

CARMARTHEN CASTLE PHASE 3 INTERIM REPORT ON WORK UP TO OCTOBER 2001



Report No. 2001/53

Report Prepared for: TACP



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CAMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGY

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OCTOBER 2001

CARMARTHEN CASTLE PHASE 3
INTERIM REPORT ON WORK UP TO OCTOBER 2001

By

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SUMMARY

This report is an interim account of archaeological works undertaken between February and October 2001 at Carmarthen Castle. A watching brief was undertaken during demolition of modern structures and de-rendering of part of the castle gatehouse south tower. Nothing of significance was discovered except for brick constructed vaults that were accidentally broken into by machinery. Three evaluation trenches were excavated to establish the line of the curtain wall and the site of a putative tower between the gatehouse and the southwest tower. No evidence of these was found, but the probable edge of the castle ditch was located. A further watching brief was undertaken on the excavation within the gatehouse towers. It appears that both towers were infilled with mortar and rubble, possibly to withstand cannon fire, in the English Civil War. Part of the north tower infill was cut through at a later date. Evaluation excavation was undertaken in the gatehouse passageway. This was very disturbed by modern service trenches, but the sidewalls indicate the possibility that drawbridge counterbalance pit may exist. Finally a survey and photographic record have been made of the gatehouse. Drawings of this last piece of work are currently in production.

INTRODUCTION

TACP of Wrexham who are overseeing the third phase of the project to enhance the remains of Carmarthen Castle commissioned Cambria Archaeology Field Operations to undertake the archaeological component of the project. The client is Carmarthenshire County Council, with the Heritage Lottery Fund providing the major part of the finance, and with additional funding from Cadw and Carmarthenshire County Council. Within this phase there are a number of associated but separate pieces of work, the purpose of these being to reveal more of the castle structure and to gain information for display options.

The remains of Carmarthen Castle are situated on the southern side of the present town, with a commanding position over the River Tywi and the bridge across it (Figure 1). The Ordnance Survey grid reference is SN 41301996. The underlying geology is shaly stone overlain by deposits of clay and gravels.

SITE HISTORY

It is not intended here to go into any depth of the history and historic setting of the castle as this is to be researched and written as part of the final report.

The first castle on the site was probably a motte and bailey, built in 1109 by English Royal command. The first use of stone construction may have taken place in the rebuilding of 1181-3. However most of this is likely to have been destroyed when the castle was attacked in 1196 and again in 1215. The castle was certainly built in stone by 1232, with subsequent repairs and additions continuing into the fifteenth century. The remains of the Gatehouse probably date to c.1410. By 1660 the castle was describe as “quite demolished”. In the 1780s a gaol was built on the site and in 1938 the current County Hall superseded this.

The recent archaeological work started on the site in 1993 when the remaining buildings along the frontage of Bridge Street were demolished and an evaluation took place on the Square Tower (Crane 1994). There was a subsequent watching brief and recording on the Southwest Tower (Ludlow 1996). Evaluations were undertaken on the Shell Keep at the northwest corner of the castle (Ludlow and Allen 1997, Page 1998). And test pits excavated to the rear of the Gatehouse (Ramsey 1998).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of all of the pieces of work in Phase Three is to enhance the remains of the castle, to enable greater public access and to provide interpretation of the whole history of the castle and its subsequent usages.

METHODOLOGIES AND RESULTS

The pieces of work of this project are described in the order in which they were undertaken. Different aspects of the work are given Project Record Numbers.

WATCHING BRIEF DURING DEMOLITION PRN 42643

This commenced in February 2001. A modern building, No. 12 Nott Square was demolished to open up the view of the Castle Gatehouse (Figure 2). The footings of this building were dug out to below ground level. Nothing of archaeological significance was seen and the immediate “cellar fill” below was of modern deposition. During this work the machine pecking out the floor and footings broke through part of the top of a brick vault located immediately to the south of No. 12. The vault appeared to be one of a number of interconnecting vaults as there was also subsidence further to the south, just to the north of the entrance line to the gatehouse. The rear, east, wall of this vault was possibly the back of the complex and was at an angle to the north-south street frontage. This vault was already partly filled with rubble prior to being broken through. A sample brick was taken from the vault construction; this has not been analysed, but an early Victorian date would seem probable.

To the south of the Gatehouse was the former Rugby Club (Figure 2), the north wall of which, on initial inspection, appeared to be older than the adjacent brick and breeze block walls, as it was constructed of stone and mortar. However observation after demolition of the rest of the building showed it to be of modern construction, as it contained brick and was constructed above brick footings. This wall appeared to be the remains of an internal wall of an earlier outbuilding incorporated within the construction of the later Rugby Club exterior walls.

Part of the lower exterior of the south side of the Gatehouse had been covered with hard cement render. It was considered that this might have covered later blockings into the ground floor, as found in previous work on the Square Tower and the Southwest Tower. However, this was not the case and the render simply covered medieval and post medieval stone walling (Photo 1).

At this stage of works, a blocking in the exterior ground floor window of the north tower of the Gatehouse was partly removed with the intention of ascertaining how access could be made into the interior of the tower. However, behind the blocking was a loose fill of soil and rubble. Subsequently a small hole was excavated through the

concrete surface at first floor level that revealed that the soil and rubble infill appeared to continue to just below the concrete.

