

# Llangollen: Understanding Urban Character



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# Introduction

## Aims of the Study

Historic character lies at the heart of local distinctiveness and helps create a sense of place. This means that because no two places share a history, every place has a unique historic character. Urban characterization is a tool which we can use to define the unique historic character of individual towns and identify the variety of character within them. It looks at the history of a town and identifies its expression in patterns of space and connection and in traditions of building, which are the fundamental ingredients of historic character.

Urban characterization can help us use historic character to create sustainable and distinctive places for the future. It aims to describe and explain the historic character of towns, to give a focus for local distinctiveness and to help realize the full value of the historic environment. It seeks to

inform and support positive planning, regeneration and conservation programmes, help improve the quality of planning advice, and contribute to local interpretation and education strategies. Responding to local character is an important objective of good design; sustaining it can bring social, economic and environmental benefits.

This study of the historic character of Llangollen is not restricted to the conservation area and ranges from its earliest parts through to more modern development. This study can be used as guidance to inform future development both within the town and in the surrounding area. It should help to guide the management of change in listed and unlisted buildings within the conservation area as well as to act as guidance for design issues both within and beyond the conservation area. The inclusion of a study area beyond the historic core shows how development can have an impact on the character of the wider area. This too should be considered when planning proposals are examined.

*Castell Dinas Brân, established about 1260, overlooks the historic town of Llangollen (© Crown Copyright (2016) Cadw).*



# Historical Background



*St Collen's Church, Llangollen, on the site of the sixth- or seventh-century church (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

## Origins and Early Development

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The kingdom of Powys developed after the end of Roman rule in Britain. It extended over most of the north-eastern quadrant of modern Wales, from the Cambrian Mountains into the West Midlands. It survived continual encroachment from Mercia to the east and internal dynastic changes until the Norman invasion of the area in the late eleventh century when parts of it were absorbed into the Welsh March. Welsh and Anglo-Norman power struggles continued, but by the mid-thirteenth century Powys was split into two Welsh princedoms — Powys Fadog (northern Powys) and Powys Wenwynwyn (southern Powys) — which survived until the Edwardian conquest in 1283.

The settlement of Llangollen has early origins within the kingdom of Powys. It sits at a naturally advantageous position within the Dee Valley as one of the main access points into Wales from the east. Steep hills rise to the north and south framing a fertile valley at a point where the Dee can be forded.

A church was founded here by St Collen in the sixth or seventh century. The form and extent of the settlement at this time is not known and there is little definite evidence for early medieval activity in and around Llangollen. Just over 2 miles (3km) to the north-west of the town, the pillar of Eliseg, a ninth-century stone memorial to the eponymous late eighth-century king of Powys, suggests that there may have been a kingdom or royal estate in the valley. The pillar survives as the fragmentary remains of a stone cross set

on a Bronze Age cairn. Although now eroded, the inscription on the pillar was recorded in 1696; it describes the glories of the kingdom of Powys and how it was erected by Concenn to honour his great-grandfather Eliseg.<sup>1</sup>

There is more substantial evidence to suggest activity in the area by the beginning of the thirteenth century. Madog ap Gruffudd Maelor, prince of Powys Fadog, founded the Cistercian abbey of Valle Crucis 1½ miles (2km) to the north-west of the town in 1201. In about 1260 his son, Gruffudd ap Madog, built Dinas Brân, a masonry castle on the site of an earlier Iron Age hillfort which overlooked the town from the north-east. This castle functioned as the administrative centre of Powys Fadog and it would have controlled a trading centre within the town.

Edward I conquered north Wales in 1283 and a year later he granted the manor of Llangollen to Roger Mortimer. He also gave his consent to a weekly market and two annual fairs. This probably formalized English control over an established Welsh settlement focused around the church and river crossing, and associated with the castle.



*The ninth-century pillar of Eliseg records the glories of the kingdom of Powys (© Crown Copyright (2016) Cadw).*

*Below: View of Valle Crucis Abbey in 1804 by John Warwick Smith. The abbey was founded in 1201 by the prince of Powys Fadog (Supplied by Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/ National Library Wales).*



There is little physical evidence however of the medieval foundation of Llangollen. Although the core of the street pattern of the town probably belongs to this period — in particular the bridge<sup>2</sup> and its main approach of Bridge Street — no discernible burgage boundaries survive. Nor are there any significant early buildings, with the exception of the church. It is likely that the town remained a small settlement through to the end of the eighteenth century. Certainly, John Leland described it as a 'village' in his mid-sixteenth-century itinerary,<sup>3</sup> and it was recorded by Edward Lhwyd as comprising 70 houses at the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>4</sup> Even by 1778, Thomas Pennant could only see a 'small and poor town.'<sup>5</sup>

This 'village' however did develop through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This was largely a result of both its location as a natural stopping point on the overland transport route from London and Shrewsbury to Holyhead and Ireland, and developments of the canal and railway network which linked Llangollen to other markets and populations. From the eighteenth century onwards, tourists with a growing appreciation of the landscape beauty of the Vale of Llangollen began to visit the town. It also grew in response to the impact of the Industrial Revolution when the surrounding area was exploited for limestone and slate, and the natural resources of the town were used for textile production.

*Aerial photograph showing the bridge over the Dee and the development of the town on its southern bank to the right of the photograph (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



## Tourism and the Picturesque

*'Llangollen is a small and poor town, seated in a most romantic spot, near a pretty common watered by the Dee, which, emblematic of its country runs with great passion through the valley. The mountains soar to a vast height above their wooded bases; and one, whose summit is crowned with the antient (sic) castle Brân, is uncommonly grand.*

*I know of no place in north Wales, where the refined lover of Picturesque scenes, the sentimental, or the romantic, can give a fuller indulgence to his inclination.<sup>6</sup>*

From the late eighteenth century, the town and the surrounding Vale of Llangollen gained a reputation as a destination for those in search of picturesque beauty. During this period, the Picturesque movement and the appreciation of aesthetic natural beauty was gradually adopted

by the leisured classes in society who experienced it through scenic pleasure tours in places such as the Wye Valley and the Lake District.

Llangollen became one such destination for tourists looking for the Picturesque. By coincidence, the development of the London–Holyhead road through the town in 1815 brought more visitors to the area and not only attracted many notable people, but also inspired many travellers' tales. Thomas Pennant, a naturalist from nearby Downing Hall in Flintshire, was one of the earliest to describe his experiences of travelling through north Wales and his 1778 description (left) of Llangollen and the Dee Valley captured the town at a moment before it changed significantly later in the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

In a similar vein, W. T. Simpson was so taken by the area that he moved to the town after publishing *Some Account of Llangollen and Its Vicinity* in 1827. He described the 'beautifully picturesque town and neighbourhood' as 'embosomed as it is in a vale where all the

*Llangollen from the Turnpike Road in Thomas Pennant's A Tour in Wales. Pennant was one of the first visitors to describe the town (Supplied by Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/ National Library Wales).*



*An anonymous watercolour of Llangollen in around 1780 (National Monuments Record of Wales: © Crown Copyright).*



beauties of nature seem to concentrate' and claimed that Llangollen and the Dee had more attractive scenery and more impressive views than the Alps.<sup>8</sup>

The author and noted travel writer, George Borrow, was based in Llangollen in the mid-nineteenth century and published the diary of his travels in *Wild Wales: Its People, Language and Scenery* in 1862.<sup>9</sup> Most travellers, however, seem to have valued the scenery and location of the town more than the attractions of the town itself. In 1851, George Virtue described the raised 'expectations' of the traveller on the approach to

the town, but that the 'interest of Llangollen itself is soon exhausted ... though there are beautiful walks up and down the banks of the river.'

He clearly felt that there was more of interest to the traveller outside the town than within and claimed that 'the environs abound in objects at once romantic and [of] historical interest.'<sup>10</sup>

The 'Ladies of Llangollen' complemented the experience of visiting a naturally beautiful area. Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Sarah Ponsonby eloped from their aristocratic life in Ireland in 1778, reportedly in fear of arranged marriages, and eventually settled at Plas Newydd on the

*Plas Newydd by W.Crane, probably between 1835 and 1850, before the house was remodelled in the later nineteenth century (Supplied by Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/ National Library Wales).*



south-eastern edge of the town. Although they led a reclusive life in their self-termed 'retirement' for the next 50 years, they also enlarged and remodelled Plas Newydd in a half-timbered Gothic style set within carefully landscaped gardens. The house and its owners became part of the attractions of the area and both were visited by notable tourists keen to meet the ladies and see Plas Newydd and the surrounding landscape.

Despite the attractiveness of the area and its popularity with the leisured classes, the town remained a rural one. George Borrow could not decide if it was a 'small town or large village.' There were inns and shops, and more fashionable villas (including Plas Newydd) higher up the hills away from the town, but his description of white houses with slate roofs clustered around the 'modest unpretending church' with a smaller suburb to the north across the 'ancient bridge' suggests a settlement that had not altered or developed significantly from its origins as a medieval town.<sup>11</sup>

## Roads, Canals and Railways

The location of Llangollen in the Dee Valley places the town in a key position for transport routes into and out of Wales. By the end of the eighteenth century, the town had developed around the main road which took a circuitous route through the centre along Church Street and past the church as far as The Hand Hotel. Here, the road split and turned left up Chapel Street into Hall Street and the west beyond, or continued straight on to Bridge Street and the bridge over the Dee.

The first major change to the town's transport connections arrived in the early nineteenth century with the construction of the Llangollen Canal (originally a branch of the Ellesmere Canal and later part of the Shropshire Union Canal). The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw the start of the Industrial Revolution which brought together

*A typical section of the canal at bridge No. 35 (Millars Bridge), an original bridge built to the designs of the canal engineers Thomas Telford and Thomas Denson (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*





the Llangollen branch. To control the flow of water into the Dee, works were undertaken as far afield as the river headwaters at Llyn Tegid near Bala. The canal ran from the feeding weir at the Horseshoe Falls to connect with the Ellesmere Canal at Pontcysyllte and opened in 1808. The impact of this development was to

open Llangollen and the Dee Valley to the wider national canal network.

In 1800, the Act of Union united Great Britain with Ireland to create the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. At the time, travelling through Wales to reach the port of Holyhead



*The canal at Penddol, around 1935. The cottage on the right dates from the later seventeenth century and sits much lower than the canal. It has since been modernized with much loss of character (Copyright: The Francis Frith Collection).*



*Bridge No. 43 on the canal with a cottage alongside (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

*A specialist lift bridge  
(No. 44) on the canal  
(© Crown Copyright:  
RCAHMW).*



*The King's Bridge  
at Berwyn  
(© Crown Copyright:  
RCAHMW).*



and then Ireland beyond was tortuous and often hazardous. Problems encountered with the introduction of the Irish mail route between London and Holyhead in 1808 forced the Post Office to seek a Parliamentary Committee to consider a new road. An Act of Parliament was passed in 1815 for the construction of a new road to link London with Dublin via the port of Holyhead. Thomas Telford was chosen as the engineer for the Shrewsbury to Holyhead section. He established the route of the A5 by adopting turnpike roads where possible, but he also created new routes, especially in Wales where there were fewer existing roads. The Holyhead road was completed in 1826 with the opening of the Menai Bridge.<sup>13</sup>

At Llangollen, Telford effectively bypassed the town by diverting the main road at the mill dam at the eastern end of the town so that it ran along Regent Street instead of Church Street. It crossed the earlier road at the Chapel Street/Hall Street junction and continued eastwards into what became known as Berwyn Street. The town nevertheless continued to serve as a stopping point for travellers on the Holyhead road. In 1827, a year after its completion, Simpson described the 'twelve licensed inns and public houses in this little town, all... very respectable' and noted that 'post carriages and horses are kept' at The Hand Hotel and The King's Head — the two main inns.<sup>14</sup>

A little over thirty years later, the railway reached Llangollen as a branch line from Ruabon. Constructed as the Vale of Llangollen Railway, sponsored by the Great Western Railway (GWR) and with Henry Robertson as engineer, it was open to traffic at the end of 1861. Construction had begun in September 1859 following 12 years of discussion and debate over the exact route of the line within the confines of the narrow band of flat land between the river, the canal and the hills on the north side of the valley. The initial station was to the east of its current location, close to Dee Cottage. This acted as Llangollen Road station where passengers were transferred via a coach service to the town. The line was later extended to the west to Corwen and the existing station and buildings were constructed in 1865 as part of this extension.

This increase in transport links to the town had a marked effect on Llangollen. The town

continued to serve as a stopping point for travellers and tourists but, from the middle of the nineteenth century, they could arrive by road or rail or canal. Improved transport also encouraged the development of local industries such as slate quarrying and cloth manufacture, which made use of the Dee for power and transport. Timber from the surrounding wooded countryside was also exploited now that it could be transported more easily.

## Victorian Boom Town

Following the development of the three types of transport links, Llangollen underwent significant changes and growth.

Stone and slate quarrying and the manufacture of woollens and fabrics continued to expand. Tourism, already an established activity, developed further and the population and services offered in the town expanded to match. Slater's trade directory for 1859, which predates the construction of the railway and most of the later nineteenth-century changes in the town, lists the majority of the town's businesses within the older more established streets: Bridge Street, Chapel Street and Church Street.<sup>15</sup> The 1880 directory, however, names new streets and a greater number and range of businesses.<sup>16</sup>

The growth in industry and corresponding expansion in population led to an increase in building within the town through the nineteenth century. Most of the red brick character of the town (houses, schools, chapels and shops), especially within the southern and western parts of the town, belong to this period of growth. Simpson had noted in 1827 that the town consisted of 'one long badly paved street, and a short cross one, together with some courts and alleys' but, by around 1860, new planned streets had been laid out. Castle Street was created to run directly south from the bridge to the Regent Street/ Berwyn Street junction, together with a new rectangular grid of streets to its west. Castle Street became the new main street in place of the older Bridge Street/Church Street area. New businesses were set up here and new housing was developed in the grid of streets to the west.

*The bridge and Castle Street, about 1955 (Copyright: The Francis Frith Collection).*



New buildings, needed by this more prosperous Victorian town, were constructed within this development. A large market was established (Smithfield on Market Street, which is now the main town car park) and new chapels were constructed (Baptist on Castle Street and Abbey Road, Congregational and Methodist on Princess Street, Methodist on Berwyn Street and Welsh Presbyterian in Victoria Square).

A town hall was built in 1867 in the fashionable Gothic style; it was one of the first 'new' buildings on Castle Street, at the junction with Parade Street, near to the older core of the town at the end of Bridge Street. A police station was added in 1867, a new school was constructed on Parade Street in 1874 and a school on Regent Street, built in 1840, was remodelled in 1871.

*Right: Castle Street Welsh Baptist Chapel (Bedyddwyr Chapel), built 1860 and now used as an information centre (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*Far right: Glanrafon Congregational Chapel (now Glanrafon Evangelical Church) was built 1902–03 in Princess Street (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*





*English Wesleyan Methodist Chapel (now English Methodist Church) in Princess Street, built in 1903 (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

Slate and stone had been actively exploited in the area surrounding Llangollen since before 1700, but the development of the canal and rail links enabled substantial growth in quarrying activity. The Pentre Felin slab and slate works were developed to process the slate quarried at Berwyn Slate Quarry on the Horseshoe Pass (formerly known as Clogau Quarry) and load it onto barges on the canal for transport to the east, directly past Llangollen. Similarly, other quarries in the area (Moel y Faen, Rhiw Goch, Pant Glas and Westminster) all benefitted from being able to transport and export their products more easily. Productivity and employment peaked in the decades following the development of the railway and canal systems.

Cotton production in the town also developed through the second part of the nineteenth century. The Dee had been used for milling from an early date. For example, Llangollen Mill (now The Corn Mill), adjacent to the bridge, dates to 1786, but milling is known on this site since the thirteenth century. However, the improved transport links and developments in machinery brought about by the Industrial Revolution meant that the river began to be used for processing other raw materials. Cotton and wool mills were the main type to be developed. The Lower Dee Mill was established as a cotton mill in the early nineteenth century but failed early in its life. It was redeveloped successfully as a woollen mill from the 1840s, when new mechanical looms were

used along with the latest technology direct from the Lancashire mill towns, and continued in use until the 1960s. The operation was so successful that its owners, Hughes and Roberts, expanded into the Upper Dee Mill in 1855, though this ceased production around 1920.<sup>17</sup>

Victorian development and activity elsewhere in Llangollen were largely responsible for the outline and form of the town that we see today. To the east of the town, the early pre-canal plan was preserved along with its building types and materials. To the west, a distinctly different area developed along new streets with buildings in new styles using new materials.

## The Twentieth Century

The twentieth century saw a general decline in the traditional manufacturing base of Llangollen resulting in a large number of redundant mills and factories. The Upper Dee Mill closed as a woollen mill in the 1920s; Llangollen Brewery and Coward's timber yard survived until the mid-twentieth century. The Lower Dee Mill closed in the 1960s as did the cattle market at Smithfield, which became a car park. However, tourism, the other mainstay of the local economy, prospered as visitors continued to enjoy the natural beauty of the area and took a growing interest in the heritage of the town.



*Above: The bridge with the railway under its northern end in the 1960s. The railway later closed and reopened to the west as a heritage line (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

The canal and the railway, which had generated the industrial growth of the town, lost their original functions. Instead, combined with the growth and predominance of car transport in the second half of the twentieth century, they took on new roles as tourist attractions. The canal was adopted for pleasure cruising and the railway line — closed in the 1960s — was gradually reopened from the mid-1970s as a steam heritage line running west to Carrog. The line was not retained east from the town and in subsequent years it was redeveloped mainly for housing.

