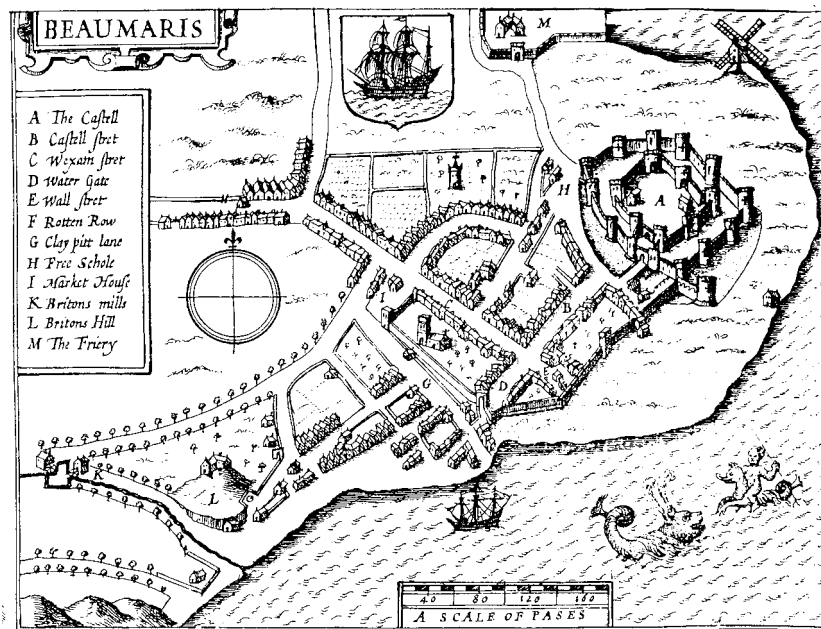


CHURCH ROOM, BEAUMARIS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

G1786



Report number : 507

Prepared for
Symonds Group

NOVEMBER 2003

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
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David Hopewell

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Archaeological Watching Brief – G1786

1. Introduction

Alterations have been carried out at Church Room, Steeple Lane, Beaumaris (Fig. 1), including the construction of a disabled access ramp outside the entrance, and new drainage both inside and out. Gwynedd Archaeological Trust was asked by Symonds Group to carry out a watching brief during the works.

2. Specification and Project Design

A project design was prepared by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust and is included as appendix 1 of this report.

3. Methodology

a) Archaeological background

A search was made of material in the Regional Sites and Monuments Record and the University of Wales Bangor Library. Particular emphasis was placed on the development of the town walls.

b) Watching brief

A watching brief was undertaken during the excavation of material to the SE of Church room during the construction of an access point for the works. A new porch was subsequently built in this area. The material was excavated using a JCB under archaeological supervision.

4. Archaeological Background

Beaumaris and Newborough, the last of the Edwardian plantations in North Wales were founded after the sacking of Caernarfon by Madog ap Llywelyn in 1294. Work began on the construction of a castle in an area of low-lying marshy ground, (Beau Mareys or Beautiful Marsh) in 1295. The borough charter was granted in 1296. Edward transplanted the inhabitants of the nearby Welsh township of Llanfaes to Newborough on the west coast of Anglesey. Beaumaris initially prospered with 132 burgages taken up in the first ten years (Lewis 1912, 63). The political situation soon stabilised resulting in a lack of urgency in the construction of the town's defences. The castle was never completed and town walls were not constructed despite a long petition to Edward II from the burgesses (ibid, 102).

Beaumaris was attacked by Owain Glyndŵr in 1403 and partially burnt down. The castle was taken in 1404 but was retaken in 1405, (Soulsby 1983, 79). In 1407 the burgesses received a royal donation of £10 'in aid of making a ditch around the aforesaid town'. Work continued in 1414, when Gilbert, Lord Talbot, the reorganiser of the decayed Post Glyndŵr boroughs of Anglesey, appropriated thirty burgages in order to build a new stone wall around the town. A yearly sum of £20 was set aside from 1451-5 for the repair of the walls.

Speed's map of 1610 (Fig. 2) shows an expanded town that was prospering as a trading post. Much of the course of the town walls can be seen on the map including the length relevant to the current report.

