

DYFED ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST LTD



DAN-Y-BANC

CARMARTHEN

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
ON THE RENOVATION OF THE RETAINING WALL
Project Record No. 30883
MAY 1995

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DAN-Y-BANC, CARMARTHEN

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Summary

In May 1995 Carmarthen District Council undertook a programme of renovation of part of the retaining wall along Dan-y-banc, Carmarthen. The wall lies on the summit of a river terrace, and may in part represent the line of Carmarthen's 15th century town wall, as well as the defences of a Roman fort.

The renovation involved the removal of all unsound masonry and, in one area, excavation for deeper footings permitting the examination of a vertical section through the underlying deposits. The wall was then rebuilt.

None of the walls that were observed in full could be attributed to a date any earlier than the later post-medieval period. Furthermore, the exposed soil profile comprised natural fluvio-glacial gravels almost in entirety; a small area of clay was present above these but was much disturbed, and impossible to assign to a definite period.

1.2 Planning History

The planning application for the proposed renovation of the retaining wall at Dan-y-banc, Carmarthen (CDC application no. D4/25244) was forwarded to the Development Control Officer of Dyfed Archaeological Trust's Heritage Management Section, as part of Carmarthen District Council's weekly list of planning applications, on 26 November 1994. The detailed plans and documentation relating to the application were received by the Trust on 16 December 1994. The wall is a Grade I Listed Building but was in a very poor condition in this area.

Following the initial comments made by the Heritage Management Section of the Trust, the Planning Department were advised, on 19 January 1995, to attach an archaeological condition to any consent in view of the possible location of the site on the line of the 15th century town wall.

Whilst no archaeological condition was attached to the consent, which was granted on 2 February 1995, the Listed Building Consent of 28 March 1995 included the advice that an archaeological watching brief be carried out, but this was not a statutory imposition.

The Planning Department agreed that a programme of archaeological recording, and a watching brief, should accompany the scheme, and Dyfed Archaeological Trust's Field Operations Section were notified of the date for commencement of the work on 28 April 1995. The work was observed by the Field Operations Section from 9 May through to 25 May 1995.

1.3 Content and scope of the watching brief

An archaeological watching brief is defined by the Institute of Field Archaeologists as a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during an operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons - normally a development or other construction project - within a specified area where archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed. The programme will result in the preparation of a report.

The watching brief will be intended to allow, subject to resources, the preservation by record of archaeological deposits in advance of their disturbance or destruction and to provide an opportunity, if necessary, for the watching archaeologist to alert all interested parties to the presence of an archaeological find for which the resources allocated to the watching brief are insufficient to support satisfactory treatment.

The watching brief is not intended as a substitute for contingent excavation.

The client will be supplied with 3 copies of an archaeological report of the results of the watching brief. The report will be fully representative of all the information recovered. Normally it will be read in conjunction with a desk-top assessment for the scheme which provides the historical framework for the watching brief. A copy of the report will also be deposited with Dyfed Sites and Monuments Record.

1.4 Purpose and methodologies of the watching brief

The purpose of the watching brief is to undertake as complete a record as possible of any archaeological features affected by the client's scheme of works. In the case of larger archaeological sites it will seldom be possible or necessary to undertake a record of the entire site; the record will be undertaken only on those areas of the site that may be affected.

The primary stage of the watching brief for any scheme normally involves consultation of the desk top assessment for the scheme and/or consultation of Dyfed Sites and Monuments Record, which is maintained by Dyfed Archaeological Trust's Heritage Management Section, for those sites affected by the scheme.

The client will normally advise Dyfed Archaeological Trust's Field Operations Section of any changes in the proposed works resulting from their consultation of the desk top assessment, and of any sites which may still be affected by the scheme. The client will also provide the Field Operations Section with a proposed schedule of works in order that a full field study may be performed on any affected site prior to the commencement of the works.

Work on or around those affected sites will be subject to the watching brief. The work will be closely observed by an archaeologist from the Field Operations Section who will also undertake a full drawn, written and photographic record of any archaeologi-

cal features which may be disturbed by the scheme, and any artefact or find exposed during the works. Recording will be carried out where necessary and when convenient: it is the Field Operations Section's aim to minimise any disruption to the client's schedule. However, if archaeological features may be lost during the scheme, it may be necessary for the Field Operations Section to request a postponement of the works in order that the archaeology may be recorded. Larger areas affected may require fuller excavation and/or survey.

