

# THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE MEDIEVAL TOWNS OF SOUTHWEST WALES

## LLAWHADEN



*Llawhaden in 1993 with the medieval hospital in the right foreground (DAT AP93-71.28)*

Prepared by Dyfed Archaeological Trust  
For: Cadw



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REPORT NO. 2021-28  
EVENT RECORD NO. 125663  
CADW PROJECT NO. DAT 165

February 2021

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By

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# LLAWHADEN

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bishop of St Davids established at castle Llawhaden in 1115. A settlement probably developed outside the castle gates. In 1281 Bishop Bek founded a town and encouraged settlers. Initially the town was successful as in 1326 126 burgesses are recorded holding 174½ burgage plots, making it one of the largest towns in southwest Wales. However, the town of Llawhaden drops out of history and it is assumed it went into severe decline following the European-wide population crash of the mid-fourteenth century and was reduced to a village. As part of his foundation Bishop Bek established a hospital at the west end of the town – this was dissolved in 1535, but one building survives.

## KEY FACTS

Status: 1281 granted the right to hold a weekly market and two annual fairs. No town charter.

Size: 1326 126 burgesses.

Archaeology: Excavation at the medieval hospital revealed extensive archaeological deposits.

## LOCATION

Llawhaden lies in central Pembrokeshire (SN 072 174). It now has two centres: Llawhaden Castle and village occupy level ground at 90m above sea level; the parish church, bridge and mill lie to the east at the foot of a steep slope on the valley floor of the Eastern Cleddau at 20m above sea level (Figs 1-3). Narberth lies 5km to the southeast and Haverfordwest 12 km to the southwest. The former town of Wiston lies 4 km to the west. Llawhaden is now bypassed – the A40 trunk road runs 2 km to the south but formerly the town lay on the main east/west route with Llawhaden bridge the lowest bridging point of the Eastern Cleddau.

## HISTORY

There is good evidence for pre-Anglo-Norman religious use of the site of the parish church of St Aidan in the form of a Celtic dedication (St Aidan) and the presence of an early Christian monument. In the tenth century Llawhaden is listed as one of the seven bishop houses of Dyfed.

Llawhaden was a possession of the Bishop of St Davids; it was Bernard, who became the first Norman bishop in 1115, who built the first castle. The original earth and timber castle had been rebuilt in stone by the early thirteenth century, but it was Thomas Bek

from his appointment as bishop in 1280 who transformed it into a major fortified mansion. In 1326 two gardens are mentioned as well as stone buildings within the walls and wooden buildings outside the walls.

In 1281 Bek granted licences for Llawhaden to hold a weekly market and two annual fairs. In 1287 he established a hospital under the rule of a prior charged with the care of 'pilgrims, paupers, orphans, the old, weak and infirm', and endowed it with land. Settlers, mostly English, were encouraged to immigrate to the new town and by 1326 126 burgesses held 174½ burgage plots, making it one of the largest towns in southwest Wales. Market dues, tolls and rentals and leases made Llawhaden the most lucrative of the bishop's holdings. Building works are recorded at the castle in the second half of fourteenth century and later, but history is silent on the later fate of the town. It is assumed that its decline was as dramatic and rapid as its rise and that it did not survive the European-wide population crash of the mid-fourteenth century. In 1501 only the chapel element of the hospital remained active and this was dissolved in 1535, by which time Llawhaden was little more than a village.

## **MORPHOLOGY**

St Aidan's Church lies at the foot of a steep, wooded valley alongside the Eastern Cleddau just above what was until the post-medieval period the lowest bridging point of the river. Llawhaden Mill lies between the church and the bridge (Figs. 2-3).

Llawhaden Castle lies on the crest of the valley at 90m, over 70m higher than the church. It is likely that a settlement developed organically outside the castle gates prior to the foundation of the town in the late thirteenth century.

A triangular intersection of four small roads 200m to the west of the castle is assumed to be the site of the medieval market place. There is a loose grouping of nineteenth century and more recent houses at this intersection. To the west of the market place the main road through the village runs on level ground. There is undeveloped land on both sides of this road, although the seventeenth century Llawhaden House (the house burnt down in 2000) with a collection of outbuildings occupies a prominent position on the north side. The remains of the medieval hospital lie at the west end of the village and most modern housing in Llawhaden lies to the north and east of the hospital. Property and field boundaries to the north and south of this main road locate the position of former burgages and excavations at the site of the hospital indicate former burgages lay to the west of this site and possibly to the south.

Low earthworks on the south side of a lane running down southeast from the market place to the valley floor mark the locations of abandoned burgages (Figs 8 and 9).

Modern houses and gardens at the top end of this lane have encroached on some of these plots.

## **BUILDINGS AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS**

### **Scheduled Monuments**

There are three scheduled monuments in Llawhaden (Fig. 4):

Llawhaden Castle (PE024). The castle is also a listed building.

Llawhaden Bridge (PE023). The bridge is also a listed building.

Llawhaden hospital (PE162). The medieval hospital is also a listed building. Extant remains comprise a small, stone-vaulted structure, probably the infirmary hall.

### **Listed Buildings**

There are fourteenth listed buildings in Llawhaden (Fig. 4). Llawhaden Castle is listed grade I and St Aidan's Church and Llawhaden Bridge grade II\*. The remains of Llawhaden Hospital and the village pound are grade II as is Llawhaden House and the eight farm- and outbuildings associated with it.

