

CAERNARFON TOWN IMPROVEMENTS
- PHASE 3

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING
SECTIONS 1-4 (G1257)

REPORT NO. 174

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING
SECTIONS 1-4 (G1257)

prepared for Arfon Borough Council

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CAERNARFON TOWN IMPROVEMENTS - PHASE 3 (GAT 1257)

SUMMARY

The street improvements undertaken in Church Street, High Street and Market Street, revealed no surfaces of antiquity, rather that there had been a major truncation of earlier surfaces in these areas during the eighteenth century. Late medieval pottery was uncovered outside the Conservative Club, but from a disturbed context. An undated roofed feature found nearby beneath Market Street may relate to the old town hall or the eighteenth century meat market. A number of eighteenth or nineteenth century cellars were also recorded, as was the heavily disturbed remains of the Town Wall beneath the archway in Church Street.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

As part of the Caernarfon Town Regeneration scheme undertaken by Arfon Borough Council the contractors, Travers Morgan, have resurfaced and laid new drains and sewers along Church Street, High Street and Market Street. As some this work involved excavation through an arch in the Caernarfon Town Wall (Church Street), a scheduled ancient monument, consent was given by the Secretary of State on condition that an archaeological watching brief was carried out and a subsequent report presented to Cadw. As the regeneration scheme also involved excavation within the Caernarfon Conservation Area and may have resulted in the disturbance of medieval or earlier archaeological remains, the Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service (GAPS), in its role as archaeological advisor to the local planning authorities, attached an archaeological condition to the grant of planning permission. As a result, GAPS produced a project brief for the applicant defining the nature of the work required.

The applicant subsequently commissioned Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (Contracts Section) to carry out a watching brief during the excavations.

The work was carried out in four sections. This report includes the three interim reports, which described sections 1-3 and also the work carried out for section 4.

2.0 SECTION 1 & 1A - HIGH STREET AND CHURCH STREET

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

1. The excavation of five test pits for the construction of man-holes, 2. The excavation of trenches for connecting pipe culverts and associated drains, 3. The general removal of ground surfaces for the re-laying of all road and pavement surfaces.

2.1 The Test Pits

The machine excavation of five test pits was observed and recorded from Monday 19th to Friday 23rd September covering sections 1 and 1a of the construction works). Two were in High Street (Section 1), two were in Church Lane (Section 1a) and one was outside the town wall west of the Church Street gate.

a. Outside the town wall (Pit 310): This showed a great depth of made ground consisting of shingle and clay, presumably dumped during construction of Victoria Dock (commenced 1868).

b. High Street (Pits 301 and 302): These showed one earlier cobbled road surface below the present street level above a small amount of made-ground to a depth of c. 0.70m. Below this level was a stony red-brown clay-loam interpreted as a natural glacial till overlying, at a depth of c. 1.70m, a series of water-laid sands, silts and clays.

c. Church Lane (Pits 309 and 316): These showed two earlier road surfaces, the earliest of which, at a depth of c. 0.70m, predated a Victorian culvert and was associated with a hand-made horse-shoe nail, charcoal fragments and oyster, mussel and limpet shells. Below this and still continuing at a depth of 2.25m was a similar deposit to the 'glacial till' in the High Street trenches.

2.2 The Excavation of Trenches for connecting culverts

a. Outside the town wall - Despite being outside the medieval town this proved to be of some interest in that the trench for the new culvert crossed the remains of the buried sea-wall of the former Bank Quay. The wall lay c. 0.50 below the present ground surface and continued, perhaps to sea-level, beyond the depth of the trench, at -1.90m. The wall was constructed of large blocks of limestone similar to those used in the medieval Town Wall. It followed the line of a boundary wall shown on Speed's map of 1610 but seems likely to be the result of later improvements, shown on an Estate map of 1777.

b. In High Street the trenching showed that this area was heavily disturbed by service trenches which, besides those still in use, were disused water and electric conduits and some earlier drainage systems. The earliest of the latter, at a depth of over -1.60m was stone-built, slate-floored and stone slab covered, associated with 18th century pottery. These early culverts seem to be part of a major re-development in the 18th century, associated with the construction of many new buildings which caused major truncation of earlier surfaces.

c. In Church Lane the culvert trenching exposed a continuation of the early cobbled surfaces exposed in test pits 309 and 316 at a depth of -0.80 to 1.00m. This is certainly an early road surface and seems likely to be that associated with the layout of the Town Wall in the 13th century.

