



Access for All 2000 Project  
Tenby Museum & Art Gallery  
Castle Hill, Tenby, Pembrokeshire

## Watching Brief

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**Watching brief for work on  
Access for All 2000 Project  
Tenby Museum & Art Gallery, Tenby, Pembrokeshire**

**I Introduction**

**I.i Tenby Castle**

Tenby Museum & Art Gallery is situated on the Castle Hill which forms the promontory divide between the south and north parts of the ancient walled port and town of Tenby. (**illustration 1**) It is possibly the site of an Iron Age promontory fort and the site of an early Welsh stronghold of the Princes of Dyfed. The site of Dinbych-y-Pysgod (Fort of the Fishes) is mentioned in a ninth century poem in The Book of the Taliesin which described the funerary feast of one of the Princes killed in battle. Castle Hill has always been assumed to have been the site of this 'Fortress above the Sea' described in the poem.

A Norman castle was built on this promontory in the late C11th/early C12th, the harbour area developed and both were further protected by a wall around the town (and almost definitely along the seaward cliffs) - giving a completely enclosed environment to this important sea trading town. From this time the castle was administered by a Constable and incorporated into the demesne of the Earls of Pembroke.

By the C17th the castle and many parts of the town walls were in ruins and long abandoned (**illus. 2**), despite the money given by Elizabeth I to repair the main walls. By the eighteenth century Castle Hill had long been neglected as the focus of the town and was used only as a work and dump area for the oyster fishermen with a couple of poor cottages built amongst the castle ruins using reclaimed stone.

With the late C18th European wars and the change of the upper class Grand Tour to the 'wilder' parts of Britain, Castle Hill once more became a popular area for all the visiting gentlefolk to admire the romantic ruins amongst the stunning sea views (**illus. 3**). The hill was 'tidied up' and improved in the early C19th in the wake of the town becoming a popular tourist destination, as were other areas of the town (apart from the working harbour area). At this time the cottage on the top of the Castle Hill, close to the keep, was leased from the Corporation of the Tenby Borough Council to become a Coastguard Station and in 1830 a local committee leased the ruins of the Castle apartments (and one of the cottages built into them in the seventeenth century), as a National School. The two classrooms were rebuilt into the former apartments of the castle and the cottage utilised as the schoolmaster's house. A toilet block was erected on the side of the ruins of the former castle hall.

By 1878 the National School had moved to the south of the town walls and a local committee sub-leased the school site from the leaseholders (the Philipps family of Picton Castle) for the Tenby Local Museum. The museum has occupied the site since that date but has been refurbished and extended several times (**illus. 4, 5**).

The most notable changes to the museum structure have taken place in the last thirty years. In the 1960s the former caretaker's cottage was turned into offices with two further upstairs galleries plus public toilet provision, the entrances changed and a



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**Tenby Museum  
Location Plan**

Grid Ref:	Scale: 1:2500
Job No:	Date: 16/09/99

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foyer built on the front of the castle building as well as the terrace between the museum and the Victorian toilet block levelled and concreted. In 1972, further extensions and entrances were changed at the rear of the building and an art gallery was added to the east end of the former cottage garden (illus. 6). During the early 1990s a workshop was added to the west side of the former cottage, butted onto the former hall area of the castle. In 1995 a further art gallery was added onto the north of the building, running parallel with the offices in the former enclosed garden area.

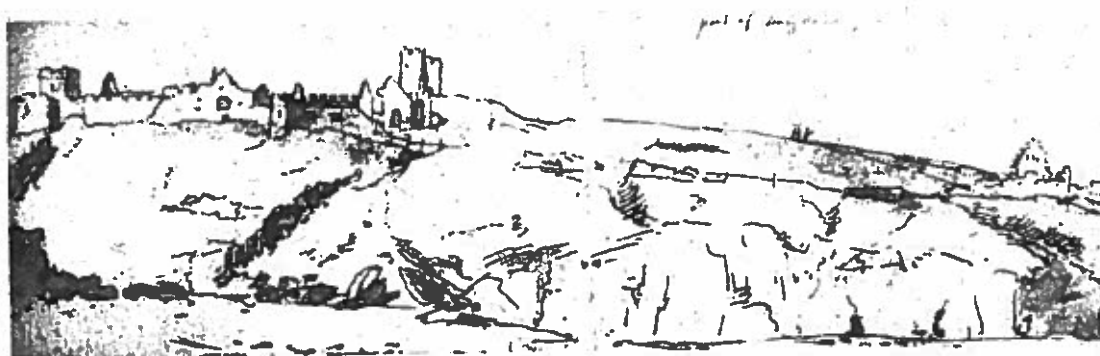
As can be seen on the illustrations from the museum archives, many of the extant walls of nineteenth and twentieth century additions and rebuilds on the castle site follow the line of original walls of the castle and the palisade enclosing the promontory (illus. 1,2,3).

In 1942, the Tenby Borough Council, having lost their original deeds and leases, repurchased their own property from the Picton Estate - mistakenly believing that the estate owned the property. The money for this purchase was raised by public subscription. The ownership then transferred, with the change in Local Authorities, to the South Pembrokeshire District Council in 1974 and in 1996 to Pembrokeshire County Council (PCC).

