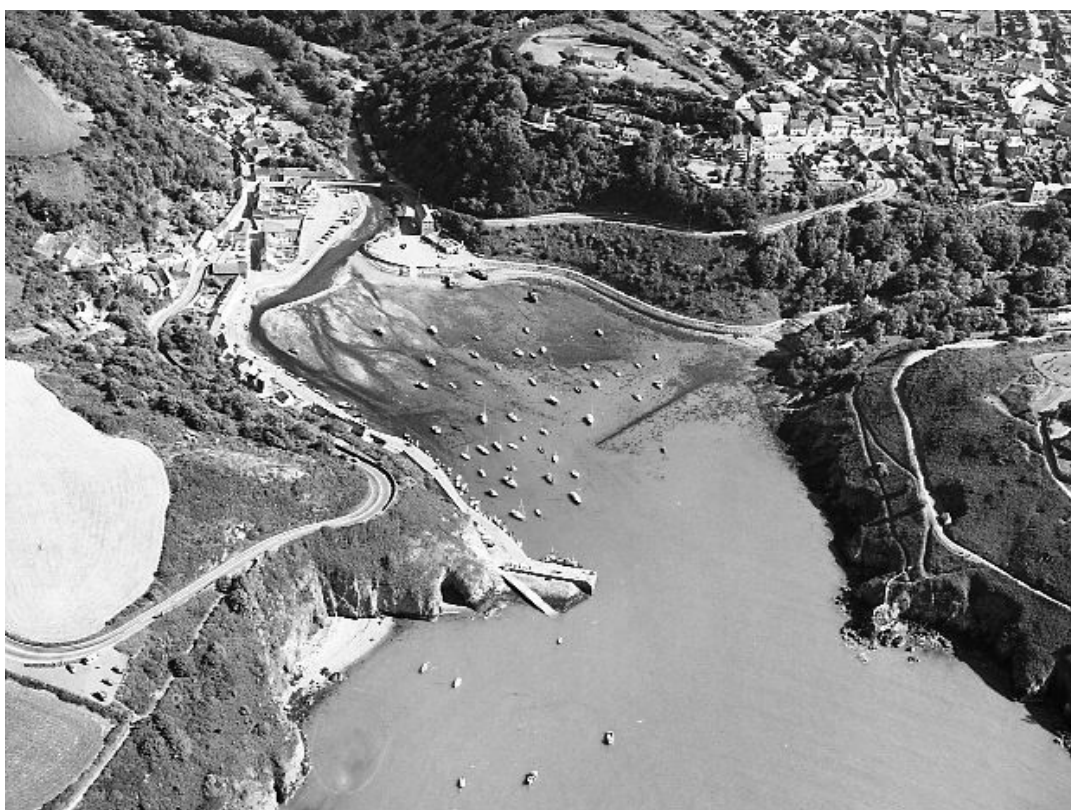


THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE MEDIEVAL TOWNS OF SOUTHWEST WALES

FISHGUARD



1988 Aerial photograph of Fishguard showing the lower town with the upper town to the right (DAT AP88-61.4).

Prepared by Dyfed Archaeological Trust
For: Cadw



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THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE MEDIEVAL TOWNS OF SOUTHWEST WALES

FISHGUARD

By

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FISHGUARD

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The origins of Fishguard are obscure but it was a relatively small and insignificant settlement until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when it became the major town of north Pembrokeshire. There is no evidence for it having been a town in the medieval period. The only archaeological investigation in the historic core of Fishguard has been small-scale but revealed stratified deposits going back to the medieval period.

KEY FACTS

Status: village

Size: unknown

Archaeology: medieval archaeology was identified in an evaluation in the centre of Fishguard.

LOCATION

Fishguard lies on the north Pembrokeshire Coast (SN 958 370) above a good natural harbour (Fig. 1). The historic core of Fishguard, the upper town, occupies high ground 70m above sea level. The lower town lies around a sheltered cove 0.5km to the west. The harbour at Goodwick, 1.8km to the north, is now commercial/industrial centre of Fishguard.

