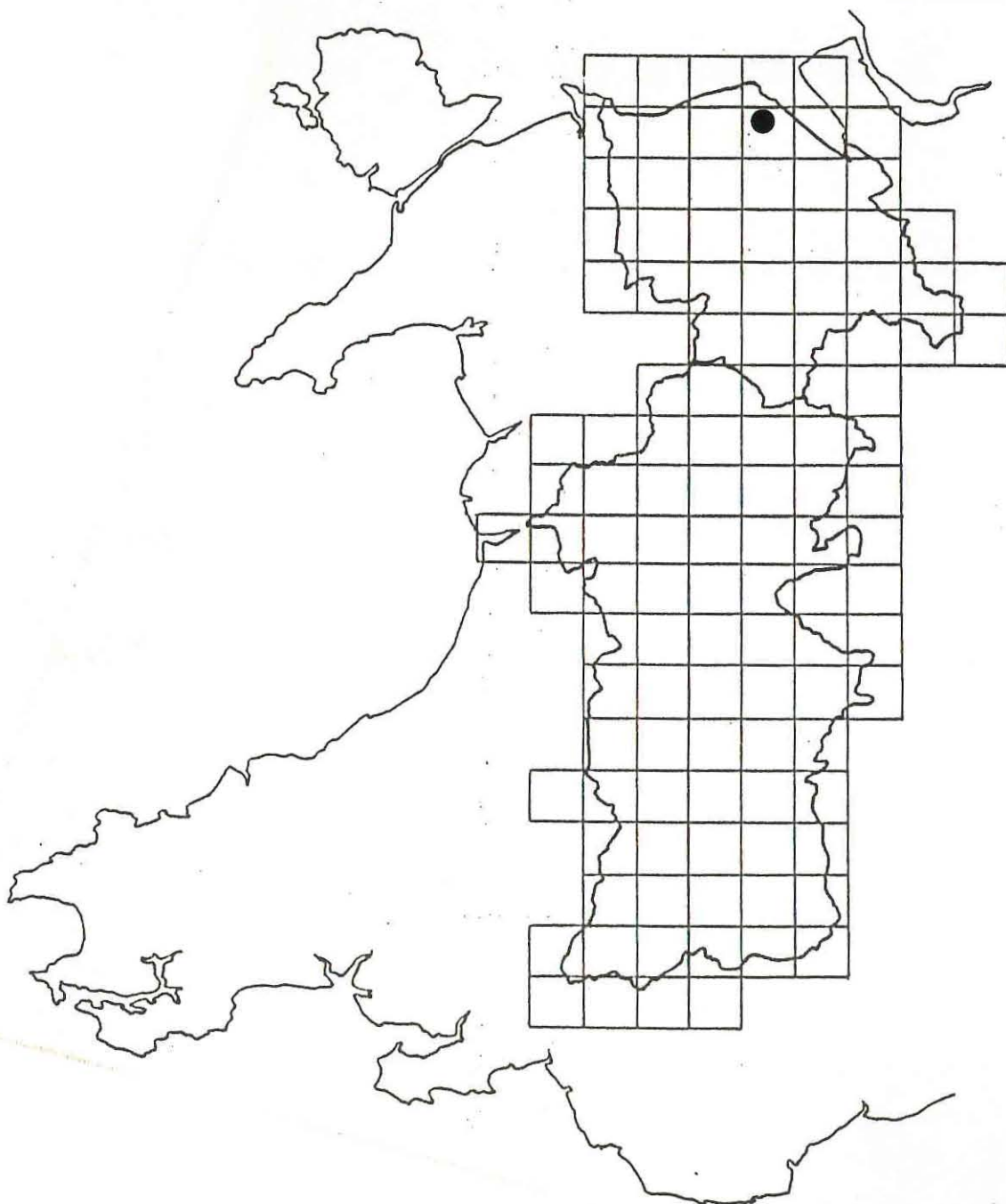


THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Lower Soughton, Northop, Clwyd

SURVEY REPORT

February 1991



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SURVEY OF THE EARTHWORKS NEAR LOWER SOUGHTON, NORTHOP, CLWYD

Introduction

Planning permission was given in the summer of 1990 for the development of a country hotel and golf course complex on a 100-hectare greenfield site centred on Rhos y Chellis Farm near the village of Northop in Clwyd. Fieldwork by the Clwyd Archaeology Service, a section of Clwyd County Council's Tourism and Leisure Division, identified earthworks of archaeological interest in an area of parkland at the extreme north-western end of the development (Fig.1). Discussions between Clwyd Archaeology Service and the developers, St David's Hotels Ltd, resulted in a commitment on the part of the latter to integrate surviving elements of the historic landscape within the overall design of the golf course proposed for this part of the Rhos y Chellis development.

