

The Old Infirmary Priory Street, Carmarthen Archaeological monitoring



Prepared for:
Mr. Dorian Davies

NAP Archaeology

Location	The Old Infirmary, Priory Street
District	Carmarthen
Planning reference	W/25480
Grid reference	SN 4167 2029
Client	Mr. Dorian Davies
Project number	150901
Report number	150901 – v.2
Date	15/01/2018

Contents

Summary	1
1. Introduction	2
1.1 Project background and commission	
1.2 Aims of the project	
1.3 Abbreviations used in the report	
2. The Site	3
2.1 Location	
2.2 Geology and topography	
3. Archaeological and historical background	4
3.1 Summary history of the site	
3.2 Previous archaeological work	
4. Results	6
4.1 Methodology	
4.2 Monitoring Area 1	
4.3 Monitoring Area 2	
4.4 Monitoring Area 3	
4.5 The finds	
5. Conclusions	13
5.1 The results of the evaluation	

Figures

Figure 1: Location plan

Figure 2: Site plan showing Archaeological Monitoring Areas

Figure 3: Ordnance Survey map of the site 1906

Figure 3: Ordnance Survey map of the site 1948

Plates

Plate 1: Northeast elevation of Infirmary showing location of Monitoring Area 1

Plate 2: Concrete pad that covered Monitoring Area 1

Plate 3: Detail of the concrete pad in Monitoring Area 1 showing remains of former block structure

Plate 4: Rear elevation of Infirmary showing location of Monitoring Area 2

Plate 5: Detail of the excavated foundation trenches in Monitoring Area 2

Plate 6: Possible burnt clay exposed in the base of a foundation trench in Monitoring Area 2

Plate 7: Southwest elevation of Infirmary showing the made ground and concrete pad in Monitoring Area 3

Summary

The redevelopment of the Old Infirmary, Priory Street, Carmarthenshire (SN 4167 2029), required archaeological monitoring during the excavations of the foundations for new extensions and services. The monitoring was intended to provide appropriate levels of recording of any archaeological remains and deposits exposed during the works.

The site lies in an area of known archaeological potential within the Roman town of Moridunum and within the medieval town.

Archaeological monitoring was carried out on the excavations for the foundations of three new extensions and the associated services. No significant archaeological deposits were encountered as the Infirmary had been subject to extensive extension and demolition in the past and this appeared to have removed any archaeological deposits that may have been present on the site.

1. Introduction

1.1 Project Background and commission

A programme of archaeological monitoring was required during the redevelopment of the former Infirmary, Priory Street, Carmarthen (NGR SN 4167 2029). This work was undertaken to fulfil planning requirements (Planning reference: W/25480) recommended by the Heritage Management Section of the Dyfed Archaeological Trust, archaeological advisors to the Local Planning Authority.

The work was conducted in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by NAP Archaeology and commissioned by Mr. Dorian Davies.

1.2 Aims of the project

The objective of the archaeological monitoring was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence or absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

In order to achieve those aims a range of source material was also examined to place the results of the monitoring in their local, regional and national contexts. The reviewed material included unpublished reports on previous archaeological work, maps, and published material.

1.3 Abbreviations used in the report

Previously known archaeological sites are identified by their Dyfed Historic Environment Record (DHER) reference number and located, where appropriate, by their National Grid Reference (NGR).

References to other archaeological reports and published works will be given in brackets throughout the text, with details listed in the References section at the end of the report.

2. The site

2.1 Location and topography

The site occupied a position on the south side of Priory Street, the main route into the town from the east, and consisted of a small plot occupied by the shell of the Old Infirmary. The area around the building had been levelled up and some parts concreted over.

The Infirmary, which was constructed in 1857-1858 and opened in 1858, is a Grade II Listed Building and it lies within the Priory Street Conservation Area. The Gate posts at the entrance onto Priory street are also Grade II Listed.

2.2 Geology and topography

The underlying geology of the site consists of Mudstone of the Tetragraptus Beds, a sedimentary Bedrock formed during the Ordovician Period in an environment previously dominated by deep seas¹ overlain by superficial deposits of sand and gravel laid down in ice age conditions of the Quaternary Period, which were exposed in the southeast corner of the site.

To the south of the site lie alluvium, clay, silt, sand and gravel deposits of the Towy Valley.

The monitoring on the site showed that the site had been raised and levelled with dark brown silty loam and building rubble, to a depth of up to 1.3m.

