

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE MEDIEVAL TOWNS OF SOUTHWEST WALES

LAMPETER



2008 aerial photograph of Lampeter (RCAHMW AP_2008_3851.tif)

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By

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LAMPETER

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A castle and church are recorded at Lampeter in the early twelfth century and it is likely that a small settlement developed organically at that time. The borough was a Welsh foundation, dating to the late thirteenth century when Rhys ap Maredudd was granted the right to hold a weekly market and an annual fair. It is likely that burgage plots were laid out alongside what is now High Street, which also served as a market place. The town was small, just 26 burgages were recorded in 1317, and remained so through to the nineteenth century, serving local agricultural communities. The only archaeological investigation in the town revealed burgage plot boundaries, but no other evidence of medieval occupation.

KEY FACTS

Status: Town charter, weekly market and annual fair.

Size: 1317 26 burgages.

Archaeology: One small-scale evaluation revealed burgage boundaries.

LOCATION

Lampeter lies on the northern bank of the River Teifi in Ceredigion, mid-Wales (SN 578 481) at a point where the Nant Creuddyn to the west and the Afon Dulas to the east flow into the main channel (Fig.1). It stands at the intersection of several major roads: the A482 gives access to Llandeilo/Llandovery to the southeast and Aberystwyth to the north; the A485 leads to Tregaron and mid-Wales to the north and to Carmarthen to the south; and the A475 runs down the Teifi valley to Newcastle Emlyn, Cardigan and the coast.

HISTORY

The Anglo-Normans established a motte and bailey castle at Lampeter during their brief occupation of Ceredigion between 1115-37. The first reference to it is in 1137 when the Brut y Tywysogyon records that the sons of Gruffudd ap Cynan burnt the castle along with those at Carmarthen, Ystrad Meurig, and Humfrey's Castle. It was then called Stephen's Castle. It is assumed that like other castles in the region it changed hands several times between English and Welsh rulers during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries until 1290 when the English King Edward I granted it to Geoffrey Clement together with the Lordship of Caron.

Between 1100 and 1135, Cadell, grandson of Rhys ap Tewdwr granted the church at Lampeter to Totnes Priory (Crouch 1989, 125-31). This indication of Welsh patronage

may be misleading as the grant to a priory in Devon suggests an Anglo-Norman foundation rather than a Welsh one, and it is likely that both the castle and church were founded by the Anglo-Normans before 1137 when the region was under their control. Alternatively, Cadell may have granted a church to Totnes during a hiatus in Anglo-Norman rule. It is unclear why he would have done this, but it may have been to curry favour with the Anglo-Norman invaders. The picture is further complicated by the recognition of a possible motte to the north of the church, which could be Stephen's Castle referred to in 1137; the extant motte lying in the University grounds having been established under Welsh rule or during the Anglo-Norman re-conquest of Ceredigion later in the twelfth century.

A bridge had been constructed by 1188 when Giraldus Cambrensis refers to Lampeter as 'Pons Stephani' (Stephen's Bridge) and one assumes by then a settlement had developed. A combination of the name of the bridge and the church dedication to St Peter give us the Welsh name for Lampeter: Llanbedr Pont Steffan.

The borough was a Welsh foundation – in 1284 Rhys ap Maredudd was granted the right to hold a weekly market and annual fair on the feast of St Denus. The earliest known charter dates to the reign of Henry VI but recites earlier ones going back to the reign of Edward I. It was a small borough with just 19½ burgages recorded in 1301, rising to 26 in 1317, almost all in Welsh hands. The town almost certainly remained small, serving local agricultural communities. However, the later medieval and early modern history of the town has not been researched. In 1728 the population stood at around 300 rising to just 320 by 1801. In 1827 St David's College was founded (now a university) and in 1868-70 St Peter's Parish Church was rebuilt on a site immediately to the north of its medieval predecessor.

