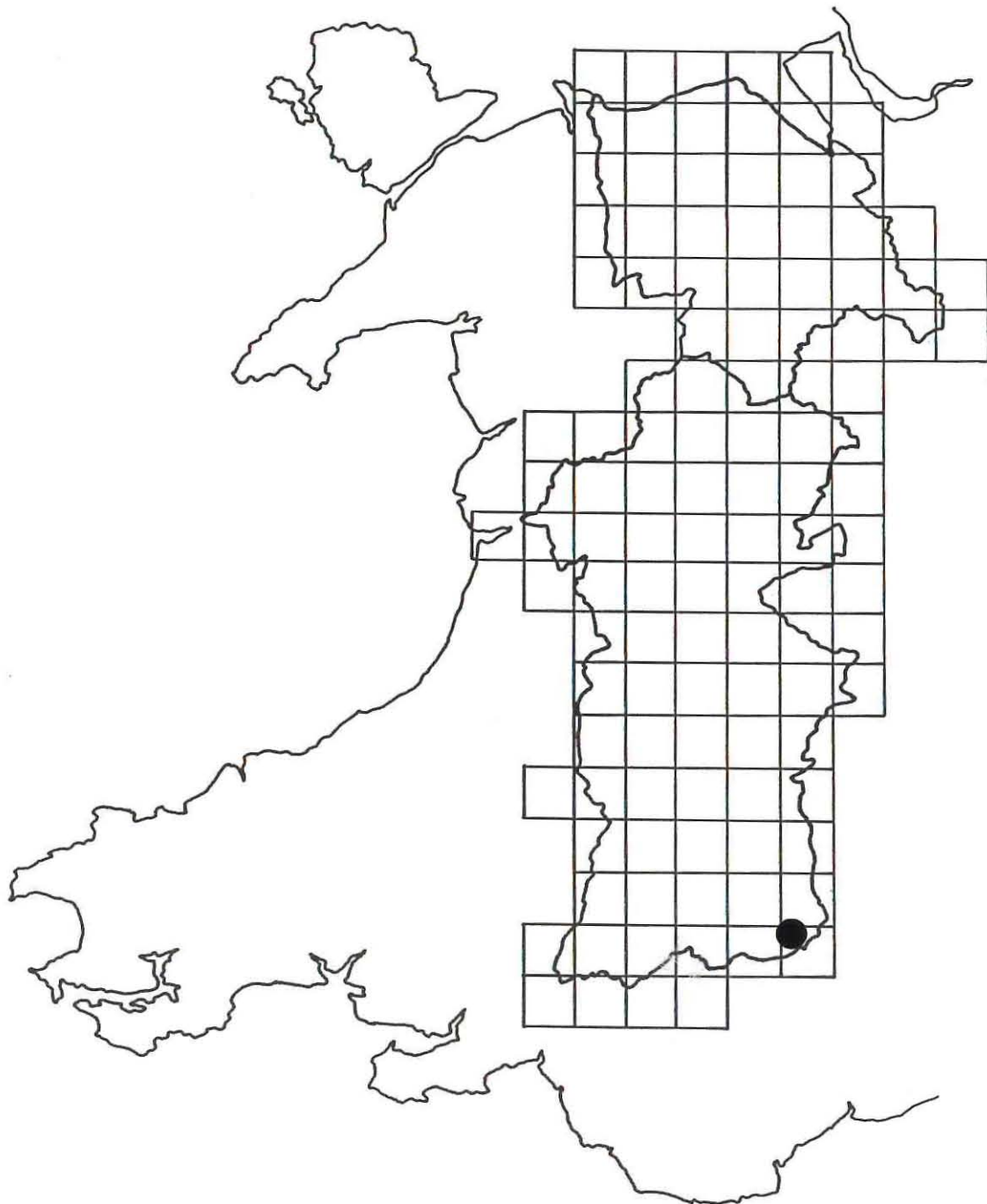


*Porth Mawr boundary wall,
Crickhowell, Powys*
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY



CPAT Report No 53

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Report prepared for Welsh Office Highways Directorate

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INTRODUCTION

The following rapid survey of the boundary wall adjoining northern side of Porth Mawr Gatehouse in Crickhowell was commissioned by Cadw on behalf of Welsh Office Highways Directorate, and was undertaken by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust between March 8th and 9th 1993. The survey consisted of four main elements:

- 1 An inspection of the wall internally and externally to identify any architectural features and changes of build.
- 2 A photographic record of the interior and exterior consisting of overlapping black and white prints and colour slide, with additional detail photographed with colour print. The exterior was photographed initially in 8m sections, reduced later to 6m.
- 3 A historical search to identify any information relating to the dating of the wall, and its likely association with other features such as Porth Mawr House and Gatehouse, or its predecessor Cwrt-y-Carw.
- 4 A rapid inspection of any landscape features within the former grounds belonging to Porth Mawr.

