

**FORMER GAS WORKS
MOUNT STREET
BALA
GWYNEDD**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

For

WSP ENVIRONMENTAL UK


CA PROJECT: 3249
CA REPORT: 11086

MARCH 2011

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SUMMARY

Project Name: Former Gas Works, Mount Street
Location: Bala, Gwynedd
NGR: SH 9284 3608
Type: Watching Brief
Date: 30st September – 1st October 2010
Location of Archive: To be deposited with Gwynedd Museum
Site Code: BAG 10

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology during geotechnical works associated with the redevelopment of the former Gas Works at Mount Street, Bala.

The watching brief identified a number of modern brick walls and an undated silt layer containing charcoal. The brick walls are thought to relate to the former gas works, including tar pits.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 In September and October 2010 Cotswold Archaeology (CA) carried out an archaeological watching brief for WSP Environmental UK at the site of the Former Gas Works, Mount Street, Bala, Gwynedd (centred on NGR: SH 9284 3608; Fig. 1). The watching brief was undertaken during geotechnical works prior to the potential development of the site. The objective of the watching brief was to record all archaeological remains exposed during the works.

1.2 The watching brief was carried out at the request of Mr Ashley Batten, Planning Archaeologist, Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT), archaeological advisor to the LPA. The fieldwork followed the methodology set out within the Health and Safety and Environment Plan (WSI 2010). With the agreement of Mr Batten no Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was prepared. The fieldwork also followed the *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (IfA 2008), the *Management of Archaeological Projects 2* (English Heritage 1991), and the *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MORPHE): Project Manager's Guide* (EH 2006).

The site

1.3 The site lies within the town of Bala and is bordered to the north-east by properties along the B4391, to the north and west by the mound of the Norman motte known as Tomen Y Bala, to the south west by properties along Lon Y Domen and to the south by a car park (Fig. 2). The site lies at approximately 165m AOD.

1.4 The site is c. 0.2ha in size, and is currently predominantly covered in shale, with some hard-standing in the north-eastern corner of the site. The far eastern part of the site is currently being used as an informal garden area and vegetable plot by the adjacent property.

1.5 The underlying solid geology of the area is mapped as Moelfryn Mudstone formation of the Ashgill Era, with superficial deposits of Alluvium: clay, silt, sand and gravel, of the Flandrian Era (BGS 2010). This was encountered in five of the six test pits

Archaeological background

- 1.6 The name 'Y Bala' probably signifies an outlet, a name given due to the fact that the town is situated where the River Dee flows out of the lake. Bala lies along the course of the main road from Shrewsbury to Dolgellau and the town is situated at the northern end of Bala Lake (LlynTegid), where the rivers Dee and Tryweryn meet. It represents the finest example of a planned English borough in Meirionnydd. The Roman road from Chester to CaerGai and Brithdir must have passed through the area of modern Bala, and presumably close to Llanfor. It is thought then to run along the north-western shore of LlynTegid.
- 1.7 The presence of a Norman motte at Bala is a fairly certain indication of the existence of a Welsh lordship, perhaps the maerdref of Uwch Tryweryn in the cantref of Penllyn. The timber buildings of a royal llys and possibly the nucleated structures of a dependent bond township might be expected in the immediate vicinity of the motte. Once again the identification and elucidation of the character of a Welsh administrative focus and its relationship to a Norman earthwork castle and (in this case 14th century) planted borough become the key archaeological questions. Tomen y Bala appears briefly in Welsh history; it was held by Elise apMadog, Lord of Penllyn, who refused to back Llywelynablorwerth in his struggle against his kinsman Gwenwynwyn. His reward for this disloyalty was that in 1202 Llywelyn drove him from the site and destroyed the castle. It does not appear to have been re-fortified. When Roger Mortimer laid out the borough it was undoubtedly his intention to defend it with a wall and ditch incorporating this existing fortification. Indeed, the 1324 charter makes special provision for such work, but there is nothing to suggest that his instructions were ever carried out. An earthen bank may have been thrown up at the top of the town, however, parallel to the Afon Tryweryn, but the area has recently been developed and no sections are visible.
- 1.8 The town of Bala consists of a long principal High Street, with parallel back streets running the full length of Arenig Street on the north-west and Plasey Street/Mount Street to the south-east. The High Street is orientated south-west to north-east, and is crossed in the middle of the town by Castle Street and Tegid Street. The three parallel streets form a simple rectangle, the north-east corner of which is occupied by the motte. The motte is sited close to the Afon Tryweryn, and perhaps alongside an early ford. The rectangle occupied by the original town therefore measures 450m by 120m. The location of the motte in the north-west corner would suggest this was

