

DAN Y BANC, CARMARTHEN ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING AND WATCHING BRIEF



Prepared by Dyfed Archaeological Trust
For: The Regan Norris Partnership



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Dan y Banc, Carmarthen Archaeological Recording and Watching Brief

Gan / By

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**DAN Y BANC, CARMARTHEN: ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING AND
WATCHING BRIEF**

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DAN Y BANC, CARMARTHEN: ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING AND WATCHING BRIEF

Summary

Dan y Banc lies on the line of the medieval town walls of Carmarthen and close to the line of the defences of the 1st century Roman fort. The retaining wall to the rear of the proposed development site may form part of or be located on the line of the medieval town wall.

As a result of this it was recommended that a programme of archaeological recording be undertaken alongside an archaeological watching brief being carried out on all ground disturbance works.

Regan Norris Partnership acting on behalf of the planning applicant commissioned Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services to carry out the archaeological works in June 2008.

The results of the archaeological recording suggest that the lower part of the retaining wall may be the medieval town wall. The upper limits of the retaining wall are likely to be of later date.

During the course of the watching brief an area of cobbling was recorded along with a much damaged stone drain, these were of post medieval date and relate to the cottages that once occupied the site.

INTRODUCTION

Project Commission

Plans (planning application no W/16354) to demolish existing buildings at Dan y Banc, Carmarthen (NGR SN 41461999) and construct a new dental practice required a programme of archaeological recording and watching brief be undertaken. The proposed development area contains no known archaeological sites. However, Dan y Banc lies on the line of the medieval town walls of Carmarthen, the retaining wall to the rear of the proposed development site possibly forming part of this. Additionally the proposed development site lies close to the line of the defences of the 1st century Roman fort.

Given the archaeological potential of the site an archaeological watching brief and programme of recording of the retaining wall was recommended by the Local Planning Authority's (LPA) archaeological advisor¹. Regan Norris Partnership acting on behalf of the planning applicant, Basset and Macgregor Construction Ltd commissioned Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services to undertake the archaeological works during June 2008.

Scope of the Project

The project was designed to record any archaeological features or deposits exposed during all major episodes of earth moving or ground breaking, such as topsoil stripping and deep cutting.

Report Outline

This report describes the location of the site along with its archaeological background before summarising the results and conclusions of the watching brief followed by the results of the archaeological recording.

Abbreviations

Sites recorded on the Regional Historic Environment Record (HER²) are identified by their Primary Record Number (PRN) and located by their National Grid Reference (NGR).

¹ Dyfed Archaeological Trust Heritage Management made the recommendation in a letter dated June 6th 2007.

² Held and managed by Dyfed Archaeological Trust, The Shire Hall, Llandeilo.

THE SITE

Location

The proposed development site is located at NGR SN 41461999 a short distance to the northwest of Old Station Road. Topographically the site is located on a broadly level plot below a substantial scarp. The site being at a height of c.15m above Ordnance Datum (OD).

