
PENDALAR, CAERNARFON

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

Report No. 248

GAT Project no. G1458

Prepared for Cymdeithas Tai Eryri

March 1997

By George Smith



Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

☎ 01248 352535 ✉ 01248 370925 email : gat@heneb.co.uk

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1. INTRODUCTION

An archaeological evaluation was recommended by Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Services in advance of residential development at Pendalar, Caernarfon (SH 485 637). The work was recommended because of the proximity of the site to the Roman auxiliary fort of Segontium (200m to the south-east) and of the discovery of a cremation burial and pot of the 1st century AD, c.40m to the east of the site in Ffordd Ysgubor Goch during house construction in 1936 (RCAHM 1960, 163). Gwynedd Planning Services also provided a brief for the work (Appendix 1). The area involved is an irregular quadrilateral, c.35m by 20m, ie c.0.07ha (0.17 acre) on which four houses are proposed to be built in two blocks of two semi-detached units. A further area to the south also lies within the same property but was not included in the evaluation since that area will be used only for an access road and car parking for which no disturbance of subsoil horizons is envisaged.

2. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The cooperation of the contractor, Mr S Burgess is gratefully acknowledged.

3. PROCEDURES AND METHODS

The work was carried out according to the project design which was prepared as part of the tender (Appendix 2). This had to be modified slightly when it was found that the contractor intended to strip and remove all the topsoil from the site prior to construction. The original project design assumed that the topsoil would still cover the site and therefore the aim was to excavate two trenches through the topsoil in order to sample the underlying stratigraphy. The results of this would be used to evaluate the presence of archaeology and to estimate the impact of the proposed construction. However, removal of all the topsoil meant, first, a requirement to monitor the soil stripping and second a need to observe and possibly identify and record features over the whole area rather than the two limited trenches proposed. The results would be of much greater potential benefit to identifying and recording any archaeological remains present than was first envisaged. The work was therefore varied from that proposed but keeping within the same time and cost limits.

4. FIELDWORK

4.1. The topsoil machine stripping

An intermittent watching brief was carried out during this work on 29th and 30th January. The work was carried out by a sub-contractor using a tracked excavator with a 5ft flat-bladed ditching bucket and was completed to a high standard. The depth of excavation was set to that which appeared to represent the top of the glacial subsoil, an orange-brown gravelly sand. The stripping first removed a very dark brown humic soil comprising the modern turf and topsoil horizon, post-dating the construction of the nearby houses in the 1930's. Secondly it removed a dark brown sandy soil with a considerable small gravel component. This was identified as the cultivation mixed soil deriving from the use of the area as part of a field of the former Pendalar Farm, prior to the 1930's housing estate construction. In all approximately 300mm depth of topsoil was removed.

4.2. General site recording

Subsequent to the stripping a 10m grid was laid out and all those sub-surface features which could be identified at this stage were planned at 1:100 (Fig.1). These consisted largely of a considerable number of relatively modern rubbish pits, identifiable by the presence of brick, slate, glass etc. There were also two pits with clay and stone fill which were close to the position at which the Posford-Duvivier Trial Pit 1 was recorded. There was also a large shallow pit containing waste building materials obviously deriving from construction works at the adjoining

Pendalar flats. Along the west side of the site the topsoil was not removed as there was strip of brick and stones, being the remains of a former farm track to Pendalar Farm, marked on the OS 25" maps of 1890 and 1910. The centre of the site was bisected by an existing foul water drain. One feature which was not readily understandable or datable was a line of large stones adjoining a scatter of smaller cobbles at the south-east of the area (Fig.1, stone line 6).

The subsequent excavations were carried out from the 4th to 7th of February. These were laid out on the basis of the general plan, to avoid the foul water drain and modern rubbish pits. Two trenches were laid out as originally specified (trenches 1 and 2) and two further trenches (trenches 3 and 4) were laid out to investigate the stone line and cobbling.

4.3. Trench 1 (Fig. 1)

This trench was 10m long by 1m wide, laid out on the line of the footings of buildings 3 and 4. It was excavated entirely by hand and removal of 100-120mm of soil showed that the surface exposed by the machine was the subsoil surface, leaving only a slight residue of the degraded interface between the topsoil and subsoil. The subsoil was of a compact, semi-cemented orange-brown sandy matrix with a 50% component of small gravel. Its surface was fairly discrete, marked by accumulations of worm-cast grit.

