

EXTENSION TO FURNACE HOUSE SURGERY, CARMARTHEN 1997

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
Project Record No. PRN 35238
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Commissioned by: Mr Merion Jones
of
Meddygyfa Furnace House
Surgery, Carmarthen

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SUMMARY

A watching brief was undertaken on the excavation for the extension on the east end of the Furnace House Surgery, Carmarthen. This work was carried out over a three day period in July 1997. This watching brief was deemed necessary, as part of the planning consent, as this extension was known to be across an area of the northern, inner part, of the Roman Town defences, and its later spread. A probable part of the defensive bank and the clay spread from it, partly sealing a probably late Roman soil layer was noted. The construction footing trench only went through a late Roman soil layer at one limited point, and no other features or layers were observed below this.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was prepared by P Crane, Project Manager, Archaeoleg **Cambria** Archaeology Field Operations. The fieldwork was also carried out by P Crane. Much of the background history and copies of the previous defence excavation trenches map and the reconstruction drawing of the defences have been provided by Heather James, to whom I am most grateful.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project commission

This project was commissioned by Mr Merion Jones of: Meddygfa Furnace House Surgery, St Andrews Road, Carmarthen.

1.2 Scope of project

The watching brief (a condition on planning application W/00695), was to record all archaeological features possible during the excavations for the building extension. No allowance was made in the brief for archaeological delay to the development brief.

1.3 Report outline

This report describes the physical environment of the site (Section 2) before summarising the watching brief results (Section 3) and the conclusions (Section 4), based on the results of Sections 2 and 3. Supporting data, including detailed records of the watching brief, are given in a series of appendices.

1.4 Abbreviations

Sites recorded on the county Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) will be identified by their Primary Record Number (PRN) and located by their National Grid Reference (NGR). Any new sites discovered during the course of the project will be allocated a new PRN and identified by their NGR.

1.5 Record numbers

Archaeological features and contexts will be referred to using the continuous three-figure numbering system (e.g. 001) employed by Archaeoleg Cambria Archaeology Field Section.

2. THE SITE

2.1 Location

The site was located within Carmarthen at the northern end of St Peter's Church Car Park and immediately to the east of the trenches excavated in 1984 for the new surgery (figure 1). The extension abuts the eastern side of Meddygfa Furnace House Surgery (figure 2) NGR SN41432043. The majority of the extension area was used as a car park, with a small lower path running along the east side of the surgery.

2.2 History

2.2.1 This site lies within the Roman town of *Moridunum*, the civitas capital of the native tribe called the Demetae (Wacher 1978), and is situated on the inside of the northern line of the town defences. This area was also within part of the earlier medieval town, before Carmarthen developed more extensively to the west.

2.2.2 The first reference to the Roman town defences were in 1188 by Giraldus Cambrensis in his *Itinerarium Cambriae*. This records the Roman town as enclosed with brick walls, still standing in part.

2.2.3 It was likely that most of the Roman town wall was robbed out early in the medieval period for the building of the new town defences to the west and for construction in general.

2.2.4 There are a few deeds in the Cartulary of Carmarthen Priory, whose Prior was Lord of Old Carmarthen, covering the area of the Roman town, with references to property along Priory Street and close to St Peter's Church, although there is no mention of boundary ditches or walls. However, descriptions in a record of 1355 probably do refer to Roman town defences (James 1980), therefore it is possible that they survived at least in some parts of the perimeter. Although knowledge of the existence of the Roman town remained, and the outline of the perimeter of the town was preserved in later development (figure 1), the position of the defences was forgotten. However the earliest Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map of 1890 appears to show a bank, which is probably a survival of a portion the Roman southern defences.