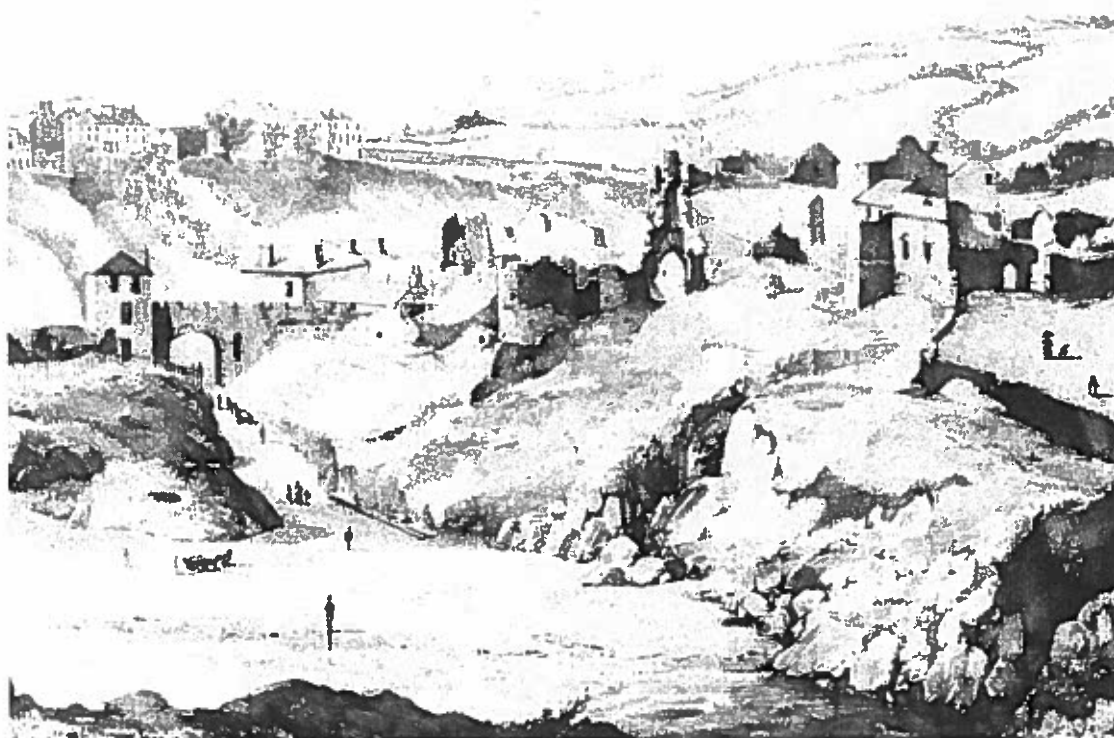
The whole hill area is grade II \* listed and the castle buildings a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM), Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments. The whole promontory is within the regulatory planning area of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park.



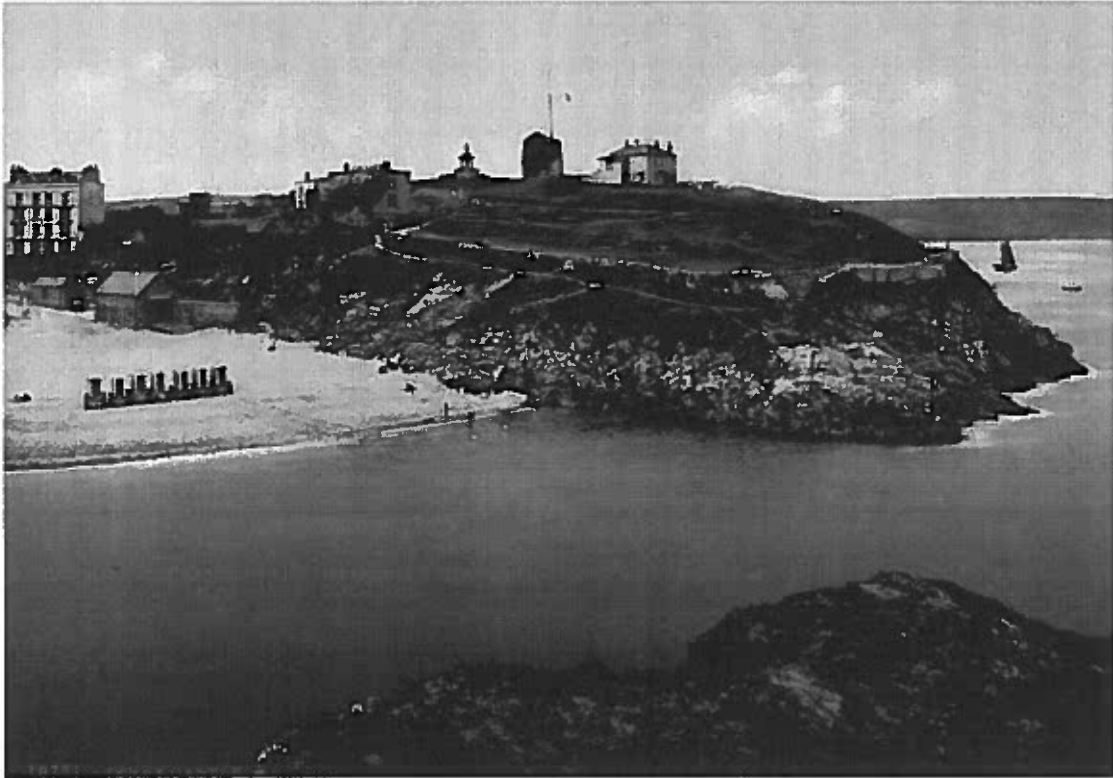
1. Tenby Museum & Art Gallery and Castle Hill, 1994  
Showing majority of extant remains of Tenby Castle  
TM&AG archive collection



2. Tenby Castle, 1678, Francis Place  
NM&GW collection  
Copyright: NM&GW, Cardiff



3. Castle Hill, c.1820, Reinagle  
TM&AG archive collection



4. Tenby Castle, c.1890, tinted photograph  
TM&AG archive collection



5. Old Castle walls to the rear (north) of the museum building, cottage & public toilets, c.1900  
TM&AG archive collection



6. Castle Hill and beach, c. 1970  
Before museum art gallery extensions  
Tenby Museum & Art Gallery archive collection

### **I.ii The Access for All 2000 Project**

This Project was grant aided by the Heritage Lottery Board and the Rural Development Scheme (administered by Pembrokeshire County Council) and was designed to enhance access to the museum and all its galleries as well as to the views and facilities of Castle Hill.

