
CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW POLICE STATION ON THE SITE OF THE BISHOP'S PALACE, BANGOR

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF 2004 – 2005

GAT Project No. G1785

Report No. 600



Prepared for Ainsley Gommon Architects
On behalf of North Wales Police

By G.H. Smith

August 2005



Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

☎ 01248 352535 ☎ 01248 370925 email : gat@heneb.co.uk

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Cover: 16th century ditch and later garden perimeter wall exposed in section at the east side of the site.
From the north-west. 1m scale. 5th January 2005

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2. The new buildings in relation to areas excavated in 1996 (Green), and 2003-4 (Black broken line). Major excavated features: 19th-20th century sewers – purple, 18th-19th C palace outbuildings – blue, earlier palace features – orange. Red arrows indicate the location and direction of record photographs Figs 3-10.
3. Subsoil section at the east side of the site. From the north-west.
4. Early 20th C sewer-cut beneath brick-built inspection chamber at the east side of the site. From the north-west.
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1. SUMMARY

A watching brief was carried out; chiefly to look at a few areas beyond those that had been excavated in 2003-4. One new feature was identified at the east side of the site. This was an 18th-early 19th century brick-vaulted tank, possibly part of an early sewerage system relating to the palace stables. The watching brief also identified a continuation of a 16th century ditch first recorded during the 2003 and 2004 excavations. No new Medieval or early Post-Medieval features were identified. Observation and recording was greatly restricted for health and safety reasons because of the method of construction.

2. INTRODUCTION

Evaluation excavations of the site of the proposed new police station adjoining the Town Hall, formerly the Bishop's Palace, were carried out in December 2003 (Smith 2004a) for Ainsley Gommon Architects, on behalf of the North Wales Police Authority. These showed that some stratified remains and features were present, which were earlier than the 18-19th century outbuildings of the Bishop's Palace, which had stood on the site until 1996 (Fig. 1) (RCAHMW 1996; Johnstone 1996, 2000). Subsequently larger scale excavations were carried out over the area of the proposed new buildings in May and June 2004 (Smith 2004b) with the exception of part of the area that was inaccessible, that is the area under a tree protected by a Tree Preservation Order and an area to the east, which extended under the existing pavement (Fig. 2). It was agreed that an archaeological watching brief should be carried out during any groundwork excavations for the new buildings.

3. SPECIFICATION

The archaeological watching brief was agreed because there were some areas of possible archaeological remains were not accessible for excavation in 2004 and because some features were only partially excavated in 2004, particularly a large ditch of probable 16th century date.

The watching brief was to be carried out by intermittent visits, following the progress of the construction work with recording carried out to a level as appropriate. A report would be prepared and archive records retained.

4. METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

Occasional visits were made during the trenching for the new building foundations. A new sewer was cut and laid across the centre of the site before the watching brief began, so that area was unfortunately not studied. This was the area where a ditch of possibly Medieval date, with water-logged and preserved organic deposits, had been found in 2004.

The watching brief was restricted to notes and photographs because the depth of the unsupported foundation trenches and the need to pour concrete as soon as possible after excavation. The trenches were cut using a 360⁰ excavator to a depth of c. 2.8m, making it unsafe to enter them or to approach the edges, except where there happened to be *in situ* hard standing, such as previously laid concrete.

5. RESULTS OF THE WATCHING BRIEF

5.1 The site was visited on nine occasions between 21st December 2004 and 17th January 2005, which saw the completion of the ground works for the actual buildings. There was then a delay until works commenced on a new road connecting the site to Garth Road and construction of boundary walls at the north side of the site. In the event additional restrictions were made on the construction to avoid disturbance to the roots of the trees at the north side, which had Tree Preservation Orders. The new road was constructed as a raised surface laid on geotextile and so did not disturb any archaeological layers. The new boundary walls did not intrude on any archaeologically sensitive layers, which excavation in 2003 had shown to be overlaid by about 0.75m of made-ground and garden soils.

5.2 Selected photographs are shown in Figs 3-10, illustrating the main observations. The locations and directions of these photographs in relation to the foundation trenches for the new buildings are shown in Fig. 2.

5.3 At the east side of the site, in the area that was not available for excavation in 2004, the foundation trenches for the east side of the Office/Admin and Reception areas (Fig. 2) revealed a layer of fine gravel at -0.4m to -0.8m (Fig. 3). This is likely to be the same as layer 317 at the east side of Trench 8 excavated in 2004. This was a dense gravelly layer with an iron-panned surface, quite different to any other layers or natural subsoil encountered on the site. It was interpreted as possibly a road surface belonging to a road oriented north-south at the east side of the place, shown on Speed's map of Bangor of 1610, prior to the construction of the extensive palace outbuildings in the 18th and 19th century.

