

11 - 13 HIGH STREET, CAERNARFON  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

REPORT 118

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Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd  
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust



11 - 13 HIGH STREET, CAERNARFON  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

prepared for  
Vanderbyl Design Ltd.

by M. A. Ward BA

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Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Report No. 118 (GAT No. 1254)



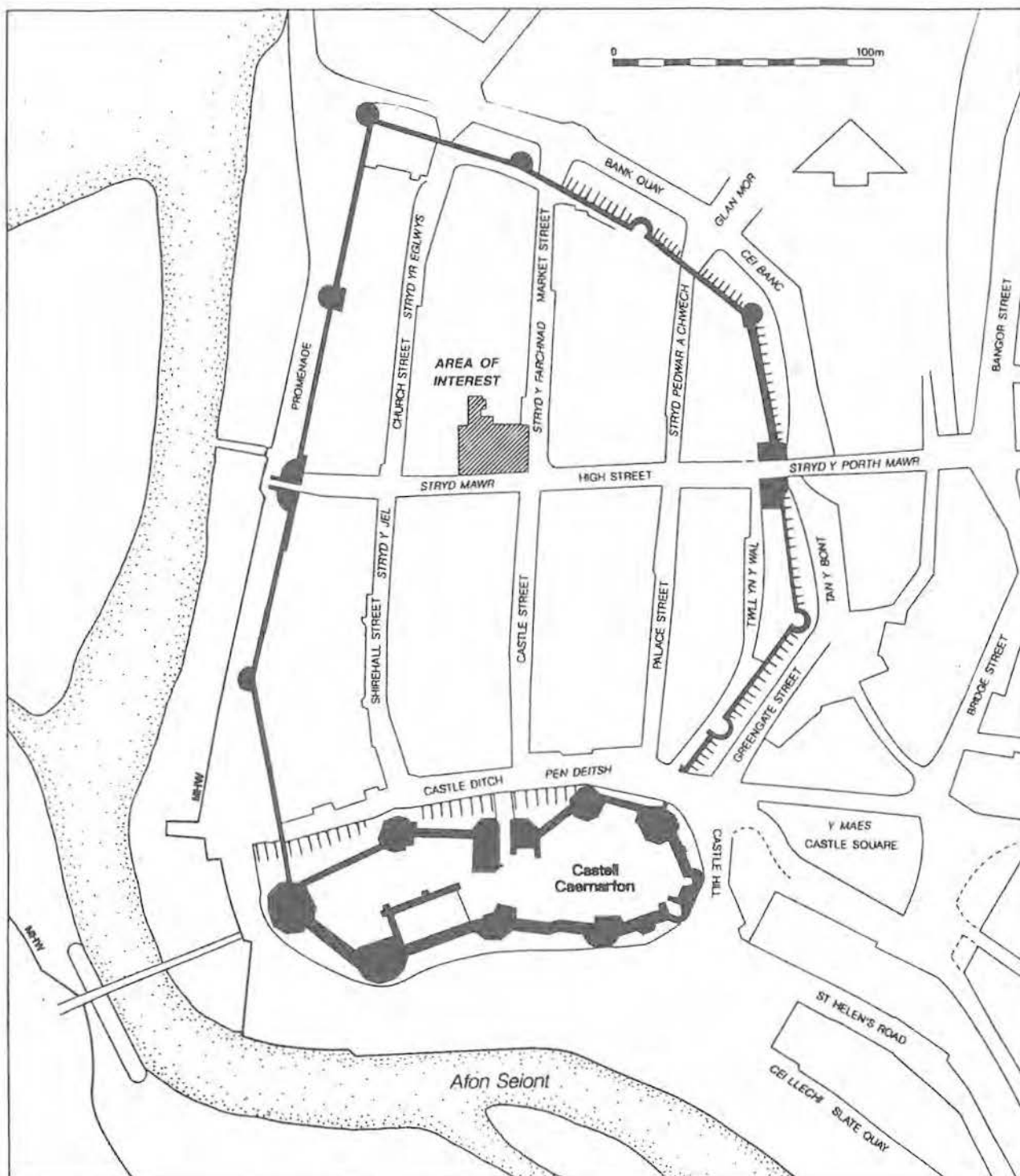


Fig.1 Location of evaluation

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A planning application (3/14/LB223D) for the redevelopment of 11-13 High Street, Caernarfon (NGR 478462835) was made by Vanderbyl Design Ltd, agents for the Caernarvon Royal Town Conservative Club. Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Planning Advice Section, in its role as advisor to the local Planning Authority, recommended that an archaeological evaluation should be carried out. Planning permission was granted on the condition that a suitable programme of archaeological work was implemented. Gwynedd Archaeological Trust contracts section was asked to produce a project design by Vanderbyl Design Ltd. The contracts section was commissioned to undertake an archaeological evaluation on 25 - 27 July 1994.

