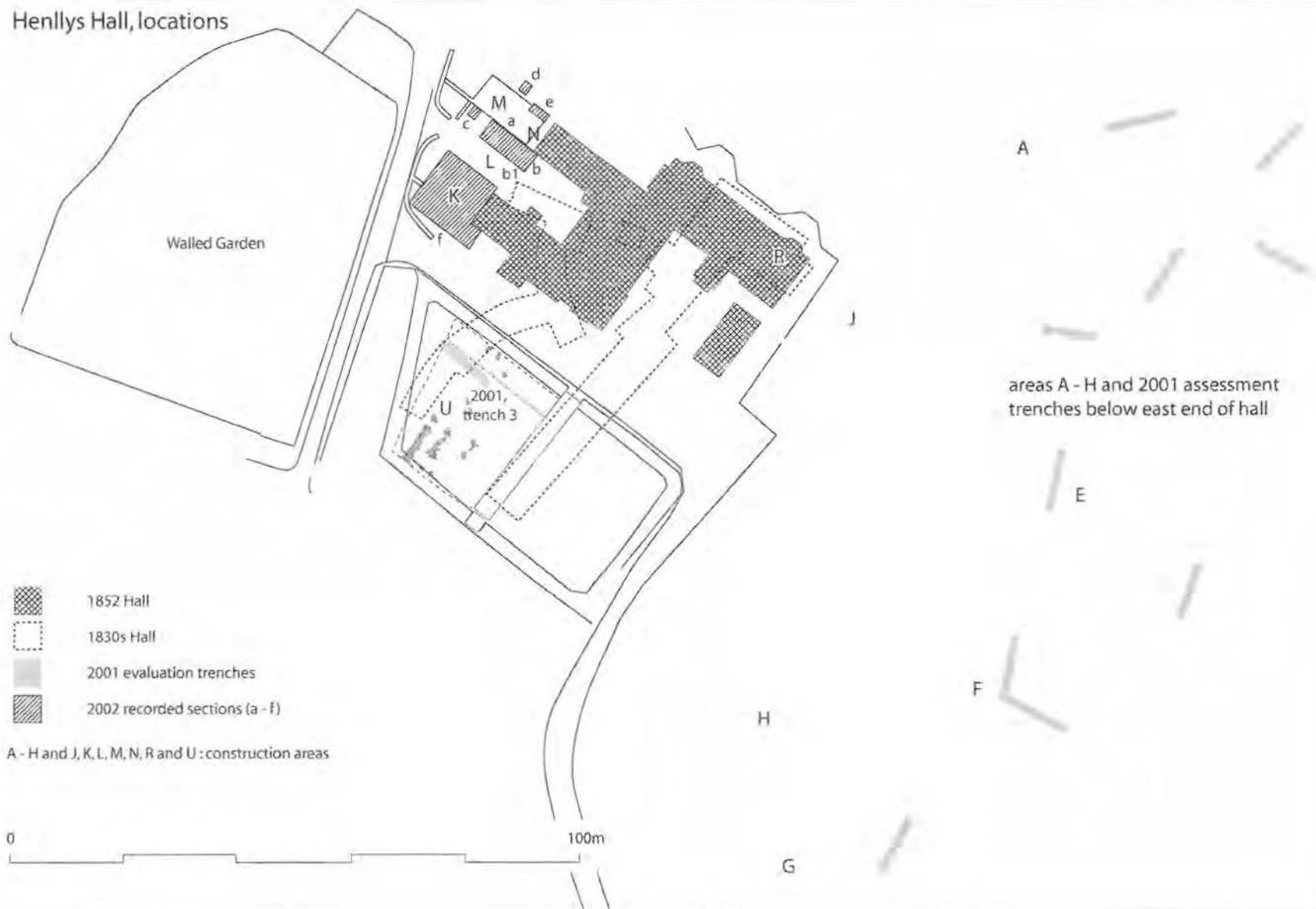
Area between block R and block J

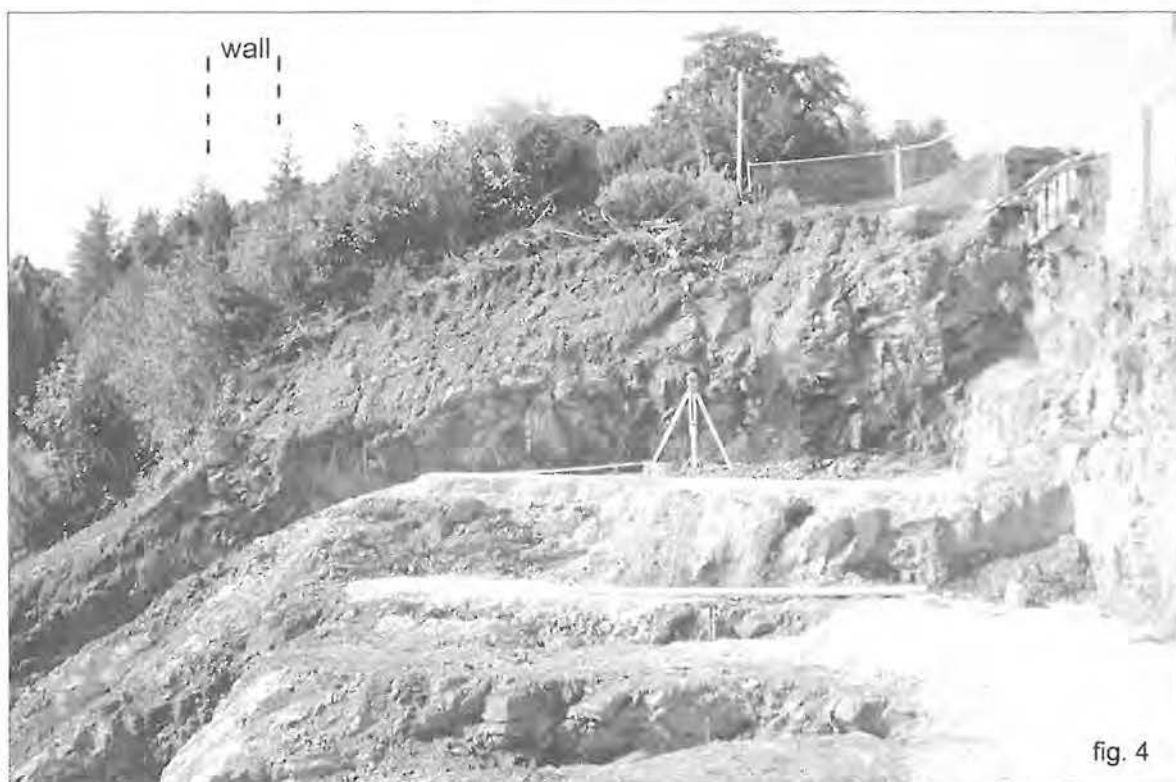
Excavations had commenced onto the surface of the rock between block R and block J leaving exposed sections on the south-western and north-western faces of the area. It was clear from these exposures that the excavations for the foundations of the south-eastern face of the 19th century Henllys Hall had been carried onto the bedrock to a level some depth below the modern ground surface in this area. A stone wall with rubble core and randomly coursed, pointed, external and internal faces revetted a level terrace on the north-east and south-east sides of the hall (fig. 2).



Fig. 3

Henllys Hall, locations





This terrace showed every indication of being made-up ground of re-deposited material. The bedrock itself could be seen to slope steeply from the eastern wall of the hall. The modern ground surface to the south, however, retained a relatively level profile eastward over a distance of some 13 m. This was due to the presence of a second, now buried, retaining wall on the line of projection of the access road to the hall from the lodge to the south (fig. 4). No significant archaeological features were identified. However, it is noteworthy that the summit of the boss of rock may originally have been more restricted and, perhaps, more visually striking than the more recent landscaped topography suggests.

Area U (fig. 5)

An undated, shallow, rock-cut linear feature had been identified during the archaeological evaluation in the area south-west of the present main building. A watching brief and the recording of any archaeological features revealed during ground works in this area formed one of the consequent recommendations.

