

Archaeological Investigations at
Lion Court,
Church Stretton,
Shropshire

by
H R Hannaford

Archaeology Service



Archaeology Service Report Number 208
© Shropshire County Council
April 2002

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT
LION COURT, CHURCH STRETTON, SHROPSHIRE

by
H R HANNAFORD MIFA

A Report for



MORRIS
PROPERTIES

MORRIS & CO LTD, SHREWSBURY

Archaeology Service

Unit 4, Owen House, Radbrook Centre,
Radbrook Road, Shrewsbury, SY3 9BJ
Tel: (01743) 254018 Fax: (01743) 254047



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



Shropshire
COUNTY COUNCIL



TELFORD
& WREKIN COUNCIL

CONTENTS

	Page No
SUMMARY	1
1 INTRODUCTION	2
2 HISTORY OF THE SITE	3
3 THE EXCAVATIONS	6
4 DISCUSSION	8
5 REFERENCES AND SOURCES CONSULTED	9
6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	9

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Church Stretton, showing the location of the study area;
1:5000 scale

Figure 2: The development site, showing the location of the excavated
area; 1:500 scale

Figure 3: The excavated area; 1:200 scale

Figure 4: The corn-drying kiln (36), plan view showing component parts;
1:20 scale

Figure 5: South-facing section through the west end of the corn-drying
kiln (36); 1:20 scale

Figure 6: West-facing section across the east end of the corn-drying kiln
(36); 1:20 scale

SUMMARY

In January 2002 archaeological investigations were carried out on a residential development site at Lion Court, Church Stretton, Shropshire. The development site lay in the historic core of the medieval settlement and post-medieval town, and an archaeological evaluation in 2001 had found significant archaeological features in the form of pits, one of them stone-lined, of possible 11th- to 12th-century date. The 2002 investigations further examined these features and surrounding area. The pits proved to be part of a well-constructed corn-drying kiln of probable 12th-century date. The kiln had gone out of use and been filled in by the later medieval period.

1 INTRODUCTION

Church Stretton is a small Shropshire town, situated about 18km south of Shrewsbury, on the A49 Shrewsbury to Ludlow road. Church Stretton lies in a valley in the South Shropshire Hills that has been a major routeway since Roman times at least. The area around Church Stretton has been densely occupied since prehistoric times. The present village probably dates back to the Saxon period, although the earliest building in the town is the medieval St Lawrence's Church.

In January 2002 work began on a housing development off the High Street in the centre of Church Stretton. The development site (the study area) occupied an area of former outbuildings and yards to the rear of properties fronting onto the east side of High Street.

The study area (see Fig. 1) lies within the historic urban core of Church Stretton. It occupies an area of medieval rear burgage plots, perhaps laid out in the 13th century, and fronting onto the main market street of the medieval town.

It was thought probable that important archaeological remains relating to medieval and post-medieval occupation of this part Church Stretton might be affected by the development. In view of the potential archaeological significance of the development site, it was deemed necessary to undertake a programme of archaeological investigation in relation to the development.

The initial phase of this programme comprised an archaeological evaluation of the site. The evaluation was undertaken in July 2001 by the Archaeology Service, Shropshire County Council and demonstrated the existence of significant features and deposits of medieval date. This resulted in further work being carried out on the site by the Archaeology Service in February 2002. This further work comprised a watching brief and the sample excavation of an area within the development site, with the aim of preserving by record the remains identified by the evaluation, and any other remains whose presence could not be established in advance of the development. The excavations were carried out in accordance with a brief prepared by the Head of Archaeology, Shropshire County Council. The project and this report have been funded by the developer of the site, Morris Property.

2 HISTORY OF THE SITE

The Geology

Church Stretton lies in a fault valley in the South Shropshire Hills created by the Church Stretton Fault, which runs from South Wales to Newport in Shropshire. The fault, which may have rivalled the present-day San Andreas Fault in its activity, was active from about 650 million years ago to 50 million years ago. Some of the oldest rocks in the county, of late Precambrian date (c.700-570 million years ago), are exposed in outcrops in the sides of the Church Stretton valley. The Church Stretton area also marks the easternmost extent of the Welsh Ice sheet of the early Wolstonian glaciation (between 200,000 and 150,000 years ago), and the southernmost edge of the Irish Sea Ice sheet of the Devensian glaciation, which stopped in the Church Stretton area at its peak c.18,000 years ago. The ice had 'retreated' from the Church Stretton valley by about 13,000 years ago, leaving behind boulder clays and gravels between 30-60m thick on the valley floor. Since this time, the streams which run through the valley have been depositing alluvium over their floodplains on the valley floor. (Toghill, 1990)

The local soils and geology differ on either side of the A49 (T) Shrewsbury-Ludlow road. To the west, the soils consist mainly of brown podzolic soils of the Withnell 2 association west of the , and stagnogleyic argillic brown earth east of the road. These soils overlie rocks of the pre-Cambrian Stretton Shale Group to the west of the road, and of the Silurian Wenlock Shale Group and Ordovician Hughley Shale Group to the east. These rocks are overlain by glacial drift and alluvium in the bottom of the valley. On the west side of the valley between All Stretton and Little Stretton, the glacial drift is absent, and better drainage more conducive to settlement is provided by gravel fans from streams running down from the Long Mynd through the batches. (Buteux, 1996, p2; Mackney and Burnham, 1966, pp17 & 23; Toghill, 1990).

