

Kenilworth Castle Hedge Trench, Kenilworth, Warwickshire

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AND RECORDING



understanding heritage matters

Archaeology Warwickshire Report No 1627
MARCH 2015



*Working for
Warwickshire*

Project: Excavation of a trench for a new hedge,
Kenilworth Castle

Commissioned by: Joanna Hull on behalf of English Heritage
Trust

Project Report No. 1627

Site Code: KC16

Planning Reference: N/A

National Grid Reference: SP 2790 7222

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Date: March 2016

Report reference: Coutts, C M, 2016 *Kenilworth Castle Hedge
Trench, Kenilworth, Warwickshire:
Archaeological Observation and Recording,*
Archaeology Warwickshire Report 1627.

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CONTENTS		Page
	Summary	2
1	Introduction	2
2	Site Location	2
3	Archaeological and Historical Background	2
4	Aims and Methods	3
5	Results	3
6	Conclusions	4
	Acknowledgements	4
	References	4

APPENDICES

A	List of Contexts	6
B	List of Finds	6

PHOTOGRAPHS

1	Excavated trench with wall running across and curtain wall to rear	7
2	Detail of wall 6	7

FIGURES

1	Site location
2	Detail from First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1887
3	Knowles map of Kenilworth Castle in the 13th century (Knowles 1872)
4	Trench excavated

SUMMARY

A section of trench was hand-excavated in the outer court of Kenilworth Castle, ahead of planting a new hawthorn hedge. The trench revealed a hitherto unsuspected stone wall on an alignment parallel with the 13th-century curtain wall which strongly suggests the position of a former building. Finds of medieval pottery and roof tile were also recovered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 English Heritage Trust propose to plant a formal hawthorn hedge within the lowest part of the outer court (the 'base court') of Kenilworth Castle on the western approach to a set of steps leading to a postern gate through the curtain wall. The purpose of the hedge will be to mitigate against unrestricted access to a hidden drop adjacent to the castle's curtain wall. Scheduled Monument Consent has been granted for this work.

1.2 Archaeology Warwickshire were commissioned to excavate the trench for the hedging in order to record any archaeological remains in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation approved by Historic England. The fieldwork was carried out on February 23rd 2016. This report presents the results of that work. The project archive will be stored with Archaeology Warwickshire until deposition with English Heritage.

2 SITE LOCATION

2.1 The area of excavation was located on the west side of the steps to the postern gate on the southern curtain wall, centred at National Grid Reference SP 2790 7222 (Fig 1).

2.2 The superficial geology of the area is 2nd River Terrace River Deposits, consisting of sand and gravel, and the underlying geology is the Kenilworth Sandstone Formation (British Geological 1984).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 The earliest castle at Kenilworth was probably a motte and bailey construction erected in the early 12th century. This was replaced in stone in the late 12th century after the castle became a royal possession in 1173/74. The outer court was added in stone in the 13th century when the water defences may also have been expanded. Since this time the surface area covered by the castle and its defences has barely altered. Further significant alterations were made under John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, during the late 14th century and Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, during the late 16th century. The castle was slighted

and fell largely out of use in the aftermath of the civil war following the execution of Charles I in 1649.

3.2 Knowles' map of the castle shows the postern gate marked. The First Edition Ordnance Survey map (1887) depicts steps leading down to the wall, as do later editions (1905, 1925, 1938), with the 1970 Edition clearly showing the side wall to the steps.

3.3 Archaeological work in the immediate vicinity includes recording during the excavation of new post-pits for fencing near Mortimer's Tower in 2004. Here a layer of demolition rubble was recorded although most of the pits appeared to cross a former post-civil war trackway (Gethin 2004). Evaluation work at the Gallery Tower in 2005 recorded stratified archaeological deposits, with dam construction layers dating to the 12th/early 13th century, pre-dating the standing walls of the Tiltyard and Gallery Tower (Jones 2005).

4 AIMS AND METHODS

4.1 The main aim of the work was to record any archaeological remains in the trench required by the new hedge, to collate the records in an archaeological archive and present the significant aspects of the archive in a report for dissemination.

4.2 The secondary aim was to form an understanding of the remains recorded in terms of their character and date, and to place the evidence in its local and regional context.

4.3 The objective of the work was a programme of controlled excavation to a depth of 0.50m from the existing ground surface.

5 RESULTS

5.1 All excavation was carried out by hand. The 0.50m wide, 5.4m long trench was de-turfed and excavation was carried out in spits. The trench was located to the west of the steps that go down to the postern gate, on the upslope side, 0.75m from the retaining wall edge.

