

APRIL 2003



55 PRIORY STREET, CARMARTHEN (FORMERLY LOWNDES GARAGE)

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AND WATCHING BRIEF,
APRIL 2003**



Report No. 2003/66

Report Prepared for:
BASSETT AND MACGREGOR LIMITED



A R C H A E O L O G Y

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CAMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGY

REPORT NO. 2003/66
PROJECT RECORD NO. 48082

MAY 2003

55 PRIORY STREET, CARMARTHEN
(FORMERLY LOWNDES GARAGE)
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AND WATCHING BRIEF

By

Duncan Schlee

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1.0 SUMMARY

In response to a planning application, Cambria Archaeology undertook an archaeological evaluation and watching brief at 55 Priory Street, Carmarthen (formerly Lowndes Garage), on behalf of Bassett and MacGregor Ltd.

The area (NGR SN 4197 2059) lies just beyond the defences of the Roman town of Carmarthen (Moridunum) and adjacent to the site of the medieval Augustinian priory. Three trenches were excavated, and the excavation of two foundation trenches was monitored. The trench sections demonstrated that the archaeological deposits had been truncated during the post-medieval period, and modern deposits/structures directly overlay natural subsoil.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Site location (Fig. 1)

55 Priory Street (formerly Lowndes Garage) is located at NGR SN 4197 2059, approximately 200m east of the east gate of the Roman town of *Moridunum*, possibly lying alongside, or on the line of the main Roman Road leading eastwards from the town. The discovery of a cremation urn just 75 m NNW of the site in 2001 confirmed that the area was also used for extra-mural burial during the Roman period. In addition, the remains of the Roman amphitheatre lie immediately northwest of the development site.

In the medieval period, the 'bishop-house' or monastery of Llandeulyddog was established immediately to the east of the Roman east gate, on a site that may have extended into the development area. During the later medieval period, Llandeulyddog was transferred to the Augustinians and was re-founded as the priory of St John the Evangelist, from which Priory Street derived its name. The Priory precinct lay 30m to the east of 55 Priory street.

The later history of the site (as attested by cartographic evidence) has been one of domestic occupation, followed by the construction of Lowndes Garage in the 1920s. The garage was demolished in advance of the current development.

At the commencement of the archaeological work, the site comprised an area measuring 27m NW-SE by 19m SW-NE (448 sq. metres), the bulk of which lay beneath a concrete-slab surface. The rear (SE) half of this surfaced area was built up several metres above the natural ground level, forming a platform supported by a revetment wall. This area was largely unaffected by the development groundworks, which were confined to the roadside half of the development. The uprights of the steel-framed structure that supported the garage building were still partially *in situ*.

2.2 Development proposals

The site was subject to a proposed development consisting of two blocks of flats, on the street frontage, with a central access way to parking bays behind, occupying the same area as the demolished building. The proposed building required the digging of test pits and foundation trenches within the first 10 metres of the street front.

The proximity of the Roman amphitheatre and other Roman period features, coupled with the possible presence of features and/or buildings associated with the medieval and post-medieval street frontage, suggested that archaeologically sensitive remains were likely to be encountered during the building works.

The Development Control Officer for Cambria Archaeology – Heritage Management therefore draughted a brief (dated 13/03/2003) for a staged archaeological evaluation during the preparation of the site before the commencement of building works.

In response, Cambria Archaeology Field Operations was successfully invited, by Bassett MacGregor Limited, to tender for the archaeological evaluation at the site. The evaluation was undertaken in stages. A new service trench through the site was required by the development. This was archaeologically monitored and recorded, and treated as an evaluation trench. In addition, two more geotechnical pits were excavated under archaeological supervision. Should the deposits revealed by the trench and pits have been of local, regional or national significance, then the appropriate strategy for further evaluation and recording would have been initiated. In the event, the deposits proved to be of limited significance and the remainder of the archaeological work was undertaken as a watching brief on the excavation of foundation trenches.

2.3 Project objectives

The primary objectives of the project are therefore –

1. to establish the line of the Roman Road at this point
2. to ascertain whether or not the site occupies a Roman cemetery
3. to test for features associated with the amphitheatre
4. to determine the quality, significance, survival and potential of these and related deposits.

Further objectives will be –

1. to test for the presence of deposits and features associated with the early medieval monastery of Llandeulyddog, and with the later medieval priory
2. to determine the quality, significance, survival and potential of these and related deposits
3. to assess the influence of these features on the resulting landscape and morphology of this part of the town. In addition, the nature of the medieval settlement outside the Priory gates may be ascertained.

2.4 Project Methodology

The objectives were to be achieved in five stages –

1. A desk-top assessment of the area. This was a cartographic and documentary search for all available sources of historic information relating to the site.
2. The monitoring of the removal of the present slab floor in the garage building (ie. the northern, street-frontage part of the property), and the removal of the existing foundations. The slab floor to the rear of the property, in the area of the proposed car park, was retained.
3. A service trench measuring approximately 8m long was to be excavated, by the contractor, through the centre of the property from the pavement through to the proposed car park area. This was excavated, under archaeological supervision, before being subject to full archaeological recording by drawings and photography.
4. Two 2m x 2m test pits were excavated, one within each proposed block of flats. These will be excavated by the contractor, under archaeological supervision, to the top of the archaeological deposits, whereupon they will be hand-cleaned and further excavated by hand where possible and/or necessary. They were to be fully recorded by drawings and photography.
5. A watching brief was undertaken on the excavation of new foundation trenches.

3.0 SITE HISTORY

3.1 Documentary search

The results of this project were assessed against a considerable body of excavation and other archaeological work undertaken within Roman and medieval Carmarthen since 1979, largely by Cambria Archaeology (Dyfed Archaeological Trust). This has involved a major excavation on the site of Richmond Park Primary School, further excavation along the street frontage here, a major excavation within the Roman fort on Spilman Street, excavations to the south of Priory Street Hospital, and numerous smaller evaluations and watching briefs including the discovery of the urn noted above. The results of this work have been published in a number of academic journals, and the definitive synthesis, by Heather James, is shortly due for publication as a monograph for *Britannia*, the national journal of Roman studies. A significant body of work has also been undertaken, by Cambria Archaeology, in the medieval town, including excavation within St John's Priory. These projects provide a framework within which the present project can be set.

Despite the substantial amount of archaeological work that has been undertaken in recent years on the development of Roman and medieval Carmarthen, there is little documented work that has a direct bearing on the 55 Priory Street site. As a result, only a brief description of the known development of the area will be given here. The definitive report on the excavations within the Roman town will shortly be published (James forthcoming). A useful summary is already available (James 1992).

The site is located approximately 200m east of the east gate of the Roman town of *Moridunum*, one of only two towns established in Roman Wales. It lies alongside, or occupies the line of the main Roman Road leading eastwards from the town towards the Roman Forts at Llandeilo and Llandovery. The area has long been thought to have been used for Roman extra mural burial and this was confirmed by the discovery, by Cambria Archaeology, of a cremation urn just 75 m NNW of the site at Park Hall in 2001 (report no. 2001/42; PRN 42599). In addition, the remains of the Roman amphitheatre (PRN 31) lie immediately northwest of the development site (Fig. 2). A trial excavation was undertaken here in 1968 (Jones 1968) and a larger excavation in 1970 (Little 1971). The amphitheatre was probably constructed in mid 2nd century (ibid.).

During the early medieval period, the 'bishop-house', or monastery, of Llandeulyddog was established immediately to the east of the Roman east gate (James 1980, 37-40), on a site that may have extended into the development area.

During the later medieval period, Llandeulyddog was transferred to the Augustinians and was re-founded as the priory of St John the Evangelist (ibid.), from which Priory Street derived its name (Fig. 2). The Priory precinct lay 30m to the east of 55 Priory street. It seems likely that the pre-existing Roman cemetery formed a focus for this early ecclesiastical site from which a 7th-8th century radiocarbon date has been obtained (James 1985, 127-129). The settlement that developed around this site was known as 'Old Carmarthen', distinct from 'New Carmarthen' that developed around the Norman Castle established on a virgin site to the south-west. Medieval development outside the precinct appears to have pushed the line of Priory Street northwards at this point, to form a kink lying north of the Roman Road, which may then be sealed beneath the Lowndes Garage site.

