

TOMEN Y MUR (ME002), TRAWSFYNYDD
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AND OTHER WORKS REPORT
05 APRIL 2018

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SUMMARY (NON-TECHNICAL)

This report has been produced to record and assess the results of a watching brief and other works that was carried out at Tomen y Mur (ME002), Trawsfynydd on 05 April 2018 by Snowdonia National Park Authority's designated archaeologist. Other than minor finds of potential archaeological value, no significant finds were identified as a result of the watching brief and other works.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background to the work

A watching brief was carried out at the site of Tomen y Mur, Trawsfynydd (SH 70886 38521) by Snowdonia National Park Authority's designated archaeologist on 05 April 2018. This was to enable mitigation work to take place at the site to reduce the degree of erosion on the mound (or 'Tomen') (see figure 1A below) and also to carry out general maintenance at the site as per the management agreement (see appendix 1). This included:

- Installing a way marker (SH 70556 38696) post to encourage visitors to walk around the base of the motte, rather than walk to the top of it which contributes to further erosion (noted as 'Work area 1' in appendix 1)
- Re-distribute stones at the base of the motte to block the gaps (figures 1A and 1B) that encourage visitors to walk up the mound (SH 70556 38694 & SH 70537 38657) (noted as 'Work area 2' in appendix 1).
- Remove stone from underneath an access gate, to enable the gate to close properly without getting caught on the stone (figure 1C) (SH 70782 38634) (noted as 'Work area 3' in appendix 1).



Figures 1A. Shows the degree of erosion on the northeast side of the mound and the gap in the stones at the base of the mound. **1B.** Shows gap at the base of the mound on the southwest side of the mound. **1C.** Shows the gate getting caught on the stone.

1.2 Origin and scope of the report

The report has been produced as a result of the watching brief that took place at the site on 05 April 2018. The purpose of the brief was to determine whether any archaeological remains or features were present at the site and to record any that were identified.

The purpose of the report is to present the result of the watching brief, with a particular focus on the ground disturbance work (work areas 1 and 3 (see appendix 1)). In addition, the report presents a before and after snapshot in relation to work area 2 (see appendix 1). The report also highlights potential areas of future work or research that could take place.

1.3 Aims and objectives of archaeological work

- To reduce the degree of erosion on the mound.
- To contribute to the effective management of the site.
- To mitigate disturbance to any archaeological material affected as a result of the works.
- To record and present the results of any information obtained through the works.

2.0 Site background

2.1 History

Tomen y Mur predominantly represents a two-phase auxiliary fort from the Romano-British period and is situated on a slope above the A470 and the modern village of Trawsfynydd and Llyn Trawsfynydd. The exact date of the Roman occupation is unknown, however it is likely to have taken place between the Flavian era and the initial reign of Hadrian (Crew and Webster 2010).

The earlier fort appears to have covered an area of 2.03 hectares and been built of earth and timber. No dating evidence appears to exist for this phase, however it is assumed that occupation would have taken place during the Flavian era (Crew and Webster 2010). In the case of the later fort, this overlays the earlier one but covers a reduced area (1.56 hectares) and includes stone fronted ramparts. In more recent times, much of this stone was re-used for the construction of the now redundant farmhouse, farm buildings and field enclosure walls located on the site. This is evident by the angular shape of the stone material. In 2007, Snowdonia National Park Authority undertook reconstructive work on the northern corner of the reduced fort to reproduce a section of the stone fronted rampart (Crew and Webster 2010) and this included the insertion of a reproduced centurial stone. According to Collingwood and Wright (1965), this is one of ten centurial stones that have been found at Tomen y Mur.

According to a geophysical survey that was carried out in 2008 (Crew and Webster 2010), the reduced fort included a *praetentura* section with four to six barracks and a *principia*. The survey also revealed two buildings in what would normally be regarded as the *retentura* section of the fort. However, these buildings do not appear typical of *retentura* structures, also a rampart exists between this portion and the rest of the fort, which suggests the reduced fort did not contain a *retentura*. This indicates that they may have been part of an annexe complex that was adjacent to the reduced fort or are of post-Roman date (Crew and Webster 2010). Additional geophysical survey in 2009 also revealed the presence of what appears to be a small settlement between the northeast gate and the amphitheatre. This was been interpreted as the location of the *vicus* (or civilian settlement).

