

505

CEFN GRAIANOG QUARRY EXTENSION

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

Report No. 505

Prepared for
Tarmac Quarry Products Ltd

By
David Hopewell and Jane Kenney

November 2003



Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
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Cefn Graianog Quarry Extension

Archaeological Watching Brief (G1598)

Introduction

The watching brief described in the present report is part of a long-standing project monitoring the extension of the sand and gravel quarry at Cefn Graianog, Clynnog, Gwynedd. The assessment of the proposed expansion area was undertaken in 1994 by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT) for Tarmac Quarry Products Limited (Flook 1994, GAT report no. 124). A project design was submitted in March 2000 by GAT, proposing a programme of field evaluation and mitigation.

An area with dimensions of 40m x 95m, (centred in NGR SH4570 4960) was to be stripped of topsoil as part of the next phase of quarry expansion. Tarmac Quarry Products Limited asked GAT to carry out a watching brief while the stripping was taking place. A watching brief had previously been carried out on an area to the east, and elements of a field system possibly of medieval or Romano-British date were identified (Kenny 2001, GAT report no. 424). The *Topography and Geology* and *Archaeological Background* sections of the present report are reproduced from this report.

Archaeological aims

The aims of the watching brief were to investigate and record all archaeological features revealed during the soil stripping operation, and to recommend whether any further work was necessary.

Methodology

The watching brief took place at various times during the weeks of 11 and 18th August 2003. The topsoil was stripped by a 360-degree excavator using a toothed bucket. The site was stripped in sections, with c. 0.3m of subsoil also being removed before the next section was stripped. The topsoil and subsoil was stored on the western edge of the site. The practice required the presence of an archaeologist throughout most of the stripping process in order to check each stripped section for features before the subsoil was removed.

The excavator and truck drivers were requested not to drive over stripped areas to avoid obscuring the archaeology. The use of a 360-degree excavator, rather than a bulldozer, greatly improved the chance of identifying archaeological features. However, the teeth of the excavator bucket caused considerable disturbance of the soil, reducing visibility. Large features, especially those composed of stones, could be identified relatively easily, but small features, such as postholes, were unlikely to be recognised.

Recording

Identified features were recorded photographically and by notes and sketches, and located by measuring from the field boundaries. The archive is held by GAT under project number G1598.

Topography and Geology

The name Cefn Graianog literally translates as a gravelly ridge (Mason 1998, xvi), and this accurately describes its character. The low, hummocky ridge lies at the eastern end of the Lleyn Peninsula, within a basin, about 3km across, surrounded by hills. The ridge rises to a height of 160m and forms an island in area of wetter, heavier soils and bog. The soils in the basin are derived from glacial and fluvio-glacial deposits, mostly of Snowdonian origin, which have been heavily weathered under periglacial conditions. In poorly drained areas silty clays and peat have formed, but the soils on the ridge are well drained, if stony, brown earths of the Arfon series, with brown podzols on the steeper slopes. Although acid, these are some of the best soils in the northern Lleyn, and are excellent soils for small-scale arable agriculture (Mason 1998, xvi-xix).

Archaeological Background

Prehistoric and Roman activity

The early prehistory of the ridge is far from clear. No Mesolithic artefacts have been discovered, suggesting that the area was avoided during that period, when occupation was mainly concentrated near the coast. However, there are some slight hints from the pollen record that forest clearance may have occurred before 4000 BC (Chambers 1998, 57), and a patch of burnt stone under a later burnt mound was dated to 5955-5500 cal BC (CAR-721) (Kelly 1992, 85). Kelly (ibid, 86) dismisses the date as a result of dating inadequate quantities of charcoal, but a recent excavation about 1km south-west of the ridge also produced Mesolithic dates. The dates, ranging from 5310-6625 cal BC at 2 sigma, were from a deposit of charcoal within what may be a natural, periglacial formation (Kenney 2000). The evidence raises the possibility of deliberate burning of the vegetation in the Mesolithic period.

The Neolithic period is almost as invisible on the ridge, although the pollen evidence is clear that there was anthropogenic forest clearance during this period (Chambers 1998, 57). The long history of farming on the ridge began during this period, although no trace of the settlements of these early farmers have yet been found. The nearest Neolithic monument is the chambered tomb at Penarth (PRN 199), situated 3.25km north-west of the ridge (Kelly 1998, 161).

The earliest monument on the ridge itself is a standing stone (PRN 124) of presumed Bronze Age date. While the numerous cairns on the ridge are generally undated, the two located close to the standing stone are presumably also Bronze Age, and appear to be funerary monuments rather than clearance cairns (PRN 224, 225). These three monuments are collectively scheduled as Cn 98 (Mason 1998, xix). The pollen evidence shows phases of clearance and regeneration throughout the Bronze Age, and the presence of burnt mounds may indicate Bronze Age settlement in the area (Kelly 1998, 161). One of these mounds (PRN 129) was excavated (Kelly 1992), producing dates demonstrating its use between the mid third and early second millennium BC, and later in the late second to early first millennium (Kelly 1998, 161). There is another burnt mound site, 175m south of the excavated one, which appears to be a complex site with three conjoined mounds (PRN 3997). The chance discovery of a ring (PRN 3446), of the type known as Bronze Age ring money, by a farm worker in 1970, suggests Bronze Age activity near the summit of the ridge.