New tourist attractions were built elsewhere in the town — Riverside Park opened in 1926 with tennis courts, a bandstand and other features. Plas Newydd, the home of the Ladies of Llangollen, was acquired by Llangollen Urban District Council in 1932 and opened to the public a year later.

The town also became the centre for the annual Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod. The first eisteddfod was held in 1947 and resulted in the development of a large site to the north of the town as a permanent campus. There was also an increase in construction in the post-war period with Ysgol Dinas Brân and housing at the Pengwern Estate.



*Right: Aerial photograph showing the site of Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

# Historical Topography

## Landscape and Setting

The town of Llangollen is set within the Vale of Llangollen — the valley of the River Dee bordered by the cliffs of Eglwyseg Mountain to the north and a further high ridge to the south, which divides the vale from the Ceiriog

Valley. The vale is a wide and fertile valley that follows the winding course of the Dee and is a natural communication route from the east into the mountainous heartland of Wales.

It has been used for a number of transport routes including Thomas Telford's London to Holyhead road and what is now the Llangollen Canal.



*Aerial view along the Dee Valley to the west of the town (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



The town sits at a natural crossing point of the Dee, where the valley narrows slightly, mainly on the south side of the river and centred on the early church and bridge crossing. Although the existing bridge probably dates to the sixteenth or seventeenth century, a bridge is recorded at this location from the late thirteenth century.<sup>18</sup> It is likely that this river crossing and the sixth- or seventh-century foundation of the church of St Collen led to the development of the town of Llangollen.

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## The Structure of the Early Town

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The earliest town developed around the church and the bridge in a linear meandering pattern along a single street. Today, the line of this street is Church Street which continues as Bridge Street. It is likely that the later London–Holyhead road (Regent Street) was built over the eastern end of Church Street, but the line of Church Street survives from its junction with Regent Street, just west of where Regent Street bridges a small tributary of the Dee.<sup>19</sup> Church Street follows

*Above: Aerial photograph view along the Dee Valley to the east of the town (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*Right: The Vale of Llangollen from Barbers Hill, around 1850 (Supplied by Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/ National Library Wales).*

a line roughly parallel to the south bank of the river, past the church of St Collen and the site of the old market house, which was probably situated in what are now the gardens of The Hand Hotel.<sup>20</sup>

Other streets probably developed as back streets, yards and closes leading off Church Street and Bridge Street. Although limited by

the proximity of the river to the north, lanes to the south such as Cross Lane are indicative of early development behind the main street frontage. A 1791 plan of the town shows the general layout of Church Street and Bridge Street along with the approach to the town from the east (see p. 75).<sup>21</sup> The plan shows streets and some buildings, but not all in detail, and is important because it depicts the town before the



*The winding line of Church Street survives from the early layout of the town (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



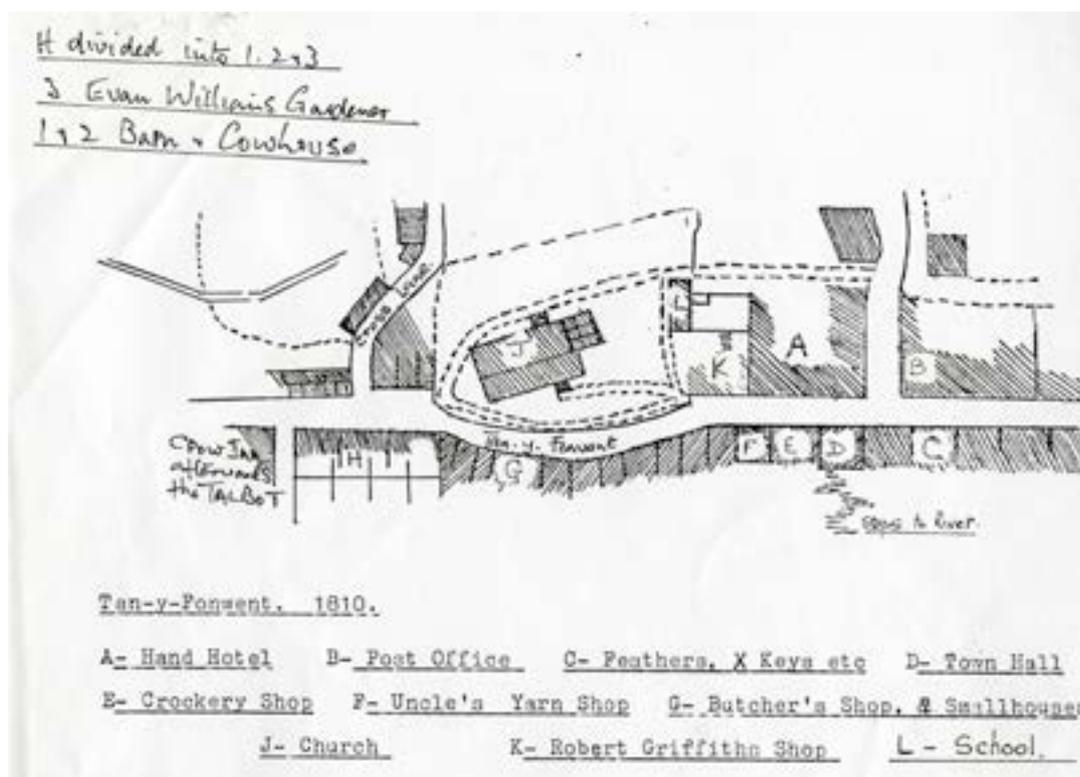
*Aerial photograph showing Castle Street extending to the right of the bridge; the older core of the town is visible to the top and the later grid pattern town is below Castle Street (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

construction of the Holyhead road. A lane, most probably now known as Chapel Street, is shown running southwards from The Hand Hotel on Church Street to the old vicarage. The plan also shows a building on the site of 12 Bridge Street, The Hand Hotel, the church and smaller buildings along both Chapel Street and Cross Lane. The lane (Butler Hill) leading to Plas Newydd is also shown, as well as buildings along its length, possibly Pen y Maes and the building that would become Plas Newydd.

A sketch plan of the town in 1810, drawn and annotated by John Hughes around 1870, shows in detail the layout of the early town and provides good historical information about changes at the turn of the nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup> Hughes described how The Hand Hotel had been extended and that his uncle's house had been added to its left (eastern) side.<sup>23</sup> The buildings opposite had been 'pulled down, and a strong wall made on the side of the river and the ground between the street and the river made into a pleasure garden'. This survives as the open space of The Hand Hotel gardens but is shown on his plan as a continuous row of buildings on the north side of Bridge Street, which extended east along the curving street to past the church. Hughes also described the old town hall opposite The Hand Hotel with 'heavy oak stairs going into the Court Room above, a dark dismal room.'<sup>24</sup>

The Feathers Inn, opposite The Hand Hotel, was described by Hughes as the 'first house', because it was the main inn in the town followed in respectability by The Royal Oak on Chapel Street. The Royal Hotel on Bridge Street, known in 1810 as The King's Head, was only a 'small inn' but, by the 1820s it had been re-erected and enlarged and became the second hotel in the town. Hughes described the route through the town in 1810: 'At that time all travelling and traffic was through the village, from Pentre Felin Hen under the church yard, turning by the Hand, between the hotel and the Post Office up to the George & Dragon (now the Grapes Hotel) turning on the right through Pentre Morgan for Corwen. Regent Street was not then made, all were gardens and green fields. There were no names on the streets or numbers on the houses then. Llangollen was an insignificant village, 60 years ago!'<sup>25</sup>

Examples of early houses, similar to those that would have existed when Hughes was writing, survive at 18 and 31 Church Street. Both are small vernacular buildings and are probably similar to those that were demolished to make way for The Hand Hotel gardens. Elsewhere, 12 Chapel Street and 1 and 2 Chapel Street Square illustrate how development took place behind the main street frontages with small cottages built in tight groups on spare land.



Map extract from the memoirs of John Hughes, woollen manufacturer in Llangollen, showing the layout of the town in 1810 (Denbighshire Record Office, DRO NTD/1304).

Other buildings in this early part of the town are likely to have early origins and may date from the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. Buildings would have been replaced or remodelled (often through refronting or enlargement) in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when the town developed.

Beyond the initial development of the town, early construction outside its core was largely restricted to industrial development, which used the water power of the Dee for milling and textile production. Elsewhere, smaller villas, estates and outlying housing were developed, but Llangollen remained essentially a small rural town.



*Above left: 31 Church Street, which may have seventeenth-century origins (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

*Above: 12 Chapel Street, set behind the main street frontage, has early origins, perhaps in the sixteenth century (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

*Left: Chapel Street Square was built behind the main street frontage as a tight group of cottages on spare land (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

## Nineteenth-century Development and Expansion

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The growth of tourism to the area throughout the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries encouraged visitors to settle and develop the town and its surroundings as a rural retreat.

The Ladies of Llangollen developed Plas Newydd and it became a cultural focus for the area, appreciated for its natural beauties. More followed and built, adapted or embellished villas and minor gentry houses with surrounding gardens, outbuildings and lodges. Good examples are Siamber Wen on Wern Road, Willow House on Willow Street and the Gothic-styled Tregwern on Hall Street. This has led to a visible influence of the polite and the Picturesque in the town and surrounding area.

*Archive photograph of Siamber Wen on Wern Road. The house is probably earlier eighteenth century but was remodelled around 1800 with a Picturesque exterior (© Crown Copyright: National Buildings Record).*



*Willow House on Willow Street is said to have eighteenth-century origins and was home to Elizabeth Hughes who served the Ladies of Llangollen (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



Later transport and industrial developments had a more dramatic effect. The canal, the Holyhead road and the railway each increased the viability and potential for industry and tourism, followed by a consequent demand for greater housing and services in the town.

John Hughes described the traffic and bustle from travellers through the town on the Holyhead road:

'The great Holyhead road had for some time now been completed, and a great traffic opened between London and Ireland. The two hotels became rivals. The Mail, the coaches and private carriages were constantly and continually going through. And then under the church yard to the Hand and turning at right angles, those to Holyhead had to go straight on, but then had to return again by the Hand for Holyhead or for London. All the members of Parliament in their private carriages came this way.

The new road from the Grapes to Pentrefelin Hen was very soon after this made, and the

new road avoided Pentre Morgan (Bwlch-y-Rhisgog road was the first made) and the new road from Pentrefelin Hen to Llangollen Fechan, avoiding the Pen-y-Bedw hill and the hill be Pen-y-Bryn and Bryn Dethol. These were all done within my memory. Also Fron-friau, Chirk Embankment and all the way from there to Gobowen.'<sup>26</sup>

The rapid expansion of the town in the second half of the nineteenth century, especially in its southern and western parts, was a direct result of the development of the transport links. Building plots along the Holyhead road had been developed from the 1820s onwards (such as the current post office building on Berwyn Street) and areas outside the immediate town had also seen some development during this period. A number of villas were constructed in the Abbey Road area and elsewhere. The old toll house on Queen Street, on the eastern edge of the town, was built around 1816 to the designs of Telford to serve his new road and is a reminder of how the new road changed the approach to the town.



*Archive photograph of the old toll house on Queen Street, built around 1816 to the designs of Thomas Telford (© Crown Copyright: National Buildings Record).*

*Archive photograph of seven cottages on the corner of Queen Street with Brook Street. The cottages were demolished in the years following the Second World War (© Crown Copyright: National Buildings Record).*



*Early building at 1-3 Regent Street (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

Some buildings had existed along Regent Street (the 'green fields' described by Hughes) before the Holyhead road but they were altered and the character of this area changed distinctly with the coming of the road.

The most dramatic development in scale and style was that of Castle Street and the network of streets to the west from 1860 onwards. Part of this area had probably already been developed from the early nineteenth century. 29 Castle





Street (now a restaurant) is an early nineteenth-century building in the Georgian tradition: symmetrical with small pane sash windows. Its location on the corner of Oak Street, which links Castle Street with Chapel Street, suggests that this was one of the first areas to be developed.

More indicative of the main development of Castle Street are numbers 37–45 (odd) on the east side between Oak Street and Berwyn Street. Conceived by Morris Roberts and designed by W. H. Hill of Oswestry, they are a cohesive three-storey commercial development with shopfronts to the ground floor and accommodation above. They are painted brick and strictly classical and symmetrical in design but, nevertheless, represent the ambitious large-scale nature of the post-1860 development of the town. The use of mainly brick for building from the 1860s onwards gives a very distinctive appearance and character to the areas of the town developed in this later period.

Industrial growth continued with the development of the mill industry (new mills were constructed on the Dee) and the arrival of a tannery, brewery and timber businesses. Agriculture developed on the town fringes in response to farming improvements and expansion. Farm buildings were rebuilt and purpose-built farms established, such as the specialist dairy farm at Vivod.

## Topography and Social Structure

The town has a mixed urban form with a commercial core surrounded by a range of cottages, villas and terraced housing, and industry. There are dense suburban streets and, especially in the earlier part, a codevelopment of residential buildings alongside commercial buildings. Within the town, there is an emphasis on a tight urban form with many buildings constructed over three floors and few breaks between buildings. Outside the town core, there are smaller-scale nineteenth- and twentieth-century suburbs in all directions, which expanded onto the lower slopes of the hills and along the river corridor.

A number of major families and landowners have influenced the town and its surrounding area; the Williams Wynn family of Wynnstay, Ruabon, have been major landowners in the Llangollen area, along with the Myddletons of Chirk Castle, and the Tottenhams of Plas Rhysgog and Plas Berwyn.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these landowners developed estates in the area using Picturesque principles, with fashionable houses set within carefully

*29 Castle Street was built in the early nineteenth century in the Georgian tradition. (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

landscaped and managed naturalistic grounds. Plas Berwyn and Llantysilio Hall (to the north of the Horeshoe Falls), and Dinbren Hall, Plas yn Vivod and Pengwern Hall are all good examples. The sale of land, especially during the development of Castle Street, was largely through the sale of estate land.

The Ladies of Llangollen — Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby — also left some long-lasting marks on the town through the transformation of Plas Newydd into a Romantic retreat with landscaped grounds on the fringe of the town centre. From the outset, this was a tourist attraction and continues to attract visitors to the town today.

*Archive photograph of Dinbren Hall. Built on the site of an earlier structure, this house probably dates from the 1790s (© Crown Copyright: National Buildings Record).*



*Archive photograph of Plas yn Vivod, which dates mainly from the 1850s or 1860s (© Crown Copyright: National Buildings Record).*



# The Character of Building

## The Chronology of Development

Llangollen as a settlement probably has origins as early as the foundation of the church of St Collen in the sixth or seventh century. Following the Edwardian conquest in the thirteenth century, there was an assertion of English control over an existing Welsh settlement centred on the church, the castle and the river crossing. The Dee had probably been bridged at this natural fording point from an early date but a substantial crossing was provided by a masonry bridge (possibly the present structure), probably from the sixteenth or seventeenth century.

The crossing point and its approach (Bridge Street), as well as the church, are the main survivors of the early town. Although little else of the medieval foundation survives, such as burgage boundaries or significant buildings, a number of early buildings which represent the earlier pre-nineteenth-century town 'core' do survive along Bridge Street and Church Street. The town was

confined to this Church Street/Bridge Street area until three major transport changes took place in the early to mid-nineteenth century.

The opening of the Llangollen branch canal in 1808 to connect the water of the Dee to the canal network at Pontcysyllte brought the first major change to the topography of the town, with a new focus of activity on the north bank of the river. The development of the Holyhead road to the south of the town from 1815 created a further radical change with the growth of commercial buildings to cater for the growing number of travellers and tourists. The third major transport change was the arrival of the railway in 1861, between the canal and the river.

With new transport links, the town's industrial activity of stone quarrying and textile production expanded. The consequent growth in population and commercial activity led to expansion and much of the town's present-day layout and buildings belong to this phase. Castle Street and the western part of the town are the manifestation of this later nineteenth century-growth.

*Llangollen Bridge,  
about 1840  
(Supplied by Llyfrgell  
Genedlaethol Cymru/  
National Library Wales).*



*The round castellated tower on the bridge, which was demolished in 1940 (By courtesy of Amgueddfa Llangollen Museum, Stan Coulter Collection).*



## Building Types

### Transport

Llangollen Bridge is a four-arched masonry bridge. Its historic part is constructed of coursed rubble with precast concrete on the modern upstream side. There are deep pointed cutwaters to both upstream and downstream sides. A bridge crossing the Dee had been recorded in 1284 and tradition has attributed the existing bridge to either John Trefor (bishop of St Asaph, 1346–57) or John Trefor II (bishop of St Asaph, 1395–1411). However, Leland noted a 'great stone bridge over Dee Ryver' in the 1530s and floriated sepulchral slabs — similar to those at Valle Crucis Abbey — found embedded in the fabric during alterations to the bridge suggest that it was constructed after the dissolution in the 1530s. Moreover, another fragment of masonry found within the fabric of the bridge, the 'Rondle Reade' stone dated 1656, suggests that construction could have been in the middle of the seventeenth century.<sup>27</sup>

Whatever the initial date of construction, the bridge has been altered and extended since it was first built. The north end had to be extended in 1863 in advance of the construction of the railway line and station; the height had to be increased to meet the new roadway level and parapets were also required. A round castellated tower at the north-east end was demolished in 1940 because it was a hazard to traffic. The bridge was widened on the upstream side in 1873 and again in 1968, which almost doubled its original width.

Although important as an early crossing point, the bridge probably only served to connect the town to the northern bank of the river and may not have been significant beyond this. The 1791 plan (p. 75) shows that although the town had developed around the church, the main road from Wrexham to Ruthin was on the north side of the river (now Mill Street/Abbey Road).<sup>28</sup> The bridge linked this road to the town, which was a collection of winding streets with lanes leading to the south. The earliest town, albeit with the prominent structures of the church and the bridge, was very much isolated and a diversion from the main route along the Dee Valley.



