



CARDIFF ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSULTANTS

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT
THE MOUNT, SPILMAN STREET,
CARMARTHEN**

(Planning application: W/09261)

Report 2008 / 11 prepared for

Carmarthenshire County Council

CARDIFF ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSULTANTS

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT
THE MOUNT, SPILMAN STREET,
CARMARTHEN**

Client: Carmarthenshire County Council

Report prepared by

J.-Y. Robic

June 2008

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1. Summary

Observation of the mechanical reduction of the ground level in advance of the construction of a new office block at the Mount, Spilman Street, Carmarthen, revealed that the potential archaeological resource had been badly affected by the construction of the previous buildings. Nevertheless a small cut feature was recorded in the east-west section and a large ditch-like feature was visible in the north-south section. This later feature is located on the course of the medieval castle ditch but its relative shallowness, the absence of finds and the presence of a complex system of probably Victorian brick sewers did not permit a definitive interpretation.

2. Introduction

2.1 The site that forms the subject of this written report consists of the site known as the Mount. It is located at the corner of Spilman Street and Queen Street at NGR SN 41359 20006 (Figure 1). The site occupies a small plot of some 600 square metres. The site is within 'New Carmarthen' or the medieval borough to the west of 'Old Carmarthen' and the Roman town.

2.2 Cardiff Archaeological Consultants was commissioned to carry out an archaeological watching brief for Carmarthenshire County Council following the grant of planning permission (W/09261) for the construction of an office block. The site is part of the historic town of Carmarthen and should contain physical evidence for the history of the construction and development of this part of the town.

2.3 It is the opinion of the professionally retained advisers to the Carmarthenshire County Council, Cambria Archaeology - Heritage Management, that the site contains an important archaeological resource. The watching brief was requested to fulfil the requirements of Planning Policy Wales 2002 Section 6.5.2. More detailed advice in Welsh Office Circular 60/96, Section 23, recommends that *'No development shall take place until the applicant, or their agent or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved in writing by the local planning authority.'*

The reason being 'to protect historic environment interest whilst enabling development'.

2.4 The scheme of archaeological investigation was prepared by J.-Y. Robic (Cardiff Arch. Consultants 2006) and compiled in accordance with Institute of Field Archaeologists' guidelines.

3. The site of Carmarthen

3.1 The historic town of Carmarthen (Caerfyrddin) occupies a river terrace on the north bank of the river Tywi, on the highest tidal point on the river. A fort was established in about 75 AD to garrison troops or auxiliaries and the town of *Moridunum Demetanum* developed to the east of the fort (Figure 2). An amphitheatre was also located to the east of the Roman town defences. Little is known of the transition period between the end of the Roman occupation and the Norman foundation by William Fitz Baldwin and his followers in 1094. Contrary to the Norman foundation of Cardiff, the site of the Roman fort was not used and the castle was built to the west of the fort on a site overlooking the river. Carmarthen was a relatively small town throughout the 12th and 13th centuries. The pressure of Owain Glyndwr's attacks in 1403 and 1405 prompted the extension of the walls in 1415 (Soulsby 1983, 101-102).

3.2 The newly extended circuit of the town walls enclosed an area of existing settlement, which marks the significant expansion of the borough during the 14th century. The burgage rents of 1301-2 suggest a population of about a thousand with a constant increase during the course of the century. This increase probably resulted from the important trade activity of the town. In 1326, Carmarthen was made a staple port with a licence to deal in wool, pelts, leather, lead and tin. This was also combined with an important fishing industry. Carmarthen had also become the *caput* of royal government in Wales and the addition of the administrative and economic function contributed to the growth and urbanisation of the town: Carmarthen could rival Cardiff or Caernarfon. By the end of the 16th century Carmarthen had a population estimated at 2,225 and the town had spilt over its ancient walls. The town remained the most populous in Wales until the large-scale urbanisation of the 19th century (Soulsby 1983, 103-104).

4 Some archaeological and historical background

4.1 Recognised as the *Moridunum* of the Antonine Itinerary from the late 16th century, the location of the town was confirmed by chance finds of Roman artefacts during the 18th and 19th century. But the precise nature of the occupation was still to be confirmed. The recognition of the remains of an amphitheatre in 1944 confirmed the importance of the settlement but it is only with the work of Professor Barri Jones in the late 1960s and early 1970s that the evidence of a defended Roman town was discovered and the hypothesis of the existence of an earlier fort to the west formulated. The work of the Dyfed Archaeological Trust between 1976 and 1989 (Figure 3) provided new evidence and confirmation of Professor Jones's early discoveries and hypothesis (James 1993, 93-94).

4.2 The fort of Roman Carmarthen is located in the area delimited by King Street and Spilman Street. Only a few excavations have been conducted since 1985, providing a

limited view of its internal organisation and chronology. The fort was founded in the mid-70s AD and probably held a small garrison. It was an addition to the network of forts established to consolidate Roman power in Wales. The 1988-9 excavations at 5-8 Spilman Street (James 1989, 51-52) revealed two phases of occupation in the fort. The Flavian fort was reduced in size toward the end of the 1st century AD and abandoned in the 1st quarter of the 2nd century AD. The passage from military rule to Roman civilian rule could explain the foundation or re-foundation of the town as the *civitas* of the *Demetae*, succeeding the fort (James 1993, 94).

