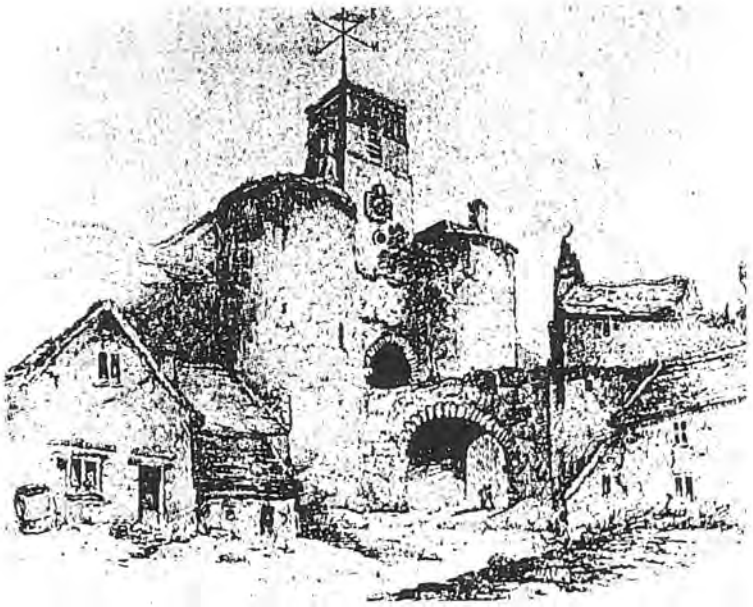
EASTGATE STREET

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

Report number: 324



Prepared for
Richard Broun Associates

G1571

April 1999

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

EASTGATE STREET, CAERNARFON

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION (G1571)

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By

Andrew Davidson
Illustrations by Andrew Dutton

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EASTGATE STREET: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

Introduction

As part of the ongoing improvements to Caernarfon, Gwynedd County Council is intending to carry out works to Eastgate Street, to tie in with the improvements already carried out within the town walls.

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT) undertook an archaeological assessment of the street in advance of these works, the findings of which were reported in *GAT Report No. 202*. The assessment revealed that Eastgate Street was supported upon a medieval stone bridge, of which parts had periodically come to light during the first half of the 20th century, but which was now completely hidden from view. As a result of this, GAT was asked to carry out evaluation excavations with the combined aims of locating the medieval bridge and of assessing the structural condition of the medieval masonry and arches.

Background

The conclusions from the Archaeological Assessment report were that Eastgate Street was the principal route into the medieval town, which crossed the Cadnant and outer ditch on a masonry bridge of four arches. The arches, however, occupied the eastern two thirds of the street, and the west end was a solid masonry causeway which was linked to the main gate by a drawbridge, later to be replaced by the Tan y Bont arch. An outer gateway, or barbican, was situated on the causeway.

The first bridge, of timber, was built sometime after the start of the building of the town walls in 1283, but it was re-built in stone in 1301-2 following damage caused during the uprising of 1294-5. It underwent repair work in 1320, and further repairs were carried out to the outer gate, or barbican, in 1406-10, following damage caused by Owain Glyndwr. The bridge was again repaired in 1507-8, and in 1520 repairs were carried out to the drawbridge, which means the Tan y Bont arch cannot be earlier than this. The outer gate is clearly visible on a drawing by the Buck brothers of 1742, but the bridge is largely hidden by buildings. The available evidence suggests the outer gate was demolished sometime between the mid 18th century and the early 19th century. The main gate was rebuilt in 1767, altered in 1833, and rebuilt again in 1968. The present houses on the south side of Eastgate Street would appear, from map and photographic evidence, to date from the second half of the 19th century. Of the buildings on the north side, Lloyds bank was built in 1906, and the Tesco store was built sometime after 1962.

