

# **NEW QUAY SLIPWAY CEREDIGION**

## **A WATCHING BRIEF**



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NEW QUAY SLIPWAY  
CEREDIGION

A WATCHING BRIEF

By

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**THE PATENT SLIPWAY, NEW QUAY,  
CEREDIGION**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF,  
APRIL 2004**

**Project Record No. 50792**

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## 1.0 SUMMARY

*Following various shortcomings in the planning process, a limited amount of archaeological recording was undertaken during groundworks for the preparation of foundations for a water sports centre and toilet block on New Quay Patent Slipway. Although some of the structures that make up the slipway complex are grade II listed features, other parts of the group are not. Various features associated with the Patent Slipway were revealed and the elevations of walls containing features associated with the slipway were recorded. During the winter of 2003/4, the northern revetment wall of the slipway collapsed. Although this feature was not listed, it was an integral part of the group and will hopefully be rebuilt.*

## **2.0 INTRODUCTION**

This report presents the archaeological recording at New Quay slipway undertaken by Cambria Archaeology during 2003 and 2004. The nature and background of the project (outlined below) effectively restrict the report to a presentation of the recorded features, with little scope for exhaustive research into either the history of New Quay, or the technological development of the Patent Slipway.

### **2.1 Abbreviations used in this report**

Sites recorded on the Sites and Monuments Record for Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire (SMR) are identified by their Primary Record Number (PRN) and located by their National Grid Reference (NGR).

### **2.2 Site description and background history**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century New Quay developed from a small fishing village to a shipbuilding community. The yards continued in operation until the 1890s and a total of 200 vessels were built. The history of New Quay shipbuilding will not be discussed in detail in this report but is described in 'Shipbuilding at New Quay, Cardiganshire, 1779-1887' by S. Cambell-Jones. (Ceredigion 7, p273-306).

The Patent Slipway at New Quay (SN38995994) was constructed at the southern side of the bay in 1863. It was required for making repairs, but also for lengthening of ships in order to increase their carrying capacity, a response to the economic need for vessels to carry larger cargoes.

The Patent Slipway consisted of a sloping ramp leading down to the water, constructed from rubble masonry. Ships were dragged onto the slipway supported in a cradle that ran on a set of iron rails. This was pulled by a winch located at the top end of the slipway. Although the Patent slipway is shown in the background of two photographs of New Quay (see Plates 1 and 2), the details of its construction and function are not known. The slipway mechanism was broken up and sold to Llanelly for scrap in 1901. Now, apart from the masonry slipway itself, little physical evidence survives to suggest how the slipway functioned.

Until recently, the only structures on the slipway were some fishermen's sheds built at the top end of the slipway, a boat store and a lifeboat shed, opposite the warehouse. Photographic evidence suggests that there was originally a single structure in the location of the fishermen's sheds, which housed the winch mechanism for the Patent Slipway. Recently, the slipway has been the focus of significant development activity, which has prompted the archaeological recording presented in this report.

Although the eastern wall of the Patent Slipway (PRN30775), and the warehouse (PRN30777) that faces onto the slipway are both Grade II Listed structures (listing description nos. 10769 and 10770 respectively), the slipway itself and the other walls and components that are associated with it were unfortunately not included in the listing.

The listed wall, constructed from large roughly dressed stone blocks, includes four square, upward sloping cavities, each containing a massive iron ring and chain. These are presumed to have been associated with the slipway mechanism, although their exact function is unclear.

The western wall of the slipway is a revetment wall built on bedrock, against the natural land slope. In addition to the warehouse frontage (PRN 30777) the revetment wall contains a stairway leading up to Glanmor Terrace. The northern wall is also a revetment wall, but is cut into the slope.

### **2.3 Development proposals and brief**

A new building, housing a water sports center has recently been constructed on the slipway, to the north of the existing boat store. A second phase of this development is the construction of a toilet block at the north end of the slipway. The development is commissioned and funded by Ceredigion County Council.

