CAE TY GWYN PLAYING FIELD, LLANBEBLIG, CAERNARFON



Report on watching brief on test pits

GAT Project No. 2060 Report No. 783 March 2009

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Craig Beuno, Ffordd y Garth, Bangor, Gwynedd, LL57 2RT

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WATCHING BRIEF ON TEST PITS

GAT Project no. G2060

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Prepared for Cyngor Gwynedd Council

By J Kenney

March 2009

Cover: Digging test pit 2 with T \hat{y} Gwyn in the background

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd

G2060 CAE TY GWYN PLAYING FIELD, LLANBEBLIG, CAERNARFON

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CAE TY GWYN PLAYING FIELD, LLANBEBLIG, CAERNARFON (G2060)

WATCHING BRIEF

Summary

Six test pits were required to assess the suitability of a field at Llanbeblig, Caernarfon for use as an extension to the existing cemetery. Gwynedd Archaeological Trust conducted an archaeological watching brief on this work. The watching brief allowed the test pits to be located so as to avoid the known archaeological features. No archaeology was present in the test pits but the depth and nature of the deposits on the site were inspected.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT) was asked by Cyngor Gwynedd Council to carry out an archaeological watching brief to assess the suitability of a field for use as an extension to the existing cemetery at St Peblig's church, Llanbeblig (centred on NGR SH 489 623; figure 1). The area of land is approximately 1.5ha in extent, and is currently in use as a football ground.

Hydrological test pits were required to investigate the depth and nature of the deposits and the level of the water table on the site. Six test pits were dug, having been located so as to give a representative sample of the deposits.

This work followed an initial archaeological assessment of the site. This assessment, which included a geophysical survey of the area, confirmed the presence of archaeological features on the site, including a potential cemetery of early medieval date (Kenney and Hopewell 2009; GAT report 773).

2. SPECIFICATION AND PROJECT DESIGN

A detailed brief has not been prepared for this work, but the project design was agreed with Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service, who are monitoring this project. The watching brief follows a project design that conforms to the requirements to the guidelines specified in *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief* (Institute of Field Archaeologists, 1994, rev. 2001).

The principal aim of this phase of the project was to ensure the digging of the six test pits to allow a hydrological survey to be undertaken, whilst ensuring minimum impact to any archaeological remains.

3. METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust under took the watching brief on 2^{nd} March 2009. The test pits needed to be fairly evenly spaced around the field, and were positioned to avoid the football pitch. The precise locations were chosen through consultation between archaeologist and the hydro survey team. The former ensured that the test pits avoided potential archaeological features identified during the archaeological assessment (Kenney and Hopewell 2009).

The 6 test pits were dug by a tracked mini-excavator. The pits were dug in two phases. First the miniexcavator used a toothless bucket to gradually take the deposits down to a level at which undisturbed virgin ground could clearly be seen (generally about 0.5m below the ground surface). This process was done under constant monitoring by the archaeologist. Each test pit was recorded at this level, so that the surface of the natural deposits could be photographed and the archaeologist could safely enter the test pits to inspect and record the deposits.

If archaeological features had been identified the digging of the test pit would have been stopped and presence of the features recorded. The test pit would then have been dug elsewhere. However, as no archaeology was present this procedure was not necessary. By excavating into the top of the

undisturbed natural deposits it was possible to check that no graves, etc., filled by redeposited natural were present and to confirm conclusively that each test pit was empty of archaeology before the pit was dug to its full depth.

When the test pits had been recorded the mini-excavator used a toothed bucket to continue down through the stony virgin ground to a depth of 2.5m or to a level where the water made further digging unnecessary. The second phase of digging was watched by the geologist and the completed pit was inspected and photographed by the archaeologist. The test pits were all a bucket wide (1.0m) and between 2.5 and 2.9m long at the surface, but became smaller with depth.

The archaeologist photographed each pit and recorded the layers revealed by making notes and measurements.

The location of the test pits was plotted with a Total Station Theodolite and this divorced survey was fitted onto OS map detail.