Facilities on the Castle Hill include the public gardens, the bandstand, the Jonah Jones Tenby Mural, the Welsh Monument to Prince Albert and the ruins of the Norman stronghold. Hopefully, the museum's initiative will precede further, smaller enhancements to ensure complete and easy access for all to the whole of the Castle Hill site.

In order to ensure full access for wheelchairs and pushchairs to the museum, the pedestrian approach needed improvement. This necessitated the removal of the steps through the 'portcullis gateway', the breaching of part of the Victorian wall onto the museum terrace in order to insert a zig-zag ramp, followed by re-surfacing of the whole area for a continuous and single surface approach.

A further, smaller ramp was added on the museum terrace, upto the rear workshop of the museum, in order to allow wheelchair user access to the museum offices and to provide two (wheelchair) emergency exits for evacuation of the building.

The main public entrance to the museum had minor refurbishments in the removal of a step and resurfaced flooring.

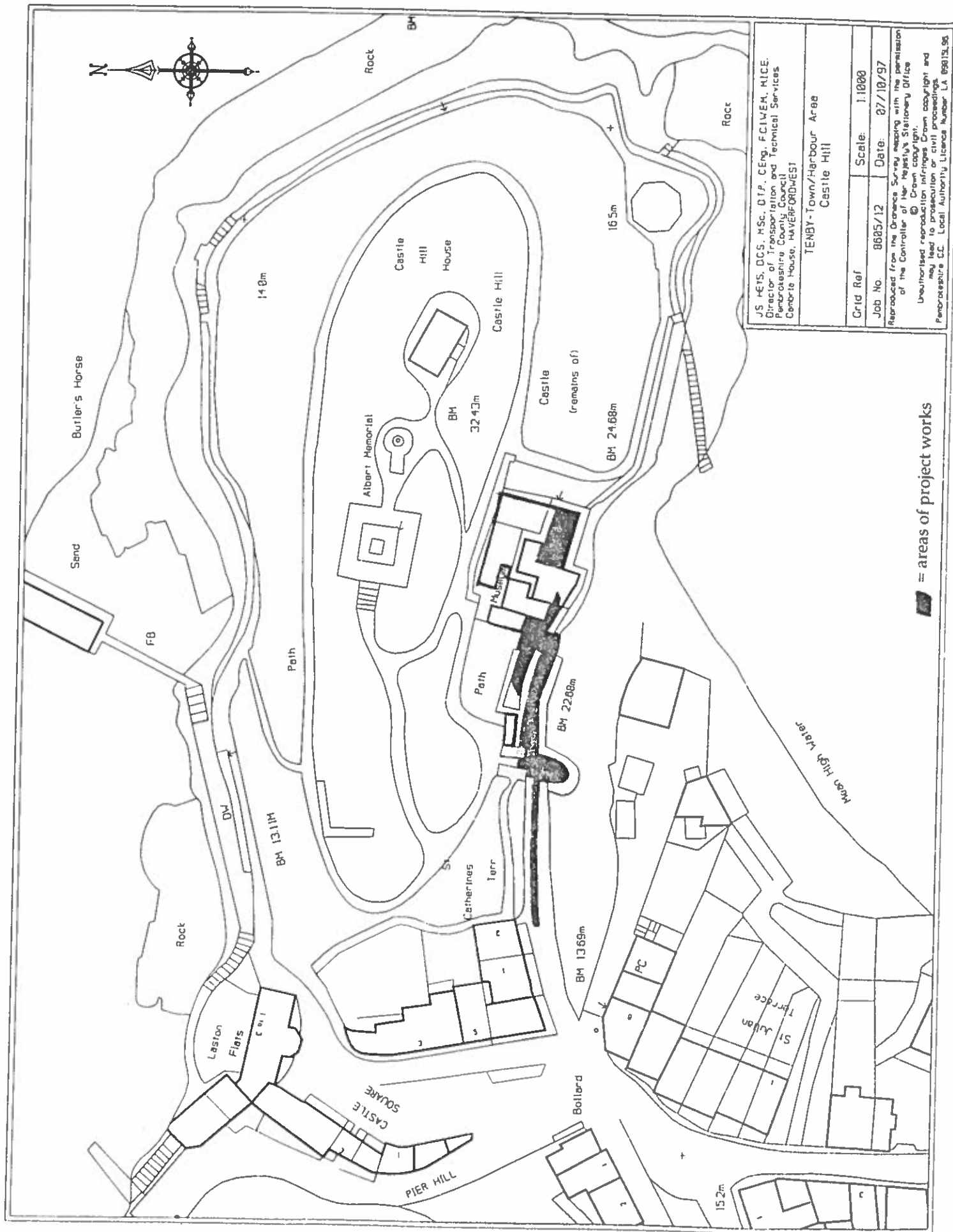
The majority of internal structural changes for the Project were within the Lower Gallery of the museum. This included the removal of the floor and raising it, back to its original position (c.50 cm higher), in order to provide one level on the ground floor public area. The stairway to the mezzanine level was removed and replaced further into the gallery to give space for a platform for wheelchairs to access the art galleries from the second stop of a passenger lift.

