Betws y Coed
Conservation Area Appraisals

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

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Conservation Area Appraisals

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1. Introduction

This report contains the results of an appraisal of the Conservation Area of Betws-y-coed undertaken by Adam Voelcker and Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT) on behalf of the Snowdonia National Park Authority (SNPA).

The aim of the appraisal is to describe and explain the historic character of the settlement in order to inform and support positive conservation and regeneration programmes. This will help improve the quality of planning advice, and contribute to local interpretation strategies. The survey will define the distinctive historical character of Betws-y-coed, and identify the variety of character within it. The aims of the survey are based upon the understanding that the variety of character identified during the survey is fundamental to local distinctiveness and pride of place, and these are to be seen as assets within the process of regeneration.

1.2 Acknowledgements

Mr Gwilym Jones, Snowdonia National Park Authority, instigated the project, and generously provided help and information to aid the project. Judith Alfrey kindly gave help and advice during the course of the project.

2. Methodology

2.1 Introduction

A brief was provided by the SNPA. The methodology employed to answer the brief is based upon that developed by Cadw following initial urban characterisation projects undertaken by Welsh archaeological trusts. These in turn were based upon a methodology developed in England for urban characterisation and assessment, but also include English Heritage guidelines for Conservation Area Appraisal (English Heritage 2006).

The following methods were used to achieve the stated aims.

Data Collection

This phase included the collection of data from regional and national historic environment records, including those kept at GAT, RCAHMW, Cadw and National Museums and Galleries of Wales. Archive records were obtained from Gwynedd Archives, Conwy Archives, University of Wales, Bangor and National Library of Wales. The records were entered onto a database that was compatible with the regional Historic Environment Record, and their location identified through a geographical information system (MapInfo). Additional records and information sources were identified from historic maps, prints and photographs, and literature sources, including early antiquarian works.

Characterisation

The characterisation process combined the understanding gained from the desk-based phase with comprehensive fieldwork and a visual assessment of the surviving historic fabric. The development of the topography of the settlement was noted, and phases of historic change identified. Distinctive architectural forms, materials and significant elements of town and streetscapes were recorded. This process allowed the identification of areas of distinctive character, and these formed the basis of the character areas presented in this report.

2.2 Bibliographic Sources

A list of works consulted, combined with bibliographic references is given at the end of this report.

2.3 Previous Archaeological Work

No known previous archaeological work has been undertaken at Betws-y-coed.

4. The Physical Setting

4.1 Extent Of Area

The extent of the area included within this study is shown on **Figure Ø1**. It includes the Conservation Area and Pentre Du, and mention is made of adjacent outlying areas.

4.2 Landscape & Setting

Betws-y-coed lies at the southern end of the Conwy valley, where the narrow valley of the Afon Llugwy joins the wider valley from the west. The village is only 3Øm above sea-level but the valley sides rise steeply on all sides, up to 25Øm. The surrounding hills are densely wooded, forming part of the ancient Gwydyr Forest which stretches from Trefriw to Penmachno. The sheltered location of the village, yet its proximity to the mountains of Snowdonia and to the water-courses draining, often dramatically, to the Conwy valley, have made the village a popular destination for visitors since the mid-eighteenth century, a popularity which continues to this day.

The Afon Conwy marks a strongly defined boundary between Gwynedd (and Snowdonia) to the west, and Conwy to the east. Though its line does not follow the river, there is also a distinct geological division, with Silurian lithologies roughly east of the Conwy valley and mostly the older Ordovician to the west.

Right:
Plate 01 - View by Paul Sandby of Pont y Pair

5. Historical Development

5.1 Early History

There is little documentary evidence of a settlement at Betws-y-coed before the early-nineteenth century, though one would expect that there must have been some houses here in the preceding century, probably grouped near to the bridge. Edward Lhuyd (166Ø-17Ø9) mentions two seventeenth-century cottages in Parochialia, 1; they are included, with others, in the RCAHMW Inventory; but all are situated in the hills and woods around the village.

Two km south-east of the village, at Capel Garmon, are the remains of a Neolithic burial chamber, with cultural affinities to tombs built in a style known as the Severn-Cotswold tradition, of which the nearest examples lie within southern Powys. Other prehistoric remains lie on the higher ground above the Conwy and Llugwy valleys, though few remains have been found on the valley floor, perhaps a reflection of the heavier utilisation of these areas in later times, which have hidden the earlier evidence, rather than a lack of former settlement.

An auxiliary fort was established by the Romans on flat land near to the river at Caer Llugwy; the site was excavated in 192Ø, when evidence of lead-working was found. The Roman road must have crossed the Afon Llugwy, by tradition either on the site of the Miners' Bridge (west of Pentre Du) or where Pont-y-pair bridge was later built, but the exact location has not been determined with certainty.

Pennant refers to the church as 'Bettws Wyrion Iddo, or the bead-house of the gran-children of Iddon'. The 1352 extent of Caernarfonshire records the township of Bettws as belonging to three free gwelyau, namely Gwely John ap Iddon, Griffith ap Iddon and Ken ap Iddon. Iddon would have lived in the 11th or 12th century, and the heirs of Iddon continued to hold the land in 1352, one of whom, Gruffydd ap Dafydd Goch was foreman of the jury that met at Trefriw to take the extent, and his effigy lies in the church. It is a reasonable suggestion, though firm evidence is lacking, that the church was founded by the descendants of Iddon in the 12th century and dedicated to St Michael. The importance of the site as a crossing point is emphasised by the construction of Pont y Pair in the second half of the 15th century. According to Edward Lhuyd writing in the 17th century the bridge was built by one Hywel Saer, who Lhuyd also claims had previously built the bridge across the Afon Lledr. Pennant says Hywel died 1468 during construction of Pont y Pair.

Betws lay within the parish of Llanrhychwyn until it became an independent parish, Llanfihangel-y-bettws, in the sixteenth century, one of five parishes within the Nant Conwy cantref. At this time it came under the jurisdiction of Sir John Wynn of Gwydir, much of the land remaining part of the Gwydyr estate into the twentieth century.

Right:
Plate 02 - Telford's bridge retains most of its original character, though it is difficult to find a suitable viewpoint to appreciate it

