

DYFED ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST LTD



LAND AT 6, OLD OAK LANE CARMARTHEN

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

Project Record No. 32581

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Commissioned by: Trant and Richards, Solicitor

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6, OLD OAK LANE, CARMARTHEN
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Summary

A proposed residential development in the small area of garden at 6, Old Oak Lane, Carmarthen, lies at a crucial position at the north-east corner of the Roman Town defences of *Moridunum*. Prior to the evaluation, there were good grounds for believing that the area contains the remains of a corner tower of the defences.

An evaluation trench was excavated within the garden, and examined to determine the nature and depth of any archaeological structures, features or deposits which might be truncated or destroyed by the construction of a single dwelling and any new services or access. The evaluation discovered that the weathered remains of a clay bank and stone structure of probable Roman date lay below about one metre of garden soil and the remains of cottages removed in the 1920s.

1.2 Planning History

A planning application was made by Mrs. Elsie May Phillips, 6, Old Oak Lane, Carmarthen to Carmarthen District Council on 10.7.95, for outline planning permission for a single residential development on land adjoining no.6. (D4/25847). On 5th September 1995, Dyfed Archaeological Trust advised the Planning Authority of the archaeological importance of the site and recommended refusal. The grounds for the Recommendation were more fully stated by the Trust on 13th September. Dyfed County Highways also lodged an objection to the application, but later withdrew it.

The Planning Committee of Carmarthen District Council instructed their officers to arrange for a site visit. A site visit took place on 14th December, 1995. The applicant was represented by Mr. Basil Richards, of Trant and Richards Solicitors. Mr. David Jones of Carmarthen District Council, case officer, and Mrs. Heather James, Heritage Management Section, Dyfed Archaeological Trust, advised the Planning Authority. It was agreed at the meeting that the procedures outlined in PPG16 (Wales) Archaeology and Planning would be followed and that the applicant would arrange an Archaeological Evaluation. A Brief and Specifications for the evaluation would be prepared by Dyfed Archaeological Trust, Heritage Management Section on behalf of the Planning Authority (Carmarthen District Council).

The Brief and Specifications were prepared by Mrs. Heather James, Heritage Management Section, Dyfed Archeological Trust. It was agreed that the evaluation would take place on 21st March 1996.

Arrangements were made for a building contractor, Mr. J.R. Hodgson, to dig the trench using a small mechanical excavator under the supervision and inspection of an archaeologist from the Field Operations Section of the Dyfed Archaeological Trust.

1.3 Definition of a field evaluation

An archaeological field evaluation as defined by the Institute of Field Archaeology's *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations* is:

a limited programme of non-intrusive and/or intrusive field-work which determines the presence or absence of archaeological features, structures, deposits, artefacts or ecofacts within a specified area or site. If such archaeological remains are present Field Evaluation defines their character and extent, and relative quality; and it enables an assessment of their worth in a local, regional, national or international context as appropriate.

2.0 RESULTS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

2.1 Site location

The area of the proposed development lies within the lawned garden of 6, Old Oak Lane, Carmarthen.

A trench was machine-dug across the site for a distance of 9.5m. The trench, 1.4m wide, ran in a north-north-east to south-south-west direction from just inside the northern hedge boundary to the southern corner of the plot (Figure 5.2). The resulting sections were cleaned and examined for archaeological evidence.

2.2 Site history

The site is at present a lawned garden with no record of any previous building works on it apart from services. It is evident that the form of the plot around the whole corner of Old Oak Lane was cut back in the 1920s as part of road improvements carried out by the then Borough Engineer and Surveyor, Mr. George Ovens, resulting in the demolition of two cottages and their respective outbuildings (Figure 5.3).

Although the garden proposed for residential development is very small, it nevertheless occupies a crucial position on the line of Roman Town defences. The line of these defences is now well established. The northern line of the Town's defences were first recognised by Professor Barri Jones in the 1960s. Dyfed Archaeological Trust's own observations and excavations in the 1970s and 1980s have extended that knowledge.

