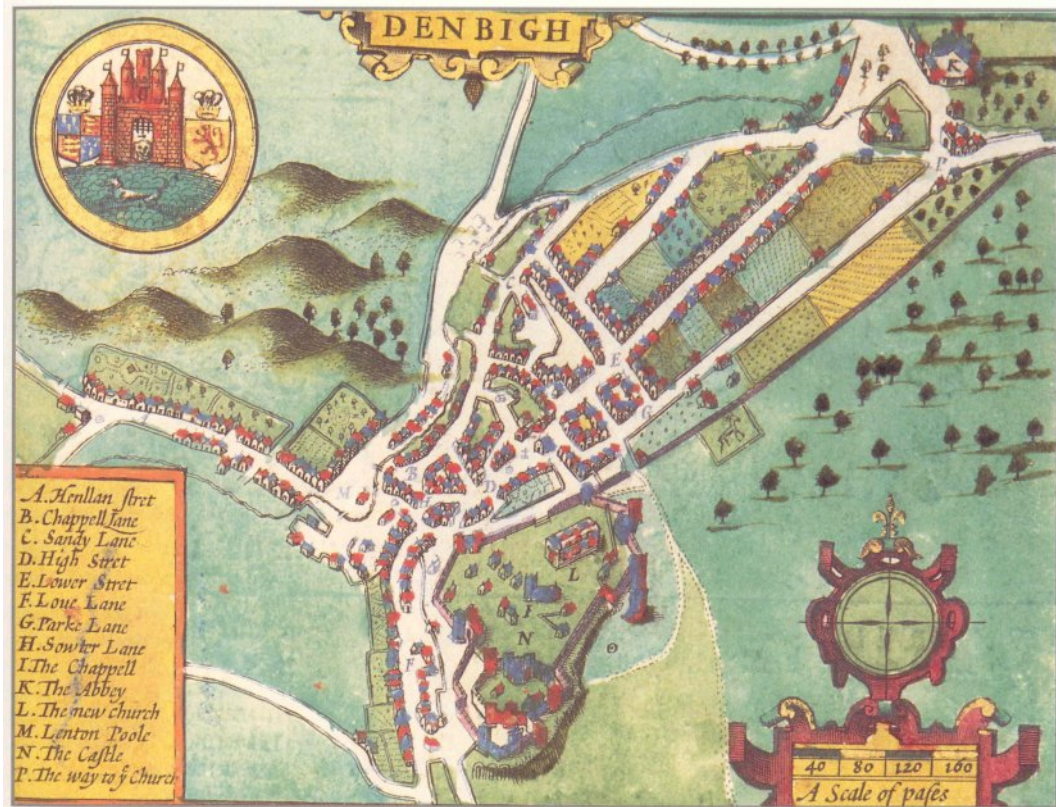


CPAT Report No 1152

52-54 Vale Street, Denbigh

Archaeological Evaluation



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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Archaeological Evaluation

I Grant
May 2012

Report for Tai Clwyd

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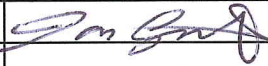
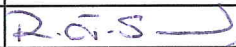
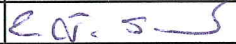
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CPAT Report Record

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CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION
2	HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
3	EVALUATION
4	CONCLUSIONS
5	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
6	REFERENCES
7	APPENDIX 1

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust was invited by Mr Bryn Davies, on behalf of Tai Clwyd, to undertake an archaeological evaluation in advance of the redevelopment of 52-54 Vale Street in Denbigh. Denbighshire Archaeology Service (part of Denbighshire Countryside Service within Denbighshire County Council), had previously determined that evaluation was required in order to identify the potential impact of the development on the archaeological resource and had prepared a brief detailing the works that were required.
- 1.2 The site is located on the west side of Vale Street, within the medieval town of Denbigh (SJ 0550 6625; Figs 1-2). Although the redevelopment encompasses both 52 and 54 Vale Street (Fig. 1), the only areas available for field evaluation were to the front and rear of No 52.

