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**BRYN GWYN STONES, BRYNSIENCYN, ANGLESEY**  
**EXCAVATION 2010**  
**PRELIMINARY REPORT**

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**Project No. G1629**  
**Report No. 942**



**Prepared for Cadw**  
**March 2011**

**By George Smith**



**Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd**  
**Gwynedd Archaeological Trust**

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Cover picture:  
Bryn Gwyn stones: Pit 6 and standing stone stump  
during excavation, by Dominic Ingram, December 2010

**Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd  
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust**



# **BRYN GWYN STONES, BRYNSIENCYN: EXCAVATION 2010**

## **PRELIMINARY REPORT**

### **GAT PROJECT NO. G1629**

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## 1. SUMMARY

Excavations in 2010 at the two standing stones at Bryn Gwyn, Brynsiencyn, Anglesey confirmed the former presence of a stone circle *c.* 16m diameter consisting of 8 stones. Fragments of some former standing stones remained while others had been removed entirely. Traces were also found of later use of the circle for cremation activity.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

The two standing stones at Bryn Gwyn (PRN 3135, SAM A22), west of Brynsiencyn, at SH46246693 stand in the straight hedge-line between two large rectilinear fields (Fig. 1). The stones are massive and the tallest, *c.* 4m high, is said to be the tallest in Wales (Burl 1976). The stones were described in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century as being part of a stone circle (Rowlands 1723). The surviving stones were removed or broken up early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as part of field changes and improvements, apart from the two stones that stand today, which were incorporated in a new field boundary.

In 2006 geophysical survey was carried out by GAT as part of the Cadw Prehistoric Pan-Wales Funerary and Ritual Monument survey in order to look for evidence of the former stone circle, the position of which was uncertain. Study of the antiquarian descriptions showed that the circle would have extended on the north side of the two standing stones and the geophysical survey identified a curvilinear feature there (Smith and Hopewell 2007). In 2008 evaluation excavation was carried out there, based on evidence from the geophysical survey of the existence of a possible curvilinear feature (Fig. 2). Three standing stone pits were found of which two contained stumps of broken-off standing stones. Two stones lay in an arc in relation to the two extant standing stones that indicated a former stone circle of 8 stones and about 16m diameter. One standing stone was isolated inside the circle and not geometrically related to the projected circle (Smith 2009).

In 2010 a further excavation was agreed by Cadw to identify the full extent of the stone circle and to look for evidence of use and dating and this work is described here. The two standing stones within an area of 20m diameter centred on them are protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Consent was obtained from Cadw for the work although only a small part of it intruded into the protected area.

**Acknowledgements:** Thanks go to Cadw for providing funding. The work could not have been carried out without the kind agreement of the landowner, Mr R.T. Roberts of Cefn Maesoglan, Brynsiencyn and of the farmer Mr A. Roberts of Bodlew, Gaerwen. Many thanks must go to all the volunteers who showed great perseverance and commitment, C. ‘Beaver’ Hughes, Dominic Ingram, Jeff Marples, Emily May, Brian Milner and Lydia Thomas.

## 3. TOPOGRAPHIC AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The Bryn Gwyn stones stand on an unusually level area at 10m OD, forming the floor of the valley of the River Braint, which lies 200m to the north (Fig. 1). Despite its level and low-lying nature the land is quite well drained because the sub-soil is mainly fluvio-glacial gravel. The soil is of good quality and supports both grass silage and arable crops.

A description of the Bryn Gwyn stones by the local antiquary, the Rev. Henry Rowlands in 1723 recorded them as being formerly part of a stone circle, which at that time was ruinous of which Rowlands said ‘...three of them yet standing whole and entire, and the Stump of a fourth...’ and he estimated that the circle had been of 8 or 9 stones and about 40ft (12m) diameter. The stones were visited by other antiquaries and descriptions vary with suggestions

of between 8 to 12 stones with a diameter of 12-14 yards (11-13m). There was also a small group of other large stones near to the circle, probably to the north of it although shown to the south by Rowlands (Fig. 3). These outlying stones may have formed a separate monument and were mentioned by other visitors. Pennant, in 1783 (11) also mentions ‘...the cromlech in the middle of the circle, all extremely imperfect’. This may have been remnants of standing stones broken *in situ* or just have been stones or pieces of stones heaped together after removal to construct a small cottage on the site. The cottage was presumably built some time after Rowlands visit, since he did not mention it. An account of 1797 (Hutton, 181) says of the stones that ‘...ignorant country people supposing money was hid under them, recently tore them up.’, suggesting widespread robbing activity. It may be that by 1802 only the two stones present today were still fully extant. The largest stone had been used as the gable wall the small cottage built sometime in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and sketched by Skinner in 1802 (Fig. 5). Notches for the roof purlins of the cottage can still be seen on the top of the larger standing stone today. Accounts show that the cottage was still standing in 1817 but it and most of the stones had been cleared to make way for a reorganised field system before 1841, when the Tithe map was produced (Baynes 1910-11, 65). Two stones survived because they were incorporated in a new field bank. The RCHMW (1937, 103) recorded that it was impossible to estimate where the former stone circle lay because the two surviving stones did not form chords of a circle. However, the re-assessment of the site as part of the Cadw Pan-Wales Prehistoric Funerary and Ritual Monument survey in 2002 indicated that the circle lay on the north side of the two surviving stones and that Rowlands positioning of the stones in relation to true north (Fig. 3) and copied by Stukely (Fig. 4) was in error (Smith 2003). Baynes (1910-11, 62) also described slight remains of an outlying bank and ditch. The bank of c. 225yds (205m) diameter and the ditch of c. 120yds (110m) diameter. There are some slight undulations in the field but no subsequent visits have recognised this feature although the field is regularly ploughed and it could have been levelled. In 2006 a geophysical survey was carried out for Cadw as a follow-up to the previous site visit (Smith and Hopewell 2007). This provided no evidence of the stone circle but did identify a series of anomalies forming a possible curvilinear enclosure approximately concentric to the possible stone circle but of much smaller diameter than the feature described by Baynes. It also identified the layout of an earlier field system of small, strip-like fields on a different alignment to the modern field boundaries (Fig. 2). One of these boundaries, in the field to the south of the standing stones, can still be seen as a slight earthwork crossing the modern field.

#### 4. OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

The main aim of the excavation was to establish the full extent and nature of the stone circle, rather than to completely excavate any features identified, which could therefore be preserved for future research. It was hoped, however, to identify some *in situ* deposits to produce dating evidence for the circle.

Although originally planned for September 2010 the work was delayed because of volunteer involvement in the excavations at Aber. The work was eventually carried out between November 29<sup>th</sup> and December 16<sup>th</sup> 2010 and from January 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> 2011. The former grid was first re-established and the trenches were laid out to encompass the projected extent of the stone circle. The topsoil was then removed by mechanical excavator. After the first day’s cleaning the trenches there was heavy rain that obscured the cleaned surfaces and subsequently through the rest of the excavation there were continuous sub-zero temperatures and frozen ground. Final completion of recording was delayed by a heavy snow fall in late December. It was impossible to carry out any more detailed cleaning and so excavation concentrated on investigating and recording the main features already identified. As this was chiefly an evaluation to identify the stone circle the main features were half sectioned, leaving fill in them that could be a source for any future research.



## 5. EXCAVATION RESULTS

An area of 128sq m (Trench 1) was excavated on the north side of the present field boundary, to include the area of the 2008 excavation and the whole extent of the stone circle as projected from that excavation (Figs 6 and 7). This trench would include four stone pits of the circle, including the two located in 2008, as well as the isolated stone pit within the circle except for an area to the south-west where there had been the 18<sup>th</sup> century cottage and where considerable sub-surface disturbance could be expected. A small extension was made to the south (Trench 2) to investigate the area of another standing stone pit. This meant demolishing part of the existing stone-faced bank (clawdd), so was kept to a minimum. Another small area (Trench 3) was excavated on the south side of the field boundary to investigate the expected position of the eighth and final stone pit.

### *Trench 1*

The three stone pits found in 2008 (Pits 3, 6 and 7) were re-identified in order to more fully record the two only partially excavated previously (Pits 6 and 7) and to try to identify original pit fill to look for dating evidence. Two new stone pits (Pits 119 and 159) were identified in their expected positions on the basis of equidistant setting for a circle of eight standing stones.

### **Pit 6** (Figs 8 and 9)

This was an isolated pit inside the arc of the stone circle, its position and orientation having no recognisable relation to the stone circle. Only part of the pit and the top of the standing stone stump it contained had been exposed in 2008 at the very edge of the excavated area. A wide, irregular robbing pit had been dug around the standing stone in order to demolish it at the time of creation of the present field boundaries, between 1802 and 1840. The pit held a large limestone slab, approximately flat-sided and of even thickness, 1.6m long and 0.3m thick. The slab was still set neatly vertical. It had been broken off at 0.5m below the subsoil surface by drilling or tapping a line of 7 holes through the slab at approximately 0.20m (8ins) intervals to weaken it and allow wedges to be driven in. The boreholes slanted down slightly from south to north showing that they had been driven from the south side. After the stone had been removed the pit had been backfilled with soil and finally with a mass of sub-rounded small cobble-sized stones, probably derived from the demolition of the nearby 18<sup>th</sup> century cottage.