Water Gate is identified on the map and presumably stood close to the junction of the present-day Watergate Street and Castle Street. The wall is shown running alongside the churchyard to a tower at a point where the north-west wall of the present church-yard kinks slightly to the south (see Fig. 1 feature 2). At this point the wall turns to the north-east, crossing Church street to join an extant length to the north of Rating Row. A survey of the town written in 1675 (N.L.W. MS. 9081 p114) notes that 'relics of it [the town wall] are to be seen further vizt., on the south-west side of the churchyard and on the north-west of the Towne...'. A fragment is recorded by RCAHMW (1937 pp. Cxlviii and 4) in the angle between Margaret Street and Steeple Lane, i.e. just to the SE of the present study (Fig. 5).

This survived to a height of about 10 feet and was 6 feet thick. The 1969 OS map shows a building (identified as *club*), to the rear of 12, 16 and 20 Steeple Lane (1 on Fig. 1). This appears to have been built over the line of the wall. It is not known if any elements of the wall survive. The site is now semi-derelict and inaccessible. This fragment of wall demonstrates that the town wall formerly ran along or close to the line of the churchyard wall to the north east of Church Room. RCAHMW (1937 Cxlviii) suggests that Steeple Lane marked the edge of the town ditch. This was confirmed by R. B. White (1975, 53) who sectioned the ditch in three places during landscaping work in St. Mary's Churchyard. The ditch was shown to be some 20 feet deep. No trace of a wall was found. A 14th century bronze gaming piece was recovered from the upper fills. Unfortunately the exact location of the trenches cannot be determined from the published account and no project archive could be located.

Church Room was built in the early 20th century and is shown on the 1919 25" map (Fig. 4). The map also shows a building at the south-east of the plot. This presumably corresponds to a 'house and yard' shown on the 1829 Baron Hill map (Fig 3) and the 1890 OS 1.10560 county series. This building had been demolished by 1969 (OS 1:2500, Fig. 1).

5. Results of the Watching Brief

A watching brief was carried out on 8th April 2003 during excavation for a site access and porch footings. An area of approximately 6m x 4m was excavated to the south-east of the present building using a mechanical excavator. The area is shown on Fig. 6.

The entire area was sealed by a 0.7 to 1.0m deep layer of Victorian demolition debris presumably from the former building at the south east of the plot. This was removed revealing a series of lime mortared stone and brick foundations. The building materials were the same as those found in the demolition debris and it can probably be assumed that the buildings were knocked down and the rubble used to level the site. One wall of the earlier buildings appears to have been retained and now forms part of the revetment to the south east of church room.

It seems likely that the brick foundations in the south-east part of the trench (fig. 7, A) relate to the building shown on the Baron Hill 1829 map, and the 1919 OS map. The long stone foundation (B) could be the remains of the boundary wall also shown on the map. A further wall connecting the boundary wall to the steps of Church Room can be seen on the 1919 map. This presumably corresponds to stone foundation C. The other subdividing wall (D) is not shown on any map but could perhaps be interpreted as an outbuilding. A small patch of earlier deposits was identified and partially excavated between foundations C D and E. This continued beneath the north-eastern end of the revetment in front of the present building (Figs 6 and 7). The lower part of the deposit consisted of soft mid grey-brown silty clay containing numerous oyster, wrinkle and mussel shells along with occasional pig bones. This was sealed by a 0.2m deep deposit of rounded coarse gravel and clay. Both deposits dipped to the north-east and could tentatively be interpreted as the upper fills of the town ditch. Unfortunately no datable finds were recovered and there was opportunity for further excavation. This interpretation therefore could not be confirmed.

A further visit was made to the site on 22nd August 2003 during the construction of the disabled access ramp. This involved a small amount of excavation beyond that recorded in the previous visit. The ramp was to be laid around the perimeter of the Church Room forecourt starting at street level adjacent to the present building. All of the excavated material proved to be Victorian demolition rubble and soil. Presumably, as noted before, the previous structures were demolished and the rubble used to raise the height of the Church Room forecourt. It also appears that some soil was imported at this point.

