

# *Archaeology Wales*

## **Prospect Place, Ebbw Vale**

Archaeological Watching Brief



By  
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Report No. 1131



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**May 2013**



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## **Summary**

*A watching brief was carried out by Archaeology Wales Ltd. during groundworks to the rear of the Ebbw Vale Institute. The archaeological work was commissioned by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. The remains of a nineteenth century row of terraced houses (Prospect Place) was identified during the investigation. Although the five terrace properties had been demolished over three decades ago, the foundations, lower walls and floor surfaces remained intact. The front and rear door openings and internal walls had largely survived, along with structural and architectural details such as the fireplaces and staircases. A cellar was also found below the dwelling at the southern end of the terrace. The remains of 1 and 2 Prospect Place were fully excavated and a descriptive and photographic record completed for these structures. The remaining three terraces were similar in layout to No. 2 and were not fully excavated due to time constraints.*

## **1. Introduction**

In March 2013, Archaeology Wales carried out an archaeological watching brief, on behalf of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, during groundworks in advance of the construction of a new split-level car park and associated retaining walls on land to the rear of the Ebbw Vale (NGR SO 16730 08995; Fig. 1). The local planning authority for the project is Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (planning application reference C/2012/0089).

The development comprised the following elements:

- The construction of a temporary access between Roderick Place and Mount Street.
- The whole area to be terraced with new retaining walls built at the eastern and western end of the site.
- The eastern wall to be set back some 3m (up-slope) from the present boundary with the Institute.
- A retaining wall to be constructed at the top (western) end of the site to allow further parking bays and rear access to the adjoining terrace (Woodville Place).
- The ground level to be built-up/levelled for this upper tier of parking.
- The northern boundary to be rebuilt or modified and the stone wall along Mount Street to be improved or rebuilt.

The excavation area for the main car park amounted to around 600 square metres.

Cartographic evidence revealed that two rows of terraced housing, Prospect Place and Hammond Row, originally occupied the site. These represent some of the earliest housing in Ebbw Vale and consequently Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust (GGAT) recommended that an archaeological watching brief was carried out during groundworks.

## **2. Background Information**

### **2.1 Site Description**

The site is located immediately behind, and to the west of, the Ebbw Vale Institute at around 325m AOD. The ground slopes steeply to the east. The underlying geology is the South Wales Middle Coal Measures formation.

## 2.2 Historic Background

The development site occupies an area that once contained two terraces of houses, Prospect Place and Hammond Row (fig. 2). These terraces are both shown on the OS first edition of 1880 and subsequent maps of the county series. Hammond Row is marked as a row of six terrace houses, all of equal size. Prospect Place is also depicted as a row of five properties, although the southern end terrace (No.1) is represented as a slightly larger dwelling on some map editions. An access road and detached garden plots were located to the front of Hammond Row and Prospect Place. Both terraces faced eastwards, across the valley.

On the early maps, a single pair of semi-detached properties is illustrated to the west (rear) of Prospect Place. These buildings are last marked on the 1920 map, and seem to have been pulled down before the 1960 survey. The cartographic evidence indicates that Hammond Row and Prospect Place were demolished in the 1970s or early 1980s.

## 3. Watching Brief Results

The archaeological watching brief was undertaken between 20<sup>th</sup> March and the 10<sup>th</sup> April 2013 by Adrian Hadley.

The soil strip for the access road between Roderick Place and Mount Street was limited to a width of five metres (fig. 3). Although some rubble was noted during monitoring, there was no evidence for *in situ* remains of terraced housing (Hammond Row). The soil strip was subsequently extended in order to build soil bunds (over membrane) on either side of the access route. No structures were found during these excavations. This suggests that the demolition material from these terrace properties had previously been taken off-site. It is also possible that the foundations of the terrace were disturbed (or dug out) when this area was landscaped.

To the north of Mount Street, between 2m and 4m of soil were excavated across the main development area (fig. 4). Extant stone walls and flagstone floors were encountered on this site. These demarcated a complete terrace row (Prospect Place) with adjoining pavement and roadway to the east (down-slope; fig 5 & fig 5a). The extant structures were cleared of demolition rubble to expose the floors and surviving external and internal walls of five dwellings (fig. 6). A cellar was also excavated below part of the house at the southern end of the terrace (fig. 7). The extant walls of the houses were predominantly constructed from sandstone in lime mortar. The internal walls were of brick construction.