Below the limit of the 19<sup>th</sup> century robbing pit, at the west side, the original pit fill remained, containing packing stones consisting of several small sub-angular boulders. The slab itself was sat in a narrower slot at -1.0m and the base of the slab was at 1.08 below the subsoil surface (Fig. 8).

No artefacts or charcoal were found in the pit fill but a bulk soil sample was taken for flotation for possible carbonised macrobotanical remains.

The standing stone had been very deeply set suggesting that it stood to a considerable height, probably at least 2m. The robbing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century shows that it had been standing up to that time and so must have been present during the life of the 18<sup>th</sup> century cottage and when Rowlands and Skinner visited it although it does not appear on Rowlands sketch (Fig. 3). However, Pennant in 1783 (11) also mentions ‘...the cromlech in the middle of the circle, all extremely imperfect’, which might refer to the broken remains of the stone in Pit 6. The vertical position of the stone stump show that it had not leant or fallen but perhaps it had been partly broken up, possibly to provide building materials for the cottage, but still remaining as a sufficient obstacle to 19<sup>th</sup> century ploughing to cause it to be further removed.

Although the position of the stone appeared to bear no relationship to the stone circle, it clearly stood as a major visible part of the site, whether earlier, contemporary or later than the circle. Neither the position nor the orientation of the stone was related to the stone circle. Its positioning may have been deliberately avoiding or avoided by the centre of the circle. The slab faced approximately north-west to south-east and its long axis lay close to the midwinter sunset/midsummer sunrise solstice line. Correspondingly it faced towards mid-winter sunrise/midsummer sunset. The slab must have been quarried and brought to the site. The nearest limestone bedrock occurs about 500m to the south-west, where there are disused quarry pits, close to the hill of Bryn Gwyn and from which the hill probably takes its name.

#### **Pit 7 (Figs 8, 11 and 12)**

This was first identified in 2008 and formed part of the arc of the stone circle. It contained the remains of a large orthostatic slab of schist set with its long axis on the arc of the circle. The upper part of the stone appeared to have been removed as part of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century field improvements. A large robbing pit had been dug around the stone to some way below the subsoil surface and then the slab broken off by hammering. The remains of the slab were still vertical but the slab was fractured and there were many flakes and fragments of rock in the robbing pit. It was thought in 2008 that the extent of the robbing pit had been identified and the base of the stone reached. However, the 2010 excavation showed that the robbing was more extensive than had been realised in this area and that the base of the slab was deeper than had been reached in 2008. Part of the north end of the stone was broken off but the size of the pit showed it had been c.1.90m wide and 0.20m thick and the remaining stump 0.75m deep. The base of the stone was at 1.30m below the subsoil surface. Some of the original stone pit and its fill survived below the level of the robbing where there were some small boulder packing stones (Fig. 11). The lowest part of the stone sat in a narrower pit c. 0.70m wide (Figs 8 and 12)). No artefacts or charcoal were identified from the original pit fill but a bulk soil sample was taken for flotation for carbonised macrobotanical remains. The overall depth of the base of the stone, below the subsoil shows that it must have been a stone of considerable height, probably over 2m high.

#### **Pit 11 (Fig. 7)**

This shallow and irregular pit had been partially exposed in 2008 on the edge of the trench. It contained some 19<sup>th</sup> century pottery in its upper fill and some chunks of limestone and was considered to belong with the early 19<sup>th</sup> century robbing phase. Excavation in 2011 showed it to be larger in area than had been expected, but continuing at the same shallow depth. It was irregular in outline, c. 1.8m diameter and 0.30m deep. More limestone was found in it, in two lines, forming a T-shape (Fig. 7). This was difficult to explain, possibly being the broken-off edges of a larger piece of lime stone that had been removed. No other artefacts were found in it to confirm its date. The pit lies on the arc of the circle, which seems meaningful but it does not form a part of the circle in terms of spacing of the standing stones. Although it was very shallow it could have contained a large block that was stable enough without deep foundation and the Post-medieval pottery in its upper fill could just derive from a robbing phase.

#### **Pit 3 (Fig. 7)**

This pit lay on the arc of the stone circle and at a position that would fit in with a circle of eight stones, set equidistantly. The pit was fully excavated in 2008 so was not re-excavated in 2010, its position just re-identified. It had been dug out for robbing in its upper part but lower down the original shape of the pit was sub-circular, 1.2m diameter, and 0.87m deep below the subsoil surface. It had steep sloping sides and approximately flat base. Within the pit on its north side was a large chunk of limestone, which may have been a broken-off remnant of a former standing stone or be a packing stone.

The pit appeared to have held a large columnar stone that had been pulled out complete, as there was no broken stump or small broken fragments. The entire remaining fill derived from the robbing phase and contained fragments of coal, 18-19<sup>th</sup> century pottery fragments, roofing slate, iron objects and a clay tobacco pipe fragment. However, two flint flakes were also found, one of them pressure-flaked. Although a piece of limestone was found in the pit it is more likely that such a columnar-shaped stone would be of a harder rock than limestone, which splits into slabs.

#### **Pit 119** (Figs 7 and 8)

This pit was newly discovered in 2010. It lay on the arc of the circle and at the correct position for a circle of 8 equidistantly set stones. It was difficult to identify because it lay within a natural, glacial trail of stones within the widespread gravel subsoil (Fig. 7). Its fill was recognisable because it was slightly darker and more humic than the subsoil around. It proved to be a rather irregular pit with steep-sloping sides, c. 1.5m diameter and 0.70m deep below the subsoil surface. A few original packing stones survived on the north edge of the pit. On the base of the pit was a somewhat decayed and irregular, broken fragment of a limestone slab, c. 0.20m thick, that had been set vertically and facing approximately north and south. This seems to be the snapped-off fragment of a large slab of limestone, facing towards the centre of the circle.

There was no surviving original pit-fill and there were no artefacts.

#### **Trench 2**

##### **Pit 116** (Figs 7 and 13)

Trench 2 was laid out to include the expected position of another stone pit, assuming stones were placed equidistantly. The expected position of the pit lay partly under the 19<sup>th</sup> century field bank, which was dismantled, but there was no pit exactly at the projected position. The trench was crossed by a shallow quarry ditch [114] belonging to the field bank. In one corner of the trench was part of a possible pit [116], quite shallow and with rounded profile, filled with fairly pure, loose gravel. In this respect it was quite different to any of the other stone pits. In addition it was not on the arc of the circle and the field bank here had been re-built in recent years after the fall of a large dead elm tree. It seemed most likely that the pit belonged to this episode although this could not be proved.

Two smaller features, 123 and 143 were also identified in Trench 2 and are described later.

The apparent absence of a stone pit here, the only one of the circle not located, needs to be explained. One possibility is that the circle was more oval than that projected and that the pit was just outside the area excavated. Another possibility is that the circle was not complete and its design included a gap or entrance in the north-east quadrant.

#### **Trench 3**

##### **Pit 125** (Figs 7 and 13)

The north edge of this trench extended up to the edge of the field bank and it was crossed there by a shallow quarry ditch [109], associated with the bank.

After excavation of this ditch a large area of disturbed gravel was exposed of indistinct and irregular outline. A cross-section was cut across this, which revealed it to be the fill of a large oval pit [125] 3.8m by 2.4m and 0.4m deep, with a shallow, gently sloping profile. The edges of the pit could be determined by their greater compactness, but otherwise the fill was

mainly gravel, if slightly darker and more humic than the natural gravel subsoil. There were no artefacts within the pit but there were several small boulders, taken to be remnant packing stones (Fig. 7).

The pit lies on the projected position of another stone hole. The large size suggests it was just a robbing pit and the shallow depth suggests that it was a large but squat and naturally stable stone. If it is correct, as so far appears, that the stones were alternately slabs and columns then this pit should have held a slab, which fits with its large oval shape, but seems unlikely given the shallowness of the pit and the lack of any central slot for such a stone. The stone must have been removed prior to the construction of the 18<sup>th</sup> century cottage or it would have been visible in front of the cottage on Skinner's drawing of 1802 (Fig. 5).

### **Pit 159**

This pit, in the south-west corner of the trench, was not identified until near the end of the excavation because it lay within another area of subsoil containing small glacial boulders and was obscured by an overlying layer of thin dark charcoal-rich soil (111) and by several smaller features, two of which, [151] and [156] were cut into the edge of the pit fill.

