

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

**Offa's Dyke, Keeper's Cottage, Ffrith,  
Flintshire**  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

**CPAT Report No 660**

**CPAT Report No 566**

# **Offa's Dyke, Keeper's Cottage, Ffrith, Flintshire**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

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Report for Flintshire County Council

**The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust**

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## CPAT Report Record

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 In August 2004, the Field Services and Contracts section of The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) were invited to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the construction of a traffic light system on the B5101 at Keeper's Cottage, near Ffrith, on behalf of Flintshire County Council (FCC). The stretch of road followed the crest of Offa's Dyke and the works were required to enable the reduction of the carriageway to a single lane due to instability along the southern edge
- 1.2 This section of Offa's Dyke is a scheduled ancient monument (SAM FI 021), which required an application for Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC). This was granted by Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments, with a condition requiring the maintenance of an archaeological watching brief during the works.

## **2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY, & BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Offa's Dyke is an 8th-century earthwork which formed the western boundary of the kingdom of Mercia. The Dyke was surveyed extensively by Fox during the 1920s, who identified the section in question, between Coed Talon Banks to the north-west (Fig 1) and Keeper's Cottage to the south-east, as 'a striking feature of the landscape it traverses' with a bank of considerable breadth and height (Fox 1955, 30-1).
- 2.2 Keeper's Cottage is located on the B5101 between Treuddyn, Flintshire and Llanfynydd, near Ffrith, Flintshire, and lies at the east end of the traffic light scheme (SJ 2700 5760; Fig. 2). The road rises to the west onto the crest of Offa's Dyke, which survives as a large bank with a ditch to the south, bounded on both sides by agricultural land. Towards the west end the road levels out at the highest point and there are two passing places constructed on the south face of the Dyke. Made-up ground associated with both passing places covers the ditch and a pipe has been inserted into the bottom of the ditch. Further to the west the road falls slightly, levelling out for the last 50m of the scheme. The western end of the scheme of works terminates opposite the entrances to the Clawdd Offa Fishery and Cysgod y Dderwen. At this point the ground to the north is higher than the road and no sign of Offa's Dyke can be seen. The area around the west end has in the past been subject to open-cast coal mining and associated activities.

## **3 WATCHING BRIEF**

- 3.1 The watching brief was carried out in August 2004 during the first phase of construction, comprising the excavation of construction cuts for the insertion of traffic light poles and control boxes at either end of the scheme, and a connecting cable trench running from west to east over a distance of 477m. A further two trenches, each 40m in length, were excavated for sensor cables extending west and east of the construction cuts.
- 3.2 For recording purposes each of the construction cuts and cable trenches were given separate trench numbers with corresponding context numbers. Numbers in brackets refer to individual context numbers as recorded on site and in the site archive.

### **Trench 1**

- 3.3 At the western end of the scheme two construction cuts (100) were excavated, each approximately 2.5m long, 1.5 wide and 0.7m deep, one on the north and one on the south side of the road, with a connecting cable trench across the road 0.7m wide and 0.45m deep. Beneath the layers of tarmac (105) and road stone (106) there were several layers of what appeared to be industrial waste. A layer of dark brown-black compacted clay and coal was seen in the south-facing section (102), where it lay below the dark brown silty soil (101) which



formed the interface of road and verge. In the east-facing section this layer (107) lay immediately below the road-stone base layer (106).

- 3.4 Beneath this was a thin (30-40mm) layer of orange material made up of ash and clinker and possible slags (103) and (108). Visible only in the east and north-facing sections was a layer of brownish yellow clay (110) and (114) which dipped north to within 0.9m of the south-facing section, where it was butted or overlain by context 108 and a compacted black layer of black silt (possibly coal dust) and small fragments of coal (109).

