

EASTGATE STREET, CAERNARFON
ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

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REPORT NO. 180

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

prepared for Gwynedd County Council

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF EASTGATE STREET, CAERNARFON

1.0 INTRODUCTION

As part of the ongoing improvement to Caernarfon, Gwynedd County Council is intending to replace the distressed railway bridge at Turf Square and enhance the streetscape of Eastgate Street to tie in with the improvement within the town walls.

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust was asked to undertake an archaeological assessment of the site to determine the implications of the proposed development.

2.0 AIMS

The aims of this assessment are:

- a) to identify and record the archaeology of the areas to be affected by the proposals;
- b) to evaluate the importance of what has been identified (both as a cultural landscape and as the individual items which make up that landscape;
- c) to recommend further evaluation work if thought necessary; and
- d) to recommend ways in which any impact on the cultural heritage resulting from the proposed improvement can be avoided or minimised (preferably utilising non-destructive techniques, where identified as appropriate.)

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Fieldwork

Two members of Trust staff visited the site on 11 October 1995, having previously negotiated permission with the owners or tenants of Siop Moduron, Siop y Pentan, Caernarfon Pets and Aquatic Supplies and Lloyd's Bank to visit their cellars. The tenant of Caffi Cei also volunteered information about the cellars on his premises, but he was not prepared to grant permission to visit them.

3.2 Desktop

Desk-top work was carried out in the Caernarfon Record Office, in the library of the University of Wales, Bangor, and at the offices of the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, using the resources of the Trust's library, and information supplied by the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments (Wales) at Aberystwyth, in particular a photographic survey of the area carried out in January 1956.

3.3 Standard abbreviations

CRO: Caernarfon Record Office, Victoria Dock, Caernarfon

NLW: National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth

PRO: Public Record Office, Kew

SMR: Sites and Monuments Record, Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

TCHS: *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society*

RCAHMW: Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments for Wales

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Location

Eastgate Street runs east-west for approximately 53m, and forms an extension of Caernarfon High Street. It begins under the Eastgate (colloquially *y Cloc Mawr*) at SH47926282 in the part of the town wall which encloses the intramural settlement on its east side, and immediately crosses a road on a bridge known as Tan y Bont. This road is known as Bank Quay to the north of the bridge and as Greengate Street to the south. At its far end, Eastgate Street opens out into a rectangular area now known as Turf Square or Pendist, which measures 27m east-west, and approximately 16m north-south. At this point, Crown Street runs off to the north, and Mill Lane (formerly *Gardd'rafon*) to the south; both decline steeply from the junction to reach the level of the abandoned railway which passes under Turf Square. The east end of Turf Square joins Bangor Road and Bridge Street, the main route for through traffic until the construction of the flyover, opened in February 1981.

4.2 History

Caernarfon was an important military site under the Roman occupation, and there is abundant documentary evidence for both a Norman and a Welsh presence before the fall of Gwynedd. Though the older part of the present town is effectively a creation of King Edward I, who established a settlement there as early as 1283, it supplanted a nucleated settlement attached to a royal *llys*; accounts survive for the demolition of twenty of its houses in July 1284 (Taylor 372). The Statute of Rhuddlan in the following year confirmed Caernarfon as the administrative and judicial capital of North Wales, and it received its charter the same year.

