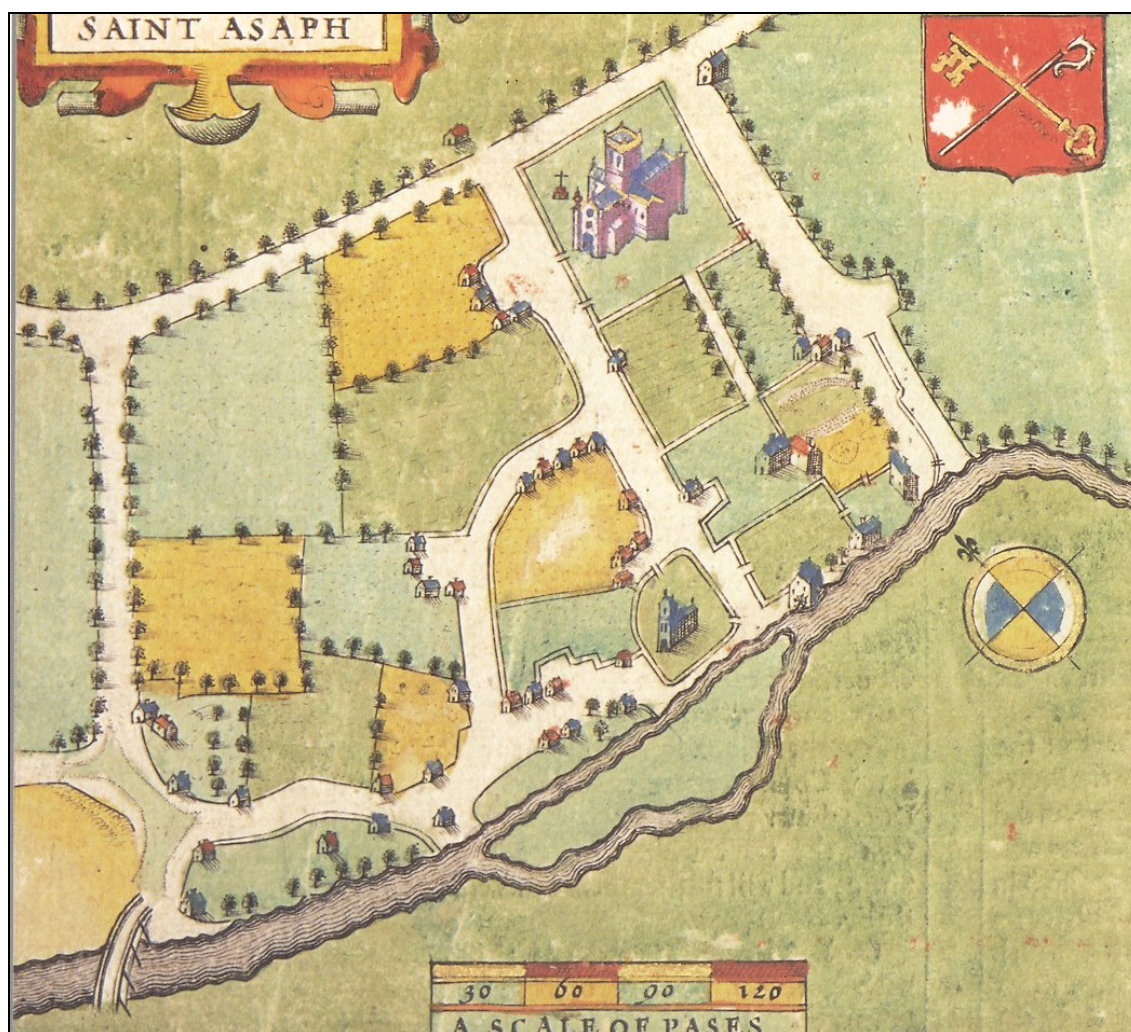


# Land off Lower Street, St Asaph, Denbighshire

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION



**CPAT Report No 962**

# **Land off Lower Street, St Asaph, Denbighshire**

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

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December 2008

Report for N Gizzi

**The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust**

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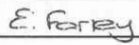
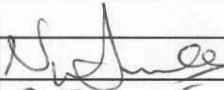