2.3 Removal of ground levels for re-surfacing work

Observation of the deeper trenching for test pits and culverts allowed a general assessment of the stratigraphy and likely archaeological impact of the shallower re-surfacing work which required excavation only to a depth of c. -0.45m. In general it seemed that this depth of excavation would intrude only into the present (tarmac) and preceding (cobbled) surfaces and their bedding without exposing any layers of archaeological interest. However, in the High Street a number of cellars were revealed which needed to be backfilled with concrete. Some were small, under-pavement coal-holes, with slate lintel roofs, but one was larger, stone-walled with a brick barrel vault. None were earlier than 18th century but were described, measured and photographed. In Church Lane the re-surfacing work revealed only recent deposits apart from exposing a small depth of the face of the Town Wall although this did not reveal any new features.

2.4 Summary

In general the evidence so far shows no buried surfaces of any antiquity in the High Street area and it seems likely that there was a major truncation of earlier surfaces during 18th century re-development. A similar observation was made during archaeological recording in advance of the construction of the new County Offices. There is also a surprising absence of any finds of pottery etc of earlier date than 18th century.

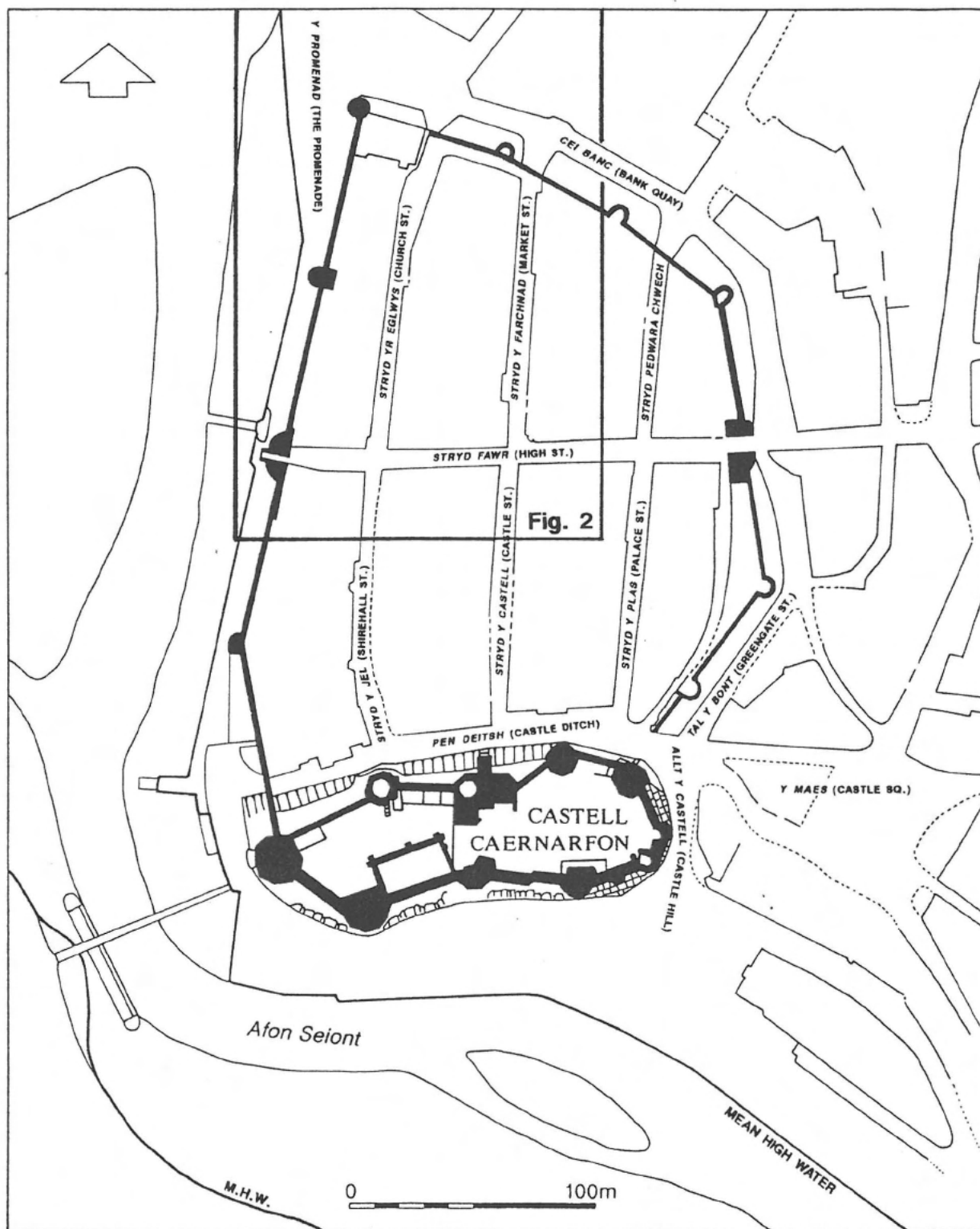


Fig. 1 Location map - Caernarfon.

