Pontypool:
Understanding Urban Character

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Aims of the Study

Historic character lies at the heart of local distinctiveness and sense of place. No two places share a history, so every place has a unique historic character, which is a powerful asset in regeneration. Responding to local character is an important objective of good design; sustaining it can bring social, economic and environmental benefits.

Urban characterization is a tool that can help us use historic character to create sustainable and distinctive places for the future. It aims to describe and explain the historic character of towns, to give a focus to local distinctiveness and help realise the full value of the historic environment. It seeks to inform and support positive planning, regeneration, and conservation programmes, help improve the quality of planning advice, and contribute to local interpretation and education strategies.

Urban characterization defines the unique historic character of individual towns, and identifies the variety of character within them. It looks at the history of a town and identifies its expression in patterns of space and connection and in traditions of building, which are the fundamental ingredients of historic character.

The purpose of this study is threefold: it is intended to contribute to a Townscape Heritage Initiative for the town centre; to inform emerging proposals for broader regeneration in Pontypool; and to offer support for policies in the Local Development Plan, which are intended to sustain local distinctiveness. The study area has been defined to provide specific support for work in the town centre and its immediate environs, whilst also setting out a context for physical regeneration activity and planning in the wider settlement area.

Different epochs of commercial building in the town centre (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Historical Background

Founded on Iron: The Industrial History of Pontypool

'The situation of Pont y Pool, near a region rich in mineral treasures, in the midst of forges and collieries, and at the head of the canal, render it peculiarly commodious for the establishment of iron manufactories; and perhaps another generation may see a new Birmingham start up in the wilds of Monmouthshire.' [1]

'...the town now derives its consequence from the mineral treasures abounding in the surrounding country. Immense quantities of iron ore and coal being found in the neighbourhood, and there are also no fewer than 13 iron furnaces, besides tin-works, forges etc, within about five miles of the town.' [2]

Pontypool has a particular claim to fame in the industrial history of Wales, as perhaps its first industrial town and the first centre for the production of tin-coated iron sheets in the country. Development began in the late seventeenth century, but the area was already established as an industrial centre associated with the iron industry by the sixteenth century. There are documentary references to a bloomery furnace at Pontymoile in the early fifteenth century.

Pontypool lies in the valley of the Afon Llwyd, which was rich in natural resources for iron production. Charcoal, coal and iron ore were available in abundance, and the river and its tributaries provided water power. Technological developments in the sixteenth century, notably the introduction of the blast furnace, enabled these resources to be exploited for larger-scale production by enterprising individuals. They leased land not only to construct furnaces, but also to extract the raw materials for iron production and the fuel to feed the furnaces.

One of the first blast furnaces in Wales was established at Monkswood (between Pontypool and Usk) in 1536. In the decades that followed, a cluster of furnaces was established in the vicinity of Pontypool by several entrepreneurs. One of these was Richard Hanbury from Worcestershire who ran a furnace at Cwmffrwdoer from about 1579, and had assumed control over a furnace at Abercarn in the Ebbw Valley later in the century. A furnace at Pontymoile (within what is now Pontypool Park) was established in about 1575–76 by John Truve, but was a Hanbury enterprise by the late seventeenth century. Another furnace near Trosnant ('Old Furnace' on modern maps) was leased to John Hanbury in 1698. [3]

The conversion of cast iron into wrought iron took place in forges, which were established close to the furnaces. Pontymoile ironworks included a forge as well as a furnace, which operated until about 1831 when it was shut down as part of a programme of improvements at Pontypool Park. By about 1577, Town Forge was probably also in existence, immediately below the bridge close to the present town centre. There is a detailed plan of the site made in 1834, but it closed down not long afterwards and its site was a park or gardens by 1881. [4] Osborne Forge, just below the bridge at Pontnewynydd, was probably at least as old as the other two; it made Osmond or Osborn iron, which was prized for its exceptional quality. [5] Later, New Forge was established immediately east of the town centre and to the north of the bridge. It became known as Town Forge following the closure of the original Town Forge below the bridge, and it remained in operation until the 1950s.

These enterprises depended on a reliable supply of raw materials derived from substantial landholdings. It has been estimated that a large charcoal-fired blast furnace needed about 7,000 acres (2,832.8 hectares) of woodland, and a forge 6,000 acres (2,428.11 hectares). Richard Hanbury acquired large areas of woodland; by 1576 he also had rights to iron ore and coal over 800 acres (323.74 hectares) around Pontymoile, Mynyddislwyn and Panteg, as well as rights to iron ore over an extensive acreage in the lordship of Abergavenny (Blaenavon area). The Hanbury family also worked coal at Lower Race, Cwmlickey and Blaendare from the seventeenth

century. Coal became an increasingly important part of the local economy as it supplanted charcoal as the fuel for the iron industry. [6]

The first specific reference, by name, to activity at Pontypool comes in 1665, when Capel Hanbury leased 'a parcel of waste called Pontypoole, together with the forge thereon'. This was probably the ironworks that was sited within what became the park, and it was either Capel or his son, Major John Hanbury, who built Pontypool Park House. Major Hanbury had established the first rolling mill for the production of black plate in the park by 1697. By about 1706, the production of tinplate had also commenced. [7] By 1728 a new rolling mill had been built at Pontyfelin (the site of the Panteg Steelworks) to supply a tin mill at Pontymoile; this was probably the first place in Britain capable of manufacturing viable quantities of tinplate. The site of this tin mill was probably at Old Estate Yard. Other tinworks were soon established elsewhere in the town, including substantial works at Lower Mill and another south-west of the bridge at Pontymoile (established in 1806, and later known as the Pontymoile Tinworks). [8]

Pontypool Park, as depicted in about 1860 (The National Library of Wales).

Above: Long-lost buildings traditionally thought to be associated with the japanning industry (Torfaen Museum Trust Collection).

Right: Traces of industrial activity still line the river banks (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

The flat valley floor was only developed for housing relatively recently, once industrial activity had ceased (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

During the eighteenth century, other centres of iron production developed elsewhere (Merthyr, Bersham, and later Blaenavon), but Pontypool had consolidated an important specialist role in the production of tinplate. [9] By 1732, a particular method of treating the metal plate, resulting in a lacquered finish that was highly prized, had been developed. The process was called japanning, and it was first developed by Thomas Allgood and taken up by his son Edward, who commenced large-scale production in 1732. There is some doubt as to the exact location of the early japan works. Tradition has it that the first site was a house in Trosnant at the back of The Star Inn, now long demolished. Another tradition suggests that the Allgoods also had japanning premises at West Place, to the rear of Crane Street (there is a drawing of it dated 1871). Nichols writes of large-scale demolition at the top of Crane Street in about 1970, which exposed a row of possible kilns, but they were not recorded. [10] Another site associated with japanning was on Lower Crane Street, which was known as Japan Street in 1836.

Production of japanware had diminished by the early nineteenth century (the Allgoods' factory closed in 1817) and, by 1858, was 'totally extinct and the town now entirely depends upon the iron and coal works, and manufacturing tinplate, boilerplate, and rail for railways. These branches are carried on extensively within a radius of eight miles from the town'. [11] The heavier industries came to dominate the local economy during the nineteenth century. They were supported by the large-scale exploitation of raw materials (including coal) within the hinterland of the town.

Much of this industrial base collapsed during the twentieth century, and there are now only scant remains directly associated with the industries that had underpinned the town. Nonetheless, there remain many reminders of industry in the topography of the area: the river and its tributary streams were managed as a source of power and, although many watercourses have disappeared, the river banks are still lined with substantial remnants of industrial activity. The pattern of settlement itself reflects historic land use. The valley floor was the valuable land for specialist production and distribution — it is only in modern times that other development has moved in to occupy the space left behind as industry moved out.

Above: The bridge in Pontypool, drawn by G. Samuel and engraved by J. Walker in 1801 (The National Library of Wales).

Opposite: The eighteenth-century market hall is probably the oldest surviving building in the town centre (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

The Growth of Urban Settlement

'One of the most singular and irregularly built towns in the kingdom.' [12]

Origins and Early Growth

Industrial activity encouraged the growth of settlement in the valley, in which scattered farmsteads were supplemented with clusters of dwellings. The hamlets of Pontymoile and Trosnant were probably amongst the early focal points, but it was probably the decision of the Hanburys to invest in the area of Pontypool itself that encouraged the development of a fully-fledged town here. All we know of this particular location before the late sixteenth century is that there was a river crossing here — there is a reference to a bridge called Pont Poell in a document of 1490. [13]

The early history of the town is elusive, but by the late seventeenth century aspiring urban status was rewarded by a successful petition for the

establishment of a market — a Saturday market and three annual fairs were granted by the Crown in 1690. The market building was provided in 1730 by Frances Bray, whose family were lords of the manor of Wentsland and Bryngwyn, and who had extensive landholdings west of the river. It was also in this period that the Hanbury family established Pontypool Park as their permanent residence. This, together with the development of new works in the vicinity, probably provided further stimulus for urban development.

Pontypool had become 'a little compact town' by 1756. The author of this description attributed its development to the Hanbury family's ironworks. He also noted that 'the houses and buildings belonging to this manufacture are scattered and extend far above a mile along the river', implying perhaps that the town itself was already something of a focal point in an otherwise scattered settlement pattern. [14] By this time, too, the status of the town was well marked by the market and assembly rooms, which had been established in 1731. Pontypool was by now developing a role as a commercial and social focal point for the wider area.
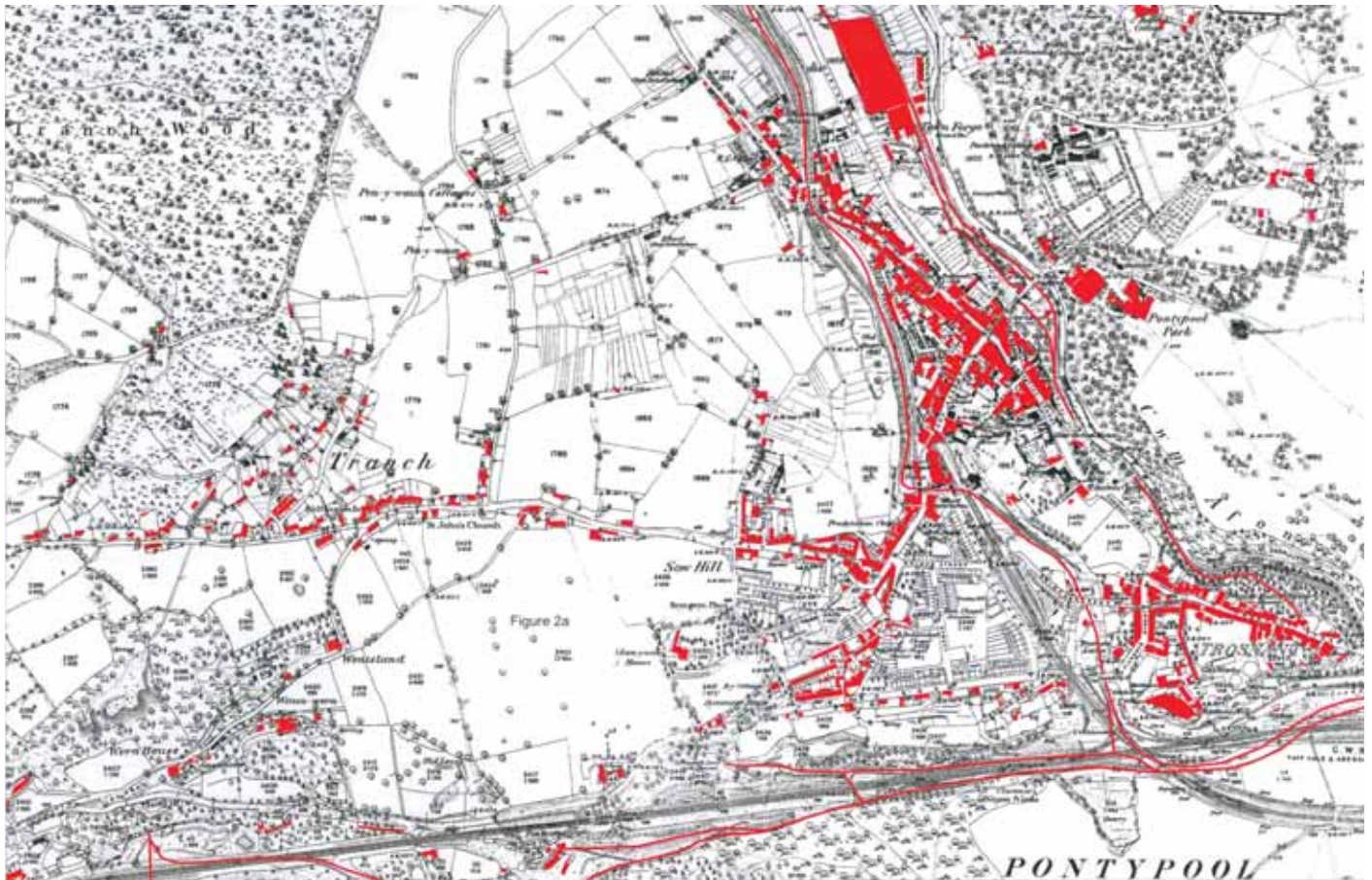
The settlement pattern of Pontypool, Trosnant and Tranch by 1844 (Tithe Map data on First Edition Ordnance Survey map base).

Map evidence confirms that there was a significant nucleus of settlement at Pontypool by the late eighteenth century. In Emmanuel and Thomas Bowen's map of Monmouthshire of about 1767, [15] Pontypool is portrayed as similar in size to Caerleon and Usk. Some years later, when a map was prepared to show the line of the proposed canal from Newport to Pontnewynydd, the layout of the town was clear: it stretched along the road running up the valley, at a junction of north–south and east–west routes.

A Swedish visitor to Wales in the mid-eighteenth century was not impressed, however. According to R. R. Angerstein, 'Pontypool is a town of little importance, and only worth mentioning because of its ironworks and its mills for rolling and tinning sheets and wire drawing'. He noted that all was in the hands of a single owner, Mr R. Hanbury, who

had a well-built house which 'lies in a deer park on the side of the river on which the ironworks have been erected, though they are at some distance from the house'. [16]

Despite little direct physical evidence, we must imagine that the town continued to thrive and grow during the eighteenth century for, by 1801, 'Pont y Pool is a large straggling place, containing 250 houses, and 1,500 souls. Several neat habitations, and numerous shops, present an appearance of thriving prosperity, notwithstanding the dusky aspect of the town, occasioned by the adjacent forges. The inhabitants derive great support from the ironworks and collieries, and have been recently benefited by the trade of the canal. The place is the principal mart for the natives of the mountainous district, and the weekly market is not the least considerable, and the cheapest in Monmouthshire.' [17]

In terms of physical extent, Pontypool was probably only a little bigger than Trosnant in the early nineteenth century, but it was during this period that its status as a major town was assured. There are several buildings in the town centre which date from this period and, though the town did not expand significantly in area, it grew in density. A map of 1836 [18] shows tight linear settlement largely centred on the junction of the main road (Commercial Street and George Street) with Crane Street and the road to the bridge, and continuing for some distance to the north-west (towards Pontnewynydd). Although clearly a distinct area, Trosnant was also quite densely developed and strongly linear along the road from Pontymoile, with limited development between that line and the canal along Clarence Street and behind it, where there was a corn mill.

What this 1836 map records is the concentration of development at the two locations which now define the modern town — the town centre and Trosnant, which contrasts with the more irregular pattern to the south-west. This contrast is shown with even greater clarity on the Trevethin Tithe Map: although there was extensive settlement scattered over the hillside at Sow Hill and Tranch (the latter probably a squatter settlement in origin), the town itself is notably compact. More formal development in the area immediately to the west of the town centre probably began in the mid-nineteenth century: the chapel on

Nicholas Street was established in 1854, and some of the housing here is quite distinct from the styles that dominated suburban development of the late nineteenth century.

Late Nineteenth-century Expansion

Although probably enjoying steady growth throughout the nineteenth century, Pontypool experienced a flurry of activity between about 1880–1900, and many town-centre buildings were built or rebuilt in that period. Most of the town's suburbs were also developed at this time. The rapidity of growth over a limited period of time has lent remarkable uniformity to these areas. In the process of this development, much of the informality of earlier settlement patterns to the west of the town was obscured, except at Tranch, where modern development still contrives to be haphazard.

