THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

# Llais Afon Inn, Betws Yn Rhos, Conwy

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

**CPAT Report No 653** 

# **CPAT Report Record**

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#### CONTENTS

- 1 INTRODUCTION
- 2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY
- 3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND
- 4 EVALUATION
- 5 NEOLITHIC POTTERY
- 6 CONCLUSIONS
- 7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- 8 REFERENCES

APPENDIX 1: PROJECT ARCHIVE

APPENDIX 2: SPECIFICATION

FIGURES

Fig. 1 Site Location

Fig. 2 Tithe Map 1841

Fig. 3 Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 1875 1:2500

.

- Fig. 4 Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 1900 1:2500
- Fig. 5 Ordnance Survey 3rd Edition 1913 1:2500
- Fig. 6 Trench Location
- Fig. 7 Trench A
- Fig. 8 Trench B
- Fig. 9 Illustration of Middle Neolithic rim sherd, Trench A context 10

PLATES

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In April 2004 the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was invited by Mr B Williams, of Bowen Dann Knox Architects, to prepare a specification and quotation for undertaking an archaeological evaluation on land adjacent to Llais Afon Inn, Betws Yn Rhos, Conwy. The pre-planning evaluation was the subject of a brief drawn up by Mr M Walters of the Curatorial Section of CPAT (CPAT EVB 536, dated 31 March 2004), acting in his capacity as archaeological curator for the region, which identified the need for a field evaluation. The specification and quotation were subsequently accepted and the evaluation was undertaken between 19-23 July 2004. This report was compiled immediately thereafter.
- 1.2 The site lies within the historic core of the settlement and it was therefore anticipated that significant buried archaeological deposits might have survived within the evaluation area.

# 2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 2.1 The village of Betws-yn-Rhos lies approximately 5km to the south-west of Abergele in the valley of a minor tributary of the River Dulas at approximately 100m OD, on the lower north-facing slopes of a range of low hills which separates the valleys of the Rivers Dulas and Elwy.
- 2.2 The development plot is situated in the southern part of the village (SH 90667349), on the opposite side to the church of the main east-west road through the village (see Fig. 1). The solid geology of the area consists of mudstones and siltstones belonging to the Ludlow Series of rocks belonging to the Silurian era (1994 British Geological Survey map). The soils in the immediate area of the evaluation consist of fine loamy or silty soils belonging to the Manod Association and fine silty and clayey soils belonging to the Cegin Association (1983 Soil Survey of England and Wales map).

#### 3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Stage 1 of the assessment involved the examination of all the readily available primary and secondary documentary, cartographic, pictorial, photographic and oral sources. Repositories consulted included the: County SMR, held by CPAT in Welshpool; the National Monuments Record, maintained by RCAHMW in Aberystwyth; the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth; and County Records Office, Ruthin.
- 3.2 No prehistoric activity had been previously recognised in the vicinity of the village, although the results of the excavation (see sections 4 & 5, below) indicate that Neolithic occupation is present, and that this may potentially be domestic in character. In passing we should note that a Bronze Age hoard has been discovered on Moelfre Uchaf, some 2km to the south-west of the village (see para 5.6, below).
- 3.3 Evidence of Roman activity occurs within 1km to the north of the village, presumably focussed on the line of the Roman road (PRN 46900; RR 67b) between Deva (Chester) and Canovivm (Caerhun). A cropmark (PRN 100509) which appears to represent a defended settlement of Roman date has been identified some 950m to the north-north-east of the village.
- 3.4 The village of Betws-yn-Rhos, also formerly known as Betws Abergele, is believed to be of medieval origin. Two main reasons for this have been put forward, namely that the churchyard appears to have been roughly circular prior to later extensions, thereby suggesting an early origin, and that the name 'Betws' translates as 'oratory', Betws-yn-Rhos therefore meaning 'the oratory within Rhos' (Owen 1994). In this case, Rhos refers to the medieval *cantref* in which the village lies, this being a land division which became politically redundant with the Act of Union in the mid-16th century.
- 3.5 Later occupation of the district is characterised by a small number of post-medieval houses, such as Plas-yn-Betws (PRN 104566), and Peniarth Fawr (PRN 25294). Additionally, the Llais Afon Inn (PRN 105478), which faces the development area, may have originated in the 17th century. The remainder of the buildings in the village are thought to be of 18th and 19th-century origin (Owen 1994).