### **Conservation Area**

Llawhaden Castle, village, church and bridge all lie within Llawhaden Conservation Area (Fig. 4).

### **Registered Parks and Gardens**

There are no registered parks and gardens in Llawhaden.

### **Registered Historic Landscape**

Llawhaden is not in a registered historic landscape.

### **Undesignated Historic Environment Assets**

There are approximately thirty-three historic environment assets recorded on the regional historic environment record of which several are duplicates of listed buildings or scheduled monuments and some are sites only known through documentary evidence (Fig. 5).

Of particular note is site 8898 on the valley floor on the east side to the Eastern Cleddau. This is an extensive crop-mark site discovered through aerial photography in 2009. The exact nature and date of the site is not certain, although it is recorded on the National Monument Record (411084) as a deserted medieval village. It is possible that this is a settlement predating the foundation of the town of Llawhaden in the late thirteenth century.

## **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).

1. Excavations and a geophysical survey were undertaken in the 1990s at the medieval Llawhaden Hospital, initially in response to a planning application to extend the car park to the Young Farmers' Club Hall lying immediately to the north of the standing remains of the Hospital. The geophysical survey detected extensive buried archaeology associated with the hospital as well as boundaries of possible burgage plots. The first excavation of 1992 following the geophysical survey, revealed complex archaeology including foundations of medieval walls, multi-phase boundary bank and medieval boundary ditches. The extant building was shown to post-date a much larger stone building. The second phase of excavation took place in early 1993 and the third in July 1993. Trenches were excavated outside and inside the extant hospital building. Finds consisted of *inter alia*, pottery dating from the twelfth century to the present day and medieval painted window glass. The extant hospital building was conserved at the same time as the 1993 excavations. References: Murphy 1993; Crane 1995 (32482).

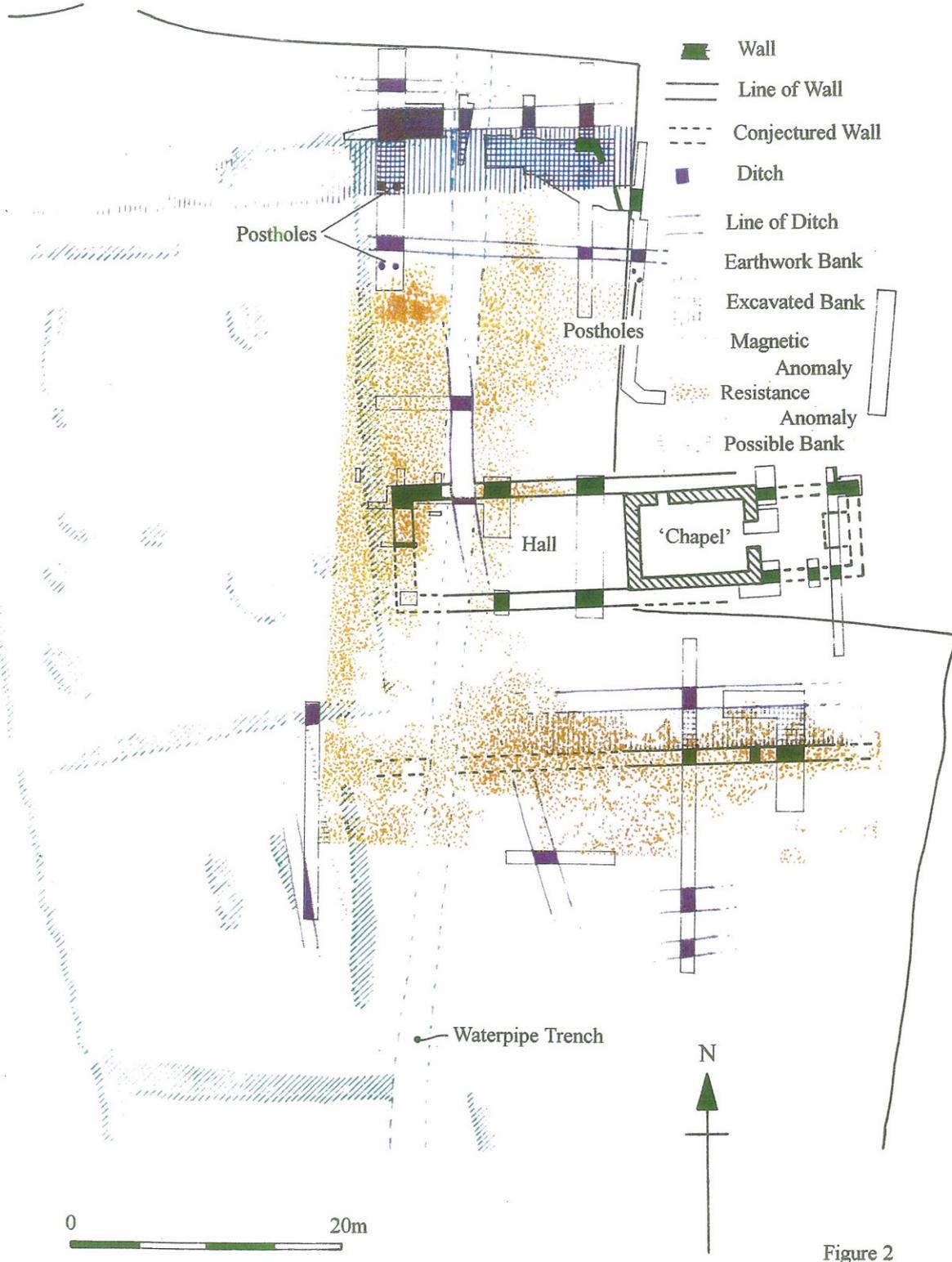


Figure 2

*Illustration from the 1995 Llawhaden Hospital report showing geophysical anomalies and the excavation trenches 1992-93.*

