
Ty Hawddgar, St Clears: archaeological watching-brief

June 2007

**A report for Mr and Mrs R Rees
by Ellie Graham BA (Hons)**



GGAT Projects



View to the southeast showing surviving medieval features © GGAT

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Summary

Mr and Mrs Rees of Ty Hawddgar commissioned the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust, (GGAT Projects) to maintain a watching-brief during ground works for an extension to the existing house and for a detached garage and parking area. The edges of a substantial ditch were revealed during excavations, probably the remains of the medieval town defences of St Clears. A small number of artefacts, including quantifiable pottery, were recovered from the development.

Acknowledgements

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The project was managed, and the fieldwork was undertaken by Richard Lewis BA MIFA of the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust (GGAT Projects). The finds were processed and identified by Andy Sherman BA. The report and illustrations were prepared by Ellie Graham BA.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Project background and commission

Mr and Mrs R Rees of Ty Hawddgar, St Clears commissioned the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust (GGAT Projects) to maintain a watching-brief during ground works for an extension to the existing house and for a detached garage and parking area under planning application number W/11383 (Figure 1). The footprint of the proposed extension adjoins the existing house, positioned to the south in the area of the utility room and garage, and extends beyond the original footprint of the building. The detached garage is positioned opposite the house, with separate access and an adjoining parking area.

1.2 Location

The town of St Clears lies on the River Cynin at its confluence with the Taf. The development area is located in the southern part of the town to the south of the modern A40, on St Peter's Street, to the west of the A4066 (Figure 1). It lies just to the north of the Taf and Tywi Estuary historic landscape area, between character areas Laugharne Parish, Pendine and Llanddowror, to the south, and Trefenty to the east. St Clears lies at the confluence of the Taf and Cynin rivers on the upper reaches of the Taf and Tywi Estuary, and thus sits in a landscape of great diversity. The reclaimed salt marsh of the estuary is located just across the river from the town and sits just above sea level, while the area further inland around the town rises to form rolling hills cut by the open valleys of the Taf and Cynin rivers, a landscape characterised by farms and fields, largely under enclosed pasture. (Murphy & Ludlow, 2000).

1.3 Geology

The bedrock in the area of St Clears is Palaeozoic sedimentary rock of the Ordovician system, which characterises much of Carmarthenshire, with Lower Devonian (Old Red) sandstone running as a thin rim along the coast between the Ordovician strata and the South Wales coalfield. The superficial deposits overlying the bedrock are primarily marine alluvium silty and clayey soils (SSEW 1983).

