

10/02/94

PRN 43252

DYFED ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST LTD

REPORT ON THE WATCHING BRIEF AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD OF 4 - 5 GUILDHALL SQUARE, CARMARTHEN NOVEMBER 1993 (DAT PRN 19975)

Client: Littlewoods plc

Project Officer: N D Ludlow

Report by: N D Ludlow

Dated: 10th. February 1994

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REPORT ON THE WATCHING BRIEF AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD
OF 4 - 5 GUILDHALL SQUARE, CARMARTHEN, NOVEMBER 1993
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The archaeological recording of, and report on the demolition and redevelopment site at 4/5 Guildhall Square, Carmarthen, was commissioned by the site owner, The Littlewoods Organisation PLC, after consultation with Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd, on 2 November 1993. Copies of this report will be deposited with the site owner and within Dyfed Archaeological Trusts Sites and Monuments Record.

The site occupies a central position within both the medieval and modern towns. The street frontage, allowing for minor changes in alignment, was a primary feature of the medieval town fronting onto Carmarthen's main marketplace.

However, nothing surviving from either the medieval or the earlier post-medieval periods was visible within the fabric of either Nos. 4 or 5 prior to demolition. Both buildings appeared to be 18th century constructions.

The site lies within Carmarthen's Conservation Area but neither building was listed.

2.0 THE MAP EVIDENCE

One of the earliest detailed maps of Carmarthen, drawn in 1786 by Thomas Lewis to show Golden Grove estate property within the town, shows the location of Nos. 4 & 5 and their outline more or less as today. The site lies adjacent to, but not on, a passage, "Red Lion Yard", that was swept away with the construction of the present Littlewoods (Figs. 1 & 2)

Both Nos. 4 & 5 are shown on John Wood's map of the town of 1834, and in detail on the 1st ed. OS 1:500 of 1888 (Fig.3)

3.0 THE STANDING BUILDINGS

3.1 The exteriors

Nos. 4 & 5, as they stood in 1993, though substantially of early 18th century date (see below), had been much altered and concealed beneath later finishes. They appear to have been of one build, with a common party wall, and possessed similar detail. Both had three storeys beneath a slate gable roof on a common eaves line, and bore brick chimneys on their end walls. The ground floors had, in recent years, been much altered for retail use.

The upper floors of No.4 were each lit by three original square-headed window openings, with projecting sills, on the street frontage. This facade carried secondary brick cladding.

The facade of No.5 was rendered in the upper floors, each of which displayed two window openings of similar detail to the above. An attic room with a dormer window had been inserted into the roof, facing the street.

3.2 The interiors

A record and measured survey of the interiors of the two buildings were undertaken by O Jenkins, RCAHMW, and G H Evans, Carmarthen Museum, in September 1993. The full report and drawings are deposited in the National Monuments Record. The results will be summarised briefly here.

Both buildings retained king-post roof trusses from the late 18th/early 19th century. Many of the interior fittings were likewise 18th century. In particular, the first floor back room in No.4 displayed early 18th century Boletian panelling of fine quality - a rare survival in Carmarthen. Various other features on this floor were of early 19th century date, including, on the SE wall, an inserted fireplace with its iron grate and panelled overmantel, and also door architraves, chair rails and skirting. The second floor front room contained a late 18th/early 19th century fireplace.

Both Nos.4 & 5 retained square section baluster stairs of similar date, while the first floor back room of No.5 featured a narrow width of early 18th century fielded panelling, and cornice. In both buildings the original ground floor features had been largely removed.

In accordance with Clause 4 of the Planning Consent the above fixtures and fittings were removed prior to demolition.

3.3 The cellars

With the complete demolition of the two buildings and the removal of cellars (8/11/93) it was possible to examine the interior faces of their end walls.

That of No.5, to the NW, was largely rendered over in the upper floors and little of interest was visible. However the wall, of limestone/sandstone rubble, continued downwards to form the cellar wall with no visible break in construction, suggesting that cellar and upper floors were contemporary. A line of floor joist sockets represented ground floor level, on the same level as the present day pavement.

The end wall of No.4, to the SE, displayed several minor building phases, providing some dating evidence. On the ground floor the original wall had been removed and supplanted by a thin modern brick wall, the floors above being supported by an inserted RSJ. The remainder of the visible walling was of limestone/sandstone rubble, with some original brick bonding. It was confirmed that the early 19th century fireplace had later been inserted into this wall, proving in addition that the 18th century panelling was in situ from the first, and thus it is likely that the bulk of the wall fabric is 18th century. The ends of two cross walls remained and were of similar substantial masonry construction.