Two small features were exposed both modern, with slate and coal, and one linear strip of buff-brown silty material. The latter is likely to be natural feature resulting from soil sorting during periglacial conditions of the last ice-age.

4.4. Trench 2 (Figs 1 and 2)

This trench was 7m long by 1.5m wide and laid out in the area of buildings 1 and 2. The trench was excavated by hand and revealed a similar subsoil to that in Trench 1 although slightly more of the topsoil/subsoil interface remained to be removed. Only one feature was encountered, only partially exposed at the west edge of the trench. The trench was therefore extended by one metre. The feature then exposed was narrow and linear and a trial cutting was made through it. It was shown to be a gully (Fig. 2, gully 1) 0.7m wide and 0.6m deep (below the subsoil surface). It was neatly cut with steep sloping sides and approximately flat base. Its fill was a fairly homogeneous dark brown silty loam with scattered small pebbles, similar to, but slightly lighter coloured than the general old ploughsoil. The fill was continuous with a similar material which lay beyond the gully to the west below the surfaces of the former track (Fig. 2, Section 4). Above the fill of the gully and approximately on the same line was a disused iron water (?) pipe. The conjunction between the two features is coincidental as they are stratigraphically unrelated and results from the fact that both are following along the edge of the former track.

The rest of the trench revealed only unaltered subsoil apart from two faint narrow and shallow lines lying parallel to the adjoining property boundary (Fig. 2). These are likely to be the base of old plough furrows confirming that the area was once cultivated farmland.

4.5. Trenches 3 and 4 (Figs 1 and 3)

These trenches were laid out to investigate the line of stones identified during the topsoil stripping. The line was at least 6m long and associated with a spread of small cobble-like stones. Trench 3 was 1.5m by 1.5m and trench 4 was 6m by 3m. These areas were cleaned over by hand to define the stones, revealing a denser spread of the small cobbles than was originally apparent. Some were laid so compactly and evenly to suggest that they originally formed part of a cobbled surface of which most has since been removed or disturbed by ploughing. Excavation of a narrow cutting across the features in trench 3 revealed that the line of larger stones was no more than a single stone wide and deep and not part of any more extensive walling or footings for instance. However, the excavation showed that although all the exposed tops of the stones were approximately at equivalent levels they had been deliberately set in the soil to achieve this effect, with their undersurfaces being of irregular depth. The stone line and the cobbling were found to lie above c.300mm depth of humic loam which lay within a linear hollow (hollow 11) c.1.75m wide (Fig. 3, section 5). The west edge of this hollow, just beyond the line of stones was distinct and steep while the east edge graded gently out, apparently reduced by ploughing. The line of stones, and the hollow continued further to the south beyond the limits of the evaluated area. It must also have originally continued further to the north where it must have been removed by ploughing since the hollow grade out at this end too although there was a scatter of disturbed small cobbling.

5. ARTEFACTUAL EVIDENCE

Despite a careful search during soil stripping as well as during excavation no stray pieces of Romano-British pottery were found.

The features (1) gulley and (7) cobbles in hollow (11) both produced 18th/19th century earthenware and the latter also produced roofing slate, clay pipe stems and some fragments of animal bone.

6. INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

The gulley in trench 2 predated the trackway surface which can be related to the late 19th/early 20th century use but may relate to an earlier but post medieval use of the same track when the field was still cultivated. The gulley appears to have been backfilled with ploughsoil and subsequently ploughed over. That the gulley does not relate to any earlier period is confirmed by the find of a piece of brown glazed earthenware in its fill. Its width at the base is typical for a spade-dug ditch and it can be interpreted as a small drain between the former track and the adjoining field.

The hollow (11) in trenches 3 and 4 seems to constitute a trampled or otherwise worn-down surface of which one edge survives at the west and which was later consolidated with a layer of cobbling. It probably represents the edge of a yard or possibly shed. Scattered pieces of roofing slate, pottery and clay pipe on its surface suggest that it is an agricultural feature associated with the former Pendalar Farm.