## **Trench 2**

- 3.5 The cable trench connecting the east and west sets of traffic lights was some 477m long, 0.7m wide and 0.45m deep. Work commenced at the western end at Trench 1 and continued eastwards towards Keeper's Cottage. For 50m at either end Trench 2 was cut into the extreme northern edge of the road, but within the tarmac surface of the road. The remainder of the trench, where the road rises onto the upstanding section of Offa's Dyke, followed the centre of the road in order to avoid concrete reinforcement which has been built to support the northern edge of the road.
- 3.6 For most of the first 50m of Trench 2 the exposed sections were the same as the south and north-facing sections of Trench 1, with the exception of the brownish yellow clay which, because it was seen at a greater depth (0.7m) in Trench 1, was not present in either sections of Trench 2. Just before the trench turned into the middle of the road (at BT pole 2A), a brownish yellow clay (204) appeared in plan at the bottom of the trench and in the bottom 50-100mm of the north-facing section. Overlying this was a 0.15-0.2m thick layer of road-stone (203), overlain by 0.15m of tarmac (201; 202). The south-facing section was at this point made up entirely of the dark brown silty soil of the northern verge (the same as 101). The fact that the clay did not appear in the south-facing section indicates that the clay is sloping down towards the north.
- 3.7 From the point where Trench 2 turned into the middle of the road the character of the road construction changed. Two layers of tarmac (205; 206) overlay a thin (25-50mm) layer of small stones in a pinky buff matrix (207). This in turn overlay a very thin layer of tarmac (208), beneath which was the base layer of road-stone (209 - same as 203). Where the road levelled out to its highest point (190.8m) a passing place has been built onto the southern edge of the road. Up to this point the road layers had resumed the earlier sequence of two layers of tarmac over a thick layer of road-stone on top of brownish yellow clay. Just to the east of the westernmost passing place the thickness of the road layers began to vary considerably, as did the thickness and depth of the clay. At the east end of the passing place the entire north-facing section (0.45m) was taken up by road layers although within a few meters this had changed to 0.25m of road layers overlying 0.2m of yellow clay. Continuing east the clay layer thinned out to a point where it was no longer visible in section or plan. The clay layer reappeared, rising to a thickness of 0.20-0.25m but east of BT pole 4A, and for the rest of the trench, the variations in depth and thickness of layers decreased and became more even.
- 3.8 The only artefacts recovered from Trench 2 were a fragment of a horseshoe (unstratified) and a rectangular ferrous object from the road-stone (217) by Keeper's Cottage.
- 3.9 At the eastern end of Trench 2, by Keeper's Cottage, the trench returned to the northern edge of the road. The north-facing section revealed 0.15m of tarmac (216), 0.25-0.3m of road-stone (217) and 50mm of yellow clay (218). The south-facing section revealed a surface of broken, loose tarmac mixed with soil and organic material (219), which extended north into the pull-in outside Keeper's Cottage. Below this were concrete blocks and bricks (220) which stood on a levelling layer of sharp Grey sand (221), below which was another line of blocks, some of which had been removed by the machine leaving a mixed sand and concrete packing (222). This structure was interpreted as a revetment for the pull-in rather than kerbing edging the road.



**Trench 3**

- 3.10 Trench 3 comprised the cable trench (300) crossing the road from north to south, situated at the east end of the eastern passing place, and measuring approximately 8m long, 0.7m wide and 0.45m deep. The east-facing section of trench 3 provided the best profile of the road layers and underlying clay (306) and was drawn at a scale of 1:20 (drawing.1 sheet.1). Below the road layers of tarmac (301) and road-stone (302) was a layer of yellow clay (306), the surface of which was at its highest under the centre of the road where 0.25m was visible in section. This layer was some 3.8m wide and sloped down to the north and south. To the north Trench 3 was cut by trench 2 but 50mm of layer 306 was visible in the south-facing section of Trench 2 at this point. To the south the clay sloped southwards where an extra layer of levelling material (303) had been built up against, and level with, the top of the clay. Beyond this to the south was the orange clay/gravel material which had been used to build up the passing place and which covered the southern ditch which had been culverted. Given its position, it would seem likely that layer 306 forms the upper part of the bank of Offa's Dyke.

