

PROPOSED FLOOD ALLEVIATION WORKS AT CARMARTHEN QUAY A DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT

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Gan / By
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PROPOSED FLOOD ALLEVIATION WORKS AT CARMARTHEN QUAY A DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT

1.0 SUMMARY

This desk-top study reviews readily available documentary, cartographic and other sources of evidence regarding the archaeological resource in the quay area of Carmarthen. The study aims to assess the likely impact of a flood alleviation scheme proposed by the Environment Agency between the old bridge and the new pedestrian bridge over the River Towy.

Although there is great potential for significant buried archaeological remains to exist in the area, the extent to which the proposed scheme will impact upon these is uncertain, and may be minimal.

Two of the proposed options for the scheme involve the building of flood defence walls. The visual and physical impact of these options upon the Grade II listed Quay structure and the Towy Works building are likely to be more significant.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Project proposals and commission

The Environment Agency is proposing to undertake flood alleviation works at Carmarthen Quay. The scheme will impact on the historic waterfront area of the town and the Environment Agency has commissioned Cambria Archaeology to undertake this desk-based assessment to determine the likely impacts of the scheme on this important historical area of the town.

Scope of the project

This assessment briefly reviews the current state of knowledge regarding the maritime histories of the towns and how archaeologically significant features or deposits that may be present in their respective quay areas of each town may be impacted upon by the proposed flood alleviation works.

The assessment is based upon the examination of existing written, cartographic, pictorial and technical information within the survey area. It aims to identify archaeological deposits within the survey area, and to assess their character, extent, significance and vulnerability. The assessment is based on materials held at the County Historic Environment Record (formerly the Sites and Monuments Record).

3.0 SITE LOCATION and HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

There is documentary evidence that medieval Carmarthen was a thriving port but there is as yet no archaeological evidence because no excavation or salvage recording has ever been carried out in the waterfront area. There would have been a quay at Carmarthen from the very beginnings of the town in the 12th century. The medieval quays and wharves were centred on the 'Island', where the Wynveth Brook flows into the Towy. This was the location of 'Island Wharf', where the north abutment of the new pedestrian bridge is now situated. Although there is as yet no direct archaeological evidence, it is almost certain that Roman Carmarthen was a port. The location of a quay associated with the Roman fort and town is not known but may well have also been in the vicinity of the medieval quay.

Amongst other possible reasons, this location was probably selected as it was probably the highest tidal reach and the lowest bridging point on the Towy. Access to Carmarthen's quays was dependant on the fortnightly high tides for all but the smallest and shallowest vessels. Larger vessels may have anchored at Greencastle and transport goods from there to the quays in smaller vessels. The river banks downstream of this area were used for ship building and storage.

In 1353, Carmarthen was declared sole Welsh Staple Port, trading in wool, pelts and leather, lead and tin. It became an important wool centre in the 16th century. Carmarthen was the largest Welsh town by the early 18th century and was an important port and trading centre. The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of the area shows a number of dwellings, Warehouses, public houses, schools, and a variety of industries and other quayside activities extending as far west as Pothouse Wharf. The port of Carmarthen was one of the chief ports of Wales until it began to decline in the 19th century. The last steamers visited the quay just before the Second World War.

Much of the historic quayside area was lost to redevelopment in the 1960s and 70s. Extensive demolition of many dwellings took place for the construction of Coracle Way, which effectively cut the quayside area off from the rest of the town. A sewage pumping station was also constructed resulting in the loss of buildings associated with Island Wharf, including the Sloop Inn (PRN 421), which were situated immediately to the west of the site of the new cycle bridge. The Hope and Anchor or Jubilee Inn (PRN 368) was formerly situated at the point where the new cycle bridge meets the existing roundabout at the bottom of Blue Street. These developments in the heart of the old dock area of the town were undertaken without any archaeological recording taking place, and the opportunity to increase our understanding of the history and development of Carmarthen was lost. The Quay wall and the Towy Works building (now both listed) are some of the only visible surviving reminder of Carmarthen's Maritime past.