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## CPAT Report Record

### Report and status

CPAT Report Title	Land off Lower Street, St Asaph, Denbighshire: Archaeological Evaluation		
CPAT Project Name	Lower Street, St Asaph		
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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Contracts and Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was invited by Mr N Gizzi to undertake an archaeological evaluation in connection with proposals to construct a new dwelling on land at Lower Street, St Asaph. The Curatorial Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, in their capacity as archaeological advisors to the local authority, had determined that an archaeological evaluation was required to identify the potential impact of the development on the archaeological resource. Accordingly, a brief was prepared by the curator which details the works required (CPAT EVB 696).
- 1.2 The proposed development lies within the presumed historic core of the town and it was assumed that sub-surface archaeological deposits might survive within the area which relate to medieval and later occupation.

## **2 GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The area of the evaluation lies along the east side of Lower Street in St Asaph (SJ 037744; see Figure 1). At the time of the evaluation the site consisted of waste ground, the area having been cleared of structures during the 1970s. The site lies 150m east of the present course of the River Elwy whose course has no doubt changed over time.
- 2.2 The solid geology consists of a reddish till, overlain by clayey permeable sub-soils that are seasonally affected by waterlogging. (Soils Survey of England and Wales 1983).

## **3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Stage One of the evaluation, as defined by the curatorial brief, involved the examination of readily available primary and secondary documentary, cartographic and photographic sources for the area of the development and its immediate environs. The repositories that were consulted included the following: the Regional Historic Environment Record (HER), held by CPAT at Welshpool; the National Monuments Record, held by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW) at Aberystwyth; the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth; and Denbighshire County Archives in Ruthin.
- 3.2 The earlier history of St Asaph as a settlement is poorly known compared with the history of its major building, the cathedral. There are of course some documentary records for the town, but few detailed maps that pre-date the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and very little archaeological research and excavation has been undertaken in recent years. Apart from archaeological work within the confines of the cathedral and its yard, two excavations have been conducted within the town itself. In 1993 an excavation close to the old railway station failed to identify any useful archaeological evidence for activity, while an evaluation in 2005 at the Deanery Gardens, to the 0000 of the cathedral, produced significant evidence for medieval buildings (Grant and Jones 2005).
- 3.3 We are thus forced back on the limited documentation and on map analysis to develop a picture of settlement growth in St Asaph. Fortunately, though maps are sparse, as noted above, St Asaph's status as a cathedral city meant that it was mapped by John Speed at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and his plan which was published in 1611 is of considerable value, for which see the cover of this report.

- 
- 3.4 It is evident that the earliest focus of activity at St Asaph was St Kentigern's Church just above the flood plain of the River Elwy, without doubt an early medieval foundation and one where the available evidence strongly flags up the likelihood of a mother church for the area run by a *clas* community. There is even a possibility that the arcing course of Cemig Street defines the line of a larger *clas* enclosure within which the early church lay (Silvester and Evans: forthcoming).
- 3.5 Whether secular settlement emerged around the church in those early centuries before the Norman Conquest is impossible to confirm, but it is likely that in the Middle Ages the settlement did start to expand. The cathedral appears to have been established on a new site on the edge of the ridge overlooking the earlier church in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. That High Street was already in existence at this time seems unlikely, though Speed's map indicates that it did precede the bridge across the Elwy. Rather the rectilinear network of roads and lanes around the cathedral was presumably laid out in conjunction with the construction of the cathedral on the ridge top.
- 3.6 By the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, there were clearly two roads running in parallel down to the river. High Street has maintained its significance but that on the south side of the cathedral has been reduced to an access way. Speed's map shows only a scatter of houses with rather more on the lower slopes of the valley towards the St Kentigern's church than around the cathedral. This may well reflect the general spread of settlement, but perhaps too may indicate where the core settlement was. North of St Kentigern's church, the lane pattern is irregular but runs along the lower side of the valley, presumably just above flooding level to a crossing of the river by a bridge now gone. It is reasonable to speculate that it was this slightly meandering lane that witnessed the earliest settlement and that Lower Street formed a part of this early settlement focus. However, while there is a general correlation between Speed's plan of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and the more accurate Ordnance Survey plans of three centuries later, absolute precision is not possible, and it is not feasible to tie a particular dwelling depicted by Speed to a modern location. It might be suggested, however, that the development area just coincides with the row of three houses depicted by Speed (see the front cover of this report).
- 3.7 The Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> edition 1:2,500 map of 1871 shows the plot as being occupied by two buildings fronting onto Lower Street, a situation which remained unchanged by the time of the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition mapping, published in 1899 (See Figure 1).