2.0 RESULTS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

2.1 Site location

The name Dan-y-banc refers to a lane, open to pedestrian traffic, running along the foot of a steep slope, the line of which runs SW-NE from the bluff upon which the castle lies (SN 4130 2000) to Tanerdy (SN 4230 2100). The slope is the most pronounced section of the extensive river terrace that forms the northern edge of the Tywi floodplain in the Carmarthen area. The terrace lies between 9m and 17m above sea level, and is composed of fluvio-glacial gravels.

The watching brief site comprises a complex of walls retaining the terrace slope, lying at NGR SN 4145 1998 (fig. 6.1).

2.2 Site history and description

The terrace slope has long represented the southern limit to settlement along the ridge that forms the spine of the town of Carmarthen. It follows that it has dictated the line of the defensive circuits around the successive occupation sites in the area.

A Roman fort (DAT PRN 39) stood in the area now occupied by King Street and Spilman Street. Excavation of the fort site by Dyfed Archaeological Trust in 1985 and 1988 (James, 1993, 7-10) and a watching brief in 1993 (Ludlow and Brennan, 1993, 57-58), demonstrated that the fort was of two phases and gave a very clear picture of its extent (fig. 6.2). It was demonstrated that the southern rampart of the fort must have lain either very close to, or actually upon the terrace slope down to what is now Dan-y-banc. The area subject to the watching brief represents part of the line of these defences, which in the excavated areas comprised a truncated bank of stiff yellow clay.

During the later middle ages, the medieval town of Carmarthen expanded eastwards from its defended core around Guildhall Square and as a result King and Spilman Streets were established. This new area in turn received town walls (DAT PRN 74) in the early 15th century (James, 1981, 30-31), the southern line of which followed, like the Roman fort defences, the terrace slope (fig. 6.3). However, the precise line of these defences is not known, nor whether any of the present terrace retaining walls follows their line, or incorporates any medieval fabric.

The watching brief site at present represents a flight of steps down the slope to Dan-y-banc, comprising four E-W retaining walls, in tiers down the slope, between which the steps run. In the main the walls are constructed from Carboniferous Limestone and Old Red Sandstone rubble.

Not all the walling material is contemporary, however. The northernmost wall, for example, consists of a thin brick wall lying upon a thicker masonry wall. Furthermore, the steps area lies between two features that project out from the nearest (northern) of these wall lines - to the east, a lean-to built against

this wall, and to the west, a dog-leg producing the entire wall line further south and out into Dan-y-banc. Both of these features are separated from the steps area by butt-joints, and appear to be earlier.

This arrangement is shown as it exists today on the first edition Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map of 1890 (Ordnance Survey, 1:2500 First Edition, Carmarthenshire, Sheet XXXIX.7, 1890 - see fig. 6.3). Earlier maps of the town (*Map of Carmarthen*, 1834, J. Wood, *Sketch Plan of Carmarthen*, 1786, T. Lewis) are not detailed enough to ascertain whether the steps were present at an earlier date.

The entire area of the steps was, prior to the renovation, in a very poor condition and much overgrown, including some large saplings.

2.3 Observations during the watching brief

The four E-W lengths of retaining wall are labelled 1-4 on the accompanying figs. 6.5 - 6.8.

The northernmost and uppermost two walls, 1 and 2, were least affected by the scheme being subject only to consolidation prior to limited rebuild. The uppermost flight of steps lies between the two.

South of wall 2 a large area of earth was retained by wall 3. This wall was completely removed under the renovation scheme. In addition an area of the retained earth, measuring 4.5m E-W by 3.7m N-S was excavated out, for piling. This entailed cutting both backwards, and downwards to below the surface level of Dan-y-banc. At its greatest height, ie. between walls 2 and 3, the section was 6m high.

The southernmost wall 4, alongside Dan-y-banc, did not extend the full length of the site and was in a very poor state of repair. The lowermost flight of steps lay between it and wall 3. Wall 4, too, was truncated by the excavation of the retained earth.

2.3.1 The walls

Only walls 3 and 4 were exposed in their entirety, including their footings. Both reached a maximum width of 0.80m, and a maximum height of 3.7m from the footings.

