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# Land to the northwest of Tremadog (Llidiart Yspytty)

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## Archaeological Excavation and Watching Brief

**GAT Project No. 1736**

**Report No. 639**

**August 2006**

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# **Land to the northwest of Tremadog (Llidiart Yspytty)**

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**Report No. 639**

**Prepared for North West Wales NHS Trust**

**August 2006**

**By**

**John Roberts**

**Illustrations by Tanya Berks**

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## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AND WATCHING BRIEF

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# Land to the northwest of Tremadog (Llidiart Yspytty)

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## **Archaeological Excavation and Watching Brief: Land northwest of Tremadog, Llidiart Ysppyty (G1736)**

### **SUMMARY**

*A final phase of archaeological excavation and a watching brief has been undertaken in advance of the construction of the Porthmadog Community Hospital on land to the northwest of Tremadog (Llidiart Ysppyty). The excavation phase involved the investigation of features underlying a Romano-British corn drying kiln following removal of the masonry which had been left in situ after excavation of the feature in 2005. This revealed a set of converging stone-lined culverts cut into the colluvium, and a small clay hearth. These features were interpreted as a primary phase of activity associated with the corn-drying complex. The watching brief focussed on the eastern end of the development area, incorporating the corn drying complex and the route of the Gorseddau Tramway. No further activity was noted in the vicinity of the kiln. A section of the Gorseddau tramway was identified and recorded towards the eastern end of the site, but no further activity was identified.*

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

The North West Wales NHS Trust commissioned Gwynedd Archaeological Trust to undertake an archaeological excavation and watching brief in advance of the construction of the Porthmadog Community Hospital at Tremadog, Gwynedd. The development is centred on SH 557403 and the affected area is indicated on the site plan (Figure 1). The development area contains remains of 19<sup>th</sup> century ironstone mining, associated tramways and a toll road. Adjacent to the site is a Roman bathhouse (now buried beneath the garden of the adjoining house).

The development area falls within a designated Landscape of Historic Interest (HLW (Gw) 7 Aberglaslyn) and within Historic Landscape Characterisation Area 35, Llidiart Ysppyty (GAT Report 422).

An archaeological assessment was undertaken in May 2002 (GAT Report no. 455) and updated to take into account a revised layout in February 2004 (Hopewell and Gwyn 2004, GAT Report no. 519). Recommendations were made for evaluation and recording, which were undertaken in May and June 2004 (Davidson and Roberts 2004, GAT Report no. 546). Recommendations for mitigation following the evaluation work included excavation at two sites: a Romano-British corn-drying complex and the Gorseddau Tramway as well as detailed recording of other features, including an abandoned agricultural building (post-medieval). This was undertaken in January 2005 and the results of this mitigation work, including an illustrated site narrative, specialist reports on artefacts and environmental evidence, radiocarbon dates and a discussion of the importance of the site were published (Kenney 2006, GAT Report no. 626). A watching brief was subsequently undertaken while the infrastructure works were carried out on the access road and car park area at the western end of the development area (Roberts 2006 GAT Report no. 607).

The original intention with the corn-drying complex was to leave it intact with a view to moving it and incorporating it as a feature during the construction of the new hospital. As a consequence the features below the masonry were not fully excavated, and these were to be examined when the complex was to be moved. A decision was subsequently reached not to use the kiln as part of the design, but to remove the structure and investigate any extant features below. The removal of the kiln took place on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2006, and the features revealed beneath were excavated. This report contains the results of those excavations.

Following the completion of the excavation of the kiln complex, a watching brief was maintained during site clearance for the construction of the proposed building. The results of the watching brief are also given in this report.

### **2 SPECIFICATION AND PROJECT DESIGN**

The requirements for this phase of the project were to:

1. Monitor the clearance of the corn drying kiln, and excavate any structures or features revealed beneath the kiln.

2. Undertake a watching brief during clearance of the site for construction of the proposed new building.

### **3 METHODS AND TECHNIQUES**

#### The Excavation

The excavation was undertaken on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of April 2006. The aim was to complete the excavation of the corn drying complex identified during the excavation of the site by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust in January 2005 (Kenney 2006, GAT Report no. 626). The corn-drying complex was located in Trench 3 (cf. Figure 1) and a 180° wheeled excavator was used to mechanically remove the stonework that comprised the structure. The features identified below the corn drying complex were then cleaned and excavated by hand.

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust would like to thank *Porthmadog Services* for their help during the course of the excavation.

#### The Watching Brief

The watching brief was undertaken between the 24<sup>th</sup> April and the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 2006.

The aim of the watching brief was to monitor the removal of the topsoil prior to the start of groundworks for the community hospital. A watching brief had already been conducted during the groundworks for the haulage road and car park area between the 14<sup>th</sup> of April and the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 2005 at the western end of the site (Roberts 2006 GAT Report no. 607).