The absence of even stray sherds of Romano-British pottery so close to such an important fort, occupied over nearly four centuries, is somewhat surprising but suggests at least that the area was not cultivated, since scattered pottery might be expected as a result of manuring of the soil. Although the entire site was not exposed to the same standard as that in the four excavated trenches the fact that a variety of post-medieval and modern features were visible shows that any earlier (eg Romano-British) features should also be identifiable. This would be particularly so for features of any extensive cremation cemetery which are made visible by the presence of dark, charcoal-rich soil. Any structural features with stone footings, bedding trenches or gulleys would also be visible. The only type of feature which might not be visible would be inhumation burials since these are backfilled with the same material which is excavated from them. For these the evaluation must rely on the sample of the area provided by the excavated trenches.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The observations during topsoil stripping and excavation show that there are unlikely to be any significant features of Romano-British date on the site. However it was not possible to use the contractor's machine for deeper investigation because of the possible presence of services, and therefore it is recommended that a watching brief should be carried out during the excavation of the footing trenches of the new houses.

8. NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

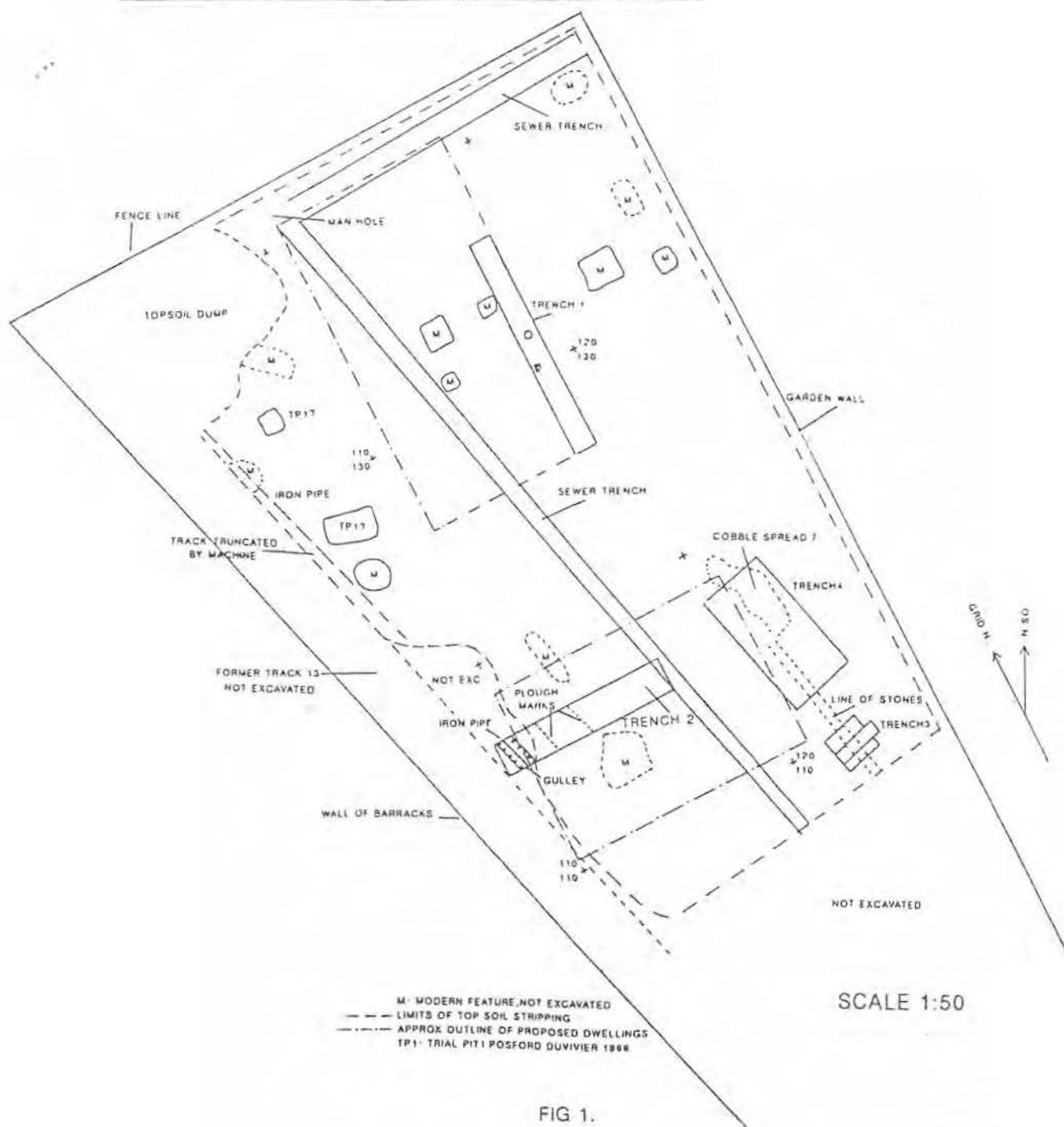
An archaeological evaluation was carried out of the area of the proposed housing development. The work involved observation of machine stripping of topsoil from all the site, planning of identifiable subsoil features and excavation of limited areas of the exposed surface.

