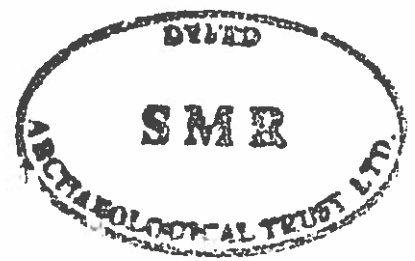


PRN 42689



WISTON, PEMBROKESHIRE, CHURCH FIELD

WATCHING BRIEF, NOVEMBER 1997

REPORT

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**Report on a watching brief at Wiston, Pembrokeshire
17th-18th November 1997**

Adrian Turgel and Dee Brennan

Brief history of site and recent excavation details

(extracted from Ken Murphy 1996, *The Castle and the Borough of Wiston, Pembrokeshire*, unpublished monograph; Llandeilo: Cambria Archaeology)

The modern village of Wiston (SN022181) is situated in the county of Pembrokeshire, 7km NE of Haverfordwest and 10km NW of Narberth, and lies on a rounded ridge at a height of 120m OD. The core of the village now consists of St Mary's Church, the ruins of a motte and bailey castle, the Manor House, St. Aidan's school, Cawdor House farm and several 19th-20th Century dwellings and agricultural buildings. The motte and stone keep dominate the village and from the summit the keep commands panoramic views south over the lowlands of Pembrokeshire and north to Preseli (fig.1, copy of Murphy 1997, fig. 11.9).

The geology is Silurian mudstones and siltstones (locally known as rab), overlain by thin boulder clay and other fluvio-glacial deposits (Geological Survey of Great Britain (England & Wales) 1974). The land surrounding the village is classified as grade 3 & 4. Agriculture today is predominantly dairy and stock-raising on permanent pasture.

The first archaeological investigation in the village was a salvage operation in 1979 during the construction of a new house. In 1989-1990 Don Benson and then Ken Murphy undertook a survey of the castle and trial excavations in Church field for the Dyfed Archaeological Trust (now Cambria Archaeology). Excavation and building surveys followed in 1994 and a survey of the Green in 1995, as well as the investigation of the possible route of a Roman Road west of Carmarthen carried out by Chris Fenton-Thomas and Quentin Drew.

History

The land around Wiston was gained by the Normans during the invasion of Dyfed in 1093. Much of N. Pembrokeshire was held by a string of castles and through the plantation of colonists in settlements protected by these fortifications. In this region, the most prominent settlers seem to have been the Flemings as an act of policy implemented by Henry I (Rowlands 1980, 147). Other settlements of Flemings may have taken place in Northern England, Scotland and possibly Ireland (Davies 1990, 11).

Wiston's name is apparently derived from Wizo the Fleming. A key document, dated to 1139-48 by Darlington (1968) and contained in the Cartulary of Worcester Cathedral Priory, states:

"Wizo built his church and castle at a site now known as Wiston in the cantref of Daugleddau"

Wizo must have arrived in Pembrokeshire prior to 1112, since bishop Wilfred of St David's (who granted him the church) died in that year. Rowlands suggests that Flemings took part in the conquest of England and Dyfed, operating as mercenaries, and that they acted under their own leaders or *locatores* (Rowlands,

146-8). Kisson (forthcoming) further suggests that after founding Wiston as a borough or town, Wizo went on to do the same thing in Lanarkshire. Wizo died before 1130 (Toorians 1990, 100).

According to the *Brut y Tywysogyon* the native Welsh attempted to repel these incomers, but it was not until 1147 that they seemed to have achieved any success at Wiston, when the castle was taken by Hywel ab Owain (Jones 1955). It was recaptured soon after, but then lost again in 1193 to the Welsh led by Hywel ap Sais, the son of Lord Rhys of Deheubarth, who held it for 2 years (Jones 1952, 74). Twenty-five years later in 1220 it was destroyed by Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, who also burned the town. Following these periodic episodes of destruction, Henry III instructed William Marshall II to repair both Wiston and Narberth (Patent rolls 1901 254-5), although some suggest that Wiston was, in fact, abandoned, and a new castle founded at Picton, 5km to the south (Toorians 1990, 103). King, however, claims that the current keep at Wiston represents a rebuilding by Marshall (King 1962, 327).

