

SOLVA

Name and Tenurial History

There are varying opinions about the etymology of the placename Solva. The earliest reference (c. 1200 AD which is early for Welsh place-names) is from Giraldus Cambrensis, "in valle de Saleuach". From this it is clear that the settlement took its name from the River Solfach. Dr B. G. Charles, in his *The Placenames of Pembrokeshire* suggests that the Welsh *saef* or *salw* 'poor' or 'mean' is the main element, relating to the river, with the additional *bach* or small.

Solva is within the parish of Whitchurch, where the parish church of St David is sited. Not until 1879 was an established church, dedicated to St Aidan, built in Upper Solva. Local gentry and landowners, whose wealth was based on agriculture and the rents from their estates, were not slow to see the economic opportunities the port and harbour offered. The landowners of Llanunwas (the Laugharne and then in the 19th century the Harries family) owned property in Solva - the 1841 Tithe Schedule shows Gilbert James Harries owning 34 properties - 'cottage and garden' or 'house and garden'. He owned the Sand Quay (see below under Harbour). The Lort Phillippes of Lawrenny owned most of the land east of Solva and it was presumably from Lawrenny Quay that much of the limestone, coal and culm that was the mainstay of Solva's early 19th century trade was shipped. Also typical were substantial farmers like Thomas Raymond of Gwar-y-Coed, (between Lower Solva and Middle Mill) whom the Tithe Schedule of 1841 shows as letting out 27 houses, cottages and land and who also had a stake in shipping. His 18th century equivalent was Abel Hicks, master mariner who owned Lower Tremanhir farm and went on to be a shipowner. The older system of ship ownership divided into 64 shares - essentially a means of spreading risks and providing opportunities for those with modest amounts of capital - meant that many of the 'middling sort' of wholesalers, retailers and craftsmen, farmers and fishermen had a stake in Solva's ships.

The diverse social history therefore of Solva - agricultural settlement, fishing village, port and harbour, centre of wholesale and retail trade, manufacture and processing of raw bulk materials (limestone), holiday village - are reflected in an equally diverse built heritage. These range from cottages and terraces, to larger detached houses of late 18th/early 19th century date, chapels and a Victorian Church, warehouses, a mill (site of) smithy (site of) and a variety of shops, inns and taverns, limekilns, a multiplicity of stone walls and variety of roads, tracks and footpaths, steps, gardens (rear and front) and other open areas to quays and other harbour 'furniture'. The enlarged insets from the Tithe Map of 1841 for Whitchurch parish are also reproduced here to show how much of the built inheritance of Solva was already in place by 1840, after which the town declined from its height of prosperity and high population levels.

Economic History

Agriculture

In the Middle Ages land, and more importantly a water mill, were held at *Saluach*, *Saluach Sybwin* and *Salvach Inferior* by the Bishops of St David's by Welsh forms of tenure. The earliest record is from 1326, in the The Black Book of St David's, a

survey of the Bishop's lands. The mill was 'Middle Mill' or *Felin Ganol*. The present day Corn Mill and Mill House on the east bank of the river Solva adjacent to Middle Mill Bridge is a Grade II Listed Building of 18th-to mid 19th century date but may well be on the medieval site. The two locations for groups of tenants holding bovates of land by Welsh tenure seem to be the present day Upper and Lower Solva. These were probably hamlets with attached communally cultivated arable fields, traces of which are still evident in enclosed bundles of strip fields. It is likely that the layout and development of Upper Solva, whose plan seemed so haphazard and irregular to travellers like Richard Fenton in the early 19th century, may have been influenced by the alignment and boundaries of former strip fields as its growth accelerated in the early 19th century alongside the newly improved road to St David's.

The export and processing of the products of the agricultural hinterland, principally corn, but some oats and barley, and the importing and production of lime for the fields, were the mainstay of Solva's economic success as a port. (see attached description by Samuel Lewis from his *Topographical Dictionary of Wales* 1833). The physical reflection of this in the town plan and buildings was in the warehouses at the head of the creek and on the west side of Main Street in Lower Solva and in the limekilns and the former corn and furze mills.

Harbour and Port.

