

Archaeology Wales

Old School, Pencader, Carmarthenshire

Archaeological Watching Brief



By
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Report No. 1079



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Summary

This report details the results from an archaeological evaluation on the site of the proposed development at The Old School, Castle Road, Pencader. The site lies adjacent to the medieval Motte and is thought to partly overlie the Bailey. The proposed development involves the construction of an eco-centre and was subject to an intrusive field evaluation to assess its archaeological potential. Several features of potential archaeological significance were identified and recorded, however these were not excavated following guidance from DAT-HM.

1. Introduction

In August 2012 Archaeology Wales was commissioned to carry out an archaeological evaluation on the site of a proposed eco-centre at The Old Castle, Castle Road, Pencader (NGR: ST 4452 3635; fig. 1). The site covers approximately 0.7 acres and is currently occupied by a number of buildings that are to be converted. The planning application number is W/24829 and the LPA is Carmarthenshire County Council.

The site is located adjacent to the medieval Motte castle at Pencader, and is thought to partially overlie the Bailey. Consequently, Charles Hill of Dyfed Archaeological Trust – Heritage Management (DAT-HM), in his capacity as archaeological adviser to the local authority, recommended that an archaeological evaluation was undertaken prior to commencement of the development to establish whether significant archaeological remains survived on the site.

The work was carried out by Jerry Bond on the 9th and 10th August 2012 in bright and sunny conditions.

2. Historic Background

The site lies adjacent to, and possibly partly within, the Motte and Bailey castle at Pencader. The castle is thought to be the castle Mabudrud, which was built by Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Pembroke around 1145 during his campaign to capture large swathes of Carmarthenshire from the Welsh Princes. The castle fell to the Welsh in the late twelfth century and King Henry II is reported to have visited Mabudrud to receive homage from the Lord Rhys in 1162.

3. Evaluation Results

Four trenches were excavated across the site, three to the front of the Old School building and one to the rear (fig. 2). In all four trenches a disc cutter was used to cut through the tarmac that covered the site. All the trenches were then excavated to the top of the archaeological horizon using a machine fitted with a toothless bucket. All areas were subsequently cleaned back by hand.

Trench 1 (figs. 3 and 4)

The trench was excavated immediately to the north of the Old School building. It measured 10m in length and 1.2m wide, was orientated east/west and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.6m.

The trench was covered by a layer of tarmac (100) up to 0.1m deep. Below the tarmac was a loose dark brown coloured silty clay (101) with frequent fragments of shale. It was 0.5m deep and extended 7m along the trench. This deposit is thought to comprise a make-up or levelling

deposit containing redeposited natural that has been extensively disturbed by tree root activity. At the eastern end of the trench the natural, a compact reddish brown silty clay with shale inclusions (102), was identified directly below the tarmac layer (100) and was cut through by a number of ceramic drains. Along the remainder of the trench, the natural was identified below context (101), the redeposited material. A small sondage was excavated to a depth of 0.5m through the natural (102) to test that it was geological.

Trench 2 (fig. 5 and 6)

Trench 2 was excavated on the northern side of the yard in front of the Old School building. It measured 10m in length and 1.2m wide, was orientated south-west/north-east and was excavated to a depth of 0.75m.

The trench was covered by a layer of tarmac (200) up to 0.1m thick. Immediately below the tarmac was a firm grey silt containing frequent inclusions of shale and stones up to 0.25m thick. This is thought to be a fairly modern levelling deposit. Underlying the modern levelling material was a loose, dark brown silty clay containing frequent inclusions of shale (202), up to 0.4m thick. This is thought to be a subsoil deposit and contained the cut for a ceramic drain. Below the subsoil (202) was the natural geology (205), a firm red brown coloured silty clay. Cut through the natural were 3 features: two large probable pits, (203)[204] and (206)[207], towards the western end of the trench and one probable post hole (208)[209] in the centre of the trench. None of these were excavated, following instructions from Charles Hill, and only probable pit [204] was recorded in section.

