Brecon Town Study

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by R J Silvester
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1 Introduction

1.1 This report, compiled on behalf of the Brecon Beacons National Park and Cadw, summarises the current state of knowledge of the archaeology and built environment of the historic town of Brecon and the suburb of Llanfaes. It complements an earlier study of the historic settlements in the whole National Park (Silvester and Dorling 1993).

1.2 It is an incontrovertible fact that Brecon is one of the most important historic settlements in Wales and certainly the most important in Powys. The only town to rival it in the county is perhaps Montgomery.

1.3 The report does not offer a detailed history of Brecon and its monuments — this would require a large volume. Instead it seeks to define the elements that make up the historic townscape, with brief syntheses of the information available for these elements. Areas are distinguished where the cultural heritage should either be preserved through the planning process or, where preservation is not an option, archaeological recording should be carried out prior to development. Finally wider recommendations are proposed for a better understanding of Brecon's heritage.

1.4 Brecon is divided into three areas for the purposes of the report: the original historic core around the castle and priory on the west side of the Honddu; the medieval borough with its suburbs on the east side of the Honddu, and Llanfaes with the friary to the south of the Usk (Fig 1).

2 Sources and Methodology

2.1 Information has been gleaned from fieldwork, from a wide range of written, cartographic and drawn sources which are outlined in the bibliography, from fieldwork and from a number of people and organisations whose assistance is acknowledged at the end of the report.

2.2 Records of listed buildings and scheduled ancient monuments prepared by the Welsh Office have been utilised and the data from these are depicted on Figs 7 and 8. It should be noted, however, that an application should be made to Cadw/Welsh Historic Monuments for the precise definition of any statutorily protected building or monument.

2.3 Analytical surveys of the castle and cathedral are currently in preparation by the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW). Comments on these two monument groups are given in summary form only pending the imminent publication of these surveys.

3 Topography and Geomorphology

3.1 Brecon has developed at a height of around 139m OD, on low-lying land surrounded by hill ranges: Eppynt to the north-west, the Black Mountains to the east and the Brecon Beacons to the south.

3.2 The land surrounding Brecon is characterised by an outcrop of Old Red Sandstone, the cathedral and castle resting on sandstones and mudstones of the Eardiston Series overlain by brown earths. The town itself occupies an alluvial fan on the north side of the Usk, a result of the Honddu feeding into the wide and flat valley floor of the larger river. The river terraces here are some 9m above the valley floor, creating an ideal location for early settlement. The valley floor is covered with alluvium, Christ College and Llanfaes lying on these deposits.

4   Chronological Outline

4.1   Some evidence of prehistoric activity has been recorded in the vicinity of the medieval town. A cist containing a few bone fragments, perhaps of Bronze Age date, was uncovered in about 1960 during the levelling of new playing fields for Brecon High School. Bishop's Meadow near Fynnonau to the north-east of the town yielded a small hoard of bronzes in 1884, again of Bronze Age origin. No records exist of prehistoric finds from the town itself, other than a pit containing flint waste and a circular scraper (?Neolithic or Bronze Age) and burnt sandstone lumps found during excavations at the castle in 1968. Given the town's attractive location, it would not be surprising if further discoveries were made in the future.

4.2   There is little solid evidence of any Roman activity on the site of the later town, and Theophilus Jones amongst others dismissed the notion of a Roman precursor, pointing to the presence of the fort of Y Gaer a short distance to the west. Nevertheless, the Roman road from Caerleon to the fort at Y Gaer is presumed to have followed the main approach through Brecon now known as the Watton, crossing the Honddu in the vicinity of Watergate and along the line subsequently adopted by Kensington, with another road from Castell Collen (Llandrindod) to Cardiff intersecting it here. Whether any sort of settlement emerged at the crossroads has yet to be ascertained.

4.3   The name, Brecon and earlier *Brechon* appears to be a Normanised form of Brychan, the semi-legendary ruler of the region in early medieval times.

4.4   In 1093 Bernard de Neufmarche defeated and killed the local Welsh rulers in battle close to the present town of Brecon. The erection of a castle at the confluence of the Usk and its tributary the Honddu, and close to a ford which offered a strategically important crossing point of the Usk, cannot be dated exactly but there is a widely held assumption that it was either already in place at the time of the battle or was one of the material results of it. During the Middle Ages the castle was the caput of one of the great lordships in south Wales, functioning not only as a stronghold but also as the administrative centre for a large region.

4.5   It has been suggested that the first settlement at Brecon developed within the protective defences of the castle bailey, with the Benedictine priory of St John the Evangelist founded to the north of the castle soon after. Later — though how much later is the subject of current debate (see below, section 6.2.1) — a town developed on the east bank of the Honddu, an area that offered some natural defence. Whether the bridging of the Usk provided a spur for this development or was a result of it remains unknown. However, it seems likely that it was provided with defences from the beginning. It was besieged by Llywelyn ab Iorwerth in 1217. Bought off by the burgesses on that occasion, he returned in 1231 and again in 1233, burning the town on both occasions. The castle however remained intact, as perhaps it did in 1322 when Richard Wroth was ordered by Edward II 'to throw down the castle of Brecon'. The town was unsuccessfully besieged in 1403.

4.6   As a result of its increasing economic and commercial importance, the town received its first charter in 1276, and others followed between 1277 and 1282, in 1308 and in 1412. 86 burgesses were recorded in 1412, 121 burgesses in 1443. The town became an important manufacturing and marketing centre — there were twice-weekly markets and three annual fairs. As Carter has pointed out it is one of the few historic towns in Wales dominated by a church rather than a castle.

4.7   With two monastic houses as well as its chapels, Brecon undoubtedly became the ecclesiastical focus of the region, and this would also have had an indirect effect on its development as a commercial centre. The importance of the developing town can be witnessed in other ways. An archdeaconry of the bishopric of St David's was based in Brecon. Episcopal courts were held at the priory, and the archdeacon had a residence at Llanddew, two miles to the north. However, in 1537 the priory was dissolved: the church was retained for the use of the townspeople, while the conventual buildings were leased out.

4.8   By the end of the Middle Ages Brecon was an important urban centre with an extensive hinterland, lying on a major land route from the English border to south-west Wales. Accessibility was without doubt a key factor. Though it was one of a number of Welsh towns referred to as 'decayed' in 1544, the 16th century reportedly saw major population growth. Under the Act of Union in 1536 Brecon was designated one of the four regional administrative centres for Wales, returning its own Member of Parliament and functioning as the centre for Quarter Sessions and an assize court. It has been

suggested that in the mid-16th century there may have been upwards of 2000 people in the town and this manifests itself in the development of extra-mural suburbs in Oldport to the north, Llanfaes, and Watton (or Waketon). Arguably only Carmarthen had a greater number of households at that time. By the end of the 17th century the suburbs housed as many people as the town itself.

4.9   George Owen described it as 'a bigge town faire built' in the early 17th century and for Hugh Thomas in 1698 it was 'a town for riches, situation, building, beauty and trade inferior to none in Wales'.

4.10   Carter has classed Brecon as one of the eleven major towns in the Principality during the 18th and early 19th century, a result of the range of functions and facilities that it offered. Its population of 5026 placed it ninth in Wales at the end of this period. The Abergavenny and Brecon Canal was constructed at the end of the 18th century, the railway arriving in the third quarter of the 19th century.

5   The Castle and Priory

5.1   *The Castle*

5.1.1   The earliest castle was of motte-and-bailey form, the wooden tower subsequently being replaced by a stone keep, probably in the late 12th century. General reconstruction in stone of other buildings within the defences may have occurred either at that time or early in the 13th century. As both fortified stronghold and administrative centre Brecon Castle appears in state records throughout the Middle Ages. The Tudor period saw a decline in its strategic importance and a reduction in the level of its maintenance. The Civil War saw it hold out for the King, but it was taken by the Parliamentarians in 1645 and this effectively marked its end as a defensive stronghold.

5.1.2   North of Castle Square is a fine motte surmounted by a segment of the polygonal (perhaps 10-sided) shell keep with associated tower; the foundations of the rest of the keep can be detected in places and a further block of masonry lies just below the northern crest of the motte. An adjacent cannon may be considerably older than the Napoleonic period to which it is normally attributed. The northern defences of the bailey survive in the form of a bank with a short section of ditch in one spot. The bank is interrupted by Ely Tower House and the whole of the earthwork (with the exception of the ditch) is within the private garden of the house. Much of the area is statutorily protected (SAM B22).

5.1.3   The stone curtain wall and towers, the gatehouse to the west, a lesser gateway with barbican on the east and a chapel dedicated to St Nicholas (referred to in 1374) have all disappeared. The Bucks' print published in 1741 depicts substantial ruins above the Usk (Fig 2). Part of the great hall, attributable to c.1280, and a contemporary round stair-turret, which underwent at least two subsequent phases of modification, are incorporated in the Castle of Brecon Hotel which occupies much of the bailey. This was refurbished as a hotel from 1809, but there had previously been a property known as Castle House, probably an inn, on the site since at least 1760. Excavations by the Welsh Office in c.1968 uncovered the north wall of the great hall. Above the Honddu a modern 'curtain wall' has been erected as part of the hotel. The line of the original wall was also reported to have been discovered during the 1968 excavations and again in a trial trench in 1981.

5.1.4   A well with a flight of steps leading past it is visible about 30m north of Castle Bridge. Its age and relationship to the castle is unknown.

