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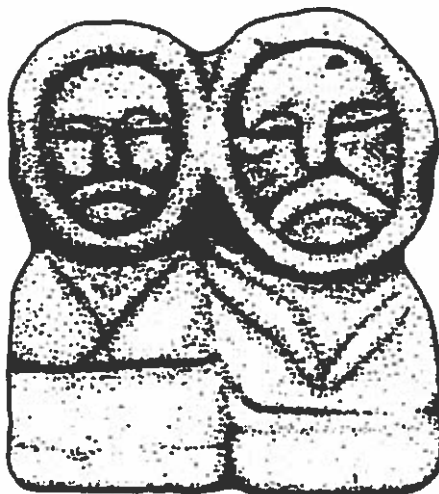
CAMBRIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECTS LTD.



**THE SOUTH-EAST CORNER OF THE CLOISTER GARDEN,
ABERGLASNEY MANSION
CARMARTHENSHIRE**

INTERIM REPORT ON EXCAVATIONS

By Ian Halfpenney B.A (Hons.), AIFA



CAP Report no. 104

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By Ian Halfpenney B.A (Hons.), AIFA

Prepared for:
**The Aberglasney Restoration Trust
East Bailiffs Lodge
Aberglasney Mansion
Llangathen
Carmarthenshire
SA32 8QH**

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**Cambrian Archaeological Projects Ltd.
Waen Old Farmhouse
Llidiartywaen
Llanidloes
Powys
SY18 6JT
Telephone/Fax: 01686 413857
E mail: cambarch@ukf.net**

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September 1999

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THE SOUTH-EAST CORNER OF THE CLOISTER GARDEN: INTERIM EXCAVATION REPORT

1. Introduction

Work started on the south-east corner of the Cloister Garden on the 9th August 1999 and was completed on the 3rd September 1999.

The Aberglasney Restoration Trust originally had not intended to excavate this area. However in light of the archaeological discoveries within the main area of the Cloister Garden it was felt that a satisfactory interpretation of the Cloister Garden could not be attempted until the function and layout of this focal point within the garden had been established.

The work involved the excavation of an area in the south-east corner of the Cloister Garden measuring 10m. x 11m. (Fig.1).

The area of excavation was covered by a considerable amount of overburden and dumped materials. In light of this it was necessary to remove these deposits by machine. This overburden was removed using a toothless ditching bucket.

The numbers in brackets refer to context numbers assigned to the various archaeological features and deposits encountered during the excavation work.

2. The Archaeological Phasing

1. 17th century
2. 18th century
3. Mid. 19th century
4. 20th century

3. Results and Discussion of the Archaeological Phasing.

Phase 1-17th century (Fig. 2)

The earliest feature encountered during this phase of the excavation was the basal remains of a wall (1387). Only one course of the wall foundation survived, construction was of local limestone with a cream coloured lime mortar. The cut of the foundation trench for the wall was 0.95m. wide. Wall 1387 was on an east-west alignment and may be a continuation of the original south wall of the Cloister Garden.

The other early feature in this south-east area is a stone built culvert (1380), which relates to the pre-construction drainage works. This culvert was of mortared stone construction, the top of the culvert was sealed with flat stone caps.

Later during this phase the eastern end of wall 1387 was removed, which provided space to build a structure in this south-east corner. The following details of this structure were noted:

The internal dimensions of this building were 5.5m. (east/west), due to the presence of a modern drain it was not possible to establish the north/south dimension although it is believed to be 7m. maximum. A test pit excavation against the later retaining wall to the south proved that the building did not extend to this point.

The north wall (1318) of the building had been robbed out and the south wall was not within our limit of excavation, the lower courses of the east and west walls were still *in situ*. These walls were 1m. wide.

The west wall (1368) survived to a height of 0.5m. and retained evidence of plasterwork (1370) on the east elevation.

The east wall (1315) also survived to a height of 0.5m. although evidence of plasterwork on the west elevation was not as convincing as that on wall 1368 due to later disturbance by a series of culverts.

The original function of this building is at present unknown, although it would have acted as a focal point for people entering the Cloister Garden through the main north entrance.

The west wall of the building contains an inset which would originally have been a large fireplace. This fireplace was located towards the south-west corner of the building.

The original flooring of the building was no longer *in situ*, but presumably consisted of a formal, possibly paved/flagged surface. Culvert 1380 mentioned above had flat stone caps and these may conceivably represent the remains of the original floor level, with the culvert which ran on a north/south alignment along the west side of the east wall being integrated into the floor of the building.

Due to later disturbances it was not possible to trace the diaper pattern surface from the north of the Cloister garden through to this southern area, although it is believed that this surface would have continued up to the south-east building.

