

HENDRE GAEROG, LON PARC, CAERNARFON

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION (G1870)

Report number : 589



Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

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Prepared

By

David Hopewell

June 2005

for

Partneriaeth Ap Thomas

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust has been requested by Ap Thomas Partnership, to carry out a program archaeological field evaluation work in advance of development at Hendre Gaerog, Lon Parc, Caernarfon (SH 4829 6244). A brief for the work was provided by Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service (D959) and a project design was produced by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust.

2. AIMS

Field evaluation is defined as a 'limited programme of non-intrusive and/or intrusive fieldwork which determines the presence or absence of archaeological features, structures, deposits, artefacts or ecofacts within a specified area or site on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater. If such archaeological remains are present field evaluation defines their character, extent, quality and preservation, and enables an assessment of their worth in a local, regional, national or international context as appropriate.' (*Standard and Guidance for archaeological field evaluation* IFA 1994, rev. 1999).

The purpose of the evaluation is therefore to ascertain the nature and status of any archaeological evidence on the site, and to make recommendations for any mitigation that may be necessary. This may involve full excavation of archaeological remains, or a recommendation for preservation *in situ* should the remains be considered to be of national importance.

3. METHODOLOGY

The site lies in the rear garden of Hendre Gaerog. Both Hendre Gaerog, a late Georgian suburban house retaining 19th Century character, and its western boundary wall are grade II listed buildings. Neither will be affected by the development. The area under investigation is sub rectangular with dimensions of 19m x 12-15m and covers an area of approximately 247 square metres.

It was recognised in the brief for the work that geophysical survey within the confined space is unlikely to produce meaningful results. Magnetometer survey would be affected by ferrous contamination from the use of the site as a garden over the preceding 120 years or more. The results from any resistivity survey are likely to be too coarse a resolution to be of practical use.

The evaluation was therefore undertaken using trial excavations in the form of two trenches within the site. The area is bounded on two sides by a tall stone wall and on one side by a house. The site is part of the garden of Hendre Gaerog and has been terraced into the natural hillslope forming two raised beds and, for the most part is bounded on the western side, by a revetment wall. The proposed development extends a few metres beyond the revetment at the north. Two 18m x 2m wide trenches running across the entire evaluation area were originally proposed. This was, however found to be impractical due to the presence of trees and shrubs on the site and also the problem of the positioning of spoil heaps within the limited area available. Two subrectangular trenches were excavated with dimensions of 7m x 4m and 5m x 4m (Fig 7).

The undifferentiated topsoil or overburden of recent origin was removed down to the first significant archaeological horizon, in successive, level spits using a small minidigger, this being the only excavator that could fit through the entrance to the site.

Following machine clearance, all faces of the trench that required examination or recording was cleaned using hand tools. All investigation of archaeological levels was by hand, with cleaning, examination and recording both in plan and section. Spoil heaps were monitored to recover artefacts to

assist in the analysis of the spatial distribution of artefacts. Modern artefacts were recorded but not retained. All of the archaeological features exposed were sampled and recorded

All excavation, both by machine and by hand, was undertaken with a view to avoiding damage to any archaeological features or deposits, which appear to be worthy of preservation *in situ* where this would be feasible.

4. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The proposed development (Fig. 1) stands 30m north-east of the Roman stone walled enclosure known as Hen Waliau, and 200m from the Roman Auxiliary fort of Segontium (both sites are scheduled ancient monuments, SAM Cn 94 and SAM Cn 6). Segontium was the main Roman base in north Wales. It was occupied from around AD 77 until the end of the 4th century. Numerous studies have shown that Roman forts are usually surrounded by a great deal of extra-mural activity, and this has been demonstrated to be the case within this area of Caernarfon (Boyle 1991, White 1985 and Hopewell 2005). The walled enclosure of Hen Waliau is the most obvious example of this. The walls still stand to a height of 4.5m in places and currently act as property boundaries within the town of Caernarfon. Other major features have been discovered in various locations around Segontium, to the east was a temple to Mithras and to the south-east a cemetery. A *vicus* was identified during works in the 19th century extending as far as the junction between Constantine Road and Vaynol street (50m to the east of the current development area) and a Roman House was supposedly discovered on Segontium Road (see RCAHM vol. 2 1960 for summary).

The area close to the development has been fairly well-sampled. A total of sixteen trenches have been excavated in Hen Waliau (Fig 2). A further eight were excavated during road improvements immediately to the north of the enclosure (Fig. 3). Wheeler carried out excavations within Hen Waliau in the 1920s, dating it to the 4th century, and recorded the local tradition of a road and well in the gardens of Bron Hendre and Mimanton to the south of the site. A cobbled surface to the south of the walls was dated to no later than the mid second century. Further excavations were carried out here in 1952, 62, 63 and 85. These are summarised in Boyle (1991). The excavations demonstrated traces of activity on the site in the later first and early second centuries. There then appeared to be a hiatus until the walls of Hen Waliau were constructed in the 4th century. The function of the enclosure is not entirely clear but the best interpretation seems to be as a storage depot. No other Roman activity was identified in this area until a series of excavations were carried out by Richard White in advance of improvements along Newborough Road. These excavations revealed widespread Roman activity in two phases from the late first to the mid second centuries. A ditch and two wells were identified along with evidence for light industrial activity including leather and metalworking. All the evidence thus points to fairly widespread activity in the area to the west of Segontium and around Hen Waliau particularly in the early years of the Roman Occupation. A watching brief was carried out 45m to the north of the present site but no Roman stratigraphy was found possibly due to a previous truncation of the deposits.

