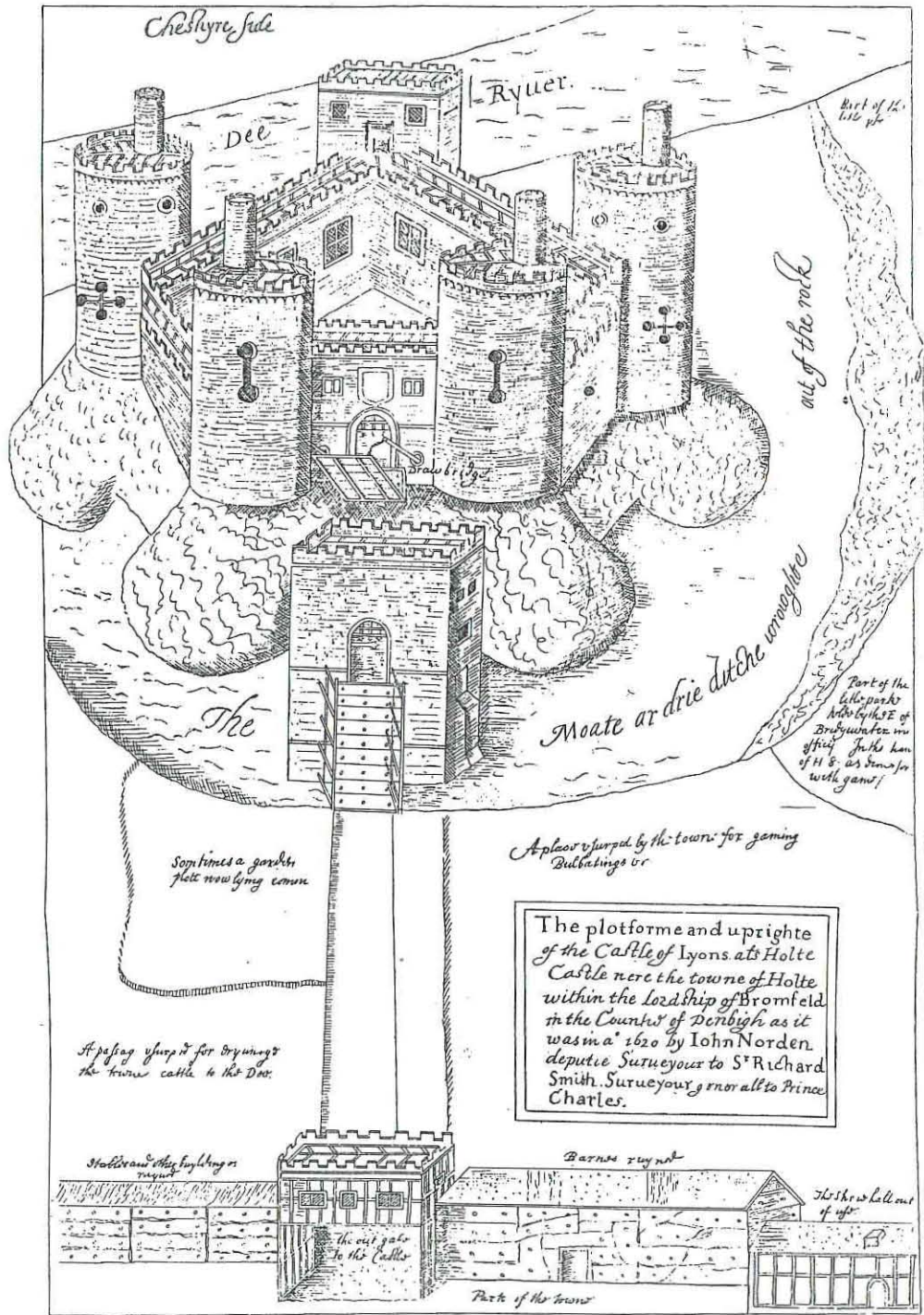


*Castle Mews, Holt*  
 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION



**CPAT Report No 267**

*Castle Mews, Holt*  
**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

**W.G. Owen & P. Frost**  
March 1998

Report for Clutton Bros.

**The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust**  
7a Church Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7DL  
tel (01938) 553670, fax (01938) 552179  
© CPAT 1998

**CPAT Report Record**

**Report and status**

CPAT Report Title	Castle Mews, Holt		
CPAT Project Name	Castle Mews, Castle Street, Holt		
CPAT Project No	768	CPAT Report No.	267
Confidential (yes/no)		draft/final	

**Internal control**

	name	signature	date
prepared by	W.G.OWEN	<i>W.G. Owen</i>	30/3/98
	P.FROST	<i>P. Frost</i>	30/3/98
checked by	N.W.JONES	<i>N.W. Jones</i>	30/3/98
approved by	A.M. GIBSON	<i>A.M. Gibson</i>	30/3/98

**Revisions**

no	date	made by	checked by	approved by

**Internal memo**


**The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust**

7a Church Street Welshpool Powys SY21 7DL  
 tel (01938) 553670, fax 552179  
 © CPAT

## **CONTENTS**

- 1 INTRODUCTION
2. LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY, and GEOLOGY
- 3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL and HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
- 4 EXCAVATION
- 5 CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS
- 6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- 7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF KNOWN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

