

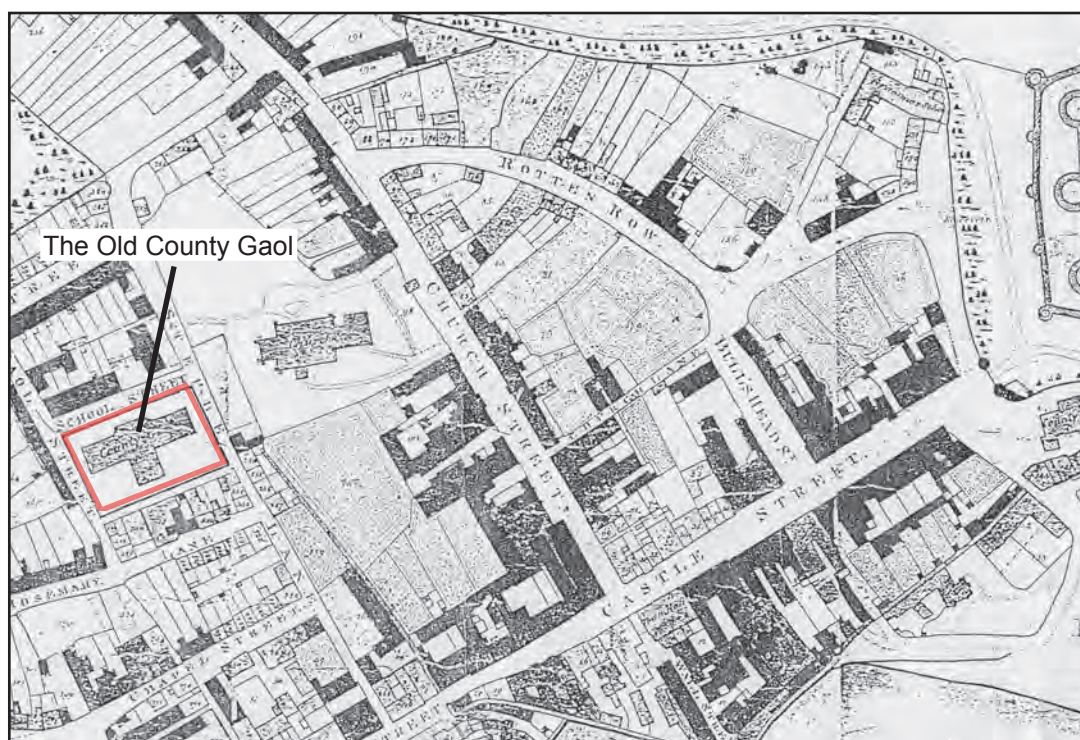
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# THE OLD COUNTY GAOL, BUNKER'S HILL, BEAUMARIS, ANGLESEY: ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF DURING EXCAVATION OF TRENCH FOR NEW FOUL WATER DRAIN

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Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Project No. G1831

Report No. 529



Beaumaris Gaol: Part of the Baron Hill Estate Map 1829 (UWB 6496)

Prepared for Cyngor Ynys Môn

by George Smith  
8th April 2004

GWYNEDD  
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**March 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> 2004**

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## INTRODUCTION

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust was asked by Ynys Mon Council to observe the excavation of a trench within an external yard of The Old County Gaol, Bunker's Hill, Beaumaris at SH 603760, GAT PRN No. 2590 (Fig. 1). The work was required because the Gaol is a Historic Listed Building, Grade II\* and a Scheduled Ancient Monument, Anglesey 66. It also lies over the site of part of the early town of Beaumaris, at least as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century. The trench was needed to insert a new foul-water drain from the west wing of the Gaol building to join with an existing manhole in the south corner of the south-west yard of the gaol.

## METHODOLOGY

The site was visited on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> March when the north end of the pipe trench had been excavated by hand. The site was visited again on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March when the remainder of the trench was excavated. The trench was cut neatly and only required minor cleaning except at the south end, close to the existing manhole, where it cut an earlier stone-lined culvert, which had to be properly exposed to allow recording. One side of the entire length of trench was then drawn and the area of the culvert was planned in detail. The trench was also photographed. The trench position was tied in to the surrounding Gaol walls.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Beaumaris and Newborough, the last of the Edwardian planted settlements in North Wales were founded after the sacking of Caernarfon Castle by Madog ap Llywelyn in 1294. Work began on the construction of the castle protected by a large moat in an area of low-lying marshy ground (Beau Mareys or Beautiful Marsh) in 1295. The town lay close by and was granted its borough charter in 1296. The town replaced an earlier prosperous Welsh town situated nearby at Llanfaes, deriving its income from sea-trade. The population of Llanfaes was removed by Edward to a new town at Newborough on the west coast of Anglesey and Beaumaris initially prospered with 132 burgages taken up in the first ten years (Lewis 1912, 63). The political situation soon stabilised and as a result defences were no longer as necessary. The castle was never completed and the town walls were not constructed despite a long petition to Edward II from the burgesses (*ibid* 102).

