

Church Bank Development, St Dingats, Llandovery

Archaeological Evaluation



October 2000

Report No. Car 15/00b

*G A Makepeace
Ty Wen
Llangenny
Crickhowell
Powys NP8 1HA*

01873 810180

Summary

H G Evans & Co. commissioned G A Makepeace to carry out an archaeological evaluation in an area south of St Dingat's Church, Llandovery. No archaeological material or features were encountered, only fluvial material ie., river gravels and sandy deposits.

Acknowledgement

I wish to thank Louise Austin and Richard Jones (Cambrian Archaeology) for their invaluable help when researching for the Desk Top Study and to Martin Bates (University of Wales, Lampeter) who visited the site whilst the trenches were open to evaluate any potential environmental archaeology there present.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Development and Commission

H G Evans & Co. commissioned G A Makepeace to undertake an archaeological evaluation to be carried out in an area south of St. Dingat's Church, Llandovery. This evaluation follows on from a previous Desk Top Study carried out in September 2000.

1.2 Location

The location of the evaluation lies at SN76303400 immediately south of St Dingat's Church, Llandovery.

1.3 Scope of the Report

The report describes the background, the findings and offers an explanation together with the appropriate appendices.

2.0 Background

2.1 Physical Setting (From Desk Top Study)

Geologically, Llandovery lies at the junction of the Silurian-Ordovician rocks. The Silurian rocks lie to the east whilst the Ordovician to the west (Neville George 1970) but it is the later fluvio-glacial activity that has formed the physical features of the valleys history at this point.

Llandovery lies at the confluences of the Afon Tywi (River Towy), the Afon Bran and the Afon Gwydderig.

Formerly in the Pleistocene, the large Towy glacier carved a path to the sea creating a broad channel which was later filled with glacial moraine, outwash sands and gravels. All three rivers (Towy, Bran and Gwydderig) contributing material that eventually formed the low island on which Llandovery stands today. This low island was formed at the end of the ridge to the north of Llandovery between the Towy and the Bran. The Towy and the Bran have changed their courses over the years, at one time the Towy split Llandovery into two halves, north and south (Fig.2.), known as the old eastern channel.

Aerial photographs of Llandovery show the remains of the fluvial channels to the east of St Dingat's church (Fig.1.) which is recorded in Cooke's History of Llandovery as the old eastern channel (Figs.2.). The last remnant of this fluvial channel lies in the small stream known as the Nant Bawddwr which flows into the Afon Bran south-east of St Dingat's Church. Nant Bawddwr was formerly part of the Town Ditch (also known as the Dyfri).

Tradition holds that there was a devastating flood (c1680) when the dark waters of the Twyi, Bran and the Gwydderig swirled around the church (St Dingats) heavily damaging it (Prys-Jones 1972,196: Arber-Cooke 1975, 14). Arber-Cooke (1975,15) records references to St Dingat's church yard in that 'the fence is destroyed on the south-east, that is to the river Bran and most part of the north side of the church'. This was in fact the eastern channel of the Towy and not the Bran.

The area around St Dingats appears from historical evidence to have been an island separated by the old Towy. Sometime between 1675 and the 1800's (Fig. 3.), the Towy river changed its course again, moving westwards towards its present course, leaving St Dingats to become part of the town.

Church Bank, to the west of the church, probably marks an old Towy river bank. Here the old road to Llandeillo ran along this towards Llwyn Jack Farm, where it probably crossed the Towy at the old ford. The old Church Bank road becoming redundant c1800 when the new turnpike was constructed. This utilising the old bed of the former eastern channel of the Towy (Fig.2.).

St Dingat's appears to have been isolated from the rest of the town with only a few houses-cottages (Fig.5.) along what is known as Lower Road-Church Bank. This area lay outside of the chartered borough of 1485.

There are no dwellings recorded close to the development site except for those west of St Dingat's Church on the old road (Church Bank). It has been suggested that St Dingat's Church appears to lie in a possible Llan or circular churchyard of medieval or prehistoric origin.

From the evidence, the development site appears to have been a field for some considerable period of time, certainly since the Apportionment (1839), earlier it was probably common land (Fig.4.).

2.2 Archaeological and Historical Background

There is little recorded prehistoric activity in the region, most of this occurring to the east of the town on the higher ground, with an enclosure-hillfort at Ynysborde.

It was not until the arrival of the Romans c50-70 AD who established a fort at Llanfair-ar-y-bryn (Alabum) to the north of the town. This fort lies at the junction of roads leading south to Carmarthen (Moridunum), east to Brecon (?Cicutio) and north to Beulah and Castell Collen. The fort went through four phases of development culminating in a much reduced size, to that of a fortlet. There may have been a small vicus or settlement to the south and east of the fort where a Roman cemetery, Roman Road and coins have been found in the past in an area east of the Bran, but north of the Gwydderig.