The pit fill was slightly more humic than the surrounding natural glacial till. Only the south-western half of the pit was excavated. The pit was sub-circular 1.7m diameter and 0.7m deep, below the subsoil surface, with steep sides and an approximately flat base. The fill contained some small boulders concentrated in the upper part of the fill, which appeared to be disturbed packing stones left in after the standing stone had been pulled out. There were no artefacts or charcoal in the pit.

The size and shape of the pit was very similar to that of Pit 3 and, like Pit 3, seemed to be its original shape, with no robbing pit so the stone must have been pulled out entire, not broken up. Its shape suggests that it held a columnar-shaped stone. This stone was one of those illustrated by Rowlands, next to the tallest slab, which still survives. Rowlands' sketch shows it as a columnar stone that was leaning at that time (Fig. 3).

### **Pit 140** (Figs 7 and 14)

This pit lay at the edge of Trench 1 and extended beyond the excavated area. That part exposed appeared to be about half of the pit, which would be sub-circular, c. 1.8m diameter and 0.8m deep below the subsoil surface with a rounded base. Its upper fill was a uniform, fine, almost stone-free silt. Lower down were some more stony layers, including some charcoal but there were no artefacts.

The proximity of the pit to the 18<sup>th</sup> century cottage made it seem likely to be associated with it but there were no objects of Post-medieval type in the pit. It seems too coincidental that the pit happens to lie at the exact geometric centre of the stone circle. Its profile and lack of packing stones suggest it did not hold a standing stone. It could have been a pit dug by 18<sup>th</sup> century treasure hunters, as mentioned by Hutton (1797), but in that case the fill would be more mixed and should contain some datable evidence. The upper fill is so fine and homogeneous that it is difficult to see where it came from, being unlike the surrounding gravel. It was possibly river silt brought from the River Braint, 200m to the north.

### **Other features** (Figs 7 and 14)

In the south-west corner of Trench 1 an irregular and thin spread of dark charcoal-rich soil (111) overlay the stony subsoil and part of the top of Pit 159 (Figs 7 and 15). A few fragments of burnt bone were found in this layer. After removal of the layer several small, sub-circular,

charcoal-filled features were seen that lay in two slightly curving lines, one to the south-west of Pit 159 and one to the north-east.

At the south-west corner of Trench 1 were three features, 131, 136 and 138. On excavation the charcoal-rich fill of each was shown to be just the top fill of larger features, which had substantial stone linings or edgings, which indicated that the features were post-holes, with packing and post-pipes intact. The charcoal-rich upper fill just occupied a small scoop in the top of each hole and so had probably collected there after subsidence in the top of the hole after a post had been withdrawn. Pit 138 was 0.50m diameter and 0.75m deep, its fill edged by substantial packing stones, suggesting it was a post-hole (Fig. 14). Its fill contained several fragments of burnt bone with a distinct concentration of bone fragments on its base and probably beneath the former post. This proved to be a cremation of a human infant. There was also one piece of pottery a rim of dark, smooth fabric with external decoration, identified as probably from a small Collared Urn (F.M. Lynch, pers. com.). Pit 131 was similar in size and packing stones, but did not contain any bone (Fig. 16).

The other line of six features, 151, 153, 156, 157, 158 and 176, lay in a slightly curving line, approximately parallel to the previous three features. These showed up clearly because of the dark fill. They varied from 0.1 to 0.25m in diameter. Two of them appeared to be cut into the edge of the fill of Pit 159 (Fig. 7) which may have remained *in situ* when its standing stone was withdrawn, showing that the small features post-dated the standing stone. Feature 151 was excavated, showing it to be quite shallow, unlike the larger holes of 136 and 138. However, it is possible that what was seen was just the infill after a driven stake had been pulled out.

The two lines of features each lay on slight arcs and these arcs were approximately concentric to the stone circle, suggesting some kind of association (Fig. 7). The subsoil to the north of the line of outer pit/post-holes was quite homogeneous, in which features would be visible and with no sign that the line of stones continued further. The inner line of smaller possible stake-holes if just driven stakes would have been very difficult to see beyond the area where they were picked out by the top fill of charcoal-rich soil. If they existed further to the north they would also have been destroyed by the widespread robbing pits dug around pits 6 and 7.

If the inner line of possible stake-holes had continued as a concentric arc elsewhere around the circle they would similarly have been difficult to identify. There were in fact three other possible post-holes in a similar position in relation to the circle on the opposite side of the circle, 123 and 143 in Trench 2 and 175 in Trench 3 (Fig. 7). Two of these, 123 and 143 were excavated. Pit 123 was 0.5m diameter and 0.85m deep with a probable packing stone (Figs 14 and 17). Pit 143 was 0.35m diameter and 0.40m deep. Both were sub-circular with near vertical sides and so clearly artificially cut, and as3 had some probable packing stones suggesting that it was a post-hole (Fig. 14). Both had dark fill, probably because of the presence of finely comminuted charcoal, and this made their identification obvious and may provide a contextual link with to the dark soil spread (111) and possible cremation activity in the south-west corner of Trench 1.

One other small feature [162] was found, between pits 6 and 140. It was oval in plan, 0.55m by 0.30m in plan and 0.20m deep, below the subsoil surface. The top fill was dark silt, possibly because of the presence of finely comminuted charcoal and lower down a gravelly silt. There were no artefacts or identifiable pieces of charcoal and no indication of date or function but the top dark fill could again provide a contextual link to the activity represented by the charcoal-rich spread (111).

## 6. ARTEFACTUAL EVIDENCE

The majority of the finds were 18<sup>th</sup> century objects, as in 2008, mainly table and kitchen wares associated with the former 18<sup>th</sup> century cottage, as well as one much worn coin, probably of George III, and other oddments.

There were 27 recorded finds, including charcoal pieces (Table 1). Some of these were from Post-med contexts and some from original pit fill. One fragment of fired clay from the backfill of Pit 7 was possibly a bodysherd of a prehistoric pottery. Another piece of pottery came from the fill of probable post-hole 135, believed to be a rim from a small Bronze Age Collared Urn (Lynch pers. com.).

9 pieces of worked flint were found, mainly from the area around Pit 159, including two pieces that were finely pressure-flaked, probably the waste from Later Neolithic or Early Bronze Age tool making, such as for a knife. Two flakes of flint were found in 2008, in the backfill of Pit 3.

**Table 1**

### *G1629 Bryn Gwyn Excavation 2010: Recorded finds summary*

<i>RFno.</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Trench</i>	<i>Material</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Context description</i>
201	102	3	flint	1	flake	Ploughsoil
202	106	1	flint	1	backed blade	2008 excavation backfill
203	103	2	flint	1	core?	Ploughsoil
204	103	2	iron	1	object	Ploughsoil
205 backfill	104	1	pottery?	1	prehistoric?	Pit 7 backfill Post-med
206	108	3	flint	1	flake	Pit/PH 107 fill
207	110	1	quartz	1	flake	Post-med field ditch
208	112	1	bone	1		Spread 111
209	112	1	charcoal	1		Spread 111
210	104	1	cualloy	1	Post med button	Pit 7 Post-med backfill
211	122	3	cualloy	1	Coin George III?	Pit 125 Post-med backfill
212	121	1	charcoal	1		Pit 6 Post-med backfill
213	118	2	bone	1		Pit 116 Post-med backfill
214	129	1	flint	1	flake	Pit 7 original? fill
215	134	1	flint	1	flake	Pit 159 original? fill
216	104	1	flint	1	flake	Pit 7 Post-med backfill
217	137	1	flint	1	flake	Pit/PH 136 original? fill
218	144	1	charcoal	1		Pit/PH 143 original? fill
219	139	1	bone	1		Pit/PH 138 original? fill
220	139	1	pottery	1	EBA rim	Pit/PH 138 original? fill
221	133	1	charcoal	1		Pit/PH 131 original? fill
222	132	1	charcoal	1		Pit/PH 131 original? fill

223	135	1	bone	1		Spread 111
224	135	1	flint	1	flake	Spread 111
225	141	1	charcoal	1		Pit 140 original? fill
226	152	1	charcoal	1		Pit/PH 151 original? fill
227	154	1	charcoal	1		Pit/PH 153 original? fill

## 7. DISCUSSION

The evidence so far shows that the circle consisted of stones that were alternately slabs and columns laid out on a fairly precise true circle of *c.* 16m (17.5yds) diameter with eight symmetrically placed and equidistant stones *c.* 6m apart (stone centre to stone centre). This would have meant that opposing pairs were of similar stone shape. The only reservation to this interpretation is the failure to identify a convincing stone pit in the expected position in the north-east quadrant. Also Pit 119 is slightly closer to Pit 3, at 5m, than expected and would then be 8.5m from the dubious stone pit 116.

