
Pen y Castell Uchaf: **Bryncroes, Gwynedd**



Archaeological Watching Brief

GAT Project No. 2117

Report No. 852

March, 2010

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Prepared for
Professor P. Clayton

March 2010

By

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PEN Y CASTELL UCHAF, BRYNCROES

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PEN Y CASTELL UCHAF, BRYNCROES (G2117)

Archaeological Watching Brief

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out during the excavation of a 61.42m² plot at the rear of Pen y Castell Uchaf, Bryncroes, for a new rear extension to the building. The relict remains of dry stone walls associated with the enclosing of a former rear yard and adjacent trackway were noted, which had been levelled as a result of building works in the 1980s.

The property lay partially within the former ramparts of the late prehistoric banked enclosure known as Castell Caeron (PRN 1234) on its south east side. The ground was noted to be mainly truncated onto a buried soil, below a deposit of topsoil and stones. However cleaning of the section of south west side of the plot revealed the remains of the former bank of Castell Caeron hill fort. The natural subsoil was observed in the base of the plot.

1 INTRODUCTION

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust was commissioned by Professor P. Clayton to carry out a programme of archaeological works during the construction of a property extension at Pen y Castell Uchaf, Bryncroes (NGR SH23203028), which lies within the known extent of the prehistoric defended enclosure of Castell Caeron (PRN 1234, Fig. 1). The proposed works included the excavation of a 61.42m² area at the rear of the property, to replace an existing smaller extension which had been built in the 1980s. The existing perimeter path was also to be scarified and replaced. The proposed works are detailed on *Hayden E. Williams Cyf.* drawing numbers 0037/2 and 0037/5

1.1 Acknowledgements

Hayden Williams, the project architect, is thanked for his assistance during this project, and for the provision of plans of the development. Ashley Batten of Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service (GAPS) is thanked for his advice and assistance.

2 SPECIFICATION AND PROJECT DESIGN

A brief for the archaeological work was not provided by Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service (GAPS), but recommendations were given for an intensive archaeological watching brief during the main groundworks.

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust's proposals for fulfilling these requirements were:

- Watching Brief
- Report

3 METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

An archaeological watching brief was carried out during the excavation work of the 61.42 sq. m area to the rear of Pen y Castell Uchaf. A small crawler excavator was used, and earth moving was limited to the excavation of the rear patio area.

The area was monitored and photographed for any archaeological deposits and a written record consisting of notes and sketches was made. Each distinct layer or evidence of archaeological activity was given its own unique context number and a descriptive record made, and these are referred to throughout the discussion of the results below in brackets. Their relationships to each other were shown on a section scale drawing, drawn at a scale of 1:20 (Fig. 3). Primary Reference Numbers (PRN) refer to the unique number given to each site on the Gwynedd Historic Environment Record (HER).

This report conforms to the guidelines and definitions specified in *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching brief* (Institute for Archaeologists, 1994, rev. 2001).

4 TOPOGRAPHY

Pen y Castell Uchaf is situated at about 200m OD on a wide natural shelf at the north end of Mynydd Rhiw (Fig. 1), within the parish of Bryncroes, Llŷn at NGR SH 23203028. The ground within Castell Caeron is higher than the shelf itself. The land falls sharply away on the north west side, but more gently to the north-east. It is almost level to the south west, but rises steeply about 100m from the fort on the south-east.

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

5.1 Introduction

The area around Pen y Castell Uchaf is known to be one of high archaeological importance. The farmhouse itself is located within the ramparts of Castell Caeron, a known defensive enclosure of probable late prehistoric date (RCAHMW 1964, 27, PRN 1234). A flint scraper of probable Neolithic date has been found to the north of Castell Caeron at SH 23143047, PRN 3646), and the well known Neolithic axe factory at Mynydd Rhiw lies some 400m to the south of the site (PRN 1624).