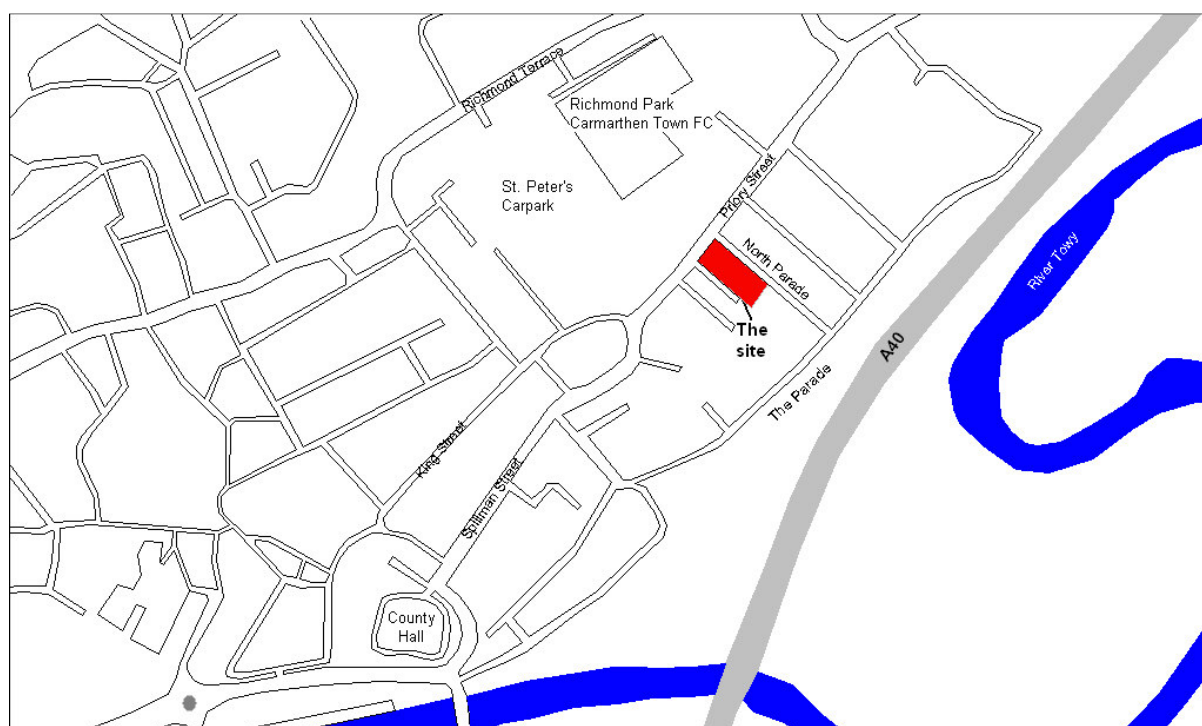


Figure 1: Location plan showing the site on the south side of Priory street.

¹ <http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>

3. Archaeological and historical background

3.1 Summary history of the site

The following is a summary of the development of the site within the history of Carmarthen and is not intended to be a comprehensive history of the town, which is available elsewhere.

A Roman fort was established c. 75 AD in the King Street and Spilman Street area of the town, with a road linking it to the fort in Llandeilo. That road is thought to have been on the line now followed by Priory Street and the A40 to the east and it is likely that a vicus developed along this road and even though there is little evidence for that early settlement (Schlee 2012) it is probable that the Roman town developed on the site of the vicus. By the mid 2nd century the town was being developed with the line of Priory Street being the main east-west route through the town.

The early town appeared to have been largely made up of timber buildings, with those recorded during excavation, c.100m to the northeast of the site, at Richmond Park Primary School and St Peter's Car Park typical of the early town (Dyfed HER No.36). By the 3rd century more stone buildings were being constructed and the town defences were well established. The town, along with many Roman settlements, declined during the 4th century and does not appear to have survived as a town following the end of the Roman period in the early 5th century. Large parts of the old Roman town remain relatively undeveloped and contain significant buried archaeological deposits, which has led to several areas of the town being protected as Scheduled Ancient Monuments (CM 234 and CM243),

A new town, known as New Carmarthen, was established to the west of the site in front of the castle gates in the early 12th century when the castle was built, in the area the around Guildhall, Notts Square and Quay Street. During the medieval period the area of the Roman town remained as a separate area, under the control of the Priory and remained largely agricultural land and undeveloped. It was in the post-medieval and early modern periods that the area around Priory Street began to be developed to any great degree.

