

CPAT Report No 1046

Brecon Town Centre

CULTURAL HERITAGE ASSESSMENT



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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May 2010

Report for Capita Symonds

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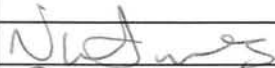

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CONTENTS

- 1 INTRODUCTION
- 2 HISTORIC CARTOGRAPHY
- 3 BRECON: HISTORIC OVERVIEW
- 4 THE DEVELOPMENT AREA
- 5 CULTURAL HERITAGE SUMMARY
- 6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
- 7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- 8 SOURCES

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In February 2010 the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) was invited by Capita Symonds to undertake a desk-based assessment of the cultural heritage within an area of Brecon town centre defined by Market Street, Castle Street, High Street Superior and Ship Street (centred SO 04412866) in connection with preliminary proposals for redevelopment. A formal instruction to proceed was received in April 2010 and the assessment was undertaken during the following four weeks
- 1.2 The study involved the collation of material, previously assembled, from readily available primary and secondary documentary, cartographic, pictorial, and photographic sources held at the following repositories: the regional Historic Environment Record, Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, Welshpool; the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth; the National Monuments Record, Aberystwyth; and Powys County Archives, Llandrindod Wells. All information provided here was current in April 2010. Further designations and additions to the Historic Environment Record after this date cannot be ruled out.

