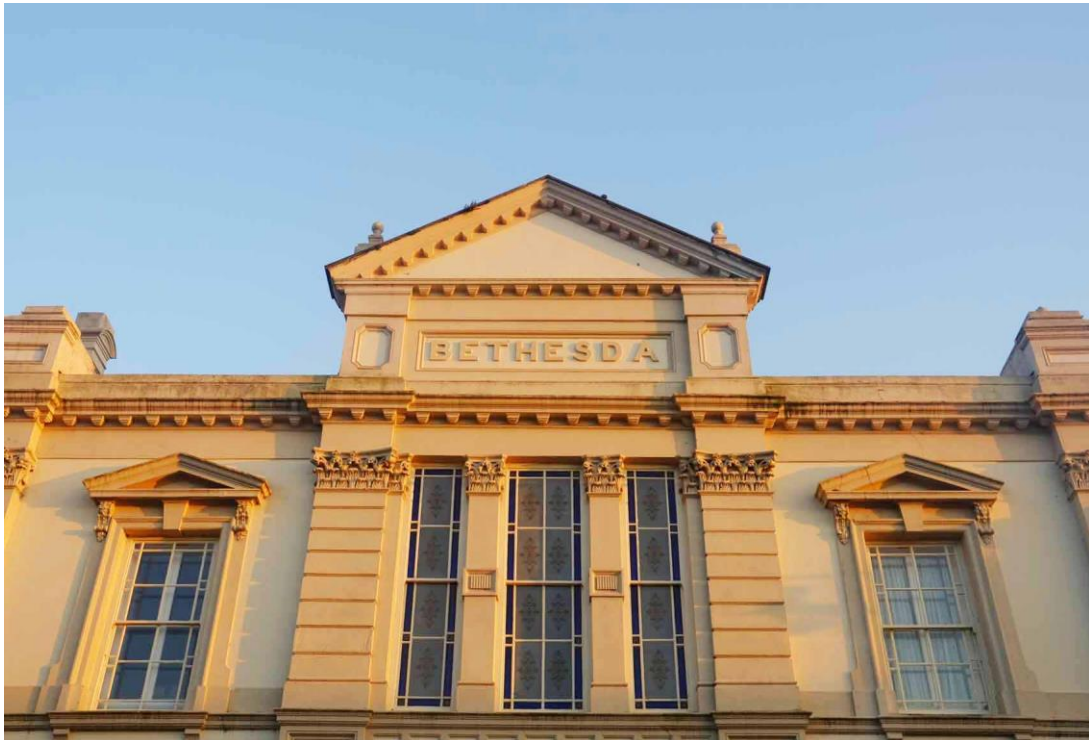


# BETHESDA

An urban character study



Richard Hayman

for

Gwynedd Council

May 2017



**Llechi Cymru**  
**Wales Slate**

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## Crynodeb

Cynhaliwyd astudiaeth o nodweddion trefol Bethesda yn 2017 i ategu'r enwebiad am statws Safle Treftadaeth Byd i Ddiwydiant Llechi Cymru sydd i'w gyflwyno i Gorff Addysgol, Gwyddonol, a Diwylliannol y Cenhedloedd Unedig (UNESCO). Tref fach yn nyffryn Ogwen yw Bethesda, ar gyrion Eryri yng Ngwynedd. Daeth i fodolaeth yn y bedwaredd ganrif ar bymtheg i roi cartrefi i weithwyr y chwareli llechi lleol, a chwarel y Penrhyn yn bennaf, oedd ymysg y mwyaf yn y Gogledd.

Mae'r adroddiad yn amlinellu hanes y gwaith chwarela yn yr ardal a datblygiad y dref drwy amser. Mae'r astudiaeth nodweddion yn edrych ar y patrwm anheddu a'i berthynas â seilwaith y ffyrdd a pherchnogaeth y tir. Mae'r adroddiad yn trafod dylanwad yr economi lleol, dyheadau diwylliannol, adeiledd y gymdeithas a defnydd deunyddiau lleol ar arddulliau adeiladu, bob un ohonynt wedi cyfrannu at gymeriad arbennig Bethesda.

O'r 1820au ymlaen, cafodd tirlun o ffermydd a mân chwareli ei weddnewid yn dref, ond chafodd twf yr economi mo'i gynnal yn yr ugeinfed ganrif. Canlyniad hyn yw bod cymeriad y dref heddiw yn deillio o ychydig ddegawdau o dwf yn y bedwaredd ganrif ar bymtheg. Tyfodd y dref ar hyd darn o ffordd i'r dwyrain o Afon Ogwen, o amgylch y capel a roddodd ei henw i'r dref. Rhoddodd nifer o dirfeddianwyr brydles lleiniau tir ar gyfer tai i weithwyr, yn bennaf ar hyd y ffyrdd oedd eisoes ar gael, sef patrwm anheddu a gyfunodd yn y pen draw i ffurfio tref, lle daeth y brif ffordd yn ganolfan fasnachol.

Gweddol unffurf yw'r tai o ran eu harddull, gydag ambell fwthyn unllawr cynnar yn y traddodiad gwledig, ond maen nhw wedi'u grwpio mewn amryw o ffyrdd, o barau i derasau hirach, gan ffurfio gridiau o strydoedd cyfochrog yma ac acw. Mewn ffyrdd cynnil y datgelir gwahaniaethau cymdeithasol, gyda rhai tai yn agor yn uniongyrchol i'r stryd, eraill y tu ôl i waliau gardd, ac eraill yn agor i lwybrau a gerddi o flaen y tai. Gwelir uchelgais economaidd yn adeiladau masnachol y Stryd Fawr ac uchelgais diwylliannol yn y capeli sydd wedi goroesi yn y dref, Capel Bethesda a Chapel Jerusalem ill dau'n uchelgeisiol iawn ac yn adeiladau amlwg yng nghanol y dref.

Mae'r deunyddiau adeiladu'n cyfrannu llawer at gymeriad y dref. Mae meini o'r maes, meini nadd o'r chwareli (ar gyfer adeiladau uwch eu statws) a gwastraff o'r chwareli i gyd yn cael eu defnyddio mewn amryw o ffyrdd. Mae'r modd deheuig y defnyddir llechi wedi'u llifio yn arbennig o nodedig, er enghraifft i greu cynteddau storm â bwâu Gothig.

Tynnir y themâu amrywiol at ei gilydd i ddangos bod Bethesda wedi cadw cymeriad cryf a neilltuol sy'n deillio o'r bedwaredd ganrif ar bymtheg a hynny ar sail cyfuniad unigryw o dopograffi, y seilwaith blaenorol, hanes economaidd a chymdeithasol, a'r adnoddau naturiol lleol y codwyd adeiladau'r dref ohonyn nhw. Mae'r adroddiad yn gorffen gydag argymhellion ar ragoriaethau dynodi Ardal Gadwraeth.

## Summary

An urban characterisation study of Bethesda was undertaken in 2017 in support of the Wales Slate World Heritage Nomination to be submitted to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Bethesda is a small town in the Ogwen valley, among the foothills of Snowdonia in Gwynedd. It came into existence in the nineteenth century to house workmen employed in local slate quarries, primarily Penrhyn, one of the largest slate quarries in North Wales.

The report outlines the history of quarrying in the locality and the chronological development of the town. The character study examines the pattern of settlement and its relationship to its existing infrastructure of roads and land ownership. The report discusses the influence on building styles of the local economy, cultural aspirations, social structure and the use of local materials, all of which have contributed to Bethesda's special character.

From the 1820s a landscape of farms and small quarries was transformed into a town, but economic growth was not sustained in the twentieth century, with a result that the character of the town today is the result of a few decades of growth in the nineteenth century. The town grew up along a stretch of road on the east side of the River Ogwen, centred around the chapel which gave the town its name. A number of landowners leased building plots for workmen's houses, mostly along existing roads, a pattern of settlement that eventually coalesced to form a town, in which the main road became the commercial centre.

Houses are broadly uniform in style, with some early single-storey cottages in a rural tradition, but they are grouped in various ways, from pairs to longer terraces, and in parts forming grids of parallel streets. Social distinction is revealed in subtle ways, with some houses open directly to the street, others behind garden walls, while others open to pathways with gardens in front of the houses. Economic aspiration is displayed in the commercial buildings on the High Street, and cultural aspirations are displayed in the town's surviving chapels, Capel Bethesda and Capel Jerusalem being notably ambitious works and prominent buildings in the town centre.

Building materials contribute much to the character of the town. Field stone, dressed quarried stone (for higher-status buildings) and waste slate from the slate quarries are all used in various ways. The ingenious use of sawn slate is especially notable, for example for storm porches with Gothic arches.

The various themes are drawn together to show that Bethesda retains a strong and distinctive nineteenth-century character based on its unique combination of topography, pre-existing infrastructure, economic and social history, and the local natural resources with which its buildings were constructed. The report concludes with recommendations on the merits of designation of Conservation Area status.

BETHESDA  
An urban character study

RICHARD HAYMAN

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## 1 Aims of the study

Historic character confers identity, creates a sense of belonging and contributes to the quality of the places where we live, work and visit. It can also be an asset for economic vitality and regeneration. Protecting and sustaining local character effectively requires a sound evidence base that can inform regeneration activity, conservation, planning and design, and support decisions about conservation, management and the accommodation of change.

Developing character studies for settlements helps provide a robust evidence-base for local planning policies and will provide a key element of support for managing these proposed settlements for the future.

The immediate purpose of this study is to provide supporting evidence for one aspect of the forthcoming Wales Slate World Heritage Site nomination. The nomination will seek to convey the important value that settlements play in the outstanding universal value of the site. Bethesda is one of the settlements selected for study, because it has its own distinctive character that reveals specific aspects of the development of the slate industry and the economy, society and culture that it produced.

## 2 Introduction

Bethesda is a town in the Ogwen Valley in the northern foothills of Snowdonia, Gwynedd, in a landscape dominated by the town on the east bank of the river and Penrhyn Quarry on the west bank. The town owes its existence to the Penrhyn Quarry and, to a lesser extent, to the smaller Pantdreiniog Quarry, which has been landscaped but tips from which extended nearly to the town centre.

