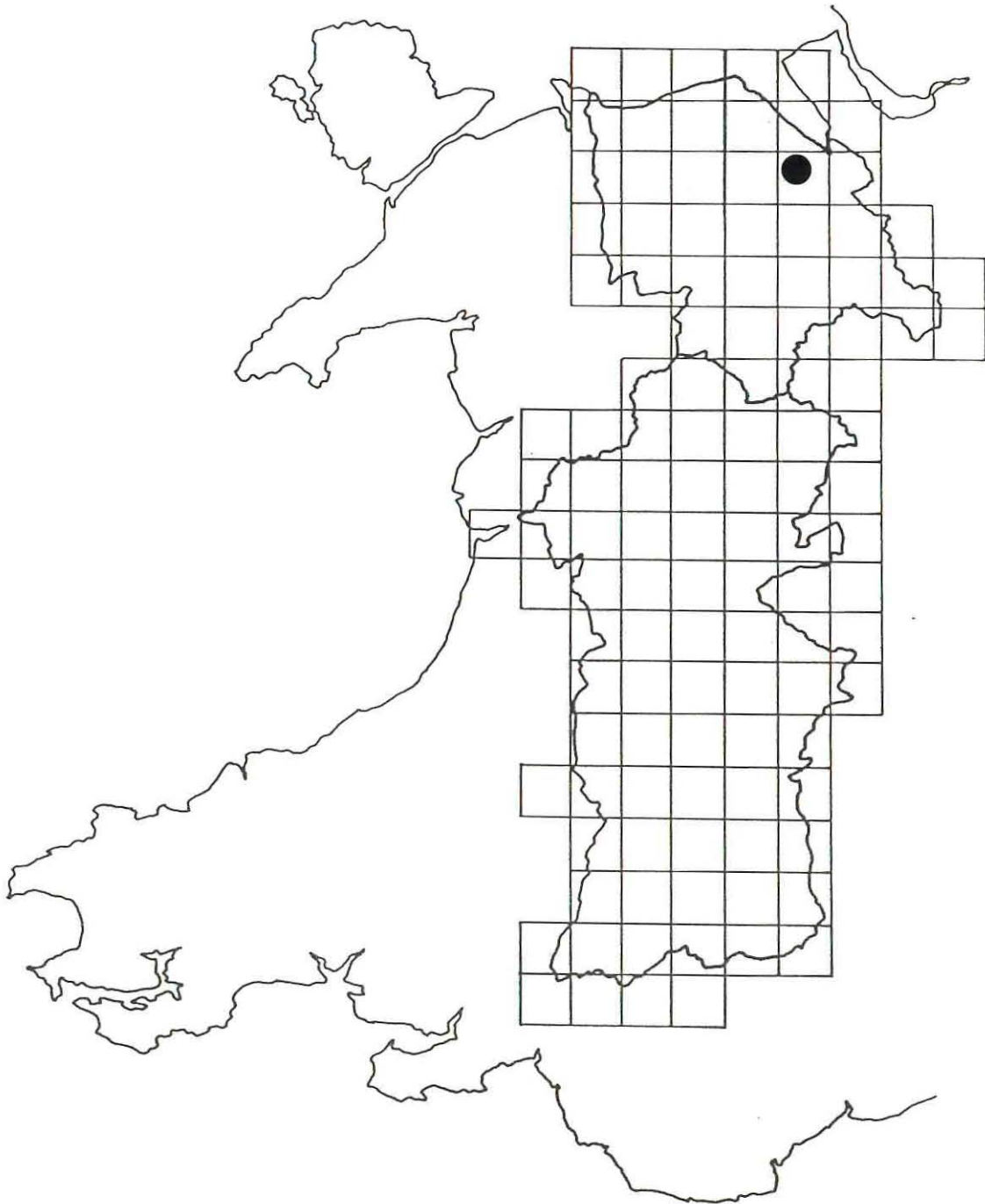


*An Archaeological Assessment of the
Rhydymwyn to Northop Gas Pipeline*



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REPORT PREPARED FOR BRITISH GAS PLC (WALES)

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 At the beginning of January 1992, as a result of the established consultative procedure between British Gas and the curatorial section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, the Trust were informed of the details of a proposed gas pipeline between Rhydymwyn and Northop in Clwyd.