**Trench 4**

- 3.11 The construction cuts and connecting cable trench east of Keeper's Cottage consisted of a trench (400) 2.5m long, 1.5m wide and 0.7m deep on the north side of the road, a connecting trench (406) of 5m long, 0.7m wide and 0.45m deep, and a trench (412) 2.5m long, 1.5m wide and 0.7m deep on the south side of the road. On the north side the trench (400) showed a change in the character of the road layers. Whilst the tarmac (401) and road-stone (402) were the same as seen in Trenches 1, 2 and 3, there was another layer of larger stones (403) beneath the road-stone. Below this was a very thin layer of orange ash and clinker (404), which lay directly on the brownish/yellow clay (405), which was seen when hand cleaning the bottom of the trench. Pressed into the top of the clay was a ferrous object, either a long nail or spike probably from context 404.
- 3.12 The north-south cable trench (406) showed the clay (410) in profile but it was less prominent than the profile seen in Trench 3. Here it showed no more than 0.1m above the bottom of the trench, where it was 3.5m wide and slightly south of the middle of the road, unlike in Trench 3 where the top of the clay was under the middle of the road. To the north the dipping clay had been levelled using a layer of larger stones (409), which appeared to be the same as context 403. This was not evident to the south where the clay dipped below the base of the trench 0.7m from the southern edge of the road.
- 3.13 On the south side of the road the construction cut (412) revealed the clay layer again (416) (the same as 405 and 410) in the south-facing section, where it was as a 0.1m thick. In the west-facing section the clay could be seen sloping southwards where it disappeared just short of the north-facing section. The north-facing section revealed an upper layer of loose tarmac and organic material (417) above a line of kerbing blocks (418) and a leveling layer of small angular stones 25cm thick (419).

**Trench 5**

- 3.14 Trench 5 (39m long, 0.5m wide and 0.45m deep) formed an extension to Trench 1, cut to lay the sensor cable extending west of the construction cut on the north side of the road at the west end of the scheme. The south-facing section revealed only a brown, silty soil (506) the same as context 101. The north-facing section was made up of 0.2m of tarmac (501) and 0.2m of road-stone (502) overlying 50mm of brown silt, from which a sherd of post-medieval pottery was recovered. At a point 10m west of Trench 1 the lower layer changed to a dark grey/black silt (504) from which a sherd of white glazed post medieval pottery was recovered.

**Trench 6**

- 3.15 Trench 6 (600) was the same as Trench 5, but extending east from the construction cut on the south side of the road at the east end of the scheme. The south-facing section revealed 0.2m of tarmac (601) above 0.2m of road-stone (602), below which was 50mm of dark grey stony silt (603). The yellow clay was not seen, except intermittently in plan at the eastern end of the

cut. The north-facing section revealed of 0.1m of loose tarmac and organic material (604) above kerb-stones (605) and the concrete setting for the kerb-stones (606).

#### **4 CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.1 The watching brief identified the upper part of the bank of Offa's Dyke in nearly all of the trenches, comprising a deposit of yellow clay. This was less certain at the west end of the scheme where, because of the build up of industrial waste to the north of the road. Due to the limited nature of the works, no constructional detail for the bank was revealed and the generally shallow depth of the trenches precluded any identification of layers beneath the bank.



## APPENDIX 1

### SITE ARCHIVE

The site archive comprises the following items which are retained in the general archives of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust at 7a Church Street in Welshpool, Powys:

- 80 context sheets
- 2 black and white negative films
- 2 colour slide films
- 2 colour print films
- Photograph register
- Context register
- Finds register
- Drawing register
- 1 A1 site drawing

### Finds (not retained)

- context 103 - vitreous slag from  
Trench 2, unstratified - partial horseshoe
- context 217 - rectangular ferrous object
- context 404 - long, thin ferrous object
- 2 small sherds of post-medieval pottery

