CARMARTHEN:
Understanding and Protecting the Archaeology of Wales' Oldest Town

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PART 1 - INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO REPORT

This report forms the first part of a project bringing together the current understanding of the historical development of Carmarthen, Wales' oldest town. The project's overall objective is to provide a framework for sustainable development within the town's historic environment and in particular to help secure the future preservation of irreplaceable archaeological evidence.

Information from historical documentation and archaeological evidence has been used to provide an overview of Carmarthen's past. Starting with its origins as a Roman fort, the report takes the reader through Carmarthen's development into a Roman town, the growth of the two medieval settlements of Old and New Carmarthen, to its Post Medieval expansion.

The physical evidence of this history are preserved in the layout of the town its roads and alleyways, rivers and streams as well as the fabric of the standing buildings and buried archaeological remains. The surviving remains of Carmarthen's past are of huge significance at a local, regional and national level but are still vulnerable to threat through on-going development. The report highlights those areas of the town we know to hold surviving remains which are of exceptional significance.

This report has been commissioned by Carmarthenshire County Council with Cadw-Welsh Historic Monuments principally to provide councillors and planners with an up to date statement of the archaeological importance of the town. It is intended to accompany a new provision of *Sites and Monuments Record* information on a GIS map base and help planners assess the archaeological and historical implications of proposed developments. Management of Carmarthen's historic environment requires a balance between conservation and development for the future benefit of its citizens.

The report does not assume a detailed knowledge of archaeological processes or the town's history and development on the part of its users. Therefore, a brief outline of Carmarthen's historical importance is given. This is followed by a brief introduction to archaeological and topographical evidence and techniques.

A more detailed statement of the physical form of the town from Roman times is provided, showing how archaeology has helped advance our knowledge. An indication of areas still containing important above and below ground evidence for the history of the town is provided together with a brief record of what we have lost.

Preliminary management recommendations are made throughout the archaeological and historical reviews. It is expected that many of these recommendations will be developed and expanded during the production of subsequent GIS mapping and SMR enhancement work.

Carmarthen is a vibrant town which continues to grow and change. It has done so throughout its history—testament to its success. Nevertheless this report is written in the firm belief that the inheritance of the past is of value and use for the future.
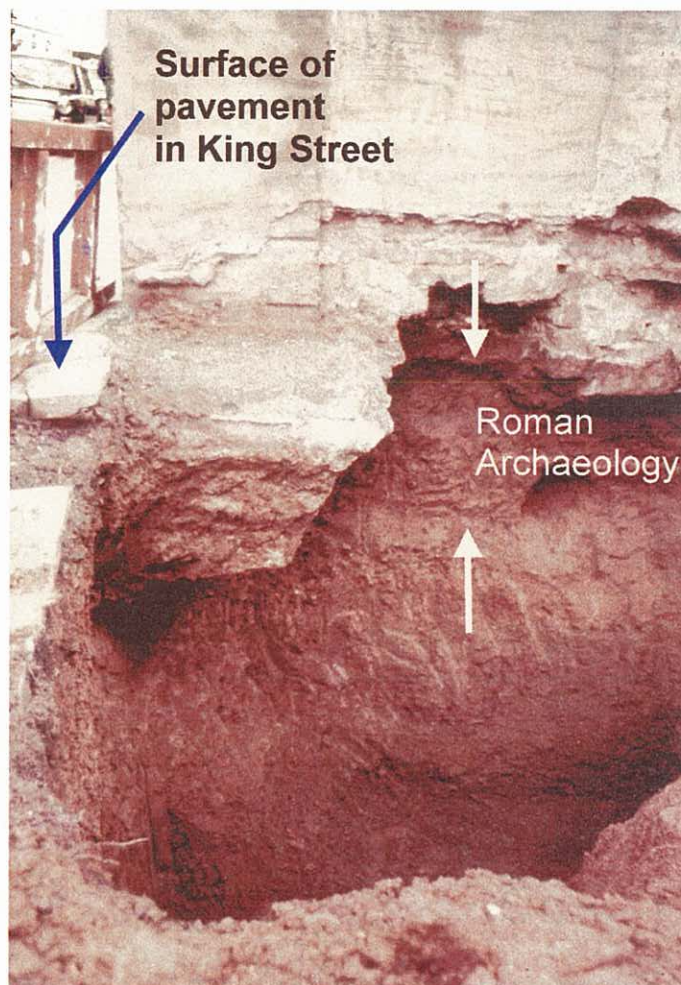
URBAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE & TECHNIQUES - A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Successful towns, like Carmarthen, continue to grow and redevelop over time. New houses and shops are built on the sites of their predecessors. New administrative, social and economic needs call for rebuilding and relocation. So urban archaeological sites often have a whole *succession* of features and structures from Roman and medieval times through to the present. Some later developments such as a deep cellar can remove almost all traces of earlier structures; in other cases floors of buildings may lie over a whole sequence of earlier surfaces. Archaeologists use the term *stratification* for such a succession and, broadly speaking, geological principles apply: the lowest layers and structures are the earliest. Such sequences will give a relative indication of date. For more precise dating building styles and, most importantly dateable finds like coins, jewellery and pottery can give greater precision—but only when they are *stratified.*

A site or area continuously inhabited for perhaps (as in the case of Carmarthen) two thousand years will tend to have a steady build up of deposits. Disposal of rubbish of all kinds in middens and rubbish pits close to hand, and indeed the cultivation of gardens behind house frontages, will result in soil build-up. The débris of demolition or simply decay of a building may serve as the foundation for another built on top of it. These processes can result in Roman or medieval remains lying at depths of one or more metres below present ground surfaces.

However, it is equally true in historic towns that ground surfaces can be lowered, later buildings and areas cut down *into* earlier deposits so that Roman floor surfaces may lie just below 19th century ones—if they have not been wholly destroyed. These processes tend to happen when the original landform continues to be modified through the centuries. The photograph shown here of an exposed section of Roman deposits in King Streets enables us to show that this street and Spilman Street lie along the spine of what was once a much more pronounced natural ridge. Centuries of flattening off the top of the ridge to make more level ground and a corresponding build up of deposits to the rear of the street frontages is the result. On the spine Roman layers lie just below the present ground surface.

Surface of pavement in King Street

Roman Archaeology

Urban archaeologists, in Carmarthen as elsewhere, are concerned therefore to build up a 3-dimensional picture of the town through time. Modern computer graphical techniques like digital terrain modelling offer exciting new possibilities. By amassing information from numerous archaeological excavations, large and small, and indeed careful observation over time, we can make a reasonable, though nowhere near complete, plot of the depths of archaeological deposits. Adding the location of cellars and deep foundations to this database further delimits areas of high archaeological potential.

EXCAVATION OR PRESERVATION

In this brief, and perforce over-simplified summary of archaeological evidence and techniques it is extremely important to recognize that an archaeological excavation is in itself a destructive process—it is indeed an unrepeatable experiment. In a town like Carmarthen where so much buried and upstanding traces from the past have been destroyed, what remains, both above and below ground, takes on increased value. Archaeological excavations are expensive and time consuming—new techniques continue to be developed, new questions asked of the evidence. There are therefore very strong reasons, partly recognised in areas of statutory protection, for preservation *in situ* for future uses and future generations to study. If however 'preservation by record' is decided upon, that record must be to the highest standards of current practice.

ARCHAEOLOGY 'ABOVE GROUND - STUDY AND RECORDING OF STANDING BUILDINGS

Archaeological techniques can also be applied to standing buildings in a way which complements and at times extends an architectural analysis. Archaeologists are also concerned to see buildings in their setting—a 'landscape archaeology' approach in an urban environment. Concern has long been expressed that the protection given to a building by Listing does not extend to below ground deposits of its predecessors and the current Cadw-Welsh Historic Monuments Review of Heritage Legislation in Wales for the Welsh Assembly government is considering a single system of designation.
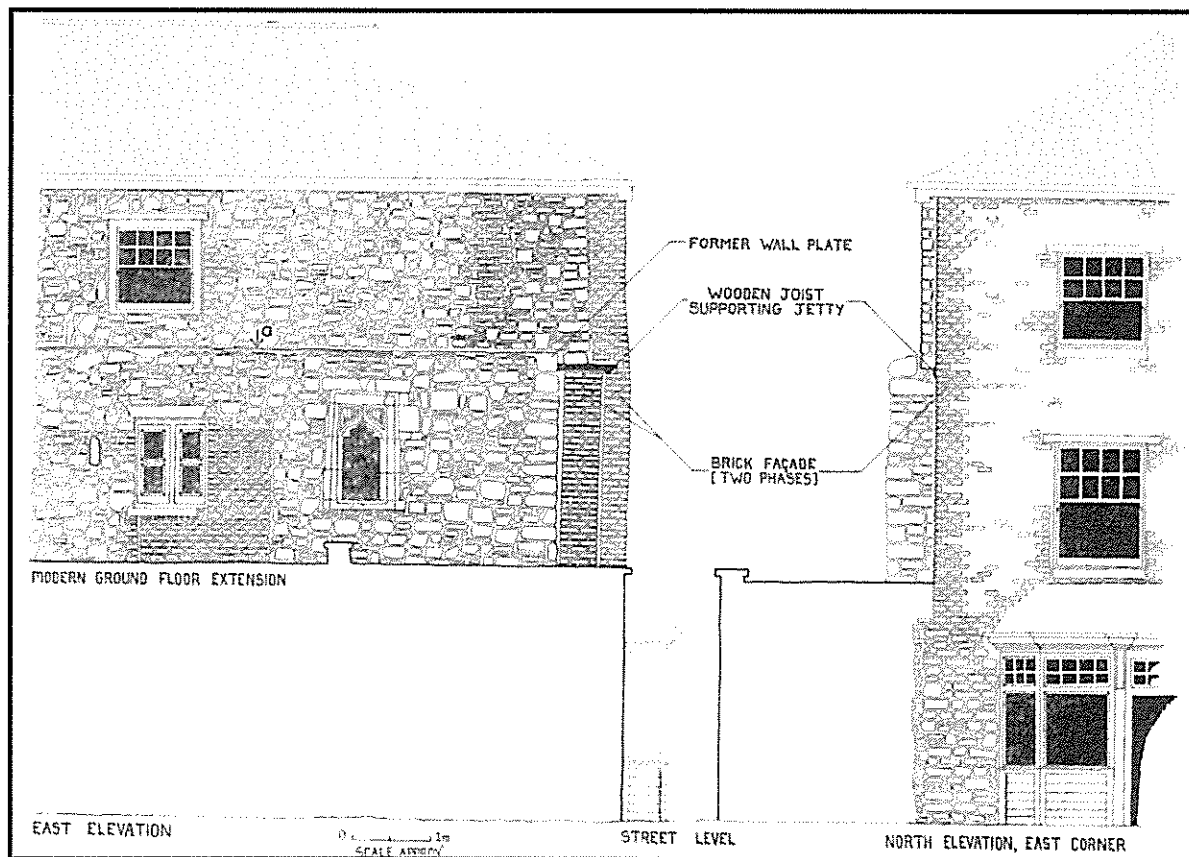

The Angel Vaults: not only does this elevation contain a fine medieval window, but shows a succession of phases starting as a jettied building

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TOWN PLAN AND DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Most historic towns experience both rapid change and also continuity in their development through time. It is this dynamic which gives each place its unique and individual characteristics and Carmarthen is no exception. Some elements of an historic town form the framework for the processes of change. The town plan—the position of its streets, open spaces and often lines of defence, as well as individual property boundaries influence or even constrain subsequent development. They can be likened to a document which can be 'read'. This process is helped by using historic maps, which, in Carmarthen's case, principally mean the maps of 1786 by Lewis, of 1834 by Wood, and of 1888 by the OS. These and others are being digitised and historic elements are being identified as part of the process of improvement of the analysis and presentation of the historical and archaeological record of which this Report is a part.