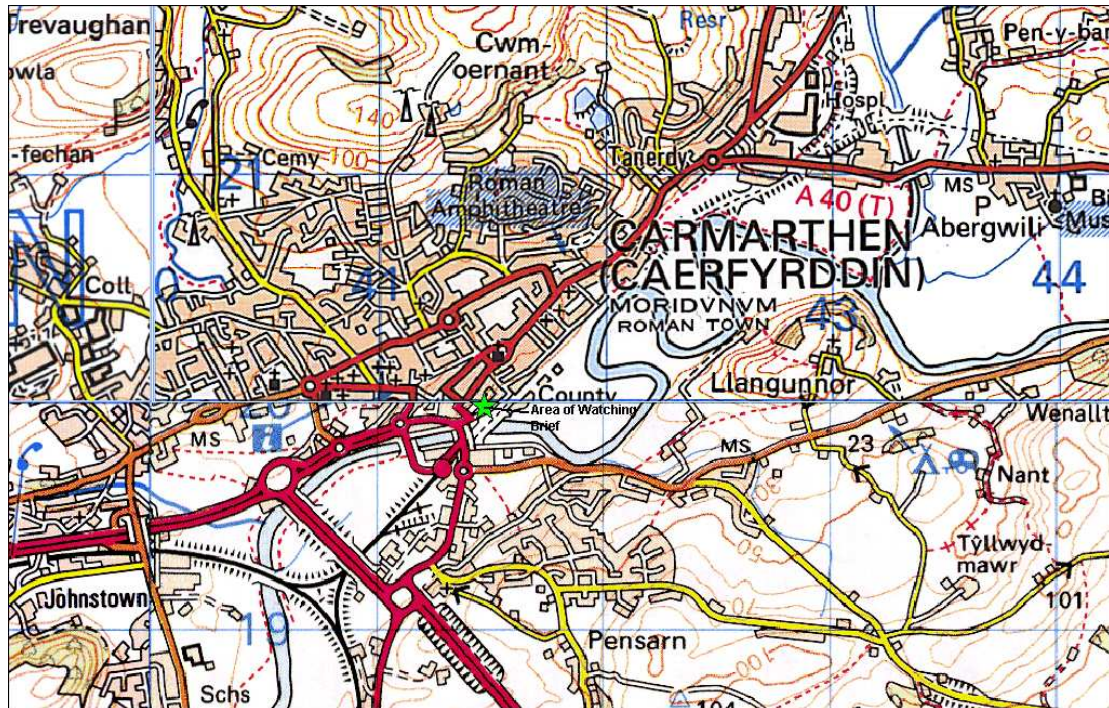


Figure 1: Extract of OS 1:50000 map, development area indicated by green star.

Reproduced from the 1987 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

Historic Landscape Development

A search of the regional HER revealed no known archaeological sites within the proposed development area. However, the retaining wall located to the rear of the demolished structures on the site may in part be the medieval town wall or lie on the former course of it. Additionally, the proposed development site is in close proximity to the site of the Roman fort which was once located on the scarp above the site and was constructed during the 1st century.

The medieval town walls of Carmarthen were constructed in two phases. The first phase initially commenced in the 1230s and continued up until the 1340s. The length of wall present at Dan y Banc is likely to have been constructed during the second phase of construction that occurred following the rising of Owain Glwydwr who besieged the castle and burnt the town in 1403. Work on this phase commenced in c.1415. The secondary phase of wall building increased the walled area of Carmarthen almost threefold (James, 1980, 32-34).

Map evidence has revealed that the site was occupied from the late 19th century by housing. The first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1890 shows the site was

occupied by a terrace of seven cottages. The cottages are also marked on the 1906 edition Ordnance Survey map.

During the 19th century Dan y Banc was home to many of the coracle men of the town who had a reputation for longevity, hard drinking and fighting. Such was this reputation that new recruits to the local police force were advised to

'Patrol in pairs through Chequers Alley, along the Quay and through Dan y Banc and Kidwelly Fach beyond the bridge; when tackling the Lewises, keep one eye over your shoulder for the Thomases, the Evanses and the Eliases; tread carefully when you're called to a coracle family fight. They have a nasty way of joining forces against outsiders who interfere in family business' (Molloy, 1980, 112).

Surviving police 'occurrence' books of the 19th century provide an insight into life in Dan y Banc with many instances of officers being called to the district to deal with offences (ibid, 134):

'Saturday night 30th June 1881. P.C Thomas Davies No. 4 reports that about 9.45pm he was called to Dan y Banc. Went there and saw a crowd and William..., fisherman, of Dan y Banc, with his coat off and wanting to fight Frederick... and David..., fishermen of the same place. He requested them to go away, which they did. He dispersed the crowd and saw all quiet. The parties had been drinking but were not drunk' (ibid, 138).