- 3.6 Within the area of the development, a single building, aligned approximately north to south, was depicted on the Tithe map of 1841 (Fig. 2). The accompanying apportionment describes the building as a cottage occupied by John Oldfield, and reveals that this was on glebe (church) land. The cottage was still evident on the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1875 (Fig. 3), but by the time of the second edition map (1900; Fig. 4), it had been modified into, or replaced by, a greenhouse. The existence of a greenhouse at this location is supported by the third edition map of 1913 (Fig. 5) and local knowledge, which was gleaned during the excavation. The north end of the cottage appears to survive as a stone wall which is revetted into the slope near the northern boundary of the development plot (see Fig. 6).
- 3.7 Additional information regarding the adjacent Llais Afon Inn can be gained from examination of the cartographic sources. The Tithe survey of 1841 names the building as 'Ty Isaf', with no suggestion that it was a public house. However, by the time of the first edition Ordnance Survey map in 1875, it had become 'The Bee Hive Inn', subsequently changing its name to 'The Saracen's Head, by which it was known in 1900 and 1913. Only in the later part of the 20th century has it become 'The Llais Afon Inn'.

#### 4 EVALUATION (Figs 7 & 8)

- 4.1 The evaluation brief specified the excavation of four trenches, one along the street frontage facing the Llais Afon Inn, with the remaining three trenches sited on the footprint of each of the three proposed new dwellings. Unfortunately, site conditions were such that the trenching design required modification, following discussions with the Curator. The trench along the street frontage was completed in accordance with the brief, with the addition of a 2.5m-long extension to examine a stone-built feature revealed during its excavation. The remaining trenches were amalgamated into a single long trench across the footprints of all three of the proposed dwellings. The aim of the evaluation was to identify the nature and possible dating of any archaeological features within the development area, with particular emphasis placed on evidence relating to medieval activity within the historic core of the village.
- 4.2 The modern and post-medieval overburden in each trench was removed by machine under close archaeological supervision, with all subsequent cleaning being carried out by hand. The interpretation of the archaeological deposits within each trench was limited by the restricted area available for examination. The numbers in brackets in the following text refer to contexts given to those features and layers which were identified during the excavation. A drawn, written and photographic record was maintained throughout (see Appendix 1).

Trench A (24.3m x 1.6m; Fig. 7, Plates 2 - 7)

- 4.3 Trench A was excavated across the footprints of the three proposed new dwellings and was aligned east-west over the main part of the development area (see Fig. 06). The trench was also sited to assess the potential for survival of a building depicted on the 19th and early 20th-century historic maps of the locality (see 3.6; Figs 03-05).
- 4.4 The topsoil consisted of a layer of very dark grey silt (36), up to 0.35m thick, which in places had been covered by a layer of white limestone chippings (35), up to 0.25m thick, that provided a surface for car parking and vehicular access.
- 4.5 Beneath the topsoil the excavation revealed a series of features in the base of the trench, all of which had been cut into the stony silts, clays and gravels which constitute the natural subsoil (04). A probable gully or pit (11) at the west end of the trench was cut into the natural subsoil and defined on its western side by a spread of stone (01). The feature was half-sectioned across the line of the trench and was found to be at least 0.6m deep, with the curved north end just visible within the confines of the trench (see Plate 4). The initial fill of its north end consisted of stony material (03) which continued in an easterly direction as the initial fill of an intercutting shallow gully (05), suggesting that both features might be contemporary. The subsequent main fill of feature 11 comprised brown clay silt (10) containing a small number of sherds of prehistoric pottery (see Section 5). A single fragment of fire-reddened stone was also recovered.

