
Historic Landscape Characterisation

Vale of Dolgellau



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Front cover: View looking towards Foel Offrwm, with one of the distinctive architectural arches of the Nannau estate in the foreground.

"Dolgelly is a hard little mountain town. Its houses are made of the mountains. They look, like Highland houses, as though they were made to endure forever. And right at the back of the square the slopes of Cader Idris lift themselves to the clouds, bright green and sage green and brown, scarred by gullies, cut across with thin mountain paths"

H V Morton, In Search of Wales, 1932

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Part A

General information

Project summary

About this study

The purpose of the present study is to provide a fuller and more detailed characterisation of the *Vale of Dolgellau* historic landscape area. For the sake of consistency with previous historic landscape characterisation projects, and with the recently-completed *LANDMAP* exercise, some of the character areas identified by this study have been extended or reduced to their logical limits. The present study therefore covers an area which is not precisely contiguous with the historic landscape area defined in the Register of Landscapes of Special Historic Interest (map 2). The *Vale of Dolgellau* historic landscape area remains that defined in the register.

Brief historical background

There is surprisingly little evidence for prehistoric activity in the area (see section 6.3 below), the principal sites being the two stone-built hillforts on Foel Offrwm (area 12) and a number of cairns on the north-facing slopes of Cadair Idris (area 17).

In the early Roman period (late first to early second centuries), the fort at Brithdir was linked by legionary army routes to Llanfor and Tomen-y-Mur (area 15). Later, drovers' routes from Arduwy and the south-west also led through the area. The name of the town, Dolgellau ('Meadow of the Cells') (area 01), may refer to the pens used for herding animals or to the presence of the medieval Cistercian abbey at Cymer on the south bank of the Mawddach (area 06). The area is also intricately associated with the estate of Nannau, home of one of the most influential Welsh families, the Nanneys (area 11, and section 6.5). In the 17th century, another religious community, the Quakers, was important in the town and its surrounding area (section 6.10). However, persecution caused most of them to leave for a new life in Pennsylvania.

Dolgellau has also had an important administrative history. The Welsh Prince, Owain Glyndŵr, held an Assembly in the town in 1404, and Dolgellau developed as the main agricultural market, assize and County administrative centre for Meirionnydd for the medieval and post-medieval periods.

Various industries have contributed to the character of Dolgellau and have left their mark on the names of buildings and roads in the town and in the intriguingly complex pattern of streets and small squares to the south of the river, unique in Wales. A valuable woollen industry, specialising in flannel, flourished in the 18th and 19th centuries, and until quite recently tanning was an important occupation (section 6.8). The gold and copper mined in the hills to the north and west of the town employed over 500 miners at the end of the 19th century (*ibid*). Goods produced in the area were taken down river to Barmouth for sea transport, or inland to Shrewsbury (via Bala).

The architectural character of Dolgellau is dominated by the grey dolerite and slate buildings, of which over 200 are listed as of historical or architectural interest. Since the 18th century visitors have come to the area to explore the scenic landscape, particularly of Cadair Idris and the Mawddach (GAT 2004), and to savour its historic past and its natural history (section 6.10).

1 Preface

Natural forces and human activity acting together over the last six thousand years have combined to produce a landscape of great beauty and variety in Wales, a national asset that is essential both to our national identity and to our individual 'sense of place' and well-being. The imprint of diverse human activities on the landscape is everywhere to be seen, from the enigmatic stone monuments of the prehistoric period and the magnificent castles and abbeys of the medieval period to quite commonplace and typical features like field boundaries, that can often be of great age. But the landscape is more than just attractive scenery or a record of the past; it also provides a place for us to live, work and sustain ourselves, through farming, forestry, tourism and so on - processes that all shape, and will continue to shape, the landscape.

Recognising and raising awareness of the importance and wealth of the historic fabric of the landscape has been the central theme and message of the (non-statutory) *Register of Landscapes of Historic Interest in Wales*, the first part of which, covering thirty-six 'outstanding' landscapes, was published in January 1998. This is being compiled as a joint initiative between Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments, the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), working in collaboration with the four Welsh Archaeological Trusts, the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales and the Welsh unitary authorities.

The Historic Landscapes Register provides a first-step national overview of the historic content of the Welsh landscape. The next step, so essential to the process of informing the way in which aspects of the historic landscape may be managed, is to make available more detailed information about the character of this landscape at a more local level. This is achieved through a process known as historic landscape characterisation, which has been developed in Wales jointly by Cadw, CCW and the Welsh Archaeological Trusts. The process involves the identification of areas of historic character which may be geographically defined and mapped, as determined by the range and distribution of surviving archaeological and historical features and the main types of historic land use patterns or historic 'themes' that have shaped the area. The key historic characteristics of the area are then identified, along with recommendations for their positive management.

This report is one in a series of landscape characterisation exercises being undertaken by the Welsh Archaeological Trusts with grant aid from Cadw. These studies will initially concentrate on those areas identified in the Historic Landscapes Register, although it is accepted that the whole of the Welsh landscape can be said to be, in one way or another, historic. Information is being prepared in a form which is compatible with CCW's landscape assessment and decision-making methodology, known as *LANDMAP*. It will be made available to a wide range of organisations and will feed into various initiatives to protect and manage the Welsh countryside, most notably the Tir Gofal agri-environment scheme. It is also seen as making a particularly important contribution to raising awareness and heightening a feeling of local distinctiveness.

The Historic Landscapes Register and these characterisation exercises fully acknowledge the dynamic and evolving nature of the landscape. They promote the view that protecting the legacy of the past in the landscape is not to be achieved by preventing change or fossilising the landscape but rather by informing the process of change, creating tomorrow's landscapes without necessarily sacrificing the best of yesterday's.

1 Rhagair

Mae'r grymoedd naturiol a'r gweithgaredd dynol a fu'n gweithredu ar y cyd dros y chwe mil o flynyddoedd diwethaf wedi cyfrannu at y broses o gynhyrchu tirwedd o harddwch ac amrywiaeth hynod yng Ngymru, ased cenedlaethol sy'n hanfodol i ni o ran ein hunaniaeth genedlaethol a hefyd o ran ein lles a'n 'hymdeimlad o berthyn i le' unigol. Gellir gweld ymhobman yr amrywiaeth a'r olion a adawyd ar y tirwedd gan weithgaredd dynol, o henebion cerrig enigmatig y cyfnod cynhanesyddol a chestyll ac abatai gwych y cyfnod canoloesol, i'r nodweddion eithaf cyffredin a nodweddiadol fel ffiniau caeau a all yn aml fod yn hen iawn. Ond nid dim ond golygyfeydd deniadol neu gofnod o'r gorffennol yn unig yw'r tirwedd; mae hefyd yn darparu lle i ni fyw, gweithio a chynnal ein hunain ynddo, drwy gyfrwng amaeth, coedwigaeth, twristiaeth ac ati, oll yn brosesau sy'n llunio, ac a fydd yn parhau i lunio'r tirwedd.

Bu cydnabod a chodi ymwybyddiaeth o bwysigrwydd a chyfoeth ffabrig hanesyddol y tirwedd yn thema ac yn neges ganolog y gofrestr anstatudol, *Cofrestr O Dirweddau O Ddiddordeb Hanesyddol Eithriadol Yng Nghymru*, y cyhoeddwyd y rhan gyntaf ohoni, sy'n cwmpasu trideg chwech o dirweddau 'eithriadol' ym mis Ionawr 1998. Caiff y Gofrestr ei llunio fel menter ar y cyd rhwng Cadw, Cyngor Cefn Gwlad Cymru a'r Cyngor Rhyngwladol ar Henebion a Safleoedd (ICOMOS) sy'n gweithio mewn cydweithrediad a phedair Ymddiriedolaeth Archeolegol Cymru, y Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru ac awdurdodau unedol Cymru.

Y Gofrestr o Dirweddau o Ddiddordeb Hanesyddol yw'r cam cyntaf, trosolwg cenedlaethol o gynnwys hanesyddol tirwedd Cymru. Y cam nesaf, mor hanfodol i'r broses o lywio'r modd y gellir rheoli agweddau ar y tirwedd cenedlaethol, yw trefnu bod gwybodaeth fwy manwl ar gael ynglyn a chymeriad y tirwedd hwn ar lefel fwy lleol. Cyflawnir hyn drwy broses a elwir yn nodweddiad tirweddau hanesyddol a ddatblygwyd yng Nghymru ar y cyd a Cadw, Cyngor Cefn Gwlad Cymru ac Ymddiriedolaethau Archeolegol Cymru. Golyga hyn nodi ardaloedd o gymeriad hanesyddol y gellir eu diffinio a'u mapio'n ddaearyddol, yn ol yr hyn a benderfynir gan ystod a dosbarthiad y nodweddion archeolegol a hanesyddol sy'n goroesi a'r prif fathau o batrymau defnydd tir hanesyddol neu 'thema' hanesyddol sydd wedi llunio'r ardal. Nodir nodweddion hanesyddol allweddol yr ardal felly ynghyd ag argymhellion ar gyfer eu rheoli'n gadarnhaol.

Mae'r adroddiad hwn yn un o gyfres o ymarferion nodweddiad tirweddau hanesyddol yr ymgwymerir ag ef gan Ymddiriedolaethau Archeolegol Cymru gyda chymorth grant gan Cadw. Bydd yr astudiaethau hyn yn canolbwyntio yn y lle cyntaf ar yr ardaloedd hynny a nodwyd yn y Gofrestr O Ddiddordeb Hanesyddol, er y caiff ei dderbyn bod modd disgrifio tirwedd Cymru gyfan, mewn un ffordd neu'r llall, fel un hanesyddol. Mae gwybodaeth yn cael ei pharatoi ar ffurf sy'n cydweddu a methodoleg asesu tirweddau a gwneud penderfyniadau Cyngor Cefn Gwlad Cymru, sef *LANDMAP*. Bydd ar gael i ystod eang o sefydliadau a chaiff ei fwydo i fentrau amrywiol er mwyn diogelu a rheoli cefn gwlad Cymru, yn bennaf y cynllun agri-amgylcheddol sef, Tir Gofal. Caiff ei weld hefyd yn gwneud cyfraniad arbennig o bwysig i'r broses o godi ymwybyddiaeth a dwysau'r ymdeimlad o arbenigrwydd lleol.

Cydnabyddia'r Gofrestr O Dirweddau O Ddiddordeb Hanesyddol a'r ymarferion nodweddiad hyn yn llawn natur ddeinamig y tirwedd sy'n parhau i esblygu. Hyrwyddant y farn mai nid trwy rwystro newid neu ffosileiddio'r tirwedd y mae diogelu treftadaeth y gorffennol yn y tirwedd, ond yn hytrach drwy lywio'r broses o newid, gan greu tirweddau'r dyfodol heb o anghenraid aberthu tirweddau gorau'r gorffennol.

2 Background and acknowledgements

The study area

The area which forms the focus of this work encompasses the whole of the area of the Vale of Dolgellau which has been identified on the *Register of Landscapes of Outstanding Historic Interest in Wales* by Cadw, CCW and ICOMOS, HLW(Gw)13 (Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments, 1998, p 117).

The study area is situated in the modern county of Gwynedd, and the historic county of Meirionnydd. It stretches from the upper reaches of the Mawddach estuary at Penmaenpool in the west to Brithdir in the east; and from Bryniau Glo in the north to the top of Cadair Idris in the south. It includes a variety of different terrains and habitats, and of different historic landscape types, such as open mountain tops and slopes, wooded valley sides, low-grade agricultural land and nucleated settlements. It is centred on the ancient and prosperous town of Dolgellau, and includes a number of outlying small settlements such as Brithdir, Llanelltyd and Llanfachraeth. It is particularly noted for its associations with the woollen industry, the Quaker movement and the (more recent) growth of tourism.

Methodology

A Mapinfo 7.5 workspace was created and the Register area was digitised (see map 2). The Regional Historic Environment Record (HER), held and maintained by GAT, was interrogated against this polygon, and the recently-completed *LANDMAP* polygonised data was also cross-referenced: all areas were examined against modern Ordnance Survey (OS) raster (1:10,000) and vector (LandLine) map-bases.

Vertical aerial photographs taken in 1992 (CCW Geoscan 1992 run 40 15-20; run 41 199-205; and parts of run 43 12-18 and run 44 248-255) were examined, although unfortunately many of the relevant photographs were not available for examination. The *LANDMAP* areas already defined were subsequently updated, and a programme of fieldwork was able to finalise the details of the extent of the character areas.

As part of the historic landscape characterisation process a total of 17 historic landscape character areas was defined (see map 2), representing discrete geographical areas of broadly consistent historic character represented physically by a dominant land use or form of settlement, for example, informed by the datasets noted above, or by historical associations (Cadw & CCW 2003). The character areas are primarily intended as a means of describing rather than classifying the historic elements of the landscape.

The study has been primarily desk-based, drawing upon information in the regional HER, readily-available aerial photographic and cartographical sources and readily-available published and non-published sources. Original fieldwork was undertaken to test the validity of the desk-based assessment and to provide ground-based photography. Original aerial photography was not possible.

Presentation

The results of the study are presented here in three sections. The first section contains general information relating to the concepts behind, and the processes of, historic landscape characterisation in general: this has been updated from reports on previous exercises. In the second part of the report, the first section provides a thematic narrative of the development of the *Vale of Dolgellau* landscape. This is followed by a description of individual historic landscape character areas, accompanied by a list of essential sources, location maps, photographs and key historic landscape management issues.

A bilingual version of the report will be available in due course on the GAT website (www.heneb.org.uk) as part of the historic landscape characterisation initiative, a consideration that has influenced the format and layout of this printed report to some extent. An illustrated leaflet about the historic landscape will also be produced to draw attention to the information available on the Internet.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to several people for their contributions to this project. Colleagues within and outside the Trust offered helpful advice throughout, especially those involved in the informal 'characterisation working party' comprising the WATs, Cadw and CCW. Judith Alfrey provided much useful information on buildings and Nina Steele provided HER data in a number of formats, and prepared the maps. George Smith contributed the general section on prehistoric archaeology and Marianne Longley prepared the illustrations. The remainder of the work was carried out, and the report compiled, by David Thompson.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this report.

BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
BBCS	Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies
CAAC	Cambrian Archaeological Association
CCW	Countryside Council for Wales
DRO	Dolgellau Record Office
GAT	Gwynedd Archaeological Trust
GIS	Geographic Information System
HER	Historic Environment Record
HLC	Historic landscape characterisation
JMHR	Journal of the Merioneth Historical Record Society
NLW	National Library of Wales
SMR	Sites and Monuments Record
THSC	Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion
UDP	Unitary Development Plan
UWB	University of Wales, Bangor
WATs	Welsh Archaeological Trusts

3 Evolving historic characterisation methodology

Historic landscape characterisation is a contribution towards the overall historic landscape initiative currently being funded by Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments, the Countryside Council for Wales and ICOMOS UK. Its principal aim is to provide information to aid the management of the historic environment in Wales.

Historical landscape characteristics are the tangible evidence of the activities and habits of the people who occupied, developed, used and shaped the land to serve human needs in the past; they reflect the beliefs, attitudes, traditions and values of those people. They include the physical remains of all aspects of human activities and exploitation of the land in the past (above and below ground, known and potential), and our understanding, interpretation and even perception of those remains. They may reflect a variety of activities occurring at one time, or evolving functions in different periods of time.

The Countryside Commission (in its document *Views from the Past*, 1996) states that as managers we should be concerned with the historic character of the present landscape, and not with the study of the past for its own sake. It places the idea of 'historic landscape character' at the centre of this concept.

Characterisation is defined as *the process of identifying and defining the particular characteristics which make each area distinctive*, and is rapidly emerging as a sound basis for describing, understanding and managing the environment. It is the great depth of human activity which underpins much of that which we feel is important about locality and landscape, and helps give an area its local distinctiveness. Historic landscape characterisation sets out to establish the historic depth within the modern landscape by identifying its principal historic components.

The term 'historic character' is generally preferred to 'historic landscape', as it is now accepted that all landscape is historic in that it reflects, to a greater or lesser degree, the processes which have occurred in history and which have formed its present appearance.

At present there is no standard, accepted methodology for establishing the historical character of landscape, but recent work in Wales has suggested that a practical approach based on considering the evidence as a series of themes may provide an answer. At a landscape level, what is significant in historical terms might include field boundary patterns (whether they are irregular or regular, their size, date *etc.*); settlement patterns (whether scattered or nucleated, date of origin *etc.*); the relict remains of earlier periods which are to be found in upland or marginal landscapes; the effect of 18th and 19th-century estates on the landscape; the impact of industry, military installations and so on.

The dominant historic themes or patterns in a locality help define local historic character. The combination of these characteristics give an area its local distinctiveness, and it is the definition of areas of local distinctiveness which leads to the definition of 'character areas'. The concept of 'character areas' differs somewhat from comparable studies in England, which are based on 'historic landscape types', where the predominant form of the present landscape is identified principally by the existing patterns of enclosures within areas of landscape.

The process of characterisation can be briefly summarised as -

(one or several) components	→	dominant patterns
(one or more) dominant patterns	→	coherent character
coherent character (with definable limits)	→	character area
(several) character areas	→	local landscape

Characterisation is a practical tool intended to aid management in its broadest forms. In order to be of any practical use, this has to be translated into the management of 'landscape

tangibles' (i.e. the evidence for historical processes and periods in the modern landscape). It is essential, therefore, that the process identifies key historic landscape characteristics which are features and/or patterns to which can be applied management prescriptions whose success or otherwise can be measured for monitoring purposes.

The reports emerging from characterisation work contain a number of elements. The first part of the report contains general information concerning the background to the project, the methodology employed, a glossary of terms and general management issues. The second part contains information relating to the specific area under study, including (a) a general historical introduction to the area, divided thematically; (b) a description of each character area split into three parts (a historical background, key historic landscape characteristics and conservation and management priorities – accompanied by a map of the area and an illustration); and a select bibliography.

4 Managing historic character

Rural land-use change

There have been many pressures on the rural environment and the countryside over the last 50 years as a result of changes in land use and shifting priorities for agriculture (the principal rural land use). Agricultural intensification and the maximisation of productivity were the priorities up until the mid 1980s, and as a consequence the character of rural landscapes changed dramatically during this period as hedgerows and trees were removed to create more efficient farming systems. Reclamation of the hills and marginal land led to the removal of significant upstanding archaeological sites and palimpsest landscapes.

Currently, due to agricultural over-production and a generally greater awareness of and concern for the quality and protection of the rural environment, the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy provides a number of incentives to farmers and landowners to manage their land in an environmentally sensitive manner. The all-Wales Tir Gofal scheme includes provision for the conservation of certain habitats and the protection and enhancement of stone walls and boundaries, as well as sites and features of archaeological and historic landscape interest.

However, of the estimated 27,000 farms in Wales, only c. 600 farms per year are currently entering into such agreements, which leaves the vast majority outside any formal management scheme, and so many important archaeological sites and landscape features continue to be lost. The challenge therefore is to identify historic landscape priorities for conservation, protection, enhancement or even restoration both within the scheme and without it.

Three of the principal advantages of an approach using character areas are that (a) it is able to identify and map both local distinctiveness and national importance; (b) by identifying physical features which can be managed it can feed directly into land management and development planning strategies; and (c) it sets the management of individual features within their local landscape context, allowing emphasis to be placed on those features which best define local landscape character. It can assist in management plans by setting priorities for management and enhancement, highlighting intrinsic values, and encouraging links to multi-purpose management.

Characterisation is about management: if we are going to manage effectively, we must know what is there, what is important and what we want to do with it. Character areas can tell us what is distinctive (*i.e.* important both locally and nationally) about a particular area, and therefore what needs to be managed in order to retain that area's distinctiveness (character).

General considerations

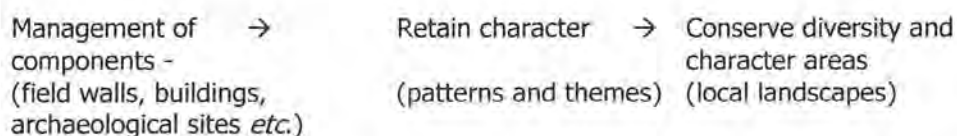
Positive management should be aimed at halting and, if necessary, reversing any trends that can be shown to be causing unacceptable damage to the historic landscape resource. If at the same time management can actually enhance the historic landscape, then so much the better. It is essential that such management is continuous, and contains provisions for monitoring and review.

One of the basic tenets underpinning management is that we should be aiming to continue (rather than halt) the evolution of the landscape: to do this we must first identify what is important and significant in historic landscape terms. It is the overall historic character of the present landscape (as evidenced in important and significant groupings and patterns) which we should aim to retain, but in order to do this we must concentrate management actions at the level of individual components. We must identify, conserve and enhance the local and regional historic diversity of our landscapes.

Agri-environment and other rural initiatives offer the opportunity to integrate the needs of the historic environment with modern land-use requirements to produce a workable, effective management system. More importantly, they should result in a working, viable landscape, which should provide ways and means for the various human activities in an area to be integrated with each other and with conservation, at the same time providing opportunities for study, research, education, interpretation and quiet enjoyment.

This means that sites and features of historic landscape interest are positively managed for their own sake, rather than just left unimproved. It is important that the management of such features is integral to the management of the farm, scheme, park or whatever the unit is as a whole, rather than an isolated, unrelated activity.

By working at the most basic level, management can be used to retain the general historic character of the area -



A management plan should specify conservation objectives for a site/area and how they will be monitored; it should identify points at which some response will be made if monitoring shows that a feature is changing; it should establish what activities/processes will be the subject of monitoring; it should establish what management of ongoing activities is required; and identify the types of development or activities which might adversely affect the site.

Not all the sites and features which comprise the historic environment require the same detailed level of management: some sites can be adequately managed by the application of simple, general strategies, while more complex sites merit more detailed, site-specific, problem-led responses.

Mechanisms - general

It is envisaged that characterisation has many potential applications to management, including -

- assisting in developing landscape conservation and enhancement projects, by identifying elements and patterns of the historic environment which are considered either typical of a local area (provide local distinctiveness) or are of particular importance (rare at a national level);
- targeting resources within grant aid by government and other organisations towards conserving elements and patterns of the historic environment in the same way;
- developing policies for unitary development plans (UDPs);
- assisting in determining planning applications, especially large-scale developments such as roads, wind-farms, mineral extraction, large-scale landfill, waste disposal, reclamation, water schemes, major settlement and major industrial development;
- aiding the management of land by farmers, and large corporate landowners such as industrial companies, water or electricity companies, the forestry industry and the National Trust;
- providing baseline information for local areas against which future change can be monitored, for example as part of the Tir Gofal scheme;

- providing general information not already on the SMR which can be used to inform advice given as part of a number of rural initiatives such as Tir Gofal, Woodland Grant Schemes *etc.*;
- providing advice in a rural framework to conservation agencies including Cadw, the Countryside Council for Wales, the Environment Agency, local authorities, national parks and others;
- providing information to a number of wider initiatives, including contributing to our academic understanding of landscape, stimulating further research, raising public perception of the landscape, and the preparation of policy statements by public bodies.

Mechanisms - specific

Tir Gofal is open to applications from farmers throughout Wales. Within the scheme, payments will be made to farmers for observing 'codes of good environmental practice', one of which is care and enhancement of the historic environment. As the scheme is a 'whole farm' scheme, it allows archaeological management strategies sensitive to the character of the landscape as a whole to be integrated with farming practices. Characterisation is useful for monitoring purposes, as it sets out the wider historic environment framework within which individual farm plans will sit. It can also help prioritise management within a broader landscape context.

Unitary Development Plans address 'land use' issues, and the UDP for Gwynedd is currently being compiled, which takes into account previous *LANDMAP* initiatives which have recently been completed. The Snowdonia National Park has abandoned its UDP in favour of beginning work on a Local Development Plan (these will eventually take over from UDPs), which again will take these initiatives into account.

Countryside strategies are the responsibility of local authorities (together with others), which have a general duty under section 1 of the Countryside Act, 1981, to have regard to the desirability of conserving the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside in the exercise of their functions relating to land. Countryside strategies principally address management of the countryside in areas outside settlement limits, but they are also a mechanism, at least in part, for implementing development plan policies. In Wales, such strategies are supported by CCW.

Local authorities have a number of powers which have implications for the management of the historic environment, including the power to establish Country Parks (section 7 of the Countryside Act 1968); the ability to declare Local Nature Reserves (section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949); the ability to enter into access agreements with landowners (section 64 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949); the ability to buy derelict land (often of industrial archaeological interest) for reclamation purposes (section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949); the duty to make Tree Preservation Orders where appropriate (section 198 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990); and the duty to apply The Hedgerow Regulations 1997, which controls the removal of certain important hedgerows (from section 97 of the Environment Act 1995). Other powers are treated separately below. Many local authorities have a countryside warden service which would benefit from characterisation information.

Local Agenda 21 programme At Rio, governments committed themselves to setting up national targets for safeguarding and improving the environment. Local Agenda 21 and Local Biodiversity Action Plans provide the means of meeting these targets, and of promoting the principles of sustainable development, at a local level. Both initiatives are about embracing a conscientious vision of the long-term future by identifying what matters locally and paying serious attention to the global costs of maintaining local lifestyles.

This has implications for archaeology and the historic environment. At a local level, sense of place is a fundamental aspect of quality of life. The present-day landscape underpins our sense of the place in which we live. Much of its character and distinctiveness is derived from the

historic environment (archaeology and the built heritage in all its forms). The historic environment is of course both fragile and non-renewable. We have a responsibility to maintain it so that future generations can also appreciate and benefit from it in the same way that we do. However, the landscape is not static. Just as today's landscape is a product of the changing relationships between people and their environment through time, so it must be allowed to continue to change.

The point of sustainability is that it promotes change which meets the needs of the future whilst retaining the integrity of the historic environment. In order to do so decisions have to be made about the relative importance of different elements. Traditionally, evaluation has been based on individual sites, with particular examples being selected out for special protection (known as scheduling). However, it is the sum total of historical and archaeological features, not individual sites, which gives landscape much of its grain, and it is often the more ordinary features that create 'local distinctiveness'. In order to ensure that decisions about the future of the historic environment are made on a secure basis, sound information needs to be gathered. Historic landscape characterisation work of the kind being carried out by the WATs provides historic environment audits, from which decisions of this kind can be made.

Biodiversity Action Plans Snowdonia National Park has recently prepared a Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP): this will to a large extent be informed by the *LANDMAP* exercise recently carried out, which means that historic environment information is available. LBAPs are a means by which Local Government Authorities can implement the biodiversity recommendations established after the Rio Summit. They achieve this by building up local partnerships and taking account of both national and local biodiversity priorities to develop strategies for the conservation of species and habitats of local significance. As we are still at the early stages of our involvement, more information will be forthcoming at a later date, but it is already obvious that the type of general information coming from characterisation projects will be able to feed into such plans.

At a general level, archaeology is of relevance to LBAPs because it raises awareness of the historical origins of the contemporary environment. There are no purely 'natural' environments in Britain; the landscape is the product of millennia of human activity. Our knowledge of the changing relationship between people and their environment through history allows us to understand the land-use activities which have led to the creation of contemporary landscapes, and comment from an informed historical perspective on those practices which could be encouraged in order to protect and conserve particular landscapes and ecosystems.

Access is a key issue in the countryside, if we are to enjoy the landscape and all its inherent interests and in turn engender understanding and respect for the countryside and the way it works. In addition to the rights of way network, the Countryside Rights of Way Act has recently been passed by Parliament. As many of the best-preserved and most fragile palimpsest archaeological sites and landscapes lie within areas to which there will shortly be greater public access, this has potential implications for archaeological management.

Historic landscape characterisation can identify these areas (*i.e.* where there are well-preserved yet fragile archaeological remains) and thus highlight the potential management problems if the areas are 'opened up' to public access. It may even be that such areas could be excluded from unfettered access under new legislation, either permanently or on a temporary basis. Characterisation also has the potential to inform leaflets, trails and other interpretative material.

