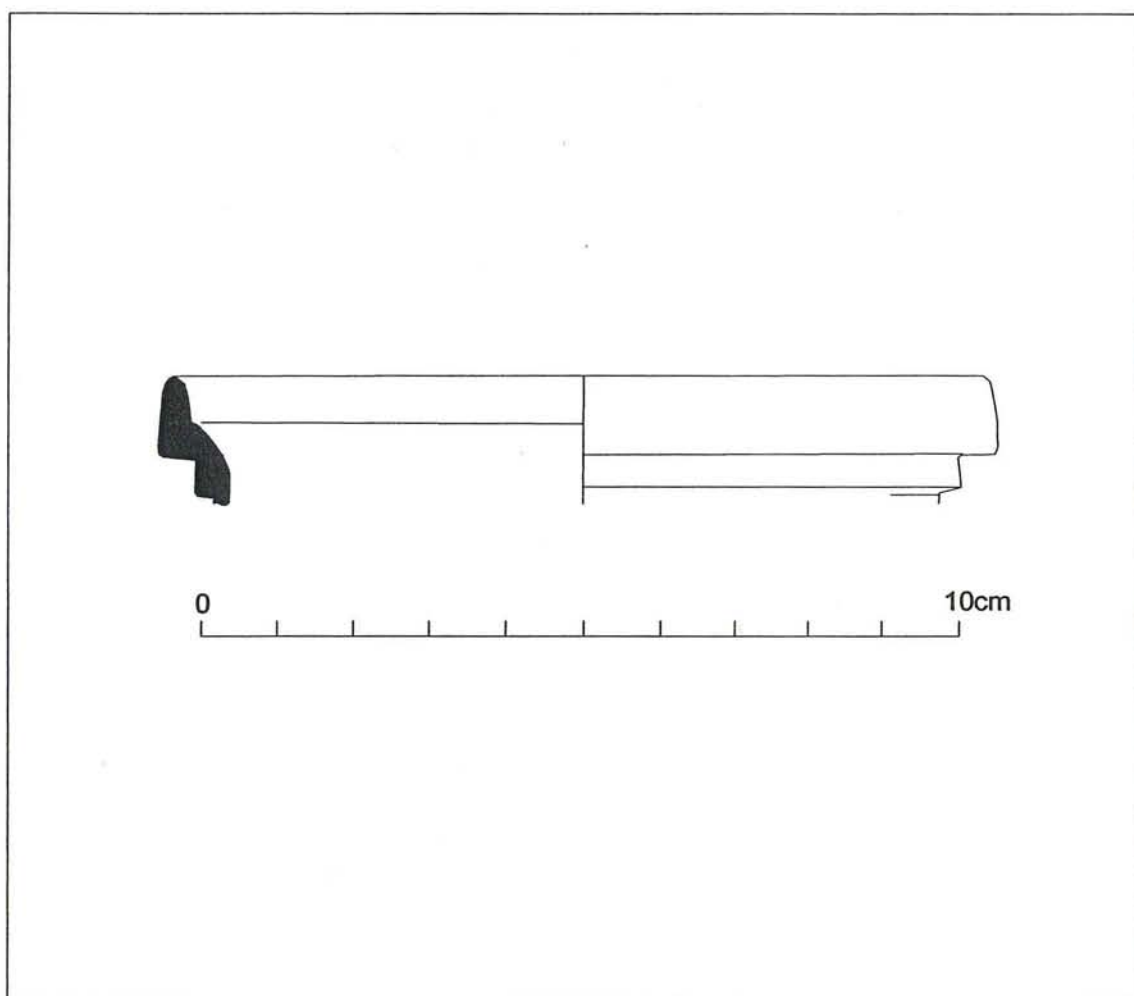


Ysgol Brynhyfryd, Ruthin, Denbighshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



CPAT Report No 522

Ysgol Brynhyfryd, Ruthin, Denbighshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

F Johnson and P Jones
March 2003

Report for C Wynne, on behalf of Denbighshire County Council

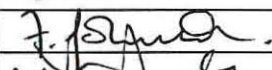

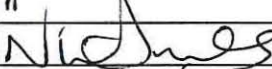
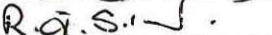
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CPAT Report Record

Report and status

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CONTENTS

- 1 INTRODUCTION
- 2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY
- 3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND
- 4 WATCHING BRIEF
- 5 FINDS
- 6 CONCLUSIONS
- 7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- 8 REFERENCES

APPENDIX 1 SPECIFICATION

APPENDIX 2 SITE ARCHIVE

ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1 Site location

Fig. 2 Location of features

Fig. 3 Ditches 07, 12 and 19

Fig. 4 Ditch 25

Fig. 5 Shale vessel

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In January 2003, the Contracting Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was invited by C Wynne & Sons Ltd to provide a specification and quotation for undertaking an archaeological watching brief during construction works at Ysgol Brynhyfryd, Ruthin, on behalf of Denbighshire County Council (DCC). The school is located close to an area where Roman and medieval activity had been revealed during excavations in 1989. A pre-planning evaluation had already been undertaken by CPAT during early January 2003, which revealed evidence for activity in the area during the Middle Bronze Age. The watching brief was requested by Mrs Fiona Gale, Denbighshire County Archaeologist, who also prepared a brief detailing the necessary works.