Subsequently in February 1991, the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust were commissioned by Clwyd County Council acting on behalf of St David's Hotels Ltd to prepare a measured survey of the earthworks as an aid to future consultations on the layout of the golf course. This survey was completed over a four-day period in February 1991.

The Survey

The fenced wood-pasture in which the earthworks - centred at SJ 245 681 - are situated covers an area of 8.91 ha and lies between Northop village and the old A55 (T) road on the north and the house known as Lower Soughton on the south-east. The grounds slopes gently down from south to north. Mature trees, predominantly oak but with some other species, dot this parkland landscape and have been depicted on the accompanying plan (Fig.2).

Five elements of the historic landscape can be recognised in this area:

1 Hollow ways

A hollow way, the eastern edge of which is intermittent, runs in from the south and then bifurcates, one branch angling off to the north-west, the other continuing to the north. The latter, though modified by subsequent usage, is a substantial landscape feature (see Fig. 3, profile 1).

These hollow ways are integral parts of the pre-turnpike communications network around Northop as is shown by the extension of the north-west alignment along Brook Street in the village and by the northern arm continuing as a modern metalled road past the parish church. In all probability the hollow ways functioned during the Middle Ages and provided the main means of access to the village from the south.

2 Field boundaries

A rectilinear network of field divisions has been fossilised in the pasture, the majority appearing as low scarp banks intermittently accompanied by shallow external ditches. More unusually one boundary (Fig.2:A) shows as a true bank in the south-western

sector of the modern field, and in the opposite corner an earlier field is edged by a ditch, almost wide enough to be classified as a small hollow way (Fig.2:B).

3 Ridge and Furrow

Ridges are discernible in the north and east of the survey area. These earthworks are generally too slight to be plotted and can be detected with a varying degree of confidence only in optimum light conditions. Towards the north-east corner the ridges are more marked and have been plotted (Fig.2:C). It is not possible to offer any convincing evidence for the date of these cultivation traces. All the easily distinguishable ridge and furrow appears to respect adjacent field divisions without necessarily conforming to their alignment. Conceivably some could attest the temporary ploughing of pasture during the Napoleonic era, but the intermittent cultivation of individual enclosures at an earlier date cannot be dismissed.

4 Bank

Akin to an inverted hollow way, a broad ridge runs south-eastwards from close to where the hollow way divides (Fig.2:D). Towards its terminal it narrows and begins to curve eastwards. While the function of this earthwork is far from certain, its alignment extending that of the north-western hollow way suggest that it may represent an embanked drive.

5 Buildings

There are no tangible remains of structures in the survey area. However, an estate map of 1718 (information courtesy of A. Berry, Clwyd County Council) depicts a dwelling where the hollow ways separate and this is reflected on the ground by platforms defined by low scarps (Fig.2:E). The location of this dwelling implies that it originated as an encroachment on the common probably in the post-medieval period (Porter 1974). More speculatively, a flat platform defined by scarp banks on the north side of the survey area (Fig.2:F) could also have supported a structure.

Miscellaneous Aspects A large low-lying area in the west (Fig.2:G) is best interpreted as a pond. It is unlikely that it was deliberately constructed, but may have achieved its present large size through poaching by animals.

Almost all of the mature trees lie close to modern field boundaries or are sited on relict landscape features. The latter relationship is significant, probably indicating that many of the trees started as saplings when the field divisions were still in use and permitting some estimate of their age. It is also possible that the trees on the bank are the sparse remnants of an avenue.

