Conwy Valley Flood Allevation Scheme Trefriw Borrow Pit



Report on an archaeological evaluation

GAT Project No. G1877 Report No. 784 March 2009

CONWY VALLEY FLOOD ALLEVIATION SCHEME TREFRIW BORROW PIT

REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

GAT Project no. G1877

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Prepared for The Environment Agency

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Cover: Digging trench 2

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION (G1877)

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION (G1877)

Summary

The evaluation has demonstrated the depth and nature of the natural deposits, which represented flooding events and a period of ploughing. A hollow-way and traces of field boundaries were identified as earthworks and investigated by an evaluation trench. These features are shown on the early 19^{th} century tithe map but the hollow-way could represent a track used from the medieval period. However, no dating evidence was recovered. A drainage ditch of unknown, but probably fairly late date, was also identified.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT) has been asked by The Environment Agency to undertake an archaeological evaluation within the Conwy Valley flood plain during the Dyffryn Conwy Flood Alleviation Scheme. The aim was principally to evaluate the line of a proposed drainage ditch within an area to be used as a borrow pit for the flood alleviation works. The evaluation also provides information on the wider area of the borrow pit. The borrow pit is to be located within two fields off Gower Road, Trefriw (NGR SH 7821 6294), as indicated on Figure 1.

2. SPECIFICATION AND PROJECT DESIGN

There was no specific brief for this work. The work undertaken followed a previously agreed project design and conforms to the guidelines specified in *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation* (Institute of Field Archaeologists, 1994, rev. 2001). The work is being monitored by the Environment Agency, with recommendations given by the Senior Archaeologist, National Environmental Assessment Service (West Team). The aims of the archaeological evaluation were to test the nature of the deposits in the area and the potential for the survival of archaeological remains. The evaluation was carried out on 18th February 2009.

3. METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

3.1 Introduction

It was initially proposed that a 30m trench should be excavated along the line of the drainage ditch. Later discussion with the Senior Archaeologist of the National Environmental Assessment Service led to the trench being split in two and one trench being placed either side of an existing field boundary. Once on site it was clear that there were earthworks in the northern field that required evaluation. It was therefore decided that the northern trench (trench 1) should be 20m in length and this was orientated across, rather than along, the proposed line of the drainage ditch to better explore the earthworks. The trench in the southern field (trench 2) was located on the route of the drainage ditch just south of the field boundary. It was not possible to locate it closer to the field boundary as the hedge was being felled and it was necessary to work around the felling.

3.2 Work Method

Excavation

A small, tracked 360° excavator fitted with a 1.80m ditching bucket was used to excavate the two trenches. The excavation was done under constant monitoring by an archaeologist. Each trench was immediately backfilled once recorded to avoid risks to people and livestock.

The aim was to remove all undifferentiated topsoil or overburden of recent origin down to the first significant archaeological horizon. However, the natural alluvial and fluvial deposits were also of interest in examining the development of the flood plain. Where archaeological deposits were present

these were exposed and elsewhere the trenches were excavated down to ancient, probably early Holocene, gravels.

One face of each trench was chosen for recording after checking that nothing appeared in the other side that was not also represented in the recorded face. This section was cleaned by hand, photographed, drawn and the contexts described. In trench 1 the main archaeological layer was context 103. Part of this was removed by machine to examine the stratigraphic relationships and expose the fill of a linear hollow that ran beneath deposit 103. The remainder of 103 was cleaned by hand and photographed in plan to record its character. It was plotted in plan in relation to the earthworks at either side. In trench 2 the only archaeology was a ditch. This was exposed at the level at which it first became visible. The feature was cleaned, photographed and planned. As it was only shallow 40% of the visible length of the ditch was excavated.

The spoil heaps were monitored to recover artifacts, but only very occasional modern or recent artifacts were recovered and these were not retained.

No significant artefacts were recovered. No soil samples were taken as there was an absence of deposits containing charred plant remains. Soil micromorphology samples or bulk samples for sediment analysis may have provided some information on the alluvial regime in this area. However this would have little meaning unless carried out as a wider study of the whole flood plain and was beyond the limit of the present evaluation.

Topographic survey

While not specified in the project design it became clear on site that there were earthworks that required recording and studying by topographic survey. The survey was undertaken using a Geodimeter 600 Total Station, and the subsequent scale drawings were compiled using a combination of computer programs including Survey Control Software, AutoCAD and Adobe Illustrator. Notes were made on the earthwork features and they are included in the list of contexts in appendix I.

Reporting and archiving

This report describes the results of the evaluation and presents a description and interpretation of features and deposits recorded. A full list of contexts and their descriptions, including the earthworks, is given in appendix I. The archive consists of context sheets and other site notes, field drawings, survey data and 41 digital images. The archive is currently held at GAT but the digital archive and a copy of the report will be sent to the National Monument Record, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales, Aberystwyth.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The following brief summary is drawn from Davidson 2005.

The medieval town of Trefriw was one of the courts of the Welsh Princes, and according to tradition the church was built there in c. 1230 by Llywelyn ap Iorwerth (Pennant 1781, 154). During the 13th and 14th centuries Trefriw was the established market town for the commote of Nantconwy (Lewis 1912, 180 and 194).

Trefriw is located within the tidal reaches of the River Conwy, and the river trade was important from the medieval period through the 16th to 18th centuries, when timber and lead ore were shipped, to the 19th century when passengers as well as industrial products were carried (Jones 1952, 127; Evans 1989).

