

CONWY VICARAGE CAR PARK

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT AND WATCHING BRIEF

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Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

CONWY VICARAGE CAR PARK
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AND WATCHING BRIEF

for Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments

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Summary

A programme of improvements to the Old Vicarage Car Park, Conwy necessitated an archaeological assessment and a series watching briefs adjacent to the S wall in the area between the castle and the Mill Gate. This area had produced evidence for several stone founded medieval buildings during excavations by Butler in 1963 - 64 and it was thought that important remains might have survived beneath the car park. In the event the 1993 investigations produced evidence of quarrying and the survival of possible Medieval soil layers, however, much of the site appears to have been subjected to widespread truncation during construction of the original car park in 1965.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE WORK

The Castle Car Park, Rosehill Street, Conwy (NGR SH782744), also known as Vicarage Car Park, was the subject of a planning application submitted by Aberconwy Borough Council for a redesign and improvement of parking facilities adjacent to Conwy Castle. As the area is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) adjacent to the castle, an application for Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) was also submitted to CADW (Welsh Historic Monuments). In order to assess the likely archaeological implications of the development proposal, the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT) was contracted by Cadw to carry out a limited archaeological assessment of the site, to establish the depth at which archaeology survived below the level of the car park.

In February 1993, after consultation with Cadw, a series of small trial trenches was excavated in potentially sensitive areas within the proposed development. The results were forwarded to CADW who subsequently granted Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) for the development work to proceed subject to programme of archaeological works being carried out. The Gwynedd Archaeological Trust was contracted to carry out these works.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND IMPLICATIONS

The present car park was previously the site of Conwy Vicarage and its gardens. The vicarage building, formerly Horse Mill farm, was built in the early seventeenth century and demolished in 1964 to enable the widening of Rosehill Street and the construction of a car park to cater for the increasing numbers of visitors to Conwy. Rescue excavations were carried out by L.A.S Butler during 1963-4 prior to the commencement of the work (Arch. Camb. cxxviii (1979). Evidence of medieval occupation was discovered relating mainly to the early years of the Edwardian occupation (1283-c.1400) and included the remains of stone foundations of three large buildings attributable to this period. Following a period of destruction in the early fifteenth century (probably during the Welsh Revolt of 1401), the area remained unoccupied, used for quarrying and rubbish pits until the establishment of Horse Mill farm and subsequently the vicarage. The vicarage gardens themselves received some alterations during the Victorian era.

The nature of the work carried out during preparation of the Vicarage garden site for construction of the car park following Butler's excavations is not recorded in detail. It is clear however that the remains of the medieval building foundations were left intact following the excavations, and therefore the likelihood of archaeological remains surviving below the level of the car park in some areas was possible.

THE FEBRUARY 1993 ASSESSMENT

The initial assessment carried out in February 1993 by GAT involved the excavation by machine of four trenches, three along the base of the town wall and one at the site of the

proposed bus pull-in. These indicated that the makeup over the area of the proposed improvements was generally about 0.3m in depth with the trench at the bus pull-in revealing overburden up to 0.6m thick. From this evidence it appeared that any disturbance to these depths would not be likely to damage archaeologically significant deposits.

THE BRIEF

Subsequently, a project brief was produced by Cadw defining the programme of archaeological works that should be carried out as a condition of the SMC (see appendix). This involved archaeological monitoring and recording during all ground disturbance, as well as restrictions on the maximum depths of disturbance permitted. Areas seen as particularly sensitive were those nearest the town walls themselves and in the area of the medieval hall located during the 1963 excavations. Identification of remains relating to this feature would warrant an alteration of agreed excavation depths to ensure preservation.

In all cases GAT was to monitor agreed excavation depths.

It was also stipulated that an archaeological assessment be carried out in the area affected by the proposed bus pull-in where the disturbance would be to a greater depth. A trial trench was to be located within the area of the proposed bus pull-in to determine the survival of archaeological deposits and/or features below the known depth of modern build-up as ascertained during the initial assessment of February 1993. Provision was available for a more extensive response should the initial intervention produce evidence indicative of significant archaeology.