Due to failures in the planning process, the historical and archaeological significance of the slipway was not considered during the planning stage of the development. As a consequence, no planning conditions regarding the archaeological sensitivity of the site were made, and no mitigating scheme of works was agreed before work commenced. The development therefore proceeded without consideration of its archaeological impact and no archaeological monitoring or recording was undertaken during the preparation of the foundations for the water sports centre.

The water sports development is a locally controversial issue, and it was only after local residents concerned at the impact of the scheme upon the Grade II listed slipway wall informed Cambria Archaeology, that the Development Control Officer was made aware of the full impact of the development upon the historic features.

Because of the lack of an archaeological condition on the planning consent, it was not possible to prevent further development of the site on archaeological grounds when the second development for a toilet block adjacent to the sports centre at the north end of the slipway was begun. This location was the site of the winching gear for the slipway. The construction of the toilet block required the removal of a row of traditional corrugated iron fishermen's sheds at the top end of the slipway. These have been replaced by row of three newly built "fishermen's sheds located further down the slipway, against the west wall immediately south of the stairs leading up to Glanmor Terrace.

However, Griff Davies Architectural Design and Consultation Ltd., on behalf of Ceredigion County Council Commissioned Cambria Archaeology Field Operations to undertake a watching brief on subsequent works in anticipation that significant remains relating to the functioning of the slipway might be encountered.

The watching brief involved observation of ground preparation for shallow concrete foundation slabs for the new fishermen's sheds. To be level, the foundations needed to be slightly terraced into the slope of the slipway. Features relating to the Patent Slipway revealed during the groundworks were revealed.

Subsequent visits were made to the site as the development proceeded. Additional archaeological recording of the wall elevations of the non-listed parts of the slipway was undertaken when the original fishermen's sheds were removed. Unfortunately, however, no archaeological monitoring was undertaken during the excavation of the foundations for the toilet block. Some recording was undertaken after the event.

### **3.0 RESULTS**

#### **3.1 The water sports building**

As noted previously, there was no archaeological monitoring or recording of this stage of the development. Local residents were concerned at the extent of the groundworks for the building foundations and the damage being done to the fabric of the slipway and the grade II listed slipway wall. Cambria Archaeology was subsequently informed.

#### **3.2 Excavation of foundations for the new sheds**

Archaeological monitoring of the next phase of the development, involving the construction of the toilet block was negotiated. The excavated trench on the site of the new fishermen's sheds was approximately 10.50m long and 2.90m wide. The northern end of the trench was 1.10m south of the stairway. Most of the material moved was sand up to approximately 0.30m. Beneath the sand was a compact layer of stones, chippings and clay. Four large, flattish but not faced, stone blocks were observed at a distance of 2.30m from the west wall of the slipway. These are understood to have supported the iron rails upon which the cradle was winched up and down the slipway. Where possible excavation stopped at the level of the sleepers that were left *in-situ*. More such blocks apparently unearthed during construction of the sports centre are at present piled up on the slipway. Further to the south two probable postholes were identified. It is uncertain whether there were once more post holes within the excavated area or if there were more sleepers. The postholes had a diameter of 0.35m and were positioned 0.60m from the wall and 3.35m (11ft) apart. The material surrounding the sleepers did not appear to be a surface. It seems probable that some of the compact material is natural bedrock, while some is similar material but redeposited.

#### **3.3 Western revetment wall- Photos 2, 4 and 5.**

To the south of the steps, the revetment wall, which slopes downwards to the south, is constructed from rough dressed rubble masonry. The main features are numerous, apparently irregularly placed, square or rectangular seep holes. Towards the southern end is a vertical joint of uncertain significance. Two larger openings, similar to those on the eastern wall of the slipway, but without the chains, were observed in this section of wall (one of these is visible in photo 2). Other such openings may exist but were obscured by ivy. A property boundary wall of rough rubble masonry is built above the revetment wall.