Many other documentary sources—deeds, administration records, photos, pictures, prints and air photographs can be used to throw light on the development, character and economic and social history of the town.
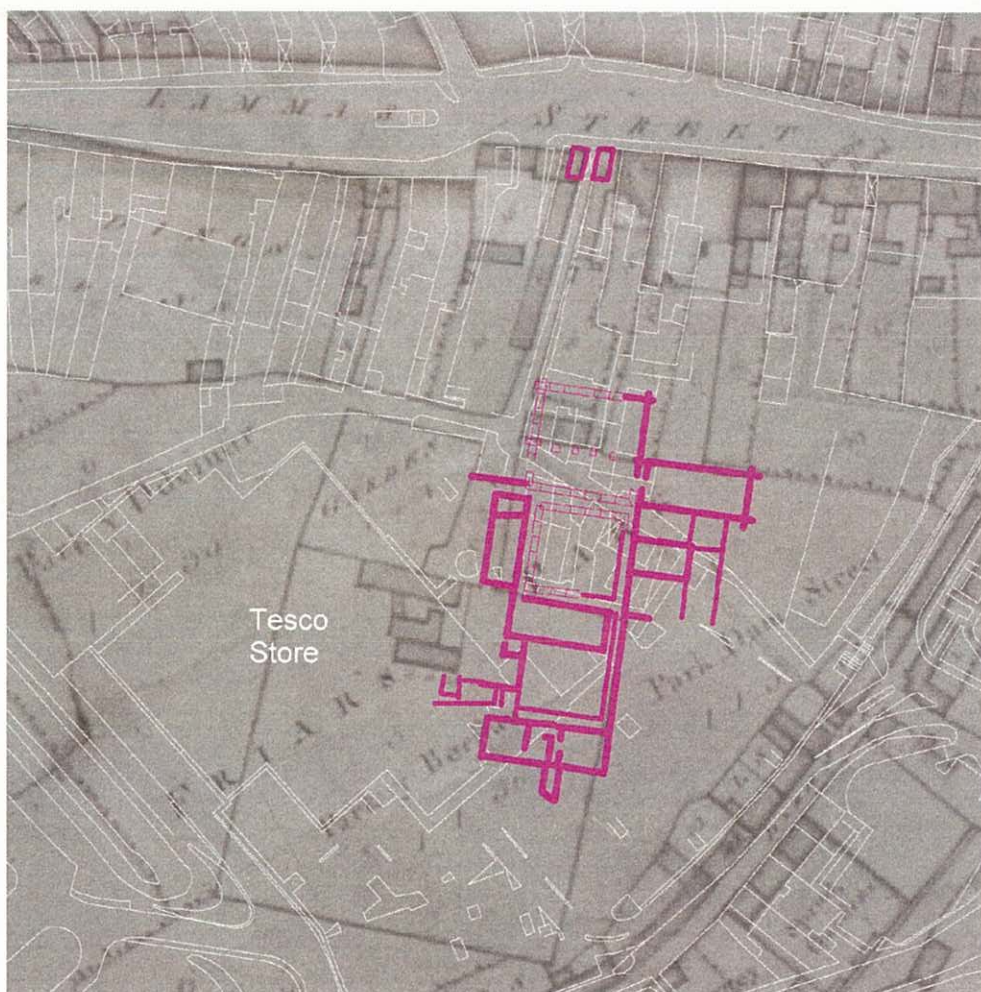

A rectified extract from the 1786 map with modern OS data superimposed and the outline of the friary.

CARMARTHEN'S PLACE IN WELSH & UK HISTORY

ROMAN CARMARTHEN - MORIDUNUM

There were only two Roman towns in what is now Wales: Carmarthen and Caerwent. Caerwent did not become the site of a medieval or indeed later town so Carmarthen can thus lay claim to being not only the oldest town in Wales but to a continuous occupation span of nearly two thousand years.

Wales of course did not exist as either a linguistic or political entity in the Roman period (A.D. 43-410). We know from Roman historians that *Britannia* was divided into tribal territories and that the *Demetae* inhabited west Wales, bordering the *Silures* to the east and the *Ordovices* to the north. Where political and economic conditions allowed, the Romans preferred to govern through local élites in newly founded towns—*civitas* or tribal capitals—on the classical model. Much of northern and western Britain however remained under military rule. Carmarthen (*Moridunum*) is thus of particular interest as an example of the power and influence of the Roman state in what might be seen as a peripheral area of the Roman world. Furthermore, urban life in Carmarthen, like Caerwent and some other Roman towns and cities in *Britannia,* evidently continued well into the late fourth century close to the end of direct Roman rule.
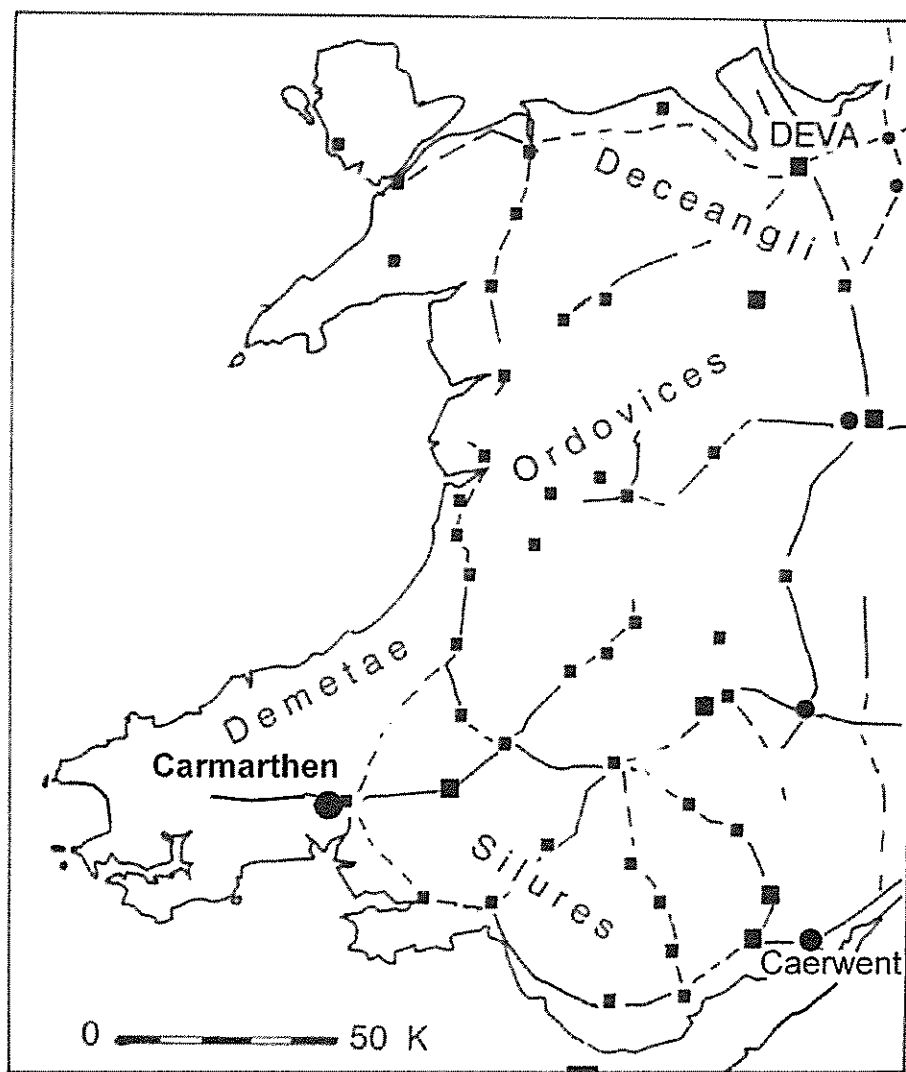
Carmarthen was one of only two towns in Roman Wales. (Square symbols signify Forts)

EARLY MEDIEVAL CARMARTHEN

The period from the early fifth right through to the early 11th centuries is undoubtedly of crucial importance in the emergence of the Welsh language which is amongst the oldest vernacular European languages. Between the 5th and 7th centuries Wales became a Christian country—whether through missionary endeavours or survival of Romano-British Christianity or through both processes. From this native Welsh kingdoms emerged undoubtedly influenced by their Roman predecessors. In West Wales the kingdom of *Dyfed* clearly descends from the Iron Age and Romano-British tribe of the *Demetae*.

Within this framework, Carmarthen is, potentially, of the greatest importance. It is unfortunate therefore that for this period of time our source material, both archaeological and historical, is sparse and often difficult to interpret and reconcile. Nevertheless the period is of great scholarly and popular interest. Although archaeological and historical information from Carmarthen is limited, it is important to recognise that it does exist. It is reasonable therefore to suggest that there was a form of continued occupation in Carmarthen after the Roman period—possibly focussed on the cult site of Llanteulyddog (the later Priory).

MEDIEVAL CARMARTHEN

Norman incursions into west Wales began in the late 11th century and the castle was the physical means of both conquest and control. Coastal assaults on navigable rivers to establish bridgeheads characterise the early stages of conquest. Carmarthen's first castle was downstream of the present site. Castles were soon followed by the foundation of small defended towns sheltering beneath the castle walls. Here Marcher lords brought in settlers who were given privileged status and who controlled trade and markets. Carmarthen was one such borough and can be compared with Kidwelly, Haverfordwest and Pembroke in terms of its plan, defences and economic role—all were ports. But medieval Carmarthen was unique in two respects.

It was physically and legally, even racially, two towns, not one. *Old Carmarthen* occupied the area of the former Roman town and was ruled by Carmarthen Priory. *New Carmarthen* lay to the west, centred on the castle and was, unlike other medieval towns in west Wales, a royal borough. There was thus an extremely significant process of accommodation with native Welsh settlement as well as outright conquest. The Norman kings had the subjugation of the Welsh princes as one objective, but control of their often rebellious marcher lords was another. Royal power was exercised through justiciars, chamberlains and constables based in Carmarthen Castle, which became the centre of the Principality of South Wales. Royal patronage has been suggested for buildings such as Carmarthen Friary on the basis of historical evidence and the extremely high quality of the buildings themselves as revealed through archaeological excavation.

Carmarthen Priory was on the same site as its early medieval Welsh predecessor—the monastic house of Llanteulyddog. A short-lived and abortive attempt to impose alien Benedictine rule on the native Welsh *clas* (religious community) was succeeded by the more congenial disciplines of the Augustinian Order. Carmarthen Priory in the Middle Ages was one of the most important centres of Welsh cultural life. The *Black Book of Carmarthen*, the earliest Welsh poetic manuscript, came from the Priory's scriptorium. The *Black Book* includes much writing on Arthurian romance and the manuscript is contemporary with other works, which link Carmarthen with the legendary Merlin.

