



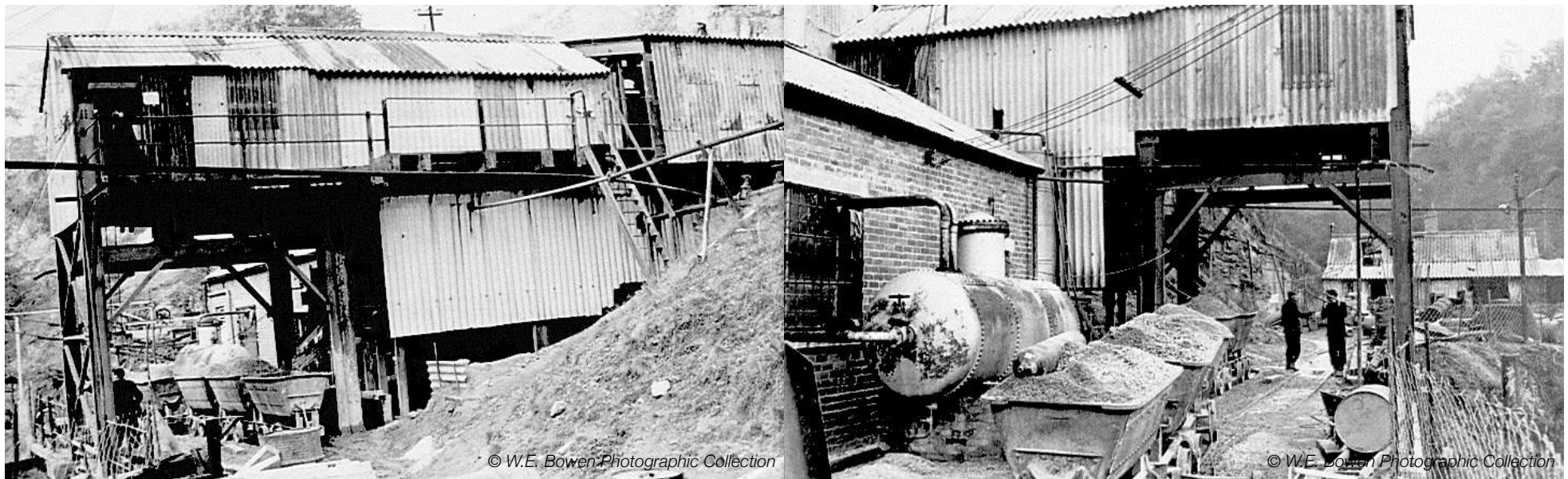
History of the Site

The village of Pontneddfechan sits on the existing boundary of the Forest Fawr UNESCO Global Geopark. The Geopark was established in 2005 and became one of the 169 members of the UNESCO Global Geoparks Network in 2015. The Geopark covers an area of 300 square miles including mountain and moorland, woods and meadows, town and villages, lakes and rivers. The Geopark comprises the western half of the Brecon Beacons National Park and is described as bridging the transition between rural mid Wales and the industrial valleys of south Wales.

The first evidence of humans in Fforest Fawr comes from the Stone Age. However like much of the south Wales valleys, it is for contributions to the Industrial Revolution that the area is rich in history.

Silica Rock was first quarried near Craig-y-Ddinas to the east of Pontneddfechan village in the 1780s. Mined from Basal Grit quartzite prevalent across the south of the Geopark, high purity silica provided perfect ingredients for the manufacture of firebricks for kilns and furnaces, supplying the copper, iron and steel industries locally and exported worldwide.

The first application of silica "tiles" within ceramic brick kilns or furnaces is credited to William Harry of the Swansea Valley, in 1817. In 1820, however, Quaker entrepreneur William Weston Young began experimenting with silica clay recipes, at his pottery in Nantgarw, for the creation of a robust, heat-proof brick that could be used to construct the whole furnace.