2.3 Roman Town defensive circuit

General

2.3.1 The northern line of the defences has been well established both on topographical and archaeological grounds. It was sectioned by six trial trenches at locations behind Francis and Richmond Terraces by Professor G D B Jones in 1968 and 1969 (interim report in *The Carmarthenshire Antiquity* vols. V and VI). This work was further analysed by T James (1980). Professor Jones found evidence for two phases of rampart construction; possible re-construction of the two-phase defensive profiles (figure 3) are due to be published shortly (James forthcoming). However there are apparent anomalies between the number of first phase ditches and the position of the second phase wall at Church Street, on the western defence. These discrepancies may be due to the very narrow trenches excavated, but it is possible that the defensive arrangements of the perimeter may not be the same for the whole circuit.

Northern defence

2.3.2 On the north line of the defences there is still a rise in the levels across the north end of St Peter's Car Park, to the south of the property boundary of Richmond Terrace, before it falls again to the road (see profile 3, figure 1). From excavations in 1969 it was known that the northern end of the car park was occupied by the clay rampart, probably forming the remains of the second phase Roman defence. It was apparent that the rear boundary behind Richmond Terrace was the line for the second phase defence wall, and a trench at the eastern end of Richmond Terrace found the face of the second phase wall surviving to several courses high.

2.3.3 In 1984 six 4m by 1m trenches were excavated on the position of the proposed foundations for the present Furnace House Surgery (PRN 35237). The tail of the clay rampart was recorded trenches A and F. Below the rampart pre-defensive occupation was detected and over the tail of the rampart in trench F there was a layer of cobbles. Trench B was excavated down to pre-Roman soil. A Roman silver coin was found on a layer above. Trenches C and E were only excavated to the top of the Roman deposits; in trench C the top deposit was a layer of cobbling.

2.2.4 Trench D, adjacent to the south side of the wall at the rear of Richmond Terrace, found part of a backfilled Roman defensive ditch. The subsoil located at this point was at 22m OD, whereas the 1969 excavation had recorded a virtually horizontal lower level of approximately 21.20m OD.

2.2.5 These small scale excavations confirmed the existence of a massive rampart and ditch in the northern end of St Peter's Car Park, and little stratified deposits immediately to the rear of the rampart.

Eastern Defence

2.2.6 Topographical evidence together with more recent watching briefs during house construction has indicated the position of the defences on the eastern side of the Roman town. To the north of Priory Street traces lie below garden soil along the rear of the houses on the western side of Oak Lane (figure 1). Possibly the gateway on this side of the town lies adjacent to numbers 100 and 101 on Priory Street.

2.2.7 The southern quarter of the eastern line was the only remaining undeveloped stretch, and is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Southern Defence

2.2.8 Although this section is not perfectly understood there appear to be Roman buildings on part of the line prior to the defences being built. The topography indicates that it is probable that the defences ran along the steep edge of the terrace above the Tywi flood plain. This slope was cut back and steepened, but only slightly, to facilitate the Great Western Railway below. It is likely that the houses built along the Parade and Esplanade during the eighteenth and nineteenth century involved the removal of any remaining defences on this side.

Western Defence

2.2.9 The location of the first and second phase Roman town defences were established by excavation in 1978. The bank and wall would have been on the eastern side of Parade Road. The outer second phase ditch was not found in investigations in 1982 suggesting that, as expected, it probably lies below Parade Road.

2.2.10 Observations made in 1976 (PRN 219), when six 2m deep foundation pits were dug for an extension on the western side of the former Furnace House Surgery, west of the County Library, revealed that Roman levels had been removed or heavily disturbed there.

2.2.11 Further north, observations made in 1973 at the vacant plot number 25 Little Water Street found no indication of a ditch, with the probability that the defensive ditch lay below the road. In 1976 a 6m by 2m deep trench was excavated at the rear of 28 Little Water Street. At the eastern end of this trench a 'V' profile ditch cut was revealed. This ditch was probably the outermost of the phase one ditches.

2.2.12 It is probable that the back lane on the western side of nos. 1 to 6 St Andrew's Road marks the course of the second phase wall, with the ground level falling off towards the back yards and gardens of nos. 2 to 9 Elliston Terrace and nos. 40 to 46 Francis Terrace.

