Conwy Valley Flood Alleviation Scheme:
Trefriw Borrow Pit

Archaeological Excavation

GAT Project No. 2104
Report No. 864
April, 2010

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Prepared for
The Environment Agency

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Summary

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust has carried out an excavation within the flood plain of the Conwy Valley at Trefriw in connection with ground works that formed part of the Dyffryn Conwy Flood Allieviation Scheme, on behalf of the Environment Agency. This also forms part of wider archaeological work associated with the scheme, carried out on both banks of the river Conwy.

A 48 square metre area, including the remaining fragment of a possible medieval track, or hollow way, was excavated to the north east of a recently excavated borrow pit. The track way was observed over a length of 11.9m, and was 3.4m wide. Evidence for wheel ruts cut into the natural glacial clay surface were observed. These appeared to have been filled in at a later date, probably during the 19th century, with gravel and clay, which probably represent phases of road surface improvement and in-filling of patches of damage. The road was replaced by a route along a straighter course before 1889, known as Gower Street, after which the area of the excavation reverted to pasture.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT) has been asked by The Environment Agency to undertake an archaeological excavation within the Conwy Valley flood plain during the Dyffryn Conwy Flood Alleviation Scheme. The aim was principally to excavate what remained of a former road (NGR SH 7821 6294), replaced by Gower Road in the later part of the 19th century, consisting of an area 12m by 4m, lying adjacent to a borrow pit for the flood alleviation works that had already been constructed.

The borrow pit is to be located within two fields off Gower Road, Trefriw, as indicated on Figure 1. This formed part of a wider scheme of archaeological work associated with the Dyffryn Conwy Valley Flood Alleviation Scheme, including work on three demountable trenches within Llanrwst itself (Berks 2007; Evans, forthcoming). These areas of archaeological significance were identified in the archaeological assessment of the area (Davidson 2005).

An archaeological evaluation of the wider area of the borrow pit was carried out during February 2009, which involved the excavation of two trenches, including one across the former road (Kenney 2009). This evaluation, although a cross-section across the road was not fully cut and no direct dating evidence was uncovered, identified that the there was a reasonable probability that the track had a medieval origin, and recommended further excavation work on the track way (Kenney 2009, 6).

1.1 Acknowledgements

The assistance of Ashley Batten of Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service (GAPS) and Ed Wilson, Environment Agency Archaeologist, is gratefully acknowledged. The staff of the contractors, *May Gurney* who provided the plant for the excavation and carried out the topsoil strip, are also thanked for their help.

2. SPECIFICATION AND PROJECT DESIGN

There was no specific brief for this work. The work undertaken followed a previously agreed project design and conforms to the guidelines specified in *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavation* (Institute of Field Archaeologists, 1994, rev. 2001). The work was monitored by the Environment Agency, with recommendations given by the Senior Archaeologist, National Environmental Assessment Service (West Team), along with Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service (GAPS). The archaeological excavation was carried out following a recommendation to record the track if the location of the borrow pit could not avoid it and to test the nature of the deposits in the area and the survival of archaeological remains (Kenney 2009, 6).

3. METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

3.1 Introduction

The excavation of the remaining area of the road way to the north east of the recently constructed borrow pit was carried out on 17th and 18th September 2009, after the construction of the borrow pit had been almost completed and most of the track way had been removed. The area lay to the south of the current Gower Street, close to the point where the old route way crossed the line of the current road (Figs. 1 and 2).

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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 the scale drawings and a photographic record was maintained. The locations of the deposits were surveyed and related to the nearest Ordnance Survey bench mark.

The work followed an archaeological evaluation carried out in February 2009 in the area of the current borrow pit, when two trenches were excavated which revealed the depth and nature of the natural deposits, and the hollow way was identified as an earthwork and evaluated archaeologically (Kenney 2009, Fig. 2). The excavation area lay about 60m east of the evaluation trenches, and the new excavation area was called trench 3.

3.2 Work Method

Excavation

An area 12m long by 4m wide, being the only surviving element of the former meandering track way which preceded that known as the Gower Road, and shown on the tithe map of 1840 (Fig.2) was excavated. Much of the length of the road had been destroyed by the construction of a borrow pit (Fig.1), and the excavation was carried out over the remaining small north east portion of the site, covering an area of approximately 48m^2. The topsoil was stripped with a 360 degree excavator down to the level at which the archaeological deposits were observed.