Beaumaris was attacked by Owain Glyndwr in 1403 and partially burnt down. The castle was taken in 1404 but re-taken in 1405 (Soulsby 1983, 79). In 1407 the burgesses received a royal donation of £10 'in aid of making a ditch around the aforesaid town'. Work continued in 1414, when Gilbert, Lord Talbot, the reorganiser of the decayed post-Glyndwr boroughs of Anglesey appropriated thirty burgages in order to build a new stone wall around the town. A yearly sum of £20 was set aside from 1451-5 for the repair of the walls.

The original layout of the town must have been truncated to some extent by the new defences, perhaps extending as far as Steeple Lane on the west side, adjoining the site of the Old County Gaol. Speed's map of 1610 (Fig. 2) shows the town wall still surviving at the west side along Steeple Lane, which probably ran along the edge of the town ditch and was then named Clay Pitt Lane, probably referring to the town wall ditch itself or to use of it for digging clay for brick-making and so there may have been brick kilns nearby. The area immediately west of Clay Pitt Lane, including the area of the Old County Gaol was already built up in 1610 and settlement in this area could have begun in the later Medieval period (Fig. 2). There could therefore be surviving remains of this early settlement beneath the gaol buildings.

A memorial stone on the front of the Gaol records it as being erected in 1829. It is also shown on an estate map also dated 1829 showing the Beaumaris properties of the Bulkeley family of the Baron Hill estate (Fig. 3). However, the plan is rather simplified, compared to the actual plan, suggesting that the survey was drawn before the building was actually completed although the street to the west is already named Gaol Street. The gaol was designed by Joseph Hansom, architect (1803-1882), who set up in practice with Edward Welch in 1828. He is best known for his design of the 'Hansom Cab' but in his main profession of architect was responsible for many prominent buildings, using a classical style, including several churches but most notably Birmingham Town Hall. He also designed Victoria Terrace on the sea-front in Beaumaris, as well as Henllys Hall and Bodelwyddan Castle in Flintshire. The gaol seems to have been built on a plot obtained by amalgamation of part of the ground attached to several former small town houses (Fig. 2). The houses were likely to have been rented properties, part of the Baron Hill estate.

There was a County gaol in Beaumaris before 1829 as recorded in documents of the 18<sup>th</sup> century for example in the case of Jane Thomas, Spinster of Llanbedrgoch, consigned in 1773 to the County Gaol at Beaumaris and convicted of stealing 'One Cloth Cloak of the Value of Eight Pence and one Linen Apron of the Value of Two Pence...Guilty To be Transported for seven years' (Ramage 1987, 287). This gaol, jointly owned by the council and the County was just outside the old town wall on the east edge of The Green, the common land by the sea front. The old gaol was identified on the Baron Hill map and schedule as in two parts, the larger part 132, belonging to the County of Anglesey, the smaller part 133 belonging to the Corporation (Fig. 3) and the 'Occupiers or Tenants' of both as 'Prisoners'. It was reported to be in disrepair and escapes from it as being not uncommon at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Williams 1988, 104). Perhaps more significantly its site was wanted for the speculative construction of Victoria Terrace (Nottingham 1994, 27) and so was purchased and the gaol demolished. It was specified that the materials of the old gaol were to be retained by the corporation and some materials may have been incorporated in the new gaol at Bunker Hill though that was supposed to have been completed in 1829 while the old gaol was not cleared until 1830 (*ibid*, 29). The new larger gaol at Bunker Hill reflected the problems associated with the growing population of Beaumaris in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the social effects of the very varied and probably unruly itinerant workforce associated with shipping, mining and quarrying. It was built at what was then a considerable cost of £8000 to the ratepayers and it took some years for the debt to be paid off (Williams 1988, 104). The gaol was used as a police station between 1878-1952.

