

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Supermarket Development at Pool Road, Newtown

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION



CPAT Report No 827

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Report for Development Planning Partnership

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In October 2006 the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (henceforward CPAT) was invited by The Development Planning Partnership (DPP) in Cardiff to provide a quotation for a pre-determination archaeological evaluation excavation of land at Pool Road, Newtown, Powys.
- 1.2 The evaluation had been requested by Mr M Walters of the Curatorial Section of the Clwyd-Archaeological Trust in his capacity as archaeological advisor to the planning authority for the region, in response to the results of an archaeological assessment of the development area carried out by CPAT in September 2006 (CPAT Report 817), in which the route of a potential Roman road had been identified.
- 1.3 The CPAT quotation was accepted by DPP in October 2006. The excavation was carried out at the end of November and this report was written immediately thereafter.

2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 2.1 The proposed development is located on the south side of Pool Road on the eastern edge of Newtown centred at SO 11459147 (Fig. 1). The site is bounded by Pool Road to the north-west and by the railway to the south-east.
- 2.2 Current and recent land use in the archaeological study area is varied, with domestic and light-industrial buildings, and the former Smithfield animal market with its associated buildings and open areas.
- 2.3 The underlying geology of the development area consists of Silurian sedimentary rocks of the Wenlock and Ludlow series (British Geological Survey map 1994). The soils consist generally of typical brown alluvial soils, derived from the River Severn which flows just to the north of the study area (Soil Survey of England and Wales map and legend 1983).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 To provide a context for the evaluation, the following section has been taken from the original assessment report (CPAT Report no. 817) and included here in unmodified form. It has the added benefit to the reader that all the salient information is included, and recourse to the original report should not be necessary.

The Town of Newtown

- 3.2 Newtown, the largest urban centre in northern Powys, lies on level ground in a bend of the River Severn. This provided some natural protection to the medieval settlement that developed here. Like so many of the historic towns and villages of eastern Wales it is not possible to determine when the earliest settlement came into existence. The surrounding area was known as Llanfair Cedewain and the valley as Dyffryn Llanfair, both of which might suggest that the church of St Mary was a foundation that pre-dated the new town.
- 3.3 The first reference to the chapel of St Mary, which still survives as a ruin beside the river in the northern corner of the town, was in 1253 when the chapel of *Llanweyr* was dependent on the mother church of Llanllwrchaiarn just down river. When the commote of Cedewain was granted to Roger Mortimer in 1279, it took him little more than a year to acquire from Edward I the right to hold a weekly market and an annual fair in the manor, and it can be assumed that the establishment of the town went hand in hand with the adoption of these rights. By 1291 Llanfair

had become independent of Llanllwrchaiarn, the implication being that Newtown was growing in importance, and by 1321 it was well established. However, specific references to Newtown do not appear until the second quarter of the 14th century, with a document of 1331 referring to the *Nova Villa de Kedenwywg*, while *Drenewyth*, the Welsh equivalent of Newtown, was first recorded in 1394. It seems likely that during the century Newtown acquired borough status though no confirmatory charter is known to exist.