The later history of the site has been one of domestic (and possibly commercial) occupation, associated with the nearby tin-plate works (James 1980, 51, 56), followed by the construction of Lowndes Garage in the 1920s. Field evidence suggests that the garage was erected new, over the site of earlier buildings which were demolished (see below). The garage continued in use into the later 20th century, but was subsequently used as a shop, which closed in the 1990s.

Despite the good potential of the site, and although the Sites and Monuments Record contains much information on Carmarthen as a whole, there were no records within the area around the 55 Priory Street site that suggested with any certainty that archaeological features would be encountered.

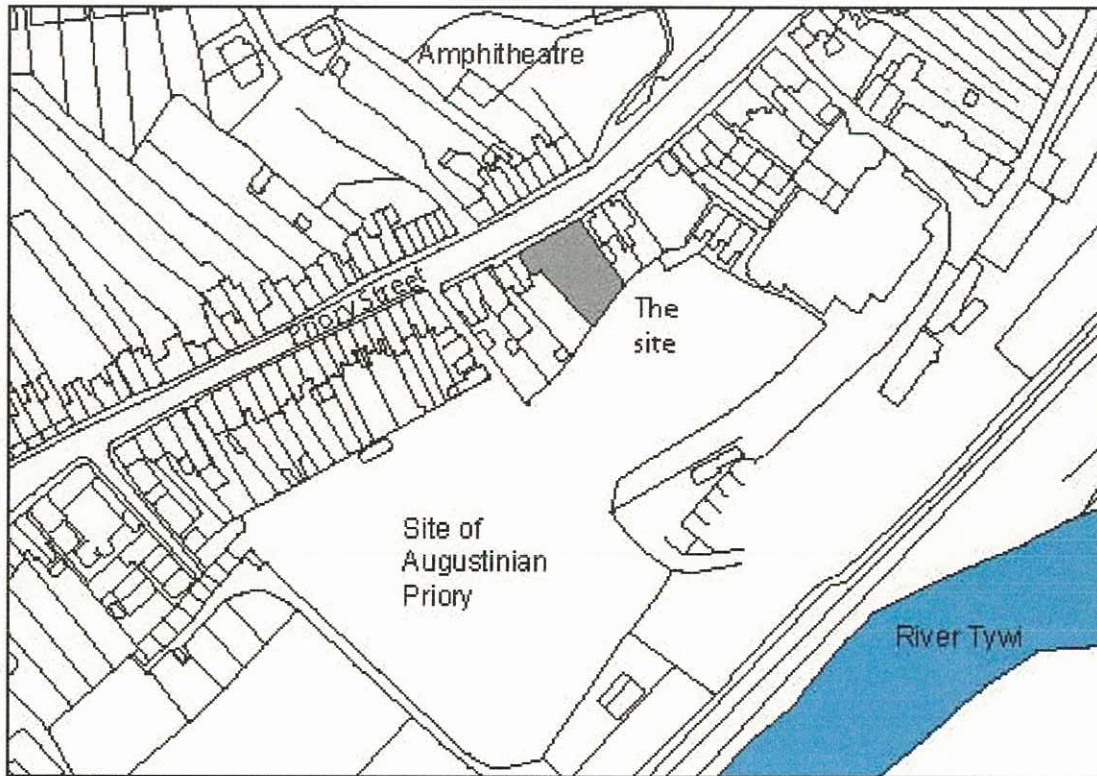


Fig. 1: Location plan of site

3.2 Historic map search

The available cartographic evidence representing the more recent use history of the site dates from 1834 onwards. The maps show the gradual development of 55 Priory Street and the surrounding area. On some maps it is difficult to pinpoint exactly which property is 55 Priory Street due to changes in property boundaries and differences in the styles used in depicting the buildings. The functions of the buildings that occupied the site at different times are also uncertain. The tithe map is not included because it is insufficiently detailed while no accompanying entries for the property in the apportionment could be identified.

The map evidence, though giving some clues as to land-use and general development of the site, lacks sufficient detail to enhance the interpretation of the post-medieval remains that were exposed on the site. The 1887 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 18) indicates a relatively large building on the site (compared to the adjacent buildings), with outbuildings behind. This perhaps suggests that the building had a non-domestic function at that time. This is also the first map to show the 'old gravel quarry' to the south of the site. It is possible that the revetment wall bounding the 55 Priory Street site (see below), is contemporary with the quarry, as possibly was the large building. However, the revetment wall may be contemporary with Lowndes Garage.

See Appendix 1 for a discussion of the historic map evidence and map copies (Figs. 15-20).

4.0 FIELDWORK RESULTS

4.1 Site description (Fig. 2)

The most immediately apparent feature of the development site was that the Lowndes Garage building was constructed upon made ground, raised up to the level of the street frontage. The garden plots behind the properties on either side of the site more accurately reflect the topography in this location. The made ground is retained by a stone-built revetment wall around the limits of the plot. The revetment overlooks the former gravel quarry site (now a grassy public open space). It is uncertain whether this revetment was built at the time the gravel quarrying was undertaken (between 1864 and 1887) or at a later time.

The concrete slab foundations for the Lowndes garage building are built over the revetment wall. The make-up beneath the slab surface at the eastern end of the site, where Trench 2 was excavated, was 0.20 metres deep, and it was decided that the make-up should remain *in situ* over the rest of the site. This effectively meant that most of the potential archaeological deposits would remain sealed and protected and the only potential disturbance to archaeological deposits would occur within the groundworks for the development. These groundworks were restricted to a 10 metre wide area along the street frontage – which, however, was the area in which archaeological deposits were most likely to occur close to the surface. This was therefore the site chosen for the evaluation trenches, ie. the test pits and service trench.

The steel frame uprights of the garage structure, and their concrete settings along the street frontage, were removed. Also sunk into the ground along the street frontage were four fuel tanks, encased in sand within brick linings. Together these features conspired to obliterate any traces of earlier archaeological deposits in that area.

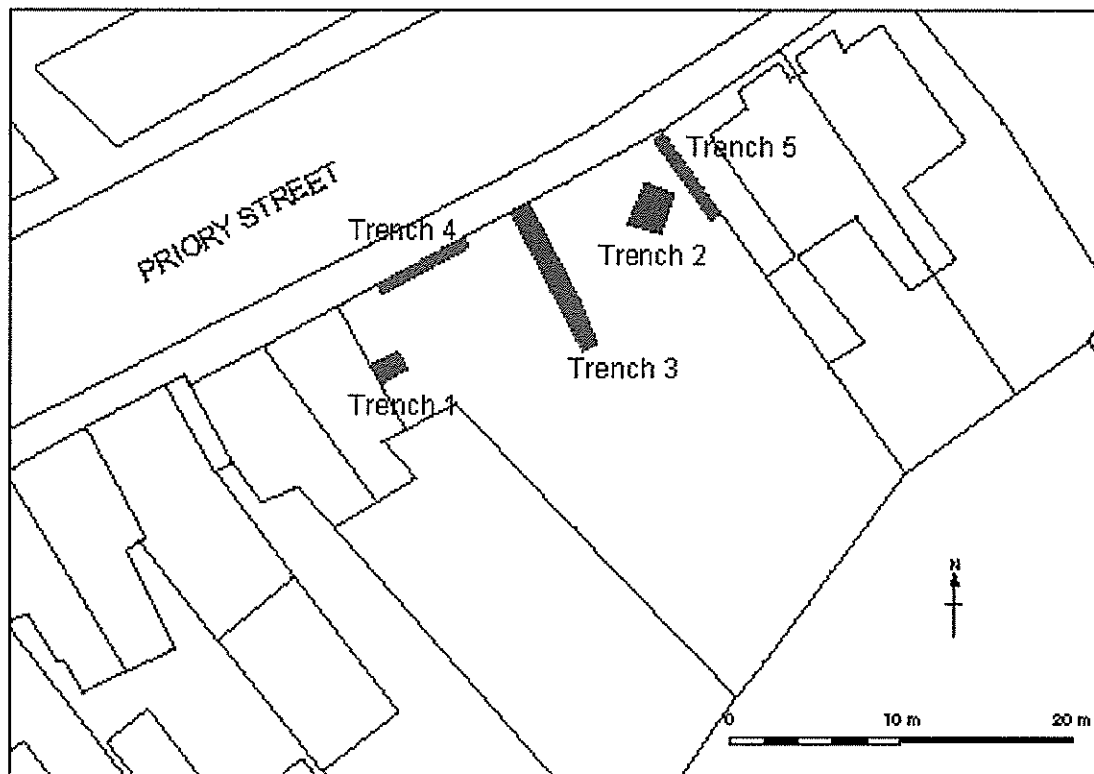


Fig. 2: Overall plan of site showing trench locations

4.2 The evaluation trenches

Two test pits (Trenches 1 and 2) and a service trench (Trench 3) were excavated.