This passenger lift was installed in the Lower Gallery, for disabled use, and stops once for the mezzanine level, for displays on the lower stairwell and the two art galleries, and then on the first floor in the upper (Social History) gallery.

Further access to the remainder of the upstairs displays (housed in the former cottage rooms) as well as the public toilet, was provided by the installation of a platform lift. The lintels over both sets of stairs and that over the public toilet were raised to enhance access. The public toilet was also refurbished for disabled ease of use.

The Access for All 2000 Project works started on 3 April 2000 and finished August 2000. A watching brief to report on the works to the listed building and to the SAM was requested by Cadw and Cambria Archaeology (SMR for Pembrokeshire).





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TENBY-Town/Harbour Area  
 Castle Hill

Grid Ref. Scale: 1:1000

Job No. 8685/12 Date: 07/10/97

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## **II.i The Lower Gallery**

Work for the Project within the museum's Lower Gallery consisted of: the removal of the existing flooring and replacing and raising the floor c.50cm higher; the inclusion of a passenger lift to access the mezzanine and upper gallery; the removal and replacement of the stairs onto a platform runway and the raising of the lintel above the stairway entrance.

The Lower Gallery was the C19th National School's girls' classroom. At that time the gallery had a single door entrance at the front of the building, now closed over and used as a showcase for museum display. It presumably had also a single door exit/entrance onto the rear of the building and to the staircase which led to the boy's classroom above, on the north wall. The extant staircase and stair rail is mid-nineteenth century in design (Frans Nicholas, HLF Conservation Architect, pers. comm., 2000) and is presumably therefore the original, in its original location. Although the Lower Gallery walls are the same as the former classroom (*illus. 7*), there was a new ceiling installed in 1967 (*illus. 8*), the stairways and entrances to the mezzanine level and shop areas have been widened considerably during the C20th and the floor was replaced and lowered in 1987 (*illus 9*).

During April 2000 this floor was completely removed and thus allowed the examination of the Victorian schoolroom floor and footings (*illus. 10*). The dwarf walls for the classroom floor were still partially intact, having been worked around by the contractors during the 1980s. These walls were plotted prior to consolidation and re-use by the present contractors; they were made of the same stone as the main castle fabric indicating they were probably rubble / reclaimed stone from the castle ruins.

The earthen floor between the dwarf walls, although very compacted, appeared to be of some depth, upto c.45 cm in some areas. There was much insect and snail activity as well as evidence of rodent intrusion around the south wall air vents.

Several finds were made on the earth flooring including a Victorian girl's silk glove, cotton bobbins, clay marbles and numerous pieces of slate pencil (all now in the museum collections and on display in the Lower Gallery).

Beneath the former floor level the walls were not plastered and enabled examination to show that all four walls were of the original castle building at that lower level, not a Victorian re-build. Examination of the wall section through the open vents under the south wall windows showed that the wall did not appear to have been re-faced. However it would appear from examination of prints in the museum archive and from testing of the wall fabric, that the upper part of the north wall, in the upstairs galleries, is a Victorian re-build on top of the ruined north wall of the castle apartments (*illus. 3*).



7. Lower Gallery with J Arnett, Hon. Curator, 1930  
TM&AG archive collection



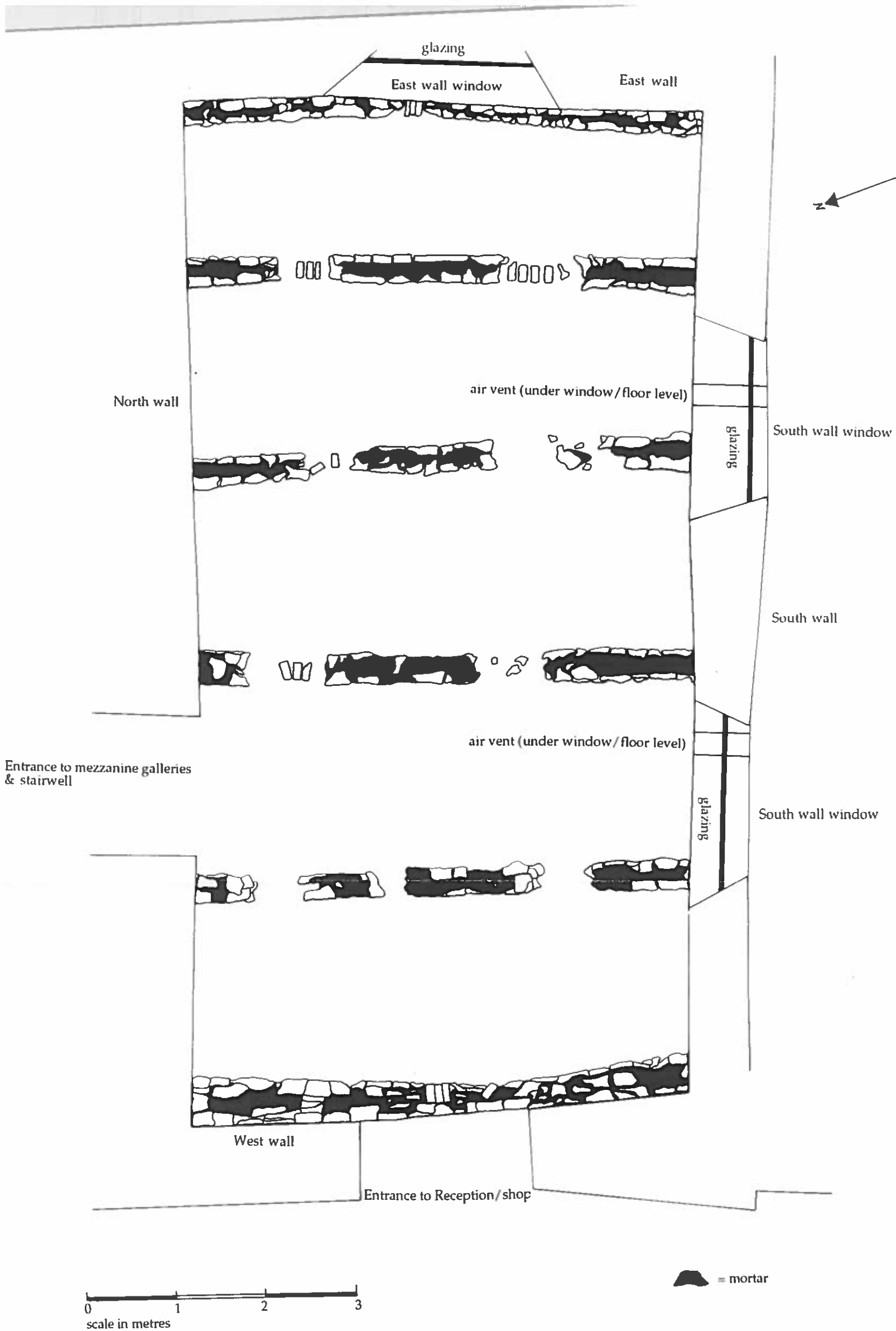
8. Lower Gallery being refurbished, 1967  
TM&AG archive collection