3. SUMMARY OF WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

3.1 The watching brief took place over three days, from Sunday 20 July to Tuesday 22 July 1997. During this time the area for the surgery extension and approximately 1m around it was reduced by a JCB sized excavator by about 900mm below the car park surface. Part of the eastern section of this area was drawn. After the area had been reduced footing trenches were excavated down approximately a further 500mm on the line of the walls to be constructed.

3.2 The earliest material encountered was a layer of brown soil (context 121) with a lot of charcoal flecks and occasional tile fragments. This layer was only seen in part of the lower footing trenches, and was probably a late Roman or post-Roman soil. There were no indications of any structures or cuts within this.

3.3 Above the brown soil layer (121) there was a layer of very light brown silty clay, probably the same as that seen further to the north end of the site (106). This layer was probably the clay spread of the later Roman rampart and at the southern end had an area of large cobbles (118) in its upper part. These cobbles may be part of the same feature as those recorded in the 1984 excavation.

3.4 Towards the eastern edge of the cobbles (118) there was a small patch of pebbles above a silty clay. These pebbles possibly butted the cobbles and could have been a repair.

3.5 Above the cobbles, the patch of pebbles and the underlying clay spread (106 and 121), there was a layer of very light to mid brown clay loam (113); this was initially confused with the clay rampart spread but did appear to be separate and later in date. However it could have been derived from later spreading of the rampart material.

3.6 The upper very light clay layer (113) was cut by a possible post hole (114), which was seen in the section on the western side of the area. This post hole contained packing (115), which contained a post pipe (116), which was filled (117) by a mid grey slightly clay loam. This fill, significantly, contained post medieval or modern china.

3.7 Above the fill (117) of the post hole (114) there was a layer of what appeared to be former garden soil (105), which contained modern material.

3.8 The garden soil was below a layer of hard core (104) for the current car park surface (103) above. The hard core layer (104) had an industrial smell and was very black in parts, possibly derived from furnace works.

3.9 The car park had been cut by a trench (102) for electric cable for car park lighting (fill 101). The fill of this trench appeared to have been cut by a later trench (108) for another electricity cable within a plastic tubing (all fill 107).

3.10 The very modern relationship between the late electricity trench (107) and the revetment wall (111) of the car park and on the pre-extended surgery east side was not established.

3.11 The revetment wall was butted by the car park drain (110), made of pre-formed concrete sections. This appeared to be earlier than the car park surface (103) although it was considered more likely to be later.

3.12 The car park surface (103) was cut by holes for a galvanised barrier. Between the revetment wall (111) and the pre-extended surgery east end, there was a sunken path with flagstone capping above sand. Neither the barrier nor the path were separately numbered.

4. Discussion

4.1 Nothing of archaeological significance, of Roman or Medieval date, was disturbed during the excavations for the surgery extension. The only material of any interest was the spread of the clay bank and cobbling which extended beyond the southern limit of the site. These layers appeared to cover a late layer of Roman or post-Roman soil. This soil may represent the period when the area was no longer functioning as a town, although the defences probably still remained.

4.2 If excavation had continued, deeper significant archaeology of the Roman period could have been encountered.

4.3 Although little of significance was noted on this part of the circuit of the defences, it must be considered that this was not necessarily a depiction of the history of the perimeter as a whole. No firm evidence, as yet, has been found for gateways or towers.

4.4 The integrity and potential of archaeological information about the defences is being lost by continuing small scale development. Little is known about them and any dates for phases are poor. At some time in the future there will need to be a concerted approach on the Roman defences of Carmarthen, to establish layout and chronology; this however will be beyond the scope of watching briefs and very narrow trenches.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 This watching brief was an adequate response to this development. However there is a need for wider overall archaeological consideration of the Roman defences of Carmarthen as a whole, not just in response to piecemeal development.

