

---

# Conservation Area Appraisal: **Cymer, Gwynedd**

---



GAT Project No. 2155

Report No. 923

February, 2011

---

# Cymer, Gwynedd

## Conservation Area Appraisal

---

Report No. 923

Prepared for  
the  
Snowdonia National Park Authority

February 2011

By  
Andrew Davidson  
&  
Robert Evans

**CYMER**

**CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL**

**Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Report No. 923**

<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>Page</b>
Summary	
1. Introduction	3
2. Methodology	3
3. The Planning Process	4
4. Archaeological Results	5
5. Historical Development	5
6. Present Settlement Character	7
7. Archaeological Resource	9
8. Statement of Significance	9
9. Management Recommendations	10
10. Bibliography	10

**Appendix 1** The Planning Process

**Appendix 2** List of Sites by PRN

**Appendix 3** Sites recorded on the Gwynedd HER within 200m of the Conservation Area

## FIGURES

**Fig. 1** Cymer Conservation Area Character Appraisal. Principal Sites

**Fig. 2** Vanner and Dolfawr Farms from a Map of the Estate belonging to Griffith ap Howell Vaughan 1794 (Bangor University Archives ZM/3667)

**Fig. 3** An engraving by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck of 1780 showing Cymer Abbey from the south-east. Vanner farm and Llanelltyd Bridge can be seen in the background

**Fig. 4** Early 19th Century engraving showing Cymer Abbey from the east, showing the barn and granary in the foreground, and Fanner farm to the rear, with Llanelltyd Bridge in the background (NLW)

**Fig. 5** Ordnance Survey 25 inch Ordnance Survey map of 1889, Merionethshire sheet XXXIII.10 and 14, with the Cymer Abbey Conservation Area overlain in red. Scale 1:2500

## PLATES

**Plate 1** Cymer Abbey from the South-west

**Plate 2** Interior of Cymer Abbey looking east

**Plate 3** Outbuildings (foreground) and Ty Fanner (background)

**Plate 4** Cymer Abbey and farm buildings from the east

**Plate 5** Detail of *sedilia* at Cymer Abbey

**Plate 6** General view of Cymer Abbey and farm buildings from the north-east

## **CYMER: CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 General Introduction**

The following document constitutes an assessment of the Cymer Conservation Area (Fig. 1), undertaken by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust on behalf of Snowdonia National Park Authority. The area is centred on NGR SH 72141952.

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

#### **1.2 Acknowledgements**

Mr Gwilym Jones, Snowdonia National Park Authority instigated the project and generously provided help and information. The staff at Gwynedd Archives, Dolgellau, the National Library of Wales, Bangor University Archives and the National Monuments Record, Aberystwyth are gratefully thanked for their help and for the provision of archive material relevant to this project.

### **2. METHODOLOGY**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

A brief was provided by Snowdonia National Park Authority. The methodology employed to answer the brief is based upon that developed by Cadw following initial urban characterization projects undertaken by Welsh Archaeological Trusts. These in turn were based upon a methodology developed in England for urban characterization and assessment, and also include English Heritage guidelines for Conservation Area Appraisal.<sup>1</sup>

The following methods were used to achieve the stated aims.

##### *Data collection*

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

##### *Characterisation*

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

---

<sup>1</sup> English Heritage 2006

identification of areas of distinctive character, and these formed the basis of the character areas presented in this report. Site visits were conducted on three separate occasions in January 2011 by representatives of the Trust.

## **2.2 Principal sources**

The resources of the county record office at Caernarfon, the National Library of Wales and the University of Wales Bangor were assessed. Aerial photographs were examined at the National Monuments Record, Aberystwyth. The historical background to and a full description of the abbey is given in *History of Merioneth* Vol 2<sup>2</sup>.

## **2.3 Previous archaeological work**

No modern excavation has been undertaken at the Abbey. The site was cleared in 1930 by the Ministry of Works when it was taken into guardianship by the state, and only minimal records were kept.<sup>3</sup> The north aisle was known to have been roofed up to this point and the *Royal Commission* 1921 volume for Merionethshire records a surviving medieval roof truss (though not necessarily in its original position).<sup>4</sup> The earliest found full description of the site is that of 1846.<sup>5</sup> A number of more recent publications discuss the site in more detail, in particular Butler, who believes the abbey church was originally designed to be considerably larger with crossing transepts, and Robinson, who discusses the site in detail.<sup>6</sup> The buildings at Ty Fanner are discussed by Smith 2001.<sup>7</sup>

A geophysical survey was carried out on land to the south of the abbey church in 1992, which is within the current Conservation Area, although little new information was revealed by the survey.<sup>8</sup>

## **3. THE PLANNING PROCESS**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Details of the planning process and how it affects management of the conservation area can be found in Appendix I.

### **3.2 Statutory and Non Statutory protection**

Cymmer Abbey is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Me1) in the Guardianship of the state. The scheduled area is 0.35ha in extent, and includes the abbey church and cloisters to the south (Fig. 1). Ty Fanner, the late medieval Abbots lodging, is listed Grade II\*, and a former domestic range to the south is listed Grade II. A corn barn and byre of post-Dissolution date to the east of the Abbey church are both listed Grade II. The area lies within the Snowdonia National Park and the Ardudwy Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest (HLW (Gw) 2), where it is described as ‘a large, exceptionally rich and well-studied landscape, situated on the western flanks of the Rhiniog Mountains, containing extensive relict evidence of recurrent land use and settlement from prehistoric to recent times’ (Cadw 1998, 76).

---

<sup>2</sup> Smith and Smith 2001

<sup>3</sup> Robinson 2006, 239

<sup>4</sup> RCAHMW Merionethshire 1921

<sup>5</sup> Jones 1846

<sup>6</sup> Butler 2004, 116-118; Robinson 2006

<sup>7</sup> Smith 2001

<sup>8</sup> Gaffney 1992

## 4. THE LANDSCAPE SETTING

### 4.1 Extent of Area

The extent of the area included within this study is shown on figure 1. It includes the conservation area centred on the medieval abbey and the immediately surrounding lands.