The borough was enclosed with stone walls, which remain substantially intact. Medieval gates included the Water Gate in the south-west corner, the Green Gate, which gave access to the market at Maes Glas, and the Porth yr Aur ("Golden Gate"), at the western end of the High Street (Soulsby 88-90). It was on this axis that the main entrance to the town was situated; this was the Eastgate, access to which was probably gained by a timber construction leading to a drawbridge. This timberwork probably came to grief in the 1294-5 uprising, to be replaced by a stone-built causeway pierced by a number of arches in 1301-2 (Johns). The drawbridge was in existence as late as 1520, when repairs were carried out (Cadw 38), but by the time of Speed's map of ninety years later, it was a thing of the past. What Speed does show, immediately to the east of where the drawbridge would have been, is the smaller battlemented gateway, where tolls were collected. This was in existence by 1309 (Taylor 385) and probably was one of the structures damaged during the Glyndwr rebellion (Royal Commission 151). After enduring civil commotion, it was damaged by a storm in the first decades of the fifteenth century (Evans 1944 11n). Nevertheless, it survived into the eighteenth century; it is shown on a print of 1750 (Evans 1944 frontispiece) but had vanished by 1776 (Bryn Odol estate map). The base of one of its towers may have survived to be discovered in the nineteenth century when it came to light in the construction of a cabinet maker's shop; whatever the structure was, it was so strongly built that gunpowder had to be used to shift it (Jones 103).

? The Eastgate constituted the administrative centre of North Wales from the Statute of Rhuddlan to the Act of Union in 1536, and the seals, charters and judicial means to facilitate the work of the Justiciar. It also housed the Exchequer of North Wales, where royal revenues were sent, but by the seventeenth century its functions had dwindled to those of a record office. By 1749 it was in a perilous state and in 1767 a new Guildhall was built above it. The structure may have been sound, but visitors were unimpressed; Grimston observed "all that can be said of it is that it is convenient." Extensions were carried out in 1833 involving the construction of a clock-tower and a lock-up, but it still failed to impress - "small and cramped ... a very disfiguring effect." Alterations in 1871 included the replacement of the old town clock with a four-faced timepiece, whose mechanical inadequacies were often compounded by the force of the wind (Evans 1944 4-11). Whatever the defects of this structure, it has one claim to fame in that it was from it that the Members of Parliament for the Borough constituency were proclaimed; from 1890 to 1945 this was David Lloyd George.

Speed's map of 1610 already shows houses alongside the south side of Eastgate Street and around Turf Square (which he calls the Oatmeal market), though as late as 1742 the total number of houses outside the town walls appears to have been no more than thirty-two, a far cry from the expanding settlement Speed depicted (Jones 72).

By the early nineteenth century, Eastgate Street had become a crowded and built-up thoroughfare; Jones, writing in 1886, relying on the memories of old inhabitants, described it as then "a very narrow lane, barely too wide to admit of a horse and cart, and if these vehicles did not get into it, the traffic was suspended until it got out" (74). Turf Square he describes as "usually crowded with idlers and loungers" (75), and derives its name from the sale of turf for domestic ovens before coal became common (117). In 1788 it had nine houses, whose inhabitants included a smith, a doctor and a seaman, a "working shop" and a "house and shop" (Jones 170).

Caernarfon's Victorian prosperity, deriving from the slate trade and connection to the national railway network in 1852, led to the construction of a number of substantial business premises in Eastgate Street and Turf Square. Caernarfon's first newspaper was published there in 1831 (Jones 118-9). John Wood's map of 1834 suggests eight separate structures on the south side of Eastgate Street and six on the north side. *Slater's Directory* for 1856 lists two drapers, two public houses, two flour dealers, a bootmaker, brazier and tinsmith, a chemist, an ironmonger, a grocer's, a beer retailer, a watchmaker and a fruiterer. This suggests a fairly prosperous and developing community, but one did not have to look far for evidence of squalor; the slaughter-house and tallow-chandlers at Tan y Bont were reported in 1846 as in "a very unsatisfactory state", generating an offensive smell, and Mill Lane/Gardd'rafon, an area notorious for its houses of ill fame, lacked any adequate sanitation (Lloyd 149-150). The brothels were closed down in the early 1870s, driving the women onto the streets, or to other regions such as Tan'rallt (Lloyd 163).

By 1889-90 the area may have catered for a slightly wealthier and more respectable clientèle; the pubs had gone, and there were four drapers, including Messrs Pierce and Williams, whose premises spanned both sides of the street, and were briefly connected by an overhead walkway, a bootmaker, a fancy goods store, an ironmonger, a jeweller and watchmaker's, a fruiterer, a fishmonger, a chemist and two printers - though the extensive premises of William Hamer, pawnbroker, may have reminded shoppers that the tide of prosperity might turn (*Sutton's Directory*, 1889-1890, Flynn-Hughes et al, 30).