2

LOCATION

- 2.1 Porth Mawr lies on the northern side of Crickhowell (Fig 1), with the Gatehouse fronting onto Brecon Road just to the north of the junction with New Road (Fig 2, SJ 2175 1857). The boundary wall extends to the north and north-west of the Gatehouse for a distance of c.230m (Plate 1).

3

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The existing house of Porth Mawr, a Grade II listed building, is a Regency mansion believed to have been completed by 1825. The house was built by the Seymour family following pre-1810 fire damage and subsequent demolition of the 15th-century Cwrt-y-Carw. The former coach house and the remains of several service buildings such as the laundry still survive. The boundary wall that exists today enclosed the estate and gardens belonging to Porth Mawr.
- 3.2 The Gatehouse which fronts onto Brecon Road is the only surviving building belonging to Cwrt-y-Carw, which appears to have been built in the late 15th century by a member of the Herbert family. The Grade I listed building is a two storey crenellated gateway set forward from the adjoining walls. The construction is of rubble masonry with dressed quoins.
- 3.3 An unprovenanced map of 1760 (Fig 3), a copy of which was obtained from Mr Louis Hurley of the Crickhowell Civic Society, depicts what one must assume to be Cwrt-y-Carw as a courtyard manor similar to Tretower. Although the accuracy of the map has to be questioned, it appears to show the Gatehouse set centrally within a range of buildings fronting Brecon Road and forming the east side of the courtyard. The whole would appear to measure c.30 x 18m overall,

enclosing a courtyard of c.18 x 7m. It is of course possible that not all of the range of buildings shown on the map belong to the original 15th century construction.

- 3.4 Although the line of Brecon Road depicted on the 1760 map closely resembles the present alignment, there is no indication of whether a boundary wall existed at this time. A search of historical information in the National Library of Wales failed to identify any records relating to the boundary wall, with the exception of a drawing published in Brycheiniog (Jones and Smith, 1967 pl I). This apparently dates from the early 19th century and shows the Gatehouse with a barn or coach house to the left and a high uncrenellated wall to the right.

4 THE SURVEY

- 4.1 Following an inspection of the boundary wall, its length has been divided into three main sections (labelled in Fig 1), according to differences in construction.

4.2 Section A-B

- 4.2.1 Section A-B adjoins the Gatehouse at its southern end and extends for c.43m to the north (Plate 2). The overall height of the wall decreases from 4.20m to 3.85m at B due to the rise in ground level. Immediately adjacent to the Gatehouse the wall is at least 1.75m higher, the upper part belonging to a 19th-century gazebo which butts onto the lower part of the wall on the interior. The construction is generally of mortared random rubble up to a height of c.2.30m. At this level a course of thin angular limestone marks a change in build, the upper part constituting a presumed 19th-century addition comprising the plain crenellated capping.
- 4.2.2 The wall contains a doorway 7.83m north of the Gatehouse, with a dressed stone arch 1.69m high and 0.91m wide (Plates 3). Although the dressed masonry is probably of late medieval date, presumably associated with the original construction, its position within this wall is not necessarily in situ. The internal elevation reveals a larger opening 2.13m high and 1.10m wide (Plate 4), the appearance of which suggests that the interior has been either rebuilt, or that the dressed stonework has been reused and possibly the whole length of wall is a reconstruction.
- 4.2.3 The majority of the interior appears to have been refaced, or at least repointed at some date and has numerous fragments of brick included within it. This continues for 32.35m to the north of the Gatehouse at which point the facing ends and the wall steps inward, narrowing by some 0.15m. This is further marked by a change in the character of the wall-facing. Beyond this point the wall is well faced with fairly regular, mortared pink limestone up to a height of c.1.95m. Above this, the construction is again of rubble and corresponds to the previously noted change on the exterior face, consistent with the later addition of the crenellations (Plate 5).
- 4.2.4 The Gatehouse has a doorway on the first floor leading to the north from the stairwell into the 19th-century gazebo.