- 3.4 Its later history is equally poorly documented. Leland in the 1530s thought it 'meately welle buildyd after the Walche fascion' (Smith 1964, iii, 12) and this suggests that unlike some other border towns it was not going through a phase of stagnation or decline at that time. In 1545, fifty-five taxpayers appear in the records.
- 3.5 The layout of the town reveals the classic pattern of a planned settlement, with a main axial street – Broad Street – and other lanes or roads running off it at right angles. There is an assumption that the bridge across the Severn linking Broad Street to the lands to the north was an early communication link, but there is little evidence to confirm such a theory. The stone bridge built here in 1826-7 and was widened in 1857; it replaced a wooden predecessor but its age is unknown. Immediately to the south-west of the planned settlement was what is usually classed a motte and bailey earthwork castle, though if it was contemporary with the emergence of the town it is an extremely late example of this type of earthwork. Newtown Hall which once lay beside it and whose gardens destroyed much of the bailey, has now gone but its history certainly goes back to the 16th century. A second motte, Gro Tump, lay further to the east, about 1.25km away from the medieval town.
- 3.6 How far south the original town extended is not immediately obvious, but becomes a little clearer when the former existence of Newtown Green is taken into account. This was an elongated tract of common land which was enclosed as late as 1806, its northern boundary lying immediately south of the Newtown Hall motte and Market Street, its southern boundary a small stream around 100m away. By 1843 the former green was dense with housing on both sides of the new Ladywell Street, but it can reasonably be assumed that the common dated back to medieval times and that there was no housing there, other than a handful of small and late in date encroachments.
- 3.7 It was only in the 19th century that Newtown really expanded as it developed into the centre of the flannel manufacturing industry in mid-Wales, with at least fifty factories established, having a considerable impact on the spread of settlement in Penygloddfa to the north of the river. Fulling mills, bleaching grounds, a foundry, tanneries and potteries all followed as Lewis pointed out in 1833, and in 1819 the Montgomeryshire canal was extended to Newtown (Dodd 1990, 107).
- 3.8 New Road was cut through the existing layout of streets in the early 19th century, but prior to its creation there was a road running along the southern side of the river, through what was called St Giles, and then swinging through the old town via Market Street, before looping up to meet an existing road running besides the river to Llanidloes. This road is almost certainly on the line of the original Roman road from Caersws to Forden Gaer near Montgomery. Its line was extended by a continuous field boundary running for hundreds of metres eastwards and clearly discernible on 18th and 19th-century maps.
- 3.9 It is against this background of a relatively small and tightly constrained medieval settlement in the loop of the Severn, surrounded by agricultural land and with a gentry house (Newtown Hall) on its western periphery, that the Pool Road development should be seen.

The Pool Road Area

- 3.10 For an assessment of the development that has occurred along Pool Road over the last two hundred and more years we are dependent on a sequence of maps that commence in 1788 and continue, admittedly irregular intervals, to the present day. For copyright reasons, it is not possible to reproduce the maps in this report.
- 3.11 The earliest, John Sayce's 1788 map shows the best depiction that we have from the 18th century. It is evident that even though David Pugh, a local gentleman, did not own all the land – some was owned by James Basier and Pryce Buckley Esq - and the boundaries have much changed, most if not all of the land to the south of the river was agricultural at that time. The modern telephone exchange block, however, is defined by boundaries that were there in 1788. To the south and south-east were two fields known as Maes Gwnasted, spread over ten acres, that were then under meadow. A small additional area was Cae Pontprin under arable.
- 3.12 The plan of 1798 refines the context confirming that all this land was agricultural at the end of the 18th century. It also holds out the interesting possibility that there was a chapel or church dedicated to St Giles on the south side of the Severn and to the north side of the main road, seemingly where Hughes' garage is today. There is the hint of a curvilinear enclosure around which the road bent and glebe land on the opposite side of the road which by the 18th-century belonged to St Mary's in Newtown. Two buildings are also shown, one presumably the St Giles House referred to in 17th-century documents. There is no suggestion that this putative ecclesiastical focus extended south of the road into the area of the proposed development, but it might provide a general context for the figurine of St Catherine found in 1935 (see below).
- 3.13 The 1821 map does not show the development area as it was restricted to Pugh's land holdings only, but simply notes "lands belonging to different persons and the vicarage". However by edging the block to the west in red it suggests that the area south-east of the historic town was already beginning to be developed. The map volume from the previous year adds nothing to this.
- 3.14 The 19th century saw the general development of this area as an industrial focus on the south side of the river. The Cambrian Ironworks lay a little to the west. The Tithe map of 1843 shows that land to either side of Sheaf Street had been built on, presumably for housing, and also along the Pool Road frontage. These Pool Road buildings comprised dwelling houses (nos 22-27), and a tannery building. The area immediately behind these buildings was a close held by a Samuel Morgan, with gardens belonging to George Green and pastures, meadows and gardens belonging to Thomas Morris extending to the south.
- 3.15 The railway which now forms the southern limits of the development area is shown on the Ordnance Survey 1:500 town plan of 1885. The tannery and other buildings fronting onto Pool Road are detailed, and an area of garden is shown laid out behind the houses on Pool Road. Adjacent to the tannery Green's Court, a short cul-de-sac, allows access to a row of properties to the west (and reflects the ownership identified on the Tithe map). A lane is shown crossing from south-west to north-east, following the former field boundaries. A Rope Walk, runs alongside the railway, with several buildings, presumably associated with the rope making process, in the same area.
- 3.16 Little change is shown by 1902 (OS 2nd edition) except for additional buildings, both along the railway, and as an extension to the terrace block in the north-eastern sector of the study area (Site 9). Later in the 20th century the entire open area underwent further development. Large corrugated iron sheds were constructed in the south-east, originally for the transport of ponies during the 1st World War and later housing the bus depot, with the Smithfield Market, built in the 1930s, occupying much of the remaining open area. Access to the market was allowed by the creation of a perimeter road, overlying the former Rope Walk in the south. Demolition of the tannery and the properties to the west allowed the creation of a new road, Smithfield Road,