5.2 The Arrival Of The Artists

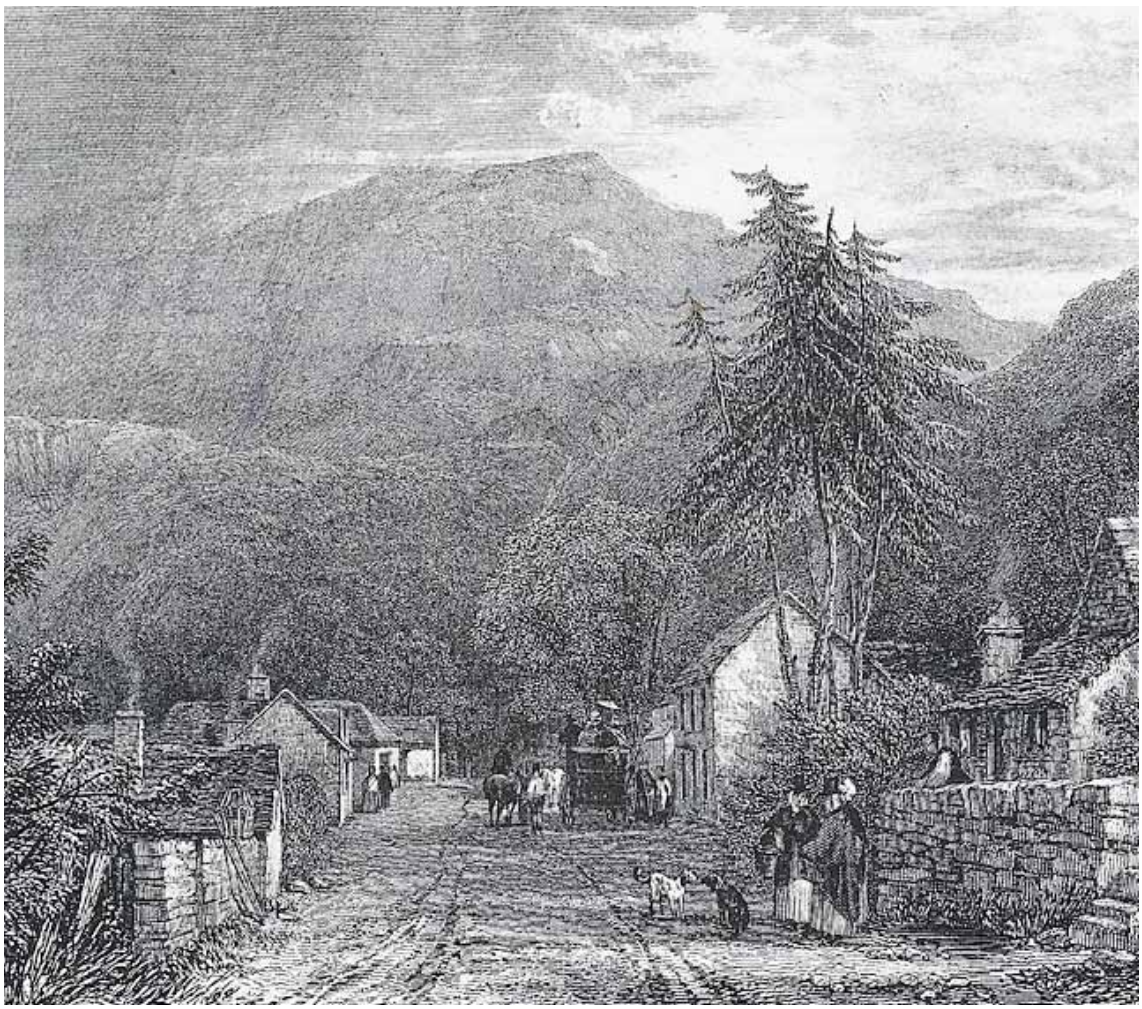
Artists such as John Boydell and the Buck brothers had been depicting the antiquities of North Wales from the mid-eighteenth century, but the Romantic craving to capture the 'awful' rugged beauty of Snowdonia came later. Paul Sandby (**Plate Ø1**) visited the Conwy valley with Sir Watkin Williams Wynn in 1776 and painted a watercolour of the Pont-y-pair looking twice as long as it really is and with craggy, barren mountains immediately behind.1 Thomas Pennant made a visit in the same year with his artist Moses Griffith, whose version of the same scene shows a less turbulent Afon Llugwy below the bridge and a background of 'majestic Alpine scenery' marginally more accurate than Sandby's.2 Pennant, though mentioning the bridge and the church, does not describe any village as such. It can have been little more than a small collection of buildings either side of Pont-y-pair.

The gradual improvement of the roads to North Wales in the late 177Øs encouraged this influx of visitors, and Betws-y-coed 3 became more accessible once the existing route to the north coast, passing through Pentrefoelas and Llanrwst (the present B5427), was diverted in around 18Ø5 to a more westerly route through Betws-y-coed and Capel Curig (following parts of a route formed in 1791). The Act of Union with Ireland in 18Ø1 made this new route more important, as perhaps also did the Napoleonic Wars, which popularised Snowdonia by providing a very acceptable alternative to the continent for every young gentleman's Grand Tour.

5.3 Telford's Road & More Artists

The turnpike route through Snowdonia, already established by 18Ø5, needed constant maintenance if it was to form a reliable link with Ireland; indeed, it required further improvement, which it received after Thomas Telford (1757-1834) submitted his government report in 1811. The importance of Telford's road was not so much in the proposed route (which followed much of the 1791 and 18Ø5 turnpikes west of Betws-y-coed) as in its superior construction, its avoidance of steep gradients, the use of cast-iron for the new Waterloo Bridge (completed in 1816 and built to take the new stretch of road across the Afon Conwy – **Plate Ø2**) and because it formed part of a unified road system.

The village undoubtedly grew from 1816. Edward Pugh described his visit in Cambria Depicta in 1816 but was more impressed by the 'great and majestic rocks' and the 'noble woods' than the village itself. He may have stayed at one of the village's inns, though Telford did not propose a coaching inn here (the last one east of Betws-y-coed was at Cernioge and the next one west was at Capel Curig, a distance of 14 miles between the two.)4 An engraving of 1818 depicts a collection of about a dozen houses on the south side of Pont-y-pair, stretching uphill to the west, with possibly the early Bryn Mawr chapel in the distance.5 The 184Ø tithe map shows that most of the land in and around Betws-y-coed was still in the ownership of the Gwydyr estate, and it remained so until well into the next century. Samuel Lewis records 'places of worship for



Left:
Plate 03 - View of the village in 1870 by T. Cheswick

Calvinistic Methodists & others' & 'a Church school, open to all the poor children of the parish', founded in 1821 by Lord Willoughby de Eresby.6 Lord Willoughby contributed other additions to the village, such as Bryn-y-bont, a picturesque cottage prominently facing Pont-y-pair at its northern end. The stone house was one of many similar cottages built on the estate around 1845 7 & had exaggerated corbels supporting the eaves, clearly shown in a drawing by David Cox.8 Lord Willoughby also funded work at the church around the same time: a large north transept was added, the windows were given idiosyncratic pointed heads and the roof structure was hidden above a rounded, plastered ceiling. Thomas Roscoe's Wanderings and Excursions in North Wales, published in 1836, did much to popularise the village, not least through the book's illustrations which romanticised both the village and the surrounding scenery. David Cox captured the turbulence of the Rhaiadr y Wennol (Swallow Falls) west of the village, and Thomas

Creswick portrayed a peaceful village scene near to the Pont-y-pair (**Plate Ø3**); but in truth, if other writers are to be believed, life was anything but tranquil in Betws-y-coed, which 'during the sketching season (…) was often filled to overflow ing with amateurs and artists. Their white tents and umbrellas, to be seen in whichever direction the eye turned, suggested to the visitor the encampment of an invading army'.9 In 1844, David Cox made the first of his regular annual visits to the village, which he continued to frequent until 1856, drawing around him, at the Royal Oak where he liked to stay, a colony of fellow artists, admirers and pupils. Near to the southern end of the bridge was another inn, the Swan (on the site of the present Pont-y-pair Hotel). Hall records that the village had 'only one small shop - a mere cottage, with a little window'.1Ø George Borrow passed through in 1854, describing the village as 'a small town' before finding himself 'in a beautiful valley with majestic hills on either side'. 11

As more visitors arrived, the artists began to move out, to villas outside the village, particularly on the east side of the Afon Conwy. Plas Muriau was built by 185Ø; the artist George Popkin moved here permanently in that year and stayed until 186Ø. Other artists such as Richard Bond, William Evans and James Whittaker also took up residence in the area.

