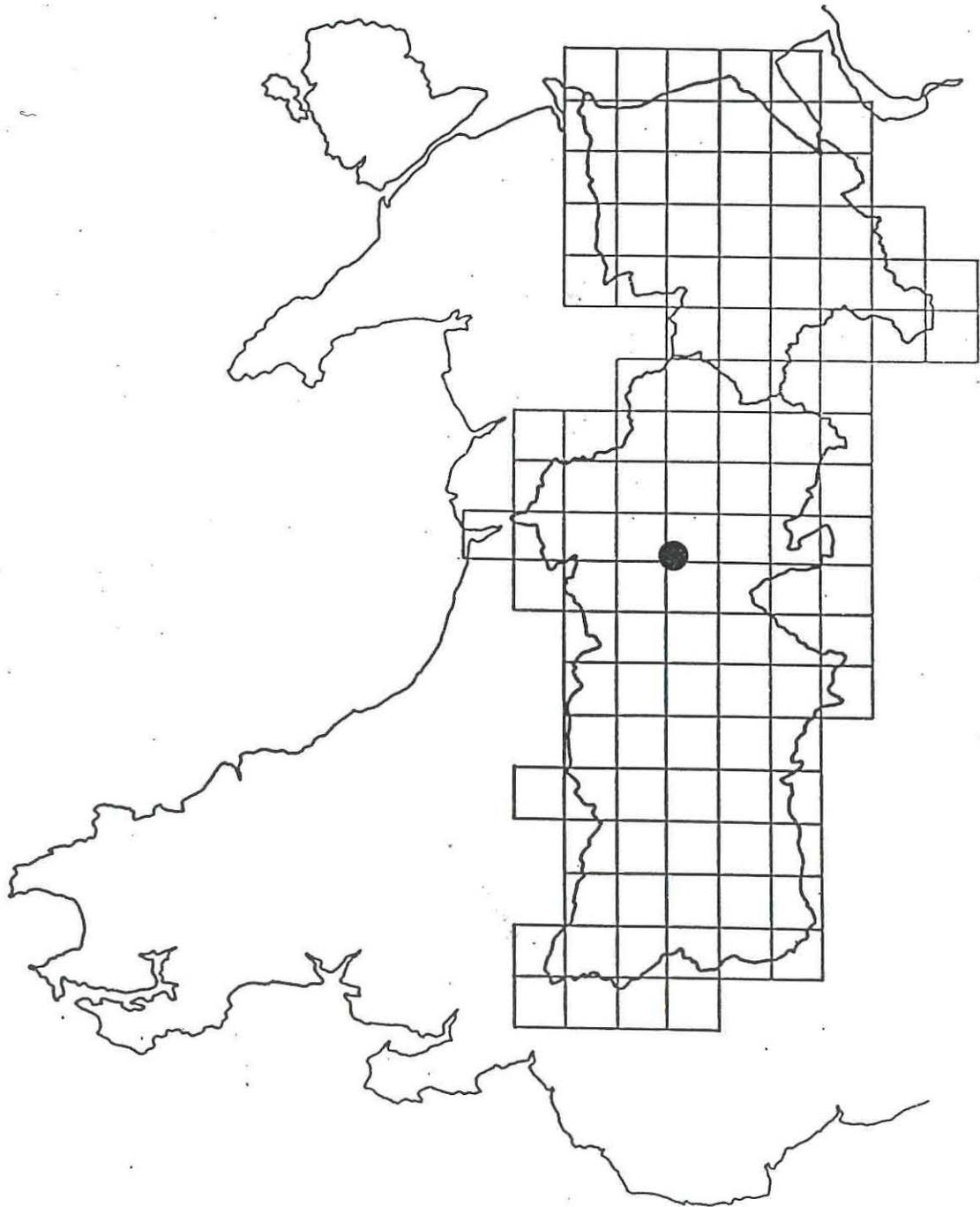


THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Greenlands, Caersws, Powys

INTERIM REPORT ON EXCAVATIONS IN THE VICUS 1989-93



CPAT Report No 75

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INTERIM REPORT ON EXCAVATIONS IN THE VICUS 1989-93

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1 Background

A proposed housing development on land adjoining Greenlands, Main Street (Fig 1) directly affected an area known to contain important archaeological remains belonging to the Roman civilian settlement, or *vicus*, associated with the Roman fort. Excavations conducted in 1989 (CS 17) by the Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) in response to a previous development proposal identified at least four phases of occupation, consisting of timber buildings and associated features, dating to the second and third centuries AD. Excavations by CPAT in 1990 in advance of an extension to the Health Centre to the north-west of the present development (CS 22) had identified a substantial defensive ditch and a series of large pits (Jones 1993).

