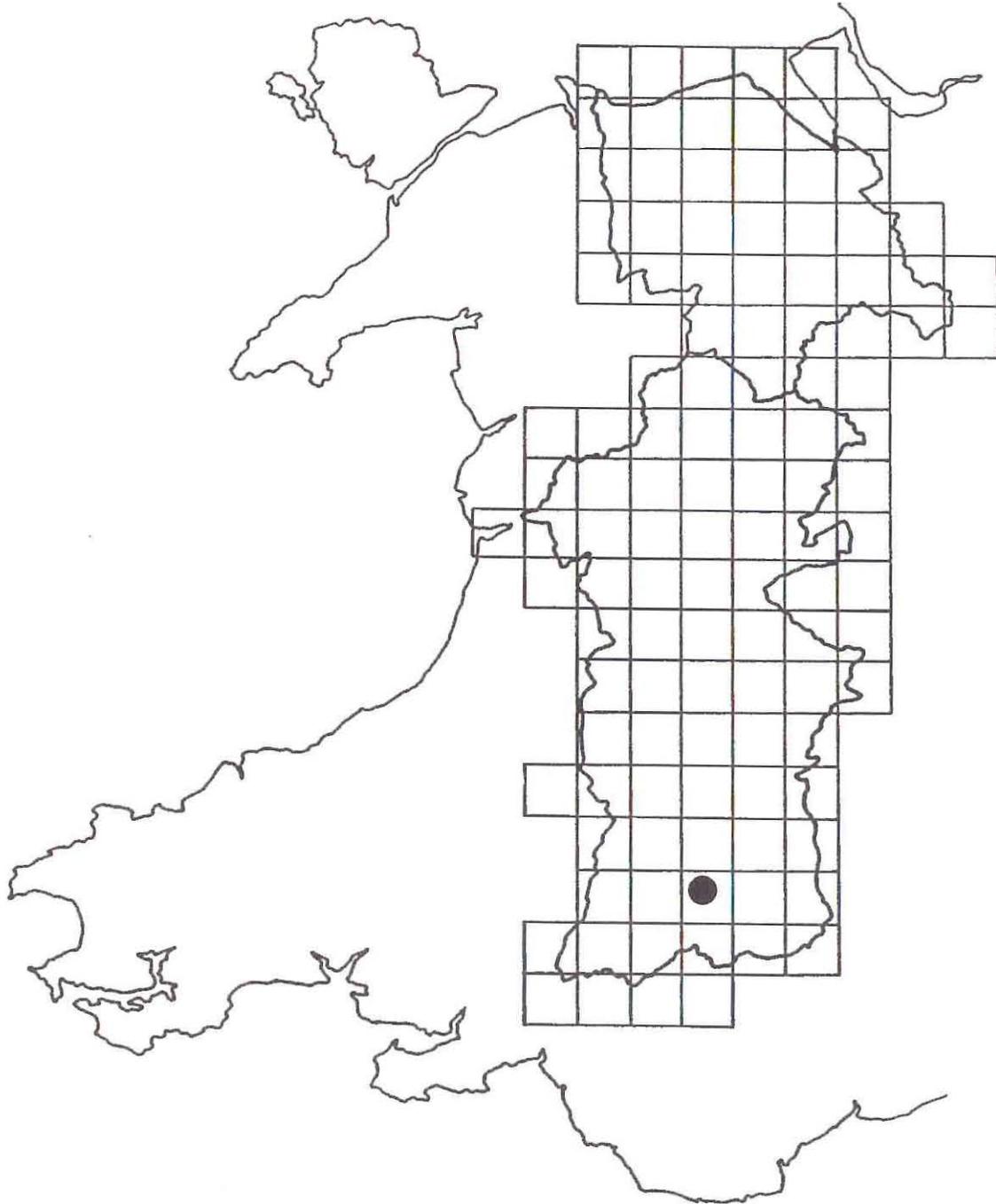


THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

*The Rhyd, Brecon, Powys*

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION



CPAT Report No 125

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION**

**by R J Silvester and R Hankinson**

February 1995

Report prepared for Powys County Council

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## **SUMMARY**

Outline planning permission has been given for the construction of a theatre and adjacent car park at The Rhyd in Brecon. The former Brecon and Abergavenny Canal (now the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal) passes through the proposal area and the sites of various 19th-century works dependent on the canal are effected by the proposals though as far as can be ascertained there are no extant remains other than the canal itself. Similarly, the site of the former race-course at Brecon is affected but again no traces of this feature remain.

