

THE OLD WORKSHOP, PENUEL STREET, CARMARTHEN: ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

JULY 2007



Prepared by Cambria Archaeology
For Mrs N Cartwright



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By

R Ramsey

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This report has been prepared by R Ramsey

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Signature Date

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SUMMARY

A planning application (W/15164) was submitted by Mrs N Cartwright to extend and convert the Old Workshop, Penuel Street, Carmarthen, into a dwelling (NGR SN 41802036). The Old Workshop lies within the confines of the Roman and medieval town of Carmarthen, an area where nationally important archaeological remains have frequently been revealed during groundworks for similar building projects. Given the potential for the presence of archaeological features or deposits on the site, planning permission was granted with a condition that an archaeological watching brief be undertaken during the groundworks.

In order to comply with the planning condition Mrs Cartwright commissioned Cambria Archaeology Field Services to carry out the watching brief in July 2007.

During excavation of the footings for the extension of the building Roman archaeological features and deposits were encountered at an average depth of 0.7m below the present ground surface. Full characterisation of these features and deposits was not possible due to the restrictive width of the foundation trenches. However, the excavations proved conclusively that below ground deposits representing the Roman occupation of Carmarthen do survive on the site of the Old Workshop. No medieval features or deposits were encountered on the site during the watching brief.

INTRODUCTION

Project background

A planning application (**W/15164**) was submitted by Mrs Cartwright to alter and extend the Old Workshop, Penuel Street, Carmarthen (NGR SN41802036). The Old Workshop (Figure 1) lies within the confines of the Roman and medieval town of Carmarthen, an area where nationally important archaeological remains have frequently been revealed during groundworks for similar building projects. As a result, Cambria Archaeology Heritage Management, as advisors to the Planning Department of Carmarthenshire County Council, recommended that a watching brief condition should be attached to the planning application, should it receive a positive determination, in order to protect potential archaeological interests.

Planning permission was granted with a condition that an archaeological watching brief be undertaken during the groundworks for the building extension.

To comply with the condition Mrs Cartwright commissioned Cambria Archaeology Field Services to carry out the watching brief in July 2007.