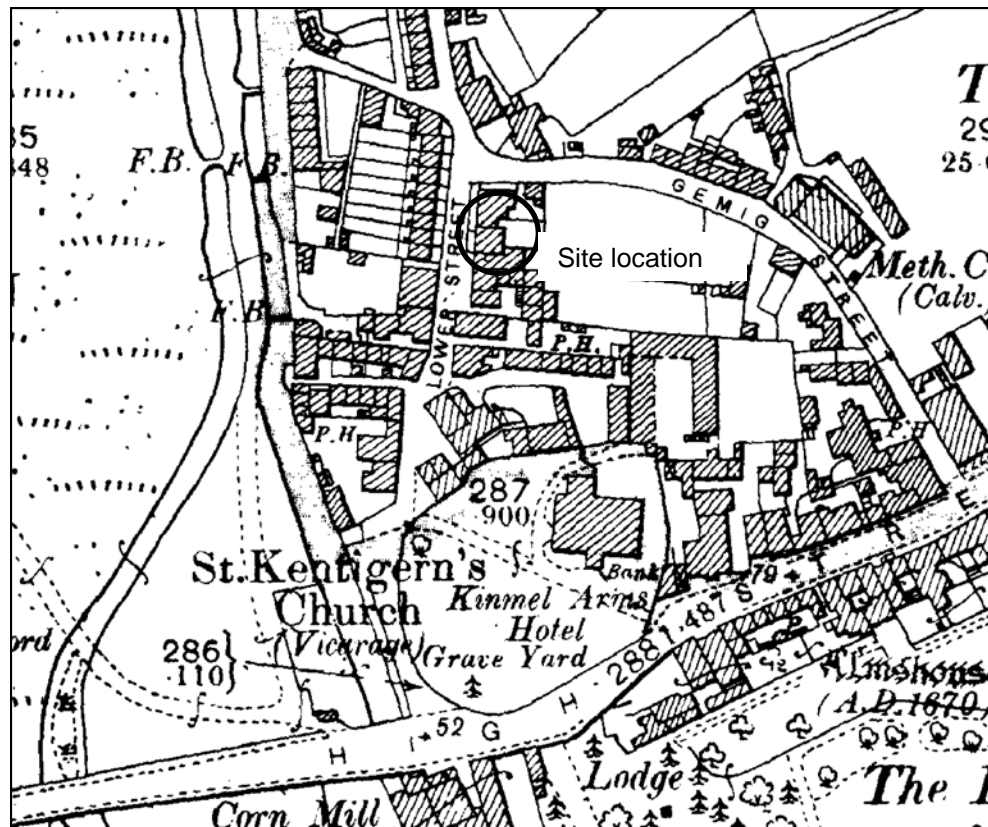


Figure 1. Ordnance Survey 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1:2,500 map of 1899, showing site location, ringed.

#### 4 EVALUATION (see Figure 6)

- 4.1 The evaluation comprised of a single linear trench measuring 10m by 1.5m, located towards the southern side of the plot, and aligned east to west (see Figure 2). The curatorial brief had originally specified a T-shaped trench, but this was later modified with the agreement of the curator due to the positions of an overhead electricity cable and a tree. This did not in any way compromise the conditions of the archaeological brief. Only half of the trench was half sectioned beneath the gravel deposit 6 as it was not necessary to excavate the whole trench.
- 4.2 The topsoil and demolition rubble (1), together with the foundation remains of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century building, were removed carefully by machine, with all subsequent cleaning and excavation being carried out by hand. Numbers in brackets in the following text refer to contexts given to those features and layers which were identified during the excavation. A drawn, written and photographic record was maintained throughout the duration of the evaluation (see Appendix 2).
- 4.3 The natural subsoil (14) consisted of a pink clay which lay at a maximum depth of 1.70m below the present ground surface, sloping westwards towards the River Elwy. This was sealed by a shallow layer of orange gritty-silt (13). A small number of finds were recovered from this deposit, including fragments of slag, a sherd of pottery of a fabric similar to Roman redwares, although the size of the sherd made the identification uncertain, and a sherd of medieval pottery. The potentially mixed nature of the finds suggested that they were likely to be residual.