MORPHOLOGY

The two earliest recognised elements of Lampeter, Stephen's Castle lying in St David's College grounds and St Peter's parish church lie 370m apart, a little separate from what is now the centre of the town. An early nineteenth century map surveyed prior to the foundation of the college shows the castle located within what seems to be a bailey, of which there is now no trace (Dawson 1819). The location of Stephen's Bridge is unknown but is assumed to have crossed the River Teifi to the south of the town. It is likely that a settlement developed organically at Lampeter during the twelfth century, perhaps close to the castle for protection. However, the granting of a weekly market and annual fair in the late thirteenth century shifted the focus of Lampeter from the castle to what is now the High Street. This wide, curving street, suitable as a market place, and flanked to the north and south by burgages may well have been laid out as part of this formalisation of Lampeter as a borough in the late thirteenth century (Fig. 7). For several centuries the

town did not develop much beyond the limits of the High Street – the 1843 tithe map (Fig. 2) shows a very small town, having hardly expanded beyond a single street. The founding of St David’s College on the site of St Stephen’s Castle in 1827 and the coming of the railway in the later nineteenth century spurred on the growth of Lampeter and by 1889 (Fig. 3) new houses and commercial premises had been built on College Street, Market Street, Bridge Street and Church Street. Development continued throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century (Fig. 4).

BUILDINGS AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS

Scheduled Monuments

There is one scheduled monument in Lampeter: the motte of St Stephen’s Castle in the grounds of the college - CD110 –(Fig. 4).

Listed Buildings

There are approximately 26 listed buildings in the historic core of Lampeter (Fig. 4). Apart from the old college buildings which are listed Grade II* all are Grade II and consists of houses, commercial properties, chapels and churches, bridges and street furniture of nineteenth and twentieth century date.

Conservation Area

The whole of the historic core of the town lies in the Lampeter Conservation Area (Fig. 4).

Registered Parks and Gardens

There are no registered parks and gardens in Lampeter.

Registered Historic Landscape

Lampeter is not in a registered historic landscape.

Undesignated Historic Environment Assets

There are approximately 86 undesignated assets in Lampeter listed on the Dyfed Historic Environment Record. (Fig. 5). These include duplicates of the 26 listed buildings. Other records are almost exclusively of post-medieval and modern buildings and structures.

Of interest is St Thomas’s Chapel mentioned in fourteenth century documents and recorded by Samuel Lewis in 1833 as Mynwent Twmas (Thomas’s cemetery). He noted that remains of the chapel were visible in the early seventeenth century and that lead coffins have been frequently dug up. The supposed location of the chapel is shown on the Ordnance Survey 1889 map (Fig. 3) alongside St Thomas’s Street.

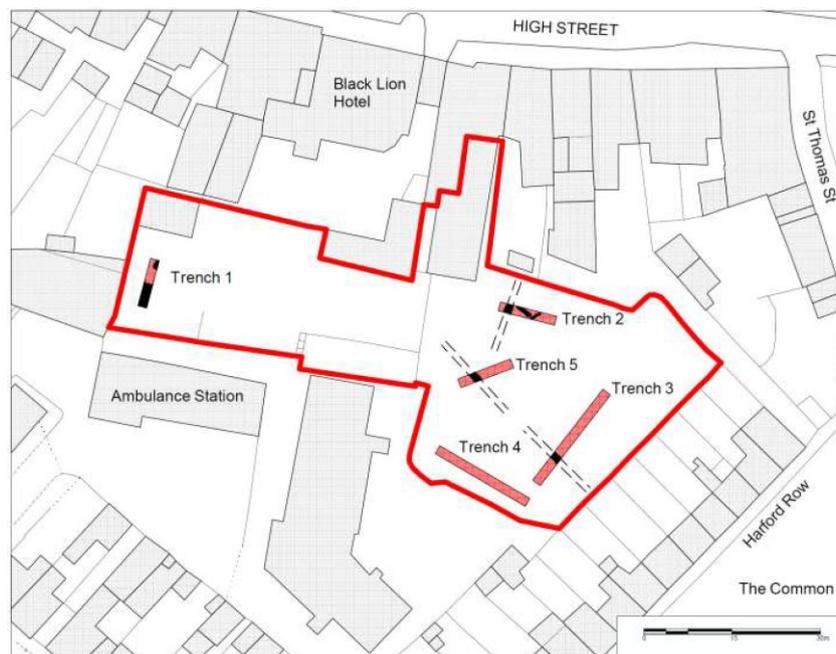
The medieval parish church of St Peter occupied a circular churchyard to the south of the current church built in 1868-70. It is assumed that the below ground remains of the medieval church and cemetery survive.