The archaeological evidence for the bridge relies upon reported sightings during the first half of the 20th century by Harold Hughes and Kenrick Evans (Hughes 1907 and Evans 1941). The evidence for arches A and B is good, as both were seen by Hughes and Evans, and dimensions for B are shown in drawings prepared by the River Authority. The information for the two western arches (C and D) is much slighter and less reliable. Evans states they were seen in 1931 during the construction of the Hamer buildings, and he reproduces a photograph of one of them. Interestingly the photograph contains a ranging rod, which suggests it was taken for archaeological purposes, but its origin is not cited. Neither the width nor height of the arches are known, and the evidence from the photograph is not sufficient to calculate these. The west end of the bridge was examined in 1961 (Johns 1962), when it was confirmed that there was no fifth arch, but the causeway was seen to include a stone pier, wider than the causeway, which was interpreted as a pier remaining from the wooden bridge. The possibility that the pier may have been the site of the outer gateway was not considered.

The Evaluation Results

Two trenches were dug across the street, positioned with the intention of finding Arches A and C (see fig. 1)

Trench A (Fig 1, Plates 1 and 2)

Trench A was initially 1m wide and 5 m long, but was widened on both the west and east sides to allow a better understanding of the revealed features (see fig. 1). On the south side, at a depth of just under 0.5 m, a compacted and mortared stone layer was encountered, which was interpreted as the roof of a cellar. The north edge of the roof could not be found, as the presence of an electricity duct prevented excavation. To the north of the duct was a well mortared masonry wall 0.53 m wide, with a projecting plinth on the north side. The plinth had been cut by a trench for a sewer pipe. The mortar was of a similar consistency to the medieval mortars used on the town walls, and the uncovered masonry was

therefore interpreted as the parapet wall of the bridge, and the plinth as the start of the road surface which had been subsequently cut by the sewer trench (see Plate 1). A similar but less mortared surface was visible on the north side of the trench. The presence of service pipes prevented any examination of the extreme north end of the trench, where the north parapet wall would have been expected. The top of the south parapet wall lay 0.8m below the present road surface, the bottom of the sewer trench lay 1.28 below, and the medieval road surface lay approximately 1.0m below. An arched brick roof of a cellar had been inserted into the south side of the parapet wall, visible at the east end of Trench A (see fig. 1 and Plate 2), but the full extent of the brickwork was not uncovered.

Trench B (Fig 1, Plates 3 and 4)
This trench was also initially 1m wide across the street, on the assumed location of Arch C. However part of it was widened to 3.5m in an attempt to locate the arch on the south side of the street. The results from this trench were very similar to those of Trench A. In the south half a cellar roof of well compacted mortared stone was located, the north edge of which lay 2.8m out from the present street frontage. North of the cellar was a gap 0.6m wide filled with loose earth and stone rubble, which lay between the cellar and a well built masonry wall. This latter was interpreted as the south side of the bridge. No arch was visible in the medieval wall in the area first examined, so the gap between the two walls was excavated to a length of 3.5m, and a depth of 1.75m below the road surface, but once again, no arch was visible within the masonry. The top of the medieval wall lay 0.73m below the road surface, and the medieval wall was exposed to a height of approximately 1m. A series of cables lying on top of the medieval wall prevented excavation of the top of the parapet. However the north face of the wall was located from the north side of the trench, although positive identification of the alignment of the face proved difficult because of the presence of all the service pipes. The wall, however, contained a change in alignment along its face (see fig. 1 Trench B), but it is difficult to explain the change other than as a change on the approach to Arch B, which, according to Kenrick Evans report, had been rebuilt at some stage. The changed alignment does not align with the wall found in Trench A.

The road surface, a layer of flat stones laid in mortar, was located in the north part of the trench at a depth of 1.2m. The parapet wall therefore survives to a height of approximately 0.5m, although it has been disturbed by the burying of service pipes. In the angle formed between the road surface and the north face of the south parapet wall lay a brick drain, constructed of two bricks on edge to form the channel, and bricks across to form the top (see Plate 3). The bricks were not of medieval date, but it is not known if the drain was in use at the same time as the road, or was lain prior to the road surface being overlain.