Pit [204] was sub circular in shape and was filled with context (203), a mid, grey brown coloured gritty silt with frequent shale inclusions. It was 0.6m in diameter and greater than 0.3m in depth. A single sherd of very worn and abraded pottery was recovered towards the top of the pit, which had traces of what appeared to be a red slip on its interior. This is thought to be early post-medieval in date.

Trench 3 (fig. 7 and 8)

The trench was excavated immediately to the east of the Old School building. It measured 10m in length and 1.2m wide and was excavated to a depth of 0.7m.

The trench was covered by tarmac (300) up to 0.1m thick. Underlying the tarmac was a loose dark red brown clay loam containing frequent small stones (302) measuring 0.6m deep at its thickest extent, narrowing to 0.15m deep at the northern end of the trench. This is thought to be a modern subsoil. A number of sherds of pottery were recovered from within this deposit, comprising a mixed assemblage of modern ceramics (willow pattern china), eighteenth and nineteenth century pottery and a single sherd of early post-medieval pottery (C. Smith *pers comm.*). Three ferrous objects, at least two of which are building fittings, were also recovered from this deposit.

The footings for an old wall [308] were identified running the length of the trench on the eastern side, and is thought to have been part of the original perimeter of the school. The footings were only partially revealed in the trench, but were at least 0.45m wide and 0.25m deep.

Underlying the subsoil (302) was the natural geology (303), a firm mid brown clay with frequent inclusions of shale. At the southern end of the trench a linear feature, thought to be a ditch [306], was identified cut into the natural. This was 1.2m wide and contained a grey

brown fill (307). At the northern end of the trench a cut feature [305], thought to be one or more postholes or pits, was identified. This feature was 0.9m in diameter and contained a loose dark grey brown loam fill (304), which contained moderate quantities of small stones.

Trench 4 (fig. 9 and 10)

The trench was excavated to the rear of the Old School building, was orientated roughly east/west and was 10m long, 1.2m wide and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.9m

The trench was covered by a layer of tarmac (400) up to 0.1m thick. Immediately below the tarmac was a loose, pale brown silty clay (401) with frequent shale inclusions. This was up to 0.25m deep and is thought to be a relatively modern levelling deposit. A single base sherd of pottery with a shiny black glaze on both its interior and exterior was recovered, which is thought to be of 19th century date. Below the modern deposit (401) was a thin deposit of loose grey shale (402), up to 0.1m thick, which appeared to extend along the full length of the trench, except in the central part of the trench where excavation was stopped because of the presence of a metal plate covering what appeared to be an old well (405). To the south of the supposed well was a linear feature comprising loose laid course rubble, (404) possibly a revetment for the cut of the well, although as this area was not fully excavated it is not possible to be certain. To the west from the well cover a small iron pipe was identified, probably an old water pipe likely to be for the supplying of water to the adjacent school, while to the west of the well was a ceramic drain. To the east of the well was a blue plastic pipe of fairly modern date typical of those used to pipe water, and next to that was a plastic drain also of fairly modern date.

The natural geology (403) was identified at the base of the trench.

4. Conclusions

The evaluation revealed a number of features on the site that appear to date from prior to the construction of the Old School, and these hint at activity that might date from the period when the area was part of the medieval castle bailey. As these features were not excavated, however, it is possible to establish their date, form or function, although both ditches and pit/postholes were identified suggesting both a defensive and domestic function for the site. The finds from the site derived from the more modern deposits on the site, including apparent made ground and landscaping deposits, and comprise pottery dating from the early post-medieval period to the twentieth century. The presence of the features and the pottery on the site attests to the long history of occupation in the area around the castle.

5. Acknowledgements

Thanks to the landowners for their assistance during the evaluation.

