

Heritage Impact Statement for the Conversion of a Listed Outbuilding at Plas Farm, Cilybebyll into Holiday Cottage & Facilities

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Vision Statement

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Vision Statement

Swansea Valley Holiday Cottages are aiming to transform otherwise disused and dilapidated buildings at Plas Farm into a set of rural tourist facilities that will include a luxury spa / gym facility, a conference space / dining area / games room, reception / shop / tourist information area, secure storage for bikes and additional accommodation. To date, works have already taken place to sensitively re-use and repurpose Plas Farm's ancillary buildings into modern eco-friendly holiday facilities (including two unused farm buildings that were recently converted into holiday cottages) by adding modern conveniences, whilst also ensuring that original components were sympathetically repaired and incorporated into the proposals, enabling them to be easily read / identified as part of the completed unit.

These conversions are part of the masterplan for the farm to create a credible and financially sustainable holiday business; the two buildings being developed as a part of this project are the last buildings on site that have not yet been repurposed to support the business. The works already carried out on site demonstrates the applicants commitment towards providing a high quality holiday environment which retains the farm's authenticity and protects the very special nature of this setting.

They have also demonstrated a strong commitment towards the sustainable development of their business and facilities and their eco-friendly ethos; with refurbishments incorporating sustainable materials such as natural breathable insulation, a wood pellet fired district heating system installed to heat all buildings and a significant proportion of the site's energy coming

from on-site solar panels. The applicants are dedicated not only to sustainable construction measures, but also to on-going sustainable practices which demonstrates their commitment to the sustainability agenda; The site's ecological value and biodiversity has been enhanced through the planting of local trees and pond creation. The family have also developed a biodiversity database and educate their guests about the environment and the local ecology. Their dedication towards environmentally friendly practices and measures has been acknowledged, with the applicants winning a number of awards with Plas Farm laying claim to being the first self catering holiday cottage business in the UK to offer carbon neutral holidays.

Plas Farm is currently a cluster of seven rural holiday cottages with no ancillary facilities. The proposals will sensitively revive, enhance and repurpose buildings which have fallen into disrepair, and provide the much needed ancillary facilities for the existing cottages. This project will be reputation changing, and help to increase visitor numbers and add value to the site's current accommodation-only offering.

The project is aligned with the following priorities to boost the tourism offer of Wales and Neath Port Talbot as follows:

- High quality, innovative, reputation changing tourism product
- All weather, all year attraction
- Spa and high quality leisure facility incl. hot tub/treatment room

- Innovative heritage related project
- Unusual places to stay (upper floor of one of the rarest buildings of its kind in the world)
- An 'obvious' facility improvement
- Creation of conference space for promotion of business tourism

The project also aligns with the following Visit Wales priorities:

- Distinctive stand out project particularly by virtue of it relating to a listed building of national importance
- High quality upgrades adding value to a well established five star business with an excellent track record
- Ambitious project in terms of scale and architectural challenge
- Will change perception of two dilapidated buildings in NPT
- Part of a cluster of products that helps to build a destination. NPT is not a traditional tourist destination and has invested in a major re-branding exercise. The Swansea Valley has lost many of its industrial buildings despite being at the forefront of the industrial revolution. This project will help preserve that history.
- As a newly discovered historically significant building, it resonates with Visit Wales' Year of Discovery & would make an excellent case study
- Future potential for creation of a job (reception-shop/ care taker / facility manager)
- Green energy project promoting sustainable tourism - all hot water and heating to be provided from onsite renewable biomass boiler

Introduction / Scope of Heritage Impact Statement

Plas Farm is a 120 acre (49 hectare) working farm near Pontardawe; the farm is situated within the ancient parish of Cilybebyll and was once part of the historic Plas Cilybebyll Estate. The Bowen family bought what was left of the estate in 1957 and eventually sold off the main house 'Plas Cilybebyll' as a private residence in 1986, whilst retaining most of the outbuildings and land that surrounded the 'Plas', which became known as Plas Farm.

In 1996, the Bowen family began to explore options for the diversification of their business and converted one of the outbuildings into a self catering holiday cottage; the cottage's conversion was a success and led to the conversion of other disused outbuildings and the construction of a new dwelling – now only two of the farm's outbuildings remain unconverted and both are in a poor state of repair. It is now intended to convert these buildings which will complete the programme of regeneration works to the existing farm buildings. The cottages at Plas Farm are now collectively known as Swansea Valley Holiday Cottages.

This document has been prepared by Rio Architects on behalf of the Swansea Valley Holiday Cottages' business to support a Listed Building Consent Application for the regeneration and conversion of an existing underused Grade II listed concrete outhouse that is considered to be an excellent, rare example of a shuttered mass concrete building dating back to the 19th Century (constructed during a pioneering phase when concrete was firstly utilised to construct buildings).

Current proposals also include the conversion of another building on site that is not listed. The works include the transformation of the existing listed concrete outhouse from current storage use into a 1 bed holiday flat and other communal facilities for the holiday residences, and the transformation of an existing 'Dutch barn' style building from its current derelict state into covered parking and storage and other communal facilities for the holiday residences. This Heritage Impact Statement has been prepared solely to support the LBC application for the listed concrete outhouse's conversion; therefore, only minimal references will be made towards the Dutch style barn's conversion.

Heritage Impact Assessment / Statement

In Wales, it has become a legislative requirement to carry out Historic Impact Assessments (HIA) and prepare Historic Impact Statements (HIS) to supplement Listed Building Consent (LBC) and Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) applications. The process demonstrates that the designers have considered the significance of the historic asset whilst developing their proposals and the HIS aids those determining the outcome of LBC / SMC applications by providing additional information on the heritage asset, including clearly identifying proposed changes, an explanation of the proposal's objectives (justification for why they are desirable or necessary), an assessment of the asset's significance and an assessment of the proposal's impact on the heritage asset's significance.

The main aim of this process is to provide decision makers with enough appropriate information to enable them to weigh up the risks and benefits to the heritage asset and understand the reasons behind the proposal before they come to a decision to approve or reject LBC / SMC. Cadw state that 'good information, available from the outset, can speed up decisions, reduce costs and lead to better overall design'. The assessment of interventions included further on details the proposals for the conversion of the outbuilding outlined within this application and presents the arguments for their implementation.