### 4.2 Landscape Setting

The solid geology of the Dolgellau region consists of intrusive igneous formations and Cambrian imbedded pale grey quartzose siltstone and silty mudstone with Dolgellau black siltstone and mudstone of the Mawddach Group in the Wnion valley.<sup>9</sup> These are overlain by Quaternary glacial till and thick accumulations of alluvium.<sup>10</sup>

The confluence of the Mawddach and Wnion river valleys form a distinct natural basin situated between the southern ends of the Rhinog and Arenig Mountains and the northern flanks of Cader 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 Cader Idris in the south. The latter dominates prospects of the basin from most directions. Between 100m and 200m above OD, however, terraces with gentler gradients occur which have assisted communications and attracted settlement from the earliest times.<sup>11</sup>

The abbey of Cymer is situated on a level terrace just above the Afon Mawddach at a height of about 10m OD on its eastern bank, above the shingle banks of the river, and just above the tidal limits and first crossing point of the river. The present 18<sup>th</sup> century bridge (now only used as a footbridge) was preceded by an earlier bridge, and linked the abbey lands with the parish church and village of Llanelltyd, which lie just above the flood plain on the north bank of the river (Fig. 4).

## 5. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

### 5.1 Prehistoric origins

Finds of Neolithic stone axes along the valley of the Mawddach show that it was at least being visited, exploited and possibly settled in the Middle or later Neolithic. Pollen studies of buried peat horizons in the uplands of Arddudwy show the first indications of human activity are from about 4000 BC but that there was much greater wide-scale clearance of forest in the Early Bronze Age, during the second millennium BC.<sup>12</sup> This expansion of settlement is illustrated in the Dolgellau area by the presence of numerous funerary and ritual monuments of the second millennium BC, and whilst the majority of surviving examples lie within the marginal uplands, one of the largest and most dramatic lies close to the east bank of the Afon Mawddach just 300m south of the abbey.<sup>13</sup>

Later prehistoric settlement survives on the fringes of the upland above of Dolgellau, consisting of groups of small circular houses and attached fields. Other evidence of settlement 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 strong natural defensive positions, between about 300m to 400m OD. Evidence for settlements lower down in the valley will have been removed by more intensive agriculture, but there is little doubt that the area in the pre-medieval period was relatively densely settled and farmed.

---

<sup>9</sup> BGS 1982

<sup>10</sup> Allen and Jackson 1985

<sup>11</sup> Smith and George 1961

<sup>12</sup> Chambers and Price 1988

<sup>13</sup> At Pentre Farm; PRN 4100

## 5.2 The foundation of Cymer Abbey and subsequent development

The period of native rule in Wales between the coming of the Normans and the Edwardian settlement was characterized, in part, by a reorganization of the church. Whilst this focused on the provision of pastoral care through a network of parish churches it also included links with new monastic orders, and in particular the Cistercians, an order which became closely associated with the identification and national aspirations of the Welsh princes and people.<sup>14</sup> Gruffudd ap Cynan and his brother Maredudd were lords of Meirionnydd and Ardudwy in the later 12<sup>th</sup> century (though they were forced to recognize the overlordship of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth), and Gruffudd was the benefactor of the new monastery at Cymer. It was established in 1198 and colonized by monks from the abbey at Cwmhir, Maelienydd. It seems probable that the monks of Cwmhir, disturbed by political unrest, initially sought to move in their entirety, though were eventually persuaded to stay at Cwmhir whilst also retaining Cymmer.<sup>15</sup> Gruffudd was limited in the lands he could grant to the Cistercians by the limits of his political power, and by the widespread grants of lands being made to Aberconwy Abbey by Llywelyn ap Iorwerth. The abbey lands at Cymer were carved from the township of Nannau, lying on the west side of the township, and relatively close to the castle of Cymer (it lies some 1000m to the east). Though initially free lands, held by the freeholders of Nannau, the lands appear to have passed to Gruffudd's father by escheat, which would explain how Gruffudd had the right to grant them to the Cistercians.<sup>16</sup>

Following the initial grant to the abbey in 1198 Llywelyn ab Iorwerth confirmed the grants and privileges to the abbey in a charter of 1209. The bulk of the landed possessions of the abbey lay close to the site of the monastery itself. The community held large mountainous tracts rising above the valleys of the Mawddach and Wnion around Llanelltyd and Llanfachreth, which included granges at Abereiddon and Esgaireiddon. The economy of the abbey was therefore based around pastoralism and sheep-farming. A number of valuable holdings further afield, at Llanegryn and Neigwl in the Llyn peninsula allowed for more mixed agriculture. The abbey appears to have had mining interests as well.<sup>17</sup>

The principal abbey remains are the church, which dates from the 13<sup>th</sup> century (with a later, 14<sup>th</sup> century, west tower), and remains of the cloister to the south.<sup>18</sup> To the west of the abbey church are two buildings which became a farmhouse and outbuildings. The north building, the present farmhouse, is a hall-house of four bays with arch-braced collar beam trusses. These have been dated to 1441, and it is likely the house was the abbot's lodging. The converted buildings immediately south may also have formed part of the abbey complex, though the majority of the building appears to be post-Dissolution in date.<sup>19</sup>

In 1291 the abbey's annual income was recorded at £28 8s 3d,<sup>20</sup> and by the end of the fourteenth century there were only five monks at the abbey.<sup>21</sup> There is no specific evidence of how the abbey fared during the Glyndwr uprising at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, though the abbey was beset by financial and administrative problems throughout the middle and later part of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup> In 1535 the income of the abbey was assessed at £51 13s 4d, though at the time the monastic community may have comprised no more than the Abbott and a single monk. The house was probably suppressed in March 1537.<sup>23</sup>

## 5.3 The abbey after the Dissolution

In May 1538 the site of Cymer, 'convent and precincts', was granted to John Powes, a servant of the royal household, upon a lease of twenty-one years. It would seem that Y Fanner became the centre of an estate

---

<sup>14</sup> Williams 2001, 3

<sup>15</sup> Smith 2001, 303

<sup>16</sup> Gresham 1984, 148

<sup>17</sup> Williams 1976

<sup>18</sup> Robinson 2006, 236

<sup>19</sup> Smith 2001, 447

<sup>20</sup> O'Sullivan 1947

<sup>21</sup> Williams 1981

<sup>22</sup> Robinson 2006

<sup>23</sup> Williams 1981

based on the former monastic lands in the immediate vicinity, and incorporating the remains of the former abbey, and using the former abbot's house as a farmhouse (Plate 3). By the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century the property was in the hands of the Vaughans of Hengwrt and Nannau, and surveys survive of the estate from 1760 (NLW 7425) and 1794, which detail the layout of the farm at those times (Fig. 2; Gwynedd Archives ZM3667), which included a byre and barn to the east of the abbey (Plate 4).