9. Lower Gallery, floor removed for lowering, 1987  
TM&AG archive collection



10. The Lower Gallery, floor removed before raising, April 2000  
TM&AG archive collection

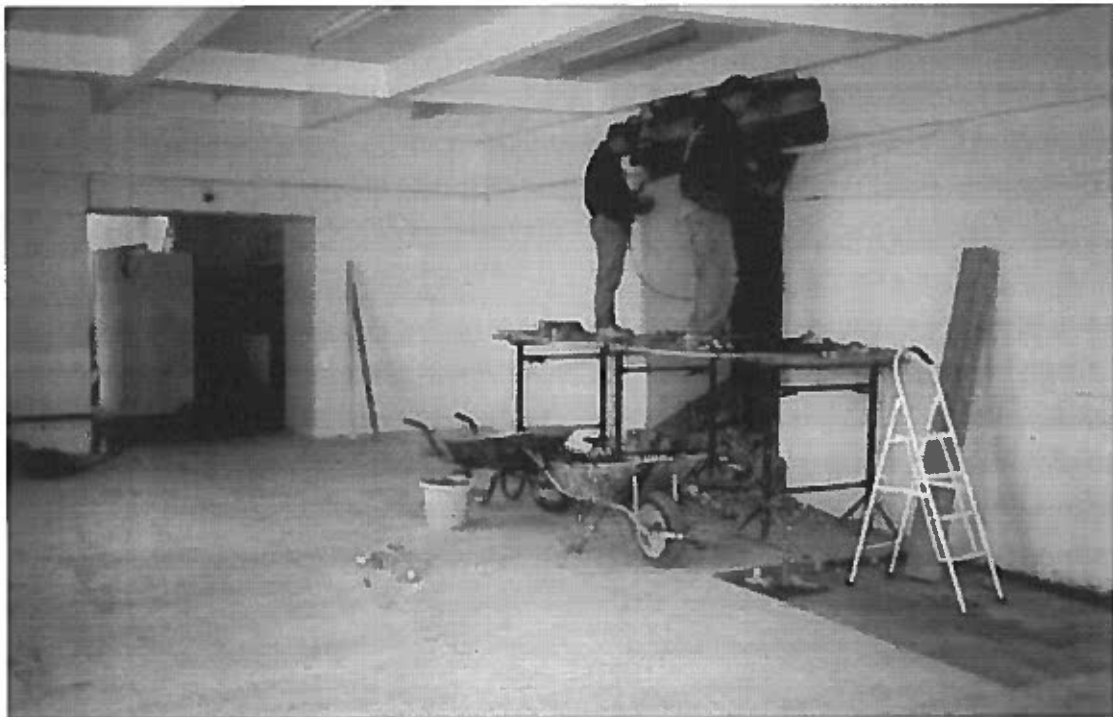


TM&AG Lower Gallery  
 Ground floor plan (showing Victorian National School footings)  
 04/04/00

## **II.ii The stairwell and upper gallery**

During the raising of the supporting lintel to the entrance to the mezzanine level (illus. 11), a cast iron, daisy wheel extractor unit was removed. The extractor matches exactly, and was located directly beneath, one in the upper gallery. This indicates that the Victorian schoolroom stairs were housed in a small external extension with the external doorway at the bottom of the staircase, the doorway of which survives but now leads into a meter cupboard. This also highlights how much the museum building has been altered and re-furbished during the last 120+ years.

In the upstairs gallery, formerly the boys' classroom of the National School, with the removal of part of the flooring to accommodate the passenger lift shaft, a large slate hearthstone was uncovered. This probably formed the stone underneath a pot-bellied stove, similar to that depicted in photographs of the Lower Gallery in the early C20th (illus.7).



11. Work on the lintel to the mezzanine level, May 2000  
The concrete base for the passenger lift on right  
TM&AG archive collection

### **II.iii Castle Hill: the upper museum approach & the portcullis gate**

During June 2000 a trench was dug by the contractors, from the gateway up to the steps onto the museum terrace (*illus. 16, 17*), in order to replace lead water pipes. The trench was cut by mechanical digger to a depth of c.90cm in places and revealed a considerable depth of rubble and loam. Within this context were found sherds of early modern pottery (mostly blue and white ceramic) probably rubbish accumulated from the cottages, schoolroom and early museum. The spoil consisted of a high proportion of oyster shells.

