

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE MEDIEVAL TOWNS OF SOUTHWEST WALES

PEMBROKE



1993 aerial photograph of Pembroke (DAT AP93-41.57)

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By

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PEMBROKE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

King Henry I granted a town charter to Pembroke in 1100. The town grew rapidly, extending east from the castle along Main Street. The morphology of Pembroke indicates that the early town was provided with defences. The population continued to grow and burgages were laid out further along Main Street to the east and in the late thirteenth century walls were constructed around the whole of the town. In 1326-7 238½ burgages were recorded, giving a population of over a 1000. There have been no largescale archaeological investigations in the town, but significant and deeply stratified medieval and later deposits were recorded during an evaluation in burgages near the castle.

KEY FACTS

Status: 1100 town charter.

Size: 1326, 238½ burgages.

Archaeology: There has been little archaeological investigation in the town, but work close to the castle has revealed deeply stratified deposits.

LOCATION

Pembroke occupies a low limestone ridge on the Pembroke River, a branch of Milford Haven Waterway in south Pembrokeshire (SM 986 014). The castle lies on the western tip of the ridge, with the town extending eastwards along the crest of the ridge. The shores of the Waterway have experienced considerable industrialisation since the early nineteenth century, but prior to that Pembroke lay within an agricultural landscape consisting of some of the richest farmland in Wales.

HISTORY

In 1093 Roger de Montgomery invaded southwest Wales and established a castle at Pembroke. There is no direct evidence for occupation at Pembroke prior to the Anglo-Norman conquest, but Roger seems to have made straight for Pembroke suggesting he was keen to acquire an important pre-existing site. Roger was succeeded by his son Arnulf. He granted the church of St Nicholas 'within his castle at Pembroke' to the Norman abbey of St Martin, Sééz, and soon after he founded Monkton Priory to the south of the castle. However, in 1100 King Henry I stripped Arnulf of all his holdings. Henry issued a charter to Pembroke, creating a mayor, burgesses and freemen, which acted as an incentive for immigrants from the west of England and Flanders to settle in the incipient town. In 1138 Gilbert de Clare was created Earl of Pembroke, and from then until the 1536 Act of Union the fledgling county palatine of Pembroke was

administered from Pembroke Castle, further promoting the commercial function of the town. Pembroke was unique in never being attacked during the Welsh/English wars that characterised much of twelfth/thirteenth century southwest Wales.

The commercial importance of Pembroke is evidenced by the town charter which commands 'all ships with merchandise which enter the port of Milford (Milford Haven) and wish to sell or buy on land shall come to the bridge at Pembroke and buy or sell there'. Clearly this document demonstrates that a bridge on the north side of the town was built soon after the town's foundation; a bridge linking Pembroke to Monkton to the south soon followed. A tide mill is recorded on the north bridge in 1199 and one on the south bridge by the fourteenth century.

William Marshall was confirmed Earl of Pembroke in 1199 and he and his sons were responsible for building much of the masonry castle we see today, with later work, including the wall to the outer ward, completed by William de Valance who held Pembroke from 1247 to 1296. Although the history of the castle is well documented the town is not. St Mary's Church was almost certainly founded during the early years of the town to serve the growing population. By 1291, and probably several decades earlier, a second church, St Michael's, was founded to serve the expanding town. A new market place was laid out with burgages on either side. Ludlow argues that William de Valance began construction of the walls surrounding the whole of the town in the late thirteenth century and his son, Aymer de Valance, completed them in the early fourteenth century. In 1324 220 burgage plots were recorded, climbing to 238½ in 1326-7, giving a population well in excess of 1000.

Monkton Priory as noted above was founded in the late eleventh century. It is likely that a small settlement developed close to the Priory, separate from Pembroke but linked to the fortunes of the town and castle. Monkton had been granted two fairs by the 1480s. The Priory was dissolved in 1593.

The later medieval history of the town has not been researched, but like other towns in southwest Wales it declined due to the European-wide population crash of the mid-fourteenth century. John Speed's map of 1611 shows extra-mural settlements, but he reported 'more houses without inhabitants than I saw in any one city throughout my journey' and George Owen writing a few years earlier described Pembroke as 'very ruinous and much decayed'. With the Act of Union in 1536 Pembroke lost most of its administrative function and its maritime trade had by then suffered as Haverfordwest had become the principal port on the Milford Haven waterway; both were later eclipsed by the foundation of the towns of Milford Haven and Pembroke Dock.

It was not until the late eighteenth century and nineteenth century that Pembroke experienced an upturn in its fortunes. Modern development has been outside the historic core of the town.

MORPHOLOGY

Pembroke occupies a long, narrow limestone promontory, with the castle sitting on its western point. The town essentially consists of one long street, Main Street, running east/west along the spine of the promontory. In the medieval period tidal inlets flanked the north and south side of the promontory, providing superb natural defences for the town and castle; the inlet on the south side has been drained but the north side remains a tidal lake.

