
Llanrwst Almshouse, LLanrwst



Archaeological Watching Brief

GAT Project No. 1890

Report No. 630

February 2005

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

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Prepared for The Llanrwst Museum Almshouse Trust

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Llanrwst

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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Archaeological Watching Brief: Llanrwst Almshouse, Llanrwst (G1890)

SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief has been undertaken in advance of renovation and development work in the back yard of the former Almshouse in Llanrwst. The groundworks involved removing the existing slate slabs covering the yard and the replacement and repair of the existing drainage system, which ran through the centre of the yard. Footings were also dug as foundations for new planting areas. The replacement drainage utilised the original layout and did not expose any archaeological activity bar the construction of the earlier drainage system. The removal of the slate flooring of the backyard exposed the cobbled floor of the former coal shed and outdoor toilet block that ran along the western and northern boundary walls as well as the a cultivation horizon and a series of stone-lined culverts that extended from the Almshouse. The culverts had been truncated by the drainage system. The footings for the new planting areas were shallow and did not reveal anything of note. The archaeology within the backyard was limited to nineteenth and twentieth century activity with no distinctive evidence related to the construction of the Almshouse in the seventeenth century. The earliest activity was represented by the culverts and the cultivation soil.

1 INTRODUCTION

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust has been asked by the *Llanrwst Almshouse Museum Trust* to undertake an archaeological watching brief at the former Almshouse, Llanrwst (SH79796160), to observe the remodelling and renovation of the enclosed backyard (Figure 1). The renovation programme involves the removal of the current slate slab floor and the rebuilding of the twentieth century drainage system that runs across the site. Further work includes the rebuilding of the current plant bed and the construction of two new plant beds, requiring the digging of new footings.

2 SPECIFICATION AND PROJECT DESIGN

The basic requirement was for a watching brief of the proposed area, in order to assess the impact of the proposals on the archaeological features within the area concerned. The importance and condition of known archaeological remains were to be assessed, and areas of archaeological potential identified. Measures to mitigate the effects of the construction work on the archaeological resource were to be suggested.

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust's proposals for filling these requirements were as follows:

- Watching brief
- Report

3 METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

The watching brief was undertaken on the 19th and 26th of January, 2006.

The aim of the watching brief was to monitor the renovation and remodelling of the backyard area of the former Almshouse. The work involved the lifting and replacing of the slate paving, the replacement and repair of the existing drains and the building of raised planting beds. The slate slabs covering the yard were removed by hand and the pipe trench and footings were dug using a 1.5 tonne 360° tracked excavator.

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust would like to thank Imogen Crawford-Mowday of the Llanrwst Almshouse Museum Trust, K D Construction and the Ark Company for their help during the course of the project.

4 TOPOGRAPHY

The former Almshouse is located towards the centre of Llanrwst to the east of Gwydir Chapel along Tan yr Eglwys Road.

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

5.1 Archaeological and historical background

The Almshouse was c.1610-1612 under the patronage of Sir John Wynn of Gwydir Castle and comprised twelve rooms designed to house the elderly poor, one to each room. The lodging was provided for free with a small stipend supplied to each tenant. The east ground floor apartment was reduced to a passageway in 1812 to give access to Tan-y-Fynwent, behind the Almshouse. In 1843 women were admitted, whilst improvements were made to the premises in the mid-nineteenth century, including the construction of twelve coal houses and a ladies toilet, which were built in the yard and new furniture was placed in the rooms. The Almshouse was renamed the Hospital of John Wynn of Gwydir in 1927 and continued in its use as a home for the elderly until its closure in 1972. The Almshouse was restored in the late 1990's and opened as a community museum and visitor attraction in 2002.

The Almshouse is a listed building Grade II (Cadw reference 41/C/40 (2)) and is located at NGR SH79796160. The PRN within the Historic Environment Record is 3618. The building is one and a half storeys high, with a six bay almshouse range. There are three pairs of tall stone chimneys and a slate roof. A passageway, giving access to Tan-y-Fynwent house at the rear, is located at the eastern end of the building. The west gabled end overlooks the grounds of Gwydir chapel and is surmounted with a stone eagle. A 17th century plaque is set into the west facing wall. The east facing end is abutted by a two storey structure. The rear of the building is accessed through the passage to Tan-y-Fynwent (Figure 2). This backyard area comprises a narrow open passage, c.8.0m long and c.2.0m wide, opening onto a rectangular backyard c.23.0m long and c.5.0m wide. A stone-built boundary wall comprises the western and northern ends of the backyard, whilst the southern end is formed by the rear of the Almshouse and the eastern end by a two-storey building. At the western end of the backyard, a narrow two storey wing extends into the yard and acts as a porch which provides, on the upper floor, a replacement room for that removed for the passageway (Figure 2). The rear of the Almshouse has, on the ground floor, wooden doors to the lower rooms and stone stairs, which provide access to the upper rooms. The coal sheds and toilet block have been removed, with the coal shed area on the west side of the yard covered with slate slabs and the coal shed/toilet area on the north side covered by a flower bed. Remnants of the slate lean-to roof for the coal sheds can still be seen attached to the north boundary wall. The floor of the backyard comprises slate slabs of various sizes.

