

UNIT 13, LLANDEGAI INDUSTRIAL ESTATE**TEST PITS*****ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF (G1479)*****Report No. 353**

G1479

Prepared for**Mott MacDonald****Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust**

UNIT 13, LLANDEGAI INDUSTRIAL ESTATE

TEST PITS

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by

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**Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
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Unit 13, Llandegai Industrial Estate - Test Pits

Archaeological Watching Brief (G1479)

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1 INTRODUCTION

It is proposed to extend the development at Unit 13 on the Llandegai Industrial Estate. The unit is located over the site of an important prehistoric ritual complex. Although this was excavated in the 1960's, there was the possibility of un-excavated features remaining on the site. A programme of work was therefore put in place to assess the archaeological potential of the site. This was to take the form of monitoring a series of seven test pits which were to be dug for engineering purposes. Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (Contracts Section) were contracted by Mott MacDonald to carry out the assessment.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AIMS

The aims of the work were to assess the archaeological significance of the site. This was to be achieved by monitoring the digging of the test pits, and recording any archaeological features which were exposed.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Watching Brief*

Seven test pits were excavated by machine to a depth of over 3m. Inspection of the exposed sections was undertaken when the test pits were at a depth of 1.1m. The test pits were located around the periphery of the area of development, with one centrally placed pit (see figure 1).

3.2 *Recording*

A written description was made of the deposits visible in all the test pits and their respective positions and depths. Archaeological features of interest were recorded photographically on Kodak Gold 200 (colour print) film and drawn as they appeared in section. The locations of the test pits were measured using 30 and 50m hand tapes.

4 TOPOGRAPHY & GEOLOGY

The area where the test pits were located had been previously levelled and a surface of slate waste laid. Areas of concrete platforms defined where a number of small buildings had been located, but they had subsequently been removed prior to the excavation of the test pits. The area is located on ground which gently slopes from the east to the west towards a large, natural hollow on the western limits of the area.

The natural sub-soil is of glacial drift derived from a mixture of Snowdonian rocks, mainly hard acidic rhyolite and granite, grit and slate (Ball, 1963).

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The presence of the multi-period site that once existed in this vicinity was first recognised through aerial photography in the early 1960's (St Joseph 1961). This identified a complex series of crop-marks that included the ditches of two large *henge* monuments, the larger some 90m in diameter, and the rounded terminus of a *cursus*, visible for some 130m of its original length. This group of Neolithic and early Bronze Age monuments, extending over an

area in excess of 0.5km square (see figure 1), are one of only two comparable sites known to exist in Wales.

Salvage excavations were carried out in 1966-67 in advance of the development of Llandegai Industrial Estate which allowed a wide range of crop-marks to be examined (Houlder 1967, 1968). These revealed evidence of burial mounds (*barrows*) and a cremation cemetery. There are indications that the landscape was by no means wholly 'ritual' in function as the remains of at least two domestic buildings, broadly contemporary with the larger *henge*, were also discovered.

There appears to have been an occupational hiatus in the area from the early Bronze Age times until the beginning of the second century BC when Iron Age farmers settled and cultivated the fertile soils here, utilising the still extant, larger *henge* as an enclosure. From then until the present the main use of the area has been for agricultural use although part of an Early Christian cemetery, perhaps associated with the site of the chapel or church of St Tegai, was uncovered just south of the route of the Medieval road that once ran west to the centre of the embryonic Bangor Fawr-yn-Arfon.

6 RESULTS OF THE WATCHING BRIEF

A watching brief was carried out, as detailed below, on the 20th of December, 1999. All the test pits were dug by machine initially to a depth of c. 1.2m to allow safe access to the pit. The sections were examined and any archaeological features recorded. The excavation of the test pits then continued to a depth of over 3m.