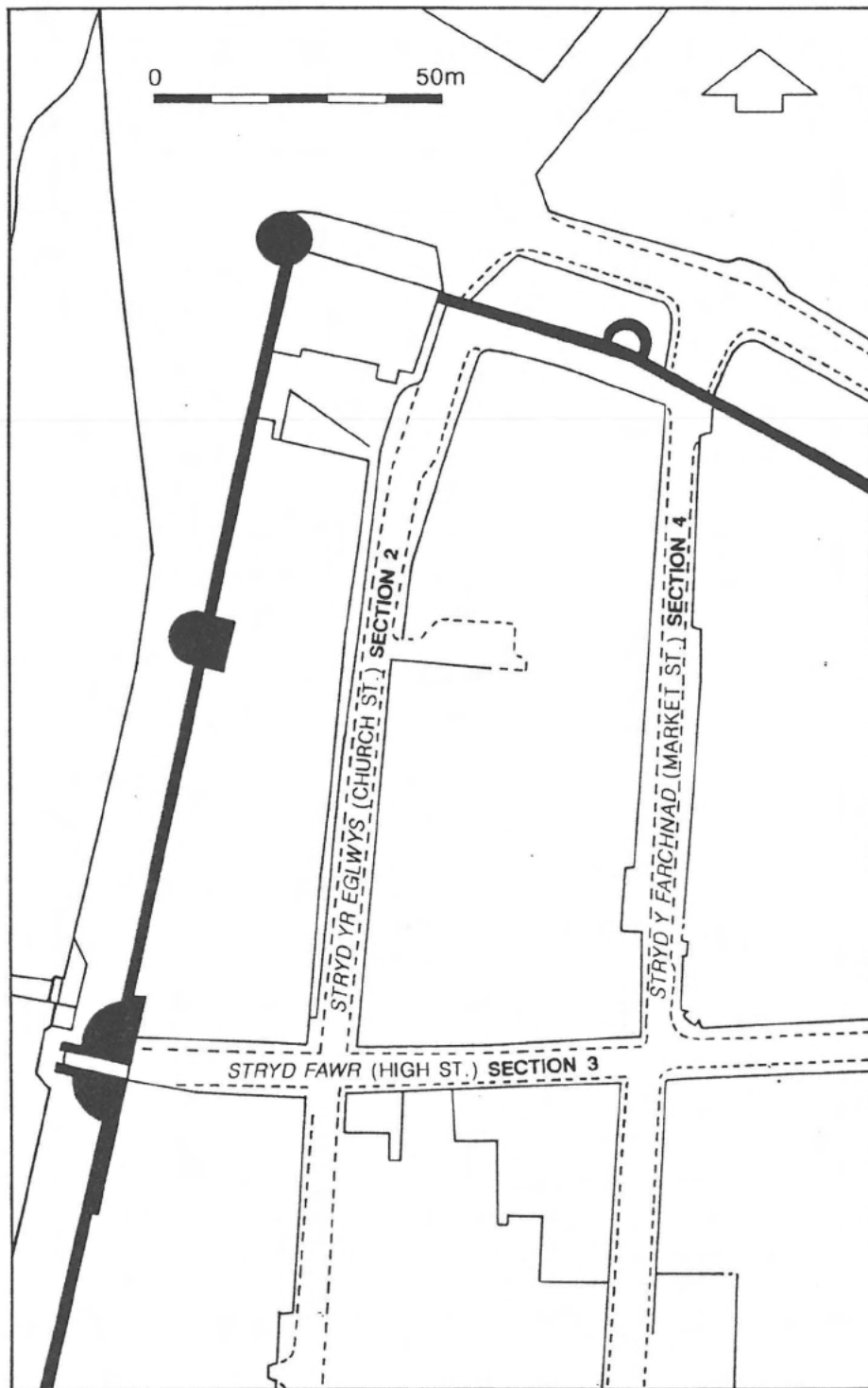


Fig. 2 Location of sections of archaeological monitoring.

3.0 SECTION 2: CHURCH STREET

The work involved archaeological observation and recording of four categories of work, viz: 1. The excavation of five manhole pits, 2. The excavation of five trenches for connecting associated drains with the main culvert, 3. The excavations of the main culvert, 4. The general removal of ground surfaces for the re-laying of all road and pavement surfaces (see fig. 3).

