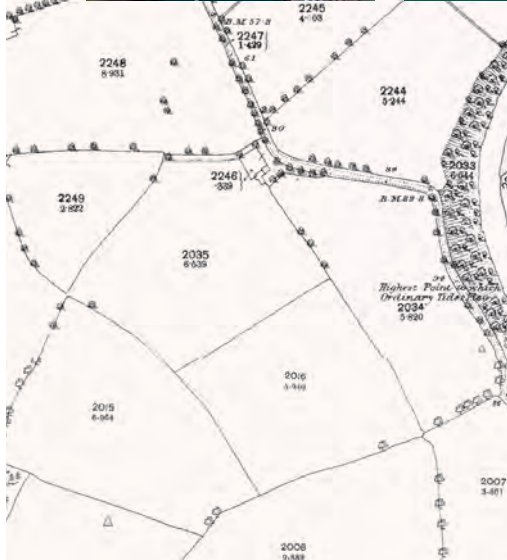


Caernarfon Waterfront: Understanding Urban Character



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Caernarfon Waterfront: Understanding Urban Character

Acknowledgement

In undertaking this study, Cadw has drawn on work carried out by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust in 2005: *Ports and Harbours of Gwynedd: A Threat-Related Assessment*. This work, carried out for Cadw, summarized the historical development of the harbours of Caernarfon, and provided a detailed gazetteer and map of sites in the vicinity of the waterfront. The gazetteer has not been replicated in full in the present report but is available from Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, who should be contacted for further advice on the archaeology of the area.

Contents

Introduction	5	Character Areas	25
Aims of the Study	5	1 The Promenade (The Medieval Quay)	25
		2 Bank Quay and Victoria Dock	27
Historical Development	7	3 The Slate Quay	30
Urban Origins	7	4 The Maes	33
Medieval Castle and Town	9	5 Segontium Terrace and Tre'r Gof	34
Land and Water: The Urban Economy	9	6 Coed Helen	36
Two Rivers and the Sea	12		
Beyond the Walls	16	The Seiont and Menai Waterfronts: Design Parameters for Redevelopment	38
Historical Topography	19	Design Vocabulary and Materials	40
The Medieval Town	19		
The Nineteenth Century: Civil Engineering and Urban Growth	21	Statement of Significance	41
		Selected Sources	42
The Character of Building	24	Maps	42
		Endnotes	43

List of Maps pages 44–51

1 All Character Areas	5 The Slate Quay Area (3)
2 All Character Areas with Historic Environment Designations	6 The Maes Area (4)
3 The Promenade (The Medieval Quay) Area (1)	7 Segontium Terrace and Tre'r Gof (5)
4 Bank Quay and Victoria Dock Area (2)	8 Coed Helen Area (6)

Introduction

Aims of the Study

Urban characterization aims to describe and explain the historic character of towns to give a focus to local distinctiveness and to serve as a tool for the sustainable management of the historic environment. It seeks to inform and support positive conservation and regeneration programmes, help improve the quality of planning advice, and contribute to local interpretation and education strategies.

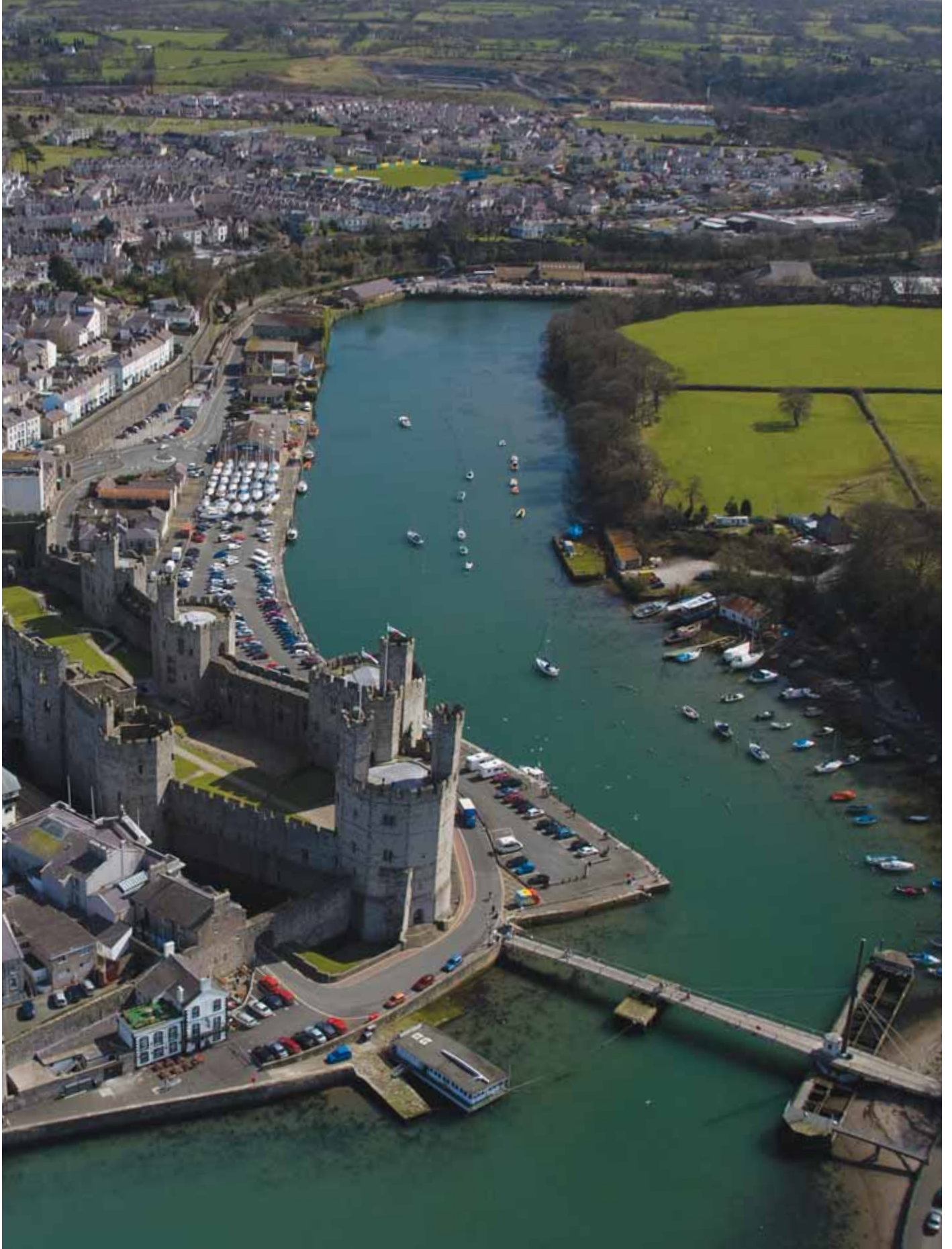
Urban characterization defines the distinctive historical character of individual towns, and identifies the variety of character within them, recognizing that this character is fundamental to local distinctiveness and pride of place, and is an asset in regeneration. It looks at how the history of a town is expressed in its plan and topography, in areas of archaeological potential, and in its

architectural character. The survey is not just an audit of features, but a reconstruction of the themes and processes which have shaped the town.

The immediate purpose of this study is to inform emerging proposals for the regeneration of the Caernarfon waterfront, a critical part of the setting of the World Heritage Site of castle and town walls. The study has therefore focussed on the Menai and Seiont waterfronts, together with the immediately adjacent urban areas. In order to understand these areas in context, it has also considered the historical background to the establishment and development of the town as a whole. It is intended that this study will provide a baseline for strategic planning as well as local management.

The Slate Quay provides the foreground to the castle at the mouth of the river Seiont.





Historical Development

Caernarfon has a long and distinguished urban history. The establishment of the medieval castle and town was preceded by Roman and Welsh settlements in the vicinity. From these origins emerged an urban culture which has endured for many centuries. Key to the long-term success of the town was the provision of a reliable economic infrastructure. Throughout its history, in changing circumstances, the waterfront has been a mainstay in the economic life of the town.

Urban Origins

'And at the river mouth he saw a great castle, the fairest that mortal had ever seen, and the gate of the castle he saw open, and he came to the castle'.¹