1.2 In view of the overall length of the proposed pipeline and its close proximity to a number of known archaeological sites it was recommended that a detailed archaeological assessment of the route should be made. Following investigation of the Sites and Monuments Record outline recommendations for an assessment were set out in a consultative paper, by M.J.Walters of the curatorial staff, at the end of January. These proposals were accepted and, in February, British Gas (Wales) contracted the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust to undertake the work.

2 TOPOGRAPHY OF THE ROUTE

2.1 The pipeline starts near the bowling green at Rhydymwyn (SJ 20606705) and runs for approximately 3.3 kilometres to near Middle Mill (SJ 23056905), west of Northop (Fig 1). This north-westerly route starting in the valley of the River Alun rises quickly up a steep-sided tributary valley onto the plateau above. The plateau drains to the south-east and the pipeline generally traverses these south-eastern slopes. For much of its length the route runs above the 200m OD contour, though in several places it descends sharply into river-cut valleys, terminating beside the River Conwy at Middle Mill.

2.2 With the exception of a narrow belt of deciduous woodland (SJ 22706890) the pipeline runs through farmland laid to improved pasture.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Initial assessment of the pipeline route was produced by a combination of research into written, cartographic and photographic sources. This was followed by systematic field survey of the whole of the proposed route. Where areas of archaeological potential were recognised and recommendations accepted, the specific archaeological response included a watching brief, metal detector survey and a small-scale excavation.

4 ARCHAEOLOGY

4.1.1 Examination of the County Sites and Monuments record for the area revealed two places of potential archaeological significance along the route - both with suggestive place-names.

4.1.2 These are the area immediately to the east of Rhydymwyn (SJ 21206725 Fig 1,A), close to Tyddyn-y-gwynt, which is suspected, from field name evidence, to be a battlefield site of the late 11th century and further on to the north-west where the pipeline passes close to a farmstead called Castell (SJ 22756870 Fig 1,B). This name probably refers to a fortified site.

4.1.3 Subsequent detailed field survey found no "above ground" evidence at the battlefield site. This was, however, not surprising as human impact on the landscape during battle is usually minimal and the only evidence left behind are generally metallic objects - weaponry, fittings for armour and maybe personal items. It was therefore decided that a controlled metal detector survey of this area would be the most appropriate response.

4.1.4 Field survey revealed nothing significant at the Castell site itself but approximately 400m to the south a previously unrecorded "motte - like" mound and adjacent ridge and furrow cultivation were found (SJ 22856835 Fig 1,C). The shifting of placenames over time is common and it is most likely that the Castell name refers to this site. This area is beyond the remit of this project but it is planned that this important discovery should be fully surveyed in the near future.

4.1.5 In the field immediately west of Middle Mill (SJ 22906890 Fig 1,D) the field survey showed that the pipeline would pass through two banks or earthworks of a substantial field system. As these banks extended across the breadth of the hillside and could not be avoided it was proposed that trial excavations on the line of the pipe should be carried out to determine their nature in advance of destruction.

4.1.6 Elsewhere along the route the field survey was unproductive. It was nevertheless felt - given the proximity of these known sites - that selective areas would be worth "watching" during topsoil stripping and later trenching.

4.1.7 Broadly then, the on-site archaeological work could be split into three parts - the battlefield site, excavation of the field banks and the watching brief. These are dealt with in turn below.

4.2 The Battlefield Site

4.2.1 The metal detector survey was carried out once the topsoil had been stripped off in the battlefield area. It was felt that not too precise a location should be relied upon for the site and that it was likely that the activity here could have ranged over much of this steep-sided valley. Therefore, as much of this area was covered as possible and, within the bounds of the wayleave, a comprehensive coverage was made of field numbers; OS 2829, 1433, 1524 & 9200 to the north of Tyddyn-y-gwynt.