To the north of the warehouse the revetment wall increases in height to the north, and is again topped with a secondary wall of rougher build, largely obscured by ivy growth. Again there are numerous square and rectangular openings in the masonry (Photo 4), but these are more regularly spaced than those to the south, and some may be directly associated with the Patent Slipway structure, rather than simply being seep holes. In addition there are several mortar scars indicating the position of roof lines. While some of these scars may be the remnants of the fishermen's sheds, others are probably associated with a shed situated at the top end of the slipway, which is depicted in the early photographs (Plates 1 and 2), and which presumably housed the winching mechanism. The two corbels that project from the wall face are also presumably associated with this shed (Photo 5).

The elevation drawing of this wall (Figure 2) was measured horizontally, but since they could not be measured, vertical measurements are approximate. The positions of the various features in the wall that could not be reached are also approximate.

### **3.4 Northern revetment wall- Photos 3 and 6.**

The northern revetment wall butts up against the southern wall, and is cut into the slope. It is built upon bedrock. The top portion of the wall was obscured by ivy but appears originally to have been capped with flat stones and to have sloped downwards to the east to meet the east wall of the slipway. The wall contains a few irregularly positioned rectangular niches. Some of these are probably seep holes but others may have held roof beams associated with the winch shed. The roof and wall scars of a fisherman's shed are also visible. The main features of interest are three differently sized rectangular niches set into the wall at ground level. The left hand niche appeared to continue upwards within the fabric of the wall, while the other two niches appeared not to. The functions of these features are uncertain. The relationship between these features and linear 'troughs' in the footings for the winch mechanism is also uncertain (see below).

During the winter of 2003/4 the northern retaining wall of the slipway collapsed (Photos 9 and 10). This section of wall was not included in the slipway listing, but was nevertheless an integral part of the slipway complex. Within the fabric of the wall were several features relating to the function of the slipway and associated structures. At present it is unclear how much, if any, of this wall remains standing. Before the collapse, a sketch elevation of the wall was made. Horizontal distances were measured while vertical distances were estimated. It is hoped that this record, coupled with photographic evidence and detailed recording of any surviving remains of the wall will be sufficient to reconstruct the main features of the wall, were that required.

### **3.5 Excavation of toilet block foundations**

Unfortunately there was no archaeological monitoring during the excavation of the toilet block foundations. Archaeological recording was only undertaken after they had been excavated. Understanding of the exact nature of the features revealed is consequently limited. Ground levels were reduced to just below the base of the wall, revealing three brick, stone and mortar plinths running southwards with 'troughs'



between them (Photos 6 and 7). The purpose of these features is uncertain but they are presumed to be the remains of solid foundations for the winch mechanism. The remains of iron holding bolts for anchoring the winch were noted (Photo 7). A subsequent visit to the site suggested that additional groundworks had been undertaken since the previously revealed features could not be identified. It is hoped that an opportunity for more detailed recording of this area will be possible when the retaining wall is rebuilt.