The construction of the Caernarfon to Llanberis railway in 1868-1870 (Bradley 121) had by this time resulted in considerable engineering works under Turf Square, and the demolition of a number of buildings; the square is effectively on a bridge over the railway, supported by arched hogged-profile wrought iron girders.

Surviving buildings within the area are no earlier than the late nineteenth century. The basement of number 14, now inhabited by Cenant Quadrant, an independent media company, was formerly the printing office of Gwenlyn Evans, who started his own business in 1884, publishing national periodicals as *Y Geninen* and *Y Llan* as well as carrying on the business of a jobbing printer. His firm pioneered monotype printing and photolithography work (Flynn-Hughes 22), and it was while based there from the 1930s onwards that his son Kenrick became interested in the archaeology of Eastgate Street (Parry 8). Though by 1889-90 Messrs Pierce and Williams's shop, Yr Afr Aur, was established on both sides of Eastgate Street at its junction with Turf Square (XS/628/1), the business seems to have contracted in the early twentieth century; in 1906 Lloyd's Bank erected new premises on the former site of Yr Afr Aur on the north side of the street (Evans 1941 37). Hamer's pawnbroker's establishment, on the other hand, metamorphosed into an extensive department store, selling china, jewellery and women's clothes (vi, Mrs Netta Toleman).

4.3 Archaeology

Though Jones records the discovery of what he considered to be one of the barbican towers pre-1886, a theory queried by Evans (Jones 103, Evans 1940 40), archaeological investigation as such begins with the demolition of Yr Afr Aur to make way for the Lloyd's Bank building in August 1906. Harold Hughes recorded two arches under the pavement and the roadway on the north side of Eastgate Street where foundations had been dug for the bank. The sections of the two arches were different; the crown of the more westerly was depressed, which he considered to have been exaggerated, though not caused, by compression. In both cases the outer order was chamfered on the face. The ribs of the easterly arch (which he called Arch A) were of square section while the outer rib of the other, Arch B, was double-chamfered, and its ribs were further apart. The chamfers of the outer arch of the first were stopped above the springing line. Three inner ribs were visible in both archways at the time of his survey. The foreman assured him that there was a repetition of similar features extending through the roadway, though in fact Kenrick Evans's later work identified a total of only four ribs in arches A and B (Evans 1941 38). The foreman, who had had to go to a depth of 18' feet to obtain a good foundation, also believed that the arches were built on made ground, though Hughes considered it might have been a river deposit and that the Cadnant formerly spread over the whole area beneath Eastgate Street (Hughes 1907).

From 1921 Kenrick Evans analysed the documentary and archaeological evidence and amplified Hughes's findings in a series of articles in *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society* published between 1941 and 1945. Evans describes the south face of Arch A, which he had seen in the cellars of the surviving part of Yr Afr Aur, on the corner of Eastgate Street and Mill Lane; since he found no trace of any further bridgework to the east, either in the cellar, in sewer excavations in Turf Square or in the railway cutting, he concluded that Hughes's easterly arch was the bridge-head (Evans 1941 37). As early as 1921 he had found the southern face of Hughes's Arch B, in the cellars of Messrs Gwenlyn Evans and Son in 12 Eastgate Street, with the Cadnant flowing through; in 1941 he took advantage of the dry summer to examine this arch, and found that the river was only flowing through the west half, and that the east half was filled with loose stone to prevent the accumulation of debris in the part not in the direct line of flow. He describes a segmental arch of about 22' span, measuring from the spring of the first order, and 26' 6" from the spring of the internal face of the arch. The width was 14' and was supported by four massive stone ribs. He suggested that the remains showed two or possibly three periods of construction, as the workmanship on the north chamfered rib is inferior to the remainder, and there is evidence of a differently-aligned arch in the springing (Evans 1941 38).

