

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE MEDIEVAL TOWNS OF SOUTHWEST WALES

TREGARON



2009 Aerial photograph of Tregaron (RCAHMW AP_2009_3592)

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By

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TREGARON

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tregaron is a small town in Ceredigion serving a large agricultural hinterland. A Welsh settlement developed around St Caron's Church in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, perhaps earlier. In 1290 the English king Edward I granted Tregaron to Geoffrey Clement with rights to hold a weekly market and two annual fairs. Tregaron remained small probably not developing much beyond its historic core until nineteenth century. Archaeological investigations have been limited and small in scale and none have revealed evidence of medieval deposits.

KEY FACTS

Status: Weekly market and two annual fairs.

Size: Unknown, but small.

Archaeology: Limited excavations did not reveal medieval archaeology.

LOCATION

Tregaron lies in the centre of Ceredigion's agricultural landscape (SN 680 598) on the southern fringes of the extensive Tregaron Bog/Cors Caron and the western fringe of the Cambrian Mountains at the intersection of historically important route-ways (Fig. 1). The A485 provides access to Carmarthenshire to the south and to north Ceredigion and north Wales to the north. Minor roads, so called Drovers' roads, give access over the Cambrian Mountains to east Wales and England.

HISTORY

The presence an early medieval inscribed stone and three cross-incised stones formerly in the churchyard and St Caron church dedication are evidence of a pre-Anglo-Norman community at Tregaron; the nature of this community is unknown. The present-day church, heavily restored in the nineteenth century, has medieval elements, and is reputed to sit on a Bronze Age round barrow.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries a Welsh settlement developed organically around the church. Rhys ap Gruffydd's foundation of Strata Florida Abbey a few kilometres to the north in the late twelfth century would have benefited the people of Tregaron. However, in 1290 Edward I of England granted the lordship of Caron to Geoffrey Clement and two years later he added the privileges of a weekly market and two annual fairs. Rather unusually there was no castle at Tregaron and there is no evidence that the settlement was ever defended. English lords normally encouraged settlers into their new acquired town; it is not known if this took place at Tregaron.

The Clements retained control of Tregaron until the mid-fifteenth century. Unfortunately no records documenting the population and size of Tregaron are known. It is assumed that it remained relatively small and of regional importance. It is worth noting that in the first half of the sixteenth century Tregaron was described as the chief town of the Lordship of Pennarth. More importantly the annual *Ffair Garon* was at one time one the largest in Wales.

The town lost its borough status in 1742 but continued to act as a regional centre serving a large agricultural hinterland.

Figure 7 shows Tregaron as it may have been in the early fourteenth century.

MORPHOLOGY

The parish church of St Caron built on a mound on the east bank of the River Brennig dominates that small town of Tregaron. The market place to the east of the church, with the Talbot Hotel standing on its eastern side, several small streets around the churchyard and the group of buildings around a crossroad on the west bank of the Brennig form the core of the historic settlement. The 1842 tithe map (Fig. 2) shows the historic core of the town as it was in the first half of the nineteenth century. The size of the medieval town is not known, but it is not likely to have been larger than is shown on the tithe map. The town expanded in the second half of the nineteenth century – see Figure 3 the 1889 Ordnance Survey map. Since then expansion has been constant but modest and Tregaron remains a small town serving an agricultural hinterland.

BUILDINGS AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS

Scheduled Monuments

There are no scheduled monuments in Tregaron.

Listed Buildings

There are approximately seven listed buildings in Tregaron (Fig. 4). These include the parish church of St Caron, a chapel, the Talbot Hotel, a bank and street furniture. All are Grade II.

Conservation Area

The whole of the historic core of Tregaron lies in the Tregaron Conservation Area (Fig. 4).

Registered Parks and Gardens

There are no registered parks and gardens in Tregaron.

Registered Historic Landscape

Tregaron lies in the Upland Ceredigion registered landscape. It has been characterised in the Tregaron character area.