## **1 Introduction**

1.1 A planning application for the construction of a new theatre and parking space at The Rhyd, Brecon was submitted by Powys County Council to the Planning Department of the Brecon Beacons National Park in May 1994. Outline planning permission was subsequently granted with on condition that an archaeological investigation of the site was initiated.

1.2 The Contracting arm of the Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust (henceforward referred to as CPAT Contracting) were invited by Powys County Council in December 1994 to tender for the archaeological investigation of the proposal site. The framework for the investigation was laid out in a specification (see Annex 1) prepared by CPAT Contracting concurrently with the tender and was based on a brief (CPAT SAI 102) issued by the curatorial section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust in their capacity as archaeological advisors to the County Council.

1.3 CPAT Contracting's tender was accepted and on 16 January 1995 they were commissioned to conduct the investigation. The desk-top analysis and fieldwork were carried out at the end of January and this report was prepared early in February 1995.

## **2 Location**

2.1 The area known as The Rhyd lies close to the east bank of the River Usk on the south-east side of Brecon, a short distance outside the walled town. The development (centred at SO 046 282) affects the canal and land adjacent to it, low-lying between the river and properties, the buildings of which generally front onto the Watton. This area has already seen development, much of it apparently inspired by local government, in the recent past (see Fig. 1). Its height is between 130m and 140m OD.

## **3 Methodology and Sources**

3.1 The framework for the investigation was developed by starting with a desk-top study of available primary and secondary sources, and followed by a field visit to access the ground remains and prepare a photographic record for the archive.

3.2 A range of sources are available for the history of the proposal area over the last two hundred years. Most relate to the canal and its development. Several maps, both manuscript and printed, reveal changes through the 19th century and into the early 20th century, providing the framework for determining the chronology of the canal and its ancillary works.

3.3 It should be noted here that Wood's map contains inaccuracies that become apparent when compared with the later large-scale Ordnance Survey maps even though the scales are similar. As a consequence the accurate projection of the development proposal onto this map is not possible. The outline shown on Fig 2 is only an approximation, and it is evident that in reality it should run up to the field boundary just to the east.

3.4 Printed works referring to the canal are common and the more

useful ones are cited in the bibliography. There is also a considerable archive of documentary material, much of it available in the National Library of Wales (NLW). In particular the Maybery Collection should be noted, the schedule for which has been cursorily examined, though a full examination of this source would take much time.

3.5 Fieldwork was limited to an examination of the proposal area and its immediate setting, with a photographic record of relevant features.

#### **4 Historic Background: The Canal**

4.1 Proposals to construct a canal in the vicinity of Brecon and Abergavenny were first publicised in 1792, almost immediately after an Act of Parliament was passed to allow the construction of the Monmouthshire Canal. The proponents of the Monmouthshire Canal realised that it was in their interests to link the two and towards the end of 1792, their engineer, Thomas Dadford the younger, surveyed over 37 miles of a proposed route from Pontymoile near Pontypool to Brecon (Fig 1).

4.2 A Parliamentary Act for the Brecon and Abergavenny Canal was passed in 1793, giving the canal company the powers to build linking tramroads as well as the waterway itself.

4.3 Construction work on the canal commenced in 1797 and reached Brecon in 1800. Wharves were constructed by the Brecon and Abergavenny Canal Company at The Watton and at the canal terminus, and adjacent to the latter, Hugh Bold established another wharf on land he owned. The effects were immediate with a reduction in the price of coal at Brecon from 1s/1s 2d to 9d per hundredweight.

4.4 The Brecon Boat Company, a second company owned largely by shareholders in the Brecon and Abergavenny Canal Company, was set up to organise trade on the new canal. It was first documented as early as 1798, and subsequently built its own wharf at the Brecon end of the canal, leased coal mines, owned limestone quarries and limekilns and supplied lime in the area.

4.5 In 1812 the Brecon and Abergavenny Canal was finally joined to the Monmouthshire Canal, giving a length of 33.25 miles though with only 6 locks. During the next twelve months wharves at Brecon and elsewhere were extended. In 1816 the Hay Tramroad (or plateway) was opened, starting at the Watton Wharf in Brecon. Branches of the tramroad were almost immediately extended to the wharves run by Hugh Bold and the Brecon Boat Company.