The current programme of rescue excavation was designed to investigate as much of the development area as possible, either through complete excavation or strategic sampling of available areas. The part of the plot nearest Main Street was not available for further investigation due to the programme of development, and efforts were therefore concentrated on the rest of the plot, together with a single trial trench within the former farmyard to the west.

2 The Excavations (Fig 2)

The excavations were conducted over a 12 week period between March 29th and June 18th 1993 by a team of five archaeologists from CPAT. Apart from adding to the plan of features previously identified, the recent excavations provided significant new information about the Roman occupation. During the first week of the excavations a trial trench c.17 x 1.50m (CS46 A) was excavated initially by machine through the former farmyard adjacent to a stableblock. This revealed at least c.0.40m of Roman stratigraphy, consisting of wall trenches, floors and stone surfaces, including evidence for possible ironworking.

The main area (CS46 B) investigated covered c.400m² surrounding the complex of timber buildings excavated in 1989 (CS17 A). The earliest features identified on the site were revealed in the north-west corner of the excavation. A substantial defensive ditch had already been identified in CS22, measuring c.2.85m across and c.1.50m deep. This was shown to extend further to the south, within the development area (785), and its continuation beyond this may be indicated by subsidence of layers recorded in Trench A. Parallel to this, was a shallow butt-ended ditch (783). A second ditch (513), apparently curving, lay further to the south, having been previously identified in CS 17. Cut into the fill of ditch 785 were a number of large pits similar to those identified adjacent to the Health Centre in 1990. It is likely that they were dug as rubbish pits, since the degree of subsidence which was evident would suggest that at least the lower layers possessed a high organic content which had rotted down. Samples were taken from the pit fills for environmental analysis which it is hoped will reveal detail of the materials deposited within the pits as well as providing information about the surrounding environment by identifying the various natural and cultivated plant species.

The excavation added further to the plans of the timber buildings already identified, but was on the whole unable to provide further evidence for their likely date and function. However, significant new information was uncovered relating to the Phase 2 structures and Building 3. As excavated in 1989, this consisted of a roughly square timber building of slot construction, c.5.40 x 4.70m, with the eastern end apparently open. The recent programme of work has revealed a sub-rectangular enclosure surrounding the building, with entrances to the east and west. Along the eastern side an entrance c.4.20m wide was formed by

ditches 640 and 649 butt-ending. Within the entrance, and set back slightly from the general line of the ditches, was a line of postholes which would suggest a gated entrance. Further postholes were evident along the inner edge of the enclosure ditches, presumably forming a timber palisade. A compacted stone surface (354) extended from the eastern side of the enclosure for at least c.25m, having been previously identified in CS17 B and C.

3 The Finds

The excavations produced a reasonably large assemblage of pottery, some ironwork and a few pieces of bronze. The metalwork is currently awaiting x-ray and conservation at University of Wales, College Cardiff. Unfortunately, the majority of the pottery recovered was fairly fragmentary, consisting of small body sherds. However, some of the larger sherds, and in particular the rim fragments, may well be of considerable importance in helping to date the occupation. It is hoped that the conservation and study of the artefacts will be completed during 1994.

4 Conclusions

The recent excavations together with those in 1989 and 1990 form the largest area yet investigated within the Roman settlement. Although the surviving stratigraphy was not as deep as that at the Old Primary School site (CS 10) excavated in 1984-5 (Britnell, 1989), the site is one of considerable importance as it has shed new light on the layout of the vicus.

The identification of a defensive ditch within this area is of considerable significance, since none were previously known or suspected. However, although the ditch would appear to belong to the earliest phase of occupation identified, it remains undated. At present, the possibilities are that either this either belongs to a smaller defended vicus, or else represents outworks protecting the fort from the east during its early period, or possibly even during its construction.

The degree to which the alignment of the structures varies from one phase to another would suggest that this area of the vicus underwent a considerable reorganisation on several occasions. The function of most of the buildings remains uncertain, although the finds might suggest some metalworking activity within the immediate vicinity, which introduces the possibility that at some point there may have been workshops in the area.

The only building for which it is possible to suggest a function is Building 3. Analogy with similar structures found elsewhere, for example at Brigstock and Colchester, where they occur in multiple groups, would suggest a small Romano-Celtic temple. The date range normally attributed to such structures spans the second and third centuries AD (Jones and Mattingly 1990, 290). At Caersws it would appear that the temple lay within a rectangular ditched enclosure with a main entrance to the east, and a possible opposing western entrance.

