

# Explore Cwm waen & Tremeirchion



AHNE Bryniau Clwyd  
Clwydian Range AONB

## The Villages of the Clwydian Range

# An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

*The parishes of Cwm, Waen and Tremeirchion lie within varied and beautiful countryside. Tremeirchion and Cwm, in the heart of the Clwydian Hills, have wide views across the Vale of Clwyd. In contrast Waen lies on the wide valley floor, with lush green fields and thick hedgerows.*

## The Clwydian Range AONB

The special character of the higher land has been recognised nationally, designated as part of the Clwydian Range Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The five Welsh AONBs, along with our National Parks, make up the most important landscapes in Wales.

The underlying limestone in this area gives it a distinct and special character. Limestone weathers easily leaving a ridge of rocky outcrops, cliffs and caves, cut by deep valleys. The lower slopes are well-wooded with both native broadleaf trees and conifer plantations.

The limestone has been widely used for building. The stone walls that snake across the hillsides, and the sturdy stone cottages and churches add to the special character.

Denbighshire Countryside Service manage the AONB with guidance from a Joint Advisory Committee, made up of local authority members, landowners, farmers and conservation and recreation representatives.



Supported by Cadwyn Clwyd through the EU funded programme, in partnership with the Welsh Assembly Government, the Welsh Development Agency, Denbighshire County Council and Flintshire County Council.

## Wildlife

The limestone supports its own special communities of plants and animals. Wildflowers thrive on the thin limestone soils. The plants in turn provide food and shelter for many butterflies, grasshoppers and other insects. Birds too thrive on the plentiful food sources—nectar, seeds or insects—and the scrub woodland at the grassland edge provides valuable nesting areas for birds and small mammals.

In many areas modern farming practices, such as fertilising or reseeding poor grasslands, have reduced the wildflowers. However pockets of unimproved grassland remain and are of great wildlife interest.

**Y Graig**, a prominent limestone crag to the south of Tremeirchion, is a good example, with flower-rich grassland and woodland. Since 1987 it has been managed as a nature reserve by North Wales Wildlife Trust with the support of the local community.

Colourful flowers such as Common Rock Rose dot the open grassland. The south facing quarry is warm and sheltered and several rarer flowers, including Pyramidal Orchids and Autumn Gentian thrive here. Butterflies too benefit from the shelter and plentiful nectar—over twenty species, including Green and Purple Hairstreak, have been recorded. Greater Spotted Woodpecker and Tawny Owl are just two of the birds living in the ancient woodland.