The farm of Ty Fanner was a substantial holding of the Nannau estate in the 18<sup>th</sup> century which included most of the land southwards to Llanelltyd Bridge, and the area eastwards from the river to the edge of the Hengwrt demesne (Fig. 2). The farm, consisting of 25 fields, was rented by Robert Pugh in 1718, paying the substantial rent of £11.<sup>24</sup> By 1859 the farm was in the hands of W.J. Household and was paying a rent of £67-10-0.<sup>25</sup> In 1841 there were in addition to the family seven male servants and three female ones living at the farm, indication that it was a substantial property. By 1901 there was only a single servant living at the property<sup>26</sup>.

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of increasing numbers of visitors to the area and interest in the abbey ruins, a large number of lithographs and images of Cymmer were created. A selection of these, held by the National Library of Wales, is listed in the bibliography (Figs. 3 and 4). Whilst they present a romanticised vision, they provide a useful indication of the character of the structures in the area at that time. The first detailed description of the remains was made by H. L. Jones in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at which time the western arcade of three bays on the north side of the nave was filled with blocking walls and the north isle was roofed over and used for farm purposes.<sup>27</sup>

The site of the abbey was placed in state care in 1930. Cymer was held by the Nannau estate into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when it was slowly broken up. Y Fanner is a working farm (Plate 6), and a small caravan park is located to the north-east of the abbey.

## **6. PRESENT SETTLEMENT CHARACTER**

### **6.1 The Topographic development of the settlement**

The abbey of Cymer (Plate 1) is situated on a level terrace just above the Afon Mawddach at a height of about 10m OD on its eastern bank, above the shingle banks of the river. It is today approached from the south along a track parallel to the river, which links to the former main north-south road just by the river crossing. The present 18<sup>th</sup> century bridge (now only a footbridge) was preceded by an earlier bridge mentioned in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The monastic precinct, focused on the church and conventual buildings, is thought to have covered an area similar to that occupied by the abbey, farmhouse and farm buildings today. A natural boundary to the west would be the small stream which runs into the Afon Mawddach close by the abbey. The stream runs along a drain within the woodland between the abbey and river, though the date of the drain has not been established. The land slopes down to the stream, and between the stream and the abbey remains is a small plot shown on the 1794 map as an orchard, though its status in medieval times is not known. On the east side the abbey remains continued into the area now occupied by the 17<sup>th</sup> century corn barn, and the full extent of the precinct may be shown on the 18<sup>th</sup> century estate map (Fig. 2). The field beyond this is called Cae Fonwent in 1794, and is therefore the probable site of the monastic cemetery.

Following the dissolution the buildings were altered for secular use. The Abbots lodging became a farmhouse, and a second house was later added to the south, on to the remains of a medieval building. To

---

<sup>24</sup> Nannau MSS 513

<sup>25</sup> Nannau MSS 812

<sup>26</sup> 1841 and 1901 Census for Llanelltyd National Archives HO 107/1427/12 and RG 13/5255 seen at [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)

<sup>27</sup> Jones 1846

the east of the abbey church the corn barn and granary were built during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (Fig. 5). Additional farm buildings, still in use, were added alongside the corn barn in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The land to the south east of the farm was developed as a caravan park during the later 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **6.2 Present settlement description**

The conservation area consists of 197 hectares of land focussed on the former abbey at Cymer (Fig. 1). To the south lies a caravan park and campsite established during the 1960's.<sup>28</sup> The area can be divided into four – of which the principle and dominant part is that containing the abbey church and cloister remains. This area is clearly marked by hedges and boundaries which indicate the Guardianship area, and within which stands the church walls, the north aisle, tower and nave remaining to eaves height, whilst the south aisle, cloister and south range of buildings remain as foundations only. To the west of these is Ty Fanner, the former abbots lodging and current farmhouse, with another range of buildings to the south which may also be partly monastic in origin. These were described as 'outbuildings', but have recently been converted into residential accommodation for holiday use. A lane along the north side of the abbey church links the farmhouse with the farm buildings east of the abbey. The latter include a stone-built corn barn and granary with later corrugated iron barns and a large modern agricultural building to the north-east (this latter outside the Conservation Area). The fourth element is the open field and the approach road to the south of the abbey precinct. To the south-west of this field is the caravan and camping site.

## **6.3 The character of building**

### *6.3.1 Wall materials and finishes*

All the buildings, with the exception of the later agricultural barns, are of exposed stone. The abbey buildings are built of local slate and dolerite, which are irregularly coursed, typically using rounded field stone, though darker squared quoins are probably quarried. Architectural dressings within the church are of a pale fine grained sandstone. The walls of the barn and byre to the east of the abbey are also constructed of local rubble, but the piers of the barn are of larger squared masonry. The later farm buildings are part timber with corrugated iron sheets.

### *6.3.2 Roofs*

The roofs of Ty Fanner, adjacent range, barn and byre are all of slate. All but the byre, which has an older graded slate roof, have been renewed in relatively recent times. There are gabled dormer windows on the east front of Ty Fanner and on the north and east sides of the adjacent range. The roofs of the Dutch barn and hay barn are of corrugated iron.

### *6.3.3 Architectural Detail*

The windows on the east front of Ty Fanner are wooden mullioned and transomed windows of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, divided into four lights by a high transom and central mullion. The simple vertical division into two or three lights, sometimes with lighter horizontal bars, is used both in the house and recently converted adjacent range. All are wooden and painted white. Doors are similarly white painted – that on the east front of the house is 17<sup>th</sup> century, and under a small porch.

The church retains architectural detail of 13<sup>th</sup> century date, including the arcade on the north side of the nave consisting of three arches with octagonal piers with moulded capitals and bold heavy-chamfered arches. Carved sandstone detailing can also be observed on the *piscina* and *sedilia* on the south side of the presbytery (Plate 5). A number of fragments of moulding around the window edges also survive.

---

<sup>28</sup> Ordnance Survey Aerial Photograph 71/283 frame 418 taken 4<sup>th</sup> June 1971

#### 6.3.4 Field Boundaries

No field boundaries of demonstrably early date were identified within the conservation area itself, but the field pattern of the surrounding area remains remarkably similar to that shown on the 1794 map (Fig. 2). The caravan park area is located within one such field, though now subdivided between the caravan and camping areas. The field boundaries are principally stone walls lined with trees.