The quay was first built in stone in the 1550s. What exists today is probably of several periods of construction. There was work on the quay in 1807-8 which was then extended eastwards from the Jolly Tar to the old bridge, and construction of a new dock in 1809-10. A slip was built near the bridge in 1813, by Daniel Mainwaring but what is visible today dates from the early 19th century with later repairs.

4.0 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The site of the proposed flood alleviation scheme lies on the north side of the River Towy, between the existing road bridge and the modern footbridge that is currently under construction. This is the same location as the existing quay wall, a Grade II listed structure. Five possible options for the scheme have been proposed:

Option 1: Do nothing.

Option 2: Hard defence structure designed to a 20-year standard of protection with a defence height above ground level of 1.15m for a length of 160m.

Option 3: Hard defence structure designed to a 50-year standard of protection with a defence height above ground level of 1.65m for a length of 160m.

Option 4: Flood proofing of specific properties to a 50-year standard of protection.

This option would not impact upon the listed quay structure but may have a detrimental impact upon the listed Towy Works building.

Option 5: De-mountable defence structure designed to a 100-year standard providing a defence height of 2.00m above ground level (when deployed).

5.0 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE

The quay wall (PRN186) is a Grade II Listed structure (9555) due to its historic interest in relation to the maritime trade of the town. It comprises a stone built retaining wall laid in courses, with squared coping stones laid on edge. The quay extends west for about 300m from near to the bridge (PRN58) to a flight of steps with iron gates at Island Wharf. There is a double flight of steps before the Jolly Tar public house. A series of about 33 fluted, tapering iron bollards with ball finials and threaded with iron chain railings is embedded in the coping of the quay wall. The bollards were made by the Priory Foundry in Carmarthen, probably in the early 20th century.

The current Carmarthen Bridge (PRN 58) was built in 1936-7. It is also a listed structure (82210) as an earlier 20th century concrete bridge of considerable scale, by a leading Welsh architect. A stone bridge was first recorded here in 1233. It was repeatedly repaired and was widened in 1777 and 1834, before its demolition in 1936.

The Towy Works building is also a Grade II Listed Building (82210) and it described as an 'eighth wonder of the world' in 1909.

The existing quayside wall structure is one of the few surviving elements of Carmarthen's historic waterfront and quay area and is a grade II listed building. Few (if any) other known sites or features have been identified within the area that are likely to be impacted upon by the proposed development. What may lie beneath the present ground surface is, however, less clear.

Excavation of waterfront sites in other towns and cities tends to show that the remains of earlier waterfront structures are often well preserved, buried behind the later constructions. Such developments also often involve the dumping of refuse and other deposits to build up ground levels behind the new waterfront structures. Such deposits can be artefact rich, and coupled with waterlogged conditions, can prove a valuable archaeological resource. The remains of boats can also be preserved in such locations.

An archaeological watching brief (PRN55208) has recently been undertaken during the construction of footings for the new pedestrian bridge over the Towy. The nature of the ground-works only provided a limited opportunity to assess the extent of survival of buried archaeological deposits in the quayside area.

Although informative, differences in ground levels between the watching brief site and the current flood alleviation proposals mean that deposition sequences and levels may well be different. Remnants of a cobbled surface that is contemporary with the dockside walls were found to have survived in places, especially immediately behind the quayside wall. Make-up deposits associated with the construction of the post-medieval quayside have also been identified. To the west, demolition of quayside structures and other buildings occurred for the construction of the new road and other subsequent developments. This has resulted in a considerable amount of disturbance to or destruction of the post medieval quayside.

The watching brief was not able to ascertain the presence, location, or extent of survival of any archaeological deposits relating to any medieval or Roman quayside in the current proposal area. Since, however, less demolition has occurred in this assessment area, there may be less ground disturbance. As a consequence there is an as yet unproven possibility that medieval or earlier deposits may survive in this area.

The watching brief for the pedestrian bridge demonstrated that waterlogged deposits, resulting in the preservation of organic materials that normally decompose, do survive in the area. If archaeologically significant deposits survive anywhere within the quayside area, it is highly probable that they will contain well-preserved waterlogged material of considerable importance.

