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ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST LTD
01/07/86

BLUE STREET RE-DEVELOPMENT, CARMARTHEN

EXPLOITING THE HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS

Preliminary suggestions

by

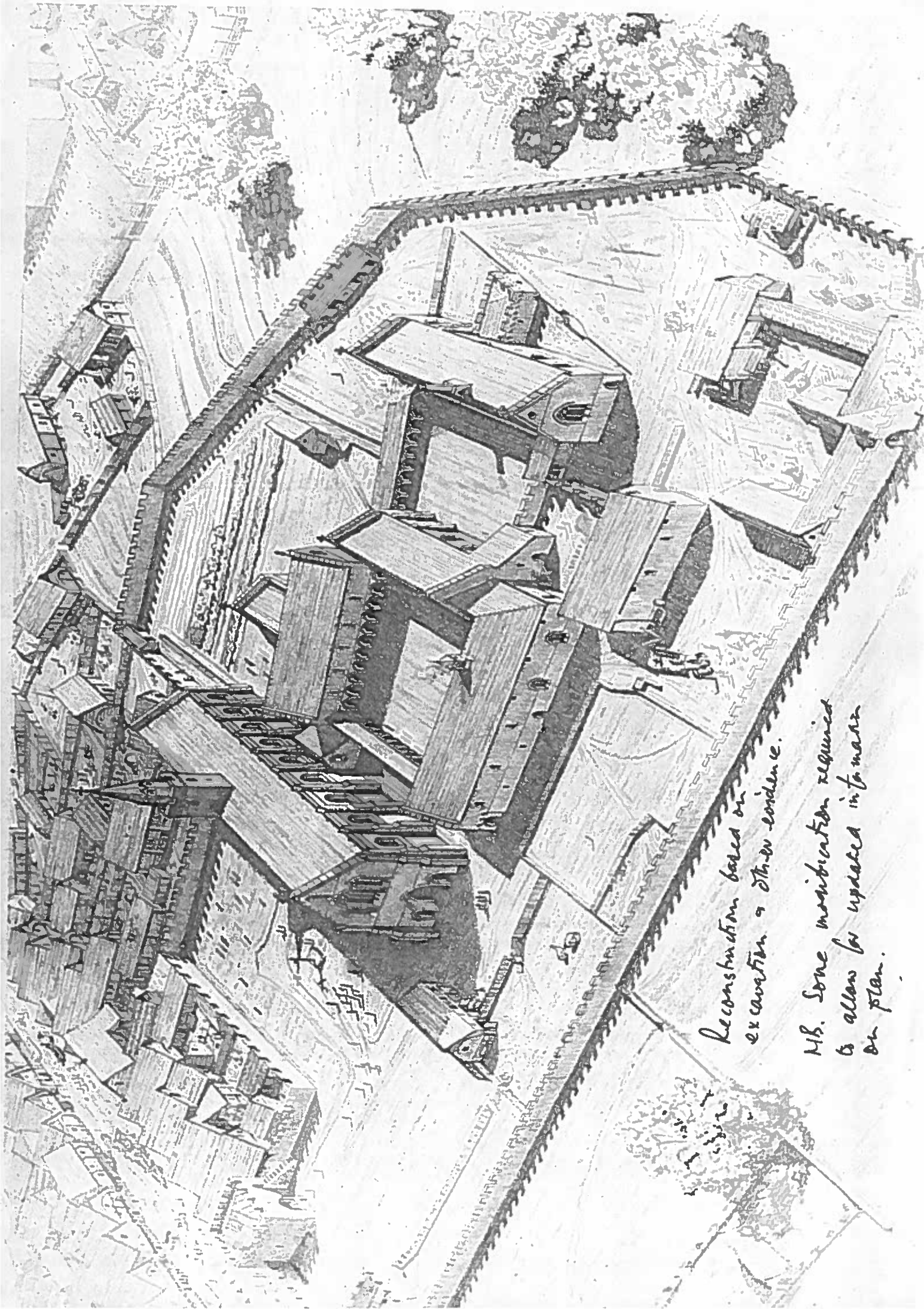
The Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