METHOD AND TECHNIQUES

Archaeological monitoring and recording was carried out by GAT personnel during the redevelopment work in March 1993. This involved a series of watching briefs during machine excavation by the contractors for drainage gulleys and trenches, lighting ducts, and landscaping for parking 'islands'. In addition, an assessment excavation was undertaken in the area of the proposed bus pull-in (Fig.2 trench A). This involved a combination of hand dug trenches and the use of a mechanical excavator where appropriate.

Sections at the sites of all ground disturbance were cleaned by hand and the recording involved black and white negative and colour transparency photography at 35mm format, written descriptions on standard GAT record forms and in the site notebook, scaled and sketch section drawings as appropriate and scaled plans of selected areas. A site plan locating all of the trenches was produced by total station.

RESULTS

The locations of the following areas are cross-referenced to site plan Figure 2. The description of each area moves from west to east across the site.

THE ASSESSMENT EXCAVATION: The Bus Pull-In

Trial Trench A(i) (Fig.3a)

An initial small trench 3.0m x 2.0m was excavated by hand at the east end of Trench A. The trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.9m. Services running parallel to Rosehill Street had heavily disturbed the northern half of the trench. The services were capped by a concrete covering of 0.20m thickness. This part of the trench was therefore abandoned. Excavation of the remaining southern half of the trench revealed stratified deposits.

The lowest layer (006) 0.65m thick consisted of a loose mid-brown silty clay (006) containing c.50% of poorly sorted broken stone and post-medieval material, shell, clay-pipe fragments and examples of 19th century Buckley ware. Sealing this was 005, a maximum 0.30m thick

layer of firm mid to dark brown silty sand with patches of sticky grey clay and containing jumbled stones to 0.10m. Overlying 005 was 003, a thin layer (0.10m) of loose mid-brown sandy clay. This deposit contained post-Medieval pottery sherds and glass fragments. Overlying this sequence was the car park make up consisting of 0.40m of crushed pink stone and 0.10m of tarmac. (not shown in Fig.3)

Trial Trench A(ii) (Fig.3b)

A trench 1.0m by 5.0m was excavated by machine extending Trench A(i) in a westerly direction (see Fig.2).

It was hoped to establish the nature and extent of deposits recorded in Trench A(i). Excavation of Trench A(ii) revealed two large cuts each containing a series of fills. The earliest cut was 025 which appeared to have truncated the bedrock. There appeared to be some slumping at the edge of the cut or possibly a recut. The lowest fill (024) contained two sherds of 18th century pottery. The later cut 021 contained two fills which appeared to correspond to 005 and 006 seen in Trench A(i)

Main Trench A

A trench, 31.0m by 4.0m was machine excavated by the contractors to a maximum depth of 0.80m, for construction of the proposed bus pull-in. As identified in Trench A(i) a strip 1.3m wide running parallel to Rosehill Street had been heavily disturbed by the installation of modern services the full length of the trench. In the area to the west of Trench A(ii) the local gritstone bedrock was observed to be, for the most part, directly below the modern car park make-up or in places overlain by a very compacted dark grey clay. No further archaeological deposits or anomalies were noted.

WATCHING BRIEFS

Trench S (Fig. 3b)

A trench 3.0m by 1.0m was excavated by machine to a depth of 1.05m close to the town wall within the area of the old vicarage building. The west facing section of the trench was cleaned.

The basal layer (016), 0.40m thick of loose mid brown silty clay containing frequent charcoal and mortar flecks, small fragments of coal and shell. This layer was cut by 014, a v-shaped trench 0.55m wide at the top. The fill of this cut was very similar to 016 but also contained several small pieces of animal bone and a group of large sub-angular stones in the upper half of the context. Overlying this was a number of demolition and levelling deposits generally containing frequent mortar and slate waste and sealing the whole sequence was the car park make-up of hardcore and tarmac.

Trench T

A hole 3.0m by 2.0m was excavated by machine to a depth of 1.3m. Gritstone bedrock underlay the car park make-up of 0.20m of hardcore and 0.10m of tarmac. No archaeological features or anomalies were observed.

