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Excavations
in
ROMAN CARMARTHEN
1978-1990



by

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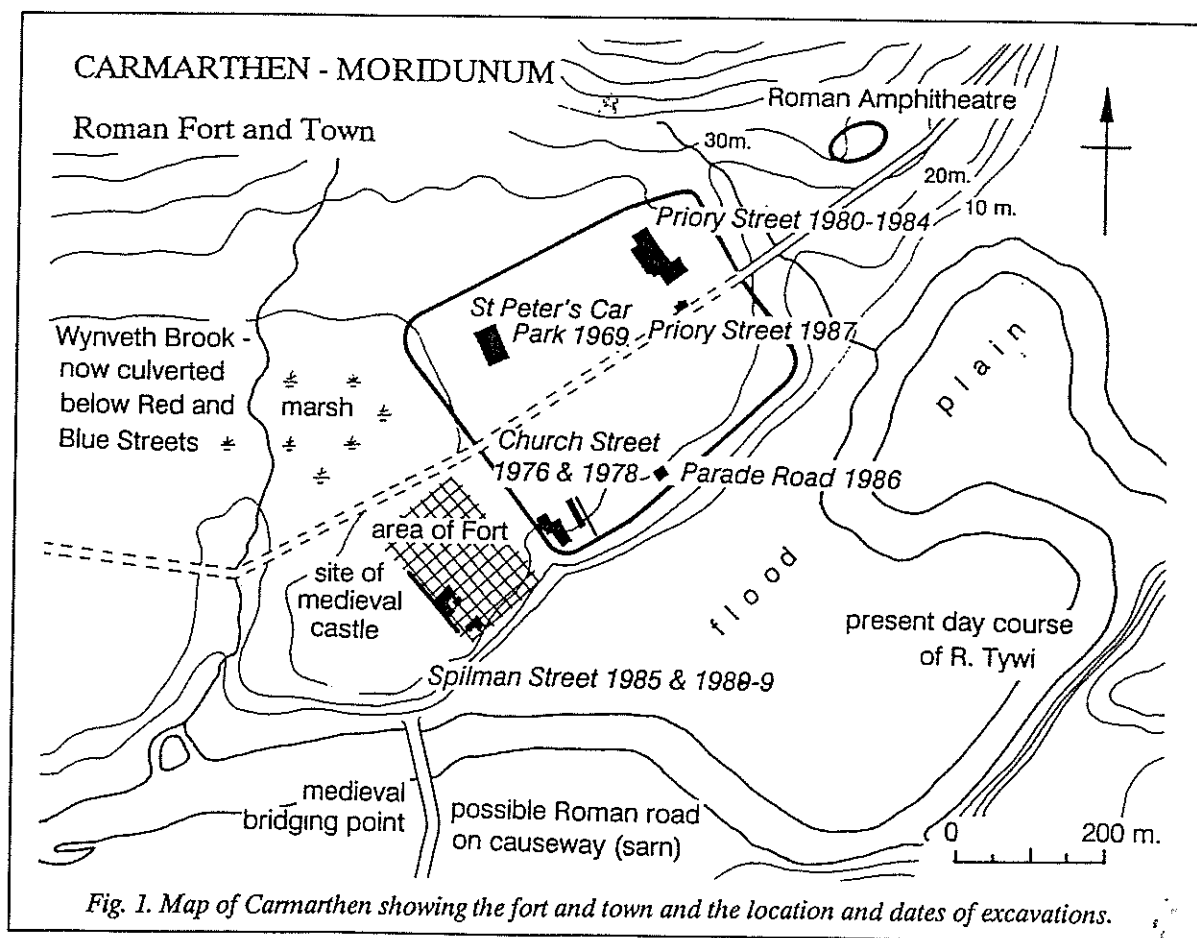
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INTRODUCTION

The great Elizabethan antiquarian, William Camden, identified the *Moridunum* mentioned

in classical sources with the town of Carmarthen. In his *Britannia*, published in 1586, he grouped the Welsh counties according to the tribes of Wales recorded by Roman authors.¹



Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion had been the territory of the *Demetae* and he was the first to point out that this tribal name was perpetuated in the Dark Age name of Dyfed for the region. *Moridunum* means 'sea-fort' from the British '*mori*', sea, and the common element '*dunum*' latinised from the Celtic '*dunos*' meaning fort.² The word survives in modern Welsh as '*dinas*'. Undoubtedly this was the name given by the Romans to their fort, which was the first settlement on the site of what was to become Carmarthen. But as in many other instances the name of the fort became transferred to the later town.

From the eighteenth century onwards we have records of finds of Roman coins, bronze objects, pottery, and parts of buildings.³ Not all of these finds have survived and in many instances their exact findspot is not known. Records of the buildings found are generally poor. But nearly all the finds and buildings were discovered on or to the rear of Priory Street at the eastern end of modern Carmarthen. The early travellers often commented on the earthworks enclosing what they termed the Roman 'camp' but there was much confusion between parts of the medieval town defences, traces of civil war earthworks and what we now recognize as the rectangular area enclosed by the Roman town defences.

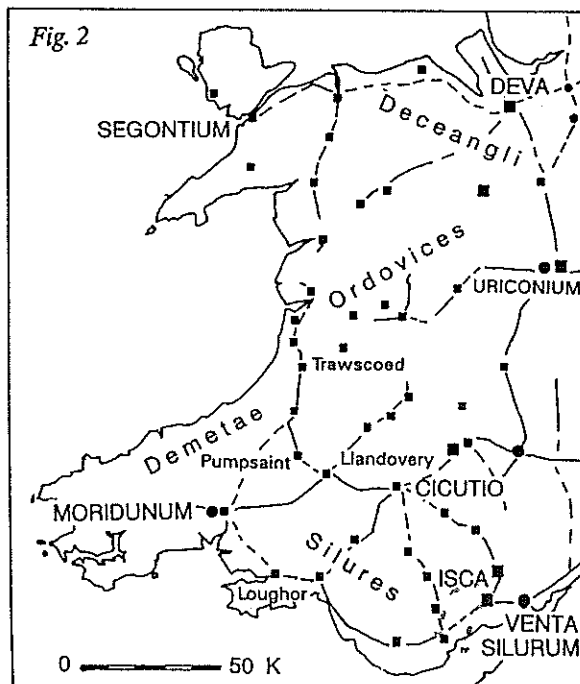
It was not until 1968 that Barri Jones of Manchester University, and John Little (then Curator of Carmarthen Museum), began a series of excavations to locate the Roman town that attracted strong local support.⁴ The northern defences were located by a series of trenches. An area of the town was excavated over a summer season in what is now St. Peter's car park. Clearance and excavation work was carried out at the Amphitheatre and small scale sampling seemed to locate the fort in the Spilman Street area.

The Dyfed Archaeological Trust was formed in 1975 and for the first time there was a full-time, regionally based, archaeological service to respond to development threats. The Trust has enhanced our knowledge of both Roman and medieval Carmarthen through a series of large scale excavations, smaller scale 'salvage' excavations and 'watching briefs' on developments.

This extended article is intended to present and explain the results of the Trust's work in Roman Carmarthen to a non-specialist audience. The definitive report is nearing completion and will be published as a monograph in 1993/4.⁵ All the excavations described here were 'rescue' excavations—that is they were carried out in areas scheduled for redevelopment, not chosen in the first instance for their research potential. Acknowledgements to all those who funded, supported and worked on the excavations are given at the end of this article, together with a note on how better protection of the archaeological remains of the Roman town has been achieved since the late 1960s both by statutory means and through planning controls. The work in Carmarthen is part of a great increase in urban archaeology in Britain since the 1960s which has transformed our knowledge of Roman, Saxon and medieval towns.⁶

The Roman Conquest of Wales

Aerial photography, particularly since the 1970s, has revealed many previously unknown Roman military sites in Wales and the Marches⁷ and archaeological excavation and fieldwork



have vastly increased the amount of information available from the Roman texts that describe aspects of the conquest.⁸ Roman armies were on the borders of what was to become Wales by the late AD 40s. In order to secure the south and east of Britain rapidly conquered after Claudius' invasion of AD 43, legionary and auxiliary forces campaigned in north and south east Wales against the *Ordovices*, the *Deceangli* and the *Silures* from early legionary bases at Wroxeter and Usk. It has been argued that the *Demetae*, in contrast to their neighbours the *Silures*, were either more peaceable or pro-Roman since there is so little evidence of pre-Flavian military action against them. But there was an early fort at Llandovery and the marching camps on the present county borders on Mynydd Trecastle and Mynydd Mawr indicate early campaigns from the Usk valley into the upper Tywi valley. There were reverses as well as advances for Roman forces and changes in imperial policies. The establishment in AD 70 of a new imperial dynasty in Rome, the Flavians, followed a year of civil war after the death of Nero.

The historian Tacitus contrasted the assertive new policies of the Flavians with the shilly-shallying of their predecessors. Under the governor Julius Frontinus (AD 74-78) a concerted campaign of conquest was organised from new legionary bases at Caerleon and Chester. Within a short space of time most of Wales was covered by a network of forts linked by a new road system. One of those forts was at Carmarthen.

EXCAVATIONS AT SPILMAN STREET, 1985 & 1988-89.

Some archaeological trial work was carried out in 1985 on the site of what was planned as a new Chairman's 'parlour' in the car park of Carmarthen District Council, Spilman Street, sufficient to show that substantial Roman deposits existed, buried a metre below the car park surface. Unfortunately building plans were altered at short notice to create an emergency underground shelter below the proposed parlour. A deep L-shaped cutting was dug out by contractors' machines removing almost all the archaeological deposits without record. Only a

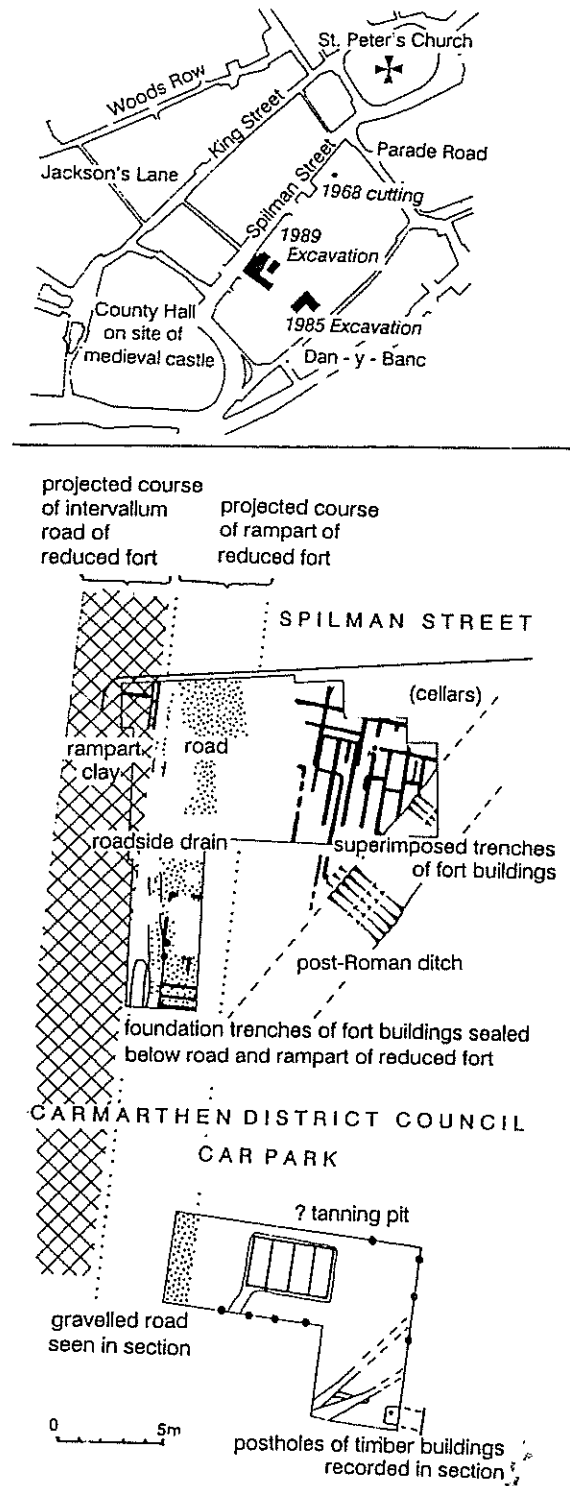


Fig. 3. Location map and plan of Spilman Street excavations, 1985 and 1988-9.

short period of time could be negotiated to record the sections and excavate any deep features still surviving below the base of the cutting.⁹

It was soon apparent from finds of coins and pottery that the occupation was of late first century date and was thus likely to be military in character. Yet the features did not seem to be of the normal type for the interior of a Roman auxiliary fort. Postholes exposed in the sides of the cutting suggested that there had been two phases of timber buildings. They were set on three sides of a deep rectangular pit or tank, and all were alongside a gravelled road which had been sectioned in the western side of the cutting. The pit, 7.7 x 4.9 m. and 1.8 m. deep, had

been clay and timber lined to hold water. Wooden partitions divided it into four equal sized compartments. It was interpreted as a tanning pit and experts with whom the 1985 results were discussed thought it unlikely that a smelly process like tanning (which involves steeping hides in urine) would take place within the densely packed interior of a fort, not even in the workshop quarter.

This apparent anomaly was resolved by the results from the 1988-89 excavations which took place further north on the sites of the demolished (and now rebuilt) 5-8 Spilman Street and the areas to the rear. This time a three month period for archaeological excavation was negotiated between demolition and rebuilding.¹⁰



Plate 1. View of Carmarthen looking NE with County Hall (& site of castle) bottom centre, and St Peter's Church, centre. The fort lies between the two. Outline of Roman town defences arrowed.

The greatest depths of Roman deposits survived on the western side of the site where a north-south aligned Roman road was discovered, undoubtedly the northward continuation of the road discovered in 1985. In the northwest corner of the excavation, alongside the entrance to the car park, were the truncated remains of a clay bank which had been revetted by turves. This was interpreted as a fort rampart and the road an *intervallum* road running around the whole interior of the fort defences. But when the clay bank and road were excavated there were the traces of rectangular timber buildings sealed below them, similar in character and alignment to those built on the eastern side of the road. The rampart evidently belonged to a secondary, smaller fort constructed partly within the defences of the original auxiliary fort, to house a reduced garrison. Such a reduction in size has been demonstrated on most of the Roman forts excavated within Wales.¹¹ We know far less about the interior plans and functions of the reduced forts than the relatively standardized layout of the auxiliary forts. There may well have been a specialization in the preparation of hides for leather and therefore a need for tanning works within the reduced fort at *Moridunum*. The Roman Army required very large quantities of leather and not just for its cavalry forces.¹²

Careful excavation of seemingly insignificant features like spreads of burnt clay and deposits of charcoal, layers found directly above the original floor levels of the Roman timber buildings (where they survived) showed that many of the buildings had been destroyed by fire. Yet there was insufficient debris to suggest that this was the result of an attack, capture and destruction of the fort. A deliberate, thorough and systematic programme of demolition, salvage, slighting of defences and final clearance of the site by burning had taken place on both the areas excavated. This can only have been carried out by the Roman Army as part of a planned withdrawal of the Carmarthen garrison.