Undesignated Historic Environment Assets

There are approximately 20 undesignated assets in Tregaron listed on the Dyfed Historic Environment Record. (Fig. 5). These include duplicates of the seven listed buildings. Other records comprise the original locations in the church of early medieval inscribed stones, find spots of medieval artefacts and eighteenth and nineteenth century buildings.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

Included in this section are excavations, evaluation excavations and watching briefs. Building surveys and desk-top assessments are not included unless they add to the known archaeology (Fig. 6).

Numbers in parentheses below refer to records in the Dyfed Historic Environment Record.

1. Six evaluation trenches were excavated in 2007 on a plot of land at Talbot Yard on the eastern side of Tregaron. No features of archaeological interest were recorded. Reference: Cook 2007 (62910).
2. A watching brief was maintained during a flood defence scheme in 2009. Nothing of archaeological significance was noted but some eighteenth and nineteenth century artefacts were recovered. Reference: Jones 2009 (62761).



Plate 1. View of Afon Brennig from Tregaron Bridge prior to dredging. Looking south.

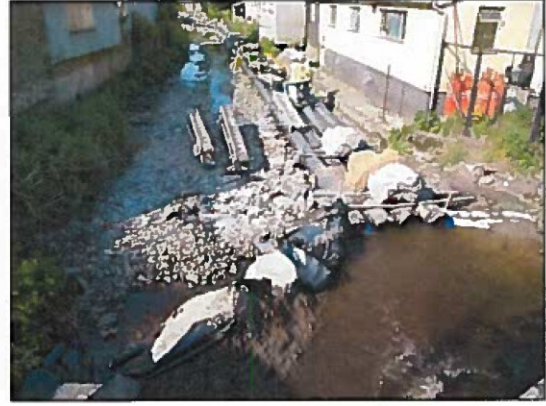


Plate 2. Damming and diverting of river by bridge in preparation for dredging. Looking south from bridge.



Plate 3. Dredging of river in area of Tregaron bridge. Looking east from bridge.

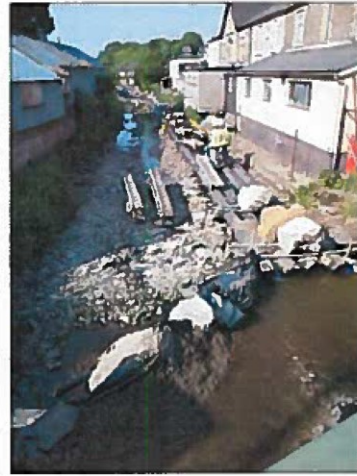


Plate 4. Damming and diverting of river by bridge in preparation for dredging. Looking south from bridge.

A selection of images of from the flood defence scheme watching brief.

3. Building recording and a watching brief was carried on during demolition of a building, Gelli-Gron, for road widening in 2000. The work concluded that Gelli-Gron a small domestic structure was built in the mid-late eighteenth century and altered in the early nineteenth century. There was no evidence for anything pre-dating the house – the building had been constructed directly onto natural gravels. Jones 2000 (41358).



13. Gelli-gron during final phase of demolition



14. Gelli-gron during final phases of demolition work



15. Gelli-gron during final phases of demolition



16. Foundation trench for new boundary wall



17. Foundation trench for new boundary wall, looking east toward the Market Square



18. Foundation trench for new boundary wall, looking west.

A selection of photographs from the Gelli-Gron report.

- An archaeological watching brief was maintained during topsoil stripping to create a temporary compound in 2008. Nothing of archaeological interest was noted. Reference: Smith 2008 (62962). The work concluded that Gelli-Gron was a small domestic structure first built in the mid-late eighteenth century and altered in the early nineteenth century

ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

Tregaon has potential for addressing some of the key research agenda items for research into the medieval period, including town development and church building. It also has the potential to address post-medieval research theme on settlements (towns).

There have been few archaeological interventions at Tregaron. Nothing of medieval date was recorded in the only one in the historic core. Thus although it remains unknown whether medieval, including early medieval, deposits survive, there is high likelihood that they do, at least in pockets within the town.

