

THE POST OFFICE, CARDIGAN: ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

JULY 2007



Prepared by Cambria Archaeology
For Ms A M Wheeler



ARCHAEOLEG CAMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGY

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By

R Ramsey

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This report has been prepared by R Ramsey

Position: Archaeologist

Signature Date

This report has been checked and approved by

on behalf of Cambria Archaeology, Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Position:

Signature Date

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SUMMARY

*A planning application (**A051010**) was submitted by Ms A M Wheeler to develop land to the rear of Cardigan Post Office, on Chancery Lane, in Cardigan at NGR SN17774608. The site lies within the medieval historic core of the town, in an area likely to contain archaeologically significant remains. 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 for the new development.*

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

During excavation of the footings for the extension of the Post Office the cellar or basement of a probable Victorian or Edwardian building was uncovered together with a well-constructed stone-lined drain.

No medieval or other archaeological features were encountered during the watching brief.

INTRODUCTION

Project background

A planning application (**A051010**) was submitted by Ms A M Wheeler to develop land to the rear of Cardigan Post Office, on Chancery Lane, in Cardigan at NGR SN17804608 (Figure 1). The plans show the proposed building of an extension to the existing Post Office building. The development site lies within the defences of the medieval town of Cardigan on the west side of the ancient thoroughfare of Chancery Lane. It is possible, therefore, that significant medieval archaeological features and deposits survive below ground on the site.

In view of the historical sensitivity of the location of the development area, Cambria Archaeology Heritage Management, as advisors to the Planning Department of Ceredigion 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 Ms Wheeler commissioned Cambria Archaeology Field Services to carry out the watching brief in July 2007.

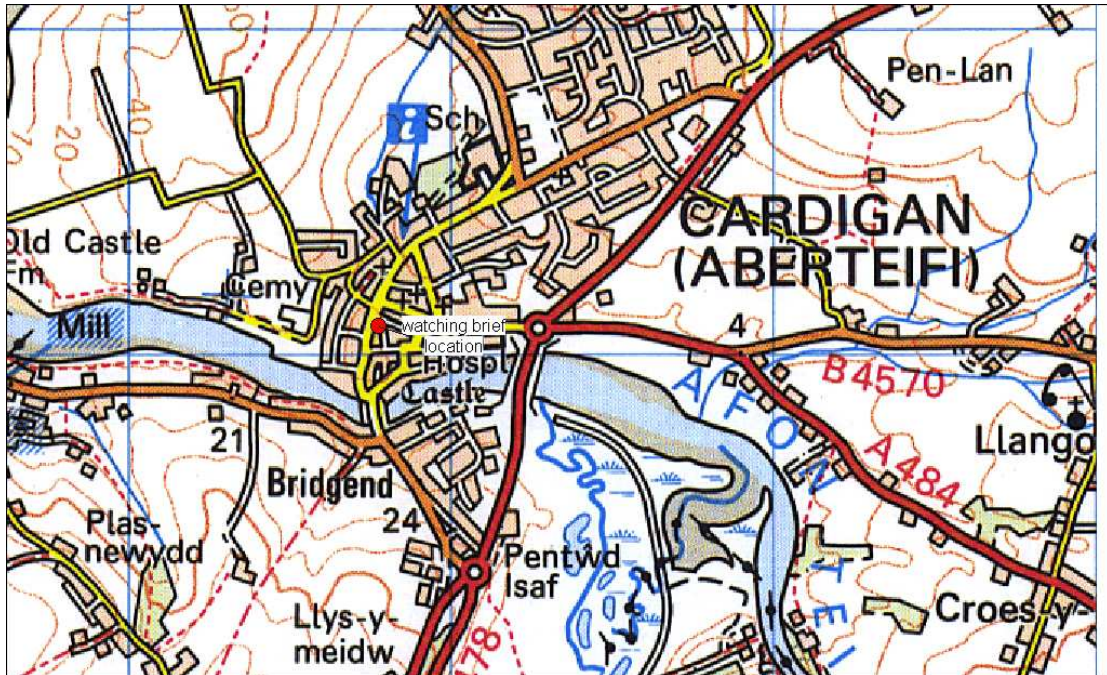


Figure 1. Location map, based on Ordnance Survey.