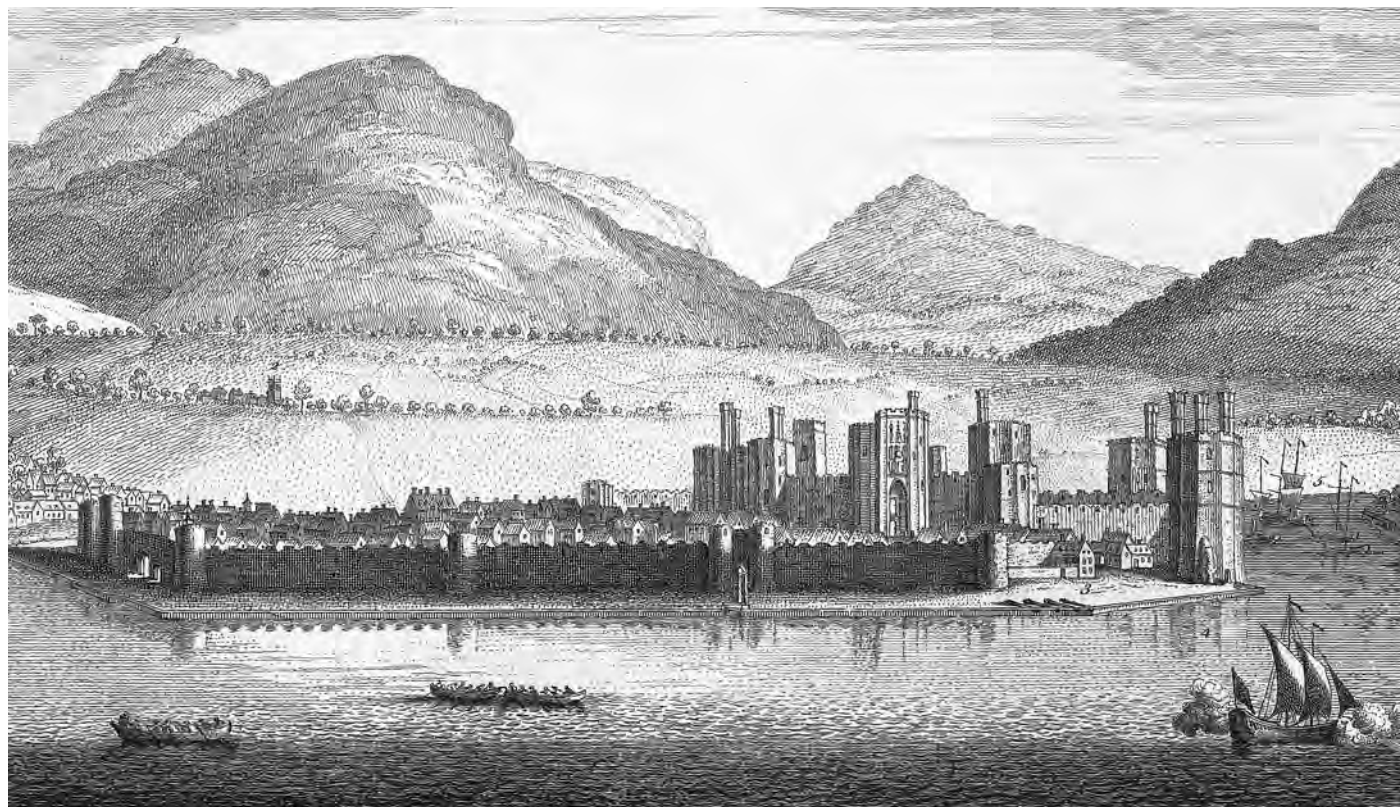
The Roman Legacy

On the summit of the ridge between the rivers Cadnant and Seiont, the Romans established the auxiliary fort of Segontium in about AD 77. Segontium became the base for a large administrative district subordinate to Chester, and was occupied until the late fourth century. This long history of occupation may partly be explained by its strategic position in fertile coastal country, and perhaps by the exploitation of the mineral wealth of the area. West of Segontium, just above the river Seiont at its closest point to the fort, is a second Roman site, Hen Waliau. This walled compound has been dated to the fourth century and interpreted as a storage depot. The remains of 'an immense wooden bridge'² across the Seiont, also thought to be Roman, were discovered in 1817, a short distance upstream of Hen Waliau.

Opposite: The castle on the water's edge where the river Seiont meets the Menai Strait.

Below: The Roman fort of Segontium, with the castle at the river mouth beyond.





The castle and walled town, strung out along the shore on a promontory between the rivers Seiont and Cadnant, as depicted by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck in 1742 (The North West View of Caernarvon Castle, The National Library of Wales).

Although the existence of a Roman settlement close to the site later chosen for the town of Caernarfon had little direct impact on the topography of the town, it was influential in the culture and history of the later settlement. The first certain reference to a settlement down on the shoreline was the castle of Hugh d'Avranches, Earl of Chester, who built a motte and bailey in 1090. In a late twelfth-century text (*The History of Gruffydd ap Cynan*), this castle was described as built in the old city of the emperor Constantine.³ Although Hugh's castle was not literally in the ruins of Segontium, the imperial association dignified it and gave it a grandeur which in turn was seized by the Welsh when they regained the area from the Normans in 1115. This imperial past is also suggested in the iconography of Edward I's castle. It was commemorated, too, in the reburial of what was claimed to be the body of Magnus Maximus in 1283. There is a tradition (not supported by archaeological evidence) that Magnus Maximus was based at Segontium as regional commander in the late fourth century — he was the Maccen Wledig of Welsh legend, father of Constantine and Peblig; several old Welsh families traced their ancestry back to him.

It is possible that the earl of Chester may have been the first to settle close to the waterfront.

However, the Romans would almost certainly have exploited (and defended) the seaways, and it is surely significant that Hen Walliau was sited immediately above the Seiont. Love Lane, which descends towards the river from South Road, close to the south-west corner of the site, may even respect the line of a Roman route from Hen Walliau.

After the departure of the Romans, the nucleus of settlement may have remained on the higher ground close to the fort, and it is perhaps significant that the church at Llanbeblig lay close to Segontium. Ecclesiastically, the later medieval town of Caernarfon fitted into an earlier parochial structure, and remained a chapelry within the parish of Llanbeblig.

Welsh Settlement

The first Norman settlement here was short-lived: when the Welsh regained the area in 1115, they probably occupied Hugh d'Avranches's castle, and certainly established a small civil settlement with a port and a court. When Edward I's officials arrived in 1283, they found a *lllys* here, with a garden in the old castle bailey. Although the motte and bailey were once again

retained — the motte incorporated in the Edwardian castle, and the bailey surviving as the area now known as the Maes (Castle Square) — the rest of the Welsh settlement was swept away. Twenty men spent five days clearing away the timbers of demolished houses to make way for the defences of the new town. Although we do not know very much about the Welsh settlement, documentary references suggest that it was a place of some importance. In 1188, Giraldus Cambrensis passed through 'Caernarfon, that is Arfon Castle'.⁴ In 1215, a poet, Prydydd y Moch, referred to 'yg caer yn aruon' as one of the four cornerstones of Llywelyn the Great's dominion over Wales.⁵ Documents associated with the princes of Gwynedd frequently referred to Caernarfon thereafter, but there were also references in vernacular sources to Caer Abersein, the Welsh-language equivalent of Segontium. This Welsh ancestry, coupled with the Roman imperial past, is resonant in the history of the later town, for 'out of the ruins of this city rose the present town, justly the boast of North Wales'.⁶

Medieval Castle and Town

The Edwardian castle and town of Caernarfon were the result of a swift building campaign initiated following the fall of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd in 1282, which opened up the lands west of the river Conwy to the Crown. Work on the castle and town proceeded in tandem, together with the construction of the quay and mill pool, the mainstays of the urban economy. The town walls were built during 1284–85. They enclosed an area of 10 acres, within which some sixty-five to seventy burgages (each measuring 80 x 60 feet/24 x 18 metres) had been laid out by 1287. Of these, fifty-nine had been taken up by 1298, and sixty-three by 1309. Although there was a setback in 1294, when the castle and town walls were severely damaged during Madog ap Llywelyn's revolt, repairs were put in hand in 1295, and improvement of the town walls, bridge, quay and castle went on until about 1330.

Alongside the physical work of building, the legal and administrative frameworks for the new town were established. Caernarfon received a charter

in 1284: under its terms, and to encourage settlement, burgesses were given autonomy in administration, with the right to hold land freely by burgage tenure, immunity from tolls and conviction, and the right to regulate trade in the borough. To further support the town, everyone for 8 miles (13 km) around had to trade there.

Caernarfon was conceived from the outset as the capital of the principality of north Wales (a status it retained until 1536). The appropriate administrative and commercial institutions were housed within the town, including an exchequer office (located above the east gate), and a justice's house with the shire hall over it (near the junction of Castle Ditch and Shire Hall Street). For local administration, the burgesses were given the right to build a town hall, and they did so at the junction of what became known later as Market Street and High Street.

Land and Water: The Urban Economy

Farms and Markets

If it was to flourish, the new town needed a viable economy. The burgesses had land on which they lived inside the town, but they were also supported by extensive holdings outside it: nearly 1,500 acres were reserved for them, including the vill of Llanbeblig and other lands around. Most of the burgesses were actively engaged in agriculture — in 1298, according to a rental of that year, five out of six burgesses held some agricultural land. The record shows them storing their valuable grain inside the walls, but keeping their beasts outside them. Much later, a thousand beasts belonging to the townsmen were amongst the casualties of Owain Glyndŵr's rebellion. However, the town was not self-sufficient — the burgesses also needed permits to buy grain from Anglesey and Ireland in 1316 and 1331, for instance, and the town was heavily dependent on imports throughout the Middle Ages. The town was still maintaining 'a brisk trade with London, Bristol, Liverpool and Ireland for the several necessities of life' at the end of the eighteenth century.⁷



Above: The Maes, traditionally the town's marketplace, and a fine urban square, lies immediately outside the walled town.

Opposite: The three waterfronts — the promenade along the Menai, Victoria Dock at the mouth of the river Cadnant, and the Slate Quay on the river Seiont.

Although the walls contained most of the town's buildings at least in the early period, the economy of the town depended on maintaining a relationship between the land enclosed by the walls, and the land outside them. In Caernarfon, it was not only the agriculturally productive land which lay outside the town walls, but also the market itself. A rental document of 1298 suggests that burgesses had stalls outside the walls on market days, and it is generally agreed that the Maes (the area formerly occupied by the bailey of the eleventh-century castle) was the original marketplace. Here, burgesses were free to trade, both with each other and with other English merchants, and they had the privilege of erecting shops and sheds in which to store saleable goods in safety. On payment of a fee, foreigners could also set up or hire stalls for the display of merchandise.

By the early nineteenth century, the Maes had begun to acquire new status as a formal square — 'perhaps the largest and best square in the whole principality'.⁸ Meanwhile, new market buildings were erected within the town walls. By 1813, 'a new market house has lately been erected with excellent shambles and stalls... over and under which are warerooms for housing grain and other unsold commodities'.⁹ In 1832, a new corn market was built on land belonging to the Vaenol estate — on the site of Plas Mawr on Palace Street. In the same period, many small shops were built within the town.





