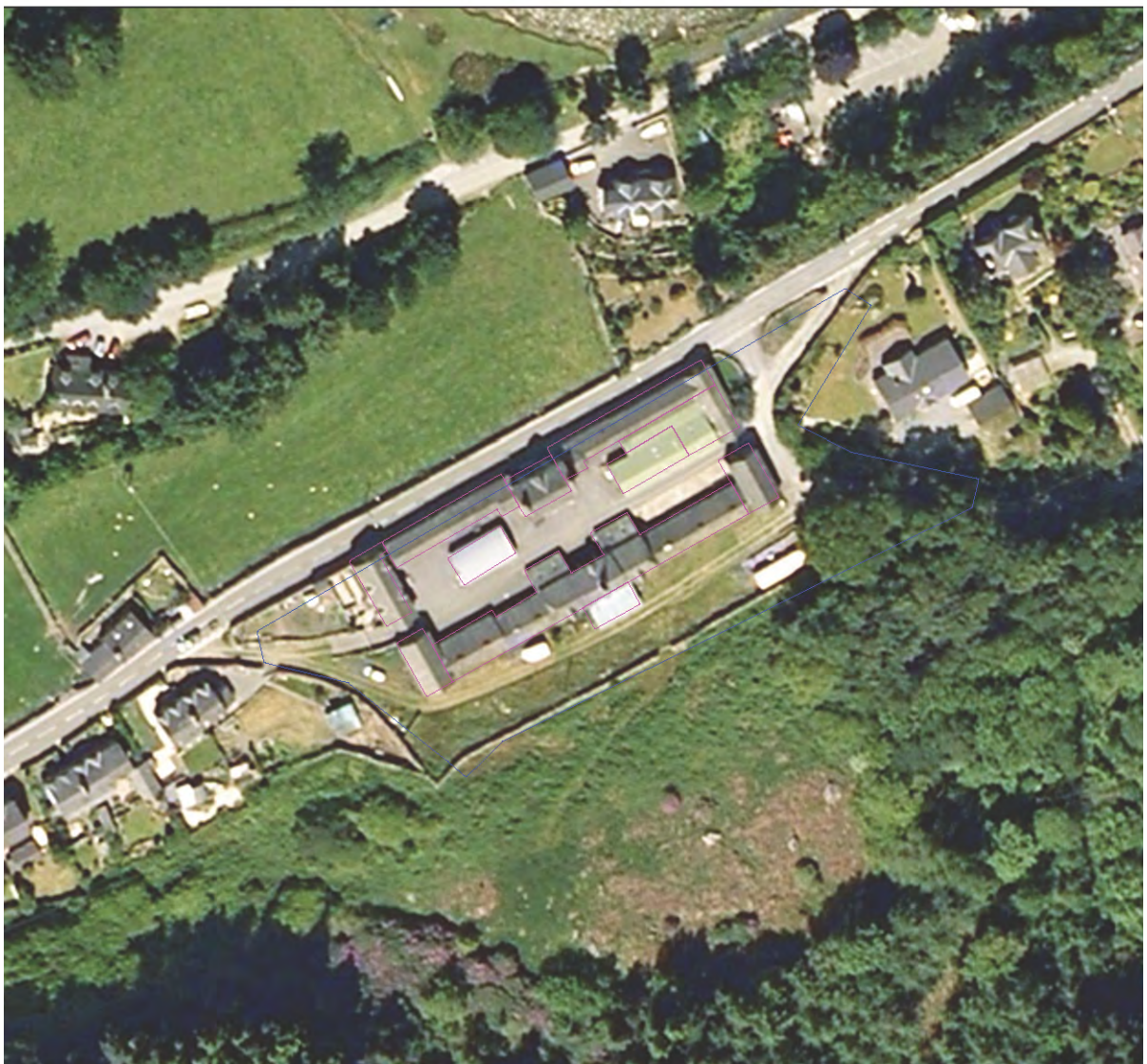


# Recording Traditional Farm Buildings and Historic Farmsteads

South Meirionnydd 2021-2022



Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd  
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust



# Recording Traditional Farm Buildings and Historic Farmsteads

South Meirionnydd 2021-22

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Prepared for: Cadw

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Cover photograph: Aerial photograph of historic farmstead polygon's over Penmaen-Ucha Farm.

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## G2469 RECORDING HISTORIC FARMSTEADS 2021-22

Location: South Meirionnydd

### Crynondeb Prosiect

*Mae'r prosiect hwn yn rhan o fenter Cymru gyfan sydd wedi'i dylunio i greu set o bolygonau GIS o adeiladau fferm traddodiadol sydd wedi goroesi er mwyn cynhyrchu data ar gyfer cynlluniau amaeth-amgylcheddol nawr ac yn y dyfodol. Mae ail elfen o'r prosiect wedi cynhyrchu cofnod o gymeriad y ffermydd sy'n cynnwys yr adeiladau traddodiadol gan ddilyn y dull a osodwyd mewn dogfen ganllaw a gynhyrchwyd gan English Heritage. Roedd methodoleg gyffredinol wedi'i dyfeisio gan Ymddiriedolaeth Archeolegol Clwyd-Powys mewn astudiaeth beilot flaenorol, a chymhwyswyd hyn yn ddiweddarach i Dde Ynys Môn, y Carneddau ac Ardudwy mewn prosiectau blaenorol. Bydd yr adroddiad hwn yn canolbwyntio ar ffermdy hanesyddol yn ardal De Meirionnydd. Roedd y mwyafrif o'r ffermydd yn yr ardal hon yn cydymffurfio â chynlluniau cwrt rhydd neu gynlluniau gwasgaredig ynghyd â chyfran sylweddol o ffermydd cynllun llinellol ac allfffermydd un adeilad.*

### **Project summary**

*This project forms part of a pan-Wales initiative designed to create a set of GIS polygons of surviving traditional farm buildings in order to produce data for current and future agri-environmental schemes. A second element of the project has produced a record of the character of the farmsteads containing the traditional buildings following the approach laid out in a guidance document produced by English Heritage. An overall methodology had been devised by Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust in a previous pilot study, and this was later applied to Southern Anglesey, the Carneddau and Ardudwy in previous projects. This report will focus on historic farmstead in South Meirionnydd area. The majority of the farmsteads in this area conformed to loose courtyard plans or dispersed plans along with a significant proportion of linear plan farmsteads and single building outfarms.*



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The project was designed with the principal aim of producing polygons of traditional farm buildings that would inform management within the Glastir agri-environmental scheme. A program of polygonisation of features in farmland and woodland had previously been carried out by the Welsh Archaeological Trusts.

The repair of farm buildings as part of the Glastir scheme has been widespread. A large proportion of farms retain *traditional farm buildings*; a category defined by Glastir as buildings predating the end of the First World War. The current project aims to record buildings falling into this category thus providing a register of *traditional farm buildings* that may be eligible for Glastir grant-aid.

A pilot project was carried out by Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust in 2015/16 which examined an area in Radnorshire (CPAT Report No 1359). This allowed an efficient methodology to be formulated. The project was continued in Wrexham (CPAT Report No 1501) in 2016/17, North Ardudwy (GAT report No 1422) in 2017/18, South Anglesey (GAT report No 1478) in 2018/19, the Carneddau (GAT report 1502) in 2019/20 and Ardudwy (GAT report No 1585) in 2020/21.

Glastir is a sustainable land management scheme in Wales launched by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2012. Its goals include "combating climate change, improving water management and maintaining and enhancing biodiversity". A targeted element has been focussing on six areas of concern: soil carbon management, water quality, water quantity management, biodiversity, the historic environment and improved access. The scheme was initially funded by the Welsh Government and the European Union however Brexit has affected this funding stream.

