

LLANDEILO ABERCOWIN, LLANYBRI, CARMARTHENSHIRE: ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

November 2010



Prepared by Dyfed Archaeological Trust
For: Mr & Mrs Morris



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RHIF Y PROSIECT / PROJECT RECORD NO. 100379**

Rhagfyr 2010
December 2010

**LLANDEILO ABERCOWIN, LLANYBRI,
CARMARTHENSHIRE:
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

Gan / By

JAMES MEEK

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LLANDEILO ABERCOWIN, LLANYBRI, CARMARTHENSHIRE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

SUMMARY

This report has been produced by Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services in response to a request from Mrs Wendy Morris, to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the erection of a new agricultural dwelling at Llandeilo Abercowin, Llanybri, Carmarthenshire (NGR SN 3138 1313). The site area lies adjacent to an earthwork mound of possible Bronze Age date on its eastern side, and close to the remains of the Church of St Teilo to the west.

A number of land drains were noted within the site area, comprising a mix of slate and ceramic material. The ceramic pipes had an inverted U-shape channel set within a rectangular profiled ceramic case, with flat sides and upper surface. Small grooves run along the length of the pipes towards the upper surface.

Along the northern edge of the site a number of areas of decaying bio-degradable sheet plastic were observed. The plastic was associated with recent episodes of maize cultivation within the field, with the plastic originally laid on the surface of the soil and the seed planted through it to keep weeds down etc. The plastic had subsequently been ploughed back into the topsoil and in places sat directly upon the undisturbed natural subsoils.

The watching brief has demonstrated that no significant archaeological remains were present within the topsoil stripped area, and thus the area of development would not impact upon any buried archaeological remains. The site area had been subject to repeated ploughing over the years, and this may have removed any archaeological remains that at one time may have been present. The archaeological potential of the earthworks to the east, and the woodland within which they lie is still considered to be high.

INTRODUCTION

Project Commission

A planning application (Planning Ref: W/23304) was submitted to Carmarthenshire County Council, by Mrs. Wendy Morris, for the construction of a new agricultural dwelling at Llandeilo Abercowin, Llanybri, Carmarthenshire (NGR SN 3138 1313). The development was approved on condition that the applicant has secured the implementation of a scheme of archaeological works in accordance with an approved Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI).

The condition was placed on planning permission following advice from Planning Services of Dyfed Archaeological Trust Heritage Management (DAT-HM) in their role as archaeological advisors to Carmarthenshire County Council, to fully inform the Members of the Local Planning Authority (LPA) of the effect of the proposed development upon the archaeological resource.

The condition was placed on the development as the site lies close to the Church of St. Teilo (at Llandeilo Abercowin farm). The proposed dwelling site also lies directly to the west of earthworks which may be of archaeological origin, which could represent a Bronze Age burnt mound or a burial mound. If archaeological remains were present within the site area, they would lie at a shallow depth below the ground surface at the interface between topsoil and natural subsoils and could potentially be exposed, damaged or destroyed by any groundworks at the site.

The condition placed on planning permission states that:

"No development shall take place until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority."

Dyfed Archaeological Trust Field Services (DAT-FS) was commissioned to undertake the archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the development proposals. An approved written scheme of investigation (WSI) was prepared by DAT-FS prior to works commencing on-site. A single visit to the development area was undertaken on 8th November 2010 at the commencement of groundworks, involving topsoil stripping of the entire development area.

Scope of the Project

Archaeological attendance and recording during groundworks associated with the groundworks associated with the construction of a new agricultural dwelling at Llandeilo Abercowin, Carmarthenshire. The groundworks had the potential to expose, damage or destroy any underlying archaeological remains, if present. The project also included preparation of this report and an archive of the results.

Report Outline

This report describes the location of the site along with its archaeological background before summarising the watching brief results and the conclusions based on those results.

Abbreviations

Regional Historic Environment Record – HER; Primary Record Number – PRN; National Grid Reference – NGR; Scheduled Ancient Monument – SAM.

Illustrations

Record photographs are included at back of the report. Printed map extracts are not necessarily reproduced to their original scale and are illustrative only.

THE SITE

Location and Topography

Llandeilo Abercowin lies 2.7km to the west of Llanybri, and 4.2km due south-east from St Clears, Carmarthenshire (SN 3138 131; Figures 1 and 2).

The site of the new agricultural dwelling lies around 350m to the east of Llandeilo Abercowin on the southern side of the access road. The site area lay within an arable field. The area of the dwelling had been left unploughed and was grass covered, although had previously been included within the arable area of the field. A hedgerow was present along its northern edge, which was breached to gain access into the site area (Photo 1 and 2). A post and wire field boundary formed the eastern edge, with a modern pond to the south and the cultivated part of the arable field defining its western edge (Photos 1 and 2).

