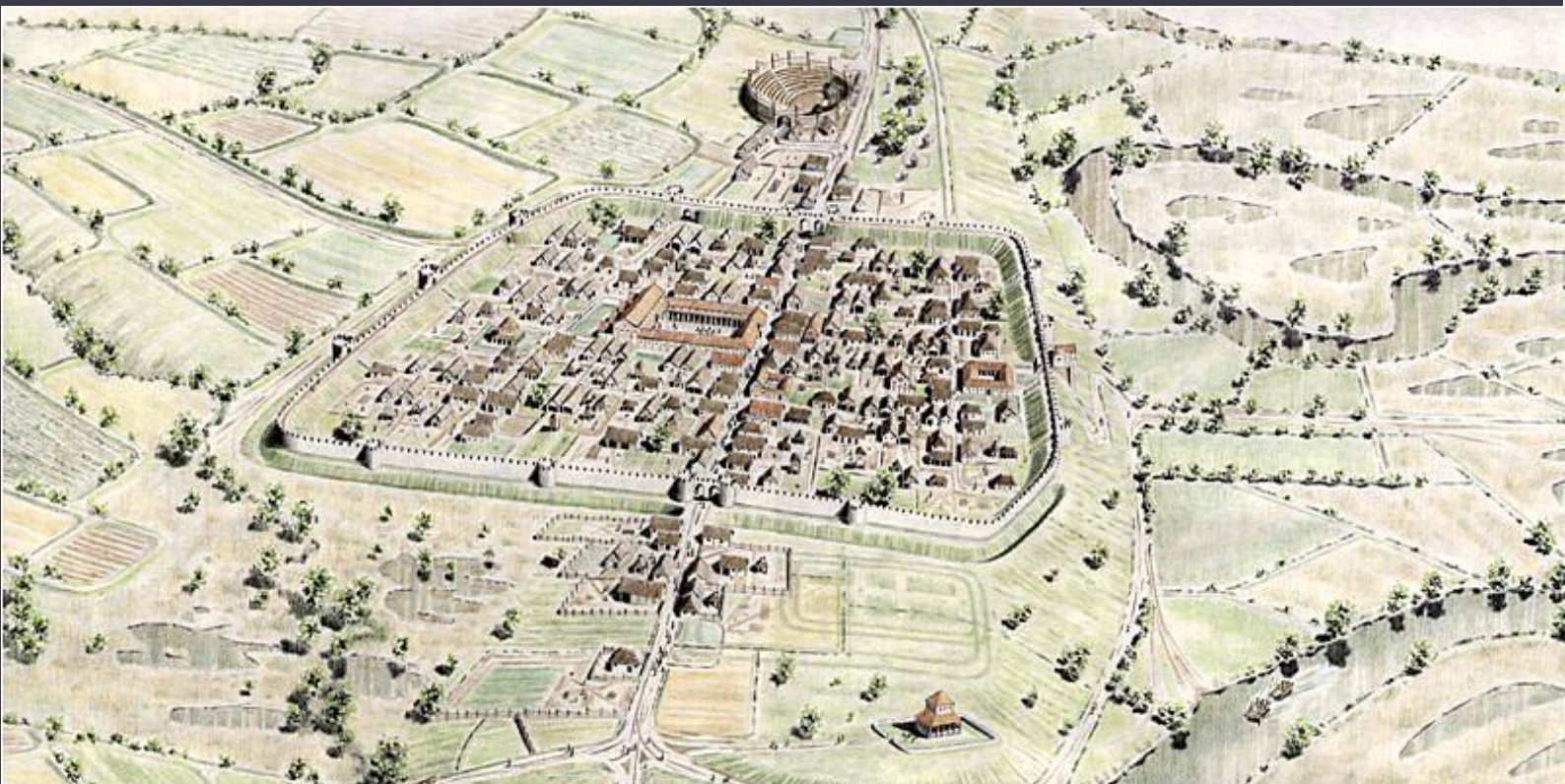


# PRIORY STREET CARMARTHEN



Watching brief for Western Power  
June 2018

# PRIORY STREET, CARMARTHEN

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF IN THE CAR PARK, JUNE 2018

### REPORT BY NEIL LUDLOW FOR WESTERN POWER DISTRIBUTION

#### CONTENTS

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
	2.1 Site location	4
	2.2 Site history	5
	2.3 Site description	7
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Aims and objectives</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Methodologies and results</b>	<b>12</b>
	4.1 The groundworks	12
	4.2 Results	12
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Discussion</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>7.0</b>	<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>8.0</b>	<b>References</b>	<b>16</b>

#### Figures

Fig. 1	Site location map	4
Fig. 2	Plan of Carmarthen showing Roman elements of the town	5
Fig. 3	Plan of Roman Carmarthen showing excavation sites	6
Fig. 4	Detail from 1886 Ordnance Survey map	7
Fig. 5	Detail from 1906 Ordnance Survey map	7
Fig. 6	Overall site plan	8
Fig. 7	Detail from 1969 Ordnance Survey map	9
Fig. 8	Aerial photograph of the site in 1979	10
Fig. 9	Aerial photograph of the site in 1985	10
Fig. 10	Plan showing location of trenches	11
Fig. 11	Plan and section of Trench A	13
Fig. 12	Detail from 1969 Ordnance Survey map, with Iron foundry and later buildings added	14

<b>Appendix – photographs</b>	<b>17</b>
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## **1.0 SUMMARY**

*In June 2018 a watching brief was undertaken, on behalf of Western Power Distribution, on the excavation of a new electricity cable trench through Priory Street car park, Carmarthen (NGR SN 4162 2045). The car park is located towards the east of the present town of Carmarthen, between Priory Street, Old Oak Lane and Richmond Terrace. The cable trench site lay behind Nos. 113-118 Priory Street, and immediately northwest of a major urban redevelopment project which had been underway since May.*

*The site occupies the Roman town of Carmarthen ('Moridunum'), much of which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM Cm 234). However, only modern features and deposits were revealed in the trench.*