The Carmarthen St. Peter parish tithe map of 1838 shows the site as one of a number of undeveloped plots on the south side of Priory Street². The Infirmary was built in 1857-58 and by the late 19th century it was shown on Ordnance Survey mapping as a square building set within a narrow landscaped plot.

Subsequent mapping showed a series of extensions built on the rear, northeast and southwest sides of the building, which by 1964 had become significant and included a large rear block and large extensions on the southwest and northeast sides, reflecting the use of the building as a hospital after it was taken over by the National Health Service in the late 1940s (see Figs 3 and 4 below for the positions of some of the extensions).

Aerial photographs from 1929³ and 1951⁴ show the Infirmary with the large extensions to the sides and rear of the building and the photographs clearly show how the earlier extensions, which were removed c.15 years ago, occupied the areas of the extensions monitored during this project.

² <http://cynefin.archiveswales.org.uk/en/tithe-maps/visualize/#Carmarthen%20St%20Peter&/transcribe/097291591593/&/georeference/301303234824/&/visualize/301303234824&/map/266230060841/>

³ <https://britainfromabove.org.uk/en/search?keywords=WPW029795&country=global&year=all>

⁴ <https://britainfromabove.org.uk/en/search?keywords=WAW039196&country=global&year=all>

3.2 Previous archaeological work

Carmarthen has seen extensive archaeological work, much of which has encountered evidence for the Roman town, so the following summary will concentrate on those that are close to site in order to place the site in its context.

All the major excavations of the Roman Town in Carmarthen have both been carried out to the north of Priory Street, with the nearest being those in St Peters Car Park and to the rear of 111-115 Priory Street around 170m to the northwest (James 2003). The excavations revealed the floor plans of Roman buildings and traces of Roman buildings were also revealed during an evaluation of the Priory Motor Mart on the north side of Priory Street (Page 2007), approximately 100m to the northeast of the site and in the Richmond Park football ground (Schlee 2012).

Works closer and perhaps more relevant to the site included the excavation of a short length of probable Roman road during the construction of the flats immediately to the south of the site (Border Archaeology 2002). Parts of the same road may also have been recorded in 1922 (Murphy and Page 2009). The construction of the supermarket in the plot to the west of the site was accompanied by a range of archaeological works that included pre-construction test-pitting that recorded evidence for Roman occupation, which may have included part of a burnt clay walled building (Ludlow 1999, 9). Monitoring works during the construction of the supermarket revealed Roman deposits and artefacts, some of which were residual and recovered from later deposits, but all were indicative of Roman activity on and close to the site (Crane 2000). Recent archaeological evaluations at number 131 Priory Street, opposite the Infirmary also revealed evidence for Roman buildings on the north side of Priory Street (Poucher 2012).

4. Results

4.1 Monitoring methodology

The monitoring consisted of three main areas where the new extensions were constructed on the northeast (Area 1), rear (southeast – Area 2), and southwest (Area 3) sides of the Infirmary building. All new foundation and service trenches were opened using a mechanical excavator operated under archaeological supervision.

All hand-collected finds other than those which were obviously modern, from the spoil were retained for inspection as, although they are unstratified, they have the potential to provide important information about the site and its use.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using a pro forma recording system. The foundation trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales, usually 1:50 for location plans and 1:20 or 1:10 for archaeological plans and sections. A photographic record of all archaeological features and deposits was maintained throughout and general photographs showing progress of the works were also taken.