TUDOR AND STUART CARMARTHEN

Carmarthen Priory and Carmarthen Greyfriars were closed down in 1536 and 1538 respectively during Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries. Equally momentous were the Acts of Union between England and Wales in 1536 and 1542. The new County of Carmarthen was represented by two MPs, one from the shire and one from the town. Old and New Carmarthen were amalgamated into a single Borough governed by a mayor and common council. As County Town Carmarthen was also the judicial as well as the administrative centre of the County (as it had been for the Principality of South Wales in the Middle Ages). It was a thriving port and a centre of trade and manufacture. Throughout the 16th, 17th and most of the 18th centuries it was the largest town in Wales. Because of the continuing pace of development and change in these centuries, there are few buildings of Tudor and Stuart date in the town. Archaeology has an important and as yet scarcely realized part to play in discovering more about this important era in the town's life.

EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURY CARMARTHEN

Only in the early 19th century did the burgeoning industrial towns of south Wales, from Llanelli eastwards, begin to outstrip Carmarthen in size. Significant changes to the layout of the town were underway from the later 18th century and its area expanded dramatically. The built heritage of the town is largely of late 18th and 19th century date. The arrival of the railway in 1853 began to affect the activity of the port of Carmarthen but it continued to function until the mid 20th century. Carmarthen was of major importance in Welsh political, cultural, educational and religious life throughout this period. By the later 19th century the modern role of county administrative, market and retail centre was well established. The study and conservation of the *built heritage* of the town is a focus of archaeological research and ranks equal with the *buried archaeology*. Both have a considerable, scarcely tapped potential, despite the many losses of buildings and archaeological deposits with little or no record.

PART 2 CARMARTHEN - ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY

ROMAN CARMARTHEN - MORIDUNUM

Roman Roads

There is to date no evidence of any prehistoric settlement on the historic town site of Carmarthen. The first Roman settlement was military—a fort sited in the King Street/Spilman Street area. This probably dates to *c*. A.D. 75. A network of forts, a day's march (*c*. 15 miles) apart, linked by new, all-weather roads were the means by which the Roman army consolidated its hold on newly conquered territory. The Roman advance was probably down the Towy valley. Forts are known at Brecon, Llandovery and the newly discovered fort at Llandeilo, and the line of the road linking them is now well established. It entered Carmarthen much on the line of the present A40, partly below Priory Street, then, possibly, proceeding north of King Street and below Lammas Street. The discovery of a Roman road extending west of Carmarthen into Pembrokeshire has been an exciting recent discovery.
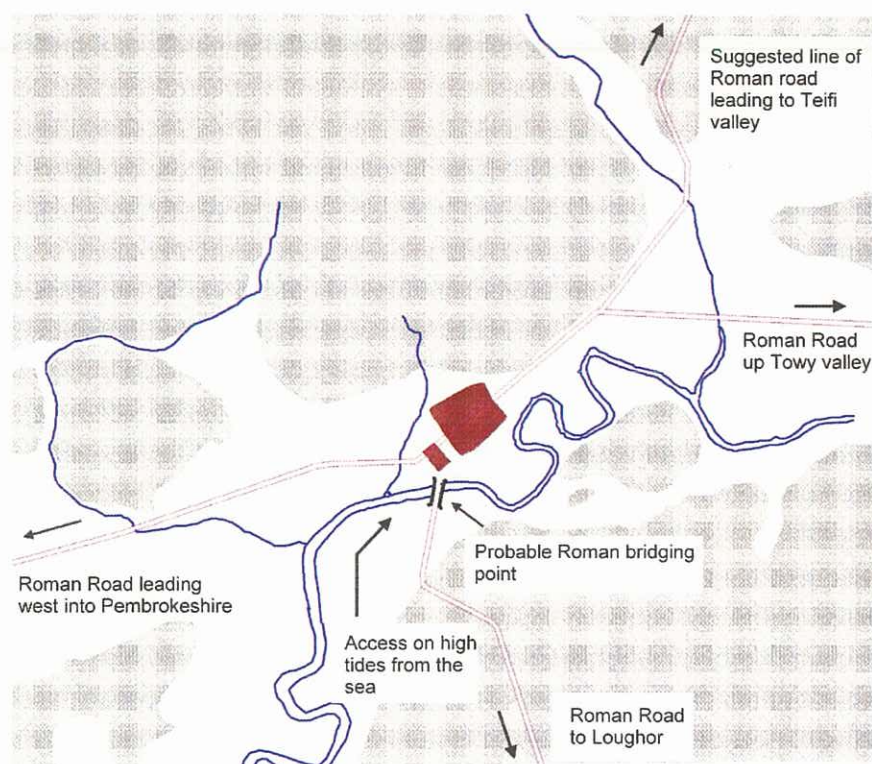
There was almost certainly another Roman road between the fort at Loughor and Carmarthen. Traditionally this descended to near Babell chapel and then was carried across the marshes of Pensarn on a causeway (*sarn*) to a bridge perhaps at the position of the medieval and modern Town Bridge. Another Roman road linked Carmarthen to Llanio in the upper Teifi valley and its course may well be perpetuated by the present day A485. A fourth route was of course by sea and river and the initial invasion force may have converged at Carmarthen in a pincer movement by sea and land.

Thus we can show that Carmarthen's nodal position in relation to routeways and its situation at the lowest bridging point of the River Towy which has ensured its success as a settlement was established some 2000 years ago. The roads laid out by the Roman military surveyors and engineers have, in the main, been in continuous use since the late first century. Major changes came only with rail transport in the 19th century and the demands of motor transport in the later 20th century.

• **Only archaeological excavation and observation can provide more information on the line, construction and sequence of Roman, and also medieval roads, streets, bridges and fords. Archaeological opportunities in the Roman and medieval towns and their immediate environs provided by roadworks and the installation of new or repair of old services should be resourced by the public bodies and private companies involved.**

The Roman Forts

Roman forts were built to fairly standardised shapes, sizes and internal layouts. It is thus possible to reconstruct the overall plan from a small excavated area but it is necessary to find sufficient lengths of ditch and rampart to be sure of alignments. A small cutting at the eastern end of Spilman Street in 1968 found first century pottery within what may be a fort ditch. A rescue excavation in 1985 in the then Carmarthen District Council Car Park (Emergency Control Centre) in less than ideal circumstances, discovered a tanning pit, part of a gravelled road and traces of timber buildings, probably of first century date. Only with the better resourced excavations in the same area, beneath the demolished numbers 5-8 Spilman Street in 1988-9, could the position of the fort be plotted. The remains of a clay rampart bank were traced on the western side of the site. But below this rampart were remains of timber buildings similar in character and alignment to those to the east and interior of the fort. Opportunities to further our knowledge on the *Carmarthen Journal* site were lost due to a misunderstanding over the extent of rebuilding and consequent restriction to a 'watching brief'. Nevertheless Roman fort features (which lay just below present day surfaces) were found and a possible internal road and gateway through a defensive bank were identified with much evidence of demolition and burning of timber buildings.
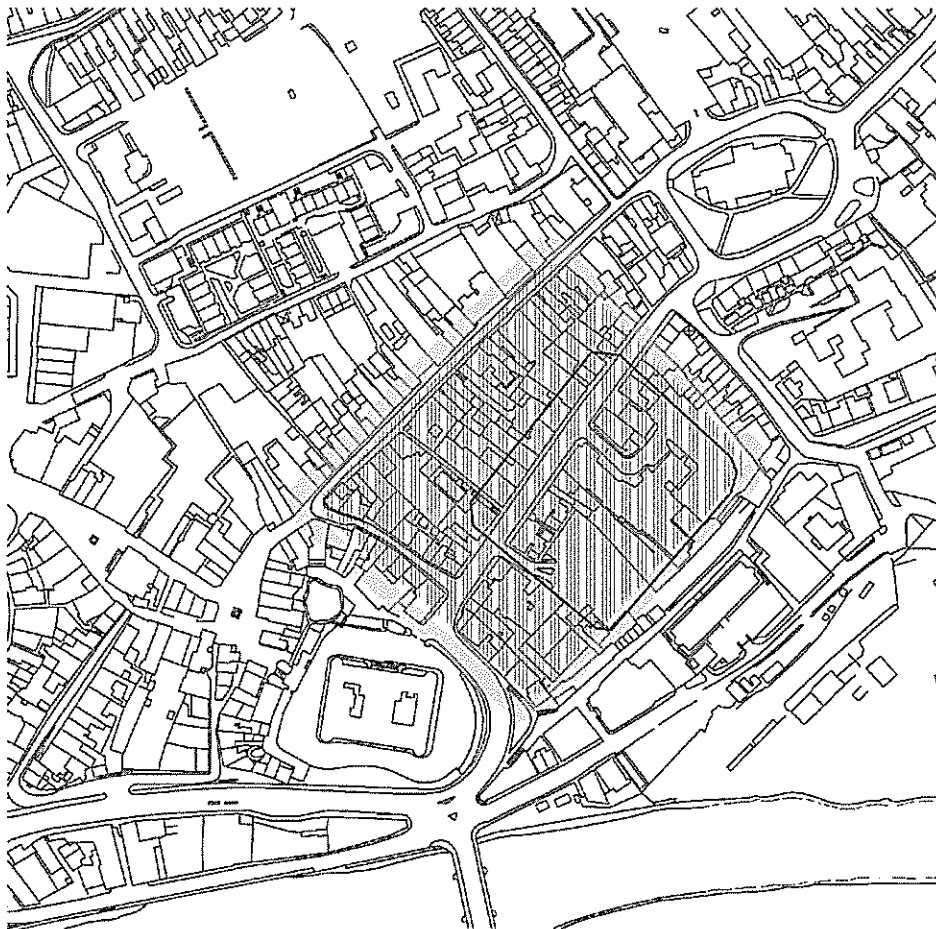
The location of the two Roman forts certainly lies in the King Street/Spilman Street area. However the actual archaeological evidence for their precise positions and overall extents is extremely limited. The conjectured position of the later reduced fort in outlined in black.

The explanation which best fits the admittedly limited facts is that an initial large fort (founded c. A.D. 75) was succeeded by the end of the first century by a smaller 'reduced' fort to hold the smaller garrison sufficient to control a pacified region. Finally, the evidence suggests that this smaller fort was itself abandoned some time in the early second century, when its defences were slighted and its buildings demolished and burnt as part of an orderly withdrawal. Such sequences are known on Roman fort sites elsewhere in Wales. However, this can only be a working hypothesis based on the small amount of evidence to date.

● **There can be no doubt that the Roman forts are located in the Spilman/King Street area. The area is heavily built up and has seen a sequence of continuous development since the Middle Ages. In the centre of the area, by processes explained above, there is very little soil cover over Roman levels. The Roman deposits containing evidence for the forts must therefore be heavily damaged. It is all the more important that every opportunity, however small, should be utilised to find out more about the forts' positions, plans, origins, development and decay.**

The Roman civil settlement of *Moridunum*—origins and development.

Roman forts in many areas of northern and western Britain had civilian settlements outside their gates catering for the needs of the garrison. Such a settlement was called a *vicus*. Whilst many forts in Roman Wales continued to be garrisoned well into the second century, very few were in existence in the third or fourth centuries. Once the garrisons were withdrawn the *vici* too dwindled. However in some cases such settlements developed into small towns and some even to tribal capitals. It was reasonable therefore to suppose that such a process may have taken place at Carmarthen. But excavations to date have failed to find conclusive proof of a *vicus*. The Church Street excavations (which admittedly did not extend to recording below the site of the street frontages) showed no traces of the late first to early second century settlement. Instead early Roman settlement seems to have focussed on a temple at the eastern end of Priory Street.