## 2. PROCEDURES AND METHODS

### *Desk-top survey*

Ordnance Survey, Tithe and Estate maps were consulted at Gwynedd Archive Service, Caernarfon, and the Department of Manuscripts and Archives, UCNW, Bangor.

### *Field evaluation*

Four trenches were excavated by machine, the concrete surface being broken up by mechanical hammer, to determine the depth, survival and extent of any archaeological deposits. The trenches were located along the line of the proposed foundation trenches to the rear of the existing buildings, representing a total area of 10.5 sq. m.

The trenches were recorded according to the normal principles of stratigraphic excavation (even where no archaeological deposits were identified). All recording involved written descriptions on Gwynedd Archaeological Trust standard forms, plans were drawn at 1:20 scale, sections at 1:10 scale, and scaled black and white photographs and colour slides were taken at 35mm format. Finds were related to their contexts.

Due to the possibility of public access, the open trenches were secured with orange plastic fencing. Spoil from the excavated trenches was stored on site in a single main spoil heap, where possible, located by the developer's agents. The trenches were not backfilled at the end of the excavations.

## 3. RESULTS

### i) DESK-TOP SURVEY (fig. 1)

#### *Historical background*

The origins of Caernarfon lie in the late Prehistoric period with the Iron Age site of Twt Hill. With the location of the auxiliary fort of Segontium, on Llanbeblig Hill to the south-east, Caernarfon became a major administrative and commercial centre in the Roman period. Occasionally Prehistoric and Roman artifacts have been found within the area of the town. There is no evidence for any continuity of settlement after the abandonment of the fort in the late 4th-century until c. 1090 when Hugh of Averanches, Earl of Chester built a motte and bailey castle. The motte lay within the eastern section of the Edwardian castle and the bailey occupied the area of Castle Square. However, it is possible that this castle was located on the site of an earlier Welsh administrative centre with a royal court (llys) and its associated bond settlement (maerdref). Giraldus Cambrensis referred to 'Kairarvon' in 1188, and Llywelyn ap Iorwerth issued a charter from Caernarfon in 1221. The Welsh town was supplanted by the creation of the Edwardian borough which was granted a charter in 1284, this involved the demolition of some of the existing houses to make way for the town walls. The shape of the enclosing walls enabled the streets to be laid out in a grid pattern, and by 1298 59 burgesses had taken up plots within the town. The castle and town were taken and damaged by the

Welsh during the revolt of Madog ap Llywelyn in 1294, but were quickly rebuilt after the revolt was suppressed in 1295.

With the creation of Caernarvonshire, from the cantrefs of Arfon, Arllechwedd and Lleyn, and the commote of Eifionnydd, by the Statue of Rhuddlan in 1284, Caernarfon became the administrative and judicial capital of the Principality of North Wales until 1536. The exchequer office was located above the East Gate, Porth Mawr, the royal courts of justice and the shire hall were located where the present courthouse stands.

The town was besieged twice during the Glyndŵr revolt in 1402, and 1403/4. However this was not the last siege endured by the burgesses of Caernarfon, during the English Civil War, the town was regarded as being of strategic importance by both the Parliamentary and Royalist forces. Initially held by the Royalists, the town was captured by parliamentary forces in 1644, only to be retaken by the Royalists in the same year. The Parliamentary forces laid siege to the town again in 1646 when parts of the suburbs and a few houses within the town were destroyed before its surrender. Although an attack by Royalist forces was made on the town in 1648 it remained in Parliamentary hands. Although Caernarfon developed as a modest slate port from the late 18th-century, the emphasis remained on its importance as an administrative centre for the county up to the present day.

### *The Conservative Club*

The borough charter confirmed the right of the burgesses to erect a town hall which was located on the junction of the High Street and Market Street (Speed 1610). The town hall fell into ruin after a new guildhall was built above the East Gate, Porth Mawr in 1767 (Jones 1889, 77). The location of the town hall, extending across much of the width of Market Street, is shown on a Town Plan of 1777. The old town hall was referred to by Jones as being almost circular, although this is not reflected in the plan by Speed. The town hall was replaced by a meat market which Jones refers to as having been built of carved stone with no roof, windows, or doors and that the entrances to the cellars were left open to allow the refuse of the streets to be swept into them. This building was demolished and replaced by a meat market which Jones suggests was erected c. 1828, but dated architecturally to the 18th-century (Welsh Office 1967 P253/801/1, No. 77). This building was also known as The Shambles on a plan of 1834 (Wood 1834). The ground floor of the present building retains 18th-century work of coursed stone with an arcade of round-headed arches, which were once open but are now filled in, and replaced by windows. In 1889 the meat market was held in the lower part of this building, the upper three storeys of 1886, were used by the members of the Conservative party as a reading and billiard room. Previously these rooms had been used as a schoolhouse, an arms depot, and as a savings bank.