GAT has previously conducted an archaeological assessment of the Dyffryn Conwy Flood Alleviation Scheme (Davidson 2005: GAT Report 618), which highlighted all sites of archaeological importance within the area. The report did not identify any known archaeological features within the fields that the drainage ditch is to cross. It does, however identify Gower Road, built in the second half of the 19th century, as the route of an earlier trackway. This was potentially, "one of the earliest tracks leading from Trefriw to the ford (later bridge) across the Conwy at Llanrwst, and perhaps medieval or earlier in origin" (Davidson, 2005: 10; Ref. No. C7). The early track was not straight like Gower road and curved

first south, then north of the present road line; the southern curve coming within the area of the borrow pit. This early road is shown on the 1840 tithe map for Trefriw.

The First Edition 25" Ordnance Survey Map of Trefriw shows the parish boundary running along the hedge in the middle of the site. The north-eastern end of this boundary curves and can be seen to follow the line of the earlier road. The south-western end of the boundary is also shown on the tithe map and the odd curve was used to join these two boundaries together and cut off a sharp corner that had existed previously.

GAT also conducted a series of watching briefs during the borehole/test pit phase of the Dyffryn Conwy Flood Alleviation Scheme (GAT Reports 622 and 696). The test pits within the area of the evaluation trench/drainage ditch were monitored in September 2007 (GAT Report 696). A total of eight test pits were monitored. No archaeological activity was identified within the confines of the test pits: the topsoil was extant to an average depth of c.0.40m, followed by a series of alluvial and/or glacial deposits.

5. RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION

5.1 Description

Trench 1

(Figures 2 and 4; plates 1-4)

The topsoil over trench 1 was 0.23m deep and was a dark grey, loose, silty loam. Beneath this at the south-western end was a thin lens of clean gravel (102), overlying a 0.5m thick layer of homogenous brown silty loam (106). Layer 106 was largely composed of alluvial silt, but it has been thoroughly homogenised by ploughing. Layer 106 was not present in the north-eastern end of the trench and it is probable that this end was never intensively ploughed. About half way down the trench layer 106 ended or was cut away by channel 113. This channel, which continued on either side of the trench as earthworks (114 and 116), had a gradually sloping south-western side, and was filled by gravel and fine alluvial silt (104 and 105). The channel was not fully sectioned as its fill was sealed by a stony deposit that was exposed to be recorded in plan. This deposit (103) was a loose, dark grey silt with up to 50% stone and also lenses of gravel, forming a layer up to 0.24m thick. The stones were up to a maximum of 300mm in length and were fairly randomly laid. Occasional post medieval pot and iron objects were recovered from just below the topsoil but no stratified objects were found. This layer was too mixed, the matrix between the stones was too dark and organic, and the layer was too high in the stratigraphy to be an alluvial deposit. It seems to have been deliberately dumped to create a rough causeway across the wet channel and this causeway could be seen as an earthwork before the trench was dug.

Below layer 106 on the southern side of the channel was a fairly loose, slightly reddish, mid-brown clayey silt layer (107), 0.4m thick, with up to 50% stones and gravel. This layer was much less homogenised than 106 and the gravel formed rough lenses. It is an alluvial deposit that has not been mixed by ploughing. This layer continued on the northern side of the channel but here it was much stonier (110), probably reflecting differential water flow over the area during inundations.

Below 107 was a 0.38m thick layer of fairly soft, malleable, mid grey silty clay (108), matched on the northern side by a soft yellow-brown silty clay (111), here 0.8m thick. Below these was a deposit of concreted gravel and stones with little or no silt matrix (109 and 112). The stones are up to 200mm in length and there is much iron panning causing concretion. This is a river gravel but the depth, compaction and iron panning suggest an early deposit, possibly fluvio-glacial or early Holocene, and this may form the first post-glacial flood plain of the river.

Trench 2

(Figures 3 and 5; plates 5-7)

In trench 2 the topsoil was a soft, dark brown clayey silt, 0.26m thick. This overlay a soft, mid brown silty loam layer, 0.42m thick, and covering the whole trench. This was generally very homogenous but became less so towards the base. This is alluvial silt, mixed, at least in the upper part, by ploughing, and is much the same as layer 106. At the base of 202 was a 0.1m thick layer of grey-brown clayey loam (203); an undisturbed alluvial deposit. Below that a 0.24m thick layer of malleable, red-brown clayey silt (204) overlay a deposit of loose, red-brown stony gravel (205). Layer 204 is an alluvial

deposit and deposit 205 seems also to be fluvial and is probably the earliest flood plain deposit and the same as 109 and 112.

Running north-west to south-east across the middle of the trench was a straight ditch (207) with parallel sides and a flat base. Its fill (206) was indistinguishable from layer 202. The ditch was only visible where it cut layer 204, at which point it was about 0.4m wide and 0.2m deep. Its north-western end was concealed under the western baulk but it never reached the eastern side of the trench and seems to have petered out within trench 2. In section the sides can be seen to be gently sloping and it is probable that this ditch was cut from quite high within layer 202 but subsequent ploughing, alluvial silting and bioturbation has obscured the sides higher up. The apparent ending of the ditch within the trench is also probably due to the fact that it could not be seen within 202 and where its base did not cut layer 204 it could not be followed. The ditch ran for about 4m within the trench.