Reproduced from the 1995 Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 scale Landranger Map with the permission of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright Cambria Archaeology, The Shire Hall, Carmarthen Street, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire SA19 6AF. Licence No AL51842A

The watching brief methodology and scope of the report

The watching brief consisted of the on-site attendance, over the course of one day, of an archaeologist during the excavation of the footings for the new building. All archaeologically significant features and deposits were recorded and photographed, and where possible, or relevant, measured plans were drawn.

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

SITE LOCATION AND BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The development area is situated fronting onto the west side of Chancery Lane, to the rear of Cardigan Post Office, at 26 High Street, in Cardigan at NGR SN17804608 (Figure 2).

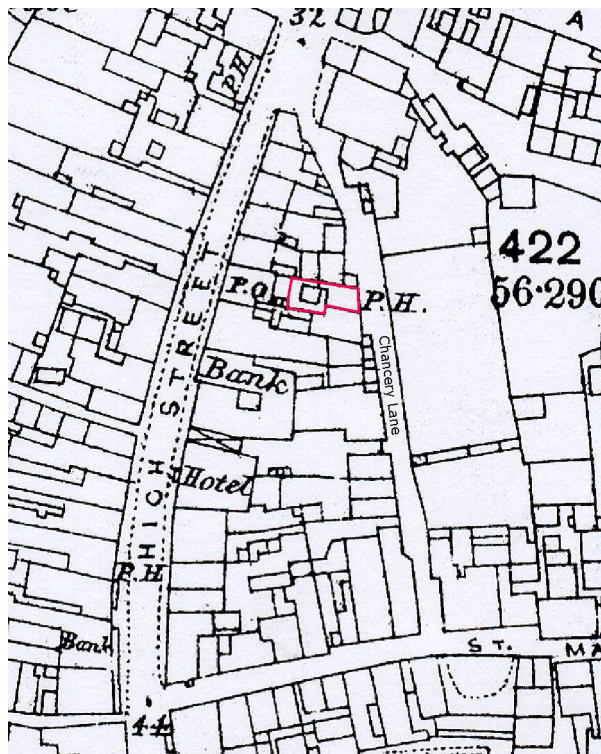


Figure 2. Location of development area on Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 25" map extract, dated 1891

Chancery Lane lies within the medieval historic core of Cardigan in an area that, traditionally, was formerly the industrial region of the town. Map evidence shows that there has been a thoroughfare in this location since at least the publication of John Speed's map of Cardigan in 1610, when it was known as *Souters Street*, although no buildings are shown along its length. By the time of the publication of the Ordnance Survey Original Surveyor's drawings of 1810 and Wood's Map of Cardigan in 1834, the thoroughfare was known as Black Lion Lane and there were buildings along most of its length on its western side whilst its eastern side is shown as enclosed land with no buildings. The first edition 25-inch Ordnance Survey map of 1891 shows further building development to have taken place on the west side of the now unnamed thoroughfare (the name has been added to Fig. 2 for reference only), with the addition of only three or four buildings to the

eastern side. The building or buildings to the rear of the Post Office appear to be marked as a public house (*P.H.*) on this map although the exact location to which the label refers is not clear. The first direct map evidence for the name Chancery Lane is on the second edition 25-inch Ordnance Survey map of 1906.

During the medieval period it is likely that most of the properties along the High Street would have had burgage plots to the rear, thus allowing for the possibility of there being archaeological evidence of their presence within the development area.

The map evidence shows, as has been noted, that building development along Chancery Lane increased and became more intensive during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The later and middle twentieth century editions of Ordnance Survey maps show that the eastern side of Chancery Lane, or at least its frontage, also became built up. At the time of the publication of the 1965 edition of the Ordnance Survey 25-inch map there was still a standing building on the plot to the rear of the Post Office.

WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

The development site comprised a near rectangular parcel of land to the east and rear of Cardigan Post Office measuring some 12.5m west to east by 6.0m north to south. The plot took a slight turn to the north towards its eastern end, at approximately 4m or so from the back wall of the Post Office building, terminating as it fronted on to Chancery Lane. Prior to the excavations the land was free of buildings and the near level surface consisted of a hard standing of compressed building rubble and stone chippings.

