

LAND AT PONTARGOTHI, CARMARTHENSHIRE: ARCHAEOLOGICAL APPRAISAL



Prepared by Dyfed Archaeological Trust
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LAND AT PONTARGOTHI, CARMARTHENSHIRE: ARCHAEOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

Gan / By

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**LAND TO THE REAR OF CRESSELY ARMS, PONTARGOTHI,
CARMARTHENSIRE: ARCHAEOLOGICAL APPRAISAL**

Summary

Due to the proximity of an Iron Age defended enclosure and a medieval chapel, to a proposed development on land to the rear of the Cresselly Arms, Pontargothi, Carmarthenshire (centred on NGR SN50602180), an archaeological appraisal was considered necessary by the archaeological advisors to the Local Planning Authority (LPA) before the planning application for the site was decided.

The proposed development lies within the Tywi Valley Historic Landscape Characterisation area that contains recorded archaeology from a range of sites of all periods.

Documentary and cartographic research has revealed that initially three sites (PRNS 728, 16417, 49276) may be affected by the proposed development. However, this was reduced to two as PRN 16417 was found to be located c.1km to the south of the proposed development area.

In addition to these sites the route of the Roman road between Carmarthen and Llandeilo has been suggested to be present within close proximity of the proposed development area.

INTRODUCTION

Project Proposals and Commission

A proposed development on land to the rear of the Cresselly Arms, Pontargothi, Carmarthenshire (centred on NGR SN50602180), lies in close proximity to an Iron Age defended enclosure and the site of a medieval chapel. The LPA's archaeological advisors recommended that an archaeological appraisal of the site be carried out before the planning application was decided.

Scope of the project

The appraisal consisted of the examination of available sources of information such as maps, published works and aerial photographs held in the Historic Environment Record¹ (HER) and a site visit. The results are intended to identify the extent and character of the archaeological resource, to assess the likely and potential impacts of the scheme on that resource and, if required, to outline a possible programme of further works to mitigate those impacts. The appraisal should be seen only as the first stage of the archaeological process and does not preclude the possibility that further archaeological input may be required prior to, or during, the proposed development.

Abbreviations used in this report

All sites recorded on the county HER are identified by their Primary Record Number (PRN) and located by their National Grid Reference (NGR). References to cartographic and documentary evidence and published sources will be given in brackets throughout the text, with full details listed in the sources section at the rear of the report.

¹ Held and managed by Dyfed Archaeological Trust, The Shire Hall, Llandeilo.

SUMMARY OF THE HISTORIC LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT

The proposed development area lies within Historic Landscape Characterisation Area 191 Nantgaredig – Derwen Fawr (Murphy and Ludlow 2000). This area was identified during Historic Landscape Characterisation assessments carried out on landscapes recorded in the *Register of Landscapes of Outstanding Historic Interest in Wales*.

Extract From The Historic Landscape Characterisation Area (Murphy et al 1998)