Whilst wall 3 formed a retaining wall of similar height throughout, wall 4 was in form a sloping parapet following the line of the lowermost flight of steps. Neither wall displayed any evidence of more than one build, and in both the masonry was bonded by a tough, grey mortar of post-medieval type. Given all the above attributes, their location at the foot of the slope, and the fact that wall 3 follows a very sinuous line, it is highly unlikely that either wall represents the line of the 15th century town wall.

The visible portions of walls 1 and 2, ie. above ground level, were 0.4m thick and of similar construction to walls 3 and 4. Wall 1, however, has been considerably heightened in brick. Wall 2, like wall 4, appears to have been a parapet wall following the line of the uppermost flight of steps. Their below-ground portions were not revealed during the renovation and it was not possible to ascertain their depth.

The visible portion of neither wall displays any evidence of more than one build.

2.3.2 The deposits

The excavation of the area of retained earth between walls 2 and 3 permitted the examination of the soil profile. Of the three sections, the north, the west and the east were drawn and are reproduced in figs. 6.6 - 6.8.

It can be seen that in all sections, the profile predominantly featured the natural fluvio-glacial gravels of which the terrace is formed. Only in the highest area, the north section, were any overlying deposits preserved. A layer of stiff yellow clay, up to 0.8m thick, directly overlay the natural gravels in the western end of the section. There was no intervening buried soil horizon. The clay was either much disturbed, or part of a late dump of possibly derived material; it contained a significant quantity of coal fragments, slate fragments and other debris-type material.

Over the clay lay an area of fine black humic soil of very recent build-up, containing brick, 20th century glass etc.

2.4 Conclusions

The steps and their associated walls appear to be all of one build, purpose built as a flight of steps from the top of the terrace down to Dan-y-banc, probably during the early-mid 19th century. It could be seen that the steps butted against the two neighbouring structures and were apparently inserted as an in-fill.

Although there is no structural evidence, it is however possible that the northernmost wall 1 follows the line of the 15th century town wall. A considerable length of continuous walling forms the rear of the properties further east along the top of the slope, a line which, if projected westwards, connects with a shorter length of wall whilst also incorporating, as a detached area, the line of wall 1 (see figs. 6.1, 6.3 and 6.4).

It appears that any pre-modern deposits overlying the natural gravels here have been truncated, possibly as a result of the cutting back of the slope when the steps were introduced. The exposed clay in the section is interesting in view of the certain presence, somewhere in the vicinity, of the southern rampart of the Roman fort. However, given the fact that the clay lies directly upon the gravels with no intervening buried soil horizon, and its very disturbed nature, it is probable that the clay is derived, having been deposited here probably during the construc-

tion of the steps. The source of the clay, however, might be remnant Roman rampart material somewhere in the immediate environs of the site.

3.0 THE FINDS

No finds were encountered during the watching brief.

4.0 THE ARCHIVE AND PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD

The archive, indexed according to the National Monuments Record (NMR) material categories, is held by the Dyfed Archaeological Trust, Llandeilo, and contains the following:-

- A. Copy of the final report
- B. Field notes
- C. Copies of architects drawings and planning specs.
- D. Monochrome photographs
- G. Correspondence on archaeological matters; references
- J. Final drawings
- L. General admin. notes
- M. Project correspondence

There is no material for classes E, F, H, I, K and N.

The photographic record (Class D) comprises:-

Photos 30883/1-30883/4:- Taken 10/5/95 after superficial site clearance

Photos 30883/5-30883/8:- Taken 11/5/95 at commencement of demolition and excavation

Photos 30883/9-30883/14:- Taken 23/5/95 after excavation of section and introduction of piling

Photos 30883/15-30883/16:- Taken 25/5/95 after additional excavation into Dan-y-banc lane

5.0 SOURCES

Dyfed Sites and Monuments Record.

Manuscript maps

Carmarthen Museum, *Map of Carmarthen*, 1834, J. Wood.

Carmarthenshire Record Office, *Sketch Plan of Carmarthen*, 1786, T. Lewis.

Printed maps

Ordnance Survey, 1:2500 First Edition, Carmarthenshire, Sheet XXXIX.7, 1890.

Ordnance Survey, 1:2500 Second Edition, Carmarthenshire, Sheet XXXIX.7, 1907.