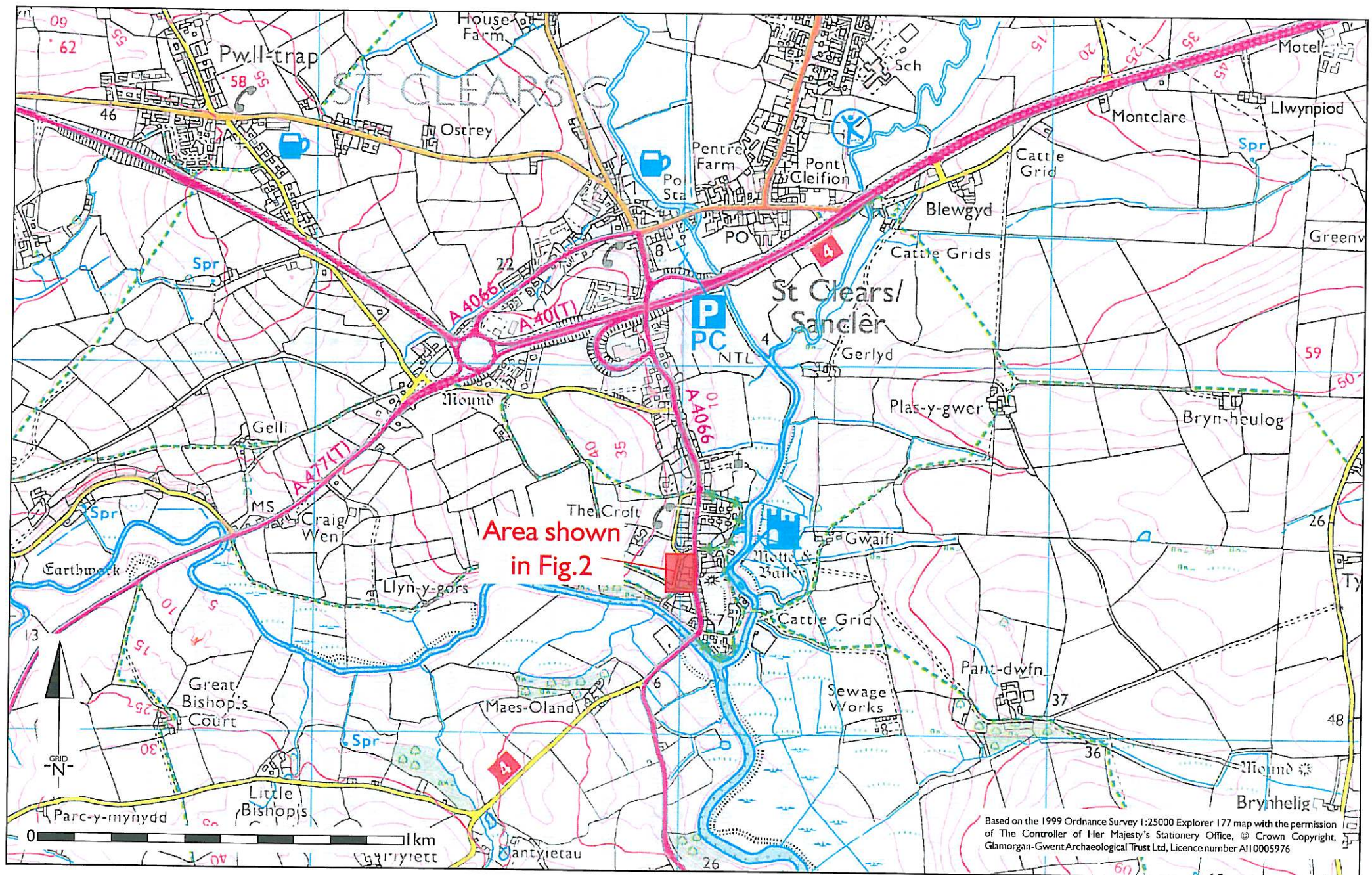


Figure 1. Location of development

1.4 Archaeological and historical interests

Prehistoric activity in the vicinity of St Clears is attested by various monuments in the area including standing stones, burnt mounds and round barrows dating to the Bronze Age, and Iron Age settlements and hillforts. Several roads mapped from aerial photographs demonstrate Roman activity in the area, as does a radiocarbon date obtained from charcoal contained in soil beneath a defensive bank at St Clears during excavations by Cambria Archaeology (Murphy 1997). The date of AD 241-611 yielded by this was interpreted as evidence of unspecified Roman or post-Roman activity around the town (Murphy 1997).

The first settlement at St Clears dates to the late-eleventh century when a Norman fort was established to guard the confluence of the Cynin and the Taf rivers, which represents the highest navigable point on the Taf. This was the centre of administration for the Medieval lordship of St Clears, one of several lordships in the area, including Laugharne and Osterlow, controlled by the Anglo-Norman barons. During the mid-twelfth century it was held by William fitz Hait, but was lost and retaken on successive occasions during the disputes over control of the area between the Welsh and the Norman lords. It was captured by the Lord Rhys in 1189, retaken by the Normans in 1195, lost again to the Welsh in 1215, but was under the control of William Marshall II of Pembroke by 1230. The castle itself was of the motte and bailey type, the substantial motte of which survives well, along with a bailey which lies to the south, although the original defensive ditch has now been infilled. St Clears was a minor lordship and the original wooden structure, unlike the larger Marcher castles, may not have been rebuilt in stone; although there is a late-seventeenth century record of stone, lime, mortar and ashes having been dug up on the mound of the motte (Lloyd *et al* 2006).

The establishment of the castle was followed by the foundation in *c*1100 of a Cluniac priory, dedicated to St Mary Magdalene, which lies just off the High Street in Lower St Clears. Although it was not a wealthy priory, having only one monk in the late-twelfth century, the chancel arch is the most significant piece of Norman church architecture in Carmarthenshire (Lloyd *et al* 2006). The church itself has received alterations, the chancel dating to *c*1300, altered in the fifteenth century, while the western tower dates to the sixteenth century. However, no trace of the associated priory buildings has been found.

A settlement developed around the castle and priory, with the earliest reference to a town at St Clears dating to 1248, while a charter was granted in 1392. The defended settlement surrounding the castle remains clearly delineated by the street plan, with the original burgage plots still easily distinguishable, lining the central High Street, which runs from north to south to the bridge over the Taf. The defences of the settlement followed the line of the streets to the west and a 90m stretch of earthworks were identified and investigated by Cambria Archaeology (Murphy 1997, 150). The defensive earthworks were seen to consist of a ditch and rampart, the bank being formed from the upcast of the ditch. Although no finds were recovered, these features have been firmly assigned a medieval date, through radiocarbon analysis of charcoal found both beneath the bank and within the rampart. A further medieval settlement lies to the north of the fortified town, clearly defined by the street pattern with burgage plots lining the main street, but this area is not thought to have been originally defended.

