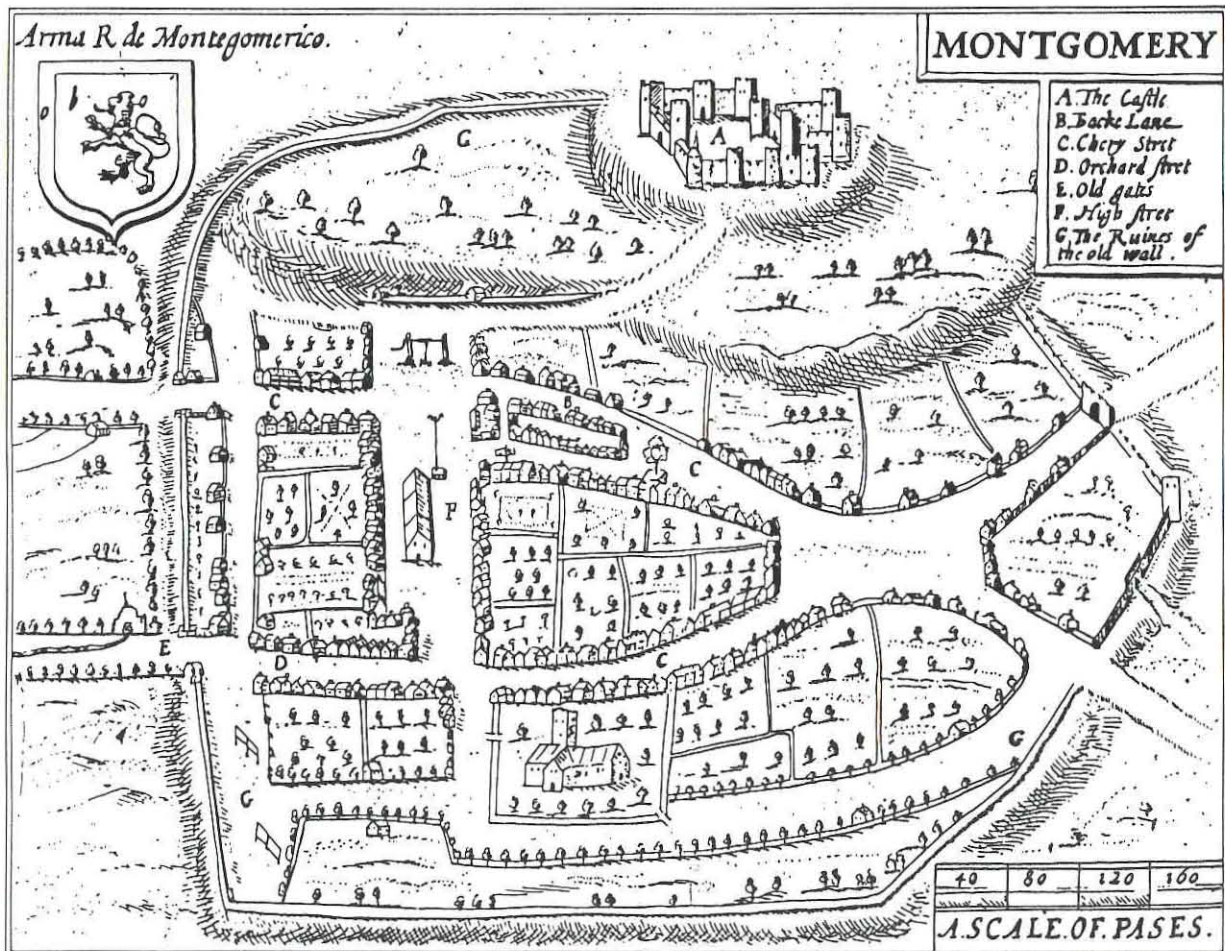


Bunner's Yard, Montgomery, Powys

EVALUATION REPORT

November 1991



The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust

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Introduction

Montgomery was founded in 1223 and granted its borough charter in 1227. The town defences, comprising an encircling outer ditch and internal bank which was surmounted by a stone wall, were probably built around 1230 and are still visible today for much of their circuit (Soulsby 1983). The medieval town appears to be preserved more or less intact (fig 1) in the modern street pattern although many buildings fronting the streets were remodelled extensively in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Notwithstanding, modern development has been kept to a minimum and traces of the original medieval buildings may well survive below many of the present houses and businesses. Most of the building lines indicated on early maps such as Speed's map of 1610 can still be identified (fig 2).

