CONWY LOWER GATE STREET

WATCHING BRIEF

REPORT NO. 63

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

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WATCHING BRIEF

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for Welsh Water.

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Report No. 63

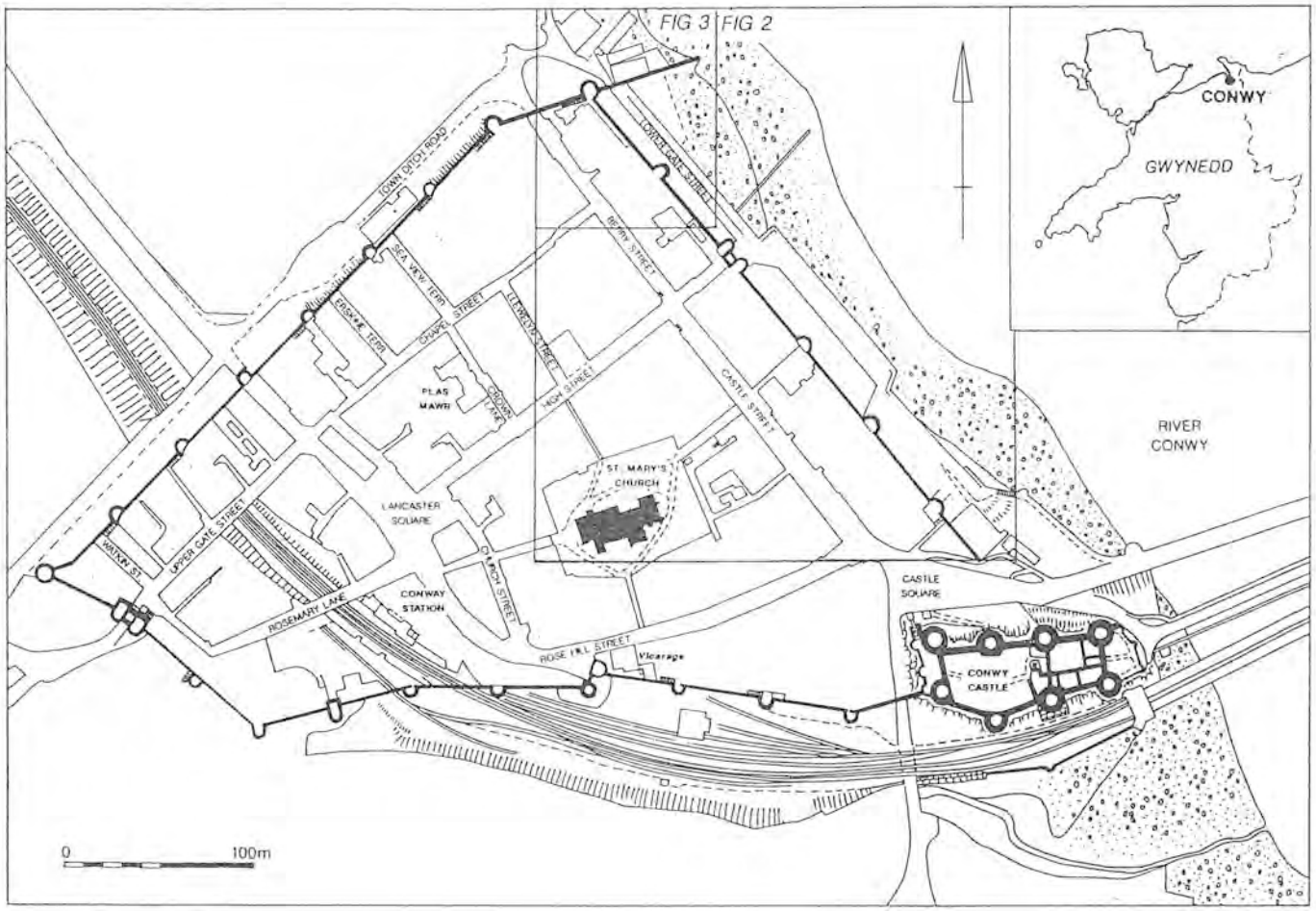

Fig. 1 General Location

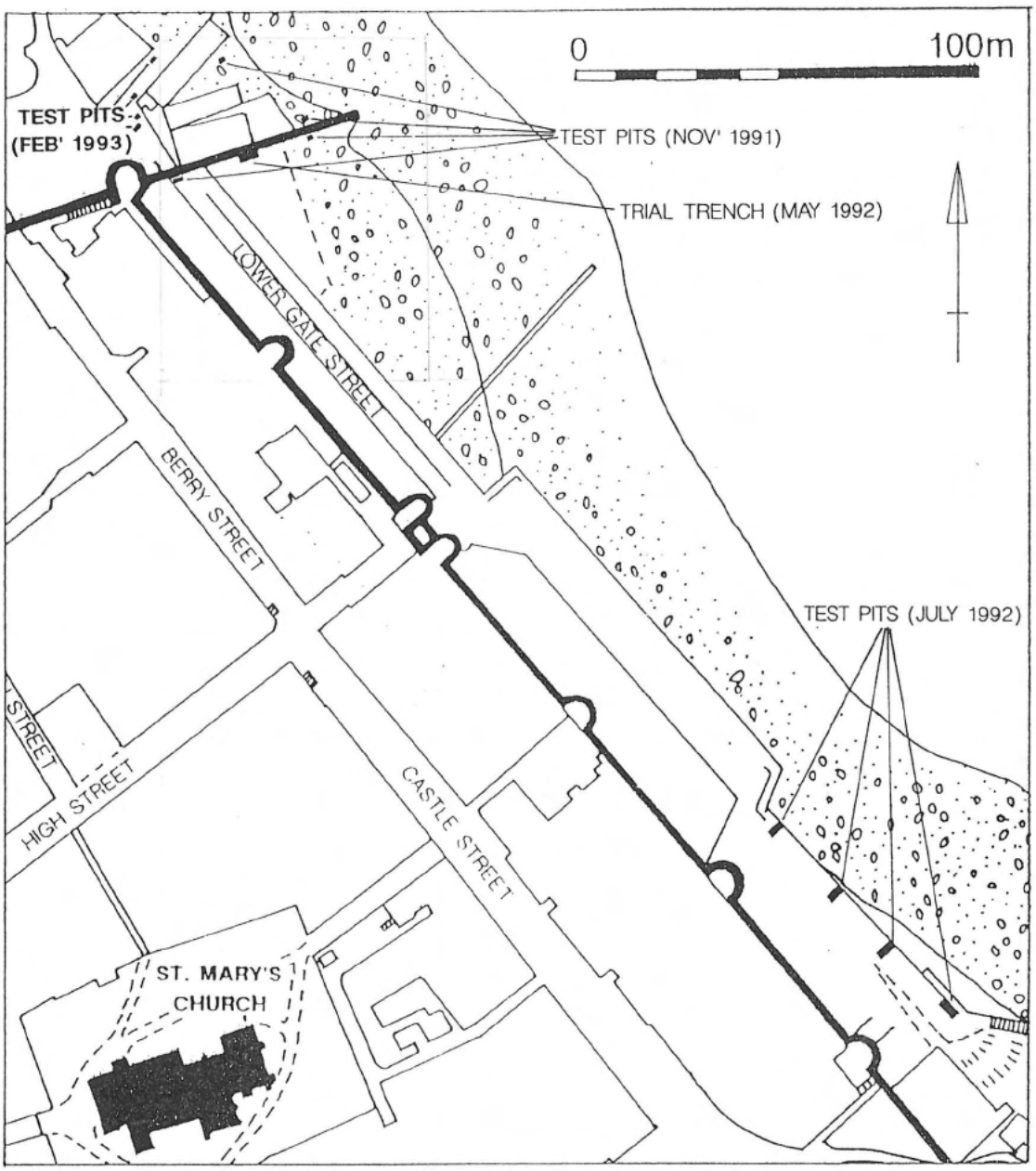

Fig. 2 Trial Work Location

CONWY LOWER GATE STREET WATCHING BRIEF - FEBRUARY 1993

1. BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF FINDINGS

The work detailed in this report shows that the area under investigated, though of importance due to its proximity to the adjacent historical remains, has suffered considerable modern disturbance prior to this present intrusion. However the trial pits did uncover two possible earlier road surface layers, which may represent earlier versions of the present road (Lower Gate Street). The disturbed state of these layers, means however that any possible dating evidence was unsure.