Earthworks

(Figure 6 and plates 8 and 9)

Trench 1 was placed to investigate a group of earthworks comprising a linear hollow divided into two by a shallow causeway, a roughly rectangular platform and other slight scarps. The eastern part of the linear hollow (114) is up to 5.5m wide and c.77m long. In places the sides are well defined and up to 0.75m high but elsewhere, especially on the southern side towards the fence, the sides are very slight. The channel curves slightly and is lost at the eastern end in the hedge. The western end is rounded and there is a slight causeway between this and the north-western part of the linear hollow (116). The latter is about 40m long before it is cut by the field boundary. It is about 5.5m wide and the south-western side reaches 0.5m high. A very slight scarp, 0.1m high, runs along parallel to the south-western side of the channel. The south-eastern end of the channel is rounded against the slight causeway.

Immediately to the south of linear hollow 114 is an earthwork that appears as a roughly rectangular platform with a well defined eastern corner and a slighter north-western corner. It measures about 24m NW to SE and about 11m across, although there is no defined SW side. The long side runs parallel to the channel 114 and is up to 0.5m high at the E corner, although much slighter elsewhere. There is also a very slight, irregular scarp (117), no more than 0.2m high, further west. There are other undulations in this western side of the field and this one was recorded because it is on a similar alignment to the side of the platform (115).

East of trench 2 is a very slight but very straight scarp (208). It is no more than 0.1m high but its straightness shows that it is an artificial feature.

5.2 Interpretation

The trenches indicate that most of the deposits are alluvial in origin. The lowest gravel (109, 112, 205) may have been deposited at the end of the last ice age or the start of the Holocene, when the river first cut through the base of the glacial valley. Repeated flooding has resulted in deposits varying from clay deposited by very low energy inundation to fairly coarse gravels from higher energy water flow. In trench 2 and the southern part of trench 1 the upper part of these alluvial deposits had been mixed by ploughing. The north end of trench 1 does not seem to have been significantly ploughed.

The ditch (207) running across trench 2 is probably an open drain dug at some point during this long history of flooding. Its straightness suggests a date no earlier than the medieval period, and probably later, but no dating evidence was available. The upper parts of the ditch have been lost due to ploughing mixing its fill with surrounding deposits, making its full depth and the level from which it was cut difficult to determine. However to work effectively it must have been about 0.4-0.5m deep and could have been cut from just below the present topsoil.

Trench 1 showed that the two linear hollows (114 and 116) had originally been a single feature filled with typical alluvial silts and gravels. The causeway was shown to be artificial and caused by dumping stone over the largely infilled channel. The rectangular platform (115) could be seen to be composed of ploughsoil (106), but the trench alone did not allow full interpretation of the deposits. In particular the fills of the channel appeared to be natural flood deposits and it was initially assumed that the channel was entirely natural.

However, the survey of the earthworks allows them to be directly compared to the historic maps and it can be clearly seen that the supposed channel was actually a hollow-way marking the former trackway leading east from Trefriw (feature C7 in Davidson 2005). The location and curve of the earthworks make this unquestionable (see figure 7). In the late 19th century, when Gower Road had been built, the line of the old road was still marked by a field boundary and this is probably what has caused slight scarps parallel to the south side of the hollow-way.

The eastern side of the rectangular platform (115) can be seen to mark a field boundary shown on both the First Edition OS map and the tithe map. The earthwork must have been caused by ploughing depositing soil against the boundaries, raising them slightly above the level in the neighbouring fields. The north-western side of the platform marks the north-western boundary of the same field. The slight scarp 117 also appears to be related to this boundary but is parallel rather than exactly on the line. The causeway can be seen as aiding access to the corner of this field where there may have been a field gate.

The straight scarp 208 cannot be identified on the historic maps and is probably the result of more recent drainage.

The field boundaries are shown on the 1840 tithe map and could date to the 18th century. The tithe map shows the old trackway giving access to field tracks. The fields and the tracks are very regular and were probably constructed at the same time as the flood defences, which were built by the Gwydir Estate in the early 19th century (Davidson 2005, C2). It is possible, therefore, that this road is no older than the early 19th century, but it is more likely that the dryland end was in use over a longer period of time, providing access to the meadows and the river beyond. It may also, at an earlier period, have lead to a ford across the river to Llanrwst.

The hollow-way and field boundaries will be recorded in Gwynedd Historic Environment Record and they have been allocated the Primary Record Number (PRN) 30321 (NGR SH 78210 62958).

6. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation has demonstrated the depth and nature of deposits along the route of the drainage ditch and these can tentatively be extended to most of the area of the borrow pit. A drainage ditch of unknown, but probably fairly late date has been identified, but the most significant archaeology is in the north-western part of the borrow pit. This represents a track and contemporary field boundaries, still clearly visible as earthworks. The track was not fully sectioned in the evaluation and no dating evidence was recovered.

There is a reasonable possibility that the track has a medieval origin, and the evaluation excavations have revealed it to be well preserved beneath the visible earthworks. It is therefore recommended that the earthworks, including the track, are preserved *in situ* by moving the borrow pit away from this part of the site. If direct impact upon this area cannot be avoided, then it is recommended that two trenches (each 10m by 2m) are excavated across the line of the track to record it. Further recommendations may be made following this work.

