

The early landscapes of Llandewi and Henllys, Gower

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The Gower Peninsula is a region where very little systematic research into the evolution of the medieval landscape has taken place. In the last three decades an examination of the patterns of prehistoric cairns has been made (Ward 1985; 1988; 1989) and, more recently, work has been successful in mapping aspects of the Roman landscape (Kissock 2006). The previous work also revealed evidence for earlier and later landscapes. Attempts to set the later, post-Roman, developments in their context indicated that the landscape of the parish of Llandewi in the centre of the peninsula underwent profound changes in the past. There are traces of a likely early medieval agricultural system and a number of abandoned farms. This report provides a first attempt to identify and analyse the development of this landscape using recent fieldwork in one parish to provide a detailed case-study.

The parish of Llandewi lies inland in the west of the Gower peninsula. It is approximately 3 km. east to west by 3.5 km. north to south; with an area of about 700 ha. The height of the land varies from around 105 m above Ordnance Datum (OD) at its south-western extremity and runs gently down slope to both the east and the north; the lowest land (30 m OD) lies along a tributary of Burry Pill (Figure 1). The soils of the area are generally deep, well-drained, gravelly loams and brown earths lying over limestone, though the subsoils are sometimes slowly permeable and subject to slight seasonal waterlogging (Bridges and Clayden 1971: 79).

Documentary History

The parish was divided between two manors, Llandewi and Henllys. Both appear to be typical examples of the small manors of west Wales founded in the aftermath of the Norman Conquest in the early twelfth century. The history of Gower's manors is a complex one; regular sub-infeudation and the existence of many detached portions has led to a situation where no two lists or maps seem to agree. Whilst the manor of Llandewi was a possession of the bishops of St. David's, the history of the manor of Henllys is more obscure. It was however listed as one of the twelve 'ancient' knights' fees in 1306. The tithe patterns can be used to determine the approximate extents of the two manors (WGAS P/107 and P/107/2). The land which paid tithes to the bishop is assumed to be the episcopal manor of Llandewi; this lies in the southern and eastern parts of the parish. A lay impropriator received tithes on the lands in the north and west and this area is taken to be the lay manor of Henllys.

In 1326 the bishopric's possessions at Llandewi were surveyed and valued. The jury recorded that there were 124 acres of demesne land, worth 1s. per acre per year. An income was also made from several quarries and an orchard. The range of crops grown was diverse: wheat,

barely, great and small oats and beans. There was sufficient pasture for eight oxen or 120 sheep. All tenants owed a heriot of their best beast or 5s. in lieu. Certain tenants were required to reap for two days and to perform two days ploughing. They were to attend court at three-weekly intervals (Willis-Bund 1902: 289–91). Suit of mill was also owed and related burdens of service were imposed. Milling took place in the neighbouring manor of Burry, where the Higher Mill was once known as Henllys Mill (Taylor 2008: 68).

Henllys was surveyed in 1583, in 1641 and in 1650 though on all occasions details are scant (Baker and Francis 1870: 13, 99). A property at Lower Newton is mentioned in 1650, and the 1641 survey records three tenements in Llandewi. Both Llandewi and Henllys appear in the survey made of 1764. Henllys is recorded as a manor comprising several tenements scattered across five or six parishes, the exact location of which were then unknown (Morris 2000: 50–51). Llandewi was thought to comprise three or four tenements all lying within the parish of Llandewi, but only two are named (Pylewell and, Newton; Morris 2000: 74). A chantry chapel is thought to have existed in the manor from the fifteenth century down to 1548, but its location is unknown (Rees 2002: 6–7).

The parish of Llandewi was a small one and population between the late seventeenth and early nineteenth century seems to have declined. In 1543 36 individuals were taxed in the first Lay Subsidy (TNA E179/221/236). This figure is just a little higher than the median figure (35) for all the rural parishes in lowland Gower. In 1563 the ecclesiastical census recorded 21 households (BL: Add. Ms. 24839, f. 39); again a figure close to the Gower median of 22. The hearth tax returns of 1670 list 37 households (Gower median 38; TNA E179/221/294). Here, as in the rest of Gower, nobody was so poor that they were exempt from the tax. However, by 1801 there were just 24 households in the parish of Llandewi, which was well below the Gower median of 47. The documentary sources therefore suggest a period of population stagnation and decline extending from the late seventeenth century through the eighteenth century. Some possible reasons for this will be discussed later.