*The Horseshoe Falls.  
The building on the left  
is a later gauging station  
(© Crown Copyright:  
RCAHMW).*



*The Horseshow Falls  
(© Crown Copyright:  
RCAHMW).*

The Llangollen Canal survives on the flat stretch of land between the Dee and the hills to the north, along with its towpath and associated structures near to the town. These include Wharf Cottage and the former

warehouse built alongside the wharf in the town. Further upstream, towards the Horseshoe Falls, the engineered weir system designed to control the flow of water from the Dee into the canal system survives.

*Llangollen railway station*  
(© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).



*Llangollen railway station from the bridge*  
(© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

The railway is also located on the northern bank of the Dee. This narrow strip of land accommodated the parallel transport routes of the road from Wrexham, the canal and the railway. The railway now only survives west of the station, which was built in 1865 to the west of the bridge to replace an earlier station of around 1860 (demolished when the line was extended westwards to Corwen). Further alterations and extensions were carried out in 1898 when the track was doubled in width and new facilities, such as platforms and a footbridge, were added. The main station building — constructed in stone to a Tudorbethan style — signal box, overbridge, goods sheds and other ancillary structures are grade II listed buildings.

To the south of the town the Holyhead road survives, now largely built up along its length as Berwyn Street/Regent Street/Queen Street. This road, along with the canal and railway, is important to illustrate the historic re-emphasis of the town that took place during the nineteenth century. The shift away from a town connected to the world by lanes to one dependent on new parallel transport links outside the urban centre brought new wealth and increased development.





*The platforms at Llangollen railway station  
(© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*The goods shed at Llangollen railway station  
(© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*The signal box at Llangollen railway station  
(© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*The former Pritchard Memorial Baptist Chapel, Abbey Road, built in 1895 (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

## Churches and Chapels

The church of St Collen is the main parish church after which Llangollen is named and the reason for the development of the early town. The sixth- or seventh-century church was superseded in the thirteenth century by a building in the Early English Gothic style. This was altered and extended until heavily remodelled and enlarged in 1864–67 by the Shrewsbury architect, S. Pountney Smith. He retained the eighteenth-

century west tower, but added a south aisle and aisled chancel, which gives the church its current external character (p. 53).

Outside the early town, chapel building defines the nineteenth-century growth of Llangollen. Prominent Rehoboth Chapel was built 1835–36 in a popular classical composition with a pedimented front overlooking Victoria Square (p. 35). It was enlarged in 1874 and a new roof was installed in 1890 — changes which echoed the rise in the population of the town throughout the nineteenth century and created the demand for new places of worship. The former Welsh Baptist Chapel (Bedyddwyr Chapel) was built in 1860 as one of the first buildings on the newly laid out Castle Street. It was built in a conventional classical style and is one of the most prominent buildings on Castle Street (p. 16).

The rise in popularity of nonconformism in the late nineteenth century resulted in the construction of more new chapels. The Pritchard Memorial Baptist Chapel on Abbey Road, built in 1895, was followed by a spate of building at the turn of the twentieth century. Glanrafon Congregational Chapel (1902–03, now Glanrafon Evangelical Church) and the English Wesleyan Methodist Chapel (1903, now English Methodist Church) were both built on Princess Street (pp.16–17). The large brick Seion Methodist Chapel was built on Berwyn Street in 1903.



*Seion Methodist Chapel, Berwyn Street, built in 1903 (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

## Commercial and Civic Buildings

The Old Town Hall and the Old Armoury, built in 1835 as the town hall on the south side of Berwyn Street, form the eastern end of Hall Street at Victoria Square. A bare Tudorbethan style was used with rubble stone construction. Along with

nearby Rehoboth Chapel, the construction of the town hall in this location suggests that the emphasis of the town was beginning to shift away from the church towards the area of Victoria Square by the early nineteenth century.



*The Old Armoury with the former Rehoboth Chapel behind*  
(© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

*Archive photograph of the Old Armoury at the junction of Victoria Square with Berwyn Street*  
(© Crown Copyright: National Buildings Record).



More ambitious developments in the Castle Street area superseded those at Victoria Square later in the nineteenth century. A new town hall was constructed in 1867 on the corner of Castle Street with Parade Street. Designed by the county architects, Lloyd Williams and Underwood, it adopted the fashionable nineteenth-century Gothic Revival style with a tall roof, timber bellcote and lancet windows. Originally,

there was a market hall at street level with civic rooms above.

Lloyd Williams and Underwood were also employed in the same year to design the police station on Parade Street, adjacent to the town hall, but in a simpler Gothic style. The location of the two buildings together at the northern end of Castle Street, near to the earlier core of the town on Bridge Street, their size and

*The town hall, built in 1867, on the corner of Castle Street with Parade Street (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*The police station built in 1867 on Parade Street (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



the adoption of the progressive Gothic styling otherwise little used in Llangollen at that time points to a determined expression of a new period and identity. This was an attempt to change the character of the town through its architecture and planning.

Two new schools had been constructed in the town by the middle of the nineteenth century: one on the north side of Regent Street (1840) and the British School in Brook Street (1846 and later converted to a chapel). With the post-1860 expansion of the town, more schools were needed so the Regent Street school was greatly extended in 1871 in the new Gothic style (in use in the early twenty-first century as the town health centre). A new purpose-designed school was constructed in Parade Street in 1874 which, along with the new town hall and police station, completed the 'new' civic core of the town.



*The British School in Brook Street, built in 1840 (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*The 1840 school on Regent Street, which was extended in the Gothic style in 1871 (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*The school on Parade Street, which was purpose-built in 1874 (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

There are a number of banks within the town. All date from the nineteenth-century growth of Llangollen but some were established in the older Bridge Street/Church Street area as well as in the later parts of the town. The Midland Bank was opened in 1863 in part of an earlier building next to The Royal Hotel on Bridge Street; it

was remodelled with a new front in 1881–83. The Old Bank was constructed in 1855 on the corner of Berwyn Street with Chapel Street. Built in brick to a simple classical style, it has an elegant curved front facade facing the junction — an obvious design for the location and an attempt to enforce formality on the Victoria Square area.

*The former Midland Bank, remodelled in 1881–83 (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*Below: The Old Bank on Berwyn Street, built in 1855 (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



Good examples of mixed commercial premises survive in the town, such as those at 4 Berwyn Street (Watkin and Williams), a three-storey building following the style of the Old Bank but with a shopfront extending the full width of the ground floor. Bridge Street retains evidence of buildings adapted for commercial use both in the form of designed facades (15–19) and the insertion of shopfronts into earlier Georgian facades (10–12). Castle Street is the main commercial area of the later period with more ambitious developments such as the buildings at the south-east end (37–45). A number of buildings were constructed individually but with a uniform appearance and some retain particularly good elements, such as the butcher's shopfront (19).



*Mixed commercial premises at 4 Berwyn Street (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*Left: Buildings adapted for commercial use at 15–19 Bridge Street (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

*Below: 37–45 Castle Street is part of the later main commercial area (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

*Below left: The impressive butcher's shopfront at 19 Castle Street (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



The principal hotels of the early town survive as The Royal Hotel (Bridge Street) and The Hand Hotel (Church Street). Both relate to the early development of the town and its period as a tourist destination for those in search of the Picturesque in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Royal Hotel is a large three-storey building occupying a commanding position at the

western end of Bridge Street overlooking the river and the bridge. It has its origins in the eighteenth century but was rebuilt in the 1820s and enlarged in the later nineteenth century, possibly following its sale in 1867. Originally, known as The King's Head, it was renamed The Royal King's Head Hotel after a visit by Princess Victoria in 1832 and became known as The Royal Hotel by 1880.

*The Royal Hotel from the river in 1901. The hotel has eighteenth-century origins but was rebuilt in the 1820s and later enlarged (Copyright: The Francis Frith Collection).*



*The Hand Hotel in 1890. Although The Hand Hotel also had eighteenth-century origins, the building is largely early nineteenth century with some later alterations (Copyright: The Francis Frith Collection).*





*Above: The Royal Hotel as it is today  
(© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*Left: The Hand Hotel as it is today  
(© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

Although The Hand Hotel on the corner of Church Street and Chapel Street has eighteenth-century origins, the building is largely early nineteenth century with a number of later alterations and additions. It has the benefit of open gardens on the river side of Church Street. The clearance of buildings

in this area was described by John Hughes (p. 22) and took place presumably only shortly after the construction of the hotel. The Wynnstay Arms, also in the early town, is an early eighteenth-century structure heavily masked by external half timbering applied in 1897.

*Archive photograph of The Wynnstay Arms and 18 Bridge Street. Both are eighteenth century but The Wynnstay Arms is masked by fake timber framing (© Crown Copyright: National Buildings Record).*



*18 Bridge Street as it is today (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



There are other coaching inns closely associated with the construction of the London–Holyhead road, such as The Cambrian Hotel on Berwyn Street. Although mid-nineteenth-century in date, it continues the Georgian tradition of small pane sash

windows. Other new inns, such as the former Nags Head at 25 Church Street and the former inn at 51 Church Street, reflect the increase in travellers to the town. The Royal Hotel and The Hand Hotel however continued as the main accommodation.



*Left: The Cambrian Hotel on Berwyn Street (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*Left: 25 Church Street, formerly the Nags Head (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*Below left: Archive photograph of the former inn at 51 Church Street (© Crown Copyright: National Buildings Record).*



*Below right: 51 Church Street as it is today (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*Llangollen Mill now  
The Corn Mill restaurant  
and bar  
(© Crown Copyright:  
RCAHMW).*

## Industrial Buildings

The water power of the Dee and its tributaries has played an important role in the town since earliest times. A number of mills are known to have utilized the river. Llangollen Mill (now The Corn Mill) was a corn mill on the south bank of the river, just to the west of the bridge. It bears a date-stone of 1786 with the name, Trevor Lloyd, but the mill itself is substantially older. Documentary evidence records milling in the thirteenth century<sup>29</sup> and it is said to have been rebuilt in 1630, indicating the early small-scale use of the Dee for water power.

Most of the mills relate to the industrial development of the town as a centre for flannel production from the mid-nineteenth century. In 1805 the Manchester mill owners, William Turner and Andrew Comber, established

the Lower Dee Mill on the north bank of the river on the downstream side of the bridge as a powered cotton mill. This mill took advantage of Llangollen as a cheaper alternative to the Lancashire mill towns. It was destroyed by fire in 1814 and although rebuilt, the mill failed when the cotton trade declined in the 1830s. It was bought by Roberts and Hughes who adapted it as a woollen mill with new mechanical looms in 1843.<sup>30</sup> The works expanded into the new buildings of the Upper Dee Mill on nearby Mill Street. The Upper Dee Mill ceased production in the 1920s and the Lower Dee Mill in the 1960s. Both were taken over by Cuthbert's seed merchants.<sup>31</sup> The mill structures of the Lower Dee Mill have been demolished and the site is now a large car park, but elements of the water management system survive along the river side and as a footpath to the bridge. The structures of the Upper Dee Mill survive.

By the 1870s, another woollen mill, the Mile End Mill, had been established further upstream from the town on the Holyhead road. It was owned by the Lloyd-Jones family who bought both the Upper and Lower Dee Mills in 1888. The buildings of the mill complex survive.

Coward's timber yard (now a supermarket) had been developed by 1890 on an empty site on the north side of Regent Street. It continued in business until the 1950s and the site was developed as a supermarket in the late twentieth century. Its roadside location and the substantial plot of land that it occupied reflect the significance of timber processing within the town.



*The Mile End Mill buildings  
(© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

Around 1900 a tannery (known as the Llangollen Hide and Skin Co. Ltd) was established within a former flannel mill on the brook at the eastern end of Church Street. It is shown on the 1874 first edition Ordnance Survey map as 'Old Mill — flannel' but, on the 1912 second edition it appears as 'Maesmor Mills'.<sup>32</sup> 43 and 45 Church Street were used as the office buildings with the tannery behind. It remained in production until about 1990 since when the site has been redeveloped for housing. There was an earlier tannery, shown on the 1840s tithe map as the 'Skin House' on Hall Street, but its use was changed in the early twentieth century.<sup>33</sup>

built nearby on the banks of the Dee for the printing and production of seed pockets by a separate company, Dobson and Crowther. In 2014 Dobson and Crowther relocated to a site opposite the Upper Dee Mill and ceased operating shortly afterwards.

The seed company, R. & G. Cuthbert Ltd, was established in the town following the use of redundant mills for seed production during the Second World War. At the end of the war, Cuthbert's acquired the old brewery site and in 1958 a new purpose-built factory was

The brewery site used by Dobson and Crowther had been the Pen y Bryn Brewery from around 1840. It operated under various guises until the 1870s when it became known as Tanqueray's Llangollen Brewery. It was the major brewery in the town until its closure in the 1930s. Other breweries operated in the town during the nineteenth century, including the Crown Brewery, the Talbot Brewery and the Sun Brewery on Regent Street. All were reliant on the growing population of the town during the industrial boom of the nineteenth century. Today, the redundant buildings of the Llangollen Brewery are the main surviving remains of this industry.



*The old brewery building,  
Llangollen Brewery  
(© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

## Domestic Buildings

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Examples of early domestic buildings, which predate the growth of the town from the later eighteenth century onwards, survive within the early core of Bridge Street and Church Street. Some buildings also survive in the outlying streets,

such as Chapel Street and Mill Street, but later remodelling throughout the nineteenth century — including re-fenestration, insertion of shopfronts, heightening and refronting — has masked many of these early buildings. It is highly likely that many of the buildings in these areas retain an early core and are some of the earliest within Llangollen.

*Archive photograph of the old post office (22–24 Bridge Street) of early seventeenth-century origins (© Crown Copyright: National Buildings Record).*



*The old post office, 22–24 Bridge Street, as it is today (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*





18 Church Street is rare because it retains its early seventeenth-century external timber frame intact. Up to the nineteenth century, there would have been more buildings like this within the early town. These buildings would have been constructed with local timber and stone using traditional vernacular building styles and techniques, which reflected the town's rural nature and limited need for major buildings. Likewise, 12 Chapel Street, which is probably an earlier sixteenth-century structure, is visibly half-timbered but was enlarged in the seventeenth century and later altered (p. 23). Such early buildings are modest in scale and tend to be single storey with attics. The use of roughcast

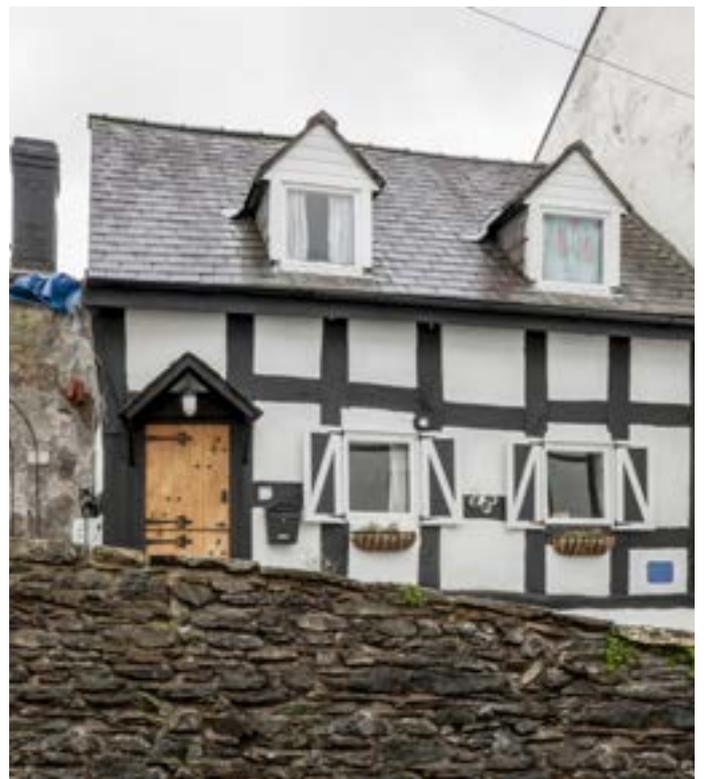
rubble masonry and small casement windows with few architectural embellishments is typical of their vernacular character. 1 and 2 Chapel Street Square are good examples with painted roughcast walls and casement windows (p. 23).

Many early buildings that have been remodelled still retain the essence of their origins. 22 and 24 Bridge Street, for example, are single storeyed with gabled attics but have had shopfronts inserted. Others have been altered more radically, such as 25 Bridge Street, which has seventeenth- or eighteenth-century origins. Its large pane sash windows and stone quoin detail are features typical of the later nineteenth century.

*Above: Buildings on Mill Street (6–8). 8, with attic dormers, may have later sixteenth-century origins (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

*Below left: Archive photograph of 18 Church Street (© Crown Copyright: National Buildings Record).*

*Below: 18 Church Street as it is today (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



Both Bridge Street and Church Street also contain a number of eighteenth-century buildings. 14 and 16 Bridge Street are dated 1754 and 18 is dated 1775. All reflect the eighteenth-century change of style

with the beginning of full three-storey building height, much larger (small paned) sash windows, brick construction and architectural features such as stucco detailing of quoins and windows.

*Archive photograph of 14–16 Bridge Street. The buildings are dated 1754 (© Crown Copyright: National Buildings Record).*



*14–16 Bridge Street as they are today (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



There are a number of eighteenth-century houses on Butler Hill, such as Plas Neywdd, Pen y Maes and Min Nant (p. 60), which were remodelled with the changing fashions in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Siamber Wen on Wern Road is an early eighteenth-century house given a strong Gothic remodelling about 1800 (p. 61), a style probably repeated elsewhere in the town at Willow House on Willow Street (p. 24) and at Tregwern on Hall Street (p. 60). This architectural remodelling clearly reflects the tastes of the time for the Sublime and the Picturesque.

