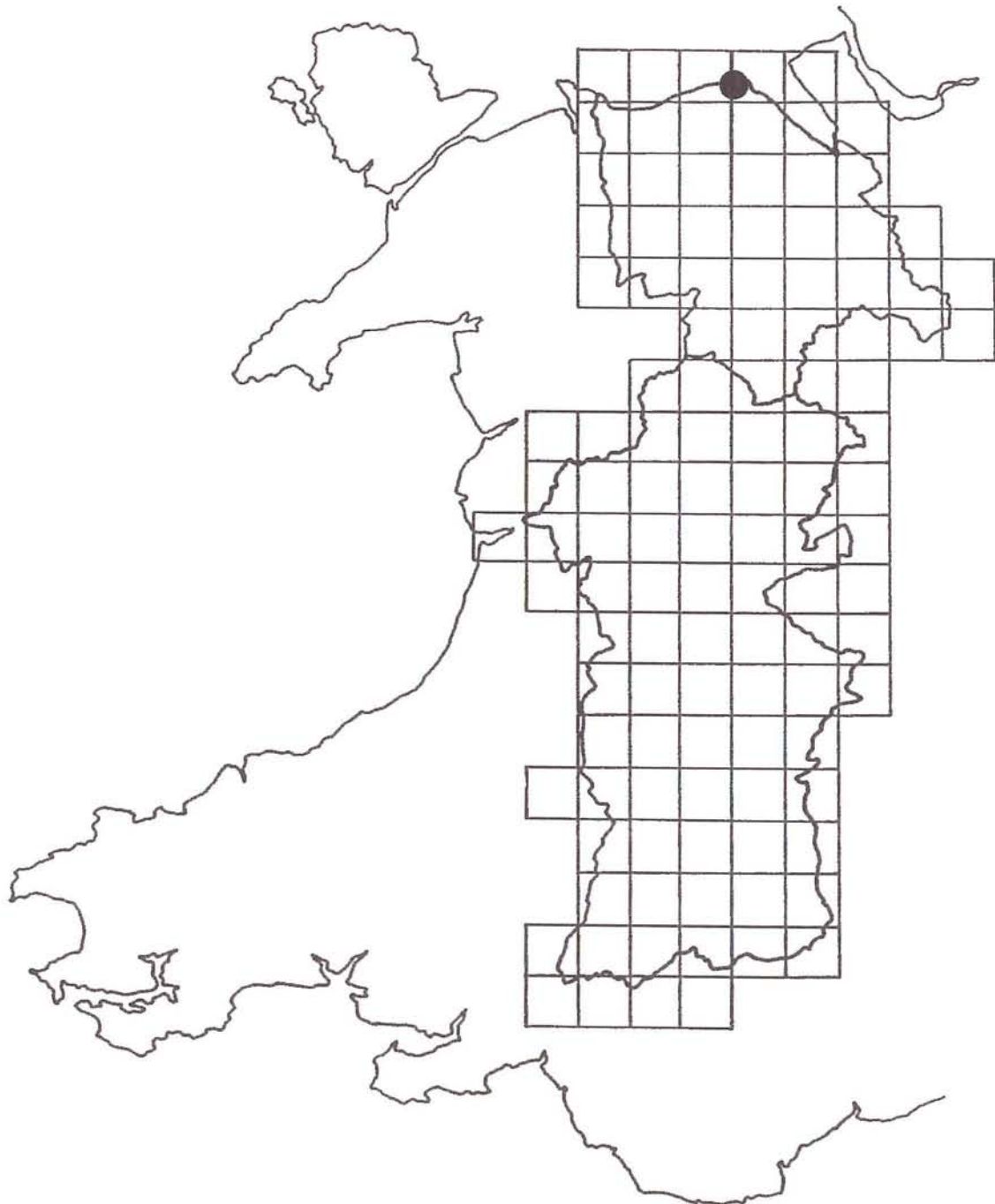


Prestatyn Sewage Treatment Works, Clwyd

DESK-TOP ASSESSMENT



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DESK-TOP ASSESSMENT

by **R J Silvester and R Hankinson**

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Report prepared for Dwr Cymru Welsh Water

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1 Introduction

1.1 The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was commissioned in January 1994 by Dwr Cymru Welsh Water to carry out one element of an archaeological evaluation on two alternative sites for the proposed sewage treatment works on the eastern side of Prestatyn. This was required in order to determine the archaeological sensitivity of the two areas which are the subjects of planning applications to Rhuddlan Borough Council (refs 2/PRE/344/93 and 2/PRE/345/93).

