

JAN 2004



# STARLING PARK, CARMARTHEN

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION



Report No. 2004/1

Report Prepared for:  
PERSIMMON HOMES (WALES) LTD



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January 2004

STARLING PARK, CARMARTHEN  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

By

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## **STARLING PARK, CARMARTHEN**

### **ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVALUATION**

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## STARLING PARK, CARMARTHEN ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVALUATION

### SUMMARY

*In advance of the proposed development of the Starling Park House site in Johnstown, Carmarthen, by Persimmon Homes (Wales) Limited an archaeological desk-based assessment was undertaken. The assessment highlighted the need for an archaeological field evaluation of part of the site immediately to the northwest and west of the extant Starling Park House where map evidence shows the former presence of outbuildings and a large rear, west, block annexed to the house. An evaluation would indicate the extent and quality of the below ground remains of these buildings and Cambria Archaeology Field Operations were commissioned to carry out the evaluation during April 2003.*

*The evaluation revealed that the demolition of the west block building had been very thorough and very little remained save for indications of the original east and west wall footings, which had been robbed out, and several courses of stonework of its southeast corner. A pitched cobble surface and a substantial below-ground drain structure from an earlier phase of building were revealed at low enough levels to have survived the demolition process. Stone footings for a corridor, which annexed the west block to Starling Park House were also revealed.*

*Trenches excavated in the vicinity of the west end of the L-shaped stable and coach house, to the northwest of Starling Park House, revealed only deposits of demolition debris and one modern red-brick wall footing for one of the temporary structures erected by the Health Authority when they occupied the site during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 PROJECT PROPOSALS AND COMMISSION**

Persimmon Homes (Wales) Limited are proposing to develop the Starling Park House site in Johnstown, Carmarthen. In February 2003 an archaeological desk-based assessment of the site was undertaken which detailed the potential impact of the development on the archaeological resource (Page 2003). The assessment report highlighted the need for an archaeological field evaluation of part of the site immediately to the northwest and west of the extant Starling Park House where map evidence shows the former presence of outbuildings and a large rear block annexed by a corridor to the rear, west, of the house.

Cambria Archaeology Field Operations were commissioned to undertake the evaluation project and it was carried out during April 2003.

### **1.2 SCOPE OF PROJECT**

The project would determine the extent and quality of the below ground remains of the buildings to the west and northwest of Starling Park House. The evaluation would be intrusive and consist of the machine excavation of four trial trenches at locations chosen on the basis of map evidence researched during the archaeological desk-based assessment.

### **1.3 REPORT OUTLINE**

This report describes the physical and topographical environment of the site in Section 2, before summarising the fieldwork methodology and results in Section 3. Conclusions based on the results of Section 3 will be discussed in Section 4. Supporting fieldwork data are given in Appendix 1.

### **1.4 ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS REPORT**

All archaeological features and layers will be referred to by use of the three-figure context numbering system (e.g. 100 = Trench 1, 200 = Trench 2, 300 = Trench 3) employed by Cambria Archaeology Field Operations. Any reference to sites recorded in the county Sites and Monument Record (SMR) are identified by their Primary Record Number (PRN) and located by their National Grid Reference (NGR).

## 2. THE SITE

### 2.1 LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

Starling Park is situated in Johnstown (Fig. 1), on the southwest outskirts of the town of Carmarthen at NGR SN3957819685. The proposed development area consists of the extant Starling Park House (PRN 44752) and the remains of its outbuildings, gardens and a small area of former parkland, which together cover an area of about 3.5 hectares (c.8.5 acres). The site is bounded on its south side by the B4312 old St. Clears Road and by modern housing along part of its northern boundary. A wooded area, Starling Park Wood, lies on a steep slope to the south between the development area and the St. Clears road: the slope, which is cliff-like in places, drops some 16m between Starling Park House and the road below.

The house rests on a prominent hill and is accessed from the road by a steep curving drive on its southeastern side. The front of the house faces east where the land falls fairly steeply away to both the east and northeast: the steepness of the natural slope has been lessened by a terraced lawn at the front of the house. The construction of a stone retaining wall some 25 metres to the north and northwest of the house and the subsequent landscaping between has taken away the fairly steep natural fall of the land on that side of the site. This is the area where the former yard and its associated outbuildings were situated. Beyond the retaining wall to the north the land falls away again following the natural hillslope. The area to the west of the house tends to follow the 24 metre contour and is therefore relatively level: this was the former garden area which was later levelled and laid with tarmac.