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Databases and online references

Dyfed Historic Environment Record <https://www.archwilio.org.uk/arch/>

Cof Cymru <https://cadw.gov.wales/advice-support/cof-cymru>

Coflein <https://coflein.gov.uk/en>

LiDAR <https://lle.gov.wales/catalogue/item/LidarCompositeDataset/?lang=en>

Research framework for the Archaeology of Wales

<https://www.archaeoleg.org.uk/areasouthwest.html>



Figure 1. Location map.

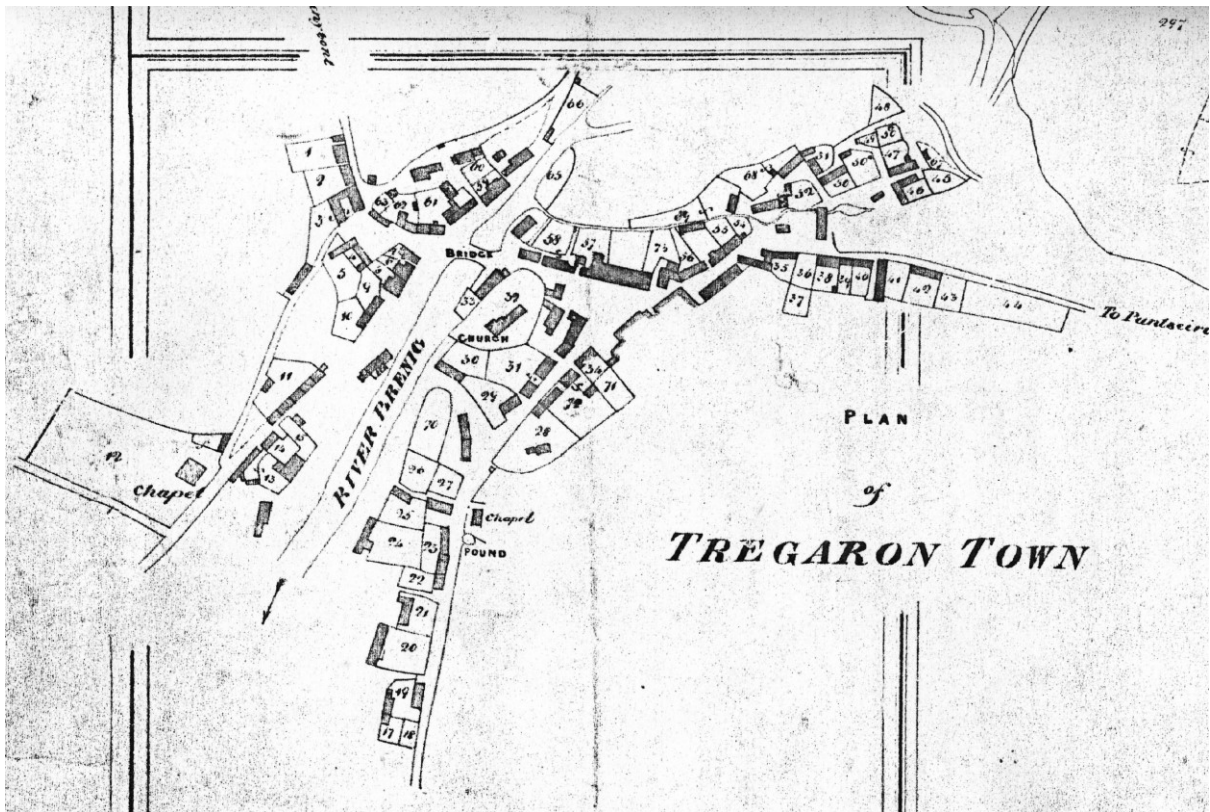


Figure 2. Extract from the 1842 Tregaron tithe map.

