

FFORDD CWM GWENDRAETH

Historic and Archaeological Background



Prepared by
Richard Jones

Report No. 2005/19
Project record No. 53871

Paratowyd gan Archaeoleg Cambria
Ar gyfer Cyngor Sir Gâr
Prepared by Cambria Archaeology
For Carmarthenshire County Council



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ARCHAEOLEG CAMBRIA ARCHAEOLOGY

Chwefror 2005

February 2005

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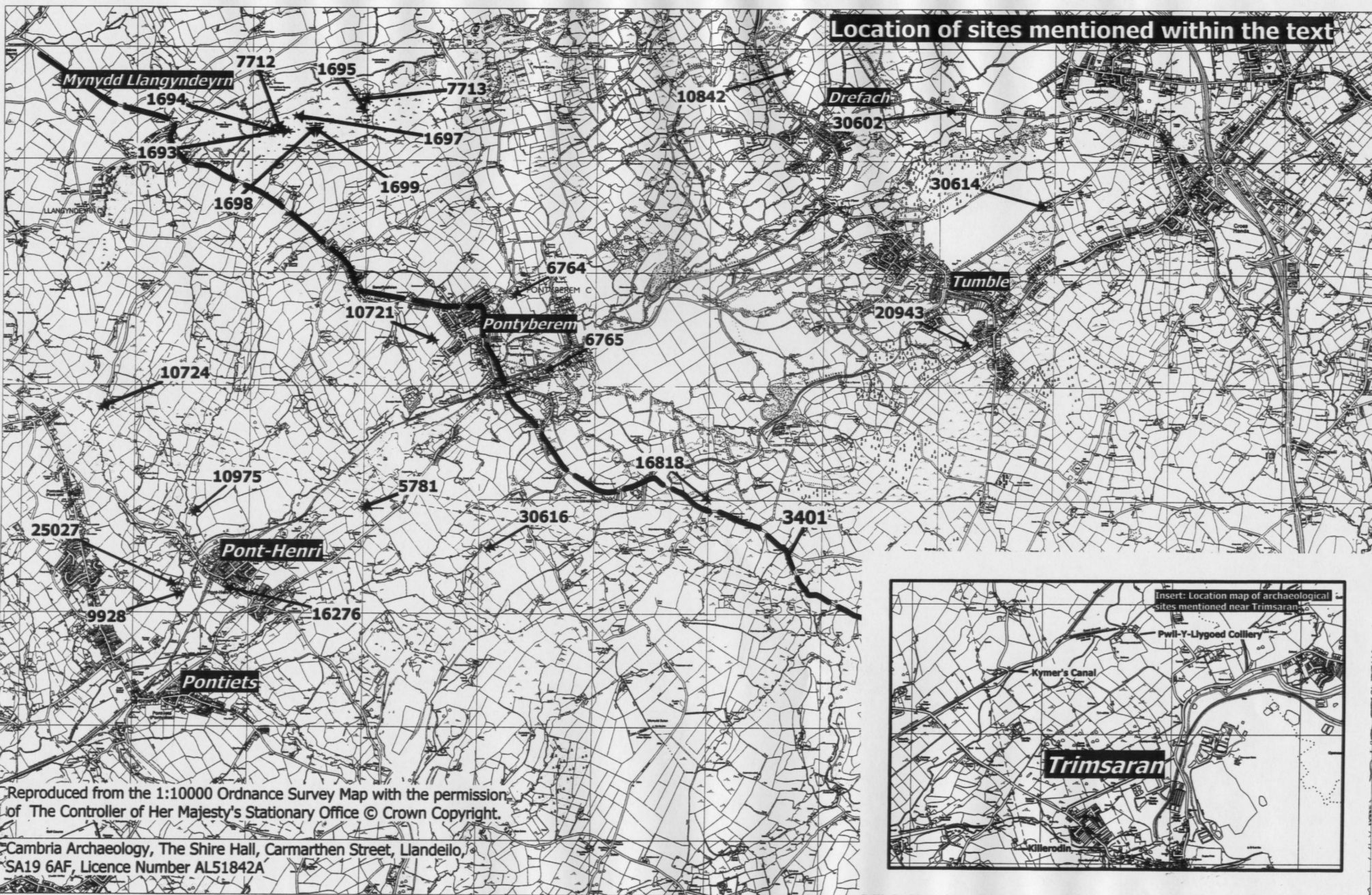
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Location of sites mentioned within the text