The proposed development of the construction of a workshop extension to the rear of R H Bunner and Son, Arthur Street, Montgomery (planning application M21164), is in the heart of the medieval town, directly behind an area of known medieval street frontages, and in an area of likely burgage plots (fig 3). The area effected by the proposed development is clearly one of considerable archaeological sensitivity. However, the exact nature and/or survival of the archaeological deposits in this area was uncertain. Accordingly, Montgomeryshire District Council requested that an evaluation be undertaken to assess the archaeological potential of the area in order that this may be taken into consideration when assessing the planning application, as is recommended in current Welsh Office Planning Advice (Welsh Office PPG 16). An evaluation brief for this work was prepared by the County Sites and Monuments Record on behalf the Local Planning Authority.

The Evaluation

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust was commissioned to undertake the prescribed evaluation which was conducted on the 25th and 26th of November 1991.

In order to test for the presence of archaeological features and to evaluate any remains present, a single trench was excavated in accordance with the project brief. The trench was located at the northern end of the yard and was roughly perpendicular to the medieval street line (fig 4). The trench was excavated by mechanical excavator with further cleaning and exploratory excavation by hand.

The results were as follows.

Stratigraphy (fig 5)

The present yard surface and hard core extended to a depth of about 0.5m after which there was a layer of fine, brown soil containing charcoal, pieces of brick and modern glass and pottery. This layer was generally about 0.4m - 0.5m thick. Below this, a layer of large (0.2m across) to medium-sized stones, extending for a depth of 0.25m, overlay an area of clay in the western portion of the trench and a layer of soft brown stoney soil in the eastern portion. The stone layer and the brown soil above it are interpreted as deliberately placed in-fill material used to build up the modern yard over the naturally soft and waterlogged old ground surface.

Archaeological deposits were noted at a depth of 1.1m below the present yard surface in the western section of the trench sloping eastwards to 1.5m. Waterlogging in the base of the trench prevented the full exploration of the archaeological surface towards the eastern

end of the area. This waterlogging presumably results from the medieval Shitebrook flowing between the rears of the eastern and western burgage plots which fronted respectively on Princes Street and Arthur Street.

Interpretation

The evaluation trench showed that considerable waterlogged archaeological deposits survive in this area (fig 6). A patch of clay in the western section of the excavated area was bordered to the north by a trench or gully and ended abruptly near the centre of the trench. Occasional charcoal flecks and well-preserved wood, identified tentatively as hazel, lay on and in this clay surface. In the limited section available for inspection, the clay did not have the appearance of a natural deposit but seemed to be re-deposited, perhaps as a floor for a building. The trench or gully defining the northern side of this clay feature may represent a wall-trench, or possibly a drainage gully similar to those located on the edges of the medieval house platform at Pool Road, Montgomery in 1984 (Britnell and Jones 1989, 51). This feature was not investigated further. A line of stakes in the eastern end of the clay patch may possibly represent the traces of an internal division or partition.

The archaeological deposits in the eastern half of the excavated area were very wet and of untested depth. The matrix was a soft, brown, organic-rich soil with abundant pieces of wood, occasional oyster shell and animal bone including the skull of a pole-axed bovine.

Running down the centre of the trench, within this waterlogged deposit, was a line of well-preserved stakes. Two of these were withdrawn and indicated that they had been sunk up to 0.6m below the archaeological horizon (1.8m below the present yard surface). Both the removed stakes exhibit clear axe or knife marks at the sharpened end (fig 7). These are interpreted as the remains of a fence-line either subdividing a burgage plot (similar to the 'pen' located in the medieval yard at Pool Road (Britnell and Jones 1989, 56), or separating two burgage plots of the medieval town.

No chronologically diagnostic finds were made to allow the precise dating of these deposits but the presence of butchered remains, oyster shell and the depth of the deposits below the present make-up might suggest a Medieval or immediately Post-Medieval date.

Conclusions

The evaluation has shown that the yard behind R H Bunner & Son covers substantial deposits of great archaeological potential. Both structural and burgage-plot archaeology appear present. In particular, the palaeoenvironmental potential of this area is considerable and would provide invaluable information on the environment and subsistence economy of historic Montgomery.