Earthworks at the site reveal that the reduced fort contained three gateways and this would have connected the fort with other key sites via the network of roads. Unfortunately, these features are less defined in the case of the earlier fort. Nonetheless, excavations by Jarrett (1962) revealed that the earlier fort would have contained a double ditch, which was later reduced to a single ditch. In the case of the reduced fort, this was v-shaped (Cooke 2011). In addition to earthworks in and around the fort, the site also contains several other earthwork features, including practice camps, an amphitheatre, parade ground, mansio, bathhouse and remnants of the former Roman roads.

More recent activity at the site includes a nineteenth century tramway that led to Braich quarry that cut through the former amphitheatre. In addition, a large rectangular feature (40m by 25m) between the bathhouse and the southeastern section of the reduced fort appears to overlay the Roman road. This indicates that the feature may well be post-Roman. According to Crew and Webster (2010) this may represent a hall and may be associated with the Mabinogion story of Math fab Mathonwy. Another characteristic feature at the site is the Norman motte that is situated near the former northwestern gateway of the reduced fort. According to Cooke (2011), this is feature mentioned in the Mabinogion and may have been constructed and used around c. AD 1090. Crew and Webster (2010) suggest that it is likely that material from the Roman fort was used to construct the feature. At its base, the motte measures 38m in diameter and at its summit, around 12m in diameter. It also has a height of around 6.5m and a 7m wide ditch with a depth of between 0.5 and 1m.

The site also contains a former farmhouse and associated buildings. Unfortunately, historical evidence relating to the farm is limited, but probably dates from the post-medieval period. A stone engraving on the east gable/corner of the house does provide a date of 1868 and includes the initials JW. This may indicate a possible construction date for the house and also represent the initials of the landowner at the time, John Williams. According to local people, the house was supposedly the victim of bombing during WWII, to date this has not been verified.

2.2 Statutory designations

- Tomen y Mur is registered as a scheduled monument (ME002).
- Tomen y Mur is located within Snowdonia Nation Park Authority
- Parts of the site are registered as a site of special scientific interest.

3.0 The Watching brief and other works

3.1 Methodology

- Due to ground disturbance, a **comprehensive watching brief** was maintained in relation to work areas 1 and 3 (see appendix 1). According to ClfA (2014), this is defined as a watching brief whereby the supervising archaeologist is present during all times of ground disturbance.
- Any and all potential finds were recorded and retained for future analyses.
- Photographic evidence of the work was also recorded and a scale was included where possible.
- In relation to work area 2 (see appendix 1), gaps in the stone wall at the base of the motte were closed using stone material that had collapsed into the ditch. In addition, this was also achieved by re-distributing some of the stone from other parts of the wall at the base of the motte. The latter approach was only adopted where the overall character of the wall was unaffected and the change was unnoticeable.

3.2 Watching brief results

Work area 1 (SH 70556 38696) (see appendix 1)

In order to install the way marker post a 50cm² surface area to a depth of 50cm had to be excavated. After initial excavation of the selected area, it became apparent that the surface area was not suitable as it contained a high number of large stones/slates. To mitigate this issue, the excavation was moved 30cm to the northwest. This resulted in ground disturbance over a surface area of 50cm by 80cm. However, as the installation area was moved by 30cm, this meant that the original plan to excavate an area of 50cm² to a depth of 50cm was retained (see figure 2).

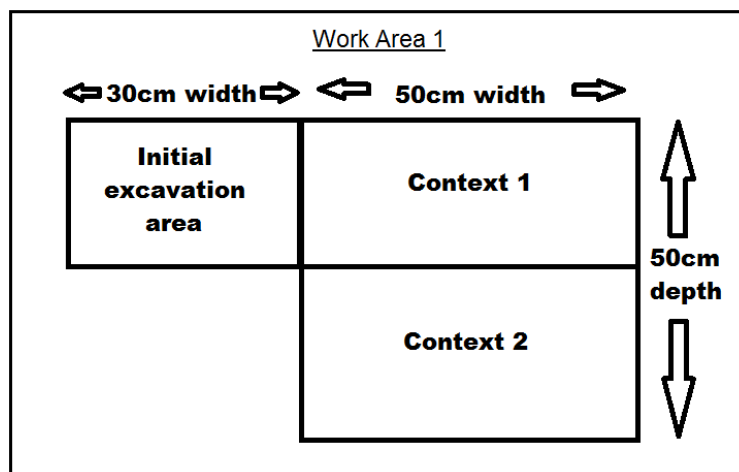


Figure 2. Diagram showing area of initial excavation and final excavation area (contexts 1 and 2)

The watching brief identified two contexts; context 1 (or top layer) was 20cm in depth and consisted of a soil layer with stones of various shapes and sizes. A sample of the soil has not been retained as this appears natural and non-archaeological. In the case of the stones (see context 1, bags 1 and 2), these have been retained as it is possible that they may be archaeological and relate to previous occupations of the site (see context 1, bags 1 and 2). Context 2 (or lower layer) was 30cm in depth and consisted of a clay layer with stone of various shapes and sizes similar to those in context 1. A sample of the clay (see context 2, bag 1) and the stones (see context 2, bags 2-6) have been retained as these may be archaeological and relate to previous occupation of the site. No other finds or artefacts were identified in either contexts.