Only one small area of the defences at the south-east corner of the Roman town enjoys statutory protection; this is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Virtually all of the rest of the line of defences has been covered (and mainly destroyed) by 19th and 20th century housing.

Apart from the Scheduled area the only remaining open undeveloped part of the whole circuit of the defences is the small area of garden at 6, Old Oak Lane. It is, moreover, in a crucial location at the north-east corner of the Roman Town. Because of modern development there is no archaeological evidence of any wall towers or gateways on the defences, but there is every reason to believe that they once existed, and were probably comparable to the ones which still exist at Caerwent Roman town.

The ground level of the garden is raised well above the pavement and road level of Old Oak Lane and rises slightly above the ground levels to the south, south-west and west, within the interior of the Roman Town. All this suggests that there may be substantial remains within the plot.

2.3 Observations

The trench and the resulting sections were examined in detail for archaeological features (Figure 5.4)

A uniform layer of dark humic garden topsoil (1) with numerous finds of 19/20th century origin covered the entire excavated area. At the north-north-eastern end of the trench, immediately below the topsoil, lay the remains of a relatively modern building. A mortar bonded wall (12) ran across the trench in a west to east alignment. The southern side of this wall was seen to have numerous layers of lime wash; the northern side was mortar rendered. Either side of this wall lay large concentrations of demolition debris. On the southern side, layer 11 was seen to consist of loam and a large proportion of lime and mortar. This lay above an exterior sunken cobbled path (15) set in a black soil. The southern extremity of layer 11 butted onto a small revetment of angular stones set into a deep layer of loam (2). On the northern side of wall 12, layer 13 was seen to consist of loam and a large proportion of mortar with numerous inclusions of brick lime and slate. This lay above a cobbled interior floor surface (14) set in a compact clay loam. The remains of this modern building were observed to have no footings and to have been built predominantly on layers of clay-loam. The exterior cobbled path (15) was constructed on layers 3 and 16, the wall (12) on layers 17 and 18. The interior floor (14) was the only part of the building to have a substantial base in the form of compacted clay layer (22). Layer 20 was similar to the compacted clay layer (22), but separated from it by a layer of clay-loam (21). It is probable that 21 is the remains of a drainage or boundary ditch.

In the central part of the section the slumped remains of a boundary bank or wall (10) was observed crossing the trench in a west to east alignment. This consisted of a spread of clay loam containing a high percentage of large angular stones and small concentrations of mortar. Several layers of clay and clay loam were seen to have been redeposited on the southern side of this boundary. The lowest layer (8) consisting of clay, the intermediate layer (7) of clay loam the upper layers (6) and (9) of clay and clay loam respectively. A sherd of pot and a fragment of clay pipe stem of post-medieval origin were discovered in the intermediate layer (7).

The southern extremity of the section revealed the remains of a substantial wall (5). This was seen to be constructed of angular stones bonded by compact mortar. This feature did not encroach across the trench and was not evident in the opposite trench section. This suggests that this is either the corner of a structure or possibly a section of wall which has been robbed to the east of the remains evident in section.

2.4 Conclusions

The remains of a building in the northern section are obviously part of the cottages or their outbuildings demolished in the road improvement scheme of the 1920s, being of fairly modern origin and of very poor construction. Below this at a depth of approximately 1 metre lie the more ancient archaeological features. It is clear that the entire site has been subject to occupation over a substantial period of time, but the exact date of the lower deposits could not be demonstrated. It is, however, likely that the clay deposits towards the bottom of the trench are the remains of the clay rampart of the Roman Town defences and that the stone wall is of a similar date.

3.0 THE FINDS

Numerous fragments of modern pot (19/20th century) were recovered from the topsoil. The only other finds in context were recovered from the clay loam layer (7) consisting of one sherd of pot and one fragment of clay pipe. These proved to be of post-medieval origin.

