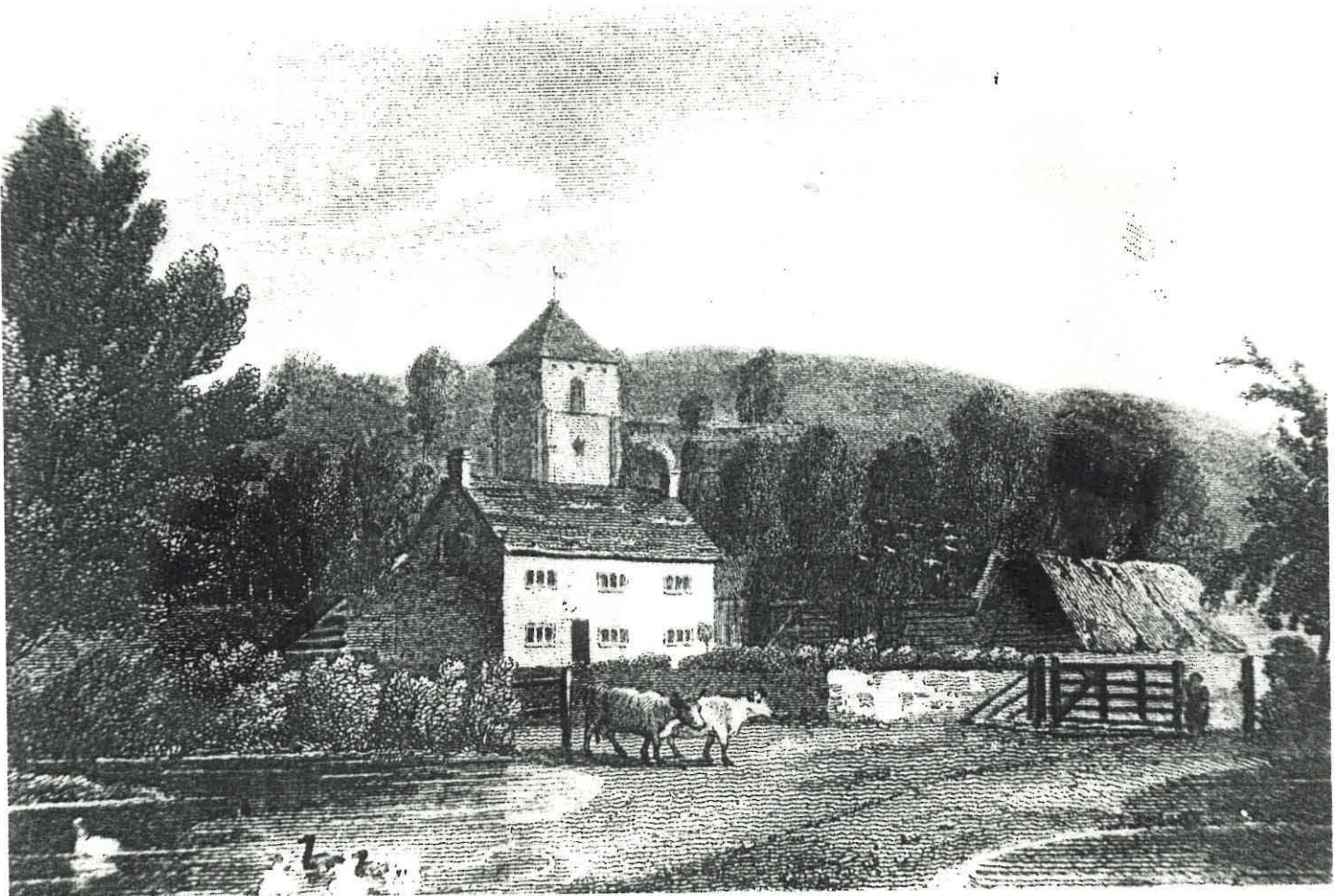


THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

New Radnor - The Porth, Powys

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON EXCAVATIONS 1991-1992



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NEW RADNOR - THE PORTH, POWYS