HISTORY

There are few sources and no published history of medieval and early modern Fishguard. By tradition the shadowy figure of Martin of Tours granted 'Abergwaun' along with other lands in what was to become the lordship of Cemais to Jordan de Cantington in the late eleventh century during the first wave of the Anglo-Norman conquest of southwest Wales. There is no historical evidence to support this tradition, but what is certain is that by 1115 Cemais was in the hands of the Anglo-Norman lord Robert Fitzmartin. The Fitzmartins established a castle in their lordship at Nevern, transferring it to Newport in the late twelfth century and also founding a town there. It is unlikely that the Fitzmartins would have tolerated a second town in Cemais to compete with their new town of Newport and therefore the existence of a sizeable settlement at Fishguard prior to the thirteenth century must be questioned. No medieval town charter is known and neither a market nor fair is recorded. The 1835 Municipal Corporations Commissioners referred to a 1653 survey which regarded Fishguard as a town and mentions burgages. In 1586 a portreeve was elected and later documents record burgesses. This evidence points to

Fishguard being no more than a village in the medieval period, acquiring elevated status in the early modern period and becoming the chief town of north Pembrokeshire.

The parish church of St Mary's was recorded in 1291 – the current building dates to 1855-57 and presumably occupies the site of the medieval church.

Eighteenth century references refer to an upper and lower town.

MORPHOLOGY

Due to the paucity of historical evidence, defining the character and extent of medieval Fishguard is problematic if not virtually impossible. It is reasonable to assume that the nineteenth-century St Mary's Church occupies the site of the medieval church and that the street pattern shown on the 1843 tithe map in the vicinity of the church has been in existence for several centuries. These streets are: The Square, West Street, and High Street (Figs 2-4). The Square probably functioned as a village green/market place with houses clustered around it, but how many houses and how far they extended along the above named streets is unknown. Figure 8 shows the conjectured extent of Fishguard in the early fourteenth century.

It has to be assumed that a settlement developed during the medieval period at what later became known as lower town around a good natural harbour.

During the nineteenth century both the upper and lower towns expanded and continued to do so in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Fig. 5).

BUILDINGS AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS

Scheduled Monuments

There are no scheduled monuments in Fishguard.

Listed Buildings

There are approximately 142 listed buildings in Fishguard (Fig. 5). Apart from a Grade II* chapel all are Grade II and consists of houses, commercial properties, chapels and churches, bridges and street furniture also all of nineteenth century date.

Conservation Area

The whole of the historic core of the upper and lower town lie in the Fishguard Conservation Area (Fig. 5).

Registered Parks and Gardens

There are no registered parks and gardens in Fishguard, although the garden of Plas Glyn-y-Mel lies immediately to the east of the lower town. It is a Grade II garden.

Registered Historic Landscape

Fishguard is not in a registered historic landscape.

Undesignated Historic Environment Assets

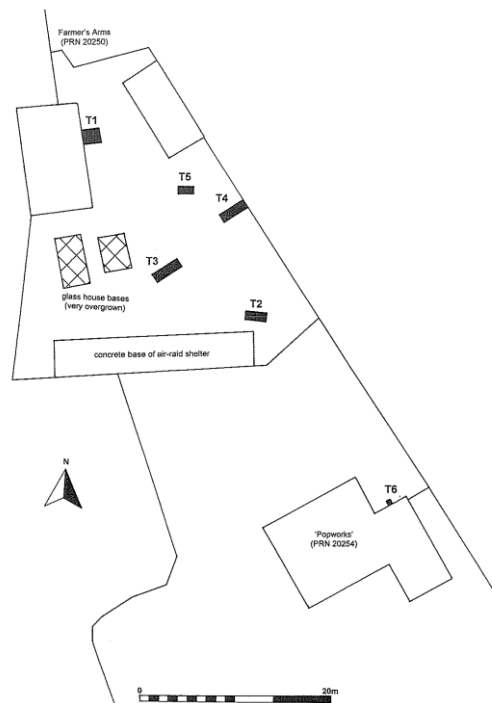
There are approximately 225 undesignated assets in Fishguard listed on the Dyfed Historic Environment Record. (Fig. 6). they include duplicates of the 142 listed buildings. Other records are almost exclusively of post-medieval and modern buildings and structures

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

Included in this section are excavations, evaluation excavations and watching briefs. Building surveys and desk-top assessments are not included unless they add to the known archaeology (Fig. 7).

Numbers in parentheses below refer to records in the Dyfed Historic Environment Record.

