

BERRY POMEROY CASTLE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



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NEW ADMISSIONS BUILDING AT BERRY POMEROY CASTLE, DEVON ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF, 2006

SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was conducted during groundworks for a new admissions building and related underground services within the scheduled area lying outside the castle walls in the vicinity of the gatehouse. Part of an outer bank associated with the late 15th-century castle's defensive ditch was exposed, as well as remains from a retaining wall which once flanked the carriage drive leading to the castle. An extensive dump of re-deposited natural slate stone and clay which had been spread across much of the area is interpreted as part of the levelling of the defences in the 16th or 17th-century, and the creation of a courtyard outside the gatehouse. Overlying the dump were deposits containing numerous fragments of broken ashlar and other building stone which had been robbed from the castle after its abandonment c. 1700. The stone appears to have been re-dressed outside the castle gatehouse before being carried away for re-use elsewhere.

The watching brief was carried out in June and July 2006 by Stewart Brown Associates, and funded by English Heritage. The site of the ruined castle (OS SX83896232; Monument No. 21706) is owned by the Duke of Somerset and managed by English Heritage.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Three archaeological watching briefs have previously been carried out within the same area (Brown 1996, 151-2, Trenches Q, R, and S). The results of the earlier work are discussed below together with those of the 2006 watching brief since the former help set the latter in context. The plan and section drawing of a particularly long trench which extended across the area from N-S (Trench Q, 1988) are reproduced in this report in order to show the relationship between trenches opened at different dates, and the archaeological deposits they uncovered (Fig. 6).

An archaeological survey made of the Duke of Somerset's Berry Pomeroy estate in 1998 provides a broader context for the castle and its setting within a deer park, including tracing the course of the former carriage drive leading to the castle from Castle Lodge (Brown 1988; and Fig. 7)).

THE WATCHING BRIEF

The groundworks were monitored archaeologically throughout. The aims of the watching brief were to observe, investigate, and record any archaeological remains and deposits disturbed or destroyed during the groundworks, and to assess the nature, extent, and date range of archaeological remains and deposits.

Field Methods

The location of the 2006 excavations was plotted onto a survey made of the castle site by

Simmons Survey Partnership in 1988 (Fig. 1). Archaeological features and deposits were individually identified and recorded as archaeological 'contexts', each being allocated a unique number for the project. Archaeological sections were drawn wherever appropriate. A photographic record was made

Finds

No finds were recovered from the excavations apart from 19th- and 20th-century pottery sherds which were discarded.

DESCRIPTION

Trench 1 (Figs. 1 and 2)

Trench 1 was on average 0.5m deep and 0.2m wide, and was dug by hand owing to the large number of tree roots in the area. It extended 8.5m westward from the existing toilet block, across an area known to contain archaeological remains from the former carriageway leading to the castle. Underlying a series of modern dumps and path surfaces (1-5) was a layer of compacted clay containing slate stone fragments (7). This, together with a more stony clay layer beneath it (8), almost certainly represent road make-up deposits for the original carriageway. The former road surface appears to have been lost in this area. To the west, were the remains of the stone wall which once revetted the downslope side of the carriageway (9). The wall was built 0.9m wide of limestone rubble set in dark brown earth.

Trench 1 Context descriptions

Context no.	description	date
1	topsoil and modern path surface	modern
2	yellow aerated clay with slate fragments	modern
3	light red aerated clay with slate fragments	modern
4	yellow aerated clay with slate fragments	modern
5	light red aerated clay with slate fragments	modern
6	dark brown aerated clay with slate fragments and loose limestone rubble	17th-20th century
7	compacted yellow and red clay with slate	16th-17th century
8	as 7, but with many more slate fragments	16th-17th century
9	revetment wall	16th-17th century

Trench 2 (Figs. 1 and 3)

Trench 2 was opened by mechanical digger in order to lay a concrete base for the new admissions building. It was 6.3m long, 4.1m wide and from 0.1m- 0.35m deep. Beneath modern topsoil (10) was a dump of loose slate stone and clay (11) which almost certainly represents re-deposited natural, or possibly quarry waste from nearby quarries opened to provide slate building stone for the castle. The surface of the dump was cleaned

archaeologically, but no features were found. A scatter of Beer stone fragments survived on the surface of the dump, almost certainly associated with the re-dressing of building stone which took place outside the castle following its abandonment. Modern pottery sherds were also found on the surface, showing that modern disturbance extends down to this level (white glazed earthenware, and flowerpot; sherds discarded).

The stony clay dump (11) was an extensive deposit also encountered in trenches 3-6 (below).

Trench 2 Context descriptions

Context no.	description	date
10	topsoil and modern dumps	modern
11	loose slate stone in clean light brown aerated clay	16 th -17 th century

Trench 3 (Figs. 1 and 3)

Trench 3 was dug by hand in order to lay an electric cable. It was 0.35m wide and 0.5m deep. Beneath modern topsoil (12) was a stony clay dump (13) which was identical and continuous with layer 11 in trench 2. At the north end of the trench, the dump overlay a deposit of red clay containing large limestone fragments and some slate stone (14). The latter deposit is interpreted as upcast from digging the late 15th-century castle ditch, and appears to have formed part of an outer bank which once flanked the south side of the ditch (see Fig. 6, outer bank).

