

***A Watching Brief at  
The Mines, Benthall,  
Shropshire, 2012***

by  
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Archaeology Service



**A WATCHING BRIEF AT THE MINES,  
BENTHALL, SHROPSHIRE, 2012**

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A Report for

**Artemis Developers Ltd.**

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## SUMMARY

*In December 2011 demolition work was carried at The Garage, The Mines, Benthall, Shropshire, in order to prepare the site for redevelopment. Work commenced on the redevelopment in March 2012. The site lies in an area formerly occupied by a clay tobacco pipe factory, which started production in the 18th century and continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A watching brief was maintained on the demolition of the existing structures. It was also a condition of the planning consent for the redevelopment of the site that this too be accompanied by a programme of archaeological work to comprise desk-based assessment and a watching brief. The Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council carried out this watching brief. The remains of part of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century kiln floor were recorded, indirectly associated with deposits of industrial waste, including pottery wasters and kiln furniture.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

**1.1** Benthall is situated in east Shropshire on the south side of the Ironbridge Gorge, some 20km southeast of Shrewsbury town centre and 6km south of Telford town centre. In 2011 work began on the redevelopment of a site at The Garage, The Mines, Benthall, Shropshire (NGR SJ 6698 0264). The development comprised the demolition of a number of standing industrial buildings, and the redevelopment of the site for housing.

**1.2** The development site lies in an area formerly occupied by a clay tobacco pipe factory and pottery (Historic Environment Record [HER] No. 03984 "Clay pipe works c 510m SE of Broadacres Farm"), which started in the 18th century and continued in production through into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1885 the pipe works was said to be one of the largest factories of its kind in England. It was considered possible therefore that archaeological remains relating to this former industry might survive within the study area.

**1.3** Because of the potential significance of the archaeological resource it was considered necessary that any groundworks associated with the demolition be accompanied by the implementation of a programme of archaeological work. The demolition work was carried out in December 2011.

**1.4** It was originally intended that "all existing ground levels shall be retained as existing. No reduced level dig shall take place all to avoid disturbing ground contamination and archaeology." (Proposed site plan, floor plans and elevations. Proposed 01. 2010). In the event, a change to the foundation design necessitated the excavation of foundation trenches.

**1.5** Provision for a programme of archaeological work, to comprise a documentary research and a watching brief was agreed with the site developer, though not until after foundation work had begun. The aim of the programme of archaeological work was to allow for the preservation by record of any archaeological remains that were encountered during the works.

**1.6** The Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council, was commissioned by Artemis Developers Ltd. to carry out the programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI) approved by the Historic Environment Team, Shropshire Council.

## **2 DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT**

### **2.1 The history of the site**

Clay tobacco pipes were made in Benthall from the later 17th century or earlier using local clays. There are no records of when pottery or pipe-making began at the site on Bridge Road, but the pottery may have been founded in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Pitchyard Pottery (HER 03984), also known as the Benthall Bank Pottery, was leased to Jasper Cox in 1800 and was run between 1814 and 1826 by William Lloyd of Pitchyard House, and from 1826 by his widow. An Elizabeth Lloyd was also landlady of the adjacent New Inn in 1829-35 and this may be the same person. (Benthall, 1957, p159; Stamper, 1998, p251; Piggot, 1829 & 1835,).

The Roden family, who lived in Benthall village and were churchwardens there, had been pipemakers and potters in Benthall and Broseley since at least the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century and had operated from a number of sites, including the King Street works (HER 11733) and the Legge's Hill works (HER 04527) in Broseley. Noah Roden I (1770-1829) had perfected the long pipes or "churchwardens" in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and supplied London clubs and coffee houses (as well as the local trade). In c. 1829 the Roden family were operating from the Pitchyard Pottery site, and in 1835 Noah Roden II also became landlord of the adjacent New Inn, on Bridge Road. A map of 1835 (Hitchcock 1835) shows the works with a kiln on the site. (Correspondence in HER files for HER 11733; Higgins, 1987, p141; Hitchcock, 1835.)

Edwin Southorn, was the younger of two sons of William Southorn, another Broseley pipemaker. The Southorns at the time operated from the nearby Legge's Hill works on the other side of Bridge Road in Broseley Wood - where in the late 17<sup>th</sup> / early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the Rodens had been manufacturing clay tobacco pipes and slipware pottery. Edwin joined Noah Roden II at his factory on the Pitchyard Pottery site, probably around 1850, apparently following a dispute in the Southorn family (but the Rodens and Southorns were also connected by marriage). After Noah's death in 1855, the Pitchyard Pottery was initially operated by his widow, but in 1858 Edwin Southorn took over the business, which by this time was producing clay pipes. Edwin brought about a number of revolutionary changes, and produced some of the finest English pipes of the period. In 1861 the works, then known as the "Broseley Pipe Works", employed 28 people, and in 1871 40 (Hannaford, 1992; Higgins, D, 1987, p141).