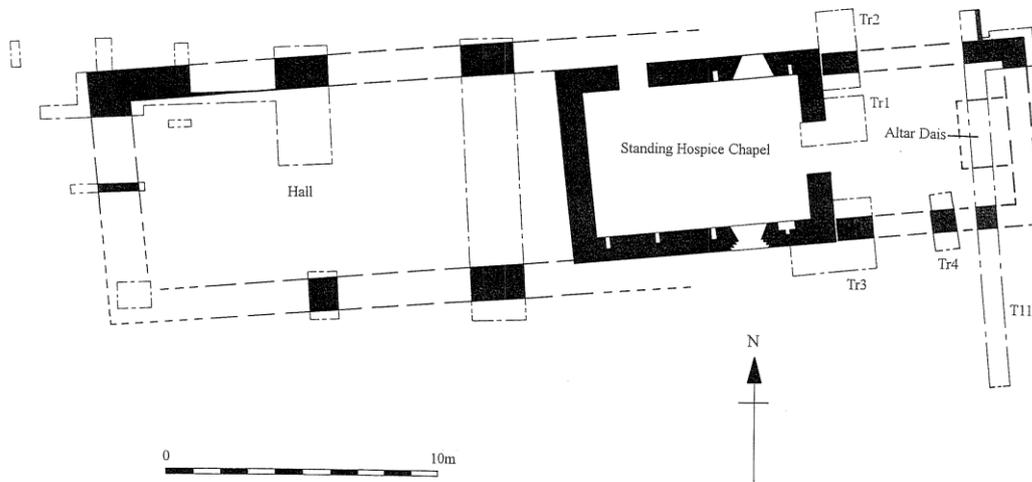


Figure 3

*Illustration from the 1995 Llawhaden Hospital report showing the excavated remains.*

2. Nothing of archaeological interest was noted during a watching brief conducted during the digging of foundation trenches for a new house at Bank Farm in 2015. References: Schlee 2015 (108640).



*The Bank Farm watching brief.*

3. Nothing of archaeological interest was noted during a watching brief for the construction of an extension to Tanglost House in 2005. Reference: Page 2005 (55440).



*The watching brief at Tanglost.*

4. A watching brief was maintained during the excavation of a trench for new drain at Castlevie Care Home close to Llawhaden Castle. For most of its course the trench was dug through topsoil and modern overburden. Nothing of archaeological interest was noted. Reference: Page 2006 (54920).



*The drainage trench with Llawhaden Castle in the background.*

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL**

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

Other than at the medieval hospital there have been very few archaeological interventions at Llawhaden and those that have occurred have been small-scale. There is a considerable amount of open space in Llawhaden, land which was laid out as burgage plots in the late thirteenth century and then abandoned and left undeveloped since the mid-fourteenth century (Fig. 7). These areas have great potential to address research themes on town plantation and town decline.

There have been several small-scale late twentieth century and later housing developments in the historic core of Llawhaden which had no archaeological intervention.

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Turner R 1991. Lamphey Bishop's Palace Llawhaden Castle (Cardiff: Cadw).