As aforementioned, the proposals described in the accompanying application form part of a wider masterplan of continued enhancement of the Swansea Valley Holiday Cottages business and the conversion of the two buildings will complete the farm's programme of regeneration works. This project will reflect the sensitive nature in which the conversion works on Plas Farm have so far been finished, and promote the authenticity of this special rural, historic environment.

The works planned for the listed outhouse are to be carried out on a basis of minimum intervention to ensure that historic fabric is only affected by proposed works when absolutely necessary i.e. the removal of components that are past the point of repair such as the corrugated metal roof and timber framed doors and windows. The repair or full replacement of existing components (dependent on the extent of damage / decay) will be carried out on a 'like for like' basis, utilising

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Introduction / Scope of Heritage Impact Statement

traditional construction techniques and matching materials wherever possible / applicable.

Sustainable building conservation techniques will be applied to take full advantage of certain works that need to be implemented i.e. incorporating slimline double glazed units within new replica timber framed windows; these units will improve the building's thermal efficiency without having a negative impact on the building's aesthetics.

Some intrusive works will need to be undertaken to enable the successful, sympathetic conversion of the concrete outhouse into holiday accommodation and ancillary tourist facilities i.e. installation of chemically anchored steel rods to re-connect areas of the mass concrete shuttered walls that have cracked and separated, and a localised area of underpinning where subsidence has been identified.

The proposed interventions required to transform the existing building into a habitable space have been designed to remain independent of the original structure, whilst also providing additional support for the existing concrete walls. The structure will be built up from a new concrete 'raft' ground floor slab that will provide the base for timber support columns which will carry the loads of the new first floor and roof structure independently; the first floor and ground floor slab will also provide lateral restraint for the existing concrete walls.

Even though the intrusive works will result in the loss of some historic fabric, their implementation will have a positive impact on the building as a

whole as it will ensure the survival of the most significant elements of the historic fabric; the concrete outbuilding is in a state of disrepair and its sympathetic repair and conversion would enhance its heritage value and ensure that its historic value is not lost. By converting the building it will also introduce a new historical layer as a result of the new role the building will offer. Finding a new beneficial use will ensure the building's survival and enable current and future generations to continue to enjoy and learn about the building's important history as a rare example of a mass shuttered concrete structure, built during a pioneering period of concrete's use in construction.

Left untouched, the remaining concrete structure will only continue to deteriorate and will soon be past the point of repair.



The photographs above show the current condition of the existing mass concrete walls – some areas have collapsed and large cracks have developed elsewhere

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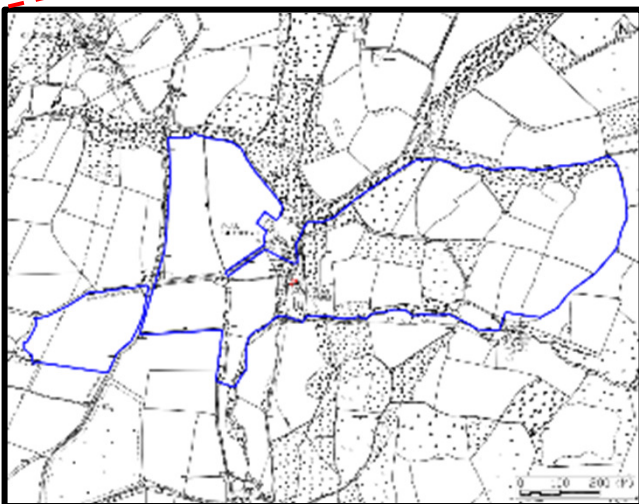
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3.1: Location & Setting

As aforementioned, Plas Farm is a 120 acre (49 hectare) working farm [Holding Number 59/143/0034]. The farm is situated within the ancient parish of Cilybebyll (approximately half a mile east of the parish church), within a slight hollow on the west facing slopes of Mynydd Marchywel; the hamlet of Cilybebyll it is located approximately 2 miles east of Pontardawe, 5 miles north of Neath and 10 miles north east of Swansea.



Plas Farm was originally the home farm of the historic Plas Cilybebyll Estate, which has a recorded history back to the early 1400s. Its sale in 1957 ended a line of inheritance that had stretched over 600 years; a legacy of almost 2000 historic documents that provided a clear insight into the estate's history had been produced during this time and were handed to the National Library Wales when the estate was sold.

Renowned for its natural beauty, the River Clydach flows through the heart of the estate, situated directly between the manor house and farm. Plas Farm has its own dedicated access track and part of the site is accessed via a concrete bridge that crosses the River Clydach. Since 1957 Plas Farm has been farmed by the Bowen family, whose ancestors have farmed the surrounding hillsides for centuries.

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3.1.1 Brief Description of the Estate's Buildings

Plas Cilybebyll

Plas Farm originally existed as the home farm of the Plas Cilybebyll Estate and only came into existence as its own entity in 1970, following the division of the estate by Oswald Bowen when he decided to divide the estate between his children. The manor house (Plas) was turned into a private residence set within 2 acres of land, with the home farm's outbuildings and remaining land becoming a small farm now known as Plas Farm.

No details or descriptions exist that indicate how the Plas would have originally looked like, the style in which it was constructed or its exact construction date; however, it is likely that some form of



Victorian South-facing Front Elevation to Plas Cilybebyll



Aerial View of the 'Plas' taken from a Lancaster Bomber during a WWII training flight, clearly showing the rear wing's roof (demolished 1955)

building has stood on the estate since its formation in the early 1400's. Some of the existing Plas' features are believed to be part of the original building i.e. an Elizabethan staircase and a wine cellar accessed via a stone staircase (that has exposed stone walls and flooring), yet most of the current building dates from extensive remodelling works carried out in the 1830s. The Plas as it stands today has a Victorian south-facing front façade with a symmetrical design and central porch, with elements of gothic, French chateau architecture evident in its design. All of the front elevation's openings have the original fenestration in place, with hooded stone mouldings above the ground and first floor windows and distinctive

decorated dormer windows to the upper floor. The walls are finished in a grey render and the building is capped by a hipped slate roof.