APPENDIX 2: SITE ARCHIVE

APPENDIX 3: SPECIFICATIONS

## **LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS**

COVER: HOLT CASTLE *c.*1620, *after* JOHN NORDEN'S ILLUSTRATION

- FIG. 1 LOCATION MAP. SCALE: 1:25,000
- FIG. 2 LOCATION OF EVALUATION AREA.  
WITHIN THE MEDIEVAL CORE OF THE VILLAGE. SCALE 1:2,500
- FIG. 3 LOCATION OF TRENCHES SCALE 1:500
- FIG. 4 TRENCH A: SECTION SCALE 1:50
- FIG. 5 TRENCH B: SECTION SCALE 1:50
- FIG. 6 TRENCH C: PLAN AND SECTION SCALE 1:50

## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In January 1998, the Contracts Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (hereafter CPAT Contracts) was asked by Modular Designs Architectural Consultants, acting on behalf of their clients Clutton Bros., to submit a specification and quotation for an archaeological evaluation at Castle Mews, Castle Street, Holt.
- 1.2 An application for planning permission (Application No. CB1727) for a residential development had been applied for by Mr. Mike Higgins of Modular Designs, acting as agent for Clutton Bros., the builders. As there were reasonable grounds for believing that there could be important archaeological remains on the site, it was recommended by the Curatorial Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust that an evaluation be carried out. Mr. Higgins therefore invited the Wrexham Archaeology Service to prepare a design brief detailing the archaeological work required.
- 1.3 The project specification submitted by CPAT Contracts, was approved by the Wrexham Archaeology Service and CPAT Contracts were commissioned to carry out the evaluation.

## 2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY and GEOLOGY

- 2.1 The development area (SJ 4103 5382) lies within the village of Holt (Fig. 1), which is located c. 8 km north-west of Wrexham and c. 13 km south of Chester. It occupies an area of approximately 3,000m<sup>2</sup> and is located immediately north-west of Holt Castle (PRN 101260, Scheduled Ancient Monument No. De106) and fronting Castle Street (B5102) on its north-west side. The site is bounded to the north-east and south by private housing and to the south-east by Holt Castle quarry ditch, which separates it from further private housing.
- 2.2 Holt lies on the Cheshire Plain with the River Dee curving around its northern and eastern edge, and which forms, in this area, the boundary between Wales and England. Prior to the development of two new houses, already built on the north side of the development area, the site comprised flat, turf-covered land c.10m above Ordnance Datum, and which appears to have been formerly used as a strawberry field. The house "Castle Mews" at present occupies the north-western half of the site, with access to it via a tarmac drive from Castle Street. The remainder of the site comprises overgrown unoccupied ground with large mounds resulting from modern dumping.
- 2.3 The solid geology of the area comprises Bunter sandstone pebble beds of Permo-Triassic Age, which are exposed in the river cliffs (Hains & Horton 1969, pl. II). The western perimeter of the development area is bounded by the red quarried sandstone face, which was the source of stone for the castle. The drift deposits are a mix of glacial till and boulder clay, overlain by loamy and sandy soils (Rudeforth *et al.* (1984) which have recently supported an extensive market gardening economy.

## 3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL and HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### Prehistoric

- 3.1 The Dee Valley, as other lowland river areas, is likely to have been rich in settlement throughout prehistoric times. During excavation at the Roman tile and pottery works (see 3.2 below), vessels associated with a Bronze Age burial were discovered at a location c.800m north-west of the development area (PRN 101249). South-west of the town, a ring ditch, also of probable Bronze Age date, has been identified by aerial photography (PRN 102484).

### Roman

- 3.2 Large scale excavations took place between 1907-1915, on a site identified as *Bovium*, a military tile and pottery works of c.1st-3rd century AD, presumably associated with the 20th Legion's fortress at *Deva*, c.12km to the north. *Bovium* is thought to have occupied c.8 hectares and included a workshops, barracks, domestic buildings, bath houses as well as industrial buildings and kilns (Grimes 1930).
- 3.3 Within the village, a few sherds of Roman pottery and tile were found during an evaluation in 1993 by Earthworks Archaeological Services on land immediately north of the present evaluation trenches

(PRN 17845), and a sherd of mortaria was uncovered during excavation work on Green Street in 1994 by CPAT (PRN 19455; Thomas 1994, 8). A coin reportedly dated c.AD119-138 was discovered in garden topsoil at a house west of the development area (PRN 102997).

#### **Early Medieval**

- 3.4 Until recently, there was nothing to indicate any activity at Holt between the Roman period and the foundation of the medieval town. However, the evaluation in October 1993 by Earthworks Archaeological Services, which comprised two linear trenches in an area where new housing has already been constructed (Fig. 2), yielded a single sherd of pottery that has been tentatively attributed to the Middle Saxon period (Earthworks 1993). The attribution and significance of this fragment remain to be established, not least because there is currently little information on whether pottery was made and used locally during this period.