The more recent history of the area is mostly dependent on map evidence although a few earlier references survive. Wheeler quotes Leland “In the olde town of Caer Sallog, alias Caersaint or Sergent, appere part of an old Castel yn the Old toune, of whiche castel is faullen into the haven salt water” (*The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the Years 1535–1543*) and identifies the old castel as being Hen Waliau. A drawing by Moses Griffith dated 1766 (see cover) shows the enclosure standing in open fields. Pennant recorded it some detail and described it as an “ancient Roman fort”. Caernarfon began to expand to the west in the early 19th century and John Woods' plan of 1834 shows a scattering of houses in the area. Hendre Gaerog appears on the plan (Fig. 4) as Hendre with the assessment area standing to the rear with most of the modern boundaries already established. By the time the first edition OS 25” map (Fig 5) was produced in 1888 the area had been extensively built upon and what appear to be two enclosures and two small buildings had been constructed on the current development site. According to the 1891 census the house was occupied by Hugh Humphries, a printer and publisher along with his daughter, daughter in law and a servant. The 1918 map (Fig. 6) shows two new buildings in the north-eastern corner of the site along with glasshouses closer to Hendre Gaerog. The enclosures and one of the small buildings are no longer shown. Ordnance survey maps from, the 1980s onwards (Fig. 7) only show one small building against the northern wall. It seems likely that the development area has remained in the possession of Hendre Gaerog since the early 19th century and has

probably served as a garden. It is therefore likely that the buildings shown on the maps are sheds or workshops rather than dwellings. It was noted that the line of the enclosure indicated on the 1818 map is the same as that of the revetment wall around trench A.

5. RESULTS

Trench A (Fig. 8)

This topsoil was removed using a minidigger. This was 0.5 to 0.75 m deep across the majority of the trench. This revealed a square of natural subsoil (103) cut away to the north and west (104). The fill of the cut features (102) appeared to be a single deposit and contained large amounts of early 20th century pottery and fragments of mortar but no other building debris. An attempt was made to remove the modern fill starting at the west side of the site. This was excavated down to a depth of 2m. Modern pottery was still present at the bottom of the trench. The natural subsoil appeared to have been cut away about 1.5m from the end of the trench. No further excavation was possible for health and safety reasons and this part of the trench was partially backfilled. The modern deposits were sectioned on the west and north sides of the trench (A(i) and A(ii), Fig 8). The section on the west side (A(i)) revealed a vertical cut into the natural subsoil to a depth of 0.7m. The subsoil had then been terraced at the same level until it reached the deep cut revealed by the minidigger. A further vertical cut, this time 0.5m deep was revealed by the section at the north (A(ii)). The natural subsoil had again been cut away at this level as far as the edge of the trench. A shallow scrape (106) into the surface of the subsoil appeared to be the base of a modern rubbish pit and was filled with cinders and broken pottery.

Synthesis and dating

No Roman material was recovered from any of the contexts in this trench. The rectangle of subsoil (103) in the south-east of the trench appeared to be undisturbed but no features earlier than the 20th century pit (106) were visible. The stratigraphy in the rest of the trench had been heavily truncated and only substantial deeply cut Roman features would be expected to survive here. There was no sign of any such features in the two sections cut through the modern deposits. It therefore seems safe to assume that there are no surviving features earlier than the 20th century terracing within this trench. The 20th century features comprise an L shaped (in plan) vertical cut into the subsoil forming a terrace about 2.2m wide at the west and in excess of 1.5m wide at the north. This was a further steep cut to depth in excess of 2m at the western edge of the trench. A revetment wall stands in front of this and the area had presumably been infilled sometime in the mid 20th century. The exact function of the terracing is somewhat unclear but it presumably relates to landscaping of the garden when the structures shown on the 1888 and 1918 OS maps were demolished. It should be noted that the current revetment wall follows the same line as largest enclosure shown on the 1888 map. The 20th century artefacts within the infill behind the wall suggest that it is probably not the same structure.

Trench B (Fig. 9)

The topsoil (123) was excavated using the mechanical digger. It was a dark loam, 0.45m deep, containing frequent pieces of 20th century pottery. This revealed a deposit of brown loamy soil (124). This was sampled and found to contain mid 19th century pottery but none of the 20th century material that characterised the layer above. This deposit was also mechanically removed. It was found to be 0.55m deep and is best interpreted as being a buried topsoil horizon. The trench was cleaned by hand revealing natural yellowish orange subsoil, at a similar level to that in trench A, with two features cut into it. The most obvious was a somewhat meandering linear cut (131) filled with a deposit of very firm greyish brown silty clay (126). This extended southwards from the northern edge of the trench for a maximum of 1.4m. There were occasional larger stones protruding through the deposit and the edge was defined at the eastern end by a line of large natural stones (130). It was excavated and found to contain occasional sherds of Roman pottery and none of the later material that characterised the topsoil layers thus suggesting an early date. Three fairly large sherds of coarseware, two conjoining, were recovered along with some small fragments of tile. The feature appears to be a wide hollow extending beyond the edge of the trench. Two roughly parallel drains (120 and 127) running along the bottom of the hollow were revealed when the upper deposit was removed. The southernmost was a shallow

meandering channel (120), running along the edge of the hollow. The line of stones (130) running along the edge of the hollow and drain could be traced for 2.8m. A small shelf cut into the subsoil to accommodate the stones indicated the extent of the feature even though most of the stones had been dislodged. The drain itself was 40cm wide and 10cm deep and was cut asymmetrically. It was steepest on the south side and roughly U shaped in section. It was filled and partially covered with varying amounts of large stones in a matrix of fairly soft silty clay (128).

Only a short length of the northernmost drain (127) fell within the excavated area. This was sectioned and found to be 25cm wide and 14cm deep. It was roughly U shaped in section the northern side having been cut somewhat more steeply than the southern. It was packed with rounded stones in a matrix of soft clayey silt (129). A single large unabraded sherd of a decorated samian bowl was found between the stones. There were several large stones overlying the drain that could be interpreted as a crude capping.

A patch of small angular stones (122) apparently in natural subsoil proved to be on closer inspection the fill of a shallow pit (122). This was 1.0m in diameter and 0.25m deep with a shallow V shaped cross section. It was filled with well mixed redeposited subsoil containing a small amount of humus. No finds were recovered from this feature so its function and date could not be determined.

Synthesis and dating

The two drains (120 and 127) are relatively slight and sit within a larger hollow (131). The stone edging (130) at a relatively high level indicates that drain 120 was probably at one time an open channel, with the stones preventing erosion to its steepest side. The stones within and over the drain are untidily heaped and do not give the impression that they were part of the original construction. It therefore appears that the drain was filled with stones at a later date and that it silted up with the stones within it, hence the soft matrix within the cut. Drain 127 was a discrete feature deliberately packed with small stones that did not extend above the cut. The soft clay matrix indicates that it also silted up. Its stone filled constriction and possible capping stones suggest that it was designed to be a covered drain perhaps functioning as a buried land drain. It therefore seems that drain 120 was originally open and running along the edge of a wider hollow, either draining the hollow itself or taking runoff from higher up the slope. Drain 120 was then partly back filled with stones and silted up. Covered drain 127 may have been cut at about the same time as 120 was backfilled. The crude capping seems to be of a similar character to the stone dumped in the open drain. It then seems the area was backfilled with firm clayey soil, perhaps to form a level surface.