Topsoil stripping was undertaken by machine on 5 September 2002 resulting in the removal of, on average, 30 to 35 cm of brown garden soil over an area of 1030 sq. m. The ground sloped gently from south to north and on the down-slope side the depth of topsoil reached 60cm. A rock surface was exposed at the southern end and at

the north-east corner with an orange clay visible in places over the surface of the rock and a thin layer of topsoil visible elsewhere.

A shale rubble path was visible running south-west to north-east across the area from a flight of steps set against the southern edge of the area towards the entrance of this former garden. Lime mortar and slate fragments were visible in concentrations towards the south-west corner of the area. Occasional fragments of brick and 19th century pottery were recorded.

Henllys Hall and its appurtenances were entirely remodelled in the 1850s and almost all of the pre-existing structures were demolished. This radical revision of the layout of the central part of the demesne does not permit the precise location of the earlier structures to be fixed in relation to the new buildings with complete certainty. Nevertheless it is clear that two structures of the 18th and early 19th century hall extended into the area that was later landscaped as a formal garden. The slight linear rock-cut feature excavated in 2001 was considered to represent a foundation trench for one of these buildings, a long arcing structure to the south-west of the main complex, with a predominant alignment SW-NE. Figure 3 shows the probable position of these structures as mapped in the evaluation report of 2001 (Lancaster University Archaeology Unit (2001b), fig 6). The linear spreads of

mortar recorded during the watching brief also correspond, in general, to the likely position and orientation of this building and perhaps represent the occasion of its demolition. Nothing earlier than the 19th century was recorded in the garden soil during the watching brief.

The position, as shown on surveyed plans of the early 19th century (UWB: Survey of Henllys Demesne, 1830) and ground plan suggests that this structure was ancillary to the hall itself.

Areas K L M and N

By early September 2002, demolition of standing

structures had taken place in the area of blocks M and N and excavations for the foundations of new buildings were about to commence across the area immediately to the west of the westernmost wings of the main hall. One objective of the machine trenching was to establish the depth at which bedrock might be reached, for the purpose of establishing a secure foundation for the proposed new buildings.

The earthmoving was monitored. Soil profiles were examined and recorded by photography and measured sketch plotting.