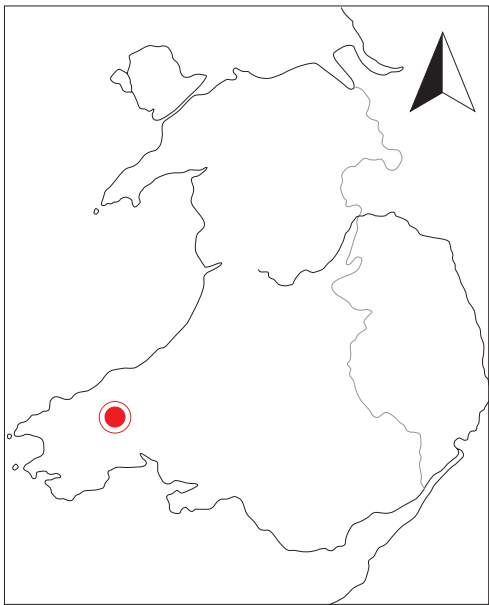
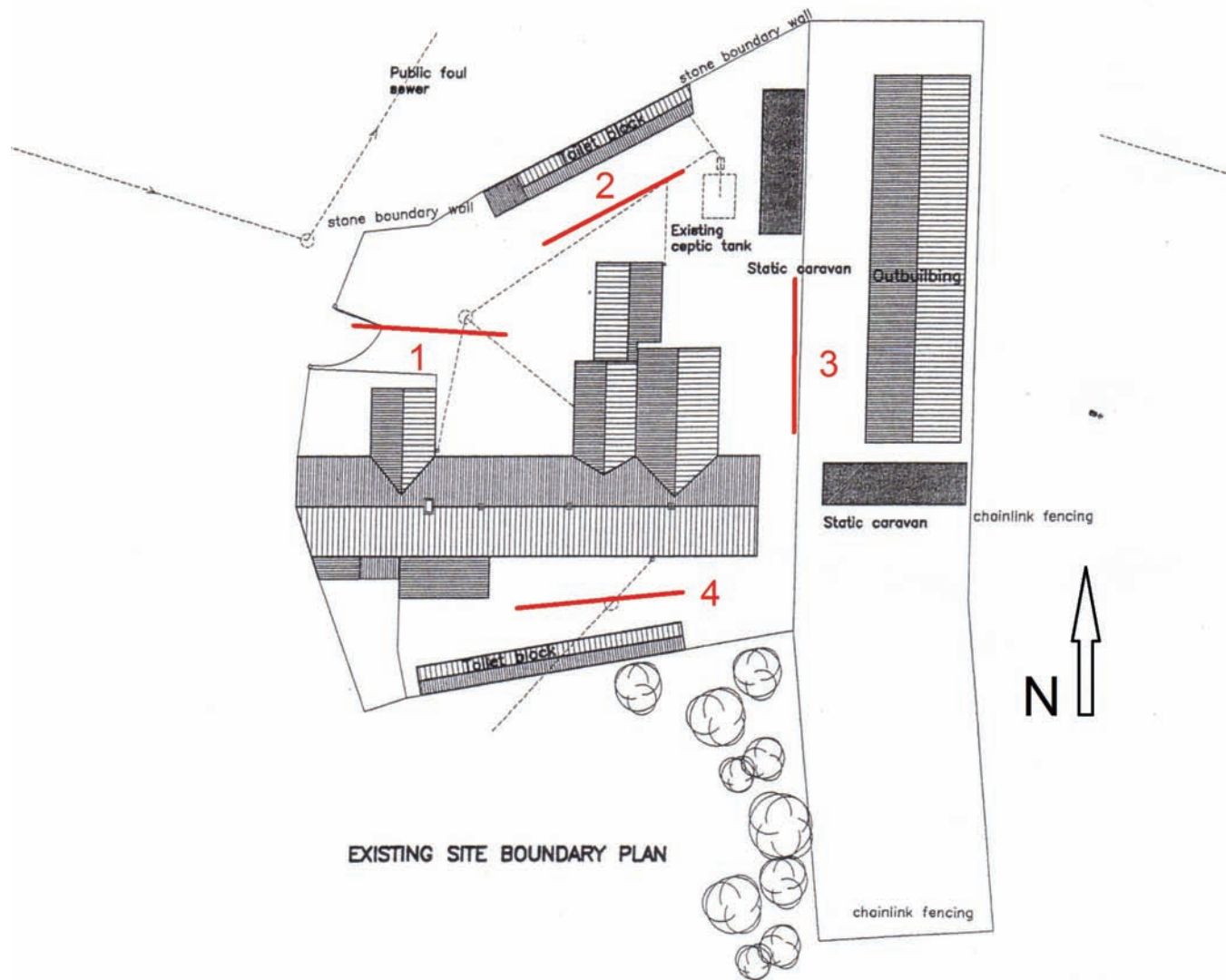