A descriptive and photographic record was completed for the remains of the terrace housing and associated structures at Prospect Place. This comprised a measured survey as well as detailed analysis of the building fabric and architectural features.

### 3.1 No.1 Prospect Place

#### *Front Room*

The front section of the house measured internally 6.15m - 6.20m across (north-south) by 3.05m front to back (east-west). This wall was 0.44m - 0.50m thick, built over the cellar wall noted above. The southern corner of this building appeared to be *in situ*, but the remaining front wall had a pronounced bow of up to 35cm (fig. 10).

The front doorway appeared to be marked by a wall return located towards the southern end of the building. A cast iron cover for a coal chute was located within the pavement, adjacent to the probable entrance (fig. 10). The cover appears to have been repositioned at some point (and paving slabs re-laid) to take account of the horizontal movement in the front wall.

The external side (southern) wall was approximately 0.5m thick. As in the cellar below, this wall was not perpendicular to the original line of the front wall.

The northern wall was 0.56m thick. A fireplace was positioned centrally on this elevation, with the chimney flue external to the party wall (with No.2).

The dividing wall (back of the front room) comprised at least one panel of brickwork. Most of this wall had not survived, and the remaining section collapsed during excavation.

Two wall ties were identified at ground floor level, just above the foundations. The cast iron pattress (wall anchor) plates were located on the end wall, but had been built into the northern wall. Both sets of wall plates were connected by a metal rod of 0.04m diameter. The lateral restraints were positioned along the front wall as well as in the middle of the building.

#### *Back Room*

Overall the back of No.1 measured 5.75m to 5.8m across (north-south) by 3.3m front to back (east-west) from the presumed line of the internal wall (fig. 6). The flooring comprised flagstones, although these had been covered by a one inch (25mm) cement screed across a large part of this area.

The side wall to the south was between 0.4m and 0.7m thick. Whilst this external wall was straight, with no bowing evident, it was noted to be on a slightly different alignment to the wall in the front room. A fireplace was positioned off-centre on this wall, to facilitate access to the cellar to the left (east). The side wall to the north adjoined No.2 Prospect Row. This was 0.48m-0.78m wide, being much thicker than the side wall in the front room. This wall was also on a different alignment to that in the front room.

The rear wall of the house was roughly 0.5m thick. The back door was positioned on the right-hand (north) side, with the opening recorded as 1.01m wide. A window (1.15m wide) was located to the left (south) of the doorway. No further groundwork was undertaken to the rear (west) of this wall.

#### *The Cellar*

The cellar was located on the southern side of the house, extending some 3.7m across (north-south) and 2.7m front to back (east-west). The floor comprised predominantly sandstone flags, with some brick flooring noted in the north-west corner. Overall the cellar was about 2m deep.

Access to the cellar was via a stone staircase leading from the back room (fig. 8). This staircase was 0.9m wide and 2.35m long. The central section appears to have been damaged during the demolition of this property.

The front (east) wall of the cellar was between 0.65m and 0.98m thick. A stone ledge, about 0.15m wide, was noted at the top of the cellar wall; this was presumably intended to support floor joists/boards. A coal chute was positioned centrally on this wall (fig. 9). The chute extended under the front wall into the pavement at the front of the house (fig. 10).

The southern (side) wall of the cellar was 0.65m thick (to include a 0.15m wide ledge at the top). The staircase extended along this wall. The opposite (northern) wall was much less substantial; measuring only 0.28m thick. A recess was noted on the back wall (western elevation); recorded as 0.98m wide by 0.91m tall and 0.22m deep. It was evident from the brick inserts within the flooring that the bow visible in the north-west corner of the cellar probably formed during the life of the building. This wall has probably buckled due to compression resulting from the horizontal (westward) movement of the front wall.

### **3.2 No.2 Prospect Place**

#### *Front Room*

The front room measured 3.85m across (north-south) and 3.10m - 3.2m front to back (east-west). The flooring consisted of sandstone flags (fig. 11).

The front entrance was situated at the southern end of the front wall. The original stone door cill had been replaced by glazed tiles set in concrete. The front wall was 0.48m to 0.52m thick, with a pronounced bow of about 0.15m - 0.2m recorded externally.