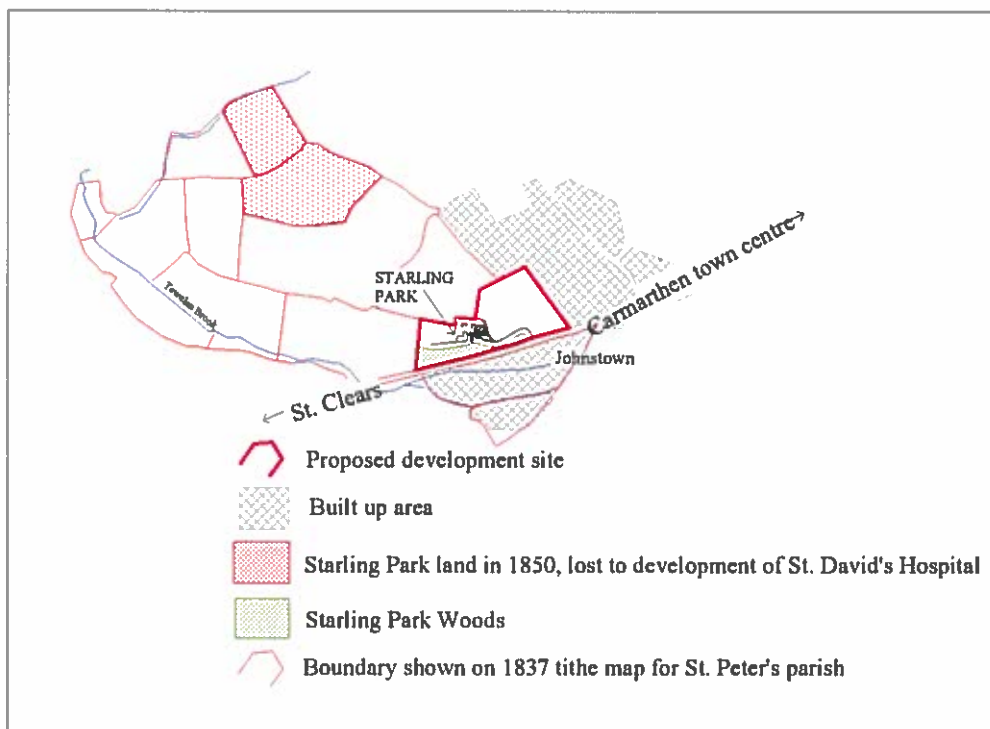


Figure 1: Location plan of Starling Park development area.

### 3. SUMMARY OF EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

#### 3.1 METHODOLOGY

Using the results and recommendations of the archaeological desk-based assessment as a guide, the locations for the excavation of four archaeological trial trenches (T.1 to T.4 inclusive) were chosen and their positions triangulated using fixed points on Starling Park House. Initially only three trenches were to be excavated but it was agreed between Cambria Archaeology Field Operations and Persimmon Homes (Wales) Limited, during the evaluation, to extend the remit of the project specification and undertake further archaeological investigation.

The four trenches were excavated using a mechanical digger with a toothless grading bucket, which stripped off the topsoil, or other surface material, down to the top of archaeological layers or features. All the revealed layers and features were then investigated by hand and descriptions of them recorded on uniquely numbered context record sheets. Where appropriate, 1:20 scale drawings in either plan or section form, or both, were drawn and photographs taken in black and white, colour slide and digital formats.

In order to save time, any extensive demolition debris and re-deposited layers were also removed by machine under the direction and supervision of archaeological field staff. For the most part, during the evaluation, any structural evidence revealed was cleaned, recorded and left *in situ*. However, a limited amount of structural evidence was removed during the excavation phase of the project to reveal earlier structures and deposits to allow assessment of their extent and character.

The solid geology of the site is represented by Ordovician Arenig shales (Tetraraptus beds), which are overlain by fluvioglacial or glacial drift deposits of sand and gravel. These sand and gravel deposits were encountered during the archaeological evaluation.

#### 3.2 RESULTS

The location and extent of the trenches are shown in Fig. 2.

At least three phases of building were identified during the archaeological evaluation undertaken on the site. Phases 1 and 2 were shown to be physically related with both being followed by demolition and/or landscaping phases. The third building phase was identified in Trench 4 where remains of a modern, presumably Health Authority, building were revealed.

##### 3.2.1 Phase 1

The earliest phase of building was identified in Trench 2 (Fig. 3) and was represented by a stone drain (213), an area of pitched stone cobbling (209) a wall foundation trench (210) and indication of a wall (212). All these features were shown to pre-date the construction of the west block building.