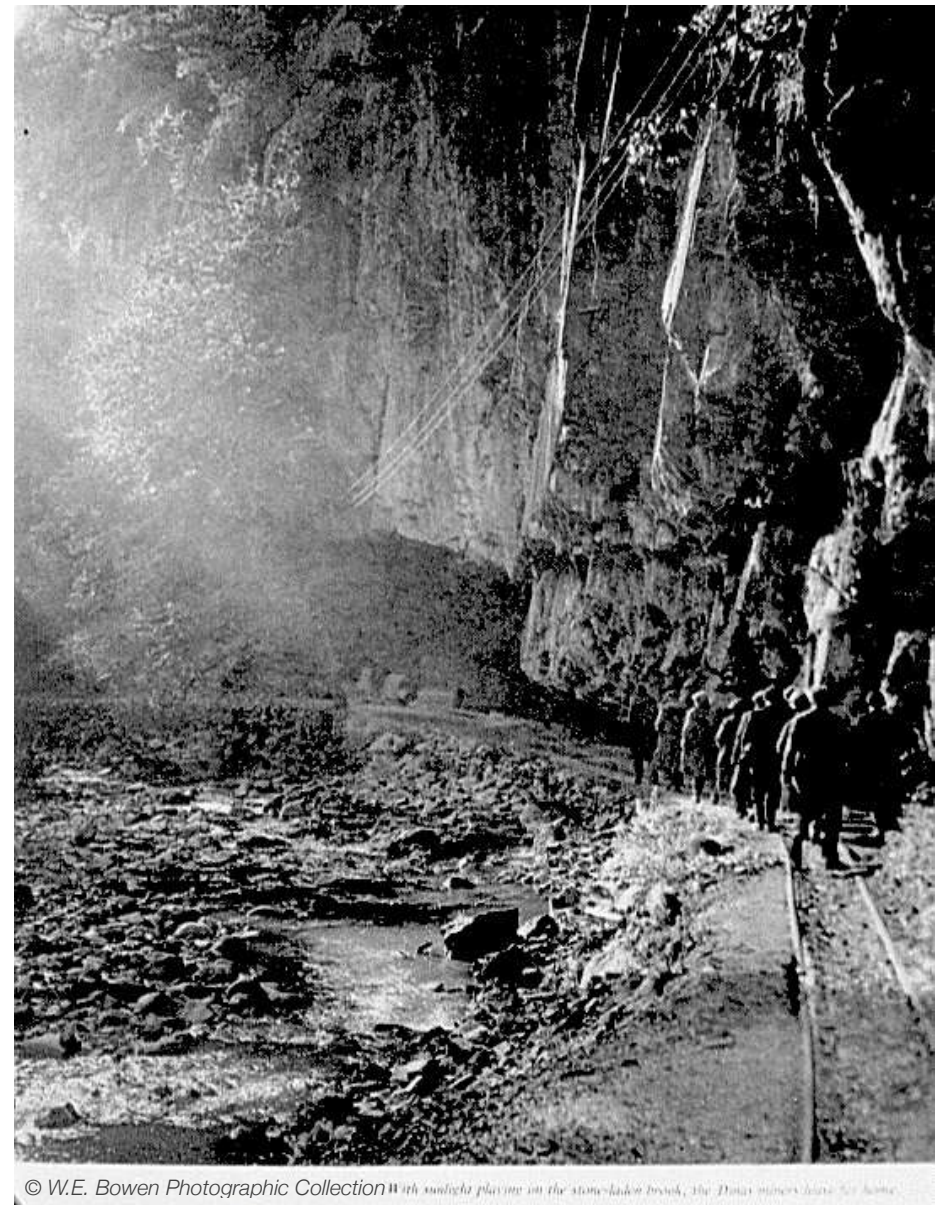


In 1822, Young, with three investors, David Morgan, John Player and Joseph Young established The Dinas Firebrick Co. in the Vale of Neath, and the first batches of firebricks began to be exported for the construction of blast furnaces across the industrialised world. The Welsh word "Dinas," became synonymous with the word firebrick in many foreign languages as a result of the extensive influence of this industry in South Wales.

Associated with the mine workings, a network of trams, cable and ropeways and tunnels were formed to take materials from the quarries to the south to meet the Great Western Railway with the main tramway ending at a loading bay south of Pontneddfechan Road, now occupied by Sgwrd Gwladys. The mine finally closed in 1964.

The tramway up the Nedd Fechan gorge now gives ready access to walkers. Some of the original stones can be seen in the path surface, each with its two holes into which pins were driven to hold the tramway plates. In 1857 the Vale of Neath Powder Company established a gunpowder works at Pontneddfechan, accommodating a deeply wooded valley of the Afon Mellte. The site was selected due to its remoteness and the hazardous nature of the manufacturing process. It also provided a readily available supply of water power and charcoal. A horse drawn tram ran the length of the site, with horses fitted with copper shoes to reduce the risk of sparks. The works was shut down in 1931, with the buildings demolished the following year.

The area of Dinas Rock, the quarries and the Powder Trail have become popular activity areas with walking trails, climbing, gorge walking and caving for casual visitors and advanced individuals and groups. A study of historic maps shows a settlement focused on the historic bridge, with



© W.E. Bowen Photographic Collection With sunlight playing on the stone-laden brook, the Dinas mines leave a home.