Further work is anticipated in the form of a watching brief as the programme of construction proceeds, and it is therefore hoped that more evidence of the Roman occupation will be revealed.

5 References

Britnell, J. E., 1989, Caersws vicus, Powys: Excavations at the Old Primary School 1984-5, British Archaeological Reports, 205.

Jones, G. D. B., and Mattingly, D., 1990, An Atlas of Roman Britain.

Jones, N. W., 1993, "Excavations within the Roman Fort and Vicus, Caersws, Powys", Montgomeryshire Collections, 81.

6 Acknowledgements

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Nigel Jones for CPAT
August 1993

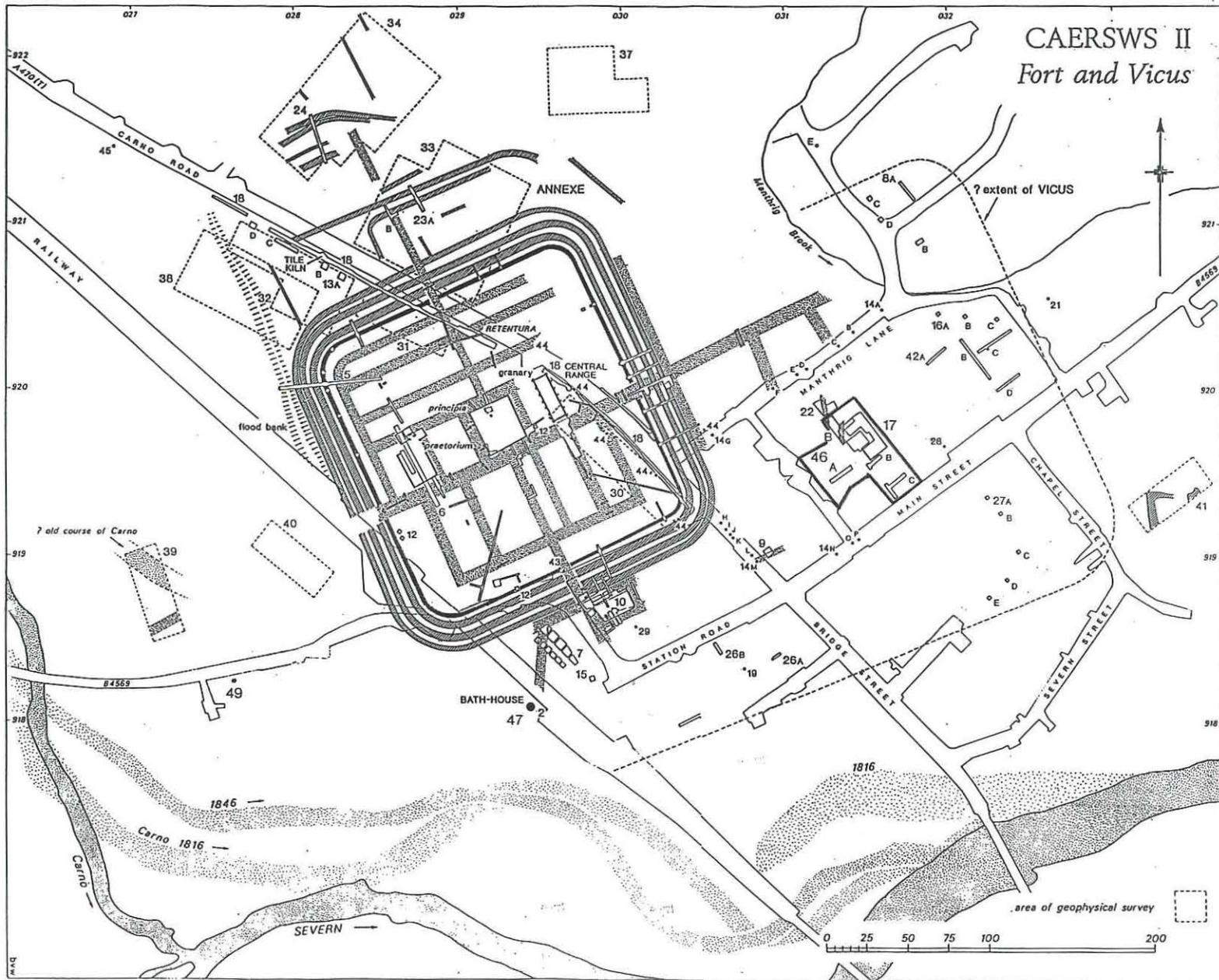


Fig 1: Roman Caersws. Numbers refer to Caersws (CS) site codes.