5.1.5   The small-scale excavations in c.1968 by the Welsh Office, and recording work on the great hall in 1989 by RCAHMW and CPAT, together with more recent detailed ground survey, will be incorporated in a forthcoming RCAHMW monograph. This detailed assessment of the castle is due to be published in the near future, and should provide a firm academic foundation on which further work can be developed.

5.2   *The Priory*

5.2.1   The priory of St John the Evangelist was, according to its foundation charter of 1100, 'situated in [Bernard's] castle of Honddu'. Whether this is a precise geographical description or simply stresses de Neufmarche's control, is open to question. However, it has been argued that the original priory church may have been constructed within a large outer bailey known later as *Beili Glas*. In due course it became the second richest Benedictine priory in Wales.

5.2.2   That a British church already occupied the spot is hinted at in documentary evidence; the chronicle of the mother house at Battle (Sussex) suggests that an existing church was restored from its foundations at the instigation of de Neufmarche. The curvilinear churchyard with the priory church awkwardly placed on its southern perimeter (see Wood's map of 1834 in particular) argues for an early medieval 'llan'. St John the Evangelist is thus perhaps a re-dedication.

5.2.3   By the mid-12th century the church may have reached its full extent. The outline of the Norman church was adopted in part by the builders of the present church in the 13th and 14th century, though only the font and stonework in the nave's east walls survive from the earlier building. It was restored in 1861–2 and 1872.

5.2.4   The priory church also served as a parish church, a screen separating the monks from the

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townspeople. Dissolved in 1537, it survived as a parish church because of this dual function. With the formation of the diocese of Swansea and Brecon in 1923 it became the cathedral church (Fig. 3).

5.2.5   The conventual buildings, of fundamentally late medieval origin with considerable 17th-century and later alterations, are classed by Haslam as 'the most comprehensive group remaining habitable in Wales'. They include the prior's lodging, what may be a guest house, a tower (now the canonry), the almonry, and a tithe barn. The cloister and chapter house have disappeared as no doubt have other buildings including a hospital referred to in 1374. The whole group is surrounded by a curtain wall, reputedly of medieval date. Together with the cathedral itself, they are currently the subject of a thorough examination by RCAHMW, and as with the castle survey, this should provide a sound academic basis for further research.

5.2.6   Fifty metres north-east of the cathedral church is the Priory Well. Its age is uncertain but it is likely to be of some antiquity. A circular embanked reservoir occupies a flat terrace below the well. Now disused, it is depicted on Wood's map of 1834 and may be considerably earlier in origin.

5.3   *The Early Settlement*

5.3.1   A settlement is thought to have grown up close to the castle by the end of the 11th century, and some references including the name of the local ward, Old Port Superior, support the interpretation of this as the original town. In 1100 at the time of the priory's foundation, Bernard de Neufmarche's charter referred to five burgesses living within the castle.

5.3.2   This early settlement may correspond with the putative large outer bailey of the castle. Dainter Street was termed Baily Glas in 1834, and its line suggests an early perimeter. There is also some rather tenuous topographical evidence for the early defences. A recent paper by D. Morgan has postulated two different lines, one enclosing an area of around 3ha, the other much larger at around 10.5ha.

5.3.3   Little is known of the extent and development of this early settlement, however, and its remains to be established whether occupation continued unbroken into the post-medieval period between the castle and the priory.

6 The Town

6.1 *Town Walls*

6.1.1 No documentary sources exist to establish the date at which the town was encompassed by defences. On the basis of murage grants for other towns in the region, however, it is likely that the walls were in position by the mid-13th century. Possibly they were preceded by earthen defences, for it is difficult to envisage an expanding settlement surviving undefended during this period. The walls were first recorded in 1314, in 1402 and again in 1483 when Richard III made a grant of £60 for their repair, all periods of unrest. John Speed reported them in good repair in 1610, but they were partially destroyed by the citizens of Brecon during the Civil War, and by the end of the century their condition had deteriorated markedly. In 1776 an Act of Parliament was passed allowing the townspeople to take down the Watton, Usk Bridge and Struet Gates and adjacent buildings because they impeded traffic. It must be assumed that the demolition occurred soon afterwards and that perhaps associated sections of the town wall disappeared at the same time. It has been claimed that the town ditch was still visible in the 19th century in the area known as Clawdd y Gaer, north of the town centre.

6.1.2 The oval perimeter of the defences (see Fig. 4) reflects the natural topography with river frontages on the north-west and south-west, and gentle natural depressions to north-east and south-east.

6.1.3 The defences are reported to have consisted, at least in their final form, of a strong stone wall with ten towers and four gates — the Watton Gate in the east, the Strowed (Struet) Gate in the north, the Bridge Gate towards Llanfaes and only a short distance away, the Water Gate presiding over a crossing of the Honddu. A substantial ditch is assumed on the north-east and south-east, apparently filled with water by a stream running down Cerrig Cochion hill. Doubt exists as to whether the wall continued above the Honddu (as depicted by Speed in 1610: Fig. 5) or whether the valley offered sufficient natural protection (as suggested by Meredith Jones' drawing of 1744: Fig. 6). The fact that Hugh Thomas talks of the northerly bridge into the town from the castle without referring to a gate might suggest that Speed was incorrect. However, Theophilus Jones mentions five gates while Leland only confuses the picture by claiming four gates but listing seven.

6.1.4 Remains of the defences survive in two or perhaps three places:

i) on the south-east, Watton Mount is a high bank surmounted by a wall and tower behind the Government Offices off Free Street and scheduled as an ancient monument (B150); the tower is thought to be early 19th century, perhaps a garden feature contemporary with the house to the south-west, but the wall itself incorporates the beginnings of a change in alignment at its north-eastern end and is certainly medieval. The best evidence for earthen defences survives here, although the presence of an external ditch can only be surmised due to the imposition of the Government Offices.

ii) on the south is a scarp bank surmounted by Captain's Walk. Below it, Danygaer Road and a track to the river presumably occupy the town ditch; on the south-west the scarp continues in the garden of Buckingham Place, perhaps with the remnants of the ditch outside it, though this area appears to have been disturbed in more recent times.

Though commonly called the town wall, almost all of the wall on the north side of Captain's Walk, , is probably post-medieval in date. One stretch behind the Ursuline Convent is protected within the B177 scheduling. In the scheduling order in 1972 it was claimed that the wall with its battered plinth was medieval, but it was reportedly rebuilt about five years later. Abutting the rear of the wall in the grounds of the convent (and included within the scheduling) is a substantial earth bank, which has been damaged slightly since 1972.

At the southern end of the scarp where it curves round to follow the river is a damaged masonry 'tower', which clearly functioned as a gateway. This is also scheduled as B177. Conventionally, it is considered to be an integral part of the town wall circuit, but it is difficult to comprehend its purpose (particularly in its present condition) for it opens on to the external face of the bank. It may conceivably have provided access to riverside installations below the town wall, protected by a spur wall. Though no traces of such an extension survive today, the 1888 large-scale map depicts an unexplained structure running down to the river's edge at this point. The proximity of Buckingham Place might provide it with an alternative explanation as an impressive rear entrance to the grounds of the house. Neither interpretation is totally convincing and it has yet to be demonstrated whether there is medieval

masonry in the gate and in the adjacent piece of wall.

iii) a short stretch of wall bordering the garden of 6 Lion Street is battered and over 4m high. The slope outside it down to the cattle market might retain traces of the town ditch. The line of the wall at the bottom of the gardens of 5 and 6 Lion Street was classed as the town wall in the 19th century, a label dropped from modern Ordnance Survey maps.

6.1.5   Recent observations in the basement of 2 The Struet has defined what is assumed to be a short stretch of the town ditch. Medieval pottery of 12th to 15th-century date, animal bone and shell was recovered from limited excavation of the fill.

6.2   *The Town*

6.2.1   The date at which habitation began on the east bank of the Honddu is unclear. What little evidence there is could indicate a relatively late date, conventionally the late 12th century, but Beresford following Edwin Poole pointed to the statement in de Neufmarche's grant of the priory to Battle (Sussex) that its possessions were in the old town (*vetus villa*), a possible implication being that a new town had already been established elsewhere. However, another charter appears to indicate that the old town was Y Gaer. Notwithstanding this, Walker has argued for an early date, probably within 20 years of the construction of the castle. This belief is based on the presumption that St Mary's was established as a chapel of ease to serve a thriving community, that by the middle of the 12th century the borough had a well-defined organisation with appointed officers, and that prior to 1188, the suburb of Llanfaes had developed to the extent that it required its own church (see section 7.3.1).

6.2.2   That Brecon was a planted town must be considered. It does not have a classic grid layout but there is nevertheless a certain symmetry to its plan and the regularity of the burgage plots off the market area is indicative of some degree of planning.

6.2.3   The modern street plan is a fair reflection of its medieval predecessor. The centre of the town contained a large triangular area used as the market place, but part of which was occupied by St Mary's Church with the hall of the gild of traders nearby. Speed's map of 1610 (Fig. 5) suggests that the houses between High Street Inferior and Church Lane are infill within this market area, but it is also worth noting that in 1834 there were more buildings in the centre of the area than at present. Within the town walls but broadly following their line were the main streets of the settlement.

6.2.4   Like many medieval walled towns in Wales there would have been open areas not developed for housing but containing agricultural structures such as barns and stables or given over to orchards and cultivated plots. In part this might be due to economic factors. In 1401, the Crown exempted the burgesses of Brecon from various tolls and other payments '...as lately many burgesses have dwelt without the walls and so the borough within the walls has deteriorated' (*Calendar of Patent Rolls*). The best commercial properties fronted onto the open market area: these were not only narrow, but also relatively uniform in size, suggesting an element of town planning with standard burgage plots. Residential properties would have been located in the streets beyond.