The buildings

The major part of the archaeological evidence for deserted and shrunken settlements falls into several distinct clusters. (Figure 2). Deserted settlements lie in the south of the study area around Newton, on the western edge of the study area at Lower Moor and in the north at Bushy Park. Four house platforms stand between the farms of New Henllys and Old Henllys in fields called Bettland and Star Field. Although public rights of way no longer exist, Star Field may have been the focus of a number of footpaths in the past. The name is appropriately descriptive of the shape of the field and

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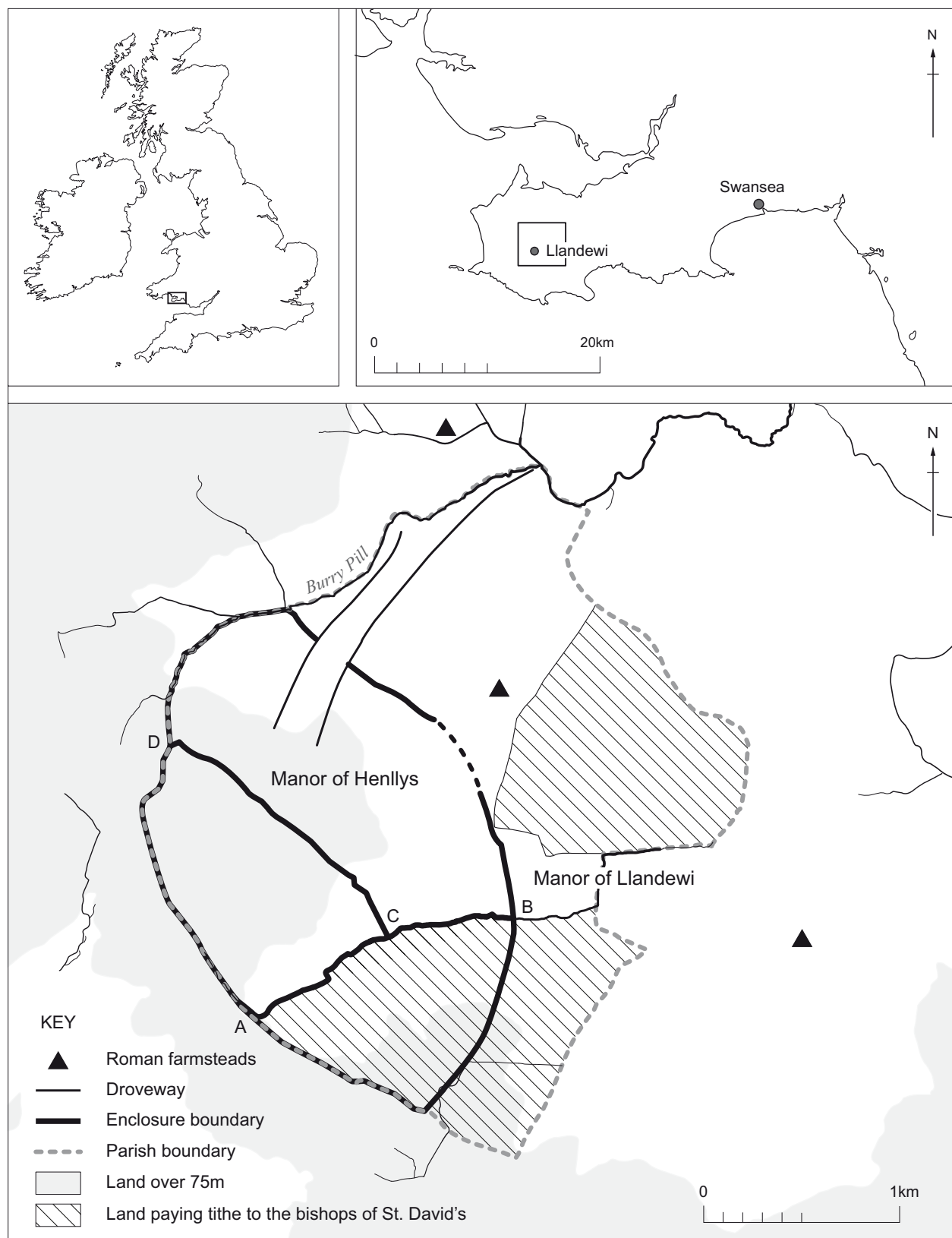


