

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT AT VALLE CRUCIS ABBEY, 1993

INTRODUCTION

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust was commissioned in January 1993 by Cadw/Welsh Historic Monuments to carry out an archaeological evaluation of land affected by the proposed construction of a new visitor centre at Valle Crucis Abbey, Llangollen, Clwyd (SAM De3) (NGR SJ 204 442).

The development lies within the scheduled area to the west of the abbey buildings, and consists of the visitor centre and two sewerage outflows to a septic tank and soakaways, in an area of potentially high archaeological sensitivity. Accordingly 10 trenches were excavated to establish the nature and extent of archaeological deposits within the affected area (Fig 1).

THE EXCAVATIONS

All 10 areas were hand-excavated down to the level of recognisable archaeology. Features were then recorded, but not excavated, and the areas backfilled. Levels on the ground surface and natural levels are listed separately below.

Areas A-B

In both areas the sloping modern path was removed to reveal a hard gravel surface, which is assumed to be of early 20th century date. This surface was relatively level, and subsequent excavation revealed that the underlying gravel natural had been cut to provide a level base for it. Cut into this natural in Area A was a shallow cut which contained fragments of bronze and charcoal, which probably represents a ditch truncated by the levelling of the natural. The removal of the surface in Area B revealed a steep-sided cut disappearing under the eastern section, which could represent a grave.

Area C

The turf was removed to reveal brown clay loam deposits 30cm thick with no recognisable occupation horizons, overlying a yellow-brown silty clay natural. Cut into this natural was a steep-sided rectangular feature aligned east-west, on the same axis as the abbey church. Only the northernmost half of the feature was present in the area, but it seems probable that it represents a grave.

Areas D-E

The removal of turf in both areas revealed a grey-brown clay-loam c 40cm thick overlying natural deposits. The natural in Area D was orange and grey mottled gravel, whereas in Area E it was yellow silty-clay, probably representing a palaeochannel. No archaeological features or horizons were present in either area.

Area F

A greater depth of modern overburden (c45cm) was revealed in this trench, and a modern service was present across the southern half of the area, cut into natural. A thin layer of gravelly loam between 2-5cm thick survived just above the natural which contained occasional scraps of lead, a patch of burning, and a single sherd of ?13-14th century pottery. The natural subsoil was again comprised of small river gravel.

Areas G-I

The removal of the turf in all three areas revealed rubble layers varying in depth between 50 and 90cm, containing fragments of roof slates, iron nails, and occasional pottery sherds.

The rubble layers could represent either construction or demolition material. The layers include ?13-14th century pottery, but may be linked to the 19th century clearance of the site, though no late material was recovered.

Below the rubble in Areas H-I was a layer of clay loam 20cm thick overlying small gravel natural. In Area G a thin layer c 5cm thick, similar to that in Area F, again contained scraps of lead and iron and a patch of burning, overlay the natural.

Area J

Area J was excavated to examine an alternative placement of the soakaway. This revealed clay loam 35cm thick overlying natural gravel. Cut into this natural were two cuts running approximately from E-W, although on a slightly different alignment than the previously recognised graves and the E-W axis of the abbey church. However, it is again likely that they represent graves.

