

CPAT Report No. 1434

Powis Castle East Front



Building Survey and Watching Brief



YMDDIRIEDOLAETH ARCHAEOLEGOL CLWYD-POWYS

CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Client name: National Trust
 CPAT Project No: 2077
 Project Name: Powis Castle East Front
 Grid Reference: SJ 2158 0647
 County/LPA: Powys
 CPAT Report No: 1434
 Event PRN: 140124
 Report status: Final
 Confidential: No

Prepared by:	Checked by:	Approved by:
Nigel Jones Principal Archaeologist		
Will Logan Project Archaeologist	Paul Belford Director	Paul Belford Director
14 July 2016	15 July 2016	15 July 2016

Bibliographic reference:

Jones, N. W. and Logan, W., 2016. *Powis Castle East Front: Building Survey and Watching Brief*.
 CPAT Report No. 1434.

Cover photograph: North-east facing cross section through the curtain wall.



YMDDIRIEDOLAETH ARCHAEOLEGOL CLWYD-POWYS
 CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

41 Broad Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7RR, United Kingdom

+44 (0) 1938 553 670

trust@cpat.org.uk

www.cpat.org.uk

©CPAT 2016



The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust is a Registered Organisation
 with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists

CONTENTS

SUMMARY	2
1 INTRODUCTION	3
2 BACKGROUND	4
3 BUILDING SURVEY	6
4 WATCHING BRIEF	7
5 CONCLUSIONS	11
6 REFERENCES	12
7 ARCHIVE DEPOSITION STATEMENT	12
APPENDIX 1: SITE ARCHIVE.....	16

Summary

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust undertook a programme of archaeological recording on behalf of National Trust in connection with changes to the East Front of Powis Castle, near Welshpool, Powys. The work related to the removal of a section of retaining wall surrounding the Old Bowling Green in order to create a new access for visitors adjacent to the kitchen wing of the castle. The work involved producing a detailed record of the section of retaining wall and a watching brief during the removal of a 7.5m-long section.

The results revealed the remains of a substantial masonry wall which is believed to have been the medieval curtain wall surrounding the bailey. Although much disturbed by excavations for modern services substantial sections of the wall survived. The external face had been removed and replaced by the later retaining wall, which had been bonded onto the medieval corework.

The curtain wall survived to a height of around 1.8m and would originally have been around 3m wide. The inner face of the wall consisted of worked, closely-laid stonework laid in rough courses, while the corework was of lime-mortared rubble. The medieval wall continued beneath the 18th-century kitchen wing of the castle, the foundations of which had been butted against it, and extended further to the north-east, presumably continuing around the circuit of the former bailey.

The discoveries add further weight to the results from a geophysical survey of the Old Bowling Green in 2002, which revealed a broad anomaly around the edge of the area, which is likely to be the continuation of the curtain wall. The survey also identified a square building, possibly a tower, the foundations for which were uncovered in an evaluation in 2015.

The results suggest that the wall may have been built across a substantial ditch surrounding the medieval keep, the presence of which was suggested by the geophysical survey, while a rock-cut ditch is clearly visible in front of the gatehouse tower on the north-east side of the castle, when viewed from the side opposite the Old Bowling Green.

1 Introduction

- 1.1. The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust was invited by Kathy Laws, Archaeologist, Ymddiriedolaeth Genedlaethol/National Trust, to undertake a programme of archaeological recording and a watching brief in connection with changes to the East Front of Powis Castle, near Welshpool, Powys.



Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2016

Figure 1. Powis Castle location

- 1.2. The East Front Project is intended to deliver an enhancement in the repair and conservation of the fabric of the East Front and its adjacent structures, as well as improved understanding, access and interpretation. The archaeological work was undertaken in accordance with a brief (P/2015/0601) prepared by the National Trust.
- 1.3. All archaeological work was conducted according to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' (CIfA) *Standard and Guidance for the Archaeological Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings or Structures* (2014) and *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (2014).