#### 6.4 Building Types

The principal, and dominant, remains are the ruins of the abbey church. Ty Fanner and the adjoining domestic range are the only residential properties within the conservation area. To the east of the abbey lie the agricultural buildings, including the barn and byre/granary. A caravan site lies just outside the south-west corner of the conservation area.

### 7. ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE

Though there is potential for the presence of prehistoric buried archaeology within the conservation area, the principal resource is the medieval abbey. There is good potential for the survival of buried remains associated with the abbey within the main precinct bounded by the farm buildings to the east, Ty Fanner to the west, the church to the north and the hedge bounding the scheduled area to the south. The potential includes the former east end of the church and the Chapter house which lie east of the present Guardianship area and within the area occupied by the farm buildings. Similarly medieval walls and buildings are known to lie within the area west of the church occupied by Ty Fanner and adjacent range.

The field east of the abbey church and farm buildings was called *Cae Fonwent* on the 18<sup>th</sup> century map, and may have been the location of the monastic cemetery.<sup>29</sup> A geophysical survey was carried out in 1992 in the triangular field south of the abbey, but it revealed no definite buried archaeology.<sup>30</sup>

### 8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The conservation area is focused on the former medieval Cistercian abbey of Cymer. It consists of the upstanding ruins of the abbey church and cloister foundations, which are all in state Guardianship; the former abbots lodging, now the farmhouse (listed II\*), and an adjacent range of buildings now converted to holiday accommodation (listed grade II). To the east of the abbey remains are farm buildings, including a 17<sup>th</sup> century corn barn and later granary (both listed buildings). A triangular field to the south of the abbey is an essential part of the setting of the abbey, and is included within the area.

The buildings are of great significance as a group. The abbey is a reflection of the upheaval of medieval Christianity which took place in Wales in the 12<sup>th</sup> century when the native *clas* churches were reformed and new monastic orders introduced. The remains are both an important archaeological resource and a significant feature within the landscape. They form a wider grouping at the head of the Mawddach estuary with the 18<sup>th</sup> century bridge and the medieval parish church of Llanelltud across the river.

The continuity of the former abbots lodging as farmhouse, and the farm buildings associated with it, define the post-Dissolution change from abbey to tenant farm. The acquisition of the abbey lands by the Nannau and Hengwrt estates is typical of the large-scale changes in land ownership and tenure which marked the origins of the great estates and the evolution of the medieval world into the modern.

The significance of the site is affected negatively only by the presence of a small caravan park to the south east of the abbey.

---

<sup>29</sup> Gwynedd Archives ZM/3667

<sup>30</sup> Gaffney 1992

## 9. MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

### 9.1 Conservation area boundary

The following changes to the conservation area boundary are suggested.

- The boundary be extended to the west up to the bank of the Afon Mawddach. The river is a significant part of the setting, and this extension would protect the link between the site and the river (Fig. 1).
- The boundary be extended to the north to include the area occupied by the former orchard shown on the estate map of 1794 (Fig. 2). This would ensure the historic integrity of the former monastic precinct is protected in this area.
- The boundary be extended to the east to include the field known as *Cae Fonwent*, a possible location of the former monastic cemetery (Fig. 1).

### 9.2 Other recommendations

- Ty Fanner and the adjacent range to the south have been sympathetically restored in recent times, and conservation work on the significant 17<sup>th</sup> century farm buildings to the east of the abbey church should be encouraged.

## 10. BIBLIOGRAPHY

### 10.1 Primary Sources

Ordnance Survey Maps 25 inch map 1<sup>st</sup> edition of 1889 Merionethshire sheets XXXIII.10-15  
Ordnance Survey Maps 25 inch map 2nd edition of 1901 Merionethshire sheets XXXIII.10-15  
Ordnance Survey Maps 25 inch map 3rd edition of 1913 Merionethshire sheets XXXIII.10-15

#### Gwynedd Archives, Dolgellau

Tithe Map of the Parish of Llanelltyd 1846  
ZM/3667 *Vaner and Dolfawr Farms in Maps of Estate Belonging to Griffith ap Howell Vaughan* 1794

#### National Library of Wales

NLW Maps 7425 *Map of Several Estates in the County of Merioneth belonging to Griffith ap Howell Vaughan esq.* 1760  
NLW *The South East View of Cumner Abby, in the County of Merioneth* 1780 (Fig. 3)  
NLW 03382 *Kimmer Abbey* 1792  
NLW 03378 *Cumner Abbey* by Metcalf 1795  
NLW 03380 *Cumner Abbey in Merionethshire* by Alez Hogg 1795  
NLW 00968 *Cymmer Abbey* by Samuel Henery Baker 1880s  
NLW *The Vale of Llanelltyd and Fanner Abbey* by Richard Roberts early 19<sup>th</sup> cent. (Fig. 4)  
NLW *Cymmer Abbey* by Hugh Hughes 1823  
NLW *Cader Idris from Kymmer Abbey from Wanderings in North Wales*, by David Cox 1844

#### Bangor University Archives

Nannau MSS 513 Rental of Hengwrt Estate 1718  
Nannau MSS 810 Rental of Hengwrt Estate September 1855  
Nannau MSS 812 Rental of the Hengwrt Estate March 1859

National Monuments Record, Aberystwyth

Aerial Photographs

RAF 106G/UK/1468 frames 2227-2231 taken 4<sup>th</sup> May 1946

RAF 106G/UK/1468 frames 4182-4184 taken 4<sup>th</sup> May 1946

Ordnance Survey 71/283 frame 418 taken 4<sup>th</sup> June 1971

Gwynedd Historic Environment Record

## 10.2 Secondary Sources

Allen, P.M. and Jackson, A.A. 1985 *Geological excursions in the Harlech Dome* (BGS, London)

Anon. 1868 *National Gazetteer of Great Britain and Ireland*

Arnold C J and Davies J L, 2000 *Roman and Early Medieval Wales*

Bowen, E. G. and Gresham, C. A. 1967 *History of Merioneth* (Dolgellau)

British Geological Survey 1982 *Harlech-Sheet 135*

Butler, L.A.S. 2004 'The lost choir: what was built at three Cistercian Abbeys in Wales', in T.N. Kinder (ed) 2004 *Perspectives for an Architecture of Solitude: Essays on Cistercians, Art, and Architecture in honour of Peter Fergusson* (Turnhout)

CADW/ICOMOS 1998 *Register of Landscapes of Outstanding Historic Interest in Wales*

English Heritage, 2006 *Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals*

Gafney, C.F. 1992 *Cymer Abbey-Report on Geophysical Survey* (Geophysical Surveys of Bradford unpublished report 91/95)

Gresham, C. A., 1984 'The Cymer Abbey Charter', *Bul. Board Celtic Studies*, Vol XXXI.