The designation of a settlement as a *civitas* or tribal capital would have been an official decision. Many such foundations, it is believed, were the work of the Emperor Hadrian. Indeed an official inscription survives at Wroxeter, Shropshire, recording the foundation of the tribal capital of *Viroconium*. A key indicator of such towns was a gridded, planned street layout and, later on, the provision of town defences. Both have been proven for Carmarthen. In addition, the existence of the amphitheatre is a mark of status. However, whilst such a decision might have been made in the A.D. 120s, the archaeological evidence from Priory Street shows that the laying out of streets and the development fronting them did not really get underway until the 150s. Another key component of a civitas capital was a central *forum* and *basilica*—a kind of town hall, law courts and market place rolled into one. This has yet to be located at Carmarthen although their
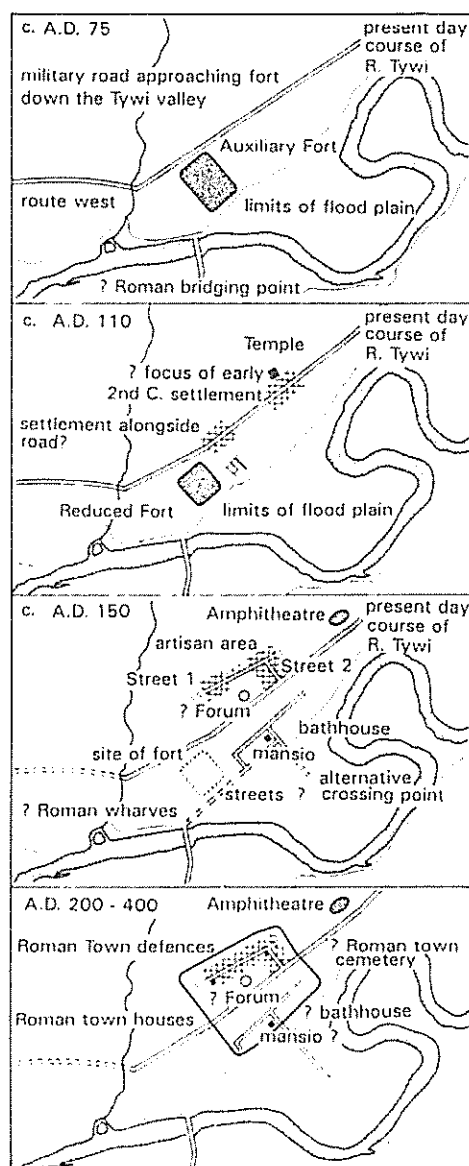
remains may lie partly below and to the rear of Bethania Chapel.

The period of densest occupation of the Roman town was through the years AD 150-200, noted in the excavations at Priory Street (on the site of Richmond Park primary school). Buildings were of earth and timber, relatively simple in plan and in the main used as shops and workshops. Here trades included baking and iron smithing. In the third century a much more elaborate part stone-built house was constructed on the site and this remained in use with many alterations for at least 150 years well into the fourth century. A similar sequence seems to have been discovered at the St. Peter's Car Park excavations in 1969. We simply do not know whether this pattern, seen in these excavations, was true for the whole of the Roman town. Certainly there were open spaces, presumably gardens, within the town as negative results from test pits to the rear of The Vicarage, Church Street (site of Ger-y-Llan) have shown.

- **In parts of the Roman town, Roman levels lie just below the modern surface. Housing, retail and light industrial developments in the 19th and 20th centuries have destroyed much archaeological evidence. A strong case therefore can be made for a presumption in favour of preservation for what little remains of this unique and finite resource. Should developments be deemed essential, however small, they should always be preceded by properly resourced archaeological excavation to the highest standards.**

The line of the Roman town defences is now well established. Even in decay they remained a prominent feature defining the area of medieval Old Carmarthen. It is also likely that they were reused as earthwork defences during the 17th century Civil War. A 1786 map of the town shows that they were subsequently used as property boundaries. Thus, this rectangular shape of the walled 'city' was perpetuated through to today by the line of Richmond Terrace, Old Oak Lane, The Esplanade and Parade, Parade Road and Little Water Street. Excavations at Church Street showed that the defences were substantial—a clay bank fronted by ditches, which was later remodelled to take a stone facing.

- **There has never been any opportunity to examine the face of the defences and establish whether there were stone towers and gates like Caerwent. Stone-robbing of the ramparts was underway in the Middle Ages and modern building has destroyed much more. Any surviving traces therefore are extremely valuable, hence part scheduling in 1989. However even this did not prevent new building and remodelling of Hen Ardd.**

Roman occupation outside the walls

It is well known that burial in Roman towns took place outside the town walls. A possible sequence, seen at Caerwent and other towns in Roman Britain and indeed in Europe, is for a cemetery to be located alongside a road leading from the city gates. Such a cemetery might well continue in use for early Christian burials and may even have then developed into a medieval religious foundation. The ideal candidate in Carmarthen's case is the site of the medieval Priory east of the Roman town, itself built on the site of the early medieval *clas* of Llanteulyddog. Stone coffins, possibly of Roman date, from the vicinity of the Old Grammar School are known from antiquarian records. Another 'extra-mural' roadside site was the Amphitheatre. In 2001 a small-scale excavation uncovered early Roman cremation burials on the sloping ground just west of the Amphitheatre. Cremation was the norm in the first and second centuries AD gradually being succeeded by inhumation. (Another cremation was discovered at Allt-y-Cnap also in 2001).

All this serves to remind us that the impact of the Roman town extended beyond its walls and that road-side development, cemeteries, waterfronts and quays would all have been found in the vicinity of the town.

- **The discovery of Roman cremation cemeteries near the amphitheatre and Allt-y-cnap reinforces the need to investigate all opportunities, in these areas and near the Priory, for more information as to their extent and dating.**

- **In Roman times the Amphitheatre was probably used for a variety of purposes, games, parades, even religious festivals and served as a focus for the region around Carmarthen as well as the town itself. Today it needs better presentation.**

Excavations on Roman sites

The late Professor G. D. B. Jones of Manchester University carried out the first archaeological excavations in the Roman town in 1968 and 1969. He established the line of Roman town defences by digging a number of trenches along the length of Richmond Terrace, and excavated a large area within gardens now part of St Peter's Car Park. Another season's work was carried out on the Amphitheatre. The key results were the establishment, for the first time, of the existence of Roman town defences, Roman streets and sequences of buildings. The latest building on the St Peter's Car park site remains the most high quality Roman building yet found in the town, having an under-floor heating system and painted plaster walls. It was also of late Roman date, extending well into the 4th century.

The two large excavations undertaken by Dyfed Archaeological Trust at Church Street and Priory Street were both in open gardens well in advance of planned redevelopment. As such they were untypical of urban excavations. More common are excavations on previously developed sites, to a tight timetable and budget in a relatively short interval between site demolition and clearance and new construction. Work at 1-5 The Parade, in advance of construction of the Tŷ Rhys sheltered housing development, was on a small scale when compared with the scale of redevelopment. Nevertheless it is clear that a large and important Roman building or buildings lie beneath this site, much of which may still be intact. It may possibly be a *mansio*, a kind of official inn for travellers and posting house for the *cursus publicus* or imperial post.

Attempts at the Lidl's site, Priory Street in 2000, to design buildings with shallow foundations thus restricting the removal of Roman deposits (whose depths had been previously established by assessment excavations) were only partially successful. Despite strenuous efforts by Cambria Archaeology's Heritage Management section and the support of planning officers, housing development at Carmarthen Infirmary, Priory Street went ahead with ineffective archaeological recording. It is likely that much was destroyed without record. Elsewhere however numerous small-scale salvage excavations and watching briefs have provided useful keyhole archaeological information on the Roman town.

- **Much of the Roman town has recently been redeveloped without full compliance with archaeological conditions. Scheduled areas carry a presumption in favour of preservation *in situ*.**

- **From a research viewpoint evidence for the Forum and Basilica is wanting, and the areas around and under Bethania Chapel are thought to be prime candidates for their location.**

EARLY MEDIEVAL CARMARTHEN

In one of the versions of the Welsh Laws, thought to be of 8th century date, there is a list entitled 'The Seven Bishop Houses of Dyfed'. These bishop-houses were monastic in origin, under the rule of an Abbot-Bishop. One of the seven was *Llan Teulydauc*, which was in Carmarthen on the site later occupied by the medieval priory of St John and St Teulyddog. The Very Revd. J. Wyn Evans, Dean of St David's, suggests that 'Teulyddog' might be a variant form of Teilo and that Carmarthen might be the origin of the powerful and widespread cult of Teilo in the early Middle Ages. He also notes that when, in 1100, Henry I granted this church to Battle Abbey for his new (and short-lived) Benedictine foundation, he also granted a church dedicated to St Peter 'in the city' of Carmarthen. This is St. Peter's, the present parish church. Its siting is very suggestive of an early, pre-Norman origin, being within the Roman town close to the probable location of the west gate. 'Could it be the case', Wyn Evans suggests 'that the dynasty to which Voteporix belonged granted the abandoned Roman town to Teilo in order that he might exercise an episcopate from there, perhaps in the knowledge that there had once been an episcopate there in late Roman times?' (Evans, 1991). [Voteporix is the earliest recorded King of Dyfed whose memorial stone is in Carmarthen Museum at Abergwili].

We have as yet no supporting archaeological evidence for this very important historical information and hypotheses. However, excavations in 1979 on part of the site of the medieval St John's Priory uncovered short stretches of three ditches, two of which produced 8th century radio-carbon dates. Perhaps these were part of a bank and ditch enclosure around the early medieval site.

More enigmatic is the short section of a substantial ditch encountered on the 1988-9 Spilman Street site during excavations of Roman fort features. This ditch was cut through the spread remains of the demolished Roman fort but sealed by medieval pottery within the soil that had formed over a long choked up and forgotten feature. A radio-carbon date centring on the mid fifth century came from carbonised wood low down in the fill of the ditch. At present there is no context in which we can place this ditch.
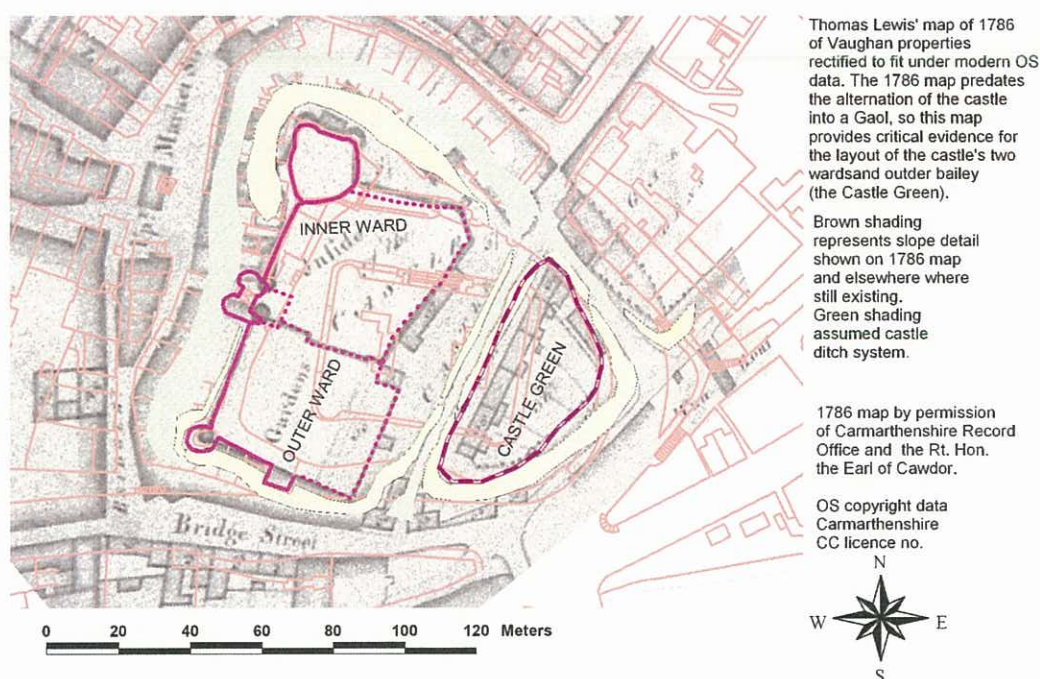
Though sparse, the combined historical and archaeological evidence is enough to suggest continued activity in different parts of Carmarthen in the centuries between the end of Roman rule and the advent of the Normans in 1100—a period of time of immense significance to Welsh history.

