

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

*Ruabon Business Park
near Wrexham*

ARCHAEOLOGICAL and HISTORICAL ASSESSEMENT



CPAT Report No 783

*Ruabon Business Park
near Wrexham*

ARCHAEOLOGICAL and HISTORICAL ASSESSEMENT

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Report for TACP

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1 *Introduction*

- 1.1 The following report has been prepared in response to planning condition 15 imposed by Wrexham County Borough Council as Local Planning Authority in relation to the planning approval given to the Wynnstay Farming Company for the development of the Ruabon Business Park near Wrexham in June 2005 (Code no RUA P/2003/1484).
- 1.2 The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (henceforward CPAT) were invited by TACP in August 2005 to provide a fee proposal for undertaking the various archaeological works covered by the conditions referred to above, and a initial costing was provided in mid-September which covered the preliminaries, namely the preparation of a report based on a documentary and field assessment, together with recommendations for mitigation as required by the local authority. In preparing the costing, cognisance was taken of a detailed curatorial design brief for the work which was prepared specifically for TACP by the Wrexham Archaeology Service, a part of Wrexham County Borough Council, in September 2005, as required under planning condition 14. As a requirement of the design brief, a detailed specification was prepared by CPAT in September 2005 and was then passed to the Wrexham Archaeology Service by TACP. This was subsequently approved by the Wrexham Archaeology Service, allowing the assessment to commence.
- 1.3 The report deals first with the background history to the development area in as far as this can be established (in accordance with condition 15), then lists the features of historical interest within the area, and finally suggests mitigation measures for those features as required by conditions 13, 14 and 16. Additional information which provides references to other documentation and elaborates on certain aspects of the study are provided in a series of notes at the end of the report. It has been prepared by Mr R J Silvester of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust.¹
- 1.4 The supplementary notes to the Conditions require that copies of the historic landscape report together with the recommendations be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for their approval, and that copies be lodge with the County Sites and Monuments Record (now the Historic Environment Record), with the County Archaeologist and with Cadw.
- 1.5 A preliminary report on the proposed development area had been prepared by Earthworks Archaeological Services in 1997 (Cole 1997), soon after the park at Wynnstay was included within the *Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in Wales* (Cadw 1995; Fig 1). This provided general background information about the context of Ruabon and Wynnstay which is not repeated here, and the present report complements the earlier one rather than superseding it.

2 *The History of the Development Area*

- 2.1 The development area (SJ 297433), comprising two fields covering around twenty-four hectares, lies immediately to the south-west of the village of Ruabon and some 600 to 700m to the north-west of Wynnstay itself. The modern A483 trunk road runs just to the east, while the A539 and the B5605 edge the area on the north and west respectively.
- 2.2 The history of the area earmarked for the new business park can be taken back with some confidence to the 1740s, but not before. Neither the Home Farm to the south nor James's Farm to the east, both of which lie a little beyond the boundary of the development area, can be traced back into the 18th century, and indeed the name of the

former is evidently a 20th-century creation, even though it almost certainly functioned as such at an earlier date.

- 2.3 In 1741 Wynnstay Park and the surrounding demesne (the manor farm reserved for the lord's own use) was surveyed for Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, the third baronet². The full-size estate map does not appear to have survived, but in addition the surveyor, Thomas Badeslade, produced for the third baronet what was termed a pocket book of maps of the demesne lands attached to several of his more important estates, Wynnstay being the primary one. These maps were copies reduced in size from the large estate maps. The original pocket book has not been traced but a photocopy exists in the Denbighshire Record Office (Fig 2).
- 2.4 The 1741 map does not show all of the area immediately to the south of Ruabon and west of Afon Eitha, but does depict one of the demesne farms known as Tyddyn y Rhyddalt. In as far as it is possible to plot the field boundaries from the 1741 map on to a modern base map, it is evident that much of the development area fell within the demesne. It is also clear that the field bounds in the mid 18th century were of a very irregular pattern which are not reflected in any way by the boundaries of today or indeed of the 19th century (Fig 3). The reason for this irregular pattern must lie in the earlier history of this land block, and one possibility – though not the only one – is that these fields were created by the enclosure, in the 16th or even 17th century, of open fields (where individually farmed strips of land were not separated by permanent boundaries) that had functioned in the Middle Ages. This view is given some credence by the fact that one of the Tyddyn fields was termed *Maes y neuadd*, the term *maes* often signalling a medieval open field in Wales.
- 2.5 Between the village of Ruabon and the Tyddyn y Rhyddalt holding no field divisions are shown in 1741. One road is depicted running south from the village through this unmapped zone and beside it a small mark on the 1741 map appears to indicate James's Farm. From the symbols used on the 1741, it appears that this road was seen as the edge of the Wynnstay park in the mid-18th century, despite some encroaching fields to the east of the road.
- 2.6 The Wynnstay demesne lands did not extend further south of the Tyddyn y Rhyddalt holding over the whole of what was in the 19th century termed Big Field, where the neck of land narrows between the Afon Eitha and the Dee, and this area too was left blank in 1741. While it is conceivable that this was tenanted land belonging to Wynnstay, it is more likely that in the mid 18th century it was in different ownership. This view is reinforced by an agreed land exchange in 1788 between the baronet and Richard Jones³. The details need not detain us, but basically an access was negotiated between the two parties for a road from Pont y Cyfflog and hence Wynnstay, to the new turnpike road beyond Bodylltyn. This road is almost the one still in existence today. That Sir Watkin Williams Wynn needed to enter such an agreement indicates that at least part of Big Field was not in his ownership at that time.
- 2.7 When then did Wynnstay acquire these other portions of land on the west side of the Afon Eitha valley? They appear to fall within the 'hamlet' of Rhuddalt. In the early 18th century Rhuddalt Issa came into possession of a family named Lewis. To Lewis Lewis in 1754 Rhuddalt Issa was also known as Ty'n y Ryddalt, and it has been suggested that possibly this land was exchanged with Wynnstay in the late 18th century, although a precise date cannot be established.³ However, establishing a precise date is arguably less important than the fact that at some point in the late 18th or early 19th century the Wynnstay Estate acquired additional land and this facilitated wide-ranging changes to the layout of this landscape.