Interpretation

It would appear that the demolished property, No. 12 Nott Square, lay over in-filled cellars of earlier buildings. The brick vault, which was partly broken through, would appear to be Victorian, although it is likely that other adjacent vaults may have earlier origins, particularly towards the frontage of the Square. The stonework revealed behind the cement render on the south side of the south tower of the Gatehouse had been very disturbed with a lot of rebuilding, including some brick. It was obvious that a lot of the lower wall structure is later than that above. Analysis of this standing building is to be undertaken later. No documentary evidence for the infilling of the north tower of the Gatehouse has been found to date, but the loose soil and rubble appeared to be relatively recent.

RUGBY CLUB EVALUATION TRENCHES PRN 42642

After the demolition of the Rugby Club and the removal of the floor and floor make up, three evaluation trenches were excavated. The purpose of these trenches was to establish the line of the curtain wall between the Gatehouse and the Southwest Tower, and to establish if there were any remains of the Square Tower depicted in Speed's Map of 1610 (Figure 3). A mini digger using a 0.6m wide toothless bucket excavated all trenches which were then hand cleaned.

Trench 1 (Figure 2) was excavated to locate both the Square Tower and the curtain wall. The trench was machined to a depth of c.0.8m into natural glacial layers of orange or orange-grey clay and gravel. Above was a layer of brown clay loam, which was overlain to the west by a floor of bricks and cobbles. A gully containing a concrete encased pipe cut the floor at an angle across the trench. No evidence was found of either the tower or curtain wall. The layer of brown clay loam was probably a previous topsoil, while the floor was probably that of an outbuilding or stable.

Trench 2 (Figures 2 and 4) was again excavated to locate the Square Tower and curtain wall. It was machined to a maximum depth of 1m into similar natural deposits to that encountered in Trench 1 but with more gravel. These natural (101) deposits were cut 6.4m west of the east Rugby Club wall (102). This cut (102) was parallel to the projected curtain wall and appeared to be the edge of a ditch. Three fills (103, 104 and 105) of this probable ditch all contained mortar flecks and would not be inconsistent with late medieval or post-medieval deposits. Above the natural there was again a layer of brown clay loam (106). This clay loam was overlain by a mortary soil (107), which was disturbed, especially in its upper regions, and contained brick fragments, along with two sherds of post-medieval pottery. A floor (108) above this layer, although very disturbed, appeared very similar to that in Trench 1. A post-hole (109) and fill (110) cut through the brown clay loam (106). This post-hole fill contained a piece of wood and a nail, and appeared to be a modern deposit. The concrete floor and footing (111) appeared to be the same deposit, and the Rugby Club wall (112) had then been constructed upon it.

Trench 3 was excavated again to locate the curtain wall but also to ascertain if any remains of the demolished angle tower, which can be seen projecting from the south

Gatehouse Tower, extended into the area of the Rugby Club. This trench was machined to the top of the natural. A narrow flat-based gully, 0.3m wide by 0.3m deep, cut the natural at an angle to the trench (Figure 2). The fill of this feature contained no artefacts but was similar to that found within Roman features elsewhere around Carmarthen. Above the natural there was a layer of brown clay loam, similar to that found in both trenches 1 and 2. This layer was cut on the north side of the trench only by a 1.2m wide feature with a flat base. The fill on the west side of this feature contained flat stones laid upon each other, with the majority of the eastern fill of two layers of mortary soil. This feature appeared to be the end of a footing trench (approximately on the line of the west wall of the angle tower), with some footings surviving on the west side and the rest of the fill consistent with robbed footings. At the west end of the trench there was a flat bottomed cut 0.6m deep which also cut through the brown clay loam. The fill of this feature contained a very large quantity of animal bone and broken roof slate and, although there was no datable evidence, appeared to be quite modern.

Interpretation

The finding of a possible Roman period feature is not unexpected, as the site is not a great distance from the walled Roman town and even closer to the earlier fort. This feature lies at an angle to the castle walls and therefore an early date for this feature is possible. The cut found in trench 2 is probably the inner edge of the castle ditch. If projected this would not have been encountered in Trenches 1 and 3 as they did not extend so far from the castle wall line. The footing seen in trench 3 may be the end of that of the angle tower but, as this did not extend or turn in the trench, this is far from certain. Further excavation to the north would be necessary to try and resolve this. The other feature of the site was the post-medieval flooring. When the documentary work is undertaken, this may resolve whether the flooring is that of a stable or outhouse.

WATCHING BRIEF ON WORK ON THE GATEHOUSE PRN 42643

Owing to there being no obvious access into the ground floor of either of the Gatehouse Towers, and the discovery that the north tower appeared to be full of rubble up to first floor level, it was decided that access would be attempted from the first floor level. The intention was for a contractor to empty the rubble fill in the north tower first to see where access would be likely to the lower levels when, dependent on results, a similar access could be gained to the south tower.

The first floor area was photographed before any clearance work began. It was overgrown with small shrubs coming out of the walls. After the contractor lifted the concrete floor and the immediate material below, it was reported that a rough floor had been revealed in the south tower; this was archaeologically drawn and appeared to be a sub-floor base of mortar and stones with a large crack adjacent to the south wall.