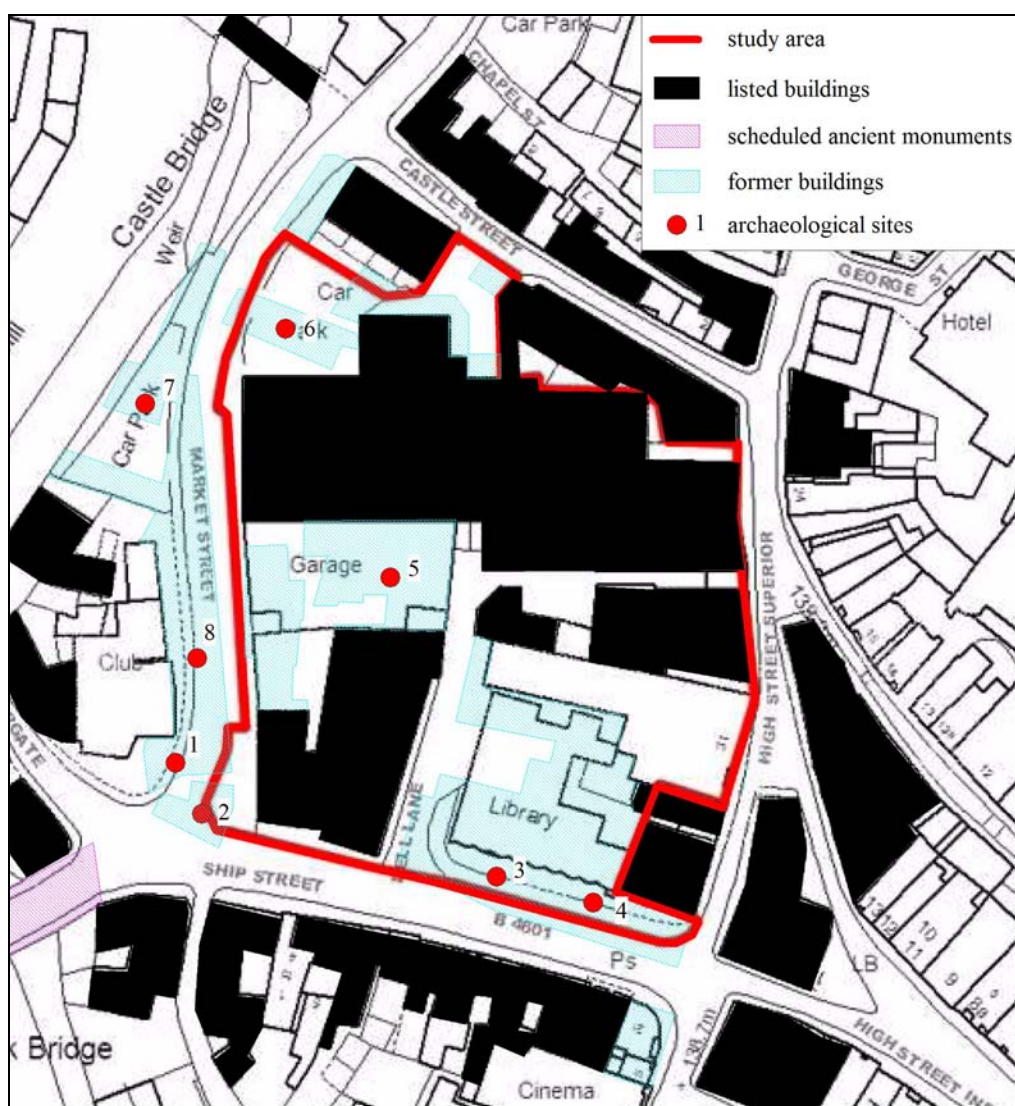


Fig. 1 Known cultural heritage assets within and around the study area (based on mapping provided by Capita Symonds)

2 HISTORIC CARTOGRAPHY

- 2.1 Charting the origins and development of Brecon in the Middle Ages is largely dependent on documentary references which are not commonplace. Even where these do exist they do not necessarily provide the detail, nor the geographical precision that allow us to define the existence of housing and the nature of associated activity on any particular street or thoroughfare within the town.

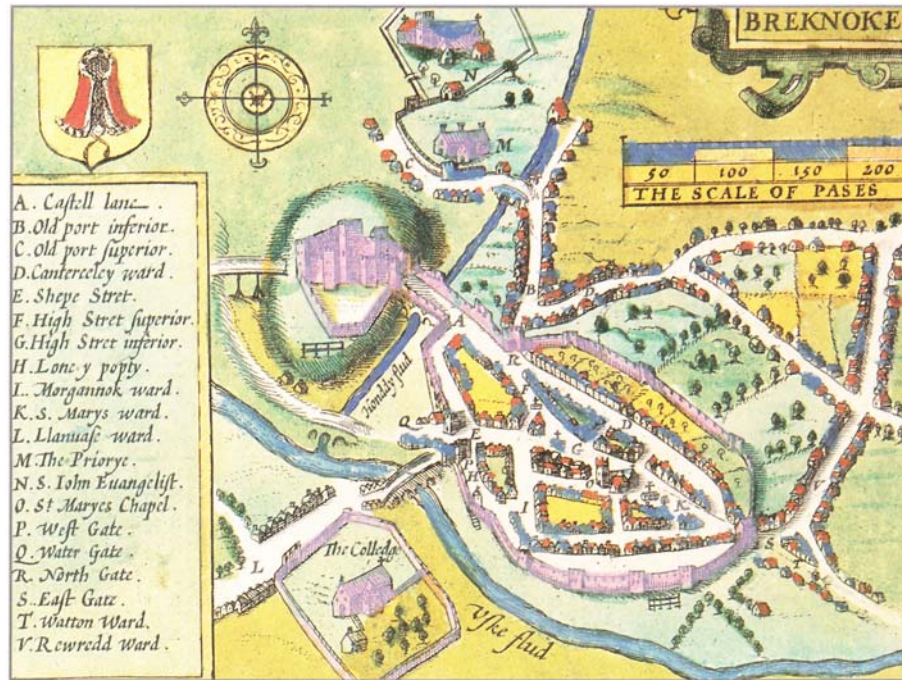


Fig. 2 John Speed's map of Brecon published in 1611. The study area lies inside the 'ring' of letters A, R, F and E in the centre of the map