A further two arches, which Evans denotes C and D, had already come to light during the reconstruction of Messrs Hamers' premises on the north side in 1931. The span of both was approximately 14' or 15'. This gave a length of 48' (29m) between D and the eastern portal of Tan y Bont (the bridge which carries Eastgate Street over Bank Quay). Within this length, Evans suggested, might be found a further arch, possibly two, and a pier for the bridge gateway, though he discounted the possibility that what Jones had described in 1886 was in fact the foundations of one of the gateway towers (Evans 1941 40-41).

An addendum describes the discovery of a chamber beneath the Eastgate which he believed formerly housed the counterpoise for the drawbridge mechanism (Evans 1941 41-42) and which was described at greater length in a subsequent article devoted to Eastgate itself. This suggested that the archway was about 10' wide (Evans 1944). Evans' speculations about the external features were, he considered, largely confirmed by a Rowlandson print discovered in the National Library of Wales (and reproduced in Evans 1945) and a sheet metal model of the gateway by one William Rowlands, a Caernarfon brazier (Evans 1945).

Photographic recording by the Royal Commission shows the town wall along Greengate Street as having been cleared of houses by January 1956, and part at least of Messrs Hamer's premises on the north side of Eastgate Street as having been demolished. This exposed arch D (Royal Commission).

The demolition of the buildings which formerly lay between Hamer's and Eastgate on the north side of the street in 1961 revealed a causeway of solid masonry 40' from east to west between it and the eastern abutment of Tan y Bont. There was no "arch X" as posited by Evans in 1941 (Evans 1941 37-41). The causeway embodied an intermediate pier of greater breadth from north to south. Along the north side of this causeway were discovered lower courses of the revetment of the counterscarp, the outer talus of the town ditch, which may originally have reached to the same height as the causeway and formed the back of the wharf along the Cadnant which gives its name to Bank Quay (Johns).

The Tan y Bont arch is composite, being an original arch of the sixteenth century, 15' in span and 13' wide, segmental and plain, springing from roughly rounded corbels, between later additions (Royal Commission 1960 153). The west wall formerly showed a corbel-like undercut at street level, extending down to an unknown depth (Evans 1944 4).

4.4 Fieldwork

On the south side of the street, cellars within properties 2, 4, 6 and 8 were examined, and on the north side those within Lloyds Bank. It was not possible to examine the remaining cellars.

No medieval stonework was visible in any of the cellars. All the walls facing Eastgate Street were faced with brick or plaster board, and access beyond was impossible.

5.0 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of findings

A medieval bridge exists under the present Eastgate Street, roughly in the location shown on fig. 1 (location plan). It was built in 1301-2 to span the Afon Cadnant, and formed the main throughfare into and out of the walled town of Caernarfon, but separated from the east gate by a drawbridge. This latter was replaced with a stone arch sometime after 1520 (i.e. Tan y bont arch). The bridge was of four arches, possibly spreading over a tidal inlet, but the river was later confined to arch B (second from east). At the west end of the bridge stood an outer embattled gateway or barbican where the tolls on merchandise were collected, visible on Speeds plan of 1610 but removed sometime after 1780.

Parts of the bridge were repaired in 1320, and again in 1507-8, and these may (as suggested above in 4.3) be visible as material changes to the fabric of the bridge.

The last known siting of the bridge was by the RCAHM investigators in 1956, who were able to examine arch B. The fieldwork conducted for the present survey failed to find any visible medieval masonry, with the exception of the solid causeway visible next to the Tan y Bont arch.

5.2 Recommendations

Establishing the state of the medieval masonry is necessary for engineering purposes, and this could possibly be done when re-surfacing the road, by attempting to find the bridge from the top. As the bridge appears to run at a slight angle to Eastgate Street, it should be possible to find the southern edge of the bridge at the western side, and if arch B were examined, it may even be possible to gain access to the underside of the arch. At least one other pier and arch should be located to enable the location of the bridge to be confirmed. It is therefore recommended that a minimum of two holes are dug to try and locate arch D and arch B. These would need to be a minimum of 2 m square, and supervised by an archaeologist to ensure no archaeological remains were damaged. Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments would need to be informed of the proposals, and scheduled monument consent may be necessary.

