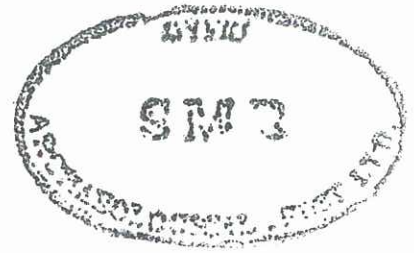


JULY 2003



Abersannan W/12/3319

Tir Gofal Call-Out Visit Report



View of Abersannan Woollen Factory, seen from the road.

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Countryside Council for Wales

CAMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGY

REPORT NO. 2003/82
PROJECT RECORD NO. 47189

July 2003

Abersannan
Tir Gofal Farm Call-Out Visit Report

By

Polly Groom

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ARCHAEOLEG CAMBRIA
Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf
Neuadd y Sir, Stryd Caerfyrddin, Llandeilo, Sir Gaerfyrddin SA19 6AF
Ffon: Ymholiadau Cyffredinol 01558 823121
Adran Rheoli Trefladaeth 01558 823131
Ffacs: 01558 823133
Epost: cambria@acadat.com Gwefan: www.acadat.com

CAMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGY
Dyfed Archaeological Trust Limited
The Shire Hall, Carmarthen Street, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire SA19 6AF
Tel: General Enquiries 01558 823121
Heritage Management Section 01558 823131
Fax: 01558 823133
Email: cambria@acadat.com Website: www.acadat.com

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CONTENTS

Introduction	3
General Description of farm	4
The Carmarthenshire Wool Industry	5
The Woollen Mill	6
The Mill Race	8
The Wheel Pit	9
Management Recommendations	10
Glossary and References	12
Farm Map	13
Quality Assurance Report	14

INTRODUCTION

A field visit was undertaken to assess the condition and advise on the management of an old woollen mill which lies on the west bank of Afon Sannan. Parts of the mill race also survive as earthworks, and a possible wheel pit was discovered on the field visit. Works proposed under the Tir Gofal scheme include the opening of a permissive access footpath near the mill, and, potentially, the provision of some kind of interpretation board or leaflet which explains the remains of Abersannan Mill.

Only features which are included within the mill complex were visited on this occasion, and the attached map does not show other sites or features of archaeological or historical interest that were identified on the HE1 which was produced for this farm.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF FARM

Abersannan Farm lies in the community of Llanfynydd, at grid reference SN56152399. The farm was visited by Cambria Archaeology on June 30th, 2003, in response to a request by the Tir Gofal project officer.

Abersannan Farm (PRN 24907) has a long history. It was first mentioned in the late 16th century and shortly afterwards became part of the Aberglasney estate. It passed through several further hands – including belonging, for a time, to the Bishop of St David's – before being sold in the 19th century to the Jones family, of Pantglas. In 1838 the tenant was Revd. David Harries, the vicar of Llanfynydd (Jones:1987: p.4-5).

On historic maps it can be seen that the area around Abersannan underwent a number of changes in the second half of the 19th century. Field boundaries in the northeast of the farm were removed to produce fewer, larger fields, and extra buildings were added to the farmstead. It was also at this time that Abersannan woollen factory (PRN 22564) was built and the landscape around it was re-organised – the mill race and weir were put in place, as were new footpaths for access to the mill.

The farmland today encompasses a stretch of the Sannan valley, and part of the west bank of Afon Dulas. The farmstead is situated just above the confluence of the two rivers, almost a mile away from Court Henry.

THE CARMARTHENSHIRE WOOL INDUSTRY

Woollen manufacturing in Wales has long been a widespread and important industry. Until the end of the eighteenth century, the separate stages of cloth making – carding, spinning, dyeing and weaving – were all carried out as cottage industries across the country. In the early 19th century, these separate industries were amalgamated into small factories in some limited areas of the country – mostly around Newtown and Llanidloes. By 1834 there were 74 weaving factories in Newtown, utilising more than 700 looms. By the second half of the nineteenth century, steam power had been adopted to run looms in these areas, and the rural wool industry had virtually vanished. The prosperity was, however, short lived, and competition from the English wool industry drove factories to close.