6.0 CARTOGRAPHIC AND OTHER EVIDENCE

Copies of the 1st and 2nd edition Ordnance Survey maps of the assessment area are included as illustrations in this report. They show the extent of the quay and other structures prior to redevelopment in the 1960s and 70s. Other maps do not provide any different or additional detail of the area. The Buck print of 1741 conveys an impression, but it cannot be relied upon as an accurate representation of archaeological features within the area.

Carmarthen (including the quayside area) has been included in a Historic Landscape Characterisation project (HLC Area 181) which attempts to define and describe the various landscape and structural elements that combine to give the town its character. The Carmarthen Historic Town Survey (a Cambria Archaeology draft document) also defines and describes the archaeological resource and historic significance of the quay area.

7.0 THE LIKELY IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED SCHEME

The exact nature of the proposed scheme is at present uncertain. The exact nature of any archaeological resource is also unknown. Consequently it is difficult to assess the likely impact of the proposed scheme upon the archaeological resource within the area. Options 1 and 4 would have the least impact upon buried archaeological remains and the listed quay structure. The impact of the other options would be greater but to what extent is as yet uncertain. The following comments are made on the suggested five options.

Option 1: Do nothing

This option would have no impact upon the archaeological resource.

Option 2: Hard defence structure designed to a 20-year standard of protection with a defence height above ground level of 1.15m for a length of 160m.

Option 3: Hard defence structure designed to a 50-year standard of protection with a defence height above ground level of 1.65m for a length of 160m.

Options 2 and 3 would both presumably have an adverse affect upon the appearance and setting of the listed quay wall and bollards and the Towy Works building. Option 3 would be less desirable as the visual effect would be greater.

The extent to which these options would have a detrimental physical effect on the quay wall and bollards, and any buried archaeological features and deposits cannot be judged without more details as to the extent of groundworks required for these options.

Option 4: Flood proofing of specific properties to a 50-year standard of protection.

This option would not impact upon the listed quay structure or buried archaeological features or deposits. It may, however, have a detrimental impact upon the listed Towy Works building.

Option 5: De-mountable defence structure designed to a 100-year standard providing a defence height of 2.00m above ground level (when deployed).

This option would presumably have a reduced visual impact when not deployed. Without further details, however, it is difficult to assess the extent to which buried archaeological deposits might be impacted upon. The extent to which it may have a physical impact upon the listed quay structure is uncertain. The extent to which the proposals may have a visual or physical impact upon the listed bridge structure is also uncertain.

The Pedestrian Bridge watching brief, indicated that there appears to be relatively sterile backfill material behind the quay wall. If the impact of any necessary groundworks could be restricted to this material, the potential impact upon significant buried deposits could be minimised.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

With the exception of the existing quay wall and bollards, which is a Grade II listed structure, the exact nature, extent location and survival of buried archaeological remains in the area of the proposed flood alleviation scheme is not known. From the results of the watching brief undertaken during construction of the new pedestrian bridge, a cobbled surface associated with the 19th century quay is likely to survive relatively intact immediately below the present ground surface. In the absence of good archaeological evidence, however, the question remains as to what other remains might survive, and where. Whether construction of the 19th century quay entailed the destruction of earlier structures and deposits relating to the medieval and Roman quays, or their preservation behind the new stone quay, is still unknown.

Excavations on such waterfront locations in other towns and cities have demonstrated that extensive and well-preserved archaeologically significant remains are a feature of such sites. Considering the importance of Carmarthen as a port throughout much of its history, and the Roman origins of the town, there is every reason to suppose that archaeological deposits of national importance are likely to survive at Carmarthen. These might include waterlogged remains of boats, the surviving remains of earlier quays, wharves and docks, backfill deposits derived from refuse generated by the inhabitants of the town and providing evidence of domestic, industrial and commercial activities throughout the towns history.

How (if at all) the proposed flood alleviation scheme might impact upon the listed 19th century quay is at present not known. Whether any earlier deposits are likely to be impacted upon is also unknown.