#### **Later Medieval**

- 3.5 The development area lies within historic core of the planted town of Holt (Silvester *et al.* 1992,47-50). The town appears to have been developed at the same time as the castle was built by John de Warenne, Earl of Surrey, from 1282. De Warenne was granted the lordship of Bromfield and Yale and presumably constructed his castle on this strategic site on the River Dee to take advantage of trading possibilities. During the medieval period, the River Dee was navigable as far as Holt, which was visibly a very prosperous borough at the time. A borough charter was issued in 1285 according to later sources, and was confirmed by a subsequent grant in 1411. The survey of the lordship of Bromfield and Yale in 1315 reveals a rapidly expanding settlement: there were 204 tenements and 159 burgesses (Soulsby 1983, 145). Soulsby estimated a population in excess of 1000 at this time, but the figure of c.650 inhabitants has been suggested by Pratt (1974, 116).
- 3.5 In its street plan, Holt bears a resemblance to the true *bastide* (fortified planted town) of south-western France, with the river bridge at one end of the developed area and the castle and market place at the other. The triangular market place is still clearly discernible as a focus for all the roads in the town with the shaft of a late medieval market cross surviving (Fig. 2). Two major streets, Cross Street and Church Street ran north to south, with a third lane, now lost, apparently lying parallel to and east of Church Street and passing just in front of the church. Church Green between Cross Street and Church Street was an area of common within the town in the 19th century and probably long before, surviving as an open space to today. Beyond Church Green to the north, Cross Street is now known as Green Street. Castle Street fed in from the south and Frog Lane from the west (Thomas 1994, 5). Burgage plots ran off the main streets, almost without exception on an east/west alignment. The boundaries of some of these are visible in the modern pattern of landholdings within the town.
- 3.6 Although a grant of murage was given early in the town's development, there is no evidence that this was ever taken up, and the castle apart, the only defence which is well documented seems to have been the tower guarding the bridge though this has now disappeared. However, a local historian has postulated a course for the defences, utilising existing or former property boundaries and topographic features (Mr N. Moore: pers. comm.). As yet, however, the construction of defences around Holt has to be proved by excavation (Thomas 1994, 5).
- 3.7 As with many Welsh towns, Holt went into decline in the late medieval period. During the mid-15th century the population was estimated at less than 300. Hostility between the English and Welsh inhabitants appears to have played a part in the decline. By 1620, when John Norden surveyed the town there were only 65 freeholders. Norden's survey of the Burgages and lands at Holt (republished by Palmer in 1910) reveals burgage plots laid out along the regular street pattern which radiated from the triangular market place, which is located north-west of the development area (Fig. 2). He also referred to a Welsh courthouse located somewhere to the west of the castle precinct, the location of which has yet to be confirmed.
- 3.8 The 1993 excavations by Earthworks Archaeological Services revealed foundation rubble and a large post-hole, which was suggested as being associated with an aisled building aligned east-west and of possible medieval date.
- 3.9 The site of Esp Hill fishponds (PRN 101267) of presumed medieval date are located c.600m west of the market square. The site is located in a field of pasture where a series of pond sites are divided by substantial earth banks.

**Post-Medieval**

- 3.10 The earliest map of the town dates to around 1790 and is one of a series of manuscript maps of the Trevallyn and Plas Teg estates in Denbighshire and Flintshire examined by Thomas (1994, 6). The Tithe Map and the 1st edition Ordnance Survey Map suggest the town had changed little since Norden's survey. The Corporation of the Mayor and Burgesses of Holt was finally dissolved by statute in 1883.

**4 EXCAVATION**

- 4.1 A total of three trenches were excavated during the evaluation (Fig. 3). A single trench 8m x 1.5m was excavated to the north-west side of the existing house of Castle Mews, which is to be demolished in advance of the development and two trenches 10m x 1.5m were excavated on the undeveloped ground to the east of the house as approved by Mr. Stephen Greuter, Wrexham Archaeology Service. The trenches were sited to coincide with the location of the proposed housing.
- 4.2 The trenches were initially machine-excavated under constant archaeological monitoring and subsequent excavation was undertaken by hand.
- 4.3 Recording was undertaken according to the specifications (Appendix 3) and the results appear on Figs 4-9, where numbers refer to contexts recorded on site.

**Trench A (10m x 1.5m: Fig. 4)**

- 4.4 The removal by machine of up to 0.4m of dark brown, humic ploughsoil (8), overlying a more silty greyish-brown layer c.0.12m thick (9), revealed a few fragments of modern brick and some sherds of 19th/20th-century pottery. These upper deposits sealed the natural subsoil (7), c.0.3m thick, which comprised reddish-brown friable sandy loam with a very low stone and pebble content. Beneath the subsoil, layers of highly degraded yellow and red sandstone (3 & 4) overlay the red sandstone bedrock at a depth of c.0.8m.
- 4.5 At the south-west end of the trench, layers 7, 8 and 9 had been cut through by a modern drainage gully (2), which contained full bricks, wood and a small amount of slag in the section which was cut to verify the character of the feature. These were contained in a sand substrate (10 & 11) which overlay a layer of dark brown sandy loam c.0.25m thick (1).
- 4.6 A linear feature (5), aligned north-west/ south-east across the trench, was exposed at a depth of 0.6m cutting through layers 3 and 4. At this level, the sides of this feature were fairly straight and c.1m wide, when first revealed. Excavation revealed that the apparently straight edges did not persist as such and that the sides became quite irregular. The fill of this feature was identical to layer 7 and contained no finds. It was interpreted as being naturally formed, possibly a small stream bed cutting through the sandstone at this point.