The earliest reference to the use of the creek is from 1365, from the Cathedral Accounts in the *Liber Communis*, when a shipment of limestones was made to Solva - but the more usual port for St. David's was its own Porth Clais. Solva is included in the Leland's list of 'litle creakittes' in north-west Pembrokeshire in the 1530s thus: 'Solvach, otherwise Salverach, a smaull creke for ballingars and fischar botes. And hither resortith a litle fresch water'. A balinger was a small coastal trading vessel of the 15th and 16th centuries. The 1566 *Report of the Commissioners to suppress Piracy* lists ports creeks and landing places in Pembrokeshire and Solva is included. George Owen, in 1603 describes it as 'a portlet for small shipping and safe upon many necessities'. By the early 17th century there is record of trade with Ireland. Lewis Morris, in his *Plans of Harbours, Bays and Roads in St George's Channel* of 1748, has a useful chart of Solva and considered it to be an excellent harbour capable of improvement. The short-lived copper mines at Dinas Fawr west of Solva probably had little impact on the port, but the widespread trade in illicit wines, spirits and tobacco in the early 18th century made use of the convenient, safe and yet relatively remote Solva creek.

Solva's rapid development as a port however dates from 1756 when a shipping company was formed and by 1773 some half dozen sailing vessels were based there. The company also built no less than 9 warehouses. Solva was the obvious place as a base for the assembly and transport of the iron and timber for the first Smalls lighthouse in 1775. Again in 1856, from the specially constructed Trinity Quay Solva was the base for the import of Cornish granite, where it was dressed and trial assembly made for the second stone built Smalls Lighthouse.

Fenton gives a valuable picture of early 19th century trade from the port (See Appendix 2 for his description) principally export of corn and imports of coal, culm and limestone (from upper Milford Haven). Warburton (in his 1944 *History of Solva*

reports brigs of 150-200 tons and at least 15 smacks based there in 1843. By 1851 the population was 1,252 and at least 9 warehouses stood in lower Solva. Some cargoes of oats, barley and butter went to Bristol in 1852 but by 1856 Solva like many other small coasting ports in remote locations was feeling the adverse effects of the new railway which had reached Haverfordwest in 1853. The use of the port as a base for building the second Smalls lighthouse was thus a welcome boost to the local economy. In the later 19th century small scale coastal shipping and the Irish Sea trade kept alive the use of sailing vessels, but the development of the cargo steamship in the second half of the 19th century meant that vessels got bigger. Thus in 1871, an RNLI report considered the water in the 'little cove' only sufficient for small coasters and fishing vessels. A Lifeboat House was built on Trinity Quay in 1869. By the end of the 19th century the limekilns themselves were going out of use as the market for artificial fertilizers grew; by 1908 4 out of the original bank of 12 limekilns on the Gribin had been demolished. Trinity House sold off their quay to the Aberaeron Steamship Co. who operated the Bristol boat until the early 20th century. The Solva and District Farmers Co-operative was formed in 1914, and they took over the Quay. Feedstuffs continued to be brought in by the few remaining coastal steamers of the inter-war years, notably the 'Ben Rein'. Paul Raggett recalls the summer season use of Solva Harbour in the 1930s by the South Wales Sea Fisheries patrol vessel, the 'Feather'. After the war the development of leisure sailing and fishing has developed apace and is part of the economic resource of the present day community.

Fishing.

This, the earliest no doubt of the uses of the harbour, still survives as its only commercial use today. In the middle ages and into the 18th century the herring fishery was a mainstay for Pembrokeshire. Tenby and Milford were the main ports but Solva too would have had its fleet of Tenby luggers. Much of the catch was salted and barrelled for export and storage for winter use. Some shore facilities - a salt-house, local coopers would be needed but it is not known whether there were such at Solva. Small scale herring fishing from open boats continued on into the 19th and early 20th centuries. Today is the part time and leisure (line) fishermen who catch a variety of fish. Commercially however, the north coasts of St Bride's Bay are the preserve of the lobster and crab fishery. Typical vessels are 18-36 foot open boats with inboard engines and a cuddy, and power winches for hauling pots. In 1982 there were 19 inshore vessels; I do not have figures for the situation today (1999).