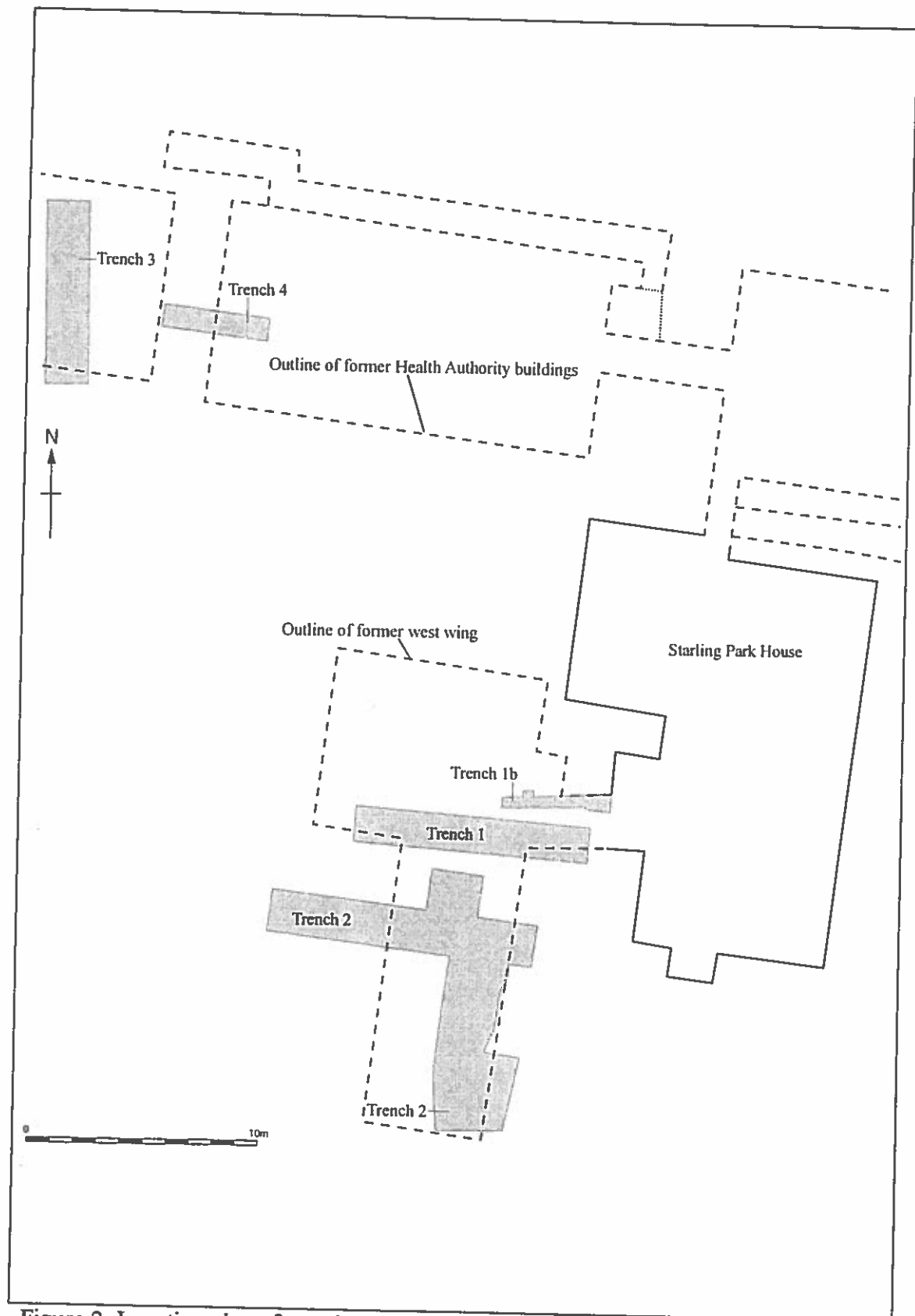


Figure 2: Location plan of trenches



### *Stone drain 213*

The stone drain (Plate 1) was located at the south end of the southern extension of Trench 2 and was a well-built L-shaped structure consisting of large and medium size mortar-bonded stone blocks. The drain was effectively a channel created by the construction of two 0.40m wide L-shaped walls some 0.40m apart at the top and slightly battered towards each other becoming 0.30m apart at the bottom. The return of the more southeasterly of the walls was curved and its base lay upon a rectangular stone slab, elsewhere the walls were set directly onto the natural gravel. The east to west length of the structure was 2.3m long and the southern return was at least 2.8m long and continued beyond the edge of the excavation trench. The depth of the drainage channel was 0.50m at its east end falling gradually to 0.80m at its most southerly exposed end. Apart from the stone slab at the return, the bottom of the drainage channel was of natural gravel with no other evidence to show that the base was formerly stone lined: it is possible that any basal slabs had been robbed for re-use elsewhere when this drain fell into disuse and was back-filled (214). Two large capstones spanned the structure at its eastern end and, again, it is possible that the whole structure was formerly capped in this way (see description of later wall 215 below).

At the base of 213 there was a dark brown layer of silt (235) to an average depth of 90mm, which contained pottery sherds and occasional fragments of glass. The pottery sherds, plain cream ware and blue transfer-printed ware, are typical of the developed tablewares of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively.