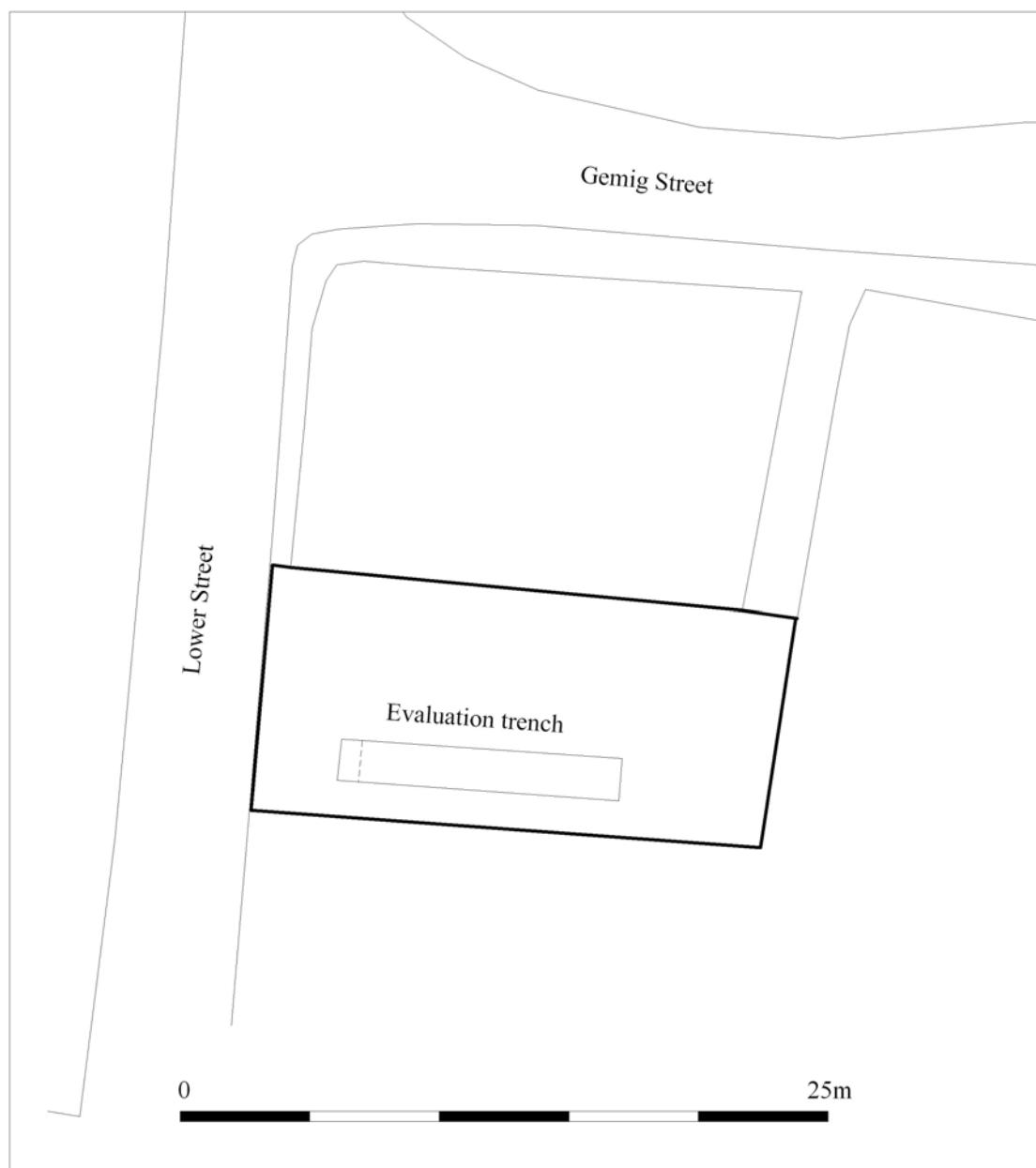


Figure 2. Trench location

- 4.4 A small, shallow pit (18) was identified cutting into the subsoil the eastern end of the trench. The pit contained some charcoal flecks but no finds nor any dating evidence and is of unknown date and function.