5.4 The Coming Of The Railway

The building in 1868 of the Llandudno Junction to Betws-y-coed branch of the London and North Western Railway made a significant impact on the village. In fact, the impact was so huge that the identity we recognise today and the very form and fabric of the village are largely the direct result of the railway's arrival. The station itself (**Plate 11, see page 11**) was built in the same year by Owen Gethin Jones, builder, poet, author and historian from Penmachno. A school for girls and infants was built in 1869. The two chapels were rebuilt, Tabernacl chapel in 187Ø, Bryn Mawr two years later. The large, new church, St Mary's, was opened in 1873 for the hoards of English visitors. Other necessary parts of the infrastructure included the gasometer, built around 187Ø on the bank of the Conwy, north of the old church, and the police station, built in 1872 on the road to the old church and the goods yard of the station (now Henllys, originally with a magistrate's courtroom and sergeant's house). Boarding houses and hotels proliferated, a handful of them strategically positioned at the end of the road to the station and the Waterloo Hotel at the far end of the village near to the Telford bridge. By 1884, there were six licensed hotels, five temperance hotels and no less than 34 boarding houses.

Outlying areas also developed or continued to expand. A group of villa-type houses was built to the north of Plas Muriau and the Waterloo Bridge, a few south of the bridge and some on the south-facing hillside north of the village. Some of these were built by professionals (e.g. Craig-y-dderwen, by a Dr Thomas, c.1882, and Coed-y-celyn, by a Polish businessman from Liverpool) and artists no doubt seeking refuge from the holiday-makers in the village (e.g. Minafon, built by Joseph Knight, c. 1879).

The population of the parish increased from about 5ØØ in 1861 to about 8ØØ in 1881 and marginally less in 1891, before rising again in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

5.5 Economic Activity

Evidence of lead-mining in the Roman period was revealed when Caer Llugwy was excavated around 192Ø.12 Sir John Wynn of Gwydyr discovered metal ores on his estate in 16Ø7 but after he died in 1627 there was little serious activity until the mid-nineteenth century (Samuel Lewis noted in 1849 that none of the lead-mines had been worked for some time, and that 'a few of the inhabitants are engaged in spinning woollen yarn and knitting stockings'). By the end of the century the area had become one of the most productive in the UK. Mining continued until 1921 at the Aberllyn mines (where zinc was also mined) and 1923 at Penrallt (Gwyn, Bennett). Quarrying for slate began commercially in the late-eighteenth century and continued into the twentieth century. The biggest quarry, at Hafodlas, produced slabs and roofing slates between 1855 and 1929. The quality of material was not of the best and certainly could not compete with the slate quarried at Bethesda, Llanberis and Blaenau Ffestiniog, but it was sufficient for local needs. Half a mile west of the village, near Pentre Du and at the foot of the incline from the quarry, a small miners' settlement was established by the quarry from the 186Øs. Similar, estate-looking and therefore perhaps workers', cottages were built near the Albert Mill (**Plate Ø5**) at Pentre Felin (**Plate Ø4**). This mill, a corn roller mill, must have been established quite early on. There was another mill east of here on the opposite bank of the Afon Llugwy, part of the Royal Oak farm (Hyde Hall mentions both mills, 'one corn and one fulling mill').

Far right:
Plate 04 - The front elevations of the houses at Pentre Felin are built of dark regular blocks, probably from Hafodlas slate quarry, whilst the side and rear elevations are of local rubble stone

The shortage of timber in 1914-18 led to the felling of large areas of woodland around the village. Under the Forestry Act of 1919, the Forestry Commission took control of the area (leased from the Gwydyr estate), planting deciduous but mostly coniferous trees on the hillsides from 1921 and continuing operations until the present time.

5.6 The Twentieth Century

Tourism is the chief economic activity today, just as it has been since the early-nineteenth century. Most of the built fabric of the village dates from this earlier period of growth and the use patterns have changed little. Conversions have been carried out where the former use has expired (e.g. Tabernacl chapel to a shop, the Glan Llugwy school to a dwelling, the station building to shops etc). The class of building that has seen the biggest transformation in the twentieth century is the school, with the County elementary school built in Pentre Du in 1928 to replace the old schools at Glan Llugwy and Bryn-y-bont. Where substantial developments have taken place (e.g. around the station and next to the Royal Oak), these are tourist-related and have inevitably included largish expanses of car-parking. The churchyard east of St Mary's church has also been given over to car-parking (**Plate Ø6**).

Left:
Plate 06 -
The former Congregational Chapel is largely masked by the later alpine-influenced timber work built onto the front gable

Left:
Plate 05 -
The mill on the left of the photograph has large grey blocks built into one elevation. Whilst the character of the mill is still recognisable, the choice of window on the front elevation is not within character

6. Topographical Development

The natural topography of the immediate area around the village and of the village within the larger setting has played a fundamental role in its layout. Betws-y-coed is located at the eastern end of the Llugwy valley, just as the valley meets the wider Conwy valley running north-south. It forms a sort of eastern gateway to Snowdonia, and must always have felt to travellers a special point of transition between the rugged, mountainous interior of Snowdonia and the more open countryside of the Denbigh moors (which they would have seen on their coach journey from Shrewsbury) or the ever-narrowing Conwy valley (seen as they travelled south by coach from the Chester-Holyhead railway, or later on the branch line). Hemmed in to north and south by steep hills which squeezed the Afon Llugwy into a narrow gorge before it joined the more placid Afon Conwy, there was never the space for a settlement to be much more than a single street following the line of the river(s). Only in a few areas, where the land was less steep and constricted, could the settlement depart from this linear layout.

It is not clear why the old church was established exactly where it was, on a bend of the meandering Afon Conwy (**Plate Ø7**). The churchyard is typically Celtic in its rounded shape (only partly round now due to the gradual erosion of the river bank which Fenton noted in 181Ø 'is falling in very fast and soon threatens the overthrow of the whole fabrick [of the church]'. The location of other buildings such as mills is more clear: the two mills at Betws-y-coed were established in obvious places where they could be supplied by a head of water diverted from the main river.

Crossing points over the rivers will always have been self-selecting, determined by width and depth of the water. A wide shallow bend in the Afon Conwy north-east of the old church permitted a crossing of stepping stones. The narrower Afon Llugwy, in contrast, allowed a bridge crossing at Pont-y-pair where rocks at the gorge provided convenient intermediate supports for the bridge piers. It was inevitable that a settlement should grow up at such a location. Just south-east of the Pont-y-pair bridge, a steep cliff descends almost to the river, more or less preventing development in an easterly direction. But to the west, for about 2ØØ yds, the land is less precipitous, allowing the early settlement to develop on both sides of the turnpike road established in the 179Øs.

Routes in and out of the village also helped to determine its layout and its character, particularly the directions in which it later expanded. Early on, apart from the Roman Sarn Elen and drovers' ways, routes were local, just tracks through the woods and hills serving the dispersed population. From the south-east (i.e. from Dolwyddelan and Pentrefoelas), the incoming road came along the west bank of the Afon Conwy from the Pont-yr-afanc bridge and dropped down to the Telford road just south of Mairlys (now Ffordd Craiglan). On this road (behind Vesey House and Argraig) was located the smithy, active in 18Ø3. An important route leading out of the village towards Gwydyr Castle would have been formed in the seventeenth century as much of the land in and around the village was owned by the Gwydyr estate. By the late 17ØØs, routes north to Llanrwst (with Conwy and the coast beyond) and west to Capel Curig (with Bangor and Holyhead beyond) were established, opening up the area to intrepid travellers and artists keen to explore Snowdonia. Telford's road, of 1815, improved the turnpikes and helped to make Betws-y-coed more popular both to visitors who chose to linger and to those on their way to Ireland.