A considerable number of modern rubbish pits were identified, as well a foul water drain and previous trial pits. Other features comprised first, a small gulley which appeared to be related to a former farm track and second, a linear hollow holding the remains of a cobbled floor defined by a stone line and which might all constitute the ploughed out remains of a paddock, yard or shed. Both the latter features were of 18th/19th century date and relate to the occupation of Pendalar Farm, the house of which originally lay just 40m north-east of the site (OS 25" map of 1890). The site itself at that time formed part of a small enclosure separate from the main farm fields and could well have been a farm yard used for a variety of purposes.

As there are no features earlier than post-medieval no mitigatory action is recommended although an opportunity should be provided for observation of the footing trenches of the new houses.

REFERENCES

RCAHM 1960. *Inventory of Ancient Monuments in Caernarvonshire, Vol. 2, Central*. Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments.



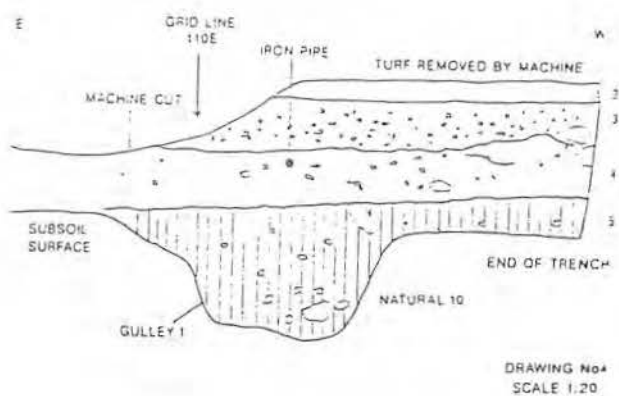
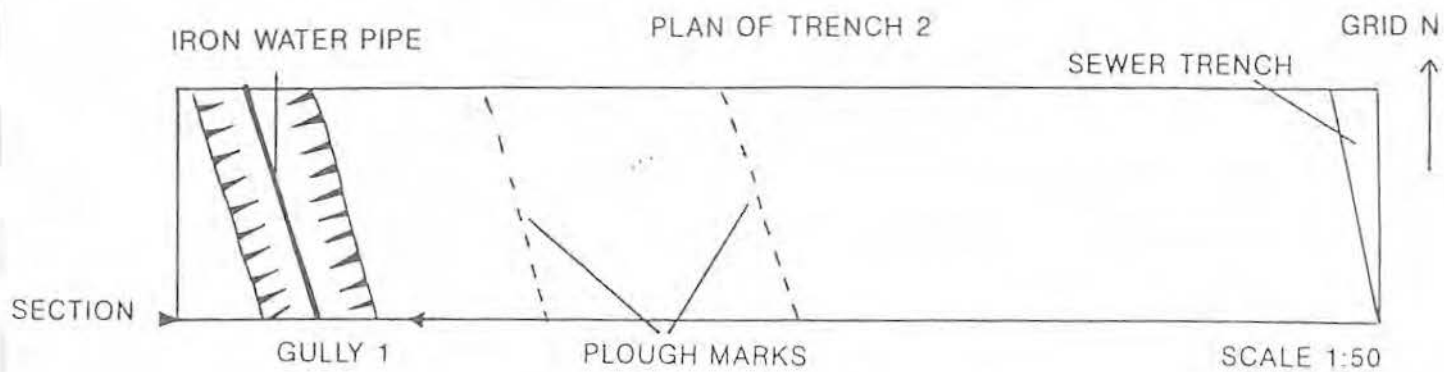


FIG 2.

