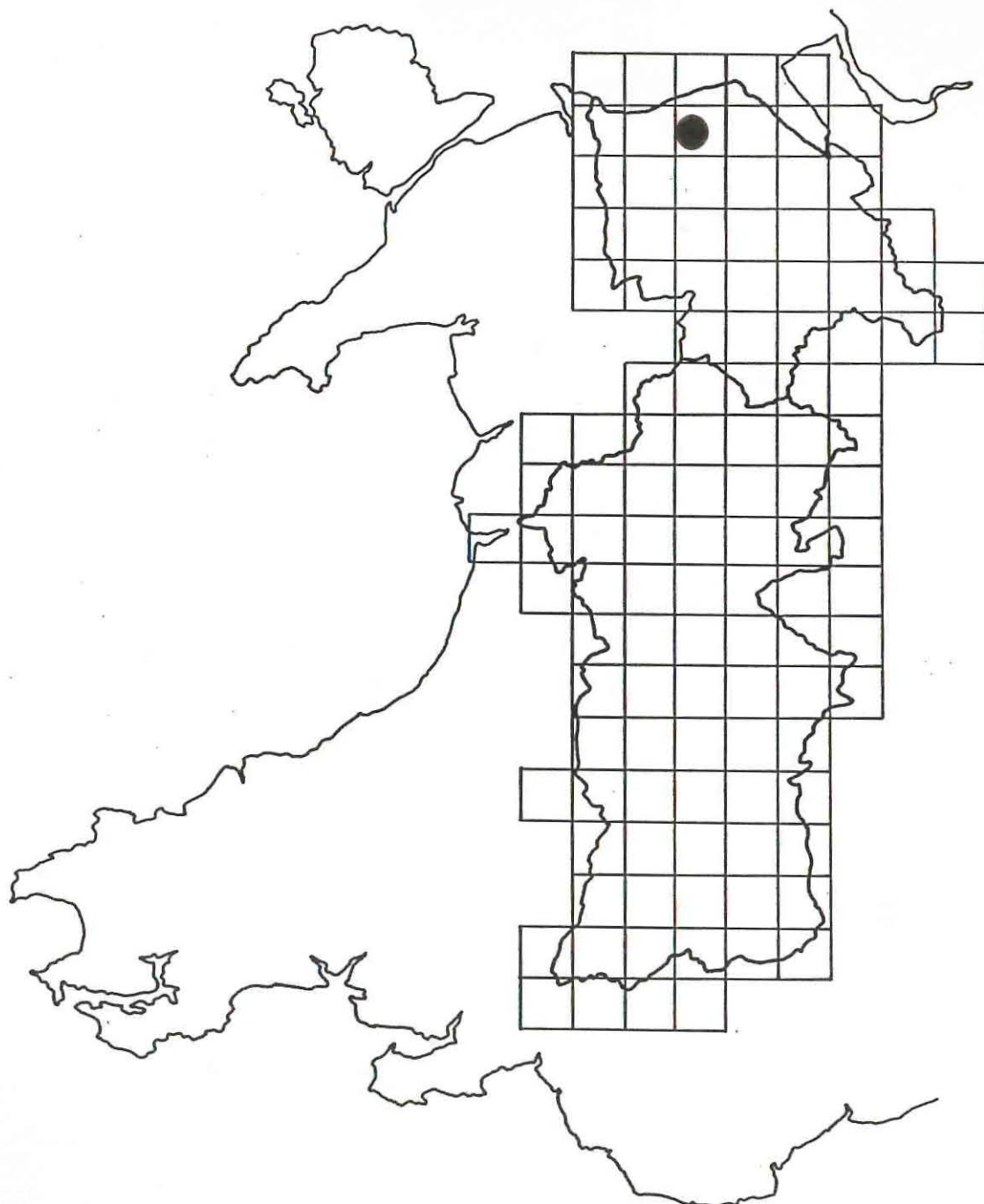


Station Yard, St Asaph, Clwyd

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION



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Report prepared for Wynnstay and Clwyd Farmers Ltd