Fig. 1
Location of site



EXISTING SITE BOUNDARY PLAN

Fig. 2
Location of trenches
across the site

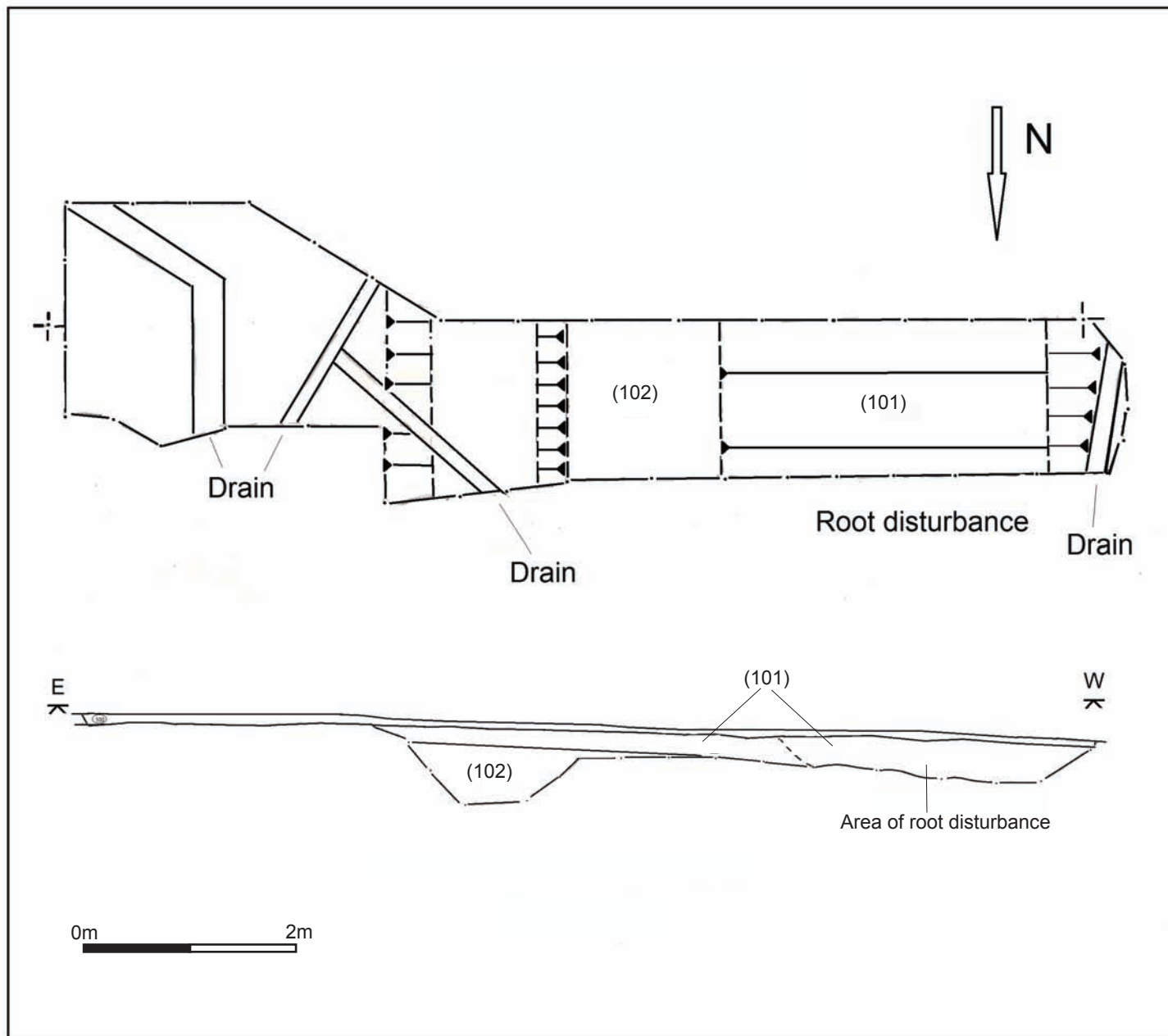


Fig. 3
Trench 1

Looking west



