
Vanner Caravan Park, Llanelltyd: Archaeological Watching Brief



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GAT Project No. 2105

Report No. 836

November 2009

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Prepared for
Rhys Llwyd Davies

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VANNER CARAVAN PARK, LLANELLYD, DOLGELLAU (G2105):

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

SUMMARY

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT) has completed an archaeological watching brief during groundworks at the Vanner Caravan Site, Llanelltyd, Dolgellau. The groundworks included the replacement and extension of an existing washing block and associated drainage/sewerage.

The groundworks were located c. 120.0m south of Cymer Abbey (SAM ME 001/PRN 4099). As a result, there was potential for buildings associated the abbey within the development area.

GAT monitored the excavation of a foundation trench to the east of the existing washing block as well as a soakaway and a septic tank pit. No archaeological features associated with the Abbey were observed within the excavated areas: all features identified were associated with the original building of the washing block, with artefacts relating to its use found within the topsoil. A photographic and descriptive record of all groundworks were completed along with a record of the superficial geological deposits.

The excavation of a service trench between the soakaway and septic tank pit was not monitored. Based on the results of the initial watching brief and the close proximity of the service trench to the soakaway and septic tank pit, it was agreed with SNPA that an archaeological watching brief was not required for the service trench groundworks.

The demolition of the existing washing block was not completed as part of the watching brief

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT) was commissioned by Rhys Llwyd Davies to complete an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of a footing trench and associated septic tank and soakaway pits during the demolition/re-building of a washing block at the Vanner Caravan Site, Llanelltyd, Dolgellau (centred on NGR SH72201940). The demolition of the existing washing block has not been completed as part of the watching brief

A brief was prepared for this work by Snowdonia National Park Authority Archaeologist (SNPA; **A-D/038**), with recommendations given for an **intensive watching brief**. Reference was also made to the guidelines specified in Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching brief (Institute of Field Archaeologists, 1994, rev. 2001).

The groundworks monitored by the watching brief included (cf. figure 02):

- washing block footings: 12.0m long by 2.0m wide (depth 0.10m – 0.25m);
- septic tank pit: 2.40m long by 3.80m wide (depth 2.30m – 2.50m);
- soakaway: 2.0m long by 1.45m wide (depth 1.30m).

Each of these elements are discussed separately (q.v. para. 5.0):

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Fieldwork

The watching brief took place on the 3rd November 2009. The aim of the watching brief was to monitor the excavation of a foundation trench to the immediate east of the existing washing block, the excavation of a septic tank pit c.7.0m southeast of the washing block and a soakaway c.6.50m east of the washing block during groundworks associated with the demolition/re-building of a washing block at the Vanner Caravan Site (figure 02; plate 01).

The work was carried out by Hitachi ZX70 site excavator; a 0.70m wide toothed bucket was used throughout the watching brief.

NB. The excavation of a service trench linking the septic tank and soakaway and the demolition and removal of the concrete pad foundation for the washing block were not monitored as part of the watching brief. The SNPA archaeologist was informed of this and agreement was reached with GAT that an archaeological presence was not required for the excavation of the trench.

3.0 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The groundworks area is located c.120.0m south of the Cistercian Abbey of Cymer (SAM ME 001/PRN 4099; NGR SH72101950). The Abbey was founded in 1198-9 on land granted by Gruffydd ap Cynan and Maredudd ap Cynan, possibly under the authority of their cousin Llywelyn ap Iorwerth. It lies at the confluence of the Mawdach and the Wnion, between the medieval parish churches of Llanelltud to the north and Dogellau to the south. The church is an aisled rectangle of the 13th century with a later (14th century) west tower. The cloister and other conventual buildings adjoin the south side of the church. The house at Y Faner, west of the abbey, is mid-15th century in origin, and is likely to have been the Abbots house. At the dissolution the lands of the abbey around Y Faner became the nucleus of an estate granted in 1538 to John Powes, a servant of the royal household (Smith and Butler 2001, 297-325).

The SNPA brief states that, "whilst there is no record of archaeological remains in the immediate area of the proposed development, it is likely that features associated with monastic agricultural and industrial interests were located in the wider environs of the monastery, extending beyond the scheduled area..." (A-D/038: 01). These features may include: wharves on the river side, ancillary storage buildings, mills and kilns that could exist within the application area (*ibid.*).

4.0 SITE LOCATION AND GEOLOGY

The groundworks area (centered on NGR SH 72201940), is located on the eastern side of the main road to the Vanner Caravan site, 159m south of the conventual buildings of the abbey. The road and the groundworks area lie on a level area with the Afon Mawddach 70m to the west and a steep slope rising to the east.

The underlying "superficial" deposits are described by the British Geological Survey to be clay/silt/ sand *diamicton* (poorly sorted sediment).