4.2.1 Trench 1 (Figs. 3 and 4)

This test pit was located on the western edge of the site, up against the wall of the neighbouring house. Directly below the foundation slab for the garage a small area of *in-situ* cobbling was revealed. This cobbling appeared to run up to the wall and is thought to be the remains of a cobbled access-way between houses. The cobbles were set into soft dark sooty material, in turn lying above a mixed layer of mortar, shale, redeposited natural gravels and clay silt. This layer is presumed to be a make-up layer for the cobble surface. Beneath this layer and the top of natural gravel deposits were some shallow pockets of orange silty clay. These may represent clay filled ruts from before the cobble surface was laid.



Fig. 3: South facing section of Trench 1

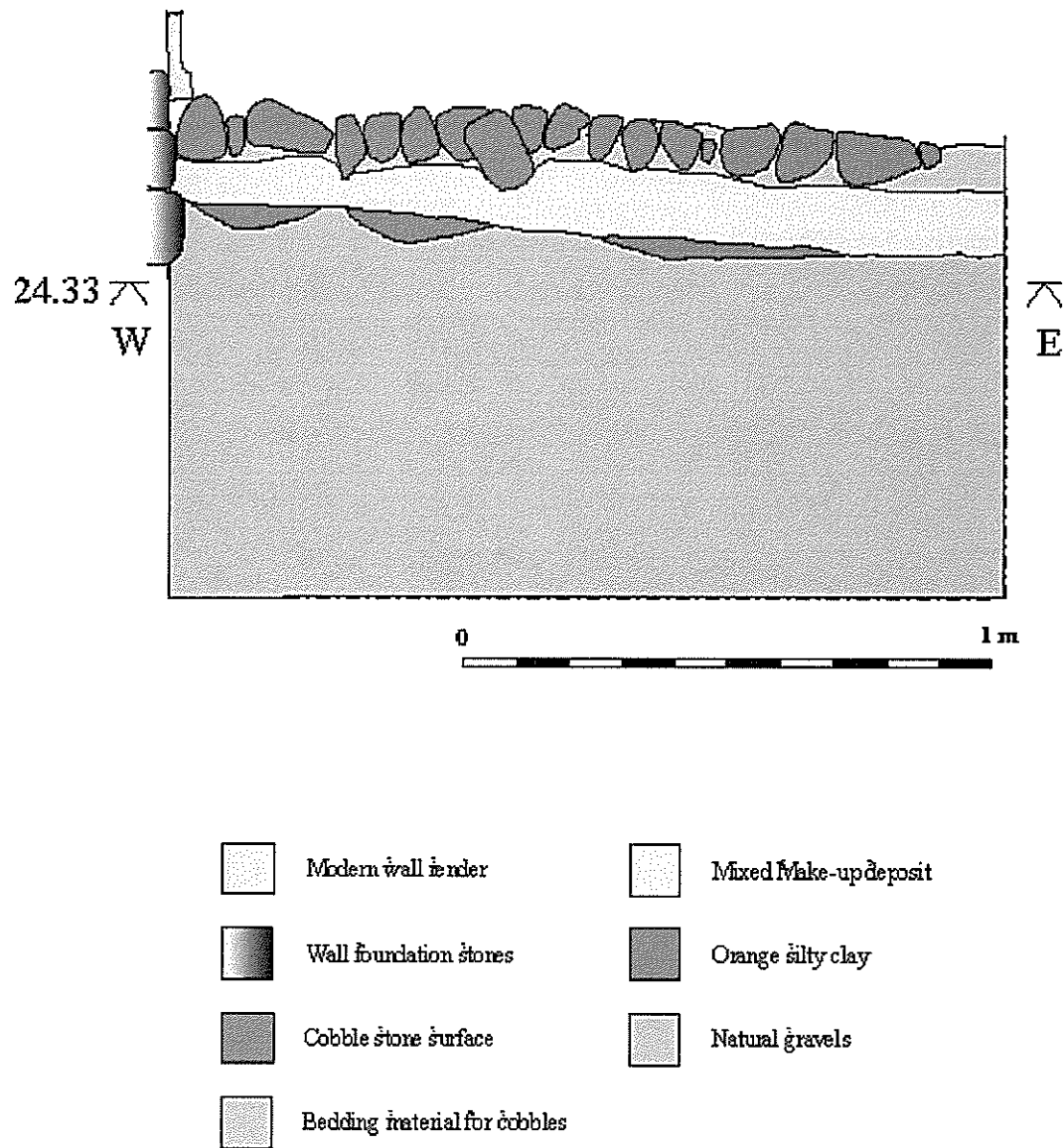


Fig. 4: South facing section of Trench 1

4.2.2 Trench 2 (Figs. 5-9)

This test pit excavated in the north east corner of the site. Beneath approximately 0.20 metres of make-up deposits, were two layers of mortar rich deposits that are presumed to represent the demolition of the building that stood on the site before the construction of Lowndes Garage. Beneath these was a thin layer of dark brown humic material on top of a layer of grey green silty sand. Compacted into the top of this layer was a patch of crushed clay pipe stems. Although no dating evidence was recovered, this is presumed to be a 19th century occupation layer. Beneath this layer were two more layers of re-deposited natural sandy silts with shale, cobbles and some mortar. These overlay a layer of flat lying stones set into a layer of compact (possibly burnt) shale. This was probably the patchy remnant of a stone surface. No dating evidence was recovered from this horizon so it cannot reliably be attributed to a particular period. Beneath this was a layer of yellow brown silty clay (probably a make-up layer for the stone surface above). Three stake holes aligned approximately at a right angle to the road were identified at this level, but may have been associated with the stoney surface above. Beneath this layer was the top of the natural gravel deposits. This horizon appeared to be a compacted and possibly burnt surface. Although no dating evidence was recovered from this horizon it can be speculated that it may represent the Roman period.