Above: The medieval quays — later the promenade — followed the Menai shore beneath the town walls.

Opposite, top right: The early quays extended no further than the foot of Castle Ditch, with informal moorings in the mouth of the Seiont (John Boydell, A North West View of Caernarvon Castle, 1749, The National Library of Wales).

Two Rivers and the Sea

The castle and its town occupied a strategic location, being bounded by the sea and situated between two rivers — the Seiont and the Cadnant. Both rivers and the Menai Strait were instrumental in the successful development of the town in the medieval period and after. The Menai waterfront offered the first quayside associated with the thirteenth-century castle and town, and a quay here was part of the original building campaign. It was constructed to assist in the building operation itself, enabling large quantities of materials to be imported. But the quay also ensured the safety and supply of the castle, and underpinned the economy of the new town. Caernarfon was provisioned with imports coming by sea, and in order to derive additional benefit from this trade, a toll was levied on every ship entering the port.

In the layout of the town, the west gate gave direct access onto quays that ran to its north and south, along the Menai waterfront. There may

also have been a small postern gate near the base of the Eagle Tower. The original quay was probably taken from the ditch to the north and east of the castle), but this was apparently destroyed during Madog's revolt of 1294. The repair and maintenance of the quay was the responsibility of the Crown, and documents record further works on the quay between 1297 and 1301. It was rebuilt in stone some time after 1316, according to a contract which referred to 300 feet (91 metres) of walling. In a further order for repair in 1322 a quarry at Aberpwl was specified as the source of stone. We know little about the form of this early quay, but there are records for a new watergate and outer postern beside the Eagle Tower, built in 1434–35. This is probably the arrangement shown on John Speed's map of 1610, which shows a small gate alongside the Eagle Tower (at the foot of Castle Ditch), and a gateway onto the quay from the shoreline to the south. This watergate was eventually replaced by a slipway, shown in some eighteenth-century prints of the castle. Notable amongst later repairs to the quay were those of 1538–39 in which stone taken from the former friary at Bangor was used.



At some time in the eighteenth century (possibly 1736), the Custom House was built outside the town walls, on the quay to the north of the Eagle Tower. By 1852 it had become a hotel — The Anglesey Arms — and was duly remodelled and extended for the purpose. The displacement of the Custom House was a mark of the changing function of the original quay. By the late eighteenth century, its amenity as a promenade was coming to the fore. Thomas Pennant considered it ‘the most beautiful walk alongside the Menai, and commands the most agreeable view’.¹⁰ By the early nineteenth century, as quays were developed under the castle walls and along the Seiont, it was firmly established principally as a promenade and presumably remodelled for the purpose — Edmund Hyde Hall described ‘a very handsome terrace, parapetted and protected against the sea’.¹¹ ‘A wide terrace extending from the quay to the north end of the town walls, forms a most charming walk, the fashionable promenade, in fine weather, for all descriptions of people, who, while they inhale the salubrious breeze, may be agreeably amused by the moving varieties of the port’.¹²

By the early nineteenth century, works were also in hand to extend the quay to the north,

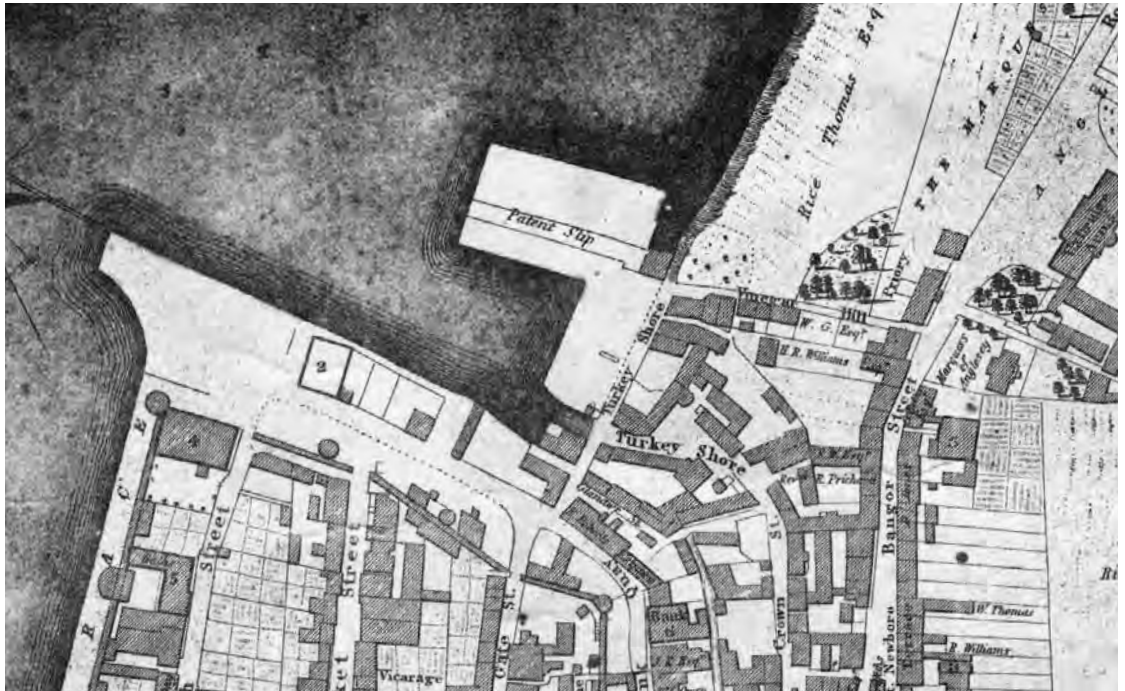


and build a pier or jetty, according to the terms of an Act obtained in 1809. The jetty wasn’t completed until 1830 — perhaps this was the quay which Edmund Hyde Hall saw in the course of construction in 1809–11: ‘as far as my observation has gone, its progress is very slow’.¹³ This new quay was part of a process in which the river mouths to the north and south of the town were established as the principal working quays during the nineteenth century.

Above: The Menai waterfront, showing the jetty built to the north of the quay, as depicted by William Bartlett, about 1840 (Caernarfon, The National Library of Wales).

Right: The new harbour and patent slip at the mouth of the Cadnant, shown in John Wood's map of the town, 1834 (Gwynedd Archives Service).

Opposite: Until the early nineteenth century, the foot of Castle Ditch marked the limit of formal moorings, as shown in this view of the castle by Paul Sandby, about 1778 (Caernarvon Castle, The National Library of Wales).



River Cadnant

Of the two rivers, it was the Cadnant which had the most prominent role in the early history of the new town. It was a working river, harnessed for milling as well as for wharfage. As part of the original works associated with the castle and town, the King's Mill Pool was created in 1285 (to the north-east of the Maes), and by 1304–05, it was serving two mills in the vicinity of the east gate.

Like the quays along the Menai Strait, the Cadnant harbour was kept in repair by the Crown. Together, these quays served the needs of the town, and it was through them that the considerable import trade was directed. John Speed's map of 1610 suggests the continued existence of a quay at the mouth of the Cadnant. It also shows the extent of suburban development to the north-east of the town by the early seventeenth century: this gives us some indication that the economic powerhouse of the town lay in that direction in this period. Representations of the castle during the eighteenth century also clearly show a wharf wall returning to run in parallel to the north wall of the town, and confirm the existence of a sizeable suburb along the shore of the Cadnant.

But by the end of the eighteenth century, radical changes to the geography of water in this part of the town had been set in train: the mouth of the river Cadnant was blocked off to enable a new

harbour and patent slip to be constructed for shipbuilding and repair. They are shown on John Wood's map of 1834, on either side of the mouth of the Cadnant. By this time, the river had been confined to a narrow channel (or even culverted), and its banks extensively built on — only the street name Bank Quay betrayed the former existence of a significant watercourse. In the early 1860s, ambitious plans for harbour expansion were put forward, possibly encouraged by the proximity of the Caernarvon and Bangor Railway which, as a branch of the Chester and Holyhead Railway, linked the town with the wider rail network. Construction of a new dock — New Basin — was begun in 1868, and completed in 1875. By 1888 the mill pool had also entirely disappeared and the Cadnant put in only an occasional appearance to the north of William Street and alongside Mill Lane, before discretely issuing into the New Basin (later known as Victoria Dock).