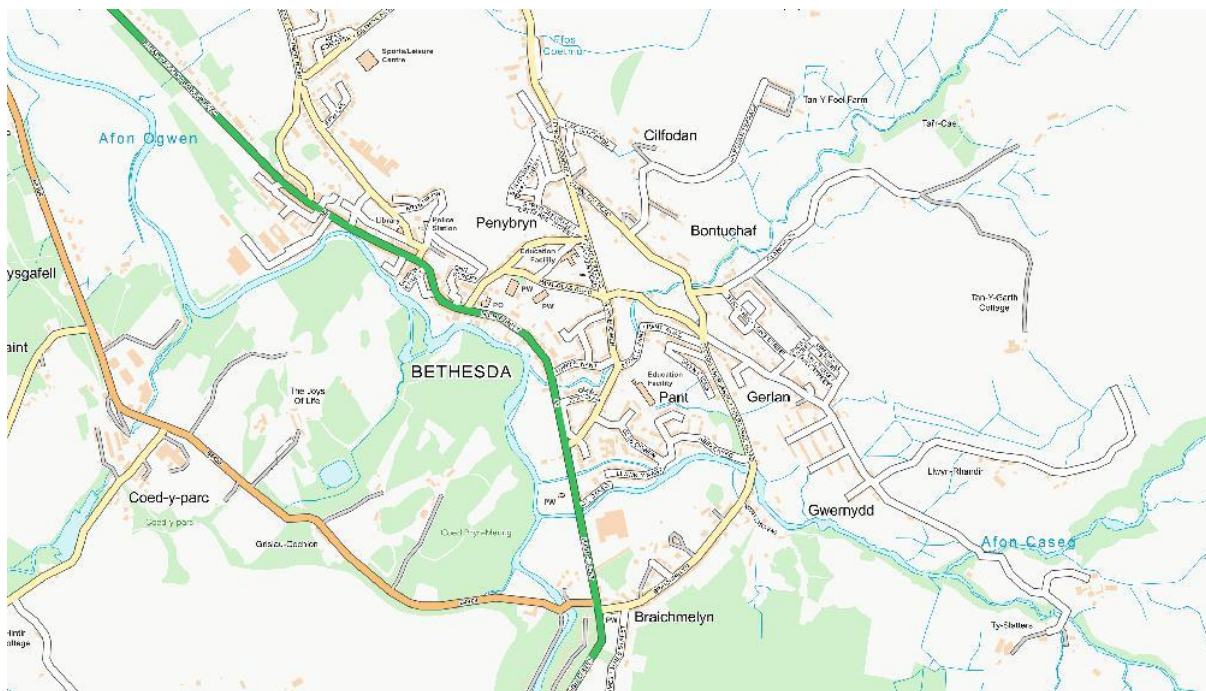


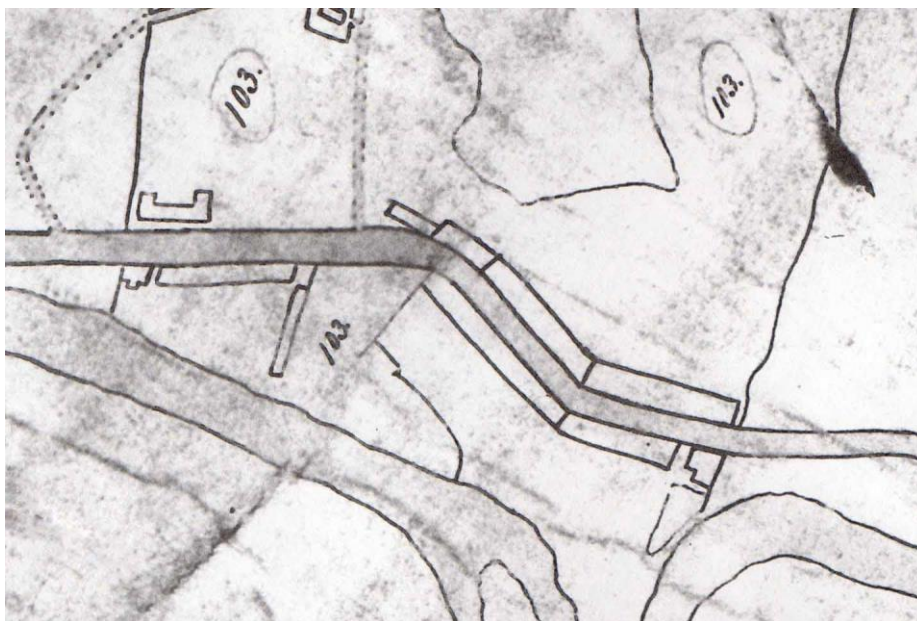
Fig 1 Location map.

The town grew rapidly from its nucleus to encompass outlying settlements, including Braichmelyn, Gerlan and Carneddi, all of which are now part of the town. The area of the town has also expanded since 1945, but some of these new developments, especially on the north side of the town where there are no surviving earlier buildings, do not have a historic character and so are not included in this study.

### 3 Historical development

Before industry, the eastern side of the Ogwen valley was a landscape of small farms and interconnecting roads. The river was crossed at Pont Twr, at the south end of modern Bethesda, from where a road led northwards to Llanllechid (now Braichmelyn, Carneddi Road and Hen Barc). This was the principal route through the Ogwen valley before the Holyhead Road, now designated the A5, was built 1815-20. The new road crossed the old road by Pont Twr, and followed the course of the Ogwen on its east bank. Settlement along this road, the principal route between London and Dublin, was the nucleus of the town.

Large-scale quarrying in the Ogwen valley was begun under the ownership of Richard Pennant, first Baron Penrhyn (1737-1808). The Penrhyn Slate Quarry, situated on the west side of the river, grew rapidly to become one of the largest slate quarries in North Wales. By 1898 it employed 2809 men. On the east side of the river was Pantdreiniog Slate Quarry, which opened in 1850 and closed in 1911. It superseded an older quarry, known as Coetmor, but was a relatively small-scale quarry by the standards of the late-nineteenth century. In 1898 it was reported to employ eighty men.



*Fig 2 Detail of Llanllechid Tithe plan showing development in Bethesda in 1840. The building lower right by the bend in the river is Capel Bethesda. The diagonal line on the right-hand side is the boundary of the Cefn Faes estate.*

The main focus of early settlement was the Holyhead Road. As early as the 1820s documents had begun to refer to the village of Bethesda, named after its roadside chapel, including land sales to farmers, publicans, shop keepers, artisans and quarrymen. This land was part of the Cefn Faes estate, making the most of the opportunity of a growing industrial economy and the presence of a transport route of national importance (figs 2, 3). The

Penrhyn Estate also owned land on the west side of the river and by 1840 had built houses for workmen on the east side of the river at Braichmelyn, close to Pont Twr (fig 4).

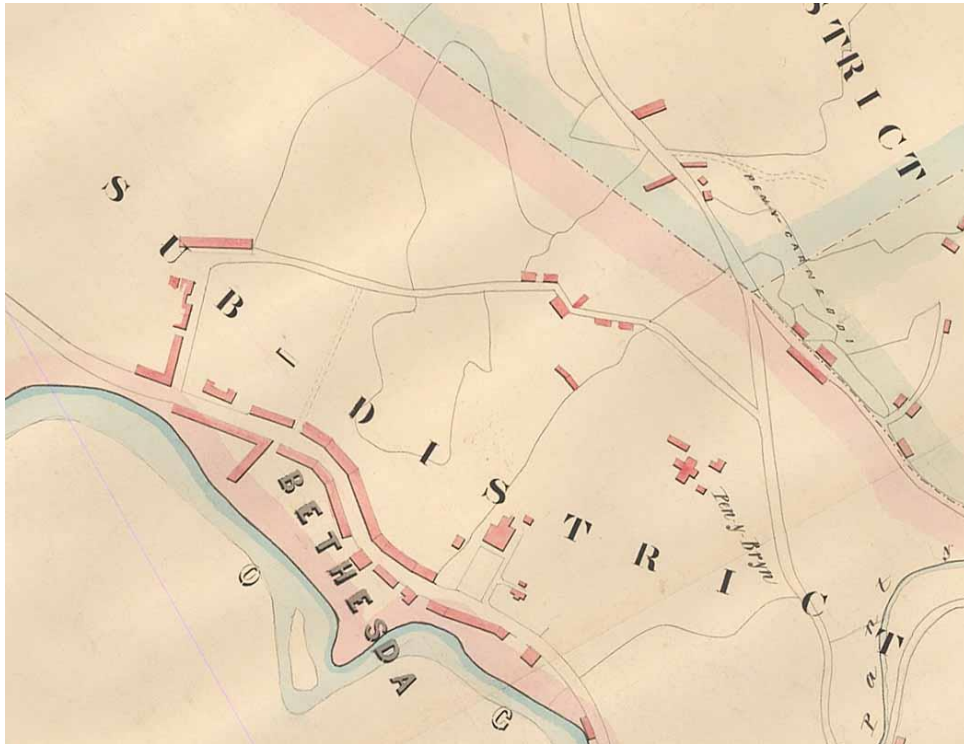


Fig 3 Detail of a plan of Bethesda, 1854, showing new developments since 1840, including Capel Jerusalem and Ogwen Terrace. (Gwynedd Archives X/Plans/S/10)



Fig 4 Detail of a plan of Bethesda, 1854. Lower left is Pont Twr and on the road leading from it are the houses built by the Penrhyn Estate known as Braichmelyn and a shorter row known as Caerberllan. Abercaseg, Pant-Ffrydlas and Gerllan (upper right) farms are also shown, as are scattered cottages. (Gwynedd Archives X/Plans/S/10)



Further development followed the Bethesda Improvement Act of 1854. The Act gave local powers to improve water supply and drainage and to manage the 'rural' aspects of the town life such as the keeping of pigs. The former Penybryn Farm was leased for building land in the 1850s, which was made possible by the existence of local building societies such as the Welsh Building Society, Prince Arthur, Union and Cefn Faes Building Society, which were established mainly by local men. The trustees of the Llewelyn Building Society, for example, were two quarrymen, a carpenter and book keeper. Even as late as the 1850s, when the pace of industrial growth had increased significantly, workmen and other local men retained a stake in housing development, which was not entirely dependent upon capitalist investment by quarry owners.

The pattern of settlement varied. By 1889 houses had been built in rows along most of the pre-industrial roads. In places there was a denser concentration of houses. Behind High Street, John Street and Pen-y-graig is an informal network of lanes with single and pairs of single-storey and two-storey houses. It dates from the mid 1850s, squeezed in between High Street and Pantdreiniog Quarry waste tips (fig 5). Other more dense developments had a more orderly plan, such as the grid of streets at Brynteg and at Gerlan (fig 6).

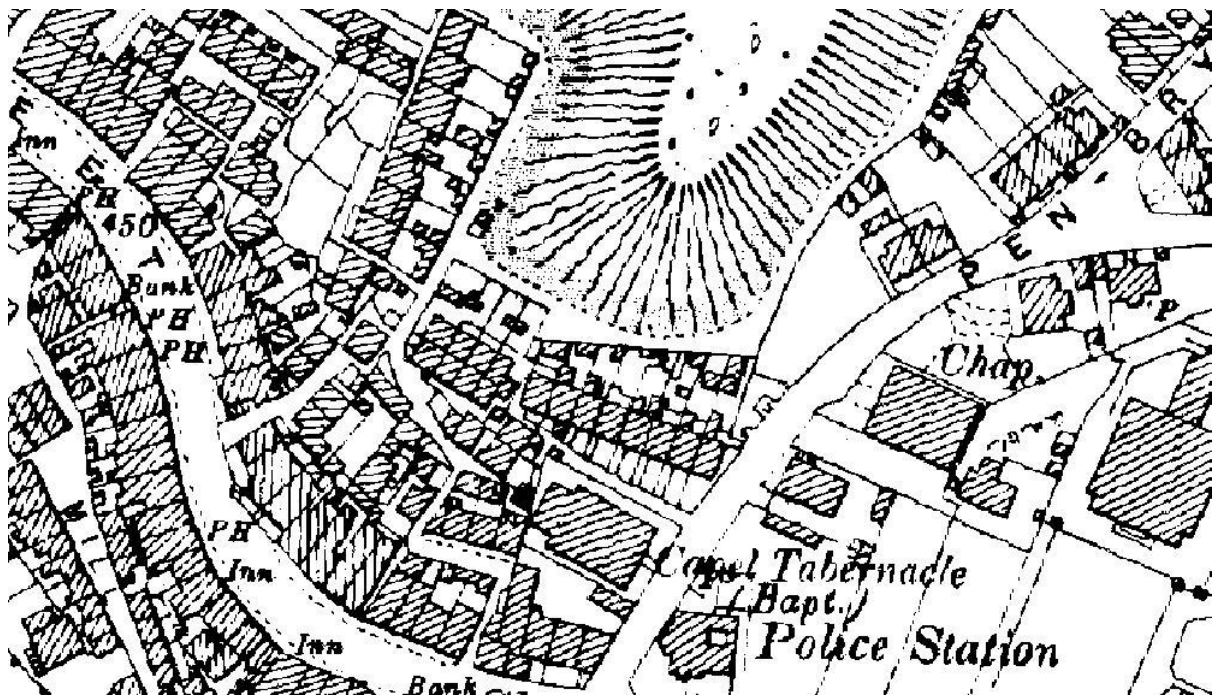


Fig 5 Ordnance Survey map of 1889 showing the tight cluster of housing around John Street and Capel Tabernacle.

