

ARCHAEOLEG CAMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGY

PRIORY STREET, CARMARTHEN

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT THE PROPOSED LIDL FOOD STORE, JUNE 1999

Project Record No. 37673

Report prepared for Grove Partnership/Lidl UK Properties GmbH
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**PROPOSED LIDL FOOD STORE,
PRIORY STREET,
CARMARTHEN**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
June 1999

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by *Archaeoleg CAMBRIA Archaeology* Field Operations during a geotechnical site investigation for the proposed Lidl Store, Priory Street, Carmarthen. The investigation consisted of 6 machine-dug test pits averaging 1m x 2.5m, and 3m in depth.

The site lies in the south-west quarter of the area occupied by the Roman town of *Moridunum*, within which the presence of archaeological deposits has been well demonstrated by extensive archaeological work during the past three decades including excavation, archaeological evaluation and watching briefs, geophysical survey and aerial photography, much of this work having been undertaken by *Archaeoleg CAMBRIA Archaeology*. The archaeological importance of the surrounding archaeology is underlined by the protection afforded to much of it as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Carm 234). The Lidl site lies outside the scheduled area; nevertheless its value as an archaeological resource cannot be over emphasised.

Significant archaeological deposits were present in all but one of the test pits, at an average depth of 0.7m towards the north of the site and 1.3m towards the south, and with an average thickness of 0.5m. In all but one of the test pits where archaeology occurred, it included deposits of Roman character, which are of importance at a national level. It is crucial, therefore, that the development makes the preservation of the deposits a priority.

1.2 DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS AND BRIEF

Lidl UK Properties GmbH, with the Grove Partnership as the main consultant, wish to develop the site as retail premises and a car park. The Earth Science Partnership (ESP), Chartered Engineers and Environmental Scientists were accordingly instructed to undertake a desk study of the site in order to obtain geotechnical and other data regarding the nature and thickness of the underlying strata as a preliminary assessment for the proposed development.

The desk study drew attention to the archaeological importance of the site and among its recommendations was the excavation of a series of test pits within the proposed development area in order to determine the presence and significance of any archaeological deposits and the likely impact of the development on the archaeology. It was also recommended that the pits be extended in depth so that a geotechnical assessment could also be undertaken.

Test pit excavation and the geotechnical assessment were undertaken by Structural Soils Ltd on 2 June 1999, and *Archaeoleg CAMBRIA Archaeology* were instructed by the Grove Partnership to undertake an archaeological watching brief on the excavation, and to report the findings.

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 *Archaeoleg CAMBRIA Archaeology* Heritage Management Section, the client will normally advise *Archaeoleg CAMBRIA Archaeology* Field Operations Section of any changes in the proposed works which may be affected by the scheme. The client will normally 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 archaeological 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 THE SITE

2.1 SITE LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

The proposed Lidl store lies at NGR SN 4165 2025, on Priory Street, towards the east of the present town of Carmarthen and just east of St Peter's Church. It occupies the south-west quarter of the former Roman Town of *Moridunum*, the eastern limit of which lies beneath St Peter's Church. The proposed development site covers an area of approximately 0.7 ha and now contains buildings, surfaces and below-ground structures relating to its later 20th century use as a garage, workshops and car showroom. It occupies a gentle downhill slope from north to south, averaging 20m above sea level. The natural slope is steeper and terminates as a steep glacial terrace running south-west to north-east above the River Tywi, which defined the southern limit of the Roman town and was followed by the line of its defences (and now by the streets 'The Parade' and 'The Esplanade'). The fluvio-glacial gravels overlie Ordovician shales and are, in areas beyond the environs of the site, themselves overlain by boulder clays.

The desk study by the Earth Science Partnership (ESP) contains geotechnical and other data relating to the geomorphology, hydrogeology etc of the site and the engineering implications of the proposed development, which will be supplemented by data obtained by Structural Soil Ltd from the test pits. It is not intended to repeat such information within this report, which is concerned primarily with the archaeology within the development area.