The Topography of the Fort Site

Useful though the Spilman Street excavations have been they represent only a very small area

of the Roman fort. However, an examination of the topography of the King and Spilman Street areas of Carmarthen can give further indications of where the fort must have been sited. The area today forms a fairly level plateau, with a sharp break of slope on its south eastern side. There is a more gentle slope on the northwest from King Street down to Woods Row as anyone who walks down Jackson's Lane can appreciate. But as a result of archaeological observation over the last 20 years, recording the levels of build-up above the distinctive clay and gravel of the subsoil, it is apparent that the area was more ridge-like when the Romans arrived. Centuries of occupation have levelled off and flattened the central area between King and Spilman Street removing Roman deposits and there has been a corresponding build up of garden soil sealing Roman deposits in the long narrow strip gardens behind the street frontages. What is now the John Street car park formed a natural barrier to the north since it was

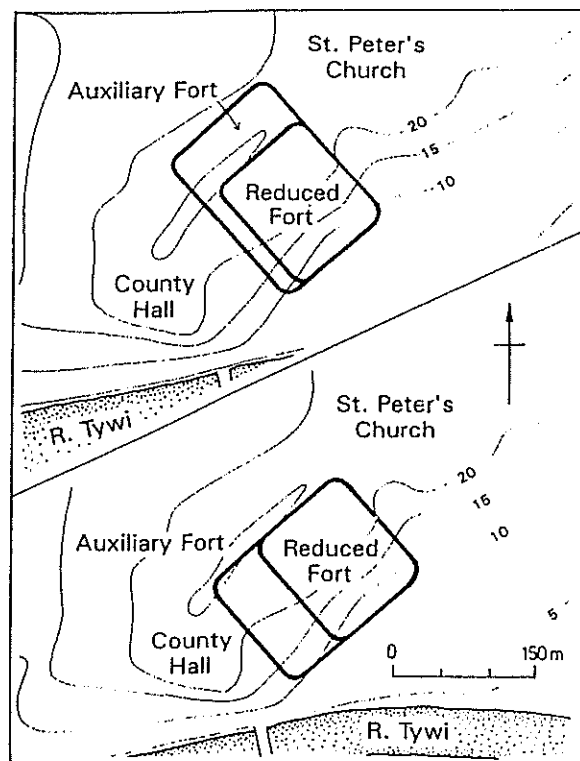


Fig. 4. Sketch maps showing alternative locations for auxiliary and reduced forts.

marshland until as late as the 18th century.¹³ West of Spilman Street lies the site of the medieval castle, now partly occupied by County Hall, with a steep fall to the river below. To the east there was a natural barrier in what was a small stream valley and is today Parade Road. The maps show some of these topographical constraints (figs. 1 & 4). If we accept that the initial fort at Carmarthen was some 5 acres in size,¹⁴ of normal rectangular plan, then it could fit either along, or across the ridge—the only 'fixed point' we have at present is the line of reduced fort rampart. But it is most likely to have been set across the ridge. There was no sign of a rampart at the southern end of the 1985 cutting, which was very close to the edge of the terrace above today's Dan-y-Banc. So the defences would have run across the slope down to the river valley rather than along its crest.

Chronology

Finds from both excavations were sparse—more material was in fact recovered from the 1985 salvage excavation. The samian pottery has been studied by Peter Webster and he suggests a relatively short occupation period between AD 75 and 110.¹⁵ There is no evidence to place the foundation of the fort any earlier than the campaigns of Julius Frontinus. An abandonment as early as c. 110 AD is unexpected since the town cannot have been organised as a *civitas* or tribal capital much before AD 130. The conventional wisdom is that garrisons were finally withdrawn on a wide scale from Wales to provide forces for the new fixed northern frontier of Hadrian's Wall. In addition there is at present little evidence for the assumed civilian settlement or *vicus* outside the gates of the fort that could have developed into a town. But the sample from the Spilman Street excavations, though very useful, is a small one and the dating might change if other areas of the fort were excavated.

THE ORIGINS OF THE TOWN

Most Roman forts had a civilian settlement outside their gates. They were termed *vici*,

singular *vicus*, by the Romans.¹⁶ At Trawscoed, Ceredigion, air photographs of the parch marks of the fort's roads, later substantiated by excavation, have demonstrated that fort and settlement were laid out as one entity.¹⁷ We know less about other forts in Dyfed, but both Pumpsaint and Llandovery had *vici* attached to them.¹⁸ It is generally supposed that whilst most *vici* withered away when their forts were abandoned, some survived and developed into towns. Dr Graham Webster suggested that there was a military frontier zone which advanced northwards and westwards across the newly conquered province, secured by networks of forts. The settlements attached to these forts were reorganised into administrative centres under civilian control once their regions were secure.¹⁹ This view has been modified in recent years as more work has been done.²⁰ Roman policy was flexible in regard to utilizing the wide variety of existing late Iron Age tribal structures it encountered. Whilst military considerations were naturally important in the precise choice of site for a fort, the general location may well have been influenced by wider strategic objectives such as proximity to an existing centre of local power.²¹ Another focus of local loyalties might have been a religious or cult centre, assimilated into the overall Roman provincial structure by a new, romanized settlement attached to that centre. Which of these strands seem to be the most important in determining the development of a civilian town in Carmarthen, succeeding the early military control of the region exercised from the fort?

Roman Roads

It is appropriate to begin with the Roman road network.²² The Roman road system in Wales was military in origin and was designed to link the network of forts that reached its most developed and extensive form following the campaigns of Julius Frontinus in AD 75. The fort at Carmarthen was at the junction of at least three roads—one approaching the fort, site from the east down the Tywi valley, the other approaching from the south-east, and very probably crossing the river at what was the medieval and is still the modern bridging point.

Either—or indeed both—of these routes could have been used by the advancing armies in AD 75 to reach the fort site at Carmarthen. Recent work based on air photographs has shown that a third route proceeded westwards from Carmarthen, presumably after the fort itself had been established.²³ It is likely that a yet to be located fort or forts lie in the Whitland area and further west into Pembrokeshire.

A fourth route branched northwards from the first utilising the Gwili valley initially and proceeded towards the Teifi valley and thence to north Wales. Much of the Roman road network survived the contraction of military control in what was to become Wales. It may not have developed in ways that can be seen in the more densely populated and prosperous south and east of *Britannia* but third century milestones show that it was maintained into the late Roman period.²⁴ Even if not immediately adjacent to the fort second century Roman occupation in Carmarthen is most likely to be located alongside the main approach road down the Tywi valley.

Excavations at Church Street 1978—Earliest Occupation

Excavations took place in the gardens south of Church Street, between 1976²⁵ and 1978,²⁶ the frontages have since been rebuilt and the sheltered housing complex of St. John's Court now occupies the area of the gardens. The excavations showed a long sequence of Roman occupation on the site between the late first and the fourth centuries. The earliest occupation was Roman and consisted of a sequence of fenced and ditched enclosures which continued in use until the early second century. A rather straggling ditch, first identified in 1976, bisected the site and had gone out of use in the first quarter of the second century. It was originally thought to be a leat supplying water to the fort but it is now recognized that Parade Road must in origin have been a natural ravine, a channel for some long-lost stream. So it is unlikely that it could be crossed by a watercourse supplying the fort.

Two things are significant about these otherwise unremarkable late first century/early sec-

ond century features. First the earliest enclosures must be contemporary with the occupation of the fort to the west. Secondly, even if they continued in use after the fort garrison had been reduced in size or even withdrawn, they do not indicate *vicus* type occupation in an area in which, according to all other known examples, we might expect to find it. It is not certain precisely what the earliest Church Street features do represent—possibly a fort annex with enclosures for stock or horses. It is unfortunate that the soils that formed over the glacially deposited clays and gravels on which the whole of Carmarthen is sited are so acid, for bone from the Roman period can only survive in waterlogged conditions. Animal bone did survive in the bottom of deep rubbish pits adjacent to the area bisected by the drain on the Church Street site. Most were of cattle that had been butchered. And the earlier enclosures themselves may well have served to corral stock. It is tempting, though unfortunately unprovable, to see these enclosures attached to the fort serving as assembly points for tributary dues collected 'on the hoof'. And perhaps the resources of a predominantly, though by no means wholly, pastoral Demetic society that were rendered in

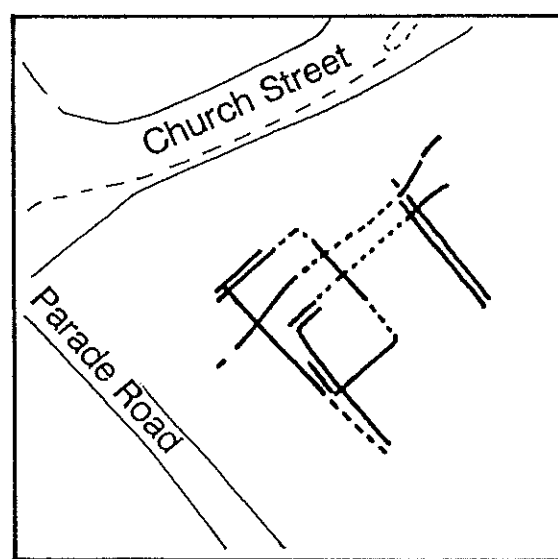


Fig 5. Early enclosures discovered at Church Street.

tribute and tax to the Roman officials were processed into leather by the army garrison, as well as consumed as provisions.²⁷

Professor Barri Jones' excavations in what is now the northern end of St Peter's Car Park do not seem to have produced evidence for early second century occupation. But of course there are other areas due east of the fort, St Peter's Church for example, where *vicus* development might be more likely on both sides of the main road approaching the fort from the east down the Tywi valley.

The Roman Temple

The most convincing evidence to date for early second century occupation comes from the eastern end of Priory Street and is associated with a Roman temple. A small part of this building was discovered in the south-east corner of the large Priory Street excavations and more was exposed by extending a cutting into the garden of no. 104 Priory Street. Unfortunately very little of the building survived; not just its building stone but even rubble from its founda-

tion trenches had been robbed out. Sufficient however remained to establish its plan: an inner, square *cella* or sanctuary within a larger square enclosure. This is the standard plan for the commonest of the temples known from Roman Britain, the so-called 'Romano-Celtic' type.²⁸

The Temple was below average size for its type, the outer enclosure being 23 m. square and the inner building 14 m. square. The outer wall was probably only a 'dwarf wall' and was never any higher than the 0.4 m. and 3 courses to which it survived on its western side. It probably supported a timber superstructure, founded on sill beams with panelling infilled with wattle and daub and probably limewashed. Only the foundations survived of the inner building. The structure was built on a massive foundation pit that was 1.5 m. deep. This straight-sided, flat-bottomed pit was cut down into the stiff boulder clay of the subsoil and had been carefully back-filled with layers of large, oval, water-rounded pebbles. Each succeeding layer was pitched into the one below giving a kind of herringbone appearance in section. Most of this stone had been dug out in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries for building purposes but the foundation 'raft' would have been substantial enough to support a modern three or four storey building; undoubtedly the scale of the foundations was also intended to act as a kind of sump or drain and we found the same techniques used, albeit less massively, for other, later, stone and timber buildings alongside the Roman streets.

The temple certainly predated the streets and timber buildings of the mid second century which occupied the greater part of the Priory Street site, indeed it was being robbed for building material by then. But there was no useful dating material recovered from the remains of the structure itself. However, when Peter Webster and his extra-mural class in Cardiff undertook the massive task of studying the very large quantities of samian pottery from all the Carmarthen excavations, they discovered that there was a significant quantity of 'Trajanic' (i.e. AD 90-110 AD) vessels in the material from the large Priory Street site. This is most likely to relate to the Temple and occupation in its environs. The entrance to the Temple was probably on its south side and it was thus approached

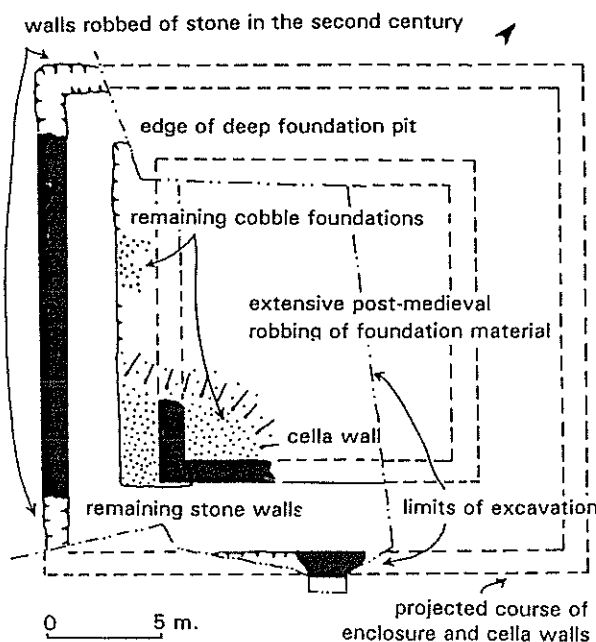


Fig. 6. Simplified plan of the Temple.

from the Roman road. Its very existence as well as its location and demise raise a number of interesting possibilities.

Was there a native cult centre in the area adopted and adapted by the Romans as part of the process of assimilating the territory into the administration of the province? Was this the reason for the continuation of occupation in Carmarthen that eventually developed into a *civitas* capital? Were the cult centre functions of the settlement transferred to a newly built amphitheatre in the mid second century? It is now recognized that Carmarthen's amphitheatre should more correctly be termed a 'theatre-amphitheatre'²⁹ since there is no good evidence for the former existence of a southern bank surrounding the arena; it is more likely that there was a stage setting here. Such structures were used for religious ceremonies as well as more secular events.