- 2.8 The next plan of the Wynnstay Estate, undated, but attributed to the early 19th century perhaps between 1800 and 1820, reveals a very different picture (Fig 4).⁴ It is evident that by the early 19th century, the landscape to the west of the park had been re-drawn. The field boundaries between the River Dee and the Afon Eitha valley were removed and replaced with new ones that were laid out to a more regular and rectilinear pattern. The old road running south was closed completely and does not appear on any later map though curiously, its line is almost precisely that of the new bypass.
- 2.9 The differential colouration on the 1820s map suggests that this area to the west of the Afon Eitha was not viewed at that time as an integral part of the parkland. Rather it was the ground around the demesne farm, later to be known as the Home Farm. Nevertheless, the wall around the whole area was known as the park wall and in 1828-32, Wynnstay was negotiating the purchase of cottages at Cefn Bychan, Swithin Place, Rhosymedre and Newbridge, some of which were within the park wall, so that they could be taken down and replaced by others outside, and the completion of the park wall as far as Newbridge. The lodges, including the fine Newbridge Lodge are usually seen as entries into the park,⁶ and one field to the east of James's Farm was at some point in the 19th century known as James's Park.⁷ This appears to show that though not incorporated into the park around the main house, this area was viewed as part of a broader parkland where access was controlled by the enclosure of a stone wall, and this is in keeping with the situation that developed on great estates in other parts of England and Wales.



Plate 1. The park wall

- 2.10 By the 1820s James's Farm, now a part of the Wynnstay Estate, was used for horse breeding and Big Field to the south of had a training course on it. There were farm buildings where the Home Farm now is, but the key feature there at the time was a 'thrashing machine' and this later became known as Machine Farm.⁸ The sunken ditch which functioned in the same way as a ha ha,⁹ and whose curvilinear course remains,

had also been built by this time. It is a reasonable assumption that this was to prevent stock getting out of what in the 1820s was termed 'the Hay Meadow' into adjacent fields. All this is recognisable or implicit from the 1820s map.

- 2.11 A stone wall was added around the outside of the estate. Tradition has it that this was built by Napoleonic prisoners of war, so sometime in the first two decades of the 19th century, but whether this was broadly contemporary with the changes in the layout of the landscape has not been confirmed.
- 2.12 Minor changes did occur in later years. The pond in the middle of the development area was not in existence when the 1820s map was drawn, but there was a sinuous line on that map which almost certainly represented a stream, curving down to the site of Home Farm and a valley outlet through what is now known as Hopyard Wood. The pond lies on the line of this stream and it appears likely that it was dug out to form a header pond for an underground water supply to power machinery such as the thrashing machine, feeding other small ponds at the farm.
- 2.13 Later maps – the Tithe Map of 1844/45,¹⁰ the 1st edition of the large-scale Ordnance Survey map of 1873 (Fig. 5) – add little to the overall picture. A supplementary field boundary ran diagonally across the development area to the east of the pond in the 19th century. It was not in place on the 1820s map and had been removed by the time of the Ordnance Survey survey in the 1873, but it does appear on the Tithe map and on an undated 19th-century estate map.¹¹
- 2.14 The only other developments to note here are that in the late 19th or early 20th century an area was enclosed in the south-west portion which was used as a football pitch by the Wynnstay Colliery football team¹² and this was still functioning into the early 1970s. In the same field there was also a tennis court. The main field remained as pasture until relatively recently. Changes to the layout of the roads feeding the new bypass have sliced off the northern part of what in the 19th century was termed the hay meadow so that the development area, though following its predecessor is somewhat smaller than it.

