

THE ALMSHOUSES SITE, LLANBLETHIAN

There is a parcel of land at the bottom, South-east, corner of Castle Hill, Llanblethian, in which the Church has an interest. See map attached. The property was vested in the Vicar and Churchwardens of Llanblethian as a charitable trust on 21 January 1699. There were two cottages on the land and they were occupied at a very low rent by poor persons of the parish. They collapsed or were demolished some time ago.

(This site was adjacent to, and is sometimes referred to as EM'S COTTAGE. But Em's was a separate cottage and the site on which it stood belongs to the Town Council)

At one time the surrounding lands to the North-east formed part of the gardens of St. Quintin's House, but these were gradually sold off as building plots. However there remained a restrictive covenant on the land immediately adjoining our site preventing the erection of buildings. Due to errors in carrying out conveyances of adjoining land, of which the Church authorities had no knowledge at the time, the Almshouses site came to be included with the covenanted land. The purchaser of that land claims to be the rightful owner of the whole piece.

When the error was discovered at the time of the latest conveyance, the Swansea Land Registry was notified by Messrs Gwyn & Gwyn of the Church's interest in the land. Consequently we should be notified of any attempt to pass the title to a new owner. This may happen following the recent death of Mr Brian Jones, of Dando (formerly Kimberley), who claimed ownership.

I hold three folders of papers concerning this land and attach a summary of the more important matters included. Much of the paperwork is correspondence conducted by Norman Roderick of Gwyn & Gwyn, as solicitors acting for the Church. There is a lot of duplication, presumably because copies of letters were passed to churchwardens and to the Vicar, but some of the papers appear to be Gwyn & Gwyn original correspondence, so that they may not now hold relevant files.

There are 3 photographs, one of which clearly shows three buildings. The largest of these appears to be a pair of semis and I think must be the Almshouses. The building on its left would be Em's Cottage which was vested in the Community Council; following its demolition, the Council has created a small garden.

I attach copies of various plans which had been attached to conveyances to indicate the property being transferred. [One of these indicates a house and another building within the "covenanted" plot, although it is possible that this was a later addition to show how the land might be developed.] One of the arguments put forward by Jones' solicitors is that old conveyances refer to land "together with the ruined cottage and garden at the south west corner of the said field" - our almshouses, they say. The photographs indicate a further building to the right of the pair of cottages and this may be the 'ruined cottage' to which they refer.

One point to consider ; if our right to the almshouse land is accepted, what are we going to do with it? The frontage is approx. 80 ft. and the depth approx. 42 ft. Would this be sufficient for a building plot? Or should we perhaps negotiate with the the claiming party to abdicate our title upon payment of £x?

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Extracts from files.

A letter from Gwyn & Gwyn to Swansea District Land Registry, dated 17 December 1979 includes a note that the site of the almshouses, Llanblethian, has been vested in the Vicar and churchwardens since the 21st January 1699. The source for this date is not apparent.

A Report to the Charity Commission of charities in the Parish of Llanblethian, dated 30 June 1837, includes under a heading 'Donor Unknown' a reference to a parchment writing, professing to be transcribed in 1821 by Mr Plumbtre, the then vicar, from a paper dated in 1710 and stated to be the only authentic document relating to the different benefactions in the parish. (I hold this document)... This parchment makes mention of a house and croft containing three-quarters of an acre, by Llanblethian Bridge, of customary lands, given by some persons unknown to the use of the church. "The cottage is kept in repair out of the poor's rates, and is occupied rent free by poor persons therein placed by the officers".

The foregoing details have been extracted from a further Report to the Charity Commissioners in 1897. This states that the building mentioned is now divided into two cottages, which are let for 17s.4d. a year each. The land is let to the owner of St. Quintin's Cottage for 4l. a year...."There appears to be no map or tracing showing the limits of this plot, nor are there any boundary stones in the garden to mark out the area. The rents are received by the churchwardens, and added to the general fund of the church after payment of repairs, which amount usually to more than the rents of the houses. The vestry select aged poor people of the parish, and allow them to occupy these cottages at a very low rent"

On 23 May 1919 the Sanitary Inspector for Cowbridge Rural District Council sent a formal notice of intention to close the property 'known as the Almshouses', stating "It is with regret that the action is taken but unless the houses are made fit for human habitation the Council has no alternative but to close them". In 1924 an order was made for the closure of the properties, but a pencil note states that they were not closed until 1928 and a copy of the churchwardens' accounts for the year to Easter 1925 records the receipt of rent of Almshouses up to 9/3/25 of 12s.