2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 2.1 Ysgol Brynhyfryd is located on the easternmost of two north to south glaciated ridges set within the Vale of Clwyd. The western ridge is occupied by the older parts of Ruthin, established around the medieval castle, while the eastern ridge is occupied by two schools and modern residential development (Fig. 1).
- 2.2 The solid geology consists of weathered Permo-Triassic sandstone, overlain by boulder clay and fluvio-glacial deposits.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The development area lies c. 300m to the north-east of an area of prehistoric, Roman and early medieval activity, which was revealed during rescue excavations in advance of housing development at Brynhyfryd Park in 1989. However, the initial archaeological interest in this area relates to the discovery of a Roman cremation cemetery of Flavian/Trajanic date during building work at the nearby hospital in 1981, which led to the suggestion that a previously unknown Roman fort might be located in this general area (Waddelove 1982).
- 3.2 The main programme of excavation in 1989 was undertaken by CPAT (see Fig. 1), although other areas were also investigated by Mr Waddelove and Professor G D B Jones who produced an interim report on work carried out during late 1988 and early 1989, arguing that the evidence suggested the presence of a later 1st-century fort and civil settlement, or *vicus* (Waddelove *et al* 1989; 1990). The results from CPAT's excavations, however, failed to reveal any features of an explicitly Roman military character, although the Flavian/Trajanic date of some of the recovered pottery strongly suggested military activity in the locality.
- 3.3 Evidence was produced, however, for multi-period occupation, ranging from prehistoric to early medieval in date. Three curving ditches were identified, along with several other features (Fig. 1, A), which produced a number of flint implements ranging in date from the Late Mesolithic to the Late Neolithic or early Bronze Age. Several sherds of Neolithic and Bronze Age pottery were also recovered.
- 3.4 The excavations confirmed the presence of Romano-British occupation in the area which may have been part of a scattered civil settlement that developed along a trackway, in association with a possible fort further to the north. A small rectangular structure (Fig. 1, B) was identified, together with several cremations, which may be the remains of a mausoleum or *columbaria*. Cremation as a funerary practice belongs for the most part to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD and cemeteries are usually found alongside roads just outside forts or civil settlements. A number of post-holes and pits were also identified, although they did not form a sufficiently obvious pattern to suggest a building.
- 3.5 The latest phase of activity consisted of a small inhumation cemetery (Fig. 1, C), comprising twelve graves aligned roughly east to west. Six graves had been cut through the fill of Romano-British features, and, although no secure dating was recovered from any of the graves, they were assumed to be early medieval in date.

- 3.6 An evaluation of the development site in January 2003 (Grant 2003) comprised the excavation of three trenches (Fig. 2). These produced further evidence for prehistoric activity in the Brynhyfryd area, consisting of a small pit containing sherds of Middle Bronze Age pottery, together with a small post-hole, also containing prehistoric pottery. It was thought likely that other related features may be present within the immediate area which might impacted upon by the present development. In conjunction with the previous discoveries in 1989 there is now evidence for some form of occupation along the ridge top during the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age.