Recommendations

The surviving archaeological remains on this site are of obvious importance and should therefore be preserved in situ. However these deposits are at a lower level than might have been anticipated and would appear to be unaffected by the majority of the proposed building foundation. It is our opinion therefore that rather than destroy the archaeological remains, the proposed works will actually ensure their preservation, as long as the present design is retained (ie involving a small number of steel stanchions and a raft floor).

Full excavation of the area of the proposed workshop would be costly in terms of removal and disposal of the overlying deposits and continuous water-pumping and should not be contemplated unless absolutely necessary. Furthermore the quantity and nature of the surviving archaeological deposits would result in a costly post-excavation programme involving expensive conservation and palaeoenvironmental specialist work. Such excavation work would have to be the subject of some form of planning agreement.

In order to ensure that a proper archaeological record is maintained we would also recommended that if planning consent is granted, provision be made for a watching brief to be undertaken during the excavation of foundations and service trenches in the areas outside the evaluation brief. Presumably this could be achieved by means of a suitable planning condition.

Alex Gibson
27th November 1991

References

- Britnell, J and Jones, N, 1989. Pool Road, Montgomery: Excavations within the Medieval Town., *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 77, 1989, 41-72.
Soulsby, I, 1983, *The Medieval Towns of Wales*. Phillimore and Co., Chichester, 185-187.

Excavation archive and Post-Excavation Work

The excavation archive currently comprises the following records, reports and materials.

A Reports

- 1 Recommendations to Bunner & Son and Montgomery District Council
- 2 Evaluation Report

B Site and Finds Data

- 1 Annotated A1 plan of excavation area, finds locations and schematic section.

C Photographic Archive

- 1 Catalogue of 35mm colour transparencies
- 2 Catalogue of 35mm Black & White negatives
- 3 Colour slides
- 4 Black and White negatives and contact prints

D Finds Data

Initial processing has been carried out on the following types and quantities of material recovered from the evaluation work

- 1 Wood: two stakes have been cleaned, photographed and drawn
- 2 Bone: bovine skull has been cleaned and photographed.

Recommendations for further post-excavation work

A short summary report on the evaluation work has been prepared for Archaeology In Wales. A more detailed report should be prepared for final publication in due course. In addition to and connection with this report further work will need to be carried out on the finds as follows:

Wood

Identification of the stakes recovered determining age of the wood and species. A sample may also be submitted for radiocarbon dating. This will all involve specialist assistance.

Bone

Identification, sex and age determination and palaeopathological report of the bovine skull recovered from the excavation. This will involve specialist help