3 *The features of archaeological and historic interest*

- 3.1 The features described below are those that are or were formerly visible within, or on the edge of, the development area. They are ordered in a simple sequential number system for ease of use, and are indicated on Fig. 6. Some of these may already have been given numbers for other purposes, within the list of Scheduled Ancient Monuments maintained by Cadw, or in the Historic Environment Record maintained by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, but these numbers will not be referred to in this text unless it appears useful.

1) Offa's Dyke

The greatest of the early medieval boundary earthworks, Offa's Dyke is associated with the great 8th-century king of Mercia. It consists of a bank with a ditch in front of it. The length of the earthwork lying at the south-western corner of the development is a scheduled ancient monument (SAM De 177), and of a length here of 145m or so, 85m edges the development area. The rear of the Dyke bank lies within the development area, the road to Home Farm lies on top of it and the ditch in the pasture field to the west.

Immediately to the north of this upstanding section, the earthen bank has been removed and the ditch, though no doubt present has been overlain by road metalling and probably by the modern embankment.

2) The pond

A large pond, elliptical in shape, with a small islet at the mid point. Regular and steep-sided this was dug probably after c.1820 and before 1845. At the northern end a steep-sided gully which terminates abruptly feeds into the pond. At the southern end is a sluice, which in 1997 had recently been cleaned out for there was a dump of clay and brick rubble adjacent to it. The lower courses of the sluice channel are of stone, the upper surviving courses of brick. 'No mechanism remains, but a decaying footbridge or operator's platform lies immediately below the broken brick abutments which probably supported one' (Cole 1997). The pond is a largely utilitarian feature which retains a parkland veneer.

3) The ha ha (or enclosure boundary).

The boundary on the southern and eastern portions of the development area consists of an inner ditch, sporadically wet, about 1m deep and 3-4m wide with a substantial rubblestone wall revetting its lower, outer side. This stands to a height of 1m-1.5m and is more pronounced in the eastern sector. It has been breached in several places, but the causeway across it on the south at SJ 29734298, may be original for the alignment of the ha ha here is offset and the causeway is itself revetted. Another stone sluice, still functioning, runs through the ha ha at SJ 2955 4301.



Plate 2. The ha ha or enclosure boundary on the southern side of the development area

4) Rectilinear field

The field in the south-west of the development shows traces of a rectangular sunken platform in its south-east corner which is evidently the old tennis court. The rest of the

field has an uneven surface. It is possible though far from certain that some of this unevenness is due to the presence of the mutilated corrugations of ridge and furrow cultivation.

5) Green Lodge

One of the Wynnstay lodges, lying immediately outside the boundary of the development. Built of local stone, architecturally, it has little of obvious interest.

6) The Park Wall and internal shelter belt.

For a distance of less than 200m on the west side, to the north of Green Lodge, the development area runs up to the park wall and incorporates the shelter belt that has been set within it. A very low bank, possible the original shelter belt boundary lies about 5m inside the modern fence. The wall itself is of rubble stone and is in generally good condition.

7) Knoll

Immediately to the east of the pond at NGR SJ29874331 is a gravelly knoll. This is a distinctive feature, visible as a low eminence from all directions. At 64m ENE/SWS by 58m NNW/SSE it is probably too large to be a Bronze Age barrow, and a through examination of all available aerial photographs has not provided any convincing support for such an interpretation. However, a smaller barrow lies just over one kilometre to the south, and the possibility that such a distinctive natural knoll was used for burial purposes in the prehistoric period should be considered.



Plate 3. The knoll on the east side of the pond.

8) *Field boundaries*

Several irregular field boundaries are shown on the 1741 map of Wynnstay and lay within the development area. No surface traces remain of these 18th century boundaries, but it is possible that sub-surface traces might be identified. A later, 19th-century field boundary, originally ran roughly north-west to south-east through the development. It was removed before the end of the 19th century and no trace of it survives.

9) *The historic landscape - general.*

The historic landscape in which the development area is to be set is quasi-parkland. It is not and as far as can be established never has been a part of what would normally be considered to be a conventional park. Nevertheless, it is a tract of ground enclosed by a park wall, but divided up into fields which, whilst functioning as elements of working farms, displayed some parkland attributes. Virtually no parkland trees now exist within the development area, and in its general appearance today it is typically farmland. Within the development area these features can be listed as the parkland wall, the tree belt within it, the pond

4 *Proposals*

4.1 *Protection of extant features*

The design of the proposed business park already takes account of the presence of some elements of the historic landscape, ensuring their future preservation.

4.1.1 Green Lodge. Condition 13 on the planning approval requires a 20m exclusion zone to be fenced off from the Green Lodge boundary. A plan showing the position of the fencing to be submitted to the local planning authority by the developers' consultants. Fencing (in accord with the aforementioned plan and in advance of any works on site) to be supervised, if required, by approved archaeologist.