The site of the new dwelling lay on relatively level ground with a slight slope down to the south-west and a small depression in the centre of the area running down towards the adjacent pond. The field was at a level approximately 0.6m above the road level to the north.

Archaeological Background

The regional HER, held by Dyfed Archaeological Trust, records thirteen known sites within a 500m radius of the development area. These include the Grade II Listed Building of Pilgrim's Rest, a medieval tower house at Llandeilo Abercowin (PRN 2187), the Scheduled parish church and churchyard of St Teilo (PRN 2186 & 49267; Scheduled Ancient Monument No. CM082) and a post-medieval dwelling (PRN 25079). These sites all lie 350m to the west of the development area at Llandeilo Abercowin, as accessed by the road which runs to the north of the site area. Also within this area a post-medieval farm outbuilding is recorded (PRN 43190).

Directly to the east of the area of the new agricultural dwelling lies the site of an earthwork of unknown date and provenance (PRN 2176; Photo 3). It lies adjacent to a spring and stream, and has been tentatively identified as a Bronze Age burnt mound, and typical location for such features. Burnt mounds are often evidenced by piles of heat affected stones arranged around a trough or pit which held water. The stones were heated in a nearby fire and then the hot stones were placed in the water to heat it up. They have been interpreted as ritual cooking or feasting sites, or alternatively as a means to create steam for either saunas or some form of industrial process, such as bending hazel withies or similar. From observation of the earthwork from the site area the shape of the mound would be more akin to a Bronze Age burial mound, being fairly round and of quite a height. A number of small hedgebanks were also present in the area of the mound which appeared to respect its location, running around the site as opposed through it, more typical later treatment for a burial mound than a burnt mound, where the importance of and respect for the funerary monument continues to be observed in later periods. The site still lies within a small wooded enclosure, separated from the surrounding fields. No archaeological work has been undertaken on the site as far as can be ascertained to provide further evidence for the origin of the feature. A second possible burnt mound is recorded on the HER 250m to the south of the development area (PRN 2177).

Other sites within the search area include an inscribed stone of unknown date and provenance (PRN 39037) and a post-medieval cart shed at Mwche, around 400m to the east-north-east. Two records of flood defences are also recorded on the HER located 440m to the west-north-west of the new agricultural dwelling area on the banks of the River Cywyn (PRN 29976 and 30535).

The sites recorded on the Regional Historic Environment Record a 500m radius from the centre of the site are laid out in the table below (Table 1).

PRN	Site Name	Grid Reference	Description
2176	Llandeilo Abercowin	SN 3141 1312	Prehistoric Burnt Mound
2177	Llandeilo Abercowin	SN 3133 1289	Prehistoric Burnt Mound
2186	Llandeilo Abercywyn Parish Church; St Teilo's	SN 3093 1304	Post-Medieval, Medieval Church, Scheduled Ancient Monument – CM082
2187	Llandeilo Abercywyn; Pilgrim's Rest	SN 31031 13073	Medieval Tower House Grade II Listed Building
25079	Llandeilo Abercywyn	SN 3100 1307	Post-Medieval, Medieval Dwelling
29976	River Cywyn Flood Defences	SN 3098 1332	Post-Medieval Flood Defence
29983	Lime Kiln	SN 3088 1315	Post-Medieval Lime Kiln
30535	River Cywyn Flood Defences	SN 3098 1332	Post-Medieval Flood Defence
39307	Mwche	SN 3172 1335	Unknown Inscribed Stone
39308	Mwche	SN 3172 1335	Post med Cart Shed
43190	Outbuilding At Llandeilo Abercywyn	SN 3091 1310	Post-Medieval Outbuilding
49267	Llandeilo Abercywyn Parish Church; St Teilo's	SN 3093 1304	Medieval, Early Medieval Churchyard, Scheduled Ancient Monument – CM082

Table 1: Historic Environment Record entries within a 500m radius of the site centre

The 1840 Tithe Map of Llandeilo Abercowin (Figure 3) is the earliest available map showing the development area consulted for this project. The map clearly shows the arrangement of buildings at Llandeilo Abercowin and the road leading east towards the site area. The development area is shown as the most easterly extent of the field labelled 176, which is described within the Tithe apportionment as arable. The adjacent enclosed woodland labelled 175, within which lies the possible burial/burnt mound (PRN 2176), is shown directly to the east of the development area.