There are two anomalous pits. Pit 140 is geometrically central to the circle but with no evidence of function although its profile suggests that it did not hold a standing stone. Pit 6 did hold a substantial stone but the position of the stone and its orientation had no relation the stone circle, although both were clearly extant at the same time. As Pit 6 seems to have been an isolated feature it could be earlier or later than the circle. One possibility is that it was a marker stone, rather than a structure in its own right and its long axis happens to be close to the line of the winter sunset/summer sunrise solstice.

It may be meaningful that the winter sunset/summer sunrise solstice line that passes through the centre of the stone circle also passes through the centre of pit 159 and that it is close to that pit where a number of secondary features were present, one of them with a cremation burial. The charcoal-rich spread (111) contained a few burnt bone fragments and may be a remnant of cremation activity or deposition around the standing stone in pit 159.

The circle lies on naturally quite level ground south-west of the probable Neolithic henge of Castell Bryn Gwyn, the south-west entrance of which faces in the direction of the stone circle. The henge was associated with Late Neolithic Grooved Ware pottery and seems likely to pre-date the stone circle, which could be an elaboration to the ceremonial landscape around the henge. The stone circle does not lie on a major solar alignment from the henge but it is possible that the henge may have been placed in relation to the actual hill of Bryn Gwyn, because it lies on the winter sunset/summer sunrise solstice line when viewed from the henge (Fig. 1). The hill itself would have been interesting to investigate but has unfortunately been largely built over.

The proximity of two major monuments on this plateau-like area suggests that the area was a ceremonial focus. Both also lie close to the River Braint, which, prior to sand blows in the 14thC AD would have been navigable for small boats and this may have been relevant to the setting of the monuments and to the activities that went on there, considering that henges elsewhere are often situated close to rivers.

## 8. FUTURE WORK

There is a certain amount of post-excavation work. There are three soil samples to process, including one, the fill of Pit 138, which is likely to produce more cremated bone fragments. The samples may also produce more carbonised botanical evidence. The cremation will have a specialist report. The charcoal will be identified and samples sent for radiocarbon dating.

The Bronze Age pottery will be drawn and a specialist report produced. Together with the radiocarbon dating this should allow an assessment of the date of the stone circle and of the cremation activity that seems to have taken place around it. A short report will then be produced for publication.

The monument is important as the only known example of a true orthostatic, free-standing stone circle on Anglesey. Another possible example once existed at Penrhos Feilw (PRN 2748, SAM A07) on Holy Island, where, as here, two standing stones remain, each *c.* 3m high and 3m apart. Geophysical survey there did not produce any evidence of a circle (GAT HER) although that is not conclusive. The geophysical evidence at Bryn Gwyn was not very informative, although in hindsight some of the robbing pits did show as anomalies but too slight to be identified from the background of natural variations. The first phase at Bryn Celli Ddu chambered tomb included a ring of stones internally bordering an earthwork that might have been a small henge, but the stones were not very large and served more to emphasise the ring work than to form a feature in their own right. No single interpretation is agreed and it has been suggested that the stone circle was actually an orthostatic kerb to the mound of the later tomb (Burrow 2010, 253).

19<sup>th</sup> century records also describe a type of circle east of Castell Bryn Gwyn, at Tre Dryw Bach (Fig. 1). It was a large irregular oval and certainly included some orthostatic stones as a plan and drawing were published (Williams 1871) but it has been cleared away since that time. It may have been just a remnant of an Iron Age or Romano-British field system but there is still a possibility that it is a Neolithic enclosure.

The rarity of the Bryn Gwyn circle makes it worthwhile to pursue the post-excavation work. Processing of soil and charcoal samples may provide material for radiocarbon dating, which will allow comparison with Castell Bryn Gwyn. The cremation burial needs a specialist report. The bone might be radiocarbon dated if no suitable charcoal is produced and one piece of skull has been retained, as found, for possible DNA study.

The whole area of the monument was not investigated so there is scope for further work in future. Detailed work in more ideal conditions could investigate the post-holes and stake-holes around Pit 159 to look for continuations of the lines of features and to understand their purpose better. A large area around pits 6 and 7 was found to have been disturbed by the 19<sup>th</sup> century demolition of the circle and not all this disturbance was removed, so other prehistoric features could still remain concealed. Only half of the fill of the main stone pits, 6, 7 and 159 was removed, so leaving deposits that could be useful if new techniques of study become available in future.

The wider area here also needs further investigation. As a probable focal ceremonial area there is a high likelihood of other features such as minor circles or burials, or of linear features such as a cursus or of an avenue between Castell Bryn Gwyn and the stone circle or the river. There is also a high chance of Neolithic settlement features in the area. The ploughed fields will have lost much evidence due to erosion of the subsoil surface but there could be preserved remnants, such as around the house of Bryngwyn Bach (Fig. 1). More extensive geophysical survey is needed to look at the area around the stone circle and the henge. This could be carried out as a sampling exercise to assess the potential for wider work. The former 'circle' of Tre Dryw Bach could also be targeted. Its position on the ground is closely identified by the 19<sup>th</sup> century plan of it so geophysical survey and trial excavation could be carried out.

Palaeo-environmental work might be usefully carried out on the valley of the River Braint, to try to understand its historical development.

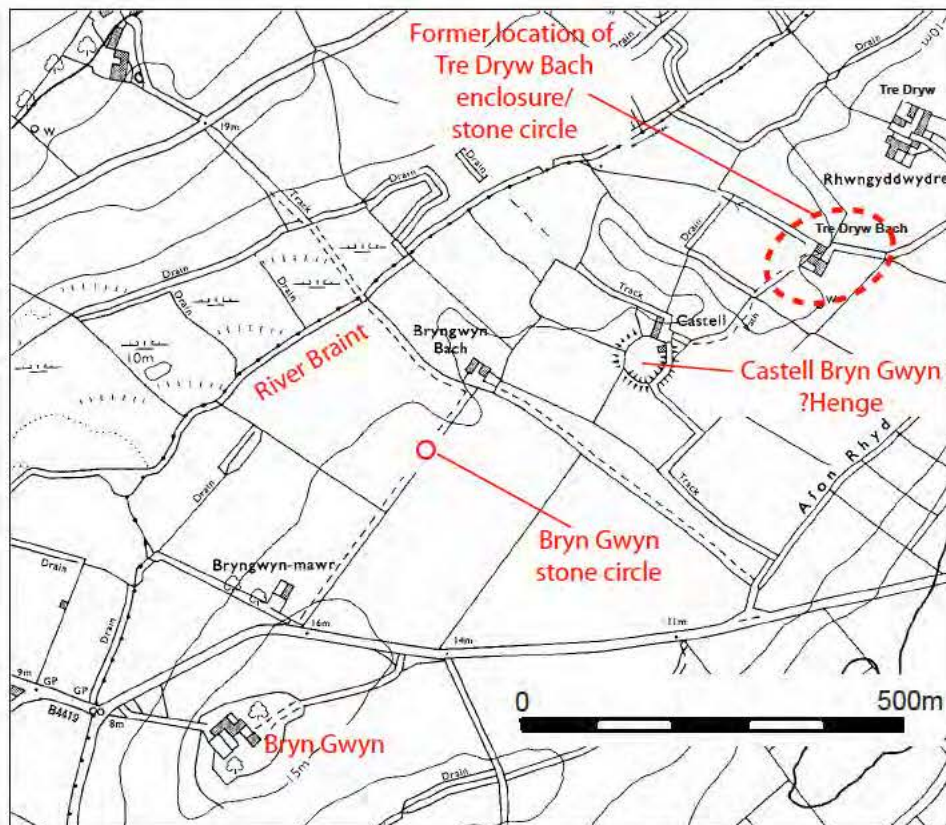


Castell Bryn Gwyn itself is a key site in national terms and needs re-assessment. The original excavations found some features in the interior but it was not possible to understand their function or date (Wainwright 1962) and there has been more recent re-interpretation (Lynch 1991, 100-3). The complexity of the phasing derived from interpretation of the excavation of the bank and ditch needs re-investigation by re-excavation and by acquisition of a radiocarbon sequence. Ideally there would also be study of a new area of the enclosure bank and ditch to look for more Neolithic deposits.