4.6 The tramroad proved to be a problem, because of its deteriorating state and the fact that it ran along the main road and caused disruption to the traffic. In 1836 it was moved to the south side of the canal, running along the towpath, and drawbridges were constructed to give access to the wharves. But it too rapidly started to deteriorate as documents of 1841 reveal, but it continued in use perhaps primarily to service the gas works.

4.7 The prosperity of the canal system did not last long. Within a couple of decades profits went into decline. The tramroad was

dispensed with in 1861. The Brecon Boat Company ceased to trade in 1865, an indirect result of the newly established opening of the Brecon and Merthyr Railway in 1863 amongst others, which stripped away much of the coal traffic from the canal. In 1865 too, the Brecon and Abergavenny Canal was purchased by the Monmouthshire Canal Company. Five years earlier the Hay Tramroad had been sold to the Hereford, Hay and Brecon railway.

4.8 The Monmouthshire Canal (together with the Brecon and Abergavenny Canal) was sold to the Great Western Railway in 1880.

4.9 By 1900 only one boat per week travelled the full length of the canal. The last toll was collected at Llangynidr in 1933.

## 5 Historic Background: The Race Course

5.1 The idea of flat racing at Brecon appears to have become increasingly popular in the 1820s, a public meeting in 1825 resolving to establish annual races on Abercundrig (Abercynrig) Meadows beside the Usk. The first meeting was held in 1828. Samuel Lewis noted in 1833 that races were held over two days each autumn and that a grandstand was about to be erected. That this had become reality is shown by Wood's map of 1834 (Fig 2). However, it is likely that this was an insubstantial affair for a report on 1867 considers the need for a grand stand on the course.

5.2 Ordnance Survey mapping suggests that the race course was still in use in 1887 (Fig 3), but had been abandoned by 1903 (Fig 4), although another source implies that races were still being held in 1905. The precise date has not been ascertained.

## 6 The Archaeology of the Development Area

6.1 Nothing is known of the appearance or function of the area prior to the construction of the canal. However, the Tithe Apportionment of mid-19th century date reveals that most of the fields traversed by the race-course were classed as meadow and aerial photographs appear to show at least one palaeochannel a short distance to the north of the present river. It seems likely that this low-lying ground close to the river was flooded periodically, a view confirmed by local sources, and that past use was largely restricted to grazing.

6.2 The Canal SO 0470 2820 Approximately 215m of the canal's course is included within the proposal from the Gasworks Lane Bridge to the Government Offices. However, the final 46m of the waterway has already been filled in and replaced by a road. It can be assumed that the remaining length of the canal, though probably cleaned out in the past, is in its dimensions largely as it was at the beginning of the 19th century. A number of cast iron tying posts are located on the south side of the canal.

6.3 Bridge SO 0467 2821 Early maps from 1834 and 1840 show a bridge crossing the canal at the point where the latter constricts and undergoes a change of alignment (opposite the public entrance of the proposed theatre). Its function is not clear and Rattenbury has claimed it was a drawbridge. By 1887 it

had disappeared, although the constriction remained.

6.4 Wharf SO 0474 2821 The Brecon Boat Company's wharf and adjacent dock lay on the north side of the canal (and due south of the later Conway Street) from the beginning. The dock was enlarged during the later 19th century but has now been filled in; it does not appear to be affected by the development proposals. The appearance of the wharf itself is not recorded, but its south-western end underlies the proposed new bridge, and its location is suggested by one of a number of breaks in the stone facing of the canal side.

6.5 The Plateway SO 0470 2820 As noted above, the Hay Tramroad was rerouted along the southern towpath in 1836 and was abandoned in 1861, some of its course falling within the proposal area. It appears that the plates were subsequently lifted, several of them seemingly donated to the local museum.

6.6 The Dry Dock SO 0472 2818 Opposite the Brecon Boat Company's dock on the south side of the canal was a small dry dock, present in the first half of the 19th century. Early Ordnance Survey maps show a rectangular feature in a similar location but it is not clear whether this is the dry dock. Its site lies just outside the eastern perimeter of the proposal.

6.7 Buildings SO 0471 2816 & SO 0472 2816 Two small structures, possibly buildings of uncertain function, were located due west of the Gas Works and a short distance south-west of the former dry dock (para 6.6). These were depicted on late 19th-century maps but have now been demolished, although a 6m-length of stone wall survives, probably from the more easterly of the two structures.