Fig. 5: South facing section of Trench 2

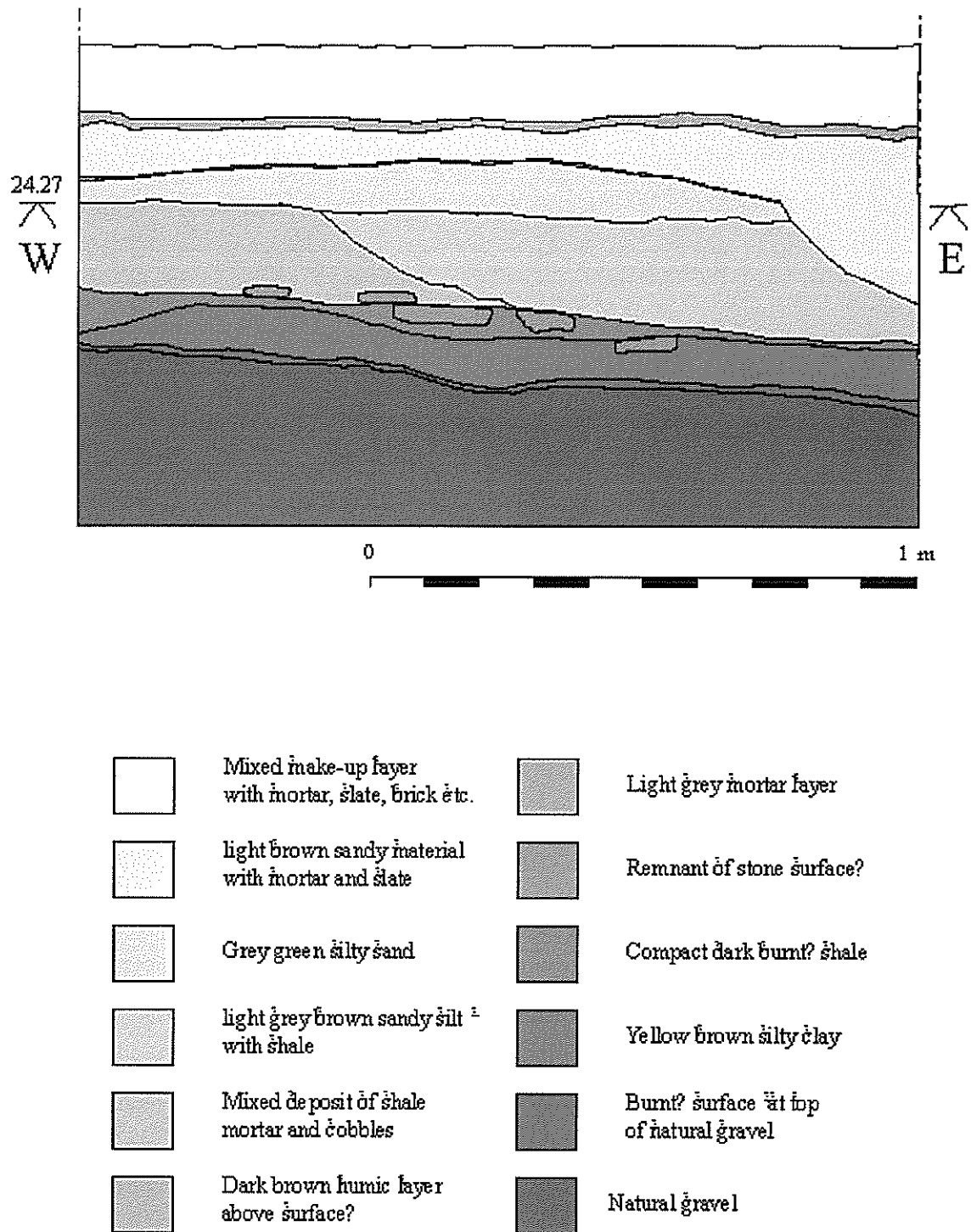


Fig. 6: South facing section of Trench 2



Fig. 7: Trench 2 during excavation, looking east (showing area of crushed clay pipe stems)



Fig. 8: Trench 2 during excavation, looking north (showing stake holes top right)

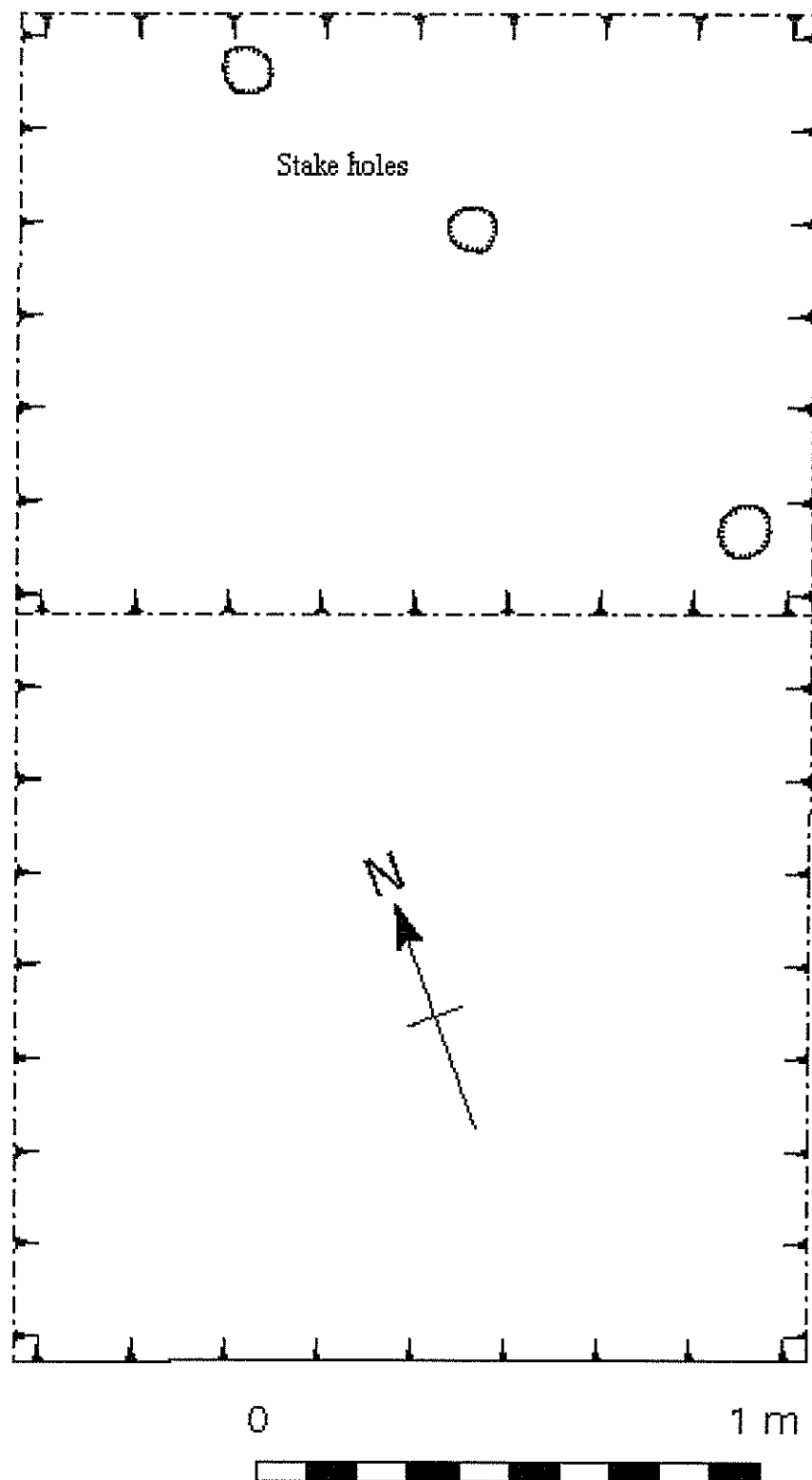


Fig. 9: Plan of Trench 2

4.2.3 Trench 3 (Figs. 10-12)

Trench 3 was dug as a service trench running back from the street front in a south-easterly direction through the middle of the site for a distance of 8 metres. At its northern end this trench revealed part of one of four fuel tanks associated with the Lowndes Garage. These, and a service trench (also associated with the garage) have truncated the majority of the deposits along the street frontage. To the south of the fuel tank all the deposits were make-up deposits of post-medieval date for raising the ground level. These overlay natural gravels. The west edge of the trench coincided with the east face of some stone wall foundations, assumed to be the remnant of former property on the site. These foundations were cut into the make-up deposits. Running up to this wall was a deposit of purple cinder material compacted to form a surface. This was bedded upon a deposit of crushed glass slag. The southern end of the trench section was disturbed by a modern sewer pipe and the concrete foundations for the steel framed garage building. There was no evidence of the stratigraphy described in Trench 2. Most significantly perhaps, there was no evidence that the top of the natural gravels had been used as a surface.