2 Background

- 2.1. The original date of construction of Powis Castle is unknown. While early accounts refer to events taking place at a castle in this area in the twelfth century, the presence of two other castle sites nearby, Domen Castle in Welshpool and Lady's Mount within Powis Castle Park, confuse the issue. It does seem that there was a castle on the site by the thirteenth century, with earliest references to a park and garden dating to the 16th century.
- 2.2. The historic development of the east front of Powis Castle has been described in some detail elsewhere (Gallagher 2015, Roseveare and Roseveare 2002). In summary, the earliest cartographic evidence is dated to 1629 and shows the castle at that date as a square structure with a bailey to both east and west. The eastern bailey is defined by a substantial wall with towers flanking a potential gateway to the east. Drawn views of the east front dating to 1684 suggest that major alterations to this approach to the castle have taken place, with a series of formal gated enclosures and stairways leading to the main east entrance to the castle itself. A raised terrace is also evident. This is all presumed to occupy the area of the eastern bailey defined on the 1629 plan. By 1752 the raised terrace, the steps, and the enclosure now known as the bowling green, are in place on a measured plan essentially as seen today.
- 2.3. A geophysical survey carried out over a wide area adjacent to the east front in 2002 included both the High Terrace Lawn and the Old Bowling Green Lawn. The survey on the High Terrace gave readings which indicated changes to its construction along its length. The survey on the Old Bowling Green Lawn (Fig. 2) revealed some significant anomalies which the surveyors thought had the potential to represent features relating to the lay out of the medieval castle (Roseveare and Roseveare 2002). These anomalies had not been tested archaeologically.
- 2.4. An archaeological evaluation (Pitt and Watson 2015) of the Old Bowling Green Lawn in March 2015 comprised four trenches to test three geophysical anomalies interpreted by the surveyors as the medieval defensive ditch of the castle, a mural tower and the medieval curtain wall (Fig. 2). Undisturbed archaeological deposits were identified within all four trenches at a depth of approximately 0.40m below the current ground level.
- 2.5. Trenches 1 and 2 revealed deposits that can be attributed to the 19th/20th centuries although one sherd of mottled ware dated to between 1690-1760, was found within a linear feature cutting across Trench 2.
- 2.6. Trench 3 exposed the corner of a sandstone building which corresponds to a square building identified by the geophysical survey of 2002. Fragments of medieval floor tile, though to be of 14th-century date were found associated with the demolition rubble of the building.
- 2.7. In Trench 4, the back face of the garden retaining wall was fully exposed and several sherds of 16th/17th-century pottery were recovered from the topsoil within the trench.

