

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE MEDIEVAL TOWNS OF SOUTHWEST WALES

HAVERFORDWEST



1989 aerial photograph of Haverfordwest (DAT AP89-74.25).

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By

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HVERFORDWEST

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the early twelfth century a town, known as Castleton, developed on the hilltop outside the newly founded Haverfordwest Castle. A market place and a church, St Martin's, were provided for the economic and spiritual well-being of the inhabitants and defences for security. The town rapidly outgrew its hilltop location and two new churches were founded to the south of Castleton. By the late thirteenth century Haverfordwest was one of the largest towns in Wales. Archaeological investigations have been small-scale but have demonstrated that stratified medieval and later deposits are likely to be encountered almost anywhere in the historic core of the town.

KEY FACTS

Status: 1213 town charter. Weekly market and annual fair.

Size: 1376 422 burgages.

Archaeology: Small-scale excavations revealed stratified medieval deposits.

LOCATION

Although Haverfordwest is almost 30km from the open sea the river on which it lies, the Western Cleddau, is tidal. The town is located in the rich agricultural land of central Pembrokeshire (SM 953 157) on what was until the mid-twentieth century the lowest bridging point of the river (Fig. 1).

HISTORY

Tancred, a Flemish settler, is credited with having founded Haverfordwest Castle between 1108 and 1113 during the Anglo-Norman conquest of southwest Wales. The early history of Haverfordwest is not well documented, but a settlement, known as Castleton, soon developed outside the castle gates, probably populated mainly by Flemish immigrants. The earliest direct reference to the castle and town is in 1152-76. Burgages are recorded at this date and a market had been established. A market cross is mentioned, presumably located in what is now Queen's Square, with St Martin's Church on the west side of the square.

Haverfordwest was attacked by the Welsh in 1115, 1136, 1147, 1189 and 1193, but the castle and lordship remained in the hands of Tancred's family throughout the twelfth century. In about 1200 Robert fitz Richard, Tancred's grandson, granted a plot of land 600m downstream of the castle to the Augustinian canons to build a priory. He endowed the town with two additional churches, St Mary's and St Thomas a Becket. St Martin's

was then in existence, but St Mary's and St Thomas's may not then have been built and were part of Robert's ambitious plans for the expansion of Haverfordwest. Both lay some distance from Castleton. In 1207 Robert was granted the right to hold a Sunday market and annual fair in the town.

In 1210 King John dispossessed Robert fitz Richard of all his holdings and in 1213 Haverfordwest was granted to William Marshall, Earl of Pembroke. Marshall's charter issued soon after 1213 granted favourable privileges to Haverfordwest which in part explains the rapid growth of the town during the thirteenth century. A second charter of 1219-29 may have been issued to promote growth following the burning of the town 'up to the gate of the castle' during Llewellyn Mawr's attack of 1220. In 1263 the burgesses of the town were granted the right to levy 'murage' – that is to raise funds for the building of town walls. Castleton had already been provided with defences, so these funds were either to convert Castleton's existing earth and timber defences to stone or more likely to protect the rapidly expanding town. Later maps and documents show and refer to town gates to the south and west of the expanding town.

The demand for housing quickly outstripped supply, evidenced in the 1280s when the sub-division of burgages into half plots and quarter plots was recorded. The exact population of the town at this time is not known, but Terry James notes that in 1282 Roger Mortimer's one third interest in the burgage rents of the town amounted to £6 10s. Multiplied by three gives a total rent from burgages of £19 10s, which with an annual rent for a single burgage of 12d equates to 390 burgage plots, making Haverfordwest one of the largest towns in Wales in the late thirteenth century, although this number of burgages may be an over estimation. Soulsby notes that there may have been as many as 360 burgages in 1326 and 422 by 1376. These figures suggest that Haverfordwest avoided, or recovered very quickly from, the mid-fourteenth century European-wide population crash that affected so many towns. However, these figures may be misleading as the number of burgages, are not always a true reflection of population size - the number of burgages recorded in the fourteenth century may include vacant plots, as a 1473-4 survey records vacant 120 burgages.

During the thirteenth century, the focus of the town shifted from Castleton to High Street and a new market place around St Mary's Church – a guildhall is referred to here in late thirteenth-century documents. Development had also spread along Bridge Street, Ship Street (Quay Street), Market Street, Goat Street, Hill Street and Dew Street. Indeed, in 1473-4 thirty-two of Castleton's burgage plots were vacant. In 1596 further plots were vacant.