6.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Williams-Jones, K, 1978: Caernarvon, in R Griffith (ed) *Boroughs of Medieval Wales*

6.2 Unpublished reports

- Summary of Excavations, SMR, Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, nd.
Caernarfon Regeneration Strategy, 1994, *Investigation of Eastgate Street for Cellars*, Travers Morgan for Gwynedd County Council, 1994

6.3 Maps and plans

- CRO: XM/Maps/9537, John Speed map, 1610 (inset in John Wood map of 1834, q.v.)
SMR, Gwynedd Archaeological Trust: Vaynol survey 1769
NLW: Bryn Odol estate survey 1776
CRO: XD2/8356, plan of Newborough estate, late eighteenth century?
CRO: XM/M1398, c. 1810
CRO: XM/Maps/9537, John Wood map, 1834 (photocopy of original on search room wall)
CRO: Tithe map, parish of Llanbeblig, 1840 (photocopy of original in Public Record office, Kew)
CRO: Ordnance survey County Series 25" 1890
CRO: Ordnance survey County Series 25" 1900

6.4 Photographs

(All CRO)

XS/1497/2/2, Eastgate from the corner of High Street and Palace Street

XS/1086/5, Eastgate Street and Turf Square from Bangor Road

XS/1497/9/6, Eastgate Street from Turf Square, showing soldiers on parade with colours

XS/638/1, Eastgate Street and Turf Square from Bangor Road, pre-1906, before construction of Lloyd's Bank, showing Pierce and Williams's shop, Yr Afr Aur, on both sides of the road, with the bridge joining them.

6.5 Paintings and prints

CRO: XS/1261, Watercolour, legend on reverse "ARCH B (the largest) PONT FAWR Y DREF (Eastgate Street, Caernarfon)"