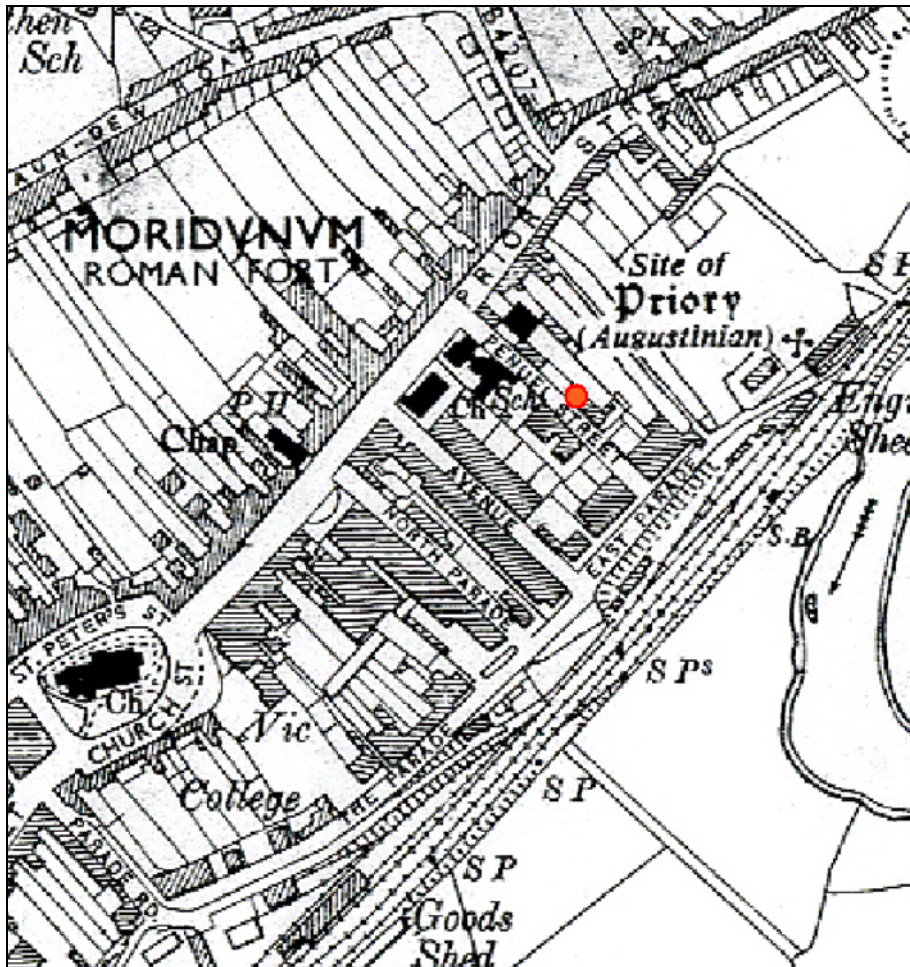


Figure 1. Location map of development area in Penuel Street, Carmarthen.

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The watching brief methodology and scope of the report

The watching brief consisted of the attendance over a two-day period of an archaeologist during the excavation of the footings for the building extension. All archaeologically significant features and deposits were recorded and photographed, and where possible, or relevant, measured plans were drawn.

This report summarises the archaeological and historical background to the site before discussing the results of the watching brief.

SITE LOCATION

The Old Workshop is situated within the confines of *Moridunum*, Roman Carmarthen, and medieval “old” Carmarthen in Penuel Street at NGR SN41802036. Map evidence shows that there was no building at this location at the time of publication of the first edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey map published in 1891 although the land was enclosed at that time. By the time of the publication of the second edition map in 1905 the site had been built upon but it is not clear if this represents the current building.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In terms of continuity of urban settlement, Carmarthen can lay claim to being one of the oldest, if not the oldest, towns in Wales. There are several Iron Age hillforts in or around Carmarthen that date to the period between 300BC and the arrival of the Romans in the mid 70s AD. The Romans established a fort on the north bank of the river Tywi in an area which recent archaeological excavation suggests was in the area of Spillman Street and King Street. It seems that this fort was somewhat reduced in size at the end of the first century and eventually abandoned all together early in the second century in favour of Roman civilian rule. The Roman town, which probably spread from the original fort's *vicus*¹, took on the name given to the earlier fort, *Moridunum*, and became, it is thought, the *civitas* (tribal) capital of southwest Wales. Archaeological excavations have shown that by the mid second century AD the town had developed a gridded, planned street layout based on a main road aligned east to west that corresponds approximately to the line of modern Priory Street. Some time later the town was enclosed by a defensive bank of clay with two outer V-shaped ditches, the total area enclosed being just over 13 hectares (*circa* 32 acres). The present day street plan of Carmarthen still respects the line of the former defences with the northern side of defensive bank running along the back of Richmond Terrace before turning south along Old Oak Lane and continuing along the footpath Llwybr yr Ardd. The southern side of the defences are represented by the line of the Esplanade and the Parade, with the western side running along Parade Road and Little Water Street before joining up again with the northern defences at Francis Terrace. The Old Workshop lies within the southeast corner of *Moridunum*, some 50m or so, equally, from both the eastern and southern defences.

Archaeological excavations over a number of years have revealed a main east-west aligned Roman road running roughly parallel to Priory Street, in the north-eastern part of *Moridunum*, with traces of rectangular timber buildings on its north frontage and better quality buildings on its south side. No excavations have been undertaken in what would have been the centre of *Moridunum*, where one would expect to find traces of the larger public buildings of the Roman town. However, the town's amphitheatre has been partially excavated: it lies just

¹ A civilian settlement outside the gates of a Roman fort comprising traders, craftspeople *et al* that sprang up, *ad hoc*, as a service community to the military.

outside the eastern defences of the town and is now a showpiece in its own public space on the north side of Priory Street. There have been no archaeological excavations undertaken in the southeast quarter of *Moridunum*, the area of the Old Workshop.

Little is known of the history of Carmarthen between the departure of the Romans in the early 5th century and the arrival of the Normans in 1093. There is disparate documentary evidence suggesting that the area containing the later Augustinian Priory of St. John and St. Teulyddog, just beyond the southeast defences of *Moridunum*, may have been the earlier location of an 8th or 9th Century monastic settlement.

When the Normans settled at Carmarthen they avoided the site of *Moridunum* and built their first castle, an earthwork, two miles away to the south. Later they moved to the location where the stone castle remains can still be seen today, but again they chose to settle outside *Moridunum*, a fact which suggests that the old Roman town was already settled at the time of the Conquest.

