

EXCAVATIONS AT CARMARTHEN, 1969

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THE SECOND SEASON of excavation took place at Carmarthen for four weeks in late July-early August, 1969. Through the generosity of the Carmarthen U.D.C. an area of land approaching two acres in size and scheduled for development as a car park was made available in the north-western corner of the Roman town. The sum of over two thousand pounds that financed the 1969 season was generously contributed by the Ministry of Public Building and Works, the Board of Celtic Studies, Carmarthenshire County Council, Carmarthen U.D.C., members of the Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society and contributors to the appeal fund launched on behalf of the excavations by the Mayor of Carmarthen and the Chairman of the Carmarthen R.D.C. To these sources and all the supervisors and volunteers who worked on the site the success of the excavation is due.

The original season of excavation in 1968 (described in the preceding volume of this journal pp.2-5) had for the first time defined the shape of the cantonal capital of *Moridunum Demetarum*. It was seen (fig 1) that changes of modern street level and subsidence cracks in buildings indicated the points at either end of Priory Street where the south-western and north-eastern ramparts ran across the modern road. The line of the north-western rampart was suggested by the remains of a bank to the rear of Richmond Terrace; the presence of a ditch on the outer side was further suggested by the name 'Sunken Lane' applied to the present road line in Speed's map of Carmarthen. Excavation in 1968 confirmed the existence of a rampart bank along the rear of Richmond Terrace and the aforementioned evidence on the ground indicated the second and third sides. Only the fourth has not been determined precisely as the area to the south-east of Priory Street is too heavily built over to allow large sections to be cut. There is a hint of the rampart line in the Vicarage garden but towards the south-eastern corner the extensive remains associated with the medieval Priory have destroyed all trace of the line. Indeed the period when the bulk of the Roman town area belonged to the Priory must have been the time when many of the late Roman levels were robbed for building stone.