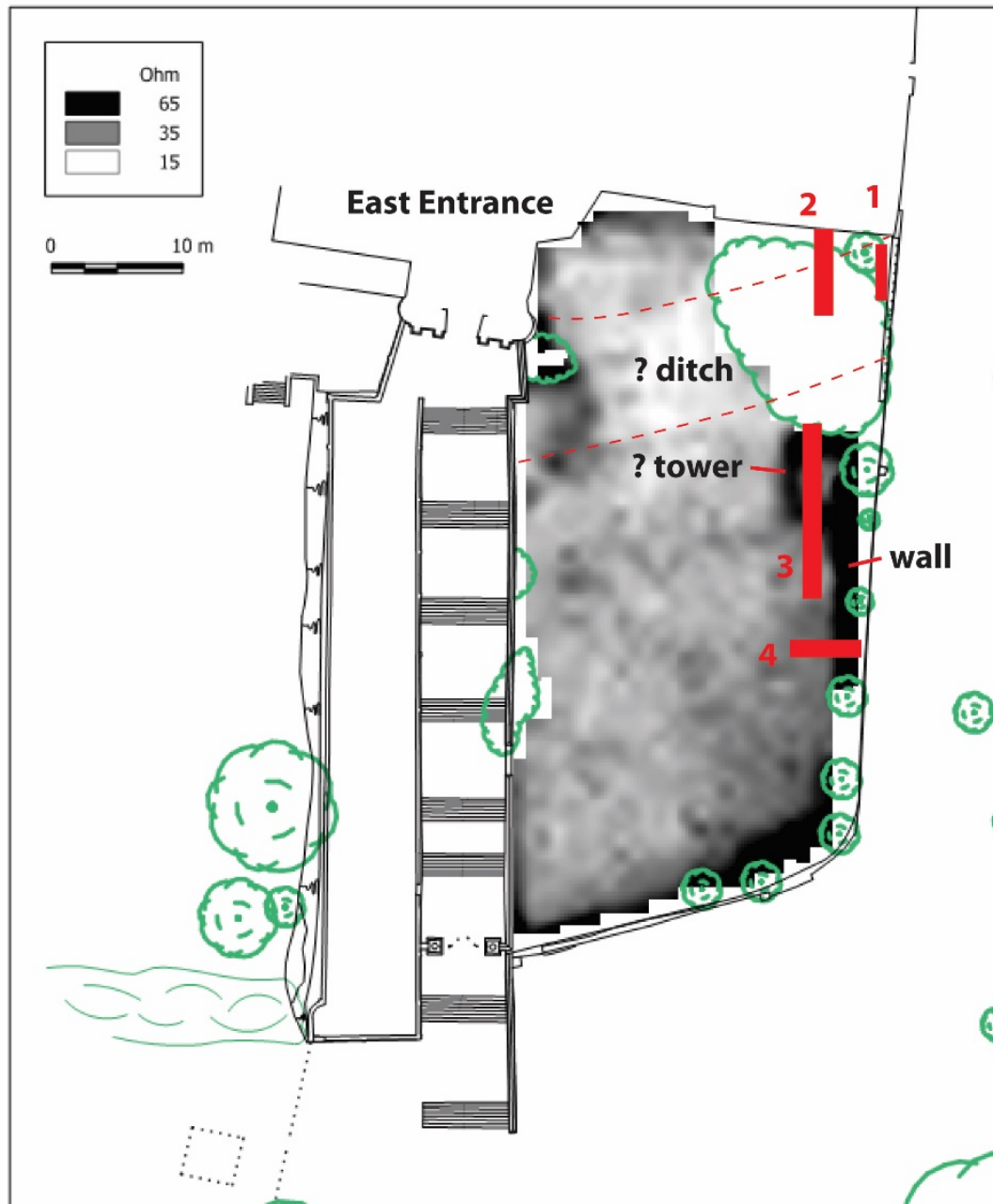


Figure 2. The results from the 2002 geophysical survey, showing also the location of the 2015 evaluation trenches (after Roseveare and Roseveare 2002). The recent works are located in the area of Trench 1

3 Building survey

- 3.1. Prior to the commencement of ground works a detailed drawn and photographic record was completed of the c. 7m-long section of retaining wall to be removed (Fig. 3). The length of wall recorded extended to beyond the recess to the north-east of the new access point.
- 3.2. The survey took the form of a Level 2 building survey as defined by Historic England 2015 *Understanding Historic Buildings: a guide to good recording practice*. This level of survey is intended to create a descriptive record of a building, and included:
 - description and photographic record of the exterior of the wall
 - conclusions regarding the wall's development and phasing, but without discussing in detail the evidence on which these conclusions are based
 - a stone-for-stone elevation drawing of the section in question.
- 3.3. The survey was conducted using a combination of total station surveying and rectified photography to produce the stone-for-stone elevation (Fig. 11). Although not affected by the current works, the survey also included the small alcove which is immediately adjacent to the section of wall removed during the watching brief.



Fig. 3 The section of retaining wall recorded during the building survey.

4 Watching Brief

- 4.1. The watching brief was conducted during the removal of a 7.5m-long section of retaining wall along the north-west side of the Old Bowling Green at the point where a new access was to be constructed. The work was undertaken between May 18th and June 7th 2016.
- 4.2. The retaining wall was removed by hand, using power tools, with the work being monitored on an intermittent basis, rather than as a detailed watching brief. At an early stage it became apparent that the remains of an earlier structure lay behind the retaining wall, although it was not possible to determine its significance until the 7.5m-long section of wall had been removed completely.