The watching brief has demonstrated that there has been much post medieval disturbance to this area. A small pocket of *in situ* deposits suggests that the medieval town ditch ran along the edge of Steeple Lane, and that the original ground surface was about 0.5m below the present. The lower fills of the ditch may well be preserved below Church Room and its forecourt given that White identified a 20ft deep ditch to the north west (White 1975, 53).

6. References

Published Works

Lewis ES, 1912 *The Medieval Boroughs of Snowdonia*
Soulsby I, 1983 *The Towns of Medieval Wales*
RCAHMW, 1937 *Ancient Monuments in Anglesey*
White RB, 1975 Beaumaris, *Archaeology in Wales* No 15

Manuscripts

History of Beaumaris 1675 N.L.W. MS. 9081, P114

Cartographic

Speed 1610, Map of Beaumaris
Map of Beaumaris 1829, UCNW Baron Hill 6496
OS 1st Edition 1890-91, 1:10560 county series
OS 25" 1919, sheet XV.13
OS 1:2500 1969 SH6076

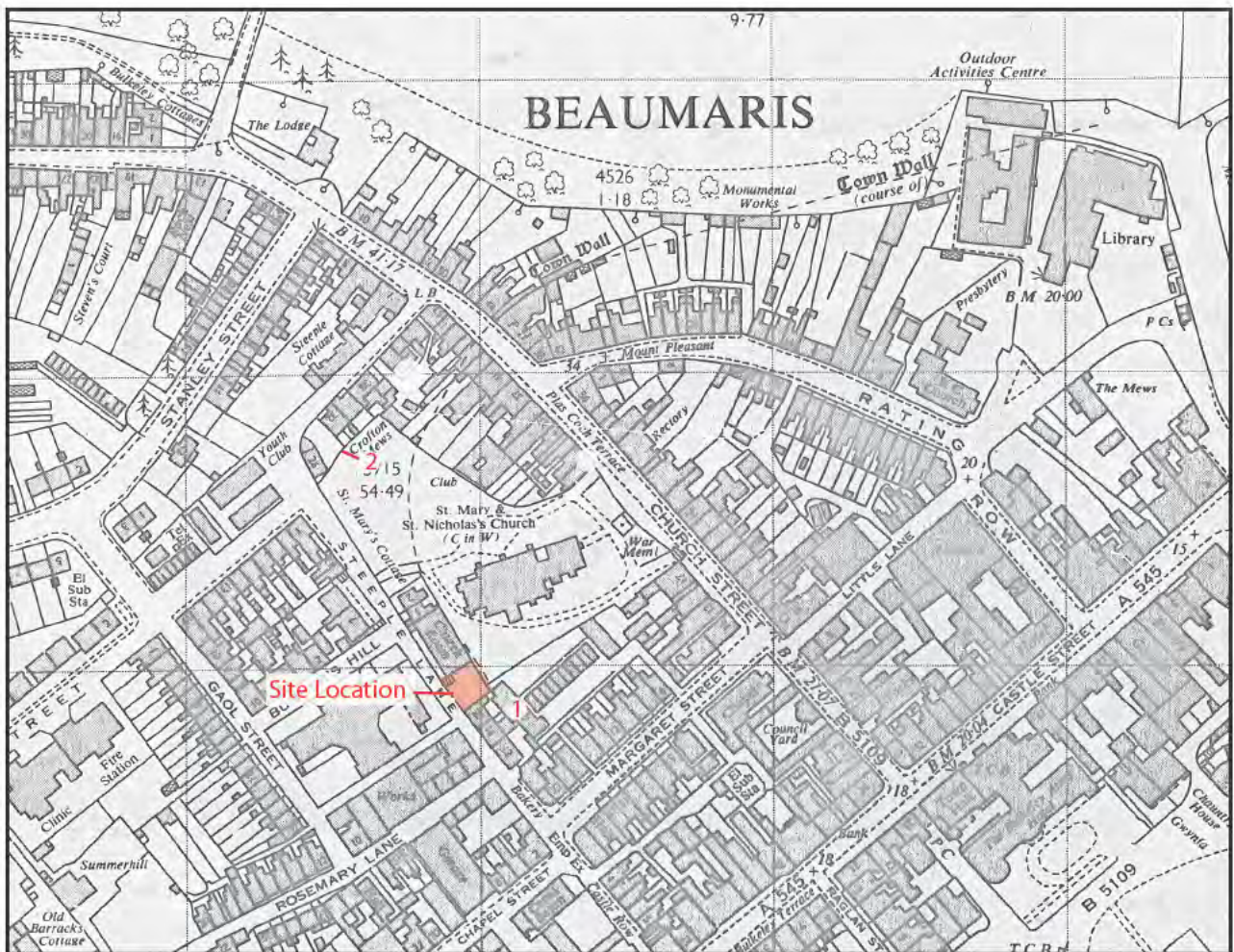


Fig. 1 Site location and features of interest. (OS 1:2500 1969 SH6076)