OS Map dated 1878

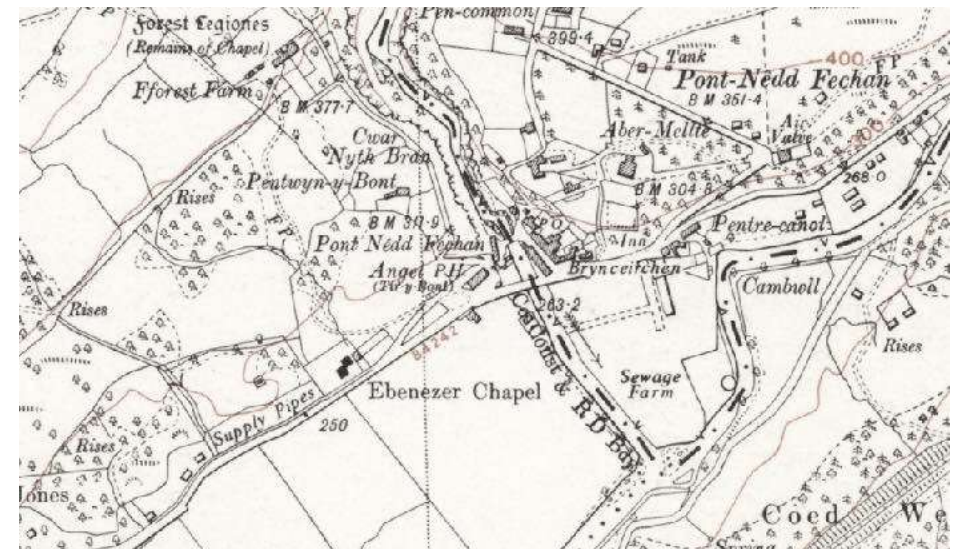
the White Horse Public House and Angel Inn both already established in the earliest map. By 1878 the tramway up the gorge to the Nedd Fechan Silica mines is shown passing to the south of the Angel Inn.

Pontneathvaughan Road originally passed to the north of the Angel Inn and originally the old Pontneddfechan bridge provided the only crossing point of the river. The present day Sgwyd Gwladys appears to have been an industrial building associated with the tramway and a loading bay or platform.

The diversion of the road to south of the Angel Inn and a new bridge are established by 1918 and by 1953 the tramway has been removed. In 1953 there are few dwellings in the village, with little growth of the settlement since 1878. Significant modern residential development has occurred to the north east of the village in recent decades.



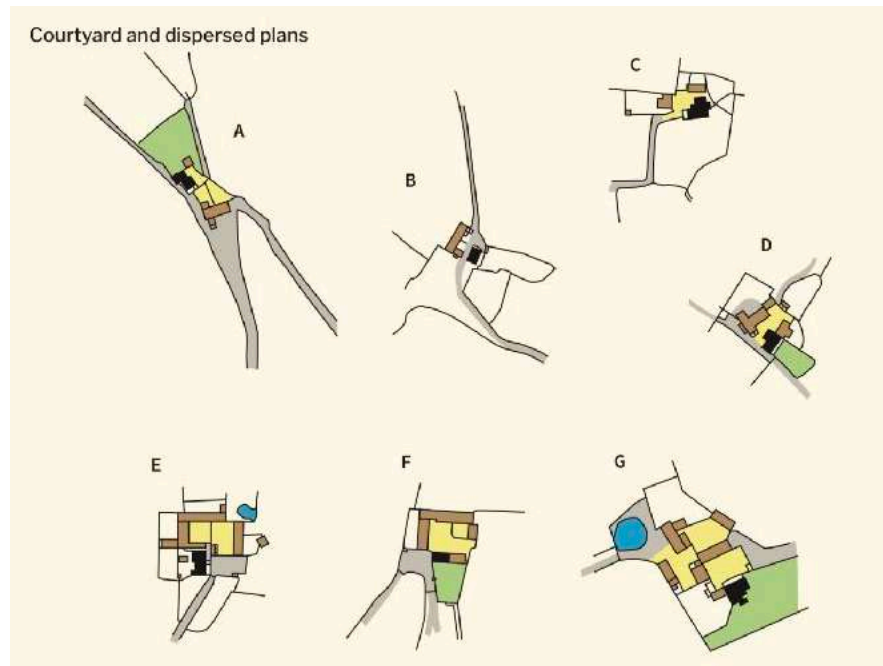
OS Map dated 1918



OS Map dated 1953

Local Character and Vernacular Agricultural Aesthetic

Further analysis of the context on which the development site centres, highlights the value and importance of historic developments set within the Brecon Beacons National Park. The development site is located within the Brecon Beacons Landscape Character Area 4. - Waterfall Country and Southern Valleys.



A key Character Statement discussing Farmsteads and their Landscapes was published in 2023 outlining the main characteristics of traditional farm buildings within the park, to in part aid the decision making process in planning by highlighting their value and how they contribute to the local landscape character.

Longhouses are described in the document as being found throughout Wales and noted as the most common type of farm building historically, and certainly present in the local area. With the layout of the traditional farmsteads found within the National Park commonly forming '*small courtyards with farm buildings facing one or two sides of the main yard*'.

Timber formed a key construction material in the structure of these farmsteads historically, with an increased use of stone plinths at ground floor evident over time. Dark stones or slates forming roof tiles with stone walls or rich tones of lime washed walls embedding the buildings into the seasonality of their environments. Large doors opening to the eaves traditional to threshing barns form distinctive features on larger barn types. With punched holes and longer slots forming windows bringing natural light into the depths of the plans.



Courtyard diagram opposite and traditional farmstead example images above have been referenced from Beacon Beacons 'Farmsteads and their landscapes in Bannau Brycheiniog National Park - Character Statement' 2023.