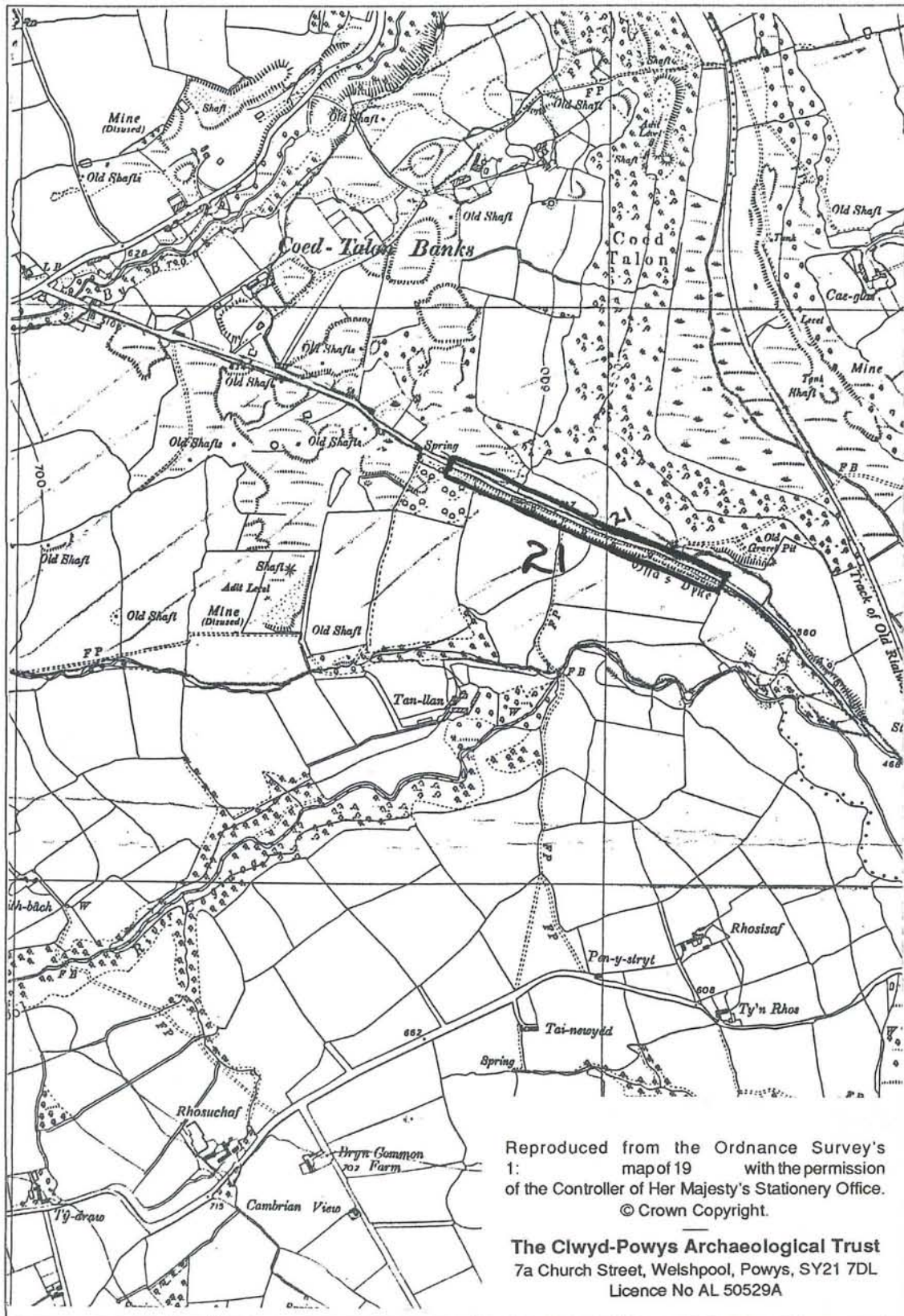


Fig 1. General location of the Keeper's Cottage development and the scheduled area of Offa's Dyke