Right: The late nineteenth-century entrance to the market — an important civic project, which played a major role in the commercial and economic life of the town (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far right: Crane Street Baptist Church (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Right: Fine detail on the roof of the market hall (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far right: The church of St John the Divine, Wainfelin (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Pontypool acquired the formal trappings of urban status piecemeal. The first and critical ingredient was the establishment of a market in the late seventeenth century. The 1730 market building sufficed until 1846, when a new building was provided. That there was justification to replace and enlarge the market in 1893–94 (and again in 1897) is a sure indication of the prosperity of the town in this period, and of its rapid expansion. The town had acquired a town hall in 1856, thanks to the patronage of Capel Hanbury Leigh, but was administered by magistrates until a local government board was set up in 1871. This board was in turn superseded by the establishment of an Urban District Council in 1895, but the market building remained as a major legacy of its regime.

Churches and chapels are other indicators of population, prosperity and aspiration. Pontypool retains some significant examples, though there have been many losses during the twentieth century. Notable survivals include St James's Church, established in 1821; Upper Trosnant Baptist Church, built in 1826; Crane Street Baptist Church of 1847; St Alban's Roman Catholic Church, 1844–46; and Nicholas Street Chapel, 1854. The growth of the town in the later nineteenth century and early twentieth century brought Merchants Hill Baptist Church (1888), and St John the Divine's Church at Wainfelin (1912–13).

The Twentieth Century

The built-up area of Pontypool increased very considerably during the twentieth century. There was some speculative building in the interwar period, most notably along the road from Pontymoile to New Inn, and from Pontypool to Penygarn, but the greatest contribution to urban growth came in the form of major public-housing schemes in the suburbs. There were also some significant new building projects in the town centre, with some good civic and commercial buildings of the 1920s and 1930s, and the police station of the 1950s. Clearance and redevelopment programmes in the last two decades of the century have also had considerable influence on the character of the town, introducing blocks of building on a larger scale than hitherto and changing the spatial pattern of the town centre: for example, widening George Street and creating the new link between George Street and Osborne Road.

The town centre, showing the extent of the market buildings (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

The modern-day town of Pontypool, surrounded by nineteenth- and twentieth-century suburbs and satellite settlements (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

The results of twentieth-century redevelopment in the town centre (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

The canal at Pontymoile — once the junction of the Monmouthshire Canal with the Brecknock and Abergavenny Canal (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Landownership

The land on which the town was built had formed part of the property of Llantarnam Abbey, which was owned in the sixteenth century by the Morgan family of Tredegar. By the early eighteenth century, the estate had effectively been partitioned, and the land west of the river belonged to Frances Morgan, who had married Edmund Bray, whose family were lords of the manor of Bryngwyn and Wentsland. The manor still owned substantial holdings in the early nineteenth century. Meanwhile, the Hanbury family were consolidating their hold on the east side of the river. This was partly about controlling resources for iron production, but also about acquiring sufficient land to establish a domestic holding — the family were not resident in the area until about 1679, when land for a house and park was purchased by Capel Hanbury (his son was Major John Hanbury, to whom the introduction of tinplating is owed). By the late seventeenth century, the Hanbury family had established a significant estate. They went on to

dominate the area, acquiring extensive holdings on the west side of the river also, though they were never the sole owners of property here, as the Tithe Survey records.

Both the Hanbury estate and the Wentsland estate owned key industrial sites, but they also had substantial agricultural holdings. Land in agricultural use sat comfortably alongside industry, as nineteenth-century estate records show. [19]

Connections: Transport Networks

The industries in the immediate vicinity of Pontypool were necessarily part of a complicated network, both for the supply of raw materials and for the distribution of finished goods. Industrialization was extensive across the region, wherever it was possible to exploit the plentiful natural resources of the area. Pontypool and its

These arches once took a tram road and a water supply underneath the canal to the tinplate works at Lower Mill (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far left: The mouth of an industrial tram road tunnel in the Italian Gardens (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

immediate environs came to benefit in particular from an amenable siting, which favoured the development of an important transport corridor and hub for a much wider area, from Blaenavon in the north to Crumlin in the west.

The production of iron and its derivatives depended on good transport links, both to bring raw materials to the sites of production and to take finished products towards their markets. It was a recognition of the growing importance of the area that a series of canals were projected here in the late eighteenth century. The Monmouthshire Canal was promoted by an Act of Parliament in 1792 — it ran from Newport to Pontnewynydd. A year later, a second canal was proposed: this was the Brecknock and Abergavenny Canal, which from Brecon reached a terminus at Llanfoist in 1805. In 1812, the canal was extended as far as Pontymoile, establishing a link with the Monmouthshire Canal.

The prime purpose of these canals was to provide industrial transport; just as important was the network of tram roads which linked individual industrial sites with the canals. The Acts of Parliament, which enabled the canals, made specific provision for the construction of tram roads as an integral part of the canal system. Provision was also made for other tram roads to be built to any ironworks, quarry or coal mine within eight miles (12.87km) of the canal and its authorized tram roads. Pontypool served as an important hub in this system: a tram road from Blaenavon and Varteg connected with the canal terminus at Pontnewynydd, and further tram roads ran from Lower Race and Blaendare to the canal at Pontymoile, and between Pontypool and Trosnant. By 1836, there were also tram roads connecting Cwmynyscoy with the canal at Pontymoile, which had become a significant transport hub.

The canal age proved to be short-lived, however. Almost from the outset there were difficulties supplying water to the canal between Pontnewynydd and Pontymoile. It may have been for this reason that the Trosnant tram road was extended alongside the canal from Pontypool to Pontymoile in 1810, and that another tram road from Pontnewynydd to Pontypool was completed alongside the canal in 1829. In addition, a tram road ran from either the Osborne Forge or the New Forge in Pontypool to Lower Mill at Pontymoile. It ran close to the river through the site of the Town Forge (its route clearly shown on the 1834 plan of the forge), [20] and through a tunnel at what is now the Italian Gardens before again following the line of the river.

Above: This engine shed is one of the few railway structures to have survived in Pontypool (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Opposite: The modern road occupies the site of an earlier railway, itself partially built over the line of the Monmouthshire Canal (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Some of these tram roads survived until the end of the nineteenth century. Some routes have been virtually completely obliterated, whilst others survive in part, such as the riverside route to Pontymoile; others have been subsumed in modern roads (the route from Blaendare), and others survive as footpaths (the route from Cwmynyscoy).

In 1845 the canal company obtained an Act of Parliament enabling them to build a new railway from Newport to Pontypool (Crane Street), to improve their tram roads, and abandon the canal above Pontymoile. By the time this line had opened for passenger traffic in 1852, the canal between Pontypool and Pontnewynydd had already been closed and the section between Pontymoile and Pontypool was closed in the following year. By 1854 the railway extended northwards as far as Blaenavon, carrying mineral traffic as well as passengers. By 1855, all its tram roads had been converted into standard-gauge lines, eventually supplemented by new branch lines serving collieries at Varteg, Cwmffrwdoer and Cwmnantddu.

This railway was initially run by the canal company, renamed as the Monmouthshire Railway and Canal Company, but it was leased to the Great Western Railway (GWR) in 1875 and amalgamated with it in 1880. Meanwhile, the GWR had built another line from Newport to Pontypool via Caerleon (initiated in 1865 and completed in 1878), east of the earlier railway. The two railway lines intersected at Pontypool Road, one mile (1.6km) from the town. Here too, the railway of the Monmouthshire Railway and Canal Company also connected with the Newport, Abergavenny and Hereford Railway in 1853, which ran from Hereford to Pontypool. This line was worked initially by the London and North Western Railway (LNWR), which had obtained powers to build a line from Pontypool to the Taff Vale Railway (TVR) at Quakers Yard in 1847. This was the Taff Vale extension, and from Pontypool Road, this railway, which was completed in 1858, took the line of the canal as far as Trosnant. It then continued west from Pontypool to a junction with the TVR at Quakers Yard. The LNWR, which operated this route as well as the line from Hereford to Pontypool, was absorbed by the GWR in 1863. There were stations at Clarence Street and Crane Street as well as at Pontypool Road. The lines had all closed by the late 1970s and were replaced by roads. [21]
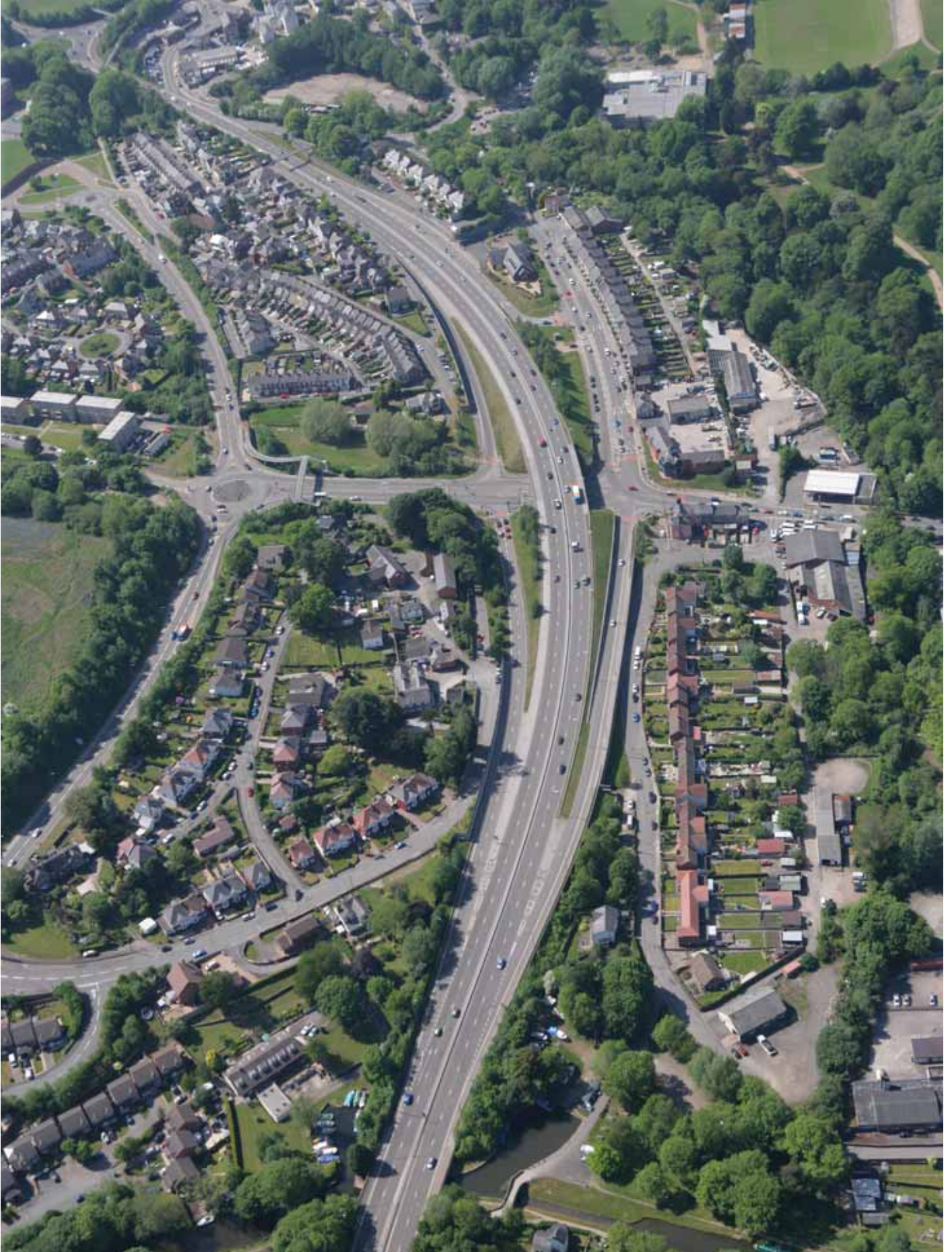
Osborne Road, created at the end of the nineteenth century as a more direct route north from the town centre (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

In addition to these industrial transport systems, and in many cases preceding them, was an important network of roads. River crossings at Pontymoile, Pontypool and Pontnewynydd were nodal points for the development of both settlement and industry, and routes following the Llwyd and Glyn Valleys converged at Trosnant. Industrial and urban development brought changes to the road network, including: a new road from Old Furnace to Trosnant in 1820 (Albion Road), which was an easier route than High Street, Tranch; and a new road 'to obviate the dangerous declivities in Trosnant', [22] from what is now Clarence Corner to the top of Rockhill Road in 1822 (Clarence Street). Osborne Road was created at the end of the nineteenth century to replace the earlier through-route which ran by George Street, Wainfelin Road and Merchants Hill to Pontnewynydd.

In the late twentieth century, the construction of major new routes in place of former railways entailed radical change to the inherited road pattern. It brought with it the loss of some of the local road connections and created bigger barriers between places. Redevelopment also brought with it the loss of some local roads, most notably Bridge Street, which disappeared under the site of the Tesco store.

Historical Topography
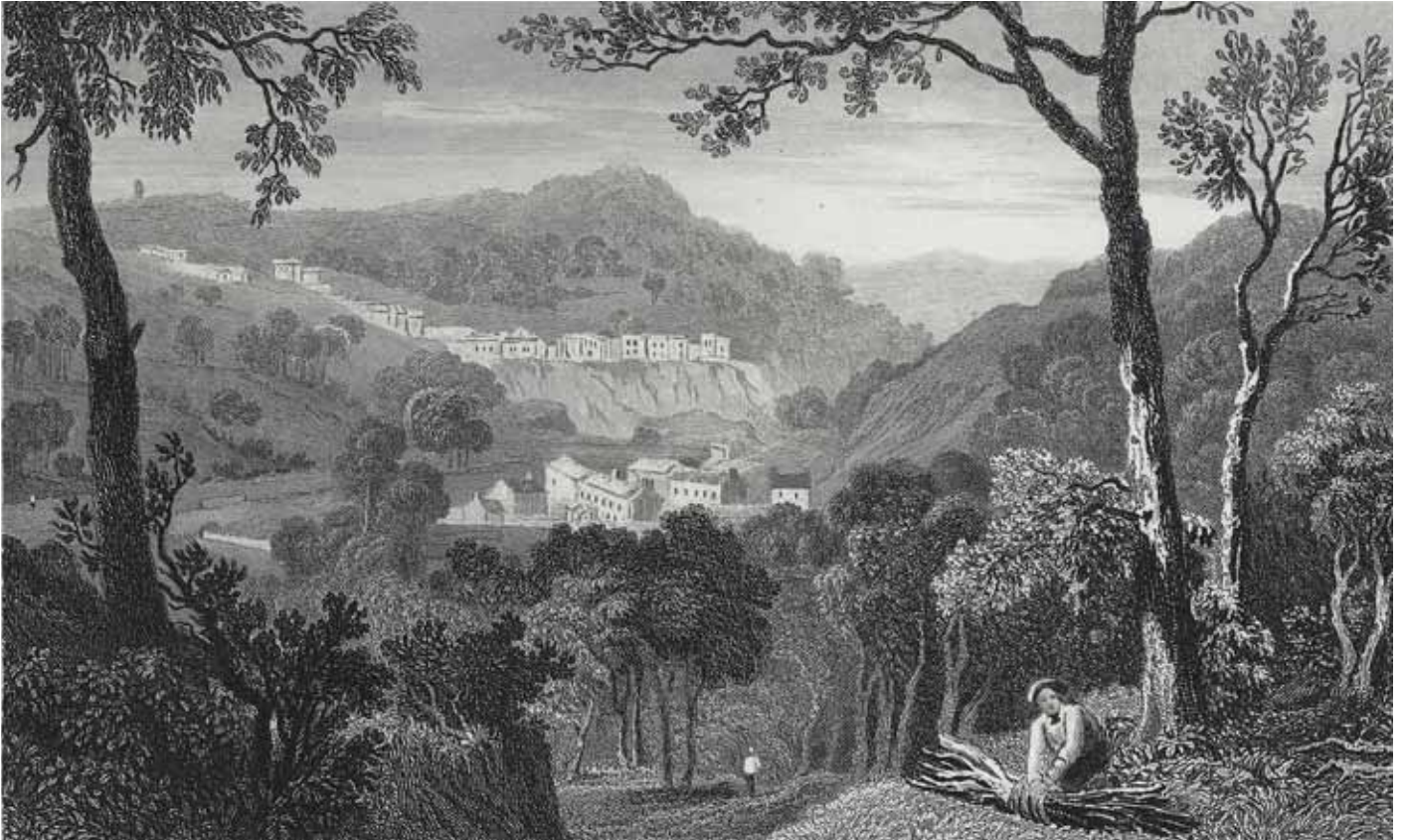
'The town is built upon a hill, and the principal street is almost perpendicular and so badly paved that the post lad desired us to alight… we therefore walked up to the marketplace, by a footway more easy of ascent.' [23]

The prime determinant of Pontypool's character is its extraordinary valley setting. In 1801, Archdeacon Coxe described the route from Blaenavon thus: 'the vale is at first a deep and narrow glen, wholly occupied by the torrent, but soon expands, and becomes cultivated… The left side exhibits a succession of neat farmhouses, with small enclosures of corn and pasture, forming recesses in the wood… In the whole valley, which is five miles in length, there is scarcely a foot of land not cultivated, or overspread with wood… approaching Pont y Pool, the vale diminished in breadth, and was closed with the rich and wooded eminences of Pont y Pool park. We soon reached the commencement of the canal, and after crossing it over three stone bridges, descended to the town… The town of Pont y Pool is singularly placed on the edge of a steep

cliff, overhanging the Afon Llwyd, and on the slope of a declivity under impending hills, partly bare, and partly mantled with wood. The line of the canal is seen winding above the town; a rapid torrent, descending from a lake at the foot of the Mynydd Maen, flows under the canal, and rushing impetuously along the outskirts of the town, precipitates itself into the Afon Llwyd, which rolls in an abyss beneath.' [24]

The steep sides of the valley constrained the form of settlement, which was mainly linear before the late nineteenth century. Settlement tended to avoid the valley floor, which was occupied by a series of iron-working sites — the fast flowing river was an excellent source of water power. It is only in very recent times that the limited flat land there has been developed with housing. Historically, the town had its back turned to the river, which continued to be the case even after industry had left. Late twentieth-century retail developments gave little consideration to their river-facing elevations and, even today, the river is a neglected amenity.