The castle is one of the largest and best preserved in the region, stone-built and dating mainly to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, comprising an inner and outer ward, a massive, circular keep and a substantial south-facing gatehouse. Initially the castle would have been protected by earth and timber defences. Ludlow has suggested that the first settlers could have been accommodated in the castle's outer ward. This is probably correct, but Henry I clearly had ambitious plans for Pembroke and it seems probable that in the first decade of the twelfth century burgages were laid out along Main Street from the castle gates. Lilley noted the extant coherent pattern of burgages stretching 400m from the castle gates to the east and suggested that this was the first phase of the planned town. Approximately 80 burgage plots were laid out, but it is unlikely that all would have been immediately taken up by settlers; many may have lain vacant for decades. This planned town included St Mary's Church and a bridge over the river to the north. The location of the market place is unclear but it may have been outside the castle gates or at the junction of Main Street/Dark Lane where Main Street widens slightly. In order to attract settlers this planned town must have been provided with defences – Ludlow indicates that this would have been where the promontory is at its narrowest 400m from the castle. Certainly, it would have been a simple matter to construct a bank and ditch across the promontory at this point and rely on the steep slopes and flanking water courses to provide natural defences to the south and north. There is a slight dip in Main Street 400m from the castle which could be caused by an infilled ditch of these defences. Ludlow, however, is in favour of the Marshalls constructed a defensive bank and ditch at this location in the early thirteenth century, and he postulates an earlier town defence lying between Dark Lane and the castle, enclosing what would have been a very small town.

The town rapidly expanded. In order to accommodate the growing population new burgages were created further east along Main Street – as many as 80 new plots were laid out. This was a planned development, evidenced by the consistent size of the plots,

which are slightly wider than those to the west, and by the creation of a wide, cigar-shaped market place on Main Street (now partially infilled by houses). The date of this new planned development is unclear, but pre-dated the foundation of St Michael's Church, which was provided for the new townspeople, and is first recorded in 1291, as map analysis shows that the churchyard was carved out of pre-existing burgage plots.

Ludlow argues convincingly that the town was provided with the extant stone-built defences in the late thirteenth/early fourteenth century. There is no documentary evidence to support this, but later records refer to rebuilds and repairs to the walls. Not all the town was within the defensive circuit; in 1326-7 238½ burgages were recorded, of which approximately 160 were inside the walls. The remainder lay outside the East Gate and to the north of the north bridge. Other houses lay close to Monkton Priory to the south of the castle. 1326-7, or soon after, marks the high point of medieval Pembroke; depopulation soon occurred.

Although Pembroke was an important medieval port there is no evidence that it ever possessed a quay. Pembroke's sheltered location and high tide range meant it was possible to load and unload ships moored on the foreshore.

The medieval town walls of Pembroke and the burgage plots, mainly defined by stone walls, are some of the best-preserved examples in Great Britain, despite some amalgamation since the nineteenth century and all effort should be made to conserve them for future generations.

Figures 7 and 8 show Pembroke as it may have been in c.1150 and c.1320.

BUILDINGS AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS

Scheduled Monuments

There are two scheduled monuments in Pembroke:

Pembroke Castle (PE005) and several sections of the medieval town walls (PE015). Both are also listed buildings.

Listed Buildings

There are approximately 120 listed buildings in Pembroke and Monkton, including the castle, sections of the medieval town walls, buildings associated with Monkton Priory and domestic medieval buildings. However, most are nineteenth and twentieth century domestic, commercial and religious buildings.

Conservation Area

The whole of the historic core of Pembroke and Monkton lies within the Pembroke Conservation area.

Registered Parks and Gardens

There are two registered parks and gardens in Pembroke and Monkton: Monkton Old Hall (grade II*) and 111 Main Street, Pembroke (grade II).

Registered Historic Landscape

Pembroke lies in the Milford Haven Waterway registered historic landscape in the Pembroke historic landscape character area.

