

Llanymynech heritage area, Shropshire: archaeological survey

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2001



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The project was conducted on behalf of Shropshire County Council Leisure Services Department. The authors would like to acknowledge the help and support of the Llanymynech Heritage Focus Group and of Evelyn Over, the Marches Woodland Initiative Network Adviser who requested that the archaeological survey work should be conducted.

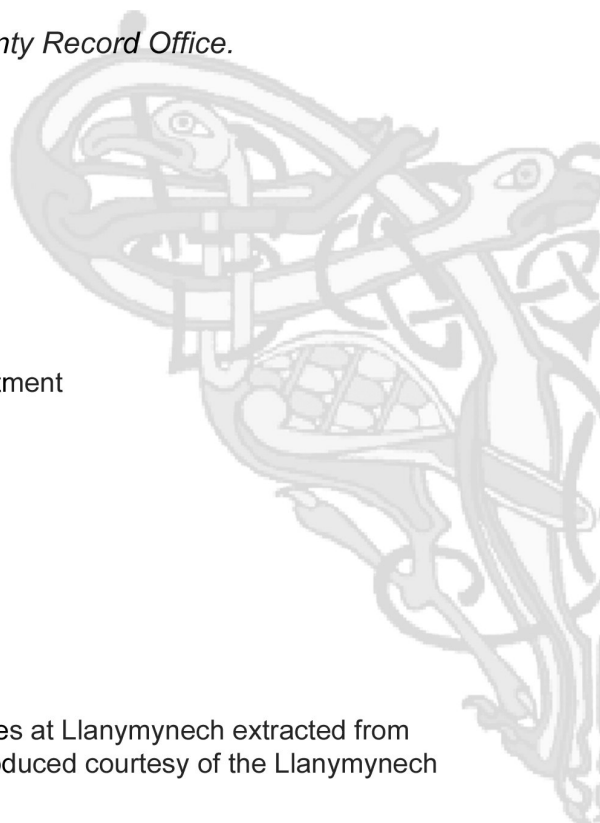
Thanks are also due to the staff of the Shropshire County Record Office.

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Cover Photograph: The layout of the major industrial features at Llanymynech extracted from the Ordnance Survey 1901 map. Reproduced courtesy of the Llanymynech Heritage Focus Group.



Contents

The Background.....	3
Introduction	3
The Tithe Map evidence - 1838.....	5
Later Cartographic Evidence.....	7
The Woodland.....	9
General Bibliography.....	13
Cartographic Material.....	13

Figures

Figure 1: Location plan.....	2
Figure 2: Site plan	4
Figure 3: Extract from the Llanymynech Tithe Map, 1838.....	5
Figure 4: Extract from the map included with the altered apportionment, 1870.	7
Figure 5: Extract from the 1 st edition OS 1:2500, 1880.	8
Figure 6: Extract from the 2 nd edition OS 1:2500, 1901.	9

Plates

Plate 1: The ridge and furrow in the field to the east of the Hoffman kiln.....	10
Plate 2: One of the unexplained pits in the eastern end of Llwyngoch Wood.....	11
Plate 3: Llwyngoch Wood, January 2001	12



Figure 1: Location plan

The Background

Introduction

Llanymynech lies on the border between Shropshire and Montgomeryshire. As it was not at the time in England, it does not appear in Domesday. Llanymynech is a wholly Welsh name which means '*church of the monks*' for which no simple explanation offers itself. The name has not appeared to have had many variations and occurs as *Llanemeneych* in 1254 and *Llanymenych* in 1310 (Gelling, 1990).

Above Llanymynech, Llanymynech Hill has been a source of minerals for centuries. Lead and copper was mined in the area in Roman times, and the hill may have been the source of lime for the construction of Viroconium (Pevsner, 1958). Llanymynech may possibly be identified with the Roman township of Mediolanum (ibid.).

Llanymynech Hill was the main source of limestone for north-west Shropshire and had been described as '*the Magazine of Limestone for a vast track of country*' in 1773 (Trinder, 1996, p 28). The opening of the Llanymynech branch of the Ellesmere Canal in 1796 (Morris, 1991, p36) meant that the transportation of this limestone became much easier. Llanymynech stone for fluxing was exported to ironworks in Coalbrookdale and Staffordshire.