Figure 3. View of the trench from the south-west, showing gravel deposit (6). Photo CPAT 2687.034

- 4.5 A banded deposit of river gravel (6), up to 0.92m thick, lay directly above (13), at a maximum depth of 0.86m below the present ground level (see Figure 3). It is possible that the gravel was deposited through water action associated with past movement and flooding of the River Elwy, or it may have been deliberately dumped to level up the area, perhaps as a flood prevention measure. At the western end of the trench, a small post-hole (15) could be seen in the section, with a depth of 0.19m, truncating (6). Whilst no finds were recovered, its position would suggest that it pre-dates the building which occupied this plot from the later 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- 4.6 Directly above (6) lay a variable greenish-yellow, sandy-silt (11), up to 0.36m thick, containing flecks of charcoal. The consistency and appearance of the layer suggested that it may have been water-borne, possibly as a result of flooding. No finds or archaeological features were discovered at this level. The full extent of the deposit could not be established as it had been truncated by the foundations for a building (5).
- 4.7 The building was defined by the basal remains of the front and rear walls, both of which were aligned north to south. The western, front wall (2) consisted of cemented bricks which had been laid directly on top of the gravel deposit (6), and survived to a height of 0.27m. The foundations for the rear wall lay 3.60m to the east, comprising a trench 0.57m wide packed with large, irregular, limestone blocks. The foundations had been cut through silt deposit (11), a deposit of brown clay (3) and into the natural gravel subsoil.





Figure 4. View of the trench from the west showing the front wall of the building (2) and the brick and stone surface (20). Photo CPAT 2687.005

- 4.8 A brick and stone surface (20) was revealed immediately to the west of the front wall, which may have formed a path along the front of the building. The surface extended beyond the limits of the excavation, having been covered by the tarmac of the public footpath (Figure 4).



Figure 5. Cobbled surface. Photo CPAT 2687.001

- 4.9 A cobbled surface (7) was identified immediately to the rear of the building (Figure 5), which extended for over 2m to the east, and formed a yard associated with the building. The eastern edge of the cobbles extended into an earlier, linear gully (9), the fill of which contained 19<sup>th</sup>-century finds.

## **5 FINDS**

- 5.1 A small sherd of pottery was recovered from the layer (13) immediately above the natural subsoil, which was in a fabric similar to Roman redwares, although the size of the sherd precludes any certainty on its date. Another small pottery sherd from the same layer is likely to be of medieval date. Other artefacts recovered from this layer included lumps of slag, fragments of charcoal, two small pieces of limestone, various pieces of broken animal bone, two small pieces of cremated animal bone and an iron object.

## **6 CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1 The evaluation was undertaken at the request of the regional archaeological curator and was prompted by the location of the proposed development site, which was thought to lie within the historic core of medieval St. Asaph. The results from the desk-based study revealed that the plot had been occupied by a building from at least the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was demolished in the 1970s.
- 6.2 The excavation uncovered the remains of the building, comprising wall foundations approximately 3.60m apart. The remains of a brick floor were also uncovered, as well as part of an external cobbled surface.
- 6.3 Beneath the remains of the building there was a thick deposit of river gravels (6), although within the confines of the evaluation it was not possible to determine its origin or function. It is possible that this was naturally deposited as a result of past movement and flooding of the River Elwy, which now lies 150m to the west, or it could have been deposited deliberately to raise the ground level, perhaps as a flood prevention measure.
- 6.4 A thin layer of silt was identified beneath the river gravel which contained a number of artefacts including a small sherd of medieval pottery and another which could potentially be of Roman date. Other finds included slag, animal bone and an iron object which. Collectively, the mixed nature of the finds suggest that they are likely to be residual, having been derived from elsewhere.
- 6.5 In conclusion, the evaluation has produced no evidence to suggest the presence of any occupation on the site before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the evaluation only investigated around 9% of the site and there is always the possibility that earlier archaeological deposits may be present in areas which have not been examined.