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. There has been one archaeological investigation in Lampeter:

1. An archaeological evaluation was undertaken on ground to the rear (south) of the Black Lion Hotel in an area of burgage plots and close to the supposed site of St Thomas's Chapel. Five trenches were excavated. There was no evidence for the chapel or of associated burials. Cobbled surfaces revealed in some of the trenches were of post-medieval date and relate to yards of the Black Lion. Boundary ditches were potentially of medieval date delineating burgage plots. Very few artefacts were found and all date to the post-medieval and modern periods. Reference: Kemp 2015 (107907).



Plan showing the trench layout to the rear of the Black Lion Hotel.



Trench 1 showing post-medieval cobbled surfaces just below topsoil.



Trench 5 showing possible burgage plot boundary ditches.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

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

There has been only one archaeological intervention and this produced little evidence for medieval occupation even though it was close to the town's historic core. Medieval archaeological deposits could well survive along the street frontage of High Street, but this frontage presents an almost unbroken façade of commercial, domestic and other buildings, many of them listed, and so opportunities for redevelopment and archaeological investigation are limited.

St Thomas's Chapel has high archaeological potential, but the exact location of this site has not been established.

Most unusually the parish church was relocated in the nineteenth century and the medieval church demolished. The site of the original parish church, to the south of the current church, is of high archaeological potential.

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Coflein <https://coflein.gov.uk/en>