Prehistoric and Roman Activity

Prehistoric activity in the Church Stretton area from the mesolithic period onwards is evidenced by a number of finds of flint and stone tools, and from large numbers of Neolithic and Bronze Age barrows, recorded on the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). Two Iron Age hillforts overlook the town from the hills on either side - Caer Caradoc (SMR PRN 226) to the northeast and Bodbury Ring (SMR PRN 1245) to the west of the town. The Portway (SMR PRN 157), a possible prehistoric routeway, later used as a medieval and post-medieval drovers' road, runs across the top of the Long Mynd c. 3km to the west of the town.

A Roman road (SMR PRN 108), Botte Street (known after 1580 as Watling Street), was laid along the east side of the Church Stretton valley, probably by the Roman army shortly after the Roman invasion of 43AD. The road ran between Deva (Chester) and Isca (Caerleon, Mon.) via Viroconium Cornoviorum (Wroxeter). There are no known Roman settlements along the road in the immediate vicinity of Church Stretton, although a posting-station might be expected to have been sited in the vicinity of All Stretton. Moreover, the Roman road does not appear to have directly influenced the post-Roman

settlement of the valley, for although the road remained in use, the medieval settlements all grew along the better-drained west side of the valley bottom.

The medieval manor and town

It is thought that Church Stretton may have its origins in an Anglo-Saxon settlement that developed just to one side the Roman road. At the time of the Norman Conquest, Church Stretton was part of the large manor of Stretton, which probably also included Little Stretton and All Stretton. Before 1066, the manor and its 4 outliers were held by Edwin, Earl of Mercia (c.1062 - 1071) and were valued at £13. Edwin had inherited the manor from his grandfather, Leofric, Earl of Mercia. After Edwin's death in 1071, his lands were given to Roger of Montgomery, Earl of Shrewsbury, and at the time of the Domesday Survey in 1086, Stretton was held directly by Earl Roger. The manor comprised 8 hides, with 3 ploughs and 6 male and 2 female slaves in lordship. There were also 18 villagers, 8 smallholders, and a priest, with 12 ploughs. The Survey records that the manor had a church, a mill, woodland with five hedged enclosures (probably for coralling game), and sufficient (uncultivated) land for a further 6 ploughs. The manor had decreased in value to 100s since the Conquest. (Thorn and Thorn, 4,1,27 & notes)

After the rebellion of Earl Roger's son and heir, Robert de Bellême, in 1101, the manor was forfeited to the Crown. It was subsequently granted successively to Henry de Burgo, Henry de Hastings, to Hamo LeStrange, and to Hawise, wife of Gruffydd ap Gwenwynwyn (or Griffin de la Pole). It was also held briefly by the Mortimers of Wigmore. In the middle of the 12th century there was a royal castle (SMR PRN 1250) on Brockhurst Hill c. 900m to the southwest of the town. The castle was probably built by Henry II in c. 1154 to guard the routeway along the Stretton valley. The castle was destroyed early in the 13th century, and was not rebuilt. A new church, however, was built on the site of the Domesday church in the 12th century. (Thorn and Thorn, 4,1,27 & notes; SMR file PRN 1250)

There were various attempts to establish a market in the town. In 1214 King John granted Church Stretton a market charter, and a Wednesday market and a one-day fair in August was advertised by the Crown; in 1252 there was a Tuesday market and a four-day fair from 2nd to 5th May; and in 1337 the Earl of Arundel obtained the right to hold a Thursday market and a three-day fair from 13th to 15th September. However, no regular market appears to have been established, although the May and September fairs continued to be held. (Baugh, 1998, p101)

A new planned settlement may have been laid out at the time of the granting of the market charter, although again there is no direct evidence that the settlement achieved the status of a town in the medieval period. The town was originally aligned along the Bristol Road (the High Street). Apart from the church, the town's oldest surviving building, The Buck's Head Inn, lies on the High Street; the Buck's head was originally a hall and cross-wing building, and has been dated to c. 1287-1321. (Baugh, 1998, p79; Buteux, 1996, p2)

The post-medieval period

The development of the settlement at Church Stretton into a town probably began around the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries. In 1593, a fire destroyed part of Church Stretton, and about this time (possibly just after the fire) a London stationer, Bonham Norton (d. 1635) bought up 9 or 10 copyholds in the manor. He was granted a warrant to receive building timber from the lord of the manor's demesne woods of Hawkhurst and Womerton, and he built a new market hall, a school and a court house, as well as a house for himself - The Hall, on Cub Lane (now Churchway). In 1616 Bonham Norton was also granted the right to hold a market and a court of pie-powder to assist him with the building (or re-building) of inns and lodging-houses in the town. (Baugh, 1998, pp79, 93, & 101).

The town's market finally became established and was notable for corn and provisions. Malting was an established industry in the town by 1587, and there were fulling mills by the late 17th century. In the early 18th century the textile trades in the town included weaving and tailoring as well. Leather trades included tanning, shoemaking, and gloving; there were also blacksmiths, carpenters, and coopers working in the town. A new town hall (demolished in 1963) was built on the site of the market house in 1838-9, although an open-air market continued to operate in The Square. Improvements to the Shrewsbury to Ludlow road, which was turnpiked between 1756 - 1877, contributed in the early 19th century to the town becoming fashionable as a resort, and, although attempts to establish a Spa failed, with the coming of the railway in 1852 the town began to develop as a health resort. This continued through the 20th century, with the town maturing as a retirement settlement and tourist resort. (Baugh, 1998, pp76-7 & 101-2)

The study area

The study area occupies the rear part of several former tenement plots that run east of the east side of the High Street opposite St Laurence's Church and The Square. These tenement plots form part of a block of long narrow plots on the east side of High Street which are thought to represent one episode of town planning in the medieval period, perhaps linked to the development of the market in the 13th century (Buteux, 1996, p4).