*The trench was 17.10m long, 0.28m wide and 0.6m deep. Beneath the tarmac surface of the car park, a deposit of modern make-up material occurred throughout the trench. It probably belongs to the establishment of the car park, in the 1990s, but may relate to a prefabricated building that occupied the site in the 1970s and 1980s. Two concrete features, at the base of the trench, may relate to this building, but are perhaps more likely to belong to the 'Tank', of uncertain function, which is marked and labelled in this location on the 1969 Ordnance Survey map.*

*The modern make-up contained a large quantity of iron slag, presumably derived from the iron foundry that occupied the development site during the later nineteenth and earlier twentieth century.*

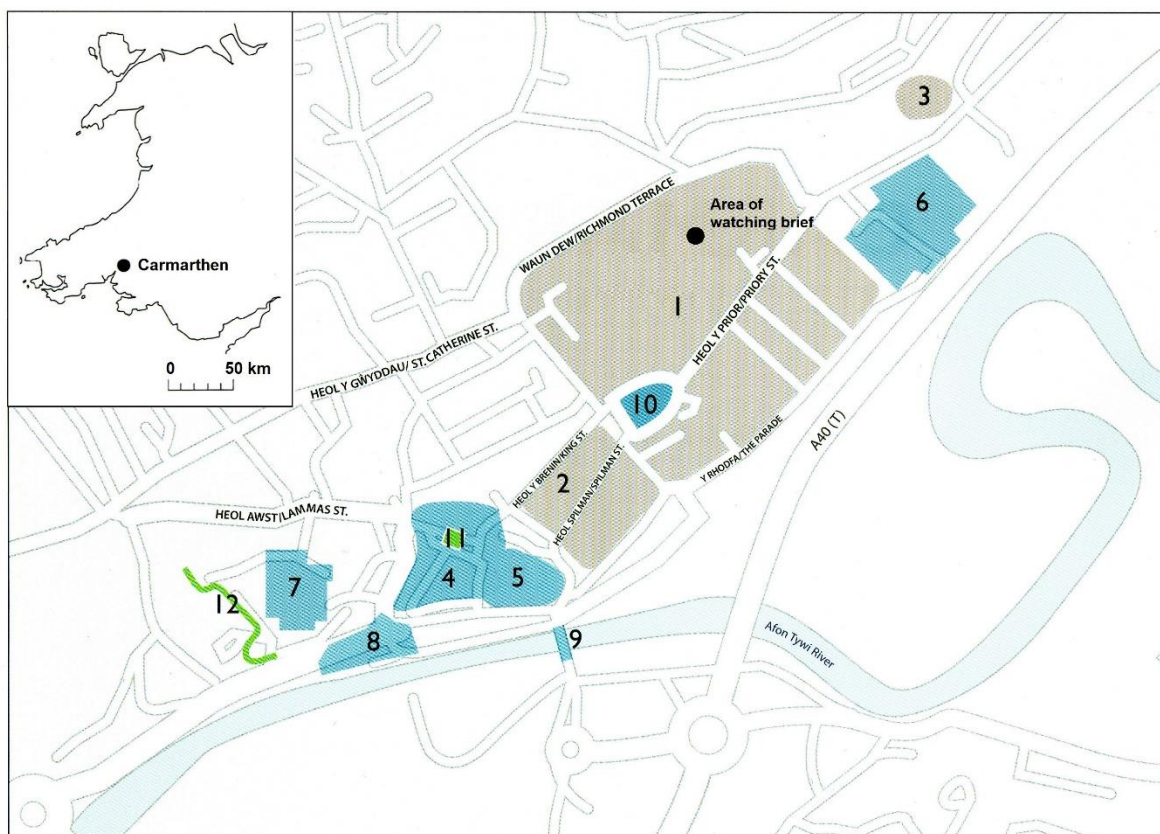
## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

## 2.1 Site location (Figs. 1 and 4)

The 2018 watching brief site (centering on NGR SN 4162 2045) occupied Priory Street car park, Carmarthen, towards the east of the present town of Carmarthen. It lay behind Nos. 113-118 Priory Street, between Priory Street, Old Oak Lane and Richmond Terrace, and immediately northwest of a major urban redevelopment project which had been underway since May 2018.

The general trend of the surrounding area is a very gentle, natural downhill slope from southeast to northwest, falling away from Priory Street. The solid geology is Ordovician shale, overlain by glacial boulder clays and gravels which form part of a broad terrace, running northeast to southwest, upon which the historic town of Carmarthen stands. However the current profile within the site itself is now level, representing made ground and averaging c.22.90m above sea level.

*Fig. 1 – Site location map*



## Carmarthen - historic features

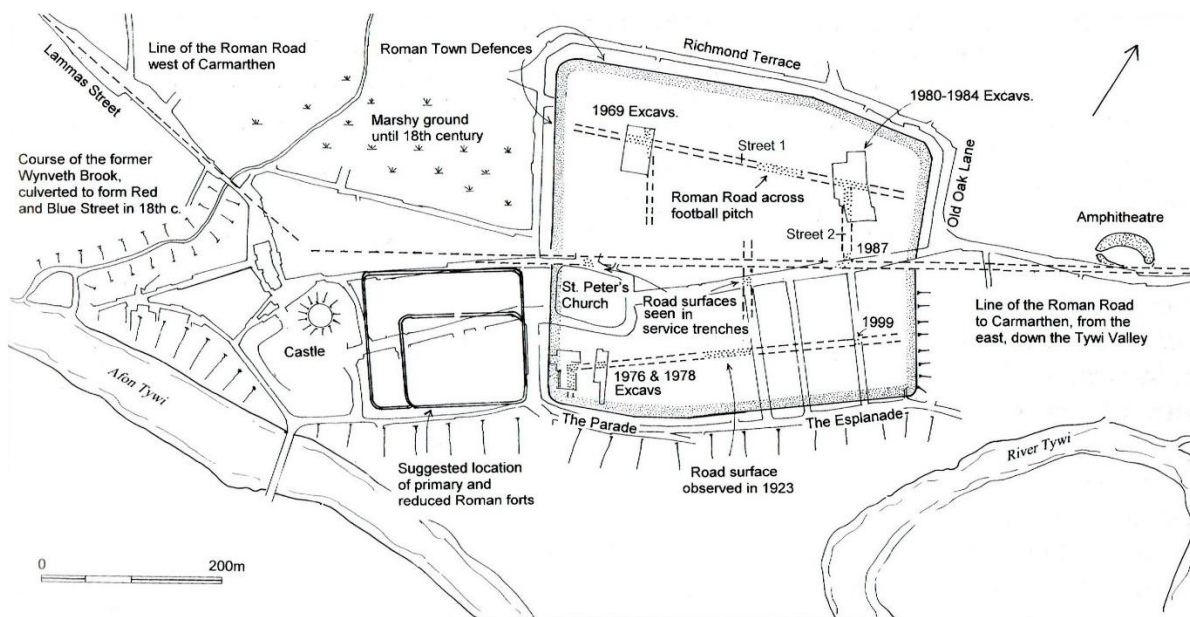
- |                        |                               |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 - Roman Town         | 7 - Medieval friary           |
| 2 - Roman Fort         | 8 - Town quay                 |
| 3 - Roman amphitheatre | 9 - Bridge                    |
| 4 - Medieval town wall | 10 - Parish church (St Peter) |
| 5 - Medieval castle    | 11 - Guildhall                |
| 6 - Medieval priory    | 12 - Civil War defences       |