THE CIVITAS CAPITAL

To the Romans civilised life was synonymous with town life, and civilian government meant government organised from towns. In some areas of late Iron Age Britain, notably the south east, high population levels and the production of agricultural surpluses allowed trade with the

Roman world and as a consequence the emergence of centralised power within tribal groups. The transition from a tribal centre or centres,

often the very large defended sites known as *oppida*, to towns that served as *civitas* capitals for government based on tribal units, was a natural one for such societies. But for the less populous, poorer, far less centralised tribal groupings of the north and west, such as the *Demetae* of west Wales, it is assumed that urban life was new and unknown. Parts of what was to become Wales undoubtedly remained under military administration—but the south was organized under civilian government. Caerwent became the *civitas* capital for the *Silures* of south-east Wales and Carmarthen the capital for the *Demetae*.

It has always been supposed that the political circumstance for this process of change from military to civilian rule in south Wales was the visit of the Emperor Hadrian to Britain in AD 122. The creation of a new fixed northern frontier to the province (Hadrian's Wall) depended upon the reduction of military garrisons in Wales. The other side of this policy coin was the stimulation of civic initiatives: most famously manifest in the great dedicatory inscription

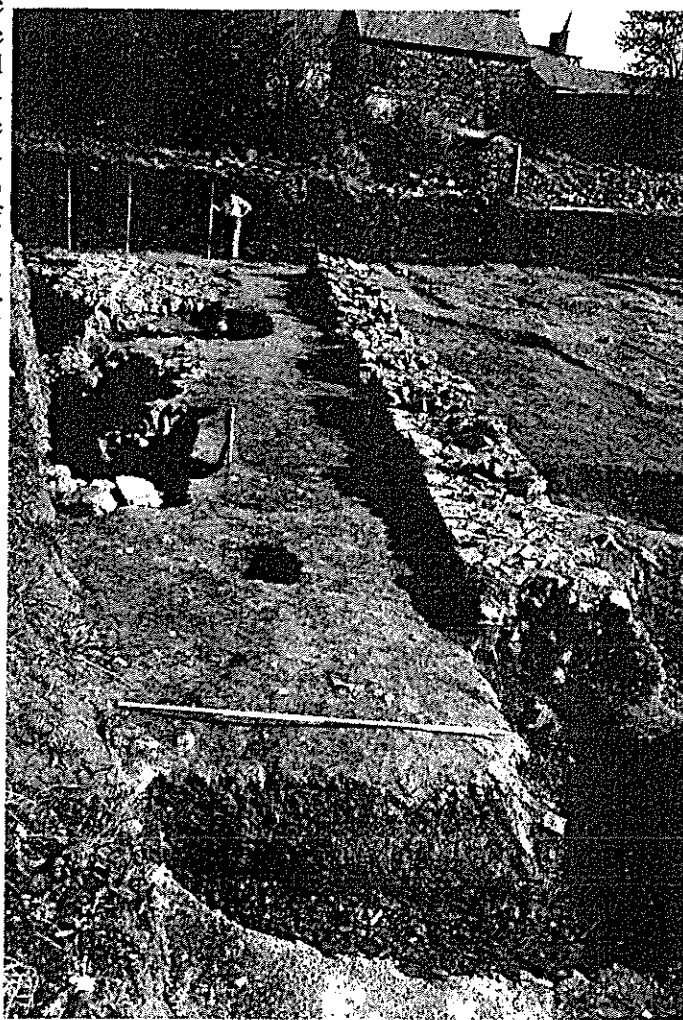


Plate 2. View of part of excavated Temple showing outer wall (right), robbed corner (foreground) and foundation for cella (left) viewed from NW

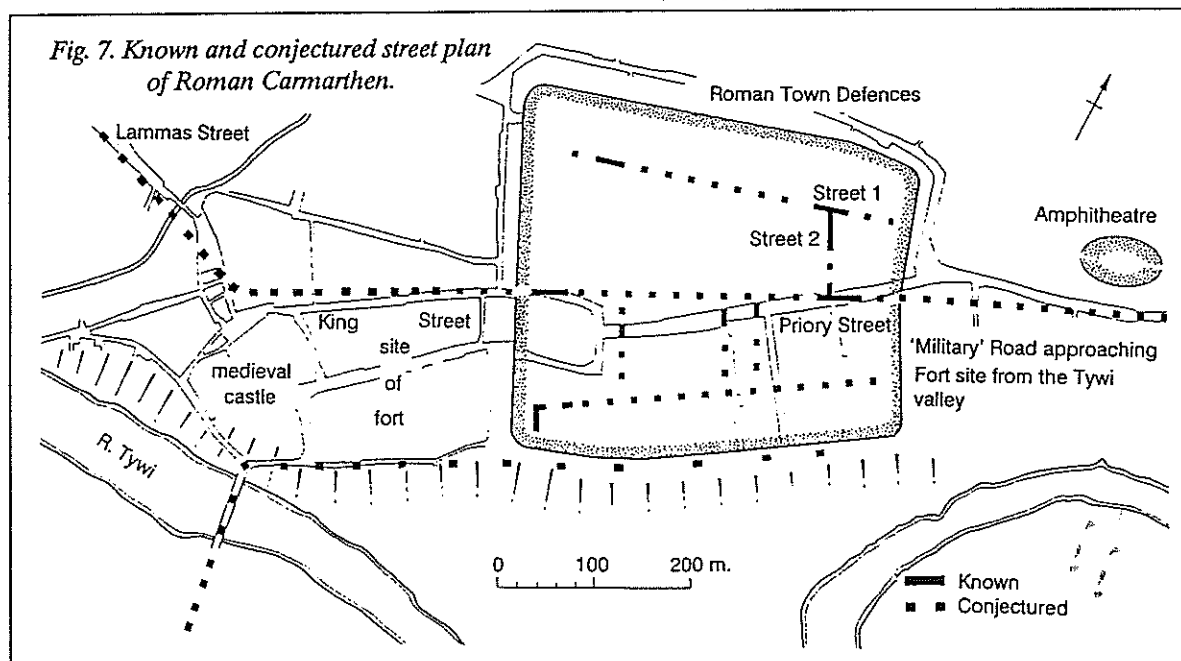
erected by the *civitas Cornoviorum* above the newly completed Forum at Wroxeter in AD 129-30.³⁰ But, as Salway cautions, in other places Hadrian's impetus 'started developments that may only show up in the archaeological record in the succeeding period'.³¹ Local tribal élites needed time to be converted to Roman ways and aspirations since they formed the *ordo* or governing council of the new towns.

At Caerwent there is incontrovertible evidence in the form of a stone inscription both to the name and the status of *Venta* as the *civitas* capital of the Silures.³² No such evidence has yet been found for Carmarthen. At Caerwent and many other *civitas* capitals of Roman Britain the excavation of the Forum and Basilica in the centre of the towns provides the physical evidence of administrative status.³³ These buildings combined the functions of central market places with justice and administration and sometimes celebration of the imperial cult. But in Carmarthen the remains of these lie buried beneath central Priory street and under the buildings either side of it.³⁴ We are left therefore with the other mark of the *civitas* capital—its regular grid pattern of streets³⁵ and perhaps its later defences to determine the status of *Moridunum*.

The Street Pattern

The ideal street plan was based on the intersection of two streets, the *cardo* from north to south and the *decumanus* from east to west. The Forum would be sited within an angle of the central intersection, secondary streets were laid off at right angles forming *insulae* or individual blocks. It has been a priority in Dyfed Archaeological Trust's excavation programme in Roman Carmarthen to establish the street pattern of the town. Some evidence has been produced by 'keyhole' archaeology, the watching and recording of service trenches, some is the result of fairly large scale 'area' excavation. Both are summarised in fig. 7.

Mention has been made above of the 'military road' which approached the fort from the east, down the Tywi valley. There can be little doubt that Priory Street lies over a greater part of its length in the Roman town area. But observations made in 1990 when trenches were cut down the whole length of Priory Street for new gas supplies showed that as Priory Street approaches St. Peter's Church its course diverges from that of the underlying Roman road, which is likely to lie beneath St. Peter's Street. Archaeologically, the best known Roman street is



Street 1 which lay on the north side of the main road and has been examined in Barri Jones' St. Peter's car park excavations and in the 1980-84 Dyfed Archaeological Trust excavations at Priory Street. Aerial photography in the dry summer of 1984 defined the street as a parchment across the Richmond Park football pitch approximately mid-way between the two excavation sites. Its course was not exactly parallel to the main road. Only one north-south Street is well attested archaeologically: Street 2 which linked the main road and Street 1 in the 1980-1984 excavation area. Excavation of the junction of the two streets proved conclusively that they were constructed at the same time. But the junction was not at a right angle. Street 2 was laid off the main road at a right angle but because Street 1's course diverges from the main road, Street 2 joined it at an oblique angle. Much less is known of streets in the southern half of the town (see fig. 7). When the town's defences were constructed in the late second century (see below) their course was partly dictated by the existing street pattern. We can see most clearly how the northern line of the defences runs parallel to that of Street 1. It is equally noticeable how the eastern side of the defences is shorter than the western. Even though more information is required for a complete picture of the Roman street plan of *Moridunum* it is already apparent that it had a regular and planned layout even if not to the standard 'chequer-board' pattern seen for example at Caerwent.

Excavation layer by painstaking layer of Streets 1 and 2 between 1980 and 1984 provided much interesting detail on how the streets were constructed and maintained throughout the Roman occupation of *Moridunum*. The method of construction differed from that of the military roads in open country. Although there were lengths of quarry ditches alongside the streets they were not continuous and they were probably intended to mark out the course of the street rather than provide the spoil to build it. The streets were constructed of layers of gravel on a slightly cambered base, they were on average 5 m. wide and at the end of the Roman period, after repeated re-surfacings, they were a good metre thick. Once laid down, the gravel

formed a very tough impervious surface. This could cause problems for those whose houses, shops and workshops abutted the streets for rainwater would run off the street into their dwellings. Whilst street surfacing was the responsibility of the town council—the *ordo*—it is probable that the individual property owner had to provide side drains and was often obliged to keep raising the interior and exterior levels of his buildings and even rebuild them to keep pace with street levels. This is a major factor in explaining the great depth of deposits on the Priory Street site as in other areas of *Moridunum* and indeed most towns of Roman Britain.

Excavations to the rear of 105-111 Priory Street 1980-1984

The Priory Street excavations provided a total picture of the development, change and decline of a sizable part of *Moridunum*. There is only space in this article to highlight the main results and describe some of the buildings and activities which took place on the site. There was a long sequence of occupation from the early second century into the fourth. Even when the site was all but abandoned the streets continued to be surfaced—evidence of late Roman occupation in other parts of the town.

Although the dating evidence was sparse it indicated that the streets were constructed nearer to AD 150 than AD 120. Only one building—C1—was constructed at the same time as the streets were being laid out. Over the remainder of the area, street frontage development was at first rather hesitant and not until about AD 150 to 160 did the site 'fill up' with numerous rectangular timber buildings mainly, though not all, set at right angles to the streets (see fig. 8). These buildings were of different sizes and plans and were a mixture of houses, shops and workshops, sometimes combining all three functions under the one roof.

The buildings were of two main types of construction: either of close-set, pole-sized timbers fixed in a continuous wall trench or of large sized uprights in individual post holes, often paired across wall lines. These differences indicate different roof structures. The close-set uprights were probably capped by a continuous

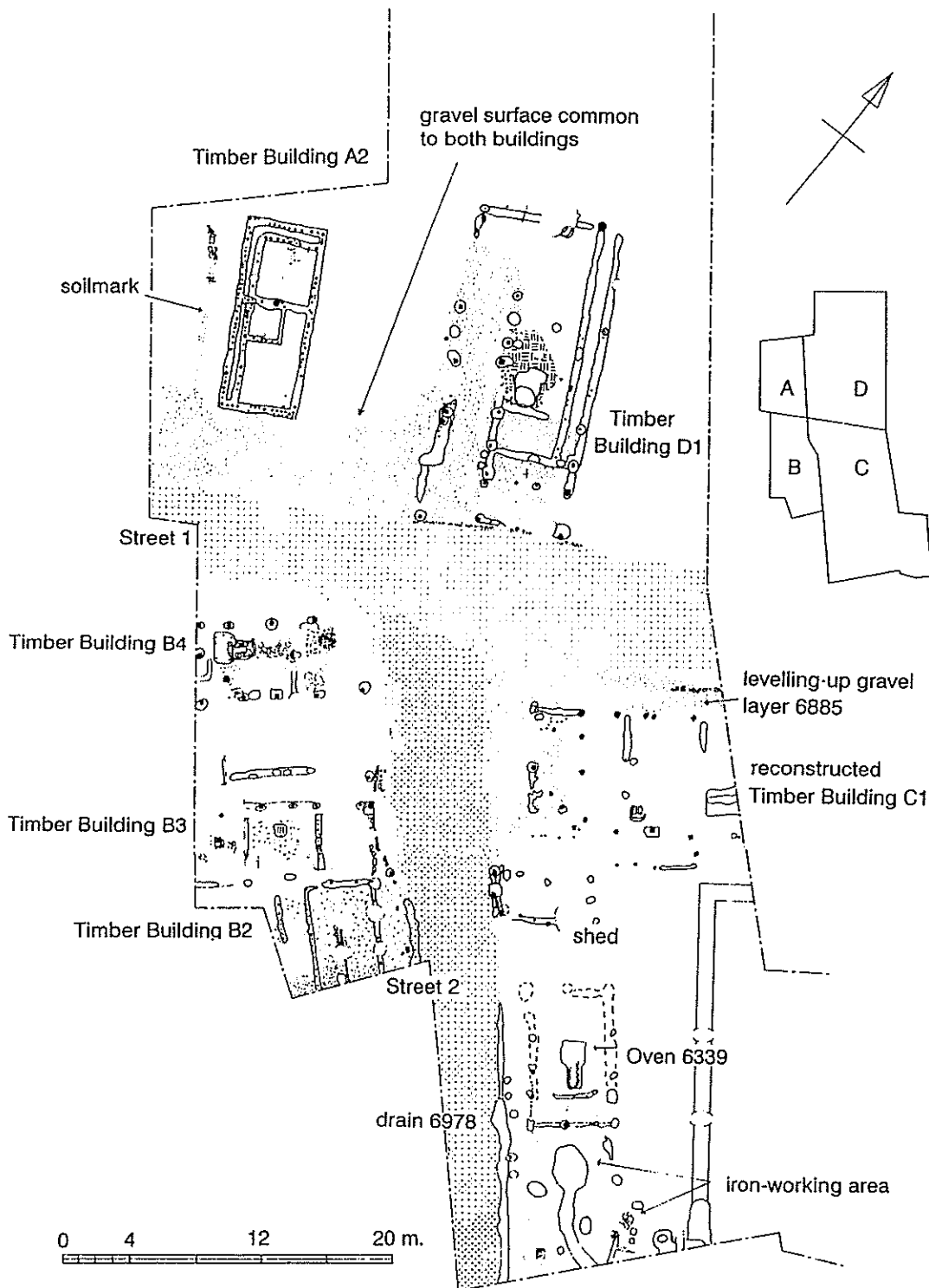


Fig. 8. Plan of Priory Street site in mid 2nd century.

wall plate whereas the paired uprights might have supported pre-formed crucks dividing the building into bays. But many of the buildings were of hybrid construction with individual walls of mass earth or 'clom' build. Whilst the plans and to some extent the methods of building differed from native styles which were still dominated by the round-house, the materials of which the Priory Street houses and shops were built were the same: earth, clay, timber and thatch.