What is known, however, is that the importance of any surviving archaeological deposits in the area cannot be over stressed, and archaeological considerations need to be given a high priority in any future waterfront developments.

The Quay is a grade II listed structure. It lies within a Conservation Area and forms a key element of the townscape visible today. Any proposed flood alleviation proposals involving structural works to the Quay will have a significant impact upon its appearance. Among the key objectives of the Carmarthen Quay and Riverside Study (2005) is to create an improved gateway and focal point to the town and to conserve and enhance the built and cultural heritage of the quayside. Any modification to the Quay and its setting in relation to other existing structures, including Re-surfacing work, should be in keeping with these aims, and should be considered in relation to the backdrop of the quayside properties and Carmarthen Castle, a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM). Raising the height of the Quay wall would require listed building consent.

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Although formerly an important part of the town, having been cut off from the present heart of the town the significance of the quayside area has become largely forgotten. Some buildings and the existing listed quayside structure have nevertheless survived. It would be desirable for the proposed scheme to retain or enhance these (and other) surviving features in such a manner that the significance of what they represent can be appreciated. Re-surfacing associated with the scheme should be of a character that does not compromise the setting of the listed elements.

Depending on what the flood prevention scheme may entail, groundworks may well impact upon archaeological deposits of national importance. The importance of any such deposits cannot be over stressed and should be a major consideration from the very start of whatever scheme is proposed.

It is strongly recommended that a 'test' or 'evaluation' excavation is undertaken in advance of any proposed scheme to ascertain the presence, absence and significance of any archaeological deposits that may be impacted upon. Preliminary archaeological investigations well ahead of any development would clarify the character of the archaeological resource in the area. This would allow the significance of any impacts to be judged. Should archaeological concerns be identified, they could be minimised through a variety of mitigation possibilities at an early stage in the process. As is apparent from much of what is contained in this desk-top study, the more information there is available, the better placed we will be to adequately mitigate the impact of the proposals upon the archaeological resource.

Should the excavation of significant archaeological deposits be unavoidable, there exists the potential to greatly increase our understanding of the early history and development of Carmarthen, providing a valuable cultural heritage resource at a local, regional and national level for the public and specialists alike.

10.0 SOURCES

- James, T. A., 1980 Carmarthen: An Archaeological and Topographical Survey (Carmarthen)
- Lodwick, J. & V., 1972 'The Story of Carmarthen' (Carmarthen)
- Carmarthen Historic Town Survey, 2005 (Cambria Archaeology Draft document)
- Schlee, D. E., 2005 An Archaeological Watching Brief At The New Cycle Bridge Carmarthen (Cambria Archaeology report no. 2005/104)



Photo 1: Westernmost section of the proposed scheme location



Photo 2: Central section of the proposed scheme location



Photo 3: Easternmost section of the proposed scheme location



Photo 4: Central section of the proposed scheme location



Photo 5: Backfill deposits exposed during watching brief on the new pedestrian bridge footings. Note the cobbled surface in section below the digger bucket.