5.2 Results of the Archaeological Watching Brief

The archive is held by GAT under the project number (G1890).

The initial stage of the watching brief was monitoring the removal of the slate floor slabs. This exposed the cobbled floor surface of the coal sheds at the western end of the yard (Figure 2). The cobbles covered an area 1.00m wide and 3.90m long. The cobbles were disturbed but still contained remnants of coal dust on the surface (Plate 2). A slate edging surrounded the outside of the cobbled area, whilst an upright slate slab defined the southern wall of one of the former sheds (Figure 2; Plate 2). The flower bed along the north wall was removed, exposing the remainder of the coal shed/toilet block area. Both the cobbles and the slate edging were more disturbed along this area, but it was possible to identify several of the slate partitions which originally separated the coal sheds (Figure 2; Plate 7). The remaining slate slabs across the rest of the backyard, had been laid on a thin sub-base of pea gravel, whilst several patches of orange sand reflected where some of the slabs had recently been re-laid, probably during maintenance work on the drainage system that ran thorough the yard. This sub-base was removed and the ground level reduced by 0.30m, exposing a cultivation deposit, dark-brown in colour with inclusions of charcoal flecking, mortar and pieces of coal (that latter two could possibly be linked to the 19th refurbishment and the construction of the coal sheds). At the southern end of the yard, a series of culverts were identified, cutting the natural clay and sealed by the cultivation soil (Figure 2). There were four culverts leading from under the Almshouse and continuing north towards the centre of the yard. The culverts varied in width, between 0.40m and 0.80m and with using rectangular slabs of stone used as capping stones (Plates 5 and 6). The culverts were shallow, c.0.20m deep, with stone sides and a slate base. They were all truncated by the modern drainage cut which ran through the centre of the yard (Figure 2). The longest example, which ran on a southwest to northeast alignment, had partially collapsed and had also been cut by a ceramic drain pipe that ran along the Almshouse wall

(Figure 2; Plate 5). A 20th century copper pipe was also identified in this area, running northwards from the Almshouse. The pipe was thin, several centimetres wide, and was laid in a 0.40m wide pipe trench, which was truncated by the large drainage cut in the centre of the yard (Figure 2). The drainage trench was connected to the Almshouse and contained the sewerage and rainwater pipes from the building, which ran through a set of manholes before exiting the yard under the passageway. The pipes were ceramic and were laid during the twentieth century. The pipe trench was re-cut and the pipes replaced with plastic versions. The manholes were also repaired. The new pipe trench followed the alignment of the original and did not expose any archaeology as the area had been extensively disturbed when the original pipe trench was laid.

A series of foundation cuts were dug for the footings surrounding the new plant beds in the yard. The footings were on average 0.40m wide and 0.30m deep. Three foundation cuts were dug into the cobbled area that ran along the northern wall. The cuts were orientated north to south and were c.1.00m long and revealed that the cobbles were set onto a sub-base of pea gravel and imported soil. Mixed into the sub-base were fragments of white and brown glazed pottery. Below the sub-base of the central footing was a rubble layer that contained fragments of brick and brown glazed pottery (including the spout of a teapot). A foundation cut was dug along the northern boundary wall as far as the plant bed, with another foundation cut to the south, which ran parallel to the back of the Almshouse (Figure 2). The foundation cuts were narrow and did not reveal much bar cultivation soil, and, in the case of the cut running parallel to the Almshouse, stone rubble indicative the 19th century refurbishments.

6 CONCLUSION

The watching brief revealed that the backyard of the Almshouse was dominated by 19th and 20th century activity, represented by the construction of the coal sheds and the drainage system. There was little evidence of the any activity associated with the original construction of the Almshouse in the 17th century. The only earlier activity was represented by the stone-built culverts and the shallow cultivation soil. Neither contained any datable artefacts. The slate slabs were presumably laid as part of the 19th century refurbishment work, with additional slabs laid when the coal sheds were demolished, covering the cobbled floors. The re-cutting of the drainage system, which was the largest part of the project and dominated the centre of the backyard, utilised the original drainage cut and did not expose any other activity.