3.1 The Manhole Pits

The machine excavation of five manhole pits was observed and recorded from November 3rd, 1994 to January 30th, 1995. They were situated along the eastern side of Church Street. The general depth of excavation was approximately 1.2m, apart from one large manhole trench (D) (3.5m by 8m) which was over 4m in depth.

Monitoring of these pits revealed the existence of an earlier cobbled road surface along this length of Church St. However, it had been disturbed in most instances by the laying of recent service pipes, surviving in the mixed backfill of the pipe trenches as loose well rounded pebbles. A nineteenth century stone built culvert, running approximately N - S, was identified in pits 2 and 3. The cobbled road may be associated with eighteenth and nineteenth century improvements in the town. Below this surface was a reddish brown stony, sandy clay, interpreted as glacial till.

3.2 The Excavation for connecting culverts

Five trenches (A, B, C, E and F) were excavated across Church St. at intervals along its length to connect drainage gullies to the main culvert. These trenches, with a general depth of 1.2m, confirmed the presence of the earlier cobble surface beneath the present road, but, which was, again heavily disturbed by the laying of recent service pipes, especially on the western side of the road. The stone culvert uncovered in manhole 3 was also revealed in trench C. While a second culvert/drain constructed of slate was uncovered in the east end of trench A, running SSW - NNE. Dating evidence in the form of pottery sherds, indicate that these features date from the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries.

At the west end of trench A immediately outside St. Mary's Church, at a depth of 0.65m, a 1.3m length of a stone and slate culvert was exposed. It was approximately 0.5m SE of the modern enclosing wall of the church and appeared to follow the slight curve in this wall. It consisted of a 'v' - shaped gully formed by two slanting slates encased by heavily mortared walling either side which was constructed of red sandstone. The gully, itself, was capped by similar red sandstone slabs. Although, no dating evidence was retrieved, the similarity of the red sandstone of the culvert with that used for the south and east walls of St. Mary's Church, suggests that the culvert is contemporary with these walls which were rebuilt between 1809 and 1810.

3.3 Trench for main culvert

This trench followed a line: from outside the town wall; through the arch and along the eastern side of Church St. Recording of the trench outside the town wall and through the archway was carried out in much greater detail than elsewhere because of the exposure of the town wall, a Scheduled Ancient Monument and associated layers.

Excavation outside the town wall revealed a build up of made ground, c. 1.5m deep, consisting of shingle and clay, presumably dumped during the construction of the Victoria Dock (commenced 1868). Running at a slight angle through the archway, above this made ground, was a stone and slate culvert, at a depth of approximately 0.83m.

Under the archway mortared stone boulders were uncovered at a depth of c. 1.45m. They were interpreted as the remains of the medieval town wall cut through by the laying of a modern sewerage pipe. Facing stones were observed on the south side of the foundations of the wall, however, after one course, the stone facing became less well defined, with smaller stones jutting out. The stone fill of the wall had also been badly disturbed by the sewerage pipe.

The stone and slate culvert observed outside the wall continued under the archway. Modern setts were also observed in the west of the trench, as was a brick and concrete feature, possibly a modern support of some sort.

The remainder of the main culvert trench ran in a N - S direction down the east side of Church Street. The cobble surface observed in all the excavations in Church Street was present, while a stone culvert ran along the southern half of the street, adjacent with the line of the present pavement, at a depth of c. 0.55m. This feature had been cut into a deposit of nineteenth/eighteenth century rubbish which included pottery sherds, animal bones and charcoal fragments. Below this, at c. 0.9m, was an unstable, gravelly layer of stony, reddish brown sandy clay interpreted as a natural glacial till.

3.4 The removal of ground levels for re-surfacing work

Approximately 0.5m of the surface was removed along Church St. This shallow depth of excavation only exposed the make-up of the present road surface and the preceding cobble surface which was again heavily disturbed by numerous service pipes running along the road. However, opposite No. 13, the roofs of two adjacent cellars were exposed by this work and subsequently partly backfilled with concrete. They extended from the basement of No. 13, where there were separate entrances, under the pavement and 1.7m out into the road. Both were brick walled, 2.65m by 1.95m, 2.1m high, with brick barrel vaulted roofs with coal-holes in the ceilings.

3.5 Summary

In general the evidence so far shows no buried surfaces of any antiquity in Church Street. It would appear that there was a major truncation of earlier surfaces during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A similar observation was made during archaeological recording in advance of the construction of the new County Offices and the drainage works carried out in High Street.

4.0 SECTION 3 - HIGH STREET

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 fig. 4.

4.1 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.

4.2 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.

4.3 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.

4.4 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.