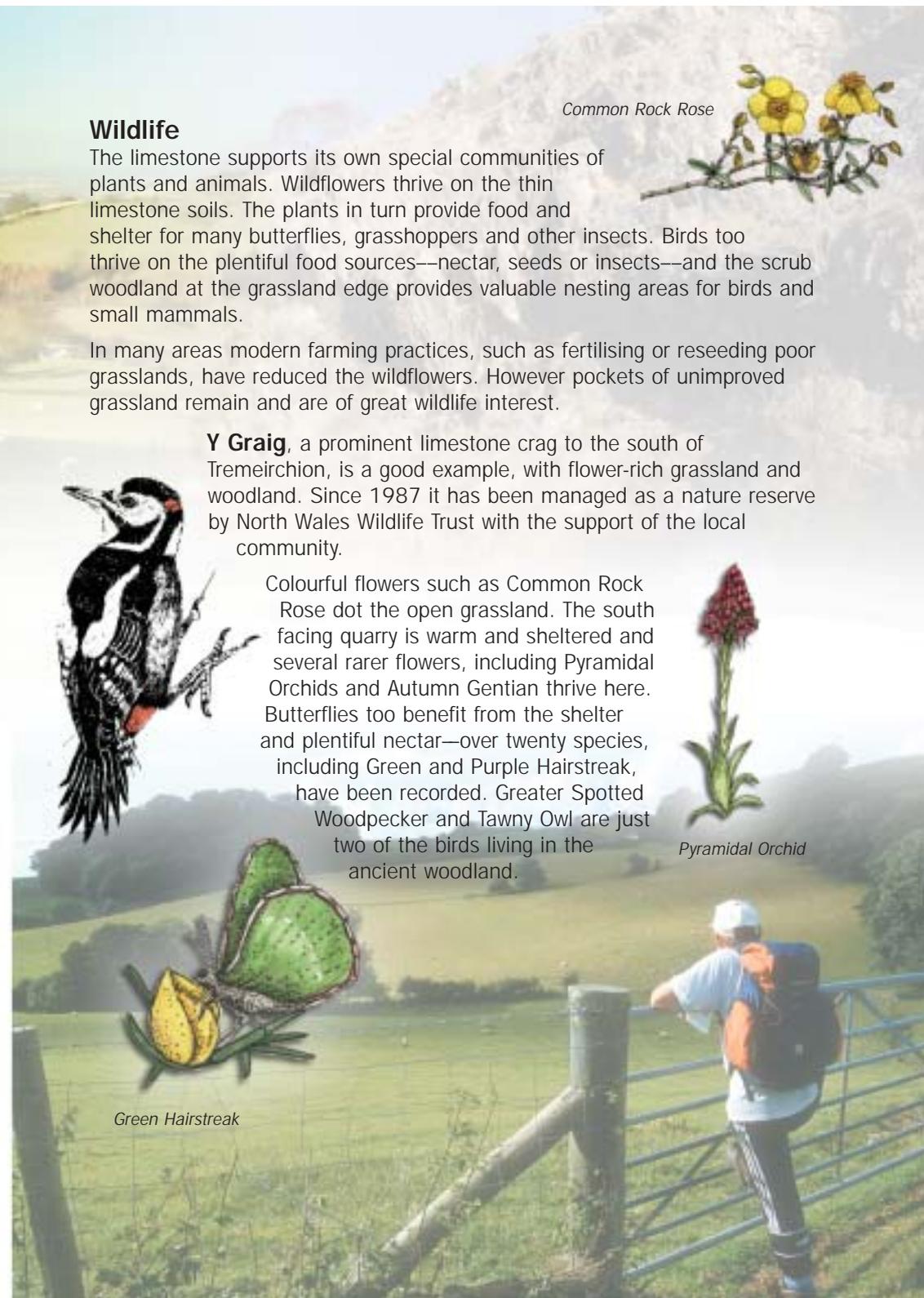
Common Rock Rose



Pyramidal Orchid



Green Hairstreak





Brynbella

# wealth & Grandeur

The hillside and Vale below are dotted with magnificent mansions of varying ages. Two of the most influential families in northeast Wales, the Llewenni-Salusburys and the Pennants, were local landowners. Some were great local benefactors—Mrs Piozzi funded repairs to Tremeirchion church and Philip Pennant, who built Nantlys as his family home, supported the establishment of the village school.

## Brynbella

This grand 18th century mansion was built for Mr and Mrs Piozzi. Mrs Piozzi was a Llewenni-Salusbury but is perhaps better known as Mrs Thrale, companion of Dr Johnson who wrote the first English dictionary. She was a clever and witty woman, said to be the only female Dr Johnson considered intelligent enough to engage him in conversation!

The friendship waned after the death of her first husband, when, against Dr Johnson's wishes, she married Piozzi, an Italian music master. London society ignored them and they returned to her beloved Vale of Clwyd. They set about building Brynbella, its name combining their Welsh and Italian ancestry. They entertained lavishly and most of the grand society of Flintshire and Denbighshire would have visited.

*(House and gardens are private but there are good views from the footpath running diagonally across field behind. Please keep to the path. The large trees that dot the field are remnants of the pleasure gardens.)*

## Bach-y-graig

The farmhouse that remains today was originally the gatehouse of a much larger building, reputedly the