### *Cobbled surface 209, wall 212 and foundation trench 210*

The outer face of the northern wall of 213 appears to have been plastered or rendered with a yellowish grey plaster (216). The plaster surface was abutted by the southernmost edge of a pitched stone cobble surface (209). The pitched cobbles comprised 40% small and medium size rounded pebbles and 60% small and medium size angular and sub-angular stones bedded into a stiff clay, which had been laid directly onto the natural glacial gravel. The surface of the cobbles was covered throughout by a thin layer of coal dust and small coal fragments (208). The cobbles abutted plaster surface 216 for a distance of 0.85m and continued beyond the northwest corner of 213 for a distance of some 0.66m following the line of a possible 0.42m wide robbed wall (212), represented by a distinct, but thin, linear mortar patch overlying the natural glacial gravel. The cobbles then followed a near right-angle return to the north exhibiting a relatively undisturbed straight edge on their western side for a distance of 4.8m where they returned, again at a near right-angle, to the west for a further 2.10m before continuing beyond the northern edge of the excavation trench (Plate 2). The north edge of the cobbles dipped gradually down from east to west (Fig.4) before levelling out and abutting a robbed wall foundation trench (210), which bounded the western edge of the cobbles and appeared to join robbed wall line 212.

Foundation trench 210 was vertically cut into the natural gravel to a depth of 0.20m, was flat bottomed, and varied in width from 0.18m at its northwest extent to 0.40m along its southerly return. The natural gravels were approximately 0.15m higher than the cobble surface on the western side of 210. At its exposed western edge in 210 the

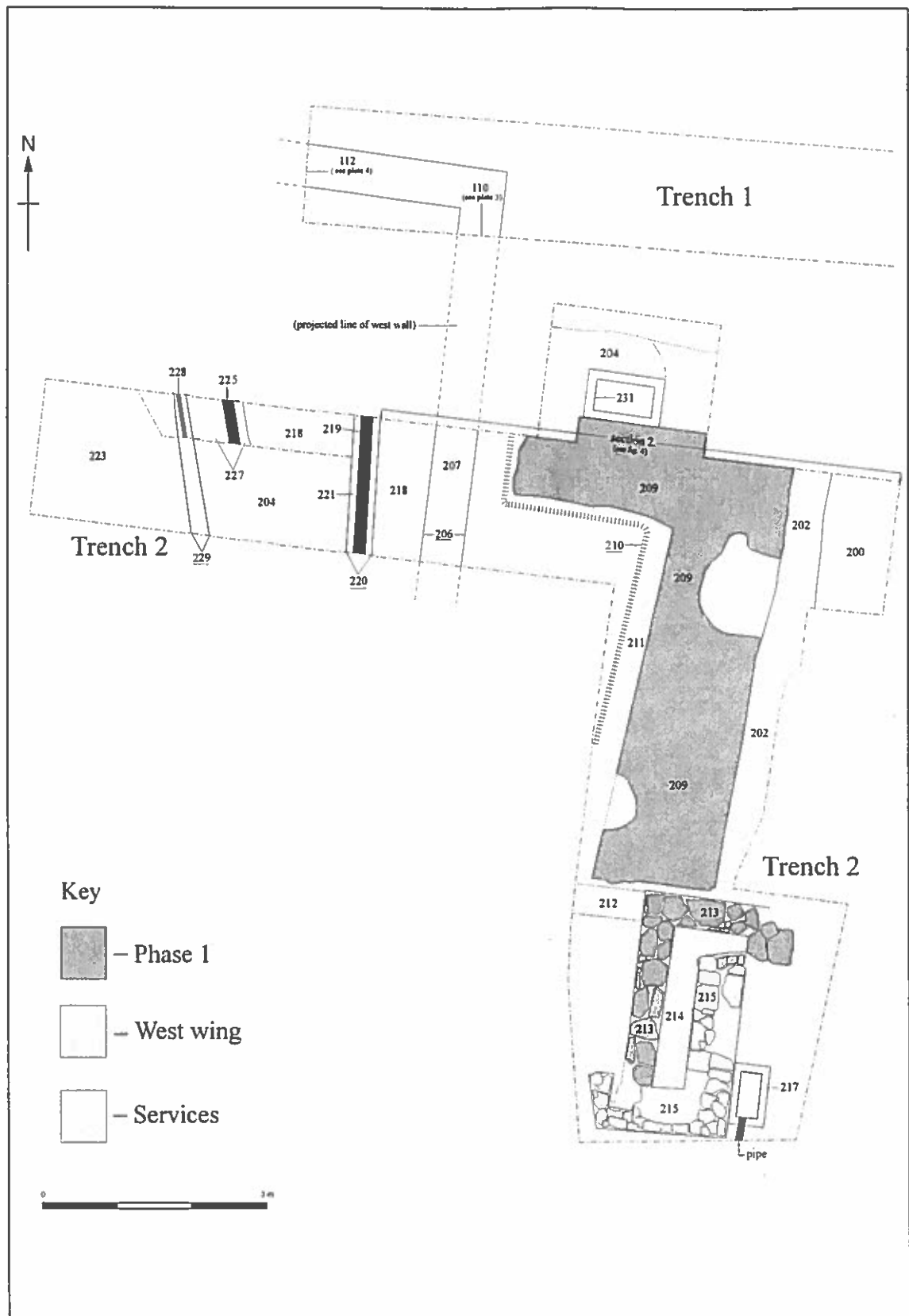


Figure 3: The excavated features

cobbled surface was seen to be 0.05m deep. The undisturbed nature of the cobbles at their interface with 210 indicates that the original wall built within it had been carefully dismantled, presumably in order to re-use the stone elsewhere.