The *rockmen*, as quarrymen were called at Llanymynech, account for 45 entries in the 1861 census. This number had shrunk to 33 in 1871 and to 21 in 1881. This may be due to a decreased demand for lime for fluxing in the iron industry (Trinder, 1996, p29).

Alternative sources of revenue were sought, and found in an increased demand for slaked lime for building and agricultural purposes. The demand from the latter industry had grown dramatically, and the capacity of the local lime-kilns was increased in order to meet it. The subject area, which is now the Llanymynech Heritage Site, has been well researched by the Llanymynech Heritage Focus Group. It comprises several discrete parcels of land, each with its own characteristics, to the north of the disused Montgomeryshire Canal.

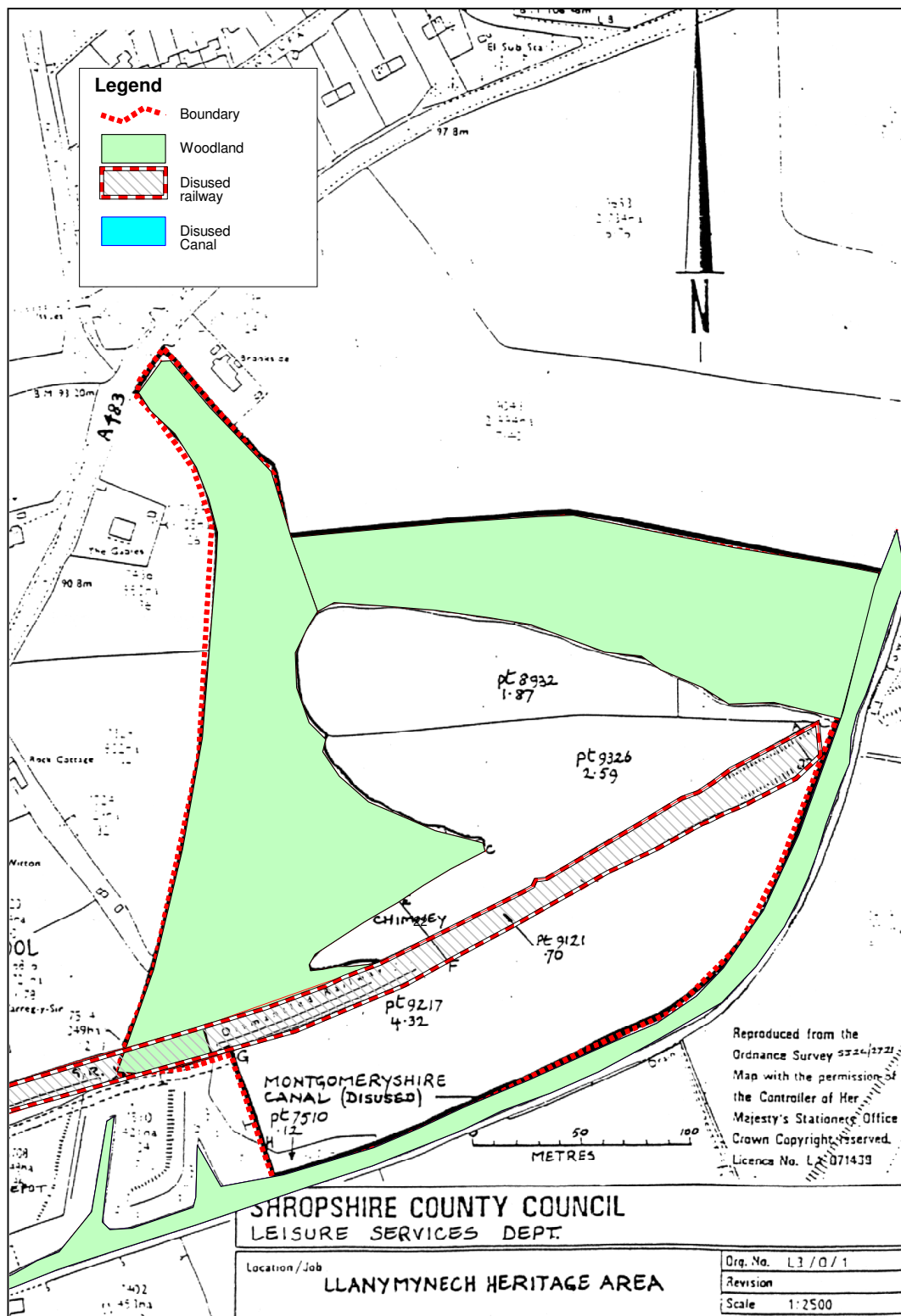


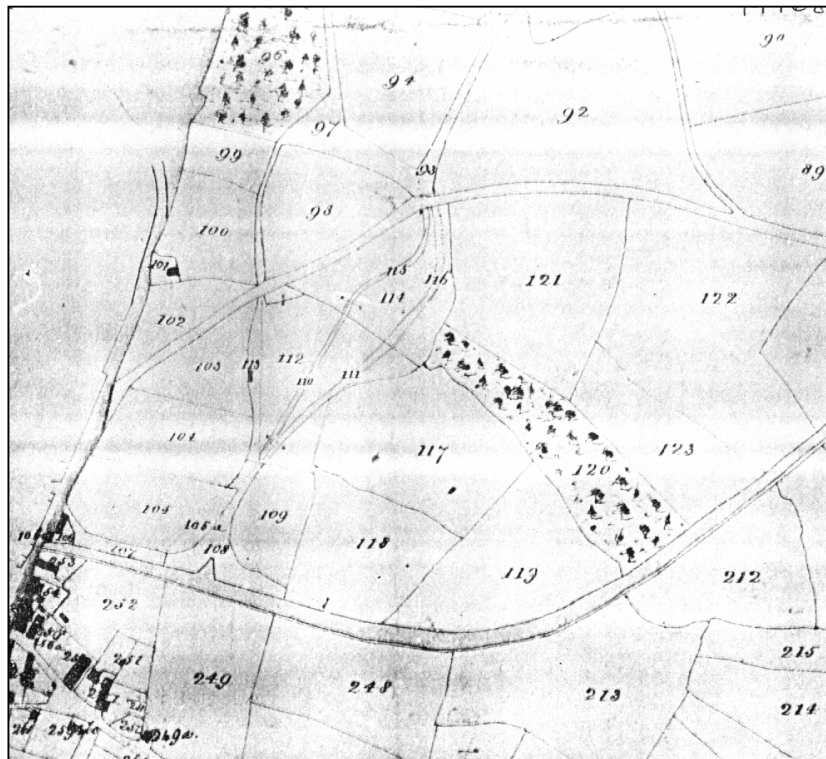
Figure 2: Site plan - The two areas of woodland, compartment 1 (Llwyngoch) and compartment 2 (secondary woodland on old industrial area) form two sides of the site. The disused Montgomeryshire Canal forms the third side. Plan courtesy of Shropshire County Council Leisure Services Department.

The Tithe Map evidence - 1838

The pre-industrial land use appears to have been, as one would expect, agricultural, consisting of a number of medium sized enclosures. The canal cut through these fields, creating a new landscape, although traces of an earlier field pattern are visible on the tithe map of 1838 (figure 3).