- 4.6 The intercutting shallow gully (05) extended beyond the limits of excavation but appeared to be curved (see Plate 5). It was sectioned and proved to be at least 0.3m in depth, becoming shallower towards its east end where it faded out to give a length of 4.2m (see Plate 6). As mentioned above, its initial fill was of stony material (03), overlain by a mixed layer of this material and brown silt from the overlying layer (02), which appeared to represent the final fill of the gully. This top fill contained a few sherds of probable prehistoric pottery and was very similar in character to fill (10) of feature 11, further suggesting that the two features were contemporary.
- 4.7 Close to the east end of gully 05 was a probable circular pit or post-hole (13), cut into the natural subsoil. Only part of the feature was visible within the confines of the trench on its south side, but it appeared to be approximately 1.25m in diameter and 0.4m deep, with a fill of fire-reddened stones and charcoal (12) (see Plate 7). The fire-reddened stone found within the fill (10) of the pit/gully (11) was of the same type which may suggest that the activity represented by this feature is roughly contemporary.
- 4.8 A further pit or post-hole (09) was partially revealed in the north side of the trench towards the eastern end. This was potentially sub-circular, with an approximate diameter of 1.5m and a depth of 0.3m, and had been cut through a layer of orange-brown silt (06), up to 0.1m thick, into the natural subsoil. The fill of the feature consisted of fire-reddened stones and charcoal (08) of an identical character to fill 12 of feature 13, above.
- 4.9 The features at the west end of the trench (contexts 05, 11 and 13) were all sealed by a layer of orange-brown clay silt (40), which was 0.4m thick at the west end of the trench but faded out 16m to the east. This was itself sealed by a layer of grey-brown clay silt (39), which was 0.3m thick at the west end of the trench but faded out 18.7m to the east.
- 4.10 A scoop or depression (37), up to 0.35m deep, was present in the south side of the trench, towards its west end, for a length of 3.8m. It cut through layer 39 and into the upper part of layer 40. Although the scoop could not be related to any structural evidence, its fill (38) of greyish mixed silty clays contained pottery of 19th-century date and it may therefore be related to the cottage which was situated in this approximate location as depicted on the Tithe and first edition Ordnance Survey maps. A very thin line of charcoal was present at the base of the fill.
- 4.11 The deposits containing prehistoric material in this trench occurred at a depth of between 0.5m and 0.9m below ground level. The nature of some of the deposits suggests that most have probably been truncated by later activity.

Trench B (10.2m x 1.6m with 2.5m extension; Fig. 8, Plates 8 - 10)

- 4.12 Trench B was aligned north-west to south-east and was located at the eastern extent of the site along the street frontage, opposite the Llais Afon Inn. An additional extension, of 2.5m in length, was excavated east to west at the southern end of the trench (see Fig. 06). Taking into consideration the antiquity of the road junction and the close proximity of the church, the siting of the trench was prospective in the hope of establishing possible remains of buildings relating to the medieval core of the village.
- 4.13 As in Trench A, the overlying topsoil consisted of a layer of very dark grey silt (14) covered by a thin layer of white limestone chippings, in total up to 0.34m thick. This contained a small quantity of 18th and 19th-century ceramics, brick and roofing slate but no evidence for any further disturbance to the underlying deposits. Beneath the topoil was a layer of light greyish brown silty clay (15), which was 0.3m thick at the north end of the trench increasing to 0.4m in the south. The deposit contained a uniform mix of charcoal flecks, stone and gravel. Apart from two 18th or 19th-century post-holes (17 and 21), the layer remained undisturbed throughout the trench. A few pottery sherds were recovered from the deposit, which were 16th-century in date and of varying forms of highly fired fine ware identified as Midlands Purple-ware.
- 4.14 A number of features were revealed in the base of the trench sealed by layer 15 but including two post-holes which had been cut through later post-medieval deposits. The natural subsoil was quite varied with a pale greenish grey silty clay (34) occuring throughout, and underlying stoney spreads (32 and 33) at the southern extent of the trench. These deposits were revealed at a depth of 0.6m at the northern end of the trench and 0.54m in the south. At the northern end of the trench the natural subsoil was sealed by a series of thin deposits no more than 0.04m thick. These consisted of a stone

and silty clay deposit with charcoal flecks (23), an orange brown clay and sand mix (18) (possibly another varient of natural subsoil), a firmer compacted clay and pebble surface (19) and redeposited orange-brown clay mixed with pebbles, charcoal and gravel (24). All of these deposits gave the impression of possible occupation layers interspersed with a silty hillwash that may have been carried downslope from the road junction above.