No finds from any of the trial pits pre-dated the eighteenth century; however, 'natural' geology or river deposits were not struck in any of the trial pits and it would appear likely that the area has been subjected to considerable dumping of makeup layers from at least some time in the 18th century. This may mean that all of the modern disturbance seen in the trial pits has occurred within these layers and that earlier features may survive sealed below the makeup layers.

2. PROJECT BACKGROUND

In November 1991 Welsh Water commissioned the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Ltd to carry out the archaeological recording of a series of trial pits to be excavated by Wallace Evans on a proposed site for a sewage disposal plant in Conwy at NGR SH 78187776. This was an area formally used as a boatyard, situated outside of the medieval town wall to the seaward side of Lower Gate Street. The pits were dug to establish the geological make-up of the area and Gwynedd Archaeological Trust's interest stemmed from the proximity of the site to the aforementioned medieval town wall, which juts out into the estuary at this point (see map - fig 2). As a result of this, it was arranged that watching briefs be carried out to record any archaeology which might be encountered.

The first series of trial pits in November 1991, (see Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Report No 34) uncovered a three tier timber structure tentatively thought to be an earlier quayside structure. It also showed the modern disturbance beneath the present road surface of Lower Gate Street which was encountered in the trial pits detailed in this report.

In continuation of the above scheme, another trial pit was dug in May 1992, (Report No 34 addendum). This pit also revealed an organic layer containing wood which may be associated with the possible quayside structure mentioned above.

On July 21 1992, in an unrelated project, a further series of trial pits was dug for Project Conwy as part of the Quayside Development and Access Scheme on the quayside further towards the castle (see fig 3) .

These trial pits were in connection with the scheme to improve the road access to the fish processing plant on Conwy quay and were excavated to check the structural stability of the quay wall. Again the proximity of the medieval town wall suggested the possibility of archaeological deposits associated with an earlier quayside.

Four trenches were excavated against the internal face of the quay wall. Initial proposals to excavate to a depth of 3m were abandoned due to the discovery of an undisclosed gas pipe rendering machine excavation impossible. Nothing of archaeological interest was observed within these trenches, the material behind the quay wall appeared to be nineteenth century in date.