4.1.2 Offa's Dyke (SAM). The scheduled area extends to the south of Green Lodge. The bank is visible on average for 6 to 7m into the field and is covered by the scheduling order. The development has been specifically designed to ensure its preservation and further, Condition 13 on the planning approval requires an exclusion zone of 15m from the boundary of the scheduled area. Cadw's advice on the precise line of the boundary will be a required input. A plan showing its position to be submitted to the local planning authority by the developers' consultants. Fencing (in accord with the aforementioned plan and in advance of any works on site) to be supervised by an approved archaeologist.¹²

4.1.3 Offa's Dyke (unscheduled). From the Home Farm access road where it passes Green Lodge northwards there are no visible surface indications of the dyke. On the basis of its projected line to the next visible section 270m to the north, the dyke bank should underlie the lane past Green Lodge and then diverge slightly from it further north. Under Condition 13, fencing for Green Lodge is to be extended northwards for a further 80m as far as the point where the access road changes its alignment, though having viewed the site the writer does not feel that such fencing is necessary. A plan showing its position to be submitted to the local planning authority by the developers' consultants. Fencing (in accord with the aforementioned plan and in advance of any works on site) to be supervised by an approved archaeologist.

4.1.4 The ha ha. Condition 13 on the planning approval requires a 10m exclusion zone to be fenced off from the inner, northern edge of the ha ha. A plan showing its position to be submitted to the local planning authority by the developers' consultants. Fencing (in

accord with the aforementioned plan and in advance of any works on site) to be supervised by an approved archaeologist.

- 4.1.5 The pond. This has both historic landscape and ecological relevance. Condition 13 on the planning approval requires a 10m exclusion zone to be fenced off around the pond. A plan showing its position is to be submitted to the local planning authority by the developers' consultants. Fencing (in accord with the aforementioned plan and in advance of any works on site) to be supervised, if required, by an approved archaeologist.
- 4.1.6 The rectilinear field. The presence of both the tennis court and the mutilated ridge and furrow should be noted and a brief record including measurements prepared for the regional Historic Environment Record. This could be done at an early stage during on-site works and would not necessitate a special visit by the approved archaeologist.
- 4.1.7 The knoll. It is suggested that a watching brief be maintained on all groundworks that take place on and immediately around the knoll. In the event that prehistoric burial deposits are identified, full excavation could be required.
- 4.1.8 The writer does not consider it either feasible or appropriate to extend preservation to the football pitch or tennis court.

4.2 Preservation and restoration of features within the historic landscape.

- 4.2.1 The *ha ha* has several thorn trees growing out of it, the roots of which are causing gradual damage to the stone wall. It is recommended that these trees, though not the other deciduous species that have occasionally colonised the bank, be removed to preserve the feature. No new trees should be planted on its edge.
- 4.2.2 *Wall and shelter belt* inside it. These features should be preserved, and a policy drawn up to replant deciduous species as necessary.
- 4.2.3 *The pond*. This should be preserved. Its southern sluice might be cleaned out and tidied.

4.3 General watching brief.

- 4.3.1 The quality and quantity of the historic mapping available makes it reasonably unlikely that there are any significant former or 'lost' parkland features which might be exposed during construction works. Known pre-parkland features which might be identified include former field boundaries (as ditches) and the culverted stream down to Home Farm. It is recommended that during major phases of earthmoving a watching brief be maintained by an approved archaeologist. The frequency and duration of the watching brief visits would be wholly dependent on the contractors' timetable and thus cannot be quantified at present. A report on the results of the watching brief would need to be prepared on conclusion of the on-site works.
- 4.3.2 Unrecognised archaeological and historic features. In the event that are such features are identified during construction works, consultations should be conducted to ensure that appropriate action is undertaken. Depending on the nature and importance of any such feature, this action might involve simple observation, recording, preservation, restoration or renovation, as appropriate.