The Plas was remodelled again in 1955 in an attempt to downsize, losing much of the rear of the property (which included a large dining room suitable for up to 40 people). Since the Bowen Family sold the Plas in 1986, it has been extensively modernised internally and a new extension has been built to its rear that currently houses a swimming pool, but many of its significant features have been retained.

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Plas Farm

Plas Farm is located to the south of Plas Cilybebyll Estate's manor house, with the site split between two courtyards that are located on opposite sides of the Clydach River, which crosses directly through the site. A concrete bridge crosses the Clydach to gain access to the other half of Plas Farm and a weir is located a short distance upstream that was constructed to raise the level of the river to supply water for a water wheel that used to power the lathe within the carpenter's workshop (now known as 'Bwthyn y Saer'). With the exception of a new residential building (constructed 2006) and the listed mass-concrete outbuilding, all of Plas Farm's other buildings have



Recent photograph of the Weir at Plas Farm



Early 20th Century Photograph of the Carpenter's Workshop

been traditionally constructed, built from local sandstone walls and pitched slate roofs, most likely constructed when Henry Leach had extensive works carried out to the estate in the early-mid 19th Century. All the buildings have features that are typical of agricultural buildings found locally that are of this era, with the exception of the elegant Georgian Coach house, listed mass-concrete outbuilding, Dutch style barn (steel frame and corrugated sheet cladding) and the new residential building (stone clad cavity walls and pitched slate roofs). The home farm site retains its original layout; however, the majority of the buildings have been converted to support the holiday accommodation business and as aforementioned, a new-build residential property now exists on the courtyard located to the east of the Clydach. The site's layout is clearly indicated on the following page.



Photograph of the Georgian Coach House (now converted to 'Y Stabl' and 'Ty Cerbyd') taken in the 1960's



Photograph of stable taken in 1958 that has now been converted into 'Hafod y Wennol' Holiday Cottage clearly showing traditional materials used in its construction

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Plas Cilybebyll

PLAS FARM SITE LAYOUT

1. Existing Listed Mass Concrete Building
2. Existing 'Dutch Barn' style Building
3. Existing Farm House & Reception (constructed 2006)
4. Existing 20th Century agricultural shed
5. Original Use: Stable
Current Use: Converted Holiday Cottage (Nant y Plas)
6. Original Use: Carpenter's Workshop (Constructed in or before 1810, based on dated fire insurance stamp - (also used as a dining area for farm workers)
Current Use: Converted Holiday Cottage (Bwthyn y Saer)
Features: Once had waterwheel to power Carpenter's lathe but was sold in 1979 and relocated to the west country
7. Original Use: Not Clear - has served as a stable, coach house, animal food store and to house doves
Current Use: Converted Holiday Cottage (Hafod y Wennol)
8. Original Use: Georgian Coach House
Current Use: Converted Holiday Cottages (Y Stabl & Ty Cerbyd)
9. Original Use: Calf or pig rearing shed
Current Use: Converted Holiday Cottage (Lloc Llo)
10. Original Use: Cart House, Milking Parlour, Sheep rearing shed
Current Use: Converted Holiday Cottage (Ty Gambo)

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3.2: Use / Purpose of Listed Building's Construction

The building was originally constructed as an outbuilding to support the estate's activities and was later transformed (mid-late 20th Century) into a milking parlour. Further details are included in the following sections 3.3 & 3.4.

3.3 Age

Constructed circa.1891

3.4 Statutory Designations

The mass concrete outbuilding at Plas Farm is designated as a Grade II listed building

Date of designation as Listed Building:

19/12/2017

Grid Reference:

274866 204069

List Description:

(Taken from Cadw's Full Report for Listed Buildings - Reference No: 87765)

Location: At Plas Farm, c100m south of Plas Cilybebyll. Approached via a drive and farm track from Cwm Nant-Llwyd Road. On the E side of the river Clydach, the farm is accessed via a concrete bridge.

History: Farm building constructed on the Plas Cilybebyll estate c1891 using concrete as a walling material. During the C19 industrialisation and improved transport enabled the increasingly widespread use of new materials such as concrete,

creosote and corrugated sheeting for farm buildings. They were cheaper to buy, simpler to use and did not require skilled labour for their use. Concrete was quickly harnessed for foundation work, dock construction, and on estates, particularly under the stewardship of improving landlords but generally its use for walling or as a construction material was limited. Mass concrete had been used in 1870 for a barn on the Buscot Estate in Berkshire and articles on its use had started to be published from this date in the Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England. In Wales the Gregynog Estate (Powys) under Henry Hanbury-Tracy was also building in mass concrete. Similar work was also underway during the 1870s at Dinas Mawddwy in Gwynedd. Concrete was also being used in South Wales in the same period; an advert from Oldfield Bros. of Bute Dock Cardiff, agents for the Economic Concrete Building Company of Gracechurch Street, London had appeared in the South Wales Daily News in May 1874 for 'economic' concrete building. A letter to the editor of the Cambrian in September 1876 described the erection of an 8-roomed concrete house in the Swansea Valley, constructed using shuttered concrete (a mix of 1:7 Portland cement to crushed local stone) incorporating large stones within each layer. The owner of the Cilybebyll estate from the mid C19 was Herbert Lloyd, an improver in estate management, and concrete had already been used on the estate by the time these farm buildings were constructed in the early 1890s: an out building at the mill, c500m south of Plas Farm was built using

concrete, possibly in the 1860s or 1870s. The experimental use of concrete was largely abandoned by the 1890s, superseded by reinforced concrete: the Weaver flour mill on the N Dock in Swansea in 1897 was the first reinforced concrete framed building in Britain. It is possible that the earlier experiments in concrete construction informed this new departure in the use of the material.

Exterior: Farm building. Mass concrete with plain cement render with platt band, gable chimney and corrugated sheet roof. Tripartite windows to ground floor, central light opening, 4 light windows to first floor. L-plan, 2 storey gabled N-S range to river with single storey wing to S (partly demolished) and single storey wing to NE. W elevation to river of 3 windows, S gable single bay with loading door and hoist to first floor with projecting roof. 2 bay E (yard) elevation with small window above ground floor door to left door to right and steps with handrail up to first floor door. Single storey wing attached in line with the gable. S elevation with doorway and wide window, N elevation of 2 doorways and central 3-light window. Single window to gable. Single storey wing to S of main range retains evidence of pigsty arrangement but roof raised to front (yard) side.