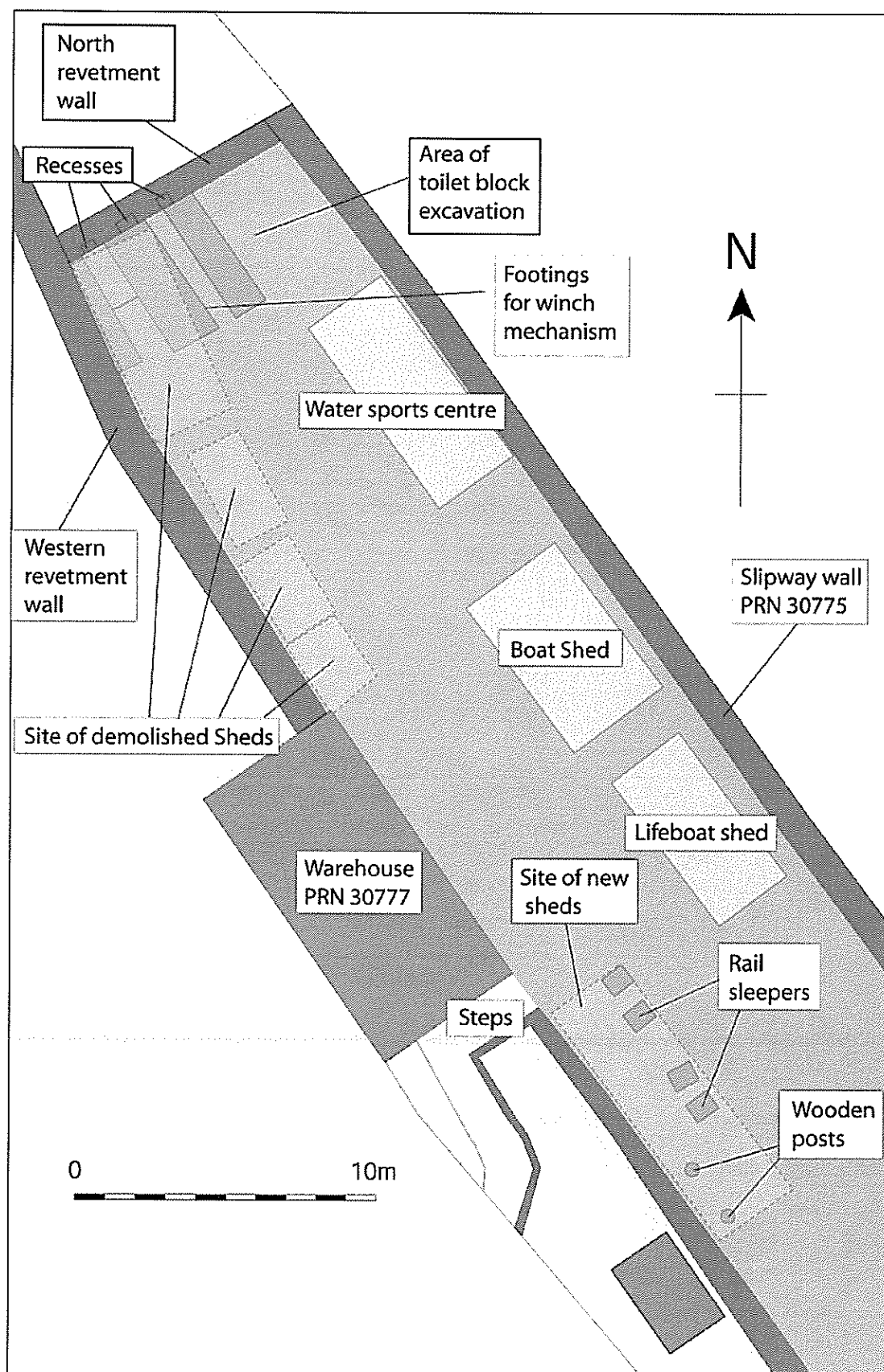
#### **4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Regardless of the causes, the circumstances surrounding the recent developments upon the Patent Slipway at New Quay have, to say the least, been unfortunate. The lack of coordination between the contractors and Cambria Archaeology Heritage management in respect to the excavation of foundations has resulted in limited opportunity for archaeological recording of features revealed during the groundworks and has resulted in the loss of what was probably the last opportunity to gain a good understanding of the nature, extent, and function of the surviving components of the slipway. Archaeological input from the start of the scheme could have ensured that the impact of the development on the setting of the slipway, and damage to the surviving fabric could have been minimised, while maximising the information recovered.