and the building of a terrace of houses followed in the 1970s. In the north-east an electricity sub-station and a new access road was sited on the former 19th-century building plots.

- 3.17 During the construction of the Smithfield in 1935 a figurine of St Catherine was found. The figurine was made of plaster and was missing the head, the surviving portion standing to just over 3 inches in height. At the time a late 14th or early 15th century date was suggested (Hughes 1936).
- 3.18 Portions of the Roman road from Caersws to Forden Gaer are very well-evidenced in the Severn Valley, most recently on the western outskirts of Newtown. Past suggestions of its course in the Newtown area have tended to focus on the modern Pool Road. However, it is clear from the later 18th-century maps that there is a continuous line of field boundaries running eastwards on the south side of Newtown. The current footpath accesses the Smithfield in the west via a metal kissing gate, then crosses the open field and continues eastwards through the bus depot. This latter part of the route appears to have been diverted slightly to the north to follow an overgrown route alongside the gardens of the houses on Maesderwen. The path across the field follows a slightly hollowed route marked by a prominent terrace along its southern edge. There is a strong possibility that the field boundaries and footpath follow the line of the Roman road. Determining the existence and precise route of the road represented the focus of the evaluation exercise.

4 EVALUATION

- 4.1 The evaluation in December 2006 consisted of two trenches (Fig. 1), located towards either end of the potential Roman road within the open, grassed area of the development area. The locations of the trenches were precisely recorded by means of total station surveying. Numbers in brackets in the following text refer to individual context records which are defined and detailed in full in the site archive.
- 4.2 In each of the trenches the modern overburden was removed by machine under close archaeological supervision down to the surface of the first recognisable archaeological horizon. Thereafter all excavation was undertaken by hand. The evaluation was essentially non-destructive and was designed to determine the depth at which archaeologically sensitive deposits survived, together with as much information as possible about their nature, condition and significance. All photography was undertaken on site in digital format. A summary of the site archive is provided in Appendix 1.

Trench 1 (Fig. 2)

- 4.3 Trench 1 measured 16.5m x 1.70m and was aligned north-west to south-east. The trench was located towards the eastern end of the perceived route of the Roman road, within the bounds of the development area. The underlying, naturally deposited material comprised a bright orange-brown stony clay (26), revealed towards the north-western extent of the trench during excavation, at a depth of c.1m below the current ground surface and sloping down gently towards the river in the north-west. This was overlain by a 0.10m thick, soft, orange-brown silty clay (25) of probable alluvial origin, and containing occasional flecks of charcoal. A comparable deposit (27) was revealed in the base of the trench at the south-eastern, upslope end.
- 4.4 Removal of the turf and rubble levelling layer (01) and a 19th-century bonded brick surface (09) exposed a cambered metalled surface (18) traversing the trench in a north-east to south-west direction, with a sequence of deposits to either side (Plates 1 and 2). This metalled surface extended to c.6m in width, with a c.2m-wide, levelled agger, and was constructed of a layer of compacted pebbles at least 0.10m thick. Two parallel linear grooves, (78) and (79), along the upper surface were interpreted as probable wheel ruts. The surface of the road lay less than 0.28m below the current ground surface.

- 4.5 In the central area of the trench a firm, reddish-brown layer of clay (19) up to 0.20m thick and containing occasional charcoal flecks appeared to underlie the metalled surface. To the north-west a deposit of distinctly pale grey clay (21), revealed in the trench section, may represent the remnant fill for a flanking ditch to the road, although if this is the case it would appear to have been recut or cleared since the initial construction of the road, as it truncated the metalled surface layer slightly. The equivalent material to the south-east was revealed in the base of the trench, and appeared to form a linear spread of pale grey clay (23) within a cut (24), although the nature of this feature was not investigated further in this trench.