Trench 3 Context descriptions

Context no.	description	date
12	topsoil and modern dumps	modern
13	loose slate stone in clean light brown aerated clay	16 th -17 th century
14	clean red clay with large rough-hewn limestone fragments and some slate stone	late 15 th century

Trench 4 (Figs. 1 and 3)

Trench 4 was dug by mechanical digger in order to lay a sewer pipe. It was 0.3m wide and 0.4m deep. Beneath modern topsoil (15) was a stony clay dump (16) which was identical and continuous with layer 11 in trench 2.

Trench 4 Context descriptions

Context no.	description	date
15	topsoil and modern dumps	modern
16	loose slate stone in clean light brown aerated clay	16 th -17 th century

Trench 5 (Figs. 1 and 4)

Trench 5 was dug by mechanical digger in order to lay a sewer pipe. It was 0.3m wide and from 0.4m – 0.6m deep. Beneath modern topsoil (17) was a stony clay layer (18) which was identical and continuous with layer 11 in trench 2. At the south end of the first run of the trench, the stony dump overlay a less stony and more yellow clay deposit (19) which probably represents an earlier dump of re-deposited natural, or possibly natural itself. The second run of the trench turned toward the south-west. Here, the stony dump (18) was cut by a long feature 0.4m deep which contained loose aerated brown clay with few stones (20). The feature lies on the known course of the revetment wall flanking the downslope side of the carriage drive leading to the castle, so can reasonably be interpreted as a robber-trench for the wall (see Fig. 1). Modern disturbances of the ground at the SW end of the trench (21, 22) were associated with the insertion of a water-pipe leading to the tearooms and a sewer pipe.

Trench 5 Context descriptions

Context no.	description	date
17	topsoil and modern dumps	modern
18	loose slate stone in clean light brown aerated clay	16 th -17 th century
19	yellow-brown aerated clay with some slate stone	16 th -17 th century
20	robber-trench containing aerated brown clay with few stones	18 th -20 th century
21	modern disturbance	
22	modern disturbance	

Trench 6 (Figs. 1 and 5)

Trench 6 was dug by mechanical digger in order to lay a new water supply. It was 0.3m wide and 0.7m deep. Beneath modern topsoil and dumps (23) was a grey clay deposit (24) which probably represents a buried turf horizon. Beneath the grey clay was a clean light brown silty clay deposit containing some slate fragments (25) which appears to have accumulated over a considerable time, probably by water action. Sediments may have built up in the 19th and 20th centuries across the area at the bottom of the present roadway, owing to frequent flooding following rain. Underlying this was a clay dump (26) containing numerous fragments of broken building stone (Beer stone, red sandstone, and granite), some of which retained flat, tooled faces. The building stone had almost certainly been robbed from the castle following its abandonment, and re-dressed for use elsewhere. At the bottom of the dump was a patch of pink mortar which probably also came from the re-working of building stone. Toward the northern end of the trench, dump 26 had been cut through by the insertion of a wooden post dating probably from the 20th century (27). The digging of the associated post-hole had completely removed a late 18th-century or later ceramic land drain which survived on the opposite side of the trench (28, ni). The earliest deposit exposed by the trench was a light brown clay dump containing many slate stone fragments which had been compacted at its surface (29). This probably represents the surface of the 16th-/17th-century courtyard outside the gatehouse. The latter deposit was absent at the northern end of the trench, where instead, a deposit of clean red clay was exposed. The clay deposit (30) appeared homogenous and

undisturbed, so could be natural, although it might just possibly represent another dump of re-deposited natural. The red clay continued along the bottom of the trench after the trench turned westward to link with trench 2. About midway along this second run, a stony dump of light brown clay (31) was found to lie between the red clay (30) and layer 26. This dump was identical and continuous with layer 11 in trench 2.

Trench 6 Context descriptions

Context no.	description	date
23	topsoil and modern dumps	modern
24	grey clay turf horizon	20 th century
25	clean light brown silty clay containing some slate fragments – probably water-deposited	20 th century
26	light brown clay containing broken building stone and mortar	17 th -20 th century
27	wooden post in post-hole	20 th century
28	ceramic land drain	late 18 th cent. or later
29	compacted light brown clay dump containing many slate stone fragments - ?courtyard surface	16 th -17 th century
30	red clay (?undisturbed natural)	
31	loose slate stone in clean light brown aerated clay	16 th -17 th century

Trench 7

Trench 7 was dug by mechanical digger for a new sewage treatment tank. It was 7.6m long, 3.5m wide, and 2.25m deep. No section was drawn of its sides since these contained no archaeology. A column of measurements was taken however in order to record the depths of different natural deposits. At the bottom of the trench was a 0.8m thick deposit of clean red clay. This overlay slate bedrock which was exposed at one corner of the trench. Above the red clay was a 0.9m thick deposit of light yellow/brown clay containing many slate stone fragments. This is almost certainly a natural erosion or hillwash deposit which accumulated at the foot of the hillside to the south. The uppermost deposits in the sides of the trench were modern dumps originating from the digging of the previous septic tank.

Trenches 8 and 9

Trenches 8 and 9 were dug by mechanical digger in order to lay drainage pipes for the new sewage treatment tank. The trenches were 0.5m wide, 1m deep, and 22.5m long. No section was drawn of their sides since the trenches cut through only modern deposits and the same erosion or hillwash deposit exposed in trench 7.

