

**ARCHAEOLEG CAMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGY
DYFED ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**

**NEWPORT
LOWER ST MARY'S STREET**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF ON THE
THE PROPOSED DWELLING SITE,
AUGUST 1996**

Dyfed PRN 33381

Report prepared for James & Kury
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reduced from 1:50 scale

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during the demolition and clearance of the old school canteen at Lower St. Mary's Street in Newport, Pembrokeshire. The watching brief continued during the groundworks and foundation-footing preparation prior to construction of the new building. The site lies within the former mediaeval town of Newport and any intrusive sub-surface disturbance within this area could have potentially destroyed any archaeological deposits or features associated with contemporary mediaeval occupation and activity.

The observations made demonstrated that the original construction of the now demolished school canteen had been so intrusive that any potential archaeological evidence on the site had been destroyed.

The groundworks revealed only natural deposits of clay and gravel.

1.2 Development proposals and commission

Following consultation with Cambria Archaeology/Dyfed Archaeological Trust's Heritage Management Section, J M Jones Architects and Tony James, of James and Kury building contractors, notified DAT Field Operations Section of the intention to commence building work at the old school canteen site in Lower St. Mary's Street. As a condition attached to the granting of planning consent it was incumbent upon the applicant to take responsibility for a programme of archaeological investigation.

James and Kury sought a cost estimate for the archaeological watching brief from DAT Field Operations which they then accepted by telephone.

The watching brief was undertaken between 19th and 23rd of August 1996.

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 and ordered archive.

The watching brief is 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 archaeological excavation.

The client will be supplied with three copies of an archaeological report of the findings of the watching brief. This report will be fully representative of all the information recovered. 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 involves consultation of the Dyfed Sites and Monuments Record, which is maintained by Cambria Archaeology/Dyfed Archaeological Trust's Curatorial Section, the client will normally advise Cambria Archaeology/Dyfed Archaeological Trust's Field Section of any changes in the proposed works which may be affected by the scheme. The client will also provide the Field 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 Section who will also undertake a full drawn, written and photographic record of any archaeological features which may be disturbed by the scheme, and any artifact or find exposed during the works. Recording will be carried out where necessary and when convenient; it is the Field 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 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 NEWPORT

2.1 Location

The small town of Newport lies on the southern side of the River Nevers estuary on the north coast of Pembrokeshire (SN 05 39) and has its present centre on the A 487 trunk road between Fishguard and Cardigan. The town retains much of its original late 12th century settlement pattern with very little modern redevelopment. During the mediaeval period it was much larger, with burgage plots extending north from the main road down to the estuary. Whilst the land to the north slopes gently down to the estuary, that immediately beyond the town to the south rises increasingly steeply up to Carningli Common.

Geologically the town is underlain by Ordovician sedimentary rock which outcrops frequently through overlying fluvio-glacial drift deposits.

2.2 Background history

The town of Newport is a mediaeval borough of relatively late foundation. It is probable, but no exact date is reliable, that the town and castle were founded *circa* 1197 after the Normans, led by William Fitzmartin, had retaken the Lordship of Cemais from the Welsh (Murphy, 1994, 57). The original castle built by Fitzmartin was sited at the northern edge of the town, where earthwork remains can still be seen to this day, and it defined the seminal nucleus of the original settlement.

The Normans had established their stronghold at Nevers (2km east of Newport), immediately following their conquest of the area, and it seems likely that the settlement at Newport was intended to be its replacement as the *caput* of the lordship.

The castle was re-sited to its present location sometime after 1257 (Browne *et al*, 1992, 7), a change which greatly altered the layout of the town by shifting its nucleus to the south where St. Mary's Church was built and a market established. The town at this time became characterised by two parallel main streets running south to north, St. Mary's Street and Long Street, and the main east-west route of Bridge Street.

The extant town rental of 1434, a transcription of which has been published by B. G. Charles (1951), is the main source of information for the study of the topography of mediaeval Newport, and this has been analysed and synthesised by V. M. Bignall (1991). Generally, her conclusion is that the present street patterns had been established by 1434 and that they were typically characteristic of a mediaeval urban landscape i.e. long narrow plots of land extending back from the street frontages. These "burgage plots", varying in width from 12m to 18m and averaging 60m long, covered the entire area represented by the present town of Newport.