- 2.2 We are fortunate, however, that John Speed's published map of 1611 (Fig 2), but surveyed five years previously in September 1606) provides a depiction of the town at the beginning of the 17th century, and one that may within reasonable parameters represent the picture in the later Middle Ages. Speed's control of detail is not always exact, but there can be little doubt that in its outline his depiction is an informative one. One hundred and thirty years separates Speed's mapping from the next depiction, that of the surveyor Meredith Jones in 1744. This map was illustrated in Theophilus Jones' *History of Brecknock* at the beginning of the 19th century, and has been reproduced in print on several occasions since, but the whereabouts of the original plan is now unknown. Theophilus Jones' reproduction suffices, however, to suggest that Meredith Jones may well have used Speed's earlier map as a base to which he added further detail (Fig 3). Whether this extra detail was carefully surveyed in by Meredith Jones or not is a moot point.
- 2.3 There is another pair of broadly contemporary manuscript maps both of which may also be by Meredith Jones who by this time was probably the leading surveyor in Brecknock. One of these is dated to 1761 (fig. 3) while the other, a much larger but less elaborate version, is undated, but looks to be a working estate map for William Morgan of Tredegar. Images of these maps cannot be included in this report for copyright reasons. Block tones were used on these maps to indicate housing and other buildings, and it is quite clear from these maps that there were buildings along most of the street frontages in the development area.
- 2.4 The Glamorgan-based surveyor Edward Thomas drew parts of Brecon in the early 1780s, and later in 1834, John Wood published his detailed plan of Brecon (fig. 4). Large-scale Ordnance

Survey maps reveal the detailed picture as it was at the end of the Victorian era in the late 19th century (fig. 5).

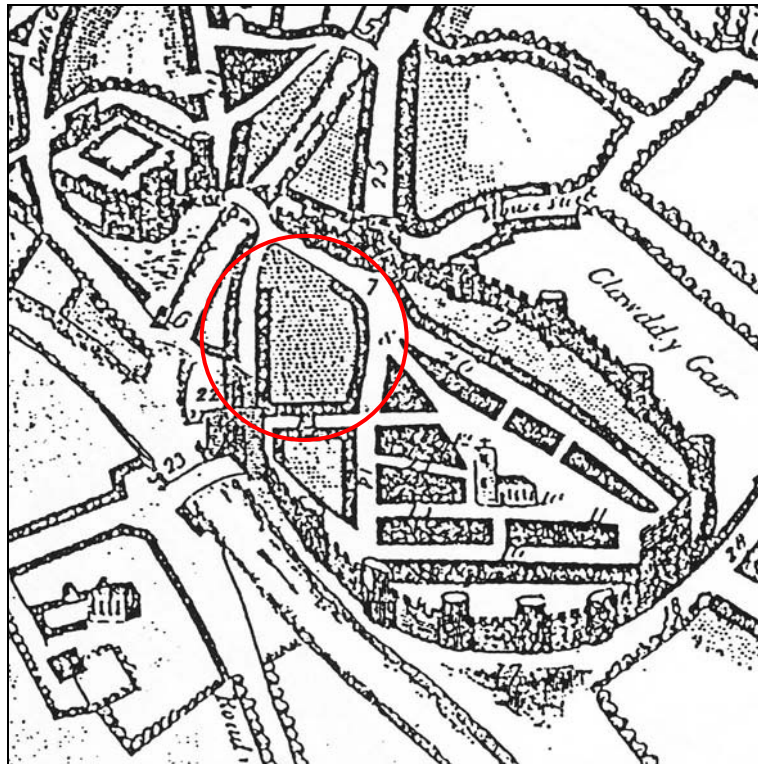


Fig. 3 Extract from the plan of Brecon by Meredith Jones showing the study area circled in red