4 WATCHING BRIEF (Fig. 2)

- 4.1 The watching brief was conducted during February and early March 2003 during the initial phases of construction, which involved the reduction of the general ground surface and the excavation of test pits, foundations and service trenches. A drawn, written and photographic record was maintained throughout the archaeological works (see Appendix 2). Excavation and recording was in general restricted to features observed either in section within excavated areas, or in plan following the removal of overburden. The programme of recording was designed to work around the contractor's programme without imposing any delays.
- 4.2 Numbers in brackets in the following text refer to individual contexts recorded on site and used in the site archive, most of which are illustrated on the accompanying plans and sections. The site archive will be deposited with the Regional Sites and Monuments Record, maintained by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust at Welshpool, while the finds from the excavation will be passed to the Denbighshire Museum Service.
- 4.3 Foundation trenches and stanchion pits were mechanically excavated in a grid pattern across the site. Archaeological features were revealed in two of the foundation trenches and within two of the stanchion pits. In addition, further features were revealed in plan during grading down of overburden deposits, and during the digging of a test pit (fig. 2).
- 4.4 At the southern end of the site a ditch (19) was revealed in both the north and south-facing sections of a foundation trench, suggesting a roughly north to south orientation at this point. The ditch, which was 1.10m wide and 0.55m deep, with concave sides and a shallow concave base, contained two fills, neither of which produced any artefactual evidence: the primary fill (21), a mixed fill of mid-brown sand and reddish sandy-clay, with occasional small pebble inclusions; and the upper fill (20), a yellowish to light brown loose sand. It was evident that the ditch had been cut from a level beneath the ploughsoil (24), (fig. 3).
- 4.5 Another length of ditch (07) was revealed during the excavation of a test pit to the west of ditch (19). The ditch (Fig. 3), which was 1.25m wide and a maximum 0.36m deep, with gently sloping sides and a relatively flat base, appeared to be slightly curving from the east to the north-west and contained two fills: the primary fill (10), a pale brown sandy-clay; and the upper fill (05), a light yellowish-brown soft sandy-silt. Cutting the eastern side and base of the ditch was a post-hole (08), with an approximate diameter of 0.25m, and a depth from the base of the ditch of 0.5m. The post-hole had steep sides, tapering to a blunt point, and contained a single fill (09), comprising a very soft yellowish-red sandy-silt. Both the ditch and the post-hole had been cut from beneath, and therefore pre-date, the ploughsoil (02), which at this point contained a single piece of clay pipe stem, dating to the 17th or 18th century. The features themselves contained no artefacts. An additional small pit or post-hole (03), which had been cut from the level of the ploughsoil, partially cut into the ditch on its eastern side. This feature was 0.49m long by 0.28m wide and 0.13m deep, and contained an homogenous dark brown sandy-silt fill, which produced no artefactual evidence.
- 4.6 To the west of ditch (07) another ditch (12) was revealed in the east facing section of a foundation trench (Fig. 3). It was not possible to ascertain the orientation of the ditch as a modern drain in the west facing section of the foundation trench had removed any trace. The visible section of the ditch did, however, reveal it to be similar in form to ditches (19) and (07), being 0.3m deep and approximately 1.0m wide, with concave sides and a shallow concave base. Similarly, ditch (07) contained two fills: the primary fill (14), a light reddish-brown to light brown very fine sand or sandy-clay; and the secondary fill (13), a very soft yellowish red, very fine sand. The ditch was also cut from beneath the ploughsoil (17), and contained no artefacts.

- 4.7 During grading of the overburden, a linear feature (52) was revealed briefly in plan, to the north of ditch (12). Due to the nature of the groundworks it was only possible to record a short length of the feature, running for approximately 2.0m in a north-south alignment, 0.6m wide and 0.15m deep. The feature contained a uniform fill (51) of yellow-brown, loose sand with no finds or inclusions, and was interpreted as a truncated length of ditch, similar in form to (12), (07) and (19).
- 4.8 Towards the northern end of the site, two large adjacent stanchion pits revealed a sequence of archaeological features. In the northern section of the most northerly pit, immediately adjacent to the south-east of evaluation trench A (Grant 2003), a clearly defined ditch (25) was revealed, (Fig. 4). The ditch was 0.5m deep and 1.8m wide, with gently sloping sides and a shallow concave base, and contained two fills: the primary fill (27) consisting of a very compacted pinkish-grey clay-silt; and the secondary fill (26), a light greyish-brown firm silt, with occasional small stone inclusions. The ditch contained no dating evidence, but was cut from beneath, and therefore pre-dates, the ploughsoil (29), which at this point contained a single sherd of abraded post-medieval pottery. It is possible that this ditch represents a continuation of the gully or ditch identified in the earlier evaluation, which had been cut by a pit and a post-hole, both of which contained Middle Bronze Age pottery. Unfortunately, as both features were not seen in plan together, this relationship can only be implied and not confirmed.
- 4.9 It was not possible to determine the orientation of ditch (25) as a large sub-rectangular pit (53) had been cut through it, removing any southerly continuation. The pit extended beyond the southern section of the stanchion pit and continued beyond the more southerly stanchion pit, where it was revealed in plan during the grading down of overburden. The pit measured 6.5m east-west, by 5.3m north-south, and was 0.6m deep, and appeared to have been cut from below the level of the ploughsoil (35). Its function is unknown, but it may have been excavated to extract clay. The primary fill (34, 41) was a 0.15m thick band of very dark brown sandy-silt, revealed in the southern sections of both stanchion pits, but absent in the northern section of the southerly stanchion pit.
- 4.10 A shallow feature (32), resembling a gentle V-shaped ditch, was identified in the southern section of the northerly stanchion pit, below the base of the larger pit (53), and contained a uniform fill (33) of very dark brown sandy-silt, similar to (34, 41). Whether this feature predated or was broadly contemporary with the initial cutting of the larger pit, (as suggested by the similar fills), could not be ascertained, and its function was unknown.
- 4.11 Pit (53) appears to have been recut slightly at a later date, then subsequently backfilled. The recutting had removed the primary fill in the central area of the feature, as well as cutting through the ploughsoil, suggesting it was a relatively modern event. The secondary fill (36, 39, 43, and 47), associated with this recutting consisted of a red, loose sand, with occasional inclusions of modern brick and ceramic drain fragments. This upper fill was interpreted as a levelling deposit to infill the depression prior to construction of the original school building.