Trench L

This trench was excavated by machine for an irregular shaped island, removing only tarmac and hardcore to a depth of 0.30m. Lower levels were not disturbed.

Trench E

Trench E involved the excavation of two gully holes and an associated trench. The two

gully holes, both 3.0m by 2.0m were excavated by machine to a depth of 1.10m. A similar sequence of deposits was observed in each pit. The bedrock was overlain by 0.40m of a firm dark brown clay, two further deposits of stony clay and finally the car park make-up. No archaeological features or anomalies were observed in either the gully holes or trench.

Trench X (Fig. 3c)

Trench X was located at the eastern end of the bus pull-in and measured 4.0m by 1.6m. Excavation here by the contractors had to be halted due to the presence of live services. This provided a convenient opportunity to record the north facing section of the trench since it contained deposits which appeared to be archaeologically significant. The trench, dug by machine to a depth of 0.50m, revealed what seemed to be a large cut feature. The section revealed a fairly steep sided cut (019) through a deposit of mixed silty clay (020). The fill of this feature (018), a very loose dark brown clayey silt, contained high concentrations of shell debris, roofing slate fragments, and charcoal flecks.

Trench G

A gully hole c.3.0m by 2.0m was excavated by machine to a depth of c.1.3m. No deposits or features of archaeological significance were observed.

Trench M

A gully hole c.3.0m by 2.0m was machine dug to a depth of 1.50m. Gritstone bedrock directly underlay the car park make-up. No archaeological recording was necessary.

Trench Y

A trench 0.5m deep, 0.80m wide, and 13.90m long was machine dug in the north east area of the site. A very dark grey silty clay containing modern sewage pipe fragments and shell debris underlay a mixed demolition type deposit containing frequent flecks of mortar. This layer underlay the car park make-up. No archaeological features were observed.

Trench B

A gully hole c.4.0m by 2.0m was machine dug to the south east of area Y. Excavated to total depth of 1.15m, the basal layer was a thick deposit of dark grey clay mixed with disturbed bedrock sealed by 0.30m of car park make-up. No archaeological recording was necessary.

Trench N

This trench was excavated for a traffic island located near to the eastern boundary wall of the car park. Only 0.6m around the perimeter of the trench was excavated forming a 'D' shape 9.6m long excavated to depth of 0.30m. There was no disturbance to any archaeology as only the car park make-up was removed.

Trench W

A trench 0.23m deep and 0.70m wide was excavated by machine around the outer edge of the island for the purpose of a foundation trench for kerbing. In the majority of the trench compacted dark grey clay lay directly beneath the car park make-up of hardcore and tarmac. In places the dark clay deposit was removed to reveal a layer of large (0.10m in size) crushed stones. No archaeological evidence was encountered.

Trench D

A trench 3.0m by 2.0m was machine dug for another gully pot. Excavated to c.1.0m deep. Gritstone bedrock 0.10m lay beneath a layer of compacted dark grey clay, which was itself

sealed by the car park make-up. No archaeological features or deposits were observed.

Trench C

A trench 5.5m by 1.0m was excavated by machine at the eastern end of the site. The depth increased from c.1.0m at the west end to 1.20m deep at the east end. Gritstone bedrock was sealed by a brown silty clay layer varying in depth from 0.70m to 1.05m. This deposit contained a small amount of shell and bone fragments. Overlying this layer was 0.10m of compacted dark grey clay, sealed by the car park make-up.

Trench Z

A trench 0.40m wide by 22.0m long and 0.40m deep was excavated at the eastern end of the site. Gritstone bedrock was exposed in places. This was underlying 0.15m of yellowish brown clay underlying a thin layer of compact dark brown clay immediately below the car park make-up. No archaeological features were observed.

INTERPRETATION

Archaeological observations during reconstruction of Conwy Vicarage car park produced no evidence of medieval features which can be matched with those described by Dr Butler during his excavations. Indeed, not one find of medieval date was recovered.