6.2.5   As the town developed there was increasing social polarisation. The more affluent members of the borough built town houses in Morgannwg ward (Glamorgan Street), artisans operated out of Ship Street and Llanfaes, while the poor probably occupied hovels perhaps in the suburbs. The period of the great rebuilding throughout Wales — from 1550 to 1640 — may well have hastened this process.

6.2.6   The variation in status is matched by the nature of the houses. The narrow frontages on Ship Street led to gable-end houses fronting onto the street and extending back along the plot. A contrast is provided by the more extensive spread of Buckingham House on Glamorgan Street. Houses in the town saw considerable refurbishment in the 19th century: many were provided with new facades, disguising their earlier origins.

6.2.7   The earliest domestic architecture in the town is attributable to the 16th century (eg Buckingham Place), though it is possible that some remnants of late medieval architecture may survive. The only possible example presently known is no.18 Ship Street. As might be expected, increasing numbers of buildings date from more recent centuries and the current picture is given in Fig. 10, simplified in as much as it defines the earliest recognisable century for each building but disregards all subsequent

modifications which in some cases have been substantial.

6.2.8 Nothing is known of the construction, size and function of medieval houses in Brecon. Evidence is only likely to be provided by archaeological excavation. Since it is estimated that up to 80% of the houses in the town centre have cellars (W. Hughes:pers comm.) this imposes a severe restriction on future potential investigations.

6.2.9 Overall, the general refurbishment of houses in the town during the 19th century has effectively disguised the origins of many of Brecon's houses. The magnitude of this is only now becoming apparent as a result of the work of the National Park's Building Conservation Officer. Two plans of the town centre (Figs 9 and 10) reveal the contrast between what resulted from the Welsh Office's Listed Building Survey (published in 1977) which for most towns is the only significant guide to the historic building stock, and the current picture of the town based on the Building Conservation Officer's observations.

6.3 *Suburbs*

6.3.1 Watton was termed a 'new borough' in 1399 when the Usk floodwaters swept away five burgages. Later, in the 16th century, it had developed a marked concentration of barns, an indication of the storage of rural produce.

6.3.2 Llanfaes, as argued above, may have emerged as a suburb by the end of the 12th century.

6.3.3 By 1610 much of Free Street, outside the Watton Gate had been built up, while to the north, Mount Street and the Struet had been developed.

6.4 *Churches and Chapels*

6.4.1 St Mary's was built as a chapel of ease within the town walls, probably late in the 12th century (though Haslam claims a mid-12th-century date for a pier in the north arcade). It was enlarged in the 14th century and a new tower was added in the early 16th century, the building reflecting the prosperity of the town. It only became a parish church in 1923.

6.4.2 St Catherine's Chapel accompanying a *hospitium* developed on the Watton at a short distance from the town. By the end of the 17th century it had been replaced by a large barn, the Spittle, and Hugh Thomas noted a font and the earlier discovery of bones in a patch called Church Yard. The precise location of this chapel has not been ascertained, but circumstantial evidence suggests that it was a little further to the north-west than is shown on modern large-scale Ordnance Survey maps, probably in the vicinity of the house named Maesllan.

6.4.3 St Eluned's Chapel on a hill above the town, just to the north of Slwch hillfort, included a shrine to the saint, one of Brychan's daughters. In the Middle Ages, as Giraldus Cambrensis recorded, its reputation spread beyond the region and it was resorted to by the sick. It is first referred to it in the first half of the 12th century, sometime between 1116 and 1149. Hugh Thomas also classed this as a chapel of ease. It reportedly fell down late in the 17th century. Traces of the structure were still visible early in the 19th century, but a hundred years later, there was only a mound, a well and a yew tree. Worked stone, said to have come from the chapel, was noted at Slwch Farm in 1949. The same source records that the chapel lay at the centre of a large, near-circular enclosure some 90m in diameter, which was still visible as an earthwork at that time.

6.4.6 A number of non-conformist chapels exist in the town. Amongst them, Bethel Chapel, modelled in the classical style in 1852, is the third building in this location; the site of the Plough Chapel of 1841 was first used by Protestant Dissenters in 1699, and the Gothic-styled Presbyterian Chapel in the Watton was built around 1866.

6.4.7 There were at least three crosses within the town, whose positions are known: the Market Cross in High Street Inferior, a preaching cross on the Bulwark east of St Mary's and the High Cross in High Street where the fountain now stands. The remains of all three are likely to have been removed in the wake of the 1776 Act (see section 6.1.1). In 1484 Richard III made a grant of six stones lying unused in the castle for the erection of a stone cross.

7 Llanfaes

7.1.1 Bounded by the Usk and its tributary, the Tarell, this area was subject to frequent flooding. Flood defences were only provided in 1983.

7.1.2 Llanfaes developed as an extra-mural suburb during the Middle Ages. Whether 'Newtown', referred to a survey in 1326 and reflected in the still-current name Newton, represented a separate focus of settlement remains to be ascertained. Llanfaes' nucleus in the earlier 19th century was Orchard Street as far west as St David's Church and Heol Hwnt West (now Newmarch Street). Superficially at least the houses on both roads are 18th and 19th century in date, and nothing earlier has yet been recognised. However, the ford known as Rhyd Bernard led directly into Heol Hwnt West, and thus the development of dwellings along it might be anticipated.

7.1.3 Another castle, known as 'Crwcws Castle', may have existed in the area of Llanfaes. There is medieval documentary evidence for its existence, and the Tithe map includes cognate names, but the exact location and indeed the function of the stronghold are not known.

7.2 *Christ College*

7.2.1 St Nicholas' Friary, which was to become the largest of the ten Dominican friaries in Wales, was established on the opposite side of the Usk from the town, though the foundation date and the founder are unknown. Its position on the edge of a border town is hardly typical, but perhaps emphasises the growing importance of Brecon as a market centre and focal point on a major routeway in the Middle Ages. The first record is in 1269, and Parry has argued for a beginning around 1250. In 1541 soon after the Dissolution it became the home of a college transferred from Abergweli (Carmarthenshire) and was known as Christ College. Some of the buildings were demolished in 1660. It was re-established as a public school in 1853. The chapel was restored between 1859 and 1872 and new school buildings added in 1861–4, with further additions in this century.

7.2.2 The choir of the friary church, its roofless nave, a refectory and an adjacent hall survive from the medieval period, though all have been much restored. They are claimed as the largest group of Dominican buildings surviving in Britain.

7.2.3 The earliest features in the chapel date from around 1240. The large hall may have originated in the 13th century as the infirmary, the apsidal end perhaps housing a chapel. The small hall appears to be 14th century and may have been the guest hall.

7.2.4 Lost buildings include the chapter house and cloisters to the south of the church. Speed's map seems to indicate a curtain wall and gateway surviving into the mid-17th century, and a manuscript plan of 1851 depicts the 'ancient burying ground' to the east of the chapel.

7.2.5 Within the last five years, D. Morgan of Christ College has conducted excavations in front of a blocked door on the south side of the chapel. These produced only a long-cross penny of indeterminate date and post-medieval debris, and revealed little structural information, though they did demonstrate the shallow nature of the building's foundations. A frequently observed parchmark in the grassed area of the earlier cloisters was also trenched some years earlier but proved to be a 19th-century pathway.

7.3 *Other Buildings*

7.3.1 The church (formerly chapel) of St David was mentioned by Giraldus Cambrensis in 1188. Its foundation date is obscure, but the *llan* element in Llanfaes might conceivably point to an early medieval origin. The present church is a rebuild of 1924.

7.3.2 South-east of Christ College, probably where Dinas Lodge now stands was a crenellated tower with archway, depicted on a 19th-century engraving by J. Griffiths. This is thought to have been the monumental entrance to an estate on the south side of Brecon.

8 Bridges, Fords and Mills

8.1 *Bridges*

8.1.1 *The Usk Bridge* Parry surmises that the Usk must have been bridged when the friary was founded in the mid-13th century, succeeding the ford known as Rhyd Barnard. The first reference to a stone bridge is in 1461 and Leland noted that the bridge across the Usk had been swept away in 1535. It was replaced by the present bridge in 1563, though this has been repaired several times since (eg 1772, 1794 and 1801) and widened — some would say vandalised — in the 20th century. This fine structure is scheduled as B4.

8.1.2 *The Castle Bridge* This linked the town and castle, but was essentially a postern, reputedly with a drawbridge. Some modification has occurred to this two-arched bridge in the recent past, including the removal of stone parapets in the early part of this century. Nevertheless, with the large central pier and the massive masonry foundation on the castle side, it is possible that an original medieval bridge forms the core of the existing structure, and at least two phases are discernible even from a cursory examination.

8.1.3 *The Watergate Bridge* The lowest bridging point of the Honddu, this is an iron structure erected in 1874. Previously the bridge was of stone and had been replaced or reconstructed at least twice earlier in the 19th century. The date of the first bridge here can only be guessed at, but it was certainly in position in 1610, and in the mid-18th century had three arches separated by cutwaters.

8.1.4 *The Priory Bridge* Little information is available about this, the most northerly of the three bridges across the Honddu. The present bridge was a rebuild of 1813 but its predecessor is depicted on Speed's map of 1610.