The Agriculture (Wales) White Paper was published on 16 December 2020. The White Paper sets out proposals to replace the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and other EU agri-environment schemes with a single direct support scheme for farming, the *Sustainable Farming Scheme*. The paper contains little detail concerning the historic environment but includes the following statements establishing general principles

*"We propose the Bill should contain provisions establishing Sustainable Land Management as the overarching principle for future agricultural policy, including future support."*

*"The cultural importance of landscapes and archaeological or historical features adds another layer of meaning to the definition and implementation of SLM. Although landscape change is inevitable over time through natural processes, change brought about by SLM practices should not undermine the cultural value derived from individual features or the context provided by their surrounding landscape."*

The consultation period on the White Paper ended on the 26 March 2021 and a Policy Response was issued by the Welsh Government on the 21 September 2021 which stated that



*“subject to sufficient funding being provided by the UK Government, it is our intention to continue with the Basic Payment Scheme until 2023 to provide support for our farmers as we work together to transition to the Sustainable Farming Scheme.”*

*“Alongside this I am announcing extensions to Glastir Advanced, Commons and Organic contracts by two years, to December 2023.”*

A second element was added to the project in the form of a study of the character of farmsteads following a methodology developed by English Heritage (now Historic England). This aims to *“provide a consistent understanding of farmstead character at a landscape level, through recording the distribution, plan-type and degree of change seen between historic mapping and the present”* (Lake 2014 and Lake and Edwards 2017).



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### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

Pilot projects were carried out by Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust in 2015/16 and 2016/17. The rest of the Welsh Archaeological Trusts (WATs), including GAT started work on the project in 2017/18 in the form of limited pilot projects designed to develop and implement a consistent methodology for the identification and recording of historic farmsteads across Wales. A meeting was held in the CPAT offices before the project commenced. Abi McCulloch and Chris Martin described the methodology that they had developed for the polygonisation of buildings and Jeremy Lake, who had previously worked on the English Heritage farmstead characterisation project, presented a manual for recording historic farmstead character (Lake and Edwards 2017). It was recognised that the characterisation element was potentially the most time consuming element of project so this was streamlined and 14 different fields were identified as the core features that should be recorded. Jeremy Lake subsequently visited all of the WAT offices in order to provide guidance for the characterisation project.

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust agreed to carry out a pilot project covering an area of Northern Ardudwy in 2018. The methodology established by CPAT and Jeremy Lake was used and CPAT provided a template MapInfo Table for the characterisation process. It was, however, necessary to add an additional 18 fields of metadata to conform to Gwynedd Historic Environment's spatial data standards. All digitisation was carried out using MapInfo desktop geographic information system (GIS) and two tables were produced, G2496\_traditional\_farm\_buildings containing individual building polygons and G2496\_farmsteads containing the farmstead characterisation data.

The methodology established in the pilot project has been adopted by GAT for subsequent phases of the project. The current phase of the project produced characterisation for South Meirionnydd excluding the parts of Ardudwy that have already been surveyed.

#### 3.2 Digitisation

The data was derived from Epoch GIS registered versions of the Ordnance Survey 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (1900-1901) 25" to the mile maps for Anglesey. The 2<sup>nd</sup> edition maps were used because they were the closest to the end of the First World War cut-off point for the designation of traditional farm buildings by Glastir. These were overlaid with building polygons that were extracted from the *Topographic Area* layer of Mastermap 2012. These were used in a MapInfo workspace along with recent Next Perspectives Aerial photographic cover.

Any Mastermap 2012 polygons that corresponded to buildings on the 25 inch map were copied and pasted into the traditional\_farm\_buildings table. These were then manually cross referenced with existing HER data and any existing Primary Record Numbers (PRNs) were added to the table. Those buildings that were not already recorded in the HER were then allocated new PRNs. The rest of the standard HER data fields were then filled in for each entry. NGRs and X-Y coordinates were derived automatically from MapInfo. Other politico-geographic data was derived from existing MapInfo tables along with spatial correspondences to Cadw's listed buildings database.



The farmstead characterisation data was added to a second MapInfo table. The extent of each farmstead was defined by a single polygon drawn around the buildings and yards. Each farmstead was assigned a new PRN and data fields relating to layout and condition as defined in table 1 below were manually filled in. Additional metadata fields were added to the table to conform to Gwynedd Historic Environment Records spatial data standards.

**Farmstead Mapping Attribute Table**

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>PRN</b>                                      | Unique No.  | Unique reference number to fit with any existing data sets   |
| <b>Site Name</b>                                | Modern Name<br>(historic name)  | Modern farm name with historic name (if different) recorded in brackets  |
| <b>Classification<br/>Primary<br/>Attribute</b> | FARMSTEAD<br><br>OUTFARM  | Defined as a site with farmhouse and associated working buildings and areas for the working of a farm<br><br>Defined as a site (outfarm) or individual building range (field barn) remote from the farmstead |
| <b>PLAN TYPE</b>                                | This results from combination of Primary and Secondary Plan Attributes e.g. LC3 = Loose Courtyard with buildings to 3 sides of yard; RCmy = Regular Courtyard multi-yard plan |  |
| <b>Plan Type<br/>Primary<br/>Attribute</b>      | DISP<br>LC<br>LIN<br>LP<br>PAR<br>RC<br>ROW<br>SING<br>UNC  | Dispersed<br>Loose Courtyard<br>Linear<br>L-plan (attached house)<br>Parallel<br>Regular Courtyard<br>Row Plan<br>Single building (use for field barns etc. where there is no yard)<br>Uncertain             |



|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <b>Plan Type<br/>Secondary<br/>Attribute</b> | 1, 2, 3, 4<br><br>L3 or L4<br><br>L<br>u<br>e<br>ful<br>cl<br>dw<br>my<br>cov<br>d<br>y  | No. of sides to loose courtyard formed by <i>working</i> agricultural buildings<br>Yard with an L-plan range plus detached buildings to the third and/or fourth side of the yard (may be used with LC or RC dependent on overall character)<br>Regular Courtyard L-plan<br>Regular Courtyard U-plan<br>Regular Courtyard E-plan<br>Full Regular Courtyard plan<br>Cluster (Used with DISP)<br>Driftway (Used with DISP)<br>Multi-yard (Used with DISP or RC)<br>Covered yard forms an element of farmstead<br>Additional detached elements to main plan<br>Presence of small second yard with one main yard evident |
| <b>Tertiary<br/>Attribute</b>                | Codes as per Secondary Attribute table e.g. LC1d = Loose Courtyard with building to one side of yard with additional detached buildings; DISPMYL = Dispersed multi-yard group including a prominent Regular L-plan within it |   |
| <b>Survival</b>                              | EXT<br>ALT<br>ALTS<br>DEM<br>HOUS<br>LOST  | Extant – no apparent alteration<br>Partial Loss – less than 50% change<br>Significant Loss – more than 50% alteration<br>Site remains but no OS 2nd edition buildings legible<br>Farmhouse only survives<br>No evident trace of farmstead/outfarm site  |
| <b>Sheds</b>                                 | SITE<br><br>SIDE   | Large modern sheds on site of historic farmstead – may have destroyed historic buildings or may obscure them<br>Large modern sheds to side of historic farmstead – suggests farmstead probably still in agricultural use  |
| <b>Farmhouse<br/>Position</b>                | ATT<br>DET<br>UNC  | Attached to agricultural range<br>Detached<br>Uncertain (cannot identify which is farmhouse)  |
| <b>Confidence</b>                            | H<br>M<br>L  | High<br>Medium<br>Low   |
| <b>Area</b>                                  | Rapid polygonal capture of the area of the farmstead, capable of analysis after an area mapping project has completed  |   |
| <b>Notes</b>                                 | Free text field to add notes relating to the character or identification of a record or confidence score   |   |