deliberately incorporated. It is assumed that the motte had a ditch around it but there is today no trace of either this or an associated bailey.

- 1.9 The site itself lies immediately to the south-west of the motte mound of Tomen Y Bala. It comprises the location of a former gas works which was operational from at least 1888 until 1963 when the site was used as a gasholder station. The gasholders were subsequently removed between 1978 and 1981.

Methodology

- 1.7 The fieldwork followed the methodology set out within the *Health, Safety and Environmental Plan* (WSP 2010). An archaeologist was present during intrusive groundworks which comprised the excavation of six geotechnical pits (Fig. 2, TP101-106).
- 1.8 Written, graphic and photographic records were compiled in accordance with CA Technical Manual 1: *Fieldwork Recording Manual* (2007).
- 1.9 The archive from the watching brief is currently held by CA at their offices in Kemble. The archive will be deposited with Gwynedd Museum. A summary of information from this project, set out within Appendix B, will be entered onto the OASIS online database of archaeological projects in Britain.

2. RESULTS (FIG. 2)

- 2.1 Within trenches TP 101 to 105 the natural geological substrate was revealed at depths ranging from 0.63m to 2.55m below present ground level (bpgl). This consisted of a yellow grey clay and gravel mix. This was overlain by demolition and make-up deposits.
- 2.2 Trenches TP101 to 103 also contained modern red brick walls. Trench TP101 contained a single north-east/south-west wall 1001 which continued beyond 2.15m bpgl and was abutted by demolition and make-up deposits 1000 and 1002. Trench TP 102 contained two parallel red brick walls 2001 and 2002. These ran north-east/south-west and continued to below 0.22m bpgl. They were abutted by demolition and make-up layer 2000. Trench TP103 contained a single north-

west/south-east brick wall greater than 1.5m in height and abutted by demolition and make-up layers 3000 and 3002

- 2.3 Within trench TP106 the natural substrate was not observed, however grey brown clay silt 6001, which contained flecks of charcoal throughout, was observed up to the base of the test pit 1.3m bpgl. This was covered by demolition and make-up 6000 which was 0.55m thick.

3. DISCUSSION

- 3.1 The walls observed in TP101 to 103 relate to the former gas works. The wall in TP101 appears to relate to tar pits recorded in this location (WPS 2010). The structures that the walls in TP102 and TP103 relate to are unknown, although TP102 lay close to the retort house (ibid.). Within TP106 deposit 6001 was observed between 0.55m to 1.3m bpgl. Unlike the deposits observed above the natural in the other trenches this is undated, and contains no evidence of modern demolition rubble or artefacts. Due to its proximity to the mound of Tomen Y Bala motte this deposit has the potential to relate to the construction of the mound or possibly it represents a ditch fill, although the presence of charcoal may indicate it was related to the modern gas works. The lack of archaeological deposits within the other trenches is probably due to ground reduction undertaken during the groundworks and later demolition associated with the Gas Works. The variety of depths at which the natural substrate was observed within these trenches, compared to the level of the potential archaeological deposit 6001, suggests that large volumes of material were removed during this modern activity.

4. CA PROJECT TEAM

Fieldwork was undertaken by Sian Reynish. The report was written by Sian Reynish and Kelly Saunders. The illustrations were prepared by Peter Moore. The archive has been compiled by Kelly Saunders, and prepared for deposition by James Johnson. The project was managed for CA by Richard Young.