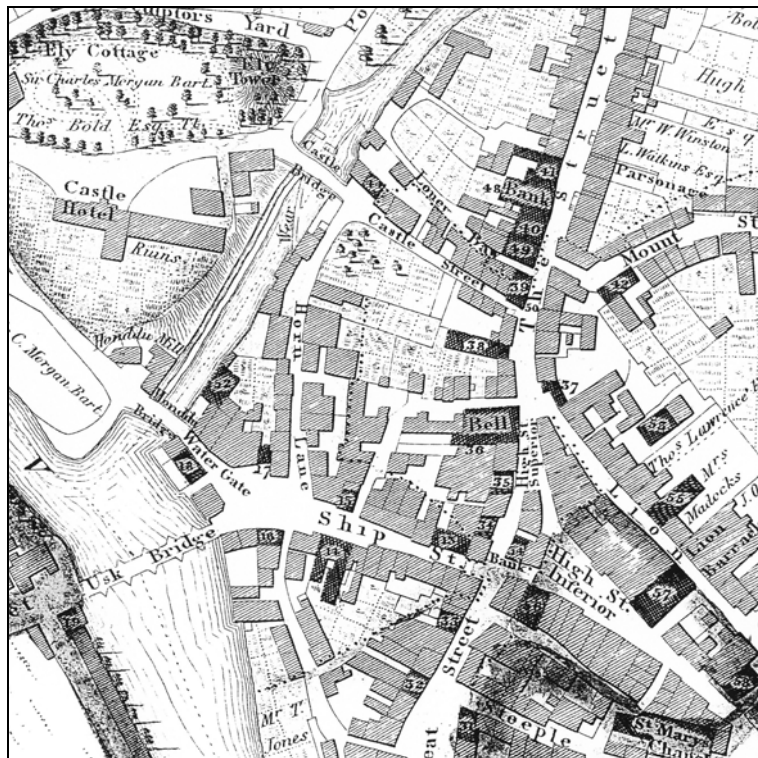


Fig. 4 Extract from John Wood's plan of Brecon in 1834 with the study area in the centre

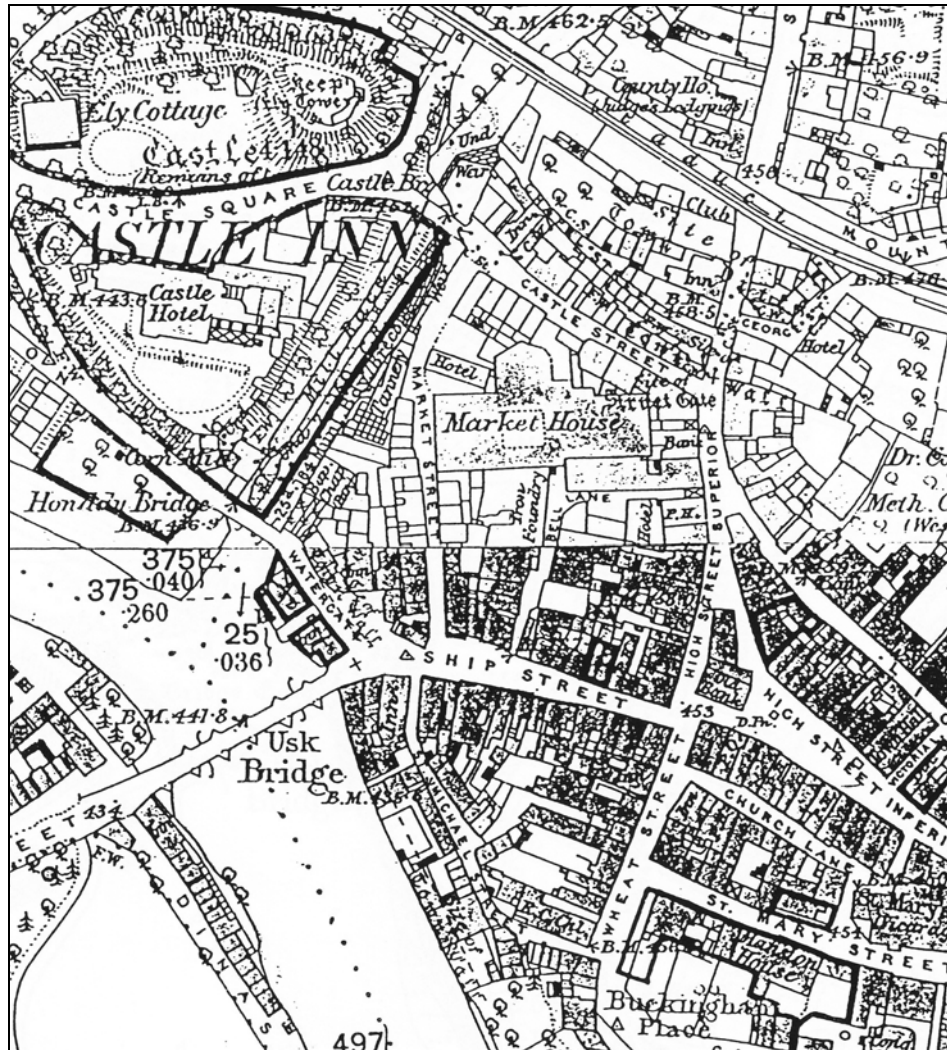


Fig. 4 The Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25" map of Brecon, published in 1889