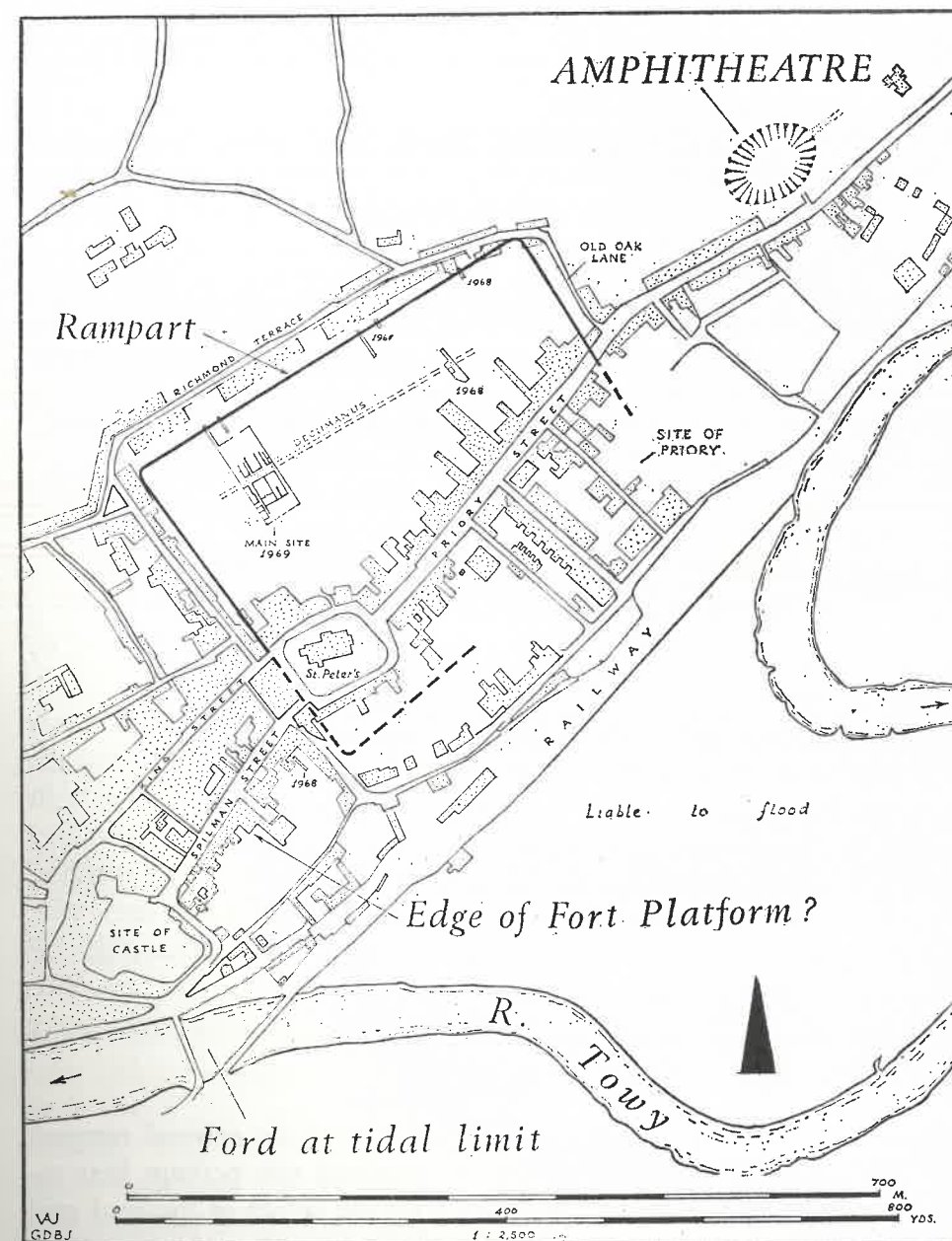


Fig. 1. General plan of Roman Carmarthen.

The strategy adopted in the area available was to remove the overburden of the topsoil by mechanical means. At the northern end of the excavations two sections were cut through the line of the rampart. Then four trenches were cut round the perimeter of the rectangular excavation area behind the rampart and a grid of twenty-eight boxes was laid out in the interior. The evidence immediately apparent from the perimeter sections, particularly the line of an east-west street, speeded interpretation of the buildings located in the centre.

The Rampart

In 1968, despite the clear-cut evidence of a two-phase town wall on the northern side of *Moridunum Demetarum*, modern buildings etc. had made it impossible to cut a continuous section across the rampart. In 1969, however, two sections were excavated across the total width of the rampart. Both produced indential structural evidence with which the 1968 discoveries can readily be assimilated. The original rampart-core proved in both cases to have been c.19ft. wide and survived to a maximum height of 4ft. 9ins. This turf and clay bank was fronted by a v-shaped ditch approximately 18ft. wide with a depth of 9ft. below the original ground level in the Roman period. The second period saw additions on a massive scale. The period I ditch was filled in and the front of the rampart mass extended to the line of a stone revetment built over the earlier ditch. In 1968 several courses of the revetment had been found *in situ* but in 1969 the stone had been robbed in both sections. The robber trench suggested that the revetment was c.5ft. 3ins. wide when standing. To the rear of the original core a massive dump of clay was added bringing the total width of the town wall to no less than 58ft. The back of the rampart at this stage was packed down with heavy stone slabs to prevent excessive erosion.

A *terminus post quem* for the construction of the original rampart was provided by Antonine samian; the structure was perhaps best regarded as a development contemporary with the layout of the road grid (see below).

The Town (fig. 2)

The area excavated behind the rampart proved to be both structurally and historically informative, largely due to the existence of an east-west street, or *decumanus*, running through part of the site. This made it far easier than usual to identify building plans and to examine the transition from random development to the gridded layout associated with the formal planning of the Demetic capital.

Two features, a pit and a timber strip building, were found in levels below those of the later town. The associated pottery in both cases belonged to the early second century, when civil settlement was presumably expanding from the *vicus* originally associated with the Flavian fort to the south-east (v.*Carm.Ant.V*(1969),4).

The primary level of the street belonging to the gridded layout produced a worn coin of Aurelius Caesar and so suggests the formal creation of the cantonal capital towards the end of the second century. From then on the development of the two areas to north and south of the *decumanus* took different lines. To the south the buildings were residential in character and large in scale, to the north the structures were far smaller and associated with industry or trade. In the latter area, apart from the corner of a small house (Building E), all the structures located were timber built, i.e. Buildings F, G and H. Building G contained a small furnace very similar to another cut down into the remains of Building E, probably not before the late third century. Building H yielded a crucible used in copper (?) working from a third small furnace set, in this instance, in the rear room of a shop or workshop.

South of the *decumanus* four more buildings were identified. Below them all ran the line of a robber trench (c.80ft. long) stratigraphically sealed beneath the make-up for Building A. Its function is not clear but it may have been associated with an early building in the vicinity. The clean fill of the robber trench suggested that the stone blocks had been thoroughly and carefully removed. On the western side Building D survived very fragmentarily and overlaid the remains of a third century structure (C) abutting the *decumanus*. The latter building was 59ft. wide overall and at least 22ft. long. Internally it was divided into two rooms (27ft. and 26ft. wide) and had a colonnaded portico six foot wide along the edge of the street.