5.2 Sandstone wall 6 was aligned parallel to the curtain wall which was 3.40m to the south. It was 0.72m wide and was exposed as a single course 0.12m deep in the base of the c.0.50m deep trench. The northern face was dressed.

5.3 To the north was an abutting layer of dark reddish brown sandy silt with frequent small fragments of tile and mortar (7). Overlying the wall and to the south of it was a spread of sandstone demolition rubble (4). It was 0.2m deep over the wall, and over 0.4m deep to the south.

5.4 At the southern end of the trench a modern feature 5, cut layer 4. It extended at least 2.2m from the curtain wall and was filled with very dark grey brown sandy silt with frequent tile, some modern glass and Nottingham stoneware pottery (2).

5.5 At the northern end of the trench layer 4 was overlain by a layer of dark reddish brown silty sand (3) which contained medieval pottery and fragments of glaze-splashed medieval tile. Layer 3 was cut by an ambiguous, rounded, feature (8), partly revealed at the east side of the trench, north of wall 6. This may have been a posthole but was probably part of an animal burrow, and was filled with very dark grey brown sandy silt (9). The overlying topsoil was 0.16m deep (1).

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The sandstone wall 6 seems likely to have belonged to a hitherto unknown building in this part of the site. It is tempting to posit a building backed up against the curtain wall but there is no evidence for scarring on the face of the curtain wall or any joist holes. At 0.72m wide the wall could have been stone-built to the eaves but a timber-frame on a plinth is also possible. The presence of a demolition layer over the foundation could suggest that its demise was late in the castle development, although the overlying deposit containing medieval debris could point to a medieval sequence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeology Warwickshire would like to thank Joanna Hull for commissioning the work on behalf of English Heritage Trust.

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APPENDICES

A List of contexts

<i>Context</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Comment/details</i>
1	Topsoil	Very dark reddish brown sandy silt
2	Fill of cut 5	Very dark greyish brown sandy silt
3	Layer	Dark reddish brown silty sand
4	Rubble layer	Sandstone spread
5	Cut	Cut into rubble 3
6	Wall	Red sandstone, runs east-west
7	Layer	Dark reddish brown sandy silt
8	Burrow/posthole	Modern
9	Fill of 8	Greyish brown sandy loam (unexcavated)

B List of Finds

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Comments</i>
2	Clay pipe	2	Stems
2	Pottery	1	Nottingham stoneware
3	Pottery	3	Medieval, 13th/14thC
3	Animal bone	1	Rib fragment
3	Roof tile	11	3 with splashes of glaze, 1 inscribed
3	Brick	1	Burnt fragment of HM brick
3	Iron	1	Nail