DISCUSSION

The Late 15th-century defences (Fig. 6)

The construction of the castle in the late 15th century began with the digging of the defensive

ditch and the raising of earthwork ramparts, on which the stone defences were then erected (Brown 1996, 21). Upcast from digging the ditch comprised largely rough-hewn limestone rubble and red clay, which was thrown up to each side in order to construct the rampart beneath the curtain wall and a smaller outer bank. Both these features appear in the composite section of trenches 2, 3, 5 and Q (Fig. 6). The ditch was infilled sometime in the 16th or 17th century with a series of dumps containing large quantities of building demolition waste, which is likely to have come from one of the major rebuilding campaigns undertaken by the Seymours after they acquired the castle in 1547. The infilling of the ditch remains unexcavated, so its precise date is unknown. Trench Q exposed some of its uppermost layers, but these produced no datable finds. The outer bank would almost certainly have been levelled at the same time that the ditch was infilled.

The 16th - or 17th - century Outer Court (Figs. 6 and 7)

The levelling of the outer defences created a flat open area outside the castle gate which is then likely to have served as an outer court. There are remains of outbuildings on the south-east side of this area, facing the castle, which may well represent remnants of stables and perhaps a coach-house (Fig. 7). The remains have yet to be investigated archaeologically, but it would not be surprising if they were found to date from this period.

On the west of the court, the ground now falls sharply away along a straight break in slope. This appears to be a deliberate re-shaping of the local topography in order to extend the level area of the courtyard toward the west. Indeed, many of the modern service trenches which crossed this part of the site located an extensive 16th - or 17th - century levelling dump which made up the ground by more than 0.5m (Fig. 6). The dump contained much broken slate stone which is likely to be either re-deposited natural or quarry waste. Very similar deposits were used to infill the eastern terrace of the castle, which was built c. 1600 (Brown 1996, 125). In places, the top of the dumps had been compacted to form a hard, distinct surface. Elsewhere, the surface has been lost owing to later disturbances.

The Carriage Drive (Fig. 7)

The present roadway leading to the castle has been in existence since at least the time of the Tithe Map made in 1841, but is not the original one. There is a disused, overgrown 'hollow way' which clearly preceded it, and which follows a different route. The old carriage drive can be traced for most of its length, and is especially clear close to the castle, where it was terraced into the hillside and revetted by stone walls on both sides (Fig. 7; the old carriage drive underlies the present tearooms and toilets). The revetment walls are still standing in places to a height of over 2m. Elsewhere, the walls have been reduced to their footings (eg in Trench 1, wall 9), or have been removed entirely (eg in Trench 5, robber-trench 20).

A route down to the castle would presumably have been established when the castle was first built in the late 15th century, but the carriage drive itself may date from the later conversion of the castle by the Seymours into a stately house. The drive would have opened onto the outer court, where carriages would have been able to turn, and stabling may well have been available.

CONCLUSION

The watching brief has provided a useful assessment of the archaeological stratigraphy surviving within a large area just outside the castle. By combining the results of the 2006 work with those of previous watching briefs, it has been possible to produce a continuous N-S profile through the archaeological deposits surviving across much of the area, albeit to an average depth of only 0.5m (Fig. 6). This provides valuable information relating to the late 15th-century earthwork defences surrounding the castle, as well as the overlying levelling deposits associated with the later courtyard.

It has been shown that archaeological deposits dating from the occupation of the castle lie at a shallow depth beneath the present ground surface, the depth in most places being less than 0.3m. In the vicinity of the present tearooms however, there are deeper overlying deposits associated with re-dressing of stone robbed from the castle after its abandonment c. 1700. The latter deposits are up to 0.4m deep (Fig. 5).

A limitation of all the trench excavations outside the castle is the absence of pottery or other datable finds. This means that the levelling of the earthwork defences and the creation of the courtyard cannot presently be dated more closely than generally to the 16th or 17th century. It would seem that the deposits covering much of this area most often comprise re-deposited natural stone and clay, and contain very few, if any finds. The infilling of the defensive ditch however has potential for producing finds from its lower levels, since it is likely that domestic waste would have been tipped into the ditch in addition to the building demolition waste known to occupy its upper levels.

A photographic record was made of the 2006 trenches, but these illustrate little more than re-deposited natural deposits, so none have been selected for inclusion in this report.

REFERENCES

Brown, S.W. 1996 'Berry Pomeroy Castle', *Proc. Devon Archaeol. Soc.* **54**.

_____ 1998 *Berry Pomeroy – Archaeological Survey for Presentation*.

Appendix

Summary of the Archive Contents

Site Records

1 Folder containing:

31 site context sheets

15 colour print photographs with index

section drawings - 2 drafting film sheets, plus 1 A4 sheet graph paper

Finds

No finds were kept from the excavations. The only finds were 19th- and 20th- century in date – these were discarded on site.

Report

1 copy of the report

The site archive was deposited at Exeter RAM Museum in October 2006.