### **Databases and online references**

Dyfed Historic Environment Record <https://www.archwilio.org.uk/arch/>

Cof Cymru <https://cadw.gov.wales/advice-support/cof-cymru>

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

Research framework for the Archaeology of Wales

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

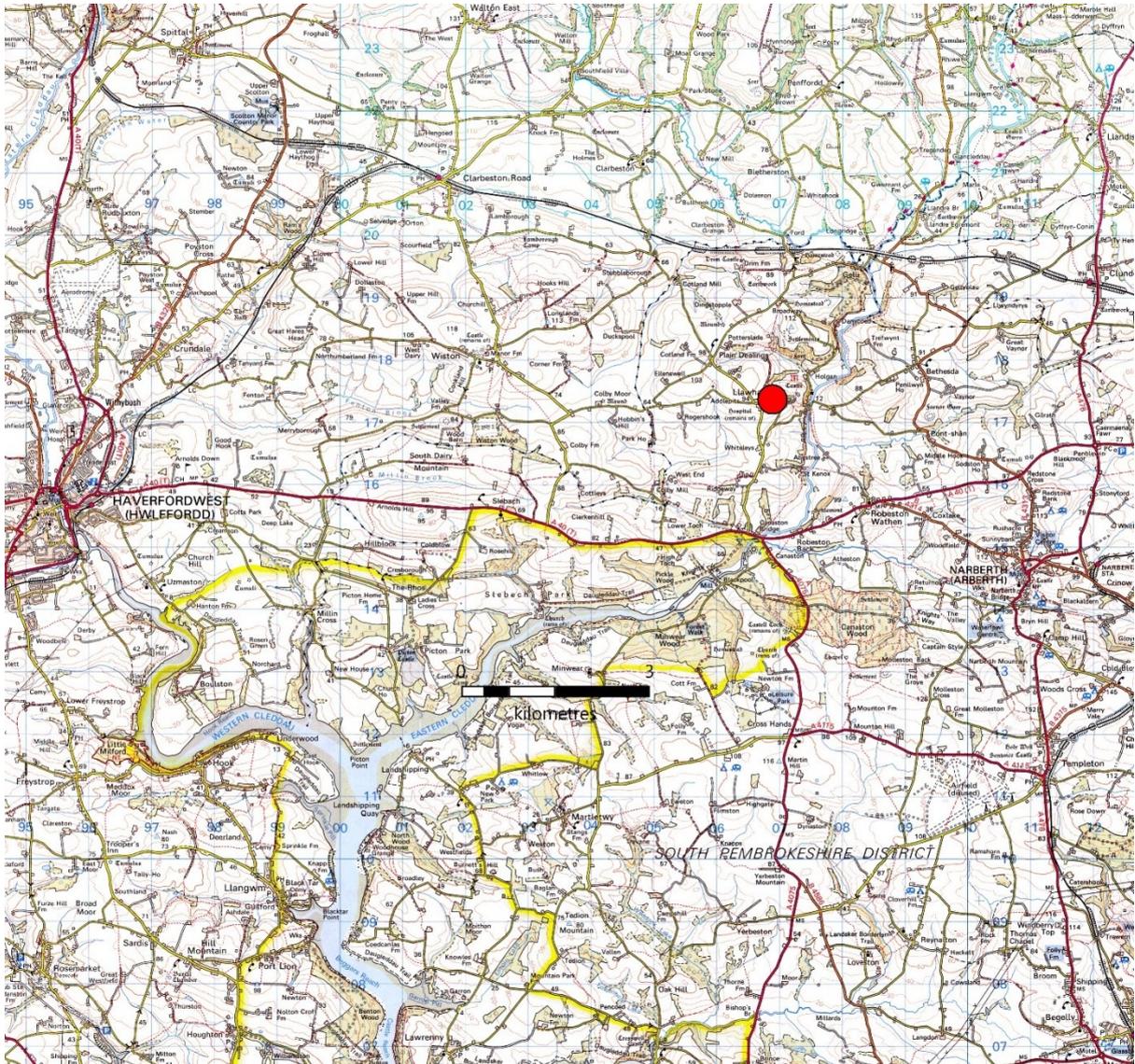


Figure 1. Location map.

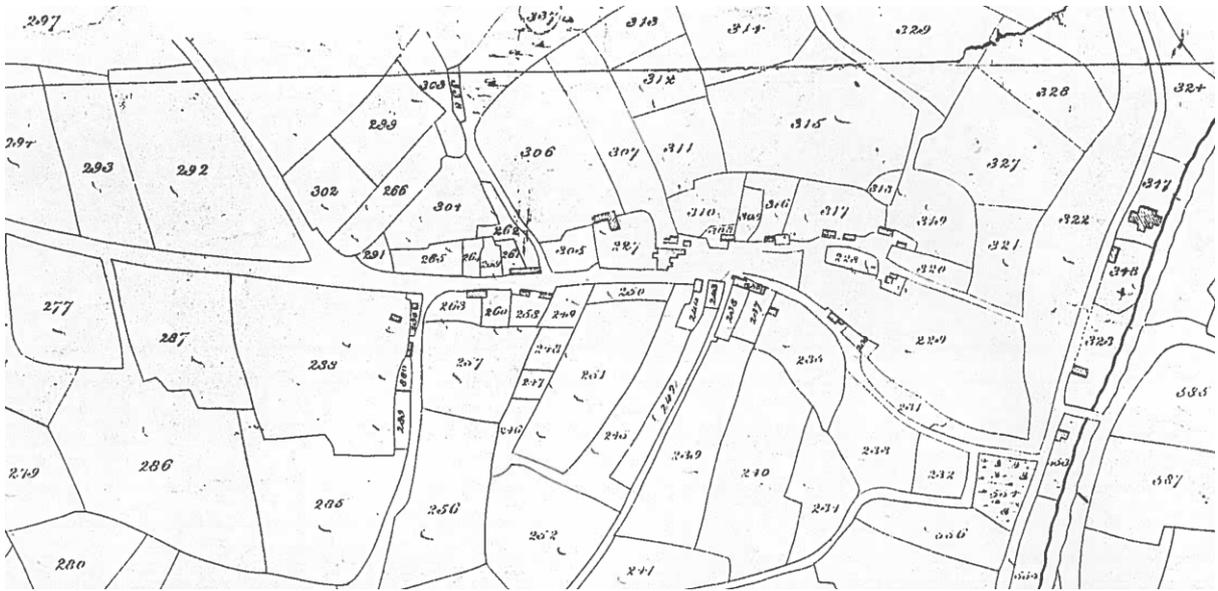


Figure 2. Extract from the 1843 Llawhaden tithe map.