New fashionable detached villas were built, such as Fair View and Arnon Cottage on Abbey Road and Dee Villa on Mill Street, and terraced houses were built on newly laid out Regent Street

(10–34). Altogether, this marks a development towards a more polite style of architecture in the town and a trend for larger, more substantial and less vernacular building.

Elsewhere, survival of pre-1860 domestic buildings is variable but this reflects the changes brought about by the growing popularity of the town and area, as well as increasing wealth and prosperity, in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Victorian domestic building of the post-1860 growth period was predominately in the grid of streets to the west of Castle Street. There were also less dense developments elsewhere in the town either as single buildings or short terraces.



*Arnon Cottage was built as a fashionable detached villa on Abbey Road in the earlier nineteenth century (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*Terraced housing at 10–18 Regent Street, built in the first half of the nineteenth century (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

Building of this period is invariably in brick (sometimes combined with roughcast or render) with decorative use of different coloured bricks and hard-fired terracotta elements such as ridge tiles. This use of brick and terracotta reflect the dominance at the time of the industrial manufacture of building materials in the nearby Cysyllte/Cefn Mawr area of the lower Dee Valley and the ease with which it could be transported the short distance to Llangollen.

In the Castle Street grid of streets, domestic building comprises mainly two-storey, with some three-storey brick terracing. Large pane sash windows predominate with some detailing to windows and other elements such as bargeboards. Some terracing, such as that on Princess Street and West Street, retain the architectural language of the Georgian period with render and stone quoins; 20 West Street for example has a vernacular classical doorcase. More decorative elements do appear, such as the raised render window surrounds on 20 West Street and adjacent buildings, and the window heads on various houses on Princess Street and Market Street. Where the main building material is brick and left visible, houses still retain a simple symmetrical layout with stone or brick window heads and cills. Sometimes, there is decorative

use of differing shades of brick, as on Market Street opposite the market site, and sometimes a degree of architectural decoration such as oriel windows, eaves' detailing or terracotta. Often, brick is used only for visible external elevations. This is demonstrated by the exposed gable end of John Street which shows that stone continued to be used for rear elevations.

Generally, there is a shift in style, scale and decoration of domestic building which mirrors the shift in building patterns after 1860. In short, brick becomes visible and housing tends to be more densely developed as smaller-scale buildings are more tightly packed. The general styles, however, are a continuation of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century trends.

### Modern Buildings

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The library on Parade Street is one of the most notable modern buildings in the town. Built 1970–72 and designed by the Denbighshire County Council architects, R. A. C. MacFarlane and E. Langford Lewis, it has an unusual 16-sided plan using rough-faced reconstructed stone with a plain upper floor and a continuous arcade of pointed windows to the ground floor.

*The library on Parade Street built in 1970–72 (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*





*The twentieth-century NatWest bank on Castle Street  
(© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

The NatWest Bank building at the south (western) end of Castle Street demonstrates late twentieth-century urban development using a style and materials of the period. The influence of twentieth-century entertainment and leisure can be seen in two buildings — the former 1920s garage/cinema at 26–28 Castle Street, which is now a shop, and the former garage on George Street.

## Building Materials and Detail

The town contains a varied range of materials and architectural styles, which illustrate its growth over time. The local geology and regional timber-framing tradition dictated much of the earlier architectural character. The character of the later town is defined by increased industrialization and new communication links which developed from the nineteenth century.

In 1827, W. T. Simpson described the town: ‘... for the most part formed with obscure mean-looking houses, built of the dark-coloured silicious stone procured from the rocky bed of the river, and from the surrounding hills. The houses are seldom more than two stories high, and have a very somber appearance, except where the owners have had the good taste to avail themselves of the lime

which is near at hand, in rough-casting or plastering the fronts. The difference of the appearance of the buildings thus finished is so advantageous that it is to be hoped the plan will be generally adopted.’<sup>34</sup>

In 1849, Samuel Lewis reported that: ‘The houses of the town are in general old and of mean appearance, though occasionally interspersed with some handsome modern dwellings ... they are for the most part built of a dark shaly stone, which gives them a very dull aspect.’<sup>35</sup>

### Walling

Timber is likely to have been the earliest walling material used in Llangollen, together with whatever stone was easily available locally. The timber framing still visible in Church Street (18) is a good example of this vernacular building tradition, which predated the eighteenth century (p. 47). Many of the buildings in the early town area probably retain fragments of earlier structures behind later facades, which were added to enlarge (widen or heighten) older buildings in new styles.

Brick and stone are the most common surviving walling materials in the town. From the eighteenth century stone was readily available with good sources of limestone to the east of the town and slates and shales to the west.

*Exposed polychrome brickwork at 8–10 Berwyn Street (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



Stone buildings were often left exposed or covered with limewash or roughcast, or a rendered finish such as scribed render (stucco). A stone building with some form of wall finish may indicate the use of poor quality stone or an intention to hide an earlier structure that has been altered or refronted. When stone (or brick) buildings have been given a finished or decorative cover, this is often to conform to an architectural style, especially in the Georgian period. The use of rendered finishes also allowed elaborate detail to be added, such as the Gothic windows in Abbey Square or the window heads in Princess Street.

Brick became more available from the mid-eighteenth century first with the development of improved transport links and then with the nineteenth-century growth of industrialized brick production, especially in the areas around nearby Wrexham. Brick was more commonly whitewashed when it was used in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century buildings. In later buildings, it was more likely to be left exposed. It was also used decoratively, as in the polychrome arrangement at 8–10 Berwyn Street, or in a mottled variegated arrangement, such as the red and yellow bricks used at 8–10 Regent Street. The development of local industries in the later nineteenth century enabled a greater use of higher quality brick, as well as tile and terracotta, often in combination with stone (for window lintels for example).

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## Roofs

Thatch survives in areas surrounding the Vale of Llangollen in combination with timber-framed buildings as well as those of stone. It is probable that thatch was used for the earliest houses in the town though it has now disappeared from use.

Slate is now the dominant roofing material and has been extracted from quarries in the area from the seventeenth century. It would have been readily available from the nineteenth century as the productivity of the slate quarries increased, following greater industrialization and improved transport links in the surrounding area. Slate would have been one of a suite of standard factory-manufactured building materials from the early nineteenth century onwards, but especially during the post-1860 growth of the town when there was more comprehensive and uniform development.

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## Joinery

18 Church Street is the only building in the town to retain largely unaltered external square timber framing. Timber framing does however survive elsewhere, such as the cruck construction used at 31 Church Street. Where they survive, early windows have small pane casements; these differ from the windows of the eighteenth century onwards which are typically 16-pane sashes. From the mid-nineteenth century, windows had larger horned sashes, which not only reflect changing architectural styles, but also changes in manufacture that allowed larger panes of glass to be made.

# Character Areas

## I. The Early Town

### Historical Background

Modern Llangollen retains the core of the much earlier town centred on the church of St Collen. Although later developments in transport links and urban planning moved the emphasis of the town, its first centre was focused on Church Street and Bridge Street, and the river crossing over the Dee. This early town survived largely intact until the construction of the Holyhead road from 1815. The layout shown in the 1791 plan (p. 75) largely reflects how the town developed around the earliest known structures — the thirteenth-century church of sixth- or seventh-century origin and the bridge, which is likely to date from the sixteenth or seventeenth century with perhaps thirteenth-century origins.<sup>36</sup>



*St Collen's Church, Church Street, in the heart of the early town (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

*Below: The bridge over the River Dee (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



The 1791 plan shows the river crossing and an east–west road on the north side of the bridge marked 'To Wrexham' (east) and 'Fm Ruthin' (west) (p. 75). A number of buildings are shown around this junction, plus a lane to the north. No similar junction is shown towards the eastern end of Church Street, which suggests that the main road along the Dee Valley was to the north of the river. The detail at the eastern end of Church Street is vague: the plan shows the street terminating in an open square before a lane (Butler Hill) turns to the south. There were few other streets at this date: Chapel Street existed as a lane to the vicarage to the south of the town and there were two lanes, presumably leading over the hills to the south. Cross Lane, to the east of the church, is the only other street of note; it enclosed a small area to the eastern end of Church Street.

The existence of only one main street at the end of the eighteenth century suggests that the town had not developed far beyond its initial location, nor had it undergone much growth or expansion. The 1791 plan and the drawings and notes of Llangollen in 1810 by John Hughes (pp. 22, 75) suggest a town of one main street with dense development and redevelopment along and immediately behind its length. The proximity of the river on the north side limited expansion in this direction but there would have been informal courtyard developments behind the major street-side buildings.

*Small-scale development at Chapel Street Square*  
(© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).



## The Character of Building

The early town of Llangollen has a layout and appearance very different from the other parts of the town. The winding and undulating nature of both Bridge Street and Church Street are at odds with the other primary streets in the town, which tend to be more consciously designed and laid out in straight lines. As a result, Bridge Street and Church Street offer more varied and less formal views. There is also a greater complexity and density of buildings — often rebuilt successively both individually and in groups — which creates a variety of character not repeated elsewhere in the town.

Although few early buildings remain, the individual plot structures — especially along Church Street — survive and there has been little development within the main street frontage since the early twentieth century. There is open space, principally surrounding the church and in The Hand Hotel gardens.

Along with the church, some early buildings are obvious: 18 and 31 Church Street are examples of small seventeenth-century vernacular buildings (pp. 23, 47). Others are less obvious: Bryn Dwr, opposite the church, was also built in the seventeenth century but was heightened and refronted in the nineteenth century and has a very different character. Elsewhere, early small-scale courtyard developments survive, such as Chapel Street Square.

There is some distinction in building use within the area: Church Street retains a small-scale domestic flavour in contrast with Bridge Street (and the area to the west of the church) where the buildings are typically more substantial and commercial in nature. Bridge Street contains some of the more important hotels of the town (The Royal Hotel and The Hand Hotel on the junction with Church Street) as well as buildings which reflect growing prosperity in the eighteenth century. 14–20 (even) Bridge Street are all substantial Georgian developments with some good detailing typical of the period. Nineteenth-century commercial success is evident in 15, 17, and 19 Bridge Street, which are late Georgian but with later shopfronts.



*Above: Small-scale domestic building at 27–32 Church Street (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*Left: The corner between 22 Bridge Street and 2 Chapel Street showing the difference between the scale of building in the two streets (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*The Royal Hotel remains a substantial presence on Bridge Street (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*Archive photograph of 19–23 Bridge Street. The buildings date from the early eighteenth century with later, but still historic, shopfronts (© Crown Copyright: National Buildings Record).*

Finishes to buildings across the area tend to be plain-coloured render or roughcast with some enhancement of architectural detailing (quoins, window surrounds etc.).

## 2. Nineteenth-century Growth: Around the Canal and Railway

This phase of development around the canal and the railway to the north of the town was brought about by the development of transport links and industry as well as the growing influence of tourism and travelling. This phase is distinct from

the major topographical changes brought about by the construction of Castle Street from 1860 and is comparable to the changes to the town on the south side of the river during this period.

### Historical Background

There had been some early development from the sixteenth century to the north of the town, and probably before, at the junction of the Wrexham–Ruthin road with the bridge. The 1840s tithe map (p. 76) shows development along Abbey Road to the west and Mill Road to the east, which may have been associated with travellers along the Wrexham road diverting to the town over the bridge.<sup>37</sup>

The Green Lane and Wharf Hill areas were both developed, at least partially, by 1840, probably as a result of their proximity to the town and the road junction over the bridge. Construction of the canal between 1804 and 1808 would have further increased traffic and activity in the area. The construction of the railway and the development of the Dee mills complex around 1860 brought further building activity. By this time, the narrow strip of land between the river and the hills to the north was divided by the parallel lines of the railway, the road and the canal with a mix of development in between, ranging from workers' housing to The Ponsonby Arms public house and Dee Villa. Further expansion

took place with scattered villas along Abbey Road. By the early twentieth century, the area had largely developed its modern form.

Major developments, however, took place in the twentieth century, notably the removal of the railway to the east of the bridge and the redundancy of the Dee mills complex. The Lower Dee Mill was demolished and flats were constructed on part of the site; the Upper Dee Mill survives but is currently unused. The school was replaced in the late twentieth century with the larger Ysgol Dinas Brân and the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod centre was constructed.



*Dee Villa, Mill Street,  
built in 1837 by  
John Hughes, woollen  
manufacturer  
(© Crown Copyright:  
RCAHMW).*



*Dee Bank Cottage,  
Green Lane  
(© Crown Copyright:  
RCAHMW).*

## The Character of Building

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The varied form of building in this area relates to its historical development outside the town and its close associations with transport links to the town. The bridge and early buildings at its northern end survive. 8 Mill Street is probably later sixteenth century in date. Although altered in the nineteenth century, its steeply pitched roof is a key indicator of an early building and suggests



*Above: Green Lodge built in the mid-nineteenth century on Green Lane (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

that this area around the bridge had been developed from at least the sixteenth century.

The buildings to either side of 8, especially 4 and 6, are slightly later and probably have early eighteenth-century or earlier origins. Their survival suggests that this was an important area of the town which has been developed and redeveloped from the eighteenth century onwards. It was certainly a popular area from the end of the eighteenth century when a number of Regency villas were constructed in the Green Lane area and further along Mill Street.

The railway, with its complex of buildings and structures, also adds to the character of this area and is a particular tourist attraction to the town. The open space, and views to and from the station, the tracks and the bridge are some of the most defining aspects of the character of the town. There is little surviving physical evidence of the line to the east of the bridge and no suggestion that the town was previously linked to a wider rail network.



*Right: 6-8 Mill Street (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*Right: Llangollen railway station (© Crown Copyright (2016) Cadw).*

Equally, the redevelopment of the Lower Dee Mill site with a block of flats has eroded the industrial character of this area, though some early eighteenth-century workers' housing does survive close by. The Upper Dee Mill buildings survive and are an important and rare surviving indicator of the industrial nature of this area of the town. So too are the mews-style industrial workers' housing which survives nearer to the bridge on the north side of Mill Street.

Because of the topography of the area, the modern developments of the school and the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod site do not intrude and are largely hidden. Abbey Road, leading out to the west, has seen ongoing development during the twentieth century but retains its character of larger detached houses that was established when villas were constructed at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

### 3. Nineteenth-century Growth: the Holyhead Road

The phase of development around the Holyhead road to the south of the town was brought about by the development of transport links and industry as well as the growing influence of tourism and travelling. This phase is distinct from the major topographical changes brought about by the construction of Castle Street from 1860 and is comparable to the changes to the town on the north side of the river during this period.

#### Historical Background

The area had seen some development during the eighteenth century before the construction of the Holyhead road, but this was restricted to limited buildings outside the main town. Only three routes south from the town are shown on the 1791 plan (p. 75) and this area was probably very open and rural in character.<sup>38</sup>

A collection of buildings on Regent Street (1, 2 and 7 Regent Street) and Church House (21 Regent Street) have origins from the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although they predate the Holyhead road, they were altered after the road was built. Unlike most of the post-1800 buildings, they are not aligned to Regent Street and Church House is noticeably set well back.<sup>39</sup> A further group of buildings (39–47 (odd) Regent Street and The Sun Inn) has, at least in part, late eighteenth-century origins (especially 39, 41 and 43) and is enough to suggest that the line of Regent Street (the Holyhead Road) was being formalized with development before the arrival of Telford.

*Top: 1–3 Regent Street set back from the later building line (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

*Bottom: Archive photograph of the north front of Church House, Regent Street. This side, on Cross Lane, was originally the main front before the south front was altered in the early nineteenth century to become the main facade (© Crown Copyright: National Buildings Record).*





*Top: Min Nant, Butler Hill  
(© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*Top right: The post office (former Baptist College), Berwyn Street  
(© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*Right: Tregwern, Hall Street  
(© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

Of the other developments south of the town, Butler Hill extends south from the western end of Church Street. The three buildings shown in the 1791 plan — probably Min Nant, Pen y Maes and Plas Newydd — all have early eighteenth-century origins but were altered during the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

On the 1791 plan (p. 75), Chapel Street extends to the south to a collection of buildings, which includes the vicarage<sup>40</sup> and presumably the area now known as Victoria Square. A road marked 'To Corwen', which is probably Hall Street/Willow Street, runs west and a lane to the east marked to Glynne — possibly Glyn Ceiriog — is probably now Hill Street. There were a number of buildings on Hall Street (the area not shown on the 1791 plan), including 21–25, which were built around 1800, but this area changed

dramatically by the time of the 1840s title map (p. 76).<sup>41</sup> This shows the Victoria Square area largely as it is today with the Holyhead road cutting a line along the south edge of the town; nevertheless, Victoria Square and Hall Street remained a focus for development.

It is possible that Victoria Square represents a re-centring of the town, which predated the post-1860 changes, but was lost when those later and larger-scale developments took place. Some of the buildings on Castle Street (29 — now a restaurant) certainly predate 1860 and their position on a line running directly from the bridge does suggest an earlier attempt to enlarge the town centre away from the area around the church.

By the mid-nineteenth century the area had been developed further with the new town

hall, Rehoboth Chapel, the Baptist College (now post office), and The Prince of Wales on Regent Street. There were also industrial buildings (30 Regent Street is a former slaughterhouse and butcher's shop) and domestic buildings (including 27 Hall Street, and Tregwern and Willow House, which were remodelled at this time) as well as most of the terraces fronting onto Regent Street. By the time of the first edition Ordnance Survey map in 1874 (p. 77), the area was largely in its modern form, with the exception of some later nineteenth-century development, mainly housing. During the twentieth century, the area to the south-west was heavily developed for further housing.