8.2 *Fords*

8.2.1 Three fords have been recognised. The Usk was originally crossed by two, both of them shown on current large-scale Ordnance Survey maps. Little has been written of the one below the town which crossed to land occupied by the friary but its course would suggest some antiquity, probably providing a crossing point that avoided going through the town. That known as Rhyd Bernard and referred to as *Bernardys forde* in 1406, 200m above the confluence with the Honddu, seemingly represented the major crossing. Finally a paved crossing of the Honddu is still visible just above Castle Bridge, but nothing is known of its history.

8.3 *Mills*

8.3.1 Some mills were in existence at an early date. The fast-flowing waters of the Honddu powered several, notably Castle Mill near the confluence with the Usk, which Rees saw as an early development, and a second early water-mill on the Usk at the source of the later canal. This spot has not been located.

8.3.2 The Castle or Honddu Mill is potentially one of the most interesting, though the surviving building has yet to be examined. It seems to have come into existence at an early date and may be the Water Grist Mill and Malt Mill mentioned in a parliamentary survey of 1381. It was still active in the 19th century and the mill leat, now infilled, is shown on Wood's map of 1834. The mill machinery was removed about 1950.

8.3.3 Slightly higher up the Honddu but below Castle Bridge was a saw mill with a mortar mill on the ground floor. Of timber and stone and perhaps of 18th-century date, this was recently recorded by RCAHMW. Only its shell now survives.

8.3.4 The fulling mill beside Priory Bridge was called Burges Mill in a parliamentary survey of 1652, and is depicted on a Buck print of 1741. It closed in 1937 and has now been demolished.

9 Industrial Archaeology

9.1 The terminal of the Brecon and Abergavenny Canal occupies flat ground south of the Watton. Built between 1796 and 1800 the canal was linked to the coast by the Monmouthshire Canal in 1812. The wharves at Brecon were extended between 1809 and 1812, the Brecon Boat Company's wharf used particularly for coal and lime. A tramroad extended the link to Kington in Herefordshire. The network was taken over by the Great Western Railway in 1880 and commercial trade continued into the 20th century, finally ceasing around 1933.

9.2 Little of industrial interest now survives at the terminal of the canal: the wharfs, at least one dry dock, a lime shed and perhaps other installations that are shown on 19th-century maps have all disappeared.

9.3 The Brecon and Merthyr Railway with its first station in Watton was opened in 1863. The Neath and Brecon Railway erected a temporary station at Mount Street by 1868, but a joint station was opened at Free Street in 1871. Almost all evidence of the railway has now gone: the Free Street Station was demolished to make way for a fire station, the Watton Station site is now occupied by the Welsh Water Offices.

10   Recommendations

10.1   Recommendations presented here are covered under four headings: planning (sections 10.2–10.4), management (10.5–10.9), research (10.11–10.13) and tourism (10.14).

10.2   Much of Brecon's history is written around its standing buildings: the archaeological investigation of below-ground remains has been neglected in contrast to towns of equivalent importance in England, and there is a catalogue of missed opportunities. We can point to the construction of the large supermarket above the town defences behind Lion Street and the rebuilding of Ely Tower House within the Castle bailey. Any examination of sub-surface deposits, whether it be through watching brief, evaluation or full excavation is potentially valuable for the recovery of archaeological and environmental data. This will hold true for the castle, cathedral, friary, town, town defences and any other element of historic Brecon considered above. It is particularly important for the historic areas defined on Fig. 4, including the whole of the walled town. Only by accepting future opportunities when they arise will it be possible to build up a picture of the medieval and early modern town, and to answer key questions such as whether there was a pre-Norman settlement at Brecon and the date at which the walled town east of the Honddu was established.

10.3   Figure 11 defines an historic core 'envelope' for Brecon and Llanfaes; the impact of future development proposals on this area's heritage should be carefully assessed and if appropriate an archaeological response should be initiated. Some areas within the 'envelope', currently devoid of buildings, have been highlighted. The majority of these are particularly sensitive medieval street frontage sites or on the line of the town defences. Should any of them come up for development, it is considered that a pre-planning archaeological evaluation would be the most appropriate requirement.

10.4   Ground disturbances undertaken by the service industries are an inevitable part of urban life, but can sometimes provide useful information on buried deposits. During the course of the study, Welsh Water cut trenches at the bottom of Ship Street and close to the eastern end of Castle Bridge. Neither of these was monitored by an archaeologist and it is can be argued that they represent missed opportunities. It is recommended that closer liaison be established with the companies involved in the service industries and that the National Park adopts a more positive role in monitoring such works.

10.5   The present condition of the gateway by the river is a cause for concern. A programme of vegetation clearance and masonry stabilisation should be initiated as a matter of urgency. The effect of vegetation on the Watton Mount wall and bank is less pronounced and there are indications that some clearance has occurred recently. It should be established whether this is undertaken on a regular basis and if not a positive policy of control should be implemented.

10.6   Only four monuments in the town of Brecon are scheduled (Fig. 7), namely the Usk Bridge (B4), the northern part of the castle (B22) and parts of the town defences (B150 and B177). As much of Brecon's heritage lies beneath the ground the justification for further scheduling would have to be particularly strong. Upstanding monuments which might be considered for scheduling are the already listed curtain wall around the conventual buildings south of the cathedral, and the adjacent tithe barn. Consideration should be given to extending the scheduled area of the castle (B22) to take in the section of bailey ditch outside the grounds of Ely Tower House on the north side of the earthworks and the gardens to the south of the Castle of Brecon Hotel which presumably still contain buried features of significance.

10.7   Given the architectural significance of the Dominican friary survivals at Christ College a full architectural survey is recommended to assess their medieval authenticity and the extent of 19th-century renovations, and to provide a detailed and precise framework for subsequent recording as and when the opportunity arises. That the only protection given to this particular complex is the listing status of certain buildings is a cause for concern, and the appropriateness of scheduling selected areas (eg the cloisters) should be considered. In the future proposed developments at Christ College should be carefully assessed and in the absence of any other controls, the local planning authority should adopt a strong attitude to the preservation of all remains relating to the former friary.

10.8   Little of the medieval castle survives. Most vulnerable at present is the tower abutting the wall of the Great Hall. Attempts by the owners to marshal grant aid a few years ago seem to have failed and this, one of the more prominent landmarks of the town, is at risk. The National Park should consider what

course of action is appropriate here.

10.9   Various organisations have interests in the cultural heritage of Brecon, including the Brecon Beacons National Park, Cadw, CPAT, the Brecknock Society, the Brecon Museum, RCAHMW and, through its staff, Christ College. It has become apparent during the research on this report that links between the various organisations are not always close and in some cases are non-existent. This cannot be to the benefit of the town. It is recommended that the National Park through its staff should foster closer ties with other bodies and individuals involved in the preservation and interpretation of Brecon's cultural heritage.

10.10   Much of the research on Brecon's past has been geared to its political and social history. With some notable recent exceptions, the study of its topography has been largely neglected. The plan of the walled town, its burgage plots and streets, and the growth of its suburbs merit detailed examination. Whilst the charters and other surviving borough documents have also received considerable attention, the extents accompanying the *Inquisitions Post Mortem* for this seigneurial settlement seem to have received little study. The potential for topographic studies of the full extents of the manor and castle from 1301, 1337 and perhaps later years remains to be assessed.

10.11   The defences of Brecon have not received the same attention as those of other Powys towns such as Llanidloes and Montgomery. Detailed fieldwork is required, particularly in the vicinity of Captain's Walk and on the north-east side of the medieval town above Clawdd y Gaer, in itself a significant place-name. Measured survey is needed of the surviving sections of defences behind Captain's Walk and at Watton Mount, and the gateway by the river. Every opportunity for detailed fieldwork and excavation on the unconfirmed stretch of town defences above the Honddu should be taken.

10.12   A thorough study of the town's bridges is required. While the history and the development of the Usk Bridge is known in part, the structural history of the other bridges in the town has never been investigated. This should be rectified to avoid future unsympathetic alterations to the bridges, the fate of the Usk Bridge in 1978.

10.13   1993 is celebrated, perhaps not wholly accurately, as the 900th anniversary of the founding of Brecon, and this has led to a rash of new work on the town both published and in progress. Nevertheless, it is apparent that despite much recent research, source material is widely scattered, often in obscure publications or more worryingly not published at all. The bibliography accompanying this report is far from comprehensive, providing no more than a foundation. It is recommended that the National Park with its full-time heritage staff and GIS facility should collate existing records on Brecon's cultural heritage. Subject to appropriate controls such an archive would be open to public consultation.

10.14   Brecon has considerable potential as a historical resource. It contains the only cathedral in the region, has important secular and religious remains, and was one of the few walled towns in Brecknockshire. Its tourism potential is considerable, though the fact that a number of key properties, namely Christ College and the Castle are in private ownership is a drawback. Nevertheless, there seems to be a policy of under-playing the tourist potential of Brecon. There is nothing on the main access roads to suggest that it is an historic town containing important buildings, tourist information seems geared to the Brecon Beacons at the expense of the town itself and, quite remarkably, there is no town guide, only an A4 pamphlet describing a town trail. Serious consideration should be given to rectifying these deficiencies.