Although there was mining and quarrying in the hills above the village, most of this activity was on a small scale not requiring big roads for the transport of the quarries' produce. Even Hafodlas quarry made do with just an incline linking the quarry to the existing road at Pentre Du. The separate settlement at the foot of the incline was a direct result of the quarry. The land here was flat and featureless, allowing a regular layout of miners' houses. By 1913 this settlement was a vil lage of its own, with a Sunday school and a shop (and later the primary school for Betws-y-coed).

Betws-y-coed has always been a destination for tourists rather than, for example, a centre of manufacture and its layout has reflected this function, particularly after the railway arrived in 1868 and the village grew rapidly to the south-east. The basic needs of visitors were board

Left:
Plate 07 - The medieval church, above the river, is probably a 12th century foundation, and the earliest surviving building at Betws

and lodging, a shop or two, a place of worship - and an attractive atmosphere. The restricted topography and the linear pattern of development worked rather conveniently in favour of the visitors and meeting their requirements. Hotels and boarding houses could develop along the road on its south and south-east side, facing out over the river(s) towards the scenery (the sun conveniently enhancing it rather than blinding the admirer's eyes since the views were northwards). One of the earlier (pre-Victorian) hotels was the Royal Oak, which faced north-east over the neck of flat meadow between the two rivers and axially towards its courtyard of stables, and its farm and mill beyond. The later hotels developed further east along the road to the Waterloo Bridge, particularly opposite the road to the station, where the more substantial ones sit prominently.

The railway followed a level route southwards along the Conwy valley before taking a more tortuous one westwards up the valley of the Afon Lledr. The station was located in the meadow land as near to the village centre as possible, with its goods yard and employees' houses beyond. This area, largely open and vacant north of the station, became an obvious place for expansion chiefly for the benefit of visitors in the later part of the twentieth century - shops, cafes, toilets etc. around the station, camping ground and caravan park and a golf-course further north, and visitor attractions in converted buildings once belonging to the Royal Oak.

Other pockets of land have been used where the topography permits, mostly for dwellings - for example, on the north side of the Afon Llugwy west of Bryn-y-bont, at Pentre Du and between Waterloo Bridge and the railway bridge over the main road. Most of these areas are expansions of land already developed (or begun to be developed) in the late-Victorian era rather than entirely new.

7. The Character Of Building

7.1 The Style & Development Of Building

Betws-y-coed is a village of hard, dark, slatey stone, much of it from the Ordovician beds worked at the Hafodlas quarry, where material suitable for slabs and roofing was produced from the mid-nineteenth century. But documentary evidence, including early pictures, suggests that the pre-Victorian settlement centred around the Pont-y-pair bridge consisted of low, stone buildings that were lime-washed, in contrast to the later, much dourer character of unpainted stone. It is unlikely that many of these earlier buildings survive, but the low lines of the more humble vernacular style of building are visible between Pont-y-pair Hotel and Bryn Mawr chapel, and also further west at Banc Llugwy (**Plate Ø8**), a row of small, two-storey cottages (originally nine, in three groups probably not all of the same date), built of undressed rubble walls, with deep lintels (of a type used at the outbuildings at Plas Tirion, near Llanrwst, dated 1837) and rough, irregular roofing slates.

For the most part, the village's buildings are mid- to later Victorian and exhibit the vertical proportions, steep roofs, decorated gables, bay windows etc. fashionable at this period. The majority are detached or semi-detached (and so sit in their gardens almost like villas), and are quite big. None are of great architectural distinction but each tries to be distinctive, as is natural in a layout of individual rather than grouped buildings (such as terraces, which are rare in the village), and taken as a broad group they are a good representation of the style of the times.

It would be interesting to know more about the architects and builders who were involved in the post-railway expansion of the village. Were architects involved at all, or are the designs largely the result of capable builders following fashionable ideas (Owen Gethin Jones certainly had both aptitude and awareness)? An established, national firm of church architects was brought in to design

Right: Plate 08 - The cottages at Bank Llugwy are some of the older and more vernacular style buildings in the village

what is arguably the most important ingredient of the village's architecture, St Mary's Church (**Plate Ø9**), but in the realm of domestic buildings the expertise was no doubt kept local. Regardless of whether the substantial houses were designed by architect or builder, they display a distinct 'mountain' style - not exactly Alpine (with their wide overhanging roofs) or Germanic (with their half-hipped gables) or anything else so specific, but something certainly Northern (as opposed to Mediterranean, say) and responding to the harsher, wetter climate of the mountains (**Plate 1Ø**).

Some of the modern buildings have made an attempt to be in keeping by using local materials (at least those sourced in north-west Wales if not at Hafodlas) but they have not matched the scale and presence of the Victorian ones. So often they look diminutive and apologetic, and lack the finer detail of the older buildings.

Far left:
Plate 09 - The later church St. Mary's, one of the few architect designed buildings (Palet & Austin, Lancaster), was opened in 1873

Left:
Plate 10 - The Alpine views of Betws y Coed, characterised by dark building stone and varied rooflines

Above:
Plate 11 - The station, built by Owen Gethin Jones, is built of dark squared blocks, with much use of yellow and red brick around the window reveals and as horizontal banding

7.2 Wall Materials & Finishes

Walls are built from a variety of stones and in a variety of laying methods including random rubble, snecked and coursed. Generally the better material is used on front elevations, dressed or semi-dressed and with fairly narrow joints, whereas the less public elevations use inferior rubble stone laid with considerably more visible mortar (**Plate 11**). Quoins, lintels and surrounds to openings are formed in better-quality stone, chosen for length and regularity. After the railway arrived (in 1868) it became economic to bring in from England more workable stones, and also brick, useful for architectural detail such as surrounds to door and window openings. Owen Gethin Jones, the builder of the station and of St Mary's Church, made good use of these new materials in both buildings (**Plate 12**). One of the first houses to be built in Pentre Du has yellow brick around its openings, and Tŷ'n-y-coed, built in 1877 above the Trefriw road, has red sandstone dressings and string courses.

Applied finishes are rare, though it is interesting to see at Banc Llugwy finishes that would have been more commonplace in the past: one house in the row is flush pointed (to the point of being a thin render) and painted white, and another has been coated with a thicker roughcast, its openings lined with smooth render bands in a contrasting colour.

With the Victorian tradition of exposed stone unchanged, walls remain, for the most part, as they always were, but with the following exception. Repointing has been carried out, much of it in ribbon style. Although this method was sometimes used before the beginning of the twentieth century, it has regrettably become much more fashionable in recent times.

Left:
Plate 12 - Pentre Du is a distinct settlement separate from the main village. The houses were built by the quarry for workers housing in the second half of the 19th century

7.3 Roofs

It is not surprising that roofs are predominantly of slate. Much of it will have been produced at Hafodlas, but equally the grey slates of Blaenau Ffestiniog and the purple of Bethesda have been extensively used. Most roofs are slated with regular sized slates, but a few (e.g. the row of older cottages at Banc Llugwy) still have their original, rougher, smaller slates (some with diminishing courses). Ridges are clay, either black/blue or red; most are of plain design but a few are more ornate.

There is a mixture of steep roofs (i.e. of 45 degrees or more from the horizontal) and ones of shallower pitch. The former are inspired by Gothic, Pugin etc, the latter are more classical in inspiration (it would be interesting to find out whether these two styles relate to particular owners, builders, dates etc). In both cases, overhangs are deep, often an encouragement for ornate barge-boards and intricate timber-framing within gables (**Plate 13**). Gables proliferate, more than a few of them of the half-hipped variety (e.g. Tan-lan, next to the post office).