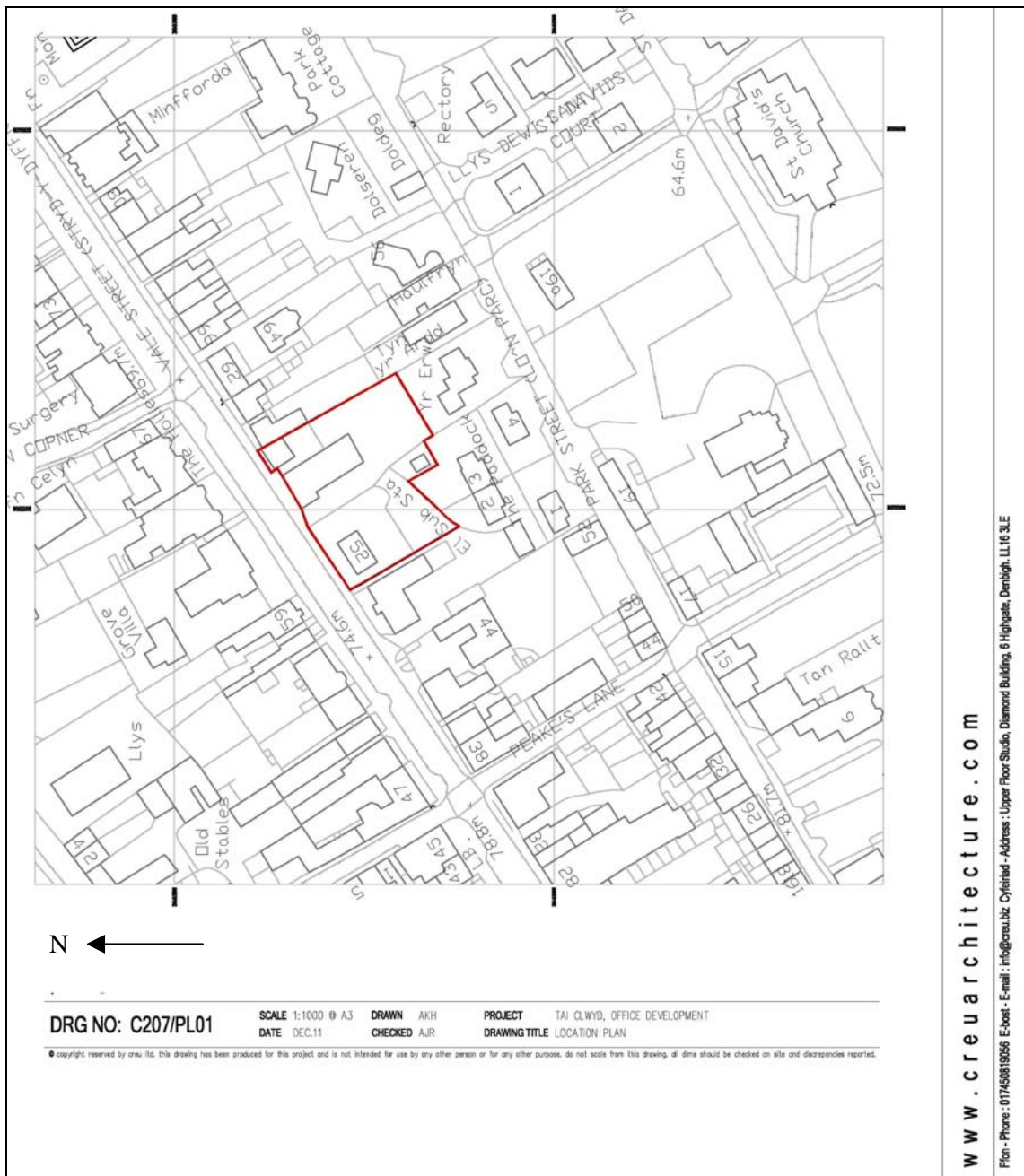


Fig. 1 Development Site location



Fig. 2 View of 52 Vale Street. Photo CPAT 3460-0019

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The hill-top castle and walled town at Denbigh were constructed by Henry de Lacy in the second half of the 13th century, after the creation of the lordship of Denbigh by Edward I in 1282. However, it has been argued that the hilltop had previously been a stronghold of Dafydd ap Gruffydd, functioning as a court (or *llys*) which was the centre of the cantref of Rhufoniog; and there are references during the 13th century to the *maerdref* of Dinbych, the nucleated settlement that would have been associated with such a *llys*. The name itself is considered to derive from *dinas fechan* or 'small fortress'.
- 2.2 It was briefly recaptured by the Welsh in 1294, but by 1311 the fortifications at Denbigh, which with Ruthin controlled the Vale of Clwyd, are assumed to have been largely complete. The creation of a borough followed quickly, leading to an influx of English families. Forty-seven burgages held by thirty-nine burgesses were listed in 1285 when the first charter was granted, but subsequent to the Welsh attack on the town in 1294, a second charter between 1295 and 1305 recorded only 45 burgages, together with the first mention of the town walls. A manor was established in due course near to the castle.
- 2.3 As early as the beginning of the 14th century, the town had begun to expand beyond the confines of its walls and down the northern slopes of the hill. As Soulsby has pointed, out the site of the walled town was ideal for defence but not for commercial operations. In 1305 there were 183 burgages outside the defences, 52 within, and by 1337 the town spread over 57 acres. By 1311 an annual fair was being held and in 1334, the 'Survey of Denbigh' interestingly refers to 'a borough within the walls' and 'a market town without'. It also mentions the hamlet of 'Neuburgh', part of Lleweni where originally the townspeople had held agricultural land. Neuburgh cannot now be traced and Beresford stated that 'it is not certain whether the survey has recorded an abortive attempt to lay out a small borough beyond the suburbs of Denbigh, or whether it is the remains of a Welsh commercial settlement, older than Denbigh'.
- 2.4 In 1373 there were 438 burgages, and Denbigh at this time was clearly commercially successful. A detailed rental of 1476 also charts the growth of the town beyond the walls with more than four times as many burgages outside as inside, and this some eight years after the extra-mural

areas had been ravaged by fire during the Wars of the Roses when the Earl of Pembroke besieged the castle.