July 1986

The Old Palace,
Abergwili,
Carmarthen,
Dyfed. SA31 2JG

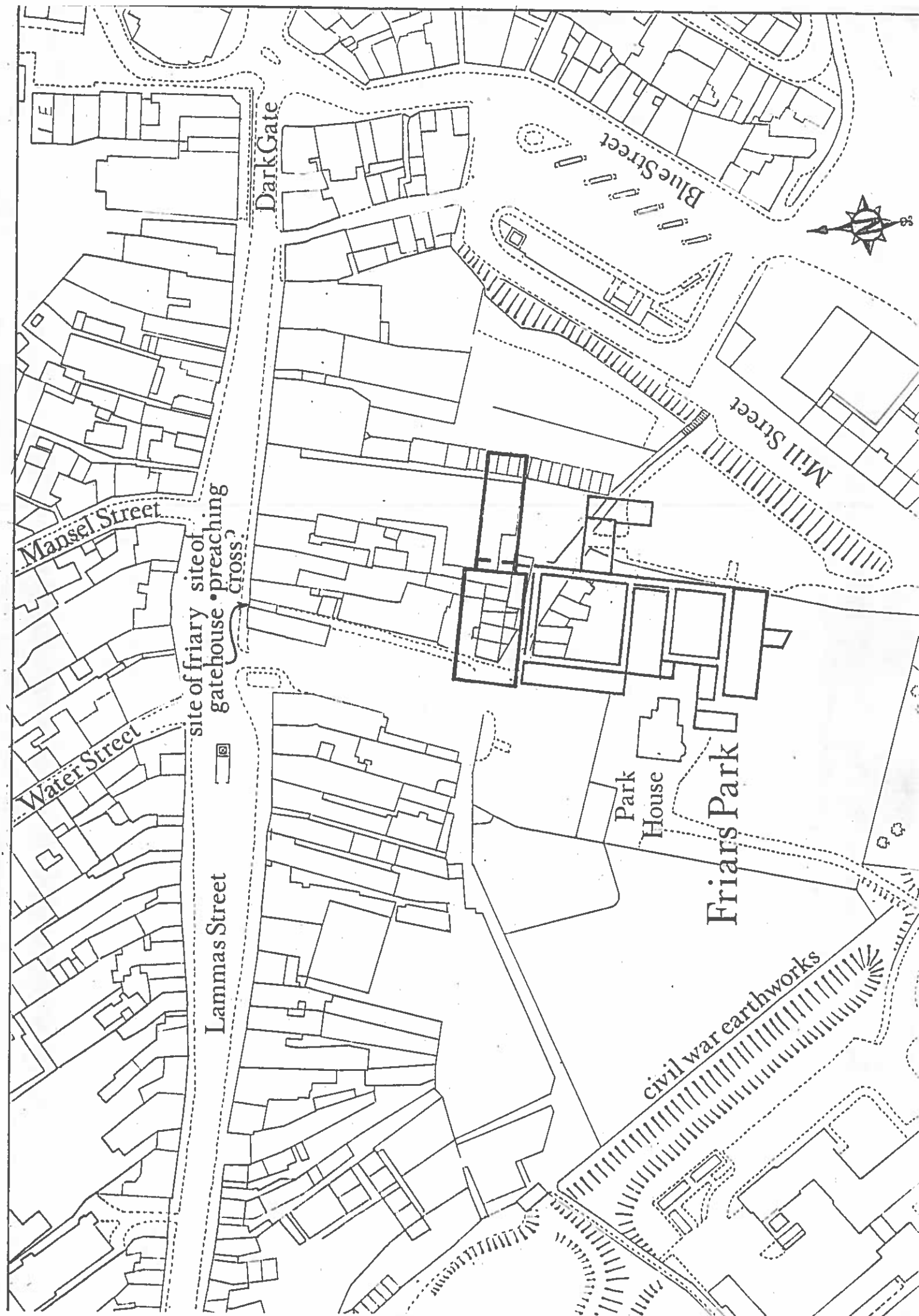
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The suggestions outlined in this report do not envisage the alteration of the proposed layout of the development in any way. The suggestions would not necessarily involve the construction of a specific 'heritage centre' within the complex (though no doubt this would be of value and benefit). Rather, we propose the utilisation of the historical and archaeological information to introduce historical elements within the details of the design throughout the complex as a whole, as part of a coherent overall strategy to marketing this dimension. As such we suggest that this could well become an attraction in its own right, and of commercial benefit.