Major and sustained forest clearance started on the ridge in the mid first millennium BC, and the earliest settlement sites discovered so far date from the mid 2nd century BC. Three hut groups have been excavated on the ridge (Mason 1998). The Graeanog site and Cefn Graeanog II were founded in the 2nd century BC and continued through the end of the Roman period. The third hut group, Cefn Graeanog I, was established in the 2nd century AD, and again continued to the end of the Roman period. There may have been a 4th hut group (PRN 118) 300m to the west of Graeanog (Kelly 1998, 162) and there are similar sites about 1km away to the south-west around Caerau (PRN 108, 109). The Iron Age is further represented in the area by a small hillfort (PRN 203) on Y Foel, the rounded hill to the north of the area (Mason 1998, xix).

Medieval and later periods

Although the hut groups went out of use at the end of the Roman period the pollen record shows that the ridge continued to be farmed, and the settlements had probably not moved very far away (Kelly 1998, 162). Resettlement of the ridge occurred from the 8th century AD. The Graeanog hut group site was reoccupied between the 8th and 11th centuries, and a medieval homestead (PRN 120), excavated by Kelly (Kelly 1982), was in use between the 11th and 13th centuries. A further group of medieval platform houses (PRN 123) were located on the bog margin to the south, but they were destroyed without excavation (Kelly 1998, 162). A possible medieval farmstead (PRN 3999) and an isolated platform house (PRN 4360) are located on the north-eastern slope of the ridge.

In the medieval period Graeanog first appears in written history. The confirmation of the grant of 'Grayanawt' to the *clas* of Clynnog Fawr, in the 1209 charter of Llywelyn ap Iorweth, probably refers to the excavated medieval homestead (PRN 120) (Kelly 1998, 162).

neighbouring sites, combined with artefactual evidence, can solve the problems of dating these field boundaries.

Summary

A single feature was identified during the watching brief. This was interpreted as being the denuded remains of a field bank. This could be post medieval but could alternatively be part of the remains of a field system, further elements of which were identified in a watching brief to the east (Kenny 2001). The field system was not dated, but may be of medieval or even Romano-British date. Future work may be able to establish the date of the fields.

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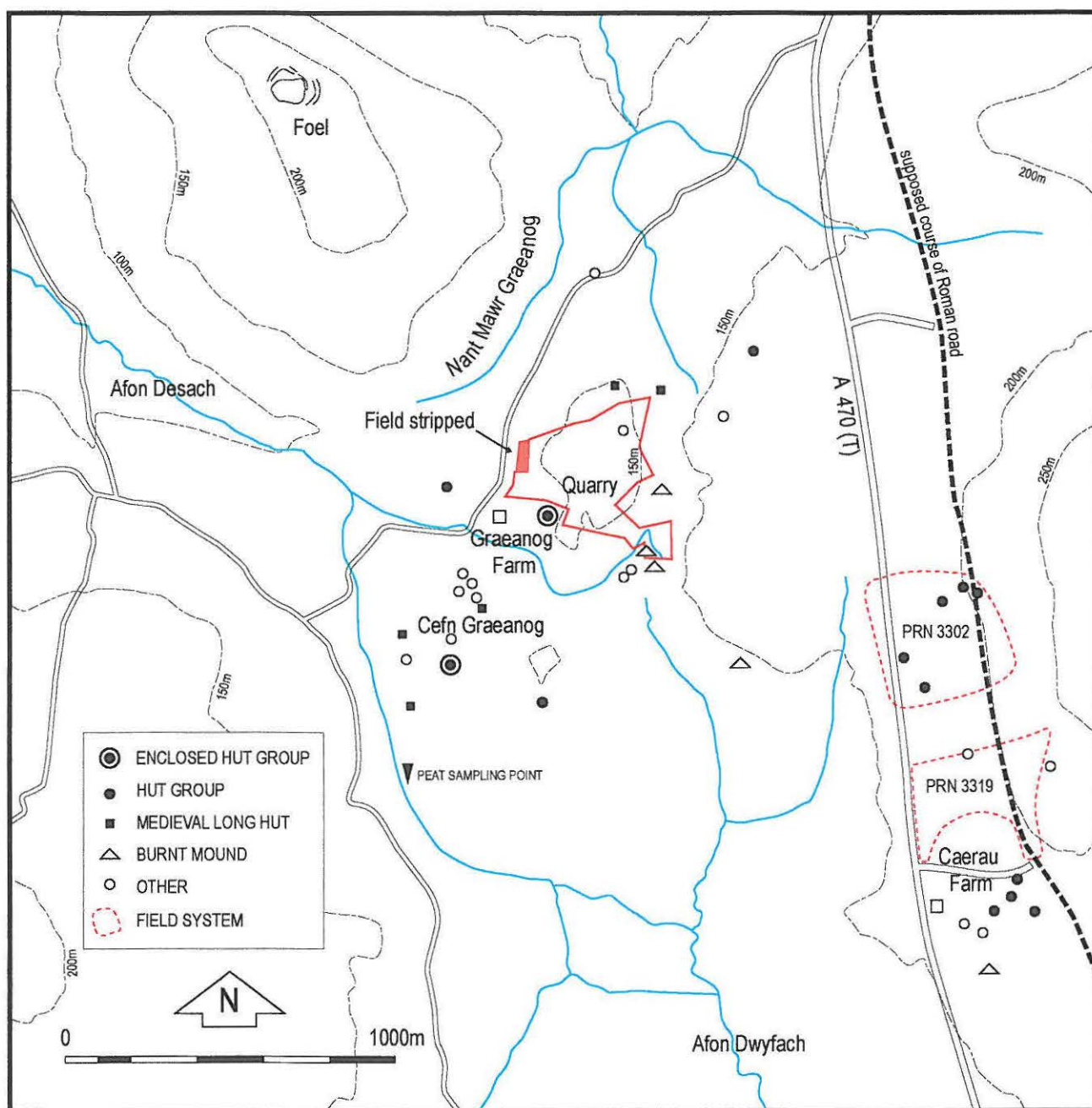