Early Ordnance Survey (OS) maps show no change in the area since the 1840s (Figures 4 and 5). The proposed development area is shown on both OS maps as a wooded and marshy area on the eastern edge of the main field, with the adjacent enclosure containing the possible burial or burnt mound also illustrated. The site is shown in a similar state on more recent OS maps, although it is known that it has been used for maize cultivation in recent years. The early OS maps also show very little change in the layout of Llandeilo Abercowin.

The area of Llandeilo Abercowin is included as its own Historic Landscape Character area, as defined by Dyfed Archaeological Trust, within the Carmarthen Bay Estuary Area. The following information is taken from the description for Llandeilo Abercowin:

Historic Background

During the medieval period Llandeilo Abercowin was a demesne manor and sub-lordship of the Lordship of Osterlow or Ystlwyf (Rees 1932), coterminous with the ecclesiastical parish of Llandeilo Abercowin. The former parish church of St Teilo may be a pre-conquest foundation, but the present (ruined) structure is later medieval; the church is said to have been reconstructed under Richard de Laundrey, Lord of Llanddowror and Llandeilo Abercowin in c.1270 (RCAHM 1918, 83). This area includes that part of the Lordship of Llansteffan which contained the landholding (of uncertain status) of Pentrewyn, now represented by a farmstead; it may have been the site of a further chapelry to Llansteffan apparently known as 'Eglwys Trewyn' in the 14th century (Rees 1932). By the late Medieval period the sub-lordship of Llandeilo Abercowin was owned by the Dwnns of Penallt, Kidwelly (Jones 1987, 100), who were to become one of Wales' leading gentry families and commentators. The Morgans of Muddlescwm, also near Kidwelly, had acquired the holding through marriage by 1488 (ibid.) and it

may be they who were responsible for the construction of the 16th century manor house next to the church, which is traditionally (but spuriously) known as 'Pilgrim's Rest' from its location on the supposed pilgrim's route to St Davids (Hartwell Jones 1912, 372), and the possible site of a ferry to Laugharne; the manor may have been accompanied by a former settlement. The landscape is characterised by fairly large but rather irregular fields which appear to be the result of the amalgamation and enclosure of fields, possibly in part comprising open strips, since ridge-and-furrow has been recorded to the north of the area (Marshall 1985, 19). This amalgamation occurred during the 17th- and 18th-century either under the Mansels who had acquired the holding in c.1600, the Dawkins who succeeded them in 1660 (Jones 1987, 100), or their successors, from 1791, who also held Pentrewyn (ibid.). It was complete by 1840 at least (tithe map; Figure 3). The farm of Cwm Celyn, on the foreshore, has associations with Glyn Jones, the Anglo-Welsh author of many stories and poems set around the Taf estuary (James, n.d.).

Description and essential historic landscape components

This is a small but nevertheless a reasonably distinct historic landscape area of fairly large fields with irregular boundaries, in an area of undulating hills that rise from the estuary of the River Taf to a maximum height of over 90m. Almost all the land is under improved pasture, apart from some small stands of secondary deciduous woodland and scrubby ground on steep slopes overlooking the estuary, and patches of rushy ground in some hollows. Dispersed farms characterise the settlement pattern, set in a landscape of medium-sized fields which tend to be regular in shape, and probably 17th- or early 18th-century in date. Boundaries to the fields consist of earth banks topped with hedges. Hedges are in good condition, well maintained with few distinctive hedgerow trees.

Additional archaeological features include elements of earlier landscapes such as the two pairs of Bronze age standing stones at the north end of this area, 'Maen Llwyd' and 'Meini Llwydion'; one of the sites has been excavated and a number of dispersed features, with little discernible pattern or function, was noted (Marshall 1985, 19). Two burnt mounds also lie near Cwm Celyn.

Pilgrim's Rest is a Grade II listed building from the 16th century with a vaulted undercroft; it is still occupied and lies next to the ruined medieval church of Llandeilo Abercowin, of which the earliest surviving detail is from the 15th century. Other buildings are stone-built, with slate roofs, but are not distinctive and farms such as Pentrewyn, with a historic core, now consist mostly of large modern outbuildings. A Post-Medieval smithy formerly stood at the north end of the area.

Though a relatively distinct historic landscape area, it is not easy to define clear boundaries between this area and those to the east and north. There is better boundary definition to the south and west against reclaimed salt marsh.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

Methodology

The archaeological watching brief consisted of a single visit being made to the site to observe initial topsoil stripping of the entire site area and works associated with emptying and backfilling the adjacent pond to the south. The work was carried out on the 8th November 2010.

The topsoil strip was undertaken using a large 360 degree tracked excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. It was possible to monitor the entire topsoil strip of the development area, although the access track into the field from the road to the north was not observed. Access into the field had involved the removal of part of a hedge and bank. Due to the waterlogged nature of the ground in this area the ground was badly rutted from tracking of the excavator.

