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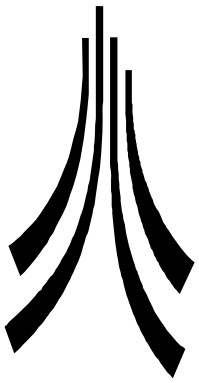

June 1999

CUMBRIA COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

CARLISLE

SUMMARY OF PHASE 2A ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AND PHASE 2B WATCHING BRIEF

Commissioned by: Cumbria College of Art and Design

Cumbria College of Art and Design
Carlisle

Summary Report of Phase 2A Excavation and Phase 2b Watching Brief

Report no 1998-99/060/AUA7890

Checked by Project Manager. ..... Date
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The fieldwork was undertaken by Mark Chesterman, Richard Heawood, and Matt Town. Christine Howard-Davis commented on the pottery, and Rachel Newman gave helpful advice. The report was written by Richard Heawood, and edited by Jamie Quartermaine. The project was managed by Jamie Quartermaine.

SUMMARY

An excavation and watching brief were carried out in May 1999 at Cumbria College, Carlisle. Excavation to the south-west of the main College building revealed only twentieth century features, and suggested that modern disturbance had been heavy. However, a watching brief at the main gate revealed a dump containing Roman pottery, the butt-ends of two possible beam slots, a larger linear feature, a pit, a posthole, and a possible kiln. The brief provided only for the recording of features that would be affected by the proposed development. As the putative kiln was below this depth it was agreed that it should not be excavated, and thus an origin as a tree bole cannot be discounted. The evidence suggests Roman occupation close to Brampton Road, probably ending by the late third century AD. No evidence for the Hadrian's Wall *Vallum* was present in this area.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

1.1.1 Lancaster University Archaeological Unit (LUAU) conducted an excavation and watching brief at Cumbria College of Art and Design, Carlisle, between 5th and 17th May 1999. The work represented Phases 2A and 2B of a programme of archaeological fieldwork being carried out for the College jointly by LUAU and Newcastle University Archaeological Practice, in accordance with the terms of a brief set by Helena Smith, Development Control Officer, Cumbria County Council. The fieldwork was required as a condition of planning permission in order to mitigate the impact on the archaeological resource of the extension and improvement of the College, its access roads, and services, currently being conducted for the College by principal contractors Lambert and Gill Ltd.

1.1.2 The College lies on a site which has been identified as being of high archaeological importance (County Sites and Monuments Record 5782, Scheduled Monument 28484). The main College building is located between the line of Hadrian's Wall, and the probable course of the associated *Vallum c*200m to the south-east of the Wall. It is also only *c*60m north-east of the north-eastern defences of the Roman fort of Stanwix, believed to have been the largest fort along Hadrian's Wall. The site has recently been evaluated by Carlisle Archaeological Unit (CAU) (CAU 1993, 1998). Trial trenches close to the main College building identified the presence of redeposited layers of clay, which may represent the remains of the fort's parade ground. A cut feature was revealed adjacent to the main Brampton Road entrance to the College and it was suggested that the course of the *Vallum* lay further to the south-east than had hitherto been thought.

2. RESULTS

2.1 PHASE 2A

2.1.1 The Phase 2A excavation was sited immediately to the south-west of the main College building, between the College and the defences of the fort of Stanwix. It consisted of three contiguous trenches, positioned in order to investigate a high proportion of the area to be disturbed by the concrete ground beams of a south-western extension to the College (Fig 2).

2.1.2 Prior to excavation of these trenches, the construction programme required the removal of a modern brick retaining wall, and that the bank beyond to the south-west be cut back using a mechanical excavator. An archaeological watching brief was maintained whilst these works were carried out, and several sections through the deposits to the south-west of the Phase 2A excavation were cleaned by hand and recorded. The deposit sequence recorded by CAU (CAU 1998, Trench 1) was confirmed and expanded. Predominantly modern deposits 0.6–0.8m thick (1] were found to overlie a layer of firm, dark pink clay containing pebbles and cobbles [2]. This varied between 0.1m and 0.6m in thickness, with a roughly horizontal upper boundary and very undulating lower interface. A deposit of loose yellowish and reddish brown sand [3], lay below the clay, with bands and pockets of gravel intermittently present. This extended down to the limit of excavation. Both the clay and sand deposits were interpreted as being of geological origin, on the basis that they were clean, without finds or any mottling, and were separated by an undulating interface marked in places by concentrations of manganese. Early observations had suggested the possibility that the upper part of stony layer [2] might be redeposited and represent part of a cobble surface, but this was discounted when a more extensive section became available. The upper surface of context [2] lay some 1.1m above the ground floor level of the main college building and adjacent ground surface to be investigated by the Phase 2A excavation. This indicated that the College had been built within a terrace cut into the shallow natural slope that extended downwards to the north-east.