Tourism The Wales Tourist Board (WTB) has the strategic responsibility for encouraging people to visit Wales and for the provision of tourist facilities. In recent years tourism has become one of the most important growth sectors of the economy. Unitary authorities all have a tourism strategy of some description, and historic characterisation has a part to play in sustainable 'green tourism' in that it can help identify local distinctiveness which can be used to attract visitors (by way of advertising), create atmosphere and inform quality initiatives such as local walks, guides and other recreational activities. It can also direct visitors to areas with a robust historic environment, and away from those which are particularly fragile.

Management agreements In addition, local authorities have the ability (under section 39 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act, 1981) to enter into management agreements with landowners. This is an area which could be explored further from the historic environment perspective, as such agreements could cover not only individual monuments but also historic landscape characteristics (such as boundary types).

Other local authority programmes Local authorities have programmes for economic development, highways maintenance, environmental education and coastal protection. These would all benefit from the information which is being compiled through the characterisation projects, and, in the other direction, the safeguarding of the historic environment would benefit from those drawing up these programmes having direct access to historic landscape characterisation data. In fact, information at this broad level would probably be more useful than detailed, site-specific HER data.

Forestry Commission Information from characterisation projects will be invaluable in contributing to national and regional indicative forestry strategies, indicating where new proposals for planting are likely to be acceptable (or unacceptable) from a historic environment perspective. On a day to day basis, it can provide information at a landscape level which can inform proposals for new planting. It will be particularly useful when considering proposals under any of the challenge schemes.

Environment Agency is responsible for producing Local Environment Action Plans (LEAPs) and Catchment Management Plans (CMPs). The historic environment does not have a high profile in either of these, and both could therefore benefit from the information which characterisation can provide.

Other bodies Historic landscape characterisation information can be used to educate and inform a wide range of organisations and individuals including statutory agencies, voluntary bodies (RSPB, Woodland Trust, North Wales Wildlife Trust, British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, National Trust), town councils, community councils, farming unions and others. It is our experience that often it is easier to explain the importance of, and inherent interest of, the historic environment by using historic characterisation, than by the more traditional means of individual archaeological sites and excavations.

Local distinctiveness and a sense of place, which are of undoubted interest to people, can all be conveyed by such means, and the potential importance of this aspect of characterisation cannot be emphasised too strongly.

5 Glossary of keywords and expressions

Definitions

Character

the overall impression created by an area of landscape which is susceptible to being described

Characterisation

the process of identifying and defining the particular characteristics which make different areas of landscape distinctive

Character area

where component elements form dominant patterns to allow the definition of an area which can be clearly described: historic character areas are either

a) areas which embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or theme, or represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction: or

b) areas which show organisation of space either during one particular period or through time. This may be visible in the arrangement of fields or siting of settlements; or a pattern of land-use which represents traditional practices unique to a community; or in the sheer density of remains relating to either a single theme/period or succession of periods/themes; or the grouping together of buildings *etc.* which are distinctive in style, design or method of construction; or a transportation system reflecting an important innovation in engineering.

Coherent character

where the components and patterns across an area of landscape are consistent, coherent character can be defined, which can lead to character areas

Component

the most basic building blocks of the historic landscape, including walls, farms, cottages, archaeological monuments *etc.*, which, when combined, form dominant patterns

Dominant patterns

patterns formed by components such as field walls which are visually dominant in an area: the spread of a single dominant pattern, or the coincidence of two or more, leads to coherent character

Element

another word for component (preferred)

Evaluation

The process of attaching value (non-monetary) to a particular area of landscape, usually by reference to an agreed set of criteria in the context of the assessment

Feature

another word for component (preferred)

Historic landscape

the physical remains in the current landscape of the evidence for past human exploitation of the environment over time

Relict

historic landscape components which are no longer in use are described as relict for management purposes

Process of characterisation

This can be briefly summarised as -

- (several) components → dominant patterns
- (one or more) dominant patterns → coherent character
- coherent character (with definable limits) → character area
- (several) character areas → local landscape

Levels at work

<i>level</i>	<i>action</i>
landscape	strategic policies, overviews (national)
character areas	management policies - <i>LANDMAP</i> , UDPs, countryside strategies (regional)
<i>(coherent character</i>	<i>stage of characterisation (general management guidelines))</i>
patterns/groupings	characterisation is undertaken at this level (local)
components	define what is important/typical & manage landscape components (site specific)

Useful descriptive terms

presence

conspicuous, evident, missing

scale

open, exposed, enclosed, secluded, confined, intimate, small scale, medium scale, large scale

diversity

uniform, simple, diverse, complex

unity

unified, ordered, interrupted, fragmented, chaotic, rambling, structured, organic

balance

harmonious, balanced, discordant, chaotic

enclosure

confined, enclosed, open, exposed

texture

smooth, textured, rough, very rough

colour

monochrome, muted, colourful, garish

movement

remote, vacant, peaceful, active

form

straight, angular, curved, sinuous

stimulus

boring, bland, interesting, invigorating

other

palimpsest, aesthetic value, visual amenity, educational potential, sense of place, distinctive character, common character, historically complex, domesticated character, essentially wild

Part B

Information specific to Vale of Dolgellau

VALE OF DOLGELLAU

Extract from the **Register of Landscapes of Outstanding Historic Interest in Wales**

The confluence of the Mawddach and Wnion river valleys forms a distinct natural basin situated between the southern ends of the Rhinog and Arenig Mountains and the northern flanks of Cadair Idris. Above the basin floor, which is only just above sea level, the slopes rise steeply on all sides, reaching 629m above OD at the summit of Y Garn in the north west, 400m above OD at the summit of Moel Offrwm in the north east, and 893m above OD at the summit of Cadair Idris in the south. The latter dominates prospects of the basin from most directions. Between 100m and 200m above OD, however, shelves of land with gentler gradients occur, which have assisted communications and attracted settlement from the earliest times.

Although the area is not without evidence of prehistoric activity, it is perhaps more significant historically, as it demonstrates the way in which the development of a medieval landscape can be clearly charted, using historical sources and fieldwork, starting with the building of the motte and the granting of the charter of Cymer Abbey in the 12th century. It continued with the development of the Abbey granges, which later disintegrated and were taken over by a large gentry estate, Nannau, which itself grew in power and wealth. The area also has associations with the growth of the Quaker movement in Wales. Dolgellau was a centre of the woollen industry, and in the north of the area there are the remains of gold and copper mining enterprises of the 19th and 20th centuries.

There are several Iron Age hillforts on the higher summits between the valleys of the Wnion and Mawddach Rivers south-west of Llanfachraeth, notably Moel Offrwm and Moel Faner. The close grouping of these sites in this relatively small area may indicate its strategic location at the focus of several natural routes in and out of the basin. To the east, a Roman fortlet was established above the River Wnion valley at Brithdir, from which good prospects of the basin are obtained and where excavations have revealed evidence of activities of an industrial nature, including tanning.

Cymer Abbey, one of the last and the smallest of the Cistercian houses to be founded in Wales, was built in 1198-9, close to the estuary of the River Mawddach at its lowest bridging point. The 1209 Charter of Llywelyn Fawr granted it extensive lands. The home grange extended up to Y Garn and beyond, but most of its lands, including the granges of Abereiddon, Esgaireiddon and Hafod Newydd lay outside the area described here, in the inland valleys to the east. The Abbey was never especially wealthy but was involved with dairying, fulling, shipping, fishing and possibly iron-making at Dôl-gun (where there was an early blast furnace in the late 16th century).

With its origins in the 12th century, Nannau is the oldest, and possibly the foremost, estate in Gwynedd. Its growth is well documented from the 15th century onwards, helped to a great extent by the acquisition of abbey landholdings after suppression, and by encroachments onto Crown lands. By 1840, Nannau owned over 9600ha in Meirionnydd, covering some 200 holdings. The estate has well-preserved examples of late 18th to early 19th century cottages constructed on a distinctive model, whilst Plas Nannau, built in the same period, is also largely intact.

Meirionnydd boasted a considerable woollen industry which reached its peak towards the end of the 18th century, declining rapidly in the first half of the 19th century. There were perhaps a total of 60 factories in the county at the beginning of the 19th century. The area around Dolgellau saw the greatest concentration of fulling mills between the mid 16th and mid 19th centuries, many of which were sited in the River Arran valley to the south of the town. Tanning and the production of leather, and especially the glove industry in the 19th century, also prospered. The town itself was largely rebuilt in the 19th century for English tourists who came to climb Cadair Idris. It is a place of distinctively uniform architecture and the many

meandering, small streets reflect the unplanned nature of its development from earlier origins in the medieval period.

The area is strongly associated with the Quakers. George Fox came to 'sound the day of the Lord' on the slopes of Cadair Idris in 1657, and by 1660 there were at least 24 people named as Quakers in Meirionnydd. Many of the early Friends emigrated, but in the 18th century Quakers were involved in several economic enterprises. Dôl-gun, an early blast furnace on the banks of the River Wnion east of Dolgellau, was planned by the Quaker Ironmaster, Abraham Derby, and managed intermittently by the Quaker diarist, John Kelsall. At Tyddyn-y-garreg, Tabor, there was a burial ground, and also a meeting house (now a Congregational chapel).

The western side of the area fringes the Meirionnydd Gold Belt which saw considerable activity during the later half of the 19th century, although many of the mines only operated sporadically, producing small quantities of metal. Copper was worked at Glasdir, west of Llanfachraeth, where there are the remains of a large mill.

SUMMARY

Ref number	HLW (Gw) 13
Index map no.	31
OS map	Landranger 124
Former County	Gwynedd
Unitary authority	Gwynedd
Principal area designations	The area is entirely within the Snowdonia National Park. The southern side includes part of the Cadair Idris Site of Special Scientific Interest. The area includes Cymer Abbey Guardianship Site and Cymer Abbey and Dolgellau (various) Conservation Areas.
Criteria	3, 5
Contents and significance	A natural basin at the confluence of two valleys situated between Cadair Idris, the Arenig and Rhinog Mountains, containing diverse evidence of land use and exploitation from the prehistoric, medieval and recent periods. The area includes a close group of Iron Age hillforts; a Roman fortlet and industrial complex; Cymer Abbey and motte, territorially succeeded by the Nannau Estate; Dolgellau town; 19 th - and 20 th -century gold and copper workings; historic associations with the Quaker movement.

6 Historical themes and background

6.1 Physical setting and environment

This area is rather specialised topographically, because its main feature is its dissected nature at an internode of valleys and routes with relatively little land available for agriculture or settlement. Lower Palaeozoic sedimentary and igneous rocks of Ordovician age dominate the bedrock geology of the Cadair Idris massif. The igneous assemblage comprises extrusive basic and acid volcanic rocks, including pillow lavas and ash-flow deposits, together with a variety of intrusive rocks such as dolerites and microgranites. Interbedded with the igneous rocks are mudstones, fine sandstones and, on the north-facing scarp of Cadair Idris, an oolitic ironstone which was worked locally as a source of low-grade iron ore. Locally superimposed upon the bedrock geology are hummocky glacial deposits (moraines) which were deposited during the last of several major phases of ice-sheet glaciation which culminated approximately 18,000 years ago. This glaciation caused deep dissection of the landscape, creating an impressive assemblage of landforms including cirques and U-shaped valleys. Post-glacial times witnessed the development of alluvial fans and screes, some of which are stratified, whilst glacial over-steepening of the southern flank of the Tal-y-Llyn Valley resulted in a major landslide that dams the valley at the south-western end of the lake.

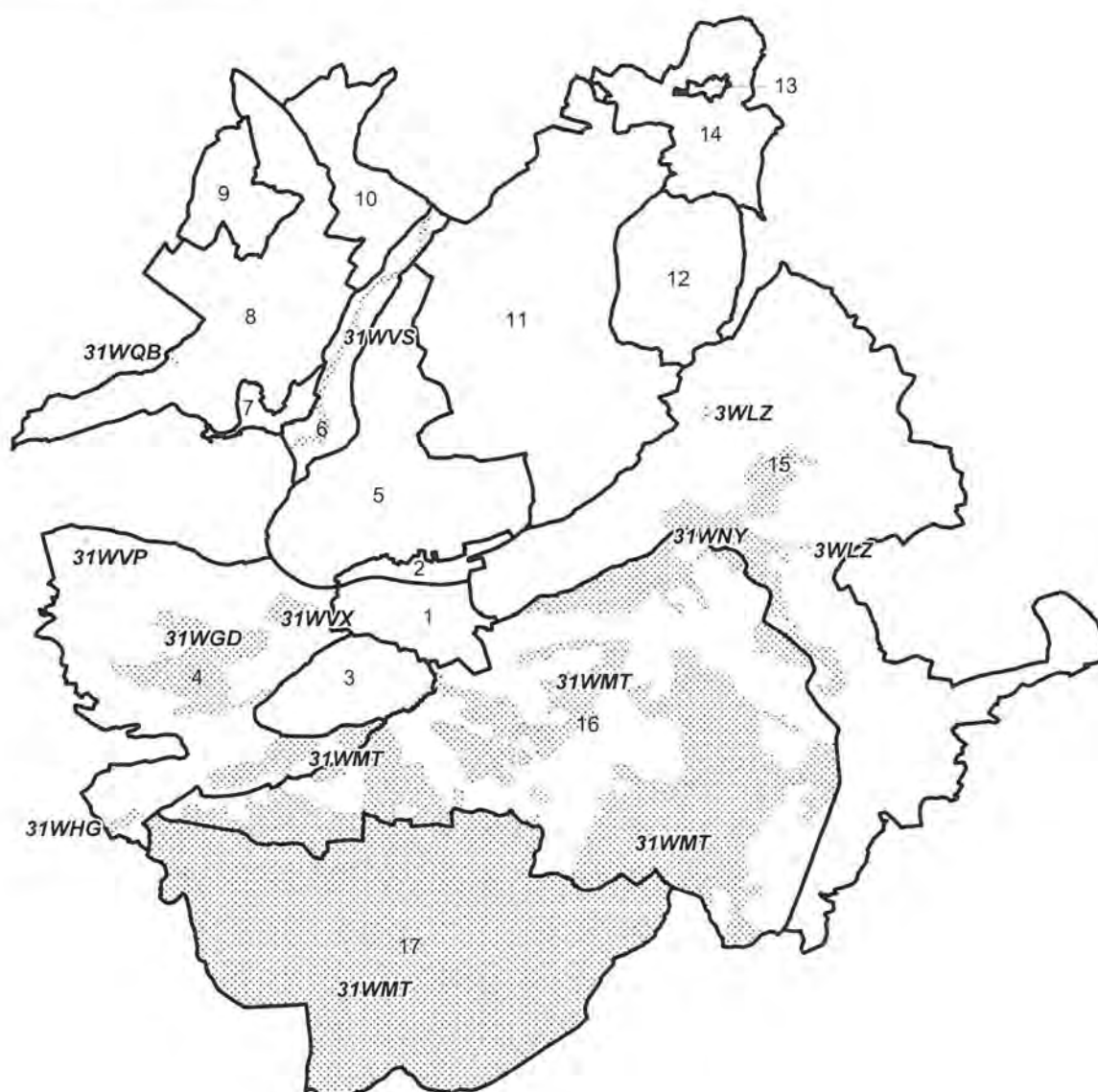
The Cadair Idris massif provides excellent exposures through a thick succession of bimodal acid-basic volcanic rocks of Llanvirn-Caradoc (Ordovician) age. Such bimodal volcanic successions are characteristic of the marginal basin environment which existed in parts of Wales during Lower Palaeozoic times. The site incorporates a well-exposed south- to south-easterly-dipping succession of volcanic and associated sedimentary rocks, many component units of which show considerable lateral variation. The varied volcanic products consist predominantly of basic lavas and related pyroclastic rocks in the lower part of the sequence. Higher in the sequence acid lavas and tuffs predominate. Of particular importance are exposures of a thick granophyre sheet which evidently broke surface to form an effusive flow. This large site is a classic locality for the study of the palaeo-volcanic rocks of Wales.

The area of Cadair Idris and Tal-y-Llyn is outstandingly important for glacial and periglacial landforms. It contains a number of glacial and nivation cirques, including Cwm Cau which has been described as the finest cirque in Britain. This cirque shows a very clear relationship to geological structure and opens out onto the Tal-y-Llyn Valley, a classic U-shaped valley developed along the structural weakness of the Bala Lineament. In addition to large-scale features of glacial erosion, the area is also renowned for a range of depositional landforms associated with mass movement and periglacial processes. Most spectacular of these is the bar impounding Tal-y-Llyn, formed by a huge landslide from Graig Goch. The Tal-y-Llyn Valley also contains very fine examples of stratified screes, well exposed near Maes-y-pandy. Other periglacial interests include protalus ramparts, notably at Graig-y-llyn, and a large debris fan or blockstream near Bwlch Llyn Bach.

Furthermore no fewer than five still extant woods are listed by Edward Lhuyd's *Parochial Queries* (1696) as being in Llanelltyd Parish, including Koed y Ganllwyd, Koed y Berthlwyd, Koed Dol y Melynlyn, Koed y Hengwrt and Koed y Vanner (Linnard, 2000). Some of these are in the project area.

6.2 Sites of Special Scientific Interest

The area is particularly important in natural environmental terms, which is reflected in the fact that there are nine SSSIs, varying in size, either partially or fully within the study area. These are: Aber Mawddach (CCW, 31WVS), which covers a central part of area 06; Bryn y Gwin Isaf (CCW, 31WVX), which lies within area 04; Cadair Idris (CCW, 31WMT), a huge area which covers the whole of area 17 and also parts of area 16; Coedydd Dyffryn Wnion (CCW, 31WNY), which lies in the lower parts of areas 15 and 16; Glasdir Copper Mine (CCW, 31WHD), which



Map 1 Location of numbered HLC areas in relation to SSSIs (code in *italics*)

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Gountryside Council for Wales, 100018813 [2005]

touches on the western edge of area 11; Llwyn-iarth (CCW 31WGD), which occupies a substantial part of area 04; Penmaenuchaf Hall (CCW, 31WVP) in area 04; Llyn Gwernan (CCW, 31WHG) in the western part of area 04; and Mwyngloddiau Wnion ac Eglwys Sant Mark (CCW, 31WLZ), which occupies two small sites within area 15. Map 1 shows the location and extent of these SSSIs mapped against the historic landscape character areas.

Brief descriptions of these areas are given, as this natural environmental interest will influence any future management of the character areas.

Aber Mawddach (Mawddach estuary) covers 1340.6 ha, which includes the whole of character area 06. It was designated for its biological features, including the estuary itself, a large shallow estuary which drains south-west into Cardigan Bay, and a series of adjacent habitats. The overall management objective for the SSSI is to retain the habitat- and species-related interest of the area, which includes several BAP species.

Cadair Idris, a large upland site extending to some 5500 ha (making it one of the largest SSSIs in Wales), is of special interest for biological, geological and geomorphological features: it includes the whole of character area 17. The summit of Cadair Idris rises to 893m, and there are cirques, summit ridges, steep scree slopes and cliffs found on the massif itself. On the eastern side there is the large U-shaped valley which contains Tal-y-Llyn. On the western side of the site there is a long, steep-sided ridge running from Craig Las to Mynydd Pennant, and a large basin lies to the south of the summit. The special biological features of the site include blanket bog, wet and dry heaths, lichen-bryophyte heath, tall herb and fern ledges, vegetated natural rock exposures, standing water, broad-leaved woodland, calcareous, acid and marshy grassland, flushes and springs. The site is also of special interest for its assemblage of higher plants, lichens, bryophytes and montane invertebrates. The area of Cadair Idris and Tal-y-Llyn is outstandingly important for glacial and periglacial landforms. It contains a number of glacial and nivation cirques, including Cwm Cau, a particularly fine example.

Coedydd Dyffryn Wnion SSSI is situated on the south side of the Afon Wnion, extending from the outskirts of Dolgellau for 6km towards Rhyd-y-main and Y Bala. Two main areas of woodland are included. The first of these is centred around Coed Maes yr Helmau (also known as Torrent Walk) and the second is an area of woodland between Brithdir and Bryn Coed Ifor. Both the woodland areas are north-east-facing, with deeply incised and humid gorges. The SSSI includes a 2.7km section of the Afon Clywedog and 0.7km section of Nant Helygog. The woodlands include land shown as woodland on the Ancient Woodland Inventory.

The bedrock geology at this site is dominated by a variety of lithologies, which are late Cambrian (Merioneth Series) to early Ordovician (Tremadoc-Llanvirn Series) in age. Rock types occurring both in the subsurface and at outcrop include mudstones, siltstones and sandstones of the late Cambrian Mawddach Group, and basic and acid volcanic rocks of the early Ordovician Rhobell Volcanic and Aran Volcanic groups. The latter groups are also associated with numerous basic dolerite intrusions.

The soils are predominantly brown podzols (strongly leached) on the steeper slopes, and stagnogley/stagnohumic gley (slow draining, base accumulating) soils on the gentler slopes.

Bryn y Gwin Isaf (SH717178) is a grade II-listed, early 19th-century 'Plas', situated 1.5 km west of Dolgellau, overlooking the Afon Mawddach. The SSSI designation extends to 12.3 ha in extent. It is of special interest as an important breeding roost of the lesser horseshoe bat, a European stronghold for this species. The site comprises the main house, which supports the nursery roost, and roof spaces of associated dwellings which are used as satellite and night roosts. The grounds and associated woodland, which are used as feeding habitat by lesser horseshoe bats, are also within the site, and the roof space of the main house is also used as a breeding roost by a colony of brown long-eared bats.

Glasdir Copper Mine (SH 740223) extends to 3 ha and was selected as an SSSI for its geological interest. The site is important for the good exposures of a mineralised breccia pipe, the details of the genesis of which remain a subject of continuing research and debate.

Llwyn-Iarth (SH 709173 - entirely within area 04), extending to some 56.8 ha, consists of a number of enclosures and unfenced land. It is of special interest for its species-rich neutral grassland and for its large population of wood bitter-vetch. Also of special interest are the extensive areas of flush and fen, and the mixture of habitats, which includes wet heath, marshy and acid grassland. The acid flushes are dominated by soft rush and/or by bog mosses with a patchy cover of purple moor-grass, bog asphodel, common sedge, carnation sedge and star sedge. There are small areas of neutral flushes on the western side of the site, where acid-loving bog mosses are found mixed among more base-demanding species of bog moss. Marsh St. John's-wort and bog pondweed are locally abundant along flush lines or soakaways. The wet heath is characterised by frequent cross-leaved heath and heather with associates such as tormentil, heath milkwort, and lousewort.

There is an extensive area of fen vegetation close to the stream near the southern boundary, where tall tussocks of purple moor-grass rise out of a carpet of more base-demanding mosses. Bog myrtle forms a patchy canopy over the tussocks. Less prominent but still frequent are various sedges and other species, including round-leaved sundew, cross-leaved heath, common cotton grass, dioecious sedge, bottle sedge and bogbean. The presence of the nationally scarce bog moss *Sphagnum platyphyllum*, as well as lesser bladderwort, oblong-leaved sundew, many-stalked spike-rush, and white beak-sedge, is notable. On the southern and western edges of the site lie two other areas of marshy grassland dominated by purple moor-grass with large patches of bog myrtle. A narrow band of purple moor-grass along the edge of one of the northern fields includes marsh hawk's beard. Other vegetation represented at Llwyn-iarth includes rush pasture with frequent sharp-flowered rush and common marsh bedstraw, small stands of meadowsweet and wild angelica, and western gorse heathland.

Penmaenuchaf Hall (SH699184) is a 19th-century country house situated 3 km west of Dolgellau, at an altitude of 40 m, overlooking the Afon Mawddach. The SSSI is 0.1 ha in extent, of special interest as a breeding roost of the lesser horseshoe bat. Penmaenuchaf Hall is used during the summer months by the bats in order to raise their young. Lesser horseshoe bats return annually to the same site and Penmaenuchaf Hall has been used by the species for many years. The building also supports a breeding roost of brown long-eared bats. Natterer's bats, pipistrelle bats and whiskered/Brant's bats have also been recorded at the site.

Llyn Gwernan (SH703159), 3 ha in extent, is an important geological site, notable for an unusual thickness of Devensian Late-glacial organic deposits.

Mwyngloddiau Wnion a Eglwys Sant Marc was selected for its biological interest and is located in the Afon Wnion valley near Brithdir, Dolgellau. The site consists of two adits and a church and is of special interest for hibernating and breeding bats, particularly lesser horseshoe bats *Rhinolophus hipposideros*. The complex of mines around Brithdir was worked during the 19th century for various metals including gold, lead, silver, copper and zinc. St. Mark's church, Brithdir, was built in the 19th century by owners of the Caerynwch estate, and was fashioned on the lines of a northern Italian country church.

6.3 Prehistoric settlement

The dissected nature of the area, at an internode of valleys and routes with relatively little agricultural land or land suitable for settlement, meant that from at least the medieval period Dolgellau developed as a market and administrative centre on a river crossing. Throughout the prehistoric period, however, when most settlement was scattered and was densest in areas that were more agriculturally productive or where settlement had developed around tribal groupings, there seems to have been little activity in the Dolgellau area, where neither of these applied.

Evidence of occupation in the mesolithic period, before about 4000 BC, is almost absent from the whole of Meirionnydd. The closest evidence of this period relevant to the Dolgellau area is a single flint point from just to the east, and possibly a collection of flints and an antler tool from Mochras, on the coast north of Barmouth. However, comparison with elsewhere in north Wales

suggests that most mesolithic occupation was close to the coast, and whereas in Llŷn and Anglesey such sites are preserved on cliff headlands, in Meirionnydd, with its low-lying coast, all such sites (except perhaps that on the headland at Mochras) may have been lost to rising sea-levels during the post-glacial period.

In the earlier neolithic, several areas of concentrations of chambered tombs in north-west Wales demonstrate the presence of settlement nearby, but there are none close to the project area, the nearest group being that in Ardudwy to the north-west. However, there are several finds of neolithic stone axes along the valley of the Mawddach, showing that it was at least being visited, and possibly exploited and settled, in the middle or later neolithic. One such axe has been found here at Cefn Meulan, just north-east of Dolgellau.

Pollen studies of buried peat horizons in the uplands of Ardudwy show the first indications of human activity from about 4000 BC, but reveal that there was much more widespread clearance of forest in the early bronze age, in the second millennium BC (Chambers and Price, 1988). This expansion of settlement is illustrated also in the Dolgellau area by the presence of numerous funerary and ritual monuments of the second millennium BC, of which there are fifteen in the immediate area and many more close by. The most important group in this area is that at Hafod Dywyll, Islaw'r Dref, where there are seven cairns close together; this group can be regarded as a communal cemetery. However, the settlement to which the cemetery belonged is unknown and may be at some distance, since the cairn group lies at the top of a pass alongside a trackway that runs east-west. Further to the west this track passes another concentration of early bronze age funerary and ritual monuments at Cregennan, Arthog, including cairns, a stone circle, several standing stones and several cup-marked stones. The Cregennan area can be regarded as a funerary and ritual complex and may have been a focal centre for a wide area around. The location of the funerary monuments does not therefore help to identify the whereabouts of the contemporary settlement, which may have had a focus elsewhere or have been quite widely scattered. The close relation between the Cregennan and Hafod Dywyll monuments and the trackway has a parallel with another trackway and concentration of monuments around Hengwm, Ardudwy. Both tracks head east towards the Mawddach valley and it has been suggested that the northern track crossed the Mawddach close to where Dolgellau is now, joining the southern route to continue inland towards the Upper Dee (Bowen and Gresham, 1967, 61-2, 116).

However, this interpretation is not supported by the distribution of bronze artefacts such as palstaves, all of which have been found quite close to the coast in this area, only appearing inland on the north side of Ardudwy, in the land lying between the Vale of Ffestiniog and the Upper Dee. The probable prehistoric route south of the Mawddach may therefore have joined the northern route to continue northwards over the Ardudwy uplands, and if so the crossing of the Mawddach near Dolgellau may have been an important communication point, perhaps as the first easy crossing point on the estuary.