## 2.2 Site history (Figs. 2-5)

Carmarthen is the site of the Roman settlement of *Moridunum*. Long known to have been the site of a fort, it has been demonstrated to have developed into a Roman town which was located either side of Priory Street. Buildings, features and deposits belonging to the town were revealed through excavation by Barri Jones in the 1960s, and more importantly by a long sequence of excavations and watching briefs undertaken by Dyfed Archaeological Trust (DAT) and others, since 1978. Accounts of DAT's work, with summaries of the earlier excavations, are to be found in James (1980) and James (1992) and James (2003).

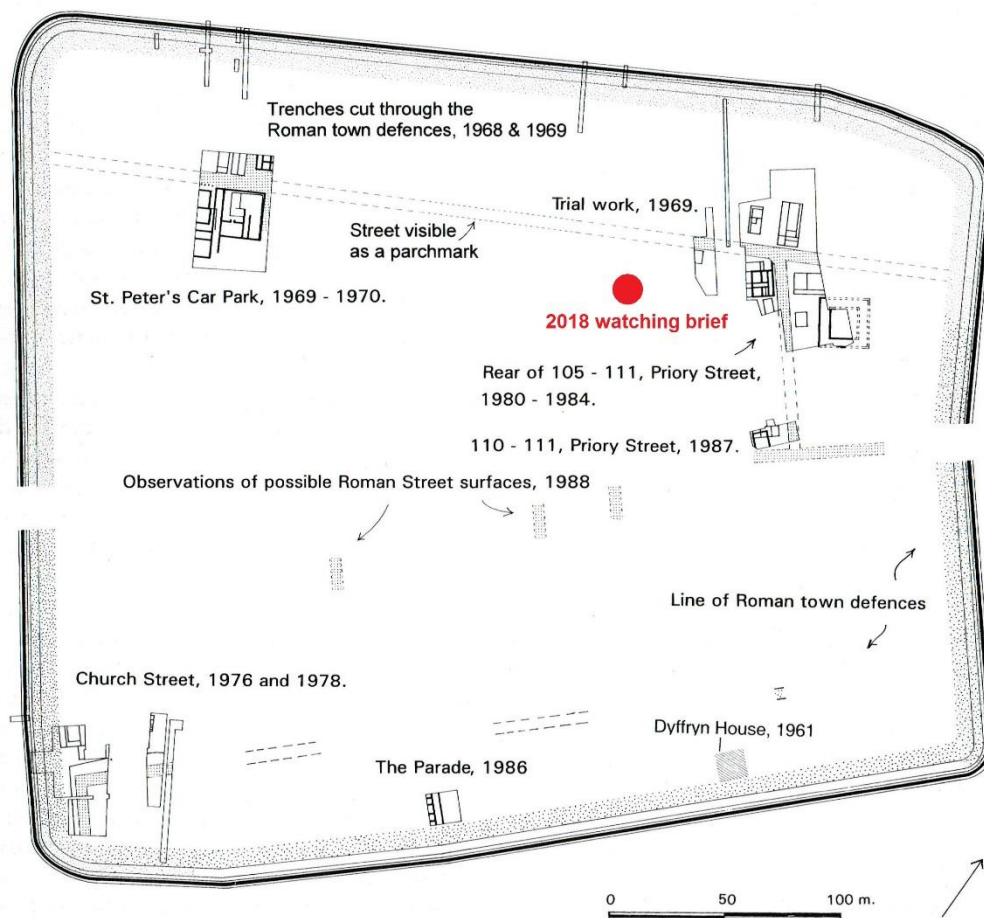
Fig. 2 – Plan of Carmarthen showing the proposed location of the Roman forts, the Roman town defences and the presumed line of Roman streets (from James 2003, Fig. 1.6).



Roman occupation began with the construction of a fort in the King Street/Spilman Street area which was occupied AD 75-c.AD 100. A town was formally laid out by c.AD 110. It was defended by a clay rampart in the late second-third century AD, supplemented by a masonry wall in the later third-fourth century AD. The course of the Roman defences is preserved in the lines of Little Water Street, Richmond Terrace, Old Oak Lane, the footpath known as Llwybr-yr-ardd, The Esplanade, The Parade, and Parade Road (Fig. 2). At least two well metalled streets ran through the defended area from east to west, the southern roughly on the line of Priory Street. A large area in the north-east quarter of the defended area, immediately east of the present development site, was totally excavated by DAT between 1980 and 1987 (Fig. 3); the work revealed a sequence of timber buildings, a temple, evidence for ironworking, and two metalled roads, including a section of the northern east-west road that ran the length of the town (James 2003, 47-168). Urban life in the Roman tradition had collapsed by the fifth century AD, but some form of occupation may have persisted, for a period, at Carmarthen.