Reconstruction based on
excavation & other evidence.

N.B. Some modification required
to allow for updated information
on plan.



site of friary site of
gatehouse • preaching
cross?

Lammas Street



Dark Gate

Park
House

Friars Park

civil war earthworks

Mansel Street

Water Street

Blue Street

Mill Street

1. This preliminary document is restricted to various ideas which could be used to reflect the historical and archaeological importance of the site in the new development potentially enhancing its physical and commercial attractiveness.
2. The potential can be approached on a variety of levels depending on the degree of interest by the parties involved, consideration of the commercial gain, and overall budgetary constraints.
3. As part of a general consideration of this potential, two factors should be borne in mind. One is the recent rapid growth of Carmarthen as a commercial centre, attracting an increasing number of shoppers and visitors - a growth which will obviously be enhanced by the proposed development. The second factor is the potential for enhancing the town as a tourist centre in its own right, utilising its own past.
4. Whilst Carmarthen is, historically and archaeologically, the most important town in Wales (the only town with an urban history in both Roman and Mediaeval times), there is relatively little in its existing fabric which provides an independent incentive for tourists and other visitors attracted by historic atmosphere and features. Although Roman and mediaeval elements are preserved in the existing street patterns, their significance is not readily apparent and many major elements which would have enhanced the historic atmosphere - eg the mediaeval town walls and gates, are no longer extant. Whilst the historic layout of the older parts of the town contributes to an attractive atmosphere, individual historic attractions are few - eg the amphitheatre, portions of the castle - and cannot be considered (though capable of further enhancement), powerful attractions in their own right. Carmarthen Museum lies outside the town.
5. The Blue Street redevelopment offers an exciting and challenging opportunity to create a significant visitor/tourist resource, using elements and themes reflecting, in the development, the history of the Friars Park area (and perhaps also a wider area of the town).
6. Several modes of interpreting themes relating to the history of the area are suggested here. It is considered that, depending on budgetary constraints, there is sufficient historical/archaeological information and material to effectively make the complex into an 'interpretative centre' as well as a commercial one, reflecting incidentally, the Mediaeval Friars' own attempts to reach the widest possible audience.

7. If a high level of exploitation of the area as a historic/tourist centre is aimed for, then funding bodies, such as the Welsh Tourist Board, the local authorities, the Arts Council (for example bursaries for murals, stained glass, other art work) may be interested in contributing resources.

8. The Friary: themes relating to existing knowledge of the complex and life within it

These can be done in two-dimensions as paintings, murals or mosaics possibly done in the style of the period, eg, Giotto, the major influence on the decoration of the original Franciscan monuments for the walls of the proposed arcade; as dioramas (miniature theatres viewed through prisms set in rectangular openings giving the illusion of movement and full size or as holograms. The ideas to bring across would be the importance of the Friary in the Middle Ages, the archaeological remains and the Friars' skills at engineering, health and caring. Explanatory text would be kept to a minimum.