Roman deposits of national significance survive throughout the area of the former Roman town, with a normally good state of preservation, and a substantial portion of the open ground to the north of Priory Street is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM Carm 234) emphasising the archaeological importance of the Roman deposits as a whole. In addition, medieval and later deposits are also present.

2.2 SITE HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION (SEE FIGS. 1 & 2)

Carmarthen is the site of the Roman settlement of *Moridunum*. Long thought to have represented just a fort, *Moridunum* has been demonstrated through excavation by G. D. B. Jones in the 1960s, and more importantly by a long sequence of excavations and watching briefs performed by Archaeoleg CAMBRIA Archaeology/Dyfed Archaeological Trust since 1978, to have been a town. Accounts of the Trust's work (and summaries of the earlier excavations) are to be found in James, 1980, and James, 1992. Below is a very short précis based on these two sources.

Roman occupation began with the construction of a fort in the King Street/Spilman Street area which was occupied AD 75-c.AD 100. A town was formally laid out by c.AD 110. It was defended by a clay rampart in the late 2nd-3rd century AD, supplemented by a masonry wall in the later 3rd-4th century AD. The course of the Roman defences is preserved in the lines of Little Water Street, Richmond Terrace, Old Oak Lane, the footpath known as Llwybr-yr-ardd, The Esplanade, The Parade, and Parade Road (fig. 2). At least two well metalled streets ran through the defended area from east to west, the southern roughly on the line of Priory Street. A large area in the north-east quarter of the defended area, excavated by Dyfed Archaeological Trust 1980-84, revealed a sequence of timber buildings, a temple, evidence for ironworking, and two metalled roads, including a section of the northern east-west road that ran the length of the town. Urban life in the Roman tradition had collapsed by the 5th century AD, but some form of occupation may have persisted at Carmarthen.

Fig. 1. Map of Carmarthen showing the extent of the Roman fort and town, and the location and dates of excavations