Full list of finds can be found in appendix 2.

Work area 3 (SH 70782 38634) (see appendix 1)

Work area 3 involved the removal of a stone that was stopping the gate from closing properly. The exposed part of the stone indicated that it was trapezium shaped and no longer than 10cm on its longest side. During removal of the stone, it became apparent that it was much larger than it first appeared and in a triangular shape (see 3.3 Photographic record below). The stone itself does not appear to be archaeologically significant although it is possible that it was part of the adjacent field enclosure walls at some point in the past as it is similar in style and type of stone. No other finds were identified during the removal this stone and the gap created by the removal of the stone was backfilled with spare top soil from work area 1.

3.3 Photographic record

Work area 1 (SH 70556 38696) (see appendix 1)



Plate 1. Southwest view showing the initial excavation location where waymarker would be installed.



Plate 2. Southwest view showing the initial excavation location with turf layer removed and top of context 1.



Plate 3. Northeast view showing the initial excavation location with stone (on right) and final excavation location with turf and content of context 1 removed. Also showing top of context 2.



Plate 4. Northeast view showing content of context 2 removed.



Plate 5. Northeast view showing plastic pipe that will hold the waymarker in place.



Plate 6. Northeast view showing postcrete in place around plastic pipe.



Plate 7. Southwest view showing waymarker cemented in place.



Plate 8. Southwest view showing waymarker in place with soil and turf backfilled.

Work area 2 (SH 70556 38694 & SH 70537 38657) (see appendix 1)



Plate 9. Southwest view showing gap in wall at base of the motte (northeast side of the motte).



Plate 10. Southwest view showing the gap filled with stones at the base (northeast side of the motte)



Plate 11. Northeast view showing gap in wall at base of the motte (northeast side of the motte).



Plate 12. Northeast view showing the gap filled with stones at the base (northeast side of the motte).



Plate 13. Southwest view showing collapsed stone and gap at the base of the motte (southwest side of the motte)



Plate 14. Southwest view showing the gap filled with stones at the base (southwest side of the motte)



Plate 15. Northeast view showing collapsed stone and gap at the base of the motte (southwest side of the motte)



Plate 16. Northeast view showing the gap filled with stones at the base (southwest side of the motte).

Work area 3 (SH 70782 38634) (see appendix 1)



Plate 17: Northeast view showing the gate area with the stone to be removed.



Plate 18. Northeast view showing gate area with the stone removed.



Plate 19. East view showing the removed stone.



Plate 20. Northeast view showing gate area with a backfill of redundant soil from work area 1 (see appendix 1).

4.0 Archaeological potential and further work

- The watching brief for work area 1 (see appendix 1) has uncovered clay and stones that may be archaeological and related to previous occupations of the site. As a step forward, it would be useful to have this material analysed by a suitable qualified and experienced specialist to determine whether this is the case or not.
- The installation of the waymarker post and filling gaps in the wall at the base of the motte have been undertaken to reduce erosion on the northeast side of the motte. As a step forward, it would be useful to monitor the condition of the erosion to determine whether or not this has been an effective strategy to deal with the issue.

5.0 Publication and archiving

- This report and any associated photographs will be saved in accordance with Snowdonia National Park Authority policy. In addition, any archaeological finds will be archived in accordance with Snowdonia National Park Authority's policy.
- A copy of this report will be shared with Cadw as the Historic Environment agency responsible for scheduled monuments in Wales.
- Additionally, a copy of the report will also be shared with appropriate sections of the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust and also the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales.

6.0 Conclusion and recommendations

The report has presented the results of a watching brief and other works that took place at the archaeological site of Tomen y Mur on 05 April 2018. Other than minor finds, including clay and stone, no other potential or significant archaeological finds were revealed. Work undertaken at the site will hopefully contribute to the effective management of the site and also address some of the issues for which the work has been carried out.

It is recommended that the condition of the erosion on the northeast side of the motte is reviewed and further work undertaken should this mitigation work turn out to be ineffective. In addition, it would be useful to determine whether or not the finds that have been recovered are archaeological or not.

Acknowledgements

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- Cadw for their advice on the works and also for granting permission to carry out the work within the scheduled area.
- The landowner for granting permission for this work to be carried out.