The excavation area was cleaned by hand tools onto the archaeological deposits and planned in relation to the whole site and a scale plan at a scale of 1:50 drawn (Fig. 3). Two sections were cut across the observed track way and sections of these were drawn at a scale of 1:10 (Fig. 4)

Reporting and archiving

This report describes the results of the evaluation and presents a description and interpretation of features and deposits recorded. A full list of contexts and their descriptions, including the earthworks, is given in appendix I. The archive consists of context sheets and other site notes, field drawings, survey data and 41 digital images. The archive is currently held at GAT under project code **G1877** but the digital archive and a copy of the report will be sent to the National Monument Record, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales, Aberystwyth.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The following brief summary draws significantly on Davidson 2005.

The medieval town of Trefriw was one of the courts of the Welsh Princes, and according to tradition the church was built there in c. 1230 by Llywelyn ap Iorwerth (Pennant 1781, 154). During the 13th and 14th centuries Trefriw was the established market town for the commote of Nantconwy (Lewis 1912, 180 and 194).

Trefriw is located within the tidal reaches of the River Conwy, and the river trade was important from the medieval period through the 16th to 18th centuries, when timber and lead ore were shipped, to the

19th century when passengers as well as industrial products were carried (Jones 1952, 127; Evans 1989).

GAT has previously conducted an archaeological assessment of the Dyffryn Conwy Flood Alleviation Scheme (Davidson 2005: GAT Report 618), which highlighted all sites of archaeological importance within the area. The report did not identify any known archaeological features within the fields that the drainage ditch is to cross. It does, however identify Gower Road, built in the second half of the 19th century, as the route of an earlier trackway. This was potentially, "one of the earliest tracks leading from Trefriw to the ford (later bridge) across the Conwy at Llanrwst, and perhaps medieval or earlier in origin" (Davidson, 2005: 10; Ref. No. C7). The early track was not straight like Gower road and curved first south, then north of the present road line; the southern curve coming within the area of the borrow pit. This early road is shown on the 1840 tithe map for Trefriw.

The First Edition 25" Ordnance Survey Map of Trefriw shows the parish boundary running along the hedge in the middle of the site. The north-eastern end of this boundary curves and can be seen to follow the line of the earlier road. The south-western end of the boundary is also shown on the tithe map and the odd curve was used to join these two boundaries together and cut off a sharp corner that had existed previously.

GAT also conducted a series of watching briefs during the borehole/test pit phase of the Dyffryn Conwy Flood Alleviation Scheme (GAT Reports 622 and 696). The test pits within the area of the evaluation trench/drainage ditch were monitored in September 2007 (GAT Report 696). A total of eight test pits were monitored. No archaeological activity was identified within the confines of the test pits: the topsoil was extant to an average depth of *c*.0.40m, followed by a series of alluvial and/or glacial deposits.

An evaluation was carried out in the vicinity of the excavation on 18th February 2009 (Kenney 2009). The aim was principally to evaluate the line of a proposed drainage ditch within an area to be used as a borrow pit for the flood alleviation works. It was clear that there were earthworks in the northern field that required evaluation. It was therefore decided that the northern trench (trench 1) should be 20m in length and this was orientated across, rather than along, the proposed line of the drainage ditch to better explore the earthworks. The trench in the southern field (trench 2) was located on the route of the drainage ditch just south of the field boundary. It was not possible to locate it closer to the field boundary as the hedge was being felled and it was necessary to work around the tree felling work that was being carried out .The evaluation also provided information on the wider area of the borrow pit. The borrow pit is located within two fields off Gower Road, Trefriw (NGR SH 7821 6294), as indicated on Figure 1. The evaluation demonstrated the depth and nature of deposits along the route of the drainage ditch and these could be tentatively be extended to most of the area of the borrow pit. A drainage ditch of unknown, but probably fairly late date was identified, but the most significant archaeology was uncovered in the north-western part of the borrow pit. This represented a track and contemporary field boundaries, which were still clearly visible as earthworks, and could be seen on the tithe map of 1840 (Fig. 2). The track was not fully sectioned in the evaluation and no dating evidence was recovered.

There is a reasonable possibility that the track had a medieval origin, and the evaluation excavations revealed it to be well preserved beneath the visible earthworks (Kenney 2009).