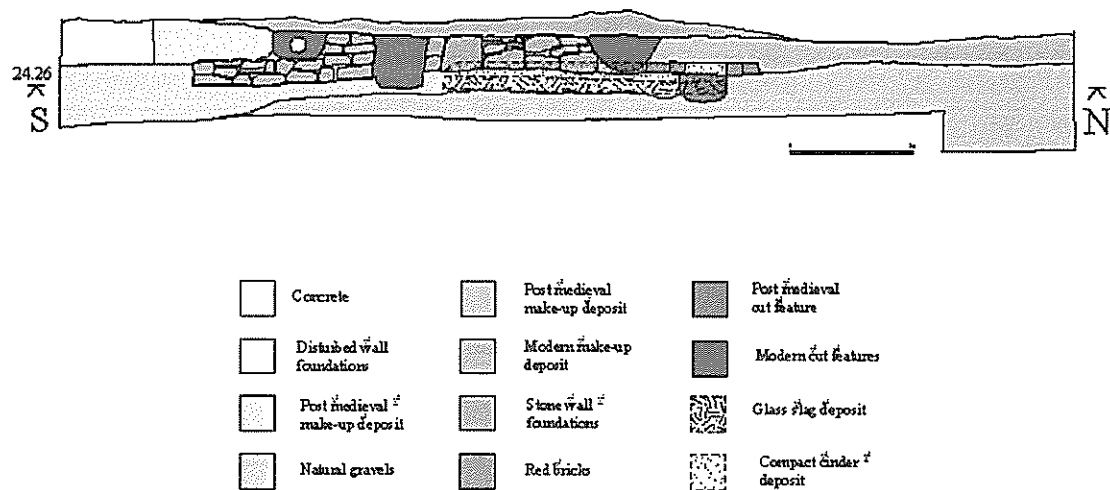


Fig. 10: Southeast facing section of Trench 3



Fig. 11: South end of Trench 3, east facing section

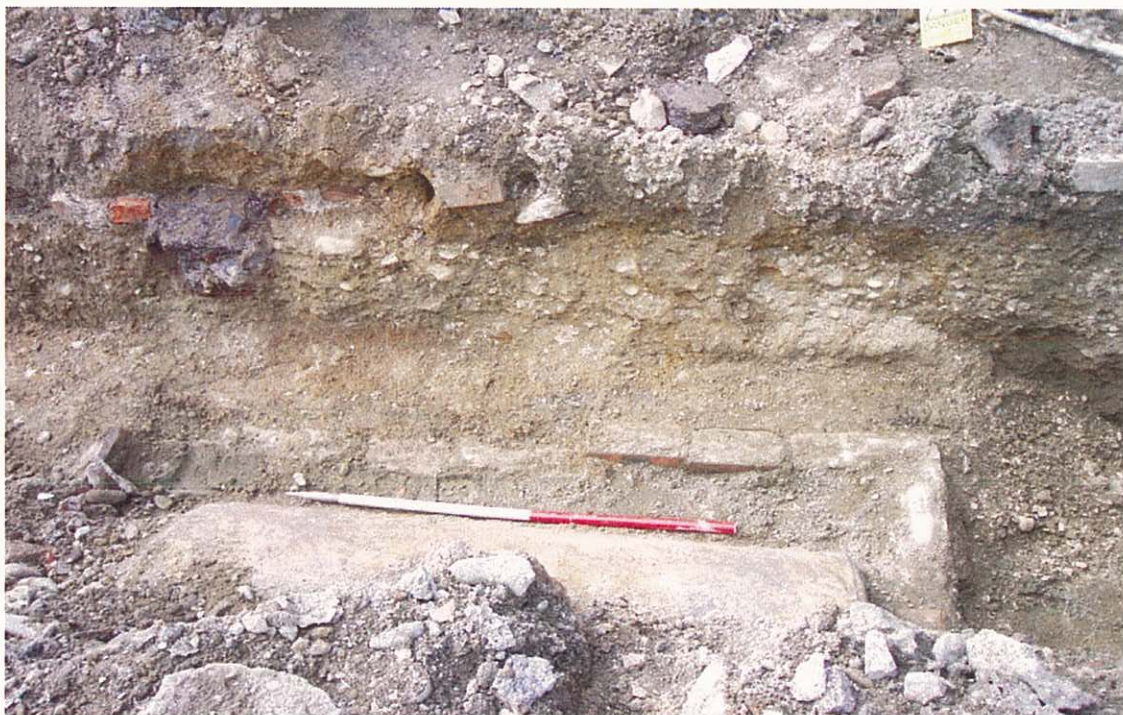


Fig. 12: North end of Trench 3, east facing section

4.3 The foundation trench watching brief

The garage had been a steel frame structure without foundation trenches. Therefore new foundation trenches were required for the development.

The test pit excavations suggested that the north-east corner of the site in the vicinity of Trench 2 was most likely to contain archaeologically significant deposits. Consequently the digging of foundation trenches in this area was undertaken under archaeological supervision. The deposits revealed in the foundation trenches did not, however, correspond with those in Trench 2.

The majority of deposits in foundation Trench 4, along on the street frontage, were truncated by the fuel storage tanks and concrete settings for the steel frame of Lowndes Garage. Surviving deposits were all of post-medieval date, directly overlying natural gravels (Fig. 13).

Trench 5, the foundation trench along the eastern edge of the site, also revealed only mixed dark grey silty post-medieval deposits overlying natural gravels and gradually sloping down to the south. The post-medieval material dropped below the bottom of the foundation trench approximately 7 metres from the street front. The top of the gravels appeared to follow the natural contours of the land but the absence of the more complex stratigraphy encountered in Trench 2 suggests that the majority of earlier deposits may have been truncated away before the post-medieval deposits were laid down. No evidence of post-medieval building remains was encountered within the trench (Fig. 14).

From the results of the test pits and foundation trenches described, it was considered unlikely that further monitoring of the excavation of the foundation trenches for the rest of the building would be necessary.



Fig. 13: Trench 4, the foundation trench along the street frontage, south facing section



Fig. 14: North end of Trench 5, the easternmost foundation trench, west facing section

4.4 Conclusions

The mixed dark silty deposits encountered at 55 Priory street were primarily post-medieval in date, most probably 19th century. They appear to be make-up deposits to create a level platform upon which the stone building foundations in Trench 3 were built. It seems likely that the revetment wall was built to contain these deposits. All this suggests that the ground level was raised before the construction of Lowndes Garage in the 1920s.

The field evidence indicates that the construction of Lowndes Garage, which was new-built – along with its made-ground platform, in the 1920s – truncated nearly all the evidence for earlier structures. Insufficient of the underlying structures and deposits, which appear to have been post-medieval, was exposed to fully clarify the character of the buildings and the sequence of their construction.

However, it is also apparent that Roman and medieval deposits had already been truncated prior to the erection of these post-medieval buildings (or, as is less likely, they were never present here). In particular, there was no archaeological evidence for the Roman road. While this may suggest that the road lay further north, ie. directly beneath Priory Street, associated Roman deposits might have been expected.

In addition, this street-frontage area was heavily truncated by the insertion of four fuel tanks and the concrete settings for the garage frame. Only in Trench 2 was there any suggestion of a possible Roman period horizon. Since these deposits or their equivalent were not encountered in either Trench 3 or the eastern and northern foundation trenches, it is assumed that this was a small 'island' of stratigraphy that had somehow escaped subsequent truncation.

Although the 55 Priory Street site had considerable potential to reveal significant archaeological deposits, in the event, little was found. While this may be due to the considerable truncation that has occurred at the site in the recent past, it is more likely that any features that are present (such as the two stake holes in Trench 2) are sufficiently ephemeral or scantily distributed, that they cannot be easily identified or interpreted within the context of the limited groundworks that the development and the surviving archaeology warranted.

It is clear from the cartographic evidence that the plot of land immediately to the east of 55 Priory Street has remained undeveloped until relatively recently. The reason for this is not immediately apparent but it could have implications for the potential survival of any archaeological deposits that, if they were ever present, appear to have been lost at 55 Priory Street.

5.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The fieldwork, research and recording were undertaken by Duncan Schlee of Cambria Archaeology, who wrote this report. Thanks to Hubert Wilson for assistance with the site survey, and Neil Ludlow for project management (both of Cambria Archaeology).

6.0 ARCHIVE DEPOSITION

The archive, which will be indexed according to the National Monuments Record (NMR) material categories, is held by Cambria Archaeology, Llandeilo, and contains the following:-

- A.** Copy of the final report and disk
- B.** Field notes
- C.** Copies of planning specifications and site drawings
- D.** Colour photographs (disk)
- E.** List of finds
- G.** List of references
- J.** Final drawings
- L.** General administrative notes
- M.** Project correspondence

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

7.0 REFERENCES

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Little, J. H., 1971 'The Carmarthen Amphitheatre' *Carmarthenshire Antiquary* 7, 58-63.

