

ANGEL VAULTS CARMARTHEN

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF



Prepared by Cambria Archaeology
For

Martin Jones



ARCHAEOLEG CAMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGY

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ANGEL VAULTS CARMARTHEN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

Gan / By

Pete Crane BA hons MIFA

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ARCHAEOLEG CAMBRIA
Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf
Neuadd y Sir, Stryd Caerfyrddin, Llandeilo, Sir
Gaerfyrddin SA19 6AF
Ffon: Ymholiadau Cyffredinol 01558 823121
Adran Rheoli Treftadaeth 01558 823131
Ffacs: 01558 823133
Ebst: cambria@cambria.org.uk
Gwefan: www.cambria.org.uk

CAMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGY
Dyfed Archaeological Trust Limited
The Shire Hall, Carmarthen Street, Llandeilo,
Carmarthenshire SA19 6AF
Tel: General Enquiries 01558 823121
Heritage Management Section 01558 823131
Fax: 01558 823133
Email: cambria@cambria.org.uk
Website: www.cambria.org.uk

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April 2007

Paratowyd yr adroddiad hwn gan / This report has been prepared by Pete Crane

Swydd / Position: Senior Archaeologist

Llofnod / Signature Dyddiad / Date

Mae'r adroddiad hwn wedi ei gael yn gywir a derbyn sêl bendith
This report has been checked and approved by Ken Murphy

ar ran Archaeoleg Cambria, Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf.
on behalf of Cambria Archaeology, Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Swydd / Position: Principal Archaeologist

Llofnod / Signature Dyddiad / Date

Yn unol â'n nôd i roddi gwasanaeth o ansawdd uchel, croesawn unrhyw sylwadau sydd
gennych ar gynnwys neu strwythur yr adroddiad hwn

As part of our desire to provide a quality service we would welcome any comments you may
have on the content or presentation of this report

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Cover Photo. View of extension area before excavation

SUMMARY

A short watching brief was undertaken on an extension to the Angel Vaults in Carmarthen. Steps down into an 18th or 19th cellar were uncovered but nothing else of archaeological significance.

INTRODUCTION

Cambria Archaeology-Heritage Management, as advisors to Carmarthenshire County Council Planning Department, identified potential impacts on the archaeological resource on a proposed toilet rebuild and extension on the east site of the Angel Vaults, Nott Square, Carmarthen (National Grid Reference SN 4126319978, planning application no W12035).

The Angel Vaults are located immediately opposite the Castle Gatehouse (Fig. 1); this area is outside the Roman fort and town, but in the centre of the medieval town. Given its location it is likely that there was occupation here from the 1100s but the earliest evidence is from John Speed's map of 1610, which indicates dwellings in this location.

Because of the limited results and the long and complex history and archaeology of Carmarthen town, it is not intended here to go into any detail. The history of the town has been covered by Terry James (1980) and J and V Lodwick. A recent town appraisal is forthcoming (Austin, H and T James, and Poucher). Of particular relevance to this site are cellars found in front of the castle gatehouse (Schlee 2004).

It is probable that there was a market outside the gatehouse soon after the castle was founded on its current site in the early 1100s. The earliest map of the town was produced by John Speed circa 1610 (Schlee 2004). A detail in the left hand corner of this map (Fig. 2) appears to show a hollow way or ditch and no buildings where the Angel now stands. The main map (Fig. 3), however, does show buildings running from the site of the Angel vaults southwards and on the east side of Nott Square. However, it would be dangerous to read too much into these illustrations.

The first mention of The Angel on Nott Square may be as the "Angell" in 1573 and then again in 1657. However, it is not certain whether these are references to this site or possibly one on St Peter's Street. No public house is indicated as such on Wood's map of 1834 (Fig. 1), even though the Carmarthen Journal records the death of the proprietor in 1833 (Lodwick 1994, 400). The Ordnance Survey 1895 1:500 map shows a urinal on the site of the proposed extension. On the east side of the Angel on the first floor, above the area of this extension, there is a stone window moulding (Photo. front cover) which would appear to be medieval or a little later in date. However, it is suspected that this window may have come from another building, such as from within the castle or the former church of St Mary's, which was on the site of the Guild Hall.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the watching brief were to characterise and record the extent, chronology and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits identified during the groundworks.

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

Site visits were made from the 8th to the 11th of January 2007. The old toilet block and store had already been demolished and the floors taken up (Cover Photo). The area under investigation was approximately 8m long by 3.6m wide. Excavation was done by a mini tracked digger using a toothed bucket along with some hand digging by the contractor's work force. After the initial start on site it

was agreed with the area's Archaeological Development Control Officer that a continuous archaeological presence was not necessary but groundworks should be inspected on completion of digging. Unfortunately, partway through the groundwork, due to very wet weather and soft deposits, it was necessary to pour concrete into the footings before they could be inspected (Fig. 4).