7. SOURCES CONSULTED

Tithe map for Trefriw c. 1840 Ordnance Survey County Series Caernarvonshire Sheet XIV.13, First edition 1889

Berks, T. 2007. Dyffryn Conwy Flood Alleviation Scheme: Archaeological Watching brief (GAT Report 696)

Davidson, A. 2005. Dyffryn Conwy Flood Alleviation Scheme: Archaeological Assessment (GAT Report 618)

Evans, J. R., 1989 'The Trefriw Steamers, 1847-1940', *Aberconwy Historical Society Transactions*, 13-17.

IFA. 2001. Institute of Field Archaeologists 2001 Standard and Guidance for an archaeological evaluation. http://www.archaeologists.net/

Jones, E. G., 1952 (ed.) A description of Caernaryonshire 1809-11 by E. Hyde Hall.

Lewis, E.A. 1912, The Medieval Boroughs of Snowdonia.

Pennant, T., 1781 Journey to Snowdon

Roberts, J. 2006. *Dyffryn Conwy Flood Alleviation Scheme: Archaeological Watching Brief* (GAT Report 622)

APPENDIX I

For location of earthwork contexts see figure 6, for contexts in trenches see figures 2-5.

- Dark grey, loose, silty loam with fine crumb structure, 0.23m thick. Generally has few stones, but much stonier where passes over 103.

 Topsoil in trench 1.
- Very loose, dark blue-grey rounded gravel with no stones larger than 50mm. Includes fine gravel but no silt. The deposit is no more than 0.1m thick.

 Thin lens of gravel deposited by fairly high energy water flow during inundation.
- Very loose, dark grey silt with up to 50% stone and also lenses of gravel, forming a layer up to 0.24m thick. The stones are up to a maximum of 300mm in length and are fairly randomly laid.

 This seems to be a deliberate dump of stones and gravel to create a rough causeway across the channel. Occasional post medieval pot and iron objects were recovered from just below the topsoil but no stratified objects were found.
- Soft yellow-brown sandy clay with few stones but interleaves with gravel deposits at NE end. The deposit is 0.34m thick.
 Alluvial deposit, fill of channel **113**.
- Fairly loose, dark grey-brown silt, 0.2m thick. Very mixed with c.10% stone and lenses of gravel, some of which are silt-free grey gravel. The stones are up to 150mm in length. Gravel lenses similar to those in 105 interleave with 104 and these two deposits are essentially part of the same inundation process.

 Alluvial deposit, result of fairly high energy flow, fill of channel 113.
- Fairly soft, mid brown silty loam layer, 0.5m thick, with occasional small stones. Very homogenous.

 Mainly alluvial silt but homogeneity suggests mixing by ploughing. Water in channel 113 has caused leaching and iron panning at the NE end of this deposit.
- Fairly loose, slightly reddish, mid-brown clayey silt, 0.4m thick, with up to 50% stones and gravel. This layer is much less homogenised than 106 and the gravel forms rough lenses.

 Alluvial sediment deposited under varying conditions of water flow causing a mixed deposit of gravel and silt.
- Layer of fairly soft, malleable, mid grey silty clay, 0.38m thick, with occasional small stones. This is a fine alluvial deposit caused by low energy inundation.
- Dense, compact deposit of gravel with grey clay matrix. Some stones are up to 300mm in length.
 This is a river gravel but the depth and compaction suggests an early deposit, possibly fluvioglacial or early Holocene.
- A layer of very loose mid brown silt, 0.52m deep, with up to 80% stones and gravel. The stone is mixed throughout but reaches its highest concentrations in rough lenses.

 An alluvial sediment deposited under varying conditions of water flow causing a mixed deposit of gravel and silt. This is essentially the same layer as 107 but the higher concentration of stones suggests a higher energy water flow at times.
- Fairly soft yellow-brown silty clay with very few stones. Fairly malleable. Forms a layer 0.8m thick.

 This is a low energy alluvial deposit similar to 108 but with less clay and a variation in colour due less gleying than 108 has been subjected to.
- 112 Concreted gravel and stones with no silt matrix. The stones are up to 200mm in length. There is much iron panning causing concretion.

- This gravel deposit is probably the same as 109 and the degree of compaction and iron panning agree with an early date. This may form the first post-glacial flood plain of the river.
- 113 Channel with gradually sloping S side, N side not seen in excavation. The channel is at least 0.5m deep and filled by 104 and 105. These deposits show that it is a natural channel filled with alluvial deposits. However, it cuts through layer 106, which appears to be largely a ploughsoil. This indicates that the channel was formed after the development of a deep, well mixed ploughsoil and could be medieval in date or possibly later.