Plate 1 Trench 1 from the south-east

- 4.6 A dark greyish brown clay-silt (17) sealed the sloping north-western side of the road, and continued to the end of trench in the north-west where it deepened to 0.30m. This material generally contained c.5% pebbles, although there was a distinct band of stonier material (shown as a dotted line on Fig. 2) representing eroded material from the surface of the road. A comparable deposit (16) was identified at the south-eastern end of the trench, although in this area it had been disturbed to a greater degree by later activity. This activity consisted of several features associated with the delineation of a boundary, and included two postholes, (06) and (08), which followed the alignment of the road. A shallow (0.18m) ditch (15) filled by a greyish-brown, stony material (14), lay on the same alignment and had been cut from a similar height. Both the postholes and the ditch were sealed by a thin, less than 80mm, band of dark greyish brown silty-clay (04) which was interpreted as a possible former turf layer.
- 4.7 The recutting of a third ditch (13) on the same alignment truncated this possible turf line. The mid greyishbrown silty-clay fill (12) of this ditch was sealed by a layer of cemented pale grey clay (11) with frequent iron staining. The origin of this material was not known, but it may be

related to the later post-medieval brick-built structural remains (02) and (09) and later demolition layer (03). This material lay directly below the current topsoil and turf (01).



Plate 2 Trench 1 road surface and wheel ruts, from north-west

Trench 2 (Fig. 2)

- 4.8 Trench 2 measured 19m x 1.70m and was again aligned north-west to south-east. The trench was located towards the western end of the perceived route of the Roman road, within the bounds of the development area. The underlying, naturally deposited material comprised a bright orange-brown stony (*c.*80%) clay (76), revealed towards the north-western extent of the trench during excavation.
- 4.9 The earliest archaeological feature identified in this trench was a circular pit or extremely large posthole (65), at least 1.60m in diameter and 0.60-0.80m deep, situated towards the central area of the trench, and continuing beyond the limits of the excavation. The feature contained two deposits, the lower (64), a very sticky, wet reddish-brown clay with occasional greyish patching, and an upper fill (63), a soft orange-brown silty-clay, with occasional charcoal flecks. This upper fill was very similar to, and may be derived from, a probable alluvial deposit (77) which extended across the north-western area of the trench, overlying the natural subsoil (76). A comparable deposit (75) was also revealed at the south-eastern end of the trench. This material may be considered equivalent to deposit (25) and (27) in Trench 1.
- 4.10 A 4.80m-wide spread of *c.*0.15m-thick of dark reddish-brown clay (72) and (74), containing up 2% charcoal flecking, was identified towards the south-eastern end of the trench, sealing the earlier pit (65). This material was very similar to (19) in Trench 1, and appeared to fulfill a similar function as a base for the construction of a cambered metalled road surface (58) and (73). The metalling of the road was not fully investigated during this evaluation, but appeared to be constructed of at least 80mm of compressed, sub-angular and rounded pebbles. An additional layer of very firm greyish-brown sandy-clay (71) directly underlay the metalled surface, visible at the south-eastern end and probably formed the agger of the road. The upper surface of the road lay just 0.22m below the current ground surface. Both the metalled surface

and the underlying construction layers would originally have been slightly more extensive, but later activity had truncated their north-western and south-eastern extents.



Plate 3 Trench 2, pit (65) from north-west



Plate 4 Trench 2 road and ditch fills from the south-east

- 4.11 Along the south-eastern edge of the road, a series of ditch cuts were revealed. The earliest of these (69) may represent the original ditch associated with the construction of the road. This consisted of a concave-sided, flat-bottomed ditch, c.0.24m deep, containing a lower fill of soft reddish-brown clay (68) and an upper fill of greyish-brown clay (67). A deposit of brownish-grey stony clay (70), containing up to 75% pebbles and partially sealing the alluvial material (75), may represent upcast from the digging of this ditch. A later ditch (60), containing a distinctively light grey clay (59), partially truncated the earlier ditch and the upcast material. Based on the nature of its fill, this feature may be considered comparable to ditch (24) in Trench 1.