Bach-y-graig farmhouse



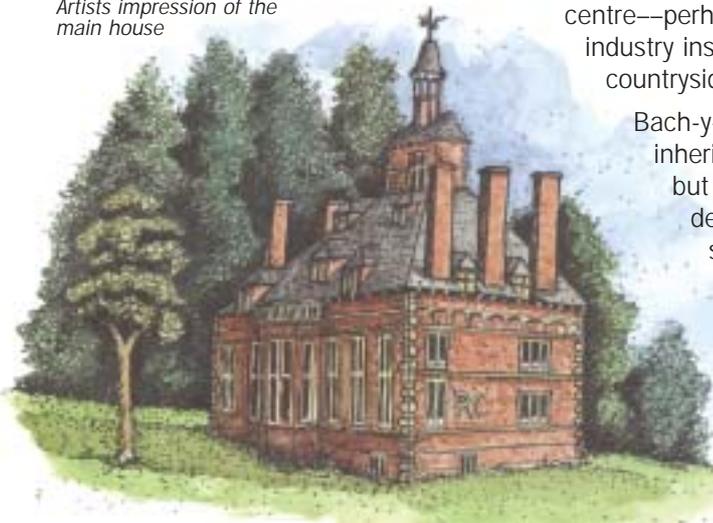
first brick house in Wales. It was built between 1567-9 by Sir Richard Clough, a merchant from Denbigh.

The Flemish countries were the hub of the Elizabethan cloth trade and Sir Richard became wealthy whilst working in Antwerp as agent for Sir Thomas Gresham, the 'Queen's Merchant Royal'. Gresham was responsible for building London's Royal Exchange (forerunner of the Stock Exchange) in grand Flemish style. Clough supervised the import of bricks for the work and later brought these Flemish influences up to rural Wales when he built Bach-y-graig.

Sir Richard reputedly brought bricklayers from Holland. It is uncertain whether they made bricks from local clay, or imported them from Antwerp. The finished building was very different from both traditional Welsh and English renaissance buildings of its time. It was considered spectacular and no tour of Wales by English society was complete without a visit. Locals didn't think so highly of it, with some calling it 'the work of the Devil'.

Sir Richard intended to trade from Bach-y-graig by widening the River Clwyd to take barges. The large outbuildings were probably designed as warehouses. He died in Hamburg in 1570 so his plans were never realised. Imagine how different the area would look if it

Artists impression of the main house



## Mrs Thrale (1741-1821)

*Mrs Thrale, from a portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds. On seeing this the witty Mrs Thrale commented, 'In these features so placid, so cold, so serene, What trace of the wit or the Welshwoman's seen?'*



Portrait of Sir Richard Clough. (By permission of the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies.)

had become a major trading centre—perhaps sprawling industry instead of peaceful countryside!

Bach-y-graig was finally inherited by Mrs Thrale but was by then decaying. Her adopted son, John Salusbury Piozzi, didn't share his mother's fondness of it and demolished the main block in 1821.

# walking Opportunities

## Offa's Dyke

Offa's Dyke National Trail is a 182 mile long distance footpath that traverses the border country of England and Wales, from Chepstow to Prestatyn. Here the trail runs along the Clwydian ridge above Tremeirchion and Cwm. It is easy to follow, clearly waymarked with the distinctive acorn symbol, and gives superb views across the Vale of Clwyd.

Offa's Dyke was a long earthen ditch and bank, built in the 8th century by the Anglo-Saxon King Offa of Mercia—now the Midlands—to protect his border from attack by Welsh chieftains. Seventy miles of actual dyke were constructed, with gaps where the river or treacherous bog formed a natural barrier. (This section does not follow the course of the original dyke).

Fron Haul farmhouse, signed from Offa's Dyke to the south of Tremeirchion, serves teas everyday and offers accommodation (Tel: 01745 710301).

## Circular walks

The network of quiet lanes, bridleways and footpaths give plenty of opportunities for circular walks. Devise your own routes using Explorer map 265 or refer to any of the following:

'Hidden Denbighshire' – a free pack of walks leaflets, including one in Tremeirchion, produced by Denbighshire Countryside Service. Tel: 01352 810614 or 810586.

'Walking in the Clwydian Hills' by Carl Rogers & 'Circular walks along Offa's Dyke Path Volume 1' by Jeff Lomax – Mara Books Tel: 01928 723744

'Walks on the Clwydian Hills' by David Berry – Kittiwake Press Tel: 01650 511314

## Bach-y-graig

Documents suggest the woodland behind Bach-y-graig has ancient origins and its special range of flowers, shrubs and trees reflect this. It was a royal hunting forest and Edward, the Black

Prince, hunted there for deer and boar. The forest was highly valued supplying building timber and firewood for Rhuddlan Castle, oak bark for tanning leather, coppiced stems for charcoal making and foliage from felled trees for fodder. You can still see the earthen woodbanks that marked the boundaries and enclosed the deer.