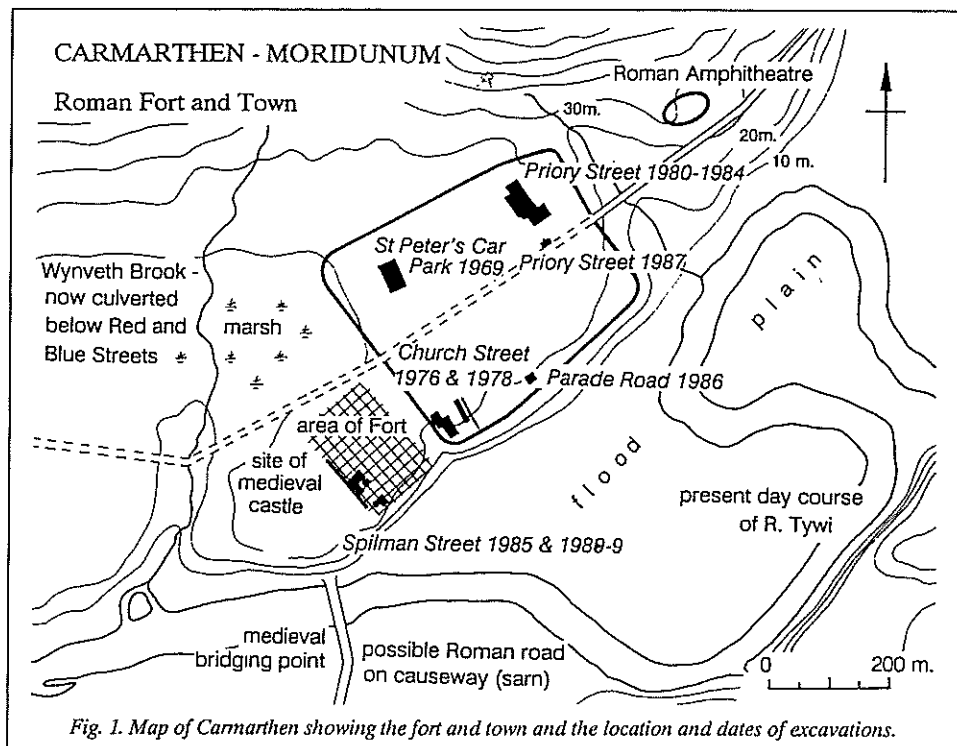
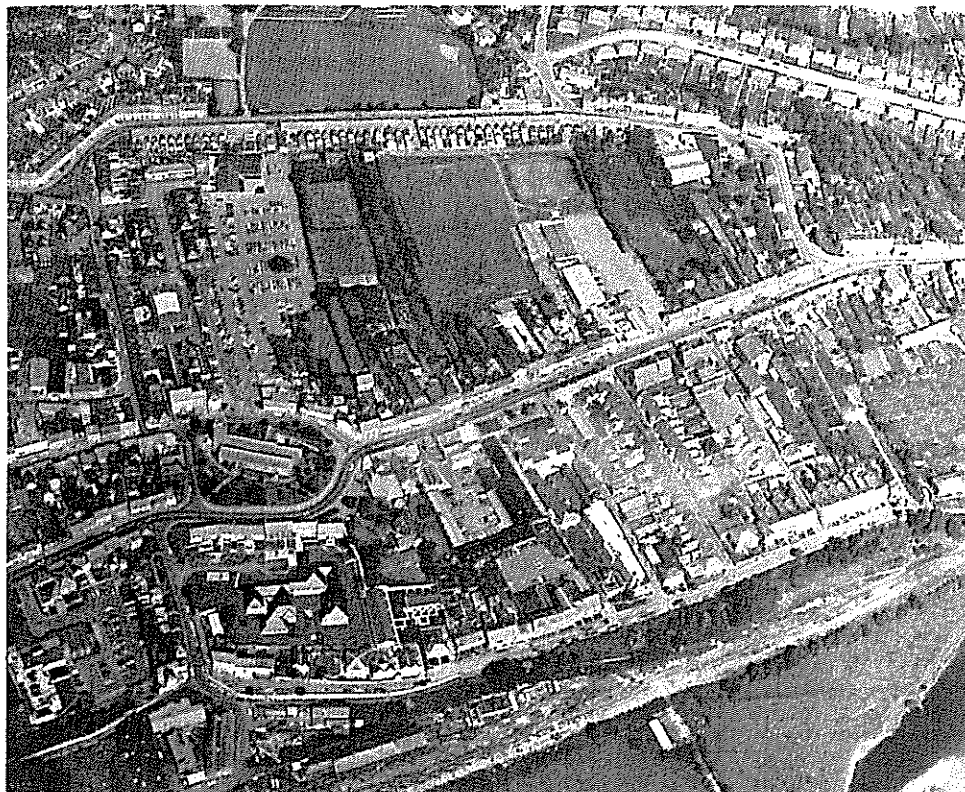


Fig. 2 Carmarthen: the Roman town site looking NNW in 1985



The area of the Roman town was, during the medieval period, primarily given over to agricultural use but archaeological excavation has demonstrated that only the uppermost Roman levels have been subject to plough damage. The present Priory Street was established as a routeway during this period, during which development, in the form of urban plots, occurred around St Peters Church to the west, and around the site of the priory to the east at the junction of Priory Street and Old Oak Lane.

However, the establishment of continuous development along both sides of Priory Street did not occur until after c.1600 and even then was piecemeal, and was to remain so until the later 19th century; the Golden Grove map of 1786, and the John Wood map of 1834 (Carmarthenshire Record Office) both show the central section of the south side of the street as empty of buildings. The proposed development area and its immediate environs are depicted as being occupied by buildings on the Speed map of c.1610 and in all later maps, in long, narrow plots - that may be medieval in origin - extending southwards towards The Parade. However, none of the present structures are this early; the buildings immediately west are later 19th century when the former hospital to the east was established (before 1891) and the garage buildings occupying the development site itself were constructed until after 1948, across the site of four former properties and their plots. The area subject to the recent test-pitting represents the western three of these plots.

