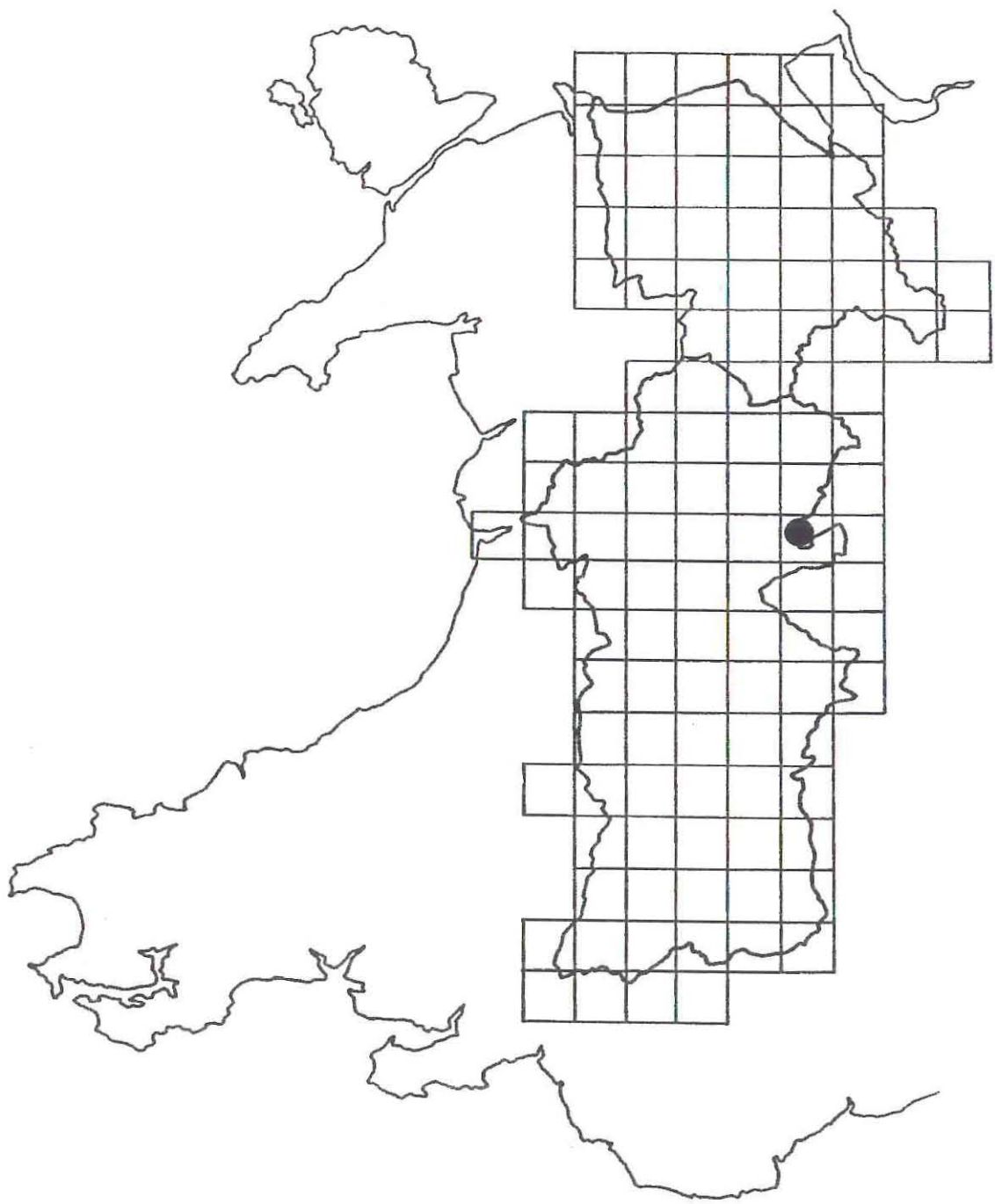
THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Plas Du, Montgomery, Powys

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION



CPAT Report No 153

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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September 1995

Report prepared for Dr P. Ashton

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 In June 1995 the Contracting Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (hereafter CPAT) was invited Dr P. Ashton of Plas Du, Montgomery, to prepare a specification and tender for an archaeological evaluation to determine the archaeological sensitivity of the proposal to renovate a section of the town walls, including the NE corner tower, forming part of the Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM Mg23, PRN 170).