After 1220, Wiston passed to the Wogan family, which had Picton and Wiston branches, and at this point the castle may have been superseded by the Manor House, as later references to a monthly court at Wiston suggests manorialisation. It was not until the 16th century, however, that unequivocal evidence of a borough occurs, with reference to:

"...three burgages and gardens in Wiston between the lands of John Wogan and John Goba of the lane and the Mary Lane" (Ancient Deeds 1906, 270)

the latter presumably a reference to the still-surviving holloway between St. Mary's Church and Church Field. In 1577, there is further reference to:

"twelve and a half burgages in the town of Wiston lately bought from different persons" (Green 1916, 199)

By 1694, the Manor House seems to have been in a poor state of repair, although a sketch of the castle and Manor House in c.1740 seems to show it still standing (Gough Maps 37, fol. 25v). The house was largely destroyed soon after 1855. The estate had been sold to Lord Cawdor in 1794 (Carmarthen Record Office, Cawdor 2/740). In 1835, the Commissioners on Municipal Corporations to Parliament (Green n.d. Vol. 19 351-2) recorded, under "Borough of Wiston", a mayor, an alderman, burgesses and an annual fair, although no-one could recall the existence of a charter. A mayor was still elected in Wiston until the earlier years of this century.

The Borough

The extent and the location of the former borough is difficult to determine. It appears to have been a regular planned settlement with its basic grid provided by a pattern of roads: an east-west road, now a holloway leading from the castle entrance; a north-south road, now a terrace, alongside the pond; and the modern east-west road through the village.

The width of this modern road seems to have been originally substantial; wide enough indeed for a market place with an animal pound to the north of the church as the only surviving element of its former use. The road appears to have been

later reduced in width by the construction of a ha-ha to the north of Cawdor House in the 17th-18th centuries. Building platforms mark the position of former house plots alongside the road, but are insubstantial. Linear boundaries revealed by geophysical survey in Church Field suggest a high degree of agricultural subdivision, while earthworks along the northern edge of the field hint at "more complex archaeological remains".

Investigations along the line of a putative Roman road running to the north of the village (Fenton-Thomas & Drew, forthcoming) suggest that it possibly divided into two arms immediately to the west of the village, before travelling on further into Pembrokeshire. One piece of Roman pottery was discovered during the Church field excavations. Murphy suggests that Wizo may have founded his castle on a pre-existing defensive site, of possible Iron Age or Romano-British origin.

Summary of 1990 excavations at Church Field.

In 1990, the Dyfed Archaeological Trust undertook a trial excavation on the site of Church Field the land on which Mr and Mrs Harris have begun building work for their future dwelling, the subject of this present report. Following an initial geophysical survey and with the assistance of Cadw funding, the DAT team focussed their attention on the northern frontage of Church Field, directly adjoining the existing local road. Due to the shortage of time and adverse weather conditions, the excavations failed to clarify the nature and interpretation of some of the structural features that had registered on the geophysical survey.

However, Trench 1 located over a large geophysical anomaly proved to be a large pit, 1 m. deep, capped with a dense layer of burnt clay, below which lay alternating layers of silty loam, charcoal-rich soil and dense charcoal deposits. (carbon-dated 1150±70 BP [CAR -1441] calibrated to date range AD 680-1019) Evidence was also found of stone and timber buildings in trenches 3,4,5,10,11 and 14, also post-holes and hearths.

These trial excavations produced a remarkable quantity of pottery sherds, 99% of which proved to be from the 12th-14th century (although dominated by 13th-14th century material). Most of this medieval pottery (c.80%) was locally made, coarse gravel-tempered cooking pots and jars. The rest was from Ham Green, North Devon, and Saintonge, and there were a few unidentified sherds. Other finds included stone discs and fragments of roofing slate. DAT's interpretation of the plan morphology was to identify three crofts or burgages (property blocks) laid out at right angles to the northern frontage of the main street throughout the borough. According to the DAT excavation report, these seem to have been originally constructed as timber fences which were later rebuilt in stone.