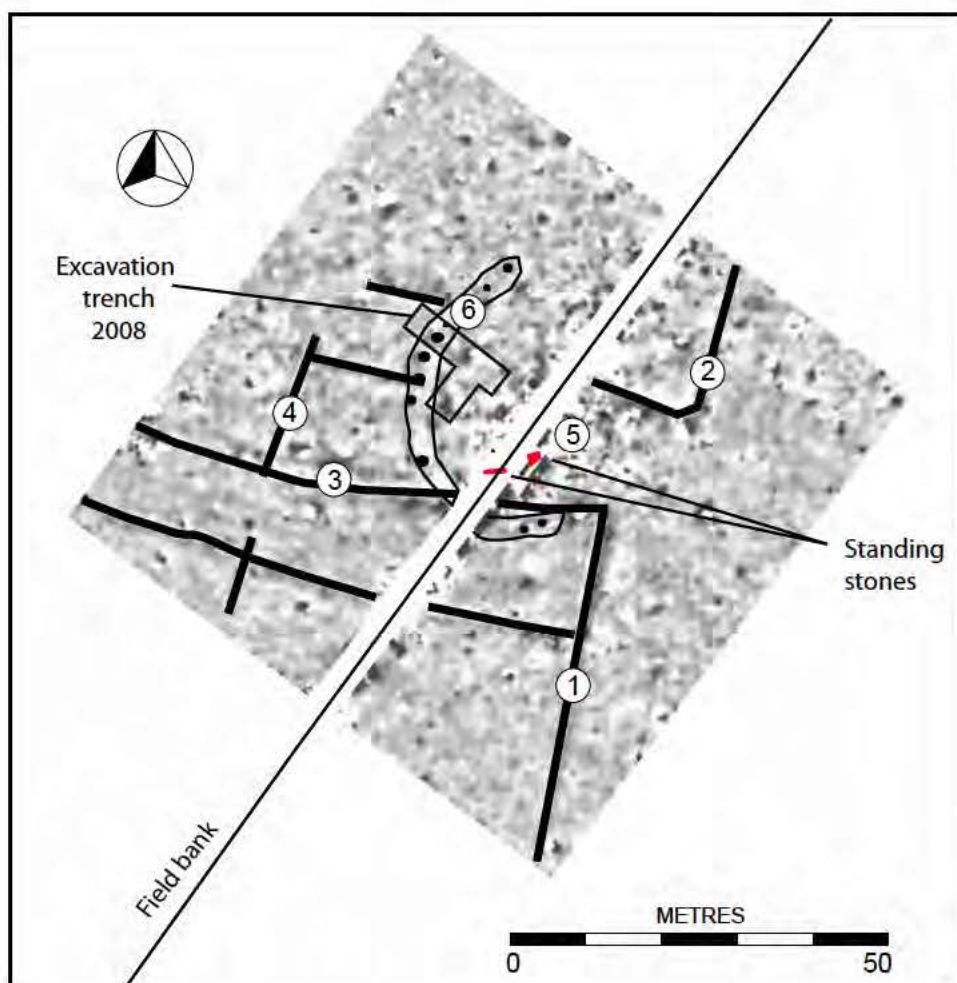
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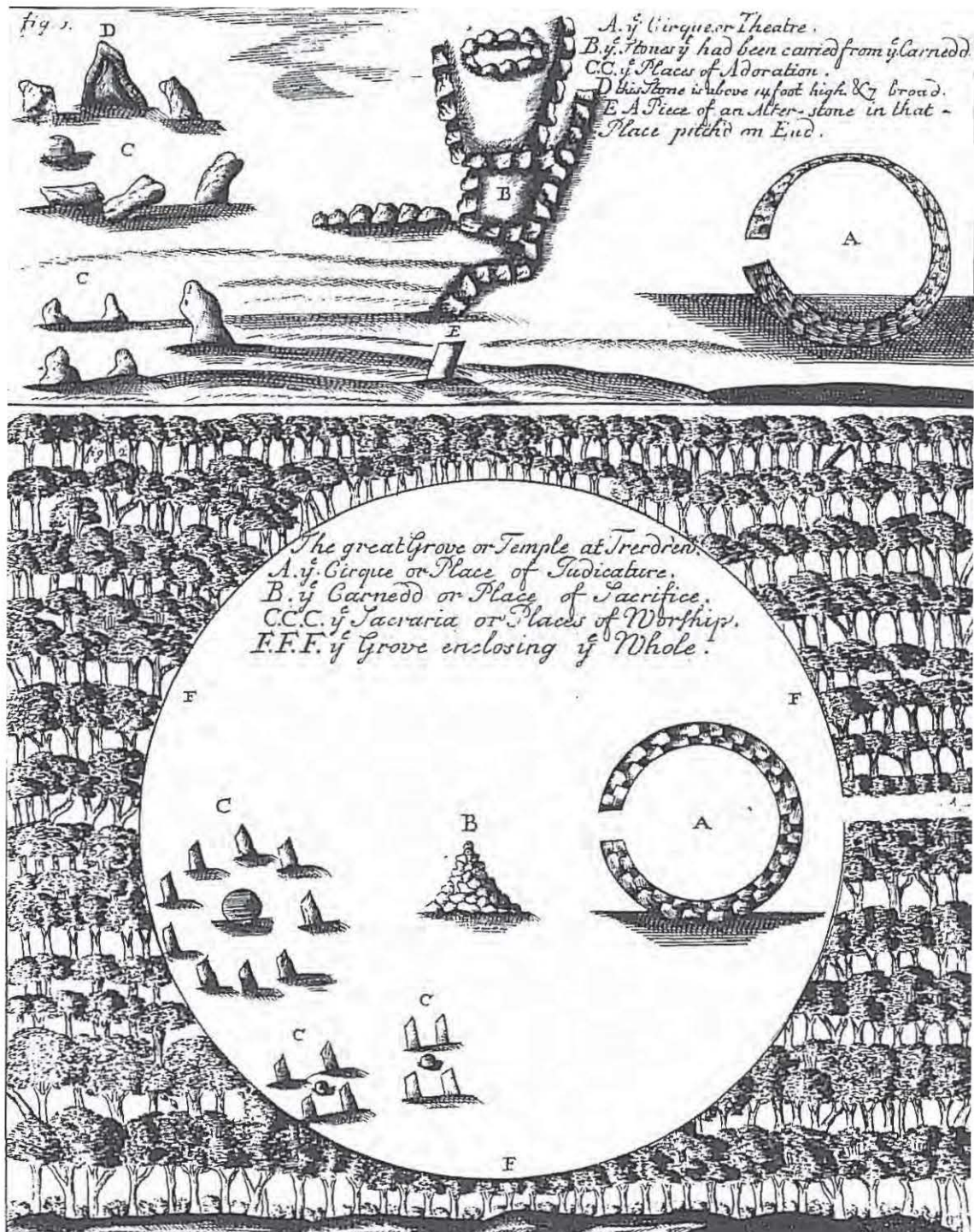


G1629 Bryn Gwyn 2010 Fig.1 The location of the site in relation to the surrounding landscape. Based on OS 1:10,000 scale map. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Licence number AL 100020895



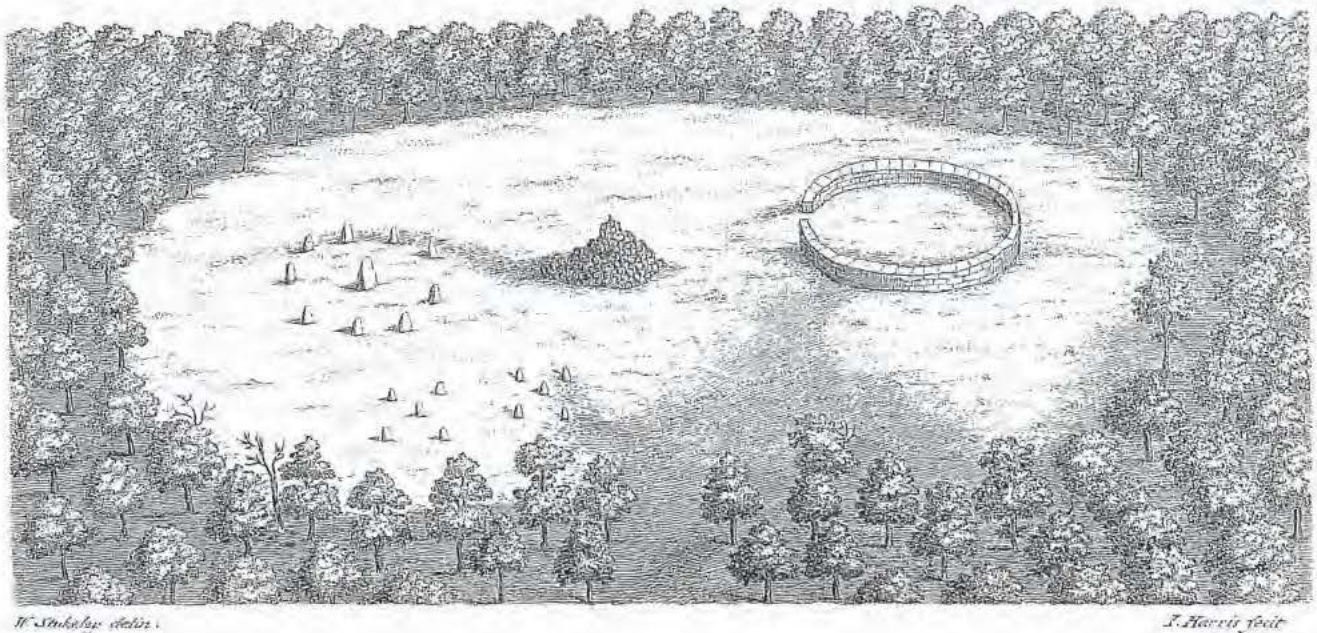
G1629 Bryn Gwyn 2010 Fig.2 Gradiometer survey interpretation (2006) and location of excavation trench (2008)