Survey projections indicate that two steps would have been necessary to gain access into the south-east building from the formal path, probably through a central doorway in the northern wall.

The excavation uncovered two postholes (1356+1372) which complete a line of ten running on a north/south alignment, marking the western edge of the diaper pattern path. This line of postholes suggest that the path was bounded by a fence which, apart from a gate at the north end, prevented access onto the western part of the garden.

A further segment of the upper terrace retaining wall (1331) was located. Only the basal two courses of the 2m. length uncovered remained *in situ*. This portion of the wall represented its southern limit and would have been situated against the north wall of the south-east building. This north wall had been robbed out and therefore the relationship

between the north wall and the upper terrace wall had been lost.

Phase 2 – 18th century (Fig. 2)

During the 18th century the function of this building appears to have changed. The fireplace was altered and a lead working area was added in the fireplace. This *in situ* lead working comprised of a 'furnace base' (1397) composed of mortar with gradually sloping sides and a rounded concave base. The base had been mortared onto the existing wall (1368) and measured 1m. north/south and 0.8m. east/west with a depth of 0.4m. This furnace contained a clay base (1365) above which were two sandy deposits (1363+1364), the upper sand deposit (1363) was a reddish colour which may have been due to discolouration by the heat. Lying immediately above these sandy deposits was a 0.4m. deep deposit of ash material (1362). This ash deposit had an extremely high lead content and contained a number of pieces of partially melted lead artefacts. Context 1362 was also visible in section on the east side of the building. It therefore seems likely that the original flooring had been removed at the time this lead working was taking place and that the lead ash had become spread across the room building to a new surface being laid.

It was not possible to investigate this ash further as the deposit had been sealed below a later pitched stone surface (1298), which also appears to be 18th century in date. This pitched stone surface is composed of randomly arranged limestone pieces and covered the interior of the room. The fireplace inset had been largely infilled with the pitched stone, sealing the base of the lead furnace, leaving enough space for a smaller fireplace and grate measuring 1m. x 0.5m. This new fireplace was located in a more central position within the inset. In between the pitched stones a deposit of ash was evident, demonstrating that the room at this time still had an active fireplace *in situ*. However, over time this fireplace was removed and the ash pit infilled with brick, indicating that the building was still in use when the fireplace was no longer working.

On the east side of the building, evidence was uncovered of a shallow (0.1m. deep) drain (1383) running parallel to the east wall. This drain was constructed of pitched stone and appears to have been open to the room. A second drain (1314) appears to have flowed into 1383. Drain 1314 has a pitched stone base, with stone sides which are well integrated into the lower courses of wall 1315. These drains appear to have flown from north to south within the room. The function of these drains is unclear and their southern extent is unknown, due to the limit of excavation.

At a later date the northern part of drain 1383 is infilled with pitched stone, 1314 appears to have still been active as does the southern portion of 1383 as there is evidence of later reparation. This reparation work was carried out using half bricks, which may be contemporary with the later brick infilling of the fireplace (awaiting specialist brick report).

The entrance to this building from the Cloister Garden appears to have been altered during the 18th century. A door threshold was constructed in the north-west corner, probably with two steps being built to the north of the door to allow access into this room. This new doorway is contemporary with the laying of the pitched stone surface.

The pitched stone surface evident within the building continued north into the Cloister

Garden itself and this surface (1332) is evident butting up to the earlier upper terrace wall. Unfortunately, later disturbances had removed most of this external pitched stone, so that the full extent of the surface is unknown.

The south-east room appears to have been in use for a considerable period of time, and there are a number of phases to the rooms usage before it is finally abandoned, probably in the mid. 19th century.

Phase 3 – Mid. 19th century (Fig.3)

Substantial alterations of this south-east area were undertaken in the 19th century. It is at this time that the building is demolished leaving only the partial remains of some of the walls and the pitched stone surface. The east end of the South Range is remodelled to form a ramp from the Parapet down to the terrace in front of the house. The base of this ramp was composed of rubble material, possibly the result of the demolition of the south-east building which was dumped on top of the remains of the pitched stone surface. This ramp was bounded on the north side by wall 1299 and on the south side by 1300.

Wall 1299 butted up to the east edge of the north side of the South Range. A length of this wall 6.2m. remained *in situ*, up to a height of 1.3m. The stonework on the north side of this wall was laid to a good face, whereas the south side was randomly laid.

Wall 1300 was arranged in the reverse of this, i.e. with the south face being laid to a good face and the north side being random. It is clear from this arrangement that the area forming the ramp between the two walls was not intended to be visible, whereas the other two sides, which retained evidence of limewashing, were intended to be seen.