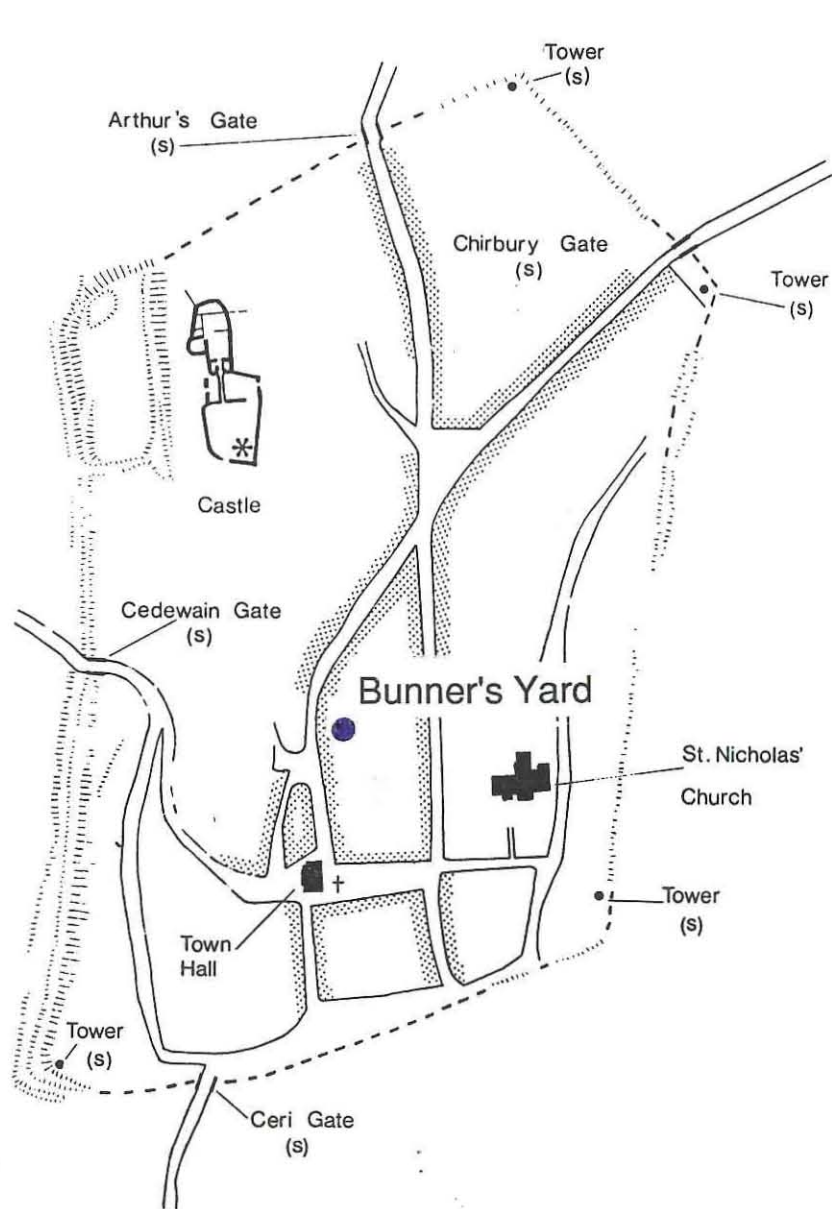


Fig 1 - Medieval Montgomery

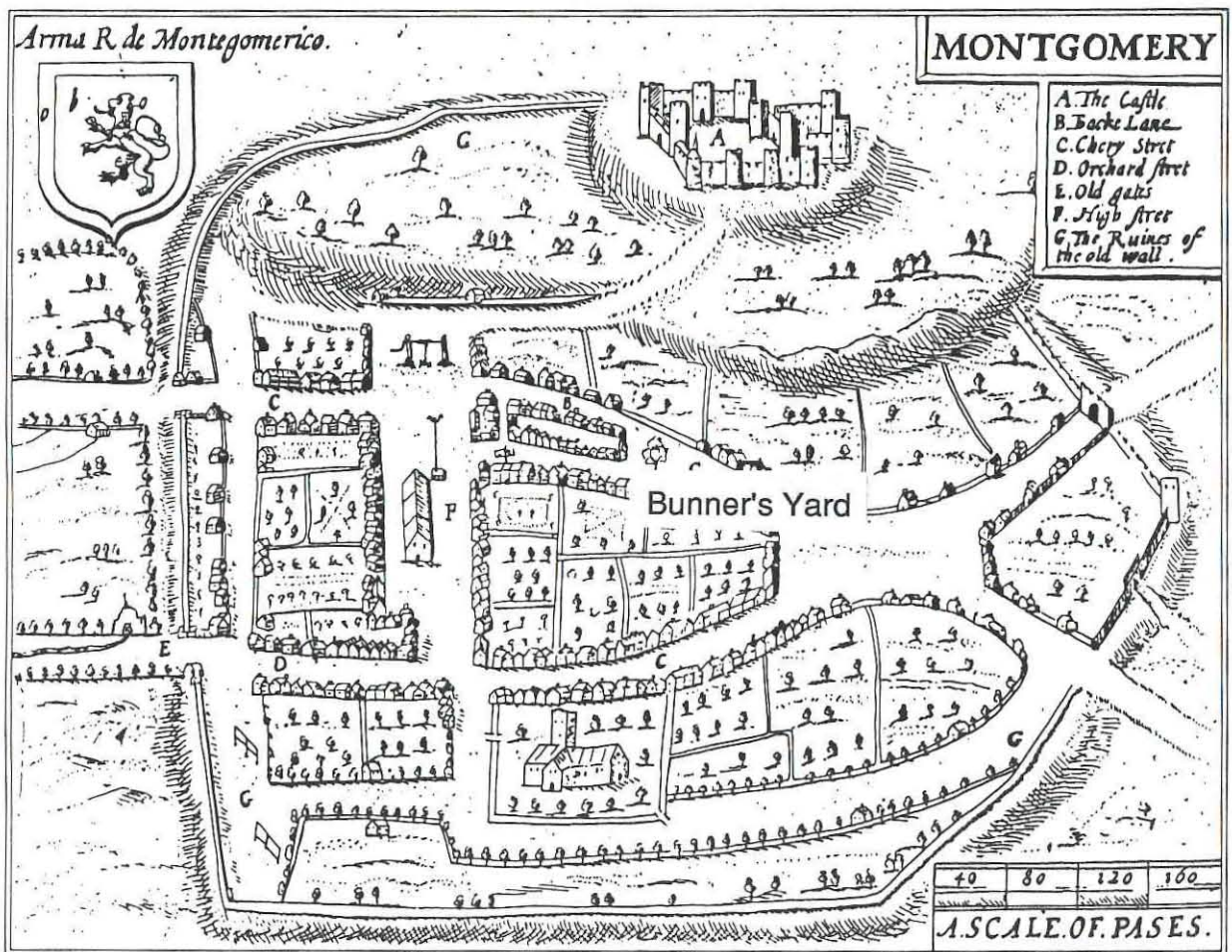