This can be partly attributed to the constraints on the development design and restrictions on the depth of disturbance imposed by Cadw as part of the SMC. The depth restrictions set for the areas where Butler identified his buildings meant that ground disturbance here was minimal. Area Z was located within the area of the Eastern Hall, however, no evidence for the building was observed.

The deep, brown silty clay deposit noted in area C may be the same as a similar widespread context identified by Dr Butler as medieval in date.

Several trenches produced evidence possibly representing the quarrying activities that have taken place since at least the late 18th century. Deposits encountered in areas X and A most likely represent post-medieval backfilling of possibly much earlier quarry pits. Area X was within the area of quarry 2 as identified by Butlers excavations. Area Y was within the area of quarry 3. At the time of the 1963-4 excavations an orchard was located in the hollow of a large quarry pit, which was partially back filled at that time. Butler describes the filling in of this feature. Deposits noted in area Y would seem to correlate with this very recent backfilling.

Areas S and A were located within the area of the former vicarage building. Observations in Trench A would seem to suggest that all traces of the building were removed at the time of demolition, the natural bedrock being present below the car park make-up in all but the eastern area which where cut 025 may be the edge of a quarry. Area S produced a cut feature (014), which may represent earlier activity on the site of the old vicarage, although no dating evidence was recovered to confirm this.

The very compacted dark grey/brown clay encountered in areas Z, D, W, B, E, and S, appeared to be a redeposited material possibly laid down and compacted during the car park construction.

CONCLUSIONS

The project was successful in its prime objective of minimising damage to archaeological evidence at the site. Whether the said evidence has actually survived the development of the original car park is still, however, open to question. Information regarding the construction of the original car park is limited to a statement from Dr Butler to the effect that, "...the area was 'levelled' to provide a flat surface....", (CAM 1/2/6214/11 Annexe 1). This may mean

either that material was dumped to level the site up and the car-park constructed over this, or that material was removed from the site, the site levelled down and the car-park then constructed. Dr Butler describes a deep garden soil overlying much of the site, (Arch. Camb. Vol. 127 p. 43 - 69), and as little evidence of this was encountered during the recent investigations it may suggest the latter of the two options. This may mean that the levelling process, along with the known quarrying, has severely disturbed or perhaps entirely removed the underlying archaeology in large areas of the site.

Comparison of height values from Dr Butlers excavation report against heights for the present ground surface suggest a consistent lowering of the area by an average of 0.5m. The apparent large variation in the height of the ground surface between the level recorded during the 1963-64 excavations and those recorded in 1993 coupled with the fact that evidence of medieval occupation identified during the 1964-5 excavations was not observed during the recent work suggests that much of the archaeology that Butler observed has now been truncated.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES

The archive material generated by the project is at present held at the offices of GAT.