Preliminary report on excavations 1991-1992

Introduction

The present town of New Radnor was founded some time in the mid-13th century (Soulsby 1983, 206-9). It was laid out on a fairly regular grid of streets enclosed by a stone-revetted bank and external ditch. The town was dominated by an impressive masonry castle built by Roger Mortimer, replacing an earlier motte-and-bailey timber castle built by Philip de Broice in 1096. After initial success, New Radnor appears to have suffered a decline in fortune, leading to many areas within the town being abandoned after c 1400, and remaining undeveloped to the present day. John Speed's map of 1610 shows large areas of empty space within the town walls, probably indicating that the town had declined by this time. These vacant plots have a particularly high archaeological potential since they are likely to contain traces of buildings and other structures abandoned in the medieval or late medieval period, and which have been largely undisturbed by later activity.

The Porth is an empty plot of this kind, adjacent to the west gate of the medieval town. The field fronts onto Church Street to the north, with the town defences forming the western boundary and a probable medieval side-street, now a green lane, forming the eastern boundary (fig 1). The area appears to have remained mostly unoccupied since at least 1610, when Speed's map depicts it as open space. Archaeological excavations were carried out by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) within this area between September 1991 and February 1992 following the granting of planning permission for housing development. The excavations were funded by Cadw/Welsh Historic Monuments.

Excavations in 1991-1992

A geophysical survey of the area of the development was undertaken on behalf of the Trust by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford, in advance of excavation, which it was hoped would give some indication of buried medieval structures. The geophysical survey provided little positive evidence of what might be anticipated, and therefore two initial trial trenches were excavated to test the anomalies that had been revealed by the survey. The results of the trial excavations were reasonably promising, and consequently a larger area along the medieval street frontage was examined in more detail.

The excavations have provided important evidence of occupation during the early life of the medieval town. The partial plans of several stone and timber buildings have been identified which fronted on to Church Street. Some of these are likely to have been agricultural rather than domestic. Several of the larger buildings appear to have been constructed with stone end-walls, with one or both sides either timber-framed or open-sided. It is anticipated that further interpretation of these structures will be forthcoming during post-excavation analysis. These structures are associated with three small circular ovens and a well-preserved square corn-drying kiln with associated arched flue in dry-stone walling (fig 2). A similar structure was previously excavated by CPAT in advance of the construction of the Community Centre in Hall Street, New Radnor (Dorling 1988). Part of the excavated area has produced large quantities of ferrous slags suggesting the site of a medieval smithy. The rear of the plot behind the structures contains numerous large latrine and/or rubbish pits, one of which is stone-lined.

The pottery so far suggests that the plot was occupied from the foundation of New Radnor in the mid-13th century until the end of the 14th century, following which it appears to have been used for cultivation. It is likely that a reasonably large assemblage of medieval pottery will be recovered consisting of cooking pots, glazed jugs and jars (fig 3). It is probable that this is mostly of local manufacture, but there appear to be a number of products of the Herefordshire potteries. There is a close parallel with medieval pottery from earlier excavations by CPAT at the medieval church site known as Capel Maelog, on the outskirts of Llandrindod Wells (Britnell 1990). Other artefacts were fairly scarce, with only a few iron objects, mostly nails, and relatively little copper alloy or lead, and no coins. Stone objects include fragments of a mortar and a quern.

Underlying the medieval layers were a number of postholes and other features associated with a small flintwork assemblage together with several sherds of decorated ?Bronze Age pottery.

This is the first reasonably large-scale archaeological excavation within a medieval town in mid Wales, and as such the results are of some importance. In terms of the history of New Radnor itself it is clear that this part of the town was occupied by successive structures during the medieval period, the pottery evidence suggesting abandonment of this part of the borough for settlement from a date of about 1400. A full report on the excavations is currently in preparation, which it is hoped will be completed in 1993. At the same time, the opportunity is being taken to conduct a more thorough topographical survey of the remainder of the enclosed area of the medieval borough, in order to assess its archaeological potential.