It should be noted that some linear features continue beyond the present field boundary, particularly on the east, but in the main they are fragmentary and fall outside the survey area as defined in the commission brief.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Individually none of these landscape elements is highly significant or unusual. Together they represent a fragment of the medieval and post-medieval landscape around Northop and as such this may be regarded as typical of the sort of landscape which surrounded many small settlements in Clwyd. Comparable landscapes have become increasingly rare as modern communities have expanded and agricultural practices have altered. Consequently the proposed integration of these features in the new golf course is to be welcomed as a positive step to preserving a part of Northop's heritage.

R J Silvester

Reference

Porter, J 1974 'Encroachment as an element in the rural landscape' *Local Historian* 11.3, 141-147

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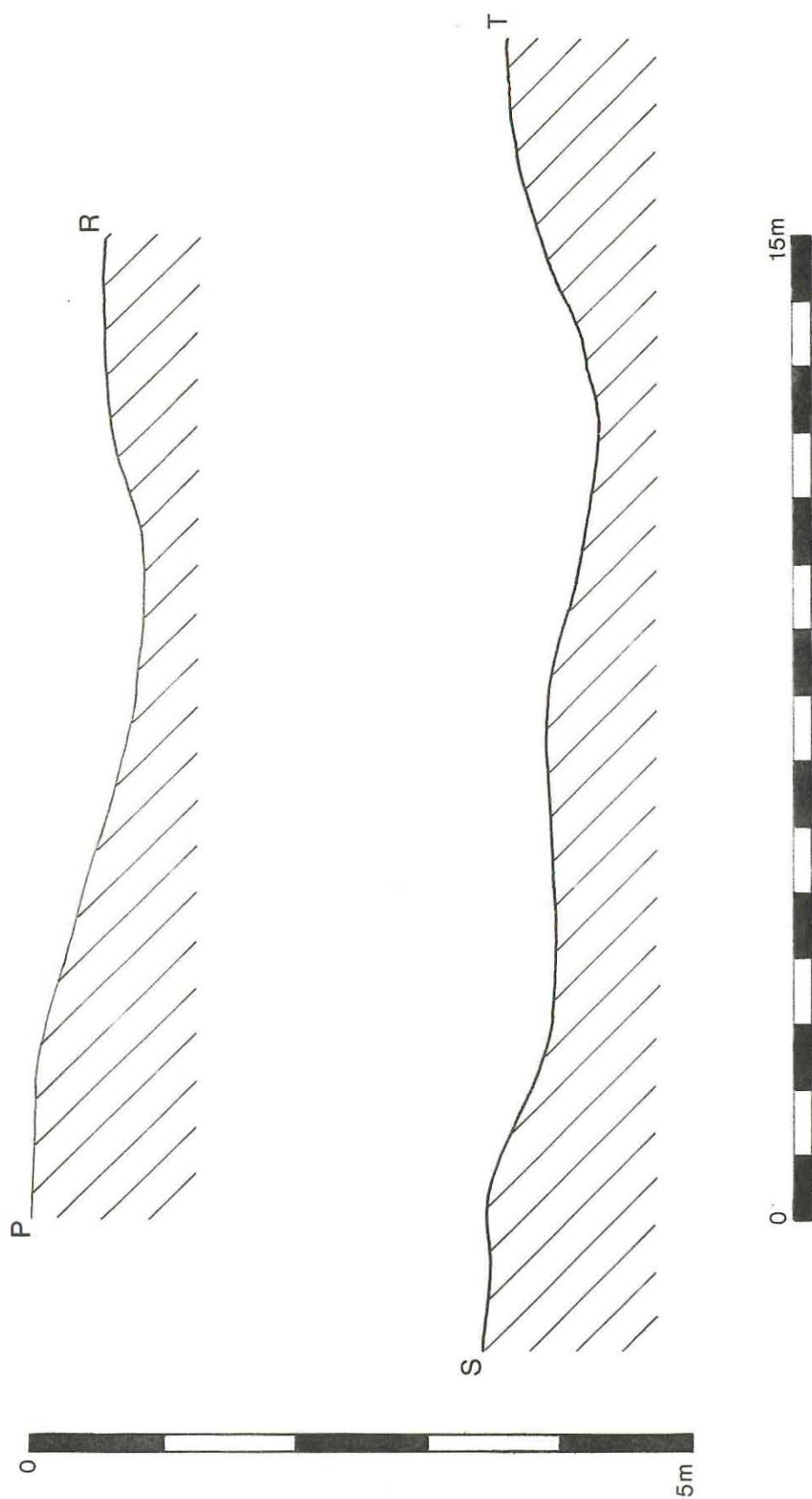
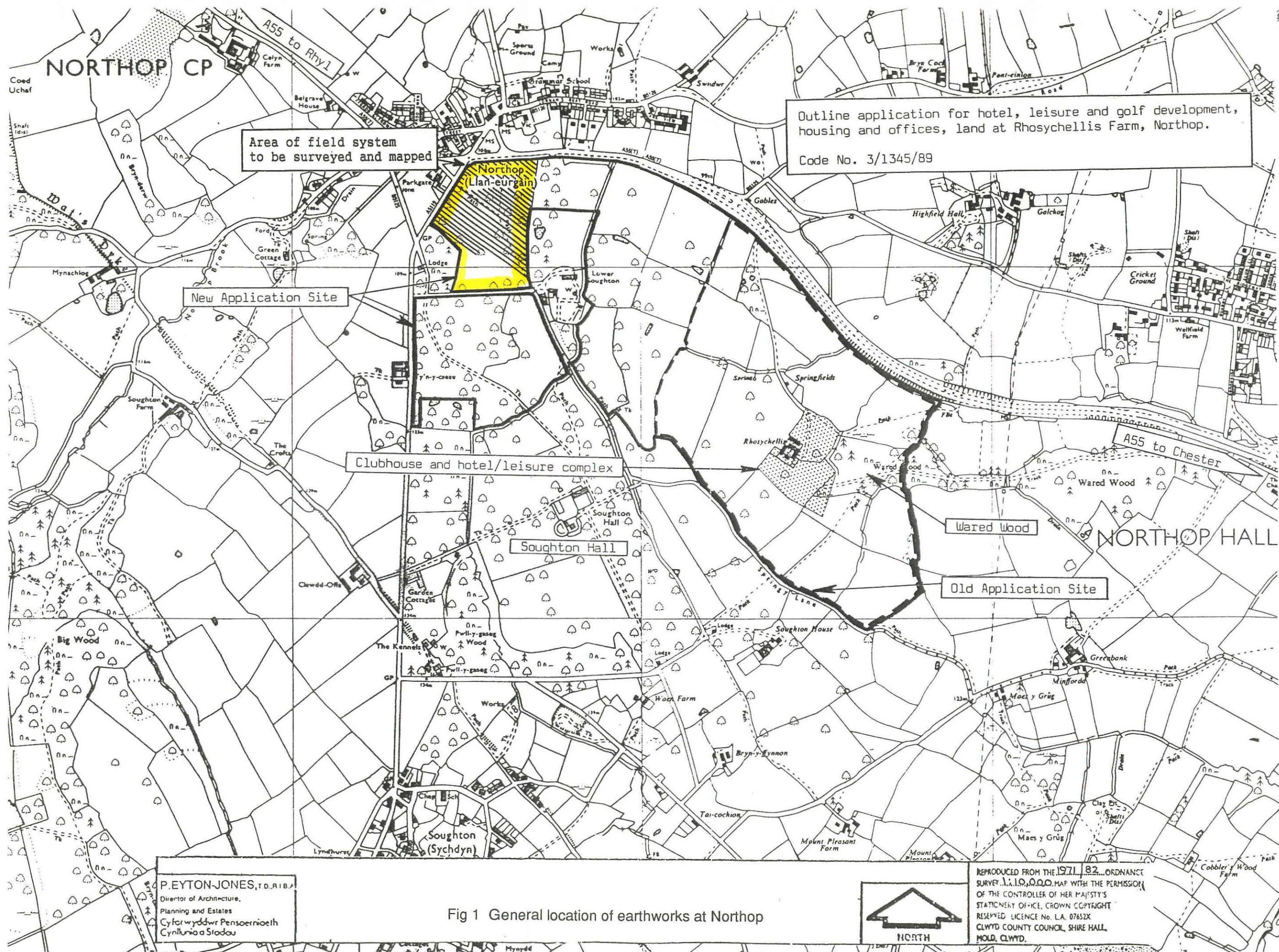