Associated with the castle, was a quay on the river, which served the medieval settlement, and remained in use until the beginning of the twentieth century. However, it declined due to the silting of the river and became secondary to the larger ports, which developed on the south coast to serve the industry in the area. Although no longer in use, it survives to the east of the bridge over the river (Lloyd *et al* 2006).

2. Methodology

The first phase of work for the construction of the garage, to the west of Ty Hawddgar house, involved the excavation of a large quantity of material to lower the ground level, which was carried out without archaeological supervision. Subsequently, the standing west and north facing sections were recorded; the spoil was examined and a walkover survey was undertaken on all exposed areas to identify and recover artefacts of an archaeological nature. The footings for the kitchen extension, a total of four trenches, were mechanically excavated, using a 450mm toothless grading bucket, to a maximum depth of one meter. Sections showing features of archaeological interest were recorded in both areas; all levels relate to the present road surface, which is 16mOD.

A written and photographic record was made of all archaeological features and deposits in accordance with the GGAT *Manual of Excavation Recording Techniques*. Contexts were recorded using a single continuous numbering system (indicated in bold, e.g. **101**) and are summarised in Appendix II. Samples are indicated by an asterisk prefix (e.g. *001). The excavated area was located in relation to published boundaries (OS grid).

All classes of finds have been retained, cleaned, and catalogued and remain in temporary store until arrangements for final deposition are agreed, in line with the requirements of the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (2001). When substantial quantities of modern material were recovered, an on-site policy of record and discard was implemented.

The management of environmental recording and sampling followed the principles and tenets laid down in English Heritage's *Guidelines for Environmental Archaeology*, published in 2002. Small samples of molluscan shells were taken for identification purposes.

The project archive will be deposited with an appropriate receiving organisation, in accordance with the UKIC and IFA Guidelines. This archive will comprise the site archive, research archive, artefacts (excepting those that may be subject to the Treasure Act) and ecofacts, subject to the agreement of the site owners. A copy of the archive index will be deposited with the National Monuments Record, RCAHMW, Aberystwyth.

The watching brief was undertaken in July 2006 and May 2007.