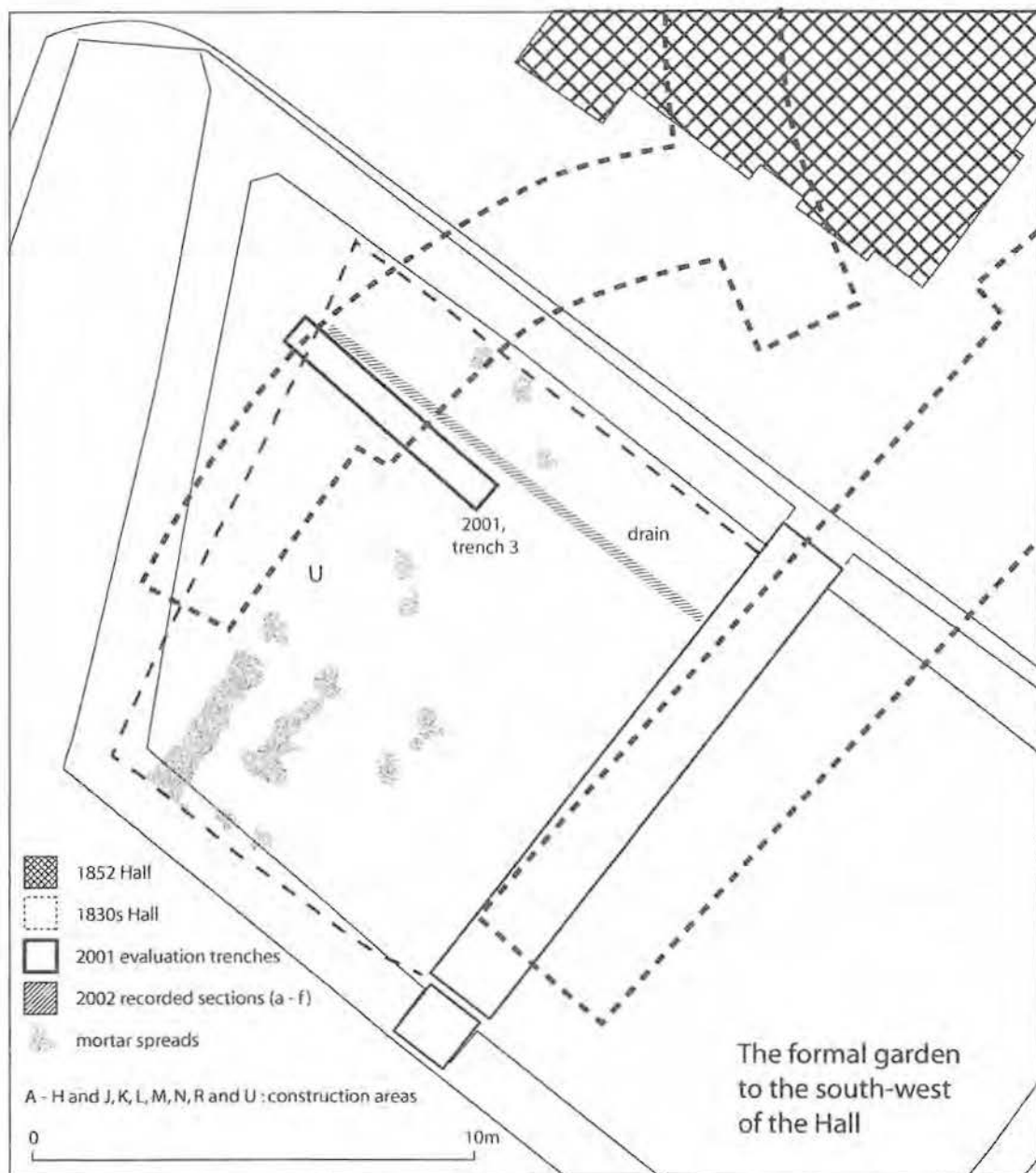


fig. 5

fig. 6



In the area of block M (Section A fig. 6)

The modern ground level at block M was lower than that immediately to the south. The ground surface here had been terraced into the gentle natural slope which fell from south to north. The removal of the pre-existing building at Block M revealed a soil profile as an exposure in the northern face of the upper terrace. The principal components were (to a depth of 1.5m) from the top:

1. Hard standing for yard on upper (southern terrace)
2. Dirty brown soil
3. Orange grey shaley layer with the appearance of having been re-deposited.
4. An orange clayey soil.

The likelihood of re-deposition across these terraces was confirmed in other machine-cut trenches.

In the area of block L (Section B; fig. 7)

This trench was excavated to a depth of over 2m within an area of 10m west-east by 5m north-south. Bedrock was identified at 1.6m in the south east corner of the trench, dropping to 2.5m in the north-east corner. The bedrock also dropped away to the west. A series of small (approximately 2m square) but deep (3.5m to