Looking east



Fig. 4
Trench 1

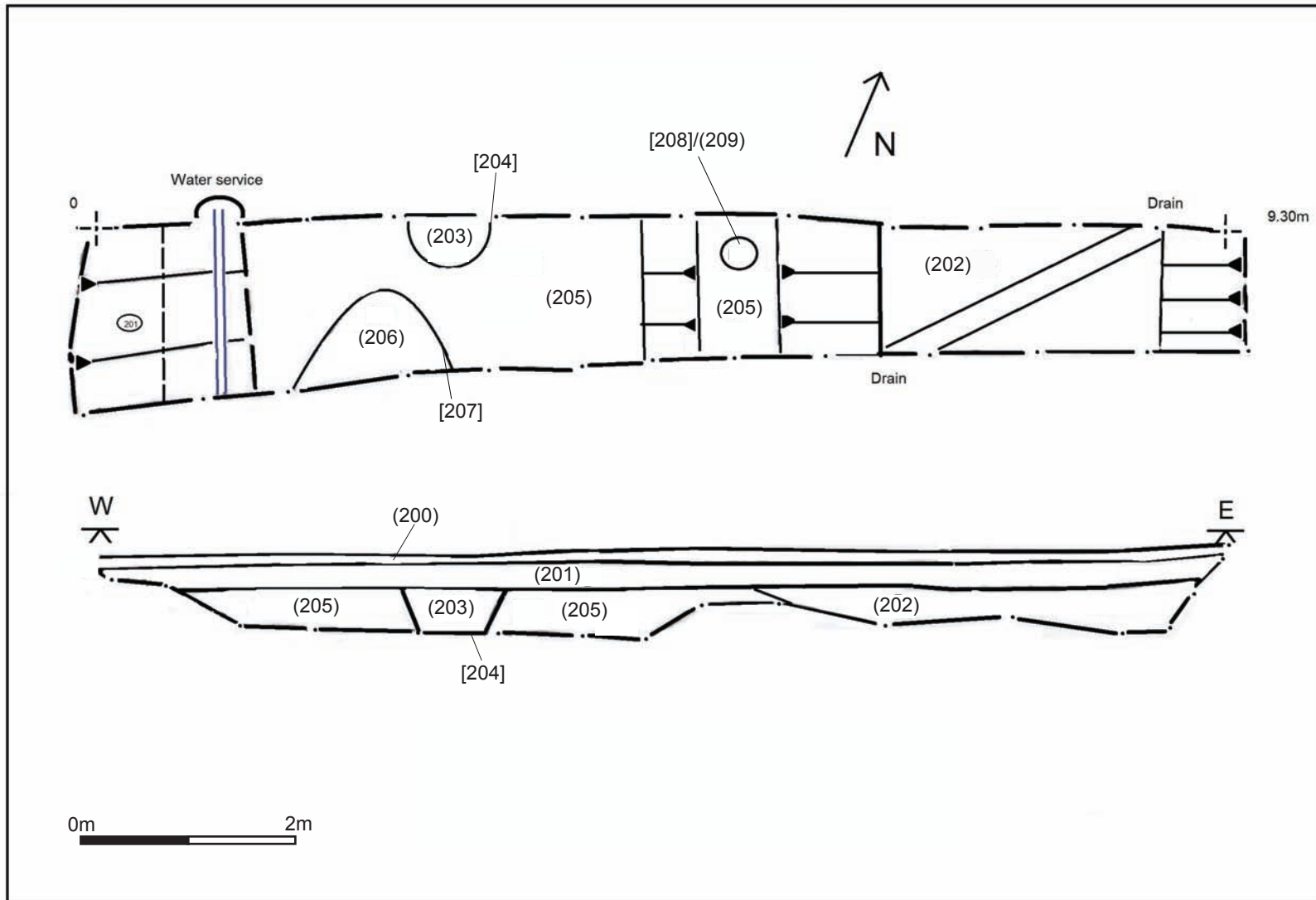


Fig. 5
Trench 2



Looking northeast



Southeast-facing section showing pits [204] and [207]