4.2.2 The bulk of the material discovered comprised of largely indistinguishable ferrous objects and included a number of nails. More informative was a George II halfpenny (1728-60) and a lead token with an acorn motif which probably belongs to the 17th century though may be earlier. A second coin was badly degraded and unidentifiable. A lead jerkin button, decorated with a raised cross and dots was also found. The dates of the last two items cannot be ascertained but they are unlikely to be of any great antiquity.

4.2.3 All these items were found immediately (less than 5cm) below the modern turf and are quite likely to have been redeposited. Very few finds were made at all where the stripping/levelling operation had cut any deeper than this into the slope.

4.3 The Field Banks

4.3.1 In the field immediately to the west of Middle Mill Farm lie two parallel (apparently) earthen field banks running approximately north - south. They survive to about 0.8m high and are approximately 40m apart. The land between them is sloping and is laid to pasture.

4.3.2 Trenches (approximately 9m long by 2m wide) were cut to investigate each of the banks. The excavations were carried out by machine until archeological levels were reached when digging was completed by hand. Recording consisted of scale drawings of the features uncovered (both in plan and section), written description and photographs where appropriate. The more illuminating sections from both trenches are appended here (Fig 2), the complete archive of the excavation has been lodged with the Sites and Monuments Record.

4.3.3 Excavation revealed evidence that both banks had originally had retaining walls on their downward side. In the lower section part of the foundations - of loosely packed sandstone cobbles - was apparent, and above this the good stone of the retaining wall had clearly been robbed out. Only a few of these larger stones survive in the field boundary opposite to give an idea of the wall's original structure. In the upper section a few of these large (up to 25cm) angular pieces of sandstone survived, more or less, in situ.

4.3.4 The only other feature of note occurred 1.5m above the position of the wall in the lower trench. This was a roughly circular setting of large stones - a mixture of angular sandstone and cobbles to 35cm - with an outer diameter of approximately 0.8m and an inner diameter of 0.3m. The stones tip inwards and appear to form the base of a post pad. The occurrence of such a feature here is surprising and is very difficult to interpret in isolation. It is possible though, that a post here was part of some earlier wooden fence or revetment to the bank.

4.3.5 All finds from the excavation came from the lower trench. These consisted of a large nail found in the ploughsoil layer downhill from the wall trench and several shards of 19th century glazed pottery from the wall robbing trench itself. A number of small pieces of weathered flint were also found in the upper layers but there was no suggestion that these had been worked.

4.3.6 From this evidence the most likely interpretation is that these banks - together with their once substantial retaining walls - formed the boundaries of a narrow strip field or lynchet cut into, and using, the natural contours of the hillside. There was no evidence to date their origin. However, the walls are likely to have been removed in the 19th century.

4.4 The Watching Brief

4.4.1 As noted above it was proposed that the top soil stripping and pipe trenching should be observed in selected areas. Generally, the wayleave fenced off for the pipeline works was approximately 20m wide and within this about 12m to 15m was stripped of topsoil, the spoil being heaped in the remaining area. Topsoil stripping was generally very shallow, a depth of 0.05m being usual, and only on steeper slopes, where a flatter finished surface was required, was it taken down to depths of up to 0.3m.

4.4.2 This work was watched in progress with particular attention being paid to areas in the vicinity of the field banks, Castell farm and the battlefield. Once finished, the entire length of the stripped route was walked to check for unsuspected features. The exercise defined the extent of the field banks more clearly and produced a number of indeterminate ferrous objects and a quantity of 19th century glazed Buckley Ware but was otherwise relatively unproductive.

4.4.3 The trench taken out for the gas pipe itself was approximately 1.3m wide and over 2.0m deep, the laid pipe requiring a minimum coverage of 1.8m of soil. The large sections thus revealed generally revealed only natural layers though, where it passed close to the lynchet (approximately 3m further south), it again showed the field banks in the section. No further finds were made at these deeper levels.