Published works

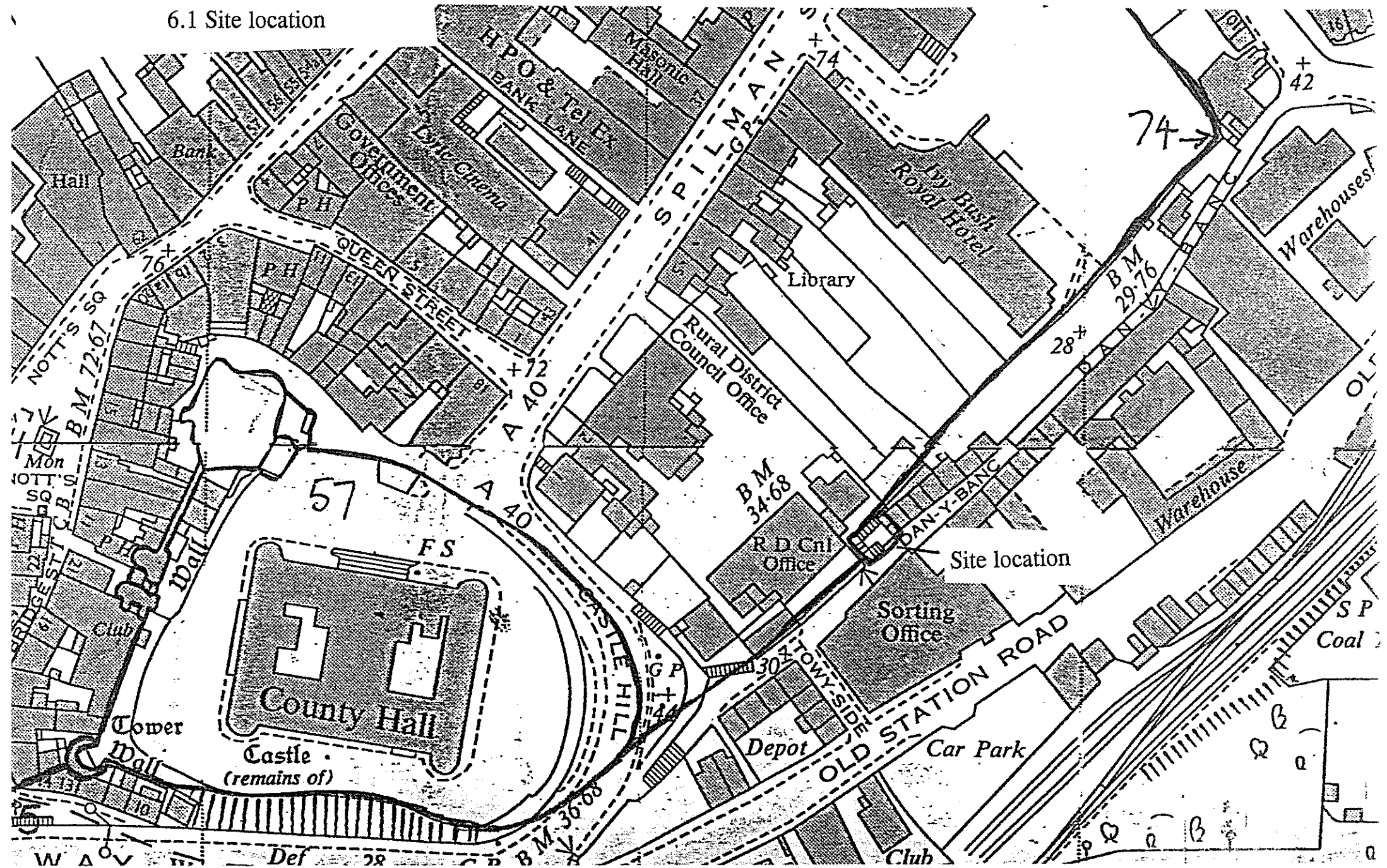
James, H., 1992, 'Excavations in Roman Carmarthen 1978-1990', *The Carmarthenshire Antiquary*, Vol. XXVIII.

James, T., 1980, *Carmarthen: An Archaeological and Topographical Survey*.