Interpretation
The location of the medieval wall has made it possible to fit a drawn model of the medieval bridge (using information given in Hughes 1906 and Evans 1941) over the plan of the present street more accurately than had formerly been possible (see fig. 1), and also to attempt a reconstruction of the bridge (fig. 2).

This shows that the bridge occupies only the northern half of the present street. The southern street frontage until the 19th century would have been some 2.8 north of its present alignment, above the north edge of the cellars which underlie the present street. This alignment casts doubt upon the plans previously published which show the bridge skewed at an angle to the present street. However, it does present a problem, because when the lines of the bridge are projected to the west end, they pass well to the north of the medieval gateway. Although only a small percentage of the length of the bridge was examined, and the alignment was not easy to ascertain in the test pits, it appears likely that the alignment of the east half of the bridge is different to that of the western half. Whereas the change in alignment could occur anywhere west of Arch C, it seems most probable that it occurred west of Arch D, and that the solid causeway between Arch D and the Tal y Bont arch was on a different alignment to that of the bridge. This was formerly the site of the outer gatehouse (see above), but it is difficult to see why this should necessitate a change in alignment.

Conclusions and recommendations
The results of this study have indicated that the majority of the medieval bridge which underlies Eastgate Street survives in good condition. Bridges of this date which survive with little modern alteration are not common, and, given the very high archaeological importance attached to the castle and town walls, (Caernarfon Castle and Town Walls are a World Heritage Site, a Scheduled Ancient Monument and a Guardianship Ancient Monument) the site should be treated as of national

importance, although the structure is at present neither a Scheduled Ancient Monument nor a Listed Building.

The excavations have provided a much clearer understanding of the location of the bridge, but they do leave a number of questions concerning its alignment, and the phases of construction, unanswered. It is therefore recommended that a further programme of evaluation work is undertaken, to allow appropriate management recommendations to be made. This would involve ascertaining the location of the bridge at Arch D, and examining the nature of one or more of the redundant arches. Because of the difficulties of excavating from the top, caused by the proliferation of services, it is recommended that the arches are examined via the adjoining cellar walls. The excavations have shown that this would be possible, certainly for Arch C, and probably for Arch A.

It is also recommended that future evaluation work should include more detailed recording of the western causeway, which is visible from Bank Quay, and the location of both the Tan y Bont arch and the Gatehouse. This would allow a more accurate location plan to be drawn, and would considerably enhance the usefulness of the reconstruction model (Fig. 2). GAT have also been informed that information concerning the bridge and causeway may be housed in un-indexed files in the National Archaeological Record, Aberystwyth, and these should be examined.

Concerning future works, it is recommended that all future construction work should be designed to avoid damaging the medieval masonry, and that any excavations deeper than 0.5m should be accompanied by an archaeological watching brief. It is also recommended that any work which may reveal further evidence of the bridge and its construction should be accompanied by an archaeological watching brief.