During the medieval period Carmarthen effectively became two towns. The area to the west of *Moridunum* became the new Norman settlement, a royal borough, centred around the castle. The old town of *Moridunum* came formally under the control of the Augustinian Priory of St. John and St. Teulyddog by the granting of a charter from Henry II. At this time the old town, which was largely Welsh in character, became a semi-manorial borough controlled by the Prior, a state of affairs that remained up to the Dissolution in 1536. The only above-ground medieval building associated with the priory remaining to this day is part of the precinct wall and the gatehouse, which has been incorporated into a row of terraced houses on Old Priory Road.

The 'new' Anglo-Norman town of Carmarthen developed quickly, and by 1300 it had 286 burgages. The town walls started to be built in stone by 1233, and also during that period large stone towers were added to the castle. It is thought that the castle had attained its greatest extent by about 1430. Carmarthen Greyfriars was built in the town in the late 13th century, parts of which were revealed by archaeological excavation during the 1980s and 1990s ahead of the building of the Tesco store and Greyfriars Shopping precinct. The Friary was dissolved in 1539.

After the Reformation and the Dissolution the two towns finally came together in 1546 and Carmarthen, as an administrative centre for the region, became governed by a mayor and common council. From that time until the early 18th century Carmarthen was the largest town in Wales, and was seen effectively as its Capital. Few buildings remain from this period but architectural fragments do survive incorporated into later buildings. Parts of the earthwork defences thrown up during the Civil War still survive, named as the 'Bulwarks' or 'Intrenchment' on early edition Ordnance Survey maps, and can be seen in the area of the Police Headquarters.

The town as seen today has a built heritage that reflects the extensive growth of Carmarthen over the last two and a half centuries, constantly changing as industries have come and gone and been replaced by new service industries. Chapels in various architectural styles sprang up along with public buildings and terraces of houses. The new housing estates of the late 20th and early 21st century that have established themselves on the outskirts of the town characterise the latest development of the town.

WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

Prior to an archaeologist attending the watching brief at the rear of the Old Workshop a 2.9m wide by 4.2m long shed abutting the building at its east end had been demolished and most of its 0.20m thick concrete slab foundation/floor had been removed.

An area between the Old Workshop building and the stone boundary wall to the northeast, measuring some 6.5m by 5.6m and encompassing the building footprint of the former shed, was cleared of resultant rubble and vegetation by a mini digger using a toothed bucket. The toothed bucket was then replaced by a 0.60m wide grading bucket to remove a 50mm depth of topsoil in order to grade the ground in preparation for the excavation of the footings for the building extension. No archaeological features were revealed during this ground preparation.

The foundation trench for the building extension (*Figure 2* and *Plate 3*) was excavated by a mini digger using a toothless grading bucket. Removal of topsoil (101) to an average depth of 0.7m throughout the trench revealed two mixed orange-brown, friable silty clay soils (102 and 103) containing frequent flecks of charcoal and 10% small and medium angular stone fragments. The soils contained frequent tile and brick fragments and several sherds of pottery, all of which were of Roman date². These layers, which were identical in colour, texture and percentage of coarse components present, were interpreted as representing Roman occupation layers. At this stage of the groundworks the required depth for the foundations had been reached. However, the ground was deemed too unstable and further excavation was needed to establish a firm base for the building foundations, and to satisfy the requirements of the building inspectors.

A test excavation at the southwest edge of the foundation trench, using both the mechanical digger and hand excavation, established that the Roman layers were 0.4m deep and were seen to overlie a natural, either alluvial or fluvioglacially derived, mid-yellowish brown silty sandy clay containing c.15% small and medium size rounded stones (106). This natural layer was deemed acceptable as a firm base on which to set the foundations for the new building.