Retail and wholesale trade.

The principal exports and imports of corn and lime were interdependent. Their physical reflection was in grist mills and warehouses, and in limekilns. To process this bulk cargo, both in its raw and finished state coastal limekilns sprang up everywhere in Pembrokeshire, partly because they were close to the outcropping source material or that it was easier to transport limestone and coal, the fuel of the kilns, by sea and because they were accessible to local farmers. George Owen, in his *Description of Pembrokeshire* of 1603 gives a remarkably detailed account of the geology of the limestone, how it was burnt for lime and the benefits it brought to the soil - where once were furze and fern there was now sweet grass and corn. Interesting also, in view of Solva's Sand Quay, are his comments that where lime had previously been used 'it is now changed for a better kind of husbandry . . . which is sanding their ground'. In the later 18th century lime might be mixed with sand and seaweed as a general fertilizer.

The bank of limekilns on the southern side of the harbour below the Gribin is well known and protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Other individual kilns were closer to the streets and houses of Lower Solva. This was a seasonal trade, with the kilns inactive in the winter. The farmers would often assist at the kiln to reduce costs and be ready with their carts to get the slaked lime back to their fields. The reason for the concentration of kilns below the Gribin is obvious - easier to offload the limestone and culm fuel from ships and accessible by carts from the foreshore between tides and via an old track back up to the farms on the south side of Solva. The large kiln at the foot of the Gribin path ornamented by anchors and gargoyles survives, another is now part of a garden wall at the bottom of Solva Hill. The two on the Main Street were demolished in 1872 to make way for the Methodist Chapel; another, behind Harbour House has also gone. Fenton remarked on the pall of smoke over Lower Solva when the kilns were being fired.

Another mineral resource was local stone, particularly the hard doleritic granite of the Middle Mill quarries. There was no shortage of local building stone, for houses, walls, quays etc. An interesting photograph reproduced by Paul Raggett shows a pile of Middle Mill gravel behind the harbour quay where the Car Park is now, presumably for export.

Tourism and leisure.

Even in 1811 Fenton speaks of Solva beginning 'to be frequented in the summer months by such as wish for an airy, healthy situation, with a charming sea prospect.' . Travel along the coast road from Haverfordwest to St David's, via Solva, the preserve of the wealthy few in the coaching era, increased as the railway came to Haverfordwest. From mid century onwards, with the decline in population, properties were available for summer letting and those forced to emigrate for work might return for visits. Sir Gilbert Scott's restoration of the Cathedral at St David's brought an ever-increasing volume of visitors, also appreciative of the beauties of St Bride's Bay. 'The St David's Omnibus left the Hotel Mariners at Haverfordwest on Tuesdays and Saturdays and, from 1875, the Mail Coach ran daily, but the passengers had to get out and walk up Newgale and Solva hills. . . A motor omnibus service was inaugurated in 1916'. (Miles, 1993). Undoubtedly the added attractions of leisure boating, boat trips and the annual Regatta and races added to Solva's appeal. The donation of The Gribin to the National Trust in 1937 by members of the Williams family of Tan-yr-Allt was followed by purchases in 1940 of land flanking the Harbour. Other acquisitions followed and the Coast Path, the linking thread of Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, has ensured the preservation of open spaces and the coastal cliffs with access for walkers. This has created a distinctive 20th century kind of leisure landscape celebrating the natural environment. Whilst many regret the passing of local shops of all kinds and the heavy pressure of motor traffic, at least the tourist industry allows certain kinds of retail outlets to flourish, whose success is partly ensured by being located in older buildings

Location and Topography

Solva is located on the north side of St Bride's Bay some 4 km north west of the long storm Beach of Newgale and 6 km east of St David's. The dog-legged shaped tidal creek of the River Solva and the steep sided valley between Lower Solva and Middle

Mill are part of a 'ria' or drowned valley formed as a meltwater channel at the end of the Ice Age. The river flows out to the sea between high cliffs of a narrow entrance with offlying rocks and, further out, the islet of Green Scar. Apart from the smaller Porth Clais it is the only tidal creek along an indented high cliffed coastline and the only really safe anchorage between Milford and Fishguard.