5.0 SECTION 4 - MARKET STREET

This work involved the archaeological observation and recording of: 1. The excavation of the main culvert and connecting trenches; 2. The general removal of ground surfaces for the re-laying of all road and pavement surfaces. Archaeological monitoring took place between May 1st, 1995 to May 19th, 1995 and consisted of eight site visits. The location of the main works recorded are shown on fig. 5.

5.1 Background

The main area of interest in Market Street is in the vicinity of the Conservative Club, on the corner of Market Street and High Street. This is the site of both the medieval town hall and later, eighteenth century meat market. Speed's map of 1610 portrays the town hall as extending southwards across much of the width of Market Street while the location is marked as 'The Conduite'. The medieval town hall fell into disuse after a new guild hall was built above the East Gate, Porth Mawr in 1767 (Jones 1889, 77) and was replaced at the end of the eighteenth, beginning of the nineteenth century, by a meat market, the entrances of the cellars of which were reportedly left open to allow the refuse of the streets to be swept into them (Jones 1889, 77). This building was replaced by another meat market in c. 1828 with the upper floors being used as a schoolhouse, an arms depot, a savings bank and as a reading and billiard room by members of the Conservatory party (GAT Report No. 118).

5.2 The Main Culvert and Connecting Trenches

The excavation by machine of the main culvert trench along the western side of Market Street to a depth of between 1.1m and 1.7m and an approximate width of 0.8m, revealed a number of modern service pipes and subsequently heavily disturbed deposits. However, at the southern end of the street two notable features were encountered: firstly at the south-west end of the street, outside the Conservative Club at an approximate depth of 1.1m a layer of charcoal was uncovered from which six sherds of late medieval (fifteenth or sixteenth century) and two sherds of nineteenth century pottery were retrieved. The presence of the nineteenth century pottery in this layer indicates that it has been disturbed and that the medieval pottery may not be in its original location.

'Tunnel' The second feature in the area of the old market hall was two parallel stone walls outside No. 1 Market Street, running across the street to within 1.4m of the north-west side of the Crown Public House. They were 1.3m to 1.5m apart, between 0.2m to 0.4m wide and at a depth of 2.2m there was a slate floor. Large slate slabs, at a depth of 0.5m from the modern street surface, roofed the feature which was partially backfilled. Approximately 1.25m from the east end of the 'tunnel' was a brick partition wall dividing the 'tunnel' into two compartments (west and east ones). The western side of the 'tunnel' had been disturbed and partly destroyed by the installation of modern service pipes cutting through. There was no doorway on the east side, but the walls terminated neatly 1.4m from the Crown Public House. The west of the 'tunnel' was subsequently disturbed by the installation of the culvert and a manhole entrance, while the west side was backfilled with concrete.

The location of the 'tunnel' in the probable position of the old town hall marked on Speed's map and the reference on the same map of the 'conduite', suggest that this feature may relate either to the structure of the town hall, possibly a cellar, or it may represent the 'conduite', some sort of street drain for refuse similar to the one referred to by Jones (Jones 1889,77). Jones may indeed be referring to the older 'conduite' when he talks about the cellars of the old market hall being left open for refuge.

Elsewhere along the main culvert and in the man-holes a loose, light brown/orangey brown, shingly sandy clay was exposed under the modern road surface with the fragmentary remains of a cobbled surface present along its length and with the various backfills from modern service pipes. This sandy clay would appear to be 'made-ground', rather than natural glacial till. No other archaeological features were identified in the main culvert or the man-holes.

5.3 The Removal of Ground Levels for Re-surfacing

Between 0.4m and 0.6m in depth of the present road surface was removed along Market Street. This shallow depth of excavation exposed the make-up of the present road surface and the remains of a preceding cobble surface, consisting of cobbles inset in a layer of nearly pure sand, which had been subsequently heavily disturbed by the laying of modern services along the length of the road but survived in a good condition under the pavements on both sides of the street.

This work also revealed the presence of seven cellars, two on the east side and five on the west side of the street.

Cellar 1 was a brick barrel roofed cellar with stone supporting walls, located 1.4m to the west of the north-western corner of the Crown Public House. This was first identified by a coal hole, 0.3m in diameter and was broken into from the street. The west-facing section directly above the cellar suggested that at some time in the past the ground directly above the cellar had been consolidated by a double layer of slate slabs (0.8m by 0.3m in size) with a layer of dark silt between. The remains of a clay pipe were found within this layer, while along with the apparent truncation of the cobble surface and sand layer at this point indicated that this consolidation work had been undertaken in the nineteenth century.