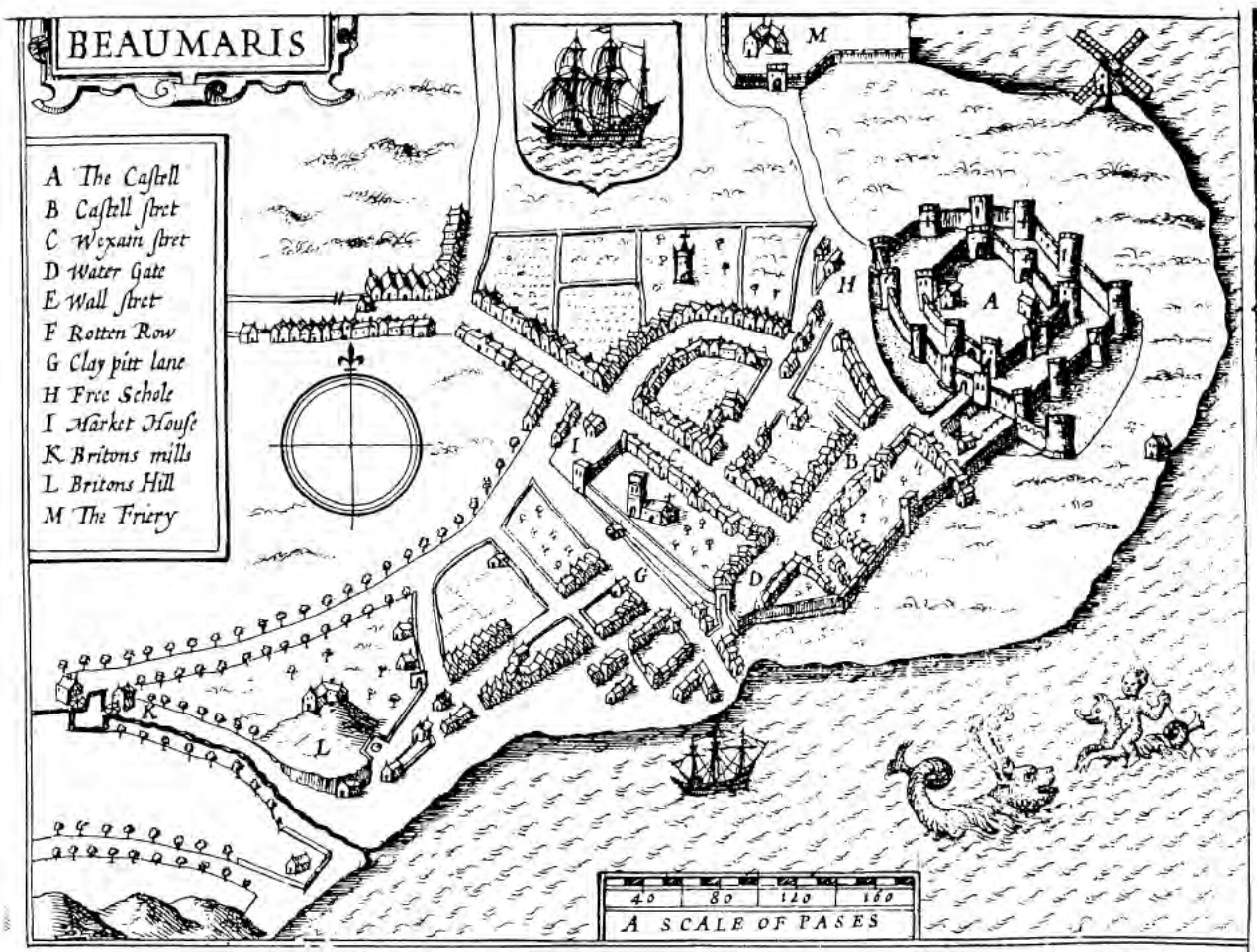


Fig. 2 Speed's map of Beaumaris 1610