Lower Solva lies at the head of the tidal inlet at the lowest bridging point of the river and is constrained by topography into a long narrow single street development mainly along the west bank of the river forming Main Street and Prendergast. A broader level area has been created on the valley floor by cutting back into the steep sides on the west of main street and by terracing (notably for the former 'Nectarium' and by building up on the eastern side by revetting the river bank. Terracing and building up continues at Prendergast but mainly for gardens - remarked upon by Fenton.

Upper Solva is in a more open situation inland of the cliffs on the west side of the harbour mouth and upper valley sides to the west and south west of Lower Solva and is now much the bigger settlement. It is clear that the settlement was extending south of the road in Fenton's day and again, to cope with the sloping situation a considerable amount of terracing has taken place. The other factor of course affecting the settlement layout is the desire for a prominent position 'with a sea view'. The headland area bounded by pen yr Aber (formerly Harbour View Road), itself terraced into the slope and revetted on its downslope side seems to have developed from the 1790s. The main areas of modern expansion have been to the north and north west up the hillslope over former fields, whose shapes and boundaries suggest for open fields.

Settlement Plan Form

The Development of the Harbour.

The harbour is and was a key element in the development of Solva. It is vital therefore that any account of its topography takes the maritime history and uses into account. An over-dominant land-based perspective can lead to a disregard for and destruction of important parts of the maritime heritage through a failure to appreciate and understand how the harbour was used.

It is clear that from its earliest days and right through the era of coastal sailing vessels that ships entered Solva on the tide and dried out on the reasonably level, relatively sandy bottom of the creek. At lower water springs the harbour dries out half way across the outer pool, at neap tides vessels of moderate draught could stay afloat in the outer pool but any trading vessel needed to come in to unload and load. Cargoes of limestone and coal were mainly taken off by bringing up horse and cart to the dried out vessel.

Lewis Morris's chart shows only a single 'key' and that on the southern, 'Gribin' side of the harbour perhaps where the bank of limekilns are. It was obviously of benefit if ships could come alongside to unload their cargoes of limestone, coal and culm for firing the kilns. Fenton alludes to 'the remains of an old pier, but injudiciously placed'. From the order of his description, I suggest that this may have been built off Trwyn Caws where there is a rocky shelf. The name may be a contraction of 'cawsy' or causeway Fenton suggests a harbour wall from the eastern side would be beneficial -

but this was never built. The base of a large mooring post survives, eloquent and interesting testimony to the need for mooring posts, warping bollards, well-secured iron rings etc to secure the 200-300 ton brigs and, equally importantly manoeuvre them in the days of sail without engines to assist. The 1841 Tithe map shows 2 quays, one probably the Sand Quay and another, further towards Lower Solva must be incorporated within the present harbour side path to Trinity Quay. Another quay or wharf shown on the second edition 1906 1:2500 map is on the north side of the upper harbour where the present day car park is. This was probably only usable on spring tides but corn from the warehouses could be conveniently loaded. Although not marked as such some kind of weir across the mouth of the river may have restricted access as it definitely does today. The raising of levels and creation of open ground at the head of the creek undoubtedly pushed the tidal limit away from Lower Solva. The whole of this area has been altered by the construction of a carpark and the neat revetment of areas both sides of the river mouth by stone walls; the slip is also modern. It is not known whether any record was made of previous structures or of slighter but significant elements like mooring posts marked on the 19th century 25 inch maps prior to this work of the creation of the fine walkway to Trinity Quay (in the 1970s ?). Paul Raggett suggests that there was a small 'Fishermen's Quay' enlarged and subsumed within the 1856 Trinity House Quay with its new access road..

The Cornish granite for the new Smalls Lighthouse was brought in by a steamships and a steam tug towing barges took the dressed stones out to the Smalls Reef. A new road was cut down the steep slope to the new quay. The well there was incorporated into the new quay. This is marked as a well on Lewis's 1748 chart and was the best of the watering places so valued by early coastal traders easily accessible from their boats (see Leland above). A Lifeboat house and slip were built at the seaward end of this Quay in 1869 and is now used by the Yacht Club to store their tenders. The steeply ascending path up to Fort Cottages from the top of the slip is an early one, perhaps giving access to Fisherman's Quay.