Undesignated Historic Environment Assets

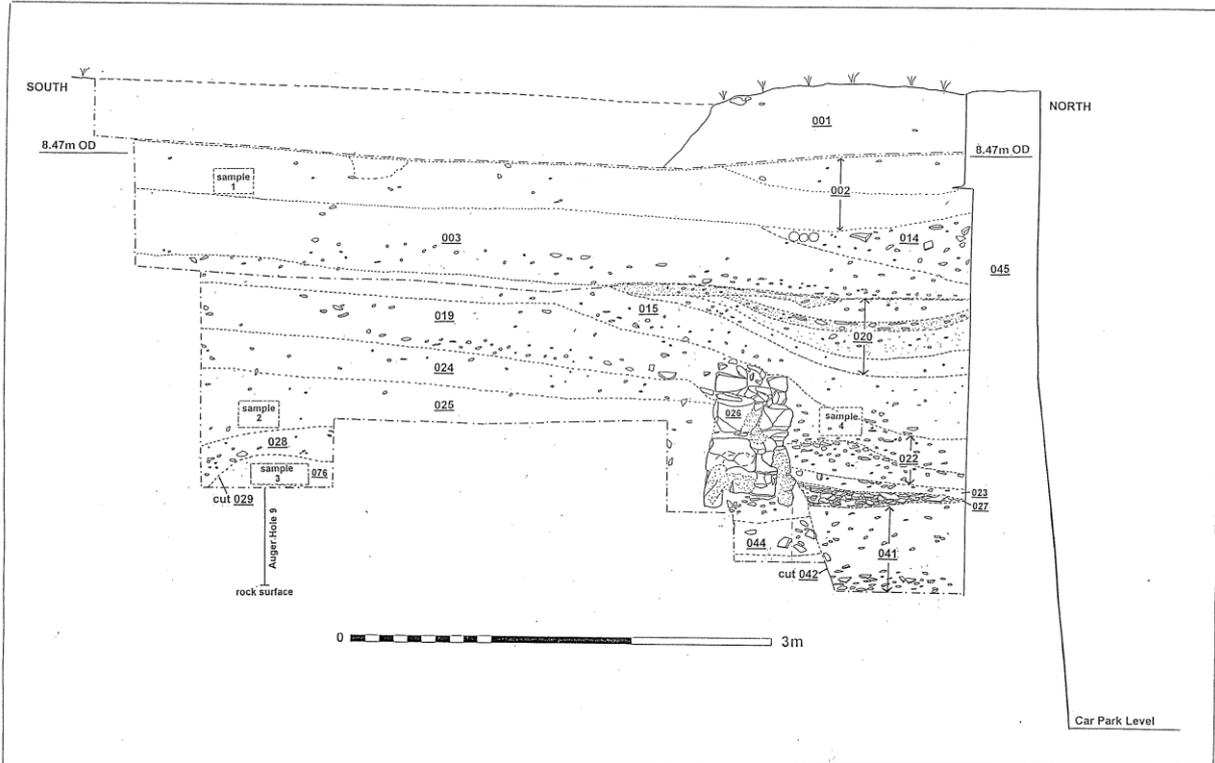
There are over 250 historic environment assets recorded on the regional historic environment record. Many of these are duplicates of listed buildings and scheduled monuments and many others are of post-medieval and modern buildings and other structures. Prehistoric and Roman finds have been recorded from a cave below the castle and Roman coins were found during excavations in the castle.

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.

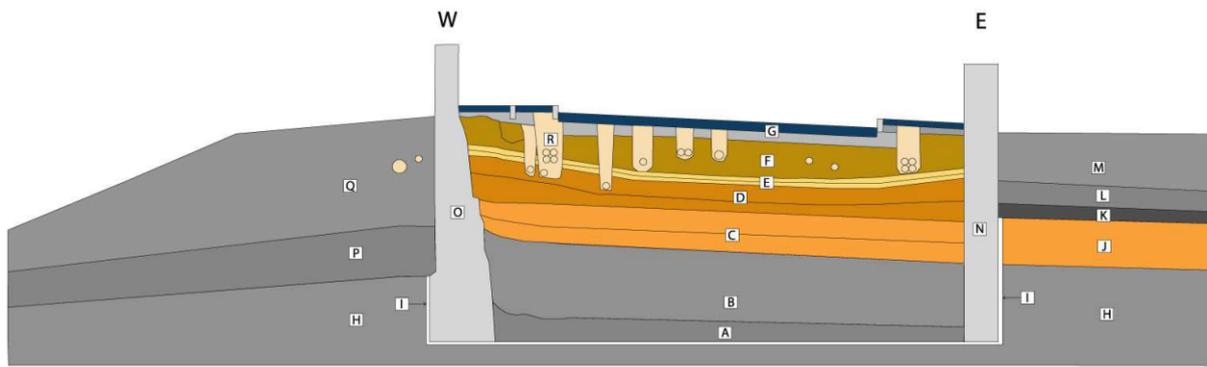
Numbers in parentheses below refer to records in the Dyfed Historic Environment Record

1. Pembroke Castle. Several excavations have taken place in the castle over the past 150 years. As the castle is not part of the town details of these are not provided here. Selected references: Cobb 1883, Ludlow 2006 (56795), Meek and Ludlow 2018 (113212).
2. Excavations in 1994 in burgages close to the castle revealed deeply stratified deposits to the rear of the burgages dating from the thirteenth to the twentieth century. The town wall to the rear of the plots seems to have been newly constructed in the seventeenth century on a slightly different line to its medieval predecessor. A substantial rock-cut ditch was noted, possibly a medieval feature. Reference: Lawler 1995 and 2001 (30116).



Section drawing of the 1994 excavation showing the deeply stratified deposits behind the upstanding town wall.

3. A watching brief was maintained during the construction of a new drill hall close to the castle in 2002. The footprint of the new hall lay within the demolished old hall. Foundation trenches cut through deposits associated with gardens of eighteenth century and later date. No medieval deposits were identified. Reference: Schlee 2002 (46044).
4. A watching brief was maintained during flood alleviation works on Monkton Bridge in 2006. The date of the current bridge is unknown, but a bridge is known at the location from at least 1331. No evidence for a bridge predating the current structure was noted during the watching brief. Reference: Schlee 2006 (56897).