APPENDIX ONE: DETAILED RECORDS OF WATCHING BRIEF

Record numbers used for PRN 35238

Context	101-121
Photo	201-207
Drawing	251

APPENDIX TWO: CATALOGUE OF WATCHING BRIEF ARCHIVE

The project archive has been indexed and catalogued according to National Monument Record (NMR) categories and contains the following:

- A. Copy of final report.
- B. Site records, including context record sheets and site notebook.
- C. Drawing catalogue and site drawings.
- D. Site photographs - catalogue, colour slide and B/W contact sheets.
- G. List of references, including primary and secondary sources.
- I. Archive report and draft copies of final report.
- J. Publication drawings.
- M. Miscellaneous correspondence.

There is no material in categories E, F, H, K, L and N.

The archive is currently held by Archaeoleg Cambria Archaeology Field Operations, Llandeilo, Dyfed as project number 35238. The archive will remain in the SMR of the above, for the foreseeable future.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Salway P 1982 Roman Britain

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PRN 35238
Site Location _____

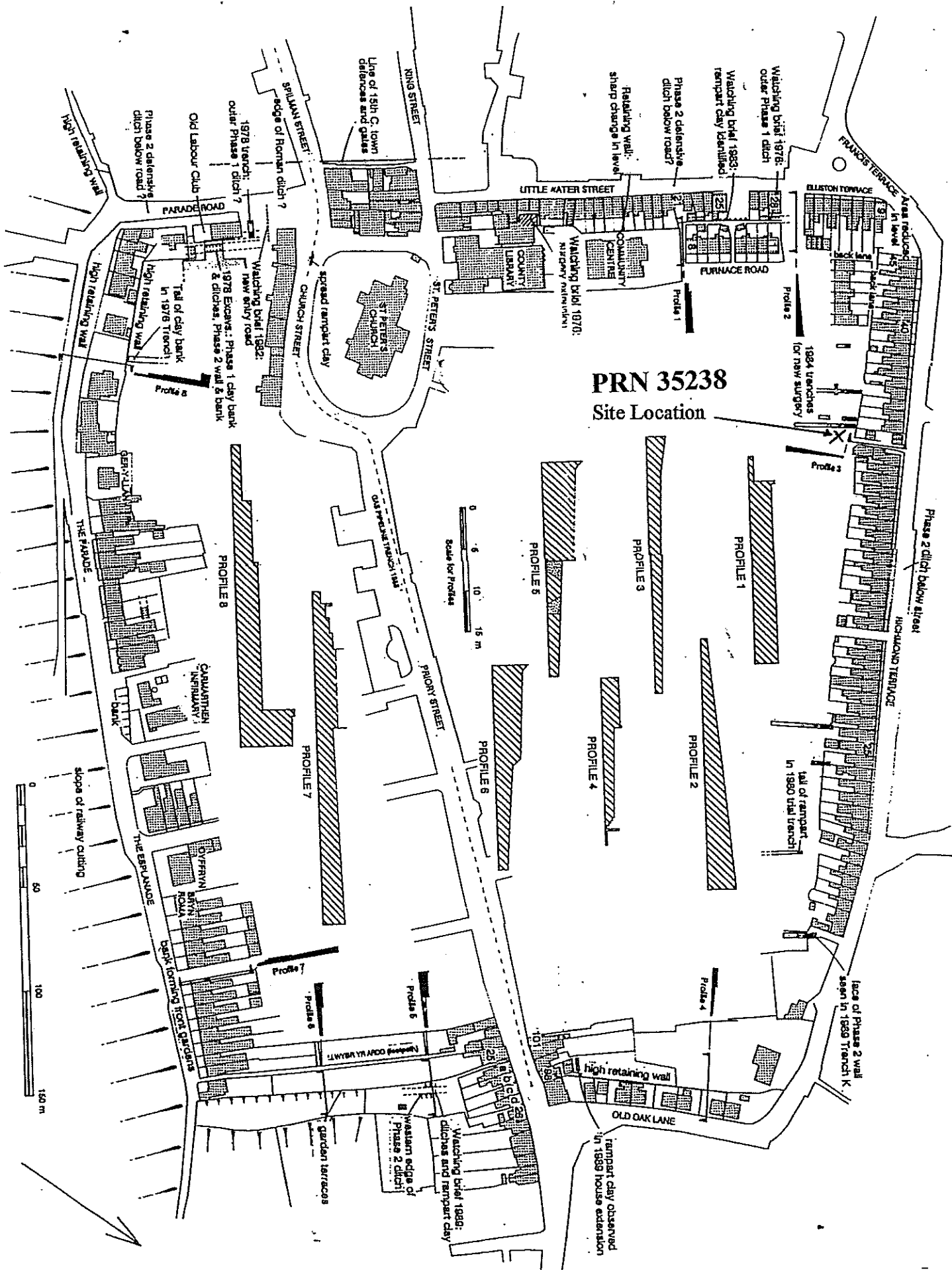


Figure 1: Outline map of Carmarthen showing the location of excavation trenches, watching briefs on the line of the Roman Town defences, with profiles of present day surface levels across the line of the