7 SOURCES CONSULTED

Rowley, P., Williams, P. & Jones, E. 2005 *Hen Luniau Llanrwst a'r Cyffiniau*

CADW Listed Building Records; Llanrwst

Historic Environment Record (HER) Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

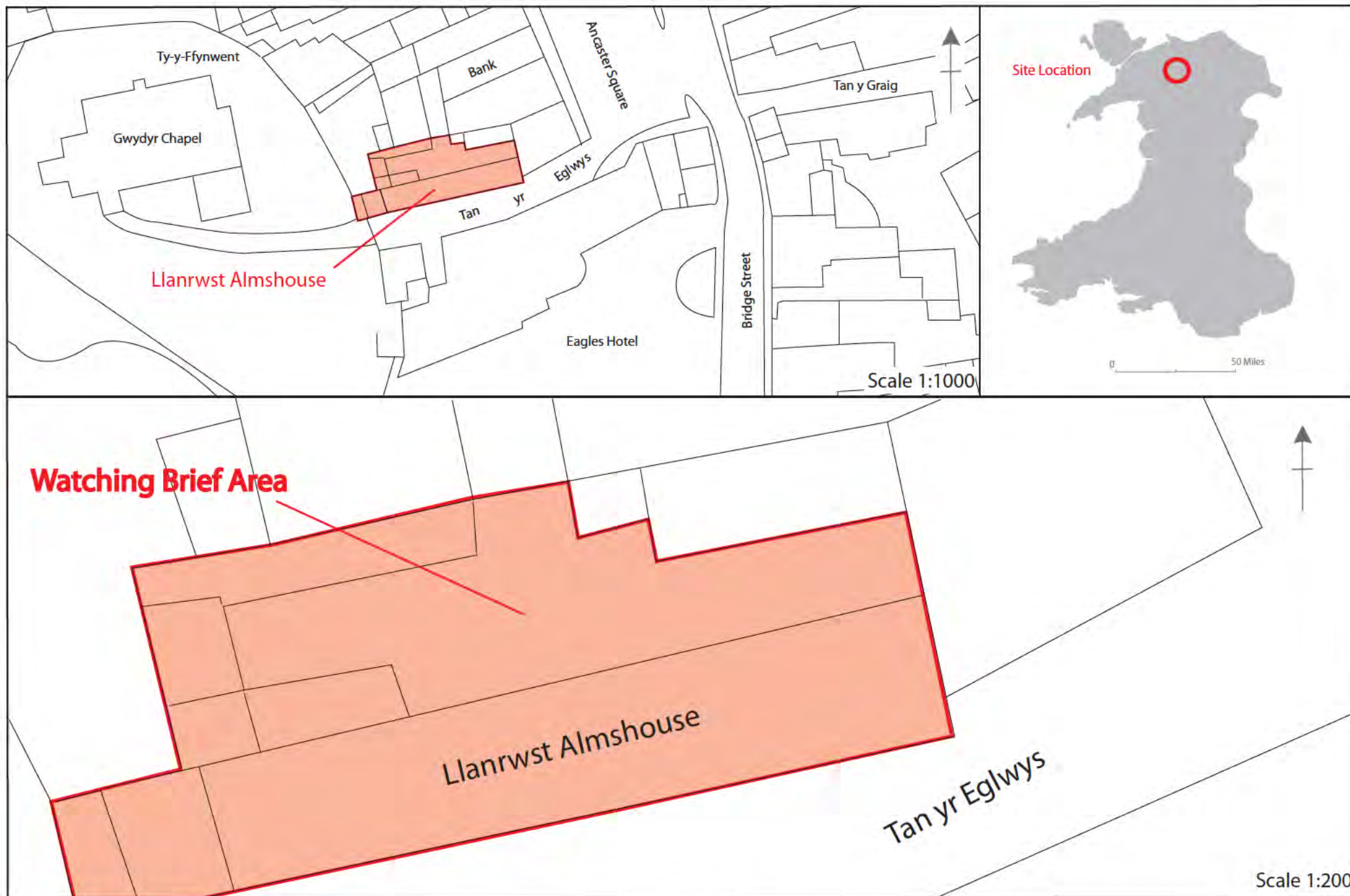


Figure 1. Location maps

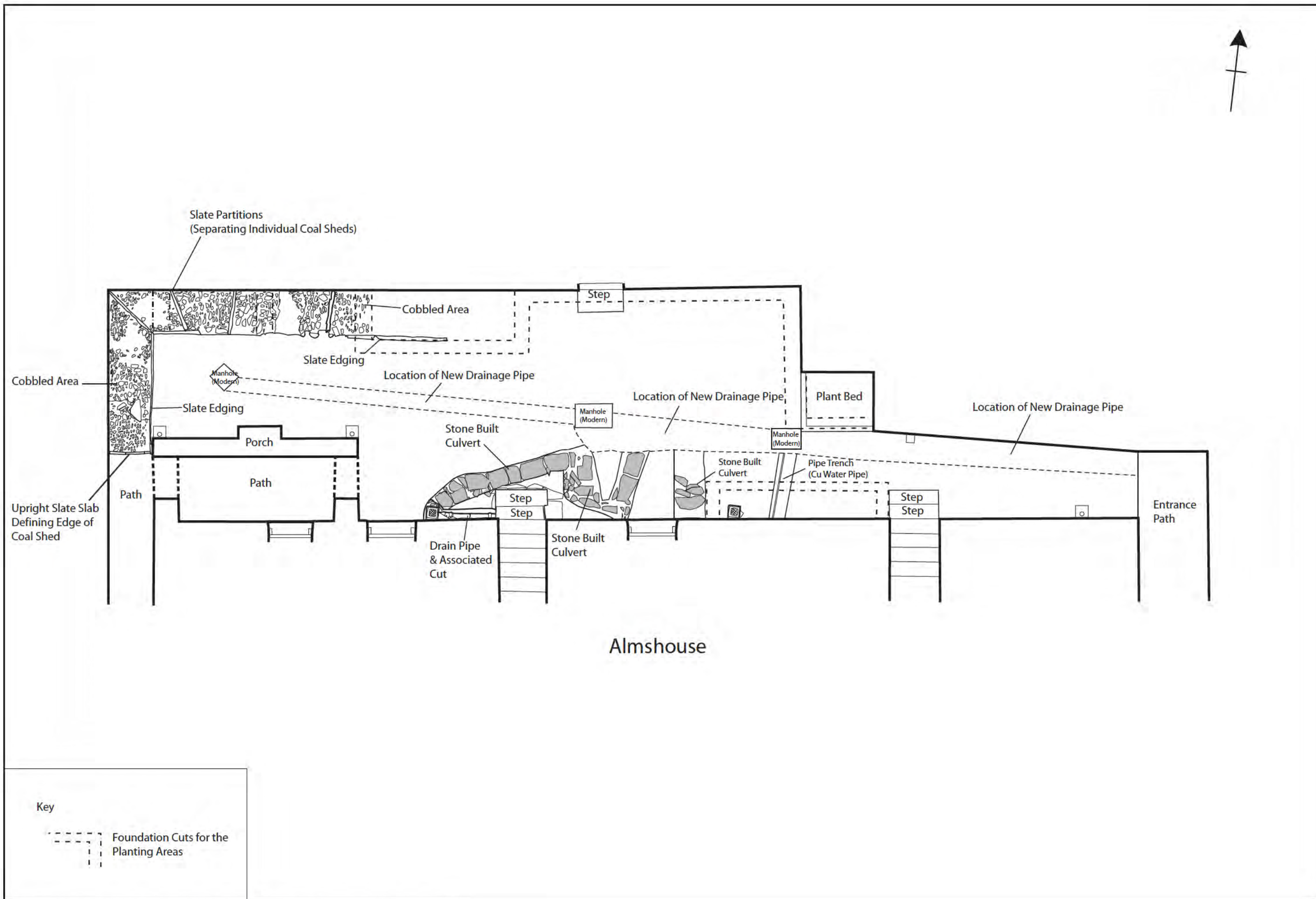


Figure 2: Plan of Watching Brief Area to the Rear of Llanrwst Almshouse (Scale 1:80 @ A3)



Plate 1: South Facing Elevation of Almshouse



Plate 2: View South of Former Coal Shed Wall
and Cobbled Floor Surface



Plate 3: South Facing Section of Pipe Trench



Plate 4: View West of Pipe Trench



Plate 5: View East of Culverts



Plate 6: View West of Culverts



Plate 7: View West of Former Coal Shed Area with Surviving Cobbled Floor. (Note: Coal Dust on the Cobbles and Redundant Roof Slates Embedded at the Top of the Boundary Wall)



Plate 8: Mid-Twentieth Century Photograph of the Watching Brief Area. (Note: Coal Sheds to the Rear with Slate Roofing and the Slate Paving Slabs on the Floor.) Source: *Hen Luniau Llanrwst a'r Cyffiniau*