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust would like to thank John Parkinson and Mike Brennand of *Allenbuild* and Jason Edwards of *Jennings* for their help during the course of the watching brief.

### **4 TOPOGRAPHY**

The development area lies on a strip of pasture between the cliffs of Craig y Castell and the reclaimed estuary of Traeth Mawr, varying in altitude from c.10m to 30m OD (figures 1 and 2, plates 1 and 2). This formed part of the farm of Llidiart Ysptyty. A sharp break of slope forming a low cliff face in places separates the north and south parts of the site. The A487 runs below this along the south-western boundary of the site.

### **5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS**

#### **5.1 Archaeological and Historical Background**

A detailed history of the site has been compiled in the desk-top assessment report (Hopewell and Gwyn 2004). Finds of Mesolithic/Neolithic date were recovered during trial excavations on Y Bryn, 50m to the south of the development site in 1995 (Hopewell 1995). Bricks and human remains apparently dating from the Roman period were discovered in the vicinity of Llidiart Ysptyty c. 1810 and in 1876 workmen engaged in building a drain identified further remains. Excavations carried out in 1908 revealed a Roman structure with hypocausts, interpreted as a bath-house. Pottery indicated that this was used from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Breese and Anwyl 1909). This site is now preserved under the garden of a new house by the A487 south-east of the development site.

The establishment of a church dedicated to St Beuno in Penmorfa suggests a settlement in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, but otherwise there is no evidence for the area until the late 16<sup>th</sup> century when the name Llidiart Ysptyty is first recorded. The reference suggests that there was a route across Traeth Mawr and a landing point for a ferry boat here. The name, Llidiart Ysptyty, meaning 'gateway to the hospital', may have referred to a *hospitium* under the patronage of the Knights of St John or another order, but there is no other evidence for this. The discovery of skeletons by the road in 1820, later reburied in

Penmorfa church, may be connected with a *hospitium*. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century the name was applied to a farm, the farmhouse of which still stands to the north of the school. The connection of the name *castell* to this site almost certainly refers to the crags above rather than to a man-made castle or fort.

The estate of Tremadog was bought by William Alexander Maddocks in 1798 and he reclaimed Traeth Mawr to increase his land holdings by building an embankment at Porthmadog. The town of Tremadog developed on the reclaimed land, and Llidiart Ysppyty was severed from the sea. In 1810 the Caernarvonshire Turnpike Trust took over and improved the old road from Llidiart Ysppyty to Penmorfa and Caernarfon. This road ran through the middle of the development site, partially along what is now a farm track. However, in 1845 the Caernarfon road was rebuilt on its present alignment.

The craggy outcrop in the southern part of the site is composed of iron stone and this was mined, possibly from 1754, but certainly by 1770. The mine was at its most productive between 1839 and about 1850, but it had closed down by 1851. The first railway from the mine to Porthmadog was constructed in 1840-41. It ran from the northern side of the mine workings, south-east past Llidiart Ysppyty House. The line was subsequently relaid, probably in 1848, to run to the base of the workings, along the southern boundary of the site, abandoning the original line. However, to reach the top of the workings a loop of line was added. In 1855-7 the railway was completely rebuilt and extended from this curved loop to the north-west to give access to the Gorseddau Slate Quarry, some 3 miles to the north. The mine site, now closed down, continued to have a function as a station and slate yard on the Gorseddau tramway. By the 1860s the quarry had also closed, and in 1872-5 the railway was re-gauged and adapted for a locomotive running to Cwm Pennant, but this railway saw little use and was lifted before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## 5.2 Results of the Archaeological Excavation

The archive is held by GAT under the project number (G1736). It is the intention to deposit the project archive and all small finds with the Gwynedd Museum and Art Gallery, Bangor.

The excavation programme (2006) was a continuation of the work undertaken by the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust in May/June 2004 and January 2005. During the evaluation phase (May/June 2004) the remains of a stone structure was identified in Trench 3 (GAT Report no. 546). Trench 3 was extended during the excavation phase (January 2005) to locate the limits of the structure and the remains were investigated (GAT Report no. 626). The structure was identified as a Romano-British corn drier, comprising a rectangular stone structure with a T-shaped flue. At the northeastern corner of the corn drier were two ovens comprised of circular floors built from stone blocks set within clay. The ovens were thought to be contemporary with the corn-drying complex (GAT Report no. 626: 7). The excavation phase also identified below the corn-drying complex and ovens a line of large slabs up to 0.7m in length, interpreted as a possible pathway, and, to the east of the pathway, a stone-lined culvert joined to a shorter L-shaped culvert (*ibid.*).

The excavation phase described in this report was a continuation of the excavations undertaken in 2005. The aim was to remove the corn-drying complex and ovens to expose the full extent of the “pathway” and investigate the two culverts.