Notes

- 1 The conditions require that the developer shall employ a historic garden archaeology specialist to conduct all the archaeological works. Robert J. Silvester, BA, FSA, MIFA is the Deputy Director and Head of Field Services of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust. He has worked in Wales for seventeen years, and is an acknowledged specialist in the study of historic landscapes, and has a long list of publications and reports to his name. He is also an authority on estate and other manuscript maps.
- 2 The pocket book survives as a photocopy at Denbighshire Record Office, Ruthin (*Denbs R. O./NTD 176*) where it is wrongly dated to the 1780s although its true date was recognised by Cadw in their report on Wynnstay Park (Cadw 1995, 287). Its precise date can be attributed to 1741, because one of the full size estate maps – that of Llangedwyn – survives in its original form in the Denbighshire Record Office, and carries that date.
- 3 Palmer 1992, 32.
- 4 *Denbighshire Record. Office/Wynnstay Doc 6250.*
- 5 Plan of the Wynnstay Demesne in the ownership of Sir Watkin Williams Wynn. It does not show the Newbridge lodge, built in 1827/8 (Mowl and Earnshaw 1985, 191), whilst Cadw (1995, 289) attribute to c.1800-1820. Their contention that the fifth baronet spent £40,000 on improvements between 1819 and 1830 might tie it down to around the 1820s, as improvements to the estate would offer a suitable context for its production.
- 6 As in Mowl and Earnshaw 1985, 188 which refers specifically to Wynnstay, and Robinson 1988, 97
- 7 Different beliefs exist as to whether the development area falls within the park at Wynnstay, and might be summed up as the traditional view of a park against a conceptual approach which takes a more holistic view of the park as an enclosed entity. On the one hand it has been argued that the park was solely the open and wooded area around the house, which is shaded in darker green on the early 19th-century demesne map, lying to the east of the Afon Eitha valley and this contention is strengthened by the Ordnance Survey depiction in 1879 where the conventional shading for parkland is restricted to the same area. The dissenting view as promoted by Cadw in 1995 is that the area contained within the park wall should be considered as Wynnstay Park, and this appears to be supported by at least one 19th-century document, as described in para 2.8 above. Such a view would generally be adopted by heritage organisations and the situation is paralleled on some of the great English estates such as Holkham, Norfolk where the home farm is enclosed within the boundary wall and the whole area is considered to be the park (personal communication from Dr T Williamson, University of East Anglia). It does not appear that these two views can be rationalised.
- 8 Undated 19th-century plan of Wynnstay Home Farm. *Denbighshire Record. Office/Wynnstay Doc 5885.*
- 9 The ha ha or sunken fence is normally associated with the ground immediately around a house or mansion, designed to allow uninterrupted views of the surrounding parkland or fields for the occupants of the house, whilst deterring stock from entering the gardens. The sunken boundary at the Home Farm operated on the same principle but had no apparent connection with viewpoints.
- 10 Tithe Map for Ruabon in National Library of Wales

- 11 *Denbighshire Record. Office/Wynnstay Doc 5877*
- 12 J Cole 1977.
- 13 Dr Sian Rees, regional inspector of ancient monuments for Cadw has indicated that she would be happy for the approved archaeologist to determine the boundary of the scheduled area and thus the fencing associated with it, but that Cadw would retain the right to monitor it once it was erected.

Acknowledgements

The writer's thanks are due to: the staff at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth and the Denbighshire Record Office in Ruthin; Sir Watkin Williams Wynn for access to the early 19th-century estate map; to the staff of the National Monuments Record at Aberystwyth for making available aerial photography; and to Dr Tom Williamson for his advice.

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Sources

Maps, published and unpublished

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1820s Map of Wynnstay demesne.

1809/36 Ordnance Surveyors' survey drawing no. 316

1844 Ruabon Tithe Map

1873 1st edition 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map: Denbighshire 35.10

1912 3rd edition 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map: Denbighshire 35.10

Aerial Photographs

RAF/G/UK/1454/3367. 02/05/1946

RAF/540/488/4386. 11/05/1951

F2158RAF/5171/0077. 16/06/1962

Meridian 40/72/256. 02/05/1971

OS (Wild) 13095 152.97. 00F047. 08/05/1993.