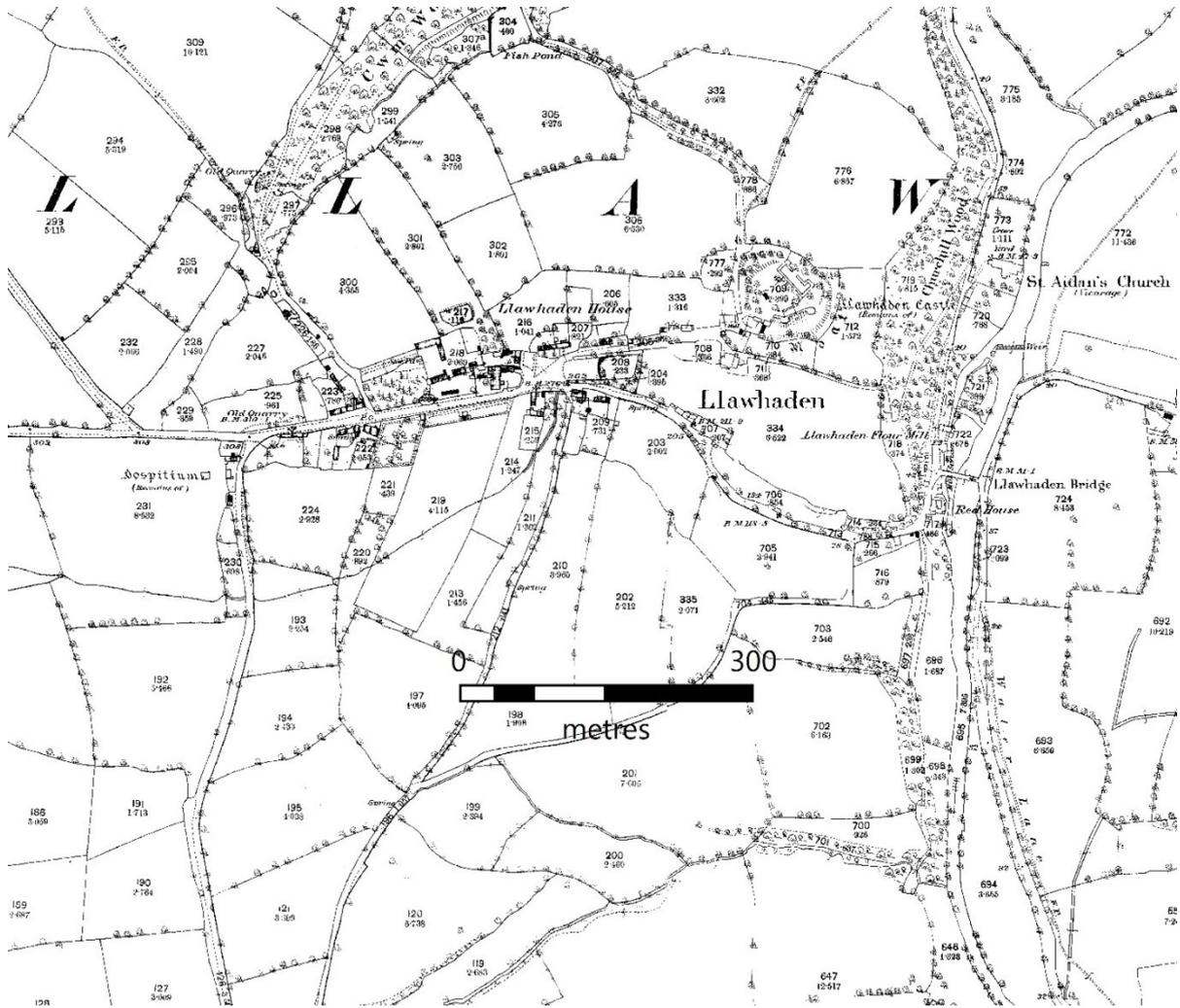


Figure 3. Extract from the 1889 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 1<sup>st</sup> Edition map (Pems 28.04 and 29.01).