In all, four reasonably large sherds of Roman pottery were recovered from hollow 131 and the associated drains. The piece of samian ware from drain 127 was very sharp and unabraded suggesting that it was freshly broken when it was deposited. This can be taken as a good indication that the feature is of a Roman date. The sherds of coarseware in the upper fill of the hollow were the only datable finds in the context and again suggest a Roman date for the infilling of this feature. The pottery will be sent to the National Museum of Wales for more precise dating; the samian sherd should be closely datable.

The shallow pit remains undated.

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Deposits and features dating from the Roman period have survived within the development area. These appear to be concentrated in the northern part of the site. Two drains running through a hollow that was probably filled in during the Roman period to form a level surface clearly extend to the north and may represent the edge of an area of more significant remains. The activity seems to peter out towards the southern part of the site. There were no features cut into what remains of the undisturbed subsoil in trench A. It was however clear that the stratigraphy across much of this side of the development area had been had been significantly truncated and the potential for the survival of archaeology dating from before the 19th century is low. Judging by the evidence in both trenches there is a layer of modern topsoil, between 0.5m and 1.0m deep across most of the site.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The potential for the survival of significant Roman or other early remains is low across all but the northern 6 metres of the development area (Fig. 10). There may, however, be minor features present in the area of lower potential that did not fall within the evaluation trenches. A watching brief is therefore recommended for any disturbance deeper than 0.5m below the current ground surface. Any disturbance above this level will be within the 19th/20th century deposits, will not affect the earlier archaeology and therefore requires no mitigation.

The northern 6m of the development (Fig. 10) area has a higher potential for the survival of Roman archaeology. The features discovered in trench B clearly extend into this area and may indicate the limit of a wider area of Roman archaeology. It is therefore recommended that full excavation should precede any disturbance deeper than 0.5m.

The areas that have already been evaluated (trenches A and B) require no further excavation or mitigatory measures.

8. REFERENCES

- Boyle, S.D. 1991, Excavations at Hen Waliau, Caernarfon, 1952-1985. *BBCS XXXVIII* 191-212
Griffith, M. 1766, View of Hen Waliau from the north-west reproduced in Boyle 1991
Hopewell D. 2005, Roman Fort Environs in North-West Wales. *Britannia* (forthcoming)
Leland, John. *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the Years 1535-1543*. L. Toulmin Smith, ed., 1964.
White R.B. 1985, Excavations at Caernarfon, 1976-77 *Arch Camb CXXXIV* 53-105
Wood, J. 1834, *Plan of Caernarfon*

APPENDIX 1 – CONTEXT LIST

Context Number	Trench	Prov date	Description
101	A	C20	Humic topsoil
102	A	C20	Fill of 104/5
103	A+B	Glacial	Subsoil
104	A	C19/20	Terrace cut into subsoil N/S
105	A	C19/20	Terrace cut into subsoil E/W
106	A	C20	Rubbish pit
107	A	C20	Fill of 106
120	B	Roman	Drain in base of 131
121	B	Undated	Pit
122	B	Undated	Fill of pit 121
123	B	C20	Dark humic topsoil
124	B	C19	Brownish buried topsoil
126	B	Roman	Upper fill of 131, hard silty clay
127	B	Roman	Drain in base of 131
128	B	Roman	Fill of 120, soft clayey silt with stones
129	B	Roman	Fill of 127, soft clayey sit with well packed stones
130	B	Roman	Stone edging to 131/120
131	B	Roman	Hollow with drains 120 and 127 cut in base

APPENDIX 2 – LIST OF FINDS

001	101	Misc. collection of 20 th century ceramics
002	102	Misc. collection of 20 th century ceramics
003	123	Misc. collection of 20 th century ceramics
004	124	Misc. collection of 19 th century ceramics, clay pipe stems and bone
005	124	Small abraded Roman coarseware rim sherd
006	124	Small abraded Roman samian rim sherd
007	124	Small abraded Roman samian sherd
008	124	Small abraded Roman samian sherd
009	126	Roman coarseware sherd, red fabric
010	126	Roman coarseware sherd, orange fabric
011	126	Roman coarseware sherd, orange fabric
012	126	Misc. fragments of tile
013	127	Roman decorated samian sherd