- | | | |
|---|--|----------------------------------|
| A Stony silt backfill | G Modern road surface | M Disturbed topsoil |
| B Grey silty clay backfill | H Natural grey silty clay deposit | N East wall of bridge |
| C Orange silty clay backfill | I Cut for bridge construction | O West wall of bridge |
| D Make-up for earlier road surface | J Natural orange silty clay deposit | P Waterlain silts |
| E Early road surface | K Crushed slate demolition layer | Q Topsoil |
| F Make-up for modern road surface | L Grey silty topsoil | R Modern service trenches |



Schematic section of Monkton Bridge.

5. A watching brief was maintained during construction of an extension to a social club in former burgage plot in 2007. Foundation trenches were deep and narrow and thus identifying archaeological deposits was problematic. A pit of unknown date was observed. Reference: Crane 2007.



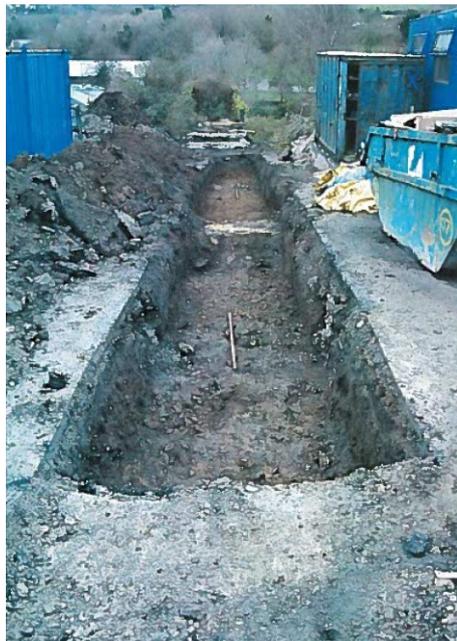
Excavating the foundation trenches to the social club.

6. A watching brief following demolition of a lean-to for construction of a small extension to 68 Main Street in 2005 revealed no significant archaeological deposits. Reference: Cambria Archaeology 2005 (54921).



General view of the watching brief area at 68 Main Street.

7. An evaluation of two trenches in 2008 to the rear of Tudor House, 115 Main Street, revealed heavy disturbance from the late nineteenth century onwards over much of the site. However, furthest away from the street frontage intact garden soil was recorded, perhaps containing post-medieval or even medieval garden features. Reference: Owen 2008 (62984).



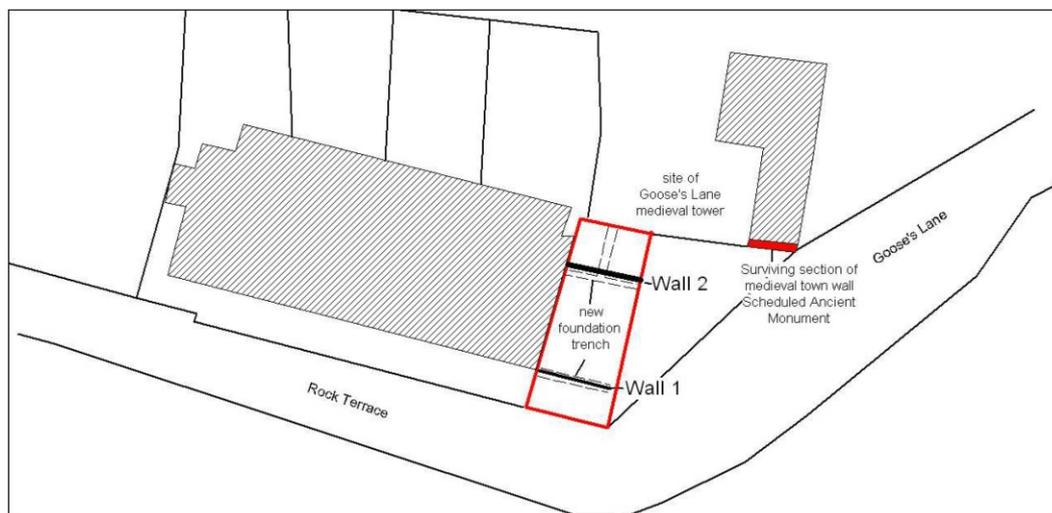
General view of Trench 2 at Tudor House.

8. Nothing of archaeological interest was noted during a watching brief on construction of a rear extension to Robinson Retail, East End Square, in 2007. Reference: Crane 2007a (63405).



The foundation trenches to the rear of Robinson Retail.

9. A watching brief carried out immediately outside the medieval town wall at Rock Terrace revealed two walls relating to post-medieval buildings of minor archaeological significance. Reference: Dyfed Archaeological Trust 2008 (64747).



The location of the two post-medieval walls recorded during the watching brief at Rock Terrace.

10. Four small, widely spaced but deep evaluation trenches were excavated on the Commons to inform a flood alleviation scheme. In all trenches modern deposits overlay estuarine and marine clays. Reference: Crane 2006 (55921).



Photograph of one of the evaluation trenches on the Commons.

11. A watching brief was maintained during topsoil strip for a new cycle way at Monkton. The topsoil strip was very shallow and thus nothing of archaeological interest was noted. Reference: Crane 2012 (102873).