4.0 REFERENCES

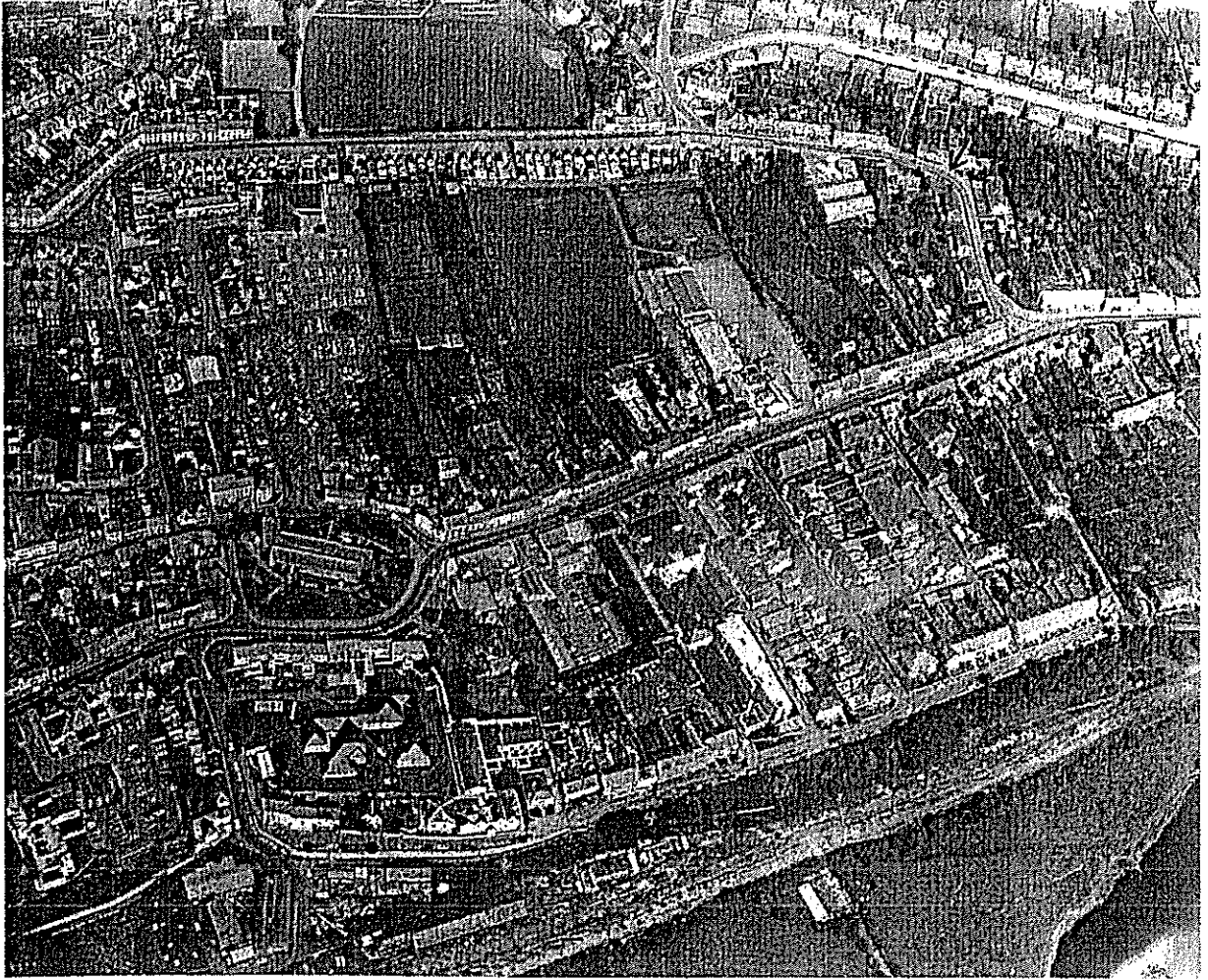
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