Fig 1 : Known archaeological sites in the Graianog area.

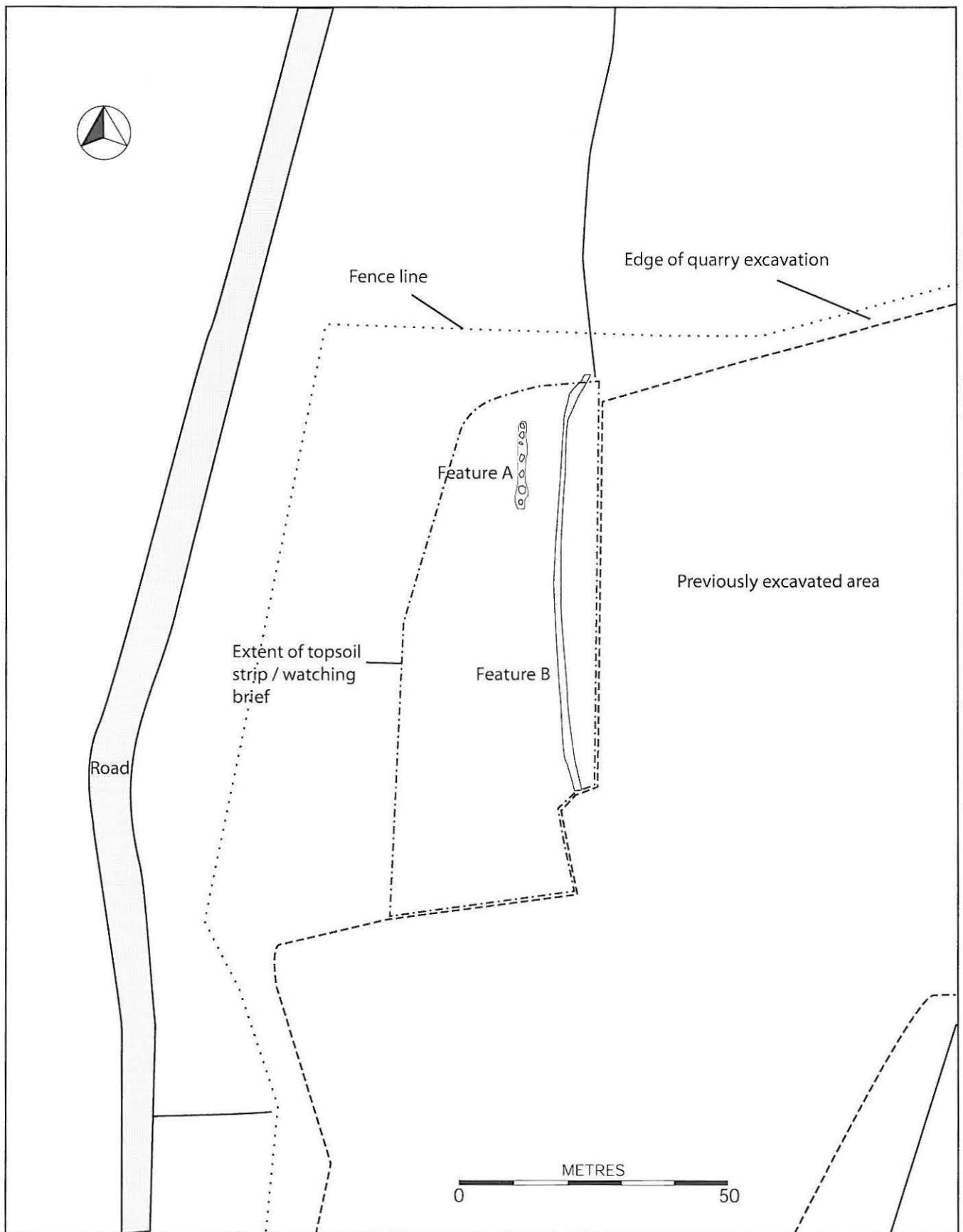


Fig. 2 Site plan showing location of features