

CAERNARFON TOWN IMPROVEMENTS  
SECTION 3 - HIGH STREET (G1257)  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING

REPORT NO. 164

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd  
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

**CAERNARFON TOWN IMPROVEMENTS**  
**SECTION 3 - HIGH STREET (G1257)**  
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prepared for Arfon Borough Council

by S. Jones

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## INTERIM REPORT

The work involved archaeological observation and recording of three categories of work:

1. The excavation of manhole pits, 2. The excavation of the main culvert and connecting trenches, 3. The general removal of ground surfaces for the re-laying of all roads and pavements surfaces. This work took place between February 27th, 1995 to March 20th, 1995. The location of the main works are shown on figure 1.

### 1. The Manhole Pits

The excavation by hand and machine of the manhole pits, to a depth of approximately 1m, along the route of the main culvert on both the north and southern sides of the High Street revealed only heavily disturbed deposits. In manholes 1 and 2, at a depth of 0.4m to 0.7m, a very mixed stony orange/brown sandy clay underlay 0.3m of a mid brown clayey silt containing debris such as slate fragments. These deposits were interpreted as disturbed natural glacial till and recent road make-up respectively.

### 2. The Main Culvert

This trench ran in an approximately west-east direction from the north-western corner of the arch at Porth yr Aur along the northern side of High Street to just east of the junction with Church Street where it crossed to the southern side of the street. It was between 0.7m to 1.1m deep and approximately 0.8m wide.

The area excavated directly east of Porth Y Aur was very heavily disturbed by recent service pipes. However, approximately 20m to the east an orange/brown sandy clay, interpreted as natural glacial till, appeared at a depth of 0.6m rising to 0.4m further east. This was overlain by made ground of grey/brown clayey silt which contained fragments of slate, bone and shells, but less than recorded in a similar context elsewhere along High Street. Overlying this, at a depth of approximately 0.1m, was the remains of a cobble surface very similar to the cobbled road surfaces found in Church Street. Further to the east along the main culvert trench the orange brown sandy clay appeared to be higher in the north facing section as opposed to the south facing section, possibly reflecting the previous camber of the road.

Where the main trench crossed from the north to the south side of the road, just to the east of the junction of Church, High and Shirehall Streets, the remains of an earlier cobble surface was confirmed, but again it was heavily disturbed by a number of service pipes which ran in an east-west direction along High Street. Notable among these was a large Victorian brick constructed sewer which ran along the centre of High Street, with a brick lined manhole situated at the junction of the four streets. Its brick roof was first uncovered at a depth of approximately 1.1m, while inspection by the manhole revealed it to be at least 4m deep. Its construction would, therefore, have caused much disturbance to the deposits along the centre of the street to a considerable depth.

### 3. The Removal of Ground Levels for Re-surfacing

Between 0.4m and 0.5m in depth of the present road surface was removed along the High Street. This shallow depth of excavation exposed the make-up of the present road surface, the remains of a preceding cobble surface which had been heavily disturbed by the laying of modern service pipes and a line of granite setts running east-west, parallel with, and 0.2m from, the northern pavement of High Street.

This work also revealed the presence of five small cellars and the street entrance to another cellar (see figure 1). Cellars 1 and 2 were located adjacent to the northern pavement outside No.'s 7 and 9 High Street respectively. They were 1m wide and extended beneath the road by

1.2m. Stone walls supported brick barrel vaulted roofs with small (0.3m in diameter) vents/coal holes with iron covers. Cellar 1 had already been partially backfilled, this was completed with concrete. A drainage tub was placed in cellar 2 the remainder of which was also subsequently backfilled with concrete. Two other adjacent brick barrel vaulted cellars (cellars 3 and 4) were located on the south side of the High Street in front of No. 16. A fifth cellar (cellar 5) was located at the western end of High Street, outside No. 3, approximately 2m west of the corner with Church Street. This one was quite different in construction having stone walls but roofed by large slate slabs with a small possible bricked-in vent/coal holes in the centre. It was approximately 1.5m by 1.35m and 1.8m high and could be entered from No. 3. The final 'cellar' located (cellar 6) was actually in Church Street, approximately 2m north of the corner with the High Street and appeared to be a street entrance to a cellar beneath No. 5, High Street, rather than a cellar itself. Again this had a brick barrel vaulted roof, along with steps to the west, descending into the 'cellar' from the street side. The 'cellar' was 1.3m by 0.8m in size and lead into the cellar/basement under No. 5, High Street. These small cellars are all likely to have been coal stores and no earlier than the late seventeenth century in date.

## SUMMARY

The archaeological evidence so far shows no buried surfaces of any antiquity surviving in High Street confirming similar observations made during past archaeological recording in advance of the construction of the new County Offices, the drainage works carried out in High Street and the drainage works in Church Street. However, a number of cellars were identified, and the presence of the cobble surface and the granite setts confirms that major re-surfacing and street improvements were undertaken in this area of the walled town in the eighteenth or nineteenth century.

## FIG. 1