The movement of the limestone from the quarries on Llanymynech Hill down to the canal was effected by means of railways. These were narrow gauge (in comparison with the standard, yet to be introduced, gauge of 4' 8") tracks over which horse-drawn carts carried the rock. Steep slopes were managed by use of winding gear, which raised and lowered the carts along an inclined plane.

One of the routes used by these railways had already gone out of use by 1838, and on the tithe map is land parcel 113. It is described as '*Stables, part of old railway*' and occupied by Messrs Pickering & Co. The landowner was the Earl of Bradford. The horses in these stables were presumably used for drawing the stone-carts on the railway. This track was in use as early as 1809 and was the *Old Rail Road* in 1820 when a man is recorded as being killed in an accident on it



(Trinder, 1996, p29).

Figure 3: Extract from the Llanymynech Tithe Map, 1838. The canal has clearly caused changes in the field pattern. An original field boundary appears to have been cut by the canal between land parcels 109/118 and 249/248. The eastern part of Llwyngoch Wood, 120, seems originally to have formed one field with 123 and 212.

Three mineral railway lines run from the north. Messrs Baugh's line runs through land parcels 93, 115, 110 and 105a to wharf 107. Messrs Pickering's line runs through land parcels 97, 116 and 11 to their wharf 108. Land parcel 113 is an already disused railway utilised by Pickering's for stables.