Fig. 6
Trench 2

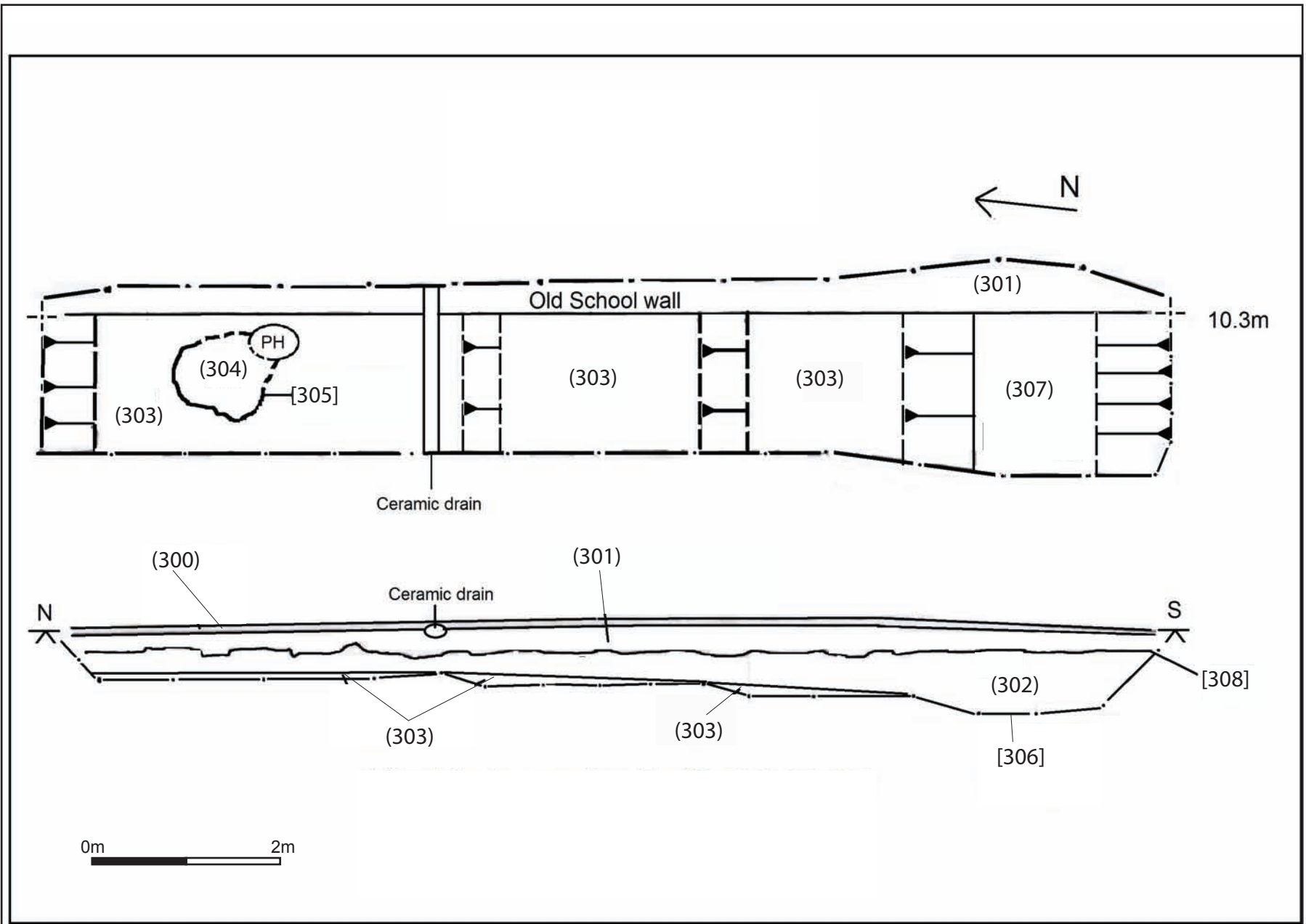


Fig. 7
Trench 3



Looking west

View of pit/posthole [305]



