

# **POOL SIDE DEVELOPMENT CAERNARFON**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION (G1500)**

**Report No. 280**

**Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd**

**Gwynedd Archaeological Trust**

# **POOL SIDE DEVELOPMENT CAERNARFON**

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**Report No. 280**

**Prepared for  
WATKIN JONES & SON LTD  
January 1998**

**Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd  
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### **1 INTRODUCTION**

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (Contracts Section) were asked by Watkin Jones & Son Ltd to undertake an archaeological evaluation of the land adjoining Pool Side and Bridge Street in Caernarfon at NGR SH48016274, where it is proposed to erect retail units, a mall and ancillary accommodation. This was undertaken in line with the brief provided by Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service.

### **2 EVALUATION BRIEF**

The aims of the archaeological evaluation were to ascertain the nature of the archaeology and establish what further action would be required to safeguard the archaeological interest of the site.

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Desk-top study**

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust carried out a desk-top study which involved consulting the Regional Sites and Monuments Record, the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments (Wales) *Inventory for Caernarvonshire Vol II*, relevant material held by the County Archives in Caernarfon including estate and tithe maps and schedules, Ordnance Survey maps, previous excavation reports and other literary sources.

#### **3.2 Trial trenching**

Two visits were made by Trust staff on 10th and 11th December 1997 to supervise the excavation of a number of trial trenches on the site undertaken by the contractors. The trenches were dug by machine and the deposits examined as they were excavated. The stratigraphic sequence was recorded, and soil samples were taken, although these were not used for any subsequent analysis, as the lack of archaeological material meant such work could not be justified.

### **4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS**

#### **4.1 Location**

Caernarfon is situated on a peninsula projecting from the south shore of the Menai Strait between the estuaries of Afon Cadnant and Afon Seiont. The site is located to the north east of Caernarfon Castle centred at SH 48016274 between Pool Side to the north, Bridge Street to the west, Penllyn to the west and the properties on the north side of Pool Hill to the south. The site covers an area c. 50m by 25m oriented east-west with a surface of compacted rubble, partly tarmaced with areas of concrete.

#### **4.2 Historical Background**

##### *4.2.1 The Roman Period*

There is evidence of prehistoric activity in the vicinity of the present town of Caernarfon but the earliest known settlement dates from the Roman period, commencing c. 80 AD. The Romans established an auxilliary fort just north of the present Llanbeblig Road and a harbour with a storage depot to the south west on the Afon Seiont. Although the fort was abandoned in the 4th century, the civilian settlement, which had built up around the fort, probably continued to be occupied for some time. Archaeological investigation has confirmed that the Roman occupation extended at least as far west as Pool Street and possibly beyond

#### 4.2.1 Medieval Period

In 1090 AD the Earl of Chester erected a motte and bailey at Caernarfon, on the site of the present castle, which was subsequently occupied by the Welsh when they reconquered the area in 1115 AD. A small settlement developed around the motte with a llys, or court, and extensive gardens. The present stone castle and walled town were built by Edward I following the conquest of Wales in 1283. Burgages, of houses and garden plots, were laid out within the town walls and a quay, bridge and mill pool were also constructed. The King's Mill Pool, which existed at this site, was formed by the damming of Afon Cadnant, probably between 1283-1287. The pool is first mentioned in the Exchequer Accounts for 1285, which record the payment of wages for its construction. It supplied water for two mills, one of which was functional until the 1860's (RCAHMW 1956).

Despite two periods of unrest, Caernarfon prospered and by 1610 had expanded beyond the town walls to the east as shown on a map by John Speed (see fig 1). This map clearly shows the location of the substantial mill pond with its bridge of five arches and dam. One arch can still be seen, with difficulty, beneath the junction of Bridge Street and Pool Street. It is a well-built, plain, roughly segmental arch with a 3.2m span, a width of 3m and with its apex at 2.4m and springers at 1.6m above the stream (RCAHMW 1956). A town map of Caernarfon, dated 1834 shows the Mill Pool had been reduced on the north and west by properties facing onto Pool Side and Bridge Street. The OS map of 1888 shows that by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the entire pool had been filled in and built over.