Archaeological evidence unearthed by the Dyfed Archaeological Trust during excavation in 1991 (Murphy, 1994), enabled conclusions to be drawn regarding the nature of the buildings within three of the burgage plots. The excavations took place in Long St. prior to the building of the new school. It was argued that the three excavated dwellings all had clay-built walls, thatched roofs and tiled smoke vents, and were built in the early 13th century. It seems that they became deserted in the last quarter of the 13th century and the land apparently reverted to agricultural use.

It is in the context of this cursory background history of Newport that the watching brief undertaken at the old school canteen site in Lower St. Mary's Street was set.

2.3 Site description

The proposed dwelling site, and subject of this watching brief, is the former old school canteen site (NGR SN 0581 3922) adjacent to Maes-yr-haf on Lower St. Mary's Street.

The canteen stood at a level some 2.00m higher than the road and prior to demolition appeared as if it had been constructed upon a level platform of 'made' ground.

Lower St. Mary's Street slopes gently down to the Nevern estuary, and is the more easterly of the two main north-south orientated streets of mediaeval Newport.

3.0 METHODOLOGIES AND RESULTS

3.1 Groundworks / Excavation

The plot of the canteen site is a near rectangle, measuring some 35.00m E-W by 14.00m N-S. Demolition of the canteen and its foundations was undertaken by machine as was demolition of the red brick retaining wall and steps on the street frontage at the eastern end of the plot.

No hand excavation or clearance was undertaken on the site.

3.2 Observations

After removal of the concrete floor and foundations of the canteen building the revealed ground surface was scraped clean by removing a shallow spit of the exposed yellowish brown sandy clay. The clay was homogeneous containing occasional medium sized rounded pebbles, frequent small angular gravel inclusions and occasional flecks of manganese; this is consistent with the deposit being natural i.e. geological rather than archaeological. Furthermore, the clay displayed all the characteristics of a fluvio-glacial deposit and again this is consistent with the drift geology of the area. The clay deposit was present throughout the whole of the site and had no intrusive features cut into it.

On the southern side of the site, on the boundary with Maes-yr-haf, it appears as if the clay had been upcast to form a sloping bank as part of the landscaping work between the two properties when the ground was levelled to create a platform prior to construction of the canteen. The natural slope of the land had been terraced to accomodate the canteen and in the process all topsoil had been removed, together with a section (unquantifiable) of the yellowish brown clay subsoil.

At the eastern end of the plot, the demolition of the red brick frontage retaining wall and steps revealed a varied number of layers of dumped building rubble and soils to a depth of approximately 1.25m which lay directly upon the yellowish brown clay subsoil. These layers were laid purposely to make up the ground at the front of the building plot during the original construction of the canteen.

Clearance and excavation at the eastern end of the site was deeper to allow for the driveway access to the new building; the yellowish brown clay subsoil was seen to be some 1.00m thick and was overlying a greenish grey shaley gravel set in a clay soil matrix (70% medium/small shattered shale fragments). This layer, again, was characteristic of a fluvio-glacial deposit, and was of indeterminate depth. No archaeologically derived deposits or features were encountered.

4.0 CONCLUSION

During the original construction of the old school canteen, reputedly in 1946, the groundwork preparation entailed the creation of a level platform cut into the natural sloping ground on the site in Lower St. Mary's Street. It was seen that those groundworks destroyed all the original topsoil and intruded into the natural subsoil to some depth. No archaeological deposits or features were encountered during the watching brief, only *in situ* geological strata.

Any archaeological deposits or features which may have been present would have been destroyed during the terracing/platform construction for the old school canteen.

5.0 THE FINDS

All finds encountered were of twentieth century manufacture, or occurred in twentieth century contexts. None were retained.

6.0 ARCHIVE DEPOSITION

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

- A.** Copy of the final report
- B.** Field notebook
- D.** Photographs (monochrome)
- L.** General admin.
- M.** Project correspondence

There is no material for classes **C, E, F, G, H, I, J, K,** and **N.**

7.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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8.0 REFERENCES

8.1 Unpublished Works

Bignall, V.M., 1991, *Newport (Trefdraeth) in West Wales: An Analysis of the Origins, Planning and Development of a Norman New Town* (Undergraduate dissertation, Lampeter University; copy held in Dyfed Sites and Monuments Record).