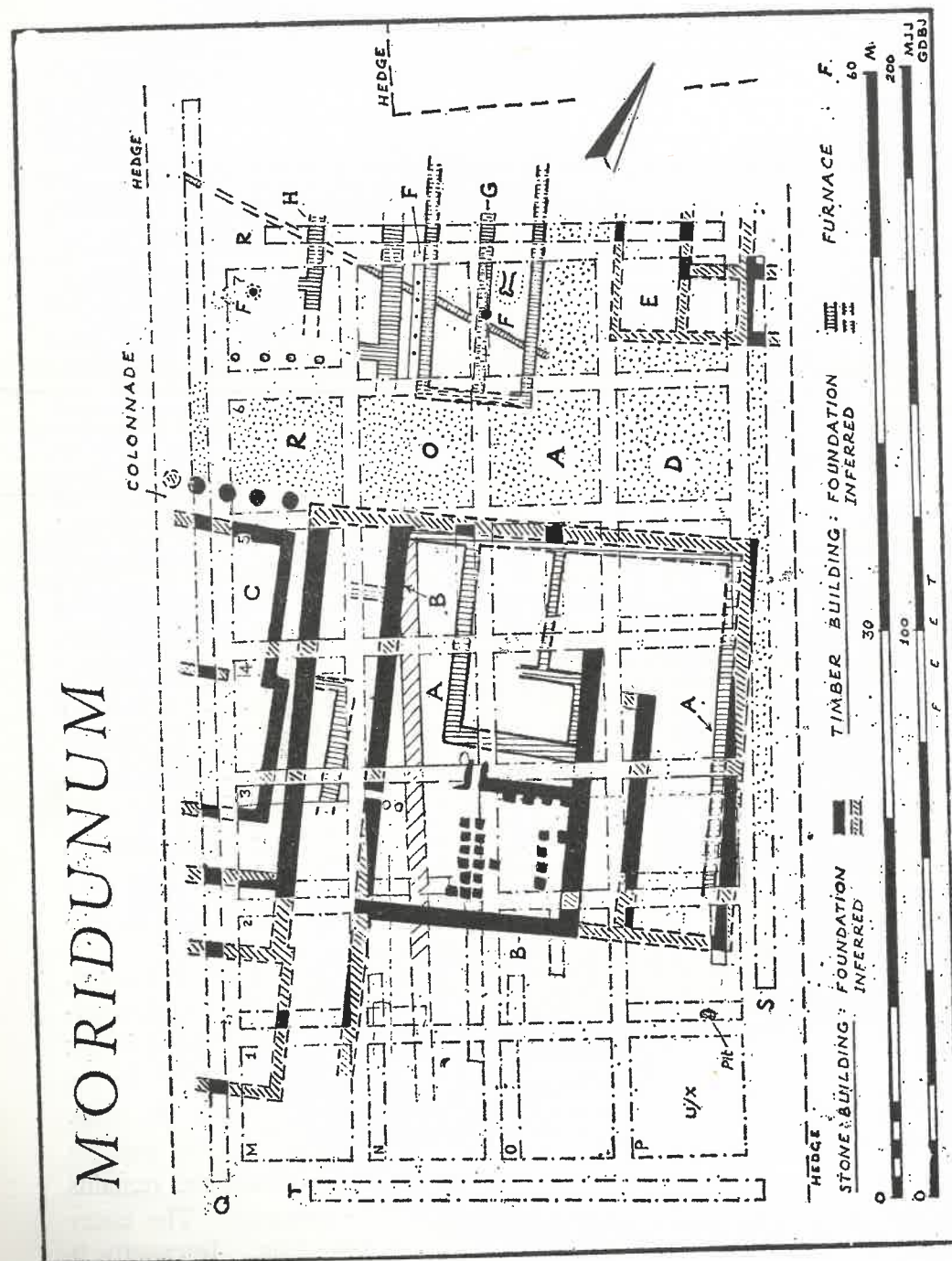


Fig 2. Plan of the 1969 Excavations.