6.8 The Race-Course SO 046 281 Over 100m of the former race-course lies within the proposal area. Its appearance is not recorded but it is unlikely that it was anything other than a grass track.

6.9 The Grandstand SO 0469 2816 Notwithstanding the apparent inaccuracies in Wood's plan, it is evident that the grandstand shown on the 1834 map lay just within the current proposal area. No trace survives and as suggested above it was probably not a substantial structure.

6.10 The Winning Chair SO 0470 2817 Much the same applies to the winning chair as was written about the Grandstand. It had disappeared by 1887, although the Ordnance Survey mapping of that date does show a small building or structure a short distance to the east.

6.11 Building SO 0462 2815 All maps up to the beginning of this century depict a structure, perhaps a field barn, straddling a field boundary. Modern development of the area has disguised its position, but it lies within the proposal area beneath the planned car park.

6.12 A number of other features including several small buildings on the north side of the canal and the site of the Gas Works on the south side, fall just outside the proposal area and are not discussed in detail here.

## **7 Conclusions**

7.1 A number of features associated with the Brecon and Abergavenny Canal and with Brecon race-course lie within the boundary of the development proposal. With the exception of the canal itself, these have all disappeared, largely as a result of 19th-century and modern development, but also no doubt because of the insubstantiality of some structures. In these circumstances and with the possible exception of the infilled section of the canal, it seems unlikely that much significant archaeology is located below ground level.

## **Acknowledgements**

CPAT Contracting would like to thank the following organisations and their staff for assistance in the preparation of this report:

The Sites and Monuments Record of CPAT at Welshpool

The Map Department of the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth

The Powys Record Office, Powys County Council at Llandrindod

The British Waterways Archive at Gloucester

Brecknock Museum, Brecon

Brecon Public Library, Brecon

Thanks are also due to Brecknock Museum and the National Library of Wales for permission to reproduce Fig.1, and Figs 2,3 and 4 respectively.

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### Manuscript Sources

John Lloyd Collection, Brecon Museum

Maybery Collection, NLW

### Cartographic Sources

1793 Printed 'Plan of a Canal from the Town of Brecknock to join the Monmouthshire Canal' by T. Dadford Junior Map Dept, NLW no. W165. Other copies in Powys Record Office [manuscript maps in the Quarter Sessions Deposits] and Brecon Museum)

1811 Manuscript Plan of 'Proposed Tramroad from the Public Wharf at Brecon to Eardisley' Microfilm Copy, Map Dept, NLW

1834 Printed Map of Brecon by John Wood

1837 Map of Brecon by R.K.Dawkins. Scale 4" = 1 mile Map Dept, NLW no. M2259

1840 Tithe Map of Brecon St Mary Map Dept, NLW. Accompanying Apportionment dated 1841

1887 (published 1889) 1:2500 Ordnance Survey Map, 1st Edition

1903 (published 1904) 1:2500 Ordnance Survey Map, 2nd Edition

n.d. Annotated 1:2500 Ordnance Survey Maps, British Waterways Archive, Gloucester BW 702/90 and BW 693/90

## Annex 1

### LAND AT THE RHYD, BRECON, POWYS

#### SPECIFICATION FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION AND ASSESSMENT BY CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The proposed development of the former canal terminus at the Rhyd in Brecon (SO 0467 2817) has been the subject of a planning application to the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (Outline Planning Application K13766) submitted by Powys County Council.
- 1.2 Powys County Council have decided on the advice of their archaeological advisor, the Curatorial Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, that an archaeological investigation is necessary as a condition of planning permission. Accordingly a brief (CPAT SAI 102) has been prepared by the Regional Sites and Monuments Record for Powys which describes the scheme of archaeological works required.

### 2 Objectives

- 2.1 The primary objective of the investigation is to identify all sites of archaeological interest within the proposed area of development and to assemble such information as is readily available to set those sites in their historic context. This will be presented in a report detailing the archaeological resource, in as far as this can be determined, to enable the local authority to assess the archaeological implications of the development of the area.
- 2.2 A second objective is the formulation of broad recommendations for the preservation and/or further examination of the archaeological resource in advance of and during the development.