There seems to have been little development until the building of the motte and bailey castle early in the c12th century (c1116) by Richard fitz Pons with stone

walls being added in the late 13th century. The castle stands on a high hillock overlooking the Afon Bran. Outworks in the form of two banks were destroyed by the construction of the car park which may have been part of the old town (Castle Ward) where the Town Ditch (the Bawddwr) formerly flowed. Whether this was originally part of the town or part of the outer bailey to the castle as the name implies is not known but it could have served both purposes. (Fig.2.). The town being established by 1185 as indicated by the number of Welsh burgesses or landowners being recorded at that time.

A priory was established around 1110 AD at Llandovery, probably on the site of the Roman fort at Llanfair-ar-y-bryn, north of the town, subsequently becoming the site of the parish church of St Mary's.

The town had various periods of prosperity and decline after the medieval period and it was not until the 19th century that it began to prosper and become a market town.

Two churches had been established, one at St Mary's built within the confines of the Roman fort and the other St Dingat's to the south of the town.

3.0 Fieldwork Results

3.1 Site Visit

The evaluation commenced on the 12th October prior to the marking out of the trenches. Three trenches 15 x 1.8m were excavated by JCB with toothless bucket, 5m from the adjacent churchyard wall (Fig.7.).

3.2 Extent of Inspection

The three trenches (15 x 1.8m) were excavated down to the natural river gravels in order to verify the depth of any archaeology present on the site. The general depth of all three trenches was 0.9m with deeper test holes at the ends of each trench reaching a depth of 3m.

Additional test holes were excavated by the prospective developer and these were checked for any archaeology, though being outside of the initial remit. No archaeology was found, though a sectional profile was carried out (Figs.7 & 8.).

3.3 Site Record

As no archaeological features were found, a sectional profile was drawn to record the fluvial deposits across the site (Fig.8.) and a colour photographic record was made.

3.4 Archaeological Record

No archaeological record was made.

4.0 Conclusion

The site appears to have had little disturbance except for some shallow ploughing (c0.25-0.30m). This seems to have been kept to a minimum as the plough soil was light in colour. The nature of the land at the site was formed by riverine deposits, first the coarser gravels (context 4) with lighter and more sandy deposits towards the surface (contexts 2 & 3). The area around St Dingat's Church was probably a former island in the river. The sandy-clayey deposits (context 2) are probably a result of flood deposition over the 'island' in the middle of the former Towy. The sloping edge or bank found in Trench 3 may mark an old fluvial channel of the eastern channel of the Towy which flowed passed the site. No environmental deposits were found.

5.0 Bibliography

- Arber-Cooke A T A 1975 *Pages from the History of Llandovery.*
- Edwards N 1997 *Landscape and Settlement in Medieval Wales. Oxbow Monograph 81.*
- Ludlow N D 1998 *St Dingat, Llandingat, Carmarthenshire (Dinefwr). Dyfed PRN 4093. Archaeolog Cambria. Cadw: Welsh Historic Churches Project.*
- Manning W H 1981 *The Fortress Excavations 1968-71. Report on the Excavations at Usk 1965-1976, 24-44. UWP. Cardiff.*
- Murphy K &
Ludlow N D 2000 *2.1.2 Llandovery. Carmarthenshire: Twyi Valley. ACA Report PRN 40373.*
- Neville George T 1970 *South Wales. British Regional Geology. HMSO.*
- Prys-Jones A G 1972 *The Story of Carmarthenshire. Davis Publ.*
- Rees S 1992 *Dyfed. A Guide to Ancient and Historic Wales. HMSO.*
- Soulsby I &
Jones D 1977 *Historic Towns in the Borough of Dinefwr. Archaeological Implications of Redevelopment. Univ. College, Cardiff.*
- Salter M 1994 *Old Parish Churches of South-West Wales. Folly Publ.*

6.0 Contexts and Features

- Context 1 Plough Soil. Grey-brown, sandy with slight clay content, friable, loamy soil. Occasional white-blue glazed pottery and slate fragments. Thickness 0.25-3.0m thickness.*
- Context 2 Outwash sands. Light, compact, friable, grey brown merging into light brown-grey towards the base, with the occasional small rounded pebble. Stratification of the sands could be identified in places. Thickness 0.95-1.0m.*
- Context 3 Outwash gravels. Fine shaley-pea gravels, grey-brown, lightly compact with sandy infilling, rounded edges, thin pebbles showing deposition layers. Thickness 0.5m*
- Context 4 Coarse river gravels. Large rounded water worn-glacial pebbles up to c 20 x 10cms, average size c8cms, with smaller pebbles and pea gravels. Thickness unknown.*

7.0 Report Completed

This report was completed October 2000.