**Trench B (10m x 1.5m: Fig. 5)**

- 4.7 Removal by machine of up to 0.35m of dark brown, humic ploughsoil (12), overlying a more silty greyish-brown layer c.0.12m thick (13), revealed the natural subsoil (14), c.0.44m max. thick, which comprised reddish-brown friable sandy loam with a very low stone and pebble content, as in Trench A. Beneath the subsoil, a layer of degraded yellow sandstone c.0.32m max. thickness (15), spread over the south-eastern half of the section, abutting a layer of brick red degraded sandstone c.0.22m thick (16), which had bands of the yellow degraded sandstone running through it (Fig. 7). These layers represent an undisturbed horizon, in which no features were revealed.

**Trench C (8m x 1.5m: Fig. 6)**

- 4.8 The trench was sited on the north-eastern edge of the garden area of Castle Mews house, where a large oil tank and its concrete raft had to be removed prior to the excavation. At the north-western end of the trench, the rectangular form of the trench as originally specified had to be modified to accommodate the presence of a telephone cable.
- 4.9 Removal of the topsoil (17) exposed, at a depth of c. 0.40m, a layer of stiff, clean, orange-yellow sandy-silt (24) which was interpreted as the natural subsoil. In the south-eastern part of the trench, this layer was cut by the edge of a ditch-like feature (19), which extended across the full width of the trench and which reached a maximum depth of 1.60m below the surface of the topsoil which sealed

it. This feature contained two fairly distinct layers of fill, a buff coloured sandy loam (18), and below it a grey, silty clay (20), which became more compact with depth, Finds from this layer consisted of fragments of hand made brick and floor tile, three sherds of 18th century pottery and a clay pipe stem. A more complete excavation of this feature was prevented by the presence of a sewage pipe (21) contained in a pipe-trench (22), which crossed the trench.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 The lack of archaeological features suggests that the development area has had little other than agricultural use in past times. Previous documentary research ( Earthworks Archaeological Services, 1993) revealed no evidence for any occupation to the rear of the street frontage in this part of the village. The lack of evidence of occupation in Trench C, located only c.0.6m from the present pavement can only be applied to the precise location of that trench and can not be used to infer a lack of occupation on the street frontage on this area in general.

## 6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 6.1 CPAT would like to thank Clutton Bros. for their assistance throughout the project and Mr. Charles Clutton for his provision and operation of the JCB; Dr. S.J. Altree for his co-operation, particularly over the siting of Trench C and Mr. Stephen Greuter of Wrexham Archaeology Service.

## 7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Earthworks Archaeological Services 1993, *An Archaeological Evaluation at Castle Street, Holt, Clwyd*. Northop.
- Grimes, W.F., 1930, Holt, Denbighshire: the works depot of the twentieth legion at Castle Lyons. *Y Commrodor*, 41.
- Hains, B.A., & Horton, A. 1969, *British Regional Geology, Central England*. 3rd edition. London: HMSO.
- Nash Williams, V.E. (revised Jarret, M.G.) 1969, *The Roman Frontier in Wales*. 42-44, University of Wales Press. Cardiff.
- Palmer, A.N., 1910, *The Town of Holt*. London.
- Pratt, D., 1965, The Mediaeval Borough of Holt, *Denbighshire Historical Society Transactions*, 14, 9-74.
- Pratt, D., 1974, The Charter of Holt, *Denbighshire Historical Society Transactions*, 23, 104-125.
- Rudeforth, C.C., Hartnup, R., Lea, J.W., Thompson, T.R.E., and Wright, P.C., 1984, *Soils and their Use in Wales*, Bulletin No 11. Harpenden: Soil Survey of England and Wales.
- Silvester, R.J., Walters, M., & Wayne, D., 1992, *Wrexham Maelor Historic Settlements*, CPAT Report No. 42.
- Soulsby, I.N., 1983, *The Mediaeval Towns of Wales*. Chichester: Phillimore and Co.
- Thomas, D., 1994, *Green Street, Holt, Clwyd*. CPAT Report No. 115.

### Manuscript Sources

- c.1790 Estate Map of Holt and surrounding area: Flintshire County Record Office, Hawarden D/BC additional
- 1843 Tithe Survey of Holt Parish: Denbighshire County Record Office, Ruthin.



1873 1st edition Ordnance Survey 1:2500

## APPENDIX 1

## List of Known Archaeological Sites:

- PRN 101249**      **HOLT ROMAN SITE AND BARROW**      **Sam. DE013**      **SJ 404546**  
Works depot of the 20th Legion known as Bovium. Excavated by Acton 1907-1914. Includes various structures of Roman date and possible site of a Bronze Age barrow. Finds related to the barrow deposited at the national Museum of Wales.
- PRN 101258**      **ST. CHAD'S CHURCH**      **SJ 4120 5409**  
Church built late 13th century in decorated to perpendicular style. Tower added 15th century.
- PRN 101260**      **HOLT CASTLE**      **Sam. DE106**      **SJ 4113 5377**  
Castle built between 1282 and 1311.
- PRN 101267**      **ESP HILL FISHPONDS**      **SJ 404538**  
Field containing remains of fishponds of possible medieval date.
- PRN 102484**      **SYCAMORE HOUSE RING-DITCH**      **SJ 407534**  
Possible ring-ditch of Bronze Age date, identified by aerial photography.
- PRN 102997**      **HOLT ROMAN COIN**      **SJ 4080 5365**  
Dupondius of Hadrian AD119-138. Found in garden topsoil.
- PRN 17845**      **1993 EXCAVATIONS**      **SJ 4108 5385**  
Excavations at Castle Mews by Earthworks Archaeological Services.
- PRN 19455**      **1994 EXCAVATIONS**      **SJ 4100 5425**  
Excavations at Green Street, Holt by CPAT.