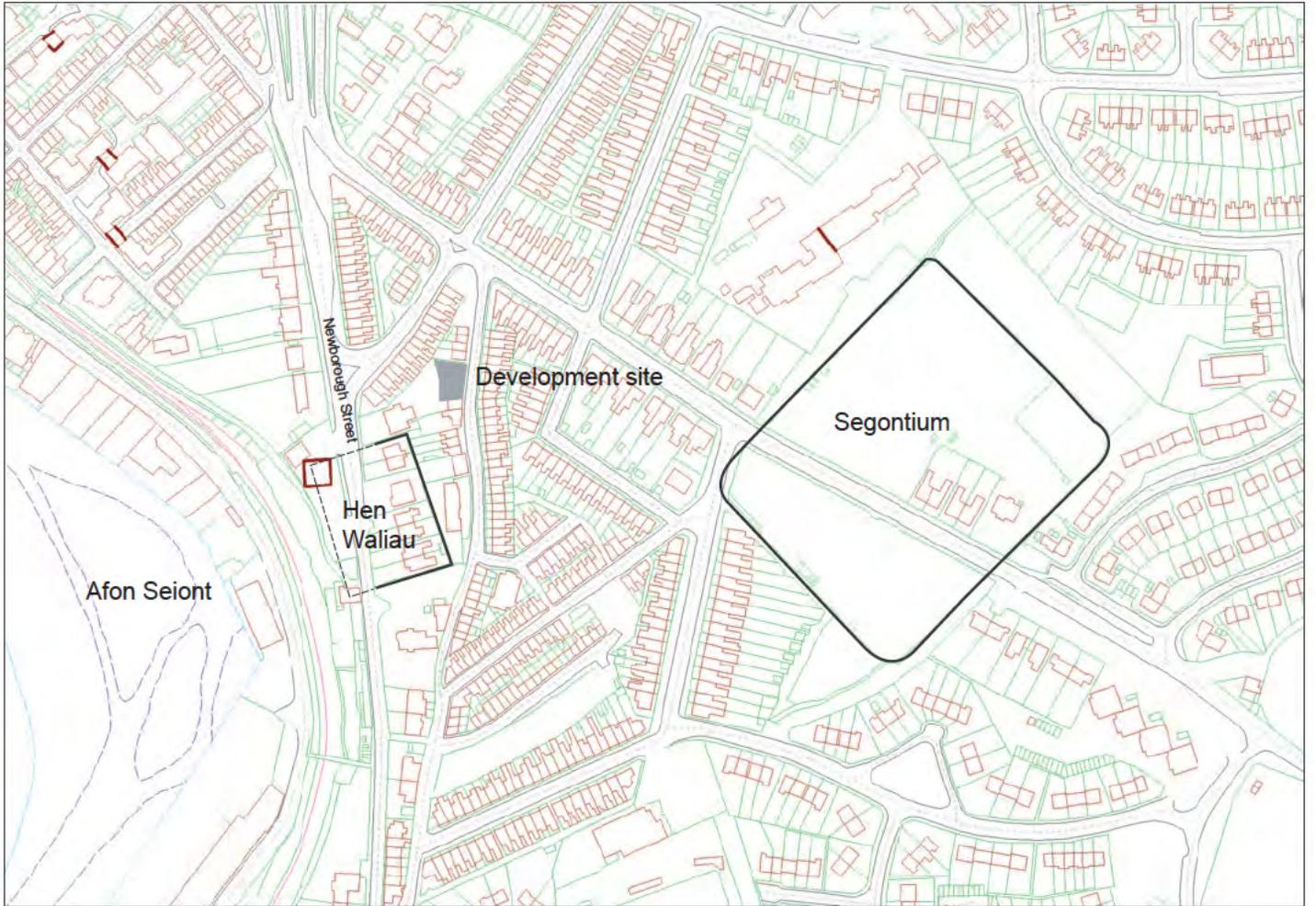


Fig. 1 Location of development area, Segontium and Hen Waliau

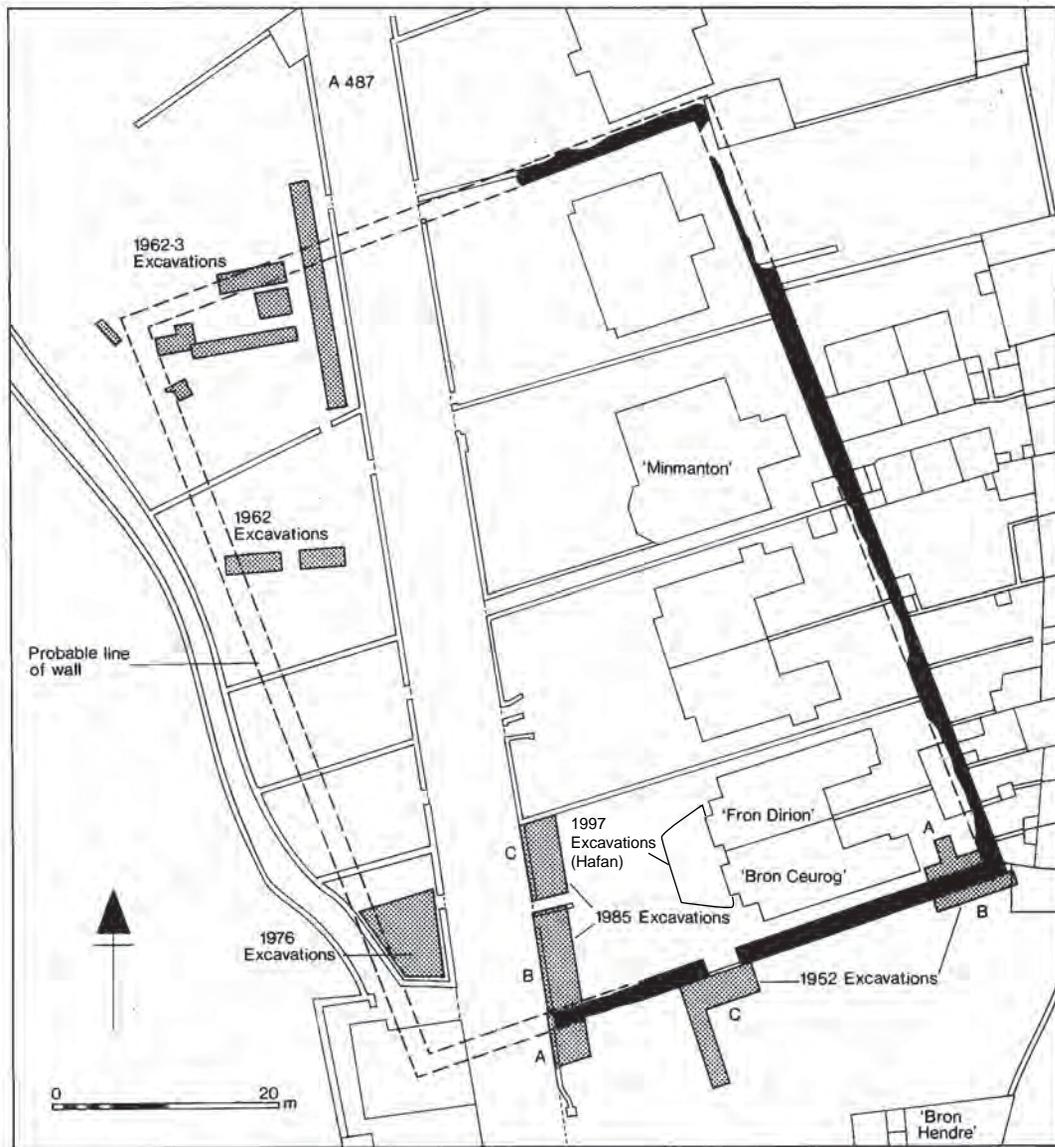


Fig. 2 Excavations within Hen Waliau 1952-1997 (after Boyle 1991)