While the uplands in this period were cleared for pasture, there is some evidence that the wealthiest settlement may have been in the areas of arable lowland. One of the largest known burial monuments of this period in north Wales, possibly reflecting high status, is from the lowland close to Dolgellau, at Pentre Farm near Cymer (area 05), on the north side of the valley. The mound is about 22m diameter and 2.5m high, and excavation in the 19th century suggested it was of complex construction and probably of several phases of re-use (Bowen and Gresham, 1967, 93-40). There are also two high-status finds of this period from close to Dolgellau, a stone battle-axe and a stone axe-hammer. Another high-status object of the middle bronze age has also been found, a gold torc or neck-ring, from a hill south-west of Dolgellau. A bronze palstave axe-head has also been found close to the town. All these finds might suggest that there was some settlement nearby, but there is no direct evidence, and all the objects could be associated with trade routes.

The earliest known prehistoric settlement in this area is represented by several examples on the fringes of the upland above Dolgellau, consisting of groups of small circular houses and attached fields. By analogy with other excavated examples in north-west Wales these belong to the last centuries of the first millennium BC and into the Roman period (G Smith, 1999). Their

presence on the upland fringes may be a matter of survival and there may have been other, perhaps more affluent, settlements on lower and better quality land, the remains of which have been removed by many centuries of agriculture. Possible remains of such settlement was found sealed beneath a Roman period building close to the Roman fortlet at Brithdir, 4km east of Dolgellau (White, 1978, 36-8).

Other evidence of settlement here in the first millennium BC is in the form of four defended sites around the fringes of the area. These forts are set high up in natural strong defensive positions, between about 300m to 400m OD. Three lie to the north on the ridge between the Wnion and Mawddach valleys (areas 11 and 12) and one is to the south-west in Islaw'r Dref (area 04). There is also one lower-lying defended site on a promontory at Cymer (area 05), overlooking the Mawddach estuary. All are similar in having very prominent positions with wide viewpoints, but are relatively inaccessible as settlements. None has been excavated or otherwise dated and all may have been constructed not long before the Roman conquest. Only one, the largest, at Moel Offrwm, has evidence of much actual settlement; two are suggested to have been deliberately demolished (Bowen and Gresham, 1967, 142, 153) and one, that at Islaw'r Dref, is unfinished. In common with the majority of excavated sites of this period in north-west Wales, most native settlements probably continued to be occupied into and through the Roman period (G Smith, 1999). The presence in the Roman period of only a small fortlet at Brithdir, 4km east of Dolgellau (area 15), suggests that there was a relatively sparse native population and even this fort, constructed about AD 70-80, was abandoned, at least as a defended site, by about AD 120 (Hopewell, 1997, 315-6).

6.4 Historic administrative areas

The project area currently lies within the present Unitary Authority of Gwynedd, administered by the Snowdonia National Park Authority, and the historical county of Meirionnydd. The current community councils include Dolgellau, Brithdir & Llanfachraeth, Llanelltyd and Ganllwyd. J Beverley Smith (1999) contains a detailed discussion of the possible administrative boundaries at the time land was granted to the abbey at Cymer in the early 12th century, which were probably somewhat different from those of today. In the pre-conquest period, the area was divided between the commotes of Ardudwy Is Arthro (to the north-west and including character areas 06 (part), 07, 08, 09 and 10), and Tal-y-bont in Meirionnydd (containing the remainder of the character areas): the division probably lay along the course of the Wnion). The shire county of Merioneth was created under the Statute of Wales in 1284, and the project area was subsequently further sub-divided between Llanelltyd parish (in the former commote of Ardudwy), and Brithdir & Llanfachraeth and Dolgellau (in the former commote of Tal-y-bont), with the Mawddach apparently forming the dividing line between the latter two. This corresponds with the churches recorded in the Valuation of Norwich in 1254 which were Llanelltyd, Llanfachraeth and Dolgellau (Davidson, 2001), although only the former retains any medieval masonry.

The only pre-conquest township recorded within the southern part of Ardudwy Is Arthro is Llanelltyd. Within Tal-y-bont, however, there are several recorded settlements (Bowen, 1971; Smith, 2001). To the north are the church and settlement of Llanfachraeth (area 13) and the bond settlement of Nannau (area 11 - see below, section 6.5 for further details). Dolgellau (area 01) was a self-contained parish shown as having a church foundation, whilst the remaining part of Uwch Cregennan (lying mainly to the south of the Wnion and Mawddach estuary) within the project area had townships at Garthmaelan (now in the southern part of area 11, and actually north of the Wnion), Brithdir and Gwanas (both near the eastern end of area 15). There is a further possible township at Garthgynfawr (on the southern edge of area 16), and several farms on the 1838 Dolgellau tithe map are recorded as being within this township (see below, section 6.6).

By 1293, when the Merioneth Subsidy Roll was compiled (Williams-Jones, 1973 - see below, section 6.6), several townships are recorded within the project area. In Ardudwy there was Llanelltyd; and in Tal-y-Bont, Nannau consisted of up to one hundred families (it was, in fact, the most populous and highly-assessed township in the whole county), Garthmaelan to the

south had around fifty (both area 11, and important in the development of the monastic lands of Cymer), Dolgellau had around thirteen (ironically it was one of the smallest, least-populated and lowest assessed townships in the new county, but see below, area 01), Brithdir (area 15) and Garthgynfor (area 16) both recorded around fifty households, while Gwanas (also area 15 and linked with the Knights Hospitallers) had very few.

The extent of 1284 records, on 'manors' such as Dolgellau, groups of bondsmen whose numbers may have been small but whose very existence pre-supposes modestly centralised administrative nodes (Thomas, 2001). The small increase in the growth of the 'town' of Dolgellau between 1293 and 1548 is misleading in that it refers to households not in the 'town' but in the old parish of Dolgellau, which consisted of eight townships. Leland described Dolgellau in the 1530s as the 'best village in this commote' of Tal-y-bont (Toulmin Smith, 1906), and village or not it clearly had larger ambitions. The 'town' of Dolgellau by the mid-16th century was bigger than one of its rivals, Bala, but had yet to overtake the 'county' town of Harlech, although it was already in a strong position to challenge the claims of other towns to be the administrative centre of Merioneth: as early as 1546 it was playing host to quarter sessions (Williams-Jones, 1976).

Williams-Jones (*ibid.*) has an interesting table showing the relative populations of the various parishes at certain dates between 1292 and 1801. Of those parishes which concern us, in Dolgellau 154 people were taxed in 1293-4 and 158 in 1543, while there were 140 households in 1563 and 130 tenements in 1592; 307 people were taxed in 1670, while the population in 1801 was 2,949. In Llanelltyd, there are no returns for 1292 or 1543, but there were 38 households there in 1563, just 59 people were taxed in 1670, while the population in 1801 was 398. In Llanfachraeth, 112 people were taxed in 1293-4, there are no returns for 1543, but there were 76 households in 1563 and 79 tenements in 1592; 166 people were taxed in 1670, while the population in 1801 was 1,069. This statistical table should be treated with some care as it does not necessarily reflect trends in population growth, but it does provide an interesting set of 'snap-shot' figures in certain set years.

The boundaries of Ardudwy and Meirionnydd altered after the Dissolution in the 16th century, when the previously ex-parochial monastic lands were incorporated into the parish system and became part of Llanelltyd and thus Ardudwy (Gresham, 1984; Smith, 1999).

6.5 The medieval landscape - Cymer and Nannau

The charter of Llywelyn Fawr, dated 1209 and granted to the Cistercian Abbey of Cymer, founded by Maeredudd ap Cynan about 1198, gives some detail regarding the location and boundaries of the lands held by the monks (Williams-Jones, 1957; Gresham, 1984; Smith, 1999). The abbey was located in a typical (Cistercian) riverside location, in the commote of Tal-y-bont in Meirionnydd and close to the border with Ardudwy (formed at that point by the Afon Mawddach). The settlement of a colony of Cistercian monks in a new territory was a familiar feature of the Order in the 12th century, and although we do not know why the monks from Cwm-hir settled at this particular location, Smith (1999) explores some of the possible reasons and suggests the most likely explanation was because the land was probably originally given by Gruffudd ap Cynan and would thus, for political reasons, have been from the lordship of those commotes in the southern part of the principality, where the Cymer lands are in fact located (Smith, *ibid.*).

Probably as a result of the limited choice available to their benefactors (whichever of the Welsh princes was ultimately responsible for the granting of land (Smith, *ibid.*)), the monks of Cymer did not enjoy extensive arable lands (unlike elsewhere); despite holdings in Llŷn, particularly at Neigwl, their possessions were largely the pastures of an upland terrain, and they never knew great affluence. Nevertheless, lay patronage was crucial to their foundation and survival. The Cistercian grange could reflect more than one form of economic exploitation, and it is obvious that the granges of Meirionnydd were not like the typical lowland grain-producing farms. The land here was largely pasture, so stock-raising and dairying were the mainstay of the monks' economy (Smith and Butler, 2001).

It is possible that the granges here were largely devoted to cattle rather than to sheep, given contemporary records (Smith, 1999), so the grange was thus in essence a cattle farm, a *vaccaria*, a term also used to describe the upland estates of the princes. An alternative to *vaccaria* is *havotrie*, indicating that the *hafod*, so often associated in later centuries with sheep farming, was, in the 13th century, a cattle farm rather than a sheep farm. The *hafod*, Smith suggests, was not necessarily associated with summer grazing in the system of transhumance, but with a system which necessitated the provision of shelter for beasts and those who tended them all year round and which required the pasture resources of the upland to be available for exploitation all year round. At Cymer, even the domain in close proximity to the abbey seems to have been a cattle farm. To what extent the monks exploited their mineral resources we do not know, although 14th-century sources (quoted in Smith, 1999) indicate that they took advantage of the iron resources of Ardudwy, and that their forges provided a commodity for which there would have been a ready market.

The lands which formed the nucleus of the abbey's possessions were located on the bank of the Mawddach near its confluence - its *cymer* - with the Wnion (area 06), probably itself in part of the township of Nannau, but probably also including the small township of Garthmaelan (area 11). Unfortunately the abbey and its domain lands are not recorded in the 1209 charter, although lands in Ardudwy, namely Llanelltyd and Cwm yr wnin, *inter alia*, are recorded (and now fall within character areas 07, 08 and 09). These lands are now in the parish of Llanelltyd (Ardudwy), but at the time they would have been extra-parochial. The nearby grange at Hengwrt (area 05) is also recorded. Unfortunately, the charter does not give any details about the extent of it (Gresham, 1984). The vast majority of the lands belonging to the abbey lie at some distance to the east (outside the project area), including Abereiddon and Esgaireiddon (Griffith, 1984; Gresham, 1984) and many other locations spread around the general area, including eleven lands in Brithdir (probably part of area 15), and others outside the project area to the north (including Trawsfynydd).

Cymer was never an affluent house, and the limited nature of their endowments is reflected in the buildings that they provided for themselves (clear from an analysis of the standing remains - Raleigh Radford, 1965). In response to the investigations of Henry VIII, the Abbot of Cymer decided to lease off some of the farms belonging to the monastery in 1534, to increase income (many to the Nanneys of Nannau and Baron Owen of Llwyn). However, by 1536, when the monasteries were visited to review their cost-effectiveness, Cymer fell into the category whose annual income fell below £200, and Dissolution was near. Two cottages and appurtenances in Llanfachraeth ('arhengourth' and 'Llyn Kenthal') are mentioned in litigation in 1540 as being a parcel of the manor of Cymer (Griffiths, 1984, 369), and there are numerous examples of further litigation concerning land in the area.

Thomas (1966), among others, traces the identifiable history of the township of Nannau from c. 1100 to 1600. At the time of the Edwardian conquest, the largest township in Meirionydd in terms of population (see above) was Nannau, apparently occupied by a single clan (although 112 families are recorded there by the end of the century), probably with a population centre around Tyddyn Cefn Llanfair (area 11, to the south of the present Nannau house). The Vaughans had acquired virtually the whole parish by 1797, when a detailed estate survey was carried out (UCNW Bangor, Nannau MS 678), and the field names would seem to imply reliance on pastoral resources, although the medieval mill at Llanfachraeth was important to inhabitants of the local townships (including Nannau and Garthmaelan).

The story of the family of Plas Nannau and their investments in land in the 15th century, both in Llanfachraeth and beyond, is well documented, and one can trace in some detail the growth of a far-flung estate (Thomas, 1966; Parry 1958; Thomas, 2001; J Gwynfor Jones, 2001). They leased land from the Abbot of Cymer (see above) in the early 1500s, a valuable asset when the Dissolution arrived, and soon after, for example, purchased all the messuages, meadows and pastures of a free tenement in Nannau. In the latter part of the 16th century there were c. 80 families living in Llanfachraeth parish, and by the time of the 1592 rental, two concentrations of ownership were evident. Fourteen tenements were held by William ap Rynallt and Hugh ap John Wynne in the north-western part of the township (outside the project area), while 38 were

held by Hugh Nanney in what is largely land in areas 11 and 14. The sheer volume of surviving documents concerning litigation allows a fascinating (and time-consuming!) insight into the area during this period. At his death, Hugh Nanney Hen left a vast amount of land to his heirs and also a massive debt.

After the Dissolution, the domain land formerly controlled by the monastery, and Hengwrt, had to be included in the parochial system and it was taken into Llanelltyd. The abbey and its domain became the property of John Powys, Sergeant-at-Arms, and it subsequently passed to Sir Walter Lloyd of Cardiganshire. Hengwrt, after being leased for some time, came into the family of Baron Owen of Dolgellau. Then Hywel Vaughan of Gwengraig managed to buy both properties and left them to his son Robert Vaughan, the antiquary.

From the time when Hugh Nanney bought the large parcel of monastic properties, the granges formed part of the Nannau estate; for example, the former grange of Hengwrt-uchaf in Llanelltyd which had been important in the 13th century. Hugh ap Gruffydd became known as one of the few 'gentlemen' in the area in 1538, and used the surname Nanney after 1549 (Griffiths, 1984) (the family name was changed from Nanney to Vaughan in the middle of the 18th century, when one of the female descendants married William Vaughan of Cors-y-gedol). Nanney had considerable legal difficulties over former abbey lands he had purchased, as many tenants claimed that they still maintained rights over the land they farmed.

A struggle for social supremacy ruled life in the area at this time (the late 16th century), the main contestants being the Nanneys of Nannau (area 11) and the Owen family of Llwyn (area 02) and Tymawr. Baron Owen had been sheriff in the 1540s and 1550s, but he was subsequently murdered and Hugh Nanney became sheriff in the 1580s, giving his son an Oxford education. The local history of this period is clouded by the feud between these two families.

The Nannau estate was tenanted and controlled by William Vaughan until 1774, when it passed to a relative, Hugh Vaughan of Hengwrt-isaf, and thereafter was passed down the family line.

6.6 Agriculture

Meirionnydd has always been a typical highland agricultural county, and this part of it is no exception. Typically, settlements and enclosed fields are restricted to the valleys and foothills (for example areas 05, 11, 14 15 and 16), between steep and almost barren mountain ridges (area 17) and hill tops (for example areas 08, 10 and 12), which still also dictate major transport routes (see section 6.9 below). Only rough grazing takes place on the higher slopes (areas 08, 09, 10 and 17 again), and although there is evidence for past (area 17) and some present (area 09) settlement, much of the occupation must have been seasonal (although see Smith, 1999 (and above section 6.5), who argues against the traditional view of transhumance).

There is actually surprisingly little recorded archaeological evidence for *hafodtai*, the most substantial being on the edge of areas 16 and 17 above Bwlch Coch, where there is an impressive set of platform houses, while there are ephemeral remains further up in area 17. The highest permanent farms now are those on the lower slopes of Cadair Idris (in area 16) and above Cym yr wnin (area 09), which lie approximately along the 200m contour.

Following the Edwardian conquest, surveys of lands now belonging to the Crown ('extents') were undertaken. That for Meirionnydd was probably undertaken between 1284 and 1285 (MCJ, 1867; Carr 2001), and is less detailed than the extents of Anglesey and Caernarfonshire. It is arranged under commotes but with only a summary entry for each one, with a few separate entries for the individual townships, giving a summary of the numbers of households and their taxable value at the time of the conquest. It may be simply a digest of an earlier survey rather than the extent itself. The purpose of an extent was to record the rents, dues and services due to a lord from his tenants, and Edward, of course, wanted to ascertain what exactly was due to him, so these extents relate to the situation before the conquest, although they do not yield any information about the *gwely* or *gafael* or about the tenurial pattern in each individual township.

Demesne lands in the various commotes in Meirionnydd appear to have been more dispersed than in other parts of Gwynedd; for example, in Tal-y-bont demesne services were due from bondsmen at Dolgellau (see area 01 below for a fuller description of the development of the town), rather than the eponymous *maerdref* of the commote. These residents, who were described as tenants of the Crown, were primarily either Welshmen (described as cattle breeders) or foreigners (Englishmen and Irishmen who were recorded as being 'agricultural workers').

During their occupation, for over three and a quarter centuries, the monks at Cymer made the most of their knowledge to advance agriculture in the area. The main aspects were cattle and sheep production, making full use of the wool for clothing. Some recent research has refined the traditional view of the medieval economy of north Wales as being one which was dominated by pastoralism in a largely free social context (Thomas, 1968). It has long been clear, however, that the upland grazings of the interiors of Meirionnydd supported considerable numbers of livestock, some of which went to the border markets and helped form the drovers' routes of later centuries.

Draught animals (oxen and horses) were more valuable than any other livestock: cattle were priced at about half their value and sheep were relatively worthless, although this does not imply relative numbers of stock. Oats were the most widely-grown field crop, closely integrated with the pastoral economy.

Pastoralism was the keynote in the economic structure of the Nannau estate in the medieval period, and a notebook entry for May Day, 1599, lists 72 cattle, oxen and bulls; 55 sheep and lambs; 17 goats and 5 horses. It is clear from records (Thomas, 1966) that during the 16th and 17th centuries there was a great expansion in sheep rearing in response to the demands of the woollen industry, and it is also evident that among the more progressive landowners (including the Nanneys) profits were ploughed back as investments, which in turn caused the landscape to be modified profoundly. Where they had existed, relics of open-field cultivation had been largely obliterated, Thomas suggests, by 1600, while on the flanks of the Afon Wnion, Hugh Nanney was making careful note of payment made for ditching and the building of stone walls near Garthmaelan (southern end of area 11), in much the same way as Sir Robert Williams Vaughan did two centuries later. In Nannau, as elsewhere in Meirionnydd, the medieval society and landscape was fading away and the foundations of the modern structure were being laid.

Thomas (1967) records the locations of over 400 encroachments on common and waste land in Meirionnydd in the late 16th century, recorded in an inventory drawn up in 1592. The predominant post-enclosure use of encroachments was for cattle and sheep pasture, probably in response to the increasing demands for beef and wool marketed through the towns of the Welsh border. The values of land increased from 6d to 3s or 5s per acre if it was enclosed and drained. Thomas's distribution map shows concentrations of enclosures to the south (probably area 16) and to the south-west of Dolgellau (area 04). One or two smaller encroachments are shown in Llanfachraeth parish. He argues that many of the larger units of encroachment may be on former monastic land which had been intensively and continuously grazed by cattle and sheep since the 13th century, and thus it might be expected that the greatest changes in the landscape took place in these areas. For example, within the project area, a number of former squatter holdings can be reconstructed, such as one dated 1793 (Ty'n y maes) on the Nannau estate, amid sporadically-cleared woodland and heath on the outskirts of Llanelltyd hamlet (area 07). On the other hand, a number of houses on Foel Offrwm (area 12), whose names also appeared on the 16th-century encroachment inventory, have had their original layouts masked by more recent acquisitions of land, and one can only suggest that their cores are represented by the half-acre gardens which subsequently grew into the farms of Pen-esgynfa and Lletty'r-hwsmon (edge of area 12).

The product of this activity was a new moorland edge, a '*crenellated margin of occupation*' (Thomas, *ibid.*) the precise course and position of which depended on a whole complex of interacting factors, including the tenurial history of encroachable land, soil quality, vegetation and altitude, the latter factors probably being less important as the land would be used for grazing, not arable. These encroachments had a profound impact not only on the physical

landscape, but also on the social and agrarian fabric of the whole area. Agricultural limits were pushed upwards and outwards, and cottage settlement began to fill in corridors between existing farms (Thomas, *ibid.*).

There were several important sub-medieval estates within the project area in addition to Nannau and Llwyn (the lands of the former are still readily recognisable by the distinctive architectural style, while the latter, largely subsumed, are virtually unrecognisable in the modern landscape). These centred on houses (all of which still exist) such as Dôl-gun, Dolserau, Caerynwch and Gwanas, all situated in the lowlands. Most of these were later absorbed by the Nannau estate which eventually owned Nannau, Hengwrt, Caerynwch and Llwyn.

The Merioneth Agricultural Society was founded in 1801 as the Napoleonic Wars' demand for increased productivity led to a reassessment of agricultural resources, particularly of the common lands, many of which had been eaten away over several centuries by private Acts of Parliament and illegal encroachments (Thomas, 1967). An Act permitting enclosure of the commons and waste land was passed in October 1810, when the principal landowners in the area (which comprised Nannau-uwch-afon, Nannau-is-afon and Llanelltyd) included Sir Robert Williams Vaughan (Nannau): there were seven acts altogether just dealing with Llanfachraeth parish. In the depression which followed the Napoleonic Wars, the building of stone walls gave welcome work to local people. Sir Robert Vaughan's workmen were reputed to have built 55 miles of walling for enclosures at this time, using mules to cart the stones. The effect on the landscape is still evident today (see character area descriptions below - 12, for example): the long stone walls which seamed the *friddoedd* produced a network of large, rectilinear fields which contrasted sharply with the irregular patchwork of the smaller, older enclosures.

There are three tithe maps which cover the area - Llanelltyd (drawn up in 1843), Llanfachraeth (drawn up in 1846), and Dolgellau (dating from 1838). That for Llanelltyd covers (all or part of) character areas 7, 8, 9 and 10; Llanfachraeth covers (all or part of) areas 12, 13 and 14 while Dolgellau covers all of areas 1, 2, 3, and 4 and parts of 15, 16 and 17. Unfortunately none tell us much about the contemporary agricultural landscape, as they all simply record the extent of properties without going into details of field patterns or names. The Dolgellau tithe map is more detailed, but probably simply reflects the more complex pattern of land holding here (outside the main core of the Nannau estate - most of the area is owned by Sir R W Vaughan).

In Llanfachraeth, most of the (arable) area was apparently given over to oats and barley with about a fifth down to wheat. Rent due in lieu of tithes was £75. There was a similar pattern in Llanelltyd where oats, barley and wheat were grown in the same proportions as above, but with about half the amounts, while the rent due in lieu of tithes was only £38. There are no comparable figures for Dolgellau.

Across the project area, the typical upland Meirionnydd practice of remote cow-houses dispersed about the farms seems to have been commonplace, and there are several examples, mostly lapsing into ruin (for example area 14). Most of the smaller farms are linear in plan, and this appears to correspond with both altitude and acreage (*e.g.* Ty Glas, Brithdir; Cors-y-garnedd, Llanfachraeth), but the larger ones (especially those related to estates - see above) have detached farm houses and buildings (*e.g.* Gwanas, Brithdir, Hengwrt).

6.7 Later settlement

6.7.1 Settlement patterns - nucleated

There are only three truly nucleated settlements within the project area - Dolgellau, Llanfachraeth and Llanelltyd. Each has developed around a core of a medieval church (recorded in the 13th century), but in quite different ways. The entire area is dominated historically by Dolgellau, with the other two settlements only really developing in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Dolgellau (principally area 01, but also area 02) is a hugely important town, from both a historical and an architectural point of view. Its eventual success must, undoubtedly, be attributed to its favourable geographical location. Its historic core is built on the floodplain at the junction of two rivers and the first mention of *Dolkelew* is from 1253, while in the 1293 extent (Williams-Jones, 1976) there is reference to the bond community of Dolgellau, and it later developed as the main agricultural market, Assize and county administrative centre of Meirionnydd. It appears to have developed as a town in the medieval period 'almost by stealth' (Smith, 2001), its urban characteristics virtually unrecognised by royal administrators for several centuries. Not until the early 17th century are there references to its being a market town or borough and to its tenements as burgages, but the commercial importance of the town may have begun by the early 14th century, when there were already references to a market and fairs.

Various industries have contributed to the character of Dolgellau, and have left their mark on the names of buildings and roads in the town and in the unique, complex pattern of streets and small squares south of the river Wnion. A valuable woollen industry, specialising in flannel, flourished in the 19th and 20th centuries, and tanning was an important part of the local economy until quite recently.

The architectural character of Dolgellau is dominated by the grey dolerite and slate buildings, of which over two hundred are listed. Visitors in the 17th and 18th centuries complained that every entrance to the town was barred by a turnpike, that the streets were irregular and very narrow, the houses small and ill-lit, but during the first part of the 19th century the town was vastly improved by Sir Robert Williams Vaughan of Nannau. He largely rebuilt the centre of the town, laid out its fine market square and was instrumental in getting a Court House built, a National School founded and a new county gaol erected.

The small village of Llanfachraeth lies within the northern part of the project area. Again, the church (which has medieval origins, but was rebuilt in the early 19th century) forms the focal point of the village, but the settlement in its present form is 19th century, built under the patronage of the Nannau estate (thus nicely introducing one of the major themes of this area, discussed in more detail below under 'architectural character'), and many of the listed buildings in particular are of a distinctive 'estate-derived' style. There are two dated houses in the village (1809 and 1812), but nothing appears to be any earlier and the 1846 Llanfachraeth tithe map shows just three houses (to the east of the church and north of the road), although by 1901 (OS 2nd series map) the village had expanded somewhat. There is no suggestion of formal planning in the village, however, which retains a vernacular character principally spread out along a single road, until the building of a small council estate (to the north of this road) in the late twentieth century. It now has its own 'suburban' development in the form of a string of bungalows on its edge.

The earliest historic core of the settlement of Llanelltyd is concentrated around the church, towards the southern end of the character area, opposite Cymer Abbey, on land which was once owned and controlled by the monks (Gresham, 1984 and Williams, 1990), where there are, perhaps, three late-medieval structures. The next 'historic core' lies to the west along the northern side of the 18th-century turnpike road from Dolgellau to Barmouth. Here the houses, most of which now are 19th century, with some earlier examples, are built along the base of the south-facing hill slope above the floodplain of the Mawddach where it broadens out into the estuary. The 1901 OS map shows Llanelltyd appearing to have developed further at the

junction where the road crossing north across the Afon Mawddach from Dolgellau meets the road running from Barmouth north to Trawsfynydd. A separate core to the village was created to the north in the mid 20th century, with the building of a council estate based on a series of terraced houses above the main road.

6.7.2 Settlement patterns - scattered

Outside the nucleated settlements, the project area can be loosely divided into three areas based on patterns of scattered settlement and 'architectural character'.

The first area covers the northern part of the area and includes settlement around Cymer (character area 06), Nannau (character area 11), Llanfachraeth (character area 14) and, to some extent, Hengwrt (area 05). Here, settlement is wrapped around the high spur whereon runs the Precipice Walk to the west, and Foel Offrwm to the east, as well as occupying the valleys of the Wnion and Mawddach. It is mainly a dispersed, traditional farming settlement pattern. The existence of the Nannau estate has had a strong influence on the character of settlement throughout the area (see above, section 6.5), particularly following the massive re-building programme undertaken by the estate from the early 19th century; most of the vernacular farm and other buildings date from this period, giving the area one of the most distinctive architectural landscapes in north Wales. Arguably the house of Nannau, with its appurtenances, represents, in effect, a rural nucleation of its own which extends far beyond the defined area of the designated parkland (area 11), and which needs careful recording.

The second area lies to the south of Dolgellau, roughly bounded by the high ground of Dolgledr to the west (Mawddach HLC report no. 472), the foothills of Cadair Idris to the south (area 16), and to the north and east by the valleys of the Wnion and the Clywedog (taking in most of character areas 04, 16 and 17). Once again it is a landscape of scattered traditional agricultural settlement, with the occasional partial nucleus, most notably at Tabor (area 15). There is a series of sub-medieval farmsteads (such as Maes Angharad and Llwyn-iarth), most of which display the characteristics of marginal upland properties (linear farms and remote field barns), always surviving 'on the edge', not surrounded by estates. Here, inevitably, there is an emphasis on abandonment and de-population (particularly a series of farms and fields within area 04), a phenomenon which does not occur elsewhere within the project area. This is a typical, marginal, agricultural landscape, displaying evidence for a move into, and then retreat from, upland holdings.