Figure 1 The location of Llandewi, the manors of Henllys and Llandewi and the large enclosure with its internal divisions and the droveway. (The internal boundary AB clearly predates that of CD, but the interval between the construction of the two is unknown.) © Anne Leaver.

may indicate that several routeways once met here to form an irregularly-shaped green. More evidence for the past existence of footpaths here comes from the presence of numerous stiles leading into the field, including one

between Star Field and Black Five Acres made from a single large slab of stone.

One former house site was known prior to this survey. The Royal Commission's *Inventory* recorded a long hut

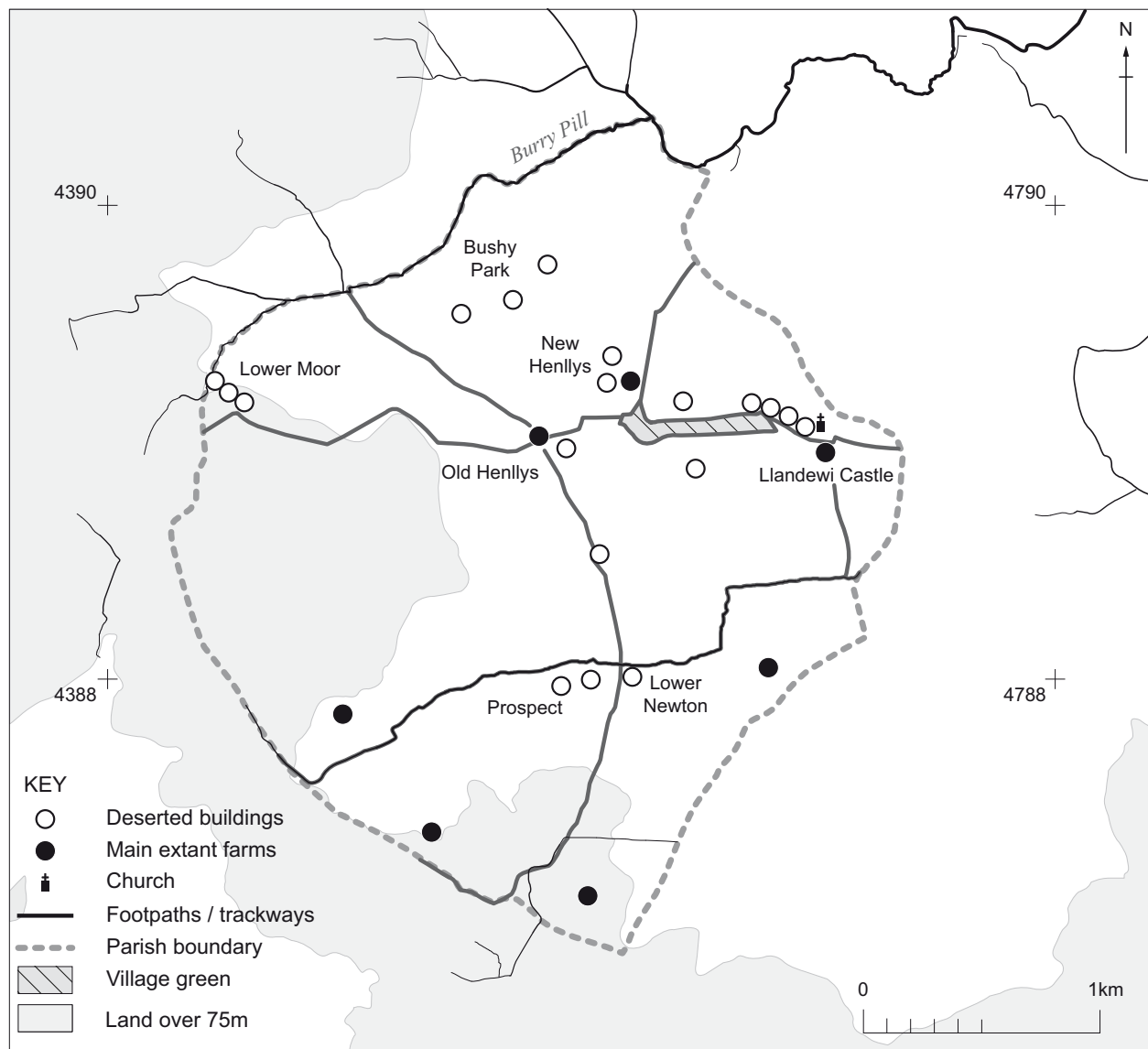


Figure 2 The distribution of deserted settlement and trackways. The main focus of settlement is along a probable narrow, rectangular green, which expands into a star-like shape at its western end. The eastern end of the green is marked on the northern side by a track between the church and Old and New Henllys and on the south by a footpath and hollow way. © Anne Leaver.

and croft adjacent to Old Henllys Farm (RCAHMW 1976: 41–42) which had also been noted by L.A.S. Butler (1972: 267) Faint remains of a hut aligned north-south, measuring 14.5 by 9 m lie within the north east angle of an enclosure which itself measures 26 by 23 m. The enclosure has a slight bank and ditch and its eastern edge is marked by a hedge bank.

Two platforms are visible in an adjacent field called Bettland. A small-scale trial excavation here identified limited structural remains and finds including a sherd of Monnow Valley ware, likely to be of thirteenth-century date, and a late medieval harness buckle, which was recovered from the overburden (Clark 2004: 60, fig. 45, no. 39). Near New Henllys Farm stand traces of another building; animals have now destroyed all but one corner of what seems to have been a structure on a platform at NGR 453892.

Air photographic evidence exists for other structures. At NGR 450880, in the eastern part of the field to the west of Lower Newton, markings suggest the former existence of a building 20 m. long and 10 m. wide. A ditch crosses the field just to the west of the building. A prehistoric henge monument lies close by but the building and ditch are not thought to be a part of it (RCAHMW 1982, 47–48). A smaller structure in the north western part of Henllys manor at about NGR 446896 appears to be the farm of Bushy Park shown on the first edition 1" OS map of 1830. A complex series of features around NGR 455888 may also include structural features.