The side wall to the south adjoined No.1. This was 0.56m thick, being much less substantial than the party wall (with No.3) opposite. The latter was recorded as 1.22m wide. A fireplace was positioned centrally on the northern elevation.

The dividing wall (back of the front room) comprised three panels of brickwork. The door opening (0.95m wide) was located on the left-hand (southern) side of the wall.

#### *Back Room/s*

This room measured between 3.85m and 4m across (north-south) and 3.5m front to back (east-west). The flooring consisted of sandstone flags.

The side wall to the south (0.48m - 0.78m thick) was noted to be on a slightly different alignment to that of the front room. The floor slabs were laid parallel to this wall, and hence were not aligned with those in the front room.

A mid twentieth century fireplace was positioned centrally on the northern wall. A staircase was located to the left (east) of the fireplace; this was built in brick, with wooden treads extending over the risers (fig. 12). Only the lower section of the staircase survived. The bottom three steps turned within a 0.8m square stairwell.

The rear wall of the house was roughly 0.5m thick. The back door was offset to the left (south), with the opening recorded as 0.91m wide. A window (1.35m wide) was positioned to the right (north) of the doorway. No further groundwork was undertaken to the rear (west) of this wall.

### 3.3 No.3 Prospect Place

#### *Front Room*

The front room measured 3.85m across (north-south) and 3.2m front to back (east-west). The flooring consisted of sandstone flags (fig. 13).

The front wall measured 0.46m to 0.50m thick, with an entranceway evident at the northern end. The entire front wall appears to have bowed inwards by some 0.1m.

A fireplace was positioned centrally on the southern elevation. This comprised a cast iron grate set in brickworks surrounds (fig. 14). This flue was positioned back to back with that of No.2, set within the 1.22m thick party wall. The opposite wall (northern elevation) was of less substantial construction, being 0.43m to 0.5m thick.

The dividing wall (back of the front room) comprised three panels of brickwork. The opening was offset slightly to the right (north); recorded as 1.25m wide. This layout is symmetrical to No. 2 Prospect Place.

#### *Back Room*

The back (western) half of this property was not excavated due to time constraints, however it was of the same dimensions as No.2. The fireplace was not identified, but it is thought to have been on the opposite side of the party wall to that of No. 2 Prospect Place.

### 3.4 No. 4 Prospect Place

#### *Front Room*

This property appeared to have the same two-room layout as Nos. 2 and 3 Prospect Place, although it was not fully revealed during the groundworks. The front room measured 4m across (north-south) and 3.2m front to back (east-west). The floor consisted of a thin concrete slab laid over the original flagstones (fig. 15).

The front wall was 0.42m to 0.5m thick, with an entranceway at the southern end. The central section of this wall had bowed inwards by as much as 0.1m.

The side wall to the north of this room was noted to be 1.22m wide, the same width as the substantial party wall shared by Nos. 2 and 3. A section of this wall had survived to the rear of this room; showing the general construction of facing stones in lime mortar with a rubble core at least 0.6m across (fig. 16). The position of the original chimney was marked by a twentieth century hearth, positioned approximately central to this wall

The dividing wall (back of the front room) comprised two panels of brickwork. There was probably another panel on the left-hand (southern) side of this elevation. The original opening was probably offset to the south, mirroring the position of the doorway in the adjoining property (No. 5).

#### *Back Room*

The back (western) half of this property was not excavated due to time constraints, however it was of the same dimensions as Nos. 2 and 3 Prospect Place.

### 3.5 No. 5 Prospect Place

#### *Front Room*

No. 5 had a two-room layout similar to Nos. 2 to 4 Prospect Place. The front room measured 3.9m across (north-south) and 3.20m front to back (east-west). Very few architectural features had survived in this property, although unlike in No. 4, the flagstones had survived more or less intact (fig. 17).

The front wall measured 0.46m to 0.5m thick, with an entranceway evident at the northern end. The entire wall appears to have bowed inwards by some 0.1m.

The front entrance was situated at the northern end of the front wall, where the original stone door cill had been overlaid by a concrete slab. This wall was 0.49m to 0.51m thick. At some point in the past this wall had bulged inwards, but only by 0.05m. In general not much of the front wall had survived; the dimensions were defined by the foundations below the level of the internal floor and exterior paving slabs.