During the Middle Ages, Priory Street was an arterial route connecting the town of Carmarthen with the Towy Valley route corridor. Either side lay open 'strip' fields; the street frontage was progressively developed with housing during the late medieval and post-medieval periods (James 1980, 24-5, 47-57). The area behind these properties however remained largely undeveloped, and was primarily given over to gardens (Figs. 4 and 5); the considerable depth of topsoil appears to have been deliberately imported into this part of Carmarthen, as garden soil, during the nineteenth century.

*Fig. 3 – Plan of the Roman town of Carmarthen showing the watching brief site relative to selected, major excavations (from James 2003, Fig. 1.4).*



By the later nineteenth century, an iron foundry had been established behind Nos. 116-118 Priory Street (and within the 2018 development plot): it is shown on an Ordnance Survey map from 1886, and another from 1906 when it had developed considerably with the addition of a large rectangular building (Figs. 4, 5 and 12; also see James 1980, 51, 56). The foundry had become disused by the mid-twentieth century, when the footprint of the large rectangular building appears to have formed the basis of a building apparently used as a laundry in the late 1960s (Figs. 7 and 12; also see Section 2.3 below, in which further twentieth-century use of the area is also outlined).

Fig. 4 – Detail from Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map of 1886

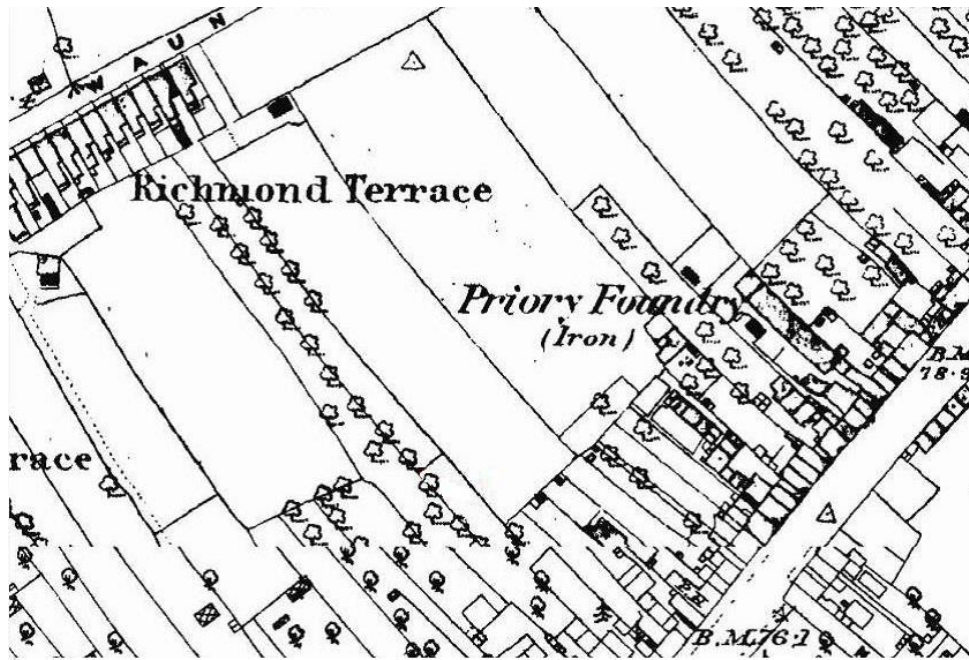
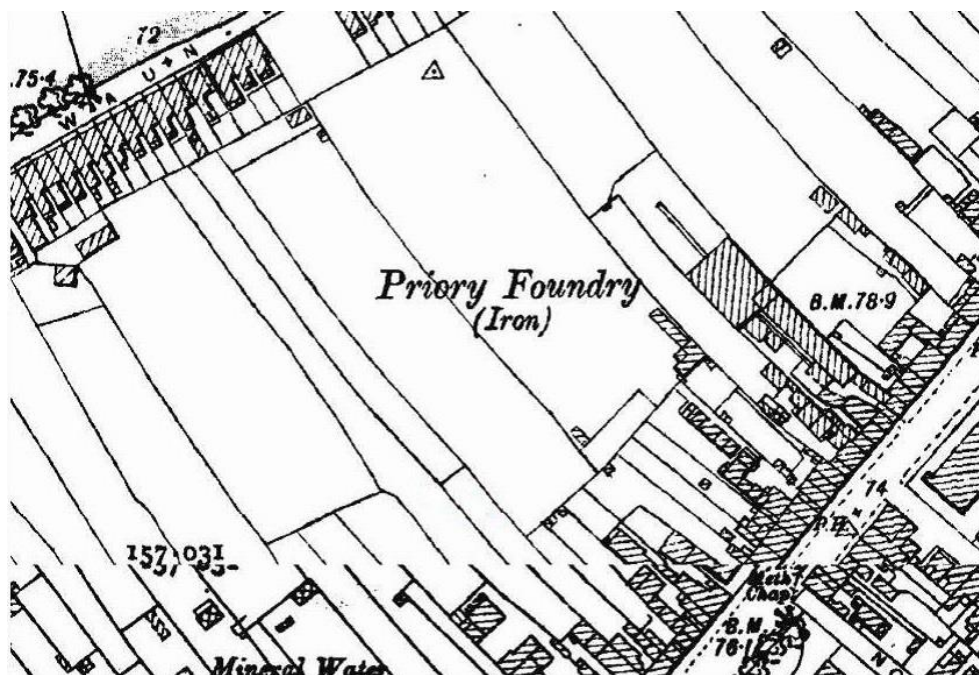


Fig. 5 – Detail from Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map of 1906. Cf. Fig. 12