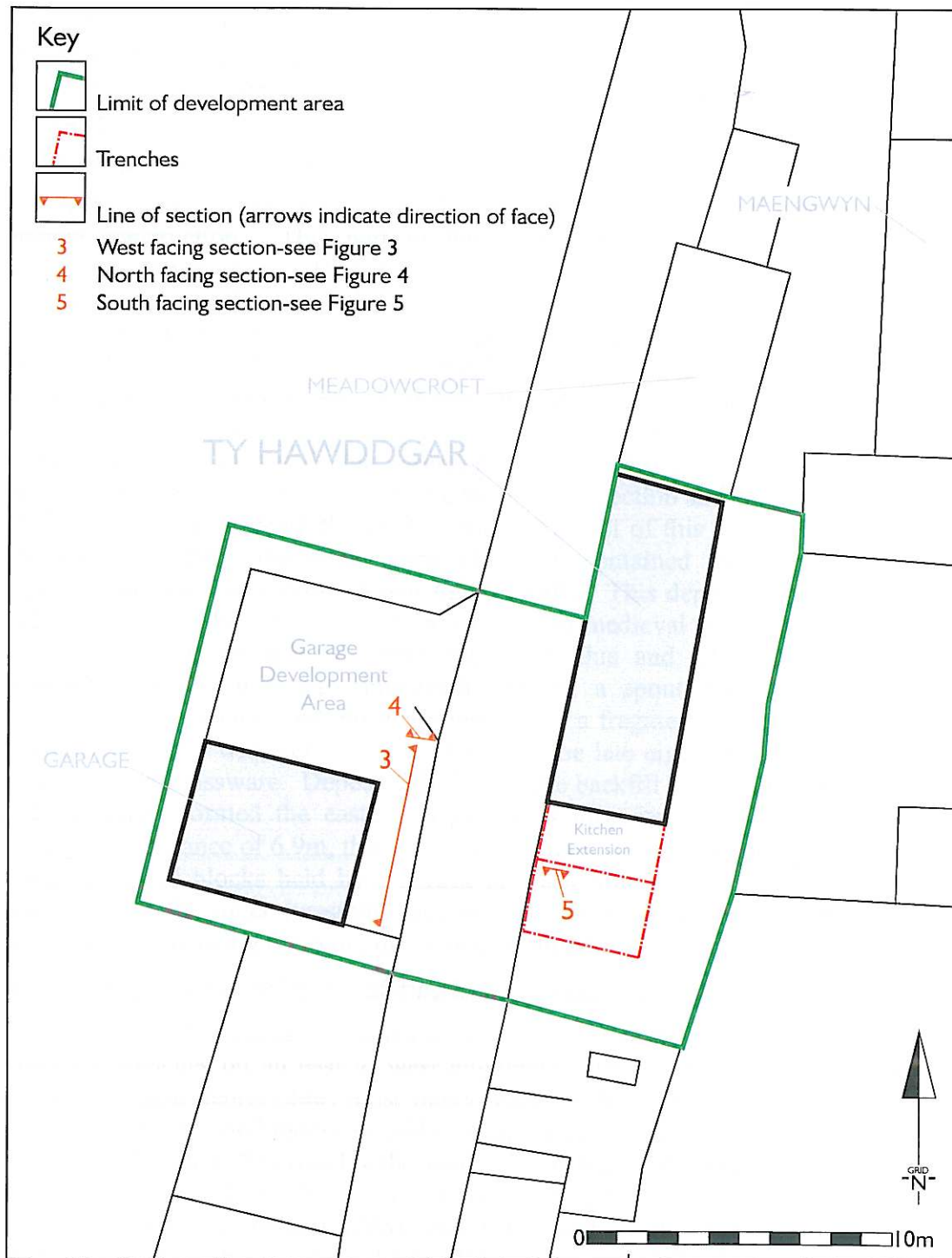


Figure 2. Plan of development area and trench location

3. Results

The program of works was divided into two separate phases; first an area of 102m² on the western side of the road was excavated in preparation for the construction of the garage and parking area. The second phase of work involved the excavation of the lawn area in order to lower the ground level behind the building, followed by the excavation of the footings for the kitchen extension.

Phase 1 Garage area on western side of road. (Figures 3 and 4; Plate 1)

In order to lower the ground surface, a substantial quantity of material was removed ahead of the garage construction. This part of the development works was carried out without archaeological supervision. However, five sections were recorded prior to the garage construction. The north, east and south-facing sections did not exhibit any archaeological features or deposits; this may be due to the presence of the natural sandstone bedrock rising steeply west from the road. The west and north-facing sections make up the corner edge of the excavations along the western side of the road and form a continuous section. The basal layer (204) proved to be a natural sandy-clay and would appear, based on the open sections to the north, east and south, to overlie the natural sandstone bedrock. A cut (203), made into the natural, was revealed along the length of the west-facing section and sloped steeply towards the east, apparently diving beneath the modern road. The fill of this cut consisted of a dark red-brown clay-loam (202), the upper parts of which contained marine shell and charcoal, subsequently identified as *Cerastoderma Edula* (*001). This deposit (202) was overlain by a layer (201) which can be definitively dated to the post-medieval period by the finds recovered from it. These include two adjoining sherds of blue and white transfer-printed, white earthenware plate dating to the nineteenth century, a spout and body fragment from a nineteenth century brown-glazed buffware teapot and a fragment of an ornamental miniature, in a creamware fabric with yellow-glaze, dating to the late eighteenth century; in addition to nineteenth century glassware. Deposit 201 formed the backfill behind the extant post-medieval wall (200), which formed the eastern boundary of this site. Aligned north to south and continuing for a distance of 6.9m, this wall is constructed of roughly coursed sandstone cobbles and roughly shaped blocks held by a matrix of weak lime mortar. Stones were jutting out horizontally from the inner (western) face of the wall into the overlying deposit (201), the intention presumably being to secure the wall more firmly.

Phase 2 Footings for extension to existing house (Figure 5; Plates 2-5)

The footings for the kitchen extension formed two north to south trenches and two perpendicular trenches on an east to west alignment. The overlying deposit across this site consisted of modern debris (206) most likely from the demolition of the previous extension. The debris (206) contained modern rubble including brick, glass, tile and stone held within a cement and sand matrix, this overlay the sandy-clay natural (205) except in the central footing (aligned east to west). Here the excavation of the trench revealed a negative feature (207), which was cut into the natural (205), and filled with a grey-brown silty-clay containing frequent sandstone pebbles and boulders (208). The cut (207) sloped down in a westerly direction beneath the road at an angle of 35 degrees. A thin layer of pebbles (209) was identified in the east-facing section overlying the natural sandy-clay (205). This deposit would appear to represent the continuation of the negative feature 207, continuing on the same alignment as the road.