On their eastern side, the cobbles had suffered much damage by the construction of the eastern wall of the west block building, this being represented by robbed-out wall foundation trench 203, part of the second phase of building.

### **3.2.2 Phase 2**

Evidence for the second phase of building, the construction of the west block adjoining Starling Park House, was found in both Trenches 1 and 2 and their extensions.

The western wall of the west block was represented by a 0.60m wide robber trench (206) which survived to a depth of 0.20m and was shown also in Trench 1 in the north facing section as context 110 (Plate 3). The western return of the west wing of the building was also represented by a robber trench (112) seen only in the east facing section of Trench 1 (Plate 4).

Evidence for the eastern wall of the west block was present in the form of both robber trench (203) and wall footing (215) in Trench 2 with no evidence present in Trench 1. Robbed wall foundation trench 203 was 5.8m long, 0.60m wide where fully exposed, with an average depth of 0.12m and appeared to cut through the entire eastern edge of the pitched cobble surface 209. Wall footing 215 was 0.60m wide and consisted of at least two courses of mortar-bonded stone to a maximum height of 0.25m extending for some 2.6m N-S before returning to the west for at least 1.60m and continuing beyond the edge of the excavation. The footing was overlying drain 213 (Plate 5) and the demolition backfill (214) of its drainage channel, suggesting that 213 had at least partially fallen into disuse by the time the west block building was built. The outer face of 215 where it crossed fill 214 was also the most westerly limit of the capstones (Plate 6) left *in situ* on the stone drain 213: perhaps this indicates the possibility that any other capstones were removed prior to the backfilling of 213 and the construction of wall 215. Also abutting the outer face of 215 on its eastern side were the remnants of a rectangular brick-built drain (217) (Plate 7) measuring 0.80m by 0.48m and comprising at least two courses of single bricks with a flat sandstone base and a plastic outfall pipe exiting beyond the edge of the excavation trench to the south.

A discrete layer (Fig.4) of demolition debris (205), consisting of a yellowish brown silty soil containing 20% small and medium size angular and rounded stones and 10% mortar, lay upon the pitched cobble surface at its most northerly extent which may represent a make-up or sub-base floor layer for the second phase of building. It appears that this layer was partially removed during the demolition of the final phase of building, to be replaced or overlain by the extensive demolition debris layer (204), which was revealed throughout Trench 2 as a make-up layer for the post-demolition hard standing surface of limestone chippings (201).

In the most northerly extension of Trench 2, the red brick-built footings (231) of a vertical-drop soakaway drain (Plate 8) were revealed. It was a rectangular structure measuring 0.84m E-W by 0.60m N-S comprising five courses of bricks set into the

natural gravels to a depth of 0.41m but with an additional depth of 0.23m of gravel removed from the bottom to form a soakaway. The footings for this feature cut through the cobble surface 209. The lower, silty, fill of the soakaway contained a high percentage of pottery, which was retained for finds analysis. The potsherd assemblage represented at least two types of pottery; a cream jug with a green transfer-printed battle scene and two pieces of blue transfer-printed tableware depicting Swiss landscape scenery. From markings on its base, the cream jug was identified as being produced by Lowe and Abberley at the Viaduct Works in Longton, Staffordshire: it is known that this firm only occupied that site between 1862 and 1863, which means that the sherds cannot have been deposited into the drain before that time. The blue transfer-printed tableware was popular and widely available throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

At the east end of Trench 1 and within the additional trench (T 1b), excavated alongside it to the north, the footings for the walls of a connecting corridor between the west block and Starling Park House were revealed. The more northerly of the wall footings (106) extended for some 3.70m, was 0.40m wide, and abutted the wall on the northern side of the possible service stair wing at the rear of the house. It survived to a height of 0.20m and comprised mortar-bonded stonework (Plate 9) resting on natural gravel. The southern wall footing (107) also abutted the house, was 1.0m long and survived to a height of 0.11m: it too comprised mortar-bonded stonework resting on natural gravel, but appears to have suffered more damage than 106 did during the demolition phase. The tops of both wall footings lay, on average, only 50mm below the present ground surface.