The cellar was approximately 2.3m long by 1.1m wide and 1.4m deep, with a doorway facing towards the pub (east). The cellar, however, did not go right up to the pub ending 1.4m west of the modern pub building. This gap, under the pavement, had been filled with debris some of which emanated from the cellar and a layer of light grey plaster debris. The cellar itself had been backfilled with nineteenth century debris, including a number of green glass bottles. The southern wall of the cellar was formed by the northern wall of the 'tunnel', as a result the west wall of the cellar abutted the tunnel and must, therefore, be of a later date than the 'tunnel'.

Cellar 2 was a cellar entrance/coal hole. Located beneath the pavement outside the northern window of No. 3 on the west side of the street. It provided access to the basement of this house, but had been previously backfilled with rubble. It was constructed of stone and was 1m by 1m in size.

Cellar 3 was located outside No. 10 on the east side of the street, beneath the pavement at right angles to the building. It was initially identified by a square stone coal hole, approximately 0.5m by 0.5m. Stone walls supported a brick barrelled roof, approximately 1.6m wide and 1.5m high inside. The cellar was backfilled.

Cellars 4 consisted of four consecutive brick barrel vaulted cellars, relating to houses No.'s 5 to 11. They ran parallel with the houses on the west side of the street, in a north-south direction, rather than at right angles to the houses as the cellars did elsewhere in the street. Each cellar had its own coal hole and iron cover and could be entered from the houses via a brick barrelled passageway under the front steps of the houses. The top apex of the outside of the cellars was between 0.6m (the southern end) and 0.7m (the northern end) below the existing pavement level. Inside the maximum height of the cellars was 1.5m. Houses No.'s 7 to 11 have lead downpipes dated to 1800, suggesting a possible date for these cellars. They were not backfilled or destroyed but consolidated with concrete platforms between the cellar roofs and the new road surface.

Beneath the archway in the town wall, 0.4m of road surfacing was removed this revealed a stone plinth, running in a north-south direction at the base of the eastern side of the arch. It protruded out from the base of the arch in a westerly direction for 0.4m, 0.1m beneath the existing road surface. It was constructed of stones, yellowish-brown in colour and between 0.2m by 0.2m and 0.3m by 0.3m in size and was cut away slightly to the south (0.1m lower). This plinth was not disturbed by the improvement works.

5.4 Summary

The work in Market Street confirmed the existence of a cobble surface, similar to those uncovered in High and Church Streets, dating no earlier than the last two hundred years. Cellars 1 and 3, also, very closely reflect the style of construction of those cellars found in the previous stages of the improvement works, while cellars 4, although very similar in construction were differently aligned, running parallel with the houses as opposed to right angles to them and apparently built as one unit.

The late medieval pottery found outside the Conservative Club may indicate some activity around the town hall in this period, but the presence of nineteenth century pottery in the same layer demonstrates that this area had been disturbed and that, therefore, the late medieval pottery is not *in situ*. The 'tunnel' may be related to the town hall or the earlier market hall or the 'Conduite'. However, the lack of dating evidence makes it difficult to assign it to a specific period, but, it does appear to be earlier than Cellar 1 which is probably eighteenth century in date.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The work undertaken in this part of the town revealed that a major truncation of earlier surfaces had occurred in the eighteenth century. As a result, apart from the disturbed or re-deposited late medieval pottery found outside the Conservative Club and possibly the 'tunnel', no earlier features or artefacts were uncovered. The remains of the cobble surface found at each stage of the scheme and the shingle and clay 'made' ground found in areas, along with the different styles of cellar which appear to date from the eighteenth century seem to confirm the major re-development at this time. The re-building of part of St. Mary's and the culvert associated with this (Section 2) between 1809 and 1810 may also reflect the last stages of this development.

The excavations through the Town Wall (section 2) exposed the remains of the wall, with facing stones surviving on the south side for one course. However, as with most of the areas beneath the modern road throughout the scheme, the laying of nineteenth and twentieth century service pipes had destroyed any earlier surfaces including the cobble surface.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the work crews, and the representative from Travers Morgan, John Lister, for their co-operation during the excavations.