1. Excavated trench with wall 6 in the centre



2. Detail of wall 6

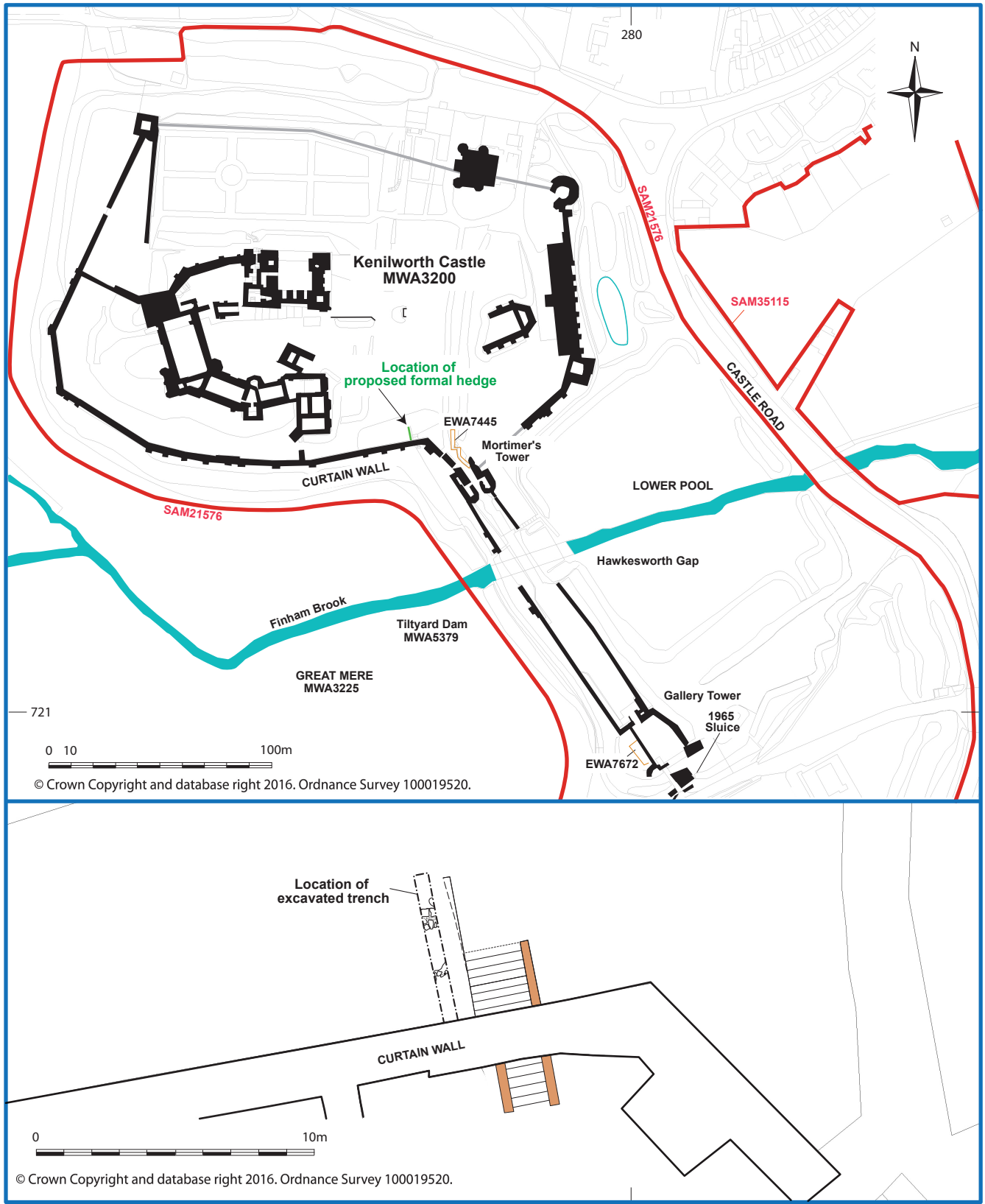


Fig 1: Location of excavated trench

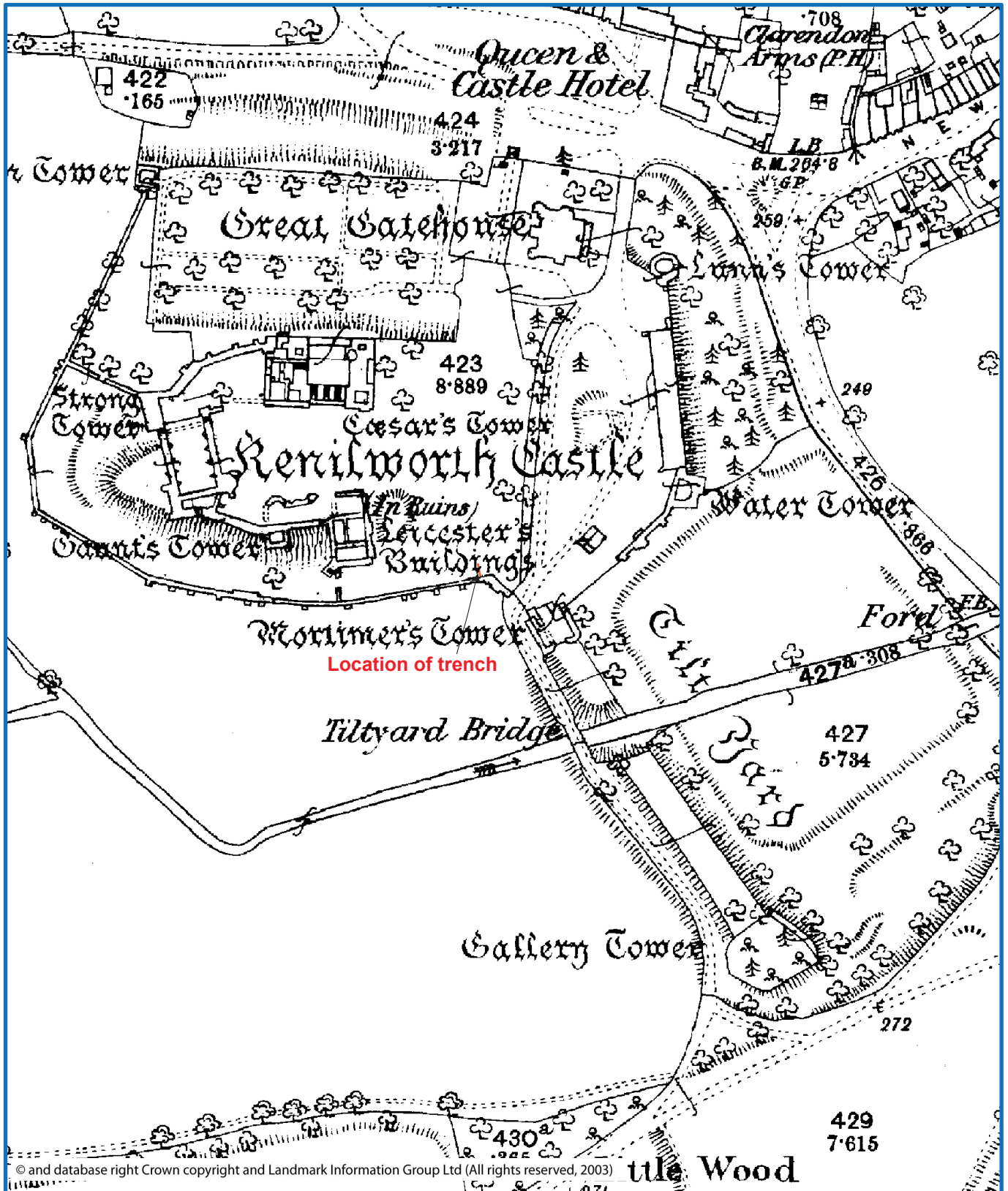