Appendices

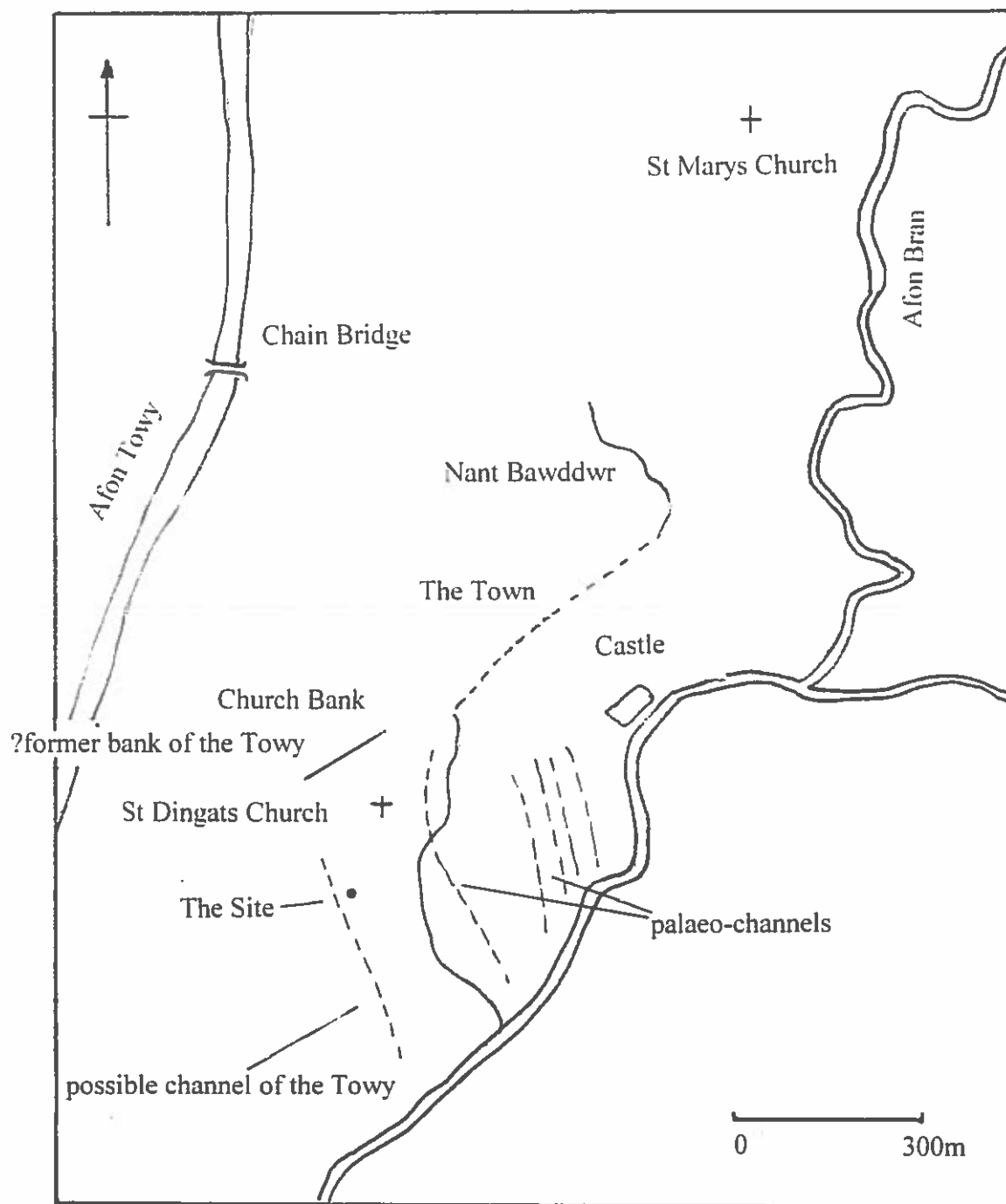
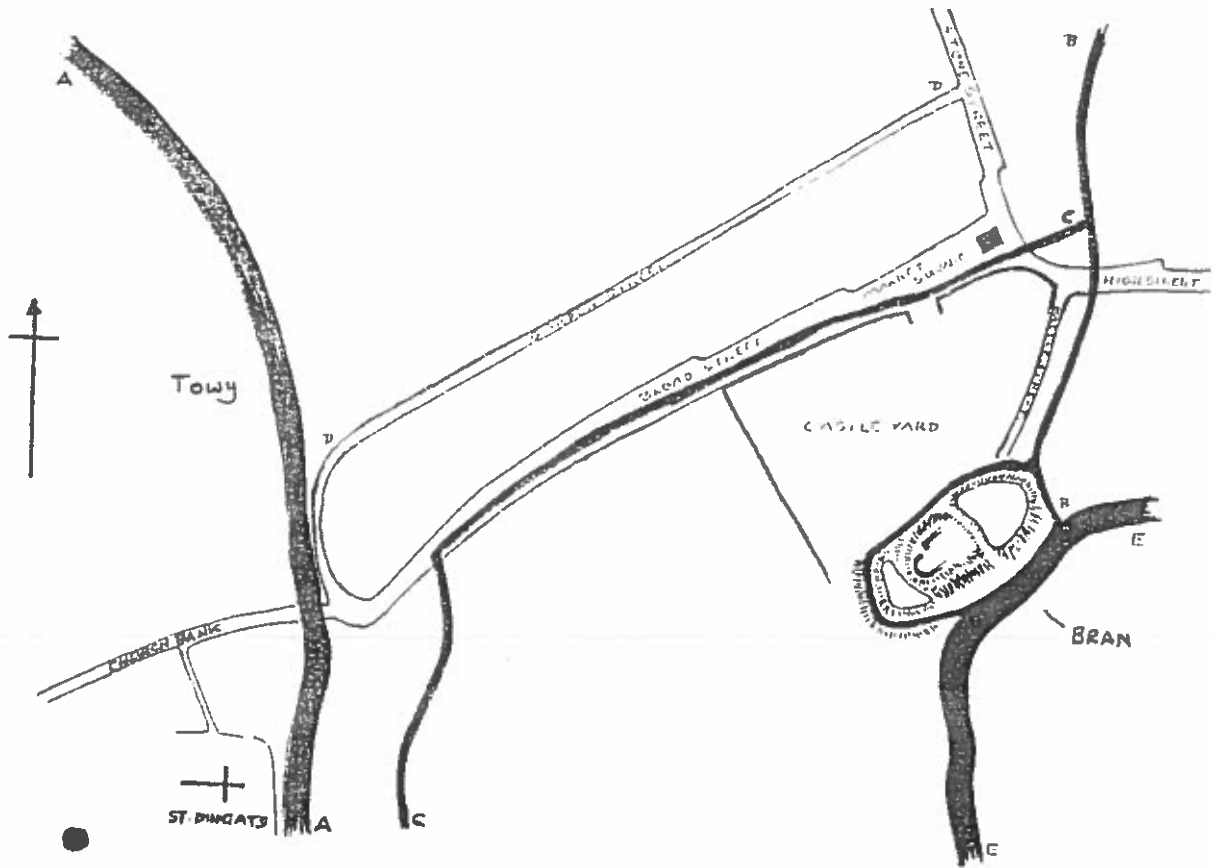