2.1.3 In conjunction with the cutting back of the bank, an existing tarmac surface and thick layer of roadstone covering the area of the Phase 2A excavation were removed by machine. A deposit of yellowish and reddish brown sand was revealed below, its upper surface being *c*0.3m above the maximum impact level of the concrete ground beams. This sand appeared to correspond to deposit [3] identified in the section to the south-west. As its truncated surface lay up to 1.6m below the upper interface of the natural deposits identified in section, it now appeared that, unless the position of a Roman terrace had corresponded to that of the modern one, the archaeological potential of this area must be low. In view of this situation, Helena Smith (Development Control Officer, Cumbria County Council) and Paul Austen (English Heritage) asked that the trenches in this area be dug by machine rather than by hand, and authorised their reduction in width to 0.5m.

2.1.4 Accordingly, the three trenches were excavated by machine to the maximum impact depth of the concrete beams in order to verify that the deposit of sand encountered was of natural origin. The trenches were 0.3–0.4m in depth, and the bottom and one side of each trench were manually cleaned. All deposits encountered were identified as being either geological or modern in origin. The pipe trench associated with a drain shown on the architect's plans was identified and, towards the south of the area, it appeared to be cut by a more recent trench on a slightly different alignment. This latter was filled with redeposited sand and sharply defined lenses of grey silt, and sherds of modern glass were

recovered from it. This was the organic silty deposit recorded by CAU in the test pit to the north-east of Evaluation Trench 1 (CAU 1998, 3, 5). Two other modern features were recorded: a possible foundation cut immediately adjacent to the modern College building, and a possible service trench at right angles to the building, which contained a steel rod lying in a near horizontal position.

2.2 PHASE 2B

2.2.1 The project brief specified that the stripping of soil associated with the alteration of the main Brampton Road entrance to the College be conducted under archaeological supervision. The area was to be hand-cleaned, and any features planned, but archaeological excavation was not considered necessary.

2.2.2 In view of the negative results in Area 2A, Helena Smith and Paul Austen, representing Cumbria County Council and English Heritage respectively, asked that resources be switched to Area 2B. Helena Smith made a verbal variation of the brief to allow selective excavation of features, and additional machining below the main contractor's impact level to try and establish whether the *Vallum* might indeed be present in this area (CAU 1998, 5, paras 7.4-7.5). Further verbal alteration of the brief had to be made after the soil strip had begun, when it became apparent that, in part of the area, significant archaeological deposits existed within the depth of the overburden to be stripped. These deposits were manually cleaned and planned, and then a further spit was excavated by machine down to the contractor's required level. This part of the area was then hand cleaned and planned a second time. The maximum depth of the strip was 0.95m. Finds recovered during the respective machine strips were retained as they were of significance to the dating and/or interpretation of the site. However, ecofacts (eg unmodified animal bone) were not collected from the machined deposits.

2.2.3 The soil strip was deepest at the eastern end of the affected area and here, a 0.25m depth of topsoil was encountered. Below, a substantial homogeneous deposit of dark greyish brown sandy silt with occasional small pebbles, [25], was entirely removed. It was a maximum of 0.65m thick, and contained very occasional sherds of relatively abraded Roman pottery, as well as sherds from later periods. Silt deposit [25] had a diffuse lower interface with a deposit of mid greyish brown sandy silt, [26], a maximum of 0.2m thick. This interface was difficult to define during machining, and the lower deposit was also partially removed to achieve the depth required by the contractors. Two patches remained within hollows in the underlying sand, one of which was subsequently excavated by hand. Deposit [26] was only defined within 6m of the eastern corner of the trench, to the south-east of the cut for a modern field drain. It contained a higher concentration of pottery sherds than [25] above, and these were less abraded and appeared to date exclusively from the early second to early third centuries AD. A sondage dug through the underlying sand within CAU's Trench 4 (CAU 1998) was located and cleaned out. Although the surface of the sand here corresponded to the base level required for construction of the road, this sondage was extended by machine to the north-west for some 7m. It showed the sand consistently to be *c* 0.3m thick, and to overlie firm, reddish brown clay. The sondage was dug a further 0.25m into the clay, but the clay was clean and of uniform composition, and was consistent with a geological origin.