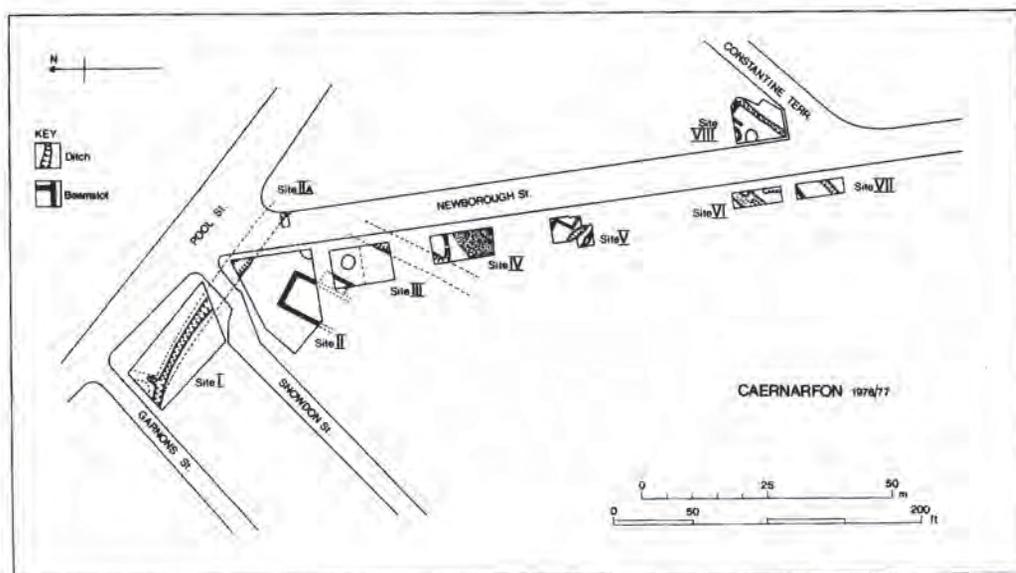


Fig. 3 Excavations in Caernarfon 1976-77 (White 1986)