5. REFERENCES

BGS (British Geological Survey) 2010 *Geology of Britain Viewer* 1:50,000
http://maps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyviewer_google/googleviewer.html accessed 25
October 2010

WSP Environmental UK 2010 *Health, Safety and Environment Plan, Former Gas Works,
Mount Street Bala*

APPENDIX A: CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

Trench TP101

No.	Type	Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Spot-date
1000	Layer	Make-up layer including demolition rubble			2.15	
1001	Wall	Brick wall, North-east/south-west			2.15	
1002	Layer	Mixed natural substrate			0.4	
1003	Layer	Natural Substrate				

Trench TP102

No.	Type	Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Spot-date
2000	Layer	Make-up layer including demolition rubble			0.63	
2001	Wall	Brick wall, North-east/south-west	>0.4	0.45	>0.22	
2002	Wall	Brick wall, North-east/south-west	>0.4	0.45		
2003	Layer	Natural Substrate				

Trench TP103

No.	Type	Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Spot-date
3000	Layer	Make-up layer including demolition rubble			0.65	
3001	Wall	Brick wall, North-west/south-east			>1.5	
3002	Layer	Make-up layer including demolition rubble			0.85	
3003	Layer	Natural Substrate				

Trench TP104

No.	Type	Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Spot-date
4000	Layer	Make-up layer including demolition rubble			0.84	
4001	Layer	Natural Substrate				
4002	Deposit	Area of concrete, possibly covering a pipe		0.6		

Trench TP105

No.	Type	Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Spot-date
5000	Layer	Make-up layer including demolition rubble			0.5	
5001	Layer	Make-up layer			0.3	
5002	Layer	Make-up layer including tar and modern ceramics			0.7	
5003	Layer	Natural Substrate				

Trench TP106


No.	Type	Description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Spot-date
6000	Layer	Make-up layer including demolition rubble			0.55	
6001	Deposit	Clay silt with charcoal throughout			>0.75	

APPENDIX B: OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project Name	Former Gas Works, Mount Street, Bala, Gwynedd	
Short description (250 words maximum)	An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology during geotechnical works associated with the redevelopment of the former Gas Works at Mount Street, Bala. The watching brief identified a number of modern brick walls and an undated silt layer containing charcoal. The brick walls are thought to relate to the former gas works, including tar pits.	
Project dates	30th September – 1st October	
Project type	Watching Brief	
Previous work	None	
Future work	Unknown	
PROJECT LOCATION		
Site Location	Former Gas Works, Mount Street, Bala, Gwynedd	
Study area (M ² /ha)	0.2ha	
Site co-ordinates	SH 2830 6080	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Name of organisation	Cotswold Archaeology	
Project Brief originator	Gwynedd Archaeological Trust	
Project Design (WSI) originator	WSP Environmental UK	
Project Manager	Richard Young	
Project Supervisor	Sian Reynish	
MONUMENT TYPE	None	
SIGNIFICANT FINDS	None	
PROJECT ARCHIVES		
	Intended final location of archive	Content
Physical	N/A	N/A
Paper	Gwynedd Museum	Trench sheets, photographic registers and developers plans
Digital	Gwynedd Museum	Digital photos
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
CA (Cotswold Archaeology) 2011 <i>Former Gas Works, Mount Street, Bala, Gwynedd: Archaeological Watching Brief</i> . CA typescript report 11086		