Lodwick, J and V., 1994 *The Story of Carmarthen* (St. Peter's Press).

APPENDIX 1 Copies of historic maps

Fig. 15: 'Plan of Caermarthen' (1834)

On This map 55 Priory Street appears to be the plot immediately west of the vacant plot. The property divisions and building depictions appear rather stylised.

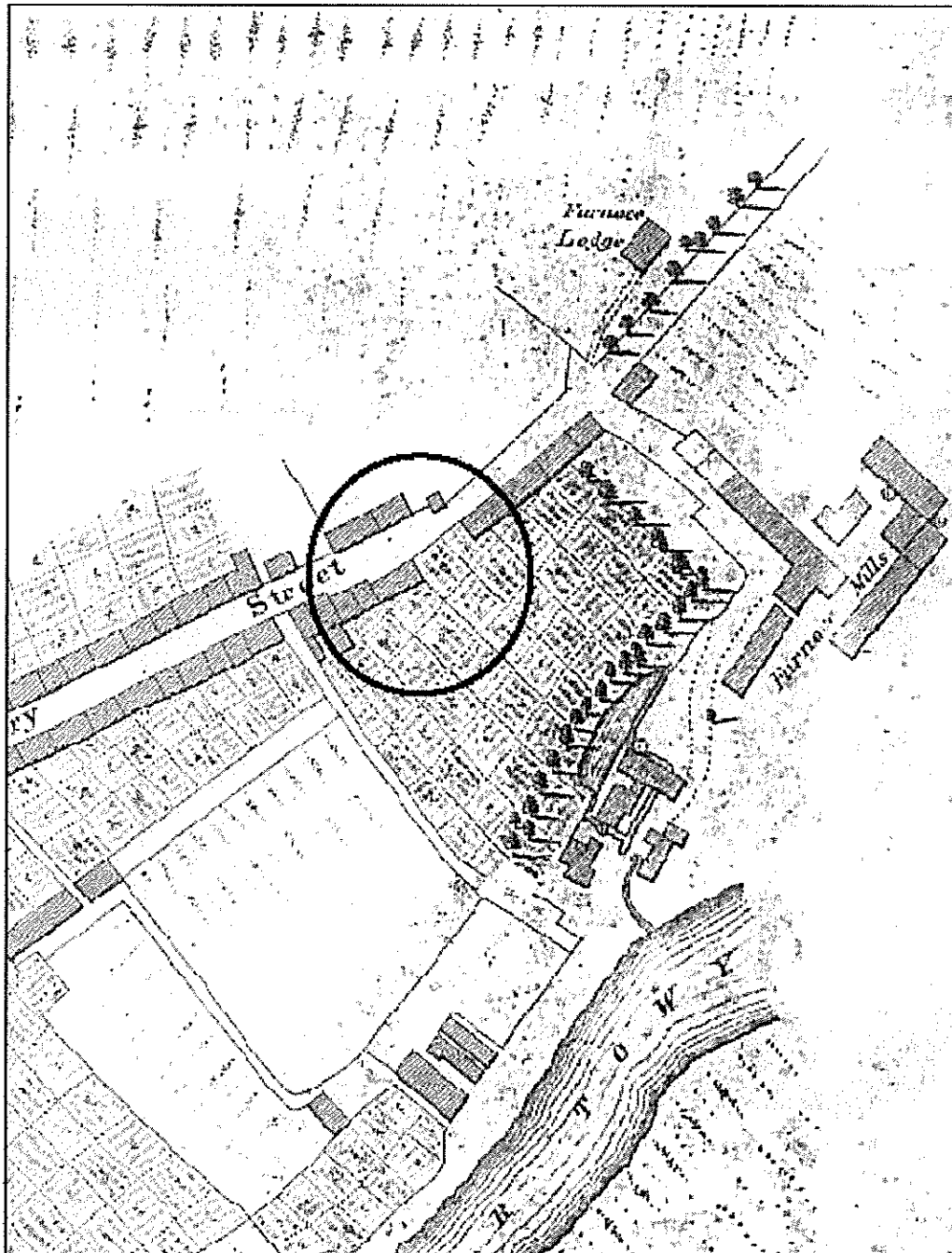


Fig. 16: 'Carmarthen and Cardigan Railway Map' (1862?)

On this map, probably produced 28 years later. Although property boundaries may have changed and the street front buildings are depicted differently, it seems that the 55 Priory Street plot is the same as that depicted in the earlier map. The adjacent plot remains vacant.

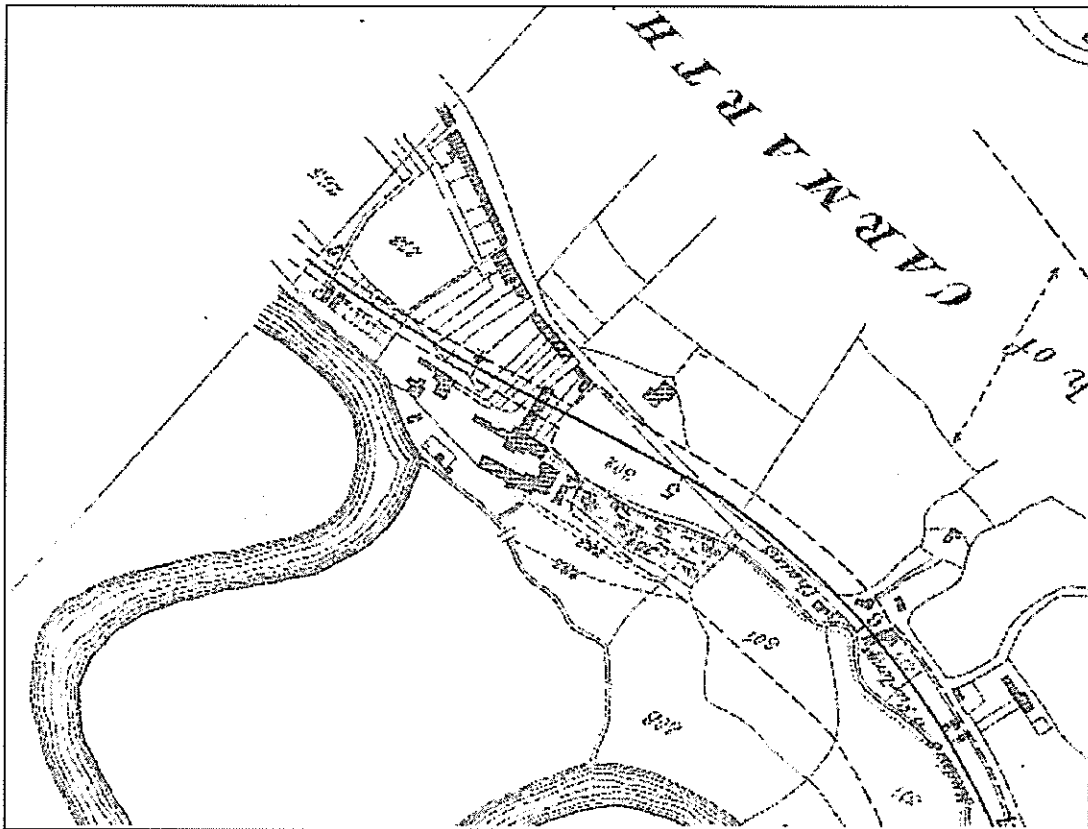


Fig. 17: 'Carmarthen and Cardigan Railway Map' (1864?)

On this map, possibly made two years later than map 2. The depiction of property boundaries and buildings has changed again but it appears that 55 Priory Street appears unchanged. A building has been built on the street frontage of the vacant plot.