There is no detailed cartographic coverage of the area before the Tithe Apportionment map of 1838. This map shows the study area as a vacant plot, probably consisting of yards and gardens, behind the properties on the east side of High Street (Bilbey, 1985, plate 44). The first small scale detailed plan of the study area is the 1st edition Ordnance Survey (OS) plan of 1883 (OS, 1883); this shows the western half of the study area as yard areas, with a number of out-buildings in the western half. The 2nd edition OS of 1903 (OS, 1903) indicates that one of the outbuildings on the northern side of the study area was a smithy, and the yards to the south were likely to have formed part of the smithy's working area. By 1927, outbuildings had been erected across the entire study area (OS, 1927).

3 THE EXCAVATIONS

An excavation area 10m by 7.5 in extent was marked out at a distance of c. 1.5m from the east wall of the eastern extension of "The Vaults" PH (see Figures 2 & 3). The topsoil and overburden were removed from the excavation area with a JCB mechanical excavator down to the level where the 2001 evaluation had determined that significant archaeological features and deposits were likely to be encountered. The underlying deposits were then cleaned by hand before being sampled and recorded as appropriate.

The natural subsoil was encountered at depths of between 800mm below the existing ground surface at the western side of the excavation area to 900mm at the eastern side. The natural subsoil consisted of a slatey gravel (Figures 4-6; 31).

A stone-lined feature (Figures 3 & 4; 36) was cut into this subsoil in the northern part of the excavation area. This feature comprised a horseshoe-shaped wall of stone fragments bonded in buff clay (Figures 4 & 5; 28), and has subsequently been identified as the base of a corn-drying kiln. The western end of the kiln was 2.6m wide at its top with an internal width of 1.6m, tapering down to a width of 1.1m. The stones of the internal face of the stone lining were smoothed and worn. At the neck of the horseshoe were larger stone blocks that might originally have supported a lintel or arched opening which led to a rectangular section. This rectangular eastern end to the kiln was again cut into the natural gravel subsoil (31) and also lined with side walls (Figures 4 & 6; 26 & 27) built of stone fragments bonded in buff clay. The eastern end of this section was not seen in these excavations, but the eastern end of the cut for this kiln was seen in the 2001 evaluation trench, giving the feature a total length of 5.05m.

The eastern (neck) end of the horseshoe-shaped end and both the side walls of the eastern rectangular parts of the kiln had been truncated and damaged, with much of the stonework apparently thrown into the centre of the kiln.

The base of the western horseshoe-shaped end of the kiln was filled with a deposit of light brown clay loam and rock fragments (Figures 4 & 5; 20). This lay beneath a looser fill of rock fragments with some dark greyish brown silty loam (17) and a light yellowish-brown silty clay (18). The upper part of the kiln was filled with a deposit 400mm thick of dark greyish-brown silty loam with some rock fragments. None of these deposits produced any finds.

The eastern end of the kiln was filled at its base with a deposit of light greyish brown clay with stone fragments (Figures 4 & 6; 25), and a dark greyish brown silty loam with rock fragments, identical to the upper fill (16) of the western end. This deposit (19) contained a few fragments of 12th- / 13th-century cooking pot, and a few fragments of decayed animal bone. The amount of stone in these two deposits, particularly that in the eastern half of the kiln, suggested that they may have represented material from the upper parts of the walls which had fallen into the structure on its dis-use. A further deposit c. 100mm thick of dark greyish brown sandy silty loam with fewer

stone fragments, but also containing sherds of 12th- / 13th-century cooking pot, filled the uppermost part of the length of the feature.

All these deposits were sealed by a layer of dark brown sandy silty loam (Figures 5 & 6; 5) up to 450mm thick. This layer, which probably represented a buried garden or yard soil, was partly removed by machine, but in the northern half of the excavation area its lower levels were cleaned and then excavated by hand, and produced medieval and post-medieval pottery of 13th- to early 18th-century date.

In the centre of the excavation area the base of a post-hole was cut into this buried soil layer (Figure 3; 9). The base of a post-pipe was surrounded by a pad of stone fragments which would have packed the base of the post. Some of this packing had been disturbed and was spread in the surrounding buried soil layer. Two small fragments of 18th-century pottery were recovered from the fill of the post-pipe. The level of the base of this post-hole would suggest that it had been cut through the overlying 19th- / 20th-century yard soils, and was therefore probably of that period.

At the westernmost edge of the excavation area, the edge of a pit (Figure 3: 39) containing the burial of a small animal, probably a dog, was also seen cutting into the buried soil layer (5). The fill also contained fragments of brick and 18th-century pottery, and was not investigated further.

All these features and deposits were sealed by up to 500mm of 19th- to 20th-century yard soils (Figures 5 & 6; 24) and debris from site clearance work carried out prior to this excavation (Figure 6; 21). These deposits were entirely removed by machine from the excavation area.