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FFORDD CWM GWENDRAETH

Introduction

The study area covers the valley of the Gwendraeth Fawr from Cwm-mawr in the northeast to the outskirts of Pontiets in the southwest and includes the industrial communities of Pontyberem and Pont-Henri. This is a predominantly industrial landscape and inevitably the majority of the archaeological and historic sites that are recorded on the regional Sites and Monuments Record are of nineteenth and twentieth century date and relate to the industrial, social and cultural life of the valley during this period. Nevertheless, the group of prehistoric monuments located on the nearby Mynydd Llangyndeyrn strongly suggest an important Neolithic and early Bronze Age presence in the area of the valley and a history of settlement and farming that stretches back over the past 5000 years.

The valley has a common theme throughout, tracing changes from a pastoral to industrial/urban society. This can be seen through the construction of a canal system to service early mining in the area, and the later development of a railway system in response to the increased demand for coal, echoing the technological development brought about by the Industrial Revolution.

The villages have specific themes common to all – Mining, Chapels, important buildings and mining related infrastructure i.e. Pontyberem –the Canal Incline and the Cwm-mawr canal terminus; Pontiets and Pont-Henri – Iron working, and the Naptha factory; Tumble /Drefach - Carmarthenshire tramway.

Archaeological and Historic background

Neolithic (4500-2200 BC)

The Neolithic period saw the arrival of settled farming communities in some parts of the country. In many areas these communities have left evidence of their funerary and ceremonial practices in the form of chambered tombs or cromlechs and complexes of stone circles and other stone alignments. Within Ffordd Cwm Gwendraeth there are a few recognised sites that may fall into this category. However, to the north of Pontyberem is the area of Mynydd Llangyndeyrn rich in prehistoric archaeology from the Neolithic and the Bronze Age. These sites include the two chambered tombs at **GWAL-Y-FILIAST** (PRN 1698 and 1699) both of which are Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAM).

- GWAL-Y-FILIAST (PRN 1698 and PRN1699) - Two Chambered Tombs comprising stone-built chambers thought to have been originally covered within mounds of earth or stone that date from the Neolithic period (4500BC – 2200BC). They are thought to have originally contained cremated human remains. The two sites lie just below the summit of Mynydd Llangyndeyrn in a sheltered location at the foot of a large rock outcrop.



The two Neolithic Chambered Tombs at Gwal-y-filiast on Mynydd Llangyndeyrn

Bronze Age (2200-700 BC)

The Bronze Age saw the arrival of the first metal-using communities into the area and the widespread modification of the landscape through farming. The most visible remains of these communities are ritual and funerary monuments such as cairns, round barrows, standing stones and henges and these can be found throughout southwest Wales. Round barrows are thought to be burial mounds associated with elite graves whereas standing stones are thought to have ritual/ceremonial significance. However, very few settlements dating to the earlier part of this period have been discovered. Within the study area there are 10 possible Bronze Age sites, including three suggested round barrows (for example **GARN WEN** PRN 10724) and seven possible Standing stones (for example **CAE GARREG WEN** PRN 10721). However, at the majority of these sites there are no surviving remains. The former presence of the Bronze Age monuments are only suggested by the survival of place names on historic maps. By contrast several well-preserved Bronze Age barrows survive on the nearby Mynydd Llangyndeyrn.

- **GARN WEN** (PRN 10724) - No visible evidence exists, the site is suggested from place-name evidence taken from the Llangendeirne parish tithe of 1847.
- **CAE GARREG WEN** (PRN 10721) - No visible evidence exists; the site is suggested from place-name evidence taken from the Llangendeirne parish tithe of 1847.
- **MYNYDD LLANGENDEIRNE** (PRN 1693, 1694, 1695, 1697, 7712, 7713) - The remains of several round barrows are located on the summit of

Mynydd Llangyndeyrn. These are thought to be burial mounds dating to the early Bronze Age. The concentration of sites on the mountain suggests the former presence of a cemetery.