2.2.4 Context [25] was interpreted as a post-Roman accumulation horizon, possibly partly colluvial in origin, though perhaps also related to landscaping of the grounds of the house which had preceded the College on this site. It lay to the north-west of the recent bank

identified by CAU (1998, Trench 4). Context [26], with its relatively large sherds of often unabraded Roman pottery, may have formed in part through the dumping of refuse in the Roman period. No evidence was observed to suggest that this was a cultivation horizon or buried soil. Both the sand and the clay deposits recorded below appeared to be clearly of geological origin and it was concluded that the *vallum* did not pass through this part of the site.

2.2.5 Deposit [26] appeared to seal the terminals of two linear cut features, [22] and [24], though it was difficult to be certain of this relationship given that excavation was by machine. The linear features were sample excavated by hand. They had differing profiles, but both features were relatively shallow and narrow (Fig 3), though with relatively steep sides and flat bases. Both were truncated to the north-west by the cut for a recent field drain, and beyond, further hand excavation would have been required to determine whether these features continued north-west. It is possible that both were beam slots, or that [24] was a beam slot and [22] an adjacent gully. Their alignment was roughly at right angles to a beam slot identified by CAU *c*8.5m to the north (CAU 1998, Trench 2). The fills of both features contained concentrations of Roman pottery, particularly [14], the fill of Cut [24], from which large, unabraded sherds thought to be of late third century date were recovered. However, the pottery was mainly concentrated at the tops of the fills, raising the possibility that it had slumped in from the overlying deposit, and was more related to the dumping of rubbish above than to the use of the cut features. It was thought possible that [22] and [24] might be cut into an underlying feature with a sandy fill, but this could not be adequately defined without further excavation.

2.2.6 Further west, overburden [25] appeared to seal a wide, shallow, circular pit that may have been subject to horizontal truncation. Sherds of medieval green glazed pottery were recovered from the surface of the pit fill, but few finds were recovered from the excavation of the fill. It is considered that the medieval pottery may have slumped over the fill from above, and consequently the pit cannot be reliably dated. The pit was cut into an extensive layer of brown sandy silt with mottles of yellowish brown sand, [21], which contained sherds of late first to early second century Roman pottery. The deposit is considered to have formed at the interface between the natural sand below, and deposits above. Evidence for considerable root activity was observed. Although deposit [26] was not recognised this far west, it is possible that the pottery within [21] was also derived from Roman dumping. The surface of this deposit lay largely at or below the required depth for the base of the access road, though it was partially excavated when a sondage was dug to reveal the deposits below (*Section 2.2.3*).

2.2.7 To the west removal of overburden [25] revealed a roughly ovoid deposit of dark brown sandy silt [19], encircled by a band of mid brown sandy silt [18], that was difficult to distinguish from [21]. Both these deposits contained relatively large quantities of Roman pottery, yet their surfaces lay at least 0.2m above the required depth of stripping for road construction. The deposits were planned and recorded, and as they were relatively extensive and ill-defined at this level, pottery was collected and then a further spit was machined down to the depth required for construction. A clearly defined 'pear-shaped' deposit of dark brown sandy silt [23] was then revealed almost immediately below [19], probably indicating that both were fills of a steep-sided cut. Deposit [19] proved to contain late second to early third century Roman pottery, deposit [23] late first to early second century pottery as well as late second to early third century sherds. The plan shape of the deposit [23] suggested that it might be infilling of a former kiln. However, it was agreed, in discussions with Paul Austen and Helena Smith, that this should not be excavated as it was beneath the maximum depth that would be affected by the development. Abundant

fine roots were also observed within the deposit, so that, without sample excavation, the possibility that the feature was a tree bole cannot be ruled out.

2.2.8 Deposit [18] was 0.27m thick and appeared to be truncated centrally by the putative cut containing [19] and [23]. A small slot dug through its western edge showed that it contained a large proportion of roughly hewn sandstone blocks and it may have been the fill of a cut feature. The deposit is not fully understood, but its plan form suggests that it was related to the feature filled by [19] and [23]. It sealed a sub-rectangular post hole, which was half sectioned, and a linear feature *c*1m wide, which remained unexcavated.