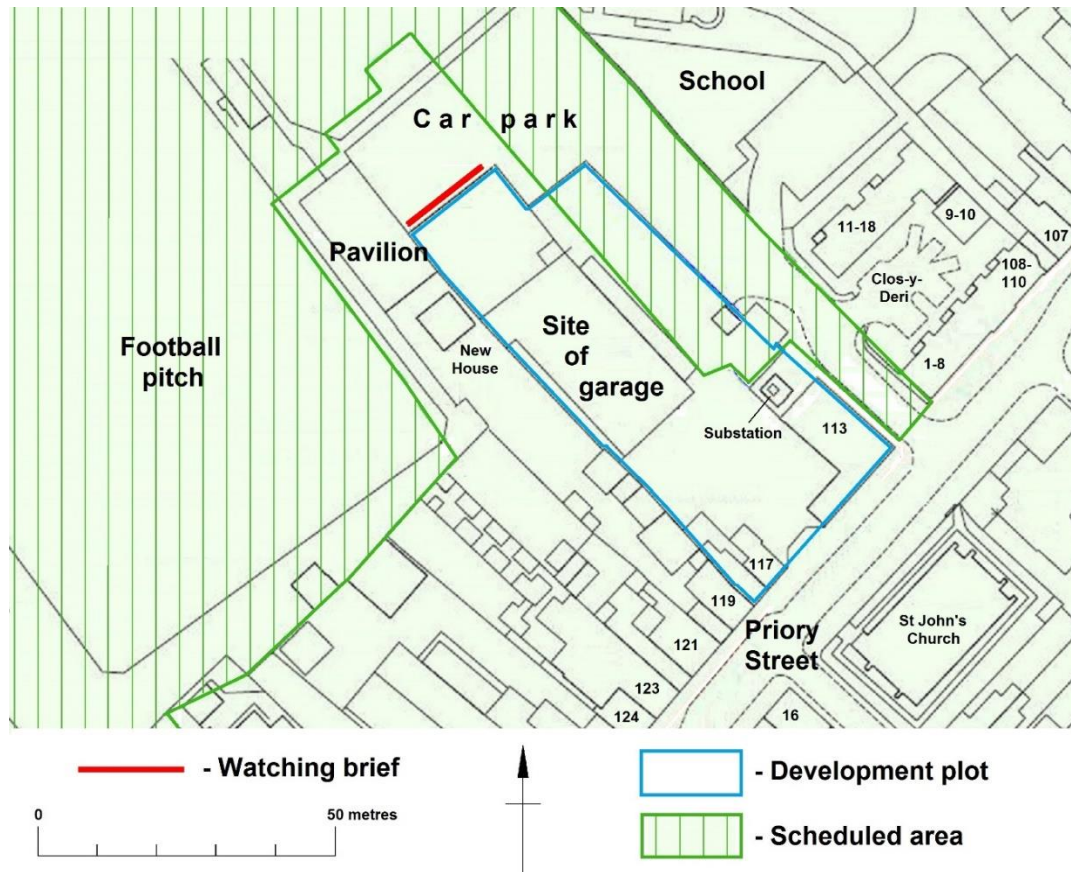


### 2.3 Site description (Figs. 6-10)

The 2018 watching brief was part of a major redevelopment at Nos. 113-118 Priory Street, Carmarthen. Until recently containing a garage and showroom – ‘Priory Motor Mart’ (formerly Denzil Evans) – which were demolished in May 2018 (Figs. 6 and 10), the plot will be given over to new housing. The development lies partly within a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM Cm234), representing the Roman town, and is therefore being accompanied by a full programme of archaeological recording, undertaken by Archaeology Wales.



Fig. 6 – Overall site plan



The development plot is located near the centre of the Roman town, north of Priory Street which perpetuates the line of the main Roman road through the town; comparison with other Roman towns suggests that the plot lies immediately north-east of the Roman forum. It is situated immediately southwest of a trial excavation in 1969 (Fig. 3), beyond which lies the large area that was totally excavated by DAT, in 1980-87 (see above), and now occupied by Richmond Park primary school and the Clos-y-Deri housing development (Figs. 3 and 6). Immediately to the west of the plot is Carmarthen Town's football pitch (Figs. 6 and 10), within which evaluations and a watching brief on cable trenching revealed Roman deposits at an average depth of 0.80m-1.00m (Ludlow 1996 and 1998; Schlee 2012).

The natural topography across the site means that Roman horizons rise up towards Priory Street itself, which historically ran along a slight ridge. The development plot itself has been subject to a pre-determination evaluation by DAT (Page 2007), and further exploratory work by Archaeology Wales. Initial site clearance, in early June 2018, has revealed surviving Roman levels along the Priory Street frontage of the plot, overlain by post-medieval deposits and features; intervening medieval deposits are possible. Full excavation of this frontage, by Archaeology Wales, is scheduled for June and July 2018.

During the post-Roman period, the rear (northwest) half of the development plot remained largely undeveloped until the iron foundry was established (see Section 2.2 above). Long, narrow backyards and gardens, their boundaries possibly having medieval origins, extended sixty metres northwest from the axial Priory Street; they terminated at a continuous northeast-southwest boundary, northwest of which was open space (Figs. 4 and 5). The



foundry straddled these two zones. By the late 1960s, a large building occupied much of the northwest half of the development plot (behind Nos. 116-118 Priory Street), partly overlying – or adapted from – the main block of the foundry (see Figs. 4, 5, 7 and 12); both lay southeast of the watching brief site. Labelled ‘Laundry’ on the 1969 Ordnance Survey map (Figs. 7 and 12), this later building was associated with a feature labelled ‘Tank’ to the northwest, and a building labelled ‘Depot’ further west. The remainder of the rear half of the plot was occupied by a car park. The electricity substation, and football pitch, had already been established.

*Fig. 7 – Detail from Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map, published in 1969. The development plot lies just right of centre. Cf. Figs. 4, 5 and 12.*