1.2 A brief was prepared on behalf of Rhuddlan Borough Council by their archaeological advisers, the Clwyd Archaeology Service (CAS), a part of Clwyd County Council, on 9 November 1993. This summarised the planning background, archaeological interest, aim of the evaluation and specified the approach to be followed in conducting the evaluation. It was considered that both a desk-top study of available records relating to the area and a programme of hand augering would be necessary.

1.3 Welsh Water encountered difficulties in arranging access for the archaeological contractor to undertake the fieldwork element of the evaluation, but instructed CPAT in the first instance to undertake the desk-top assessment. Following discussions between CPAT and CAS, a written specification for this element was produced (Annex 1) and agreed with CAS and with the client.

1.4 The desk-top study was carried out in mid-January 1994 and this report prepared immediately afterwards.

2 Location (Fig 1)

2.1 Both application sites lie about 1km to the north-east of Prestatyn town and centre on enclosed ground sandwiched between the A548 to the south and the Chester/Holyhead railway line to the north. Location 1 (centred at SJ 0830 8347) is defined by a roughly rectangular area covering 3.8 hectares, adjacent to the main road and with an access road leading off it. Location 2 (centred at SJ 0790 8362) is also broadly rectangular with an area of 4.3 hectares and has a longer access road from the A548.

3 Geology

3.1 A complex geological sequence has been distinguished in the Prestatyn area which can only be briefly outlined here. The solid geology of Carboniferous age comprises the Holywell Shales, and the Lower and Middle Coal Measures with the boundary between them passing across the north-west tip of Location 2; a short distance to the south Chert Beds of the Gronant Group underlie the access road and extreme west of Location 1. More important, however, from an archaeological point of view are the drift deposits of post-glacial origin. With the exception of where the access road(s) leaves the A548, all the grounds proposed for development are underlain by peat, but the interface between these organic deposits and the boulder clay lies on the north side of the main road and thus very close to Location 1 in particular.

3.2 The peat deposits run along the coast on a broadly east to west axis and have been examined recently by CPAT on a site between Nant Hall Road and Bodnant Avenue owned by the Land Authority for Wales and some 800m to the south-west of Location 2 (centred at SJ 0705 8317) and also on the site of the proposed Kwik-Save supermarket extension a further 300m to the south-west

(centred at SJ 0680 8300). Beneath the peat was blue-grey estuarine clay and on the periphery of these wetland deposits were shell middens indicative of Mesolithic and Neolithic activity (see below).

4 Desk-top Assessment: The Proposed Sites

4.1 The object of the desk-top element of the evaluation was to determine the sequence of land-use and development in the alternative areas proposed for the sewage treatment works by using the available documentary sources together with historic cartography and any other, readily available, secondary sources. For convenience, Locations 1 and 2 will be assessed together except where a feature is specific to one area. Following the specific assessment of the fields in question the broader archaeological and historical context will be considered.

4.2 The earliest documentary source consulted was a manuscript sketch of the 16th century. Its precise date cannot be established, and although its style might point to a date closer to 1550 than to 1600, there can be no certainty on this as maps of the Elizabethan period can be remarkably conservative in appearance (see Harvey 1993). However, for the purposes of this report, the precise date is less important than the fact that it can be broadly dated to the 16th century.

4.3 The sketch covers an area described as "The very platte of the mote and all other lands adjoining to hyt". The mote of the title refers to the motte and bailey castle in the fields to the west of Nant Hall Hotel, itself on the eastern outskirts of Prestatyn. The sketch is not scaled and indeed is more of a picture map than a measured plan. It does not include the area of the proposed works, but is concerned with the lands between the town of Prestatyn and its boundary with Gronant (see below, section 4.5) some of which belonged to Thomas Conwey (or his heir).