No other significant archaeological features were recorded.

The excavation area was backfilled with the excavated spoil on completion of the excavations.

4 DISCUSSION

The only substantial and significant archaeological remains encountered in the excavations were the remains and associated deposits of the corn-drying kiln in the northern part of the excavation area. This structure appears to have dated from the 12th-century at least, but had gone out of use and been filled in probably by the late 13th or 14th century.

The structure was stone lined, with a horseshoe-shaped west end opening into a rectangular chamber to the east.

The deposits associated with it are the first medieval deposits to have been excavated and recorded within the town. The feature and its associated deposits date to the 12th/13th century at least, and are thus contemporary with both the earliest documentary reference to the settlement at Church Stretton and the earliest surviving phase of the town's only medieval building, the parish church of St Lawrence.

5 REFERENCES AND SOURCES CONSULTED

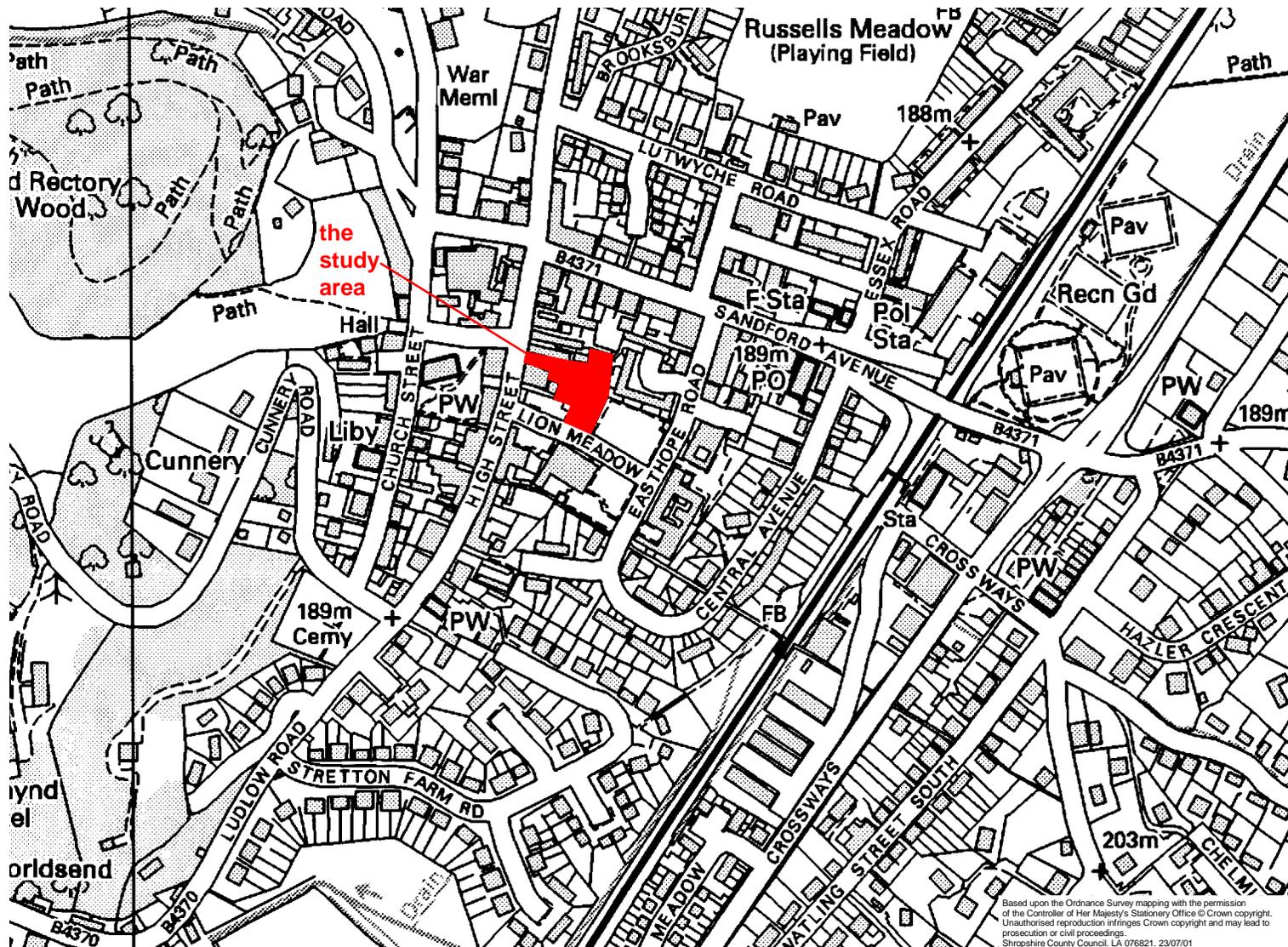
- Baugh, G C, (ed)**, 1998: *The Victoria History of Shropshire, VCHS*, vol X
Bilbey, D, 1985: *Church Stretton: A Shropshire Town and its People*, Chichester
Buteux, V, 1996: *Archaeological Assessment of Church Stretton, Shropshire*, Hereford and Worcester County Council, County Archaeology Service Report No. 307
Foxall, H D G, 1978: Field-name map based on the Tithe Apportionment and Map for Church Stretton Parish 1840
Mackney, D, and Burnham, C P, 1966: *The Soils of the Church Stretton District of Shropshire*, Harpenden
Ordnance Survey, 1883: 1:2500 1st edition, Shropshire Sheet Nos LVI.9
Ordnance Survey, 1903: 1:2500 2nd edition, Shropshire Sheet Nos LVI.9
Ordnance Survey, 1927: 1:2500 1927 edition, Shropshire Sheet Nos LVI.9
Rattue, J, 1995: *The Living Stream*, Woodbridge
Thorn, F and Thorn, C (eds), 1986: *Domesday Book, Shropshire*, Chichester