Under an intermittent watching brief the contractor proceeded to empty the interior of the north tower. This was filled with loose, mortary soil containing stones, brick fragments, a little animal bone and one clay pipe bowl of 18th – 19th century date. A few voids were encountered within the fill, one of which was over 1.2m deep. The excavation within the tower did not proceed as expected, as the interior had no internal face but was an irregular hole surrounded by rough masonry (Photo 2).

Excavation of the hole in the rough masonry was stopped at a level with the base of the first floor window, although the fill of the irregular hole continues downwards.

There was a large crack extending up the north side of the north tower, which was photographed before being consolidated by pinning. As the scaffolding was being dismantled a pole was dropped onto the first floor level where the portcullis slot had been covered with stone slabs. A slab broke leaving a 0.5m size hole (Photo 3) and the debris descended 6.5m into the gatehouse passageway, further cracking its concrete surface.

Interpretation

The rough masonry within the north tower would not appear to be an original feature but may well have been placed in the lower floor (or floors?) of the tower so as to consolidate the tower to enable it to withstand cannon fire, possibly in the period of the English Civil War. The south tower would appear to be completely filled up to first floor level, and the crack between this masonry infill and the wall structure can clearly be seen on the interior at first floor level. The date of the excavation of the hole through the rough masonry in the north tower cannot be ascertained on present evidence but it appeared to have been backfilled soon after excavation. This infill is post medieval in date and possibly much later than the 18th – 19th century clay pipe may indicate.

It is uncertain when the stone slabs were placed over the top of the portcullis slot, but the surrounding mortar with brick fragments suggests a Victorian date. The concrete floor over the first floor was late 20th Century.

GATEHOUSE PASSAGEWAY EVALUATION PRN 43519

Not all context numbers appear on figures

An evaluation was undertaken in the passageway between the front railings and the rear gaol wall and doorway. The purpose of this was to ascertain, by removal of modern disturbances, the underlying archaeology so as provided information about future design and display options.

The passageway had been much altered from the medieval period, many of the walls being rebuilt and apparently poorly consolidated. The route through had two steps and railings with a gate at the front, and at the rear two steep steps with a further step into a doorway in a gaol period wall (Photo 4). The concrete floor surface was cracked (502) and contained a manhole cover (504).

The concrete surface (502) was removed and proved to postdate the manhole construction (504). The interior of the manhole was voided down to c.1m to a soil fill. There were no visible pipes at that level. When the rear steps were removed, these showed wear patterns that indicated that some of them had been re-used. Above or associated with an electricity cable and below the rear step a self seal bag was found dated 23rd Feb. '90'. Owing to the presence of the manhole, a live water pipe, an electricity cable and a further live high power cable below bricks (Figure 5), excavation had to be restricted to the south side of the passageway. The depth of digging was halted at an artificial level c. 1.2m down (Photo 5), as all modern material

had been removed and no further practical progress could be made without the removal of service pipes also running across this side of the passageway.

The earliest features encountered were walls (or wall footings) on the east (531) and south (532 and 533) sides of the excavation (Figure 5). The sequence in which these walls were constructed is uncertain. At the junction in the southeast corner the upper part of the walls (531 and 532) had been disturbed by a service trench and lower down there was an angled stone at the junction (Photo 6). On the south side there was a vertical butt joint between the walls (532 and 531 - Photo 7). All of the walls or footings had good faces, mostly of red sandstone. Bonding of all the walls was sandy soil - that of the east wall (531) and the adjacent southern wall (532) was very similar. The east wall (531) had a battered face (Figures 6). The westernmost of these walls (533) had lime mortar pointing. Although this wall had a modern patch towards the front, its style suggests that it may predate the wall section (532) to the east.

The earliest deposit (520) was at the eastern end of the excavated area (Figures 5 and 6) and contained roof slate some pitched at an angle, indicating rapid deposition. This deposit contained one late medieval - early modern pottery sherd. Above and to the west there was re-deposited clay bonded walling (519). Above this was a deposit (518/528 recorded separately, but almost certainly the same) that contained one 18th century pottery sherd (Figure 7) as well as handmade brick fragments. Above this there was a loose layer of soil (517/527), which lay under another deposit (526). These deposits all appeared to follow rapidly one after the other from east to west.

At the west end of the excavation, there was one side of a probable trench (529), running north - south. This had cut the above deposits (517, 526 and 527) that extended to the west end of the excavation. The fill (530) of the trench (529) contained a fragment of glazed medieval ridge tile. The patch of more recent material in the wall to the south (533) was in line with this feature.

A pipe trench (521, fills 512-516 and 523-5) cut the above deposits. The pipe was of iron, about 40mm in diameter, and surrounded by a deposit of hard ash. Above the upper fill of this pipe trench there was a 20mm thick layer (522) of off-white mortar, and over this a layer of fairly loose soil. Both of these layers and some of the fills of the earlier pipe trench (521) were cut by another pipe trench (534, fill 535) (Figures 7 and 8) with a similar pipe. Above this was a loose layer of soil (506); this appeared to be cut by the trench (508, fill 509) for the manhole (504). If the manhole trench did not cut the loose soil layer (506) it certainly cut the later pipe trench (534) and its fill (535).