## The Character of Building

The character of this area varies with a range of buildings which reflect the unplanned and piecemeal growth of the town outside the main historic area. Fashionable domestic villas were constructed at the height of the town's popularity during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Tregwern, Willow House and Siamber Wen).

Others were built and then altered very shortly afterwards as a result of the fast-changing layout and prosperity of the town (39, 41 and 43 Regent Street).

*Siamber Wen, one of the fashionable villas constructed at the height of the town's popularity in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*Below: Earlier eighteenth-century housing, which was later altered, 39–47 Regent Street (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*Different building finishes at 31–33 Regent Street (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*Below: Rehoboth Chapel on Victoria Square was built in response to the growing population (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



The terraced buildings along Regent Street display a common form of continuous rows of three-storey buildings, but they have a varied appearance which reflects their piecemeal development. Different materials (brick and stucco) were used at different times for different developments.

Elsewhere, the industrial development of the town can still be seen in the site of the Dee Mill. The mill buildings have now been demolished but the plot and the adjacent rows of workers' housing demonstrate the substantial size and influence of the mill industry in the town. The old tannery on Hall Street survives, albeit altered. Other buildings which also reflect the growing population of the town from the end of the eighteenth century survive, including the old town hall, chapels and schools.

By the very nature of the Holyhead road, development along Regent Street and Berwyn Street was uniform and confined to continuous street frontages. Elsewhere, the topography dictates less uniform development though it was largely constrained by pre-existing routes (those shown on the 1791 plan, p. 75) and influenced heavily by the layout of the ground resulting in smaller-scale more individual developments.



## 4. Plas Newydd

### Historical Background

Plas Newydd and the surrounding gardens were created by the Ladies of Llangollen. They are fine examples of late eighteenth- to early nineteenth-century Romantic architecture and gardening.

The ladies were Lady Eleanor Butler (1739–1829) and Miss Sarah Ponsonby (1755–1831). They were both born into noble Irish families but left Ireland in 1778 and eventually settled in Llangollen in 1780 after touring Wales. They rented a small stone cottage, on the high ground immediately south of the town and above a steep valley to the east, and renamed it Plas Newydd. The ladies chose to live in a self-styled eccentric retirement, inhabiting a life of rural simplicity, local society and entertaining visitors en route to and from Ireland. Over the next 50 years they gradually enlarged the original cottage and added Gothic windows and canopies, and an elaborate porch. Their hobby of collecting carved oak and stained glass was put to use in heavily

decorating the house in a Romantic fashion inside and out. Plas Newydd was bought in 1876 by General John Yorke of Erddig. He enlarged the house further and added the fake timber framing. His extensions have not survived but the house retains the timber-framed appearance. Plas Newydd and the gardens eventually passed into the ownership of the local authority.

The gardens were largely created by the ladies between 1780 and 1831. The cottage had been surrounded by fields when they arrived in 1780 and their intended life of rural simplicity included gardening, heavily influenced by contemporary ideas on Romantic landscapes and gardens. They divided the surrounding fields and planted them to create shrubberies, winding walks, a kitchen garden (first bordered by a hedge and later a wall) and a dairy. They created rustic structures such as fencing, seats, bridges and Lady Eleanor's bower overlooking the valley. By 1790 the garden had become greatly admired by visitors, but work continued up until around 1800 including the alteration of the flow of the river in the valley to create pools and cascades.

*Plas Newydd retains the fake timber framing introduced in the late nineteenth century (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

Much of the ladies' planting and structures have been lost and other elements such as the formal garden to the front of the house have been introduced since their occupancy. Nevertheless, the essential structure of Plas Newydd and its gardens is largely that created by the ladies.

### The Character of Building

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The character area is roughly an oval shape to the south-east of the town in a secluded glen bordered to the west by Butler Hill and to the east by the Cyflymen brook. It comprises the house, its associated outbuildings and the gardens.

The house is located to the north of the area with the main entry from Butler Hill via a winding beech tree-lined drive. There is a further drive to the north leading to a parterre in front of the house. A small single-storey stable building is

located to the south-west of the house on the south side of the drive.

The gardens lie to the south, east and north-east of the house and comprise two main parts. There is an upper garden mainly to the south of the house, but also to the north-east, and a lower garden in the valley to the east. Each has a different character: the upper garden has a formal layout while the lower is a wild woodland garden.

The upper garden to the south of the house is mostly on level ground, with a formal parterre and a lawn with an adjacent Gorsedd circle. Shrubberies, lawns, hedges and topiary are the primary features of the upper garden along with the dairy to the west of the house. The lower garden is wilder and more informal in character and comprises earthen paths amongst largely deciduous trees with some structures, such as a belvedere on the site of Lady Eleanor's bower.

*The formal garden in front of Plas Newydd, which was introduced after the occupancy of the Ladies of Llangollen (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



## 5. Castle Street and the Western Town

### Historical Background

Llangollen grew exponentially from the mid-nineteenth century as a result of developments in industry and transport in the town. It changed radically from the town shown on the tithe maps of the early 1840s (p. 76) to that which appears on the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1874 (p. 77). The main area of growth was based on a new main street, Castle Street, and a grid of streets to the west between the Holyhead road and the river, with a large livestock market at its centre.

The establishment of Castle Street in 1860 was the idea of Morris Roberts, a local builder, and has traditionally been seen as the catalyst for this growth. However, the open space to the west of the bridge had probably been used for limited development from the early nineteenth century. The restaurant (29), on the corner of Castle Street and Oak Street, predates 1860 and probably represents, in part, an early colonization of new land outside the crowded historic centre,

which from the early nineteenth century was bypassed by the Holyhead road and reduced in importance by activity on the canal. It also made practical sense to drive a new road linking the bridge (and the canal) with the Holyhead road and the collection of new buildings in Victoria Square. Oak Street may have grown from a small backstreet leading away from the old town. It does contain some early nineteenth-century buildings (5 and 7) and may have been the obvious place to begin the construction of a linking road. Whatever the exact development of Castle Street, it belongs in the period following 1860 and now largely defines the character of the town.

Formally established in 1860, Castle Street and the land to the west grew quickly. A plan by W. H. Hill, architect and surveyor of Oswestry, shows 'Building Land in Llangollen'. Undated, it can only post-date 1860 by a few years as the new town hall (1867) is not shown, but the Welsh Baptist Chapel (Bedyddwyr Chapel) of 1860 does appear. Part of Castle Street Square was cleared. It had been built orientated along Bridge Street but was now an obstruction to the line of Castle Street. 29 also appears on Hill's plan along with a number of other buildings on Castle Street and the new Smithfield market site.



*Castle Street Square as it is today. It was cleared in part to make way for Castle Street (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

The remainder of the area is shown divided by a grid of streets. Market Street, the main street west from the middle of Castle Street; West Street, crossing near its end, and the land in between divided by further streets (East Street, Queen Street and George Street) was already split into lots for sale. By the time of the first edition Ordnance Survey map in 1874, the area had been substantially developed and by the 1912 second edition Ordnance Survey map, the area was largely as it appears

today (p. 78). There have been some more recent developments with housing and minor industrial developments at the eastern end and some limited clearance of the original 1860 building plots (the garage on George Street, for example), but the area remains largely as defined by Hill in around 1860. One of the most important changes to the area has been the loss of the market and the clearance of the market buildings, but the area has been retained as the main town car park.

*29 Castle Street predates the planned 1860 development of Castle Street (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



*37–45 Castle Street is a cohesive three-storey group typical of the 1860 development (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*





*Plain brickwork and an oriel window at 27 Castle Street also date from the 1860 development (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

## The Character of Building

The character of the area is dominated by the materials and layout of the 1860 development. The red brick buildings on broad streets laid out in a grid pattern are clearly different from the rendered and roughcast buildings in the winding and undulating streets of the old town and the areas north of the river and south of the Holyhead road. Equally, the area itself is defined by four clear components — commercial Castle Street, the market site, a collection of civic and religious buildings around Parade Street and Princess Street, and housing to the west.

Castle Street is now the main commercial part of the town with primarily large three-storey buildings with shopfronts on the ground floor. Styles vary and there is a clear continuation of building in the Georgian tradition with symmetrical design and small pane sash windows common features intermixed with the use of plain brick, painted brick and detailed stuccoing. There are some narrower buildings (15, Barnado's and 17, Cafe & Books), which are possibly some of the earliest developments and some individual buildings (11). More typical of the 1860 phase are 37–45 (odd) on the eastern side of Castle Street between Oak Street and Berwyn Street. Designed by Hill, they are a large cohesive three-storey commercial group with shopfronts to the ground floor and accommodation above.



*Plain brickwork and oriels windows, plus an impressive shopfront survive at 19 Castle Street (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

Although the painted brick of this group contrasts with the plain brick and oriels of 19 to 27 (odd) (between the Gwyn Davies Butchers block of buildings and the newsagents on the corner of Oak Street), there is a consistent symmetry in design of a large group of buildings which is representative of the large-scale nature of the post-1860 development.



The market site survives as a large open space but has lost the main market building constructed between 1874 and 1912. Interestingly, its function as a car park continues the use of the site as a gathering point within the town.

A number of civic buildings in polychromatic brick were built along Parade Street as part of the initial development (the town hall, police station and school). Although in different styles, they are clearly an attempt to create a new nucleus associated with the expansion of the town. There is also the early 1970s library, which is built of materials and to a style not seen anywhere else in the town, but completely in keeping with its function.

*Above: The town hall on the corner between Castle Street and Parade Street, built in 1867 as part of the new civic core of the town (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

*Right: The police station on Parade Street, also built in 1967 (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

*Below right: The school on Parade Street completed the new nucleus of the 1860s expanding town (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

*Below left: The 1970s library on Parade Street (© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



Housing in this area is dominated by two-storey terraces, both single and double fronted. They are built either in the Georgian tradition, with render or roughcast and formal architectural detailing like stone quoins (such as 20 West Street), or deliberately new and Victorian using plain red brick and large pane sash windows (Westbourne Terrace at the western end of Market Street), but retaining the Georgian pattern of symmetry and basic detailing. There is also a mix-and-match approach to finishes and embellishment which help to relieve the uniformity of an otherwise strict and repetitive area of housing. Decorative window heads, bay and dormer windows, and oriels are all common. This combination of styles and materials reflects the diverse nature of development that was laid out in one phase, but took place over time and by different hands.

## 6. The Canal

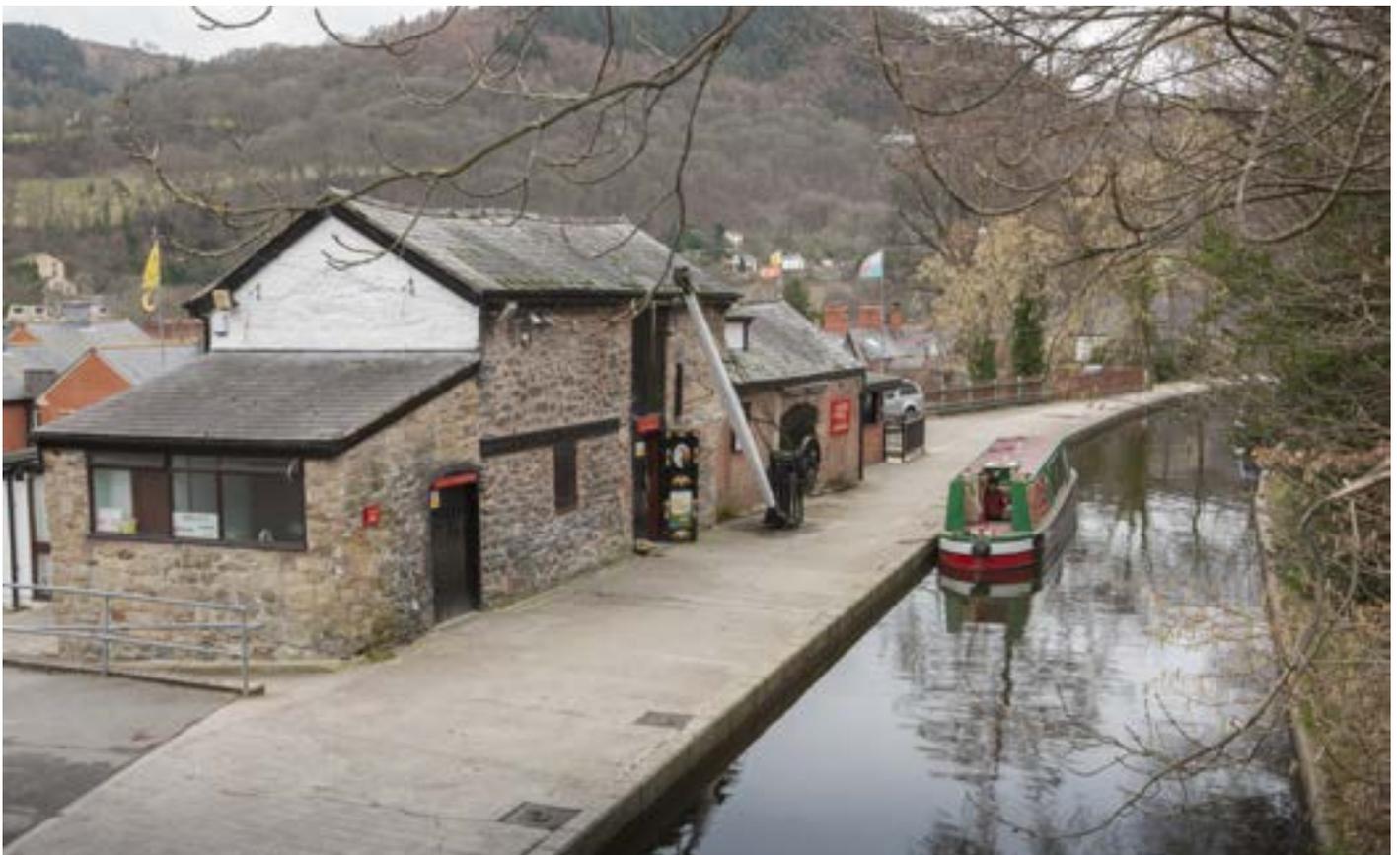
### Historical Background

The canal was constructed as a branch of the Ellesmere Canal (later the Shropshire Union Canal) during the period of great canal building

in Great Britain in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The canal at Llangollen was completed in 1808 to provide a sufficient and reliable supply of water from the River Dee for the larger canal network. It also served to transport locally produced materials (slate, timber etc.) out of the area and goods into the town. The canal was built as far as the Horseshoe Falls where a complex weir structure diverted water from the river into the canal. The weir is a masonry structure 460 feet (140m) long, with a high-level channel to draw the water off into the canal.

Moorings were provided in the town and the 1874 first edition Ordnance Survey map shows 'tenters' (cloth-drying frames) in the field opposite (p. 77). Various buildings were constructed as part of the canal development such as the former warehouse and the nearby cottage, possibly built as a worker's house for the moorings. In 1947 a valve tower was added at the Horseshoe Falls end of the canal to control the flow of water, but, overall, the canal and its towpath have survived largely without later developments. The significance of the canal was recognized in 2009 with the inscription of Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal onto UNESCO's World Heritage List.

*The former warehouse at Llangollen Wharf  
(© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*





*Above: The chain bridge with Berwyn railway station*

*(© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

*Right: Berwyn railway station*

*(© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*

*The chain bridge near to the Horseshoe Falls at Berwyn*

*(© Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).*



Near to the Horseshoe Falls, within the area of Berwyn, there is a high five-arched road bridge — King's Bridge — built in 1902–06 over the Dee. The Chainbridge Hotel is on the north side of the Dee, which is crossed by the chain bridge — originally constructed around 1820 to enable access from the nearby limestone quarries to the newly built Holyhead road. On the south side, the railway line from Llangollen stops at Berwyn station and the line is carried westwards over a six-arched viaduct.

### The Character of Building

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The canal is an east–west linear feature with a towpath on its southern side, located to the north of the Wrexham road, with a moorings basin to the north-west of the Llangollen Bridge area. Further to the north and west, it connects to the River Dee at the Horseshoe Falls. It is largely hidden from view from the town by structures and vegetation.

The Horseshoe Falls area is dominated by the chain bridge and road bridge over the Dee. The hotel and station provide contrasting structures on each bank to an otherwise undeveloped and wooded valley.



# Statement of Significance

Llangollen is known as a small town of handsome and substantial red brick buildings on the banks of the River Dee. Its highlights include the bridge, the heritage railway, the canal, Plas Newydd — the home of the Ladies of Llangollen — and the site of the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod. Beyond these individual features lies a deeper history of an older town of winding streets and small alleys with stone and timber buildings.

The church was founded by St Collen in the sixth or seventh century and, although much altered, is the earliest known building in the town. It marks the early establishment of a settlement in the Dee Valley at a natural crossing point of the river on one of the main valley routes into and out of the mountainous interior of Wales. Little else of this early settlement survives except for the core street pattern of Bridge Street and Church Street, and the small lanes behind with some scattered small vernacular buildings. This street pattern however survived and continued to exert an influence over the development of this part of the town.

The early town remained essentially a small rural settlement through to the later eighteenth century. By this time, the town and the surrounding area had become a focus for the fashionable interest in natural wild landscapes known as the Picturesque movement. Llangollen and the Dee Valley became one of a number of areas renowned for their landscapes and the town welcomed an influx of tourists and settlers to the area. The visitors brought fashionable ideas on architecture and design which inevitably influenced the appearance of the town and its outlying areas. The restrained Georgian styles of this time are still very much evident today despite later remodelling.

At broadly the same time, the improvement of road links from London to Holyhead (and Ireland) followed by the construction of the railway and canal caused a surge of development. The town now became a stopping point on a much wider transport network. This brought new infrastructure and activity. It enabled the development of new industries and generated

demand from travellers and workers for accommodation and supplies. The water power of the Dee had long been used for industry but was now exploited for the production of textiles, timber and slate quarrying. With the improved transport links, industry prospered and tourism developed and flourished.