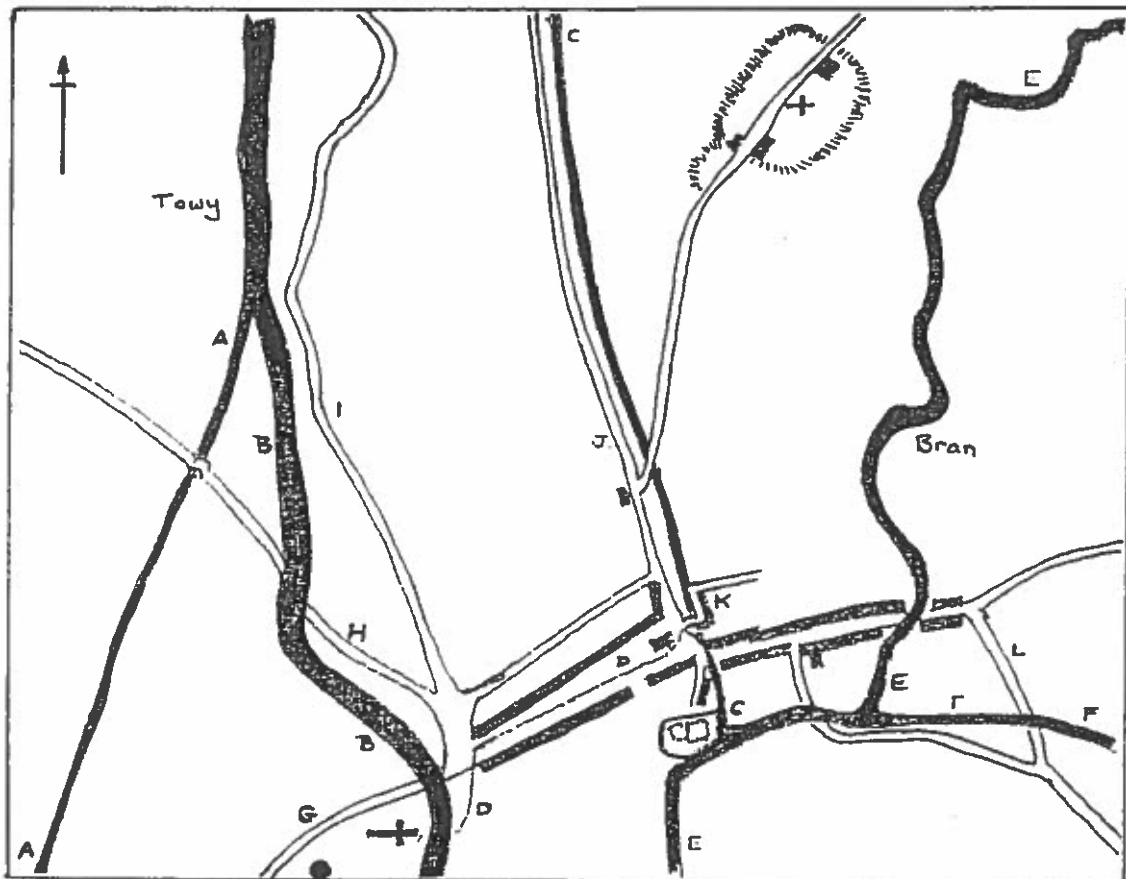
Fig 1

Palaeo-channels



The Site

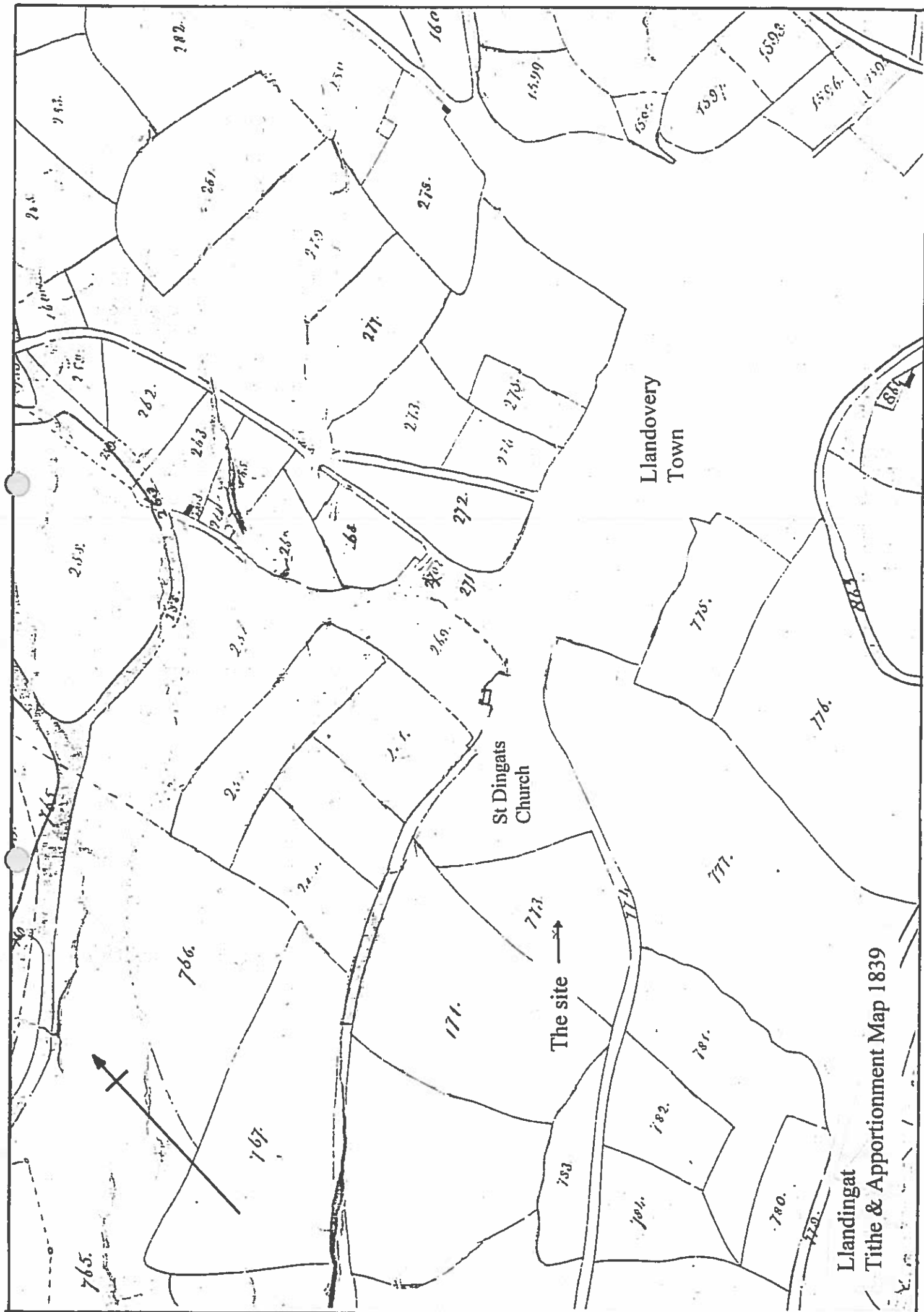
LLANDOVERY. THE CHARTERD BOROUGH OF 1485