Left:
Plate 13 - Ornate timberwork to fascias and gables is common to many buildings

Right:
Plate 14 - The Royal Oak Hotel has played a formative role in the history of the village, and is a dominant building. Its features are characteristic of the building style at Betws, with multiple gable, broad chimneys and pointed window heads

Right:
Plate 15 - The former Glan Llugwy school lies east of Llys Caradoc (Blacks) partly hidden from road level. Llys Caradoc is typical of the late 19th century villas, with multiple gables,

and the characteristic pointed windows

7.4 Architectural Detail

Fancy detail is common, not surprising in a village predominantly of big, detached houses built to impress visitors.

Ornate timber-work to fascias, bargeboards, gables etc. has already been mentioned. Windows are generally of painted timber, with vertical sliding sashes of few panes. Canted bays are common, with little polygonal roofs and monolithic slate supporting posts. There is quite a variety of window-head shape: most are flat and plain, but examples of semi-circular, segmental and shallow-arched can be seen at Craft Cymru, The Fairhaven and Hawkshead respectively. One of the more intriguing heads is of shallow triangular shape (seen at the Royal Oak and Blacks shop – **Plates 14 & 15**)) - this has a resemblance to the top of Telford's milestones, of which there are two in the village. Dentilated string-courses are a feature on some of the more substantial houses (e.g. Llys Caradoc, apparently built as a grocer's shop and house (opposite Bryn Mawr chapel)). Ornate ironwork can be seen in gable finials, a few surviving balcony balustrades and railings to front gardens.

7.5 Streetscape

In a village whose pattern is linear and depends so much on the boundaries between the river, the main street and the buildings along it, walls and railings are important (**Plate 16**). There are many lengths of good-quality stone wall, of surviving iron railings (early photographs show that many have been removed), and also combinations of both. Trees are also important, and fundamental to views along the main street. Many are particularly fine specimens and will date from the later nineteenth century.

Left:
Plate 16 - Early photographs show there were formerly many more railings, but that those that remain are important for establishing the character of the streetscape

8. Character Areas

Area 01 - The Core Of The Old Village

Historical Background

Little is known about the original pattern of building which must have centred around the bridge, reputedly built by Howell Saer around 1468. Pennant does not mention any village in 1781; Hall states that there were 84 inhabited houses in the parish in 18Ø9-11 but he was unspecific about their location (most of them were probably smallholdings and cottages dispersed in the woods). An engraving by Compton/Havell of 1818 shows the Pont-y-pair bridge with two bends along its length, and a scattering of houses on the south bank of the Afon Llugwy stretching uphill to the west. On the brow of the hill is a taller building which may be the first Bryn Mawr Calvinistic Methodist chapel, built in 18Ø8 and rebuilt in its present form in 1872 to designs by the Liverpool chapel architect, Richard Owen. There would undoubtedly have been toll-gates or a toll-house at or near the bridge, perhaps at the southern end on the east side. A toll-house is certainly recorded opposite this point, on the south side of the main road; this may be Telford's toll-house, built in 1829. Near to it, to the west, was the Swan Inn, where the artist David Cox stayed around 1844 before the Royal Oak became his favourite quarters. The Swan later became the (possibly rebuilt) Masonic Hotel (1889 OS map) and finally, by 1913, the Pont-y-pair Hotel, its current name.

In 1821 Lord Willoughby de Eresby founded 'a Church school, open to all the poor children of the parish' and this was probably located beyond the northern end of the bridge. The school later became the Bryn-y-bont (National, i.e. church) school, for boys, and was demolished for the Memorial Hall, opened in 1929. Next to it, around 1845, he built an estate cottage, Bryn-y-bont, perhaps for the teacher. This cottage is clearly shown on a drawing of the Royal Oak Inn by David Cox, c.185Ø. The girls and infants had their own school, west of the bridge and almost opposite Bryn Mawr chapel, built in 1869 on land given by the Gwydyr estate to Sophia Jex Blake, who had been teaching children informally on her regular visits to the village from the 185Øs. This became the Glan Llugwy (undenominational) school.

It is likely that there were former buildings between Glan Llugwy school and the bridge, squeezed between the road and the river. West of the school, the Tabernacl Independent chapel had been built in 1842. It was rebuilt in 187Ø and was converted into a shop in the 199Øs. East of the bridge, the toll-house was replaced between 189Ø and 1913 by a larger building, now the premises of Hawkshead.

The Character Of Building

The present character of the area is very different to that shown in Creswick's charming view of 1836, in which the buildings are small, low and mostly white-washed. None of those cottages survive; their replacements are dark, unpainted stone buildings of the mid- to late-Victorian era, with the deep, projecting eaves, decorated gables and dormers, and the vertical proportions characteristic of the village's buildings generally. But one important feature that does survive is the pattern of development on both sides of the street, in contrast to the remainder of the long, main street of Betws-y-coed, which is characteristically a street built up on just one side.

Area 02 - Pentre Felin

Historical Background

This area lies beyond the northern end of Pont-y-pair, on the road leading to Gwydyr Castle and Trefriw (the present B51Ø6). The mill, on its northern side, was probably established early, far earlier than Hall's reference to it in 1811 when he mentions 'one corn and one fulling mill' in the village (the fulling mill was no doubt the one on the far side of the Afon Llugwy, part of the Royal Oak farm). The corn mill (later called the Albert Mill) was fed from a catch-pond in the Llugwy west of the bridge, via a leet below the present car-park, and discharging to the river further east, its mill-race passing below the road and still visible in the garden between Nos 2 and 3 Pentrefelin.

East of the mill is Bodlondeb, once the Miners' Arms Inn. On the southern side of the road was the Hand Inn, 'a wretched house, with miserable accommodation'. This is one of the few buildings shown on the 184Ø tithe map, but may not have survived after the arrival of the railway. Semi-detached houses make up the remainder of the street on its southern side. These were built in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, perhaps by the Gwydyr estate for quarry- or mine-workers. They are not dissimilar to the miners' houses built at Pentre Du.

The Character Of Building

The three-storey mill building is much changed (**Plate 12, see page Ø6**) but Bodlondeb still retains its original character (though its original purpose is unclear), with its symmetrical composition, its central advancing bay and its steep shouldered gables . The southern end of the mill is as intriguing as it is puzzling, with its apparently random areas of huge stones.

It is the houses which give the street its distinct, 'estate' character (**Plate 11, see page Ø6**). All are built of stone, using dark, fairly regular blocks (probably from the Hafodlas quarry) for the front elevations; longer, dressed blocks for the quoins and around openings (many of them with circular saw-marks visible); and a rougher rubble for the side walls. Most pairs of houses have deep eaves, timber barge-boards and a pair of gabled half-dormers with iron finials. Those towards the northern end of the street have a projecting canopy above the front door(s); at the southern end, the roof between the dormers is lifted above small upper windows. Swn-y-dwr was clearly built as a single house and displays carved window heads to its upper window openings.

As the ground falls away towards the river and is consequently lower than the road, the houses on this side have a lower floor looking out to the rear garden, in effect making them three-storeyed. Low, front-garden walls with railings survive at the top end of the street; at the lower end, these may have fallen victim to road-widening.