The largest area of deserted settlement lies in the field centred on NGR 459892 adjacent to the church (Figure 4). The surface is very uneven and now contains no visible traces of foundations, but inspection of air

photographs suggests several possible sets ofcroft boundaries and hollow ways. Numerous irregularities occur in the vicinity of these features and could be due to natural limestone outcrops or quarrying (GGAT HER 856w). Immediately to the south of the church stands Llandewi Castle, now a farmhouse, but once an episcopal palace. Bernard Morris has argued that within the present farmhouse there survive certain features which suggest a fourteenth century origin (1998: 98–106; Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments prefer to locate the palace c. 500 m further west in the field centred on NGR 455888.). Morris proposes that the walls of the hall are medieval and that the chimney stack was added when a fireplace was built to replace an open hearth at the centre of the hall. One of the pair of doorways that would have marked a cross passage separating the hall and the kitchen remains *in situ*. The church is also thought to have been built in the fourteenth century, but extensive and somewhat zealous restoration has left little trace of the original structure (Orrin 1979: 37–40.)

New Henllys is a typical example of a mid-eighteenth century farmhouse, whilst Old Henllys has been much altered over its long history and its original form is uncertain (Morris 1998, 107–117 and 39–42). The central probably dates to the sixteenth century, though the building may incorporate earlier fabric to the west. In the southern part of the parish stand three farms which may have been founded in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries: Upper Newton, Lower Newton (sometimes known as High and Low Newton) and Prospect Farm; the names are undoubtedly significant of new foundation and aspiration. Prospect Farm must have been short lived – it is recorded on Yates's 1799 map of Glamorgan, but by the making of the tithe map in 1841 it is given only as a field name. Lower Newton, now derelict and abandoned, was a two-storey, three unit, lobby entry

house built between the late-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth century. The lobby leads into both the parlour and the hall, which in turn leads into the kitchen. Hearths lie in both the hall and the kitchen and access to the upper storey is via a staircase built alongside the chimney stack.