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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF LAND AT WYNNSTAY & CLWYD FARMERS DEPOT, CHESTER STREET, ST.ASAPH, CLWYD

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was commissioned in May 1993 by Wynnstay & Clwyd Farmers Ltd of Eagle House, Llansantffraid, Powys, through the offices of Eaton, Manning, Wilson Partnership of 31 Severn Street, Welshpool, Powys, to carry out a desk-top review and archaeological field investigation of land off Chester Street, St Asaph. This was intended to establish the archaeological and historical significance of the site, the subject of an outline planning application for residential development presented to Rhyddlan Borough Council (ref. 2/APH/0439/92/P).
- 1.2 An advisory brief was prepared on behalf of Rhyddlan Borough Council by their archaeological advisers, the Clwyd Archaeology Service, summarising the planning background, the archaeological interest, the aim of the evaluation and specifying the approach that should be adopted in conducting the evaluation. It was recommended that both a document search and a limited amount of archaeologically supervised trial trenching would be required. Four evaluation trenches should be excavated, the topsoil and recent overburden from these being removed mechanically. If archaeological deposits were encountered, subsequent excavation should be carried out manually. Recording of features and stratigraphy in each trench should be conducted according to the normal principles of stratigraphic excavation.
- 1.3 Following discussions with Clwyd Archaeology Service, a written specification for the evaluation was prepared by CPAT and submitted to the developer who in turn referred it to the Clwyd Archaeology Service. This specified the objectives of the evaluation, the methods that the contractor would employ and the programming of the proposed evaluation work (copied as Annex 1).
- 1.4 The specification and the tender for completing the evaluation was accepted by the client's agent on 6 May 1993. Documentary research and field investigations were carried out in mid-June and this report prepared immediately afterwards.

2 Site Location, Drift Geology and Land Use (Fig.1)

- 2.1 The site comprises an area of approximately 9000 square metres located on the eastern edge of St Asaph in Clwyd. The northern boundary of the site is defined by Chester Street (the A525), the eastern edge by the dismantled Vale of Clwyd Railway, whilst the western and southern sides are bordered by the curtilages of private residences.
- 2.2 At present the area is occupied by the offices and warehouses of Wynnstay and Clwyd Farmers Ltd., a coal merchant's stockyard and the old Station House, an attractively designed and constructed building which may possibly date to 1858 when the Vale of Clwyd railway was opened. The area, which appears from surface observations and comparison with the overall contours of the surrounding area to consist largely and possibly entirely of 'made-up' ground slopes slightly from west to east and overlies clay tills derived from Permo-triassic rocks which are

characteristic of much of the underlying subsoil of the Vale of Clwyd (Rudeforth et al 1984, 220).

3 The Historic Background

- 3.1 It is clear from John Speed's plan of St Asaph, published in The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain, in 1611 that in the early 17th century, Chester Street did not exist as a thoroughfare. A single house is depicted on the east side of what is now Denbigh Road and Mount Road, opposite the cathedral, and while we should not expect from Speed a totally accurate depiction of the density of dwellings, the available evidence points to fields and open areas between the main road and the River Clwyd.
- 3.2 By the beginning of the 19th century a small cul-de-sac, perhaps about 50m long and hemmed in by houses had developed opposite High Street. This was selected for a turnpike extension in 1811, replacing the old St Asaph road to Holywell which had previously run along Mount Road and then swung north-eastwards along what was termed Bishop's Lane towards the river. Its successor, rather shorter in length and served by a new bridge across the Clwyd, became Chester Street. The area later to become Station Yard is shown on the plan of 1811: there is nothing to suggest that it was anything other than a field at that time.
- 3.3 Twenty years later, Chester Street was identified as the 'best street in the town', with 'several handsome houses and pleasing cottages which have greatly improved the place' (Lewis 1833).
- 3.4 The Rhyl to Denbigh railway which passed through St Asaph was planned in 1855 and built between 1857-1858. It can be assumed that Station Yard was constructed at the same time.