If there were strong natural constraints on the nature of settlement, there were others that were historical and man-made. Landownership influenced the distribution of land use to a very marked degree, and the land on the east side of the river was reserved for the interests of the Hanbury family and remains remarkably undeveloped. A more fragmented pattern of ownership on the west side allowed the town and its environs to develop in relatively piecemeal fashion, plot-by-plot or field-by-field. The growth of the suburbs to the west clearly shows how development was accommodated to the earlier field pattern. For example, the area bounded by Albion Road, Upper Bridge Street, Crumlin Street and Lower Park Terrace was a field in the 1830s — its name, Cai Nicholas, is recalled in Nicholas Street. In Wainfelin, Edward Street was fitted into a narrow field and Wainfelin Avenue marks a former field boundary.

Transport routes have also helped to shape settlement. The first framework for settlement was provided by roads that were probably long-established. The route from Pontymoile to Trosnant continued via Bridge Street towards Sow Hill and served as the main axis of settlement in this area. The new road from Trosnant to Rockhill, created in the 1820s, followed the line of the canal, and the space between the old road and the canal was rapidly developed, as the 1836 map of Pontypool records. Similarly, the route through the town centre, which originally went via Hanbury Road, Commercial Street and George Street, to Wainfelin and Merchants Hill, was probably an old one. It was only supplanted in importance in the late nineteenth century when Osborne Road was created as a more amenable connection from the town centre to Pontnewynydd and Blaenavon (it was initiated by the Local Government Board in 1878). Crane Street was probably also an early road line; it continues as a footpath dropping steeply down the hill below Commercial Street and aligns directly with the bridge. The modern road up the hill (Park Road) was in existence by 1835, but may have been a relatively recent contrivance to allow easier access to and from the bridge.

Above: Wainfelin grew up in former fields (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Opposite: Pontypool grew in linear fashion, following the valley to either side of the crossing point at the bridge (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

The Tesco supermarket and its car park, built over the original line of Upper Bridge Street, and diverting the direct route from Trosnant to Sow Hill (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).
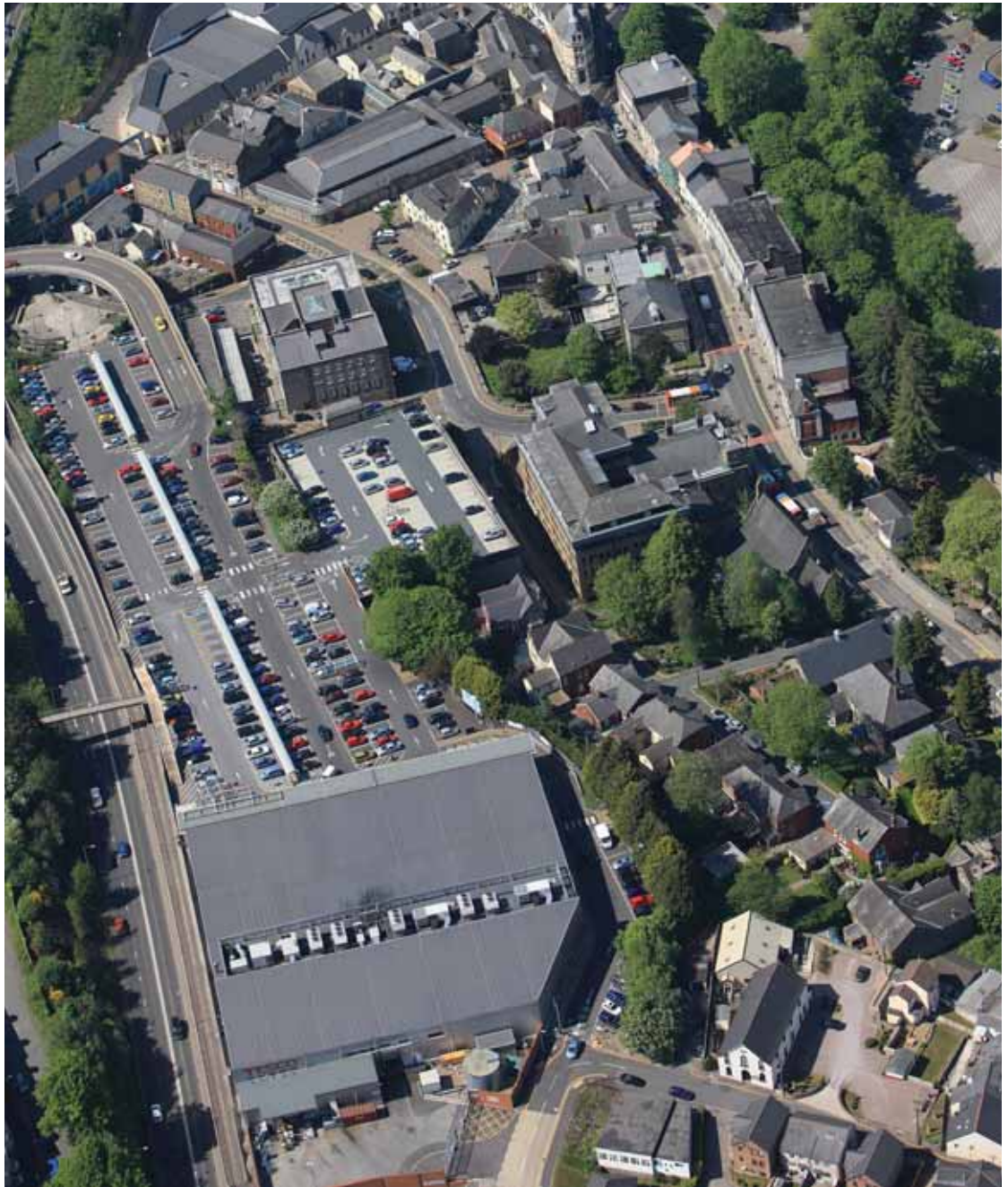
Away from the town centre to the west, the 1836 map of Pontypool records a settlement pattern that was more scattered, though still strung out along roads. Late nineteenth-century suburban growth in this area also used existing arteries, but filled in the fields between them. In the process, many of the earlier buildings at Sow Hill and Crumlin Street (once Wesley Street) were replaced.

First the canal and then the railway created boundaries between one area and another, establishing a firm separation between the town centre and its western suburbs, for example. The canal arrived before the major urban development

of the nineteenth century and was one of the factors that helped to contain and shape it. As the canal was replaced by the railway, and as railways in turn were replaced by major roads, these boundaries have hardened, leading to a much greater separation between areas. Some of the original connections have also been severed, most notably the direct link from Trosnant to Sow Hill via Upper Bridge Street, which is now blocked by the Tesco site, and the direct route from the southern part of Pontymoile at Maesderwen to the crossroads near the bridge.

The Character of Building

Vernacular cottages at Tranch are a reminder of rural traditions (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

The Chronology of Building

The town has a long urban history, but there are few buildings within it that betray this — the earliest known survival is the former corn market of 1731. The development of a town with definite urban character took shape in an area where existing settlement had been quite different. Dispersed rural building traditions are still in evidence in the surrounding area — at Pontymoile, Trefechan and Tranch, some buildings predate much of what surrounds them and have a vernacular character and scale. Early photographs show that at one time there were more buildings like these within the town centre and at Trosnant, but that they were the casualties of development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Not all these casualties of redevelopment, however, were vernacular in character — there were some notable examples of substantial urban properties that were lost either to redevelopment in about 1900, or to clearance during the twentieth century.

Early houses in Trosnant, cleared in twentieth-century redevelopment (Torfaen Museum Trust Collection).

The early decades of the nineteenth century are the first period to have left a real mark on the character of the town; but another significant period of investment at the end of the century introduced some of its most striking buildings, as well as most of the residential areas surrounding it. This was followed by another period of settlement growth in the 1920s, with limited speculative development and extensive public-housing schemes. Further public-housing schemes followed the Second World War. There was also small-scale, but cumulatively extensive, private housing development, for example at Tranch.

Building Materials

The immediate area yielded plentiful supplies of stone, with Pennant sandstone the predominant building material. This stone did not readily lend itself to fine dressing and coursing however, and was seldom exposed before the late nineteenth century. Traditionally, stone was limewashed, but a characteristic of more polite urban building traditions is the use of render. In Pontypool, limewash is still occasionally found on ancillary buildings, but render is much more common. Notwithstanding extensive renewal, there are still buildings in the town displaying their historical rendered finish, with scribed courses in imitation of ashlar. A render finish also distinguishes some of the earliest suburban houses in the area around Nicholas Street and Park Terrace. The influence of the gothic revival reached even relatively humble building projects after about 1870, and stone began to be exposed in commercial and residential development. Pennant sandstone naturally occurs in a range of colours. This is exhibited in the town either in a polychrome effect in single buildings, or in the careful sourcing of stone to achieve a uniformity of finish, which varied from one building to the next. The stone could be rough-dressed or rock-faced to give a rugged, muscular effect.

Far left: Distinctive rubble stone at The Globe Hotel (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Left: Bath stone ashlar on the former Midland Bank (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Rock-faced rubble combined with brick and terracotta (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Render was typically used in building projects of the early and mid-nineteenth century (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Brick was also in widespread use, especially as dressings on stone buildings. It was not often used as the principal building material until the twentieth century, notwithstanding the presence of several brickworks in the vicinity of the town. There are, however, some good examples of its use, including glazed brick and terracotta. Even though the regional vernacular tradition had been for split stone-tiled roofs, by the nineteenth century slate had become ubiquitous. It still dominates the town and the use of other materials, even as replacements, is rare.

Prestigious projects were more likely to use imported materials; for example, Bath stone ashlar was used for Crane Street Baptist Church, for Barclays Bank (built as the London and Provincial Bank in 1893), and for the Midland Bank of 1910–11.

Whatever the material, it is common to find distinctions between the main façade and the side and rear elevations. Façades are usually emphasized by the quality of finish and detail, with a rougher finish used elsewhere, and for ancillary buildings.

Decorative brickwork is a striking feature of these terraced houses (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Right: Brick began to supplant stone as the main building material in the early twentieth century (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far right: Split stone tiles were the traditional roofing material before slate became widely available in the nineteenth century (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Right: An unusual and stylish example of the use of glazed brick (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far right: Contrasting stone used for side and main façades (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Building Types

Commercial Building

'Demolition of the old Crown Hotel, and erection of fine modern hotel, and great development in Osborne Road, and erection of palatial premises for the London and Provincial bank speak volumes for the go-ahead character of the townspeople.' [25]

As it developed in the nineteenth century, Pontypool became the commercial hub of its extensive hinterland, and the town centre is essentially a highly specialized commercial quarter where almost every building was built for commerce, the main exceptions being civic and

Early nineteenth-century commercial building in a Georgian tradition (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far left: A late nineteenth-century commercial building using varied materials and forms to striking effect (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Left: This row on Osborne Road is a good example of large-scale planned development (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

The market is an excellent, large-scale example of a single commercial development (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Banks are amongst the most striking individual commercial developments in the town centre, each with a distinctive signature style (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

religious institutions. Commercial building has its own style, various permutations of which are readily apparent here. Early examples respect a Georgian tradition with restrained classicism, symmetry and generally simple rendered surfaces. In the later nineteenth century, a more expressive style was characterized by greater modelling of façades, using a variety of materials and detail.

This was the general development of architectural fashion but, within these broad parameters, there are three main distinctions in commercial building in the town: buildings can be individual developments lacking exceptional features, they can be individual developments with strong individual character, or they can be large-scale speculative developments with a unified design. In much of the town, individual buildings predominate with a variety of scale and size that lends considerable character to the streetscape, notwithstanding extensive loss of original detail. Many of these buildings are relatively simple in style, but Pontypool has a particularly fine series of 'signature buildings' with strong individual character. Some of the most prominent are banks occupying prime positions at road junctions, designed to make full use of their sites (HSBC, about 1910–15; Barclays, about 1880; and National Westminster, converted from an earlier office building in 1905 and making the most of the new junction formed by the creation of Osborne Road in 1878).

Far left: Fine commercial architecture at The George (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Left: The former Crown Hotel (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far left: The former Clarence Hotel (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Left: The former Co-operative building is an excellent example of the art deco style (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far left: Individual buildings in an identical style make up this terrace of shops on Osborne Road (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Left: Lion Buildings provide an early example of commercial development designed as a unit (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Public houses and hotels were also often designed to attract attention. Good examples include: The George (1905), The Crown Hotel, and The Clarence Hotel. There were also some flamboyant individual shops, such as Manchester House and the art deco former Co-operative building. The market itself also represents an individual development, albeit on an exceptional scale.

Pontypool also boasts some very good examples of large-scale planned developments from different periods, notably the Lion Buildings, built as a row of shops by G. V. Maddox of Monmouth in 1840, and the Osborne Road development. Maintaining or reinforcing the essential unity of these developments on the one hand, and respecting the diversity of individual building projects on the other, are important keys to reinforcing the character of the town centre.

Civic and Religious Buildings

Civic and religious buildings are an extremely important component of the scene, where distinctive individual design was often a reflection of patronage. This is certainly true for the town hall (1854), St James's Church (1821 and 1854) and the library (1908). These buildings are notable for the use of imported materials, often finely

Right: The town hall, a major civic building of 1854 (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far right: St James's Church hall, built in about 1910 (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Right: The Methodist Chapel on Nicholas Street, built in 1854 (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far right: The public library, built in 1908 (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Right: Examples of rural building traditions can still be found here and there in Pontypool (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

finished; they were designed by named architects, often from outside the area, who used polite architectural styles. For example: St John the Divine's Church was designed by J. Coates-Carter; St Alban's Roman Catholic Church by J. J. Scoles; and the town hall, by Bidlake and Lovatt of Wolverhampton. Crane Street Baptist Church introduced the Greek revival to Pontypool in 1847.

Residential Development

'Pontypool is a clean town rendered famous by its manufactory of japanned ware. The houses are of stone, whitewashed, covered with stone slate.' [26]

Although the town is decisively urban in character, remants of rural building traditions have survived in its hinterland; for example at Twmpath and Gelli-pistyll, Tranch, Park Cottage, St David's Close (formerly Pen y Garn Farm), and various houses at Trevethin.