### **3.2.3 Phase 3**

The west block building was demolished during this phase and this was represented across the site by various layers of demolition debris, particularly layers 109 in T1 and 204 in T2, which had been spread to act as make-up layers for a hard standing surface (102 and 201 in T1 and T2 respectively) of limestone chippings.

In Trench 4, buried by much re-deposited demolition debris and other dumped material (401), the red brick footings (Plate 10) of what appeared to be a modern building were seen to rest upon a concrete foundation (403). The footing (402) was 0.30m wide, comprised seven courses of bricks to a depth/height of 0.53m, and was aligned north to south continuing beyond both sides of the 1.0m wide excavation trench. Some 0.30m to the east lay a solid concrete feature (404), aligned as 402, measuring 0.30m wide and 0.19m deep. A length of electric cable was protruding from beneath the feature but it was not possible to identify whether this was associated with it. It seems probable that 402 represents the footing for the western end of one of the Health Authority buildings marked on later editions of the Ordnance Survey maps, which formerly stood to the north of Starling Park House.

A number of service pipes were cut through the contemporary ground surface (218) abutting the outside of the west wall of the west block (Fig.3) They included two water pipes (219 and 225) and a gas pipe (228), but it is not clear which phase of activity they are associated with. The trenches for the pipes cut through a buried metal surface (224), which appears to have been associated with the later phase of

the house rather than the Health Authority occupation. This area was later covered by the existing tarmac surface (222) laid as a car parking area by the Health Authority.

A trench (Trench 3) was excavated to investigate the site of a former L-shaped farm building to the north of the house, but there was no evidence of any *in situ* building. Made ground deposits of mixed demolition rubble and dumped building materials were encountered to an average depth of 0.5m below the surface, which were seen to overlie undisturbed natural glacial gravel. At the north end of the excavation trench, at a depth of some 0.36m, the natural gravel dipped downwards following a relatively steep natural slope to the north: in the east facing section of the trench it appeared that the natural slope had been levelled up by the deposition of a garden soil. The top of the soil layer was compacted indicating that it may have been a previous ground surface, which had subsequently become buried. It is likely that this soil layer represents the levelling up of the natural slope, behind the retaining wall built some distance to the north, to form a level farmyard and garden to the north and northwest of the house.