4 Archaeological Background

- 4.1 It has been suggested that St Asaph could have been the site of the Roman fort of Varis (Waddelove 1991, 16) and that the favoured location of this installation extended up to the south-western edge of the development area. Roman finds dating to the 1st-2nd centuries AD have been found at other locations within the town, (CAR 2152; CAR 2155), seemingly indicating some Roman activity in the area.
- 4.2 The proposed development site lies approximately 120m east of the cathedral established in the mid-seventh century AD by St Kentigern. As indicated above, the earliest known cartographic source suggests that this was an open-field area, but such is its proximity to the medieval core of the town that the possibility of contemporary activity in this area cannot be entirely dismissed.

5 Field Evaluation

- 5.1 Four evaluation trenches were laid out within the area (shown as A, B, C & D on Fig.2); in consultation with Mr I. Sanderson of Clwyd Archaeology Service, their locations were altered slightly from the original recommendations in the brief to take account of on-site obstructions.

Each trench was excavated as outlined in the advisory brief, the exposed horizontal surfaces and vertical sections examined and, in view of the modern stratigraphy revealed, 1m-long sample sections of the latter drawn at a scale of 1:10. A photographic record of each trench was also made.

5.2 Trench A (Fig.3)

5.2.1 Trench A was 9m long and 1.5m wide and was sited close to the north-western corner of the station yard and immediately adjacent to its south-western boundary which closely follows the postulated north-eastern defences of the putative Roman Fort (Waddelove 1991, 17). The uppermost layer of the overburden consisted of grey, gritty material containing much modern debris and concrete fragments, to approximately 0.20m below the surrounding ground level. Below this, extending to a depth of 1.80m, excavated material consisted entirely of post-medieval and modern brick fragments, glass and pottery sherds contained in a stiff clayey matrix which varied in colour from light grey to a buff-brown.

5.2.2 There was no indication of earlier levels or natural undisturbed subsoil at 1.80m below the ground surface and after consultation with Clwyd Archaeology Service no further was carried out.

5.3 Trench B (Fig.4)

5.3.1 Trench B was 10m long and 1.5m wide and was located 27m to the south-east of Trench A and was again immediately adjacent to the south-western boundary of the site. Concrete fragments and modern debris contained in a grey, gritty matrix extended to a depth of 0.15-0.25m below the surrounding ground surface. Below this layer and extending to the level of the natural undisturbed boulder clay subsoil at a depth of approximately 0.70m, the contents of the trench consisted of successive layers of redeposited clays varying in colour from light grey to pink, the upper levels of which were stained with fuel oil. Finds consisted of modern brick fragments and small quantities of relatively modern pottery sherds.

5.3.2 No archaeological features were observed cutting the undisturbed natural subsoil at the base of the trench.

5.4 Trench C (Fig.5)

5.4.1 Trench C was also 10m long by 1.5m wide and lay just to the north-west of Station House. The uppermost 0.18m of the fill consisted of quarried stone hardcore below asphalt. Extending to the undisturbed boulder clay subsoil at an average depth of 1.40m below this makeup, the stratigraphy consisted largely of clays varying in colour from dark grey to buff. These contained brick waste, coal fragments and pottery sherds of post-medieval date. Again, in the limited area of undisturbed subsoil, no archaeological features were detected.

5.5 Trench D

5.5.1 This trench was sited opposite the depot of Wynnstay Farmers and was also 10m long by 1.5m wide. It was located immediately adjacent to the

edge of a concrete base, which subsequently proved to be the earlier station platform. The trench was not excavated to the level of the undisturbed subsoil as flooding occurred as a result of the leakage of ground water from the surrounding area into the trench. Material excavated down to the level of flooding consisted of recently deposited debris.

6 Conclusions

- 6.1 The two trenches, B and C, excavated to below the surface of the underlying undisturbed subsoil indicated clearly that at these locations any former soil layer had been previously removed and the subsoil truncated to an unknown depth. Subsequently, it appears that the ground was 'made-up' to its present level with clay soils containing post-medieval debris. Although not fully excavated to subsoil level, the results of trial trenches, A and D, further supports this conclusion.
- 6.2 No identifiable in situ or redeposited finds earlier than the late 19th century were recovered from the trenches, nor were any features identified which could have originated from earlier periods. In particular, no evidence was forthcoming of former Roman activity in this area, and the absence of medieval and early post-medieval artefacts tends to confirm the picture presented by Speed in 1610.
- 6.3 Trial trenching in the development area was limited and in some instances handicapped by the remains of previous industrial activity on the site. As a consequence it cannot be claimed unequivocally that the whole of the development area is devoid of earlier features. There is a faint possibility that original soil levels may remain intact in some areas that were not sampled.