4.4 The 'high way' from 'Nant' (Gronant) to Prestatyn is depicted, and there can be little doubt that this is the minor road, termed on some modern maps the Gronant Road, that adopts a rather irregular course to the south of the present A548. Fields in the vicinity of the motte, some arable, some meadow and some 'more' (i.e. rough pasture?) are labelled, with the 'waste of sands' and the sea beyond. It has been suggested that this could be an early enclosure map depicting the parcelling up of land in the vicinity of the motte during the Tudor period. Notwithstanding the fact that the development areas lay beyond the Prestatyn/Gronant boundary and are thus not shown on the sketch, it has some significance for this study. The motte itself appears to occupy peaty ground, assuming the Geological Survey plan to be accurate, and therefore there is an implication, which can be extended to the areas designated for the sewage treatment works, that the low ground adjacent to the coastline was already enclosed at the time the map was drawn in the 16th century.

4.5 More than two hundred and perhaps as much as three hundred years separated this map from the next available cartographic sources, the Tithe maps for Meliden and Llanasa, both drawn in 1839. Unfortunately, the available copies of both maps are badly damaged with sections missing in the areas proposed for the sewage treatment works. At best it can be extrapolated from the Meliden Tithe map that Location 1 was almost certainly used as either permanent pasture or as meadow in the mid-19th century. What these two maps do demonstrate is that the drain that passes slightly to the west of the access road to Location 1 and to the east of the access road to Location 2 before passing through the eastern half of the latter area towards the sea is the line of the old parish boundary, a fact confirmed by the later Ordnance Survey

maps. It is likely that as a boundary it goes back to a time before this was enclosed, for the 16th-century sketch (section 4.2) reveals that on its line was a spring (Fynnon wen) which probably fed directly to the sea along a natural drain but which was diverted to feed Nant mill. This drain must have been present before the surrounding ground was enclosed and would have represented a natural division that could be utilised for a boundary. Whether its present form in any way reflects its singular nature cannot be ascertained from the desk-top assessment.

4.6 The first edition of the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map covering the area of the proposal was surveyed in 1870 and published in 1872 (Fig 2). In 1848 the Chester to Holyhead Railway had been built separating the enclosed land from the salt marshes. On the map, Location 1 covers an area comprised of the whole, or parts of, eight fields. Three fields are shown with an area of less than one acre and the two fields shown on the tithe map are still extant. What appears to be a rectangular building, probably a barn, can be seen to the west of Terfyn Covert, and this should be located just outside the south-eastern boundary of Location 1.

4.7 Location 2 covers an area comprised of parts of three fields. One of the fields (OS plot 26) was part of a field bisected by, and therefore predating the railway. The 1870 Ordnance Survey map shows nothing of significance here, although attention should be drawn to the curious configuration of drains, giving the impression of three sides of a small enclosure, to the north-east of Nant Hall (Hotel) which is overlain by the south-west corner of the Location 2 area.

4.8 The 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map was revised in 1910 and the second edition republished in 1912. By then the fields shown on the first edition map at Location 1 had been amalgamated into six fields utilising the old boundaries, the only exception being OS plot 167 which had previously been part of a larger field (Fig 3). The building to the west of Terfyn Covert was in a ruined state, but another building, perhaps a cottage together with a garden, had been constructed nearby in the intervening period. Again this lay very close to the southern edge of Location 1. The pattern of fields at Location 2 remained unchanged.

4.9 More recently, the A548 linking Prestatyn with areas to the east was driven across the area, representing the southern edge of Location 1 and the main approach to both sites. No attempt has been made to discover when this road was built.

5 Desk-top Assessment: The Surrounding Area

5.1 Despite the fact that no archaeological finds have been recorded within the area of the proposed development, the area in and around Prestatyn has a very high archaeological potential, with previous finds and structures within the environs of the site representing a wide range of periods including the Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Roman, possibly early medieval and medieval periods.