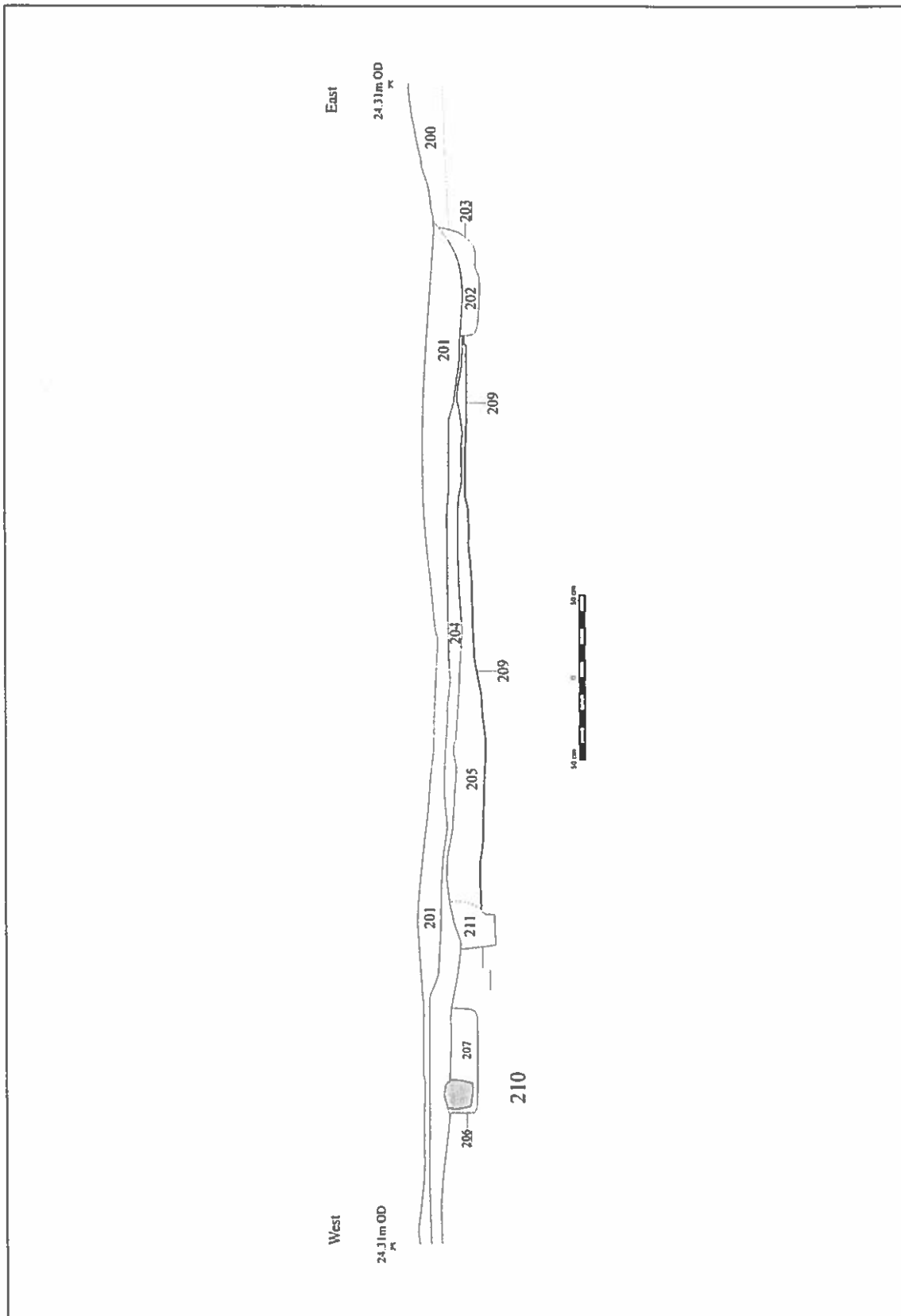


Figure 4: South-facing section of Trench 2

## **4. CONCLUSIONS**

### **4.1 THE EVALUATION RESULTS**

The evaluation has shown that the annexed block to the west of the house was a later addition and not part of the original design of Starling Park House. Its slightly skewed connecting passage was butted up to, but not tied into, the rear wall of the possible service stair extension of the main house. Furthermore, the southeastern corner of the west block had been built over an earlier substantial stone drain structure, which probably related to the original house. The cobbled surface, which was possibly a small external area of hard standing and probably bounded by a wall of some form, also seemed to belong to the original building phase.

What was also made clear during the evaluation was that the ownership and occupation of the site by the Health Authority resulted in the almost total demolition of the west block of Starling Park House and the farm buildings around the yard to the northwest. The extent and completeness of the demolition was surprising, with only a small section of the southeast corner of the building surviving as a stone structure. In the other sections where traces of the walls of the west block were encountered, only the very bases of the foundation trenches survived.

### **4.2 A TARGETED WATCHING BRIEF**

The results of the evaluation were conclusive enough to enable targeting of the future watching brief phase of the project towards those areas of the site that retain the highest archaeological potential. In particular the area around the stone drain structure requires further investigation and further elucidation of the nature of the structure itself may also be possible. The former farmyard area to the northwest of the house will also require close monitoring during the watching brief given the minimal results gained from the excavation of Trenches 3 and 4 during the evaluation.

## **APPENDIX ONE: DETAILED RECORD OF FIELDWORK**

### **SUMMARY CONTEXT RECORD FOR TRENCHES 1 & 2**

#### **Trench 1**

- 100 Turf and topsoil
- 101 Discrete patches of turf, moss and soil accumulated on limestone fragment hard-standing surface 102
- 102 A hard standing layer of limestone fragments laid after demolition of the west block building (same as 201 in Trench 2)
- 103 Probable machine-cut hollow effected during the demolition of the corridor connecting the west block to Starling Park House, identified in the south-facing section
- 104 Demolition debris filling 103
- 105 An *in situ* differentiated natural gravel layer
- 106 The stone footing of the most northerly of the two connecting corridor walls between the west block and the house
- 107 The stone footing of the most southerly of the two connecting corridor walls between the west block and the house
- 108 The foundation trench for wall 107
- 109 A re-deposited or graded demolition debris and rubbish layer, post-demolition landscaping layer acting as a sub-base for 102 hard standing
- 110 Robber trench for west wall of west block (correlates with 206 in Trench 2)
- 111 Demolition debris fill of 110
- 112 Probable robber trench for the south wall of the western return of the west wall of the west block
- 113 Fill of 112
- 114 Natural *in situ* glacial gravel layers

#### **Trench 2**

- 200 Turf and topsoil
- 201 A hard standing layer of limestone fragments laid after demolition of the west block building (same as 102 in Trench 2)
- 202 Demolition debris fill of 203
- 203 Robber trench for east wall of west block
- 204 A demolition debris layer graded prior to laying of 201 hard standing
- 205 Possibly a first phase demolition debris layer
- 206 Robber trench for west wall of west block (correlates with 110 in Trench 1)
- 207 Demolition debris fill of 206
- 208 Layer of coal dust overlying 209
- 209 Area of pitched stone cobbles
- 210 Robbed out foundation trench for a wall or other structure abutted by cobbling 209
- 211 Mortar-rich fill of 210
- 212 A thin linear layer of mortar possibly representing remnants of a robbed wall
- 213 Stone drain or conduit
- 214 Demolition debris back-fill of drain 213