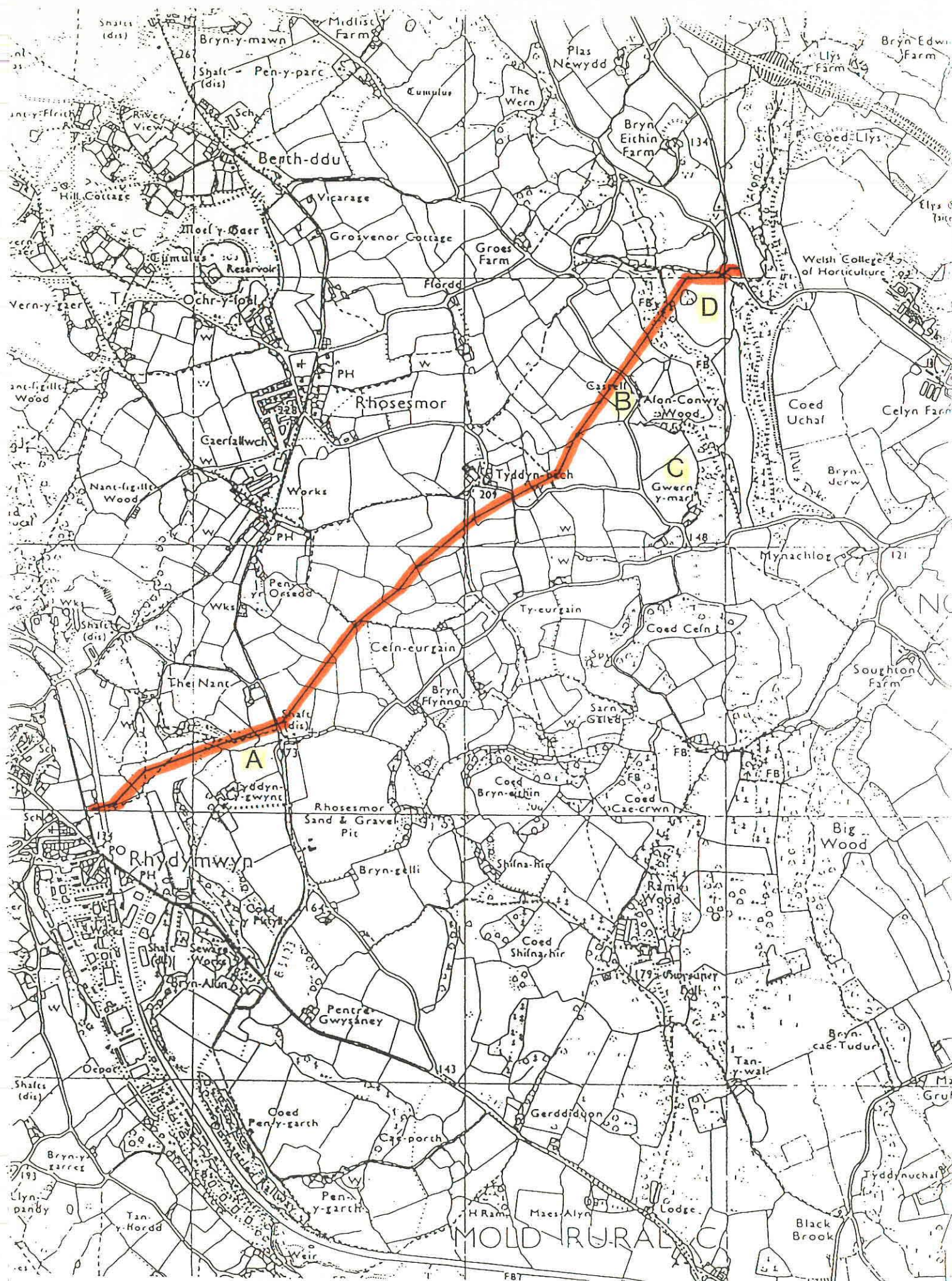
5 Conclusion

5.1 Of particular interest was the small-scale excavation of the field banks which provided a rare, if necessarily limited, opportunity to investigate a lynchet - a common yet inadequately understood feature of the medieval, and perhaps later, landscape. That it seems to have survived in its original form as late as the 19th century is especially noteworthy. Also of great potential interest is the field system and possible motte discovered close to Castell in the course of the field survey.

5.2 Though this archeological assessment of the pipeline route produced a limited amount of data this should perhaps be seen as a success of the consultative procedure rather than any failure. From the outset the commitment of the client in co-operating to safeguard the known and potential archaeology was commendable. It is to be hoped that there will be a similar successful relationship in future projects.

