

CASTLE GREEN, TAUNTON, SOMERSET

(NGRs ST 22663 24565 and ST 22667 24536)

Results of an archaeological watching brief

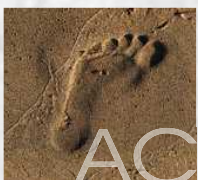
Scheduled Monument: Shell keep castle, part of the associated outer bailey, ninth century cemetery and a Civil War siegework at Taunton Castle (National Heritage List no. 1013541)

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On behalf of:
Western Power Distribution

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AC archaeology

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CONTENTS

	<i>Summary</i>	
1.	Introduction	1
2.	Archaeological background	1
3.	Aim	2
4.	Methodology	2
5.	Results	2
6.	Comments	3
7.	Archive and OASIS entry	4
8.	Acknowledgements	4
9.	Sources consulted	4

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1: Location of site

Fig. 2: Locations of watching brief observations

Fig. 3: Castle Bow trench, sections

LIST OF PLATES

Plate 1: Castle Bow trench, Castle Walk, with work in progress, view from the north

Plate 2: Castle Bow trench, Castle Bow, with work in progress, view from the west

Plate 3: Castle Walk trench, Castle Walk, brick culvert S109, view from the west (scale 1m)

Plate 4: Castle Walk service area trench, view from the east (scale 1m)

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken in January 2016 during the replacement of two sets of 11kv switchgear and associated cables at Castle Green, Taunton, Somerset (ST 22663 24565 and ST 22667 24536). The pair of trenches were located within the bounds of Taunton Castle which is designated as a Scheduled Monument, and the investigations were required by Historic England. The excavations revealed a series of deposits that had been disturbed by the laying of modern services with no features or deposits related to the medieval history of the site exposed. The only feature of note was the remains of a brick culvert or relieving arch of 19th century date. There were no finds.

1. INTRODUCTION (Figs 1 and 2)

- 1.1 This document sets out the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during replacement of two sets of 11kv switchgear and associated cables at Castle Green, Taunton, Somerset (ST 22663 24565 and ST 22667 24536; Fig 1).
- 1.2 The watching brief was commissioned by Western Power Distribution and was undertaken by AC archaeology between 7 to 23 January 2016.
- 1.3 The works were located in two locations on the east side of Castle Green – within and adjacent to Castle Bow, and within a service yard situated off Castle Walk (Fig. 2), both situated at a height of around 18m aOD on flat land. The bedrock geology consists of mudstones and halite-stone underlying a Quaternary alluvial deposit of clay, silt, sand and gravel (British Geological Survey 2016). The site is located within the former precinct of Taunton Castle, which is designated a Scheduled Monument. The building Castle Bow is Grade I Listed. The investigations were required by Historic England as a condition of Scheduled Monument Consent for the works.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The history of the area has been presented in the archaeological assessment for the Taunton Castle Enhancement Scheme prepared by Exeter Archaeology (Manning 2008, 3-6). A more detailed history of the medieval castle has also been published (Bush and Meek 1984). A summary based on these documents is presented below, along with the results of more recent archaeological investigations.
- 2.2 Taunton is known to have Saxon origins, although the exact location of the main settlement has yet to be established. A Saxon cemetery, which lies beneath the central Castle Green area, is thought to have gone out of use by the early 12th century, when the castle was constructed. The cemetery is believed to have been associated with a minster, the location of which is thought to lie inside the castle precinct, possibly within the present grounds of the Castle Hotel. Burials have been exposed on numerous occasions from the 19th century onwards (Clements 1984, 26-32; Manning 2008), and have been radiocarbon dated to the late Saxon period. A skeleton excavated on the west side of Castle Green as part of the enhancement scheme produced a radiocarbon date of cal. AD 976-1152 (Rainbird 2015, 18).
- 2.3 Taunton Castle was constructed in the early 12th century, with the position of the outer bailey being represented by the area now known as Castle Green and the surrounding buildings. The outer bailey ceased to have a defensive function from at least the 15th century, although the castle was briefly refortified during the Civil War in the mid-17th

century. Part of the moat around the western side of the outer bailey was observed in 1933 when the building now occupied by the bingo hall was constructed, and more recent geotechnical investigations undertaken in advance of the enhancement scheme have amended the known position of the infilled moat around the inner bailey (Passmore 2010).