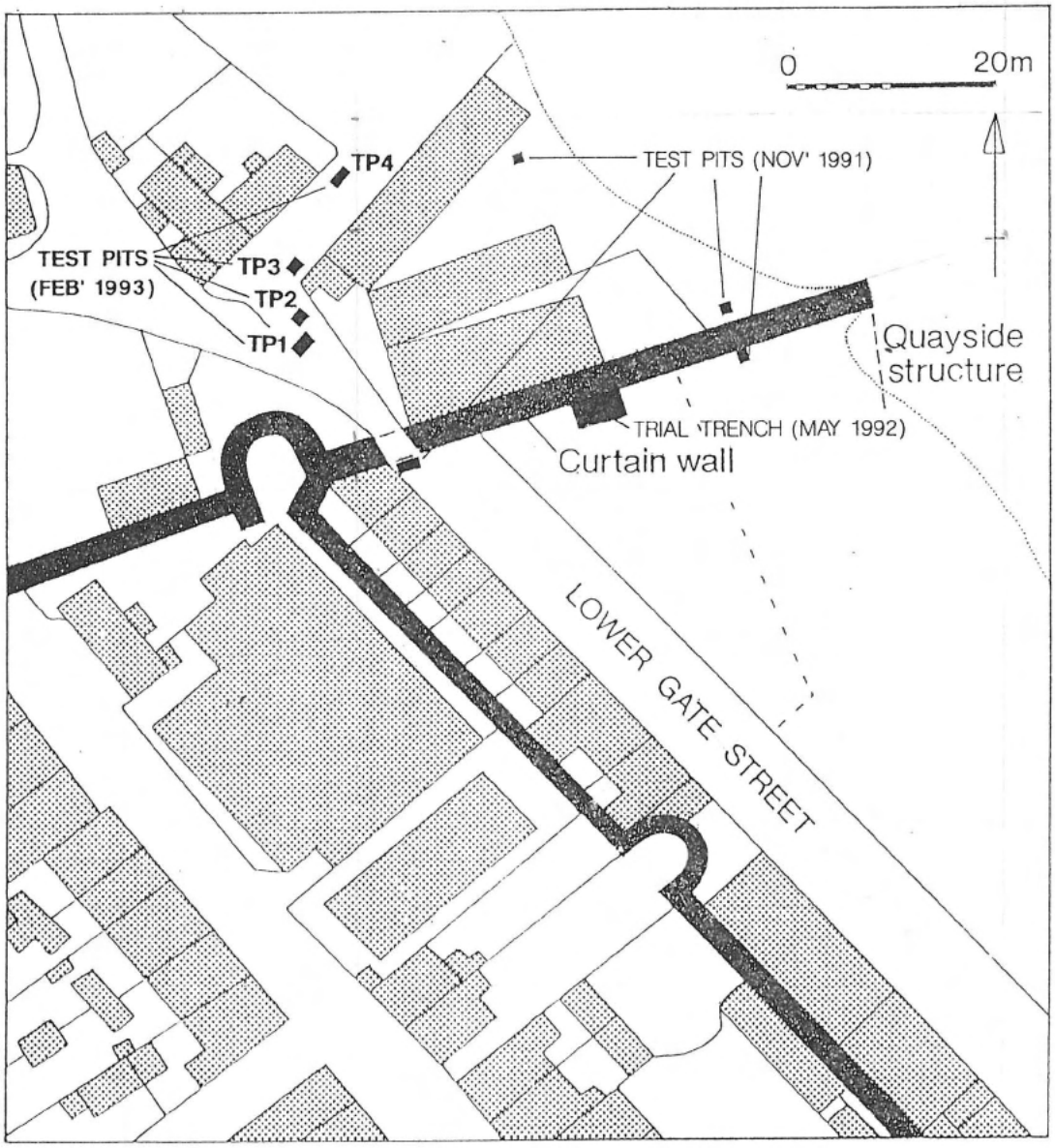

Fig. 3 - Trial work location - detail

3. THE PRESENT WORK

The present series of pits/boreholes, detailed in this report, were undertaken in late February 1993 to establish the location of the existing service pipes/cables at the locale (see map - fig.2). Again Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Ltd was commissioned by Welsh Water to carry out an archaeological watching brief.

4. AIMS AND METHODS

The excavation of the trial pits was carried out by Wallace Evans and was initially to consist of three hand-dug trial pits, which would subsequently have boreholes sunk into them to establish the depth of the bedrock. This was later adjusted to four trial pits as the first proved to be unsuitable for boring.

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Ltd was to observe these proceedings and record all findings through scale drawings of the sections revealed, photographs of the exposed geology/archaeology, a detailing of the uncovered layers/deposits/features on standard context record forms, and the collection of any finds and samples necessary.

5. OBSERVATIONS

Trial Pit One - (See fig 4)

The first trial pit was located on Lower Gate Street 8.15m from the exterior of the town wall and to the rear of the proposed sewage disposal plant site (see map - fig 2). The pit measured 1.65m by 0.55m and was hand-dug to a maximum depth of 0.78m. The surface layer consisted of tarmac (001), which had been laid as a road surface and varied in thickness from 120mm-180mm.The tarmac overlaid a reddish-brown hard-core (002) which was made up of angular stones of a generally consistent 60mm length, and could be assumed to be associated with the tarmac (001) above. The thickness of the deposit 002 ranged from 140mm-340mm. The deposit lying beneath the hard-core (002) was a greyish-brown clayey sandy silt with clay inclusions (003), thickness varying from 100mm-400mm. This deposit in turn contained, at around 600mm depth, a layer of rough stone blocks (004), which was thought to be a possible earlier surface layer associated with the road. The deposit 003 also contained the service pipes and the disturbed character of both 003 and 004 may have resulted from the installation of these pipes. No archaeological finds were uncovered and this trial pit was deemed unsuitable for boring and a second trial pit dug in the vicinity.