Nos. 11 and 13 High Street were once a single building (Wood 1834) the Packet House Inn which Jones described in 1889, as a very old house with a sundial inserted into the walls with a date of 1616. There is an early 17th-century beam in situ (RCAHMS 1960, No. 1122). It is possible that other parts of the building are of this date. The only changes to the area to the rear of Nos. 11 and 13 were the erection of small outbuildings which have subsequently been demolished.

### **ii) FIELD EVALUATION (fig. 2)**

Four trenches, representing a total area of 10.5 sq. m, were located along the line of the proposed foundation trenches to the rear of the existing buildings. Due to the narrow nature of the trenches none were totally excavated below a depth of 1.2 m in order to comply with health and safety legislation. A test pit was excavated in trench 4, to a greater depth than the safety limit, to gauge the depth of the natural subsoil. The size of trenches 3 and 4 were amended due to the need to retain access to the boiler room and the location of previously unlocated foul sewers. The depth of trenches 2 and 3 were restricted in accordance with the clients wish to avoid any damage to existing sewer pipes.

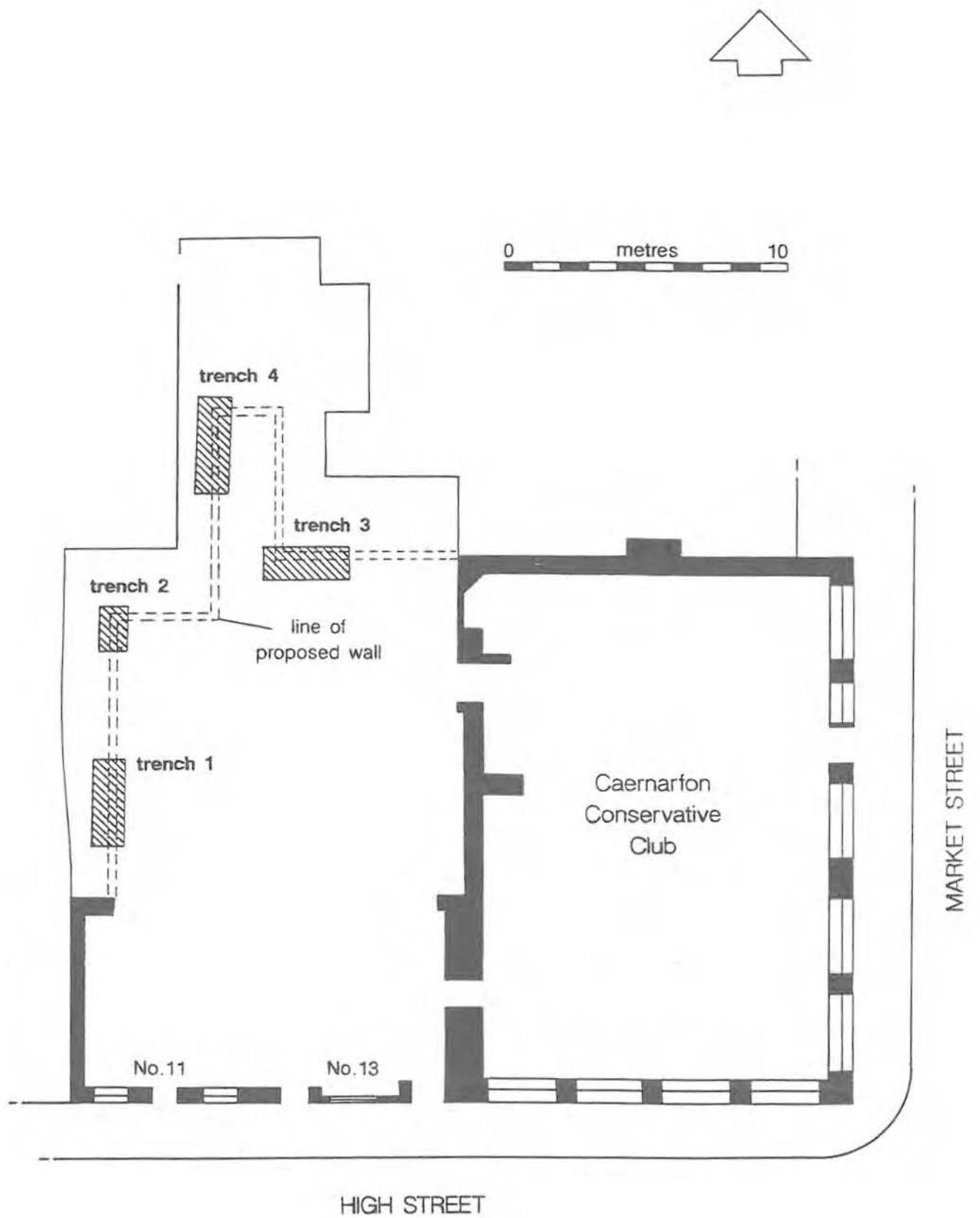


Fig.2 Location of evaluation Trenches



### *Trench 1 (fig. 3)*

A trench, 3 m long, 1 m wide and 1.2 m deep, was excavated by machine and hand cleaned. At a depth of 1.2 m two cobbled surfaces (A) were encountered, separated by a brick wall (B) a single course wide, running north to south, parallel to the present alignment of the rear of No. 11 High Street. A sequence of deposits had formed against the west face of the wall (C) to a depth of 0.8 m, before the wall had collapsed and the east side filled in (D). The function of this wall cannot be determined. It was too narrow to bear any load, and may have been a division between two areas of cobbled yard. However, such a division is not represented on any plan consulted and it may have been an short-lived outbuilding. The type of brick used would suggest a date in the second half of the 19th-century. The area was subsequently levelled with 0.3 m of material (E). A trench for a foul sewer pipe (F), which ran north to south along the western half of the trench, cut through the levelling deposits and the cobbled services. Two iron and lead water pipes (G) were inserted through the upper levelling deposit and the fill of the sewer trench before the present yard was concreted (H). The trench was not excavated any deeper due to health and safety constraints. No deposits or finds of archaeological significance were noted in this trench.