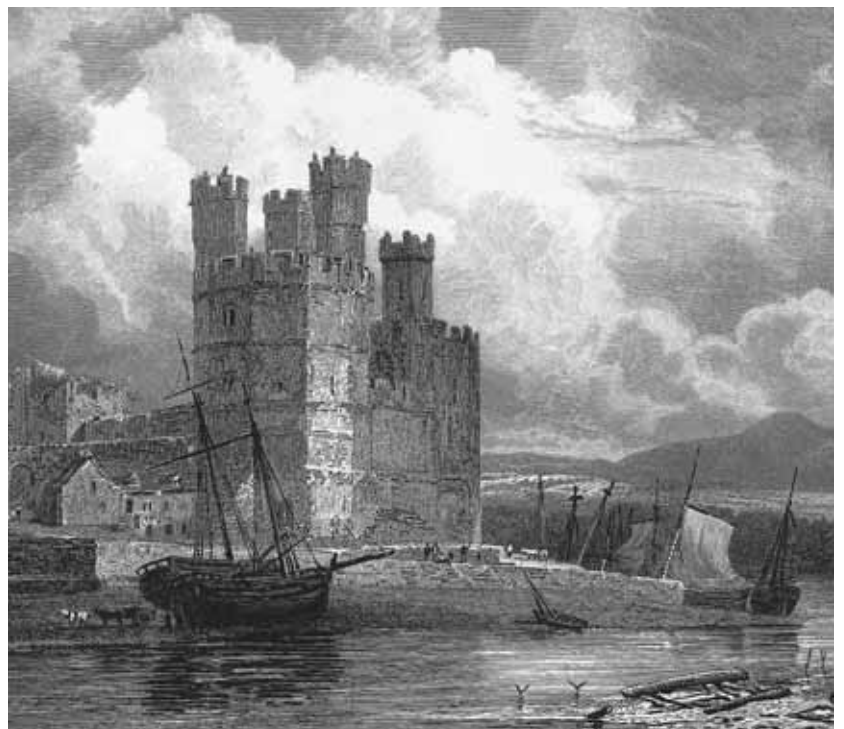
River Seiont

In eighteenth-century images boats are moored in the wide mouth of the Seiont. It is clear from these images, and from those early nineteenth-century paintings and engravings which favoured a view of the castle from the south, that there were no formal wharfages on the Seiont. Pressure to develop on this side of the town was fuelled by industrial activity elsewhere:



pre-eminent was the rapid rise of the slate quarrying industry, which was hungry for port facilities. The Vaenol and Penrhyn estates established ports at Y Felinheli and Penrhyn, but the independent quarrying areas further west were better served by Caernarfon. The rapidly growing quarrying enterprises in the Nantlle area demanded port facilities capable of handling large quantities of bulky materials. The east bank of the Seiont was readily accessible from the south-east, and offered substantial space without competing uses. In 1793, an Act of Parliament was obtained for 'enlarging, deepening, cleansing, improving the harbour of Caernarvon'.¹⁴ In addition to improvements to the Cadnant, this also included works to deepen the channel of the Seiont, increasing the space available for moorings.

The first formal structures alongside the river Seiont were probably built in the early years of the nineteenth century, by which time engravings also show a wharf underneath the Eagle Tower of the castle. The Slate Quay itself was probably begun in about 1803, with further improvements in about 1809. Other works of improvement followed: in 1817 an earthen bank by the Maes was removed, partly by subscription and partly at the expense of the corporation and parish, who



employed the poor in removing the earth to improve the quay. By 1834, the entire waterfront as far as the site later occupied by the Union Ironworks had been developed as wharves, and more wharves were built upstream in the years that followed.

Quays extended beneath the Eagle Tower in the early nineteenth century (Thomas Girtin, Caernarvon Castle, The National Library of Wales).



Above: The Slate Quay — a working waterfront beneath the castle walls and along the river Seiont.

Opposite, top right: The horse-drawn railway which brought slate from the quarries to the quay, as depicted by David Cox, about 1840 (Caernarvon, The National Library of Wales).

Opposite, bottom right: A suburb crowding the north-east shore of the Cadnant, as depicted by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck in 1742 (The North West View of Caernarvon Castle, The National Library of Wales).

The Slate Quay was sited to be convenient for the hinterland, not the town itself, and direct access from the quarrying areas was essential. At first slates were transported using carts, but as the volume of slates increased, pressure mounted for a cheaper and more efficient form of transport. In 1813 a group of quarry owners met to consider applying for an Act of Parliament for ‘an iron tram or railway from their respective quarries to the Port of Caernarvon, for the purpose of carrying their slate to market to avoid the present exorbitant prices paid for carriage by carts’.¹⁵ An Act for this scheme was eventually obtained in 1825, and the Nantlle Railway opened to traffic in 1828. It had a chequered history, and was ultimately replaced by the Caernarvonshire Railway, initiated in 1862. This railway in turn was linked with the Caernarvon and Bangor Railway, completed in 1852, via a tunnel under the town, constructed in 1869.

The Slate Quay, linked by railway to the quarries, was well suited for a specialist function, though in

practice its utility was by no means confined to the slate trade. Industry also fuelled the growth of the town during the nineteenth century, and with this came increasing pressure for general trade. However, imports were best handled on the west side of the town, along the Menai Strait, just as they had been in the medieval period. It was in this area that the Harbour Trust concentrated the development of general harbour facilities by building the New Basin.

Beyond the Walls

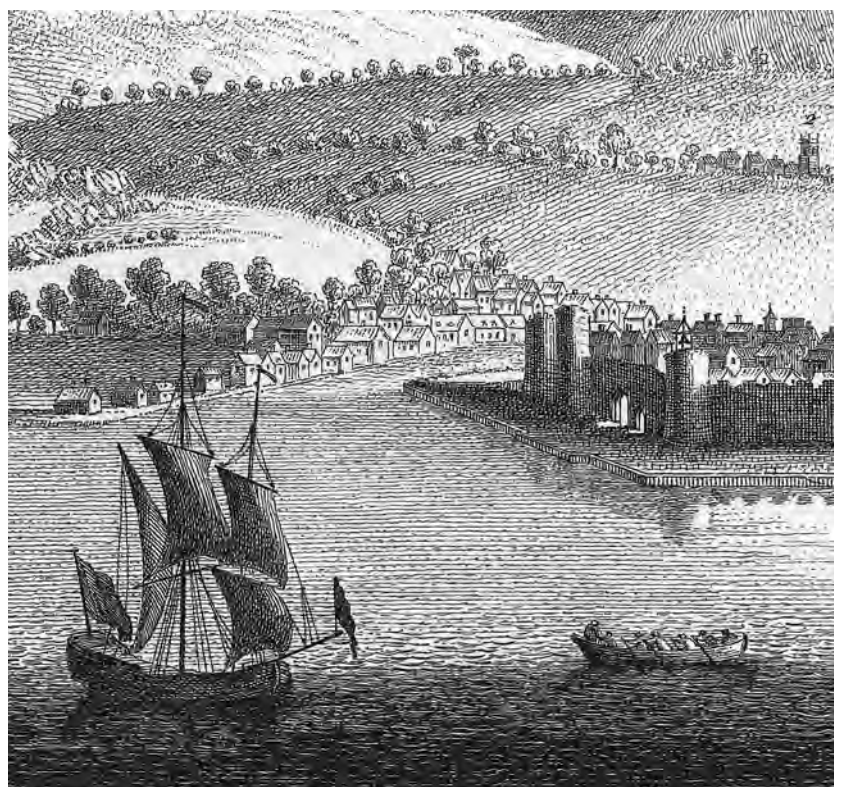
*‘The town was originally contained within its present walls, but the suburbs are become of greater extent than the town’.*¹⁶

Caernarfon was divided by its walls into two distinct territories, and whilst most building was confined to the 10 acres within the walls, there



was some development outside them. It may be surmised that from a very early date building outside the walls was limited, as this was where the town's mills were located. The first certain record of suburbs comes in accounts of Owain Glyndwr's rebellion, when some sixty houses were destroyed. However, by the time Speed made his map of the town in 1610, there was extensive development in the area of modern Bangor Street, Penrallt, and Mill Lane, as well as along the road to Llanbeblig. The suburbs were once again destroyed in the civil war, but had been re-established by the mid-eighteenth century. A detail from Samuel and Nathaniel Buck's *The North West View of Caernarvon Castle* clearly shows a crowded suburb on the north-east bank of the river Cadnant, whilst John Boydell's view (page 13) shows building along the road to Llanbeblig and Penrallt.

It was only in the nineteenth century, with rapid urban growth fuelled principally by quarrying in the hinterland of the town, that attempts were



made to change the relationship between the parts of the town inside and outside the walls. New gates were formed in the walls — Church Gate in 1812 and Market Street Gate in 1828–30. Hole in the Wall or Green Gate was blocked, and the wall at the east end of Castle Ditch breached, in order to link the town with the Maes.

In the same period, the Maes was transformed: 'what was called the Maes, near the castle, long a nuisance to the place, now forms the site of a handsome row of buildings'.¹⁷ This was the origin of the terrace on the east side of the square. Further works followed, including the removal of an earthen bank that enhanced the view from this terrace and improved the quay at the same time. Perhaps it was this that paved the way for yet more ambitious development here, in the shape of The Castle Hotel and its terrace, built by 1834.

The town continued to expand in successive building projects throughout the nineteenth century. As we have seen, the river Cadnant

was culverted and built over, and housing eventually covered the redundant mill pool. Meanwhile, on the other side of town, Segontium Terrace was already visible on a map of 1810, and an area to the south of Pool Lane — called Caemaesglas — was sold for building in 1824. Development was mostly carried out by private individuals using funds raised by money clubs and building clubs. This was probably the first systematic encroachment of the town onto the agricultural land which surrounded it. The process of expansion took hold to such an extent that by 1890 the walled town was dwarfed by its suburbs.

At the same time, the walled town itself was not immune to the winds of change. Considerable building projects were set in train. Some of these were civic — the shire hall and the markets — and others were private. But the face of the town now is largely the result of this enterprise.

The Maes — medieval marketplace transformed into formal urban square, depicted by W. Wood in 1850 (The National Library of Wales).



Historical Topography

The Medieval Town

The natural topography of the site chosen for the building of Caernarfon Castle and town offered a dramatic defensible position. Bounded to the west by the Menai Strait, the site was a peninsula on a narrow neck of land between two rivers. The river Seiont formed a natural boundary to the south, where it lapped at the walls of the castle until wharves were built here in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century. The river Cadnant lay to the north and east: it was spanned by a bridge leading to the east gate of the town, and its narrow valley offered both an opportunity to exploit water power for milling, and a defensive barrier.

The east gate was the main entrance to the town, sited at one end of its through street. With the exception of a small postern giving access to the Maes, this was the only landward entrance to the town. At the other end of the main street, the west gate led out onto the quays along the Menai waterfront. Although the quays were successively repaired, reconstructed to form a promenade in the nineteenth century, and widened at the north end to link with the New Basin, it is nevertheless likely that medieval masonry survives within the present structure of the promenade.