A Round Barrow on the summit of Llangynderyn

Iron Age (700BC – AD43)

Evidence of settlement within the Iron Age is represented by a single site **CARNAWLLON-FAWR** (PRN 5781) recorded as a possible defended enclosure or hillfort. Defended enclosures are thought to be the remains of farmsteads surrounded by a defensive ditch and bank. Typically, each would have contained the roundhouses of an extended family group. Over the centuries farming has destroyed the earthworks associated with many of these enclosures. Frequently, the only indications of their presence are cropmarks caused when arable crops grow over the buried ditches. Hundreds of similar enclosures have been identified throughout southwest Wales along with larger hillforts that might indicate the presence of an element of centralised, political control. Very little is known about the day-to-day lives of the people of this period. The only evidence are the surviving artefacts from the Iron Age and the Romano-British period.

- CARNAWLLON-FAWR (PRN 5781) - Defended homestead, comprising of a hilltop enclosure bounded by one or more substantial banks, ramparts and ditches.

Roman and Early Medieval Periods

There is no direct archaeological evidence for these periods within the immediate area. It has been suggested that a former Roman road between the Roman forts at Loughor and Carmarthen crosses the study area to the south and west of Pontyberem (PRN 3401). However the only evidence for this road to the south of Carmarthen (taken from aerial photographs) suggests that, if anything, the road heads first towards Kidwelly and in fact runs to the south of the study area.

Medieval (AD 1080-AD 1540)

The Medieval period is represented in the study area by 18 sites. These range from religious sites, such as **MYNACHLOG** (PRN 6764) thought to have monastic origins and **CAPEL IFAN** (PRN 12676), both of which are located near to Pontyberem. Other medieval sites such as **TOWER HILL** (PRN 10842) suggests, through place-name evidence, the location of a former tower or fortification. The area also has surviving fragments of ridge and furrow cultivation representing evidence for medieval agriculture. This system of agriculture, focusing on large open fields, continued into the later post-medieval period. The medieval settlements at **GLYNSE** (PRN10975), and **CILFERI** (PRN13240) and **KILLERODIN/CILRHEDIN** (PRN13241), located within Trimsaran community, are also surviving evidence for medieval activity in the area.

- **MYNACHLOG** (PRN 6764) - Place-name evidence which suggests a religious origin "Mynach" Welsh - English "Monk/friar"
- **CAPEL IFAN** (PRN 12676) - Chapelry to Llanelli parish. It is believed to have medieval origins and is marked on William Rees' 1932 map "South Wales and the Borders in the 14th century". Records show that it had acquired burial rights by 1821, at least (the date of the earliest memorial in the churchyard). It was regarded as requiring to be rebuilt in 1833 and had been entirely rebuilt in the later 19th century. A post-medieval church (PRN 1690, now stands at that location, presumably on the same site as the medieval chapelry. There is no current evidence for an early medieval date.
- **TOWER HILL** (PRN 10842) - Derived from Place-name evidence
- **GLYNSE** (PRN 10975) - The exact location of this medieval house is unknown, the house is first mentioned in medieval documents of the 14th century and also shown on Saxton's Map of Carmarthenshire 1578.
- **CILFERI** (PRN 13240) - Evidence for this medieval house is derived from medieval documentation.
- **KILLERODIN/CILRHEDIN** (PRN 13241) - Evidence for this medieval house is derived from medieval documentation.

Post Medieval

The vast majority of sites within the study area date to the Post Medieval period (1540-1899). This period, although relatively short, has seen the greatest technological and social change. These are characterised by an increase in international trade, education to a greater proportion of the population and the spread of ideas through international contact and the printed page. Society changed from a 'feudal' ideology controlled by long established elites, to a society where wealth and status were gained through commerce and trade raising the profile and status of the merchant. The latter end of this period saw the migration of people from the countryside to the towns and an increase in sites of production to service the demand brought about by the Industrial Revolution.