## THE WATCHING BRIEF

The trench cut for the new drain ran diagonally across the south-west courtyard of the gaol from an existing drain just south of the west wing to an existing brick lined manhole in the south-west corner of the yard (Figs 4 and 7). The trench was 0.50m wide and cut to a depth of 0.5m at the north end inclining to a depth of 0.8m at the south end adjoining the manhole (Fig. 5). For most of its length the trench cut through the modern turf layer, which had been laid over an original gravel yard surface (L2). This in turn had been built on a base layer of gravel and stone chippings (L3) laid over a deep make-up layer of clay and stone (L4). The yard surface, foundation and make-up layer (Fig. 8) appear to be part of the original construction of the gaol and the pipe trench did not cut through into any lower layers that predated the gaol and which might have produced evidence of earlier settlement or activity in the area.

At the south end the pipe trench cut at an oblique angle through a substantially built culvert (F5). This was constructed of a slate slabbed floor, mortared limestone side walls and limestone slab roof (Figs 5, 6 and 9). The internal dimensions of the culvert channel were 0.30m (12in) wide and 0.26m (10in) high. The side wall at the south had been largely destroyed at this point by the construction of the earlier manhole (Fig. 10). The surviving north wall was 0.60m (24in) wide. The culvert was dry and had no internal deposits.

## CONCLUSIONS

The trench cut through deposits forming the original gravel yard surface of the gaol and underlying yard foundation and make-up layers relating to the construction of the gaol in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. There was therefore no archaeological evidence about layers or structures predating the gaol. Such layers could have been truncated by construction of the gaol, but are more likely at this southern, downhill side to have been buried by make-up layers during construction of the level surface of the yard. The make-up layer beneath the yard contained occasional pieces of 18<sup>th</sup> century pottery, butchered animal bone and one piece of medieval pottery. This material was redeposited from elsewhere, but possibly from the excavation of the gaol foundations. It does therefore provide some evidence of previous occupation on the site of the gaol or nearby.

The trench also cut through a stone-lined culvert. This appeared to have also been an original construction belonging to the gaol and the make-up and yard layers had been deposited around and over the culvert (Fig. 5). The culvert was aligned parallel to the gaol wall and appears to have been a foul water drain taking effluent from an external privy at the south-west corner of the west wing of the gaol (Fig. 4) and out under the gaol wall where it must have joined with a main drain.

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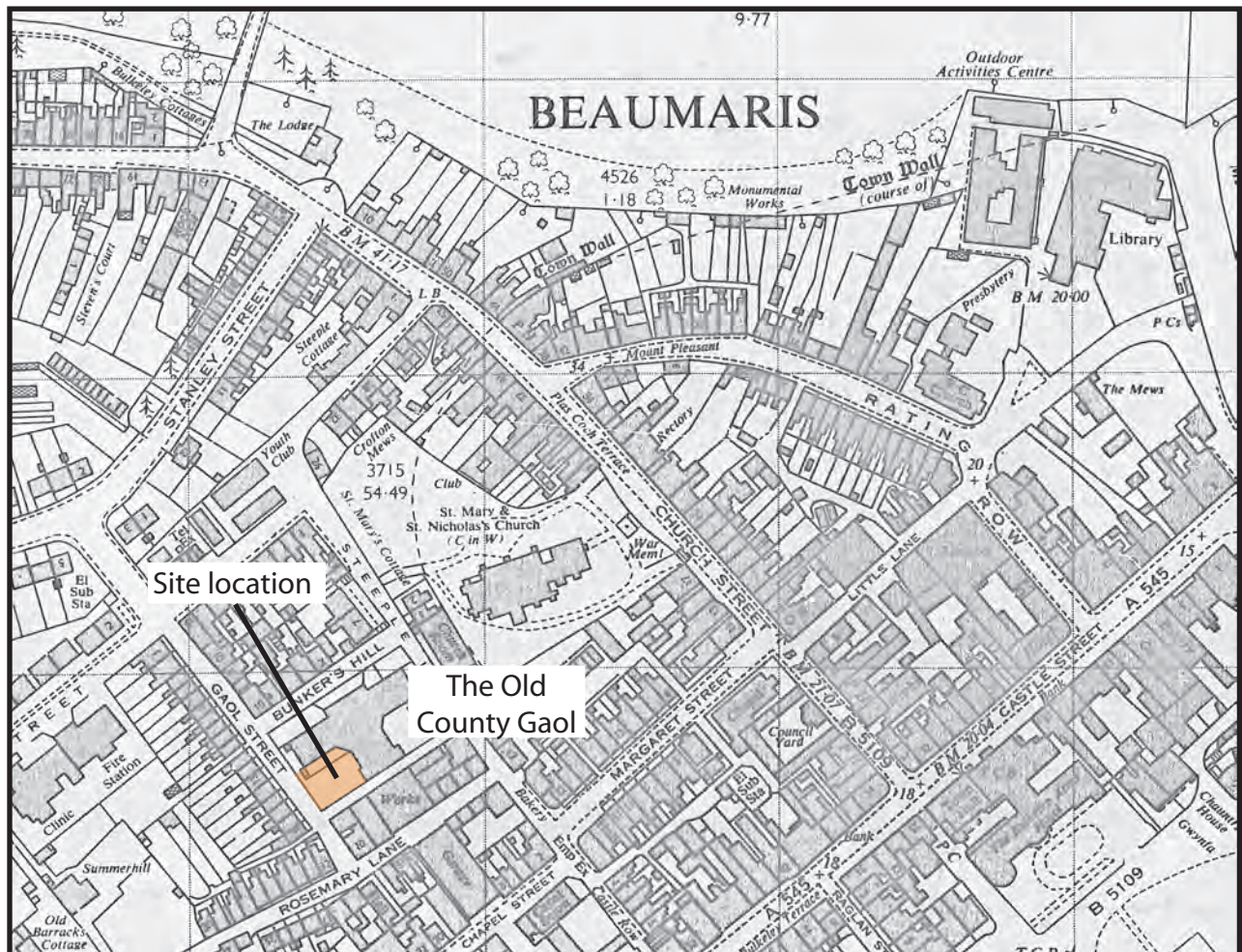