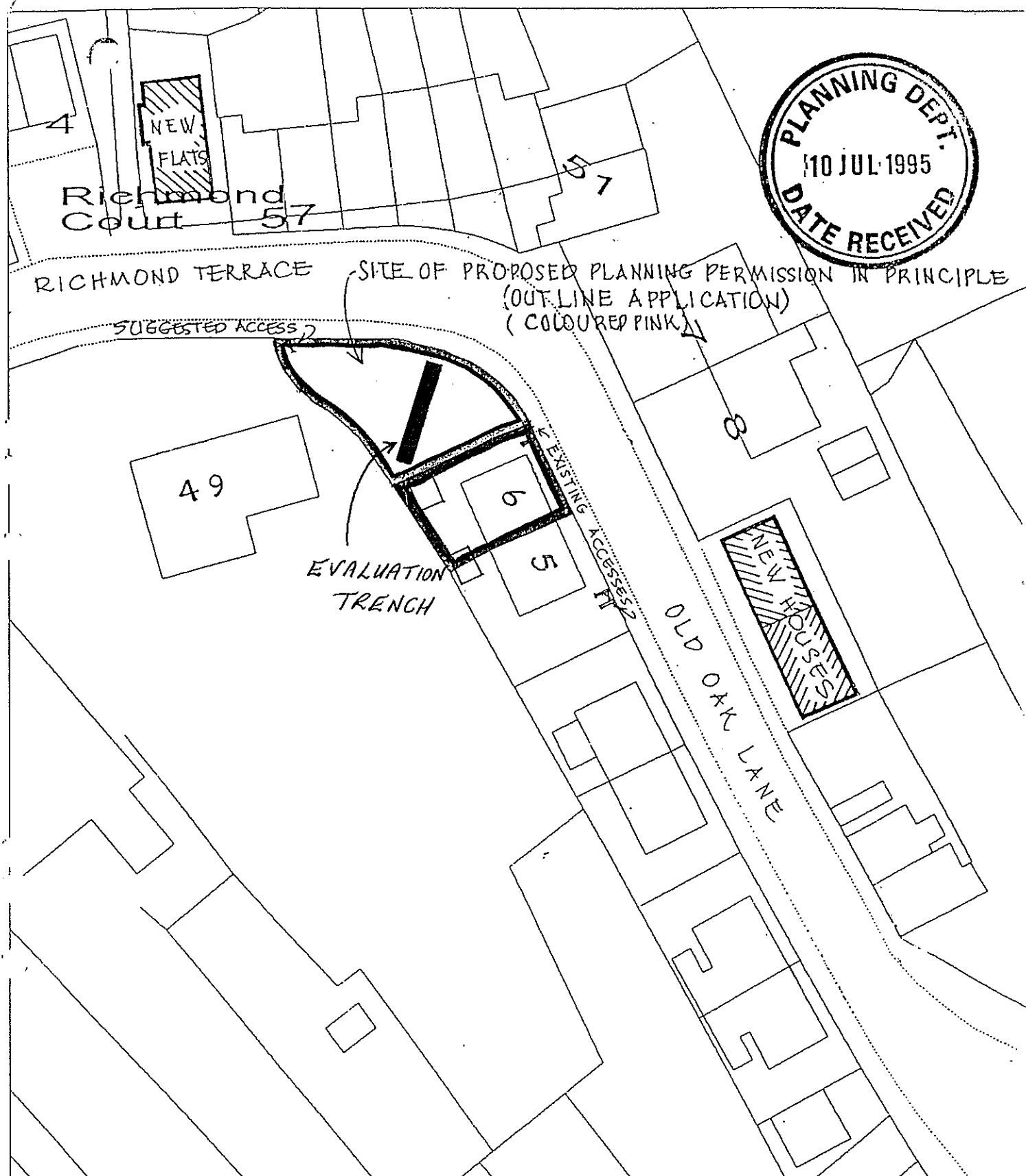
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Roman town looking NNW in 1985.