5.2 Archaeological recording undertaken during the 1920-30s by F.G. Smith (1926-7) during the construction of the Bryn Newydd housing estate (CAR 2256; see references to sites in the Clwyd Archaeological Record in Annex 2), about 1km to the south-west of both locations, provides evidence of considerable and probably complex archaeological activity of different periods. Much of this work does not meet modern standards of recording and consequently the dating of some of this evidence is uncertain. It is clear that there was a buried land surface containing an assemblage of early Mesolithic chert artefacts

(Clark 1938; Clark 1939; Wainwright 1963; Jacobi 1975; Jacobi 1980). Two radiocarbon dates of the 9th millennium BP have been obtained for carbonised hazel nut shells recovered from this deposit (David 1991).

5.3 Work recently undertaken by CPAT (Bell *et al.* 1992) on the Nant Hall Road development site (centred at SJ 069832; see section 3.2), about 800 metres south-west of Location 1, revealed middens composed of edible marine molluscs dating back to the late Mesolithic/early Neolithic era during the 5th millennium BP, a time of significant changes in the coastal environment. Earlier this area had yielded prehistoric and possibly Roman finds (CAR 1971).

5.4 The midden sites are of major archaeological importance in view of the scarcity of evidence for Mesolithic settlement and activity in this region and in view of the fact that the deposits cover a crucial period between the late Mesolithic and early Neolithic period. There is little evidence for this period available nationally, when it is assumed that early peripatetic hunter-gatherer groups adopted a more sedentary way of life.

5.5 Other archaeological finds and features in the area include a macehead (CAR 2259) about 500m south of Nant Hall Hotel, a polished stone axe; a Bronze Age round barrow (CAR 2263); a perforated stone which may be a whetstone from Terfyn House (CAR 2264); a stone adze from Aberconway Road (CAR 4217); and a find of Roman coins (CAR 2235). All of these provide evidence of continuing activity into the later prehistoric and Roman periods which is of regional significance.

5.6 The motte and bailey earthwork known as Prestatyn Castle (CAR 2253) acts as one focus of activity in the Middle Ages. Though there is a dearth of information about it, it is supposed to have been thrown up by Robert de Banastre in the early 1160s and destroyed by a Welsh alliance in 1167. Excavations in 1913 revealed surviving building foundations. Whether in its short tenancy it influenced settlement or other activity in the area may be doubted, but it was still a well recognised feature in the 16th century, and in itself is of regional importance. Whether the nearby mill known as Nant Mill (CAR 4853) goes back to the time of the castle could only be determined by excavation, although it is a possibility. It is depicted on the 16th-century sketch map in the National Library of Wales.

5.7 Nant Hall Hotel (CAR 2234), converted from a private house in 1879, is largely of late 18th century/early 19th century build but it is rumoured that earlier timbers survive internally. Its history certainly goes much further back for the site is depicted on the 16th-century sketch referred to above (section 4.2), when it was associated with the Conway family, and it is also mentioned in connection with the Glyndwr uprising in the early 15th century.

6 Conclusions

6.1 The two sites selected for the sewage treatment works lie on peat, perhaps though not certainly with marine clays beneath, and close to the interface with the dry land. It is precisely this zone, 1km to the south-west, that has produced important remains of early prehistoric activity during recent development work. Whether there were local topographic or geomorphological factors that influenced the location of that activity has not yet been determined, but it is quite plausible to assume that similar activity may have occurred elsewhere in the vicinity, including areas further east. What can be certain is that there is no means of determining the location of that activity from a study of existing records!

6.2 The assumption has been made on the basis of known sites that most of the

midden lie close to the edge of the peat, and from this it might be suggested that Location 1 is more likely to reveal and damage buried archaeology. However, this assumption has not been tested stringently and the lack of opportunities to examine deeper peat profiles may have introduced an inadvertent bias in the evidence.

6.3 No known archaeology exists on the two alternative sites, but several features and finds of prehistoric and medieval date have been recorded within 500m of them.

7 References

7.1) Sources

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SPECIFICATION FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK-TOP ASSESSMENT

1 Introduction

1.1 Welsh Water propose to construct a new sewage treatment works to the east of Prestatyn and on the north side of A548. Two alternative sites have been designated for this development at SJ 083 834 and at SJ 078 837 and Welsh Water have applied to Rhuddlan Borough Council (Application nos. 2/PRE/344/93 and 2/PRE/345/93) for planning permission.