 This is part of the channel seen as an earthwork running through the field and recorded below as 114 and 116.
- This is a linear hollow seen as an earthwork. It is up to 5.5m wide and c.77m long. In places the sides are well defined and up to 0.75m high but elsewhere, especially on the southern side towards the fence, the sides are very slight. The channel curves slightly and is lost at the eastern end in the hedge. The western end rounded and there is a slight causeway between this part of the channel and 116. The evaluation trench showed that the channel continued through and that the causeway is largely artificial.
- This earthwork appears as a roughly rectangular platform with a well defined eastern corner and a slighter north-western corner. It measures about 24m NW to SE and about 11m across, although there is no defined SW side. The long side runs parallel to the channel 114 and is up to 0.5m high at the E corner, although much slighter elsewhere. The evaluation trench suggests that this platform is built up largely of ploughsoil (106) and the well defined eastern corner may be the result of ploughing depositing soil against a field boundary.
- Running north-west of trench 1 is another part of the channel. This is about 40m long before it is cut by the field boundary. It is about 5.5m wide and the south-western side reaches 0.5m high. A very slight scarp runs along parallel to the south-western side of the channel and may be the result of flooding from the channel but could be an artefact of ploughing. The south-eastern end of the channel is rounded against the slight causeway. As discussed above this is part of channel 114 and originally continued through as a single feature.
- This is a very slight, irregular scarp. It is no more than 0.2m high. There are other undulations in this western side of the field and this one was recorded because it is on a similar alignment to the side of the platform (115). However, the gravel deposit 102 found in the evaluation trench suggests that some of these slight scarps could be the result of gravel deposited in fairly recent inundations.
- 201 Soft, dark brown clayey silt, 0.26m thick, with a fine crumb structure and few stones. Topsoil over trench 2.
- Soft, mid brown silty loam, 0.42m thick, with few stones. Generally very homogenous but becomes less so towards the base, where it merges with 203.

 Alluvial silt, mixed, at least in the upper part, by ploughing.
- Firm, grey-brown clayey loam containing small stones, occasional gravel and flecks of iron oxides. It forms a thin layer 0.1m thick.

 An unmixed alluvial deposit.
- 204 Soft, malleable, red-brown clayey silt, 0.24m thick, with occasional small stones. A low energy alluvial deposit.
- Loose, red-brown gravel with stones up to 300mm in length. The deposit is more compact lower down with silt and clay between the stones towards the top but not lower down. The colour is also darker towards the top.

 This is an early fluvial gravel and is probably the same as 112.
- Soft, mid brown silty loam with few stones, although some small stones are concentrated along the base of the cut. 206 is indistinguishable from 202.

 This is the fill of a ditch **207**.

- A straight ditch with parallel sides and a flat base. It was only visible where it cuts layer 204, at which point it is about 0.6m wide and 0.2m deep. Its north-western end was concealed under the baulk but it never reached the eastern side of the trench and seems to have petered out within trench 2. In section the sides can be seen to be gently sloping. The ditch runs for about 4m within the trench.
- This is a very slight but very straight scarp. It is no more than 0.1m high but its straightness shows that it is an artificial feature. It may be the result of a buried drainage feature but it could be the trace of a field boundary.