MEDIEVAL CARMARTHEN

Carmarthen Castle

'Carmarthen Castle was pivotal to the medieval history of Wales. Its surviving remains represent just a fraction of what was a typical, large, medieval masonry castle, one of the largest in Wales. It was neglected after the Civil War of the 17th century and much was cleared away when a new County Gaol was built, designed by John Nash. This was extended in the 1870s to cover almost the whole castle site. The Gaol was itself demolished in 1938 to make way for the present County Hall, designed by Sir Percy Thomas. A large-scale programme of consolidation and enhancement works is being carried out on the Castle by Carmarthenshire County Council, grant-aided by Cadw and accompanied by archaeological recording. This has produced valuable results and important new information on what still remains a striking and interesting monument' (Ludlow 2004).

Castle layout suggested by 1786 map

Thomas Lewis' map of 1786 of Vaughan properties rectified to fit under modern OS data. The 1786 map predates the alternation of the castle into a Gaol, so this map provides critical evidence for the layout of the castle's two wardsand outder bailey (the Castle Green).

Brown shading represents slope detail shown on 1786 map and elsewhere where still existing. Green shading assumed castle ditch system.

1786 map by permission of Carmarthenshire Record Office and the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Cawdor.

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The early castle, built in 1109, was of earth and timber, centred on an entirely artificial massive earth mound (a motte) flanked by two baileys. Archaeological evaluation work in 1997-8 provided important new information on the original position of the unusual, stone 'shell keep' which encased the mound and also of a masonry tower on its summit. This probably dates to the later 12th century. Historical sources between 1230 and 1300 record what were for the time very large sums of money spent by the English kings in remodelling and extending the castle in stone. Sources refer to 'five towers', the masonry defences of the inner bailey, part of which survive today. In 1409 a substantial new gatehouse was built which today gives access to Nott Square. The rear of this gate was removed when Nash's Gaol was built but what survives is still an impressive and indeed complex structure. Extremely interesting new information has recently come from excavations outside the Gatehouse entrance showing that the castle ditch extended round this side of the bailey circuit physically separating the castle from the medieval borough. A stone causeway, whose central gap was bridged no doubt by a lifting drawbridge, spanned this ditch giving access to Nott Square.

The origins and development of New Carmarthen

The town, which developed outside the gates of the early 12th Century Castle, was a deliberate new-planted town. The initial foundation has clear evidence for a nucleated market-based plan. Defensive considerations were at first paramount as the early 13th century saw several attacks by the Welsh. It is unlikely that all built-up areas were enclosed when the defence was first converted to stone in 1233. The walls follow the strong defensive topographical features of the area which were so attractive to the builders of the Castle. The principal plan component of the early—and later medieval borough—was the market place where only the privileged burgesses were allowed to trade. This was sited, characteristically, right outside the castle gates. Two streets led down to the Bridge and Quay; a third (King Street) towards the parish church and Old Carmarthen. The most positive evidence for planning in this period is the siting of the Church of St Mary, *alias* the Rood Church, beside the market cross. Remains of this church are probably still encased within buildings between Nott Square and the Guildhall.Carmarthen, like many other boroughs, experienced tremendous growth in the 13th century.

There was some extra-mural settlement flanking Lammas Street, lower Quay and Bridge Streets and along King Street from an early date which also expanded into a new Spilman Street (The Kings and Spilmans were prominent 12th and 13th century families). Townspeople, or burgesses, had their properties fronting the streets with long narrow plots of land (burgage plots) behind. These plot boundaries have in many cases survived as property boundaries in the historic core of the town. They are important historic elements in the town's plan and 'documents' in their own right on past stages of growth. A survey of 1268 listed 168 burgages; by 1300 the Justiciar for West Wales accounted for 286.


NEW CARMARTHEN: c1300
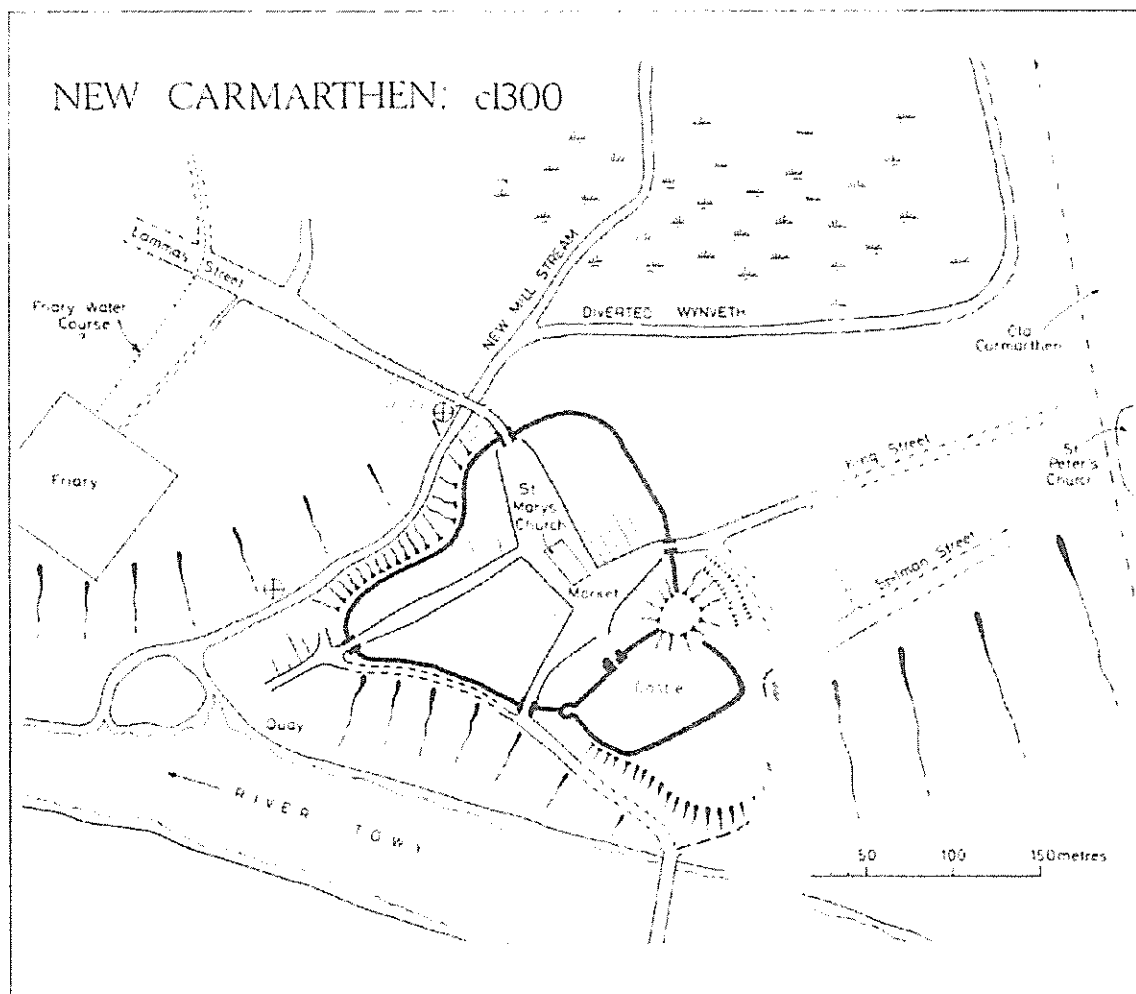
- Our understanding of the origins and development of New Carmarthen is almost wholly based on topographical and documentary evidence. No archaeological excavation has taken place on any burgage plot where medieval deposits have survived later rebuilding or the construction of cellars. Any such uncellared site would be of the highest value.

The Town Defences - Walls and Gates

Our knowledge of the line and structure of the medieval town defences is based on topographic and documentary evidence as well as some surviving lengths of stone wall. All the town's gates were removed by the late 18th century and Carmarthen is unlucky, in contrast with other towns, in having no illustrations surviving of the town's gates. No excavation work has ever been carried out on the town defences. Archaeological excavation is the only way in which we can learn more about the structure and sequence of the defences and also clarify their exact line where this is uncertain.

The early 13th century saw several attacks on the town and widespread destruction of presumably timber buildings. A 'murage' grant of 1233 allowed market tolls to be diverted towards the construction of stone walls. We do not know whether these walls replaced earth banks and timber palisades. Upstanding portions, 'fossilized' property boundary lines and changes in level allow us to be certain of their position for a good half of the circuit, but there is uncertainty regarding the northern half.
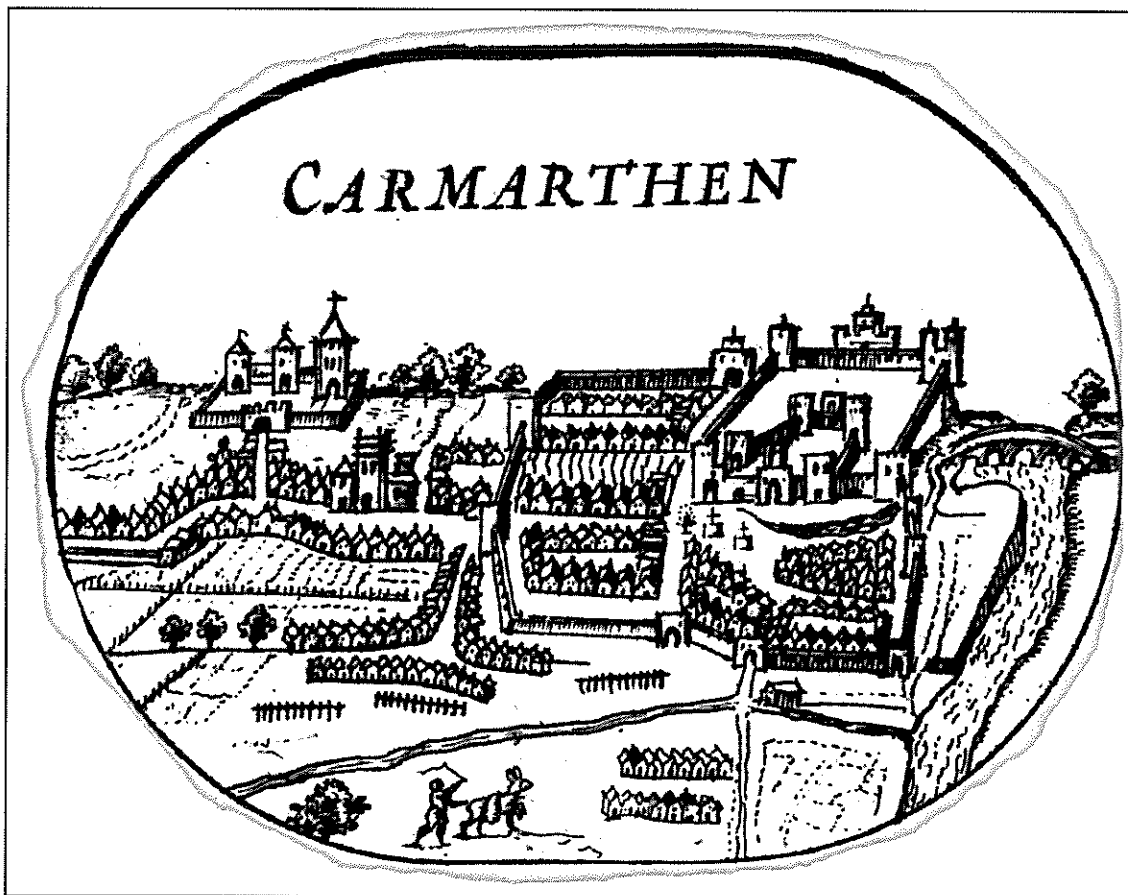
Plan of Carmarthen from Speed's map of Wales 1610. This version appears to be earlier than his town plan (overleaf) because it shows gates in Quay and Bridge Gate that had been removed by 1610. It also shows a ditch fronting the castle. This plan may be late medieval in origin.