Partial evidence of the 19th century shale pathways was uncovered during the excavation of this ramp area, although later 20th century disturbances made it difficult to ascertain their full extent.

Wall 1299 abutted the north wall of the South Range at the point where the original 17th century steps would have been. Removal of these steps would have left scarring on the wall face similar to that still visible on the North range. However, only very limited scarring remains on the South Range. This suggests that portions of this wall were rebuilt during the 19th century as they were clearly intended to be visible.

Wall 1300 butted up to the east edge of the south side of the South Range. A length of 7.5m. remained *in situ*, up to a height of 1.65m.

Both of these walls start on an east-west alignment, then gradually curve north-east towards the Mansion and the terrace area. The walls gradually decrease in height as they approach the terrace area.

This area was obviously subjected to extensive landscaping during the 19th century and it may have been at this time that the 18th century external pitched stone surface was removed, possibly to facilitate the planting of a bed. It is also at this time that a pathway (1305) is laid to the south of the ramp with an archway allowing access into the Upper Walled garden.

Phase 4 – 20th century

A number of 20th century disturbances were evident during the excavation work which relate mainly to drainage systems. In the north-east of the excavation area a large brick manhole was uncovered. Unfortunately, this could not be removed as one of the ceramic drains connected to it was still active.

The area to the south of the excavation had been extensively disturbed by the insertion of a modern drain, which prevented any archaeological investigation of this area.

3. Conclusions

The excavation work undertaken in the south-east corner of the Cloister Garden was, necessary in order that the interpretation and restoration of this area be as accurate as possible. Findings from the excavation have clearly vindicated this decision as the south-east corner produced archaeological results which were not anticipated and shed new light on the layout and subsequent usage of this area and the Cloister garden as a whole.

4. Acknowledgements

Thanks to Kevin Blockley for his advice and comments on this report, and to Phil Evans, Jason Frankland, Richard Jones, and Andrew Joynson for their assistance with the excavation work and to all the staff of the Aberglasney Restoration Trust for their help and advice.

