

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Gaol Road, Montgomery, Powys
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

CPAT Report No 275

Gaol Road, Montgomery, Powys
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

R. HANKINSON
April 1998

Report for Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments.

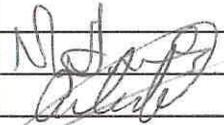
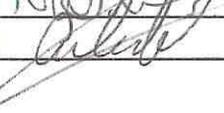
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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At the end of March 1998, the Contracting Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT Contracts) was asked by Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments to provide a quotation for a watching brief during the excavation of foundation trenches for a housing development at Gaol Road, Montgomery, Powys (SO 2230 9692). The CPAT Contracts quote was accepted by Cadw and the work was subsequently carried out on 31/3/98 and 1/4/98, with the report prepared immediately afterwards.
- 1.2 The area of the development occupied a vacant plot at the junction of Pool Road and Gaol Road. Planning permission had been granted in 1990, prior to the implementation of PPG 16, and consequently the developer was not committed to the funding of preliminary archaeological work. Following a request by the Curatorial Section of CPAT, Cadw had agreed to provide funding for an emergency watching brief to be carried out, which is the subject of this report.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The town of Montgomery originated in the earlier part of the 13th century and appears to have been constructed in conjunction with Montgomery Castle (Britnell & Jones 1989, 41). Construction of the Castle began in 1223 (Burnham 1995, 152), and by 1227 borough status had been granted to the town (Britnell & Jones 1989, 41). Although the town was prosperous during the medieval period, it is evident that there must have been some stagnation in subsequent growth as it was apparently only recently that the town outgrew its 13th century boundaries (Britnell & Jones 1989, 41); this may have led to the abandonment of plots which had previously been occupied by housing.
- 2.2 The area of the development falls within the medieval boundaries of Montgomery, which are taken to be those depicted on Speed's map of 1610 (Fig. 2). The map of 1610 also depicts houses adjoining the road, which follows the approximate line of the present Pool Road, leading to Arthur's Gate at the northern edge of Montgomery.
- 2.3 The evidence given above suggests that there were dwellings located on the eastern side of Pool Road in 1610, and it is reasonable to assume that these were of medieval origin. Confirmation of the presence of medieval structures on the eastern side of Pool Road was provided by excavations carried out by CPAT some 100m to the south of the development between 1984 and 1987. The excavations provided evidence of a house platform occupied by two successive structures of medieval date with associated occupation features (Britnell & Jones 1989).

3 WATCHING BRIEF

- 3.1 The watching brief was carried out during the excavation of foundations for a terrace of four houses fronting onto Pool Road. The foundation trenches, which were 0.7m wide, were excavated by machine using a toothed bucket within an area measuring 17.9m north-north-west/south-south-east by 9.0m west-south-west/east-north-east, overall. The trenches were excavated to a maximum depth of 1.7m below the ground surface at the southern end of the site but were generally of the order of 1.2m deep. Due to the nature of the machining, features were not readily apparent when they were being excavated, but hand cleaning of the resulting sections revealed a number of features, particularly in the north-north-west section (Section 1: Fig. 4). No readily datable finds were recovered.
- 3.2 Removal of up to 0.9m of dark grey-brown loamy topsoil (1) revealed a layer of light grey smooth clay (2), up to 0.3m thick, containing many small stones, a few fragments of fired clay and occasional flecks of charcoal. The clay and stone layer (2) was seen to rest on the mottled natural clay subsoil (9) and was present throughout the west-south-west section (Section 2: Fig. 4), although it thinned to the east-north-east and was not present in the section (unrecorded) provided by the foundation trench on the east-north-east side. A modern drainage trench (11) occupied by a ceramic pipe and mixed fill (10) was seen to cut through the topsoil and underlying layers in the west-south-west section.
- 3.3 The remaining features identified during the watching brief were present in the north-north-west section (Section 1: Fig. 4). The clay and stone layer (2) was seen to continue for approximately 3.0m to the east-north-east where it was cut by an irregularly shaped pit (4) filled by a mixture of loose

brown earth and red, burnt, loamy soil (3). The layer (2) did not recur on the east-north-eastern side of the pit.