7 Sources

7.1 Documentary

1811 Denbighshire Quarter Sessions Records: Turnpike plan deposit, St Asaph to Holywell (Clwyd Record Office, Ruthin)

7.2 Printed

Goodall, S.P. 1992 The Vale of Clwyd Railway. Rhyl to Denbigh

Lewis, S. 1833 A Topographical Dictionary of Wales 2 Vols (S.Lewis and Co, London)

Nicholson, N. and Hawkyard, A. 1988 The Counties of Britain. A Tudor Atlas by John Speed (London)

Rudeforth, C.C., Hartnup, R., Lea, J.W., Thompson, T.R.E., Wright, P.S. 1984 Soils and their Use in Wales (Soil Survey of England and Wales, Bulletin No.11)

Waddelove, E., 1991 Roman Dyffryn Clwyd from Prestatyn to Rhug Park (Ruthin)

8 Acknowledgements

8.1 CPAT wishes to acknowledge the assistance given by the staff of Wynnstay and Clwyd Farmers Ltd, the staff of the Clwyd County Council Records Office and also Mr Ian Sanderson of the Clwyd Archaeology Service.

9 Excavation Archive

9.1 The excavation archive currently comprises the following records.

9.2 Site Records

9.2.1 Plans and sections archive

Three annotated A4 section drawings

9.2.2 Photographic archive

35mm colour transparencies of excavation trenches and sections

35mm black and white prints of excavation trenches and sections

9.2.3 Context record archive

Catalogue and description of contexts

ANNEX 1: SPECIFICATION FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVALUATION AT WYNNSTAY AND CLWYD FARMERS DEPOT, CHESTER STREET, ST ASAPH, CLWYD

1 Introduction

1.1 The proposed residential development on land off Chester Street, St Asaph, lies within an area of potential archaeological sensitivity, with a putative Roman fort and a historic medieval town in the vicinity.

1.2 Rhuddlan Borough Council have decided on the advice of the Clwyd Archaeology Service who are archaeological curators for the District that a field evaluation is necessary to assess the implications of the proposed development on the archaeological resource in order that these can be taken into account during the determination of the planning application. Accordingly a brief has been prepared by the Clwyd Archaeology Service which describes the scheme of archaeological works required.

2 Objectives

2.1 The objectives of the evaluation are:

2.1.1 to reveal by means of a combination of desk-based assessment and evaluation trenches, the nature, 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 the planning authority to assess the implications of the development.

3 Methods

3.1 The first stage of the evaluation will examine all the readily available primary and secondary records relating to the area.

3.2 The second stage will take the form of four trenches, each up to 10m long and 1.5m wide, as specified in the evaluation brief. The trenches will have the topsoil and any modern overburden removed mechanically, with this phase of the work being supervised closely by the archaeological team leader. This will be followed by manual excavation of all areas deemed to be of potential archaeological significance within the trench.

3.3 The excavation will be undertaken using standard evaluation procedures:

3.3.1 removal of modern overburden and sterile lower levels

3.3.2 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 within the constraints imposed by time and safety considerations.

3.3.3 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 Evaluation Brief),

and photographed in monochrome and colour. All drawn records will be related to control points depicted on modern maps.

3.3.4 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 an appropriate museum, subject to agreement being reached with the landowner and the museum curator.

3.4 Following the on-site work a report will be prepared according to the principles laid out in the Evaluation Brief.

3.5 The site archive will be prepared to specifications laid out in Appendix 3 in the Management of Archaeological Projects (English Heritage, 1991), to be deposited in the Powys County Sites and Monuments Record.