The most recent development is the flight of steps and handrails built in 1995 together with refurbishment of the Quay for the historic landing from the Royal Yacht *Britannia* of the Queen, on her visit to St David's. This and mooring facilities for yachts ensure that the Quay remains in active use. It is unfortunate though (if my information is correct) that resurfacing of the Quay with tarmac has covered up marks which were the actual assembly templates for the foundations of the Smalls Lighthouse. I do not know whether any drawings or photographs of these were made before this happened.

The development of the road system.

In the medieval and early modern period the main road from Haverfordwest to St David's went through Whitchurch, crossing the River Solfa at Middle Mill. Any route down the valley therefore to Solva creek would have been down to today's Prendergast. I agree with Broom that, sketchy as the details are, Ogilby's Road Map of 1675 shows the main road passing through Solva, although it is not named as such. According to Paul Raggett the early through road led down to the head of the creek and crossed the foreshore (at low tide) before the bridge was built. Emanuel Bowen's *Map of South Wales* of 1740 clearly shows and labels 'Silvach Bridge' and, close by the symbol used for a mill. Solva Mill was also then in existence by the early 18th century. A schematic representation of houses either side of the road is shown in

Upper Solva. A clear sign of the quickening pace of economic life in early 18th century Dewisland were improvements to the road from Lower to Upper Solva said by Warburton to have been promoted by Canon Holcombe of St David's as a private road. This must have involved rock cutting to create a wider terrace and good foundations for the retaining wall of the curve from the top of the slope into Upper Solva. In 1791 parliament authorised improvements to the road between Haverfordwest and Solva and Fenton talks of the turnpike' road though no gates appear to have been built. The next major improvement of this road was in 1840 when it was further widened by cutting back against the steep sides of the hill and lowered to reduce the gradient. The two levels can be seen on entering Upper Solva. between High Street and Wilcock Street. The curve at the top is massively revetted with masonry walls.

The history of river and water source management.

The earliest management of the River Solva between Middle Mill and the creek was the construction of a leat to power Solva Mill which was lead off from the river at Hendre Ruffydd and carried on a curving level course down the eastern side of the valley. The overflow from the mill leat re-entered the river just above Solva Bridge. Although somewhat schematic, Lewis Morris's 1748 chart appears to show a tidal creek extending as far up as Solva Bridge. For the settlement to expand it was necessary to reclaim land from the sides of the creek and the foreshore and an essential prerequisite would thus be to confine the river below the bridge and mill within stone banks thus allowing level ground to be made up either side at a high enough level to escape all but the worst floods or tidal surges. This allowed an extension of garden areas, useful for a variety of storage purposes, to extend from frontages on the east side of Main Street and for a terraced row of cottages (New Street) to be built down to the edge of the river wall. This canalization of the river must also have led to the creation of The Gamlyn - an area of open ground now used as the children's playground. A Solva fishmerchant and landowner is said (Boyle, 1998) to have leased 'Gamblyn Field' to John Phillips, promoter of The Smalls lighthouse, for his engineer Henry Whitesides to use as his shore base. Here the prefabricated timber cabin and cast iron base stanchions were set up before being transported out to the Smalls reef. Whitesides subsequently bought an acre of the field and built Harbour House for himself, where he died in 1824. This was also the site of the annual fair - *Gwyl Sant Ioan*, or Gooseberry Fair held in July.

Leland remarked on Solva creek's fresh water and before mains water (brought in in 1938) both Upper and Lower Solva depended on a number of springs and wells. There was a pump (recently reinstated as a decorative feature) at 'Cornel pwmp' at the southern end of Prendergast. The fountain still surviving at Trinity Quay in its fine arched recess was a valued water source as was the spring and well at the Fort Cottages. The steep slopes between Upper Solva and the lower northern sides of the Harbour around Trinity Quay are criss-crossed by paths now used for leisure but formerly for access to the wells and springs and the Harbour itself. In Upper Solva the 1906 2nd edition 25inch map shows a well close to the main road half way between St Aidan's Church and Mount Pleasant Chapel and the Yellow Pool, or *Pwll Melin*. The well site is now occupied by a telephone kiosk and the pool filled in and made into a turning area outside the Spar shop. It was used for watering cattle and horses.