Fig. 4 The red conglomerate corework of the medieval curtain wall was gradually uncovered as the retaining wall was removed

- 4.3. Following the removal of the section of retaining wall it became apparent that the structure behind represented the remains of the medieval curtain wall surrounding the north-eastern bailey of the castle. Following discussions with the National Trust Archaeologist and the contractors, Treasure and Son Ltd, it was agreed that the ground level behind the retaining wall would be reduced gradually by controlled hand excavation to expose the extent of the curtain wall and enable sufficient opportunity to produce a thorough archaeological record prior to its removal.
- 4.4. Removal of the topsoil (1) revealed the rubble core of the wall (3), the outer face of which had been removed, with the 18th-century retaining wall (4) being bonded directly onto the corework. It was also apparent that the area had seen significant modern disturbance, with the insertion of two substantial service trenches, one of which connected to an alcove in the retaining wall, immediately to the north-east of the section which had been removed.



Fig. 5 The upper part of the medieval curtain wall showing recent disturbance by service trenches, viewed from the roof of the adjacent kitchen wing.

- 4.5. Excavation of the soils behind the wall revealed a single, undifferentiated landscaping deposit (15), comprising a firm, reddish silt. No dateable finds were recovered but animal bone (probably *Sus* (pig)) and a single piece of ceramic building material were recovered, but not retained.



Fig. 6 View from the south-east showing the upper part of the internal facing of the medieval curtain wall



Fig. 7 The top of the medieval curtain wall, viewed from the south-east



Fig. 8 The top of the medieval curtain wall, viewed from the north-east

- 4.7. The medieval wall survived to a width of up to 1.95m, having been truncated by the later retaining wall. However, assuming that the external face would have been in approximately the same position as the retaining wall the original width would have been around 3.0m.
- 4.8. The internal face was relatively well preserved and was built from dressed, close-bonded conglomerate blocks laid in rough courses, with a slight batter of around 0.2m between the top and bottom of the wall, surviving to a height of approximately 1.8m. The corework consisted of lime-mortared conglomerate rubble.
- 4.9. It was evident that the curtain wall continued beneath the 18th-century kitchen wing, the foundations of which were butted against the inner face of the wall (Fig. 10).
- 4.10. Natural soils were revealed at a depth of approximately 2m below the level of the internal ground surface, although the interface between the natural deposition and the landscaping deposit (15) was quite diffuse and not clearly delineated. There was no obvious evidence for a medieval ground surface which would have been contemporary with the wall.



Fig. 9 North-east facing section through the medieval curtain wall



Fig. 10 The medieval curtain wall, showing the butt-joint with the 18th-century kitchen wing

5 Conclusions

- 5.1. The programme of archaeological works in connection with the creation of a new access as part of the Powis Castle East Front Project has revealed significant new information regarding the earlier history of the castle. The works were undertaken in advance of and during the removal of a 7.5m-long section of the retaining wall around the Old Bowling Green, which occupies the site of the north-eastern bailey of the castle. A detailed record was made of the section of retaining wall before its removal.
- 5.2. A watching brief conducted during the removal of the retaining wall, which at this point was of a single phase, and the reduction of the ground level behind it, revealed the remains of a substantial masonry wall which is believed to have been the medieval curtain wall surrounding the bailey. Although much disturbed by excavations for modern services substantial sections of the wall survived. The external face had been removed and replaced by the later retaining wall, which had been bonded onto the medieval corework.
- 5.3. The curtain wall survived to a height of around 1.8m and while only 1.95m of its width remained intact it is likely that it would originally have had a width of around 3m. The inner face of the wall consisted of worked, closely-laid blocks of Powis Castle Conglomerate laid in rough courses, while the corework was of lime-mortared conglomerate rubble. The stone used to build the wall would have been quarried locally and is the same as that from which much of the castle was constructed.