Edwin Southorn died in 1876, and in the late 1870s the factory was run by Hopkins & Co. as the Raleigh Tobacco Pipeworks. By 1882 the Southorn family seem to have taken charge of the site which continued to operate as the "Raleigh Pipe Works" and was said in 1885 to be one of the largest factories of its kind in England. Production on the site apparently ceased sometime between 1895 and 1909. The works, labelled as a "Pipe Works", are shown on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey 25" maps of 1882 and 1902 (see Fig. 2) as two parallel ranges of buildings joined with a kiln at their northern end. (Stamper, 1998, p254-5; Hayman & Horton, 1999, p91; OS, 1882 & 1902.)

Whether the works were abandoned or whether there is simply a gap in the records for the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is unclear. Much of the history for the site in the later 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries has been compiled from trade directories, and it may be that the Bridge Road works were operating under Southorn's "Broseley Pipe Works" from their address at the King Street works in Broseley. Whichever, from about 1922 Wolfson Rowe & Co., operating as the "Salop Pottery", was making earthenware on the Pitchyard site. On the 1927 OS 25" map, a second kiln is shown on the west side of the

main factory buildings, as well as the kiln at the northern end. Between c. 1929 and 1937 the works were operated by the Leigh Pottery Co. Ltd. for the production of decorative wares. From the late 1930s the Benthall Stoneware Co made sanitary pipes at the works until the 1950s. Pottery production was also restarted here by a Stoke-on-Trent firm in about 1950, but this was a short-lived enterprise. The site is still shown as a "Pipe Works" on the 1954 OS 1:10,560 (6") map of 1954. (Benthall, 1957, 168-9; Clarke, 1993, p63; OS, 1927 & 1954; Stamper, 1998, p254-5.)

From 1959 until at least the late 1980s the site was used as a garage and chemical store. By 1973 the kilns had gone, though the east and west ranges of the former pottery buildings still stood. The remaining buildings were demolished in 2011. (Clark & Alfrey, 1987, p190; OS, 1973; Hannaford, 2011.)

## **2.2 Previous archaeological work**

In the early 1950s finds were made in the gardens across the road from the works of slipware plates, dishes and drinking vessels "with crimped edges sometimes known as Welsh dishes". The slipware included pieces of a "fireclay body, covered with a red or brown slip which in turn was decorated with a white slip poured on with a slip kettle and quill or a comb of quills". (Benthall, 1957, p169)

The area was included in the Nuffield Archaeological Survey of the late 1980s carried out by Ironbridge Institute. The two central units of the east range buildings were still relatively intact, though altered in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century. The west range had been partly demolished by this time, though some walls survived, and a chimney still stood against the west wall of this range. No kilns survived. (Clark and Alfrey, 1987, p190).

In 1983 construction work for the garage on the pottery site revealed a large underground chamber. This was recorded by the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Archaeology Unit (archive: Benthall, The New Inn, BE83B) and interpreted at the time as an old water cistern. 18<sup>th</sup> century clay pipes, earthenware pottery wasters and sagger fragments were also recovered. (Trueman, 1988, p29.)

An archaeological evaluation of the nearby Legge's Hill Pipeworks site in 1992 produced evidence of late 17<sup>th</sup> century pottery production and early 18<sup>th</sup> century clay tobacco pipe manufacturing by Sam Roden (Hannaford, 1992).

An archaeological watching brief was maintained on the demolition of the remaining structures on the Bridge Road site in 2011 (Hannaford, 2012).

### **3 THE WATCHING BRIEF**

Following the demolition of the surviving buildings in 2011, redevelopment of the site began in March 2012. The excavations for foundations were undertaken in several stages, partly due to limited access on the site. The development consisted of two blocks linked at first floor level. The first block, of three units, was aligned west-east at the northern end of the site, the other, of four units, aligned north-south along the street frontage. The foundations for the northern block and southern two units of the eastern block had been excavated and the concrete foundations poured before the archaeological watching brief was implemented.

#### **The north block**

The northern block of the new development lay over the former kiln structure shown on the OS mapping. Part of the kiln wall could be seen in the northeast corner of the foundation trench, and it was agreed that as part of the watching brief a small trial trench would be excavated in the centre of this block to see if any further remains of this kiln survived.

