

GENERAL HISTORY

A castle had been established at Laugharne by 1116. It is probable that soon after its construction a small settlement would have grown up in front of the castle gate. A charter granted by Guy de Brionne in 1278-82 conferred borough status on this settlement and in 1465 a licence was issued to enclose the town with a wall. A survey dated 1592 indicates that by this date the town was of a size comparable the modern-day settlement minus its 20th century development. After the 16th century the town seems to have entered a period of decline, only picking up again in the late 18th - early 19th century when many of the houses were rebuilt on a relatively grand scale.

TOPOGRAPHY

It is clear from Fig. 1 that the Butcher's Arms House sat in the centre of the Medieval town of Laugharne, within the area defended by the town wall and opposite the entrance of the castle. Duncan Street, now a cul-de-sac, may have been, in the Medieval period, a thoroughfare and possibly the main access out of the town to the west, rather than Wogan Street. Whatever the position, it is probable that site of the Butcher's Arms had two street frontages and therefore two houses - one facing Wogan Street the other Duncan Street. Because of the location of the Butcher's Arms in the centre of the town it is unlikely that the site was ever vacant of dwellings for any length of time, even during the town's decline in the 17-18th century. Thus remains from a period spanning over 800 years could be expected from in and around the site.

THE BUTCHER'S ARMS HOUSE - THE BUILDING

The building as it stood prior to demolition dated to the late 18th - early 19th century, though with many stone structures earlier, unrecognised elements may have been incorporated within it. It was of three-storeys, with a central door (late modified - possibly when conversion into a public house took place) leading into a through-passage with dog-leg stair. One room lay on each side of the passage on the ground floor, three rooms on first floor and large attic room on top floor. It would seem from the construction that the Butcher's Arms House was built against a now demolished building that lay to the east. The through-passage led through to a rear room on west side. This contained a massive chimney-fireplace. During demolition it was observed that the flue to this curved up to outlet through the chimney stack at the front of the house, indicating this rear portion of the house was contemporary with the front. The remaining rear part of the house seems to have been of a later date. All the two-storey rear of the house was covered with a modern asbestos sheet roof.

The roof structure at the front of the house was original (Fig.

2). It consisted of six main trusses each with a slightly arched collar beam. The blades of the trusses were jointed onto wooden blocks set into the stone walls. Through purlins were trenched into the trusses. On the north side the purlins were jointed with simple scarf joints at each truss, on the south side short lengths of purlin were laid side by side in the trenching. The ridge purlin was a modern replacement. All the timbers were saw and roughly shaped, many had bark and sap-wood attached. The timber of the main beams was oak. After their removal from the house, carpenter's marks were noted on the blade pairs of the roof trusses.

To the rear of the dwelling were two small ranges of 19th century, stone-built out-buildings set on either side of a small yard.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL DEPOSITS

Because of the method of demolition no archaeological deposits were observed during the course of the work, and as the site was then levelled to a height below the top of the subsoil all surviving stratigraphy was removed. However, during the course of demolition and subsequent levelling a free-standing section up to 1.6m high was created along the eastern edge of the site. It was from this section (reproduced here; Fig 3) that the archaeological information was obtained. The majority of the archaeological features in the section seemed to have been associated with the property to the east, not with the Butcher's Arms, and so interpretation of many of the remains is problematical.

Over much of the southern half of the section tarmac and concrete lay directly over undisturbed geological deposits. In the exposed section these consisted of fluvio-glacial gravels, but at a lower depth, during the digging of the foundation trenches for the new building, a band of fine, wind-blown sand and thin layers of clay was observed. The remainder of the southern part of the section comprised deposits associated with a 18th or early 19th century building. Here, two walls sat either side of a shallow, brick-floored cellar. This cellar had later been infilled. This infill had been provided with a damp-proof course consisting of broken early 19th century wine bottles. To the south of the cellared building and associated with it was a cobbled surface.