- 3.4 Underlying the topsoil (1) on the east-north-east side of the pit (4) was a layer of mid grey-brown clay (6), up to 0.45m thick, containing small stones. Underlying the clay layer (6) was a compact layer of angular stones in a mid grey smooth clay matrix (7), up to 0.3m thick, which persisted for 2.2m in the section. Underlying both the stone layer (7) and the clay layer (6) was a layer of light grey-brown clay (8) containing many small stones, which appeared to have been cut by the pit (4). Within a raised area of the base of the pit there was a layer of light grey-brown clay (5), up to 0.3m thick, containing many small stones, and this may well be the same layer as layer (8).
- 3.5 A layer of modern rubbish, stone, concrete, etc. (12), which has been recorded at the extreme east-north-east end of the area of the foundation trenches, appears to have been a result of the dumping of waste material excavated during the recent refurbishment of the Montgomery water supply.

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The limited width of the foundation trenches and the manner of their excavation have inevitably rendered it difficult to recognise potential archaeological features. The nature of the archaeological remains revealed by the excavations carried out in 1984-7 (Britnell & Jones 1989) demonstrates that features relating to medieval occupation on the street frontage are relatively slight. It is therefore possible that, although present, features relevant to the medieval occupation of the development area have not been recognised during the watching brief. No readily datable finds were recovered from the features discovered during the watching brief.
- 4.2 The presumed line of the medieval version of Pool Road passes immediately to the west of the development area. In view of the fact that the clay and stone layer (2) does not persist to the east-north-east in Section 1, it seems possible that this layer may be related to the former road, although whether it represents a road surface or an adjoining feature is uncertain.
- 4.3 Examination of the north-north-western section (Section 1: Fig 4) demonstrated that there was a drop of 0.5m in the level of the natural subsoil from the west-south-western end to the east-north-eastern end of the trench. The change in level occurs within a horizontal distance of 1.5m, although the precise profile is masked by a later pit (4). This difference in level may be evidence of ground levelling, perhaps for a house platform, and, if this is the case, the compact stone layer (7) may have been part of the foundations.
- 4.4 The burnt soil present within the fill (3) of pit (4) suggests that there may have been an area of burning in the vicinity. This burnt material could be related to occupation and may have been part of a layer which has been truncated by subsequent ground disturbance on the site.
- 4.5 The lack of datable finds and the limitations imposed due to the nature of the watching brief mean that the features recorded cannot be readily assigned to a particular period. It would, however, appear that some inferences can be drawn from comparisons between the area of the 1984-7 excavations and the area covered by this watching brief. The 1984-7 excavations revealed evidence of medieval timber buildings on a levelled platform close to the eastern side of Pool Road; the apparent levelling recorded in the section at the north-north-western end of the site may relate to a structure or structures of similar function and date.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 5.1 The writer would like to thank Mr M. Broxton, the site developer, and his site staff for their help and co-operation during the watching brief.