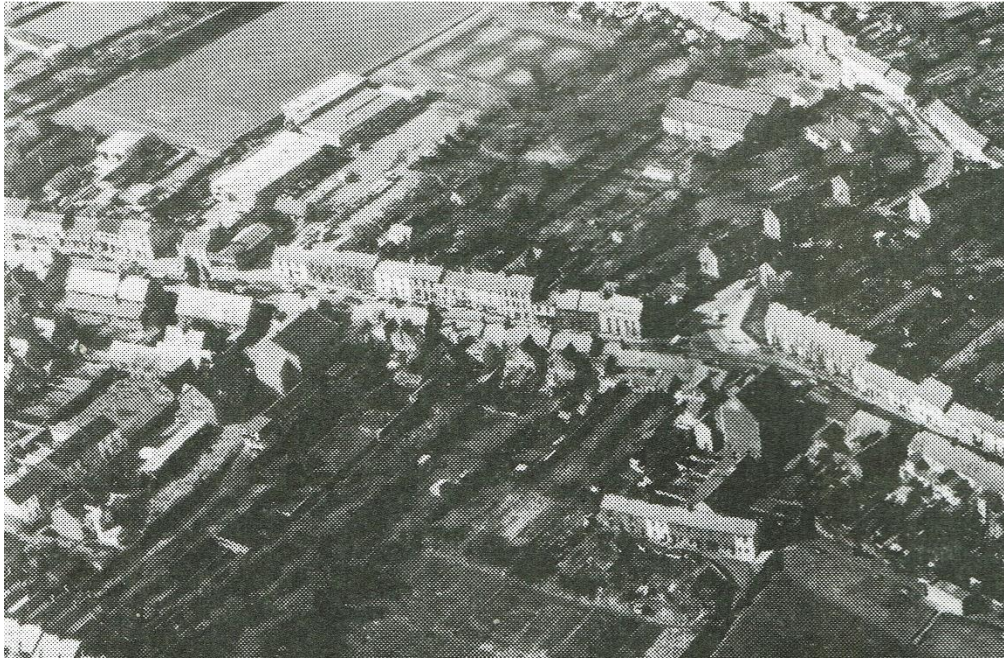


The laundry building appears to have gone by 1979, when the present garage (recently demolished, see above) was shown on the site in an aerial photograph (Fig. 8); map evidence suggests that it occupied a slightly different footprint from the laundry. The depot was still standing while, immediately to the east of it, another large, prefabricated building had been erected. These buildings are also clearly shown in an aerial photograph from 1985 (Fig. 9), by which time the prefabricated building had become a nightclub, ‘Merlins’.

The depot and nightclub building were demolished during the early 1990s. The depot was replaced by a new pavilion to serve the football pitch, and a building named ‘New House’; both are still standing (Figs. 6 and 10). In addition, the car park was extended round to the rear of the garage/development plot, occupying the site of the former prefabricated nightclub building.



*Fig. 8 – Aerial photograph of the development plot (top left quarter) in 1979, from the west. Visible are the garage building, former nightclub, depot, car park, and football pitch beyond (from James 1980, Plate 6).*



*Fig. 9 – Aerial photograph of the entire Roman town in 1985, from the southwest; the outline of the defences is preserved in the present street plan. The football pitch is top centre, with the development plot immediately to the right. Also visible are the garage building, former nightclub, depot and car park (from James 1992, Plate 3).*





### 3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

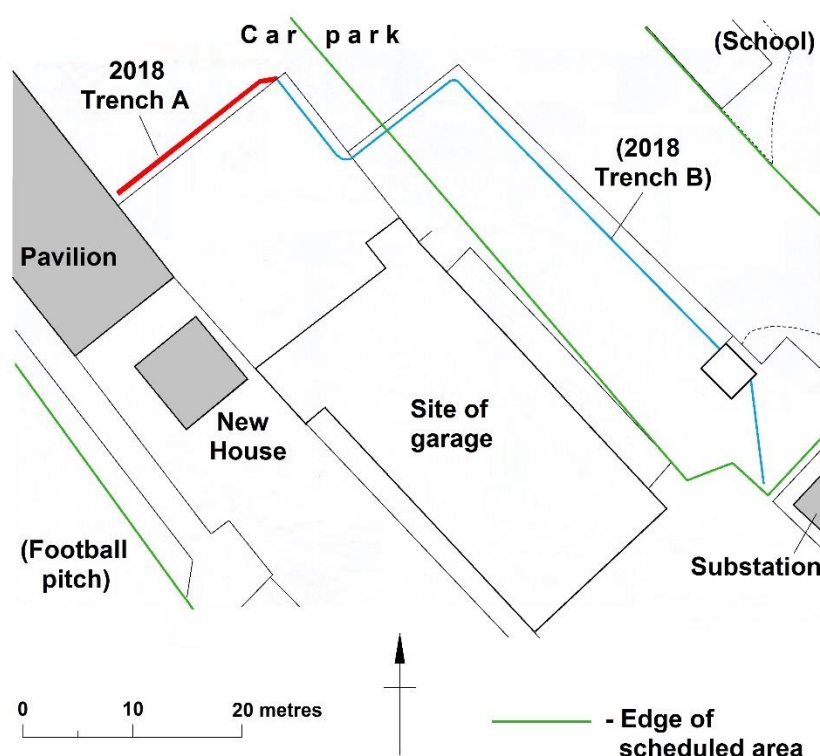
As the new Priory Street development requires a mains electrical supply, new cabling was laid, by Western Power, within a trench that was excavated along the northern and eastern edges of the development plot. The trench led northwest from the substation near the southeast corner of the plot. The major part of its length (**Trench B**, Fig. 10) occupied the Scheduled Ancient Monument: consultation between Neil Ludlow and Will Davies, of Cadw, confirmed that its excavation came under the terms of the Scheduled Monument Consent which had been granted for the overall development, and this part of the trench was excavated in late May with monitoring by Archaeology Wales (reported on separately).

A small section of the new trench, however, lay outside the scheduled area (**Trench A**, Fig. 10), in the car park just beyond the northwest edge of the development plot. Western Power were keen that this section, too, should receive archaeological monitoring. As it fell outside the scheme of works agreed with Archaeology Wales, monitoring of this section of the trench was awarded as a separate contract and was undertaken by Neil Ludlow, after notifying the archaeological curator (Mike Ings, Senior Planning Archaeologist at DAT).

The aim of the watching brief was to –

- Monitor the excavation of the new cable Trench A.
- Minimise disturbance to any *in situ* archaeological features and deposits.
- Record the character, extent and significance of any archaeological features and deposits.
- Collate the data retrieved during the fieldwork into a structured archive.
- Prepare of a report based on the results of the above.

Fig. 10 – Plan showing location of trenches





## **4.0 METHODOLOGIES AND RESULTS**

Trench A was 17.10m long (northeast-southwest), 0.28m wide, and had a consistent depth of 0.60m throughout (Fig. 11). The depth was agreed beforehand: previous archaeological evaluation, and excavations to the northwest and east of the development site, suggested that Roman deposits may lie beneath this depth, overlain by nineteenth-century garden soils. The trench turned southeast, to link with the previously-excavated Trench B, at its northeast end. At its southwest end, the new cable was to be jointed with an existing cable running alongside the football club pavilion.