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(iii) *Unpublished sources*

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c.1616 John Speed: plan of Brecon from map of Wales
1744 Meredith Jones: plan of Brecon
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1786 Sparrow/S.Hooper. Castle Bridge from the north-east (Brecon Museum)
1788 J. W. Smith. View from below castle to Usk Bridge and beyond (NLW Aberystwyth)
J. W. Smith. Watergate bridge and adjacent buildings (NLW Aberystwyth)
1798 G. Samuel/J. Stover. Usk Bridge from west bank of river (Brecon Museum)
?Early 19thC R. Colt Hoare. View from Watergate Bridge northwards (Brecon Museum)
1812 T. Bourdon. Brecon Castle and Castle of Brecon Hotel (Brecon)
1813 Mrs Lathbury/S. Rawle. Christ College Chapel (Brecon Museum)
1850 J. M. Ince. The Struet and Priory bridge (NLW Aberystwyth)
19thC J.Griffiths. Usk Bridge and castle.
19thC C.R. Nicholls. Castle from Watergate Bridge (Brecon Museum)
19thC J. M. Ince. Brecon and Usk Bridge from west side of river (NLW Aberystwyth)
n.d. Carey. Brecknock Castle (Brecon Museum)

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Appendix 1

Archaeological Sites: Concordance

| Name	Grid Reference	SAM	PAR	NPT
Motte and Bailey	SO 0430 2875	B22	601	60
Castle Hall	SO 0430 2872	–	6874	62
St Nicholas' Priory	SO 0420 2845	–	603	–
St Nicholas' (holy) well	SO 042 282	–	5691	–
Christ College chapel	SO 0420 2847	–	20101	32
Christ College halls	SO 0420 2841	–	6875	33
Ridge and furrow	SO 0423 2835	–	6876	–
?Bronze Age cist burial	SO 052 296	–	619	399
Usk Bridge	SO 0430 2859	B04	4015	6
Honddu Bridge	SO 0431 2866	–	6877	–
Castle Bridge	SO 0436 2875	–	6878	71
Priory Bridge	SO 0450 2890	–	6879	243
St Mary's Church	SO 0453 2852	–	20149	45
St David's Church, Llanfaes	SO 0379 2831	–	6880	86
Town defences – Watton Mount	SO 0467 2847	B150	6881	5
– Captain's Walk	SO 0449 2838	B177	6882	116
– Clawdd y Gaer	SO 0462 2860	–	6883	173
– Riverside 'gate'	SO 0442 2841	B177	6884	35
– 2 The Struet	SO 0445 2871	–	6885	–
Cathedral	SO 0444 2899	–	6886	237
Conventual buildings	SO 0441 2896	–	6887	241
Priory Well	SO 0452 2906	–	6888	121
St Catherine's Chapel	SO 0504 2810?	–	6889	4039
St Elyned's Chapel	SO 0578 2960	–	617	397
Slwch hillfort	SO 0560 2940	–	611	2
Brecon Bronze Age hoard	SO 056 295	–	618	398

Key
SAM – Scheduled Ancient Monument (Cadw)
PAR – Powys Archaeological Record (CPAT)
NPT – National Park Treasure (BBNP)

Figure 1 : BRECON - Outline Plan   1:6,000 scale

Pendre

RIVER USK

BRECON TOWN CENTRE

Llanfaes
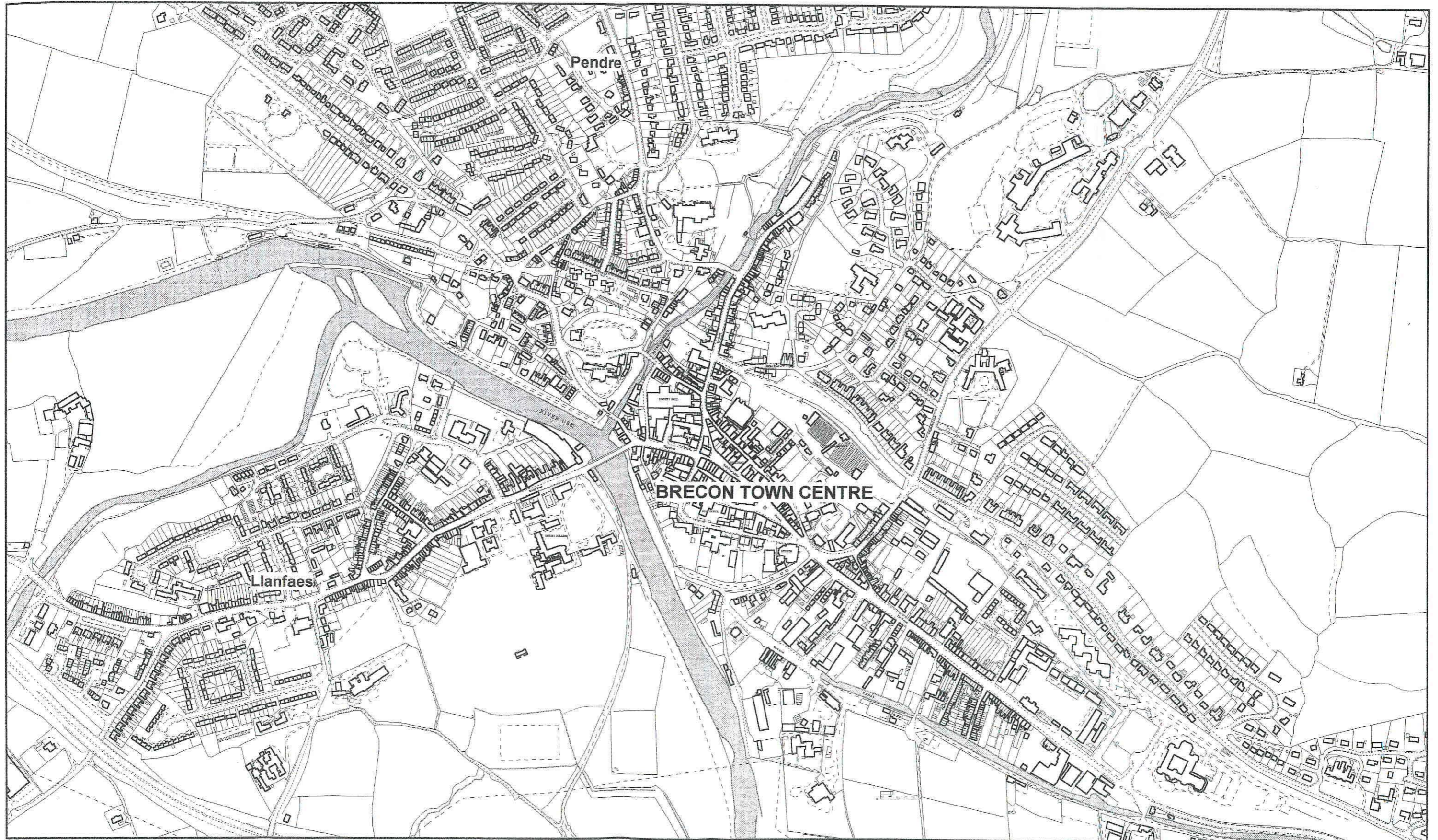
THE SOUTH EAST-VIEW OF BRECKNOCK CASTLE.
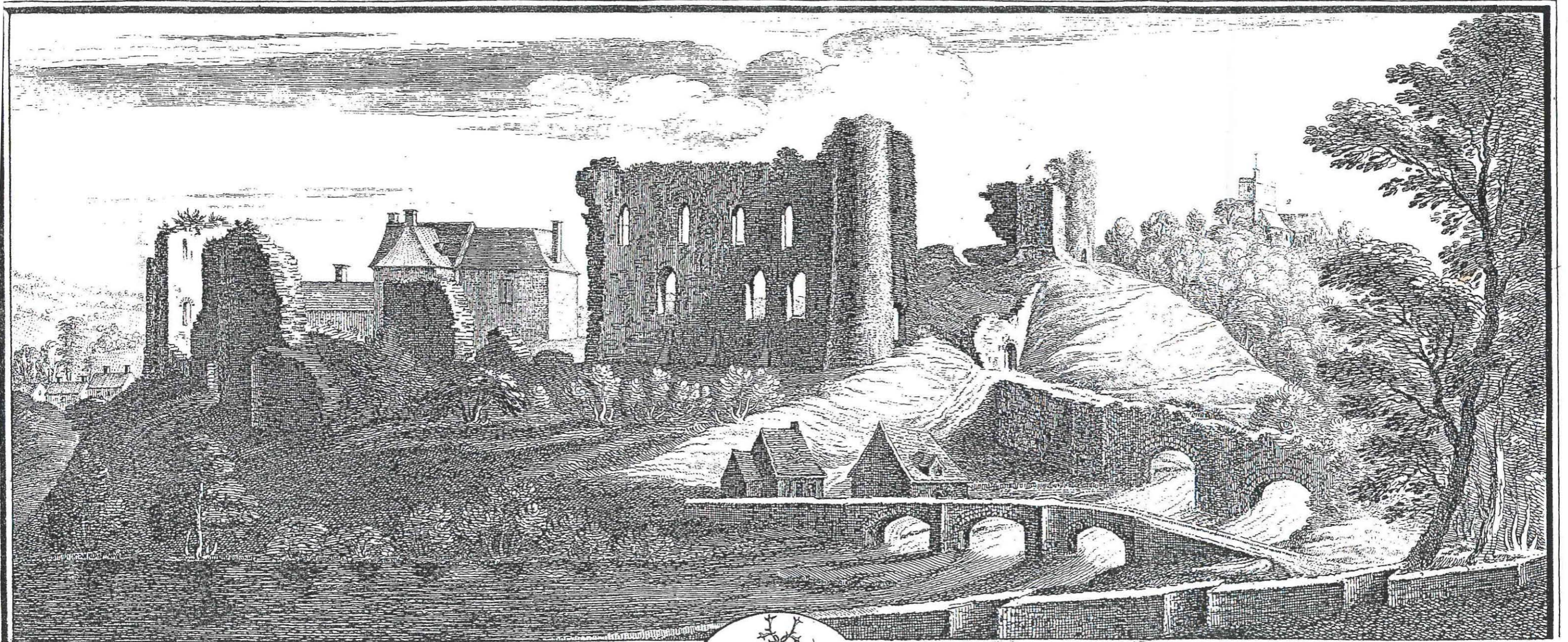
To William Morgan Esq.
This Prospect is humbly Inscrib'd by
his most Oblig'd Servants
Sam. & Nath. Buck.