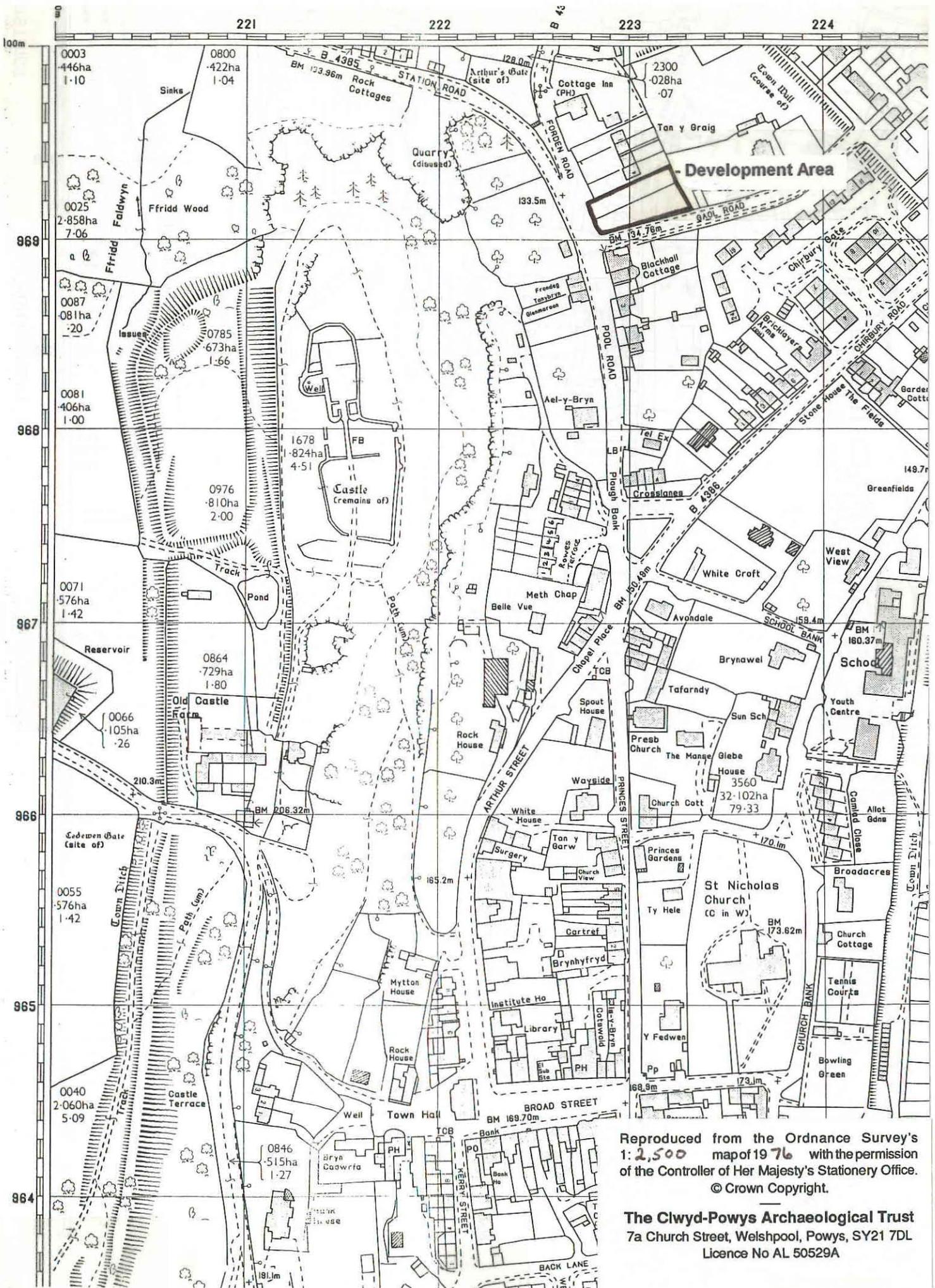
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Britnell, J., & Jones N., 1989, Pool Road, Montgomery: Excavations within the Medieval Town, *Montgomeryshire Collections* 77, 41-72.

Burnham, H., 1995, *A Guide to Ancient and Historic Wales: Clwyd and Powys*, London: HMSO.