The side wall, on the southern side of the building, had also been badly damaged during the demolition of this property. The position of the fireplace was not ascertained, but was probably positioned back to back with the hearth found in No. 4. The opposite wall (northern elevation) was more complete, having been retained to mark the boundary with the adjacent property (Ty Coed). This external wall marked the end of the terrace, but also continued 15m further eastwards as a boundary wall (approximately 0.5m wide).

The dividing wall (back of the front room) comprised three panels of brickwork. The opening was offset slightly to the right (north); recorded as 1.01m wide.

#### *Back Room*

As with Nos. 3 and 4 Prospect Place, the back (western) half of this property was not excavated due to time constraints. It was of similar dimensions to numbers 2, 3 and 4 Prospect Place.

### 3.5 The Road and Pavement

During the groundworks, the access road for Prospect Place was identified to the east of the terrace housing. The former road was defined by a pavement to the west and a stone wall to the east. Some patches of old tarmac were found along the line of the road; this surface appears to have been laid directly on top of the natural subsoil (fig. 18).

The pavement in front of the houses was about a metre wide, extending along the entire length of the terrace row. The original stone paving slabs and kerb stones had survived at the northern end of the site; the remaining slabs and kerbs were of concrete.

The short stretch of wall discovered to the east of the terrace, in front of Nos. 4 and 5, was built of stone blocks in lime mortar. It was approximately 0.5m wide and extended some 8.4m (to align with the extant stone pillar on Mount Street). The average height of the wall was 0.5m lower than the pavement, which suggests that

these are the foundations of a boundary wall. The road would have been 2.5-2.6m wide opposite No.5 Prospect Place.

### **3.6 Other Structures**

A large culvert (fig. 5 and fig. 5a) was identified along the northern side boundary. This feature had an internal diameter of 0.55-0.65m and was at least 15m long, running downhill on a predominantly east-west alignment. For the most part it was built of large stone blocks, with the upper stones forming an arch set in lime mortar (fig. 19). Towards the bottom of the site, the culvert was built in brick; it is here that the culvert appeared to turn approximately 45 degrees, to run (north-south) parallel to the boundary with the Institute.

Another drain or culvert was discovered on the southern side of the site, although this was much smaller, at approximately 0.25m square (fig. 20). The culvert ran downhill from the eastern end of Prospect Place (at the junction with Mount Street). This feature extended some 6.5m in an east-north-east direction, but appears to have been disturbed at the lower end of the development site. This culvert was constructed of blocks set in lime mortar over sandstone slabs. The top was also covered with slabs. This culvert was covered by around 0.3m of topsoil.

## **4. Discussion and Conclusions**

The remains of the five houses that comprised Prospect Place were revealed during groundworks in advance of the redevelopment of the site. Houses 1 and 2 were completely exposed and excavated, while houses 3, 4 and 5 were only exposed and excavated up to the partition wall dividing the ground floor front and back rooms. Following discussions with GGAT, it was decided that the rooms to the rear would be excavated away without a complete record being created, due to the time constraints of the project.

The extant remains of the ground floor walls of the houses have provided an opportunity to examine the fabric and methods of construction used to build terraces in Ebbw Vale. Very few properties of similar date survive in this part of the town. To the south of the development site, in particular, a number of terrace rows have been pulled down to make way for new housing; notably, Saron Row, Roderick Row, Zion Row and Redwood Row. The surviving structural and architectural features from Prospect Place are therefore of local archaeological significance.

The watching brief has revealed that the terrace of houses on Prospect Place comprised five structures, the southern-most of which (No. 1) was the largest. This house measured 6.15m wide compared to the average of 3.85m wide for the other four structures. All the houses comprised two rooms downstairs, separated by a thin brick wall.

In house No. 1 a fireplace was identified in the front room, built into the party wall shared with No. 2. A second, larger, fireplace was identified in the back room, built into the external wall. It was the only house to have a cellar. This was located beneath a suspended timber floor at the front of the house. A stone ledge on which the timber floor would have sat was identified in the front wall of the house. The cellar was accessed down a stone stair from the back room and had a coal chute on the eastern side which opened from the pavement in front of the terrace. It is possible that the

room at the rear of the house was subdivided into a kitchen and a hallway, as indicated by different floor coverings. This was the only house in the terrace thought to have had a wooden staircase leading to the upper floor, as no evidence for a stone staircase was identified within the house walls.