The Caldey Roads oyster beds were extensive and heavily fished from late medieval times until the C18th, with 'Tenby Oysters' an important local resource and export. By the mid C19th, the majority of the beds were gone due to overfishing and the trade in this commodity disappeared. From the massive amount of oyster shells found in this trench, and in all excavation of the Castle Hill approach (*illus. 17,18,19*), it would appear that this south side of the hill was used in the processing of the oysters and / or utilized as a tip for the shells – possibly prior to burning for lime.

The portcullis gateway steps were also levelled in order to enable an easier gradient for wheelchair / pushchair access (*illus. 12,13,15*). Again, smaller pieces of rubble mixed with loam and the ubiquitous oyster shells constituted the context – although the deposits here were much shallower (bedrock only c.10cm down in places) (*illus. 14*).



12. Portcullis Gateway, c. 1920  
TM&AG archive collection



13. portcullis gateway, 1999

The original curtain wall to the castle has been lowered and iron railings installed  
TM&AG archive collection



14. portcullis gateway during removal of steps prior to re-surfacing, June 2000

TM&AG archive collection





15. The portcullis gateway and upper approach after re-surfacing, July 2000



16. Upper approach before re-surfacing, June 2000  
TM&AG archive collection



17. Upper approach (refilling) pipe trench, June 2000  
TM&AG archive collection

## **II.iv The lower approach**

The trench dug for the laying of the water pipes was extended from the portcullis gateway down the lower approach of Castle Hill to a point outside 2, St Catherine's Terrace (**illus. 18**).

This approach was always assumed to have been the common approach to the castle over the centuries. However, in prints in the museum archive (**illus. 22,23**), it clearly shows that up until the C19th, the common approach was along the outside of a curtain wall, (now only extant to a metre high, heavily resurfaced and topped by railings) (**illus. 13**), and through what is now the Rotary Gardens. This curtain wall appears to have extended from the original Whitesands gateway (**illus. 3**), with castellations and arrowslits (**illus. 22**), and ran parallel to the curtain wall of the castle buildings, giving stepped access through the wall (**illus. 12**), at the south east tower, to the south of the portcullis gate (**illus. 22,23**).

There may originally have been a lower gateway entrance across what is now the Castle Hill approach. Another C17th sketch by Francis Place, in the National Museum & Gallery of Wales collection, indicates there was a gateway here.

During the digging of the pipe trench, the foundations of a large, blocked wall were revealed by the contractors (**illus.19**). Two of the limestone blocks in the partial wall revealed were of over 60cm in length (**illus. 20, 21**) and were thus presumably incorporated to uphold a large or heavy structure. The wall appeared to run in a NW – SE direction. If the present small, railed wall of the Rotary Gardens is the remainder of the original curtain wall, it maybe that the wall revealed could have been a structure backing onto it or may have been connected to an initial castle gateway.

Photographs taken of this trench and partial wall again highlight the proliferation of oyster shells in these deposits (**illus. 18, 19, 20, 21**).