3 BRECON: HISTORIC OVERVIEW

- 3.1 The date at which the town of Brecon came into existence has yet to be established. When, in 1093, the Norman lord, Bernard de Neufmarché, defeated local Welsh rulers at a location thought to have been relatively close by, there may already have been some sort of settlement here. There is a hint for instance that the original churchyard associated with the priory of St John was curvilinear in its design and this could reflect an early medieval beginning for a settlement on the west bank of the Honddu.
- 3.2 An alternative view highlights the castle which controlled the strategically important river crossing of the Honddu immediately north of its confluence with the Usk. This must have been established soon after de Neufmarché subdued the area and established himself as the local lord. Its subsequent emergence as the *caput* or principal base for one of the great lordships in south Wales saw it functioning not only as a stronghold, but also as an administrative centre for a large region.
- 3.3 Settlement will also have developed around it fairly rapidly. The earliest urban development is assumed to have been located within the castle bailey on the west bank of the Honddu, and the Benedictine priory of St John was founded soon after. How much later were the beginnings of

the town on the opposite, east bank of the Honddu is still open to debate, but there can be little doubt that this was a planned town, its roads and lanes laid out deliberately within the constraints of the topography and a market – presumably the most important in the district – established at any early date.

- 3.4 When it was besieged by Llywelyn ab Iorwerth in 1217, the burgesses bought him off, revealing not only that the town already had its defences by that date but also that it had by this time a burghal charter, even though the first surviving charter dates from a rather later time (in 1276). An origin for the town in the 12th century thus seems undeniable. Llywelyn returned in 1231 and again in 1233, burning the town on both occasions. The town was also besieged by Owain Glyndŵr in 1403. Notwithstanding this setback, at the time that a new charter was granted in 1412, 86 burgesses were recorded and by 1443 this number had risen to 121. As the town developed it became an important and thriving market centre with twice weekly markets and three annual fairs, the most important urban centre in the region.
- 3.5 It was during the Tudor period of the 16th century that Brecon reputedly saw major population growth. In 1536 it was designated as one of the four regional administrative centres in Wales, reinforcing its significance at that time, and Leland penned a lengthy description of it during his travels in the 1540s. In 1563, diocesan returns appear to indicate that more people were living in the suburbs than in the town itself, and this is itself an indication of how the settlement was expanding beyond its original core within the town. Indeed there have been suggestions that by the mid-16th century the population may have been at least two thousand, with extra-mural settlements in Oldport, Llanfaes and Watton.
- 3.6 Its more recent history does not need to be detailed here. It is sufficient to note that better documentation, as well as the visible signs wherever we look in Brecon, demonstrate how it has developed into the town of today.

4 THE DEVELOPMENT AREA



Plate 1 Aerial view of the development area showing its relationship to the Castle and the Usk Bridge