Title :- PROPOSED DWELLING ADJOINING
6 OLD OAK LANE, CARMARTHEN.
SITE PLAN:

Scale - 1:500

Figure 5.2

COUNTY OF THE BOROUGH OF CARMARTHEN

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENT OAK LANE

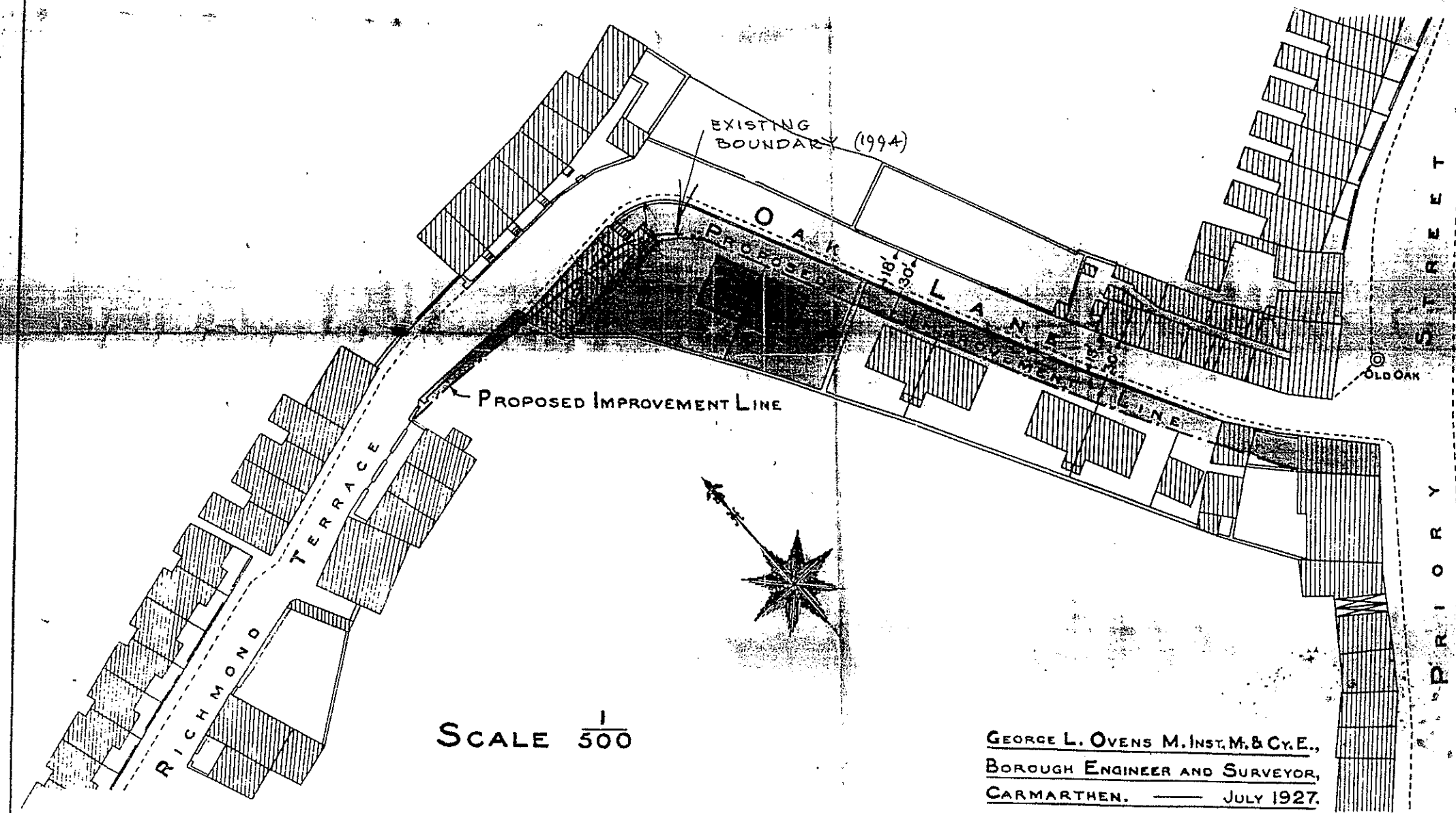


Figure 5.3

6, Old Oak Lane Southeast facing section.