5.0 RESULTS

The three groundwork areas referred to in para. 1.0 are described separately; all excavations were cut into the base of a steep slope.

5.1 Washing block footings (figure 02; plates 02 & 03)

5.1.1 Dimensions: 12.0m long by 2.0m wide (depth 0.10m – 0.25m)

The footings for the washing block extension ran parallel to the existing eastern end of the block. The excavation reached a maximum depth of 0.25m and was limited mainly to turf/topsoil removal. The exposed sections comprised mid-brown clay-silt with occasional small to medium sub-angular stones. Recovered artefacts were limited to modern rubbish associated with the use of the washing block.

In the limited areas where subsoil was exposed, a light brown/orange clay-silt was identified.

The northern end of this trench (length: c.4.0m) was heavily disturbed and appeared to be the backfill of an existing soakaway/drainage pipe that was part of the original washing block construction. This fill contained broken bricks of the same type used for the extant washing block.

Several 50mm black plastic pipes were also identified crossing the southern end of the footings excavation (plate 02).

5.1.2 Discussion:

No archaeological features were identified within the confines of the excavated area. Only modern/20th century activity was identified within this trench. The area seems to have been heavily disturbed by the earlier building phase.

5.2 Septic tank pit (figure 02; plates 04 & 05)

5.2.1 Dimensions: 2.40m long by 3.80m wide (depth 2.30m – 2.50m)

The septic tank was located c.7.0m southeast of the existing washing block and was excavated into the break of slope (base) of the west to east slope.

The stratigraphy within the septic tank pit comprised three visible sections: turf/topsoil (mid-brown clay-silt, between 0.25m and 0.53m thick); a yellow clay-gravel with frequent very small rounded stones and rare sub angular flat stones (between 0.92m and 1.31m thick); below this there was a mid brown gravel clay with frequent very small rounded stones and rare sub angular flat stones, (between 0.74m and 1.05m thick).

5.2.2 Discussion:

No archaeological features were identified within the confines of the excavated area.

The deposits observed reflected the records for the geology within this area (BGS Sheet 135) which describes the superficial deposits as 'undifferentiated drift made up of clay, and 'silt sand'.

5.3 Soakaway (figure 02; plates 06 & 07)

5.3.1 Dimensions: 2.0m long by 1.45m wide (depth 1.30m)

The soakaway was located c.6.5m east of the existing washing block and was excavated into the break of slope (base) of the west to east slope.

The stratigraphy within the soakaway comprised three visible sections: turf/topsoil (mid-brown clay-silt, 0.26m thick); an orange clay-silt with rare small flat irregular stones (0.48m thick); a mid-brown gravel-clay with frequent very small rounded stones and rare sub angular flat stones (1.05m thick).

5.3.2 Discussion:

No archaeological features were identified within the confines of the excavated area.

The deposits observed reflected the records for the geology within this area (BGS Sheet 135) which describes the superficial deposits as 'undifferentiated drift made up of clay, and silt sand'.

6.0 CONCLUSION

No structural or artefactual material associated with Cymer Abbey were identified within the confines of the excavated areas; all activity identified was related to localised use as a late 20th century washing block site associated with the Vanner caravan park.

Apart from the soakaway/drainage activity identified in the footings trench, all stratigraphy beneath the topsoil were identified as glacial in origin that matched the known geological deposits within this area.

The excavation of a service trench between the soakaway and septic tank pit was not monitored. Based on the results of the initial watching brief and the close proximity of the service trench to the soakaway and septic tank pit, it was agreed with SNPA that an archaeological watching brief was not required for the service trench groundworks.

The demolition of the existing washing block was not completed as part of the watching brief.

7.0 SOURCES CONSULTED

Geological survey of Great Britain (England and Wales), SHEET 135, Drift Edition, 1:50000 Series.

IFA. 2001. *Institute of Field Archaeologists 2001 Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief.*

Smith J & Butler, L.A.S 2001. 'The Cistercian Order: Cymer Abber', in '*The History of Merioneth. Volume II. The Middle Ages*', edited by J. & Ll. Beverley Smith; Cardiff:University of Wales Press

Snowdonia National Park Authority mitigation brief **A-D/038**

Williams D. 1990 *Atlas of Cistercian Lands in Wales*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff.

Williams, D., 2001 *The Welsh Cistercians*, Gracewing, Herefordshire.

