

OLD PRIORY ROAD ALLOTMENTS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



Prepared by
Cambria Archaeology
For
Carmarthenshire County Council



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By

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SUMMARY

In early July 2005 a hole appeared in the allotments on the west side of Old Priory Road, Carmarthen. The hole measured c.1.5m x 1m x 1.5m deep. Initial investigation showed that an underlying sewage culvert had partially collapsed. The allotments occupy part of what was the precinct of the former St. John's Priory (a Scheduled Ancient Monument). Therefore, an archaeological watching brief was required during works to expose and repair the culvert.

The culvert runs northwest – southeast through the priory precinct and its line passes through the suspected positions of some of the prior buildings. However, the collapsed section was north of the buildings and no deposits associated with the priory were noted.

The culvert, probably constructed sometime during the late 19th or early 20th century, was built using red brick and it was circular. The culvert is still an active part of the town's sewage system, so the form of the base was not seen or recorded. A 2m – 3m long section of the west side had collapsed. This will be repaired and the hole backfilled.

INTRODUCTION

Project background

The collapse of part of a major sewage culvert in the Old Priory Road Allotments required urgent repairs. The collapsed section lies at NGR SN41912046, within the former precinct of the medieval St. John's Priory, a Scheduled Ancient Monument (PRN 44: SAM CM 236). Features of Roman and Early Medieval date have also been recorded in this area (James 1985; Ramsey 2004). Consultations between Carmarthen County Council and Cadw resulted in a requirement for a watching brief to monitor the required ground works necessary to allow the repairs and to record any exposed archaeological deposits. Cambria Archaeology Field Operations were commissioned to carry out the watching brief in July 2005.

The watching brief methodology and scope of the report

In order to facilitate repair work a large area was excavated above and around the collapsed section. This was achieved using a mini excavator with a 60cm wide toothed bucket. The excavation was monitored and all deposits and structures exposed recorded, principally the culvert itself. This report outlines the main watching brief results before discussing the impact of the works based on the on-site observations and the known archaeological potential of the area. Known archaeological sites mentioned in the text are annotated with their Primary Record Number (PRN) as recorded in the Sites and Monuments Record held by Cambria Archaeology at their offices in Llandeilo. All grid references are prefixed with NGR (National Grid Reference).

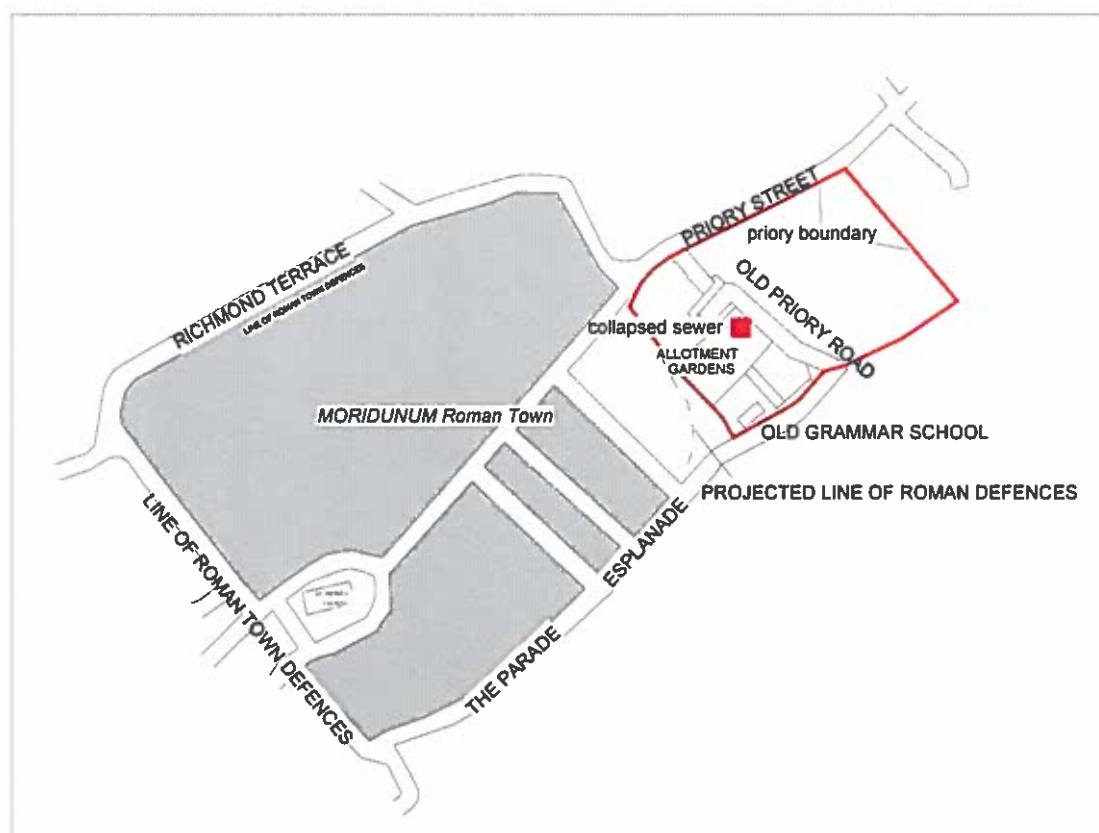


Figure 1 Location plan showing the location of the collapsed sewer culvert in relation to the known archaeological resource.

WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

The collapsed section

The initial collapse was identified in early July and it resulted in a hole c.1.5m x 1m x 1.5m deep. This exposed a soil profile consisting of c.40cm of loamy topsoil overlying light brown silty clay (Plate 1).



Plate 1: The hole caused by the initial collapse showing the topsoil and subsoil.

The watching brief results

In order to undertake the repairs the collapsed area was extended by machine to approximately 4m x 3m x 1.5m deep. The watching brief recorded the structure of the culvert itself and the soil profile in section.

The soil profile

The northeast side of the trench revealed that the topsoil was of an average 40cm thick, although it increased to c.1m at the northwest end, where it appeared to fill a hollow in the clay. The underlying light brown silty clay extended down to the top of the arched culvert (Plate 2).

It was felt that the interface between the topsoil and subsoil would be the likely level at which deposits or features associated with the priory would be encountered. However, the recorded profile was directly above the culvert and, therefore, it must have been formed after the culvert was constructed and it was probably re-deposited during the backfilling of the original construction trench (see Plate 2).



Plate 2: The collapsed section of the culvert and overlying stratigraphy.

The culvert

The culvert measured c.1m diameter and was constructed from red brick using a stretcher bond (see Plate 2). The base of the sewer was not investigated so it is not certain if it has a flat base or whether the culvert is completely circular.

Discussion

Several mid to late 19th century reports commented on the poor state of the sanitation, water supply and drainage system of Carmarthen (Lodwick and Lodwick 1994, 193-197) and this culvert was probably built as part of a wide-ranging package of improvements aimed at addressing the issues raised in those reports.

The condition of the culvert in this area is of some concern, as it has apparently collapsed in the past (Zoë Bevans pers comm.). The previous collapse may be evidenced by the topsoil filled hollow visible in the northeast section (see Plate 2). It could be that the fabric of the culvert is degrading to a point where it may cause structural problems elsewhere.

There were no deposits or features associated with any activity earlier than the culvert.

SOURCES

- James T 1985 'Excavations at the Augustinian Priory of St. John and St. Teulyddog, Carmarthen, 1979'. *Archaeologia Cambrensis* **CXXXIV** (1985), 120-161.
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