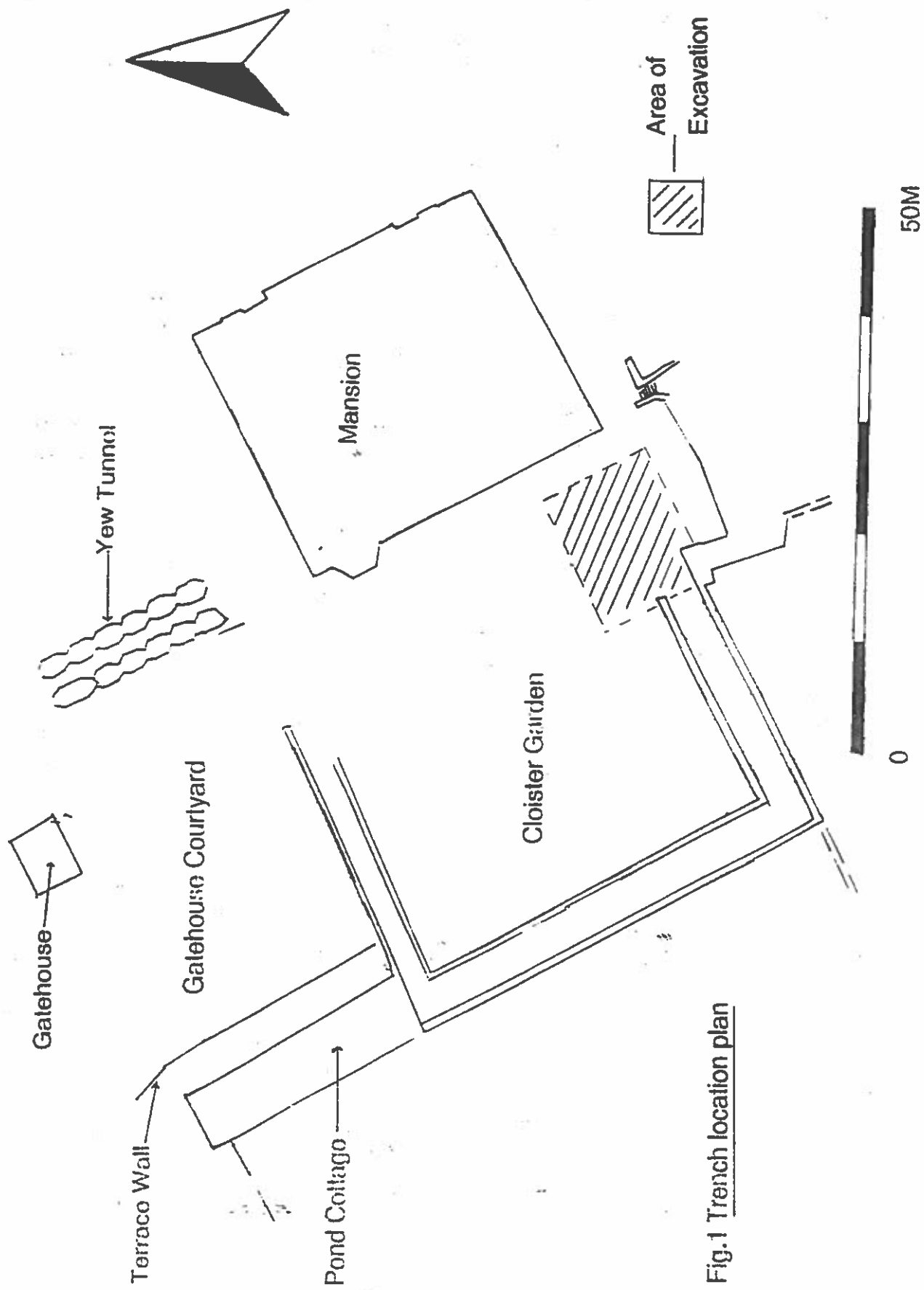


Fig.1 Trench location plan

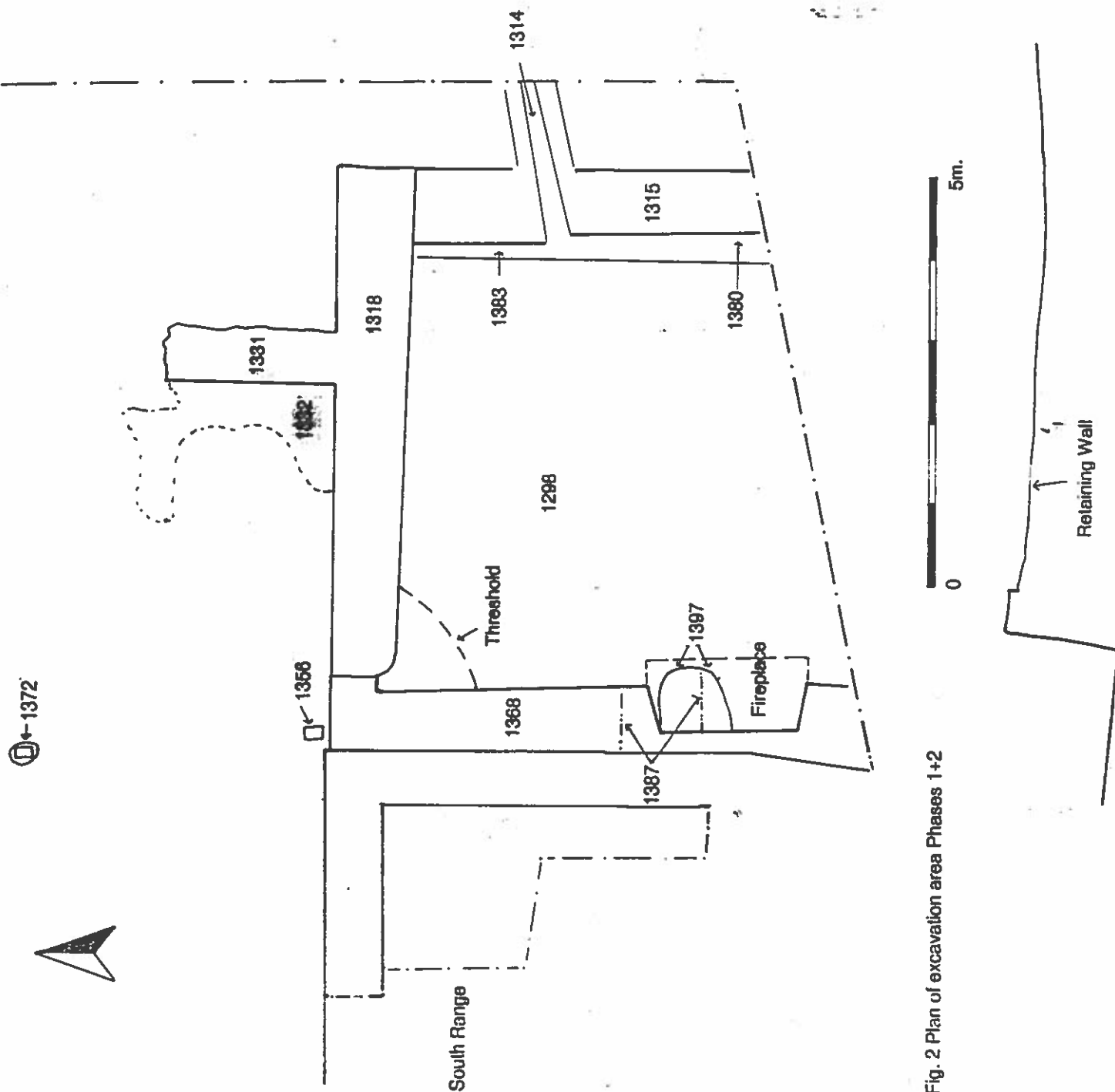