The site

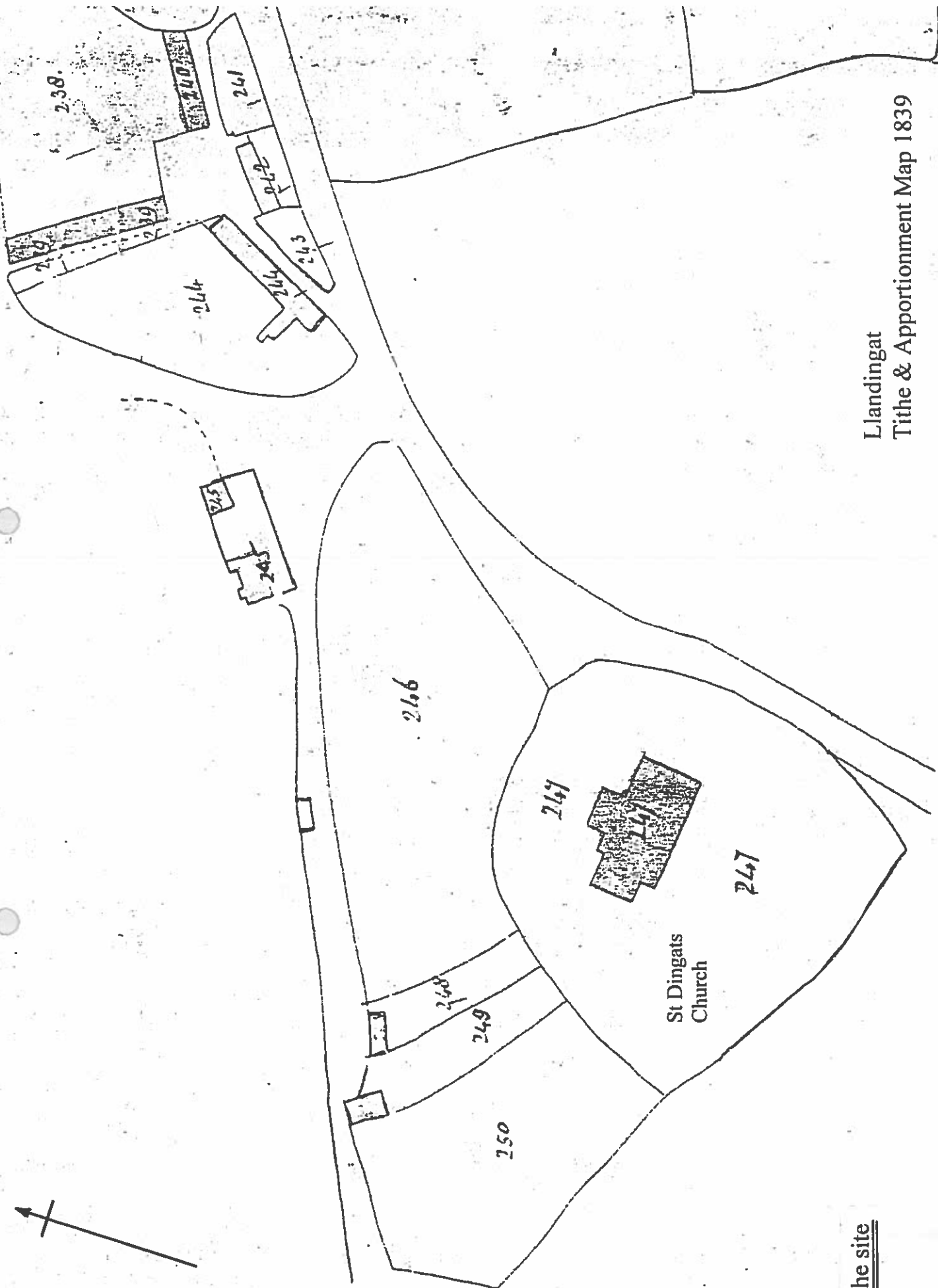
LLANDOVERY IN 1675

Fig 2



