

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Ruthin Town Hall, Denbighshire

ADDITIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

CPAT Report No 640

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ADDITIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

I Grant, R Hankinson and R Silvester

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Report for Balfour Beatty Construction Ltd

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust

7a Church Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7DL

tel (01938) 553670, fax (01938) 552179

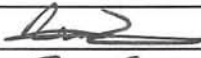

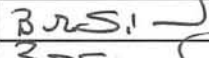
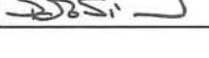
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The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust

7a Church Street Welshpool Powys SY21 7DL

tel (01938) 553670, fax 552179

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Between September and November 2003 the Contracts Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) conducted a watching brief on work being carried out around Ruthin town hall by Balfour Beatty Construction Ltd. The work had been requested by the Denbighshire County Archaeologist, acting in her capacity as the archaeological curator, and was the subject of a brief drawn up by her.
- 1.2 A report was prepared in December 2003 and submitted to Balfour Beatty Construction Ltd and through them to the county archaeologist. Subsequently, it became apparent that further on-site construction works which might have an impact on sub-surface archaeology were to be undertaken and CPAT were called back on the advice of Mrs Gale to undertake an additional watching brief.
- 1.3 The following supplementary report identifies the results of the additional watching brief. For all background information the reader is referred to the first report which is no 596 in the CPAT Report series.

2 THE ADDITIONAL WATCHING BRIEFS

- 2.1 The watching brief comprised a series of site visits during the latter construction phases of the extension to the town hall, to record any features of archaeological interest that might be revealed. Features that were encountered were sketched, described and photographed, as and when appropriate. In part, the nature of the recording was determined by the method of working used in the excavations being examined. Health and Safety considerations rendered detailed drawn recording of the features encountered impracticable.
- 2.2 *Watching Brief I* (Fig. 2)
 - 2.2.1 Further excavations for the foundations of the external ceremony and photoshoot area, south of the access ramp, took place on the 30th March 2004 under the observation of Mrs F. Gale of Denbighshire County Council. As a result of this work CPAT were on site the following day in order to investigate further any features of note. The foundation trench was approximately 2.5 to 2.9m wide, stepped in 0.5m each side, attaining a maximum depth of 1.37m. Initial inspection of the site excavations revealed that concrete had already been set in two thirds of the footings. However three features, a 19th-century wall footing and two pits of earlier origin, were recorded in section and partial plan.
- 2.2 The earliest feature was a sub-circular pit (Fig. 2; D), at least 3m in diameter, located 3m north-east of the present boundary wall on the south-western side of the site. Although the upper levels of the pit had been truncated by a modern brick inspection manhole, the archaeological deposits survived at a depth of 0.3m below the present ground surface and continued to an observed minimum depth of 0.7m. The primary fill of the pit consisted of a light green sandy silt, extremely cess-like in appearance, sealed by a dark brown silty clay that contained numerous fragments of charcoal, wood, slate and blackened animal bone. A high percentage of the waste material may well be residues from a tanning workshop. Three unabraded fragments, all from the same vessel, of highly fired, lead glazed pottery with remnants of applied 'thumb frilled' decoration, date the pit to the late medieval period i.e the 15th to early 16th centuries. The fabric is possibly of local origin, either from Rhuddlan or Ewloe.
- 2.3 Another pit (Fig. 2; C) was revealed in section at a point 14m along the retaining wall of the access ramp. Although it was not possible to record the full extent of the feature, it was noted that the humic deposits were similar to those of the previously recorded pit. In addition to quantities of charcoal and animal bone, fragments of wooden roofing timbers were also visible in the surviving pit section. The third feature, a late post-medieval wall footing (Fig.2; E), was located 3.5m south-east of the western-most point of the access

ramp retaining wall. The wall, 0.25m below the existing ground level, was 0.6m wide and 0.5m in height and was constructed from white sandstone blocks bound in lime mortar. Ceramics recovered from below the wall date the feature to the late 18th /19th century.