The trial trenches produced "evidence of recutting and redigging of boundaries along persistent alignments". While "the earliest elements appear to pre-date the 13th/14thC and may reflect a degree of formal planning...stratigraphic and pottery evidence suggests that a subsequently broader field pattern was imposed over the whole area, and that buildings on the northern frontage had been abandoned before the beginning of the 15th century." (Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd Half-Yearly report November 1990, 9)

Despite DAT's 1990 recommendations regarding outline planning permission granted by Preseli Pembrokeshire DC for three dwellings on the site (i.e. that a 20-metre strip bordering the northern and eastern boundaries of Church field be subject to either a total ban on building or to extensive archaeological investigation), the developers obtained permission to build one dwelling provided a suitably qualified archaeologist was present during the excavations for foundations to the proposed development ('a watching brief'). This was subsequently organised for the 17th-18th November 1997, and Adrian Turgel of the Department of Archaeology at Lampeter observed the mechanical preparation of foundations.

The Watching Brief

A JCB cut trenches for foundations of one dwelling; starting at the south-east corner and moving anti-clockwise (fig. 2). The main foundation trenches were 1.10 m wide at the northern end of the site, decreasing to 80cms at the southern. Within the area of the excavation, topsoil was also removed to a depth of 30cms to allow for a concrete floor slab. As well as the foundation trenches a track from the main road to the new building was excavated to a depth of 35cms, but no appreciable evidence for structural features or pottery sherds was noted at this depth.

Many small fragments of pottery and some larger sherds were found (see below) whilst the digger was excavating the north-eastern quadrant of the building area; these were brought back to Lampeter for further investigation (see report below). Only one significant archaeological feature was observed: an area of burnt material, mostly wood ash and burny soil, which was exposed in one of the internal foundation trenches at a depth of 45 cms. This was probably a hearth site (see fig. 2).

A notable feature of the general stratigraphy exposed by the excavations was the appreciable difference in depth of topsoil between the northern and southern trenches. Topsoil at the northern end was 40-50 cms deep, whilst at the southern end topsoil depth was only 20-30 cms. suggesting considerable former cultivation and manuring towards the front of the suggested burgage plots in this part of Wiston.

The site slopes slightly down from the road, and vegetational changes to the north of the development site, along with an apparent levelling of the ground in places, suggests that this area (see fig.3) could be the location of earlier dwelling sites. Pottery finds at the northern end of the site seem to be in keeping with such an interpretation, and the date of some of this ceramic material might reinforce DAT's suggestion that the site could be part of the burgage plots originally planned and laid out in the 12th century. If so, then the area to the north-west of the site might be of particular interest for further study (given the owner's consent) or at least should be treated with a certain amount of respect and caution regarding further development in this specific location - i.e. as long as this area of the site was left free of future buildings or limited to single spit cultivation (executed with care) much of the underlying archaeology is likely to be preserved.

Finds

Dee Brennan

A total of 24 sherds of medieval and 3 of post-medieval pottery was recovered from the watching brief. The following limited discussion of the vessels is due directly to the nature of their unstratified recovery. The material evidence, although sparse, would seem to reflect and confirm interpretations of 12th to 14th century activity within the study area.

The medieval material consists almost totally of local pottery with evidence for only one non-local vessel from the Ham Green area of Bristol. The 'local' pottery comprises sherds from hand-made cooking pots (16 unglazed) and jugs (6 glazed) in gritty fabrics identified under the generic term Dyfed Gravel-tempered ware. Slight variations in the fabric were first recognised and described by C.O'Mahoney (1985, 20), and a recent survey of medieval ceramics in Wales provides a summary of the forms and distribution of the ware(s) (Papazian & Campbell 1992, 56-59).

The 'local' content of this small collection mirrors previously excavated material from Wiston, from the 1990 Church Field excavation and from consolidation work carried out on the castle (Brennan in Murphy, forthcoming). The predominance of locally made pots appears so far to be typical of ceramic assemblages from within the region including Gwbert (Benson et al. 1978), Cardigan Castle (O'Mahoney in Murphy 1985), and Newport (Brennan & Murphy 1996). A visual analysis of the sherds examined from the watching brief would suggest that more than one centre of production was involved, as is repeatedly evident from other studied assemblages.