- 2.4 During the 19th and 20th centuries, buildings were constructed within the outer bailey, although many of these have since been demolished. At this time, part of Castle Green was also used as an open cattle market. Until recently, the surface of the cattle market survived under the Castle Green car park, and it has been left *in situ* following the enhancement scheme landscaping (Rainbird 2015).
- 2.5 The building Castle Bow is Grade I Listed (National Heritage List no. 1060075). It is now part of the adjacent Castle Hotel, but has its origins as the 13th-century East Gate to the castle precinct. The building has been much altered (Webster 2016). Excavations in 2010 within the passageway did not expose any significant archaeological deposits. However, radiocarbon dates of cal. AD 890–1030 and cal. AD 1020–1170 were determined from burials located to the west along Castle Green (Passmore 2011). More recent excavations adjacent to Castle Bow during the enhancement scheme were too shallow to expose any archaeological deposits (Rainbird 2015, 9). Subsequent replacement of a water main did not produce any evidence for archaeology pre-dating the later post-medieval period (Green 2014).

3. AIM

- 3.1 The aim of the investigation was to monitor all groundworks to identify, excavate and record any below-ground archaeological deposits and features. This was with particular reference to the Saxon cemetery and medieval castle.

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The site works were undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (Passmore 2015) and in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (revised 2014).
- 4.2 Site observations were recorded using the standard AC archaeology pro-forma recording system, comprising written and graphic records and in accordance with AC archaeology's *General Site Recording Manual, Version 2*. A photographic record was made.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Castle Bow (Detailed sections Figs 3a-c; Plates 1-3)

A trench was excavated in Castle Walk which passed through the southern arch of Castle Bow and turned 90 degrees to continue within the south side of Castle Bow. The Castle Walk trench was north-south aligned and irregular in plan but in its final form measured approximately 10.5m long by 3.0m wide and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.2m, but more commonly 0.9m (Plate 1). The Castle Walk and Castle Bow trenches were joined by a breach 0.15m wide. The Castle Bow trench was east-west aligned and measured approximately 5m long by 1.2m wide and up to 0.80m deep. Chunks of tarmac were present in deposits to at least 0.63m deep in this trench and in all areas it was clear that the deposits had been disturbed by buried services.

The remains of part of a brick culvert or relieving arch (S109) was recorded in the at the southern end of the Castle Walk trench; the structure continued beyond the limits of the trench to the south and west. It was aligned east-west with the head of the arch situated immediately beyond the limit of the trench to the south. The bricks were red, hard-fired and unfroged bonded by a hard light grey mortar containing charcoal flecking. No finds were recovered from this trench.

5.2 Castle Walk Service Area (Plate 4)

In the service yard to the east of Castle Walk an area of 2.40m long by 2.20m wide was excavated to a depth of 0.90m below the ground surface. The excavation revealed that the area was formed of backfilled material over a variety of modern services. No archaeological features were recorded in plan or section and no finds were recovered.

6. COMMENTS

6.1 Castle Bow

Castle Bow is the former East Gate of the castle. It was substantially modified in the 19th century and incorporated within the building now occupied by the Castle Hotel. The watching brief trench passed in a narrow slot through the southern doorway (Door 452 in Webster 2016, fig. 15.1). This is a brick-arched doorway and Webster (*ibid.*, p. 244) states that it was probably inserted in 1822 when the meat market was built taking up the majority of the block to the south of Castle Bow, which covers an area previously occupied by the castle defences and the outer moat. The area to the south of the doorway forms a sub-square area with the Castle Green Inn to the west and 20th buildings to the east (replacements for the market building) which formed a pound area for the market (*ibid.*, fig. 6.1). Brick culvert or relieving arch S109 may also date to the period of the construction of the meat market. The trench had the potential to reveal remains of the foundation for Castle Bow where the doorway had been inserted, but these had been completely removed. No historic flooring was seen in Castle Walk or the passage of Castle Bow.

