

Conservation Area Appraisal

Bryn Eglwys, Gwynedd



Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust



Yew trees lining path to St Ann's Church.

Conservation Area Appraisal

Bryn Eglwys, Gwynedd

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I. Introduction

I.1 General Introduction

This report contains the results of an appraisal of Bryn Eglwys Conservation Area which lies south-west of Bethesda. It has been undertaken by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT) on behalf of Cyngor Gwynedd Council.

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty upon all local planning authorities to determine areas which it is desirable to preserve and enhance to designate them as conservation areas. The Act also states that local authorities should review their past activities in this area and to add more conservation where appropriate.

The appraisal evaluates the existing conservation area, providing an overview of its history, architecture and condition and suggests appropriate recommendations.

I.2 Acknowledgements

Eryl Williams and Hannah Joyce, Cyngor Gwynedd, instigated the project, and generously provided help and information to aid its progress. Dr John Llywellyn Williams kindly gave help and advice during the course of the project.

1

No's 1 - 2 Bryn Eglwys.



2
Map of Conservtion Area

3
Aerial View of the church
and village. (Copyright
Map data 2021 Google).

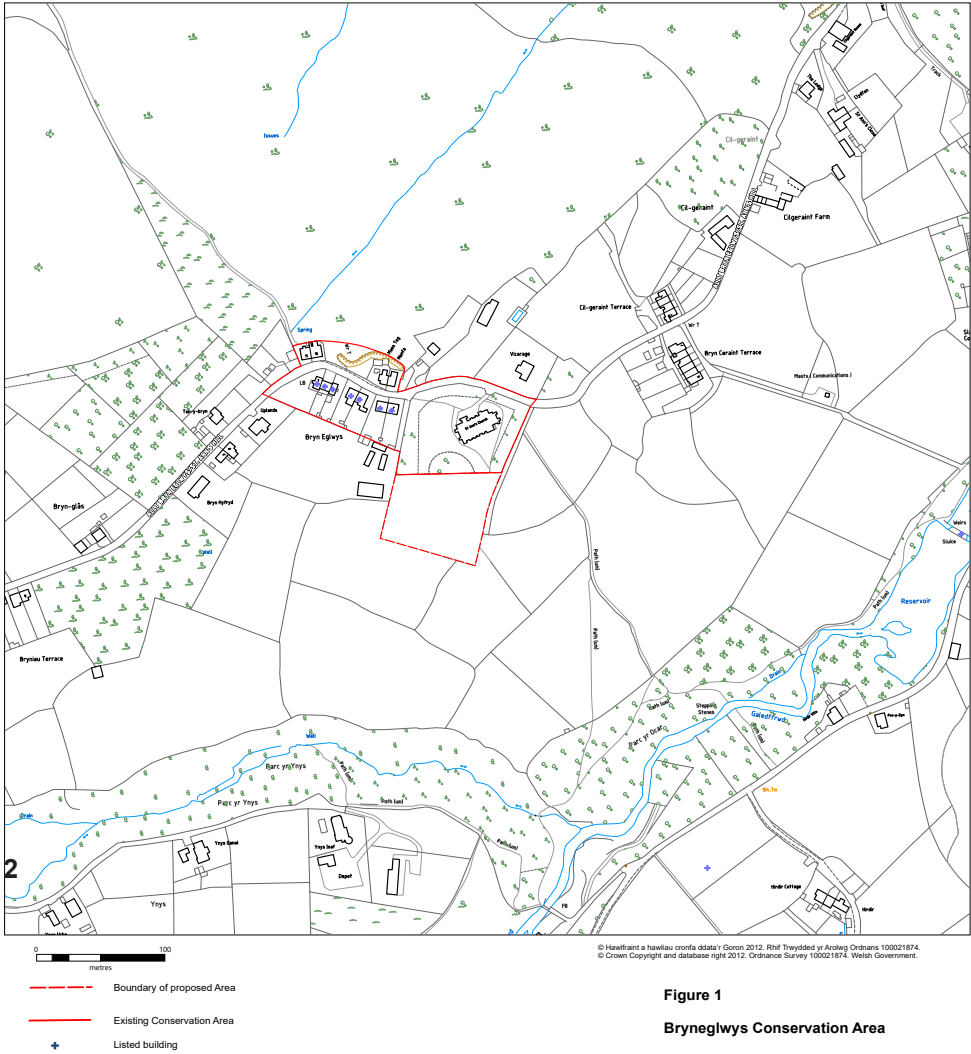


Figure 1
Bryneglwys Conservation Area



2. Background history

This small settlement lies between Bethesda and Mynydd Llandygai. It's name is shown on the OS 1900 map as Bryn Eglwys, and it includes the former church of St Ann's.

There appears to be little in the way of archaeological sites in the vicinity of Bryn Eglwys. It would be expected that signs of early agriculture would be visible on surrounding hillsides but nothing is recorded.