In 1838 Pickering's line ran down from the quarry to north-west into land parcel 97 (described as part of inclined plane and railway) on the tithe. From here it continued through land parcels 116 (*part of railway*) and 111 (ditto). The line

terminated at the company's wharf (108) on the canal. All the company's land was leased from the Earl of Bradford.

The other company operating a railway in Llanymynech in 1838 was that of Messrs Baugh and Co. Their route ran down from the north, (93 – inclined plane and railway) to cross Pickerings line at the road from Oswestry. From here it continued through land parcels 115 and 110 (both '*part of the Railway*'), through 105a ('part of railway passing through field 105') to a wharf to the west of Pickerings', marked 107 on the tithe. As was the case with Pickerings, the landowner was the Earl of Bradford.

These lines, together with the canal and wharves, co-existed with a surrounding area in which agricultural activity continued as normal in 1838. To the north of what is now the Llanymynech Heritage Site, fields 121, 122 and 123 (Coppice Field, Lower Field and Llwyn Coch) were farmed by John Bothel. To the west of the old railway, and divided by the road were Upper (102) and Lower (103) County Stone Field occupied by Richard Nightingale whose house and garden is marked 101. To the south of Lower County Stone Field was Cae Maddoc (104), a piece of pasture land occupied by John Griffiths, and to the south of that was another piece of pasture land (105) also called Cae Maddoc and occupied by John Pryce. The Earl of Bradford also owned all this land.

The earl's tenant of the land which comprised most of what is now the Heritage Site was Robert Cross and the field names of his holding seem to derive from recent changes to the pattern of occupation. To the north-west of the road he had two arable fields called Three Corner Field (98) and Square Patch (100), both names describing shapes which must post-date the old railway. Field 109, adjacent to Pickering's wharf, is Wharf Meadow, while 112, not altogether surprisingly considering that two railway pass through it, is Railway Field. To the east of Wharf Meadow is Canal Field (118) and to the east again, Lower Field (119). North of Wharf Meadow, field 117 is simply 'Field adjoining wood'.

All of the above property was rented from the Earl of Bradford who retained in his own hands only one part of the subject area, the woodland marked number 120, and called on the tithe 'Llwyn Coch Plantation'.

The eastern part of this wood appears, from the shape of the field boundaries, to have once been part of a larger field, which comprised 120, 123 and 212. If so, the plantation cannot be older than the very end of the 18th century, when this pattern was disrupted by the canal.

Later Cartographic Evidence

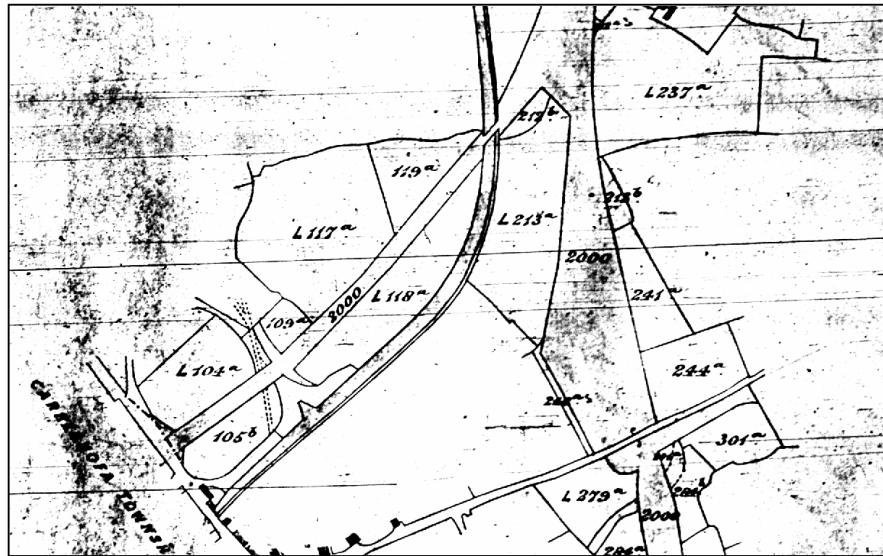


Figure 4: Extract from the map included with the altered apportionment, 1870. The major change here is the land of the Cambrian Railway, marked 2000, further partitioning the landscape.