Photograph of the topsoil strip for the cycle way at Monkton.

12. Two short watching briefs were undertaken during rebuilding of a corner of Monkton churchyard wall. The wall had been rebuilt in the post-medieval period on earlier footings, perhaps of medieval date. It was considered likely that medieval deposits

survive in the area of the wall – these were not disturbed during the work.
References: Bell 2016, Poucher 2011 (108990, 102241).



The churchyard wall during the rebuilding work.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

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

Apart from within the castle, archaeological investigations in Pembroke have been mostly limited to watching briefs during small-scale construction projects. However, an evaluation in burgages close to the castle and north quay has demonstrated that significant and deeply stratified archaeological deposits are present in the town.

Several issues particular to Pembroke need to be addressed: the early defences of the town, the dating of construction of the extant town walls, the expansion of the town during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the chronology of burgages.

Buildings, many of them listed, present almost unbroken street frontages and thus opportunities for archaeological investigations in key areas are severely limited. However, the admittedly small-scale work done in burgages to the rear of the street frontages have highlighted the potential of these areas.

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Databases and online references

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

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.

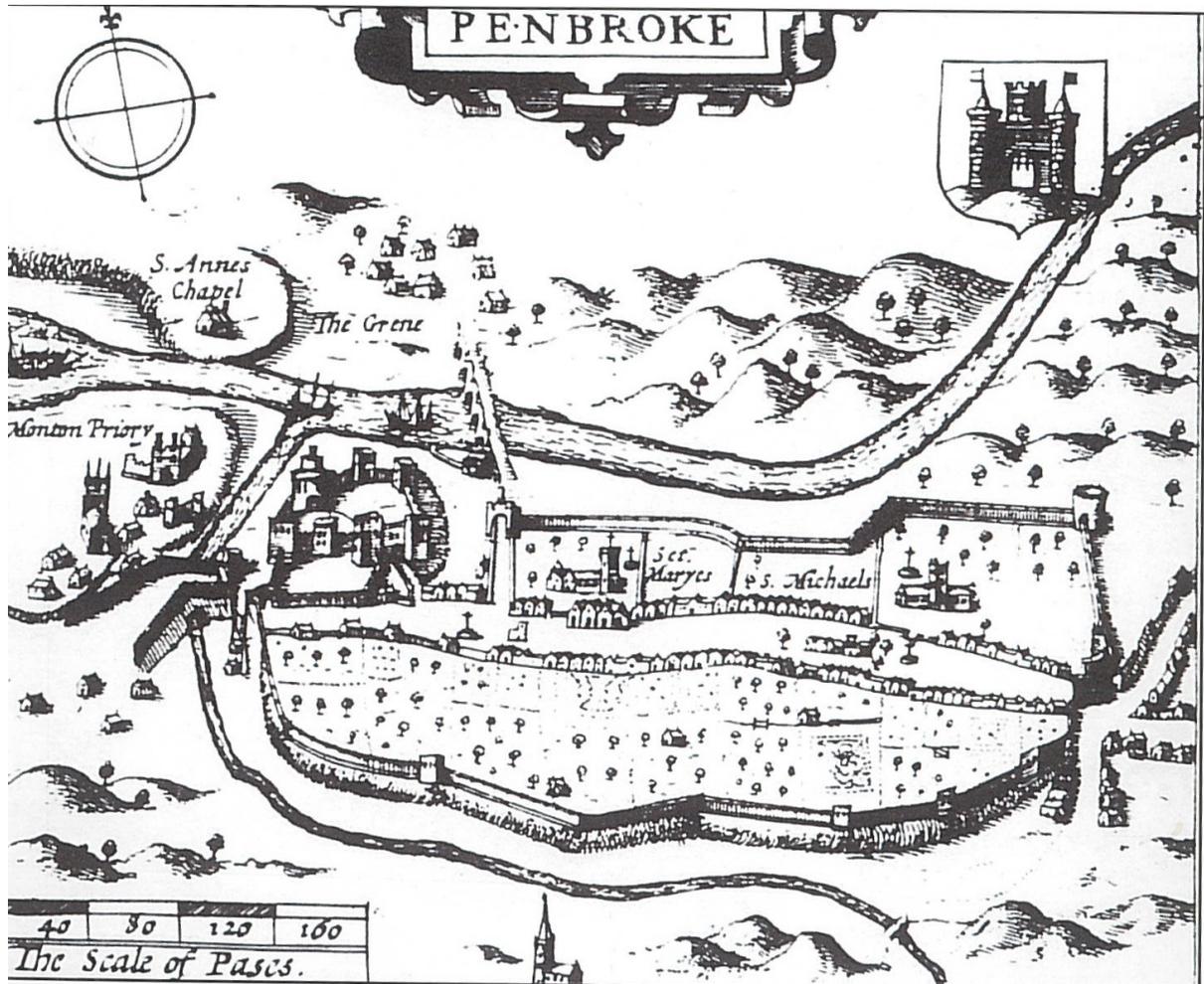


Figure 2. John Speed's 1611 map of Pembroke.