Fig 2 - Speed's Map, 1610

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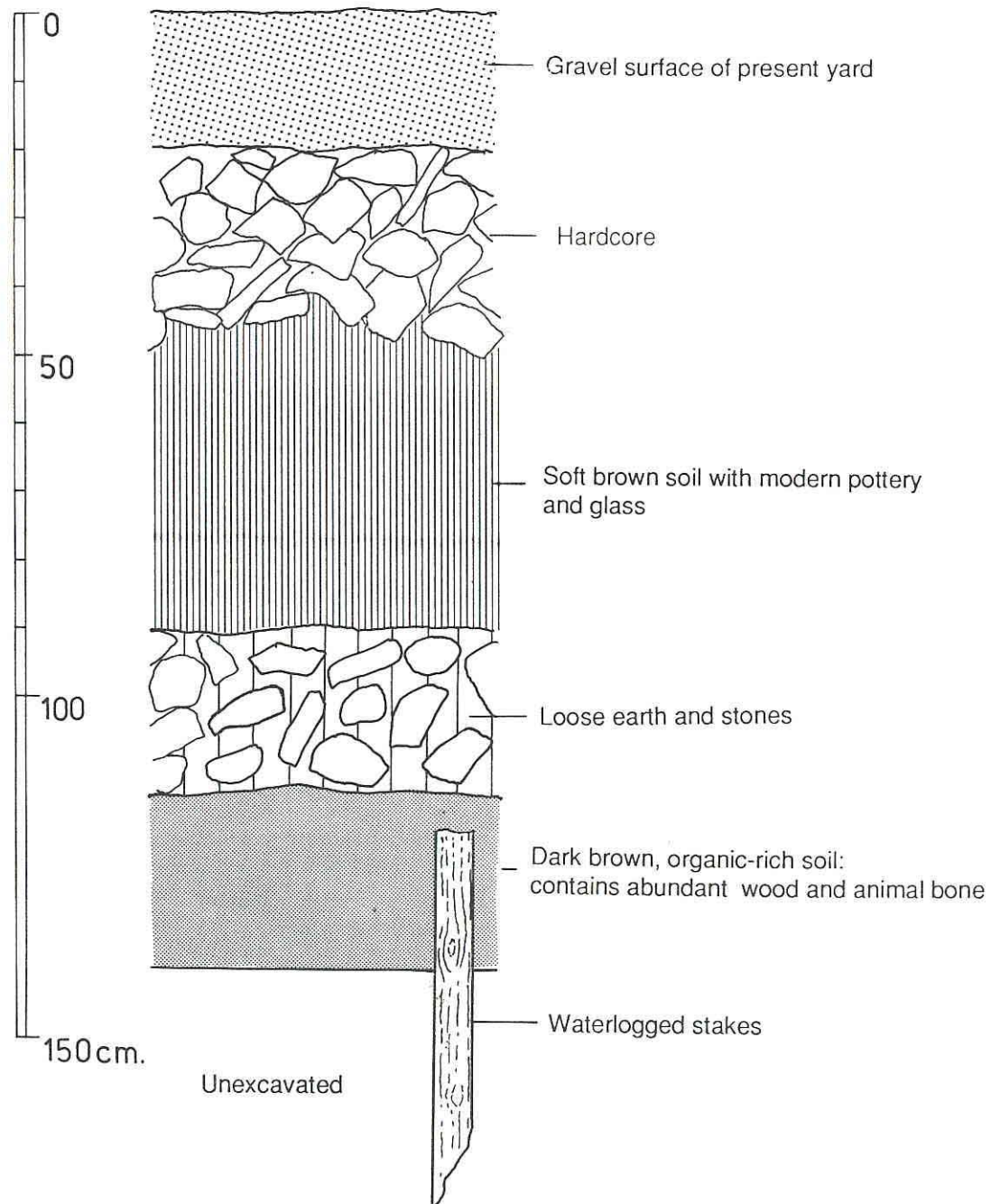