ABBREVIATIONS

AOD	Above Ordnance Datum
DoE	Department of the Environment
EP-NS	English Place-Name Society
OS	Ordnance Survey
SMR	County Sites and Monuments Record, Shire Hall, Shrewsbury
SRRC	Shropshire Records and Research Centre
TSAS	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society
TSAHS	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society
VCHS	Victoria County History of Shropshire

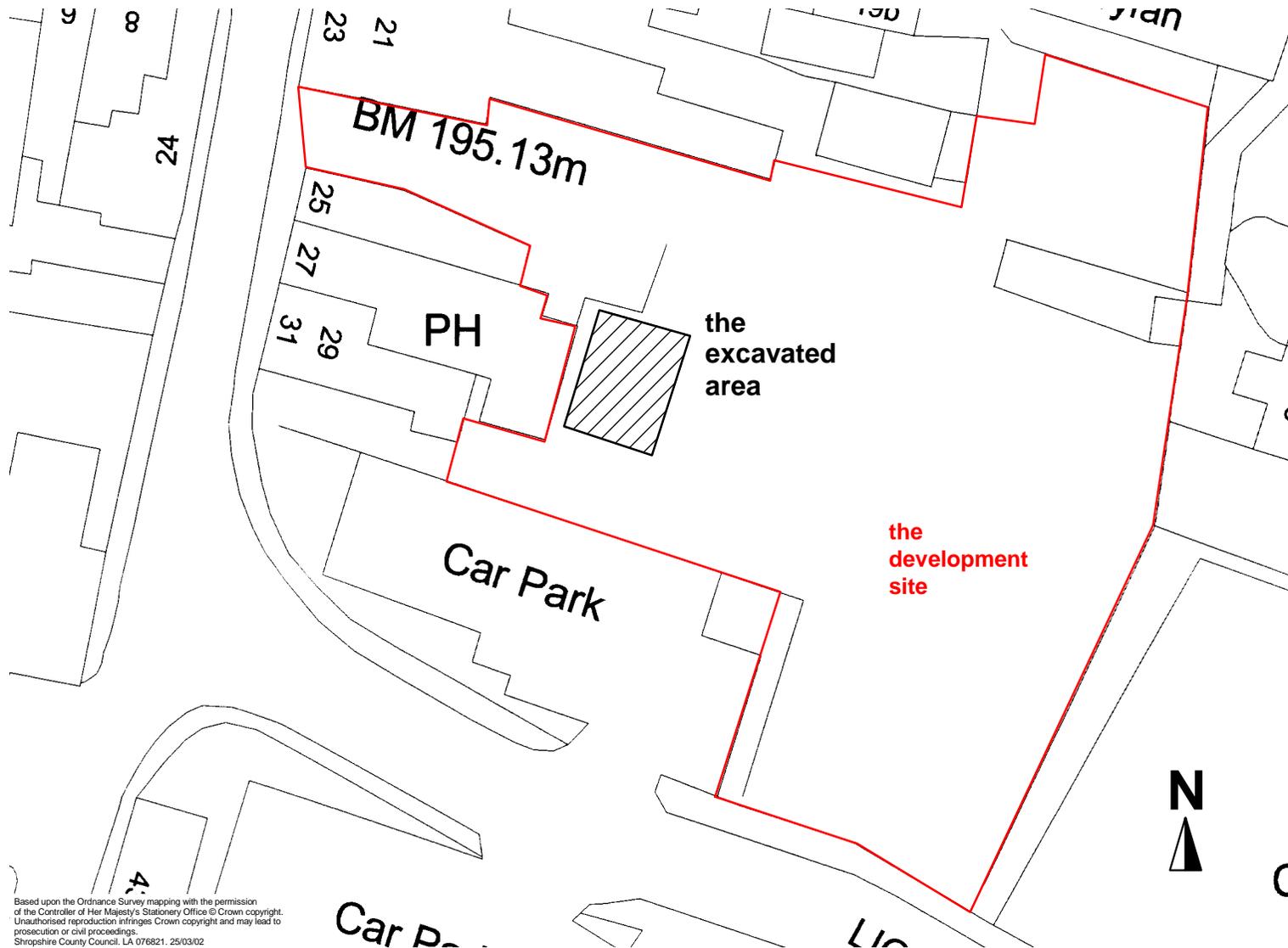
6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Emma-Kate Burns, Curator of Archaeology Shropshire County Council, and Wayne Turner for their assistance with the site investigations. The JCB mechanical excavator was supplied and operated by Les Powell of L C Powell Plant Hire Contractors of Shrewsbury.