3.0 METHODOLOGIES AND RESULTS

3.1. DESCRIPTION OF GROUNDWORKS (FIG. 3)

Six test-pits, TP 1 - 6, were machine-excavated averaging 1m x 2.5m, and 3m in depth (Fig. 3). Archaeological deposits were present in all but one, TP2, at an average depth of 0.70m towards the north of the site and 1.30m towards the south, and with an average thickness of 0.50m.

The test pits were first excavated to a depth of 1.00m and were recorded at this level, their sections being hand-cleaned and drawn at 1:20 scale to show the archaeological deposits and their relationship with overlying and underlying material. They were subsequently fully excavated, and the additional information was added to the drawings, but it was not possible to record this additional information in the same detail as in the uppermost 1.00m. Deposits at this lower level are accordingly depicted with dotted lines in Figs. 4-9 (Appendix I).

Each archaeological deposit or feature has been given a unique context number (eg. 003, 007) in accordance with *Archaeoleg CAMBRIA Archaeology's* Field Recording Manual.

3.2. OBSERVATIONS (FIGS. 4-9)

In all but one (TP5) of the test pits where significant archaeology occurred, it included deposits of Roman character. Particularly important were those within TP1 where burnt clay and charcoal deposits of marked Roman character lay between 0.70m and 2.10m from the surface, containing a Roman redware sherd and fragments of *tegula* (Roman tile), suggesting that a clay-walled building had been burnt *in situ* possibly filling a cut to the west of the test pit.

TP3 featured possible Roman deposits at a depth of 1.15 - 1.60m, cut by a deep post-medieval feature - a well?. TP4 and TP6 both featured deposits which could not be fully characterised and of unknown date; however in both test pits it appears that plough-damaged Roman deposits may be represented. They occurred between 1.70m and 2.20m in TP4, and between 1.35m and 1.65m in TP6. In TP5 the section was largely occupied by modern make-up but a possible deposit or natural soil occurred between 2.20m and 2.30m from the surface.

A detailed description of the test pit sections and a discussion of the individual deposits is included as Appendix I of this report.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

Archaeological deposits were present in all but one of the six test pits, TP2, at an average depth of 0.70m towards the north of the site (TP1) and 1.30m towards the south (TP5 and TP6), and with an average thickness of 0.50m.

The deposits are of significance at a national level, forming part of a much wider archaeological resource relating to the Roman town of *Moridunum* and its medieval successor. The potential for survival this wider resource has been demonstrated by a variety of archaeological projects undertaken during the past three decades, and its importance is underlined by the protection afforded to much of it as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Carm 234).

The development of the site should accordingly allow for the preservation of the resource. It is understood from the development plans that the northern area of the site, within which the significant deposits are shallowest (0.70m in depth in TP1), will be given over as car parking, thereby minimising the archaeological impact; it should be noted that the area occupied by TP2 in the north-eastern corner of the site has already been significantly damaged by former fuel tank excavations and an unknown percentage of this corner may be archaeologically sterile.

It is further understood that the remainder of the site will be made level with this area through deposition, raising ground levels; as this is the area within which significant deposits currently lie at a minimum depth of 1.20m it should be possible within the design to minimise intrusion and disturbance of deposits by building foundations. However, it must be stressed that the importance of preserving the deposits should be recognised by all aspects of the development, including preliminary groundworks, drainage, etc.; with regard to the latter, the possible archaeological sterility of the north-east corner of the site assumes significance.

5.0 THE FINDS

Although a small number of finds of Roman, and later date, were recovered, it was not possible within the limitations of the project to fully process and analyse them. The finds were retained and are held at the offices of *Archaeoleg CAMBRIA Archaeology* at Llandeilo, but is unlikely that funding will be released for any processing. They include roofing tile (*tegulae*) and slate, and Roman redware and medieval -post-medieval gravel-tempered ware sherds.

6.0 ARCHIVE DEPOSITION

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

- A. Copy of the final report and disk
- B. Field notes
- C. Copies of planning specifications
- G. List of references
- J. Final drawings
- L. General administrative notes
- M. Project correspondence

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

7.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The fieldwork and reporting were undertaken by Neil Ludlow, of *Archaeoleg CAMBRIA Archaeology*. Acknowledgements to Mark Williams of Structural Soils Ltd for his co-operation during the watching brief, and to Steve Gibbins of Lidl UK Properties GmbH.