All groundwork excavations on the site were undertaken by a mini digger with a toothed bucket. It is preferable to use a toothless grading bucket on potentially archaeologically sensitive sites in order to minimise any damage but the ground was too compact on this site for that to be an effective means of excavating the foundation footings.

A series of four approximately square "padstone" trenches were excavated along the length of the northern boundary wall of the building plot (see Figure 3 for locations and exact dimensions). All the padstone trenches were dug to a depth of 0.9m and slightly undercut the northern boundary wall by 300mm. The initial excavation in each of the trenches revealed an existing modern drain, the pipe trench for which had been excavated through a fairly stiff natural orange brown clay. The drain pipe was removed from along the length of the wall to allow the excavation of a linear footing trench connecting the padstone trenches. No archaeological features or deposits, other than the modern drain, were revealed during the excavation of this linear trench; the only deposits encountered were the natural orange brown clay subsoil and above that the mixed friable backfill of clay and building rubble for the modern drain. The drain was ultimately diverted to avoid the newly dug foundation.

During the excavation of the third padstone trench, counting from the rear of the Post Office to the east, the removal of the compacted building rubble from the south side of the trench revealed the top of an approximately 0.40m wide wall (Plate 1). The deposit to the south of the revealed wall was a mix of building demolition debris and general urban waste in the form of broken bottles, twisted iron, and flagstones *etc.* which after the removal of the initial hard compacted rubble layer was seen to be quite loose and friable. A test excavation (see Figure 3) of this loose demolition debris was carried out and it was seen to be present to a depth of 1.9m and filling the cellar of a former building. The cellar walls were

intact and on the southwest side of the excavation a thin brick partition wall was seen to terminate. The floor of the cellar comprised large rectangular stone flags all in excellent condition. At the western edge of the test excavation a red brick-built structure resembling a possible hearth, seen only in the resulting section, was built up from the stone floor and up against the south facing cellar wall (Plate 2). The cellar floor and walls showed evidence of the presence of coal dust. It was too dangerous to make a detailed measured record of the features present within the test excavation. Record photographs were taken and, in the interests of safety, the cellar was backfilled. In order to assess the extent of the cellar building the mini digger cleared an area tracing the tops of the walls, this involved the removal of approximately 50mm of the hard standing rubble surface (see Figure 3 for extent and dimensions) and a small amount of intrusive excavation through the building demolition fill of the cellar on its southern side.

During the excavation of the southern foundation trench a well-constructed stone slab-lined drain (Figure 3 in blue, for location) was revealed some 50mm or so below the existing ground surface (Plate 3). This feature was on the same alignment and constructed against the southern wall of the exposed building cellar which suggests that they were of similar date. The stone-lined drain contained a large ceramic pipe that may have been a later addition to what might have originally been a storm 'soakaway'. The full extent of the stone slab-lined drain was not established and much of what was exposed had to be destroyed during the excavation of the southern foundation trench for the new building extension. The 0.9m wide capstones covering the drain were recovered for re-use elsewhere.

Trenches excavated at the eastern end of the site again revealed only the compacted hard standing building debris surface overlying natural clays with no archaeological features or deposits being encountered.

CONCLUSION

The features encountered during the groundworks to the rear of the Post Office represent, in the form of a stone-lined drain and the cellar of a building, the remnants of a probable Victorian or Edwardian building that was demolished sometime after the publication of the 1965 edition of the 25-inch Ordnance Survey map. Only natural clay deposits, and existing modern drainage arrangements were encountered during the excavation of the padstone trenches. The stone-lined drain was shown to run parallel and contiguous with the exposed cellar wall and was either contemporaneous with or later than the building. Part of the stone-lined drain was destroyed during the general groundworks and excavation of the southern foundation trench for the new building extension. These excavations revealed only building demolition debris overlying natural clays.

No medieval, or earlier, archaeological features or deposits were encountered during the groundwork excavations. It is most likely that any medieval archaeological features or deposits would have been destroyed during the later building construction given that only natural clay subsoil horizons were revealed at such shallow depths below the existing hard standing surface on the site.