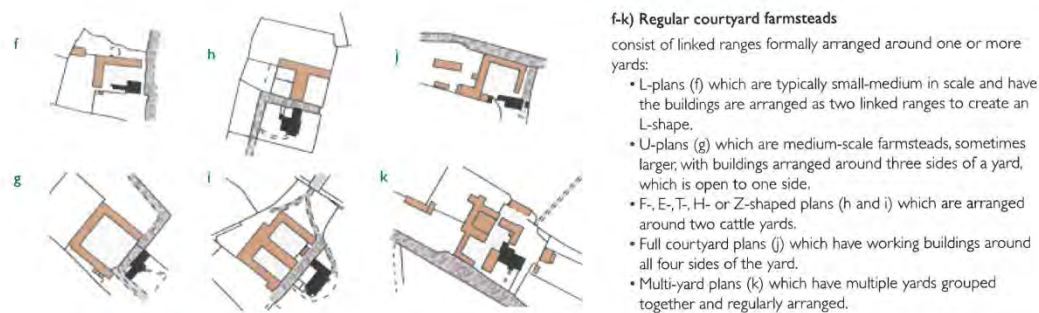
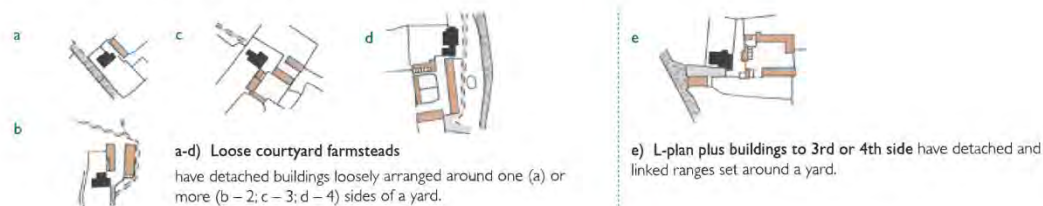


## Farmstead yard layout plans

### NATIONAL FARMSTEADS CHARACTER STATEMENT

These drawings show the full range of farmstead plans which are encountered across England.

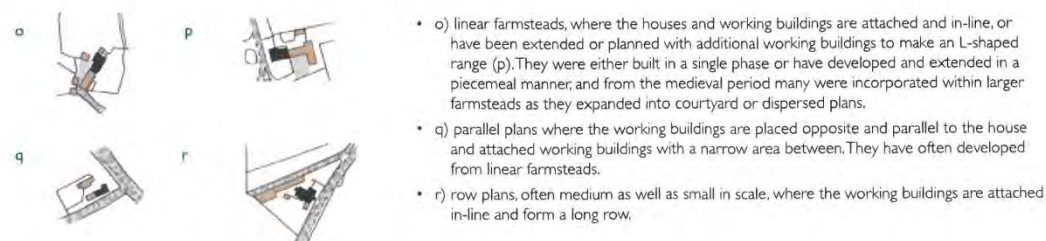
**Courtyard plans** are the most common forms of farmstead layout, where the working buildings are arranged around one or more yards. The largest courtyard farms are found on high-status sites, estate farms and in the arable vales, wolds and downlands of England, and the smallest in stock-rearing and dairying areas. Cattle yards either developed as areas for treading straw from the threshing barn into manure, or – especially in upland areas – an area for moving cattle and storing the manure. They may have scatters of other farm buildings relating to routes and tracks, usually cart sheds and other ancillary buildings.



**Dispersed plans** have no focal yard area and the working buildings are dispersed along a routeway or within the boundary of the farmstead. They are concentrated in upland and wood pasture landscapes including areas close to common land for holding stock. They vary greatly in scale and are often bisected by routeways and public footpaths.



**Linear and other farmstead types** are most closely associated with upland and common-edge farmsteads.





The majority of the fields describe variations in the layout of the farm. The fields were filled using the range of farmstead plans identified in the National Farmsteads Character Statement (Lake 2014, 10).

The completed tables were submitted to the Historic Environment Record at Gwynedd Archaeological Trust.

### **3.3 Fieldwork**

In previous phases of the project a small amount of targeted fieldwork was included in the work programme. This was designed to assess the accuracy of the desktop survey by visiting selected farms and to record any regional architectural characteristics. A small number of farmsteads were visited after the completion of the desk-based work. 4 farmsteads were visited, with all appearing to be the same plan as seen during the desk-based assessment (Plates 1-6).



## 4. RESULTS

### *4.1 Study area*

South Meirionnydd is a coastal and mountainous region of Wales characterised by the urban districts of Barmouth, Dolgellau, and Tywyn, and the rural district of Dolgellau. There are three Historic Landscape Characterisation areas within the study area, Dolgellau (Gw 13), Mawddach (Gw 14) and Dysnni (Gw 17). Meirionnydd is mostly a highland agricultural county with settlements and enclosed fields confined to the valleys, situated between steep mountain ridges and hill tops. Rough grazing does take place on the higher slopes but there is not much evidence for long term occupation in these areas.

Dolgellau, situated at the confluence of two rivers, developed as the main agricultural market, assize, and county administrative centre of Meirionnydd. The woollen and tanning industries were an important part of the local economy and prospered during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Increased agricultural demand resulted in the founding of the Merioneth Agricultural Society in 1801 and the reassessment of agricultural land usage. In 1810 an Act of Parliament permitted the enclosure of common land with long stone walls creating a network of large rectilinear fields from the older irregular smaller enclosures.

This year's survey covered 770 square kilometres and added 1848 building polygons within 464 farmsteads and outfarms. This included full characterisation of the farmsteads within all 25" map squares that fall within or partly within the South Meirionnydd boundary area (Figure 01).

### *4.2 Attribute analysis and distribution*

Loose courtyard plans made up 33.8% of farmsteads i.e. with detached buildings arranged around one or more sides of a yard (Figure 02). Of these, 16% had working buildings on one side, 45% had buildings on two sides, 18% on three sides, and 1% on four sides. 16% of the loose courtyard farmsteads had a L-shaped range with additional buildings to the third or fourth side.

Dispersed farmyard plans accounted for 33.4% of the farmsteads i.e. farms with no focal yard (Figure 03). Of these, 82% were dispersed clusters with the buildings spread around the boundary of the steading, 15% were dispersed driftways dominated by the routeways to them and 3% had multiple working yards.

Linear farmyard plans made up 10.6% of farmsteads (Figure 04). Of these the majority (73%) had additional detached elements to the farmstead. These farms were generally smaller in size with most ranging between c. 0.03 – 0.30 hectares.

Regular courtyard plans accounted for only 7.3% of the farmsteads within the study area (Figure 05). 43% of these were U-shaped, 15% were L-shaped, 15% were full courtyards, 9% were L-shaped with additional elements to the 3<sup>rd</sup> side of the yard, 9% were multiyard farms, 3% were E-shaped, 3% were T-shaped and 3% were L-shaped with additional buildings to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> side.



Other farmstead layouts were recorded although all were uncommon. These comprised single buildings (5.8%, Figure 06), L-plans (5.2%, Figure 07), parallel plans (3.4%, Figure 08), and row plans (0.4%, Figure 09). A total of 39 of the 464 farmsteads (8.4%) were outfarms i.e. a building or a range of buildings remote from the main farmstead. These mostly (69%) comprised a single barn with a yard.

The main concentrations of farmsteads are along the eastern coastal plain and on the lower west-facing hillslopes below the upland grazing. The farmstead distribution extends into the uplands. Here the farms are smaller, somewhat dispersed in nature and often have one or two accompanying outfarms, which mark the upper extent of the current settlement pattern. There are extensive areas of the remote uplands that contain no farmsteads or outfarms (Figure 01).

#### ***4.3 Survival and condition***

Survival and condition were determined from the mapping and aerial photographic evidence. The data for the converted field was derived from aerial photography and in some cases a brief Google search of the place name, or estate agents' property information. This approach gave a reliable estimate of the general survival of buildings.

The survival of farm buildings shown on the 25" map was generally high although 5% could be seen on aerial photographs as fully or partially ruined. The survey shows that 20% of farmsteads were more or less intact with no significant loss of structures and 60% had less than 50% alteration. 19% of historic farmsteads had greater than 50% alteration.

8% of the farmsteads have been converted, mostly into holiday accommodation. Some farms have been surrounded by caravan parks and it is unlikely that any farming activities still take place on site. However, in other locations working farms have diversified and use some of the land for caravans or camping.

Most farmsteads that have been converted are along the coastline or near popular tourist destinations. These have predominantly been reused as holiday lets or as camp and caravan sites. This is illustrated particularly well on the coastline at Towyn where the farms are now almost entirely surrounded by caravan parks or new housing developments (Figure 10).