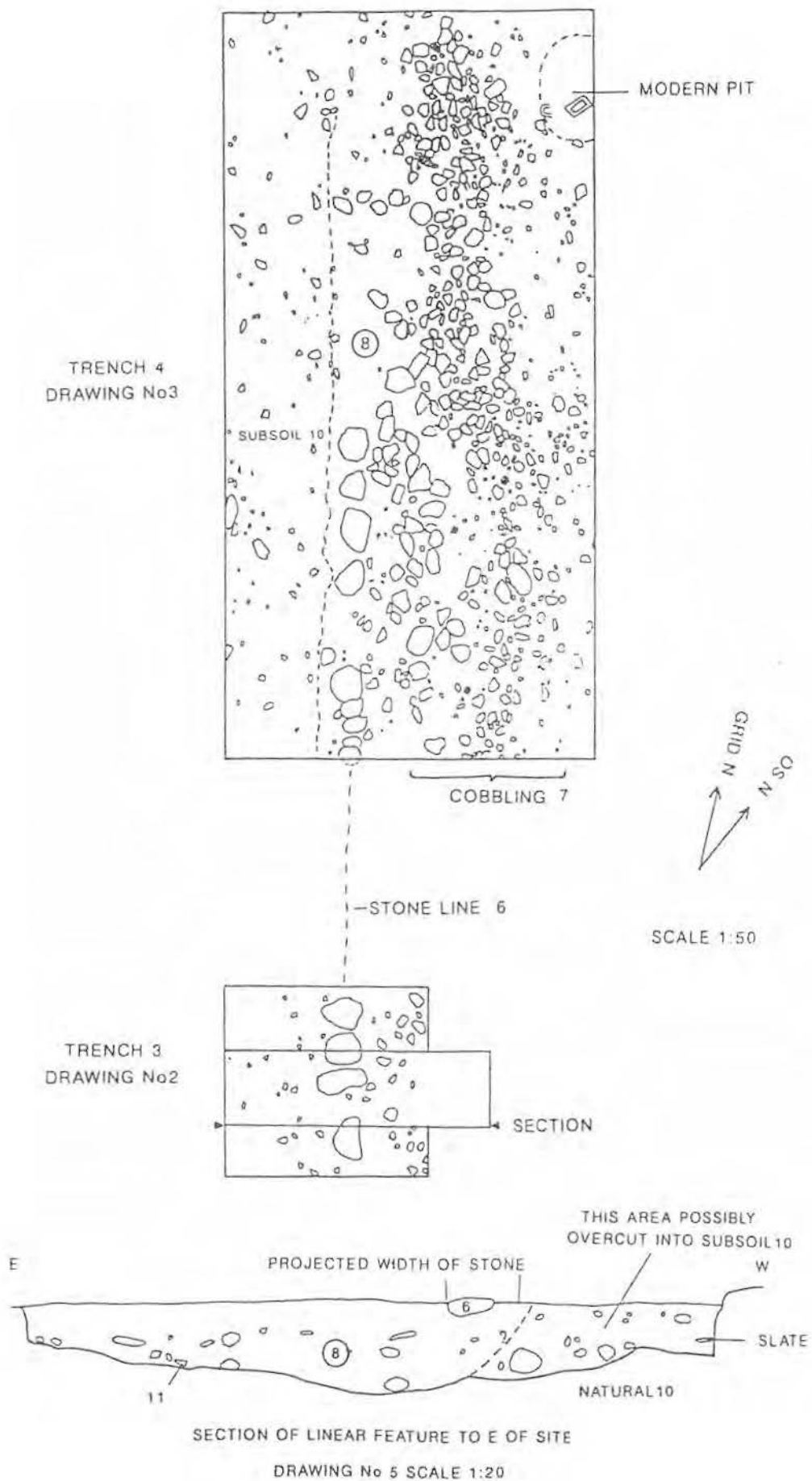


FIG 3.



Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

☎ 01248 352535 ☒ 01248 370925 email : gat@heneb.co.uk

www.heneb.co.uk