### *Trench 2*

A trench, 1.5 m long, 1 m wide and 1 m deep, was excavated by machine and hand cleaned. A partly demolished stone wall, 0.7 m high, was noted in the north-west corner of the trench. This wall was recorded as an outbuilding on the 1st edition of the Ordnance Survey 25 inch map for Caernarfon. A foul sewer pipe ran parallel to, and against this wall, at a depth of 0.7 m. It cut through a further drainage pipe, which ran north to south along the eastern side of the trench. The trench had been filled with stone rubble, which contained late 19th-century pottery, and consequently the trench could not be excavated any deeper due to the unstable state of the trench sides and the presence of the sewer pipes. No deposits or finds of archaeological significance were noted in this trench.

### *Trench 3*

A trench, 3 m long, 1 m wide and 0.7 m deep, was excavated by machine and hand cleaned. The foundations of the recently demolished outbuilding were noted, and a sewer pipe ran across the bottom of the trench from the south-east to north-west. No deposits or finds of archaeological significance were noted in this trench. The trench was not excavated any deeper due to presence of the sewer pipe.

### *Trench 4 (figs. 4 and 5)*

A trench, 3 m long, 1 m wide and 0.7 - 1.45 m deep, was excavated by machine and hand cleaned. The northern end of the trench was excavated to a depth of 1.45 m as none of the other evaluation trenches had reached sufficient depth to encounter either the natural subsoil or sealing deposits. The natural subsoil was reached at a depth of 1.45 m below the concrete surface of the yard. Four deposits of levelling (A), with a total depth of 0.75 m, lay above the subsoil. Similar deposits were encountered during the excavation of 29 High Street, and they can be interpreted as an accumulation of material within the rear of the Medieval burgrave plots. At present, the reasons for the accumulation of such a deep deposit of material within Caernarfon are unclear, and may only be resolved by further excavation elsewhere within the town. Two small sherds of early to late 14th-century pottery were found within the uppermost of these deposits. In the southern half of the trench these deposits had been overlain by a cobbled surface set in red clay (B). The cobbled surface was subsequently replaced by a second surface of larger stone cobbling also set in red clay (C), the northern edge of which had been set back further south than the earlier cobbling. It is probable that the cobbling forms part of the yard of Post-Medieval date which may possibly be associated with the surviving fragments of 17th-century building within 11 and 13 High Street. To the north of the cobbling, deposits of debris and slate had accumulated (D). In the very northern end of the trench a wall foundation (E), ran east to west, and may have been a property boundary pre-dating the earliest detailed map of 1834, as it did not appear on this or any of the subsequent maps. Sherds of Buckley ware, consistent with an 18th or early 19th-century date, were found within the foundation fill. Two surfaces of cobbling (F and G), and their associated levelling deposits, abutted the southern side of this wall, and probably formed yard