The stratigraphy of the northern half of the section is more complex. At the extreme northern end a 19th century wall was associated with a flag-stone floor to the north and a cobbled surface to the south. To the south of this lay a series of mixed soil layers the bottom-most of which - from the pottery contained within it, ~~shards it seems to date from the 16th - 17th century.~~ Below and earlier than this layer were two walls, one bonded with mortar the other with clay. Earlier than all the above remains were a series of pits. The two largest had served as cesspits and dated to the Medieval period. Both these had been clipped by the section cutting and deepened to the east, away from the site. The

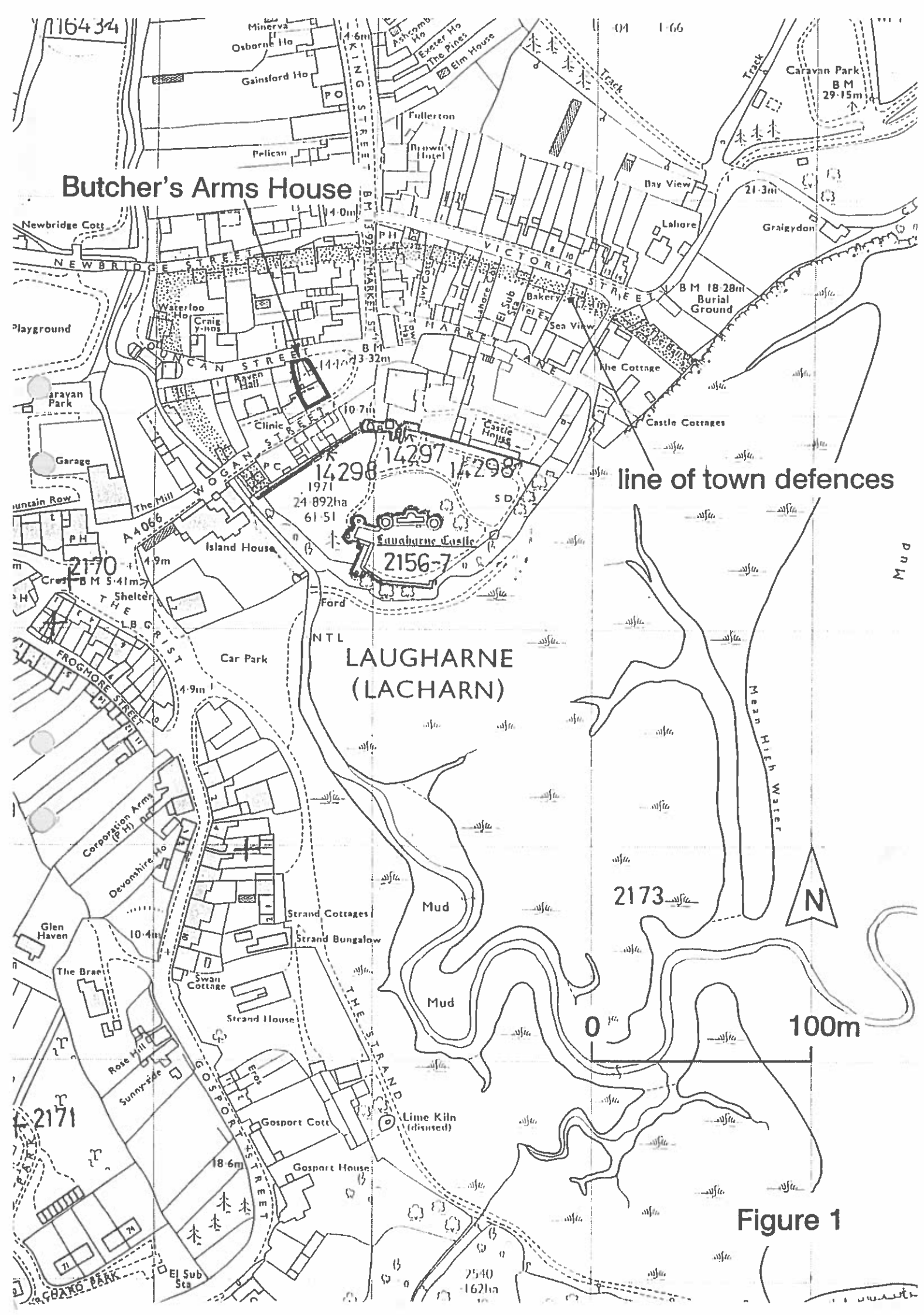
large, northern pit contained a few degraded sherds of pottery dating to the 13th or 14th century - sherds C. The other large pit contained a pot sherd of possible 14th - 15th century date - sherd A. This pit had been back-filled with cockle shells. Remains of the original soil profile provide an indication of the topography of the town prior to its building. It would seem that there was a gentle natural slope down to the north, away from the castle.