It was during the nineteenth century that Llangollen grew into the town with which we are familiar today. Whole new streets were laid out in straight lines away from the lanes of the existing town. Often lined with large new buildings in red brick or in fashionable Gothic styles, they were distinct from their Georgian predecessors. Most of the major commercial and civic buildings in the main thoroughfare, Castle Street, which define the town today, date from this time.

The nineteenth-century boom faltered during the early twentieth century when most of the traditional manufacturing and local industries declined. In their place, the town turned to its earlier role as a tourist destination. The railway, which had survived in part the cuts of the 1960s, became a heritage leisure line. The canal too was brought back to life and is popular with tourists. The eisteddfod site was established as an international centre for music and other destinations were developed in and around the town.

Traces of this rich history are preserved in the street patterns and buildings, which give Llangollen its distinct character. Together, they help tell the story of the transition from a small rural town to a Georgian tourist destination and the rise and fall of a Victorian industrial boom town. Its twentieth-century reinvention as a tourist centre depends on this historic character, which should be cherished and respected for the benefit of future residents and tourists alike.

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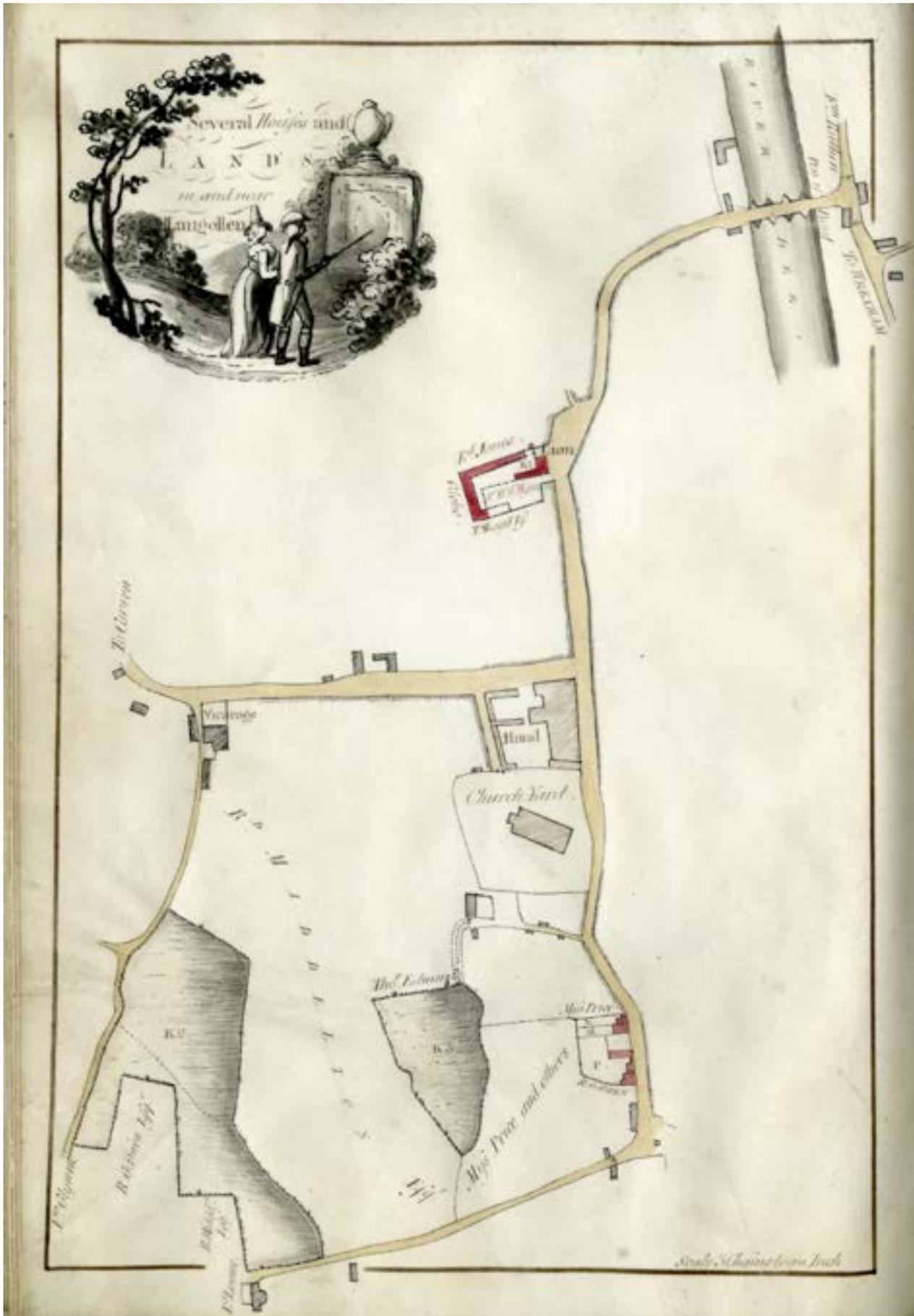
[http://www.llangollen-railway.org.uk/  
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# Endnotes

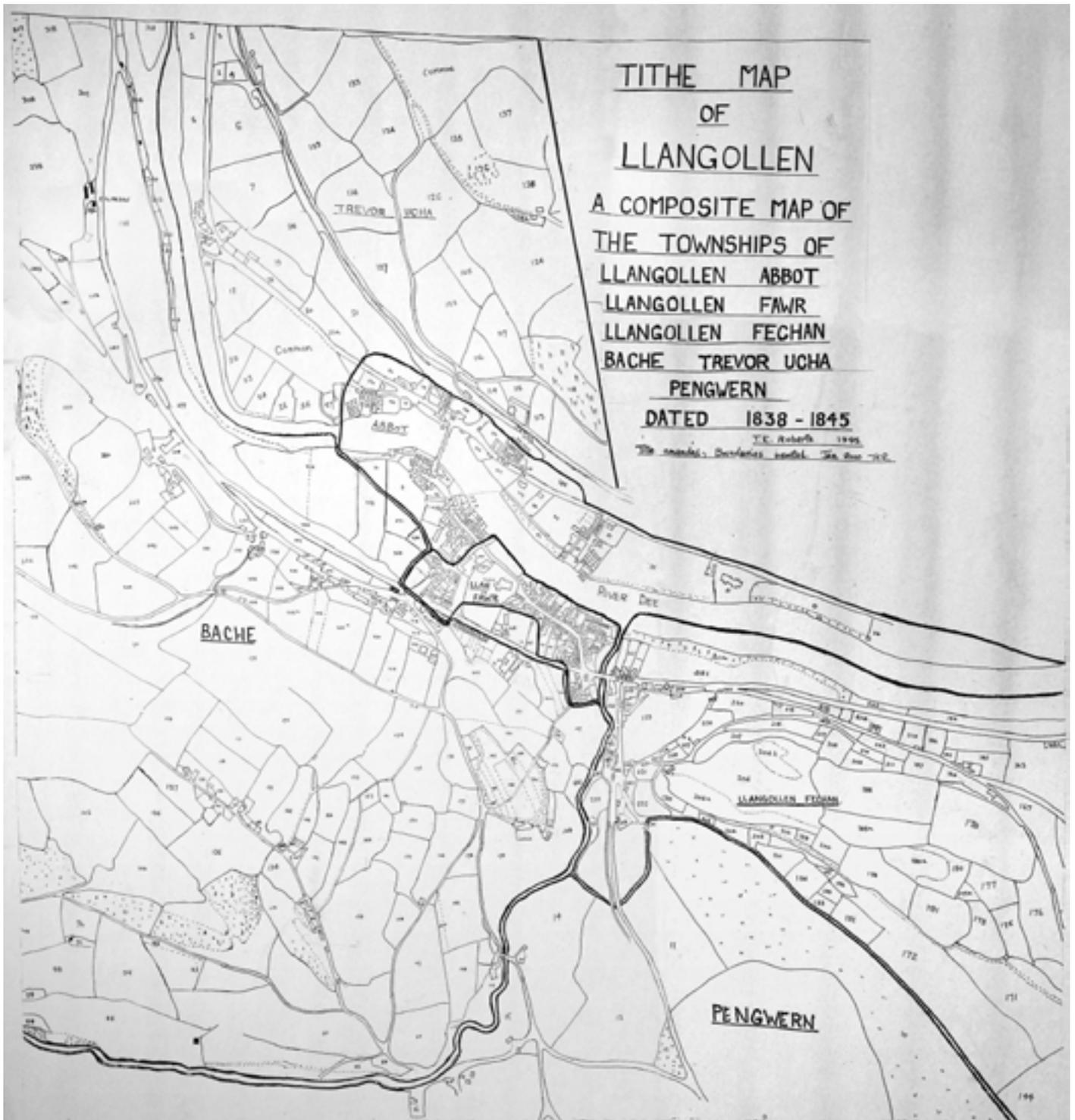
1. N. Edwards, 'The Pillar of Eliseg' in D. H. Evans, *Valle Crucis Abbey* (Cardiff, 2008), pp. 53–56.
2. The construction of the current bridge is widely believed to have been instigated by John Trevor, bishop of St Asaph, in 1346 and most of the early traveller accounts from the early nineteenth century onwards, such as Pennant and Simpson, make this claim. Although a bridge probably existed here from the late thirteenth century, the existing structure is more likely to date from the sixteenth or seventeenth century. R. G. Ffoulkes-Jones, 'Llangollen Bridge', *Transactions of Denbighshire Historical Society*, 28 (1979), pp. 207–13.
3. 'Llangotlan is a 9 miles above the Holt, and there is a great stone bridge over Dee Ryver. Llan gotlan village is on the south side, and Dinas Brane Castelle stondith apon an high hille on the north ripe of Dee a 3. quarters of a mile of. The castelle of Dinas Brane was never bigge thing, but sette al for strenght as in a place half inaccessible for ennemyes. It is now al in ruine: and there in the rok side that the castelle stondith on bredith 648 every yere an egle. And the egle doth sorely assaut hym that distroiththe nest, goyng down in one basket, and having a nother over his hedde to defend the sore stripe of the egle.' *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the years 1535–43*.
4. Edward Lhwyd, *Parochialia*, R. H Morris (ed.) *Archaeologia Cambrensis* Supplement, Part II (London, 1910), p. 40.
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7. Ibid.
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13. J. Quartermaine, B. Trinder and R. Turner, *Thomas Telford's Holyhead Road: The A5 in North Wales*, CBA Research Report 135 (York, 2003).
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15. Slater's *Directory of Gloucester, Hereford, Monmouth, Shropshire and North and South Wales* (Manchester and London, 1859), pp. 51–54.
16. Slater's *Directory of North & South Wales* (Manchester, 1880) pp. 125–29.
17. Ifor Edwards, F. Foulkes and Iorwerth Roberts, 'Industry at Llangollen', *Transactions of the Denbighshire Historical Society*, 18 (1969), pp. 136–54.
18. R. G. Ffoulkes-Jones, 'Llangollen Bridge', *Transactions of Denbighshire Historical Society*, 28 (1979), pp. 207–13.
19. Likely to be a dam for a mill where this brook meets the Dee.
20. W.T. Simpson records that a market house 'once stood where the Hand Gardens now are, and is a convenience much wanted'. Hand Gardens is a reference to the gardens of The Hand Hotel. W.T. Simpson, *Some Account of Llangollen and Its Vicinity: including a Circuit of About Seven Miles* (London, 1827), p. 5.

21. 1791 Survey of several estates in Co. Denbigh belonging to Rev. Edward Roberts. Denbighshire Archives, DD/DM/736/1.
22. Extracts from the memoirs of John Hughes, woollen manufacturer, Llangollen. Denbighshire Archives, DRO NTD/1304.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Now inserted in a rectangular panel in the Masonic Hall on Hall Street. It is supposed to have been removed from the bridge during the widening works of 1873 and refers to the reconstruction of the bridge by the mason Rondle Reade at a cost of £250. R. G. Ffoulkes-Jones, 'Llangollen Bridge', *Transactions of Denbighshire Historical Society*, 28 (1979), pp. 207–13.
28. 1791 Survey of several estates in Co. Denbigh belonging to Rev. Edward Roberts. Denbighshire Archives, DD/DM/736/1.
29. The mill was probably established by the monks of Valle Crucis Abbey. A thirteenth-century document about a fishing dispute between the monks and the freemen of the town mentions the mill.
30. The mill was managed by John Hughes who built the adjacent Dee Villa for himself in 1837.
31. Ifor Edwards, F. Foulkes and Iorwerth Roberts, 'Industry at Llangollen', *Transactions of the Denbighshire Historical Society*, 18 (1969), pp. 136–54.
32. It is highly likely that the 'Old Mill' shown on the 1874 first edition Ordnance Survey map has early origins and that there was an early damming of the brook near to the junction of Church Street and the Holyhead road (p. 77).
33. This is the building to where the Rondle Reade stone, discovered during 1870s work on Llangollen Bridge, was relocated.
- 228 and 229 — Skin House and House and Skin House — appear on the tithe map of Llangollen: a composite map of the townships of Llangollen Abbot, Llangollen Fawr, Llangollen Fechan, Bache, Trevor Ucha and Pengwern, dated 1838–1845, Denbighshire Archives, DRO NTD/1705 (p. 76).
34. W. T. Simpson, *Some Account of Llangollen and Its Vicinity: including a Circuit of About Seven Miles* (London, 1827), pp. 3–4.
35. S. Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Wales*, Vol. II, third edition (London, 1849), pp. 42–46.
36. 1791 Survey of several estates in Co. Denbigh belonging to Rev. Edward Roberts. Denbighshire Archives, DD/DM/736/1 (p. 75). R. G. Ffoulkes-Jones, 'Llangollen Bridge', *Transactions of Denbighshire Historical Society*, 28 (1979), pp. 207–13.
37. The tithe map of Llangollen: a composite map of the townships of Llangollen Abbot, Llangollen Fawr, Llangollen Fechan, Bache, Trevor Ucha and Pengwern, dated 1838–1845, Denbighshire Archives, DRO NTD/1705.
38. 1791 Survey of several estates in Co. Denbigh belonging to Rev. Edward Roberts. Denbighshire Archives, DD/DM/736/1 (p. 75).
39. Church House is dated to 1786 but was altered after the arrival of the Holyhead road. It is an example of later eighteenth-century expansion predating the changes brought about by the Holyhead road.
40. This is presumably a different building to that shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey as the vicarage, which is situated further to the south and within its own laid-out gardens and presumably dates from the mid-nineteenth-century.
41. The tithe map of Llangollen: a composite map of the townships of Llangollen Abbot, Llangollen Fawr, Llangollen Fechan, Bache, Trevor Ucha and Pengwern, dated 1838–1845, Denbighshire Archives, DRO NTD/1705 (p. 76).