6.2 Castle Walk service area

The trench excavated in the Castle Walk service area had the potential to locate archaeological features and deposits related to the castle defences within the line of the outer moat at this location (*ibid.*). However, no features or deposits related to the castle defences were observed. In addition the trench was located in a position which would have been internal to the market constructed in 1822 and there was potential for the survival of features and deposits related to this structure. There were no features or deposits related to the meat market observed. The whole block within which the Castle Walk service area trench was located has been subject to re-development during the 20th century which appears to have destroyed the evidence for the historic use of the site.

6.3 Summary

The archaeological watching brief found that in general the deposits consisted of mixed material which had been disturbed by the laying of modern services. The only feature observed was the remains of a brick culvert of probable 19th century date. No features or deposits relating to the Saxon cemetery, medieval castle or Civil War siegeworks were uncovered.

7. ARCHIVE AND OASIS ENTRY

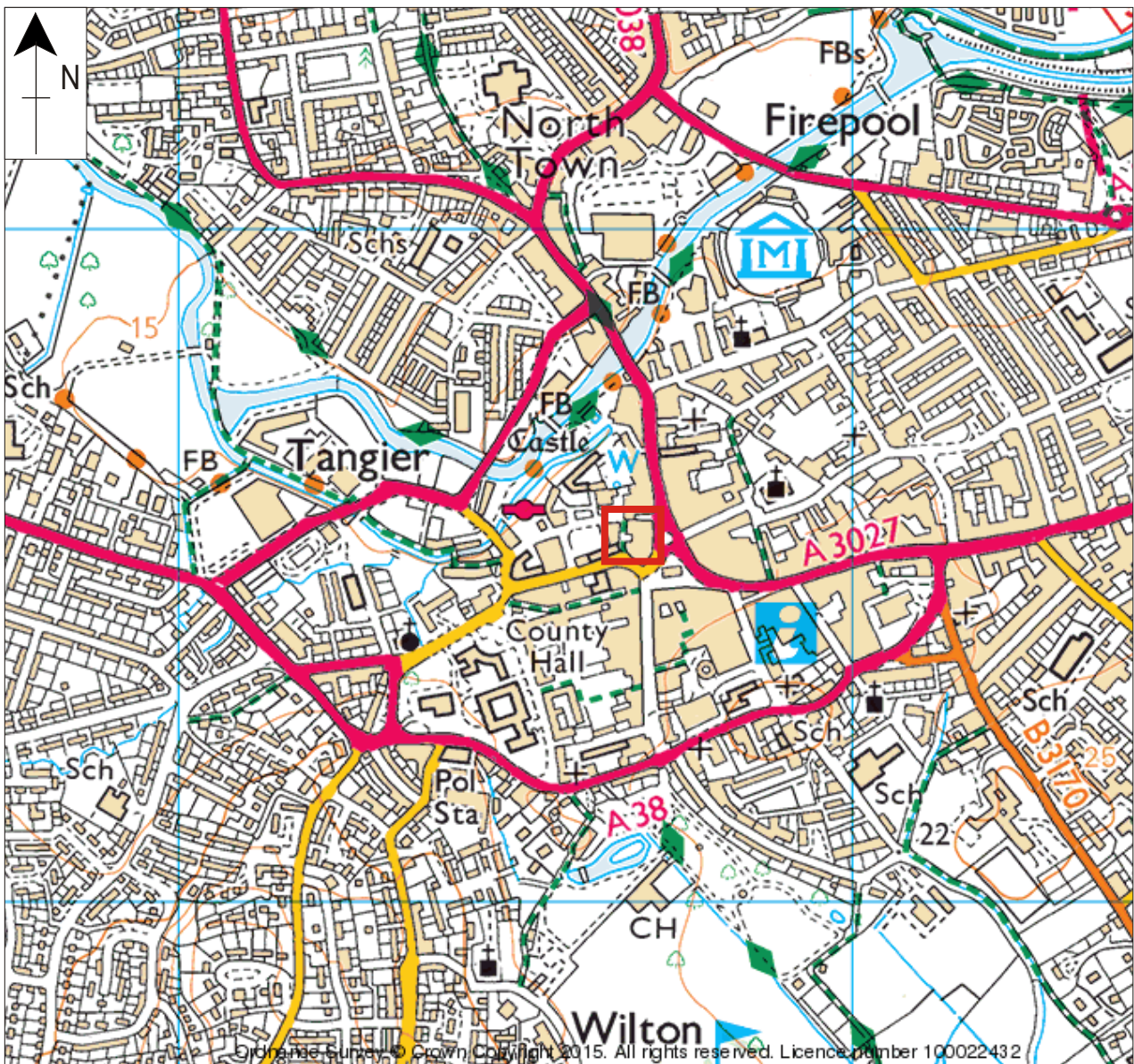
- 7.1 The paper and digital archive is currently held at the offices of AC archaeology in Bradninch under the project number ACD1245, and will be deposited with the Somerset Heritage Centre, Taunton. A museum-allocated accession number of TTNCM 45/2015 and a Somerset HER Event no. 35034 has been obtained from the Somerset Heritage Centre.
- 7.2 An entry to the OASIS database, which will include a digital copy of this report, has been created using the unique identifier **246266**.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 8.1 This project was commissioned by Western Power Distribution and managed for them by Keith Alderson and managed for AC archaeology by Andrew Passmore. The watching brief was carried out by Abigail Brown, Chris Blatchford and Paul Jones. The illustrations for this report were prepared by Stella De-Villiers. The collaborative role of Chris Webster, Somerset Historic Environment Record archaeologist, is greatly appreciated.