The third area, although more disparate in character, can be defined as lying between the valley of the Wnion and the A470 (*i.e.* based on character area 15), where the historical settlement looks to have origins in traditional agriculture and small estates, similar to the first area but without the domination of either a major estate or the flux of marginal, upland settlement. Dolserau and Caerynwch were parts of the Nannau estate but are largely untouched by its architectural influence, while areas around Gwanas and Tir Stent display upland farming characteristics but without the recent concomitant abandoned farmsteads. Brithdir, by contrast, is a straggling settlement, much of which is modern. It appears to be a roadside development and mainly mid 19th century in date (for example, its chapel is dated 1860). This would appear to have developed outside the limits of estate control.

6.7.3 Architectural character

Building materials

The use of local stone dominates throughout the area (sometimes, though rarely, limewashed), together with slate as a roofing material (Dolgellau (area 01) is the only place where there is a substantial use of other materials). Differences in the sourcing of material (whether it was field stone, or quarried) and handling (whether it was rubble, dressed, dry-stone etc.) of stone are indicative of dating, but also of status. The well-dressed blocks used in Caerynwch (area 15), or contrasting examples in Llanfachraeth village of fieldstone and boulder and dressed boulders, are good examples. Similarly, the differences in the use of roofing slate are indicative of age and status, graded slates being earlier. There is evidence, too, of prior building traditions

involving timber: for example, there are several cruck-framed buildings (*e.g.* Gwanas Fawr, area 15, and most notably the barn at Dref Gerrig, area 16). There are at least three good examples of sub-medieval houses characterised by the internal use of timber (see below).

Building functions

Dolgellau displays a wide range of building types, from cottages to gentry houses, inns and hotels, mills, factories, police station, county administrative offices, colleges and schools and almost every other type of infrastructure-related building. This range is unmatched in the area: even the other nucleated settlements only contain cottages (houses), a church and a school.

The social structure of buildings in the rural part of the project area ranges from Nannau at the top, via other gentry houses, including some sub-medieval houses which appear big enough to have functioned as small estate centres (*e.g.* Llwyn, Plas Hen, Dôl-gun, Dolserau), to small cottages (mainly north of the Wnion - see area 1 described above) and farmsteads which were intimately linked to the land. Caerynwch is a later example of a building of clear gentry character, and built for a baron of the exchequer at the end of the eighteenth century: later still are Gelligemlyn and Plas Canol. Most of the (rural) vernacular buildings are farmsteads, with houses conforming to a common plan, with limited variation in size. There are a few examples of smallholdings (there is one just below the A470, between it and the Torrent Walk, for example), but most seem to be of medium size. There are remarkably few cottages in the area.

Across the project area, the typical upland Meirionnydd practice of remote cow-houses and open-sided haybarns, dispersed about the farms, seems to have been commonplace and there are several examples, mostly lapsing into ruin (for example, area 14). Both of these are highly characteristic of an upland agriculture dependant on stock. In rural areas, non-farm buildings mainly seem to have been built singly (with a few examples of paired estate cottages, such as 1 & 2 Carleg, and 1 & 2 Brynteg at Bontnewydd).

Arguably, the other principal historical building type in the area was the woollen mill, and more recently the *ffatri* (see section 6.5.1, and area 01 description). Unfortunately, there are no significant buildings of this type now remaining.

Building chronologies

The area boasts a particularly long chronology of building. The earliest surviving standing buildings are probably those associated with Cymer Abbey, Y Fanner (area 06), a substantial farm with two houses, one 17th century and the other medieval, and the only structure to survive intact the dissolution of the monastery, as it was almost certainly the abbot's house (Smith & Suggett, 1995). The other two principal late-medieval houses are Dolgun-uchaf (area 15) and Plas-hen (area 16 - the home of Lewis Owen, the baron of the exchequer at Caernarfon). The latter is classically built down, rather than across, the steep slope on which it is set, with the parlour end almost certainly (originally) on three floors. Dolgun-uchaf is the most complete of the houses, having survived a whole succession of additions and alterations, including the conversion of half of the house into a farm building. This is built on low-lying land again (as at Y Fanner), and interestingly has its parlour at the uphill end. The size of the rooms (including an open hall of three bays) indicates an ancient house of high social status (see section 6.10.4), and it was probably the home of Tudur Goch ap Ednyfed. Unlike many of the Nannau-related houses, it never became the centre of a large estate, and by the mid 19th century was part of a small estate of six farms owned by one John H Lewis of Dolgun Hall (shown on the tithe map).

Other sub-medieval houses have survived by virtue of being relegated to farm-building status when a new house was built (*e.g.* the 17th-century primary house at Bronwian, and the house at Cefn-creuan-uchaf; also, Cae'r march is thought to be late 15th century, while Plas Hen also has late medieval origins as a hall-house). Fragments of an early building are incorporated within Gwanas Fawr (area 15): this is particularly significant as the presence of crucks is indicative of building traditions which pre-date the now ubiquitous use of stone across the area.

Surviving buildings suggest that a considerable amount of building work was undertaken during the 17th century, suggesting an important period of prosperity. Thereafter, it was not until the 19th century that there seems to have been any significant development in building traditions. Then, there is evidence for extensive estate-sponsored activity (see Nannau (area 11) in particular), but also the arrival of new generations of gentleman builders, principally building small country houses on apparently new sites (*e.g.* Coed and later Gelligemlyn). The area shows a little evidence for small-scale 20th-century building (outside Dolgellau - areas 01 and 02), with the little housing estate in Llanfachraeth (area 13), and rushes of speculative building there and at Brithdir (area 5). Otherwise, contributions from this and the last century simply amount to heavy-duty alterations to the historic building stock.

Architectural character

A key theme (especially in the first 'rural character area' mentioned above) is the buildings sponsored by the Nannau estate, including cottages and farms (*e.g.* Coed mawr and Gallt-y-carw, Llanfachraeth (which are remodellings of earlier buildings), Ty-n-y-llwyn (also Llanfachraeth) and Gelli (Tan y foel). These buildings were described by Samuel Lewis in 1833 thus: 'the numerous farmhouses built of stone in the ancient English style which are scattered through the parish have a very pleasing effect on the general appearance of the scenery'. There are certain identifiable stylistic hallmarks (curved walls and shaped chimneys for example), but in general there was no blueprint, rather a picturesque variety. Their idiosyncratic character enables the reach of the estate to be identified beyond the immediate environs of the Plas and the definition of character area 11: for example, Gellilwyd fach and Plâs y Brithdir are Nannau estate farms south of Dolgellau. To the east, Gwanas (area 15) appears to have been another estate farm, incorporating a genuine late medieval porch, and with its pedimented gable and bold roof has a distinctive robust style, presumably deemed appropriate to its upland setting.

Before the introduction of this architectural variety in the early 19th century, a common regional house-type seems to have predominated in the area. The Snowdonia-type house is typified by its end chimneys, near-central entrance (to cross passage) and early storeyed form, developed from an earlier hall house tradition which here can be seen in the primary house at Bronwian, at Cae'r march and Dolgun-uchaf. There are numerous examples which chart the development of this plan from single storey, via attic with dormers to two full storeys. The detail evolved, but the essentials of the plan survived, to be subsumed eventually in a vernacular Georgian.

Polite architectural traditions are represented (in addition to Nannau) by Caerynwch (area 15), which is Georgian in character. Examples of a later 19th-century vernacular revival (in a sense, the heirs to what was being done on the Nannau estate a couple of generations earlier) is seen to advantage in, for example, Gelligemlyn: this is a style which is consciously apt for a ruggedly picturesque, upland landscape. It appears in smaller buildings too, as at Dol-y-clochydd nearby (area 06), with its over-sized roof. (It is perhaps worth noting that none of these 19th-century buildings have been listed). South of Dolgellau, polite architectural traditions are also represented to a degree (for example in Coed, which is a small gentry house (based on an earlier farmhouse) near Tabor (area 16), and Bryn y gwin, of 1805). The other architectural glory of the area is the church of St Mark (area 15), with its former rectory (Goedlan) which dates from 1895-8.

Other miscellaneous themes identified during fieldwork include the extent of modernisation in housing, combined with the extent of dereliction in farm buildings (several on the edge of Llanfachraeth, for instance, and also in area 04). This marks quite a radical change in building use, and has also created a large class of vulnerable buildings which warrant recording before they are lost.

6.8 Industry

6.8.1 Woollen industry

While Meirionnydd is not particularly suited to being an 'agricultural' county, due to its topography and landforms, it is ideally suited to the exploitation of water power. The average rainfall is high (at least 60-80 inches per year) and many streams and rivers rise in the mountains and flow into the lowland valleys (Parkinson, 1984). Until the development of the steam engine in the 18th century, water provided the power for almost all industrial processes, particularly in rural areas. In Meirionnydd the major 'industries' were more or less directly related to agriculture, as exemplified in the distribution of water mills in the county (corn mills, woollen mills, saw mills and slate-dressing works), mostly situated at lower altitudes near to settlements.

The Dolgellau area was first connected with the wool trade in the 13th century, following the establishment of the Cistercian Abbey at Cymer, and it subsequently became the principal industry of the area in historical times (DRO CQ7/76). The actual manufacture of woollen cloth here is mentioned in Acts of Parliament in James I's reign, and in order to encourage the woollen trade, a law was passed in 1678 making it obligatory for only woollen shrouds to be used in local burials. The first reference to a fulling mill in Meirionnydd occurs in 1546 at Garthgynfor (area 15), when Dolgellau was noted as being an important wool market in west Wales (Jack, 1981): 16th-century sources also provide a detailed record of the cattle and wool traders prominent in the fairs and markets here (J Gwynfor Jones, 2001). The general trade benefited from Dolgellau's situation on a complex of thoroughfares, diverging from Caernarfon (and Holyhead), Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury (see area 01 below).

The Afon Aran, which flows northwards down the steep slopes of Cadair Idris before entering the Wnion at Dolgellau, was the power source that drove the fulling machinery and later the carding and the spinning mills. There were several fulling mills along its banks where the cloth was beaten and washed to close up the fibres (see below). Tour writers of the 18th and 19th centuries talk of the streams 'resounding with the sound of the pounding wooden mallets', and of the tenter racks where the cloth was then dried and bleached 'extending along the hills' (*e.g.* Bingley, 1801). The lengths of coarse, undyed hand-woven cloth, called 'Welsh Webs' or 'White Plains', were around two hundred yards long.

Arthur Aikin, who toured north Wales in 1796, wrote a serious and well-observed account of the Welsh woollen trade at the time (DRO Dolgellau town file). He had difficulty getting at the facts both because (he claims) of its disorganised state (compared with, say, Yorkshire) and also because of the 'shyness and jealousy of those concerned in the trade'. However, the kind of cloth that was produced in Dolgellau was apparently 'strong cloth' or 'high country cloth' and all the farms around produced webs of this cloth, using every scrap of wool that was to hand, even 'the refuse from the wool-staplers and skinners'. The warp is fleece wool of the county; the wool is a mixture containing about a half and sometimes a third of lambs' wool.

Aikin goes on to say that the standard measurement of a web was seven-eighths of a yard wide, by about 200 yards long, and while the price of each web depended on the quality of the wool, he noted that during 1796 the price per yard had, in general terms, been increasing rapidly by about 3-5 pence a yard. The central market for the Dolgellau webs was at Shrewsbury, but this centre was by now far less important than it had been earlier in the 18th century, principally because of the increasingly competitive nature of the woollen business. The Shrewsbury trading centre was a closed shop, run by the Drapers' Company, and only members were allowed to do business. Other, more progressive dealers, therefore, who were excluded from dealing at Shrewsbury, went direct to the source of supply and did business in Dolgellau itself with either farmers, cottagers or the owners of the fulling mills. In time, members of the Drapers' Company were also forced to do business at the source of supply and they began to keep employees permanently at Dolgellau to develop business links and make sure they got first choice of the product. Aikin adds that in more peaceful times (*i.e.* before the outbreak of

the wars with France in 1793) wool used to be transported from as far away as Kent, showing what an important processing centre Dolgellau was.

By 1780, the woollen trade was flourishing and most of the webs went to Shrewsbury. After this, a direct export trade grew, with the products being shipped firstly down the Mawddach to Barmouth and thence principally to London, but this declined after war broke out in 1793, and the goods had to be sent to Shrewsbury again. Whilst most of the woollen cloth helped fulfill home demand, much of it was exported to the continent (particularly Holland and Germany) or to the Americas to provide clothing for slaves. There was also a weekly market in Bala for locally-made small, woollen articles such as stockings, wigs and gloves which were a by-product of the main trade and which brought in much-needed cash. At one time, Dolgellau was the third-largest (behind Llanidloes and Newtown) wool-producing town in Wales.

Output was at its height at the end of the 18th century, with 718,000 yards of webs being produced, mostly for export. However, output thereafter fell dramatically and by 1831 only 352,000 yards were being produced, and less than a thousand yards in 1848. One writer (unknown) in 1833 estimated that 1,400 people were employed in the flannel industry at that time and the number of pieces made annually was 30,000, averaging 110 yards each. Towards the height of the industry, in the middle to late 18th century, it was estimated by Walter Davies (see Parkinson, 1984) that perhaps eighteen mills were operating in the Dolgellau area. However, in 1842 only three *pandai* are recorded, and by 1861 only three fullers were living in the parish (ibid.). Later in the 19th century 'factories' were established to take advantage of new developments in machine technology (Parkinson (1984) contains a detailed description of the various processes involved in the production of the cloth), and there may have been as many as sixty in the county at one time: by 1925 there were only six.

It was this thriving woollen industry that made Dolgellau such a busy place in the late 18th and 19th centuries (along with the booming tourist industry). According to Bingley (1801), it was the focal point of the neighbourhood. He noted that there were very considerable manufacturers of flannel which had led to an increase in the population of the town and to the town being considered as something of a trading centre (although he didn't think much of the standard of accommodation on offer!). The manufacture of flannel was still in full swing fifty years later. A booklet printed in the town (printing was another local industry - see below) around that time (DRO Dolgellau town file) stated that a great number of 'little farmers' were making a kind of woollen cloth called 'gweuodd' or 'webs', and that almost every cottage had a loom. It was the job of fulling mill owners to gather together the work of the cottagers and farmers and to scour, bleach and mill it ready for the market.

The 1901 OS map shows the extent of woollen factories on the Aran to the south, with four factories and two mills shown (including Fron-goch factory, Idris factory, Wenallt factory and Factory fawr, as well as Pandy and Pandy Aberneint (dis.)) Parkinson's figure E (1984) also shows an area across the Wnion, north of the town, as 'tenter field', where the webs would have been laid out to dry.

At the same time (i.e. from the end of the 18th century until well into the 19th), Dolgellau also had a flourishing tanning and currying industry, along with associated activities (six skinner's yards and three tanneries), and about 100,000 local lamb skins and many kid skins were sent to Worcester, Chester and London each year.

6.8.2 Iron production

In the early 18th century Abraham Darby of Coalbrookdale (through his Quaker connections with the area) discovered ironstone ore about half a mile west of Cross Foxes. Combining the discovery with the potential of charcoal from the well-wooded district as a fuel encouraged him to build a blast furnace, just beyond the confluence of the rivers Wnion and Clywedog. At that time the Afon Wnion was navigable up to Dôl-gun, which enabled the manufactured pig iron to be shipped away.

Darby first thought of smelting in 1714 and began building charcoal stocks the following year. Despite initial problems the foundations of the smelter (still visible at the side of the road to the foot of Torrent Walk) were laid in 1718. Smelting began the following year and almost 500 tons of pig iron were produced in c. 37 weeks of work. This annual amount was never improved on, possibly as production was no longer in the hands of Darby himself, but those of John Kelsall, a Quaker, who had been an apprentice at Coalbrookdale and who took up residence in Dolgun-uchaf. (Kelsall kept a series of journals, largely unpublished and now in Friends' House, London, which are an important source of information on the social and religious history of the period.) There were problems with the regular supply of good quality charcoal, largely due to the calcareous nature of the local limestone ore. In 1729 the use of local ore ceased, and supplies richer in iron content were obtained from Lancashire, although this, of course, led to higher production costs. Most of the iron was taken by sea to London where it was sold.

A forge had been erected c. 1720 to create puddling facilities needed to convert the cast iron to wrought iron which would be suitable for forging. This was erected near the blast furnace, and remains are still visible. The original water wheel was replaced in 1730, and reports relating to the blast furnace ceased after 1743. In the Nannau papers (Nannau MS 536) there is preserved an agreement dated 1732 between Kelsall and Katherine Nanney for making charcoal at various specified woods. The forge continued in use for a few years but most of the machinery etc. was offered for sale 1802. The farmhouse near the river is where the horses used for transporting the iron to the river boats were stabled, and the present walled garden was the horse paddock (Thomas, 1984). The furnace was excavated in the 1980s by P Crew and was clearly of the charcoal-fired type (Crew, nd).

6.8.3 Other

In about 1860, the owner of the copper mines above Bontddu (Mawddach report 492, area 05) discovered gold. The owners of the Figra and Clogau Copper Mining Company took out a licence to extract gold, and by May 1861 profits were sufficient to initiate a mini gold rush in the area (the so-called Welsh gold rush of the 19th century), centred on Dolgellau (Hall, 1988). Gwynfynydd Gold Mine (to the north of the project area but within the banded vein which contains the ore and which stretches from Trawsfynydd down the Mawddach corridor and eventually out under the sea at the western end of the Mawddach estuary) was also established at this time, but serious mining ceased during the First World War (Farr, 2001).

Some of the easternmost remains connected with the gold mining industry (Prince of Wales, Sovereign, Wnion, Cesailgwm and Caegwernog mines - Hall, 1988, 66; Foster-Smith, 1977) are to be found in areas 08 and 09 (most were originally trialled for lead and none were particularly successful), although details about their outputs *etc.* are difficult to establish. Some of these minor concerns were worked between c. 1856 and 1866 by the East Cambrian Gold Mining Co. Ltd., but little seems to have been found.

T H Roberts, Ironmongers (towards the northern end of Eldon Square, Dolgellau), was an important source of panning equipment, and in fact, the gold and copper mines in the hills around the town employed over 500 miners towards the end of the 19th century.

In 1798 the first printing press opened in the town, and this began a small but important local industry which printed everything from tourist leaflets to (religious) pamphlets to books.

6.9 Communications

6.9.1 Road

A remarkable number of roads pass through Dolgellau, and this goes some considerable way to explaining the growth and importance of the town as a communication hub. Leading north over the river, roads immediately go east and west (with a smaller one continuing north) to Bala and Barmouth (via Llanelltyd). On the western edge of the village the road forks into two, with both

routes leading to Tywyn (one over the mountains and one by the side of the estuary). A smaller road to the south leads up the southern side of the Ceunant, while a complex of roads to the east leads (via Tabor) to Dinas Mawddwy and (presumably) Bala. These roads are shown on a map of 1794 and many are considerably earlier.

There is good evidence for a Roman road which extended southwards from Tomen-y-Mur (past the Roman tile kilns at Penystryd) to Brithdir, and from Llanfor (Bala) westwards to the same fortlet (Hopewell, 2004). It is likely that these roads continued in use well into the medieval period and beyond (the route of the latter is still evident in the current landscape and is still in use). Roman pottery and coins are reported as being found on the Marian in Dolgellau in the late 17th century (area 01), but there is no direct evidence of Roman occupation below the town.

The Hengwrt archives (THCS, 1927) contain some 'ancient' maps of Meirionnydd, and the earliest, dated 1578, shows not a single road in the county. The next (probably also about 1578) shows just one, which runs from Dinas to Dolgellau to Llanfacreth (sic) and then takes a straight line over the mountains to Harlech. Robert Norden's map of north Wales (1694) shows the mail route from the West Midlands to Caernarfon via Dolgellau for the first time, and also shows some other Welsh towns.

The first turnpike roads in Wales were established in 1777 (Pritchard, 1961). The Act which established the Merioneth Turnpike Trust was general and embraced all the principal highways in Meirionnydd: it was kept going until the last quarter of the 19th century. The Trust was a single entity but was split up into five road districts, including Dolgellau and Mawddach, which took in the road to Barmouth, and the road between Dolgellau and Maentwrog as far as the bridge at Trawsfynydd.

George Kay, writing in 1794, commented that, in recent times, roads in Meirionnydd had been improved by the turnpikes but were, in his opinion, still too narrow. He reported that 'part of the road from Dolgellau to Barmouth cost two and a half guineas per rood of eight yards'. This road would appear to be a brand new construction, as all previous traffic had been by boat. In around 1755 the road to Bala was built, replacing the old track. In April, 1834, a correspondent for the Caernarfon and Denbigh Herald (C&D, 19/4/1834) described the state of the Trawsfynydd to Dolgellau road as 'disgraceful and dangerous', adding 'in every yard of it there is a rut deep enough for the grave of a child and to ensure breakdowns the space between is filled up with lumps of stone each as large as cannon balls of Swedish turnips' (Pritchard, 1961, 29).

The Post Office map dated 1823 (Dolgellau Archives, Trawsfynydd parish file) does not show any road northwards from Dolgellau (although 'Transvynith' is shown), but the road was certainly shown on a map dated 1827 (Dodd, 1925, 139), and appears to have been a brand new turnpike construction. Before the 1860s, the daily Royal Mail coach route ran from Dolgellau (whence mail had arrived from Shrewsbury via Bala), over Bont Fawr and over Llanelltyd bridge and then took two routes - northwards towards Plas Tan y Bwlch (via Trawsfynydd) or westwards along the Mawddach via Barmouth (using the new turnpike road which passed through Bontddu, and a ferry across the estuary) to Tywyn. These routes had been established since at least the middle of the 18th century and are shown on a series of contemporary maps. Again, its position at the centre of a hub of communications emphasised Dolgellau's importance.

There were tollgates at all road entrances to Dolgellau by the end of the 18th century, which was a constant cause of complaint by visitors until they were finally abandoned in 1875.

6.9.2 Rail

Cambrian Railways was formed in 1864 (as an amalgamation of three mid-Wales companies) and the section of the railway which linked Aberystwyth-Machynlleth-Barmouth-Porthmadog opened on 3rd July 1865. The main line was opened throughout its length on 10th October 1867. In 1899 McDougall (see GAT report 492 - area 11) built, at his own cost, a station at Morfa Mawddach to serve his enterprise (the development of the area on the morfa, as a

holiday resort for wealthy Midlands industrialists, which eventually became Fairbourne). An extension (Dolgellau branch) to the east of Morfa Mawddach station had reached Pemmaenpool in 1865, where it was halted due to lack of finances. However, four years later it was continued and ran along the southern side of the estuary, before crossing over it, and on as far as Dolgellau, where it terminated just east of Bont Fawr on the north side of the Wnion (the details of the line and station are shown on the 1901 OS 2nd edition map).

This station formed an end-on link with the westernmost extent of the Great Western Railway, which came via Bala from Ruabon and opened at the same time. Travellers had to change platforms from one railway to the other; up until 1925 this was by means of simply crossing the track, until a footbridge was built. The line was finally closed in 1965 and is now a cycleway ('the Mawddach trail'). The line of the railway was partly used (in area 02) as the line of the new road bypass, opened in 1981 (Wear & Jones, 1990). The only other station in the project area was Dolserau Halt (Torrent Walk) to the north-east of Dolgellau (the track came down the Wnion valley alongside the river and can still be traced today throughout area 15). This consisted of a very simple platform with no staff and was intended mainly for visitors to Torrent Walk. Originally opened in 1935, it was closed in 1951.

A minor narrow-gauge railway was constructed to take ore down to the furnace at Dôl-gun in the 19th century (see section 6.8.2): the slight remains can still be seen today as part of a bridleway running down the eastern side of Tir Stent (area 14).

6.10 Cultural associations

6.10.1 The Meirionnydd Quakers

The Quaker George Fox made his first visit to Wales, and specifically to Dolgellau, in 1657, saying he had found an earthly Paradise and that 'here is a valley of peace and beauty'. He and John ap John, the first Welsh Quaker, had been travelling throughout Wales preaching their belief that man could have direct personal communion with God, with no need for formal creeds, rites or church hierarchies. Fox taught that men and women should learn to listen to 'the Inner Light' and follow Christ's words in all things.

Although they had both met with opposition and persecution on their journey, their message had a great appeal for many of the farmers living in the hills around Dolgellau, Llwyngwrl and Bala. Among the first converts were Thomas Ellis, Iscregennan; Owen Lewis, Tyddyn y Garreg (area 16) and Robert Owen, Dolserau (area 15). Other leading families who owned their own properties were also members of the faith, and lived in houses such as Llwyn Du, Brynmawr and Dôl-gun (see section 6.8.2). At the latter, there is an outbuilding with steps leading up it where an early meeting of the Quakers took place: there is also a building at Tyddyn y Garreg which was similarly used.

Several leading industrialists in the 17th and 18th century were Quakers. People like the Rowntree, Cadbury, Darby and Clark families were members of the Society of Friends and in fact the industrial revolution owed much to the Quakers. They were hard-working people, who, as Fox said, believed in the inner light, a personal relationship with God, and hard work. As a sect they rejected rituals, including social ones - they did not, for instance, believe in doffing hats to people who were considered to be more important in society. They espoused ideas of equality, even basic feminism, and they did not believe in holding services in churches, which they called steeple houses, preferring informal meetings in simple rooms. They were persecuted much more vigorously than other Nonconformist sects, mainly because of their refusal to take the Oath of Allegiance to the King: following the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 this was considered to be political treachery and probably part of a Papist plot. But Quakers (or Friends, as they called themselves) maintained that to swear an oath of any sort was contrary to the teaching of Christ.

One of the first to suffer here was Robert Owen of Dolserau, who spent five and a half years in a damp prison on the banks of the Afon Aran, not being allowed home even once during that time. He was one of the local gentry, a descendant of Baron Owen (see section 6.5) who had been murdered by the Red Bandits of Mawddwy. But not all Quakers belonged to the landed gentry: for example, Ellis Pugh had been born in Brithdir of humble parents and became a notable preacher; his book, translated as 'Salutation to the Britons', was the first Welsh language book to be printed in America. It is interesting that his printer was the father-in-law of Benjamin Franklin.

Rowland Ellis, Bryn-mawr, became a member of the Society of Friends in 1672, and, shortly afterwards, he and a number of others were brought before Judge Walcott at Bala. When they refused to take the Oath of Allegiance and Supremacy the judge threatened to punish them as traitors, the men to be hanged, drawn and quartered, the women to be burnt. But an eminent London lawyer arrived in time to prove that Walcott was administering a law which had already been repealed, and he was obliged to release the prisoners.

Bala, also, had its share of persecution, with Quaker barns being set on fire and tenants being dispossessed of their land. A farmer called Cadwaladr Thomas was the first to be evicted by his landlord, with £55 worth of his stock seized. Fortunately many of the Welsh Quakers owned their own farms and were able to help the less fortunate among them.

In 1681, William Penn acquired land in America (which later became Pennsylvania), and the Welsh Quakers bought 40,000 acres between them. The first to emigrate were Dr Edward Jones of Bala and his company in 1682, sailing from Liverpool in the ship 'Lyon' and reaching Delaware some eleven weeks later. They were followed by hundreds of other Welsh Quakers, including Rowland Ellis (see above), who, in 1687, named his new farm there Bryn-mawr, after his old home south-west of Dolgellau (area 16). This name was later given to the famous women's college there, though it is not on the site of the original Bryn-mawr.

William Penn had promised the Welsh that they might live together in one 'free' Tract, speaking their own language and administering their own laws. However, on reaching Pennsylvania they discovered that their dream was not to be honoured, and after a long struggle to persuade the Founder to keep his promise to them, the authorities finally changed the boundaries, splitting the Welsh Tract in two.