Sites and Areas of Archaeological Interest.

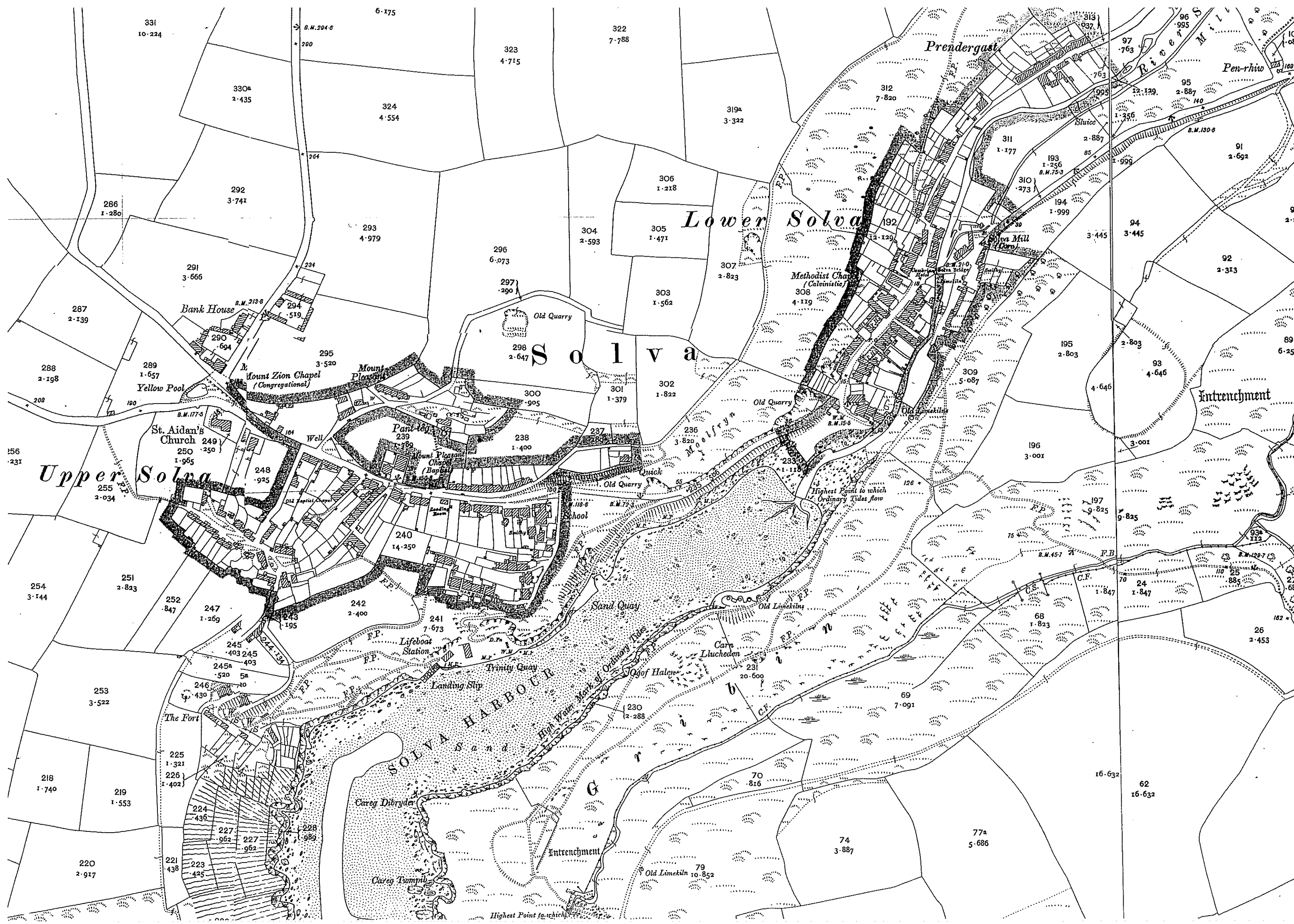
A list of record entries for Solva (not exhaustive for Listed Buildings for which see R. Scourfield's Conservation Area Appraisal) in the *Sites and Monuments Record* is given below. The production of this statement has enhanced the base record. It is evident from casual finds as well as the survival of upstanding Iron Age hillforts and enclosures that there was a fairly dense prehistoric occupation. The rapid development of Solva, both Upper and Lower, in the early 19th century with consequent quarrying, terracing and levelling up of the landform is likely to have removed most traces of medieval occupation. An attempt has been made in this Statement to indicate what is of significance in the harbour itself and what has been lost or covered up. Any future enhancement schemes there or elsewhere should certainly be subject to archaeological comment, mitigation and/or recording. It is hoped that the production of this Statement, which has concentrated on form and function, gives a better understanding of the importance of the minor features as well as buildings which contribute to the historic environment of Solva.