The area incorporating the T-shaped flue was removed first and revealed that the structure was built on shale-rich colluvium with no evidence of any previous activity (Plate 03). The area incorporating the circular ovens was subsequently removed, exposing the full length of the culverts and “pathway” (Figure 2; Plate 02).

The “pathway” comprised a series of flat sub-angular stones orientated northeast to southwest (Plate 04). Several of the stones were removed and found to be capping stones for a silted-up culvert, rather than part of a pathway. The base of the culvert was cut into a red-brown silt and lined with flat stones along the sides. It was subsequently designated as Culvert A (Figure 05; Plate 08).

The two culverts identified in the January 2005 excavation were cleaned and fully exposed. They were designated as Culverts B and C respectively (see Figure 02). Culvert B was orientated southwest to northeast, 4.00m in length and c.0.50m wide. Culvert C fed into Culvert B and was orientated northwest to southeast (Figure 02; Plate 07).

The base of Culverts A and B were cut into a deposit of red-brown silt. This red-brown silt appeared to be redeposited colluvium, possibly placed in this area to level off the slope of the hill prior to constructing the culverts. It was an isolated deposit not found below the T-shaped flue at the western end of the trench. The three culverts appeared to have been built together to form a herringbone pattern that would drain water from the slope and channel it away from the area. The subsequent watching brief of the entire area (described below; para. 5.3) did not reveal any other culverts joined to those in Trench 3. Their location directly under the corn-drying complex suggests they were laid as a part of the primary phase of construction for the kiln and ovens to alleviate an area of problematic drainage.

Partially covering Culverts A and B was a clay hearth (Figure 02). The hearth was located directly below one of the circular ovens identified during the 2005 excavation (Plate 02). The hearth was c.2.00m wide and 0.20m deep and comprised a thin layer of yellow clay, followed by a layer of charcoal-rich clay and a thin layer of heat reddened clay (Figure 09). The hearth, like the culverts, utilised the levelling deposit of red-brown silt. The fact that the location of the hearth matched that of one of the ovens from the corn-drying complex suggested that the two were related, with the hearth either representing the primary phase of the construction of the oven (as the stone “floor” of the oven was set into clay) or an earlier phase of corn-drying that was succeeded by the construction of the oven. The heat reddened surface of the hearth could have been caused by the oven.

Overall, the archaeology below the corn drying kiln suggested a primary phase of activity, which involved the construction of the culverts followed by a clay hearth. The latter feature is best interpreted as an earlier phase of corn-drying activity, though it could date from the construction phase of the ovens.

### **5.3 Results of the Archaeological Watching Brief**

The archive is held by GAT under the project number (G1736).

The watching brief was undertaken between the 24<sup>th</sup> April and the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 2006 and monitored the land strip of a trapezoidal shaped area approximately 1.05 ha in size (Figure 01). The area was formerly enclosed by a series of stone-built walls with a farm track to the south. An agricultural building and the southern boundary wall had already been demolished during the construction of the haulage road and the car park area, as had the western boundary wall. The north and east boundary walls were not affected by the development. The main focus of the watching brief was to monitor the areas that incorporated the Romano-British corn drying complex (Trench 3) and the route of the Gorseddau tramway. The former was located towards the base of a relatively steep northeast to southwest aligned slope, whilst the latter was located in a wetland area (Figure 2). The Romano-British corn drying complex had already been removed during the excavation phase, exposing the underlying culverts (see para. 5.2).

The bulldozer began stripping westwards from the northeast corner of the site. The depth of the strip down to the glacial clay averaged 500mm but was shallower on the crest of the slope at 200mm. This northern part of the site comprised a clay-rich glacial deposit with outcrops of shale rock head. A ceramic drain and a possible French drain were noted at the northwest corner of the site. The latter measured 200mm in width and the same in depth, with a fill of stones (sub-angular/irregular). It was not considered to be a field boundary wall as it was too narrow. Either way, it was interpreted as post-medieval. As the machine continued down the slope the subsoil changed to a red-brown shale-rich colluvium that matched the deposit identified in Trench 3 during the excavation phase. The stone-built culverts were removed: the stonework was stripped by the bulldozer and stockpiled at the southern end of the site prior to removal. No earlier features or any associated artefacts were found: the strip exposed the colluvium identified during the excavation phase. The strip continued into the marshland south of the Romano-British area, towards the 19<sup>th</sup> century tramway. This area was notably wetter as the run-off pooled here. The subsoil was a distinctive yellow-blue glacial clay.