1. An archaeological assessment followed by a field evaluation was carried out in 1999 on a site proposed for a new arts and exhibition centre. The evaluation although small in scale revealed the site had been intensively used in the past with evidence dating from the medieval period through to the modern. References: Crane 1999 (37405); Page 1999 (37419).



Drawing showing the trench layout on the site proposed for a new arts and exhibition centre.

2. Nothing of archaeological interest was noted during a watching brief on construction of a small building at Berry Hill: Reference: Crane 2008 (94524).
3. An archaeological appraisal followed by an evaluation and watching brief was carried out at Chimney's Link on the western fringe of the historic core of Fishguard as part of construction of a new road in 2017-18. The appraisal noted the archaeological potential of the area but nothing of archaeological significance was recorded during the evaluation and watching brief. References: Day and Meek 2017; Enright 2017; Day and Jenkins 2018 (111125, 110435 and 111224).



Photograph of the Chimney's Link construction work.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

Fishguard has some potential for addressing some of the key agenda items for research into the medieval period, including settlement plantation and church building. It also has the potential to address post-medieval research theme on settlements (towns)

The only archaeological intervention to take place in the core of the historic settlement a small-scale evaluation, demonstrated that significant medieval and later deposits survive. Street frontages in Fishguard's historic core present an almost unbroken façade of buildings, many of them with listed status, and though it is possible that medieval and later deposits survive beneath them, opportunities for archaeological investigation are limited.

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- Day A and Jenkins L 2018. Chimneys Link Phase 2 development, Fishguard, Pembrokeshire: archaeological watching brief, Dyfed Archaeological Trust unpublished report 2018-02.
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Databases and online references

Dyfed Historic Environment Record <https://www.archwilio.org.uk/arch/>

Cof Cymru <https://cadw.gov.wales/advice-support/cof-cymru>

Coflein <https://coflein.gov.uk/en>

LiDAR <https://lle.gov.wales/catalogue/item/LidarCompositeDataset/?lang=en>

Research framework for the Archaeology of Wales
<https://www.archaeoleg.org.uk/areasouthwest.html>