At the southern end of the site there was apparent natural subsoil between 0.4 to 0.5m below the former floor - the floor being at a similar level to the paved road to the east (Fig. 4 and Photo. 1). The surface of this subsoil was roughly scraped by the contractor's work force and, although nothing was seen cutting into the subsoil, it is not certain that there were no small archaeological features.

To the north the subsoil had been excavated to c.2m deep (where seen) for the construction of a cellar. At the southern end of this there were stone steps leading into the lime-washed walled cellar (Photo. 2). The floor of the cellar was of red clay tiles 225mm x 225mm by 50mm. There was no evidence present on the lower part of the wall to the west of the extension to indicate whether the cellar had been vaulted (Photo. 2). There appears to have been a blocked doorway in the southwest corner possibly predating rapid backfilling of the cellar. The upper backfill of the cellar and the deposits above the subsoil to the south had some modern disturbance, presumably from the demolished Victorian urinal and the later pub toilets. The east wall of the cellar had been reduced to a great extent by a British Telecom cable trench.

CONCLUSIONS

The height of survival of the natural subsoil at the southern end of the site, of less than 0.5m below the general floor or pavement level was unexpected. Although nothing was seen in the top of the subsoil it would have been advantageous to archeologically clean this surface and perhaps this should be included in any future archaeological briefs in this area.

The cellar would appear to be post-medieval in date and even though its structure was not seen in detail it was likely to date to the 1700-1800s. The cellar would appear to have been backfilled in the late 1800s before the construction of the Victorian urinal.

SOURCES

Austin A, H and T James, and Poucher forthcoming, Carmarthen Historic Town Survey

James T 1980 *Carmarthen: An Archaeological and Topographical Survey*. Carmarthen: Carmarthen Antiquarian Society

Lodwick J and V G 1994 *The Story of Carmarthen*. Carmarthen: St Peter's Press

Ordnance Survey 1895 Carmarthenshire Sheet XXIX. 7.6 First ed. 1:500 (National Library of Wales)

Schlee D 2004 Carmarthen Castle Excavations outside the Gatehouse June-August 2003. *Unpublished report copy held by Cambria HER*