Examples of decorative ironwork (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Urban Residential Building

The vast majority of residential building before the twentieth century in Pontypool and its suburbs dates from the two decades at the end of the nineteenth century. Most is terraced housing, or small rows and pairs, with only a relatively few individually built houses. There is a clear hierarchy of housing types, ranging from modest terraced houses to quite substantial villas; because of the limited period of building, there is quite a simple set of variations. The few early to mid-nineteenth-century buildings are usually rendered but, for the majority of development dating from the late nineteenth century, building materials are generally either rock-faced rubble brought to courses (often snecked and rock-faced and combined with brick for dressings), or brick (often used as a facing on rubble buildings). The brick used for dressings is generally a bright facing brick in red and yellow. The majority of the houses, of whatever scale, have small front gardens. Boundary detail is a very important feature of the town — rubble or brick walls and gate piers, with cast-iron railings, often very decorative, and perhaps made locally.

Right: Small terraced houses with a single upper window (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far right: Terraced houses with two upper windows (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Right: Terraced houses with bay windows (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far right: Larger terraced houses with full-height bay windows and generous gardens (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Examples of larger houses with more elaborate detailing (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Distinctions rest in the size of house (most terraced houses are single-fronted, some only wide enough to warrant a single window upstairs, but most with two), and in the quality of detail, such as single or two-storey bay windows, decorative façade treatment, etc. Larger houses often have a gabled front and a more elaborate composition.

Terraces are either composed of a string of identical houses, or are unified in some way, whether by a designed composition using gabled blocks as a centrepiece or as end-stops, or by the use of detail which continues across from one house to the next. Examples of the former are on Upper Park Terrace and Clarence Street, and Wainfelin is rich in examples of the latter.

Far left: A simple terrace of repeated identical houses (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Left: A terrace designed as a symmetrical composition, with advanced gables at either end of the row (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far left: A simple terrace, the houses unified by continuous stone detailing (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Left and below: Terraced houses, linked by rich brick detailing (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Character Areas

This fine building was probably built in the eighteenth century — The George replaced it in 1905 (© The Francis Frith Collection).

1. Town Centre

Historical Background

The early development of the town centre is obscure, but we know that there was enough of a town to warrant the establishment of a market in the late seventeenth century, followed by the purpose-built market house and assembly room in 1730. The Corn Market is the earliest standing building in the town centre. Other buildings that date from before the nineteenth century were replaced when the town's commercial importance consolidated in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There are some images that give an indication of what has been lost, including some buildings of real vernacular character, as well as some more sophisticated urban buildings, probably from the eighteenth century.

The modern town centre is very much the product of nineteenth-century growth tempered by twentieth-century renewal. The map of 1836 shows that most of the modern street pattern was already in place, with two main axes of development. One of these was the line of Commercial Street (originally Caroline Street) and George Street as far as the canal bridge (now the junction with Malthouse Lane), which was probably an early route up the valley, going thence via what is now Wainfelin Road, with a secondary line following the east bank of the canal. The second axis was Crane Street, which

may have been another early route leading to the river crossing, where a bridge was recorded in the fifteenth century. The more amenable gradient of Park Road was already in existence by the early nineteenth century. Development on Crane Street was concentrated above the junction with Commercial Street, and although it continued across the canal towards Sow Hill, it was more piecemeal there. Development in the valley floor was limited, but it was the prime area for the location of industry. New Forge (later Town Forge) was served by a substantial pond, and another works (the original Town Forge until about 1831) lay immediately south-west of Town Bridge, with a feeder supplying water from a pond on the north-west side of the road.

The most radical changes to the form of the town came first with the substitution of the canal, and the tram road alongside it, by a railway. The railway did not entirely follow the line of the canal, but from Clarence Corner to Crane Street ran somewhat further east, along the boundary of properties on St James's Field (the road was

created in the early twentieth century). The railway was in turn superseded by the A4043 and we must imagine that, with each successive change, a harder barrier was introduced between the town centre and the settlements to its west. Another radical change was the creation of Osborne Road at the end of the nineteenth century, reorienting the town to the north away from George Street and Wainfelin Road.

Twentieth-century losses include redevelopment on the north side of George Street. On the west side of Osborne Road, The Theatre Royal was demolished in 1960 [27] and a new road link with George Street was created. Several public houses and the Tabernacle Baptist Church of 1836 were all demolished on the west side of Crane Street in 1960. The west side of Crane Street then became a car park and was redeveloped for retail in 2000. This area had once contained several courts and streets, which connected through to the upper end of George Street. The redevelopment did not recreate these links and there was also piecemeal redevelopment elsewhere.

The link between George Street and Osborne Road, the retail developments on Crane Street and George Street, and the Riverside car park are just some examples of twentieth-century changes to the town centre (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Dense development patterns in the town centre (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Glantorfaen House — a grandiose residence on the edge of the town centre (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

The Character of Building

The town centre is tightly developed as a series of near continuous frontages. Space for building was constrained, and many occupied virtually the whole of their plots; vacant space is rare, and The Globe Hotel is exceptional in having a clearly defined rear yard. The small yard at the rear of the former Crown Hotel is another example of enclosed space within the town centre. Other

courts and back lanes to the north-west of Crane Street and at Rosemary Lane were lost in modern redevelopment, though the opening up of space and through routes between Glantorfaen Road and Market Street is also a consequence of modern redevelopment, following the closure of Crane Street Station. Buildings are strongly oriented to the streets, and where rear elevations are exposed to view, it is often to the detriment of the townscape. Notable exceptions to this are those banks which were designed to exploit prominent corner sites, and the large houses on the southern edge of the town centre (such as Glantorfaen House).

The town centre is dominated by commercial building, and the main distinction is between individual developments and unified planned developments. Amongst the former there is considerable variety in size and scale, ranging from narrow frontages to such large developments as the former Crown Hotel or the HSBC Bank. These developments span from

Left: Distinctive commercial developments in the town centre (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Left: Varied building patterns on the principal streets (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far left: An early example of planned commercial development (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Left: A late nineteenth-century example of planned commercial development (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Left: Surviving original detail on Osborne Road (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Above: A mix of materials and styles characterizes development on the west side of George Street (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Right: The exuberant use of materials on The George contrast with the simple renders used on earlier buildings (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far right: The Bath stone ashlar façades of the bank buildings flank the rendered front of the early market hall (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

about 1830 to about 1930 and this relatively long period of development, coupled with the variety of individual projects, lends considerable distinction to the town centre. Examples can be found along Commercial Street, where Pearl House and the former Co-operative store are high-quality art deco buildings, whose large-scale and relatively austere surface treatment is in contrast to the piecemeal development pattern elsewhere along the street, which is mostly assembled from single buildings with different storey heights and façade treatment. Some of the most distinctive individual buildings are the banks and public houses — amongst the latter, for example, The George and The White Hart.

Unified planned developments are also an important feature of the town centre, ranging from the Lion House development of 1840, to the Osborne Road development of about 1890. Both of these are unified by the rhythm of façade detail — the repeated windows in plain recesses in Lion House, and a more elaborate scheme in Osborne Road that includes pilasters, a continuous eaves band, and the line of shallow oriel bays. Piecemeal renewal of detail has undermined some of the unity of this terrace, but it remains a very strong composition.

Variety in the organization of development, and its relatively long chronology, has led to a very

Left: A rare surviving example of an original shopfront on Market Street (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far left: Rough rubble in a rare surviving industrial building — part of the former Castle Brewery (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Left: A fine example of a late nineteenth-century commercial building, with display windows on two floors (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

varied palette of materials. The earlier town-centre buildings had render finishes, some of which survive (the west side of George Street includes some good examples interspersed with Edwardian and art deco building). Render was supplanted by exposed stone and brick in the later nineteenth century, best exemplified in developments on Crane Street, including the market, Jubilee Buildings and some shops. Early twentieth-century building schemes often used imported materials, for example faience and Portland stone.

Although the general form of building development of all kinds remains strong, the retention rate for original detail is poor, especially at ground-floor level. Early shop fronts are rare survivals indeed and should be treasured. Upper floors have fared better, and many buildings retain original detail at this level, including some examples of nineteenth-century fenestration.

On the edge of the town centre, some residential development also survives — large houses at the southern end, and a cluster of small terraced houses to the north. In this area too, there is one surviving industrial building, a relic of The Castle Brewery and a rare example of the rough use of local stone with no attempt at dressing.

Right: The town hall, Hanbury Road (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far right: The spacious layout of buildings amongst greenery is characteristic of Hanbury Road (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Right: A fine early twentieth-century house, built as the vicarage to St James's Church (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

2. Hanbury Road

Historical Background

Pontypool town centre has remained resolutely separate from Trosnant, and the distinctive character of Hanbury Road perpetuates this separation. Possibly the land here came early into the ownership of the Hanbury family and was not released for development. It was certainly the Hanbury family who funded the building of the town hall here in 1854, and they may have provided patronage for St James's Church, which was originally built in 1821. In the twentieth century, development remained limited, confined to civic and religious building, and a small residential development.

The Character of Building

Pontypool gains considerable character from the grouping of civic and religious buildings along Hanbury Road and its immediate environs, not only from the strong design of individual buildings, but also from the spaciousness of layout which characterizes them. Unlike the town centre and Trosnant, the civic and religious buildings here are set in well-defined individual plots, and are designed to be seen from more than one position. Individually designed, often by named architects, they adopt strong architectural styles, and their individuality is reinforced by the use of exotic materials. The small housing development on St James's Field is a good group of typical Pontypool villas, their brick façades lively with bay windows, gables, and decorative detail.

3. Trosnant

'Trosnant is the most ancient part of Pontypool and contains many dwellings, mostly cottages of great age.' [28]

Historical Background

Trosnant is generally thought to be one of the earliest focal points for settlement in the area, and the site of one of the early japanning works in the eighteenth century. The map of 1836 clearly shows it as a separate settlement, almost as large in extent as Pontypool town. Its main axis is the line of what is now Bridge Street, which then continued across the canal to Sow Hill. Extensive clearance in the second half of the twentieth century damaged all sense of a coherent streetscape here, but it was only the creation of the A4043 and later of the Tesco supermarket, which virtually obliterated what had once been a significant through-route. There was also some development along what is now Clarence Street as far as The Clarence Inn, but the section west of Bridge Street probably dates from the creation of

the new road to Rockhill in 1820. This new road (Clarence Road) swung round towards Pontymoile, closely following the line of the canal. It effectively bypassed the original through-route (Bridge Street and Trosnant Street), which was finally severed by the development of the leisure centre car park. Further development took place between Bridge Street and Clarence Road, including housing and a corn mill, presumably powered by the Glyn Brook. In the later nineteenth century the town gasworks was established in previously open ground to the east of this lane.

Trosnant occupied a pivotal position in the valley, sited along the principal through-route, and at a junction with what was to become the main way into the town centre. This position was consolidated by the creation of Albion Road in the early nineteenth century as a direct route to the town from the west. The canal and later the railway strengthened these local connections; Clarence Street Station was one of three stations serving Pontypool. The closure of the railways in the twentieth century and the substitution of their lines by new roads, as well as the loss of the original through-route via Bridge Street, meant that some of this connectivity was lost.

Trosnant before redevelopment in the mid-twentieth century (Crown Copyright: MOD).

Right: The fomer Clarence Hotel (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far right: Modern detail on early nineteenth-century buildings on Clarence Street (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Right: Historical building patterns at Trosnant, dwarfed by the Tesco supermarket development (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far left: Large houses at Cwm Fields (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Left: The early route of Bridge Street (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Left: Cwm Fields, in a mesh of historical and modern routeways (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Growth at Trosnant remained limited after the mid-nineteenth century, though there was some consolidation in existing areas of development. A continuous building line on the west side of Clarence Street was established, for example, and there was also some rebuilding, such as that at The Clarence Hotel. What had once been quite a densely developed residential area was subject to extensive clearance in the twentieth century, such that the original focus of development has been all but lost.

Meanwhile, new residential development at the end of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth created satellite settlements. One of these was the linear development along Clarence Road; another was the small area to the north of Cwm Fields between the two railway lines. In this area a small suburb was created, its street pattern based on an existing lane from Blaendare (Victoria Road), a footpath which crossed the railway at Clarence Street Station, and a tram road from Cwmynyscoy (School View). Although the modern road network (the A472) has severed the link from the old Blaendare road to Pontymoile, the route to the site of Clarence Street Station at Clarence Place survives as a footbridge.

Right: The former Quaker Meeting House, Bridge Street (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far right: Trosnant House (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Right: Rare original detail on Clarence Street (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far right: Upper Trosnant Baptist Church dates back to 1826 (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

The Character of Building

Several early buildings of marked vernacular character have been recorded in Trosnant. Now only one survives — the small cottage on the old line of Bridge Street. There remain elements of vernacular character in the outbuildings between Trosnant Street and Bridge Street, with their rough limewash finish.

Elsewhere on Bridge Street, only piecemeal development survives, including Trosnant House and the former Quaker Meeting House of about 1800. The role of Clarence Street as part of the major axis through the town is reflected in the relatively dense development pattern there,

where continuous building lines comprise a series of small-scale individual developments. Extensive enveloping work in the 1980s introduced standard poor-quality shopfront detail on Clarence Street, but there remain remnants of early character, including pilasters on the block adjacent to Bridge Street, scribed render on no. 10, and shopfront detail and downpipes on no. 21B.

On Rockhill Road, early twentieth-century housing is typical of Pontypool: terraced with either unifying detail, or conceived as a composition using gables to punctuate the row.

Rich architectural detailing at Cwm Fields (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

The development to the north of Cwm Fields around Victoria Road is a remarkably coherent settlement area that had its own small church. It includes a particularly good range of house types, including some substantial villas in spacious gardens, which are distinguished both by their scale and architectural flamboyance. There are also good examples of terraced houses linked by the use of strong polychrome brick detailing or as designed compositions. Brick is not just used for dressing here, but also as the main building material in the larger houses and in one of the smaller terraces.

Pontypool Park (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

4. Pontypool Park

Historical Background

'The mansion is singularly situated at the extremity of the grounds, a small distance from the town, which (though seated on the perpendicular of the cliff, rising from the opposite bank of the Avon) is so judiciously concealed by plantations of oak, beech, and poplars, that scarcely a single house is discerned.' [29]

Pontypool Park was the seat of the Hanbury family who developed industries in the area from about 1576, but did not establish a residence here until the late seventeenth century. It is possible that land on the east side of the river formed part of Richard Hanbury's original land lease at the end of the sixteenth century, since it would have provided a good source of timber for charcoal; but the ironworks established here in 1575–76 did not come into Hanbury hands until the late seventeenth century. Capel Hanbury was purchasing land for the park in 1677 and 1689, and the first house was built in about 1694; it was then successively extended and altered in

1752–65, 1800–10 and 1872. A deer park was created in about 1700 by Major John Hanbury, and the main drive from the gates at Pontymoile Bridge was in existence by about 1720. Various changes to the layout and character of the park and garden were made during the nineteenth century. Amongst the most important of these was: the removal of the ironworks from their original site on the north side of the river (west of where the leisure centre now is) in 1831, the reconstruction of the entrance gates, and the construction of a bank planted with trees to screen the town from the house and park. Other important nineteenth-century components of the park are the American Gardens, established in 1851, and the kitchen gardens, which had been established by the 1880s. Public ownership of the house and park in 1920 inaugurated another epoch of change, as the house became a school and various recreational additions were made to the park: tennis courts (1924), bowling green (1925), rugby ground (1925), and bandstand (1931). The kitchen gardens were partially developed for housing, and a major public-housing development at Penygarn was inserted into what had previously been part of the park. The leisure centre and ski slope were added in 1974.

The Character of Building

Successive episodes in the history of the house have each left their trace, though it is dominated firstly by the early nineteenth-century work of Capel Hanbury Leigh, who not only remodelled and reoriented the house, but was also responsible for building the stables as well as for work in the park itself. Twentieth-century work, associated with public ownership, included additions to the house linked to its new use as a school, as well as developments within the park itself. Important architectural components of the park include the Shell Hermitage, ice house, and kitchen garden walls (though neglected, these are largely intact). The Penygarn estate is a large 1920s development by the local authority. Beyond it, the American Gardens have survived as an important mid-nineteenth-century arboretum.