Acknowledgements

CPAT is grateful to the Meredith brothers for permitting access for the excavations and to their agent Mr R Meredith, to Radnorshire District Council and the people of New Radnor for their support and encouragement, to Geophysical Surveys of Bradford for undertaking prior geophysical survey, and to Cadw/Welsh Historic Monuments for funding the work.

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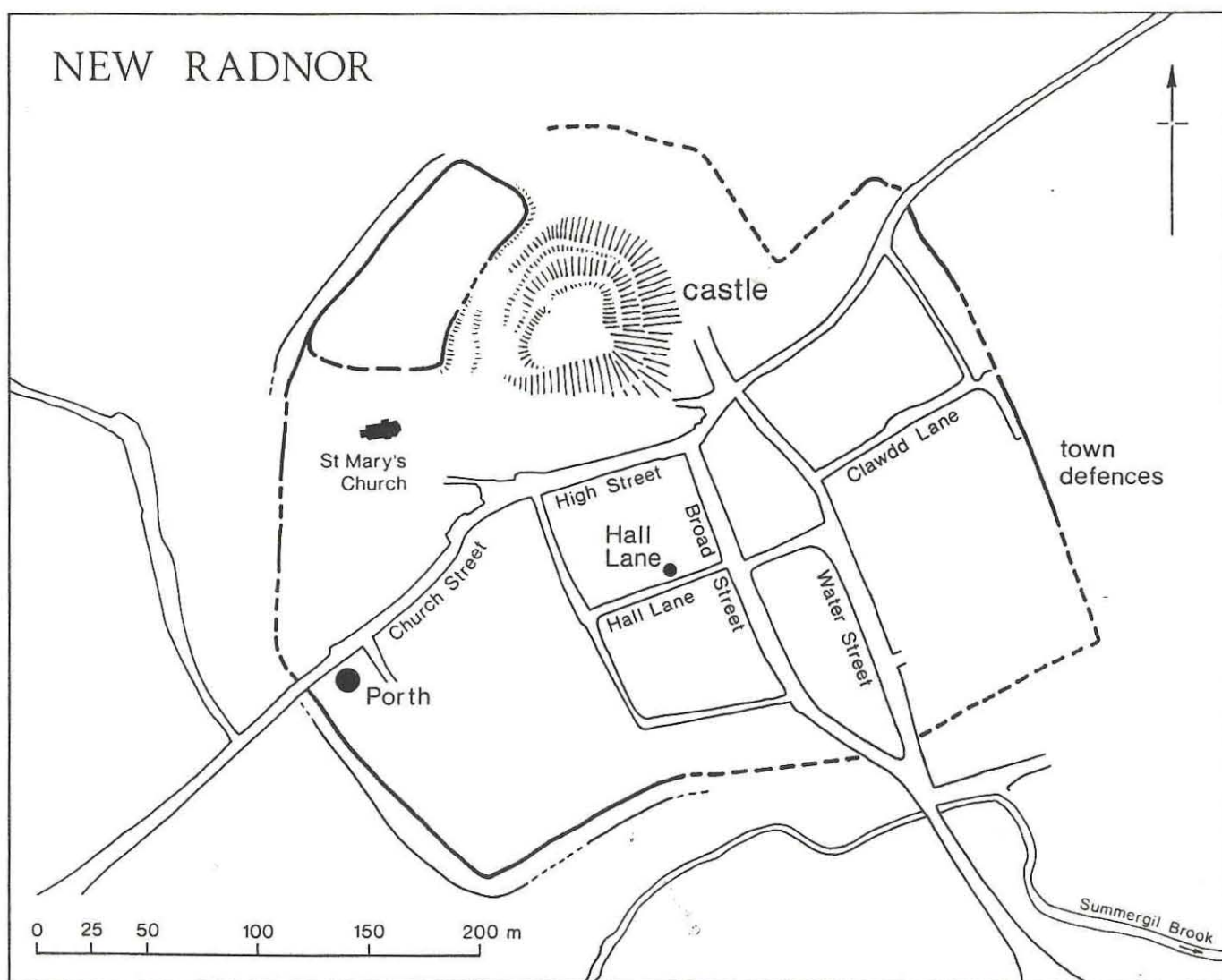