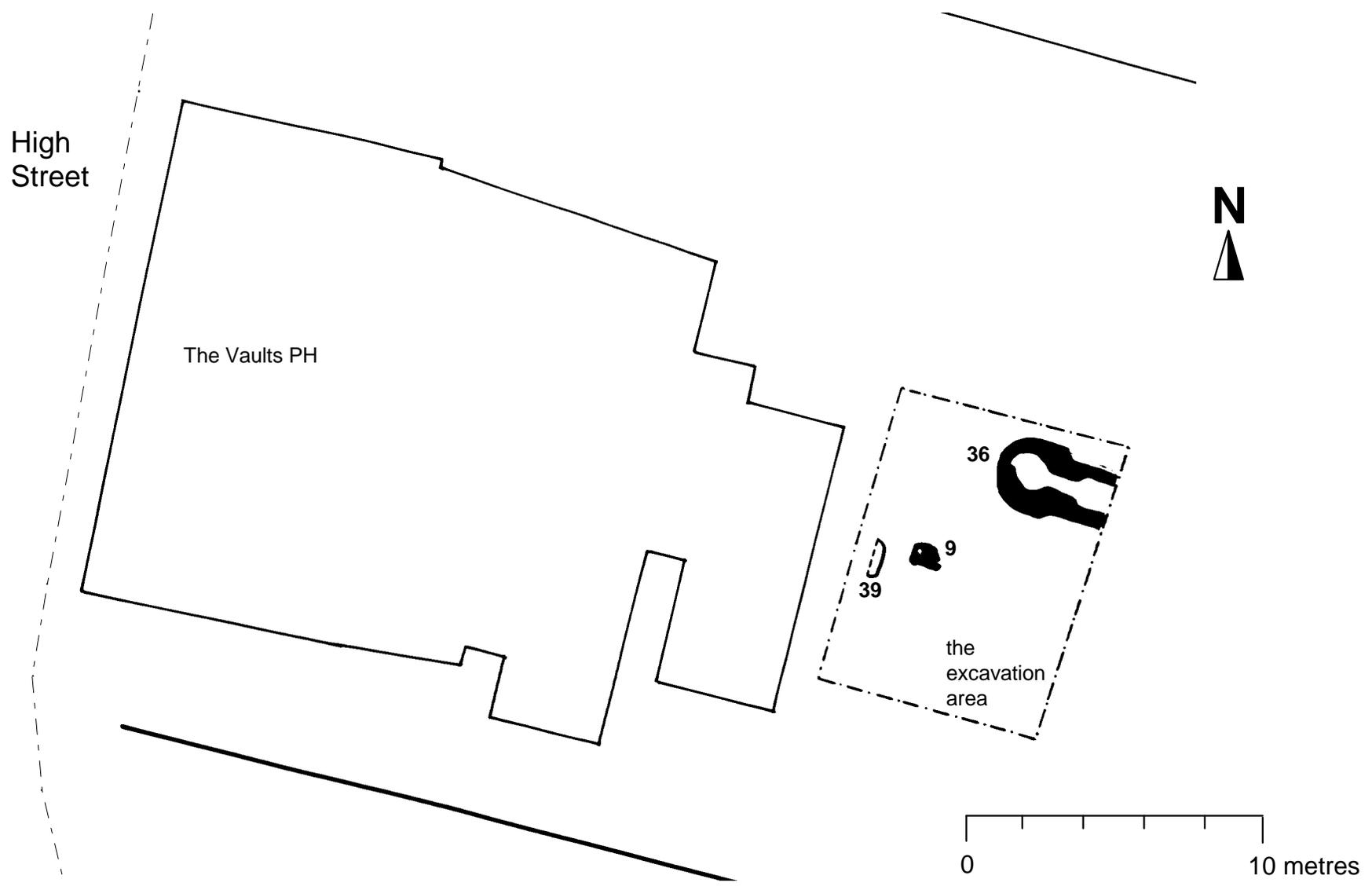
LION COURT, CHURCH STRETTON 2002

Figure 1: Church Stretton, showing the location of the study area; 1:5000 scale

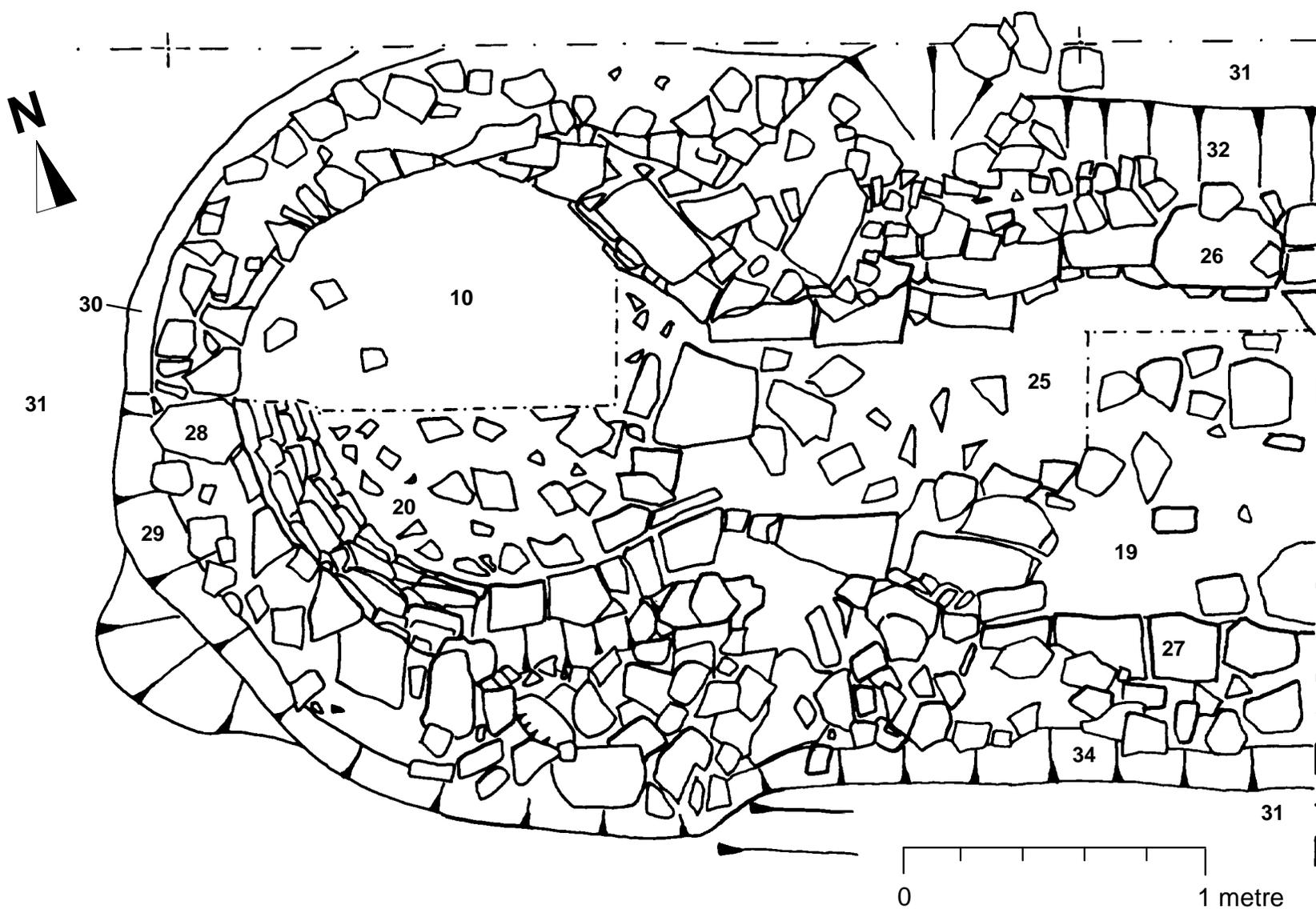


LION COURT, CHURCH STRETTON 2002

Figure 2: The development site, showing the location of the excavated area; 1:500 scale