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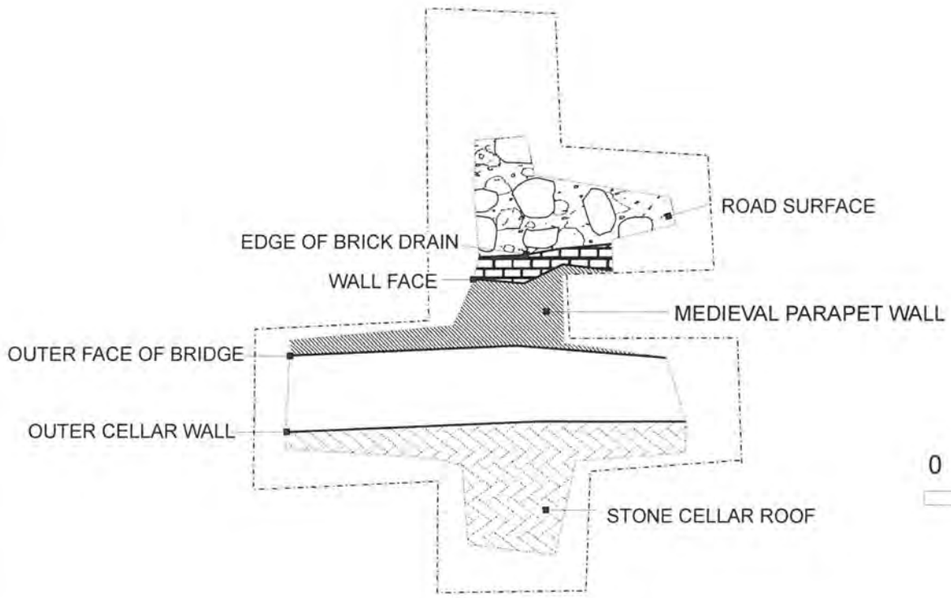
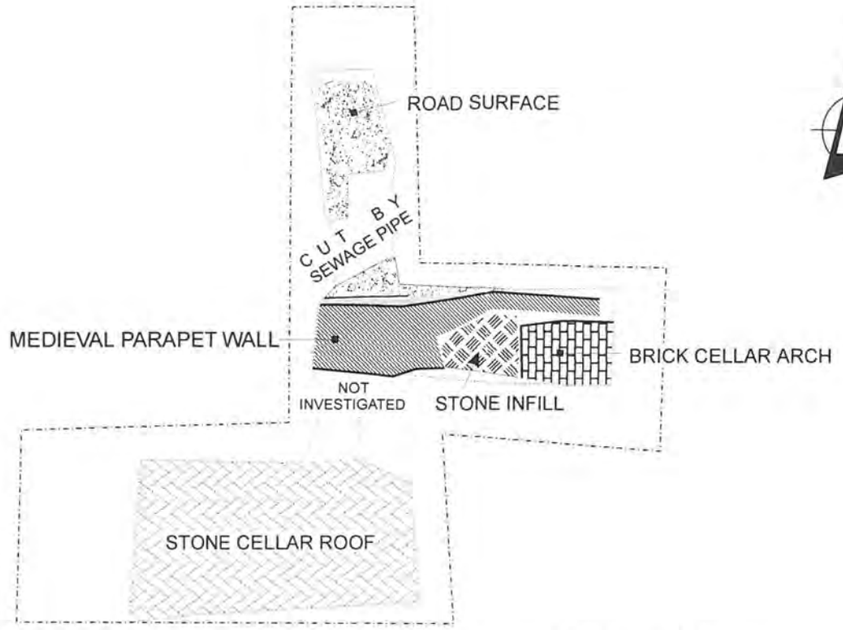
Jones, WH, 1889: *Old Karnarvon*, Caernarfon, reprint by Siop y Pentan 1984