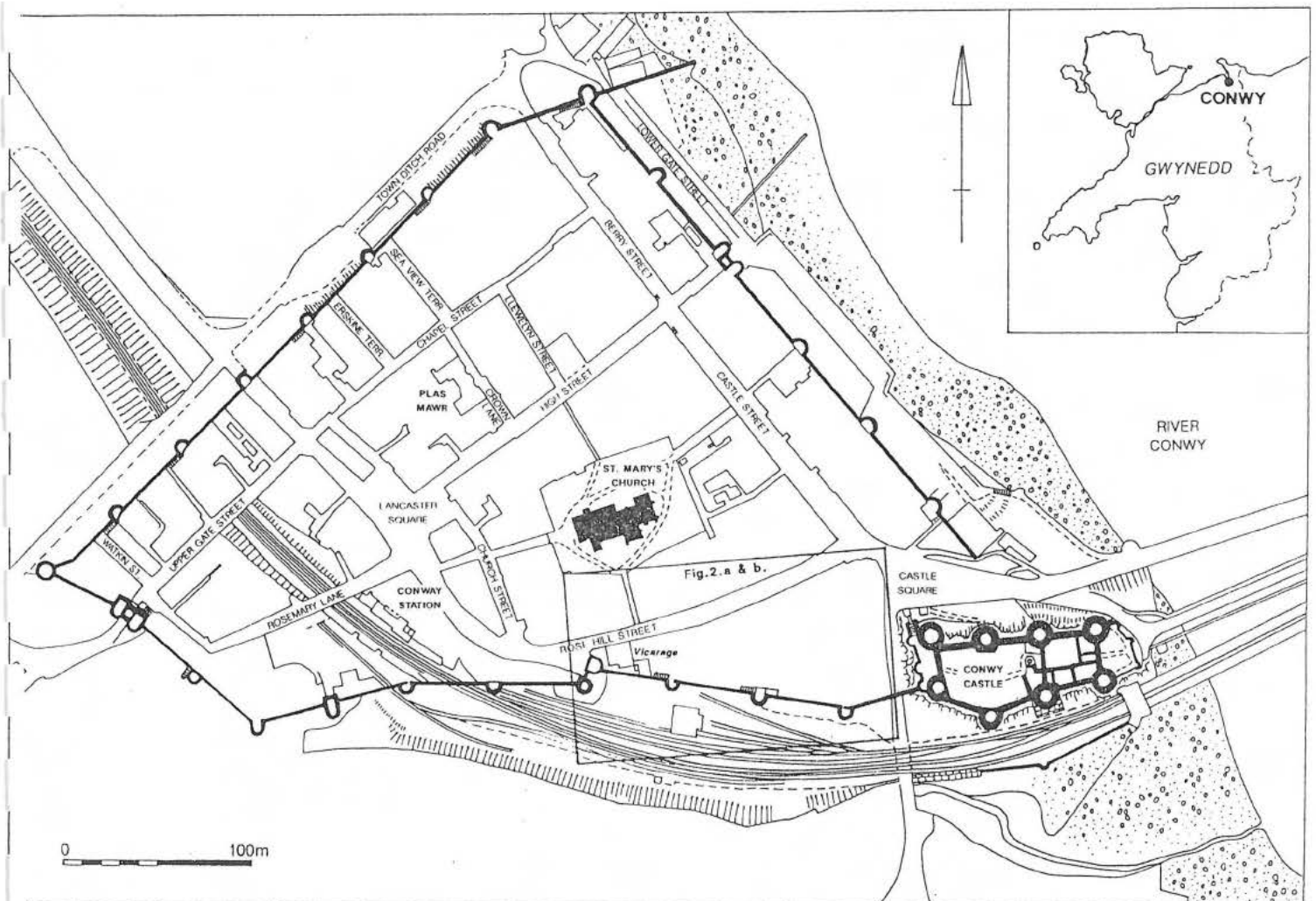