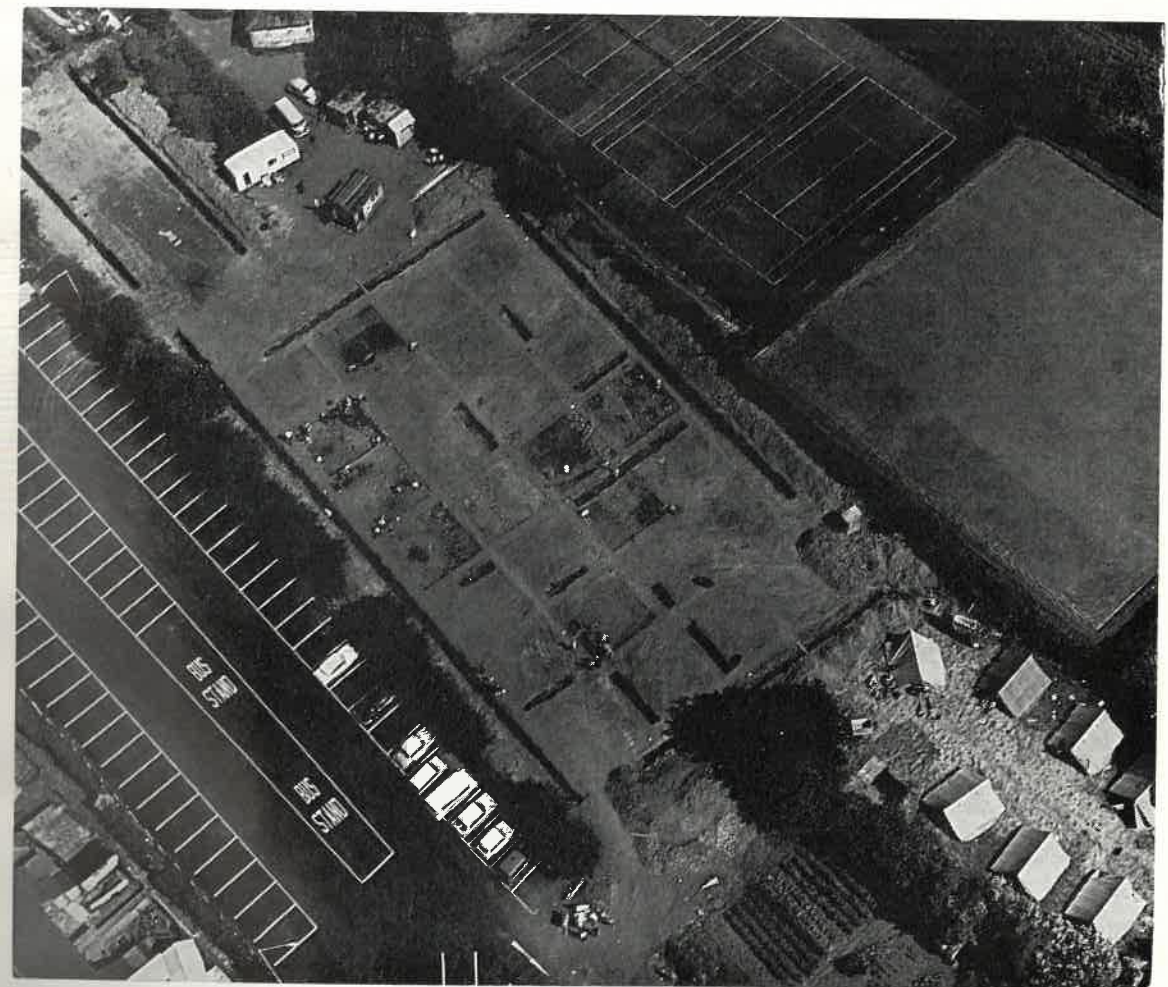


Plate A. An aerial view of the excavations at an early stage. The rampart sections can be seen in the top left hand corner.

Photo : K. DAVIES

*Photo : K. DAVIES*

Plate B. An aerial view of the excavation area alongside the St. Peter's car park. The open area represents the north-western corner of the Roman town of Carmarthen (*Moridunum Demetarum*) with the town rampart embodied in the lines of Richmond Terrace (in foreground) and Little Water Street running at right angles in the middleground.



Plate C. Building B: hypocaust *pilae* surviving in trenches N3/03.



Plate D. Building B: foundation courses of walls in 04/P4. The alley abutting the eastern side of the building can be seen in section in the foreground.