Trial Pit Two - (See fig 5)

The second trial pit, measuring 1.04m by 0.90m, maximum depth 0.76m, was also hand-dug and situated closer to the wall at the rear of the proposed sewage plant site, 0.75m further from the town wall (see map - fig 2). The surface layer was tarmac (001), 70mm-110mm thick. This overlaid an orange-brown medium sand (005), forming a foundation layer for the road surface, ranging from 10mm-110mm in thickness. The deposit below 005 was a light grey-brown silty sand (006) which was similar to 003 in trial pit one and 006 likewise contained rough stone blocks (007), some of which retained an adhering white mortar skin. Again these two deposits, 006 and 007, which extended between a thickness of 210mm-450mm, appeared disturbed, probably to do with the laying of the pipes which were found at this level. Deposit 006 overlay a grey-brown clayey silt (008), very stony and which contained late nineteenth-/twentieth-century pottery fragments. This layer, 008, appeared to be partially sealed by stone blocks (010, see Fig.5) and may represent a stone surface. The stone blocks 007 may then be part of 010 which has been disturbed and redeposited along with 006. It is possible that the modern finds from 008 are the result of contamination during the disturbance

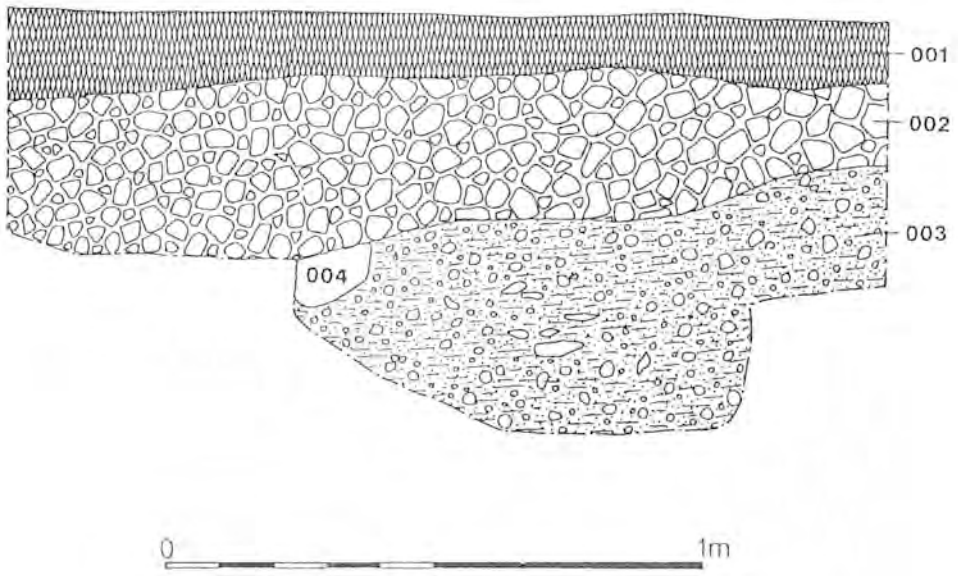

Fig. 4 - Trial Pit One (SE facing section)

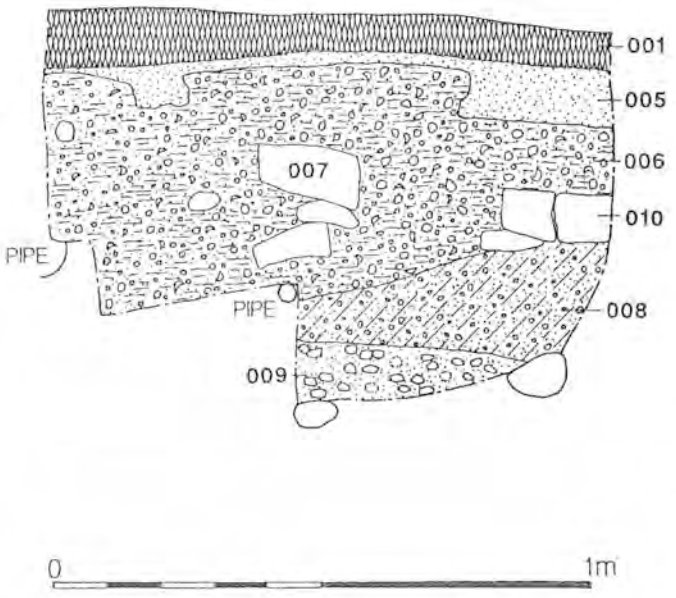

Fig. 5 - Trial Pit Two (SE facing section)

was an uneven, gravelly, cobbled layer (009), and though the section drawing does not show for the laying of the pipes and thus the dating for 010 is not secure. The final layer revealed it, appeared to form a very distinct cobbled surface, with a high mortar content ranging from 80mm-160mm in thickness. Unfortunately, a date could not be determined due to a lack of associated finds.