4.3 The town of Moridunum developed to the east of the fort (Figure 3) and extended to 13.2 ha of which less than 10% has been excavated. The excavation directed by Professor Jones in the late 1960s unearthed the first element of the structure of the Roman settlement with its town defences, gridded street layout, multi-phased timber and half-timbered buildings and amphitheatre outside the town defences (Jones 1968, 1969, 1970). The large-scale excavation conducted in the early 1980s by H. James and the Dyfed Archaeological Trust on the friary site confirmed the findings of the earlier excavations in the north-west corner of the Roman settlement and provided a complete picture of its urban development and decline. The gridded street layout reminiscent of Caerwent was confirmed and the numerous resurfacings showed that the streets were still in use and maintained well into the 4th century AD (James 1993, 95). The sequence of rectangular timber buildings of the 2nd century AD shows that some are short-lived and some persisted through the century until a period of abandonment at the end of the 2nd century AD. The buildings were demolished to make way for larger timber-framed buildings on stone footings in the 3rd century AD. Occupation probably lasted into the 4th century on the friary site but the density was never the same as during the 2nd century (James 1993, 97). The town defence were also re-examined in the 1978 excavations at Church Street (James 1977 and 1978) and two phases were recorded. The first phase was a homogenous clay and timber bank later remodelled by the addition of a stone face.

4.4 The post-Roman period in Carmarthen is less well documented than the previous and it is thought that a native community could have settled around a Celtic Church dedicated to St-Teulyddog (Soulsby 1983, 101). The tradition placed this Welsh community near the site of the later priory. Excavations conducted in 1979 revealed a number of ditches of early Christian date (James 1979, 37). It is possible that a loose occupation of the old Roman town and surrounding areas continued until the arrival of the Normans.

4.5 William Fitz Baldwin and his followers founded the first castle in 1093 on a site called Rhyd-y-Gors 1km south of the town. The site was quickly abandoned and a new castle built in 1109 by Henry I. Contrary to the Norman foundation of Cardiff, the site of the Roman fort was not used and the motte-and-bailey castle was built to the west of the fort on a site overlooking the river and a possible bridging point. In the 12th century a stone shell keep was erected at the centre of the motte. The Norman settlement or 'New Carmarthen' grew and developed to the east of the castle around King Street, Spilman Street and west of St Peter's Church (Figure 2). Trade and markets were controlled by the new settlers while the native township of 'Old Carmarthen' developed around St

Teulyddog's church. This was allowed to remain but fell under the control of the prior of St-John by royal grant of Henry II. The Augustinian priory founded in 1127 close to the early Celtic Church and the Franciscan friary founded by 1284 south-west of the castle were the focus of religious activities. During the 13th century towers and new stone walls were added and in 1409 a new gatehouse was built. The reformation forced the closure of the priory in 1536 and the friary in 1539. The two towns were amalgamated in 1546 and were governed by a mayor and a common council (Soulsby 1983, 102-103, Cambria Archaeology 2006, 10-19).

5 Previous archaeological work.

A number of recent excavations have been conducted in the vicinity of the Mount. The results, briefly summarized, reflect the potential archaeological resource of the proposed development site of the Mount (Figure 4).

5.1 Roman

1 Council Car Park: Two main phases of occupation were recorded. They consisted of drainage trenches and beam slots of timber buildings in the south-east corner of the excavation. To the north evidence of Flavian timber buildings destroyed by fire, while a possible large tanning pit and a Roman street were excavated. After destruction by fire the northern area seems to have been sealed by a dump of clay interpreted as the spread and levelled Flavian fort rampart (James 1985, 28-29).

2 5-8 Spilman Street: Four main phases of Roman military occupation were identified. These consisted of a phase of early timber buildings sealed by the rampart of a reduced fort, backed by an *intervallum* road with evidence for a phase of abandonment and clearance. The Roman features were cut by a large V-shaped ditch of post-Roman or pre-medieval date (James 1989, 51-52).

3 33 Spilman Street: The sequence of the two-phase Roman fort was confirmed by the presence of features relating to the large Phase 1 fort and to the reduced Phase 2 in the trench sections. In the north-western half of the site a road was recorded in trench B. The road and other features were all sealed by extensive layers of burnt clay alternating with bands of charred wood. This could indicate a deliberate burning of the buildings of the Phase 1 fort after their dismantlement prior to the establishment of the reduced fort. A stiff yellow clay bank in the south-east half of the site represents the remains of the rampart of the Phase 2 fort. The road was re-laid on top of the burnt clay layers and possibly formed one of the two main streets of the reduced fort (Ludlow and Brennan 1993a, 57-58)

5.2 Medieval

4 Castle: The demolition of some houses adjacent to the outer castle wall between the south-west tower and the east tower did not reveal any medieval stratified deposits (Crane 1993, 72).