Interior: Largely refitted mid-late C20 in conversion to dairy farm use. S single storey range retains 1891 dated roof truss.

Reason for Designation: Included for its special architectural interest as an extremely rare example of a mass concrete building from the C19 pioneering phase of the use of concrete for building construction

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3.5 Plas Farm's Current Use

The Lloyd family and their ancestors that had owned the Cilybebyll Estate for centuries sold it to Oswald Bowen in 1957 for £8500. It had been on the market for several years with little interest. Local farmers felt that such a large property was not suited to running a successful agricultural business — the house was too big, the large lawned areas and gardens required constant attention, the outbuildings of its home farm were run-down and the acreage of accompanying land too small. Interest from further afield was also limited. The Severn Bridge and M4 motorway had yet to be built and it was simply less fashionable to buy a large house in the countryside.

When Oswald Bowen bought the estate, it consisted of the main estate house (known as Plas Cilybebyll), around 80 acres of farmland and the estate outbuildings. In 1970 he divided the property between his children, 'Plas' mansion became a private dwelling with 2 acres of land and its surrounding farmland and home farm became Plas Farm.

The main estate house was sold in 1986. The Bowen family remained at Plas Farm and ran it as a dairy farm up until 1993, when they decided to diversify and focused their efforts on developing an

agri-tourism business. The process of diversification into tourism began with the conversion of an existing outbuilding of the Plas Cilybebyll Mansion House into a self catering holiday cottage in 1996.

The success of the diversification led to the conversion of a further two outbuildings into three self catering holiday cottages in 2002, 2005 and 2006. More recently two further conversions were completed in 2017 and then finally a 1 bed cottage conversion was completed in 2020. In conjunction with the development of the cottages two other attractions were progressed at the farm namely:

- The Plas Farm Trail – an historic walk around the farm for guests at the holiday cottages with accompanying book published in 2005, and
- The Scheduled Ancient Monument – A World War II bunker scheduled by Cadw in 2011 in recognition of its national importance.

The holiday cottage business was proving to be the most financially viable option for diversification and a business on which the family could begin to sustain the farm and its future. In terms of visitor numbers Swansea Valley Holiday Cottages is now the largest Farm Stay business in Neath Port Talbot.

Plas Farm is currently owned by Mr and Mrs. David Bowen who run the business with their son Richard. As aforementioned, The farm currently supports 150 ewes (and their lambs) and 10 suckler cows (and their calves) and has benefitted from over 10

years of management under various Welsh Government Agri-environmental schemes aimed at protecting the historic environment, combating climate change and enhancing habitats of importance to wildlife.

3.6 Historical Context

A detailed overview of Plas Farm's historical context (that expands on the information provided in this document and also includes details of the farm and surrounding area's built, archaeological and natural heritage) is included in the book 'Small Dreams in a Sleepy Valley' by Richard Bowen (ISBN No: 978-1-905900-43-5). The following information is a brief synopsis of Plas Farm's historical context, supplementing the information supplied in the aforementioned book.

Located in the ancient parish of Cilybebyll, Plas Farm is the former Home Farm of the Plas Cilybebyll Estate, which has a recorded history back to the early 1400s. The estate has a unique character and remarkable history, with its inhabitants and their ventures linking it to the descendants of Welsh Kings, Arthurian legend, tales of the Mabinogion, the Norman invasion, the Earls of Pembroke, eighteenth century French prisons, Charles II, Iolo Morgannwg, the tea plantations of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), coal mining, the Industrial Revolution and much more. These individuals are also responsible for forming Plas Cilybebyll's historic boundaries, with much of the estate's structures as we now know them the result of works commissioned by Henry Leach in the 18th Century, with some further works implemented during the mid-20th Century.

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Cilybebyll's Outline History Prior to the Formation of Plas Cilybebyll Estate

It is not certain how Cilybebyll gained its name; popular opinion is that Cilybebyll derives from a combination of the Welsh words 'cil' meaning 'nook' and 'pebyll' meaning 'tents', referring to the site's possible use as a retreat by off-duty Roman troops posted at Nividium (Neath), as their garrison was only located 5 miles away. However, no Roman artefacts have been located at the site to date and two alternative meanings have been put forward including one where 'pebyll' refers to a cottage or a religious cell. Another plausible meaning of Irish origin has been put forward where 'kil' refers to a church and 'pebyll' or 'bebyll' refers to a personal name.

We know that humans have inhabited this area for a long period, with evidence of Bronze Age activity located nearby; two round cairns (that have been robbed in antiquity) are located on the summit of Mynydd Marchywel and early Bronze Age sword and axe head dating to around 800BC were also found on the mountain.

Cilybebyll estate falls within an area that was once known as Glywysing (which effectively became Glamorgan/Morgannwg), a Welsh Kingdom that was formed in the 5th Century and ruled by King Glywys; the kingdom was reputed to have spanned between the River Tawe in the west all the way to the River Usk in the east. A long succession of Welsh kings ruled this area throughout the early medieval period, spending the majority of their

time driving back Saxon invasions and keeping neighbouring Welsh kingdoms in check; being on the western 'front' of the territory, the area now known as Cilybebyll would have borne the brunt of any advances made by the neighbouring kingdom of Deheubarth, especially since the kingdom's seat was located near Cardiff (Dinas Powys) - a significant distance on horseback.

Information relating to this period of Wales' history is sparse to say the least; it is also widely accepted that documentary evidence relating to important figures from the Medieval period often came from chronologies written centuries after the events had taken place, usually to glorify a person of interest or for some sort of personal or political gain, with accounts often being of limited historic merit, especially as they were often intertwined with miracles, myths and legends. Yet, even though the authors may have known very little about the actual events, it is likely that these often stemmed from true stories passed down through generations. Chronologies written in the 16th Century that recollected the events of Norman Conquest of Wales and how Robert Fitzhamon came into power provide us with a rough narrative of Cilybebyll's history.