In addition to the Augustinian Priory located downstream of the town, the Dominicans (Black Friars) founded a second monastic house, a friary, in the town sometime before

1246. Initially this was in an unfavourable position, but in 1256 the friars were granted funds to relocate their church and other buildings. The exact position of the relocated friary is unknown as nothing now remains above ground, but it was on the east side of Bridge Street, probably between the lanes called Hole in the Wall and The Friars. It was a large community with 39 friars recorded in 1285. It continued to expand and in 1285 the friars acquired more burgages; the friary may eventually have occupied the whole of the east side of Bridge Street with a chapel dedicated to the Holy Trinity close by what is now the Old Bridge.

Haverfordwest was an important port with quays alongside the western bank of the Western Cleddau downstream from what is now the Old Bridge towards the Priory.

If Haverfordwest experienced population decline in the mid-fourteenth century it had recovered by the mid-sixteenth century when in 1547 it was described as 'the best buylt the most civill and quickest occupied Town in South Wales'.

MORPHOLOGY

The castle and early town – Castleton – occupy a rocky hill overlooking the Western Cleddau. Land falls away precipitously to the east to the river, steeply to the north and south and more gently to the west. High Street and St Mary's Church lie to the south of the castle and early town on the opposite side of a minor valley the bottom of which is now occupied by a car park called Castle Lakes, but formerly a stream called *Schyterichslake* (translated as Shitter's Brook, indicating it was an open sewer) in later medieval documents, which flowed down it into the Western Cleddau (Figs. 2-4).

Castleton exhibits no evidence of formal planning. It consists of several streets to the west and north of the castle (North Street, Church Street, Holloway, Hayguard Lane), St Martin's Church and a market place (probably in what is now Queen's Square). Later expansion of Castleton included the north end of North Street and Kiln Road – the whole of Castleton was provided with defences, probably at first earth and timber, later rebuilt in stone. The exact line of the defences is unclear apart from along the west side of Castleton where extant property boundaries almost certainly mark its course. There were probably three gates into Castleton. North Gate survived until the late seventeenth century and is marked on Lea's 1690 map of Haverfordwest (Fig. 2). A second gate lay on Church Street close to St Martin's and a third probably at the end of Holloway, giving access to quays and the bridge over the river. Castleton rapidly outgrew the confines of its defensive circuit. Houses were built around what is now Perrot Avenue and Mariner's Square to the southwest, and also close to the bridge.

In the early thirteenth century as part of Robert fitz Richard's expansionist plans St Mary's Church was founded, burgage plots were laid out on either side of High Street

and a market place established in the triangular plot of land occupied by the new church. At the same time, or not long after, burgage plots were laid out alongside Market Street, Goat Street, Bridge Street and Quay Street. St Thomas a Becket's Church was probably also established at this time on open ground to the south, with an area set aside for the annual fair (now St Thomas Green). A priory was founded to the south of the town. It is likely that this new development was at the expense of Castleton, which may have become a bit of a backwater.

This expanded town was provided with defences. The course of these and the exact location of the gates is not known, but West Gate stood at the top end of High Street to the south of St Mary's Church, probably where the street narrows, and South Gate would have stood on Market Street. Thomas a Becket Church would have stood outside the town walls.

Before the end of the thirteenth century burgage plots had been laid out outside the town walls on Dew Street, Hill Street and elsewhere. As James notes the reverse S-shape of the plots on Dew Street indicates that they were laid out over former open fields. A Dominican Friary was established on level ground alongside the river on Bridge Street in the mid-thirteenth century on what had been burgages. There is now no trace of the Friary and Bridge Street is occupied by shops and other commercial premises.

The exact location of the town quays and wharfs in the medieval period has not been established. Nathaniel and Samuel Buck's 1748 'East View of Haverford-West in the County of Pembroke' shows the warehouses and other buildings fronting the river from the Old Bridge down to the Priory. In the medieval period, and indeed until the early nineteenth century, the river to the east of the town would have opened out into a wide tidal lagoon with the Old Bridge approached from the east via a causeway. This was before the construction of the second bridge over the river at the foot of High Street.