Although Welsh names such as Merion (sic), Radnor, Haverford and Gwynedd still survived, and although Welsh was the language of worship in both Merion and Gwynedd Meeting Houses until about the middle of the 18th century, the Tract soon lost its Welsh identity. Disillusioned, many of the Welsh Quakers returned to Wales, but gradually they disappeared from Meirionnydd. By the next century only one or two well-known names remained – such as that of the woman minister, Sorti Owen, Dewisbren, who would walk all the way to London and back every year to be present at the Quakers' Yearly Meeting. In 1847 the Congregationalists were given permission to use the old Quaker Meeting House near Dolgellau, which was named Tabor (area 16), and it is still a place of worship today. There is a Quaker burial ground at Tyddyn y Garreg, and it is generally believed that the last Quaker in the area died in about 1850 or so.

The houses associated with the Quakers in the Dolgellau area shown in the Atlas Meirionnydd (Bowen, 1970) include Dolserau, Dôl-gun (area 15), Hendre, Tyddyn-y-clawdd, Gwanas, Tir-stent, Cwm-hafod-oer, Bwlch-coch, Dewisbren, Bryn-mawr, Tregerrig and Tyddynygarreg, with a chapel at Tabor (all area 16).

6.10.2 Painters and artists

Since the end of the 18th century, Dolgellau has been a mecca for English and Welsh painters and artists, who were interested in both the town itself and the surrounding landscape (most notably Cadair Idris and the Mawddach, as well as the woollen mills on the Aran). Two of the more significant paintings, perhaps, are Richard Wilson's 1765 painting 'Llyn-y-cau, Cader Idris' (which now hangs in the Tate Gallery in London and is considered one of the masterpieces of 18th century art) and the later 'The Old Mill, Dolgellau' by William Mander (fl. 1880-1922).

In addition, a series of artists has also made numerous paintings of the town of Dolgellau itself over the years: these include works by Thomas Gainsborough and John Hassell (both late 18th century); John Webber (for example, a 1790 painting looking down on the town from the road to Tywyn); George Pickering (an early 19th century painting looks south over Dolgellau towards Cadair Idris); Elizabeth Baker (again a 19th century artist, one of whose views is similar to the latter); and William Hughes (who painted several views of Eldon Square and surrounding streets in the 1830s). Copies of these are included in the Dolgellau Town File (DRO). The latter also contains many historical photographs of Dolgellau (by numerous photographers) which go back to the late 19th century and record the development of the town in considerable detail.

6.10.3 Tourism

Amongst the earliest recorded 'outside' views of Dolgellau are those of Camden, in his 'Britannia' (1586), who saw Dolgellau as no better than 'a small market town', while Leland (1710) described it as no more than 'the best village' in Tal-y-bont (J Gwynfor Jones, 2001). By the 1770s, partly as a result of improvements in the road infrastructure, the more adventurous (English) were being attracted to Wales: they came to 'admire her sovereign mountains, beautiful vallies and surprising cascades' (Pritchard, 1961). Some of these visitors, known as tourists to distinguish them from 'ordinary' travellers whose main object was simply to travel from A to B, kept accounts of their journeys or tours. These accounts are invaluable sources of information on the state of the country at the time. One of the foremost was Thomas Pennant, whose 'Tours in Wales' (published in the early 1780s) influenced many others to travel here (J Gwynfor Jones, 1981).

The popularity and influence of these accounts were reinforced by the publication from the 1770s of Road Books as Guides to Travellers: Pennant had not been impressed with the state of the roads around Dolgellau, although these did gradually improve after 1777 with the building of the first turnpike roads in the county (see section 6.9.1). Many of the early tourists repeated the routes (and opinions!) of Pennant, but things changed considerably over the next thirty or so years.

John Byng, later Viscount Torrington, wrote in 1784 'to suppose that Wales can be seen from a carriage is a grand mistake. It is impossible to explore this country but on horse-back: as from Dolgelle [sic] we have travelled nothing but narrow paths..'. Henry Wyndham (nd), an Old Etonian Sheriff of Wiltshire, described his entry into the town thus: 'we entered among the miserable hovels of this town under a boarded chanel which serves as an aqueduct to a mill and from which the water is constantly dripping upon the passenger's head' (Dolgellau Town File, DRO).

In 1836, Thomas Roscoe describes his visit to the area : 'a pleasant walk of about a mile and a half beyond Llanelltyd brings the traveller to Dolgelley, which is encircled by mountains, and seated on the river Wnion, here a broad, shallow stream, over which is a handsome bridge of seven arches. It has a neat church, containing some old monuments; and a commodious county-hall'. Some time later, H V Morton (in 1912) visited 'Dolgelly', stating he 'might be in the Austrian Tyrols as the square is crowded with mountaineers'.

Cadair Idris (allegedly) takes its name from a 7th-century warrior killed in a battle against the Saxons. Unlike many other peaks in north Wales, it does not quite reach 3,000 ft (it is 2,927 ft high), but due to its isolation it appears higher, and during the 18th century it became one of the most popular destinations for tourists in north Wales, with most visitors to it staying in Dolgellau. Byng (1784 - see above) reported that 'Robin Edwards has shewn this mountain for forty years' to 'Wilson, Gainsborough and every artist who for thirty or forty years back have visited these places'. Robin Edwards (probably the most famous of all Cadair's and Dolgellau's guides even now) would refer to English tourists as 'Curiosity men', and was still advertising his services in the town (via handbills printed on one of the local presses) at the age of 84.

By the mid 19th century, Robert Pugh, the 'Guide General', amongst others, used to lead people up the tracks of Cadair Idris on ponies. He had a cottage on the summit where shelter 'was to

be had for those wishing to see the rising sun, or in case of a shower or likewise' (there are still remains of a dwelling there). Riding up Cadair was a very popular activity, and at one time between 40 and 50 Welsh ponies were kept at one hotel in the town alone for this purpose. Also in the 19th century, a man used to travel from Dolgellau to the summit of Cadair Idris on a pack mule, to sell lemonade and sandwiches to tourists, and the route he took is now called the Pony Path. The two highest glacial lakes - Llyn Cadair to the north and Llyn Cau to the south - are favourite destinations. Llyn Cau is a most impressive lake, reputed to have no bottom, and also to hide in its depths a monster like that of Loch Ness.

One of the most famous climbers of Cadair Idris was O G Jones, an adventurer of the late 19th century who pioneered a number of rock climbing routes, including several up Cadair. In the early days, climbers stuck to gullies and crack lines; O G ventured onto faces and ridges, and so began a new trend of higher risk climbing. Sadly, he was killed in the Alps at quite a young age.

6.10.4 Other associations

Several houses in the area are associated with Court Poets of the medieval period: these include Nannau (area 11), Hengwrt (05), Cymer (06), Dolserau, Caerynwch, Gwanas (all area 15), Berth-lwyd, Tyddyn garreg, Plâs Brithdir (all 16) and Llwyn (02). These poets were nearly all associated with the 'uchelwyr' and the distribution of houses (and estates) gives an important glimpse into 16th-century life (Bowen, 1970). Among the more famous bards are Gruffudd ap Adda ap Dafydd (born c. 1344), Gruffudd Nannau (fl. 1654), Harri Hywel (fl. 1637-71) and William Jones (1907-64). For a full discussion of the bardic evidence for the Meirionnydd gentry in the social order see J Gwynfor Jones, 1981-4.

Several other important figures are associated with Dolgellau. Dr John Thomas, the 18th-century Bishop of St. Asaph, Lincoln & Salisbury, was a native of Dolgellau, and John Price (1828-1903) became Dean of Bangor. Gryffydd Owen, the first physician of the newly formed state of Pennsylvania in the 17th century, originated from the town. Robert Owen, the famous Quaker, lived briefly at Dolserau Hall, while a former Archbishop of Canterbury, Frederick Temple, founded the Dolgellau cricket team - one of the oldest in Wales. Richard Jones (1787-1855) and William Hughes (1838-1921) were two of the town's more important printers. Henry Owen (1716-95), the cleric, physician and scholar was born at Tan-y-gadair into a Quaker family. Owen Owens (1792-1862), the 'sensible preacher and moderate Calvinist' and schoolmaster was born at Maes Angharad (area 04). In 1725, Baron Richards was born at Coed, Brithdir: well-educated, he became Chief Justice of Chester, Baron of the Exchequer and Lord Chief Baron.

Hengwrt is now largely famous, as one of the mansions of the Vaughans of Nannau, for being the place where the Hengwrt MSS, now at Peniarth, were formerly kept, and also as the home of the famous diarist Elizabeth Baker (c. 1720-89) (Passmore, 1999), whose diaries give an unrivalled view of life in late 18th-century Dolgellau.

One of the earliest Grammar Schools in Wales was built in Dolgellau in 1665, endowed by Dr John Ellis (who was a Rector here at the time): the building was demolished in 1969. The year 1715 saw the death of Dr Daniel Williams: a trust was established from his will which eventually set up Dr Williams' School for Girls (see area 02) in the late 19th century (an establishment since taken over by Coleg Meirion-Dwyfor).



Historic Landscape Characterisation - Vale of Ddolgellau

Location of areas (see over for key)
Register area in thick black line

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7 Historic landscape character areas

The study area has been divided into 17 separate historic character areas as follows:

01	Dolgellau	(PRN 19180)
02	Dolgellau (north)	(PRN 19181)
03	Field system - Ffridd Llwyn	(PRN 19182)
04	Fields & woods - west of Dolgellau	(PRN 19183)
05	Fields & woods - north of Dolgellau	(PRN 19184)
06	Lower Mawddach corridor	(PRN 19185)
07	Llanelltyd	(PRN 19186)
08	Forestry, Cym yr Whin	(PRN 19187)
09	Fields around Ty'n-y-Llwyn	(PRN 19188)
10	Open mountainside – Brÿniau Glo	(PRN 19189)
11	Nannau estate	(PRN 19190)
12	Open mountain - Foel Offrwm	(PRN 19191)
13	Llanfachraeth	(PRN 19192)
14	Fieldscape around Llanfachraeth	(PRN 19193)
15	Fields & woods - east of Dolgellau	(PRN 19194)
16	Fields & woods around Tir Stent	(PRN 19195)
17	Northern slopes of Cadair Idris	(PRN 19196)

An overall location map (map 1) showing the position of these areas in relation to each other is included at the beginning of this section.

Each character area description has been divided into three sections following the model of earlier reports – historic background, key historic landscape characteristics and a section on conservation priorities and management.

A map showing the extent and detail of each area is located facing the description, the area being outlined by a solid, black line.

Colour plates which give an impression of the overall texture and character of each area are also included following the area description: some of these are aerial photographs, but sometimes a ground level view has been more appropriate.



Historic Landscape Characterisation - Vale of Dolgellau

Historic Landscape Character Area
01- Dolgellau

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Historic background

The historic core of Dolgellau is built on the floodplain at the junction of two rivers, the Wnion (running east to west), and the Aran, which joins it from the south. The name 'Dolgellau' ('meadows of the cells') may refer to the pens used by drovers for herding animals, or to the presence of the medieval Cistercian Abbey to the north (area 06). The first mention of the church (dedicated to St Mary) and indeed of *Dolkelew* is from 1253 (in the Norwich Taxatio), and in the 1293 Extent (Williams-Jones, 1976) there is reference to the bond community of Dolgellau (see section 6.4 above). In 1285 the town was referred to as 'Dolgethley'. In the 17th century another religious community, the Quakers (see above), were important in the town and surrounding area before most left for a new life in Pennsylvania. Dolgellau has also had an important administrative history. Owain Glyndŵr held an Assembly in the town in 1404, and Dolgellau later developed as the main agricultural market, Assize and county administrative centre (see area 02) of Meirionnydd.

Dolgellau appears to have developed as a town in the medieval period 'almost by stealth' (Smith, 2001), its urban characteristics virtually unrecognised by royal administrators for several centuries (although there is an intriguing reference to 'a mayor of the town of Dolgellau' in 1367). Dolgellau was never a borough, and is one of the few county towns in Wales which never returned a member of Parliament. Not until the early 17th century are there references to its being a market town or borough and to its tenements as burgages, but the commercial importance of the town may have begun by the early 14th century when there were already references to a market and fairs. Certainly, Dolgellau seems to have superseded Harlech as the premier town of the shire in the course of the 16th century (Smith, *ibid*). Dolgellau's eventual success must, undoubtedly, be attributed to its favourable geographical location. Its situation at a point where several road systems converged upon a bridgehead and river which was probably navigable by small boats were to its advantage, while its location on the economic frontier between the sheep and cattle farming countryside in the uplands and the good arable lands in the immediate vicinity may have enabled the town to develop as a place where the produce of two economic zones might be exchanged.

In 1791 (in the Universal British Directory) Dolgellau is described as follows - 'The buildings in general, are low and irregular. The markets are on Tuesdays and Saturdays, and there are 7 fairs in the year. The tide flows within a mile of the town. The principal occupations of the town are, Physicians 2, Lawyers 3, Merchants 7, Grocers 4, Web-manufacturers 11, Web-merchants 1, Tanners 3, Skinners 5, Mercer 1 Currier 1, Carrier 1, Corn factorer 1, Timber merchant 1, Woolstapler 1, Plumber/glazier 2 and Sadler 2'.

A 1794 map of the town (ZM/3667) shows the irregular layout of town much as it is today, and also shows the roads out over the bridge to Bala and Barmouth, as well as to Dinas Mawddwy and Tywyn. The town's development was due to the central part it played in the county's woollen industry, which reached its peak circa 1800, but declined over the following century due to the birth of mechanical mills. All the factories shown on the 1901 OS map, for instance, are described as 'woollen', and there is a drawing of a fulling mill c. 1830 in the DRO (ZS/36k/38). The population of the parish rose from 2940 in 1801 to a maximum of 4037 in 1831, but then dropped to 2467 by 1891 before rising to 2632 by 1991.

Visitors in the 17th and 18th centuries complained that every entrance to the town was barred by a turnpike, the streets were irregular and very narrow, and the houses small and ill-lit. Rev J Evans in 'A Tour Through Part of North Wales' in the year 1798 and at other times, claimed that Dolgellau 'is improving in building and population from the

increasing trade in coarse cloth, it promises to become no inconsiderable place'. In 1808, Richard Fenton wrote 'the Masonry of Dolgelley merits particular notice. From time immemorial they have been built with very large stones...lifting them with an immense machine which takes above a day to erect, and worked by two men requiring a Lever of vast power'.

However, during the first part of the 19th century the town was greatly improved by Sir Robert Williams Vaughan of Nannau. He largely rebuilt the centre of the town, laid out its fine market square and was instrumental in getting a Court House built, a National School founded and a new county gaol erected (it closed in 1878 for lack of occupants!).

The 1838 tithe map shows almost all settlement in Dolgellau restricted to south of the river Wnion, with the exception of three buildings north of bridge (including Llwyn – see area 02 below), but even these areas are described as fields. The settlement is concentrated around Eldon Square, but is shown extending south along the road running alongside the Aran where the woollen mills and their associated buildings were located. The 1901 OS map shows the town had not expanded much beyond its 1838 limits, except to the east where it has crossed the river and Victorian infrastructure buildings such as schools, a brewery and a sawmill have been built. It also clearly shows the extent of the woollen industry on the river to the south, with four factories and two mills marked (Fron-goch factory, Idris factory, Wenallt factory and Factory fawr, as well as Pandy and Pandy Aberneint (dis.)).

Various industries have contributed to the character of Dolgellau, and have left their mark on the names of buildings and roads in the town and in the intriguingly complex pattern of streets and small squares south of the river Wnion, which is unique in Wales. A valuable woollen industry, specialising in flannel, flourished in the 18th and 19th centuries, and tanning was an important part of the local economy until quite recently. Many goods produced here were taken either to Barmouth for sea transport, or to Bala and thence Shrewsbury. Cae Marian is where Welsh cattle were shod before starting on the long journeys to the markets of Kent and Essex. It was given in trust to the town in 1811.

Since the 18th century, visitors and artists have come to the area to explore the scenic landscapes of Cadair Idris and the Mawddach estuary (see section 6.10 above). Eldon Square (formerly the main market square – see photograph) is now established as the location for the annual 'Sesiwn Fawr' music festival.

Key historic landscape characteristics

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century architecture, tourist town

The architectural character of Dolgellau is dominated by the grey dolerite and slate buildings (built from local stone), of which over two hundred are listed. Although visitors in the 18th century complained of the streets and houses, during the first part of the 19th century the town was vastly improved by Sir Robert Williams Vaughan of Nannau. In rebuilding the town centre, creating the market square and exerting the necessary pressure to have public buildings built, he seems to have largely followed the same layout that the town had previously (compare the 1794 map with a modern one for the town centre).

The town has a very dense architecture, with narrow streets and tall buildings (some made even taller and more imposing by the massive chimneys obviously required to keep fires going), all built from the same stone but with different finishes marking both development over time and social status. The jumble of streets and irregular layouts of house plots seem chaotic by 19th century standards (*cf.* Tremadog and Porthmadog), and the social juxtapositions of 'grand' town houses with terraced cottages and even

industrial buildings is unique in Wales. The town displays a range of masonry styles (for example in the use of 'snecking' after c. 1870, and of rough boulders in earlier phases).

The Dolgellau Town Trail gives an excellent overall impression of the present-day architectural splendour and history of the town. A map of the trail and full details are available from the tourist information centre on Eldon Square (see photograph), but some of the finer and more important buildings are described here.

At the northern end of the 'old' town, *Bont Fawr* (formerly a scheduled ancient monument) was built in 1638 (the date is on the downstream side of the bridge) and has since been widened and extended. It is called *Y Bont Fawr* (the Big Bridge) to distinguish it from a smaller bridge that lay just to the south. Dolgellau has suffered from many floods, and one major flood in 1903 destroyed part of the bridge. The top end of Bont Fawr was raised to accommodate the railway which ran on the line of the present bypass to the north of the river, the station being located just upstream of the bridge. Initially (in 1868), through-passengers were obliged to change here as two rival railway companies, each with its own terminus, met here.

Arguably the finest architect-designed building in the town, the County Hall, just south of Bont Fawr, was built in 1825 at a cost of £3,000, the architect being Edward Haycock. It served as the administrative headquarters of Meirionnydd in the 19th century, and its role as a court house continues to this day. The porches were filled in in 1995, spoiling the simple elegance of the building.

Just off Eldon Square is the imposing building (ca. 1886) of T H Roberts, a remarkably well preserved ironmonger's which still has its original fittings. A much older building, Cwrt Plas yn Dre, once stood on the site, and was reputedly a meeting place for the famous Welsh rebel Owain Glyndwr who temporarily controlled much of Wales in the early 1400s. Despite being the town's chief tourist attraction at the time, the building was demolished in 1881 and parts were re-erected in Newtown.

By the mid 19th century Dolgellau had its own gas supply produced from burning coal. The retort house remains, though its chimney stack has been removed and slated over. Gas was stored in gasometers behind the works.

The now defunct Golden Lion Inn was once a coaching inn. It became the premier hotel of the area and was an obligatory stopping point for any passing European royals. The Old Town Hall (*Y Sosban*), dated 1606, once fulfilled the judicial and administrative functions of the town (before the building of the new County Hall). Two dungeon-like rooms downstairs served as a lock-up for vagrants and drunkards.

The present St Mary's church dates from 1716, with a chancel added in 1864. The masonry is, unusually, of dressed slate with blocks overlapping at the corners, log-cabin style. The timber piers inside were brought over the mountains by ox-cart from Dinas Mawddwy. A carved stone effigy (ca. 1350) of Meurig ap Ynyr Fychan lies in the north-east corner of the church. The first mention of the church and indeed of *Dolkelew* is from 1253.

The fine town house of Tan y Fynwent dates from the late 17th century and was the rector's residence at one time (possibly being built as such). Its chimneys are unusually positioned, and it has an interesting 19th-century lattice-work porch. Such porches are one of the characteristic architectural features of the town.

Just south of the river, the Marian, Dolgellau's main green space and one of its greatest assets, was given in trust to the town in 1811 and has been the focus of the town's leisure activities for generations. By the 16th century there was a bowling green here (now under the car park), surrounded by ditches to keep out grazing animals. A hollow in the grass in the cricket outfield marks the site of a cockpit. The stone circle was set

up in 1948 to proclaim the National Eisteddfod of Wales the following year. Dolgellau rugby club matches are also played here.

To the west of the church and south of the Marian, the Lawnt is the historical centre of Dolgellau, where the first settlement is thought (without archaeological evidence) to have grown up around the slightly raised ground in the area of the church. The Lawnt is now a residential area but still retains evidence of former commercial activity such as shop windows. Hope House was a woollen factory, while nearby a building with a tall window was Dolgellau's first bank, established in 1803.

The former police station dates from the mid 19th century. Its delicate Gothic windows present a very different image of the law from that of the modern police headquarters across the river (area 02). On the road out to the west is the toll house of the former turnpike road to Tywyn.

At the height of the religious revival at the beginning of the 20th century, Dolgellau had about ten chapels, and their services, Sunday schools, prayer meetings and bible readings were a major social focus in the town. The main chapels were largely rebuilt in the late 19th century (Tabernacl 1868, Salem 1893, Ebenezer 1880, Judah 1839/1928), and more recently several chapels have been converted to other uses, including a post office, a theatre and a dental surgery.

In the early 19th century, the area around *Y Domen Fawr* (Meyrick Square) in the southern part of the town was a crowded warren of little houses, workshops, shops and 'tippling houses'. The 1801 census recorded 2,949 inhabitants in Dolgellau, and while today the population is slightly lower, there are at least twice as many dwellings in the town. Nearby, Tan y Gader, built c. 1800, was used as a maternity home. The unusual wheel window in the attic gable can be seen in several houses of similar age in the area. To the north, Fro Awel is a typical vernacular cottage. The design, with its low roof and hipped dormer windows, is typical of the mid 17th - mid 18th century. The rear wing was once a candle factory to supply the gold mines. Opposite, Siop y Seren was built in 1800, partly for commercial use, with a shop extension added later. The stone bridge at the back on the second floor gave weavers access to the loom rooms in the upper two storeys.

Near the crossing of the Afon Aran is *Wtra Plas Coch*. The name 'wtra', used for a narrow lane, comes from the Shropshire word 'out-track', a farm road (this was originally the route which led out of the town towards the woollen markets of Shrewsbury). The Unicorn and Plas Coch were built around 1700 and originally had steeply-pitched roofs with dormers and tall chimneys. The Clifton Hotel, next door, was rebuilt around 1820 from the old town jail (1716-1813). John Howard, the penal reformer, visited the jail in 1774 and commented on its filthy state. Little had improved by 1788, when prisoners petitioned about the maggots and 'nasty filth' in the water, which came from the river Aran where sheep skins were washed.

Nearby is Bwthyn Pont yr Aran, a vernacular cottage of the 17th century. The roof details here are interesting: the slates are laid in diminishing courses and there are inset stone slabs to shed the water away from the base of the chimney stacks. These are a common feature in Dolgellau, which enjoys an annual rainfall of around 70 inches. The ground floor is below road level. This is also true of the older buildings along *Wtra'r Felin*, which leads from here to the church. This is likely to have been the route of the road that led west to the centre of the town. The buildings behind housed a fellmongering business, where sheep pelts were processed. The business closed in 1989, thus ending the long tradition of processing wool and sheep-hides in the town. The present bridge (Pont yr Aran) is built on top of its much narrower predecessor.

Finally, Eldon Square (named for Lord Eldon, Chancellor of Britain in 1801, who was a friend of, and won a lawsuit for, Sir R W Vaughan), in the centre of town, was the meeting place, market place, trading place, and the venue for fairs, community events

and festivals. It contains several buildings of interest including Eldon Row (1810); Neuadd Idris, built c. 1870 as a market hall (now converted to shops) with assembly rooms above; Plas Newydd, at the top of the Square, which dates from the 17th century, with the bays facing the Square added around 1800; Central Buildings was formerly a warehouse and shop for the locally produced tweed, while Ty Meirion used to be called London House, being an emporium for goods from a London merchant. (Many Welsh towns have their London, Liverpool or Manchester House.) At the rear, the hoist and loading bay on the third floor are still visible.

Conservation priorities and management

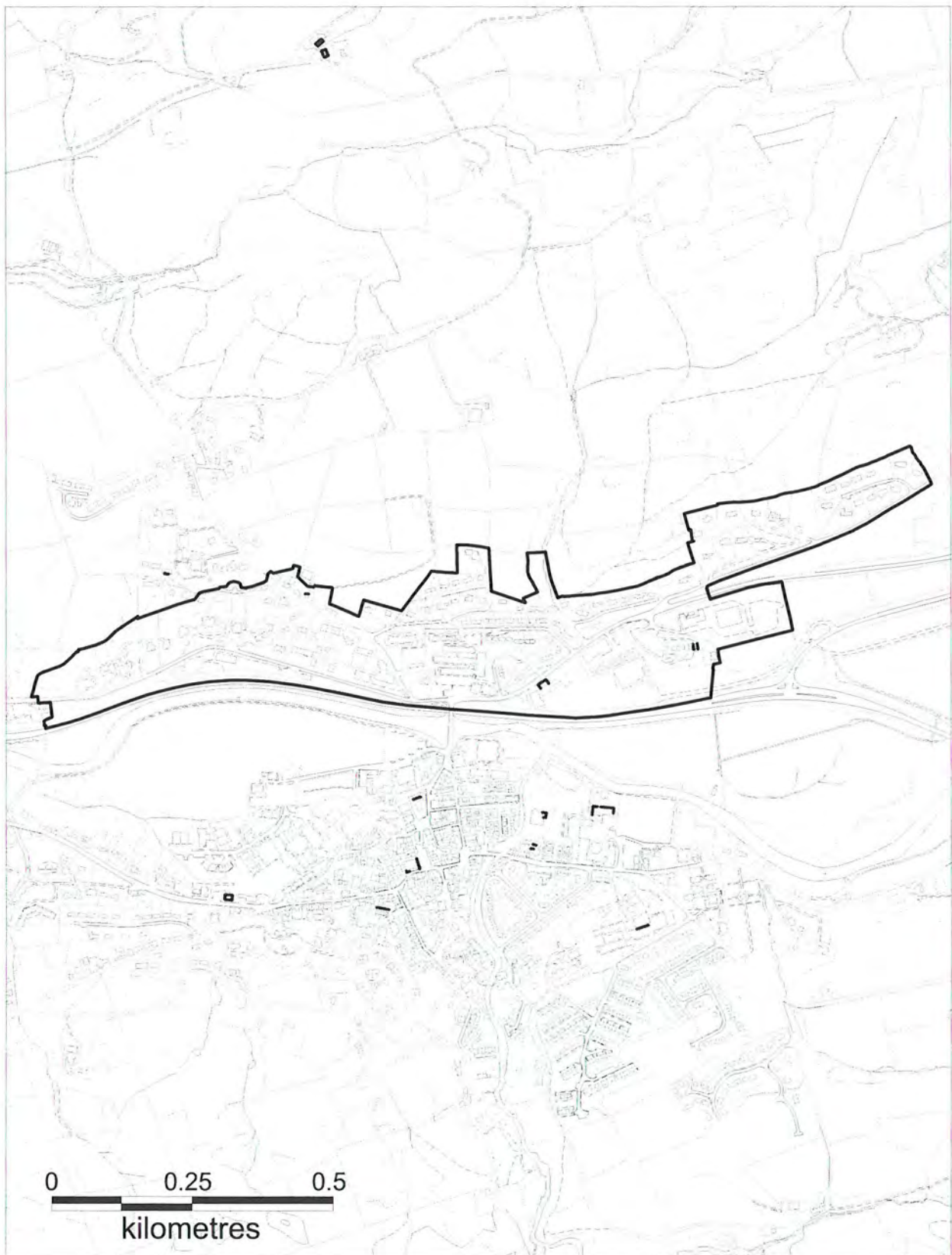
- Conservation of the unique architecture of the town (more than 200 buildings are listed)
- Conservation of the general character and atmosphere of the town



01 Dolgellau

(PRN 19180)

View of the northern end of Eldon Square, showing the distinctive architecture and layout of the town.