I 1791 Survey of Llangollen

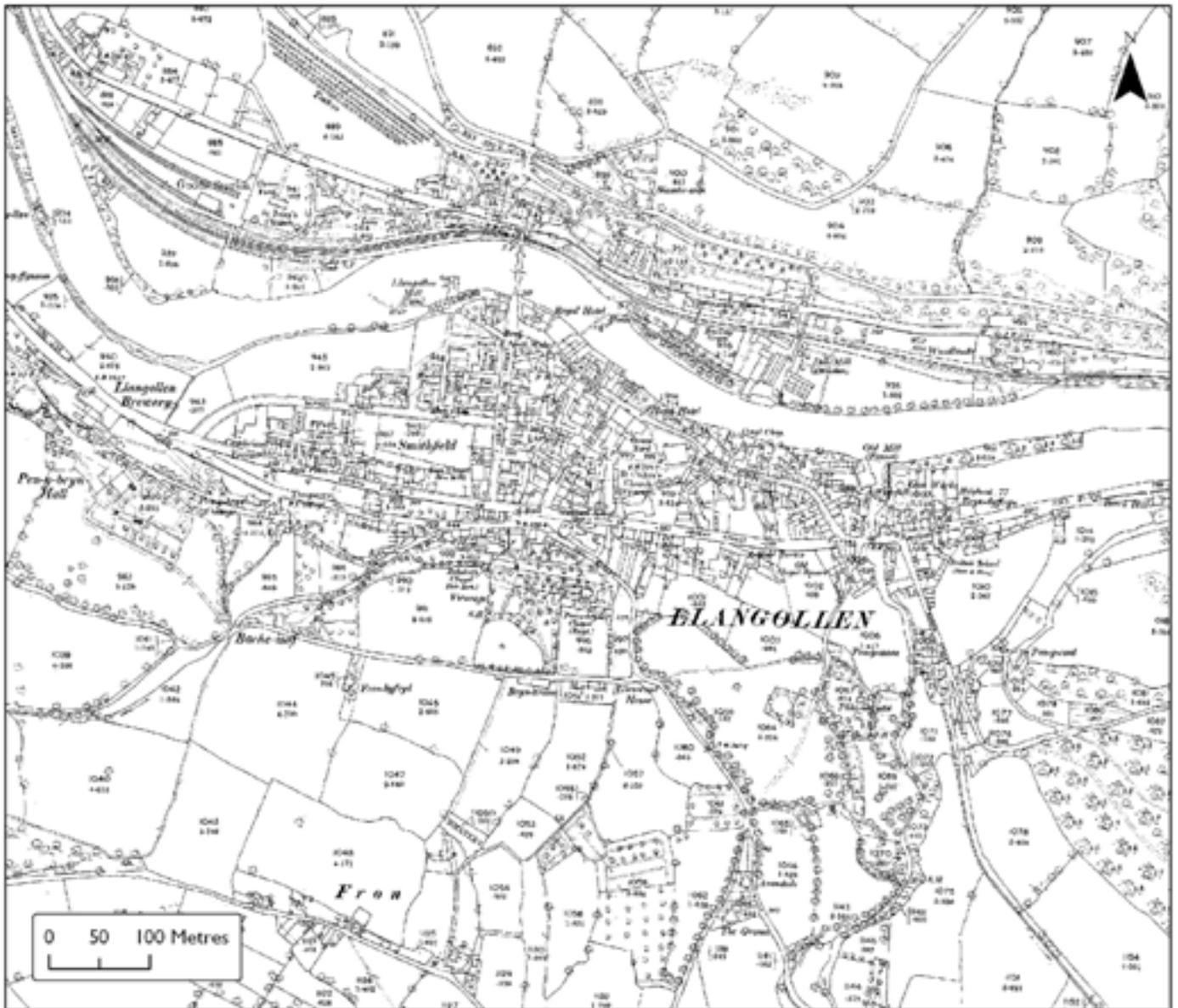


## 2 Composite Tithe Map of Llangollen 1838–45



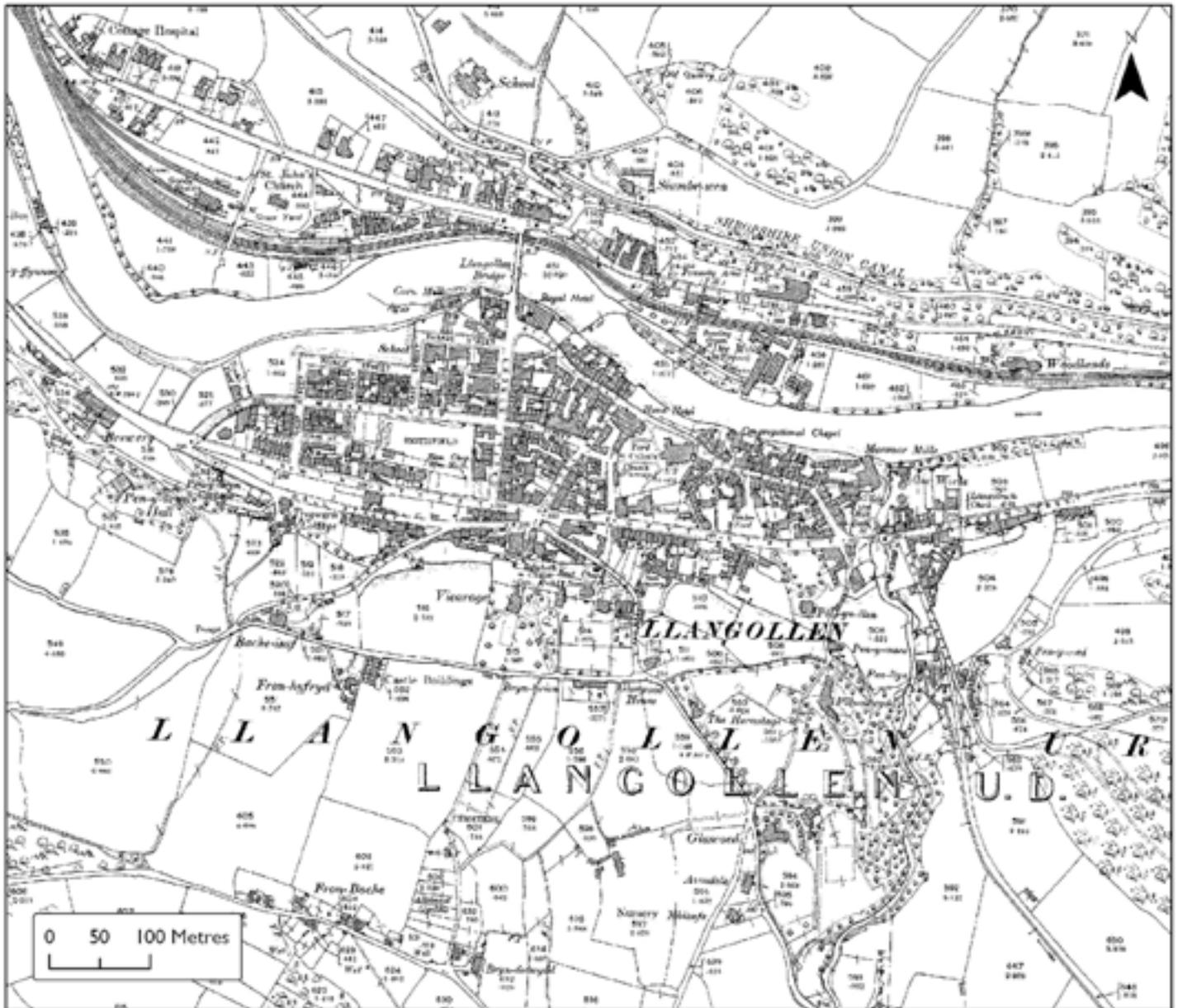
Denbighshire Archives, DRO/1705

### 3 Extract from the 1874 First Edition Ordnance Survey Map



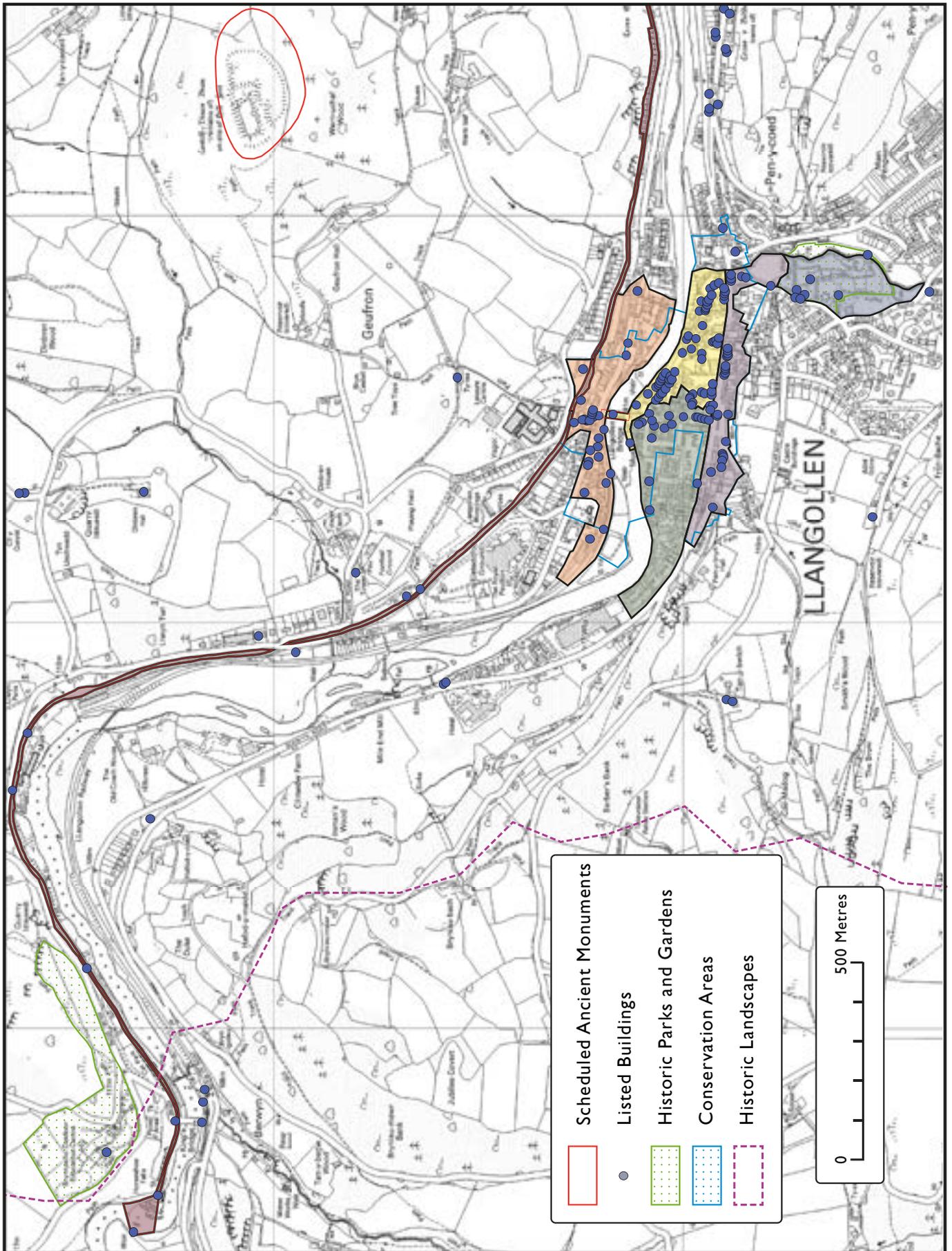
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4 Extract from the 1912 Second Edition Ordnance Survey Map



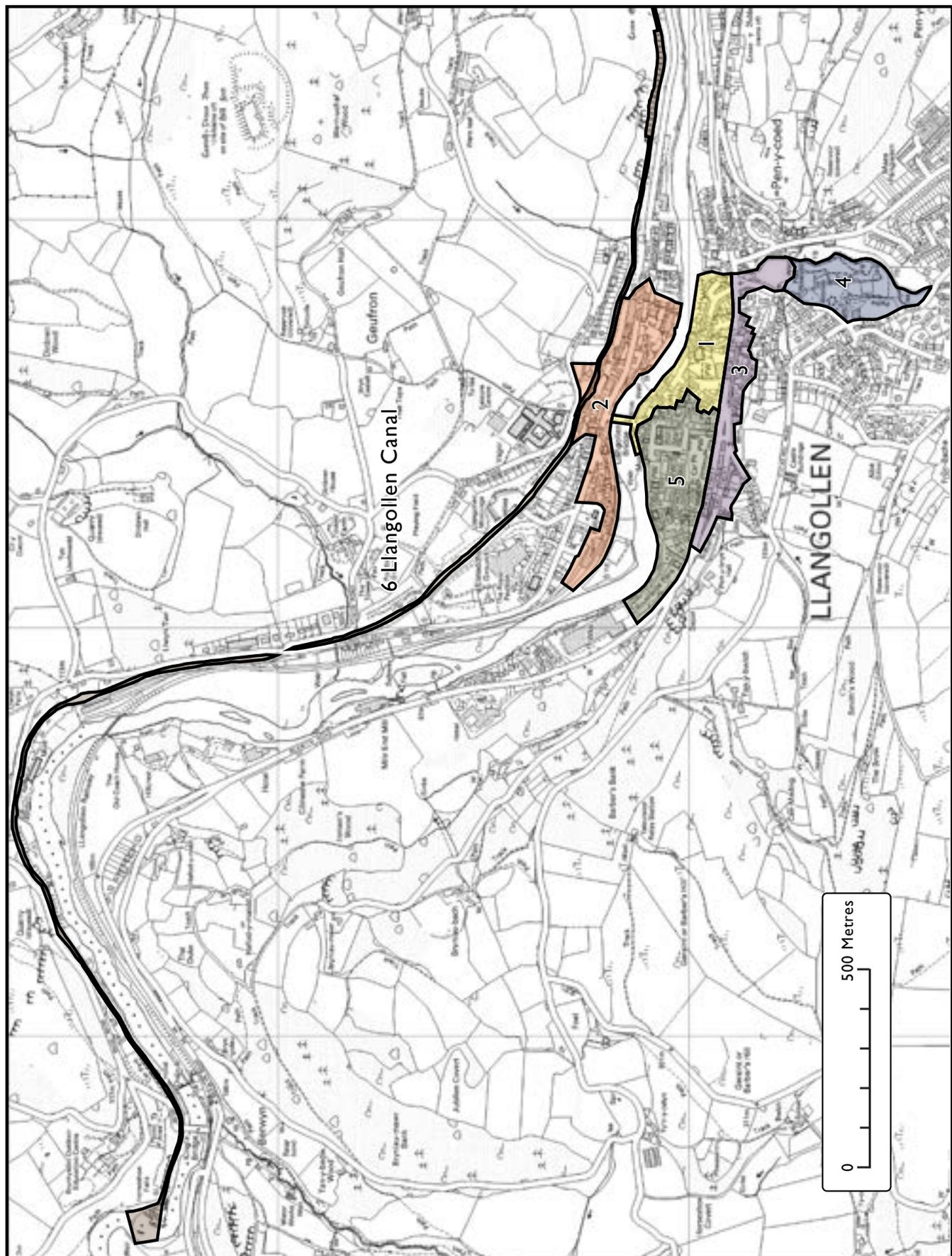
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## 5 All Character Areas with Historic Environment Designations



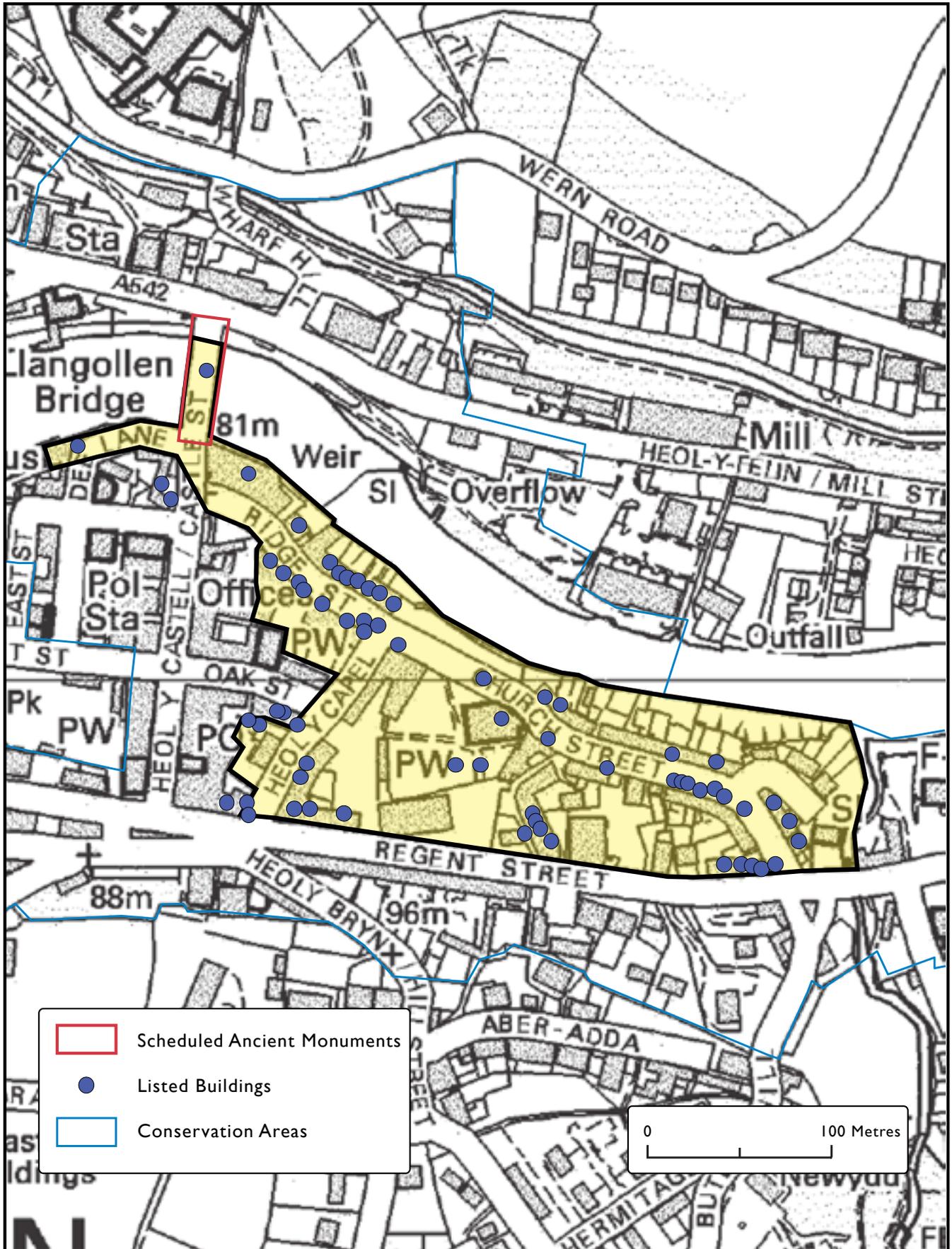
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## 6 All Character Areas