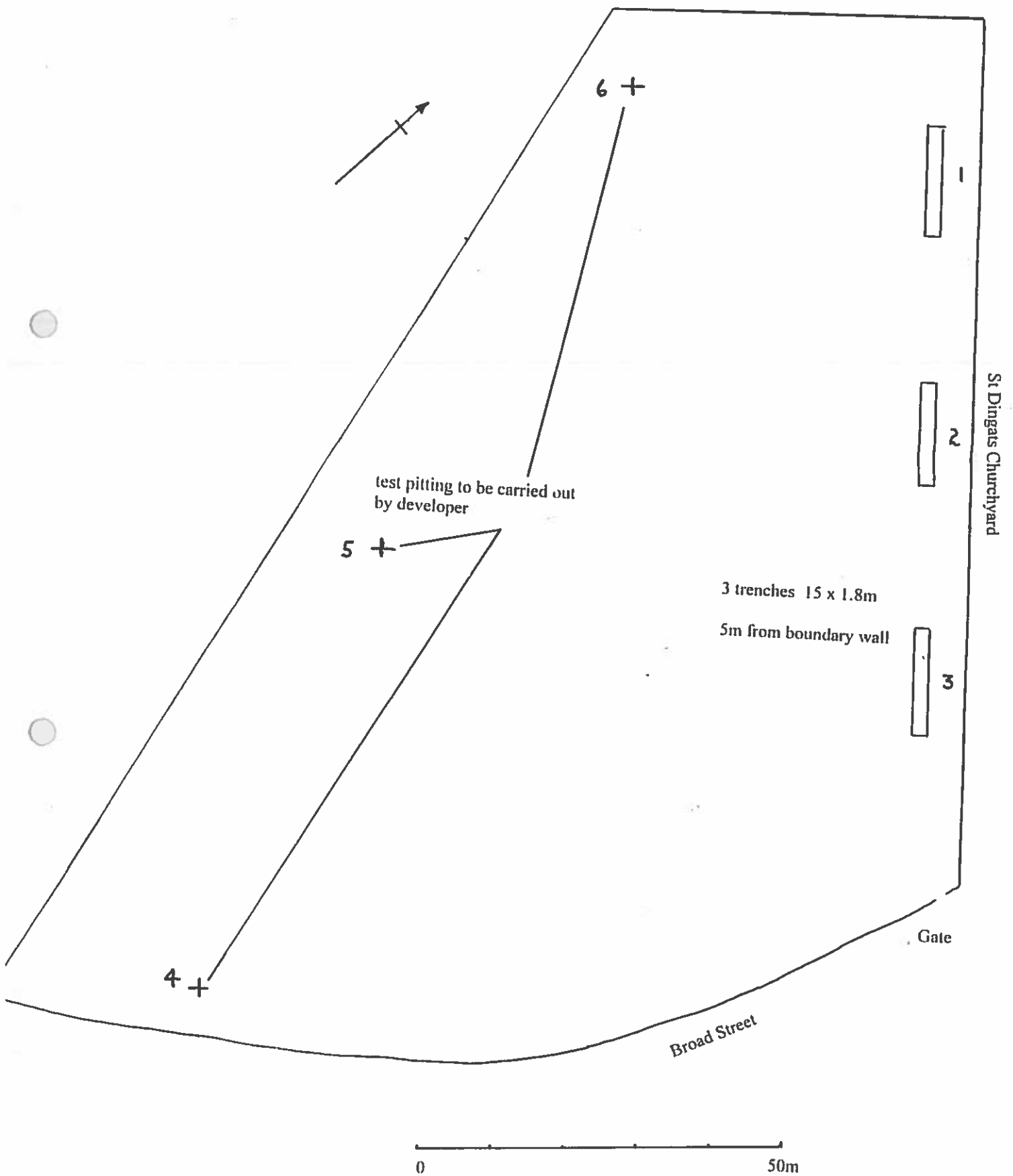
Llandingat
Tithe & Apportionment Map 1839