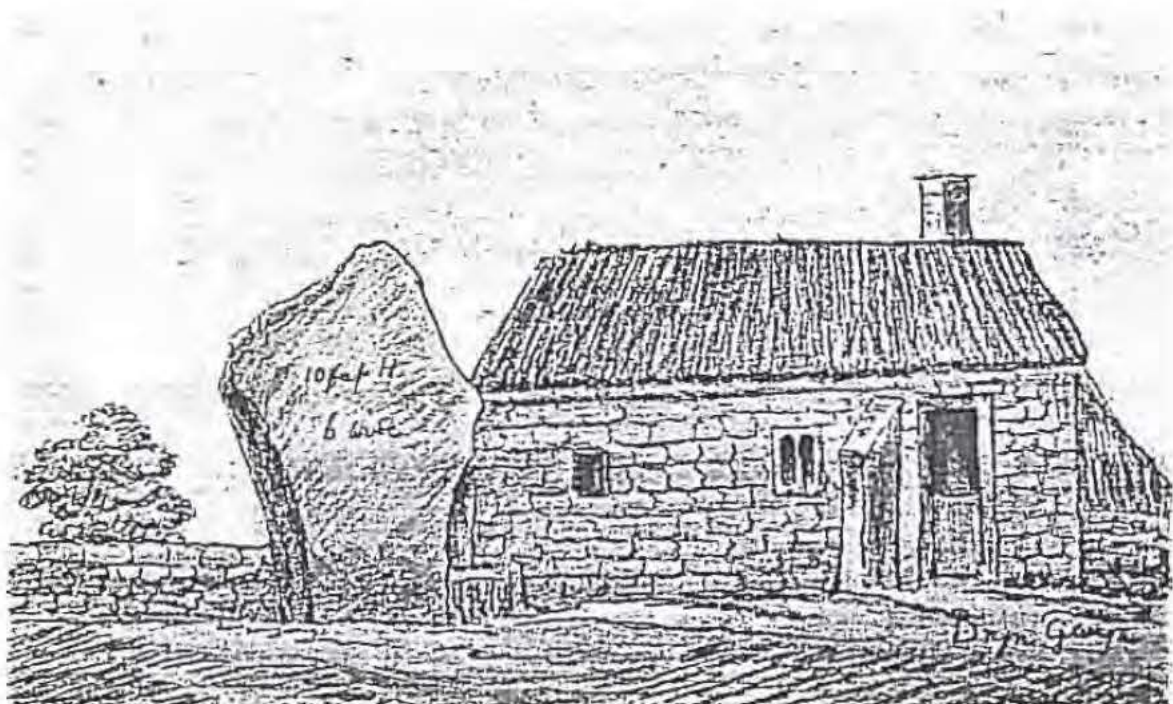


G1629 Bryn Gwyn 2010 Fig.3 The Bryn Gwyn stones (C) and Castell Bryn Gwyn (A) and area by Rowlands (1723)



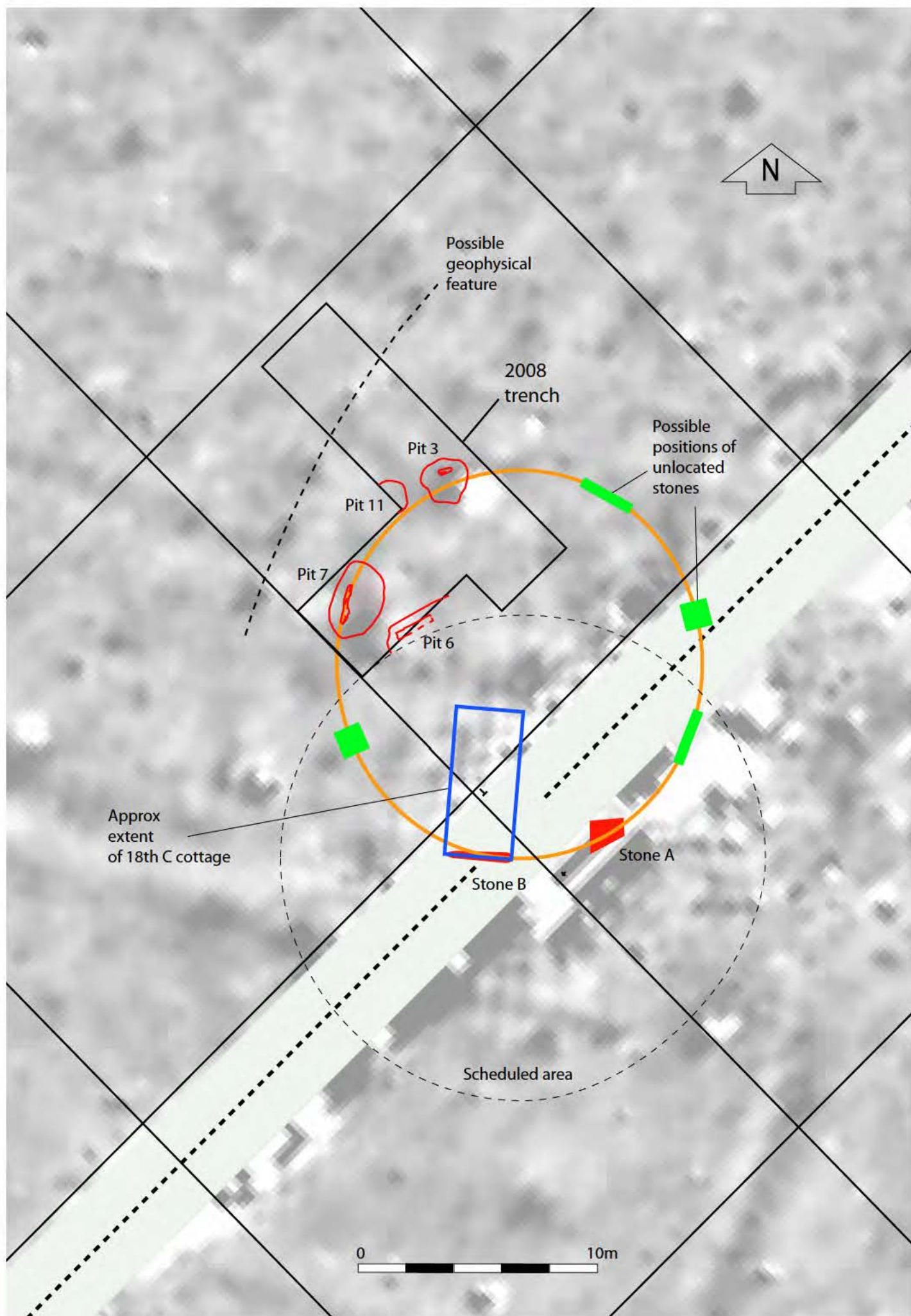


G11629 Bryn Gwyn 2010 Fig. 4 Illustration of the Bryn Gwyn stone circle, cairn and Castell Bryn Gwyn by Stukeley (1724) based on Rowlands drawing



G1629 Bryn Gwyn 2010 Fig. 5 Drawing of the 18th century cottage and the smaller of the two surviving standing stones from the north-east, by the Rev. John Skinner (1802). The larger stone formed the left gable wall of the cottage in this view.