Historic Landscape Characterisation - Vale of Dolgellau

Historic Landscape Character Area
02 - Dolgellau (North)

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Historic background

Most people enter Dolgellau (as they have done for centuries) via the seven-arched bridge *Y Bont Fawr* (The Big Bridge), which spans the river Wnion. This was originally built in 1638, although it has had various modifications over the years: originally it had a span of ten arches but three were lost with the building of the railway in the 19th century, and it has been largely reconstructed since (there are several photographs in the Dolgellau Town File in the DRO).

Parts of the complex at Llwyn (towards the eastern end of the area) date back to the 1600s. There is a mansion, farm cottage and associated buildings such as a Dutch barn, cart shed and granary. It was the home of the prominent family of Baron Owen, sheriff of Meirionnydd in the 1540s and 1550, and the the arch rival of the Nanneys of Nannau for control of Dolgellau and the former lands of Cymer (see section 6.5 above for details) before he was murdered (J Gwynfor Jones, 2001, has fuller details).

The 1838 tithe map shows this area as still mainly fields with a few scattered buildings alongside the complex of roads (all still visible today) running through it. The 1901 OS map shows the town of Dolgellau as having expanded considerably since 1898, particularly to the north of the Afon Wnion. Amongst the earliest (and still finest buildings) here is a long line of huge, sometimes elegant, late 19th-century villas, set out on the south-facing slopes, many of them including the '*coed*' element in their names. Later, in the 20th century, this northern part of the town was developed further to include buildings which house the county council offices, the county archives, the police station, the school (built 1889) and the college as well as a number of modern service buildings and rows of terraced council houses. Photographs showing the start of the development of this area can be found in the NLW (JTH/NLW, and GHC/NL) and DRO ZS/36K/93, 96. The former even includes a steam train in the foreground!

Dr Williams' Girls' School was established here in 1878 and closed in 1975 (when it was taken over by Coleg Meirion-Dwyfor). The famous footbridge over the road was opened by Dame Margaret Lloyd George (an Old Girl of the school) in the 1930s.

The 1901 OS map shows the route of the Cambrian Railway (Dolgellau branch) coming in from Arthog/Fairbourne along the southern edge of the Mawddach estuary, crossing the Wnion and running alongside the northern bank of the river to the station which lay just to the east of Bont Fawr, where there was a junction with the Great Western Railway (Bala and Dolgellau branch). This then ran eastwards alongside the river through area 15. The railway passed through the town from 1868 to 1964, and much of its route is preserved in the modern road layout.

Key historic landscape characteristics

Twentieth-century municipal buildings, housing

Particularly characteristic of the part of Dolgellau north of the river are the huge and imposing 19th-century mansions, set within large, landscaped grounds. The building complex surrounding Llwyn still survives, now marooned amidst a sea of 20th-century constructions. The early 20th-century municipal buildings which form the core of the current Gwynedd Council offices have some finer features, as does the college. There are several rows and informal terraces of later 20th-century houses, stretching back up the hill towards the golf course. All traces of the former railway have long since been removed.

Conservation priorities and management

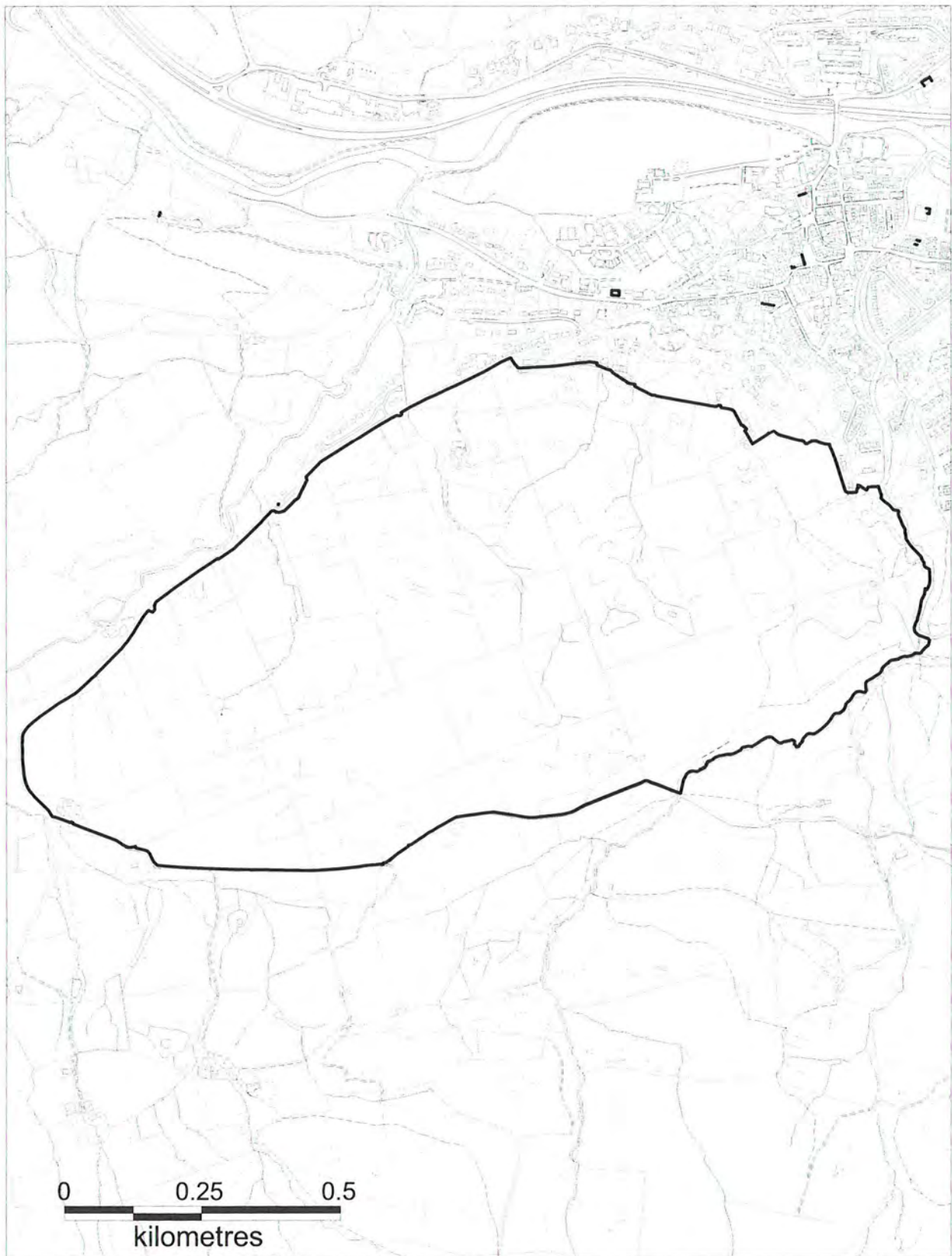
- Conservation of some of the municipal and college buildings
- Conservation of the late Victorian villas



02 Dolgellau (north)

(PRN 19181)

View of the 'northern' part of Dolgellau which shows the modern terraced housing and offices which are characteristic of this area.



Historic Landscape Characterisation - Vale of Dolgellau

Historic Landscape Character Area
03 - Field system - Ffridd Llwyn

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Historic background

The area is already loosely defined on the 1838 tithe map by the elliptical road scheme extant today, but contains fewer straight field walls (which were presumably property rather than individual field boundaries), and the area was not as distinctive as it is today. It is recorded as being in the township of Dolgellau and helpfully referred to as 'fields'. Rhydwen at the western end was the only settlement shown here, and the area extended further east under what is now expanding Dolgellau. By 1901 (OS 2nd series map) the field pattern was fully developed and as we see it today, and some encroachment had started on its eastern end by the expanding town. There are a couple of stone field barns within the area.

Key historic landscape characteristics

Drystone walls, regular pattern, pasture

This is a small, discrete area of regular fields, defined by a series of straight drystone walls, laid out at right-angles to produce a grid-like pattern, superimposed on a series of rocky outcrops which appear to be largely unchanged from the tithe and early OS maps. The system, largely surrounded by the secondary road, is presumably post-medieval in origin, and the area does not contain any earlier evidence for settlement or agriculture. The land within the fields is all improved pasture (unlike that in the surrounding areas to the north and south (04 and 16)).

Conservation priorities and management

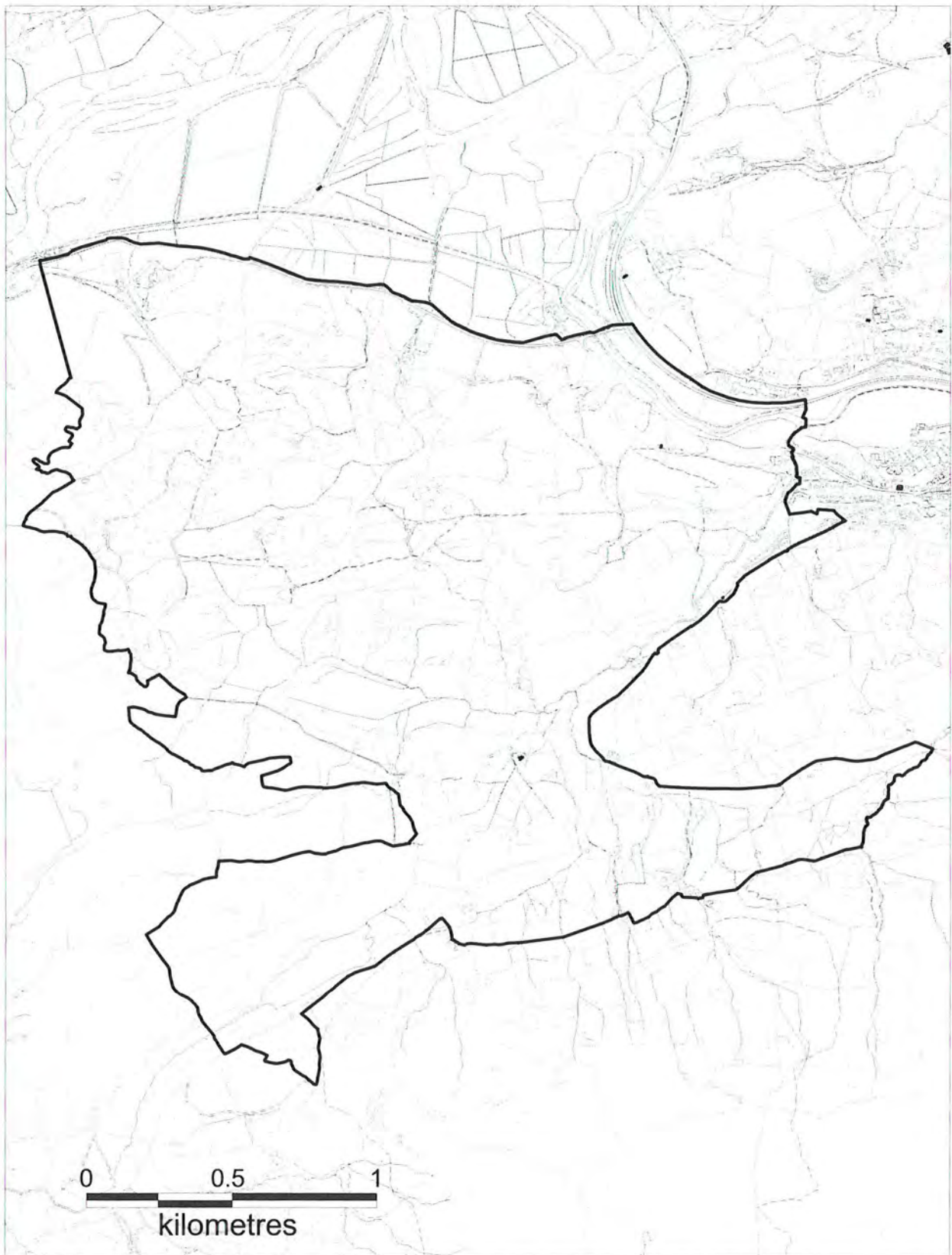
- Conservation of the drystone walls and their pattern



03 Field system - Ffridd Llwyn

(PRN 19182)

View of this character are looking north-east, showing the regular pattern of substantial drystone walls which differentiate this area from the surrounding landscapes.



Historic Landscape Characterisation - Vale of Dolgellau

Historic Landscape Character Area
04 - Fields and woods - west of Dolgellau

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Historic background

This large, rather amorphous area is characterised by open ground (much of it is designated SSSI) and fewer fields, with a scatter of farms such as Derwas, Graig and Llwyn-iarth (there are relatively few farms in the area), all of which predate the 1843 tithe map where most are recorded as being in Garthgynfawr township (within Dolgellau parish). The map, unfortunately, does not show the field pattern, nor the complex of trackways which must have existed to serve the remote farms.

The area is shown as largely wooded on the 1901 OS map, and it still retains the scattered settlement patterns of the 1840s. The field pattern, which is irregular, is identical to that on the modern map. The complex set of trackways shown is retained today as trackways or footpaths. Interestingly a 'Rifle range (disused)' and 'Markers' huts' are marked just east of Tal y Waen, the remains of the latter being still well-preserved.

Key historic landscape characteristics

Vernacular houses, field banks, woodland

This is a large area of unenclosed, open land, irregular fields and woodland, downslope from the bare mountain of Dolgledr and reaching as far down as the Mawddach estuary. It contains a number of sub-medieval houses (such as Maes Angharad (surrounded by escaped rhododendrons), Gelliwyd Fawr and Gelliwyd Fach) which have a loosely-scattered pattern and which are surrounded by lynched field banks, some of which may be prehistoric in origin (many of the fields are circular or oval in shape), although there are no known prehistoric sites in the area. Some of these farms are now derelict (others have recently been 'prettified'), and the whole has an atmosphere of the dereliction of marginal uplands in the 21st century.

The irregular enclosures are defined both by drystone walls and field banks, which are quite unlike the boundaries in the areas to the west and east. While most of the area is pasture, there are some low-lying, boggy, unimproved fields. Most of the woodland is now mixed, with some areas of semi-natural oaks surrounded by modern forestry. There is also a good deal of holly here (which is absent from surrounding areas), and evidence for coppicing. The SSSI designations for 31WGD, 31WVX and 31WMT (above section 6.2) contain more detailed descriptions of the 'natural' landscape.

Conservation priorities and management

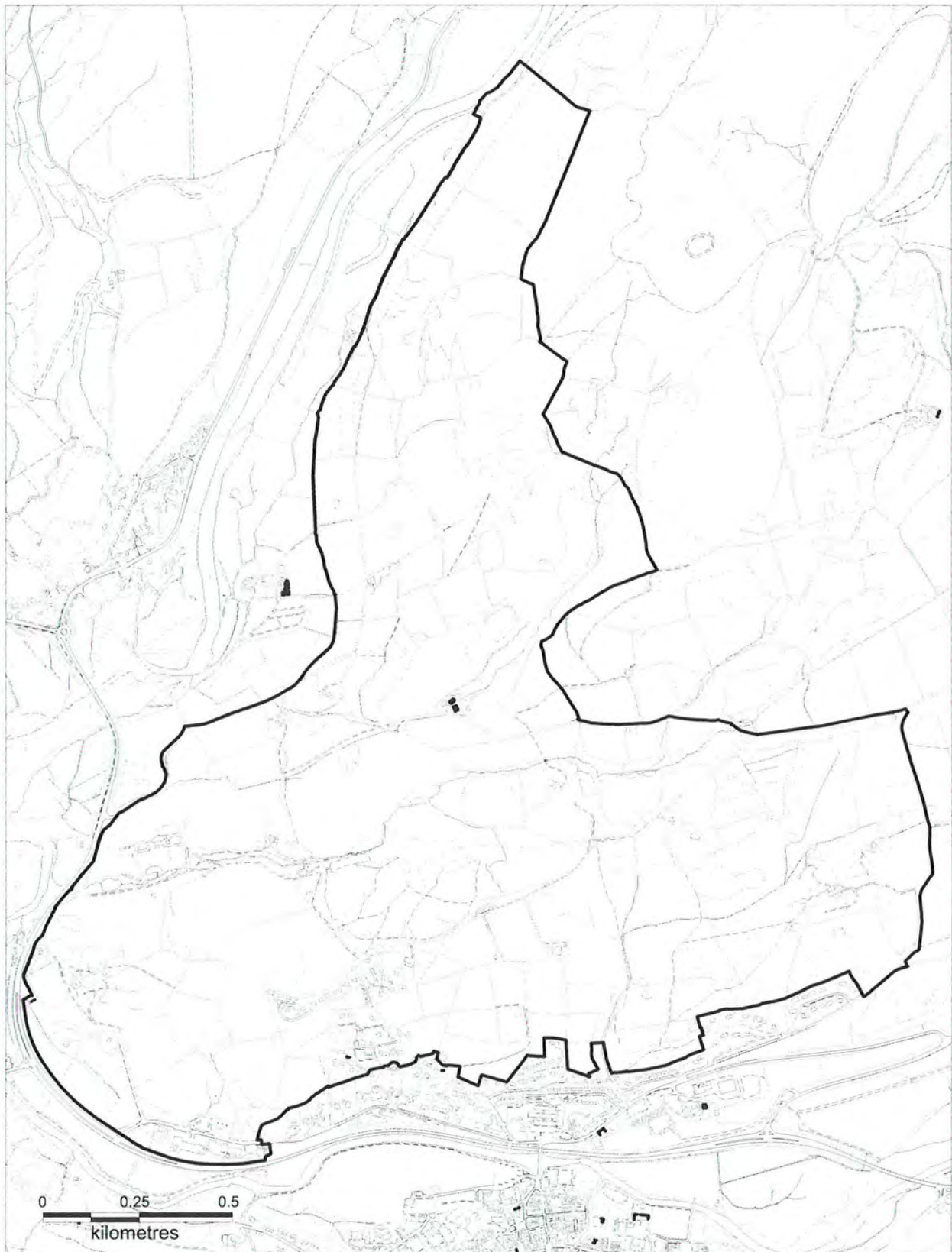
- Conservation of the vernacular characters of the scattered farmhouses.
- Preservation of irregular fieldscape
- Conservation of the various SSSI interests



04 Fields & woods - west of Dolgellau

(PRN 19183)

Distant view showing the wooded hillside on the lower slopes of Cadair Idris.



Historic Landscape Characterisation - Vale of Dolgellau

Historic Landscape Character Area
05 - Fields and woods - north of Dolgellau

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Historic background

Hengwrt is recorded as one of the granges of the abbey of Cymer, granted a charter in 1209 (see section 6.5 above, and area 06 below). It is the only grange that is in close proximity to the abbey itself, and was probably farmed for cattle. After the Dissolution, the domain land formerly controlled by the monastery, and Hengwrt, had to be included in the parochial system and it was taken into Llanelltyd. The abbey and its domain became the property of John Powys, Sergeant-at-Arms, and it subsequently passed to Sir Walter Lloyd of Cardiganshire. Hengwrt, after being leased for some time, came into the family of Baron Owen of Dolgellau. Then Hywel Vaughan of Gwengraig managed to buy both properties and left them to his son Robert Vaughan, the antiquary.

The 1840 tithe map of Llanelltyd does not contain any detail relating to the area, beyond the fact the land was owned by R W Vaughan. The 1901 OS map shows Coed Dol-fawr, Coed Ffridd-gam and Coed Pen-y-cefn much as they exist today, as well as most of the smaller patches of woodland in the area. Likewise most of the field boundaries match up with what exists today, and the settlement pattern remains unaltered (the southern part of the area has been encroached upon by the expansion of Dolgellau (area 02)). Hengwrt is shown with a substantial park and garden surrounding the house, and Dol-rhyd to the south is also a substantial house.

Recent developments here, on the northern edge of Dolgellau, include Dolgellau golf club (in a small valley to the east of Hengwrt), and the more prominent radio transmitting mast on the higher land.

Key historic landscape characteristics***Pasture fields, hedgelines and trees, woodland***

This is an area of woodlands and fields, set on a rolling series of hillslopes between the lower reaches of the Afon Mawddach (area 06) and the estate land of Nannau (area 11). The open fields are all down to improved pasture, and are defined mainly by hedgerows with trees, some of which have stone walls at their bases. The woodland is again typically a mixture of semi-natural and modern forestry. There is a number of scattered farms and houses in the area, the most important of which (Hengwrt and Dol-rhyd) are post-medieval in date, and significant buildings. The southern part of the area has been eroded by the expansion of Dolgellau in the 20th century, north of the river.

Conservation priorities and management

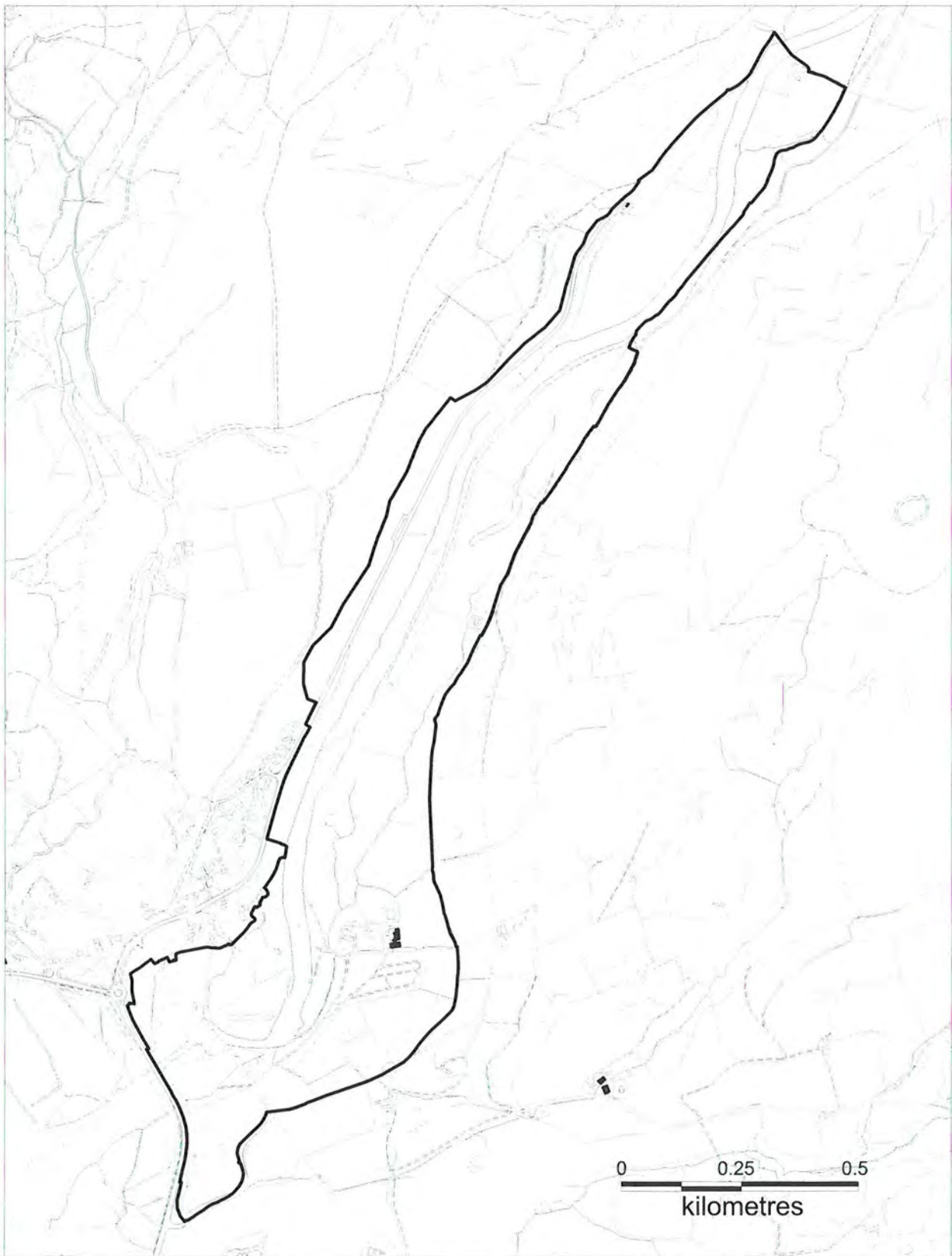
- Vernacular architecture of the scattered farms
- Pasture fields
- Hedgerows and trees



05 Fields & woods - north of Dolgellau

(PRN 19184)

View showing the open pasture, hedged in by trees and woods, which is characteristic of this area.



Historic Landscape Characterisation - Vale of Dolgellau

Historic Landscape Character Area
06 - Lower Mawddach Corridor

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Historic background

This area is dominated by two principal archaeological monuments, Cymer Abbey (founded by the Cistercians in 1198 and granted a charter by Llywelyn in 1209) and Llanelltyd bridge. A detailed description of the lands and properties held by Cymer, along with a map showing a number of interesting field names, is included in Williams (1990, 41-3): a brief summary has been supplied in section 6.5 above. Proximity to the estuary of the Afon Mawddach, close to its bridging point, was a considerable advantage to the monks of Cymer. They had access by sea to their properties in Llŷn, whilst more locally they had important fishing rights, the 'water of Cymmer' stretching as far as Llyn Penmon (Penmaenpool today) (Lewis and Davies, 1954). The abbot laid claim (in the mid fourteenth century) to 'fishing in all his rivers, ponds, and waters, and in the haven and shores of the sea with nets and other instruments' (Ellis, 1838). The significance of water to the abbey was perhaps underlined when one of the monks was accidentally drowned (Williams-Jones, 1957).

In addition to the abbey and home grange (most of which appears to have been on the opposite side of the river, in character areas 07, 08, 09 and 10, and which was probably farmed for cattle), the monks also controlled water and fulling mills, and an iron forge nearby, as well as granges at Aberreiddon, Esgaireiddon, Hafod Newydd and Brynbedwyn. They also had land further away (Williams, 1990, 41-3), in Trawsfynydd and Brithdir, for example.

Llywelyn had granted Cymer the right to recover its own cargoes lost in storm and shipwreck (*ibid.*), and its possession of boats is also alluded to in the field name Cae Llong (near the modern Pentre farm). One commentator has suggested that another field name, Dôl-y-stabal (running along both sides of the river between the abbey and the bridge), is to be interpreted as 'the field of the staple', indicating the participation of the abbey in the wool trade (Ellis, 1928). In 1536 Henry VIII dissolved all monasteries earning less than £200 per annum: Cymer Abbey was earning just £51 and thus fell victim. The land belonging to the abbey was taken into Llanelltyd parish (see sections 6.4 and 6.5 above), and was bought by the Nannau estate (which had begun renting property from the abbot early in the 16th century). The estate continued to develop this land over the next centuries (although the land to the west of the river was probably retained as cattle walks).

The 1901 OS map shows the area, with the exception of the new road to the west of the river and the highly visible and intrusive caravan site adjacent to the abbey, much as it is today. The only other settlements here are the farms of Dolfawr and Dôl-y-clochydd.

Key historic landscape characteristics

Cymer Abbey, Llanelltyd bridge, floodplain

This area comprises the floodplain of the lower Afon Mawddach, just above the point where it broadens out and is joined by the Afon Wnion to form the Mawddach estuary. In addition to the two major monuments and farmhouses mentioned above, there are just a number of modern field boundaries (post and wire fences) here.

The early 13th-century church is simple in plan (an indication that the monks here were never well-off – see section 6.5): the tower was added at the west end a century or so later. The position of the cloister (its east end lying beyond the line of the east wall of the church) shows that the usual transepts and choir were never built (Ralegh Radford,

1965). The farmhouse at Y Fanner, next to the abbey, is the earliest building in the area and was probably originally the abbot's house (see section 6.7.3 above). There are two other farmhouses on the flat floodplain of the river, which is dominated by steep hillsides on both sides.

The 'old' bridge here (see photograph) is probably 18th century or earlier in date, but there are references to a bridge being in existence near the abbey in 1400, and the crossing would have been important not only for the monks but for trade in general (see section 6.9 above).

Aber Mawddach (Mawddach estuary) has been designated a SSSI covering 1340.6 ha, most of which lies outside this character area. However, the river itself as it runs through this area is part of the designation (CCW SSSI ref. 'Mawddach estuary/Afon Mawddach' 31WVS). The overall management objective for the SSSI is to retain the habitat- and species-related interest of the area, which includes several BAP species.