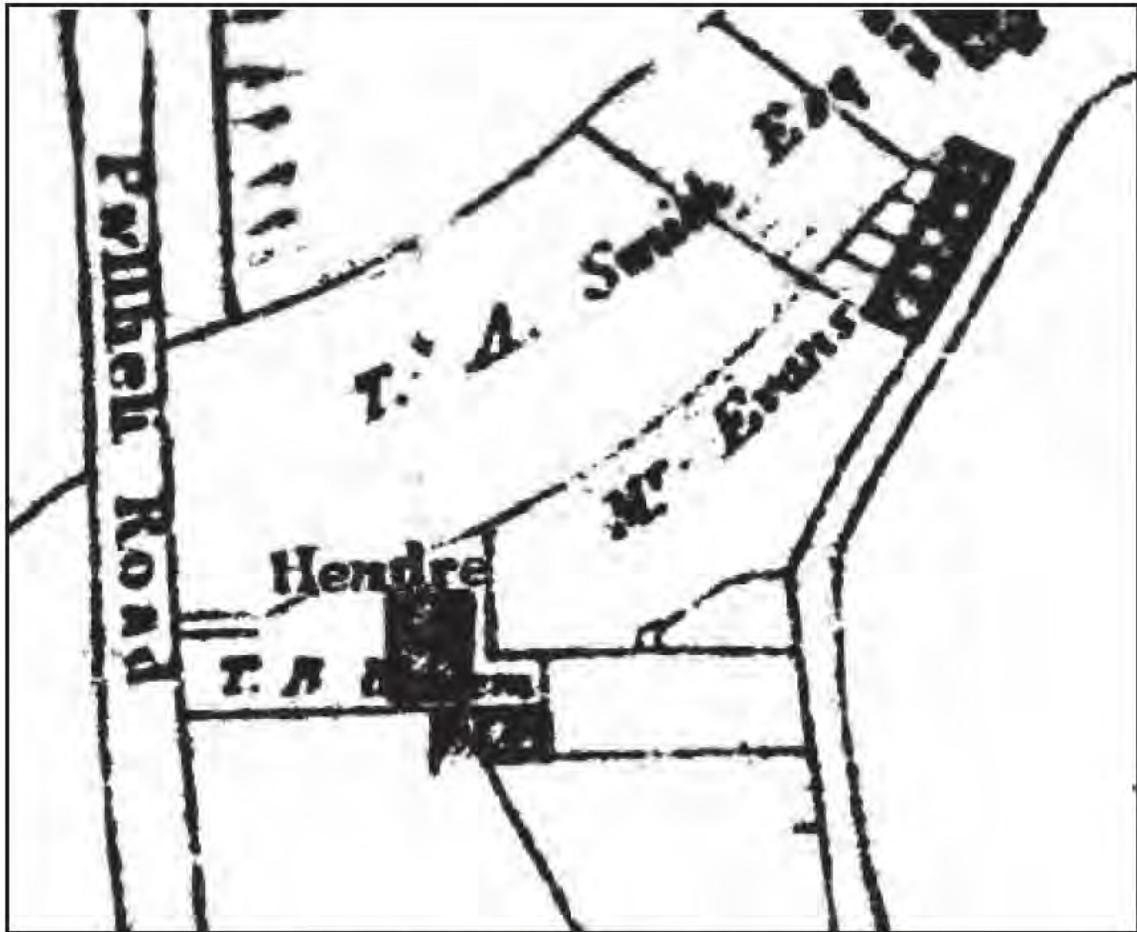


Fig. 4 Excerpt from John Woods' plan of Caernarfon, 1834



Fig. 5 Ordnance survey 25" map Caernarvonshire XV 4 1888

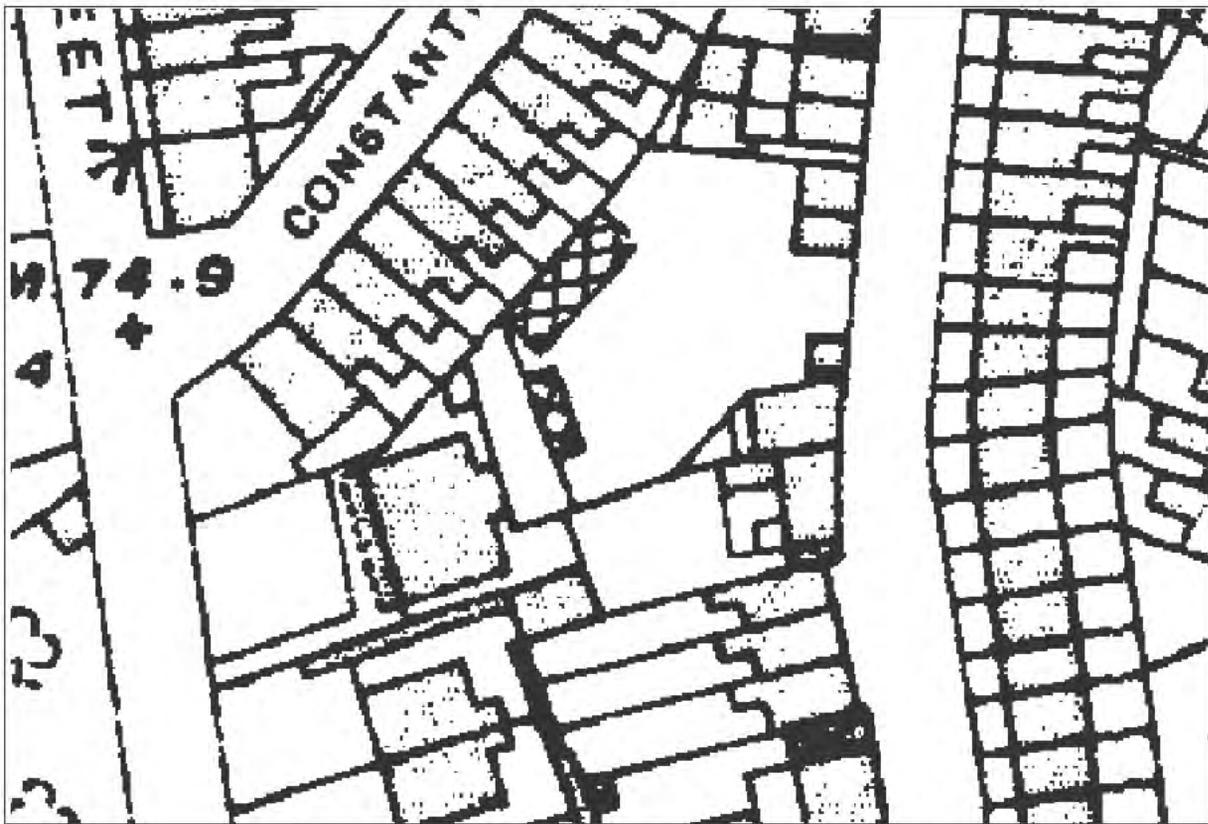


Fig. 6 Ordnance survey 25" map Caernarvonshire XV 4 1918