5 FINDS

- 5.1 The majority of the finds recovered during the watching brief were retrieved from the spoil produced during earlier grading work for the insertion of a plant access road, and from topsoil (01 etc) and the ploughsoil buried beneath it (02 etc). Unfortunately, none of the features identified during the ground works produced any artefactual evidence.
- 5.2 The spoil produced a variety of ceramics and glass, predominantly dating from the post-medieval period, and similar in range to those identified during the earlier evaluation. In addition, four sherds of medieval pottery were recovered, each in a sandy fabric typical of north-east Wales, although the precise origin remains unknown. Perhaps the most significant find were two rim fragments from a Roman worked shale vessel, the larger of which displays two external steps below the rounded rim, with corresponding internal bevels, (fig. 5). Only the uppermost step is visible on the smaller fragment. The vessel is similar in form to a shale bowl from Silchester (Lawson 1976), although the Brynhyfryd example appears to be from a slightly larger bowl, having a maximum external diameter of 110mm. Within Wales, fragments of shale objects have also been recovered from the Roman civilian settlement, or *vicus*, at Caersws (Owen 1996).
- 5.3 Topsoil finds included a single sherd of medieval Ewloe-type ware, and a range of post-medieval wares dating from the 17th to the 20th century.

- 5.4 Finds recovered from the ploughsoil included a rim sherd of Cistercian-type ware, dating from the 16th to 17th centuries, clay-pipe stems dating from the 17th to 18th centuries, and two sherds of brown glazed coal measures redware of 18th to 19th-century date.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The watching brief identified a number of sections of ditch-type features, the nature and extent of which could not be determined due to the inevitable limitations imposed by the contractor's working methods. Although none of the features could be firmly dated through artefactual evidence, it was clear that they had all been cut from a level beneath the modern ploughsoil and were clearly not, therefore, of modern date and could be of post-medieval or earlier derivation. The ditches were all of consistent form, as well as being similar in character to those identified during the earlier evaluation. Although almost certainly related to each other, it was not possible to determine their significance due to the nature of the watching brief.
- 6.2 The ceramic assemblage complements that recovered from the earlier evaluation, emphasising the presence of possible medieval occupation nearby. Of particular note are the fragments of a Roman shale bowl which, although not associated with a specific context, provide further evidence for Roman activity within the immediate vicinity, as identified during previous excavations in 1989.

7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 7.1 The writers would like to thank the following for their assistance and co-operation: Nigel Jones, CPAT; C. Wynne, D. Stocks, J. Williams, C. Wynne and Sons Ltd; and I. Gent, Gent Construction.

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APPENDIX 1

YSGOL BRYNHYFRYD, RUTHIN, DENBIGHSHIRE SPECIFICATION FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF BY THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Contracting Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust has been invited by Simon Moreton, C Wynne & Sons Ltd, to provide a quotation and specification for undertaking an archaeological watching brief at Ysgol Brynhyfryd, Ruthin, in connection with the construction of a new extension. A Brief has been prepared by Denbighshire Archaeology Service which details the works required.
- 1.2 The site lies within the area of a postulated Roman fort and although a pre-planning evaluation by CPAT in January 2003 revealed no definite evidence of Roman activity within the development area, significant evidence was found relating to Bronze Age activity. There is therefore a possibility that related deposits extend into the area in question.

2 Objectives

- 2.1 The objectives are:
 - 2.1.1 to maintain an archaeological watching brief during the initial phases of construction;
 - 2.1.2 to prepare a report outlining the results of the archaeological works.