2.3 *Watching Brief II* (Fig. 1)

- 2.3.1 A service trench was dug by a small earth-mover and by hand across Wynnstay Street between the Old Council offices and the Old Town Hall on 21 April 2004.
- 2.3.2 The trench was c.0.55m wide and dug to a nominal depth of 0.60m, although because of services this depth had to be exceeded and went down to 0.70m+ in places. In all it is estimated that this would have been c.13.5m long, across both the road and the adjacent pavements, and in all a little less than 12.3m of it was observed.
- 2.3.3 At the eastern end, particularly beneath the footpath the ground was badly disturbed by services, but from about 1.2m a stratum of dark brown slightly sticky silt, a 'garden soil' became evident, and this became continuous from 4.5m, with a tarmac and rubble make-up layer above it of around 0.3m. Included within this soil were occasional, small fragments of brick, mortar, charcoal and cinder or coal, together with the occasional sherd of pottery. One small fragment of bone and a clay pipe stem were also noted. Nowhere was this the bottom of this material reached, although there was at least one place where a lump of degraded sandstone was found at the base of the trench.
- 2.3.4 At the western end of the trench a spread of rubble (Fig.1; A) was identified, mostly red sandstone in a very soft state with occasional lumps of limestone. Some of the lumps were up to 0.3m long. This material occurred at about 0.40m below the road surface and was overlain by the 'garden soil'. It was not possible to gauge its depth but at least two courses appeared to be present. It did not appear that the sandstone spread across the whole of the trench, rather than the trench had been cut along roughly the same axis as the stone spread which was traced for about 1m before disappearing under deposits which had not been cleared at the time that the watching brief had been held because of overlying service cables. Although there can be no certainty because of the small amount of rubble visible, it is quite likely that this represented a wall foundation of relatively early date.

2.4 *Watching Brief III* (Fig. 1)

- 2.4.1 The excavation of foundations for a wall alongside the access ramp and around the new entrance/lift shaft building, both to the rear of the town hall, were carried out on 12 May 2004.
- 2.4.2 The trench was generally 1.0m wide and attained a maximum depth of 1.5m. Most of the deposits revealed represented disturbance by previous construction work, presumably of the 19th and 20th centuries, with the natural subsoil of red boulder clay only evident in the base of the trench at one point, where it passed to the rear of the new entrance building.
- 2.4.3 Alongside the access ramp, the trench revealed that the stone wall which supports the ramp had footings which projected 0.3m beyond the line of the wall, both wall and footings were left in-situ. At the edge of Wynnstay Street, the trench ended on encountering the wall which formerly delineated the street frontage of the plot. The wall was largely composed of limestone blocks and appeared to be of a similar build to other structures in the immediate area, which have a 19th-century origin. On completion of the excavations the trench was filled with concrete to provide a base for the new wall.

2.5 *Watching Brief IV* (Fig. 2)

- 2.5.1 The excavation of two 2.3m x 0.6m trenches, for the purpose of installing concrete stanchions to underpin the wall alongside the access ramp, were carried out on 02 June

2004. Within one of the trenches the remains of a stone wall (Fig. 2; B) were recorded in situ. The wall was located at a point 1.07m north-east of footing trenches that were excavated on the 31/03/04 (See location map) and was orientated north-west to south-east at a right-angle to the existing modern wall. Constructed from large limestone blocks and bonded with red-pinkish clay, the wall survived as two courses to a height of 0.4m with a step on the south-west side. The base of the wall was not observed due to a deposit of compacted clay abutting both wall facings. From the robust nature of the build it is evident that further elements of this structure will almost certainly survive along its projected line in both directions. Although no dating evidence was retrieved from within the fabric of the wall, it is possibly of medieval origin.

3 CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 These limited watching briefs have revealed evidence of both medieval and post-medieval activity close to the heart of the town at Ruthin. In themselves they tell us little but collectively it is clear that even such restricted work as this can add to the overall knowledge of the historic settlement.

4 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 4.1 The writer would like to thank the following people for their assistance during the work: Mrs F Gale, Denbighshire County Archaeologist; and the site staff of Balfour Beatty and their sub-contractors, particularly Mr G Blower.