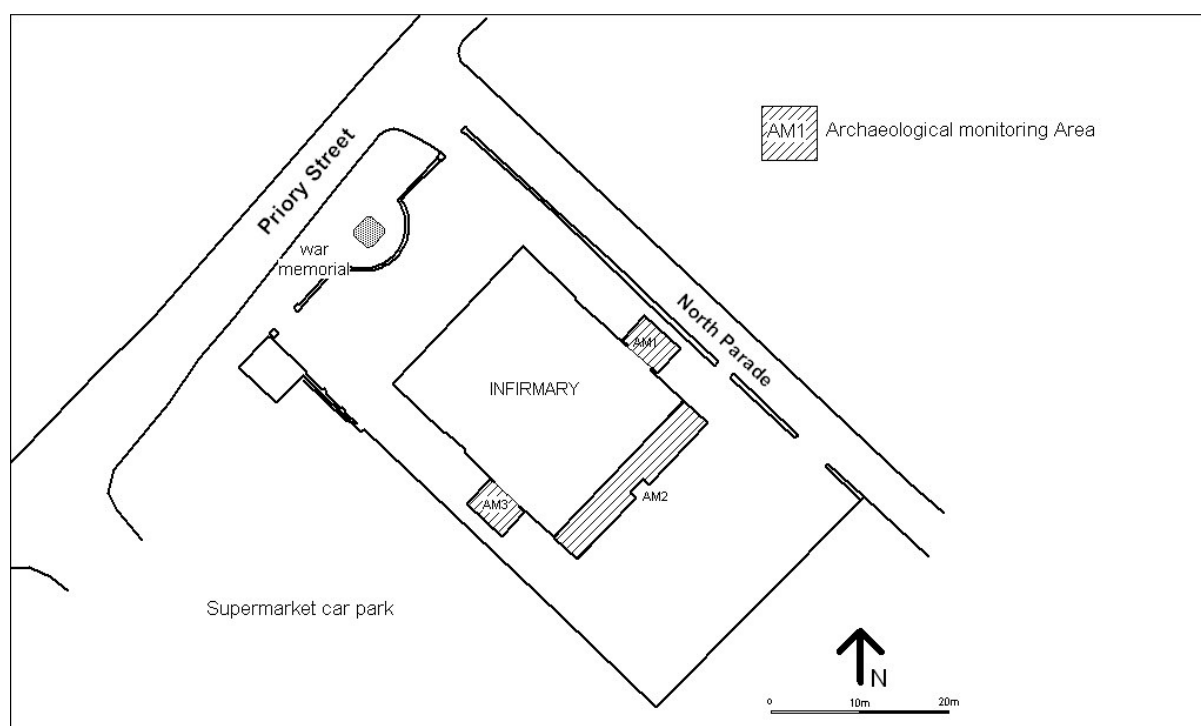


Figure 2: Site plan showing the main Archaeological Monitoring Areas

4.2 Monitoring Area 1 (Figure 2: Plates 1, 2 and 3)

Monitoring Area 1 on the northeast side of the building (Plate 1) and consisted of three trenches, c.0.6m wide. Excavation of the trenches exposed a massive concrete pad that extended beyond the east and north edges of the new foundations. The southern edge of the pad was exposed and where visible it was c.0.75m thick and the base was constructed on the stiff orange clay natural (Plate 2). The base of the pad was c.1.6m below the current ground level and it was covered by 0.7m of modern building rubble and loose soil.

There were traces of a former stone and block building on the pad (Plate 3), which appeared to correlate with the extension shown in this area on an OS map of 1968, so it appears that the pad was laid as the foundation for the former extension that occupied this area.

The excavations for the pad and its construction had removed any archaeological features and deposits that may have been present.

4.3 Monitoring Area 2 (Figure 2: Plates 4, 5 and 6)

Monitoring Area 2 was at the rear of the building and it had the largest footprint of the three new foundations, consisting of a series of trenches c.0.75m wide and up to 1.4m deep excavated to form two rectangular separate blocks (Plate 4). Each block was made up of four trenches (Trenches 1-4 and Trenches 5-8), three short trenches extending out from the rear wall of the Infirmary and a long trench to form the southwest side.

All the trenches were excavated through a layer of loose brown loam and modern building rubble (001) that covered the whole of the area to the rear of the Infirmary building. layer (001) overlay several dumps and layers of clay and rubble (003, 007, 009, 011) that appear to have been deposited during or after the construction of the Infirmary or the later extensions.

The excavation for both sets of trenches required the removal of parts of a stone and brick foundation for an earlier extension, a number of services and two large concrete manholes (Plate 5).

The base of the new foundation trenches 1-4 revealed a very compacted layer of stiff orange/light brown clay containing frequent small fragments of shale and occasional flecks of charcoal (010). It is likely that this layer was the working level for the construction of the earlier extension.

A small spread of stiff red/orange/yellow clay, which may have been fire reddened clay (006) was recorded extending below the rear wall of the Infirmary (Plate 6). A spread of small rounded loose stones and shale fragments on the southwest edge of (006) may have been associated, but it was not possible to determine a definite relationship. The position of the clay spread extending below the standing building precluded any investigation, but did confirm that it predates the mid 19th century construction of the Infirmary. It is not certain what period it dates from, but similar deposits are known from the supermarket site next door (Crane 2000, 8).

The only finds from the trenches were a few sherds of 19th century pottery and glass (not retained), suggesting that the area was heavily landscaped following the construction of the Infirmary building.

