

Wales' slate landscape inscribed as UNESCO World Heritage Site

- UNESCO has inscribed Wales' slate landscape as the UK's latest World Heritage Site
- The decision was made today (28 July 2021) by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee meeting in Fuzhou (China)
- The status recognises the regions 1,800-year history of slate mining, its people and culture, and its role in 'roofing the nineteenth-century world'

Wales' slate landscape has been inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The *Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales* has become the UK's 33rd UNESCO World Heritage Site and the fourth in Wales, following the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, Blaenavon Industrial Landscape and the Castles and Town Walls of King Edward 1st in Gwynedd.

The landscape – located in the mountains of Snowdonia - became the world leader for the production and export of slate during the 18th century. While slate has been quarried in North Wales for over 1,800 years, it wasn't until the Industrial Revolution that demand for slate surged as cities across the UK expanded to roof workers' homes and factories.

By the 1890s, the landscape employed approximately 17,000 and produced 485,000 tonnes of slate a year. As well as the international demand for Welsh slate, the area was also home to significant innovative developments in quarrying and stone processing and railway technology for mountainous environments. Today's landscape has been transformed on a monumental scale due to hundreds of years of quarrying and mining in the area.

The industry had a considerable impact on global architecture and urbanisation in Europe and North America, with Welsh slate used on several buildings, terraces and palaces across the globe. This included Westminster Hall, the Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne Australia and Copenhagen City Hall, Denmark.

The inscription also celebrates the unique cultural traditions of the area, including the Welsh language and its role not only as the language of the community, but also the language of business, the slate-working skills of the quarrymen, and their precise use of the Welsh language in their craftsmanship and the strong cultural traditions associated with the area including poetry, literature, music and arts. The inscription reflects this by including workers settlements with their characteristic chapels and churches, band-rooms, schools, libraries and meeting places that introduced and reflected new forms of social organisation.

While inscription recognises the area's unique historical role, the landscape also supports the unique cultural identity of local communities. At least 70% of the population speak Welsh and continue to participate in thriving Welsh language literature, arts and crafts, and musical scene. While this inscription will protect, conserve, and enhance the landscape for future generations, it will also help strengthen the Welsh language and increase local pride and confidence in this important indigenous language. Designation as a World Heritage Site will work as a significant driver for economic regeneration and social inclusion in the Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales by creating opportunities for appropriate developments, new business opportunities and expansion of existing businesses.

Note to Editors

1. Quotes:

UK Government Heritage Minister Caroline Dinenage said:

“UNESCO World Heritage Status is a huge achievement and testament to the importance this region played in the industrial revolution and Wales’ slate mining heritage. I welcome the prospect of increased investment, jobs and a better understanding of this stunning part of the UK.”

Kate Pugh OBE, Non-Executive Director for Culture at the UK National Commission for UNESCO, said:

“This UNESCO inscription is a magnificent achievement comparable to the effort and perseverance of the people who lived in these awe-inspiring places and worked these slate mines. UNESCO World Heritage Site status calls for a galvanising vision, and everyone from Gwynedd Council, its partners and the people now living in those historic settlements should be commended for their solid commitment to getting the global recognition that their landscape well deserves.”

Lord Dafydd Wigley, Chair of the Wales Slate Partnership Steering Group:

“After Charing the Wales Slate Partnership Steering Group for over 5 years, I am thrilled by this decision by the World Heritage Committee and welcome our inscription on behalf of all our partners, landowners, communities and businesses.

“Partners have worked tirelessly over more than a decade to reach this important milestone, and we will now need to strengthen our cooperation to ensure that we deliver for the people, communities and businesses of the slate areas. This inscription is a celebration of Gwynedd roofing the world, our unique language, culture and communities and how we exported people, technology and slate to the four corners of the world.

“I would like to pay my thanks to all involved in developing this inscription and offer my congratulations to the newest World Heritage Site in Wales”.

Press Contact:

Matthew Rabagliati
Head of Communications
07376429772

Images: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1_BbQKmgqalUO3pYApUI4Wq2NJ_RycaPB

2. Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales (United Kingdom)

The nominated serial property is composed of six serial components, each encompassing relict quarries and mines, archaeological sites related to slate industrial processing, historical settlements, both living and relict, historic gardens and grand country houses, ports, harbours and quays, and railway and road systems illustrating the functional and social linkages of the relict slate industrial landscape.

They are:

1. Penrhyn Slate Quarry and Bethesda and the Ogwen Valley to Port Penrhyn

This area illustrates the industrial functionality of the slate landscape, from quarry to sea, including physical and visual relationships to workers' settlements and the quarry owner's estate.

2. Dinorwig Slate Quarry Mountain Landscape

Located in the Nant Peris Valley, at the foot of Mount Snowdon, this serial component covers one large area including the Dinorwig Slate Quarry, its associated processing areas and transport system, the Dinorwig Slate Quarry Hospital where quarry workers were treated, and four workers' settlements. They are testimonies of the daily life and struggles of the emergent working classes.

3. Nantlle Valley Slate Quarry Landscape

This area shows the technology used to extract and process the slate remaining in situ, and also illustrates the diversity of dwellings of workers and the transformation of the rural environment.

4. Gorseddau and Prince of Wales Slate Quarries, Railways and Mill

This area represents the expansion of the slate industry in the mid-19th century through the replication, in a remote location, of the technology developed in Penrhyn Slate Quarry.

5. Ffestiniog: its Slate Mines and Quarries, 'city of slates' and Railway to Porthmadog

This area illustrates the expansion of the slate industry and the further development of technology for slate working both on the surface and underground, and the different means used to transport it.

6. Bryneglwys Slate Quarry, Abergynolwyn Village and the Talylyn Railway

This area illustrates the maturity of the slate industry, displaying the influence of the technology developed in the Nantlle Valley and Ffestiniog quarries, as well as the evolution in the planning of workers' settlements.

About the UK National Commission for UNESCO

The UK National Commission for UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation) is appointed by the UK Government to support the UK's contribution to UNESCO and bring the benefits of UNESCO to the UK. It is the hub for UNESCO-related matters in the UK. For information available at www.unesco.org.uk