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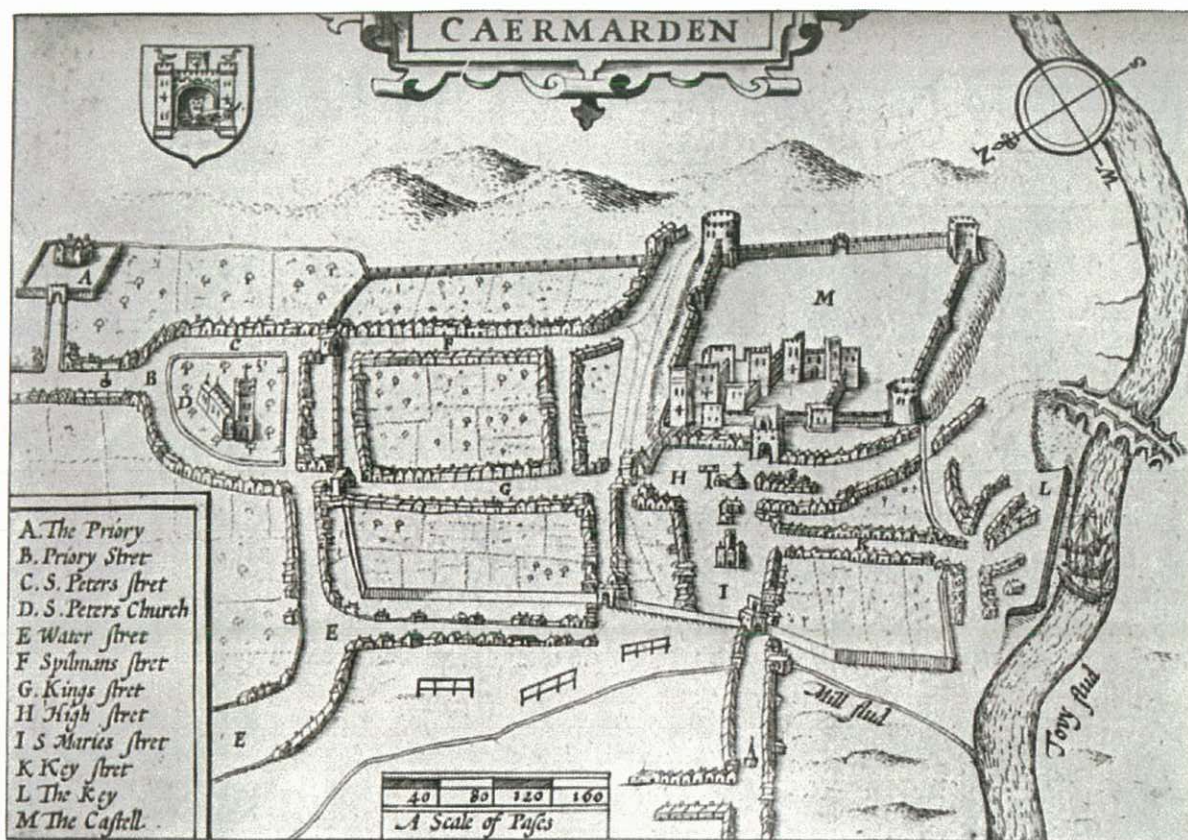
Speed's bird's-eye view of 1610 showing the disposition of gates and walls. This gives us an invaluable glimpse into the layout of the medieval town.

The particular circumstances of Welsh history resulted in a second and late phase of wall building in the early 15th century. The town was attacked by the forces of Owain Glyndŵr and the weakly defended, but by then built-up, areas flanking King Street and Spilman Street suffered heavily. A new

Later medieval defences - the uncertainties
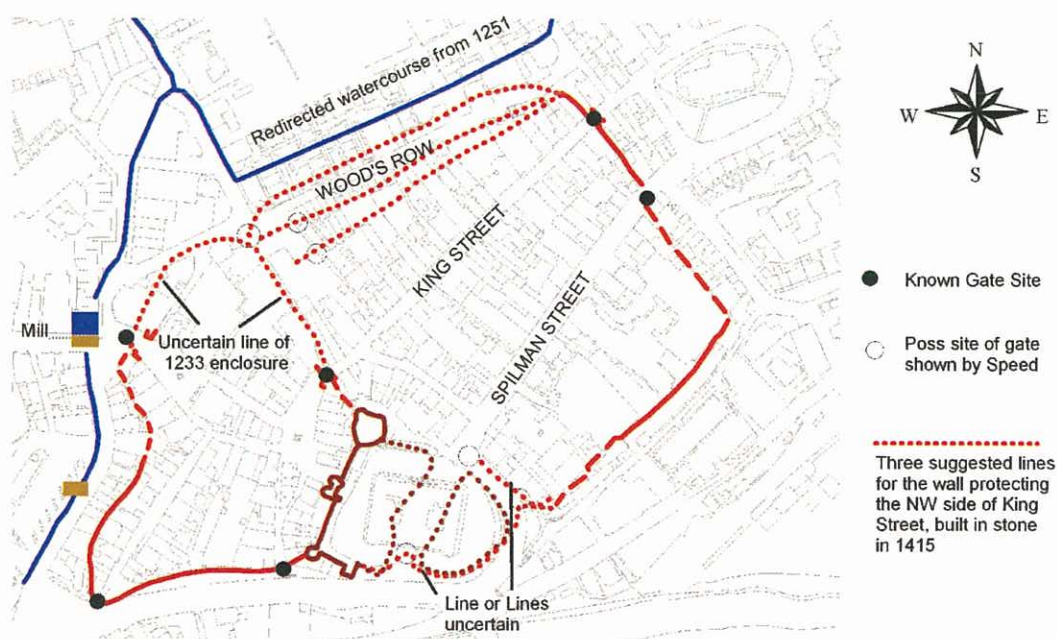
murage grant was made in 1415 to wall these areas. The southern and eastern line of the second phase of defence, and three or four additional gates, are known from Speed's map of 1610, but there is considerable uncertainty about the northern line along Wood's Row. The influence of the defences as a fossil feature on later town development was and is a powerful one.

- **Further work on the town walls is an important research objective. The gardens between King Street and Wood's Row contain the key to understanding the precise line of the late medieval town walls and their assumed earlier 13th century earth and timber phases. The area also has high interest for the location of Roman fort deposits.**

Old Carmarthen

The town of Old Carmarthen was granted a charter by Henry II confirming the Prior's claim to the former Roman town. His jurisdiction extended from the Priory to the gates of New Carmarthen (thus including King and Spilman Streets). However this latter claim was in reality unsustainable. The old town exercised market rights (long a bone of contention with the New Town). The market was probably located at the junction of Priory Street and Old Oak lane, where the street noticeably widens. The extent of medieval settlement is not known. The maximum number of burgesses has been estimated at 100 (James 1989, 13). Their burgage properties are likely to have been concentrated near the Priory end of Priory Street and around St Peter's Church. The interior of the Roman town appears to have been used as gardens whilst the ruined Roman stone buildings and city walls were used as a ready quarry for building stone.
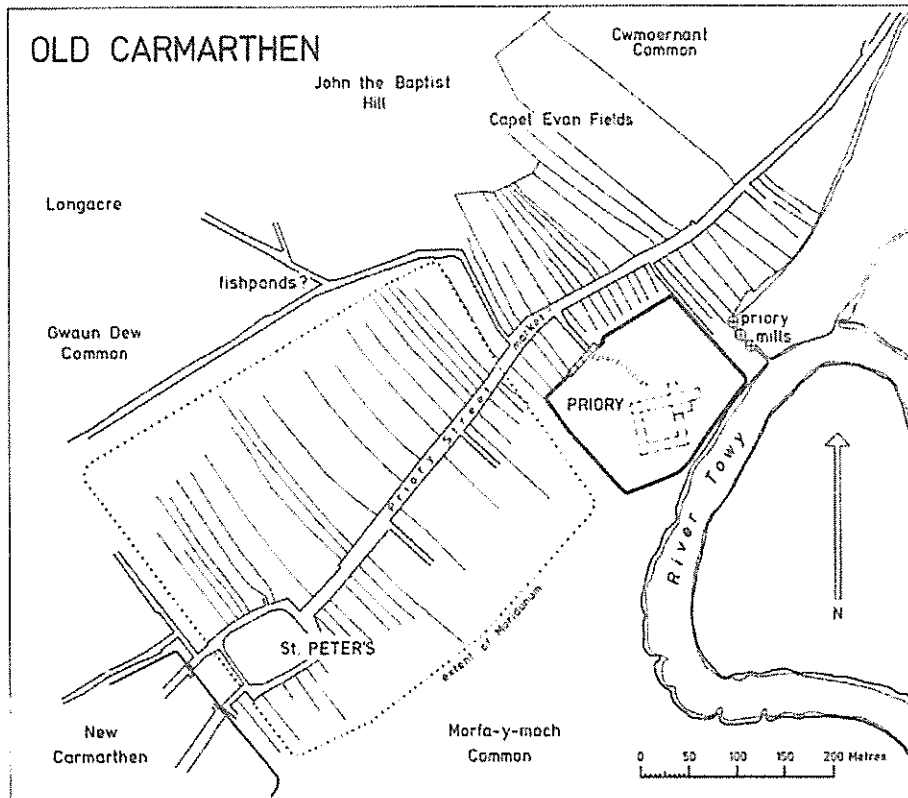
- **Any archaeological excavations or watching briefs in Old Carmarthen need to be aware of potential medieval deposits surviving above the Roman levels.**

Medieval Religious Buildings

Carmarthen Priory

Carmarthen Priory was one of the richest in Wales, noted for its almsgiving and hospitality to travellers as well as its learning. Only one short length of wall belonging to the Priory Church which forms the southern tip of Parc Hinds, has survived the Dissolution and subsequent industrial uses of the site,. However, renovation work in 1993 uncovered numerous medieval features, which show that the present row of cottages of Old Priory Row embodies parts of the Priory Gatehouse. Topographical and map evidence allows us to be fairly certain about the extent of the Priory precinct. The priory mills and watercourse are described below under water sources and waterpower.