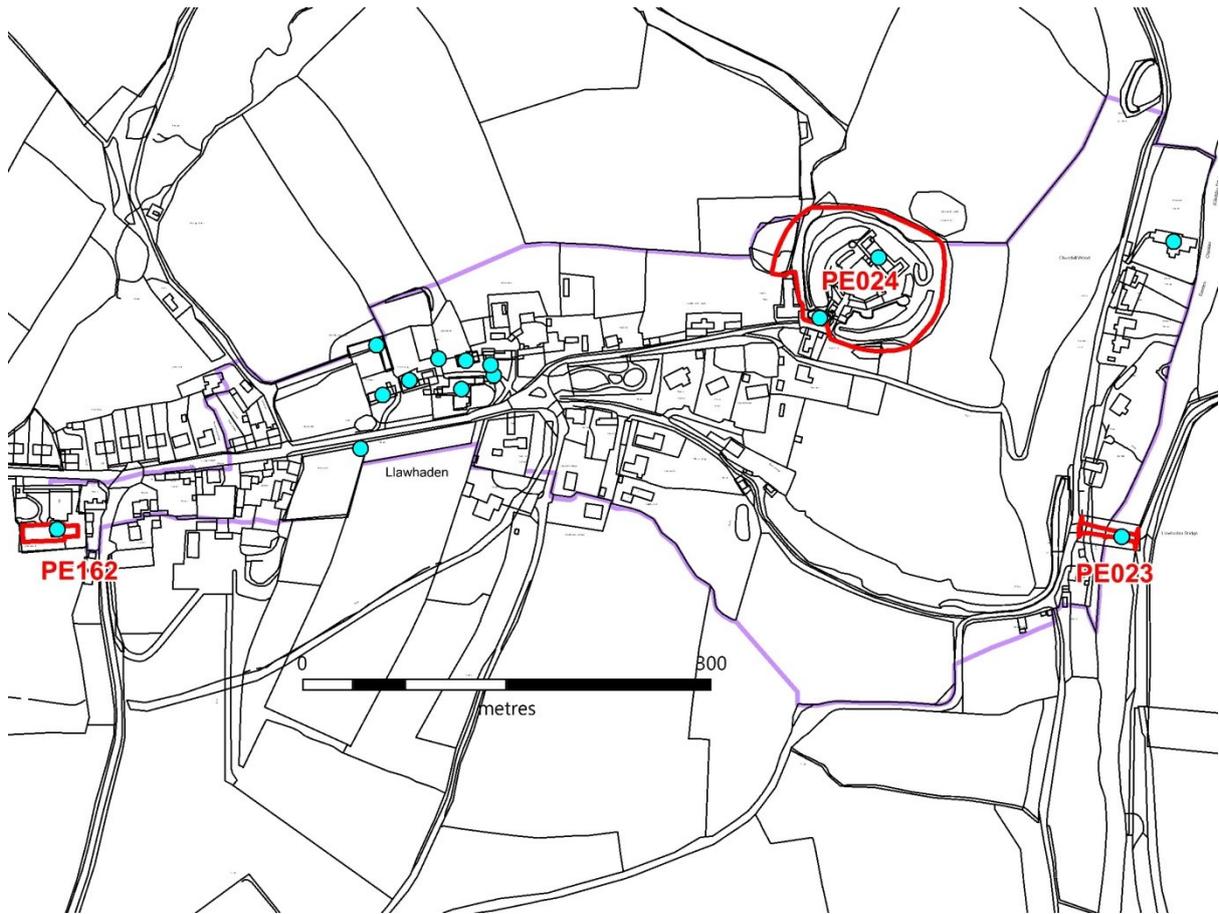


Figure 4. Listed buildings (blue circles), scheduled monuments (outlined in red) and the conservation area (outlined in purple).

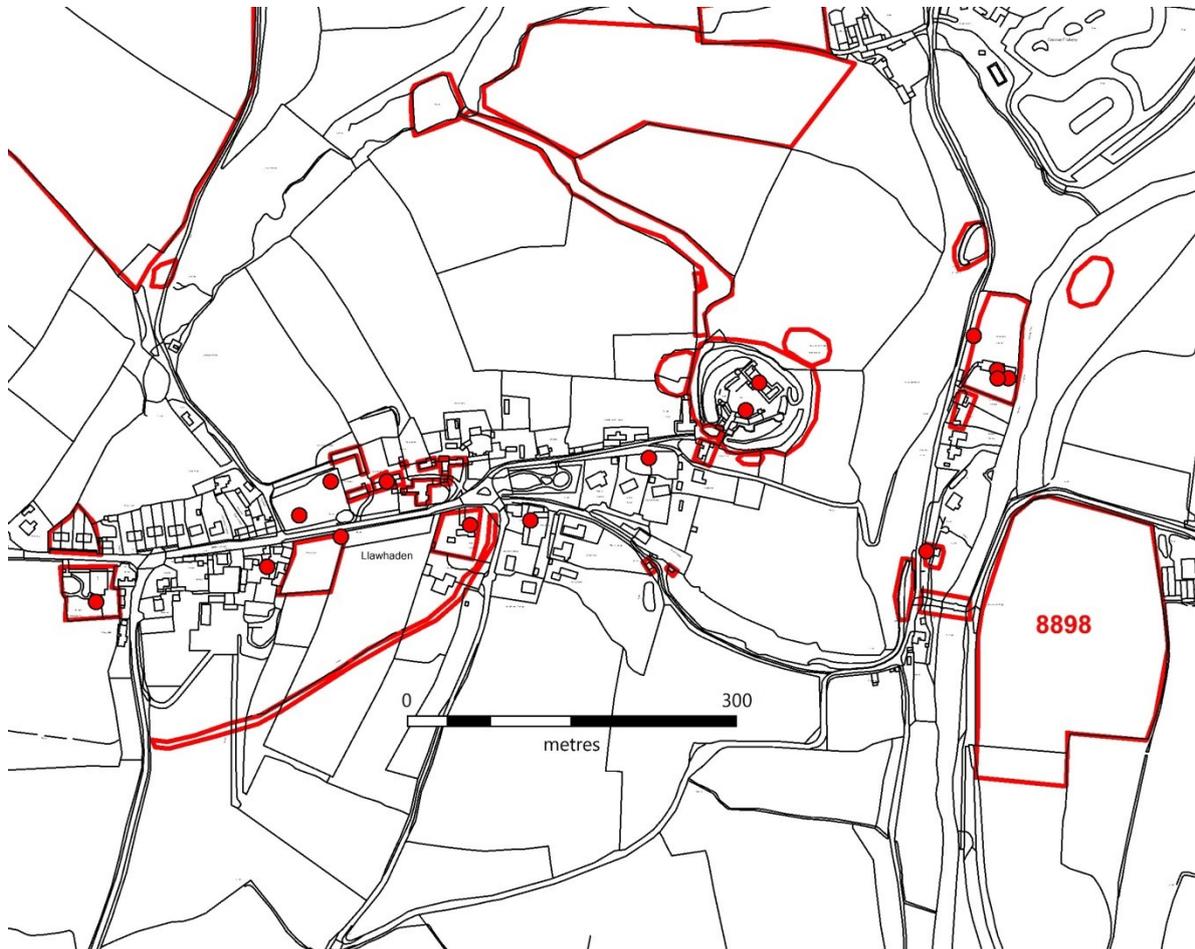


Figure 5. HER records – a mixture of point and polygon data.