2.2.9 At the western end of the trench, overburden [25] was removed to reveal a deposit of brown sandy silt with frequent yellowish brown sandy mottles. It resembled deposit [21], but contained only very occasional sherds of Roman pottery. It was thought to have formed at the interface of the natural sand below, and extensive root disturbance was apparent. It was truncated by three features, filled by redeposited clay, which appeared to be modern. None were excavated.

2.2.10 The pottery recovered from the area of the Phase 2B watching brief derives from a broad period from the first to late third centuries AD. However, within a number of individual contexts, the early sherds were clearly residual. For several of the features, a late second to late third century *terminus ante quem* can be cited. Some of the pottery survived in large, unabraided sherds.

2.2.11 ***Conclusions:*** the evidence of the two possible beam slots, [22] and [24], appears to confirm the suggestion (CAU 1998) that there was at least one Roman timber building on the site. The other features, such as the putative kiln [19], which for the most part contain substantial amounts of Roman ceramic, indicate considerable activity on this part of the site. However, the excavation did not provide any evidence that the *Vallum* extended through the area.

3. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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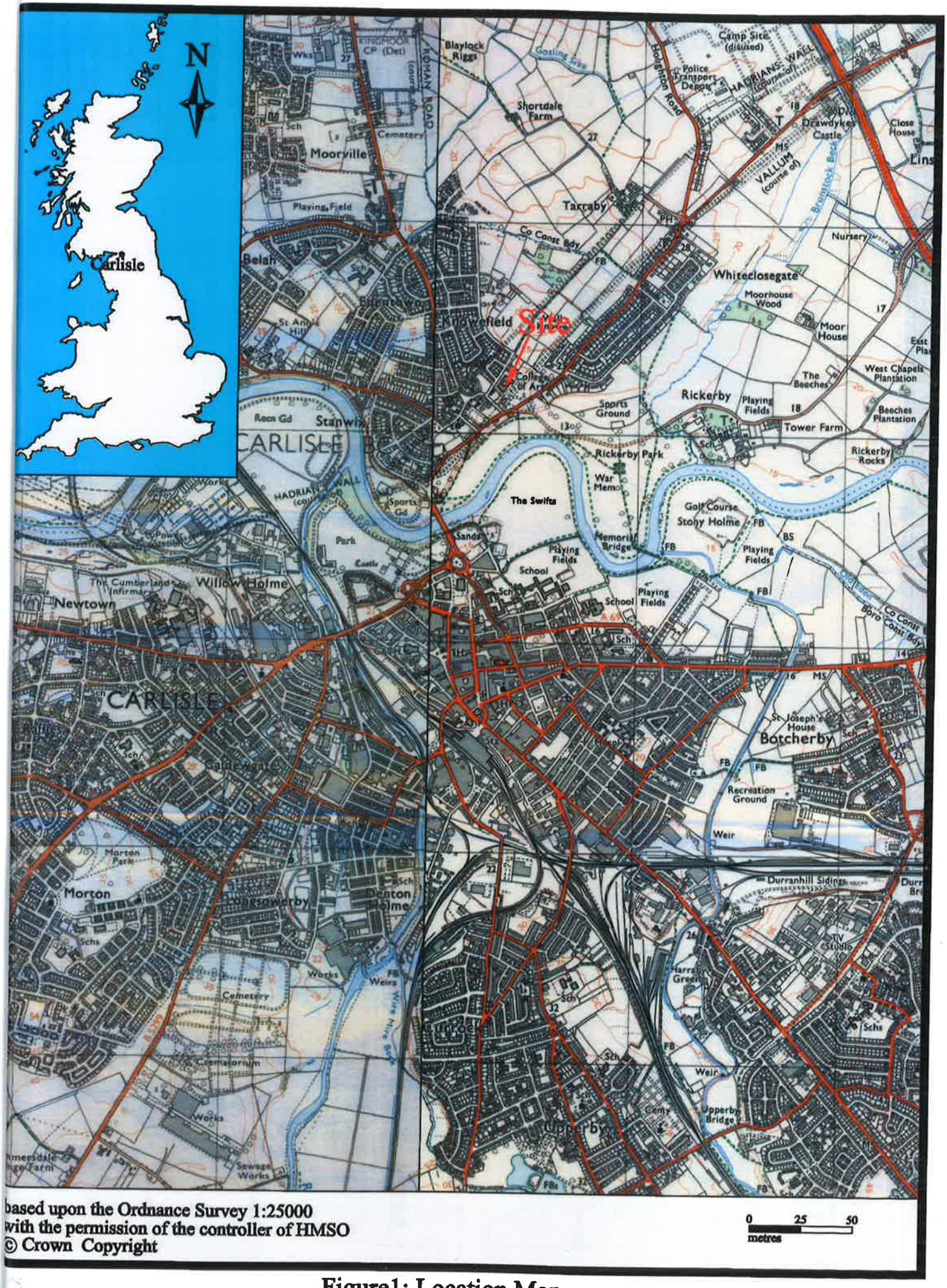