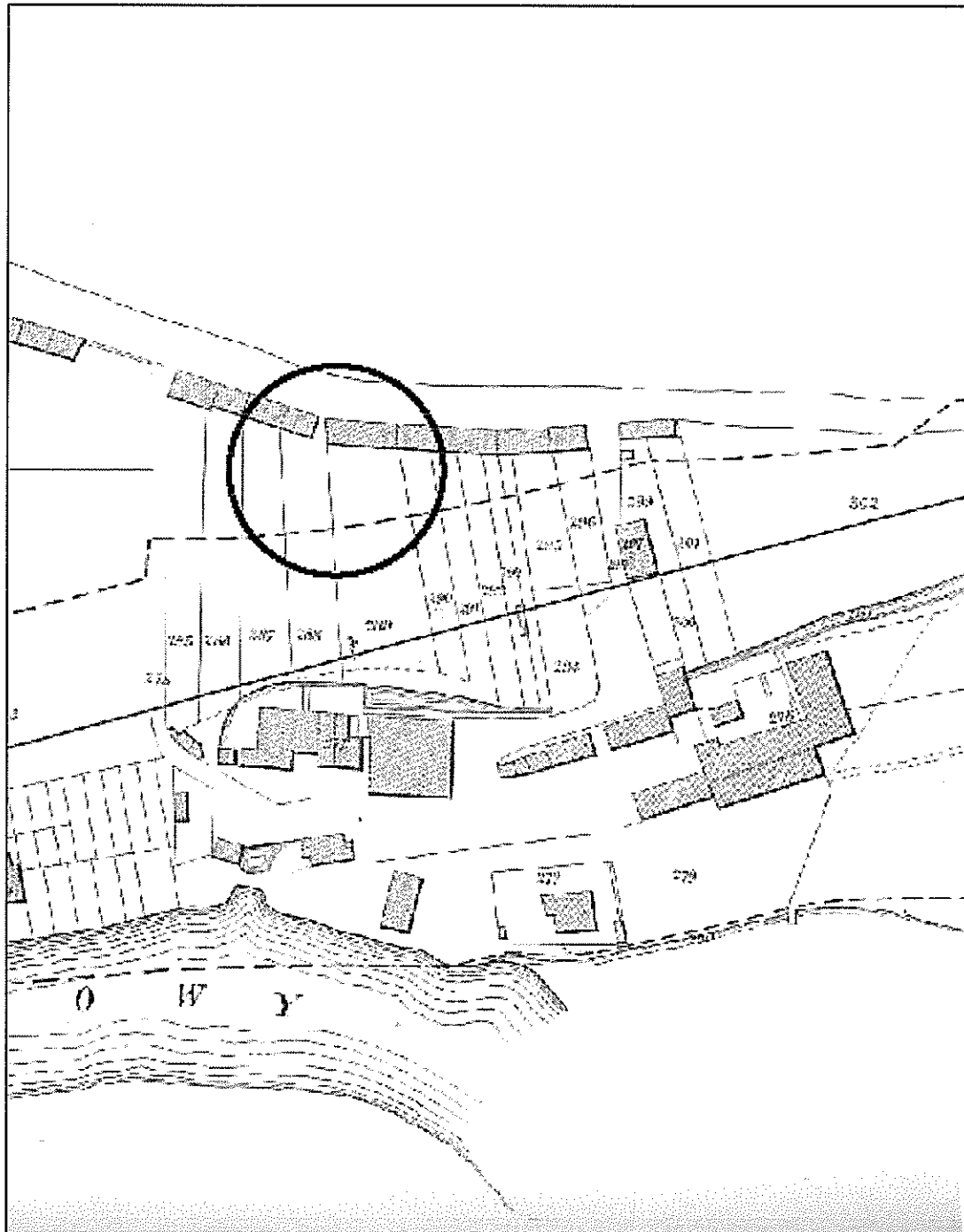


Fig. 18: Ordnance Survey 1:25000, Carmarthenshire Sheet XXXIX.3, 1st edition, 1887

On this map made 23 years later, there appear to be considerable changes in the area. The depiction of property boundaries and buildings is again different, but is more detailed. It appears that significantly different buildings are depicted at 55 Priory Street and that the plot to the east is again vacant. To the south of the plot a gravel pit has removed much of the area previously occupied by garden plots behind the street frontage.

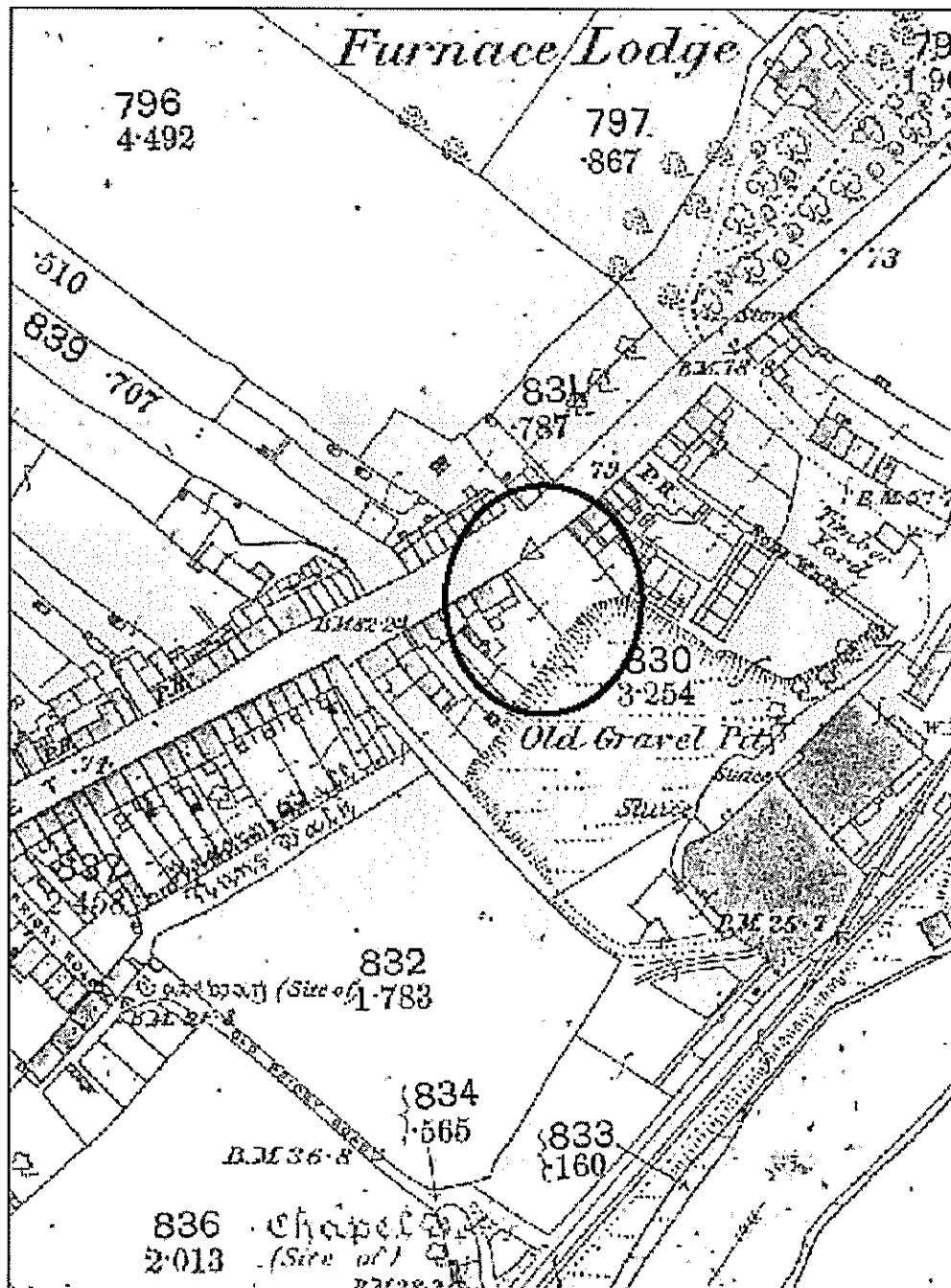


Fig. 19: Ordnance Survey 1:10560, Carmarthenshire Sheet, XXIXNE, 1st edition, 1891

This map made four years later shows the site is essentially unchanged, although building depictions are in a different style.