### 3 Methods

- 3.1 Readily available cartographic and documentary sources relating to the canal terminus and its immediate environs will be assessed. These will include:
  - (i) the regional Sites and Monuments Record at CPAT's offices in Welshpool
  - (ii) the National Monument Record held by RCAHMW at Aberystwyth
  - (iii) documentary sources at NLW, Aberystwyth and the County Record Office at Llandrindod Wells
  - (iv) published archaeological and industrial reports
  - (v) early cartographic sources, both manuscript and printed, at the NLW, the CRO and in specialised repositories

- 3.2 The amount of detail that can be incorporated in the report at this stage will be dependent on the diversity and availability of the sources encountered.
- 3.3 A rapid but methodical survey will assess the nature and condition of the archaeological resource in the development area. A rapid descriptive and measured survey will be made, together with a comprehensive photographic record.
- 3.4 Following 3.1-3.3 an analysis of the desk-top and fieldwork data accompanied by appropriate plans will be prepared as a report for the client. This will include recommendations as outlined in section 2.2.

#### 4 Resources and Programming

- 4.1 The desk-top assessment and field survey will be undertaken by an experienced archaeologist who will also be responsible for the preparation of the report. Overall supervision will be by the deputy director of CPAT who is also a member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.
- 4.2 All report preparation will be completed by the same field archaeologist who conducted the desk-top assessment and fieldwork.
- 4.3 It is anticipated that the desk-top assessment and the fieldwork will take up to two weeks. Subsequent report preparation will require a further week and it is anticipated that this will follow on immediately after completion of the investigation.
- 4.4 A commencement date should be set within one month of CPAT receiving written confirmation of their appointment by the client, but may be implemented more quickly depending on CPAT's work programme current at the time of acceptance.

R. J. Silvester  
3 January 1995

## Annex 2

### Photographic Archive

- 1 Present terminal of canal - from SE
- 2 View of canal from present canal terminal (para 6.2) - from WNW
- 3 Square plan building to N of canal, visible on 1st edition OS - from SW
- 4 Narrowing of canal at bridge location (para 6.3) - from SE
- 5 Infill of wharf on N side of canal (para 6.4) - from S
- 6 Bridge carrying Gasworks Lane - from SE
- 7 N bridge abutment showing slots and coursed walling - from SSW
- 8 and 9 View to W from Gasworks Lane bridge
- 10 Butt end (easternmost) of walling associated with building marked on 1st ed OS - from NNE
- 11 and 12 Site of Gasworks - from W
- 13 Council yard - from N
- 14 and 15 View of site from T-junction at southern end of Rich Way - from NW