5. Pontymoile

Historical Background

Pontymoile was probably one of the first focal points for industrial activity and associated settlement in the area, though the eponymous ironworks were probably sited in Pontypool Park. The first tinplate works was established in Pontymoile in the early eighteenth century, probably at what is now Old Estate Yard, and the works at Lower Mill, which supplied it, were set up in the 1720s. In 1807, another large tinplate manufactory (Pontymoile Tinworks) opened to the south-west of the bridge; it closed in 1960. A tramway connected this site with the works at Lower Mill (running on the line of the back lane to the rear of Fountain Road and probably a continuation of the tramway from the north of the town centre), and a feeder took water from the river to Lower Mill. The tunnels taking the tramway and feeder beneath the canal survive, and one building (and a gate pier) survive on the site of Pontymoile Tinworks.

The Rustic Lodge in the American Gardens, built in 1841 (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Above: The toll house built at the junction of the Monmouthshire Canal with the Brecknock and Abergavenny Canal (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Right: The last surviving building on the site of the Pontymoile Tinworks (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Pontymoile was also a significant interchange point, not only as an early river crossing point and junction of north–south and east–west routes, but also as the junction of the Monmouthshire Canal and the Brecknock and Abergavenny Canal to the south-east. Here too tram roads from Cwymynyscoy and Blaendwr terminated adjacent to the canal, south-west of the river crossing. The construction of the Great Western Railway on the line of the canal disrupted but did not entirely destroy this connectivity — indeed the roads which had converged here from Cwmynyscoy and Penyrheol were taken under the railway via a new link, creating a crossroads at the intersection of Fountain Road and Rockhill Road. The creation of the A472 on the line of the railway, and other highway improvements, have done extensive damage to local links, isolating the Maesderwen area and severing the original line of Fountain Road and Rockhill Road.

This area was a natural focus for settlement, and there is still a small nucleus of relatively early buildings at the foot of Rockhill Road, though there have been considerable losses in this area. One of the survivals is a formal eighteenth-century house, which is thought to have become the truck house of the Monmouthshire Canal Company in the early nineteenth century; the terrace adjoining it is an unusual example of early nineteenth-century formality. Residential development here was limited until the 1920s, when terraced houses linked this nucleus with the secondary focus at the junction of the canals.

Far left: An eighteenth-century house, thought to have been used as the truck house of the Monmouthshire Canal Company in the nineteenth century, with early nineteenth-century terraced houses beyond (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Left: A small vernacular house close to the river crossing at Pontymoile (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far left: An early vernacular building at Maesderwen (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Left: A group of houses built in about 1845 by the Pontypool Park estate (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

The Character of Building

The main focus of settlement in Pontymoile was the road junction close to the river crossing. Here a single small vernacular cottage survives, together with the altogether grander group comprising The Old Truck House and nos 64–72 Rockhill Road. Despite considerable alteration to detail, this group retains remnants of the original scribed render, and a formality of design that is a clear indication of status. The junction was once more defined, with housing on the opposite side of the road that was replaced in the late twentieth century by commercial development on a different alignment. Public housing (of the 1920s) links this area with the Old Estate Yard, where various former industrial buildings and a cottage row of possible eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century origins survives, albeit much altered. Another significant focal point of early development is at Maesderwen, which was once directly linked by road to the rest of Pontymoile.

6. Osborne Road

Historical Background

Osborne Road is a development of the late nineteenth century. It was initiated in 1878 and the 1882 Ordance Survey map shows the beginnings of development along its line. Dates on the buildings themselves show that much of the development was taking place in the 1890s and was substantially complete by 1901. A second link to George Street was created in about 1970.

Osborne Road supplanted George Street–Merchants Hill as the main road route up the valley, itself supplanted by the creation of the A4043 on the line of the former railway in the 1970s. It was also severed by the creation of a second road — Riverside — in the valley bottom. The northern section of road beyond the junction with Riverside may have been an existing route, perhaps even the tramway from Pontnewynydd to Pontypool, which was built in 1829 and ran parallel to the canal.

Above: The late nineteenth-century linear development along Osborne Road contrasts with the more haphazard layout adopted for more recent housing on the valley floor (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Right: Carefully composed groups of houses are characteristic of development on Osborne Road (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Below the road lay Town Forge with its large pond for water supply and, close to the bridge at Pontnewynydd, Osborne Forge. The valley floor was developed and redeveloped for housing and a multi-storey car park in the second half of the twentieth century — all traces of the industry which had preceded it were lost.

The Character of Building

Osborne Road has a very strong and coherent character, unified by its single period of development and consistent use of stone, mostly rock-faced rubble with brick dressings. At the town-centre end, it boasts a good example of unified commercial development on an ambitious

scale, and a fine chapel of 1905. Smaller purpose-built shops of varying sizes with upper-floor bay windows and some surviving shopfronts then give place to residential development. This comprises a range of housing types, including paired villas with gabled frontages and sometimes bay windows, or modest terraces without bay windows but with simple detail (for example, painted brick surrounds to doors and windows). Other rows are distinguished by continuous decoration — bands of brick linking all houses, for example, or, in one instance, a repeated composition of pointed arched windows and triple gables for each pair of houses in the row. Many of the houses have small front gardens and many retain good boundary detail.

With the exception of a single large gothic house, the northern section of the road consists of more modest terraces with limited detail. An interesting modern interpretation of the terrace occupies the site of the Drill Hall.

7. Penygarn and East of the River

Historical Background

Development on the east side of the river was limited until the twentieth century. This was essentially an agricultural landscape, with small-scale industrial activity (quarrying) close to the river, and a pattern of woodland and fields to the north of the road from Pontypool bridge to medieval St Cadoc's Church. South of the road, the expanse of Pontypool Park was only interrupted by Pen y Garn Farm. Into this essentially agricultural landscape, small-scale

development was gradually introduced in the course of the nineteenth century. One of the first buildings here was probably the Baptist Chapel, followed by the Baptist College (later the Intermediate School) in 1835. It was only in the twentieth century that residential development on any scale took place here. Old Penygarn is an oddly isolated development comprising small terraces and some distinctive large villas. Perhaps its developer intended to create a more substantial suburb here but, if so, it did not take off. It was only after the council had acquired the park that development of any significance took place — Penygarn is a large public-housing scheme of the 1920s and 1930s, with limited speculative development at its southern edge.

The Character of Building

Close to the river, the clustered buildings at Woodhouse represent a forge manager's house and associated cottages, almost the only intrusion of industrial settlement onto the east bank of the river. Pen y Garn Farm survives as Park Cottage.

Above: Distinctive street patterns and building layouts at Penygarn (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Right: High-quality architectural detailing at Old Penygarn (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Old Penygarn is a development of about 1905; its terraces are typical of Pontypool, but the larger houses are very distinctive and very well preserved. Penygarn represents a good example of public-housing development, with its carefully planned layouts and use of a limited range of house types combined in groups of two or four. Roughcast render predominates, though this may

originally have been contrasted with exposed brick. Although little original detail survives, the estate retains a coherent character.

8. Sow Hill

Historical Background

The 1836 map of Pontypool shows that there was already significant development in this area. The complicated pattern of roads suggests development along earlier tracks and field boundaries, with a new road from Old Furnace to Trosnant (Albion Road) on a more amenable gradient than the earlier route, which ran via Tranch High Street. Development was concentrated along this earlier line and on Crumlin Street (then known as Wesley Street). By 1881, this area had massively expanded and

Innovative patterns of development highlighted in this mid-twentieth-century view (Crown Copyright: MOD).

An older survival on Twmpath Road (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

new streets had been established in former fields. This development probably began in the 1850s (the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel is dated 1854), immediately following the construction of the railway, which provided a firm boundary to the east. By 1881, Upper Bridge Street (originally Pound Lane), Park Terrace and Albion Road were developed, as was the upper end of Nicholas Street. Twenty years later Nicholas Street had been completed, along with John Street and Capel Street. By 1881 also, there had been development further west around Gwent Street and, in the early twentieth century, there was further expansion west around Twmpath Road. Housing schemes from the mid-twentieth century introduced designed layouts, contrasting with the more informal patterns of historical settlement in the area.

Right: A symmetrical composition on Upper Park Terrace (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far right: Unusual classical detailing (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Right and far right: Modern finishes mar the quality of these nineteenth- century terraced houses, which were originally rendered, but they still retain some good original detail (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Right: A surviving example of scribed render (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

The Character of Building

Very little of the early settlement of this area has survived its comprehensive suburban development from the late nineteenth century onwards, but there is an important early survival at Twmpath Farm, and a handful of small vernacular buildings on Tranch High Street. Nineteenth-century residential development includes some mid-century housing with its own distinctive character. Before about 1880, render was commonly used as the finish on stone buildings and, on Upper Park Terrace, Upper Bridge Street and the top end of Nicholas Street, some houses retain their original scribed render. Several of the developments here are distinguished by the use of overtly classical detail, with pedimented doorcases. Later development is the more typical Pontypool terrace, with exposed rubble and brick dressings.

Park Terrace stands out not only for the quality of detail and composition at Upper Park Terrace, but also for the larger houses at Lower Park Terrace with their bay windows and gables. The much later development on Twmpath Road takes up a key theme of housing in Pontypool — its pairs and terraces are carefully composed as designed groups. The area as a whole represents an interesting mix of different types of house.

High-quality housing on Park Terrace (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Distinctive pairs on Twmpath Road (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Above: Wainfelin from across the valley (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Right: An early survival at Wainfelin (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

9. Wainfelin

Historical Background

In the early nineteenth century, the area to the south-west of the town was largely agricultural, with a pattern of small fields and scattered dwellings. The main route north from Pontypool once came this way. It is now Wainfelin Road and, at its junction with Merchants Hill, there is at least one building which predates the development of this area in the late nineteenth century. Penywain Road may have developed from earlier farm tracks or paths, but the Trevethin Tithe Map does not show it as a through-route. The area retained this open character until the end of the nineteenth century when, piecemeal at first, the fields began to be built over and linear development took place along the through-road. The process of development left many pockets of land untouched, however, and it was only the public-housing programme after the Second World War that initiated development on a scale larger than that of single fields. Even now, some of the old fields remain.

The Character of Building

The limited period of development has lent a strong coherence to this area, but there is considerable variation of character within it. The cluster of buildings close to St Alban's Church on Wainfelin Road represent some of the earliest buildings here (they are shown on the map of 1836 and are probably early nineteenth century in origin), whilst at the northern end of the street is another survival, probably even earlier. Along Wainfelin Road the housing is a mix of large semi-detached villas, characterized by bold massing and big gables, and intermediate-sized houses with two-storey bay

windows and gabled fronts. All have characteristically long gardens and good boundary detail. The streets behind this main axis were developed with smaller terraced housing, mostly of similar plan, but with variety in detail. Each street (and sometimes each block of housing) has its own style. Flamboyant use of decorative brick, with subtle distinctions such as whether or not there are bay windows, lend a strong sense of colour and rhythm to the streetscape. Good surviving boundary wall detail contributes to the strong character of this area.

Left: Stone and brick in both simple and elaborate combinations (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Far left: Ornate use of brickwork links these terraced houses (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Left: Larger terraced houses, with gables, full-height bay windows, and long gardens (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Left: Substantial houses with lively façades (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Statement of Significance

Pontypool has a distinguished history and can claim to be the first truly industrial town in Wales. Within the limits of the modern settlement area major technological developments in the iron industry took place, and these have also given the town a place in the history books. Like other successful industrial towns, however, development pressures brought a relentless cycle of change and there is now little in the standing fabric of the town to suggest its early origins and growth. Direct evidence of its industrial base is now elusive. The cycle of change has also ensured that many of the historic transport networks that served the town and its hinterland have been overlooked, lost, or replaced by modern roads. The river too, which was integral to industrial development, has been neglected. Nevertheless, one legacy of past industrial prosperity is an architecturally sophisticated town centre. An impressive series of civic and commercial buildings crowded into a topographically constrained site have produced a townscape of considerable quality.

In common with other industrial towns, the character of modern Pontypool was defined in a relatively short time in the late nineteenth century by the development of extensive residential suburbs. The topography and transport routes served to divide these areas, each of which has a strong individual identity, notwithstanding

shared characteristics arising from common models of building and materials, and a distinctive style. Architectural detail is used here to mark out many types and grades of house, and its survival lends real distinction to the town, displaying a rich social history even from the relatively recent past.

Pontypool Park is another remarkable assertion of history — as the site of some of its earliest industry and the home of its dominant landowning dynasty, it is an area absolutely central to the fortunes of the town. Though not quite immune to the processes of change that have done so much to model the town, the park has resisted many of them and survives not only as an important legacy of the past, but as a valuable foil to the dense development patterns which characterize the town itself.

The whole settlement of Pontypool shares an important industrial history. Extraction and production generated a mesh of connections between disparate areas, and together supported a town with a clearly defined centre and a coherent series of satellite settlements. Some of the broken threads that bound the settlement together could be repaired but, at the same time, the separate physical character of its component parts is a distinctive feature of the town, which should be reinforced.