The archive consists of notes, the TST survey and 33 digital images taken using a Nikon D40 DSLR. The paper archive will be held by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (project code G2060), and the digital photographs and other digital material will be curated by the National Monument Record (NMR), Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales, Aberystwyth. A copy of this report will be sent to the Historic Environment Record (HER) Archaeologist at the curatorial division of Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, Bangor, for deposition in the Regional HER. A copy will also be provided to the NMR.

4. GEOLOGICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The field proposed for the new cemetery is generally flat with a very slight slope towards the southwest. It lies between 50 and 40m OD on a ridge of ground between the rivers Seiont and Cadnant that flow through the town of Caernarfon into the Menai Strait. The field is on the eastern edge of the town, where it opens into agricultural land comprising mainly small pasture fields, and is currently used as a football ground.

The rocks underlying Caernarfon are Ordovician shales and these are overlain by glacial drift (Davies 1977 and Casey and Davies 1993, 1). The test pits showed this drift to be a stony boulder clay.

An archaeological assessment and geophysical survey were carried out on the site (Kenney and Hopewell 2009). This highlighted several archaeological sites in the area and features within the study area itself.

The edge of the proposed development area lies some 140m east of St Peblig's church, and approximately 170m east of the site of a Roman Mithraeum, which was associated with the adjacent Roman fort of Segontium. Finds indicating the presence of a Roman cemetery have been found either side the Roman road that leads south-east from the fort past St Peblig's church, and a Bronze Age burial urn, found at Maes y Barcer to the north of the study area, indicate the presence of prehistoric burial in the area. An aerial photograph and subsequent geophysical survey revealed the presence of two or more square ditches which may contain burials of early medieval date, and other features in the immediate vicinity. The potential for the existence of buried archaeology at this site is therefore very high, and its potential relationships with the Roman cemeteries and medieval church are intriguing.

5. RESULTS OF THE TEST PITS

Introduction

Deposits in each test pit are described below and the results are summarised and conclusions discussed. The layers are defined by measurements from the present ground surface. The trenches are located on figure 2.

Test pit 1 (plate 1) Size: 2.5m by 1.0m, 2.5m deep max.

- 0-0.36m: Layer 101. Dark grey silty loam with few stones towards the top but about 20% stone along the base of the layer. The stones are occasionally up to 200mm in length. The smaller stones are generally sub-angular and the larger ones rounded. There are numerous roots and occasional fragments of coal or coke. Some 19th/20th century pottery was recovered but not retained. Topsoil, merging into ploughsoil.
- 0.36-2.5m: Layer 102. Friable sandy clay, mottled in colour, partly light grey/partly orange-brown. It contains about 30% stones, which are rounded or sub-rounded and up to 500mm in length. This deposit continued to the base of the trench, where the water level was reached. No bedrock was visible. Boulder clay.

Test pit 2 (plate 2)

Size: 2.6m by 1.0m, 2.5m deep max.

- 0-0.25m: Layer 201. Friable, dark grey sandy loam, with about 20% small sub-rounded stones. Topsoil
- 0.25-0.38m: Layer 202. Friable, dark grey-brown silty loam, generally freer of stones than 201. Contains occasional coal/coke fragments. Ploughsoil, here distinct enough to record as a separate layer.
- 0.38-2.5m: Layer 203. Yellow/grey brown sandy clay, fairly friable with c.20% stones up to 200mm in length. The stones are rounded or sub-rounded. The surface of this layer is orange-brown coloured and loess-like in patches, but these are discontinuous and only 0.1m deep. Below this level this deposit continued to the base of the trench, where the water level was reached. No bedrock was visible. Boulder clay: noticeably less stony in this test pit than in others.

Test pit 3 (plate 3)

Size: 2.5m by 1.0m, 2.3m deep max.

- 0-0.3m: Layer 301. Friable dark grey silty loam with about 20% stones, mainly rounded and small but some larger stones project into this layer. Occasional fragments of coal or coke. Topsoil, merging into ploughsoil.
- 0.3-2.3m: Layer 302. Friable yellow-brown clayey sand, with about 30% stones, which are rounded or sub-rounded and up to 600mm in length. This deposit continued to the base of the trench, where the water level was reached. Boulder clay. It appears in this trench and others that the larger stones are present in the upper part of the boulder clay and stones further down are generally smaller.