Wood John 1834 Map of Carmarthen

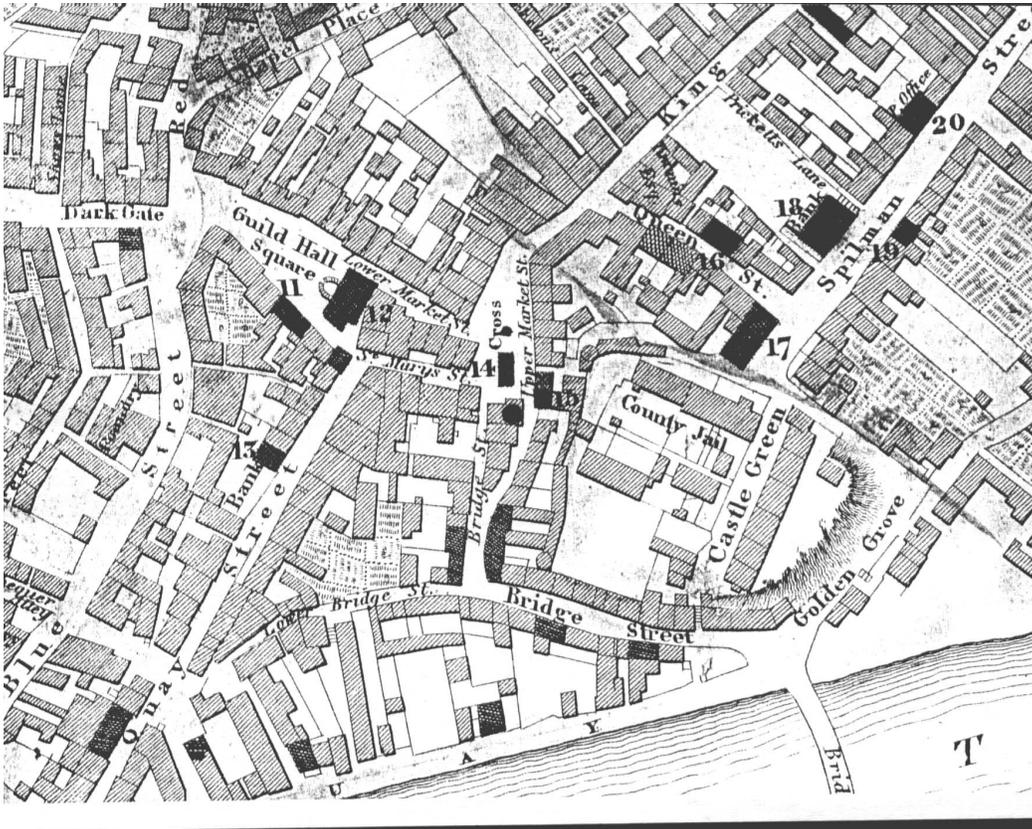


Figure 1: John Woods Map of 1834. ● Location of Angel Vaults

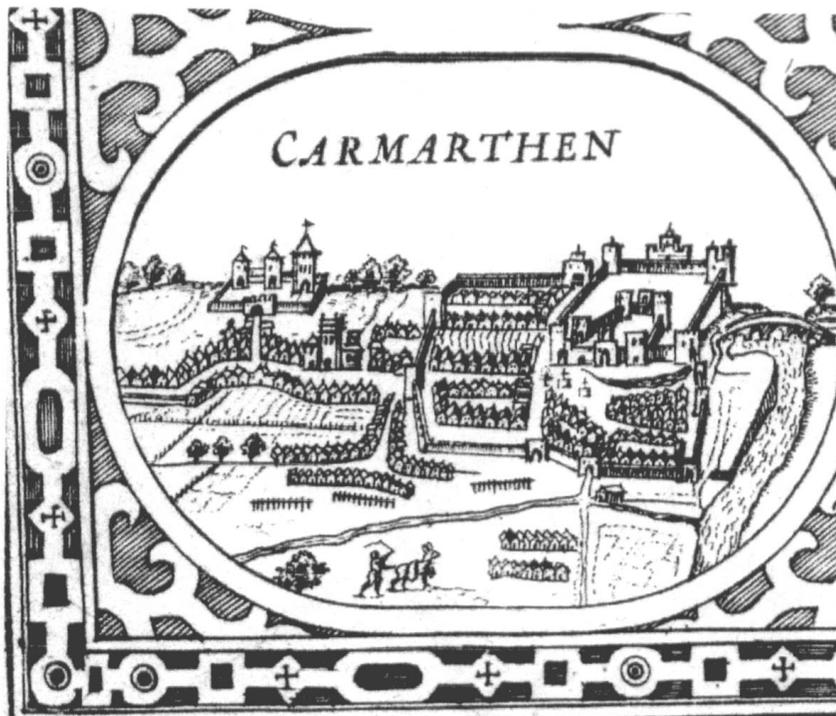


Figure 2: Insert of Carmarthen by John Speed c. 1610. Note lack of buildings in front of the castle