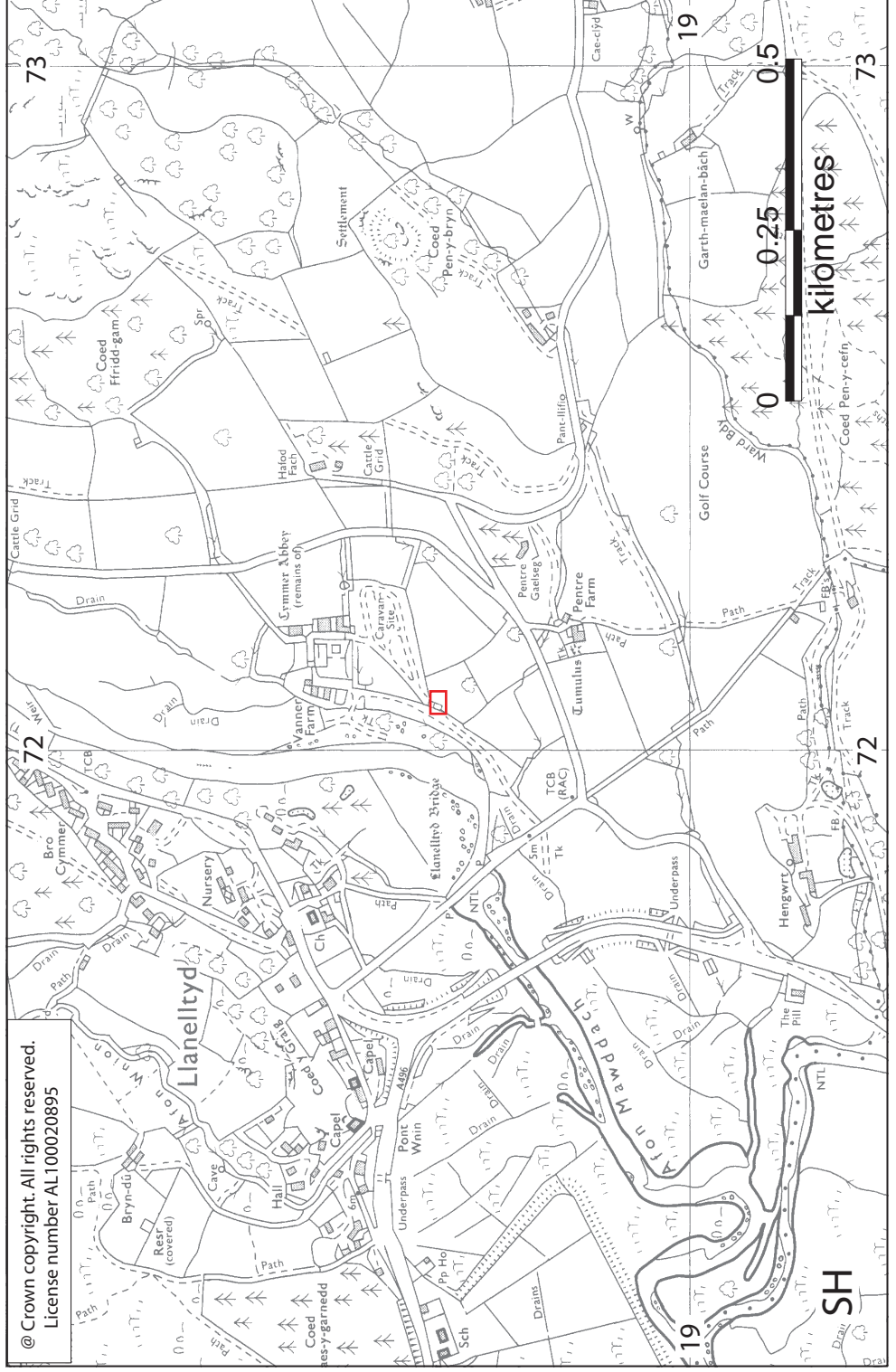


Figure 01 Location Map. Development Area highlighted in RED (scale: as shown on plan)