Area 03 - The Main Road Between Pont-Y-Pair & The Railway Bridge

Historical Background

The exact routes of the old tracks to the bridge at Pont-y-pair from the south-east (i.e. from Penmachno and Dolwyddelan) are not certain. The turnpike came this way at the end of the eighteenth century, and the present road is Telford's, of 1815. The Royal Oak inn was 'a long, low building only a chamber high and coloured of a mild salmon-tint' when David Cox stayed here each year between 1844 and 1859. It was enlarged or rebuilt in 1861, again in 1865 and probably yet again after the arrival of the railway in 1868. Apart from the commercial development to the immediate south-east of the hotel (built in the 199Øs) and the distinctive, small hipped-roof building just north-west of the hotel (probably contemporary with Bryn-y-bont and perhaps built by Lord Willoughby), the street's buildings are mid- to later Victorian and the result of massive expansion due to the railway. For the most part, they comprise hotels and boarding houses, the biggest of which sit prominently at the end of the road to the station. Their original names (some English, some Welsh) can often be seen in faded paint on the front elevations. St Mary's church was built in 1872-3 since the old church was too small. It was a competition design by Paley and Austin of Lancaster, and was built by Owen Gethin Jones of Penmachno (the job apparently nearly bankrupting him) on land given by the Gwydyr estate.

The Character Of Building

The street retains the Victorian character it had originally, with buildings lining just its south-western side, overlooking fine trees, green space and the rivers. This linear pattern is interrupted by the church, which sits back from the street within its churchyard (recently developed as a car-park). North-west of the Royal Oak, the buildings form a nearly continuous ribbon but south-east of the church, there is more space between them, by now almost like villas in their gardens. Early photographs show iron railings in front of some but most of these do not survive. The building materials are, for the most part, the local dark stone and slate; only the church introduces imported material, a reddish limestone donated by Lord Willoughby and quarried from his Ancaster estate in Lincolnshire.

Area 04 - The station & Royal Oak stables

Historical Background

This area stretches north into the neck of land forming the water meadows between the two rivers. Once, the old church was the only building here, perhaps originally a tiny, single-cell chamber located near a river and surrounded with a (partly) rounded enclosure, both typical of the early local Celtic saints. Access was from the north-east, along the Afon Conwy from a stepping-stone crossing point, and also from the west, later via the 1756 lych-gate. The church was rebuilt in the early-fourteenth century and was extended by Lord Willoughby around 1843.

The Royal Oak's stable block lies north-east of the hotel, with its former farm and mill further north (both now converted to domestic use). The railway and its station and ancillary buildings (designed and built by Owen Gethin Jones) transformed the area in and after 1868 (Plate 15, see page 10). A gas works was built north of the old church in 1870 and a police station south of it in 1872, giving the area a distinctly utilitarian flavour. Access to these, to the goods yard and to the old church, by now isolated and defunct, was along a new road parallel with the station approach.

Pressure from tourism in the 1990s changed the area still more. The need for car-park space, public toilets and also adequate parking and turning space for coaches was met by providing areas in front of and beyond the station. The station building was no longer required for station use and was converted and extended for commercial/tourist purposes, and the stable block was converted into a tourist information centre. The farm buildings became a motor museum and the remainder of the area was given over to a caravan park and a golf course.

The Character Of Building

There is no single distinct character to the buildings in this area. The stable courtyard still retains a flavour of its past, but the station is swamped by the recent neo-vernacular development around it to the point that it is unrecognisable as a former station unless one is standing on the platform.

The important three-sided open space between the station/stables and the main street has been retained and has the feel of a village green with fine trees around its edges and railings along the street.

Right:
Plate 17 - The school was designed by Rowland Lloyd Jones as one of a number of 'open air' schools. This is the only example with surviving original windows

Area 05 - Between The Railway Bridge & Waterloo Bridge

Historical Background

At the southern end of the main street was the first Waterloo Hotel, built after the railway arrived and later massively enlarged, with a tall tower with pyramidal roof facing the village, and an extensive garden to the north. The road was raised to cross over the railway, its walls coped with huge slabs of local stone and with one of Telford's milestones reset (his road must have been lower and level). Later in the twentieth century, the hotel was demolished and a new hotel was built, set back from the road and with annexes to the south and west. The remainder of the land between the road and the railway was developed for housing and filling stations.

Waterloo Bridge, completed in 1816, was based on Telford's designs for two recent bridges in Scotland, but was more elaborately decorated (with the national emblems of the four countries of Great Britain), intended as a celebration of the great British victory and even, perhaps, as an advertisement for the use of cast-iron. The bridge was upgraded in 1929, when its carriageway was rebuilt and widened by cantilevering the footways out beyond the flanks of the bridge.

The Character Of Building

This area (which is outside the conservation boundary) is essentially modern, with little remaining from earlier times apart from the road walls and the rural aspect facing towards the river. Telford's bridge retains most of its original character, unfortunately difficult to enjoy as convenient access to suitable viewpoints is denied (**Plate Ø2, see page Ø4**).

Area 06 - Pentre Du

Historical Background

This is a separate and distinct settlement from the main village, located about 1 km west of the centre (near Pentre Du Farm), at the foot of the incline from the Hafodlas quarry (less than 1 km to the south). The quarry, which operated from 1855 to 1929, produced roofing slates and slabs; these were transported down the incline, along a short length of tramway to the main road, and then by wagon to the quay on the Afon Conwy at Trefriw, or, after the railway was built in 1868, to the station in Betws-y-coed (the proposed extension of the tramway to the station was never built).

The settlement was a planned one and built by the quarry. Six miners' cottages were proposed here in 186Ø. The 1889 OS map shows six semi-detached houses (i.e. 12 dwellings) with gardens, on either side of a cul-de-sac (Dolydd Terrace) off the main road, mid-way between the incline and Pentre Du Farm. By 1913, the cul-de-sac had been extended eastwards towards the incline, providing a further nine semi-detached houses (i.e. 18 dwellings) along the south side of the lane, named Gethin Terrace. By this time there was a post office at the junction of Dolydd Terrace with the main road, and a Sunday school at the right-angled corner formed by the two terraces.

In 1928, after years of arguments over a suitable site (the school was first mooted in 19Ø5) and also a delay caused by the First World War (a design had been drawn up in 1912), the County elementary school was built on a site donated by Lord Ancaster alongside the tramway. Once the quarry closed, the tramway and incline were abandoned, and Gethin Terrace was extended northwards to join the main road, thus forming a loop around Dol-y-weunydd. The school (**Plate 17**), designed by the architect to the Caernarvonshire Education Committee, Rowland Lloyd Jones, was one of a number of experimental 'open-air' schools proposed in 1911, in line with current thinking on school buildings and the ameliorative effect they might have on children's health. The Caernarvonshire schools were characterised chiefly by the large expanses of folding/sliding, south-facing windows which could be fully opened to the air and sun. The school at Pentre Du is a particularly good example since it is the only one where the original windows survive (it was listed in 2ØØ9).

More recently, the area within the loop has been filled with semi-detached and terrace houses, a playing field and an extension to the school playground, and further houses have been built along the south side of the main road. A caravan park has been established opposite the school and a water works near to the foot of the incline. It is regrettable that the planned nature of the original settlement has been diluted by the more haphazard layout of the recent houses.

The Character Of Building

The area certainly feels separate from the main village. The land is flat, so the original semi-detached houses could follow a regular, linear pattern, each with its garden. The earlier houses in Dolydd Terrace (**Plate 12, see page 11**) are similar to those in Pentre Felin, with dark stone to the front elevations, more irregular stone to the sides, dormers with decorated barge-boards and finials, pentice porch roofs etc. One house has yellow brick quoins and window dressings. The front gardens are lined with low stone walls, simple railings and slate gate-piers. The later houses in Gethin Terrace are plainer, with fewer architectural features such as dormers and gables.