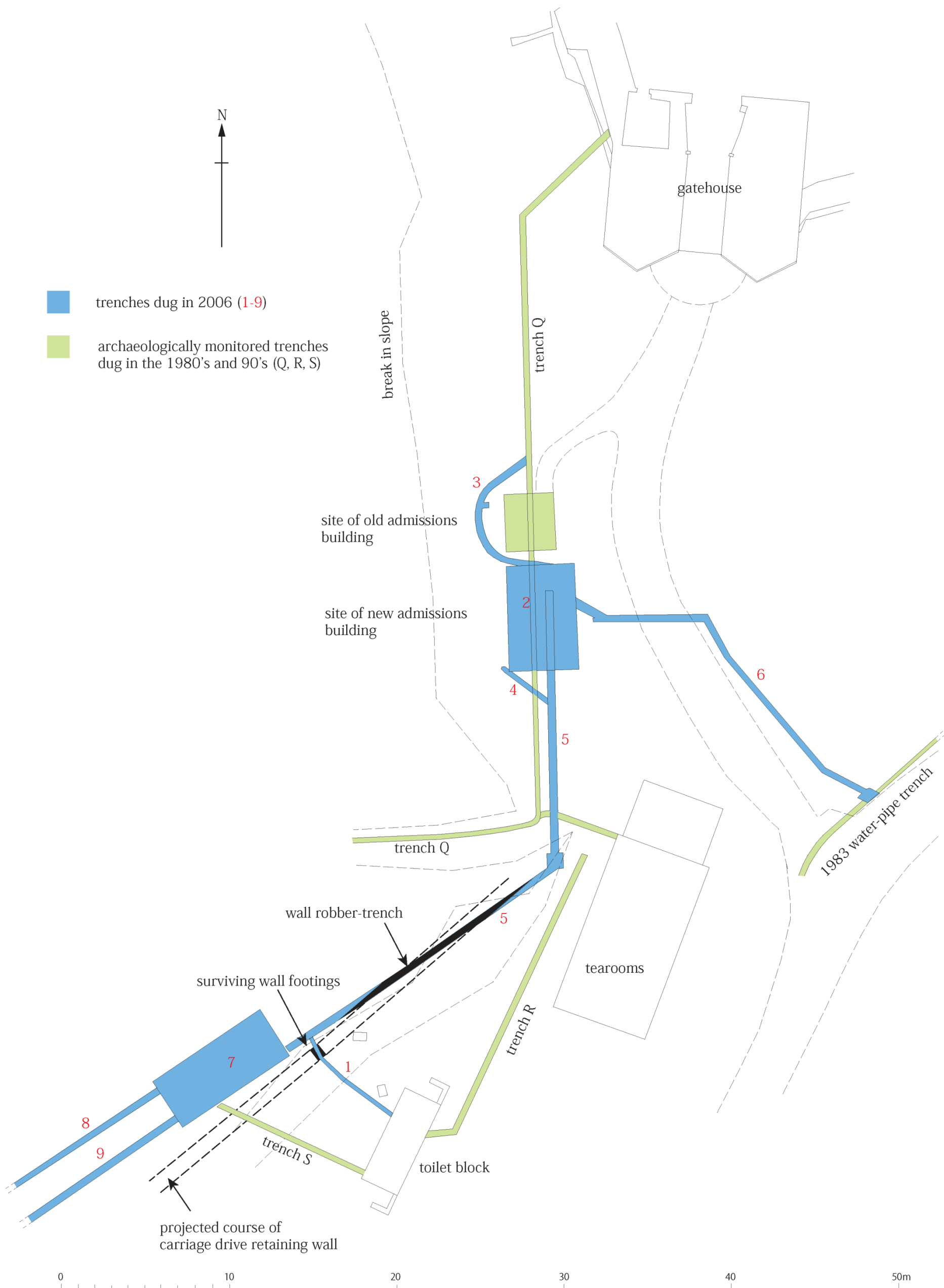


Fig. 1 Plan showing archaeologically monitored trenches to the South and South-east of the castle gatehouse.