## **7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

- 7.1 The writer would like to thank Richard Hankinson and Nigel Jones, of CPAT for their help and assistance with the excavation. Also the staff of the following repositories for their help with the desk-top study; the Historic Environment Record, CPAT, Welshpool; the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth; the National Monument Record, RCAHMW, Aberystwyth.

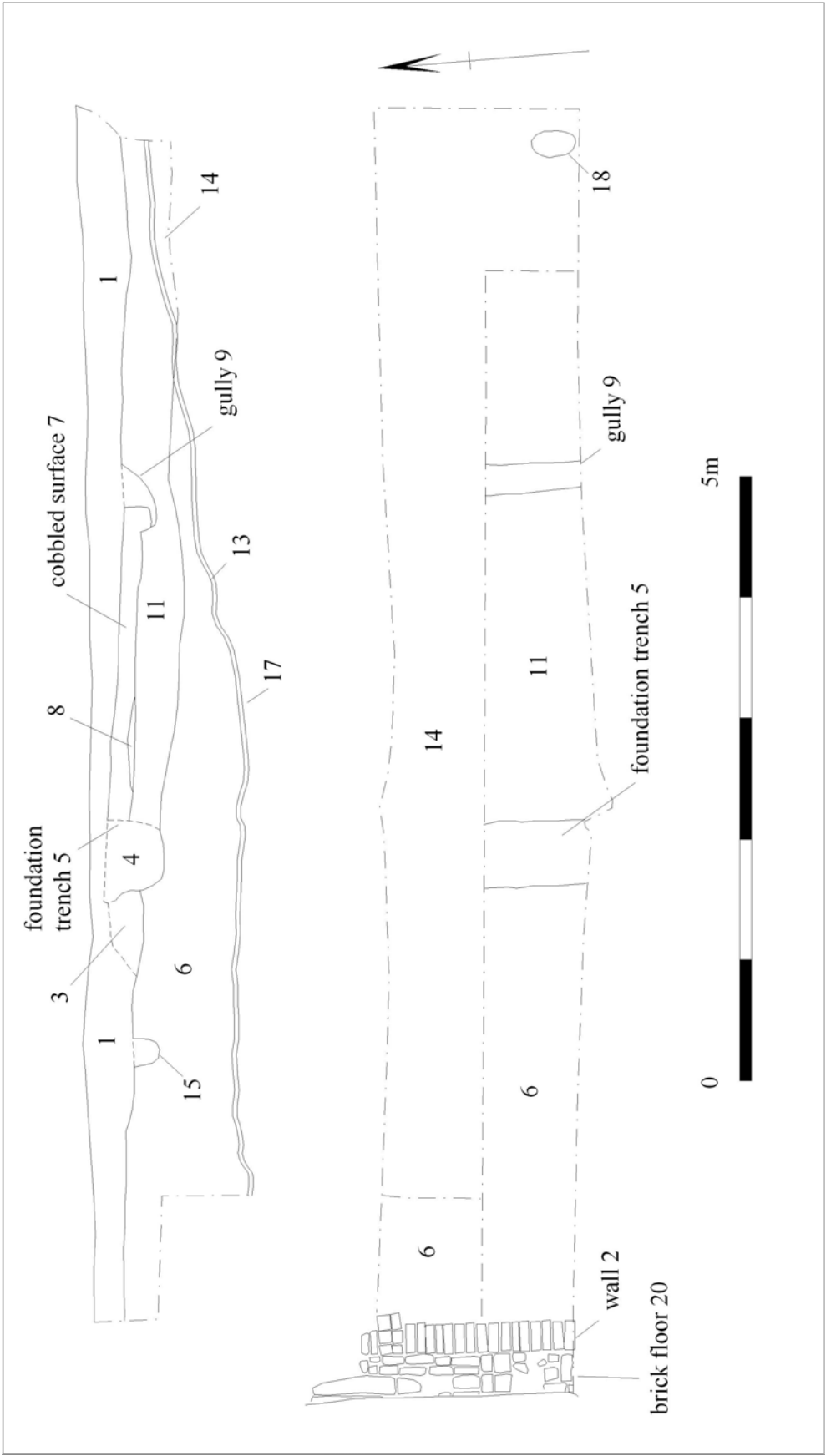


Fig. 6 Trench plan and section

## 8 REFERENCES

Grant, F, & Jones, N W, 2005. *Deanery Gardens, St Asaph, Denbighshire: archaeological evaluation*. CPAT Report No. 742.