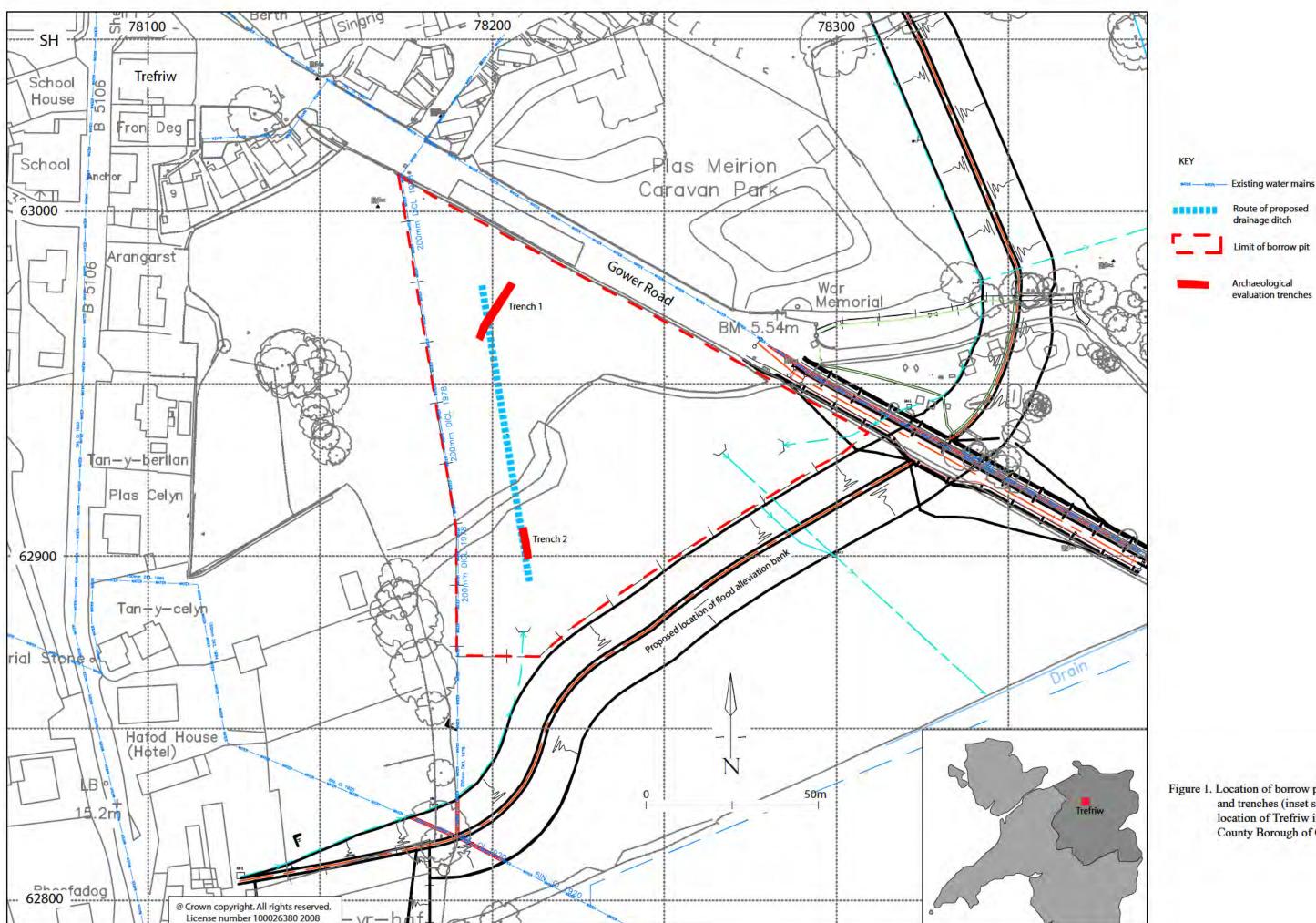
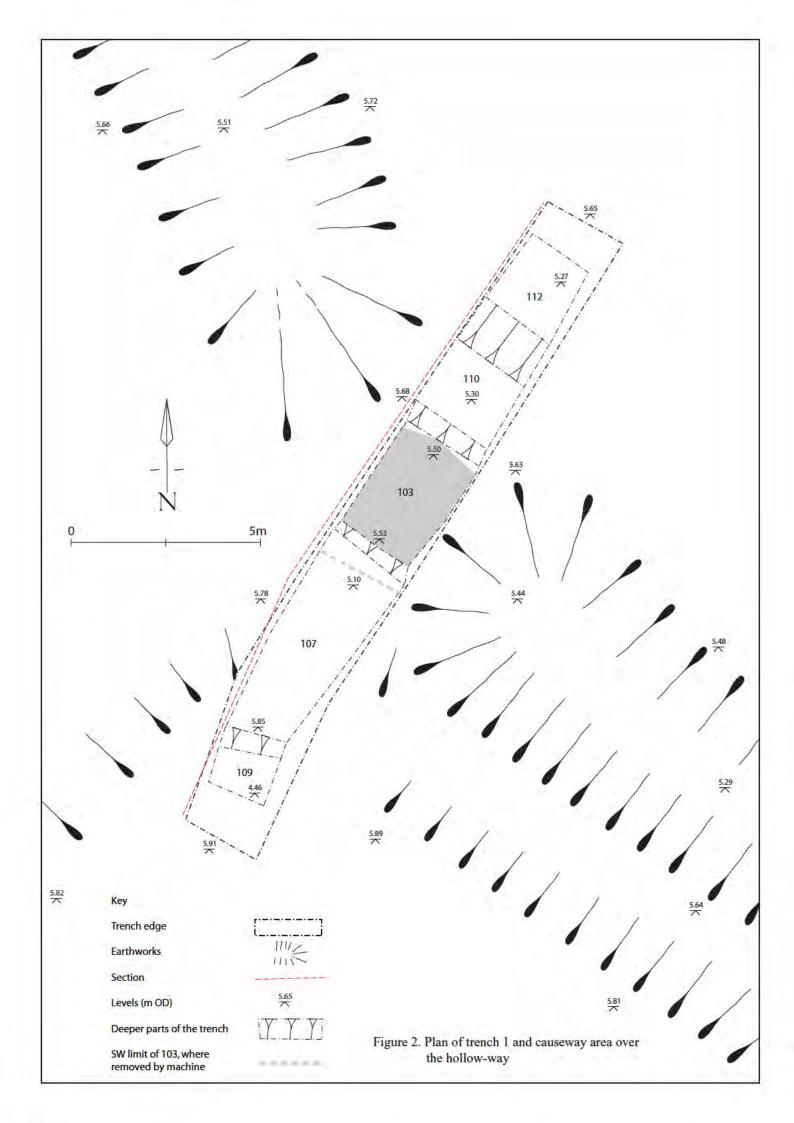