1.2 Rhuddlan Borough Council have decided on the advice of the Clwyd Archaeology Service that an evaluation is necessary to assess the implications of the planning application on the archaeological resource in order that these can be taken into account during the determination of the planning applications. Accordingly a brief has been prepared by the Clwyd Archaeology Service which describes the scheme of archaeological works required.

1.3 The brief requires both a desk-top assessment and a fieldwork evaluation to be undertaken on the alternative sites. Welsh Water are having difficulty in arranging access for the archaeological contractor to undertake the fieldwork element and have requested that the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) undertake the desk-top assessment as a first stage in the process. This specification is thus concerned only with the desk-top assessment. Should CPAT be invited to tender for the fieldwork element of the evaluation, a supplement will be prepared for this document.

2 Objectives

2.1 The objective of the assessment is to gather as much information as is readily available to establish the likelihood of archaeological deposits in the two areas proposed for development. This will be presented in a report detailing the archaeological resource in as much as this can be determined to enable the planning authority to assess the implications of the development.

3 Methods

The readily available documentary resources will be examined, to include the regional Sites and Monuments Record, published and unpublished archaeological reports on the area, and early cartography.

4 Resources and Programming

4.1 The desk-top assessment will be undertaken by one or two skilled archaeologists who will also be responsible for the preparation of the report. Overall supervision will be by a senior member of CPAT's staff who will also be a member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

4.2 It is anticipated that the assessment may take up to one week to complete and this will include the preparation of the report. The research will commence immediately at the request of Welsh Water.

R. J. Silvester
17 January 1994

Annex 2

CAR 1971 Nant Hall Finds (SJ 07058313) (PRN-101933)

Prehistoric and Roman finds scatter found in Fields 56/56b in 1920-30s including a reasonably large assemblage (c 470) Mesolithic and Neolithic flint and chert lithics and two bone counters and a lead spindlewhorl of possible Roman date.

References: Davies 1949; Wainwright 1963; Bell *et al.* 1992

CAR 2234 Nant Hall Hotel (SJ 07678339) (PRN-102205).

Nant Hall Hotel of late 18th/early 19th-century stucco. Historic site associated with Edward I and later the Conways of Bodrhyddan.

References: OS Records 1961; Welsh Office Listing Description 1950

CAR 2235 Bryn Newydd Area Finds (SJ 07298273) (PRN-102206)

Four Roman coins of Titus Constantine II Maximus and Constantine the Great. Found during the 1920-30s during construction of the Bryn Newydd housing estate.

References: Davies 1949.

CAR 2253 Prestatyn Castle (SJ 07238331) (PRN-102226)

Low mound and ditch excavated in 1913 showing wall foundations of the castle. References exclusively 12th century.

References: *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 13 (1913), 350; Cathcart King 1983, 154

CAR 2256 Bryn Newydd Cemetery and Working Floor (SJ 07248270) (PRN-102228)

Complex site including two inhumation cemeteries of about 20 graves of uncertain date but possibly of several periods (Mesolithic, Neolithic or Early Christian), shell midden (cockles), hearths and working floor. Mesolithic, Neolithic, and Medieval finds recorded.

References: Smith 1926-7; Clarke 1938; Clark 1939; Davies 1949; Jacobi 1975; Brassil 1978; Brassil 1991; David 1991; Caselden 1992.

CAR 2259 Homefield Find (SJ 07698287) (PRN-102232)

Macehead of fine textured grey granite found in 1930 and a circular stone with perforation found in 1926. Both found close to an old mine shaft.

References: Davies 1949.

CAR 2263 Coed Bell Tumulus (SJ 08758289) (PRN-102236)

One metre-high mound of earth and scree with surrounding ditch and outer bank, with overall dimensions of 24m by 20m.

References: Davies 1949; OS records 1959.

CAR 2264 Terfyn House Find (SJ 08428327) (PRN-102237)

A perforated stone object found in 1904 was thought by Davies to be an axe hammer but may be a whetstone. It has in the past been attributed to the Bronze Age. It is now in Grosvenor Museum, Chester.

References: Davies 1949; OS records 1961.