Some indication of the tramway was given by a concentration of large sub-angular stones that could have been the backfill identified in Trench 09 during the 2005 excavation. However, there was limited evidence of this, due, in part, to the method of stripping and the extensive waterlogging in this area. The strip did not go deep enough to fully remove the “backfill” and confirm whether it was associated with the Gorseddau Tramway. When the marshland area was fully stripped it exposed what appeared to be the tramway line extending eastwards towards the primary school. A close inspection revealed that

the feature was c.2.0m wide but very shallow, c.0.10m, comprising a dark brown stone-rich deposit (stones were small and sub-angular). It did not have the depth or the inclusions to match the tramway activity recorded to the west during the 2005 excavation, but it did appear on the same alignment as both this and the OS map evidence. It is therefore possible that the tramway further west was upgraded to a higher specification

## 6 CONCLUSION

### The Excavation

The stone structures forming the T-shaped flue and the circular ovens were removed, exposing a network of stone-built culverts. A clay hearth was identified partially covering the culverts and was identified as a primary phase of corn drying activity. No artefacts were recovered.

### The Watching Brief

The aim of the watching brief was to identify any extraneous activity associated with the Romano-British corn drying complex as well as to identify the route of the tramway. There was no further activity associated with the corn drying complex; the surrounding area was limited to rock outcrops, glacial clay and colluvia. Prior to the watching brief, the route of the tramway was visible as an embankment running across the western end of the development area, passing through the middle of the site in a rock cutting and defined across the south-eastern part of the site as a terrace in the hill slope. The terrace was possibly an agricultural feature created by a level deposit of colluvium that was reused for the tramway. Trench 09 from the excavation phase (GAT Report 626) was placed across this terrace, locating the trackbed of the tramway built from deposits of shale. The trackbed was c.0.65m below ground level. On the flat surface of the trackbed were parallel lines up to 0.14m wide and between 0.33m and 0.38m apart which represented the position of timber sleepers for the tramway. The trackbed was sealed by c.0.40m of brown loam and large boulders, which was used to backfill the tramway cutting when it was abandoned. Little of this evidence was forthcoming during the watching brief phase and this was due in part to the methodology used: across the terrace, the bulldozer and 360° only stripped to just below the topsoil, so the buried trackbed was not uncovered. There was evidence of occasional large stone boulders running in a general easterly direction across the site and these were interpreted as the backfill of the tramway cutting. Towards the eastern end of the site, the line of the tramway was tentatively identified as a wide dark brown linear feature that stood out from the surrounding glacial clay. The linear feature was c.2.0m wide and extant for c.15.0m in length. The only disparity was the depth of the feature: it was very shallow, c.0.10m in depth, with no evidence for the shale trackbed or the wooden sleepers and in this sense did not match the evidence from Trench 09.