In 1841 there were 4957 inhabitants of Llanllechid parish, but by 1871 there were 7739 people, of which over 3,000 people lived in Bethesda. Very quickly, Bethesda acquired the economic and social infrastructure of a town. High Street became the focus of service industries, displacing quarrymen who had built houses there – there were 72 quarrymen living on High Street in 1851 but only 16 in 1871. Ogwen Terrace was laid out in 1853, a reflection of the fact that shopkeepers and professional people were moving to the town and that local economy was expanding rapidly. By 1871 High Street had 15 publicans, three grocers, three greengrocers, a butcher, tailor, as well as accountants and a post master (fig 7).

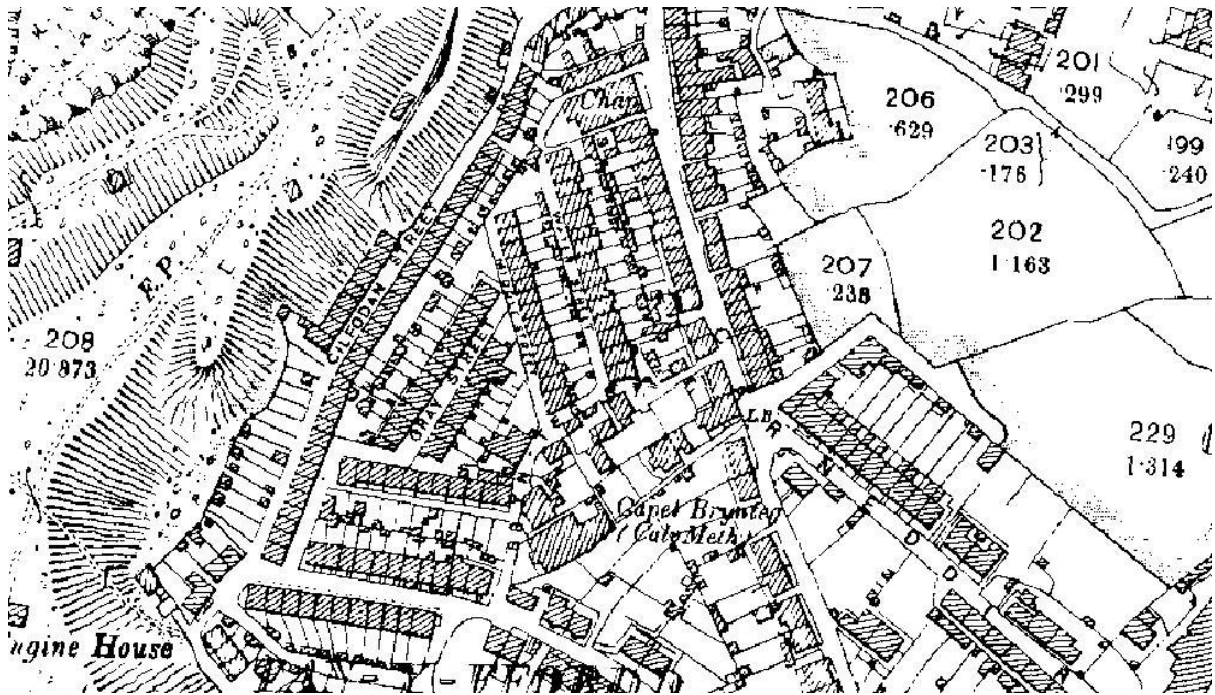


Fig 6 Ordnance Survey of 1889, showing the parallel blocks of streets making up Brynteg and built in the 1860s. On the west side is Pantdreiniog Quarry. Houses on Cilfodan Street, nearest the quarry, have now been demolished.



Fig 7 Early-twentieth century photograph of High Street, dominated by shops but with Capel Bethesda centre-left. (Gwynedd Archives XS3270/3)

The town's cultural and social infrastructure was based on chapels, church and schools. The principal denominations – Independent, Calvinistic Methodist and Wesleyan – were well represented in the town. Capel Bethesda was the earliest of the chapels but others

developed on or near High Street, namely Jerusalem (1842), Siloam (1838) and Tabernacle (1856). Demand for chapels in the expanding outlying districts was met by Brynteg (1864), Carneddi (1816), Salem (1871) Treflys (1866) and Gerlan (1869). The established church arrived comparatively late, partly because a church intended for the quarrymen had been established on the west side of the river in 1813. Having accepted that Bethesda was now the urban centre of the Ogwen valley, the Penrhyn Estate commissioned Christ Church, which was built in 1855-56.

Schools were attached to Capel Jerusalem (which also offered evening classes for adults in 1861) and the parish church (a National School), but were superseded after the 1870 and 1889 Education Acts. Ysgol Gerlan opened in 1872 to serve the new estate. County schools were built at Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen, which opened in 1895 (fig 8), and Cefn Faes, which is dated 1907 (see fig 32). Ysgol Penybryn, on the site of Penybryn Farm, was built late, after 1914.



Fig 8 Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen, as built in 1895 with shaped gables. (Gwynedd Archives XS327015)

The standard-gauge railway reached Bethesda in 1884, with a branch line from Bangor. It was a terminus on the north side of the town, and was built on land reclaimed from the Coetmor Quarry tip. The station stimulated expansion at this end of the town, including residential streets, which also demanded a new chapel, Capel Bethania, built in 1885 (fig 9).

There was little reason for new development in the decades after 1900. A protracted industrial dispute over unionisation led to the closure of the quarry between 1900 and 1903, by which time many people had left Bethesda to search for work elsewhere, and some customers had sourced their slates from other quarries. Although the quarry re-opened it was now in a period of decline. Pantdreiniog Quarry closed in 1911. By the 1930s new developments were in council houses, and included Adwy'r Nant (1932-34) and Braichmelyn.

Post-war development has largely been confined to northern side of the town, and previously undeveloped farmland between the town centre and Braichmelyn. The former Pantdreiniog Quarry and its waste tips have been landscaped, but have not been built upon.



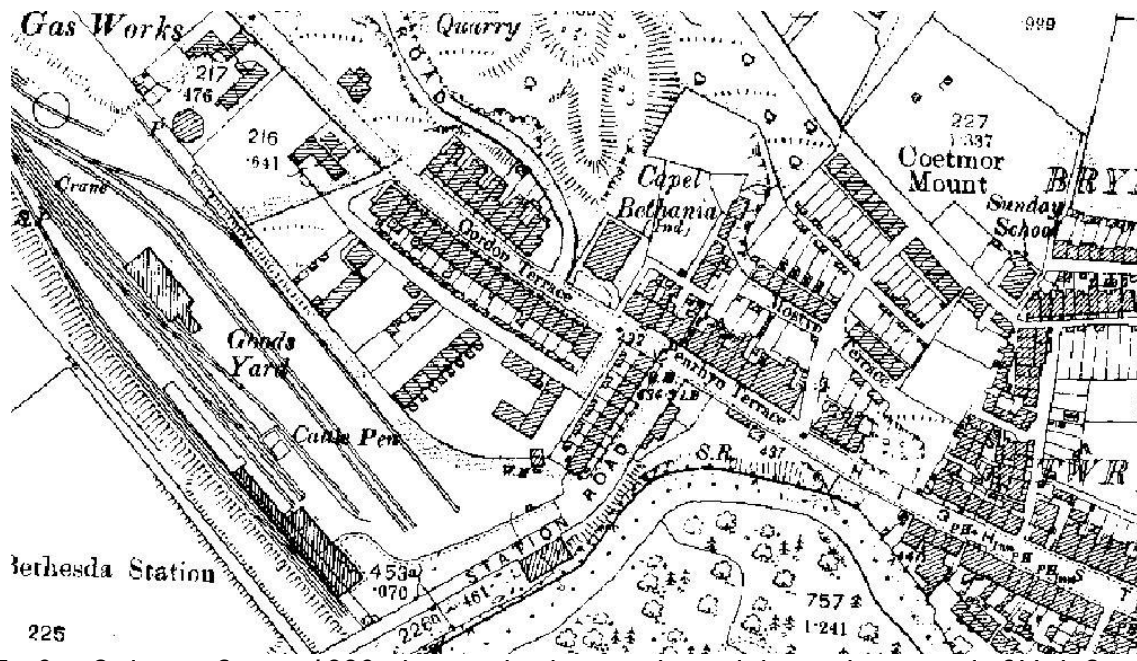


Fig 9 Ordnance Survey, 1889, showing development beyond the north-west end of High Street, mainly following the opening of the railway in 1884.

## 4 The character of building

### 4.1 Building style and detail

Bethesda was built on a landscape of small farms, evidence for which is the scattered remnants of field walls and surviving farmhouses at Abercaseg and Pant-Ffrydlas, both of which are two-storey, double-fronted farmhouses with sash windows and openings offset to the side (fig 10). These small Georgian-style farmhouses provide an instructive contrast with the earliest industrial housing, which is humbler, based on vernacular tradition and therefore of a more conservative design.



Fig 10 Pant-Ffrydlas farmhouse, built of rubble field stone but with quarried slate lintels, and replacement sash windows.





*Fig 11 Single-storey cottages, Braichmelyn. These represent the earliest type of industrial housing. Garden walls and porches are a later addition.*



*Fig 12 Caerberllan, built by 1840, with communal access path and gardens at the front instead of the rear. These gardens originally had stone-built coal bunkers.*



Industrial housing from the 1830s to the 1890s is a story of progress, but it also reveals an emerging social hierarchy, fostered perhaps by differentiation in the quality of housing. The earliest type of industrial housing is the single-storey cottage, sometimes with an attic sleeping space, or *croglofft*, which was built singly or in pairs and is found alongside some of the pre-industrial roads. It has a clear origin in the regional vernacular tradition. The greatest concentration of them is at Braichmelyn, where a line of cottages is on the old road from Pont Twr to Llanllechid (fig 11). Many houses had been built here by 1840 but not in a single building programme. The cottages were built individually, or are grouped in pairs or short rows. A separate row, Caerberllan, was also built, with access by path rather than road across the front of the cottages, and gardens also in front (fig 12). This line of twelve houses is transitional between rural and industrial housing types. Another example is Frondeg, a short, much altered row on Pant Road.

Larger two-storey houses became the norm after 1850, the smaller of which are single-fronted, with a double-depth plan. The principal distinction in these houses is whether there are one or two windows in the first floor, but there are also variations in width and height. Houses built along existing roads are in groups, usually between two and four, but there are also longer terraces.

The relationship of house to street is an important component of industrial housing. On the east side of the former Pantdreiniog Quarry is a grid of streets – Water Street, Middle Street, Brynteg Street – where houses open directly on to a narrow street, with a rear garden on the hillside behind. In Bryntirion and on Carneddi Road there are also terraced houses opening on to the street (fig 13). Most houses, however, are set back behind small front gardens, which have low stone walls, often with iron railings (fig 14). Communal access paths, already noted at Caerberllan, continued until the 1860s, when the estate at Gerlan was laid out. In Gerlan the terraces are built along the contour and have pathways to the front, as well as narrow access courts to the back (fig 15).