This wall, in its original form, did not continue downwards to form a cellar. Instead, the cellar belonging to the building next door, No.3, possessed as its NW wall a fairly slender brick revetment of rather poor construction. This had originally retained soil to the NW, and it was only later that a cellar was excavated beneath No.4 and given its own lining wall. The removal of the latter wall during demolition revealed an area of the original soil profile still clinging to the brick revetment of No.3 (Fig 4).

The rear line of the cellars, to the NE, was represented after demolition by 2 rendered cellar chambers to the E, and at least one further original chamber to the W. However, this area had been much affected by 20th century cellar alterations. Behind the cellars was an area of yard at street level.

A line of cellar walls defined their SW limit along the street frontage.

Nothing within the built fabric of either Nos.4 or 5 Guildhall Square suggests a construction date any earlier than the early 18th century. Indeed, the substantial nature of the masonry construction of the two end walls and the presence of brick within them, the marked absence within these walls of any evidence of major breaks in construction, changes in alignment or earlier roof lines, suggest that both buildings were de novo constructions of the early 18th century.

4.0 THE BELOW-GROUND DEPOSITS

The removal of all structures from the site permitted the examination of the deposits below (Fig.4).

The development area contained two distinct sectors:-

- i) To the rear (NE), within the yard, where no cellars occurred but the surface deposits were nonetheless exposed, and which was at first unexcavated;
- ii) To the street frontage (SW) where the removal of the cellars resulted in an excavation averaging 2.5m in depth, though over most of the site 0.5m of this depth was occupied by demolition debris.

Throughout the area the deposits consisted of undisturbed, fine grained fluvioglacial gravels.

4.1 The yard

To the rear the natural gravels appeared right to the surface, roughly corresponding to the street level, where not masked by modern deposits. Examination of this surface prior to its excavation failed to reveal any archaeological features or deposits.

With the excavation of this area to a depth of 1.5m by 14/12/93 a complete section along the NE edge of this area was visible. The deposits had been much disturbed by the foundations of the adjacent Littlewoods building but nonetheless it was apparent that the gravels occurred throughout. Bands, up to 0.5m thick, of extremely fine dark or grey brown grit alternated with similar thicknesses of rather coarser yellowish, or iron oxide stained, crushed shale gravel. The two outcropped alternately on the surface. The whole was a totally sterile deposit. Not a trace of charcoal, mortar, shell, or any evidence of human activity, was seen.

The only visible archaeological feature was right in the NW corner (Fig 4). What was probably the base of a post-medieval rubbish pit was sectioned by a current foundation pit. It contained cockle shell and some post-medieval roofing slate in a dirty, mixed soil fill.

4.2 The main body

The cellars at the front of the properties were cut through the same succession of fluvioglacial gravels. However, the section through them was visible in only two areas. A soil profile remained clinging to the revetment for the cellar of No. 3 (see above & Fig. 4), and was a 2m column of the same alternating bands of fine grit and coarser shale gravels. Along the SW edge, on the street front, the cellar retaining wall had broken through to reveal what were predominantly fine grits beyond.

The floor of the excavation, averaging 2m deep, as might be expected consisted entirely of fluvioglacial gravels where not obscured by debris or disturbed by modern cellar alterations. The whole area was again entirely sterile.