4 Resources and Programming

4.1 The evaluation will be undertaken by a small team of skilled archaeologists under the direct supervision of an experienced field archaeologist, who will also be responsible for the desk-based assessment. Overall supervision will be by a senior member of CPAT's staff who will also be a member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

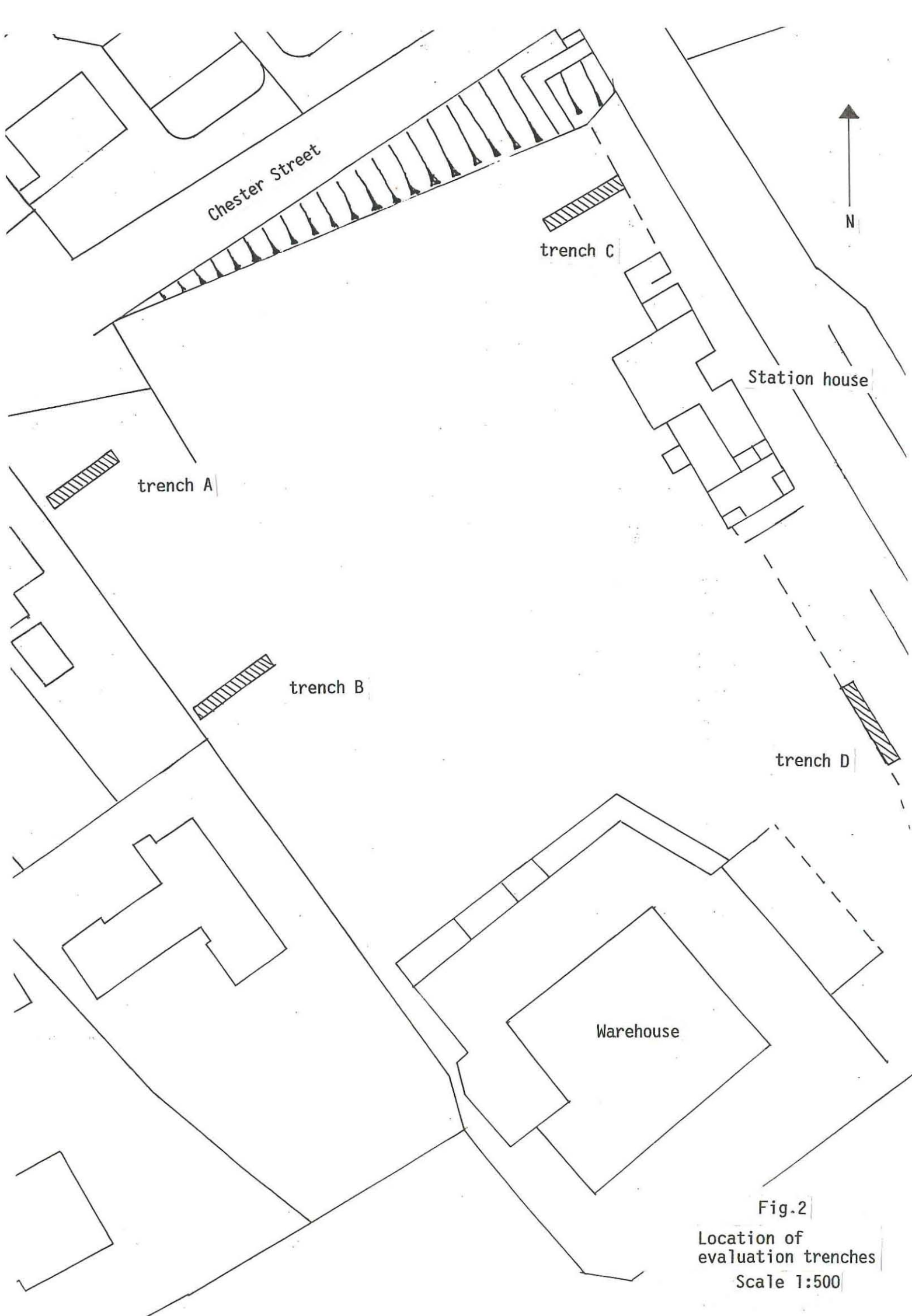
4.2 All report preparation will be completed by the same field archaeologist who conducted the evaluation.