- 4.15 Two linear slots were identified (26 and 28) running parallel to each other and orientatated east to west, both extending beyond the limits of the excavation on the eastern side. The northern slot (26), 1.0m in length and 0.3m wide, terminated in a butt end, while the southern slot (28) extended for 1.5m and then turned to the south for a further 0.6m. Upon excavation both features contained similar fills (25 and 27) of a loose mid-brown silty clay with charcoal flecks and small pea grit up to 0.1m thick. A line of rounded sandstone blocks (29), their average size 0.4m x 0.3m x 0.3m, extended from the southern end of slot 28,forming a linear structure one course in height and 2.5m in length (see Plate 10).
- 4.16 The features appear to represent the remains of a timber building along the street frontage, with sill beams laid within slot 28 and resting on a sleeper wall (29) to the south, levelling above the sloping ground. Slot 26 may have been a drainage gully associated with the building, or possibly part of an earlier sill-beam structure.

#### 5 NEOLITHIC POTTERY identified by Frances Lynch

- 5.1 The pottery was removed from the fills of two possible gullies in Trench A context 02, the upper fill of gully 05, and context 10, the fill of pit or gully 11. No other artefacts were found in association with the pottery, except for a single burnt stone in context 10.
- 5.2 Context 02 contained 4 featureless sherds and several scraps. Two fabrics are involved; both are thick (10-14mm), rather poorly fired and heavily gritted with angular pieces of rock up to 5mm across. The darker fabric contains conspicious pieces of white vein quartz, while the one with a beige/pink outer surface contains a darker rock, possibly a quartz sandstone.
- 5.3 Context 10 contained a single beige/black rimsherd with deeply impressed twisted cord decoration (see Fig. 9), and three other small featureless sherds and some scraps which probably come from the same pot. It contains much angular stone grit, probably also a quartz sandstone or weathered silicic igneous rock (?microgranite), which breaks through the outer surface. The inner surface is smoother and the rim has been more carefully finished to accept decoration. Two other small sherds from the same context are from a different pot, much thinner (6mm) and fired red. It contains smaller (2-3mm) rounded quartz grains with black ferric oxide minerals.
- 5.4 The shape and decoration of the rim from context 10 and the fabric of the other sherds are consistent with an identification of the pottery as Peterborough Ware of the Mortlake style. Such pottery occurs in small quantities quite widely in Wales, especially along the north and south coasts and in the Marches. It is found within some megalithic tombs, often associated with the blocking of the chambers (eg Trefignath, Anglesey and Gwernvale, Powys) and in unexplained, possibly domestic, contexts as here at Betws yn Rhos. Radiocarbon dates associated with Peterborough Ware suggest that it was current between 3500 and 2500 cal BC, alongside other decorated styles such as Grooved Ware (Gibson 1995, 30). The Mortlake style was probably most popular about 3000 cal BC.
- 5.5 The slightly angled rim and the short lines of neatly twisted cord pressed into it may be compared to pots from Cefn Bryn, Gower, Ogmore and Caldey Island in the south and to vessels from Trefignath and Bryn yr Hen Bobl in Anglesey and Four Crosses in Powys (Gibson 1995, Figs 2, 5, 6 and 7). It is impossible to be certain of the shape of the complete pot but it should have had a gently rounded base and to have been quite extensively decorated on the body, though none of the other sherds present shows evidence of such decoration.
- 5.6 No prehistoric finds have been recorded previously from the village, but a famous hoard of experimental bronze palstaves was found on the slopes of Moelfre Uchaf, some 2km south-west of the village centre, suggesting that bronze smiths at the forefront of technological change were living in the vicinity some 1400 years later (Lynch *et al* 2000, 103). Although the evidence is tenuous, these

#### 6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 Within Trench A the evaluation has demonstrated the presence of Middle Neolithic occupation consisting of a series of shallow pits and gullies, some of which contained sherds of Peterborough Ware. The extent and nature of these features cannot be determined from the evidence gathered through the evaluation process. However, it is reasonable to assume that contemporary archaeological deposits may survive across the western extents of the site.
- 6.2 The features identified within Trench B probably represent surviving remains of a timber building along the street frontage. The features were sealed beneath a layer containing 16th-century ceramics, suggesting that the building may be late medieval in date. Only a small quantity of 18th and 19th-century ceramics were recovered from the topsoil, generally impliying very little disturbance to the underlying archaeology.