7 SITE ARCHIVE

- 1 Black and white film
- 1 Colour slide film
- 1 A1 sheet of section drawings @ 1:20
- 12 Context record forms
- 1 small bag of burnt clay fragments from Context 2



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Fig 1 Location of Development (Scale 1:2,500)

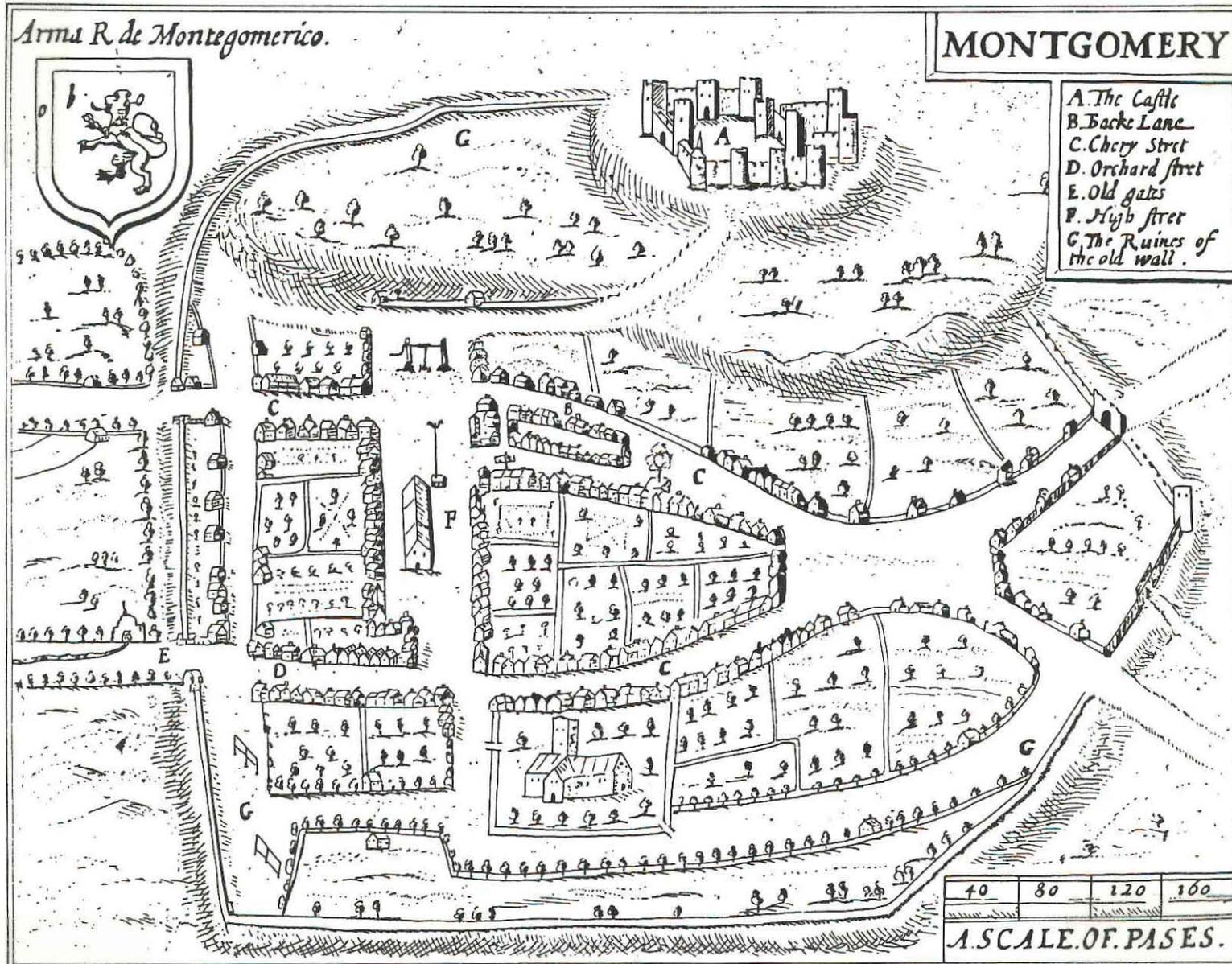


Fig 2 Speed's Map of Montgomery of 1610

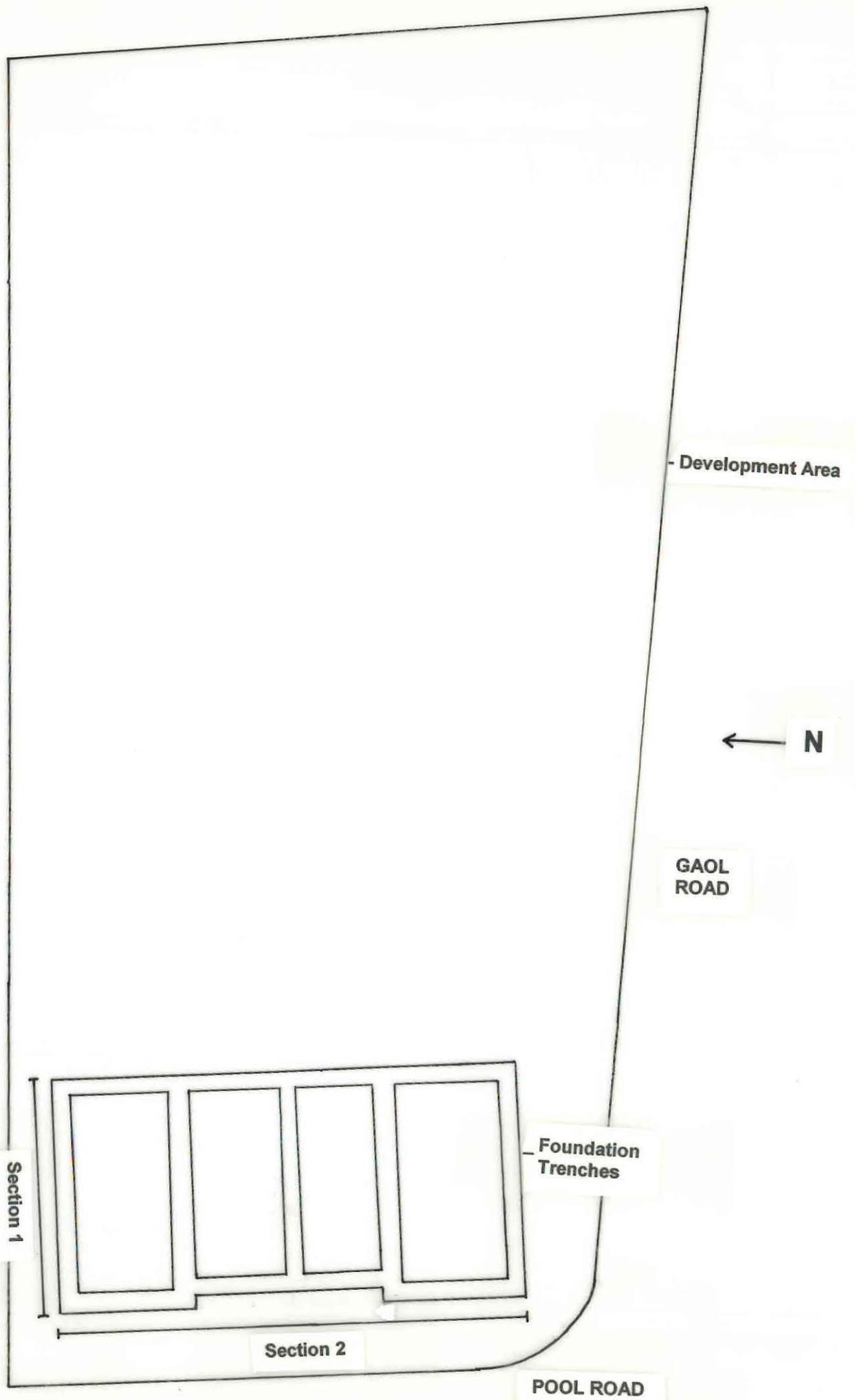


Fig 3 Plan of Development Area (Scale 1:200)