Fig 2: Detail from First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1887-8

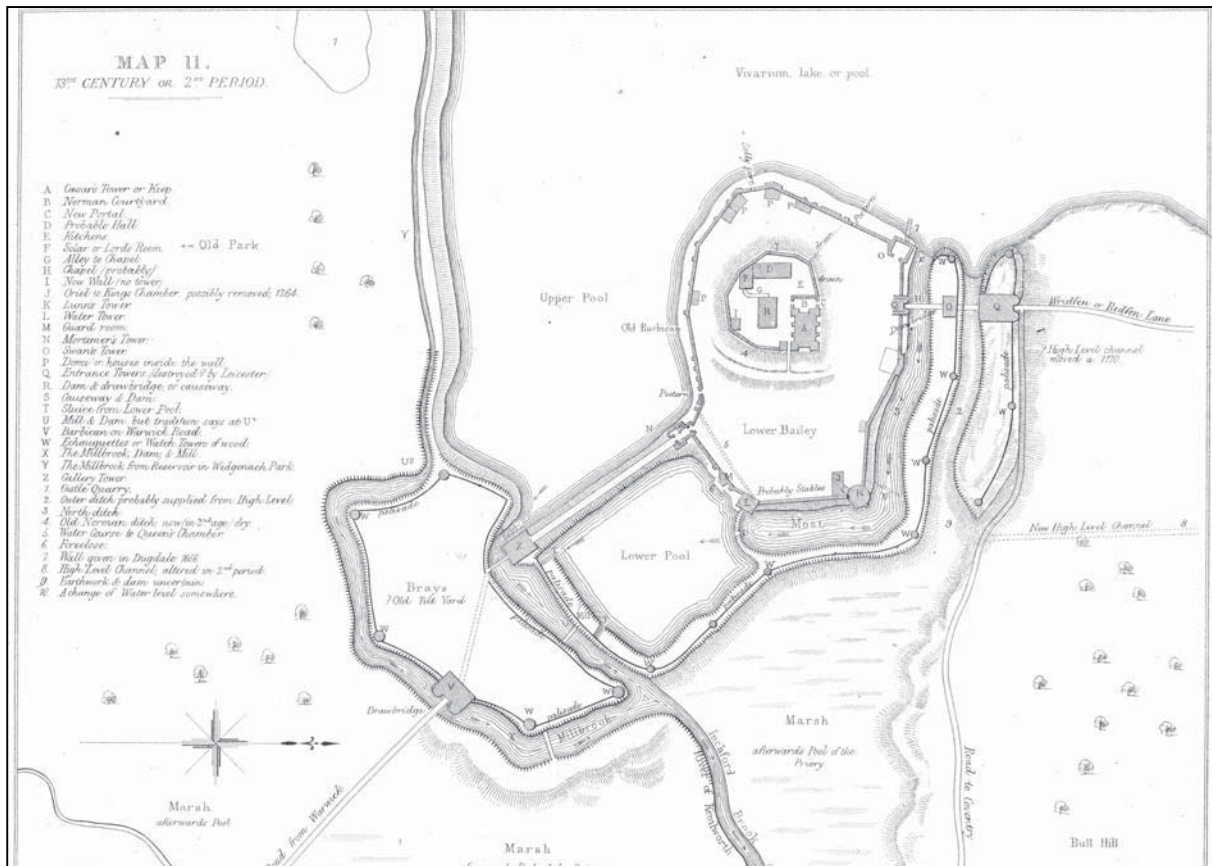


Fig 3: Knowles map of Kenilworth Castle in the 13th century (Knowles 1872)