Figure 7 shows Haverfordwest as it may have been in c.1150. Figure 8 as it may have been in c.1250 and Figure 9 in c.1320. Haverfordwest achieved its medieval apogee in the early fourteenth century, after which it experienced modest decline, picking up again later in the medieval period. Since then the town has experienced considerable growth, particularly from the mid-nineteenth century.

BUILDINGS AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS

Scheduled Monuments

There are two scheduled monuments in Haverfordwest: Haverfordwest Castle (PE366) and the Priory (PE017).

Listed Buildings

There are over 280 listed buildings in Haverfordwest, not all are in the medieval core of the town. Most are eighteenth and nineteenth century houses, commercial properties and street furniture (Fig. 4).

Conservation Area

The whole of the historic core of Haverfordwest lies within the Haverfordwest Conservation area (Fig. 4).

Registered Parks and Gardens

Part of the Priory is a registered park and garden (Fig. 4).

Registered Historic Landscape

Haverfordwest is in the Milford Haven Waterway registered historic landscape in the Haverfordwest historic landscape character area.

Undesignated Historic Environment Assets

There over 450 historic environment assets recorded on the regional historic environment record of which 280 are duplicates of listed buildings. The remainder are mostly of nineteenth and twentieth century unlisted buildings and structures (Fig. 5).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

Included in this section are excavations, evaluation excavations and watching briefs. Building surveys and desk-top assessments are not included unless they add to the known archaeology (Fig. 6).

Numbers in parentheses below refer to records in the Dyfed Historic Environment Record

Note: large scale excavations have been carried out at the Priory, but as this lies some distance from the medieval town they are not described here. The numerous investigations at the castle are not described.

1. Excavations in 1978 followed by a second phase in advance of house building in 2003 on a vacant plot of land at Hayguard Lane immediately to the north of the castle revealed medieval archaeology. An earth bank up to 1m thick and 5m wide occupied the south side of the site. It dated to the late twelfth or early thirteenth century and was interpreted as part of the castle defences. It overlay a trackway and other archaeological features that were considered domestic in nature dating to the twelfth century. A large assemblage of medieval pottery was found during the excavation. House foundations were designed to ensure protection of the archaeological deposits. Reference: Crane 2004, Crane and Courtney 2004 (49172).



Photograph of the Hayguard Lane excavation showing a trench dug through the medieval bank and underlying twelfth century deposits.

2. A watching brief was maintained during construction of a house immediately outside a tower/curtain wall of the castle. The foundations of the house were dug into the upper levels of backfill of the castle ditch. The ditch seems to have been deliberately backfilled in the eighteenth century. Reference: Crane 2008 (64379).



Photograph of the construction work in progress outside the castle walls.

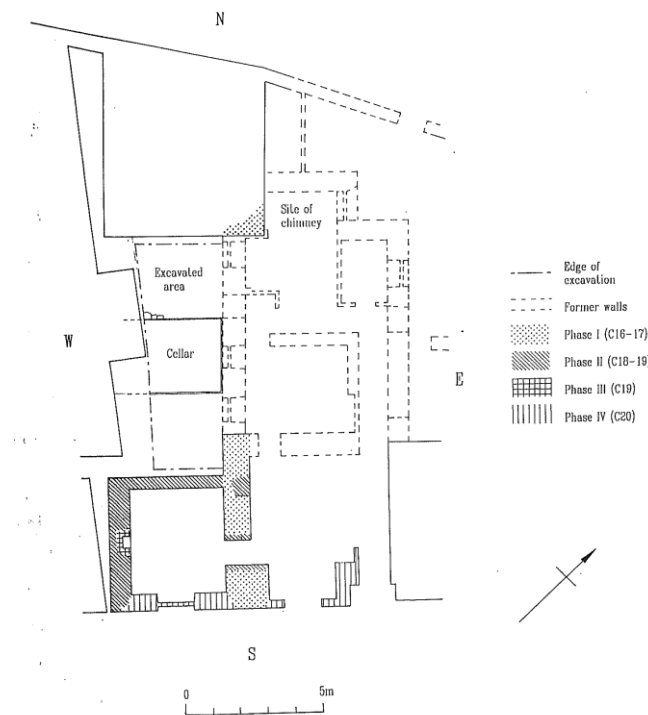
3. Little of archaeological interest was noted during a watching brief on an extension to 1 Castle Terrace. The house dates to the nineteenth century and the watching

brief identified the footings of a stone wall of this date. Reference: Pannett 2009 (97151).