Many other towns in Roman Britain have produced similar evidence for timber buildings of artisan character though few have been excavated over such a large area as at Carmarthen. The Carmarthen examples are smaller in scale than those excavated in second century London³⁶ or St Albans³⁷ and without any of the refinements of plastered walls, drains or latrines but they probably fulfilled the same functions. The loss of organic evidence such as bone due to the acidic gravel soils of the Priory Street site means that much of the evidence for the use of the buildings is lost. However there is evidence in the form of ovens and querns for baking on a larger than domestic scale which is discussed below. There is a wealth of evidence for iron and possibly bronze smithing.

Some of the Priory Street buildings were disused or near derelict by the late second century, others seem to have been deliberately dismantled and their sites cleared. This was followed by a period of abandonment. But taking all the archaeological evidence together we seem to have an ordered, even centrally directed change of use on the site rather than a catastrophic collapse. There is some indication that parts of the site were given over to garden cultivation; in other areas rubbish material or stone was brought to the site to be dumped over the vacant properties. The marked change in the character of the area was contemporary with the construction of earth and timber defences around the whole of *Moridunum* but we do not know what the relationship between the two events is.

When occupation was resumed in the early third century, it was different in many ways to what had gone before. Some activities continued—there were a number of smithies and

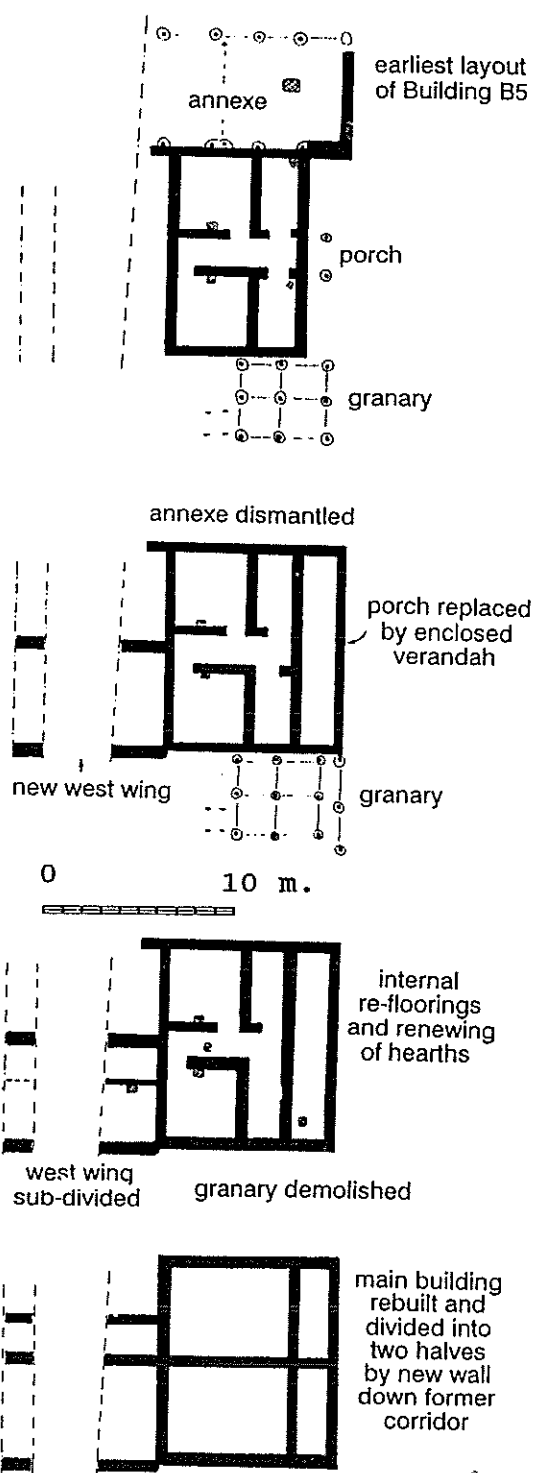


Fig. 9. Simplified plan of Building B5, showing main phases of development.

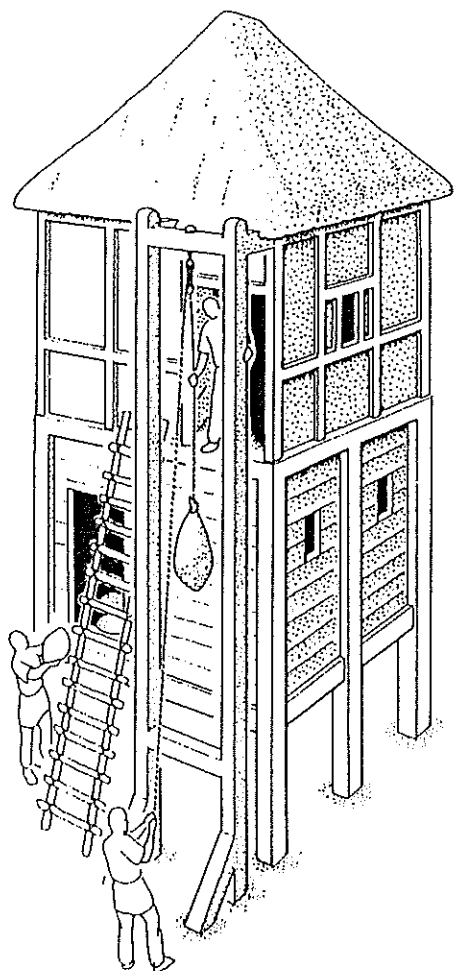


Fig. 10. Reconstruction drawing of the Granary by Neil Ludlow.

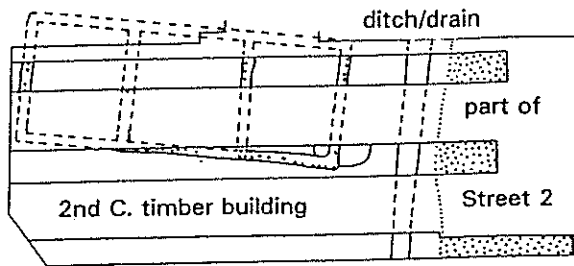
possibly some iron smelting. More large clay ovens were built. Although several of the timber buildings containing or associated with smithing and baking were little more than sheds, two more substantial rectangular buildings were constructed on the site, fronting the streets. But throughout the third and probably well into the fourth century the site was dominated by a larger building occupying the whole of excavation area B. This building was the most 'Romanized' of all the structures on the Priory Street site. It had a timber framed superstructure founded on dwarf stone walls, some of which survived to their original four course 0.4 m. height. As the block plans (fig. 9) show the

building underwent considerable alteration and development. The rectangular core of two rooms either side of a central passage soon had its street frontage porch replaced by a 'verandah'. A wholly timber building attached to the northern side of the building was part of the original plan but there does not seem to have been any internal communication between the two. Was the timber building intended from the outset as a separate shop or workshop located in a prime street junction position and intended for leasing? If so, the scheme evidently did not work, testimony to changed times and the building was soon abandoned. Another early feature was a granary built on a raised platform (3.5 x 4.0 m.) supported by nine posts on the south side of the main building. Some charred grain was discovered in the destruction levels of this structure and is described below on the section on pottery and food preparation. The granary seems larger than that required for a single household raising the possibility that House B5 belonged to a grain merchant. The 'wing' which was added to the south west side of the building was not completely exposed in excavation so we do not know its full extent but it was frequently altered and was not of so high a standard as the main block. Although Building B5 was the most developed of all the Roman buildings on the Priory Street site, with its stone floors and well constructed fireplaces, it still fell short of the highest quality of Roman town housing. An example of this type of building was found on the St Peter's Car Park site in 1969 which had a hypocaust system of underfloor heating. There are hints from antiquarian finds of buildings with mosaic floors and painted wall plaster in other parts of the town.

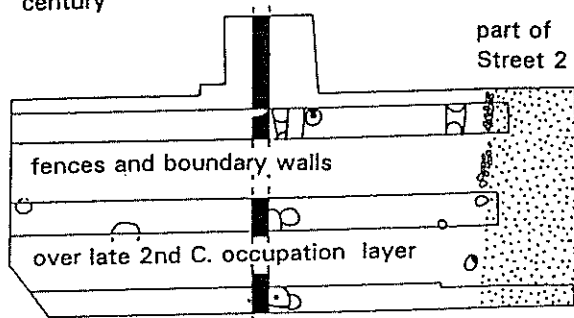
Excavations at 108-111, Priory Street 1987

The main Priory Street excavations showed how an area of the town changed in character between the second and third centuries. This kind of change from busy artisan occupation to a more agricultural economic régime, from unpretentious, close-packed timber buildings to larger Romanized town houses, has been noted in many other towns in Roman Britain.³⁸ But

c. A.D. 130



Late second century



Third - fourth centuries

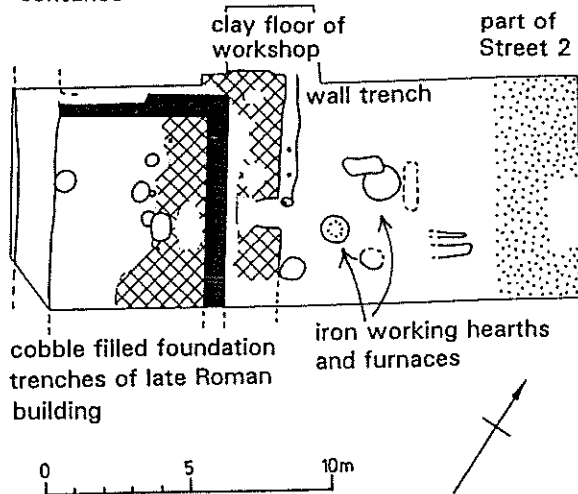


Fig. 11. Phased plans of 2nd–4th century occupation.

even from the beginning there was variety in kinds of buildings within the *civitas* capitals since they displayed their status not just in the regularity of street plan but in their official buildings, notably the forum and basilica. When 109–111, Priory Street were demolished in 1987 to be replaced by a sheltered housing scheme, the opportunity to excavate on the site was eagerly sought, even though time was short and access restricted.³⁹ This was and still is the only site which has been excavated in the central area of the Roman town alongside the main road. It was assumed that there would have been better quality buildings alongside what was the main road through the town in contrast to the artisan structures found alongside Street 1.

The results were unexpected. The earliest building, of early to mid second century date, was a rectangular, three-roomed timber structure similar in construction to the second century timber buildings fronting Streets 1 and 2 further north. It was aligned narrow end on to Street 2 and not, as might be expected, to the pre-existing main road which lay just to the south of the excavated area. The implication must be that there was little on this site alongside the main road before Street 2 was constructed, despite the proximity of the Temple precinct.

A similar sequence of occupation to the adjacent site to the north was uncovered although the details were sketchy. The earliest building was sealed by a thick layer of mixed soil of late second century date reminiscent of the abandonment layers further to the north. When occupation was renewed in the third century a specialist workshop set back from Street 2 was built. It had a thick, heat-stained clay floor and the remains of iron working hearths and furnaces outside suggest that iron was being smelted as well as forged and worked from billets or bars. This was in turn succeeded by a larger and better quality building reminiscent of the part stone built B5. Again the eastern side of the building was set back from Street 2 but this time its southern walls must have been hard up against the edge of the main road. Thus only at this late period (mid third to early fourth century?) was a moderate quality building constructed alongside the main road. More excava-

tion, however small scale, is needed on the central area of the town before we can fully assess the significance of the 1987 results.

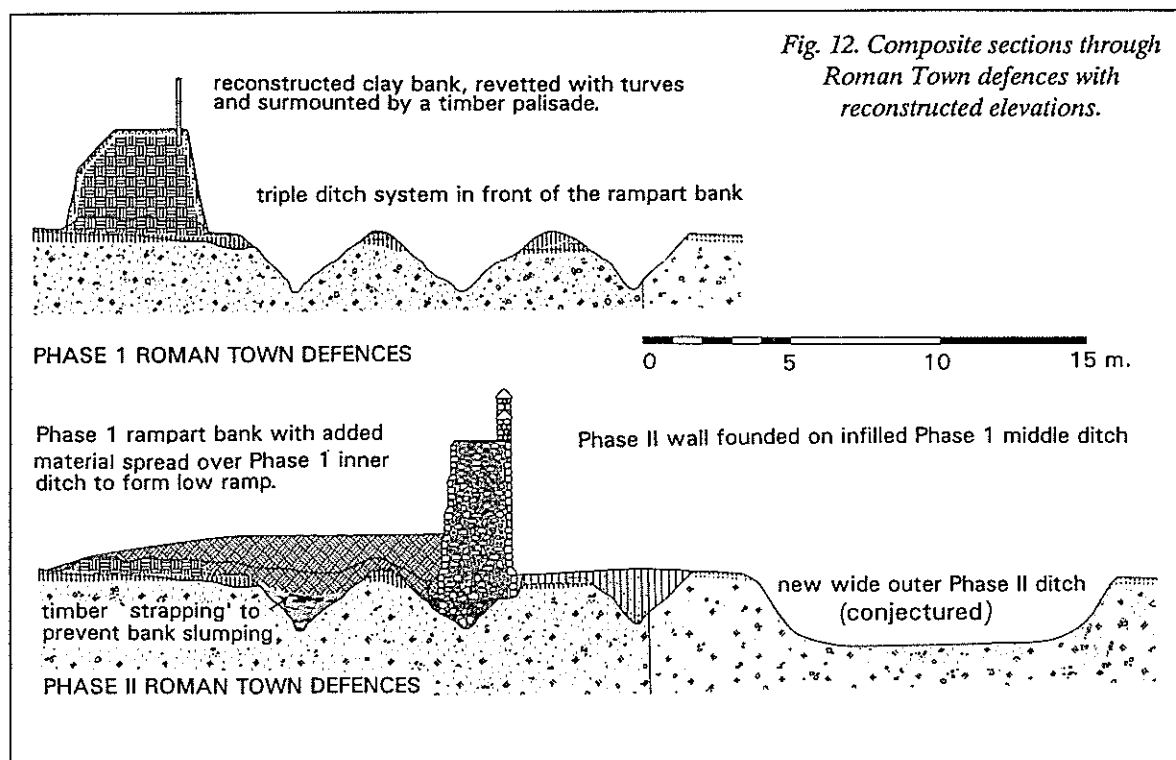
THE ROMAN TOWN DEFENCES

Unlike Caerwent (the *civitas* capital of the Silures) there are no upstanding remains of the Roman town walls at Carmarthen. This is due to the fact that the medieval towns of Old and New Carmarthen used the walls and probably the remains of half-buried Roman stone buildings as convenient quarries for building stone. Caerwent on the other hand was little more than a village after the Roman period thus its walls and towers survived. But the line of the Roman town defences of Carmarthen has been fossilized by the course of more modern roads and property boundaries. The Roman defences survived therefore as topographical constraints, even in their decayed form of banks and part filled ditches. Almost the whole of the defensive circuit is now built up in one form or another, the only remaining stretch where both the bank,

face and ditch area in front of the defences remains as open ground is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument but it covers less than 5% of the original circuit. The defences were first sectioned on their north side, to the rear of Richmond Terrace, by Barri Jones in 1969 and 1970. A large area of defences was excavated by the Dyfed Archaeological Trust in 1978 on the east side of Parade Road and there have been a number of small scale salvage excavations and watching briefs which have added to our knowledge. The current state of knowledge is summarized in fig 12.