The Oswestry and Newtown Railway opened its line through Llanymynech on 10th June 1861 and became part of the Cambrian Railway shortly after. Soon branch lines were radiating around the area. An altered tithe apportionment was made in 1870 (figure 4) to show the changes which this had brought about. The map shows the inverted Y of the land now owned and occupied by the Cambrian Railway, and numbered 2000.

The land is still in the ownership of the Earl of Bradford and the field names are unchanged from 1838. The former 104, now L104a is still part of Cae Maddoc, and is occupied by John Roberts. To the south 105b, occupied by Thomas Savin, is also still part of Cae Madoc. Both are pasture.

Most of the other fields marked are occupied by Richard Richards. L117a is described as *Parts of Canal Field, field adjoining and Lower field* and is arable. 109a, *Part of Wharf Meadow*, is pasture and L118a, *Part of Canal Field*, is meadow. 110a is a piece of arable land in the occupation of George James Saunders, *Part of Lower Field*.

The Ordnance Survey carried out their first survey of the area in 1874. The relevant portion of the 1st edition 1:2500 map is shown in figure 5. Despite the presence of the railway, the canal is clearly still the main means of transport for the local extraction industry. A new basin has been cut to the west of the original one and both are edged by rail or *tramway* tracks. The railway has had some impact, however. There are main line sidings, and one branch of the tramway crosses the main line to run beside one of them to the west.

Limestone extraction served two purposes. One was the supply of the limestone itself to ironworks over a large area; the other was the local burning of the stone to produce lime. Lime had always been an important building material as a component of mortar, but by the end of the 18th century an increase in its use in agriculture had created a much greater demand. Although there are earlier kilns on the site, the first major impact of this industry in the cartographic record is on the 2nd edition OS 1:2500 plan of 1901 (figure 6).

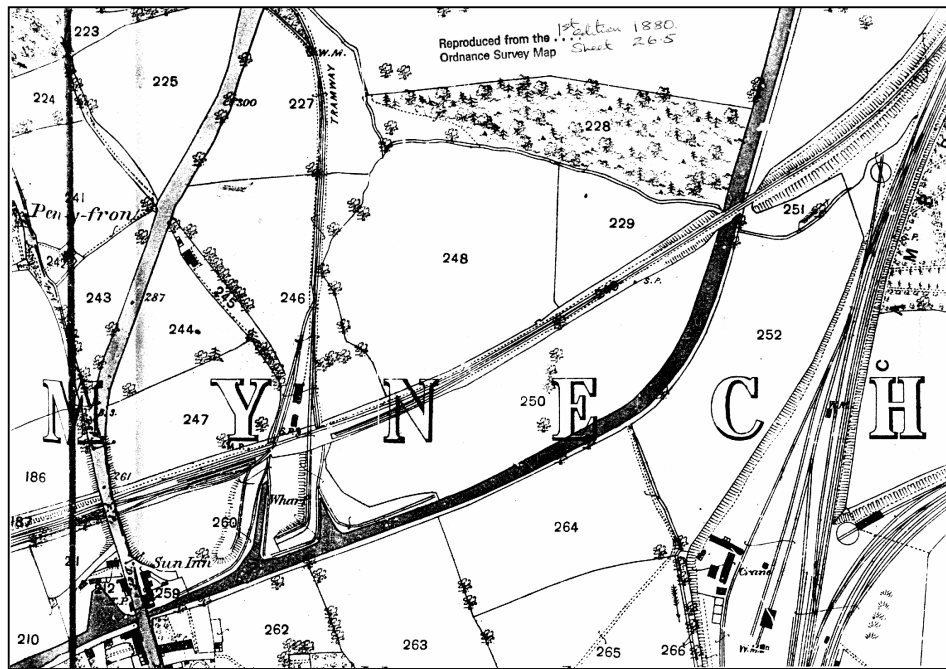


Figure 5: Extract from the 1st edition OS 1:2500, 1880. A new basin has been excavated to the west of the original one.

This plan shows the tramway system around the old wharves somewhat shrunk and simplified, but the main change is further to the west. Here a large oval lime kiln has been built and tramlines laid to deliver limestone directly to each side of it. The southern part of fields 117 and 118 on the tithe (248 and 249 on the 1st edition OS), have been incorporated into the industrial property and across them a standard gauge siding from the main line has been laid. The siding runs to the south of the new kiln and rejoins the main line further to the west.