Interpretation

It is known that an earlier gatehouse was destroyed in 1406 and the base of the present structure would date to soon afterwards. It is likely that the gatehouse was extended forward at this period and the wall faces (531-533) seen in the sides of the excavation date to this later time. The space between these footings, given the date of the deposits, was not infilled until the post medieval period. These deposits (519, 520 and 528), appeared to be deliberate rapid infilling. It is possible that the open space between these walls was for the accommodation of a drawbridge counterbalance. Without further excavation, interpretation of these walls and later deposits cannot be

resolved, and further excavation would not be possible until the service pipes and cables were removed.

It is not intended here to comment on how the wall or wall footings relate to the standing structure, as this will form part of the final report including the standing building analysis. However, much of the portcullis arch appears to be poorly consolidated and the arch on the south site appears to have been badly re-aligned.

GATEHOUSE STANDING BUILDING RECORDING PRN 43612

A survey, drawings and photographs, has been made of the gatehouse so that stone by stone drawings could be produced in the future, if required. The outline drawings are currently in production.

FINDS

Analysis of the few finds recovered concluded that the medieval material is residual. Detailed report is in the project archive.

DISCUSSION

The initial watching brief on the demolition work proved that nothing of archaeological value was lost. The subsequent evaluation trenches in the Rugby Club failed to find any trace of the curtain wall or the interval tower depicted on Speed's map of 1610. There are certainly inaccuracies in this map and it is possible that the drawing represents the Square Tower located on the south side of the castle. Having found the probable edge of the castle ditch it is likely that the curtain wall sits on a bank above the level of the Rugby Club floor.

The watching brief on the removal of material from the first floor of the Gatehouse has shown that both towers have been infilled with rough masonry at a later date. This was probably to consolidate the towers to resist cannon fire in the period of the English Civil War. This masonry should be preserved as it forms part of the historic fabric of the building. There is no dating evidence for the irregular hole through the rough masonry in the north tower but it would appear to be post medieval and a 19th century date is likely. This hole was probably excavated from the ground floor with access through an arrow slit, this slit being enlarged into a "window". Probably soon after the excavation of the hole, the "window" was blocked up with stonework and the hole infilled. Owing to their fragile condition, the stone slabs above the portcullis slot need attention.

The evaluation within the gatehouse passageway has shown that there is little of archaeological significance immediately below the surface except for the wall or wall footings. Documentary research and parallel evidence from similar castles may indicate that there was a drawbridge in the front of the castle gatehouse, but will not prove that the wall faces seen in the base of the gateway passage are those of a drawbridge counterbalance pit. Additional excavation, however, may resolve this point. Further excavation within the passageway may also reveal evidence of the earlier gatehouse and the way the later building relates to it.

The on-site work of the Gatehouse standing building recording has been completed, and processing is taking place. The recording of the gaol wall to the east is likely to be

undertaken in the near future. The documentary research and final report have yet to be programmed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

John Llewelyn, Carmarthenshire County Council; John Pugh, TACP; Deirdre Williams, for pottery assessment; Neil Ludlow, Duncan Schlee, Hubert Wilson, all from Cambria Archaeology Field Operations.

ARCHIVE DEPOSITION

This will be temporarily held by before permanent deposition at a suitable museum to be agreed by all parties.

REFERENCES

All are unpublished client reports copies of which are held by Cambria Archaeological Trust SMR.

Crane P 1994. Carmarthen Castle, Demolition of No's 10-14 Bridge Street, Evaluation within the Square Tower undertaken between 21/6/1993 and 1/7/1993 and the Watching Brief carried out during demolition ending 9/9/1993

Ludlow N D 1996. Carmarthen Castle, Archaeological Recording and Watching Brief November 1995 – March 1998

Ludlow N D and Allen B 1997. Carmarthen Castle, Archaeological Evaluation Within the Shell Keep

Page N 1998. Carmarthen Castle, Shell Keep, Archaeological Evaluation

Ramsey R 1998. Carmarthen Castle Gatehouse, Archaeological Evaluation September 1998

APPENDIX 1: 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 interim report.
- B. Site records, including context record sheets and site notebook.
- C. Drawings non-publication.
- D. Site photographs - catalogue, colour slide, B/W prints and digital images.
- E. Finds data
- I. Archive report and draft copies of interim report.
- J. Publication drawings.
- M. Miscellaneous correspondence.

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

Cambria Archaeology Field Operations, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire currently hold the archive. Project number 42641.