9. Statement Of Significance

The essential pattern of Betws-y-coed is one long street with buildings on one side and the river on the other. Trees are always apparent, either fine species close to or woods on the surrounding hills, and the village is seldom without visitors. The physical character was established soon after the railway arrived in 1868 and it largely survives to this day. The function of the village as a tourist destination also continues, thereby helping to preserve its character. The challenge is to allow the village to continue and develop its tourism role in a sustainable way without over-preserving it in Victorian aspic. This challenge has already been sorely tested by a change in the means of arrival by visitors - formerly in a controlled fashion by train, today in cars, which threaten to overwhelm the village in their demand for parking space. On the other hand, the temptation to locate modern out-of-town buildings (such as supermarkets, business/industrial units etc) at the periphery of the village has fortunately been resisted. Summary of the village's points of significance:

- Its distinctive and memorable layout (one long street);
- Its setting (would the village be what it is without the rivers and the wooded hills?);
- The homogeneity of its fabric (mostly big detached stone buildings dating from the later nineteenth century);
- Yet also, conversely, the exceptions to this homogeneity (where buildings are older or lower or not detached or not faced in stone);
- The abundance of fine, substantial trees within the village;
- The absence of modern sprawl at the village's points of entry.

10. Management Recommendations

10.1 Conservation area boundary

It is recommended that the boundary of the Conservation Area be reviewed since it was established some time ago. In various places its exact line appears to be arbitrary, sometimes including within the area buildings which should perhaps be excluded &, in other places, doing the reverse.

The following areas might be looked at in more detail:

Area A (northern boundary)

Extending the area to include the old Royal Oak mill, its water-courses and more of the river banks in the C.A., including on the western bank of the river next to the B51Ø6. Consideration might be given to including the former Royal Oak farm and its tree-lined lane running parallel with the river.

Area B (station)

When the electricity sub-station is specifically excluded, why are the railway museum and shop and the adjacent car-park not also excluded? There seems to be some inconsistency here.

Area C (A5 north of railway bridge)

Consideration to be given to the inclu sion of the west side of this road, with its stone wall and line of trees.

Area D (western boundary uphill of St Mary's church and the Royal Oak)

This boundary line seems to follow no logical feature or natural boundary.

Area E (western approach to the village)

An area behind Bryn Mawr chapel is shown included whereas the remainder of the boundary along the southern side of the A5 follows the rear boundaries of each property - the reason for this is not clear (access was not possible). Perhaps more of the river and its northern bank should be included within the C.A., particularly if this helps to prevent future development along the river.

10.2 Listed Buildings

There are very few listed buildings in Betws-y-coed, which is perhaps not surprising due to the absence of older buildings. Consideration for listing might be given to the cottages at Banc Llugwy (which form a good, surviving pre-Victorian group largely unspoilt by new windows and other features) and the Royal Oak hotel (which, though 1861 and later, is essentially unchanged on the street elevation and has a definite presence in the streetscape).

Listed buildings and other structures in the village:

- St Michael's Church
- St Michael's Church lych-gate
- St Mary's Church
- Bryn-y-bont (cottage)
- Ysgol Cynradd, Pentre Du (school)
- Waterloo Bridge
- Pont-y-pair (bridge)
- Two milestones on A5