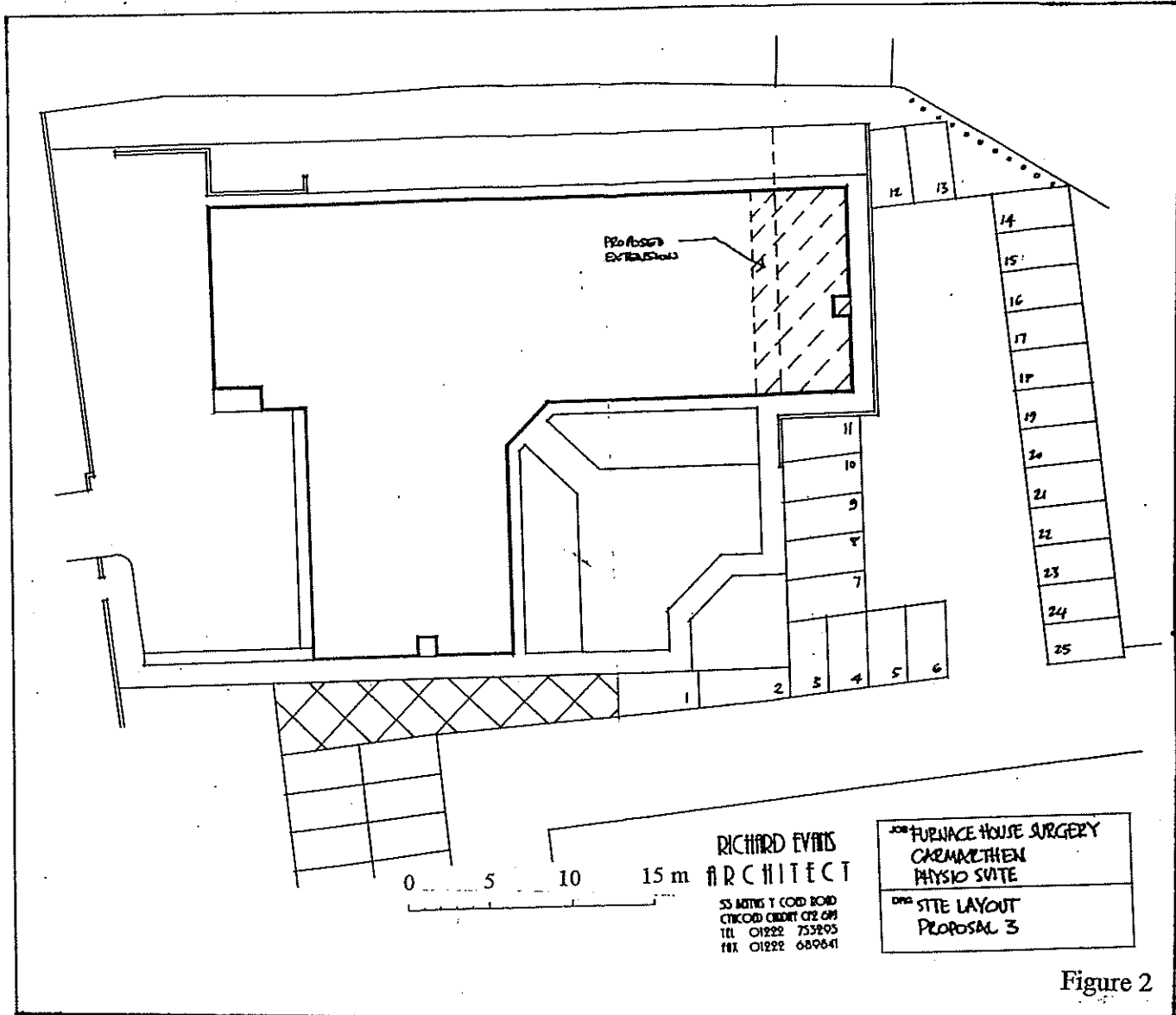


Figure 2