Trial Pit Three - (See fig 6)

This trial pit, dimensions 1.1m by 0.60m, maximum depth 0.80m, was located near the corner of the wall running to the south (rear) and west of the proposed sewage plant site (see map - fig 2). Again the top layer consisted of tarmac (001), though a much thinner layer, 10mm-20mm, no doubt due to the distance from the main road. Beneath 001 was an orange gritty deposit (010), similar to 005, 60mm-90mm thick which can again be assumed to be a foundation for the tarmac surface. This in turn sealed a light grey stony deposit (011), 140mm-340mm thick, which bore a resemblance to 003, and consistent with this also contained a number of rough stone blocks of moderate size, thought to be a disturbed part of 012. Reaching a similar depth as 011 at a depth of 470mm were two merged deposits, a bright orange yellow clay (013), 140mm-170mm thick, and a grey yellow sandy/clay (014), 20mm-140mm thick, containing a high proportion of small irregular stones. Both of these deposits, plus 011, sealed 012, a layer of large stones 110mm-200mm thick, which contained a patch of mortar (015), and could be interpreted to be the debris from a disturbed stone surface, or possibly a structure. This layer was very similar to the layer 009 found in trial pit two. Below 012, a dark grey clay (016), 40mm-110mm thick, was uncovered with other clay inclusions; which in turn covered a yellow flecked clay (017), 160mm-270mm thick, containing shell, mortar and a large stone block, 330mm by 180mm, visible in the drawn section (see fig 6).

Trial pit four - (See fig 7)

This trial pit, dimensions 2.2m by 0.90m, with a maximum depth of 0.80m, was located closer to the shore at 2.5m east of the east wall of the sewage plant site (see map - fig. 2). It also had a thin tarmac capping, 10mm-20mm, which came down onto a thin layer, 20mm-40mm thick, of mortar and rubble (stone, brick) (018). Below this was found a humic deposit (019), 50mm-80mm thick, containing small stones as well as some slates, 30mm in length, lying horizontally.

The deposit below this was the first of a series of thin sandy or charcoal layers. 020 was a brown yellow sandy, gritty layer, 100mm-110mm thick, incorporating flat pebbles of an average 30mm diameter. The first charcoal layer was 021, 10mm-20mm thick, and was found to contain blackened gravel, 5mm-7mm in size. Below this was another sandy deposit (022) 30mm-60mm thick, brownish yellow but with less than 20% stones. This overlay a thin light grey sandy deposit (023) only 10mm thick, which in turn gave way to a greyish-yellow sandy deposit (024) with a thickness of between 50mm-70mm. Another 10mm thick deposit of light grey sand with flecks of charcoal and shell fragments, (025), lay below this . Beneath this layer was a grey-yellow sand (026), 60mm-80mm thick, containing 20 per cent stone. 026 overlay a dark brown compact silty clay (027), 100mm-140mm thick and containing numerous shells and pebbles approximately 30mm in diameter. The lowest charcoal deposit in the section was 028, 10mm-1.50mm thick. The last deposit to be revealed was a medium brown gritty sand (029), 230mm-260mm thick, 50% of which was made up of small well rounded pebbles 30mm-80mm in diameter with mussel and oyster shells. This deposit was also the only one in this pit to contain any finds, i.e. fragments of pottery of eighteenth and nineteenth century date.