However, whilst the coracle men of Dan y Banc had a formidable reputation they were often included in civic celebrations. A coracle race from the Quay round a boat moored at the Pothouse and returning to the Quay formed part of the celebrations to mark the marriage of the Prince of Wales in 1863:

'Eight coracles came to the scratch and on the signal being given off they went and kept together like a group of partridges, each man being quite at home in his one oared boat. However, on their return the receding tide told the tale on these primitive little vessels and the strongest arm and muscle would best. The following were first at the winning post:

William Thomas, Dan y Banc (first); Griffith Lewis, Dan y Banc (second); David Lewis, Dan y Banc (third) and William Lewis, Dan y Banc (fourth) – all were loudly cheered' Sergeant David Williams Duty Diary 10th March 1863 (Molloy, 1981, 170).

In addition to the coracle men Dan y Banc once housed riverside labourers known locally as 'hobblers', along with a small contingent of Irish immigrants who made their living by travelling around the area selling crockery. Living conditions in Dan y Banc were poor, with many people occupying one-roomed cottages (Lodwick & Lodwick, 1994, 186-187). Dan y Banc in 1873 consisted of 38 houses, with 36 bedrooms and 7 lavatories and housed a total of 128 families which equates to more than a dozen people for each bedroom (Molloy, 1981, 177). It is also known that in 1873 Dan y Banc was known as Steam Street (Lodwick & Lodwick 1994, 377).

Much of Dan y Banc and its immediate vicinity has been the subject of development in the modern period with the construction of a skating rink which subsequently became the Royal Mail sorting office, and is now Carmarthenshire County Council offices. The building is still known locally as 'The Rink'. Also, more recently the construction of the Customs and Excise and Social Security Offices has swept away the former housing. Additionally a reinforced concrete wall has been constructed along much of the northeast boundary of Dan y Banc.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING

Methodology

The methodology employed to undertake the archaeological recording of the length of retaining wall, which may form part of the medieval town walls of Carmarthen or lie on the line of it, consisted of two site visits being made to compile a photographic survey of the upstanding masonry. An additional feature of the programme of archaeological recording was the production of a scaled 1:20 elevation drawing of the lower portion of the wall. It was not possible to produce a full elevation drawing due to the height of the wall.

Discussion

The section of retaining wall (see figure 4) recorded at the proposed development site stands to a height of c.10m and is constructed predominantly of sandstone. The presence of putlog holes, which once housed the wooden scaffolding used during construction, suggests that the lower portion of the wall may be of medieval date and form part of the town walls. Within the central portion of the wall a band of larger squared stone blocks was noted. A series of five later walls abut the possible medieval wall, these probably relate to the cottages that once occupied the site. The upper levels of the wall appear to have been the subject of much later work, with a band of brickwork being present along with slots for floor beams and joists, and with further brick insertions further up. Substantial areas of concrete rendering were also noted, these probably dating to the 1960s as the name Gerald Davies with the date 1963 was noted scratched into cement where an area of rendering had been removed. It is also known that the wall has been stabilised by means of pinning this being evident from scarring along much of its face.

Conclusions

Given the presence of putlogs it is likely that the lower section of the retaining wall recorded at Dan y Banc represents a section of the original town wall of Carmarthen. However, much of the upper levels have been the subject of much later work as evidenced by the presence of brick additions. Whilst the upper levels contain brickwork much of the stone used in construction appears to be geologically the same as that found in the lower levels, but without any putlogs which may point to a later date. It is possible that the upper levels of the wall have been rebuilt, possibly reusing the original town wall material, although it is not possible to be certain.

WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

Methodology

The watching brief methodology consisted of site visits being made to monitor the groundworks undertaken as part of the development. The groundworks monitored consisted of two phases which are described individually below.

Phase 1

This involved the demolition of a section of cottage wall, part of which had been demolished prior to the site visit and the excavation of a c.1m wide terrace into the bank behind.

It was noted that the section of cottage wall to be demolished was constructed of rough stone and mortar that contained coal and ash fragments, which suggests a post medieval date. A further rough stone wall was also recorded prior to its demolition that appeared to have been constructed in a 1m wide cut, which was also filled by a dark brown silty clay of loose compaction.

The stratigraphic sequence revealed in the bank during the excavations consisted of a dark greyish brown silty clay topsoil of moderate compaction containing much modern debris. This overlay a 0.4m deep moderately compacted mid orange brown sandy clay subsoil horizon containing c.15% small sub-rounded stone. The natural horizon was a mid grey sandy clay of firm compaction containing c.40% sub-rounded pebbles.