BRECKNOCK or BRECON call'd by the Britains Aberhonddy from the Conflux of the Rivers Usk & Hond-hy. Bernard de Newmarch the Conq.r of this Country in the Reign of K. William Rufus built this Castle, which was afterward repaired by the Brozes and Bohuns. Here it was that I. Morton Bp. of Ely was confin'd by the Protector Richard Duke of York, who committed him to the Custody of Henry Stafford Duke of Buckingham: This Duke procured the Crown for K. Richard 3.d but being afterwards disgusted with him: He & the Bishop his Prisoner, here contrived the Overthrow of that Prince, & the promotion of Hen: E.l of Richmond to the Crown of England, under the Name of K. Hen: 7.th And thus in ye Tower of this Castle, ye Ruins of which still bears ye Name of Twr-Eli or Eli Tower, this notable Revolution was 1.st projected, which was afterwards brought to a successful Issue.

Sam.l & Nath.l Buck delin et Sculp.t Publish'd according to Act of Parliament March 23. 1741. — 1. Eli Tower. 2. The Priory

Fig.2 The Bucks' Print of Brecon Castle, 1741

THE SOUTH-EAST VIEW OF BRECKNOCK-PRIORY.
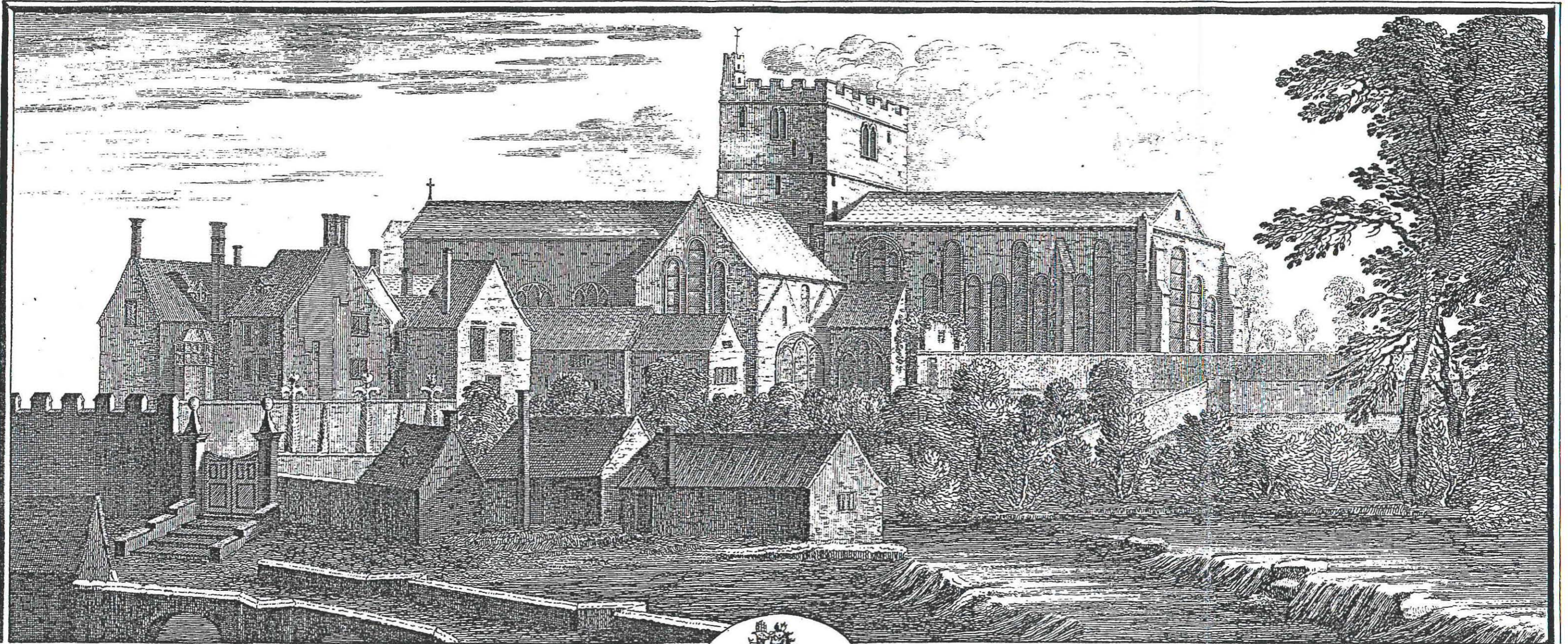
To Nicholas Jeffreys Esq.;
Proprietor of this PRIORY
This Prospect is humbly Inscrib'd by
his most Oblig'd Serv.ts ———
Sam.l & Nath.l Buck.

THIS Priory of Benedictines was in y.e Reign of K. Hen.t I founded by Bernard de Newmarch and dedicated to S.t John y.e Evangelist & made subordinate to y.e Abbey of Battle in Suſſex. It is now a Parish Church being a most Magnificent Spacious building Situated on an Eminence and built in y.e Shape of a Croſs; it is near 200 feet long & 60 feet broad. In y.e Centre of y.e Croſs an Embattled Tower rises about 90 feet high which lies open to y.e Church above y.e Roof. The Chancel hath no side Iſles but y.e Body of y.e Church hath & is Wainscotted flat at top & Painted. On y.e North side of y.e Church is a very good paved Cloyster w.ch opens into y.e Church & Joines it to y.e Priory Houſe where y.e Refectory or Dining Hall is still remaining An.Val.{ £2.4.2 Dugd. 134.11.4 Speed.

Sam.l & Nath.l Buck delin et Sculp. Publiſh'd according to Act of Parliament y.e March y.e 15.th 1741.

Fig.3   The Bucks' Print of Brecon Priory, 1741

Figure 4 : BRECON - Historic Monument Areas   1:4,600 scale
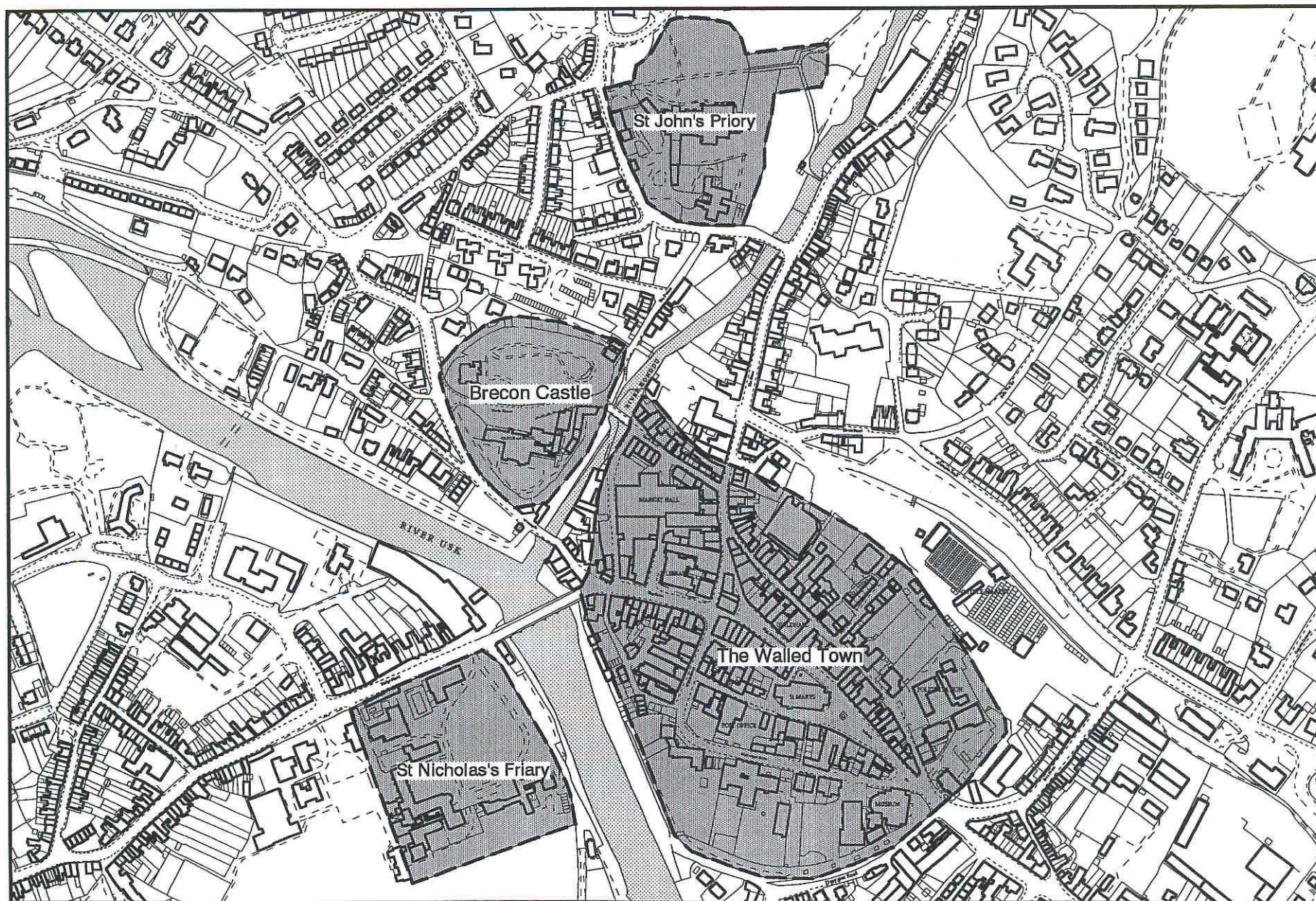
St John's Priory

Brecon Castle

RIVER USK

St Nicholas's Friary

The Walled Town

Produced by Brecon Beacons National Park. AWP/CP

Reproduced from 1992 Ordnance Survey 1:2,500 maps with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office, Crown Copyright

Fig. 5 John Speed's Plan of Brecon, 1610

BREKNOKE

A. Castell lane.
B. Old port inferior.
C. Old port superior.
D. Cantercelcy ward.
E. Shepe Stret.
F. High Stret superior.
G. High Stret inferior.
H. Lone y posty.
I. Morgannok ward.
K. S. Marys ward.
L. Llanuaß ward.
M. The Priorye.
N. S. Iohn Euangelist.
O. St Maryes Chapel.
P. West Gate.
Q. Water Gate.
R. North Gate.
S. East Gate.
T. Watton Ward.
V. Rewredd Ward.