Fig. 1 Beaumaris Gaol. Site location.  
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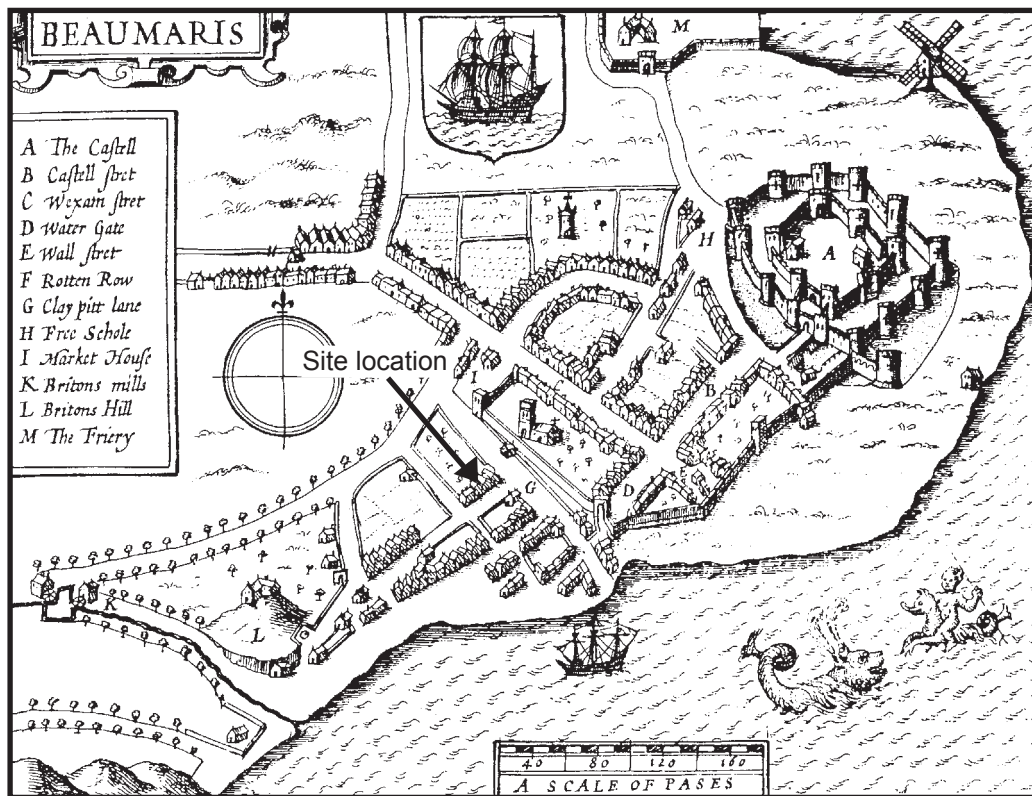