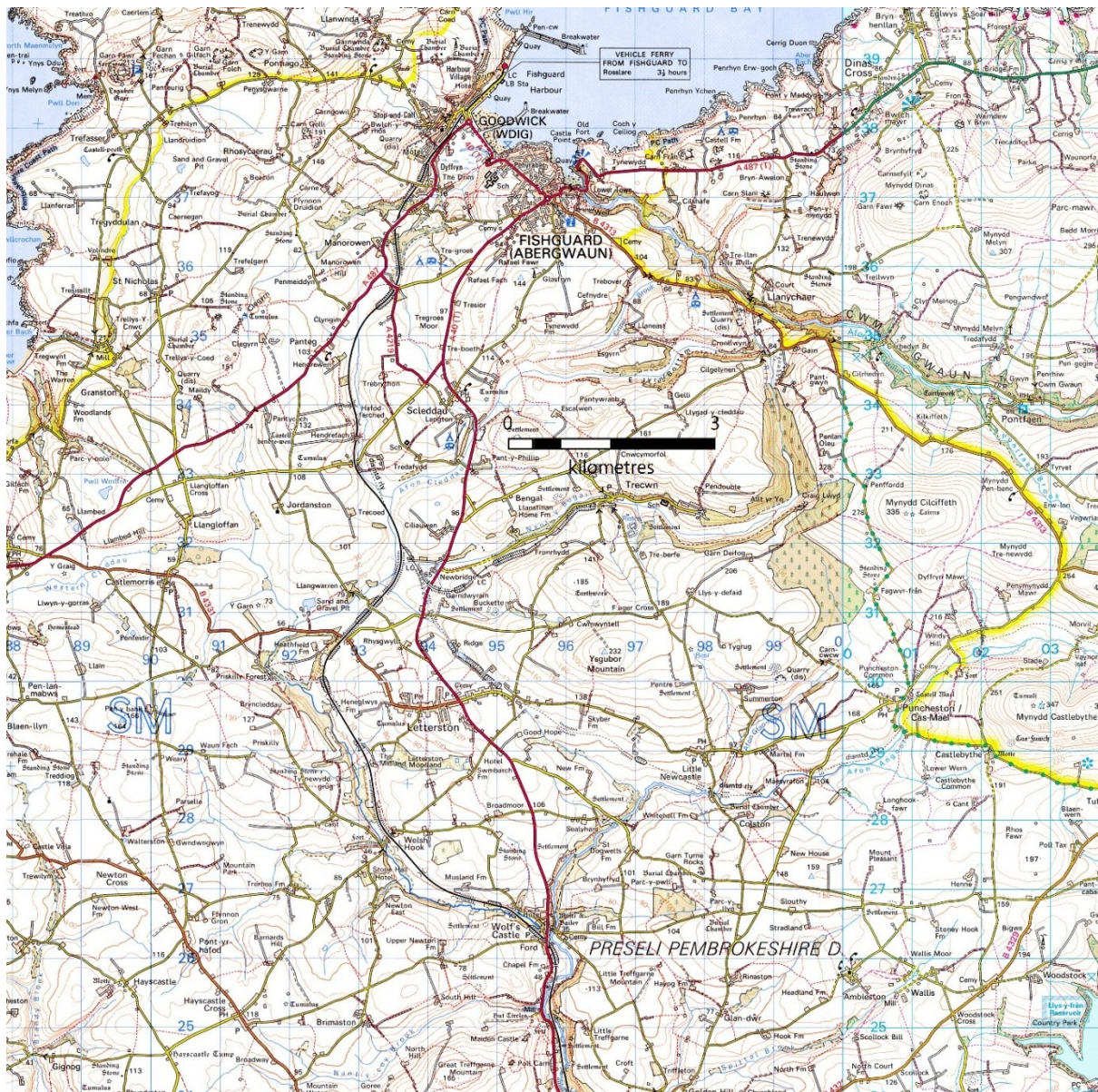


Figure 1. Location map.



Figure 2. Extract from the 1843 Fishguard tithe map.