The fortunes of the Carmarthenshire wool industry ran in a different vein. As the larger urban factories declined, villages in the middle Teifi valley – notably Llandysul, Felindre, Drefach and Pentre-Cwrt – became the centres of the Welsh wool trade. There had been a long tradition of cloth production in Carmarthenshire, and small organisations had been in place since the early 19th century where successful smallholders, who could afford to purchase a loom, would employ one or two weavers. In the second half of the 19th century, as larger factories closed, small ones were built in and around the Teifi valley, using water power to drive loom machinery. West Carmarthenshire and south-east Cardiganshire became prosperous while other parts of the country struggled (Geraint Jenkins, J:1976:p.96 – 103).

Both the date of Abersannan mill (between 1839 and 1891), and its location, suggest that it was part of this expansion of the rural woollen industry. It probably was only used for one process (either weaving or fulling), since there seems to be no provision for a dye-house, and no internal divisions to indicate that more than one process was carried out here.

The power loom, driven by water power, was introduced to the area in around 1850 (Geraint Jenkins, J:1976:p.102) and Abersannan farm, as a large and well-established landowner, may well have been in a position to set up a small weaving factory.

It is harder to establish why the factory fell out of use by 1907. One possibility may be that the small size of the factory worked against it – as other places increasingly incorporated dye houses and carding machines, it became unviable for a factory to only carry out one part of the cloth manufacturing process.

THE WOOLLEN MILL – PRN 22564

The mill was not seen on the 1839 tithe map for Llanfynydd Parish, but is shown as “Abersannan Woollen Factory” on the 1891 Ordnance Survey map. It was clearly, however, a short lived venture since the factory is marked as disused on the 1907 map.

The mill survives as a single-storey rectangular building by the side of Afon Sannan. It is about 17m x 6m, with three doors in the west wall and four windows (one of these is now blocked) in the east wall. A further door is in the north gable. All of these openings have wooden lintels, most of which were put in place by the current landowner using timbers from the original, collapsed, roof structure. The large amounts of doors and windows point to this being a purpose built woollen factory rather than a re-used building since a good light source was essential for cloth manufacturing.

The building shows no signs of any internal divisions. In the southwest corner are the remains of a small chimney which appears to have been set into a recess within the stonework, resulting in the wall being thinner at this point. The chimney and any associated fireplace has now collapsed, but the curved shape of the recess and smoke-blackened rubble are clues to its presence.



Plate 1. *View of the woollen mill, seen from the north.*



Plate 2. *View of the interior of Abersannan Woollen Mill. There is a fourth window, now blocked, in this east wall. The lintels above the windows and doors have been added by the current landowner, using timbers from the collapsed roof.*

The building may have been modified more recently – the landowner informed Cambria Archaeology that people remembered ‘an old man’ living in the building. A small ‘porch’ type extension on the north side of the building may date from this time since it is clearly not tied into the stonework of the main building. The extension now survives only as the low remains of a single wall, and it is not clear how extensive it originally was.

In general, the site is in a good, stable condition. The current landowner has done a large amount of restoration work, re-building the tops of the walls and filling in gaps in the stonework. He has also re-roofed the building with corrugated iron sheeting, and it is now weatherproof. However, there are problems with the building which may need addressing in the future. There are several large, structural cracks in the north gable wall, and the very tops of both gable ends are missing.

The mill is very significant locally. As the rural wool industry expanded, factories like Abersannan were built further away from the main centres in the Teifi Valley. This would have impacted on the economy of the area, and also on its social history. The wool industry was a new way to make a living in a primarily agricultural region.

THE MILL RACE

Leading away to the north of the mill is a very slight, linear earthwork which marks the remains of the mill race. The line of the race is discernible as it crosses the field, and then passes into woodland by the side of the river. Here the race is clearly visible as a flattened terrace, running parallel with, but above the river. In some places the terrace is preserved well enough that both a sunken channel and a raised path next to it are visible. Further north the terrace becomes lower and less pronounced, until the race is being carried along the base of the slope next to the river. The point at which the race joins with the river is not clear. A short length of channel cut into rock next to the river may be the only remains of a weir which is marked on the 1st and 2nd edition Ordnance Survey maps.

The mill race is a significant historic landscape feature. It is an integral part of Abersannan Woollen Factory and, as such, has the same local importance as the building itself.