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

Research framework for the Archaeology of Wales

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

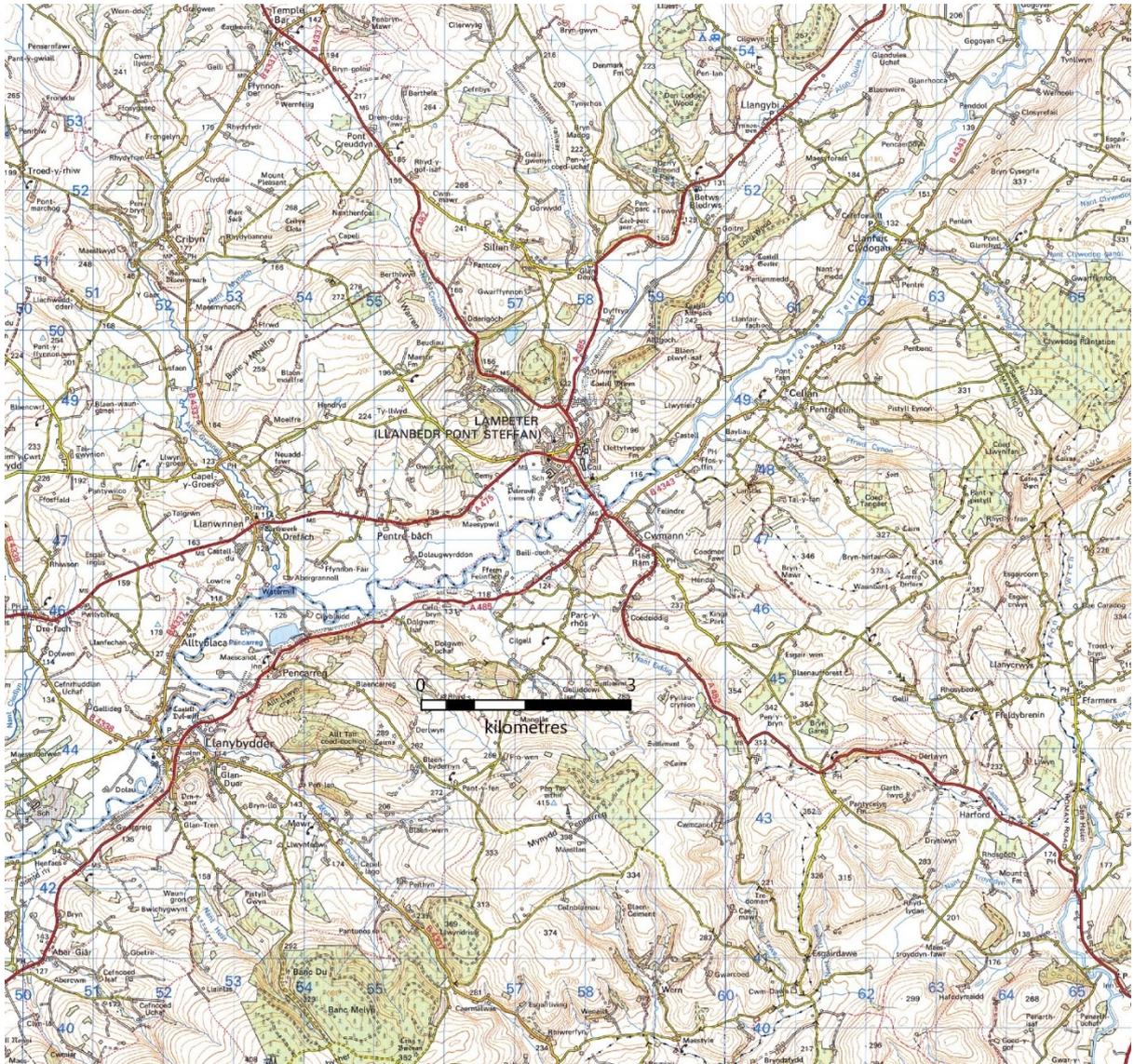


Figure 1. Location map.

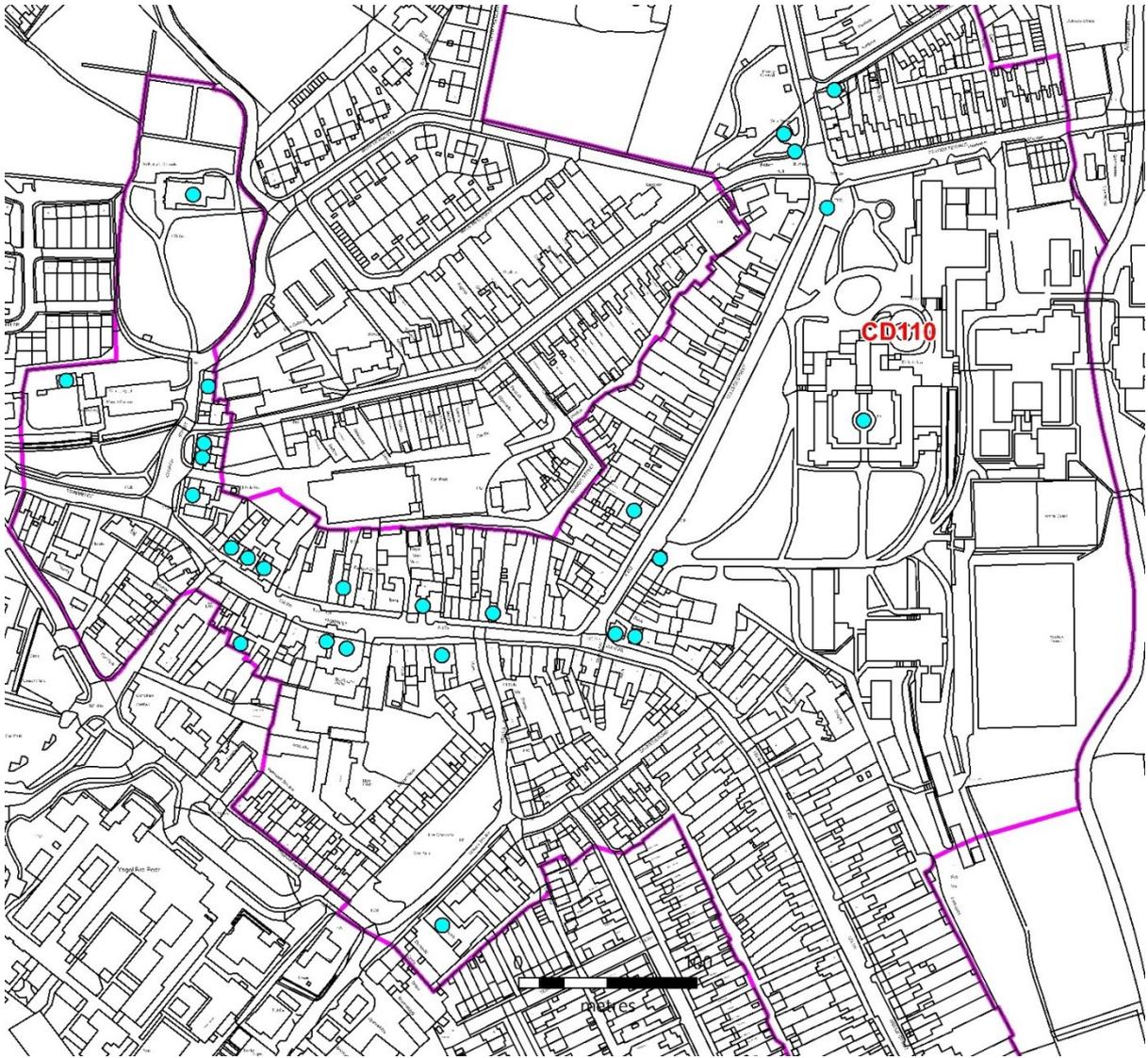


Figure 4. Listed buildings (blue circles, scheduled monument (red) and the conservation area (outlined in purple).