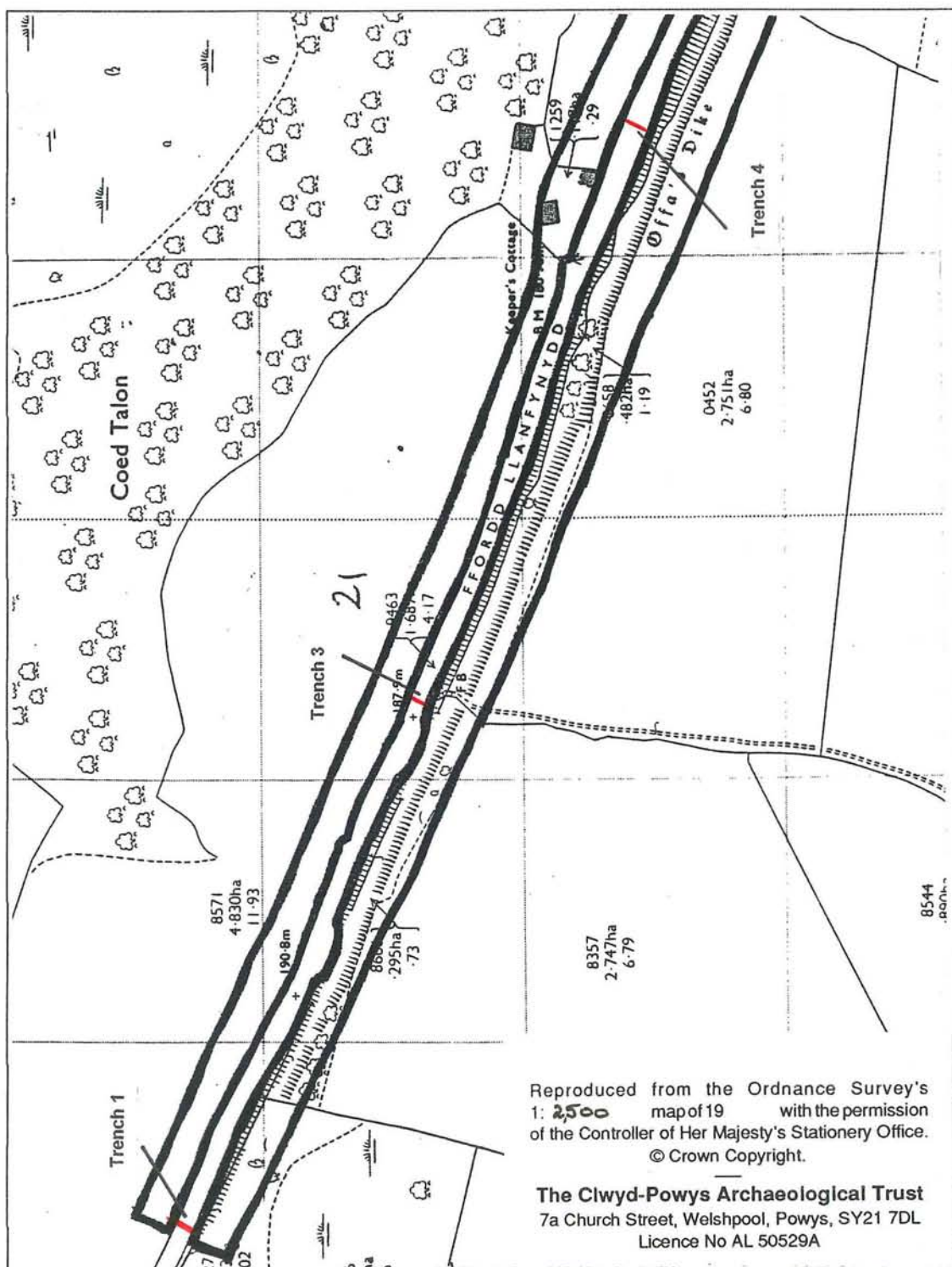


Fig 2. Scheduled area of Offa's Dyke at Keeper's Cottage, together with location of Trenches 1, 3 and 4. Trench 2 ran between Trenches 1 and 4, Trench 5 extended westwards from the west end of Trench 2, and Trench 6 eastwards from the east end of Trench 2.