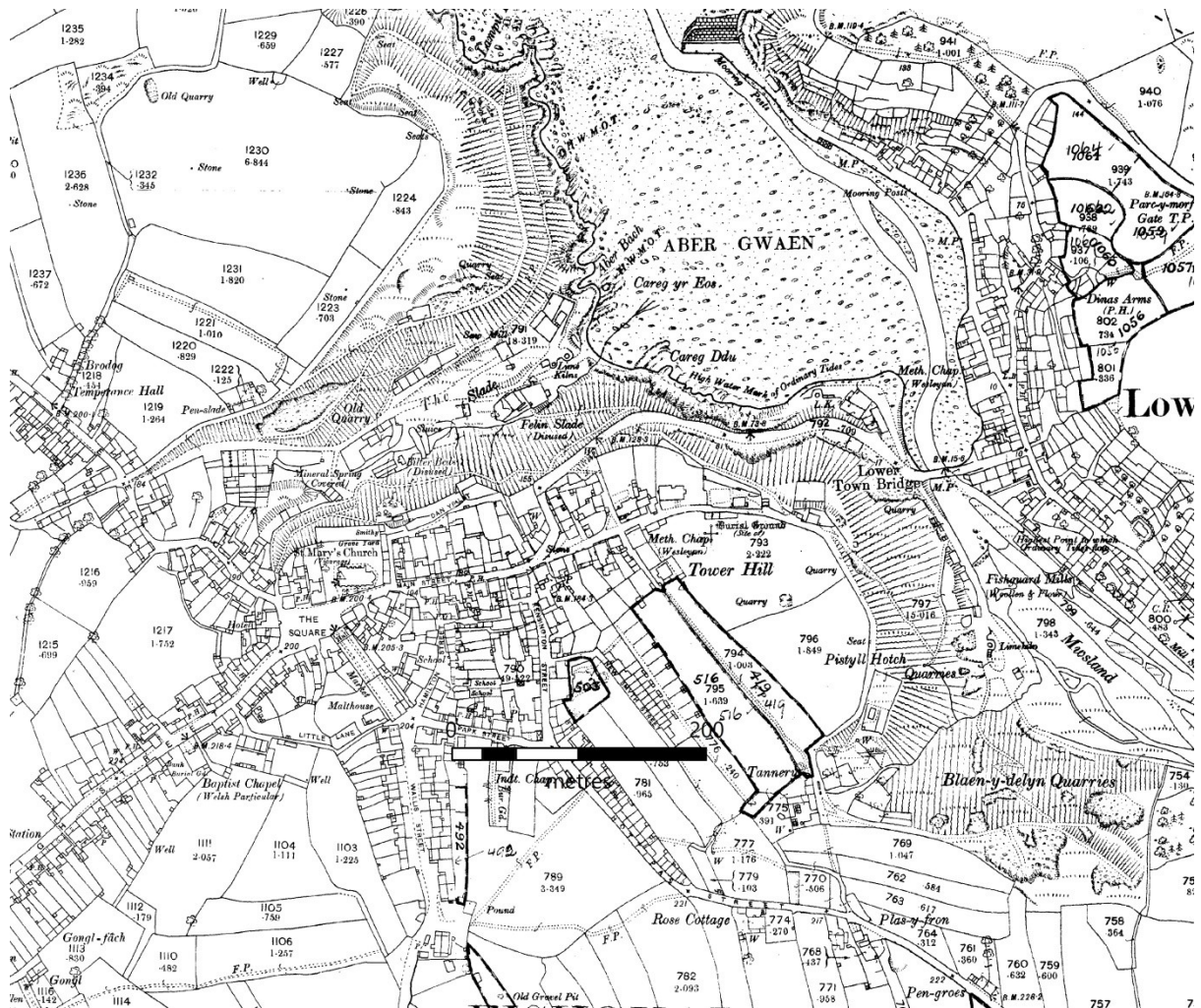
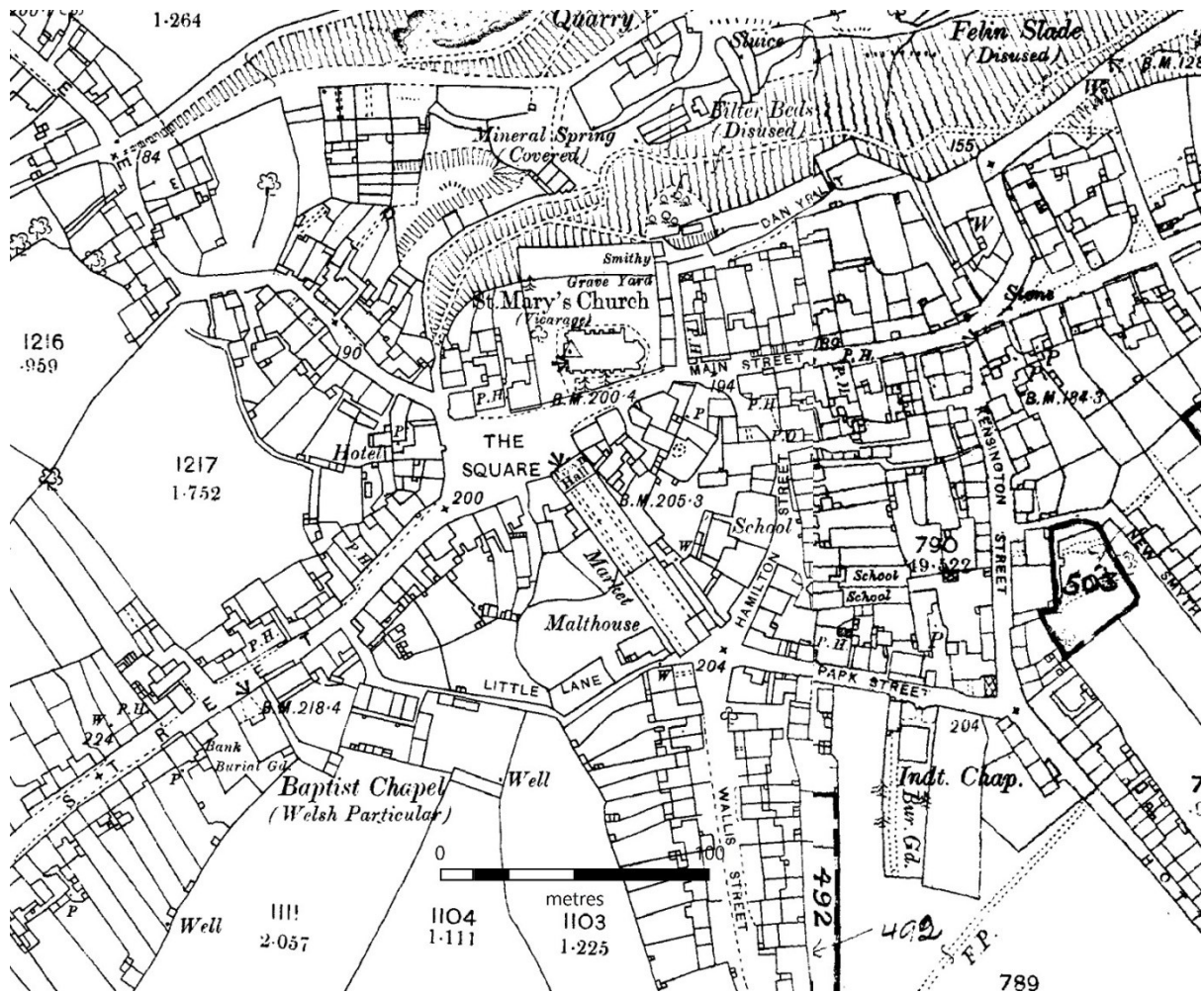