4.4 Monitoring Area 3 (Figure 2: Plate 7)

Monitoring Area 3 was on the southwest side of the building and as with Monitoring Area 1 consisted of three foundation trenches, c.0.6m wide and a narrow service trench. Excavation of the foundation trenches exposed a massive concrete pad that extended beyond the west and north edges of the new foundations. The southern edge of the pad was exposed and where visible it was c.0.8m thick and the base was constructed on the stiff orange clay natural. The base of the pad was c.1.4m below the current ground level and it was covered by 0.6m of modern building rubble and loose soil.

The pad appeared to correlate with an extension shown in this area on mapping (Figs 3 and 4) and aerial photographs of the site, so it appears that the pad was laid as the foundation for a former extension that occupied this area.

The excavations for the construction of the pad had removed any archaeological features and deposits that may have been present.

4.5 The finds

No finds other than a few sherds of 19th century pottery were recovered from any of the monitored areas.

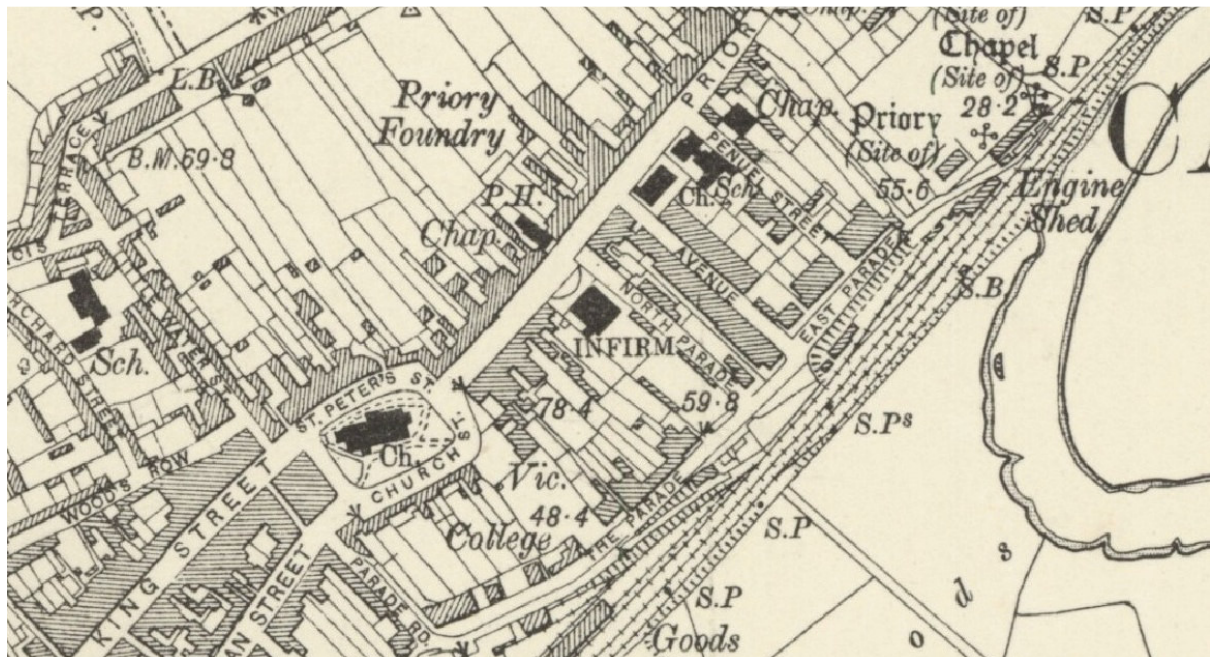


Figure 3: Ordnance Survey mapping from 1906 showing the first extension in Monitoring Area 3.