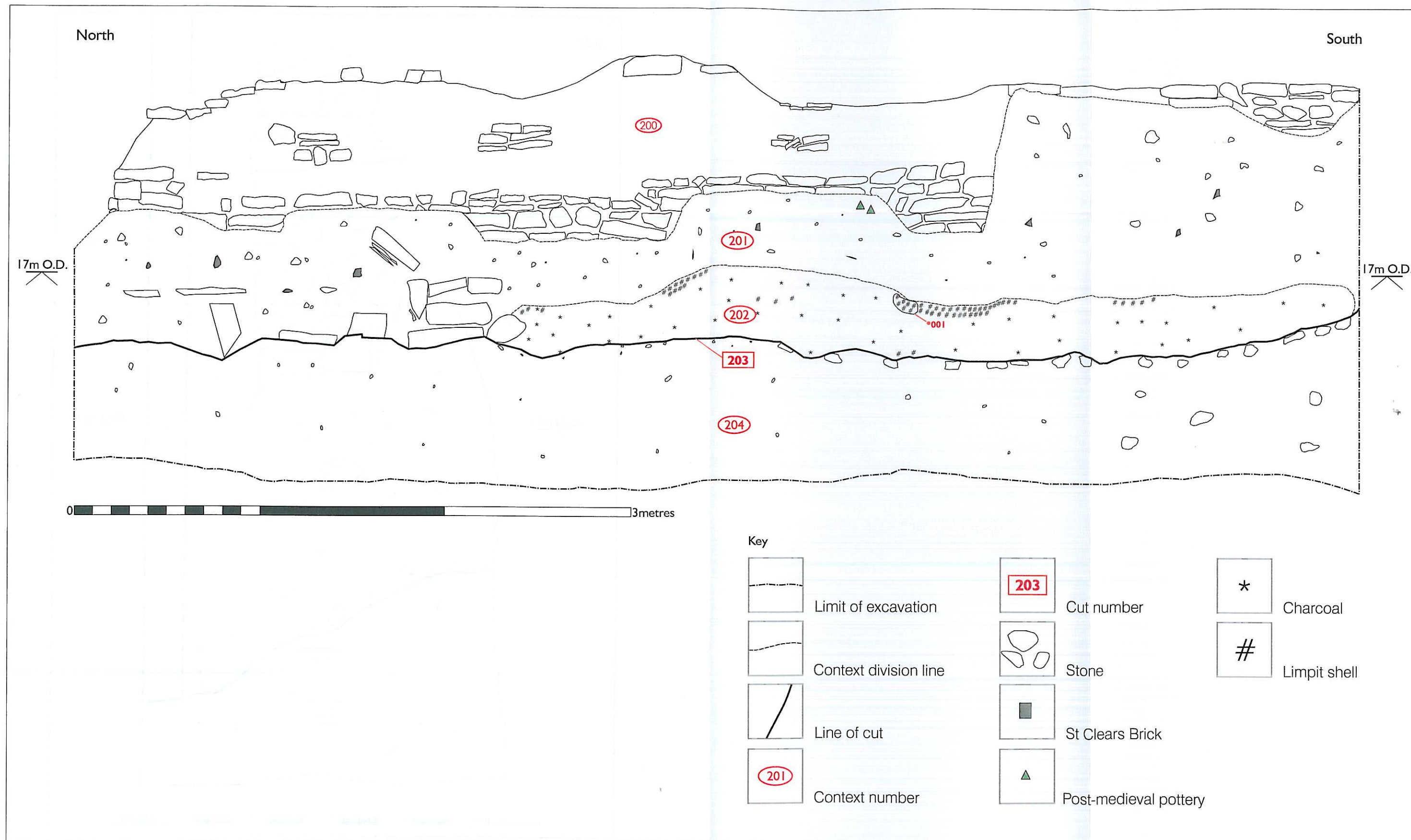


Figure 3. West-facing section of garage development area

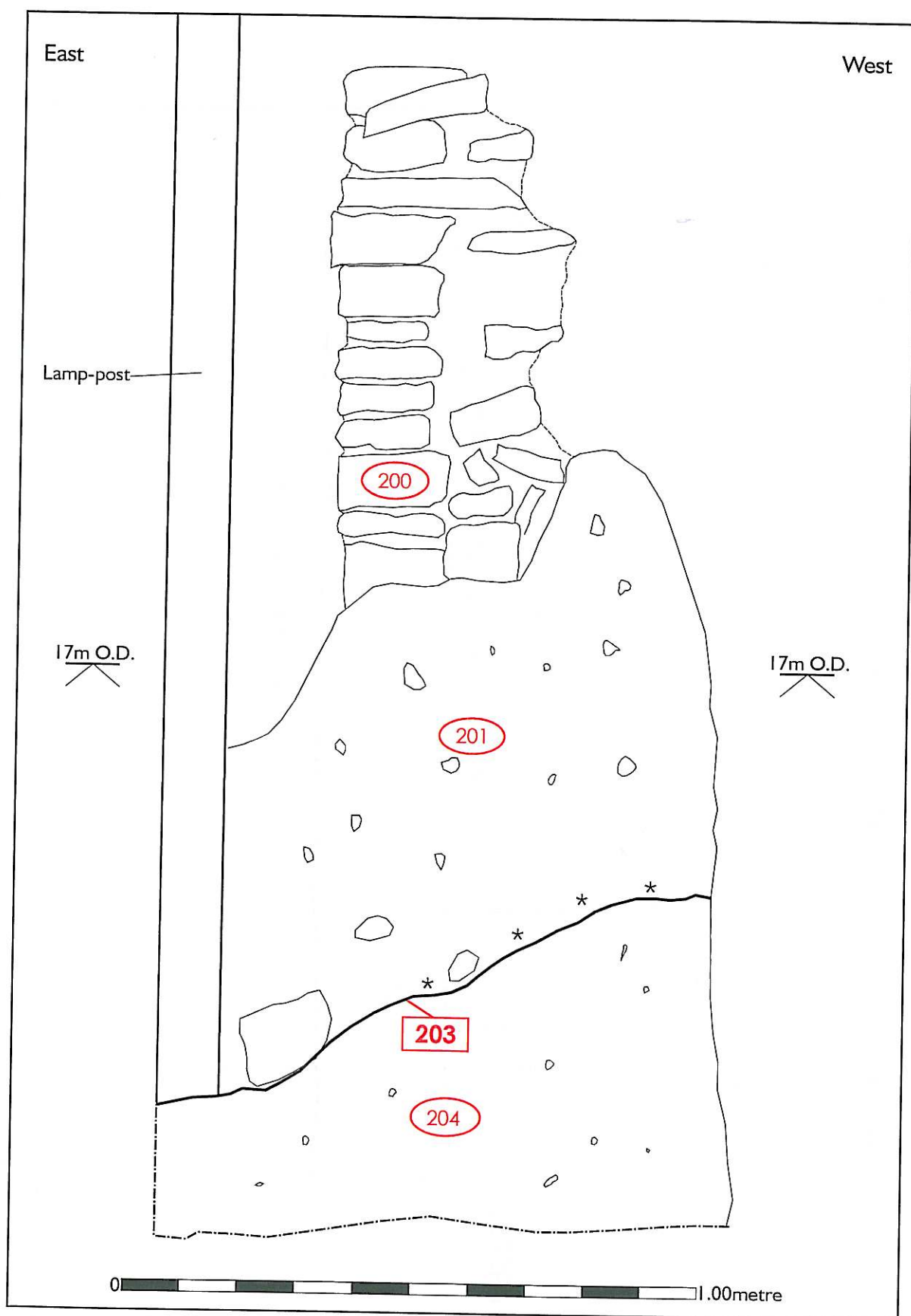


Figure 4. North-facing section of garage development area

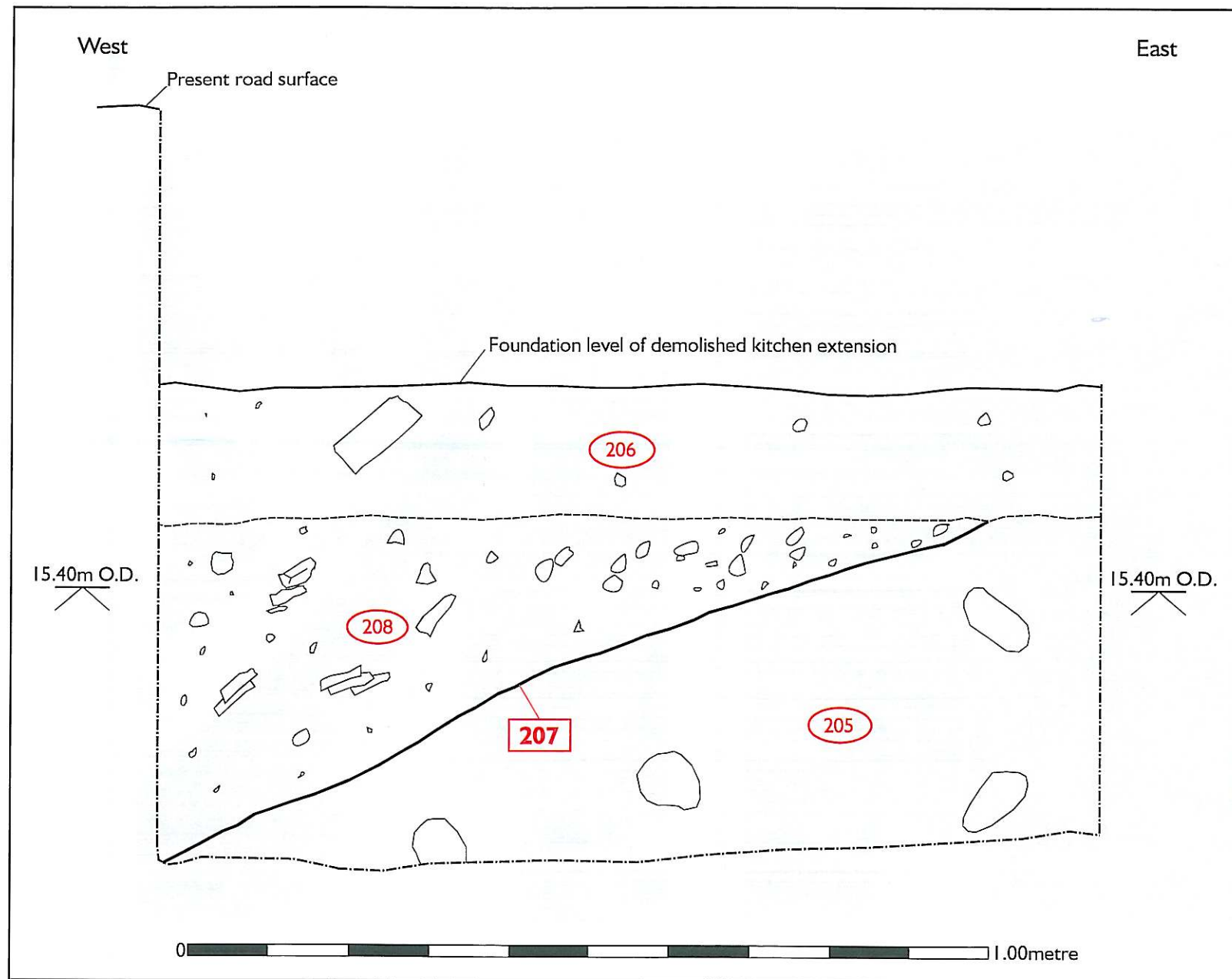


Figure 5. South-facing section of the central (east-west aligned) kitchen extension trench



Plate 1: View of west-facing section showing medieval deposits behind wall 200



Plate 2: Southwest facing view kitchen extension trenches showing ditch cut (207) and pebble layer (209)