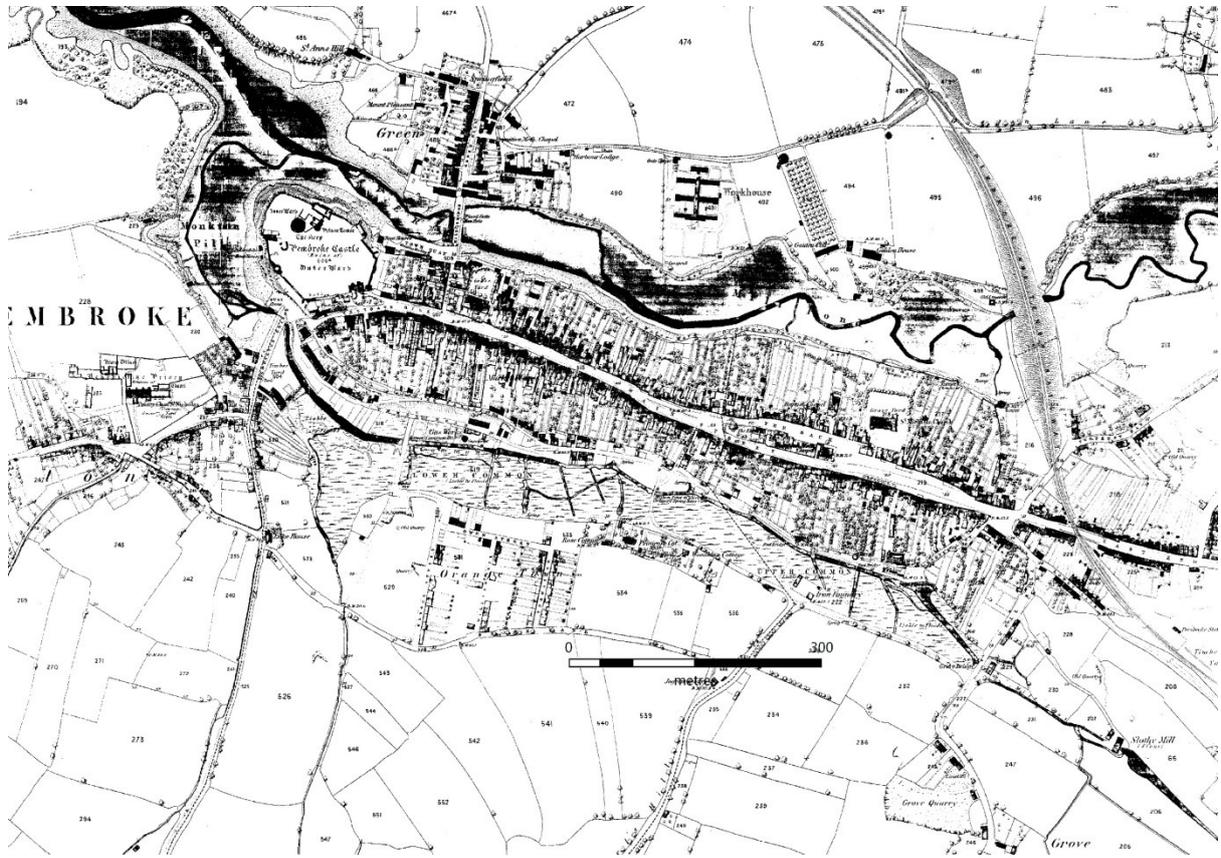


Figure 3. Extract from the 1866 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 1st Edition map (Pembroke 40.09).