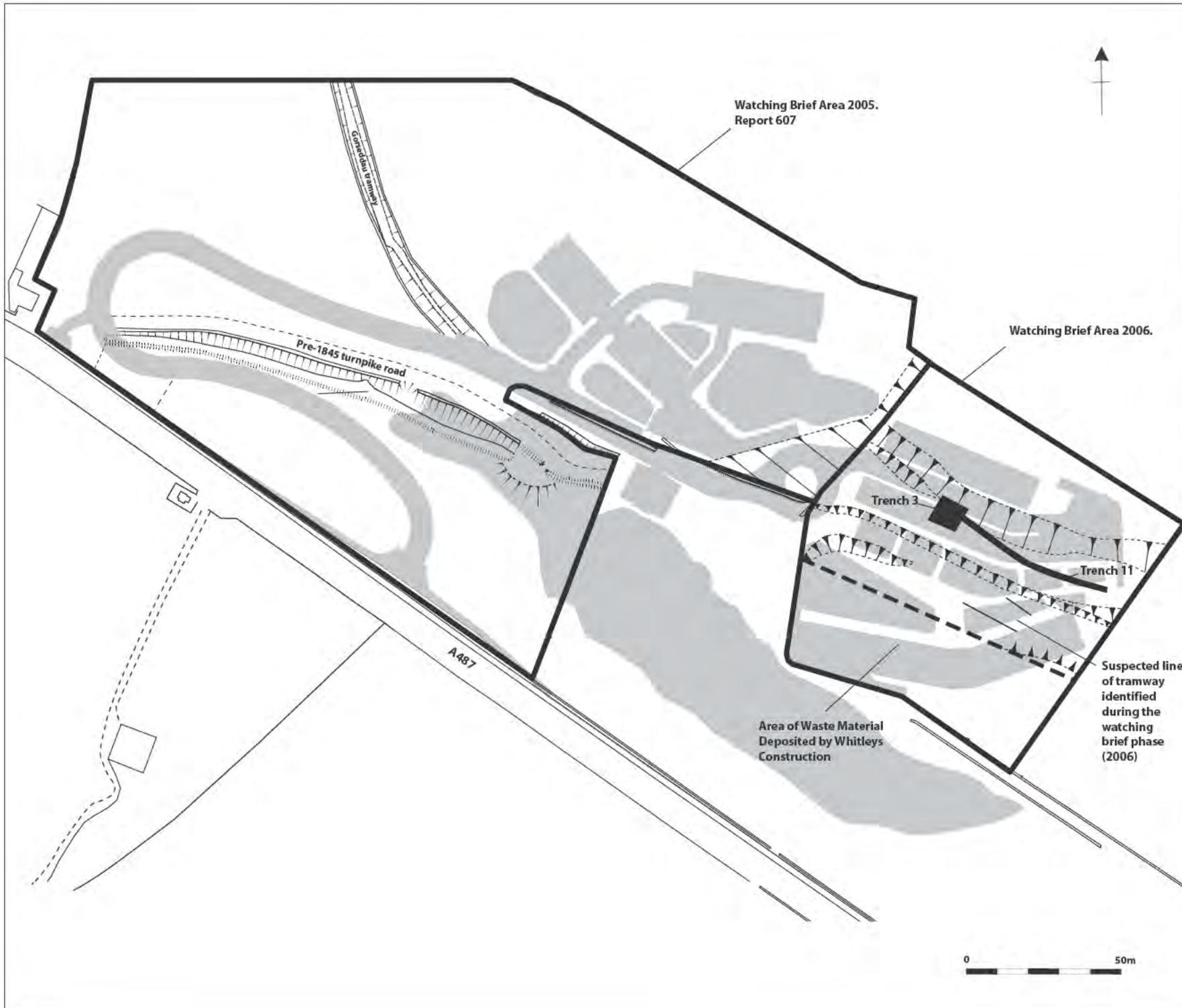
## 7 SOURCES CONSULTED

Davidson, A and Roberts, J, 2004, Land to the north-west of Tremadog (Llidiart Ysppyty):  
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Archaeological assessment.  
*Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Report No. 519*

Kenney, J, 2006, Land to the NW of Tremadog (Llidiart Ysppyty): archaeological excavation.  
*Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Report No. 626*

Roberts, J, 2005, Land to the NW of Tremadog (Llidiart Ysppyty): archaeological watching brief.  
*Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Report No. 607*



Proposed Development Area

YMERBODOLLETH  
ARCHAEOLOGOL  
GWYBODED



GWYBODED  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
TRUST

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Figure One. Location Map



- 2006 Excavation
- 2005 Excavation (Report 626)
- Two Romano-British Ovens
- Charcoal