3 Methods

- 3.1 The watching brief will be undertaken to include monitoring of all relevant groundworks during the initial phase of construction.
- 3.2 All archaeological deposits and/or features noted during the watching brief will be excavated by hand and recorded by drawn section/plan and/or photography as appropriate. All photography will be in 35mm format black and white negative and colour slide. All features identified will be tied in locationally to points which are identifiable on modern Ordnance Survey mapping.
- 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. This will be in A4 format and contain conventional sections on: Site location, Topography and Geology; Historic Background; Watching Brief; Conclusions 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 watching brief will be undertaken by an experienced field archaeologist and overall supervision will be by Mr RJ Silvester, a senior member of CPAT's staff who is also a member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists. The duration of the watching brief will be entirely determined by the contractor's programme of work.
- 4.2 All report preparation will be completed by or with the assistance of the same field archaeologist who conducted the fieldwork.
- 4.3 Copies of the report will be deposited with the client within one month of the completion of on-site works.

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.

N.W. Jones

29th January 2003

APPENDIX 2 SITE ARCHIVE

Site archive

53 Context record forms
 1 black and white negative film
 2 colour slide films
 Photographic catalogue
 Context Register
 Drawing Register
 Levels Record
 1 A1 site drawing
 1 A2 site drawing

Finds Catalogue

context	number	weight (g)	description	dating
1	2	3	clay pipe stem	17-18th century
1	2	33	glazed coal measures redware	19-20th century
1	3	25	developed whiteware	19-20th century
1	3	17	Mottled ware	17-18th century
1	2	15	slipware	18-19th century
1	1	6	green bottle glass	19-20th century
1	1	1	Ewloe	medieval
2	2	4	clay pipe stem	17-18th century
2	2	42	glazed coal measures redware	19-20th century
2	1	23	Cistercian rim	16-17th century
U/S	2	5	black shale rim fragments	Roman
U/S	1	5	?Rhuddlan pale orange sandyware	medieval
U/S	1	13	?Rhuddlan grey glazed	medieval
U/S	1	20	green glazed grey sandyware	medieval
U/S	1	4	?Rhuddlan green glazed	medieval
U/S	1	26	Midlands Purple	15-16th century
U/S	6	19	clay pipe stems and bowl	17-18th century
U/S	1	1	Mottled ware	17-18th century
U/S	3	13	mottled brown glazed coal measures redware	17-18th century
U/S	6	126	coal measures slip redware	17-18th century
U/S	1	6	brown glazed coal measures buff	17-18th century
U/S	4	172	coal measures slipware	18-19th century
U/S	20	846	brown glazed coal measures redware	18-19th century
U/S	1	11	burnt brown / black glaze redware	18-19th century
U/S	1	7	brown glazed stoneware	18-20th century
U/S	5	51	unglazed coal measures redware	18-19th century
U/S	1	5	pearlware	18-19th century
U/S	1	3	bone china	19-20th century
U/S	7	110	whitewares	19-20th century
U/S	1	172	opaque blue glass base	19-20th century
U/S	1	22	green bottle glass	19-20th century



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Fig. 1 Site location showing previous excavations, scale 1:5,000