*Fig 13 Houses opening directly on to the street in Bryntirion.*



Fig 14 Houses in Bont Uchaf are set back from the street behind garden walls.

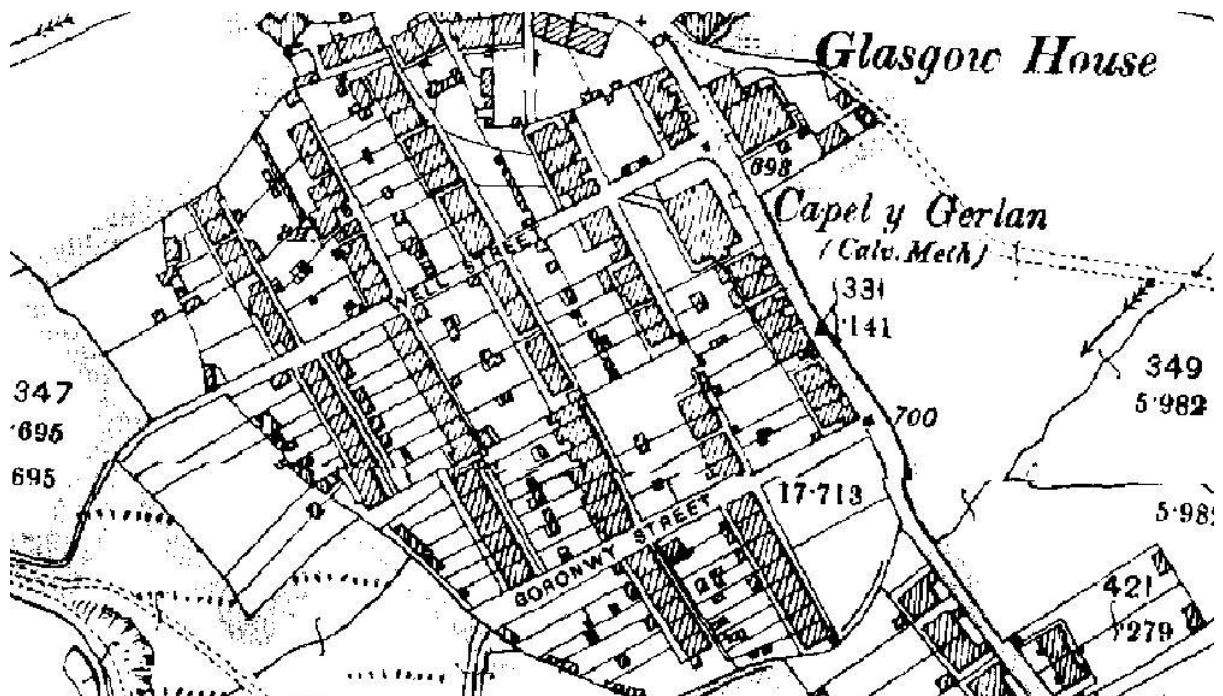


Fig 15 Gerlan in 1889. Houses are reached by communal paths and back courts at right angles to Well Street and Goronwy Street. The gardens are at the front, on the downhill (left in the picture) side of the houses.

Larger houses were built toward the end of the nineteenth century. Three-bay houses were built along Ffrydlas Road and Garneddwen, in a hitherto undeveloped part of the town. Another departure from the norm was the reversion to a self-consciously vernacular form,



best seen in the pairs of houses on Henbarc, which are traditional single-storey cottages, each with an attic sleeping space, or *croglofft*. There are only small numbers of individually built houses in Bethesda, a reflection of the relatively homogeneous social structure of the town (fig 16).



*Fig 16 Llys Llewelyn, an individually built house in Braichmelyn, distinguished by being built of rock-faced quarried stone.*

Original character of the houses has been eroded from the twentieth century onwards. When built, the houses were faced in stone, but many have been pebble-dashed or cement rendered, and there has been widespread replacement of windows and doors. Most windows were originally twelve-pane sashes, with four-pane and two-pane sashes common in the late nineteenth century (fig 16). Sash windows are now a rarity in the town.

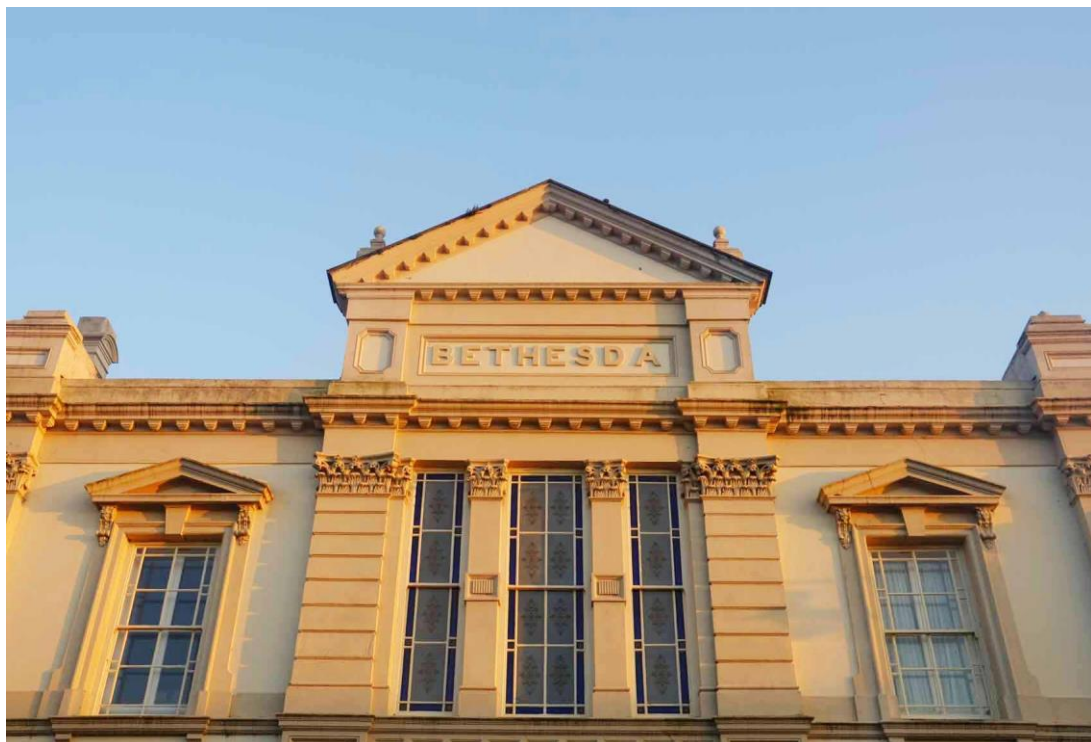
The High Street became the economic and cultural centre of the town and its buildings reflect that status. Church and chapel vie for attention in the town centre. The Gothic church with pointed windows contrasts with the round-headed windows of the chapels, symbolising the rivalry between Anglican and nonconformist. The parish church was built at the expense of Lord Penrhyn, and was designed by the London-based architect T.H. Wyatt. The surviving chapel buildings were also the work of outsiders. Jerusalem and Bethesda were both rebuilt in the 1870s, by Richard Davies of Bangor and Richard Owens of Liverpool (but a native of Caernarfonshire) respectively (figs 17, 18). Bethania was built by the Reverend Thomas Thomas of Landore, Swansea, in 1885 (see fig 28), and completes the



trio of chapels built by specialist chapel architects, and which embody the rising confidence, prosperity and sophistication of the nonconformist community in the late-nineteenth century.



*Fig 17 Capel Jerusalem, set back from the road behind a small park.*



*Fig 18 Capel Bethesda.*





*Fig 19 High Street, a mix of two-storey and three-storey commercial buildings*



*Fig 20 Number 2 Ogwen Terrace, originally a bank, distinguished by the Palladian arrangement of windows in the middle storey, under sandstone lintels and arch.*

The economic infrastructure of the town is represented by its commercial buildings. Inns and public houses, all of which are on the south-west side of High Street, originate from the period when the Holyhead Road was a major transport route (fig 19). The Douglas Arms is the only freestanding building, and boasts a classical portico. Other public houses, including the Victoria and Kings Head, are two storey buildings, but there are also numerous three-storey buildings on the High Street. Ogwen Terrace, begun in 1853, is architecturally the most ambitious and perhaps the earliest of them. Built on a curving line, the individual houses always differed in their style. Some have hood moulds over the windows, while Number 2, originally a bank, is faced in blocks of cut slate and features a first-floor Palladian window (fig 20). Many of the buildings in High Street belong to the second half of the nineteenth century and incorporate contemporary shop fronts in the lower storey.

#### 4.2 Building materials

Building materials make an important contribution to the character of the town, and the majority of them were derived from local sources. Field stone is used for boundary walls, some of which were originally field walls, and for some houses (see fig 10), but most of the buildings in Bethesda are built of quarried stone (fig 21). This, however, can differ considerably. There are houses built of large blocks and other houses of small blocks of stone, although usually laid in regular courses. Few of the buildings have arched openings, the preference instead being for large lintels, often of slate blocks.



*Fig 21 Most of Bethesda's houses, like this pair on Penybryn Road are built of quarried stone laid in rough courses. The copings of the gate piers are of small pieces of quartz, which was a by-product of slate quarrying.*





*Fig 22 Roofs on Penybryn Terrace have slates of different sizes, the left side having been re-roofed.*

Locally quarried slate is used universally for roofs. Slates are generally laid in even sizes, although the need to renew roofs has meant that in a single street it is sometimes possible to see a house laid with large slates and another with small slates (fig 22). Shaped slates appear only rarely, for example to decorate the roofs of porches (fig 23).



*Fig 23 Shaped slates are uncommon, but are used here for picturesque effect on a wooden porch.*

Slate has many other uses, however, especially in slab form, and provides some of the most distinctive local characteristics. Slabs are used as paving, as the treads for garden steps, and set upright in lines to form fences between gardens, or to line paths, a practice with a clear rural origin (fig 24). Slabs are used to roof the porch canopies over front doors, and occasionally to roof ancillary structures like coal bunkers (fig 25). The most striking use of sawn slate is for gabled porches, which characteristically have ogee or cusped arches, some of which retain elaborate sawn-slate crestring (fig 26). The most common use of sawn slate is for gate piers. Quartz was a by-product of slate quarrying and is used occasionally in the late-nineteenth century for the coping courses of rubble-stone gate piers (see fig 21).



*Fig 24 Slate paving slabs and gate piers.*



*Fig 25 Slate-slab roof on a bracketed porch canopy.*





*Fig 26 Slate porch details.*



*Fig 27 The roughcast front of the Victoria Hotel, with smooth-rendered architraves and raised letters.*

Non-local stone was an important status marker for places of worship and other prestigious buildings. The parish church is built of green rubble stone from North Wales and has sandstone dressings. Sandstone dressings were also used for Capel Bethania. The war memorial is of dressed limestone.

Not all buildings were originally faced in stone. Commercial buildings, chapels and schools were traditionally faced in roughcast, examples of which are Jerusalem and Bethesda chapels. Public houses are likewise rendered, often embellished with smooth-rendered architraves (fig 27). This practice was popular in the early twentieth century but was superseded by pebble-dash walls.

Brick is most prevalent at the north end of the High Street, in buildings close to and erected after the opening of the railway in 1884. Some brick fronts are now concealed by render, such as Rhes Penrhyn, but the most striking examples of brick include Capel Bethania and Tai'r Eglwys (fig 28).