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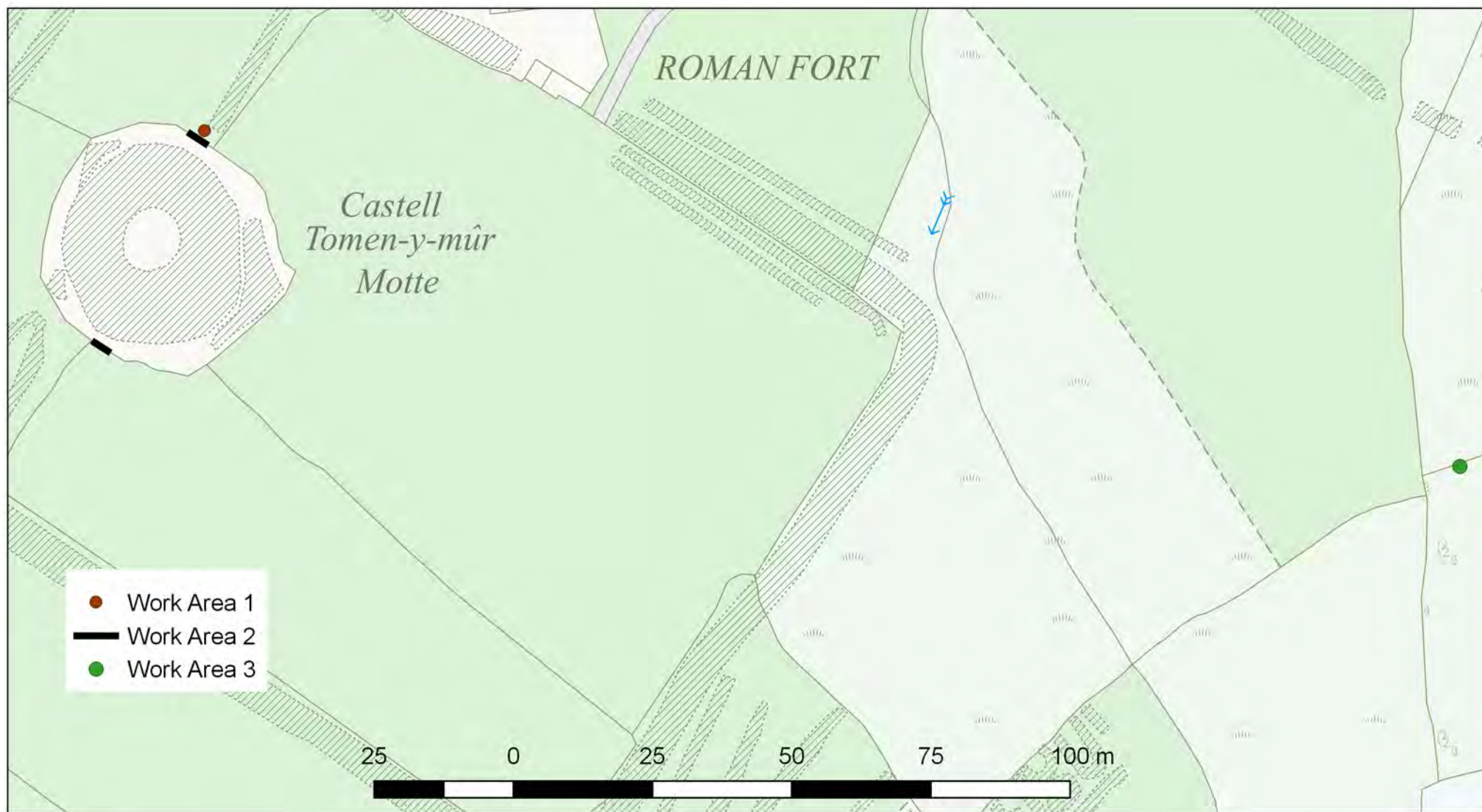
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Appendix 1 - Site map



Graddfa / Scale: 1:1,000

Creawdwr / Creator: Tomos Jones

Dyddiad / Date: 11/7/2018



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Appendix 2 – List of finds

Site: Tomen y Mur		
Date of watching brief: 05 April 2018		
Context no.	Bag no.	Description of finds
1	1	Stones of various shapes and sizes
1	2	Stones of various shapes and sizes
2	1	Clay
2	2	Stones of various shapes and sizes
2	3	Stones of various shapes and sizes
2	4	Stones of various shapes and sizes
2	5	Stones of various shapes and sizes
2	6	Stones of various shapes and sizes