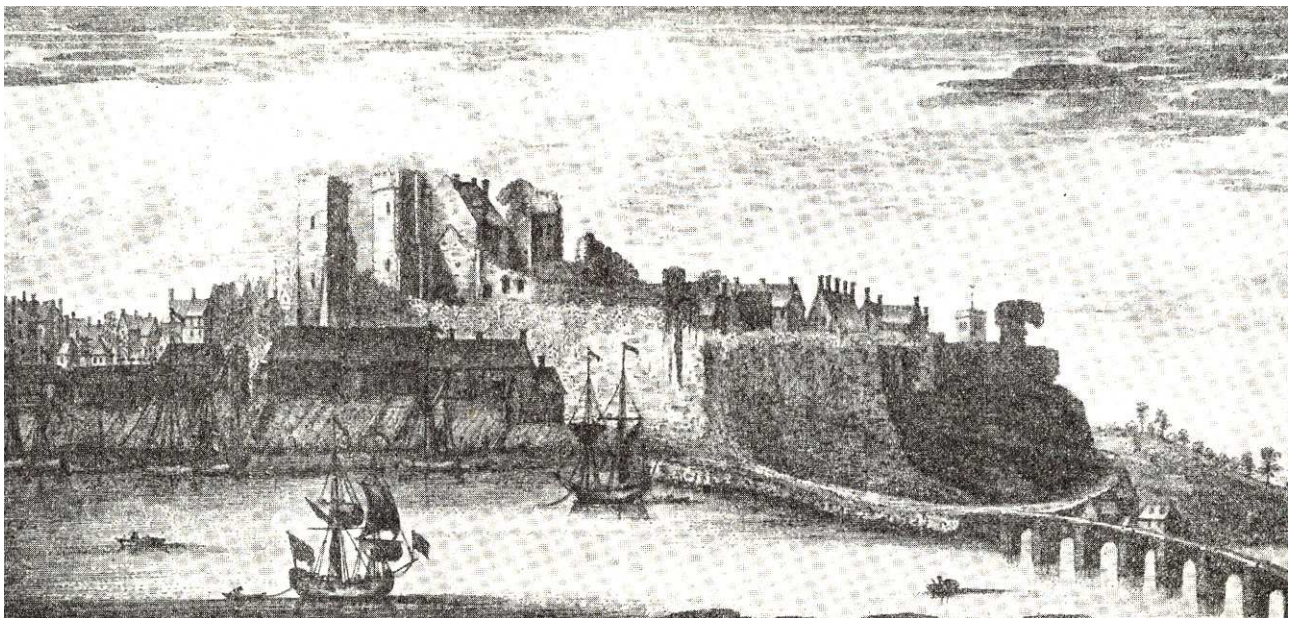
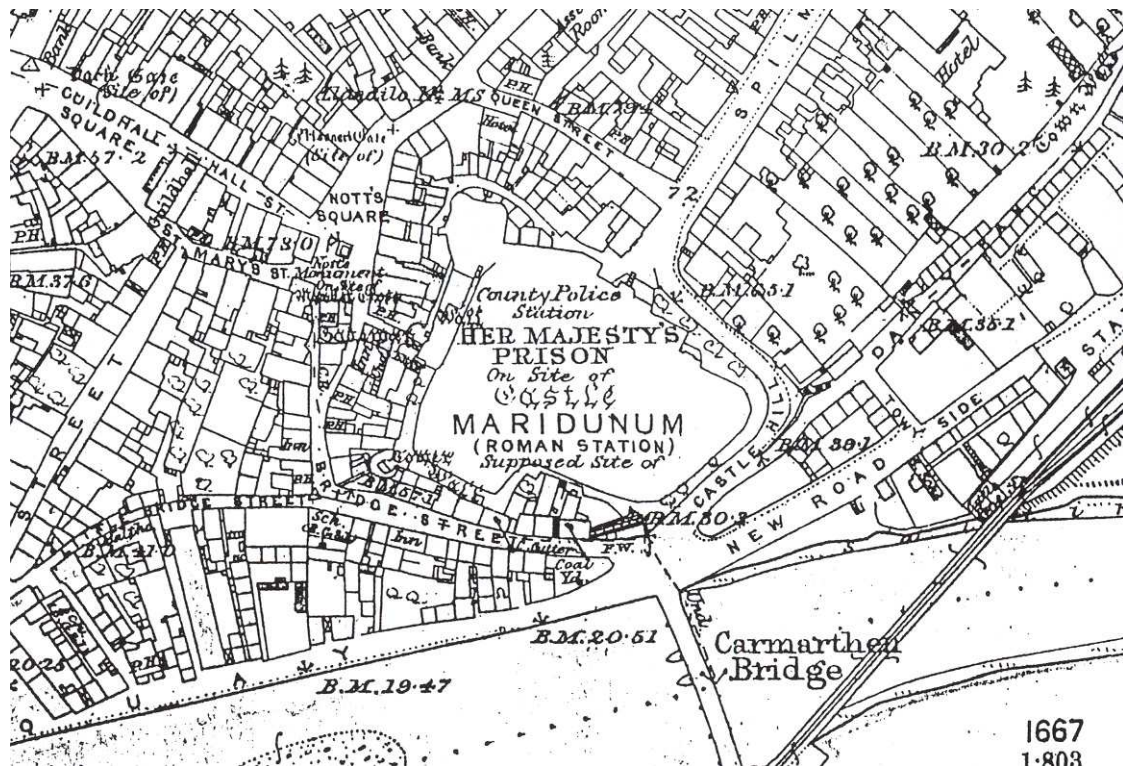
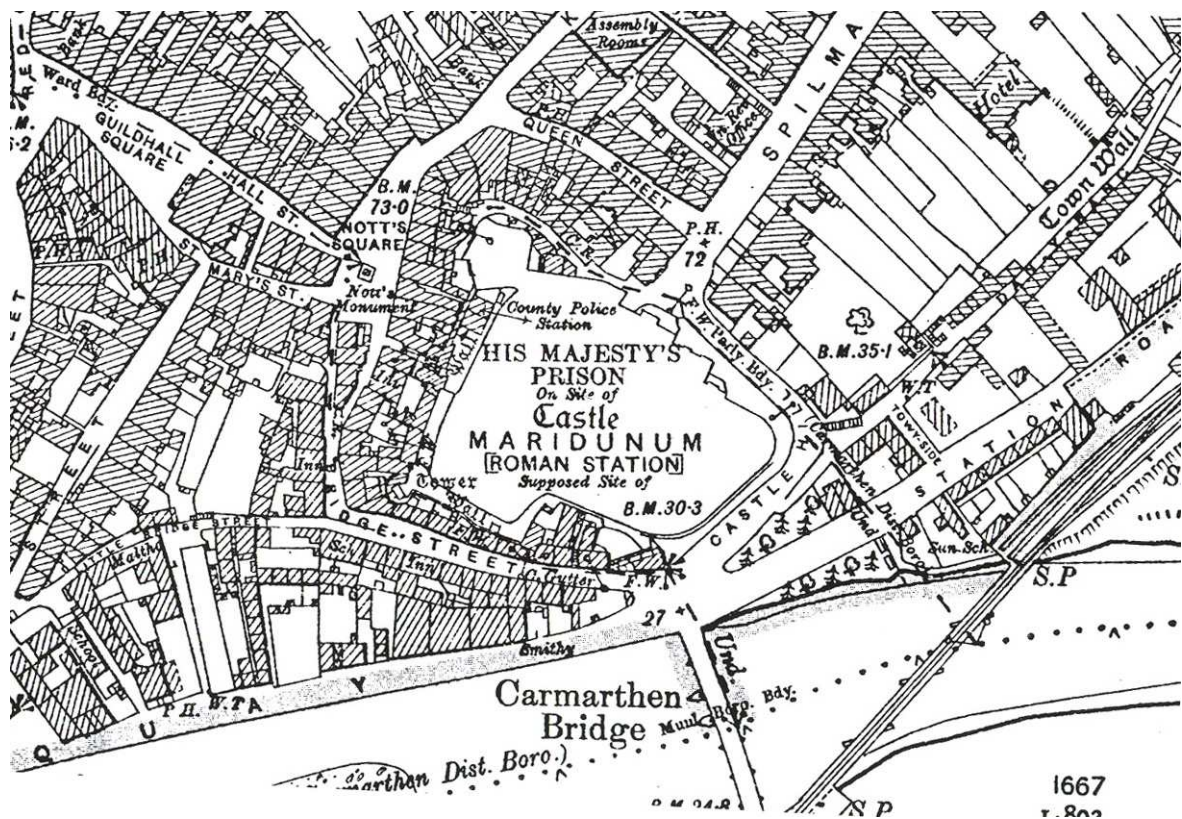


Plate 1: The Buck print of 1741 showing the quay area.



Map 1: Ordnance Survey 1st Edition



Map 2: Ordnance Survey Second Edition

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