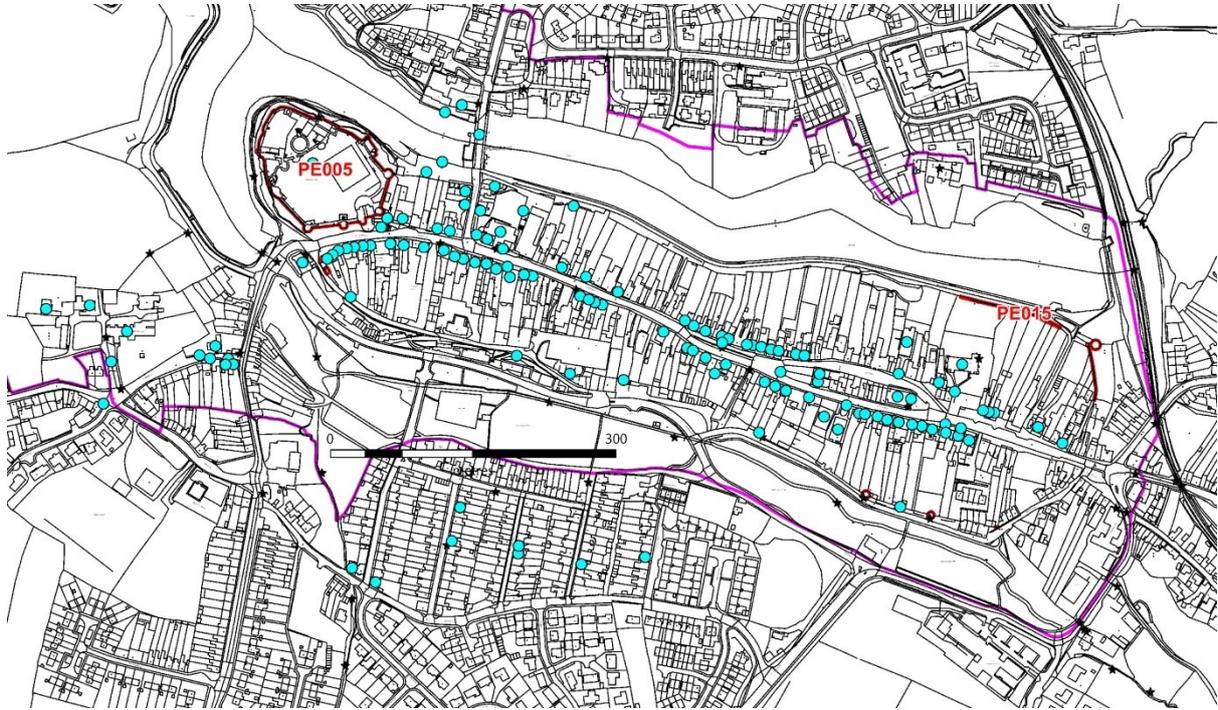


Figure 4. Listed buildings (blue circles), scheduled monuments (outlined in red) and the conservation area (outlined in purple).

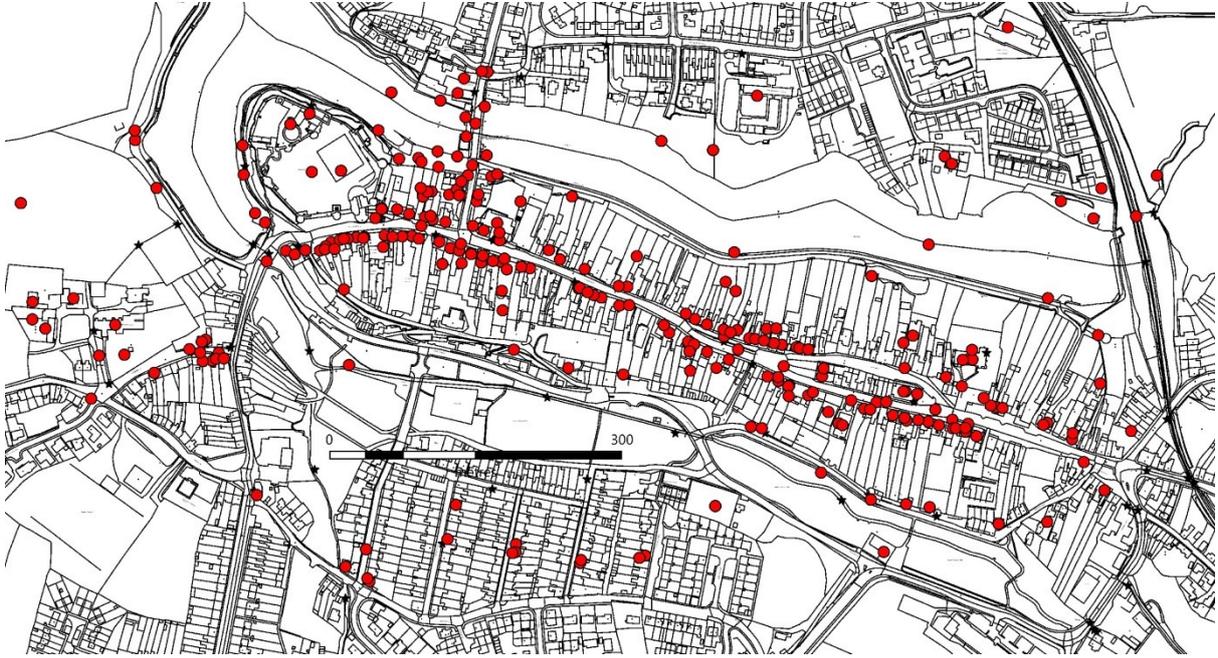


Figure 5. HER records.