In 1945 there was a conveyance of adjoining land by a Mr & Mrs Thomas to Mrs B.J.Homfray and the plan attached to the conveyance included the site of the almshouses. The Thomas's purported to sell this site which they did not own; the error was probably made in the office of solicitors drawing up the conveyance and there are no grounds for alleging fraud by the principals. Subsequent conveyances have repeated the error.

As the nearby land was being broken up and sold for building a restrictive covenant was placed on the land adjoining the almshouses to prevent the building of any dwelling which would interfere with the view of the countryside enjoyed by the people who had built houses in the field above. In 1970 a Mr Vaughan, the owner of Pengwern, the neighbouring house in Broadway, who believed that he owned all the land, sought to have the restriction lifted. One of the houses affected was Thimble Cottage, then owned by Ernest Carder. Carder was a member of the Llanblethian P.C.C. and recognised the error. He refused to sign any documents until the true ownership of the almshouses site was acknowledged.

In December 1970 the solicitor acting for Vaughan wrote to Gwyn & Gwyn to confirm that Vaughan did not lay claim to the cottages, - but that did not prevent the error in conveyancing being repeated when the land was conveyed to Brian Jones in 1978.

The covenant still holds. Carder didn't release it and when I was asked to do so in 1985 I refused on environmental grounds - on this occasion I was not provided with a map of the area concerned, and was not aware of the controversy.

In 1978 Vaughan conveyed the land to Brian Jones. At that time Swansea District Land Registry was informed of the Church's interest and on 6 February 1980 Gwyn & Gwyn were advised by the Land Registry that registration of the land "is now being completed to exclude, for the time being, the land the subject of your objection" Later, in 1991, in response to an enquiry, the solicitors acting for Jones were advised that the matter remained in dispute.

In 1980 a firm of solicitors asked Llanblethian Community Council if they would sell the land on which stood the remains of Em's Cottage. After consultation with Llanblethian P.C.C., the Council suggested that there should be a joint application for planning permission for a dwelling on the two adjoining pieces of land. Because our title was not clear, Gwyn & Gwyn proposed to obtain Counsel's opinion on the validity of our claim. A draft case was prepared but never seems to have been submitted. The Council became disenchanted with the delays in obtaining an opinion and proceeded to demolish the remains of Em's cottage. They then created a garden on the corner.

Addendum It seems likely that the whole of the open land was the "land and croft containing 3/4 acre, and that the croft part has been lost due to adverse occupation. This land formed part of the garden of St Quentin's House and was let to the owner - at £4 p.a. in 1897. The rent of £4 was paid to Llanblethian Parish Church by the owner of the House. Later, when there was a division of the property, a rent of £2 was paid by each of the owners of St Quentin's House and St Quentin's Cottage. [This was received by me in my time as Treasurer at Llanblethian, but whether it has been paid in recent years, I do not know]. We didn't know what exactly was covered by this rentcharge, but it is possible that it is related to the rent of this land.

J.A.H.

Copy of an article referring to the Almshouses printed in the Cowbridge & District Local History Society Newsletter in December 1996.

"REMEMBER THE POOR"

Over the centuries the people of Llanblethian have always been generous to those members of their community who were poor or disabled. Their efforts were generally channelled through the church. Overseers of the Poor were appointed by parishioners at the Annual Vestry Meeting and it was at Vestry Meetings that the circumstances of paupers were discussed. Instructions would be given to the Overseer to pay for clothing or for the maintenance of the needy of the parish. (mind you, they were very loath to help those they considered belonged elsewhere)

The Vestry set the rates which had to cover the cost of repairing roads, of the police and maintaining the poor. They also received and dispensed alms originating in various benefactions. Some of these are listed on the benefactions board on the wall of the parish church. Perhaps the most well-known of these is the 'Evan Jenkins Trust' created in 1699 to put in order the tenor bell in Llanblethian church and then to use the income for the reparation of the churches of Llanblethian and Ystradowen "and also to bind the poorest sort of children apprentices....and likewise to relieve old labourers that should be unable to work" This trust is still going strong with substantially the same objects.

Although donations at the time of bequest may have seemed generous, the income they produce now has become pitifully small. In 1871 Mary Ann Entwisle left £100, the income to be used to supply free coal about Christmas time to poor residents of Llanblethian, preferably to poor widows of good character. In 1992 this was producing £2.48 p.a., which would not buy much coal! There have been several similar small trusts; distributions became embarrassing and administration burdensome. Last year 10 of these trusts were liquidated and the proceeds amalgamated with Cowbridge United Charity thus maintaining the original intentions of the donors.

It is not generally known that the church maintained almshouses in Llanblethian. These were at the bottom corner of Castle Hill where it meets Broadway. The site is now overgrown.