Phase 2

Phase 2 of the groundworks monitored consisted of the excavation of c.0.5m wide foundation trenches and c.1.8m square pits to accommodate the steel frame of the new building. These were excavated along both the front and rear of the development site along the line of the town wall.

The excavations along the frontage of the site revealed much modern disturbance. However, a 3.1m long x 0.3m wide area of cobbled road surface was revealed beneath the modern tarmac of the existing lane which runs along the front of the development site. Along the edge of the cobbled surface grey brick kerbing was noted. The bricks used to construct this kerbing were of a dense engineering type with high crushing strength and it was noted that they were produced by Doulton and CB. It is unknown what the initials CB denote but a brickworks was once located to the south-east of Dan y Banc and it is possible that they were produced there.

A pit excavated in the south-west corner of the development plot frontage revealed a 1.4m x 0.3 high length of probable drain beneath heavily disturbed modern deposits. This had a 0.18m x 0.04m deep slate base *in situ* and would probably have originally been capped with slate. However, the whole structure was much disturbed by the insertion of later stoneware pipes.

Three pits excavated along the base of the possible town wall revealed no evidence for a ditch although it was possible to discern that the wall had been constructed on the natural horizon comprising a firm mid grey brown sandy clay containing c.40% small to medium sized pebbles.

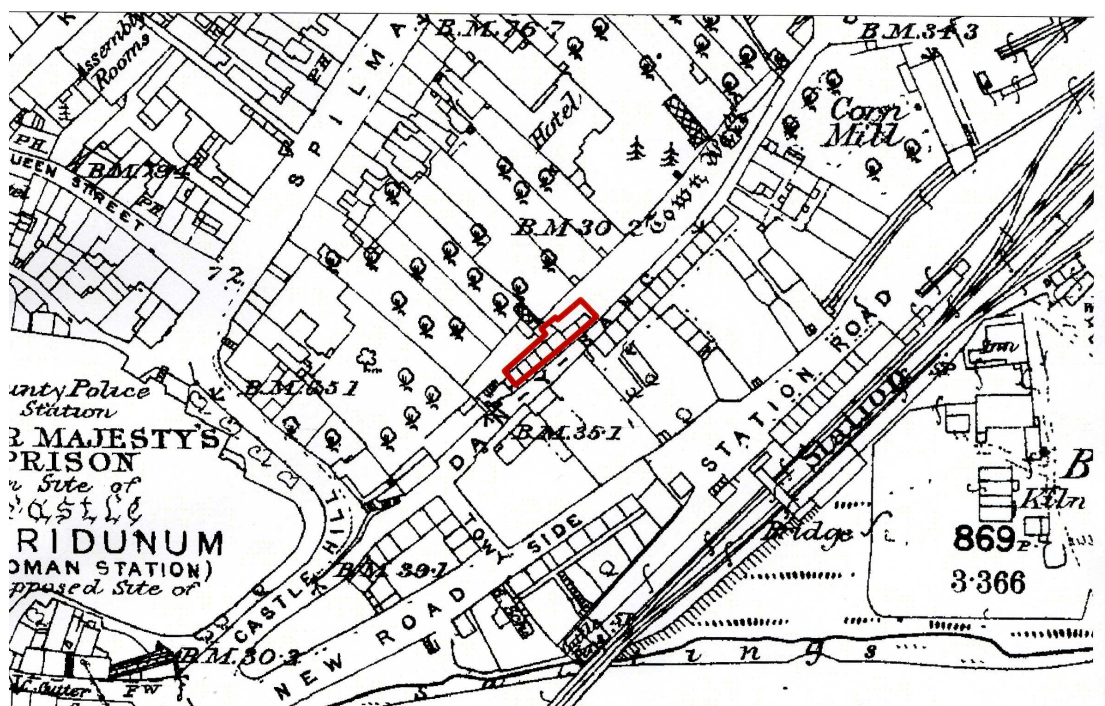


Figure 2: Extract of 1st edition OS map 1890 showing development site in red.