Deserted villages are rare in Wales. The density of deserted settlement in the two manors of Llandewi and Henllys shows that many more farms once stood here. The documentary evidence for population change (reviewed above) points to an episode of population decline between the late seventeenth century and 1801. There is also evidence for later desertion – Prospect, Lower Newton, Bushy Park and, more recently, Lower Moor no longer exist as occupied, functioning farms.

The fields and hedges

In order to contextualize the settlement evidence, an extensive study of the evolution of field boundaries within the two manors used two techniques – hedgerow species studies and landscape stratigraphy. Landscape stratigraphy or topographic analysis relies on the principle that long boundaries which are regularly abutted by other, shorter boundaries (but not crossed by them) are likely to be oldest ones in the area (Williamson and Bellamy 1987: 17). This method enables a relative chronology of the evolution of the medieval and postmedieval landscapes to be built up.

The second approach, hedgerow species analysis, became a well-known technique over the last 40 years. The basic principle contends that the age of a hedge in centuries is roughly equal to the number of species in a 30 m length of that hedge (Pollard, Hooper and Moore 1974: 79), though the methodology has not been without its critics. Muir and Muir went so far as to describe it as 'fundamentally flawed' (1987: 50) and, more recently,



Figure 3 The main focus of settlement in the eastern part of the parish of Llandewi lies to the north of the church (visible, with its graveyard, centre right) and, less clearly, along the two paths which lead west towards Old and New Henllys. Crown copyright.

Barnes and Williamson have summarised in some detail the problems associated with it (2006: 31–8). Muir and Muir do, however, accept that there is an ‘underlying truth’ to the theory with young hedges being species-poor (and dominated by hawthorn and elder) and older hedges being species-rich (with hazel, ash and oak regularly found; 1987: 69). Barnes and Williamson maintain that in ‘most circumstances’ (their emphasis) it is possible to distinguish hedges planted after 1750 from those that are medieval (2006: 135). They were also careful to remind practitioners of hedge dating that Hooper and Pollard were clear in their view that the results were not precise but had a margin of error of ± 200 years (2006: 25). Studies of northern and western Gower hedges have been carried out in the past (Cooper 1988: 1–33; Kissonock 1991: 130–147; Weeks 1998, 6–7). Species-rich and species-poor hedges can, of course, be identified and in hedges of known date and provenance enclosure hedges are usually correctly dated by the application of the basic Hooper-Pollard formula. These hedges also have a particular species profile; hawthorn and blackthorn are very common and elder and ash are regularly present. Some of the species-rich, woodland relict hedges are thought to have been the product of assarting; here the dates are far less exact and hazel is the dominant species, with hawthorn and blackthorn also regularly present as well as holly, oak and sycamore.

In the parish as a whole over 150 30 m lengths of hedge were examined. Almost two thirds of the hedges had 3, 4 or 5 species (respectively 17%, 26% and 23% of the total) with 21% having 6 or 7 species and 13% just one or two. The dominant species was blackthorn (present in 77% of samples) followed by hawthorn (71%), rose (60%), hazel (59%), ash (43%) and sycamore (33%) with smaller amounts of elder, holly, oak, willow, birch and just one horse chestnut. Thus the pattern would seem to be one of widespread hedge establishment between c. 1500 and c. 1700. The diversity of species could point to many of these hedges being woodland ‘relics’.

On a more localised level certain patterns become evident (Figure 4). In the eastern part of the lands of the manor of Henllys large, geometrically shaped fields are common. Some fields are irregularly shaped, but they are in the minority. In the upland section fields are generally smaller but usually retain their regular shape. In the southern half of the study area fields tend to be small, but varied in shape. Species counts in this area point to the possible construction of hedges in the late eighteenth century too. This area was once divided into strips of arable land. Some of the boundaries here preserve the boundaries of the strips. They appear “kinked” – they turn through 90° and after a short distance turn through 90° again so resuming their original direction; clear examples of this can be seen at NGR 446879, 454879 and 452875.