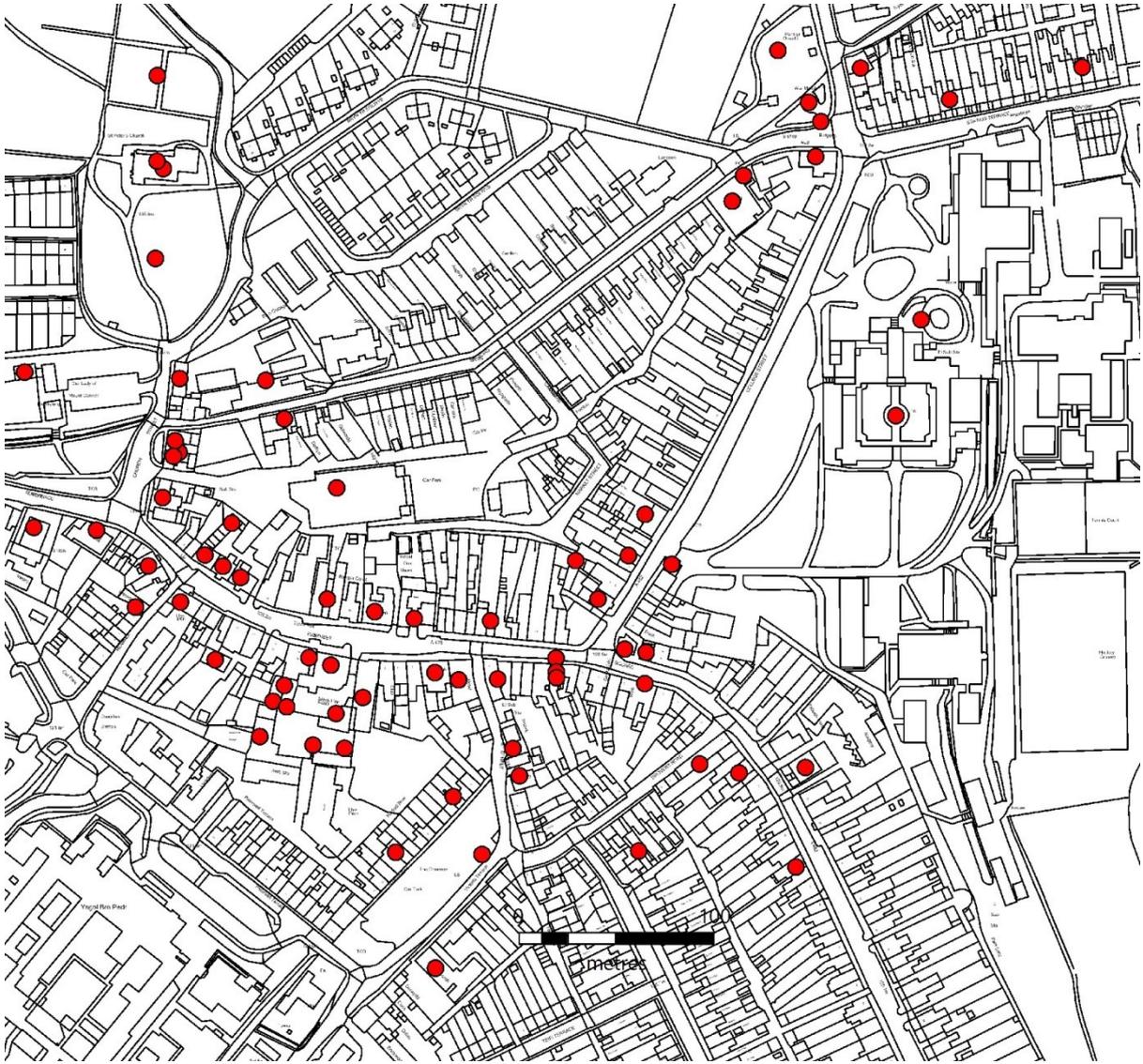


Figure 5. HER records.