The Streets

- 4.1 The development block as we see it today is bounded by Castle Street on the north, Market Street on the west, Ship Street on the south and High Street Superior on the east. A minor land, Bell Lane, runs off Ship Street. These thoroughfares frame and distinguish the development area and it is useful to consider each of these in turn.
- 4.2 Castle Street was known, at least in its western part, as Castle Lane in the early 17th century, leading then as now to the bridge over the Honddu and the Castle. Its eastern end was at the North Gate (subsequently known as the Struet Gate) and the town wall fringed it on the northern side. Castle Street, then, was an intra-mural lane, certainly of medieval date and probably going back to the time when the defences were first constructed in the 12th century. It is likely that houses were built on the south side of Castle Street in the Middle Ages, though whether the street frontage was fully occupied is open to question as this would not have been the most desirable part of the town. Speed shows a continuous row of houses on his published map of 1611, but this is not the case on his working drawing of 1606. Though this omission could be no more than an aberration in the working drawing, we would do well to note that Meredith Jones' map of 1744 shows no houses around the angle where Castle Street and Market Street meet, a situation perpetuated on John Wood's map in 1834. While the situation in the 17th century and later may not have mirrored that in the Middle Ages, it remains a possibility that houses were sparse on this part of Castle Street throughout the town's history.
- 4.3 Market Street has a long history but its name is a Victorian one, a reflection of the construction of the Market House in 1839-40. Prior to this it was Horn Lane, appearing as such on a map of 1780. Its angles have been slightly smoothed by the modern road improvements in the town, but Horn Lane is very much as it was at the beginning of the 17th century, and by extension in the Middle Ages too. Horn Street too was an intra-mural lane and of medieval date with the town wall running along its western edge, to a tower, probably part of the Watergate which was

found in excavations in 2003. And like Castle Street, Speed showed houses along it on his published plan but not on his working drawing. A slight difference is that some of the houses so depicted were larger than others. Whether this reflects a true situation or is an engraver's convention is unclear. By the middle of the 18th century, it appears as though there was continuous housing along Horn Street from its southern end northwards to the angle two-thirds of the way along it.

- 4.4 Ship Street is a 18th-century name. Speed has it as Sheep Street and a document of 1569 in the National Library of Wales confirms that this was a well-established name that perhaps had its origins in the Middle Ages. By the 1740s it had become Ship Street, though Thomas (in 1780) adhered to the old name. Leading downhill to the crossings of both the Honddu and the Usk, it is of no surprise that Ship Street had a continuous row of houses along its northern edge (in the development area). This is a situation which almost certainly held true in the medieval period as well.
- 4.5 High Street Superior edged the long wedge-shaped market square at its southern end and provided access to the North Gate beyond this. Powell claims that the name can be taken back into the mid-15th century. By the beginning of the 17th century infilling was occurring on the market square and a couple of houses had been built where the bank now stands, giving further definition to the street. Again, with its central position it is likely that this street was flanked by continuous houses in the medieval period, a situation that has continued up to the present.
- 4.6 Bell Lane is of unknown age. It may be of 19th-century date, serving the Bell Hotel which was tucked away behind the Punch Bowl public house in the late Victorian era. Maps pre-dating the 19th century show no traces of the lane, though their evidence (or lack of it) is not wholly conclusive.
- 4.7 A question that emerges is whether the layout of streets on the north side of the development area has been modified since the time of John Speed. He depicted Castle Street (or Lane) as bifurcating into High Street Superior and Lion Street (fig 2), whereas today this is a staggered junction with Castle Street coming off High Street Superior further north than the latter's junction with Lion Street. This is not an academic point because if the alignment of Castle Street has been altered, post-1606, its original line lies just within and beneath the development area. In this instance, however, it is clear that the engraver of Speed's map departed from his original. Speed's working survey of 1606 provides a better representation of the layout of this part of the town and the junction of the streets is more accurately depicted, conforming to the modern layout.
- 4.8 *To summarise the block of land that constitutes the development area is one that had an inherent coherency in the early 17th century and there is every reason to suppose that that coherency can be taken back into the medieval era as an element of the original townscape.*

The buildings

- 4.9 There is no solid evidence, documentary or archaeological, for the buildings that populated the development area prior to the 17th century. There is though the possibility that no 9 Ship Street has architectural features going back into the 16th century.
- 4.10 We can however make some reasoned assumptions based on later evidence, and by analogy with other towns. It is likely that the street frontages of Ship Street and High Street Superior were lined, probably almost continuously, with houses and associated shops in the Middle Ages. With Market Street and Castle Street, the houses may have been more intermittent, but there will certainly have been some. Many of these houses would have had burgage plots stretching out behind them, long blocks of land which were no wider than the buildings that fronted them. These plots would have contained ancillary structures, gardens, domestic animals and rubbish dumps within them (*cf* the works around Bethel Square in 1994-5). The burgage

plots are barely visible today, and even on 19th-century maps they are difficult to detect, for infilling has been a feature of post-medieval Brecon, resulting in over 40 buildings being depicted on Wood's map of 1834 and nearly 50 on the late 19th-century Ordnance Survey maps. We can speculate that Bell Lane might have originally formed a division between blocks of burgage plots, its alignments and location being suggestive of this.