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1. The Extent of Urban Development by 1844 (Tithe Map data on First Edition Ordnance Survey map base)
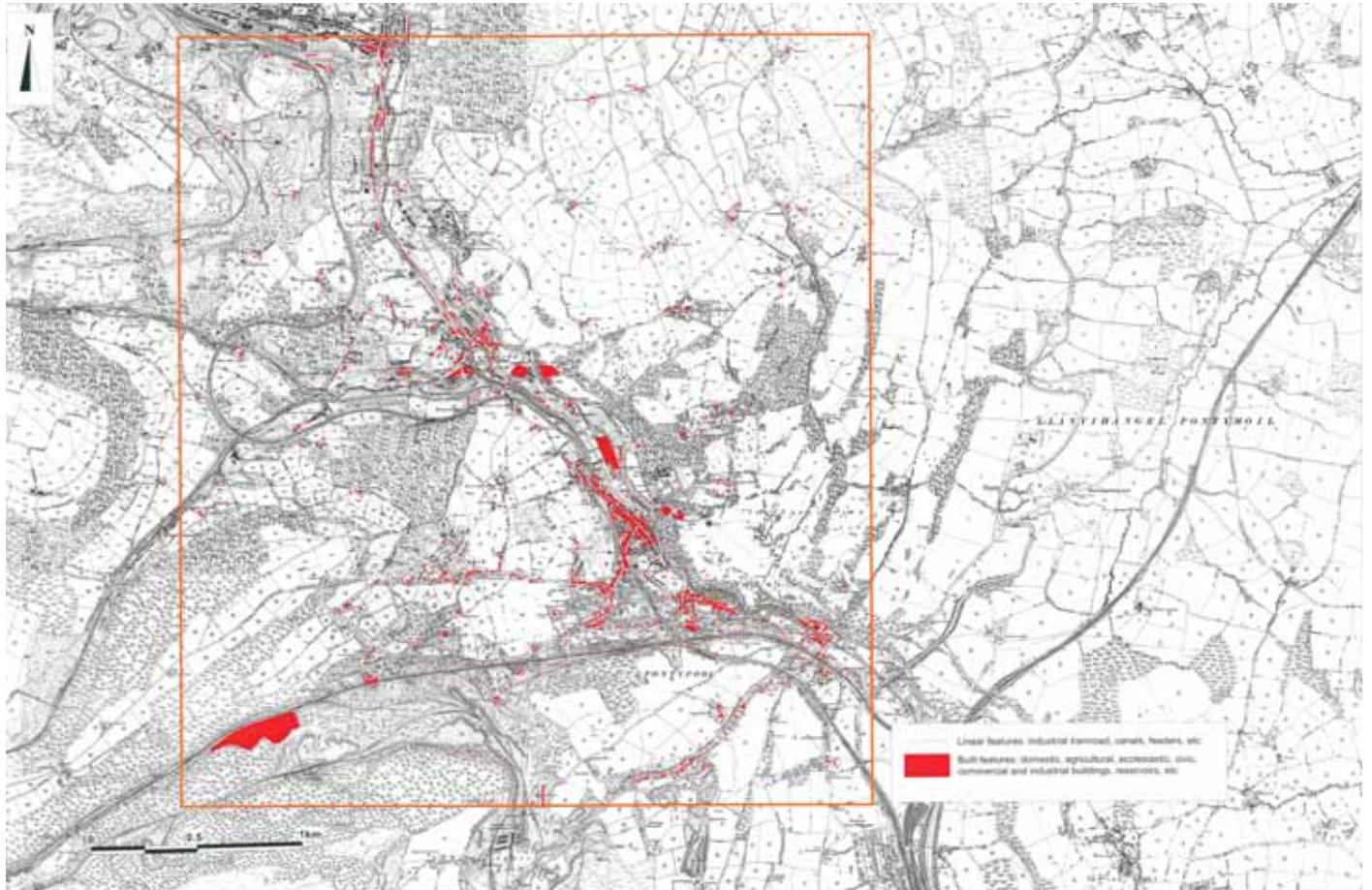
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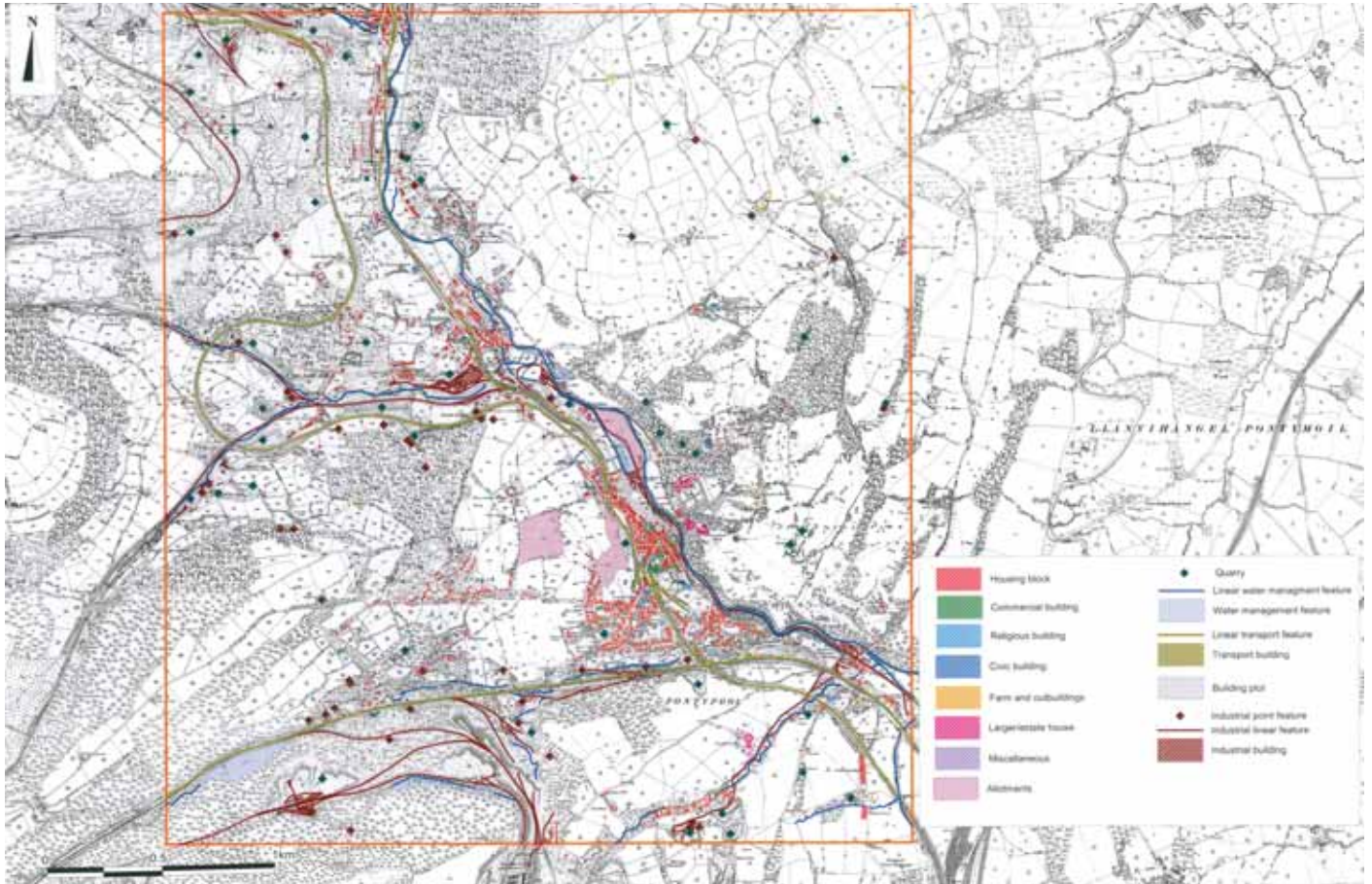
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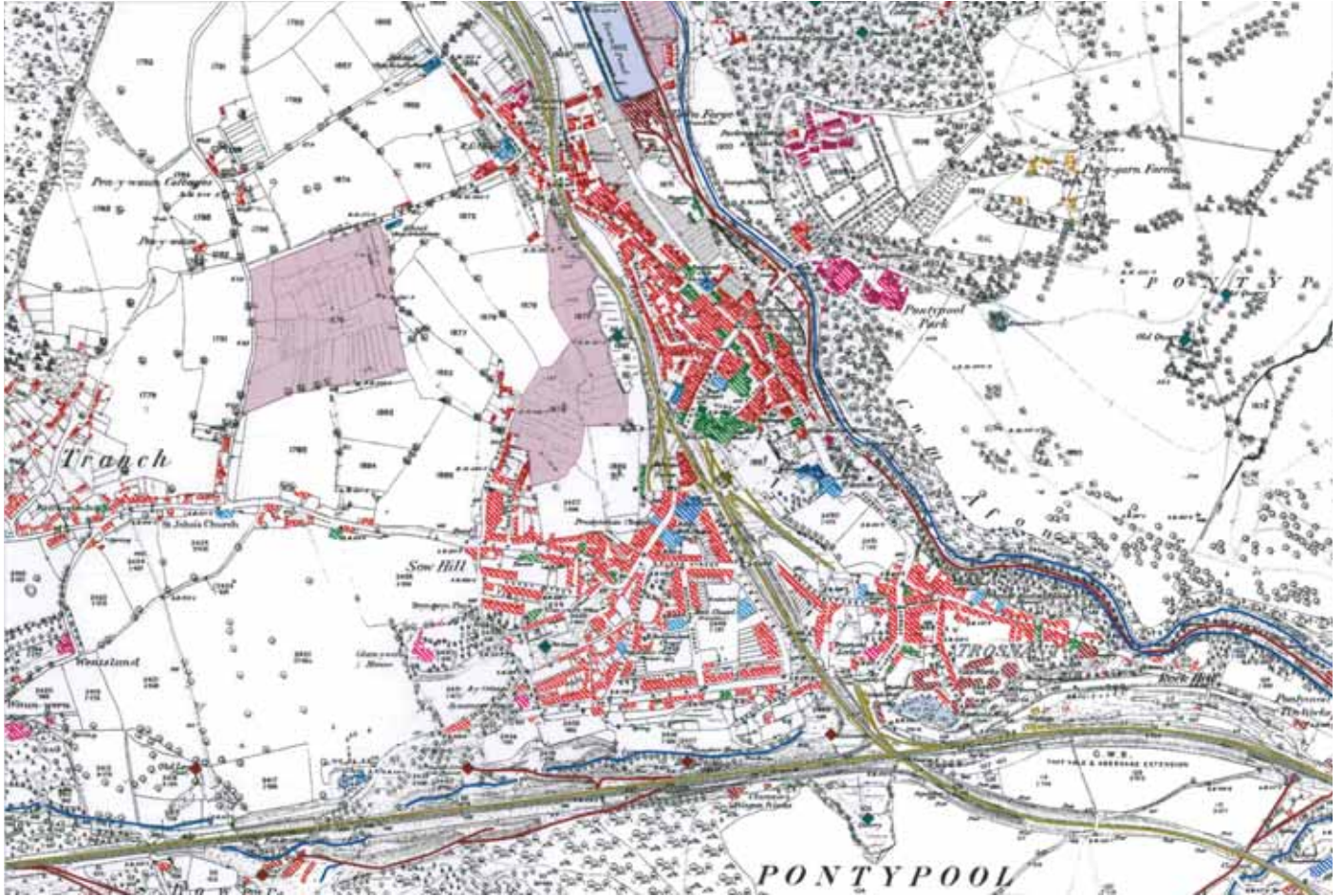
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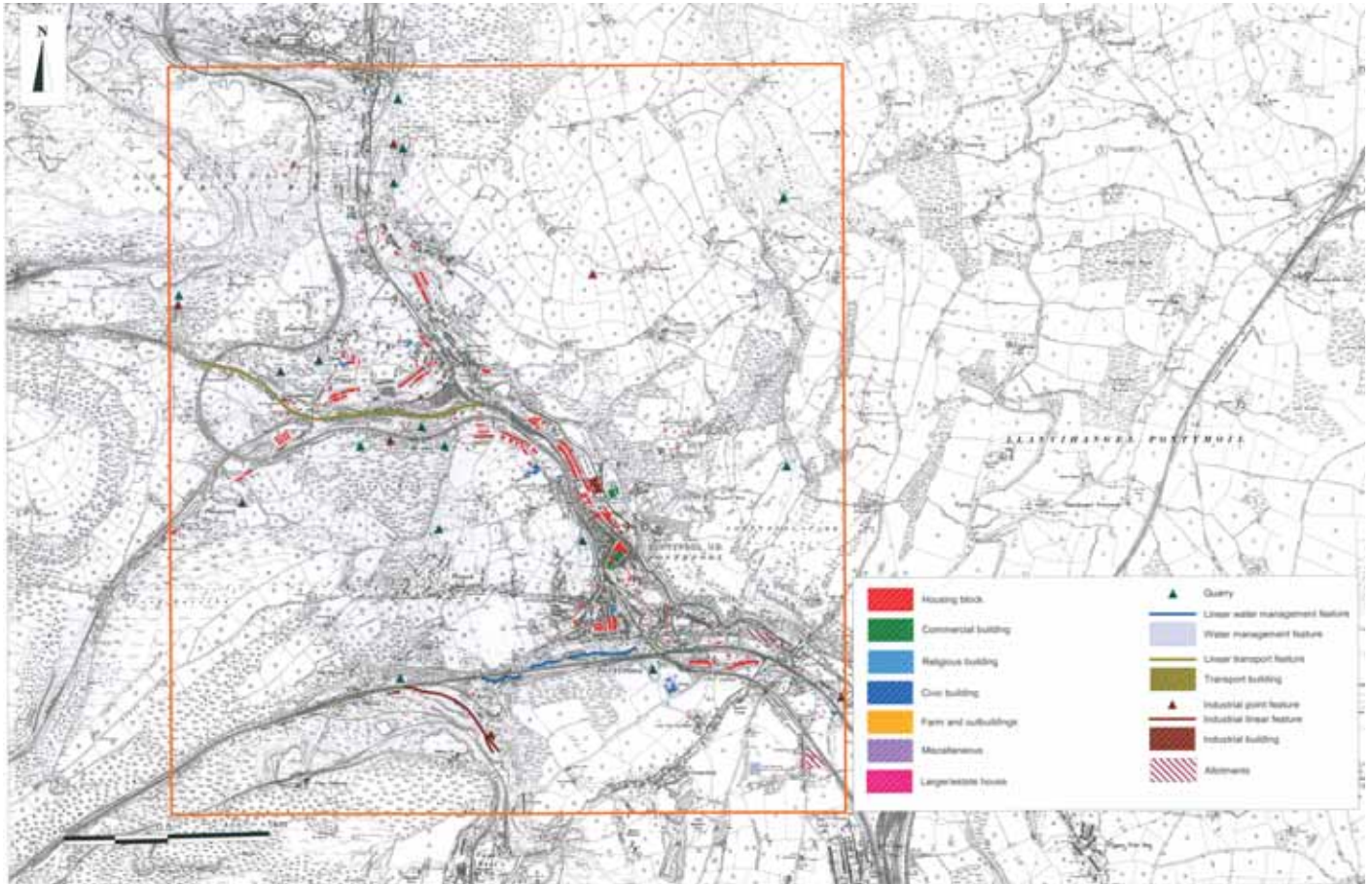
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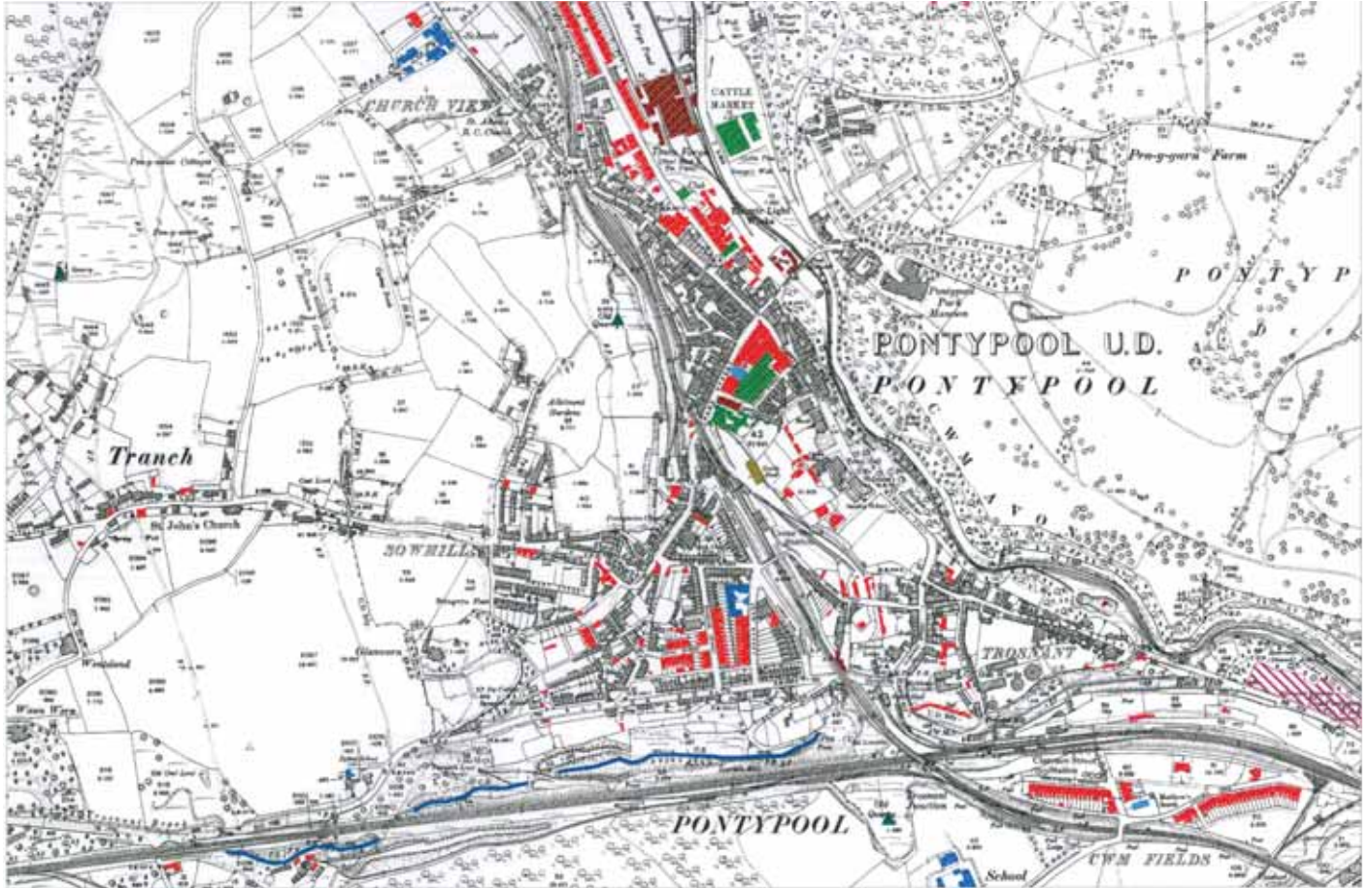
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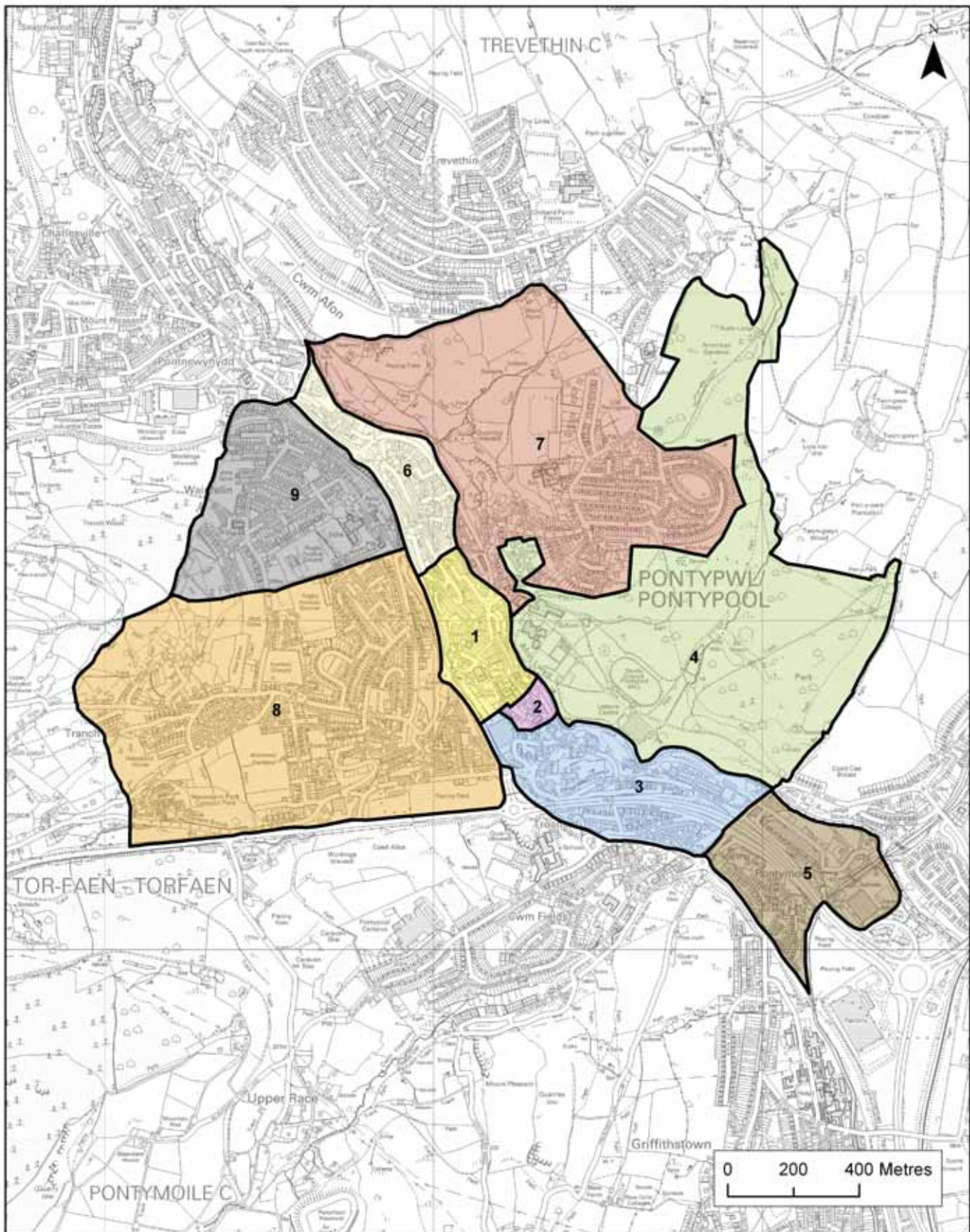
7. All Character Areas with Listed Buildings, Registered Park, and Conservation Area