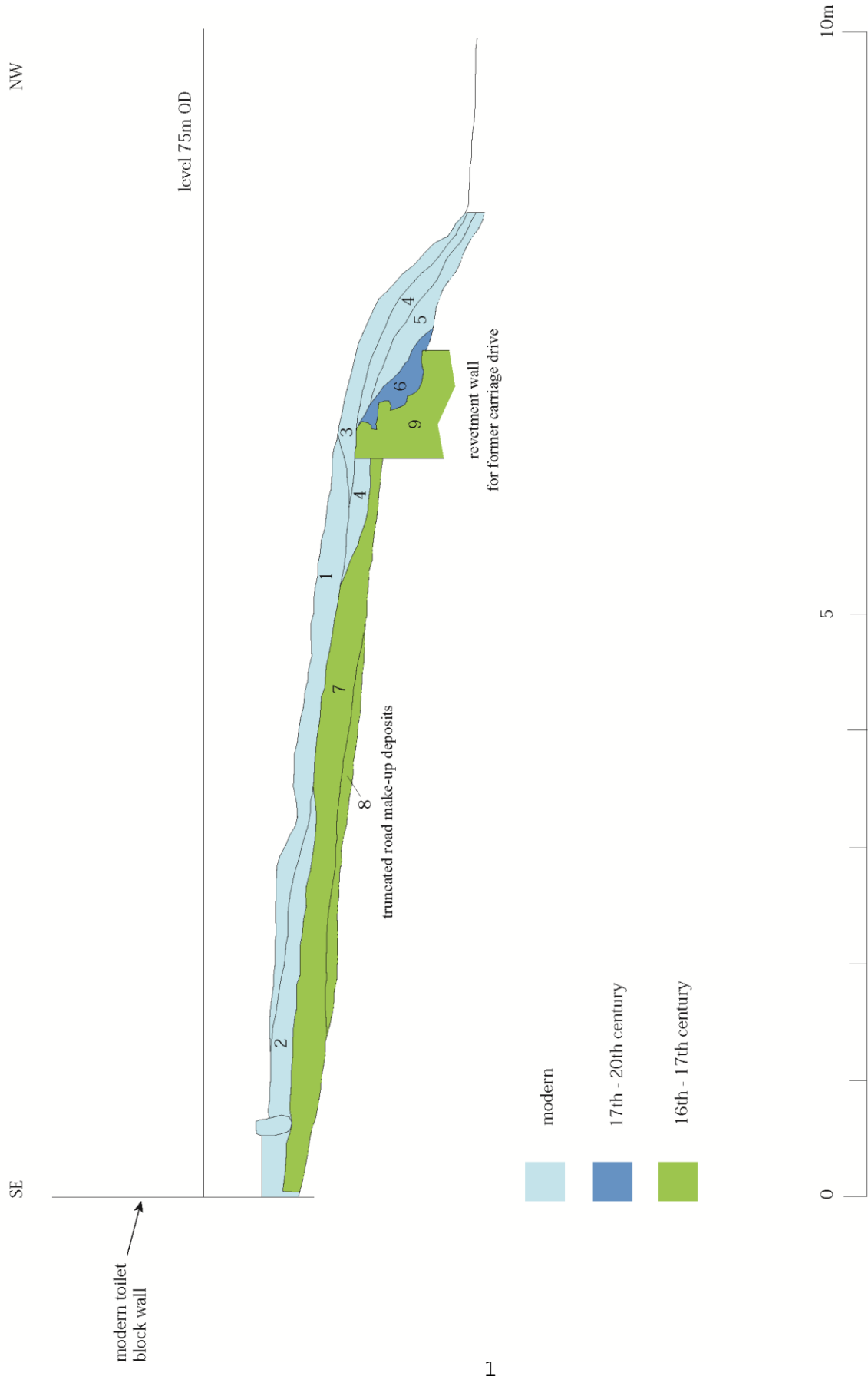


Fig. 2 Section 1

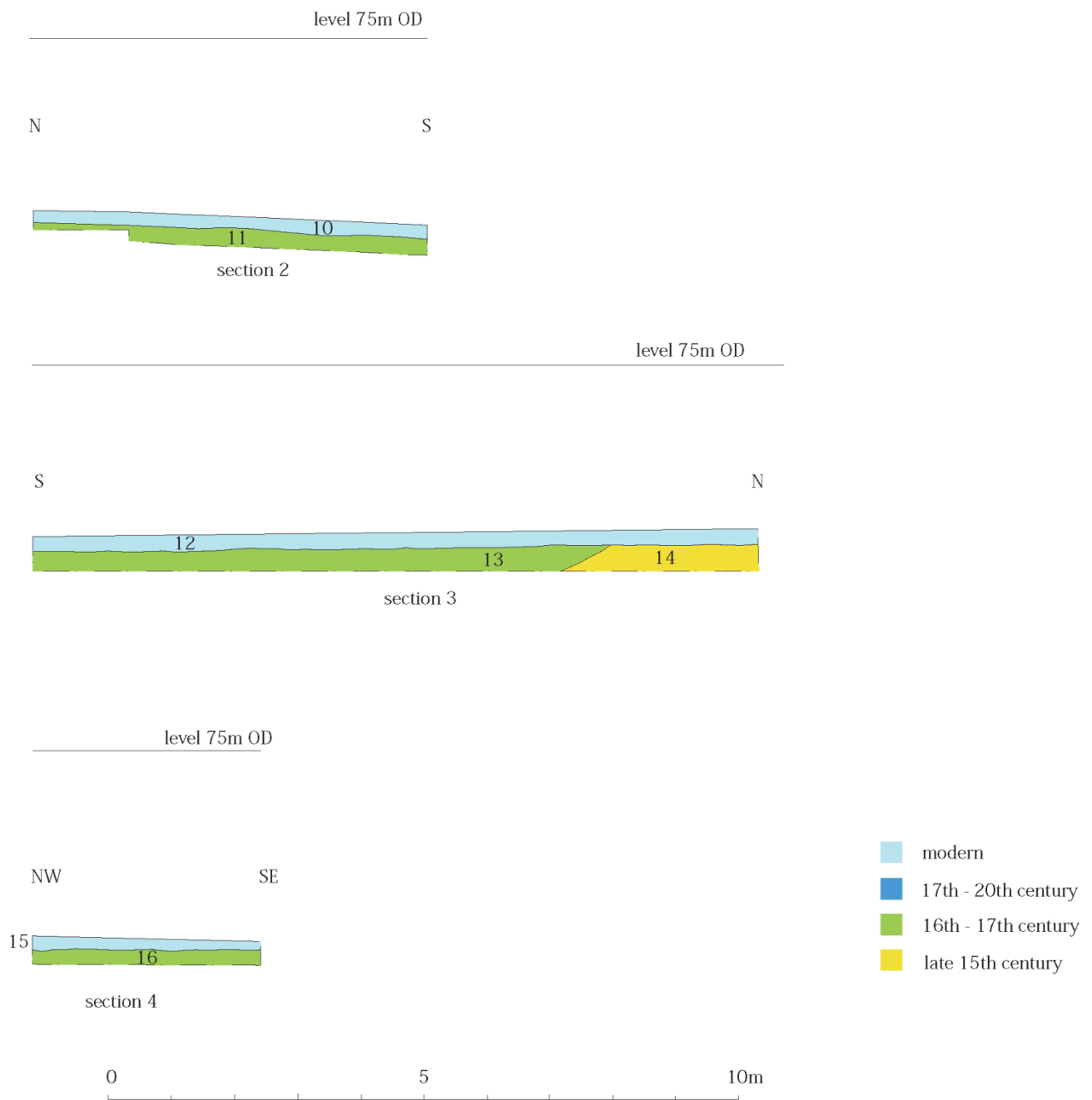