#### 4.2.2 Archaeological history

Deep foundations were excavated within the mill pool on the east side of Bridge Street in 1956, but no remains of masonry were noted (RCAHMW 1956).

During the installation of a sewer pipe alongside Pool Hill in 1979, a watching brief was carried out by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust. The trench started east of the short north-south road (opposite No. 17 Pool hill) and ran eastwards, parallel to Poolhill and about 1m north of the edge of the road, as far as the east end of the carpark. At least 2.5m of water-logged silt was recorded beneath 18th and 19th century rubble. From the silt a large quantity of well-preserved leather-work was retrieved, dating from the 14th-17th centuries. Artefacts included mostly pieces of shoes, but also scabbards, belts, part of a jerkin, the bottom of a 'jack', or leather jug, and a variety of off-cuts. A fragment of French Saintonge ware dating from the first half of the 16th century was also found (White 1979). The leatherwork consisted of waste pieces or damaged pieces which had been deliberately thrown away from adjoining leather workshops which formerly lay along Poolhill, of which one shoe repair shop is the sole survivor of a once much larger industry (*pers comm* Mrs S I White).

In June 1988, during the development of a building in the south-west corner of the site, a dry-stone culvert of unknown date was noted running east-west (GAT Sites and Monuments Record).

An archaeological assessment was carried out by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust in 1989 prior to development of the area. The aims of the assessment were to attempt to define the limits of the pool and to assess the nature and extent of any structures associated with the mill pool (Boyle 1991). Four trenches were excavated by machine to a depth of 3.5 - 4m, three of which were east of the present evaluation area, under where the new multi-storey car-park has been constructed, and one just to the east of the public lavatories. The stratigraphy was broadly similar consisting of layers of loose rubble overlying grey or grey/brown silts. The base of the silt deposits was not reached in three of the trenches. In one trench, located as close as possible to the site of the mill dam, the south edge of the pool was found, where a gravelly clay containing water-worn pebbles underlay a thin layer of grey silt.

## 5 RESULTS

An archaeological evaluation was carried out at the site on 10th & 11th December 1997. The evaluation trenches were located in what would have been the west end of the 13th century mill pool. Four small trenches were excavated by machine on 10th December and the stratigraphic sequence was recorded. It was found that in each trench a concrete raft was encountered at a depth of 0.75 - 1m, which the excavator could not break through. It was therefore decided to use a more powerful excavator to deepen and extend the four trenches. The location of these trenches are shown in fig 2.

### 5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was located to the south west of the site as shown on the enclosed plan. It measured 10.5m x 2.6m and reached a depth of 5.4m below the surface. The trench was crossed at the west end by an exterior cellar wall. The excavation was therefore continued for 3m east of this wall, and the interior of the cellar was not excavated. The stratigraphic profile, as illustrated in fig 3, consisted of 0.4m of tarmac overlying c. 1m of loose rubble and building debris which was overlying a layer of concrete 0.2m thick. Below this was c. 0.5m of rubble and rounded stones overlying a thin, and in places indistinct, layer of charcoal. Underlying this was c. 1m of sand and gravel mixed, particularly in the first 0.3m with rubble, which appeared to be material dumped to raise and consolidate the ground surface. This material was probably brought in to fill the pond at the end of the 19th century. This in turn was overlying a c. 0.2m band of very dark grey silt covering the paler grey and grey/brown pond silts with occasional layers and lenses of sand. These strata were characteristic of the gradual silting up of the pool. The trench was excavated to a depth of 5.4m below the surface which exposed a depth of at least 2.5m of the pond silts. These contained a quantity of well-preserved organic matter such as leaves and twigs and a few modern pottery sherds, fragments of glass, shell and slate towards the top but no artefacts of earlier age. The machine could not safely excavate further.