This is a very large character area lying on the northern side of the Tywi valley and stretching from Nantgaredig in the west to beyond Llandeilo in the east. The valley was the major historic route corridor into West Wales and the Roman road from Carmarthen to Llandovery followed the interface between the alluvium and the solid geology on the north side of the Tywi, whose course is now more-or-less followed by the modern A40(T). During the historic period most of the area lay within the southern half of the commotes, and later hundreds, of Cetheiniog and Maenordeilo. The two commotes were held of the independent Welsh lordship of Cantref Mawr until the establishment of the county of Carmarthen in 1284. The relative homogeneity of the present landscape may represent a historical unity of land-use. Ridge and furrow cultivation has been recorded in the Tywi floodplain but this northern margin may always have been largely pasture, and north of Llanegwad lay an area of waste or common called 'Killardun Forest'. Enclosure within the area, furthermore, may have been of relatively late date, the majority of the fields being medium-sized and regular. Llanegwad is the only early nucleation within the area. It may represent a pre-Conquest church and settlement with a radial system of boundaries possibly perpetuating an infield-outfield system. It is the site of a parish church, a motte and later - under the patronage of the Bishops of St Davids - a small borough, now a village. To the north at Allt-y-ferin is a second motte which belonged to the Lordship of Carmarthen to the east, and may be the site of the 'Dinweilir' taken by the Welsh and recaptured in 1159. It was associated with a former chapel. The remainder of the area is divided between the parishes of Llangathen and Llandeilo Fawr. At the confluence of the rivers Cothi and Tywi lay the core of Maenor Brunus, mentioned in the 12th century Llandaff Charters but probably pre-Conquest in origin, with a chapel at Llandeilo Rwnws on the banks of the Tywi and another near Pontargothi. The significance of the location was such that it was named (as 'Ystrad Brwnws') as the site of a battle between the Normans and the Welsh in 1116; the use of the Tywi Valley as a routeway led to its being the site of a further battle, near Derwen Fawr, in 1257. Maenor Brwnws was granted, at an unknown date but probably during the late 12th century, to the Premonstratensians at Talley. The post-dissolution grange was represented by the gentry houses of Wythfawr and Ystradwrallt, which had been established by the 1540s; the latter may retain the 'Ystrad' element from Ystrad Brwnws. Penllwynau also lay in Llandeilo Rwnws estate and was later a gentry home Cilsaen near Llangathen is a late Medieval house that became part of the Golden Grove estate in the 17th century but its origins are earlier, being associated with the later princes of Deheubarth and termed 'manor' in early Post-Medieval documentation. Court Henry has 16th century origins and is associated with a small area of 19th century parkland and a de novo 19th century church, while a second area of parkland at Allt-y-ferin is contemporary with the house of 1869. The establishment of modern communications also influenced the settlement pattern. A turnpike, established in 1763-71 more-or-less followed the line of the Roman road.

The straight courses through Pontargothi and Derwen Fawr were however constructed under Thomas Telford in the 1820s with the subsequent development of the two villages, and Felindre. The area is also crossed by the former LNWR main West Wales railway line which was opened, as the 'Vale of Towy Line', by the Llanelli Railway and Dock Company in 1858. The present settlement of Nantgaredig is entirely modern and developed around the railway station.

Description and essential historic landscape components

A very large character area on the north side of the Tywi Valley and including part of the lower Cothi valley. It rises from the flood plain of the Tywi at 20 m OD in a series of low rounded hills that achieve a maximum height of over 120 m. The whole area is enclosed by medium-sized fields which are under pasture, nearly all of which is improved - there is very little rough or rushy ground. The fields are divided by earth banks topped with hedges. Hedges are generally well maintained and in good condition. Many possess distinctive trees. There are numerous small stands of deciduous woodland, particularly on steep valley sides where it may be ancient, with conifer plantations on the very steep valley sides of the Cothi. Dispersed farms provide the dominant settlement pattern. Older survivors, such as Llethr Cadfan provide time-depth to the settlement pattern not readily obvious in the extant buildings. Superimposed on to this ancient pattern of dispersed farms is a more recent nucleated settlement pattern. Llanegwad village has Medieval origins but surviving buildings indicate that its development belongs to the 18th- and 19th-century, with rapid expansion in the 20th-century. Felindre is a loose cluster of 19th- and 20th-century dwellings, but other nucleated, clustered and linear villages such as Nantgaredig, Pontargothi and Derwen Fawr, while having a small core of 19th-century buildings, are now essentially late 20th-century developments. The area has, like much of the Tywi Valley, a parkland feel and small areas of 19th century emparking surround Allt-y-ferin House and Court Henry. The low accessible hills to the north of the flood plain allowed for the development of an important east-west routeway along the Tywi valley, from the Roman to the modern period, represented by the present A40(T). The modern settlements described above, except for Nantgaredig which developed around a railway station, tend to be located along this road.

The recorded archaeology of such a large landscape area includes a range of sites from all periods. The majority of archaeological features relate to agricultural land-use but there are also two motte castles, of which Allt-y-ferin was added to an Iron Age inland promontory fort, Bronze Age standing stones and a henge monument at Nantgaredig.