YMDORIED OL AETH  
 ARCHAEOLÓGOL  
 GWYBIEDO

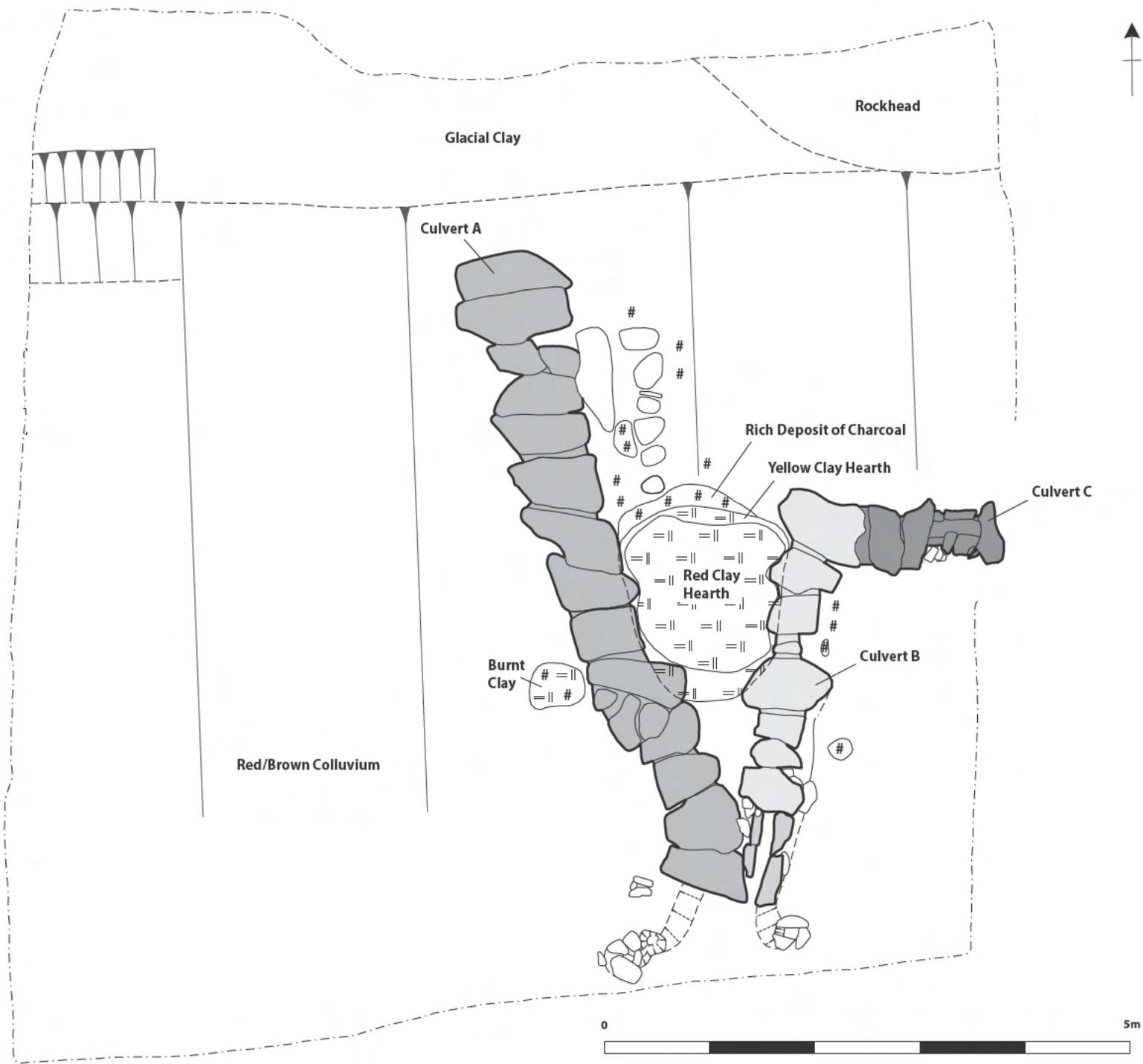


GWYBIEDO  
 ARCHAEOLÓGOL  
 TRUST

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**Figure Two. Trench 3. Features identified in 2006 excavation in relation to the corn-drying complex.**

SCALE: 1:50



-  Culvert A
-  Culvert B
-  Culvert C
-  Burnt Clay
-  Clay
-  Charcoal

YMDDORIEDOLAETH  
ARCHAEOLOGOL  
GWYNEDD



GWYNEDD  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
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**Figure Three. Trench 3. Series of culverts below corn-drying complex**

SCALE: 1:50

Figure 4. Trench 3. Culverts A-C and Clay Hearth Partially Removed.