However, since the doorway appears to be an original feature, it poses the question of where did it lead. One possibility is that it lead into a room in the east wing of the 15th-century courtyard house, as depicted on the plan of 1760. The other is that it led onto a wall walk, which would have required the wall to be of considerably greater thickness than its present appearance. As noted above, the interior may have been refaced, and therefore possibly also narrowed.

4.3 Section B-C

- 4.3.1 Continuing north and then north-west from B the wall is of a single phase of construction, consisting of a mortared rubble exterior set on a low plinth up to 0.55m high. The total height is c.4.10m, the upper part being crenellated with plain cappings, now largely removed, and feathered aprons to the crenels (Plate 7).
- 4.3.2 The interior of the wall is a continuation of the facing noted at the northern end of the previous section: well faced, regular pink limestone. This forms the boundary to the kitchen garden and orchard belonging to Porth Mawr, and must be assumed to date from its completion in 1825. A contemporary plan is apparently in the possession of Mrs Newman of Porthllyn, although her absence at the time of the survey prevented its inspection. We are informed that the plan identifies the position and variety of each of the fruit trees within the orchard, although it is uncertain what further detail it contains relating to the internal layout of the estate grounds. The area behind the wall is now largely occupied by two bungalows, and parts of the wall are obscured by ivy and later buildings.
- 4.3.3 The northwestern boundary to the plot occupied by Ty-Bryn is formed by a contemporary wall of identical construction, presumably bounding this side of the orchard. In the angle between the two walls, in the yard of Ty-Bryn and beneath a modern lean-to shelter, is a recess set within the corner where the masonry is curving. The recess is c.2.30m long and 0.46m deep, slightly arched at the top to a maximum height of 1.04m. The base is 0.42m above the yard surface. A single shelf formed by two large slabs of stone divides the recess centrally. A narrow stone hood, now much damaged, is set 0.28m above the recess following the curve of the arch. The most likely interpretation is that it was constructed as a beebole, and similar examples are known from elsewhere.
- 4.3.4 Beyond Ty-Bryn the interior of the wall is of the same construction and bounds an area of former glasshouses. The boilerhouse and one sunken glasshouse still remain, together with several other outbuildings, some of which are of lean-to construction against the wall. A gateway 2.91m high and 2.34m wide is now unused, but formerly led into a yard containing a collection of lean-to buildings previously used to house animals.
- 4.3.5 Immediately to the north of the gateway, a doorway in a lean-to building leads down a flight of steps into a subterranean chamber (Plate 6), the floor level of which is c.1.70m beneath ground level. A detailed survey was prevented due to a lack of lighting, but it was possible to

record the basic layout. The chamber at the base of the stairs was 3.93m long, widening from 1.90m to 3.00m. The ceiling was constructed of arched brick. At 1.68m along the south western wall a narrow opening c.0.90m wide led upwards, possibly linking to a manhole visible on the surface. Beyond the first chamber a narrow passage led for 3.50m to a dwarf wall c.0.50m high and 0.50m wide. Beyond this the floor level dropped a further 0.90m into a second chamber measuring 3.45 x 2.45m. A roughly square blocking, possibly for a chute, was visible in the end wall c.1.75m above floor level. It is presumed that this was constructed during the 19th century as an icehouse, although there are apparently stories of its use for hanging venison in the days when Porth Mawr had a deer park.

4.4 Section C-D

- 4.4.1 The final section of wall is marked by a change in construction and height from C to the Lodge at D. The south eastern end of this section begins with a blocked opening 2.73m wide and 2.96m high (Plate 7). This also coincides with the end of the crenellations, and the wall beyond is only c.3.00m high, of rubble construction with no plinth. Above the blocking, and continuing for 6.60m to the north west, the upper part of the wall has been rebuilt to a height of 4.28m as part of a further lean-to building on the interior.
- 4.4.2 Two blocked features were visible in the exterior face of the wall (Plate 8). A blocked doorway 2.04m high and 1.10m wide was identified 5.45m south-east of the end of the wall at D. A further 5.10m to the south-east was a blocked window 0.8m above the road, 1.70m high and 1.20m wide.
- 4.4.3 The interior of the wall is again of well faced, regular pink limestone, within which it is possible to identify at least two small blocked windows, not visible on the exterior face. It would seem likely that at some point several lean-to buildings were constructed against the wall, and have been subsequently demolished.