Plate 5 Trench 2 Ditch (60) from the south-west

- 4.12 A spread of greyish-brown sandy clay (66) sealed the sloping south-eastern side of the road and the upper ditch fills. A comparable material (62) was identified on the north-western side of the road, although here it was rather more disturbed and contained a number of rounded river cobbles and pebbles. Up to 0.35m of mid to dark greyish-brown, soft silty clay (52) sealed the earlier features and continued across much of the trench. This probably represents an early post-medieval agricultural deposit, similar to (16)/(17) in Trench 1.
- 4.13 Considerable later post-medieval disturbance relating to demolition and/or construction was identified at the north-western end of this trench. This took the form of a series of pits (62), (56), (51) and (44), which may be related to the development along the Pool Road in the 19th century, and to the later development of the Smithfield animal market. A later, extensive pit (33) containing rubble and dateable plastic wrapping may be associated with the construction of the houses on Smithfield Road in the 1970s on the site of the old tannery. Further boundary features dating to the later post-medieval period were present along both sides of the road in the form of postholes such as (39) and (42).

5. THE FINDS

- 5.1 A considerable quantity of building material was identified during the excavation, predominantly consisting of demolition debris dating to the 19th and 20th centuries. This included bricks stamped with the manufacturer's details identifying both Newtown and

Stourbridge kilns, roofing slate and fragmented slabs, and concrete blocks. Aside from the bricks the majority of the material was recorded but not retained.

- 5.2 Surprisingly little pottery was identified during the excavation, and all of it dated to the later post-medieval period. A single clay tobacco pipe stem was retrieved from the posthole fill (41) in Trench 2, and sherds of 19th-century whiteware, coarse Buckley-type ware, and industrial-ware were retrieved from deposit (35), also in Trench 2.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The evaluation confirmed the presence of a metalled road running on a north-east to south-west alignment across the development site, the route of which has been fossilised in the later field boundaries, trackway and footpath. The form, construction and associated stratigraphy of the road implies that it does indeed represent the Caersws to Forden Gaer Roman road linking the 1st century AD military forts, the route of which in the Newtown area was hitherto unknown. That the road remained an important landscape feature throughout the intervening centuries is confirmed by the presence of features associated with the delineation of boundaries, such as postholes for fencelines, and linear ditches. Many of these features appear to have been replaced and redug over time, reflecting the age of the road and the longevity of its impact on the landscape.
- 6.2 The projected line of the road, based upon the results of this evaluation, place it beneath the northern corrugated iron shed of the bus depot in the east, and beneath the Smithfield entrance and toilet block, and animal pens to the west.
- 6.3 In addition to the Roman activity in the area as evidenced by the road, earlier, prehistoric activity is suggested by the presence of a relatively large pit or posthole, partially sealed by the road in Trench 2. The function and precise date of this feature could not be ascertained within the parameters of the evaluation exercise, but the presence of possible further, related features in this area should not be discounted.
- 6.4 The excavation suggested that the natural topography of the landscape prior to the construction of the road was more sloping than in the present day, reflecting the proximity of the site to Afon Hafren (the River Severn) in the north-west. Subsequent medieval and post-medieval deposits have led to a levelling of the area.

6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 6.1 The writer would like to thank the following for their assistance during the programme: Richard Hankinson, Ian Davies, Nigel Bowen; the staff of the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth; and the staff of the National Monuments Record at RCAHMW in Aberystwyth; and the staff at the Powys County Archives in Llandrindod Wells; and the rights-of-way officers at Powys County Council.

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Maps

1788 Survey and Valuation of sundry Farms, tenements and lands in the parishes of Newtown, Llanllwrchaiarn etc belonging to David Pugh Esq. Surveyed and mapped in A.D. 1788 by Jno Sayce (NLW/Harrison Vol 7).

1798 Plan of Newtown and surrounding area (NLW/Glansevern 147/now Folio 89)

1800 (circa) Kedewen Cottages and Lands allotted to the Lord on the enclosure of Commons in that manor. (NLW/Powis Castle M22).

1820 Map of Farms, Tenements and Lands in the Parishes of Newtown, Llanllwrchaiarn, etc, belonging to David Pugh Esq By J Lloyd, Land Surveyor, Broseley, Salop There is a partial schedule only. (NLW/Harrison Volume 6).

1821 Map of Lands in Several Parishes of Llanllwrchaiarn, Newtown etc, the property of D Pugh Esq (NLW/Harrison Deposit 85). Almost certainly be J Lloyd.