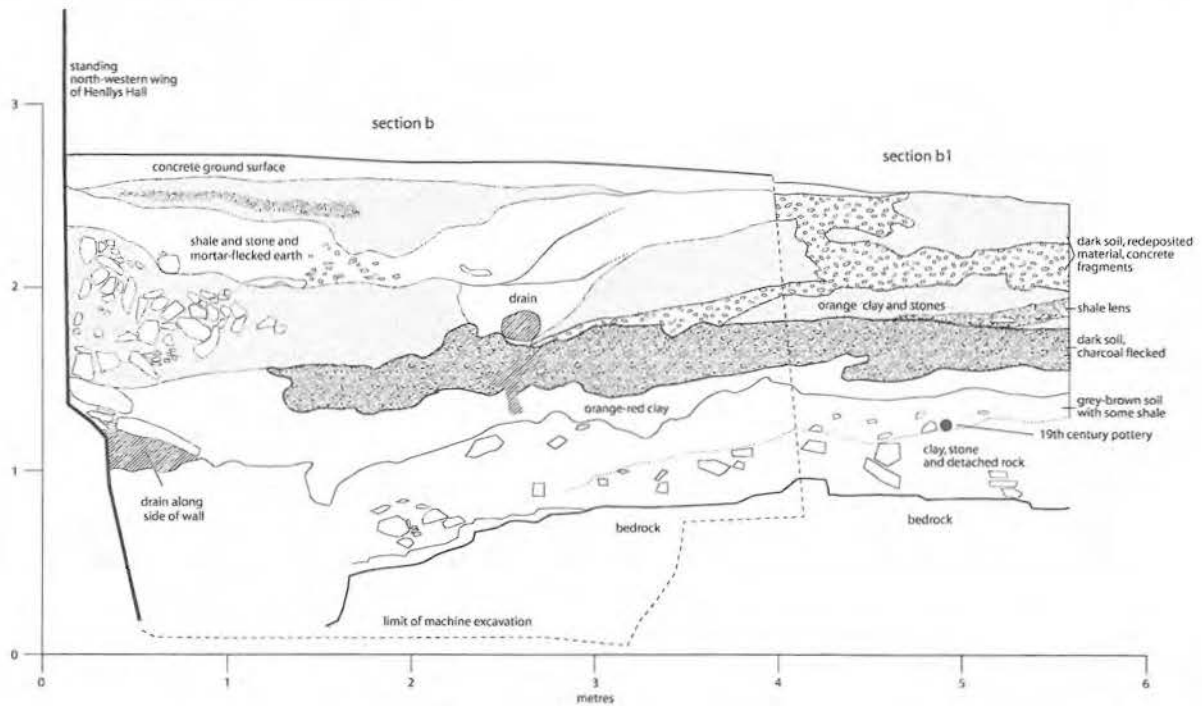
4m) were excavated to the west and north of this trench in an attempt to locate bedrock (fig. 2: C, D and E).

The recorded section in this trench, at the eastern end and at the south eastern corner, revealed a succession of re-deposition and disturbance. At the base of the sequence, between 1.6m and 2.20m, detached stone overlay the shaley bedrock. A grey brown soil with at least one sherd of 19th century pottery overlay this horizon although the relationship of this layer to the foundations of the north-west wing of the hall was obscured by loose material tumbling out of the section. It is likely to represent the ground surface contemporary with the construction of the new hall in the 1850s. At this point a drain was inserted against the south wall of the north-west wing and subsequent deposits represent a levelling up of the ground surface to create a terrace between the north-west and south-west wings.

In the deeper trial trenches, to the west and north, away from the main building, the sequence is less complicated. Typically these holes were dug to a depth of 3.5 to 4m. Below a thick concrete raft, the pre-existing surface, sloping away to the west and north, could be seen to have been

made up with between 1 and 2m of broken shaley rock. This material was probably obtained during the process of excavating the cellars of the main building and its wings. Beneath this a brown, agricultural soil was encountered, around 1.5m thick, overlying orange sandy clay.

fig. 7



In the area of block K (Section F, Fig. 8; fig. 9) Excavations were undertaken around the perimeter of an area of approximately 11.5m north-south and 12.0m west-east. The terraced surface to the west of the south-west wing of the

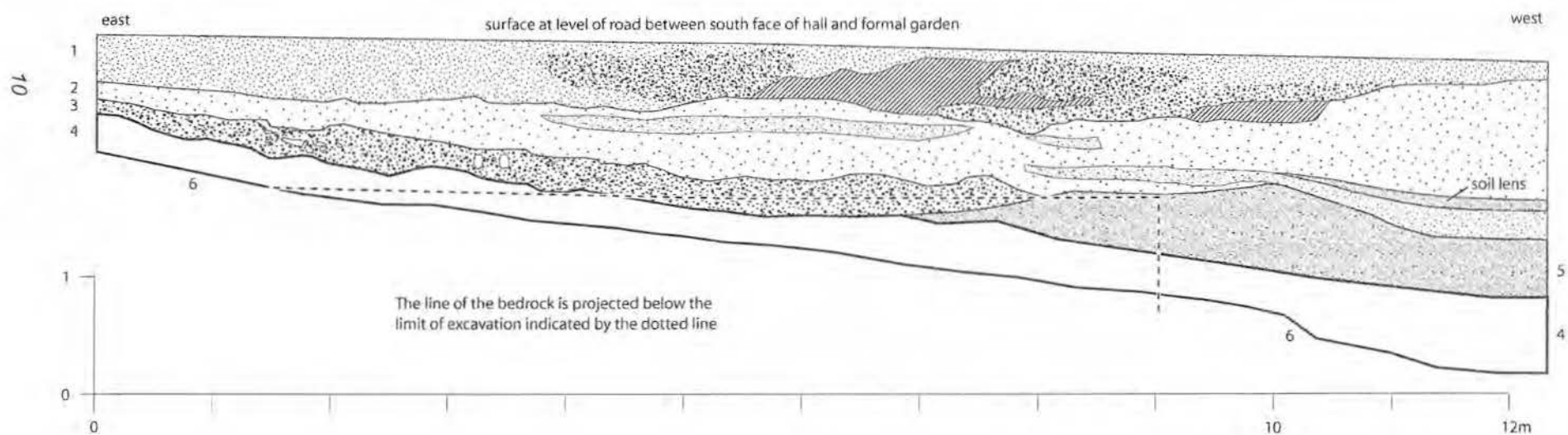
hall is on the same level as that in the area of block L. However, this surface had been terraced into the higher ground immediately to the south when the present hall was built in the 1850s.