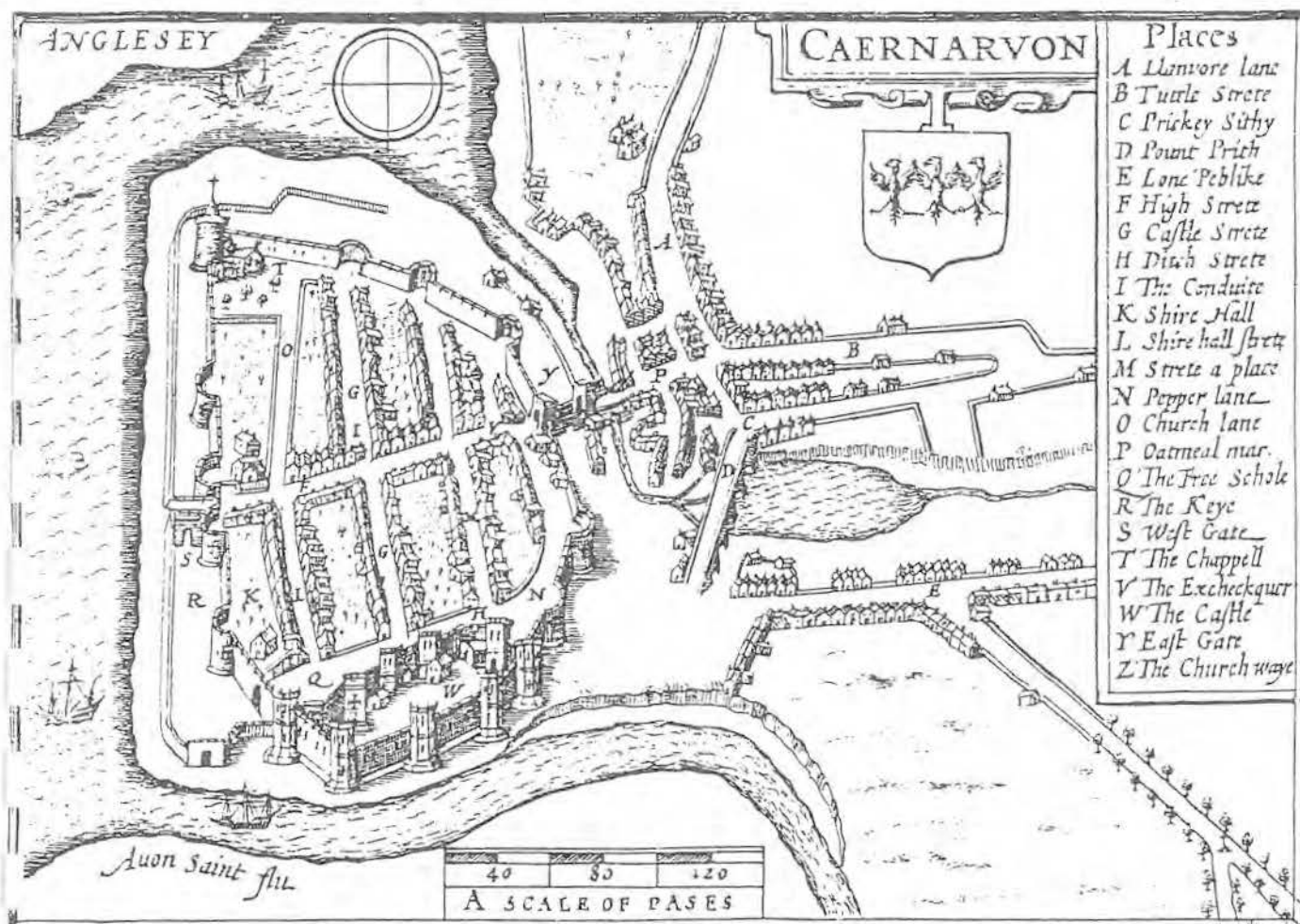
Unattributed, c. 1700: *Porth Mawr from an Old Print*, end piece to Jones 1889.

Buck, S and N, 1742: *Caernarfon castle and town*, reproduced in Cadw, 37.

Boydell, 1750: *Prospect of Caernarvon: Taken from the East Side*, reproduced in Evans 1941, frontispiece.

Rowlandson, T, 1797: *Entrance to Conway (sic)*, reproduced in Evans 1945, frontispiece, original in NLW.

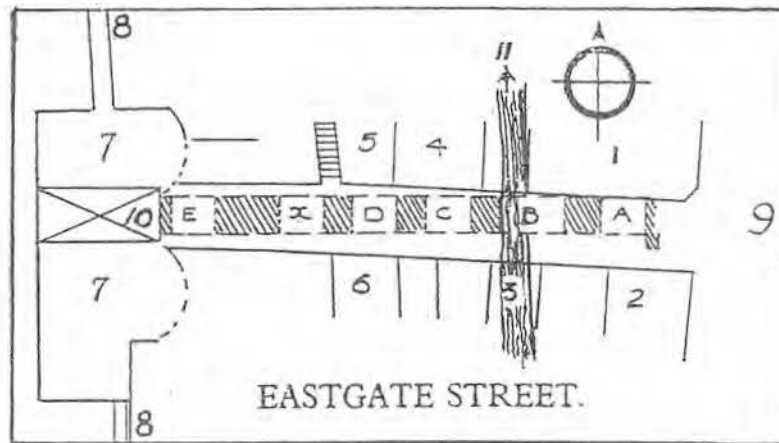
Unknown, c. 1809: *A drawing of the East Gate*, reproduced in Cadw, 38.