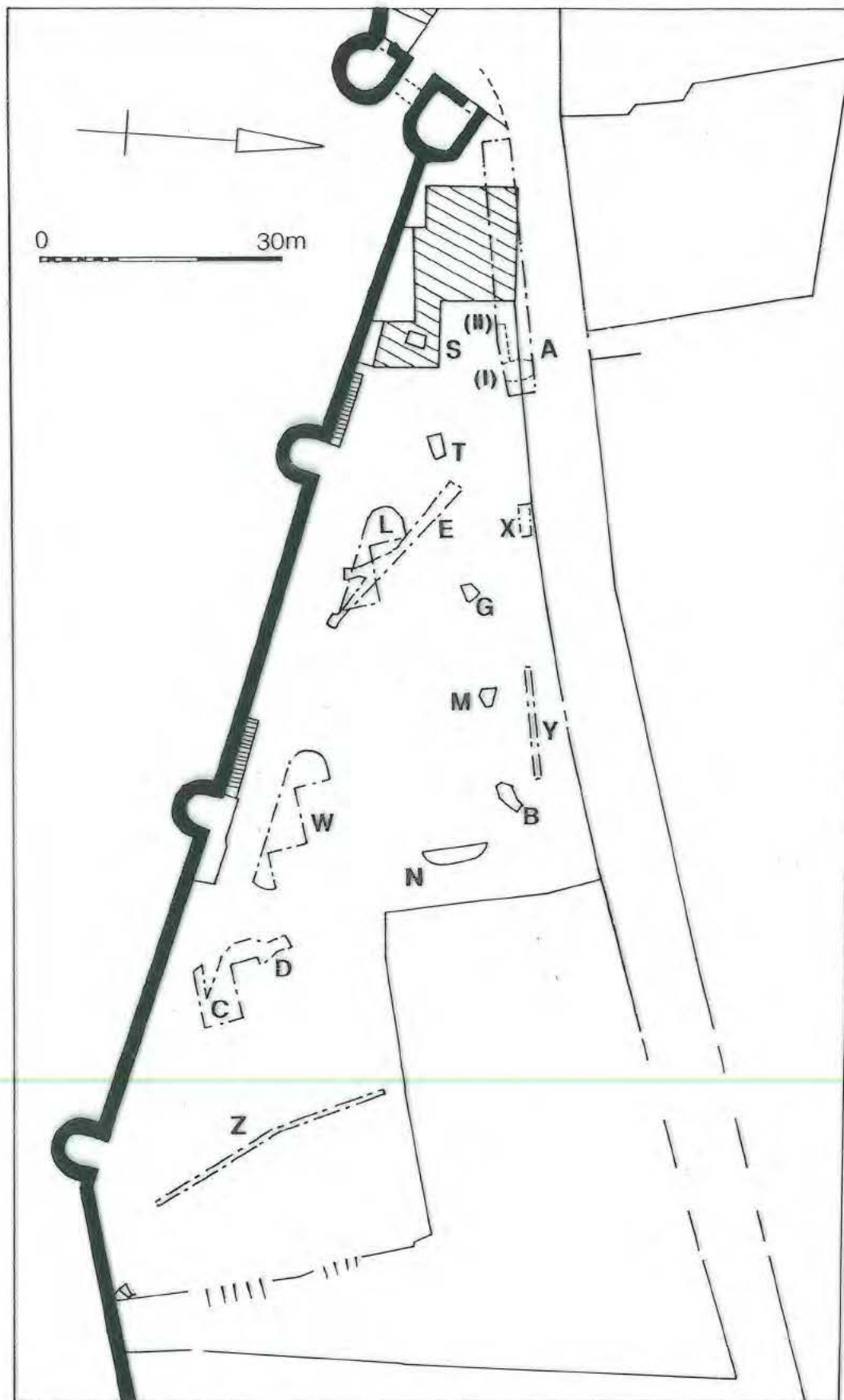