The parish church of Llanegwad was rebuilt in the 1840s and like the 19th century church at Court Henry is unlisted. The Grade II listed Llethr Cadfan farmhouse and its Grade II listed granary are both 17th century, and the early 19th-century Llwynhelig House and stable-block are also both Grade II listed. The area otherwise has a relative lack of distinctive buildings but the largely 18th- and 19th-century Court Henry, which is Grade II* listed, preserves an earlier core and the home farm has good quality masonry buildings. Farmhouses are generally of 18th- and 19th-century date, stone built with slate roofs. Most are of two storeys and three bays, in the Georgian tradition, but larger examples are present. Associated with the larger farmhouses are large assemblages of farm buildings, these are often*

arranged in a semi-formal basis reflecting the higher status of the holdings. Farmhouses in the vernacular tradition are present, but in a lesser number than those in a polite style. Smaller farmhouses and those in the vernacular tradition tend to have a more limited and smaller collection of farm buildings, often compacted into a single range.

The boundaries of this area are not clear cut as most of the neighbouring areas share similar historic landscape components. Part of the boundary to the south lies against the flood plain of the Tywi, Dinefwr Park and Llandeilo town; these provide reasonably clear definition. Elsewhere to the south, and to the west and east there is no hard-edged border between this area and its neighbours, but rather a zone of change.

The Proposed Development Area

The proposed development area is located to the rear of the Cresselly Arms at Pontargothi, Carmarthenshire (centred on NGR SN50632181). The site is currently under pasture and is bounded by hedges. Topographically the area slopes down gently to the west whilst to the east a substantial river terrace aligned northeast southwest was noted. No visible archaeological features or deposits were noted during the course of the site visit.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE

Known Archaeological Sites

An initial search of the regional HER revealed that no known archaeological sites are located within the proposed development area. However, eight sites were identified in close proximity to the development area.

PRN	NGR	Site Name	Type	Period
726	SN50602186	Pontargothi Chapel; St Marys Chapel; St Hernin's Chape; Llanyhirin?	Chapel	Medieval
4747	SN50562176	Pont-Ar-Gothy	Bridge	Medieval
6773	SN50552177	Creselly Arms	Inn	Post Medieval
8976	SN50782176	Salutation Inn	Cist grave cemetery?	Early Medieval
16417	SN506219	Cae'r Capel; Allt Abercothi	Hillfort?	Prehistoric?
16970	SN50622175	Siloam	Chapel	Post Medieval
29735	SN50672172	Cothi Bridge Hotel	Public House	Post Medieval
49276	SN50602186	Pontargothi Chapel; St Marys Chapel; St Hernin's Chapel; Llanyhirin?	Ecclesiastical Establishment	Early Medieval

Table 1: Sites within close proximity to the proposed development area.

From the information retrieved from the initial HER search it is possible that three sites may be affected by the proposed development. These are:

PRN	NGR	Site Name	Type	Period
726	SN50602186	Pontargothi Chapel; St Marys Chapel; St Hernin's Chapel; Llanyhirin?	Chapel	Medieval
16417	SN506219	Cae'r Capel; Allt Abercothi	Hillfort?	Prehistoric?
49276	SN50602186	Pontargothi Chapel; St Marys Chapel; St Hernin's Chapel; Llanyhirin?	Ecclesiastical Establishment	Early Medieval

Table 2: Sites that may be affected by the proposed development.

PRN 726 Pontargothi Chapel; St Mary's Chapel; St Hernin's Chapel; Llanyhirnin? (NGR SN50602186)

Map evidence has revealed that the proposed development site is located in a field once known as 'Cae'r Capel' (Tithe Map and Apportionment, 1839). This suggests a medieval chapel may once stood in this vicinity, although no above ground remains are visible today and its precise location is unknown. Documentary sources suggest that:

'Near Cothy bridge are the remains of an ancient and dilapidated edifice, formerly a chapel of ease to the mother church (Llanegwad), but now converted into a stable : there were anciently several other chapels in the parish' (Lewis, 1833).

The Royal Commission Inventory for Carmarthenshire records that in 1917 enquiries into the location of the chapel had been unproductive but records that the chapel was bequeathed the sum of 40s by Sir Rhys ap Thomas, for a vestment for 'our Lady chapel at the bridge end of Cothy' (RCAMW, 1917, 118).

Recent archaeological research into the chapel suggests that it was once located in the middle of the field on a level platform on top of the river terrace which occupies the field (Ludlow, 2004). At present it has not been possible to demonstrate if this is the actual chapel site.