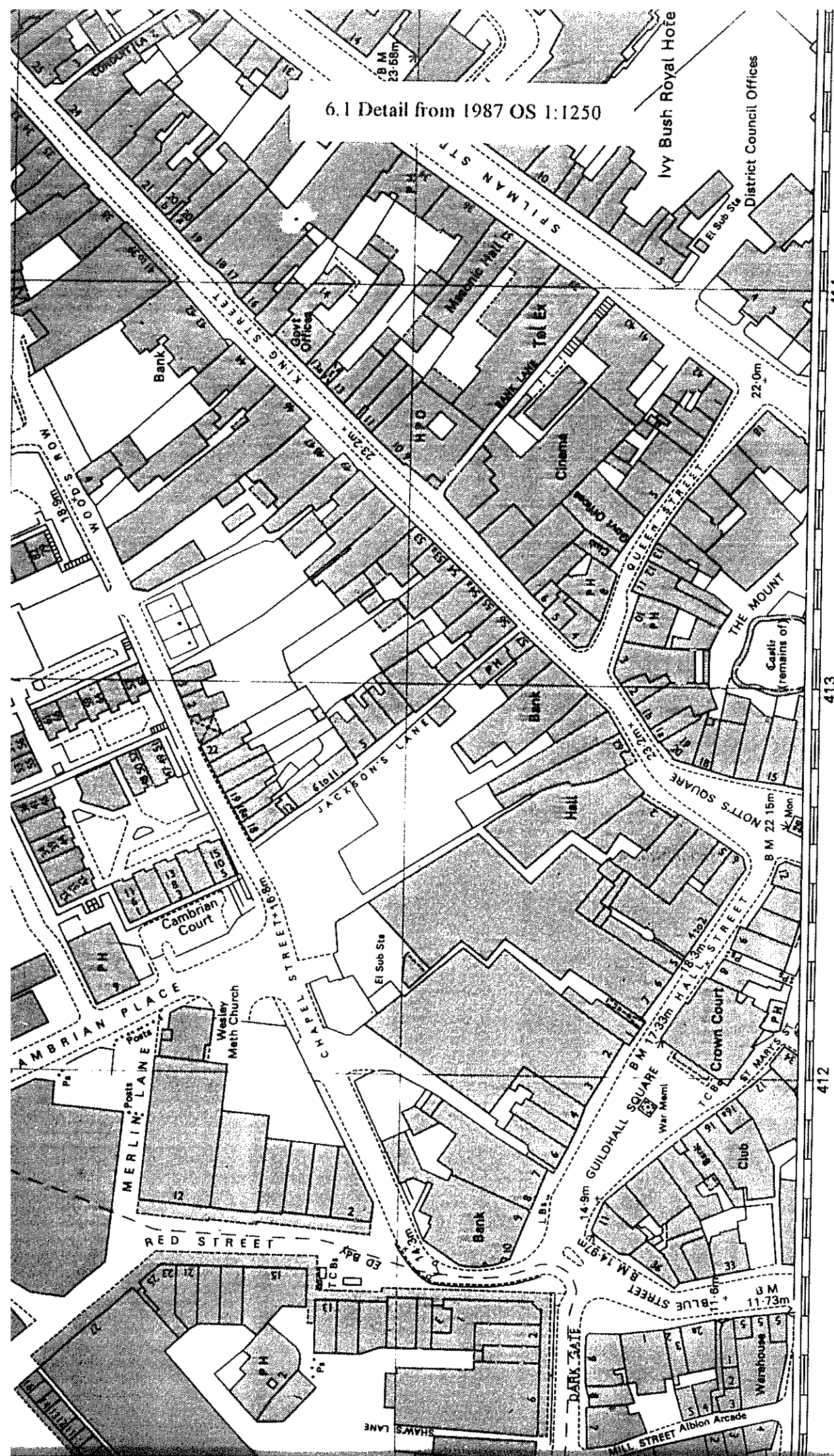
5.0 DISCUSSION

It has been seen that, with one exception, no below-ground archaeological features were visible within the development area. Moreover, the deposits showed no sign of human activity being completely sterile - and unstable - fluvioglacial gravels. The entire area was remarkable for the complete absence, even as scatters, of material such as clay pipe stems, bottle glass and transfer printed pottery usually associated with sites of this nature.

The fact that these gravels occur right at the surface to the rear of the properties suggests that the ground level here may originally have been higher, and truncated probably when Nos.4 & 5 were built in the early 18th century. Their construction likewise erased all traces of any earlier buildings or cellarage on the site.

The level of Guildhall Square has probably changed little over the centuries and thus prior to the 18th century there may have been a marked NE-SW downhill slope from the rear of the properties to the street. Possibly during the Middle Ages the street may even have been a slight "hollow-way" - examination of No.5 St. Mary's St., the other side of the medieval Guildhall Square, by Dyfed Archaeological Trust and Carmarthen Museum in September 1993, demonstrated that the ground level there also once sloped down sharply towards the Square.

6.1 Detail from 1987 OS 1:1250



CARMARTHEN CO CONST

SN 4119NW

MID AND WEST WALES EURO CONST

354,72.76

Apr 1983

Heights are given in metres above the Newlyn Datum.

Bench mark lists which may contain later levelling information, also particulars of bench marks to which no values have been shown, are obtainable from the Ordnance Survey, Southampton.

The representation on this plan of a road, track or path is no evidence of the existence of a right of way.