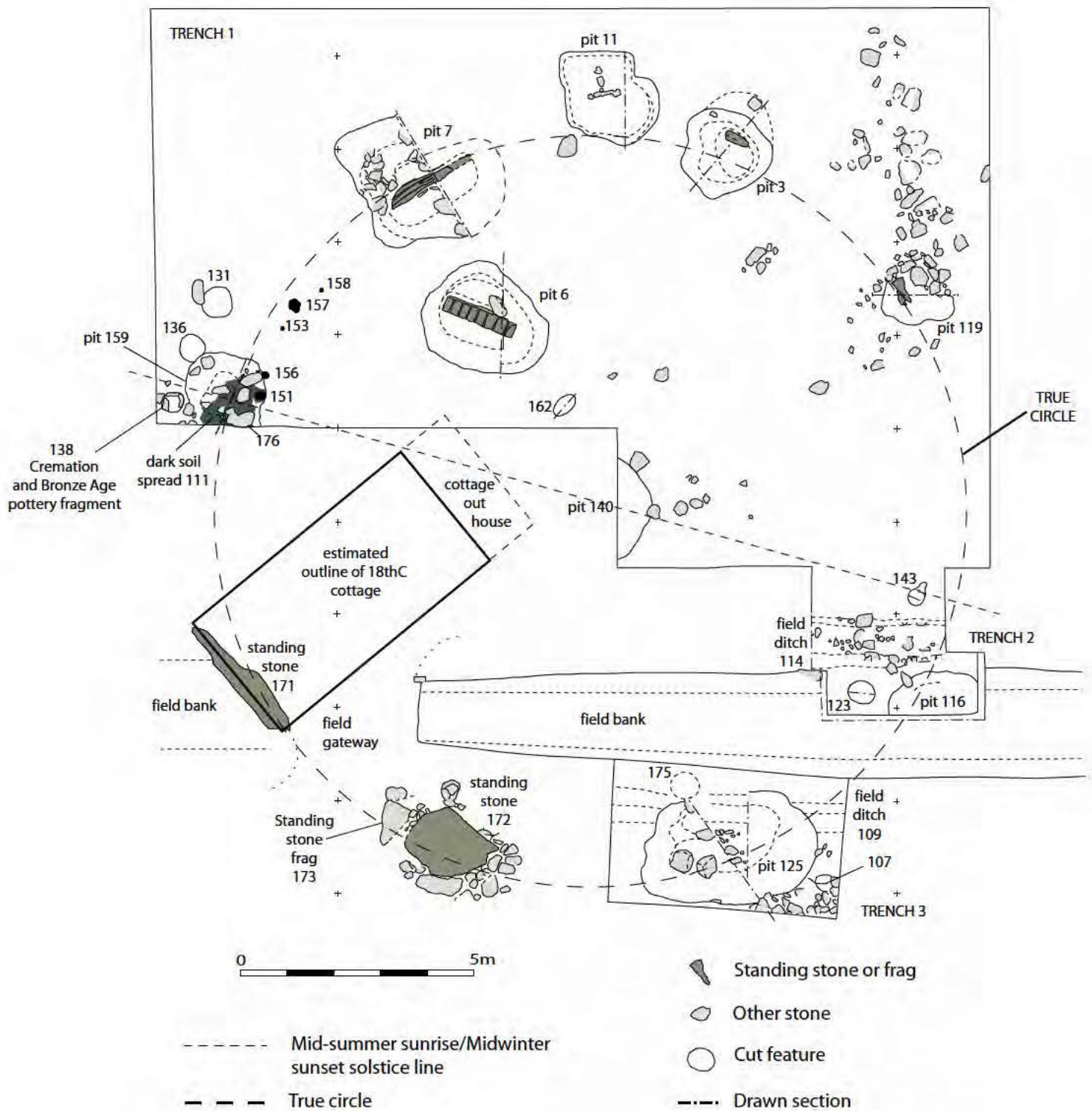


G1629 Bryn Gwyn 2010 Fig. 6 Location of standing stones, 2008 trench, pits and projected stone circle in relation to the gradiometer survey

# BRYN GWYN STONE CIRCLE GAT EXCAVATION 2010

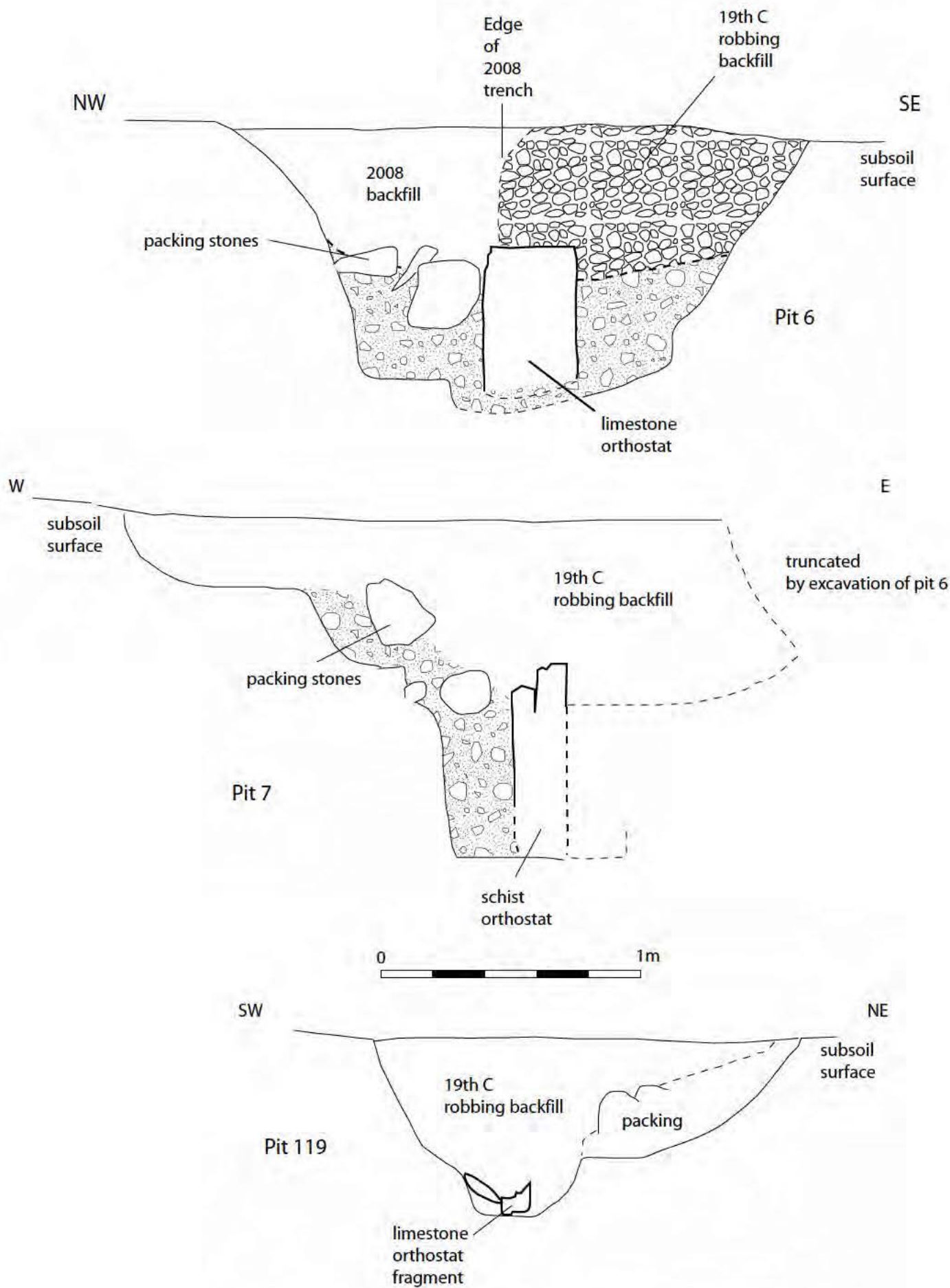
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G1629 Bryn Gwyn 2010 Fig.7 General excavation plan





G1629 Bryn Gwyn 2010 Fig.8 Pits 6, 7 and 119, cross-sections





G1629 Bryn Gwyn 2010

Fig. 9 Pit 6 showing the surviving standing stone stump in its pit, excavated to the base, with packing stone in situ. 1m scale. From the west



G1629 Bryn Gwyn 2010

Fig. 10 Pit 119 showing the remnant of limestone slab in its base and with original packing stones still in situ on the right. 1m scale. From the south-east