1.2 The evaluation was requested by Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments acting in their role as archaeological advisors to the Secretary of State for Wales.

2 LOCATION (Fig. 1)

2.1 The site lies at the NE corner of the 13th-century town defences between Arthur's Gate and Plas Du.

2.2 The wall in question forms a boundary between land belonging to Plas Du, within the town defences, and land owned by Montgomeryshire District Council, including the town ditch, to the north. This includes the NE corner tower, and adjacent sections of wall to the west and south, extending for a maximum of 33m and 72m respectively.

2.3 The town defences are assumed to have consisted of a substantial ditch and internal bank surmounted by a stone wall, and are thought to have been constructed some time after 1227 (O'Neil and Foster-Smith 1940, 218). Excavations in 1938 and 1939 identified the foundation of the town walls to the west of the corner tower, the front of which lay 5ft 6in (1.6m) in front of the existing wall, which is described as modern (O'Neil and Foster-Smith 1940, 225-6 and pl. 4).

2.4 John Speed's plan of 1610 (Nicholson & Hawkyard 1988) shows a crenelated wall at this point with a substantial corner tower. Care should be taken, however, not to place too much emphasis on this early depiction as the details may not be entirely accurate, and indeed any standing masonry at that time could relate to the original late medieval Plas Du, rather that to the 13th-century town defences.

3 THE EVALUATION

3.1 CPAT was commissioned to undertake the evaluation, which was carried out between 24th August and 6th September 1995. In accordance with the Schedule of Works and recommendations by Cadw, the evaluation consisted of three stages: a photographic and drawn survey; a single evaluation trench along the line of the corner tower; and last of these, a watching brief during consolidation. The latter is an on-going commitment and will form an appendix to the present report once works have been completed.

3.2 Photographic and Drawn Survey

3.2.1 Following the clearance of vegetation from the walls and tower, but prior to repair works commencing, a photographic survey of the standing structure was undertaken, consisting of a series of overlapping views of the interior and exterior in 35mm black and white print and colour slide formats. The aim of the survey was to provide a

photographic record of the condition of the wall before consolidation work commenced.

3.2.2 The corner tower was in a state of advanced collapse, with only the southern side adjoining the boundary wall still standing. The interior survived to a maximum height of 1.1m, while the exterior extended to 2.6m, the maximum thickness being 1.1m. The wall was composed of random uncoursed stone with traces of mortar on the lower section of the external face only. The curvature of the masonry suggested that it had not been laid out consistently to a common radius.

3.2.3 Adjoining the south side of the tower, and apparently of contemporary build, a length of wall extended south for 24m before a change in height, and possibly in build, was evident adjacent to a structure built against the external face. Along this length the wall was constructed of random, uncoursed, clay-bonded masonry, surviving to a maximum height of 1.5m internally, with a basal thickness of c. 0.7m. A section 2.7m long had been roughly rebuilt in 1994, and another small area of internal facing had recently been mortared. Apart from these changes, the structure of the wall appeared to be of one build.

3.2.4 To the south, the wall extended for a further 49m. This section stands to a height of c. 0.9m internally, but has been constructed to revet the outer facing of the rampart where it has been cut back to form an access to adjacent properties. The wall is again random, uncoursed masonry but here is topped by large stone blocks.

3.2.5 To the west of the corner tower the wall is generally of a similar build to that described in 3.2.3 above but is topped by large stones, and survives to a maximum height of 2.0m. The eastern end, however, shows some evidence of having been rebuilt and would not appear to be contemporary with the surviving structure of the tower.

3.2.6 The drawn survey was conducted using an EDM and included both sections of wall and the corner tower, as well as adjacent areas of the town defences. The results are illustrated in Fig. 1. In addition to providing a location for the evaluation and an archive record of the standing masonry, the survey also recorded earthwork features lying within the defences between the tower and Plas Du. A slight platform (c. 13 x 5m) was identified cutting into the inner tail of the bank, while three faint, parallel gullies may indicate former boundaries.

3.3 The Evaluation. Trench A (3.6 x 1.2m max., Fig. 2. Numbers in brackets refer to Fig. 2)

3.3.1 Trench A was located to examine the structure of the tower in the area where it had collapsed, in the hope of identifying the original line of the medieval wall. A full drawn, written and photographic record was maintained throughout the evaluation.