FIGURE 1: Location

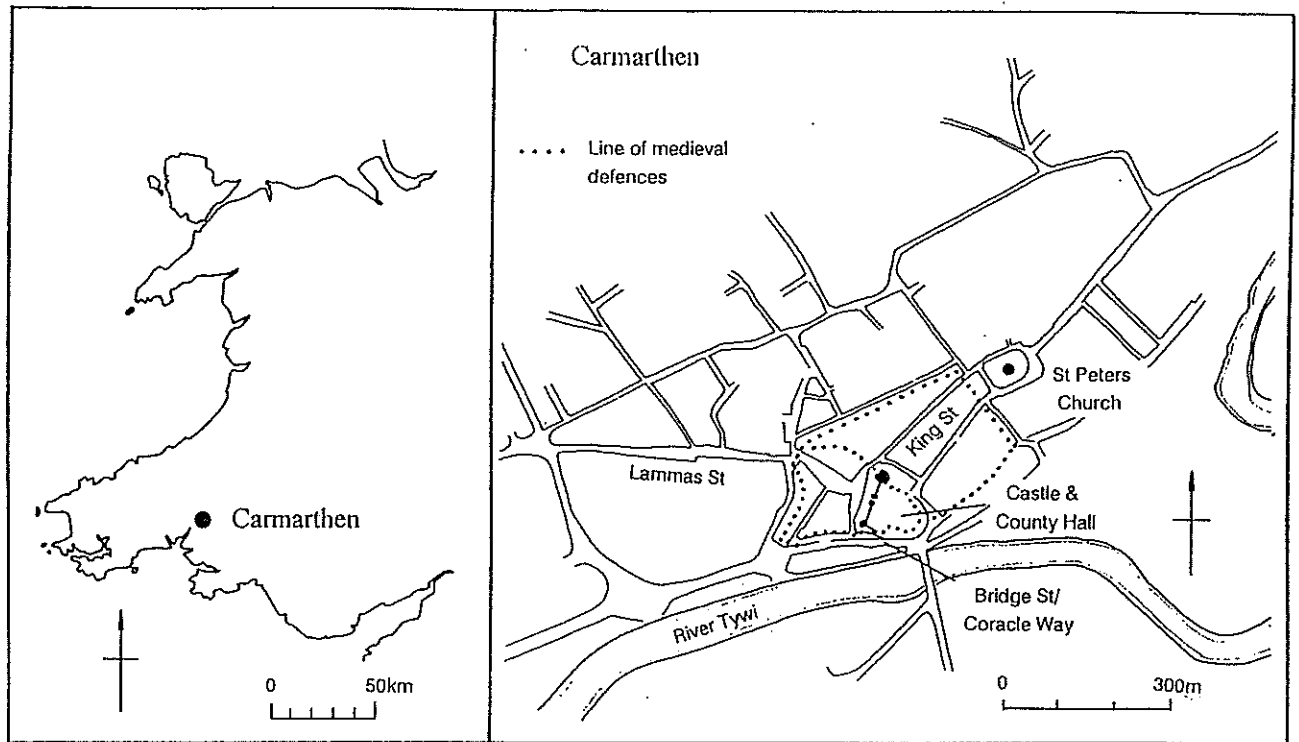


FIGURE 2: Gatehouse and Rugby Club