## 5. DISCUSSION

### *5.1 The digitisation process*

The project followed the methodology established in 2017-18 thus ensuring an efficient workflow and making sure that outcomes were compatible with the Gwynedd HER. The digitisation of the individual farm buildings is a relatively swift process. The input table contains 52 fields but only 3 require manual entry and the rest can be batch filled at the end of the project. This process was the main purpose of the project.

The farmstead characterisation was added as a secondary element but is more complex and time consuming than the digitisation of individual buildings. The input table contains 34 fields but crucially 12 of these fields require manual input and the process includes reference to aerial photographs, the existing HER, Cadw listed building records and RCAHMW records. The categorisation process requires confirmation of the current status and condition of the buildings, the identification of the farmhouse, and the allocation of the plan to one of 8 basic plan types and 18 sub-plan types.

The main categories of farmstead plans as defined in the Historic Farmsteads manual (Lake and Edwards, 2017) proved to be readily identifiable although smaller more irregular farmsteads could sometimes be interpreted in more than one way. It was in many cases possible to reliably identify secondary and tertiary attributes such as multi-yards, drift-ways, clusters and numbers of buildings around courtyards. Some of the other attributes seem to require more subjective judgement and could be regarded as being on a continuum of loose court yard plans.

### *5.2 Conclusions*

The farmsteads within the South Meirionnydd survey are typically small and irregular with a high proportion of associated outfarms consisting of a single barn with accompanying yard. The presence of barns in fields some distance from the main farmsteads is a characteristic of the Meirionnydd area. This pattern is not seen in upland areas in northern Gwynedd such as the Carneddau. They appear to be late 18th or early 19th century in date and although some remain in use, many of them are now in a ruinous condition, particularly in the more remote upland locations.

Much of the settlement in South Meirionnydd is on the northwest-facing and southeast-facing slopes between the coastal plain and the mountains of the Rhinogydd. Here the settlement pattern is characterised by farms set along route ways into the uplands and probably has its roots in transhumance farming of the medieval hafod and hendre system. The practice of transhumance gradually declined between the 16<sup>th</sup> century (or earlier) and the 19<sup>th</sup> century and many of the hafodydd on the upland margins developed into permanent separate farmsteads some of which are still occupied. Place name evidence allows some of these farmsteads to be identified e.g. Hafod-y-Fedw (PRN 93,314) which is now a National Trust Holiday Cottage. Other hafodydd may have continued in use as outfarms. Many of the earlier and more remote hafodydd associated were abandoned and can be seen preserved in the uplands as long hut settlements. The settlement pattern in South Meirionnydd in many ways



resembles that of the upland margins of the Carneddau (Jones, 2020) with small loose courtyard farms predominating.

The influence of large estates is less than in the Carneddau and Anglesey study areas with many farms having their origins in earlier settlement patterns that extended into the uplands from townships in the fertile lowlands. This was mostly achieved by encroachment onto the commons and Crown lands. Wealthy landowners benefitted most from the enclosures, but the poor-quality land was not always suitable for amalgamation into large farms. These processes resulted in a landscape containing large numbers of smallholdings and tenanted farms.

The farmsteads of South Meirionnydd are an important part of a distinctive landscape characterised by extensive tracts of rough grazing. The poor agricultural land has resulted in a landscape of small farmsteads that has developed over many centuries.



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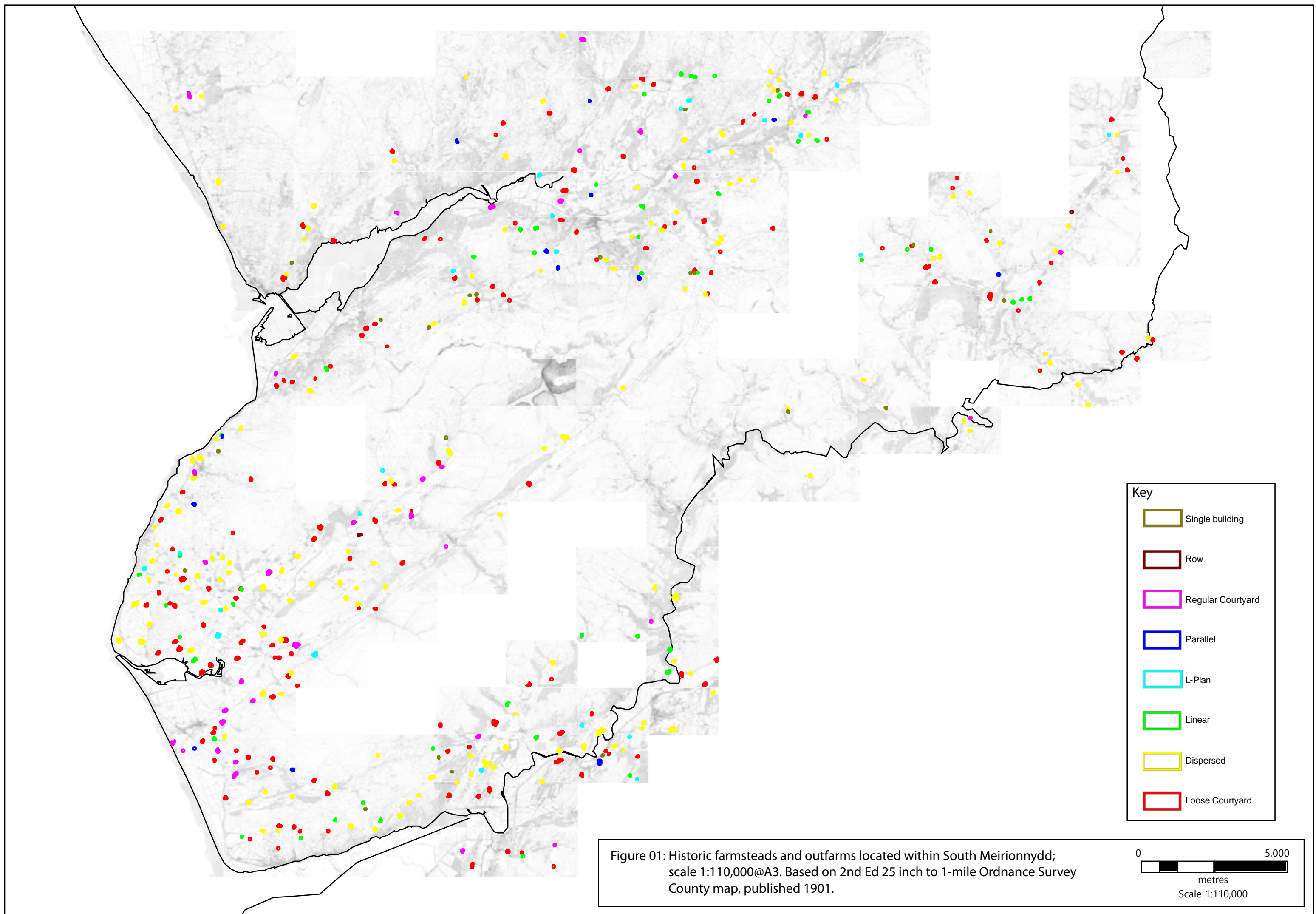


Figure 01: Historic farmsteads and outfarms located within South Meirionnydd; scale 1:110,000@A3. Based on 2nd Ed 25 inch to 1-mile Ordnance Survey County map, published 1901.