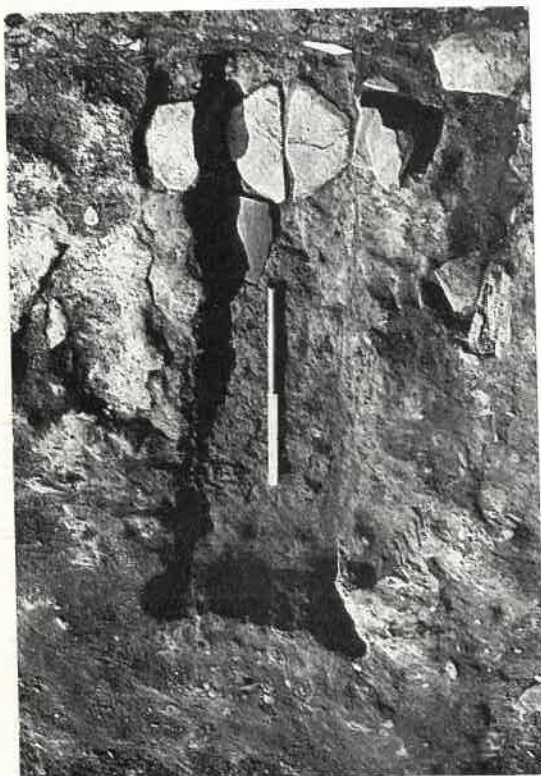


Plate E. The kiln in the eastern half of timber building G. The stone remains of the stokehole lie to the right while the two slits to the left end probably represent extraction vents.

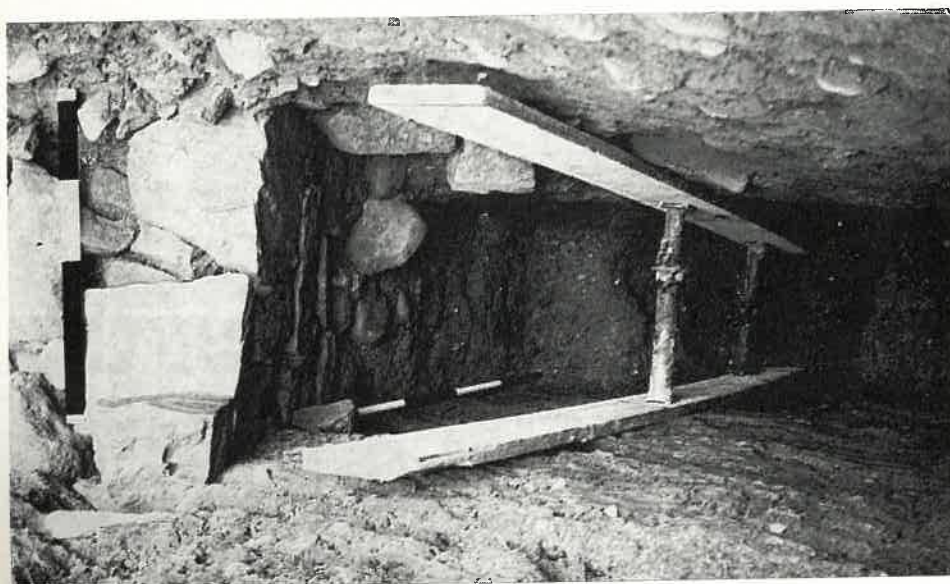


Plate F. The excavated section of the stone revetment of the town rampart (Richmond Terrace, 1968). Beneath the safety scaffolding lies the sump of the earlier (Per.1) ditch belonging to the time when the rampart did not have a stone face.



Plate G. Coins of the emperor Magnentius and his brother Decentius (left) (A.D. 350-3) from the foundation level of Building B (see p.9).

The two main buildings lay to the east. The earlier (A) was represented by a series of timber floors resting on clay and bounded by the lines of robber trenches. It was a substantial structure (at least 61ft. by 69ft.) and the associated coin series ran down to c.A.D.320. The whole area was re-levelled for the construction of a far larger building (B) measuring over 80ft. by 110ft. that survived in the form of actual foundation or robber trenches. Although much of the evidence was badly robbed, it was clear that most of the rooms had been floored with tesserae of terracotta and Prescelly stone and that one of the rooms contained a hypocaust with a furnace in the north wall. The construction of this building (B) was tightly dated by the discovery in the foundation level of two fresh coins of Magnentius and his brother Decentius (A.D. 351-3). Allowing the structure a normal life (there was no evidence of violent destruction), this takes urban life in the westernmost cantonal capital of Roman Britain into the last quarter of the fourth century, if not later.