3.3.2 Before excavations could begin, a substantial amount of collapsed masonry and post-medieval build-up had to be removed. This was achieved by the use of a machine under careful supervision and direction. Once the area had been sufficiently cleared, the whole tower platform was cleaned by hand before excavation of the evaluation trench began. The trench was excavated entirely by hand to a depth deemed sufficient to identify the nature of the archaeological deposits and allow an interpretation of the results.

3.3.3 A layer of dark, loose loam (2) had been removed by machine onto a layer of yellow-brown stony clay (1). The upper layer contained modern artefacts as well as a quantity of bricks which may have been laid as a

rough floor on top of layer 1.

3.3.4 Removal of the stony clay (1) revealed a layer of large angular stone within a clay matrix (3). Investigation of this layer showed that it had been randomly dumped, as suggested by the frequent voids and random pitch of the stones. It would appear that this layer was of some considerable depth, although this was not investigated, and had been deposited to form a platform over the outer face of the rampart, presumably associated with the construction of a tower. No dating evidence was found within the deposit, however, although a single fragment of worked stone (SF 100, Fig. 3) was recovered.

3.3.5 The outer face of this dumped material had evidently been cut-back during the construction of the existing wall. It would appear that a construction trench (4) had been excavated into the platform material to allow the construction of a wall (6) faced on the exterior only, and infilled behind with randomly dumped stone (5). This process of construction continued until the interior ground surface was reached, when an internal face was begun resting on rough footings. Fragments of clay pipe and 19th-century pottery were recovered from the backfill (5) behind the wall facing, proving that the standing masonry is of relatively recent date.

3.3.6 Within the evaluation trench, removal of layer 5 revealed the extent of the stone and clay platform material (3), the limit of which was marked by two substantial, level stones (10). A single sherd of late medieval or early post-medieval pottery was recovered from amongst the stones, but this was not securely stratified and could not be used as dating evidence. It was not possible to investigate beneath these stones, and the area in front of them had been cleared of post-medieval deposits to reveal a stony clay (9) which might be in situ bank material.

4 THE FINDS

4.1 A single small sherd of medieval pottery was recovered from layer 5, consisting of a jug body with mottled exterior glaze. A single rim sherd, possibly from a later medieval or early post-medieval jug, was recovered from amongst the stone layer 10, but was not sufficiently well stratified to provide any dating evidence. Other ceramic finds consisted of two small 19th-century pottery sherds from layer 1, a clay pipe stem and fragments of 19th-century pottery from later 5, and a sherd of post-medieval pottery from layer 8.

4.2 A fragment of worked stone (SF 100, Fig. 3) was recovered from the surface of layer 3 (see Fig. 2, location). The stone measured 185 x 112mm maximum, and 28mm thick. The original edges survived along two sides where the stone had been worked to form a slightly raised border on one face only. Two inscribed arcs had been marked on the face, as if part of setting-out a design. Curiously, the arcs appear to continue across a fracture on the face, suggesting that either the stone was not perfectly flat, or that the arcs were inscribed after the stone had been broken. It is not possible to suggest either a date or function for the artefact.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 The evaluation proved conclusively that the surviving section of masonry belonging to the corner tower, and presumably also the adjoining boundary wall, is of relatively modern construction. It is possible that both may be associated with the construction of the existing Plas Du in 1901.

5.2 The existence of an earlier tower is suggested by the deposit of stone within a clay matrix (3), which appeared to form a platform on the corner of the defences above the outer face of the rampart. However, this had been considerably damaged by the construction trench (4) for the more recent boundary wall and tower. The substantial stones (10) identified at the outer edge of the platform material are not themselves obviously part of a wall or foundations for a wall, although this must remain a possibility. The limited nature of the evaluation made interpretation difficult, and since no firm dating evidence was recovered, the precise line of the medieval tower remains uncertain. It would seem likely, however, that the position of these stones and the extent of the platform material are of some significance and give the best indication of the possible extent of the medieval structure.

5.3 Although it was not possible to identify with any certainty the line of the medieval tower, the results from the evaluation can be used to suggest a possible line for the reconstruction and reconsolidation. Taking the standing structure of the tower and the position of the stones (10) identified at the outer edge of the platform material, a radius of c. 3.0m can be suggested for the outer face of the reconstruction.

6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CPAT would like to thank Dr. Ashton and Arthur Baldwin for their kind cooperation and assistance during the evaluation.