To the south of Old Henllys Farm lies an unusually shaped set of fields. They are irregular in shape and differ in orientation from others. On the basis of the species study the boundaries of these fields appear to be early. Twenty five lengths of hedgerow were examined. They are dominated by willow (as might be expected in this wet area) and show an almost complete absence of sycamore. An average count of 5.2 and the use of the standard Hooper Pollard formula would suggest a date

in the late fifteenth or sixteenth century for the establishment of these hedges (also the date of Old Henllys farmhouse). The hedges of this area are certainly amongst the most species-rich encountered in this study and are perhaps the earliest in the parish.

Along the northern side of the track which links Old and New Henllys Farms an identical figure is found, although the species profile differs with thorn and ash being common and willow absent. The southern side of this track, where thorn and sycamore are the most common species, has a lower average count (4.6) and may possibly suggest a date for the establishment of these hedges close to the height of the major period of hedge building. The nature of the species do not safely permit further speculation; the winged fruit of sycamore and ash lead to their widespread distribution. Similarly shaped fields to those at Old Henllys exist around Pilton Green Farm and at Greylands, both on the southern edge of the parish and all three farms may have come into existence at about the same time.

In the northern part of the study area, around Cathan Farm and Llandewi Castle, lie fields which seem to preserve the shape of blocks of strips in open fields. The fields are long and thin and again often have boundaries that turn at regular 90° angles. They run from the main road southwards to the bridleway and a track. Initially all this land may have formed one large field. The species counts along the both sides of the track is 4.5 per length; this combines with the similarities of species profiles – large amounts of thorn, ash, hazel and rose – to suggest that the enclosure on both sides of the track to the main road was probably for the same reason and contemporary. A date in the sixteenth or seventeenth century does not seem too unreasonable.

Along the southern side of the bridleway linking New Henllys and the church the average the hedges are species-poorer with an average count of: 3.7 per 30 m. length. The hedges the northern side of the bridleway are, however, species-richer. The range and predominance pattern of species is similar on both sides of the bridleway, albeit with a little less ash and more rose on the southern side. The difference in the species counts between the two sides (if significant) could mark the two-stage enclosure of the edges of a green. The pattern of footpaths and hollow ways suggest that the farmsteads may once have fronted onto a long, narrow green which ran from the church westwards to Star Field.

The majority of hedge lengths examined in the southern part of the parish contain just two species: hawthorn and blackthorn. The average species count here was 2.4 leading to a possible date for the construction of these hedges, and so the enclosure of this area, towards the end of the major period of enclosure in the late eighteenth century. Sycamore, elder and ash were all found here, but hazel was rare – just one example was noted. This relative rarity is noteworthy: in Gower assart hedges hazel is the most frequently encountered species and this might be evidence for field enclosure hereabouts. The lowest species counts occur to the south of the church. Here the average of was just 1.7 species per 30 m. length, with eight of the fifteen species containing only blackthorn. These hedges may mark the last stages of the long term process of the laying and building of hedges here.