5. RESULTS OF THE EXCAVATION

5.1 Description

The natural subsoil was noted to be a mixture of glacial clays. A small patch of morainic drift (302) was observed in the north west corner of the stripped area, and two patches of silty clay with small gravel and stones (305 and 315). These form part of the glacial drift geology of the site. The latter two of these contexts are cut by the hollow way [303]. This was observed for a length of 11.9m within the stripped area, where it measured 3.4m wide and extended to a depth of 0.34m. It appears to be a track way worn through the morainic drift and glacial gravels, with a gentler slope on the south side than to the north (Fig. 3, Plate 1). The surface of the hollow way had a very compact nature, particularly towards the centre, within which was a probable wheel rut [312], about 0.15m wide and 0.05m deep. This was filled with compact gravel (311=308), which was probably an attempt to fill the rut. A patch

of clay (316), about 1.5m by 1.3m, was found within, but later than, the gravel surface. This is perhaps best interpreted as a repair patch within the road surface.

The truncated remains of a clay bank (309), 0.4m wide, was noted running along the north side of the hollow way. Adjacent to this was a gravel band 3.5m long, by 0.25m and 0.06m deep. This is possibly the fill of a drainage channel along the edge of the road.

In Trench 3a (Fig.4, Plate 2) iron pan (307) was observed in the base of the hollow way. This lay below a compacted gravel fill (306). This probably represents a period of consolidation of the hollow way surface. This was overlain by a mid greyish brown silty clay fill (304), which in turn was overlain by a mid orangy brown silty clay (314). This lay beneath the mid orangy brown silty clay topsoil (301).

5.2 Finds

Number	Context	Site Subdivision	Material	Description
1	316	Trench 3b	Fired Clay	Pipe Stem (0.21m long)
2	311	Trench 3b	Carbonised Twig	*Ilex* (Holly)

5.3 Interpretation

The exposed area seems to represent the remains of a hollow way [303] that crossed the site, and is shown on the tithe map of 1840, cut into the natural glacial clays (302,305,315). It appears to have been worn by the passing of traffic, to a depth of 0.34m into the glacial clay

The hollow way appears to have been in-filled with a number of later deposits, probably attempts to stabilise the carriageway surface (306,308,311), and later to repair it (313,314,316) in various phases. No dating evidence was obtained from most of the material that filled the hollow way (304,306,307,308,314), although material was recovered from two contexts.

The single clay pipe stem recovered from the clay repair patch (316) suggests that this repair was of late date. The recovery of a single twig of *Ilex* (Holly) from context (311) is highly suggestive of hedgerow material (EPS *pers. comm.*) which got into the compact road surface material, once the hedgerow either side of the track way (Kenney 2009) had developed. Neither find is suggestive of a pre 19th century date for the infilling of the hollow way.

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The remaining north east portion of the road predating Gower Street, not removed by the creation of the borrow pit, covering an area of about 48 square metres was excavated. The hollow way road was noted over a length of about 11.9m , and to be 3.4m wide and up to 0.34m deep, having been created by traffic wearing away the surface over many years, and to be possibly medieval in origin. In more recent times, possibly in the 19th century, the road surface was stabilised with gravel and clay, with a large pothole being later filled with clay in the 19th century. By the time of the 1st Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey Map of 1889 the road had been replaced by the straighter Gower Street (Kenney 2009, Fig. 2), so all the infilling and patching must predate this time. After this the area reverted to pasture.

7. SITE ARCHIVE

The site archive consists of 16 context sheets, one A2 sheet containing a plan of the site drawn at a scale of 1:50 and two sections drawn at a scale of 1:10, and 26 digital images. They are currently held by GAT under project code **G1877.**

8. SOURCES CONSULTED

7.1 Primary Sources

Tithe map for Trefriw c. 1840
Ordnance Survey County Series Caernarvonshire Sheet XIV.13, First edition 1889

7.2 Secondary Sources

Berks, T. 2007. *Dyffryn Conwy Flood Alleviation Scheme: Archaeological Watching brief* (GAT Report 696)

Davidson, A. 2005. *Dyffryn Conwy Flood Alleviation Scheme: Archaeological Assessment* (GAT Report 618)

Evans, J. R., 1989 'The Trefriw Steamers, 1847-1940', *Aberconwy Historical Society Transactions*, 13-17.

IFA. 2001. *Institute of Field Archaeologists 2001 Standard and Guidance for an archaeological excavation.* http://www.archaeologists.net/

Jones, E. G., 1952 (ed.) *A description of Caernarvonshire 1809-11 by E. Hyde Hall*.