The town was laid out according to a regular grid plan, with the main street bisected by a series of three cross streets, effectively dividing the area into eight sections. These in turn were laid out with burgages. Speed's plan of the town in 1610 shows



John Speed's plan of 1610 records the layout of the medieval town (The National Library of Wales).

John Wood's map of the town in 1834 (Gwynedd Archives Service).



buildings lining most of these streets, with the exception of the north-west block which remained largely undeveloped. The main entrance to the castle lay at the south end of the central cross street. This layout has proved remarkably resilient.

Although the preceding settlement was swept away for the creation of the walled town, the Norman motte and bailey, which had been appropriated by the Welsh in 1115, was retained. The motte was incorporated into the castle, and the bailey became the Maes, serving as the chief marketplace for the new town.

Not least amongst the substantial engineering projects associated with laying out the new town was the construction of a millpond in the valley

of the Cadnant. We know that this was being excavated in 1285, and there are references in the documentary record to the repair of the dam and the construction of a bridge. The King's Mill Pool survived into the nineteenth century, but was finally abandoned and built over, probably after 1869, when the railway was cut through adjacent to the dam. It had occupied the area between Pool Hill and Pool Side. Bridge Street follows the line of the dam, and one arch of the original bridge survives beneath the junction of Bridge Street and Pool Hill.



The Nineteenth Century: Civil Engineering and Urban Growth

By the 1830s the river Cadnant had lost its primary purpose as a working river. The construction of a patent slip and harbour across its mouth in 1830 was the beginning of a process culminating in the formation of Victoria Dock (originally known as New Basin), which pushed the operational waterfront onto the Menai shore. Effectively redundant, the line of the Cadnant was built over. This is now the area between Bank Quay and Glan Ucha

(formerly Crown Street). Any sense of the town occupying a peninsula between the two rivers was thus eroded.

The final remnants of the peninsula were lost when Victoria Dock was built in 1868. On John Wood's map of 1834 the shoreline to the north of the town is shown taking the line now represented by Bank Quay and Balaclava Road, with only the patent slip and harbour wall projecting beyond it into the Menai. The area to the north-west of this line was consolidated as part of the construction of Victoria Dock, effectively filling in the angle between the spur on which the town had been built, and the shoreline further north.

The New Basin and quayside, radically altering the shoreline to the north of the town — First Edition Ordnance Survey, 1888 (1:2,500).



The Slate Quay consolidated the informal shore of the Seiont in the early nineteenth century (Henry Gastineau, Caernarvon Castle, about 1830–40, The National Library of Wales).

Opposite: The town and its quays in 1888, First Edition Ordnance Survey (1:2,500).

Meanwhile, on the river Seiont, further engineering works were put in hand during the early years of the nineteenth century. Construction of the Slate Quay consolidated the shoreline here, and, as the quays were built under the walls of the castle, a continuous walkway was established for the first time. Earth taken from a rough bank in the area of the Maes in 1817 was used to improve the Slate Quay. Early prints and paintings show rough ground sloping up alongside the castle, and it was probably this moving of earth that created a more amenable access route from the town via the Maes to the new quays. It also favoured the development of the Maes as a formal square, opened to the town by breaching the wall at the east end of Castle Ditch. In turn, development beyond the Maes became an attractive proposition, and an area of fields was formally set out for development in about 1824.

Segontium Terrace and the streets behind it (Tre'r Gof) represent a significant example of planned development, and are symbolic of a new-found confidence in the prosperity of the town.

Unlike The Castle Hotel terrace, which faced the town, Segontium Terrace overlooked the river, though separated from the quayside by a steep natural slope. It was probably only when the Nantlle Railway was replaced by the Caernarvonshire Railway that significant engineering works were required here: the high retaining wall was built as part of the construction of the railway, which diverted from the line of its predecessor beneath Segontium Terrace, passing under the Maes in a tunnel, and insinuating itself below Bridge Street and Bangor Street before joining the Caernarfon branch of the Chester–Holyhead Railway to the north-east of the town.

The Character of Building

Small buildings in a variety of styles on the Slate Quay.



Architecture as display at the former offices of the Union Ironworks.



Right: Formality and fine finish at the Harbour Offices.

Far right: Contrasting scales in housing.



The waterfront areas are essentially open spaces created as a series of wharves and quays. The quays were constructed with a purely functional purpose in mind, and varying dates of building and repair are reflected in the stonework. The structures immediately associated with them are working buildings, either warehouses, workshops or offices. Most belong to an industrial vernacular tradition, but with a variety of form and finish reflecting original purpose and status. Some of the smallest buildings (to the rear of the Harbour Office) seemingly paradoxically display the greatest refinement of finish — that is because they were built for display by the quarry companies using the Slate Quay. Elsewhere, a similar use of architectural detail for display can be seen at the former Union Ironworks site. By contrast, the warehouses were intended to be secure storehouses — they are well built but with little embellishment.

Overlooking the Slate Quay, the residential development alongside the Maes and in the streets beyond it is indicative of the new prosperity of the town as it expanded in the early decades of the nineteenth century. There is a clear hierarchy here, with the houses fronting the view being of a higher status than those on the streets behind.

The great variety in the character of building is discussed in more detail for each of the character areas identified below.



Character Areas

1 The Promenade (The Medieval Quay)

Historical Background

The promenade — from the gate at the foot of Castle Ditch to the north-west angle of the town wall — follows the line of the medieval quay, which was built as an integral part of Edward I's castle and town in 1283–85. It is possible that the harbour of the Welsh settlement preceding the Edwardian town also occupied this site. The original Edwardian quay was built of timber, but was rebuilt in stone following its destruction in an uprising of 1290–91. There are many references to its subsequent repair, including one referring to

the use of stone taken from the former friary at Bangor in 1535. The quay had a single principal point of access from the landward side via the west gate of the town. There was also a small postern at the foot of Castle Ditch, though this may not have been provided until 1434–35, when accounts refer to timber and stone being used for a new watergate and postern. Speed's map of 1610 shows a watergate at the southern end of the quay, but by the mid-eighteenth century this had been demolished and replaced by a slipway. A small jetty was also built here, probably when a ferry across to Coed Helen was established in 1822. Both of these survive, albeit repaired or partially reconstructed.

The small jetty marks the limit of the medieval quay — the continuous walkway beneath the castle walls was not created until the early nineteenth century.





The original quay as depicted by John Boydell in 1749 (A North West View of Caernarvon Castle, The National Library of Wales).

In the early nineteenth century, the focus of trade was shifting to the Slate Quay and the improved harbour at the mouth of the Cadnant. As a direct result, the original quays took on a new role as a promenade — a key attraction for visitors to the town. In this capacity, the quays were reconstructed, and an early nineteenth-century description refers to the parapet walls as defence against the sea.

During the nineteenth century, too, the original quay was extended to the north and south, eventually creating a continuous walkway beneath the castle and town walls. Early nineteenth-century prints and paintings show quays beneath the Eagle Tower of the castle, and as the Slate Quay was developed, so too was a link to the original quays established. When the

New Basin or Victoria Dock was constructed in 1868–74, the quay was widened at its northern end.

A detail from John Boydell's *A North West View of Caernarvon Castle* of 1749 shows the Custom House just to the north of the postern at the foot of Castle Ditch. The building had an enclosed yard to its rear, which terminated at the first tower in the town wall. The Anglesey Arms replaced the Custom House by 1852, but it is probable that the yard wall belongs to its predecessor. Boydell also showed a cluster of small buildings against the wall immediately north of the Eagle Tower, also visible in early nineteenth-century prints and paintings. These buildings survived into the twentieth century.

Archaeological Potential

The promenade may contain remains of the medieval quay, and the southern end, where a postern and watergate were once sited, is an area of particular interest. Archaeological work elsewhere on the promenade in 2006 found no medieval deposits, but did reveal evidence relating to quay construction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and to the construction techniques used in the foundations of the town wall.

Character of Building

Different phases in the development or repair of the quay walls are discernible in different types of stonework — in the vicinity of the Eagle Tower, for example, rock-faced masonry suggests late-nineteenth-century reconstruction. This contrasts with the stonework of the earlier slipway and jetty, both of which have random stone surfaces with good vernacular character.

The Anglesey Arms was remodelled and extended in the late nineteenth century, with large function-room windows overlooking the waterfront, but may incorporate elements of the eighteenth-century Custom House which preceded it. The boundary wall of its yard is constructed of rough stonework and is almost certainly a survival from the period of the Custom House.

2 Bank Quay and Victoria Dock

Historical Background

The mouth of the river Cadnant was probably developed as a wharf from the early days of Edward I's town. It may have an even older history, as we know that the earlier Welsh settlement included a port, though its precise whereabouts is unknown. We know little about this early wharf, though it is clearly shown in eighteenth-century representations of the castle. It effectively ceased to function when a new harbour and patent slip were built across the mouth of the Cadnant in 1830. The river was culverted, probably at the same time, and the former wharves built over. Bank Quay and Glan Ucha follow the banks of the Cadnant.

The harbour and patent slip of 1830 signalled the start of substantial development on this side of the



Jetty and slipway at the limit of the medieval quay.



Robust functional detailing in quay walls.



Bank Quay marks the line of the river Cadnant, culverted in the early nineteenth century.

Right: Doc Victoria, on reclaimed land to the north-east of the docks.

Far right: One of the compounds characteristic of development alongside Victoria Dock.