- a) The inside of the church and sacristy as it was at the time of the Dissolution.
- b) The fire which resulted in the preservation of the stained glass window recovered by the excavation
- c) The Friars meeting in the Chapter House and skeletons under the floor discovered through excavation
- d) The Friars preaching at preaching crosses with an explanation of why the Grey Friars were so popular
- e) Curing the sick and the types of herbs the Friars used
- f) Friars using the exchequer and traders bringing in their goods, incorporating representations of the jetons and counting board - the mediaeval commercial aspect of the site
- g) The aqueducts and conduits they built bringing fresh water to the Friary
- h) The kitchen, buttery and brewhouse, catching fish in the River Towy, gardens for food and herbs
- i) The King's Chamber

9. Environmental features carrying through the theme of the Friary

In addition to the use of elements; in whatever medium, from the themes above:

- a) Musical recordings of the bells, and/or the restoration of a bell on the site, summoning the faithful to prayers and brief chanting appropriate to the period and hour e.g. Terce 9.00 a.m., Nones 12 noon, Vespers 4.30 p.m.

- b) The plan of the Friary marked by plaques set into the ground in the car park or on a wall where appropriate, describing the part of the Friary that used to be there and its function
- c) A mural depicting aspects of the history of (Mediaeval) Carmarthen
- d) Stations for donations to charities allocated to different organisations at different times
- e) Use of themes from the life and philosophy of St. Francis e.g. birds, flowers, animals
- f) Designs from tiles found at the Friary for floors and walls
- g) Designs from the seal matrices
- h) Some replica stained glass windows - substantial remains of the originals were found during the excavation.
- i) A fountain
- j) Plaques and/or amorial bearings for the illustrious men buried at the Friary
- k) The Tudors represented by reference to their architectural and decorative styles (eg Perpendicular forms, Tudor rose device, arms of Henry VII (with Greyhound and Dragon supporters)

10. Civil War aspects. The western boundary of the CCL development is formed by the remains of the Civil War earthworks and bastion, possibly the finest surviving example of a Royalist town defence anywhere in the country. This period of the site's history could be exploited by use of enlargements of contemporary prints (or designs based on these) depicting the use of this kind of defence (battle scene, artillery etc). See also paragraph 12 below.

11. Displays in two dimensions for cases (can incorporate three-dimensional illusions)

- a) Carmarthen then and now showing the town plan from the air
- b) Carmarthenshire 1284-1535 featuring sites that the public can visit
- c) The archaeological excavation and its history - a sequence of aerial photographs perhaps
- d) The Friary as it might have appeared c.1400
- e) A replica of the stained glass window from the excavation

12. The use of names for specific parts of the development - buildings, areas of buildings, pedestrian walks, car parks etc.

- 1) Personalities associated with the site
Tudor Aled)
William Egwaf/d) Bards .

Sir Rhys ap Thomas "Eagle of Carmarthen" (tomb removed from Friary,
now in St. Peter's Church,
Carmarthon)

Edmund Tudor, father of Henry VII

William de Valance, Earl of Pembroke (first recorded lay burial in
the Friary Cemetery)

Civil War Period

General Roland Laugharne (Commander; Parliamentary Forces)

Richard Vaughan, 2nd Earl of Carbery, Golden Grove (Chief Cavalier)

Prince Rupert (King's nephew, who appointed Colonel Charles Gerard
to command the Royalists)

Colonel Lovelace (Commander of Garrison)

Educational Use

Thomas Lloyd - first Grammar School in Carmarthen

- 2) Preservation of existing historic names:
Navigation Lane; Friars Park (?for a car park); Mill Street;
Buckingham Place; The Bulwarks
 - 3) Contrivance of new names based on historic elements:
Cwrt-yr-Brodyr Llywd (Greyfriars); The Cloister(s);
The Chapter House; The Choir; The King's Chamber etc.
13. Many of these suggestions could be implemented on a small scale on various parts of the site, enhancing its attractiveness and interest, or on a larger scale, as part of a coherent design and plan to deliberately enhance the commercial and tourist potential of the area to the maximum by exploiting the historic factors to the full. If there is further interest in these ideas, then we suggest that a meeting should be arranged at our offices, between the Trust, the architects of the principal companies involved, and District Planning Department Officers. This would allow an opportunity to discuss ideas in more detail and examine the full range of information and illustrative material that the Trust possesses about the site.