9. SOURCES CONSULTED

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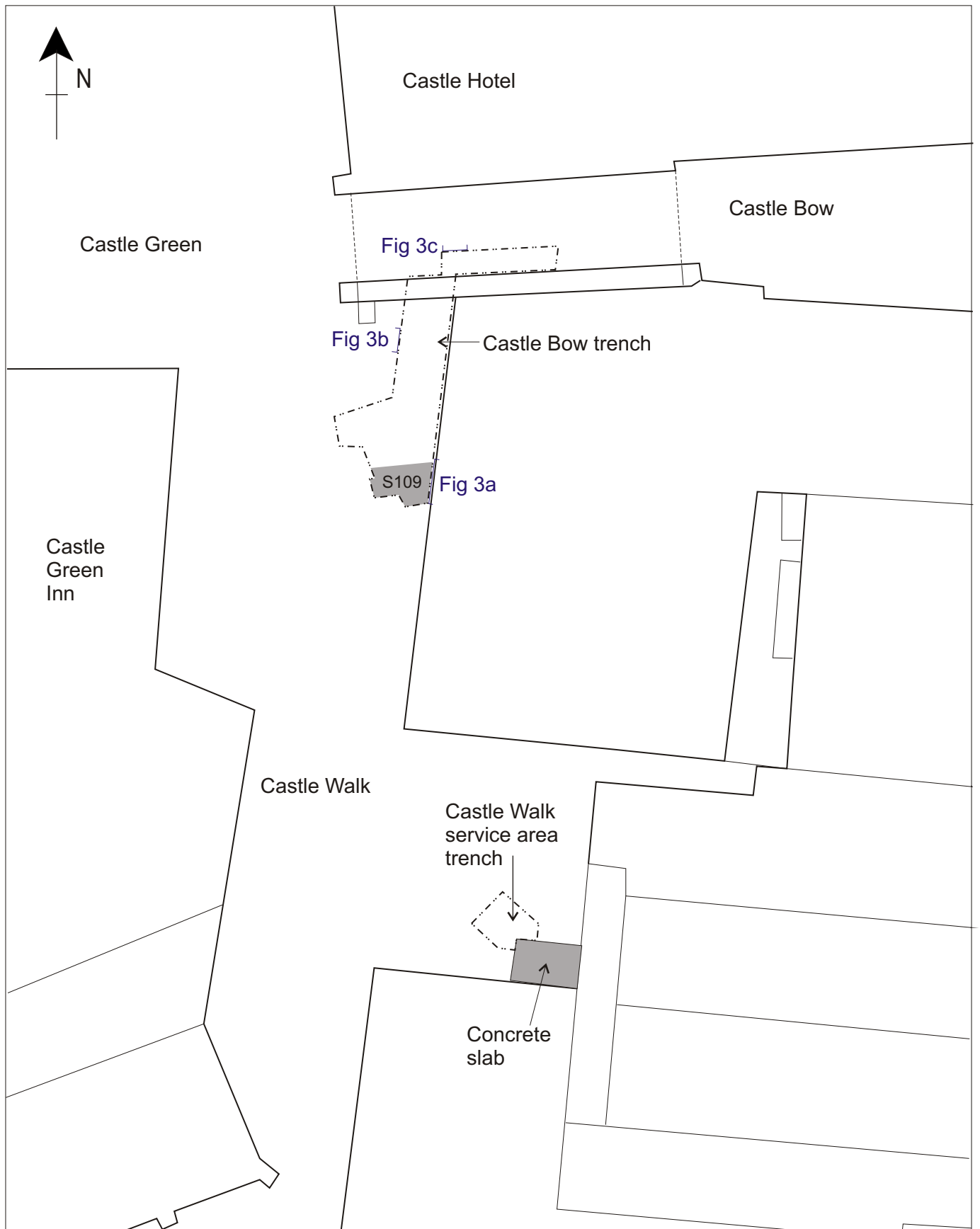
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PROJECT