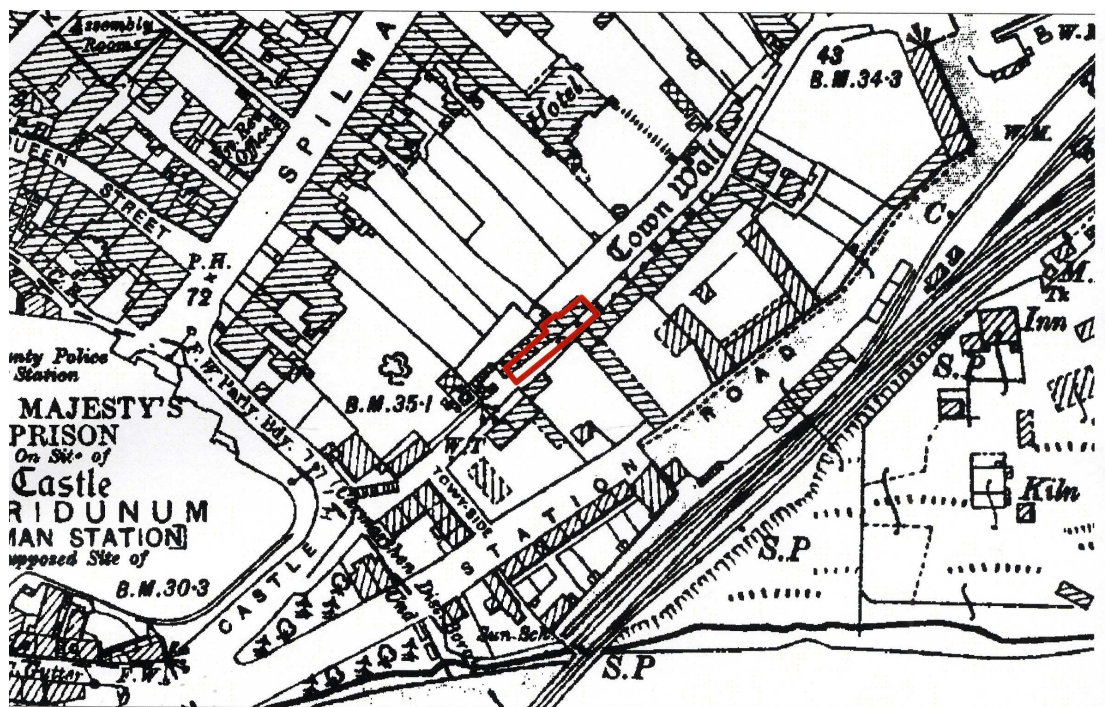


Figure 3: Extract of 2nd edition OS map 1906 showing development site in red.



Plate 1: Entrance to Dan y Banc c1900 length of town wall visible behind coracles.



Plate 2: View of Dan y Banc looking towards proposed development site c1900.



Plate 3: North east gable wall of former cottage prior to demolition.



Plate 4: Former cottage wall showing prior to demolition.



Plate 5: Section through bank from southeast.



Plate 6: Rear and side walls of former cottage prior to demolition.



Plate 7: Cobbled surface with brick kerbing.



Plate 8: Stone built former drain showing later stoneware pipe.



Plate 9: Section beneath possible town wall.



Plate 10 Overall view of development site.

SOURCES

Map

Ordnance Survey 1890 1:2500 1st edition.

Ordnance Survey 1906 1:2500 2nd edition.

Ordnance Survey 1986 Swansea, Gower and Surrounding Area Landranger 159.

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APPENDIX 1

PHOTOGRAPHIC SURVEY OF RETAINING WALL THE PHOTOGRAPHS



Plate 11: Showing full height of northeast end of retaining wall.



Plate 12: Showing full height of mid section of retaining wall.



Plate 13: Showing full height of southwest end of retaining wall.



Plate 14: Southwest corner of retaining wall with gated entrance to steps up to Carmarthenshire County Council Offices visible in bottom left hand corner.