CAR 4217 Aberconway Path Stone Adze (SJ 075828) (PRN-102667)

Shafthole adze, of greywacke possibly derived from drift. Chance find during construction work.

References: Manley and Greuter 1983.

CAR 4853 Nant Mill (SJ 07308306) (PRN-102966)

A corn mill with associated millpond, now used a storehouse for a farm but with much of the machinery still intact. It was in existence in the 16th century.

Reference: NLW Edward Owen Colln; Thompson 1981

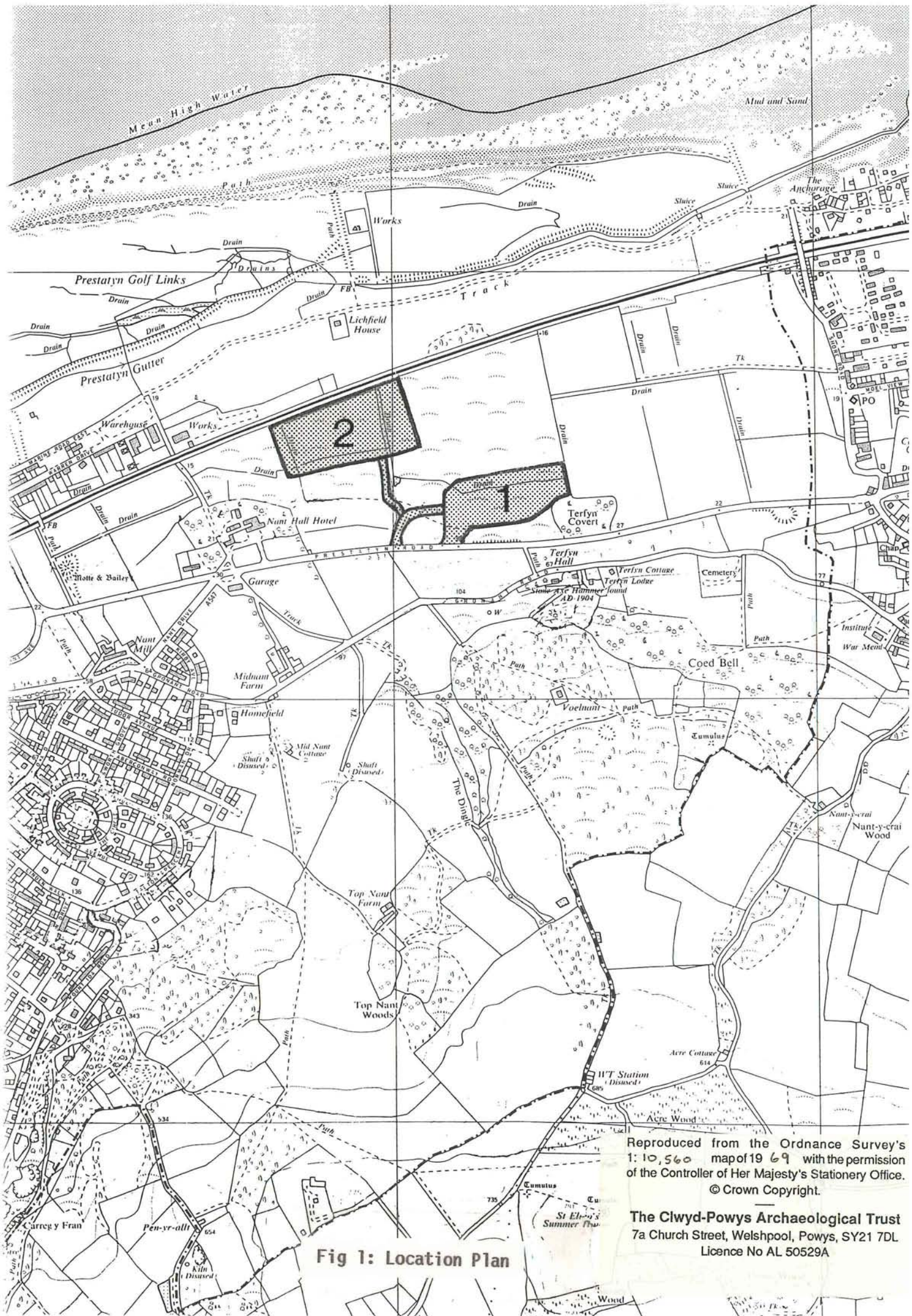


Fig 1: Location Plan

Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey's 1:10,560 map of 1969 with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
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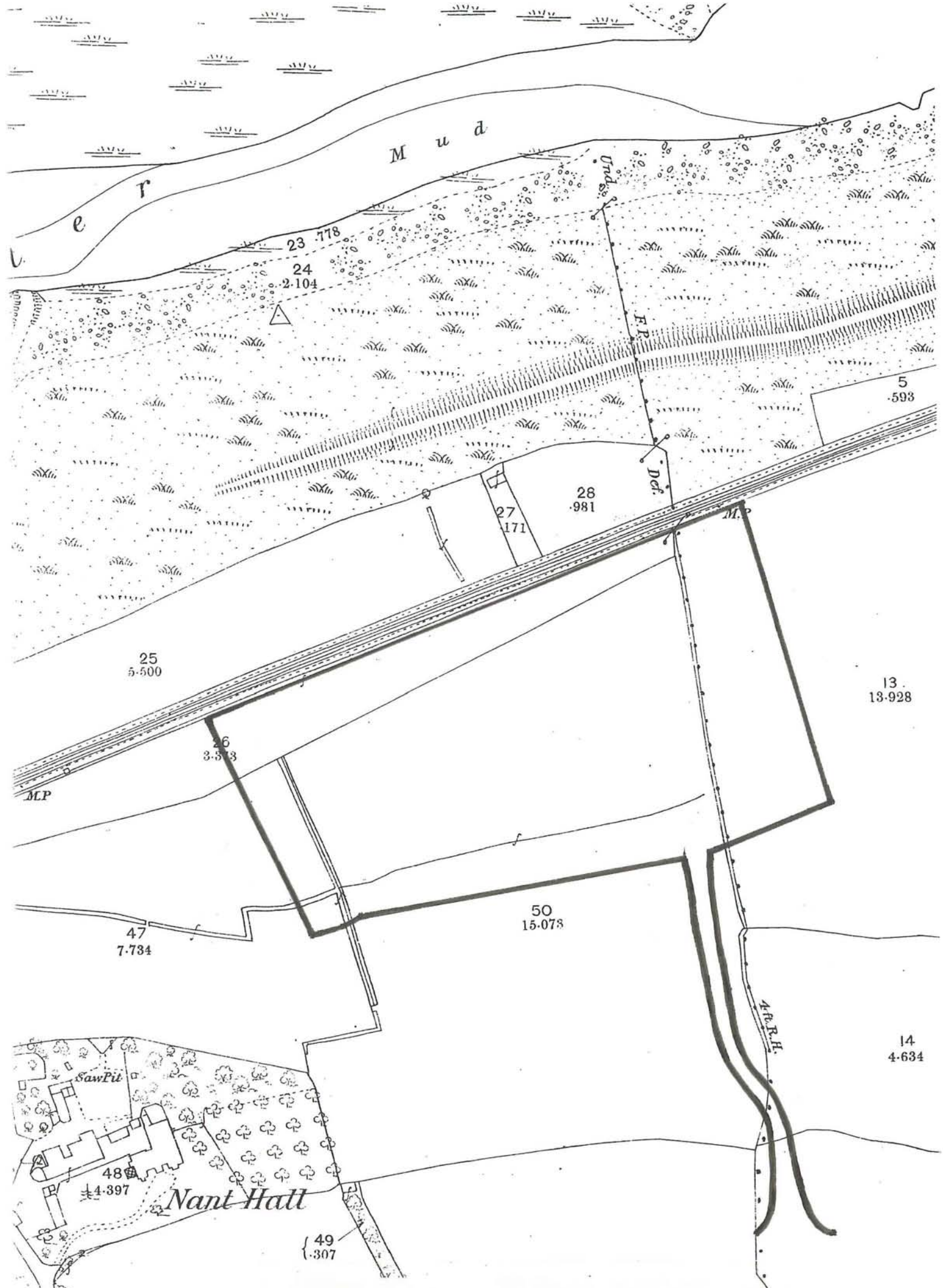