## **5.2 Trench 2**

Trench 2 was located to the north of Trench 1 and measured 4.2m x 3.3m. The same stratigraphic sequence was found as in Trench 1 with the exterior wall and cellars of the previous building were encountered at the western end. An area 4m x 1.5m was excavated down to the pond silts at a depth of c. 3m below the surface. A coarse black gravel layer covered by a thin layer of brown sand marked the upper surface of the pond silt at this location.

## **5.3 Trench 3**

Trench 3 was located to the south west of Trench 1 with the aim of trying to locate the culvert of the Afon Cadnant. The trench measured 6.5m x 3m x c. 1m deep. A brick wall was visible running east-west at a depth of c. 0.3m below the tarmac surface with a parallel brick wall c. 1m to the north. The intervening space was filled with brick rubble. To the south of these walls was a steel girder under which the brick culvert could be seen. The girder was removed but the presence of live cables made further investigation impossible. It was apparent, however, that the culvert took a turn to the south west which would align with the known outlet of the Afon Cadnant at the corner of Bridge Street and Pool Hill.

## **5.4 Trench 4**

Trench 4 was located to the north west of the site and measured 3.5m x 2m. Below the tarmac surface was a layer of loose brick and stone rubble 1m thick. The rubble lay on a concrete floor, below which were the cellars of the previous building. Another concrete raft, the floor of the cellars, was encountered at a depth of c. 3m below the surface but the influx of water made further investigation impracticable.

## **6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The excavations revealed that the pond silts of the previous mill pool were present at a depth of c. 3m below the surface. The depth of these silts was not established but they were at least 2.5m thick. Cellars of the previous building, the Nelson, occupied much of the west end of the site. They had been dug to a depth of about 3m, that is, to the level of the pond silts. No archaeological finds earlier than the 19th century were recovered from the silts, and this is probably because the finds from the 1979 watching brief came from close to the edge of the pond, and adjacent to an area occupied by leather work-shops (*pers comm* Mrs S I White).

The site is to be excavated to a depth of 2 m, from which depth the foundations will be pile-driven. A depth of 2 m would not reach the level of the pond silts, and archaeological monitoring of this work is therefore not recommended. However, any major excavation alongside the medieval bridge may reveal evidence of construction of the bridge and culverts, and it is therefore recommended that such work is monitored by an archaeologist.