Figure 1
New Radnor - The Porth, 1991-1992: location of excavations by CPAT in 1991-1992

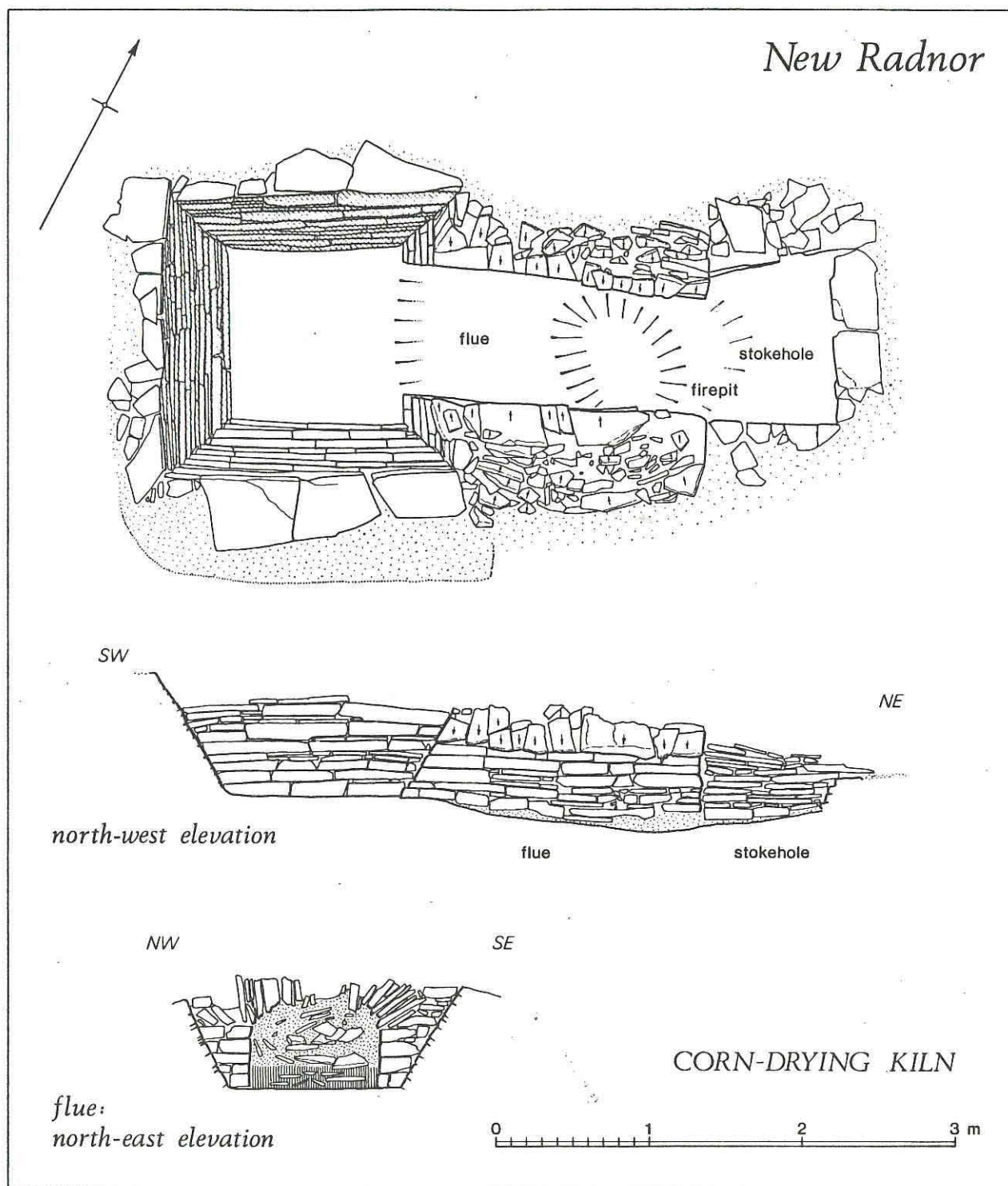


Figure 2