Test Pit 01

This test pit was 1.1m wide and initially 2.9m in length, but was extended further by 2.6m. The lowest context recorded was a brown gravel, containing lenses of silty sands. This was present at a depth of 1.1m. Directly overlying this (at a depth of 0.8m) and visible along the whole length of the south-east facing section (but not visible for the full extent of the north-west facing section) was a narrow layer of red-brown gravelly clay. Approximately halfway along this gravelly clay, in a slight hollow, there was a lense of charcoal and burning. A sample of this charcoal was removed for further analysis, but on initial examination appeared to have been a hard wood (possibly oak). Overlying this layer were a series of oblique (see figure 2) lenses of gritty gravels. These gravels appear to be re-deposited outwash material, suggesting periods of flooding in the area during the post-glacial period. These were overlain by 0.3m of slate waste and tarmac. The layer containing the charcoal and the burnt clay appeared compacted, suggesting that it is the remains of a surface. As the gritty gravels overlying this layer appear to be naturally deposited, it is suggested that the burnt layer may be of some antiquity.

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Test Pit 02

This test pit was 1.1m wide and 3.5m in length. The lowest recorded layer was a mid brown, sandy gravel, 95% of which consisted of small (less than 100mm * 100mm * 100mm in size) rounded to well rounded stones. Maganese staining and decaying non-organic material was also recorded within this context. Overlying this (at a depth of 1m) was a brownish yellow and grey in places, silty sand. This in turn was overlain by another layer of mid brown gravel, but this time consisting of smaller stones (less than 10mm * 10mm * 10mm in size). Another layer of grey, silty sand sealed this layer at a depth of 0.6m. These contexts were interpreted as naturally deposited glacial gravels with episodes of ponding. The pit was sealed by 0.3m of slate waste. No archaeological features were recorded.

Test Pit 03

This test pit was 0.9m wide and 4.2m in length. The lowest recorded layer (starting at a depth of 1.15m from the surface) was a mid brown clayey silt. Small, rounded stones made up a large percentage of the context (85%?). Immediately above this was a layer (100mm in

depth) of dark grey silty clay, 85% of which was small, rounded stones. This layer was interpreted as an old ground surface and the mid brown clayey silt below it as plough soil.

These two layers were covered by a light brown, silty gravel, 95% of which consisted of rounded to well rounded stones, ranging in size from 1mm*1mm*1mm to 100mm*100mm*100mm. This context was interpreted as local gravel used to level this part of the area. All the above contexts were sealed by 0.3m of slate waste.

Test Pit 04

This test pit was 0.8m wide and 5m in length. The lowest recorded context (starting at a depth of 0.6m) was a mid, orangey brown gravel, 95% of which consisted of small, rounded to well rounded stones. This was overlain by a light, orangey brown sandy silt, 90% of which consisted of rounded stones. This context began at a depth of 0.3m and was 0.3m thick. It in turn was overlain by 0.3m of slate waste.

The above contexts were interpreted as naturally deposited glacial gravels, showing signs of localised ponding, no archaeological features were recorded.

Test Pit 05

This test pit was 0.9m wide and 4.1m in length. Only two contexts were recorded in this test pit, the lowest was a dark brown, sandy gravel, mostly consisting of small stones. This was overlain by 0.45m of slate waste.

The dark brown gravel was interpreted as the naturally deposited glacial gravel. No old ground surfaces were visible, probably having been removed during the levelling of the site and no archaeological features were recorded.

Test Pit 06

This test pit was 0.9m wide and 4.6m in length. The lowest recorded context in this pit was the same brown sandy gravel as recorded in test pit 5, but it became visibly darker with depth. Within this gravel, at a depth of 0.7m, a lense of yellow, brown, silty sand was recorded. This was interpreted as evidence for localised ponding taking place during the deposition of the gravels. The gravel was overlain by a layer (0.3m deep) of slate waste. No archaeological features were recorded.

Test Pit 07

This test pit was 0.8m wide and 3.6m in length. The lowest context recorded was the dark, brown gravel found in test pit 6. Within this was a layer of yellow brown silty sand at a depth of 0.8m, again interpreted as ponding taking place during the natural deposition of the glacial gravels. Overlying this was 0.35m of slate waste. No archaeological features were recorded.