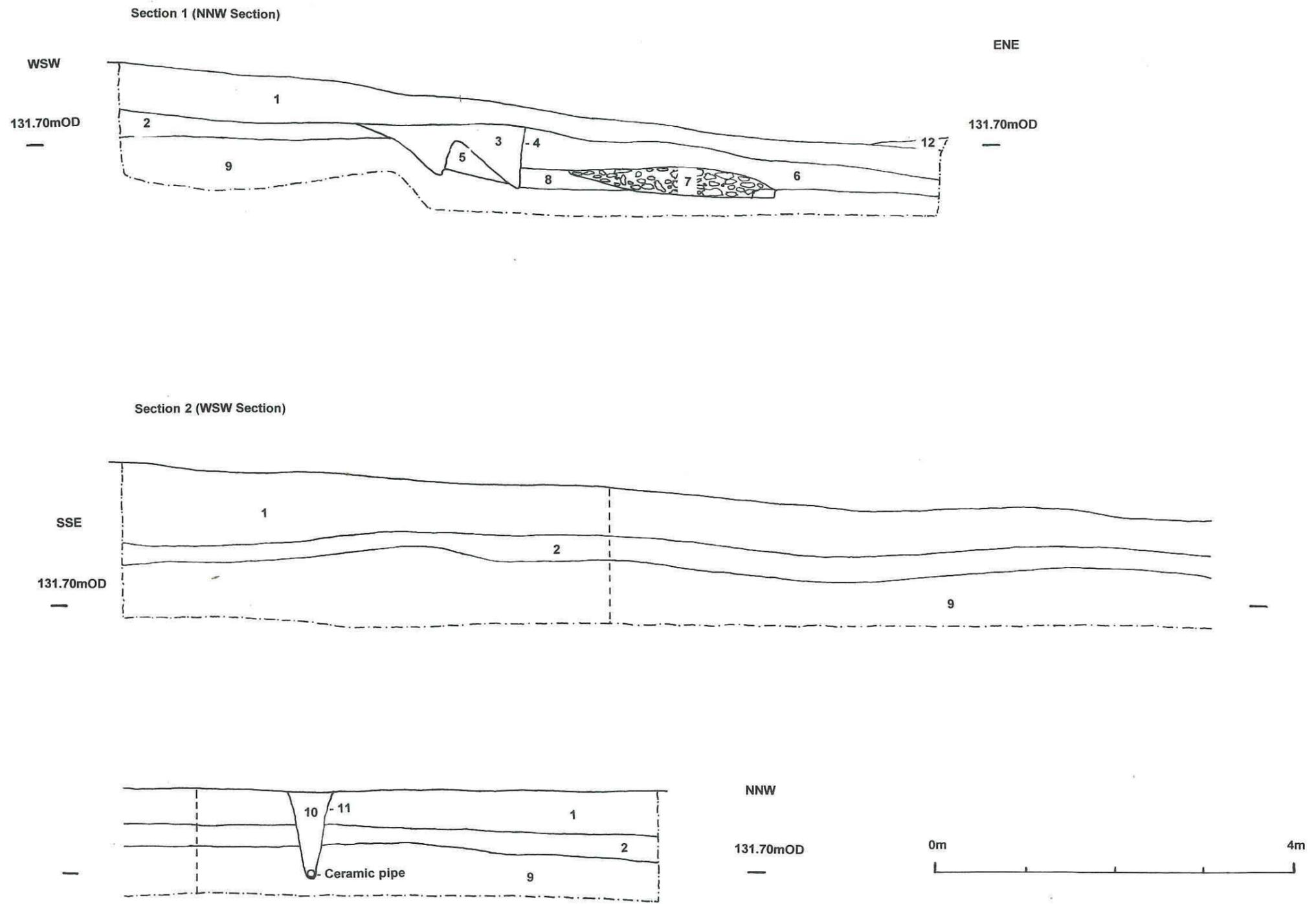


Fig 4 Section Drawings of Foundation Trenches (Scale 1:50)