Haslam, R., Orbach, J. and Voelcker, A. 2009 *Gwynedd* (Pevsner Buildings of Wales Series)

Hopewell, D. 2008 *Gwanas Fawr Possible Roman Fort: Geophysical Survey (G1944)* Unpublished GAT Report No. 735.

Jones, J. G. 2001 'Governemnt and Society 1536-1602' in Smith, J and Smith, L. (eds.) *History of Merioneth Vol II. The Middle Ages* (Cardiff)

Jones, H. L. 1846 'Cymmer Abbey, Merionethshire', *Arch. Camb.* 1, 97-116

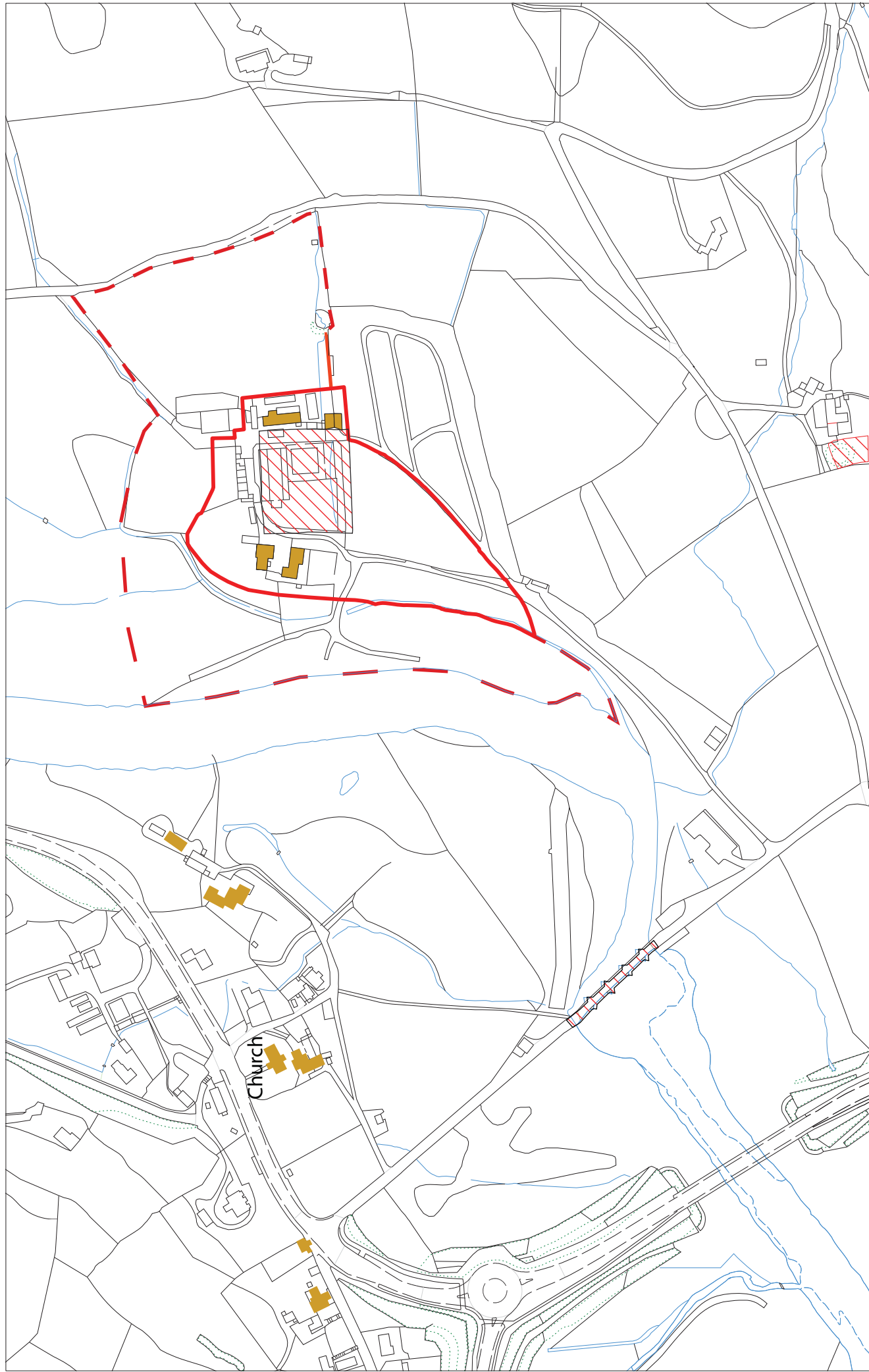
Lewis, S. 1833 *Topographical Dictionary*

Lunt, W. E. (ed.) 1926 *The Valuation of Norwich 1254*

O'Sullivan, J. F. 1947 *Cistercian Settlements in Wales and Monmouthshire 1140-1540*

RCAHMW 1921 *Inventory of the County of Merioneth*

- Robinson, D.M. 1990 *Cymer Abbey* (CADW guide)
- Robinson, D.M. 2006 *The Cistercians in Wales. Architecture and Archaeology 1130-1540*
- Smith, P. 2001 'Houses c.1415-c.1642' in Smith, J. and Smith, L. (eds.) *History of Merioneth Vol. 2* (Cardiff)
- Smith, B. and George, T.N. 1961 *British Regional Geology. North Wales*
- White, R. B. 1978. 'Excavations at Brithdir, near Dolgellau, 1974'. In George C. Boon, ed. *Monographs and Collections I. Roman Sites*, Camb. Arch. Assoc., Cardiff.
- Williams, D. H. 1976 'The White Monks in Powys' *Cistercian Studies* 11, 73-101
- Williams, D. H. 1981 'The Cistercians in West Wales: 1 Cymer Abbey 1198-1536/7', *Arch. Camb.* 130, 36-58
- Williams, D. H., 2001 *The Welsh Cistercians*; Gracewing, Hereford.