What can be established from the chronologies is that the land between the Afan and Tawe rivers (including what became the Cilybebyll Estate) was distributed between Sir Richard De Grenville (one of Robert Fitzhamon's twelve knights) and Iestyn ap Gwrgant's three sons; they were rewarded for

abandoning their father to his fate following his treacherous behaviour towards another Welsh lord that was on good terms with the Normans. Sir Richard was handed the Lordship of Neath, which included the castle, town, land and manor of Neath (most of the land between the Neath and Tawe rivers) along with the Lands and Manor of Monk Nash. Iestyn's eldest son, Caradog was handed the Lordship of Avan, which gave him control of the land between the Neath and Afan Rivers (the only Welsh lord that managed to retain a portion of Glamorgan's lowlands), Madoc (second son) was handed the Lordship of Rhuthyn (Rhydding) and Rhys (third son) was handed the lordship of 'Reeding or Sofflen' (Resolven) - an area located between the Neath and Tawe Rivers. The accounts indicate that all the land transferred to Iestyn's sons were subordinate holdings, held in fealty towards Robert Fitzhamon.

Further references indicate that in 1129, Sir Richard handed Cilybebyll Parish to the Cistercian abbey at Neath as he had found the locals difficult to manage, opting to return to the comfort of his rich west country estate. Another source indicates that Sir Richard exchanged the parish of Cilybebyll with Rhys ap Iestyn for land at Resolven, which is likely as this part of the Neath Valley was considered to be an important bridging point that enabled passage from the eastern side of Glamorgan towards the Swansea and Amman valleys, which would have been desirable for the Normans in

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order to gain access further west. Even though the recorded accounts paint an uncertain picture of the exact events, they still hold significance towards Cilybebyll's narrative as they signify the beginning of Cilybebyll's documented history.

Wars broke out frequently between the Welsh Lords and their Norman counterparts, with Cilybebyll bearing the brunt of violent clashes as it was close to a boundary between Norman and Welsh land. The Welsh continued to attack the area intermittently up until the start of the 14th Century, with attacks likely to have taken place in the area during both Llywelyn ap Iorwerth's (Llywelyn Fawr) campaign when he destroyed Neath's town and castle in 1231 (assisted by Morgan Gam, Lord of Afan) and Llywelyn ap Gruffudd's (Llywelyn Ein Llyw Olaf) campaign in 1258 that destroyed the town once again. An account of the events from 1262 indicated that after all the wars, the area laid waste with the tenants killed and mills burnt. It is also recorded that in 1316, a Welsh revolt organised by Llewelyn Bren that started at Caerphilly and spread throughout Glamorgan saw sporadic raids take place at Cilybebyll where again, tenants were killed and houses were destroyed.

Following this period, no evidence exists to suggest that Cilybebyll was anything more than a quiet backwater until the development of the coal industry during the 19th Century. At the start of the 18th Century the parish was described in Edward

Lhuyd's Parochialia as a 'Gentleman's seat; present proprietor Richard Herbert . The parish is generally mountainous, mossy, heathy and rocky and subsequently not very fertile; it has some wood and turf enough which they neither use nor cut here, being supplied with the readier fuel, wood and coal. People are generally healthy, not subject, as we know, to any peculiar diseases'.

Plas Cilybebyll Estate

As aforementioned, Plas Farm was originally the home farm of the historic Plas Cilybebyll Estate, which has a recorded history back to the early 1400s and was recorded as having the largest land holding in the district in 1838. The estate's records which consisted of over 2000 individual documents were deposited to the National Library Wales (NLW). The following excerpt has been taken directly from the HMC/NLW Family and Estates project, (compiled by Mair James), it clearly outlines a timeline of Cilybebyll Estate's ownership since it was established in the 1400's; the information was compiled from the estate's papers that comprised mainly of title deeds (1497-1946), deeds of settlement (1575-1954), and mortgages, (1859-1916).

Administrative and biographical history: *The Cilybebyll estate was small and compact, made up for the most part of lands in the southern and central parts of the parish of Cilybebyll and neighbouring parts of Blaenhonddan to the west of Alltwen, and farms near Pontardawe in the parishes*

of Llangiwig and Llangyfelach. The estate also owned Cwmtwrch Farm in Carmarthenshire, near the foot of the Black Mountain. Whereas some estates could boast continuous ownership by one family over several centuries, tenure of the Cilybebyll estate was rather more complicated. Alice, daughter of Thomas ap Griffith Goch of Ynys-arwed, married Griffith ap John ap Lewis. Alice was probably the heir of Cilybebyll, as some pedigrees describe Thomas ap Griffith Goch as of Cilybebyll. Their son Lewis Griffith, the first of the family to use a surname, married (as his second wife) Jenet Herbert, and had issue a daughter and heir, Jenet, who married George Herbert, the fourth son of Matthew Herbert of Swansea. The Herbert family of Swansea was part of the same clan as the Herberts, earls of Pembroke, and was the source of the Herbert families of Cilybebyll, Cogan Pill and White Friars. The Herbert family retained Cilybebyll until the death of Matthew's great-grandson, Richard Herbert (c.1669-1725). He had married Elizabeth Lloyd (c.1686-1771) of Cilymaenllwyd, but died without male heirs, leaving his two daughters and co-heirs, Elizabeth (dsp. 1797), the heiress of Cilybebyll and wife of Richard Turberville (c1708-77, dsp.), and Mary, the wife of Samuel Hughes of Llwyn-y-Brân. On her death, Elizabeth left Cilybebyll to her mother's family. Her heir was her cousin John Herbert Lloyd (d. 1817), the son of John William Lloyd (d. 1752) of Carmarthen. He was succeeded by his sister Jane (d. 1828), the wife of William Bassett. Jane was succeeded by her kinswoman Jane Brand

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(d. 1849), the daughter of John Jones (d. 1787) of Brawdy, Pembrokeshire, and wife of Henry Leach (d. 1848) of Milford. Henry Leach completely modernized and improved Cilybebyll "as scarcely to retain any vestige of its ancient character". Jane and Henry's son Francis Edwardes Leach (1805-1865) assumed the surname Lloyd on inheriting Cilybebyll on the death of his mother. His son Herbert Lloyd (1838-1914) of Cilybebyll married in 1864 with Frances Harriette (1838-1929), daughter of S. G. Purdon of Tinerara, Ireland. Their eldest son John Herbert Purdon Lloyd (1868-1957) inherited Cilybebyll on his father's death.