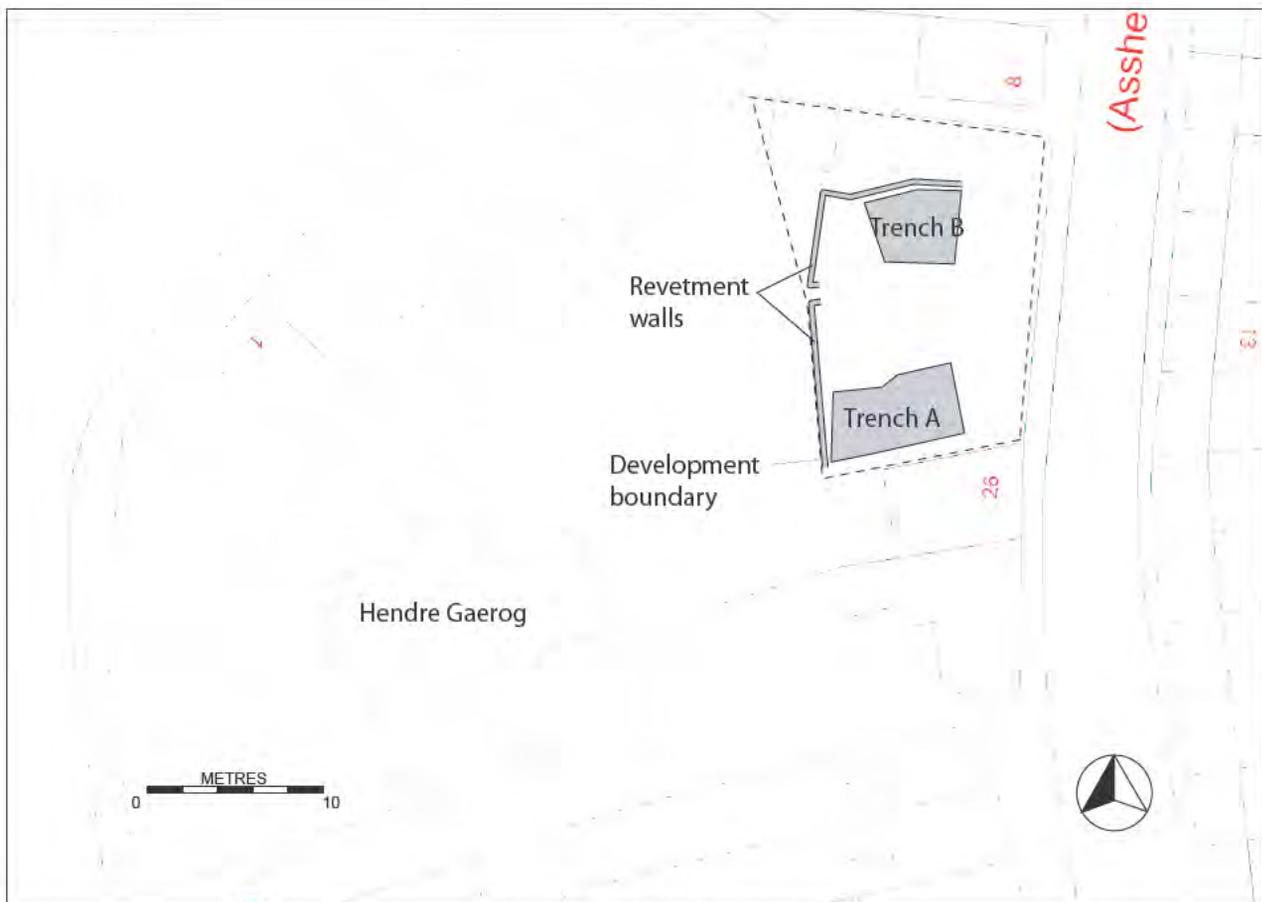


Fig. 7 Trench locations

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Fig. 8 Trench A

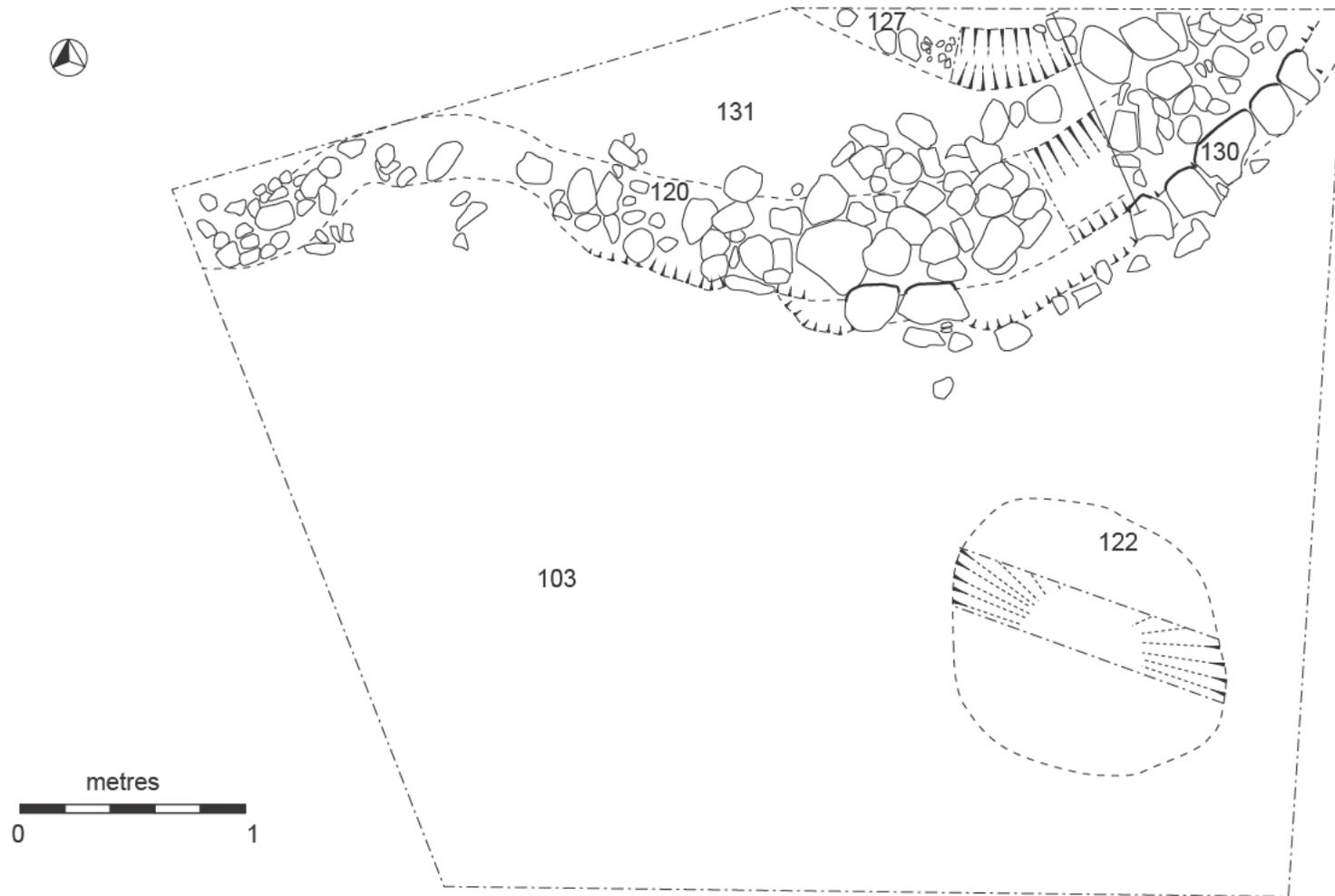
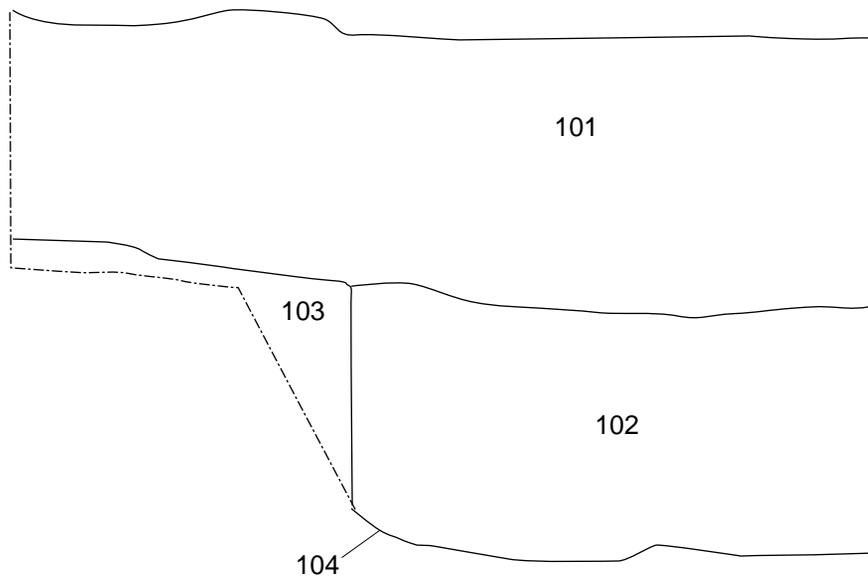
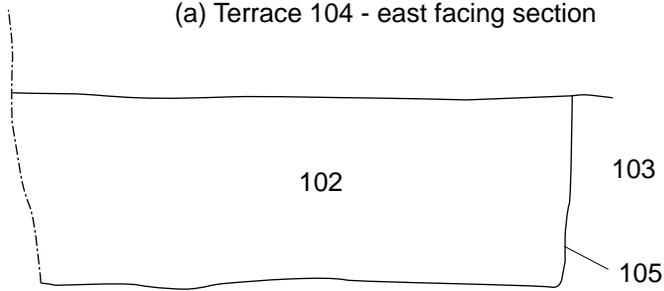