Coal played a major role in providing power for the Industrial Revolution. The earliest record of mining in the area is at Carway in the 1600s, and in 1760s Thomas Kymer of Kidwelly developed pits at **Pwll-y-llygod** (PRN 11093) and **Fforest Fawr** (PRN 30605). Kymer also built (c.1766 to 1768) the first substantial canal (**Kymers Canal** PRN 5777) in south Wales. The canal was built to transport anthracite and clum from Kymer's pits near Trimsaran to ships on the Gwendraeth Fach River below Kidwelly. In 1824 the canal was extended as far as Pontiets and by 1866 the canal was re-engineered, becoming the 'Burry Port and Gwendraeth Valley Railway'.

Over the past four hundred years the valley has been witness to the rise and fall of the coal industry, from its beginnings in the 1600s at Pwll-y-llygod and Fforest Fawr to its eventual decline and the virtual extinction of coal mining with the closure of **CYNHYDRE** (PRN 16818) during the late 1980s.

The area has one Scheduled Ancient Monument representing the change from agriculture to an industrial society. The **FURNACE** (PRN 9928; SAM No Cm227) near Pont Henri is the remains of a charcoal fired iron smelting complex dating to 1620-1724. The complex is located next to **FURNACE** (PRN 25027) a major dwelling and farmstead which took its name from the iron working complex, once owned by the Grundy family in the early 17th century.

Other major dwellings in the area such as **COALBROOK HOUSE** (PRN 6765) were once listed as Grade II. The building now destroyed was located about half a mile east of Pontyberem and was the residence of the Jones family c.17th century. Others are **LLETTY MAWR MANSION** (PRN 20943) said to be of Elizabethan Origin and home of the Thomas family until 1819.

- **PWLL-Y-LLYGOD** (PRN 11093) - Coal pits developed by Kymer in the 1760s, located near Maesgwendraeth.
- **FFOREST FAWR** (PRN 30605) - Coal pits developed by Kymer in the 1760s, located near Maesgwendraeth.
- **KYMERS CANAL** (PRN 5777) - The first canal to be built in Wales c.1766-8. Use declined towards the end of 18th century although most was later incorporated into the fabric of the 'Burry Port and Gwendraeth Valley Railway'.
- **CYNHYDRE** (PRN 16818) - One of the last deep mines to close in south Wales, closed.

- FURNACE (PRN 9928) - Located near Pont Henri is the remains of an early iron working complex dating to 1620-1724. The Furnace is associated with (PRN 25027). The site is also a Scheduled Ancient Monument and protected by Law.
- FURNACE - (PRN 25027) A major farmstead associated with (PRN 9928)
- LLETTY MAWR MANSION (PRN 20943) - Dating from the Elizabethan Period (1558-1603) and ancestral home of the Thomas family now a modern building.
- COALBROOK HOUSE (PRN 6765) - Now destroyed its precise location unknown.