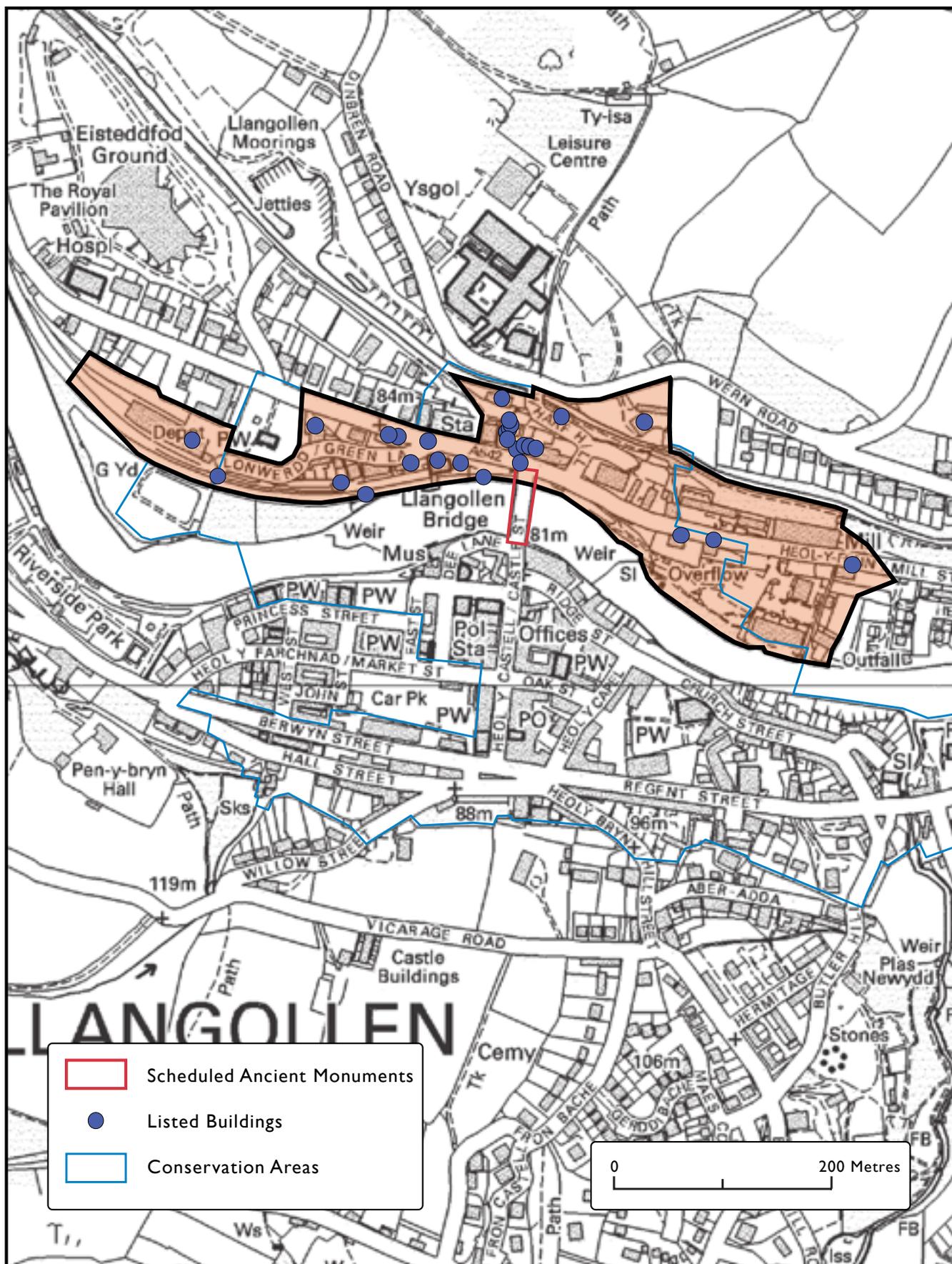
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7 The Early Town (I)



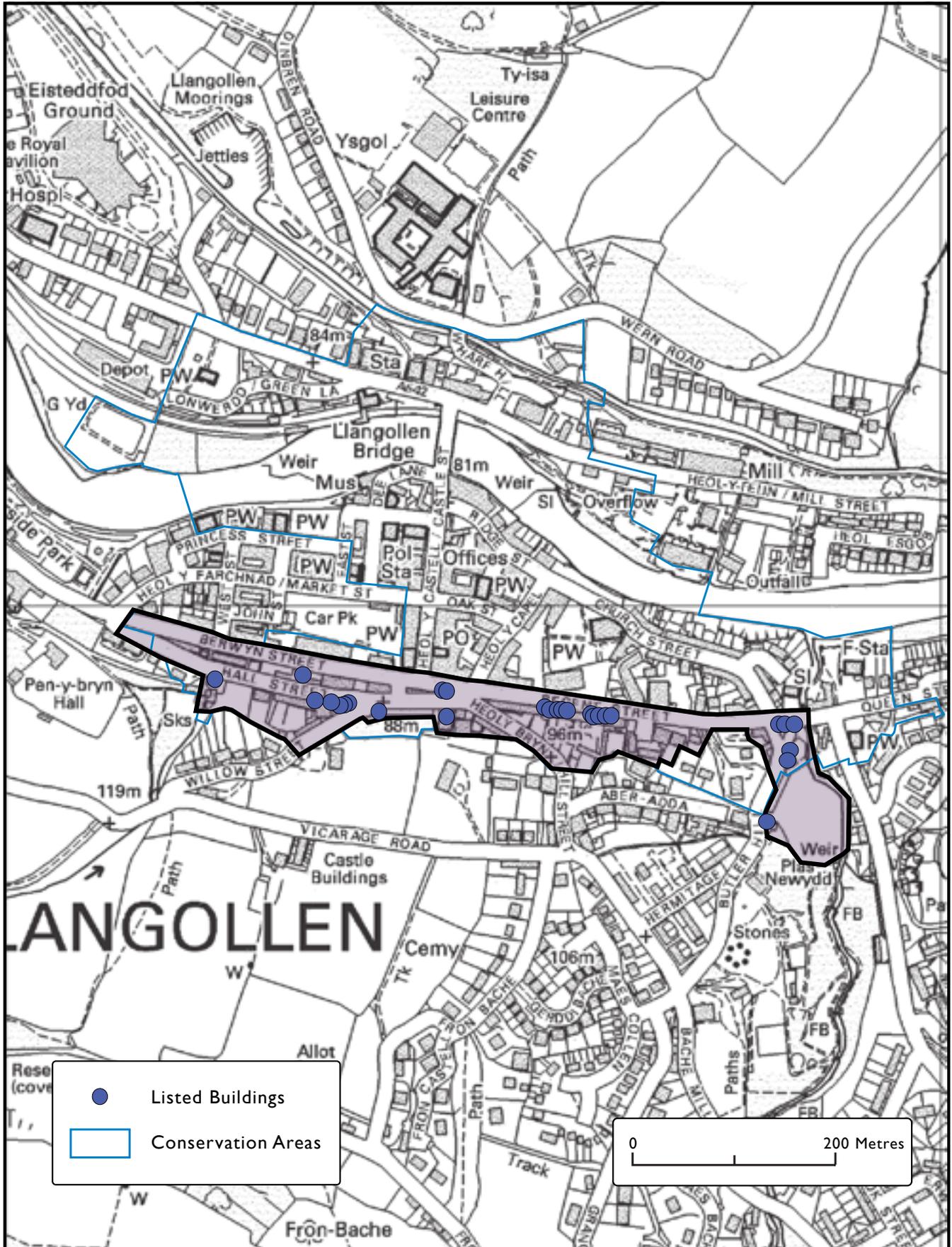
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### 8 Nineteenth-century Growth: Around the Canal and Railway (2)



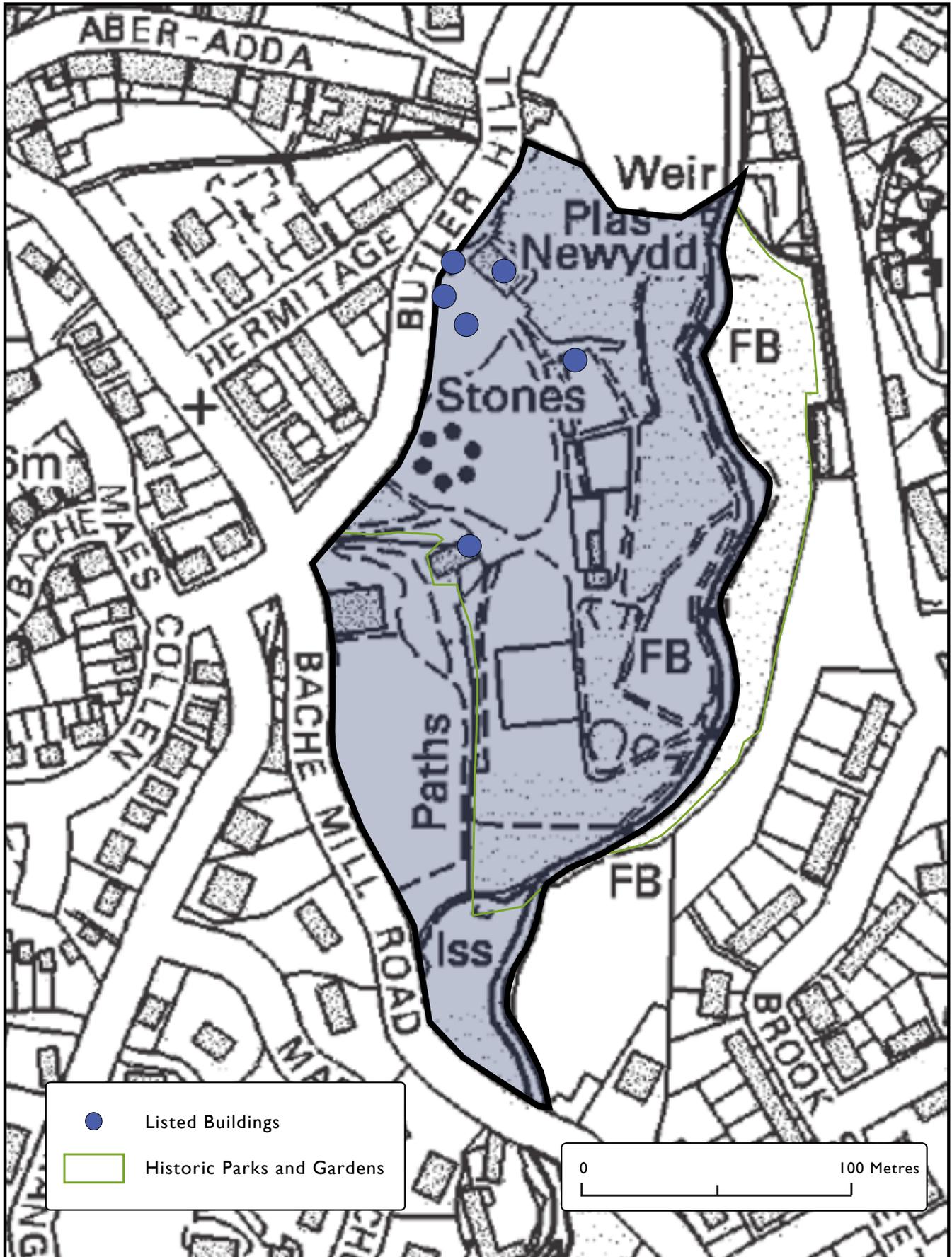
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9 Nineteenth-century Growth: the Holyhead Road (3)



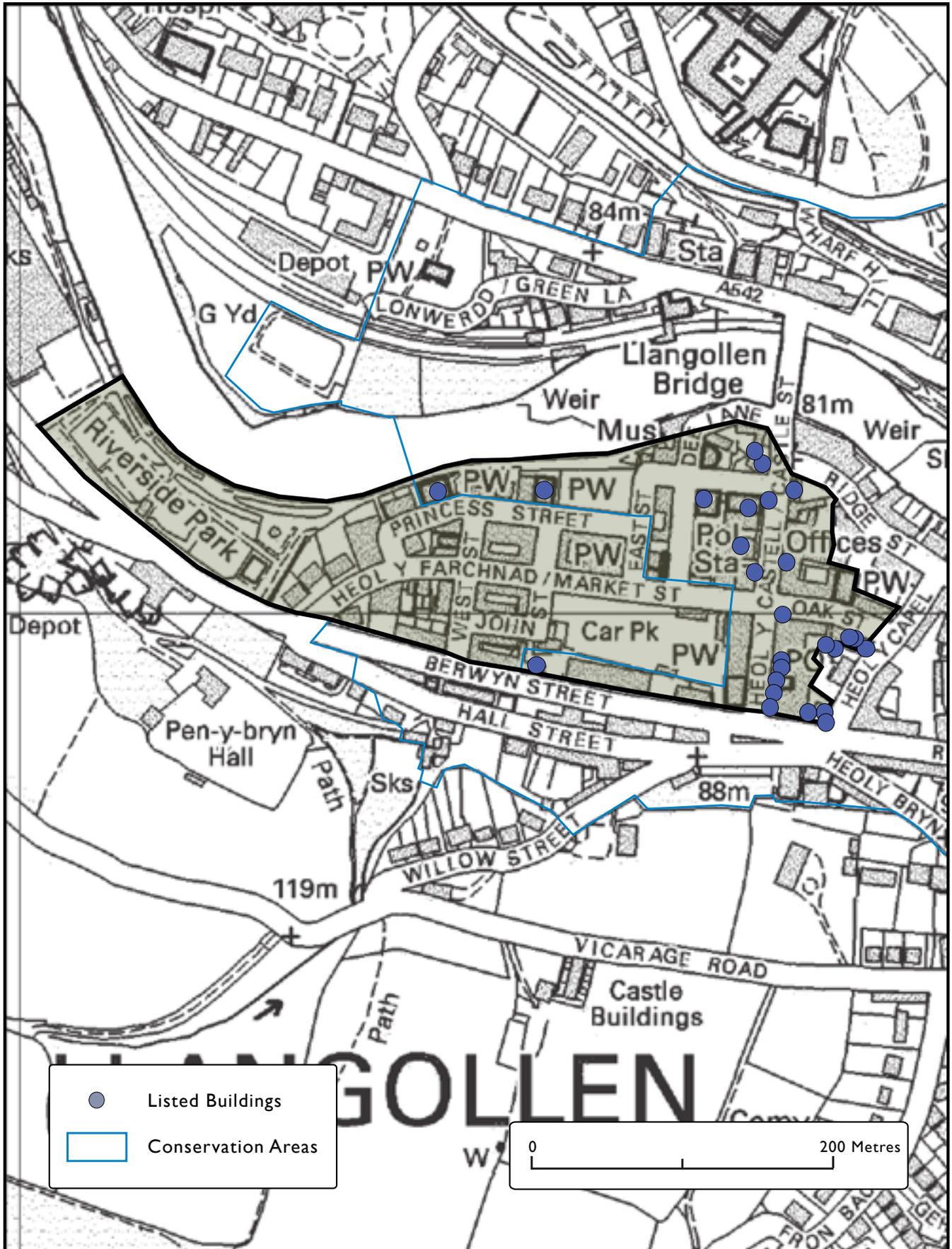
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### 10 Plas Newydd (4)



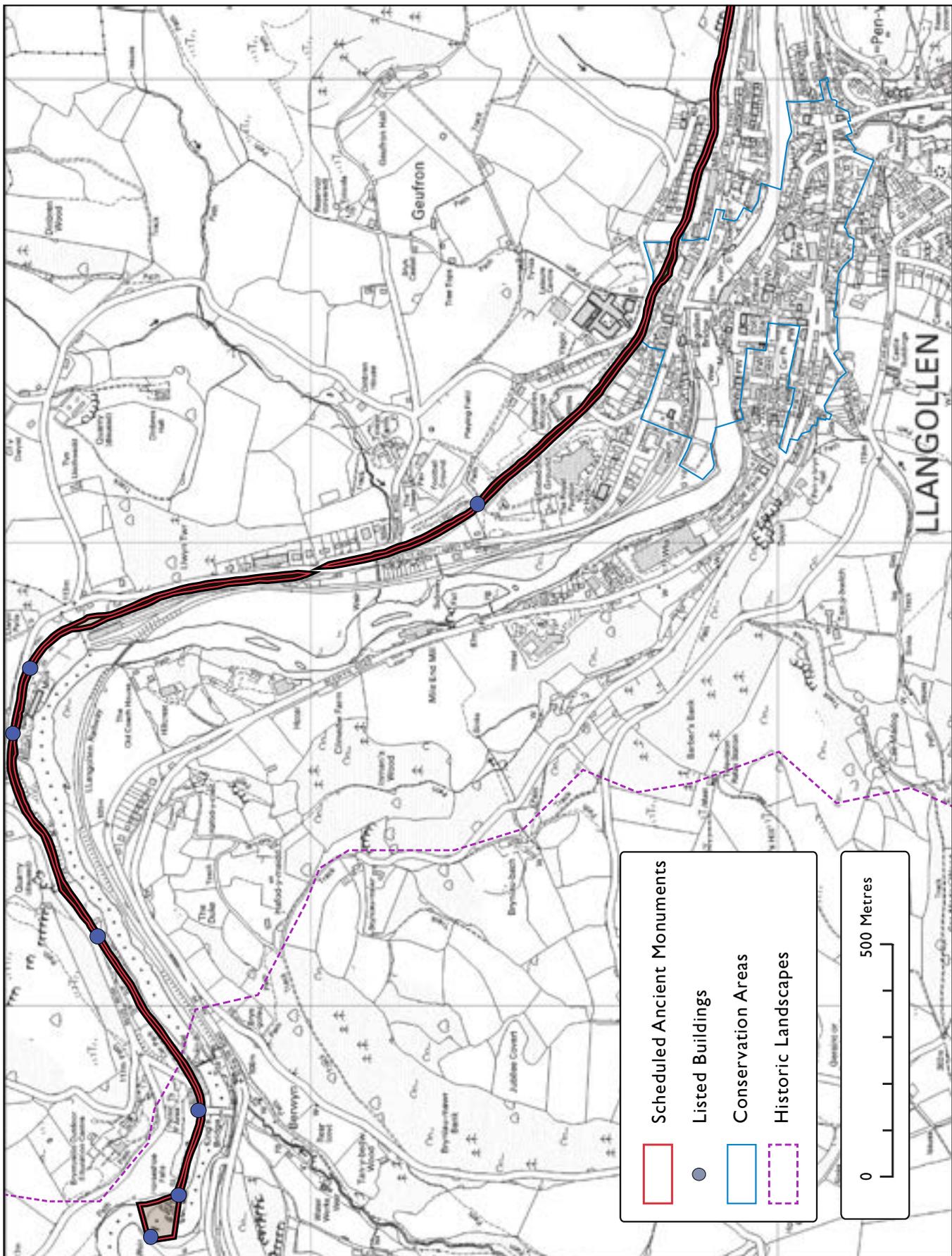
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II Castle Street and the Western Town (5)



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## 12 The Canal (6)



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