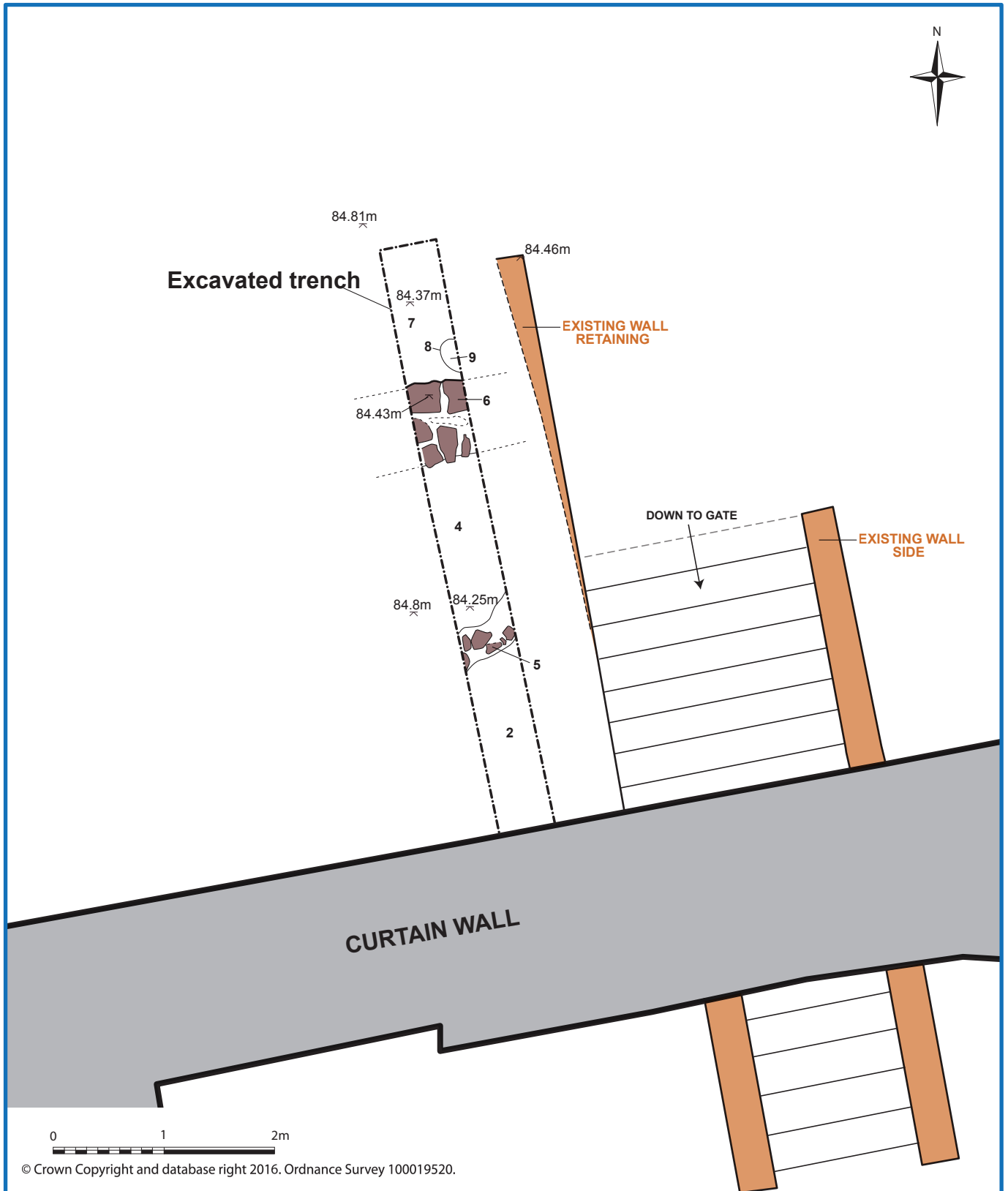


Fig 4: Trench excavated