There is also some suggestion that the chapel may have been associated with the lost medieval hamlet of Llanyhirnin that was located on the south bank of the Cothi near its junction with the Towy where it is crossed by a bridge on the A40 (*ibid*). Again, the precise location of the hamlet is unknown, but it would appear that it may be within or in close proximity to the proposed development area.

In addition to the chapel and possible associated hamlet there is the likelihood that a burial ground would also be present in close proximity.

PRN 8976 Salutation Inn Cist Grave Cemetery? (NGR SN50782176)

A possible early medieval cist grave cemetery that was reported to have been uncovered in the garden behind the Salutation Inn, which may suggest the presence of an ecclesiastical site in the vicinity. However, the site was not viewed archaeologically and the presence of the cist grave cemetery is unsubstantiated.

PRN 16417 Cae'r Capel: Allt Abercothi Hillfort (NGR SN506219)

The site was identified through aerial photographic coverage of the area as amorphous earthworks (DAT AP93-64.12, AP93-65.13) and has been interpreted as a possible prehistoric hillfort.

However, recent archaeological fieldwork has led to the site being reassessed as it was found that the site is located c. 1km (NGR SN50632092) to the south of the proposed development site c.200m to the northeast of the property known as Allt Abercothi (Murphy *et al*, 2008).

Therefore the proposed development would have no impact on this site.

PRN 49276 Pontargothi Chapel; St Mary's Chapel; St Hernin's Chapel; Llanyhirnin? (NGR SN50602186)

The previously discussed chapel (PRN 726) was probably of medieval date. However, there is the suggestion that it may have replaced an earlier ecclesiastical site, possibly of early medieval date. The dedication of the chapel to St Hernin, a 'Celtic' saint points to the fact that this may be the case. As with the later medieval chapel the precise location of this ecclesiastical site is unknown although it is a possibility that it may lie within, or in close proximity to, the proposed development site.

However, the discovery of possible cist graves (PRN 8976; NGR SN50782176) to the rear of the Salutation Inn c.200m to the south east of the proposed development site may indicate it may have been located in that vicinity. Alternatively, it could be said that the ecclesiastical site may once have been associated with a very large burial enclosure.

A further suggestion would be that the Salutation Inn site was the location for the earlier ecclesiastical site which later moved to Cae'r Capel field. Although, again, it is not possible to conclusively prove this from the evidence available.

Roman Road (PRN 33946 and 33952)

The precise route of the Roman road between Carmarthen and Llandeilo in the vicinity of the proposed development site is unclear at present. However, it may be located close to the proposed development site on the course of the modern A40, or possibly c. 250m to the south (Schlee, 2005).

Aerial photographic survey has identified much of the route of the Roman road between Carmarthen and Llandeilo (James & James, 1984, 23-28). Within at c.1.5km radius of the proposed development site two separate stretches of Roman road have been identified from aerial photography

PRN	NGR	Site Name
33946	SN49212144	Barrwns
33952	SN52122174	Llwyn-Fortune

Table 3: Known sections of Roman road in a c.1.5km radius of proposed development site.

The Roman road was found to survive just below ground surface at nearby Llwynfortune Farm (SN5248221776) during a watching brief in 2004 (Schlee 2004). The river crossing may potentially have acted as a focus for roadside settlement or other activity in the Roman period.

Archaeological Potential

The presence of a medieval chapel (PRN 726) and possible early medieval ecclesiastical site (PRN 49276) in close proximity to or within the proposed development site suggests that the potential for encountering archaeological features and deposits from these periods is high. Additionally, the possibility of the presence of the hamlet of Llanyhirin along with a burial ground suggests the proposed development is located within a potentially archaeologically sensitive area.

The hillfort (PRN 16417), although recorded as within or in close proximity to the proposed development site will not be affected as recent archaeological survey has led to the site being reassessed and was relocated c. 1km to the south.

The line of the Roman road between Carmarthen and Llandeilo may pass close to the proposed development site. The river crossing may potentially have acted as a focus for roadside activity in the Roman period.