7 REFERENCES

Nicholson, N., & Hawkyard, A., 1988 *The Counties of Britain: A Tudor Atlas by John Speed.*

O'Neil, B. H. St J., & Foster-Smith, 1940 'Montgomery Town Wall', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 95, pt.2, 217-28.

APPENDIX 1

SITE ARCHIVE

Site data:

10 context record sheets
4 black and white films, contacts, negatives and archive prints
113 colour slides
Photographic catalogue
1 A3 excavation plan with A3 photocopy appended with site levels
EDM survey data, Penmap file PLASDU.PTS
ACAD drawing files PLASDU.DWG and PLASDUOS.DWG

Finds data:

Context 1: 2 sherds of 19th-century pottery.

Context 3: 1 fragment of carved stone SF 100.

Context 5: 1 sherd of medieval jug body; 1 clay pipe stem fragment; 1 sherd of 19th-century pottery.

Context 8: 1 sherd of post-medieval pottery.

Context 10: 1 sherd of late medieval/early post-medieval pottery.

APPENDIX 2

MONTGOMERY TOWN WALLS: ARTHUR'S GATE/PLAS DU

SPECIFICATION FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVALUATION BY CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

1 Introduction

1.1 The proposed works on the town walls of Montgomery which currently form the boundary between Arthur's Gate and Plas Du involves renovation to the existing wall surmounting the rampart.

1.2 This area borders the historic core of Montgomery and the surviving earthworks in this area are scheduled ancient monuments.

1.3 Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments in their capacity as archaeological advisers to the Secretary of Sate for Wales have determined that an archaeological assessment should be a condition of Schedule Monument Consent.

2 Objectives

2.1 The objectives of the evaluation are:

2.1.1 to reveal by means of an evaluation trench the nature, condition, significance and, where possible, the chronology of the archaeology within the area of the proposed development in so far as these aims are possible;

2.1.2 to record any archaeology revealed in the evaluation trenches;

2.1.3 to prepare a report outlining the results of the field evaluation and incorporating sufficient information on the archaeological resource for a reasonable planning decision to be taken regarding the archaeological provision for the area affected by the proposed development;

2.1.4 to identify and make recommendations options for the management of the archaeological resource, including any further provision for that resource where it is considered necessary.

2.2 to undertake a photographic survey of the existing walls after the clearance of the present vegetation but prior to the consolidation/rebuilding works.

2.3 to maintain a watching brief during the period of consolidation/rebuilding of the present wall.

3 Methods

3.1 A single excavation trench 2m long by 1m wide. Where required this will be taken to a maximum depth of 1.2m below the existing ground surface. Consultation with the client and the curator will be necessary before this depth is exceeded.

3.2 The evaluation will be undertaken using standard evaluation procedures:

3.2.1 removal of modern overburden by machine;

3.2.2 evaluation of the archaeological deposits by hand trowelling to

establish their importance and integrity, but avoiding any unnecessary disturbance of the deposits. All features encountered will be examined as fully as appropriate to fulfil the requirements of the evaluation and within the constraints imposed by time and safety considerations.

3.2.3 all archaeological contexts recorded using the standard numbered context system employed by CPAT. All significant contexts to be planned and/or drawn in section at appropriate scales, and photographed in monochrome and colour. All drawn records will be related to control points depicted on modern maps.

3.2.4 all archaeological artefacts and environmental samples recorded and processed in a manner appropriate to the material involved. Those requiring conservation or other specialist treatment will be stored in a stable environment until such times as they can examined by a specialist. All finds, except those deemed to be Treasure Trove, are the property of the landowner. It is anticipated that they will be donated to the appropriate local or regional museum, subject to agreement being reached with the landowner and the museum curator.

3.3 Following the on-site work an illustrated and bound report will be prepared. This will be in A4 format and contain conventional sections on: Site location, Topography and Geology; Historic Background; Excavation; Conclusions and Recommendations and References, together with appropriate appendices on archives and finds.

3.4 The site archive will be prepared to specifications laid out in Appendix 3 in the Management of Archaeological Projects (English Heritage, 1991).