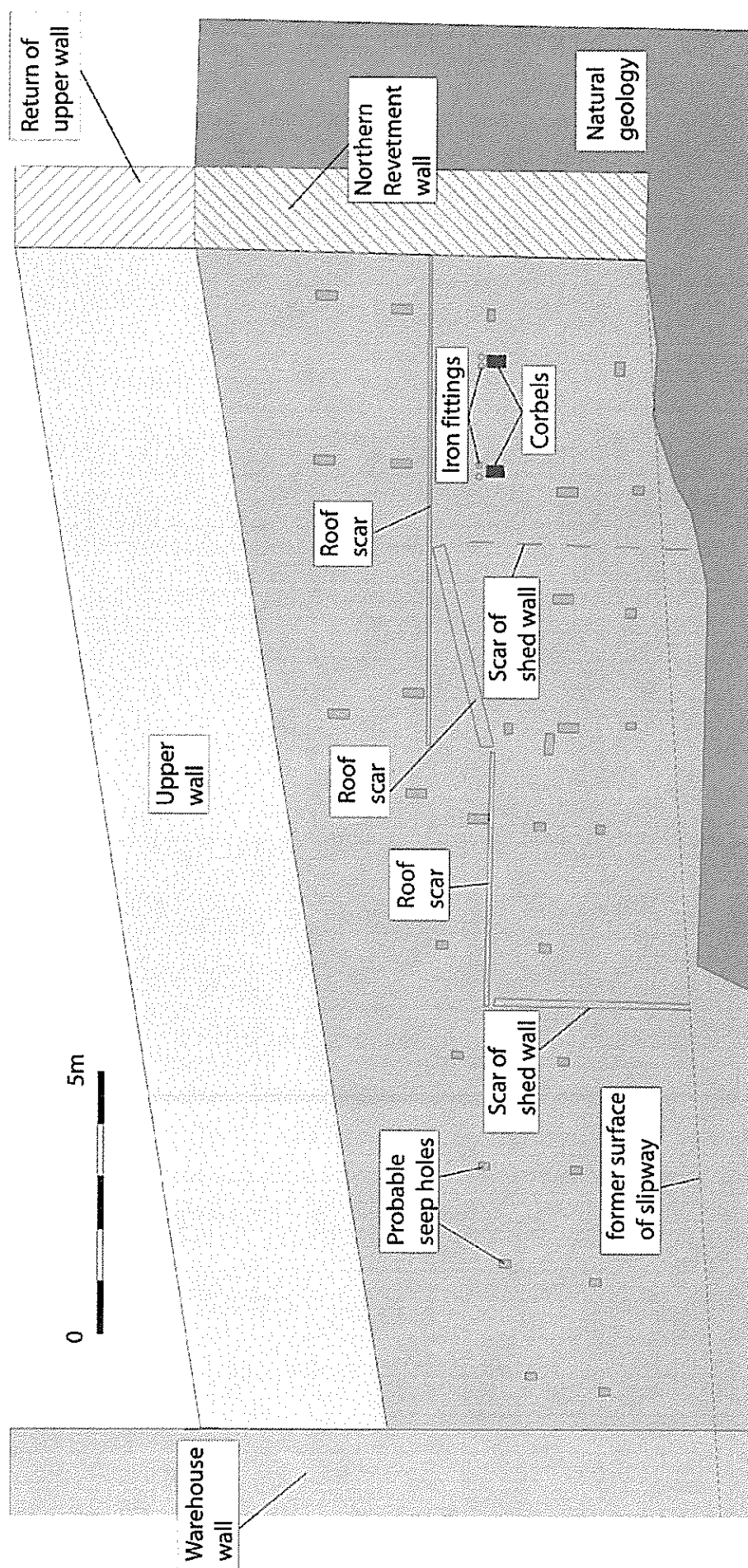
The collapse of the northern retaining wall has further compromised the integrity of the surviving parts of the slipway. It is strongly recommended that there is an adequate level of archaeological input into any future aspects of the development. It is further recommended that the clearing of the collapse debris and any further groundworks are carried out under direct archaeological supervision and that there is detailed recording of the surviving remains. This will hopefully enable sufficient information to be recovered from the remains to inform whatever action is taken to remedy the collapse of the revetment wall and the damage done to the setting of the surviving parts of the slipway.