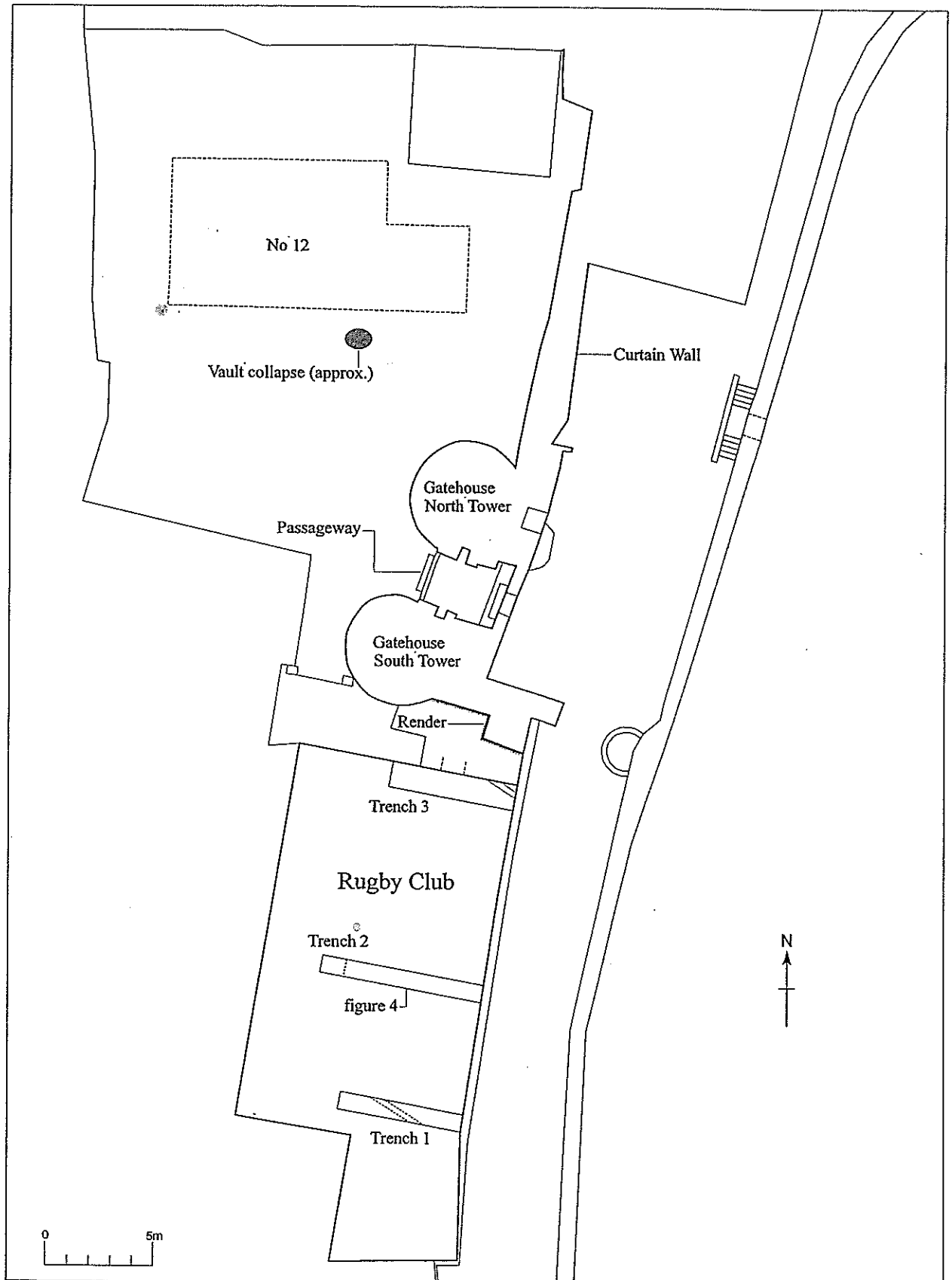


FIGURE 3: Speed's Map of 1610

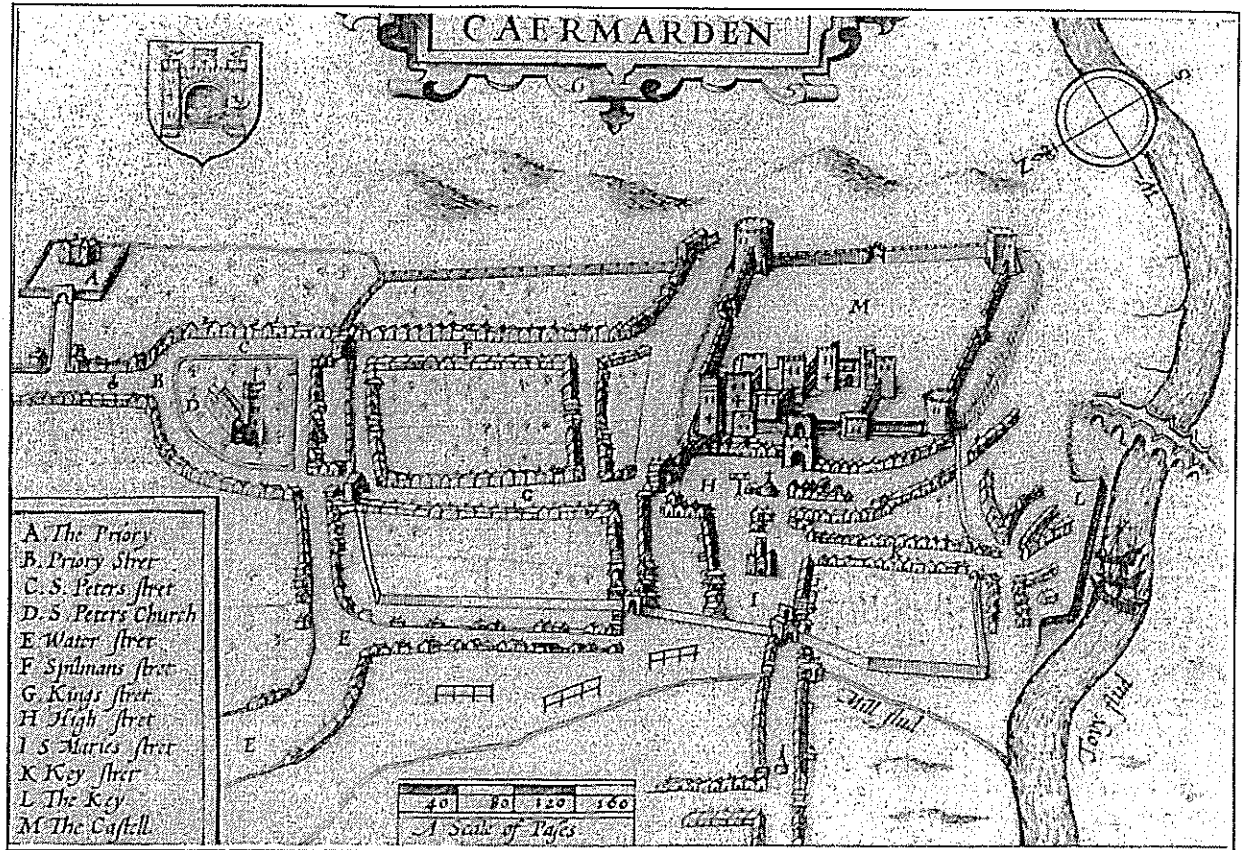