For a small charge, you can walk the nature trail through the forest. It is particularly attractive in spring. The farmhouse also offers accommodation. Tel: 01745 730627.

## Y Graig

One of the most peaceful places to walk is through Y Graig Nature Reserve. An information board at the entrance marks the paths and there are picnic tables on the higher ground with superb views.

Traditional teas and accommodation available

Ffynnon Beuno

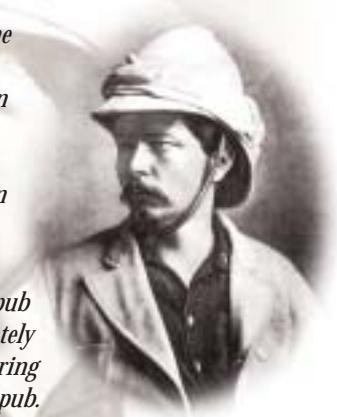
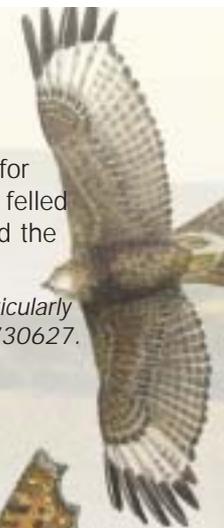
## H.M. Stanley 1841–1904

*The Victorian explorer who founded Congo Free State is probably best known for saying, "Dr Livingstone, I presume" when he tracked down the missing missionary in Tanganyika.*

*Stanley was a controversial character. His real name was John Rowlands and he was born in St Asaph. Abandoned by his mother, he spent his childhood in St Asaph workhouse (now the H.M. Stanley Hospital). The stories of his workhouse departure vary—in one account he ran away after turning on the cruel master; in another he was a valued pupil, leaving to train as a pupil-teacher at Brynford!*

*He then lived with his aunt at Ffynnon Beuno, a pub and farm, before leaving for Liverpool, and ultimately America and the beginning of his explorations. During his stay he helped his aunt on the farm and in the pub.*

*His relations showed him little affection but he had fond memories of the local area. He particularly loved scrambling up Y Graig. In his autobiography he wrote, "There I was happiest, withdrawn from contact with the cold-hearted selfish world, with only the sheep and my own thoughts for company."*



# Travelling through

The gap in the Clwydian ridge at Rhualt has always been the natural route for an east-west road. The remains of the original Roman road can still be traced to the east of Bryn Gwyn Mawr. A similar route, upgraded many times as the traffic changed, has been used over the centuries by packhorses and oxen carts, livestock, stagecoaches, steam engines and finally motor vehicles.

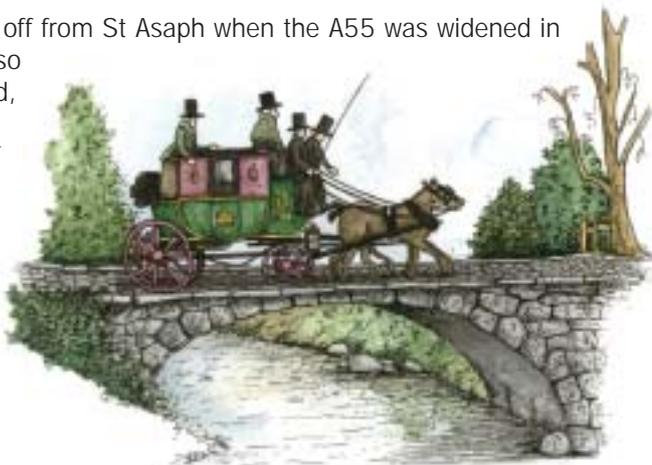
## Pont Dafydd

St Asaph cathedral was the focus of the medieval church in north-east Wales and so the route from Holywell to St Asaph was particularly important. Bishop Dafydd of St Asaph built the cobbled bridge, Pont Dafydd, in 1630, to carry the road across Afon Clwyd.