THE SCALE OF PASES

50   100   150   200

Honddy flud

The Colledge

Yske flud

PLAN OF THE TOWN OF BRECON IN THE YEAR 1610 BY JOHN SPEED

Fig. 6 Meredith Jones' Plan of Brecon, 1744

ICHNOGRAPHY
of the Town of
BRECKNOCK,
From a Plan by Meredith Jones.
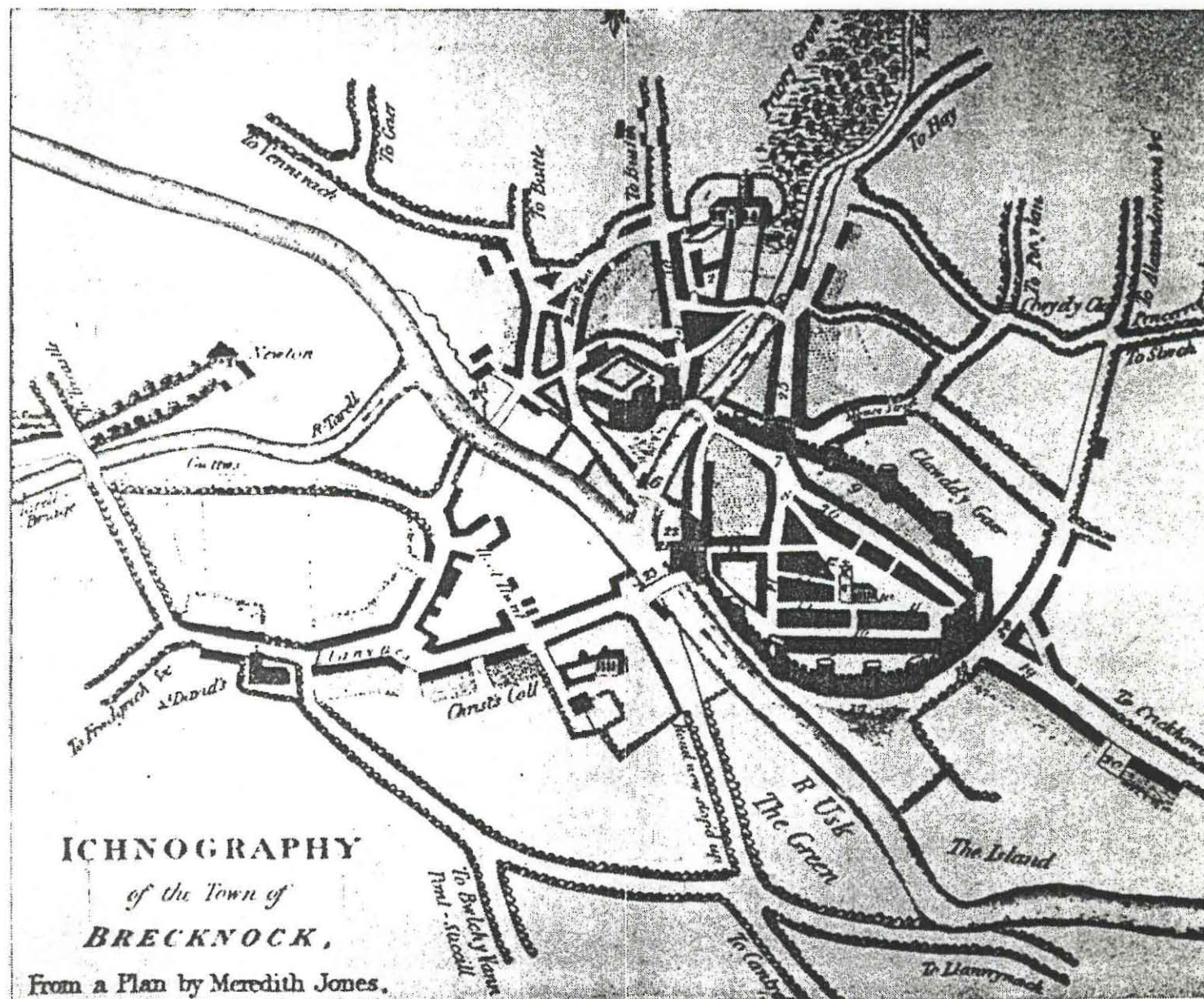
SURVEYOR IN 1744.
Reference :
1. St. John the Evangelist.
2. The Priory House, Cloisters, etc.
3. The Castle.
4. Castle Bridge.
5. Upper Bridge on Do.
6. Lower Do.
7. Struet Gate.
8. High Street Superior.
9. Town Wall.
10. St. Mary's Chapel.
11. The Bulwark.
12. High Street Inferior.
13. Ship Street.
14. Wheat Street.
15. St. Mary's Street.
16. Glamorganshire Street.
17. Captains Walk.
18. Watton Gate.
19. Watton.
20. Old Bowling Green.
21. Water Gate.
22. Bridge Gate.
23. Usk Bridge.
24. Usk Mill.
25. Struet.
26. Lion Lane.
27. Church Street.
28. Heol rhydd.
29. The Postern.
30. Pen-y-dref.