Excavations in 1979 in advance of a the construction of a sewage pumping station over what was shown to be part of the Priory Church gave an indication of the position of the church, some claustral buildings, including the Prior's House, and part of the cemetery. It is evident that the greater part of the Priory remains unexplored, and that more survives below ground within the precinct boundary. Unfortunately the building of the electricity sub-station on the western side of Old Priory Road in fact involved more un-monitored disturbance of archaeological deposits than archaeological curators were apprised of. Part of the area is used as allotments and in 1992 Scheduling of area CM 236 was extended. Significant areas however remain unprotected by scheduling.
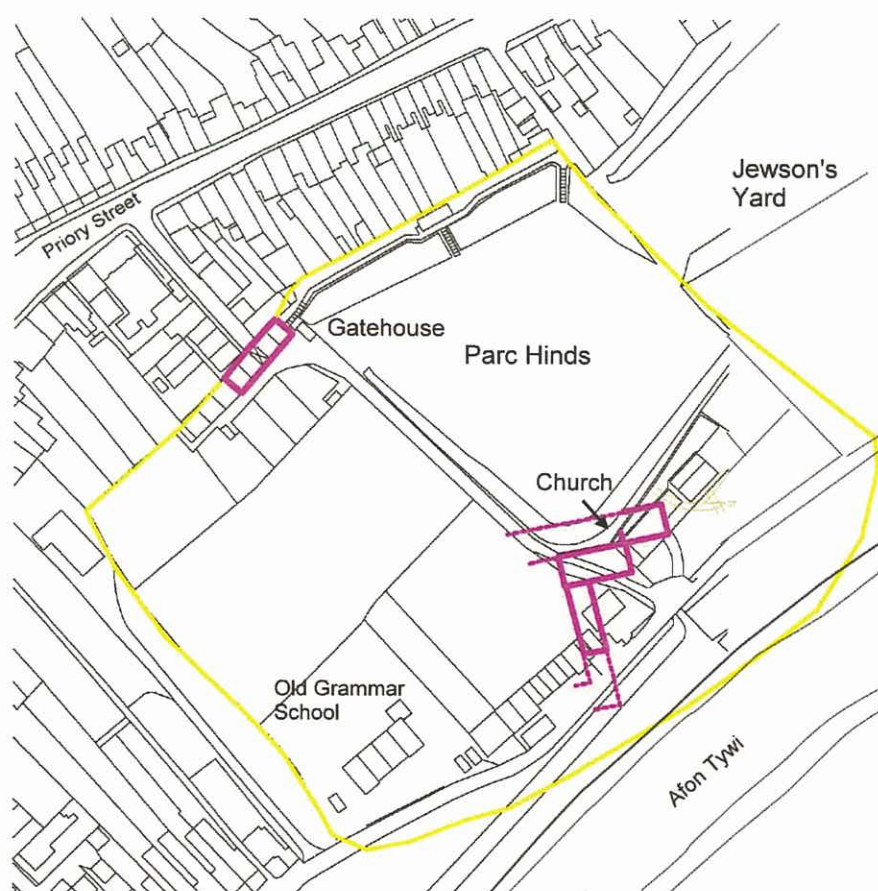
The known elements of Carmarthen Priory both upstanding (the Gatehouse) and from excavation. Early medieval features were found immediately east of the Church.

- **It is Cambria Archaeology's view that this whole site is one of the most archaeologically significant in Wales, not only for the medieval Priory but also for the Dark Age and Roman periods. Consideration should be given to extending scheduling to protect as much of the site as is practicable.**

Greyfriars

Extensive archaeological excavation between 1990-1993, and again in 1997, in advance of the construction of Tesco Stores and Greyfriars Court, funded by developers and Cadw, produced evidence on the Church, claustral buildings and cemetery. It remains the largest British Greyfriary house outside London recorded by excavation. The quality of the buildings and their fittings was shown to be exceptional and it is highly probable either Henry III or Edward I, either when he was Prince of Wales or King, was its founding benefactor. Carmarthen Greyfriars was largely built on what we would today term a green-field site west of the town in 'Lammas Fields'

It was of a size and quality sufficient to be seriously considered as a suitable replacement for St David's Cathedral by Bishop William Barlow who wished to move the see to Carmarthen.

Lammas Street

Friary Gatehouse

Tesco

The plan of Carmarthen Greyfriars - recovered from extensive excavation 1983-1997. Those areas shaded remain unexplored, including the main body of the church and gatehouse, and contain valuable archaeology.

- **A significant part of the Nave of the Greyfriars church remains unexcavated, buried below Lammas Street Car Park and the adjacent Friars' Park cottages on the north-east side of Tesco's.**

St. Peter's Church

Provision for archaeological work is made in 'conditions' attached to faculties for alterations and building works. The recent archaeological work in the area of the Consistory Court and chancel has shown both how earlier levels are much disturbed by centuries of burials (albeit that these graves have proved to be of considerable interest in their own right) and the fact that the Church and churchyard lie directly over Roman levels. Road widening which shaved back the graveyard in 1955 unearthed considerable quantities of Roman pottery.

The church has a complex developmental history and no detailed architectural study has ever been undertaken. Below ground archaeological deposits under the church and graveyard will be equally complex.

- **The most pressing questions are to establish whether the church was founded before the Norman conquest and what its relationship was to the Roman town, given its position near the west gate.**

St. Mary's Church

This church, probably founded in the late 12th or early 13th century, stood at the hub of the 'new' town. It was dissolved in the 16th century and today is marked only by the name St Mary Street. In the 1950s refurbishment of properties between the Guildhall and Nott Square uncovered parts of the church, which included a blocked doorway and relieving arch in the east wall and the piscina in the south wall. Some salvage recording was undertaken but it is unclear if the remains were then covered up or demolished The balance of probability is that these walls still survive within the fabric of the shops of Hall Street-St Mary Street.

- **Any development of the buildings in the Hall Street-St Mary Street block are likely to uncover surviving fabric of the church.**

Lesser Medieval Chapels

St Catherine's Chapel, which gave its name to the street, was a chantry chapel containing an image of St Catherine. Although described as a chapel of six hermits it was certainly a chantry in the gift of New Carmarthen. There is no record of its closure and it may have become an almshouse. Its precise location is uncertain, but antiquarian sources suggest it was located near St Catherine's mill.
St Barbara's was another chantry chapel, located in Johnstown. It was situated where the Royal Oak later stood, possibly the site of the present Friend's Arms. Another lost chapel, dedicated to St John, is recalled by the name Capel Evan [Road].

No work on small chantry chapels in an urban context has been undertaken in Wales.

- **The location of St. Catherine's, only generally understood, will need to be resolved should there be development on the old Mart Site or the former Jones and Davies garage. This area also included St Catherine's Mill. The location of St Barbara's also needs confirmation.**

POST MEDIEVAL DEVELOPMENT

After the Dissolution of the Monasteries Henry VIII amalgamated the two towns in 1546 incorporating the Borough with a Mayor and common council. With the closure of both the Priory and Friary, land in the borough was freed up for redevelopment. A short-lived grammar school was set up at the Friary. New gentry town houses lined Quay Street and St Mary Street. The former was a busy thoroughfare leading to the Quay (which was rebuilt in stone in the 1540s). The waterfront would have contained warehouses and workshops, and shipbuilding yards. The brook that separated the walled borough from Lammas Street (outside Dark Gate) had maintained a plethora of mills, mill ponds and tanneries since the Middle Ages. The Guildhall replaced St Mary's sitting between the town's markets in Nott and Guildhall Squares and the castle declined in importance only being used as a centre during the Civil War. In the 1640s the town was enclosed with new earthwork defences—the surviving remains are the best examples of Royalist town fortification in Britain.

During the Greyfriars excavations evidence for an earlier defensive system was discovered (James, T. 1991). This provided impetus for reappraising the extent of these defences which are believed to have run from the upstanding defences near the regional Police HQ around St Catherine Street as far as the rear of Richmond terrace, where they joined with the Roman town walls.

- **The surviving Civil War defences are unique and could be better displayed. The precise line of the defences between Friar's Park and Elliston Terrace is only assumed (there are 17th and 19th century references to their existence crossing Water Street and north of Elliston Terrace).**
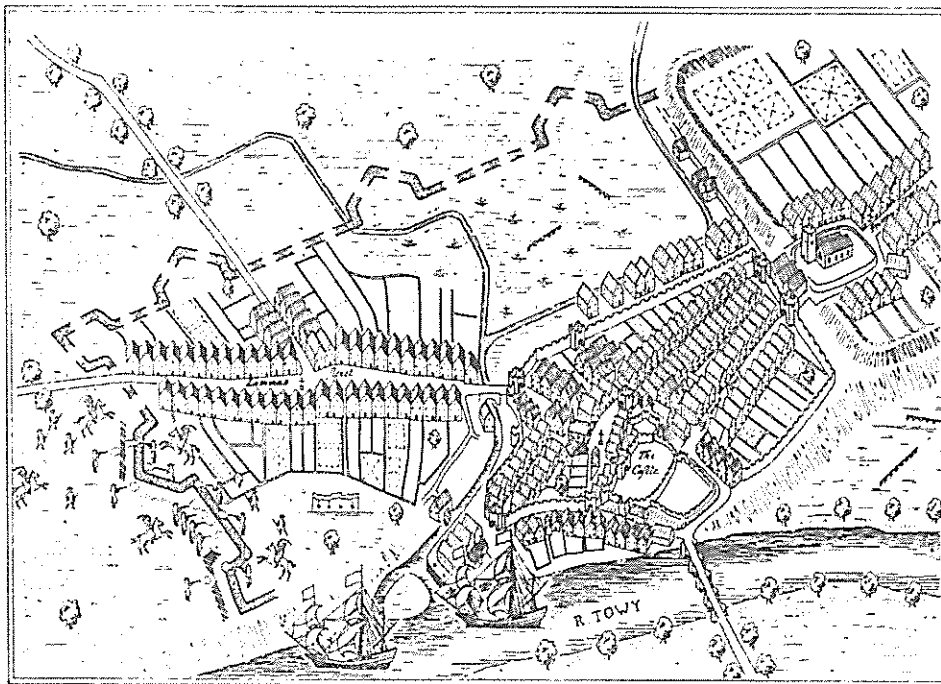
An artist's impression by Neil Ludlow of the Civil War defences showing the assumed line as an intermittent bank.

By the 18th century Carmarthen was still the largest town in Wales, although it was soon to be eclipsed by the new industrial boroughs to the east. The medieval mills of the old Priory had a blast furnace established near them in 1747 and tin mills were added in 1761. East Carmarthen thus took on a more industrial character. The zonal development of the town from the late 18th century shows all architectural periods, Georgian, Regency, early and later Victorian and Edwardian. These developments produced new streets and the architectural styles of their buildings can be used to see

how the town expanded chronologically. The town is blessed with superb chapels and the quantity and quality of iron railings from the town's foundries and its numerous war memorials is remarkable.