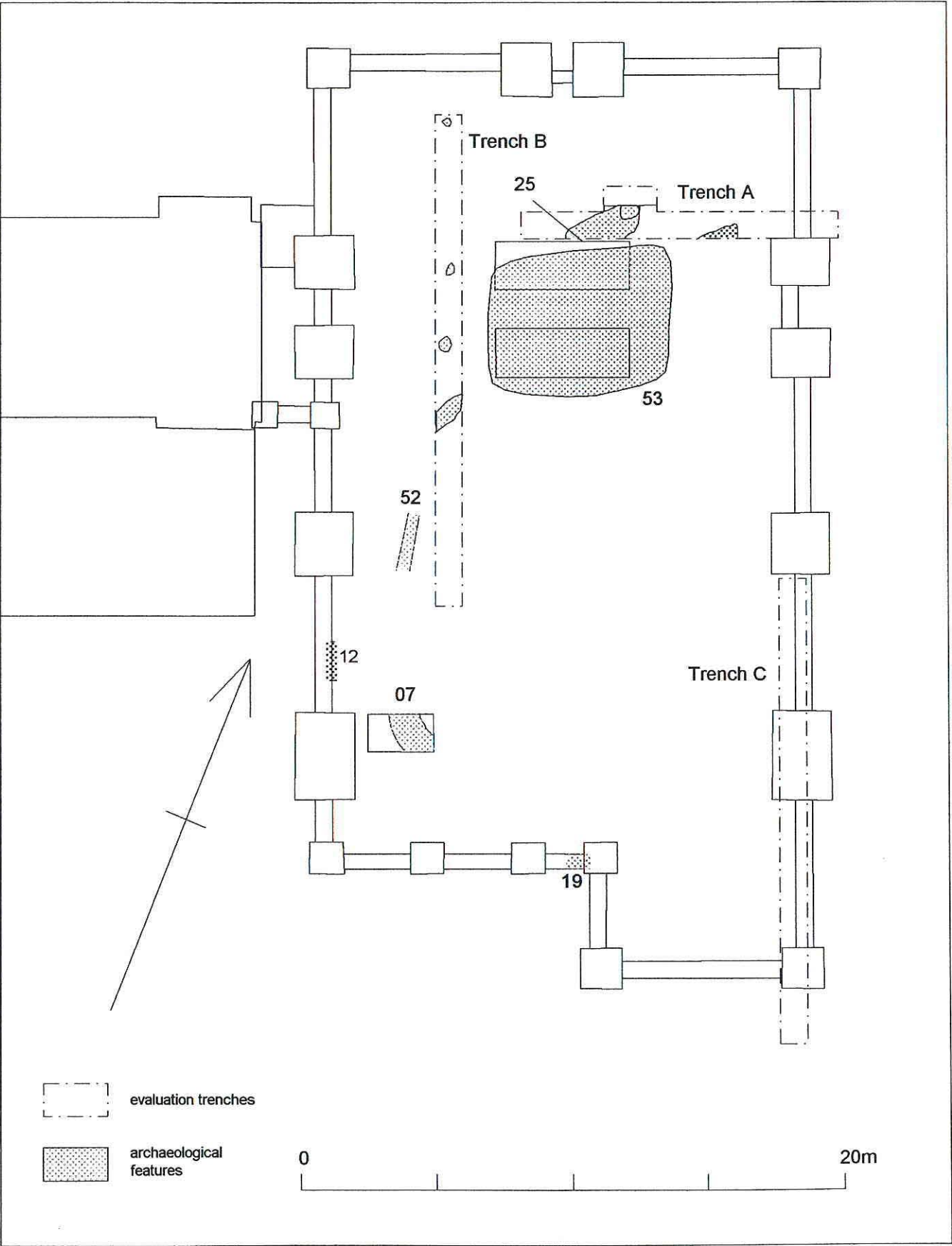


Fig. 2 Ysgol Brynhyfryd, Ruthin, Archaeological Watching Brief, scale 1:200