Figure1: Location Map

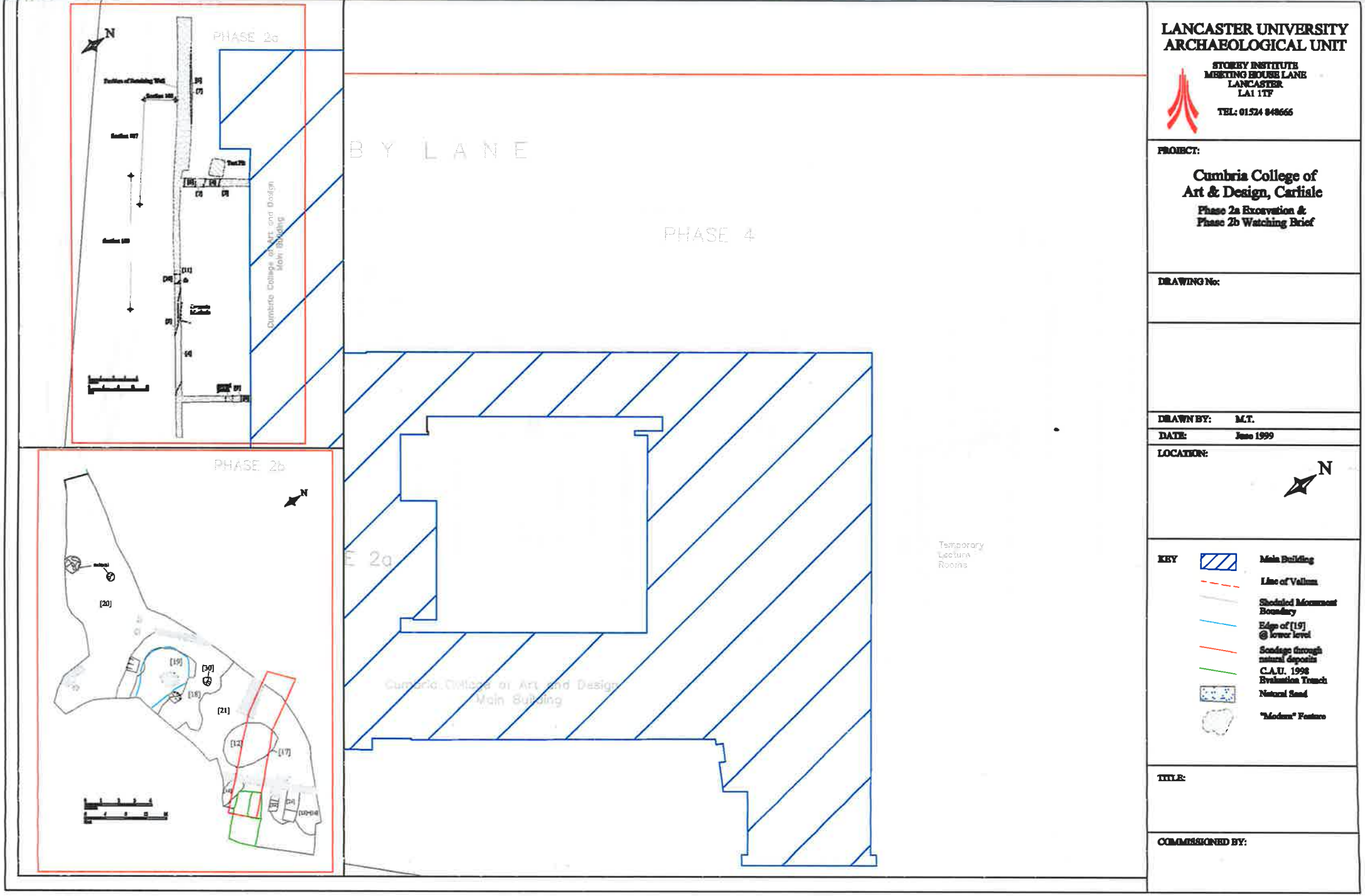


Fig 2 : Site Plan, with additional views of Phase 2a & 2b

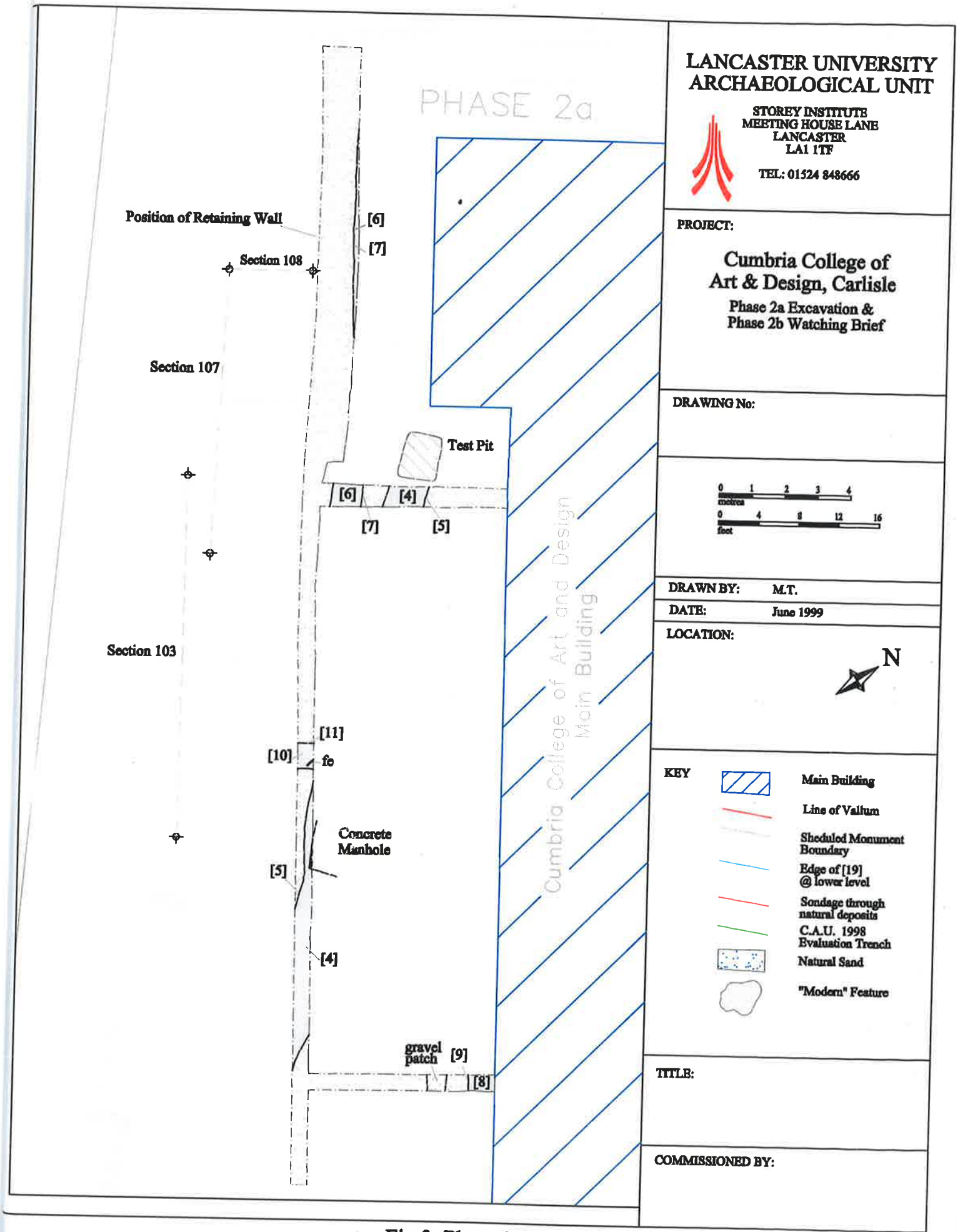
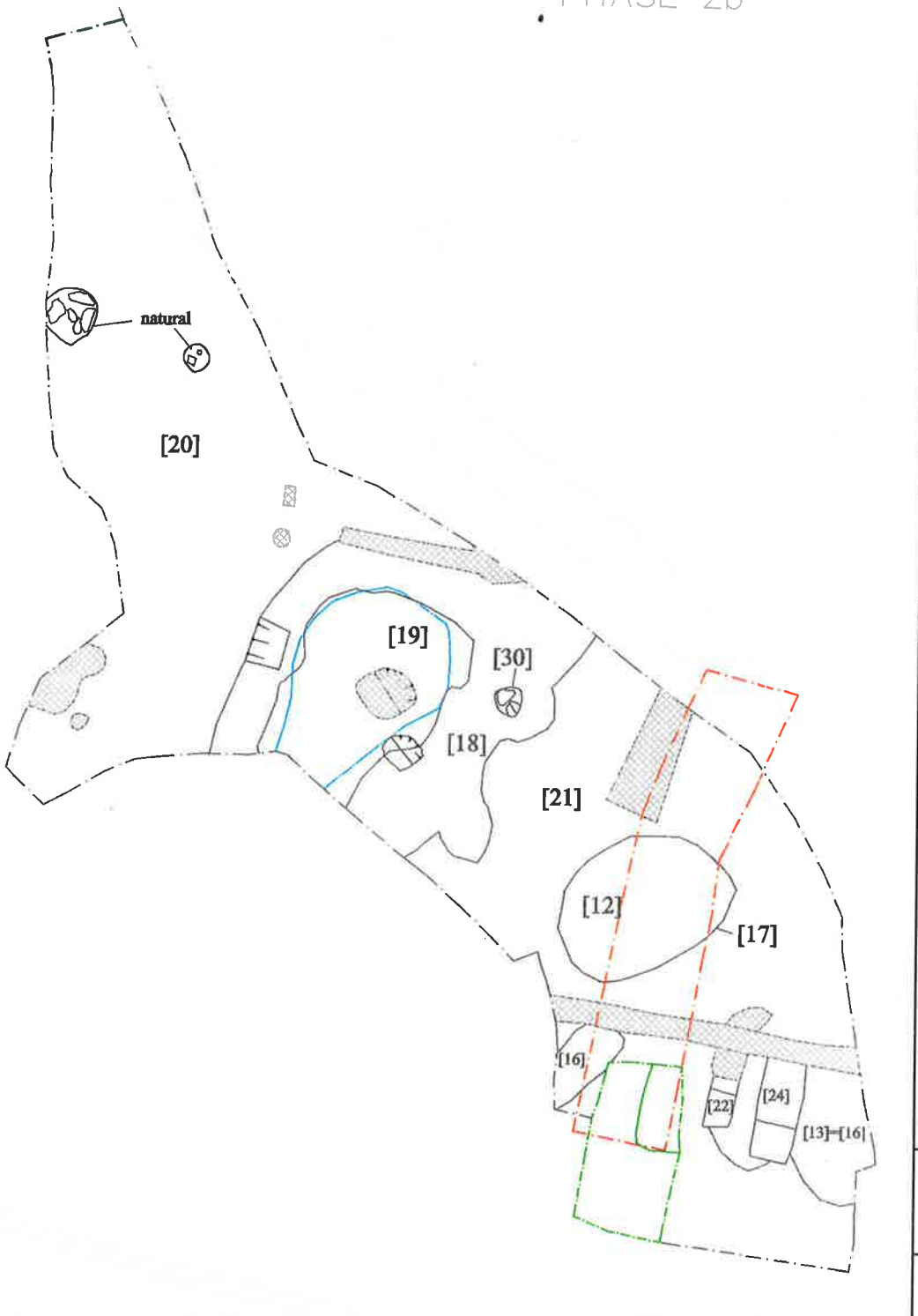


Fig 3: Phase 2a



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PROJECT:

Cumbria College of Art & Design, Carlisle

Phase 2a Excavation & Phase 2b Watching Brief

DRAWING No:

0 1 2 3 4
metres
0 4 8 12 16
feet

DRAWN BY: M.T.

DATE: June 1999

LOCATION:

N

KEY

- Main Building
- Line of Vallum
- Sheduled Monument Boundary
- Edge of [19] @ lower level
- Sondage through natural deposits
- C.A.U. 1998 Evaluation Trench
- Natural Sand
- "Modern" Feature

TITLE:

COMMISSIONED BY:

Fig 4 : Phase 2b