- Listed building
- Building of local note
- Scheduled ancient monument
- Proposed conservation area extension
- Conservation area boundary
- Snowdonia National Park Boundary

Scale: 1:2500



Cymer Conservation Area  
Character Appraisal  
Figure 1 Principal Sites



THE SOUTH EAST VIEW OF CUMNER ABBY, IN THE COUNTY OF MERIONETH.

[illegible]


 To Robert Vaughan Esq;  
 This Prospect is humbly Inscribed by  
 his most Obedt. Servants  
 Sam<sup>l</sup> & Nath<sup>l</sup> Buck.

Fig. 3 An engraving by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck of 1780 showing Cymer Abbey from the south-east. Vanner farm and Llaneltyd Bridge can be seen in the background

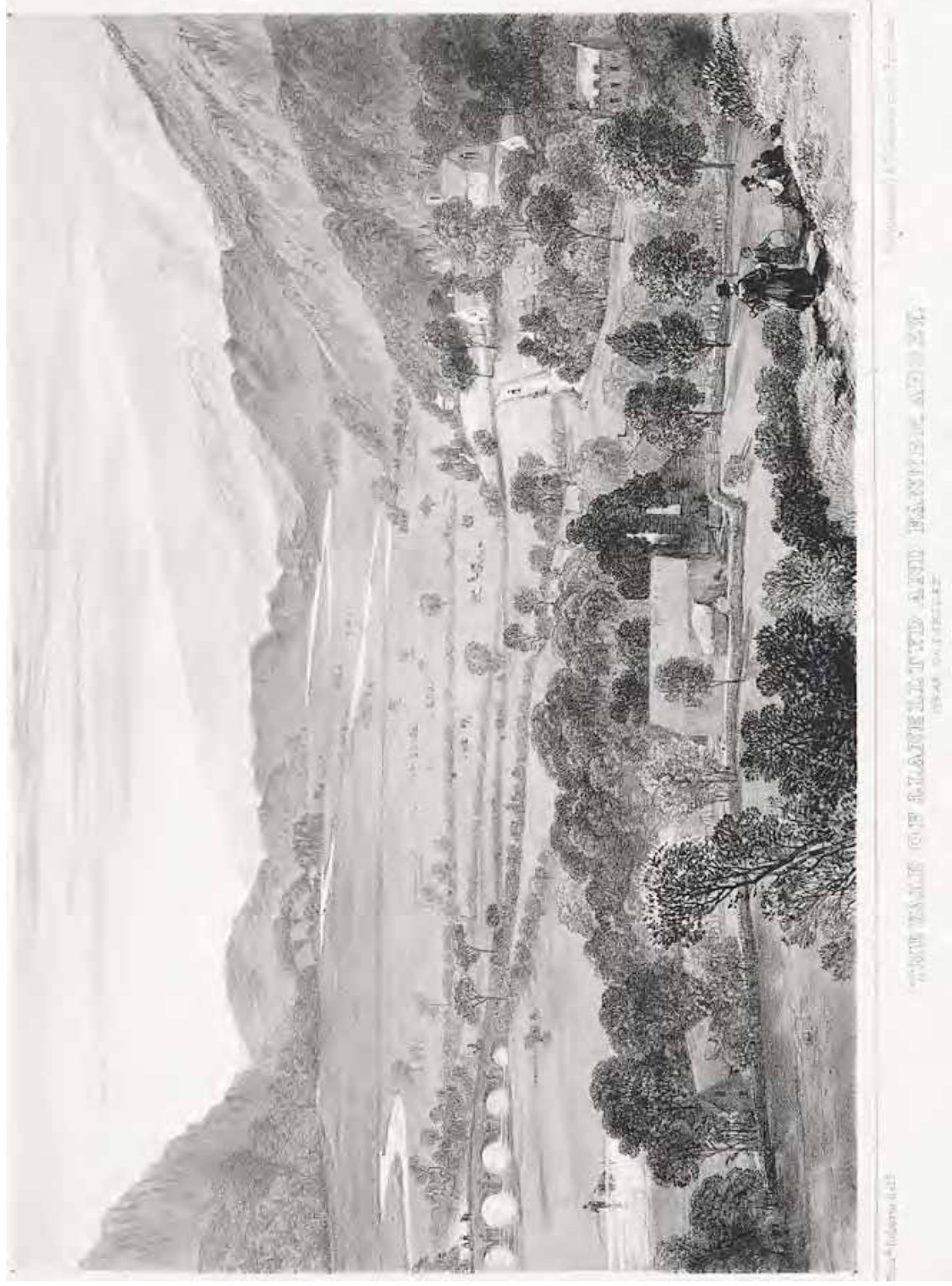


Fig. 4 Early 19th Century engraving showing Cymer Abbey from the east, showing the barn and granary in the foreground, and Fanner farm to the rear, with Llanelltyd Bridge in the background (NLW)