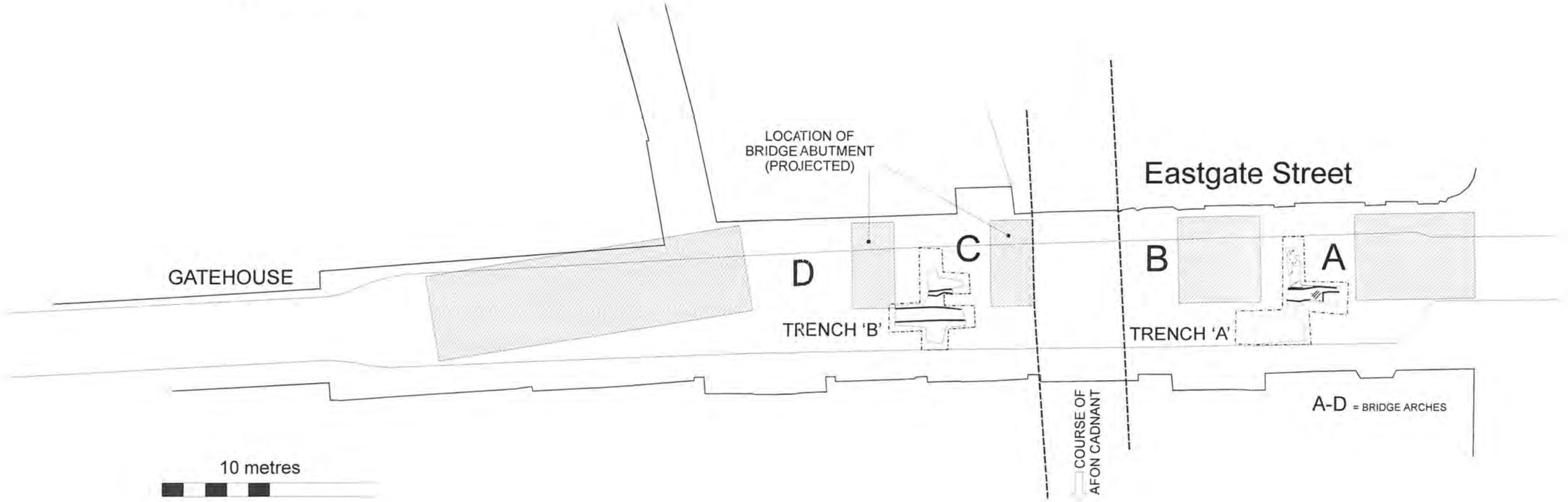


TRENCH 'B'

0 3m



TRENCH 'A'



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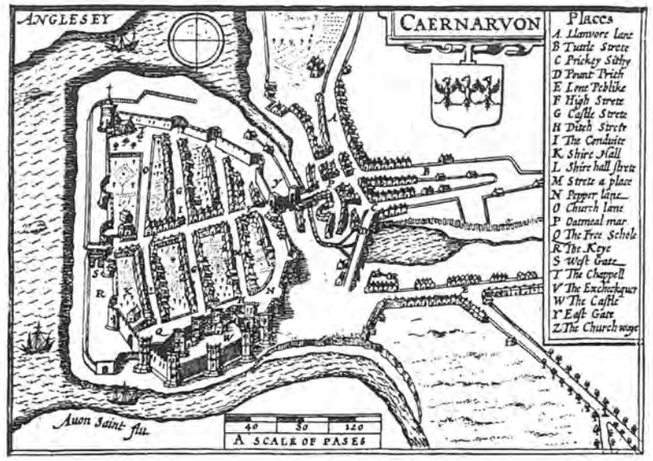
EASTGATE STREET, CAERNARFON
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