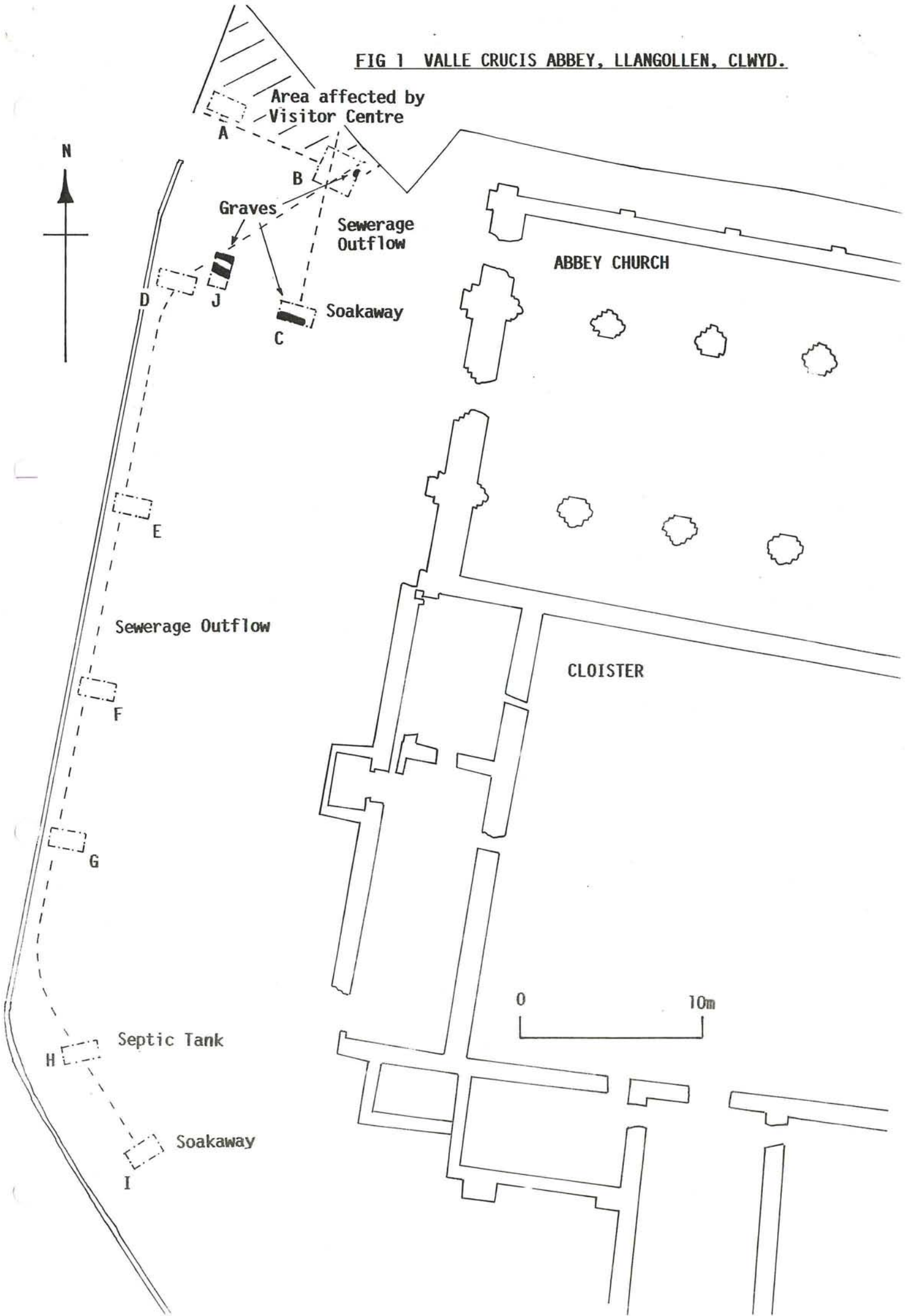
FINDS

The finds recovered from the excavations, which include pottery sherds, iron objects, scraps of lead, bronze and animal bones, are currently being stored at CPAT. Further work would include conservation and specialist reports on these.

CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation demonstrates the sensitivity of the area archaeologically, particularly to the north in the area affected by the visitor centre and the first 20m or so of the sewerage outflow lines where the graves were revealed. The rest of the area revealed little archaeology, although there remains the possibility that the placing of the trenches has missed some important features such as walls and paths, and possibly further burials.

FIG 1 VALLE CRUCIS ABBEY, LLANGOLLEN, CLWYD.



David Thomas
CPAT, 1.2.93

LEVELS

All levels are m AOD.

Area A

Ground surface: 105.29-105.47 (E-W)

Gravel surface: 104.88

Natural : 104.85

Area B

Ground surface: 104.68-104.90 (E-W)

Gravel surface: 104.54

Natural : 104.48

Area C

Ground surface: 104.62-104.77 (E-W)

Natural : 104.32

Area D

Ground surface: 105.09-105.24 (E-W)

Natural : 104.77

Area E

Ground surface: 104.73-104.84 (E-W)

Natural : 104.32-104.46 (E-W)

Area F

Ground surface: 104.38-104.51 (E-W)

Natural : 103.87-104.04 (E-W)

Area G

Ground surface: 104.17-104.29 (E-W)

Natural : 103.64-103.95 (E-W)

Area H

Ground surface: 103.86-103.93 (NE-SW)

Natural : 102.96-103.22 (NE-SW)

Area I

Ground surface: 103.57-103.63 (N-S)

Natural : 102.97

Area J

Ground surface: 105.05-104.97 (N-S)

Natural : 104.64