Excavation of the Roman Town Defences at Church Street 1978

The limitations of examining defensive circuits solely by trenches and recording in section are now widely recognized. This limitation applies equally to Iron Age hill forts, Roman fort or town defences and medieval town walls. It was useful therefore to have the opportunity to excavate part at least of the Roman town



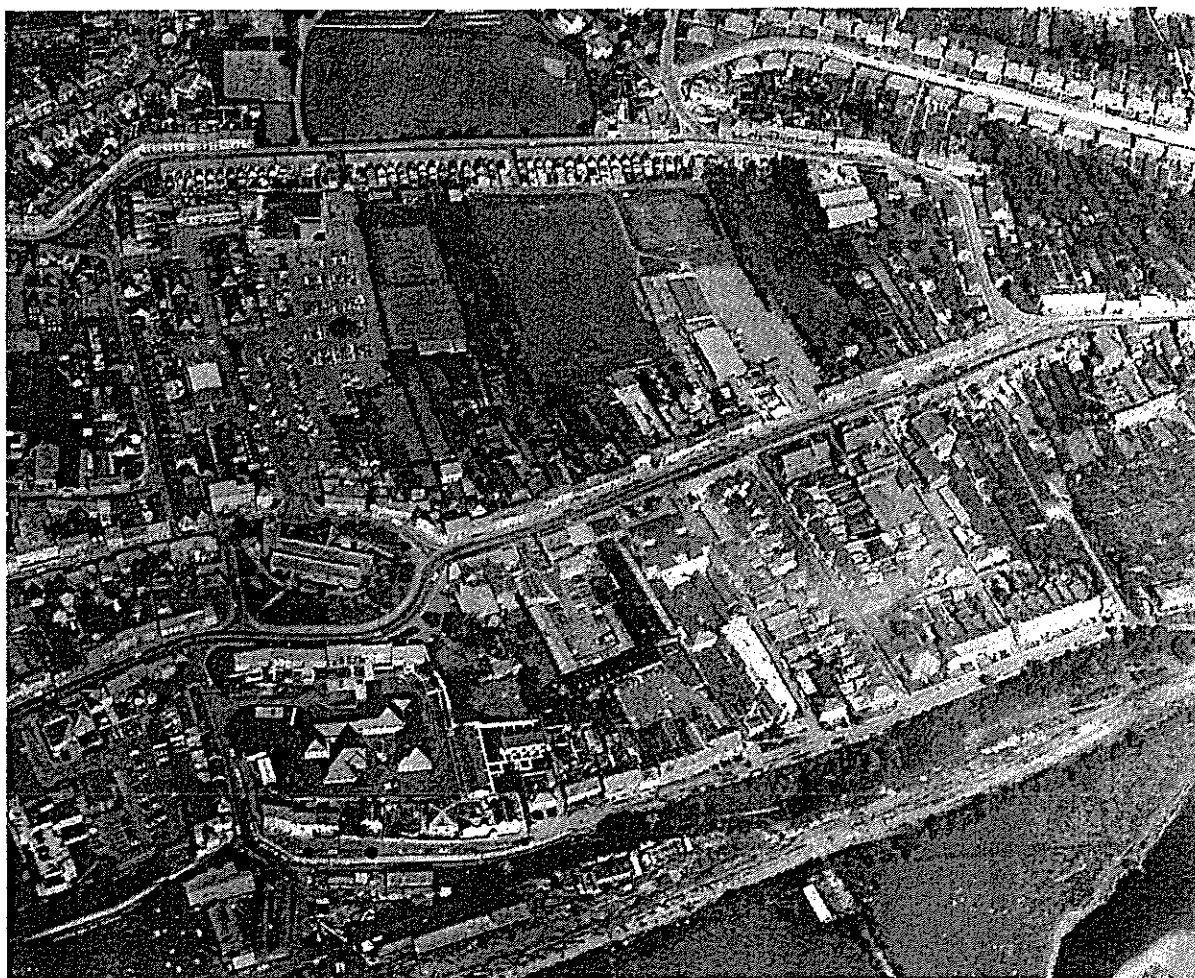


Plate 3. Roman town looking NNW in 1985.

defences at Church street as an area. The two phases of construction which Barri Jones had postulated on the basis of his 1968 and 1969 trenches were substantiated and more information gained on the structural sequence.

The first phase of construction consisted of a clay bank fronted by two, possibly three narrow 'v' profiled ditches. The clay bank had been faced with turves back and front to preserve its shape and the remains of these survived at the base of the very weathered and spread rampart. Sufficient survived however to establish the original width at 4.6 m. and to estimate the height at about 3 m. The bank would probably

have been surmounted by a strong timber palisade. The form of these defences is reminiscent of Roman military construction. This does not necessarily imply that they were built under military supervision or with army labour, rather that these were the only constructional techniques with which the inhabitants of *Moridunum* were familiar. They are not the same as the construction methods used for example for the defensive circuits around the circular Iron Age enclosures still being occupied in west Wales by the upper ranks of native society. The archaeological excavation of even a 15 m. length of eroded clay rampart involved considerable

physical effort—the original construction must have been a major undertaking. Furthermore the rampart clay was not the same material as the spoil from the ditches outside—the subsoil there was a mixed clay and gravel. One would have thought that this too would be a suitable material for construction, easily derived from the ditches but it is evident that pure clay was preferred and must have been transported to the site. Until this century there were clay pits on the valley floor below the town and these may first have been worked in Roman times. Wherever the rampart has been sectioned or noted around the whole circuit of the town's defences the material has been the same. This does suggest that the construction was a single, well-planned piece of work.

The sparsity of any finds, let alone datable

ones, in the ditch fills or rampart core means that it is impossible to say how long the defences were maintained. By the time the defences were extensively remodelled and rebuilt the ditches had been allowed to silt up. The remodelling took the form of a very considerable widening of the existing rampart, making it a sloping ramp faced by a stone wall. Clay was again used in the remodelling but with other materials. The existing rampart was levelled and pushed out over the inner ditch of the first phase defences. But before this was done bundles of carefully trimmed oak branches were laid down the length of the choked up inner ditch to provide a firm foundation for the extended bank. We do not know if this was done around the whole circuit since the Church Street section is the only area excavated. The middle ditch of the

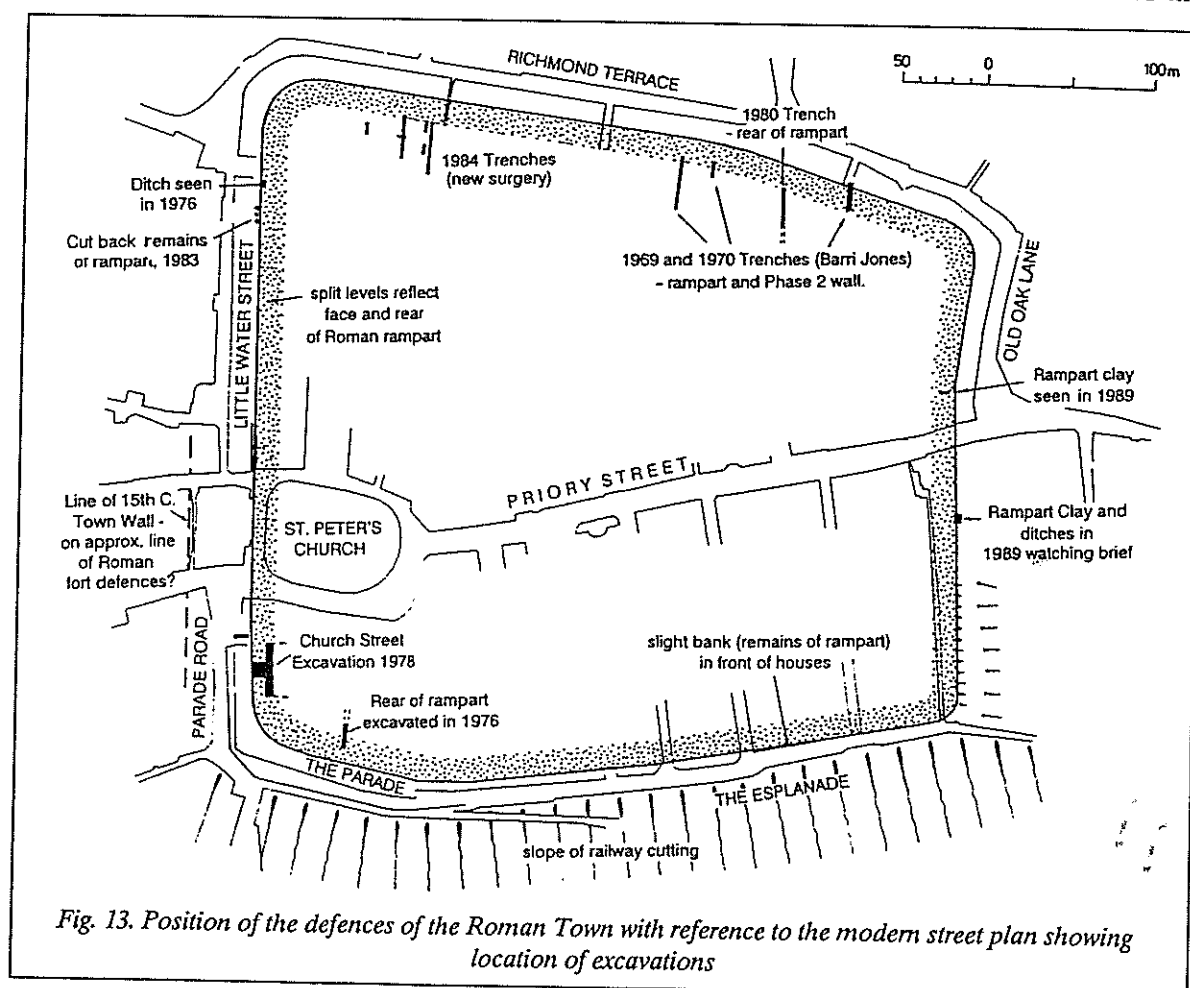


Fig. 13. Position of the defences of the Roman Town with reference to the modern street plan showing location of excavations

phase 1 defences was carefully cleaned out and cut back to take layers of carefully set large rounded pebbles—exactly the same foundation technique that was used for the Temple walls and, on a smaller scale, for Building B3. A stone wall was built over these foundations backed by the clay ramp. The Phase 2 outer ditch was probably wide and shallow but this has yet to be demonstrated archaeologically in Carmarthen since most of its circuit is now covered by roads. The new Phase 2 defences now took up a very wide area indeed all around the town—no less than 15 m from front to rear.

The Date and Purpose of the Defences

There is little precise evidence to date either

phase of construction even supposing that the defences were built in two short seasons and not done piecemeal over an extended period. But Carmarthen is not unusual in this for a recent critical examination of the dating of Roman town defences in Britain revealed how flimsy some of the evidence is.⁴⁰ The dating is important, because it has been argued that they represent a centrally authorized response to a political crisis in late second century Britain.⁴¹ So there has been a tendency to assign a late second century date overall. Carmarthen is also similar to many other towns in having a second phase of remodelling in stone and this also has been seen as a third century response to political insecurity resulting from Barbarian pressure. But more recent arguments have discounted central initiatives and stressed local

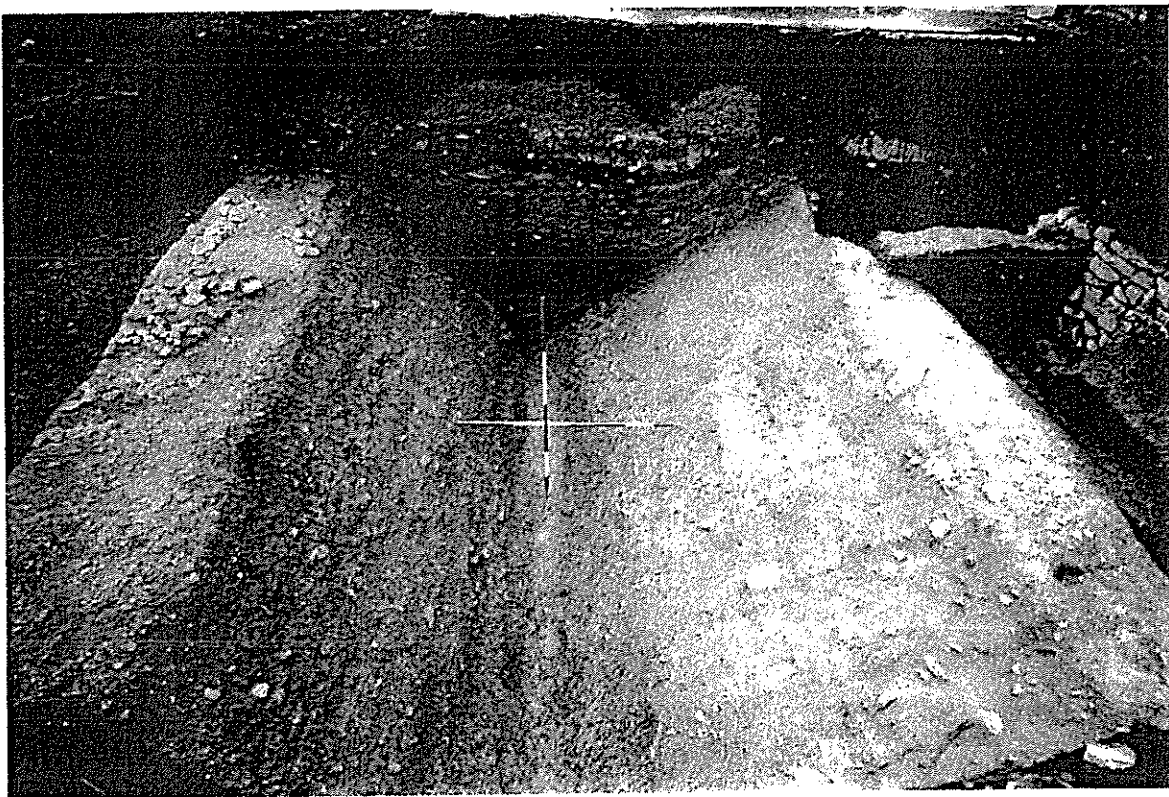


Plate 4. Excavation of Phase 1 inner ditch at Church Street, 1978, showing silting in section and Phase 2 walling, built over infilled middle Phase 1 ditch (far right). To the left, rampart clay has been removed by excavation, exposing mid-late 2nd century building foundations.

