Lindsay Ashford talks to Gwyneth Griffiths who first alerted police to last week’s armed siege in Llanbadarn.

The woman who raised the alarm at the start of the siege in Aberystwyth has been describing her terror when she realised the seriousness of the situation she was caught up in.

Gwyneth Griffiths, 46, (pictured) who lives in Llanbadarn and runs the Liery Gwyn Hotel with her parents and her brother, was serving behind the bar when she heard a shot fired.

She said: “At first I thought something had fallen, but then there was another real bang on the window and I thought, ‘God, it must be a gun.’”

Mrs Griffiths and the two people in the bar – pensioner Betsy Slater and her daughter Jeanette – stood motionless, watching the window as two more shots were fired.

“I thought it might just be children with an air rifle but I phoned the police,” she said. It was then that Mrs Griffiths got a hint that something more serious was happening:

“As I was talking, the officer at the other end of the line said there was another call coming through and he had to phone me back.”

A few minutes later she was told that the call had been from a man who said he had a gun and was going to shoot.

Then Mrs Griffiths got another call, this time from Dyfed Powys Police headquarters in Carmarthen. She was told to lock the doors because the police were involved in a ‘serious incident’.

“That’s when I really started getting frightened,” she said. The police had given her a number to ring if anything happened but they didn’t arrive at the hotel until 10.45pm – more than an hour after Mrs Griffiths had first contacted them.

“Three of them came in wearing bullet proof vests and carrying guns,” she said. “They wanted to know how they could get a view of the yard, but you can’t see it from the hotel.”

The boundary fence of the scrapyard at the centre of the siege is just a few feet away from the Liery Gwyn’s side windows, but a row of fir trees screens the yard from view.

Mrs Griffiths said she looked out to see the hotel grounds swarming with police officers and dogs.

By eleven o’clock the two women who had been drinking in the bar decided to go home, despite police advice to the contrary. But Mrs Griffiths’ mother Mary Jones, who had been out for the evening with the Liery Gwyn ladies’ darts team, came back to the hotel through a back entrance to keep her daughter company instead of returning to her home in Llanbadarn.

“Just before two o’clock in the morning I phoned the police in Carmarthen,” Mrs Griffiths said. “They told me they had the man contained in one place, but they said I shouldn’t go home. They told me to try to get some sleep.”

Eventually she did fall asleep on a settee but her mother stayed awake all night.

In the morning the police allowed Mrs Griffiths to go home. When the siege finally ended at six o’clock in the evening Mrs Griffiths says she felt a great sense of relief.

She is unwilling to talk about Gerald Mason, the man at the centre of the siege, saying that she feels it wouldn’t be fair to discuss him or his family.

Gerald Mason has been sectioned under the Mental Health Act and taken to a secure mental hospital.

Neither Mr Mason’s father Dai, who lives in a house next to the scrapyard, nor his sister Sharon, who lives in Beryneddfaid, were available for comment.

Police have confirmed that a shotgun was removed from Mr Mason’s caravan, but have not disclosed what type.