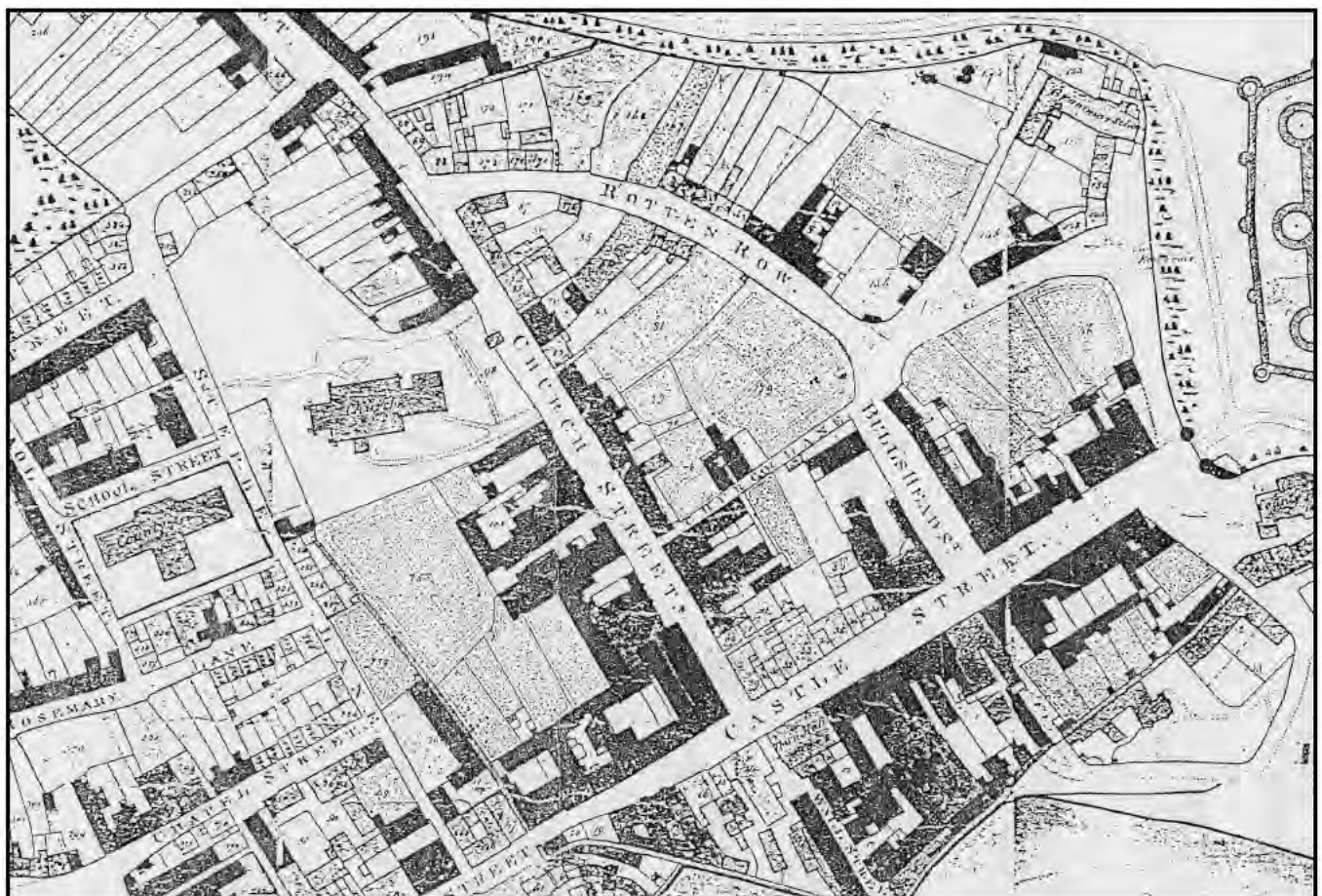


Fig. 3 Beaumaris 1829 (UCNW Baron Hill 6496)