General view of the work at 1 Castle Terrace.

4. Very little ground disturbance was required during the redevelopment of 3 North Street, originally a sixteenth/seventeenth century house. A watching brief on small-scale excavation revealed modern deposits overlying natural gravels. It was considered possible that the medieval town wall ran through the site, but no evidence for this was seen. Reference: Ludlow 1995 (43257).



Plan of the 3 North Street.

5. A small-scale evaluation in 1989 demonstrated that the east side of Old Bridge was accessed by a causeway running across tidal mud-flats until as late as the early nineteenth century, with wharfs and quays on the south side of the causeway and a couple of buildings on the north side of the causeway. The mud-flats were infilled sometime during the first part of the nineteenth century. Reference: Murphy 1989 (13829).
6. Nothing of archaeological significance was noted during a watching brief on minor works to the thirteenth century undercroft known as the Crypt (a listed building). Reference: Shobbrook 2009 (98681).
7. An archaeological evaluation followed by watching briefs were carried out as part of the construction of a car park at Foley House, Goat Street. The car park mostly occupied an area to the rear of the street frontage containing boundary walls thought to be respecting the lines of burgage boundaries laid out in the thirteenth century. Apart from a few small areas the construction work did not require deep excavation and any archaeological remains are preserved beneath the car park. Some sections of boundary wall were removed during construction. The cellar of a possible medieval building was recorded on the street frontage. References: Page 2004, Page 2006, Ramsey 2010, (52114, 56419, 94870, 94871).

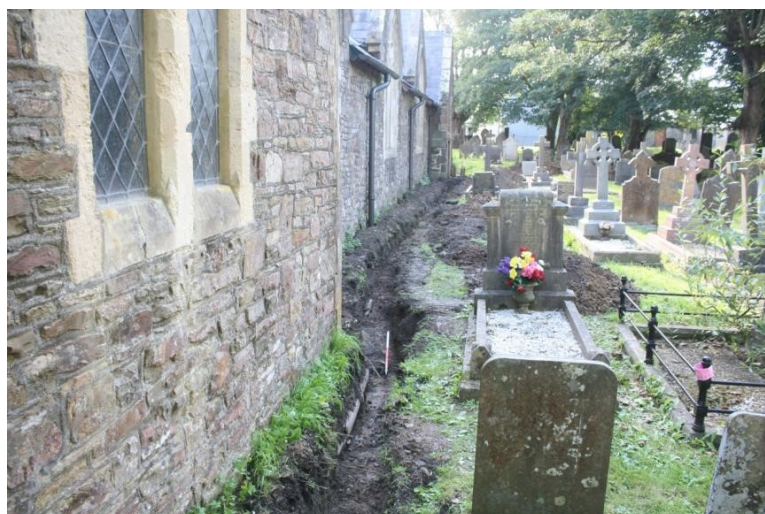


General shot showing the made ground on which Foley House (in background) and garden were established.



Walls of the possible medieval building fronting Goat Street.

8. A watching brief during construction of a Job Centre on Quay Street indicated that down to the eighteenth century the area was open ground probably subject to tidal flooding with a quay on the east edge of Quay Street. During the eighteenth century soil and other material was dumped on the site to raise the ground levels and a new quay was constructed along its present line. Reference: Murphy 1994 (27948).
9. Nothing of archaeological significance was noted during the installation of floodlights at St Thomas's Church in 2002. In 2020 a watching brief during the digging of a service trench associated with the conversion of the church to a dwelling revealed unmarked graves and an earlier boundary ditch. Reference: Crane 2002a, Shobbrook 2020 (44487, 121871).



The service trench at St Thomas's Church in 2020.

10. In 1982 a small stone building with vaulted undercroft on Quay Street was identified as a 'Tudor Trader's House'. The following year the building was dismantled and the site excavated. It was discovered that there were originally two con-joined undercrofts. The building has been reconstructed at St Fagan's Museum, Cardiff. Reference: Nash
<http://www.pembrokeshirehistoricalsociety.co.uk/tudor-traders-house-haverfordwest/>
11. A watching brief was maintained during upgrading of storm water drains and sewage systems in key areas in Haverfordwest. However, new services were either tunnelled or replaced earlier services and nothing of interest was noted. Reference: Crane 2002 (44315). Note shown on Figure 6.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

Haverfordwest has very high potential for addressing some of the key agenda items for research into the medieval period, including town plantation and castle building. It also has the potential to address the post-medieval research theme on settlements (towns).