Conclusions and Suggestions

While it is possible that buried archaeological features or deposits relating to possible medieval or early medieval chapel sites may survive within the proposed development area, these sites may, however, be located elsewhere. The location of the cist grave cemetery at the Salutation Inn may suggest the chapel is located to the east of the proposed development. Nevertheless there is still potential for associated archaeology to be present within the development area. Likewise, there is also potential for Roman period archaeology within the development area. If archaeological features were proven to be present they have the potential to be complex in nature and of local or regional significance.

Sources

Map

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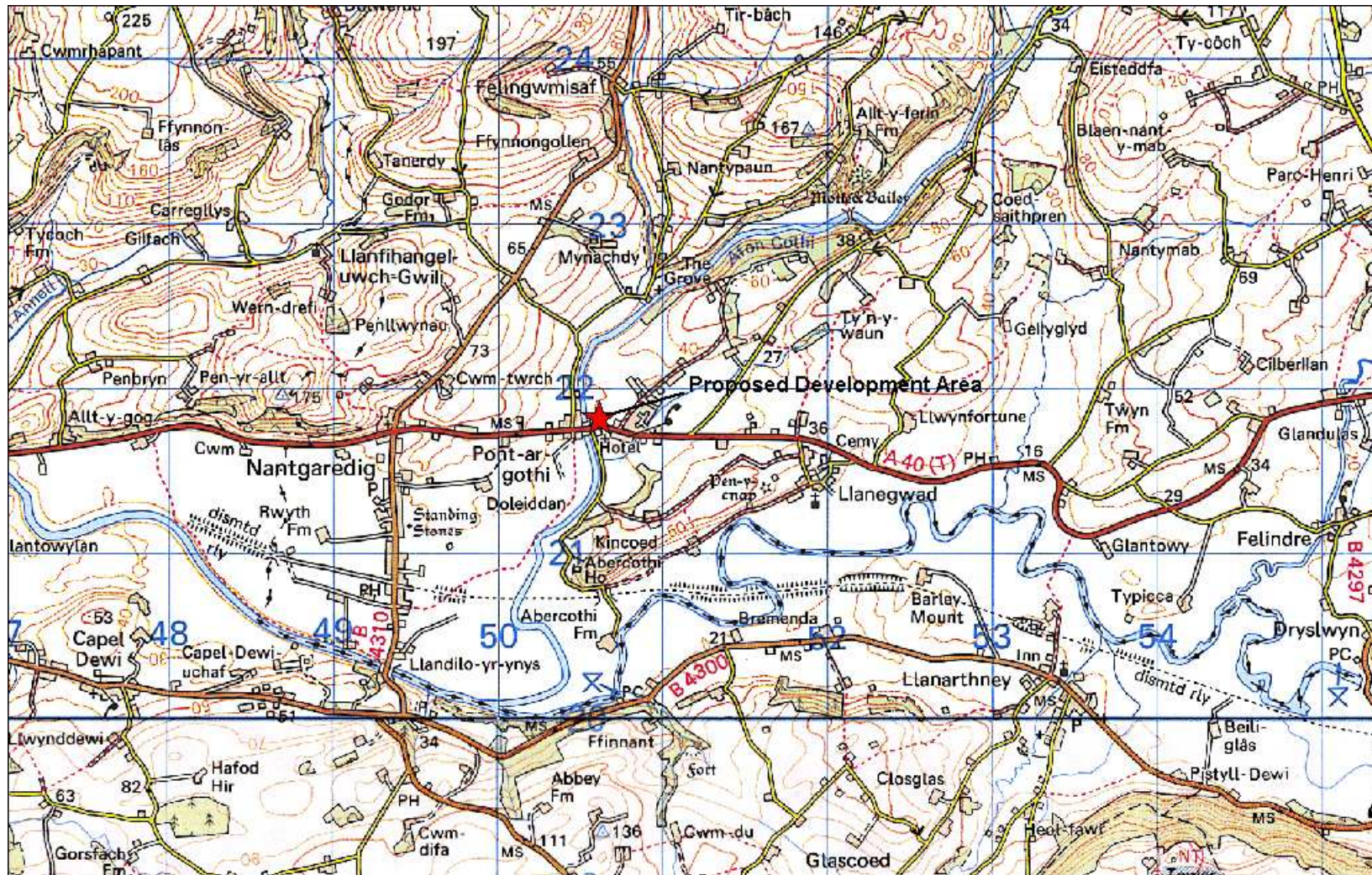