1843 Tithe survey of Newtown Parish

1885 Ordnance Survey 1:500 town plan

1886 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25" Montgomeryshire 36.15

1890 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 6" 36 SE

1902 Ordnance Survey 2nd edition 25" Montgomeryshire 36.15

1983 Soil Survey of England and Wales map and legend (Sheet 2 – Wales, at 1:250,000 scale)

1994 British Geological Survey map of Wales (Solid edition, at 1:250,000 scale)

APPENDIX 1

PROJECT ARCHIVE

79 Context record forms
3 A1 site plans
28 digital images
Photographic catalogue
Context register
Drawings register
Levels register

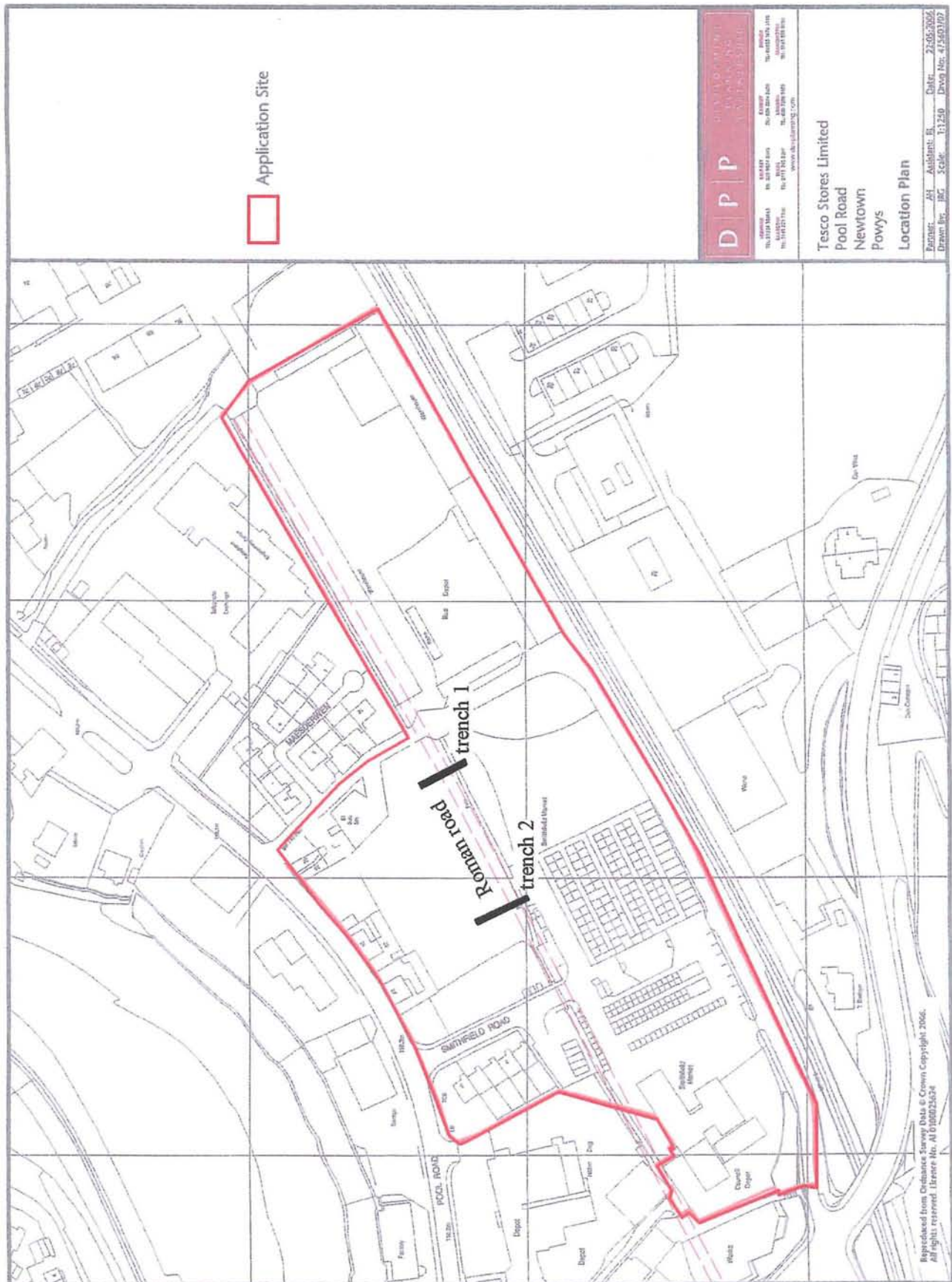


Fig. 1 Development area showing location of trenches and Roman road

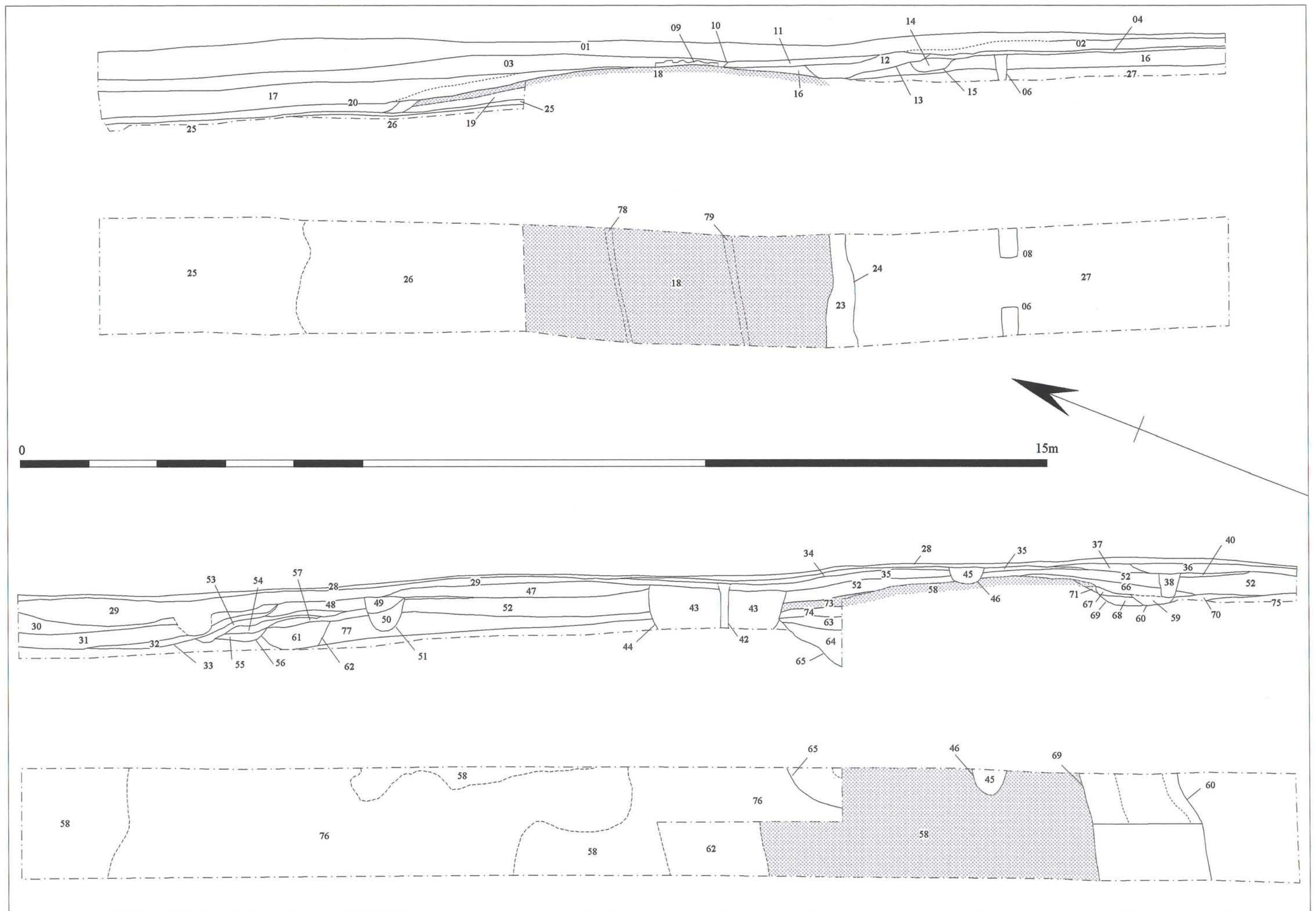


Fig. 2 Trenches 1 and 2, plan and section, scale 1:50