- 2.5 For the late 15th and 16th centuries there are details of craftsmen practicing within the town: a draper, glovers, shoe-makers, mercers and weavers. And from the 15th century come references to High Street, Beacon's Hill, Pepper Lane and Sowter Lane.
- 2.6 By the early 16th century a survey records suburbs for three quarters of a mile to the north of the castle, a pattern of development also represented on Speed's map published in 1611. His map reflects the general abandonment of the walled town with relatively little housing within its confines, though there was St Hilary's chapel and the incomplete church begun by the Earl of Leicester in the 1580s.
- 2.7 The decline within the walls continued in later centuries: a drawing of 1750 shows few houses, even though the population of the town at the time was nearly 2000. Instead the focus of the town was High Street with three roads - Love Lane, Henllan Street and Lower Street - leading off it. Lower Street (now Vale Street) had three minor streets running parallel to it. John Ogilby in his *Britannia* in the 1670s stated the town to be "esteemed the best in North Wales".
- 2.8 During the Civil War in the mid-17th century, Denbigh briefly became again important militarily. There was a battle here in 1645 and the castle was besieged, surrendering to the Parliamentarians in the following year.
- 2.9 Some expansion occurred between the early 17th and the mid-19th century. Edward Lhuyd noted a total of 330 buildings in the town at the end of the 17th century. Redevelopment occurred later in the 19th century. The railway along the Vale of Clwyd was built in 1860, and communications were further improved by the major road from Ruthin to Rhyl.

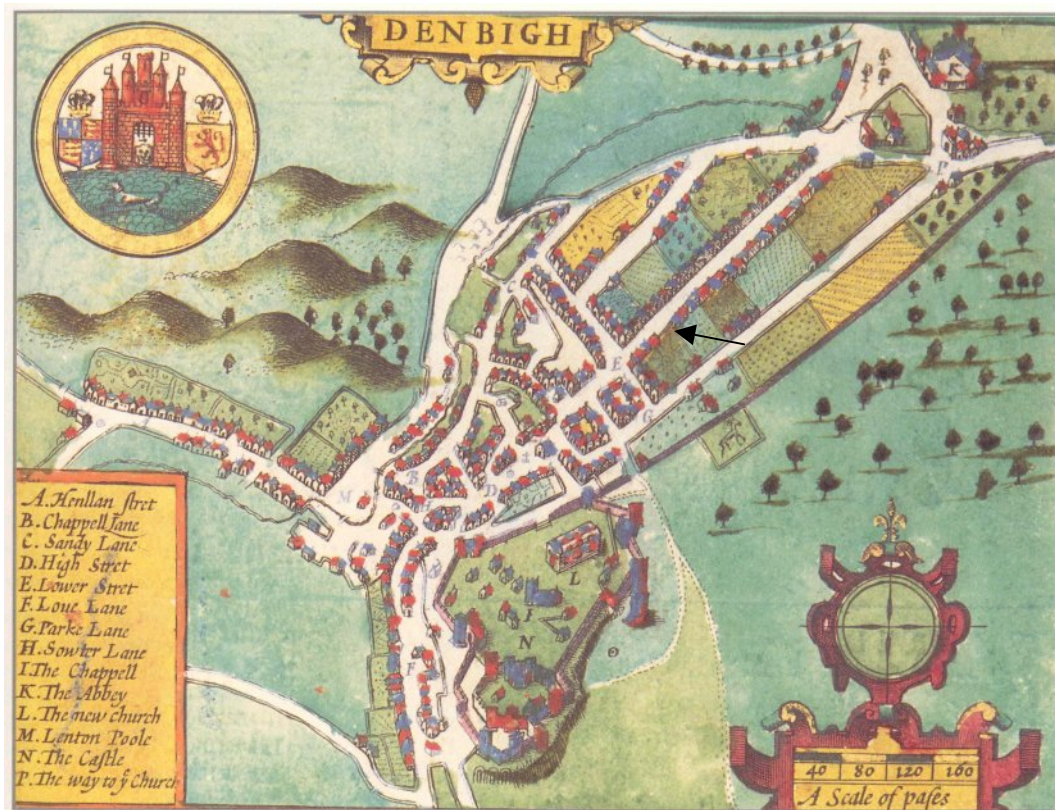


Fig. 3 John Speed's plan of Denbigh published in 1611 (the development site is arrowed)

The Development Site

- 2.10 The earliest detailed map available to us, John Speed's plan of Denbigh published in his *Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain* in 1611, but surveyed perhaps three or four years earlier, shows houses along the street frontage of what is now known as Vale Street but not in the area of the proposed development (Fig. 2). Interestingly, this appears to have been part of a larger area which is depicted as a formal garden.
- 2.11 Over two hundred years separates Speed from the next informative map of the town. The Tithe map offers a detailed picture of Denbigh in 1840 and shows part of the development site as 'Grove', an area devoid of buildings and lined to either side by trees. Presumably, the Tithe Surveyor has used this descriptive to differentiate the site from the more normal gardens (Fig. 3). Down slope of the 'Grove', within the plot currently occupied by 54 Vale Street, the Tithe map indicates the presence of a building along the street frontage.
- 2.12 The Ordnance Survey 1:500 town plan of 1872 reveals little change from that depicted in 1840, apart from showing trees along the street frontage.