### **Cartographic sources**

1611 John Speed's map of St Asaph

1843 Tithe Survey for St Asaph

1871 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 1:2,500 map, Flintshire 4.15

1899 Ordnance Survey 2nd edition 1:2,500 map, Flintshire 4.15

1983 Soils Survey of England and Wales – The Soils of England and Wales: Sheet 2, Wales

1994 British Geological Survey map – The Rocks of Wales (Solid edition)

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**APPENDIX 1: SPECIFICATION****1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Contracts and Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust has been invited by Planscape to submit a tender for undertaking an archaeological evaluation in connection with proposals to construct a new dwelling on land off Lower Street, St Asaph, in Denbighshire (SJ 03677438). The Curatorial Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, in their capacity as archaeological advisors to the local authority, have determined that an archaeological evaluation is required to identify the potential impact on the archaeological resource. Accordingly, a brief has been prepared which details the works required (CPAT EVB 696).
- 1.2 The proposed development lies within the presumed historic core of the town and sub-surface archaeological deposits may survive within the area which relate to medieval and later occupation.

**2 Objectives**

- 2.1 The objectives of the evaluation are:
  - 2.1.1 to reveal by means of a desktop study and field evaluation, the nature, condition, significance and, where possible, the chronology of the cultural heritage within the area of the proposed development in so far as these aims are possible;
  - 2.1.2 to record any archaeological sites identified during the evaluation;
  - 2.1.3 to prepare a report outlining the results of the evaluation.

**3 Methods**

- 3.1 Stage 1 of the evaluation will involve the examination of all the readily available primary and secondary documentary, cartographic, pictorial, and photographic sources at the following repositories: the regional Historic Environment Record, Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, Welshpool; the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth; and the National Monuments Record, Aberystwyth; Denbighshire Record Office, Ruthin.
- 3.2 All cartographic sources consulted will be included within the desktop section of the report, together with transcriptions of relevant documents and copies of plans, maps and photographs containing relevant information.
- 3.3 The Stage 2 evaluation will consist of a single 'T'-shape trench, 2 wide and totalling no more than 20m in length, the location and dimensions of which will be agreed with the curator in advance.
- 3.4 All excavations will be undertaken using a machine excavator with a toothless bucket to remove modern overburden down to the level of the first recognisable archaeological horizon. Thereafter, all excavation will be conducted by hand unless otherwise agreed with the Curator in advance. The evaluation will be entirely non-destructive and designed to determine the depth at which archaeologically sensitive deposits survive, together with their nature condition and significance. The depth of natural deposits will be determined to assess the extent of any stratified deposits which may be encountered.
- 3.5 It has been assumed that the area in question has sufficient access for a JCB or other mechanical excavator. Excavated material will be temporarily stored adjacent to the trench, which will be reinstated with this material upon completion. The trenches will be surrounded by plastic barrier fencing during the excavation if required but no provision has been made for stripping or relaying any surfaced areas or reseeded.

- 3.6 Contexts will be recorded on individual record forms and be drawn and photographed as appropriate. All photography will be in digital format to a minimum resolution of 6 mega pixels. All features will be located as accurately as possible with respect to buildings and boundaries identified on modern Ordnance Survey maps and levels will be related to Ordnance Datum where possible, with the use of total station surveying.
- 3.7 All artefacts will be related to their contexts from which they were derived and treated in a manner appropriate to their composition and will be processed by trained CPAT staff. Provision has been included for sampling deposits for dating, environmental and technological evidence as appropriate.
- 3.8 Following the on-site work an illustrated and bound report will be prepared in A4 format, containing conventional sections on: Site location, Topography and Geology; Archaeological Background; Evaluation; Conclusions and References, together with appropriate appendices on archives and finds.
- 3.9 The site archive will be prepared to specifications laid out in Appendix 3 in the Management of Archaeological Projects (English Heritage, 1991), to be deposited with the Regional Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). All artefacts will, subject to the permission of the owner, be deposited with an appropriate museum.