Acknowledgements

The metal detector survey was carried out with voluntary help from the Historic Search Society (Mold) to whom we are most grateful.



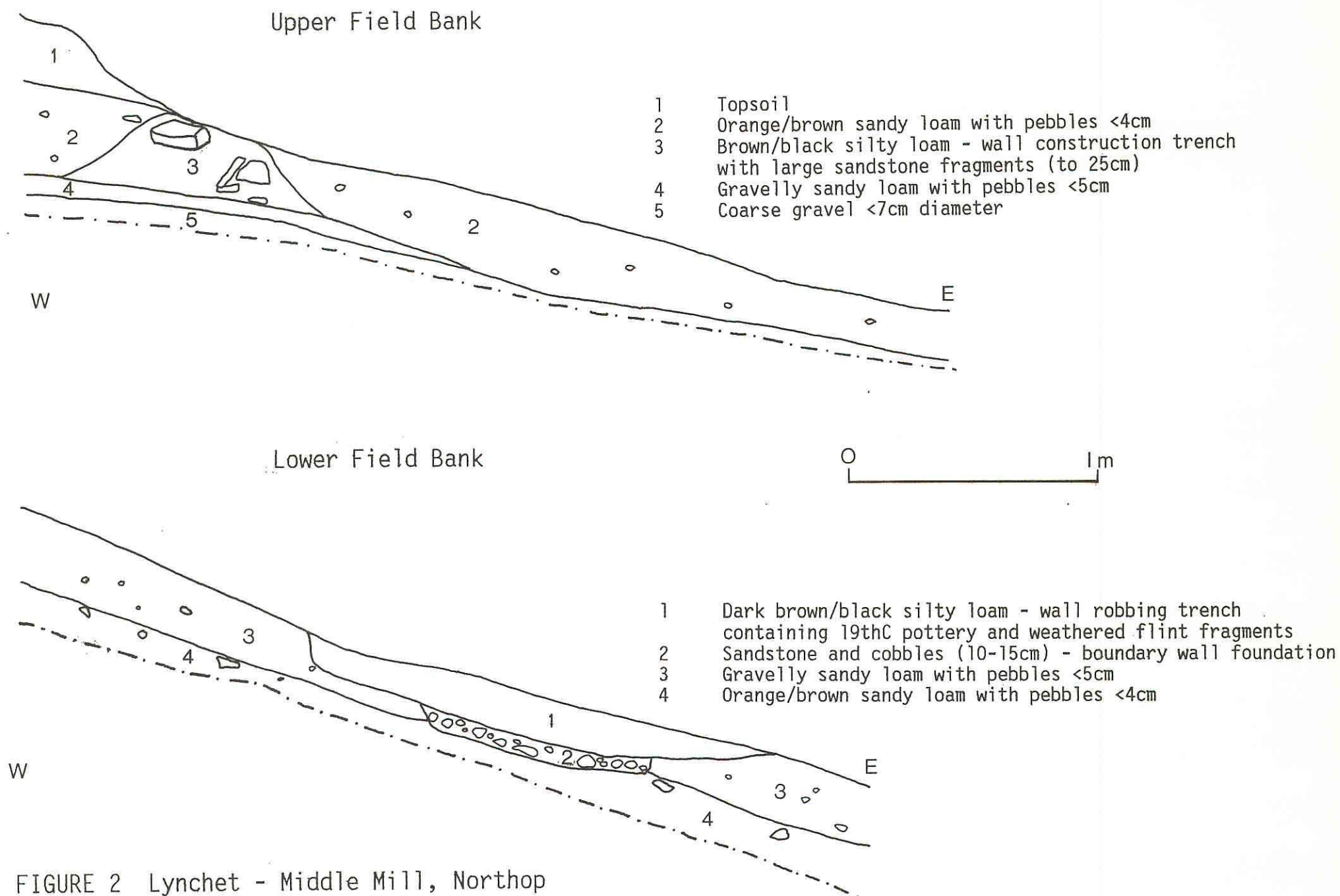


FIGURE 2 Lynchet - Middle Mill, Northop