Fig. 4 Extract from Denbigh Tithe Survey, 1840. The Development Site is outlined in red

3 EVALUATION

- 3.1 The evaluation, conducted between 21-25 May 2012, consisted of two trenches, one located at the front of No 52, and the other to the rear (Fig. 4). The trench layout, agreed in advance with the curator, Denbighshire Archaeology Service, was dictated by the current use of the development plot and the position of services which restricted the areas available for evaluation.

3.2 In both of the trenches the modern overburden was removed by machine, under close archaeological supervision, down to the surface of the undisturbed natural subsoil or 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. During the excavation a written, drawn and photographic record was maintained, a summary of which is provided in Appendix 1. The numbers in brackets in the following text refer to individual context records that form part of the site archive, and this will be deposited with the regional Historic Environment Record in Welshpool.

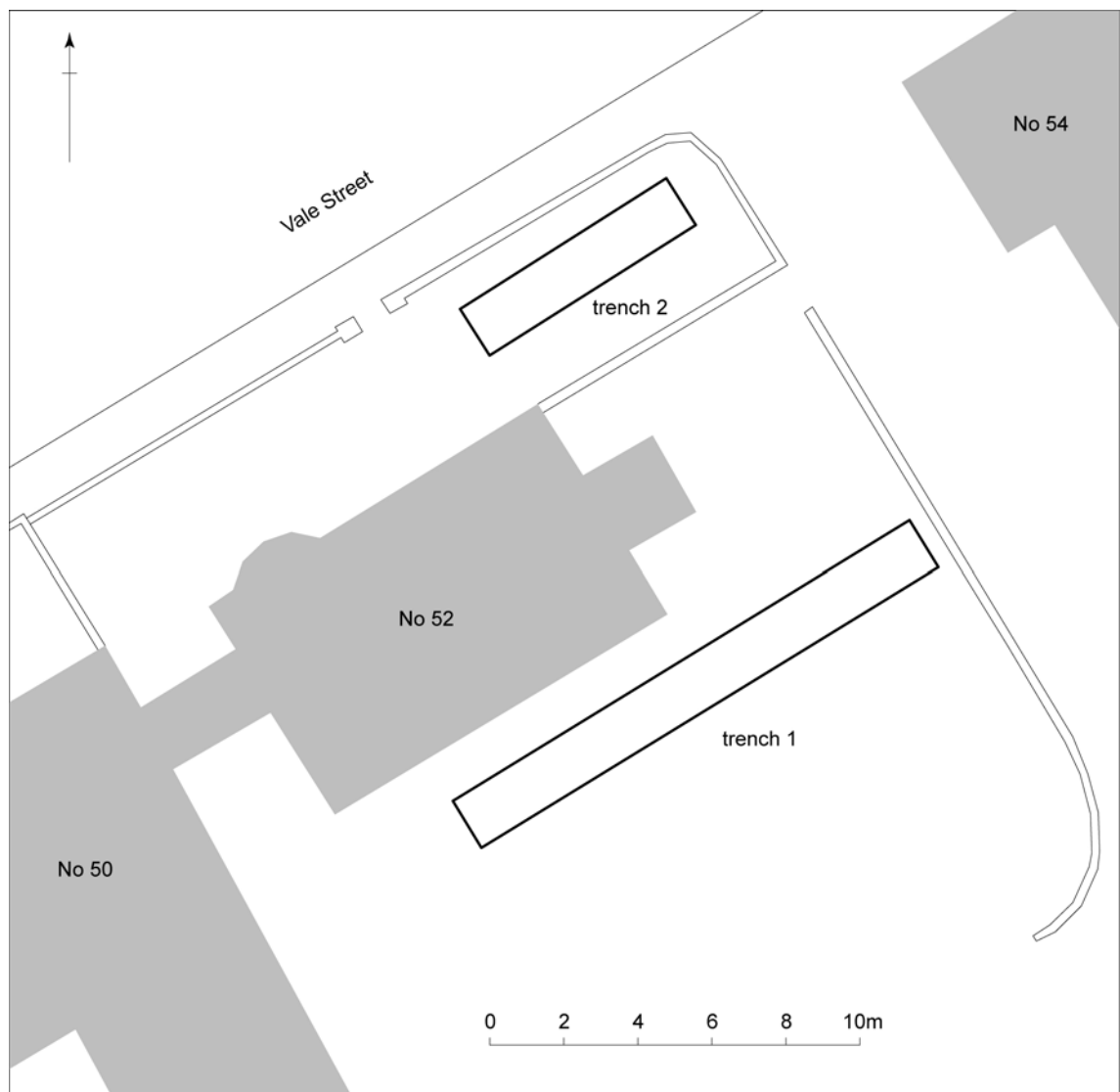


Fig. 5 Location of the evaluation trenches

Trench 1 (Figs 6-9)

