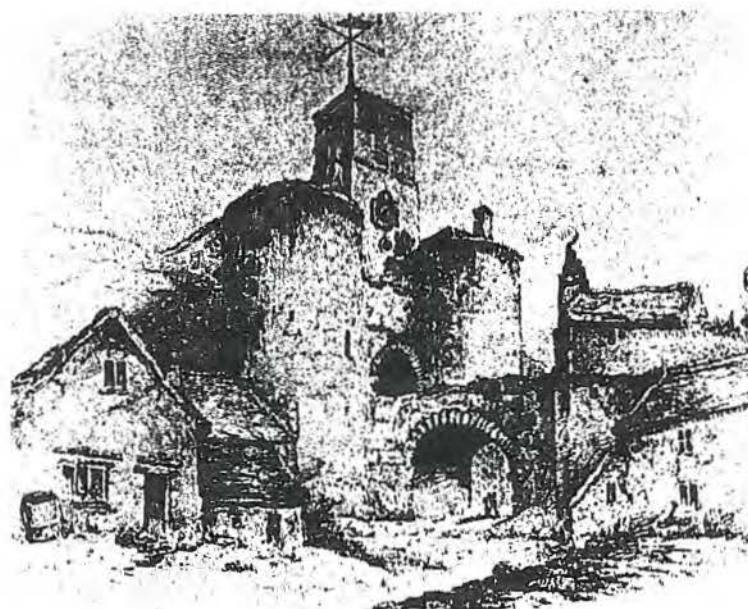


EASTGATE STREET, CAERNARFON
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

Report number: 361



Prepared for
Cyngor Gwyedd Council

March, 2000

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

Event PRN
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EASTGATE STREET, CAERNARFON
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION (1619)

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By

Andrew Davidson
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March, 2000

EASTGATE STREET, CAERNARFON: ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF (G1619)

Introduction

As part of the ongoing improvement to Caernarfon, Cyngor Gwynedd is carrying out improvement works to Eastgate Street, to tie in with the improvement already carried out within the town walls.

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT) was contracted by Cyngor Gwynedd to undertake an archaeological assessment of the street in advance of these works, the findings of which were reported in *GAT Report No. 202*. Subsequently, limited evaluation work, as described in *GAT Report No. 324*, was undertaken to supplement the assessment. Following on from this, GAT was asked by Cyngor Gwynedd to carry out a watching brief during the resurfacing of the road. This has resulted in new information concerning the location of the bridge, the details of which are described in this report.

Background

Eastgate Street is supported on a masonry bridge of four arches, built 1301-2 to replace a timber bridge built c. 1285. The bridge is thought to originally have spanned a tidal estuary, although the Cadnant is now confined to Arch B (see fig. 1), and the remaining arches are all blocked. The west end terminates in a solid masonry causeway, upon which was originally situated an outer gateway or barbican. Between the west end of the causeway and the main gate there is now a stone arch (Tan y Bont arch) although this gap was originally crossed by a draw bridge, the masonry arch being erected sometime after 1520. The main gate was rebuilt or altered in 1767, 1833, 1871 and 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.

Archaeological recording carried out in 1961 (Johns 1961) showed the causeway part of the bridge to be in three parts, the centre section being a stone pier greater in width than the two flanking sections of stone causeway. The pier may date from the construction of the timber bridge in 1285, although it probably also formed part of the outer gateway of the stone bridge. The west section of the causeway and the pier remains are clearly visible from in the section of walling lying between the Tan y Bont arch and the stone steps leading down from Eastgate street. Bank Quay was originally the town ditch, on the east side of which it was possible to moor boats. Evidence observed in 1961 suggests the east side of the ditch was formed by a high revetment wall, which reached to the top of the bridge.

The four stone arches of the bridge were all observed during the first half of the 20th century, although the information for the two western arches (C and D) is slight, and not very reliable. The results from those observations (Hughes 1907 and Evans 1941) and from the trial excavations carried out in 1999, have been used to superimpose a plan of the bridge over the present street system. This showed the width of the bridge to be little more than half the width, and situated on the north side, of the present street. It is known from documentary sources that the street was widened to the south in the 19th century. The conclusions reached in Report No. 324 were that the west end of the bridge, *i.e.* the causeway part of the crossing, was on a different alignment to the remainder of the bridge. However, findings from the watching brief show this to be incorrect, and although there may be a slight change in alignment, it is not as great as thought.

Results of watching brief

The site was visited during and following the removal of the old tarmac surface of the street. At the east end the excavations were not deep enough to reveal archaeological remains. However, at the west end the medieval remains were closer to the surface, and a small part of the south parapet wall was revealed immediately east of the Tan y Bont arch. In addition, two small areas of road surface were revealed (see fig. 1), one north of the visible section of parapet wall, and one at the crown of the Tan y Bont arch. The former was composed of small to medium sized cobbles (no larger than 10cm). The crown of the arch was composed of larger blocks of masonry, up to 40cm long, set on edge.

The location of the revealed features was recorded by EDM survey, and the opportunity was also taken to record more accurately the alignment of the medieval masonry visible from Bank Quay. The results of this are shown on fig. 1, from which it can be seen the bridge and causeway are aligned along the north side of Eastgate Street, and on the north side of the arch of the main gate. The approximate dimensions of the original size of the stone pier are shown. A request has been made to the National

Monuments Record for additional information concerning the observations made by C N Johns in 1961, which should enable a more accurate plan of the pier to be drawn, and the location of the medieval wall of Bank Quay to be added.

Conclusions and recommendations

The results of the watching brief and additional survey have provided a clearer understanding of the location of the bridge, although uncertainty still exists over the exact location of each of the arches and their present condition. There is also uncertainty over the location of the Bank Quay medieval wall.

As stated in Report No. 324, it is clear from the work carried out to date 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. Care should therefore be taken that any future work does not damage the structure, and that any work which may reveal further evidence of the bridge and its construction should be accompanied by an appropriate programme of archaeological work.

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