Since the late twentieth century slate has enjoyed a revival as a building material. Most of this is in the form of garden walls, but it is also used as the retaining walls around Llys Dafydd in the centre of town, an example of how slate is important to local identity (fig 29).



*Fig 28 Capel Bethania was built of bright-red Ruabon brick, with sandstone dressings, and therefore of non-local materials.*





*Fig 29 Slate remains an important local building material, used here for the retaining walls of Llys Dafydd in the centre of the town.*

#### *4.3 Topography*

Bethesda is built on a west-facing hillside above the Ogwen river. Most of its houses are built along the contour, and look westwards, where Penrhyn Quarry dominates the landscape (fig 30). The setting of Penrhyn Quarry is enhanced by the presence of the town on the opposite side of the valley, and vice versa.



*Fig 30 The backdrop to these houses in Brynteg is the Penrhyn Quarry and the snow-capped mountains.*

It has already been noted that the pattern of settlement was determined to a large extent by pre-industrial roads. However, new roads were also constructed, such as Penybryn Road in the 1850s, to connect emerging residential areas with the town centre. Pathways contribute much to the character of Bethesda, often taking a steep course directly uphill, and were established by informal use (fig 31). Most of these pathways have been laid with tarmac, but in places traces of earlier cobbles are visible.



*Fig 31 Path below the Gerlan estate, lined with slate fences.*

Pantdreiniog Quarry has had a long-term impact on the landscape of the town. Its tips were ranged on the downhill side of the quarry, extending almost as far as the High Street and inhibiting the expansion of the town.

#### *4.4 Cultural history*

Bethesda is a Welsh-speaking town. In the 1871 census only thirty-two of its 3252 inhabitants were born outside of Wales. Official attempts to promote English as the language of progress in the nineteenth and into the twentieth century are a well-documented aspect of Welsh cultural history. Evidence of it is visible throughout the town, where street signs and tablets on buildings invariably use the English language (fig 32). Welsh is confined to tablets on chapels, and to the war memorial, commissioned locally, although even here it is notable that the 1939-45 roll call defers to English street names (fig 33).



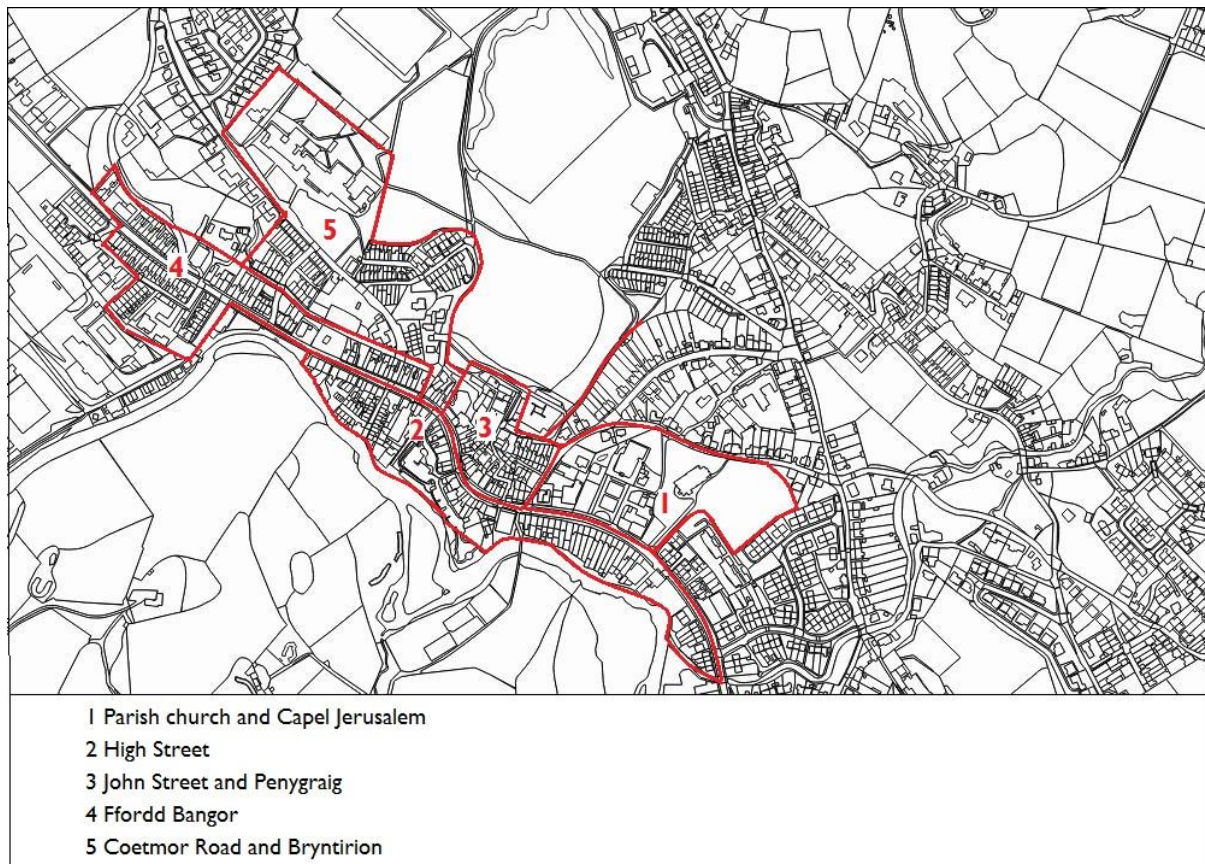


Fig 32 Although Welsh was overwhelmingly the language of its inhabitants, signs on nineteenth-century buildings were written in English.



Fig 33 Bethesda's war memorial, organised locally, is inscribed in Welsh.

## 5 Character areas



*Fig 34 Character areas in the centre of Bethesda.*

### 5.1 Parish church and Capel Jerusalem

The church and the town's largest chapel are on land that was developed on the fringe of the town that emerged on the former Cefn Faes estate, beginning with Capel Jerusalem in 1842, beside which is a former school of the 1850s (fig 34). The church was built on the adjacent plot.

This area is part of the linear development of the High Street, and places of worship dominate its character (fig 35). It has become the focal point of the town, partly because church and chapel are the most prominent of the town's buildings, but also because the chapel is set back from the road behind a small park (see fig 17). It was here that the war memorial was erected in 1923 (fig 36). Slate gravestones in the churchyard are a distinguishing characteristic of the region.

There has been some loss of historic character, derived mainly from the loss of the former National School which faced High Street. The site has been redeveloped for housing, beyond which is Tai'r Eglwys, a row of four brick houses built in the 1880s.





Fig 35 Christ Church, 1855-56, by T.H. Wyatt. Slate gravestones are a characteristic feature of the region.



Fig 36 Bethesda war memorial, a Cenotaph-type memorial by R.J. Hughes of Llanfairfechan, constructed of dressed limestone.

## 5.2 High Street

High Street is the commercial centre of Bethesda and emerged from the 1820s on the north side of Capel Bethesda (fig 34). Two-storey buildings, well represented by the King's Head and Victoria Hotels, represent the earliest phase of surviving buildings, following which three-storey buildings became the norm in the second half of the nineteenth century, many with contemporary shop fronts (fig 37 and see fig 19). Some of the three-storey buildings probably replaced earlier small houses. Ogwen Terrace, the most ambitious development, was built as a mixture of residential and commercial properties on a curving line. The character of the row has been diminished by the loss of original detail in some of the houses. Capel Bethesda stands amid the commercial buildings, opening directly on to the street, a sign of its early origin.

Land between High Street and the river had been developed by 1889. This area includes Ogwen Street and Glanafon Street, the latter with single-fronted terraced houses opening on to the street, and a small lock-up. This area is notably poorer than the High Street.



*Fig 37 Three-storey commercial buildings on the High Street, some of which were originally rendered. The shop fronts are mainly of the late-nineteenth century.*

## 5.3 John Street and Penygraig

On the north side of High Street was a small area of steep ground below the Pantdreiniog Quarry tip, on which narrow lanes developed where individual and pairs of houses were built in the 1850s (fig 34). On the east side was the former Capel Tabernacl, which has been demolished, but uphill of which Tabernacle Terrace has survived, a row of eight houses.

At the downhill end, facing High Street, are some of the earliest surviving houses on High Street, including a pair of two-storey houses on a rocky prominence (fig 38).





*Fig 38 The earliest type of houses facing the High Street belong with Penygraig and John Street immediately behind.*



*Fig 39 10-11 John Street, are unusual in sharing a hipped roof, and for retaining sash windows.*

The essential character of this area is its cramped and informal pattern of settlement, reached by narrow winding lanes and paths on a steep site (fig 39 and see fig 5). The relatively humble two-storey and single-storey houses contrast with the commercial properties on High Street, and with the more planned development at Brynteg.

#### 5.4 Ffordd Bangor

The opening of a railway station at the north end of the town in 1884 appears to have stimulated development of this part of the town (fig 34 and see fig 9). It includes commercial buildings on Victoria Terrace, a large three-storey block known as Penrhyn Terrace, and other two-storey houses. Although now largely pebble-dashed or rendered, most of the buildings in this part of the town were constructed of brick. The best example is the landmark building at the north end of the town, Capel Bethania, built of striking bright red Ruabon brick (see fig 28).



*Fig 40 Gordon Terrace / Rhes Gordon, dated 1885, is a superior row of houses notable for the use of broken pieces of stone laid in a crazed pattern, and for the continuous veranda on cast-iron posts, a self-consciously non-local design.*

Gordon Terrace is dated 1885, and is faced in rubble stone in a crazed pattern, and has a continuous veranda on cast-iron posts (fig 40). Opposite is Elfed Terrace of 1898. Both are set behind front gardens, are entirely residential in character, and mark a decisive end to the commercial buildings on the High Street. Both Gordon Terrace and Elfed Terrace are designated as Conservation Areas. Behind Gordon Terrace there are nineteenth-century terraced houses, but the station and railway have been redeveloped.



### 5.5 Coetmor Road and Bryntirion

This is a character area of nineteenth-century terraced houses built uphill of High Street and on the west side of the Pantdreiniog slate quarry tip (fig 34). Early development is shown on the 1854 map of Bethesda (fig 4), but the encroachment of Pantdreiniog tip changed the character of the landscape and cut off the road between Bryntirion and Penybryn Farm. Most of the extant houses were built in the period 1854 and 1889, and Coetmor Road was cut across this area between 1900 and 1907, when Cefn Faes school was built. There are also modern houses.

Steep pathways, linking with High Street, are a feature of this area (fig 41). The houses are pebble-dashed and there has been much window and door replacement (fig 42). On a steep hill, most of the houses face westwards over the valley. The dominant buildings are the two schools, Ysgol Cefn Faes and Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen. Further uphill to the north and west are post 1945 housing developments.



Fig 41 A steep pathway leading down from Coetmor to High Street.