Fig. 2 Plan of excavation area Phases 1+2

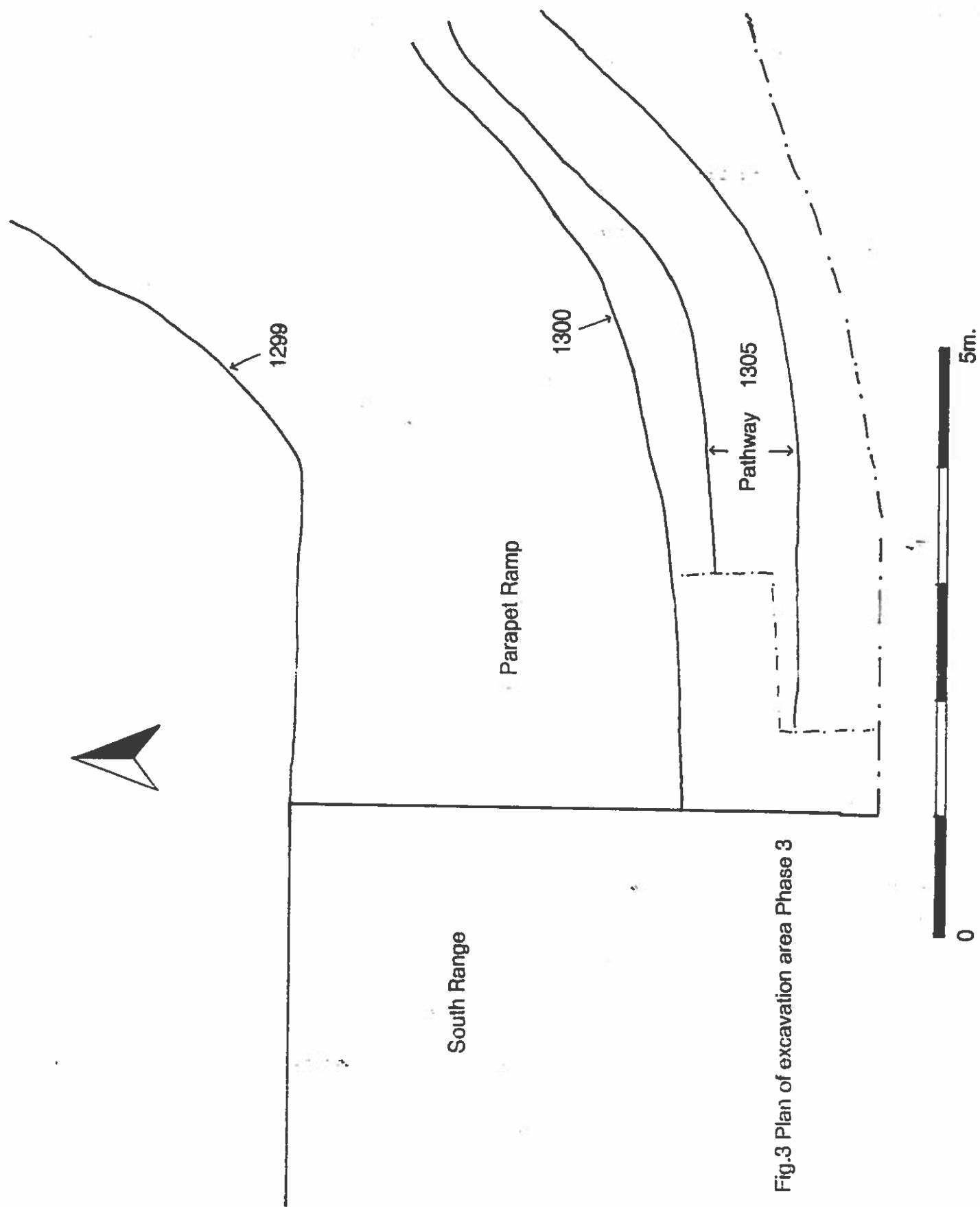


Fig.3 Plan of excavation area Phase 3