# Plan of a Canal

from the Town of BRECKNOCK to join the

MONMOUTH SHIRE CANAL

near the Town of PONTY POOL in the Counties of

BRECKNOCK and MONMOUTH

By T. Dadford Jun. Engineer

1793

With a PLAN of the MONMOUTH SHIRE CANAL as taken in

1792

S H I R E

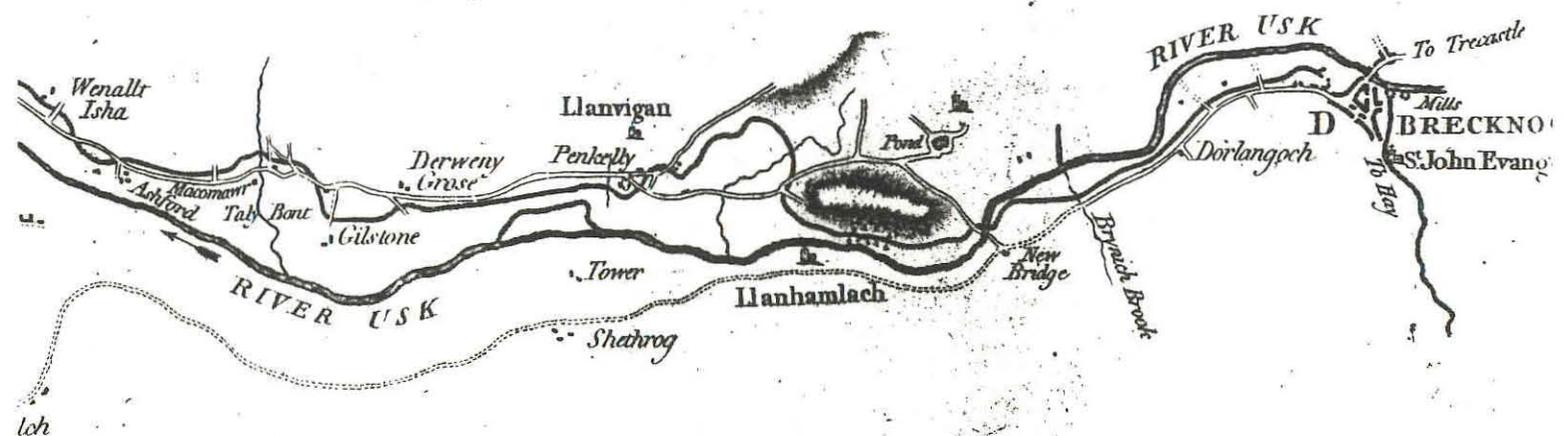


Fig 1 Printed Plan of the Proposed Canal by Thomas Dadford, 1793. Scale 1:63360

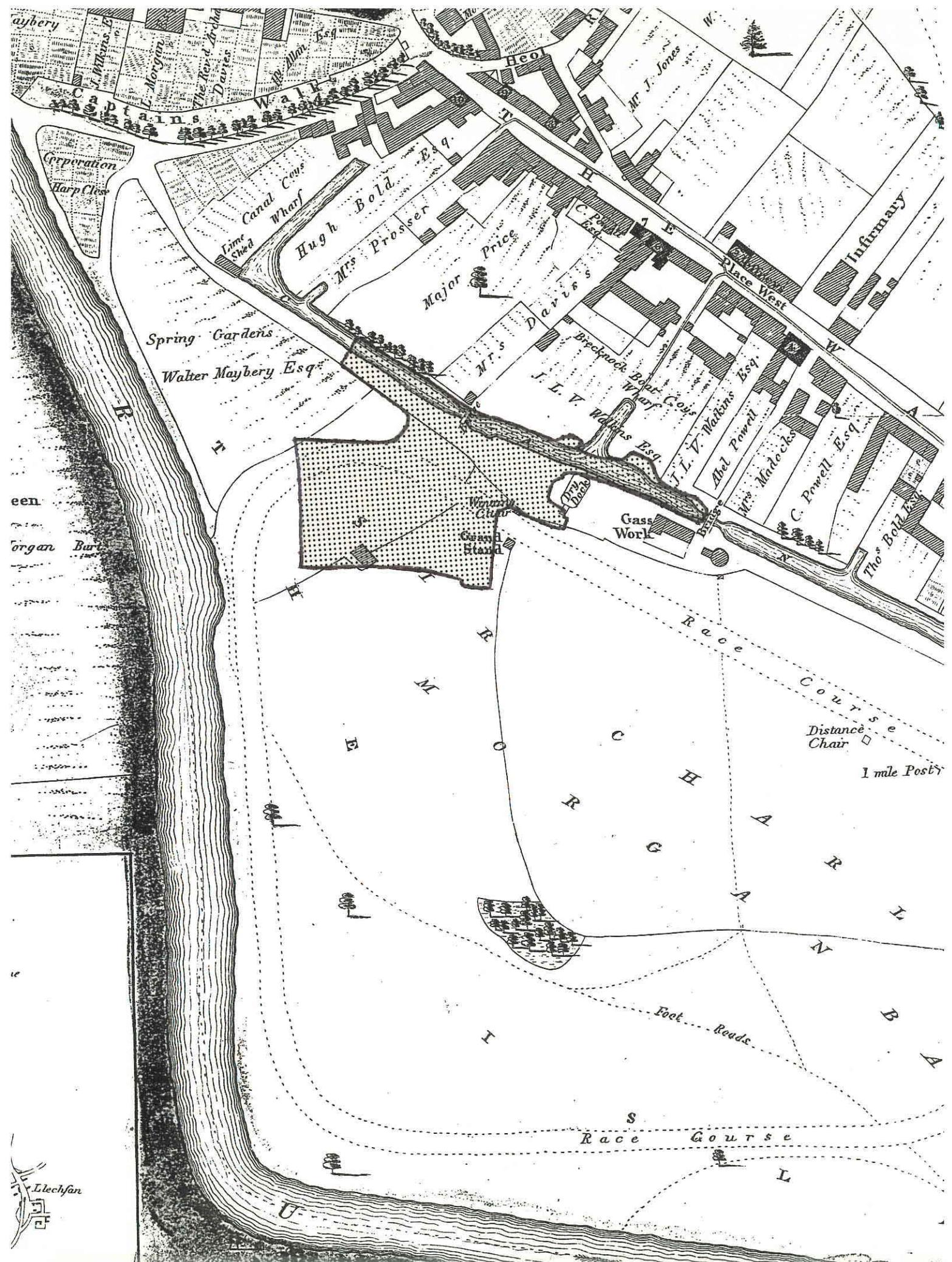


Fig 2 Printed Map of Brecon by John Wood, 1834. Scale 1:2376. Note that the proposed development is shown in stipple.