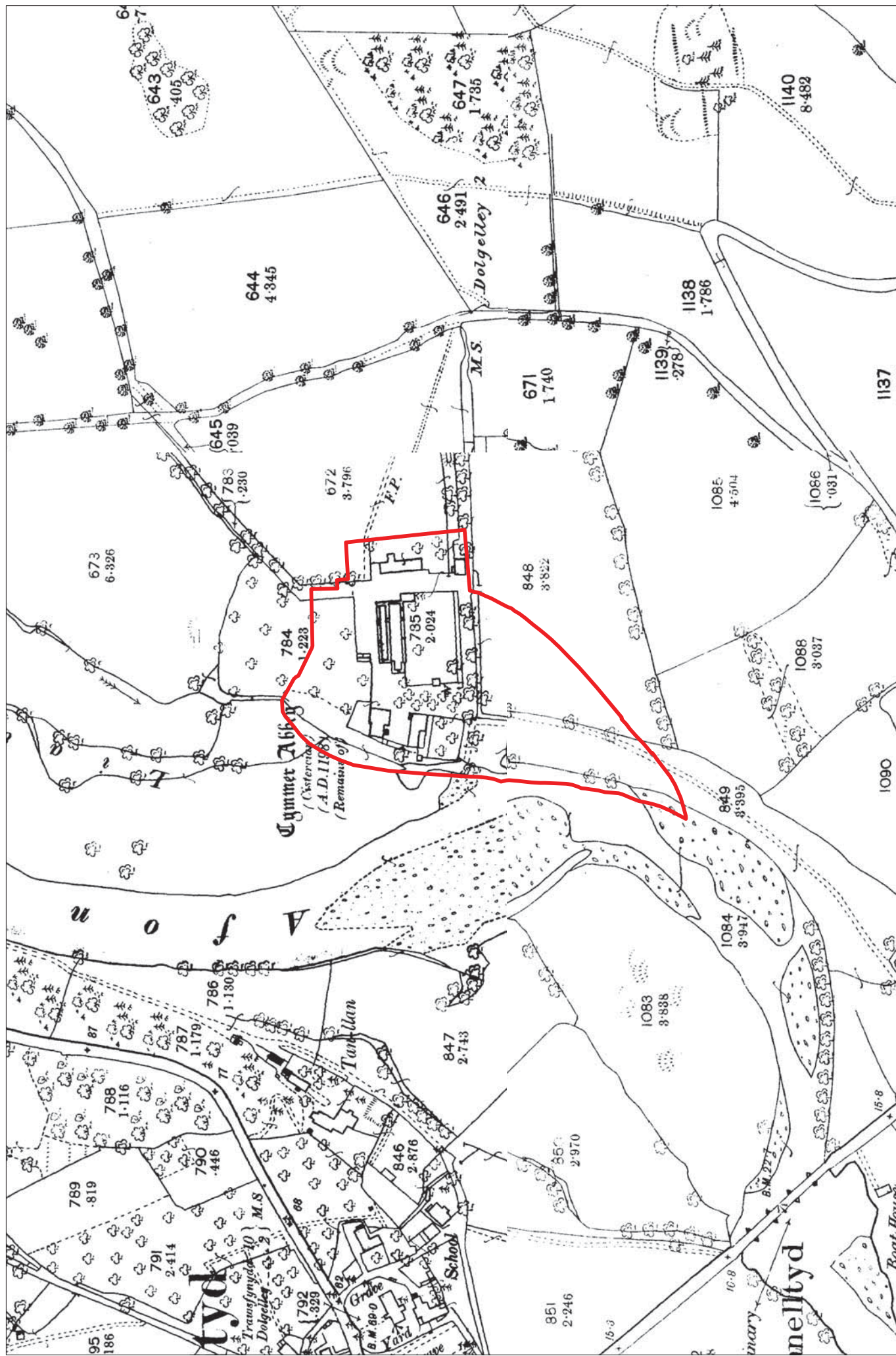


Fig. 5 Ordnance Survey 25 inch Ordnance Survey map of 1889, Merionethshire sheet XXXIII. 10 and 14, with the Cymr Abbey Conservation Area overlain in red. Scale 1:2500



**Plate 1** Cymer Abbey from the South-west



**Plate 2** Interior of Cymer Abbey looking east



**Plate 3** Outbuildings (foreground) and Ty Fanner (background)



**Plate 4** Cymer Abbey and farm buildings from the east



**Plate 5** Detail of *sedilia* at Cymer Abbey



**Plate 6** General view of Cymer Abbey and farm buildings from the north-east

## **APPENDIX I**

### **THE PLANNING PROCESS**

#### **Conservation Areas**

The 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act places a duty on every local planning authority to determine which parts of their area are areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. The Act defines a conservation area as ‘an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance’. The Act also states that the local planning authority should, from time to time, formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of these conservation areas. The location and extent of the Cymer Conservation Area is shown in Fig. 1.

#### **Local Plan Policies**

Current regional and local plan policies are defined in *Gwynedd Structure Plan* (adopted 1993) and, for the National Park, *Eryri Local Plan* (adopted 1999). The plan can be consulted in the offices of the National Park, or online at [http://www.eryri-npa.co.uk/images/eryri\\_local\\_plan/elp\\_english.pdf](http://www.eryri-npa.co.uk/images/eryri_local_plan/elp_english.pdf). Policies concerning archaeology, including historic towns, are given in section 5, policies AR 1-4. Policies concerning the built heritage, including listed buildings and conservation areas, are given section 6, policies TA 1-12.

#### **Heritage and Local Planning Context**

##### *Snowdonia National Park Authority*

The Cultural Heritage Section within the Planning and Cultural Heritage Service works to protect and enhance the archaeology, historic buildings and culture of the National Park. The Section provides advice to the public on which buildings are listed, and on any proposed alterations requiring Listed Building Consent or Planning Permission. Advice on Conservation Areas and the Built Heritage is given by the National Park Planning Department through their Building Conservation Officer. Advice on the management of the archaeological heritage is provided by the National Park Archaeologist. Together they contribute to the decision making processes to inform on the likely impact of development on the historic environment and how best to mitigate the impact.

#### **Archaeology and Local Planning Context**

The local Planning authorities are recognised and identified as having the key role in protecting our archaeological heritage. Government advice and planning case law clearly establish archaeology as a ‘material consideration’ in the planning authorities’ assessment and determination of a planning application. This is seen both in national and regional policy documents and guidelines.

The protection of the vulnerable historic environment falls into two broad categories: Statutory protection and non-statutory protection.

Statutory protection is provided by the following Acts and Orders:

- The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, as amended by the National Heritage Act 1983
- The Town and Country Planning Act 1990
- The Planning and Compensation Act 1991
- Statutory Instrument 1199, the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1988

- Statutory Instrument 1995 No. 419, The Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995

Designations arising from these Acts and Orders are Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas.

Non-statutory protection is provided by national policies and guidelines contained within:

- Planning Policy Wales, March 2002
- Welsh Office Circular 60/96, Planning and the Historic Environment: Archaeology, December 1996
- Welsh Office Circular 61/96, Planning and the Historic Environment: Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas, December 1996.

#### ***Relevant Extracts from Welsh Office Circular 60/96***

*Archaeological remains are a finite, and non-renewable resource, in many cases highly fragile and vulnerable to damage and destruction. [Paragraph 3]*

*Archaeological remains are part of our cultural heritage, not least in terms of the information they provide about the past, valuable both for their own sake, and for their role in education leisure and tourism. [Paragraph 3]*

*The key to the future of the great majority of archaeological sites and historic landscapes lies with local authorities, acting within the framework set by central government, in their various capacities as planning, highways, education and recreational authorities. [Paragraph 7]*

*Local planning authorities should expect developers to provide the results of such appraisals, assessments and/or evaluations as part of their applications for sites where there is good reason to believe there are remains of archaeological importance. [Paragraph 14]*

*Authorities will need to consider refusing permission for proposals which are inadequately documented. [Paragraph 14]*