The new kiln was a Hoffman kiln, first designed for the brick-making industry and later adopted for lime burning. This kiln operated by fire which burned in a circular motion around the central core of the structure with coal being poured in from the top. By this means the kiln could be made to operate continuously.

The 1901 plan also shows a smaller standard gauge siding to the north of the main one and to the east of the kiln. This would have been used to bring in the coal for fuelling the kiln. The coal was then transferred to the smaller narrow-gauge trucks, which were hauled up to a set of points above the kiln and then reversed onto the top of the kiln, where the coal was released into it by gravity.

The main standard gauge loop would have been used to take away the slaked lime product of the kiln. A small building shown at the end of a short siding west of the kiln may have been an engine shed. If so, this would have housed the locomotive, which handled the standard gauge part of the operation.

The large embankment to the west of the Hoffman kiln, which is such a prominent feature on the site as it is at present, had yet to be built in 1901. However, it may be in the course of construction, represented by a tramline on a short embankment in the angle formed by the junction of the tramway to the wharves and that to the kiln.

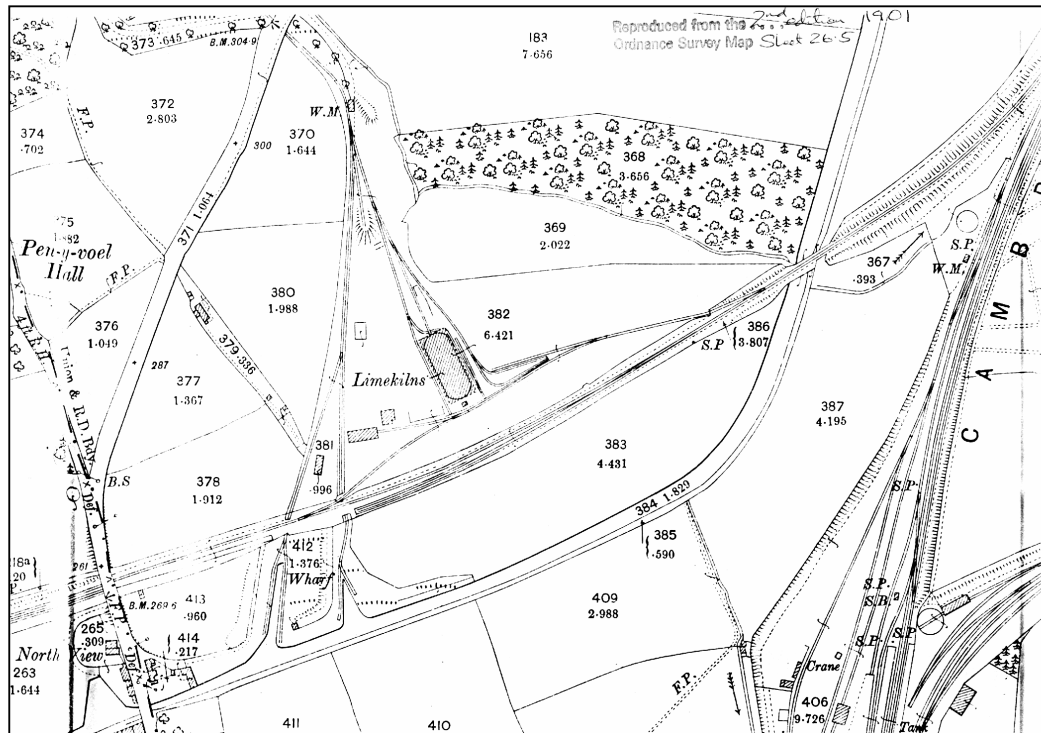


Figure 6: Extract from the 2nd edition OS 1:2500, 1901. A new Hoffman lime kiln is served by a loop of the railway.

The Woodland

The woodland at the Llanymynech Heritage Site forms two distinct units, neither of which is of any antiquity - Llwyngoch Wood (Compartment 1 in figure 2), and the woodland on the old industrial site (Compartment 2).