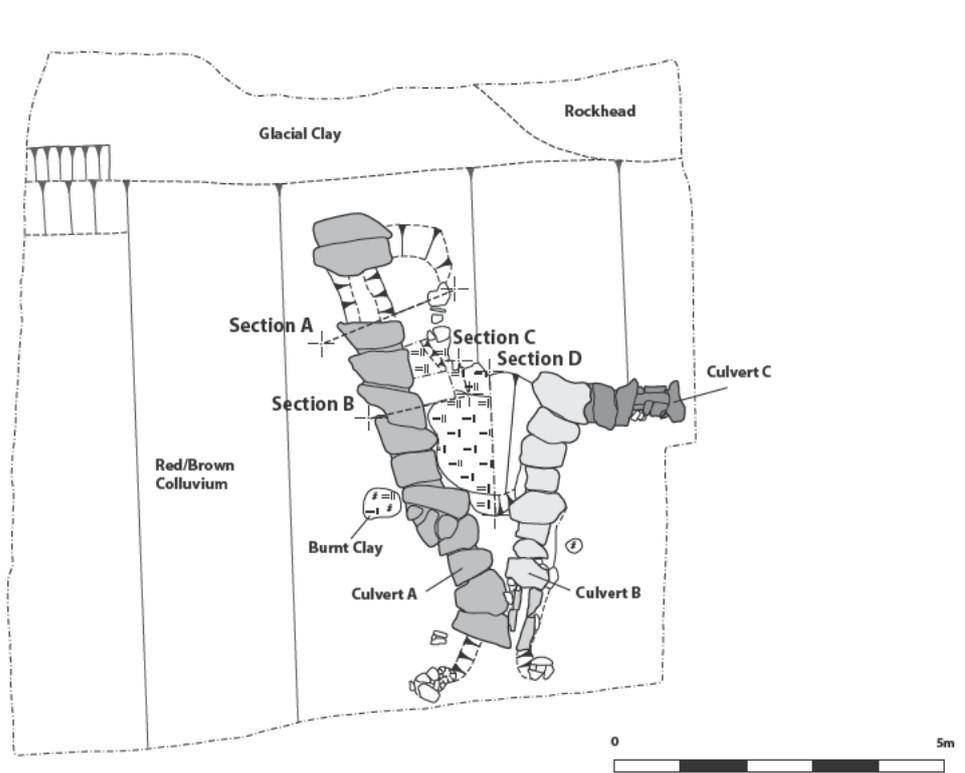
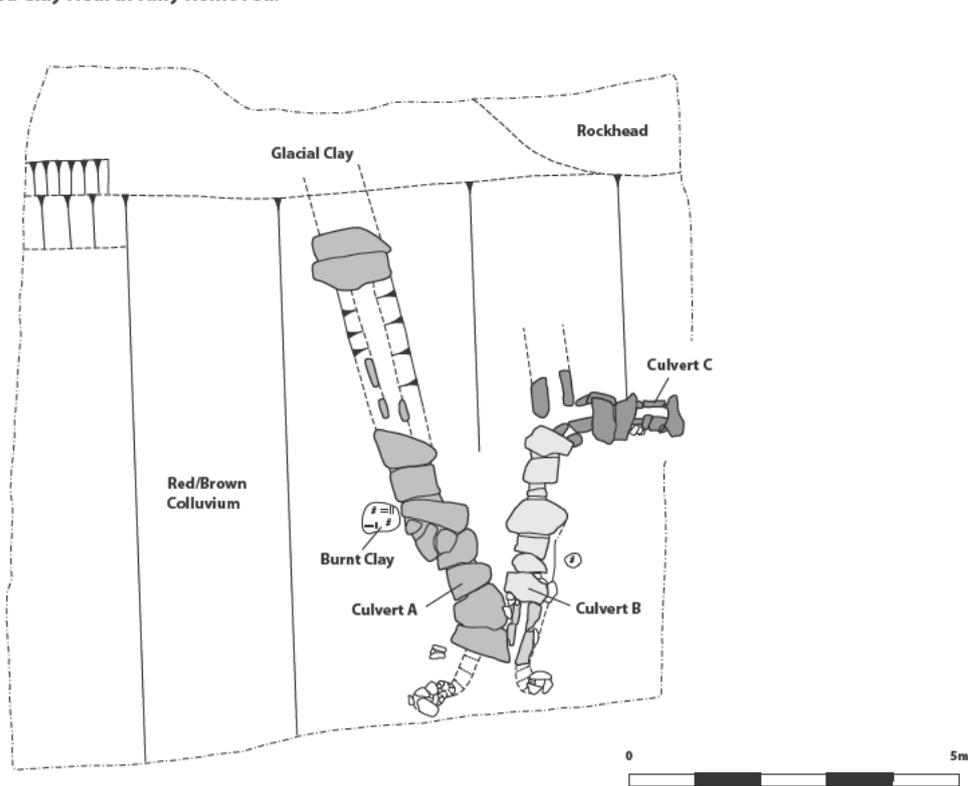


Figure 5. Trench 3. Culverts A-C and Clay Hearth fully Removed.



	Culvert A		Clay
	Culvert B	#	Charcoal
	Culvert C		
	Burnt Clay		

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Figures Four and Five. Culverts A-C