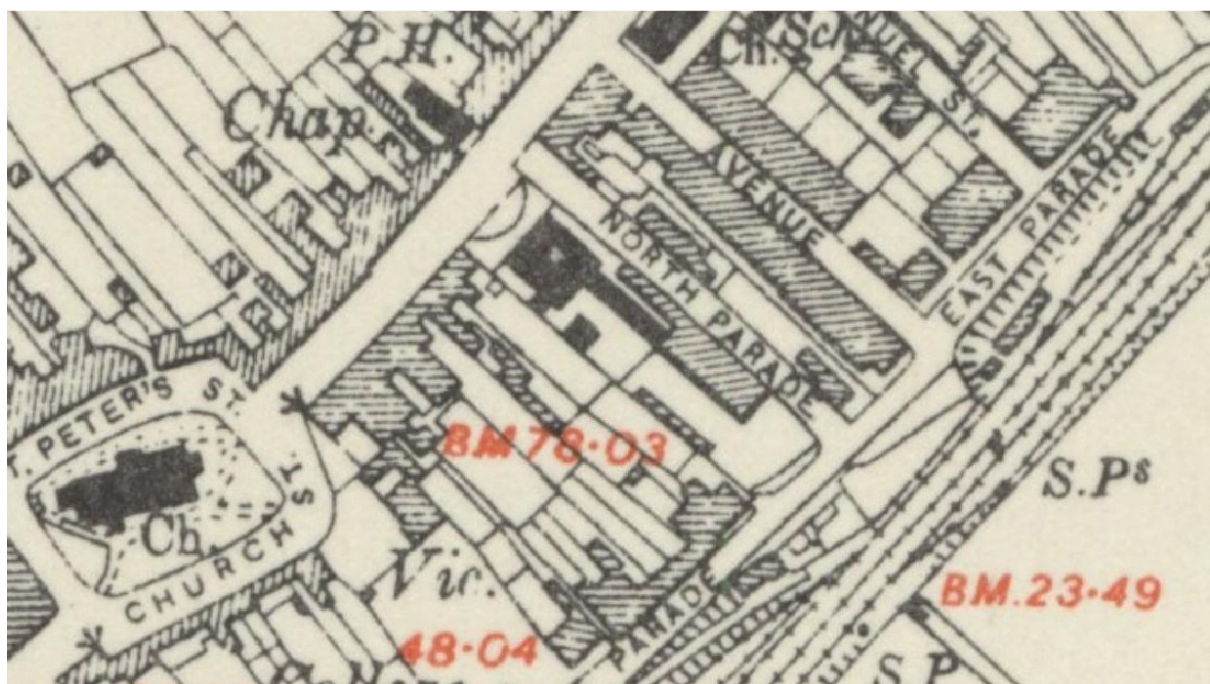


Figure 4: Ordnance Survey mapping from 1948 showing the early hospital extension.



Plate 1: Northeast elevation of Infirmary showing location of Monitoring Area 1



Plate 2: Concrete pad that covered Monitoring Area 1.



Plate 3: Detail of the concrete pad in Monitoring Area 1 showing remains of former block structure



Plate 4: Rear elevation of Infirmary showing location of Monitoring Area 2



Plate 5: Detail of the excavated foundation trenches in Monitoring Area 2



Plate 6: Possible burnt clay exposed in the base of a foundation trench in Monitoring Area 2



Plate 7: Southwest elevation of Infirmary showing the made ground and concrete pad in Monitoring Area 3

5. Conclusions

5.1 The results of the monitoring

The monitoring was carried out on all groundworks associated with the redevelopment of the Infirmary building and no significant archaeological features or deposits were encountered, although an area of possible heat affected clay was noted in one of the foundation trenches in Monitoring Area 2.

The Infirmary site has always been small and the building had a series of fairly extensive extensions and the new extensions were on the footprints of some of those earlier extensions. To the rear of the building the new extension was on the same footprint as one of the former extensions, so the new foundations effectively replaced the stone and brick foundations of the earlier structure and no extensive new excavations were required.

On the southwest and northeast sides of the building the new extensions were also placed on the footprints of earlier structures and in both cases the excavation for the new foundations encountered substantial concrete pads, which were 0.75m-0.8m thick and covered by c.0.75m of made ground. Not all the pads were removed for the new construction, but where the edges were exposed they had been dug into the natural and all archaeological deposits had been removed.

It appeared that the construction of the Infirmary building and its later additions and alterations had removed any archaeological deposits that were present on the site.

References

- Crane P 2000, *Lidl Foodstore, Priory Street, Carmarthen: archaeological evaluation and watching brief*. DAT report 2000/52
- Ludlow N 1999 *Priory Street, Carmarthen, an archaeological watching brief at the proposed Lidl Food Store*.
- Murphy F 2009 *Scheduling Enhancement Project 2009: Roman non-military sites: Dyfed*.
& Page M DAT report 2000/52
- Page N 2007 *Priory Motor Mart, Priory Street, Carmarthen, Archaeological Field Evaluation*.
- Poucher P 2012 *131 Priory Street, Carmarthen: archaeological evaluation*. DAT report 2012/16
- Schlee D 2012 *Richmond Park Football Ground, Carmarthen: archaeological evaluation*. DAT report 2012/15

On-line sources

British Geological Survey 2015. *Geology of Britain viewer*. Available at: <http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>

Britain from Above. Available at: <https://britainfromabove.org.uk>