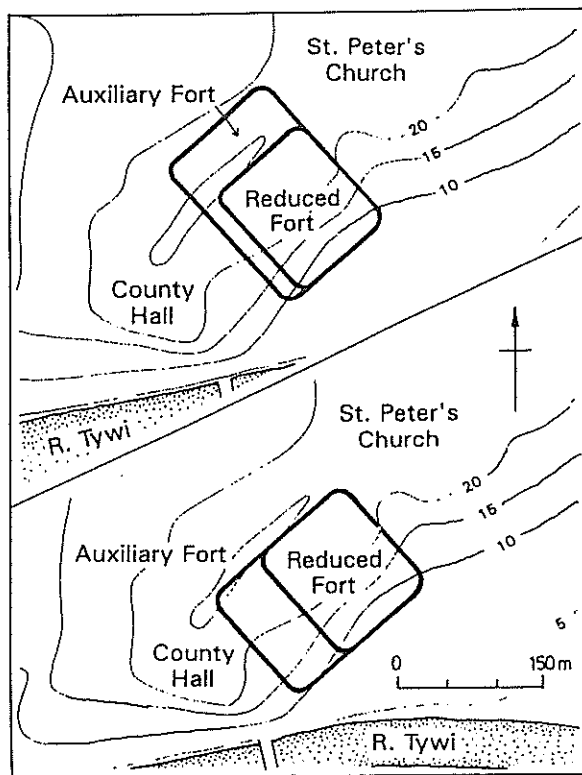
Lodwick, J., and Lodwick, V. G., 1972, *The Story of Carmarthen*.

Ludlow, N., and Brennan, D., 1993, '33 Spilman Street, Carmarthen', *Archaeol. in Wales* 33.