D. G. Benson, Trust Director, T. A. James, Greyfriars Excavation Director,
Barbara Roberts, Visual Display Officer

15.7.86

Journal comment

Emergency at hospital

At the start of a new year it's always a useful exercise to stand back and examine the issues which have occupied a lot of our attention during 1984 and will continue to do so in 1985.

It was disappointing to learn last week that the day-to-day running costs for the new intensive care unit at the West Wales General Hospital at Gunglwl are just not there at the moment.

The four-bedded unit cost £1 million to build and was completed last August. It will be staffed by 23 nurses who have still to be appointed.

Clearly there is a certain amount of embarrassment as the money for expensive equipment continues to pour in from various organisations and individuals who have embarked on sponsorship events. To date donations stand at £57,000.

But the figure that matters to fire the unit into daily use is £178,000 — the cost of running it for one year.

What we find baffling is that as the unit was set to open early this year why wasn't the cash identified before now? With highly skilled staff still to be found it would seem that time was running out.

If the first patients are not in the new ward by March there are going to be a lot of disappointed people in Dyfed. For some, the desperate search for cash could mean the difference between life and death.

Stop acting — do something

Another subject we heard much about was the attempt to buy the former Lyric cinema in King Street, Carmarthen, and turn it into a theatre centre.

Again there was disappointment as the local authorities were not prepared to give financial support.

Where does that leave Carmarthen District Council's plan which looked at the way Carmarthen should develop up until 1991?

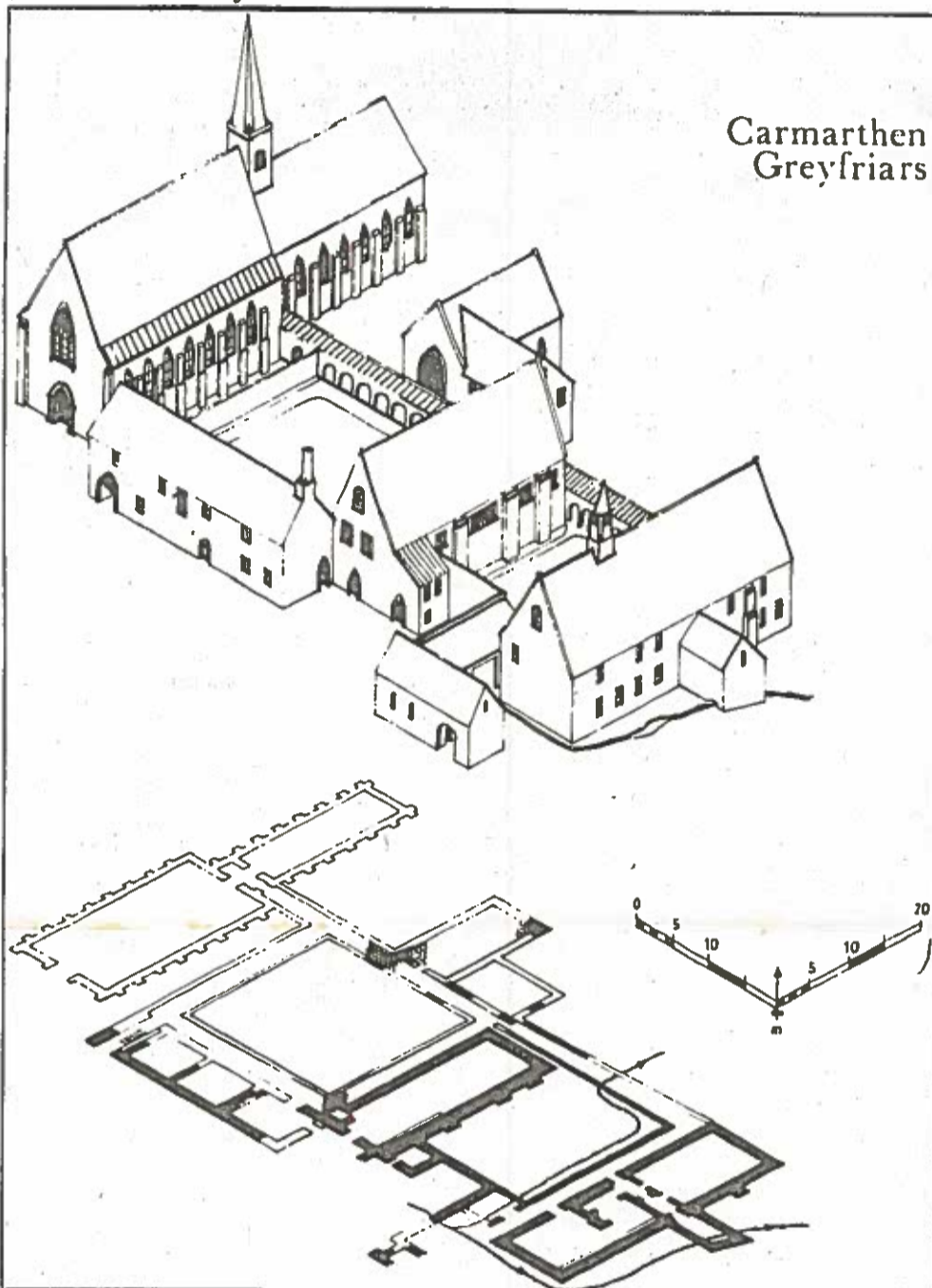
The draft plan says: "It is the policy of the district council, in conjunction with appropriate interested parties, to explore the feasibility of constructing a concert hall with theatre facilities".