5.2 General History

The extension to the rear of Pen y Castell Uchaf is on the line of the eastern ramparts of Castell Caeron hill fort (Figs 1,2 and 4), a small curvilinear banked enclosure of probable late prehistoric date (PRN 1234). It was described in 1903 as being 'nearly destroyed, but the original form can be distinctly traced' (Owen 1903, 252). It is of a small enclosed settlement type (Bowen and Gresham 1967) of which a number exist on Llŷn, such as at Meillionydd and Castell Odo, and is defended by a double set of banks (Alcock 1960, 79; Smith 1999). Although much of the stone from the rampart has been removed and reused in local field boundaries and other structures, the shallow earthworks are still visible on the west and south side of the fort. The enclosure is oval, slightly flattened on the north west, and measures about 67m from the north west to south east, by 76m. It is surmounted by two stone walls about 2.2m thick, and 3m apart. Both of these are robbed out to foundation level, and there is no surviving evidence of facing stones. The outer wall is not visible around the south east of the circuit, in the vicinity of Pen y Castell. There is no evidence for the entrance, although it is thought to have been on the east side, where the wall lines have been interrupted (RCAHMW 1964, 27).

The farmhouse at Pen y Castell Uchaf (Fig. 4; cover illustration) consists of a three roof bay main building with former byre to the north east of lower height. The current structure is of probable late 18th century or early 19th century date. It was probably formerly associated with the nearby farmhouse of Pen y Castell Isaf, as they both lie adjacent to a complex of regular small semi-improved fields of probable late 18th or 19th century date, bounded by dry stone walls, and the farms probably formed part of a larger property in former times that was later divided into two. A track way formerly passed the cottage to the south west (Fig. 4), which would probably also have allowed access to a rear yard. The truncation of the ramparts of Castell Caeron was probably carried out at this time, in order to provide a relatively level rear yard. The rear yard area was altered as part of the kitchen extension building work in the 1980s (Hayden Williams *pers. comm.*), and the south western perimeter scarified. The dry stone walls which bounded the yard and trackway were also somewhat truncated at this time.

6 RESULTS OF THE WATCHING BRIEF

6.1 Introduction

The demolition of the 1980s kitchen extension to the property had already taken place prior to the watching brief. The excavation of an 8.98m by 6.84m area to the rear of Pen y Castell Uchaf was observed, carried out with a small crawler excavator. The excavation created a 61.42 sq. m level plot, with a disturbed area of ground seen in plan where the former extension had been, and natural subsoil over the rest of the plot. The sections that bounded the excavation on the south west, north west and north east sides were examined, and a scale plan and section drawings were made and photographs taken. On the south west side of the plot a section of through the bank of Castell Caeron was observed as a result of the cleaning of the section.

6.2 Archaeological Results

A number of archaeological deposits were observed associated with the south east bank of Castell Caeron, located on the south west edge of the development plot (Fig. 2). The banks have been removed further east within the former yard to the rear of Pen y Castell Uchaf. The bank was not observed on the north east side of the development area, as the development did not extend beyond the limits of the truncated former rear yard area to Pen y Castell Uchaf. All observed deposits were truncated for an area 3.3m by 6.7m behind the farmhouse of Pen y Castell Uchaf, which formed the base of the 1980s extension to the house, and only a stony silty loam containing much modern waste material was noted (104). This deposit would obscure any evidence for an external ditch which would probably have been associated with the bank of Castell Caeron (PRN 1234).

No environmental samples were recovered from the site, and finds consisted solely of waste material from the 1980s extension and these were not retained.

6.3 Stratigraphy

6.3.1 North East Facing Section (Fig. 3, Plate 3)

A mid greyish brown silty loam, with small to medium rounded and sub-angular stones, and up to 0.4m in depth was noted (200). This is best interpreted as a topsoil and stone spread, created by the collapse of the dry stone wall which overlies the bank. This overlies a light orangy brown silty clay and sand subsoil (111), which in turn overlay a light yellowish brown clay (101), noted up to a depth of up to 0.8m. This is probably the relict remains of one of the banks of Castell Collen fort (PRN 1234), which overlay a buried orangy brown silt clay buried soil layer (102), about 0.3m deep, which overlay natural clay (103), and was cut by the 1980s development [109].

The bank (101) was cut by a modern plastic water pipe trench [113], and backfill (110), which occurred before the collapse of the drystone wall, as this (200) overlies it. The south western part of the section (104) consists of backfill from the 1980s excavations, containing much modern rubbish, overlain by recent topsoil (112).

6.3.2 South East and South West Facing Sections (Plate 4)

Layers (102) and (103) were noted in the south east facing section. Layer (101) existed in a heavily truncated form, and was overlain by the stony topsoil deposit (200).

Modern disturbance was noted in the form of a cut for a telegraph pole anchor pit [105] and backfill (106).