Client:
Richard Broun Associates

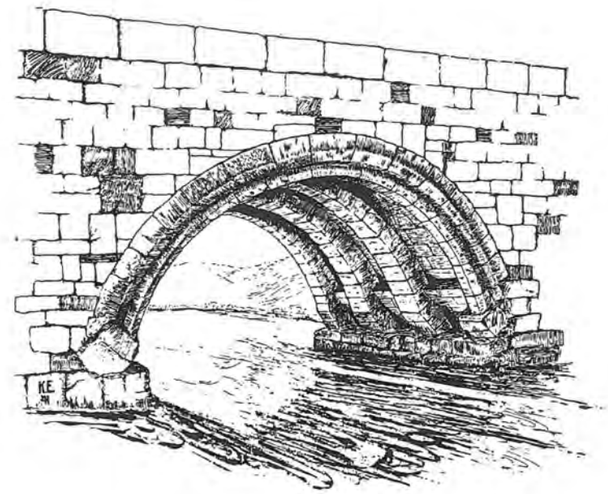
Scales: 1:50 & 1:200

14/04/99
Andrew Dutton

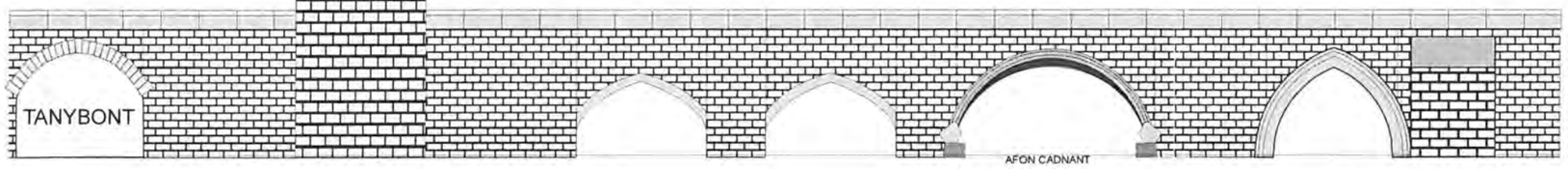
Drawing number
D:\G1571/1.cdr



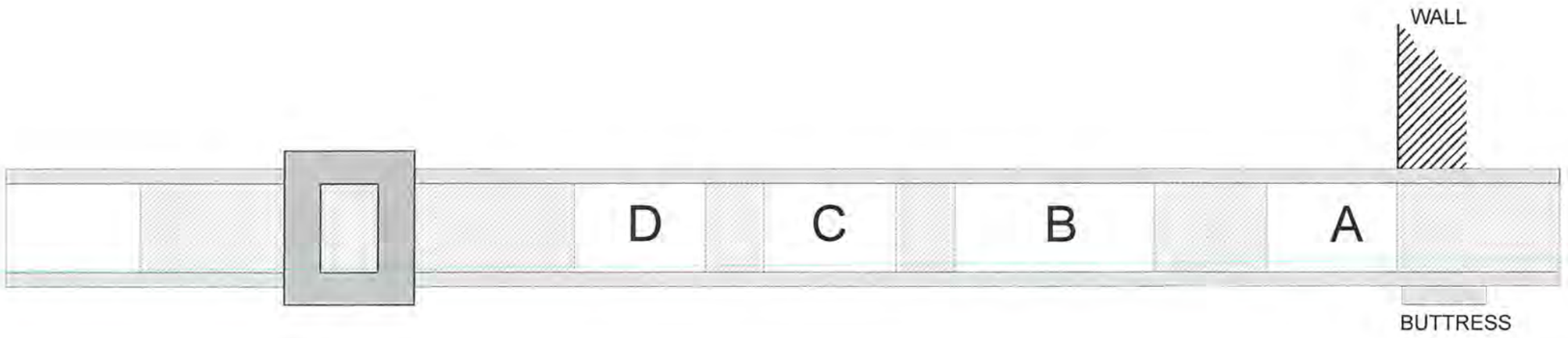
JOHN SPEED'S 1610 PLAN OF CAERNARFON



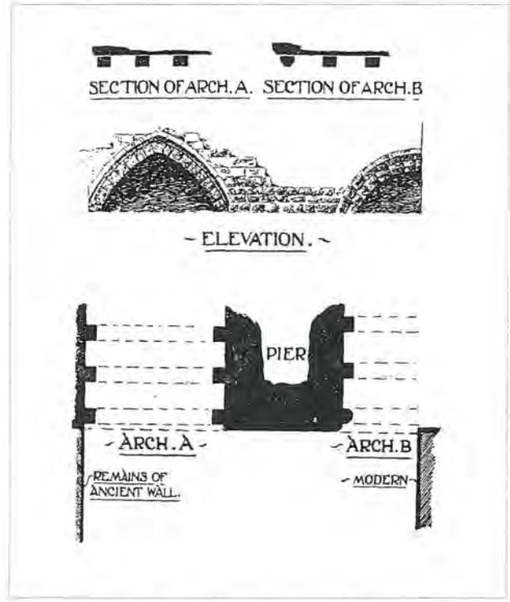
RECONSTRUCTED VIEW OF ARCH 'B'
(NORTH FACE ; ABUTTING BUILDINGS OMITTED)
after Kenrick Evans 1941