Fig 5 - Schematic section of the deposits encountered in the evaluation trench

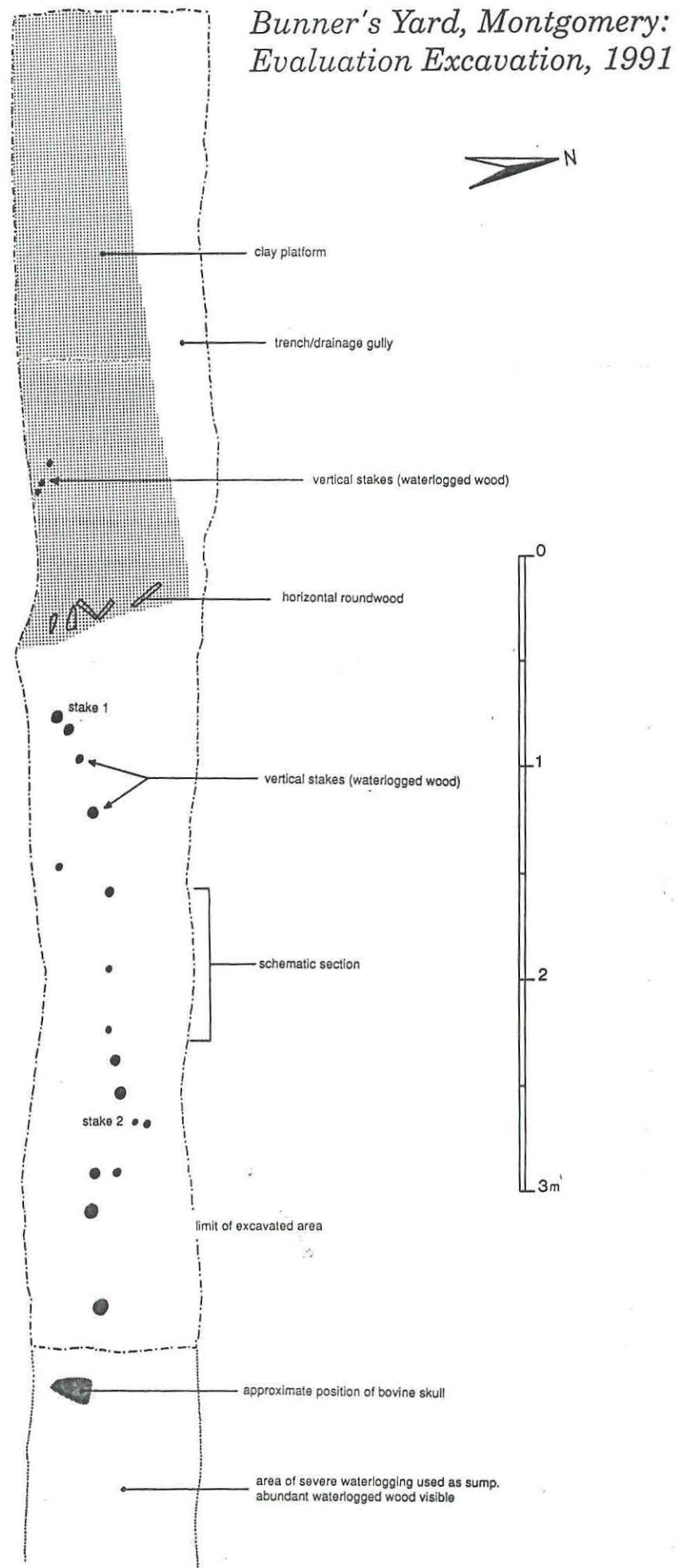


Fig 6 - Plan of the excavated area and the archaeological features.