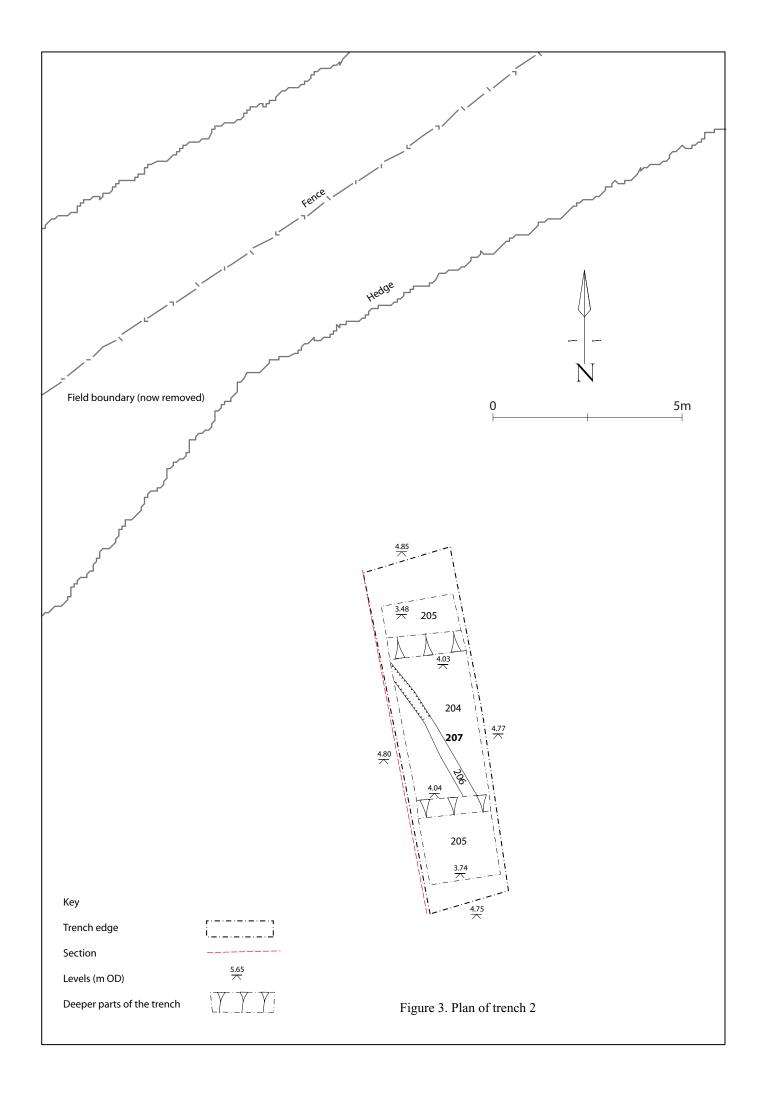
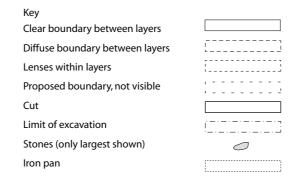