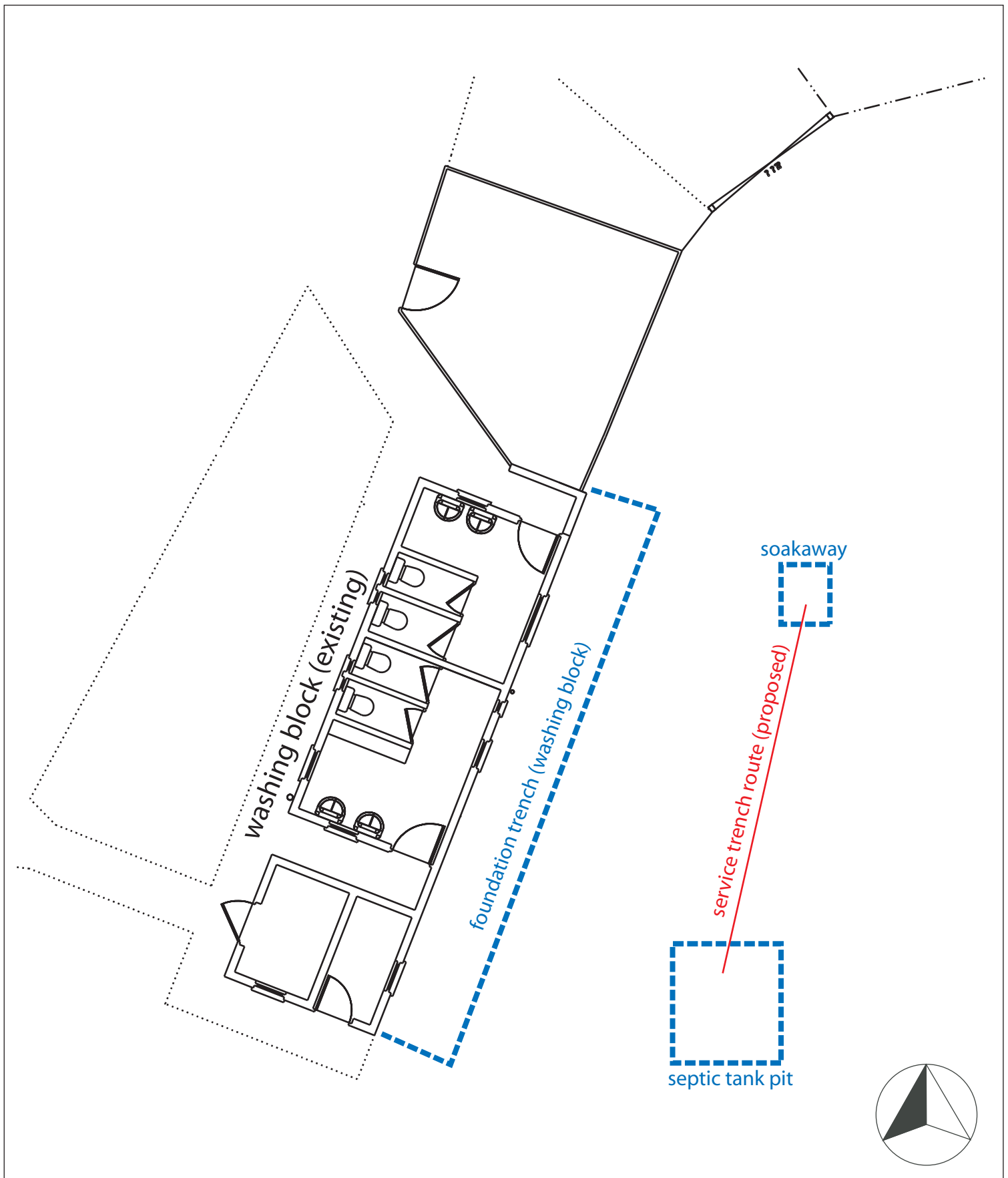


Figure 02: location of groundwork areas discussed in the text (highlighted BLUE). The existing washing block will be demolished as part of proposed works and will be replaced by a washing block on the revised footing dictated by the foundation trench. A proposed service trench (highlighted RED) was not excavated during the watching brief discussed in the report but is proposed for a later date. Based on the observations from the excavated areas, it is thought that the archaeological potential is low and a further watching brief is not required. (based on client drawing 124(F)L05; scale 1:100@A4)



existing washing block
(to be demolished)

footings trench

septic tank pit

soakaway pit

Plate 01: view northwest of development area, detailing extent of groundworks monitored by the watching brief. The existing washing block demolition does not form part of the watching brief. A service trench will also be dug between the septic tank pit and the soakaway pit.



Plate 02: view north of washing block footings during excavation. Note the modern disturbance associated with the construction of the existing block (ranging pole: 1.0m)



Plate 03: view north of washing block footings detailing limit of excavation. Note the modern disturbance associated with the construction of the existing block (ranging pole: 1.0m)



Plate 04: view north of the septic tank excavation detailing limit of excavation. The pit was excavated into a slope and comprised topsoil of varying thickness followed by two distinct glacial deposits (ranging pole: 2.0m)



Plate 05: view west of the septic tank excavation detailing limit of excavation. The pit was excavated into a slope and comprised topsoil of varying thickness followed by two distinct glacial deposits (ranging pole: 2.0m)



Plate 06: working shot of soakaway detailing exposed sections and stratigraphy. The topsoil was extant to a depth of 0.26m followed by an orange clay-silt; followed by a mid-brown gravel-clay to limit of excavation (ranging pole: 1.0m)



Plate 07: east-facing section of soakaway detailing limit of excavation and exposed sections/stratigraphy. The topsoil was extant to a depth of 0.26m followed by an orange clay-silt; followed by a mid-brown gravel-clay to limit of excavation (ranging pole: 1.0m)

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