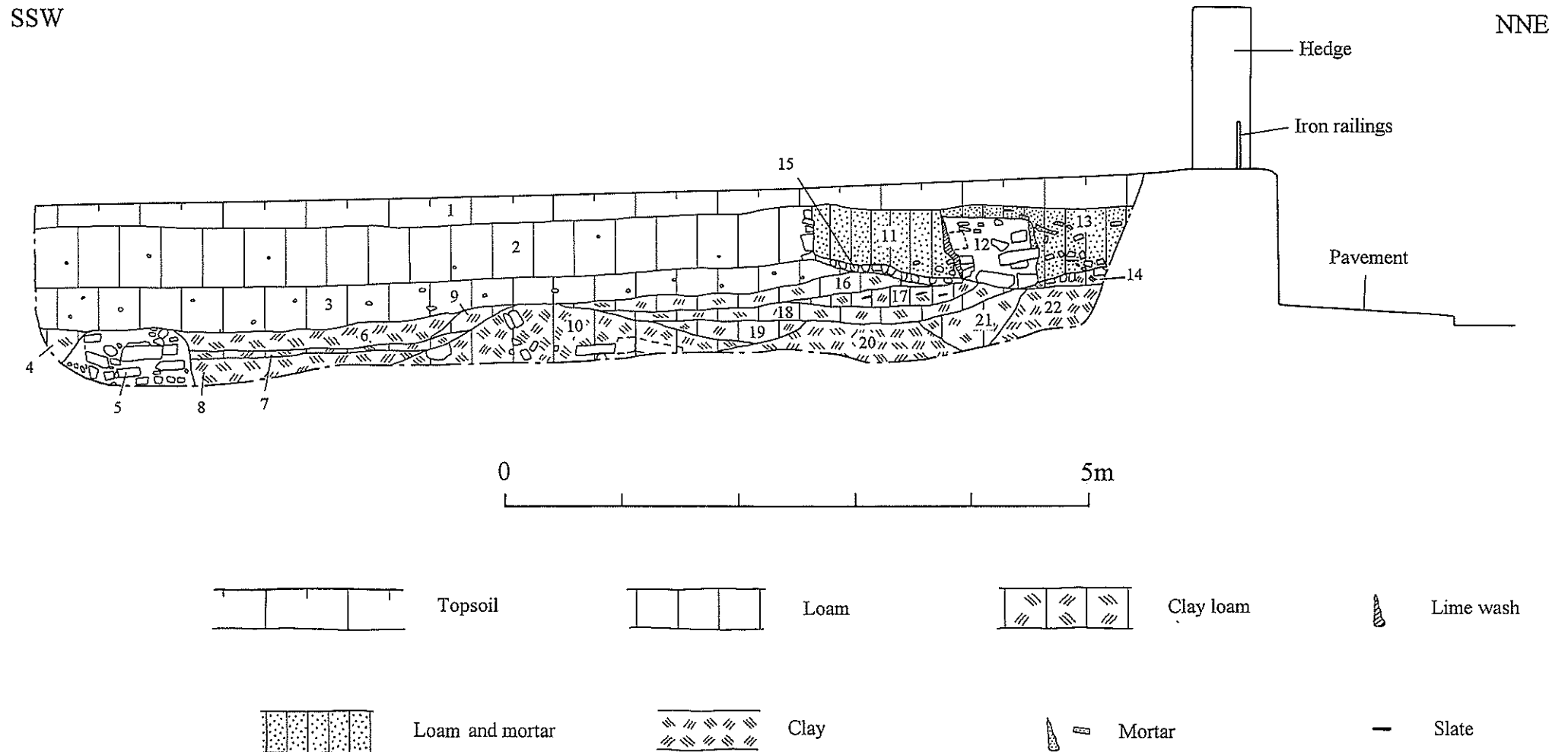


Figure 5.4