-
- 5.4. The finish of this stonework suggests that the internal face was intended to be on view. The medieval ground surface was approximately 1.8m lower than the present day ground surface. There was no trace of an earlier medieval ground horizon visible at this depth however.
- 5.5. The medieval wall continued beneath the 18th-century kitchen wing of the castle, the foundations of which had been butted against it, and extended further to the north-east, presumably continuing around the circuit of the former bailey.
- 5.6. The discoveries add further weight to the results from a geophysical survey of the Old Bowling Green (Roseveare and Roseveare 2002) which revealed a broad anomaly around the edge of the area, which is likely to be the continuation of the curtain wall. The survey (Fig. 2) also identified a square building, possibly a tower, the foundations for which were uncovered in an evaluation in 2015 (Pitt and Watson 2015).
- 5.7. The results from the recent investigations show a significant difference in the presumed level of the medieval ground surface compared with evidence from the 2015 evaluation. Excavations in the area of the possible tower revealed through geophysics identified a contemporary surface at around 0.74m below the present ground level, while the section of curtain wall extended to a depth of round 1.8m. One explanation for this difference could be the presence of a substantial ditch surrounding the medieval keep, across which the curtain wall had been constructed. The 2002 geophysical survey provided evidence for the presence of such a feature in this area, while a rock-cut ditch is clearly visible in front of the gatehouse tower on the north-east side of the castle, when viewed from the garden terrace to the south-east (Fig. 14).

6 References

- Gallagher, C., 2014 *Powis Castle, Powis: the development of the East Front*, unpublished report for the National Trust.
- Pitt, K. and Watson, S., 2015. *Powis Castle East Front, Welshpool, Powys: Archaeological Evaluation*. Welshpool: CPAT Report 1334.
- Roseveare M.J. and Roseveare A.C.K., 2002 *Evaluation of the site of the East garden and associated Features at Powis Castle, Powys, Wales*, unpublished report for the National Trust.

7 Archive deposition Statement

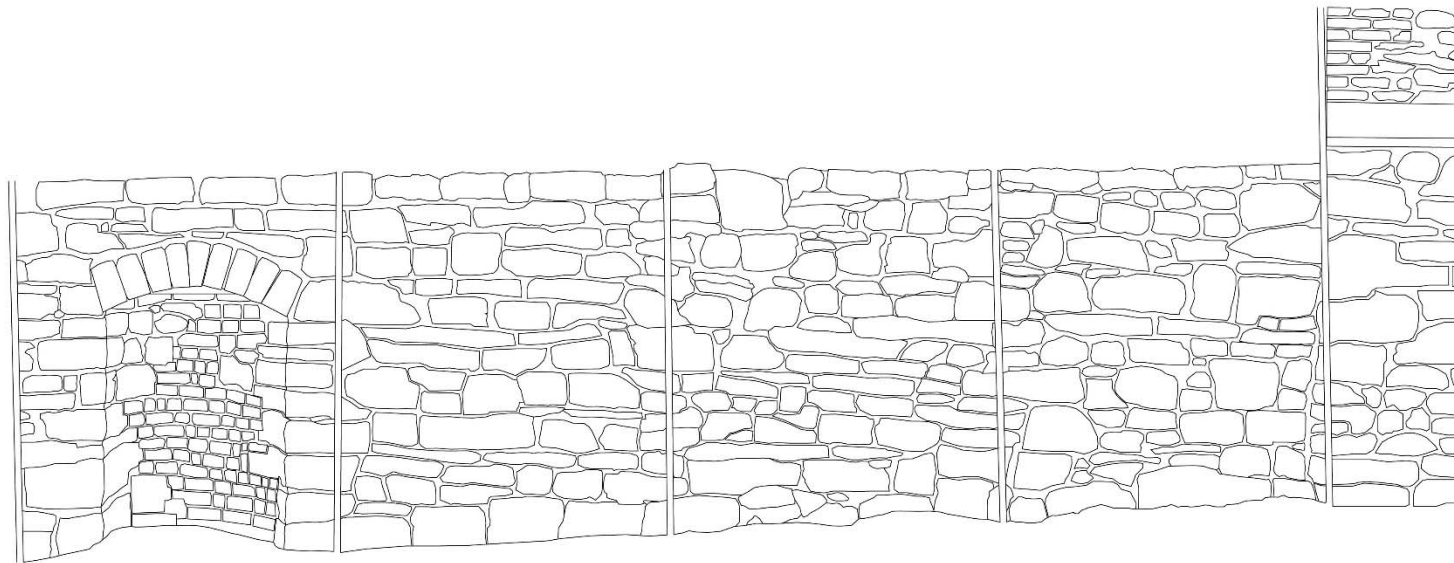
- 7.1. The project archive has been prepared according to the CPAT Archive Policy and in line with the Cifa *Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives guidance* (2014). The archive will be deposited with the regional Historic Environment Record and the National Monuments Record. A summary of the archive is provided in Appendix 1.