# 7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

7.1 The writers would like to thank the following people for their assistance during the project: Mr N Jones, Ms W Owen, Mr R Phipps and Mr R Silvester, CPAT; Mrs F. Lynch Llewellyn for the analysis of the pottery; Mr and Mrs Jones, Llais Afon Inn; and Mr M Walters, of the Curatorial section of CPAT.

# 8 REFERENCES

#### Published Sources

Gibson, A M, 1995. First impressions: a review of Peterborough Ware in Wales in Kinnes, I and Varndell, G, (Ed.) Unbaked Urns of Rudely Shape: Essays on British and Irish Pottery for Ian Longworth. Oxford: Oxbow Monographs 55, 23-39.

Lynch, F M, Aldhouse-Green, S, and Davies, J L, 2000. Prehistoric Wales. Stroud: Suttons.

Owen, W J, 1994. Colwyn Borough Historic Settlements, CPAT Report No 93.

#### Cartographic sources

Tithe Map 1841

Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 1875 1:2500

Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 1900 1:2500

Ordnance Survey 3rd Edition 1913 1:2500

1983 Soil Survey of England and Wales map (Sheet 2 - Wales) and Legend (1:250,000 scale)

1994 British Geological Survey map of Wales (Solid edition at 1:250,000 scale)

#### **APPENDIX 1**

# PROJECT ARCHIVE

#### Site archive

3 A1 site plans 1 black and white negative film 1 colour print film 1 colour slide film 41 context record forms photographic catalogue context register drawings register 5 levels record forms Specification, brief and correspondence

#### **APPENDIX 2**

#### LAND ADJACENT TO LLAIS AFON INN, BETWS YN RHOS, CONWY SPECIFICATION FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION BY THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

#### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Contracting Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust has been invited to prepare a specification of works for undertaking an archaeological evaluation on land adjacent to the Llais Afon Inn, Betws Yn Rhos, Conwy. The Curatorial Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, acting as archaeological advisors to the local planning authority, have determined that an archaeological evaluation should be undertaken to assess the potential impact of the proposals on the archaeological resource.
- 1.2 The site lies within the historic core of the settlement and it is therefore anticipated that significant buried archaeological deposits may survive within in the area and the following specification has been designed to evaluate the depth and significance of these deposits.

#### 2 Objectives

- 2.1 The objectives of the evaluation are:
- 2.1.1 to reveal by means of a desktop study and field evaluation, the nature, condition, significance and, where possible, the chronology of the archaeology within the area of the proposed development in so far as these aims are possible;
- 2.1.2 to record any archaeological sites identified during the field evaluation;
- 2.1.3 to prepare a report outlining the results of the assessment, incorporating sufficient information on the archaeological resource for a reasonable planning decision to be taken regarding the future management of the archaeology.

#### 3 Methods

- 3.1 Stage one of the assessment will involve the examination of all the readily available primary and secondary documentary, cartographic, pictorial, photographic and oral sources. Repositories consulted will include the following: County SMR, CPAT, Welshpool; the National Monuments Record, RCAHMW, Aberystwyth; the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth; and County Archives, Hawarden.
- 3.2 The field evaluation will consist of four 1.5m wide trenches, the size and positions of which will be determined following discussions with the client and curator, although the total length of trenches will be no more than 55m. The excavations will be undertaken using a machine excavator with a toothless bucket to remove modern overburden down to the level of the first recognisable archaeological horizon. Thereafter, all excavation will be conducted by hand unless otherwise agreed with the Curator in advance. The evaluation will be entirely non-destructive and designed to determine the depth at which archaeologically sensitive deposits survive, together with their nature condition and significance. The depth of natural deposits will be determined to assess the extent of any stratified deposits which may be encountered. It has been assumed that there is sufficient access for a mechanical excavator and that excavated material will be temporarily stored adjacent to the trenches which will be reinstated with excavated material on completion. No provision has been made for reinstating tarmac or turfed areas with anything other than excavated material.
- 3.3 Contexts will be recorded on individual record forms and be drawn and photographed as appropriate. All photography will be in 35mm format black and white print and colour slide. All features will be located as accurately as possible with respect to buildings and boundaries identified on modern Ordnance Survey maps and levels will be related to Ordnance Datum where possible.