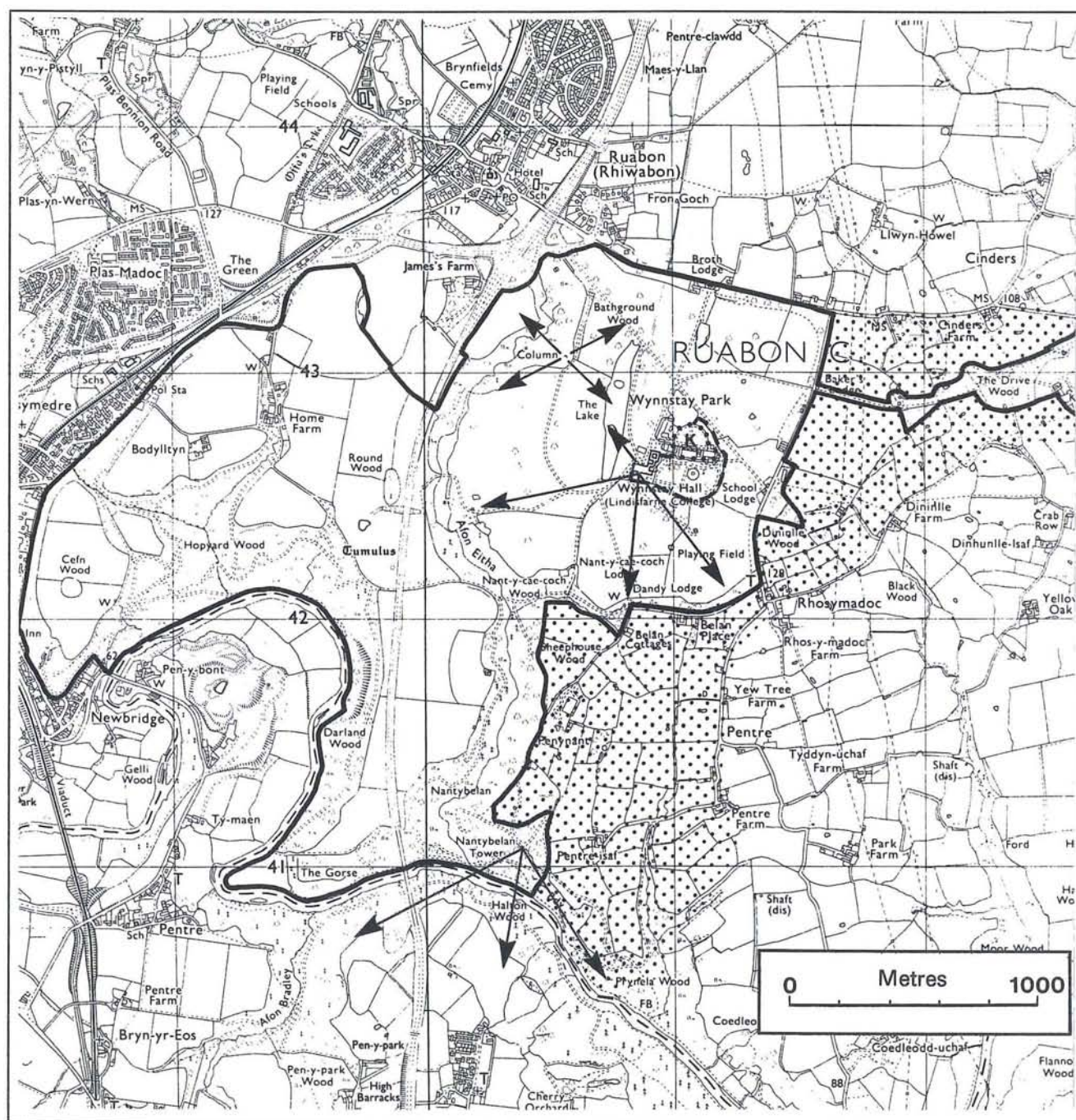


Fig. 1 The registered park at Wynnstai (after Cadw 1995)