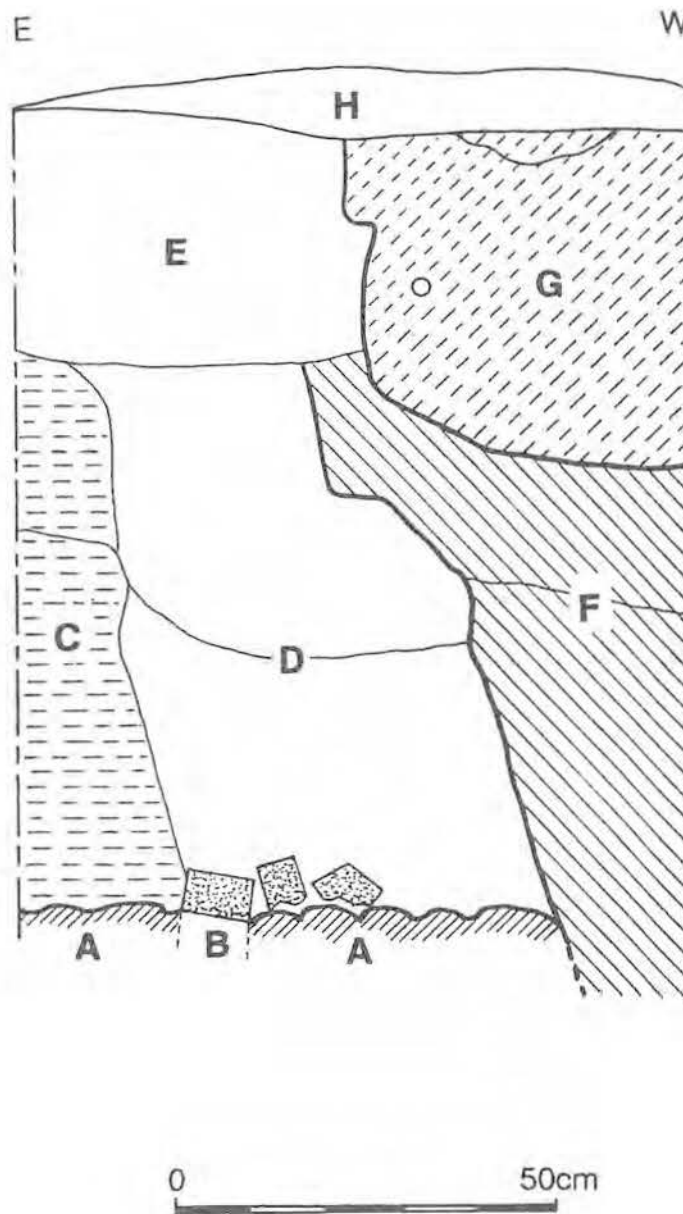


Fig.3 Evaluation Trench 1 South section

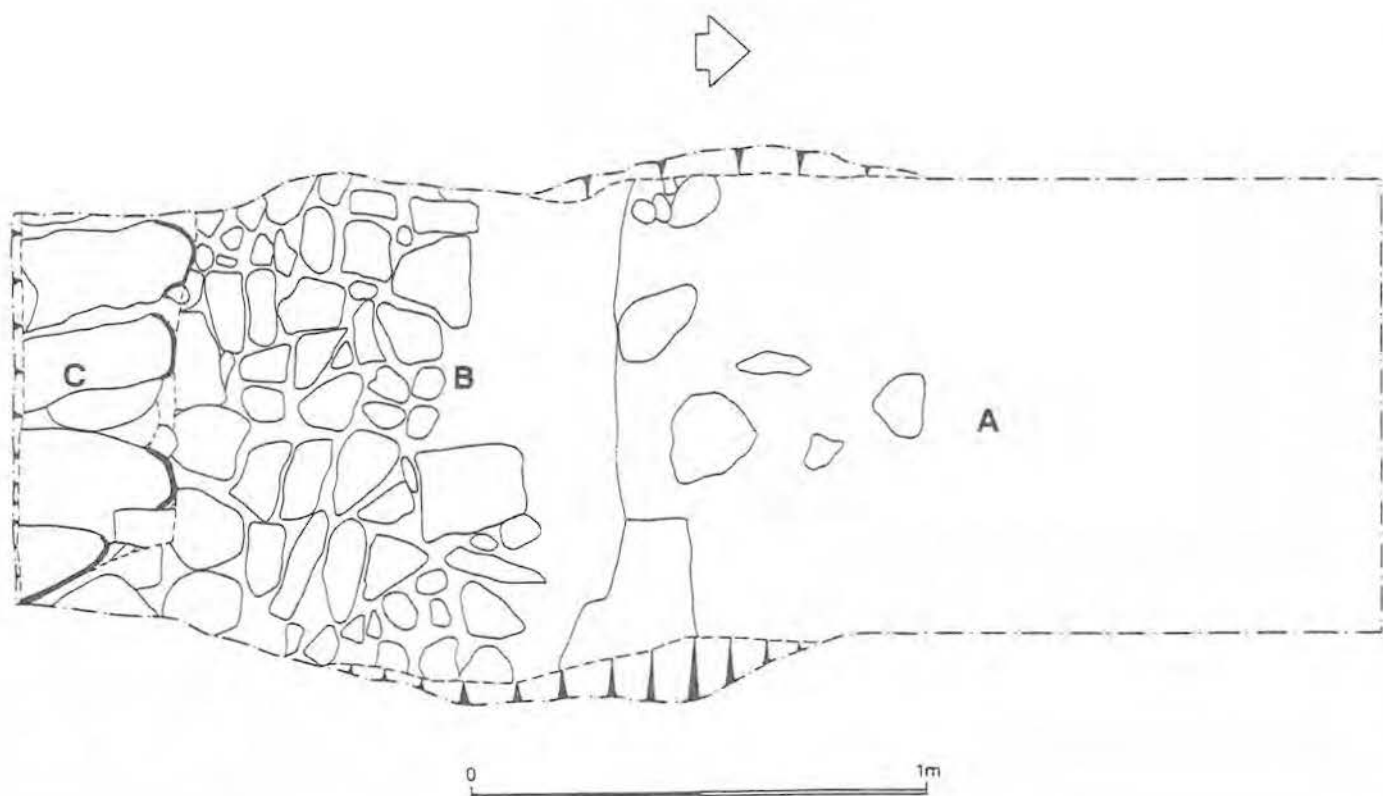


Fig.4 Plan of evaluation Trench 4

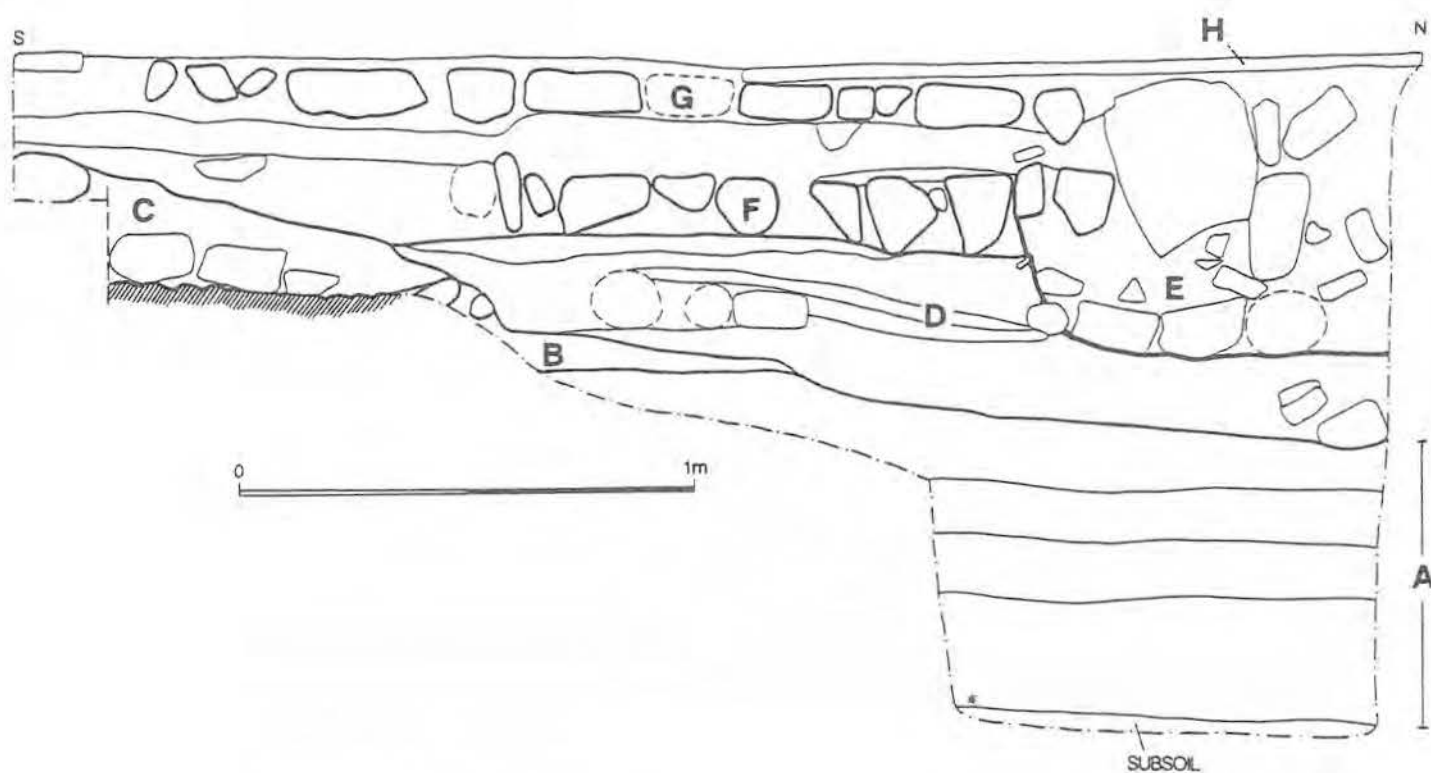


Fig.5 Evaluation Trench 4

surfaces before being replaced by concrete (H).

#### 4. SUMMARY

Due to the need to retain the existing sewers, and health and safety considerations: the depth, narrowness and unconsolidated sides of the trenches, the excavations could not be carried out to any great depth. To the depth excavated no deposits or finds of archaeological significance were noted from evaluation trenches 1, 2 or 3. However, in part of trench 4 a small trial pit was excavated into possible Medieval deposits. The area, where trench 4 was located, would have been to the rear of the medieval burgrave plots, and consequently the existence of structural features would not be expected. However, the existence of rubbish and cess pits with rich artifact assemblages remains a possibility and substantial archaeological features, anywhere within the Medieval Burgrave plot, may have survived sealed beneath the later accumulated deposits.