New Radnor - The Porth, 1991-1992: medieval corn-drying kiln

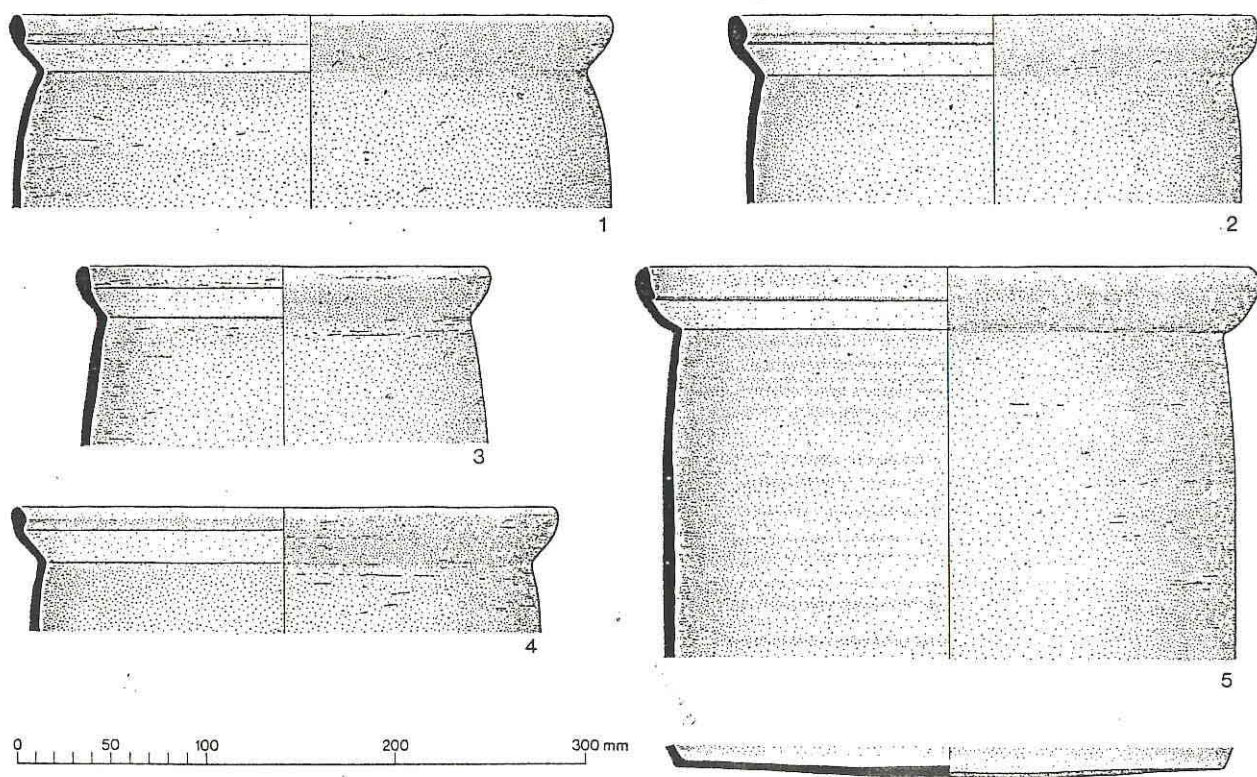


Figure 3
New Radnor - The Porth, 1991-1992: selected medieval pottery