8.2 Published Works

Browne, D. M., Percival, D., and Parkinson, A. J., 1992, *Newport Castle*.

Charles, B. G., 1951, 'The Records of the Borough of Newport in Pembrokeshire', *The National Library of Wales Journal*, 7.

Murphy, K., 1994, 'Excavations in Three Burgage Plots in the Medieval Town of Newport', *Medieval Archaeology Vol.XXXVIII*.

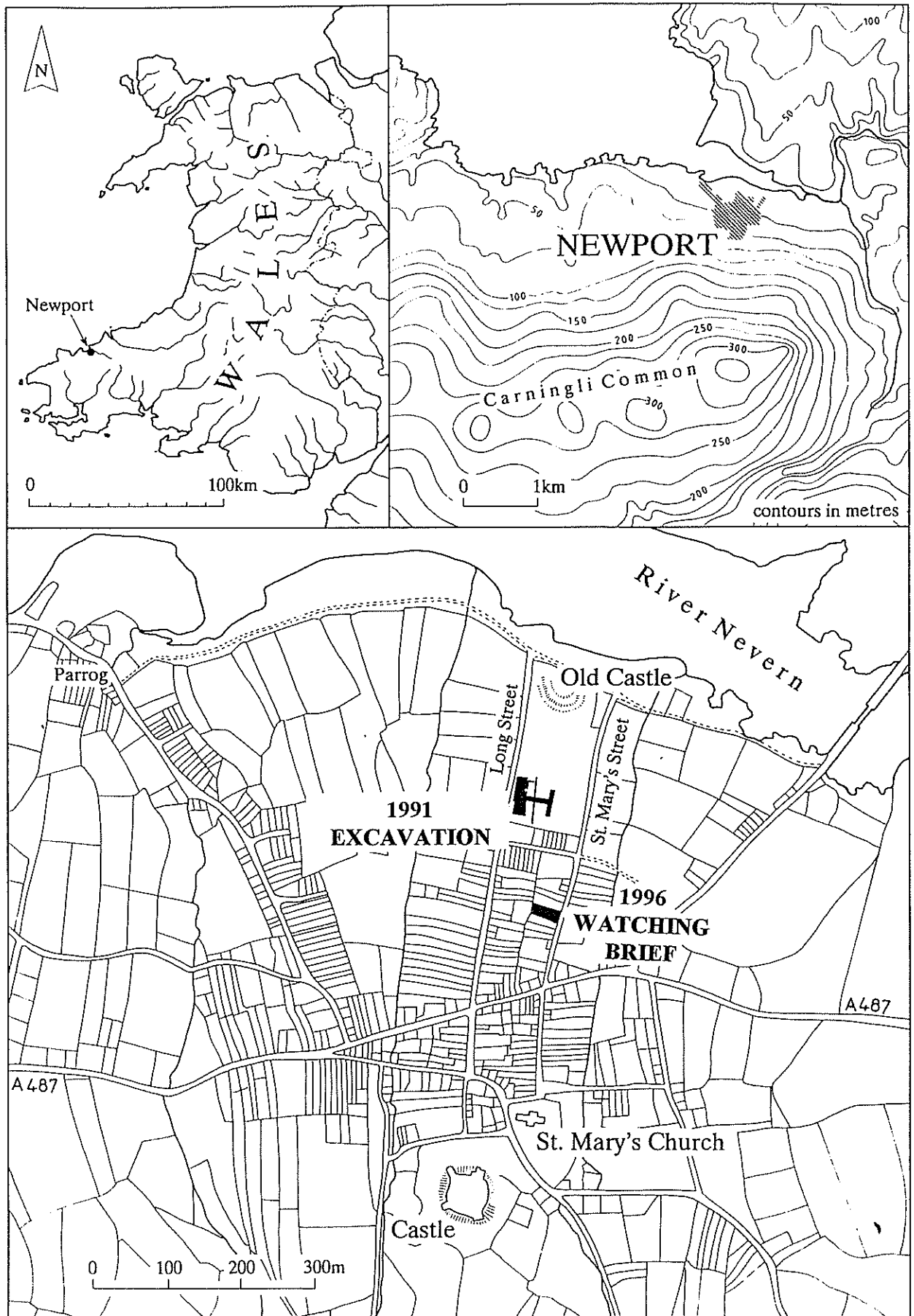


Fig. 1: Location map and area of 1996 watching brief