Figure 1: Location map of proposed development site based on Ordnance Survey



Figure 2: Plan of proposed development area supplied by Owen Banks

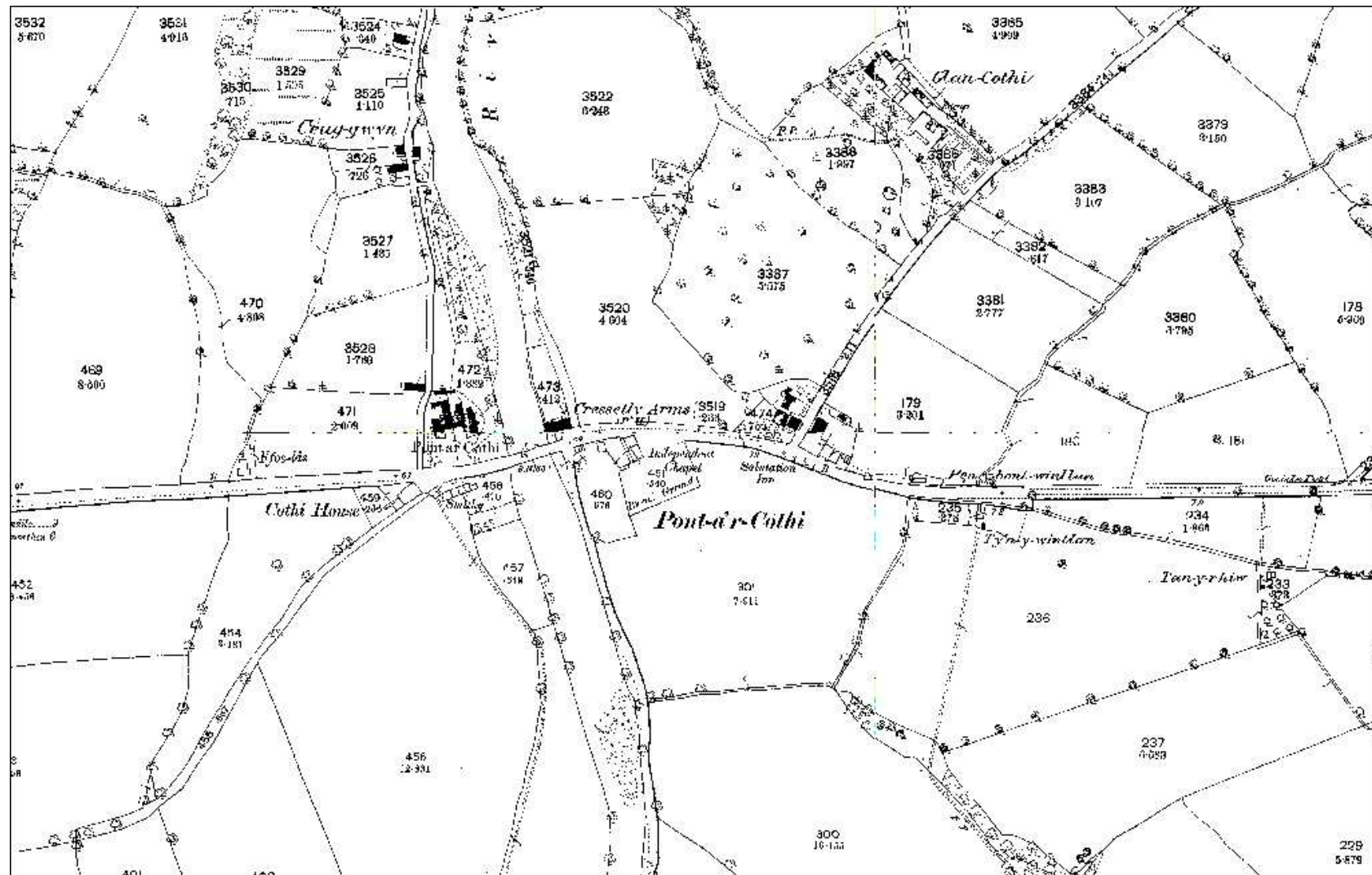