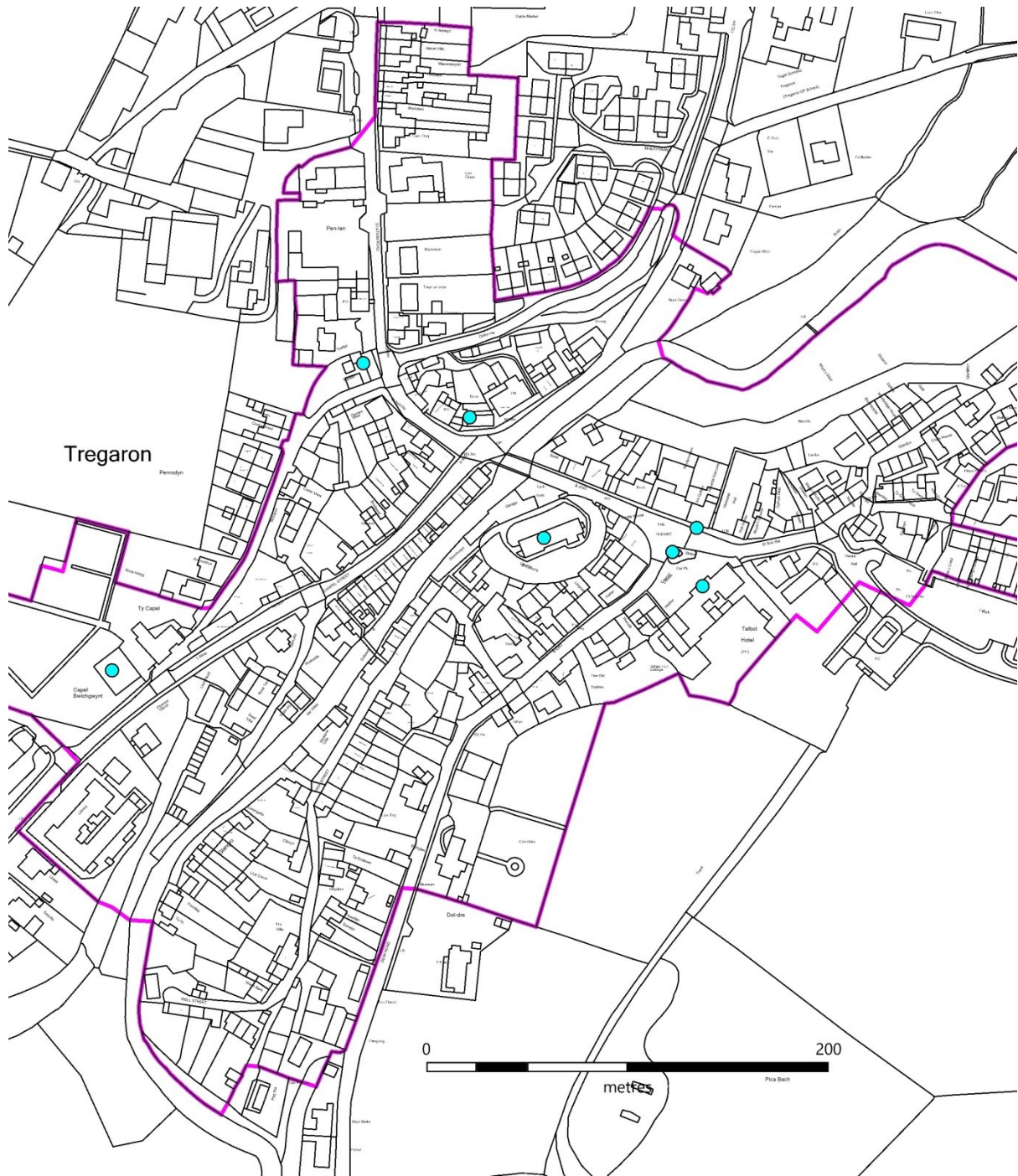


Figure 4. Listed buildings (blue circles) and the conservation area (outlined in purple).



Figure 5. HER records.