For centuries it carried travellers to and from St Asaph and was carefully maintained by the church. However, when traffic increased, a replacement was built in 1840s.

The old bridge was cut off from St Asaph when the A55 was widened in 1969. The river was also diverted so Pont Dafydd, once so highly valued, now sits at the edge of a field with grass growing beneath!

Imagine stagecoaches clattering over Pont Dafydd in bygone times!



Tollgate on Criafol Hill, Rhualt



## Turnpikes and tolls

The Chester-Holyhead road was built in 1663, running via Rhuddlan. It was soon re-routed via Holywell and St Asaph, passing through Rhualt and over Pont Dafydd, to avoid the marshes around Rhuddlan. A Turnpike Trust was set up in 1756 to improve and maintain the road. Road users paid a fee which was collected at tollgates along the route. The tolls were unpopular and many took the long way round to avoid paying! Traffic soon increased along this upgraded road and by the end of the 18th century regular mail coaches and stage coaches ran between Chester and Holyhead. Several of the milestones that marked the route can still be seen today.

## Felicia Hemans 1793 – 1835

Poet Felicia Hemans, spent most of her life here, living first at Bronwylfa, St Asaph, and later at Rhyllon, the brick farmhouse close to Pont Dafydd. Her most famous poem is "Casabianca". The name may be unfamiliar but the opening lines are more easily recognised.

*"The boy stood on the burning deck,  
Whence all but him had fled;  
The flame that lit the battle's wreck  
Shone round him o'er the dead."*



Reputedly, she first thought of it whilst standing on the old bridge. The strong rhythm and patriotic and sentimental flavour typify her style. She was very popular in Victorian England, when recitations were often part of an evening's entertainment.

She loved the local countryside and pined to return, both when spending winters in London in her youth, and when her military husband was posted to Daventry. When her marriage failed she returned with her children and continued to write, no doubt still drawing inspiration from her surroundings.

# Looking back in time

People have valued this area since prehistoric times when they sheltered in the caves at Ffynnon Beuno, hunted on the wooded slopes and gathered water from the plentiful springs.

The rich mineral deposits may have been used by early man; the Romans certainly mined lead at nearby Meliden and, by the 19th century, several mines were active and the stone itself widely quarried.

The area was spiritually important too—the Bronze Age burial tombs, Holy wells, miracle-working Medieval cross, ancient churches, Jesuit College and Welsh chapels, bear testament to this.

We still value this landscape, now protected as some of the most attractive countryside in Wales.



**AHNE Bryniau Clwyd  
Clwydian Range AONB**

*1985 area declared an  
Area of Outstanding  
Natural Beauty*

*140 – 85 years ago  
Y Graig limekiln in use*

*800 – 150 years ago  
Drovers walked their  
cattle to Caerwys  
market or further  
afield.*

*1846  
St Beuno's  
founded.*

*1857  
HM Stanley  
lived at Ffynnon  
Beuno*

*300 to 80 years  
ago Lead, zinc and  
copper was mined  
from the Pennant  
and Cwm mines.*

*1630  
Pont Dafydd  
was built over  
Afon Clwyd.*

*1567  
Bach-y-Graig,  
was built.*

*1792  
Brynbella built  
for Mrs Piozzi  
(Mrs Thrale)*

*1756 Holywell  
- St Asaph road  
Turnpiked*

*1,400 years ago  
St Beuno preached  
locally.*

*1,400 -500 years ago  
Pilgrims visited  
Ffynnon Beuno and  
may have passed  
through enroute to St  
Winefride's well at  
Holywell.*