Far right: Warehousing and other buildings characteristically aligned at right-angles to the dockside.

town, where there were the twin advantages of space and direct access to the Menai for large vessels associated with coastal trade. The building of the New Basin — later known as Victoria Dock — between 1868 and 1874 was a major intervention in the topography of the area. In conjunction with the building of the dock itself, a sizeable area of the shore was reclaimed (to either side of the 1830s patent slip, and to the north-east of the basin) and developed as boatyards and warehouse compounds to serve the new dock. The station terminus of the Caernarfon extension of the Chester–Holyhead line lay to the north-east of this area, and its arrival in 1852 was probably a stimulus to the development of the docks.

The area to the north-east of the docks was enlarged by further reclamation work between 1888 and 1900, and the Victoria Flour Mills developed in this period. The mills were subsequently demolished and the site has recently been redeveloped for residential and commercial use.

Archaeological Potential

Although opportunities to record the nineteenth-century structures built as part of the Victoria Dock and its 1830 predecessor should not be missed, the primary archaeological potential of this area focuses on the line of the Cadnant, where any early remains will be located.

The Character of Building

With the creation of Victoria Dock came the establishment of a series of compounds, laid out in the area between the basin and Balaclava Road. One of these compounds housed the patent slip which survived from the earlier developments of



1830. These compounds — owned and operated by many individuals — are characteristically enclosed by rough stone boundary walls, and buildings are sited at their peripheries.

The dry dock (on the site of the patent slip of 1830) is a good surviving example of one of these compounds. It has a gateway from Balaclava Road, with a small office building in the corner (the hipped roof of which has unusually large slates). A large building within the compound has wide openings in each gable end. The remains of another compound survive to the south-west: this was originally a timber yard (timber from America was one of the principal imports to Caernarfon in the nineteenth century). The boundary walls include a variety of stonework techniques (presumably reflecting periods of repair and rebuilding), and there are the remains of several nineteenth-century buildings in the angles of the yard.

Warehousing was developed in a distinctively linear pattern, running in a series of parallel ranges between the dockside and Balaclava Road. Only one of these warehouses now survives. Built in at



least two phases, it has rubble walls with buttered pointing. The frontage onto Balaclava Road has distinctive polygonal random rubble. The warehouse bounds the dry dock, but presents an almost blind elevation onto the dockside, suggesting that it was an independent concern.

A traditional stonework finish survives on a dockside warehouse.

The archives and car park building now occupy the site of a timber yard and pond, and respect these earlier boundaries. The original linear development pattern to the north-east has been lost. The Galeri is built on a different orientation, running counter to the original pattern.



Doc Fictoria, the recently completed new development on the north side of the dock, has proved to be a controversial addition to the townscape. Concerns focussed on its impact on the setting of the World Heritage Site of castle and town walls: this is a sensitive site where excellence in design and careful attention to scale and massing is of paramount importance. Scaled back from the original proposals, and with its mass somewhat broken by the choice of forms and materials, the resultant scheme avoids excessive damage to the character and setting of the castle and walled town, but still dominates the dock area. The scale and simple detail of the Galeri, with its adoption of a modern 'take' on a historically authentic dockside vernacular style, represents a more appropriate model for development here.

The street frontage employs a more decorative finish.

Modern development has not always reflected the scale and orientation of early development along the dockside.



On the south side of the dock, the Royal Naval Reserve Battery (now the yacht club premises) was built between 1872 and 1888.

Important examples of dockside fixtures survive — a swing bridge, bollards, and a crane — and should be retained either in situ, or sensitively relocated within the immediate area.

Far left: The Galeri, a modern interpretation of dockside vernacular.

Left: Doc Victoria.



3 The Slate Quay

Historical Background

Development of quays along the Seiont waterfront was a direct response to the rise of slate quarrying in the hinterland of Caernarfon in the early years of the nineteenth century. Development may have been initiated following an Act of Parliament for the improvement of the harbour, obtained in 1793, but was probably mainly put in hand following a further Act in 1809. Although proceeding in phases (there are for instance references to improvements made in 1817), the quays were substantially complete by the time John Wood made his map in 1834. Extending as far as the Union Ironworks site, the Slate Quay was developed by Caernarvon Harbour Trust, whose offices were built in 1840. This was in contrast to the slate ports of Penrhyn and Y Felinheli, which were developed by quarry owners — the Penrhyn and Vaenol estates respectively. However, the area upstream, beyond the Union Ironworks, appears to have been developed independently on land leased from Lord Newborough. Investment in this dedicated slate port was consolidated by the



Top right: The offices of the Harbour Trust signal the prominent role of the Slate Quay in the fortunes of the town.

Below: The Slate Quay, a working port overlooked by fine town houses, as depicted by Hugh Hughes, about 1850 (Caernarvon Castle and Town, The National Library of Wales).

arrival of the Nantlle Railway — an independent enterprise by the proprietors of several slate quarries in the Nantlle/Llanllyfni area — which opened for traffic in 1828. This railway was superseded by the Caernarvonshire Railway, which was completed in 1870. The Slate Quay served a number of independent quarries, and although slate was its mainstay, other commodities were also shipped there. A number of enterprises developed in conjunction with the principal trade, notable amongst these being the Union (de Winton) Ironworks, and the Brunswick Ironworks. The Union Ironworks was established in about





1844 on land leased from Lord Newborough. An independent quay or graving dock on Lord Newborough's land was filled in and built over as the Union Ironworks developed after 1844. Early work contracts included producing components for the Britannia Bridge and girders for the Houses of Parliament. J. P. de Winton joined the company in 1854. The company specialized in producing machinery for the slate quarrying industry, including locomotives, wagons, turntables, winding drums, saw tables and weighting machines. By 1889 the site was extensive and comprised several ranges of warehouses and workshops (the only group to survive are the buildings now occupied



by Gwynedd Tyres), an erecting shop (substantially intact), and an office and showroom (intact). The works closed in 1901–02.

Upriver from the Union Ironworks was a series of smaller enterprises: slateworks, lime kilns and limeworks, and timber yards. All of these (with the exception of one of the timber yards) had direct access to a wharf. Downstream of the ironworks was the Slate Quay proper. The Ordnance Survey map of 1889 shows the area demarcated as a series of compounds, each let to an individual quarry. Originally these yards had access to ships via ramps, but all except two of the ramps had been filled in by 1889. The compounds were demarcated by walls, some of which survive.

Between the line of the railway and the embankment below the Maes and Segontium Terrace lay a discrete area divided into a series of small plots, which were probably set out in 1829. In 1834, these were copper ore and coal yards (copper ore was exported from Caernarfon, and coal was imported). In 1840, the Harbour Offices were built across the north-western boundary of this site, which by 1844 also included a foundry. The frontage of this 'island' site overlooking the Slate Quay was gradually developed with a series of buildings, including the offices of quarry companies and independent agents in the slate trade.

Archaeological Potential

The sequence of building and repair of the quay walls may be visible in changes in masonry style. The Slate Quay area is made ground and it is known that some of the fill came from levelling at the Maes in the early nineteenth century. Embedded in the surface are remnants of the standard gauge line installed in 1870.

Top left: The erecting shop of the Union Ironworks is a reminder of an important local industry.

Above: The Slate Quay, ordered by the demands of its trade, in the late nineteenth century (Caernarvon Slate Quay and Harbour, Gwynedd Archives Service).

The varied pattern of building on the quay reflects the many enterprises that operated here.

The original layout of the Slate Quay as a series of yards is perpetuated in the modern use of space.



The characteristic alignments of the small buildings occupying the 'island' site on the quay, shown in this engraving by Newman and Co. (Caernarvon Castle, The National Library of Wales).



Industrial vernacular at the rear of the 'island' site.

The recording of surviving buildings at the various working compounds that occupied the 'island' site and the river frontage would help establish the sequence of development and may reveal evidence for a more detailed understanding of building use. Several of the buildings associated with the Union Ironworks have already been demolished, but surviving boundary walls and potentially floor surfaces may retain details of archaeological interest that should be recorded as opportunity arises.

The Character of Building

The organizational structure of the quays is directly reflected in the character of building. Individual enterprises leased areas of the quay for their own business needs: slate quarries hired compounds for the storage of slate in the open area below Segontium Terrace and, along with other companies, they let small yards in the 'island' site at the back of the quay. Upriver, a series of enterprises established their own distinct premises. All of these needed some form of demarcation, and the area is still characterized as a series of separate compounds. This historical layout is apparent both in surviving boundary walls, and in the structure of more recent development. Surviving nineteenth-century buildings are confined to the 'island' area on the Slate Quays themselves and the warehouse behind, and the Union (de Winton) Ironworks and the adjoining site.

At the Slate Quay, the buildings in the 'island' site yards are as varied as were their tenancies





The Maes — outside the walls, but at the heart of town life.

in the nineteenth century. Some of them were clearly built as display buildings, and though small, have a degree of refinement in their façade treatment — slate-hanging, scribed render, and polychrome brickwork. Others — notably those to the rear of the site — have more of an industrial vernacular character, using mainly rubble stone or corrugated iron. The large warehouse built against the slope below the Maes was constructed between 1834 and 1844 for Morgan Lloyd and Son, wine and spirit merchants. The high quality of its stonework provides a clue to the value of its original content.

The Union (de Winton) Ironworks encompass a range of styles from the formality of the office building and the distinctive detailing of the erecting shop, to the rougher industrial vernacular of the buildings in the yard beyond.

4 The Maes

Historical Development

The Maes probably originated as the bailey of the Norman castle built in 1090. The Welsh took the castle in 1115, and the bailey is thought to have become the garden of a *llŷs* of the Welsh princes. When the Edwardian castle and town were laid out the area was retained as the marketplace of the town, and thus it remained until recreated

as a formal town square when Caernarfon began to expand in the early nineteenth century. The first major building project here was the terrace on the north side of the square, which had been built by 1817. The Castle Hotel and its associated terrace followed in about 1830, and the east side of the square was also built up by 1834. Preparations for the investiture of the Prince of Wales in 1911 included the demolition of the north end of The Castle Hotel's terrace opposite the Queen's Gate. The south end of the terrace remained uncompleted until the 1990s.