4.5 The Internal Topography

- 4.5.1 As noted above, the area occupied by Ty-Bryn and Porthllyn formed the kitchen garden and orchard belonging to Porth Mawr. An inspection of this area, together with that to the south west of the former glasshouses revealed no features of archaeological importance. There was no evidence of former structures, and it would seem likely that the area was entirely occupied by cultivated gardens and orchards.
- 4.5.2 The paddock in front of Porth Mawr and bounded to the north west by the access road to the bungalows is a basically flat field of rough grazing rising gently to the north-east. The only feature identified was a broad low bank c.0.5m high and c.3.00m wide, running parallel to the access road c.4.00m within the field. A possible break in the bank was identified slightly off-centre to the north-west. It would seem likely that this is the remains of a boundary feature which could relate either to the present Porth Mawr house, or to its 15th-century predecessor.
- 4.5.3 The area closer to the house and immediately behind the

wall to the north of the Gate House has been landscaped to create formal gardens of presumed 19th-century date. A low terrace in front of the house has presumably been levelled by cutting into the natural slope at its northern end. To the west of the house a further terrace has been created c.5.00m west of the wall, the levels dropping by c.0.5m to a roughly triangular area containing the remains of a pond and fountain belonging to a 19th-century water-garden feature. There is no visible evidence for features relating to the earlier occupation of the site.

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The section of wall between A and B, adjoining the Gatehouse to the north, is the only part which is of possible late medieval origins. Although the interior has probably been refaced and the upper crenellated section is certainly recent, it is possible that the lower exterior portion of the wall is original. Certainly it must predate the construction of the present house, and the drawing of the early 19th century shows part of this section which may be that surviving today. As noted above, it is difficult to tell whether the doorway is an original feature: although the style is contemporary, it could have been reused. One argument against this, however, is that the plan of 1760 shows that part of the building fronting Brecon Road as only extending c.12m to the north of the Gatehouse, and there is no evidence of a change in build at this point, which could therefore suggest that the entire section has at some point been rebuilt.
- 5.2 It would appear that the majority of the boundary wall, the section between B and D, is of 19th-century construction. Presumably, this is contemporary with the construction of Porth Mawr which was completed in 1825, and formed the boundary wall to the kitchen gardens and orchards. Although of relatively recent origin, the wall still possesses considerable historical value, particularly in association with Porth Mawr House and Gatehouse. On the interior of the wall, the presumed beebole and the icehouse are of particular note and are worthy of further investigation and recording.
- 5.3 The landscape features within the former grounds of Porth Mawr show no evidence for structures associated with the 15th-century Cwrt-y-Carw, with the possible exception of the low bank noted within the paddock. The majority of the area appears to have been landscaped in the 19th century to form the grounds and walled kitchen garden for Porth Mawr. However, it is entirely feasible that archaeological remains survive belonging to the late medieval occupation. In addition, the existence of three buildings fronting Brecon Road on the 1760 plan would suggest that evidence for these structures may well survive along the interior of the wall. Although of unknown date, they may well have been of late medieval or early post-medieval construction.

6 OPTIONS FOR FURTHER WORK

- 6.1 The possibility of small scale trial excavation against the interior of the wall in section A-B to identify the exis-

tence of any earlier foundations relating to the previous width of the wall, or possibly associated with the 15th-century occupation.

- 6.2 Possible geophysical survey in the area immediately to the north of Porth Mawr to identify any surviving remains of Cwrt-y-Carw. The terraced lawn in front of the house, as well as the paddock, may also produce evidence of former occupation.
- 6.3 A more complete, preferably drawn and photographic, record of the presumed beehive keep and the icehouse.
- 6.4 An inspection of the estate plan held by Mrs Newman of Porthllyn to identify any evidence for the former layout of Porth Mawr grounds.