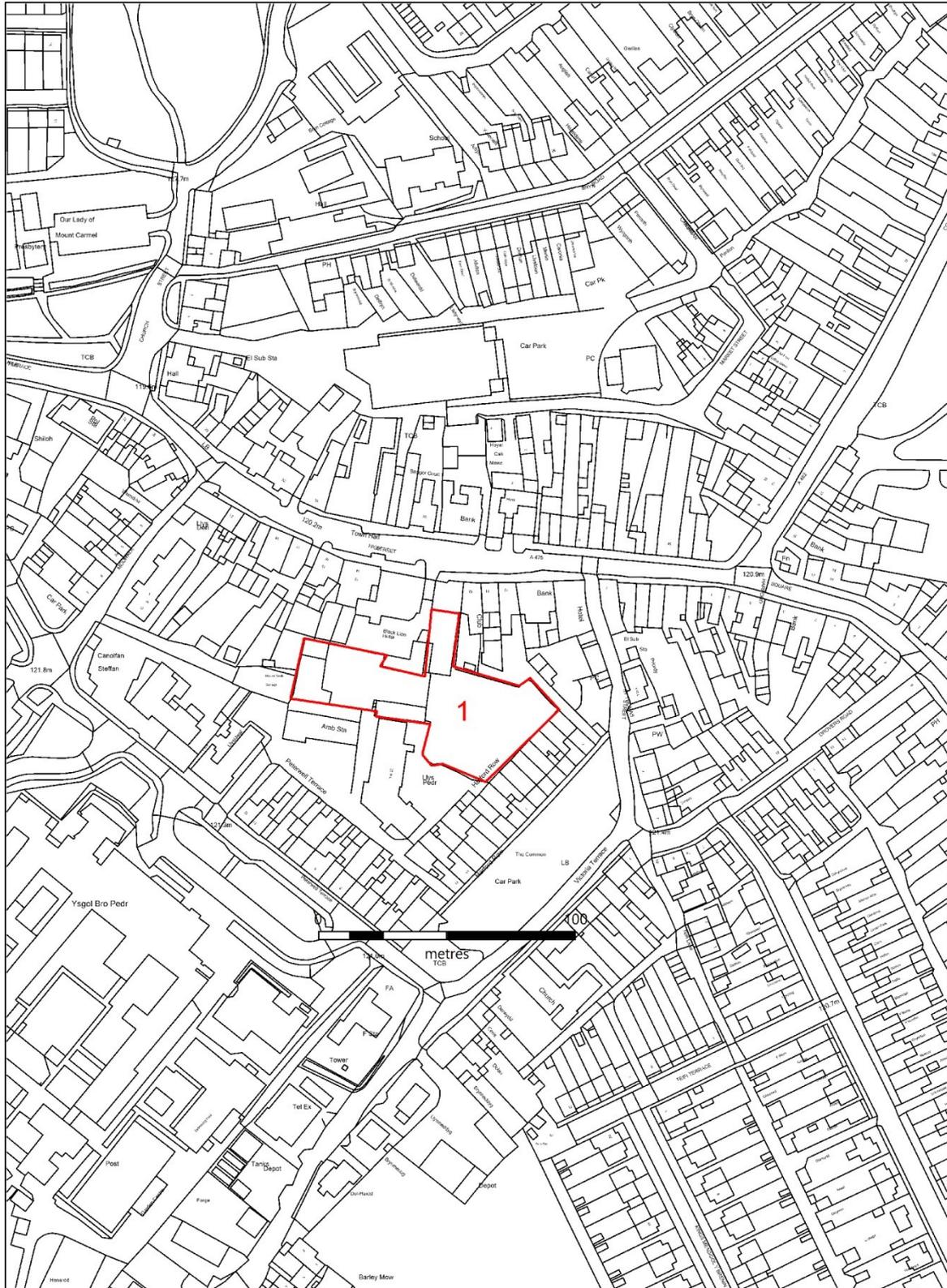


Figure 6. Location of archaeological interventions.



Figure 7. Conjectural plan of Lampeter as it may have been at its maximum extent in the medieval period, c.1320.