The initial groundworks involved the excavation of a small channel around the eastern and south-eastern edges of the area to drain the site (which was badly waterlogged in places).

Topsoil stripping was undertaken across the northern half of the site first, from east to west, followed by the southern half from east to west.

Results

The topsoil removed from the site area comprised a dark brown friable topsoil of approximately 0.30m depth across the entire site area (Photos 4 and 5). Removal of the topsoil exposed a very thin interface layer between the topsoil and underlying undisturbed natural geology, forming a mixed subsoil.

The south-eastern corner of the site contained a large quantity of root holes and disturbance from former vegetation (some of which had been removed as part of the development).

The north-eastern part of the development area contained a large number of small to medium stones randomly located in the topsoil and subsoil. A number of fragments of ceramic land drain were also present in these areas. These had an inverted U-shape channel set within a rectangular profiled ceramic case, with flat sides and upper surface. Small grooves run along the length of the pipes towards the upper surface.

Along the majority of the northern half of the site thin plastic sheeting was visible both within and at the base of the topsoil (Photo 6). The sheeting was badly decayed.

The exposed underlying natural soils comprised a mostly mixed silty sandy clay, with mottled patches from red to yellow in colour. A few patches of siltier fine sand and clay brownish yellow in colour with bits of fragmented stone within it. This had the appearance of decayed sandstone.

In the central part of the southern half of the site an area of greyer natural was noted, with orange and brown clays at the edges. This patch formed a roughly linear arrangement and corresponded with the slight depression noted in the field at the start of the works. Investigation of the feature showed that it was of natural origin.

The emptying of the pond was observed for a short while, by which time it was noted that the base of the pond was very flat and appeared to have been created through machine excavation. It was confirmed by the owners that they had created the pond and it was not of any earlier origin.

CONCLUSIONS

The watching brief has demonstrated that the site area has been subject to arable cultivation since at least 1840. This is evidenced with the land drains noted within the site area which would have been inserted to improve drainage. Although no plough scars were noted within the site area, the interface layer at the base of the topsoil is presumed to represent the lowest plough depth.

The plastic sheeting seen within the topsoil and lying on top of the natural soils in places is a result of modern farming practices. In recent years the field was used for maize cultivation, with plastic bio-degradable plastic laid over the ploughed topsoil before seeds were drilled through. The sheeting acted to reduce weed growth, retain heat and moisture. Following harvest the sheeting is ploughed back into the topsoil to degrade, resulting in fragments sitting within and at the base of the topsoil.

The small and medium stones noted at the eastern end of the area, close to the edge of the field are thought to represent field clearance. As stones were encountered during ploughing of the fields, they are thrown to the field edges to prevent plough damage.

The greyer natural encountered in the central part of the development area is considered to be the remnants of a relict water course that ran down-slope through the field and presumably connected with the stream course which runs on the far side of the pond to the south.

The pond to the south of the development area is of modern date, created by the current owners. The pond was flat based, as would be expected through machine excavation.

The watching brief has demonstrated that no significant archaeological remains lay within the development area. Potentially such remains may have been present, but could have been removed through repeated ploughing of the area for at least the last 170 years. No remains associated with the possible Bronze Age burnt mound or burial mound were revealed. The potential for significant archaeology to be present in the surrounding woodland to the north and east is still considered high, although for the main area of the arable field this potential is reduced. There is no archaeological potential for the area of the former pond, the construction of which would have removed any underlying archaeological deposits that may have been present.