5 Castle: The re-opening of the blocked south-west tower before its consolidation revealed that the medieval basement had been extensively undermined by a sequence of 18th- and 19th-century cellars (Ludlow 1994, 62-64).

6 Castle: An evaluation on top of the shell-keep uncovered a circular stone structure. After excavation it was apparent that the structure was one of the earliest surviving features of the castle but it was not possible to ascertain its function (Ludlow and Page 1997, 85-86).

7 Castle: an excavation in front of the gatehouse revealed, preserved in the wall of a late 18th- to mid-19th century cellar, the masonry causeway that linked the gatehouse with the town. A series of pre-15th century masonry piers supporting a wooden bridge probably preceded the construction of walling connecting the piers to form a continuous causeway. The ditch was partly machine-excavated and proved to be at least 4m deep. Important finds of leather and wood objects were made from a waterlogged layer of the ditch fill (Schlee and Ludlow 2003, 130-131).

8 Guildhall, 4-5 (SN 4118 2006, not on map): A watching brief during the demolition of two dwellings failed to produce any medieval deposits, despite its location in the centre of the medieval town. The deposits were removed in the 18th century during the construction of the two buildings (Ludlow 1993, 73)

9 Jackson Lane (SN 4127 2008, not on map): A watching brief in the area of the 13th- and 15th-century towns' defences uncovered the remains of the 13th-century stone enclosure and a possible associated ditch (Ludlow and Brennan 1993b, 72-73).

6 Aims and Objectives

6.1 'The work should elucidate the character, distribution, extent, and importance of the known and potential archaeological resource that exists in the development area'. (typical brief issued by Cambria Archaeology - Heritage Management).

6.2. To consider the archaeology of the site in its wider local or regional context although particular attention will be paid to areas which will be directly affected by the development or aspects of it

7 Methodology

7.1 The watching brief should have been carried out at the start of the removal of the floor slab of the previous building and during the subsequent reduction of the ground level to construction depth of the new build. Unfortunately, a serious breakdown in communication between the successive project managers at Mott MacDonald (Cardiff) and the site contractor (T. Richards Jones Ltd) resulted in the Written Scheme of Investigation not being appropriately distributed prior to the commencement of the site work. Groundworks therefore commenced without the attendance of staff from Cardiff Archaeological Consultants. In fact were it not for the diligence of staff from Cambria Archaeology-Heritage Management, CAC would have been unaware that works had commenced. On arrival on site CAC could only note that the footprint of the building had been reduced by 1.20m (19.28m AOD) below the existing floor level. Large segments of the north and east section had been shored with trench sheeting to prevent the sides collapsing, obstructing the recording of the deposits (Plate 1). Two segments were left open until archaeological recording was completed.

7.2 The watching brief was carried out during the remaining phase of groundworks in the footprint of the new building (Figure 5). It consisted of monitoring the mechanical removal of the last 0.70m of soil above construction depth at 18.54m AOD. Two segments of side sections (Figure 6) were also recorded and a deep trench for installation of a replacement sewer was also monitored. An area nearly 50m square at the south end of the proposed development was excavated without archaeological supervision after the agreed date was changed by the contractor.

7.3 Written, drawn and photographic records to an appropriate level of detail were made including context sheets, a site diary, three-dimensional field drawings and survey data. Plans and section drawings were at a scale of 1:20. The drawings were cross-referenced to fixed boundaries on the relevant OS plan.

8 The watching brief results

8.1 The watching brief was carried out by Jean-Yves Robic and Jerry Bond on an *ad hoc* basis from Tuesday 23 October 2007 to Wednesday 14 November 2007.

8.2 The two segments of section not covered by the trench sheeting were recorded and provided a stratigraphic sample of the accumulated deposits.

Section 1 (Figure 6, Plate 2)

Below the recent tarmac (Context 01) and concrete layers (Context 02), a thick deposit (0.60m to 1.20m) of dark grey fine soil with charcoal, fragment of bones and shell (Context 03) capped and cut the single fill (Context 05) of a large ditch-like feature (Context 04). Its fill is composed of dark grey to black soil with small stone, fragments of bone and shell and with a large lens of similar material mixed with a cream lime mortar and slate (Context 07). Context 04 is cut in a layer of sterile light brown clay with rounded pebbles (06) interpreted as a geological horizon. The gradient of the slope of context 4 is low (33%) and its projected north end is some 5m to the north. A number of modern and ancient services have disturbed most of the layers. The most important is a large, probably Victorian, brick sewer with a modern fibreglass lining running east-west through the site (Figure 5, Plate 3) lying close to the base of the cut 04. There is no visible cut associated with this structure in the fill context 05. It seems likely then that context 05 was deposited after the construction of the sewer. The unexpected position of the Victorian sewer necessitated the excavation of a 2m-wide trench (Figure 5) across the site to lay a replacement sewer below the construction depth. The trench confirms that the base of the cut 04 was situated just below the Victorian sewer and that the geological horizon continued toward the south. Further excavation to the east of the Victorian sewer revealed that it was connected to a similar structure running north south (Plate 4).