The four remaining properties were all of a broadly similar size and layout. They were constructed symmetrically with two ground floor rooms. Nos. 2 and 3 and Nos. 4 and 5 shared substantial party walls into which a brick staircase and fireplace had been built for each house. These were set back to back. The party walls between Nos. 1 and 2 and Nos. 3 and 4 were much less substantial and had no structures built into them. Part of the wall between houses 4 and 5 had been damaged and the front room fireplace at No. 5 had not survived. At least one of the fireplaces in houses 1, 2 and 4 had been modernised with twentieth century hearths and mantelpieces. House 3, however, retained the original cast iron grate in a brick surround. The original flagstone floors survived in houses 2, 3 and 5, but had been covered by a concrete scree in house 4.

The structures represent the remains of a typical early to mid-nineteenth century terrace of houses that were built in response to the expansion of Ebbw Vale during the industrial revolution. The terrace is likely to have housed workers from the local mines and ironworks and their families. The identification of one structure that is notably larger than the other four, complete with a cellar, suggests that the terrace housed families of different status. It is possible that No. 1 Prospect Place was occupied by a more senior worker than the remaining houses, although documentary research would be required to confirm this. Alternatively, the structure may have been a public house, although no other evidence was recovered to suggest this. The houses were occupied into the mid twentieth century, appearing on maps up to the 1940s. The 1962 OS map of Ebbw Vale shows a blank area where Prospect Place used to be, indicating that it had been demolished by this time.

## **5. Acknowledgements**

Thanks are due to Bethan McPherson, Simon Dobbs and Dave Williams (Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council) for their assistance throughout the project. We also acknowledge the help provided during the archaeological fieldwork by the contractor, Jim Davies Civil Engineering Ltd; in particular Jim Davies (managing director), Andrew Miles (contracts manager) and Colin Thomas (site foreman) as well as Peter Drideaux, Dennis Davies and Richard Baker. We are also grateful for old drawings of the scheme area kindly supplied by Allan Thomas, the owner of the property adjoining the development area (Ty Coed, Hillside, Ebbw Vale).