3.3 Trench 1, measuring 14.6m by 1.5m and aligned north-east to south-west, was located to the rear of 52 Vale Street within the area of an existing car park. The depth of the final excavation level varied across the length of the trench owing to modern services encountered towards the eastern end of the trench (see Fig. 8 features 04 and 09). At a depth of approximately 0.7m at the western end of the trench and steadily increasing up to 1.3m down slope to the east was a deposit of soft brown-mottled reddish sand (12). The nature of the deposit, resembling an

occupation layer, indicated a degree of past activity within the immediate vicinity. A sondage (test pit) excavated at the western end of the trench (Fig. 8) demonstrated that the deposit (12) was up to 0.17m thick and immediately overlay the underlying, undisturbed natural subsoil (13), a soft red sand with occasional 'brash' fragments of red sandstone. Two features (16 and 19) recorded at this level were subject to further investigation. Other features (07, 38 and 39) had been cut from a higher level and because of their relatively late post-medieval origin (late 18th/19th century) were not subject to further investigation.



Fig. 6. Trench 1, viewed from the east, with the electricity cables in the foreground.
Photo CPAT 3460-0046



Fig. 7. Sondage illustrating the depth of deposits at the western end of Trench 1.
Photo CPAT 3460-0039

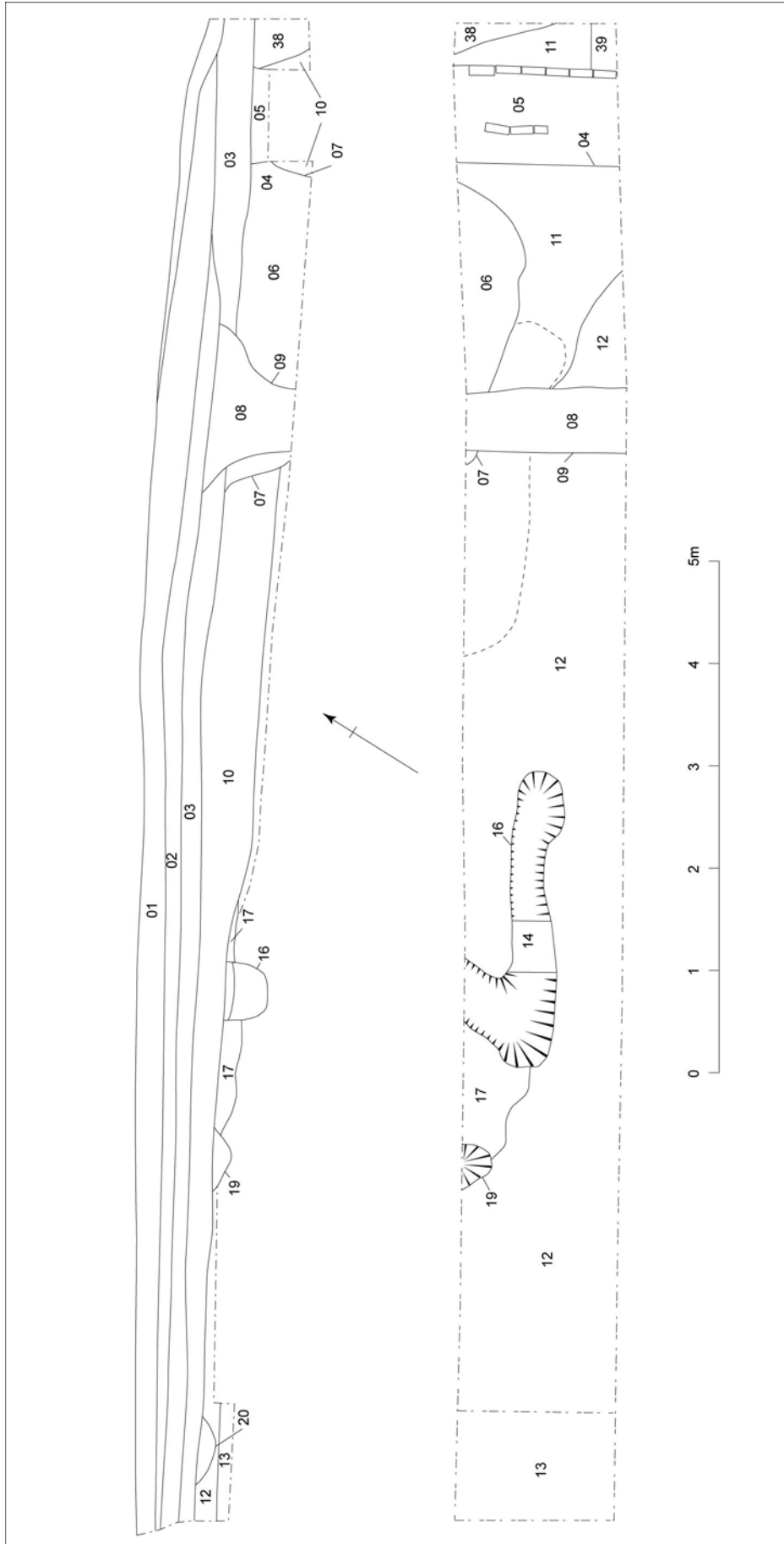


Fig. 8 Plan and section of Trench 1

- 3.4 Recorded mid-way along the trench was a linear feature (Fig. 9, 16), orientated north to south with a sharp 2.9m - long return to the east. This feature, 0.52m wide and 0.42m deep with steep sides and slightly curving base, contained two fills (15, 14). From the lower basal fill (15), a soft mid-brown silty sand 0.34m thick, a number of pottery sherds were recovered along with a copper alloy dress pin, fragments of mussel shell, a corroded iron nail and multiple food waste fragments of animal bone, some of which were burnt. The pottery, generally considered to be of 15th-century, late medieval, origin, contained body and rim sherds from either jugs or jars, each with variable exterior splashed glaze colourings of either mottled olive green or a higher tempered purple finish. The fabric was predominantly of a light orange or buff sandy nature (except where the ceramic had been fired to a harder purple-brown finish). In addition, at least one small fragment of Cistercianware was identified along with fragments of unglazed tile. The fill (15) was sealed by a thin (0.08m) deposit (14) of loose, mid to dark greyish brown, charcoal-flecked silty sand. The fill (14) also contained a few small fragments of 15th-century pottery together with oyster and mussel shells and two sherds of a very fine dark mottle brown glazed red pottery (presumed to be of later 16th-century origin).



Fig. 9. South-east facing section through late medieval (15th century) feature (16).
Photo CPAT 3460-0006