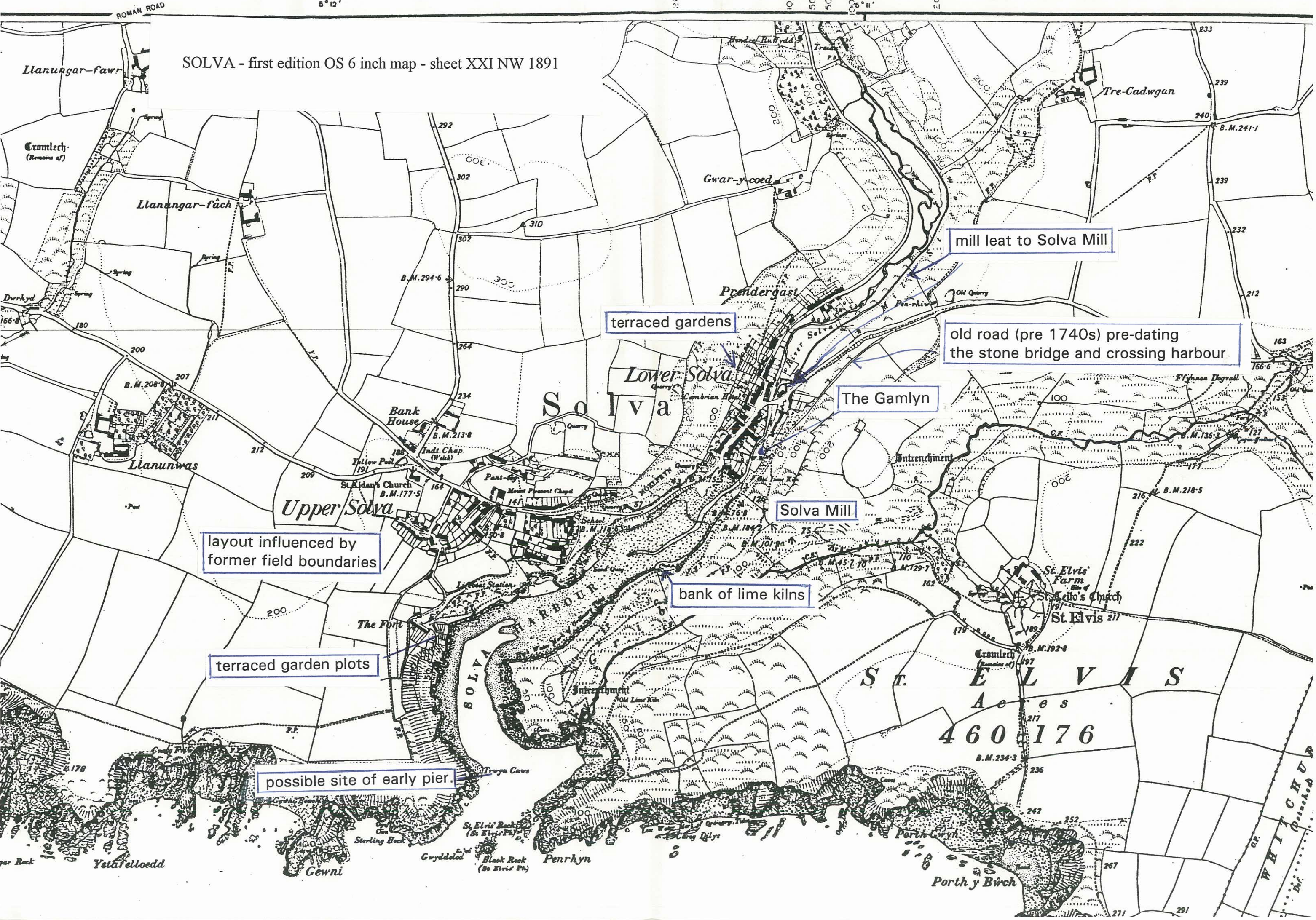
Bibliography.