**APPENDIX 2**

**Site Archive:**

24 Context record forms  
2 A1 site drawings

1 black and white negative film, contacts and archive prints  
1 colour slide film  
Photographic catalogue

**Finds:**

3 sherds post-medieval pottery, context 18  
3 fragments of brick, context 18  
6 fragments of floor tile, context 18

**APPENDIX 3****Castle Mews, Holt: Archaeological Evaluation****SPECIFICATION FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVALUATION  
BY CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST****1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The proposed development of a block of land at Castle Mews, Castle Street, Holt (SJ41035382) involves the building of a residential development, the background to which is described in the Curatorial Brief.
- 1.2 This area lies close to the historic core and castle of Holt and previous work has suggested that Roman and Medieval remains may well survive in this area.
- 1.3 The Wrexham Archaeology Service in their capacity as archaeological advisers to the local planning authority have determined that a field evaluation is necessary to assess the implications of the proposed development on the archaeological resource. Accordingly a brief (dated 26.01.98) has been prepared by Wrexham Archaeology Service which describes the scheme of archaeological works required and against which this specification has been composed.

**2 Objectives**

- 2.1 The objectives of the evaluation are:
  - 2.1.1 to reveal by means of evaluation trenches, 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 recommendations options for the management of the archaeological resource, including any further provision for that resource where it is considered necessary.

**3 Methods**

- 3.1 The evaluation will take the form of three trenches, of varying lengths and widths (dimensions specified on the sketch plan accompanying the Brief). Where required these 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 (as

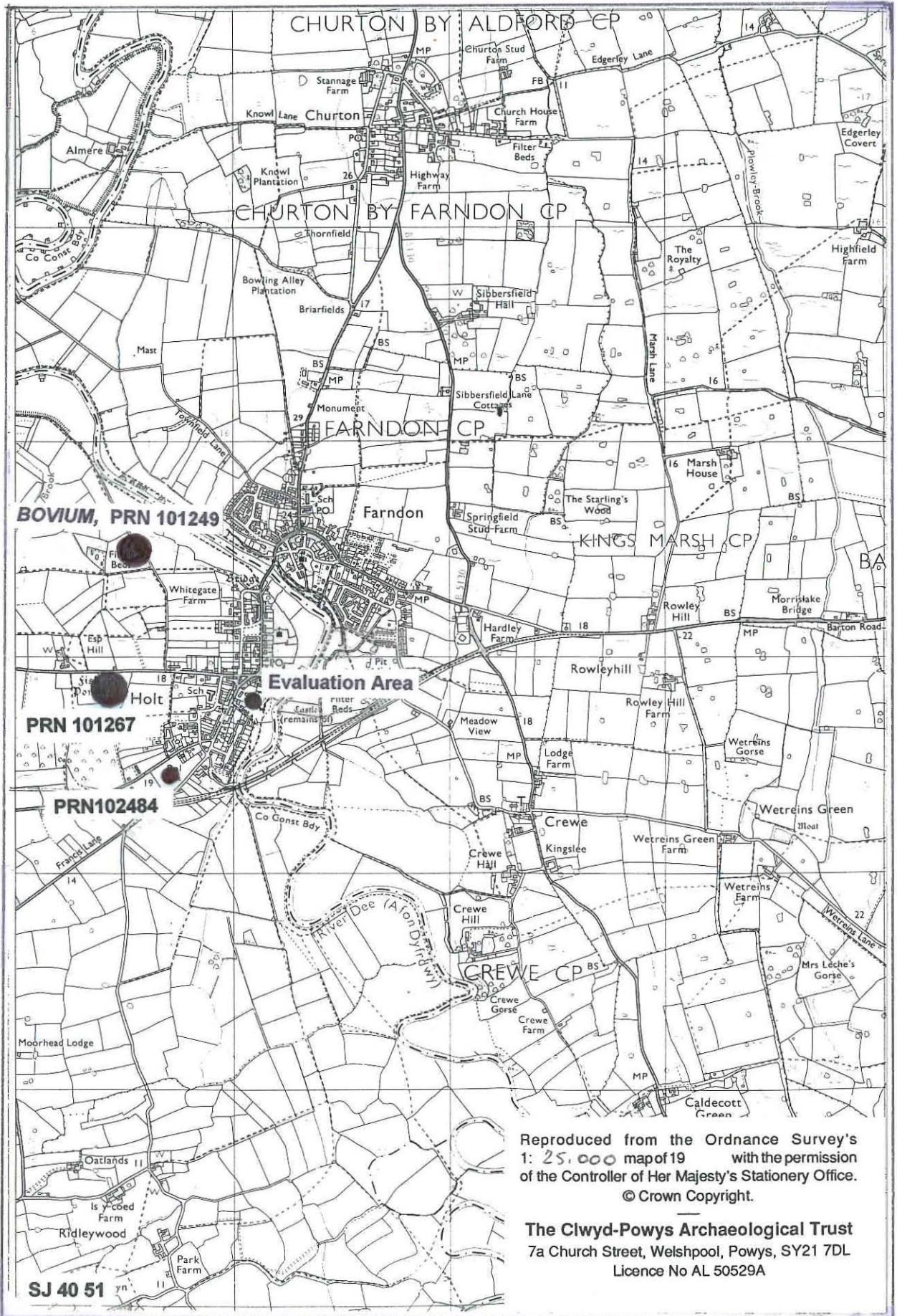
defined in the Curatorial Brief), and photographed in monochrome and colour. All drawn records will be related to control points depicted on modern maps.