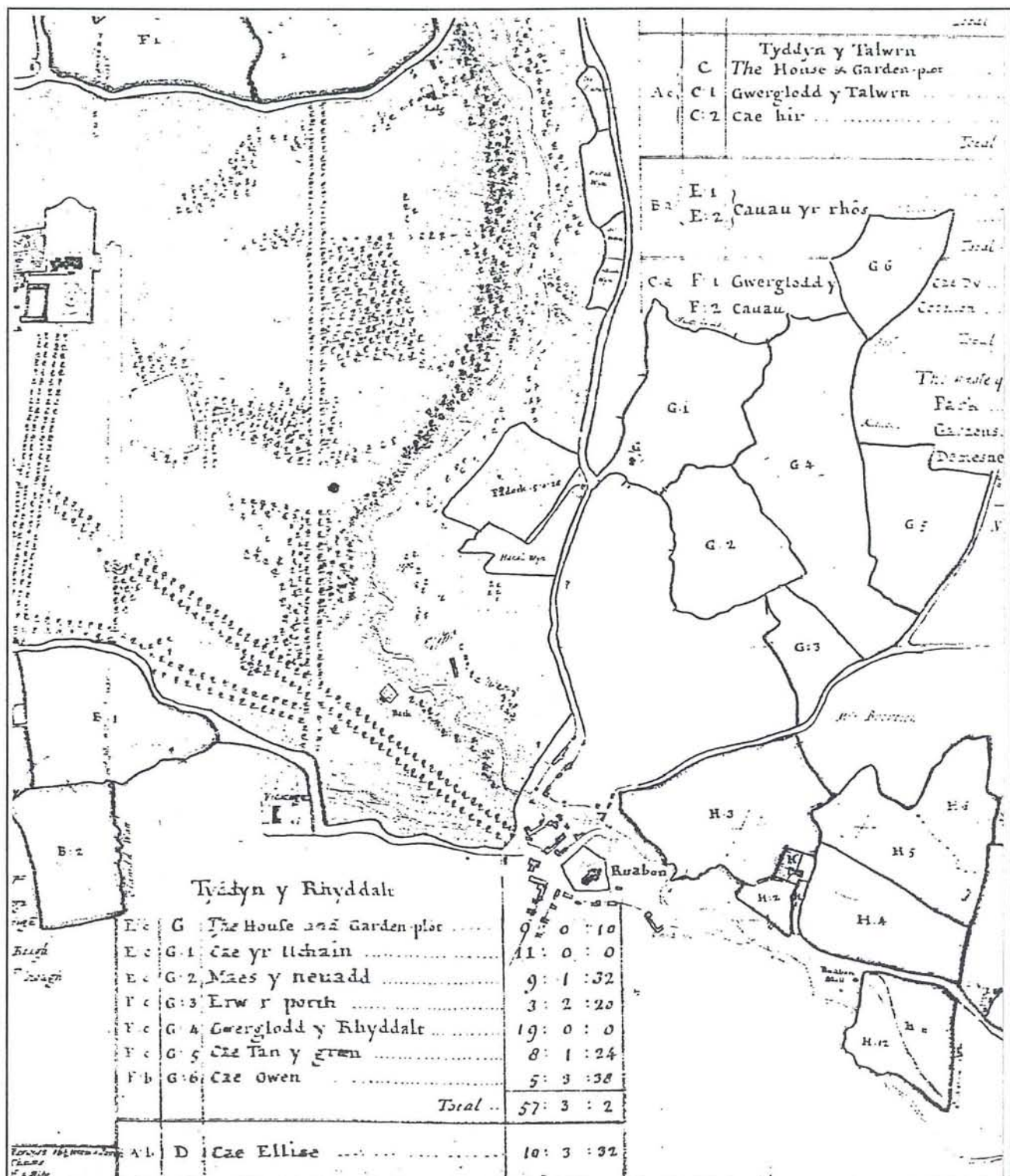


Fig. 2 Badeslade's plan of Wynnstay and its environs in 1741 showing the fields to the west of Afon Eitha (reproduced by permission of Denbighshire Record Office).

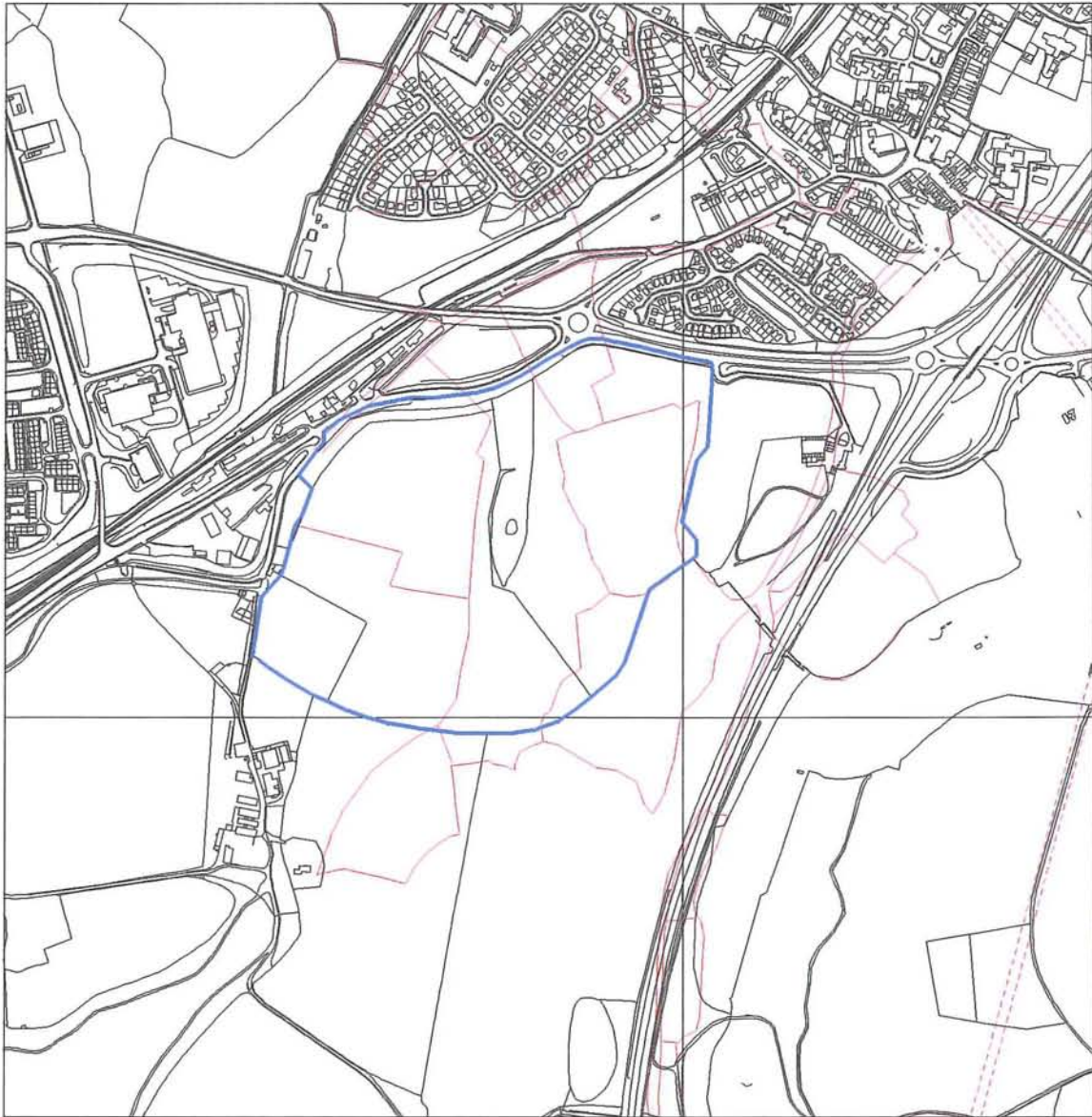


Fig. 3 The relationship of the layout of the area in 1741 to its modern counterpart. Scale 1:10,000
Ordnance Survey data provided by Wynnstay Estate, licence number 0000000