Section 2 (Figure 6; Plate)

The sequence in Section 2 is less complex. Below the same tarmac (Context 01) and concrete (Context 02) a modern backfill layer composed of yellowish clay with stones and pebbles (Context 08) capped the geological horizon 06. A small rounded pit or gully (Context 09) was filled with grey clay and late 19th- to early 20th-century building rubble (Context 10).

8.3 The removal of the last 0.70m of ground to reach construction depth confirmed that the geological horizon 06 was reached in all excavated areas. The area to the south of the new building footprint was not watched during groundworks but it is thought that the loss of archaeological data was minimal as the area was heavily disturbed by deep brick masonry and the route of the Victorian sewer (Figure 5, Plate 5).

9 The finds

As most of the groundwork took place within the geological horizon no finds were made. The cleaning of the two sections only produces relatively recent building rubble and fragments of bones and shells. None were retained.

10 Conclusions and recommendations

8.1 The results of the watching brief showed that the basement of the previous building had affected the potential archaeological resource to a depth of 1.20m to the east and 2m to the north. A dense network of recent and Victorian utilities also contributed to the deterioration of the archaeological resource. The large cut feature recorded in the east section seems to be related to the construction of the deep Victorian sewer rather than to the medieval castle ditch, as once thought. No medieval or Roman deposits or artefacts were identified.

11 Acknowledgements

The author is pleased to acknowledge the help and assistance of the ground staff of T Richard Jones Ltd during the watching brief and of Mike Ponsford, C.A.C., for editing the report.

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13. Appendix

13.1. A summary list of contexts

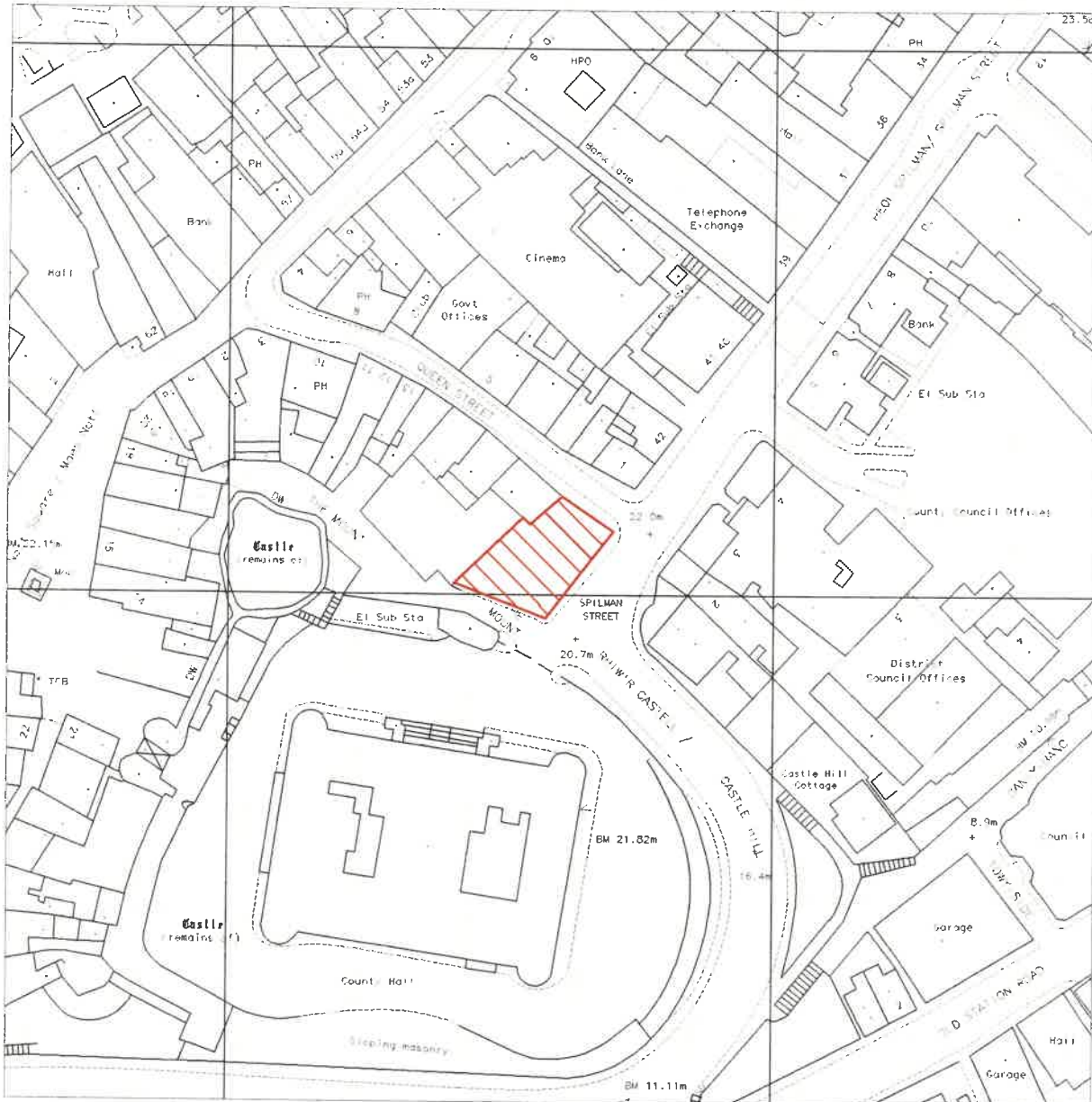
No.	Location	Brief description	Relationship	Notes
01	Sect 1; 2	Tarmac	Over 02	20th C
02	Sect 1, 2	Concrete	Under 01	20th C
03	Sect 1	Dark grey soil, Charcoal, bones	Under 02	Recent made ground
04	Sect 1	Cut feature	Under 03	19th C
05	Sect 1	Dark grey to blacksoil	Fill of 04	19th C
06	Sect 1, 2	Light Brown clay, rounded pebbles	Under 04, 08	Natural
07	Sect 1	Lenses of 05 + cream lime mortar	In 05	Demolition
08	Sect 2	Yellowish clay and stones	Under 02	Recent made ground
09	Sect 2	Small rounded cut feature	Under 08	19th C?
10	Sect 2	Grey clay & building rubble	Fill of 09	19th C?