Excavation of layer 102 at the northwest side of the foundation trench revealed an area that had been subjected to intense heat or burning (layers 104 and 105, see *Figures 2 & 3*, and *Plate 1*). Layer 104 was a reddish-brown friable silty clay soil containing little or no coarse components and occasional flecks of charcoal. In plan (*Figure 2*) this layer had curved edges, and extended for c.5.5m along the trench, continuing beyond both the northwest and southwest facing sides of the trench. This layer, however, did not extend as far as the southeastern part of the foundation trench where layer 103, albeit indistinguishable in character from layer 102, was present throughout, sealed by topsoil layer 101, and directly overlying natural deposit 106. Whilst the general spread of layer 104 suggested a potentially ovoid shape, and may have represented the remains of a large pit, it is not possible to conclude this with any certainty. In section (*Figure 3*) the burnt layer 104 appeared to be either deposited against layer 103 or was more likely the fill of a feature cut through layer 103 (109?). Layer 104 along the section to the northeast is shown as sloping down, becoming shallower, and gradually fading out with no evidence for a cut feature at that end. It is unclear whether it had been truncated from above, which may have destroyed any evidence of a cut

² The finds comprised one potsherd of Samian ware, several potsherds of fine white and orange wares together with several fragments of brick and tile. All these finds were recovered and returned to the owner of the Old Workshop, Nana Cartwright.

feature. A continuous layer of charcoal (105) some 5mm deep sealed the interface between the burnt layer 104 and the natural deposit 106, but was not seen to continue between the interface with layer 103. The presence of charcoal layer 105 and its stratigraphic association with the heat-affected layer 104 suggested that these layers may have been the result of *in situ* burning rather than being re-deposited material.

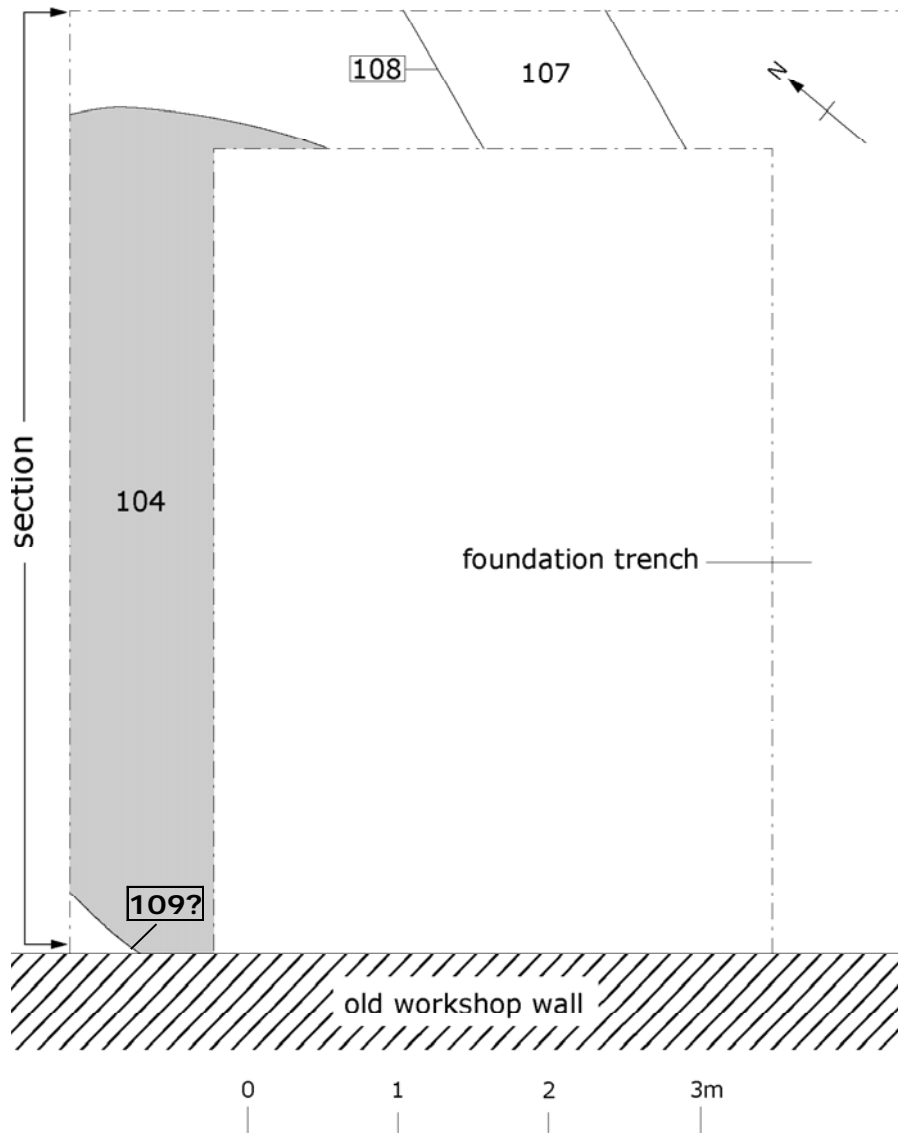


Figure 2. Plan of building extension foundation trench with schematic representation of archaeological layers.