The site





Land at Church Bank, Llandovery.



St Dingat's, Llandoverly

Sectional Drawings.

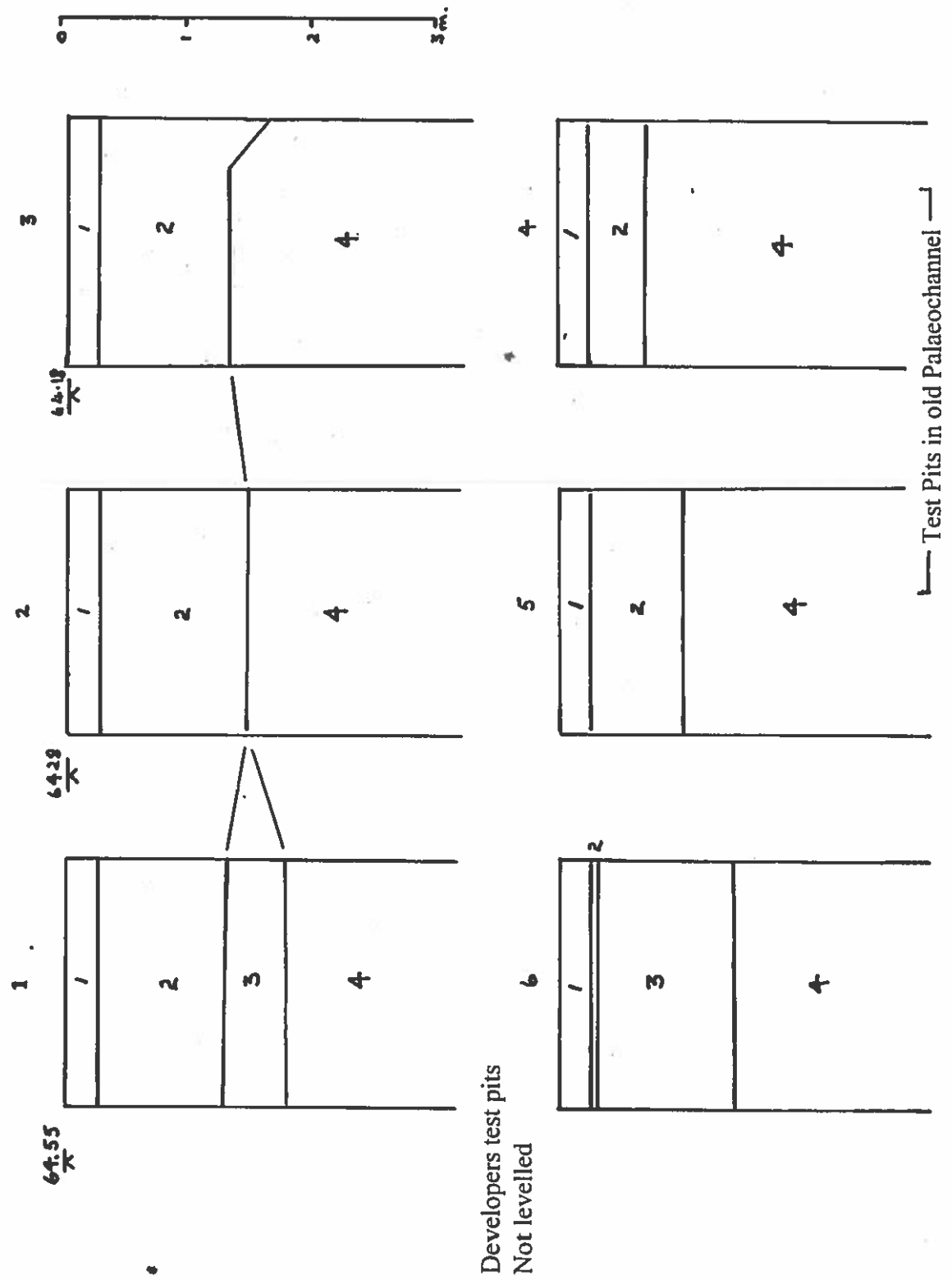


Fig. 8.