#### 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The area of greatest archaeological potential may lie close to the street frontage in areas which have not been disturbed by later developments or cellars. Due to the difficulties outlined above it has not been possible from this evaluation to recommend which areas of future ground disturbance require further archaeological excavation. However, it is impossible to guarantee that further archaeological remains will not be found within the area of the proposed redevelopment. It is recommended that provision be made for a watching brief of any ground disturbance, with the opportunity to record any archaeological deposits if they are encountered.

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## APPENDIX

### Copy of Project Design

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION: 11-13 HIGH ST, CAERNARFON (G1254)

Prepared for Mr Damien Utton, Vanderbyl Design Ltd Manchester - July 14 1994

### 1. PROJECT BACKGROUND

Vanderbyl Design Ltd have applied to Arfon Borough Council for planning permission to carry out a redevelopment of part of the Conservative Club at 11 to 13 High Street Caernarfon. In its role as archaeological advisor to Arfon Borough Council, The Planning Advice section of the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust has identified the archaeological implications of the scheme. Subsequently, a condition has been attached to the grant of planning permission requiring that a programme of archaeological works be carried out to determine and ameliorate the archaeological implications of the proposed development. The Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (Contracts Section) has been asked by the applicant to produce a project design and costings to carry out an appropriate programme of work to address these implications.

### 2. THE SITE AND ITS ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Occasional prehistoric and Roman finds have been recovered from Caernarfon. The Roman auxiliary fort of Segontium is located approximately 800m to the SE and nearby is Hen Waliau, a late Roman storage compound.

In the medieval period, before the establishment of the Edwardian borough in the late 13th century, Caernarfon was an important Welsh administrative centre with a royal court (*llys*) and settlements of the King's tenants (*maerdref*). The exact location of these is unknown as many of the existing structures in the town were demolished at the time of Edward I's invasion and much of the stonework used in construction of the town walls.

Following the building of the castle, a walled town was added with 70 burgage plots laid out. The configuration of the medieval town is largely preserved in the present street pattern but the scale of Georgian and Victorian redevelopment, particularly the introduction of extensive cellars, has rendered much of the area within the town walls archaeologically sterile.

However, excavations at a nearby site, 29 High Street, carried out by the Trust in 1993 have revealed the remains of a light timber and wattle and daub building of Medieval date associated with several pits which contained Medieval pottery sherds. Stone-built foundations were also revealed relating to post-Medieval occupation of the site. It therefore appears that archaeological deposits of the medieval period may have escaped destruction in this part of the town.

The present development scheme involves the demolition of the existing extension to the rear of 11-13 High Street, the gutting of the rest of the structure and the construction of a significantly larger replacement extension. Most of the foundation trenches will therefore disturb what may be relatively untouched archaeological deposits surviving between the existing buildings.



### 3. THE BRIEF

The applicant wishes to secure a programme of archaeological work which will also meet the condition of the planning consent. It is recommended that an evaluation of the site is undertaken to ascertain the nature of the archaeology and establish what, if any, further action is required to safeguard the archaeological interest of the site.

The brief is to carry out an archaeological evaluation of the area which has planning permission. The aim of the evaluation is to gather sufficient information to establish the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of the archaeological deposits (if any) in the area, so that they can be taken into account. The preferred option, wherever possible, is the preservation in situ of significant archaeological features. Where preservation in situ proves impracticable a reserve option of preservation by record (i.e. further 'rescue' excavation) should be considered.

The scope of the evaluation should be as follows:-

- 1) A full appraisal of existing data relating to the site, such as SMR information, early maps, estate surveys, local society records, geotechnical data, other accessible documents, oral evidence etc. as appropriate and available.
- 2) Trial trenching at an appropriate level. It is proposed that four trenches be dug, two on the line of the proposed foundations for the west wall of the concert room, one on the line of the north wall of the proposed ladies room, and one on the line of the west wall of the proposed gents/boiler building. The precise location of the trenches will be decided on site (in discussion with the Planning Advice Section), following the establishment of what services are present.