SOURCES

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Map

Tithe Map 1840 – Llandeilo Abercowin

Ordnance Survey 1880s 1:2500 – Pembrokeshire

Ordnance Survey 1906 1:12500 – Pembrokeshire

Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 Land Ranger

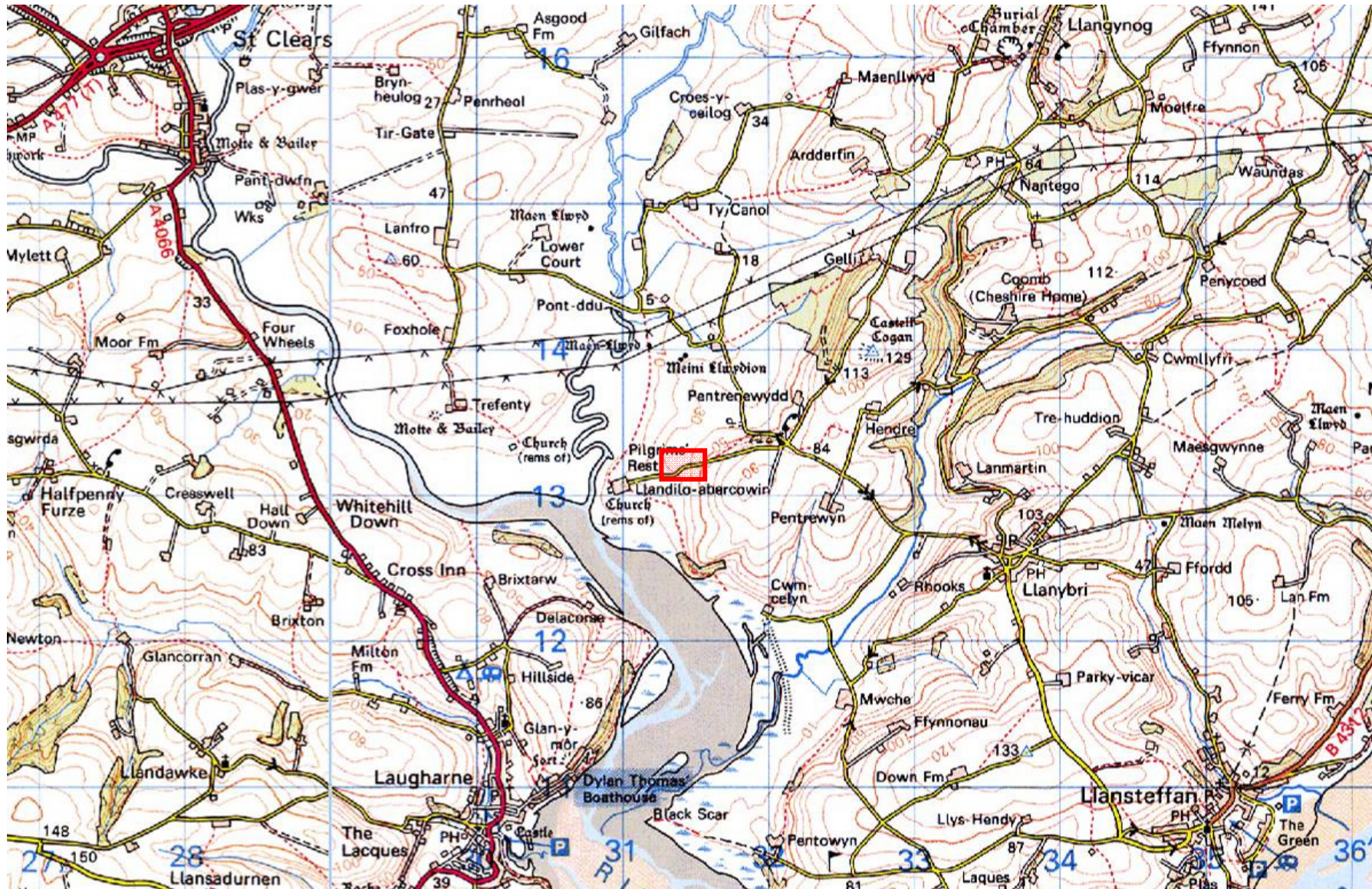


Figure 1: Location map of watching brief site based on Ordnance Survey.

Reproduced from the 1995 Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 scale Landranger Map with the permission of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd., The Shire Hall, Carmarthen Street, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire SA19 6AF. Licence No AL51842A