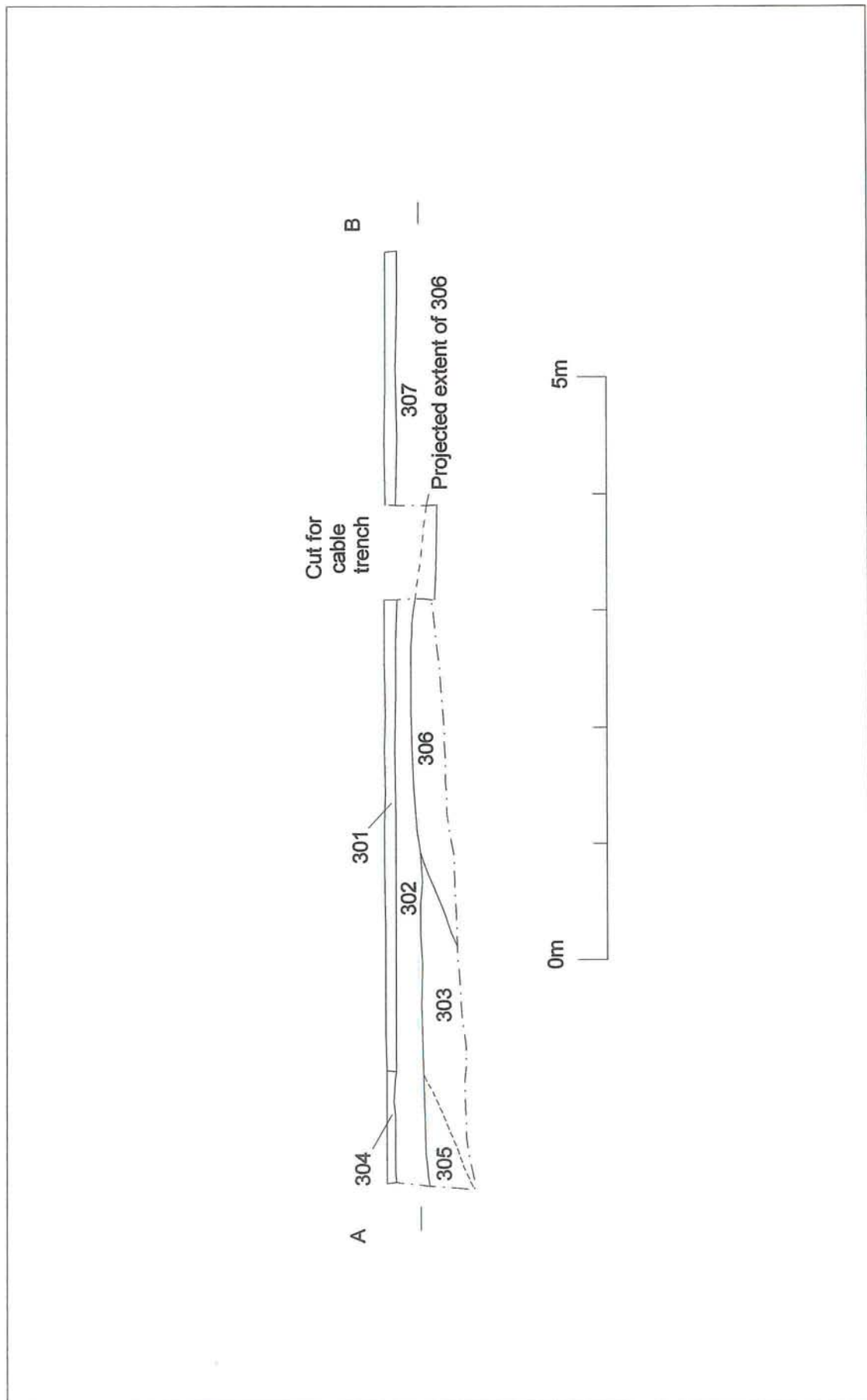


Fig. 3 Trench 3 section Scale 1:50



Plate 1. Trench 2. North-facing section of road where trench turns (CPAT 1750/14)



Plate 2. Trench 2. General view of undulations in the yellow clay A (CPAT 1750/19)





Plate 3. Trench 2. Larger stones (403) in north-facing section (CPAT 1750/22)



Plate 4. Trench 3. Section through road and dyke (CPAT 1750/23)





Plate 5. Trench 3. Section through centre of road and dyke (CPAT 1750/25)



Plate 6. Trench 6. South-facing section (CPAT 1751/08)