Although there were scattered agricultural cottages in the vicinity, the majority of the housing in the area consists of small industrial settlements of just a few houses. Richard Fenton, writing in the very early 19th century, says 'took a ride to see the Mill [i.e. Felin Fawr] for sawing the blocks of slate for chimney pieces, tomb stones, side boards cyphering slates etc., which is a wonderful piece of machinery, and carried on with great success by Mr Worthington. Hence to the beautiful chapel built, consecrated, and endowed by Lady Penrhyn for the use of the people employed in the slate quarries, forming a vast population scattered over the sides of the mountain in neat cottages built for that purpose'. The church mentioned is the predecessor of St Ann's, lying south of the mill, and built in 1812-13, though possibly preceded by an earlier church. It was buried under slate tips in the mid-19th century.

The description by Fenton would suggest a number of the surrounding cottages, particularly those now buried under the slate tips, were built in the early 19th century, at the same time as the buried St Ann's church. However, those further west below the tips appear mid-19th century, perhaps to replace the buried settlements, and roughly contemporary with the later St Ann's church.

The settlement of Bryn Eglwys lies west of the church, as part of a small planned community for workers at the quarry. The cottages are typical of Edward Douglas-Penrhyn's considerable efforts to improve the Penrhyn Estate, to which he had succeeded in 1840. They appear to be slightly earlier than the church, rebuilt by the estate in 1865 after the original church of 1813 had been submerged by new workings at the quarry. The church was sited here in an elevated position to be visible from the valley and

the town of Bethesda. The lack of a major congregation and high repair cost led to the church becoming redundant in 1997.

3. The Character of the settlement

3.1 Location

The settlement of Bryn Eglwys lies on the eastern facing slopes of hills rising from the Ogwen Valley. Penrhyn Slate Quarry lies to the south-east, with the Felin Fawr Slate Works in between the two. The small settlement of Cil-geraint lies between the slate works and Bryn Eglwys, whilst the planned industrial village of Mynydd Llandygai is on higher moorland to the south-west. The land becomes open moorland just above the settlement with a more productive field system below leading towards Afon Ogwen. Bethesda lies on the far side of the river. The relatively sheltered aspect, protected from the prevailing westerly winds, has allowed trees to grow up in the area of the church.

The winding lane of Bryn Geraint leads up the hill, past the church, through the settlement and on to the open moorland, giving the initial impression of a sheltered tranquil church set in mature woodland with picturesque cottages beyond. Unfortunately, the dilapidated state of the church belies that impression.

3.2 Character

This small roadside settlement lies alongside St Ann's church. Its name (Bryn Eglwys) would suggest that even if the cottages pre-date the church, it was always intended for the church to be rebuilt here. The road sweeps round the north side of the church, followed by a short straight, before curving to the left. The Conservation Area encompasses the church and the cottages lining the north and south sides of the short straight. The southern cottages, all listed, are of a single storey with loft, end chimneys and slate roofs. The first two pairs have central doors with a three-light vertical window on one side, and a two light window on the other. The windows and doors have stone voussoirs and the former have slate cills. A front garden is enclosed by attractive rough stone walls with vertical capping stones. The 3-unit end house is a slightly different style, having long slab lintels, with 3-light windows on the ground floor and 2-light windows in the forward facing gables.

4
North side of St Ann's church showing vegetation growth up to the church and damaged windows.

5
Damaged window.

3.3 Designations

The southern row of cottages beyond the church (No's 1 - 7) are all Listed Grade II. The church is not listed. The Conservation Area lies within the wider World Heritage Site, and also within the designated Historic Landscape of Arfon.

4.0 Conservation Area

Approaching the village from the east, the Conservation Area contains the Church of St Ann to the south of the road, identifiable by the wooded graveyard which surrounds the church. West of the cemetery, on the same side of the road, are seven listed cottages and on the northern side, a pair of unlisted cottages, one in extremely good condition and the other slightly altered. Below these is another pair of cottages which have been considerably altered and expanded. Not included within the Conservation Area are the two lower churchyards, the upper of which of which is shown on the 1900 Ordnance Survey Map and therefore created soon after the building of the church.



The church of St Ann was designed by Goronwy Owen, architect to the Penrhyn Estate, in 1865, replacing the church of the same name which had been enveloped by the quarry spoil tips. The church consists of a nave and chancel with aisles, a south

porch and a north vestry. The two-stage north tower has a tall broach spire. Materials used include dark rubble stone with limestone dressings. The church is in a perilous condition, the spire is supported by an iron tree which is rusting away and is in imminent danger of collapse. Windows are smashed and distorted, rubbish blocks the doorways. The dilapidated gateposts lead into a restricted parking area with a vehicle track encircling the church, with access to the graveyards. Thick brambles lie against the walls and scrub is encroaching. The wider area surrounding the church is relatively impenetrable with maturing trees. The churchyard directly inside the gates and to the left has been maintained and is of importance to the community. Flowers are present on a number of the graves. There has been an effort to control the yew trees on the eastern boundary but only to prevent encroachment on adjacent fields. The church is privately owned, unlisted