Fig 3 Profiles of hollow ways



LOWER SOUGHTON NORTHOP

0 75m

→ Z

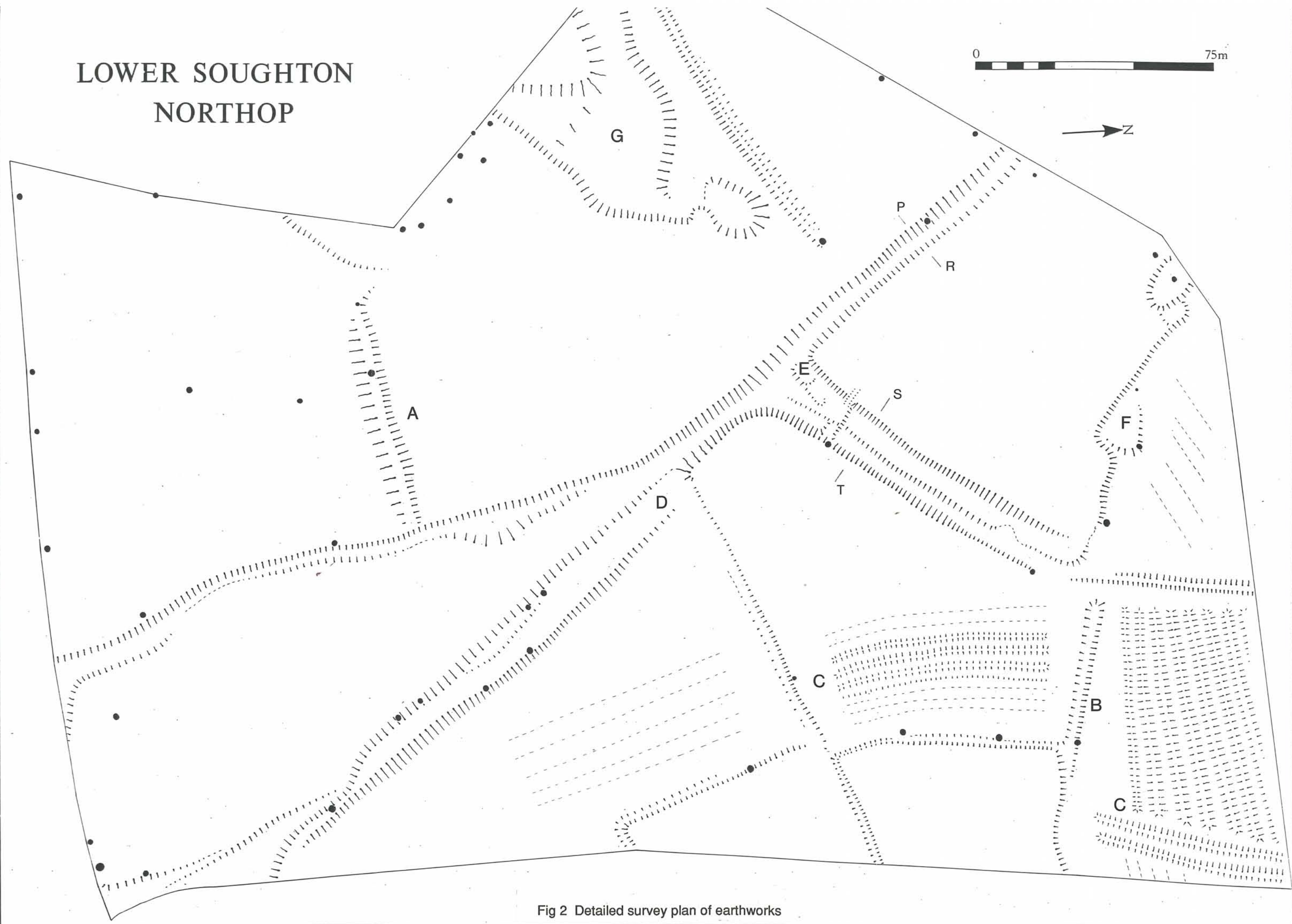


Fig 2 Detailed survey plan of earthworks