4.3 It is anticipated that the assessment and evaluation will take about seven days in all and the subsequent report would be prepared 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.

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.

R. J. Silvester
29 March 1993



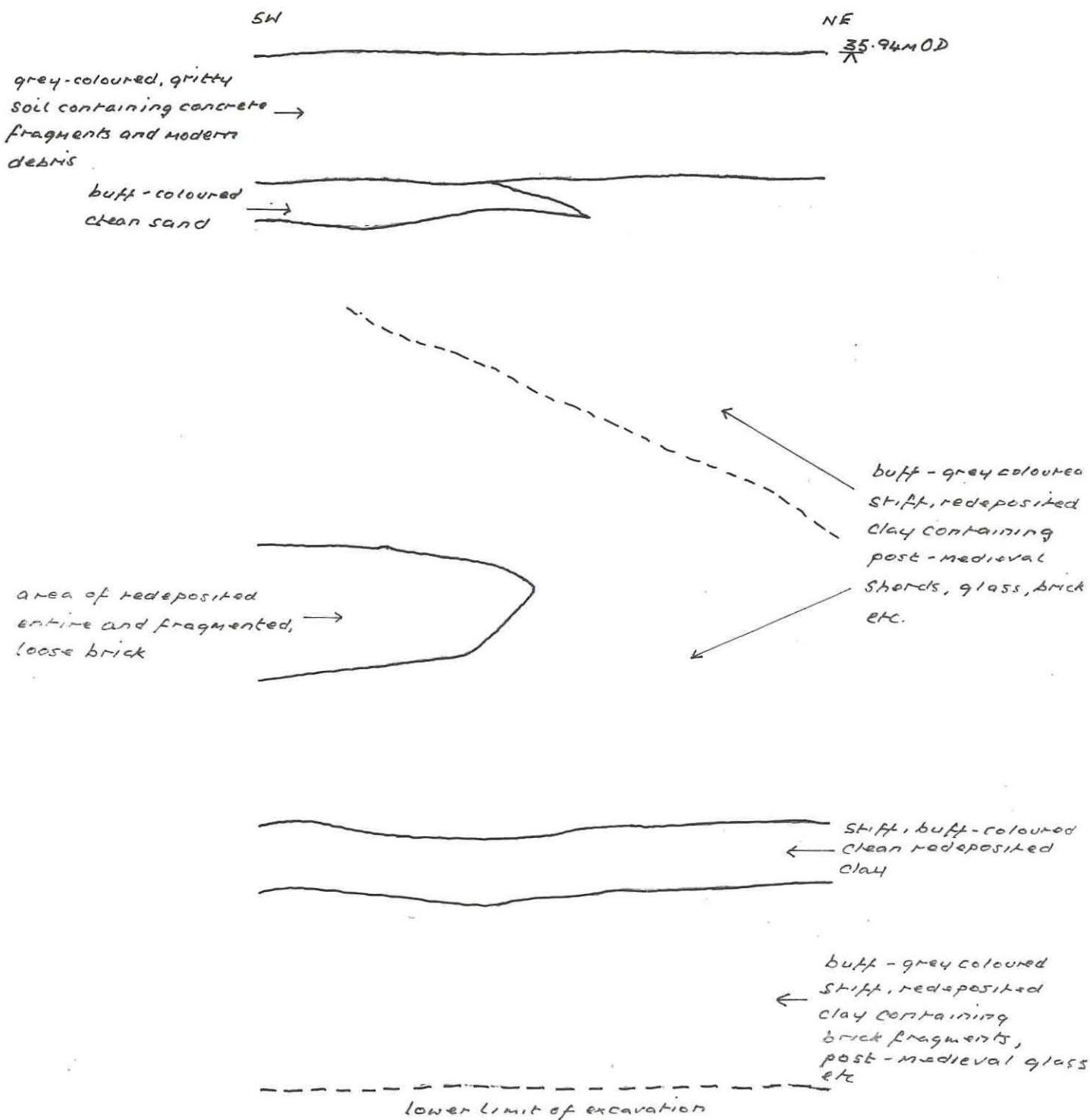


Fig. 3
 Station Yard, Chester Street, St. Asaph.
 Part of Evaluation Trench A
 Scale 1:10