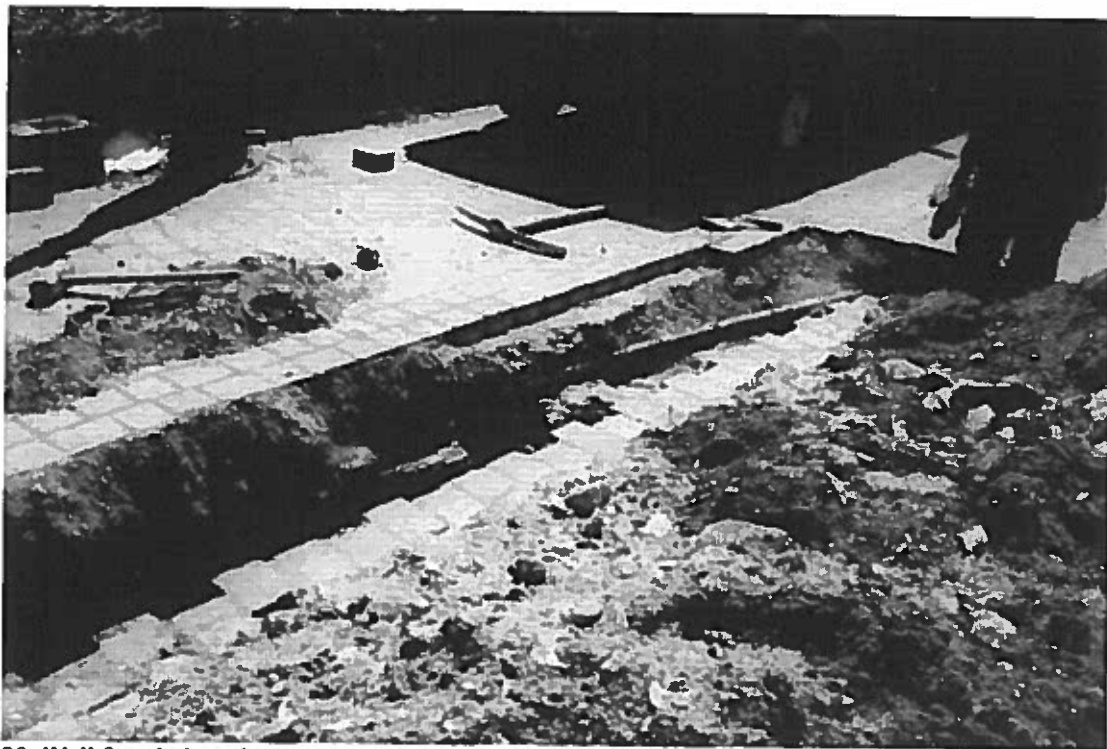


**18. Pipe trench, lower approach, Castle Hill, June 2000**

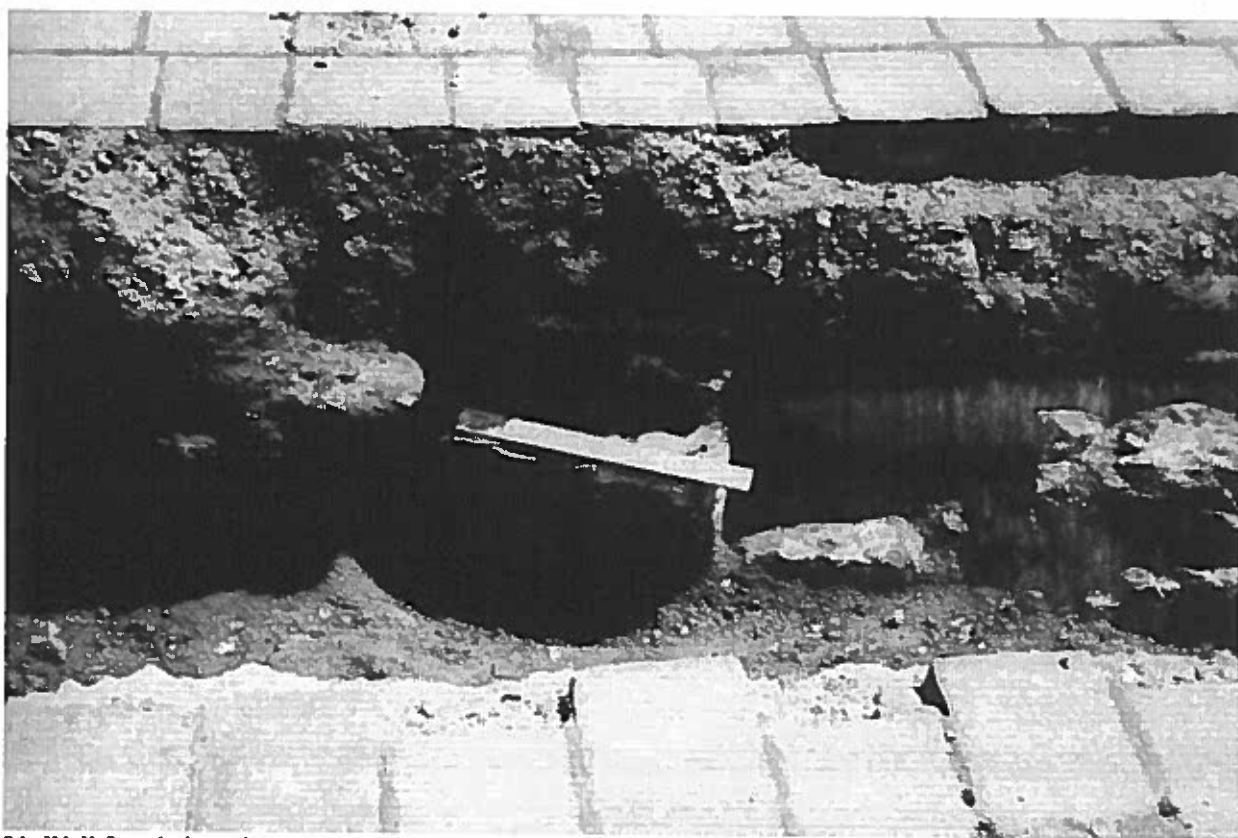
The wall foundations are mid front of the photograph, running off in a south easterly direction  
TM&AG archive collection



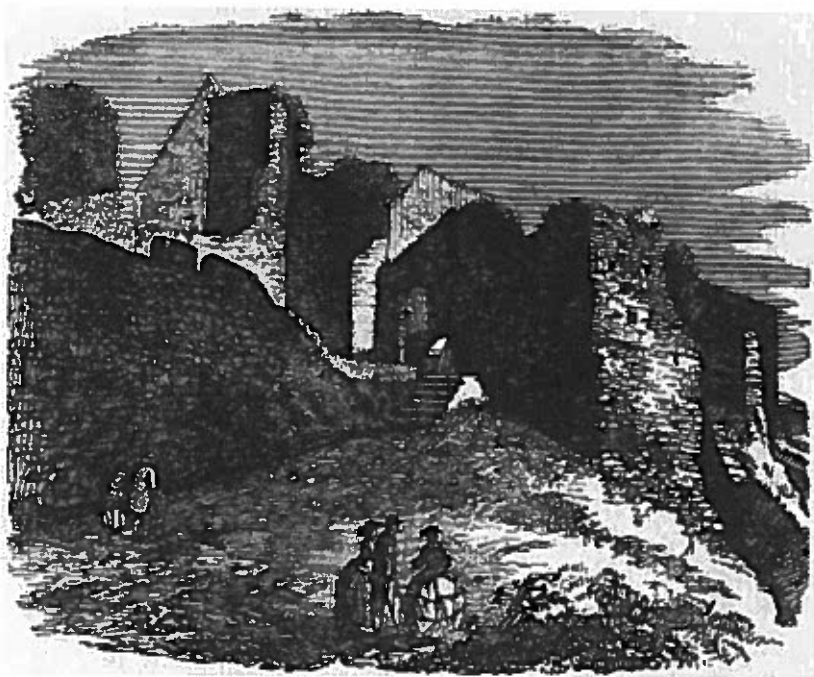
19. Wall foundations found in pipe trench, June 2000  
TM&AG archive collection