St Dingats, Llandoverry



Trench 1

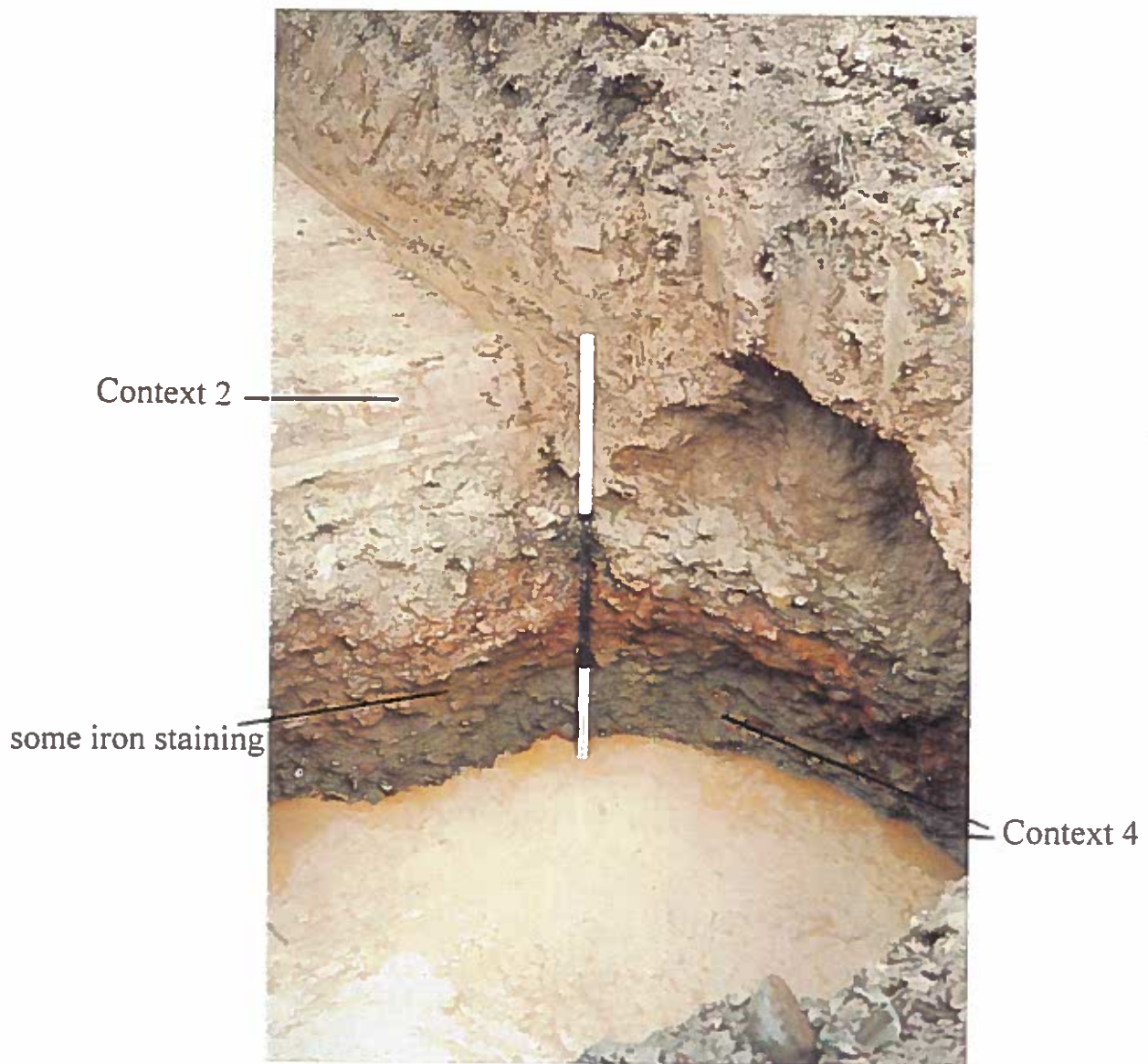


Trench 2

Context 4

Context 3

St Dingats, Llandovery



Trench 3