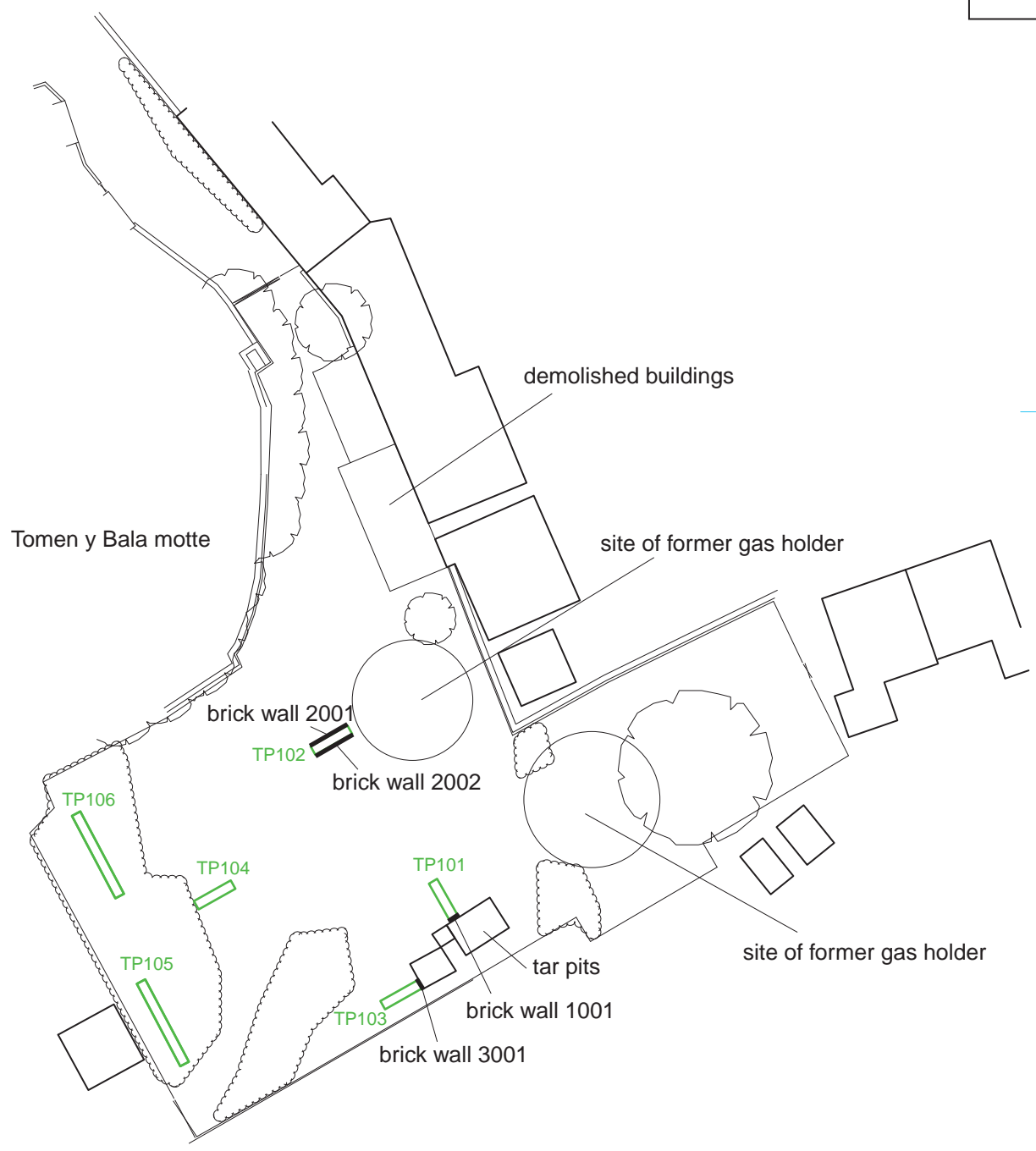
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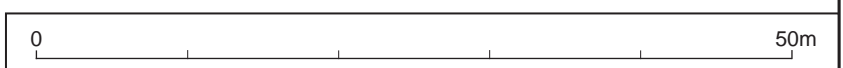
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PROJECT TITLE Former Gas Works, Mount Street Bala, Gwynedd			
FIGURE TITLE Site location plan			
DRAWN BY	SCALE	PROJECT NO.	FIGURE NO.
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geotechnical test pit

COTSWOLD ARCHAEOLOGY			
<small>PROJECT TITLE</small> Former Gas Works, Mount Street Bala, Gwynedd			
<small>FIGURE TITLE</small> The site showing location of observed groundworks			
<small>DRAWN BY</small> PJM	<small>SCALE</small> 1:500@A4	<small>PROJECT NO.</small> 3249	<small>FIGURE NO.</small> 2