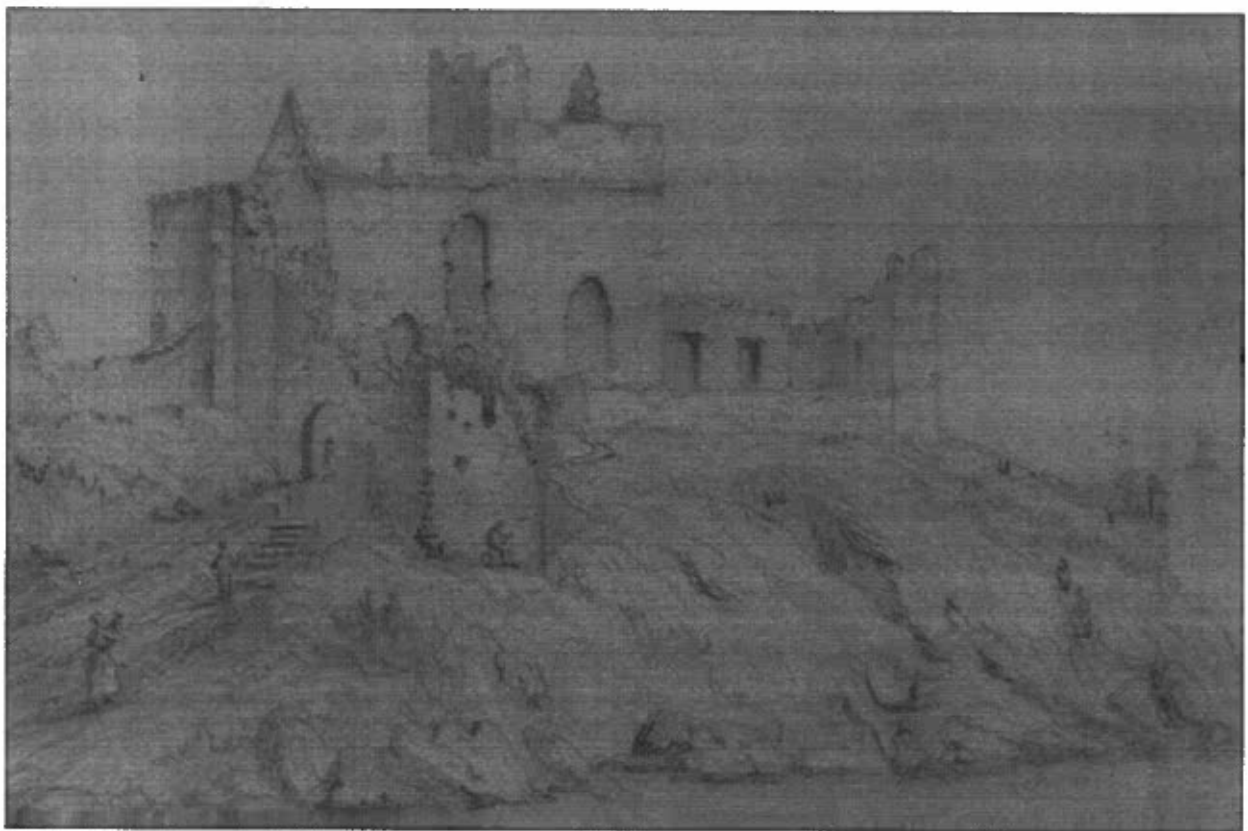
20. Wall foundations, lower approach, Castle Hill, June 2000  
TM&AG archive collection



21. Wall foundations, lower approach, Castle Hill, June 2000  
TM&AG archive collection



22. 'Entrance to Castle Hill before St Catherine's Terrace was built'  
TM&AG archive collection



23. Tenby Castle, early C18th  
TM & AG archive collection



## II. v The museum terrace

The concrete terrace between the museum and the former Victorian toilet block was cut away in order to incorporate ramped access to both museum entrances. The higher level of ramping, aligned against the extant castle hall walls, remained at the same level and was designed not to disturb any of the SAM (illus.24).

The contractors dug a test pit alongside the castle walls to investigate the depth and nature of the deposits. It was supposed that the level of deposition on the terrace would be to several metres, as the adjacent part of the museum building, housing the museum library, had the original castle flooring beneath its current floor level, to a depth of 2 metres. The test pit, and subsequent excavation of the lower ramps, revealed under the 12 cm of 1960s concrete were several metres of rubble, loam and oyster shells. There was no bedrock nor floor level revealed, indicating a build up of rubble and rubbish over several centuries (illus. 25).



24. Museum terrace, surfacing the ramps, July 2000  
TM& AG archive collection



25. Museum terrace with ramps in place, July 2000  
TM&AG archive collection

### **III Summary & recommendation:**

During the building works for the Access for All 2000 Project, no parts of the SAM, the Listed Building nor the archaeology beneath the approaches was damaged. The works did reveal however glimpses of the changes in the use of this historic landscape over the centuries.

Much of the above-ground structure of Tenby Castle and its curtain walls have disappeared. It would appear from the watching brief and the desk based research that much of the archaeology is still intact but little work has been done to fully investigate the extent of this Norman stronghold. Archive pictures from as early as the C17th reveal that the castle was far larger than previously thought and that the curtain / town walls probably surrounded the town and all the seaward cliffs.

Over the last three centuries successive building works, particularly on the south side of the Castle Hill have altered the outer walls and the former apartments of the castle considerably.

A more extensive research project and survey of the Castle Hill would reveal much more information on this SAM and how it was originally incorporated within the fortified town of Tenby.