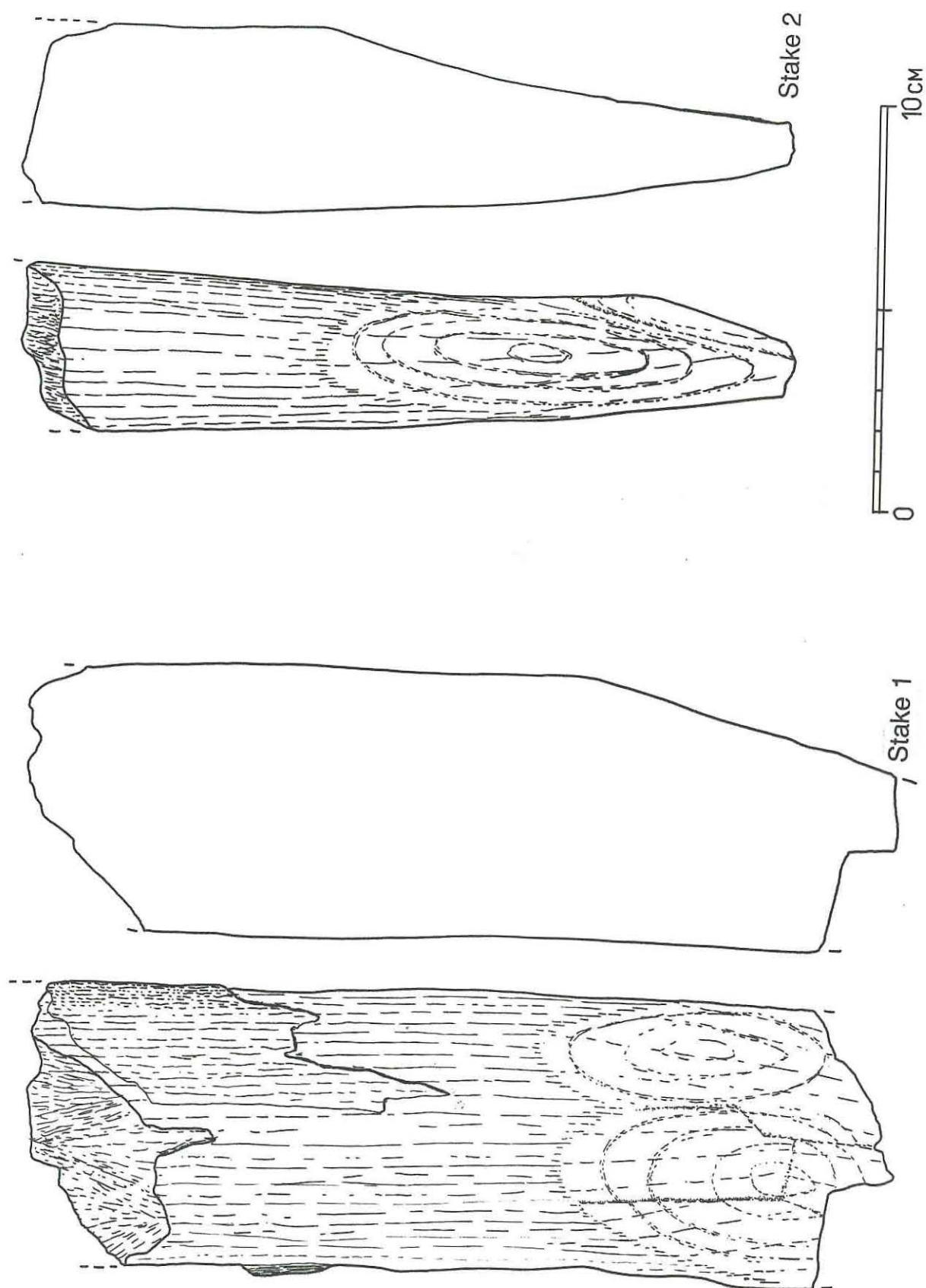


Fig 7 - Wooden stakes 1 and 2 showing clear indications of axe/knife marks