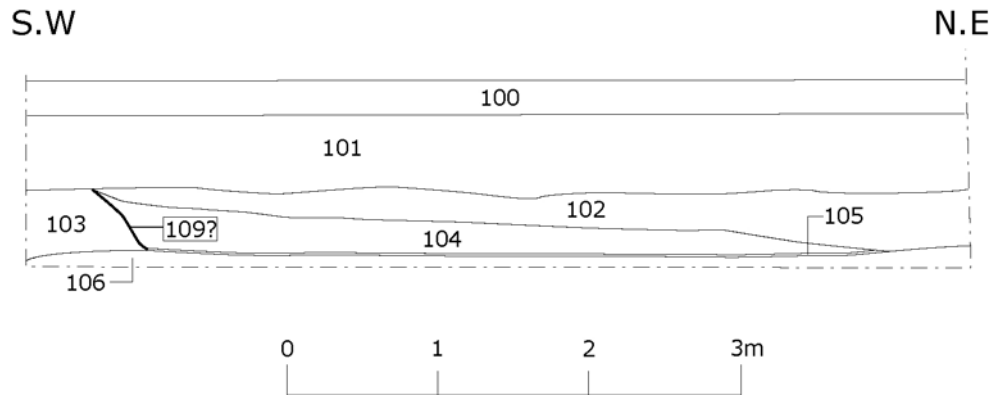


Figure 3. Southeast facing section showing stratified deposits

At approximately half way along the northwest to southeast length of the footing excavation, layer 103 was cut by a 1.2m wide linear feature (108) to a depth of 0.2m (0.9m below present surface). The feature extended beyond both sides of the excavation and was filled with a homogeneous dark brown friable silty clay loam (107) containing 50% medium-sized and large angular stones and fragments of modern red brick (*Fig.2 and Plate 2*). Not enough of the feature was exposed to enable full characterisation, but its steeply cut sides and concave base suggested that it might represent a robbed-out foundation cut or a drain. The fill of this feature contained only 19th or 20th century building rubble amongst soil hardly distinguishable in character from the topsoil (101) with no diagnostically Roman or medieval material present.

Topsoil 101, a dark brown friable silty clay loam containing c.15% coarse components of small and medium sized angular stones and late 19th century to early 20th century building debris (red brick fragments and mortar), sealed 107, 102, and 103 throughout the footing excavation. There appeared to be no intervening medieval layers represented between the Roman layers and the topsoil and, if they existed at all, it is likely that they were cleared away prior to the construction of the Old Workshop and possible importation of a garden soil.

DISCUSSION

The results of the watching brief confirmed that there are below-ground Roman remains in the area of the Old Workshop, formerly the area within the southeast corner of *Moridunum*. It was also revealed that the ground in this area was too unstable to provide a firm base for the building foundations of the agreed extension to the depth that had been proposed, and, as a result, the excavation of deeper foundation trenches were necessary, which cut through the Roman layers.

The Roman deposits were encountered at a depth of 0.7m below the current ground surface level, and those features exposed (layer 104 and cut 108) were excavated and recorded by hand down to the natural horizon. Potential pit 109? contained a 5mm deep continuous layer of charcoal (105) overlain by layer 104, which was itself 0.4m deep, with both layers suggesting the presence of *in situ* burning, which may be the remains of an oven or hearth of Roman date.

CONCLUSION

The deposits encountered within the watching brief at the Old Workshop, Penuei Street, Carmarthen clearly demonstrated the preservation of Roman material in this area at a depth of 0.7m below the current ground surface. The results also showed that the ground in this area was considered too soft to satisfy the requirements of the building inspectors for a firm base for building foundations, and therefore other developments in this part of Carmarthen may also be affected by similar soft ground conditions, with significant implications for the archaeological deposits of Roman Carmarthen.

PHOTOGRAPHS



Plate 1: Oblique view of part of the southeast facing section showing burnt layer 104 and underlying charcoal 105



Plate 2: Oblique view of southwest facing section showing the stone-rich fill 107 of cut feature 108



Plate 3: General view of the foundation trench, looking south

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