Archaeological Potential

The Maes has a history pre-dating the establishment of the Edwardian castle and town and its subsequent use as the main marketplace, but archaeological work in 2008 showed truncated natural deposits and bedrock across much of the area, suggesting potential is limited. Building recording and especially investigation of any cellars should be considered.

Right: This terrace presents a formal frontage onto the Maes.

Far right: From the Slate Quay, the terrace is a prominent but disregarded feature of the townscape.



A mixture of materials in the wall of a domestic yard at the rear of the Slate Quay.

The Character of Building

The terrace comprising nos 32–37 on the south side of the square towers above the waterfront. It presents a polite and well-maintained architectural frontage to the square, but the rear, whilst prominent from the quays, has not fared well: its render finish is largely a twentieth-century modification, and there are signs of neglect. The buildings were provided with yards at quay level: their boundary walls include a variety of materials including beach boulders. The remains of earlier stabling etc survive in some of the existing garages. From the lower level, the modern extension to the terrace appears over-scaled and heavy. At the lower angle of the road connecting the Maes and the quay, the Castle Gift Shop occupies a small corner plot which existed in 1834, but was not developed until about 1850. Although small, it is very polite, with sash windows, scribed render, and a sophisticated roof.



The pattern of small-scale outbuildings and yards competes for attention with modern development beneath houses fronting onto the Maes.



5 Segontium Terrace and Tre'r Gof

Contrasting scales are characteristic of the townscape beneath the Maes.

Historical Background

This area probably comprised fields until about 1824, when there is a reference to a piece of land called Caemaesglas being sold for building. The regular grid of streets suggests that the land was set out for building by the original owner, but the variety in building suggests that development lay in many hands. There is a reference to the use of building or money clubs to enable this work to go ahead. Garnons Street





*Left and below:
Architectural formality
with varied detail:
Segontium Terrace.*

and Snowdon Street were a slightly later development (between 1834 and 1844) on another plot of land belonging to Richard Garnons.

Archaeological Potential

Where later disturbance has not removed deposits, there may be evidence for medieval and post-medieval activity outside the town walls, and even discrete Roman activity.

The Character of Building

Segontium Terrace is a formal development of large town houses sited to command a view across the Seiont. Formally set out, and with a common language of architectural detail, there is nevertheless some variety both in house plan and in finish. This may be because building work was undertaken by several people, working within a general plan set down by the original landowner, although differential change has also introduced variety — there is some fine early twentieth-century detail, for example. A mix of rubble and brick is exposed at the rear, but the polite frontage is rendered with remnants of ashlar scribing. This was probably the original finish — the roughcast with smooth-rendered dressings of some of the houses may be an early twentieth-century alteration. The high quality slate slab steps are a reminder of the economic driver for the development of the town in the nineteenth century. There are some distinctive boundary walls in the area, assembled from a rough mix of stone including river stones.



*An unusual dressed stone
façade in Tre'r Gof.*



*Random rubble to
the rear of Segontium
Terrace, and river stones
in the boundary wall.*



Above: Coed Helen has remained quite distinct from the town.

Right: Small-scale vernacular buildings close to the shore.

6 Coed Helen

Historical Background

Until the development of the Slate Quay in the early nineteenth century, the south-west bank of the river Seiont had no real connection with the town. The land belonged to the Coed Helen estate whose park ran down to the river, and the first evidence of a link with the town is the Aber Ferry House, built in 1822. In 1900, a swing bridge was built here, but demolished in 1969 when the present bridge was built.

At the end of Ffordd Coed, the lane leading down to the shore, a small group of buildings was in existence in 1834 — they were described as boathouses in 1844, and by 1888, there was a small quay here, adjacent to a boatbuilder's yard. The quay survives, as does a boat shed and a chandlery. The current park (and at one time an open-air swimming pool) was established in the early twentieth century.



Archaeological Potential

Remains of quays and structures associated with the former boatyard would be worthy of recording. The geomorphology of the area, and recorded remains in the surrounding landscape, suggest there is a high potential for evidence relating to prehistoric or Roman activity here.



Character of Building

The stone quay and the vernacular timber and corrugated-iron sheds contrast with the polite character of the ferry house.

The markedly rural character of this bank of the river provides a dramatic foil to the intensely urban and built-up area of the town opposite.

Above: The river Seiont has always effectively separated town from country.

The small scale of the quay at Coed Helen contrasts with the industrial scale of the Slate Quay (left).

The Seiont and Menai Waterfronts: Design Parameters for Redevelopment

General Character

The Caernarfon waterfronts were working and trading areas. They may be overlooked by residential developments, but the character of the quays is essentially simple and rugged. Any redevelopment of these areas should avoid gentrification or prettiness — polite residential detailing would appear alien and contrary to the historical development and social history that are outlined in this study.

Whilst demolition of many of the existing structures along the quays is probably inevitable, since neither their constructional quality or facilities is adequate, the principle of salvage and reuse of features and materials should be accepted in any proposals from the outset. This would assist the integration of new

development into the townscape and embody the principle of sustainability. Materials such as stone and slate, and items of historic interest such as the iron gateway of the Brunswick Ironworks, should be identified at the earliest opportunity in the development of any schemes, and their careful salvage and reuse embedded into planning approvals and contract specifications. Detailed archaeological recording should precede any demolition.

Forms of Development

The Menai waterfront, north of the town, is characterized principally by large industrial structures contained in a series of compounds. Recognition of this in the design of modern development is one of the crucial factors in

Industrial buildings occupy a series of enclosed compounds along the water's edge of the Slate Quay.



its successful integration into the townscape. Any further redevelopment proposals in this area should seek to follow the original pattern of development, in which buildings were aligned to run back from the quayside, rather than parallel to it.

The Seiont waterfront is more varied, both in its forms of development and in its topography. The 'island' site at the northern end of the Slate Quay is a dense huddle of small individual structures, characterized by differing heights, materials and orientation. This is a direct reflection of the establishment of this area as a series of small plots or compounds. Any reconstruction here needs to perpetuate this essential nature but, even accepting the principle of reuse of salvaged materials, this can be achieved without recourse to any period style. The southern end of the Slate Quay has a different character and consists, broadly, of a series of enclosed compounds. These are surrounded by relatively high stone walls and contain a number of simple structures, each compound having both access to the street and a frontage to the river. This form of development has a variety and flexibility that could form the basic module for reconstruction

along the east bank of the Seiont. There are few listed buildings along this part of the river — the Harbour Offices, the Union Ironworks Assembly Shop, and the Union Ironworks Offices comprise the total — and there should be no doubt about their retention and incorporation in any redevelopment proposals. But in contemplating the possible clearance of much else along St Helen's Road, it should be accepted that the granting of full planning permission and the letting of a contract for reconstruction should be the prerequisites of commencing any demolition.

We have noted that the waterfronts are characterized by vernacular and industrial structures of generally bold simplicity. Decorative effects are the exception rather than the rule. The existing buildings provide a vocabulary of details and materials that should form the language of reconstruction.

Each waterfront area has its own character, but together they form an important series of linked spaces. Public realm design should reflect the distinctive character of each area, as well as encouraging their connection.



Small buildings of varied character crowd together in the 'island' site on the Slate Quay.

Design Vocabulary and Materials

There is considerable variety in height, but three storeys provide a maximum, and in some areas (such as the 'island' site on the Slate Quay) less will be appropriate. Buildings are articulated into generally small component parts, with ridge lines often set at 90 degrees. Roofs are invariably slated and gabled, with slightly overhanging or flush verges. There are very few hipped roofs. Modern roof lights would look alien in such industrial structures, but the vocabulary of traditional industrial design provides several solutions for roof-level glazing — glazed ridges, raised and glazed ridge lanterns, even wholly glazed sections of roof. Roofscape features such as chimneys, vents and turrets are rare features in the area, but provide useful accents or markers if required. Walls are constructed generally of rubble stonework, though there are some significant examples of brickwork, usually red. Brick is often used for the quoins to window openings in rubble walls. Boundary walls are invariably of rubble stone, sometimes limewashed or painted. Some slate-hanging of walls survives, in the local vernacular tradition, and profiled metal sheets are found as cladding on both roofs and external walls. Lime render, as a relatively polite finish, was also employed at the northern end of the Seiont where the presence of the ashlar-built Harbour Offices gave an air of refinement to be emulated. Renders were traditionally never belled outwards over the heads of openings or at the bases of walls, and modern details such as these should be avoided. In terms of decoration, the predominant colour palette is quite muted. The vocabulary of wall finishes should be used with caution — it is advisable not to mix several finishes on the same building, but to emphasize and reinforce the boldness and simplicity of the massing of structures by limiting the disposition of materials. As for doors and windows, we have noted that consciously domestic detailing would be alien to the quays. And twee period styling would be a mistake here. The best approach is probably going to be simple, modern and efficient.

Buildings that seek to draw attention to themselves will be out of place on both the Seiont and Menai waterfronts. The castle provides drama enough in views of this area. So this is not the opportunity for diva designers. It is subtlety that is needed here, underpinned by an appreciation of the significance of the quays in the development of Caernarfon. It is the existing character of the waterfronts that will provide a springboard for the visibly successful regeneration of the area.

Statement of Significance

Caernarfon's waterfront has been integral to the fortunes of the town throughout its history. The Romans may have had a harbour here — the early Welsh settlement certainly included a port. The success of the medieval foundation was owed in large measure to its siting, providing it with a working river and essential trade links. The town profited from this favourable siting in the nineteenth century, reinventing itself as a port for the slate industry, and flourishing and expanding as a confident county town.