Figure 3. Extract from the 1889 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 1st Edition map showing Fishguard upper and lower town (Pembs 1st map 1889 09.03 and 09.04).



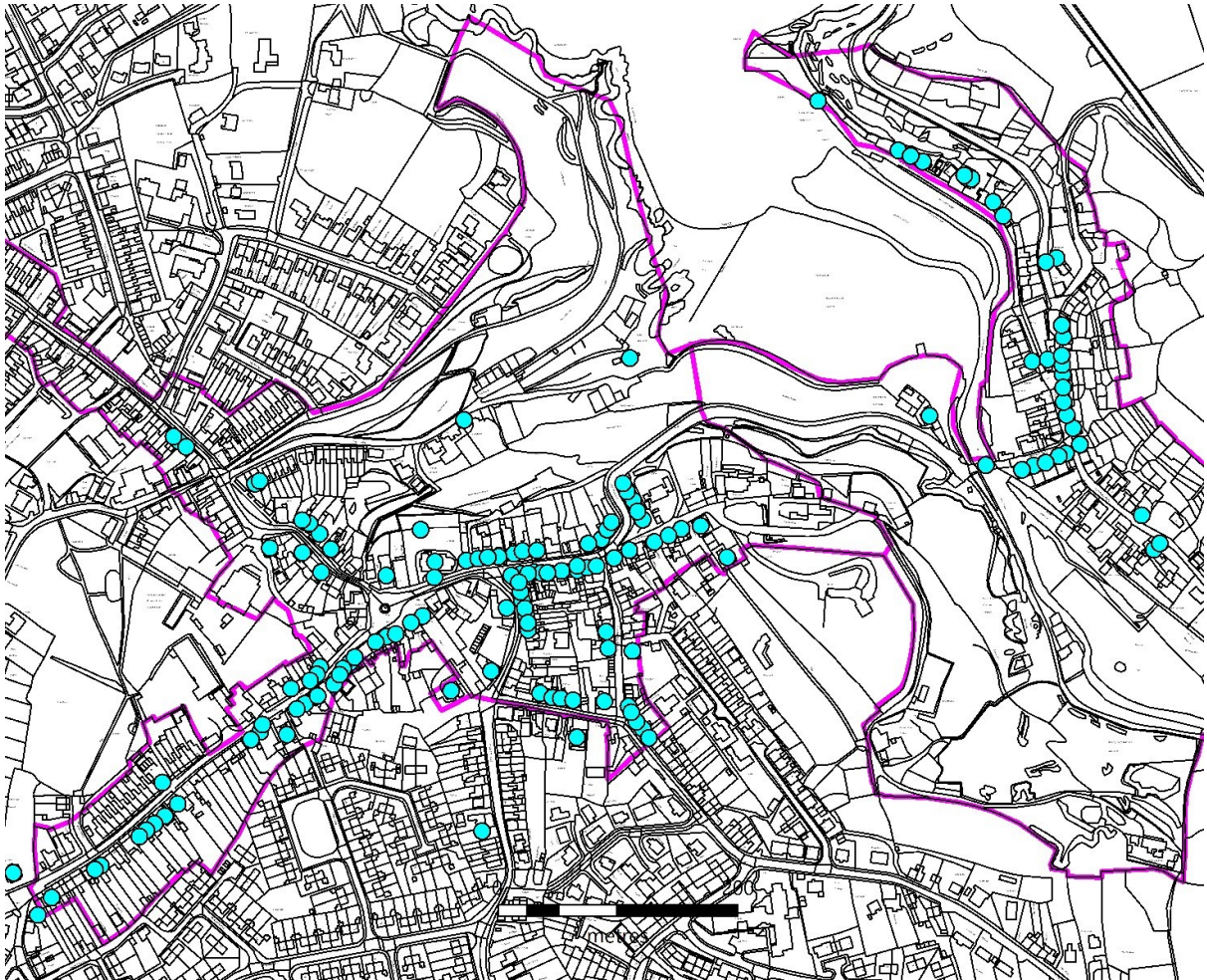


Figure 5. Listed buildings (blue circles) and the conservation area (outlined in purple).

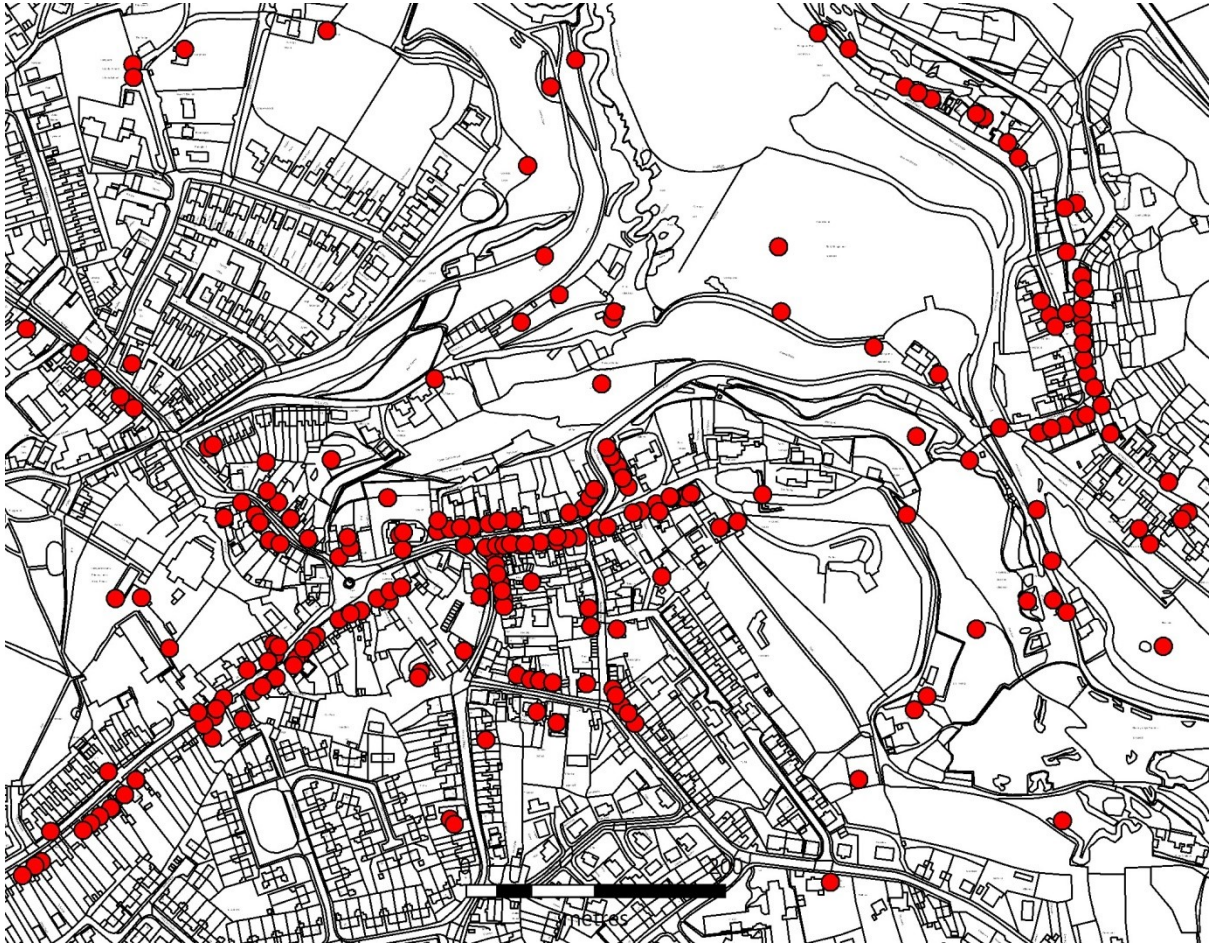


Figure 6. HER records.