Fig. 2 Beaumaris Gaol: Speed's map of Beaumaris, 1610

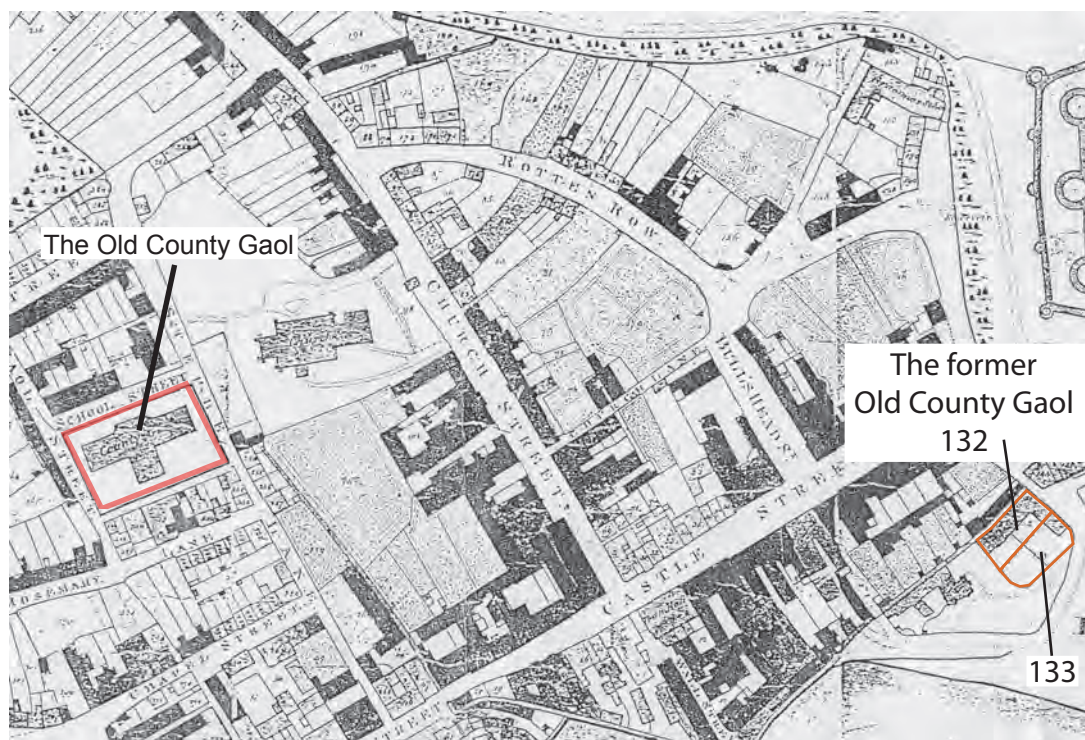


Fig. 3 Beaumaris Gaol: Part of the Baron Hill Estate Map 1829 (UWB 6496)

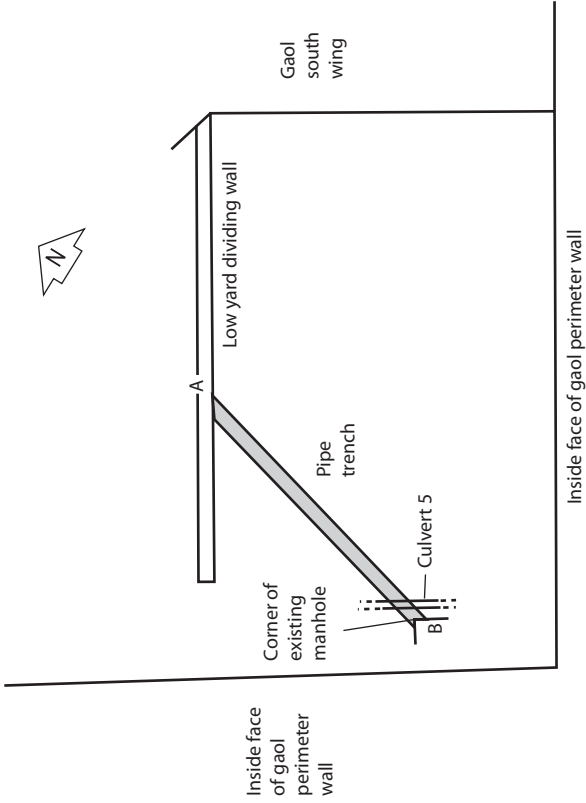


Fig. 4a Beaumaris Gaol: Location of new pipe trench, Scale 1:200 (at A3)