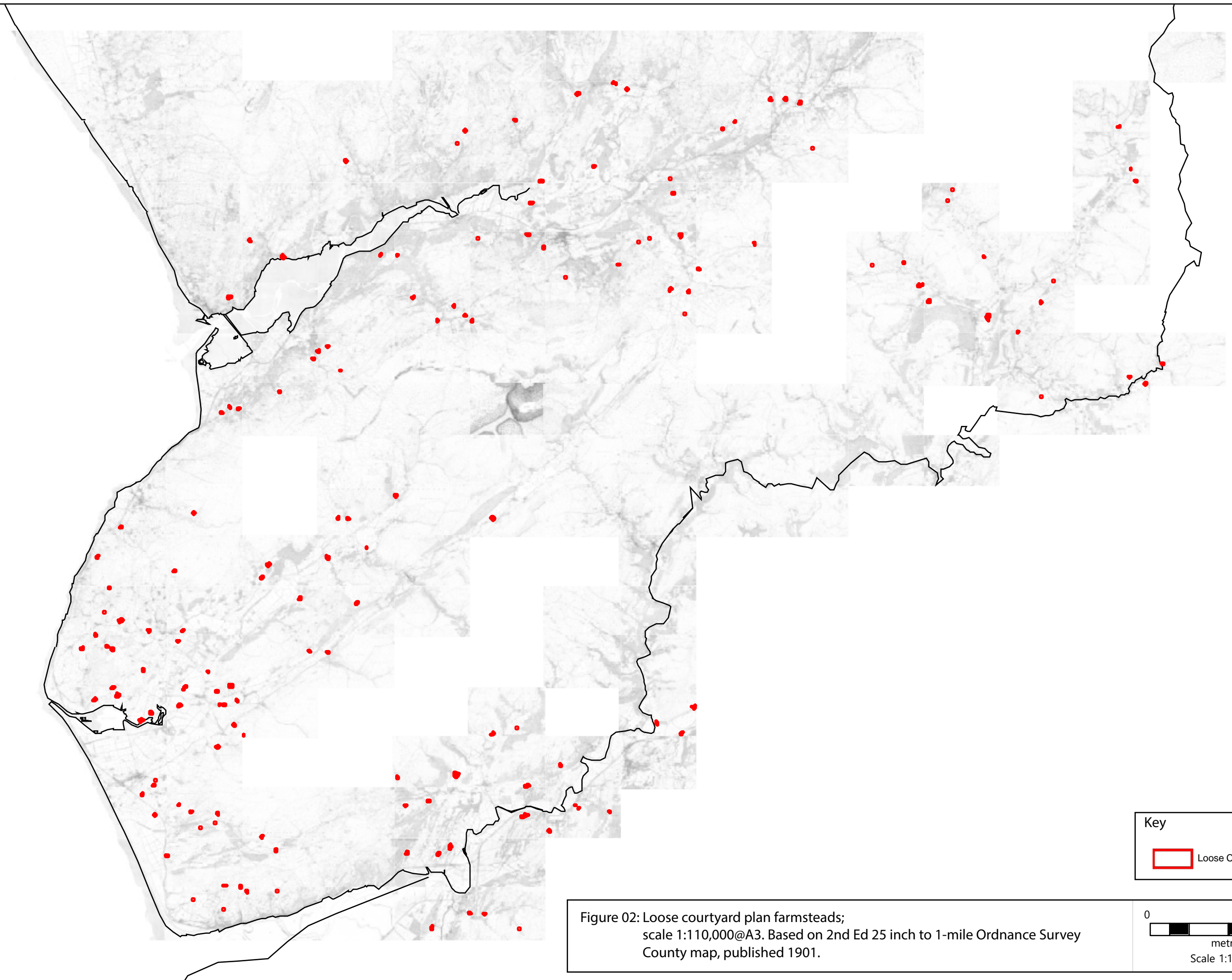
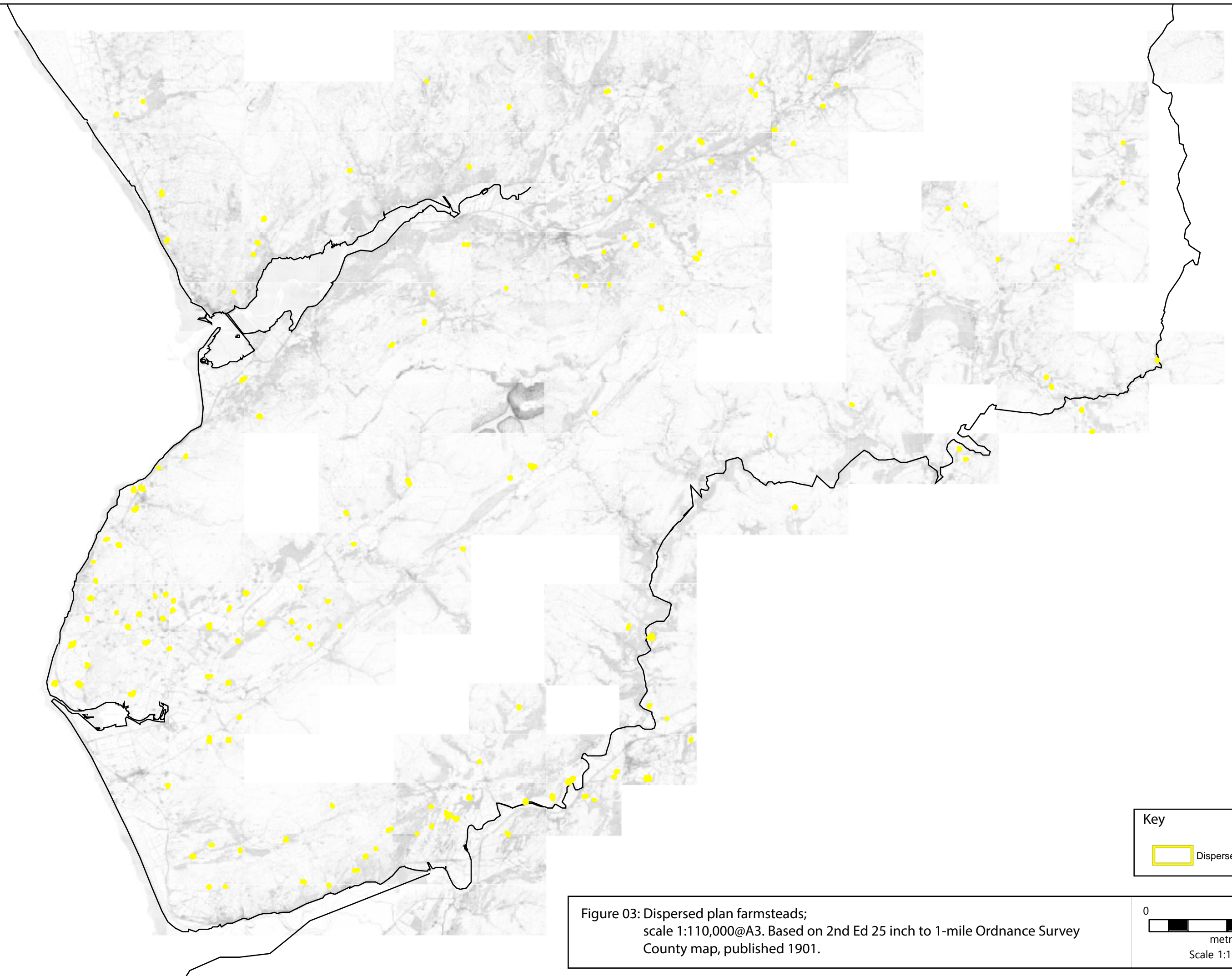


Figure 02: Loose courtyard plan farmsteads;  
scale 1:110,000@A3. Based on 2nd Ed 25 inch to 1-mile Ordnance Survey  
County map, published 1901.