Fig. 11 Rectified photograph and stone-for-stone survey of the section of retaining wall on the north-western side of the Old Bowling Green

NE

SW



0 5m

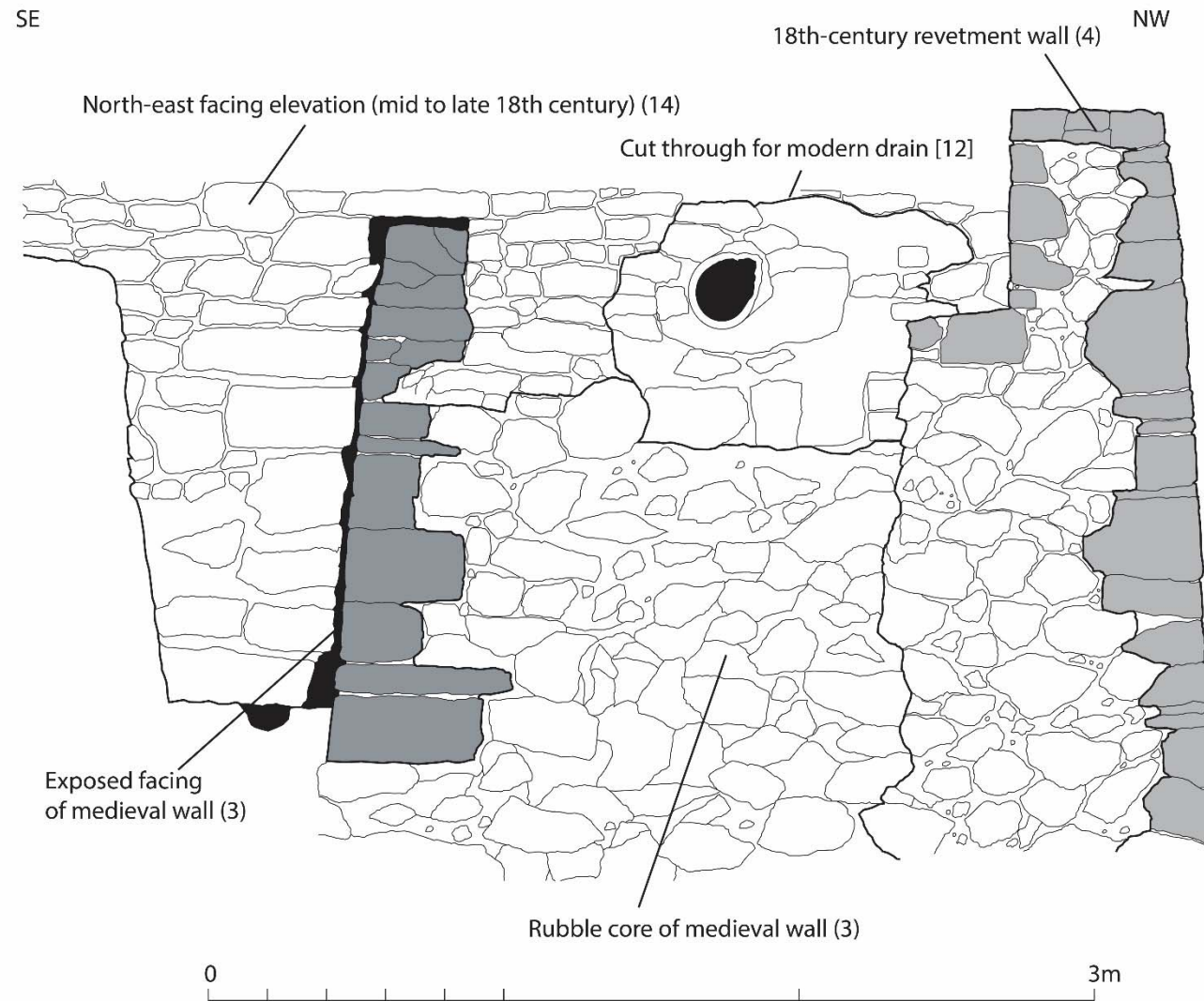