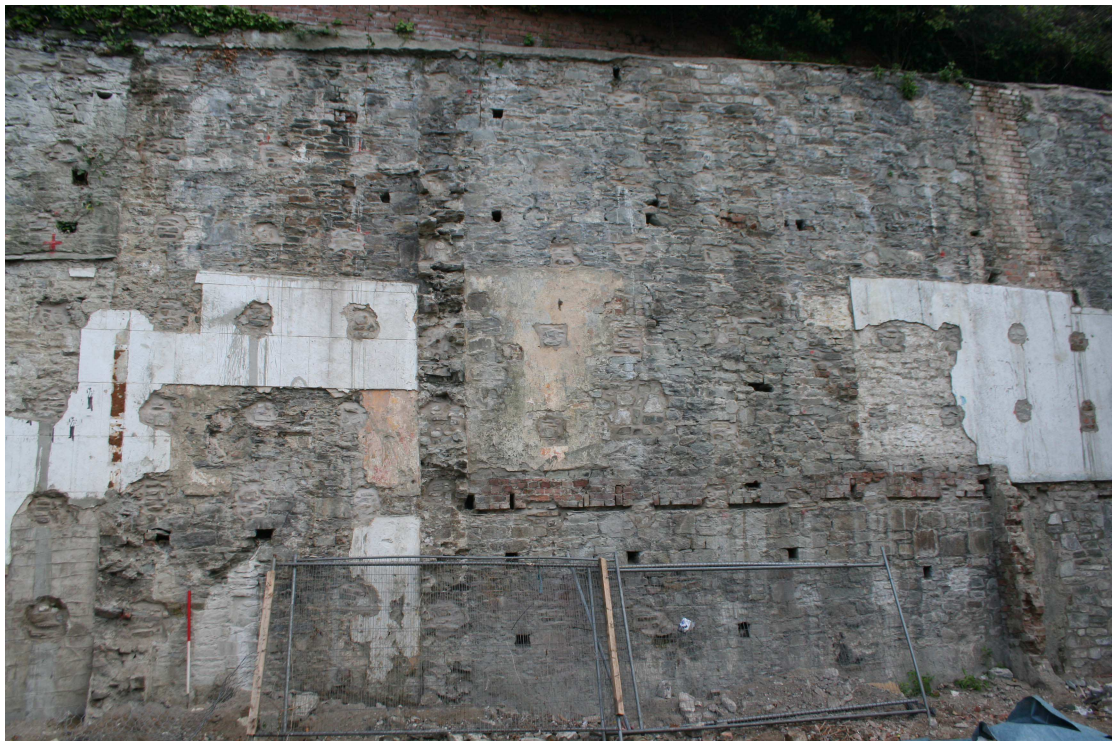


Plate 15: Landscape view of mid section of retaining wall.



Plate 16: Lower section retaining wall from southeast.



Plate 17: Upper section of retaining wall from southeast.



Plate 18: Full overall shot of retaining wall from southeast.



Plate 19: Lower section of northeast end of retaining wall showing former gable end to right and internal cottage wall to left. Shot 1



Plate 20: Lower section of retaining wall shot 2.



Plate 21: Lower section of retaining wall with putlogs visible. Floor joist slots of former cottage visible in upper image shot 3.



Plate 22: Lower section of retaining wall with putlogs visible. Floor joist slots of former cottage visible in upper image shot 4



Plate 23: Lower section of retaining wall with putlogs visible shot 5.



Plate 24: Lower section of section of retaining wall shot 6.



Plate 25: Lower section of retaining wall showing former gable end of cottage. Put logs visible to right along with floor joist slots of former cottage, shot 7.



Plate 26: Lower section of retaining wall showing concrete render and unknown feature relating to cottage. Damaged put log in upper left hand edge of image, shot 8.



Plate 27: Lower section of retaining wall showing damaged putlogs. Former cottage wall to left of centre. Concrete render visible in upper left, shot 9.