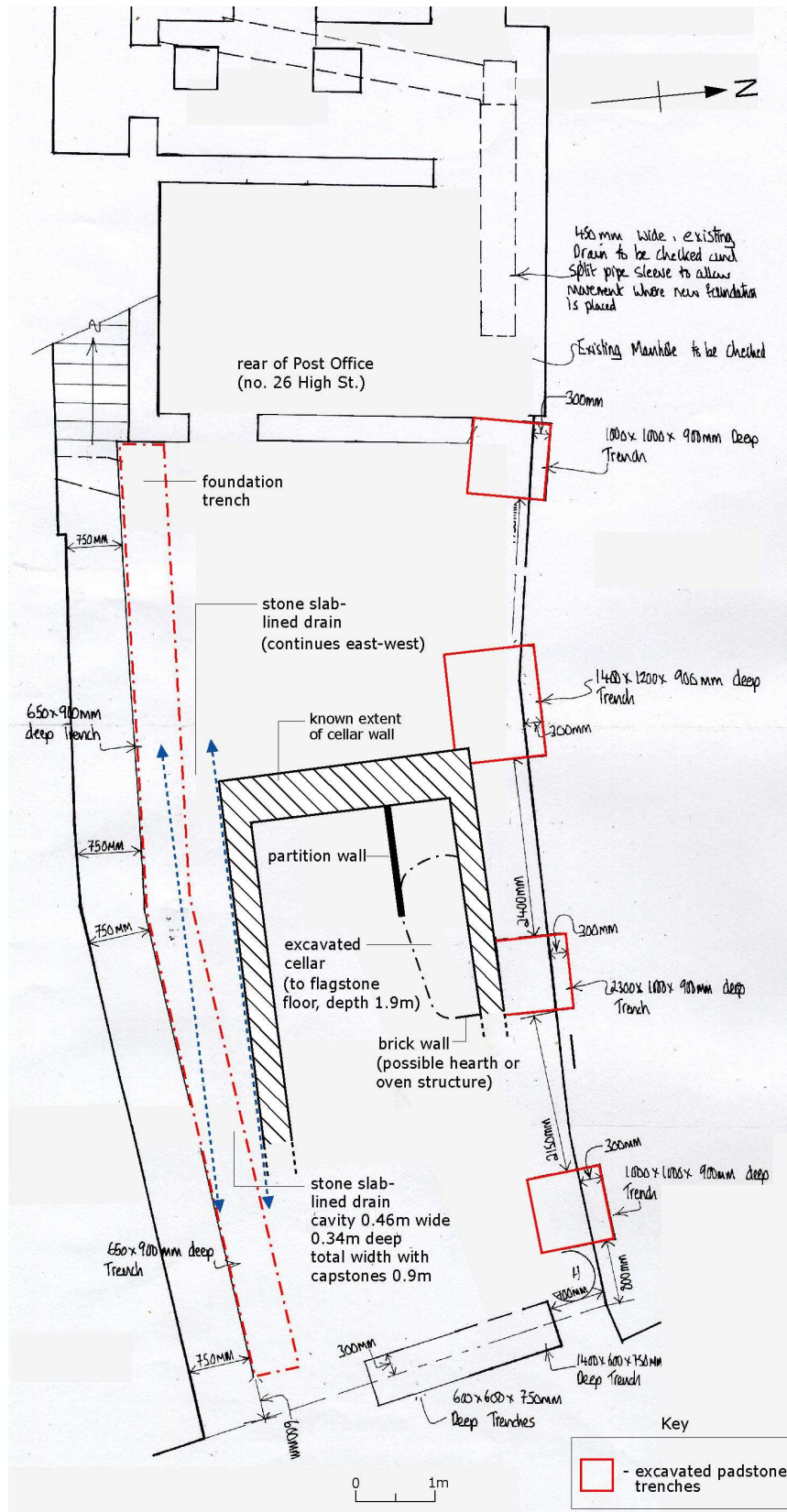


Figure 3. Plan of groundwork trenches and location of revealed features (adapted with acknowledgement to Llwyd Edwards, architect)

PHOTOGRAPHS



Plate 1: Cellar or basement wall exposed during padstone trench excavation, looking north



Plate 2: View east, showing brick structure in cellar



Plate 3: Stone-lined drain or soakaway, view east

SOURCES CONSULTED

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