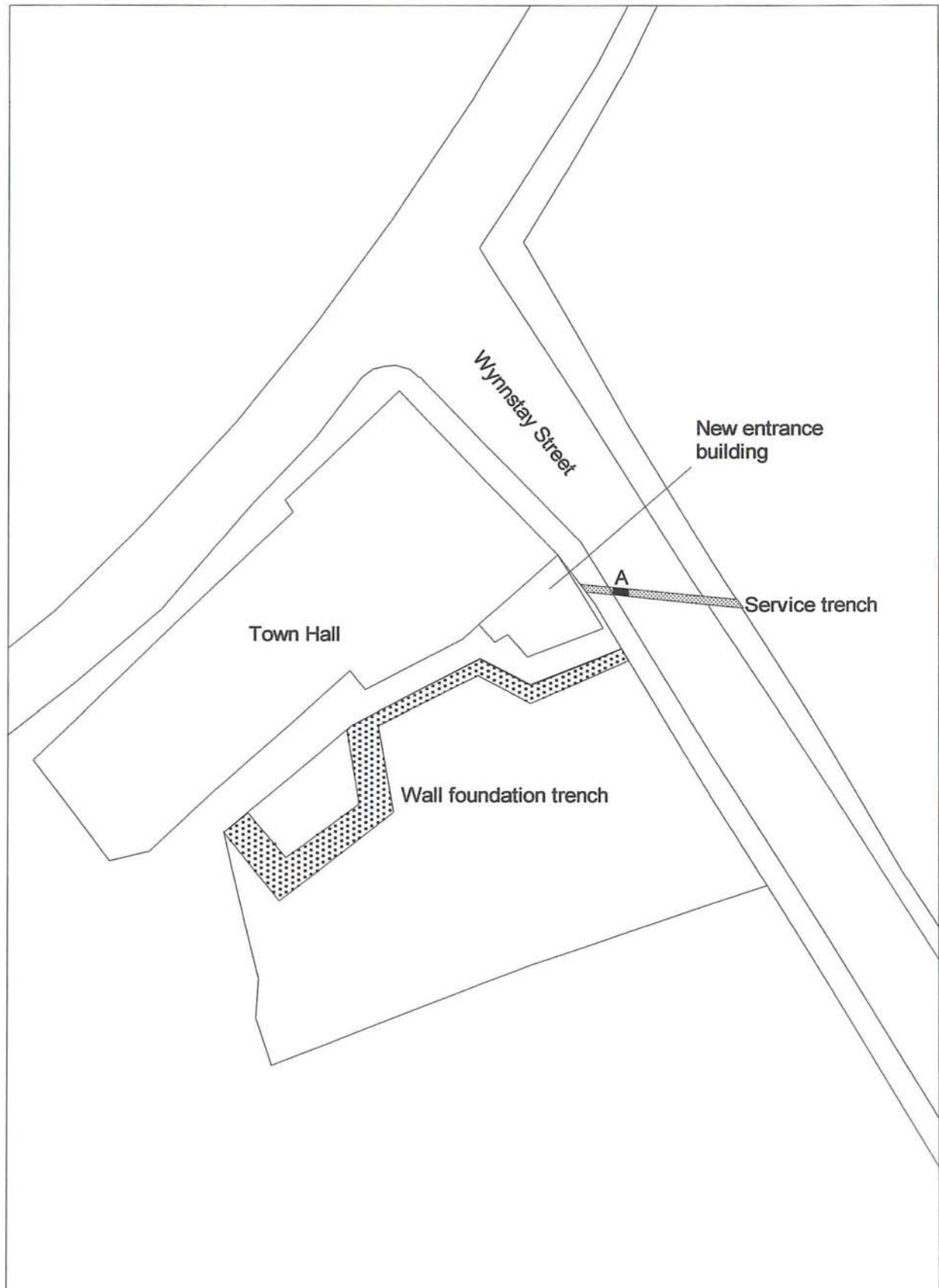


Fig.1 Overall plan of wall foundation trenches. Scale 1:500