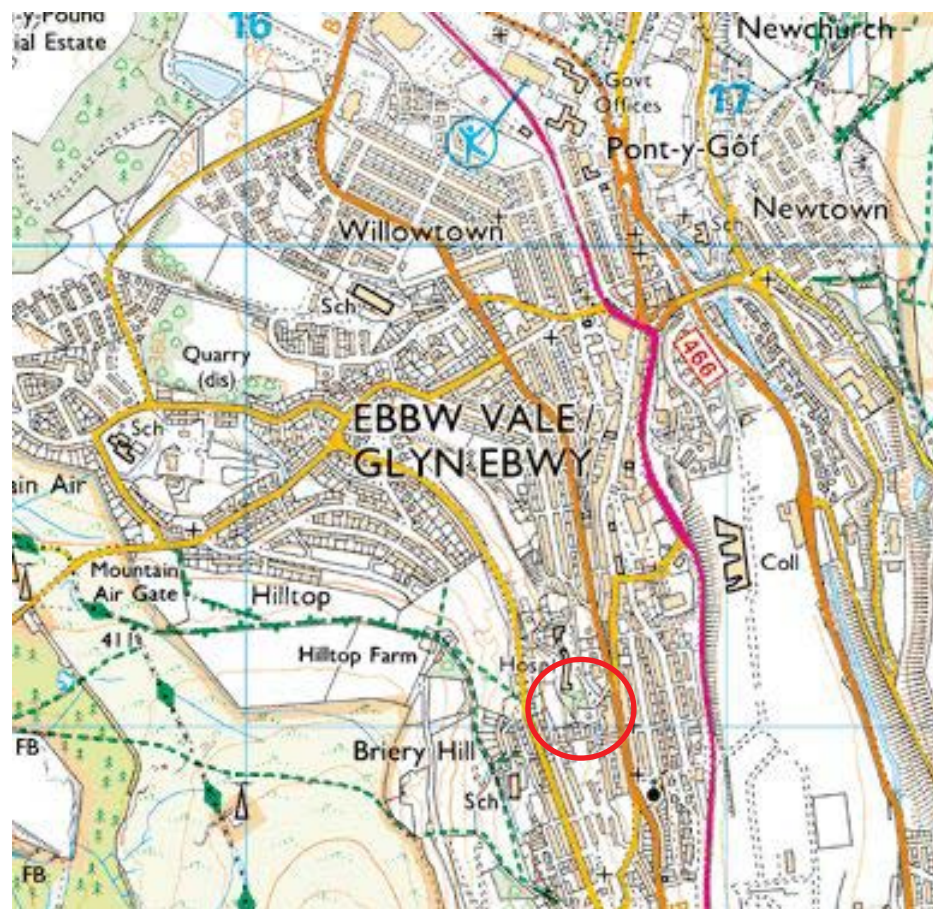


Fig. 1  
Location of  
site

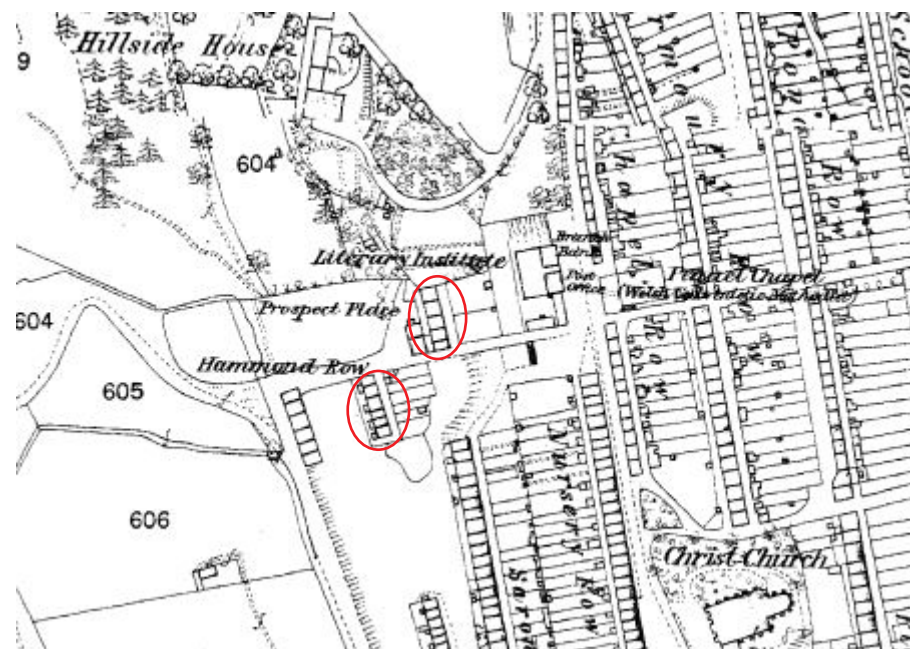


Fig. 2  
OS map of 1880  
showing the two  
rows of terraced  
housing





Fig. 3  
View of the  
temporary access  
road and soil bund  
between Rodderick  
Place and Mount  
Street.

Looking North





Fig. 4  
General view of  
development site.