- 3.5 Adjacent to, and 1.1m to the west of, the linear feature (16) was a small pit (19) against the northern section of the trench. The function of the pit (0.6m wide and 0.19m deep and containing a single fill (18) of light brownish yellow silty sand) is unknown but it is considered, along with a similar larger pit (20) revealed only in section, to be contemporary with the 15th-century linear feature (16). Two other thin deposits (11, 17) of firm, light yellowish brown, clayey sand, located in patches central and to the east of the linear feature (16), are also considered to be contemporary with the late medieval activity.
- 3.6 Both the late medieval features (16, 19 and 20) and the associated occupation deposits (11, 12 and 17) were sealed by a thick deposit (10) of mid to dark brown soft silty sand. This deposit has been interpreted as a relic garden soil (almost certainly associated with the "Grove" as indicated on Speed's map of 1610 and the Tithe Survey of 1840, Figs. 3 and 4). The depth of the deposit was variable, 0.14m thick at the western end of the trench increasing to 0.56m westwards. Numerous sherds of pottery were recovered, ranging from mottled olive/yellow glazed orange

fabrics, salt tempered green-glazed coal measures redware, Mottledware and late Cistercianware. Pottery recovered from near the base of the deposit was predominantly 17th-century in origin, progressing to 18th-century near the top. In addition to the pottery, fragments of animal bone were recovered along with clay pipe stems, iron nails and a fragment of unglazed red floor tile. The bulk of the deposit appears, therefore, to be of mid- to late Georgian (18th-century) origin.

- 3.7 Overlying the deposit (10) was a layer (03) of loose dark greyish brown silty sand containing numerous flecks of charcoal and lime mortar. As with the underlying soil (10) the depth of the deposit was variable, 0.18m thick at the western end of the trench increasing to 0.34m eastwards. The nature of the deposit indicated a possible transition in the use of the “Grove” from a regularly cultivated plot to one which was less so. The pottery and clay pipe stems and bowls recovered from this level covered a wide period from the 17th-century through to the late 18th-century. Two other deposits (01, 02), with a combined thickness of up to 0.56m, sealed this layer. The lower deposit (02) consisted of demolition material, red building sand and loose gravels associated with the general levelling of the site prior to the construction of 52 Vale Street.

Trench 2 (Figs 10-13)

- 3.8 Trench 2, measuring 6.6m by 1.5m and aligned north-east to south-west, was located along the street frontage of 52 Vale Street within a narrow strip of enclosed garden. Initially the location of this trench caused some difficulties because of restricted machine access and a network of underlying modern services crisscrossing the plot. It is worth noting from the outset that the natural undisturbed subsoil (assumed to be red sand/sandstone) was not observed at any point in the base of the trench and the final depth to which we excavated reached up to 1.7m at the eastern end of the trench and 1.8m at the west. The greater majority of the material was excavated and removed by hand. As previously noted, modern services were encountered throughout the trench (see Fig. 10 features 27 and 29 for location). The electricity service (27) was at a depth of 0.76m, water mains (29) at 0.72m and the gas mains (not indicated on the plan but located 0.2m west of the western edge of the trench) at a depth of 0.55m.