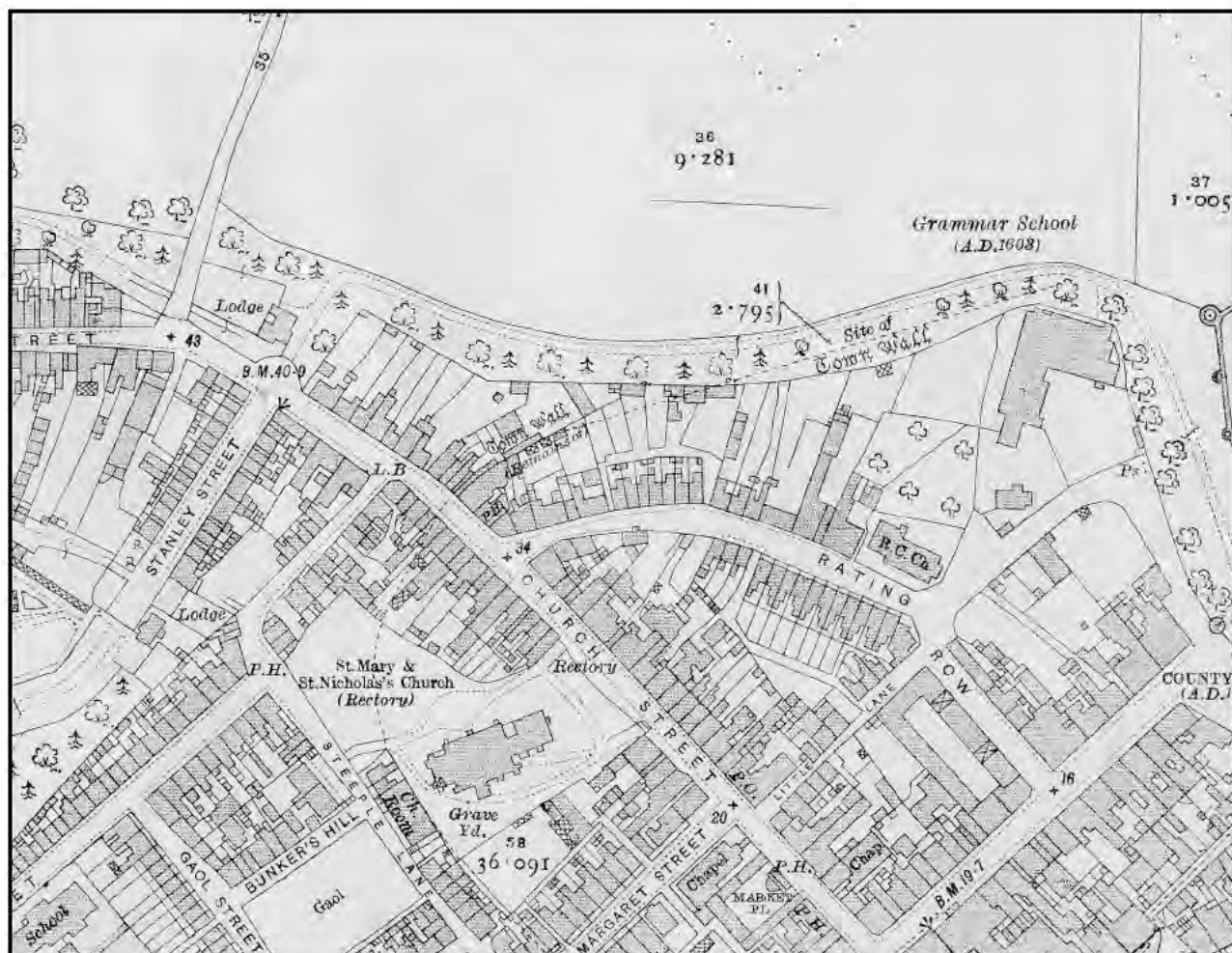


Fig.4 Beaumaris 1919 (OS 25", sheet XV.13)