Figure 1. Location of borrow pit and trenches (inset shows location of Trefriw in the County Borough of Conwy)







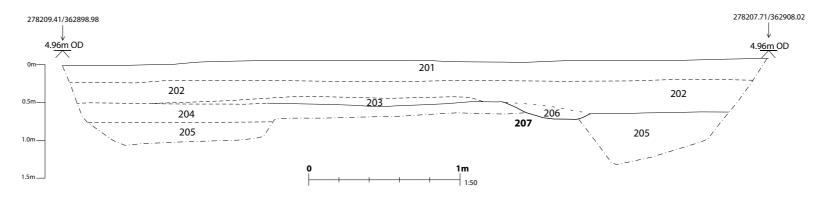


Figure 5. East facing section of trench 2

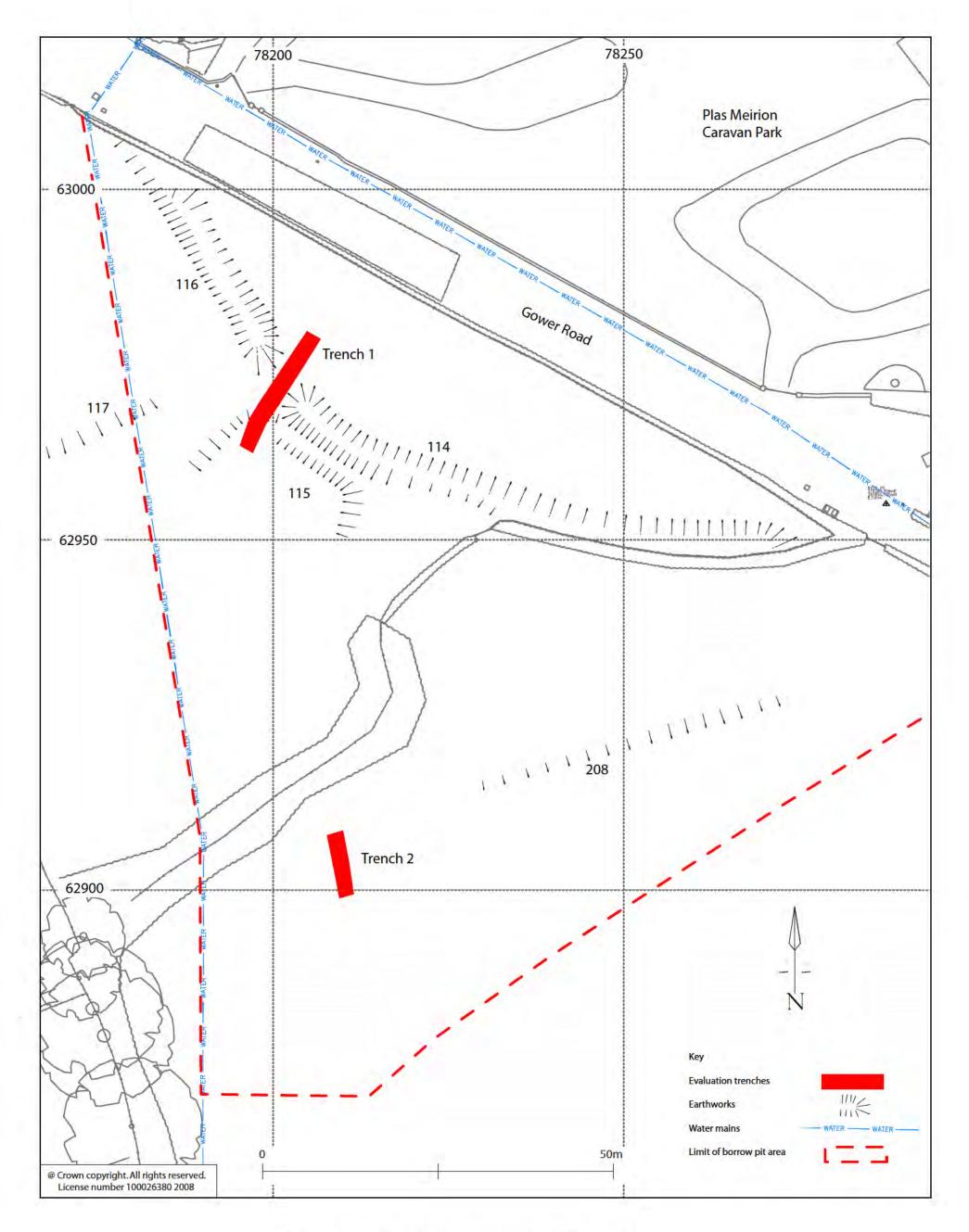


Figure 6. Plan of trenches and earthworks within the area of the borrow pit

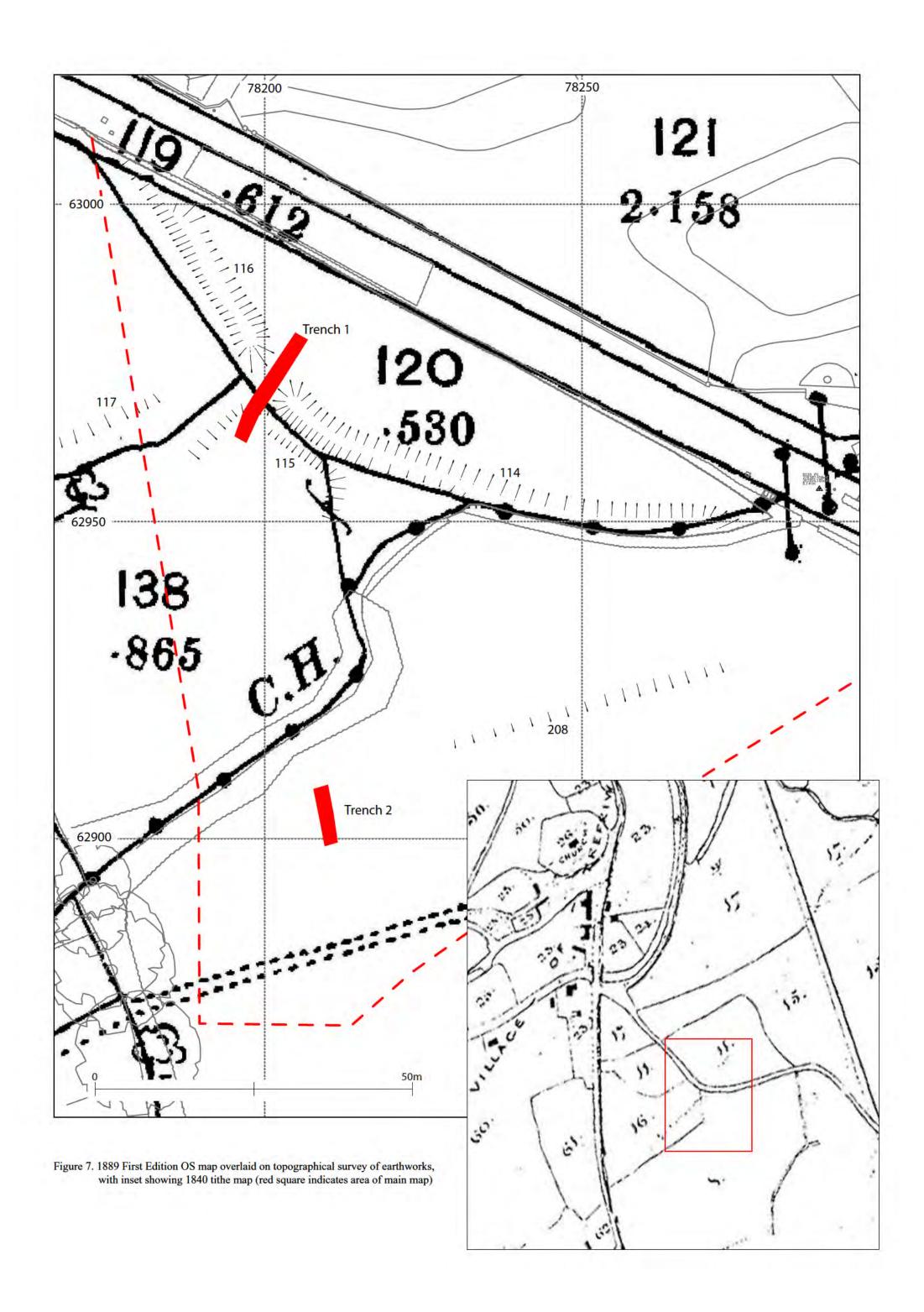




Plate 1. South-west end of trench 1, from south-east



Plate 2. Fill of hollow way 113 sealed by causeway 103, from south-east



Plate 3. Detail of causeway deposit 103 in plan from south-east



Plate 4. North-east end of trench 1, from south-east



Plate 5. Northern end of trench 2, from east



Plate 6. Southern end of trench 2, from east



Plate 7. Ditch 207 with fill 206, cutting layer 204, from east



Plate 8. View of hollow way 114, from south (trench 1 has been backfilled)



Plate 9. View of hollow way 114 and south-eastern corner of platform 115, from north-west



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