- 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 be 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 according to the principles laid out in the Curatorial Brief (p5-6). 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 small team of two skilled archaeologists under the direct supervision of an experienced field archaeologist, who will also be responsible for undertaking the desk-based assessment. 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 and negotiated access arranged by the client. 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  
Projects Manager



Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey's  
 1: 25,000 map of 19 with the permission  
 of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.  
 © Crown Copyright.

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust  
 7a Church Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7DL  
 Licence No AL 50529A

Fig. 1 Location Map. Scale 1:25,000

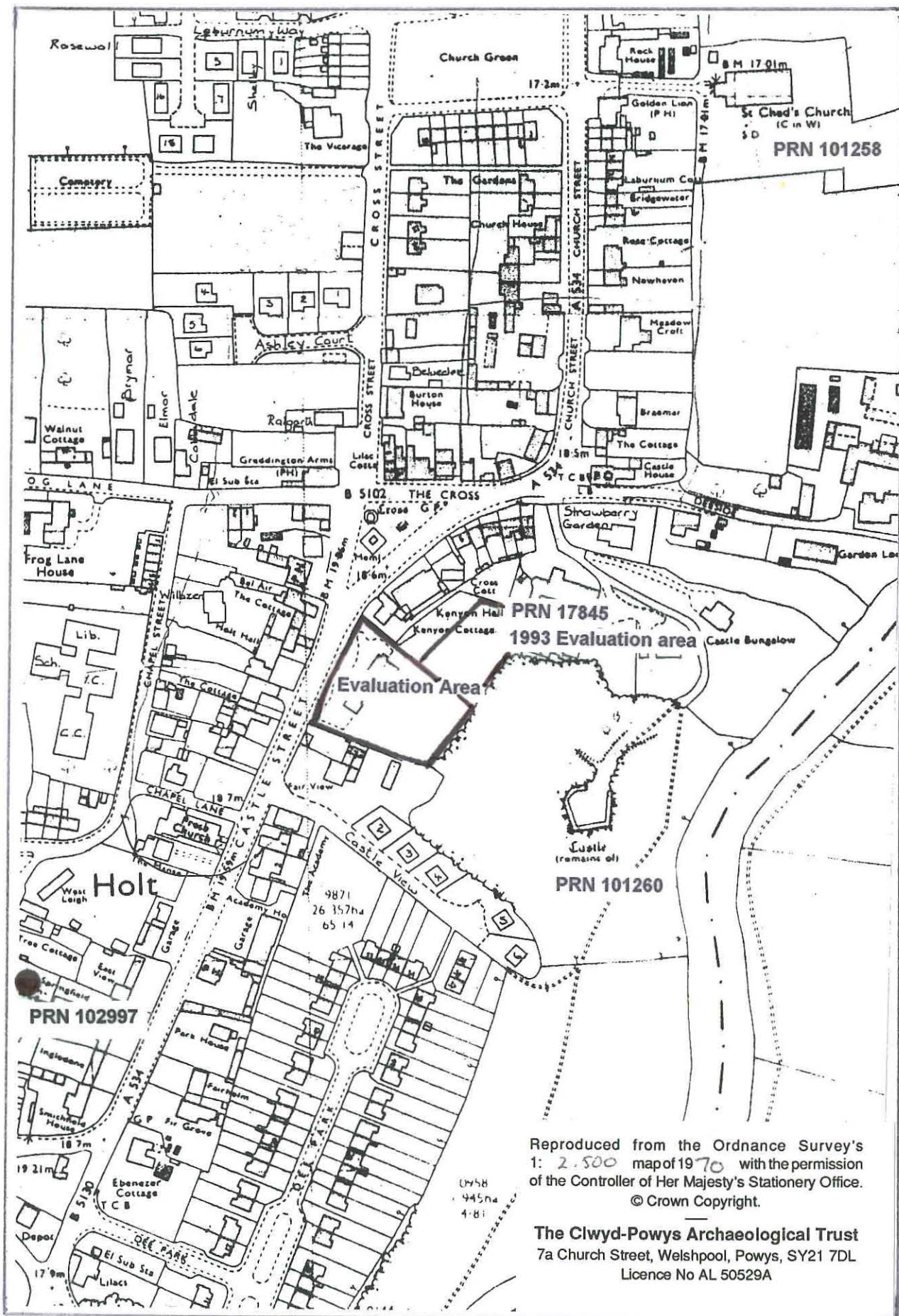


Fig. 2 Location of Evaluation Area within the medieval core of the village.  
Scale 1:2,500

Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey's  
1: 2,500 map of 1970 with the permission  
of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.  
© Crown Copyright.