diversity. Town defences can be seen as assertions of civic pride and status as much as military necessities. They are more common in Britain in the second and early third centuries than around continental towns perhaps because of the conservatism of the province, the product of 'a continuation of the prehistoric tradition of defining a settlement's status by the provision of earthen ramparts'⁴²

At Church Street the dating of the first phase of construction is only a *terminus post quem*.⁴³ Sealed beneath the ramparts was a distinctive dirty layer of occupation debris with a lot of datable pottery in it. But above this, yet below the rampart (as we shall see in more detail below) were the strip foundations of a dwelling. The latest pottery was late second century; add to this an interval of time for the building and we can only say that the defences must have been constructed some time at the very end of the second century or later—but we cannot say how much later. There was no firm evidence for the second phase of the defences but on fairly slight indications, it is more likely to have taken place in the third rather than the fourth century.

Unlike Caerwent, there is no archaeological evidence for towers and bastions being added to Carmarthen's walls or whether it had stone gates. But a medieval deed mentions 'walls and towers' of Old (i.e. the area of Roman) Carmarthen.⁴⁴ As we have seen, most of their stone was robbed in the Middle Ages and there is little likelihood of excavation opportunities arising in the future to remedy this area of our ignorance.

The Effect of the Defences on the Town

There is little indication that the defences at Carmarthen enclosed only part of the built up area, as in some other towns in Britain.⁴⁵ But at Church Street the excavations of a fairly large area inside the defences showed that one property at least had to be modified or perhaps even demolished to make way for the rampart bank. A cobbled foundation strip for the sleeper beam of a timber building lay partly below the rampart bank. There was a gravelled track, scarcely to be distinguished by the name of a street which bisected the 1976 and 1978 Church Street

excavations. It turned sharply southwards perhaps deflected from its course by the construction of the defences although there was no trace of any continuation westwards. But once the defensive bank was built the area within the south-west corner became a quiet backwater—a building was put up on the firm base of the gravelled track and there was only intermittent use of the area in the third and fourth centuries. The open area, perhaps used as gardens, extended some distance eastwards. Trial pits and a trench were cut in 1981 in the Vicarage Gardens, where a housing complex, Ger-y-llan, was later built for retired clergy. There was little trace of any significant Roman occupation so no further excavation was carried out.

There were however substantial Roman buildings on the south side of the town on the edge of the scarp above the flood plain of the River Tywi. Part of a presumed bathhouse was found in 1897 when a cellar was being dug for an end of terrace house ('Bryn Roma') on the Esplanade.⁴⁶ A small-scale excavation in 1961 in the garden of Dyffryn House immediately to the west of Bryn Roma located a drain from the direction of the presumed Bathhouse joining a much larger, stone slabbed drain.⁴⁷ Some first century samian pottery was recorded, but also third century coins and fourth century mortaria fragments. The Bathhouse must predate the construction of the defences but may have been altered when they were built over part of its site and thus continued in use.

A similar range of dating material from the second century to the fourth was recovered from an excavation cutting, 14 metres square dug to the rear of the former nos. 1-5, The Parade in 1986.⁴⁸ Part of a large stone building was discovered although virtually all of its stone walls and foundation material had been robbed out. Part of a possible courtyard to the building was exposed which had carefully slabbed drains crossing from the main building. It is impossible to guess at the overall plan and thus the function of the building from such a small area uncovered. One possibility is a *mansio*, an inn run for the *cursus publicus* (the imperial post) and probably other travellers as well.⁴⁹ Even from the 'worm's eye' perspective of the small excavation sample it was evident that the building, most probably of second century origin,

had been significantly altered before the early third century. There is insufficient evidence as yet however to link these changes with the construction of the town's defences immediately to the south. If a *mansio* it may indicate an entry or gate approached from either the assumed bridging point at the later medieval bridge or, as Margery suggested, from a crossing point further upstream⁵⁰(see fig. 1).

Further complications were revealed during the watching brief on the demolition of nos. 1-5 The Parade before the construction of a private housing complex for the elderly (Ty Rhys). The buildings were cellared and it was thought that all Roman stratigraphy would have been removed. However some stratigraphy remained intact in section behind the cellar walls and the 'v' shaped section of a ditch crossing the site from west to east was noted though detailed recording was not possible. If Roman, it is difficult to reconcile with the assumed course of the town defences (see fig. 13). At present therefore the archaeological evidence for three centuries of Roman occupation in the southern part of the town raises as many questions as it provides answers.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Coins

Although a reasonable number of coins were found on the various sites excavated by Dyfed Archaeological Trust, there is no comparison in quantity with Caerwent. Many of the coins purportedly from Roman Carmarthen in Carmarthen Museum's collections are of doubtful provenance. But those from known contexts have been considered along with the excavated examples by Edward Besly of the National Museum of Wales in his report.⁵¹ Evidence for fourth century occupation is provided by an issue of Valens (AD 364-75) from the 1987 Priory Street excavations. The latest coin from Carmarthen is of Honorius, AD 393-5 *Salus Reipublicae* type but from an eastern mint, perhaps Constantinople. This is unusual, but there is no reason to doubt the provenance of the coin, which was from a late Roman dumped



Plate 5. Silver denarius of the Emperor Domitian with the Goddess Minerva (reverse) AD88.



layer alongside Street 1 on the main Priory Street excavations.

Bronze Objects

All the bronze small finds from Dyfed Archaeological Trust's excavations in Carmarthen have been studied by Janet Webster and her report will be published in the excavation monograph.⁵² There is only space here to single out a few of her comments. There were forty brooches and brooch fragments recovered and about a third of these were enamelled. A liking for the bright colours of enamel on personal jewellery had its roots deep in native Celtic tradition. In the Roman period brooches and other bronze objects became more 'mass produced' and it is evident that the products of bronze-smiths' workshops not just in south-east Wales but in more distant parts of the province were marketed in Carmarthen.

One small disc brooch had a two coloured enamelled inlay of red and black around its border. Detailed laboratory examination of the brooch during conservation in Cardiff showed what a technical achievement this combination of black on red enamel represented.⁵³ No less than six seal boxes were found on the Priory

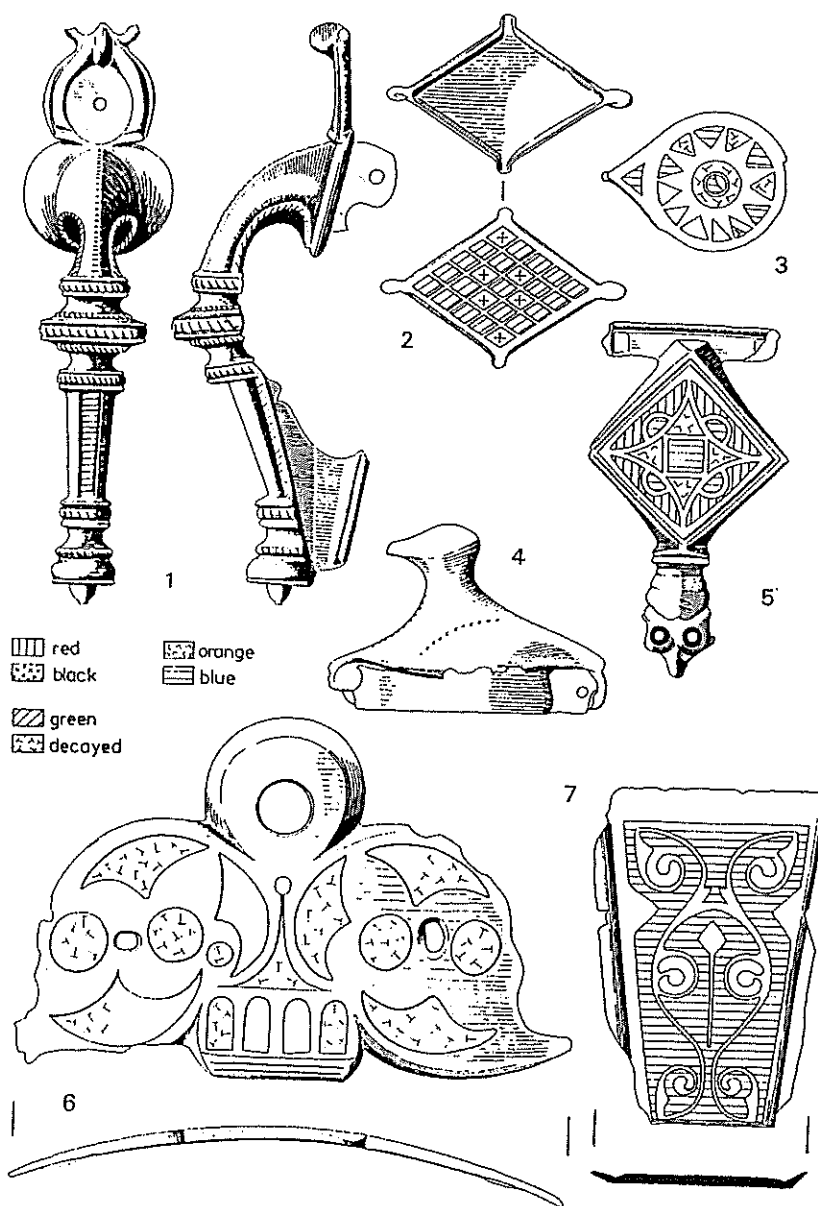


Fig. 14. A selection of bronze finds from Priory Street. 1. 'Trumpet' brooch with head plate; 2. Lozenge-shaped seal box with two-colour enamelling; 3. Tear-shaped seal box lid with red and ?orange enamelling; 4. Seal box in the form of a duck; 5. Plate brooch with turquoise and orange enamelling; 6. Enamelled escutcheon, once attached to a vessel; 7. Part of the enamelled handle of a saucepan-shaped vessel. Scale = 1:1

Street site—interesting evidence of literacy in what was a mainly artisan quarter of the town, evidence supported moreover by finds of fragments of samian inkwells. The lids of these seal boxes, some lozenge shaped, others 'tear-shaped,' were variously decorated in red, orange, and brown enamel inlays. One complete seal box was found with its lid in the form of a sitting duck. An X-ray suggested that the contents are still inside.

The fragmentary remains of a 'Disc and Trumpet' brooch had two circular 'eyes' either side of its head inlaid with silver, and the disc had two concentric rings of enamel, the inner pale green in colour. The combination of delicate silver inlays and enamels is represented on other forms as well. Brooches were also 'tinned' to give a silvery sheen.

Amongst the objects of 'military' type we should single out a propeller shaped belt stiffener, which had been silvered or tinned, of fourth century date. There was also a fine 'cross-bow' brooch which Janet Webster dates to between 350 and 380 AD. Do these two objects hint at a military presence in late Roman Carmarthen?

There were quite a high number of bronze vessel fragments from the various Carmarthen sites and two of these are of outstanding quality. A curved bronze mount or escutcheon, once attached to a vessel, belonged to the late Iron Age artistic tradition. Janet Webster also cites the use of *champlevé* enamel to support a first century date. The fact that this object was found in a third century context suggests that it was a treasured heirloom. It will form a worthy addition to the famous Carmarthen trumpet brooch of first century date in Carmarthen Museum.⁵⁴ A beautifully decorated handle from a small bronze saucepan is more classical in style with its use of a vine-leaf scroll motif and there were two colours of enamelling, one a deep blue, the other now lost. The bronze vessels were either cast (using the lost wax technique) or formed of beaten sheets. The numerous examples of waste and slag do suggest that there were bronzesmiths active in the town but there is not yet such clear evidence for this craft as there is for that of the smith working with iron.

Iron Working

There has been significant work in recent years in studying the various kinds of iron slags from Roman sites to elucidate the different stages of iron production. In Wales great advances have been made in the experimental work of Peter Crew who is attempting to replicate the production processes that would produce the kinds of slag he has discovered in large quantities from upland settlement sites of Romano-British date in Gwynedd.⁵⁵ About 100 kg. of iron slag was recovered from the Priory Street site and has been studied by Dr Chris Salter.⁵⁶ The much more easily damaged remains of hearths and furnaces did not survive so well. It is not always easy to distinguish between smelting and smithing slags. Some small amounts of iron ore were recovered at Priory Street and some tap slag, both diagnostic of smelting. But most of the evidence is for smithing.

It is interesting therefore to identify a smith's punch among the wide range of iron objects recovered from the excavations.⁵⁷ Due to Carmarthen's acid soils the iron objects were extremely corroded and often their true shape and identification was only possible once they had been X-rayed at the Conservation Laboratory in Cardiff.⁵⁸ One notable example was an iron ladle which was too fragile to conserve. It was a fine example of the blacksmith's craft. The handle was a wrought iron bar, tapering towards the middle where it was twisted, partly for decoration, partly to improve the grip. The handle had evidently had a flesh hook attached at the opposite end to the bowl.⁵⁹ The bowl was of thin sheet metal but unfortunately the object was too corroded to tell whether it had been made in one piece or whether the bowl had been welded onto the ornamental handle.