SCALE: 1:100

Figure 6. Section A

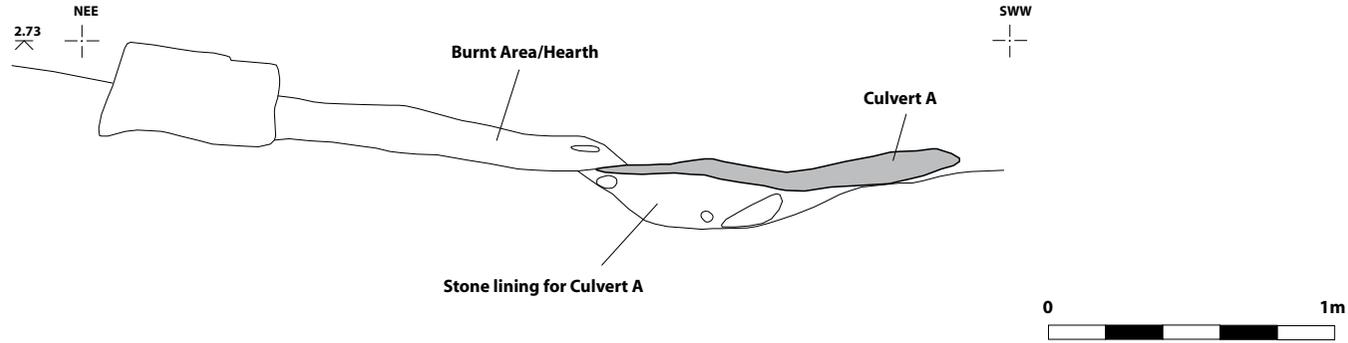


Figure 7. Section B

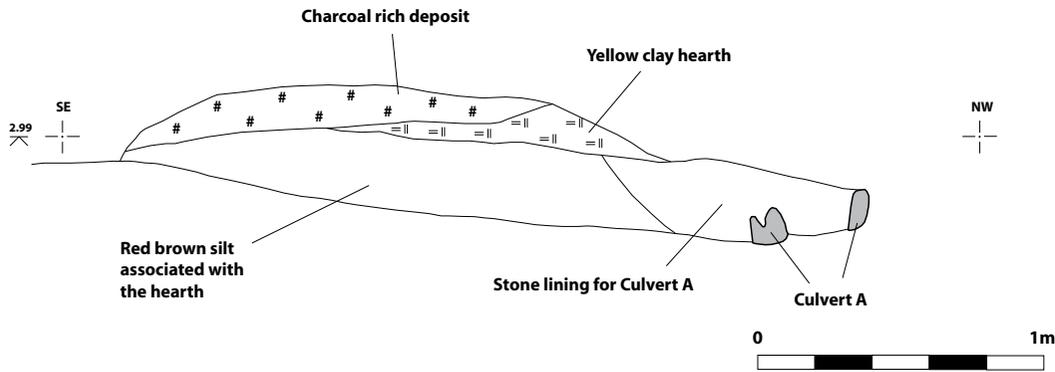


Figure 8. Section C

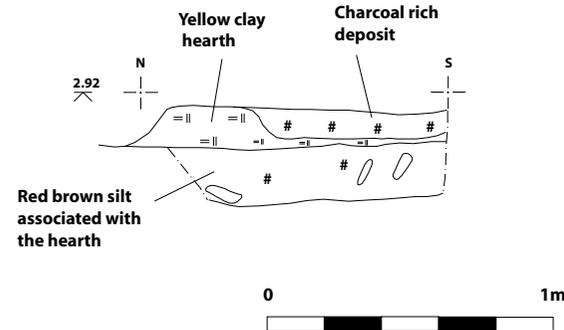
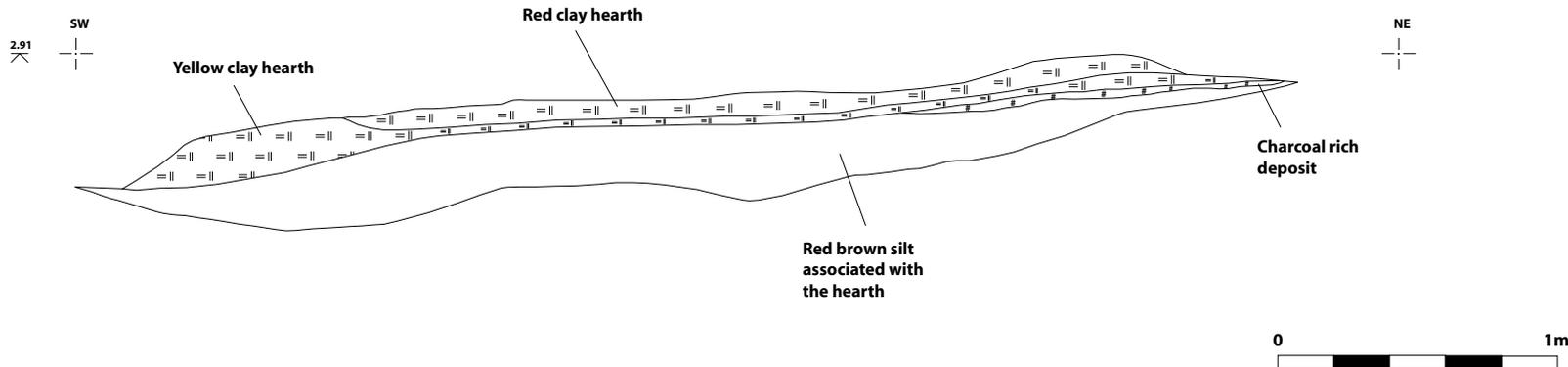


Figure 9. Section D



-  Culvert A
-  Clay
-  Charcoal



**Plate 01: East Facing View of Corn-Drying Complex Prior to Removal**



**Plate 02: Northeast Facing view of Corn-Drying Complex  
And Earlier Hearth During Removal**



**Plate 03: South Facing View of Culverts and Hearth During Removal Of the Corn-Drying Complex**



**Plate 04: South Facing View of Culverts and Hearth**



**Plate 05: Close-up of Hearth (Half-Sectioned)**



**Plate 06: Southwest Facing View Culverts and Hearth**



**Plate 07: Overhead shot of Converging Culverts B and C**



**Plate 08: Overhead shot of Culvert A**



**Plate 09: View South of Watching Brief Area; location of Corn-drying complex is in the Centre**



**Plate 10: Close-up of Corn-drying complex area during Watching Brief**



**Plate 11: View South of Watching Brief Area**



**Plate 12: View Northeast of Watching Brief Area**



**Plate 13: Location of Tramway within Watching Brief Area**



**Plate 14: View of Watching Brief Area Fully Stripped**



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