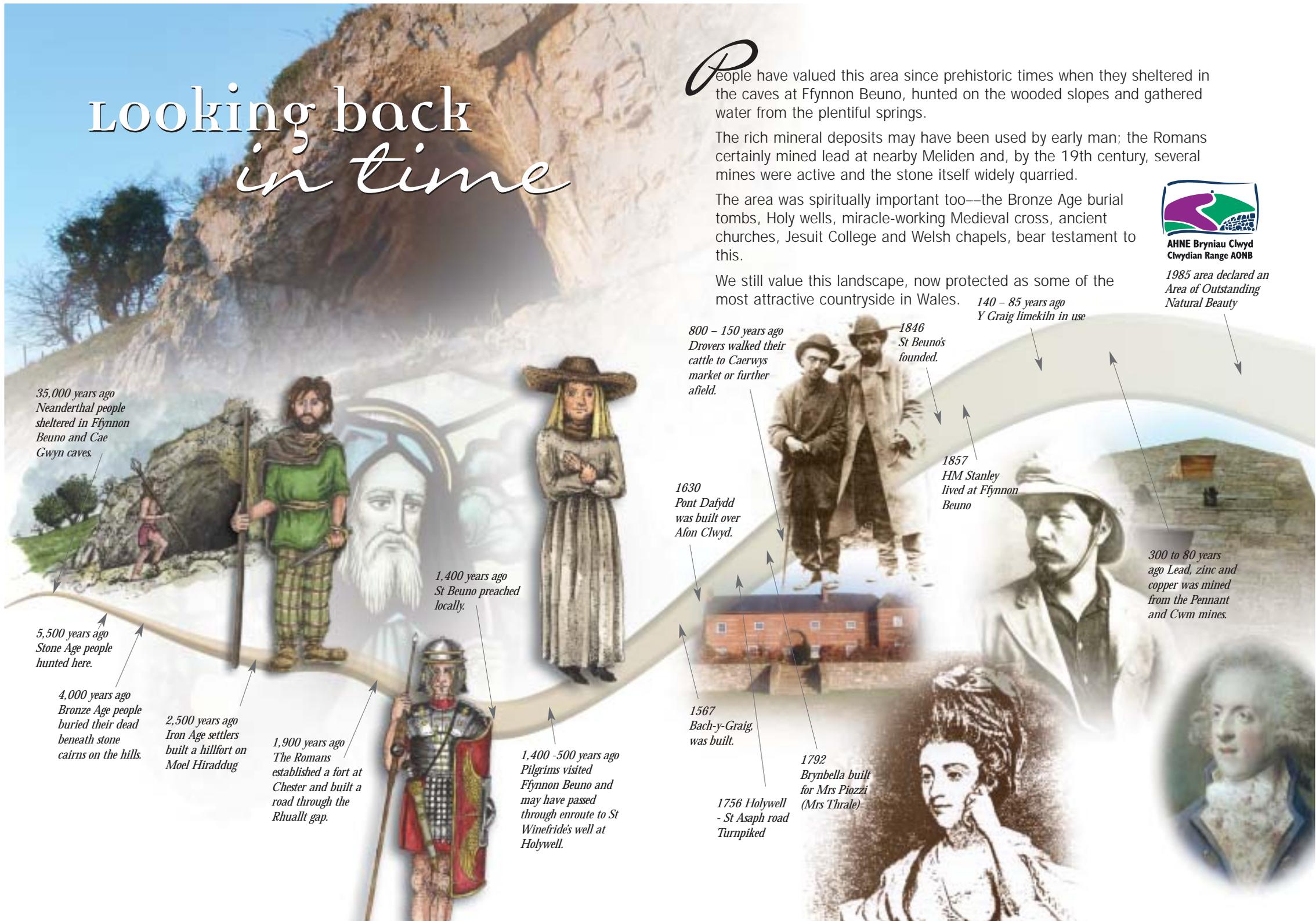
*1,900 years ago  
The Romans  
established a fort at  
Chester and built a  
road through the  
Rhuallt gap.*

*2,500 years ago  
Iron Age settlers  
built a hillfort on  
Moel Hiraddug*

*4,000 years ago  
Bronze Age people  
buried their dead  
beneath stone  
cairns on the hills.*

*5,500 years ago  
Stone Age people  
hunted here.*

*35,000 years ago  
Neanderthal people  
sheltered in Ffynnon  
Beuno and Cae  
Gwyn caves.*



# working the Stone

Remains of the engine house,  
Pennant mine

The local limestone is rich in metal ores—primarily lead, but zinc, iron and copper were also mined locally. Mining reached its peak in the 18th and 19th centuries when lead and copper were mined at Tyddyn-y-cyll near Marian Cwm and iron from Cwm mine. The most productive was the Pennant mine near Bryn Gwyn Mawr farm which was worked mainly for lead, but also zinc. It employed 46 people at its peak in 1877. The A55 now crosses the site of the dressing floors and crusher house.