Two iron shield bosses were found in different areas of the Priory Street site. One had two spearheads attached to its back through corrosion. One of the spearheads was unusual in that it had a midrib accentuated by parallel grooves on either side. The second spearhead had a wider, more leaf-shaped blade. The hemispherically domed shield boss is of a type commonly found in Roman forts—but very rarely in a town. The second shield boss was also from the

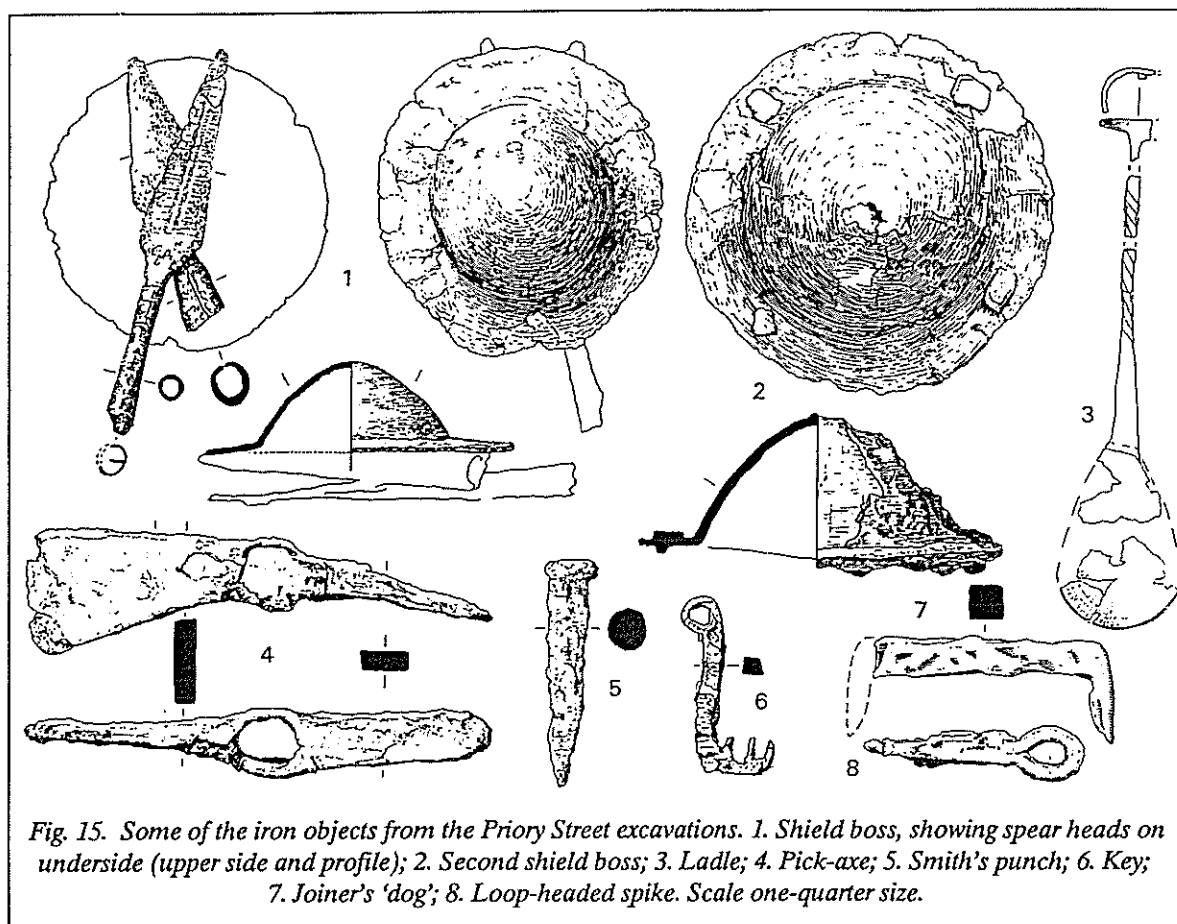


Fig. 15. Some of the iron objects from the Priory Street excavations. 1. Shield boss, showing spear heads on underside (upper side and profile); 2. Second shield boss; 3. Ladle; 4. Pick-axe; 5. Smith's punch; 6. Key; 7. Joiner's 'dog'; 8. Loop-headed spike. Scale one-quarter size.

Priory Street site, found with dumped material alongside Street 1. It had a more pointed dome than the first find and the nail holes around the flange still had the nails which fixed the boss to the shield in place. Laboratory examination identified traces of the wooden shield board in the iron corrosion products. Dr. Ian Scott, who reported on the objects, thought that the shield board was made of plywood and that both bosses came from the oval, almost flat shields carried by auxiliary troops. Their presence on the Priory Street site is a little surprising, and one can only speculate on the possibilities—but they cannot be taken to necessarily indicate military occupation in the town in the second century.

The majority of iron objects were from buildings—overwhelmingly nails in a variety of sizes. It was evident that iron fittings and fastenings were extensively used in the timber buildings

which covered the Priory Street site in the second century. Some of the larger spikes had traces of replaced wood adhering to them. Joiners' 'dogs' or clamps were used to join timbers; staples and hinges were common. An L-shaped lift-key from the Priory Street site is a three toothed example of the commonest type of key from Roman sites; it operated a simple tumbler lock.

Glass

Reporting on the Roman glass from the 1976 excavation at Church Street⁶⁰ G.C. Boon noted the restricted range of vessel glass and the predominance of bottle and window glass. This is in contrast to the much greater quantity and range from Caerwent and led him to conclude that 'Glass, it would appear, had little entry into

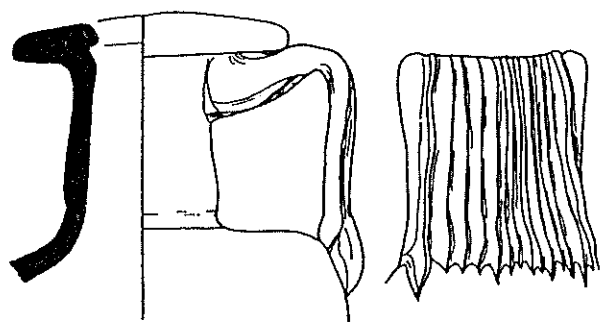


Fig. 16. Neck of square glass bottle with typical reeded or 'celery' handle.

the civilian market of Moridunum'. Study by D. Williams of the glass from all subsequent excavations has not radically modified that picture. Nevertheless there were some fragments of fine bluish-green pillar moulded bowls of first or second century date from the 1978 Church Street site and also part of a fourth century glass vessel from a possible timber structure set on the back of the Phase 2 defensive bank at Church Street.

Quernstones

The number of querns from the Priory Street site allows us to see the change in styles from Iron Age forms through to late Roman types—they thus give a good sense of the process of 'Romanization'.⁶¹ The illustration below of some of the querns found shows the progression from the rounded, bun-shaped Iron Age forms to the thin, flat, late Roman types. The presence of fragments of some Iron Age forms in the second century layers at Priory Street might possibly indicate the presence of a native population continuing for a time to use some of their own artifacts. Roman military quernstones were of a more advanced type and often imported from the Rhineland where the Mayen lava was particularly suitable. These stones evidently had both rhynd and spindle which allowed the grain to be ground in a controlled way rather than just crushed. Another innovation was the cutting of radial sets of grooves on the grinding surface of the querns—this increased the efficiency but may have added to the cost of the quern. Almost all the Carmarthen quernstones, whatever their style are made of locally available rocks. But it is difficult to tie these down to specific quarries sites. Dr R. Bevins of the National Museum of Wales has however identified one quern stone as a basal Arenig

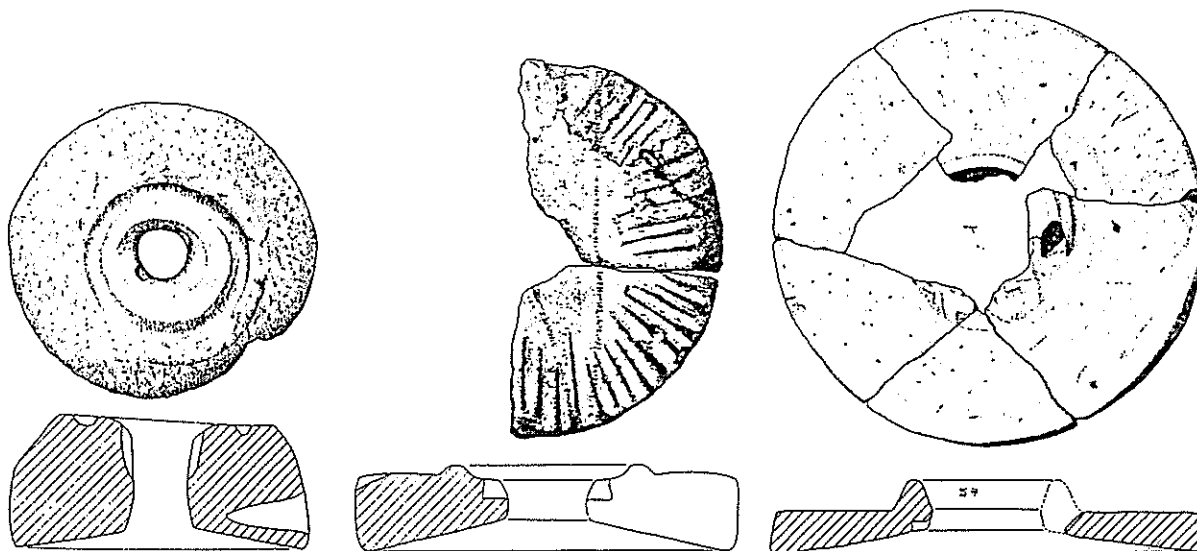


Fig. 17. Evolution of quernstone types from late Iron Age to Late Roman (left to right).

conglomerate which is exposed in an old quarry near Llangynog 7 km. south west of Carmarthen.⁶² Interestingly this same stone was used for a quern found at the small Iron Age/Romano-British farmstead at Pen-y-Coed, Llanstephan, close to the quarry.⁶³ So it is reasonable to suggest a local industry in manufacturing querns that would repay further study.

Pottery, Diet and Baking

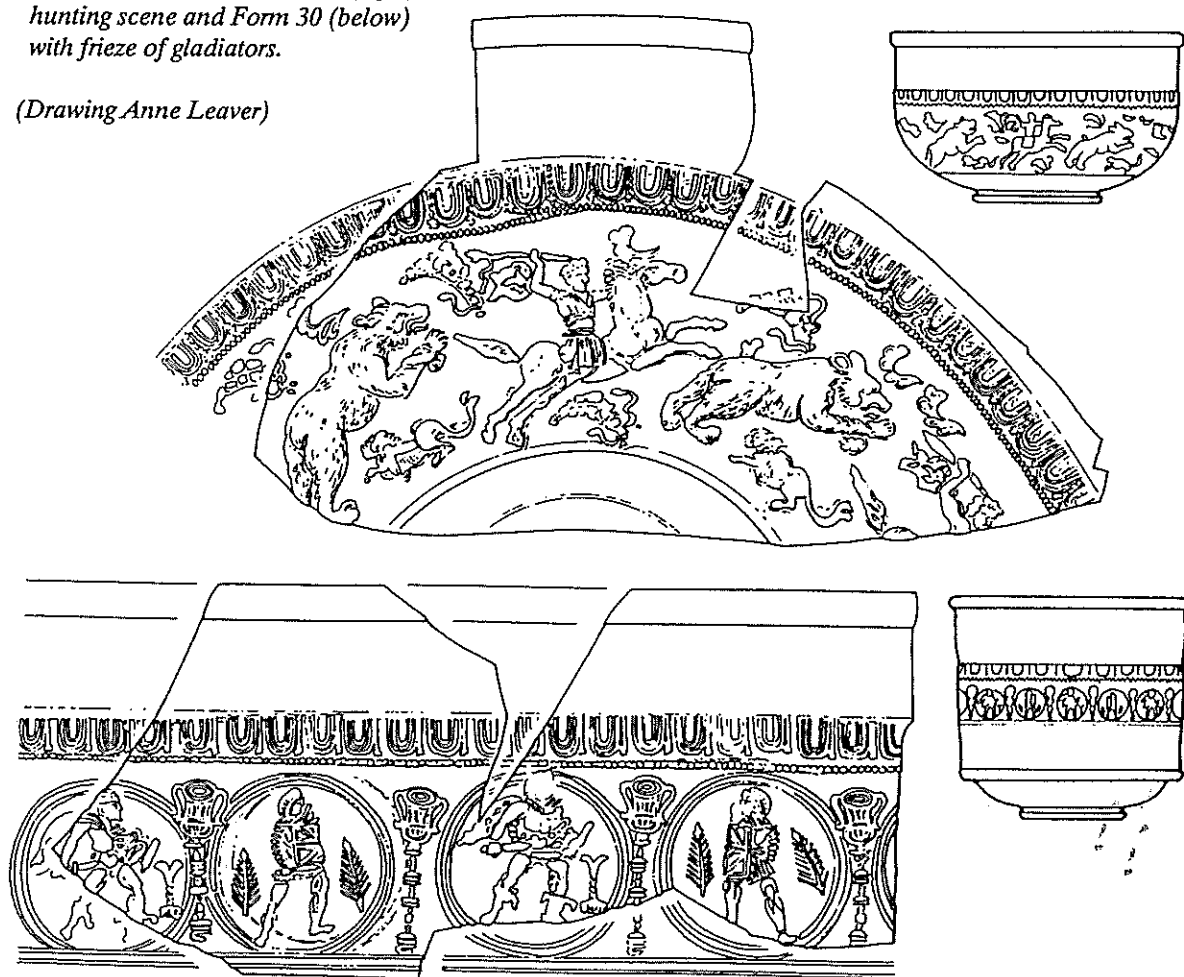
As with most Roman sites, large quantities of pottery fragments were recovered from Carmarthen. There are two main reasons which make the detailed study of all this material of particular interest to students of Roman Britain as a whole. Firstly native society west Wales in the Iron Age and indeed in the early Medieval

period was not accustomed to the ubiquitous use of pottery vessels for storage, cooking and drinking. Consequently there was not much of a local ceramic tradition. Nearly all the pottery therefore in use in Roman Carmarthen was imported. Identifying the sources of manufacture of these wares and their different distribution through the Roman period can thus give a good idea of the trading links of the town and indeed its market preferences. Secondly the rather remote, westerly position of the town gives an indication of the effectiveness or otherwise of regional marketing. These aspects will be fully explored in the detailed report.

The so-called 'samian' pottery has been the subject of intensive study.⁶⁴ This was a red-gloss tableware which was traded throughout the Roman world. The main production centres

Fig. 18. Form 37 Samian bowl (right) with hunting scene and Form 30 (below) with frieze of gladiators.