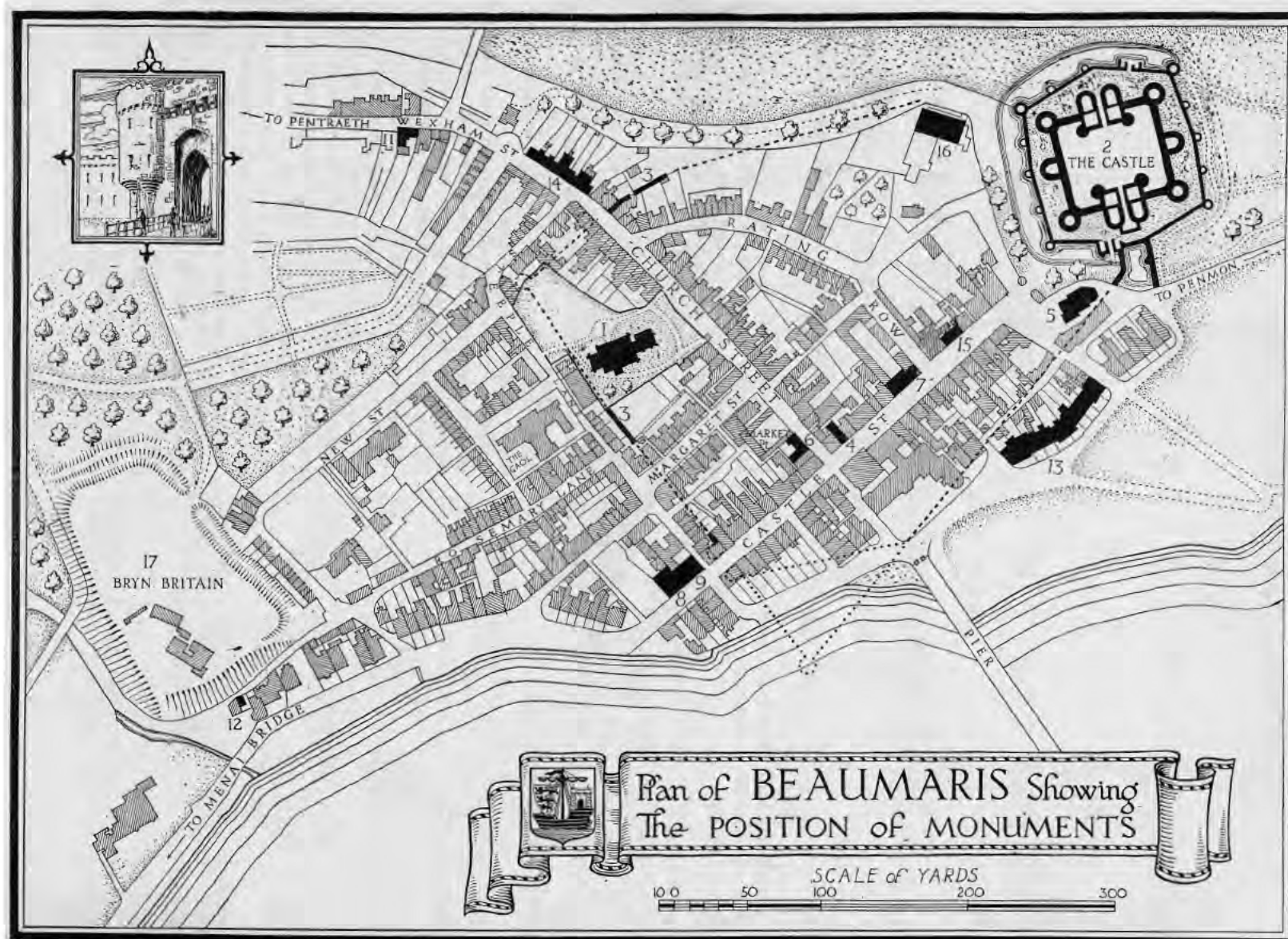


Fig.5 Plan of Beaumaris (RCAHMW, 1937 Ancient Monuments in Anglesey)