#### **4 Resources and Programming**

- 4.1 The assessment will be undertaken by a team of two to three skilled archaeologists under the direct supervision of Mr R J Silvester, a senior member of CPAT's staff who is also a member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists. CPAT is also an Institute of Field Archaeologist Registered Organisation.
- 4.2 All report preparation will be completed by or with the assistance of the same field archaeologist(s) who conducted the assessment.
- 4.3 It is anticipated that the evaluation will be completed within 5 days with a team of two experienced archaeologists, and the report will be completed within 10 days following the on-site work. A draft report will be presented to the curator prior to the submission of the final report. At present CPAT would be in a position to undertake the evaluation in April or May 2008 subject to the receipt of sufficient advanced notice from the client.
- 4.4 The following contingency sums have been allowed at the request of the Curator. The need for such contingencies, and their potential cost, would be subject to discussions between CPAT, the client and the curator once the fieldwork has been completed. The following figures are therefore only for guidance and the final cost, should any of the services be required, may be more or less than the estimates provided.

Curatorial monitoring	£50 per visit
Finds conservation etc	£100
Dating	£200
Environmental sampling	£100
Museum deposition and storage	no extra charge
Publication	<i>Archaeology in Wales</i> at no additional charge

- 4.5 Requirements relating to Health and Safety regulations will be adhered to by CPAT and its staff.
- 4.6 CPAT is covered by appropriate Public and Employer's Liability insurance, as well as Professional Indemnity insurance.

## APPENDIX 2 PROJECT ARCHIVE

### Site archive

01 A1 site plan  
20 context record forms  
36 digital photographs  
photographic catalogue  
contexts register  
drawings register  
finds catalogue  
Specification, brief and correspondence

### Contexts Register

Context	Type	Comment
1	Deposit	Dark grey-brown rubble layer relating to 20 <sup>th</sup> -century site clearance
2	Structure	Entrance wall to previous building
3	Deposit	Light grey-brown clay, probably used as a leveller for interior flooring of 19 <sup>th</sup> -century building
4	Structure	Consists of irregular limestone blocks. Eastern foundation wall of 19 <sup>th</sup> century building
5	Cut	Cut for wall of 19 <sup>th</sup> -century building
6	Deposit	Banded gravel deposit
7	Deposit	Cobbled yard surface from 19 <sup>th</sup> -century building
8	Deposit	Green sand layer in which cobbles (7) are set
9	Cut	Cut of 19 <sup>th</sup> -century gully. May have acted as a drain
10	Deposit	Dark grey-brown clay-silt, fill of (9)
11	Deposit	A grey sandy-silt, with hues of white, green and yellow.
12	Cut	Marks base of silt (11) that lies above gravel (6)
13	Deposit	Thin, hard sandy layer, contained finds.
14	Natural	Natural pink clay that slopes downwards towards the River Elwy to the west
15	Cut	Cut of probable 19 <sup>th</sup> -century post-hole
16	Deposit	Fill of (15)
17	Cut	Possible cut
18	Cut	Cut of shallow pit
19	Deposit	Fill of (18)

### Drawings Register

No	Scale	Contexts	Sheet No.	Comment
1	1:20		1	South-facing section of trench
2	1:20		1	Plan of trench after removal of (1)
3	1:20		2	Plan of trench
4	1:20		3	Plan of trench



**Finds catalogue**

<b>Context</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Comment</b>
13	Bone	2	Cremated animal bone fragment. Not retained
13	Stone	2	Limestone fragments. Not retained
13	Roman Pottery?	1	Possible Roman redware?
13	Medieval Pottery	1	Probable Medieval pottery fragment
13	Iron	1	Folded iron object
13	Bone	2	Animal bone fragments. Not retained
13	Slag	10	Slag pieces. Not retained
13	Charcoal		Charcoal fragments. Not retained