fig. 9

Section F, west of south-west wing

1. Dark garden soil below modern ground surface with mortar and clay mixed
2. Broken shaley rock with mortar lenses (predominantly redeposited quarried material from basement excavation)
3. Very dark soil with mortar lenses (suggestive of a demolition horizon)
4. Cracked, detached shaley rock above bedrock
5. Brown soil
6. Bedrock



The trench was excavated 2m into this raised, and now grassed, area. Bedrock was encountered at about the level of the terrace in the south-east corner of the trench but the exposed soil profile in the cut away southern face of the trench revealed a further 1.0m of deposits above the rock. In total, a 12m long cross-section was exposed and recorded, from the south western corner of the south-west wing of the hall to the driveway between the terrace in the front of the wing and the walled garden. The sequence, in reverse order from the present ground surface at approximately the level of the road between the hall and the formal garden to the south, is as follows.

1. There was approximately 0.5m of dark garden soil beneath the turf. This has substantial inclusions of mortar and clay mixed, particularly towards the western end where a wall lining the drive between the terrace and the walled garden stood.

2. Beneath this was a levelling-up horizon of broken shaley rock, with lenses of mortar, 0.15m thick at the eastern end but 0.6m and more towards the western end. This is likely to represent re-deposited material quarried from the hall basements. The immediately adjacent south-west wing has such a basement.

3. Beneath the re-deposited shale was a very dark soil with mortar lenses. This dips, following the sloping line of detached and cracked bedrock, westward. This very probably represents a demolition horizon associated with the removal of the 18th and early 19th century hall. These deposits extend over much of the area of the excavation in this part of the site.

4. At the western end of the trench a thick (0.5 to 0.7m) accumulation of brown agricultural soil underlies the demolition horizon.

5. Cracked bedrock occurs at 0.7m below the modern surface at the east end of the trench and at over 2.0m at the west end. The hard rock lies at about 0.5m below this.

Conclusion

It is probable that the extensive remodelling of Henllys Hall in the mid 19th century and the associated landscaping works have removed most, if not all, of the *in situ* evidence for earlier structures on the site in the areas which were the subject of the watching brief reported on here. An exception may be in the area of the formal garden to the south of the hall where the evaluation excavation of 2001 recorded what may represent the slight traces of the former presence of one of the ancillary structures of the late 18th and early 19th century hall. Linear spreads of mortar recorded at this location during the watching brief may be associated with this feature. Nevertheless, some terracing of the north part of the garden would have reduced the ground surface in the mid-19th century.

To the west of the west wings of the mid-19th century hall level terraces were created during the hall's construction. This was, for the most part achieved by levelling up the naturally sloping ground surface with shaley rock and clay quarried from the foundations and cellars of the new hall.