- 3.4 All artefacts will be related to their contexts from which they were derived and treated in a manner appropriate to their composition and will be processed by trained CPAT staff.
- 3.5 Following the on-site work an illustrated and bound report will be prepared in A4 format, containing conventional sections on: Site location, Topography and Geology; Archaeological Background; Evaluation; Conclusions and References, together with appropriate appendices on archives and finds.
- 3.6 The site archive will be prepared to specifications laid out in Appendix 3 in the <u>Management of</u> <u>Archaeological Projects</u> (English Heritage, 1991), to be deposited with the Regional Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). All artefacts will, subject to the permission of the owner, be deposited with the Powysland Museum, Welshpool.

# 4 Resources and Programming

- 4.1 The evaluation will be undertaken by a small team of skilled archaeologists under the overall supervision of Mr RJ Silvester, a senior member of CPAT's staff who is also a member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA). CPAT is an IFA Registered Organisation.
- 4.2 All report preparation will be completed by or with the assistance of the same field archaeologist who conducted the evaluation.
- 4.3 It is anticipated that the evaluation will be completed within 5 days. The report will be completed within 2 weeks of the completion of on-site works. Copies of the report will provided to the client and the Regional SMR. The Curator will be informed of the timetable in order to arrange for monitoring if required. At present, CPAT would be in a position to undertake the work during June 2004, subject to sufficient advanced notice.
- 4.4 The following contingency sums have been allowed in accordance with section 10 of the curatorial brief. The need for such contingencies, and their potential cost, would be subject to discussions between CPAT, the client and the curator once the fieldwork has been completed. The following figures are therefore only for guidance and the final cost, should any of the services be required, may be more or less than the estimates provided.

Finds conservation etc	£200	
2 Radiocarbon dates	£550	
2 archaeomagnetic dates	£400	
Environmental sampling	£200	
Museum deposition and	storage	£50
Publication	Archaeology	in Wales at no additional charge
Curatorial monitoring	£50 per visit	

- 4.5 Requirements relating to Health and Safety regulations will be adhered to by CPAT and its staff.
- 4.6 CPAT is covered by appropriate Public and Employer's Liability insurance.

N.W. Jones 29th April 2004



Fig. 1 Site Location Scale 1:25,000

CPAT Report No 653



Fig. 2 Tithe Map 1841

CPAT Report No 653



Fig. 3 Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 1875 1:2500



Fig. 4 Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 1900 1:2500



Fig. 5 Ordnance Survey 3rd Edition 1913 1:2500



Fig. 6 Overall plan of site showing trench locations. Scale 1:500

# CPAT Report No 653



Fig. 7 Trench A plan and sections. Scale 1:100





Fig. 9 Illustration of decorated Middle Neolithic Peterborough Ware rim sherd from Trench A, context 10.



Plate 1. General view of the site, viewed from the south-east. Photo CPAT 1714.34



Plate 2. Trench A, east facing, post machining. Photo CPAT 1714.11



Plate 3. Western extent of Trench A, viewed from the south-east, illustrating features (5), (11) and (13) pre-excavation. Photo CPAT 1714.09



Plate 4. Trench A, east facing section through Neolithic feature (11). Photo CPAT 1714.24



Plate 5. Trench A, west facing section through Neolithic deposits in feature (05). Photo CPAT 1714.25



Plate 6. Trench A, viewed from the south, section through Neolithic feature (05). Photo CPAT 1714.29



Plate 7. Trench A, north facing section through fire-charred pit (13). Photo CPAT 1714.28



Plate 8. Trench B viewed from the south-east, post machining. Photo CPAT 1714.19



Plate 9. Trench B extension, viewed from the east, post machining. Photo CPAT 1714.20



Plate 10. Trench B viewed from the south-east. Probable stone constructed Medieval sill-beam platform (29) and associated sill-beam slots (26) and (28). Photo CPAT 1714.31