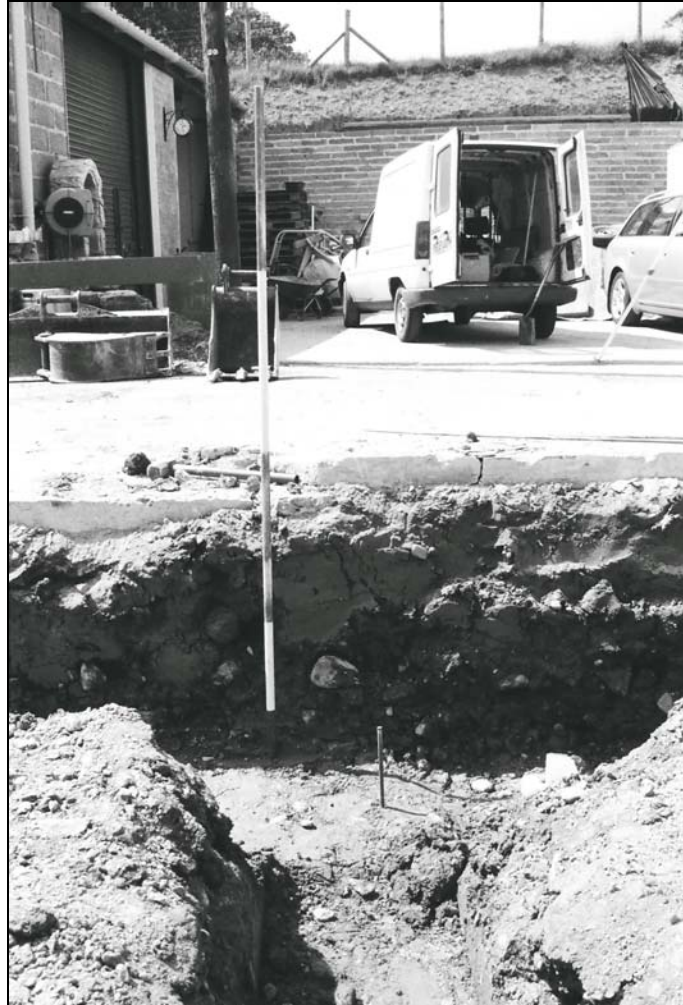


Plate 3: West facing view of kitchen extension trenches showing ditch cut (207) and pebble layer (209)



Plate 4: Northwest facing view of kitchen extension trenches showing ditch cut (207) and pebble layer (209)



Plate 5: North facing view of central kitchen extension trench showing ditch cut (207) and fill (208)

4. Conclusions

The principal features identified during the watching-brief appear to relate to the defences of the medieval town of St Clears. The earliest features are thought to be medieval. Although no pottery or datable evidence was recovered from these contexts, these features were cut directly into the natural clay and, on the western side, securely underlie the post-medieval layer, which has been dated through identification of the finds recovered. This establishes that the underlying deposits, the cut and its fill, are earlier than this date, and this part of St Clears is known to be medieval in origin, based on the street pattern and works carried out by Cambria Archaeology (Murphy, 1997).