- 4.11 *Houses are likely to have filled much of the development area in the Middle Ages, as was certainly the case from the 17th century onwards.*

Industry

- 4.12 There is the possibility that this area may have been an industrial quarter in the town in past centuries. There are signs of this in the 19th century with an iron foundry immediately to the south of the Market House, and a tannery and a smithy on the opposite side of Market Street (see fig. 5). The names of Horn Lane and perhaps Sheep Street surely attest agrarian-based industry in earlier centuries, and the importance of Sheep Street ward has been flagged up by writers. In 1664 the area had seven corvesers (shoemakers), three tanners and two curriers, revealing the importance of leather working.
- 4.13 *Industry could have been a prominent feature of this peripheral area of the town in the post-medieval centuries, but it is not possible on present evidence to suggest that this emphasis goes back into the Middle Ages.*

Town Walls

- 4.14 On the basis of the information currently available, it does not appear that the development of this block will have any impact on the town defences, although the discovery of a D-shaped tower and part of the wall at the southern end of Market Street (plate 2), outside the study area, indicates the potential for the survival of significant medieval archaeology in this part of the town.



Plate 2 The D-shaped tower and part of the town wall at the southern end of Market Street

5 CULTURAL HERITAGE SUMMARY

Listed Buildings

- 5.1 There are nine listed buildings within the study area, all of which have been designated Grade II. There is normally a presumption that statutorily designated buildings will be preserved in situ, although where any loss or alteration is unavoidable an appropriate level of building recording would be expected.

Table 1: Listed buildings within the study area

Name	Listing No.	Grade
Former outbuilding to rear of Punchbowl Inn	6809	II
Brecon Market	6920	II
27 High St Superior/Nat West Bank	6921	II
28 High St Superior	6922	II
29 High St Superior/Punchbowl Inn	6923	II
8 Ship St	7022	II
9 Ship St	7023	II
10 Ship St	7024	II
30 High St Superior	85658	II

- 5.2 In addition to those listed buildings within the study area, there are almost 60 buildings within the immediate area, the setting of which could be affected by the redevelopment. These include the Grade I listed Usk Bridge and two Grade II * buildings along Ship Street.

Table 2: Listed Buildings within the immediate area

Name	Listing No.	Grade
Usk Bridge	6815	I
7 Castle St	6853	II
12 Castle St	6854	II
13 Castle St	6855	II
Castle Bridge	6859	II
18 Castle St	6860	II
Rear Garden Wall to Nos.18 to 21 Castle Street	6861	II
22 Castle St	6862	II
23 Castle St	6863	II
18 High St Inferior	6915	II
19 High St Inferior	6916	II
20 High St Inferior	6917	II
25 High St Superior	6918	II
26 High St Superior	6919	II
32 High St Superior	6924	II
33 High St Superior	6925	II
34 High St Superior	6926	II
28 High St Inferior/Lloyd's TSB	6927	II
41 High St Superior	6928	II
39 High St Superior	6929	II
40 High St Superior	6930	II