Fig. 12 North-east facing cross section through the medieval curtain wall

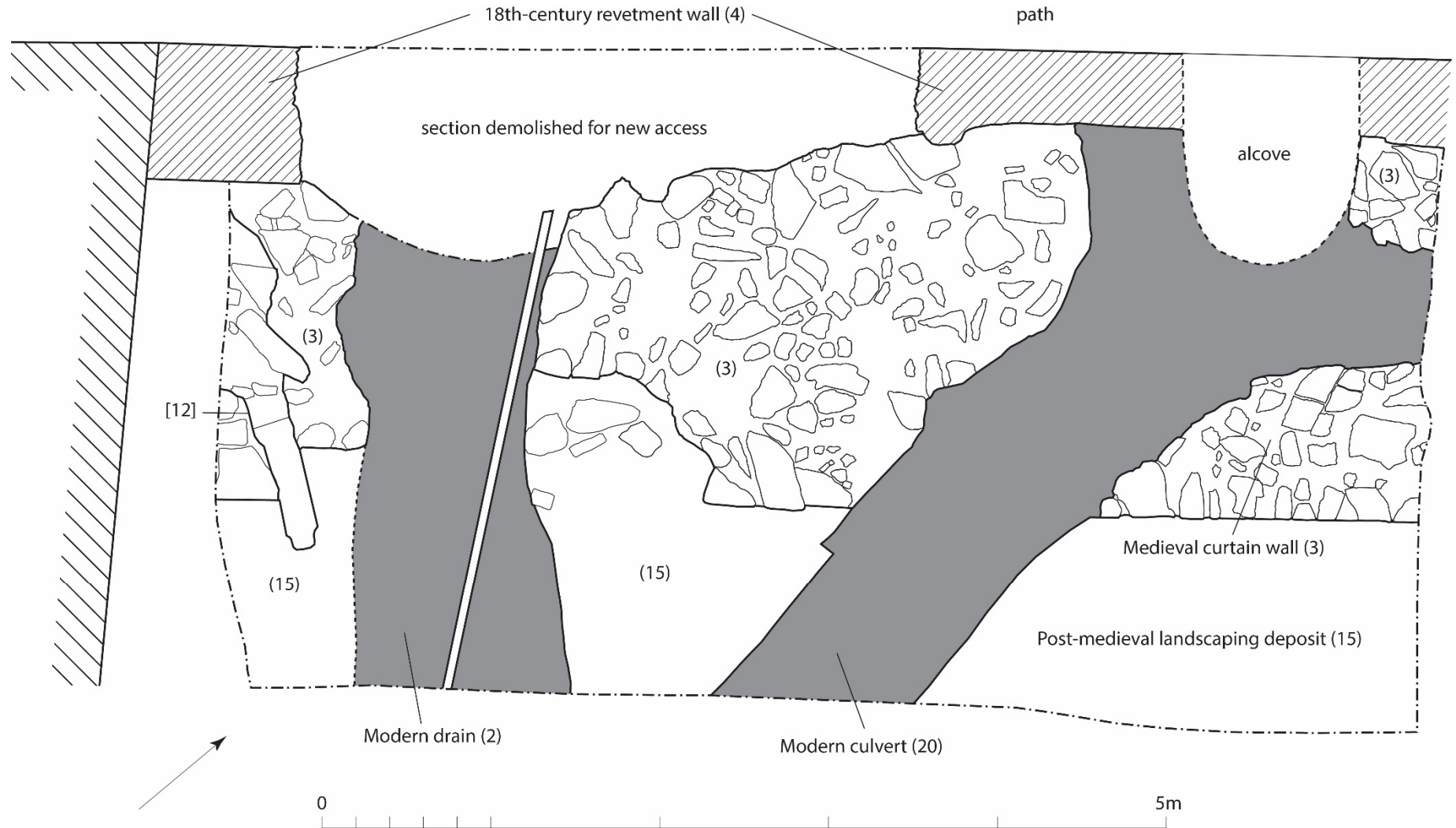


Fig. 13 Plan of excavated area

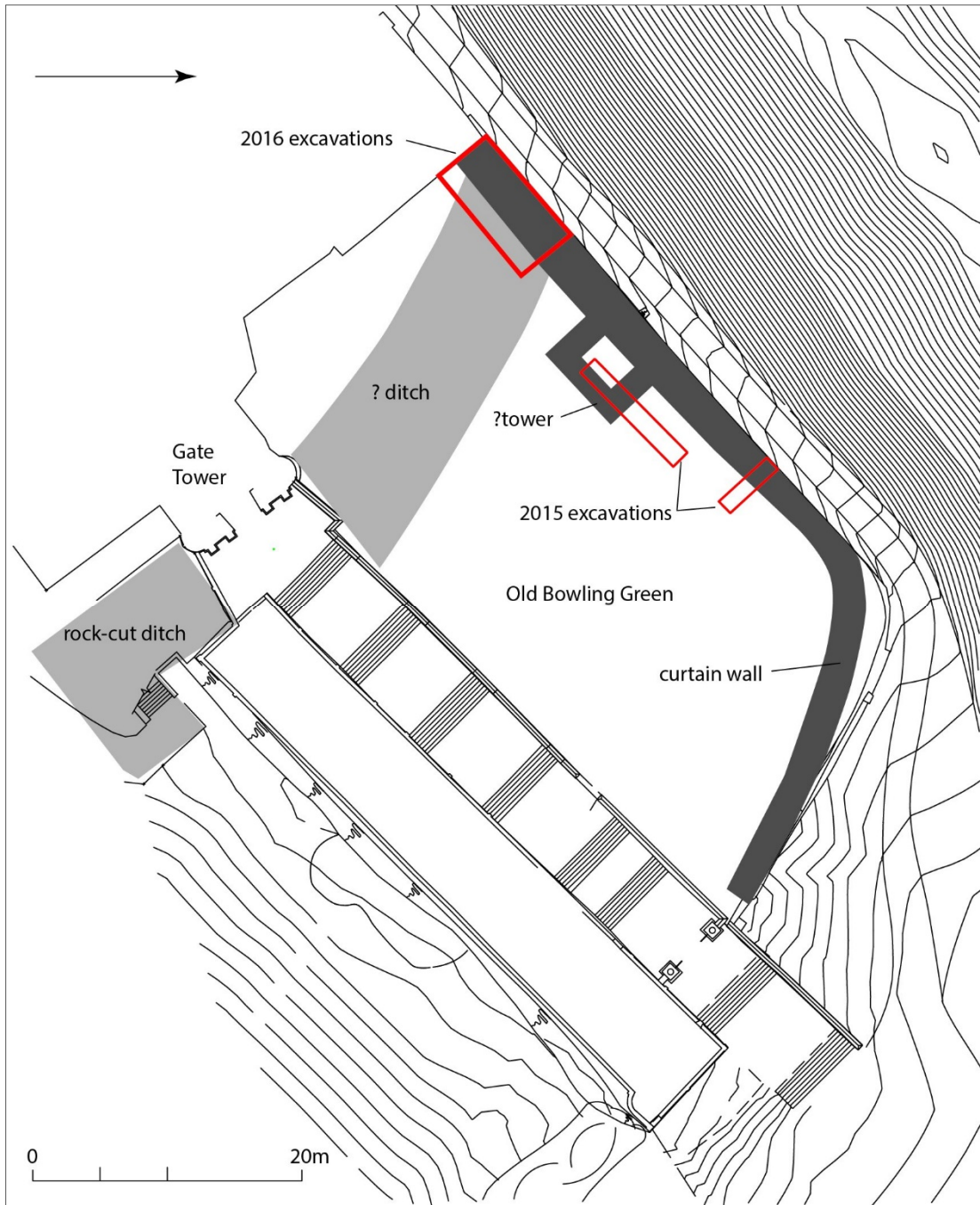


Fig. 14 Interpretive plan of the Old Bowling Green based on evidence from the excavations and geophysical survey

Appendix 1: Site Archive

CPAT Event PRN: 140124

2 A1 drawings

2 trench recording forms

Digital photographs:

CPAT film 4111

CPAT film 4197

CPAT film 4201