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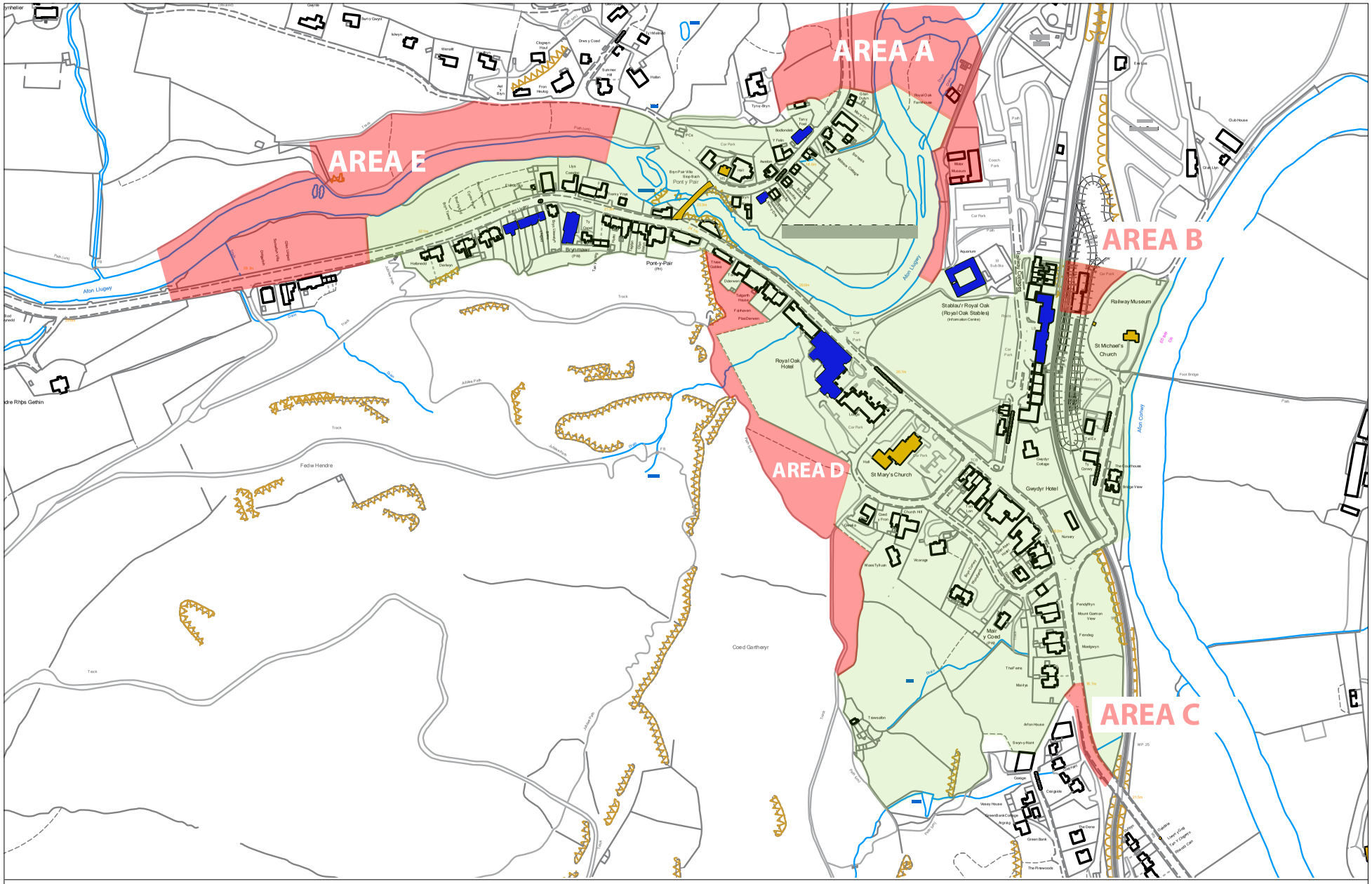
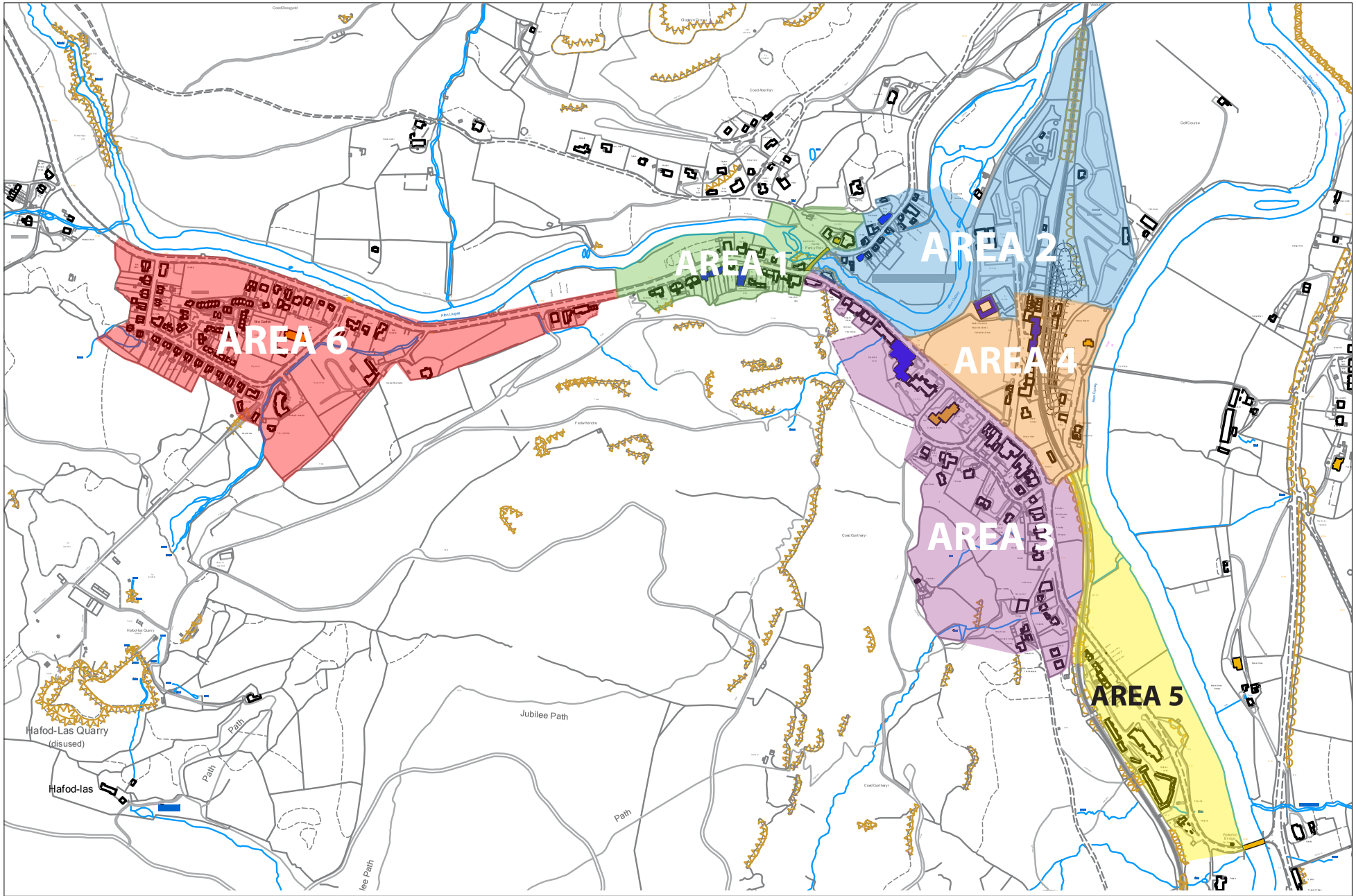
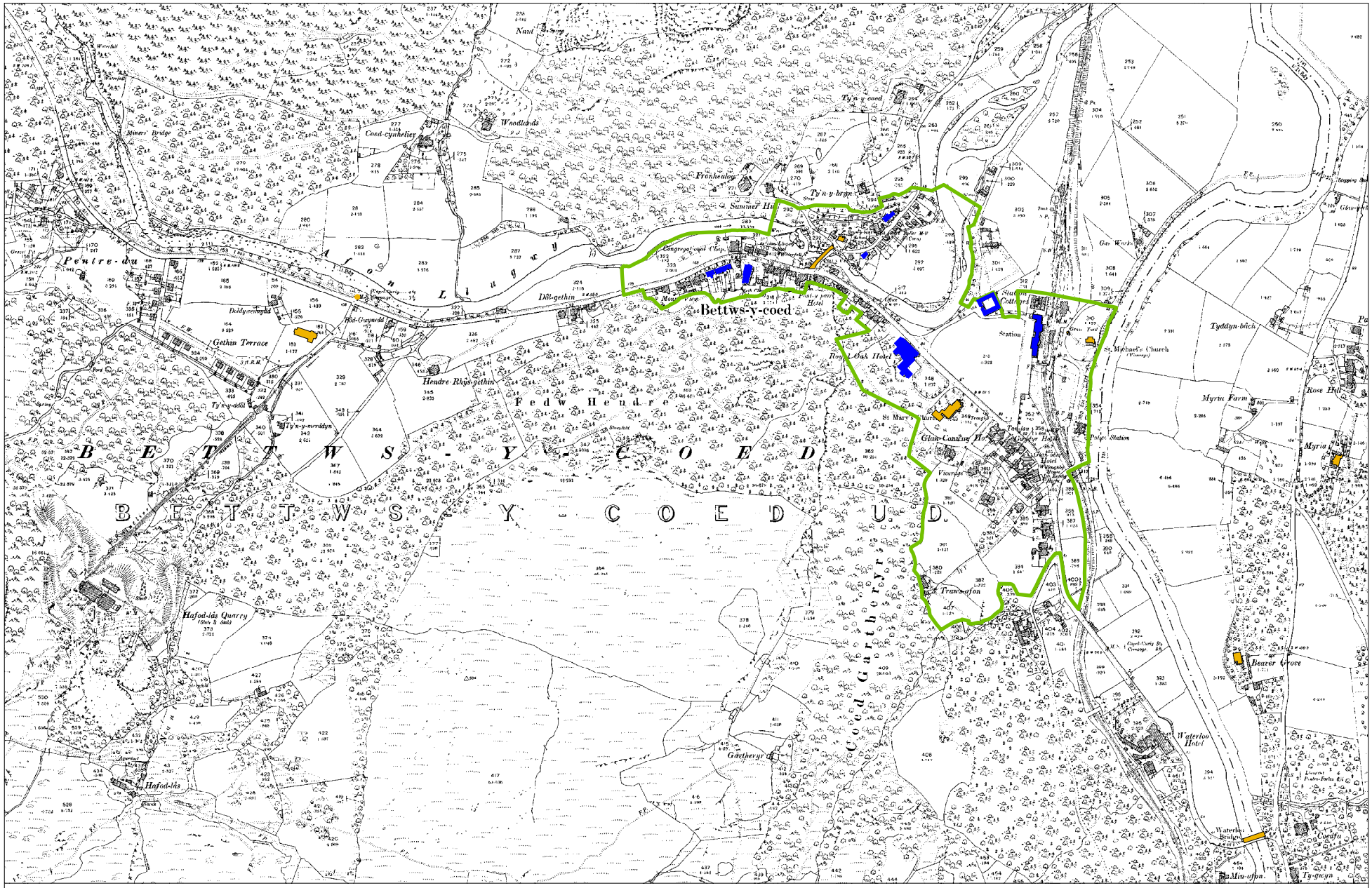


Betws y Coed Conservation Area
Character appraisal
Figure 01: Location of Conservation Area


AREA 1
AREA 2
AREA 3
AREA 4
AREA 5
AREA 6
Hafod-Las Quarry
(disused)
Hafod-las
Jubilee Path
Path
Path
Path
Listed building
Building of local note
N
Scale: 1:8000
Betws y Coed Conservation Area
Character appraisal
Figure 02: Location of Character Areas



Listed building

Building of local note

Conservation area boundary

N

Scale: 1:8000

Betws y Coed Conservation Area
Character appraisal
Figure 03: OS County Series Map 1900

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust
Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd

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