Poor drainage was a constant problem in the mines with water flowing in underground passages. Many different drainage schemes were tried. Wooden barrels filled with water were lifted to the surface by a winding engine at the Cwm mine. The larger Pennant mine installed a pumping engine in the 1870s and the remains of the engine house can still be seen today.

Funds were often limited as some of the mines were leased by small owners who only worked the mines intermittently. They were constantly looking for new, easier seams to work. The drainage issues ultimately determined the depth and extent the seams were worked.

## Limestone, quarrying & limekilns

The limestone itself was also a valuable commodity and the higher land is dotted with small quarries. Not only was it the most durable building material, but it was crushed and burned in limekilns to produce lime to fertilise acid land and for mortar. There were many kilns in the area—seven are shown on 19th century maps of Marion Cwm. Most were situated near a quarry, such as the well preserved one at Y Graig, built by Philip Pennant to produce lime for the construction of nearby Nantllys.

The compacted lime ash (a by-product) was often used as flooring material for tenants' cottages.

## Thomas Pennant, 1724 – 1798

*On of the best known members of the Pennant family is the zoologist and writer Thomas Pennant. He owned land in Tremeirchion including Henblas, Ffynnon Beuno and the Pennant mine.*

*He wrote many books and papers on zoology but it is his reputation as a travel writer that has most lived on. His 'Tour in Wales', begun in 1773, popularised North Wales, setting a trend for wealthy young Englishmen to tour the Welsh mountains. He travelled on horseback accompanied by Welsh-speaking Reverend John Lloyd of Caerwys, and his manservant and artist, Moses Griffith, who sketched enroute.*

*It was his local knowledge, familiarity with the local customs, and wealth of contacts amongst the local gentry that gave him an advantage over other writers. His exact and detailed descriptions still make his writings of great interest today. He can be looked upon as a pioneer of travel literature.*



## How a limekiln works

*Alternate layers of limestone and fuel—usually low quality coal—were fed into the kiln from above onto a bed of brushwood.*

*Brushwood was ignited from below through kindling holes.*

*After burning the lime and ash were raked out from the grate through an arched tunnel in the side of the kiln.*



# working the Soil

Ruins of Cwm Mill

The Vale of Clwyd was renowned for the fertility of its soil. Travellers boasted, 'throw in a stick and the grass will cover it overnight'. The thin hillside soils were less fertile but the underlying limestone was a valuable source of lime for fertiliser.

Farmers took their grain to the local mill for grinding—the stone remains of Cwm mill can still be seen to the north of the Smithy Arms and there was a water wheel at Pant Ifan, Rhuallt.

There had been a demand for Welsh cattle in England since Medieval times. The hardy Welsh Black cattle stood up well to the demanding long journeys to English markets, where they were fattened on the lowland pastures. The English towns grew rapidly as the Industrial Revolution gained momentum, so the demand for meat increased. The droving of large herds of cattle and other livestock reached its peak in the mid-19th century, continuing until railway transport took over.

## Drovers

Drovers' herds were once familiar sites around Tremeirchion. They herded cattle across the hills to the local market at Caerwys or further afield to the Midlands or southern England. By the end of 18th century, over nine thousand cattle were taken annually from Anglesey into England and many may have passed over these hills.

Corgis kept the herds together. They were intelligent and low on the ground so they could snap at the heels of any beast but were low enough to avoid a kick!

The drovers were well paid compared to farm labourers and their extensive travels made

them some of the best informed men in Wales. They acted as newscarriers between the isolated farms and villages and brought news of the outside world. They could often read and write and were financially astute, but also tough from dealing with the rigours of life on the road.

They wore knitted knee-length woollen stockings over their trousers, wrapped in brown paper leggings waterproofed with soap. Soap was also rubbed on the soles of the stockings to stop blisters as the foot sweated.

You can still pick out many of the drovers' tracks that dotted the hillsides. Look for small clumps of Scot's pines that were planted to mark the way or show where drovers were welcome.