### **4.1 The groundworks (Figs. 6, 10 and 11)**

Groundworks began with the removal of modern car-park tarmac. Trench excavation was undertaken by Balfour Beatty, for Western Power, using a 360° mini-digger, with assistance from a jackhammer in areas of concrete hard-standing (see below). Caution was exercised around the existing cable next to the pavilion building, where a gas installation was also present, and hand-tools were used here.

### **4.2 Results (Fig. 11, and appendix)**

Only one deposit was observed throughout the trench, occurring directly beneath the tarmac and extending to the bottom. It was a very mixed, dark-brown silt-loam material, containing some brick fragments and lenses of clay, ash and chippings, some of which were quite extensive. Shards of frosted glass, of twentieth-century date, were also present, while dominating the inclusions was a high percentage of iron slag, some of which was in the form of large concretions up to 0.20m across. This slag can be seen, in the spoil, in the photographs at the end of this report (see appendix).

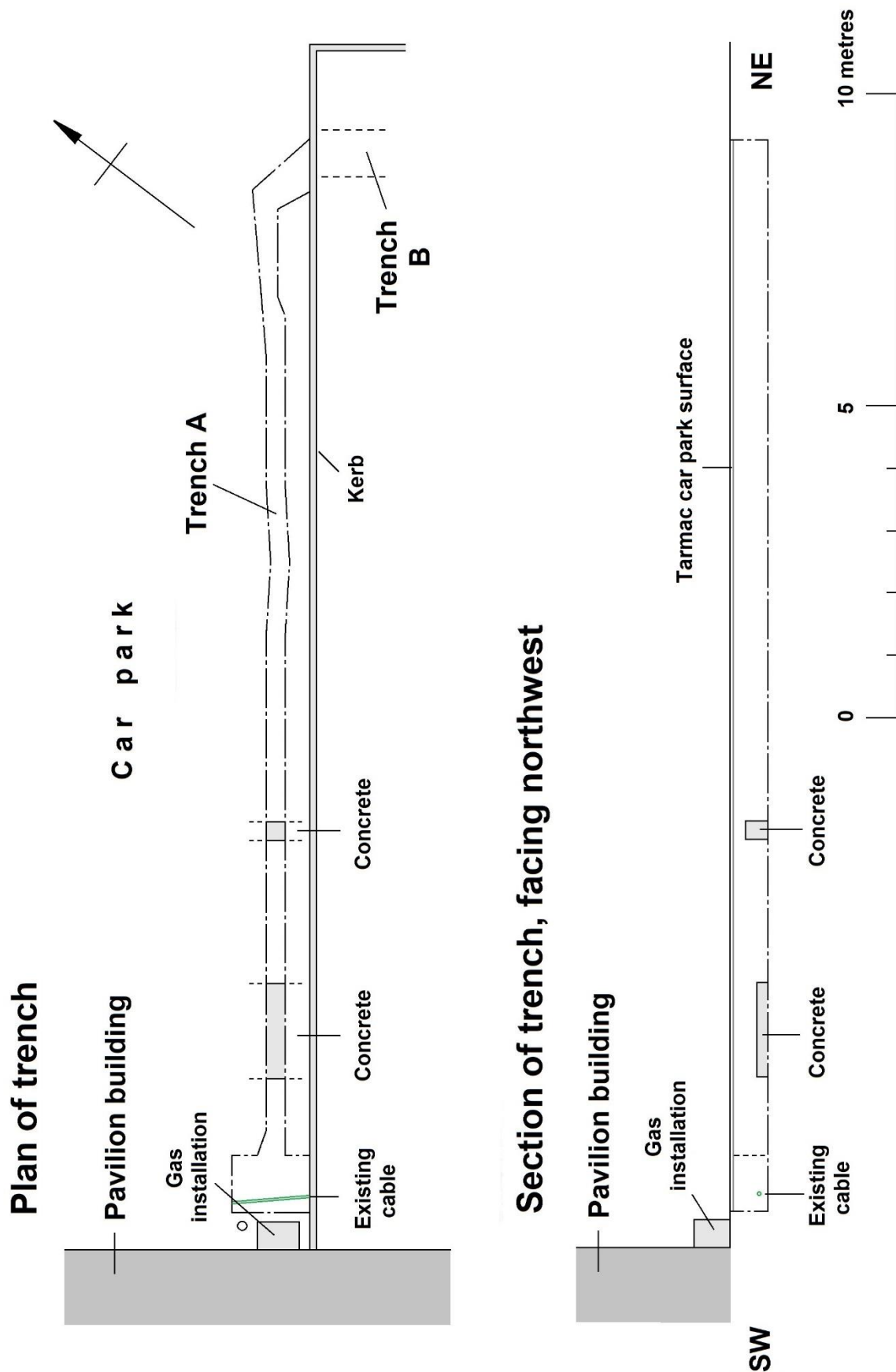
At the extreme southwest end of the trench, this mixed material appeared to give onto another horizon, of more clayey consistency, at the very bottom of the trench. However, this was of a similar dark-brown colour and, like the deposit above, contained much iron slag: it may have been part of the same general deposition event.

Seeping into the bottom of the trench, at intervals, was an oily liquid.

Two areas of concrete were present, both running beneath both sides of the trench section, and neither removed to its base (Fig. 11). To the southwest, a concrete surface appeared at a depth of 0.40m and ran for 1.50m through the trench. To the northeast, a narrower 'band' of concrete appeared 0.20m beneath the surface; it was 0.30m wide.

No other features or deposits were observed in the trench, and no further finds, artefacts or ecofacts were encountered.