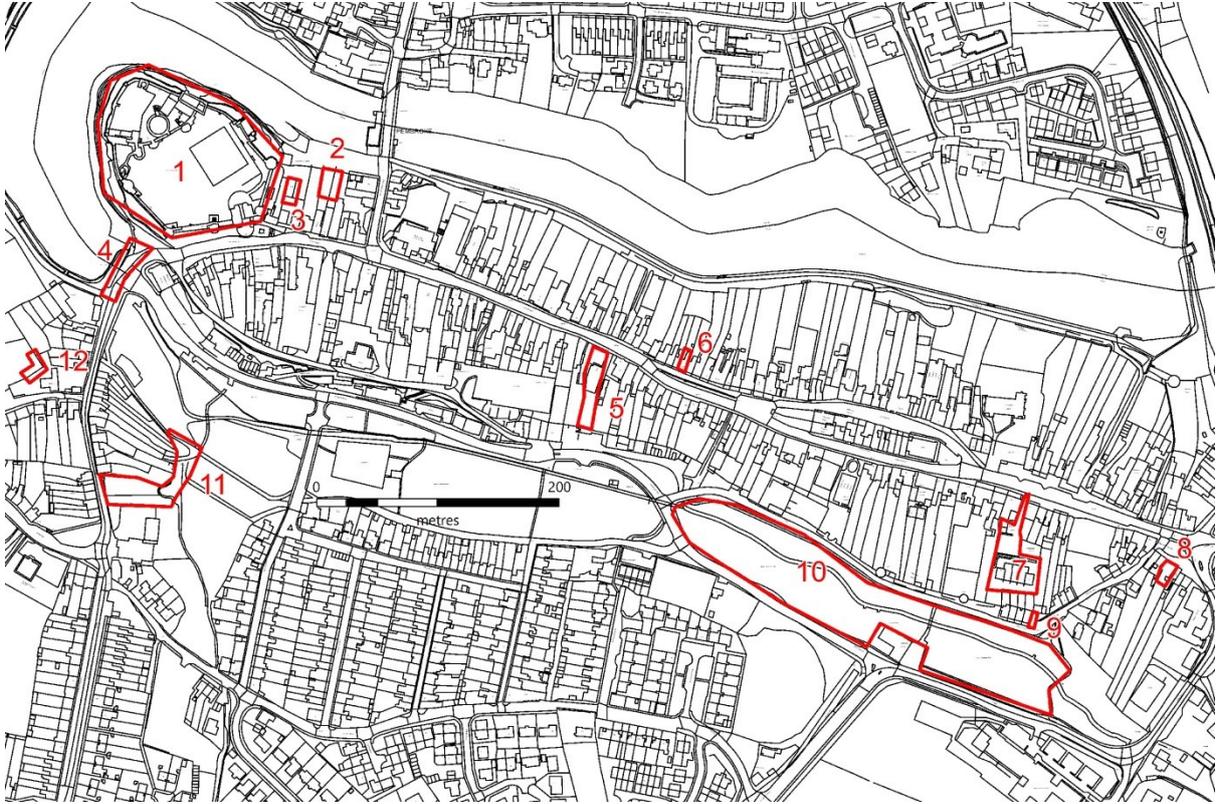


Figure 6. Location of archaeological interventions.

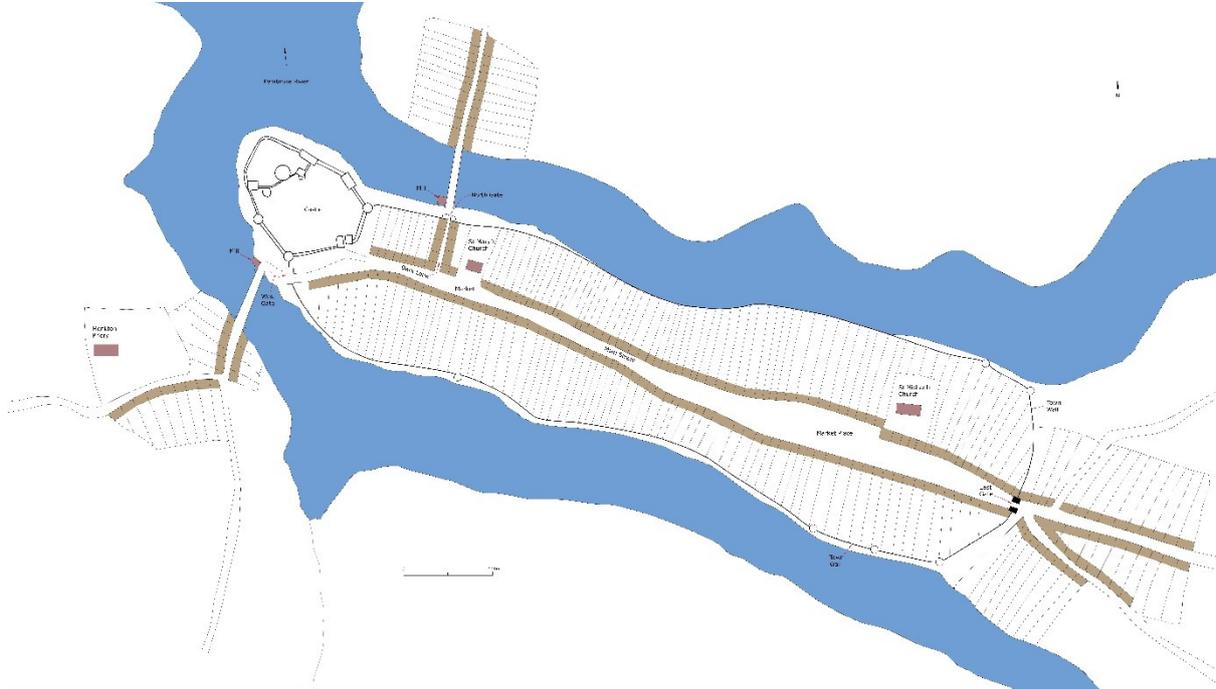


Figure 8. Conjectural plan of Pembroke at its maximum extent in the medieval period, c.1320.