8.0 REFERENCES

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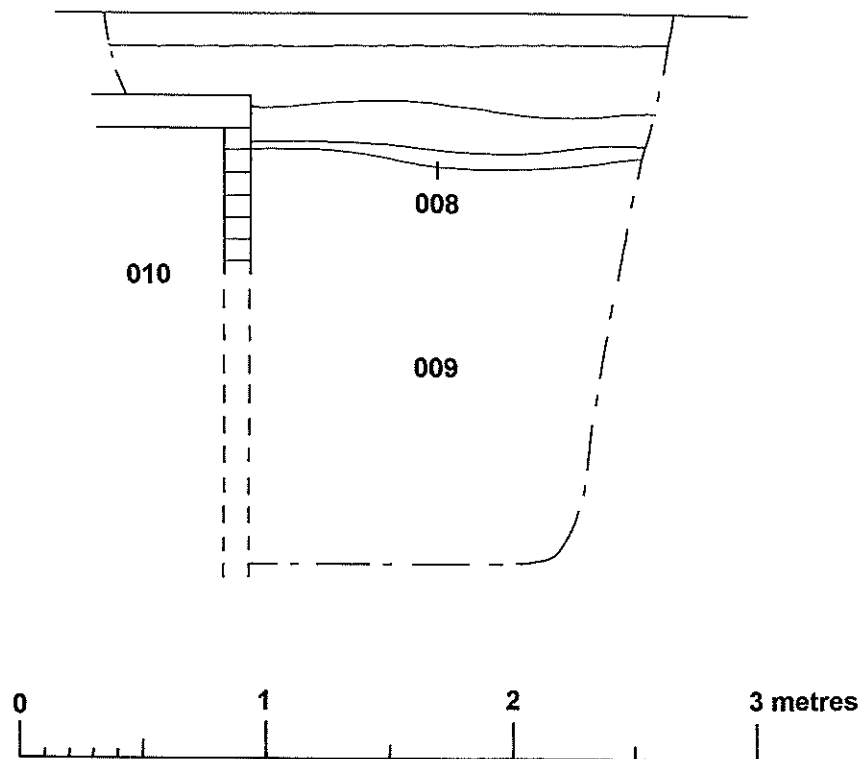
The natural soil - occurred at a depth of 1.30m at the east end of the test pit and 2.10m at the west end. It comprised loose, yellow-brown fluvio-glacial gravels with no visible buried soil or colluvium.

Discussion - Contexts 004 - 007, while exhibiting little dating evidence, are sufficiently Roman in character to be attributed to the period, particularly taking into consideration the level at which they lie and their location within the Roman town. They slump down towards the west which may mark the eastern edge of a cut feature, but their steep east slope may be due to the manner of their deposition rather than an indication that they have been cut by a later feature; the degree of heat-reddening, and the charcoal layer, suggest that the deposits may relate to a clay-walled building that was burnt *in situ* forming a mound of material. Context 003 appeared to overlie them throughout, but 002 above it was similarly confined to the west half of the trench, so this relationship is not fully conclusive particularly when given the markedly late (post-medieval?) character of 003.

Test Pit 2

TP2 measured 2.30m N-S and 1.00m E-W, and was excavated to a depth of 2.20m. The east section was recorded. No archaeological deposits were encountered.

The uppermost 0.50m of the trench section comprised a 20th century, reinforced concrete surface and two later of make-up.



Context 008 - A 20th century tarmac surface occurred at a depth of 0.50m, laid around fuel tank 010.