Castle Green, Taunton, Somerset

TITLE

Fig. 1: Site location



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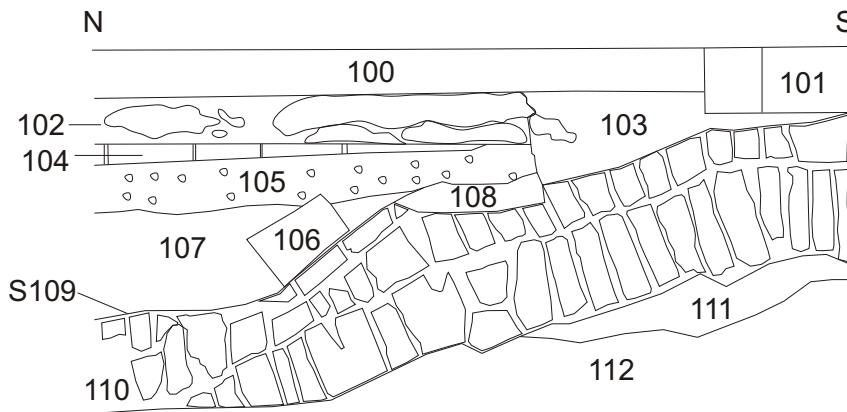
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Castle Green, Taunton, Somerset

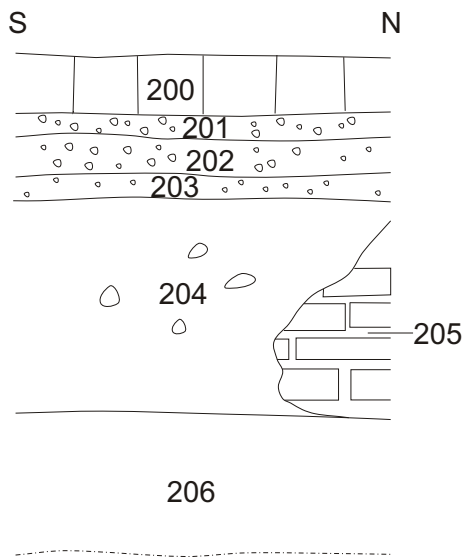
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Fig. 2: Locations of watching brief observations

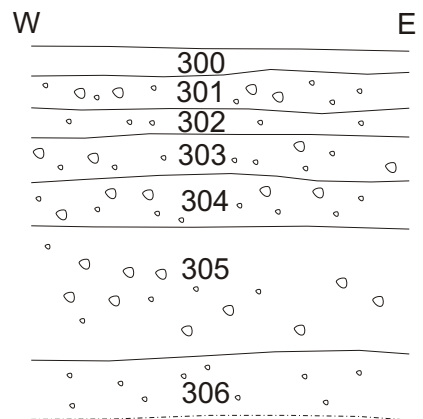
a) Section of S109



b) Representative section A



b) Representative section B



PROJECT

Castle Green, Taunton, Somerset

TITLE

Fig. 3: Castle Bow trench, sections





Plate 1: Castle Bow trench, Castle Walk, with work in progress, view from the north



Plate 2: Castle Bow trench, Castle Bow, with work in progress, view from the west



Plate 3: Castle Bow trench, Castle Walk, brick culvert S109, view from the west (scale 1m)



Plate 4: Castle Walk service area trench, view from the east (scale 1m)

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