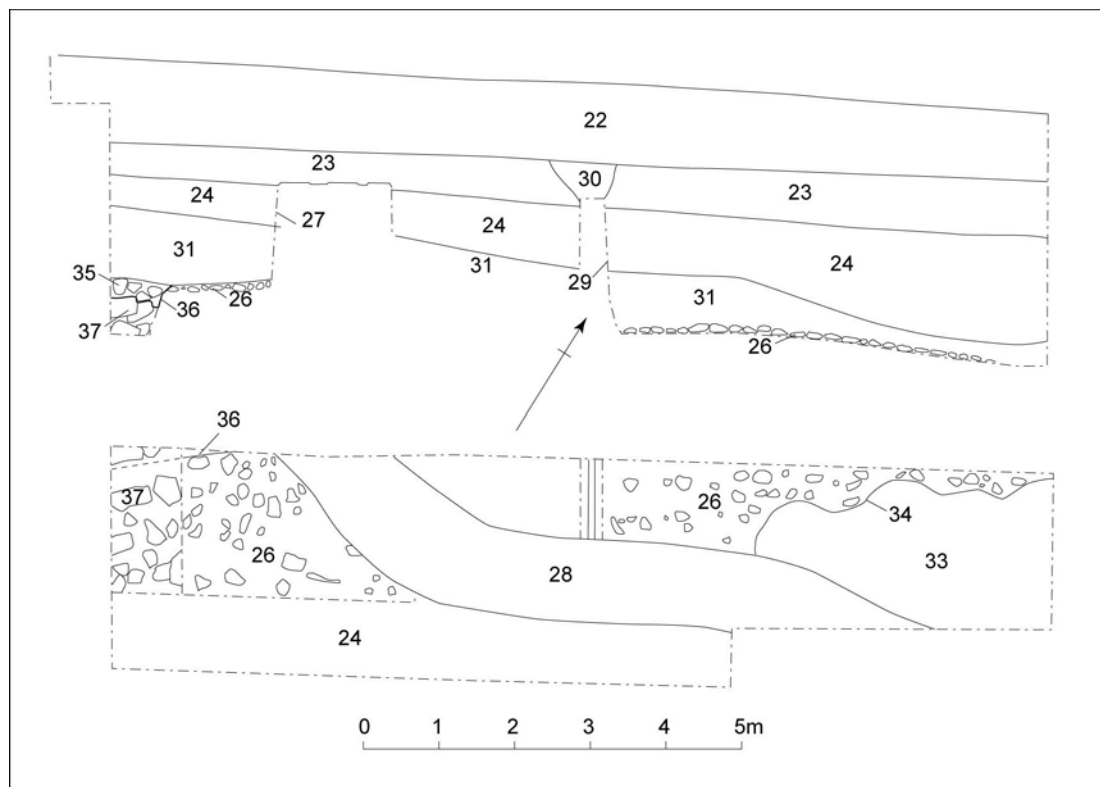


Fig. 10 Plan and section of Trench 2



Fig. 11. Trench 2, viewed from the south-west. Photo CPAT 3460-0036

- 3.9 At the western most point of the trench tightly packed rounded and angular stones forming a rough cobbled surface (26) were encountered at a depth of 1.46m. The same deposit continued down-slope westwards where it was recorded at the east end of the trench at a depth of 1.64m. At the western end a small sondage through the cobbled surface revealed an underlying deposit (37) of voided limestone rubble mixed with loose greyish silty sand (Figs. 12 and 13). The extent and depth of this material was not established, but it was at least 0.2m thick. The thickness of the overlying cobbled surface was also 0.2m. Four large fragments of butchered animal bone, a single body sherd of highly fired purple-glazed oxidised pottery and a body sherd in a light orange-cream fabric, with a yellowish brown exterior mottled glaze, were recovered from the rubble (37). Fragments of hand-made, orange-red brick and tile together with a single small sherd of unglazed orange pottery were recovered from the cobble deposit (26). Based on this small collection of artefacts it is difficult to date the two deposits although the underlying rubble (37) would appear to have late 15th/16th-century origins. In the western corner of the sondage a possible narrow gully (36), orientated north to south, was recorded in section. The feature, the extent and nature of which were not revealed in plan, remains undated.
- 3.10 The cobbled surface (26) was sealed by a deposit (31) of compacted light greyish yellow clay and fragmented limestone. The deposit, up to 0.46m thick, contained numerous flecks of charcoal, lime mortar, animal bone, clay pipe stem and a wide range of pottery dating from the 16th to late 18th centuries. The pottery included rim fragments of Midlands Purple, a body sherd of an externally black sooted buff fabric with a mottled yellow internal glaze, the base and spout of a Mottleware jug and numerous Coal Measures red and orange fabric types (fineware and coarseware) with external brown and black glazing. The yellow clay within the deposit indicates that the material was imported onto the site sometime during the late 18th century (the natural geology within Vale Street does not contain yellow clay), and its function was possibly to backfill a large feature and/or to raise and level the street frontage.