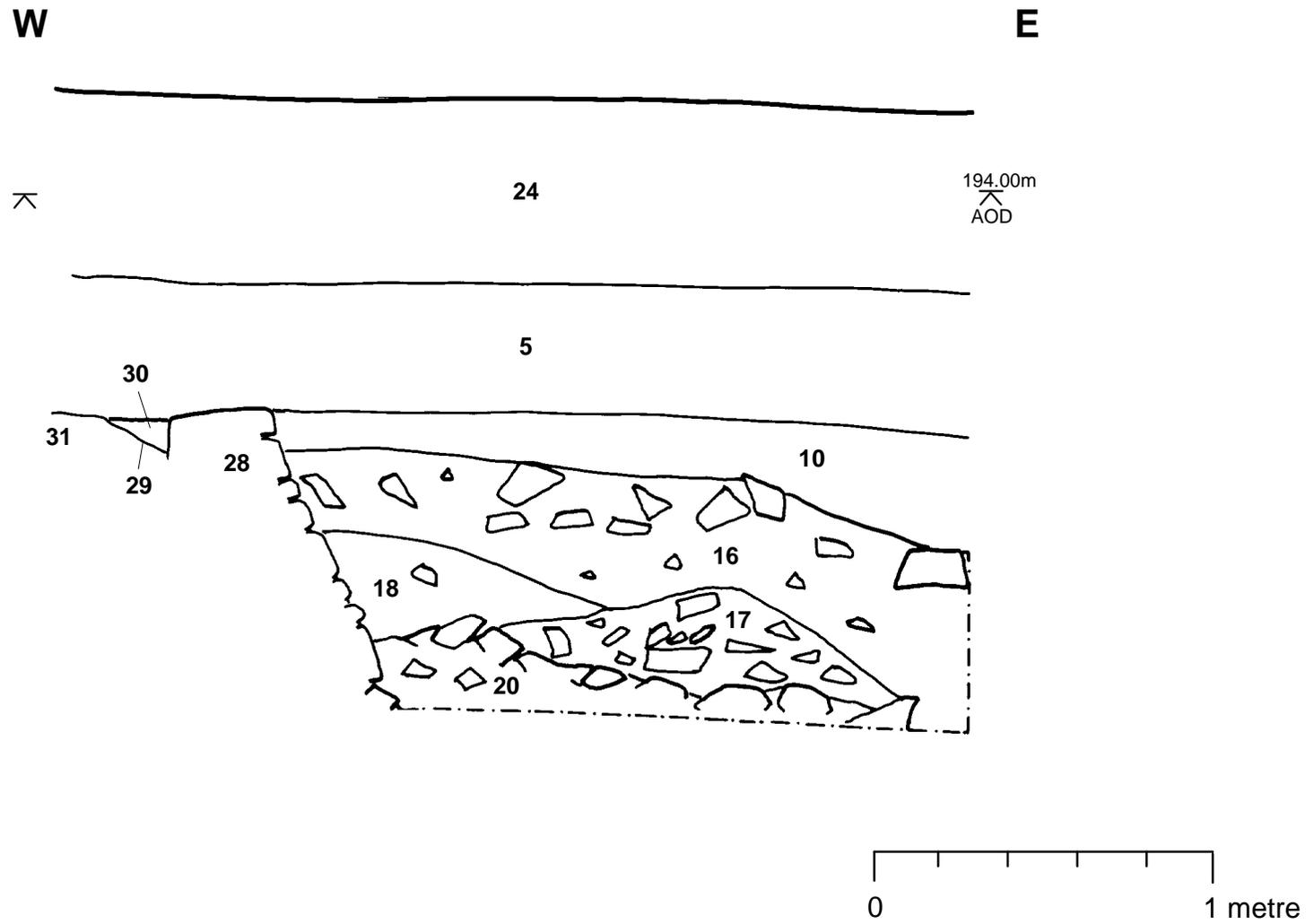


LION COURT, CHURCH STRETTON 2002
Figure 3: The excavated area; 1:200 scale



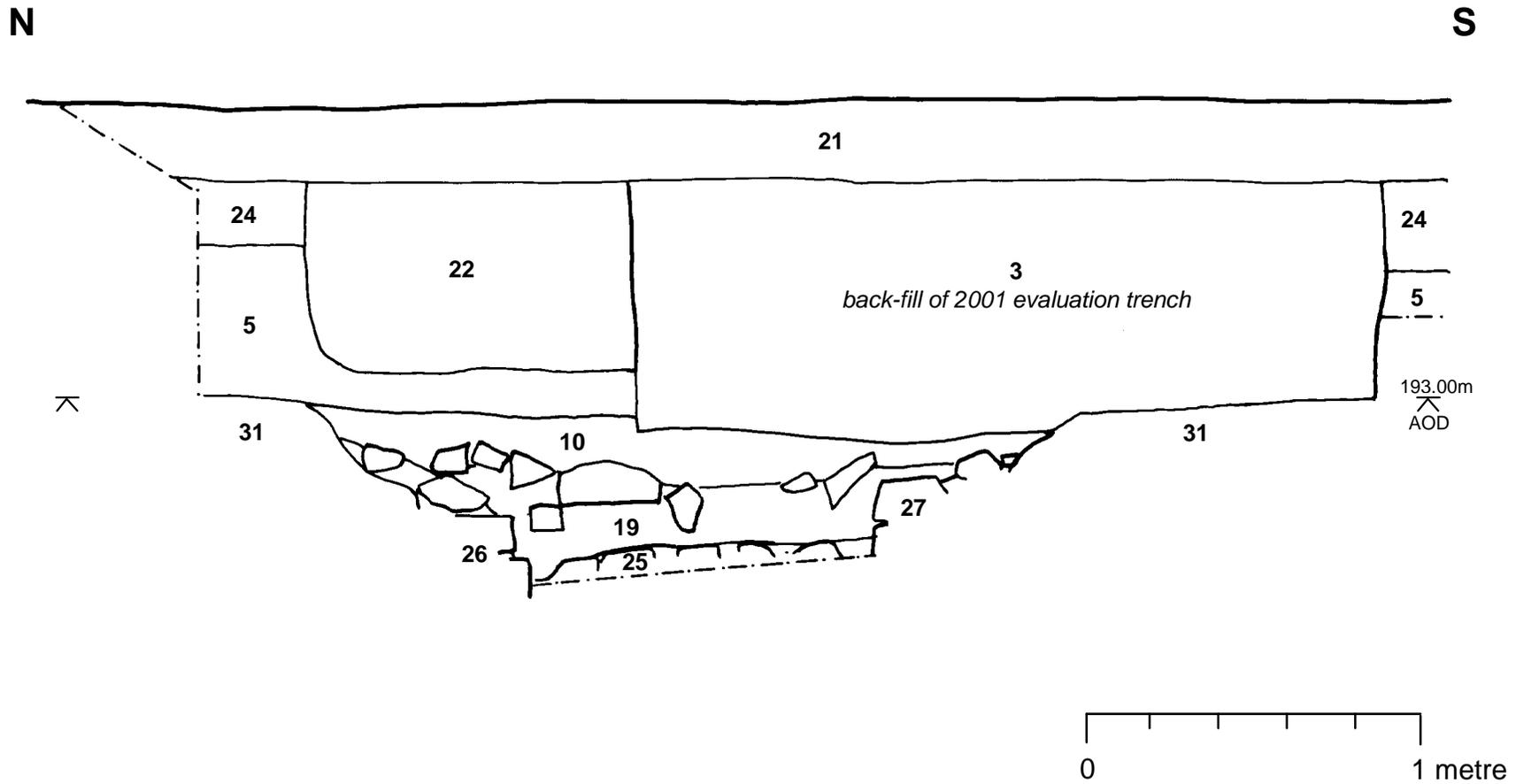
LION COURT, CHURCH STRETTON 2002

Figure 4: The stone feature (36), plan view showing component parts; 1:20 scale



LION COURT, CHURCH STRETTON 2002

Figure 5: South-facing section through the west end of the stone feature (36); 1:20 scale



LION COURT, CHURCH STRETTON 2002

Figure 6: West-facing section across the east end of the stone feature (36); 1:20 scale