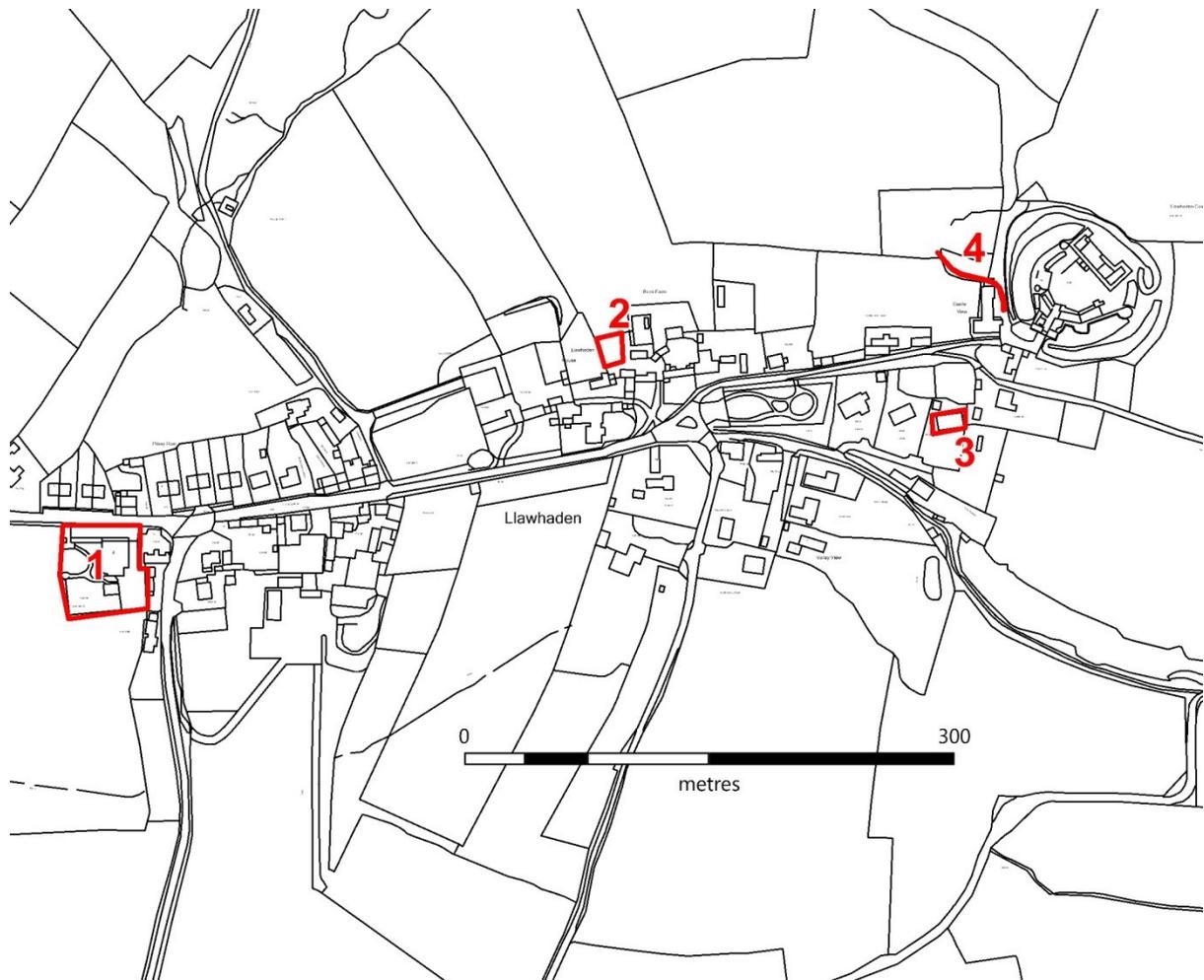


Figure 6. Location of archaeological interventions.