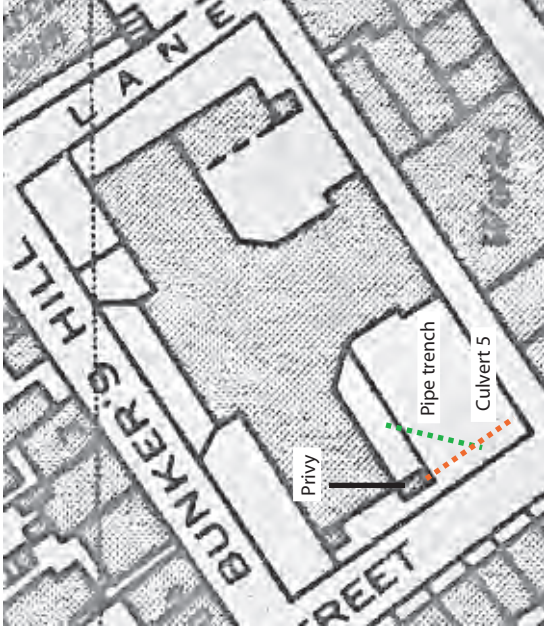


Fig. 4b Beaumaris Gaol: Line of culvert 5 in relation to the Gaol buildings.  
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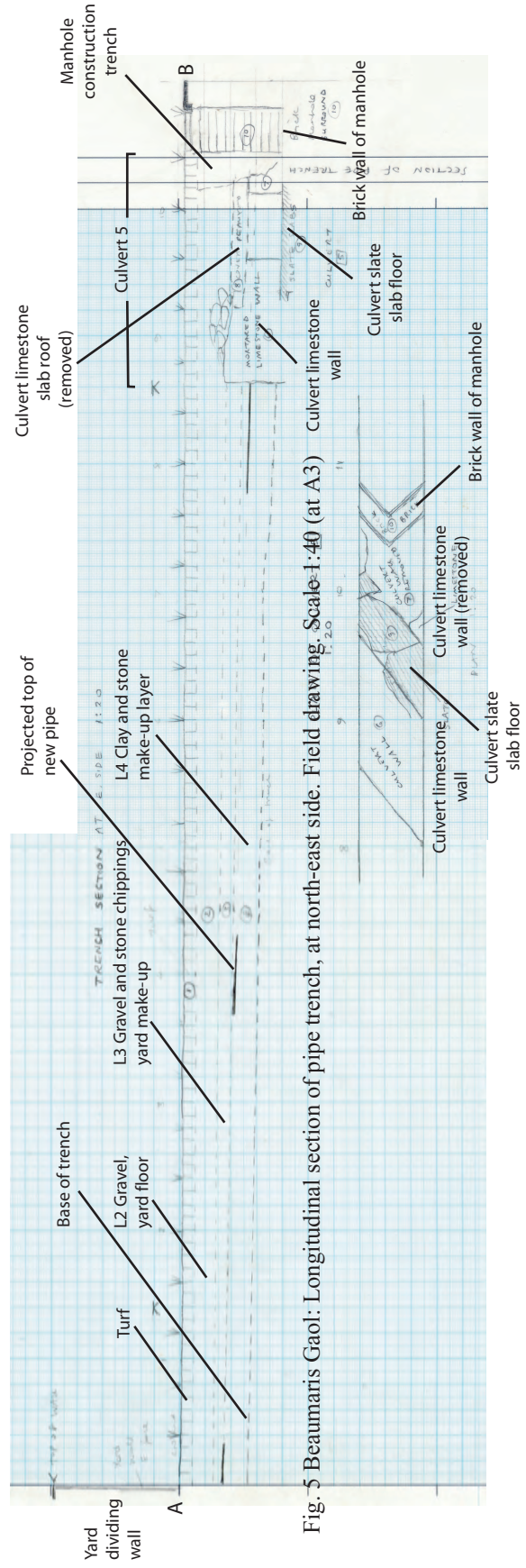


Fig. 5 Beaumaris Gaol: Longitudinal section of pipe trench, at north-east side. Field drawing, Scale 1:40 (at A3)

Fig. 6 Beaumaris Gaol: Plan of culvert 5. Scale 1:40 at A3)





Fig. 7 Beaumaris Gaol: General view of pipe trench, from the north. 1m scale.



Fig. 8 Beaumaris Gaol: Detail of north-east side of the pipe trench showing the former yard surface and make-up layers, from the south-west. 1m scale.



Fig. 9 Beaumaris Gaol: Detail of stone-lined culvert, from the south-east. 1m scale.



Fig. 10 Beaumaris Gaol: General view showing the relationship of the existing man-hole with the culvert and the pipe trench, from the south. 1m scale.







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