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust  
7a Church Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7DL  
Licence No AL 50529A

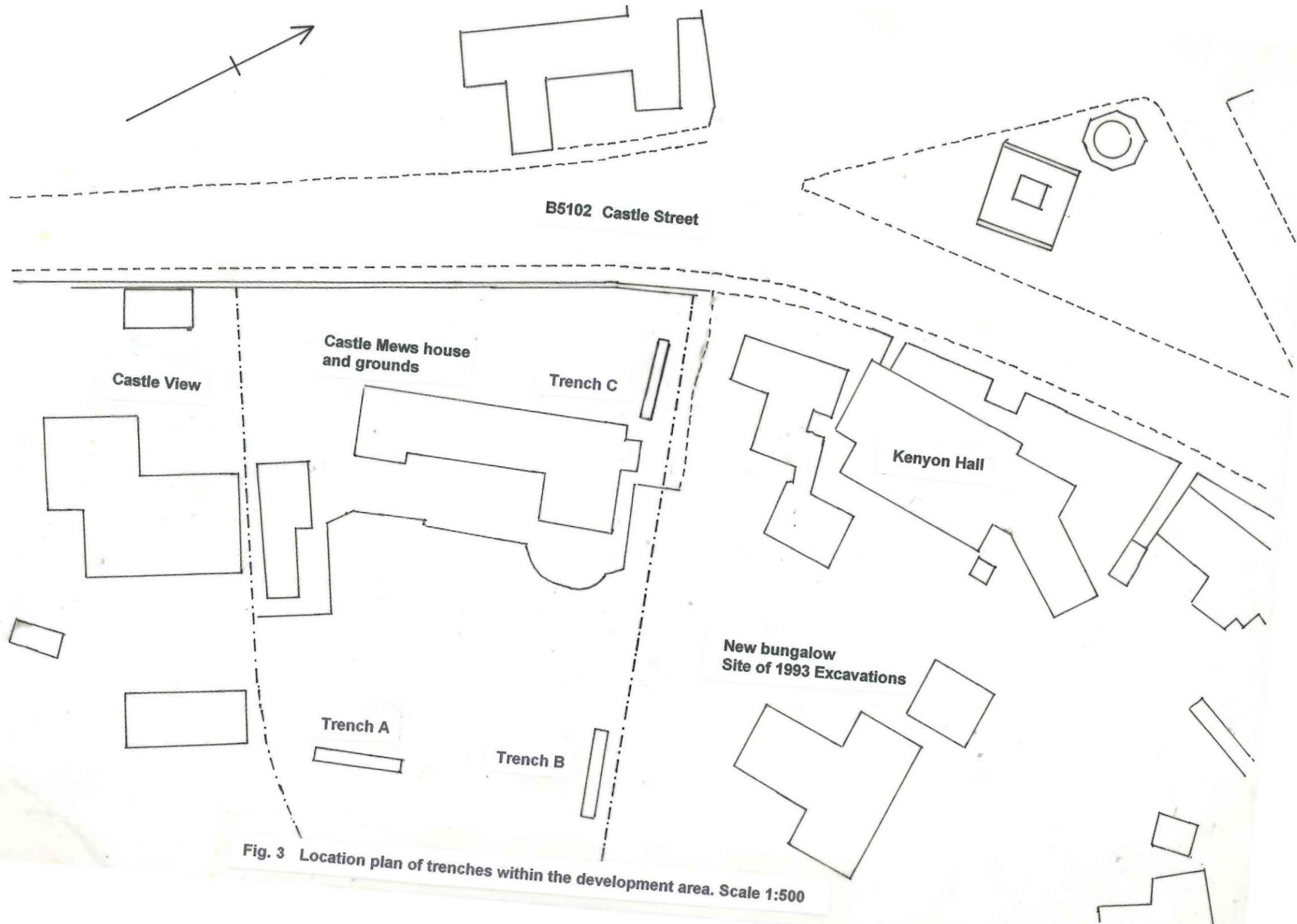


Fig. 3 Location plan of trenches within the development area. Scale 1:500