Archaeological investigations in Haverfordwest have been mostly limited to small-scale evaluations prior to development and watching briefs during construction of a house or an extension to a house. Nevertheless, these have shown that virtually anywhere in the historic core of the town has the potential to contain stratified medieval and later archaeological deposits. However, buildings many of them listed present almost unbroken street frontages and thus opportunities for archaeological investigation are severely limited.

There are some key issues that need addressing:

What was the extent of the early town – Castleton?

What was the course and character of the medieval town walls and the locations of the town gates?

Where exactly was the Friary and what survives of it below ground?

Where were the medieval town quays and do waterlogged deposits survive?

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Cof Cymru <https://cadw.gov.wales/advice-support/cof-cymru>

LiDAR <https://lle.gov.wales/catalogue/item/LidarCompositeDataset/?lang=en>

Research framework for the Archaeology of Wales

<https://www.archaeoleg.org.uk/areasouthwest.html>



Figure 1. Location map.

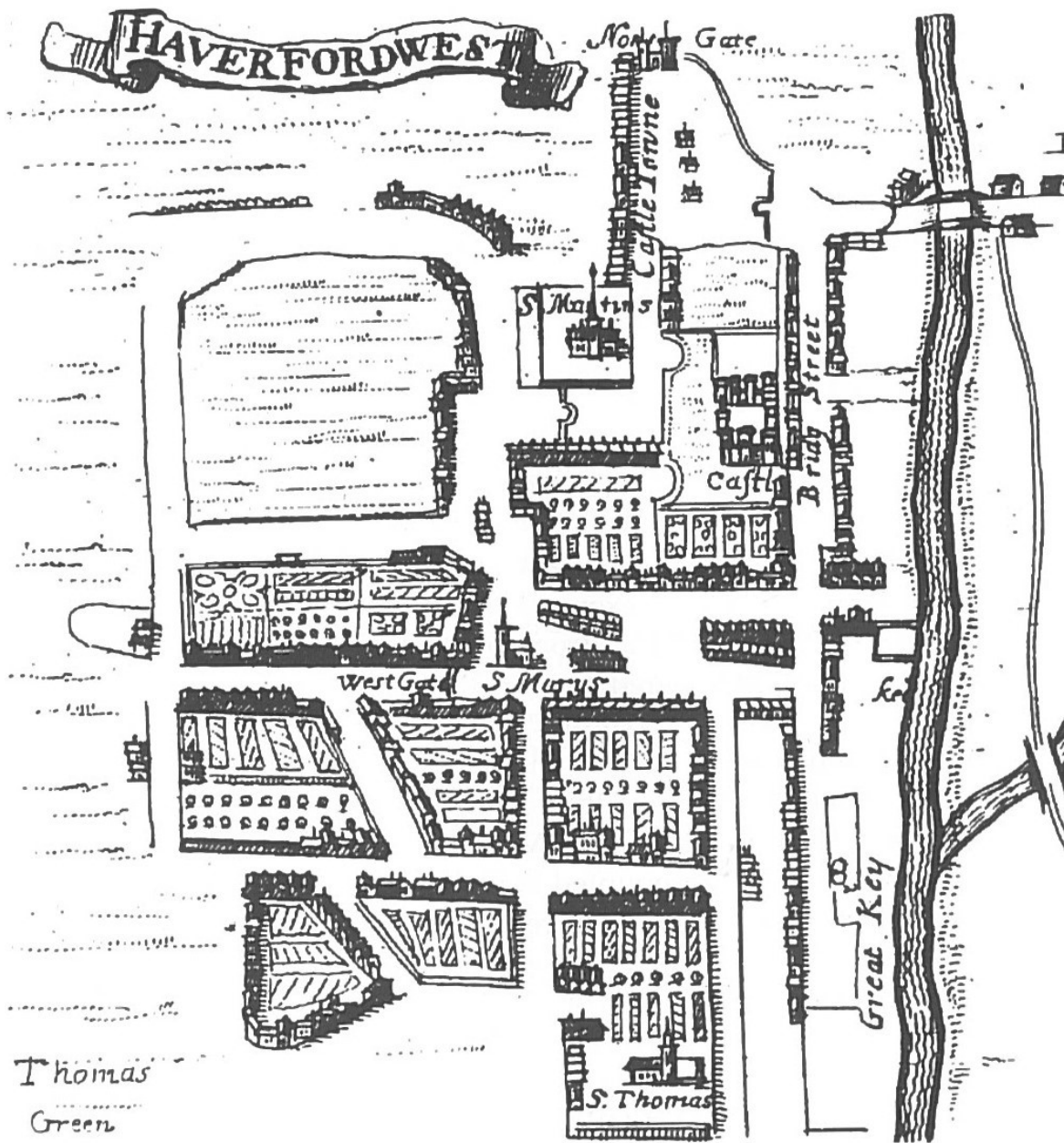


Figure 2. Philip Lea's 1693 map of Haverfordwest.

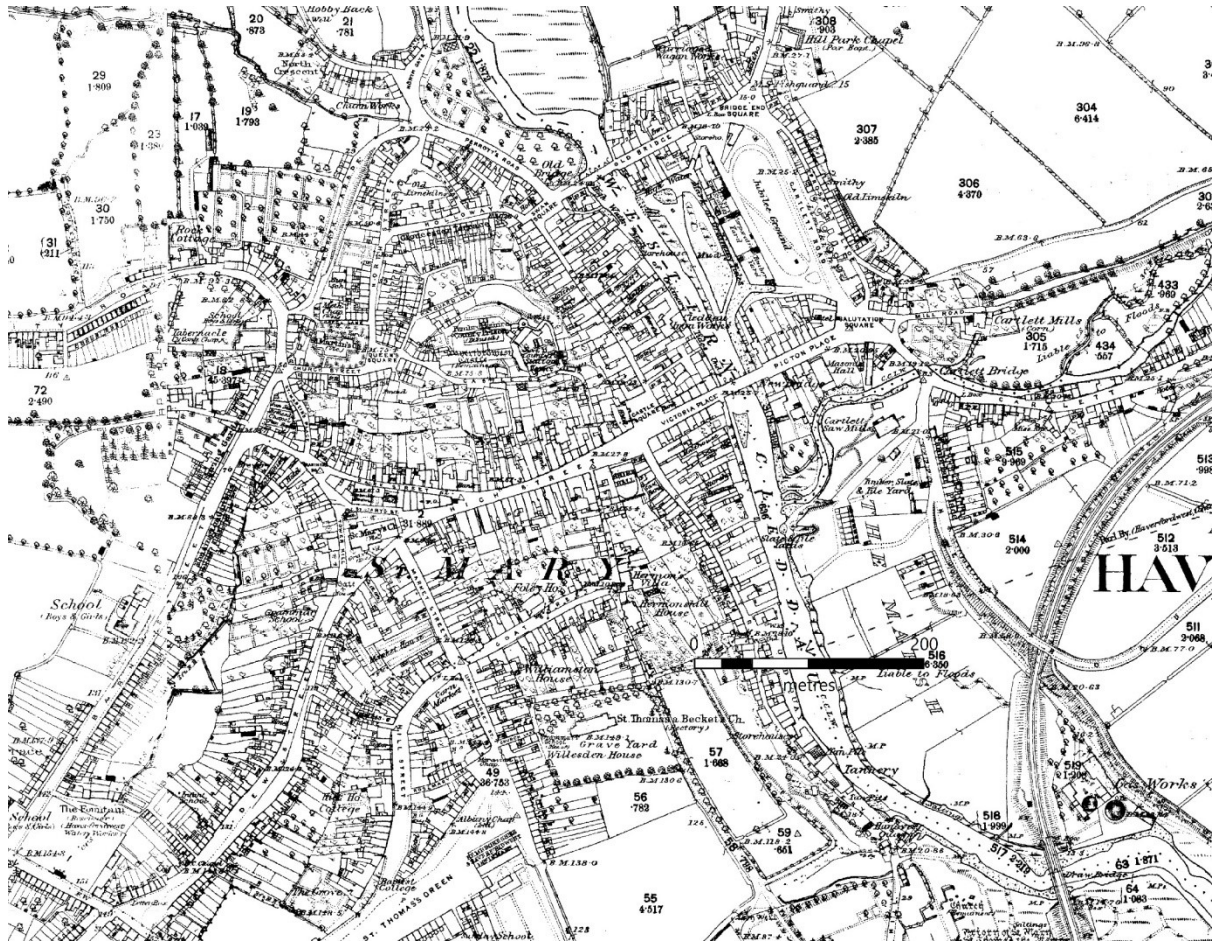


Figure 3. Extract from the 1889 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 1st Edition map (Pemps 27.07).