Looking NE

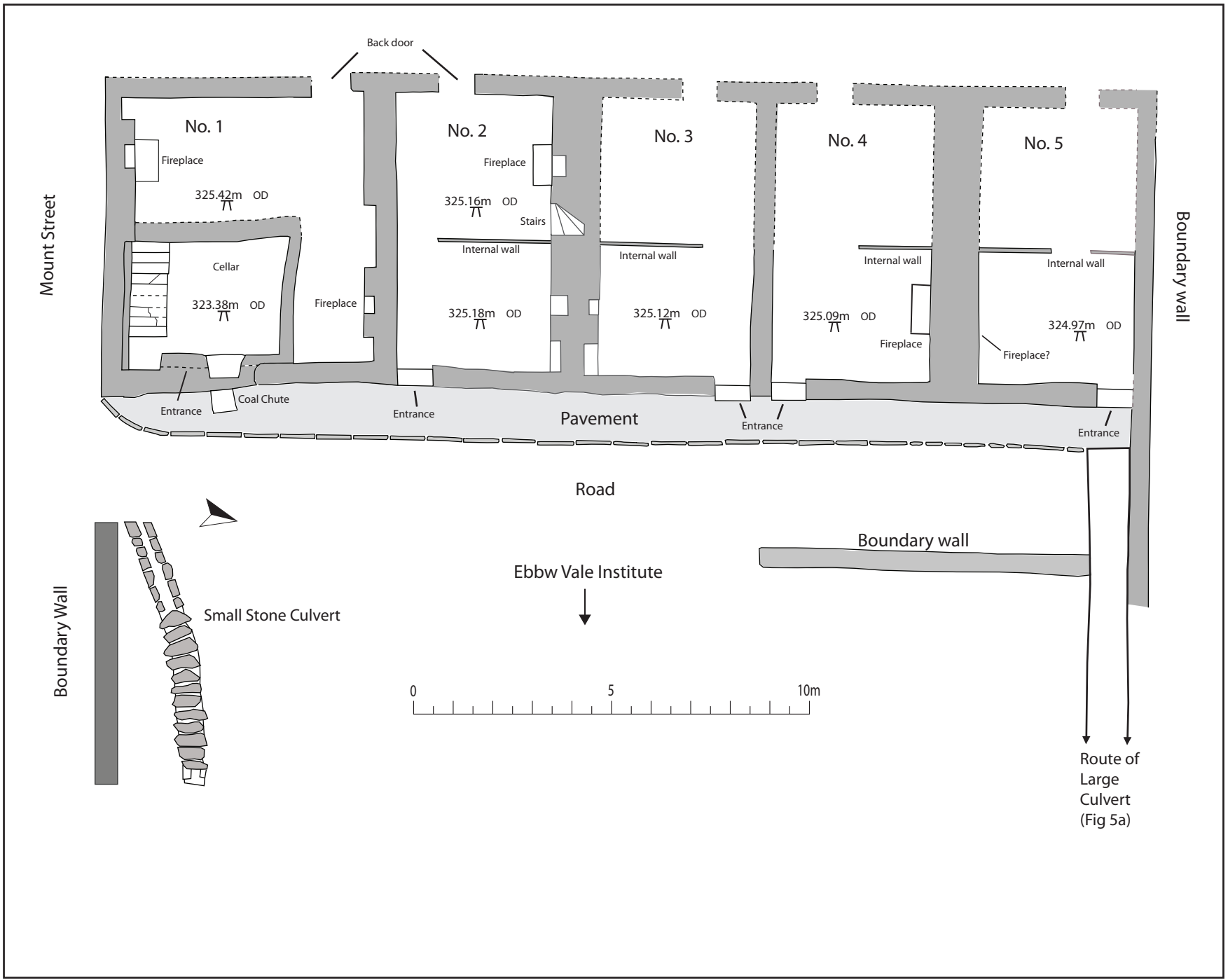


Fig. 5  
Post-excavation  
plan of structures

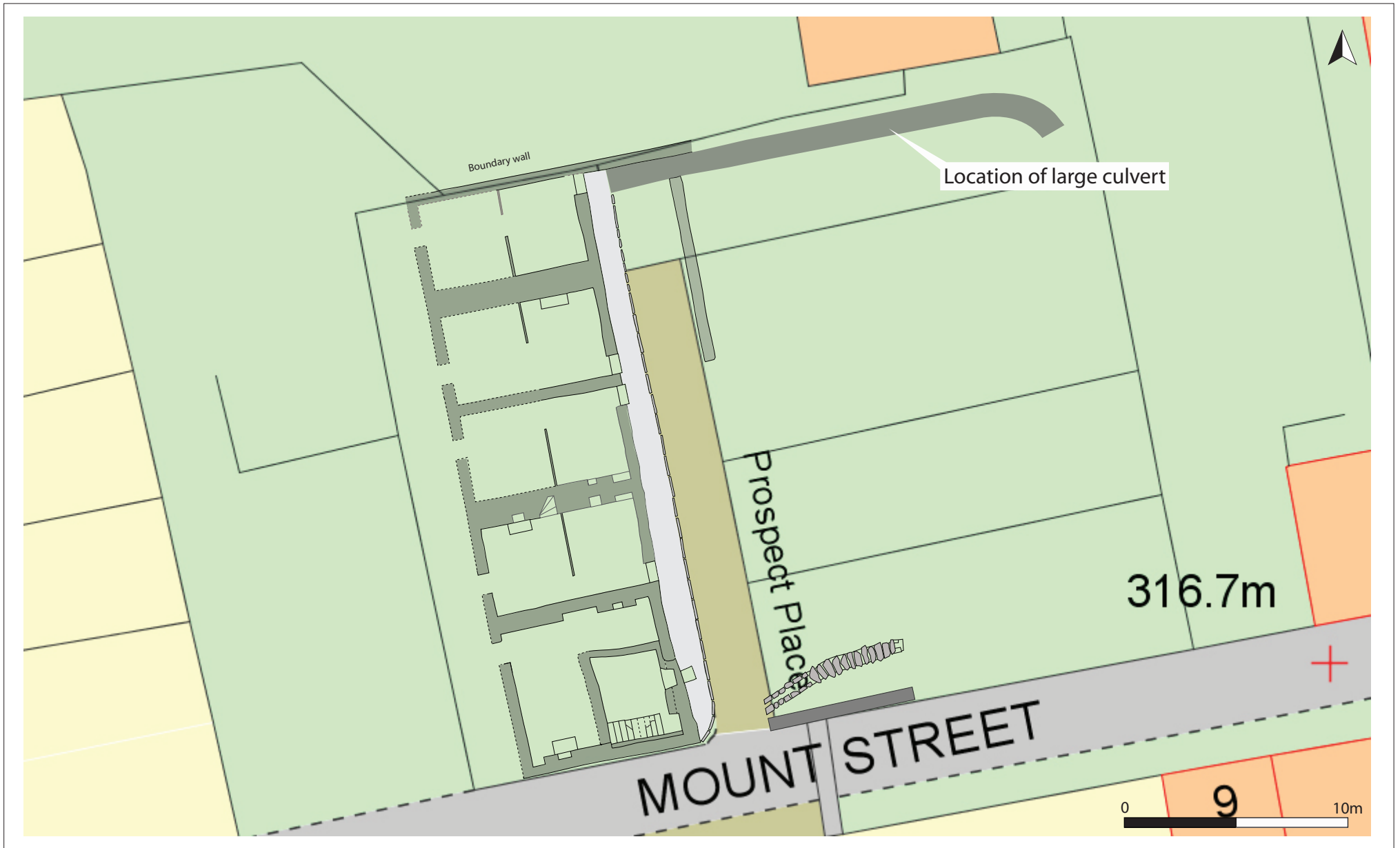


Fig 5a: Post excavation illustration overlaid on modern mastermap showing location of large culvert





Fig. 6  
The remains of the  
houses of Prospect  
Place.

Looking NE





Fig. 7  
General view of  
No. 1 Prospect  
Place.

Looking NW





Fig. 8  
The stone staircase  
within the cellar of  
No. 1 Prospect  
Place.

Looking SSE

Scale = 2m



Fig. 9  
The coal chute  
within the cellar of  
No. 1 Prospect  
Place.

Looking ENE

Scale = 2m





Fig. 10  
The front wall of  
No's 1 and 2  
Prospect Place  
showing the distinct  
bow and the top of  
the coal chute.

Looking NNW





Fig. 11  
General view of  
No. 2 Prospect  
Place.

Looking WSW





Fig. 12  
The staircase within  
No. 2 Prospect  
Place.

Looking NNW

Scale = 0.5m





Fig. 13  
General view of  
No.3 Prospect Place

Looking WSW





Fig. 14  
The fireplace  
within No.3  
Prospect Place

Looking SSE

Scale = 0.5m





Fig. 15  
General view of  
No.4 Prospect Place

Looking WSW





Fig. 16  
Section through the  
party wall between  
Nos 4 and 5  
Prospect Place

Looking WSW

Scale = 1m





Fig. 17  
General view of  
No.5 Prospect Place

Looking WSW



Original slab pavement

Boundary wall



Road

Fig. 18  
The pavement,  
road and boundary  
wall to the east of  
the houses on  
Prospect Place

Looking N





Fig. 19  
Culvert identified  
to the north of  
the houses on  
Prospect Place

Looking W





Fig. 20  
Slab covered culvert  
identified to the  
south of the houses  
on Prospect Place

Looking NE

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