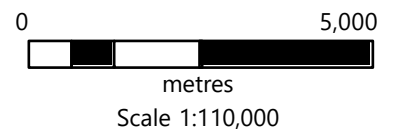




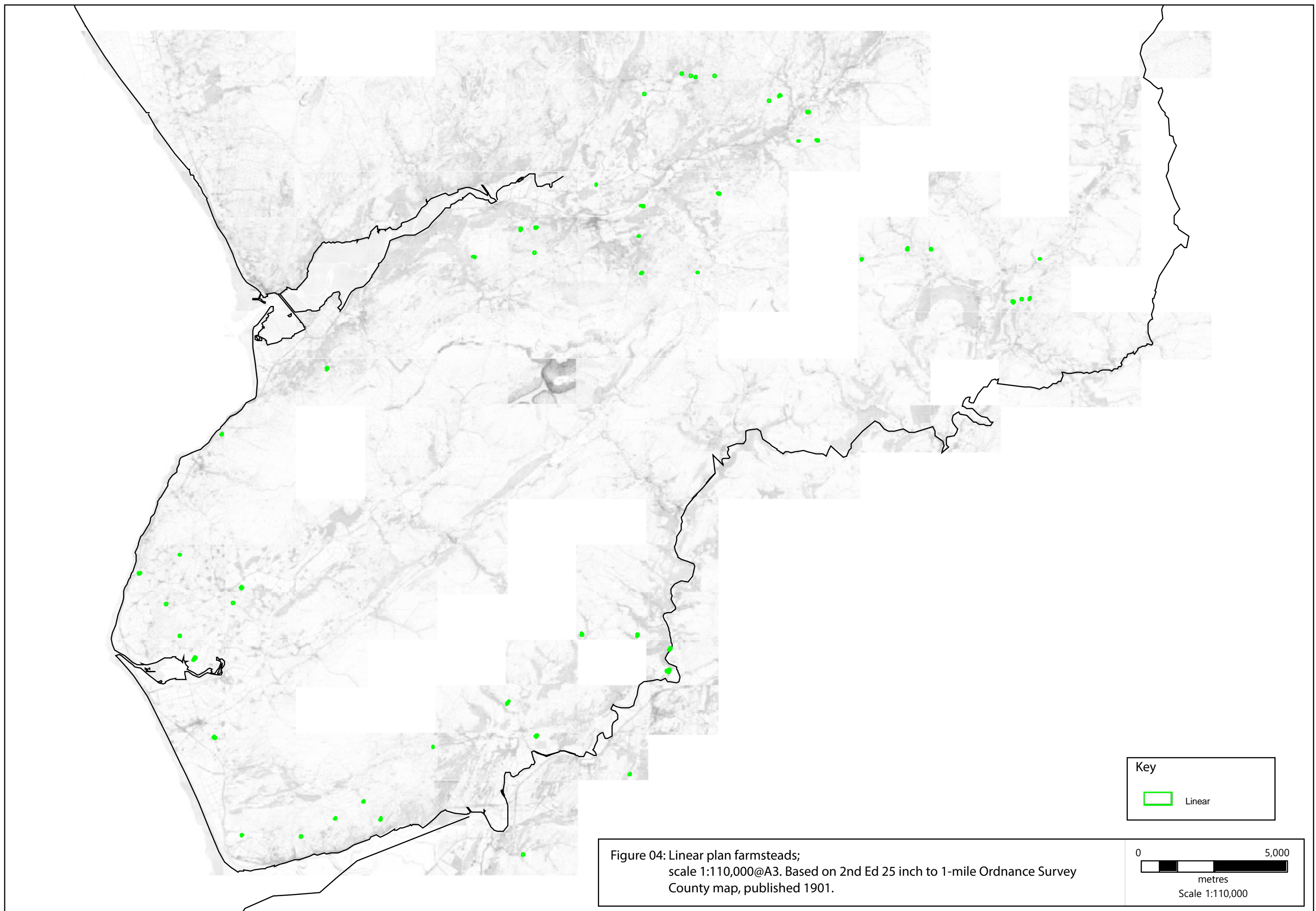
Key

 Dispersed

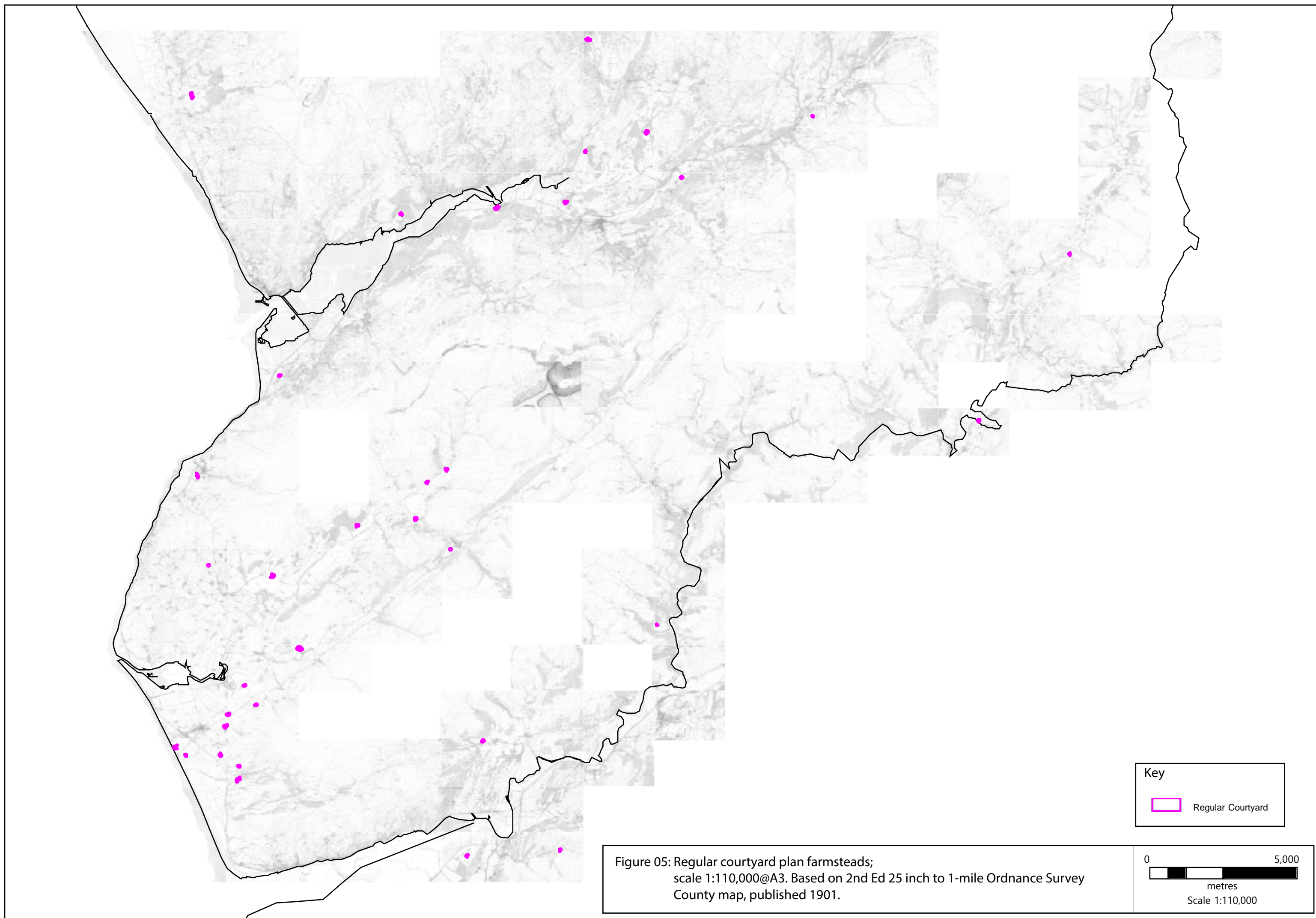
Figure 03: Dispersed plan farmsteads;  
scale 1:110,000@A3. Based on 2nd Ed 25 inch to 1-mile Ordnance Survey  
County map, published 1901.