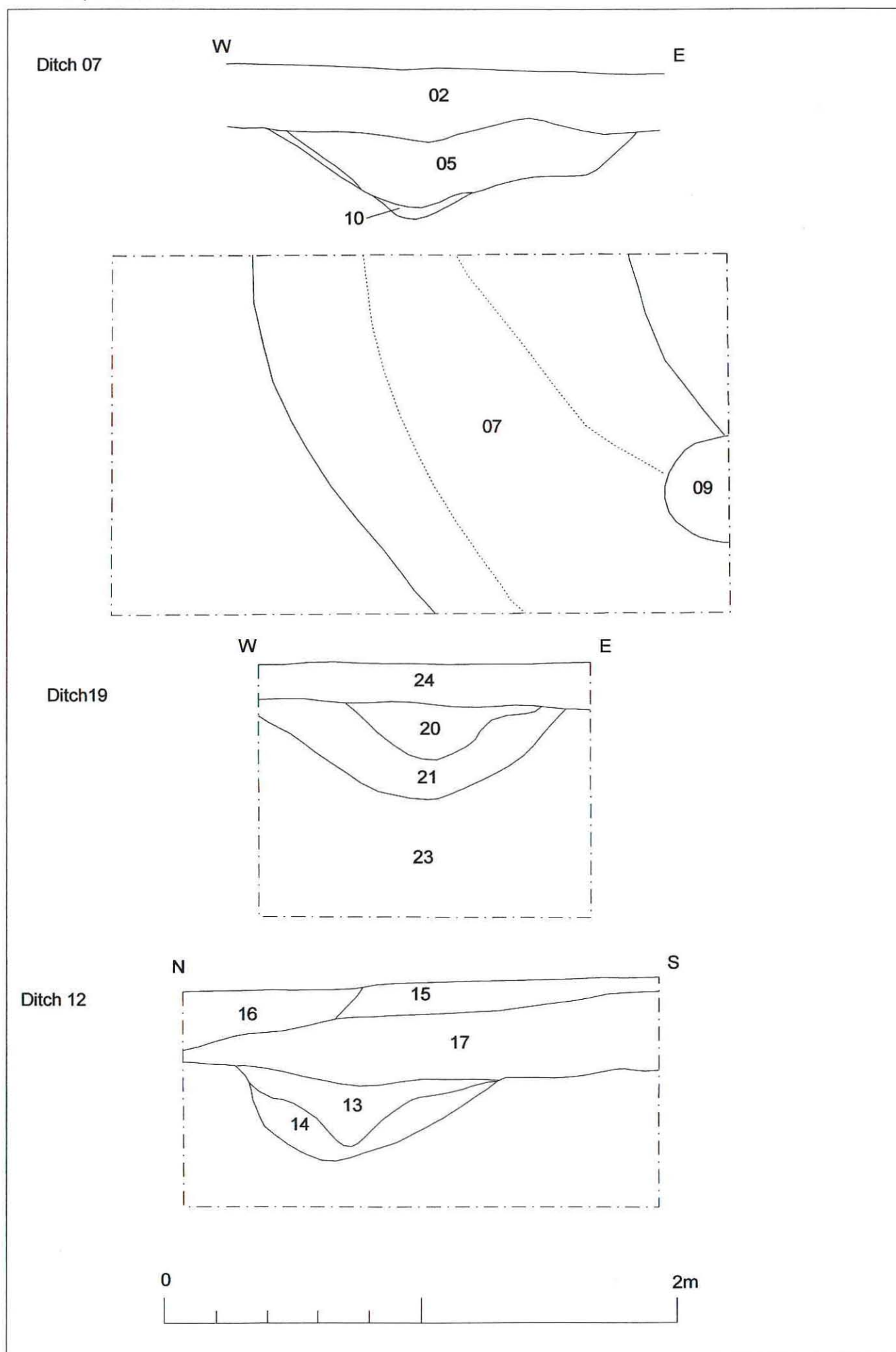


Fig. 3 Ditches 07, 12 and 19

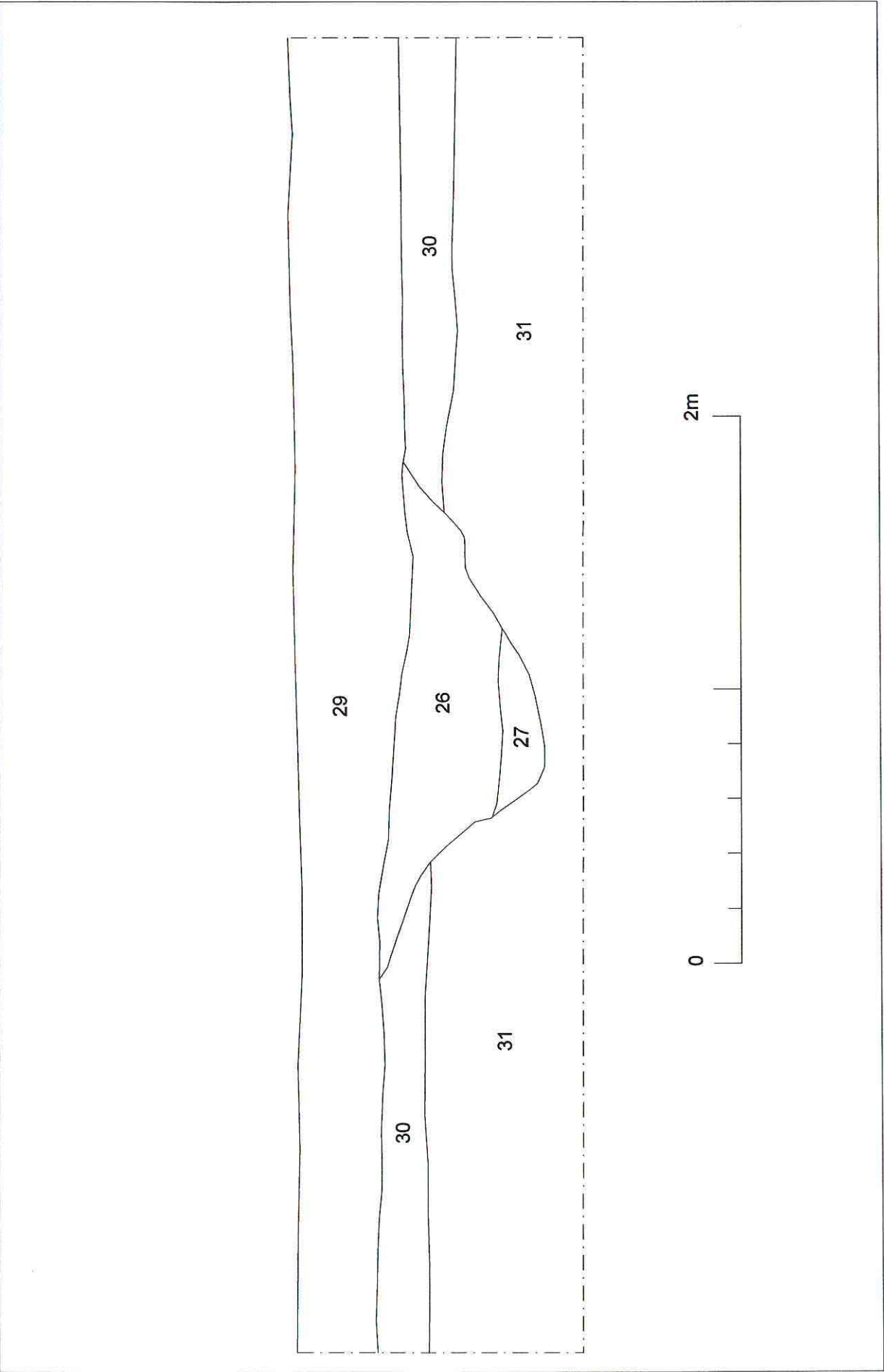