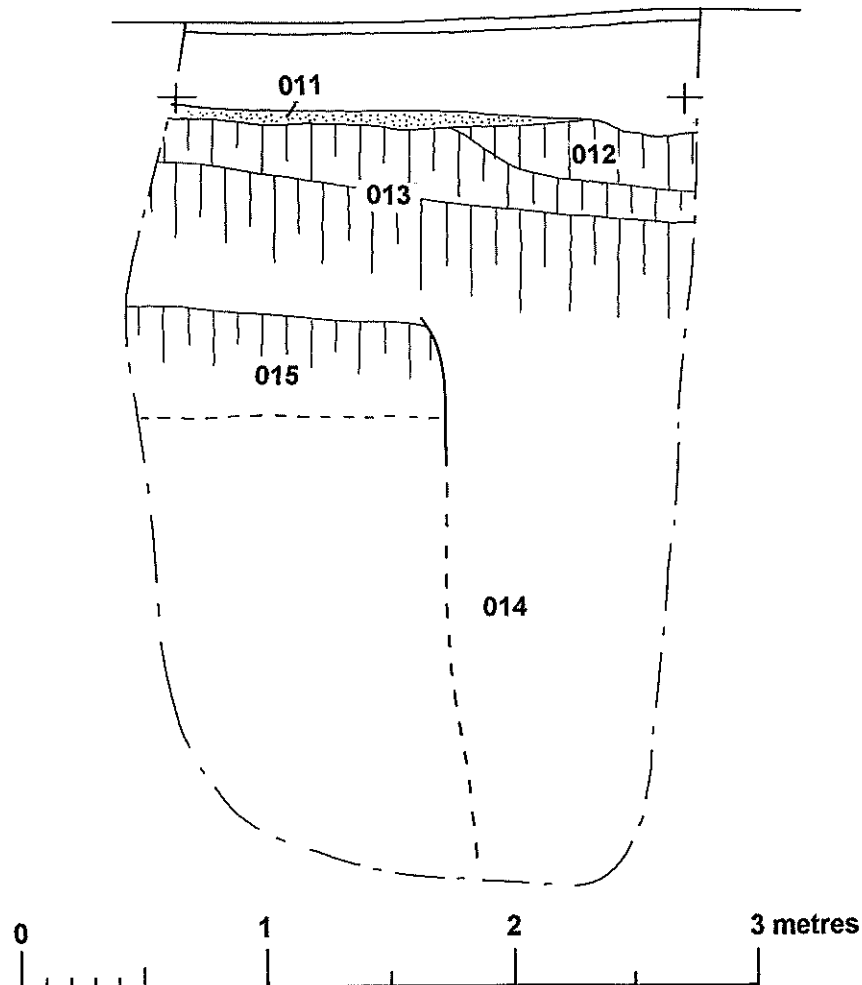
Context 009- Dark grey-brown silty loam containing much stone and brick, extending to the test pit bottom. Late 20th century, laid around fuel tank 010 and forming make-up for tarmac 008.

Context 010 - A brick-built chamber, with a concrete cap at a depth of 0.30m and descending to the bottom of the test pit, occupied the north quarter of the section extending beyond it to the north. It represents a late 20th century disused fuel tank associated with tarmac surface 008.

Test Pit 3

TP3 measured 1.00m N-S and 2.20m E-W, and was excavated to a depth of 3.45m. The south section was recorded. Significant archaeological deposits occurred at a depth of 1.20m and were 0.40m thick.

The uppermost 0.45m of the trench section comprised a 20th century tarmac surface and 0.40m of make-up.



Context 011 - Mortar layer with lime fragments and much oyster shell, 0.08m thick. Contained a sherd of Dyfed gravel-tempered ware from the early 18th century, residual.

Context 012 - Very dark greyish-brown silty clay loam, occupying a depression (or cut?), m deep, in the west half of the section. Contained 19th century brick fragments and oyster shell.

Context 013 - Two distinct layers of imported very dark brown/black loam 'topsoil', 0.75m thick, both containing impurities such as animal bone and small stones, while the lower layer contained a sherd of Dyfed gravel-tempered ware from the early 18th century.

Context 014 - Deep, vertical-sided cut feature occupying the western half of the section and extending beyond it, occurring at a depth of 1.20m and descending to the bottom of the pit. Filled by material very similar to 013.