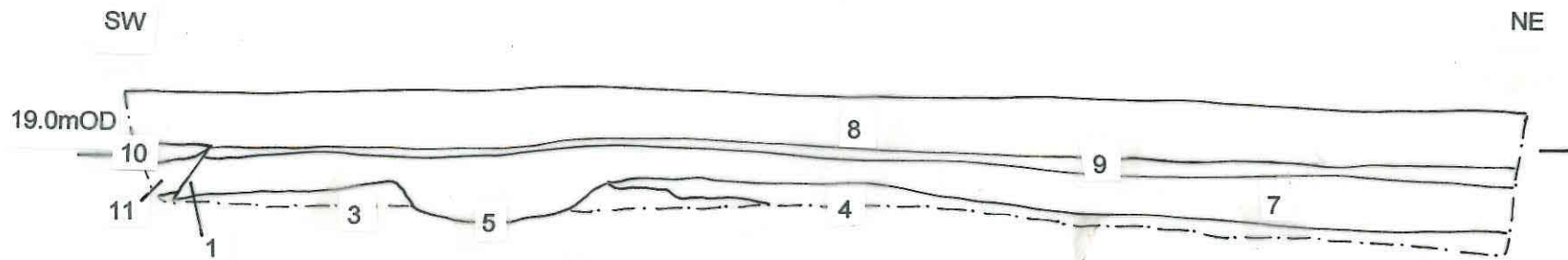


Fig. 4 Trench A section 1:50

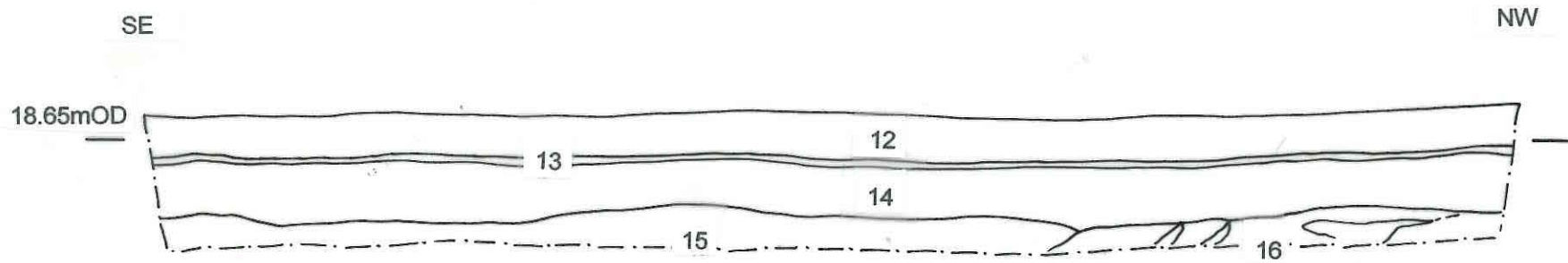


Fig. 5 Trench B section 1:50



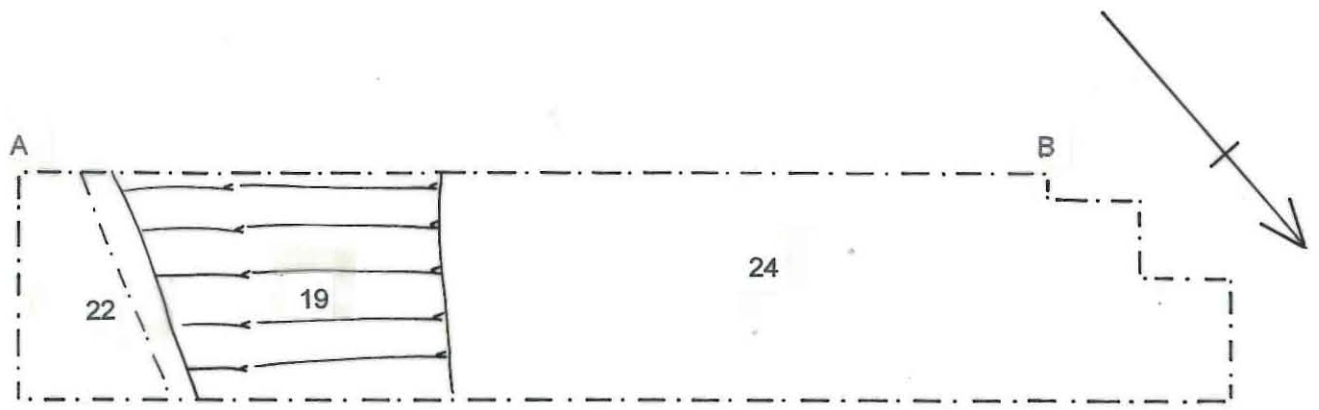
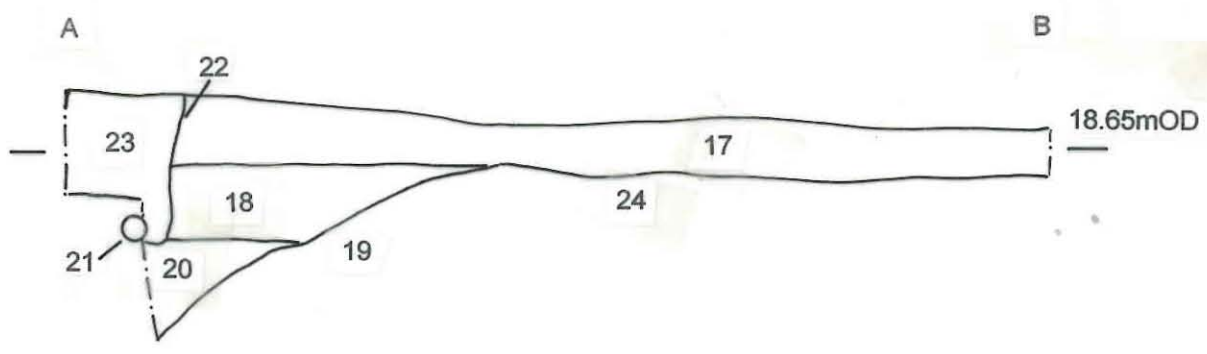


Fig. 6 Trench C plan and section 1:50