The peninsula site at the junction of two rivers and the Menai Strait equipped the town with an extensive waterfront, variously used and exploited at different periods in its history. The Menai shoreline was the original quay, reanimated as a promenade in the nineteenth century. There were also early quays along the Cadnant, which was a working river powering the town's mills. But new harbours were built across its mouth in the nineteenth century, and the Cadnant became Caernarfon's lost river. Meanwhile, in the early nineteenth century, the shores of the Seiont were exploited for the first time, under the stimulus of industrial activity — the quarrying of slate and the

mining of copper — in the hinterland of the town. Each part of the waterfront has a distinctive character, highlighting different elements in the history of the town. The original quays, rebuilt as a promenade, hug the town walls and face the Menai, which represented the supply line for the medieval town, and provided a picturesque view for visitors in the nineteenth century. The Slate Quay was the terminus of another supply line which lead from the slate quarries of the Nantlle valley. Between the railway and the waterfront, small enterprises occupied a series of carefully delineated spaces, overlooked by handsome suburban development. The extensive docks established to the north of the town were flanked by other private enterprises, but on a larger scale.

The waterfronts hold the key to understanding how Caernarfon has been sustained throughout its long history, and clearly record different chapters in the story of the town. They could once again play a leading role in its fortunes, adding a new chapter whilst retaining a tangible connection to the dynamic history of this, 'the first town in North Wales.'¹⁸

The waterfront of the river Seiont and the Menai Strait dominate the historic town and castle.



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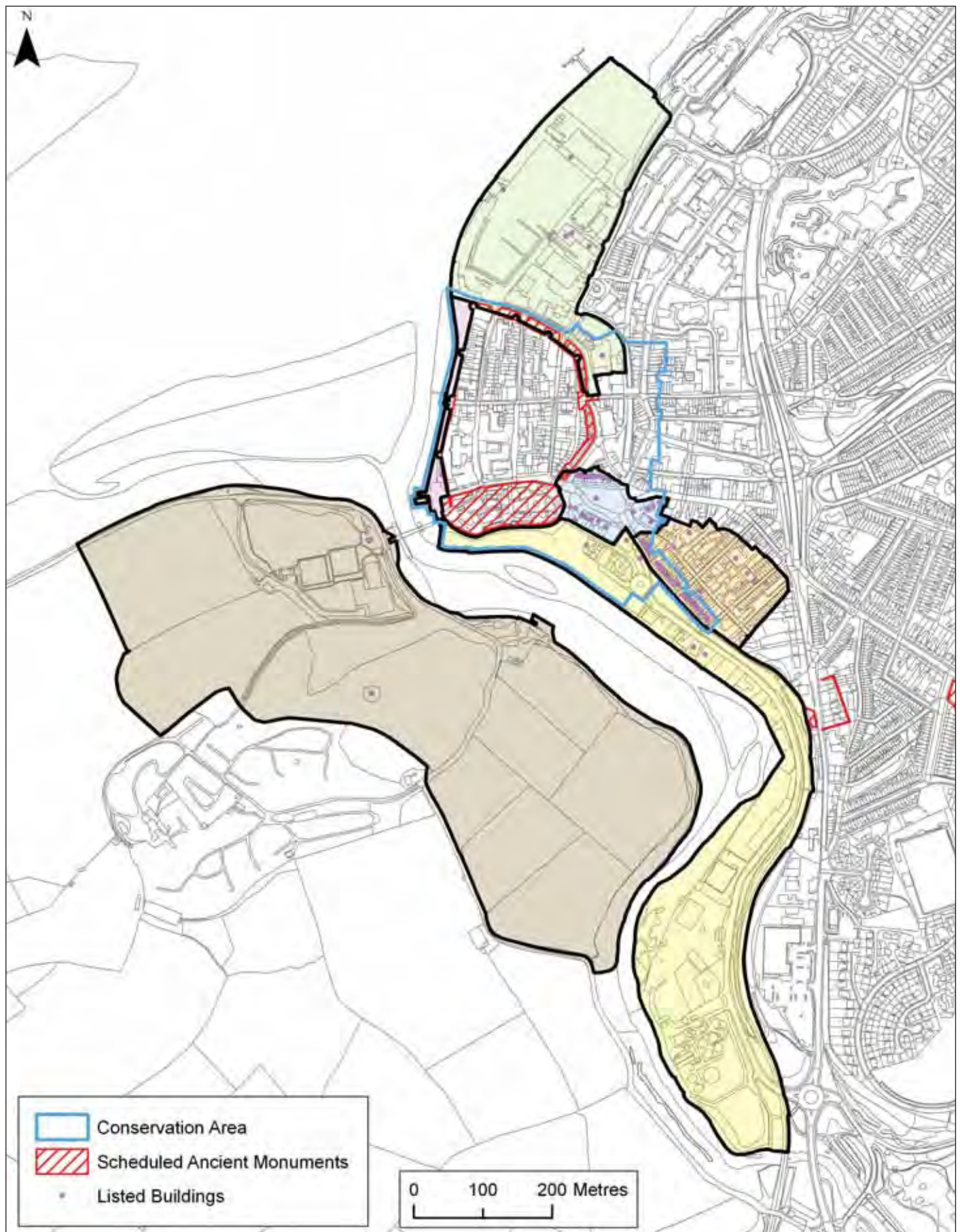
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1 All Character Areas



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2 All Character Areas with Historic Environment Designations



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4 Bank Quay and Victoria Dock Area (2)



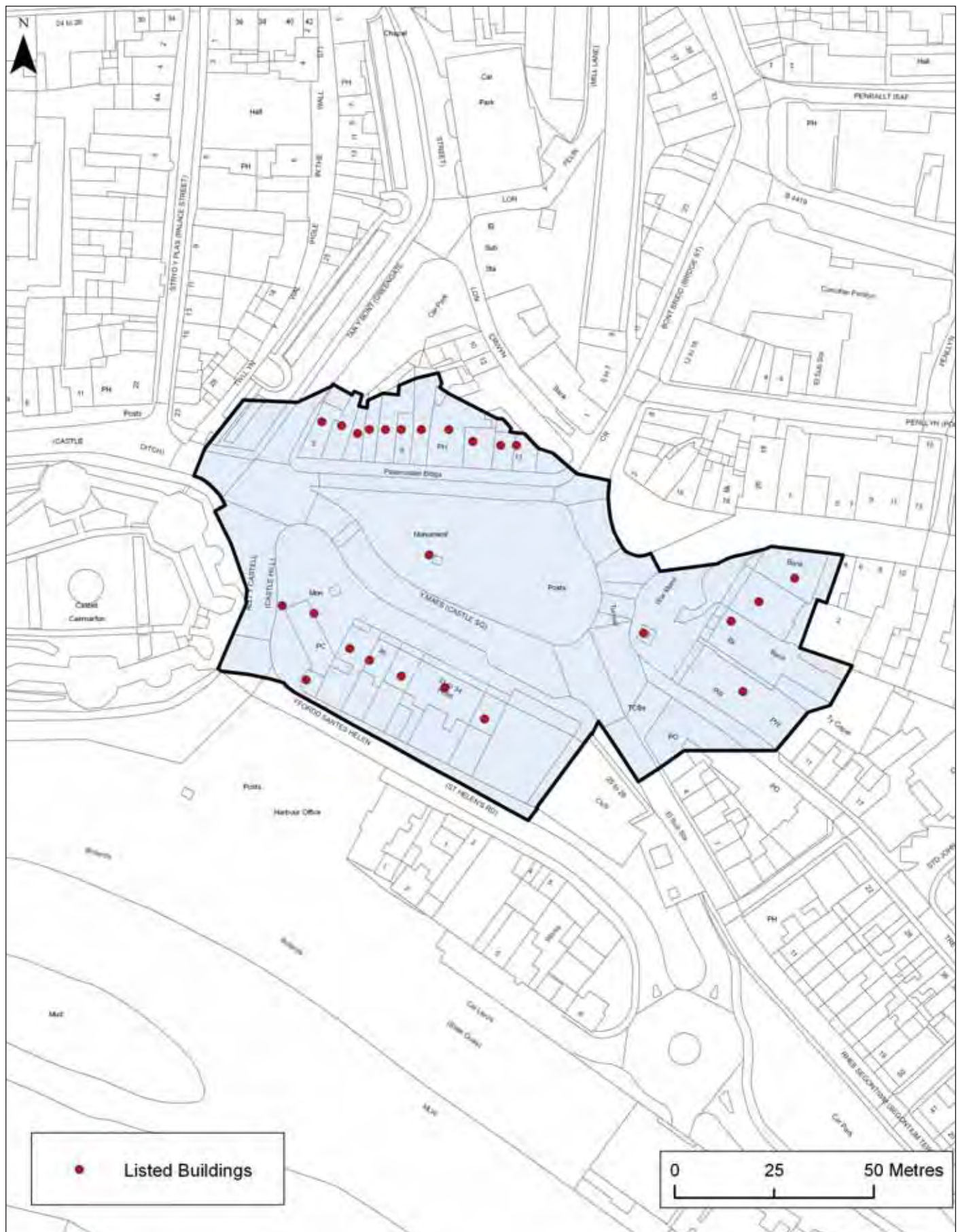
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5 The Slate Quay Area (3)



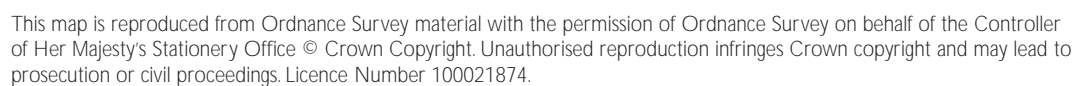
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6 The Maes Area (4)



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