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CARMARTHEN CASTLE GATEHOUSE 1998

A REPORT ON THE RESULTS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION SEPTEMBER 1998

Report prepared for TACP
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ACA
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Contents

SUMMARY

The removal of a small number of stones from a blocked opening on the western side of the north tower of the castle gatehouse demonstrated that there had been a major build-up of humic soil and building debris within the tower. This build-up of material did not enable an assessment of the state of preservation or architectural stability of the tower interior so the results of these investigations were inconclusive.

The excavation of five small test pits at various locations in the area between the gatehouse and the old gaol wall showed that the average depth at which archaeologically significant deposits or features were encountered was 0.30 metres. There was no evidence to indicate that any of the findings were earlier than the 19th or 20th century in date.

OBJECTIVES

In advance of planned changes to visitor amenity arrangements at Carmarthen Castle to be undertaken by TACP, and to fulfil the requirements of the Scheduled Monument Consent, Archaeoleg Cambria Archaeology:

(i) Monitored an investigative unblocking of an opening in the north tower of the castle gatehouse

and,

(ii) Undertook an archaeological evaluation which entailed the excavation of five 1metre x 1metre test pits in the area between the gatehouse and the gaol wall.

The work in the gatehouse was carried out in order to assess the stability and state of preservation of the interior of the tower while the object of the test pit evaluation was to establish at what level below ground meaningful archaeological deposits or features would be encountered.

RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATIONS IN THE NORTH TOWER OF THE CASTLE GATEHOUSE

The investigative work in the gatehouse was carried out by Abbey Masonry, as sub-contractors to TACP, and monitored by archaeologist Richard Ramsey of Archaeoleg Cambria Archaeology.

A number of stones forming part of the masonry blocking a large rectangular opening in the outer, west facing, side of the north gatehouse tower were removed to enable an assessment of the state of preservation and stability of the interior of the tower. The blocked opening was seen to have a splayed embrasure but any surround had previously been robbed at an unknown date.

Initially it was hoped that enough blocking stones would be removed to allow access and entry into the tower itself, but the few stones that were removed showed the space within the tower to have been largely infilled with a mix of greyish brown, lime-mortar rich, humic soil and building debris together with much organic root material. The building debris consisted of medium sized and small angular stones with frequent medium sized mortar fragments, shattered blue slate fragments and occasional fragments of red brick. To have taken out any more of the blocking masonry at this stage would have necessitated removing much of this debris, an operation well beyond the remit of the present works. A decision was made, in view of these findings, not to investigate the tower any further at this stage thereby denying any assessment of the state of preservation or architectural stability of the tower interior.

EVALUATION RESULTS FROM THE EXCAVATION OF 5 TEST PITS

The excavation of the test pits and archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Richard Ramsey of Archaeoleg Cambria Archaeology with assistance from Abbey Masonry.

Methodology

Five 1.0 metre square test pits (TP1 to TP5 inclusive) were hand excavated in order to determine the extent and character of archaeological deposits and features in the area between the gatehouse and the gaol wall. The excavations were intended as evaluative only and digging ceased as soon as any features or services were revealed and in one case where a depth of just over 1 metre was reached. Plans, at 1:20 scale, were drawn of all excavated pits and one vertical section, at 1:20 scale, was drawn. Photographs, monochrome print and colour negative, were taken throughout.

The whole area between the gatehouse and the gaol wall is eventually going to be re-surfaced with minimal intrusion below the existing tarmac surface. However, the areas where the test pits were located may be affected by more intrusive groundworks. In the

case of test pits 1 to 3 inclusive there may be groundworks to accommodate a stairway to be built up to a currently blocked doorway on a higher floor, whilst test pits 4 and 5 were dug to assess any impact that the construction of a disabled persons access-ramp may have on the archaeology below ground.