A trench 3m long by 1.5m wide was excavated through rubble in the centre of the new foundations of the north range of the new buildings (Fig. 4). The brick floor of the kiln (15 & Photo 5) was seen at a depth of 0.4m. In the southwest corner of the trench, an area of this floor had been cut away or worn away to reveal an earlier brick floor (16) immediately below. The brick kiln floors lay beneath a loose fill of brick fragments in a dark greyish brown silty sand (14) up to 0.3m thick, possibly demolition rubble from the 1980s. This in turn lay beneath a layer of rubble and chippings 0.1m thick (13) from the current building work.

The uppermost deposits on the site were still visible in the outer faces of the foundation trenches for the north range, and these were recorded (see Fig. 5). The natural subsoil of buff clay (Fig. 5a; 12) was seen at the western end of the northern foundation trench, and sloped down to the east, following the slope of the hillside. The natural clay lay beneath a layer of buff clay with charcoal (11), in turn lying beneath a sequence of tip layers of very dark grey silts, silty sands, and sandy silty clays, containing cinders, tile fragments, pottery, slag, and kiln furniture (see Fig. 5a; 3-10). The lowest of these deposits (10) produced a handle of a mug of late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century type, the other layers produced earthenware pottery fragments, including unglazed wasters, and kiln furniture of early 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century types.

In the east face of the eastern foundation trench, lying parallel to the road edge, the wall of the bottle-kiln (Fig. 5b; 17 & Photo 4) survived immediately beneath the ground surface. The interior of the kiln was filled with a loose rubble fill (19) similar to that seen in the trial trench (14). The outside face of the kiln wall was butted by a sequence of layers representing industrial residues (24, 23, 22, 21), which in turn lay beneath a rubble layer (20). All of these deposits, including the reduced top of the kiln wall, were sealed by the existing ground surface (18) of grey silt and chippings alongside the edge of the road.

#### **The east block**

Excavations for the third unit of the southern block revealed remains of a stone wall (Fig. 6; 26) aligned east-west and another (Fig. 6; 27) aligned north-south at a depth of 0.5m below the ground surface. The first (26) corresponded in location to the south wall of a rectangular building shown on the south side of the former kiln on the 1892 map, the other to the west wall of the west range of the former pipe works. Both walls survived to

only one or two courses in depth, and were built on laminated deposits of coal, ash, and dark grey silt (29) 1.5m in depth. It was not feasible to examine these features or deposits in detail. These deposits lay on the natural buff clay subsoil (30). The foundation cut for the north end of the eastern block again showed the natural clay (38) dipping down steeply to the east, lying at a depth of 3.6m below the ground surface at the road edge. The natural lay beneath a sequence of industrial waste deposits (see Photo 6), comprising a deposit of very dark grey clay (37) 1.2m thick, a layer of coal fragments in very dark grey silty clay (36) 0.4m thick, a dark grey-brown sand (35) 0.3m thick, and a compact grey clay with cinders (34) 0.4m thick. These lay beneath a layer of very dark grey silty clay 0.7m thick with cinders brick fragments, and mortar (33), a layer of mixed buff, yellow, and dark grey clay with brick fragments (32) 0.4m thick. These in turn lay beneath recent demolition and construction deposits of brick rubble and stone fragments (31) 0.2m thick.

## **4 CONCLUSIONS**

The assessment of the documentary sources has confirmed the importance of the Pitchyard pottery site in the development of the clay tobacco pipe industry in Broseley and Benthall in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This research has also shown that the site probably began operating at some time in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and continued well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The watching brief has also recovered finds that indicate 18<sup>th</sup> century origins for the pottery. The finds show that as well as clay tobacco pipes the works was also at various times producing earthenware pottery. The watching brief was very much a “rescue” exercise, however, and the current demolition and redevelopment has probably removed most of the structural remains of the old pipe works and associated deposits, with the exception of part of the kiln floor, which survives beneath the north block of the redevelopment, and some of the foundations of the former west range of buildings which may survive below ground on the west side of the development.