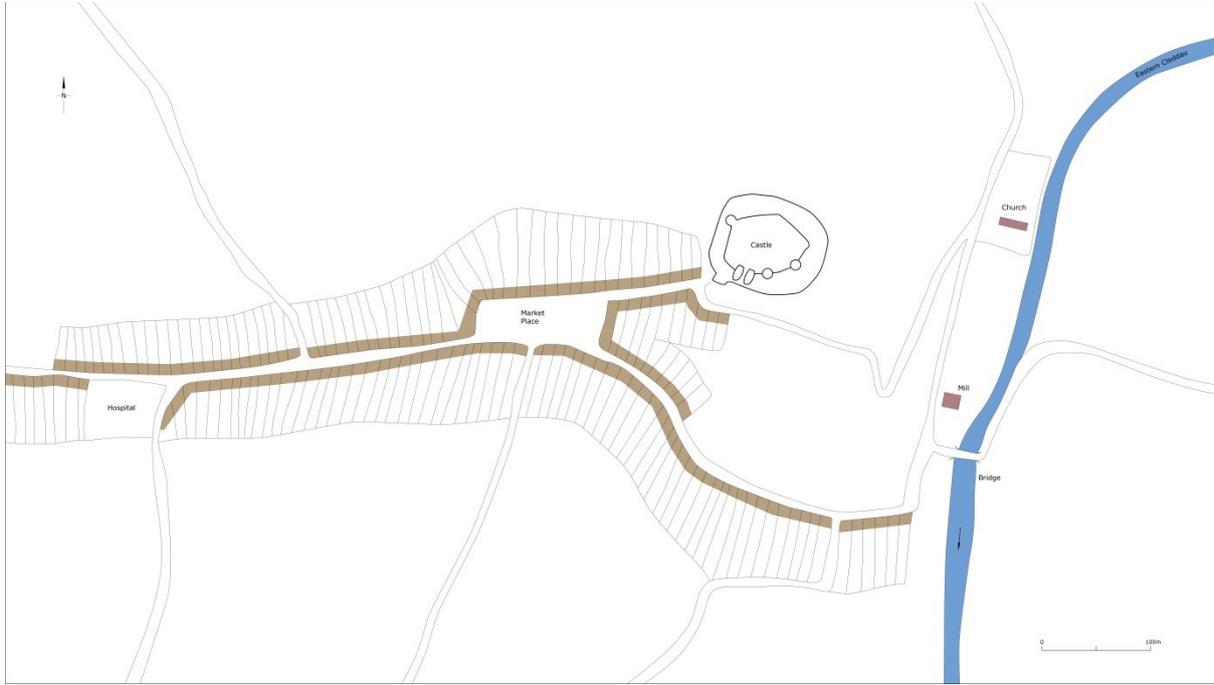
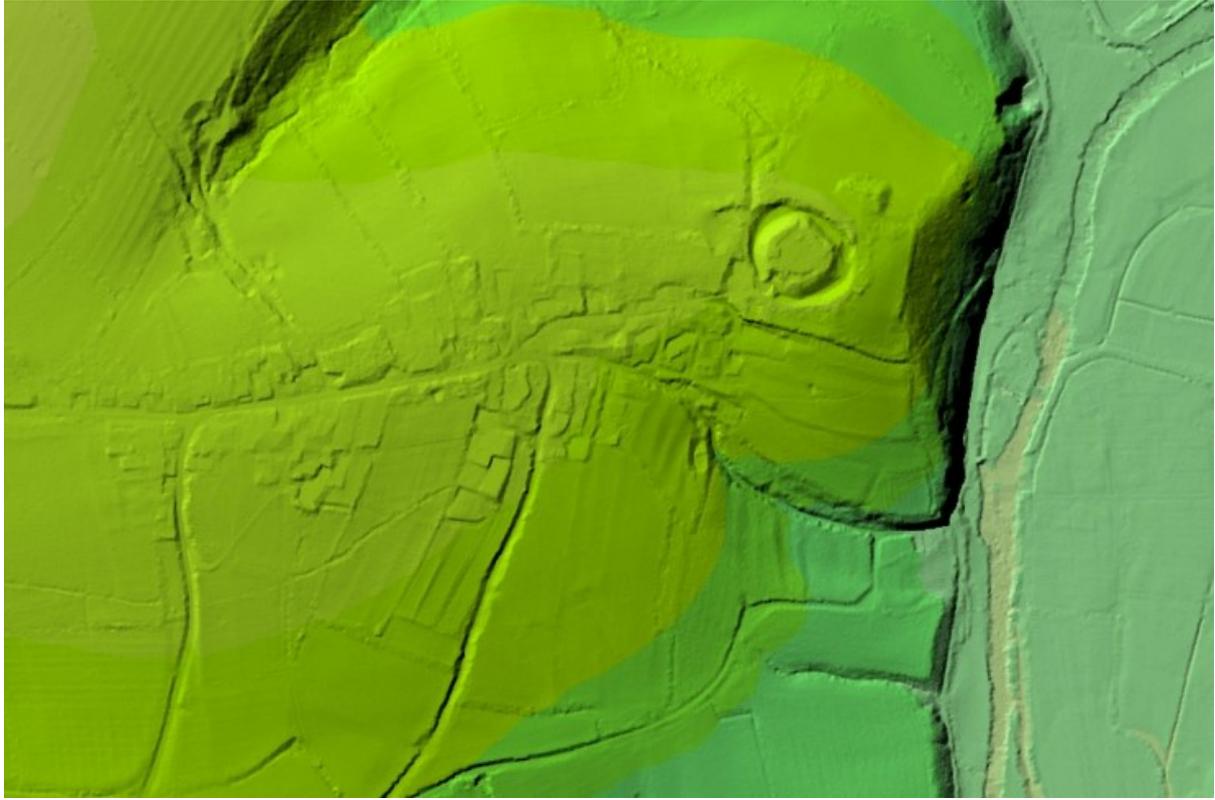


Figure 7. Schematic plan of Llawhaden as it may have been at its maximum extent in the medieval period, c. 1320.



*Figure 8. Llawhaden in 1984. Low earthworks marking abandoned burgage plots can be seen in the fields on the left side to the photograph (DAT AP84-80.29).*



*Figure 9. 1m DTM LiDAR image of Llawhaden with the abandoned burgage plots on the south side of the lane leading down from the market square to the river valley clearly visible (Contains Natural Resources Wales information © Natural Resources Wales and database right, © Crown Copyright and database right 2020. Ordnance Survey 100021874).*