43 High St Superior	6931	II
44 High St Inferior	6932	II
11 Ship St	7025	II
12-13 Ship St/Boleyn House and Flats round Rear Courtyard and Stone Flagged Pavement	7026	II*
14 Ship St	7027	II
15 Ship St	7028	II
16 Ship St	7029	II
17 Ship St	7030	II
18 Ship St	7031	II
19 Ship St	7032	II
20 Ship St	7033	II*
105 The Struet	7079	II
Watergate Baptist Church	7083	II
8 Watergate	7087	II
10 Watergate	7088	II
12 Watergate/Boar's Head PH	7089	II
13 Watergate	7090	II
4 Castle St	85590	II
10a Watergate	85598	II
10b Watergate	85599	II
11 Watergate	85605	II
14-17 High St Inferior	85627	II
19 Castle St	85631	II
20 Castle St	85639	II
21 Castle St	85642	II
23a Castle St	85649	II
25a High St Superior	85651	II
25b High St Superior	85652	II
25c High St Superior	85653	II
43 High St Inferior	85676	II
45 High St Inferior	85678	II
9 Watergate	85734	II
5 Castle St	85772	II
6 Castle St	85773	II
9 Castle St	85774	II
10 Castle St	85775	II
11 Castle St	85776	II
35 High St Superior	85784	II

Scheduled Ancient Monuments

- 5.3 There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the study area, although there are two – Brecon Castle and Brecon (Usk) Bridge – where the settings could be affected by redevelopment.

Table 3: Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the immediate area

Name	SAM No.
Brecon Bridge	Br004
Brecon Castle	Br022

Non-designated Cultural Heritage assets

- 5.4 In addition to those sites with statutory designations the assessment has identified a further eight sites within and around the study area. Of these, the town wall and tower (Site 1), the tannery (Site 7) and the smithy (Site 8) will not be affected by the proposed redevelopment although they serve to indicate the archaeological potential of the area. The remaining sites are only known from documentary sources, although it must be assumed that buried remains are likely to survive. In this respect the former street frontage along Ship Street may have the most potential and it is likely that significant buried archaeological remains survive.
- 5.5 Historic cartography indicates that there is considerable potential for buried archaeological remains associated with street frontage buildings along all four streets surrounding the study area. The interior of the area may originally have been divided into separate burgage plots, although it is clear that by at least the 19th century these were being built upon, suggesting that here also there is the potential for significant buried remains.

Table 4: Non-designated sites within and around the study area

Site No.	Name	Type	Period	Form
1	Brecon Town Wall and Tower	Tower	Medieval	Buried feature
2	1 Watergate	Building	Post-medieval	Document
3	Ship Street medieval street frontage	Building	Medieval	Document
4	Old Six Bells	Building	Post-medieval	Document
5	Market Street Iron Foundry	Iron Foundry	Post-medieval	Document
6	Queen's Head Hotel	Building	Post-medieval	Document
7	Market Street Tannery	Tannery	Post-medieval	Document
8	Market Street Smithy	Smithy	Post-medieval	Document

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 This desk-based assessment should be seen as an initial stage in determining the cultural heritage potential of the development area and further stages should be considered to include the following: field survey and assessment of cellars/previous disturbance; assessment of standing buildings; and trial excavation.
- 6.2 The results from the study clearly indicate that there is significant potential for buried archaeological remains within the area, which also contains a number of grade II listed buildings. Any below ground works within the area may impact on archaeological remains which would require appropriate excavation and recording.
- 6.3 Consideration should be given to a number of cultural heritage issues which are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Cultural Heritage issues that may need to be addressed

Issues	Likelihood	Criteria	Response	Timing
<i>Standing buildings - general</i>	High	Listing grade	Assessment of listed and non-listed buildings	Stage 2 assessment
<i>Standing buildings - alterations</i>	High	Listing grade	Appropriate recording by: i) photography; ii) survey	Pre-alterations or demolition
<i>Standing buildings - visual impact</i>	Not known	Listing grade	Sensitive design for new development	Design stage
<i>Historic townscape layout</i>	High	Curatorial concerns	On-site assessment	Pre-alteration or demolition
<i>Historic townscape character</i>	Low to medium?	Statutory body concerns	Sensitive design for new development	Design stage
<i>Conservation Area</i>	Not known	Statutory body concerns	Sensitive design for new development	Design stage
<i>Below ground archaeology</i>	High		Assess extent of cellars and/or prior disturbance Evaluation Excavation	Stage 2 assessment Stage 3 assessment Post-demolition/prior to construction

7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 7.1 The writers would like to thank the staff of the regional HER in Welshpool, the NMR in Aberystwyth and the National Library of Wales for the past provision of material and general assistance.

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