41 300

41 400

22 100

22 000



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20 0 20 40 60 80
Metres



Centre Coordinates: 241359 220007

National Grid sheet reference at centre of this Siteplan: SN4120SW

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Figure 1: Location map
(OS, Siteplan, 1:1250)

 **The Mount**

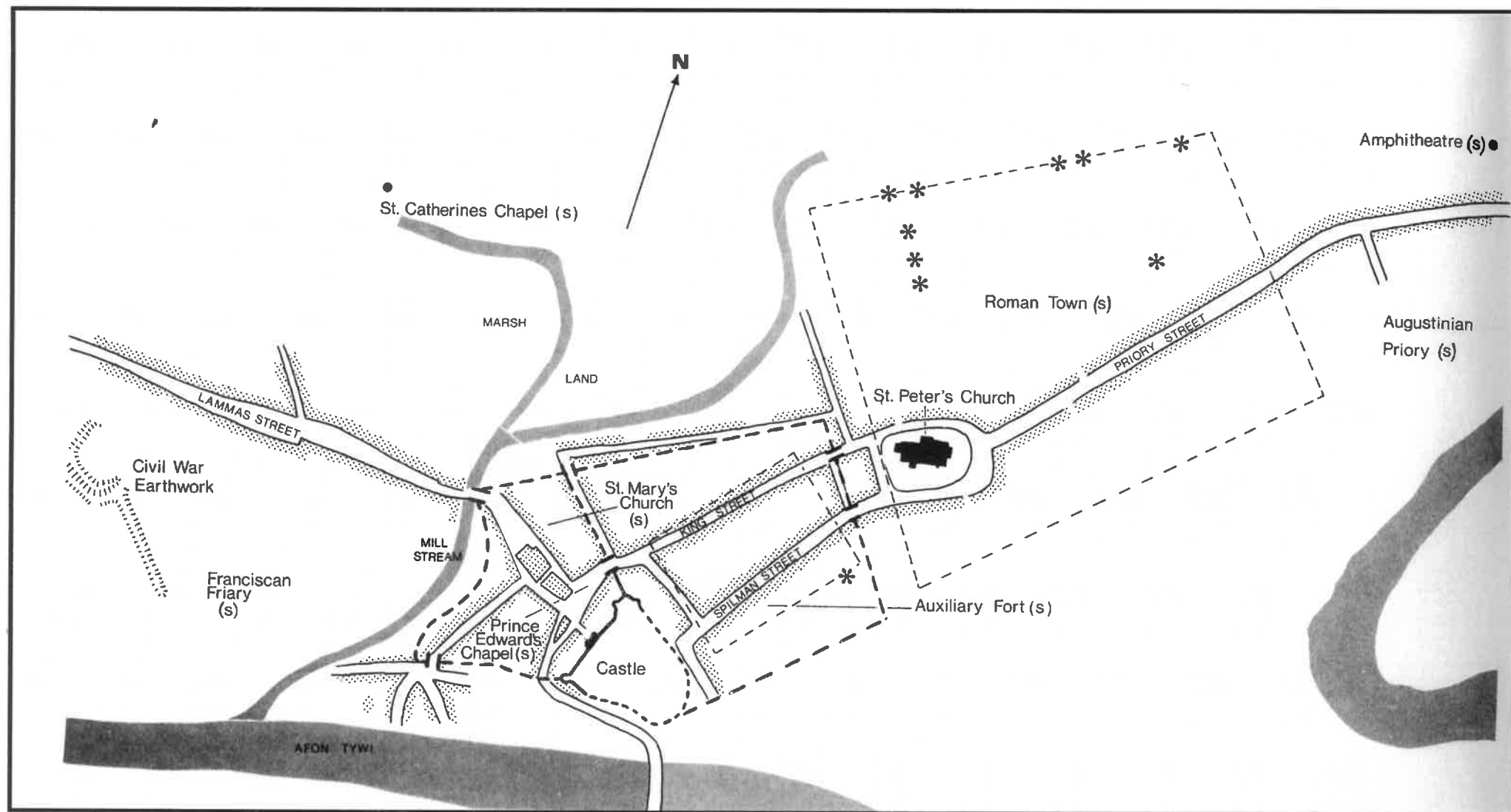