Kenney, J. 2009 *Conwy Valley Flood Alleviation Scheme: Trefriw Borrow Pit. Report on an Archaeological Evaluation* (unpublished GAT Report No. 784)

Lewis, E.A. 1912, *The Medieval Boroughs of Snowdonia*.

Pennant, T., 1781 *Journey to Snowdon*

Roberts, J. 2006. *Dyffryn Conwy Flood Alleviation Scheme: Archaeological Watching Brief* (GAT Report 622)

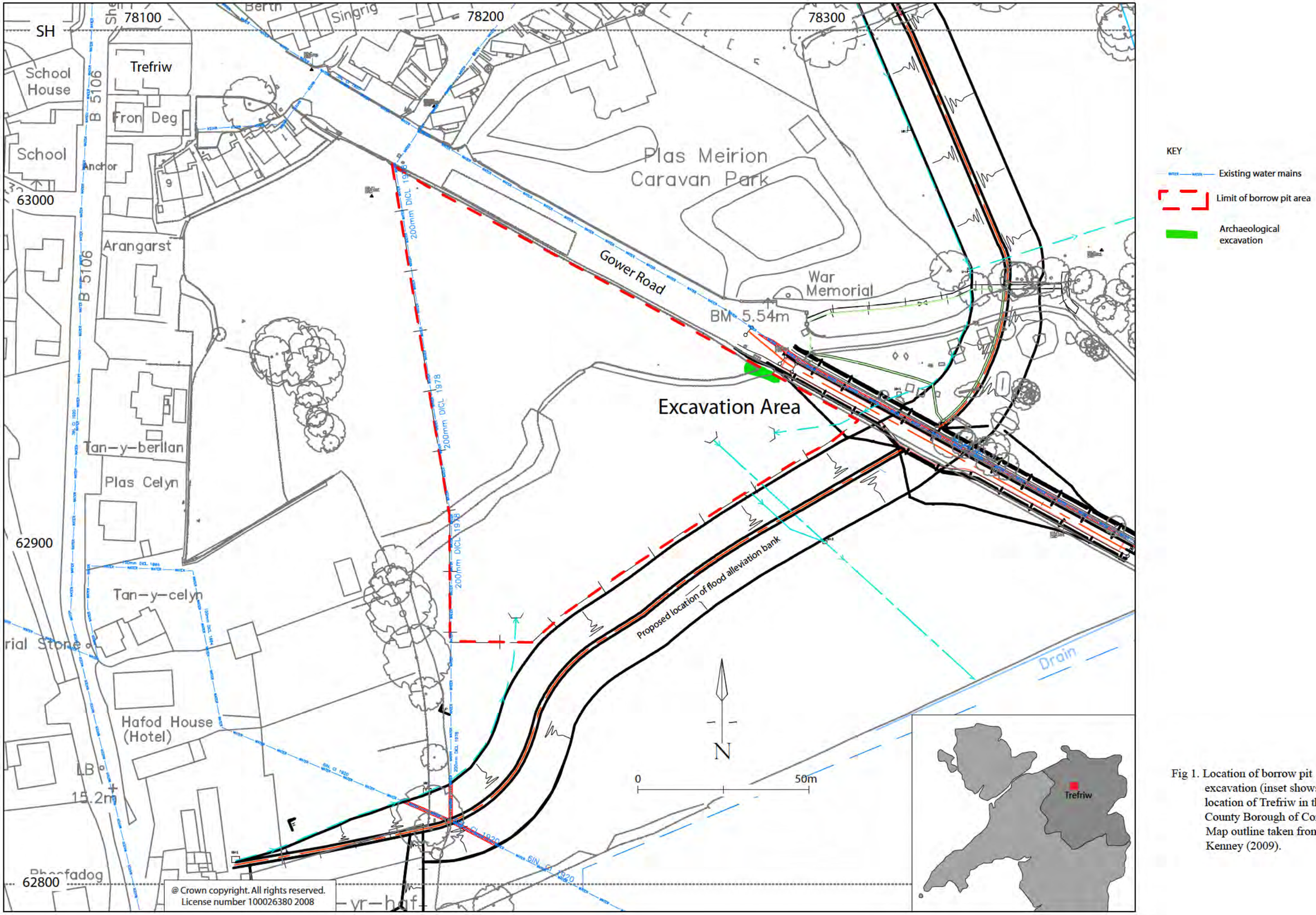

Fig 1. Location of borrow pit excavation (inset shows location of Trefriw in the County Borough of Conwy) Map outline taken from Kenney (2009).