I have seen a letter in a file of Messrs Gwyn & Gwyn stating that the site was vested in the Vicar and Churchwardens of Llanblethian in 1699 (?given by Evan Jenkins, or just a coincidence?). I hold (on behalf of the Church) a parchment document signed on March 3 1821 by Henry Plumptre, Vicar, setting out the known benefactions to Llanblethian. It includes "A house and croft containing three quarters of an acre by Llanblethian Bridge of customary lands, given also by an unknown person to the use of the church and worth per annum...17s 0d."

In 1837 the Charity Commission ordered an enquiry into charities around the country. The Report concerning Llanblethian refers to this property. To quote " The cottage is kept in repair out of the poor's-rates and is occupied , rent-free, by poor persons therein placed by the officers. On a stone tablet in front of this building are the words 'Remember the Poor'."

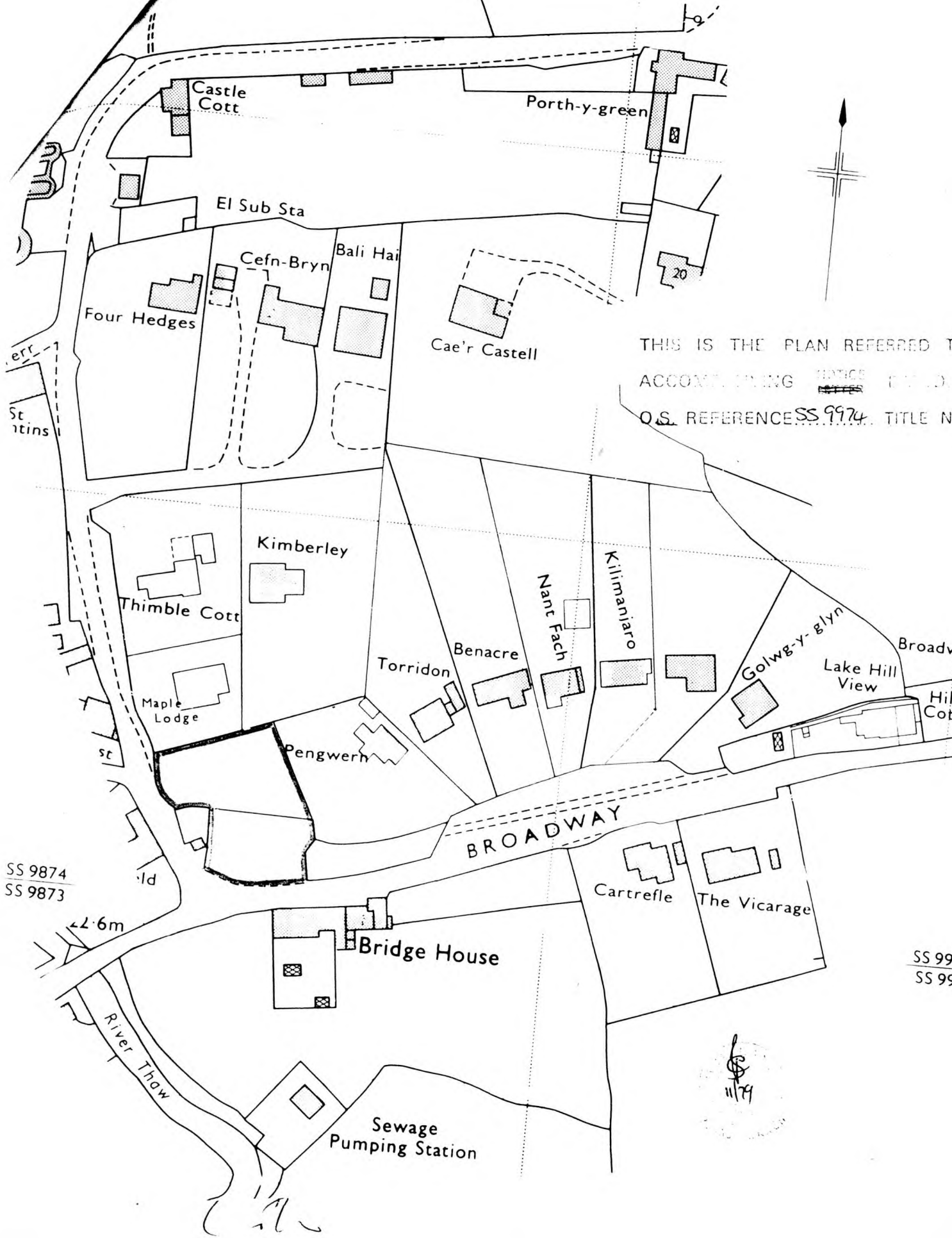
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It is not surprising that in 1919 these now ancient cottages were in a state of disrepair and the Sanitary Inspector for Cowbridge Rural District Council gave notice of intention to close them "unless the houses are made fit for human habitation" In 1924 an order was made for closure, and they were eventually closed in March 1925. A copy of the churchwardens'accounts for the year to Easter 1925 includes "To rent of Alms Houses up to 9/3/25....12s.