Figure 3: Extract of 1st edition Ordnance Survey Map

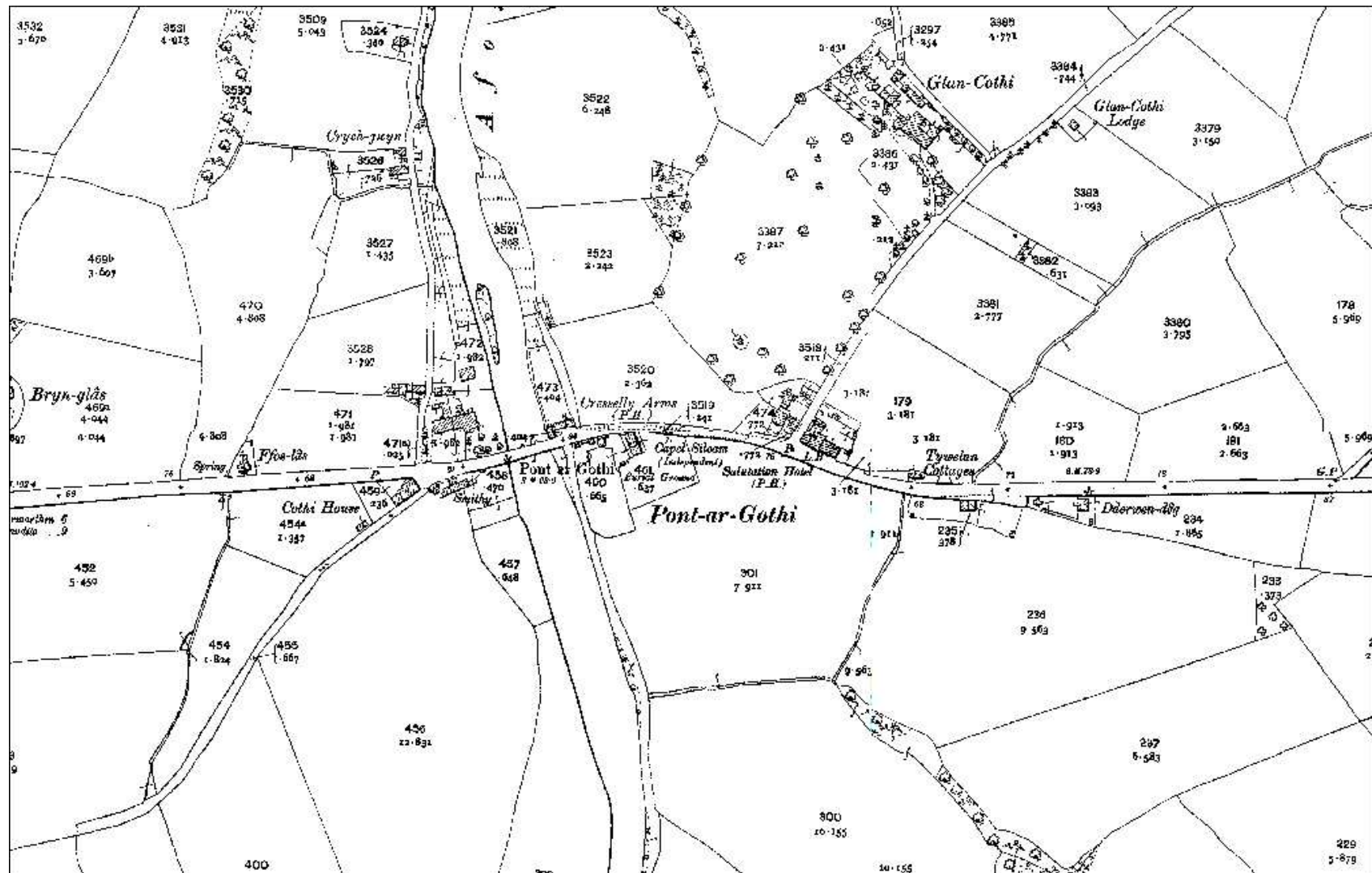


Figure 4: Extract of 2nd edition Ordnance Survey Map.