8. Town Centre

Listed Buildings
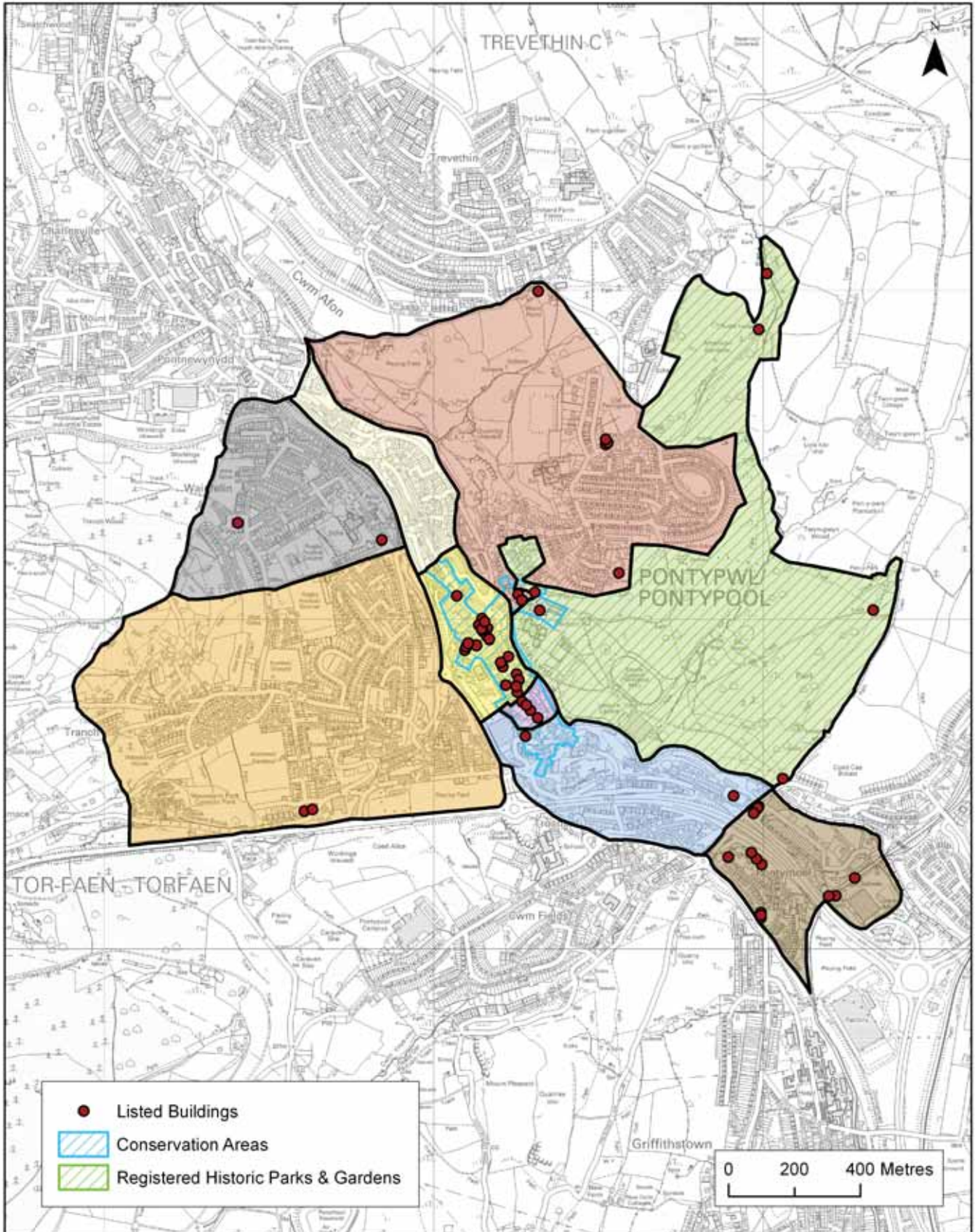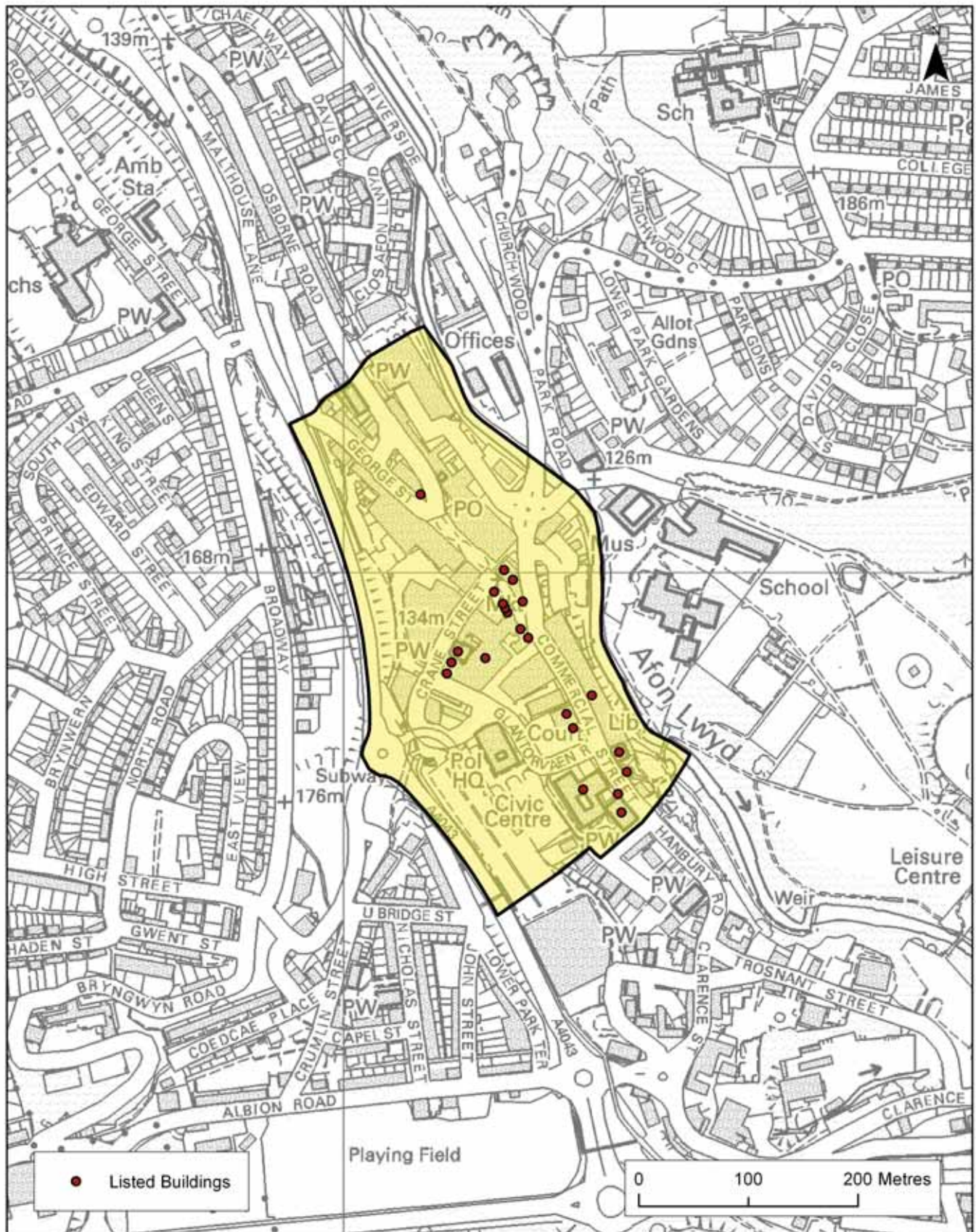
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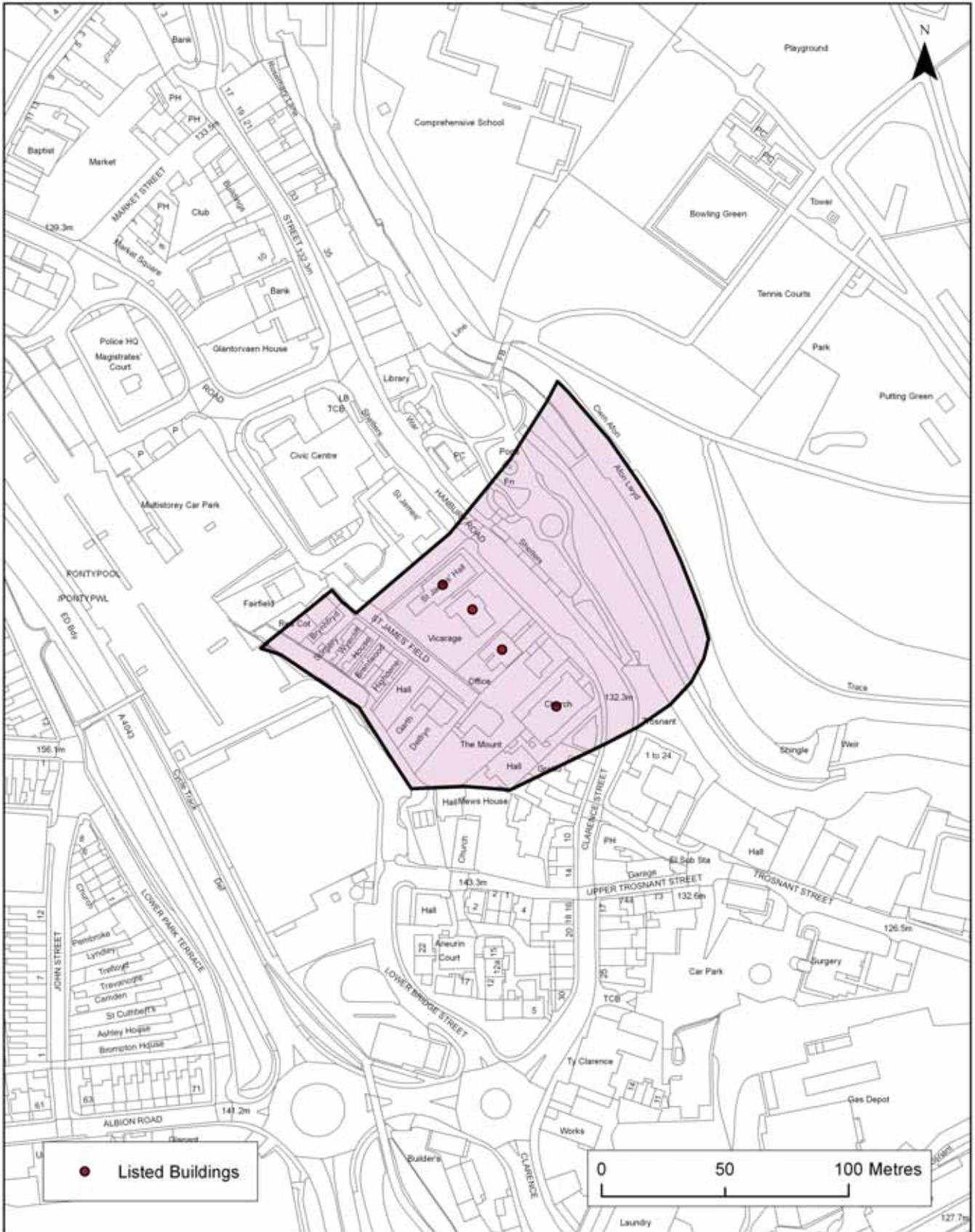
10. Trosnant