Figure 2: Plan of Roman and Medieval Carmarthen (Soulsby 1983, 102)

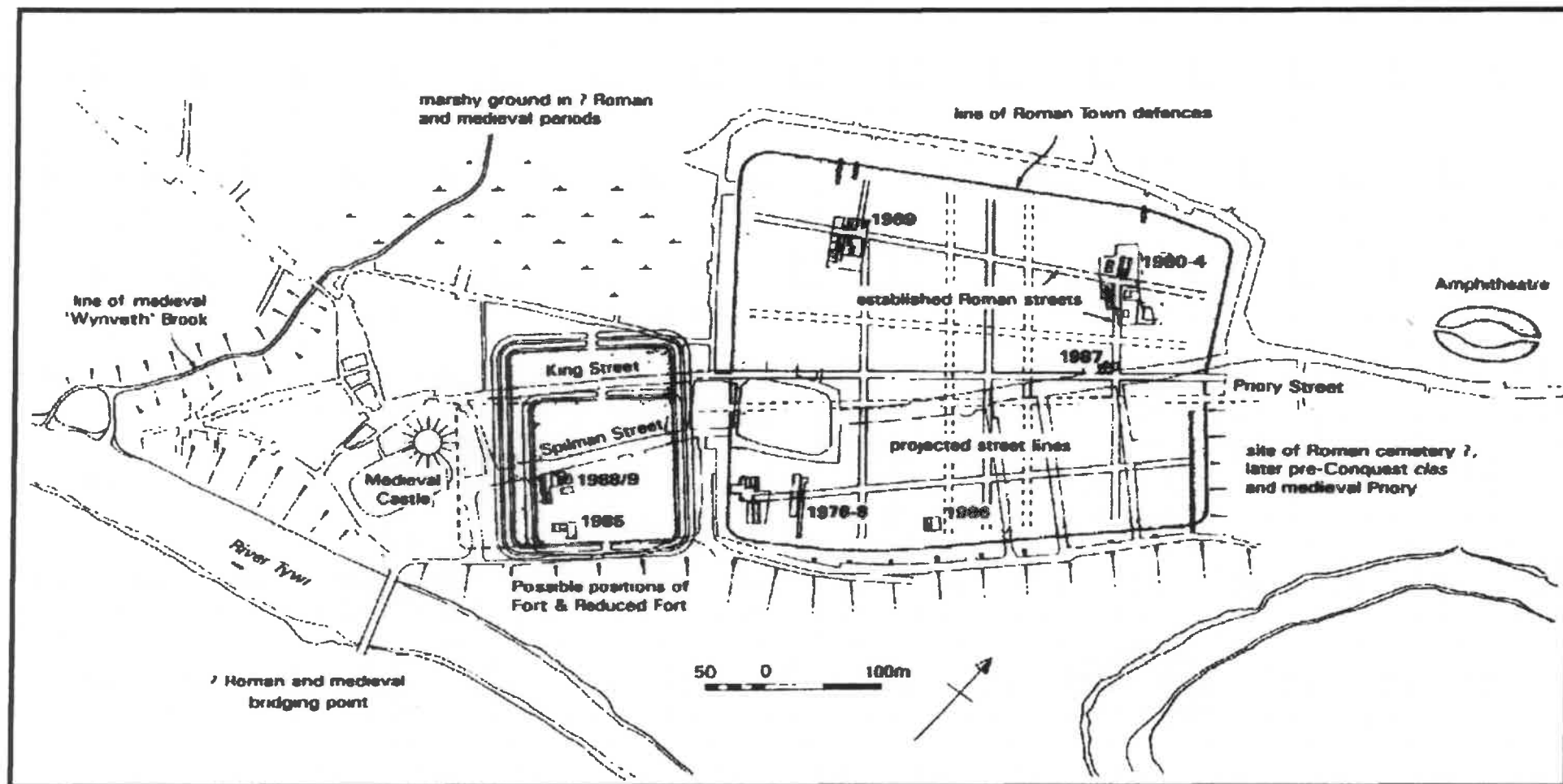
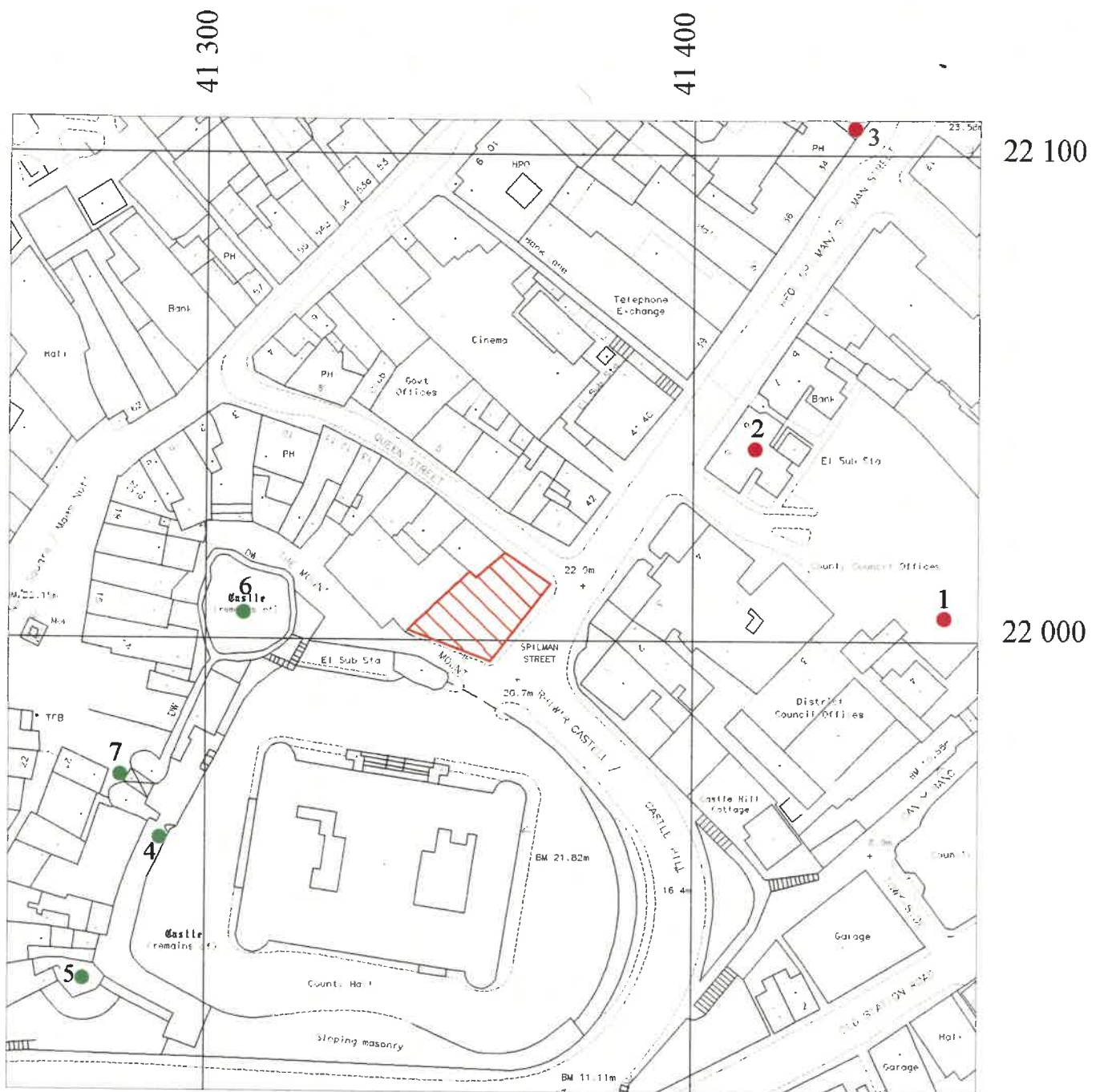