Test pit 4 (plate 4)

Size: 2.8m by 1.0m, 2.2m deep max.

- 0-0.4m: Layer 401. Friable dark grey silty loam with up to 40% stones, mainly towards the base of the layer. The stones are rounded and reach 600mm in length. Topsoil, merging into ploughsoil.
- 0.4-2.2m: Layer 402. Friable yellow-brown clayey silt, with about 40% stones, which are rounded or sub-rounded and up to 500mm in length. Some manganese mottling. This deposit continued to the base of the trench; the water table was reached at about 1.1m. Boulder clay.

Test pit 5 (plate 5)

Size: 2.9m by 1.0m, 2.2m deep max.

- 0-0.25m: Layer 501. Friable dark grey silty loam with up to 20% small stones, and numerous roots. Topsoil.
- 0.25-0.45m: Layer 502. Friable dark grey-brown silty loam with 30% stones up to 300mm in length. Ploughsoil. At the base of this a shallow linear feature was noticed but inspection showed this to be very slight and irregular and the result of root action.
- 0.45-2.2m: Layer 503. Pale orange-brown gritty clayey silt, with about 20% stones, up to 200mm in length. Noticeably less stony than some other test pits. This deposit continued to the base of the trench; the water table was reached at about 1.0m. Boulder clay.

Test pit 6 (plate 6)

Size: 2.8m by 1.0m, 2.5m deep max.

- 0-0.16m: Layer 601. Friable dark grey silty loam with few stones, and flecks of coal/coke. Topsoil.
- 0.16-0.34m: Layer 602. Friable dark grey-brown silty loam with c.30% stones up to 300mm in length. Ploughsoil.
- 0.34-2.5m: Layer 603. Yellow-brown clayey silt, with about 20% stones, up to 300mm in length. Mottled by iron oxides. This deposit continued to the base of the trench, where the water table was reached. Boulder clay. A very large boulder was seen about 1m below the ground surface.

Summary

The topsoil was between 0.3 and 0.45m deep and the previous ploughsoil could sometimes be divided from the active topsoil, but often they merged together into a single layer with only a greater concentration of stones towards the base to distinguish them. The boulder clay beneath was quite consistent in appearance. The colour and particle size changed slightly but generally it was a stony clayey silt. The stones it contained were frequently up to 500mm in length and occasionally larger. The larger stones in particular were well rounded and clearly represented a glacial deposit. As bedrock was not found in any of the trenches the glacial boulder clay must extend to over 2.5m below the present ground surface.

No archaeological layers or features were present in any of the test pits and no finds, other than recent pottery were recovered. It should be noted that the large stones in the surface of the boulder clay could make stripping trenches for further archaeological work difficult, although where the largest boulders are not present the boulder clay cleans up well with the excavator bucket and features should be fairly easy to identify within it. It is recommended that during machine stripping care should be taken to avoid dragging large stones and causing disturbance to adjacent deposits.

6. CONCLUSION

The watching brief was successful in positioning the test pits so as to avoid disturbing any archaeological features and deposits. It also allowed the depth and nature of the natural deposits on the site to be inspected. This will be useful in planning further works to evaluate any archaeology within the development area.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Figure 1. Location of the study area (shown in red) Based on OS 1:10,000 scale maps. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Licence number AL 100020895.



Figure 2. Test pits located in comparison to features identified in the archaeological assessment







Plate 2: Test pit 1, full depth



Plate 3: Test pit 2, top of natural



Plate 4: Test pit 2, full depth



Plate 5: Test pit 3, top of natural



Plate 6: Test pit 3, full depth



Plate 7: Test pit 4, top of natural



Plate 8: Test pit 5, top of natural



Plate 9: Test pit 6, top of natural





GWYNEDD ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Craig Beuno, Ffordd y Garth, Bangor, Gwynedd. LL57 2RT Ffon: 01248 352535. Ffacs: 01248 370925. email:gat@heneb.co.uk