(Drawing Anne Leaver)



first in south, then in central and finally in north eastern France and Germany, operated from the early first century through to the third centuries. Many potters stamped their wares with their own names and it is thus possible to date samian very closely, since we can establish the production period of their 'factories'. The term is used advisedly because the scale of production of particular workshops could be enormous. The products of Paternus are the most common on British sites and the central Gaulish bowl, form 37, the most common vessel type.

Kitchen ware was also imported on a large scale, notably the so-called 'Black-Burnished' jars and bowls which were produced in the Poole area in Dorset.⁶⁵ These products do not appear in quantity in Wales until the AD 120s, gradual changes in the forms of the vessels enable them to be broadly dated. Peter Webster has suggested that the success of these products was due to their efficiency as cooking vessels, terming them the 'Pyrex' of their day.⁶⁶ Other distinctive imported kitchen ware are the so-called *mortaria*. The *mortarium* was a shallow bowl, with a pronounced flange for lifting, and with inner surfaces covered in sharp grits, often quartzite fragments, for grating vegetables—the 'Moulinex' of the day! The use of many of these different kinds of vessels was introduced by the Roman Army, and their demands probably stimulated more locally based production centres in, for example, south east Wales.

One of the many questions which can be asked of the large quantities of pottery from the Roman Carmarthen excavations, so striking in comparison to the relatively sparse amounts from even high status native Iron Age sites in West Wales, is whether the vessel types suggest changes in diet, or at least in food preparation. Archaeologists need constantly to remind themselves that pottery in the Roman world was generally traded not in its own right but as containers for perishable foodstuffs.⁶⁷ The amphorae from southern Spain and the Mediterranean contained oil, olives and a very salty fish paste (*garum*) which the Romans used to 'spice-up' their food, as well as wine.⁶⁸ It has been argued that the heavy, coarse 'Malvernian' jars found in early Roman contexts in Carmarthen were salt containers.

It may be that the upper echelons of native

society, whether in the town or in the countryside, developed a taste for imported wines and Mediterranean dried fruit and nuts. But at a more fundamental level changes in crop staples were only accelerated, not initiated during the Roman period. Mention was made above of the large amount of charred grain recovered close to the timber granary on the Priory Street site. This was almost all spelt wheat. There was little contamination chaff or weed seeds so it is likely that the grain had been right through all the cleaning and sorting processes of threshing, winnowing and so forth. But the grain had germinated. Dr. Astrid Caseldine, who has reported on the grain sample,⁶⁹ suggests two possible reasons for this. The grain may have been allowed to germinate and have been accidentally burnt whilst being roasted for malting or it may simply have germinated through poor storage in the granary and been burnt when the granary was demolished. Spelt wheat had begun to replace the earlier 'emmer' in the late Iron Age and became dominant during the Roman period.⁷⁰

The numerous quern fragments described above suggest that the final stage of grinding the processed grain into flour took place in the home. The presence of large clay ovens in many of the Priory Street site's houses, shops and workshops hints at commercial baking. The ovens were often constructed within existing timber buildings, but generally when these had become rather derelict. Sometimes the ovens were protected only by ramshackle sheds. The oven built at the western end of Building B4 (see fig. 8) was a typical example: it was built within a 'T' shaped pit. The thick clay walling of the oven was built over a foundation of stone and tile rubble. The walls and floor and the collapsed clay roof of the oven chamber were all of very hard grey clay. Possibly the oven was 'fired' after it was built at a much higher temperature than that subsequently needed for baking to harden the clay walls. We do not know what sort of blocking was placed across the oven mouth as the bread was baking on a bed of glowing charcoal, but it must have been easily removed, the bread taken out and the spent fuel raked out across the tiles at the oven mouth into the waste pit behind before the next baking.

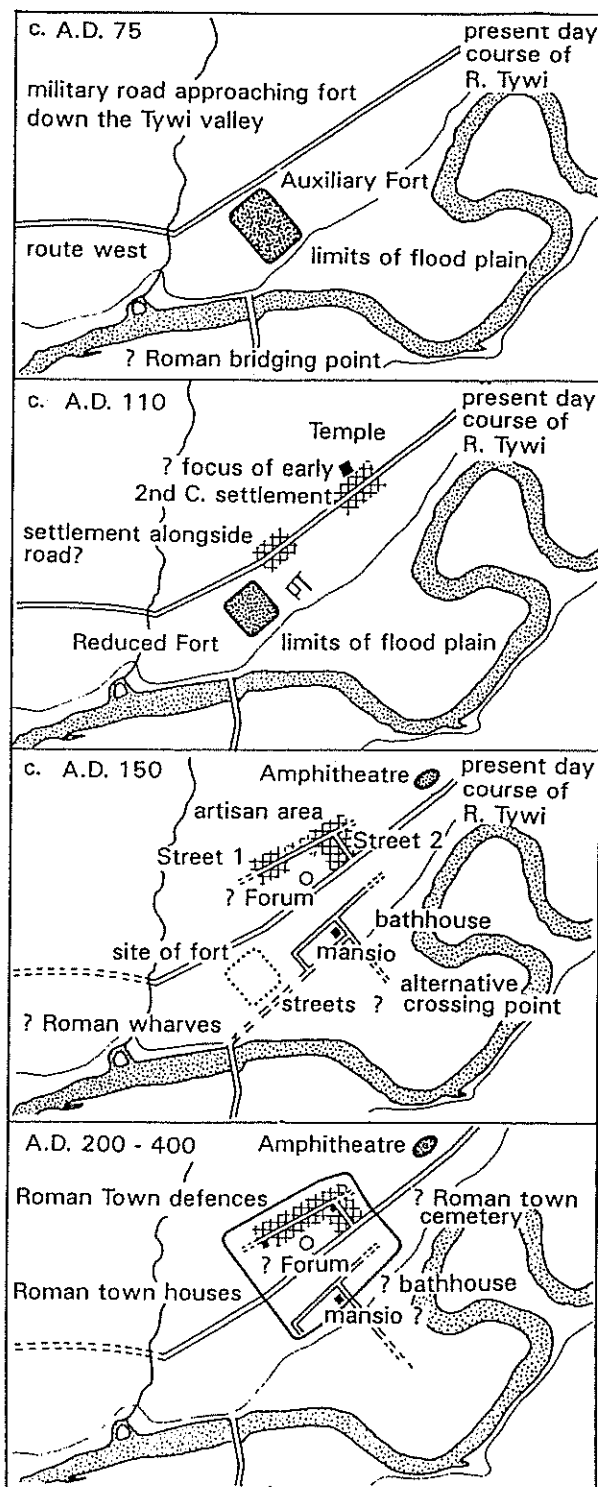


Fig. 19. Sketch plans showing the sequence of Roman occupation at Carmarthen.

This oven occupied one end of the building, the other half contained a smithy—both placed in a convenient, street side location alongside Street 1.

SUMMARY

Although I have attempted to present the archaeological information in a broad chronological sequence it has mainly been broken down into excavation site units. So it was thought advisable to conclude with a brief summary.

Roman settlement began with the establishment of an auxiliary fort, probably about 5 acres in size, in AD 75. This may have been founded by legionary and auxiliary forces advancing down the Towy valley, or north eastwards from Loughor or as a bridgehead by naval forces embarked from the legionary base at Caerleon (Isca) or by a combination of all three. The Roman bridging point of the Tywi may have been on the site of the later medieval—and modern—bridge. But the course of the Tywi upstream of this position was quite different in Roman times and there may have been a crossing point some where in the vicinity of the Old Llangunnor Road, as suggested by Margery. The fort was called *Moridunum*, a name later transferred to the town.

Possibly in less than twenty five years the fort's garrison was scaled down and the fort itself was reduced in size. It may have been finally abandoned by c. AD 95-105, its defences slighted, its buildings demolished in an orderly programme of withdrawal. However occupation of an agricultural nature continued in the annex to the east of the fort although most of the earlier fenced enclosures there had gone out of use. A Temple some distance east of the fort, set back slightly from the main approach road down the Tywi valley, seems to have provided a focus for early second century occupation. No trace has yet been identified of a *vicus* type settlement of civilians immediately outside the fort gates.

Some time after AD 120, but before AD 150, a planned street system was laid out either side of the main road on the east side of the fort site. It is assumed that this marks the official design-

nation of *Moridunum* as a civitas or tribal administrative centre for the *Demetae*, the name recorded by the Romans for the tribal people of west Wales. A crowded pattern of rectangular timber houses, shops and workshops indicating busy trading and artisan communities was recorded in the two main excavation sites of 1970 and 1980-1984 along Street 2. Larger timber building(s) of a more complex plan were identified at the Church Street site in the mid second century. Finally antiquarian references and small scale modern excavations suggest a differentiation in the kinds of buildings present in the mid second century town since a bath-house and another large civic building, perhaps a *mansio* or inn, have been identified on the southern side of the town. The archaeological evidence most fully recovered in the Priory Street excavations of a period of abandonment denotes a marked change in the character of occupation in the town between the second and the third centuries.

We do not know whether the construction of earth and timber defences around the town in the late second century preceded or was contemporary with or post-dated the change in the character of the town perceived at Priory Street. But it appears to have been a single work of construction since the materials from which it was made are so similar wherever it has been sectioned. It is likely that larger, more romanized, town houses were built in the third and fourth centuries to judge from the 1969, 1980-84 and 1987 excavations. Less is known about the southern half of the town although there is third and fourth century material from the 'bathhouse' and 'mansio' sites.

At some time in the third or perhaps the fourth century the defences were remodelled on an even more massive scale; the clay bank was widened to form a low ramp behind a stone wall fronted by a new wide and shallow ditch. There may have been towers along the circuit and stone gates but we have no archaeological evidence for these. Fourth century coins and pottery and the continued maintenance of the street system at the Priory Street site after all other occupation there had ceased, suggest that town life continued until late into the fourth century. A few bronze fittings of third and

fourth century military type may possibly indicate some kind of garrison presence in the later Roman town.

What happened to *Moridunum* after the collapse of Roman rule early in the fifth century? A possible scenario for a fifth or sixth century cult centre of Teilo, inheriting the mantle of a late Roman episcopate has been outlined by Canon J. Wyn Evans.⁷¹ The discovery of a large 'v' profiled defensive ditch which cut across the Roman fort site at Spilman Street (see fig. 2 above) was quite unexpected. Organic material from half way up the ditch (i.e. when it had silted up and was out of use) produced a mid sixth century radiocarbon date.⁷² This hints at a post-Roman fortification which might have utilised the site later chosen by the Normans for their castle.

FUTURE WORK AND THE PROTECTION OF THE ROMAN TOWN.

The nature and location of future archaeological work in Carmarthen is inescapably connected with likely redevelopment and the extent of legislative protection. Whilst research objectives both can and should be formulated it must be recognized that these are most likely to be forwarded through the opportunities provided by development. However it remains the Dyfed Archaeological Trust's policy to work for preservation *in situ* of buried Roman remains and excavation is viewed as a last resort. Paradoxically, whilst excavation is our main means of discovery, it is also a destructive process and by definition unrepeatable. Even with substantial provision of time and labour it has not been possible to excavate *all* the buried deposits which have been destroyed by redevelopment. Archaeological techniques are continually improving allowing more information to be recovered.

For some years the only Scheduled area of Roman Carmarthen was part of the Amphitheatre (scheduled in 1968). Today substantial open areas in the northern half of the Roman town are protected under Ancient Monuments legislation also smaller areas within the fort and the town defences in the south-east corner of the town. However it is not possible to protect

Roman deposits below the built-up areas of the town in this way. The archaeological interest of the remainder of the town is represented by the Dyfed Archaeological Trust's Development Control section advising Carmarthen District Council. A reasonably satisfactory process of consultation has been built up, strengthened by recent government policy guidelines. The underlying thrust of government policy in recent years has been to shift the costs of archaeological work onto the developer. The remains of Roman Carmarthen lie not below some

green field site but below a living and working part of the modern town and new housing, services and other kinds of development are necessary. The challenge is to strike a balance between conservation and development and in the case of smaller developments a policy of building on raft foundations, minimising damage to below ground deposits, is increasingly being operated. The remains of Roman Carmarthen are a unique, finite and already much reduced resource and they must be protected for the future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Archaeological excavations, particularly large, open area operations, require careful organisation and dedicated work by all the excavators in order to retrieve and record as much information as possible within the time and funds available. The Dyfed Archaeological Trust owes a great debt to William John and Ken Murphy both as site supervisors and as directors of some of the excavations described above. There are many other 'diggers' who have worked on the excavations in Roman Carmarthen, some over a number of years, others for shorter periods through the various Manpower Services Commission schemes, whose hard work and consistent application through all seasons and weathers enabled the work to be done. The various specialists who have studied and commented on the finds will have their reports published in the forthcoming detailed monograph and some have been mentioned above. But I would like to single out in this short essay the work of the Trust's Finds Officer, Mrs D. Williams and of Mr Peter Webster of the Extra-Mural Department at University College for especial thanks.

All the excavations described in this summary report have been funded by Cadw—Welsh Historic Monuments who have also funded the core staff and virtually all the equally time-consuming 'post-excavation' work. But without the support of the various government training and employment schemes organized through The Manpower Services Commission and its predecessors it would not have been possible to employ the large numbers of people required

throughout the year to carry out large scale, open-area excavations such as those at Priory Street between 1980 and 1984. MSC funding allowed the Trust to organise on-site exhibitions and 'museums' to display the work and finds to the public. Some private individuals stepped in at critical moments with small but vital amounts of funding, notably Mr Glyn Davies of Kidwelly in 1977. Jesus College Oxford, and their tenants Mr and Mrs Rees gave permission to carry out exploratory excavations in 1980 in the garden of 105 Priory Street before the site was bought by Dyfed County Council. Dyfed County Council continued to allow access and without the long period thus gained before the new Richmond Park Primary School was built, there could not have been such large scale excavation. Mr Neil Davies and his mother allowed access for a small extension to the excavation area to excavate more of the Roman Temple in 1984, again in advance of the sale of the land to the County Council. Bro Myrddin Housing Association and their contractors Hubert Williams and Son of Burry Port allowed access between demolition and rebuilding for a six week excavation period at Priory Street in 1987. Carmarthen District Council contributed significantly to the costs of the 1989-1990 Spilman Street excavation giving a clear lead on the new responsibilities of the developers themselves to pay for the costs of excavation. The Trust is also grateful to the District Council for its help over the whole of the period described above in finding temporary accommodation for site workers.

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