Figure 3: Plan of Roman Carmarthen (James 1993, 95)



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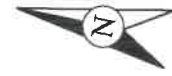
Centre Coordinates: 241359 220007

National Grid sheet reference at centre of this Siteplan: SN4120SW

Supplied by: Blackwells Bookshop
Serial Number: 00824500

 The Mount

Figure 4: Location of previous excavations in the vicinity of the Mount
(OS, Siteplan, 1:1250)

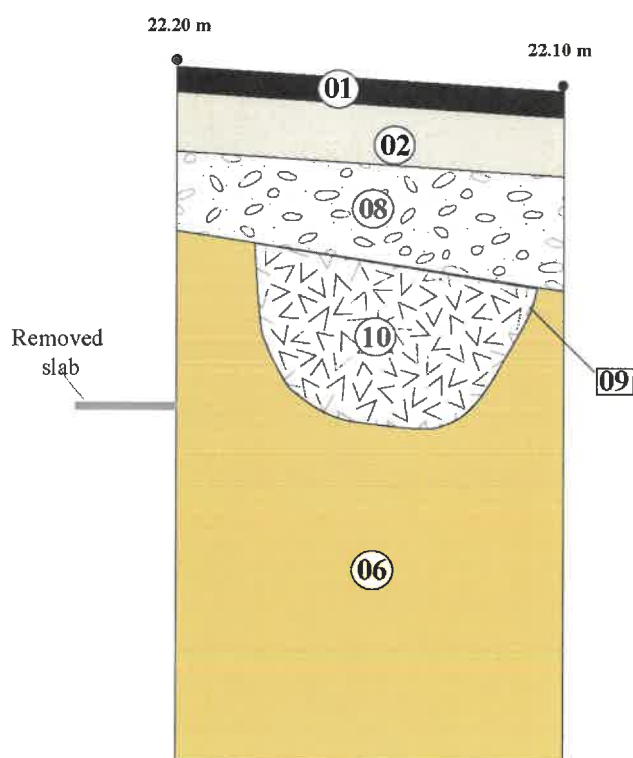
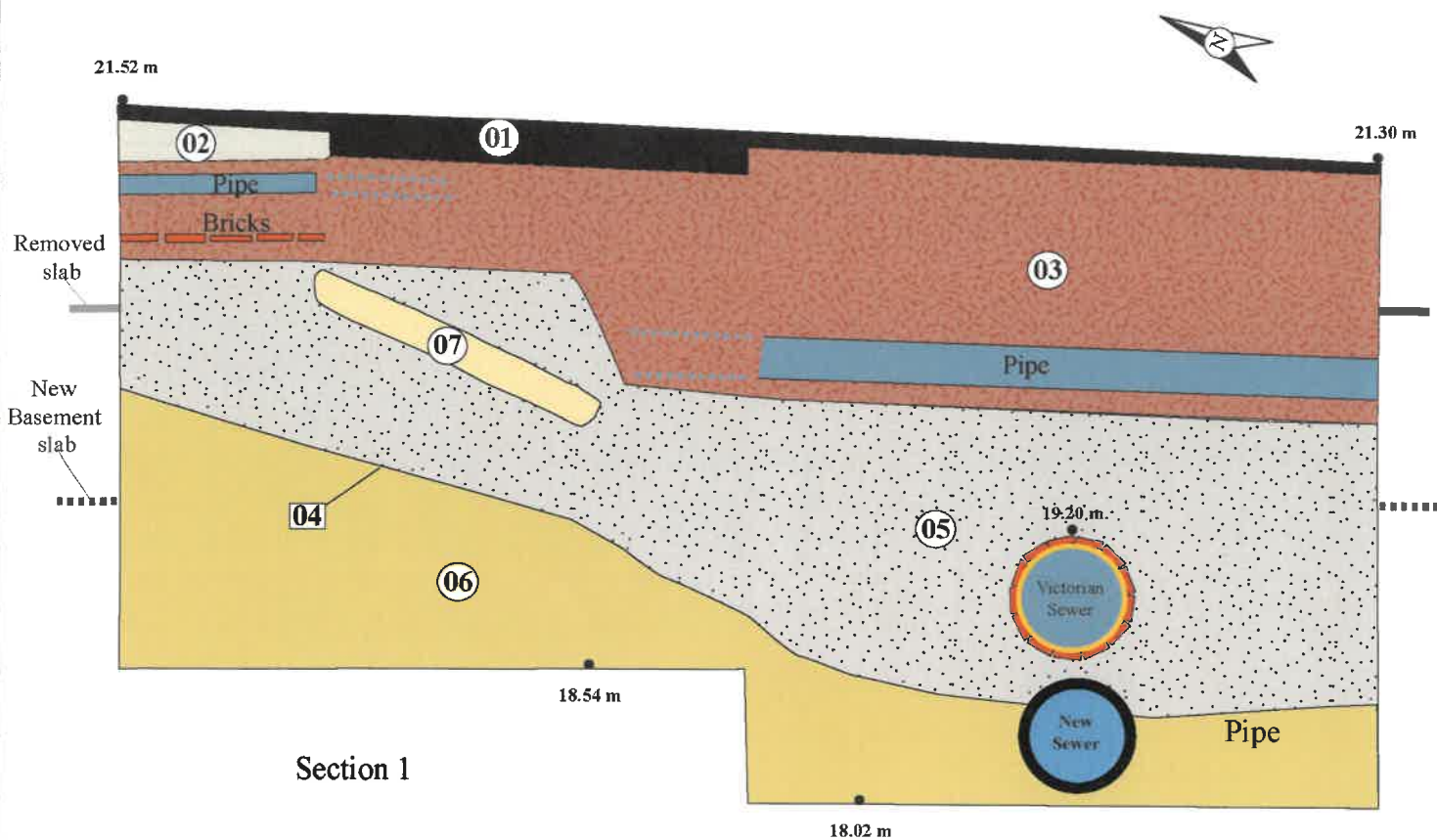


Queen Street



Footprint of new building

Figure 5: Plan of the watching brief area



0 2m

Figure 6: Sections 1 and 2



Plate 1: The watching brief area from the south



Plate 2: Section 1 from the west



Plate 3: The Victorian sewer and its modern fibreglass lining from the north



Plate 4: Connexion to the north-south Victorian sewer from the west



Plate 5: The southern end of the Victorian sewer from the north