- 215** Wall footing of mortared stone representing the southeast corner of the west block building
- 216** Plaster or mortar wall covering on north face of 213
- 217** A drain abutting the outside, east face, of 215
- 218** A hard surface, probably metalled, that represents the contemporary ground surface outside the west wall of the west block building
- 219** Ceramic sewerage or water main pipe, 160mm diameter
- 220** Pipe trench for 219
- 221** Soil fill of 220
- 222** Modern tarmac surface
- 223** Stone sub-base layer for 222
- 224** A buried former metalled ground surface
- 225** Ceramic sewerage or water main pipe, 140mm diameter
- 226** Pipe trench for 225
- 227** Soil fill of 226
- 228** Alkathene gas main pipe, 70mm diameter
- 229** Pipe trench for 228
- 230** Soil fill of 229
- 231** Red brick footings of a soak-away drain
- 232** Post demolition backfill of 231
- 233** Silty lower fill of 231
- 234** Foundation cut for 231
- 235** Silty lower fill of drain 213

## **APPENDIX TWO: CATALOGUE OF EVALUATION ARCHIVE**

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

- A.** Copy of final report
- B.** Records made during fieldwork, including context record sheets and site notebook.
- C.** Drawing catalogue and site drawings.
- D.** Site photographs - catalogue, colour slides, B/W contact sheets.
- E.** Finds catalogue, individual finds records and finds report.
- I.** Archive report, draft copies of final report.
- J.** Publication drawings.
- M.** Miscellaneous correspondence.

There is no material for classes **F**, **G**, **H**, **K**, **L** and **N**.

The archive is currently held by Cambria Archaeology Field Operations, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire, as Project Record Number 47614.



*Plate 1. View of stone drain 213, looking south*



*Plate 2. Near vertical view of western return of pitched cobbles 209, looking south*





*Plate 3. View of north facing section in Trench 1 showing robber trench 110*



*Plate 4. View of east facing section at the end of Trench 1, showing robber trench 112*





*Plate 5. Wall footing 215 crossing stone drain 213 and its backfill 214, looking east*



*Plate 6. View west of stone drain 213*





*Plate 7. View of drain 217 looking west*



*Plate 8. Red brick soakaway drain (231) after removal of its fill, looking north*





*Plate 9. Wall footing (106) of skewed connecting passage, looking east*



*Plate 10. View southeast of modern foundations for Health Authority building  
exposed in Trench 4,*

## **SOURCES**

### **CARTOGRAPHIC SOURCES**

1837 St. Peter's, Carmarthen Tithe Map and Apportionment

1830/31 Ordnance Survey original surveyor's drawings, sheet 180

1887 Ordnance Survey first edition 1:10560 Carms. Sheet XXXIX NW

1907 Ordnance Survey second edition 1:10560 Carms. Sheet XXXIX NW

1936 Ordnance Survey revised edition 1:2500 Carms. Sheet XXXIX.6

1967 Ordnance Survey Geological Survey of Great Britain, Carmarthen Sheet 229  
Solid

1967 Ordnance Survey Geological Survey of Great Britain, Carmarthen Sheet 229  
Drift

### **PRIMARY DOCUMENTARY SOURCES**

#### **Census Returns**

1851, 1861, 1871, 1901 census returns for Carmarthen (St. Peter's)

#### **Papers relating to Samuel Tardrew's Estate**

(Carmarthen Archives Service Ref: Trant RR2/12 371-373)

1850 Agreement between Sir Robert Henry Cunliffe, Baronet, of Acton Park, Denbigh, and Samuel Tardrew for letting Starling Park.

1864 Reconveyance of certain freehold properties of the Starling Park Estate.

1864 General Bill relating to Samuel Tardrew's Estate, No. 1.

1864 Agreement for a lease on a stone quarry at Allt Cnap, Carmarthen

1866 Conveyance of the stable, coach h, warehouse and yard at Woods Row.

1866 An Indenture of various holdings between Margaret Tardrew and Thomas Rees Oliver Powell.

1866 Answers to defendants questions, Prosser against Thomas.

**Carmarthen Journal** (Copies held on microfilm at the Reference Library in Carmarthen).

1897 Notice of the sale of the Starling Park Estate by public auction, Carmarthen Journal 9 July 1897, page 5.

### **UNPUBLISHED REPORTS**

Page N	2003	<i>Starling Park, Carmarthen: archaeological desk-based Assessment</i> . Llandeilo. Cambria Archaeology report for Persimmon Homes (Wales) Ltd. Report No.2003/19.
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**STARLING PARK, CARMARTHEN  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD EVALUATION**

**REPORT NUMBER 2004/**

**January 2004**

This report has been prepared by Richard Ramsey

Position Archaeologist

Signature ..... *RS Ramsey* ..... Date *7/1/2004* .....

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

Position Project Manager

Signature ..... *Nigel Page* ..... Date *7/1/2004* .....

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