The individuals that resided at Plas Cilybebyll provided the estate with an unique character and history, linking it to a number of places, events and notable individuals throughout its 600 year history. The first identifiable person mentioned in the deeds and therefore likely to be the first owner of Plas Cilybebyll Estate was John ap Lewis ap Henri, documented between 1507 & 1537, reputedly a descendant of Lord Rhys of Solven, which provides the estate with its link to the Welsh Kings of the Middle Ages. The estate was passed down through generations, with Lewis Griffith, John ap Lewis ap Henri's grandson the first to take a surname; his great granddaughter Janet married into the prominent Herbert Family of Swansea and the Herberts retained ownership of the estate until the 18th Century.

Welsh families like the Herberts had been frozen

into a subordinate social position by their English lords, but gained an opportunity to raise from obscurity and bargain for status and land during the English civil war, with the family coming to prominence during the War of the Roses. The family began to obtain their status when William ap Thomas (an ancestor of the Herbert family known as the Blue Knight of Gwent) was knighted after saving King Henry V's life at the battle of Agincourt. William's son Gwilim Ddu built on his father's reputation, anglicising his name to William Herbert, gaining a position in the House of Lords and later becoming a member of King Edward IV's inner council. He also became the first Earl of Pembrokeshire, a title he gained as a result of a successful attack on Harlech in 1468, but he was executed following a defeat at Edgcourt the following year.

William Herbert fathered many children including an illegitimate child named Richard Herbert of Ewyas; Richard did not gain his father's status or any of his titles (that were past to his legitimate younger brother, William). It was Richard's descendants that later went on to own Plas Cilybebyll Estate; Richard's grandson George Herbert of Swansea (whose brother, John was Secretary of State during Elizabeth I & James I's reigns) married Janet Griffith, owner of Plas Cilybebyll Estate.

The Herbert family retained the Plas for around 200 years, spanning across at least 5 generations,

with many of them commemorated through memorials placed at Cilybebyll's parish church. It is thought that William Herbert's sister (the third generation of Herberts, who owned the Plas during the late 1600's) was a lady-in-waiting to Catherine of Braganza (consort of Charles II) and was later appointed Mistress of the Robes to the Queen.

The fourth generation of Herberts to inherit the estate was Richard; he married Elizabeth Lloyd of Cilmaenllwyd Farm, Carmarthenshire; Elizabeth outlived Richard by many years and the estate was handed down to the eldest of their three daughters, (also called Elizabeth) who like her mother also lived to a grand old age (85). Elizabeth did not have any children and it is said that she became very eccentric in her later years; by the time she died in 1797, the property had been neglected and the estate had been left in an appalling state. Elizabeth had originally planned to pass the estate on to Elizabeth Picton but became infuriated when she was caught searching a cupboard for her will and instead decided to leave it to her cousin, John Herbert Lloyd. This started a new lineage in the Estate's ownership; the Lloyd family of Pembrokeshire retained the estate for the following 150 years, a period that spanned across six generations.

John Herbert Lloyd had spent most of his life in the West Indies but when he gained ownership of the estate, he returned to live at Cilybebyll.

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It is the Lloyd Family that are credited for shaping the estate, including constructing the home farm as we now know it; John Herbert Lloyd is known to have worked on improving the Plas, including constructing a hollow wall and chimney to provide a warm sheltered area in an attempt to grow the fruits he had become accustomed to during his time in the West Indies. Jane (John's sister) moved in with John following her husband's death, and both lived at the property for many years; Jane's husband was a close relative of Iolo Morgannwg – an influential Welsh antiquarian and poet that was a prime force behind the cultural revival that saw the birth of modern Wales. In one of Iolo Morgannwg's letters following John Lloyd's death in 1817, it showed that he held both John and Jane in high regard, stating that they 'were blessings to the County about Neath', with John's death drawing 'floods of tears from the eyes of many hundreds of poor' and that 'since his death... more than three fourths of his and his sister's charities are becoming known'. It was said that Jane was inconsolable following John's death, opting to leave the estate and relocating to west Wales for the rest of her years. Jane left the estate to her second cousin, Mary Brand Jones, with a condition written into the will that Mary's son would take the 'Lloyd' family name to honour her brother's memory.

Mary married Henry Leach, an ambitious and energetic individual from Pembrokeshire who amongst other interests, owned a number of coal mines in west Wales. Henry is also the estate's connection to the French Revolution; he had sailed the seas from a young age, working on ships transporting goods between Bristol and the West Indies. In 1793, as a part of the British government's attempt to quickly crush the French Revolution, Henry Leach's ship 'Fame' was armed under government license and he was given permission to attack and capture enemy vessels; however, whilst en-route to Jamaica, a French Man-o-war vessel captured his vessel and Henry was incarcerated at an overcrowded French Prison. Fortunately, after a number of attempts Henry managed to escape and returned to Britain by hiding inside a cask in the hold of a Norfolk-bound ship. It was after Henry returned that he sought out Mary Brand Jones (with whom he was already acquainted through his employer) and they eventually married.

Mary and Henry spent over £1800 on the estate in the 3 years following Jane's death, greatly improving the Plas and the home farm. The works they implemented included reorientating the house so that it faced south, where it had originally faced north towards the mountain and overlooked a walled garden. They also altered the site's main access route; the estate was originally accessed from a rough road that ran along the edge of Mynydd Marchywel.

The works were described in '*A Topical Dictionary of Wales*' (Samuel Lewis, 1833) as being '*completely modernized and greatly improved by its present proprietor, as scarcely to retain any vestige of its ancient character : the grounds are well disposed, and the house commands a good view of the sea and of the abrupt knolls and eminences near Briton Ferry*'.

In addition to his commitments to the estate, Henry Leach also held many important offices including working as a Collector of Customs at Milford Haven, becoming a fellow of the Geological Society and also a liberal Whig in politics.

Henry and Mary died within a year of each other, leaving the estate to their youngest son, Francis in 1849. Francis had a privileged upbringing, spending time at both Cambridge and Oxford Universities before embarking on a three year tour of the continent. Much of his time was spent away from the estate; he went on to spend several years as an agent on a West Indian sugar plantation and upon his return he had the original thatched lodge to the estate's entrance (that burnt down in 1969) built in a style that resembled the house he lived in at the West Indian plantation.