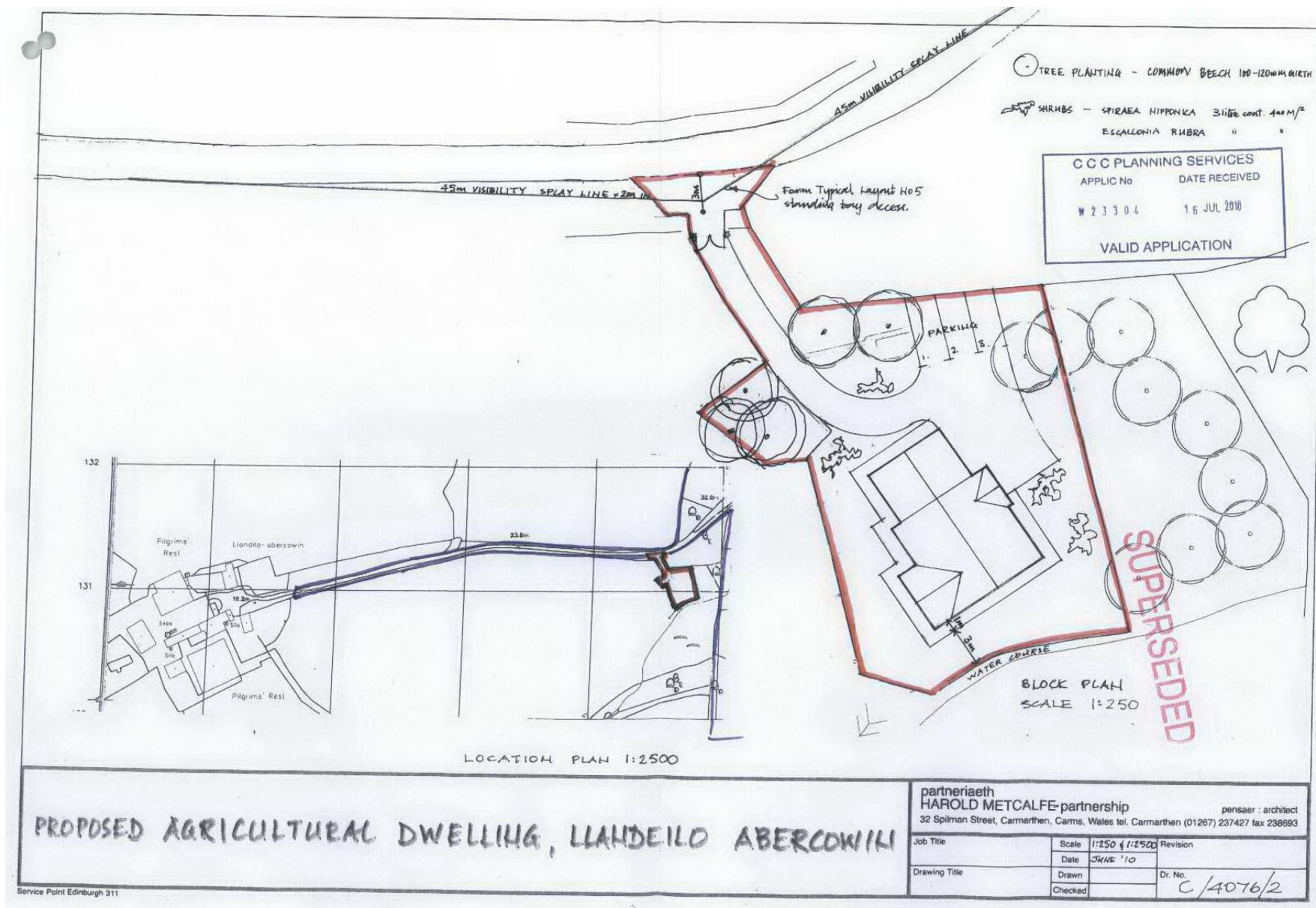


Figure 2: Development Proposal (from Planning Application information available on Carmarthenshire County Council Website)