Conservation priorities and management

- Conservation of Cymer Abbey and Llanelltyd bridge (both scheduled ancient monuments), and Y Fanner
- Need for archaeological investigation ahead of any further riverbank-related activities by the Environment Agency
- Conservation of the SSSI-related interests in the area



06 Lower Mawddach corridor

(PRN 19185)

View of Llanelltyd bridge crossing the lower reaches of the Afon Mawddach as it passes through the floodplain above the estuary.



Historic Landscape Characterisation - Vale of Dolgellau

Historic Landscape Character Area
07 - Llanelltyd

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Historic background

Llanelltyd is one of only three nucleated settlements in the project area. The principal historic core of Llanelltyd appears to be concentrated around the church towards the southern end of the character area, opposite Cymer Abbey, on land which was once owned and controlled by the monks (Gresham, 1984 and Williams, 1990 - see also areas 08, 09 and 10 which lie above it). The 1843 Llanelltyd tithe map does not show any houses within the village (only one, Muriau, is shown to the north), although the junction of the roads from Barmouth, Dolgellau (via the bridge) and Trawsfynydd are clearly defined. These had been in existence from the late 18th century. The map is not, however, completely reliable.

The 1901 OS 2nd edition map shows Llanelltyd as having developed along the northern side of this junction: on this map, the extant houses are grouped either around the church (which is situated on a slight rise above the floodplain to the south of the road as it heads north), or in terraces on the hillside to the north of the road, again above the flood plain. There is only a handful of houses here at this time.

A separate core to the village was created to the north in the mid 20th century, with the building of a council estate based on a series of terraced houses above the main road (see photograph).

Key historic landscape characteristics

Nineteenth-century nucleated settlement

Llanelltyd is very much a ribbon development, strung out along both sides (although primarily the northern) of the modern main A470 and A496, but built along the original route of the roads before improvements in the 20th century. The principal historic interest is in the southern part of the settlement. There are two or three early houses in the area immediately around the church (Ty'n-llan, for example, is listed), including one dating possibly to the late 18th century and a chapel dated 1817.

Elsewhere (*i.e.* across the road) there are a few 19th-century cottages, all stone-built; alongside these are other stone-built houses, mainly of two storeys and in short terraces. The settlement was built clinging the slopes of a natural south-facing bowl in the mountainside, above the floodplain of the Mawddach where it broadens out into the estuary.

Conservation priorities and management

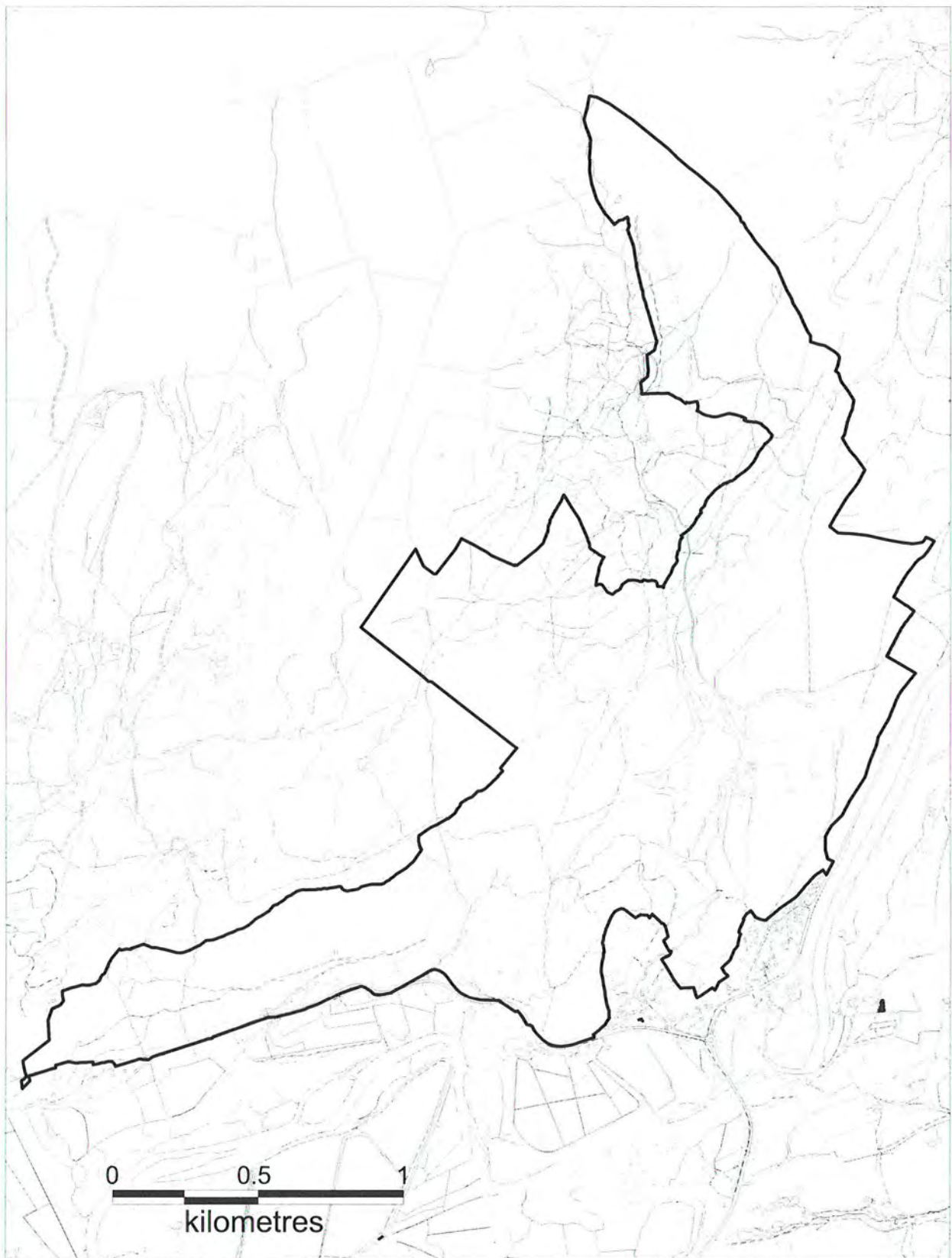
- Conservation of the earlier vernacular tradition of the settlement



07 Llanelltyd

(PRN 19186)

View of the modern housing which characterises the northern part of the village.



Historic Landscape Characterisation - Vale of Dolgellau

Historic Landscape Character Area
08 - Forestry, Cym yr Whin

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Historic background

There is no evidence for prehistoric activity in this area. However, much of the area was owned and farmed (probably for cattle) by the monks of Cymer Abbey after their charter was granted to them by Llywelyn in 1209 (see Gresham, 1984, and Williams, 1990), as part of the demesne attached to the abbey itself. The pattern of enclosures which characterises this area is part of the post-medieval enclosure of the ffridd, which also extends across areas 08 and 10. The 1843 Llanelltyd tithe map shows a couple of settlements (Cae Beudy isaf and Tan y graig) here, but only the extent of the properties owned, not any detail of field patterns. The enclosures which underlie the woodland (most of which is 20th-century forestry) probably belong to the post-medieval enclosure of the ffridd (represented, for example, by place-names such as Ffridd Beudy-isaf).

A couple of disused gold mines (un-named but probably part of the former Prince of Wales mining complex) are shown on the 1901 OS 2nd edition map in the western part of the area, just north of Maes-y-garnedd. Most of the area is shown as unenclosed mountainside, criss-crossed by a series of footpaths and trackways. There is some woodland shown (for example Coed Ffordd gôch on the lower slopes just north of Llanelltyd and further up Cwm yr Wnion (Cym yr Whin). However, most of the area is shown as open mountainside.

Key historic landscape characteristics*Woodland, forestry, field boundaries*

Most of this character area is covered in forestry, which appears to contain areas of more ancient woodland. These mask an earlier series of drystone wall field boundaries which have broken the area into a series of large, irregular enclosures. (See also areas 09 and 10 whose enclosures form part of the same pattern spreading across this extensive area of mountainside.)

Conservation priorities and management

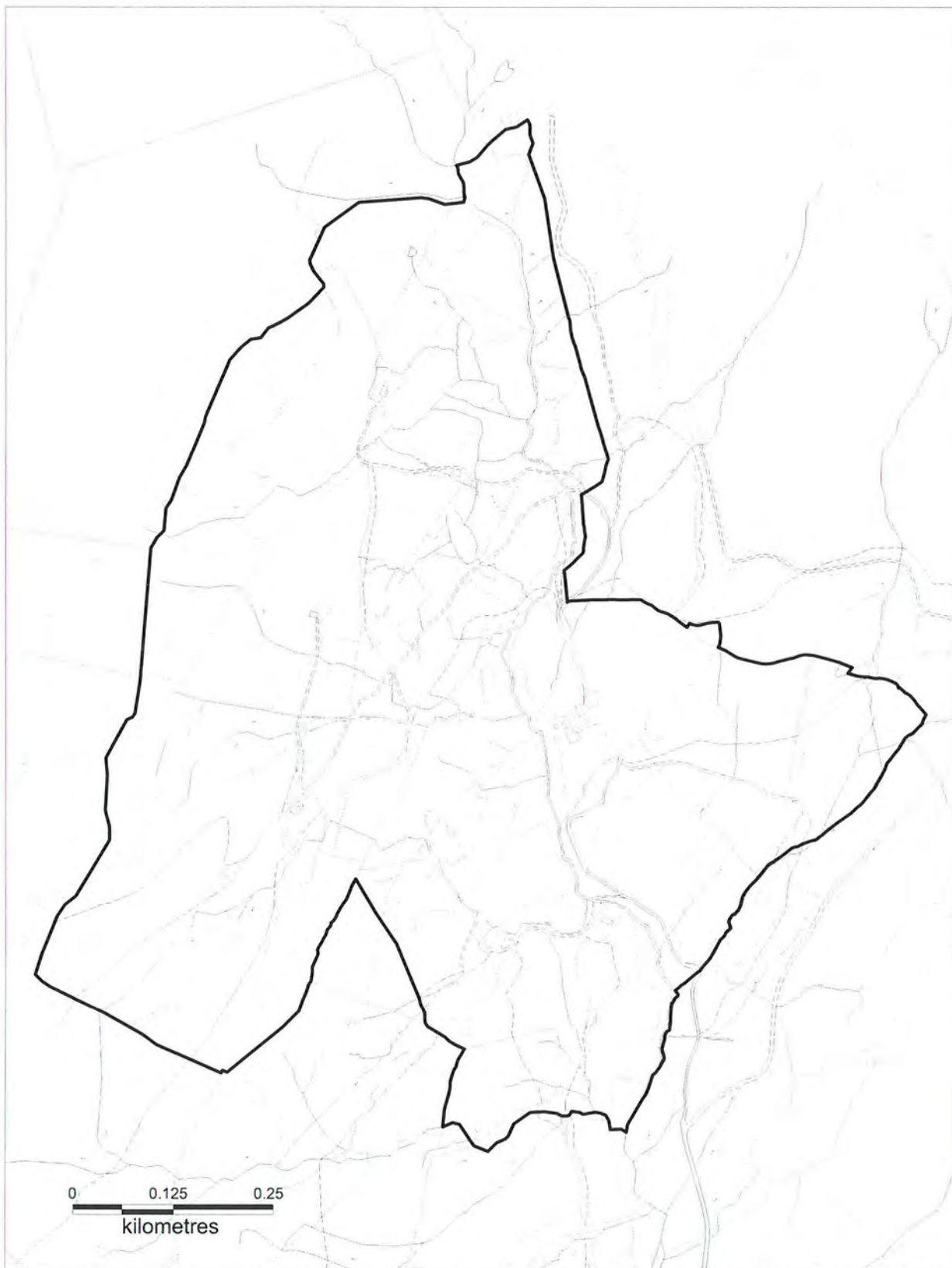
- Retention of field boundaries
- Retention of older stands of woodland
- Retention of mining remains



08 Forestry, Cym yr Whin

(PRN 19187)

View looking west showing the nature of the woodland above the Afon Mawddwy: the forestry continues over the far side of the hill top.



Historic Landscape Characterisation - Vale of Dolgellau

Historic Landscape Character Area
09 - Fields around Ty'n-y-Llwyn

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Historic background

There is no evidence for prehistoric activity in this area. However, much of the area was owned and farmed by the monks of Cymer Abbey after 1209, when it became part of the abbey demesne. The pattern of enclosures which characterises this area is part of the post-medieval enclosure of the ffridd, which also extends across areas 08 and 10.

The disused mine shown on the modern map is shown on the 1901 2nd edition OS map as the Wnion Gold Mine (see section 6.8 above), complete with its own tramway and infrastructure, including a reservoir for power production. The remains relating to the mine extend northwards out of the current project area. Blaen y cwm and Caegwernog are shown as working farms. A minor road leads up to the farm of Caegwernog (there is another inhabited a little further up): the other farms within the area are now largely derelict.

Key historic landscape characteristics

Drystone wall enclosures, farms and buildings, mining remains

This small area above the woodland of area 08 contains the (mainly ruined) remains of a number of farmsteads below the uninhabited open mountainside of Garn Fâch. The drystone wall enclosures are maintained in much of the area (particularly the lower slopes). The remains of 19th-century mining are southern outliers from the more extensive complexes around Berth Lŵyd to the north (largely outside the project area, although some are included in area 10).

Conservation priorities and management

- Conservation of the remaining buildings
- Conservation of the drystone walls and pattern of enclosures
- Investigation of the mining remains



09 Fields around Ty'n-y-Llwyn

(PRN 19188)

View of the area looking north-west towards the summit ridge, showing the open nature of the mountainside above the trees



Historic Landscape Characterisation - Vale of Dolgellau

Historic Landscape Character Area
10 - Open mountainside - Bryniau Glo

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Historic background

Much of this area also formed part of the demesne of Cymer Abbey, and the pattern of enclosures which characterises the lower-lying, north-facing slopes of this area is probably part of the post-medieval enclosure of the ffridd, which also extends across areas 08 and 09, although the land here is more desolate and rocky and can never have been very productive.

The 'mine (disused)' shown on the modern map just south of Cae-mawr is shown on the 1901 OS 2nd edition map as 'Copper mine (disused)', and was probably an outlying part of Berth Lŵyd (outside the project area to the north-east). The lower slopes around the settlement, which receive some protection from the worst of the elements, have the same pattern of enclosures in 1901 as shown today, and appear to have some woodland growing in them.

There is a single, now derelict, small farm in the lower part of the area, which is surrounded by a series of smaller, irregular enclosures. Again, there is no evidence for prehistoric activity within the area.

Key historic landscape characteristics

Drystone wall enclosures, sheepfolds, mining remains

This area contains steep and open mountainside at its southern end, while the sheltered northern part contains an interesting series of small, irregular drystone enclosures set around a former farm complex (Cae mawr). The remains of 19th-century mining represent southern outliers from the more extensive complexes around Berth Lŵyd to the north. The number of sheepfolds in the area demonstrates the former (and to some extent present) land use here. The area is almost inaccessible, being reached only by a couple of difficult footpaths.

Conservation priorities and management

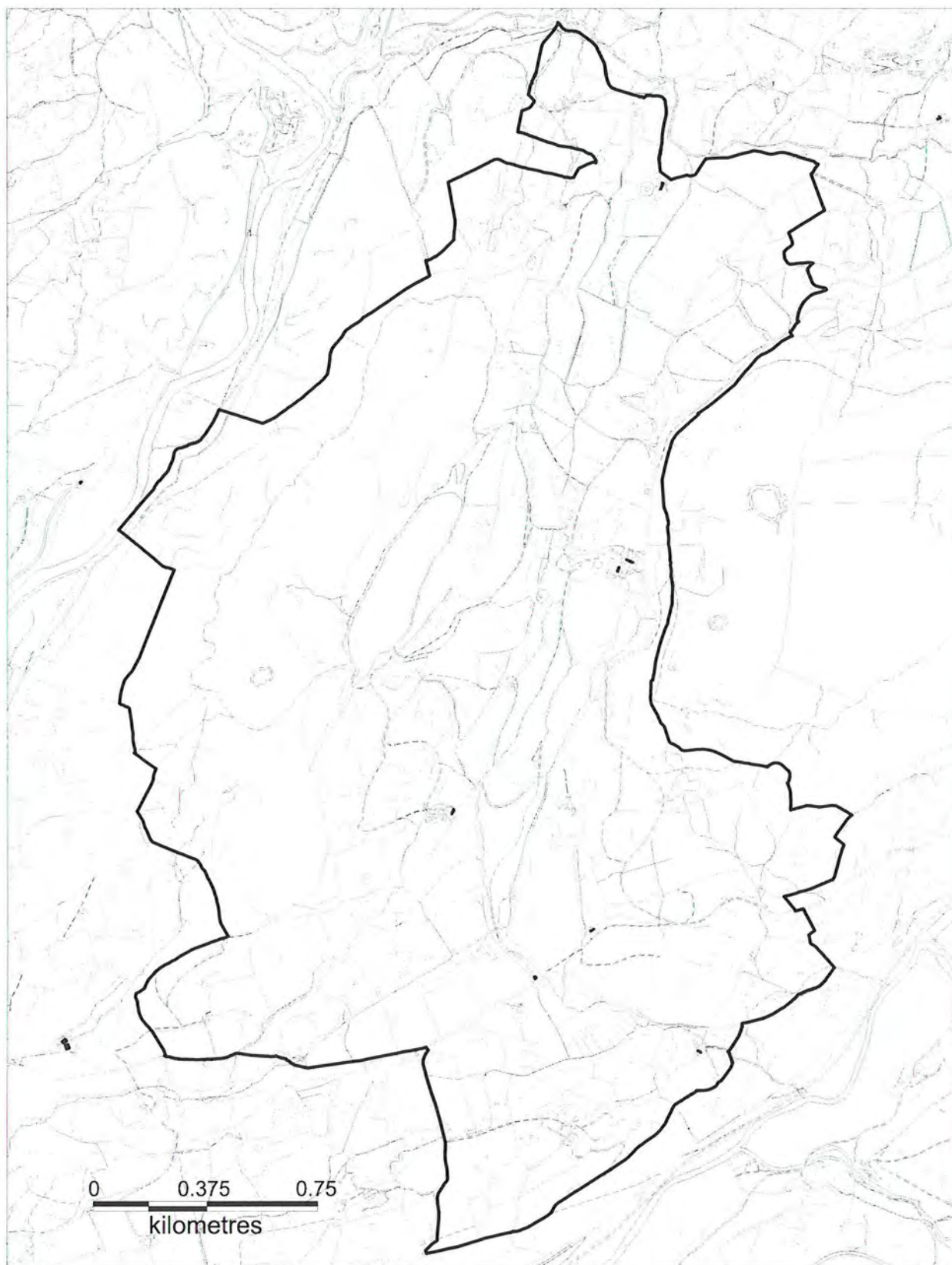
- Conservation of the drystone walls and pattern of enclosures
- Investigation of the mining remains



10 Open mountainside – Brŷniau Glo

(PRN 19189)

View looking west showing the precipitous and open nature of the hill side above the Afon Mawddwy (in the foreground): the area continues over the far side of the ridge.



Historic Landscape Characterisation - Vale of Dolgellau

Historic Landscape Character Area
11 - Nannau estate

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Historic background

Nannau is included as a grade II* site in the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in Wales (PGW (Gd) 34 (GWY), Cadw/ICOMOS, 1998). The area delineated as the character area replicates the area shown in the Register.

It is a site of ancient origins, situated a few kilometres to the north-east of Dolgellau, high up on the west flank of Foel Offrwm mountain. There is a record of a house being built here in the eleventh century. In the early fifteenth century it is supposed to have been the home of a cousin of Owain Glyndwr, Howel Sele. The highly romantic story of the murder of Howel Sele appealed to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century tourists and was retold by many of them.

The present house is over 230 m (almost 750 ft) above sea level, being described by Thomas Pennant in 1784 as 'perhaps the highest situation of any gentleman's house in Great Britain'. It is a three-storey, late-eighteenth-century stone house, square in plan, built of dressed blocks of local dark grey stone, with a shallow-pitched slate roof. The centre part of the main front is recessed, and the windows in the recessed part have sandstone surrounds; there is also a classical portico with columns, again sandstone. All the extensions and outbuildings attached to the rear of the house have been demolished, but the cellars survive.

Whether the original house was in fact in the deer park or on the present site is uncertain, but the house was probably destroyed by Glyndwr during his revolt. A new house was built in the early seventeenth century and was rebuilt on the same site in the 1690s; some traces of this building remain in the present house. The next rebuilding was about a century later, and this house has survived intact, although the pavilion wings, designed by Joseph Broomfield and added in 1805, have been relatively recently demolished.

Nannau first became important (after Howel Sele's unfortunate end) as the seat of the Nanney family, who were politically prominent and successful; the early seventeenth-century house was built by Hugh Nanney Hen and its 1690s replacement by his descendant Col. Hugh Nanney. After this there may have been financial difficulties, as the house was mortgaged in 1736; later in the century the estate passed to a relative, Robert Hywel Vaughan. Created a baronet in 1791, he built the present house in 1794-96, and his son, Sir Richard Williams Vaughan, added the pavilion wings in 1805 and was responsible for most of the estate buildings.

The 1901 OS map shows Nannau much as it is today. The areas immediately north and east of the house are shown as gardens, the woodland (particularly Coed y Groes and Coed y Moch) are the same, as are the expanse of the deer park and the kennels, pheasantry, fish pond, Howel-Sele lodge, and field boundaries. Foel Faner is shown, but Precipice Walk is not.

Nannau remained in the hands of the Vaughans (including a branch of the family called Pritchard who changed their name to Vaughan) until the house was sold in the 1960s. It has been sold twice more since then.

Key historic landscape characteristics

Nannau contains the remains of an extensive late-eighteenth-century landscape park, with an earlier walled deer park and scenic walk, formerly one of the largest and highest areas of designed landscape in Wales. There are surviving fragments of

ancient woodland with the remains of an extensive path/ride system, two walled kitchen gardens, a small walled ornamental area and lawned grounds with ponds. It also has a range of interesting and varied built features.

The deer park is probably originally medieval. It is inextricably involved in the tale of the murder of Howel Sele, which relates to the beginning of the fifteenth century. The core of the present park is likely to have been laid out in the seventeenth century, but its enlargement into the great romantic designed landscape of which substantial remnants survive today is likely to have taken place in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Nannau park is well known for its extent and height (see above). Thomas Roscoe in 1838 stated that 'the chief attraction of the spot lies in the beauty and romantic traditions of the park'. It is situated on a ridge between the rivers Mawddach and Wnion, about 3 km north-north-east of Dolgellau. The terrain is rocky and uneven, not perhaps an obvious choice for conversion to parkland, but the dramatic setting of the house, with a rugged backdrop of mountains and forests when viewed from the south (that is, from the main approach), is striking. The house is not so much set in its park as set in the landscape, the park being fitted around both. However, it does face south-east over a small area of home park to the walled deer park. The creation of an extensive area of designed landscape out of this romantic, but unpromising, terrain was a significant achievement.

The integrity of the site has been affected by the passage of time, and it cannot now realistically all be included within the designated area. However, much of the area lying outside the boundary is still visibly parkland, and looking back from Llanfachraeth in particular it is possible to see how far up the hillsides the parkland extended, and how comprehensive was the vision of the designer.

The part of the park which falls within the designated area (the actual extent of Nannau-related land is very difficult to determine, although the distinctive vernacular architectural style extends well beyond the character area) is about half woodland and half parkland. The parkland is mostly used for grazing and the woodland is commercially managed, although the survival rate of old trees and small areas of ancient woodland in the parkland is good. The lake to the west of the house (Llyn Cynwch) is also included, as is the well-known footpath Precipice Walk.

Robert Hywel Vaughan and Sir Richard Williams Vaughan, particularly the latter, at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth, made enormous changes and spent vast amounts of money on the estate; their time is known as 'the golden age of Nannau'. Clearly the deer park and other elements of the designed landscape already existed, but the enlargement of the park, layout of the grounds, construction of the lodges, gates, arches and eyecatchers, and the planting of enormous numbers of trees, can be laid at the door of Sir Richard Williams Vaughan. Some of the work was undertaken to alleviate the problems of unemployment following the Napoleonic wars, which may provide a partial explanation for the construction of miles of paths and drives and the erection of fanciful buildings and structures, but Williams Vaughan was clearly a man of vision, with ideas both grand and idiosyncratic, and the means to realise them.

The home farm is close to the road from Dolgellau to Llanfachraeth, and the drive leading to this is now also used as the main approach to the house; the drive branches off just beyond the former kitchen garden, which adjoins the farm. The original main drive, c. 1.5 km long, approached from the south, through the wood called Coed-y-moch from the lodge of the same name. The drive is now disused and the lodge is a private house.

One of the principal features of this particular landscape is Precipice Walk, a circular walk whose start and finish point is at SH 740213. The walk, which extends around the

lower slopes of Foel Cynwch and offers superb views over the Mawddach valley, to the mountains and sea beyond, is now very popular with the general public.

The original park was very extensive and undefined, blending into designed estate land and then natural landscape. The whole designed area included the deer park, tracts of woodland and areas of open moorland as well as parkland in the sense of large, grazed enclosures dotted with planted specimen trees. As the park is now fragmented and not well preserved, the largest areas of the latter type of parkland fall outside the site boundary. The areas which remain within the designated area are not large, and are scattered and very variable.

The main deer park lies some way to the south of the house, south-east of Hen Ardd and Howel Sele Lodge. It is a large expanse of fairly rough grazing, with bracken and other coarse vegetation, on a rocky hillside. The deer park wall still stands and is mostly in reasonable condition. The former drive across the deer park is disused but has a hard surface under grass, and is at least partly usable by ordinary vehicles. Pennant mentions that the Nannau venison was 'very small, but very excellent'. The deer park contains two fish ponds, shown on old maps and still containing water, though they are now silting up fast and becoming overgrown.

There is a small, square, stone-built tower, known as the 'watch tower', in the deer park on the hillside just east of Hen Ardd, south of Howel Sele Lodge. This is said to have been used as a lookout point to obtain advance warning of the arrival of visitors, a signal being sent to the house when they were seen. It seems more likely to have been chiefly a folly or eyecatcher, possibly intervisible with the 'summer house' outside the park to the south.

Nannau park was once characterised by large tracts of woodland, much of it ancient natural woodland which had been little altered apart from the addition, and later felling, of fairly widely spaced conifers. Some areas even escaped this. Other areas, mainly near the house, were enhanced by the addition of different varieties of trees. Fairly extensive areas of woodland remain today, but commercial pressures have meant that some plantations have been felled and replaced with sitka spruce and other fast-growing conifers, while other areas have not been replanted at all. Some small areas of ancient woodland have, however, survived. Coed-y-moch itself is probably based on natural oak woodland, and the name (Pig Wood) is suggestive, harking back to the time when pigs would have been turned out to forage in woodland. In the nineteenth century it was mostly mixed woodland, with some remaining deciduous, and the areas near the house and alongside the drive had added varieties of trees, and underplanting. It now has blocks of commercial conifers amongst older mixed woodland, and an area alongside the road has recently been clear-felled.

The layout of the grounds is very simple for the most part, designed to fit in with the surrounding parkland and the natural landscape. There is no formal garden near the house and very little structure, apart from the kitchen garden, but the fact that this was open on the house side suggests that its function was partly ornamental; the rest is mostly lawned, with groups of trees and shrubs. Roscoe, in 1838, waxed lyrical on the subject of the kitchen garden but did not mention the pleasure grounds.

There are two former kitchen gardens, both now completely disused. One lies at an inconvenient distance from the house (almost 1 km by the shortest route) and the cottage by it is known as Hen Ardd ('old garden'), so it is probable that the other garden, which is very close to the house, is later, and it eventually seems to have superseded the older garden.