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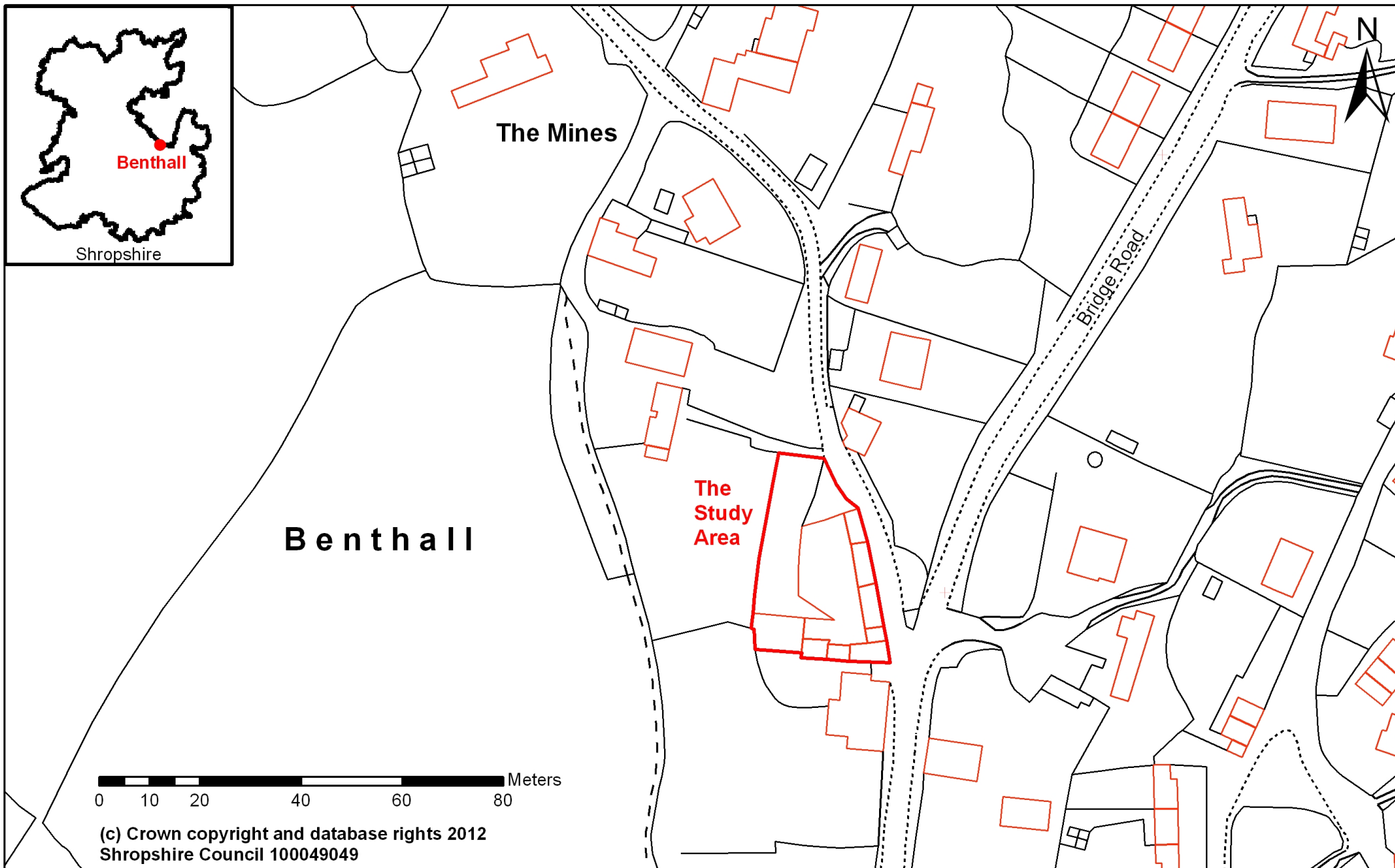
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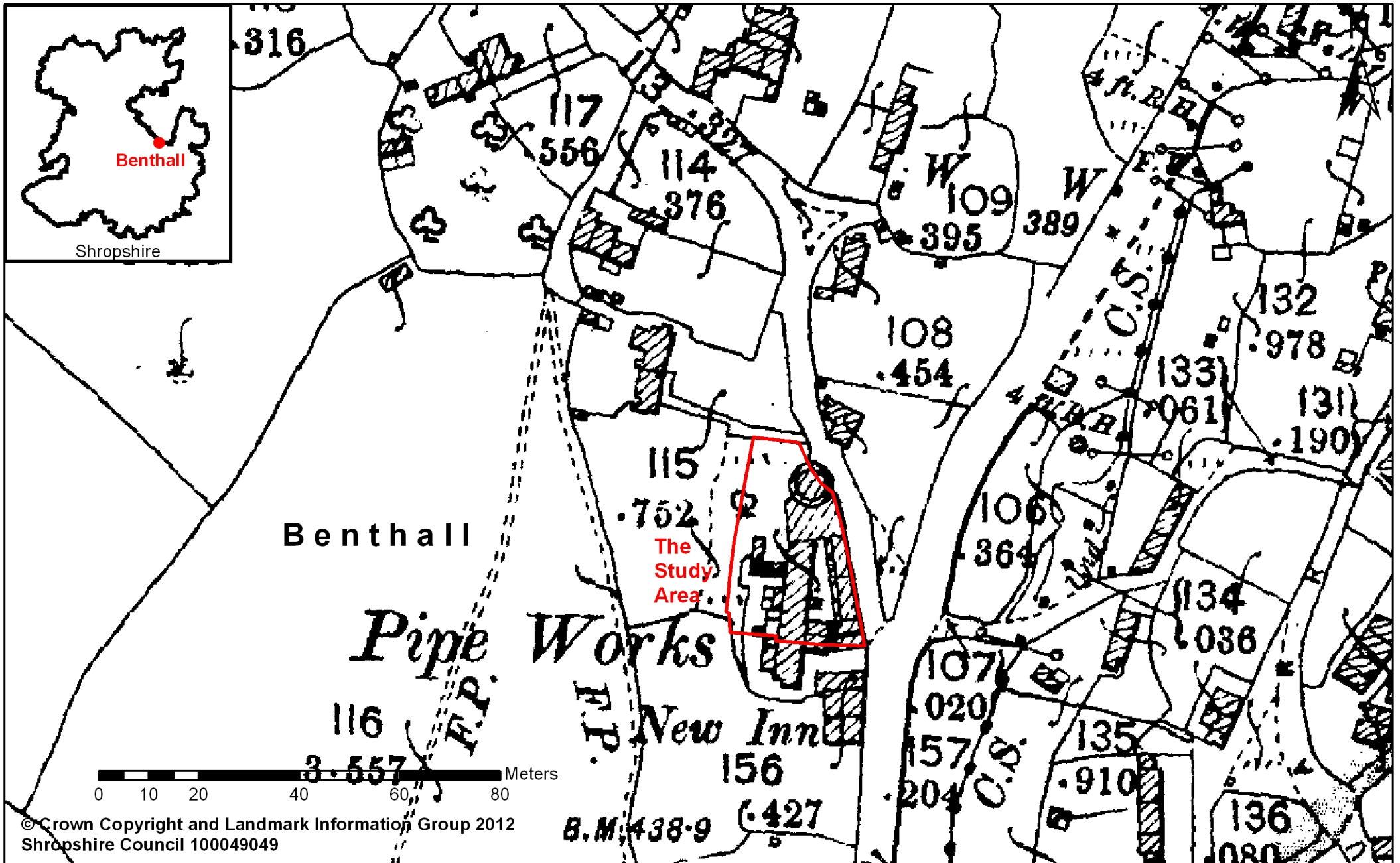
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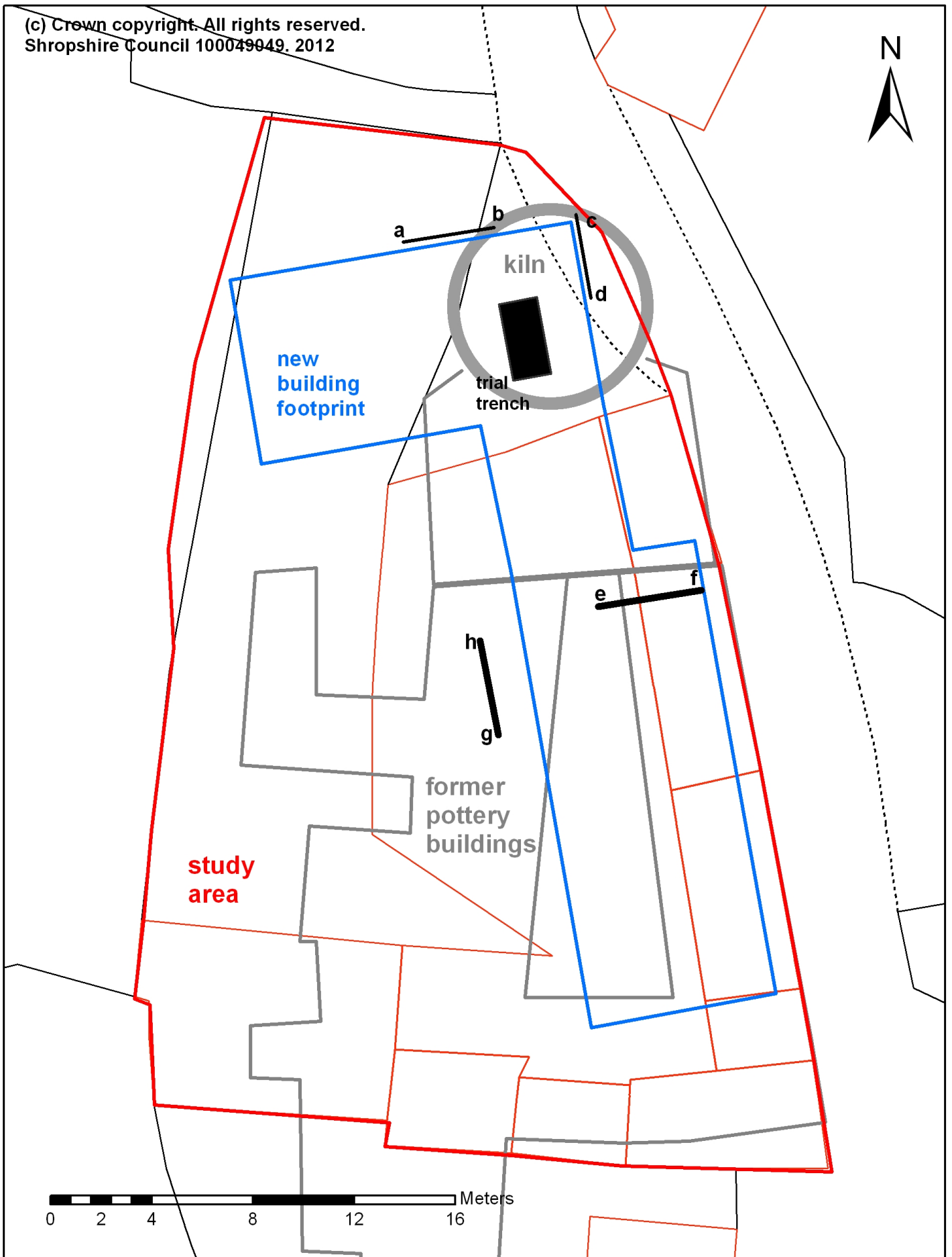