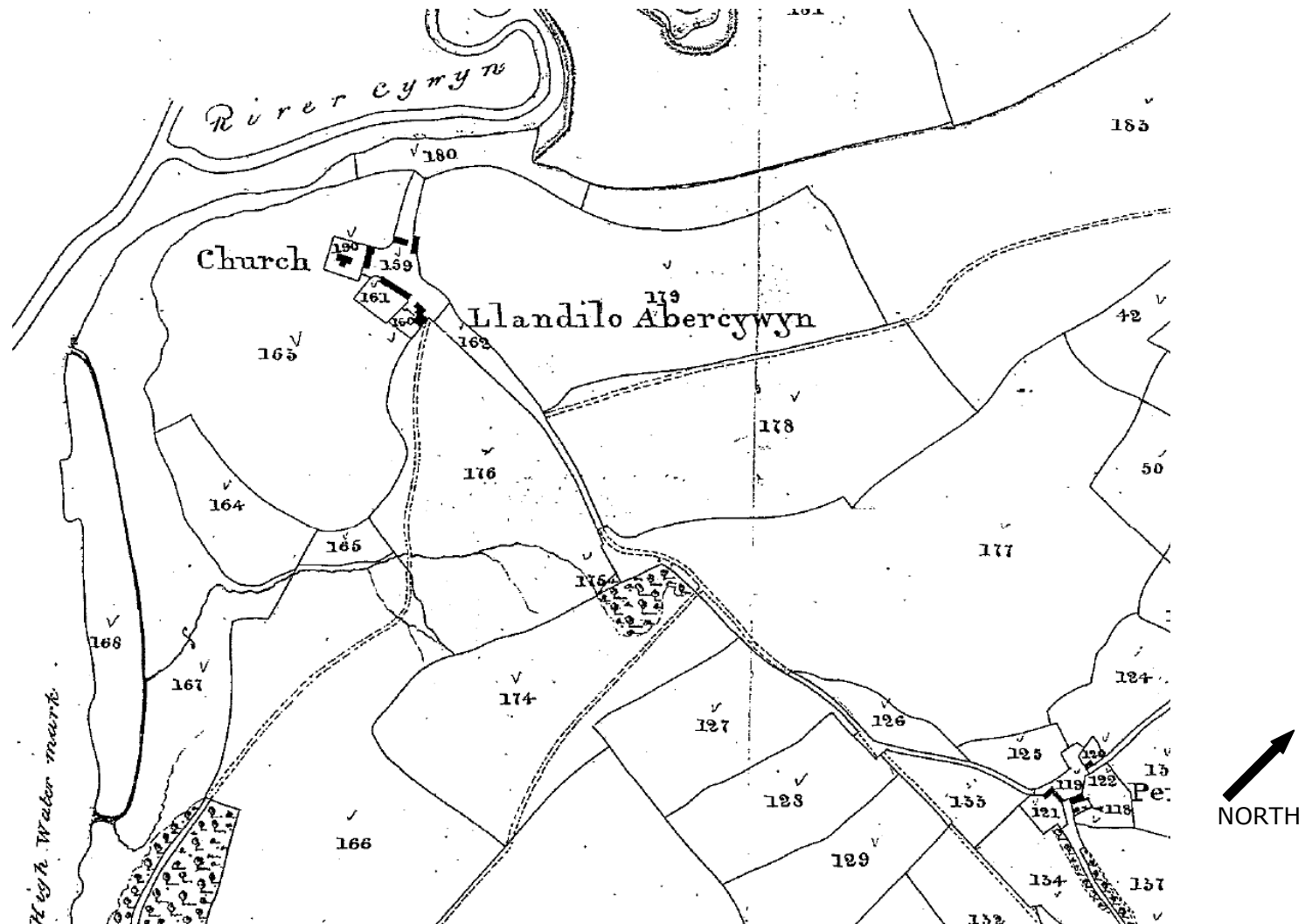


Figure 3: Extract of 1840 Tithe Map of Llandeilo Abercowin

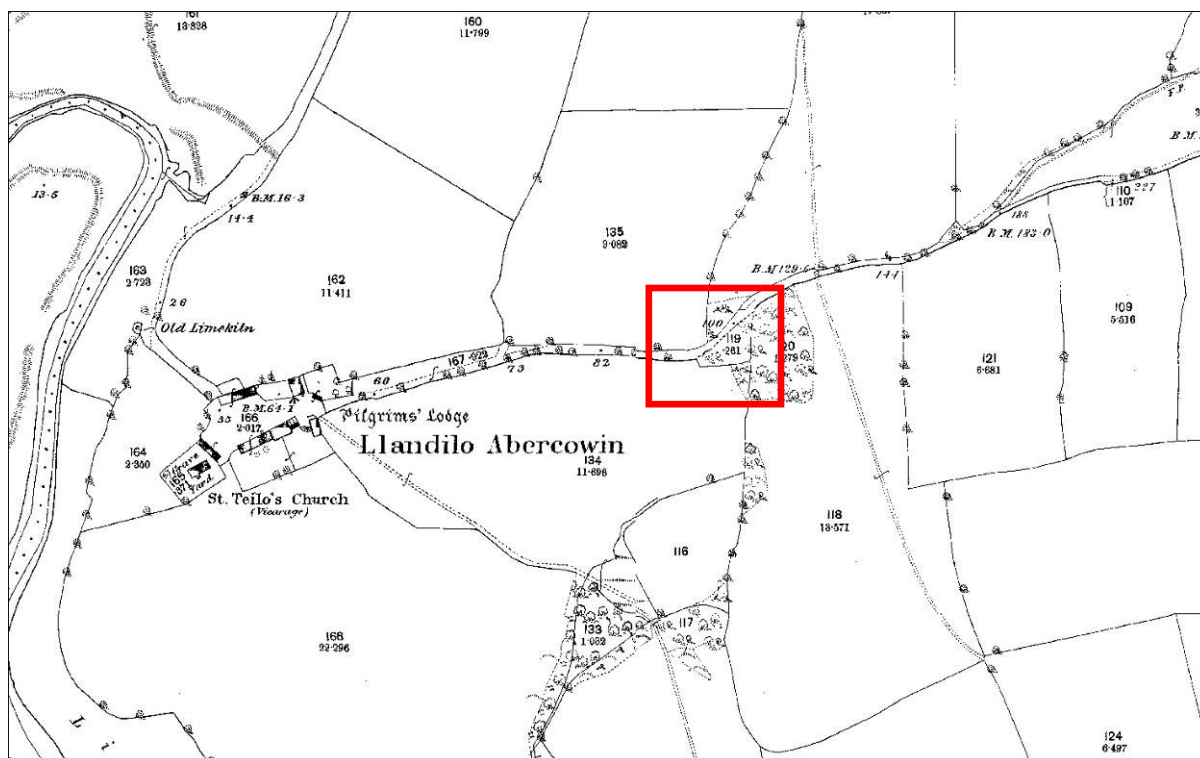


Figure 4: Extract of 1:2500 scale Ordnance Survey map (1880s) showing detail of Llandeilo Abercwin with watching brief area within red boundary