FIGURE 4: Rugby Club Trench 2 Section

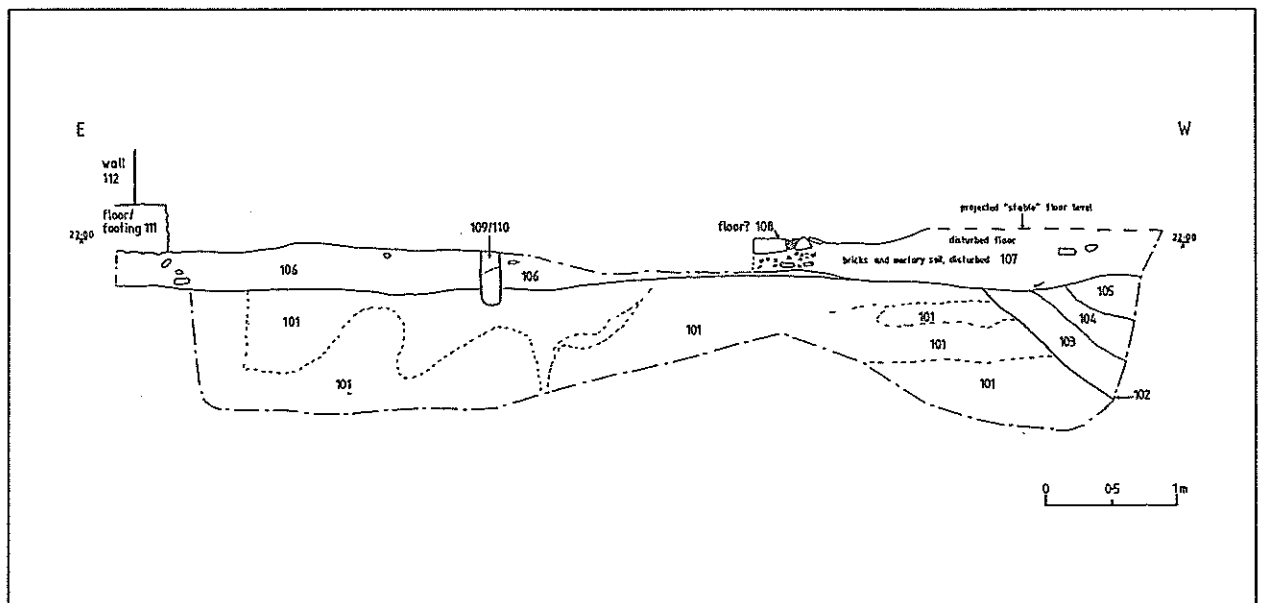
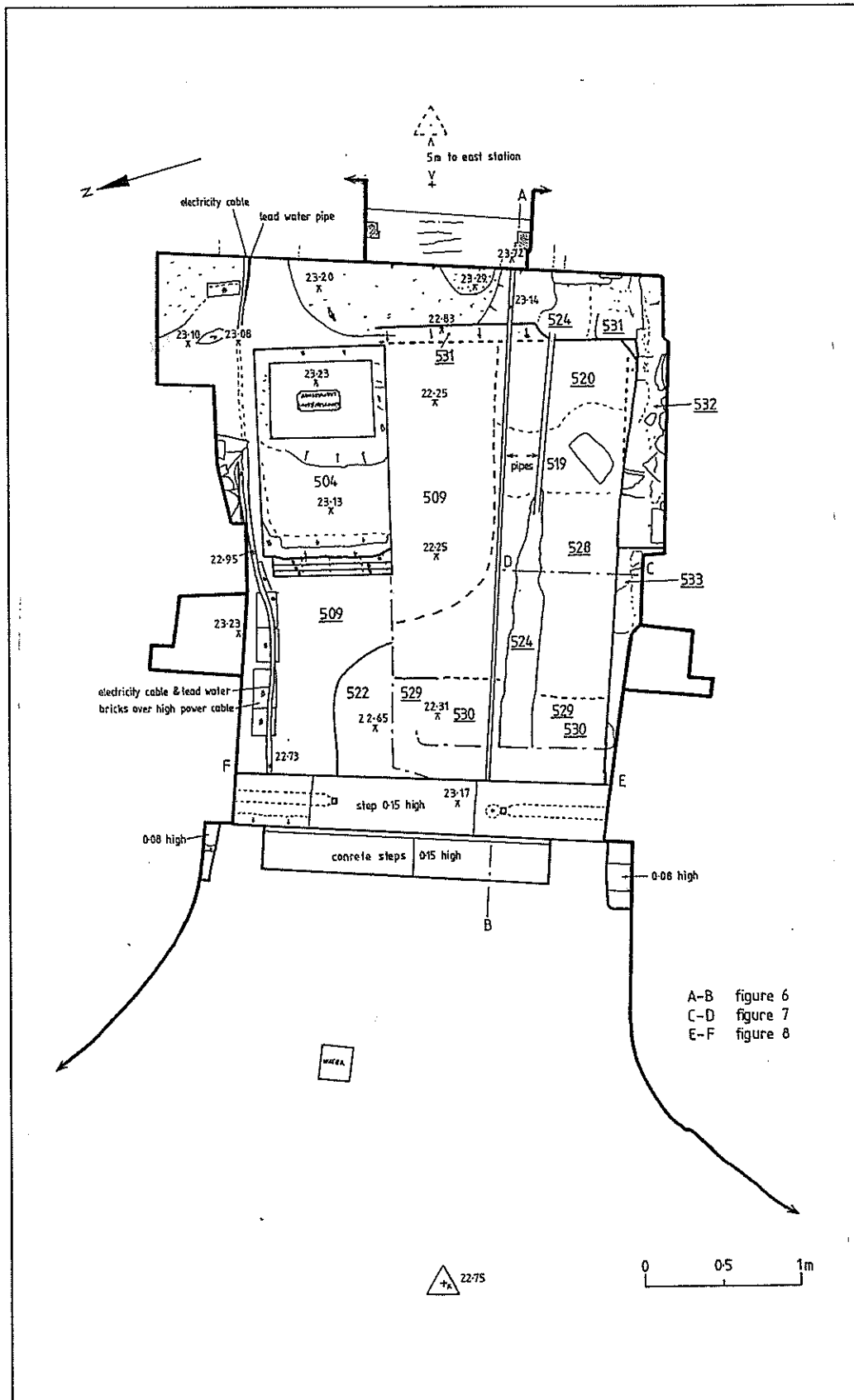