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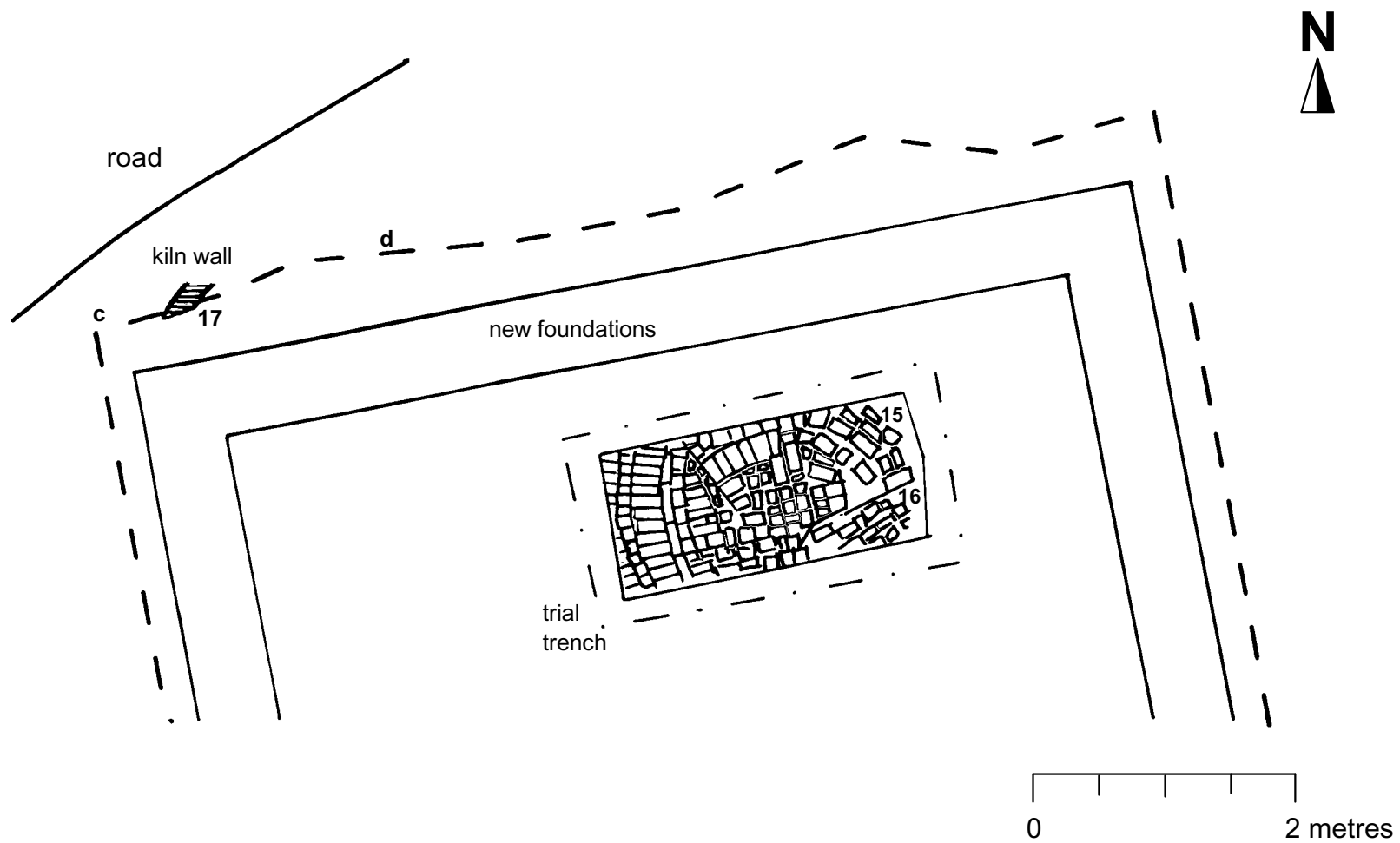
## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>HER</b>	Historic Environment Record, Shropshire Council
<b>IGMAU</b>	Ironbridge Gorge Museum Archaeology Unit
<b>NGR</b>	National Grid Reference
<b>OS</b>	Ordnance Survey
<b>SA</b>	Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury
<b>TSAS</b>	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society
<b> TSAHS</b>	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society
<b>VCH</b>	Victoria County History