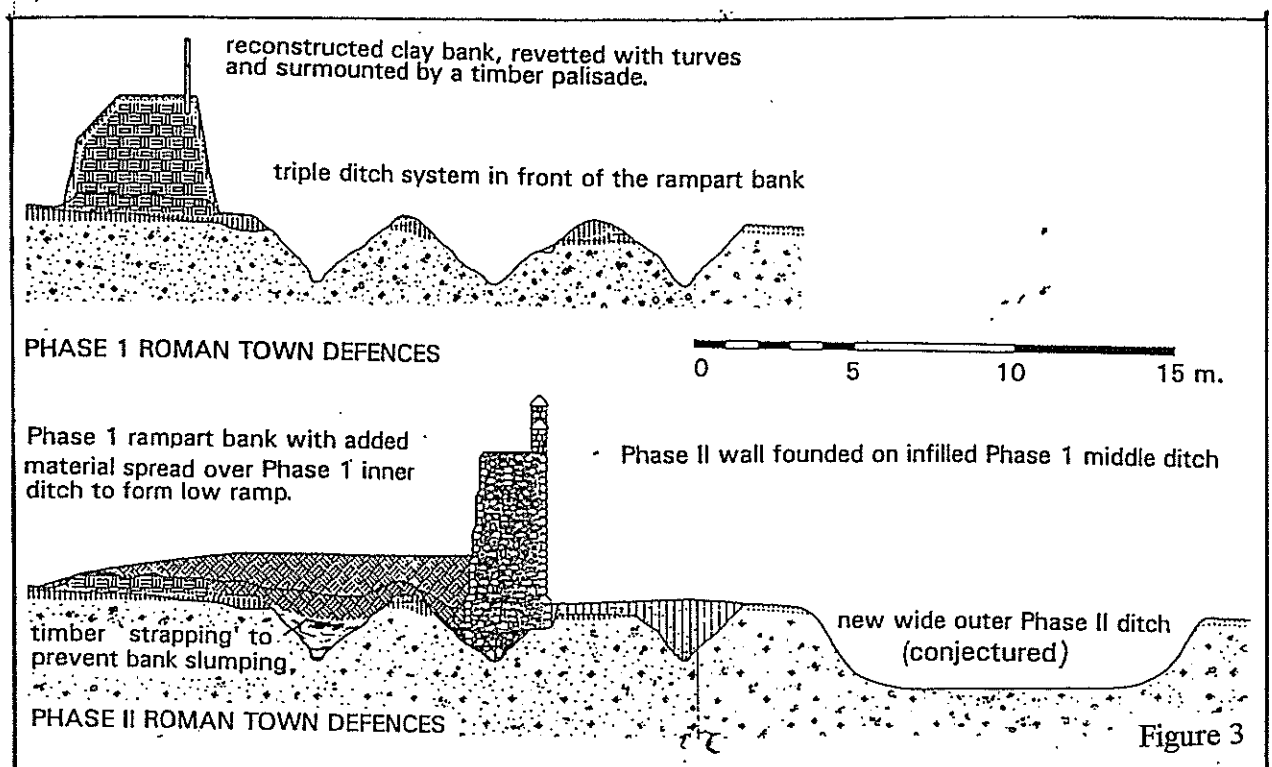


Figure 3