### 4. METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

#### STAGE 1 - Desktop Survey

The aim of this stage of the evaluation is to determine, as far as is reasonable from existing records, the nature of the archaeological resource within the specified area. Consideration will be given to the following sources:

- the Gwynedd County Sites and Monuments Record
- General published works - esp. Royal Commission Inventory
- National Monuments Record
- Cadw listed buildings list
- Local authority
- Gwynedd Archives
- UCNW Archives
- Tithe maps
- Estate surveys
- Ordnance Survey maps
- Local society records
- Geotechnical information (if available)
- oral evidence



## STAGE 2 - Trial Trenching

The intent is to make all four proposed trenches c. 3m long by 1m wide however these dimensions may need to be adjusted depending upon the location of services, the limited access available and the nature of the archaeology as it is revealed. It is understood that the trenches may be dug along the line of any of the proposed foundation trenches but that the trenches are not to be dug more than one metre wide without the permission of the developers. In addition, the trenches can be excavated one metre wide down to a maximum depth of one metre, at which point, the trench must narrow to 0.6m wide if any further excavation is necessary.

It may be necessary to first breakup and remove a layer of concrete in places. This will be achieved by the use of a mechanical breaker.

It would appear that it is just possible for a small machine excavator (JCB 801) to access the site to clear the trenches of overburden. Once archaeology is encountered, the trenches will be cleaned by hand and inspected for features and then excavated by hand. A representative sample of features will be half-sectioned (or otherwise sampled) and recorded to assess their depth, stratigraphy, nature, date and environmental potential.

The trenches will be recorded according to the normal principles of stratigraphic excavation (even where no archaeological deposits have been identified). All recording will involve written descriptions on Gwynedd Archaeological Trust standard forms, plans generally at 1:20 scale, sections generally at 1:10 scale, scaled black and white photographs and colour slides at 35mm format. Any finds will be related to their contexts and located three dimensionally if significant, and environmental samples will be taken where appropriate.

Where there is the possibility of public access, open trenches will be secured with orange plastic fencing. Spoil will be stored on site in a single main spoil heap which will be located by the developer's agents. The trenches are **not** to be backfilled at the end of the excavations.

## 5. REPORT

The assessment will lead to the production of a report which will present a summary analysis of the documentary search and all field data, incorporate this with previously available information about the archaeology of the area, and assess the archaeological resource and the implications of the proposed scheme.

The report will be produced to an adequate publication standard and will include the following:

- 1) A copy of the agreed Project Design, as an appendix.
- 2) The results of the documentary search.
- 3) A summary of the results of the field evaluation, including the archaeological features identified, along with artefactual evidence (if any).
- 4) An interpretation of results, placing them in their national and local context, and a clear statement of the potential archaeological importance of the site and associated features. This is to be separate from 3).
- 5) Plans at an appropriate scale showing the trench layout (as excavated), and the features located. Section drawings should also be included.
- 6) A full bibliography of sources consulted.
- 7) Other archaeological information which is considered relevant to the application.

8) Recommendations for what further work (e.g. further excavation, watching brief) is required to safeguard the archaeological interest of the area.

The report will be compiled using WordStar7 software. The client will be supplied with one hard copy with further copies at cost (a copy can also be supplied on disc if required). In addition copies of the report will be lodged with the County Sites and Monuments Record at the same time on the understanding that this will become a public document after an appropriate period of time (generally not exceeding six months).

## **6. DEPOSITION OF ARCHIVE**

A full archive including plans, photographs, photocopies, written material and any other material resulting from the project will be prepared. All plans, photographs and descriptions will be labelled and cross-referenced, and lodged in an appropriate place (to be decided in consultation with the County Sites and Monuments Record) within six months of the completion of the project.

## **7. DEPOSITION OF FINDS**

The vast majority of finds recovered from archaeological excavations comprise pottery fragments, bone, environmental and charcoal samples, and non-valuable metal items such as nails. Often many of these finds become unstable (ie they begin to disintegrate) when removed from the ground. All finds are the property of the land owner, however, it is Trust policy to recommend that all finds are donated to an appropriate museum where they can receive specialist treatment and study. At the very least the Trust would request access to the finds for a reasonable period to allow for study and publication.

## **8. PERSONNEL**

The work would be monitored by the Trust's Projects Manager (Contracts) Roland Flook (BA Hons. Hist.) who has carried out fieldwork in Britain and on the continent for 10 years. He is an Associate Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists. The work would be undertaken by a one of the Trust's Project Officers who routinely direct and publish major archaeological projects. The fieldwork would be carried out by fully trained Archaeological Project Assistants.

## **9. MONITORING**

The project will be monitored by the Planning Advice Section. This will involve:

1. A preliminary meeting at the start of the contract.
2. A progress meeting during the evaluation.
3. A meeting to discuss the draft report before final submission.

## **10. TIMING**

The Trust would be able to make staff available to commence this work in the week of July 18 1994 should the project design and costings be acceptable to the client. The scheduling and duration of the stages would, of course, be dependent to some extent upon the weather, for which some allowance has been made, however, it should be possible to carry out the programme of work in line with the following estimate of elapsed time:

STAGE 1 - Desk Top Survey	allowing 2 work days
STAGE 2 - Trial Trenching	allowing 10 work days
REPORT	allowing 4 work days
ARCHIVE	allowing 1 work day

Total estimated elapsed time from project start - 17 work days