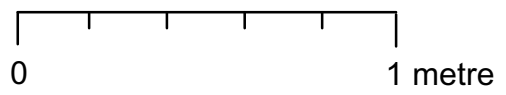
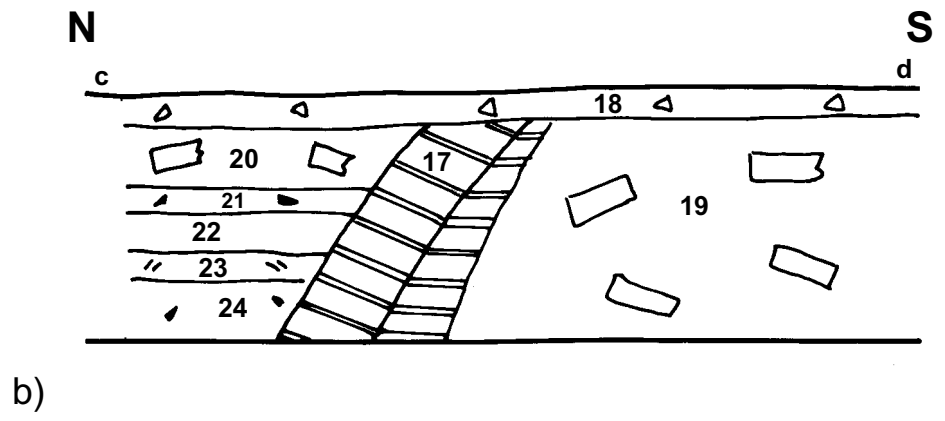
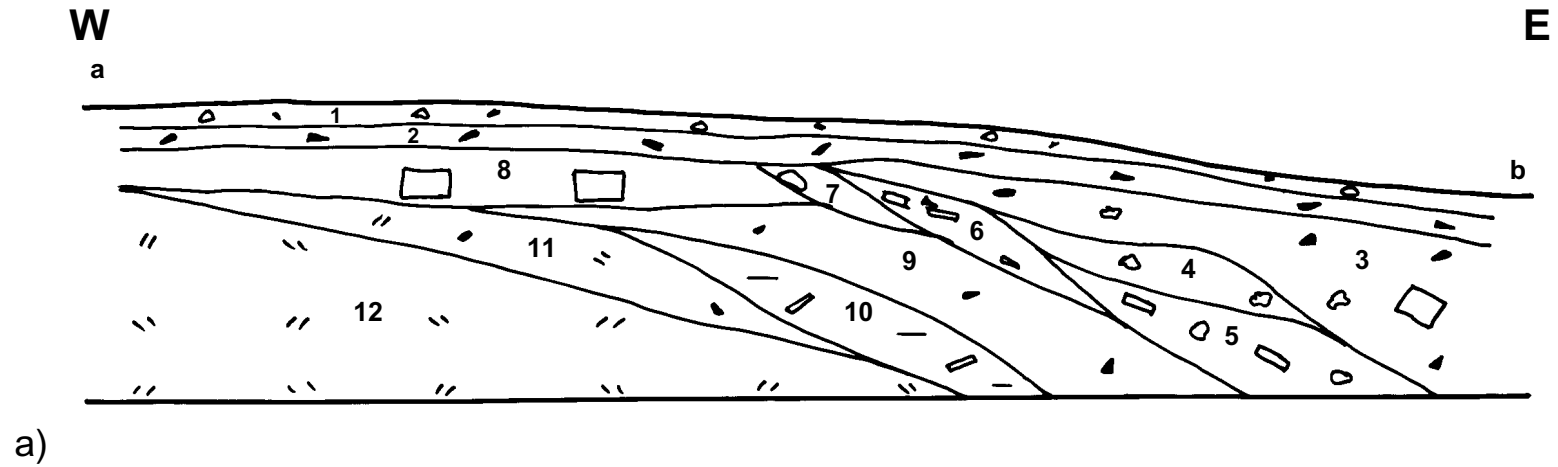