5.4 Foundation trenching at the east side of the site also removed two brick-built inspection chambers (Figs 3 and 4) belonging to two east-west sewers from the palace/town hall that were located in 2004 (Fig. 2). These sewers belong with the improvements carried out when the former Bishop's Palace land and buildings were acquired by Bangor City Council, c. 1900 (Roberts 1994, 38).

5.5 In one place a larger area than elsewhere was excavated to provide a concrete base for the Armoury (Fig. 2). This happened to cut across the line of a ditch and wall that were excavated and recorded in 2004. The wall was identified as a garden wall belonging to the later Bishop's Palace in the 17th-18th century. This had been built on the same line of an earlier ditch, which had probably also been a boundary, and which was dated to the 16th century on the basis of a large, fresh fragment of an imported German beer tankard from the base of the ditch, which also produced a carved wooden bowl or jug cover. The wall and ditch could be seen in cross-section (Figs 5 and 6) but no further artefacts were found. By a strange coincidence the concrete base for the armoury lay close to the position of a concrete block foundation found in 2003-4, which was identified as the base for a World War I tank, displayed there as a war monument until about 1937.

5.6 Trenching across the centre of site provided some good sections through the subsoil there (Figs 7-8), of which only the surface had been revealed during excavations in 2004, and so provides some information about the geomorphological history of the Adda Valley. The surface revealed then had been yellow-buff silty clay. This was the weathered surface of a deeper orange-brown stony clay horizon with patches of iron staining and panning. It was clearly not a fluvial deposit and may have resulted from slumping of fluvio-glacial deposits from the valley sides. This horizon overlies a deep, blue-grey clay, a layer that had also been encountered in 2004 at the base of a possibly Medieval drainage ditch, the deepest feature excavated in trench 6 (Fig. 2). This layer appears to be an estuarine rather than river deposit and may date from the later Post-Glacial period when sea-level temporarily rose above that of the present day.

5.7 Excavation of foundations around the entrance to the new building at the south-east part of the site (Fig. 2) broke into a small water-filled underground tank or chamber (Fig. 9). This was built of bricks with a brick-vaulted ceiling. When fully revealed, during removal it proved to be only about 1m square. After construction the backfill around the structure had included a good deal of broken pottery, including coarse earthenware as well as finer cream tableware. A sample was collected. This was similar in type to crockery found during the 2004 excavations, in the backfill of an internal (sink?) drain at the east end of the former palace outbuilding at the west end of Trench 6 (a scullery). The pottery was interpreted as rubbish from the palace dumped either during 19th century renovations or when the buildings were taken over by Bangor City Council c. 1900 and presumably subject to alterations and renovations. This would have involved insertion of new drains and sewers. One of the drains was in the yard north of the former palace coach-house at the south-east of the site and this drain emptied into the brick-vaulted tank (Fig. 2), which was therefore also of the same date, presumably connecting with the sewer found further to the north.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The construction ground work involving laying of a new foul water main drain was not seen. Observation of excavation of the foundation trenches for the new building provided some new information but this was mainly of more recent features or of features recorded in detail during the 2004 excavations. No new features were identified relating to the actual occupation period of the palace and so no new archaeological investigation or further detailed recording was required. This meant that the construction could continue uninterrupted.

7. ARCHIVE

3 Day record sheets
1 annotated site plan

2 photographic record forms

13 photographs duplicated in 52 frames of colour negative, colour transparency and digital scanned negatives