#### **5.0 REFERENCES**

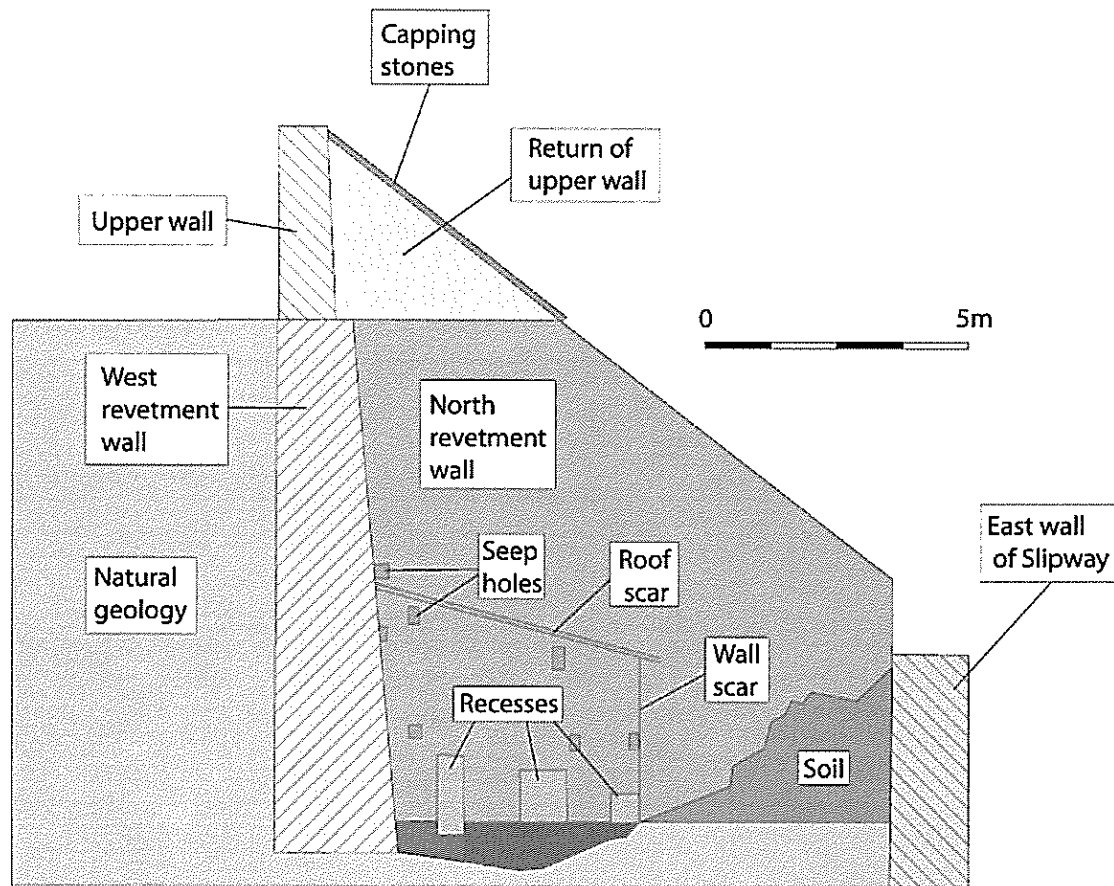
- Cambell-jones, S.        '*Shipbuilding at New Quay, Cardiganshire 1779-1887*.  
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Aberystwyth 1987.
- Passmore, S.          '*New Quay at the time of the 1851 census*'  
Ceredigion 10, 1986. Plate X.



**Figure 1:** Plan of New Quay slipway showing locations of features Associated with the Patent Slipway revealed during the recent groundworks. NB. Locations and dimensions not exact.