Glan Llyn Pond was a drover's watering hole. The lane leading from it towards Cwm is typical of many old drovers' routes with its wide verge for large numbers of cattle with a small clump of Scots pines nearby. The pond was restored as a Millennium project by local people, supported by Denbighshire Countryside Service.

Late 19th century drovers



## Twm o'r Nant or Thomas Edwards (1739 – 1810)

Another itinerant visitor to Tremeirchion was the Denbighshire poet and playwright, nicknamed 'The Cambrian Shakespeare'. He wrote from an early age and performed simple plays, known as interludes, whilst working on his parent's farm. At 24 he became a timber haulier, moving timber from near Denbigh to Rhuddlan. When his horses died of disease he turned to writing and performing to earn a living. He travelled with three others from village to village, performing his interludes. They were simple, often based on Bible stories, but were witty and poked fun at local characters—an oppressive landowner, a wealthy miser or a grumpy landlord. He often visited the inn, Ffynnon Beuno, and may have performed some of his interludes there.

Extract from 'Riches and Poverty', an Interlude, translated by George Borrow:

### Poverty

*'But one thing to me passing strange doth appear:  
Since the wisdom of man is so bright and so clear,  
How comes there such jarring and warring to be  
In this world betwixt Riches and Poverty?'*



# Religion & Relics

St Beuno's College

At Ffynnon Beuno the water flows from the mouth of a human figure. The large stone bath with steps leading down suggests it was a healing pool of some importance. It is one of several named after St Beuno who may have used the well for baptisms.

## A school for Jesuit Priests

The grand buildings of St Beuno's College were built in the 19th century as a Jesuit college, training priests for service around the globe. Nowadays trainee priests study theology at universities but many make a retreat here as part of their training. It is now a Jesuit Spirituality centre for both men and women from many countries.

Look for the tiny Rock Chapel standing amidst trees on a rocky outcrop, to the southeast of the main buildings, a landmark from the valley below.

*(NB. The college and Rock Chapel are private, but there are good views from Offa's Dyke Path).*

## The Miracle Cross

Tremeirchion church was renowned for its Medieval miracle-working Calvary cross. It was probably pulled over in the churchyard by Cromwell's soldiers. It lay there until 1862 when it was sold for £5 by the church council, unaware of its importance! It was bought by a Catholic archaeologist and given to St Beuno's who recently gifted the cross back to the church.



Saints, mystics and their devout followers have been drawn here since Christianity was first spreading across North Wales and have left a rich legacy of buildings and relics. St Beuno, renowned for restoring life to the beheaded St Winefride at Holywell, founded monasteries and churches across North Wales in the 7th century and probably preached locally.

The old yews and circular churchyard at Tremeirchion suggest it is an ancient worship site. Stories tell of three Celtic-type bells found on the hillside near Cwm church and there are records of an earlier church on the hilltop.

## Holy wells

Wells are numerous around Tremeirchion and Cwm as many natural springs emerge at the foot of the hills, where the porous limestone meets the water-resistant valley clay.

Life-giving water was held sacred by early peoples who believed gods with healing and fortune-telling powers dwelt in wells. With the conversion to Christianity many wells were re-dedicated to Christian saints and worship continued with Christian approval. Medieval pilgrims travelled miles to seek cures at these Holy wells.

The Well of St Mael and Sulien, whose well trough can still be seen in Cwm vicarage wall, reputedly cured eye inflammation. The spring, Ffynnon Asa, was strong enough to power nearby Marion Mills and its waters were used to combat rheumatism.



Ffynnon Beuno

## Gerard Manley Hopkins 1844-1889

*One of the most famous priests who trained at St Beuno's was the poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins. He had the eye of an artist and loved to walk in the surrounding hills. His diaries and letters were full of detailed observations of the natural world—cloud formations, glistening droplets of rain, swelling buds, a falcon hovering. The landscape and serenity of his surroundings obviously inspired him as he wrote over a third of his mature poetry during his three year stay, including some of his best loved poems.*

*Extract from 'In the Valley of the Elwy'  
'Lovely the woods, waters, meadows, coombes and vales,  
All the air things wear that build this world of Wales.'*