Plate 3. *The line of the mill race shows as a clear terrace on the hillside which runs parallel to the river but at a higher level. The terrace for the race is on the right of this picture, and the river is at the base of the slope on the left.*

THE WHEEL PIT

Immediately east of Abersannan Mill, between the building and the river, is a small patch of rough ground which has, in the past, been used as a garden. Adjacent to the east wall of the mill is a sunken channel or ditch, bounded on one side by the mill building, and on the other by an earth bank. The ditch or channel is mostly infilled, but is still wet underfoot. It is probable that this was the wheel pit, housing the main water wheel for the mill. This is made more likely by the presence of a small opening in the east wall of the mill building, which would have allowed the drive shaft from the wheel to power machinery within the building. The opening is now blocked. There is no trace remaining of any lining to the wheel pit.

Running from the south end of the probable wheel pit is a narrow channel which turns sharply and runs down the bank to the river. If this was the site of the wheel pit, then the channel would have acted as a tail race, carrying the water back to the river.

This area, between the mill building and the river, is quite overgrown. A number of tree stumps line the earth bank of the wheel pit, and their roots are helping to support the bank. This land is currently unused and is not grazed.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the main mill building is in a stable condition, there are some problems which will need to be addressed. The landowner informed Cambria Archaeology that the large cracks in the north gable have not widened in the past few years, but these should continue to be monitored. If they do begin to move, then it will become necessary to look into the possibility of using a metal tie or other methods to stabilise the building.



Plate 4. *The north gable of the mill shows serious structural cracks which need to be monitored.*

Future consolidation and restoration works should use materials which are sympathetic to the original fabric of the building. At present, the landowner is re-using fallen stone to carry out repairs, and this is something which is to be encouraged. If possible, future maintenance should use a lime mortar, matching the one which was used in the original construction, and the tops of the gable ends should ideally be re-built to prevent water from penetrating into the wall core.

The best way of ensuring the building's future survival would probably be to bring it back into use. A full photographic survey should be undertaken if any works are to be carried out on this building.

The area around the wheel pit and the tail race is overgrown but, again, the features themselves seem to be in a stable condition. No ground disturbance should be carried out in this area, and occasional vegetation clearance may be necessary to ensure that the features remain visible. The tree stumps which line the earth bank should be treated to prevent re-growth, but they should be left in place since their roots are helping to stabilise the bank.

The southern portion of the mill race is under pasture. Light grazing will not damage the site, but grazing may need to be controlled in wet weather to ensure that there is no erosion of the turf covering. The northern portion of the race, in the woodland next to Afon Sannon, seems to be under no immediate threat. However if the woodland is not going to be grazed this may, in time, prove a problem, allowing vegetation to become established across the earthworks. The most practical way of preventing this may be to use temporary electric fencing to occasionally allow light grazing of the earthworks. This would have to be undertaken in discussion with the Tir Gofal project officer.

A suggestion has been made that some kind of interpretation of the site is undertaken. This would be most welcome, especially since there is to be a permissive path running through the field adjacent to the mill. Either leaflets or a fixed panel would allow the significance of the building and the earthworks to be explained.

SITE AND AREA STATUS GLOSSARY

The following abbreviations are used in the gazetteer to refer to site and area status. These schedules, lists and registers are compiled and maintained by Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments.

SAM - Scheduled Ancient Monument

This is a statutory designation. Scheduled Ancient Monuments are protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.

LB1, LB2* & LB2 – Listed Building 1, 2* & 2

This is a statutory designation. Listed buildings are protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

HLW - Historic Landscapes of Wales

Historic Landscapes of Wales are defined by the *Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in Wales: Part 2.1 Landscapes of Outstanding Historic Interest and Part 2.2 Landscapes of Special Historic Interest*. The register is advisory and has no statutory powers.










PGW - Parks and Gardens of Wales

Parks and Gardens of Wales are defined by the *Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in Wales: Part 1 Parks and Gardens*. The register is advisory and has no statutory powers.