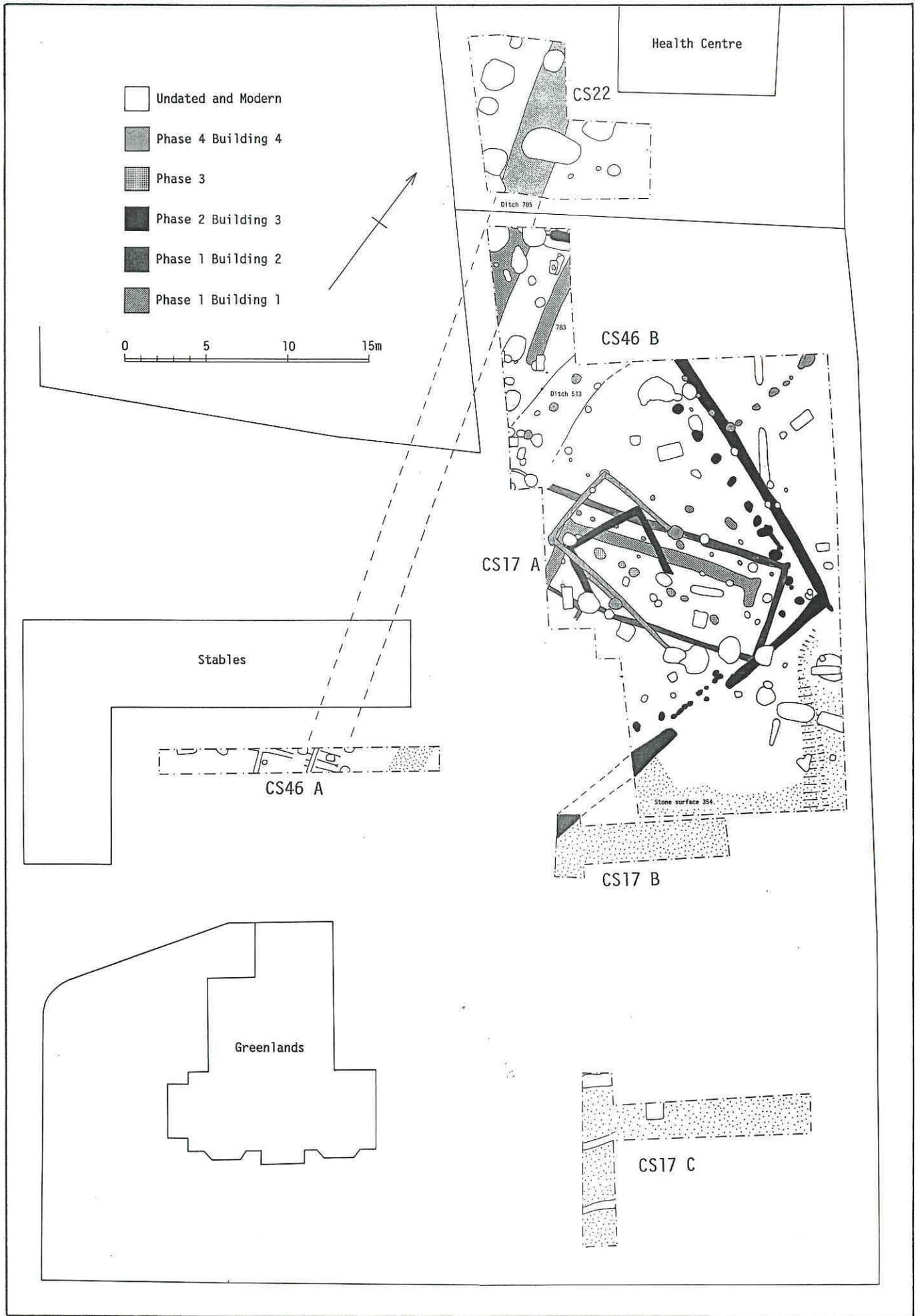


Fig 2: Caersws vicus excavations 1989, 1990 and 1993

ARCHIVE

585 Context sheets
c.250 Material forms
13 Black and White negative films with contacts/archive prints
289 Colour slides
19 A1 site plans
20 A4 site plans
2 Boxes Amphorae
2 Boxes Red Wares
1 Box Grey Wares
1 Box White Wares
1 Box Samian
1 Box Brick/Tile/Daub
1 Box Misc - Slag/Glass/Flint/Bone
5 Copper Alloy objects
c.440 frags ironwork