Next door to the Almshouses stood another cottage. This was on the corner and belonged to the Community Council. It was generally known as Em's Cottage but also as the 'Tin House' because of its corrugated iron roof. Local children were regularly admonished by the tenant for throwing stones onto the roof! This building, too, had long since become derelict and in 1984 the remaining wall was demolished. The Council replaced it with a garden, thus tidying up that corner of the village.

We are fortunate to have photographs of these cottages and one of these is reproduced here. This was taken before the bridge was reconstructed, but does show a corner of Greenfield House.

Alan Hey

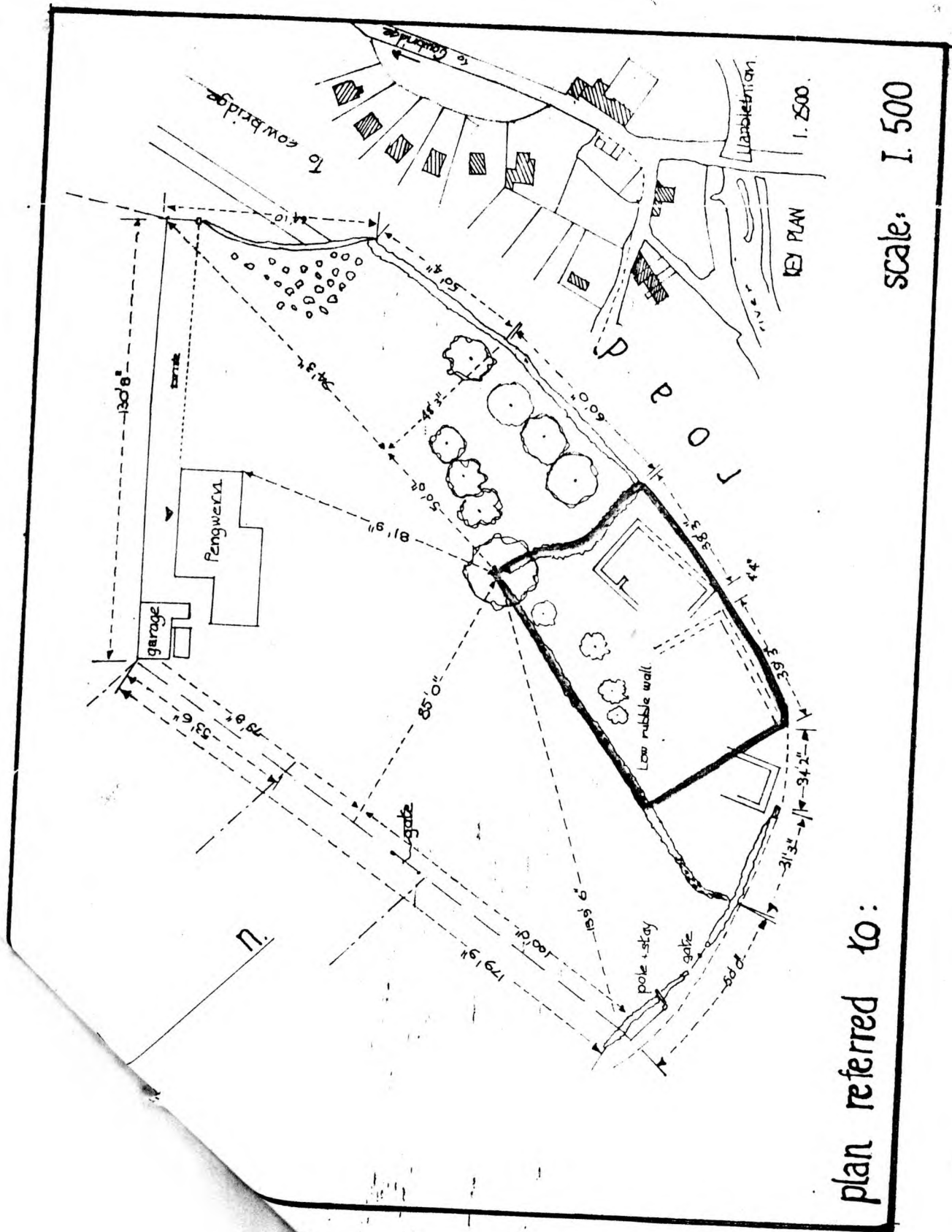


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SS 9874
SS 9873

SS 99
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1174



plan referred to:

scale: 1:500