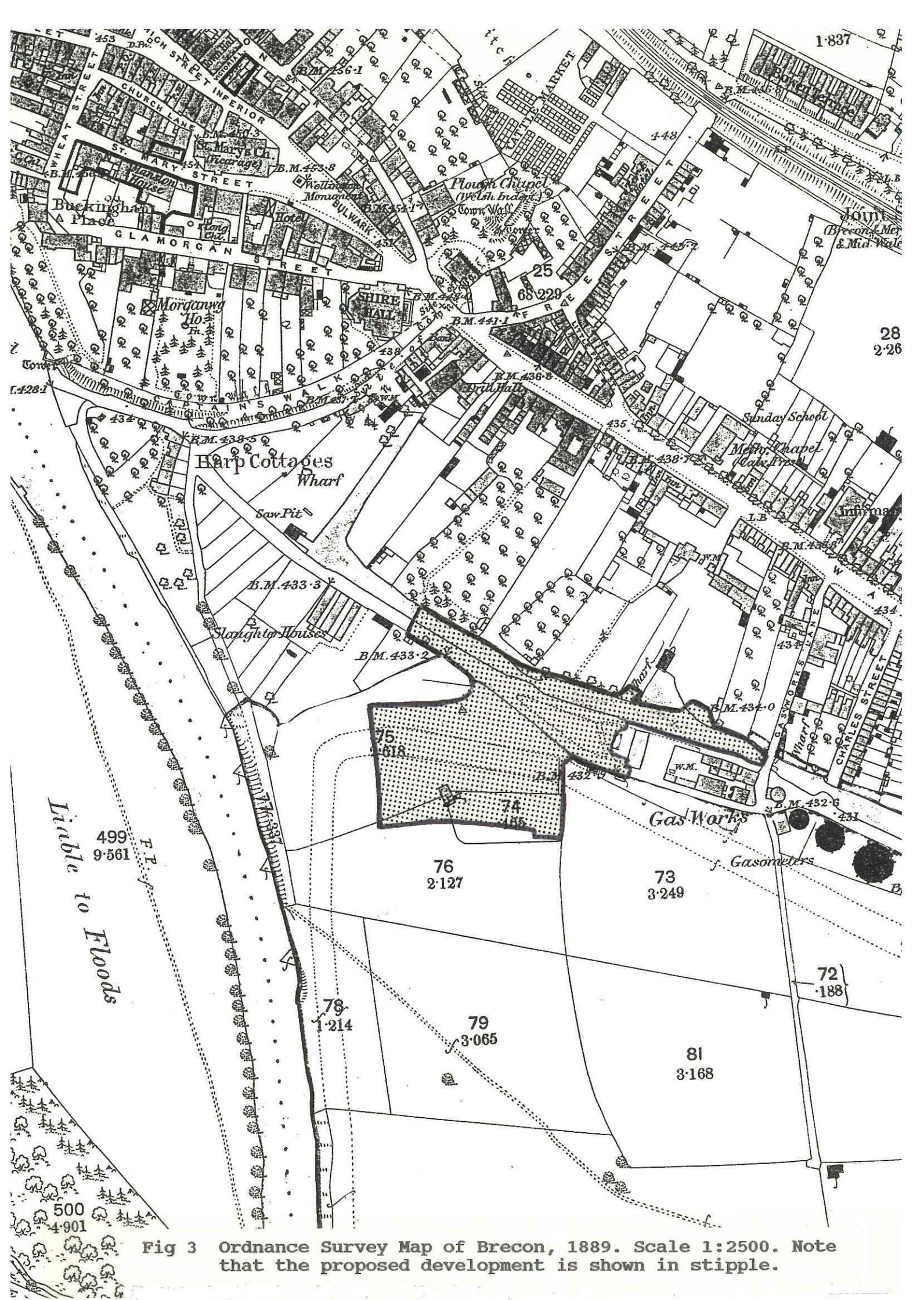


Fig 3 Ordnance Survey Map of Brecon, 1889. Scale 1:2500. Note that the proposed development is shown in stipple.