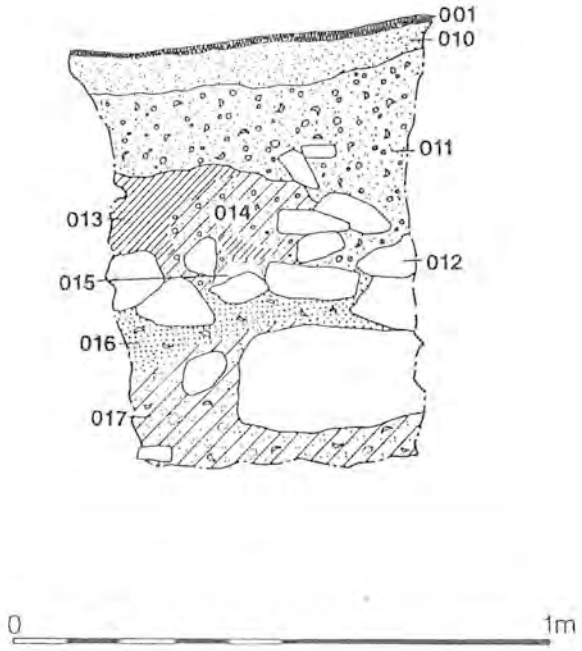

Fig. 6 - Trial Pit Three (NW facing section)

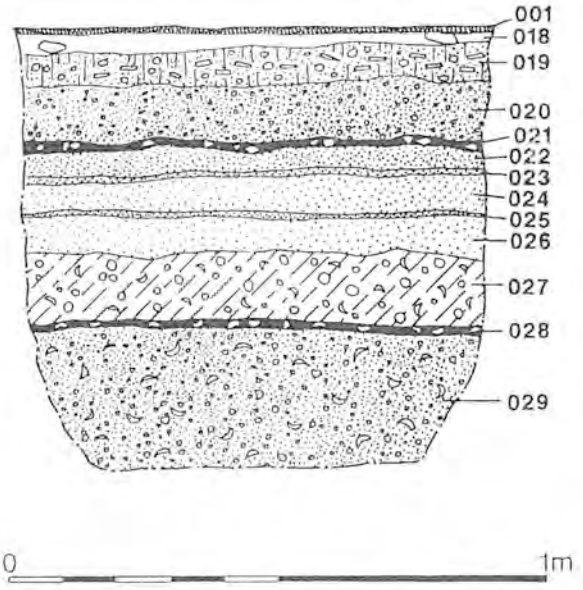

Fig. 7 - Trial Pit Four (NE facing section)

6. CONCLUSIONS

The first two trial pits showed considerable disturbance connected with the earlier installation of the service pipes at the levels revealed during this excavation. The first of these revealed the higher of two possible stone surface layers (004), and the second pit showed both of the two possible surfaces (see 010 and 009). The third pit exhibited less obvious signs of disturbance, and revealed what may be the lower of the two possible earlier stone surface layers, (see 012).

All the possible surface layers were undatable due to either the disturbance mentioned, leading to a contamination of the dating evidence by more modern redeposited finds, or a lack of finds altogether.

The fourth trial pit, showed that there had been a significant raising of ground level in the area considering that the bottom layer produced the eighteenth and nineteenth century pottery fragments; the earliest items found.

The layers revealed in this pit (number four) looked as if they had accumulated through some regular process rather than deliberate dumping. It is possible that this raising of the ground level has sealed earlier archaeological remains.

7. ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Though the trial pits covered a fairly wide area surrounding the proposed sewage plant site, it is impossible to determine without further investigation whether the disturbance which was evident in the pits excavated is universal to the whole area at the depths reached. The findings from this watching brief and the ones carried out before, would indicate that archaeology remains, but it would have to be seen to a fuller extent to establish its character and date.

There appeared to be a general raising of the ground level visible in all of the latest test pits which had accumulated both through deliberate dumping and by regular slow processes. It is possible that important earlier archaeology survives sealed below these layers. The majority of the modern disturbance revealed is associated with the laying of the service pipes and as the trial pits were located largely in the vicinity of the road, much of the makeup may be specific to this area and the sequence identified here may not be representative of the wider area.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust would like to thank Welsh Water\Dwr Cymru for their co-operation with and funding for the work carried out, and Wallace Evans for their assistance and patience while recording took place.

The author would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Sue Jones and Andy Smith of the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust who carried out the archaeological fieldwork on trial pits three and four, and also Helen Riley (GAT) who produced the illustrations.

Key to Sections.


TARMAC


HARDCORE


CLAY


CLAY (PATCH)


SILTY CLAY


CLAYEY SILT


SILTY SAND


ROCK/SHATTERED ROCK


STONE


SLATE


SHELL


COAL FRAGMENTS


CHARCOAL


MORTAR


BONE


ASH