Fig 2: Location 2. OS 25" plan of 1872

Note: Nant wi
Gronant

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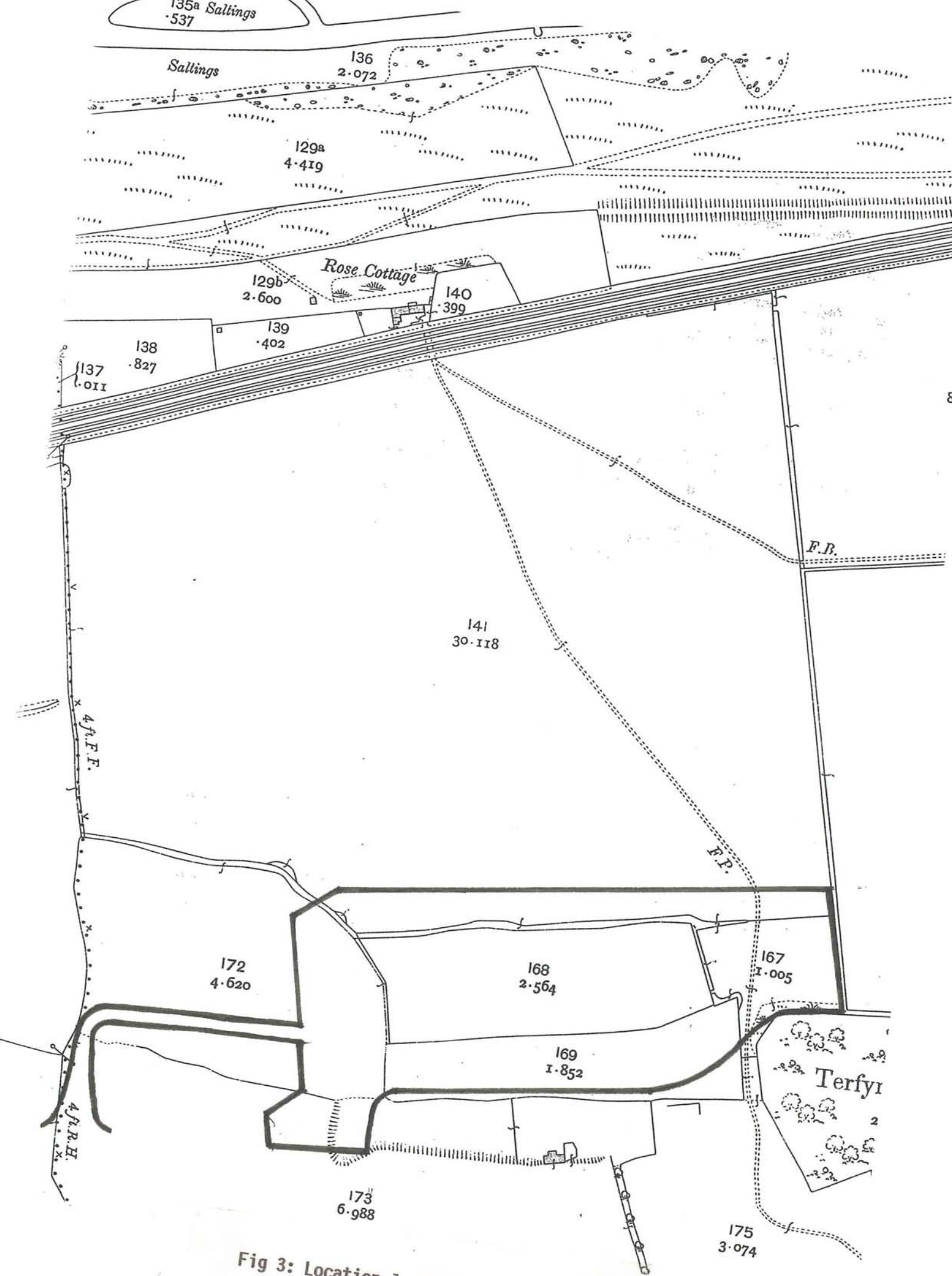


Fig 3: Location 1. OS 25" plan of 1912