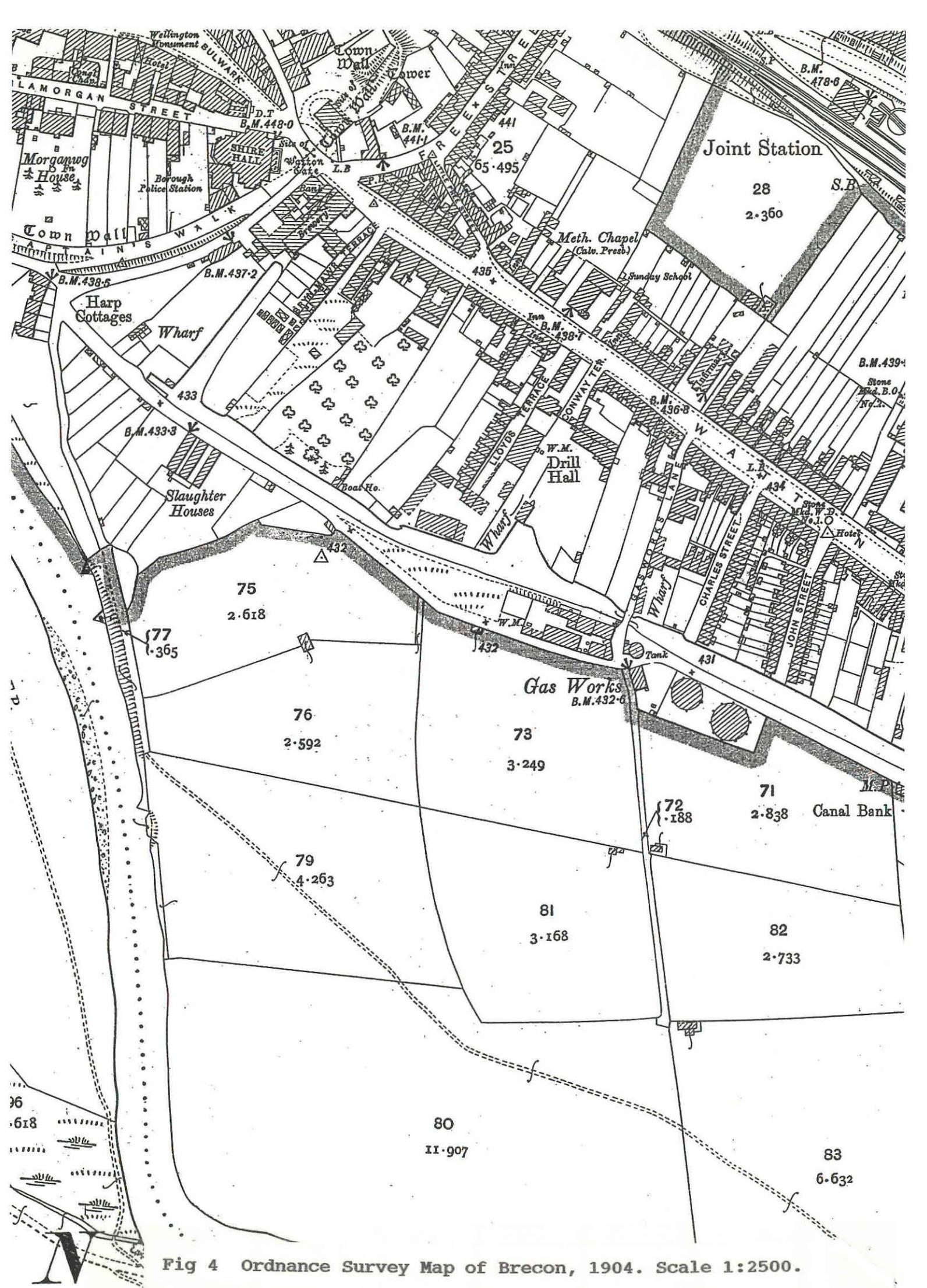


Fig 4 Ordnance Survey Map of Brecon, 1904. Scale 1:2500.