Actual dating is fairly straightforward. Thomas Roscoe, writing in 1838, describes a garden with greenhouses and hothouses 'formed and laid out at extraordinary expense'; this remark tends to suggest the garden in question had been made fairly recently, and there does not ever seem to have been any glass in the old garden (none

is shown on the 1889 map, nor are there any likely remains), so it is probable that Roscoe was describing the 'new' garden, which must therefore date from fairly shortly before 1838. It is not shown on the estate map of 1818.

A pillar now against the west wall of the old garden (moved from slightly further in) marks the spot where the Derwen Ceubren yr Ellyll, or Howel Sele's Oak, once stood. On the 1889 map a sundial, now gone, is indicated near this point.

Conservation priorities and management

- Conservation of the grade II* listed house and other buildings and structures
- Conservation of the woodland and parkland which form part of the essential character of the registered park and garden
- Identification of all the buildings associated with the estate (many of which lie outside the character area)



11 Nannau estate

(PRN 19190)

View looking 'back' to the house at Nannau showing clearly its elevated position (described by Thomas Pennant in 1784 as 'perhaps the highest situation of any gentleman's house in Great Britain').



Historic Landscape Characterisation - Vale of Dolgellau

Historic Landscape Character Area
12 - Open mountain - Foel Offrwm

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Historic background

This dominant mountain upland block comprises a single bare, rocky massif whose most significant historic features are two hillforts which crown the western heights, and afford an excellent view of the Nannau estate parkland (area 11) below. The 1901 OS map shows open, unenclosed mountain as today: both forts are shown, but only the northern one is labelled ('camp'): the other is simply shown as a ring of stones. All the field boundaries currently present are shown on this map. The drystone walls which divide the mountain top into a series of enclosures are probably early 19th century in date, created by workers in the depression which followed the Napoleonic wars, when the building of stone walls gave welcome work to local people. Sir Robert Vaughan's workmen were reputed to have built 55 miles of walling for enclosures at this time, using mules to cart the stones. The effect on the landscape is still evident today: the long stone walls which seam the *friddoedd* have created a network of large rectilinear enclosures which contrast sharply with the irregular patchwork of the smaller, older enclosures.

Key historic landscape characteristics

Hillforts, drystone walls

The only historic landscape features within the area are the hillforts and drystone walls described above.

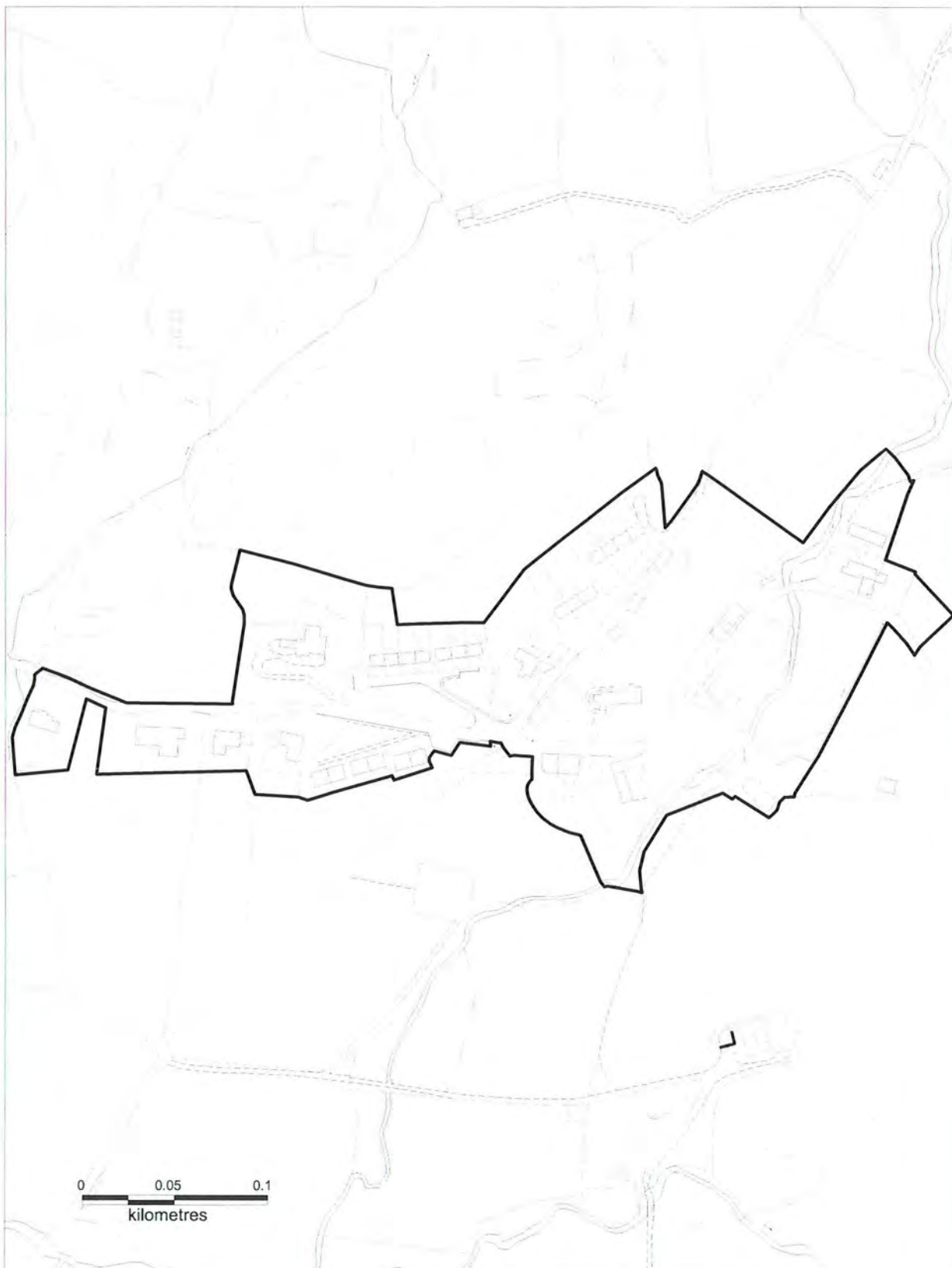
Conservation priorities and management

- Conservation of the hillforts (which are scheduled ancient monuments)
- Preservation of the open, unenclosed nature of the mountain top
- Conservation of the drystone walls



12 Open mountain - Foel Offrwm (PRN 19191)

View from the south of the 'bald', craggy and distinctive mountain of Foel Offrwm.



Historic Landscape Characterisation - Vale of Dolgellau

Historic Landscape Character Area
13 - Llanfachreth

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Historic background

At odds with the surrounding dispersed traditional farming settlement pattern, the nucleated village of Llanfachraeth is a notable exception within the project area. The church forms the focal point of the village (see photograph): it has medieval origins (as one of only three in the project area mentioned in the 1254 Valuation of Norwich) but in its present form is 19th century, built under the patronage of the Nannau estate (area 11), and many of the listed buildings in particular are of a distinctive 'estate-derived' style.

The 1846 Llanfachraeth tithe map shows just three houses (to the east of church and north of the road) here, with a larger (scattered) settlement pattern to the east, outside the project area. By 1901 (OS 2nd series map), the village had grown, although it was still very small - settlement (which included the Ty-uchaf public house) was concentrated around the church, but there were other buildings - Ty-isaf opposite, and Capel Bethel, a school and a smithy along the road to the east.

The map evidence ties in with the couple of dated houses in the village (1809 and 1812): nothing appears to be much earlier. There is no suggestion of formal planning in the village, however, which retains a vernacular character principally spread out along a single road, until the building of a small council estate (to the north of this road) in the late twentieth century. It now has its own 'suburban' development in the form of a string of bungalows on its edge.

Key historic landscape characteristics***Nineteenth-century estate village***

The principal historic interest here lies in the range of varied 19th-century vernacular terraced buildings and single houses which are the result of the most recent period of flourishing patronage of the Nannau estate.

Conservation priorities and management

- Conservation of the nineteenth-century estate-led vernacular architecture
- Preservation of the open views to the south of the Nannau estate



13 Llanfachreth

(PRN 19192)

View showing one of the listed buildings in the centre of the village, with the church spire rising behind.



Historic Landscape Characterisation - Vale of Dolgellau

Historic Landscape Character Area
14 - Fieldscape around Llanfachreth

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Historic background

The area around Llanfachraeth in many ways demonstrates similar characteristics to the outlying parts of the Nannau estate land (area 11), although the field pattern comprises smaller enclosures on the hillslopes. There are two or three farms in the area which are 18th - or 19th-century in date, as well as a number of field barns. Again, there is no evidence for prehistoric activity.

The tithe map for Llanfachraeth is particularly poor, showing very few boundaries (partially because it was owned largely by the Nannau estate) other than the outlines of actual holdings. On the 1901 map, however, the field pattern, settlements and roads are shown as they still are today, including some small pockets of woodland.

Key historic landscape characteristics***Irregular enclosures, field barns***

This small character area is characterised by a pattern of small fields, centred on the estate-derived village of Llanfachraeth, and characterised by drystone walls with trees and hedges. The area also contains a number of stone-built farms, and outlying field barns. There are no examples of recently-abandoned farm settlements, unlike the area south of Dolgellau.

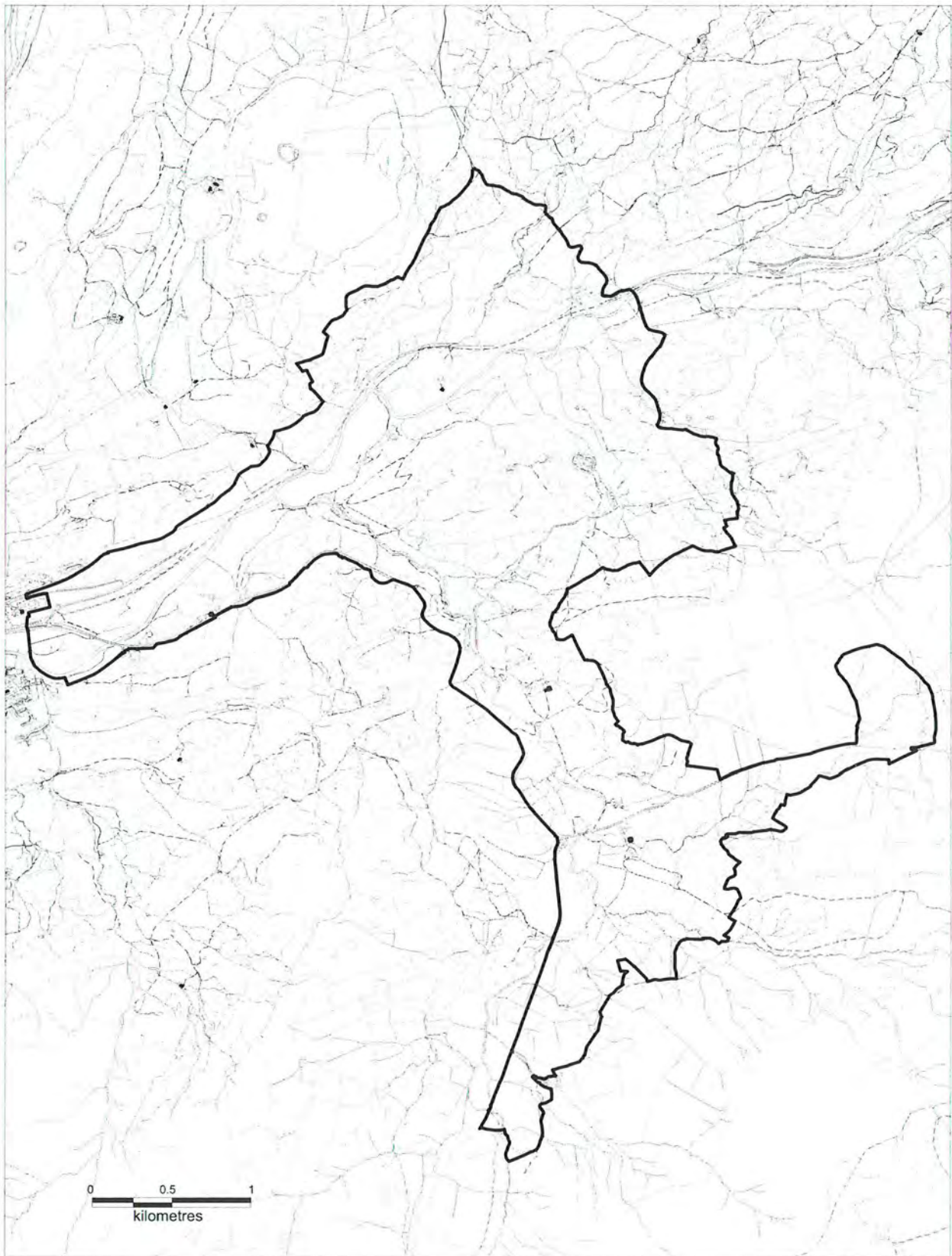
Conservation priorities and management

- Preservation of field barns
- Preservation of field boundaries and patterns



14 Fieldscape around Llanfachreth (PRN 19193)

View looking north-west to the west of Llanfachreth which shows the pattern of irregular fields defined



Historic Landscape Characterisation - Vale of Dolgellau

Historic Landscape Character Area
15 - Fields and woods - east of Dolgellau

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Historic background

This is a large, rather amorphous character area defined by a mixture of fields and woods. There are few known prehistoric sites here which, given the location of the land on either side of the Afon Wnion, is interesting (a circular enclosure near Ty'n-y-gaer might belong to this period). With one or two isolated exceptions, there are no other distinctive field patterns amongst the mostly regular enclosures which appear to be earlier than post-medieval.

There is a small Roman fort at Brithdir, on the eastern edge of the area (Hopewell, 1997). The site, a small, plough-damaged platform first discovered in 1961, commands good views of both the Wnion valley and the valley to the north leading to Llanfachraeth, both the probable lines of Roman military roads (to Llanfor and Tomen-y-Mur respectively - the former is still clearly visible in the present track). Excavations in 1966, 1974, 1978 and 1991 confirmed activity in and round the fort relating to three phases, starting in c. AD 70 and probably ending in c. AD 130 (Hopewell, 1994).

The 1838 tithe map shows a scattered settlement of farmsteads, many of which are still extant (Carreg yr ogo, Caeceirch, Henblas, Cefnmaes, Lletty maes, Tir Mab Cynnan); and the dominant settlement pattern is still one of dispersed farms, principally 18th- and 19th-century in date, although there is a fine late 18th-century estate house at Caerynwch and a minor nucleation at Brithdir (now mainly 20th-century in date, but with earlier buildings (most notably the church and school spread out along the road to the west towards the top of Torrent Walk).

The 1901 OS map shows most of the area wooded as it is today, with plantings such as Planfa Fawr (north of the Wnion) and Cyfar Dol-serau, Coed Cynan and Coed Dol-fawr to the south. Again, field boundaries reflect what is still present today. Dol-serau Hall is shown as being surrounded by a large park and garden extending for some distance along the southern bank of the river. Likewise, Caerynwch is shown as an extensive garden and parkland surrounding the house on the eastern banks of the Afon Clywedog.

Many of the areas of woodland are ancient or semi-natural in origin (particularly to the south of the Wnion), although some have been planted over by conifers in the last century. Much of the woodland on the hill slopes above Dôl-gun on the floodplain was managed for, and associated with, the post-medieval ironworks there (see section 6.8.2).

Key historic landscape characteristics

Farms and farm buildings, field boundaries, woodland

There are several distinctive farms and other buildings (the school and St. Mark's church at Brithdir, for example), whose architectural character should be preserved. In addition, several areas of ancient woodland are designated SSSIs as important habitats. The field boundaries are a mixture of field banks (some surviving as lynchets on the steeper slopes) and drystone walls.

Conservation priorities and management

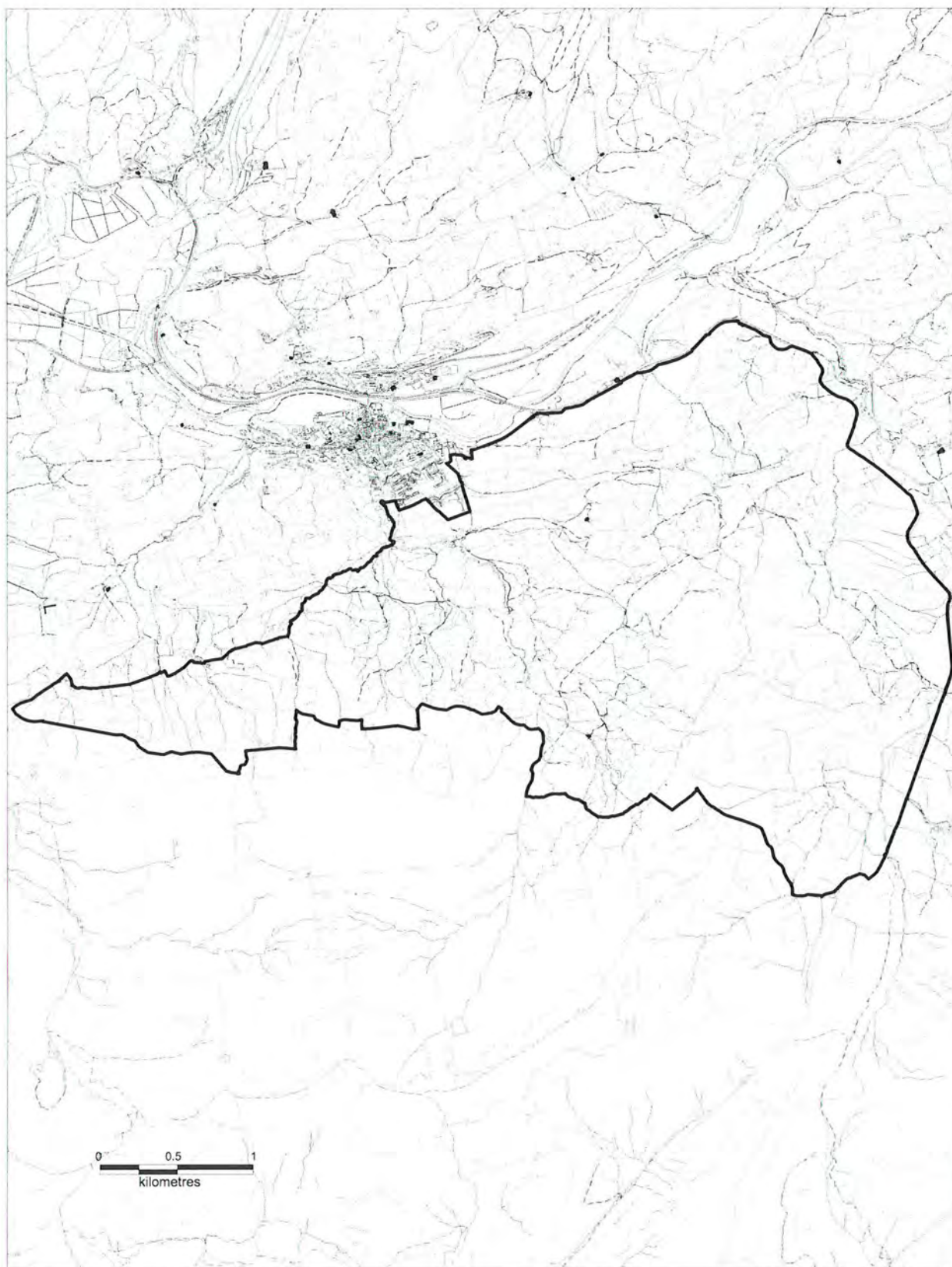
- Preservation of the architectural style and appearance of many of the buildings
- Conservation of the most important woodland
- Conservation of the rural appearance of mixed woodland, trees and pasture fields
- Conservation of the SSSI interest



15 Fields & woods - east of Dolgellau

(PRN 19194)

View looking south towards Y Foel which shows the distinctive nature of the drystone-walled fields, woodland and dispersed farms which are characteristic of this area which rises on the hill slopes on both sides of the Afon Wnion.



Historic Landscape Characterisation - Vale of Dolgellau

Historic Landscape Character Area
16 - Fields and woods around Tir Stent

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16 Fields & woods around Tir Stent (PRN 19195)

General view of the eastern part of the area, look south-east, which shows the partially-open and partially-wooded nature of the area.

Historic background

Ellis Morris (d. 1693) of Dolgun-uchaf (see section 6.7.3 above) appears among the list of freeholders entitled to graze cattle on Tir Stent in 1654 (Smith & Suggett, 1995). On the 1838 tithe map 'Tir y Stent' is shown as an undefined large area within this character area, but seemingly without owner or tenant, implying common land. The area has a typical scattered settlement pattern, with farms concentrated on the lower slopes, and all that are shown (including Tyddyn Ednyfed, Trefla (Trefeilia), Hafodlas, Pen yr Allt and Drefgerrig) still exist today (without recent additions). Again, the large enclosures shown on the tithe map show the extent of holdings rather than individual fields. The infrastructure of trackways and roads in this area is quite complex (particularly when compared with neighbouring areas), and all routes are still traceable today.

The lower slopes of Cadair Idris contain a series of farms, such as Bryn-mawr and Tan y fedw, recorded as being in the township of Dyffrydan (see Mawddach 492 report) with single long, regular walls extending up the mountainside behind.

Tir Stent is shown on modern maps as an unenclosed, rocky area, largely devoid of trees and without enclosures or settlement. The field patterns along the lower slopes of Cadair, around farms such as Tan y Gader, Bryn-rhûg, Tan y fedw and Bryn mawr are almost identical to what survives today, with small, irregular enclosures clustered around the farms, with the upper slopes still unenclosed.

Key historic landscape characteristics

Woodland, field patterns, distinctive architecture, Quaker associations

The main characteristics have been described above. The area is set on north-facing land, between Dolgellau (area 01) and the valley of the Afon Wnion, and the higher rocky slopes of Cadair Idris (area 17). Most of the area is heavily wooded and relatively inaccessible (despite the network of trackways), a fact which disguises a distinctive pattern of scattered farmsteads.

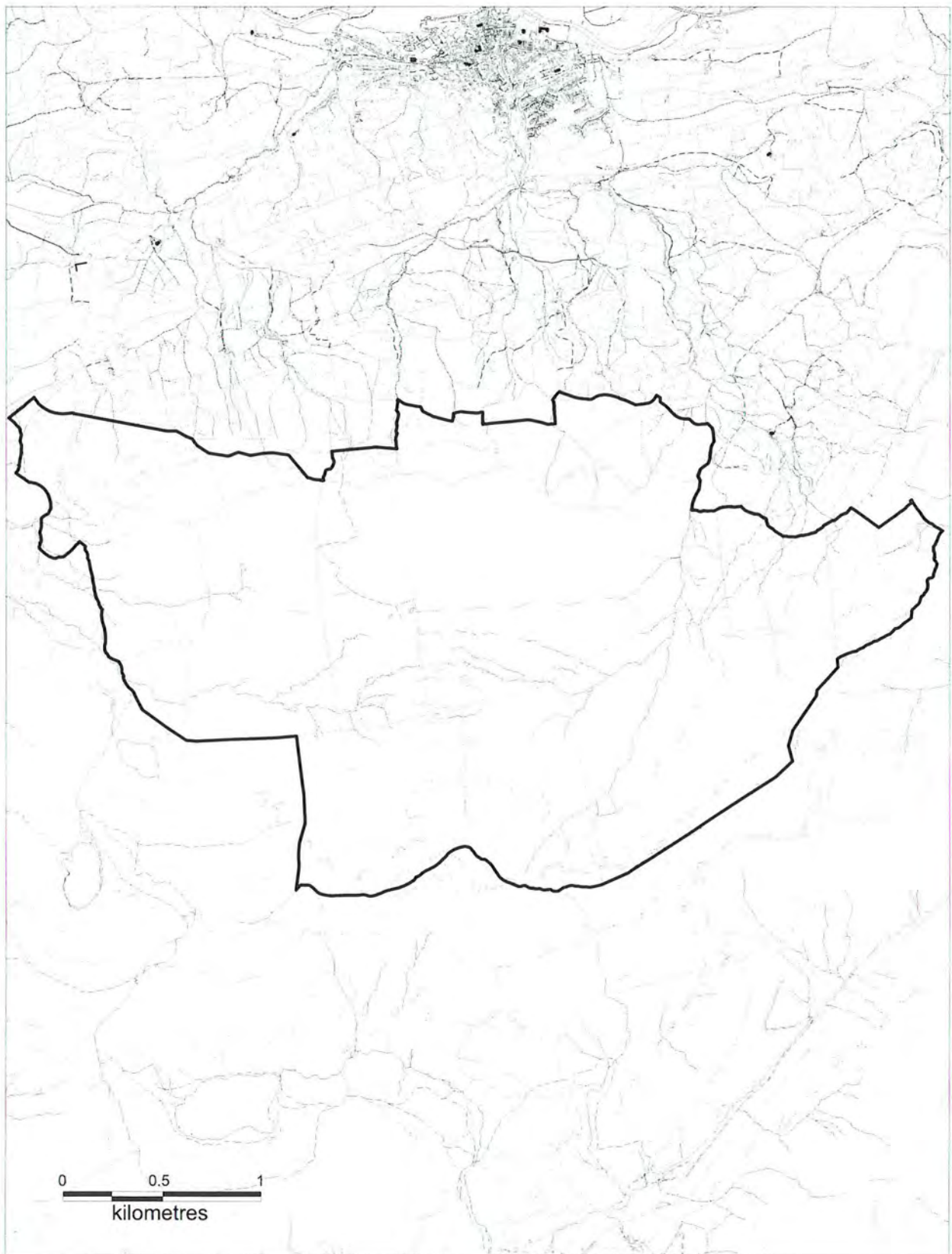
While this area contains mixed woodland, some of which (Tir Stent) is semi-natural ancient woodland, and some (particularly Coed Drefgerrig) is 20th century forestry, largely owned by the Forestry Commission, it is more dispersed than areas to the east.

The field patterns are less regular (and more interesting) than those in area 15, with a couple of areas in particular (to the north of Tabor, and around Pen-yr-allt to the south-west) indicative of possible prehistoric origins (certainly they are not post-medieval). The field banks on the steeper slopes between Dolgellau and Tabor, in particular, form distinctive lynchets.

The settlement pattern is one of very dispersed farmsteads concentrated on the lower-lying part of the area, some of which are 18th-century in date. The area is poorly served by roads, and most of the farms are situated at the end of long trackways. The only exception to this is the small nucleation at the road junction of Tabor (associated in particular with the Quakers in the 18th century (see above). The area also contains a number of mills (on the steep slopes of the Afon Aran).

Conservation priorities and management

- Conservation of the large SSSI based on Tir Stent
- Preservation of the vernacular building stock



Historic Landscape Characterisation - Vale of Dolgellau

Historic Landscape Character Area
17 - Northern slopes of Cadair Idris

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Historic background

This area of mountain slopes has remained largely unchanged since the 1838 tithe map, except that the 1901 OS map shows enclosure stopping at the line dividing this area from 16, and none of the drystone walls within area 17 appear to have been built. The lower slopes (area 16) contain a series of farms (such as Bryn-mawr and Tan y fedw) which are recorded as being in the township of Dyffrydan (see Mawddach report 492). The very top of the area (above the line marking the southern edge of the modern National Trust property) is marked as 'Common'.

There are several prehistoric sites here, particularly along the western edge of the area where there is a concentration of prehistoric cairns, and isolated standing stones and possible hut circles occur elsewhere. There are summit cairns along the ridge of the mountain. A series of impressive house platforms is located on the northern (lower) edge of the area, where the fields begin.

Key historic landscape characteristics***Prehistoric sites, open mountainside***

This remote and bleak area comprises a ridge of open, rocky mountainside below the summit of Cadair Idris. There are isolated sites situated along the fringes of the area, but the main central block (much of which is owned by the National Trust) is so inaccessible and bleak that it does not even contain the straight drystone walls that are characteristic of many upland areas (see above). All of the area lies within one of the largest SSSIs in Wales (see section 6.2).

Conservation priorities and management

- Preservation of archaeological sites
- Preservation of open nature of the area
- Preservation of the SSSI interest



17 Northern slopes of Cadair Idris (PRN 19196)

Aerial view showing the main ridge of Cadair Idris, and bare northern slopes above Dolgellau to the left of the photograph.

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