Caernarfon Town Improvements G1257.
Section 4 - Market Street

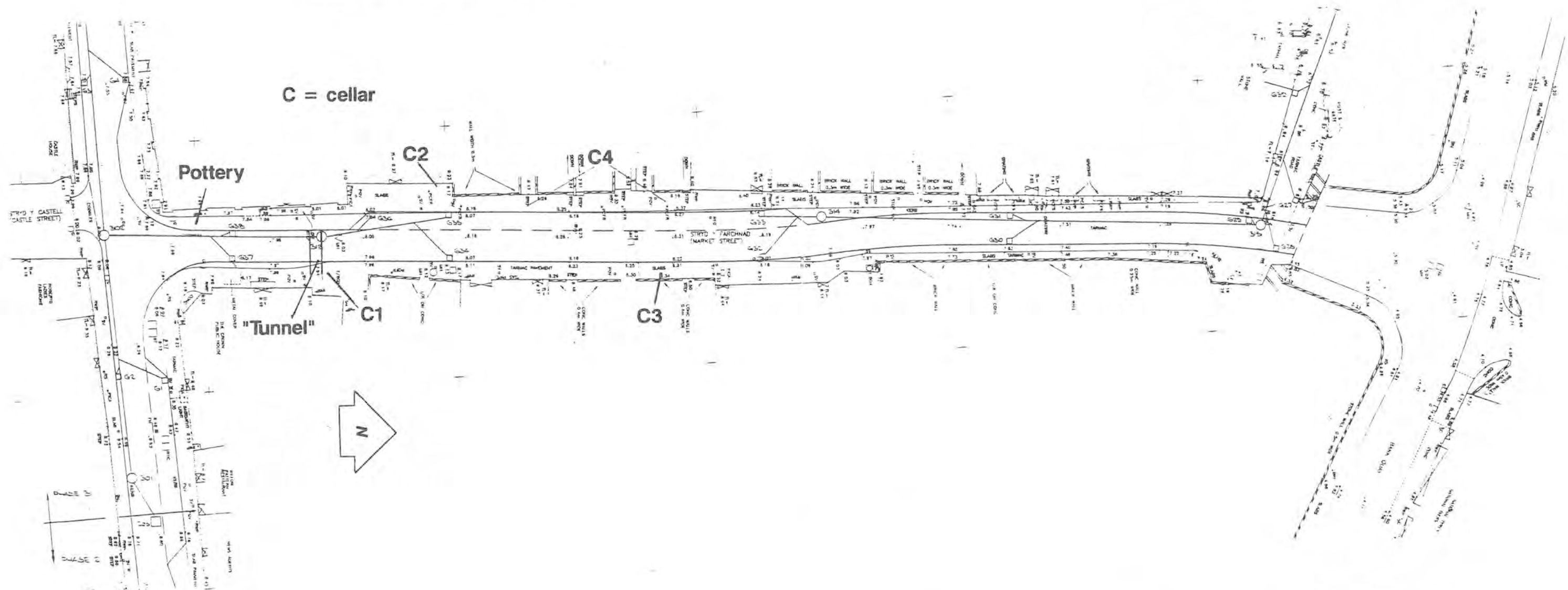


Fig. 5

Caernarfon Town Improvements G1257. Section 3 - High Street