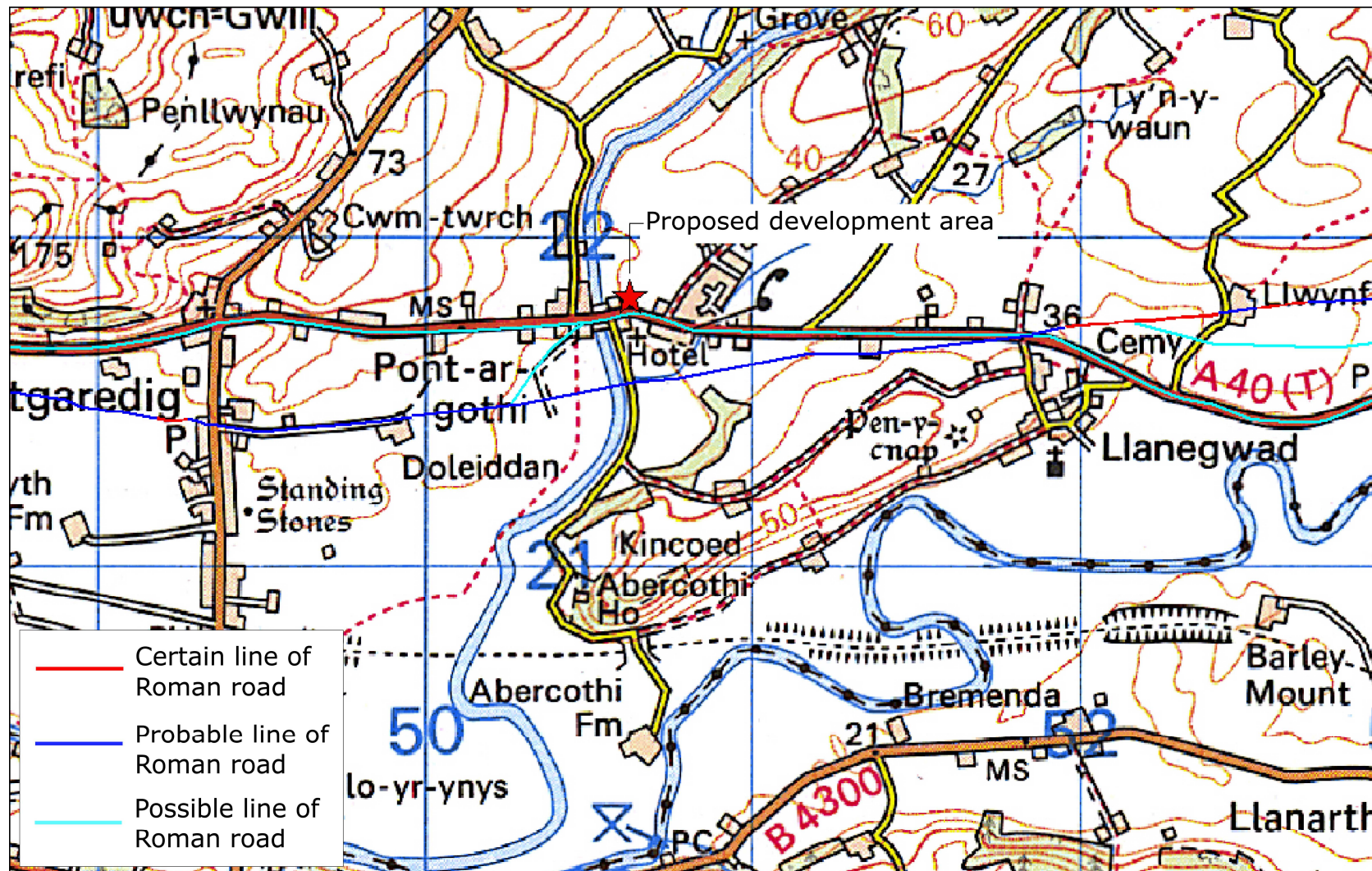




Plate 1: View of proposed development area from present access track.



Plate 2: North facing view of proposed development area.



Plate 3: South facing view of proposed development area.



Plate 4: Northwest facing view of river terrace.