The Test Pits

The location of the test pits described below can be seen by referring to the 1:50 scale composite site plan (**Fig. 1).**

Test Pit 1 (TP1)

After removing 0.10 metres depth of tarmac (Context 01) and 0.05 metres of washed stone and pebble sub-base (Context 02) this pit was excavated to a depth of 1.05 metres. A loose, friable, greyish brown lime-mortar rich soil containing coarse components of medium and small stone, frequent red brick fragments, and infrequent fragments of shattered blue roofing slate (Context 03) was encountered throughout the excavation which continued to an undetermined depth. These deposits appeared to be consistent in appearance with building debris, but the presence of 20th century pottery fragments, other modern finds and the very mixed nature of the layers would seem to indicate redeposition rather than *in situ* demolition debris.
Horizontally there seemed to be little evidence to indicate any layered or stratified deposition, but the east facing vertical section showed definite layers, differentiated only by coarse component percentages and density of mortar presence, sloping very gradually down to the north.
A 0.10 metre thick layer of consolidated building debris (Context 04) intruded into the north east corner of the excavation trench at a depth of 0.40 metres. The limited exposure of this context did not allow full characterisation.

Test Pit 2 (TP2)

Again, a 0.10metres depth of tarmac and 0.05metres of washed stone and pebble sub-base were removed revealing the same lime-mortar rich building debris that was encountered in TP1 (Context 03). This layer was excavated down to a depth of 0.48metres, revealing a modern brown ceramic drainage pipe (Context 06) orientated diagonally (NE to SW) across the NW corner of the excavation and resting upon a level, compact mortar-bonded stone surface (Context 08). The building debris (Context 05) to the NW of the drainage pipe was left unexcavated, but a probe revealed solid ground and it may therefore be assumed that (08) continues throughout the whole excavated pit. No further excavation was undertaken in this test pit.

Test Pit 3 (TP3)

After removal of a 0.20 metre depth of tarmac and 0.03 metres of washed stone and pebble sub-base a compact cement-bonded crude stone and red brick level surface (Context 09) was revealed. This surface had been cut through by a 0.30 metre wide, at least 0.22 metre deep, linear pipe trench (Context 10) orientated approximately NNW to SSE which contained a 0.10 metre diameter ceramic drainage pipe (Context 12). The fill (Context 11) surrounding the pipe was a loose greyish brown friable silty loam containing a high percentage of medium size stone and shattered mortar fragments with much angular gravel and occasional fragments of red brick and coal. It was not possible to determine conclusively the thickness of surface (09) from the revealed evidence.
No further excavation was undertaken in this test pit.

Test Pit 4 (TP4)

A 0.10 metre depth of tarmac was removed revealing, with no intervening sub-base on this occasion, a level yellowish concrete surface (Context 13) butting up against (to the east) a N-S linear configuration of two horizontal courses of modern red brickwork (Context 14). **(See illustration of TP4)**. A 0.05 metre wide by 0.04 metre deep channel had been shuttered into the concrete running between (13) and the brickwork (14). The results of the excavations undertaken in **TP5** (below) strongly suggest that the brickwork (14) revealed here is a capping for a drain (see Context 18 below). No further excavation was undertaken in this test pit.

Test Pit 5 (TP5)
The removal of a 0.13 metre depth of tarmac and 0.10 metres of a medium size angular stone sub-base revealed a lime rich mortar matrix containing much shattered slate, red brick, and angular stone fragments (Context 15). Some 0.09 metres of this layer (15) was excavated from the south east corner of the test pit revealing two large stone slabs (Context 16) which covered a hollow brick-lined drain inspection chamber (Context 18) of undetermined depth. A layer of both angular and rounded medium size stones (Context 17) was revealed to the north of the stone slabs (16) but it was unclear whether this was a layer definitely distinguishable from (15) above it. In the interest of safety all excavation ceased at this point and all revealed features were left untouched or *in situ* and rapidly recorded.

