

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE MEDIEVAL TOWNS OF SOUTHWEST WALES

TREFILAN



1992 aerial photograph of Trefilan showing motte under trees (centre) the parish church, old rectory and old school (DAT AP92-011.12).

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By

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TREFILAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Trefilan now consists of the remains of a medieval castle, the parish church, the old school, the former rectory and a group of large modern farm buildings, with little to indicate that it was once more important. It developed as a Welsh settlement in the early thirteenth century, but it was not a formal town and was never large. Its later history is entirely unknown. There have not been any archaeological investigations at Trefilan.

KEY FACTS

Status: Not a town.

Size: Unknown.

Archaeology: None.

LOCATION

Trefilan lies on the north side of the Aeron valley in mid-Ceredigion (SN 549 571), 9 km to the north of Lampeter (Fig. 1). Aberaeron and the coast lies 11 km down the valley to the northwest. The Aeron valley provides a route from the coast to inland Ceredigion and beyond. Minor roads provide route-ways to the north to Aberystwyth and to the south to Carmarthen.

HISTORY

The first mention of Trefilan dates to 1233 when the Brut y Tywysogyon records that Maelgwn Fychan ap Maelgwn ap Rhys repaired that castle that his father had built. This is presumably the 'house of Trefilan' burnt by the English in 1282. There are no later historical references to the castle. 1282 is also the first mention of a church at Trefilan, originally dedicated to St Mary, later changed to St Hilary, and also of a reeve. In 1301-02 the inhabitants of the 'Welsh vill of Trefilan' are recorded as paying 7s 6d annually, rising to 11s 2d two years later. Nothing more is known of the medieval settlement.

In the 1180s Rhys ap Gruffydd founded a nunnery at Llanllyr 1.2 km to the south of Trefilan on the south bank of the River Aeron. It was dissolved in 1537.

Some authorities refer to a fair being held at Tal-sarn, 800m to the south of Trefilan, in the medieval period without citation.

As Soulsby states the historical documentation suggests a far more important settlement than is now evident, although there is nothing to indicate that Trefilan was a town. It

probably functioned as the centre for administration and as a market for a wide agricultural hinterland.

MORPHOLOGY

Trefilan consists of the motte of the castle, nineteenth century parish church, the former rectory, the late nineteenth century school building and a range of modern agricultural buildings at Penrheol Farm. All cluster around a T-junction of the B4337 and a minor road. The hamlet of Tal-sarn comprising nineteenth century, twentieth century and more recent houses lies 800m to the south (Figs 2 and 3).

Maps and LiDAR data provide no indication for the location of the medieval settlement. Aerial photographs taken by the RCAHMS show a curving, crop-mark ditch concentric to and 60m to the southwest of the motte which is probably the line of the defensive circuit of a bailey.

BUILDINGS AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS

Scheduled Monuments

There is one scheduled monument in Trefilan: the motte and bailey castle CD077 –(Fig. 4). The motte survives as a 6m high mound surrounded by a ditch. Modern farm buildings lie close to the south side of the motte.

Listed Buildings

There is one listed building in Trefilan, Plas Trefilan, the former rectory, listed Grade II (Fig. 4).

Conservation Area

Trefilan is not in a conservation area.

Registered Parks and Gardens

There are no registered parks and gardens in Trefilan.

Registered Historic Landscape

Trefilan is not in a registered historic landscape.

Undesignated Historic Environment Assets

Apart from the scheduled motte and the listed Plas Trefilan there are two other sites recorded on the Dyfed Historic Environment Record: St Hilary's Church, built in 1806 and enlarged in 1880-82, occupying the site of its medieval predecessor; Trefilan school to the north of the castle (these are not shown on accompanying maps).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

There have been no archaeological investigations at Trefilan.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

The location of the medieval settlement has not been established. It is likely to have been close to the castle and church, but a location at Tal-sarn cannot be ruled out. The archaeological potential of Trefilan thus remains unknown.

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Soulsby I and Jones D 1976. The archaeological implications of redevelopment in the historic towns of Ceredigion District, Urban Research Unit Department of Archaeology University College Cardiff unpublished report.