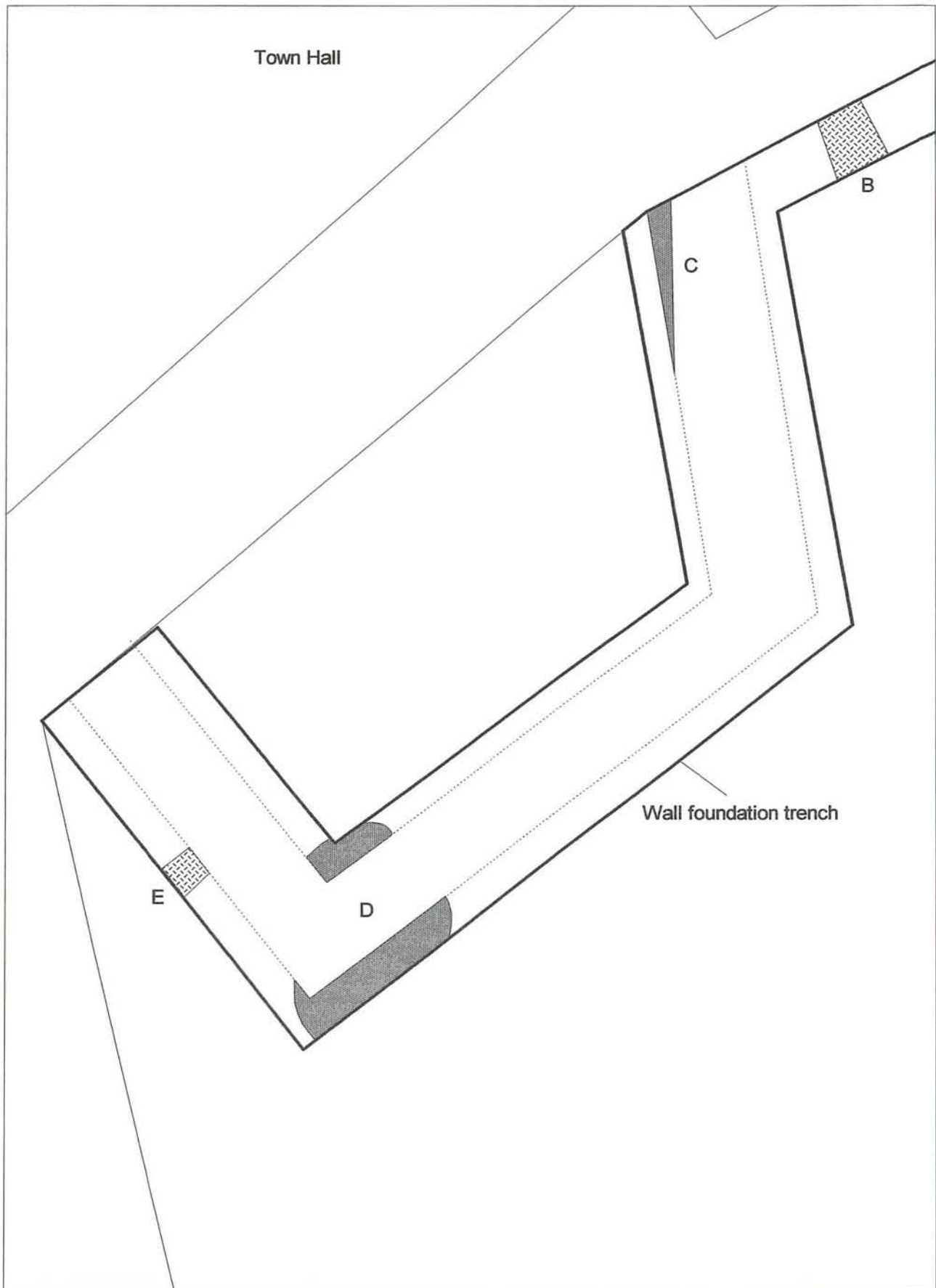


Fig.2 Plan of wall foundation trench for external ceremony and photoshoot area. Scale 1:100