Context 015 - A 0.40m thickness of deposit(s), confined to the east half of the section (removed by 014 in the west half). It was not possible to clean the section at this depth and no structure was visible within the deposit(s), which generally comprised greyish yellow-brown clay loams and which may feature stratification into a number of contexts but appeared to be disturbed in the upper levels. The deposit(s) contained fragments of tegula and a phyllite roofing slate with a nail-hole.

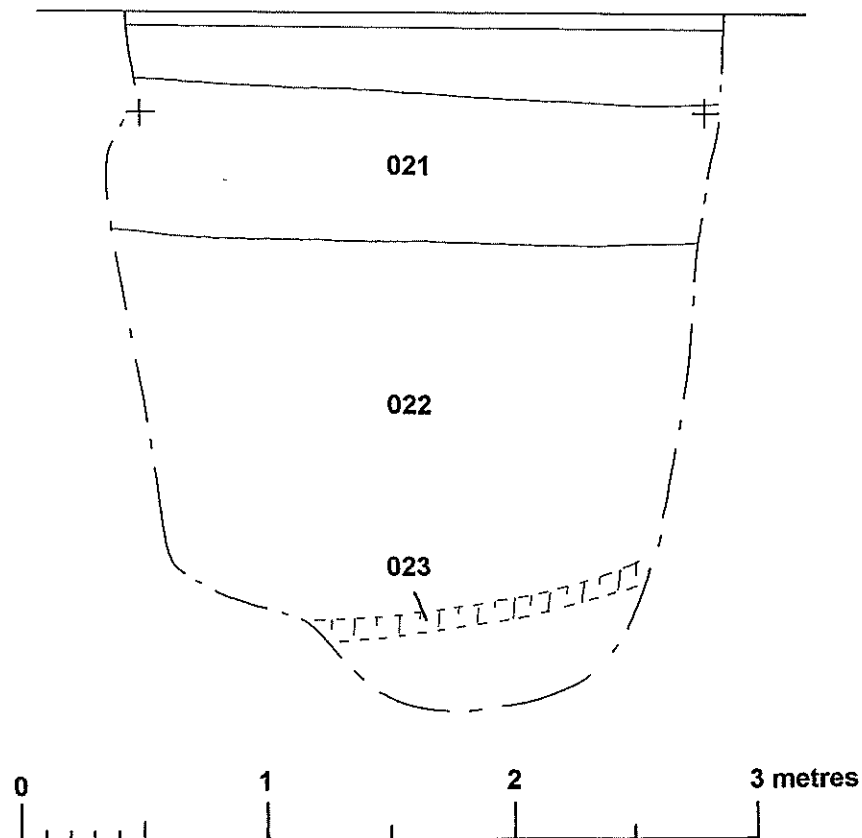
The natural soil - occurred at a depth of 1.60m. It comprised loose, yellow-brown fluvio-glacial gravels with no visible buried soil or colluvium.

Discussion - Context 015 exhibited Roman roofing material but the phyllite slate may equally be medieval. The deposit could not be fully characterised and the upper levels, at least, appeared to have been disturbed (plough damaged?), but at the level that it occupied, may be at least partly Roman. The deep feature 014 is probably a well that may have persisted into the late 18th - 19th century when 013 was imported as a garden soil; 013 is less pure than the corresponding topsoil (016) in TP4 but a property boundary is depicted between the two on historic maps, and the difference in quality is probably related to the difference in ownership.

Test Pit 5

TP5 measured 2.30m N-S and 1.00m E-W, and was excavated to a depth of 2.80m. The east section was recorded. Possible archaeological deposits occurred at a depth of 2.20m and were 0.10m thick.

The uppermost 0.35m of the trench section comprised a 20th century tarmac surface and 0.30m of make-up.



Context 021 - A further 20th brick and mortar make-up layer, 0.60m thick.

Context 022 - Very dark brown silty loam containing much stone and brick, extending to the test pit bottom. Late 20th century.

Context 023 - A 0.10m thick deposit rising from north to south. It was not possible to clean the section at this depth and the deposit could not be fully characterised; it comprised a yellow-brown clay loam which may be a buried soil or an occupation layer.

The natural soil - occurred at a depth of 2.30m. It comprised loose, yellow-brown fluvio-glacial gravels.