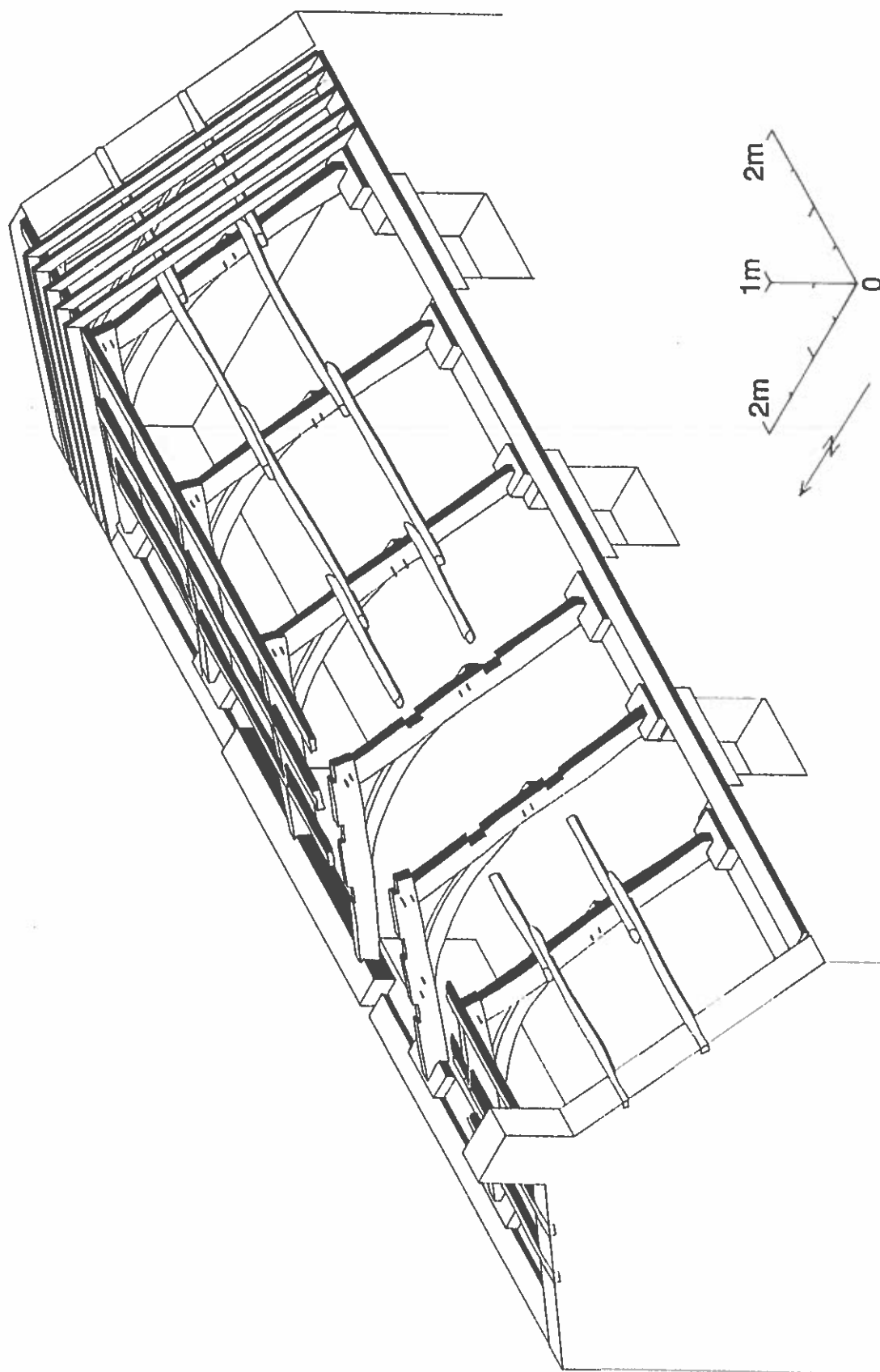
SUMMARY

The work at the Butcher's Arms House provided, for the first time, an opportunity to archaeologically examine part of the Medieval town of Laugharne. This type of work is of particular importance in Laugharne as data from the detailed excavations in the castle illustrates the social and economic military development of the site against which archaeological information from the town can be compared and contrasted. It was, therefore, rather unfortunate that it was not possible to record the archaeology as the house was being demolished and the site levelled. The drawn section, however, showing varied, well-stratified Medieval and post-Medieval deposits indicates the potential for further archaeological work within the town if and when the opportunity arises.

A full archive report has been lodged with the Dyfed Archaeological Trust. Record Nos. 14405. 25468.

K. Murphy. Dyfed Archaeological Trust. 7.1.72





BUTCHER'S ARMS HOUSE, LAUGHARNE - ROOF STRUCTURE Figure 2