Fig. 3 Sections 2 - 4

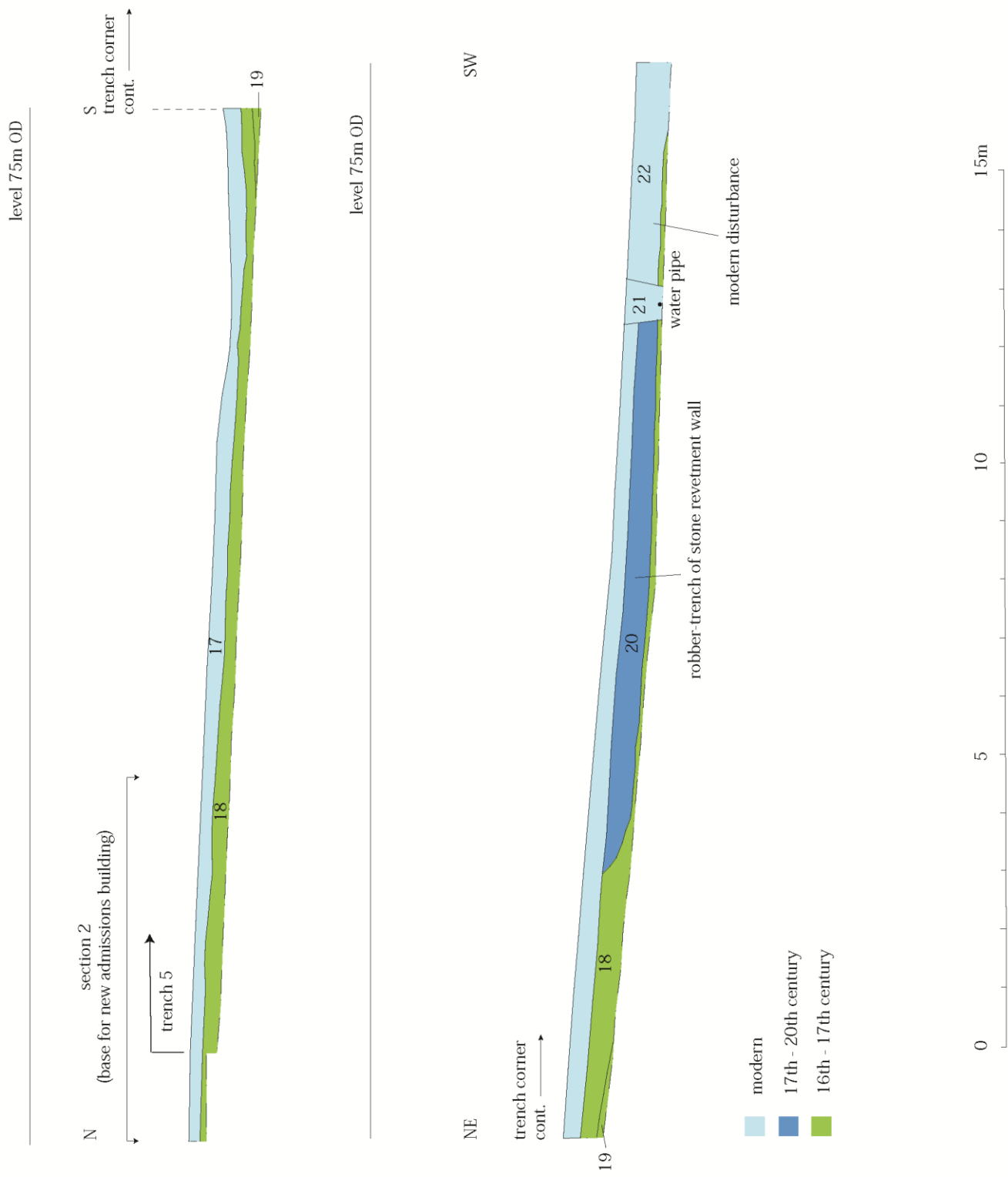


Fig. 4 Section 5 (showing overlap with section 2)