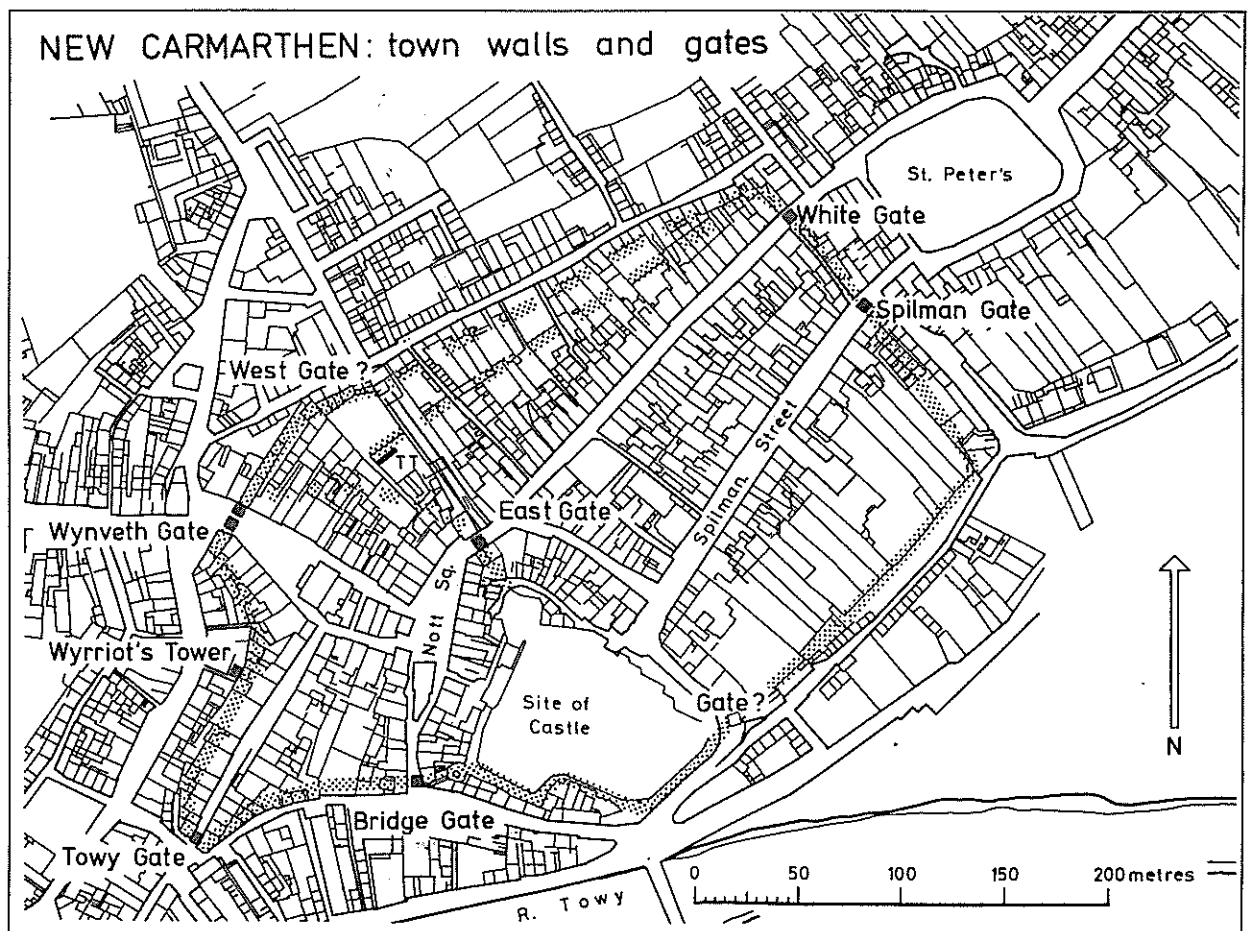
6.1 Site location



6.2 Location map of Roman forts

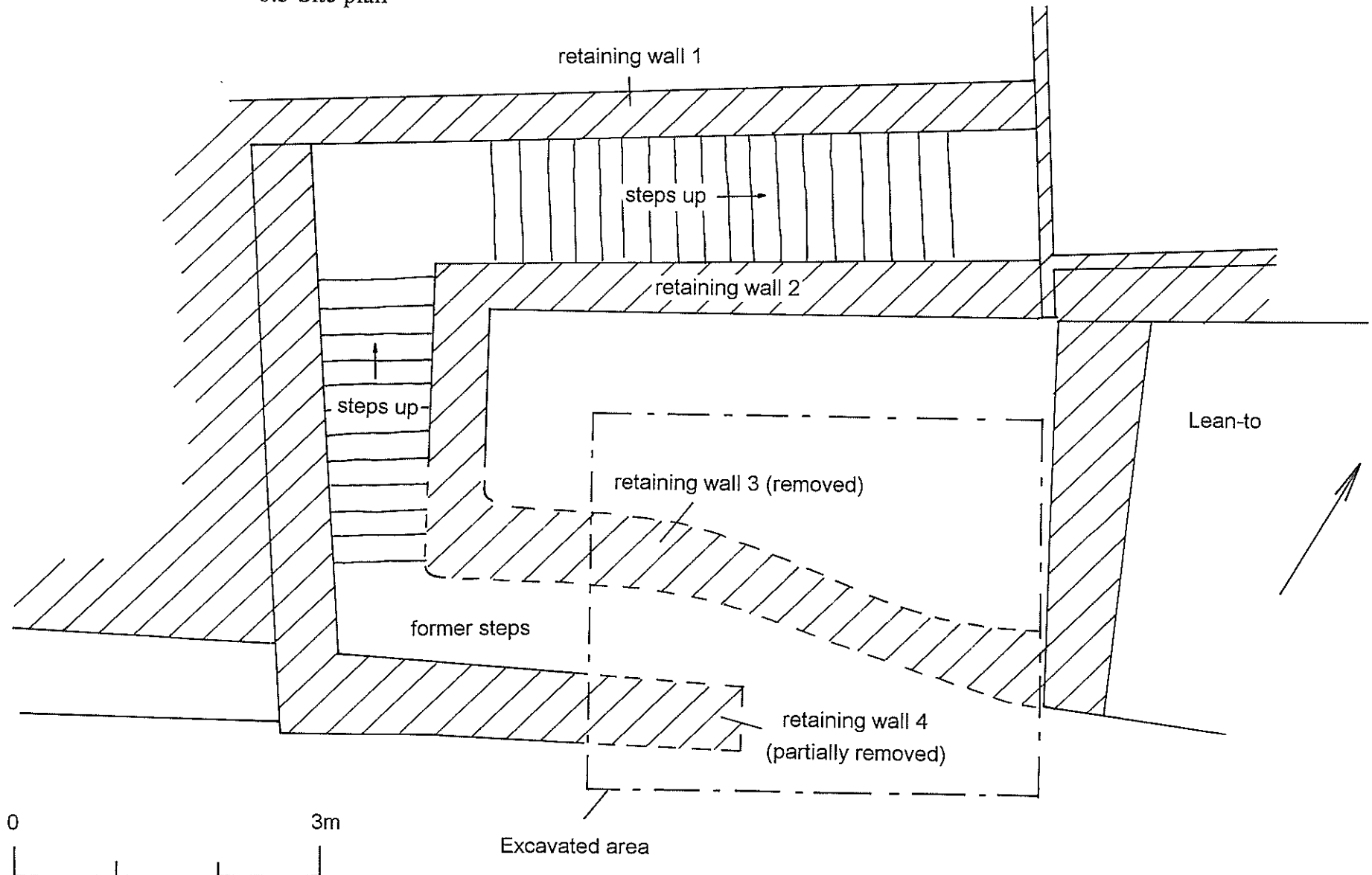


6.3 Location map of medieval