CONJECTURAL SOUTH FACING ELEVATION OF EAST GATE BRIDGE (Y PORTH MAWR) FROM AVAILABLE EVIDENCE



10 metres



ARCHES 'A' & 'B' - NORTH FACING ELEVATION
after Harold Hughes 1907

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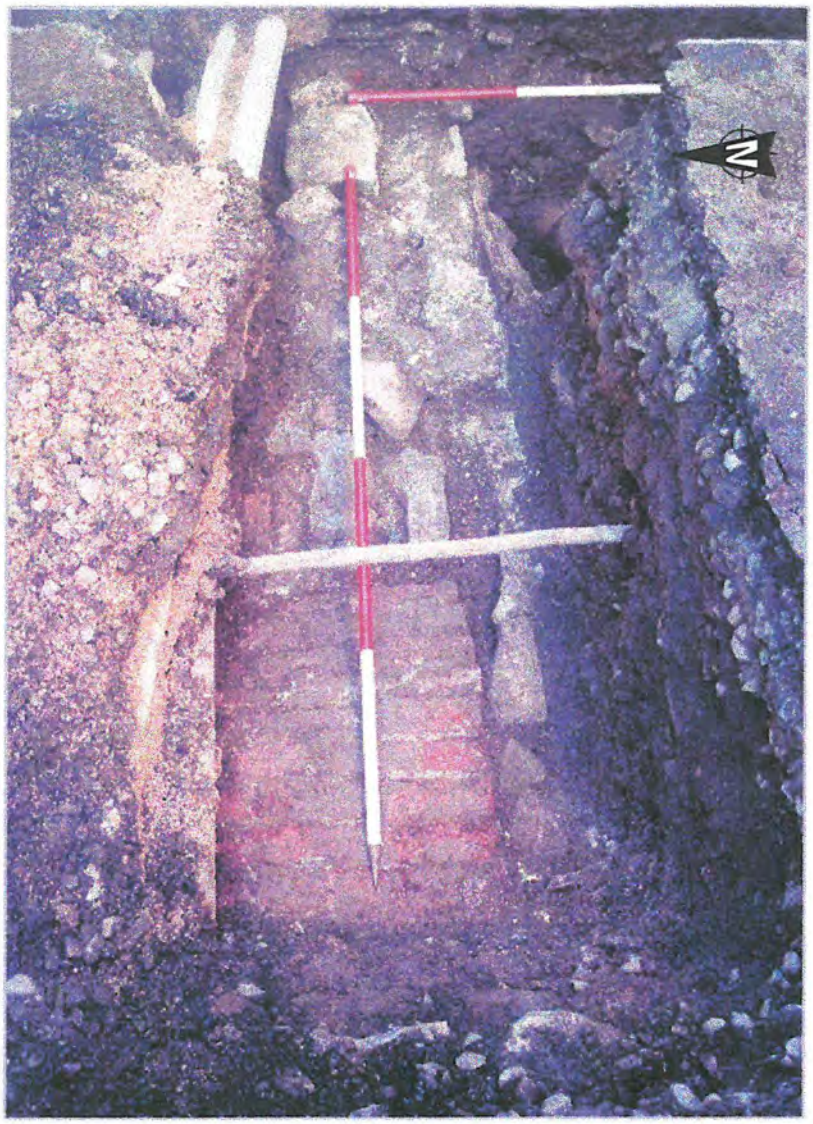

TRENCH 'A'

Plate 1. Brick arch inserted into parapet wall (left)

Plate 2. Parapet wall and road cut by sewer trench (below)

Plate 3. South side of bridge seen left of the pipe. Cellar walls are visible on the right. (above)

TRENCH 'B'

Plate 4. Brick drain visible on the north side of the parapet wall (below)