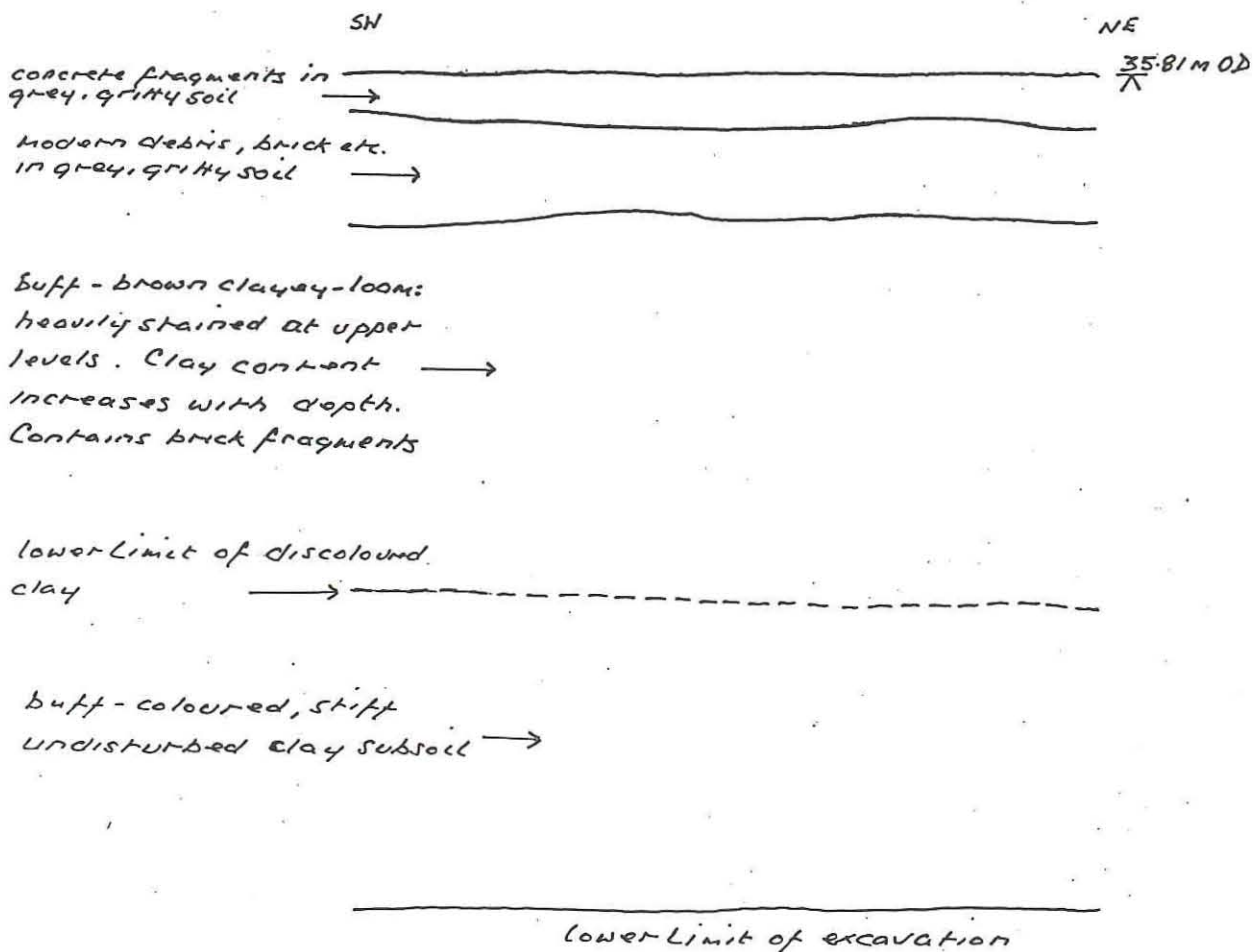


Fig. 4
 Station Yard, Chester Street, St. Asaph
 Part of Evaluation Trench B
 Scale 1:10