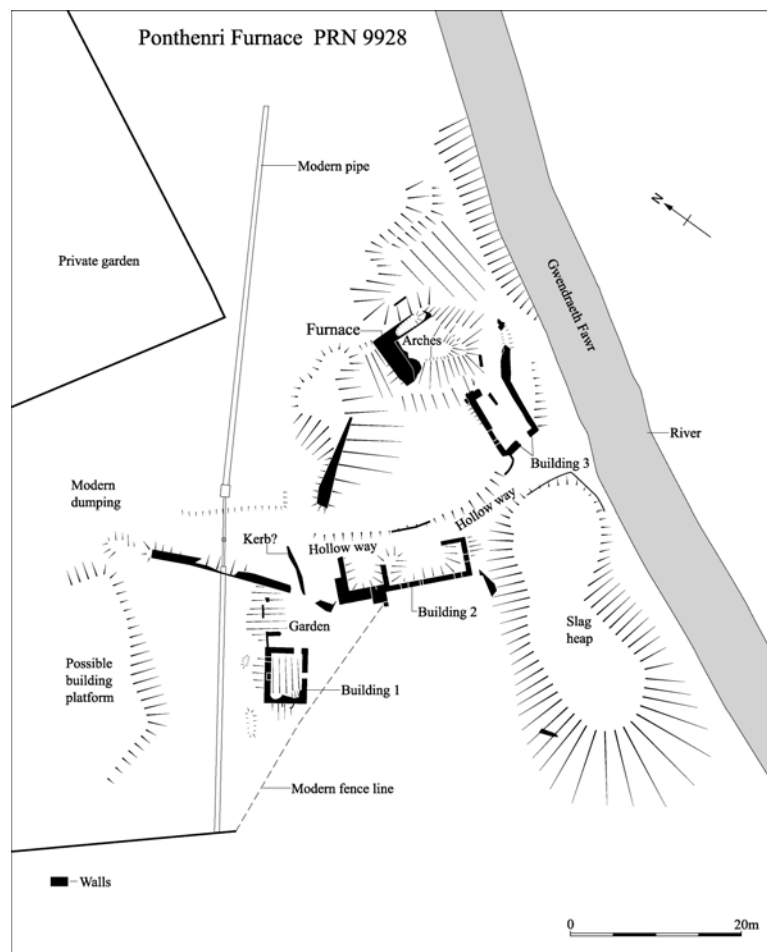


Fig. 2

Plan of the surviving remains of the iron smelting furnace at Pont Henri
 After (Page, N and Wilson, P. 2002)

19th and 20th century

Mining features

The landscape is dotted with late 19th and 20th century mining features, from shafts to spoil tips. Sites such as **Ty'n y Cwm Colliery** (PRN 30616), **Llechyfedach Colliery** (PRN 30614), **Cwmmawr Colliery** (PRN 30602) are just three of 40 recorded sites with mining associations within the area.

- TY'N Y CWM COLLIERY (PRN 30616) - Working in 1880. Site may have been destroyed by opencast mining operation.
- LLECHYFEDACH COLLIERY (PRN 30614) - Named in the Act establishing the Kidwelly & Llanelli Canal in 1812 as one of the collieries to be served by the canal.
- CWMMAWR COLLIERY (PRN 30602) - Cwmmawr Colliery appears to be working by the time of the publication of the First edition Ordnance Survey of 1890. The shaft was sunk into the Bumcwart vein some 50m below the surface, near the Gwendraeth Arms. An airshaft was also sunk in the field below the Gwendraeth Comprehensive School. Cwmmawr appears as a working mine on the 6" Ordnance Survey map but had become disused by the time of the 1907 6" map.

Chapels

Religion plays a strong part in the culture of the valley. There are 16 chapels within the area, for example **CALFARIA** (PRN 16274) and **CAPEL BETHESDA** (PRN 16276). Some have been in existence since the mid 1800s others are now disused.

- CALFARIA (PRN 16274) Built between the 1905 and publication of the Ordnance Survey 3rd Edition of 1915. Chapel disused and demolished.
- CAPEL BETHESDA (PRN 16276) Original chapel built 1838 with burial ground, and rebuilt at present location between 1880 and the publication of the Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 1905. The old chapel site appears to have been subsumed within the burial ground. It is suggested that most of the chapel's first members came from Bethel, in Llangendeirne.

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Maps

Llanon Parish Tithe map 1841

Saxton's map of Radnorshire, Brecknockshire, Cardiganshire and Carmarthenshire 1578

Ordnance Survey Original Surveyors drawings (sheet 181) c.1811

Ordnance Survey, First edition, 1891, 1:10560, Sheet XLVII SE

Ordnance Survey, First edition, 1891, 1:10560, Sheet XLVII NW

Ordnance Survey, First edition, 1891, 1:10560, Sheet XLVII NE

Ordnance Survey, Second edition, 1907, 1:10560, Sheet XLVII SE

Ordnance Survey, Second edition, 1907, 1:10560, Sheet XLVII NW

Ordnance Survey, Second edition, 1907, 1:10560, Sheet XLVII NE

Ordnance Survey, 1922 edition, 1:10560, Sheet XLVII

Archaeology

Sites and Monuments Record - list of Archaeological Sites within study area

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