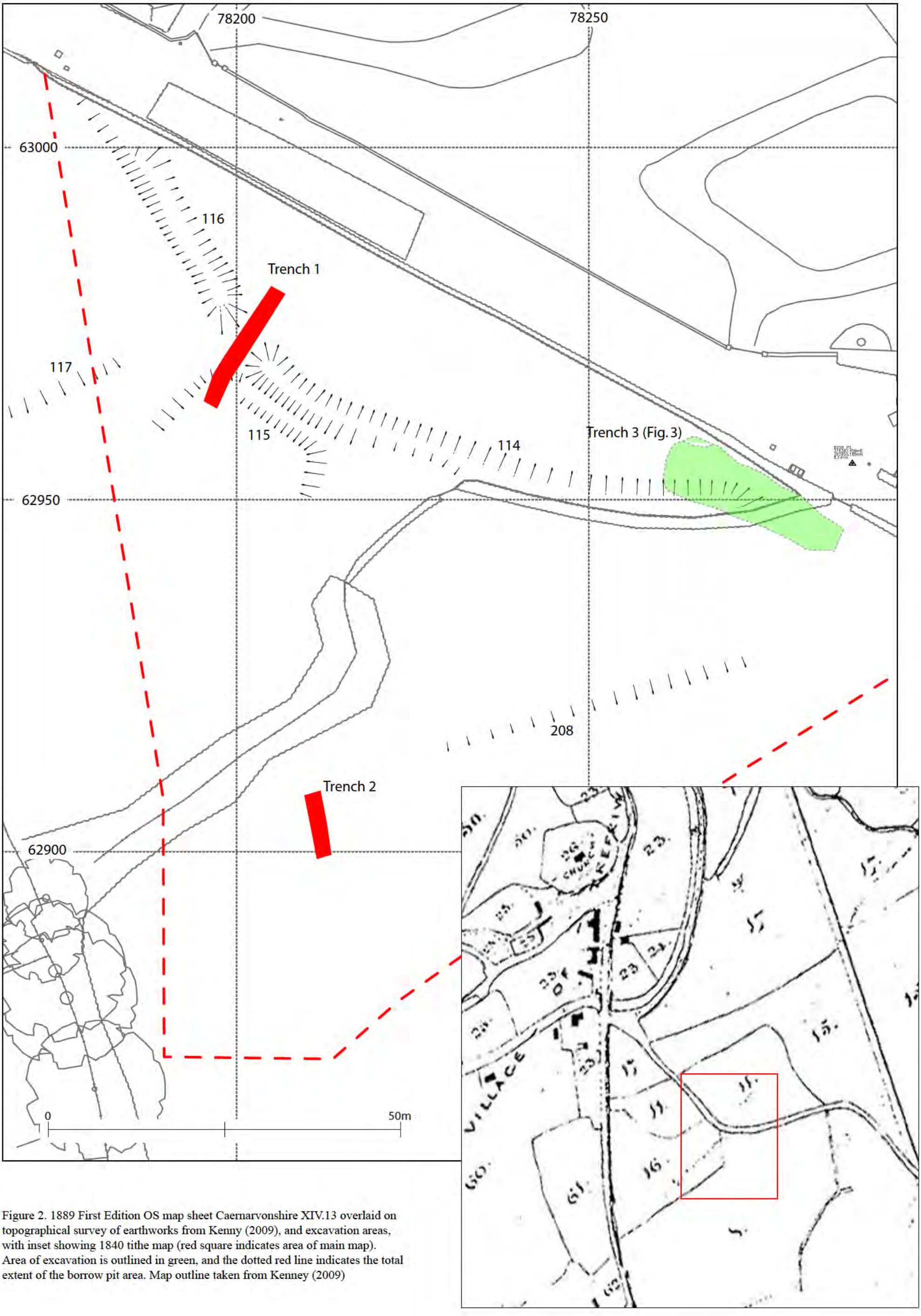

Figure 2. 1889 First Edition OS map sheet Caernarvonshire XIV.13 overlaid on topographical survey of earthworks from Kenny (2009), and excavation areas, with inset showing 1840 tithe map (red square indicates area of main map). Area of excavation is outlined in green, and the dotted red line indicates the total extent of the borrow pit area. Map outline taken from Kenney (2009)