11. Pontypool Park

Listed Buildings

Registered Historic Parks & Gardens

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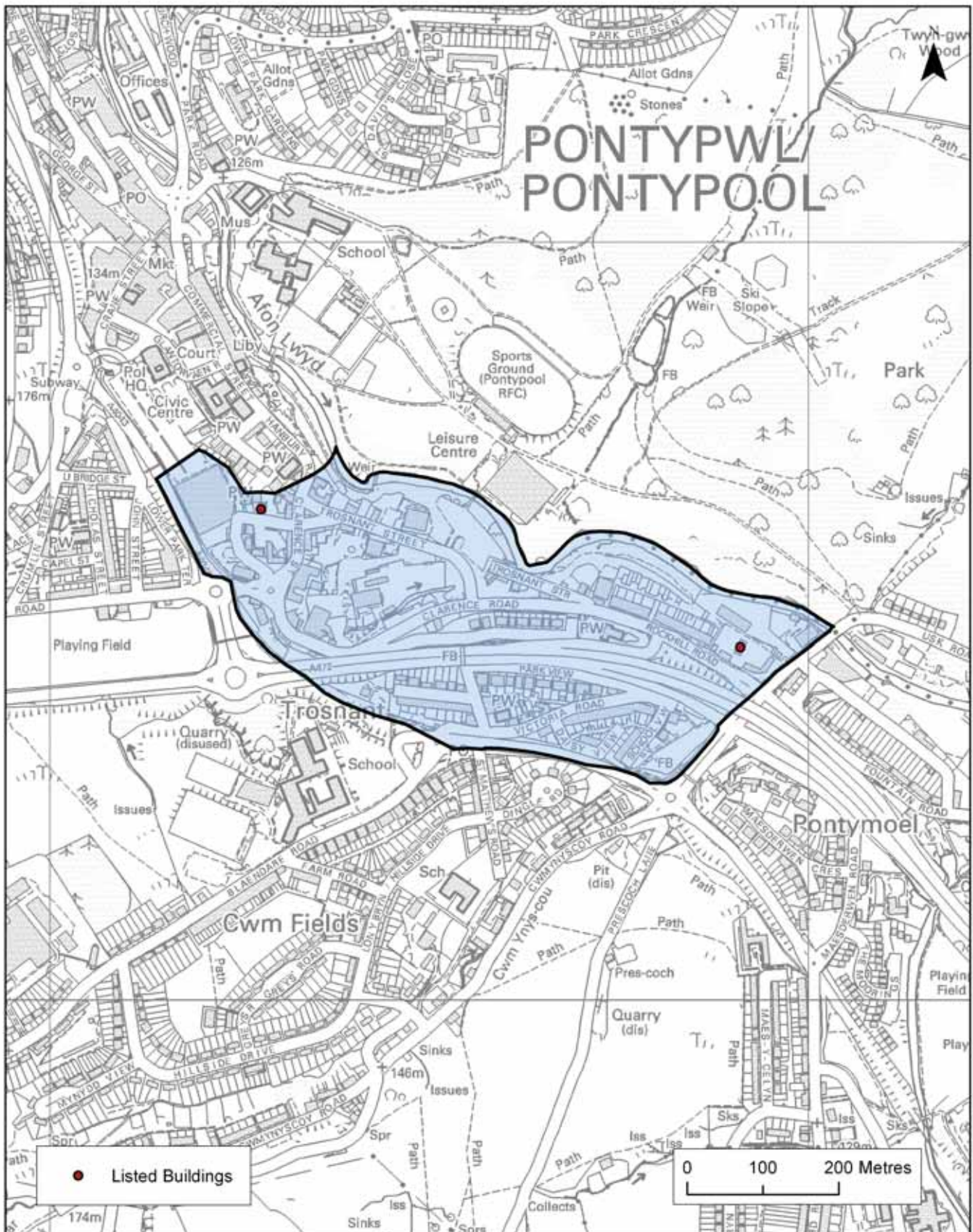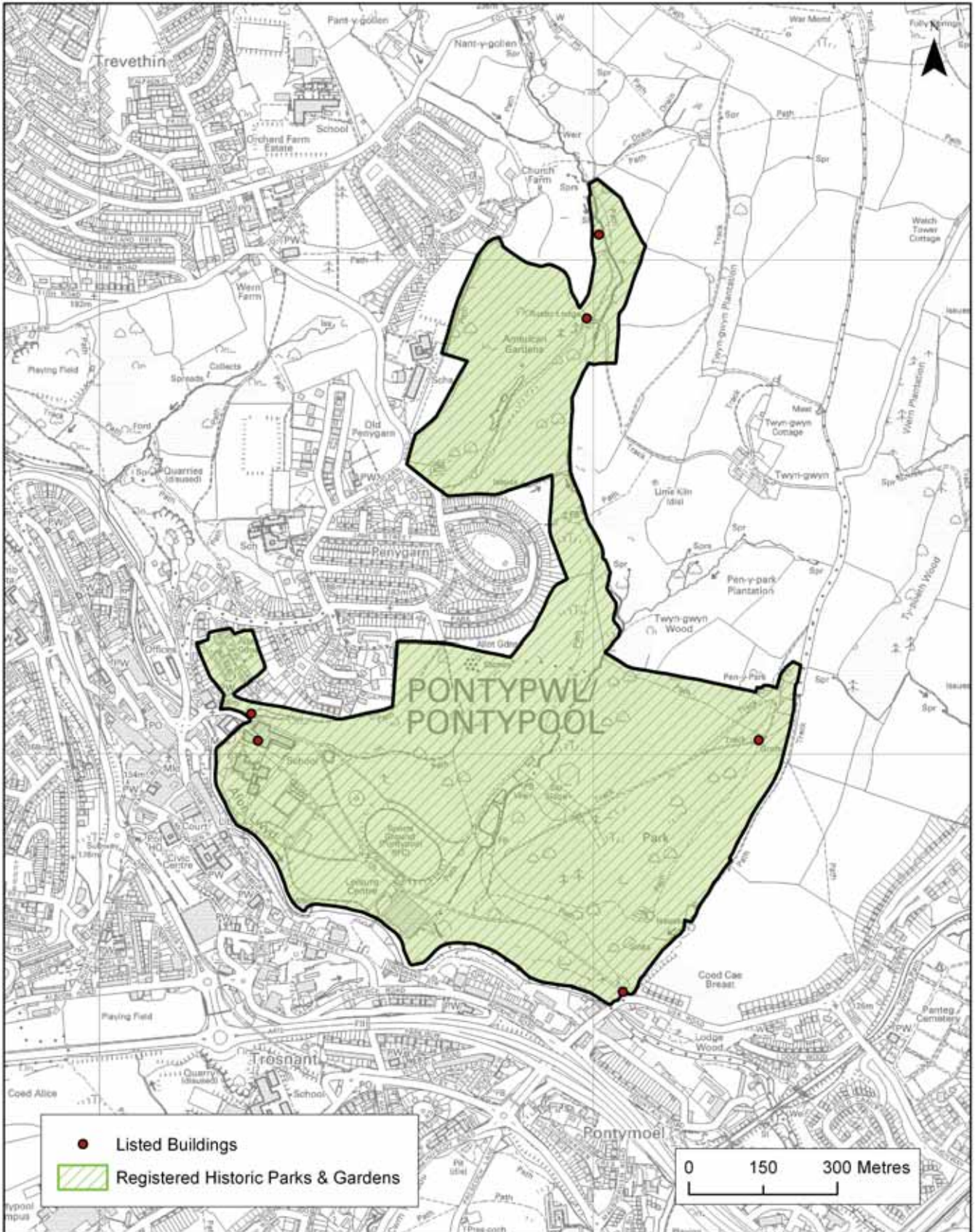
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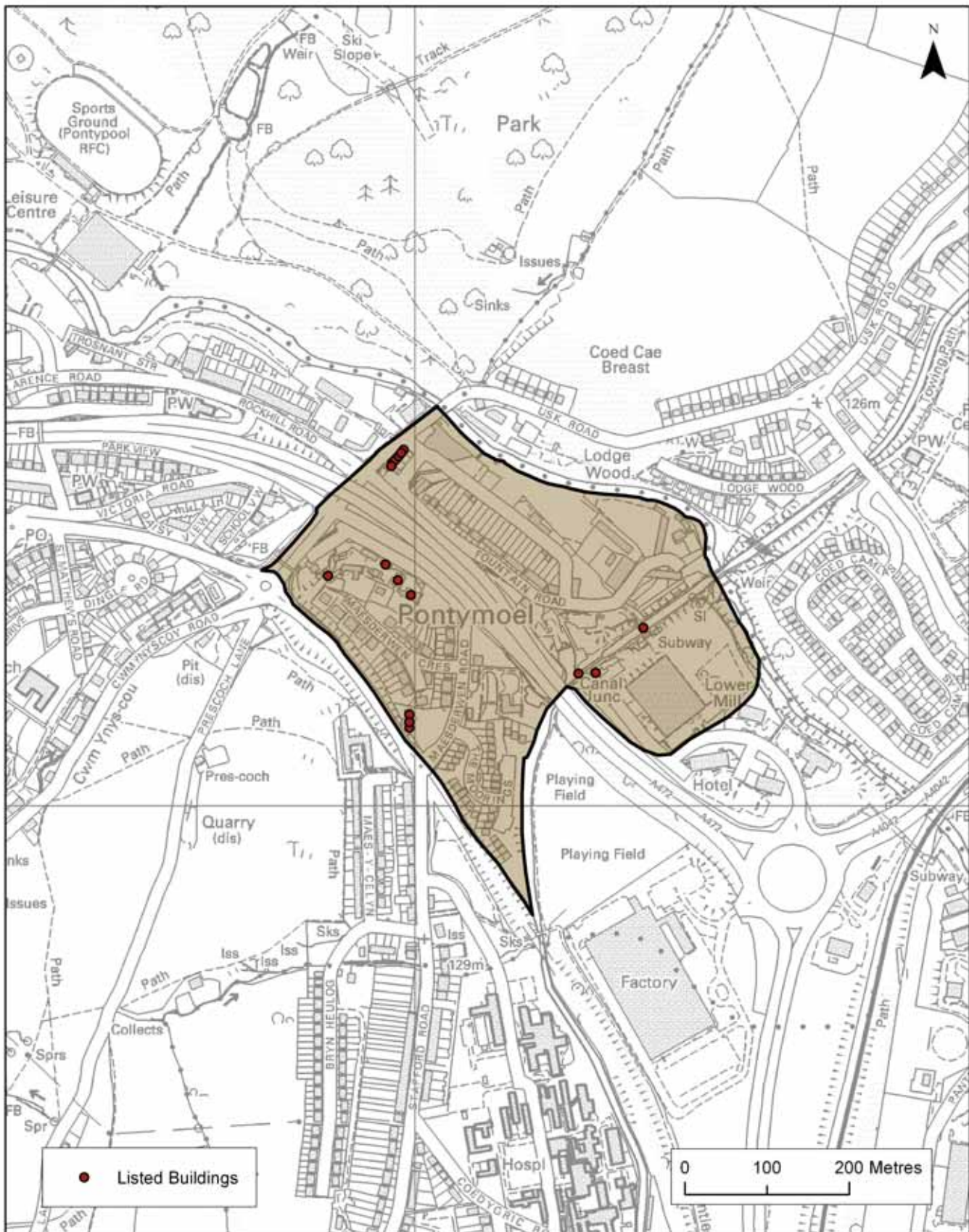
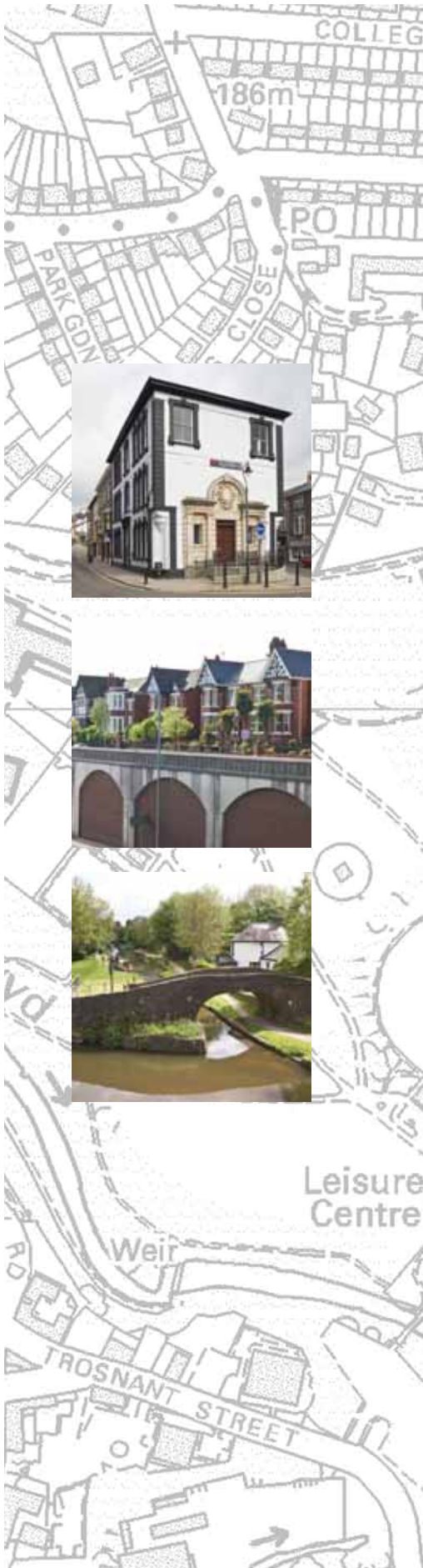## 13. Osborne Road
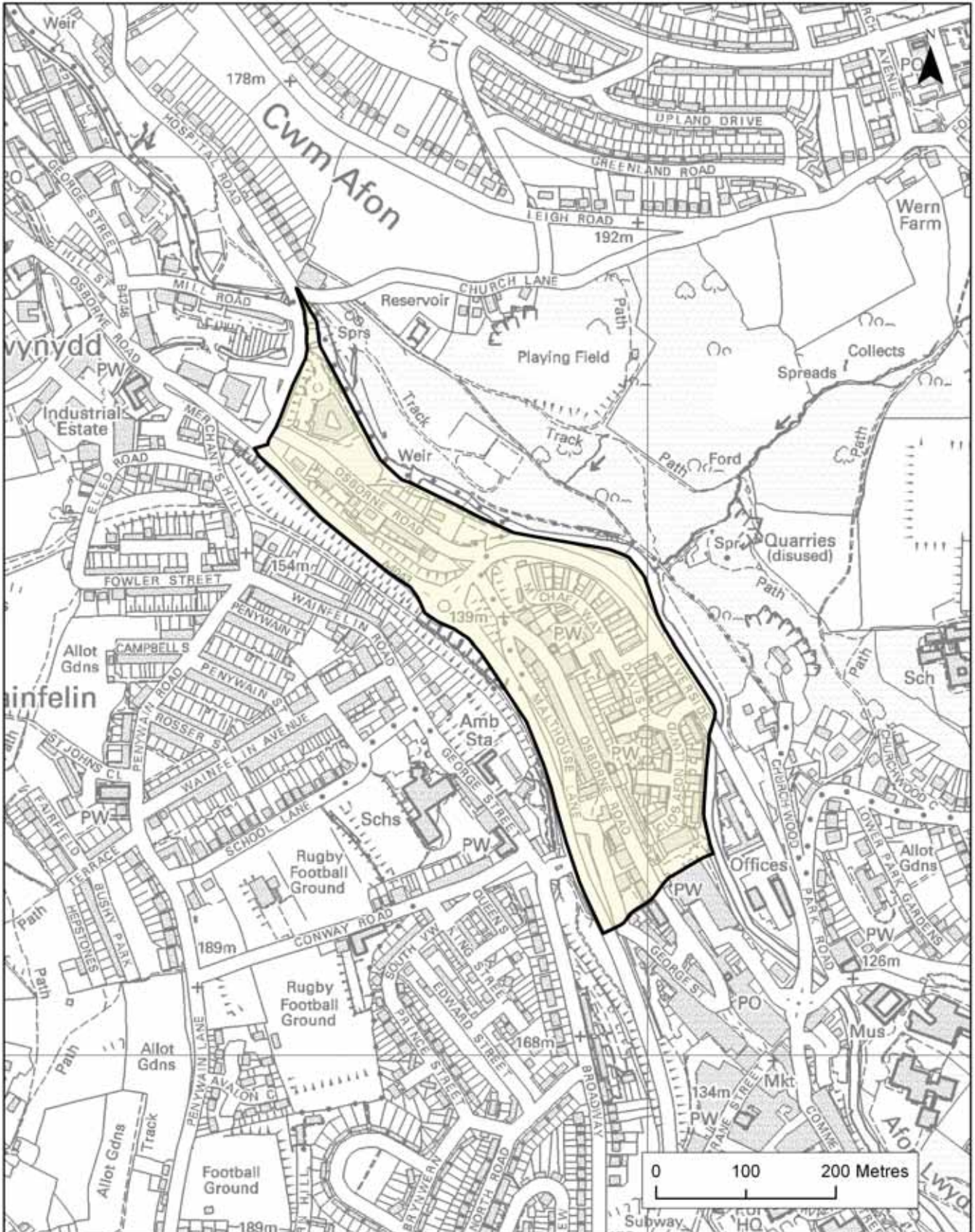
14. Penygarn and East of the River

15. Sow Hill

16. Wainfelin

Listed Buildings