The dry stone wall (Plate 4) which sat upon context (111) consisted of facing stones with a rubble core, although it was noted to be in a partially collapsed state.

7 CONCLUSION

The excavation of a plot for the foundations of a rear extension to Castell Pen y Castell Uchaf, an area of 61.42 sq. m., revealed evidence of the remains of the bank of the enclosure of Castell Caeron in the south western section of the plot. As the ground was levelled over the rest of the development area no part of the monument was destroyed. The current excavation cut into the natural subsoil beyond the disturbed ground area of the former kitchen extension, indicating that no further archaeological remains were present within the development area (Fig. 2).

Remains of the bank of Castell Caeron (101) were observed overlying a buried soil (102) in the south west section of the plot. This indicates that the bank was built up directly onto this soil. No evidence for an associated external ditch was observed, although this is likely to have been located between the bank and the house, and this area has been heavily disturbed (104), so all trace of it within the development area is likely to have been previously lost.

The truncated remains of dry stone walls, formerly enclosing the rear yard and track way behind Pen y Castell Uchaf, and therefore of probable late 18th or early 19th century date were noted.

8 ARCHIVE

The archive consists of 1 plan and 1 section drawing, drawn at a scale of 1:20, three sheets of notes and records and 98 digital photographs. These are currently held at GAT under the project code **G2117**

Three copies of the bound report will be sent to the client, a copy to Ashley Batten at GAPS, and a further copy sent to the HER Archaeologist at the curatorial division of Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, Bangor, for deposition in the Regional HER. A copy of the report will be provided to the National Monument Record, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales, Aberystwyth.

9 SOURCES CONSULTED

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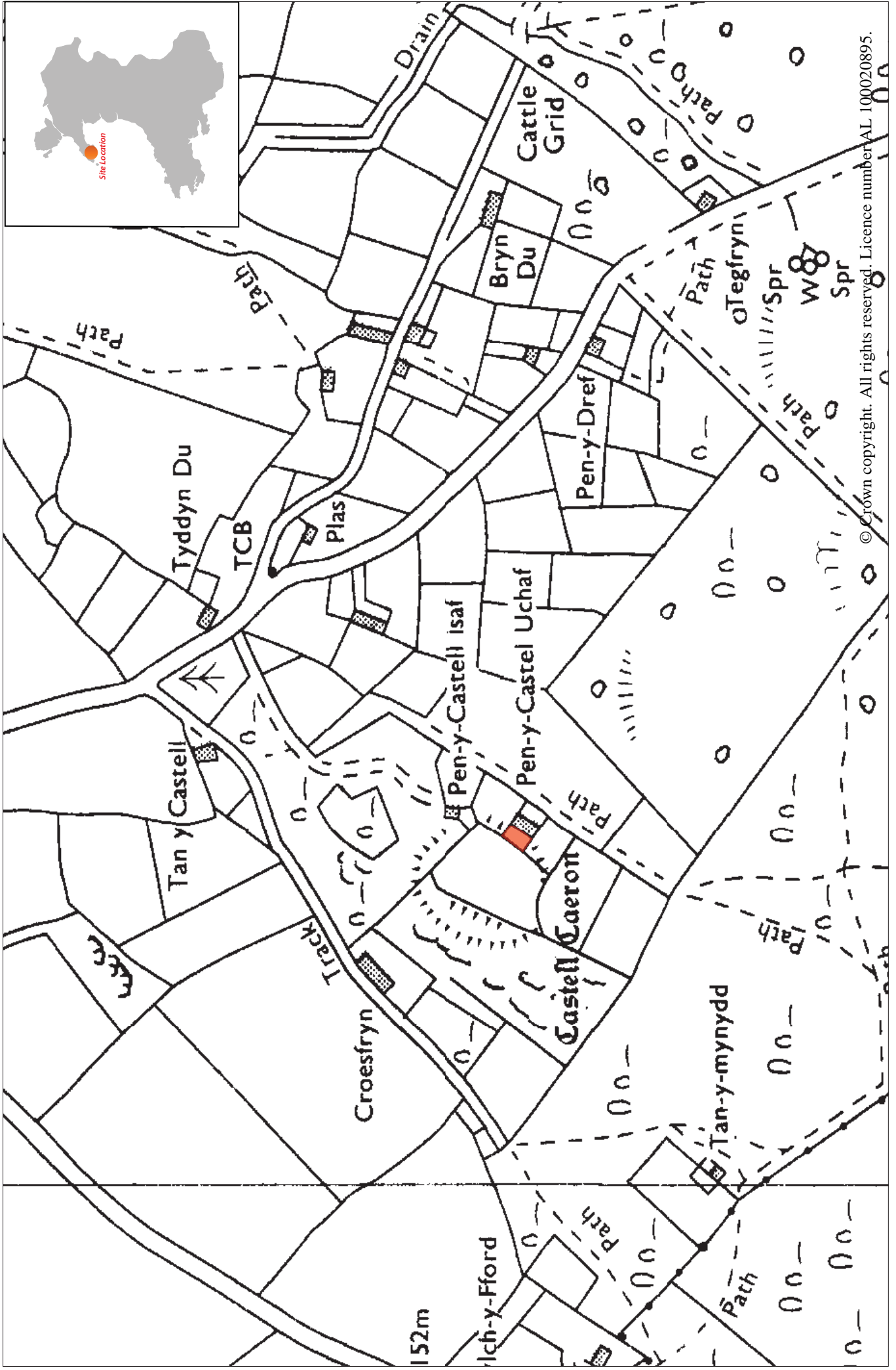
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Fig. 1 Site Location. Base map Ordnance Survey 1:10 000 sheet SH23SW. Development area outlined in red. Scale 1:2500@A4