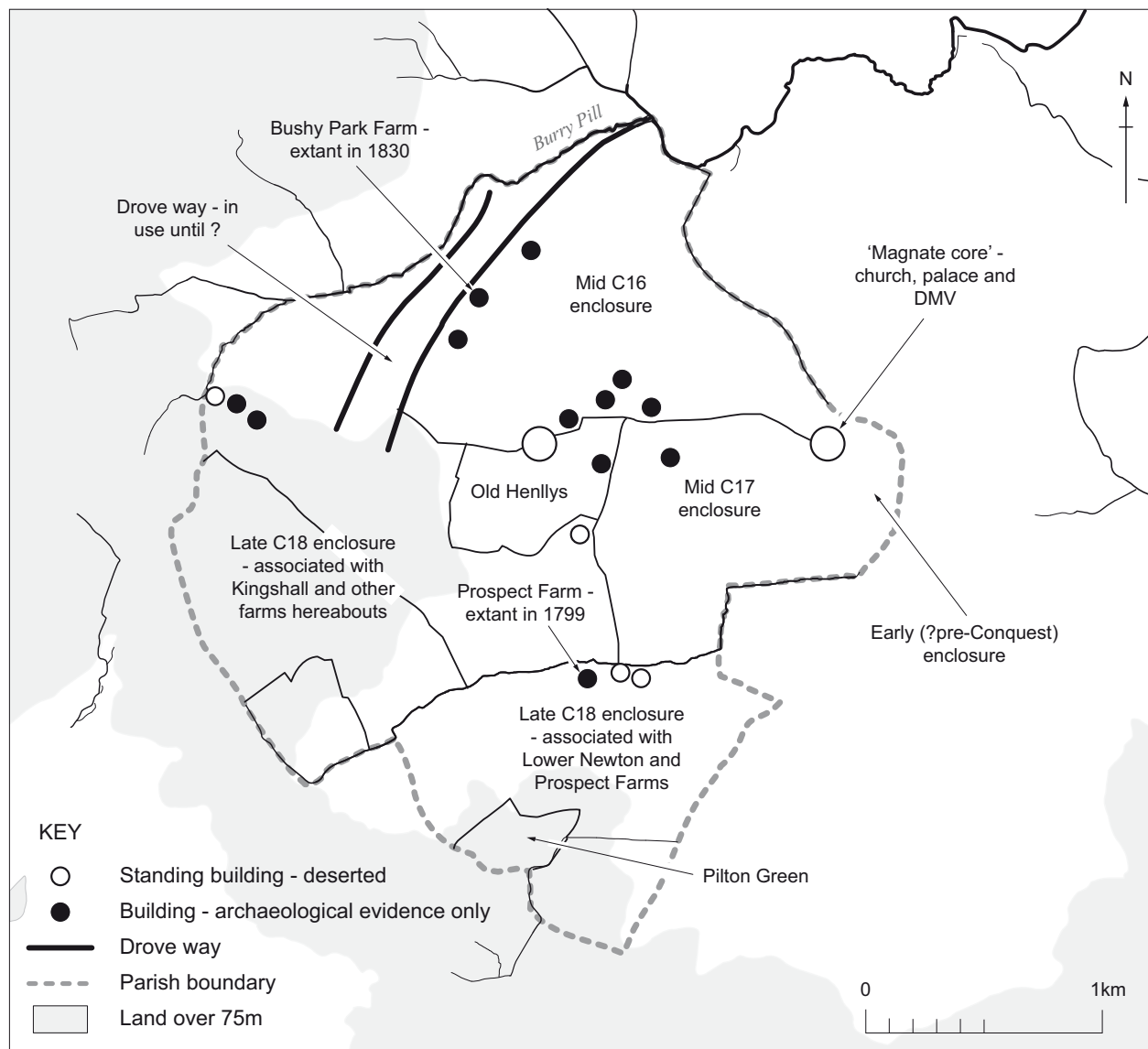


Figure 4 The pattern of enclosure in Llandewi and Henllys. The suggested dates for enclosure are based on the results of the hedgerow analysis. © Anne Leaver.

On the basis of the hedgerow study it is possible to propose an outline chronology for the enclosure of the two manors (Figure 4). Three small farms – Old Henllys, Pilton Green and Greyland – were perhaps the first enclosed, possibly at a date in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. The large triangular area between the bridleway, the drove way and the northern parish boundary could have been enclosed between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries. To the east of Old Henllys, the west of the church and the north of Lower Newton there seems to have stood another field, perhaps enclosed in the mid-seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century. A third field comprising land in and around Higher and Lower Newton and was probably enclosed in the late eighteenth century.

The application of the technique of landscape stratigraphy leads to the identification of a large, oval-shaped enclosure in the western part of the study area. (Figure 1). It is 1.7 kms. wide and 2.6 kms long. It is marked by an almost continuous series of field

boundaries and footpaths. Enclosures of a similar size with peripherally placed farms have been identified in upland Gower (Kissock 2001, 58–62) where they have been termed *llociau gwartheg* (literally translating as cattle enclosures). Similar shaped enclosures are known to have existed in north and south Wales and in north western England too; G.R.J. Jones studied these patterns in considerable detail and described the settlement around the enclosure as lying in a girdle pattern (1972, 331; 1985, 157–164). The *llociau gwartheg* may have formed an element within an early multiple estate framework as an area where bond tenants were responsible for grazing their lord's cattle. It is also possible that these enclosures had an arable function and might therefore be more appropriately described as *lloc âr* (arable enclosure.) The land within the enclosure has at some point certainly been used as arable and was laid out in strips – at NGR 446888 an east-west running boundary turns through 90° to run north south for a short distance before turning again to resume its original

direction. (This pattern may not, of course, have been an original feature and could equally well have been associated with a later scheme of land use here.)