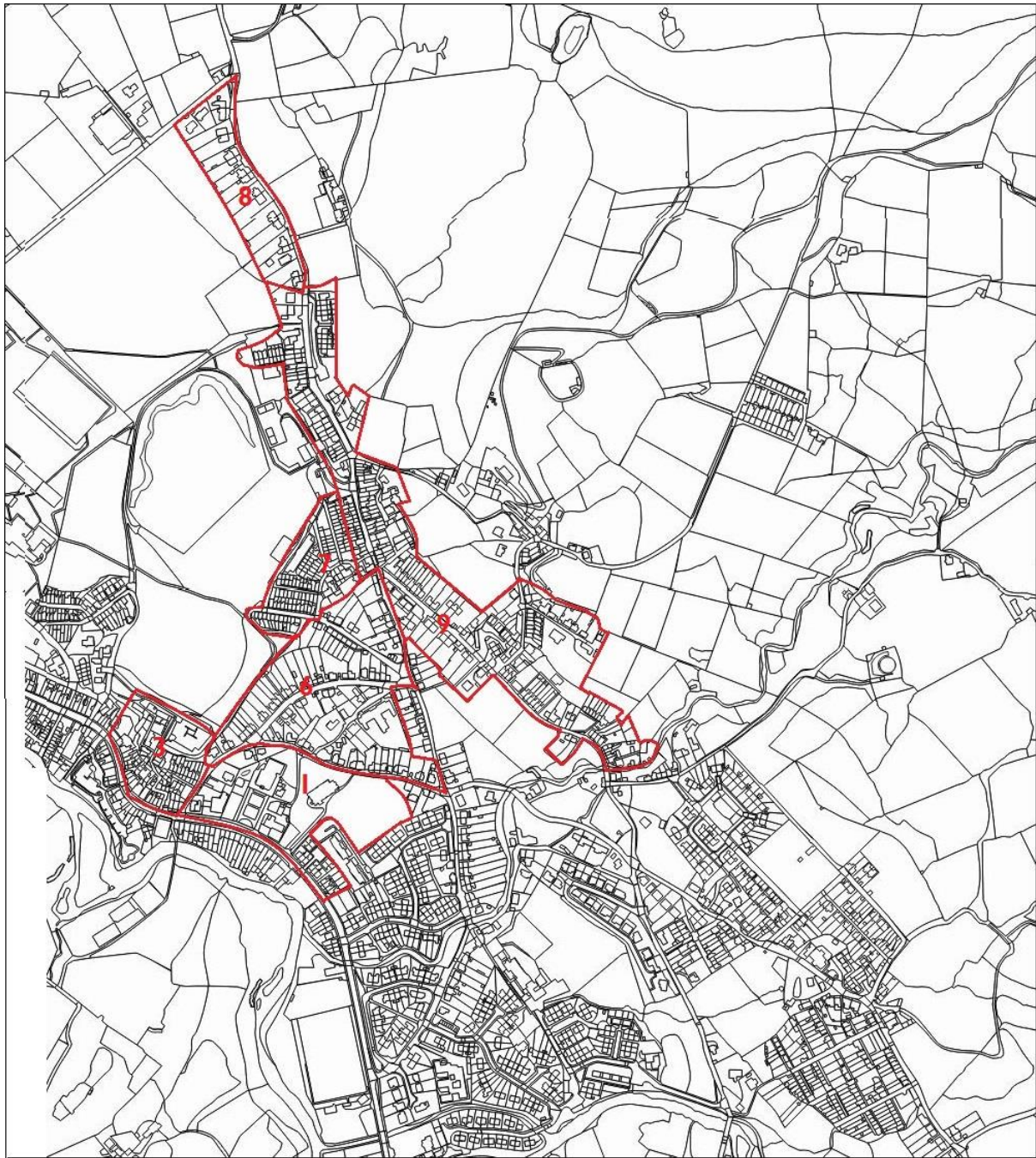


*Fig 42 Houses in Bryntirion, now pebble-dashed and/or rendered, some with added porches.*

### 5.6 Penybryn

Land on Penybryn Farm was developed in the 1850s, when Penybryn Road was created. The houses on Penybryn Road, Pant Glas Road and Cefnfaes Street are piecemeal developments, in short rows, mainly of two or four houses and set back from the street behind small gardens (figs 43, 44). The houses are generally more spacious than most of the houses in Bethesda, and are built of rubble stone, often in large blocks, under slate roofs. Sections of field wall have survived. Ysgol Penybryn, a roughcast two-storey school was built on the site of Penybryn Farm after 1914.





- 1 Parish church and Capel Jerusalem
- 3 John Street and Penygraig
- 6 Penybryn
- 7 Brynteg
- 8 Hen Barc
- 9 Carneddi Road, Cilfodan Street and Bont Uchaf

*Fig 43 Character areas on the north side of Bethesda.*





*Fig 44 Houses in Penybryn Road are mostly of quarried stone in large blocks, and built either in pairs or rows of four.*



*Fig 45 Water Street, in which single-fronted houses open to a narrow street, with gardens on steep ground behind.*

### *5.7 Brynteg*

Brynteg was developed probably in the 1860s (the chapel was dated 1864) on the east side of Pantdreiniog Quarry. This area originally consisted of three blocks of parallel streets oriented at different angles owing to the slope of the ground. One long row of houses known as Cilfodan Street has been demolished, probably with the landscaping of the former Pantdreiniog Quarry. Brynteg chapel has been altered and so the character of the area is now entirely residential.



There is a more dense pattern of settlement here than on the neighbouring, mainly pre-industrial roads (fig 43). The character of building is of closely-spaced terraced houses fronting narrow streets, probably of no more than the regulation width of 21 feet (fig 45). The houses are pebble-dashed, with slate roofs.

### 5.8 Henbarc

Henbarc is on the north-east edge of Bethesda on the road from Pont Twr to Llanllechid (fig 43). It has houses on the west side of the road that had been built by 1889. These are pairs of single-storey houses built of rubble stone, a self-conscious re-creation of vernacular cottages, but in a larger and picturesque form (fig 46). The *crogloff* is lit by a small window in the gable end, offset to the side of the stack. Many of these houses retain their original stone faces, although there has also been significant loss of character with rendering, enlargements and replacement of windows and doors. The houses are set back behind garden walls, and face fields on the east side of the road.



*Fig 46 Cottages in Henbarc are much altered, but originally were intended as a picturesque revival of the local rural tradition.*

### 5.9 Carneddi Road, Cilfodan Street and Bont Uchaf

This character area follows part the line of the pre-industrial road between Pont Twr and Llanllechid, and part of the road to Gerllan Farm (fig 43). Cottages had been built in places along the line of this road by 1840, and a Calvinistic Methodist chapel was established as early as 1816 (see fig 3). However, the chapel has been demolished and the site redeveloped, and the character of the area is now entirely residential. Most of the houses were built in the period between 1854 and 1889, in the form of terraced housing in rows of up to twelve. The rows of houses are built along the contour lines, and there are steep narrow paths on both sides of the road, connecting with Cilfodan on the upper side and Frydlas Road on the lower side.



*Fig 47 Houses on Cilfodan Street are mainly pebble-dashed, but there has been replacement and some enlargement of original windows and doors.*



*Fig 48 A pair of three-bay houses on Cilfodan Street, on a road where smaller houses predominate, set back behind walls of rubble field stone.*

There is a variety of houses in this character area that indicate social differentiation. Some, perhaps the earliest, open directly to the street, while others are set back behind garden walls (figs 47, 48 and see fig 14). The houses, nearly all of them of two storeys, are mainly pebble-dashed with slate roofs, although there remain some stone-fronted houses which



reveal both roughly-coursed and random-rubble masonry. There are some slate porches in Gothic style. Garden walls are also pebble-dashed, or otherwise rendered or rebuilt, and so make little contribution to the overall character, although there are some remnants of pre-industrial field walls (fig 48).

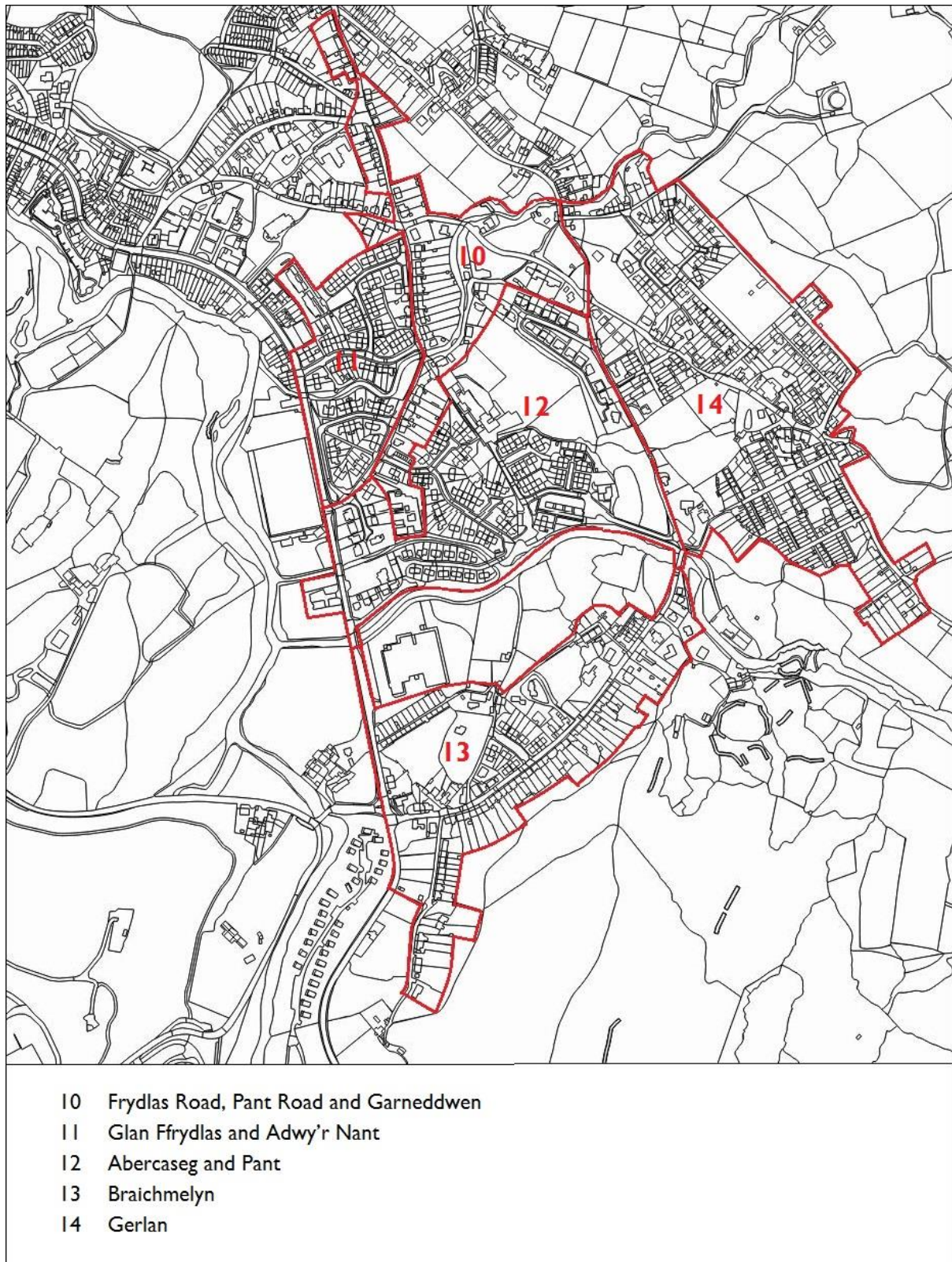


Fig 49 Character areas on the east and south sides of Bethesda.



### 5.10 Frydlas Road, Pant Road and Garneddwen

These three pre-industrial roads form an area of linear development, mainly in the second half of the nineteenth century (fig 49). However, Pant Ffrydlas Farm and an outbuilding have survived (see fig 10). There was little development by 1840, but it included a short row of single-storey houses, Frondeg, on Pant Road, now much altered.