Fig. 1 Conwy & areas of excavations.



2.b.

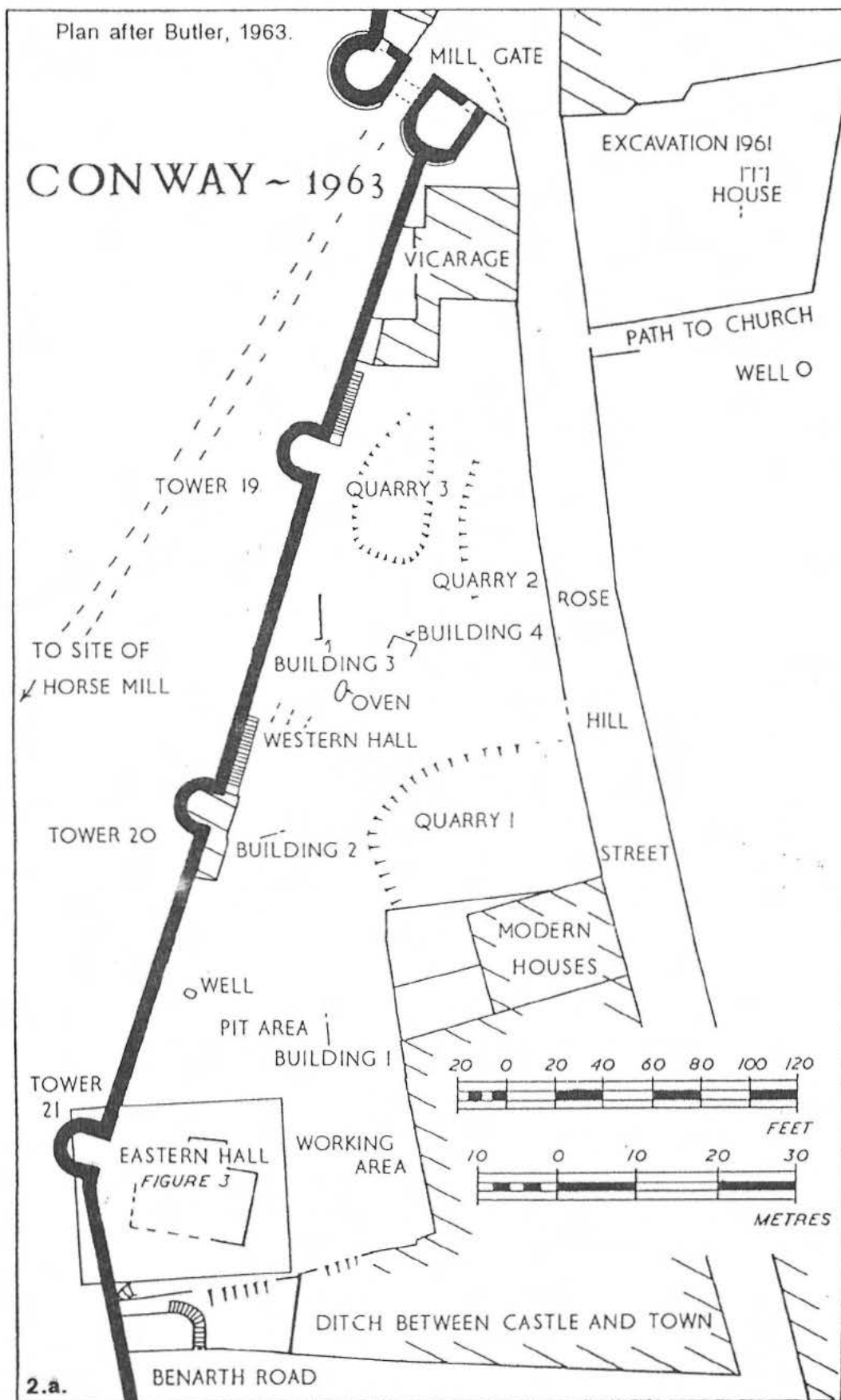
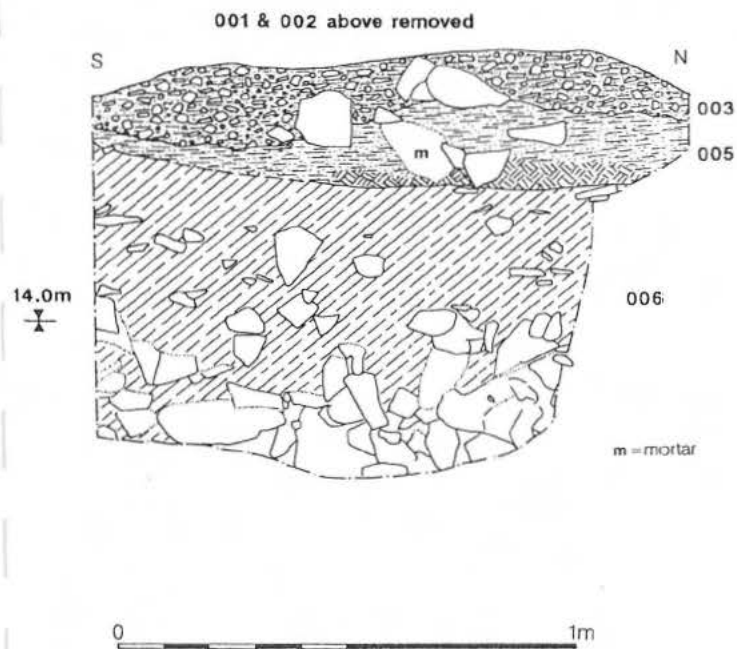
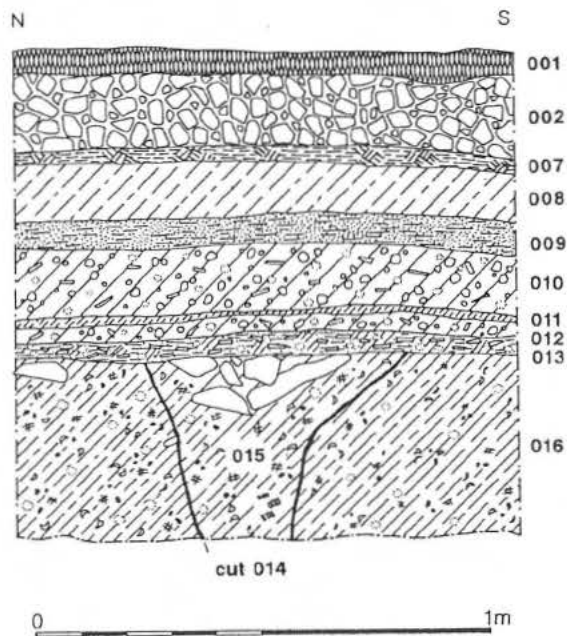