8. REFERENCES

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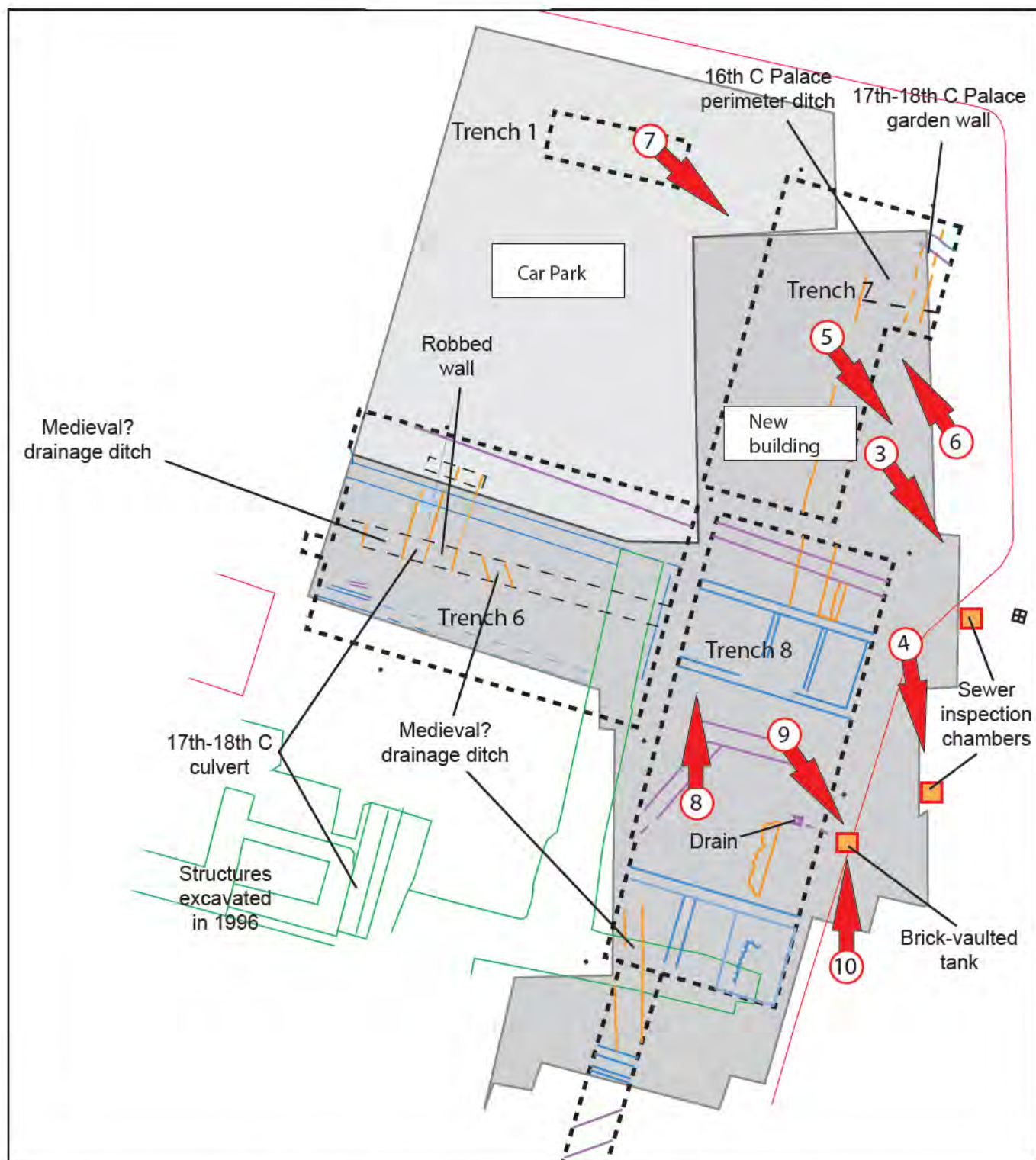
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Bangor Bishop's Palace Archaeological Watching brief 2004-5

Fig.2 The new buildings in relation to areas excavated in 1996 (Green), and 2003-4 (Black broken line).

Major excavated features: 19th-20th C sewers - purple, 18th-19th C palace outbuildings - blue, Earlier palace features - orange. Red arrows indicate the location of figs 3-10.



Bangor Bishop's Palace Archaeological Watching brief
 Fig. 3 Subsoil section at the east edge of the site, beneath former pavement. From north-west



Bangor Bishop's Palace Archaeological Watching brief
 Fig. 4 Early 20th C sewer-cut beneath brick-built inspection chamber at the east edge of the site. From the north-west.



Bangor Bishop's Palace Archaeological Watching brief
 Fig. 5 16th century ditch and later garden perimeter wall exposed in section at the east side of site.
 From the north-west. 1m scale.



Bangor Bishop's Palace Archaeological Watching brief
 Fig. 6 16th century ditch and later garden perimeter wall exposed in section at the east side of site.
 From the south-east. 1m scale.



Bangor Bishop's Palace Archaeological Watching brief
 Fig. 7 General cross-section of subsoil in the centre of the site. From the north-west. 1m scale.



Bangor Bishop's Palace Archaeological Watching brief
 Fig. 8 General cross-section of subsoil at the south end of the site. From the south. 2m scale.



Bangor Bishop's Palace Archaeological Watching brief
Fig. 9 Water-filled brick tank or cellar at east side of site. From the north-west.



Bangor Bishop's Palace Archaeological Watching brief
Fig. 10 Water-filled brick tank at the south-east side of the site, showing surrounding backfill. From the south.



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TRUST

Craig Beuno, Ffordd y Garth, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 2RT Ffon/Tel 01248 352535 Ffacs/Fax 01248 370925
e-mail: gat@heneb.co.uk web site: www.heneb.co.uk