Fig. 4 The Wynnstay Estate in the early 19th century. Reproduced by permission of Sir Watkin Williams Wynn.

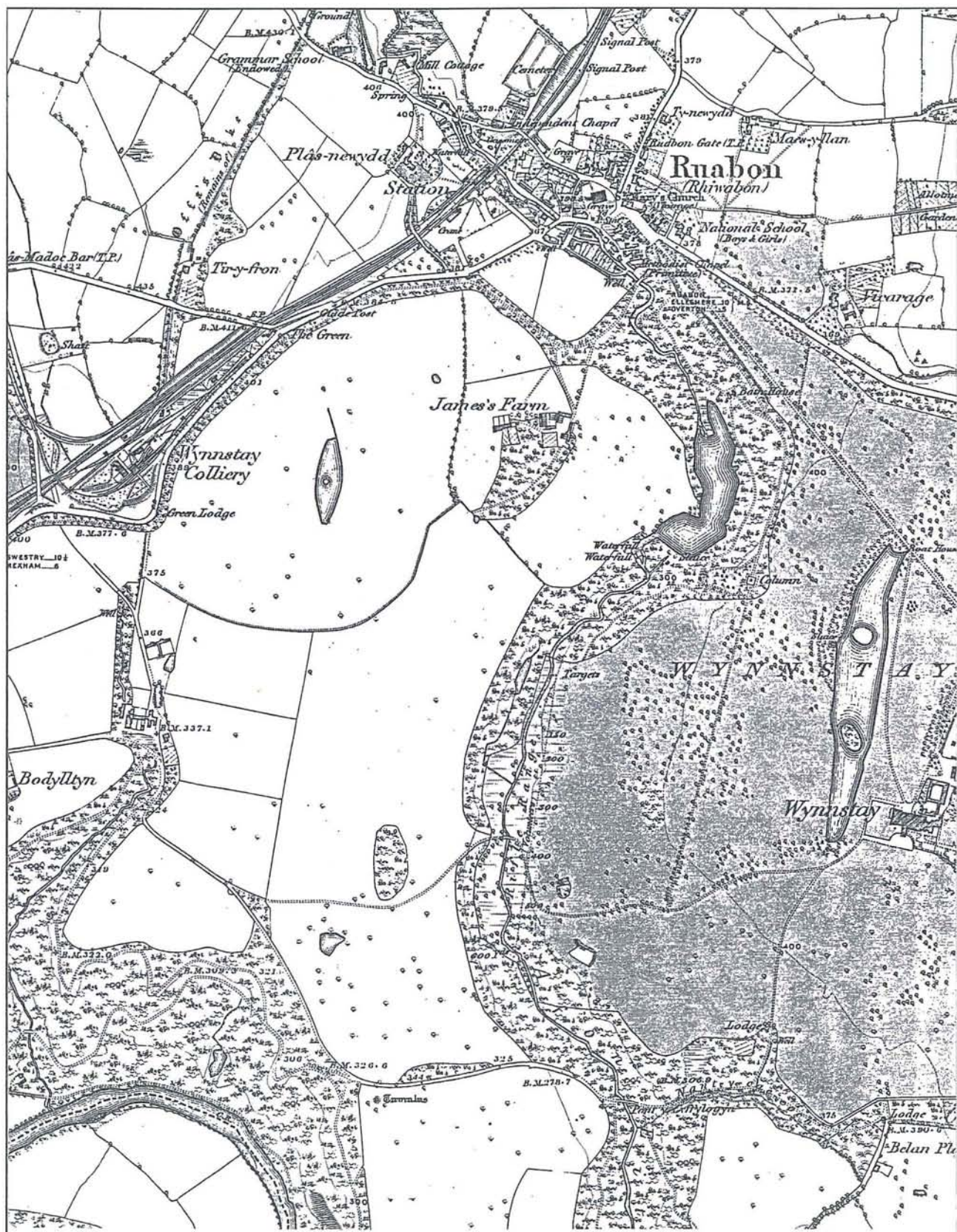


Fig. 5 The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1873. Scale 1:10,560



Fig. 6 The features of archaeological and historical interest within the development area. Scale 1:5,000
Ordnance Survey data provided by Wynnstay Estate, licence number 0000000