The dating of Dyfed Gravel-tempered wares is problematical as there is no chronological type series yet available. As with previously excavated assemblages the local material is dated by the presence of non-local imports, the one non-local vessel in this small collection is a single sherd from an unglazed cooking pot of Ham Green (Bristol region) manufacture, dated to the late 12th/early 13th century. A similar association is noted from other sites in the area. Ham Green wares are rarely found on Welsh sites in late 13th century contexts (Vince 1983, 59-62; Papazian & Campbell 1992, 32-35).

One other vessel of medieval date and local manufacture is the rim and handle of a glazed jug in a distinctive calcareous fabric. The jug is of a type and fabric first recognised at Llanstephan castle. It is suggested that the centre of production was located somewhere along the Carmarthen estuary and that the products of the industry have a mid to late 13th century origin continuing into the 14th century (O'Mahoney, forthcoming).

The earliest of the post-medieval pottery is of probable 17th century date and consists of two base sherds from internally-glazed jars in the distinctive North Devon Gravel-tempered fabric. Kitchen and dairy wares from North Devon flooded the Welsh market during the 17th and 18th centuries. One small sherd of glazed white earthenware is of 19th or 20th century date. .

Acknowledgements

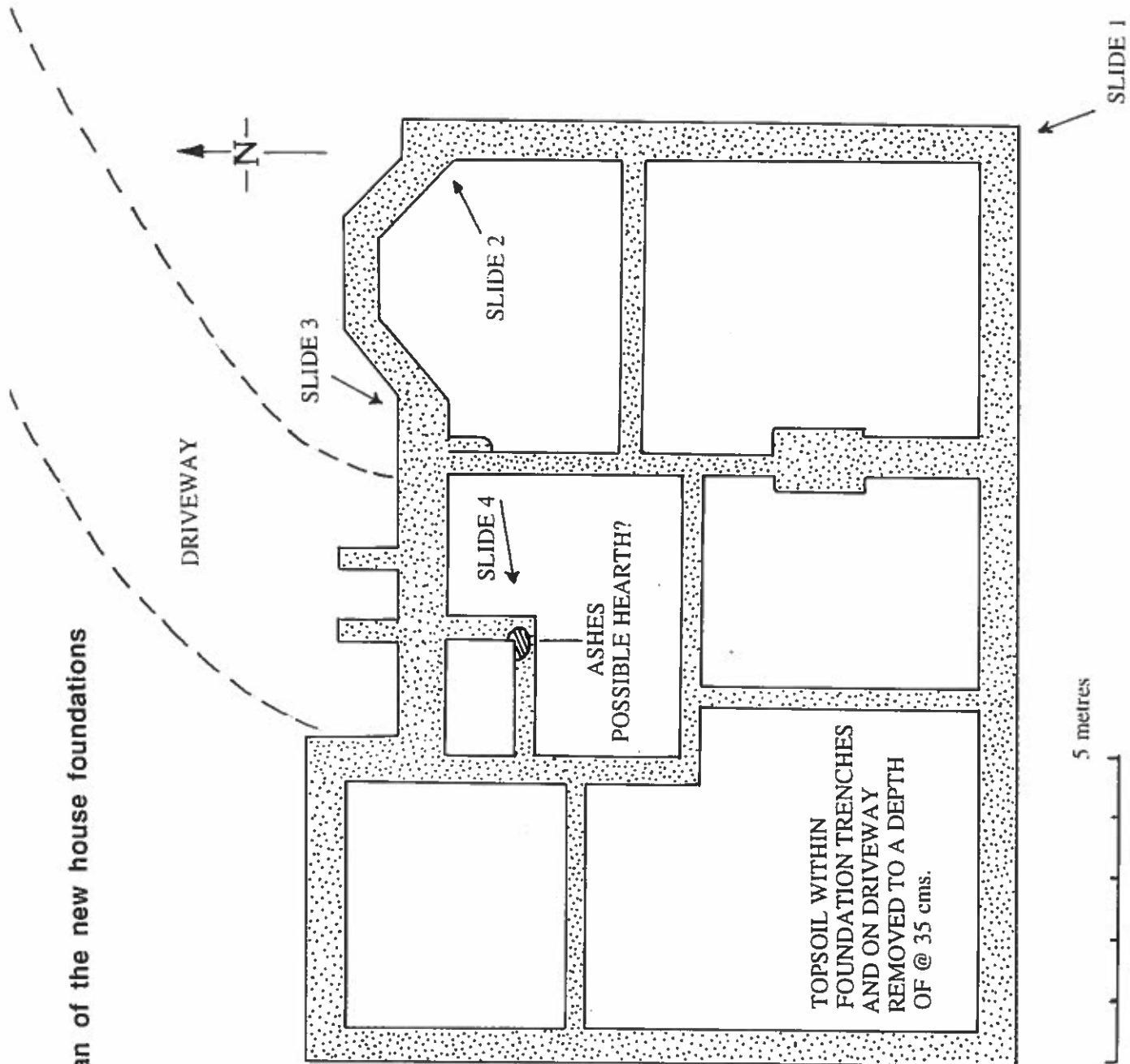
We would like to thank Mrs Harris, the site owner, for her assistance in commissioning the watching brief and for taking such an interest in the outcome. We would also like to thank Jennie Hall, the Sites and Monuments Records Officer for Cambria Archaeology for their time and help in giving us access to the information in their files.