## **7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## 8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

### 8.1 Maps of Caernarfon Town

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1770 Vaynol Papers  
1834 showing Mill Pool  
1890 Mill Pool no longer present  
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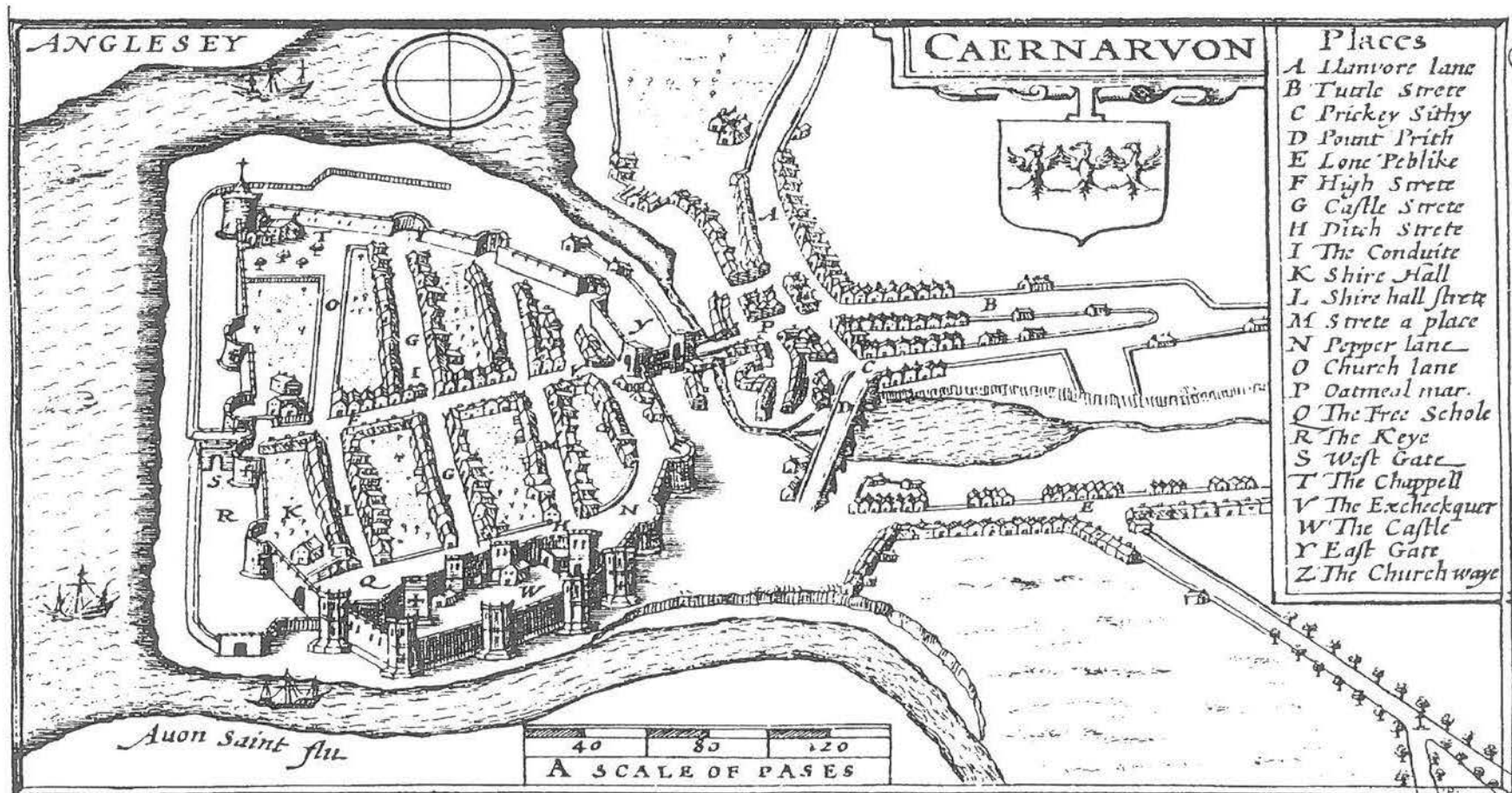