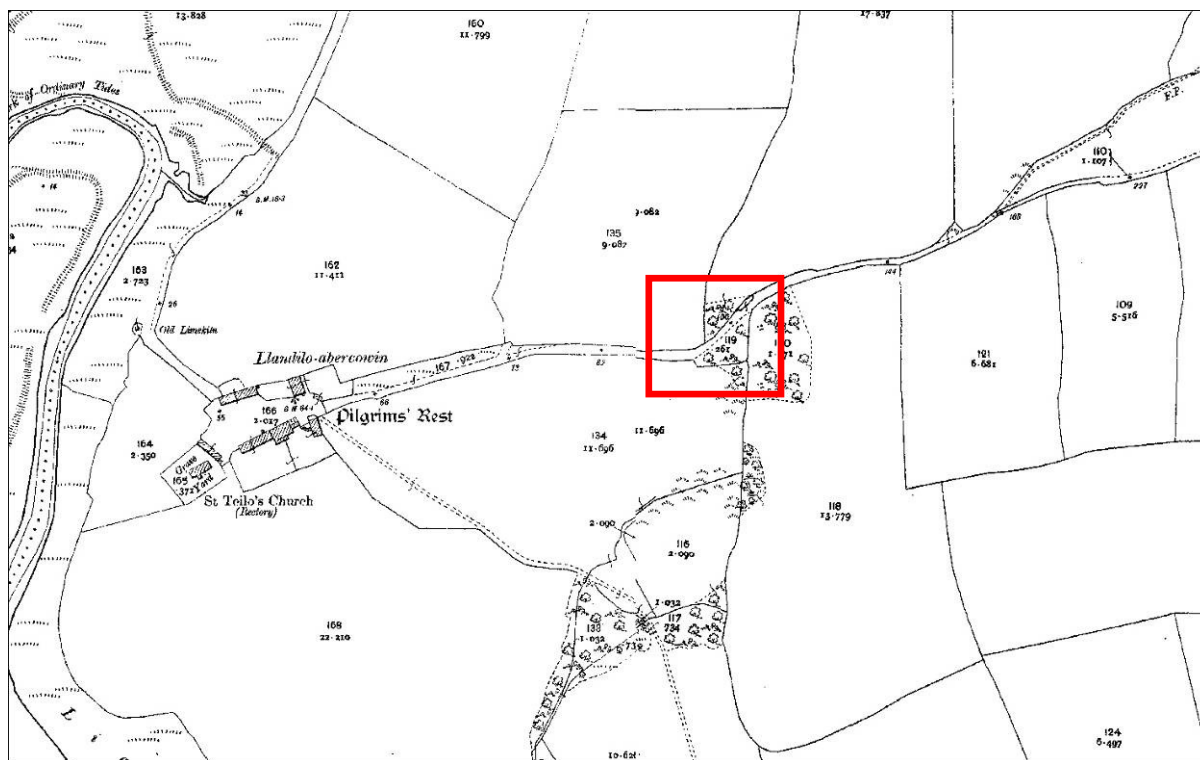


Figure 5: Extract of 1:2500 scale Ordnance Survey map (1906) showing detail of Llandeilo Abercwin with watching brief area within red boundary

PHOTOGRAPHS



Photo 1: Western side of development area at commencement of groundworks



Photo 2: Eastern side of development site at commencement of groundworks



Photo 3: Earthwork mound PRN 2136 to east of site area



Photo 4: Eastern side of site area following topsoil strip



Photo 5: Western side of site area following topsoil strip



Photo 6: Detail of plastic sheeting at base of subsoil on top of natural

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Mae'r adroddiad hwn wedi ei gael yn gywir a derbyn sêl bendith
This report has been checked and approved by

Ken Murphy

ar ran Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf.
on behalf of Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Swydd / Position: Trust Director

Llofnod / Signature  Date 14/12/2010

*Yn unol â'n nôd i roddi gwasanaeth o ansawdd uchel, croesawn unrhyw sylwadau
sydd gennych ar gynnwys neu strwythur yr adroddiad hwn*

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comments you may have on the content or presentation of this report

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