CONCLUSION

The results obtained from the test pit evaluation showed that the area between the castle gatehouse and the old gaol wall is criss-crossed by modern drainage and possible service pipes at shallow depths and their presence disallowed any deeper excavation. The only features encountered to the depths excavated were modern. Test pits 2, 3, 4 and 5 revealed the presence of pre-tarmac (01) floor or ground surfaces none of which were disturbed during the evaluation.

The various building debris layers in TP1 seen in section would seem to indicate an element of quite late purposeful build-up, or 'made ground', in order to consolidate the ground for re-surfacing. The solid concretion of building debris (04) may represent an architectural feature but this was undetermined and the greater likelihood is that it represents remnants similar to the surface (08) exposed in TP2.

The average depth of test pits TP2, TP3, and TP5 was only 0.30metres before archaeologically meaningful features were encountered; it follows, therefore, that any groundworks for future structures can be undertaken to these depths. If decisions are made to excavate to greater depths, for example to remove the existing modern drainage arrangements, it is recommended that they only be carried out under archaeological supervision.

The depth of deposits in TP1, in excess of 1.0 metre, may only be a discrete occurrence so again caution is advised should future works be undertaken, and likewise the shallow depth of the features encountered in TP4.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks are extended to Abbey Masonry for their practical work and assistance and also to TACP, the main contractors. Thanks also go to Carmarthenshire County Council; and ND Ludlow of ACA for project management.

Fig. 1: Location of Evaluation Test Pits

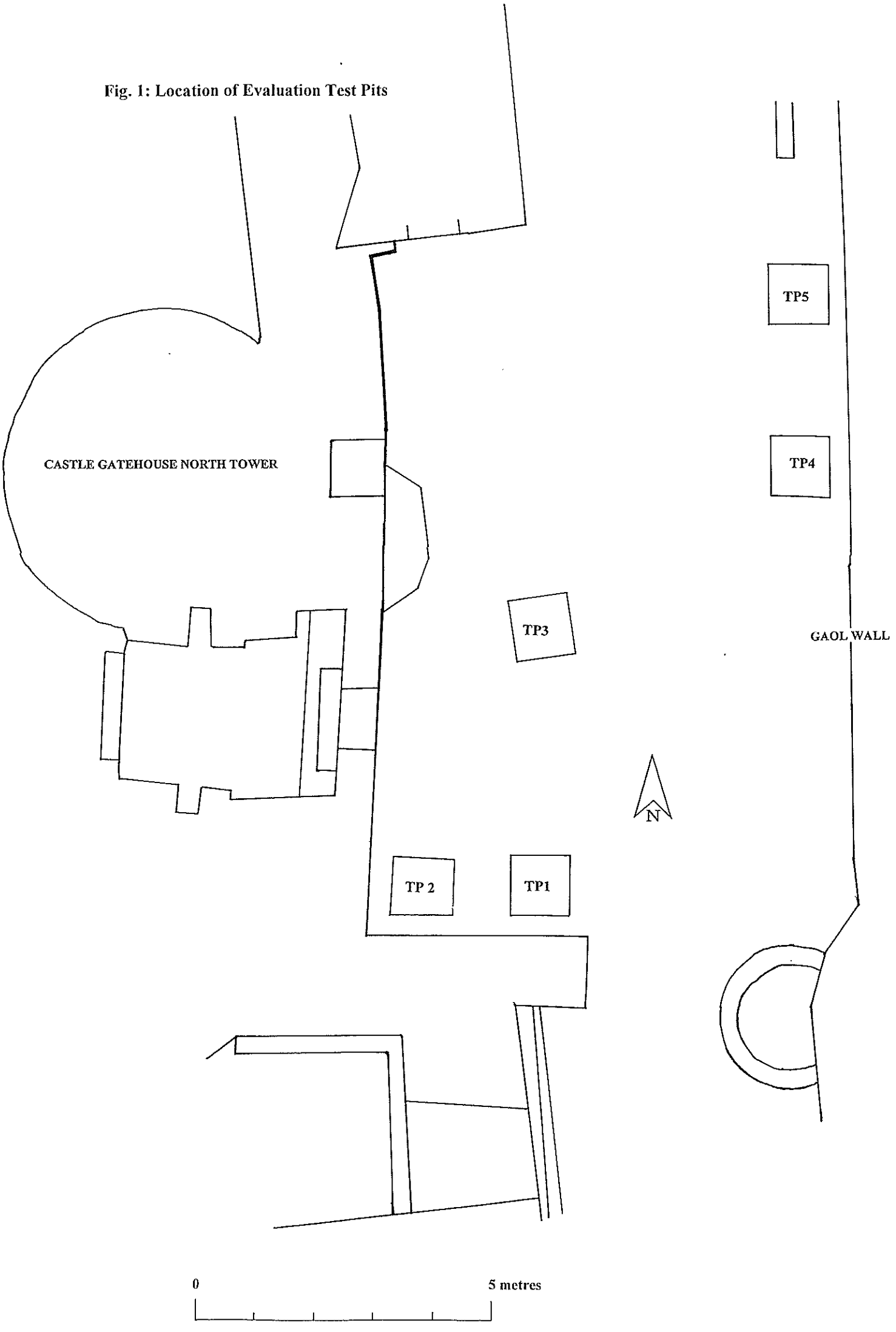
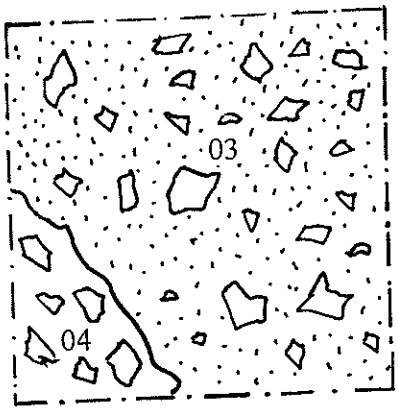
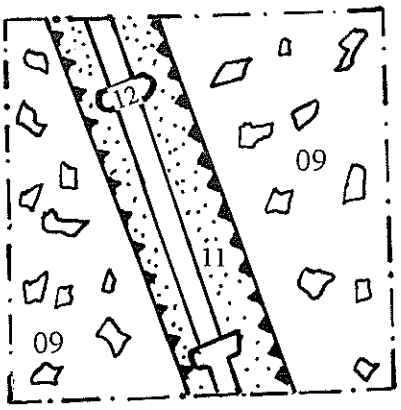