FIGURE 5: Gatehouse Passageway



FIGURES 6-8: Gatehouse passageway sections

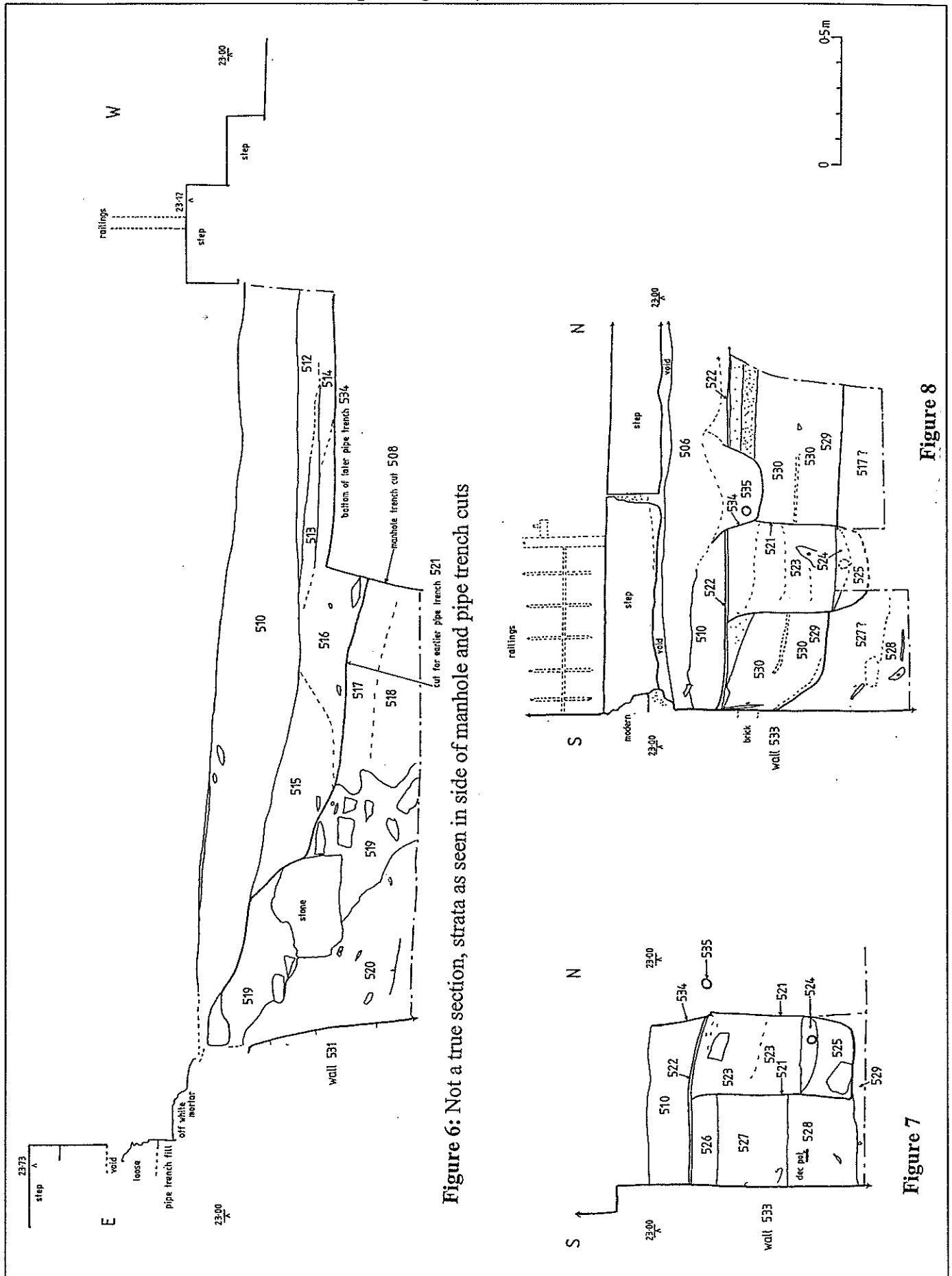




Photo 1: Gatehouse south site with render partly removed, view NNE, scale 1m



Photo 2: Gatehouse north tower irregular hole partly excavated, view SW



Photo 3: Gatehouse collapse into passageway, view W, scale 1m



Photo 4: Gatehouse passageway before excavation, view E, scales 1m



Photo 5: Gatehouse passageway as excavated, view SW, scales 1m



East wall 531

Photo 6: Passageway as excavated, view E



Photo 7: Gatehouse as excavated, view S

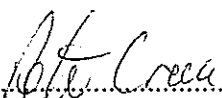
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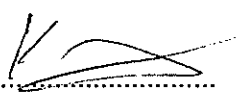
This report has been prepared by Pete Crane

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This report has been checked and approved by Ken Murphy on behalf of Cambria Archaeology,
Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Position Principle Archaeologist

Signature  Date 17.10.2001

As part of our desire to provide a quality service we would welcome any comments you may have
on the content or presentation of this report