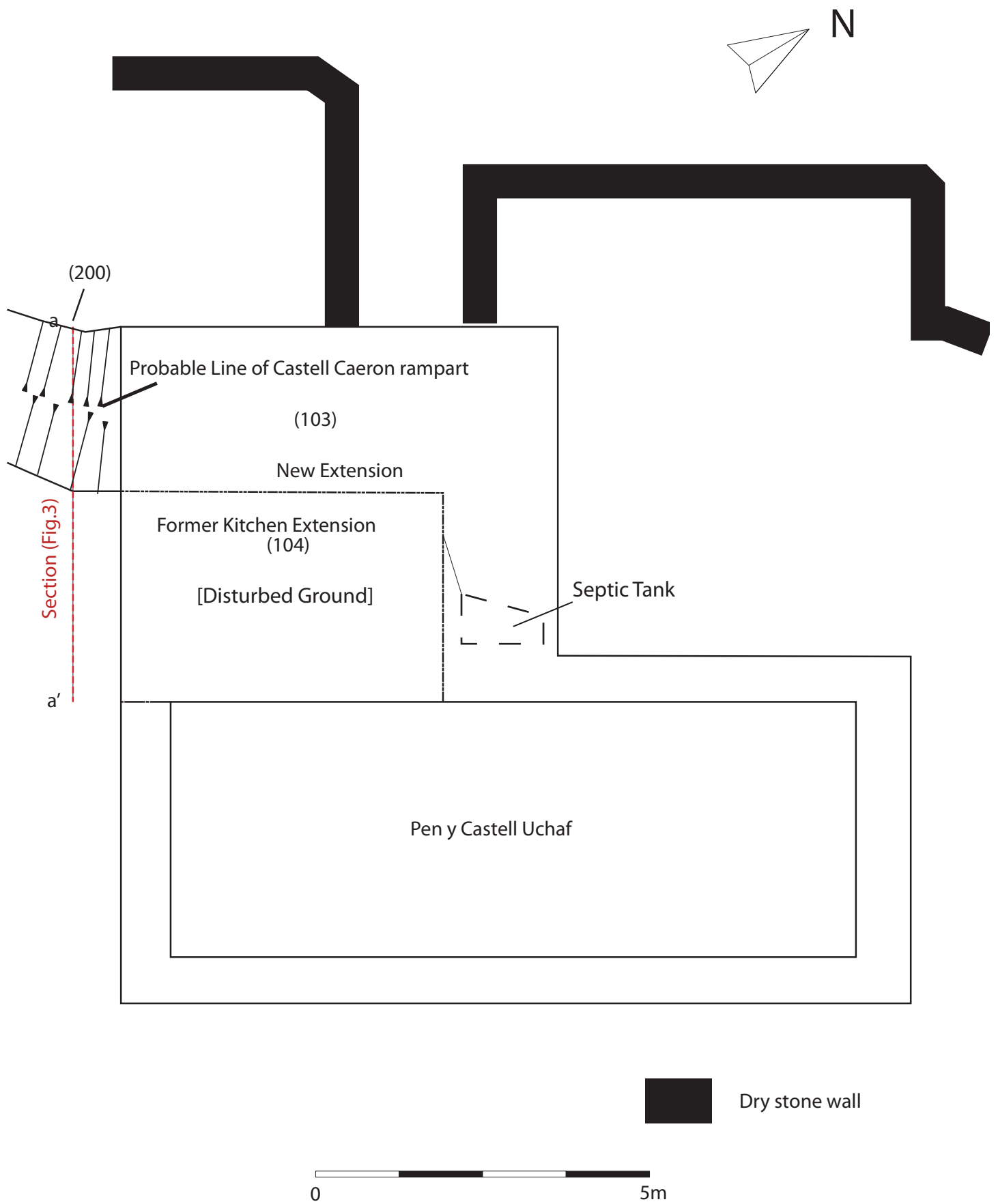


Fig. 2 Plan of rear extension excavation at Pen y Castell Uchaf

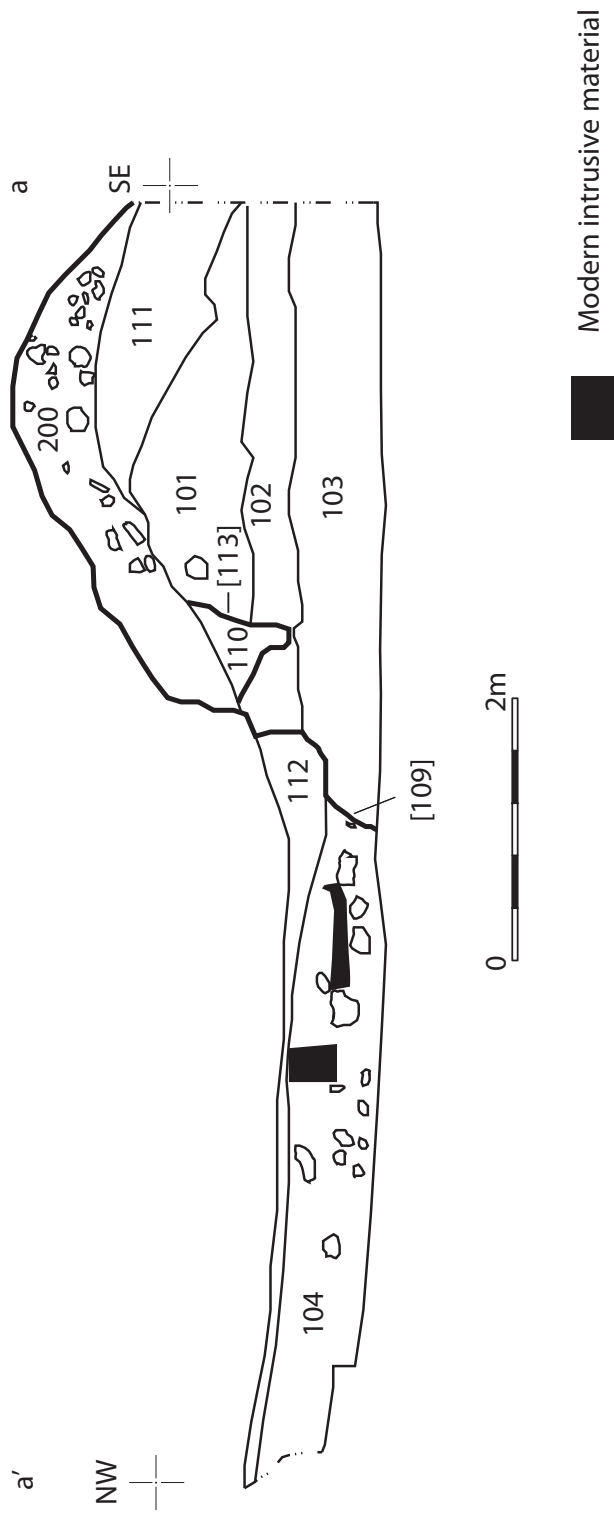


Fig. 3 North east facing section of plot showing truncated bank of Castell Caeron



Plate 1 General view of Pen y Castell Uchaf from the north-west



Plate 2 The development plot from the south-west



Plate 3 The south-west section showing the bank of Castell Caeron fort. Scale 2m with 50cm divisions



Plate 4 The north west section of the development plot

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