Databases and online references

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

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

Coflein <https://coflein.gov.uk/en>

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.

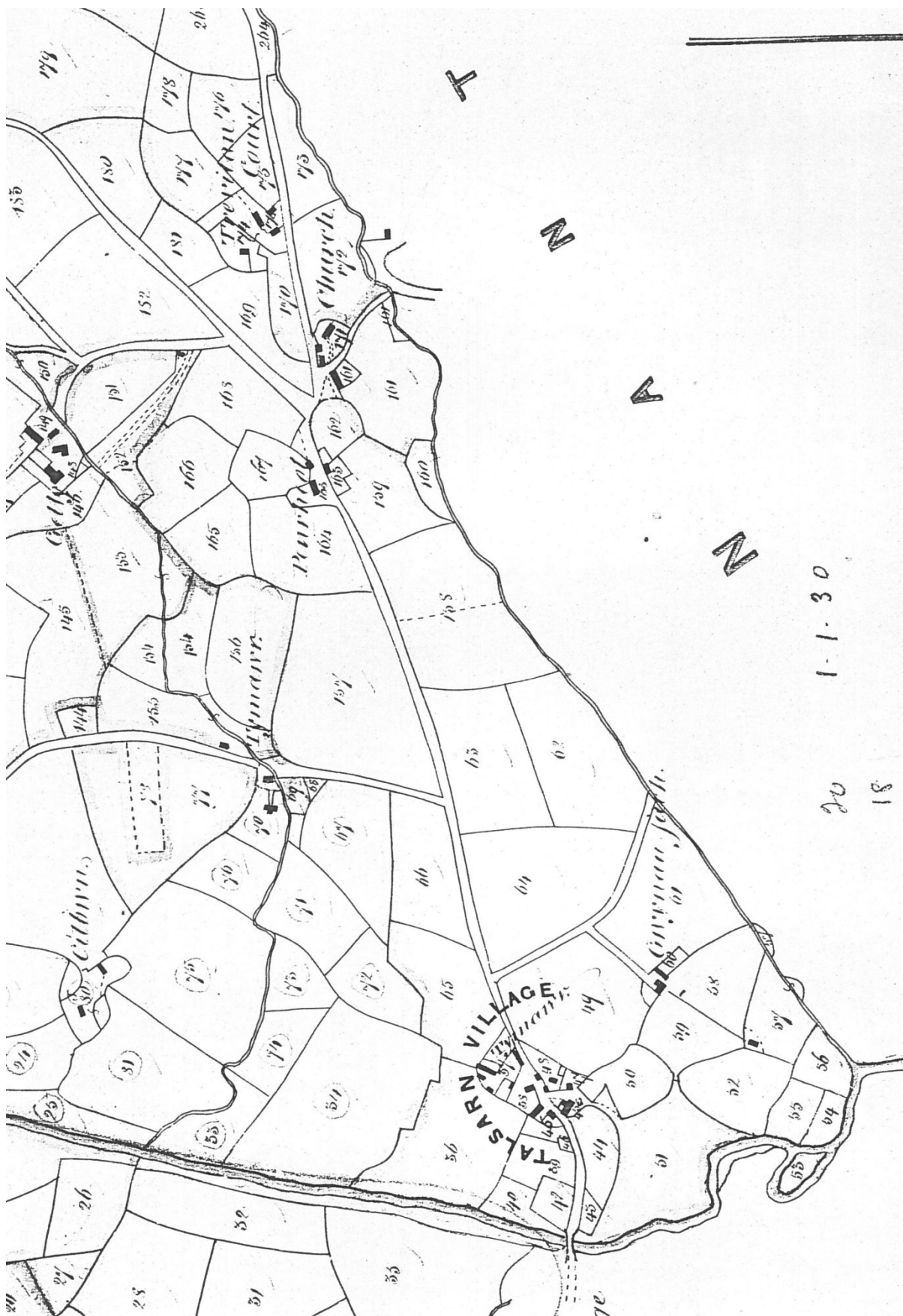
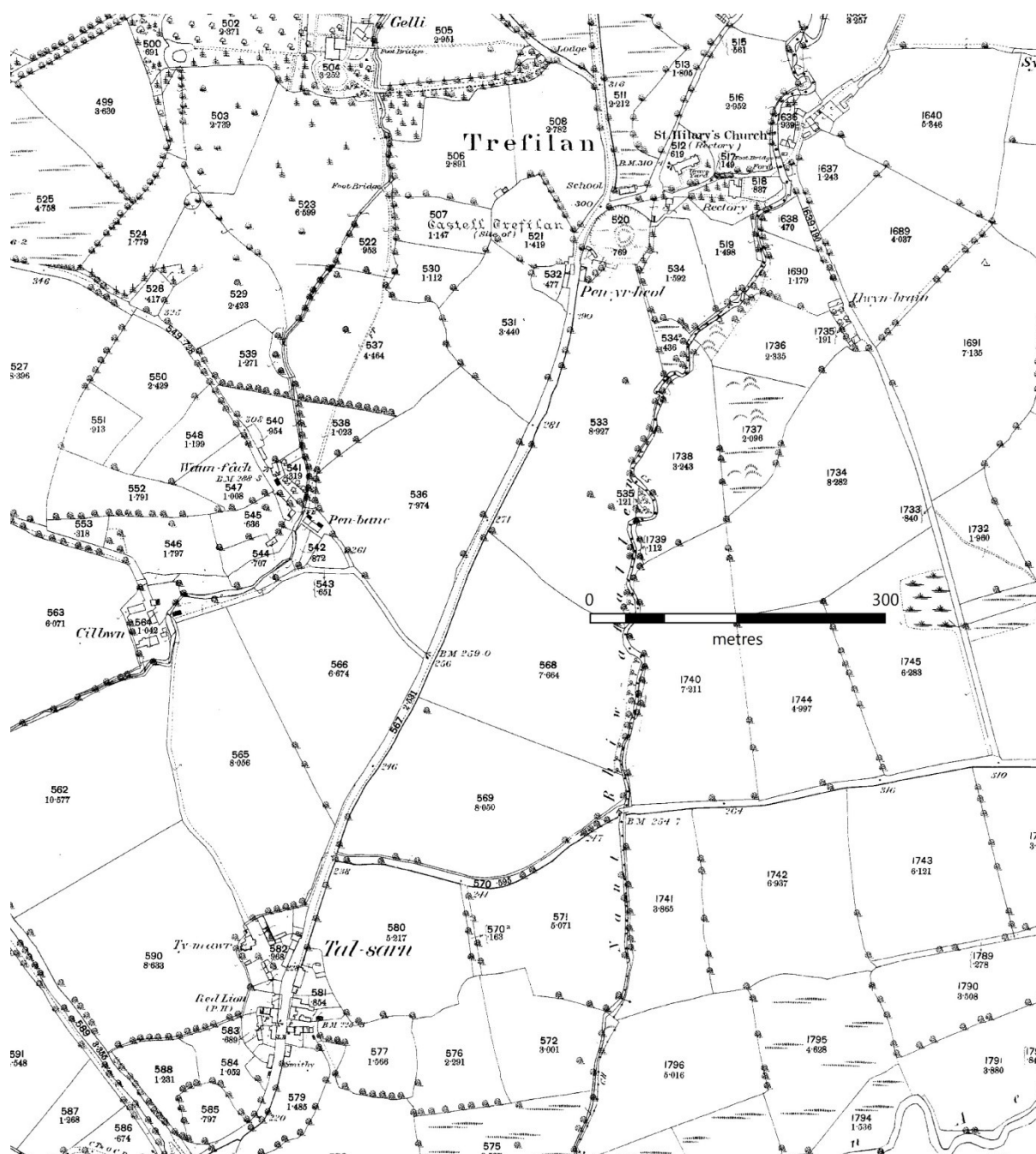


Figure 2. Extract from the 1840 tithe map showing Trefilan and Tal-sarn village.