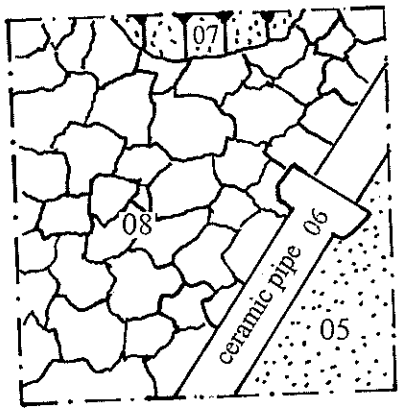
Fig. 2 **TEST PITS 1:20 Scale Drawings**



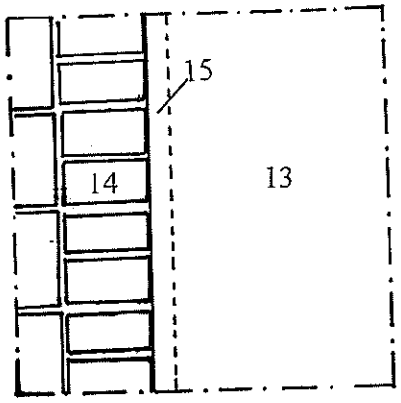
TP 1
depth 1.20 m



TP 3
depth 0.23 m



TP 2
depth 0.33 m



TP 4
depth 0.10 m

TP 5
depth 0.33 m

numbers refer to contexts

0 1 metre