Figure 7 : BRECON - Scheduled Ancient Monuments and other archaeological sites   1:5,000
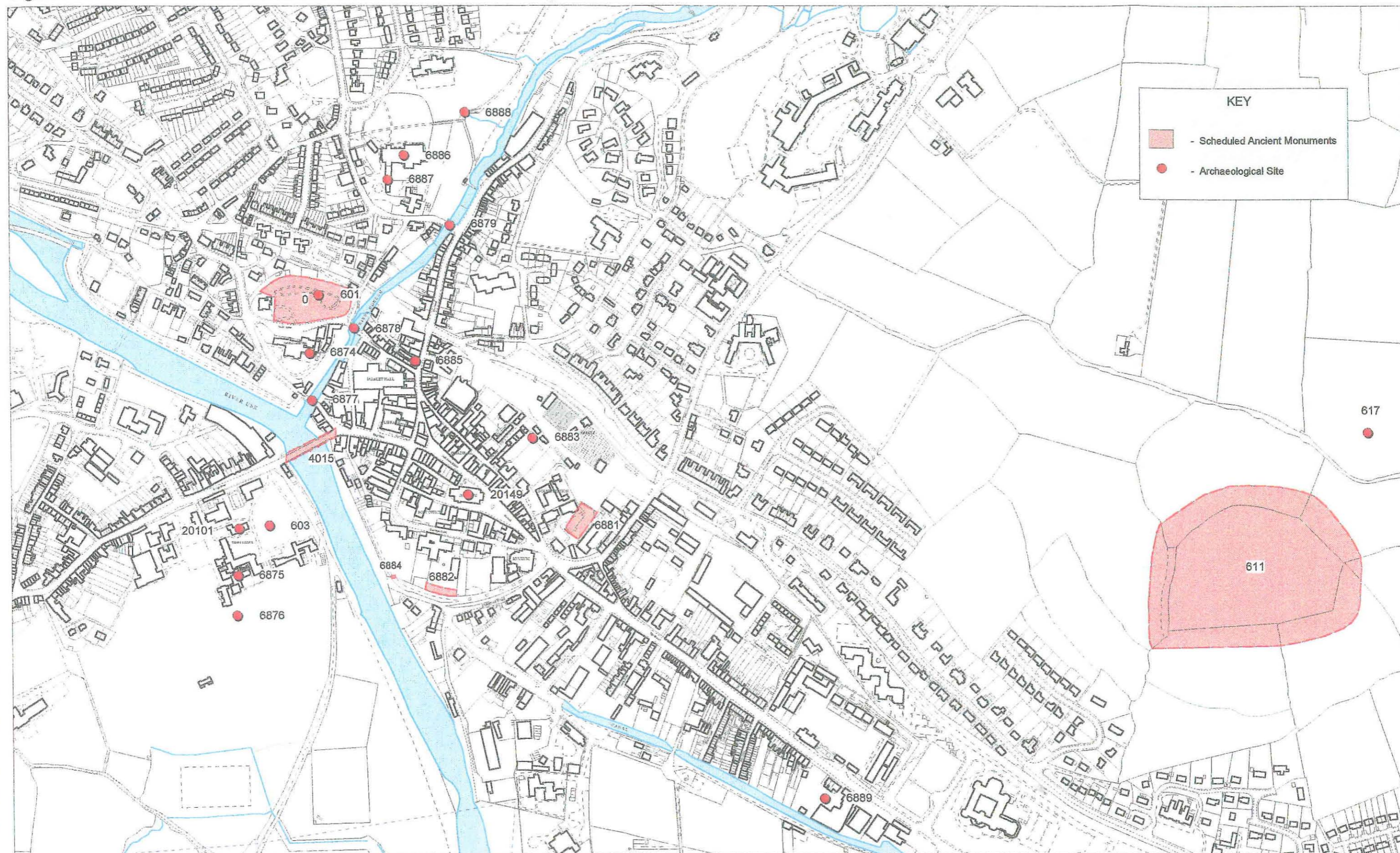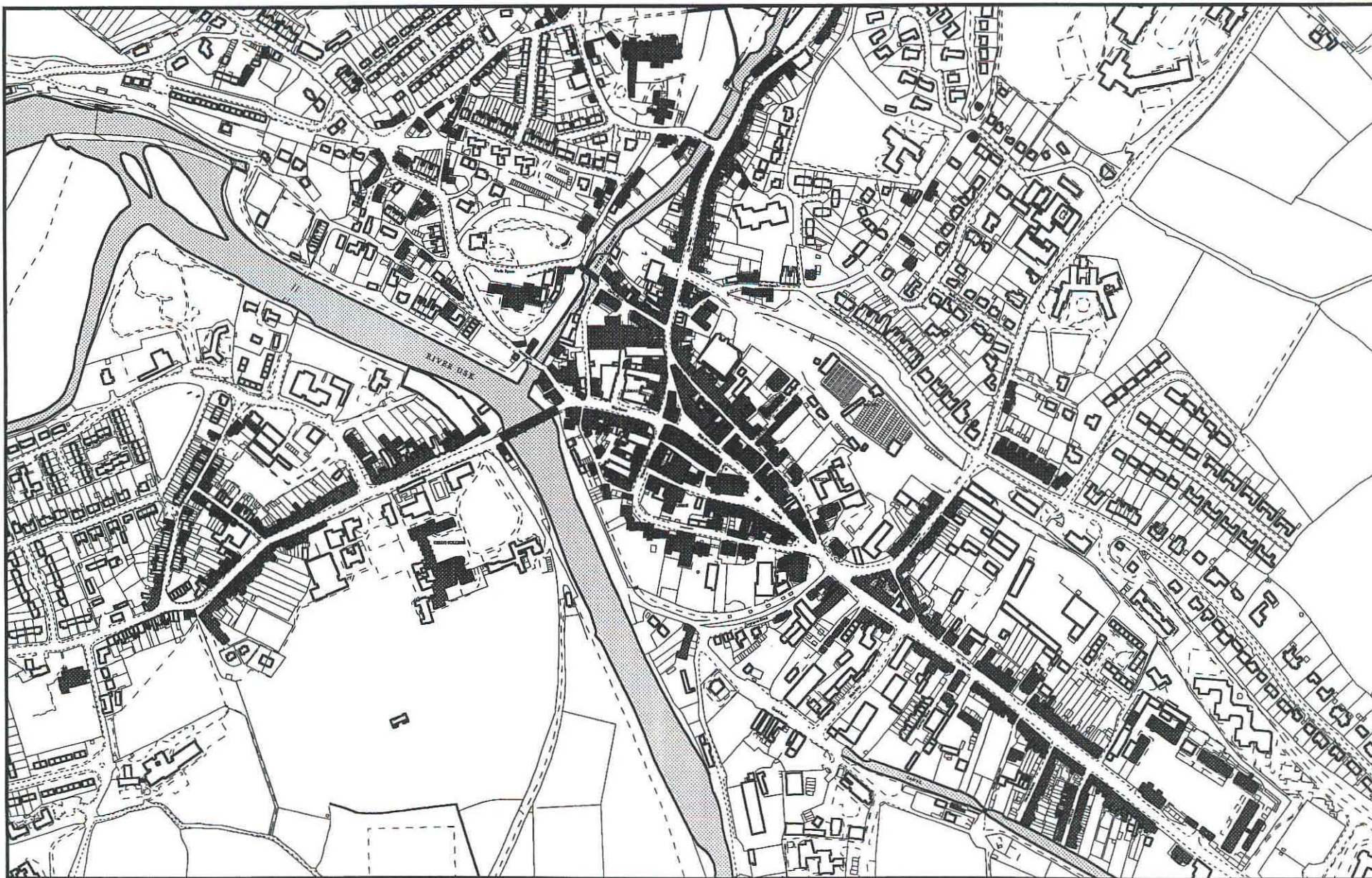
KEY

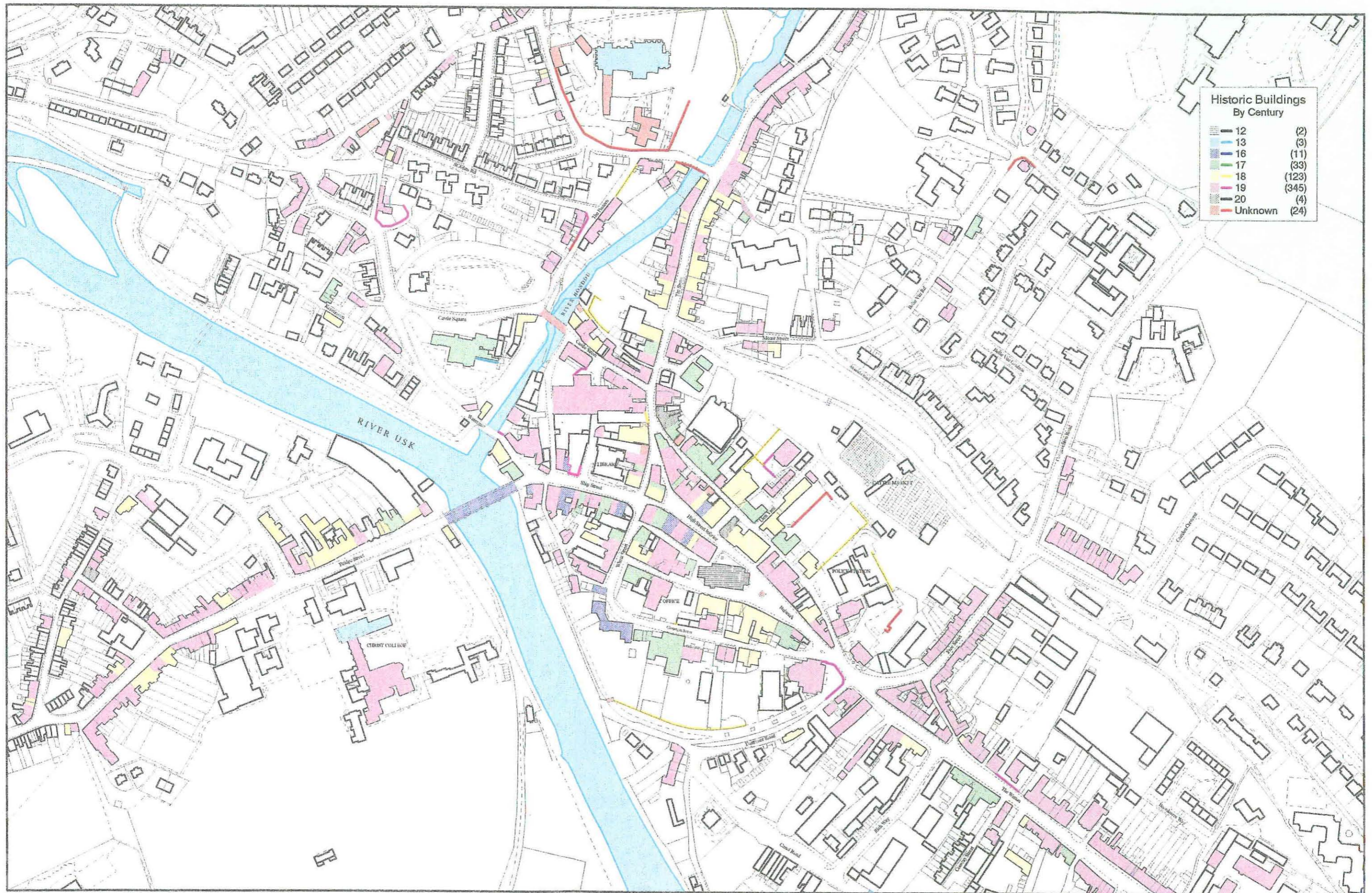- Scheduled Ancient Monuments
- Archaeological Site

Figure 8 : BRECON - Listed Buildings   1:6000 scale

RIVER USK

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Figure 9 : BRECON - Historic Buildings by earliest dated features (1977 data) 1:3,250 Scale

Historic Buildings
By Century

12	(2)
13	(3)
16	(11)
17	(33)
18	(123)
19	(345)
20	(4)
Unknown	(24)

RIVER USK

Figure 10 : BRECON - Historic Buildings by earliest dated features (1993 data) 1:3,500 Scale

Historic Buildings
By Century

—	12	(2)
—	13	(3)
—	16	(15)
—	17	(38)
—	18	(120)
—	19	(337)
—	20	(8)
—	Unknown	(20)

RIVER USK

RIVER HONDDU

CHRIST COLLEGE

CANAL

Figure 11: BRECON - Historic Settlement Core and Evaluation Areas 1:4,500 scale

KEY

- Evaluation Area

- Historic Core

RIVER USK