G1629 Bryn Gwyn 2010

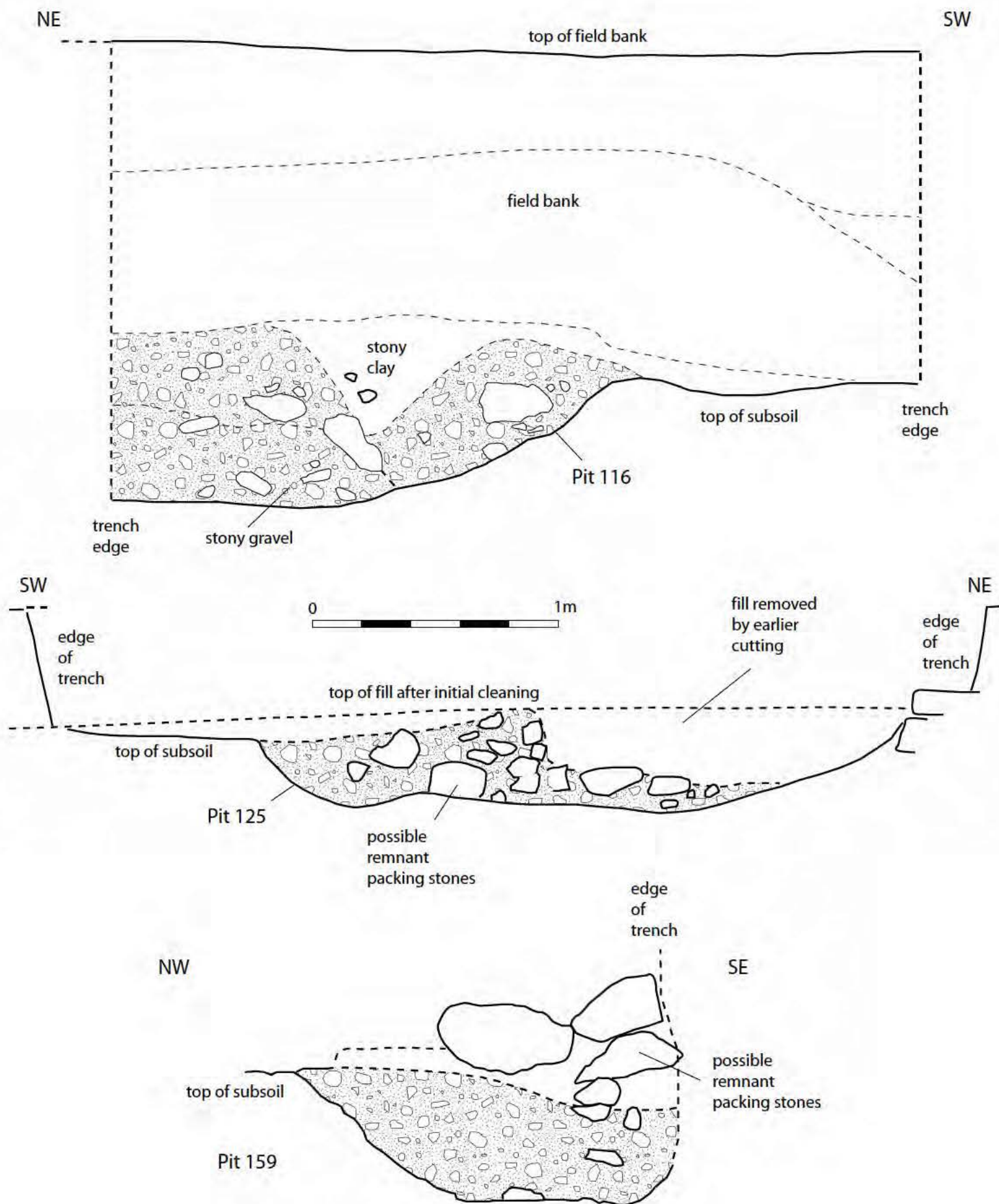
Fig. 11 Pit 7 vertical view showing the original packing in place around the surviving standing stone stump. 1m scale



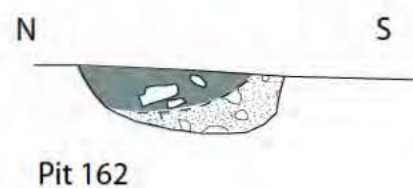
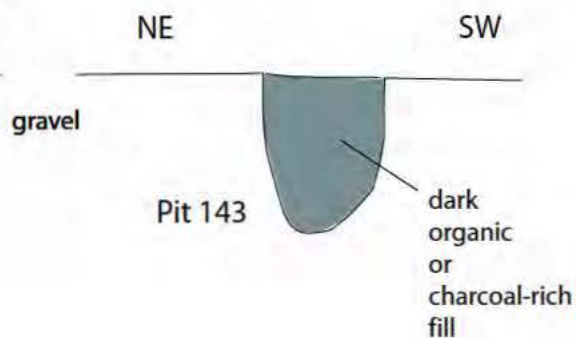
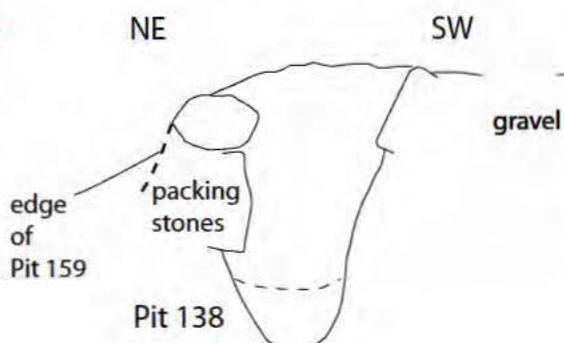
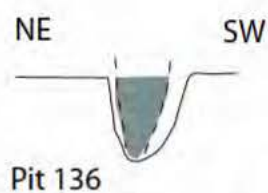
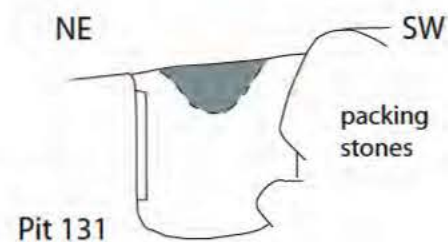
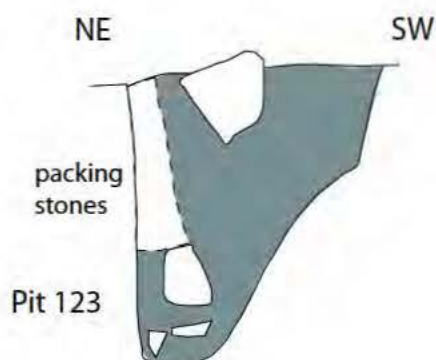
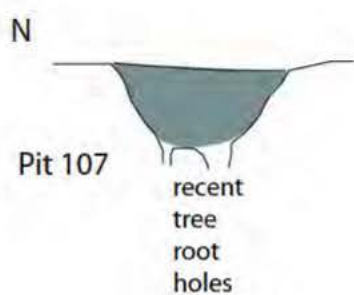
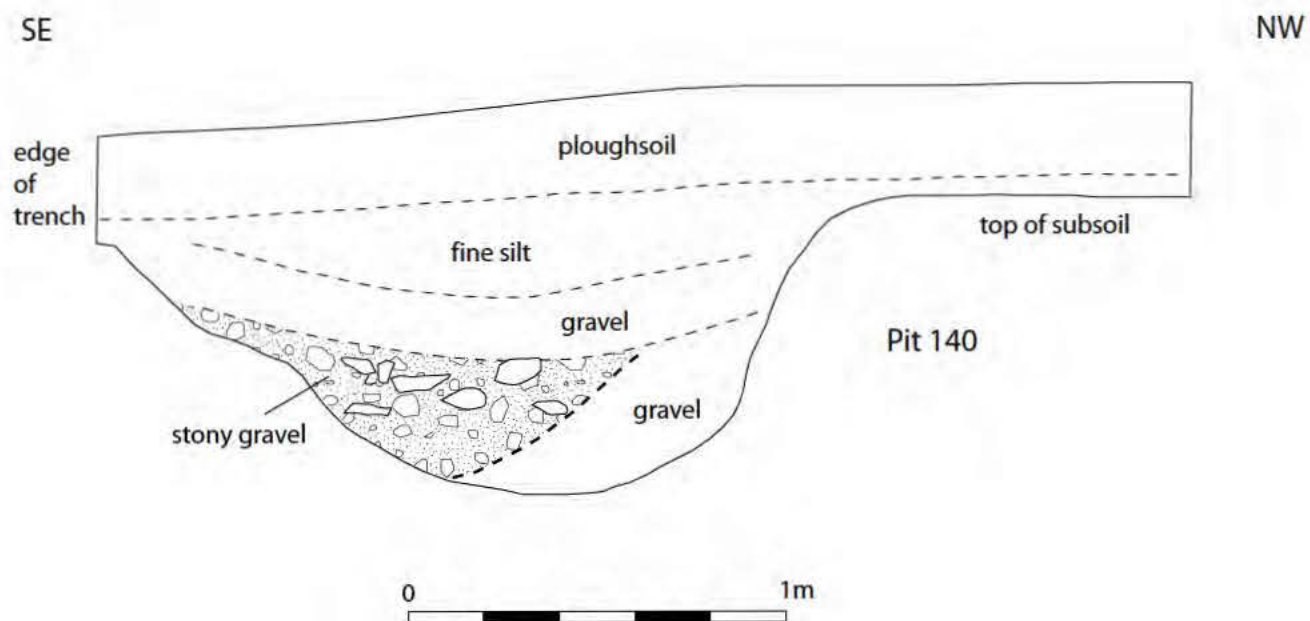
G1629 Bryn Gwyn 2010

Fig. 12 Pit 7 showing the standing stone stump in its stone hole, excavated to the base. 1m scale. From the south-west





G1629 Bryn Gwyn 2010 Fig. 13 Pits 116, 125 and 159, cross-sections



G1629 Bryn Gwyn 2010 Fig. 14 Pit 40 and Other feature cross-sections





G1629 Bryn Gwyn 2010  
Fig. 15 South-west corner of Trench , from north-west  
showing dark soil spread 111 during excavation



G1629 Bryn Gwyn 2010  
Fig. 16 Pit or Post-hole 131 from north-west,  
post-pipe half-sectioned,  
showing top infill of dark soil.  
30cm scale



G1629 Bryn Gwyn 2010  
Fig. 17 Trench 2 from north-west  
showing Pit 116, left and Pit/post-hole 123, right. 1m scale







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