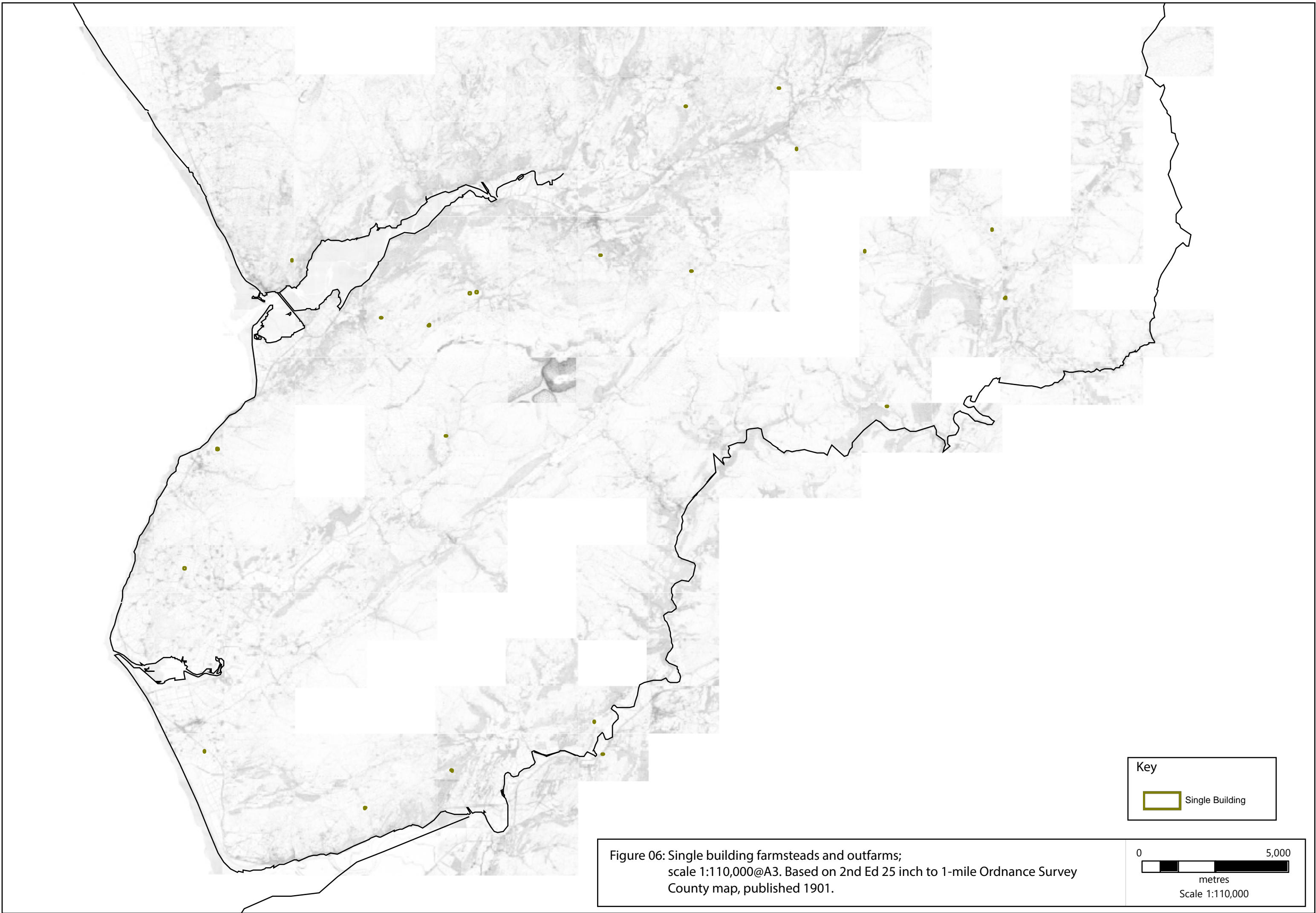




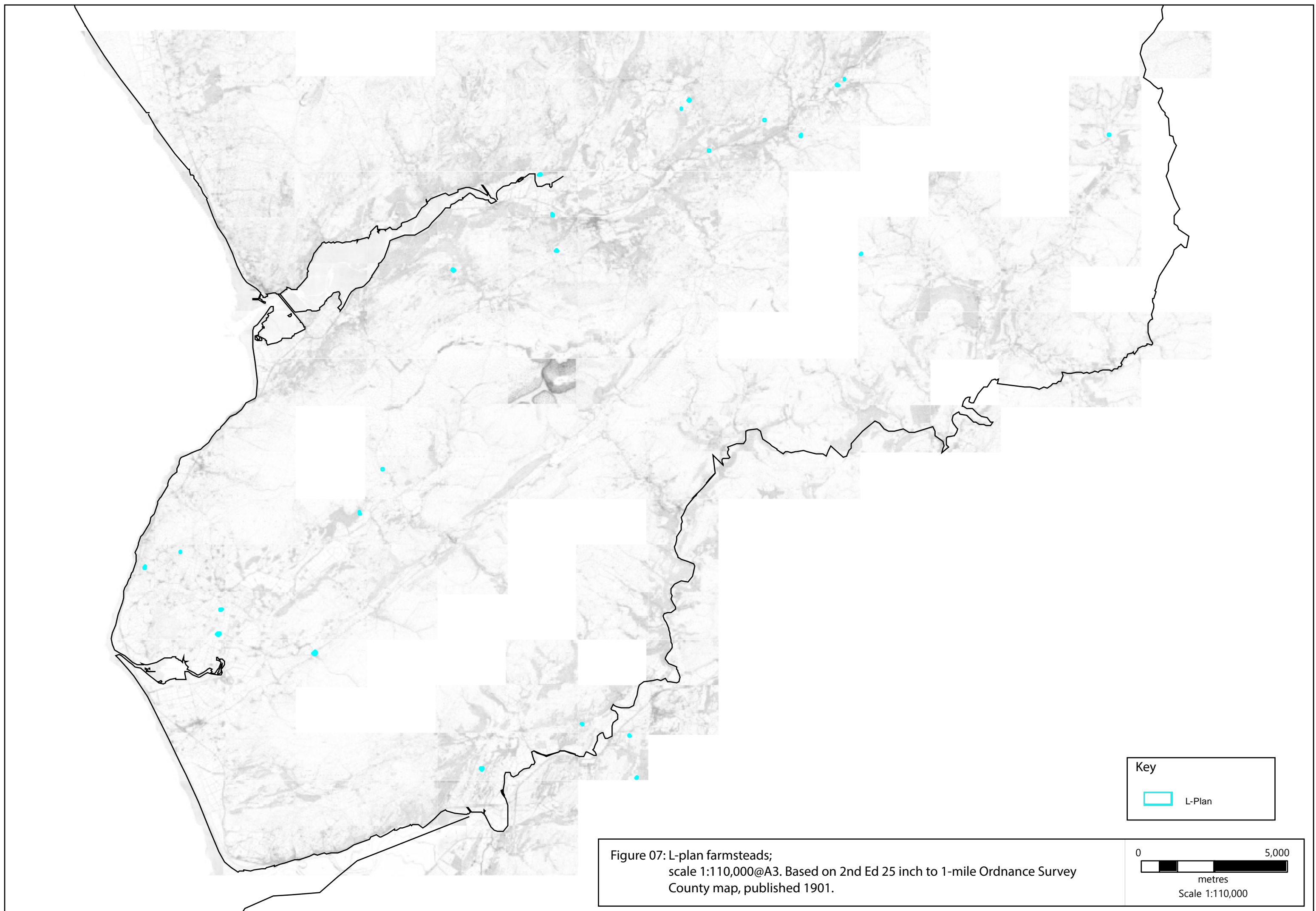




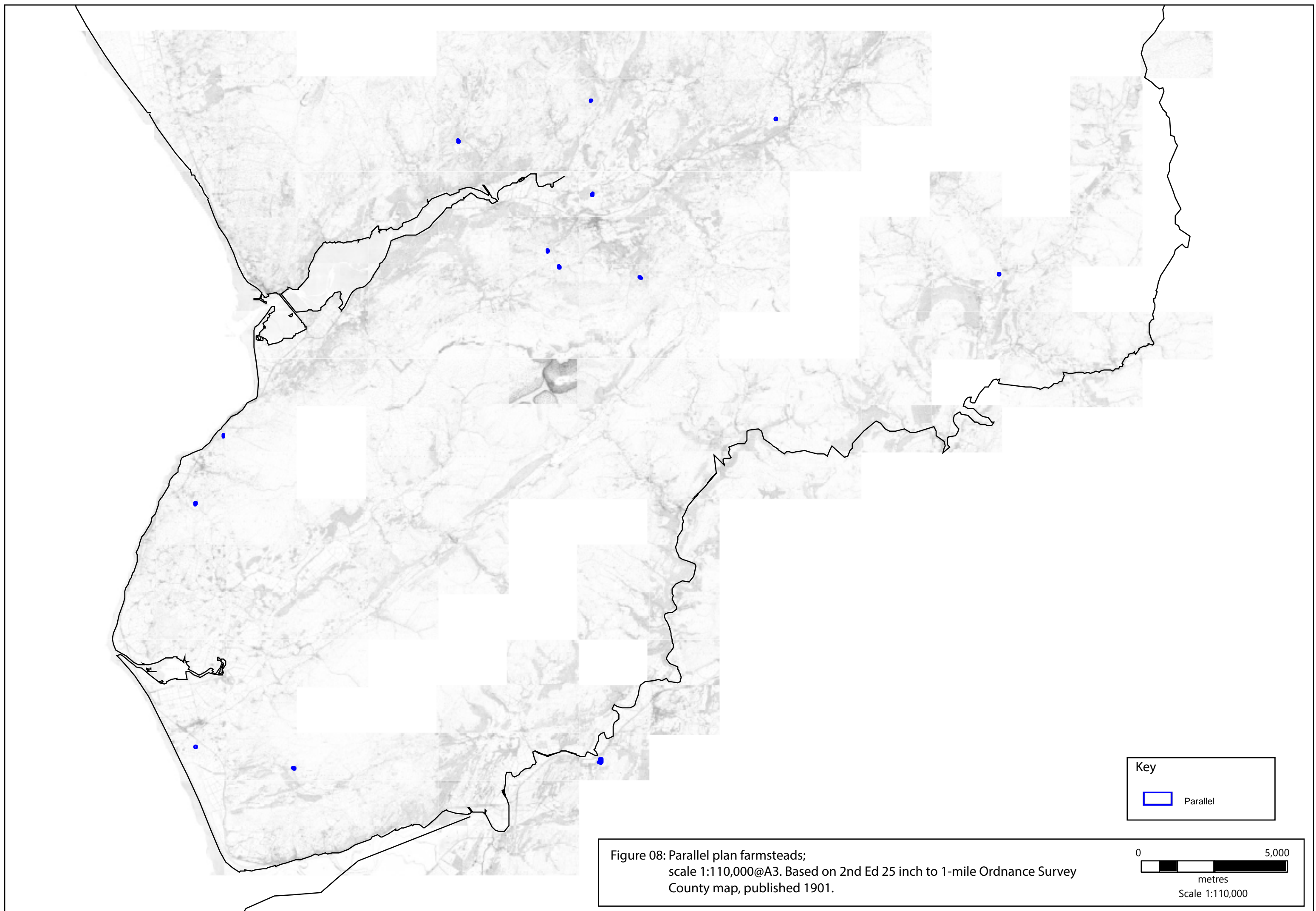














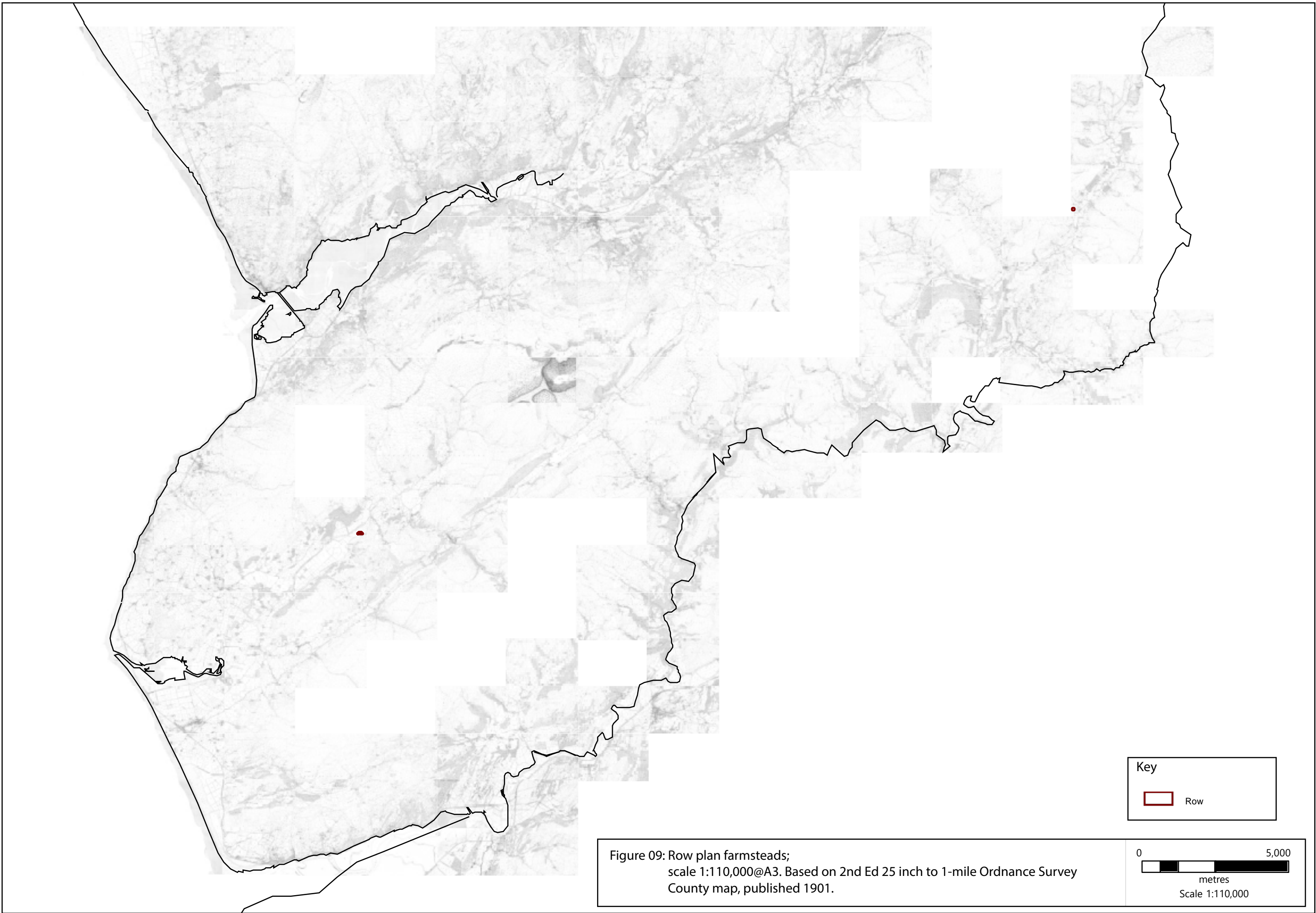




Figure 09: Row plan farmsteads;  
scale 1:110,000@A3. Based on 2nd Ed 25 inch to 1-mile Ordnance Survey  
County map, published 1901.

Key

 Row

0  5,000

metres

Scale 1:110,000





Figure 10: Development of caravan parks near Towyn, Next Perspectives Aerial Photography.

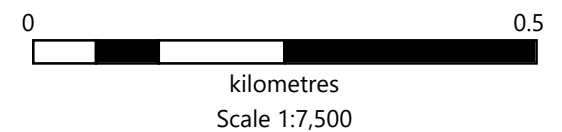






Plate 01: Rhyd-Wen L-plan farmstead, view of south facing elevation of L-shaped range  
(archive\_image: G2496\_2022\_04)



Plate 02: Rhyd-Wen L-plan farmstead, view of detached building to the east  
(archive\_image: G2496\_2022\_05)





Plate 03: Penmaen-Ucha Farm Regular courtyard, view from NE corner of courtyard  
(archive\_image: G2496\_2022\_09)



Plate 04: Penmaen-Ucha Farm Regular courtyard, view looking into courtyard from NE entrance  
(archive\_image: G2496\_2022\_10)





Plate 05: Fanner Farm Loose courtyard farmstead, view of Fanner Farmhouse and Cymmer Abbey Farmhouse (archive\_image: G2496\_2022\_15)



Plate 06: Fanner Farm Loose courtyard farmstead, view of working buildings (archive\_image: G2496\_2022\_14)





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