*When planning applications are made without prior discussion with the local planning authorities, the authorities should seek to identify those applications which have archaeological implications, and to assess their likely impact by consulting the local authority Archaeological Officer, National Park Archaeologist or regional Welsh Archaeological Trust. [Paragraph 15]*

*In the case of a development proposal that is likely to affect the site of a scheduled ancient monument, planning authorities are required to consult the Secretary of State (Cadw). [Paragraph 15]*

*Where nationally important archaeological remains, whether scheduled or not, and their settings, are affected by proposed development there should be a presumption in favour of their physical preservation in situ i.e. a presumption against proposals which would involve significant alteration or cause damage, or which would have a significant impact on the setting of visible remains. [Paragraph 17]*

*It may be possible to preserve important archaeological remains where developers prepare sympathetic designs using, for example, foundations which avoid disturbing the remains altogether or minimise damage by raising ground levels under a proposed new structure or by careful siting of landscaped or open areas. [Paragraph 17]*

*Archaeological investigations such as excavation and recording should be carried out before development commences, working to a project brief prepared by the planning authority (with reference to their archaeological advisers). [Paragraph 20]*

*It is open to the local planning authority to impose conditions designed to protect a monument. [Paragraph 22]*

## APPENDIX 2 LIST OF SITES BY PRN

### GAZETTEER OF SITES WITHIN AND ADJACENT TO THE CONSERVATION AREA

#### **4099 CYMMER ABBEY (Plate 1-2, 4-6)**

Assessment of Importance: A  
Ref: 62/G/24(5)

Site Status Reference: SAM Me001 LB I

Cymer Abbey consists of the remains of an aisled rectangular church building of early 13<sup>th</sup> century date, with undivided nave and choir, with fragmentary remains of the cloister and other conventual buildings to the south. An arcade of three bays in the Early English style with plain chamfered bases and simple moulded capitals survives on the north side of the nave. There is no evidence of a crossing and transepts having been built, though they were almost certainly planned from the start. The church is constructed of rubble dolerite with buff-coloured and red sandstone dressings, with architecture of the Transitional to Early English style. A number of architectural fragments survive on the south side of the former presbytery of the church, including a *piscina* for washing the chalice, and *sedilia* for the priests, and a former tomb recess survives on the north side. A west tower was added to the church in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and the west range, including the probable abbot's lodging was added in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

A geophysical survey was carried out in 1992 to ascertain whether any buried remains associated with the abbey to the west of the cloisters and to the south of the church, however little new information was uncovered (Gaffney 1992).

Easting: 7216 Northing: 1958

#### **12358 TY FANNER (Plate 3, Figs. 3-4)**

Assessment of Importance: A

Site Status Reference: LB II\* Ref: 62/G/25(5)

A late medieval hall house, probably the former abbot's lodgings to Cymer Abbey. It is of 'T' shaped plan consisting of end-passage hall and west wing. The hall was originally open to the roof, but is now of one and a half stories; the walls are of rubble construction and it has a new slate roof. It has a heavily battered west gable, tiered stack to the west wing with plain stacks on the west and south gables. The entrance has a wide ribbed and panelled 17<sup>th</sup> century door in an earlier door case. There are two surviving late 17<sup>th</sup> century leaded wooden cross windows with ovolo moulded transoms and frames. Two light modern windows are placed in two plain gabled rubble dormers. The former hall is 7m wide and is of four bays with arch-braced collar trusses and gable trusses. The roof has been dated to the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century by dendrochronological dating. On the west wing has an ornate arch-braced collar-beam roof. There is slight evidence for the former existence of another wing beyond the dais end of the hall. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> century a fireplace was inserted between the hall and west wing, converting the wing into a kitchen, and the square-headed mullion and transom wooden windows were fitted into the hall.

Easting: 7207 Northing: 1958

#### **12289 FORMER DOMESTIC RANGE TO THE SOUTH OF TY FANNER (Plate 3)**

Assessment of Importance: A

Site Status Reference: LB II Ref: 62/G/26(5)

A one and a half storeyed gabled house with an earlier eastern block. The east block is probably contemporary with Ty Fanner, and was once connected to it with a wall. The western house was added in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when external stairs were also added to the eastern wing. It has been recently restored and is now used for holiday accommodation.

Easting: 7208 Northing: 1952

#### **31880 BARN AT CYMMER ABBEY (Fig. 4; Plate 4)**

Assessment of Importance: A

Site Status Reference: LB II Ref: 62/G/27(5)

A five bay barn, of probable mid to late 16<sup>th</sup> century date, which was extended to the south by three bays in about 1800, creating a part open hay barn. It is built of rubble with large masonry blocks in the lower walls, with a continuous old slate roof. There are three plain entrances with stable doors to the earlier section and an upper loading bay in the north gable. The three later bays are open to the west with dividing plain rubble

piers. The roof is of collar truss type, and dates to the probable remodelling of the barn in around 1800. There are some modern additions to the building associated with agricultural activity.  
Easting: 7218      Northing: 1951

**31881 BYRE AT CYMER ABBEY (Fig. 4; Plate 4)**

Assessment of Importance: A

Site Status Reference: LB II Ref: 62/G/28(5)

A later 17<sup>th</sup> century three bay byre with upper loft, built of rubble construction with a graded slate roof. There are entrances on the north, east and west sides with a ventilation slit above the latter and a small, square opening above the former. The central gabled upper dormer entrance to the north side with a ruinous stepped access has a partially replaced mid 17<sup>th</sup> century ogee stopped-chamfered door case (Cadw Listed Building Description).

Easting: 7220

Northing: 1955

### APPENDIX 3

#### Sites Located on the Gwynedd HER within 50m of the Conservation Area

PRN	NPRN	SITENAME	NGR	SITESTAT	PERIOD	CENTURY
4099	55349	CYMMER ABBEY	SH72131950	SAM Me001	Medieval	C 12
4108	55357	ABBAY FARMHOUSE	SH72101954	LB II*	Medieval	C15AD
12289	28142	ABBAY FARMHOUSE	SH72081950	LB	Post-Medieval	
12358	28382	FANNER FARM	SH72081953	LB	Post-Medieval	



YMDDIRIEDOLAETH  
ARCHAEOLEGOL  
GWYNEDD



GWYNEDD  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
TRUST

Craig Beuno, Ffordd y Garth, Bangor, Gwynedd. LL57 2RT  
Ffon: 01248 352535. Ffacs: 01248 370925. email: [gat@heneb.co.uk](mailto:gat@heneb.co.uk)