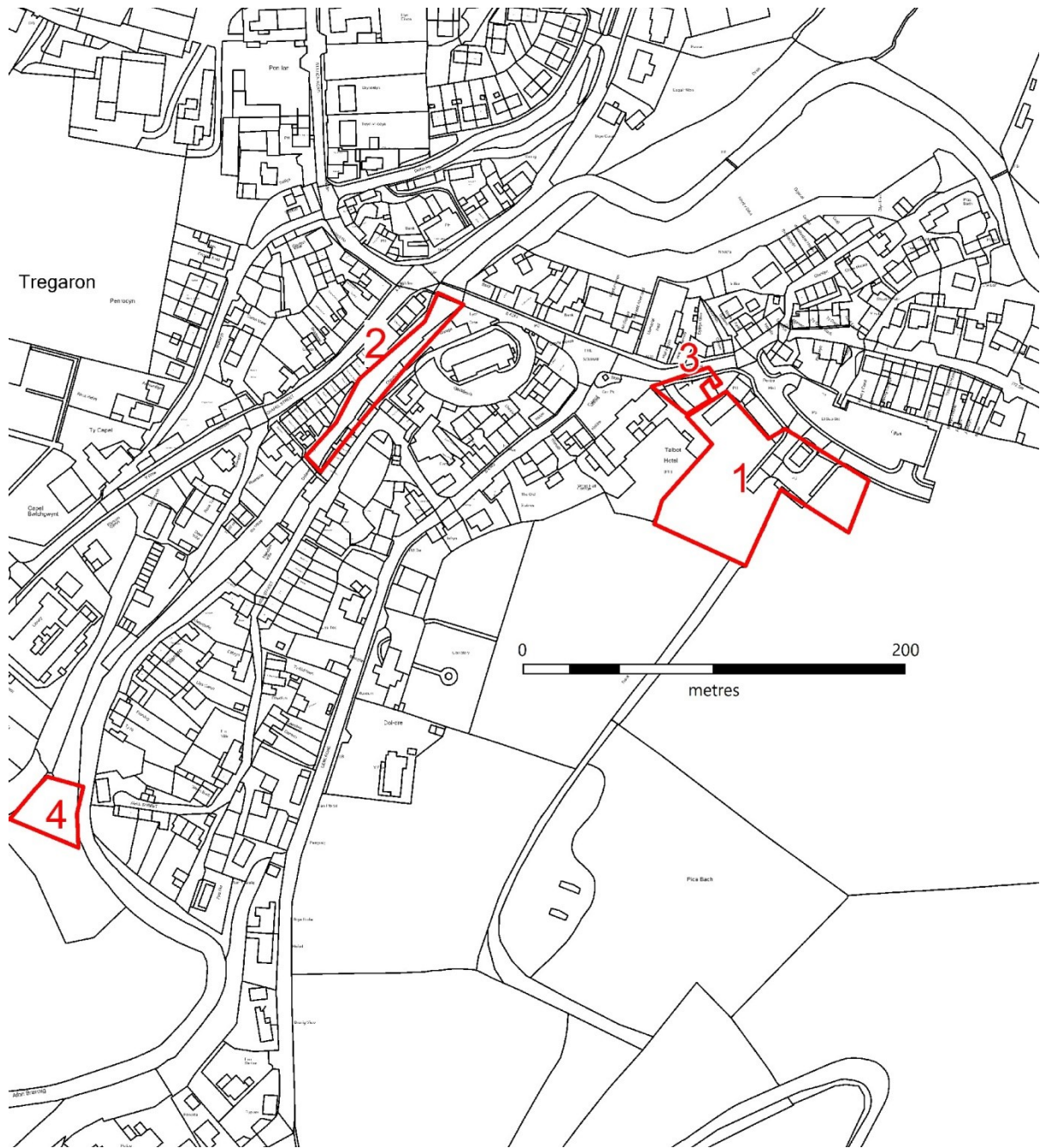


Figure 6. Location of archaeological interventions.



Figure 7. Tregaron as it may have been at its maximum extent in the medieval period, c.1320.