If Carmarthen is to be taken seriously as a town of any importance it must have first class theatrical facilities.

Money must be found to rebuild a pile of stones in Picton's memory. Make money available to build a stage for the future of the arts in Carmarthen.

Big rescue excavation at friary goes on

In this short article TERRY JAMES, field officer of Dyfed Archaeological Trust, reflects upon the results of two years excavation at Carmarthen friary.



Isometric reconstruction of the friary based on the excavated evidence. Drawing by Frank Wallace.

When Carmarthen District Council proposed redeveloping Friars' Park with a massive store and adjoining multi-decked car-park, it was not the first time that a council had taken a particular interest in the site.

Almost 450 years ago, in 1543, the mayor and aldermen wrote to King Henry VIII for permission to save the rapidly decaying fabric of Carmarthen's Franciscan friary.

Only five years had passed since this famed seat of Welsh literature had been forcibly closed by the king during the Dissolution of the monasteries. In that short time the buildings had become roofless, and as the mayor so colourfully complained in his letter, it was "runnyng daylye in contynually ruyn and decaye"—there was not a foot of lead left on the roofs—and, he added, it would be a "pitye that such buyldinge, in such a baron contrie, shoulde not be convalde to some lawfull use, for the maintenance of the common welth."

As a result of the mayor's appeal, the king gave permission for the conversion of the site into a grammar school—but fate was to strike a cruel blow. The school's founder, Thomas Lloyd, died in 1547 and the school closed.

HALLOWED

It was almost as if history had shut its door on the once hallowed cloisters of the Greyfriars. The friary, final resting place of so many great families, was regarded as one of the finest pieces of architecture in all South Wales.

It could well have become a cathedral in 1536 (had Bishop Barlow had his way), but it now became even more ruinous, its walls collapsed and robbed of stone, and over the years almost unbelievably it disappeared from the landscape.

By our time the only hint of its former existence remained in a solitary placename Friars' Park.

So it was that when the District Council made its plan to redevelop the site the archaeologists were set a task of unravelling the complex sequence of events between the friary's foundation back in the middle of the thirteenth century, and the present day.

With the co-operation of the council the Dyfed Archaeological Trust has just completed its second year of "fascinating investigation that amounts to the largest rescue excavation ever undertaken on a Franciscan friary in Britain. The excavation has provided temporary employment for over 50 people, the bulk of the financial support has come through the MSC's Community Programme and the Welsh Office.

WEALTH

The excavation results have been exceeded the excavators' expectations. It can now be demonstrated that Carmarthen Greyfriars was one of the largest houses of the Franciscan order in the country. What were the reasons for this?