and has no immediate future. *Images 4, 5*

Above the church, to the north-west are two pairs and one block of three listed cottages in what has been described as a 'vernacular revival style'. The first and second pairs are of a single-storey 2-room plan with loft. The walls are of regularly coursed and dressed rubblestone blocks, and the roofs of slate. Each cottage has 2 or 3 light windows with slate cills and voussoirs either side a central entrance. Two end chimney stacks and a larger shared central one. Both pairs have low garden walls bordering the road which are topped with vertical slate blocks. The entrances are marked by square gateposts

with neat black painted iron gates. Windows are generally painted black with white reveals and the same treatment is applied to two of the doors, the others being wood.

The front plots in 1 -3 are still gardens but no 4 now has slate chippings, a truncated garden wall allowing for a paved driveway and wooden garage. There has been considerable development



The conjoined group of three is 'H' shaped, with projecting gabled wings on either side of a lower central range. The walls are of roughly coursed rubblestone with slate lintels. The roof is slate with overhanging verges. The symmetrical front is of 1:3:1 bays, with the gables having 3 light window on the ground floor and 2 light windows above. The centre range has a central entrance flanked by 3 light windows.

The block is set back from the road with white painted windows with unpainted reveals. The vehicular entrance between 4 and 5 seems to serve 5,6 and 7, with a belt of woodland protecting the settlement to the west. Only one doorway, with a green glass panelled door, is visible from the road, serving the central single storey block (No 6). The front garden to this house is shorter providing a small court that can be a parking space. *Image 7.*



On the opposite side of the road and just above, on the bend in the road, is another pair of cottages in the same style as No's 1-4. The lower is in relatively original condition with a small open porch, probably a later addition, but in keeping. The front garden retains its wall, gate pillars and gate. The upper cottage "The Milton" has unsuitable UPVC latticed windows and an out of scale porch. It retains the front garden layout but has been extended to the side with a boxy small flat roofed extension. A substantial garage has been built uphill with parking in front. *Image 8*



The other building within the Conservation Area is opposite no's 1-2. At the time of the survey this was undergoing redevelopment, but it appears to have started as two cottages, with farm buildings to the rear. It has a central stack and slate roof. Two wings, each of two storeys, project forward, with the upper half slate hung and the lower of roughly coursed stone blocks. There is a new large rear wing visible from the road behind the right cottage. The front garden is similar to those opposite, though it slopes so the front walls retain the soil behind. In its present form the house appears out of scale within the Conservation Area. *Image 9.*

6
No. 2 Bryn Eglwys

7
No's 5 to 7, Bryn Eglwys

8
No's 10 and 11 Bryn Eglwys.

The front garden has been converted into parking, and new uncharacteristic windows inserted.



5.0 Recommended improvements

Many residents in conservation areas are entirely unaware that they live within one. There is often little or no correspondence with residents after the areas are established, and early correspondence has often not been passed on to later owners. This has contributed to uncharacteristic extensions, inappropriate windows and doors and lack of understanding of the essential character of the area.

Community involvement is therefore crucial to the success of a conservation area. Owners should be kept up to date with guidelines suggesting what is acceptable within a conservation area, particularly for doors and windows. In many cases the windows were altered before the area was designated but since designation many of these windows have been replaced, often several times. This is an opportunity to guide property owners to a more acceptable alternative. Most windows are now plastic but some are less obtrusive than others and those using the size and arrangement of the original windows are relatively acceptable, but most owners are unaware of the significance of their choices.

Most of the houses in this Conservation Area are listed so are further protected but those to the east of the road are not. Two have recently become holiday cottages and ripe for development. The pair below have already been extended in a manner not in keeping with the area. Regular updates and guidelines would help in ensuring that everyone is aware of the status and significance of the area.

The churchyard itself, even if the church continues to deteriorate, should continue to be part of the Conservation Area as it is of considerable importance to the community, and of benefit to wildlife. Positive management should be suggested for the yew trees on the eastern boundary of the churchyard. Those bounding the road are still managed by the parish, but the rest are unmanaged and a cause of resentment. The retaining of front gardens should be encouraged, with appropriate gates. The pressure to provide parking for multiple cars means that homeowners are keen to increase the size of gateways and remove walls and pillars. This should be actively discouraged as it has a detrimental impact on the streetscape.

6.0 Recommended changes to the Conservation Areas

The inclusion of the two lower graveyards within the conservation area is logical, and should be considered. They are well managed, and both are obviously of significance to the community. The upper of the two, closer to the church, was established by at least 1900, whilst the larger extension further from the church was established later. *Image 10*

7.0 Sources

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The lower graveyards at St Ann's would make an appropriate extension to the existing conservation area.





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