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- Trevor Broom, 1995 *A History of Solva*. (privately published ISBN 0 9525879 6 3).
- Peter Davies, 1989 *Dewisland Limekilns* (Merrivale Books, St. David's)
- Barbara George, 1964 *Pembrokeshire Sea-Trading before 1900*. (Reprinted from *Field Studies* vol 2. no. 1)
- Paul Raggett, 1990 *Solva: An introduction to village life and guide to the walks*. (privately published).

PRN	NGR	NAME	TYPE OF SITE	PERIOD
2780	SM80202390	GRIBIN	HILLFORT	Iron Age
4370	SM79942435	ST AIDAN'S	CHURCH	Post Med
4612	SM80742451	SOLVA MILL	MILL	Post Med
4645	SM805242	SOLVA KILNS	LIME KILN	Post Med
9834	SM8024	SOLVA	FINDS	Iron Age
11146	SM800242	UPPER SOLVA	FINDS	Neolithic
11357	SM8020;SM7520	SOLFACH;SOLVA	FINDS	Mesolithic;Neolithic
12184	SM7020;SM7520	ST DAVID'S COAST	FINDS	Bronze Age
12228	SM800240	SOLVA HARBOUR	FINDS	Mesolithic
12348	SM8024	SALVACH	SETTLEMENT	Mediaeval
16171	SM79922442		CHAPEL	Post Med
18000	SM80652447		CHAPEL	Post Med
23719	SM79922439	YELLOW POOL	POND	Post Med
23738	SM80252424	SOLVA	SCHOOL	Post Med
23739	SM80732445	MOELFRYN	SMITHY	Post Med
23740	SM80712446	MOELFRYN	LIME KILN	Post Med
23741	SM80332382	GWADN	LIME KILN	Post Med
23742	SM80252445	MOUNT PLEASANT	QUARRY	Post Med
23743	SM80542433	MOELFRYN	QUARRY	Post Med
23745	SM80662432	SOLVA	LIME KILN	Post Med
25735	SM8020?	THE SMALL CHAPEL	CHAPEL	Post Med
32621	SM80152410	SOLVA	LIFEBOAT HOUSE	Post Med
32622	SM80312417	SAND SLIP;SAND QUAY	QUAY;SLIPWAY	Post Med
32623	SM80392427	SOLVA	QUARRY	Post Med?
32711	SM80212412;SM80132410	TRINITY QUAY	QUAY	Post Med
32713	SM80232399	SOLVA HARBOUR	LANDING PLACE	Modern?
32714	SM80532427	SOLVA HARBOUR	SLIPWAY	Modern
32715	SM80612430;SM80582424; SM80232411	SOLVA HARBOUR	SEA DEFENCES	Modern
32716	SM80662430	SOLVA HARBOUR	TUNNEL	Modern
32717	SM80242395	SOLVA HARBOUR	COMMEMORATIVE STONE	Modern
32720	SM80612433	SOLVA	LIME KILN	Post Med

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32720	SM80612433	SOLVA	LIME KILN	Post Med





SOLVA - first edition OS 6 inch map - sheet XXI NW 1891

mill leat to Solva Mill

terraced gardens

old road (pre 1740s) pre-dating the stone bridge and crossing harbour

The Gamlyn

Solva Mill

bank of lime kilns

layout influenced by former field boundaries

terraced garden plots

possible site of early pier