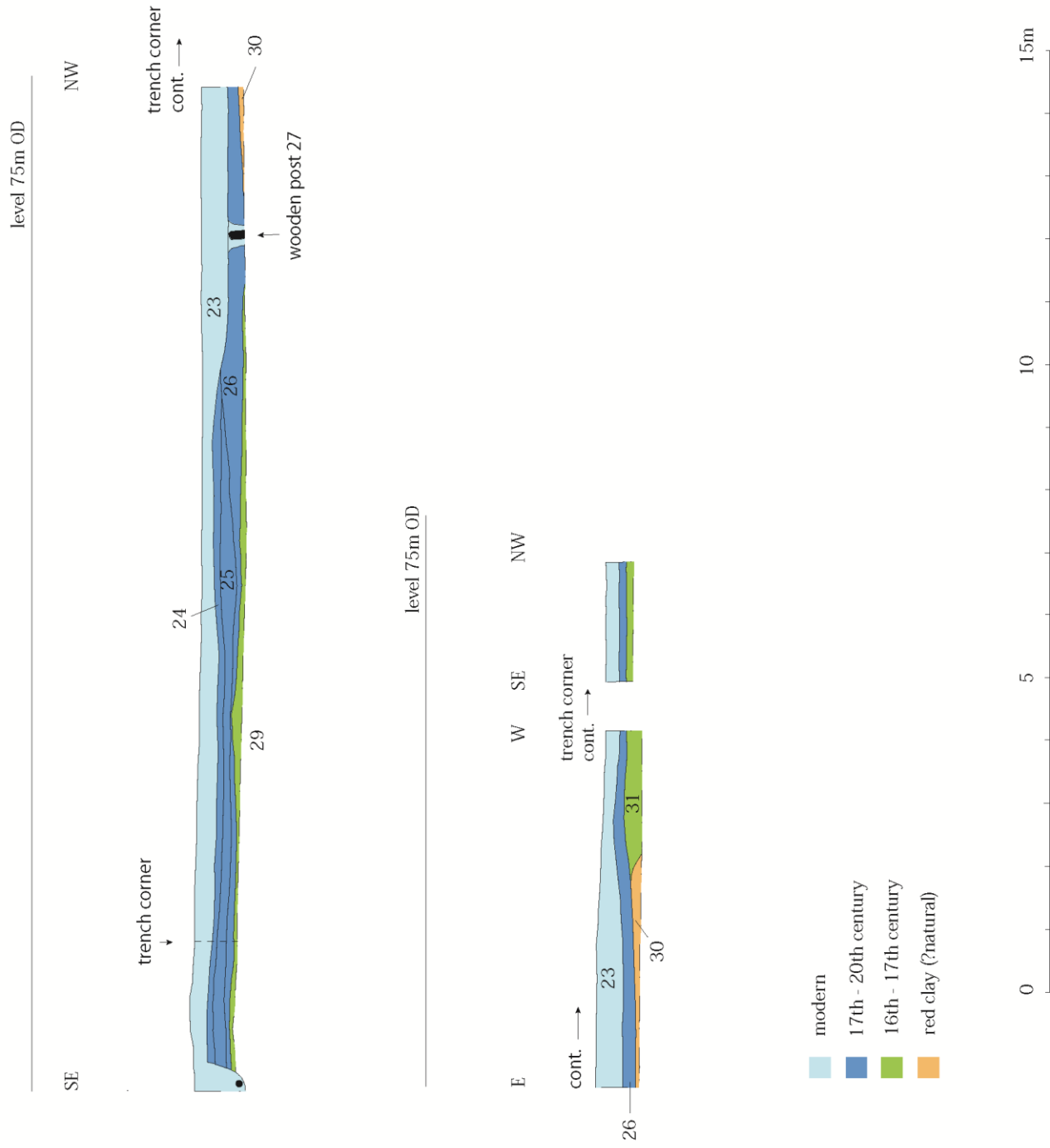


Fig. 5 Section 6

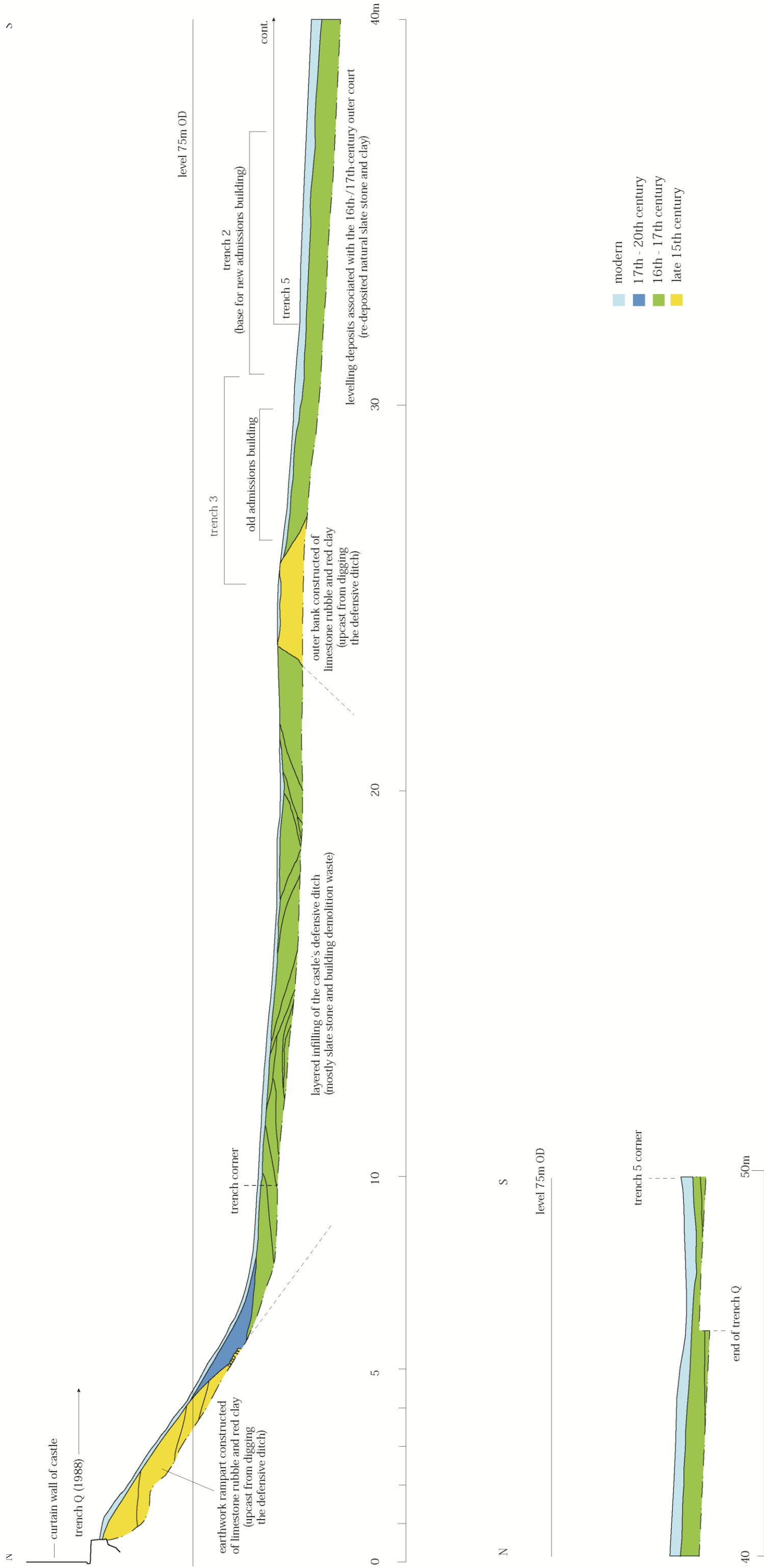


Fig. 6 Section Q (1988) and Sections 2, 3 and 5 (2006) combined to show a continuous section across