The use of landscape stratigraphy also shows four long boundaries in the south and west of the parish (Figure 1). One of these long boundaries (CD) abuts, but does cross the other (AB). AB runs for almost 2 km east-west across the southern part of the parish. It also delimits one of the blocks of land from which the bishop received his share of the parish's tithes from the rest of the parish. CD abuts this and is shorter: 1.5 km. This boundary seems to separate the higher land in the south west corner of the parish from the remainder. It closely follows the 90 m contour. The final long boundaries form a parallel pair in the north western corner of the manor of Henllys. They appear to link the higher lands and a stream some 1.5 km distant. Originating on the edge of the lands of Moor Farm, they cross the lands of Old and then New Henllys Farms, eventually ending at the stream in the lands of Cathan Farm. It is proposed that these once marked out a droveway (or *gyrlwybr*) by which cattle or sheep could be moved from the higher pastures to lower land along the banks of a small stream. These internal divisions of the *llociau gwartheg* must postdate the establishment of the larger enclosure itself.

Elsewhere in Gower these *llociau* may have originated prior to the early decades of the seventh century and Mary Atkin has argued that the north-western English examples could be pre-Anglian foundations with possibly Roman origins (1985: 179.) The recently-discovered Roman farmstead at Blacklands on the eastern flank of Harding's Down lies close to the mouth of the *gyrlwybr*. Whilst an early date is possible, it is far from proven – in west Wales Fleming and Barker concluded that the dating evidence for similar structures was 'ambiguous' and that a post-medieval date was most likely (2008: 287, 276 and 280).

Conclusion

Conventional wisdom would point to a major period of village desertion between c. 1450 and c. 1700 (for example Beresford 1971: 12.) This does not appear to be the case in Llandewi – the origin of many of the farms and the field systems described above points to the this period as one of growth. This gives way to decline and/or stagnation after perhaps c. 1700. That Llandewi may have been a closed parish could offer an explanation to this pattern. In the nineteenth century it was common to talk of parishes been either 'open' or 'closed'. Dennis Mills has proposed that this division existed as early as the sixteenth century with closed parishes being dominated by one major landlord who, desiring to minimize his payments of poor rates, limited movement into the parish possibly through control of the housing stock (1980: 23–24).

Closed parishes therefore had a small population and a low rate of growth. In contrast, in the open parish power was vested in a large number of individuals, each of whom held only a small amount of land and where disagreement between the range of diverse parties meant that population growth was unrestricted. Aspects of Mills' work have been challenged by Sarah Banks, although she accepts the general dichotomy and argues

that more variables should be used in defining open and closed parishes (1988: 51). In the early decades of the nineteenth century there were only three major landowners in Llandewi. Around two thirds of the parish was held by Sir Christopher Rice Mansel Talbot MP, who in addition to extensive interests throughout Gower held lands in Afan and in London. The remainder of the land was equally divided between the bishops of St. David's and the Popkin family. In addition to domination of the landowning ownership by three individuals there is also the likelihood of absentee land lordship and consequent disinterest – which Banks argues may also serve to further limit population growth (1988: 54). The limitations to population growth may also have led to the abandonment of certain properties; Banks has noted that in certain locations labour may have been insufficient to make new developments viable. This may explain the abandonment of farms, for example Newton and Prospect, in the early nineteenth century.

Today Llandewi and Henllys are typical of the settlements of west Wales – scattered farms with a pastoral economy and a growing leisure sector. This apparent agelessness betrays a changing landscape. A possible pre-Conquest enclosure (part of a regime of either pastoral or arable farming), deserted medieval settlements and landscapes created by enclosure all add up to perhaps more than a millennium of change. Whatever the reasons for the changes the impact on the physical landscape has been profound – it was regularly being recast with new patterns of boundaries reflecting new patterns in society.

Acknowledgements

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