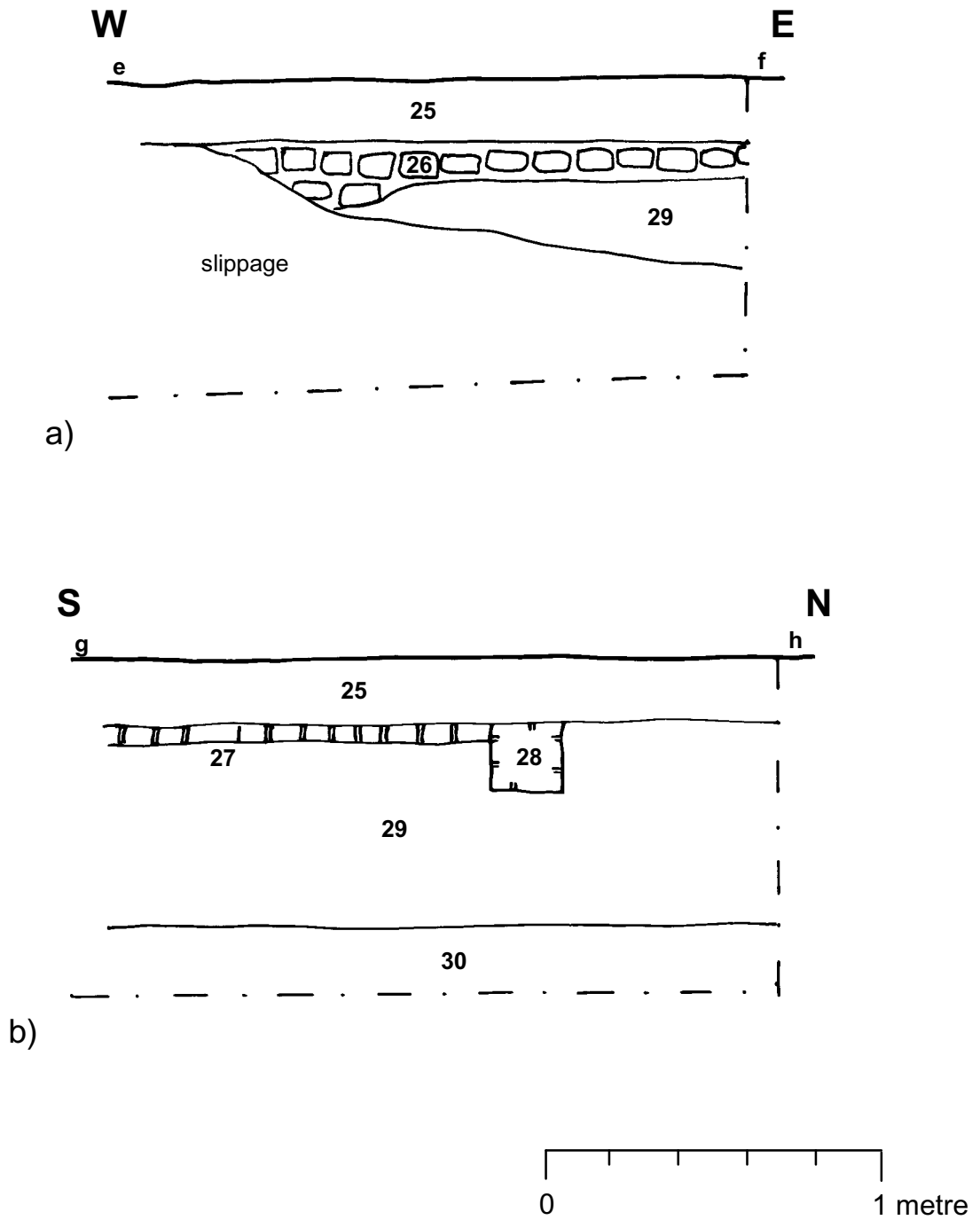
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Figure 4: The remains of the kiln in the northern part of the development, plan view; 1:50 scale



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Figure 5: a) south-facing and b) west-facing sections at the NE corner of the development site (for locations see Figure 3); 1:20 scale



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Figure 6: a) south-facing and b) east-facing sections in the central part of the development site (for locations see Figure 3); 1:20 scale



Photo 1: The study area in December 2011 prior to demolition work, looking NW



Photo 2: The study area in December 2011 prior to demolition work, looking SW



Photo 3: The northeast corner of the development, looking N





Photo 4: The remains of the kiln wall, looking E



Photo 5: The floor of the kiln, looking N (scale bars 1m & 0.5m)



Photo 6: Deep industrial tip deposits in the central part of the development area