Demolition deposits, to be associated with the removal of the earlier buildings in the 1850s, were recorded beneath this overburden. The original profile of underlying topography was recorded, sloping from south to north and from east to west, in some areas overlain by deep deposits of agricultural soil. The significance of this observation is that the spur of land which projects from the higher ground to the south, and which terminates in a dramatic eminence at its northern end, was probably narrower than the present landscaped topography suggests. The area available on this spur for building works was, therefore, more tightly constrained on the west side than appears at present. This may explain the north-south orientation of the earlier hall and suggests that any precursor should be sought in the area of the main building of the 18th-19th century hall. The probable location is towards the northern end of the spur.

The extensive landscaping of the mid-19th century permitted a re-orientation of the major buildings on a west-east axis.

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Appendix 1

Watching brief

An archaeologist will be present during all significant periods of earth and hardcore moving which have the potential for revealing archaeological remains. The watching brief is to be undertaken in a manner that allows for the immediate cessation of development for the recording of archaeological evidence. This will involve close liaison between the archaeologist and the site agent and machine operators. The areas of particular interest are those in the immediate vicinity of the hall, and the proposed Block U in the garden adjacent. The works in the area below and east of the hall have been fully evaluated, and no remains of archaeological significance found, however this area will be monitored also, though at a lesser level of intensity than the areas closer to the hall.

All stripped areas will be examined and potential archaeological sites identified; these will then be cleaned by hand trowelling or hoeing. If the features revealed can be understood and recorded with no further work required, then they will be photographed, described and located on OS 1:2500 plans. However if any of the features are too complex to allow this, then recommendations will be made for further work, which would be in addition to the work undertaken for the watching brief. A continuous context numbering system will be used, with each context recorded on standard pro-forma sheets. Sections will be drawn if relevant.

Environmental samples

Relevant archaeological deposits will be sampled

by taking bulk samples (a minimum of 10 litres and maximum of 30 litres) for flotation of charred plant remains. Bulk samples will be taken from waterlogged depoists for macroscopic plant remains. Other bulk samples, for example from middens, may be taken for small animal bones and small artefacts.

Human remains

Any finds of human remains will be left in-situ, covered and protected, and the coroner informed. If removal is necessary it will take place under appropriate regulations and with due regard for health and safety issues.

Small finds The vast majority of finds recovered from archaeological excavations comprise pottery fragments, bone, environmental and charcoal samples, and non-valuable metal items such as nails. Often many of these finds become unstable (ie they begin to disintegrate) when removed from the ground. All finds are the property of the land owner, however, it is Trust policy to recommend that all finds are donated to an appropriate museum where they can receive specialist treatment and study. At the very least the Trust would request access to the finds for a reasonable period to allow for study and publication. All finds would be treated according to advice provided within First Aid for Finds (Rescue 1999). Initial identification will be undertaken by Trust staff, but any additional advice would be sought from a wide range of consultants used by the Trust, including National Museums and Galleries of Wales at Cardiff, ARCUS at Sheffield and BUFAU at Birmingham.

Report

Following completion of the watching brief as outlined above, a report will be produced incorporating the following:

- Non-technical summary
- Introduction
- Specification and Project Design
- Methods and techniques
- Archaeological Background
- Description of the results of the watching brief
- Summary and conclusions
- Bibliography of sources consulted.

Archive

A full archive including plans, photographs, 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 regional Sites and Monuments Record) within six months of the completion of the project.

Staff

The project will be supervised by one of the Trust's Project Managers, Andrew Davidson, who has worked in various aspects of British archaeology for 18 years, and who has been responsible for managing all contract work at the Trust for the past five years, including archaeological programmes for major road contracts, pipeline construction and new development sites. The work will be carried out by fully trained officers who are experienced in conducting watching briefs and working with contractors and earth moving machinery. (Full cv's are available upon request).

Health and Safety

The Trust subscribes to the SCAUM (Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Managers) Health and Safety Policy as defined in Health and Safety in Field Archaeology (1999). A risk assessment will be undertaken prior to, and during, the field work programme.

Insurance

The Trust holds public liability insurance with an indemnity limit of £2,500,000 through Russell, Scanlon Limited Insurance Brokers, Wellington Circus, Nottingham NG1 5AJ (policy 01 1017386 COM), and Professional Indemnity Insurance for £2,000,000 per claim (policy No. 59A/SA11818791).

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