- **Recent work in many British cities and towns, has shown the tremendous contribution archaeological evidence – whether buried, from upstanding buildings or from 'material culture' – can make to recent social and economic, as well as 'industrial' history. Carmarthen's potential has been demonstrated by the only modern period artefact study to date on finds from Dyfed Archaeological Trust excavations in the town (Brennan, Evans, James and Dale-Jones 1993)**

WATER SOURCES AND WATER POWER

Medieval Carmarthen, both old and new, made extensive use of water sources to power corn and fulling mills and for tanneries as well as domestic supply. Considerable engineering in the diversion of streams and construction of new watercourses and dams took place—some perhaps even of Roman origin. Our knowledge of this remarkable sequence is at present almost wholly derived from topographic and documentary sources. Drainage and sewage works in the late 18th and mid 19th centuries buried most of these watercourses in brick-lined culverts thus fossilising their courses. Even this modern system of drainage and sewage is imperfectly known and the periodic uncovering of these culverts fuels Carmarthen's traditional and inextinguishable beliefs in systems of 'tunnels' and underground passages throughout the town.
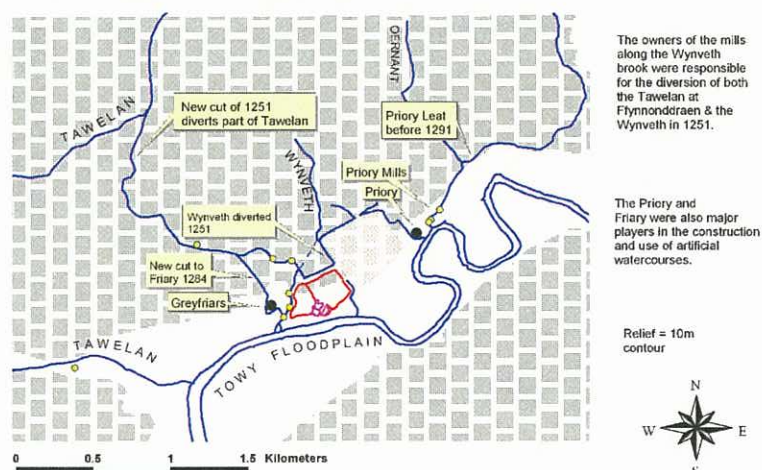
Carmarthen Priory had three mills powered by a watercourse nearly two miles long starting from a weir (destroyed in 1973 to improve river flows) on the Gwili near Cwmgwili mansion, finally discharging into the Towy. This was certainly in existence by 1291 but may have been constructed in the 12th century or even earlier. It is not impossible that it was in origin a Roman aqueduct. Although parts of this leat survive, much has been lost and eroded even within the last 20 years (most recently by Carmarthen by-pass). Attempts in the 1980s to get the surviving elements scheduled failed. Piecemeal encroachment by the owners of new houses bordering the leat has lead to it being filled in and fenced off in places. Further piecemeal attrition would inevitably reduce the coherence of this important feature and should be prevented.

- **Fresh consideration should be given to mechanisms to protect the remains of the Priory mills leat.**

- **The archaeological potential of the Priory mill sites, located in the present Jewson's builders' merchants, is considerable.**

The mills passed into secular ownership after the Dissolution. The Priory leat was subsequently used to power Robert Morgan's blast furnace erected on the Priory site in 1747. Also very early in date were the two tin mills erected on the site in 1761. Remains of the Blast Furnace and part of the 19th century tinworks survive built into a later showroom building and the present Jewson's builders' merchants. There was also a short-lived lead smelting works to the west, partly uncovered but subsequently reburied in the 1979 excavations on the site of the Priory Church.

- **Much survives upstanding of the Furnace and Tinplate Works of the 18th and 19th centuries. There are also likely to be substantial *below-ground* remains in the Jewson's yard immediately SW of the standing buildings, as well as of the late 18th century lead smelting works near the pumping station**

The management of water power

The owners of the mills along the Wynveth brook were responsible for the diversion of both the Tawelan at Ffynnondderaen & the Wynveth in 1251.

The Priory and Friary were also major players in the construction and use of artificial watercourses.

Relief = 10m contour

Even more impressive medieval works of engineering took place in New Carmarthen with diversions of both the Wynveth (*alias* Whimmon) and Tawelan brooks. There were many mills on the lower Wynveth, which drained into the Towy. The watercourse was piped in the late 18th century and now lies below Red and Blue Streets. Many of the medieval mills, tanneries and watercourses continued to power Carmarthen's industry until the 19th century (e.g. the two foundries in Blue Street and a tannery east of the Tanner's Arms). It is likely that considerable remains of mills and their associated water features survive as buried archaeological traces. The digitising of historic map and topographic evidence onto current OS map bases, which will form the next part of the enhancement of the SMR for Carmarthen, will give a more precise indication of location of potential sites. They have a very high archaeological value.

The study of domestic water supply needs more research both documentary and archaeological. Within the historic core of the borough numerous wells were dug down to the fluctuating water table in the gravel ridge on which the town was sited. Springs rose on the slopes to the north of the town. In Elizabethan times the Corporation passed bylaws to protect the cleanliness of water running though the town conduits by preventing the dumping of rubbish and washing of clothes therein. Names like 'Conduit Lane' are a reminder of their existence.

- **No excavation has been undertaken on any urban water mill or tannery in Wales. The mills along the watercourse from St Catherine Street, John Street, Red Street and down Blue Street are probably all of medieval origin right through to the 19th century and despite considerable developmental changes in the 20th century still have high archaeological value and potential.**

- **The opportunities afforded by archaeological recording both large and small scale to further our knowledge of water supply, a vital aspect of the town's history, need to be taken up within a clear research framework in order to understand the overall picture.**

THE PORT OF CARMARTHEN

We know that Roman vessels traded in the eastern part of Carmarthen Bay and that there were quays and wharves at the legionary fortress of Caerleon. Pembrokeshire slate has been found as ballast at Caerleon and was used to roof Roman Carmarthen's buildings, which must have been transported by ship. The Roman navy reconnoitred the whole coast of Britain for Agricola late in the first century AD. So although there is as yet no direct archaeological evidence it is almost certain that Roman Carmarthen was a port. We have documentary proof that medieval Carmarthen was a thriving port but no archaeological information. This is because no excavation or even salvage recording has ever been carried out over the waterfront area.

From the earliest beginnings to the final closure of the port in the 1950s access to Carmarthen's quays and waterfront was dependent not just on the tide but (for all but the smallest and shallowest vessels) the fortnightly high tides. Vessels with a deep draught might therefore anchor at Greencastle and tranship in barges and lighters. The medieval and possible Roman quays and wharves centred on 'The Island', where the Wynveth Brook flowed into the Towy. The lower part of Blue Street would also have been accessible at high tide. The river banks down stream of this area were used for ship-building and for storage. David Cox's celebrated engraving of 1830 (see cover) shows this area well. Speed's plan of Carmarthen of 1610 (page 17) shows a stone quay alongside the river to which Quay Street descended. The Port Books record at least 63 merchants and 28 registered ships in the port and town in the late 16th century.

The Quay was not extended right up to the bridge until 1808. Major changes took place at the end of the 18th century consequent upon the construction of a new market in Red Street (not the present site). The Wynveth brook was culverted and new streets, Red and Blue Streets, built over it to allow direct access from the Quay to the New Market without having to go through the narrow congested streets of the medieval town. What remained as an open watercourse of the Wynveth flowed either side of Island Wharf.

Major changes without *any* record of buildings demolished and buried deposits removed took, place in the 1960s and early 1970s resulting in the present day waterfront of Carmarthen. A new trunk road— Coracle Way was constructed from the base of Gaol Hill cutting through the lower lengths of Bridge and Quay Street to the north of Island Wharf. This has recently been 'de-trunked' consequent upon the construction of a new by-pass which this time runs on a causeway obliquely across the floodplain of the River Towy. The last buildings on Island Wharf, including the Customs' House, were cleared away in 1976 when a sewage pumping station was built on the waterfront, again without archaeological record.

Island Wharf, 1976. Deep piling for the sewage pumping station.
The 'hub' of the medieval and later port destroyed without any archaeological investigation.

- **Waterfront archaeology was in its infancy in the early 1970s but since then work in many cities and towns, notably London, has shown how early timber quays can survive buried behind later waterfronts. We have every reason to suppose that similar buried levels may still survive at Carmarthen which has as long a history as a port as it does as a town. The archaeological implications of any further waterfront developments need to have a high priority. The importance of these deposits cannot be over stressed.**

PART 3 - THE WAY FORWARD

THE CARMARTHEN HISTORIC TOWN SURVEY

This report forms the first part of the Survey, which is being jointly funded by Carmarthenshire County Council and Cadw-Welsh Historic Monuments. The overall purpose of the Survey is to develop improved understanding of the historic development of Carmarthen and identify the different archaeological potential of zones within the town. The project's overall objective is to provide a framework for sustainable development within the town's historic environment. In order to achieve this the project aims to do the following:

- Record and map the historic evolution of Carmarthen

- Record and map the historic urban topography

- Record and map the surviving above and below ground archaeological remains and potential

- Recommend guidance for planners to ensure the protection of the above and below ground archaeological resource

- Provide baseline data useable for the interpretation and presentation of the historic development and historic environment of Carmarthen

IMPROVING THE COUNTY SITES AND MONUMENTS RECORD

Archaeological advice provided by Cambria Archaeology's Heritage Management Section to Carmarthenshire County Council is based on a computerised database of individual sites, monuments and artefacts partly but not wholly registered on an electronic map base. These records need up-dating and validating and new records need to be created. To complement this it is also proposed to enhance the SMR through a GIS, including the mapping of historic map sources. Indicative mapping of the extent of Roman and medieval evidence will be carried out. Listed building data from the recent re-survey will be used to update the currently available digital data held by Carmarthenshire County Council. Polygons will also be created/validated for all Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

OUTPUTS OF GIS MAPPING

On completion of the enhancement of the SMR these data will be used to produce the following layers of digital mapping:

- Areas of historic settlement phases

- Historic topography (plan-form, street pattern, relief etc)

- Known archaeological interest and archaeological potential

- Statutory and non-statutory designations

- Historic landscape Character areas

- Zones for planning guidance recommendations.

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RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS AND INTEREST.

There is a high level of public interest in history and archaeology in general and in the history of the town in particular. But it has to be acknowledged that at present there is insufficient information generally available to the public. We believe that the historic environment of Carmarthen is also an educational resource, which could be more extensively utilised. Therefore, with its partners and funding bodies, Cambria Archaeology seeks to develop the Carmarthen Historic Town Survey in the following ways:

- Produce a popular illustrated bi-lingual booklet on the project and the importance of Carmarthen's heritage on the lines of the Cadw 'Caring for' series.

- Seek resources to allow Carmarthen SMR data to be available on-line

- Seek resources to allow aspects of Carmarthenshire County Councils GIS system to be publicly accessible

- Make regular up-dating of the SMR a part of Cambria Archaeology's annual Service level Agreement with Carmarthenshire County Council.

- Develop ways of making SMR data easily accessible for use, for example, on Carmarthenshire County Council's web site as well as through Cambria Archaeology's outreach programmes.

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Mae'r adroddiad hwn wedi ei gael yn gywir a derbyn sêl bendith
This report has been checked and approved by

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Swydd / Position: Principal Archaeologist - Heritage Management

Llofnod / Signature .... Dyddiad / Date 20/06/2004

Yn unol â'n nôd i roddi gwasanaeth o ansawdd uchel, croesawn unrhyw sylwadau sydd gennych ar
gynnwys neu strwythur yr adroddiad hwn

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