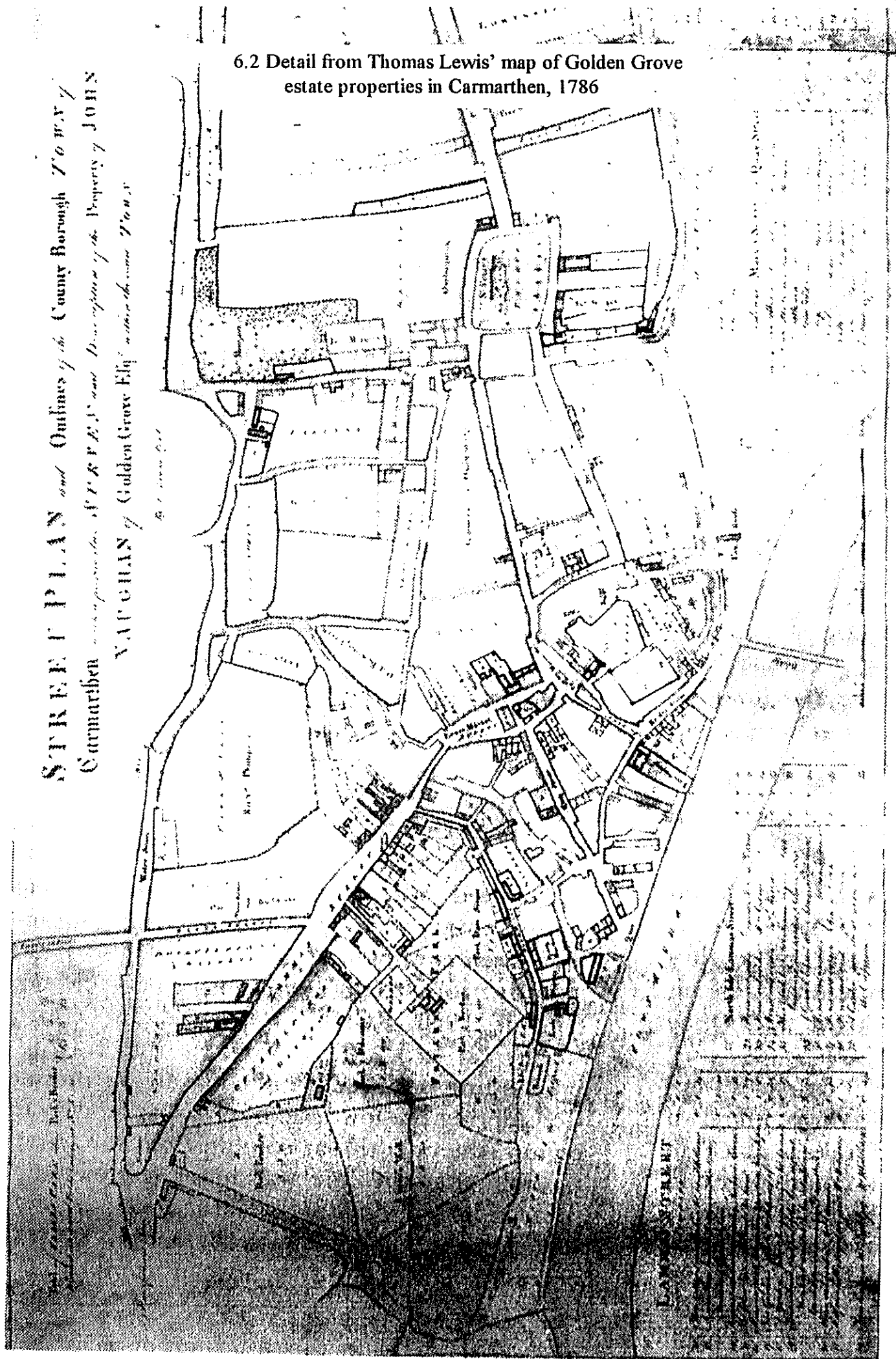
The alignment of tunnels where shown is approximate.

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STREET PLAN and Outlines of the County Borough of Carmarthen
as prepared by J. F. F. F. and Description of the Property of JOHN VACCHAN of Golden Grove Elly's and the same Town

6.2 Detail from Thomas Lewis' map of Golden Grove estate properties in Carmarthen, 1786



16 February 1994

Joachim Zadow
Robin Clayton Partnership
1 Union Court
Castle Street
Liverpool L2 4SJ

Dear Mr Zadow

CARMARTHEN: LITTLEWOODS

Please find enclosed herewith 3 copies of the report on the archaeological work at the Littlewoods site, 4-5 Guildhall Square, Carmarthen. Our invoice is likewise enclosed.

Yours sincerely,

N D Ludlow

(Encs.)

6.3 Detail from 1888 1st ed. OS 1:500

6.4 : 4 & 5 GUILDHALL SQUARE: PLAN OF SITE