Fig. 11 – Plan and section of Trench A



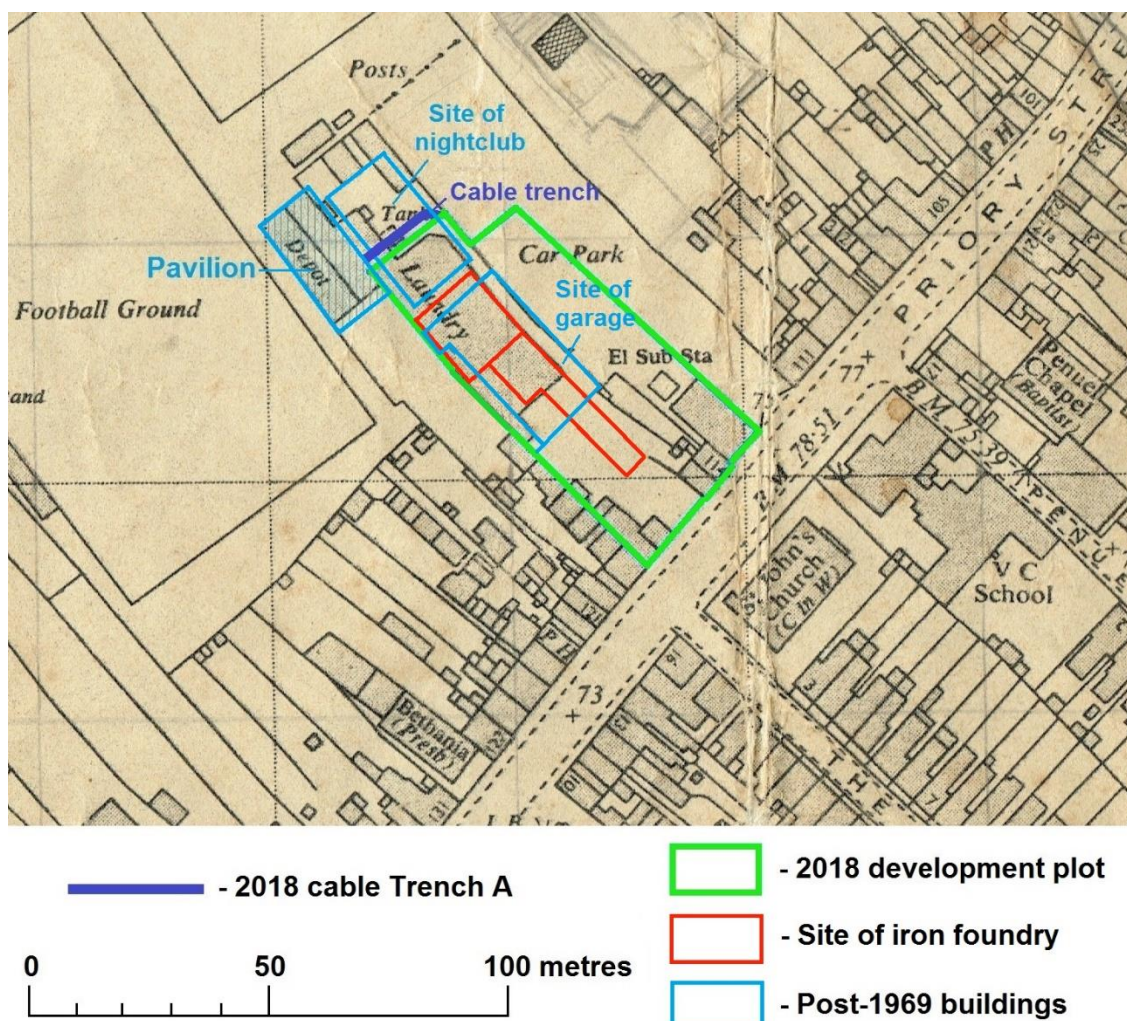
## 5.0 DISCUSSION

The deposits and features encountered were clearly of modern date, and may all belong to the mid-late twentieth century. The two areas of concrete were not fully revealed, and could not be fully characterised, but appear to correspond to the feature marked 'Tank' on the 1969 Ordnance Survey map (Figs. 7 and 12). Nevertheless, it is possible that they are associated with the prefabricated nightclub building erected in the 1970s.

The oily liquid may be associated with this tank. However, the function of the tank is unknown; it is not depicted on nineteenth-century Ordnance Survey maps (Figs. 4 and 5), and thus may not have been part of the iron foundry mentioned in Section 2.2 above (was it associated with the laundry?). It is possible instead, therefore, that the liquid represented seepage from the garage that, until recently, lay to the southeast of the trench.

The deposit(s) overlay the concrete features, and may represent make-up laid down when the car park was established over this area in the 1990s or, possibly, made ground for the nightclub building. The iron slag was presumably derived from the iron foundry, but the above evidence suggests that here it represents secondary deposition, disturbance or spreading.

*Fig. 12 – Detail from 1969 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map with cable Trench A, and approx. location of later buildings and iron foundry, added. Cf. Figs. 5 and 7.*





## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

The 2018 cable trench (Trench A) revealed, beneath the tarmac surface of the car park, a deposit of modern make-up material which occurred throughout the trench, to a depth of 0.60m or more. It probably belongs to the establishment of the car park, in the 1990s, but may relate to a prefabricated building that occupied the site in the 1970s and 1980s. Two concrete features, at the base of the trench, may relate to this building, but are perhaps more likely to belong to the 'Tank', of uncertain function, which is marked and labelled in this location on the 1969 Ordnance Survey map. The modern make-up contained a large quantity of iron slag, presumably derived from the iron foundry that occupied the development site during the later nineteenth and earlier twentieth century.

No earlier deposits or features were encountered.

## **7.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Many thanks to staff of Western Power and Balfour Beatty for all their help and good-humoured tolerance during the watching brief, particularly Will Rooke (Western Power).

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## APPENDIX – PHOTOGRAPHS

*Photo 1 – Cable trench (Trench A), looking southwest towards the football club pavilion at commencement of excavation*



*Photo 2 – The southwest end of the cable trench (Trench A), looking southwest at completion of excavation*





*Photo 3 – The western concrete feature, from southwest*



*Photo 4 – The eastern concrete feature, from southwest*





*Photo 6 – The northern edge of the cable trench (Trench A), looking north at completion of excavation*



*Photo 6 – The northeast end of the cable trench (Trench A), looking north at completion of excavation*



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