Photograph of the Original Gate House that burnt down in 1969

Both Francis and his wife, Harriet were held in high regard by their tenants, with the rector of Cilybebyll Parish stating that Francis was a 'kind and liberal landlord, one who rejoices in our own advancement' and Harriet as person 'whose life was devoted to acts of charity and kindness'. Harriet also came from a privileged background, born to a London family with links to the East India Company and the grand daughter of a former mayor of Bombay. There is a memorial to Francis and Harriet in Cilybebyll Parish Church that also pays tribute to three of their servants that are referred to as 'friends', clearly giving an indication of their kind and charitable nature. The estate was passed on to the fourth of their thirteen children, Herbert, who went on to farm the estate's land for nearly half a century.

As per his father, Herbert obtained an education at Cambridge, was public spirited and was well

respected within the community; he married an Irish lady that he met whilst studying land agency at Castle Troy in Co. Limerick. Herbert held a number of public offices including Justice of the Peace for Glamorgan and Breconshire, High Sheriff of Glamorgan and Vice Chairman of the Pontardawe Union. A significant amount of his time was also spent actively farming the estate, being a firm believer of working alongside his servants. He also showed his servants a great deal of respect, with older servants allowed to remain at the house and treated like members of the family when they could no longer work. The high regard in which Herbert was held in the community was clear as they had a stained glass window installed in his honour at the parish church following his death.

Herbert's fourth son and heir, Jack was the last Lloyd to inherit the estate, ending a lineage spanning almost 600 years. Following his formal education, Jack went on to study estate management at a Pembrokeshire estate, followed by a period of time tea planting in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Jack returned to Cilybebyll in the early 1900's to help his father, and eventually took over after his father's death. However, some of the estate had to be sold off to cover the death duties that had been imposed by the liberals in 1894. Like his father, Jack was a charitable individual and also married an Irish lady.

Like many others across the UK, the Plas Cilybebyll Estate became unsustainable to run at the start of the 20th Century as a result of a number of factors that caused a significant strain on the UK's

economy, including two World Wars and the decline of the UK's coal industry (resulting from new ships being powered by oil and the development of overseas coal industries), combined with the loss of revenue from land Jack had to part with to cover his father's death duties. Jack's financial situation was also a stark contrast to his grandfather's (Herbert Lloyd) position, who in 1873 was shown as owning a total of 2887 acres of land and having an annual rent roll of £2263 (more than £1/4 million in today's terms) in the Return of Landowners of Great Britain. As a result, tough decisions had to be made regarding the estate's future. Jack decided to have the Plas reduced in size as it was too large to suit the family's requirements and its upkeep costs were crippling the estate; in 1955 a significant portion to the rear of the Plas was demolished, including a large dining room that sat up to 40 individuals. Construction materials such as large timber beams were sold off to local farmers and the materials left over from the demolition works were piled in a heap in the woods (this 'heap' later became a useful resource that helped provide materials to renovate Plas Farm's buildings). Even after these drastic measures, the estate still proved too expensive to run, and following Jack's death his children instructed an agent to sell it, effectively sounding the estate's death knell. The Plas, home farm, two cottages, and woodland (an area covering 88 ½ acres in total), were put on the market with an initial asking price of £7500 and were eventually sold to Oswald Bowen in 1957.

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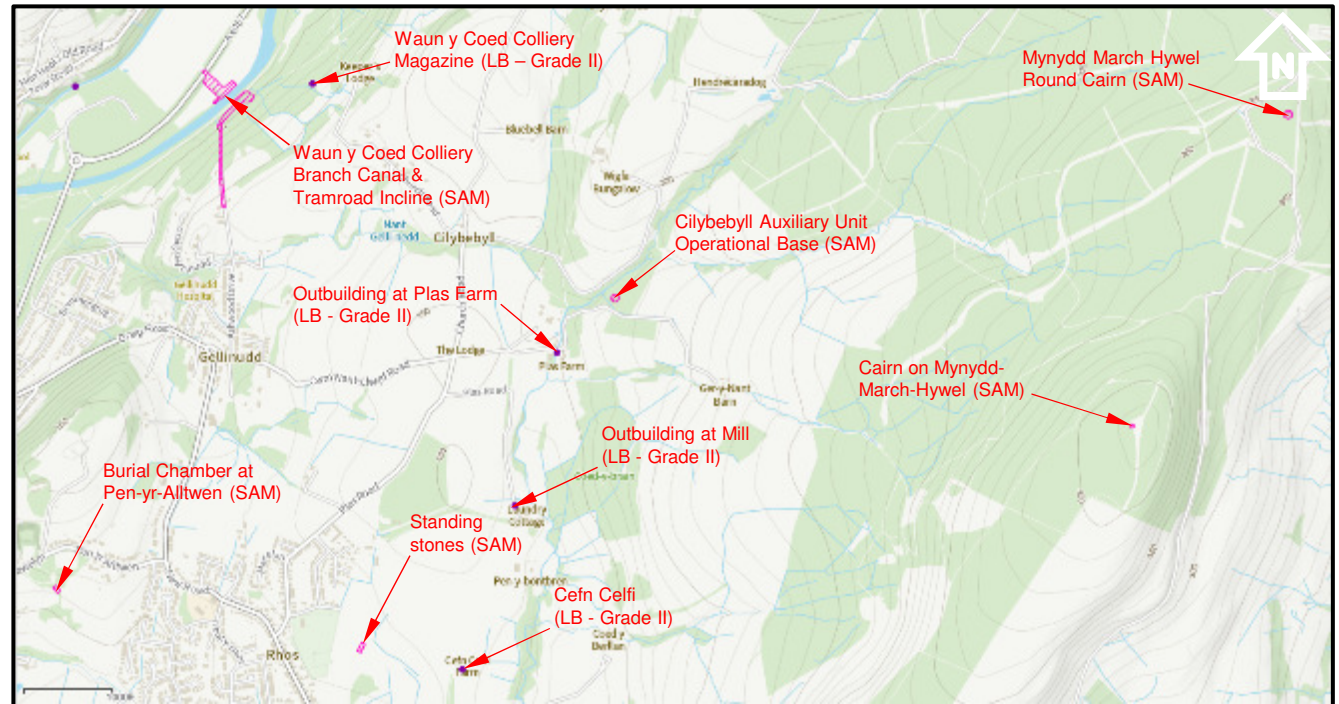
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3.7 Built & Archaeological Heritage