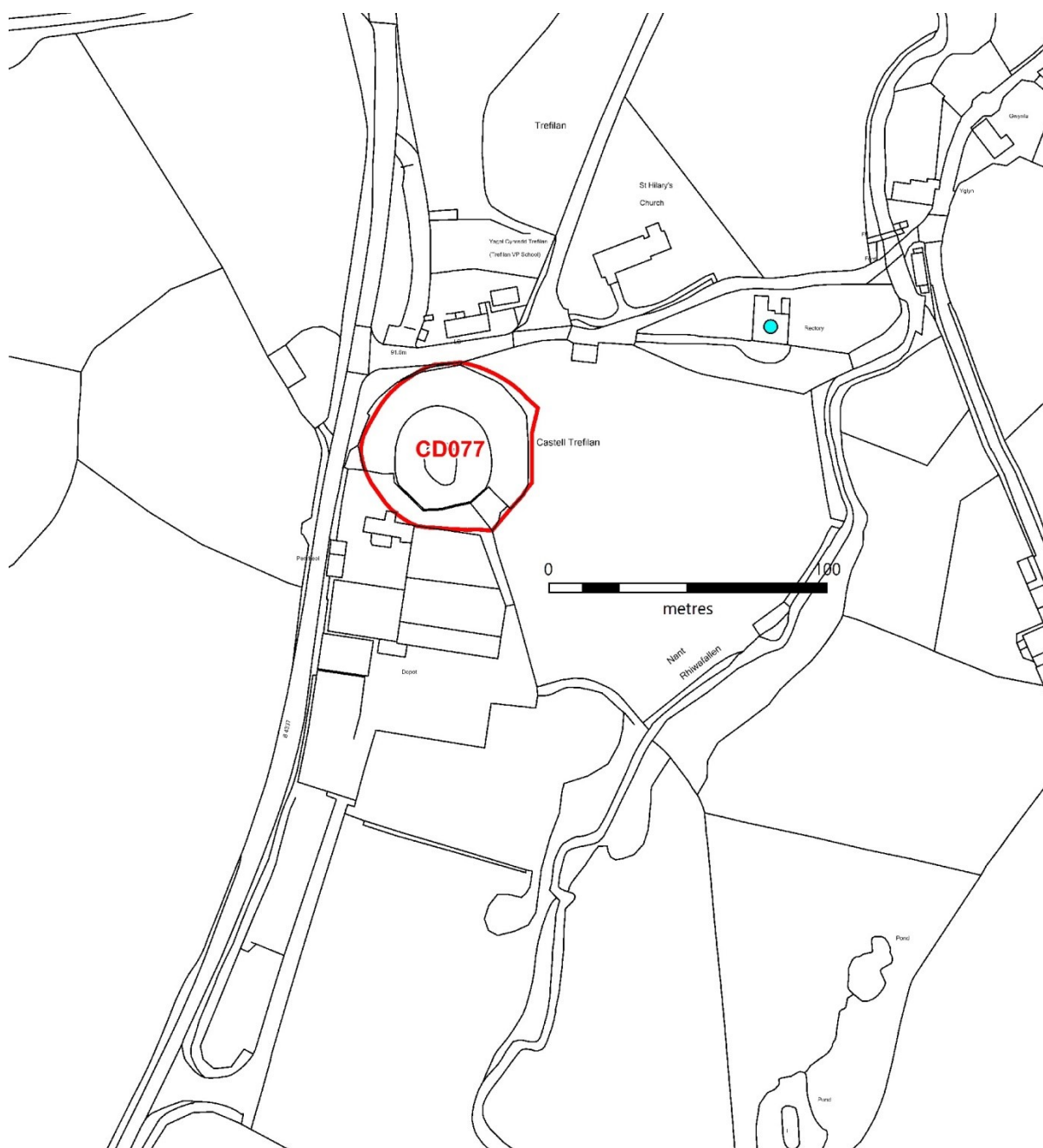


Figure 4. Listed buildings (blue circles) and scheduled monument (red).