John Speed map of Caernarfon - 1610
(Y = Eastgate)

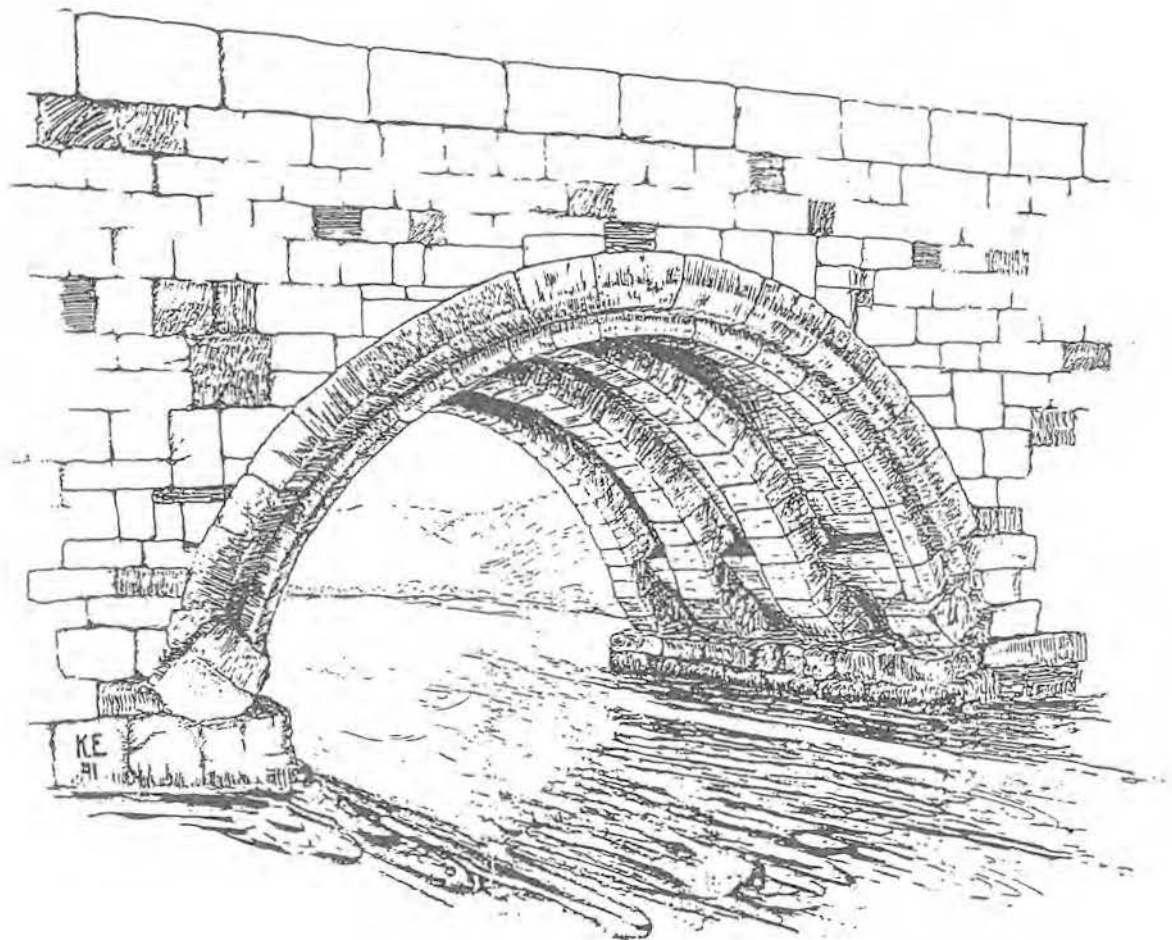


Y Porth Mawr (Eastgate) - 1809

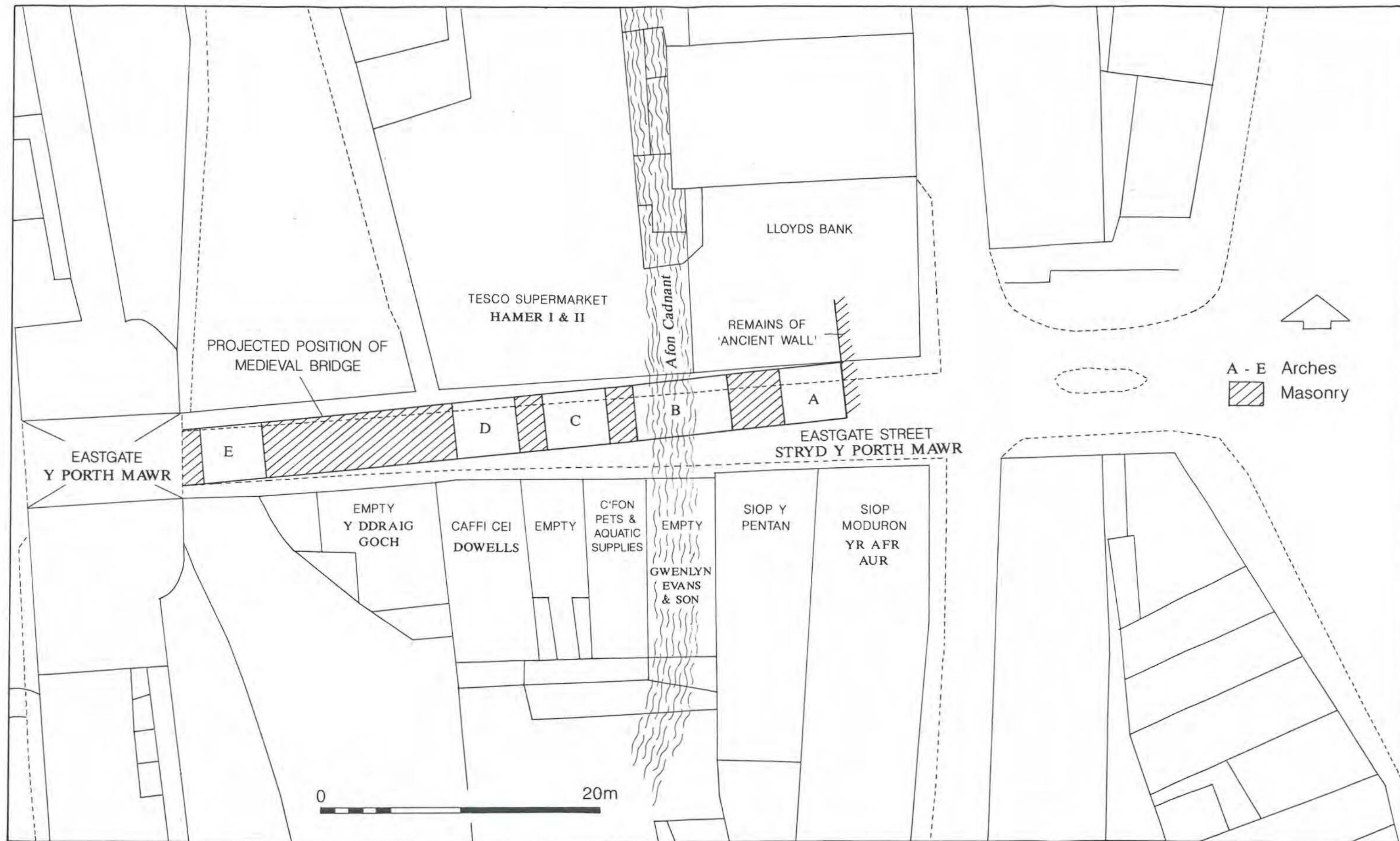


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|------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Lloyd's Bank | 7. Guild Hall | A. Lloyd's Bank Arch |
| 2. Yr Afr Aur | 8. Town walls | B. Cadnant Arch |
| 3. Gwenlyn Evans & Son | 9. Turf Square | C. Hamer I Arch |
| 4. Hamer I | Pendist | D. Hamer II Arch |
| 5. Hamer II | 10. Y Porth Mawr | E. Tanybont Arch |
| 6. Dowells | 11. River Cadnant | |

Location plan - Eastgate Street
(Kenrick Evans - 1941)



Cadnant Arch (B) - 1941
(Kenrick Evans - 1941)



Location plan - Eastgate, showing projected position of medieval bridge.