the castle defences and outer court.

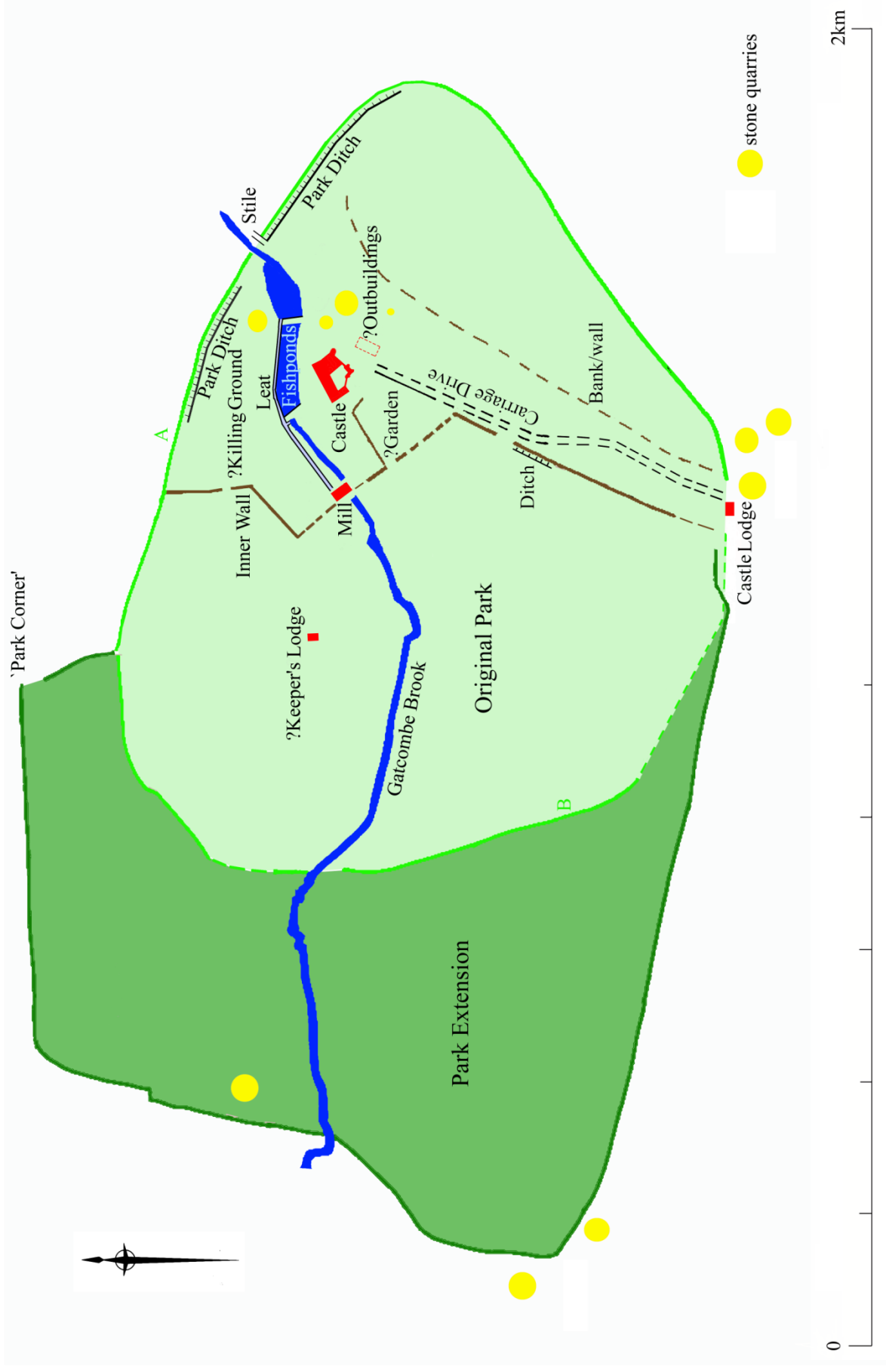


Fig. 7 Plan reproduced from Brown 1998, showing the castle in its deer park setting and the course of former carriage drive