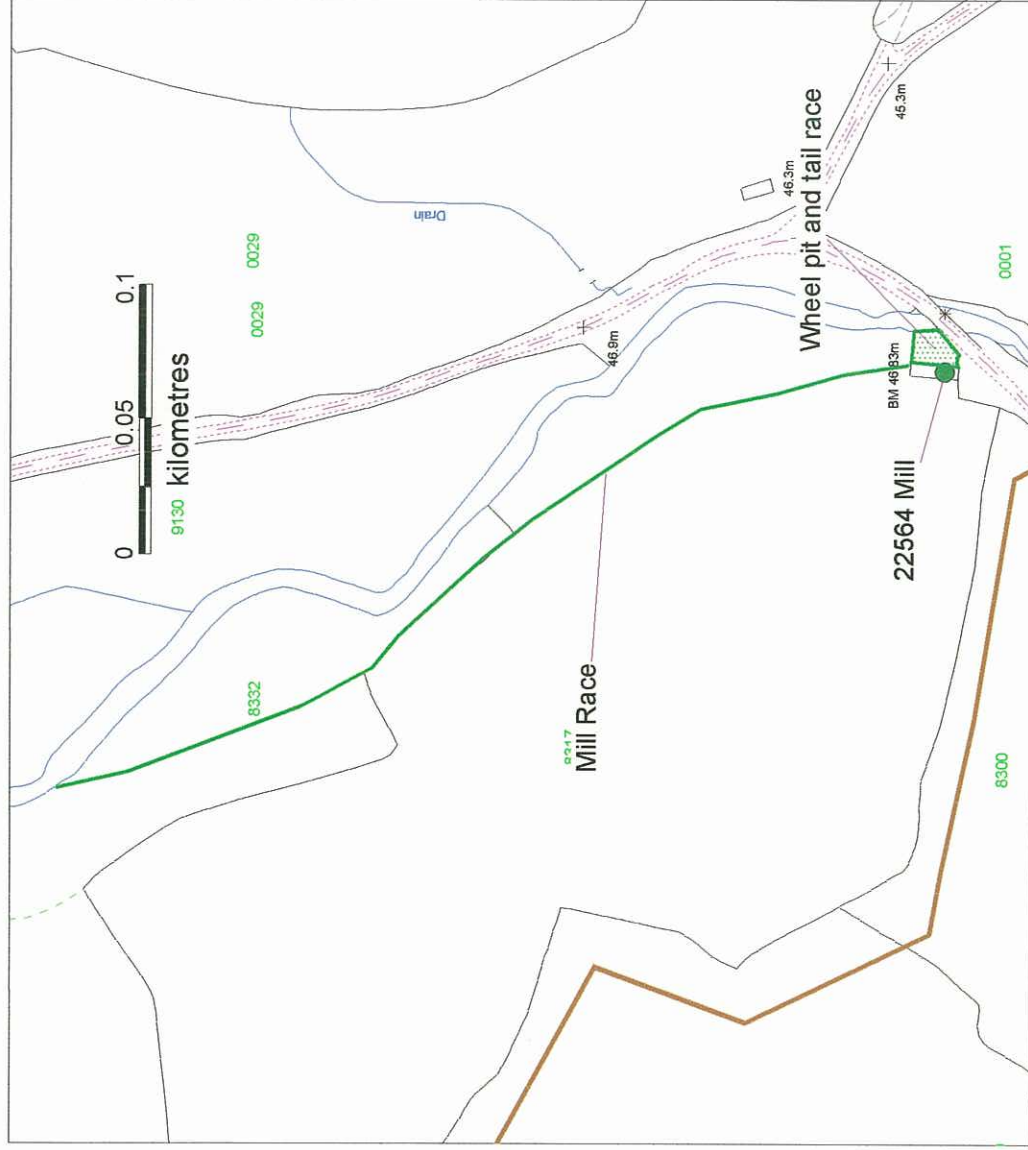
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Ordnance Survey 1907 Carmarthenshire XXXIII.SW
Tithe map 1839 Llanfynydd Parish

Abersannan
Tir Gofal Historic Environment Consultation
Countryside Council for Wales Reference W/12/3319
Cambria Archaeology Reference PRN47189
National Grid Reference SN55962404

-  Farm Boundary
- Site Category A - National Importance
 -  Scheduled Ancient Monuments
 -  Grade 1 and Grade 2* Listed Buildings
 -  Sites and Buildings of National Importance without a statutory designation
 -  Registered Parks and Gardens of Historic Interest
 -  Registered Landscapes of Historic Interest
- Site Category B - Regional Importance
 -  Sites and Buildings of Regional Importance including Grade 2 listed buildings
- Site Category C - Local Importance
 -  Sites and buildings of Local Importance
- Site Category D – Unknown Importance
 -  Sites requiring further investigation and sites with no physical definition

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Abersannan
W/12/3319

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This report has been prepared by Polly Groom

Position: Heritage Management Assistant

Signature P. Groom Date 9th July 2003

This report has been checked and approved by Louise Austin on behalf of Cambria Archaeology,
Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Position: Principal Archaeologist (Curatorial)

Signature Louise Austin Date 09/07/03

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