town walls, based on OS 1:2500, Sheet XXXIX. 7, 1890 (after T A James)

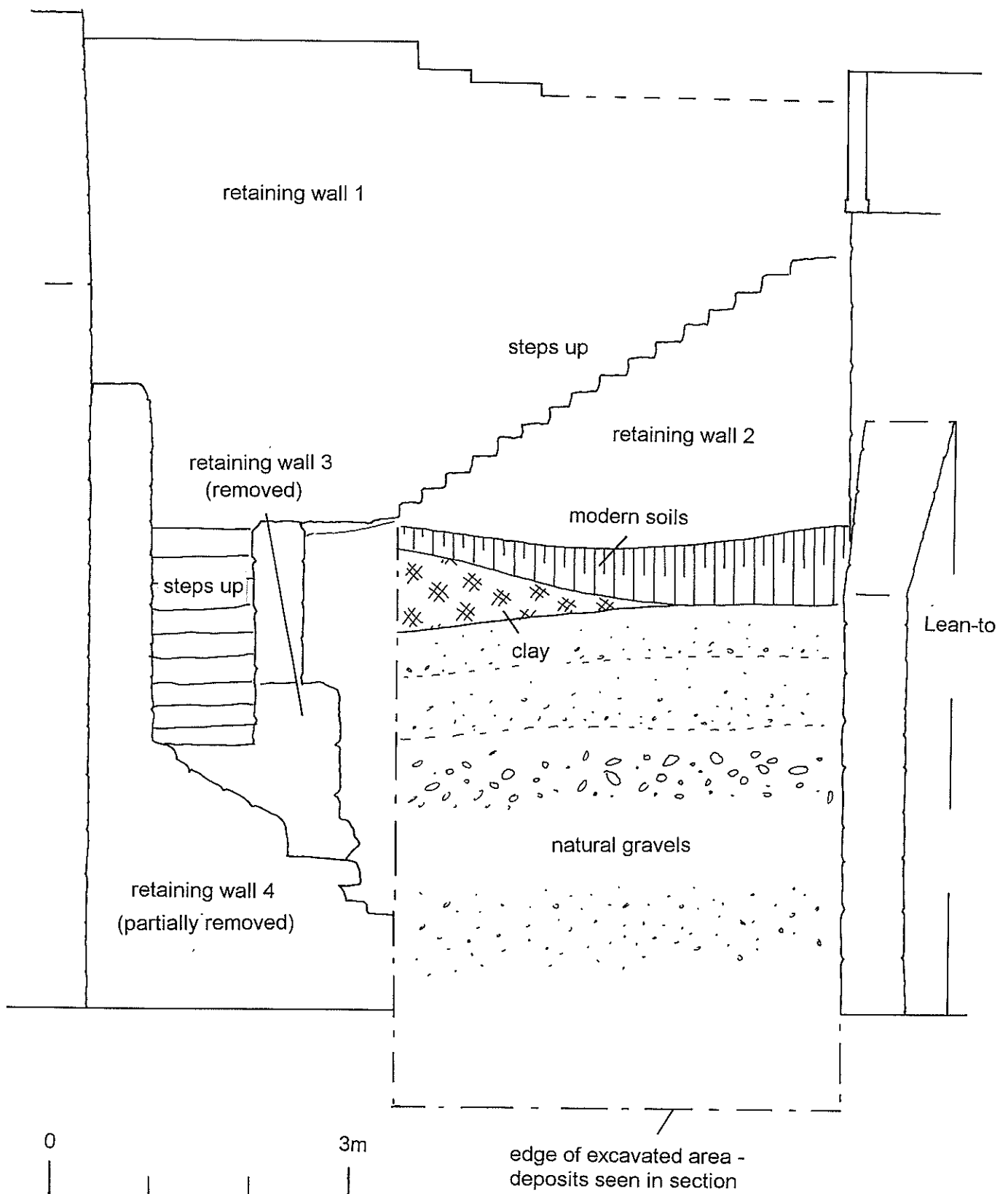




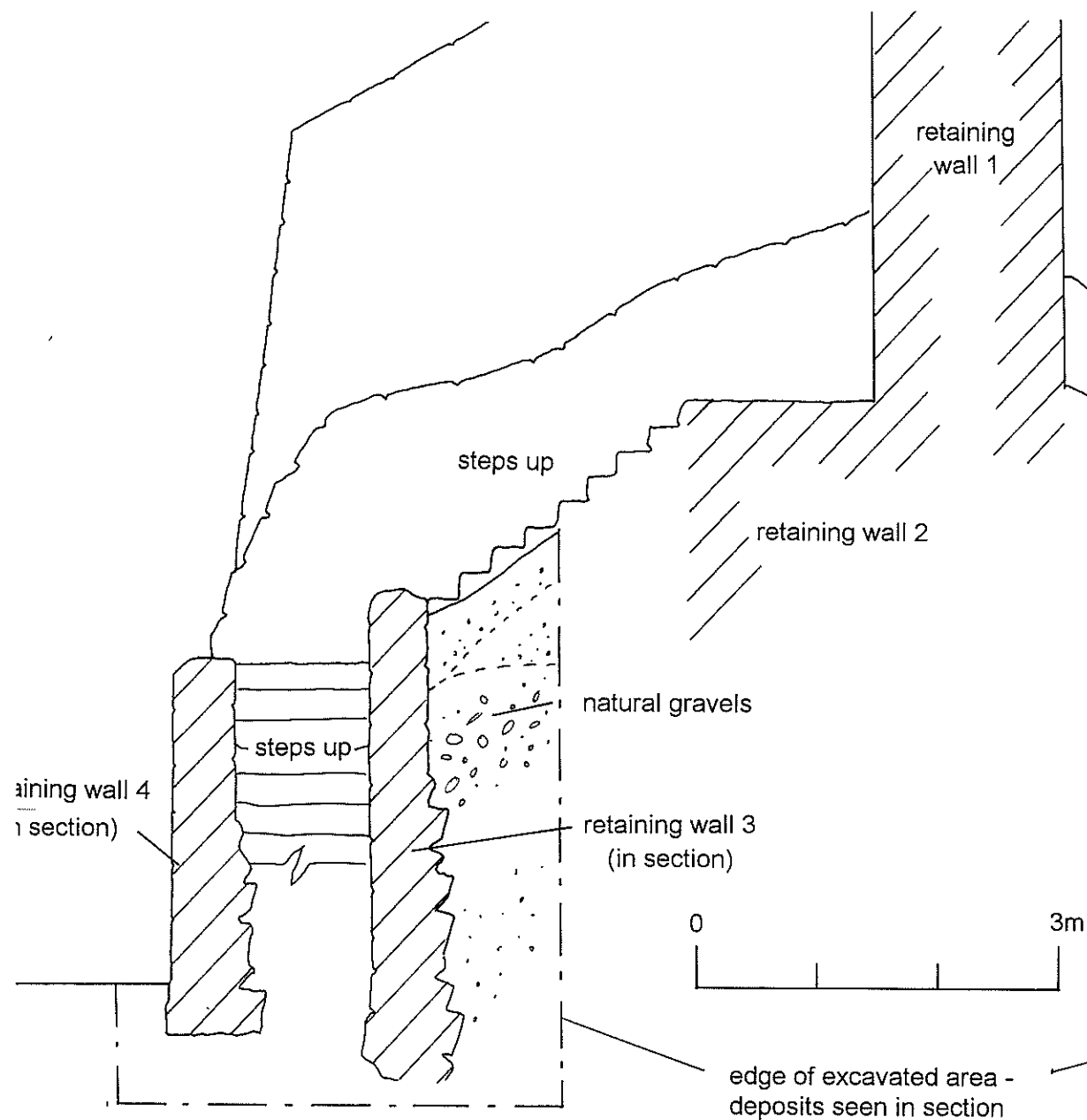
6.5 Site plan



6.6 Elevation and section of site looking north



6.7 Elevation and section of site looking west



6.8 Elevation and section of site looking east