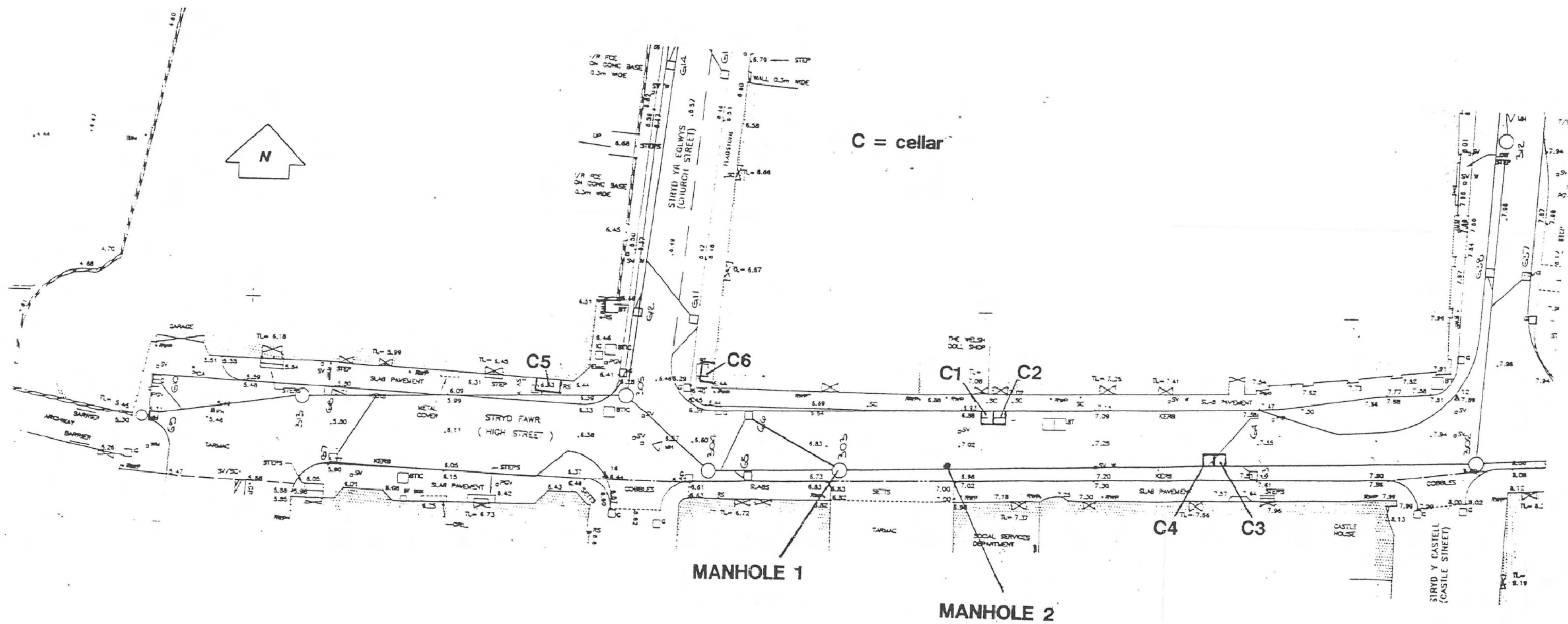


Fig. 4

Caernarfon Town Improvements G1257. Section 2 - Church Street

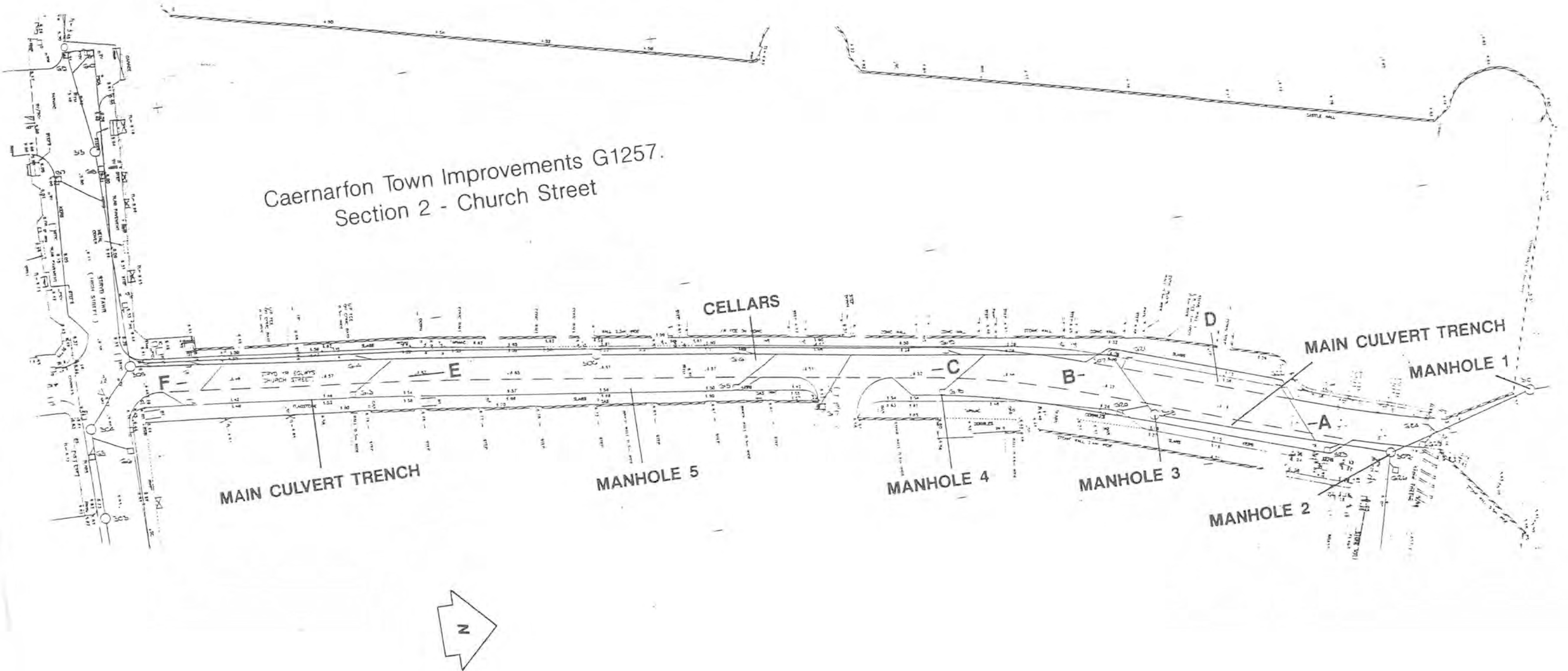


Fig. 3