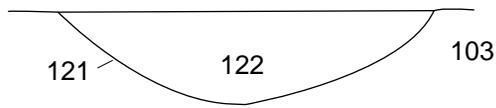
Fig. 9 Trench B



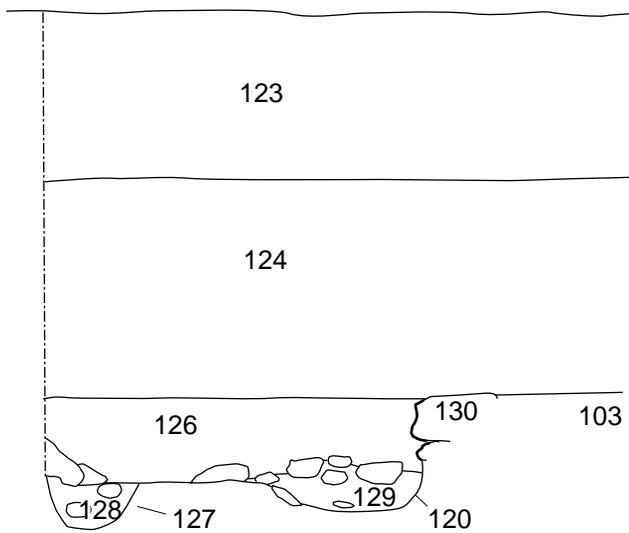
(a) Terrace 104 - east facing section



(b) Terrace 105 - west facing section



(c) Pit 121 - north facing section



(d) Hollow 131 and drains 120 and 127 south-west facing section
(123 and 124 projected levels only)



Fig. 10 Sections

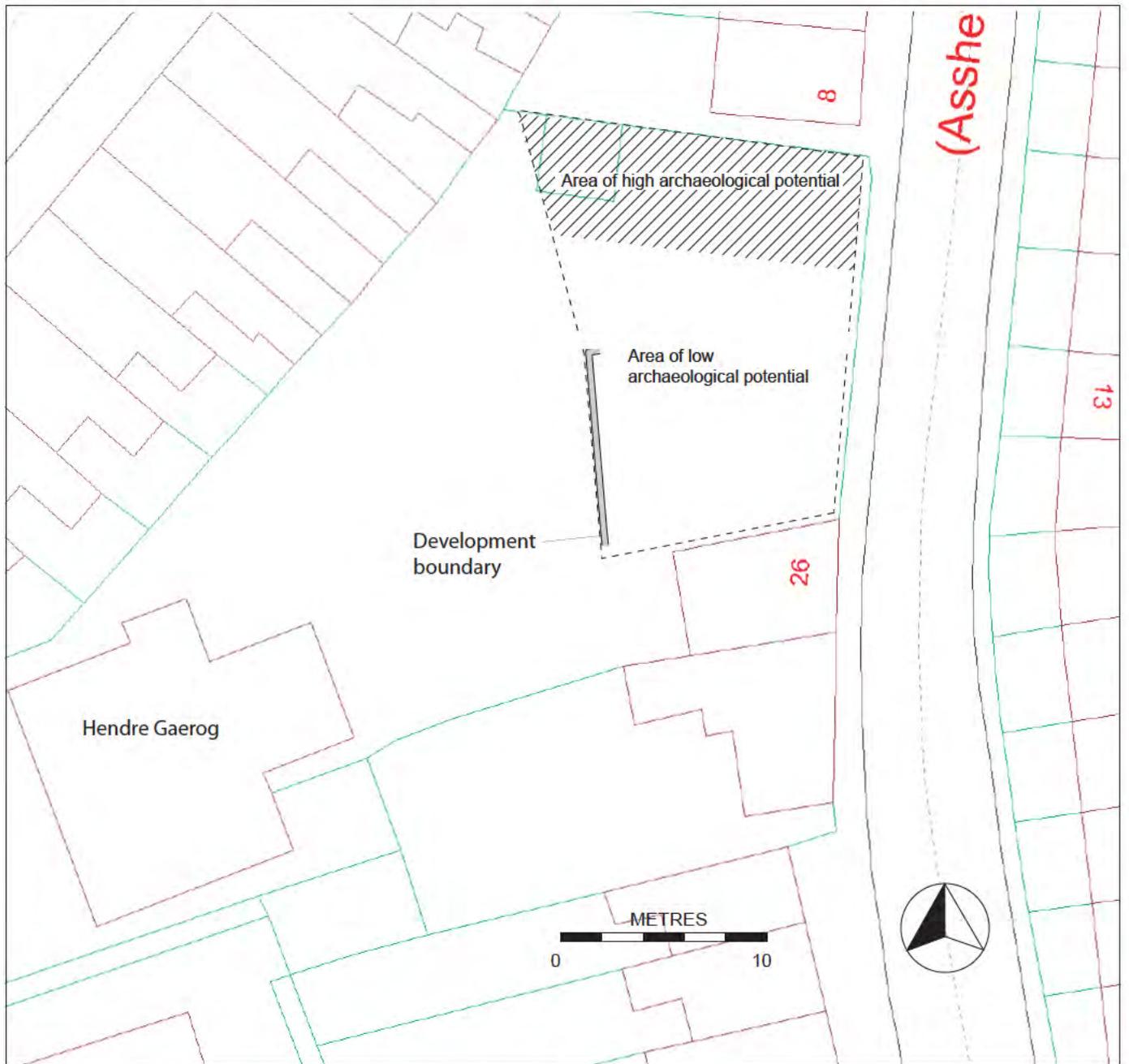


Fig. 11 Development area showing areas of high and low archaeological potential



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