Fig. 8
Trench 3

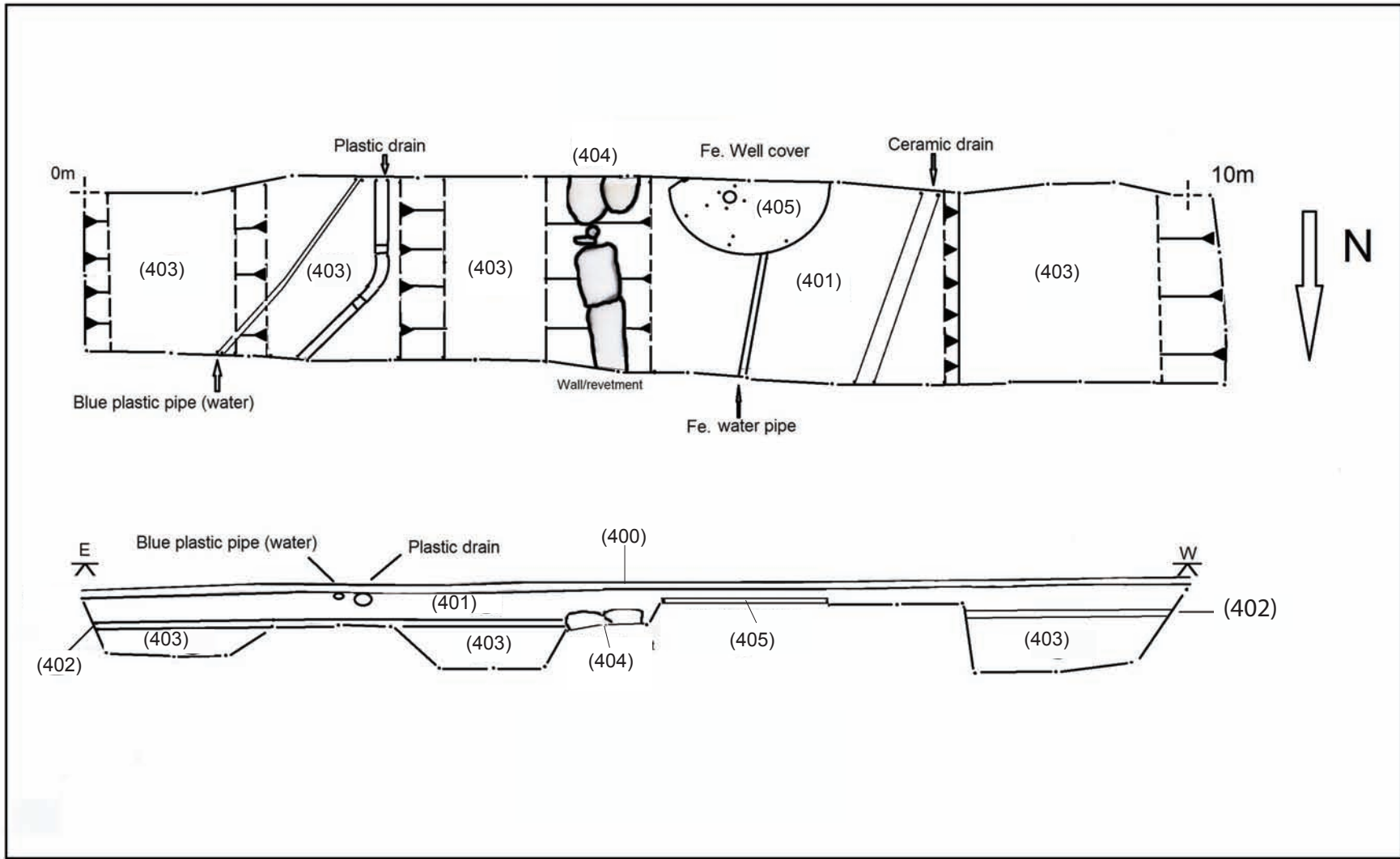


Fig. 9
Trench 4

Looking west



Possible revetment around the well



Fig. 10
Trench 4

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