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Fig. 2: The trench plan of the new house foundations



WISTON WATCHING BRIEF, 17TH-18TH NOVEMBER, 1997
 SHOWING LOCATION OF THE NEW DEVELOPMENT WITH GEOPHYSICAL
 ANOMALIES AND TRIAL TRENCHES OF THE 1990 SURVEY/ EXCAVATION.

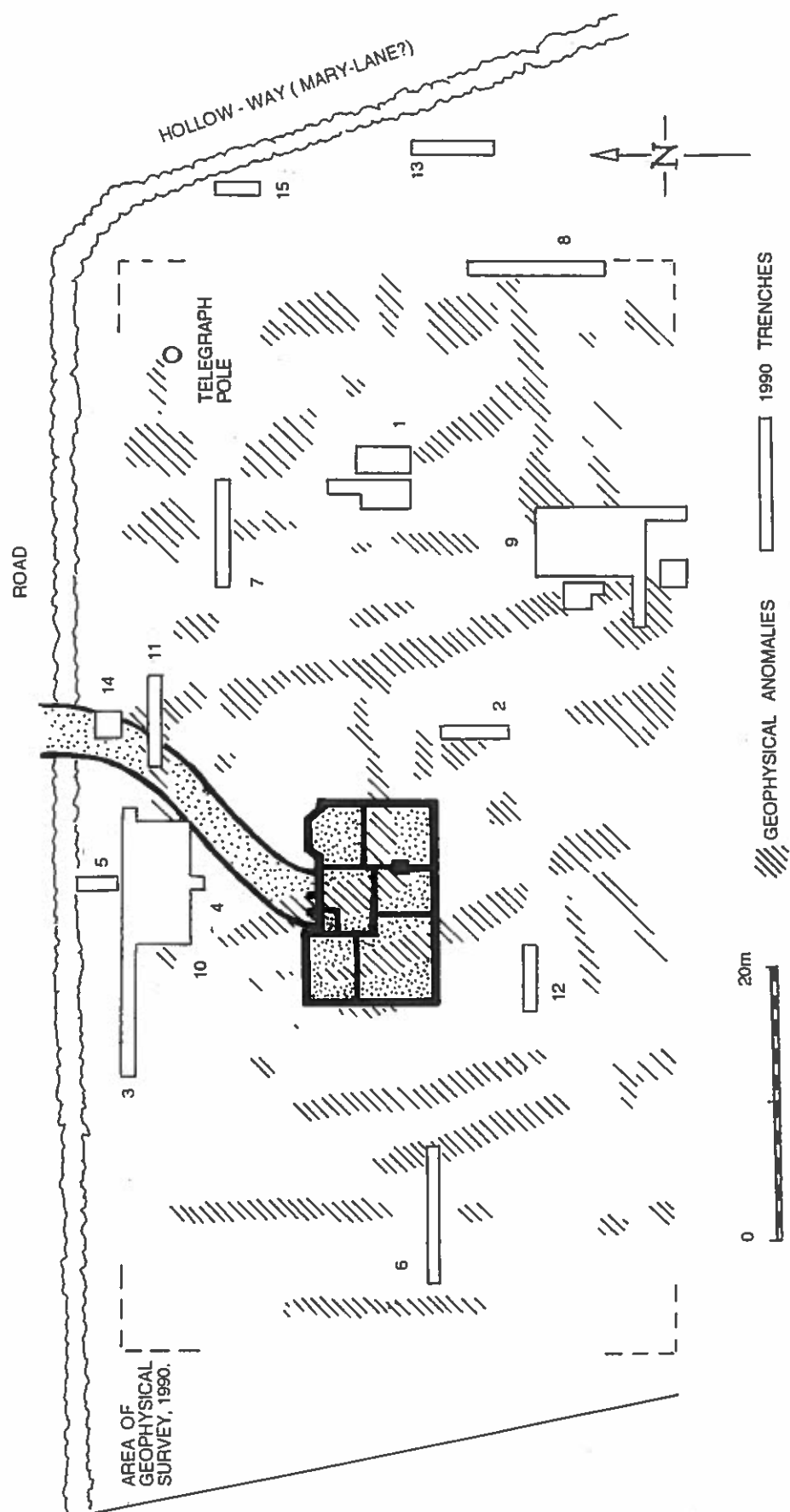


Fig. 3: The relationship of the development to the geophysical survey and excavations of 1990

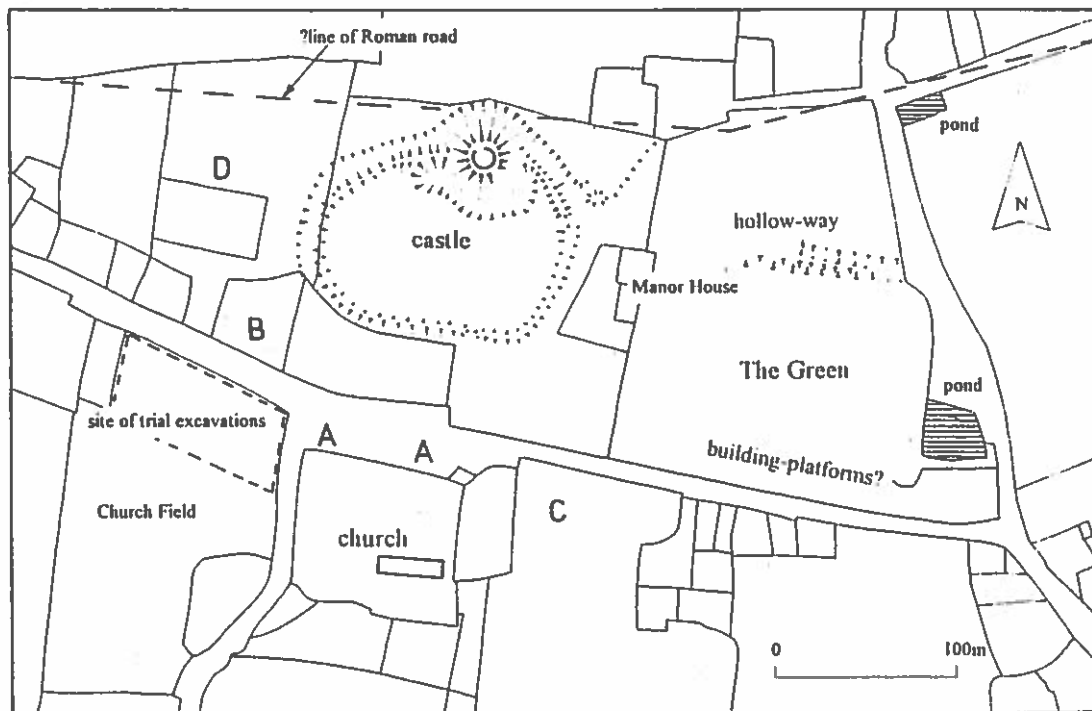


Fig. 1: Copy of Murphy 1997, fig. 11.9