Fig. 2a Butlers 1963 excavations.

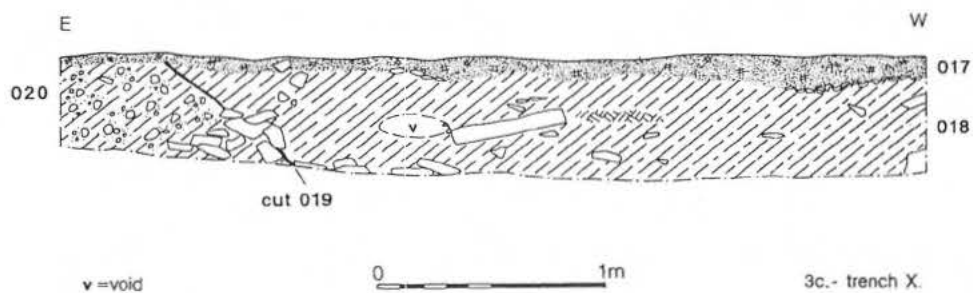
Fig. 2b 1993 trench locations.



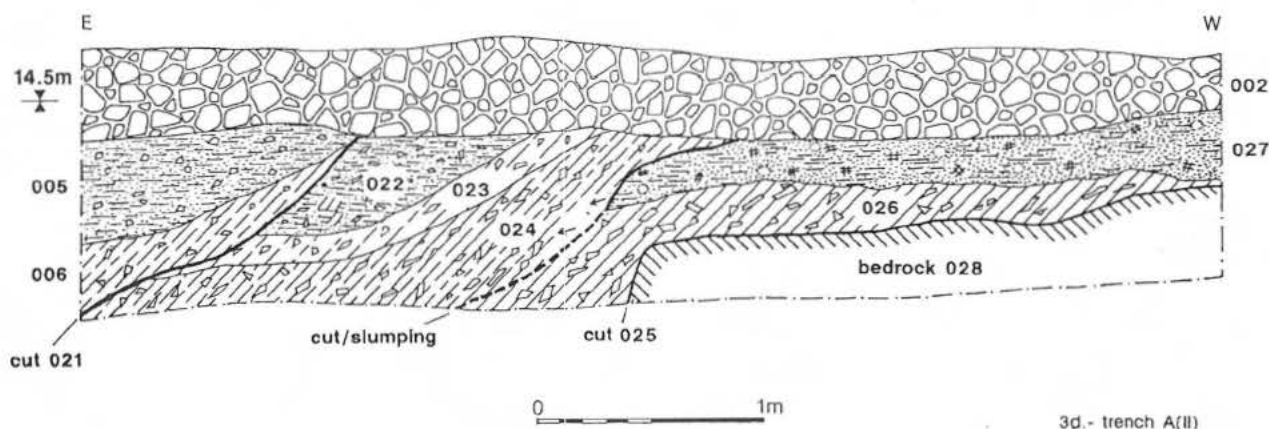
3a. - trench A(I)



3b. - trench S.



3c. - trench X.



3d. - trench A(II)

Fig. 3 Section drawings from trenches A(I), S, X, & A(II).