The most likely answer lies in the initial foundation period back in the 1270s or a little

earlier. It is probable that the friary was founded by a person of considerable wealth.

Since Carmarthen was a Royal borough at that period, then it is possible that either Edward I, or his brother Edmund, had a hand in first providing the site and then building the church and complex range of buildings used to feed and house the community of friars.

Friars were not built to a precise layout, unlike the great monasteries and abbeys of the Cistercian and Benedictine orders. Yet here, at Carmarthen, the buildings were formally ranged around two cloisters, all set on the south side of the church.

The main or "great" cloister, which lies beneath the gardens of 12-15 Friars' Park, had three buildings around its east, west and south sides with the church on the north. The cloister alleys were paved in a

most lavish way. Polished oolite floor tiles that must have taken on the appearance of marble.

APARTMENTS

The building on the west may have contained the main kitchen with apartments above for guests. It had running water, conveyed through massive blocks of dressed sandstone, in one room. A paved passage on the north side of the building led from the outside world into the enclosed tranquility of the cloister, with its colonaded walkways and gardens.

The southern range—originally another massive two storey affair—had the remains of a cider press on the ground floor, which suggests that this was the brewhouse referred to in a survey of 1538. Beneath the polished floor tiles in the eastern cloister alley were scores of burials in unmarked graves—probably friars, as the clois-

ter was a favoured final resting place for the brothers.

This area of the excavation has proved extremely difficult due to a completely unforeseen factor. For running through the back gardens of the cottages in Friars' Park and through the Upper Mill Street car-park, was a massive ditch which had all but destroyed what little remained of the friary's walls and floors.

This ditch is thought to form part of the massive ring of fortifications thrown up around Carmarthen during the Civil War in 1644.

The finely-preserved sections of these defences in the grounds of the Police HQ (The Bulwarks) are of course well known.

But the existence of this ditch, which has also been traced through the grounds of Friars' Park House, adds a completely new dimension to this poorly documented per-

iod of Carmarthen's history.

Although the ditch had severely damaged the friary, sufficient remained to provide an outline of the buildings on the east side of the cloister. Here, a chapter house has been discovered, floored with medieval glazed tiles. Beneath the floor again numerous burials have been discovered.

SURPRISE

The chapter house extends across the northern side of the Upper Mill Street car park, and was to provide yet another surprise. For tacked on to the eastern end was another large medieval building of unknown function and extent, and certainly without parallel in other Franciscan plans.

Turning to the southern—or "little" cloister. The buildings around this were investigated in 1983. The southernmost comprised kitchen, a hall (or perhaps a refectory) and another room with a privy block on the south.

It is possible that this self contained quite represents an "infirmary" for it was set far away from the noise and bustle of Llamas Street, and well protected by the northern cloister.

The friars were renowned for caring for the aged and infirm especially those who could pay! Perhaps it was here that Sir Rhys ap Thomas, along with his Bard Tudur Aled, spent their last years?

This building contained the spectacular near complete stained glass window dated to around 1250-1280. The window had collapsed inwards when the building was accidentally set alight soon after the closure of the friary. The most telling discoveries were a series of lead and copper smelting furnaces and ingot moulds crudely set up within the building probably by Henry VIII's commissioners.

They were employed to recover all saleable goods—including lead and copper sheeting from the roofs. Their destructive task was halted when the building was engulfed by a spectacular fire.

It was then left abandoned as an open ruin for centuries—to be demolished in the 18th century when the present boundaries around Friars' Park House were set up.

COTTAGES

What of the church itself? This remains for the present outside the redevelopment area. The nave probably lies under the cottages on the north side of the Friars' Park and the quire extends across the rear of T. P. Hughes' store, perhaps into the car park of the Boar's Head Hotel.

Much yet remains to be excavated if the full extent is ever to be recovered, and the Archaeological Trust will continue work on resolving some of the outstanding problems over the next few months.

But although the church itself has not been excavated, sufficient in plan of the rest of the friary has been recovered to present an impression of its overall layout.

NOW ON AT FAMILY