Buildings and structures are usually listed for their special architectural and / or historic significance; all buildings built before 1700 that have survived in almost their original condition are listed as well as most constructed between 1700 & 1850. the process becomes more selective when considering post-war (WWII) buildings, and buildings less than 30 years old aren't usually listed as they have not yet stood the test of time. Rarity also plays a pivotal role in the consideration of a building or structure's designation as a listed building. There are three designations; Grade I (of exceptional interest – 2.5%); Grade II* (of more than special interest – 5.8%); Grade II (of special interest – 91.7%). The shuttered concrete outbuilding at Plas Farm is currently designated as Grade II.

SAM designations are usually given to archaeological sites, historic ruins, or a combination of both and they can range from caves and prehistoric earthworks to 20th Century military or industrial installations; SAMs aren't graded as all are considered to be of national importance. On some occasions, monuments may be listed and scheduled; a monument's SAM designation takes precedence over its listed status. SAMs are usually scheduled as they fall under one or more of the following categories:

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Period | • Rarity |
| • Documentation | • Diversity |
| • Potential | • Group Value |
| • Survival / Condition | • Fragility / Vulnerability |



Plas Farm and the surrounding landscape has a number of features that are of historic interest. These include a mix of prehistoric & bronze age ritual and funerary monuments, structures relating to the area's 19th Century coal industry and buildings relating to Plas Cilybebyll Estate, comprising of:

Neolithic:

- Burial Chamber at Pen-yr-Alltwn (Scheduled Ancient Monument – Cadw Ref: GM514)

Bronze Age:

- Mynydd March Hywel Round Cairn (Scheduled Ancient Monument – Cadw Ref: GM531)
- Summit Cairn on Mynydd-March-Hywel (Scheduled Ancient Monument – Cadw Ref: GM327)
- Standing Stones 300m W of Cefncelfi (Scheduled Ancient Monument - Cadw Ref: GM342)

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Post-Medieval

- Cefn Celfi – Mid-C17 minor gentry house (Grade II listed building - Cadw Ref: 11193)
- Mass concrete outbuilding at the Mill (Grade II listed building - Cadw Ref: 82293)
- Mass concrete outbuilding at Plas Farm (Grade II listed building - Cadw Ref: 87765)
- Waun y Coed Colliery magazine (Grade II listed building - Cadw Ref: 82295)
- Waun y Coed Colliery Branch Canal & Tramroad Incline (Scheduled Ancient Monument – Cadw Ref: GM400) Plas Cilybebyll (locally listed)
- Georgian Coach house at Plas Farm (locally listed)

Modern (20th Century onwards)

- Cilybebyll Auxiliary Unit Operational Base (Scheduled Ancient Monument – Cadw Ref: GM620)

Other notable archaeological remains / features from the area that have been registered on the National Monuments Record include a number of undesignated cairns and round barrows, a Bronze Age sword and axe head dating to around 800BC (found to the north of the estate on Mynydd Marchywel), deserted rural settlements, Cilybebyll parish church (including its medieval graveyard and churchyard cross), and disused coal levels and ventilation shafts relating to the area's coal production. A Queen Elizabeth I sixpence was also found in one of the fields to the east of the farm.



*Early 20th Century Photograph Cefn Celfi (Listed Building) prior to mid-20th Century alterations
Source: RCAHMW*



*Structures that form part of Waun y Coed Colliery Branch Canal & Tramroad Incline (Scheduled Ancient Monument)
Source: RCAHMW*



Recent photograph of Cilybebyll Auxiliary Unit Operational Base (Scheduled Ancient Monument)



*Summit Cairn on Mynydd-March-Hywel (Scheduled Ancient Monument)
Source: Aaron Jones*

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3.8 Natural Heritage

There are no designations in place to protect any natural heritage found at Plas Farm or the wider Cilybebyll Estate. However, the farm consists of unspoilt farmland and is at least 5 miles away from any densely populated areas and as a result there is an abundance of wildlife at hand. A mix of exotic and native trees have been planted in the estate's woodland over the centuries, with 27 of the UK's 34 tree species found on the estate. In addition, over 60 bird species and 20 types of butterfly have been noted.

The Bowen family have also developed the 'Plas Farm Trail' – a two-hour circular walk of moderate grade (generally suitable for all age groups) for guests staying at the holiday cottages. It involves a gentle ascent through woods and fields passing mountain streams, bluebell woodlands and pastures whilst offering panoramic views of the Swansea valley.

The following list gives a good indication of the natural heritage located within the farm's boundaries – it is by no means an exhaustive list, but rather a list of the most notable species found on the site:



Fauna:

Common reed bunting	<i>(Emberiza schoeniclus)</i>
Nuthatch	<i>(Sitta europaea)</i>
Skylark	<i>(Alauda arvensis)</i>
Grey wagtail	<i>(Motacilla cinerea)</i>
Goldfinch	<i>(Carduelis carduelis)</i>
Dipper	<i>(Cinclus cinclus)</i>
Jay	<i>(Garrulus glandarius)</i>
Peacock butterfly	<i>(Aglais io)</i>
Orange tip butterfly	<i>(Anthocharis cardamines)</i>
Pipistrelle Bat	<i>(Pipistrellus pipistrellus)</i>
Common Lizard	<i>(Zootoca vivipara)</i>

Flora:

Welsh Poppy	<i>(Meconopsis cambrica)</i>
Bluebells	<i>(Hyacinthoides non-scripta)</i>
Broad Buckler Fern	<i>(Dryopteris dilatata)</i>
Devil's-bit scabious	<i>(Succisa pratensis)</i>
Rhododendron	<i>(Plant Genus)</i> Sweet Violet
	<i>(Viola odorata)</i>
Lucombe Oak	<i>(Quercus x hispanica)</i>
Polytrichum moss	<i>(Plant Genus)</i>