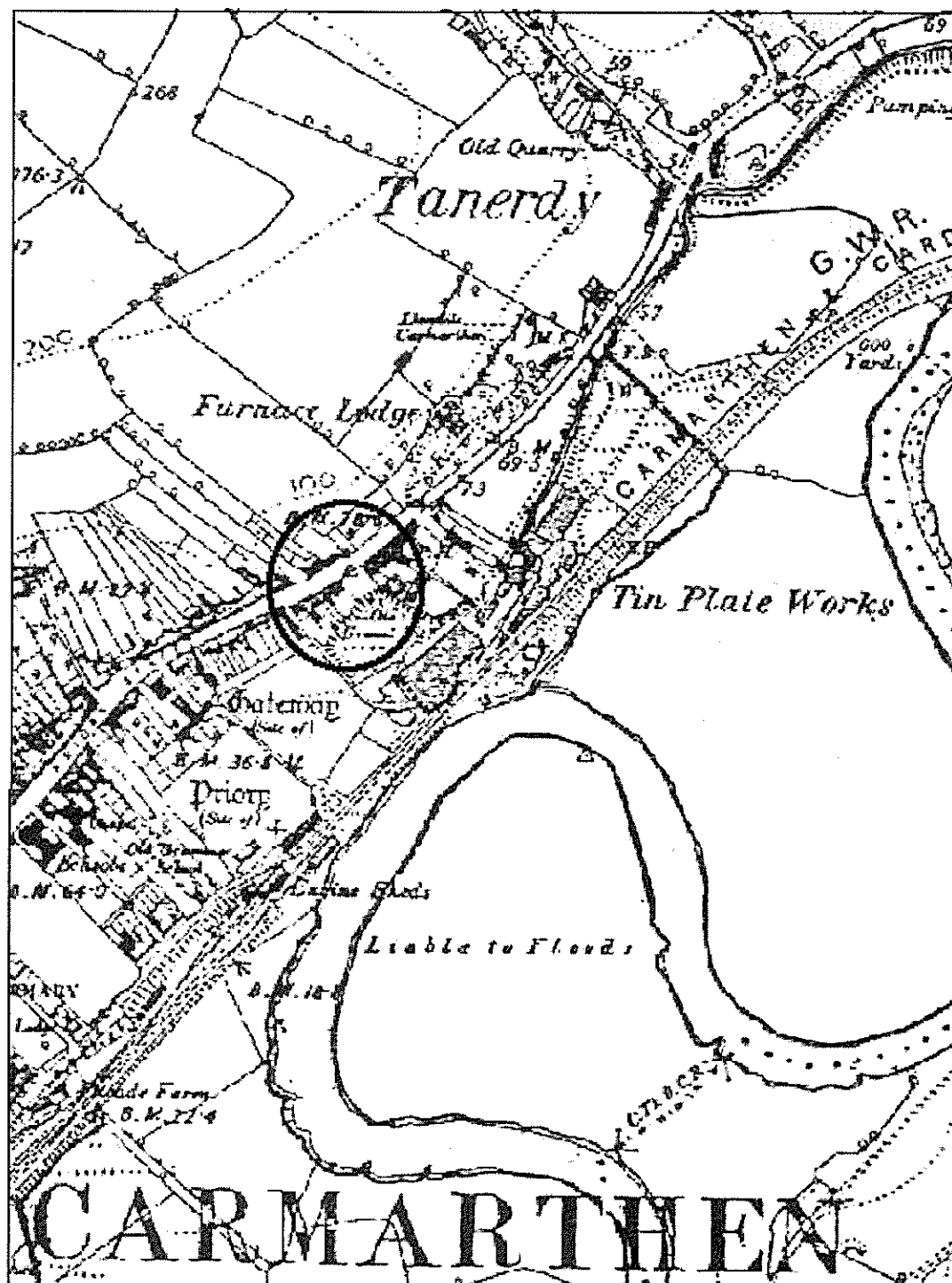
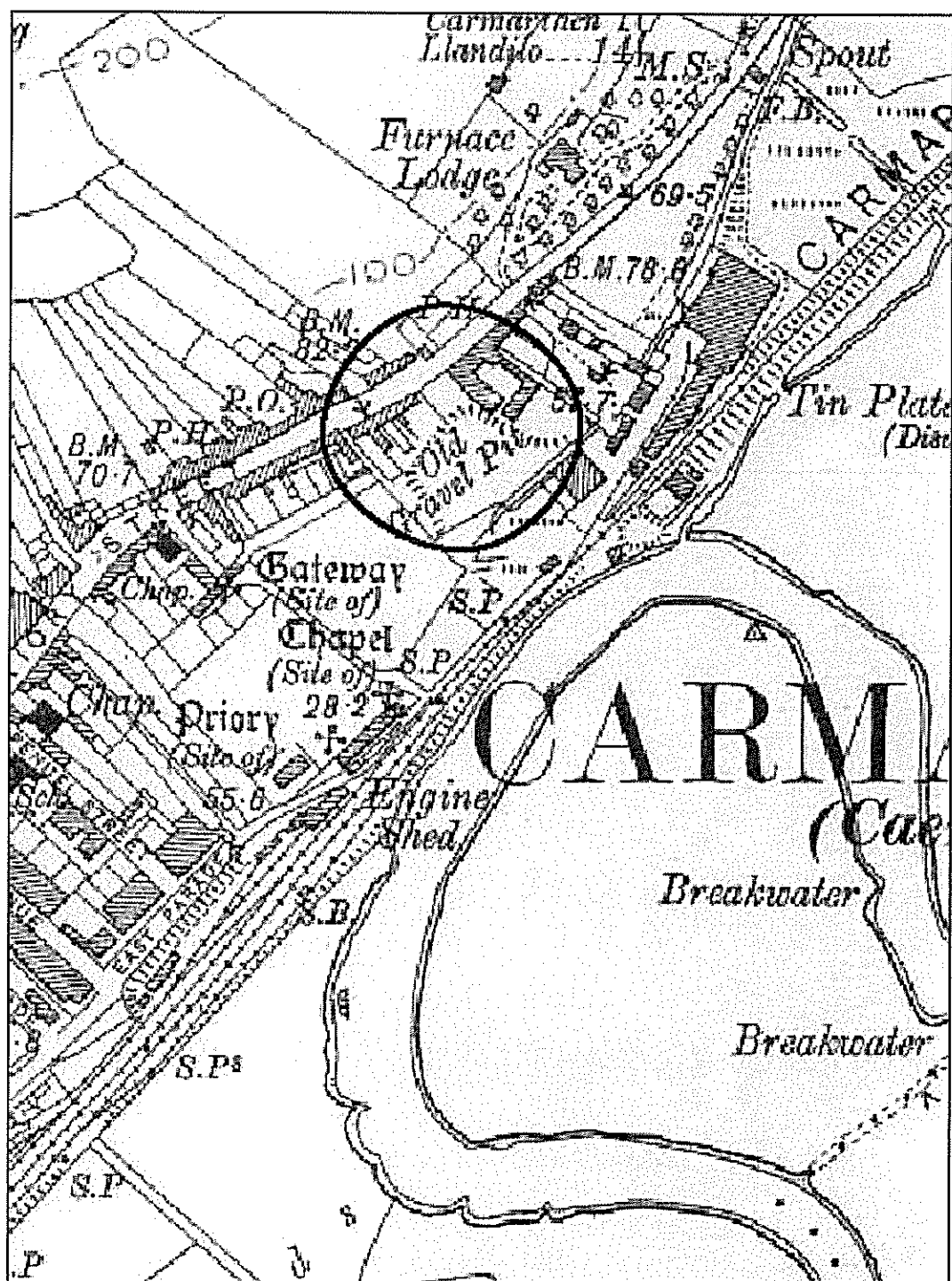


Fig. 20: Ordnance Survey 1:10560, Carmarthenshire Sheet, XXXIXNE, 2nd edition, 1907

This map produced sixteen years later also shows the site unchanged although again, building depictions are in a different style.



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REPORT NUMBER 48082

2003/66

This report has been prepared by Duncan Schlee

Position Archaeologist

Signature D Schlee Date 5/6/03

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

Position Deputy Director

Signature [Signature] Date 08/06/03

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