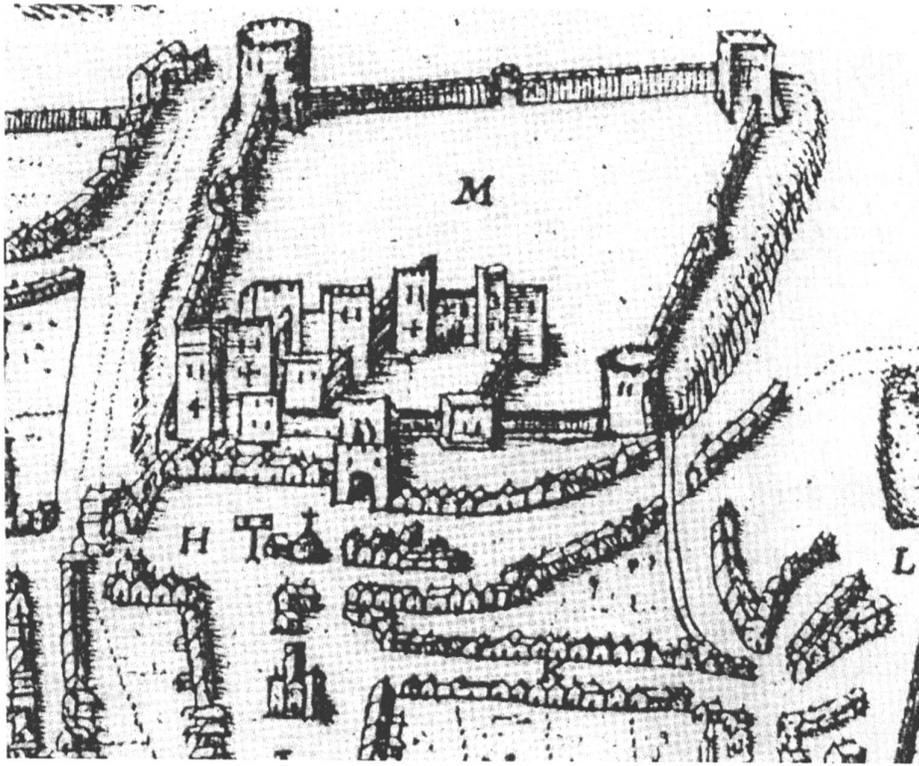


Figure 3: Detail of Carmarthen from map by John Speed c. 1610

ANGEL VAULTS EAST EXTENSION

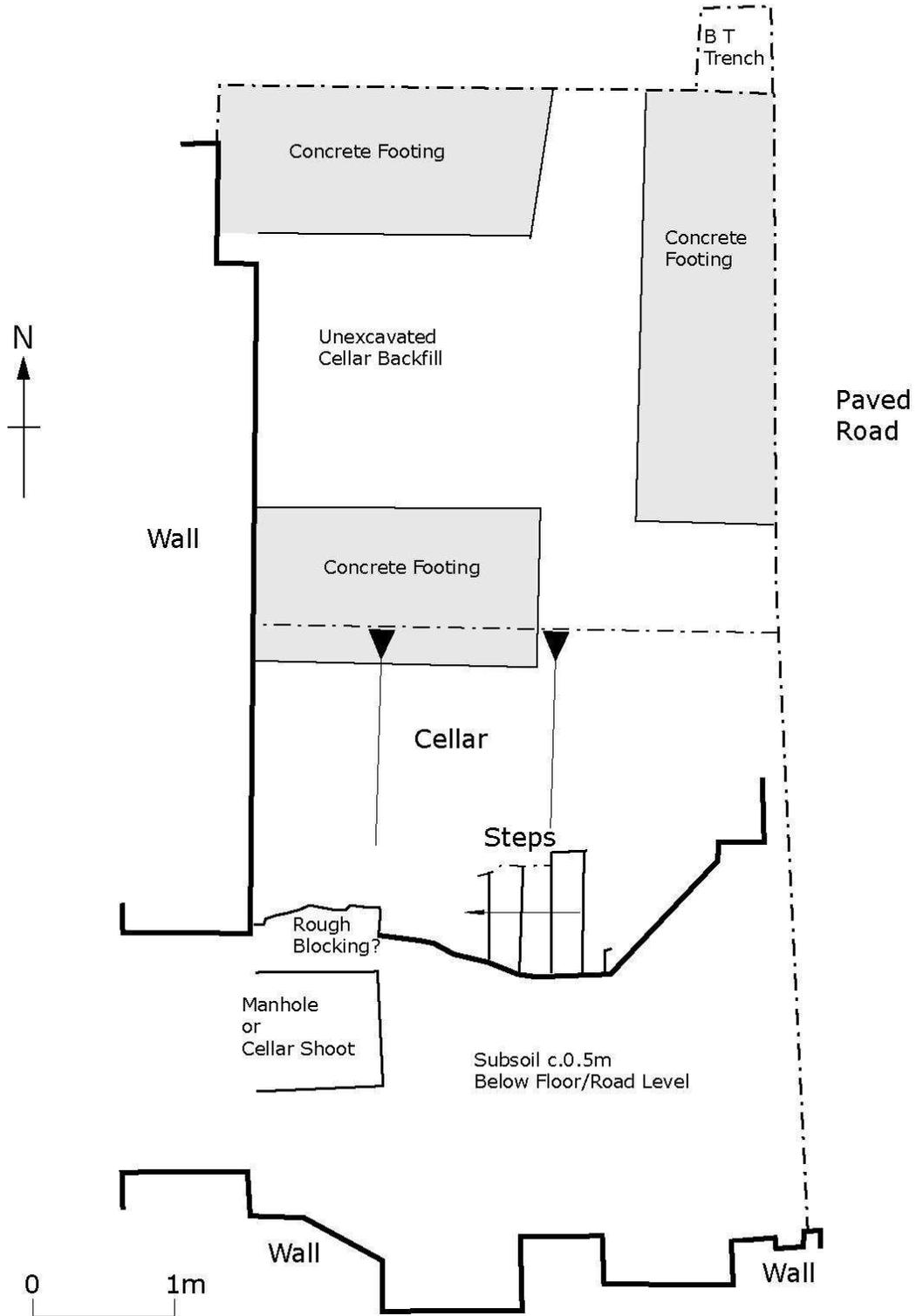


Figure 4: Plan of features



Photo 1: South end of site. View SSW. Scale 0.5m



Photo 2. South end of cellar. View S. Scale 1m