7 SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

The majority of the test pits revealed that the area consisted of naturally derived and deposited fluvio-glacial gravels and silty sands, which contained some localised ponding. Test pit 3 exposed the remains of an old ground surface and plough soil which must have been removed from the rest of the area, probably during the modern levelling phase which was sealed by the surface of slate waste.

The most notable archaeological features recorded were the burnt lense and the reddish clay layer in pit 1. The compact nature and charcoal flecked appearance of this layer suggests that it was a surface with *in situ* burning, whilst the depth of the overlying deposits indicate that it was laid down some time ago and is possibly contemporary with the Neolithic or early Bronze Age activity in the area.

It is therefore recommended that field evaluation, in the form of trial excavation, is carried out to determine the date and nature of the this early surface and the charcoal lense found within it. As no evidence of this surface was found in the other test pits, an area of 10m by 2m around test pit 1 is recommended for this evaluation.

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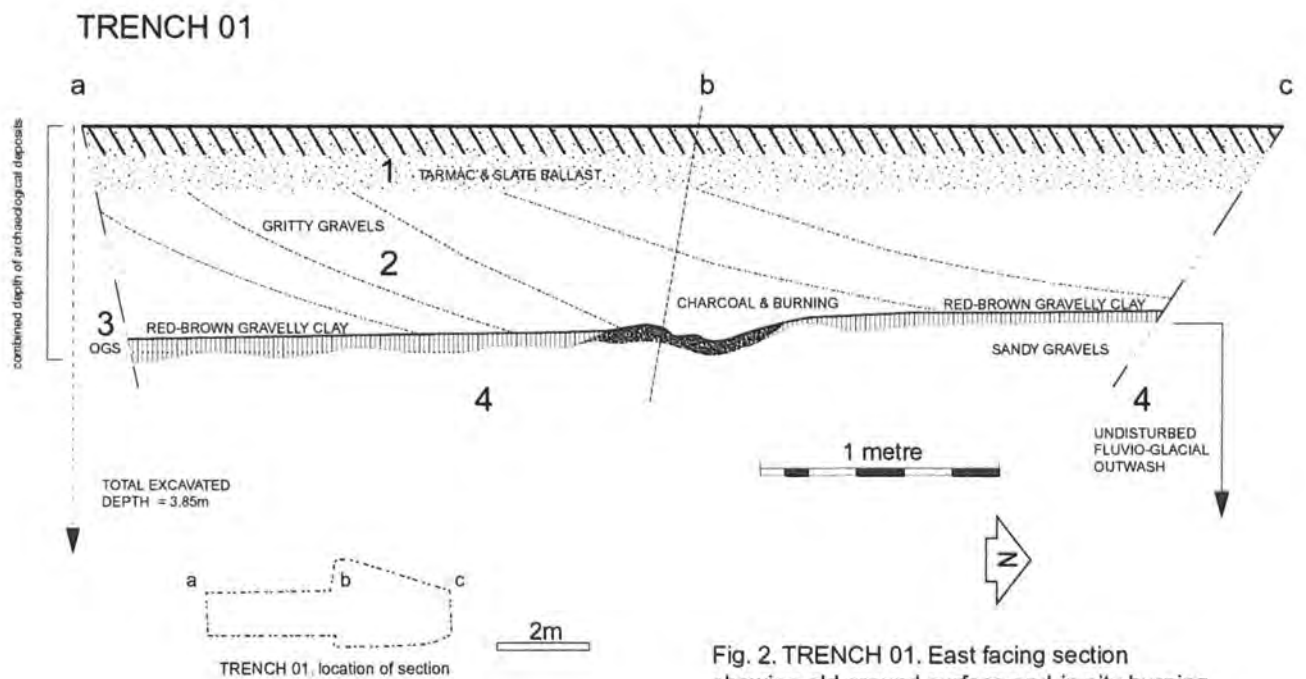
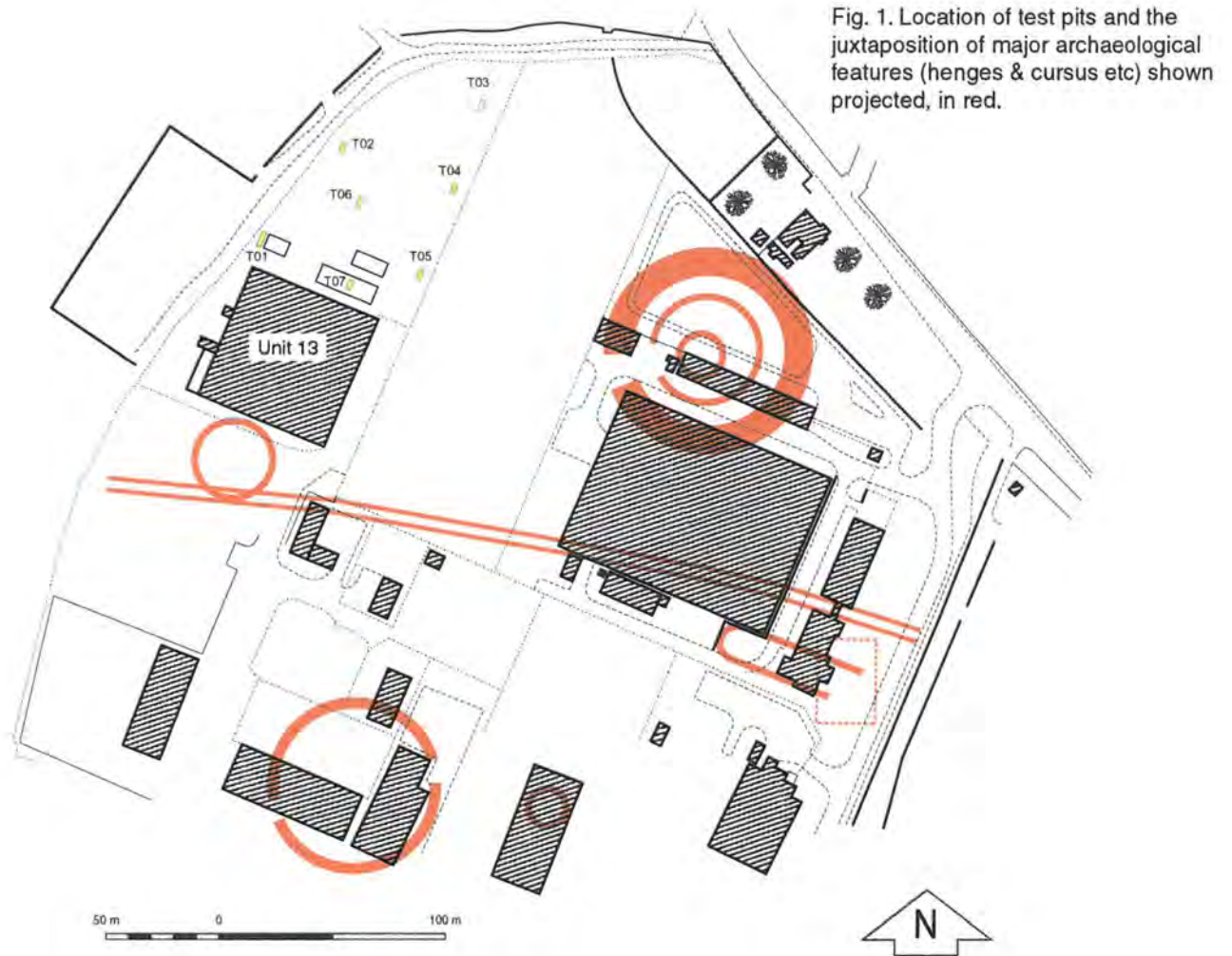


Fig. 2. TRENCH 01. East facing section showing old ground surface and *in situ* burning.



Figure 3: Test pit 1 during excavation.

Figure 4: East facing section of test pit 1, showing reddish clay surface at the base of the pit and the charcoal lense on the extreme right of the section.