The negative features identified during both phases of this work, (**203** and **207**) were found to be positioned on either side of St Peters Street and are both directly cut into the natural. They appear, from the limited extent revealed by these works, to follow the line of the road. The negative features recorded on both sides of St Peters Street would appear, based on the limited evidence of the present excavation, to converge beneath the road surface. Based on the stratigraphy, the alignment and the orientation, it seems likely that these disparate features are in fact opposite edges of a substantial ditch. The edges of the exposed ditch indicate a width, at this point, of 6.9m, suggesting the original earthworks formed a defensive system of substantial size.

The site lies on the street which clearly demarcates the edges of this part of the settlement, and which is believed to follow the line of the original medieval defences of St Clears. These defensive earthworks, investigated by Cambria Archaeology (Murphy 1997), were shown to run along this alignment and consisted of a ditch and rampart (Murphy 1997). The site straddles the modern road, under which the defences are believed to have been positioned. Therefore, it would appear that the negative features (**203** and **207**) revealed by the development are the eastern and western edges of the medieval defensive ditch respectively, which enclosed the Norman settlement of St Clears.

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Online Sources

British Geological Survey Website: www.bgs.ac.uk

Appendix I

The Finds by Andy Sherman

Introduction

A single assemblage consisting of nine artefacts was recovered from context **201**, with a date range from the late-eighteenth to nineteenth century.

Analysis

The assemblage consisted of two adjoining sherds of blue and white transfer-printed, white earthenware plate dating to the nineteenth century, a spout and body fragment from a nineteenth century brown-glazed buffware teapot and a fragment of an ornamental miniature, in a creamware fabric with yellow-glaze, dating to the late eighteenth century. This assemblage also contained two un-diagnostic fragments of brick and tile. Along with this ceramic component the assemblage contained the base of a glass wine/beer bottle and a small, clear-glass bottle probably used to contain ointment, both dating to the nineteenth century. A single un-identified bird bone was also recovered from this context.

Material type	Fabric type	Quantity	Weight	Minimum count	Period
Bird bone	-	1	0.001kg	-	-
Brick/Tile	-	2	0.024kg	-	U/D
Pottery	TPWE	2 (=1)	0.022kg	1	Post-medieval
Pottery	BGBW	1	0.055kg	-	Post-medieval
Pottery	Creamware	1	0.004kg	-	Post-medieval
Glass	-	2	0.048kg	2	Post-medieval

Note:

TPWE: Transfer-printed white earthenware

BGBW: Brown-glazed buffware

U/D: Undiagnostic

(=1): Fragments originate from single vessel

Shell sample report

Summary

A small bag (sample number *001), less than 0.5 litres in volume, of hand-collected shell was recovered from the fill of a medieval ditch (context **202**), for bivalve species analysis. Unfortunately the shell sample recovered was too small to be of any great interpretative value, however as the sample consisted entirely of an edible marine taxon, this assemblage is likely to derive exclusively from human food waste.

Results

Sample *001 contained 22 fragments of shell belonging to the species *Cerastoderma Edula* (Common edible Cockle).

Appendix II

Inventory of contexts

Context	Type	Depth	Description	Period
200	Structure	+1.10 – 2.3m	Sandstone wall, 6.9m long; 0.4m wide and varying between 1-1.2m high	Post-medieval
201	Deposit	+0.23 – 1.40m	Fill behind wall 200. Rubble backfill; orange brown sandy clay with frequent sandstone fragments and stones and heavy bioturbation in upper parts	Post-medieval
202	Deposit	+0.55 – 0.90m (average)	Fill of 203. Dark red brown sandy clay loam with frequent sandstone fragments, shell and charcoal	Probably Medieval
203	Cut	+0.61m	Cut, into 204	Probably Medieval
204	Deposit	0 – +0.61m	Natural clay. Light red brown sandy clay with frequent sandstone fragments	N/A
205	Deposit	-0.53 – 1m	Natural clay. Light red brown sandy clay with frequent sandstone pebbles and boulders. Possible manganese leaching manifesting as black and grey staining.	N/A
206	Deposit	-c0.35 – 0.53m	Modern demolition debris. Modern rubble and debris within a grey and black cement sand matrix.	Modern
207	Cut	-0.95m	Cut, into 205	Probably Medieval
208	Deposit	-0.53 – 0.95m	Fill of 207, grey brown silty clay, alluvial in appearance with frequent sandstone pebbles and isolated boulders.	Unknown
209	Deposit	-0.85 – 0.97m	Thin layer of sandstone pebbles.	Probably Medieval

All depths are measured both above and below (as indicated) the present road surface of St Peters Street and not Ordnance Datum.