Fig 1 - John Speed's map of Caernarfon - 1610



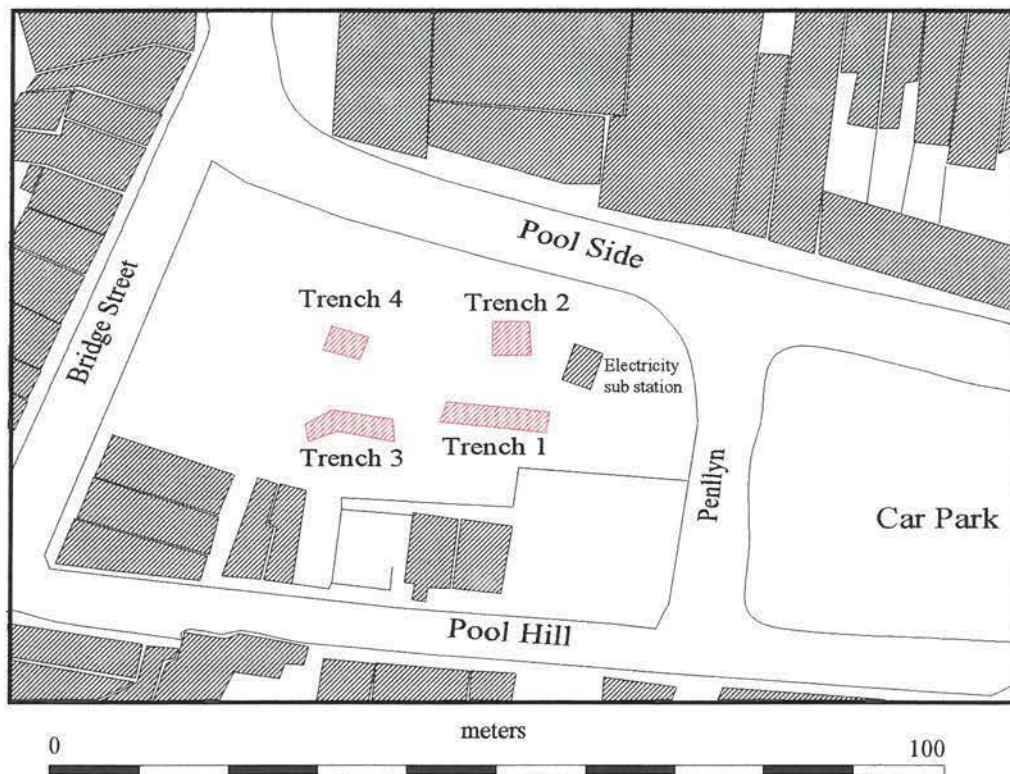


Fig 2 - Location of trenches

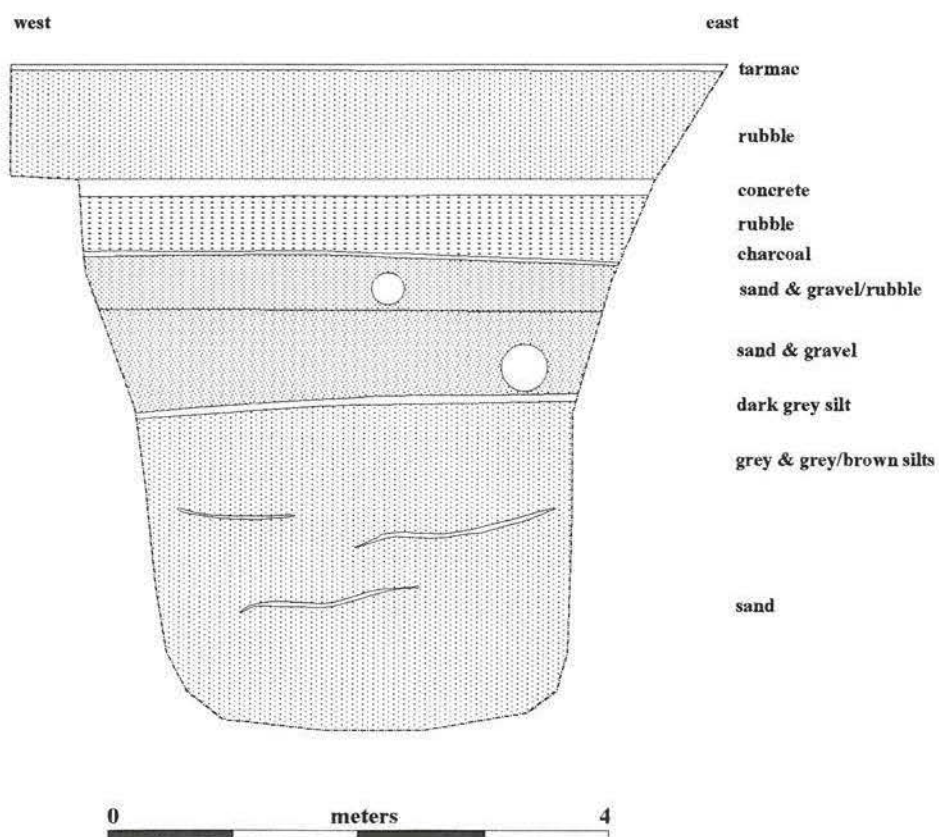


Fig 3 - Trench 1 - South facing section





Pool Side Caernarfon - Site prior to development - December 1997



Trench 1 - East facing section

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