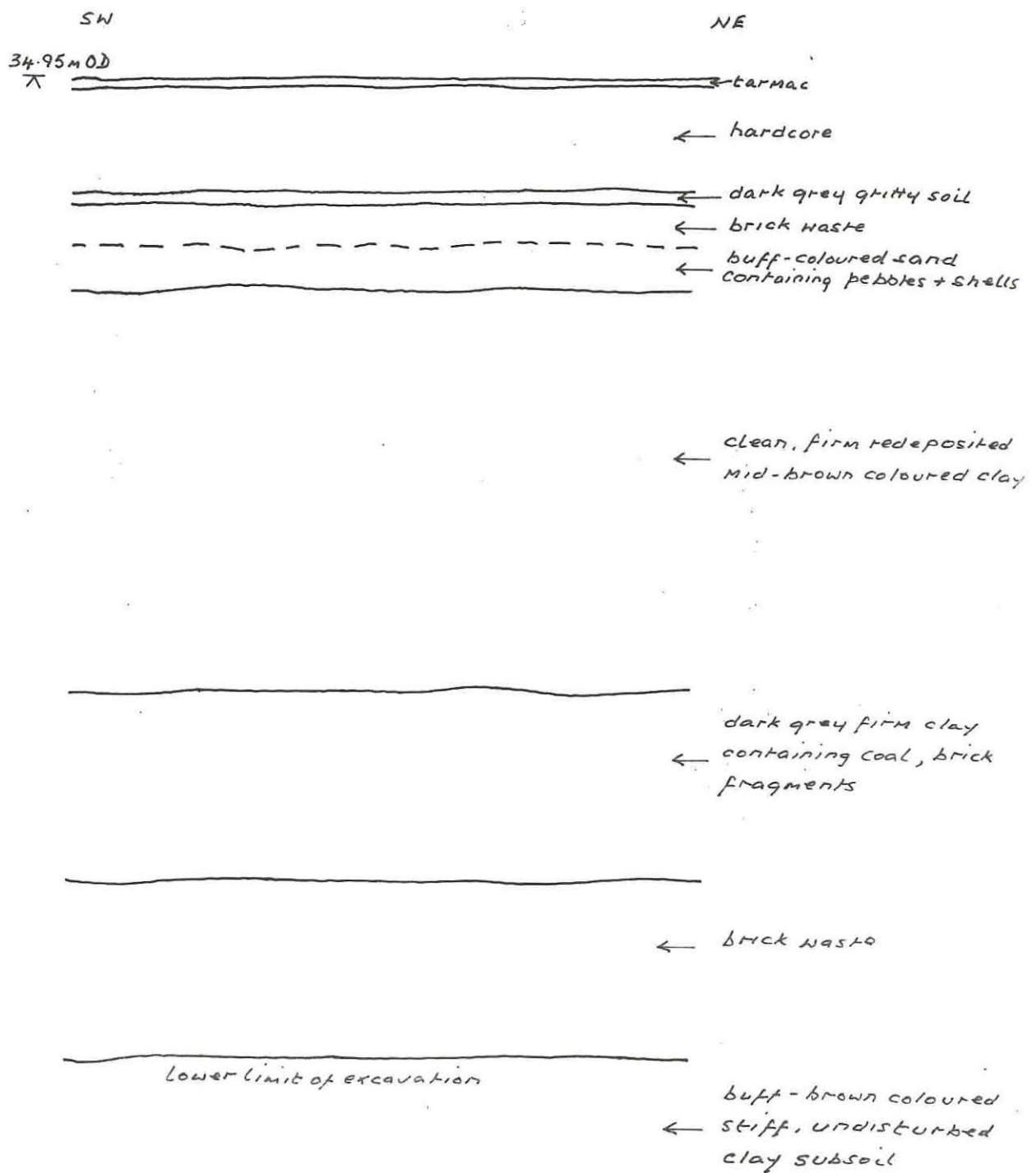


Fig. 5
 Station Yard, Chester Street, St. Asaph
 Part of Evaluation Trench C
 Scale 1:10