On Garneddwen and Frydlas Road are generally two-storey, three-bay houses of superior quality to most of the housing in Bethesda (fig 50). Many are faced in stone, including some rock-faced masonry and brick dressings. Near the south end is the former vicarage, now Plas Ogwen, surrounded by modern houses.



*Fig 50 Three-bay houses on Frydlas Road, in this example with smooth-rendered architraves, representing a superior class of housing in nineteenth-century Bethesda.*

### 5.11 Glan Ffrydlas and Adwy'r Nant

The earliest council housing was built on a greenfield site south of the church (fig 49). Adwy'r Nant is a small estate of houses bearing date stones of 1932 and 1934, in rows of three to five, and planned in a garden-village style (fig 51). Glan Ffrydlas is slightly later, and is comprised of pairs or groups of four houses. All of these council houses have pebble-dashed walls and are under slate roofs with brick stacks. They introduce a new architectural vocabulary to the town's houses, in the form of hipped roofs on Adwy'r Nant, cross-gabled bays and projecting eaves to Glan Ffrydlas, but they also continue with traditional details such as porch canopies. Although windows and doors have been replaced, this area retains a 1930s character.





*Fig 51 Adwy'r Nant, council houses dated 1934, of pebble-dashed walls, but retaining characteristic bracketed porch canopies.*



*Fig 52 Abercaseg Farmhouse. The slate porch is later, an industrial-era detail on a pre-industrial farmhouse.*



### 5.12 Abercaseg and Pant

Abercaseg and Pant were largely developed in the second half of the twentieth century (fig 49). Its overall character is therefore modern, but it has buildings of special architectural interest, notably Abercaseg Farm and Pont Abercaseg (fig 52). It extends to Holyhead Road, marked by an original milestone, where there is a rubble-stone boundary wall and 1960s Roman-Catholic church.

### 5.13 Braichmelyn

Braichmelyn is part of the old road to Llanllechid from Pont Twr. Owned by the Penrhyn Estate, settlement had begun by 1840 when there were houses along the roadside, and a separate development in Caerberllan. This area has an early industrial character, dominated by single-storey cottages, the earliest and most basic type of industrial housing (see figs 11, 12). The single-storey houses on Braichmelyn are designated as a Conservation Area. There were further developments in the second half of the nineteenth century, when building continued along the road, and James Street was laid out to the south. The latter has both single-storey and two-storey houses. Braichmelyn and Caerberllan share an estate character with details such as bracketed porch canopies with slab roofs, and brick stacks, in both cases probably alterations made to the houses later in the nineteenth century (fig 53). There has been replacement of windows and doors, and the uniformity of the early housing has been eroded by occasional pebble-dash or cement rendering.



Fig 53 Cottage in Braichmelyn. Its openings are offset from centre in vernacular tradition. The slate garden wall and brick stack are later.



Building continued into the early twentieth century. Opposite the early houses in Braichmelyn is a small development of 1930s council housing, among the earliest social housing in Bethesda. These houses have a different architectural vocabulary, in the form of pebble-dashed and brick walls, simple smooth-rendered doorway surrounds with keystones, and hipped roofs. The contrast in standards between the single-storey cottages and the council houses shows the progress made in industrial housing, and the passing of the initiative from landowner to public sector in meeting the town's housing needs.

#### *5.14 Gerlan*

Gerlan is an estate developed from 1865, but with earlier origins around the former Gerllan Farm (fig 49, and see fig 15). Two former chapels, Gerlan and Treflys, have been demolished and Ysgol Gerlan has closed but the building has been retained, a rare example of slate-hanging in Bethesda. Almost all of the buildings are therefore houses. Gerlan is built on a hillside, where individual terraces are laid out along the contour and are progressively stepped up the hill in a manner characteristic of industrial Wales. Pathways are an important part of the character of Gerlan, linking Well Street and Goronwy Street with Abercaseg Road (see fig 31).

There are single-storey cottages at Gerlan Farm and on Gerlan Road (fig 54). Mostly, however there are rows of two-storey houses, characteristically set back from the street behind garden walls or, in the case of Well Street and Goronwy Street, built entirely off the street with a communal access path and rear court.



*Fig 54 Early cottage in Gerlan.*

## **6 Statement of significance**

Bethesda is the urban centre of the Ogwen valley and is one of the small number of North Wales slate-quarry settlements that grew into a town. It owed its existence to the Penrhyn Slate Quarry, on the opposite side of the river, and grew up beside the Holyhead Road where opportunist landowners let land for building. Originally founded by quarrymen and other local people, Bethesda is notable as a self-created settlement named after the principal chapel, a distinction it shares with Bethel, Saron and Carmel.

The pre-industrial landscape of Bethesda has survived in the road network, which includes historic bridges at Pont Twr and Pont Abercaseg, and the farms, including Abercaseg, Pant Ffrydlas and Gerllan. As an industrial town Bethesda is an amalgam of piecemeal and opportunist developments that mirrored the fortunes of local industry. One consequence of that is that Bethesda demonstrates the chronological development of industrial housing in the nineteenth century. In a town made up largely of housing for quarrymen, there are subtle social distinctions, based on scale and relationship to street and to other houses. Its housing stock is built of local materials, and the ingenious use of slate, for example for Gothic-styled storm porches, is a distinguishing local characteristic.

Bethesda became the commercial and cultural centre of the Ogwen Valley, which is demonstrated in its long High Street with nineteenth-century inns and shop fronts, and ambitious chapels and church. It is an integral part of a larger slate-quarrying landscape, its setting complemented by Penrhyn Slate Quarry on the opposite side of the valley.

## **7 Recommendations**

There are already thirty-four listed buildings in Bethesda and four small conservation areas. Although no undesignated buildings were identified that could be recommended for listed-building status, there is scope for extending the coverage of Conservation Areas in Bethesda.

However, there are challenges identifying suitable areas. Loss of character is an issue in a town where most of the buildings are houses in which windows and doors have been replaced, and where the uniformity of rows has been eroded by a variety of modern surface treatments to walls. Inevitably there have also been some losses of buildings that have diminished historic character, the most important of which are the chapels. In many cases former chapel sites have been re-developed. Two town-centre chapels, Tabernacle and Siloam, are the most significant losses, as they had made a major contribution to the historic character of the town centre. Outlying chapels include Salem on Carneddi Road, Carneddi, Treflys and Gerllan, all of which were landmark buildings in their localities but have been demolished. Brynteg has been poorly converted. The loss of these is significant because the setting of chapel amid industrial housing is an essential characteristic of Welsh industrial settlements.

There is scope for extending the Braichmelyn Conservation Area to include houses in James Street. James Street has a variety of houses, both single-storey and two-storey, built in rows, pairs and occasionally singly, some of which retain early detail, including slate porches (fig 55). Development along the road appears to have been piecemeal, similar to but later than Braichmelyn itself, and with a greater variety of house types.





Fig 55 Architectural detail in James Street

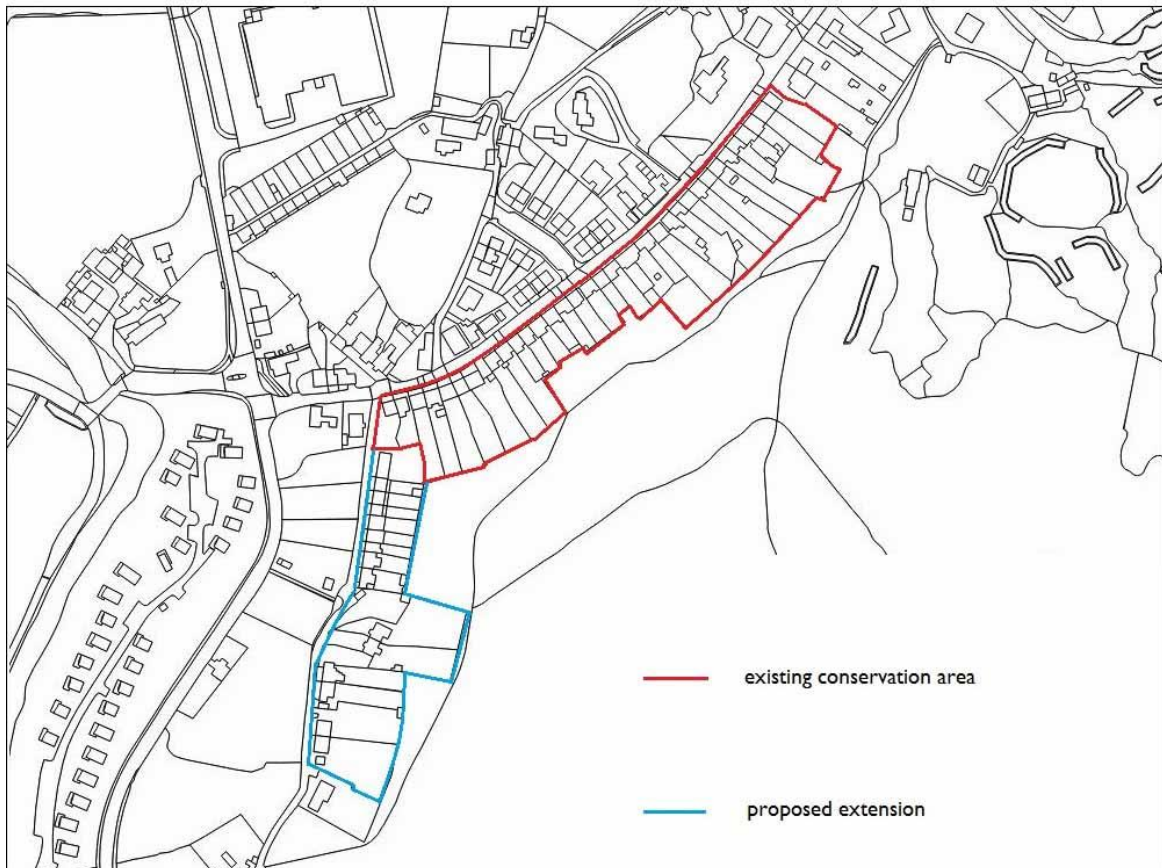
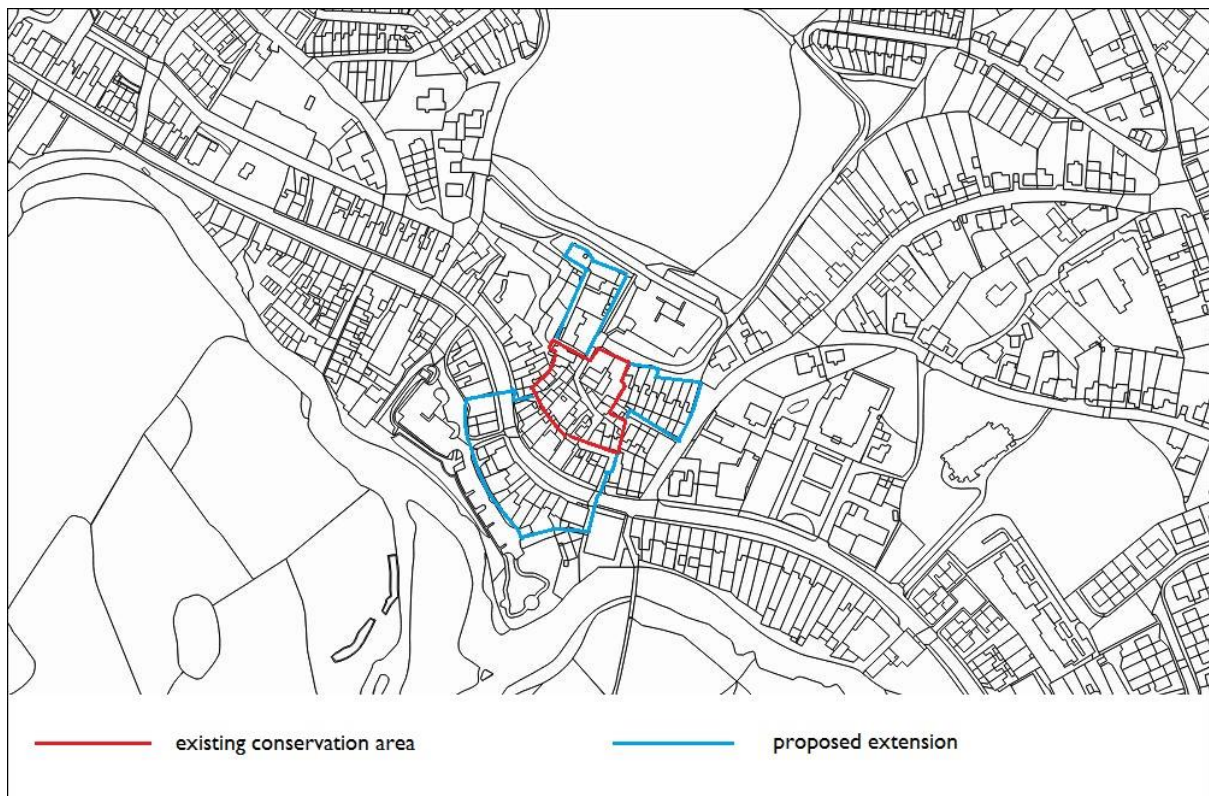