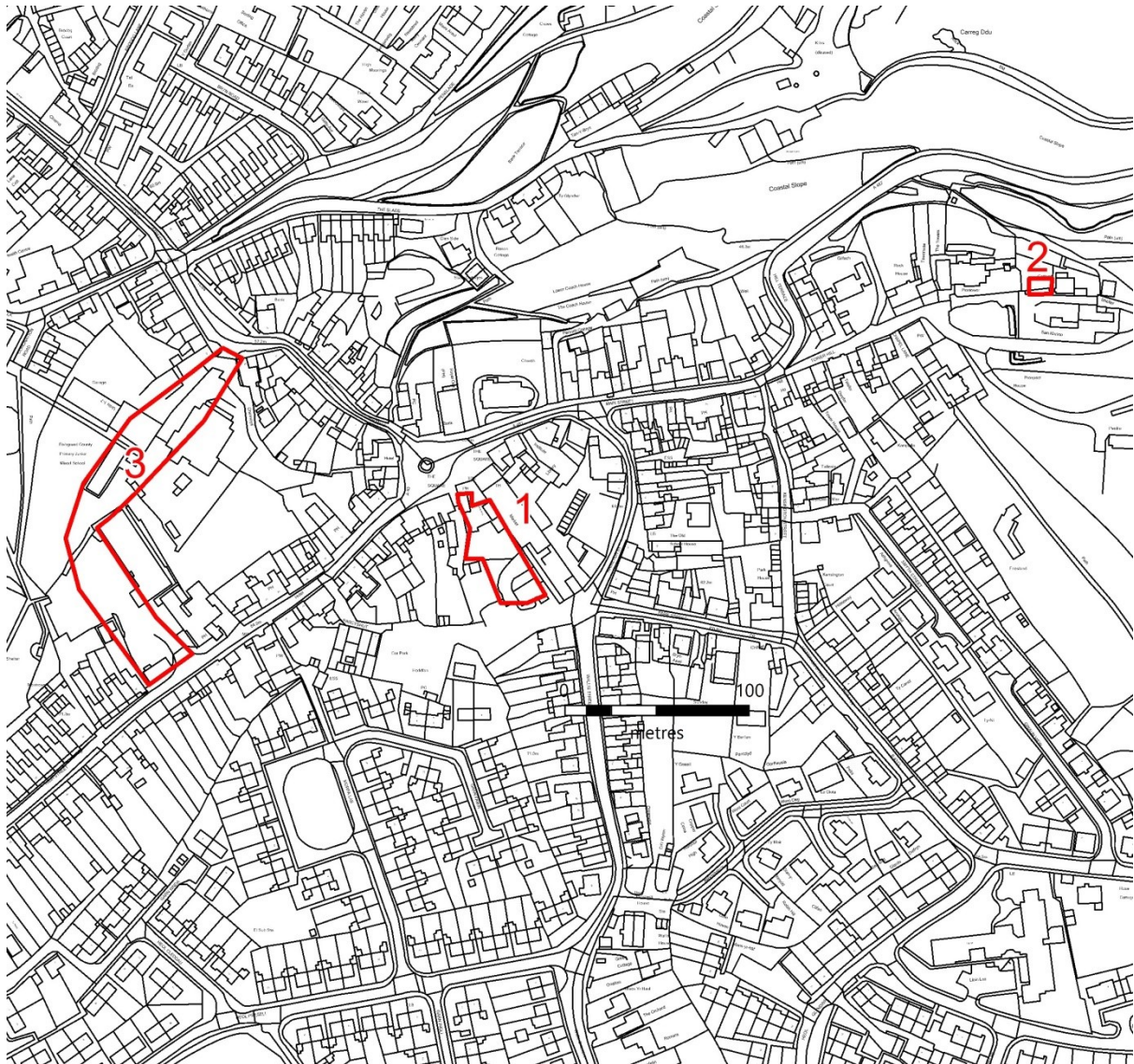


Figure 7. Location of archaeological interventions.



Figure 8. Map showing Fishguard as it may have been at its maximum extent in the medieval period c.1320.