Fig. 12. Sondage at the south-west end of Trench 2, illustrating the cobbled surface (26) and underlying stone deposit (37), viewed from the south-east. The gas mains (yellow pipe) can be seen just outside the trench. Photo CPAT 3460-0029



Fig. 13. View of the cobbled surface (26) and underlying stone layer (37), Trench 2. Photo CPAT 3460-0027

- 3.11 Curiously, at the eastern end of the trench, the clay deposit (31) was truncated by a large pit (34), which extended north-eastwards beyond the bounds of the excavation. Numerous artefacts were recovered from the upper fill (32) of the pit which was a fine buff sand 0.25m thick containing river rounded stone. The assemblage included clay-pipe stems, corroded nails, animal

bone in the form of horn cores, degraded bottle glass and pottery sherds (of typical regional style seen elsewhere across the site) generally ranging from the late 17th to the early 19th centuries. The broad date range of the pottery assemblage demonstrates the residual nature of so much of the artefactual evidence encountered during the excavations. For example a single sherd of 15th-century medieval green-glazed pottery was recovered from the pit together with early 17th-century slipware.

- 3.12 Thereafter, both the clay deposit (31) and the pit (34) were sealed by a succession of three levelling layers (24, 23 and 22), the artefactual evidence in date spanning the late 18th century to the present day. The lower deposit (24), a loose mid-reddish brown sandy silt ranging in thickness between 0.24m in the west to 0.7m in the east, appeared to be either an on-site demolition deposit or imported material of late 18th/19th-century origin. This was sealed by a 0.36m thick deposit (23) of loose dark greyish brown silty sand containing numerous flecks of charcoal and lime mortar, which in turn was sealed by the present day deposit (22), up to 0.54m thick, of dark yellowish grey garden soil mixed with general residual debris from the construction of 52 Vale Street.

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 Within Trench 1, to the rear of 52 Vale Street, the excavation demonstrated that there is some limited degree of 15th-century medieval activity within the immediate vicinity of the site. Undisturbed archaeological deposits survive (specifically below the shallower deposits on the western upper slope of the site) in the form of a linear feature, either of structural or domestic drainage origin, together with small pits. The pottery retrieved from the features dates from a period pre-dating John Speed's plan of Denbigh published in 1611. The form and quality of the pottery indicates a degree of occupation activity during the medieval period before the area becomes an open 'grove' field by the early 17th century.
- 4.2 The evident accumulation of relic garden soil deposits serve to reinforce the evidence for the maintenance of the use of land as an open space, the 'Grove' as marked on the Denbigh Tithe Survey of 1840 (Fig. 4). Subject to further study beyond the remit of this evaluation it has been conjectured that there is the possibility of a past relationship between the site and the Grade II* listed 17th-century property 'Y Gelli', located opposite (formerly known as Grove House). Retained ownership of the 'Grove' would have maintained a *vista* eastwards across the vale (later to be lost with the building of the 19th century St David's Church and subsequent development along Park Street). If this relationship between the two sites was to be confirmed this may explain why the site over the centuries remained an open space whilst elsewhere on Vale Street post-Georgian architectural expansion replaced practically all of the earlier buildings. 'Y Gelli' was once one of the grandest town houses in Vale Street, built by Hugh Clough in 1574 (constructed from bricks and other building materials imported from Antwerp) with later remodelling by Thomas Shaw (Recorder of Denbigh, alderman and bailiff) in 1693. By the 19th century this prestigious family had died out, and along with that perhaps their long standing continuing influence on the Vale Street environs.
- 4.3 The great depth of soil deposition (at least 1.8m below the present ground surface) within Trench 2 is somewhat surprising when compared with the level of the present day road surface on Vale Street. Of even greater interest is that the successive layers of imported material seal an intact cobbled surface that in turn overlies a deposit of rubble (the extent of which is unknown) that attests unknown medieval activity along the street frontage. The overlying material demonstrates a degree of groundworks activity in the 17th and 18th centuries, that subsequently changed both the view and nature of the street frontage for a purpose, presently, unknown.

5 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- 5.1 The writer would like to thank the following people for their assistance during the project: Nigel Jones, Bob Silvester, Ian Davies and Sophie Watson CPAT; Tom Jones at Mini Muckshift Ltd for all site groundworks and Mr Bryn Davies of Tai Clwyd.

6 REFERENCES

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APPENDIX 1

PROJECT ARCHIVE

Site records

38 context record forms

Context Register

Drawing Register

1 A1 site drawing

2 A3 site drawing

2 A4 site drawing

49 digital photographs, CPAT film 3460

Photographic register