In the limited excavations of 1968 the area examined further east along Priory Street produced nothing later than third century material from a stratified context. At the time late coins finds made sporadically in the area suggested that the absence of fourth century material was due to modern disturbance. Excavation further west in a less disturbed area in 1969 has thus filled the archaeological lacuna and tied the relationship of the rampart to the street grid. The evidence of late fourth century occupation can be taken to link with mention of Carmarthen in the story of Maxen Wledig (=Magnus Maximus, emperor A.D.383-8), an episode in the Mabinogion that is generally thought to be early and therefore more historically reliable than most.

At the other end of the scale the formal layout of *Moridunum Demetarum* can be seen to fit in with the development of other British cantonal capitals historically, if not geographically. While the existence of a Roman town and amphitheatre (excavated exploratorily in 1968) throws a completely fresh light on the extent to which Romanisation was carried in the west, the development of the rampart, for instance, coincides with information from other cantonal capitals.¹ Combining the *terminus post quem* of the material in the rampart core (p.6) with the presumed contemporary layout of the street grid and the additional

terminus of underlying features, then the town wall belongs to the late second century. No dating evidence of significance has yet emerged to suggest how long an interval ensued before the facing of the wall with a stone revetment; but this is a common *desideratum* on Romano-British town sites.

The two seasons 1968-9 complete the initial programme of work on Roman Carmarthen. In 1969 no work was carried out in the amphitheatre or on the heavily built-up area of the presumed fort in the King Street-Spilman Street complex. Further work on these, as well as the area of the Roman town, will depend on funds and, in the case of the fort, a sufficiently large area for excavation. It is to be hoped that, if further work ensues, the Society and Carmarthen Museum will take a major part in it.

Acknowledgements

Organising a large-scale excavation in the centre of a modern town involves much co-ordination and it is a pleasure to acknowledge the debts incurred. Mr. Barry Long and Capt. J. Smith ran various aspects of the actual excavation, while Lt.Col. and Mrs. G. H. F. Chaldecott maintained admirable liaison between the excavators and local interests. The success of the excavation owes a great debt to the support of the Mayor, Ald. D. Howells, and his predecessor, Ald. L. Howells, together with the Town Clerk, Mr. W. John Owen, and the Borough Surveyor, Mr. V. Evans. Much of the equipment on site was lent through the generosity of Mr. G. Lewis to whom the excavators are much indebted for his continuing interest. Not least the excavation benefited from the support of the members and officials of the Society, particularly Major Kemmis Buckley, Mr. W. H. Morris and Mr. Michael C. S. Evans.

Footnotes

1. J. S. Wachter, *The Civitas Capitals of Roman Britain*, p.62.

SOME ASPECTS OF EARLY NONCONFORMITY AND EARLY COMMERCE IN LLANELLI

By W. KEMMIS BUCKLEY, M.A.

(An address given to the Society at Llanelli Public Library on February 20th 1970).

IN THE YEAR 1760¹ there rode into Llanelli, perhaps indeed past this very building, Sir Thomas Stepney's new agent. He was aged 18, he came from a Pembrokeshire family, and his name was Henry Child. For the next seventy years he and his son-in-law, Rev. James Buckley, had a considerable influence on the growth of Wesleyan Methodism and on the development of business in Llanelli; and it is about these two men, remarkable by any standard, that I would like to speak tonight.

I had always assumed that Sir Thomas chose Henry Child as his agent because he was a Methodist, but I now find that this is not so: he did not become a Member of the Methodist Society until 1769². We will never know the reason why Sir Thomas engaged him; it may have been because he knew his family in Pembrokeshire, or it may have been simply that he had recognized his ability. Whatever the reason, he can have had no cause to regret his choice.

This was an exciting time in the history of Llanelli. New ideas, religious and commercial, had begun to penetrate into West Wales. John Wesley was bringing the Gospel to the people; and Henry Child's arrival in the Borough almost coincided with that of Alexander Raby and Chauncey Townsend and just preceded that of the other big business men of the time—the Wards, Wedges, Nevills and Lord Ashburnham.

He could see that there were ample opportunities for anyone with capital to make money; and his first task was therefore to create capital. This he did in the classic manner by working harder and saving his earnings. In addition to his duties with the Stepney Estate, he became agent³ to Admiral William Langdon, and to the Vaughans of Golden Grove in respect of their Kidwelly and Llanelli property.

By 1769 he was ready to take advantage of the situation created by the growing population which followed industrial expansion, and he took