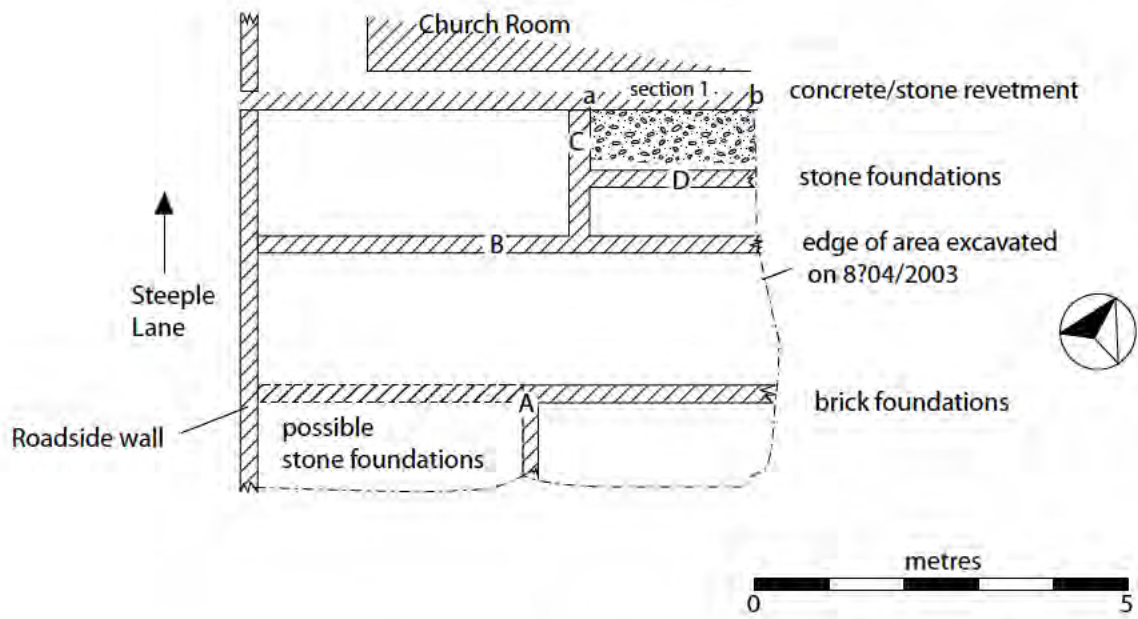


Fig. 6 Church Room Beaumaris, sketch plan

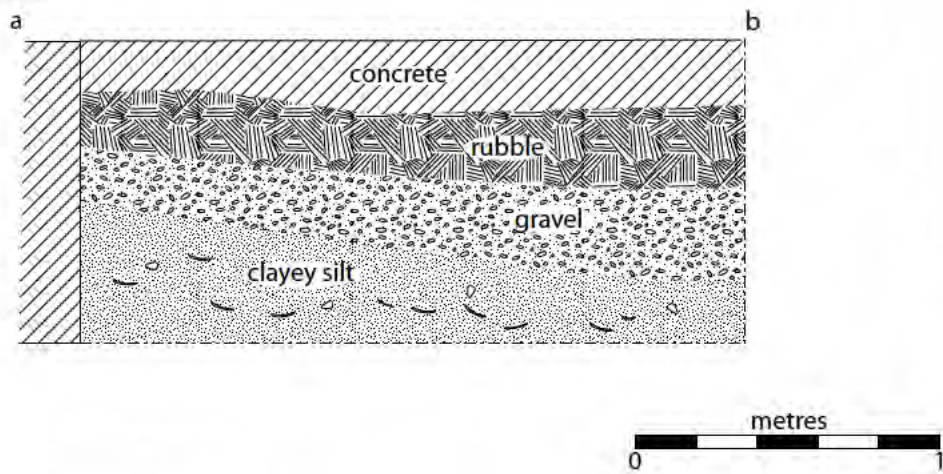


Fig. 7 Church Room Beaumaris, section 1



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