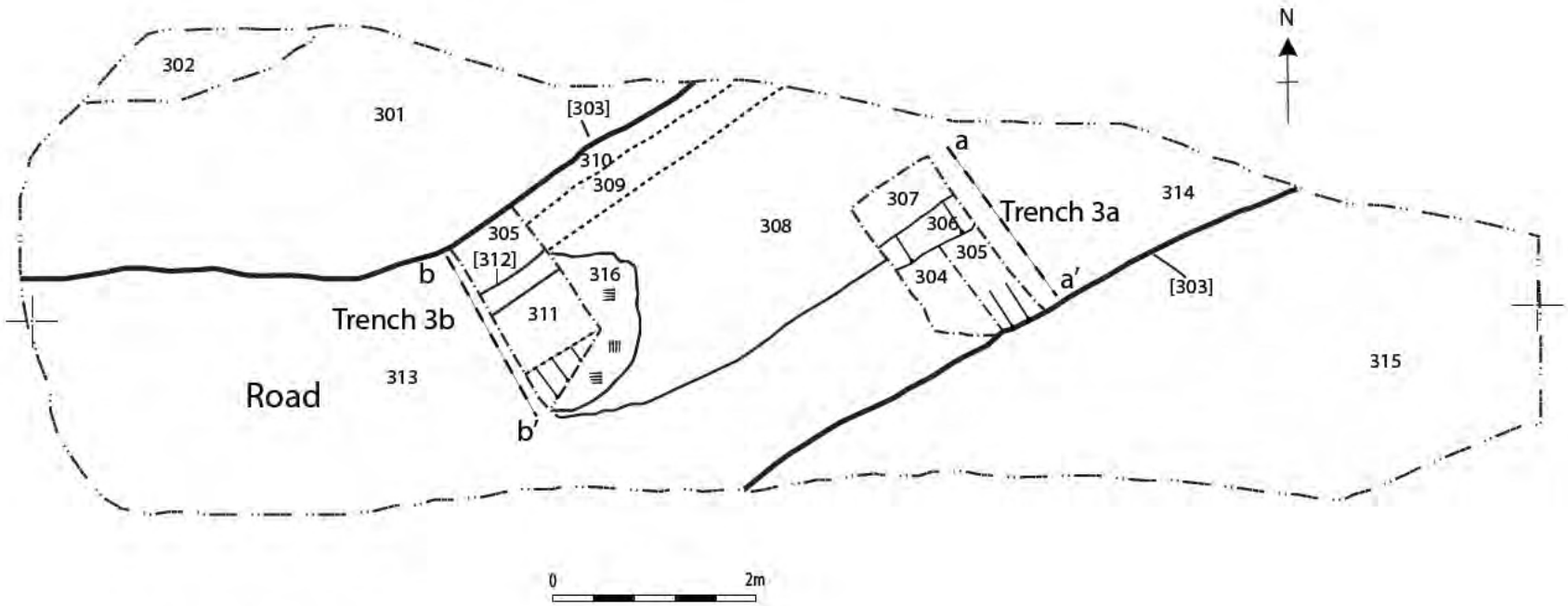

Fig. 3 Plan of excavation area

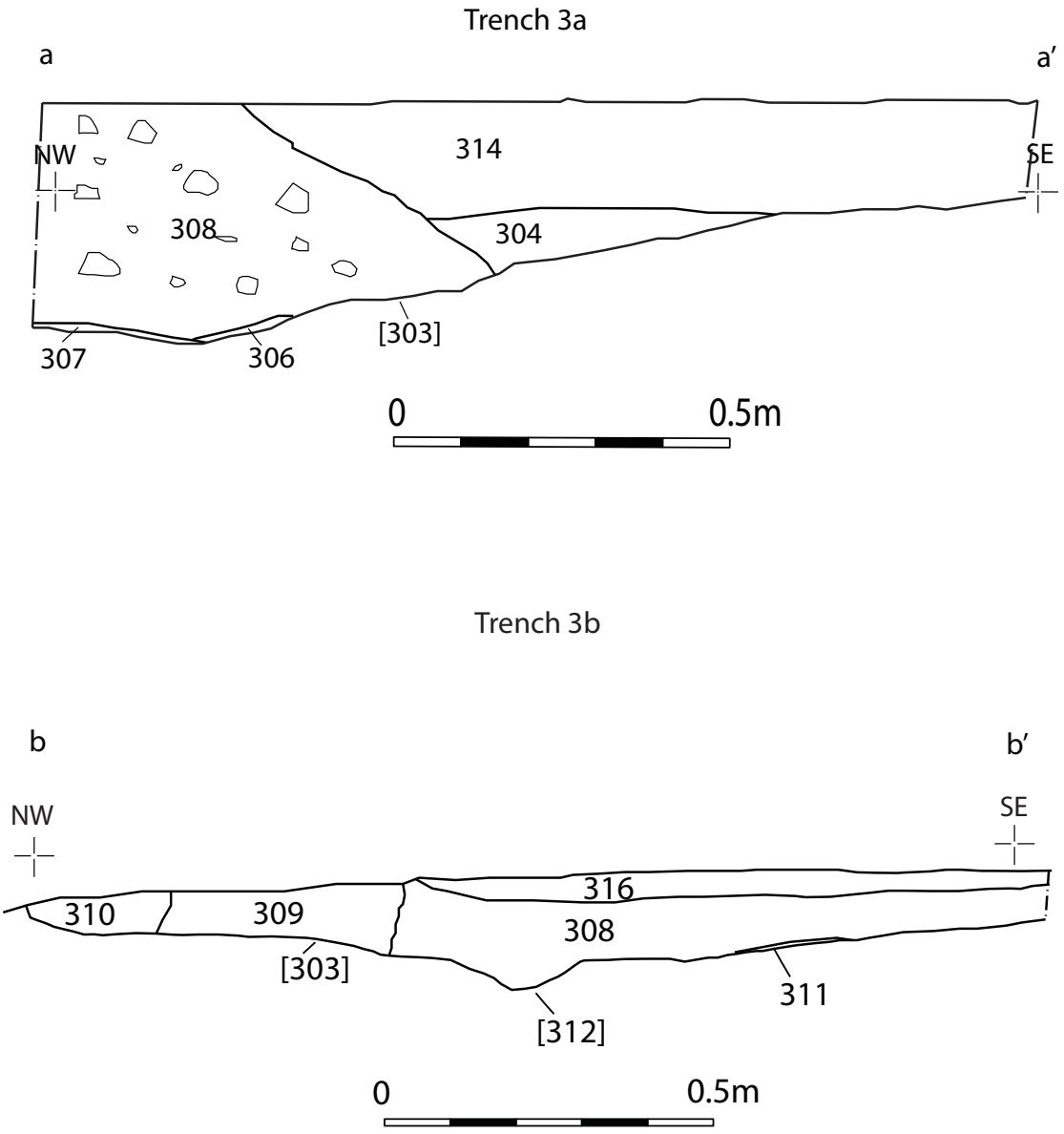

Fig. 4 South-west facing sections cut through road [303]

Plate 1 Pre-excavation image showing surviving stretch of road to north-east of borrow pit

Plate 2 Post-excavation view of Trench 3a from the south-east

Plate 3 Post-excavation view of Trench 3b from the south east

Plate 4 General view of the excavations from the east

APPENDIX I

Context List

301	Mid orangy brown silty clay, containing small rounded stones and gravel. The site topsoil
302	Light orangy brown clay with gravel, a patch of moronic drift
303	Number given to the hollow track way, seen over a length of 11.9m, 3.4m wide and up to 0.34m deep
304	Mid greyish brown silty clay fill of [303] , with small rounded stones and gravel inclusions
305	Mid orangy brown silty clay, probably glacial. Compacted as it formed the side of the hollow way
306	Mid greyish brown compacted silty gravel hollow way infill
307	Bright reddish brown iron pan with gravel at the base of the hollow way, seen in trench 3a
308	Mid greyish brown silty gravel within hollow way
309	Mid orangy grey silty clay bank along the north side of the hollow way
310	Light brownish grey silty gravel band along the north side of the hollow way. Possible fill of drainage channel along the north edge of the road
311	Compact dark greyish brown gravel surface within hollow way. The compaction was probably caused by wheel ruts
312	Possible wheel rut in compacted surface
313	Mid orangy brown silty clay with high proportion of stony gravel. This appears to be a hollow way backfill
314	Mid orangy brown silty clay, a hollow way backfill
315	Mid orangy brown glacial silty clay, cut by the hollow way
316	Mid yellowish brown firm silty clay, overlying grave deposit (308). It is possibly a patch of repair within road surface

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