In the field to the north-east of the Hoffman kiln are traces of ridge and furrow (plate 1). This would have formed part of the field system of medieval Llanymynech. Woodland was historically sparse in this area as it was in most pre-industrial agricultural landscapes. By and large it is industrial areas which preserved woodland, as in the Forest of Dean, as a source of fuel. In agricultural areas, that is most of the country, woodland tended to occur in small, carefully managed pockets, usually in situations such as steep slopes which could not easily be used for other purposes. Within the area of the Heritage Site then, the mid 18th century landscape would have consisted of fields and meadows, either open or enclosed.

At the end of the 18th century the canal, by firstly cutting through this landscape, and secondly by encouraging a system of small mineral railway lines, led to this landscape being carved up into smaller parcels.

Llwyngoch Wood (Compartment 1, figure 2) seems to be a result of this change. As mentioned above, the eastern portion appeared to have been part of a larger field before the canal. The Earl of Bradford then merged this piece of land with another tract to the west and planted it with trees, probably at the time of, or shortly after, the construction of the canal in the mid 1790s.



Plate 1: The ridge and furrow in the field to the east of the Hoffman kiln. Traces are visible running across the photograph in the right middle distance. The foreground feature is the course of the railway siding which served the kiln.

A stream bound the wood on the southern side, which would have been the boundary of the original field. Some evidence of a trackway running east to west through the wood was present, but this may be of a relatively recent origin. The eastern end of the wood, adjacent to the canal, is characterised by a number of small pools, measuring up to five metres in diameter and about half a metre deep (plate 2). No interpretation of these features is obvious but their situation adjacent to the canal at least suggests the possibility that they may have had some sort of association with it. The obvious interpretation, that they were tree holes, fails on several counts. They were approximately circular, they had no mounding on one side, and they did not appear elsewhere in the wood.

Llwyngoch Wood then, seems originally to be a plantation of around 1800 which is just as much a creation of the canal as the other contemporary features on the site. It was equally a long-term economic asset and as such, should not be seen as part of a totally separate system within a local economy which was creating a demand for timber trestles and other items. The nature of the woodland has remained the same as when it was first planted, irrespective of the species of tree. The current crop is Larch, planted around 1950 presumable as a result of then government policy to create a U K strategic timber reserve. These trees are now due to be harvested. The precise mechanism of such harvesting has no major archaeological implications, although the retention of the wood as a feature could be used to illustrate the interdependence of pre-modern landscapes.



Plate 2: One of the unexplained pits in the eastern end of Llwyngoch Wood

The other piece of woodland (Compartment 2, figure 2) is the secondary woodland now occupying the greater part of the limestone working area. The origins of this woodland are presumably accidental and a result of the non-utilisation of a piece of land over a long enough period of time to permit the woodland to take hold. The contrast with Llwyngoch Wood is striking - Llwyngoch Wood and the tramway system were contemporary creations; this woodland only occurred after the demise of the latter.

Here the woodland, although possessing some intrinsic value, is detrimental to the perception of the site and potentially damaging to the archaeology. Some saplings have rooted themselves into the stonework of the bridge abutments and other features, and will cause serious damage if they are allowed to grow in their present locations. Some of the industrial features that are not yet fully recorded and whose function remains unclear are partially obscured by dense undergrowth. Clearance of briars and other underbrush is obviously desirable to allow further more detailed survey work to take place, but also to allow native flora to re-establish itself.

From a purely historical/archaeological point of view, the site would be much better presented without the trees. The dense growth of ivy and other climbing plants which have become very well established (on the walls of the vertical kiln in particular) pose another threat to the long term preservation of these features. Care should be taken with the management of this type of vegetation as merely cutting back the ivy can cause the root system to retreat deep within the walls, then causing more damage when it grows back.

A compromise solution is the removal of all those trees and undergrowth which do not have any high ambient or other (e.g. the fox earth) priority. Any such removal should be undertaken with the requisite caution needed in order not to further damage the archaeology.

The whole of the area of the Llanymynech Heritage Site represents the optimum economic use of this piece of land over a long period of time. Fields, kilns,

tramways, canals, railways and plantations, sometimes separately and sometimes together, all represent the best return available to the parties who were variously the owners and tenants and the means of livelihood for the workers that they employed.



Plate 3: Llwyngoch Wood, January 2001 - The Japanese Larch planted around 1950 on the site of a plantation established around 1800.

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