Fig. 4 Ditch 25

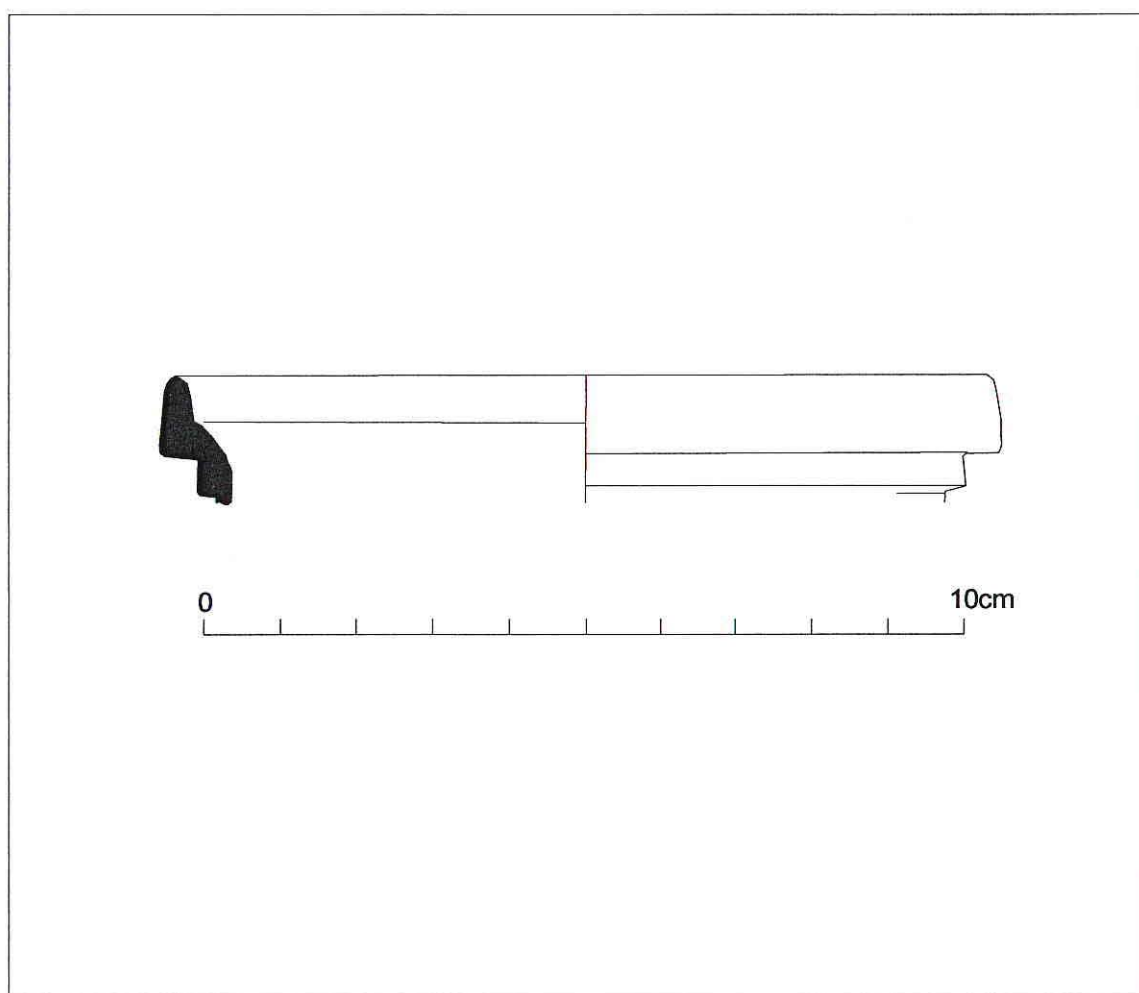


Fig. 5 Shale vessel, scale 1:1