7 REFERENCES

Jones, S.R. and Smith, J.T., "The Houses of Breconshire, Part IV", Brycheiniog, 12 (1966-7), 1-92.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Trust is most grateful to the respective landowners for the cooperation and assistance, to Mr Louis Hurley for providing a copy of the 1760 plan, and to Mr Will Hughes of Brecon Beacons National Park for information relating to Porth Mawr Gatehouse.

9 ARCHIVE CONTENTS

7 Black and white films, contacts and archive prints

5 Colour Slide films

2 Colour print films

Catalogue of photographs

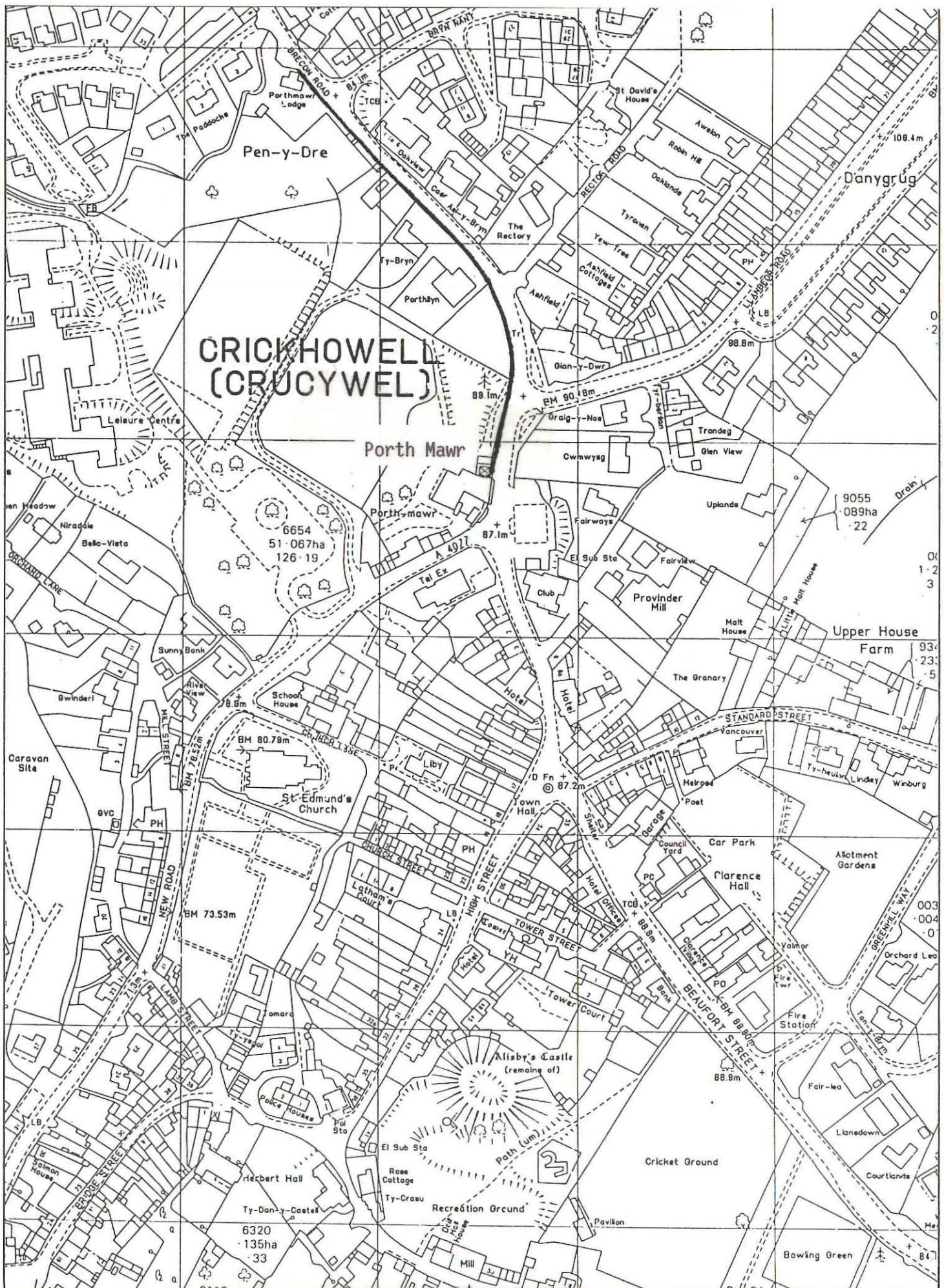


Fig 1: Location. Scale 1:2500

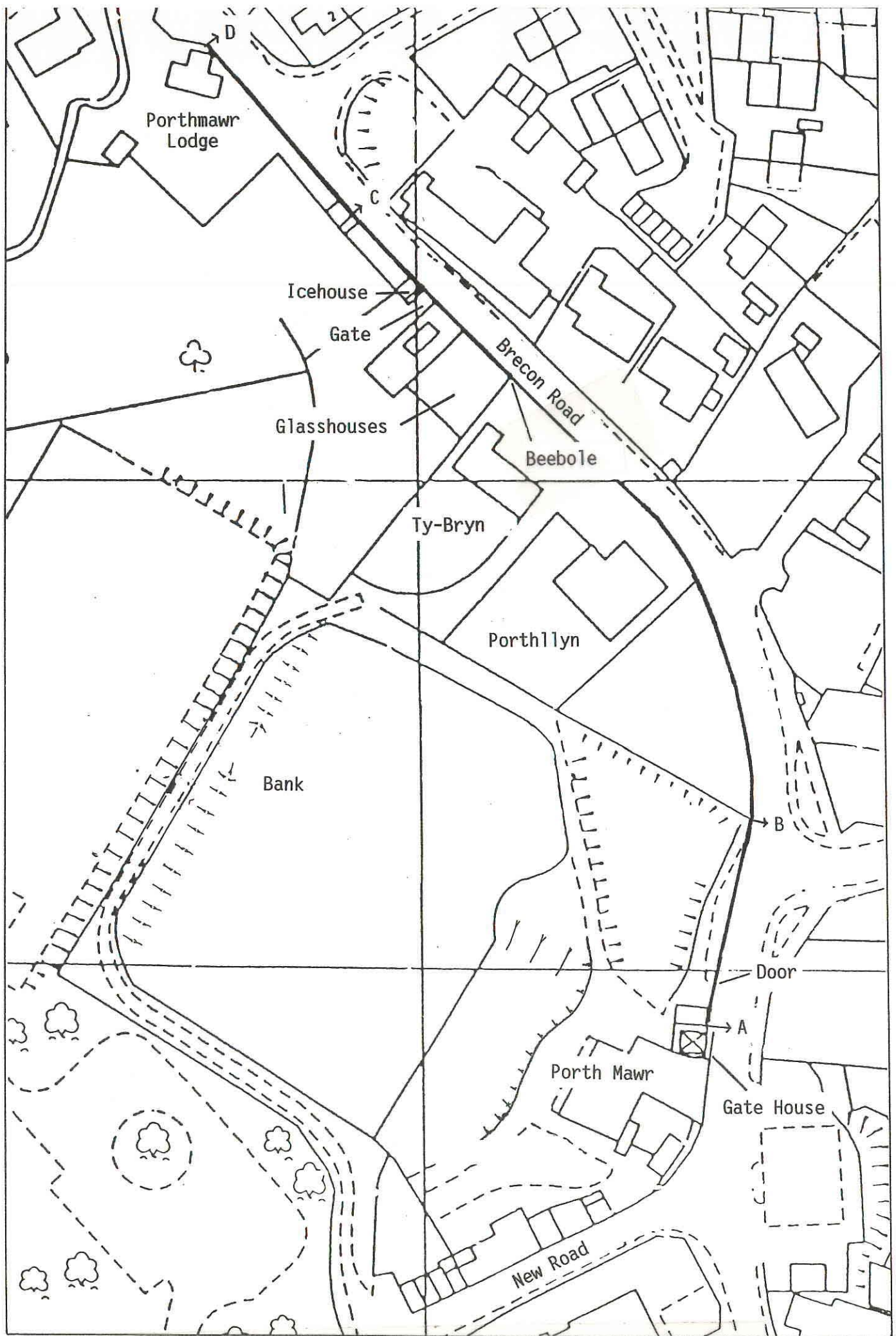


Fig 2: Porth Mawr boundary wall. Scale 1:1000

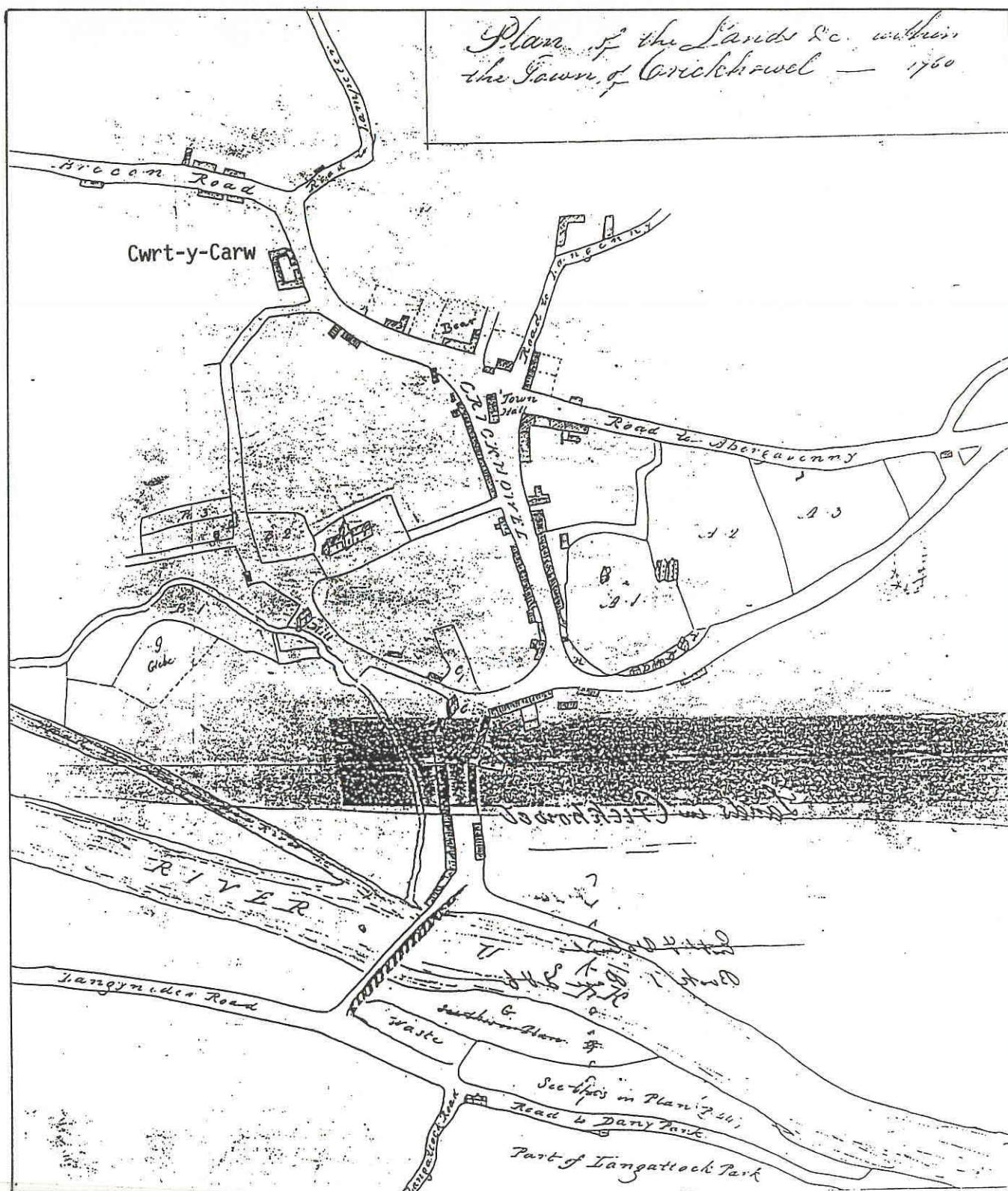


Fig 3: 1760 Plan of Crickhowell showing Cwrt-y-Carw



Plate 1: View of Porth Mawr Gatehouse and boundary wall from the south east



Plate 2: Boundary wall Section A-B from the south east



Plate 3: Doorway in Section A-B from the exterior



Plate 4: Doorway in Section A-B from the interior. Note wider opening.



Plate 5: Section A-B interior showing refacing on the right and later addition of crenellations.



Plate 6: The icehouse.



Plate 7: Change in construction at C: Note blocked entrance and upper section rebuild at south eastern end of Section C-D.



Plate 8: Blocked door and window in Section C-D.