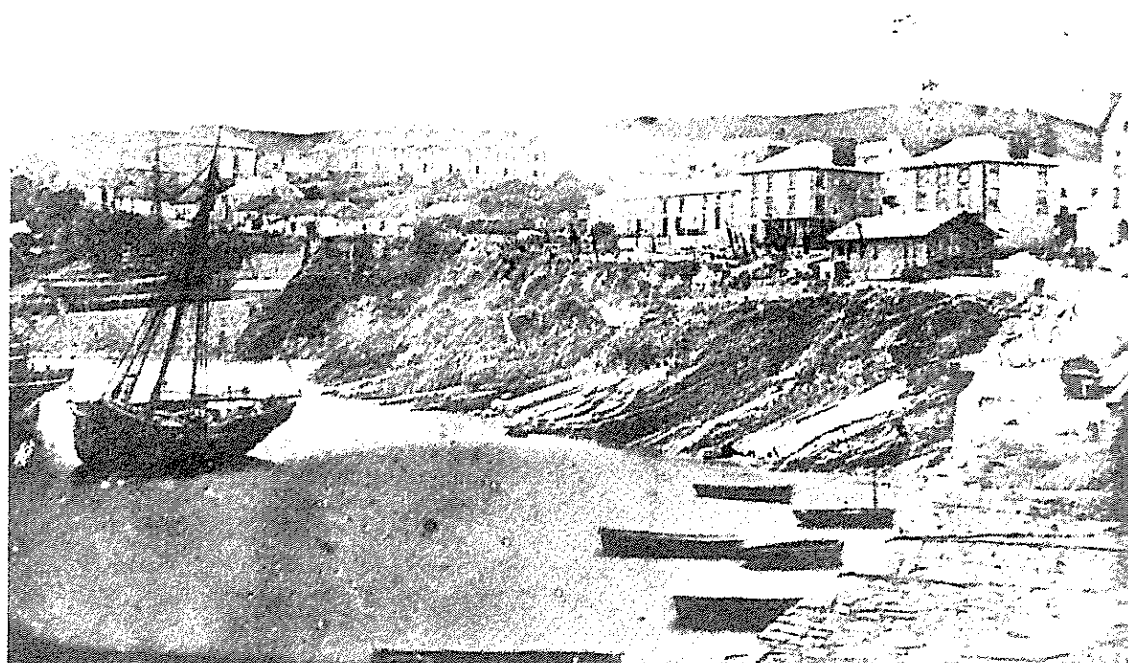
**Figure 2:** Elevation of the west revetment wall, to the north of the warehouse. NB. Horizontal distances measured, but vertical distances above roof scars are estimated. The locations of the seep holes are not exact. The width of walls in section are not known.



**Figure 3:** Elevation of the northern revetment wall. NB. Horizontal distances are measured, but vertical distances are estimated. The width of walls in section are not known



**Plate 1:** Photograph c. 1880, showing the Patent Slipway in the background. The building at the north (right) end of the slipway would presumably have housed the winch mechanism. Also note the vertical lines along the slipway. These may be part of the cradle for supporting ships on the slipway.



**Plate 2:** Photograph from 1870, showing a ship winched up onto the slipway.





**Photo 1:** The Fishermen's sheds at the northern end of the slipway. On the right is the newly built water sports building.



**Photo 2:** The southern end of the slipway. The new fishermen's sheds were constructed north of the red boat. Note the large square opening in the wall to the left of the boats.





**Photo 3:** The north revetment wall of slipway showing the various features in the wall and the roof line scar.



**Photo 4:** The west revetment wall of the slipway showing seep holes and other features north of the warehouse.





**Photo 5:** North end of the western revetment wall showing corbels, roof scar and other openings.



**Photo 6:** North end of slipway. Note the exposed foundations for the winch mechanism.





**Photo 7:** Probable holding bolt for rail or winch mechanism.



**Photo 8:** Iron fixture presumably associated with the winch mechanism.





**Photo 9:** North end of the slipway after collapse of the north revetment wall.



**Photo 10:** North end of slipway after collapse of northern revetment

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