Fig 56 Braichmelyn Conservation Area and proposed extension.

The Lon y Graig Conservation Area covers a tight selection of the buildings on the north side of the High Street. This could be extended to include all of the area between the High Street and the former tip of Pantdreiniog Quarry (fig 57). It could also be extended to include Tabernacle Terrace, although not the site of the chapel itself, which has been redeveloped. Tabernacle Terrace is on the east side of the Lon y Graig Conservation Area and was built on a constricted site west of Penybryn Road. On the High Street, opposite

Lon y Graig, are three-storey commercial buildings, some of which retain nineteenth-century shop fronts and sash windows, and one, a former bank, retains a rusticated lower storey (see figs 19, 37). These buildings should also be considered for addition to the existing Conservation Area.



*Fig 57 Lon y Graig Conservation Area and proposed extension.*



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XM/55/31, agreement with John Robert Jones, quarryman, regarding land for building at Penybryn Farm, 1856.

XS3270/3, photograph of High Street, early twentieth century.

XS3270/5, photograph of Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen.

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National Monuments Record, RCAHM Wales, online at <http://coflein.gov.uk/>



## Appendix I: designated heritage assets in Bethesda

Listed buildings	Listed building reference number	Grade
Capel Bethania	18384	II
The Victoria Hotel	18385	II
The King's Head Inn	18417	II
11 John Street	18415	II
10 John Street	18414	II
18 Penybryn Road	18416	II
16 Penybryn Road	18409	II
Capel Jerusalem	18387	I
Christ Church	18388	II
Capel Bethesda	4145	II
1 Ogwen Terrace	18389	II
2 Ogwen Terrace	18390	II
8 Ogwen Terrace	18391	II
10 Ogwen Terrace	18392	II
War memorial and surrounding wall	18386	II
17 Ogwen Terrace	18393	II
22 Ogwen Terrace	18394	II
Douglas Arms Hotel including railings	18395	II
Milestone by Bethesda Football Club	18379	II
Pont y Caseg	18380	II
Abercaseg Farmhouse	18381	II
Pont Abercaseg	18382	II

1 Cae'rberllan	18401	II
2 Cae'rberllan	18402	II
3 Cae'rberllan	18403	II
4 Cae'rberllan	18404	II
5 Cae'rberllan	18405	II
6 Cae'rberllan	18406	II
7 Cae'rberllan	18407	II
8 Cae'rberllan	18408	II
9 Cae'rberllan	18410	II
10 Cae'rberllan	18411	II
11 Cae'rberllan	18412	II
12 Cae'rberllan	18413	II

<b>Conservation Areas</b>	
Rhes Gordon / Gordon Terrace	fig 59
Rhes Elfed / Elfed Terrace	fig 59
Lon y Graig	fig 57
Braichmelyn	fig 56



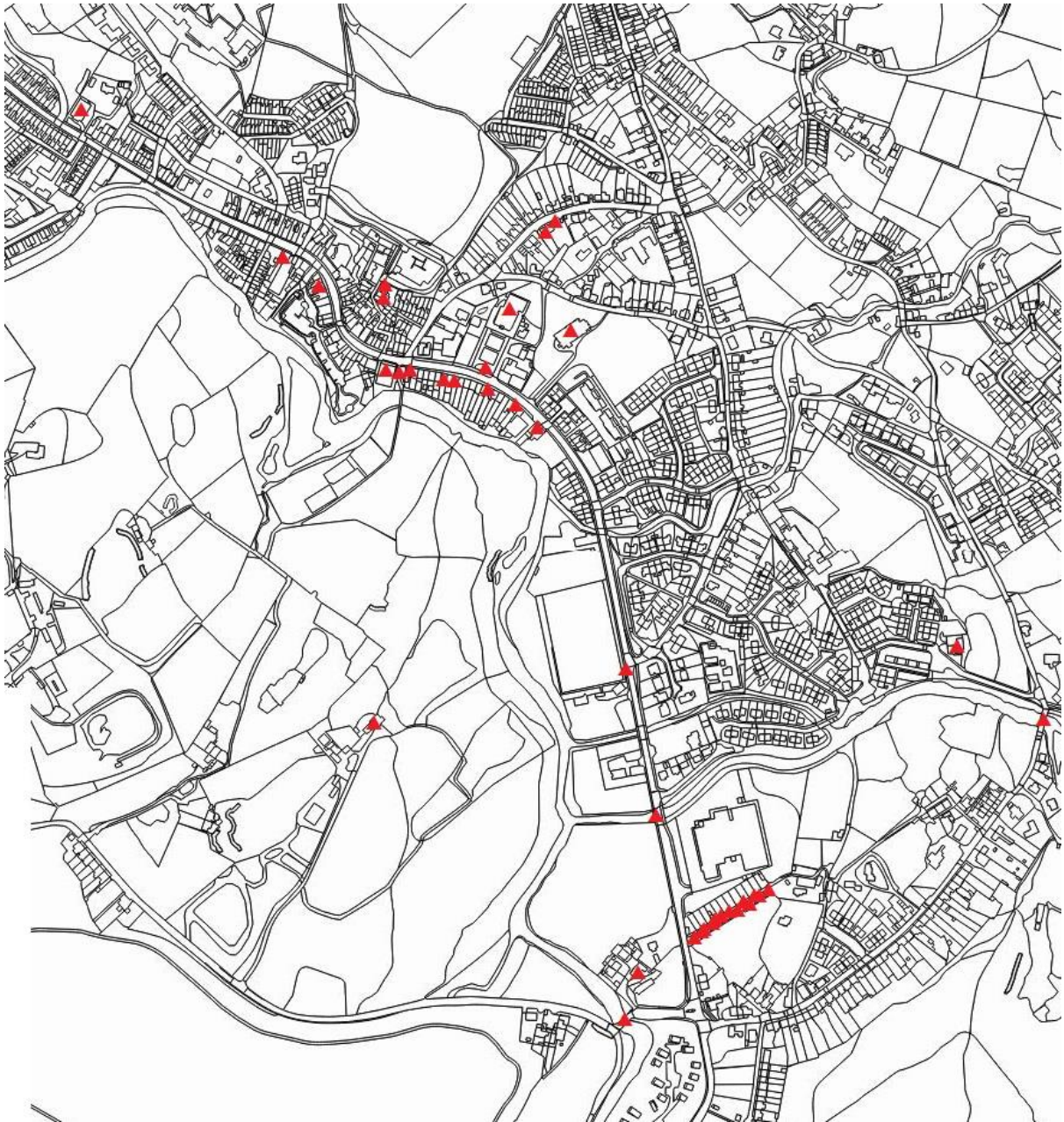
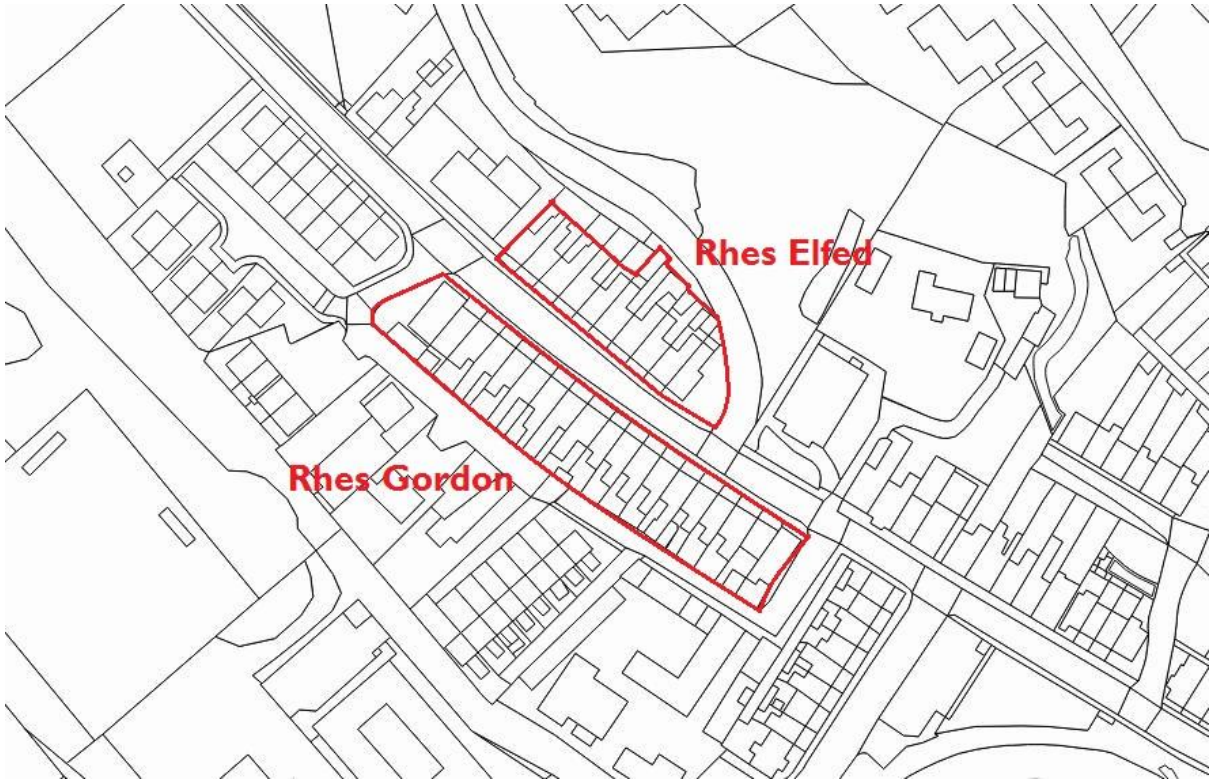


Fig 58 Listed buildings in Bethesda.



*Fig 59 Rhes Gordon and Rhes Elfed Conservation Areas*