4 Resources and Programming

4.1 The evaluation will be undertaken by a skilled archaeologist. Overall supervision will be by Dr A Gibson, a senior member of CPAT's staff who is also a member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

4.2 All report preparation will be completed by the same field archaeologist who conducted the evaluation.

4.3 It is anticipated that the assessment and evaluation will take no more than four days in all and that the subsequent report would be prepared immediately thereafter, dependent on the client's instructions and the arrangement of a suitable timetable. The date of commencement, at the time of writing, has yet to be agreed with the client, and will be dependent on the state of the site. The archaeological curator will be informed of the detailed timetable and staffing levels when agreement has been reached with the client.

4.4 Requirements relating to Health and Safety regulations will be adhered to by CPAT and its staff.

4.5 CPAT is covered by appropriate Public and Employer's Liability insurance.

A.M. Gibson
20th June 1995

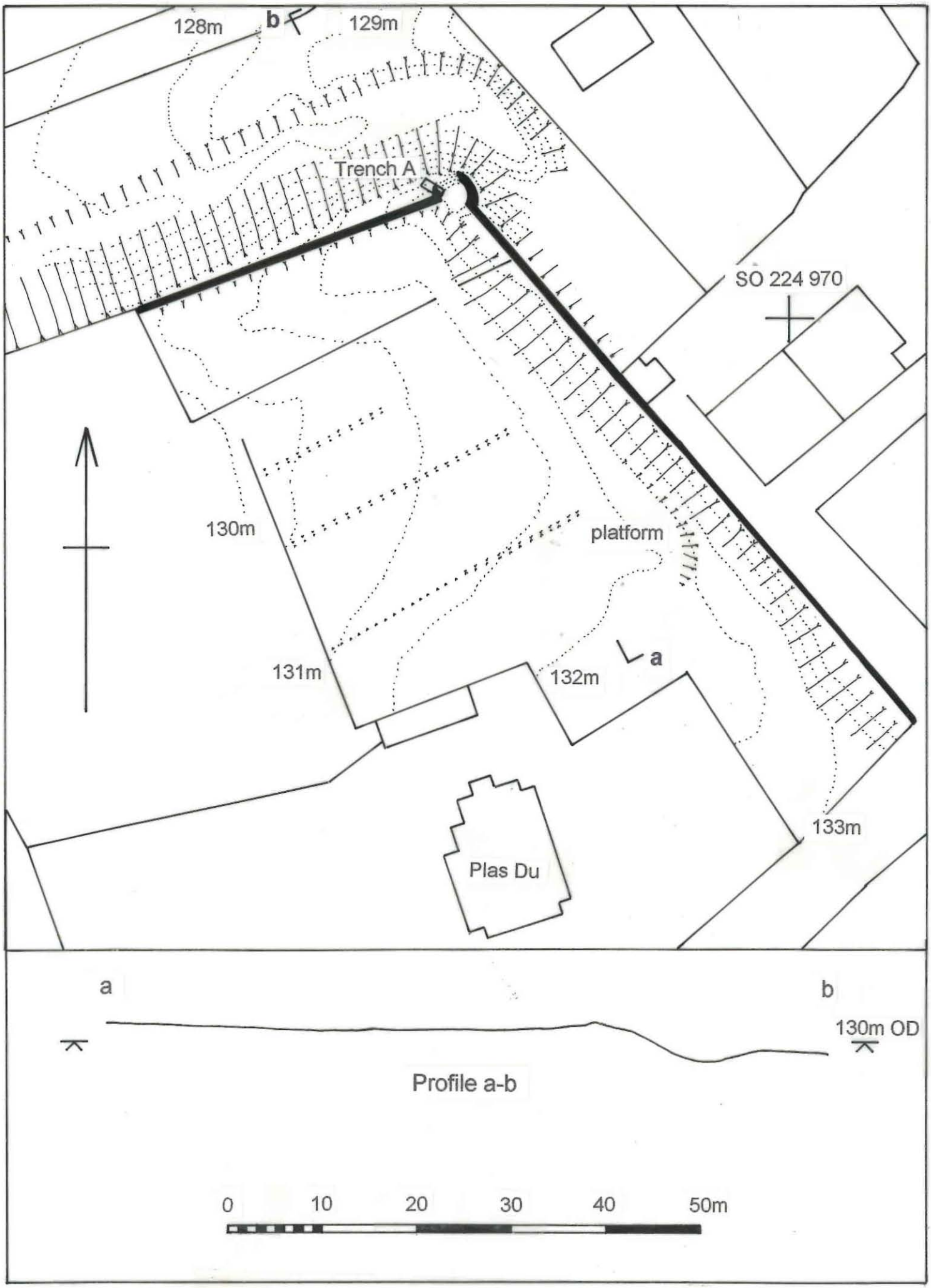

Fig. 1: location and measured survey 1:500

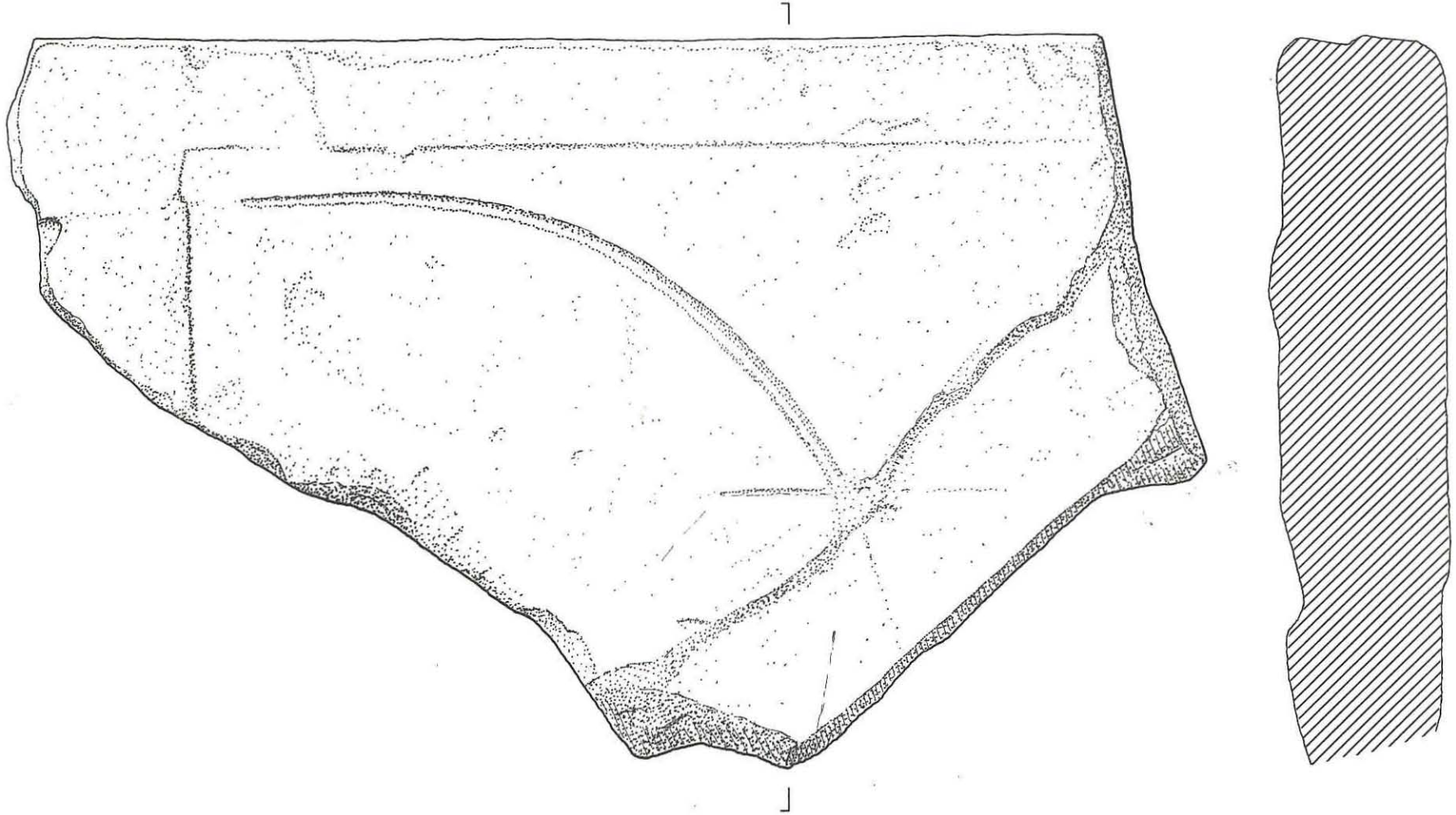

Fig. 3: Worked Stone SF100. Scale 1:1

Fig. 2: Corner tower and Trench A. 1:20