Figure 4. Listed buildings (blue circles), scheduled monuments (outlined in red) the conservation area (outlined in purple) and registered park and garden (outlined in green).



Figure 5. HER records.

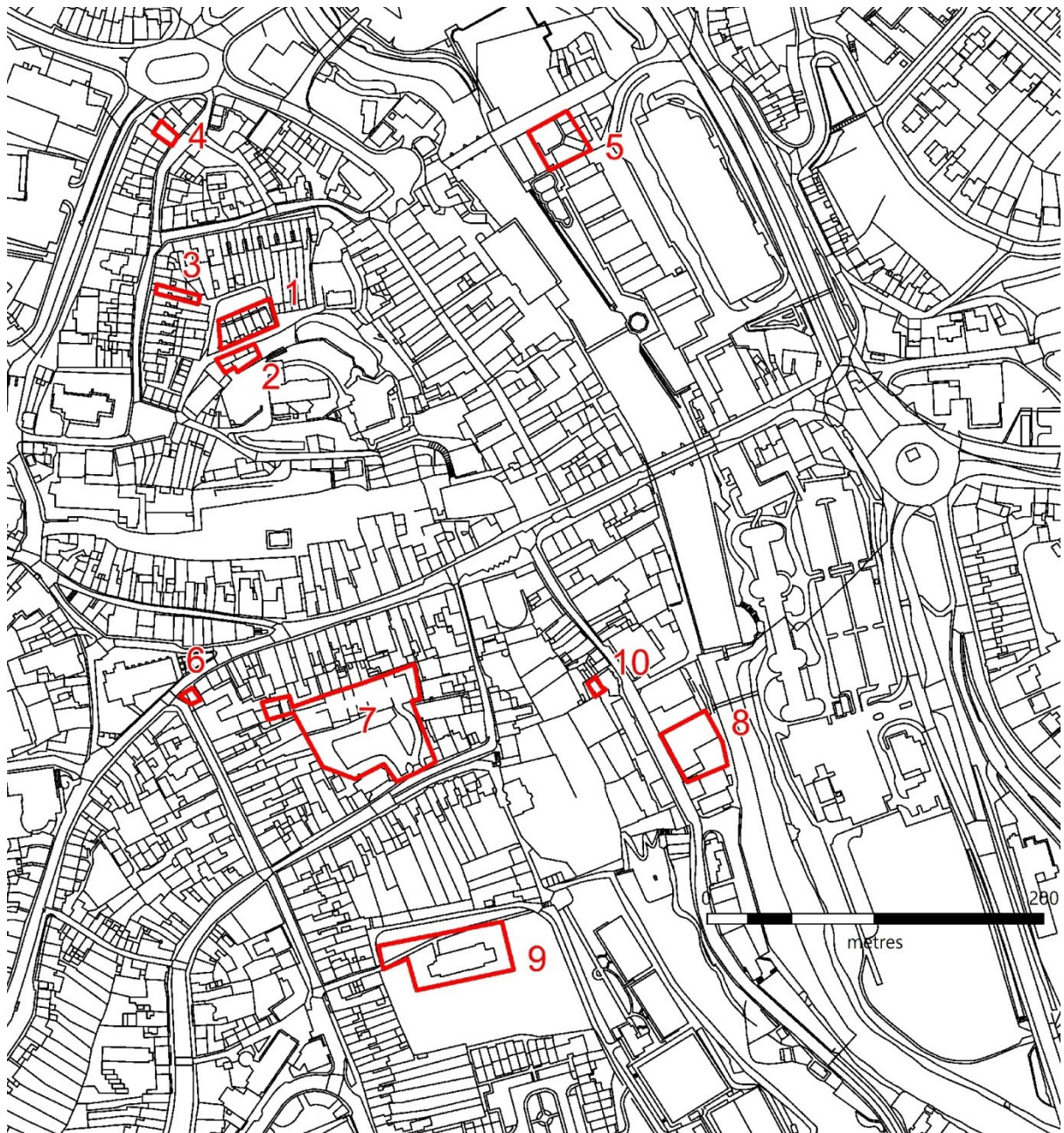


Figure 6. Location of archaeological interventions.