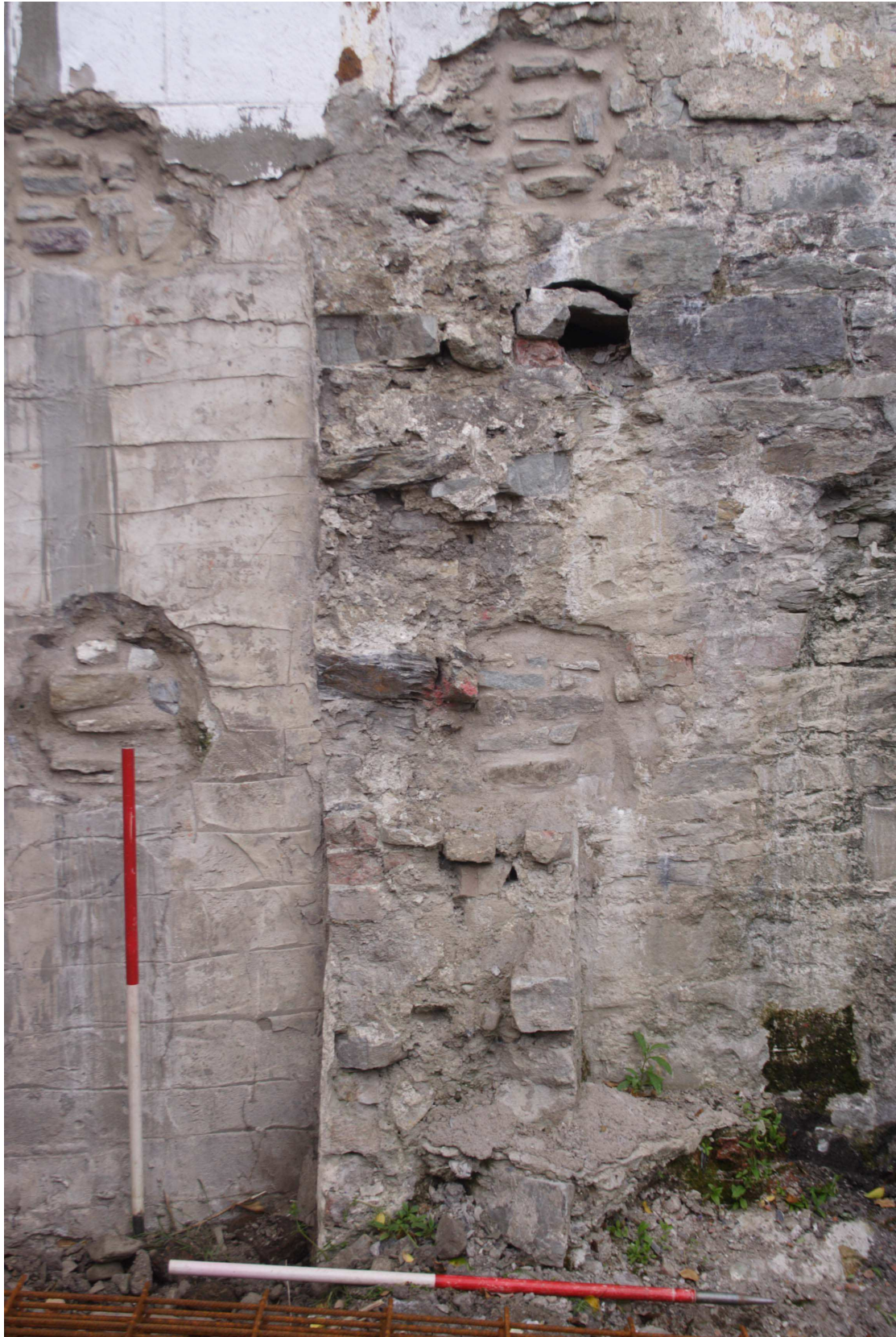


Plate 28: Lower section of retaining wall. Former cottage wall to centre. Concrete render to left. Pinning scar visible above vertical scale, shot 10.



Plate 29: Lower section of southwest end of retaining wall showing concrete render and pinning scars, shot 11.