Figure 7. Conjectural plan of Haverfordwest c.1150.

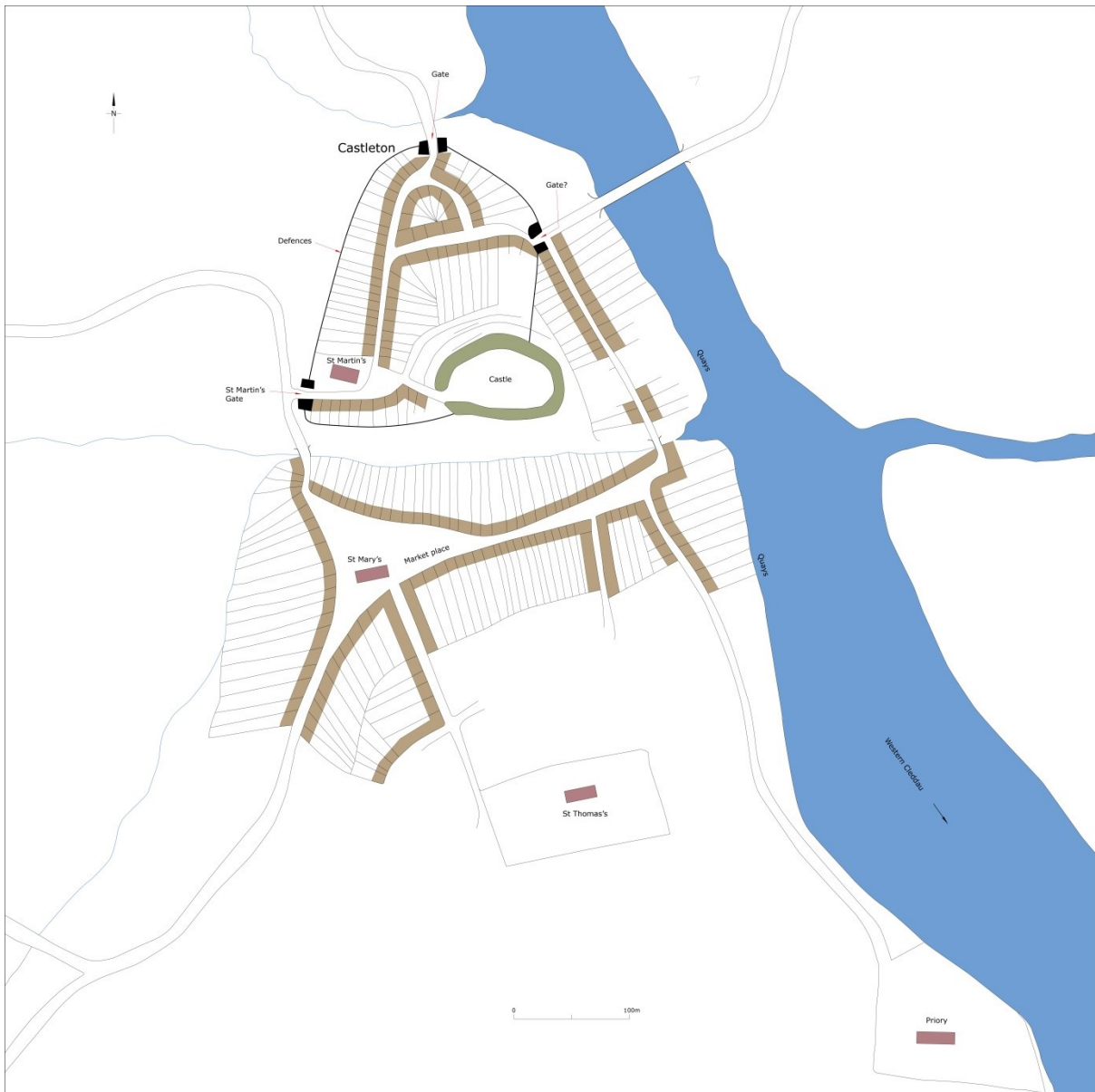


Figure 8. Conjectural plan of Haverfordwest c.1250.



Figure 9. Conjectural plan of Haverfordwest c.1320.