
NORTH EAST WALES TRUNK ROAD AGENCY (NEWTRA)

RETAINING WALL STRENGTHENING PROGRAMME

OUTLINE ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

GWYNEDD ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST
PROJECT No. G1712

Report No. 558

Prepared for Wyn Thomas Gordon Lewis

By G.H. Smith, M.A., M.I.F.A.

December 15th 2004



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Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust was asked by Wyn Thomas Gordon Lewis to carry out an outline archaeological assessment of the impact of retaining wall strengthening programmes at four locations in North Wales. These are –

- Pont Eyrarth, Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd, Denbighshire
- Ty’n Twll Isaf, Glan Conwy, Conwy
- Beaver Cottage, Betws y Coed, Conwy
- Heulfryn and Bryn Tawel, Dolwyddelan, Conwy

These assessments were required as part of the ‘Record of Determination’ which provides the information on which a decision can be based as to whether a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is needed.

2. METHODS

Enquiries had already been made with the Cadw and the Clwyd-Powys Sites and Monuments Record as to the possible presence of Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Listed Historic buildings or other Historic Environment Records on the site of or in the immediate vicinity of the proposed building works. For three of the sites, those in Conwy, searches had to be made of Historic Environment Records held by the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust at Bangor.

A rapid desktop study was made of available documents, chiefly historic maps to ascertain the possibility of unrecorded features that might be affected by the works.

Each location was visited and an assessment made of the topographic setting to ascertain the potential for -

- the presence of early soil horizons
- the presence of archaeological or historic features
- the quality of survival of such features
- the presence of associated environmental evidence

The potential in each case was graded on a scale of High, Medium, Low or None.

The assessments are presented as a text description, a record of potential and a summary statement designed to be appended to the Record of Determination.

3. PONT EYARTH, LLANFAIR DYFFRYN CLWYD, DENBIGHSHIRE (SJ 12675535) (Fig. 1)

General environmental and historical description

The wall retains the downhill edge of the A494 road for about 140m immediately north of Pont Eyarth, south of Ruthin.

The road has been built on a medium-sloping hillside, which drops beyond the road to where it meets with the fairly level flood plain of the River Clwyd. The hillside steepens to the south towards the bridge crossing, where the slopes are wooded and some of these woods are registered nature conservation areas. The slightly gentler slopes to the north are used for permanent pasture.

The road lies in open country but close to a post-medieval bridge, Pont Eyarth, a listed building Grade II, which is the only recorded historic feature within 50m of the proposed scheme. The retaining wall itself is a modern construction.

The presence of early soil horizons

Potential: Low.

Observation indicates that the road has been widened by means of terracing out above the slope, for which the wall to be re-built forms the revetment, in places up to about 3m high. The area to be affected is therefore all of recent made-ground and any earlier soil horizons can be expected to have been destroyed during construction of the existing revetment wall.

There is an adjoining area of ground in the field to the south of the road that might be affected by construction traffic. However, any presence of early soil horizons in this area can be expected to have been reduced or obliterated by construction works for the existing stone revetment wall.

The presence of archaeological or historic features

Potential: Low

Areas close to rivers are often well used for prehistoric settlement. However, significantly sloping ground has a low potential for prehistoric settlement and none would be expected here on the line of the road and revetment itself or on the closely adjoining area of field down slope that might be affected by construction works.

The post-medieval road probably followed a long-used route and there may be minor features associated with it and with local industries that used it and the bridge crossing. For instance there is a limekiln on the slopes north of the road about 200m to the south-west. The general area may also have been affected by construction of the railway, on the south side of the river.

The only historic feature directly affected by the development scheme is a minor one – a milestone, which was present at the time of the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 6inch map of 1879 and has since presumably been moved and replaced during road improvements.

The quality of survival of such features

None expected.

The presence of associated environmental evidence

None expected

Summary

The area of proposed construction has low potential for the presence of archaeological features and surface observation suggests low potential for the presence of soil horizons of archaeological value in the area of the road revetment or adjoining areas, which might be affected by construction. A full environmental assessment is therefore not recommended. The retaining wall is a modern construction and needs no more than the photographic record already made. The milestone should be avoided and retained or removed and replaced.

4. TY’N TWLL ISAF, GLAN CONWY, CONWY (SH 80407635) (Fig. 2)

General environmental and historical description

A stone wall up to 2m high retains areas of garden belonging to two properties on the east side of the A470 road. The properties lie at the foot of a significant slope on the hillside forming the east side of the Conwy valley. The hill slope continues down to the west until it meets the river flood plain.

The road follows an historic route, largely identical now to that shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey 6 inch map of 1891. The first edition 1 inch map (surveyed c. 1820, revised c. 1870) and the 1891 map both show the area east of the road as one large field down to the road edge. The existing buildings are all of 20th century construction, built on terraces some way above the road.

The presence of early soil horizons

Potential: None expected.

The road appears to have been slightly terraced into the slope on the east side and revetted. The ground behind has been built up artificially. These redeposited layers themselves have no archaeological value and the original revetting of the road terrace would have removed any pre-existing horizons.

The presence of archaeological or historic features

Potential: None expected.

There are no recorded historic features or buildings within the area likely to be affected by the construction.

The retaining wall itself is of two main phases, north and south, related to the boundaries of the properties that it fronts. The oldest is that at the north end of the site in front of Ty’n Twll Isaf, and is of partly mortared laid slab construction with random blocks. It is possible that the lower part of this length of wall existed before the construction of Ty’n Twll Isaf as a boundary to the field that formerly existed there and so may be of 19th century date. The wall has been raised in height in the 20th century to allow greater terracing of the garden of the house. The southern length of wall, in front of 1-8 Conwy Court, is of recent construction, in similar materials but neater and with a concrete slab coping.

Observation indicates that no early soil horizons will be present but prior to construction of the houses and gardens the area was sloping hillside. Such significantly sloping ground has a low potential for prehistoric settlement or other activity and none would be expected here.

The quality of survival of such features

None expected.

The presence of associated environmental evidence

None expected

Summary

The retaining wall itself is shown to be of 20th century construction and not of historic value except in as much as it is of local character built of local materials. The existing photographic record provides sufficient response.

The area of proposed construction has low potential for the presence of archaeological features and surface observation suggests that no soil horizons of archaeological value will be present in the area of the road revetment or adjoining areas, which might be affected by construction. A full environmental assessment is not therefore recommended.

5. BEAVER COTTAGE, BETWS Y COED, CONWY (SH 79875480) (Fig. 3)

General environmental and historical description

The A470 road narrows as it approaches Pont yr Afanc, closely contained within roadside walls, with no roadside verges. It runs along a rocky slope, which forms the valley side into which the road has been terraced. The wall to be replaced lies in front of Beaver Cottage and Coed Celyn farm. It is about 67m long and up to 2.10m high. It is of neat random laid slab construction with larger slab coping in front of Beaver Cottage and slightly lower, of poorer construction in front of Coed Celyn.

The line of the road has remained unchanged since the late 19th century, as shown on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 6 inch map of 1891 and probably before. It is a historic route and was a turnpike road, there was a turnpike toll gate (Beaverspool Gate) about 400m to the south of Pont yr Afanc. There would have been more ancient routes through the valley here, for instance the Roman road between forts of Caerhun, Conwy and Tomen y Mur, Trawsfynydd, but it is likely that the route by Beaver Cottage only came onto use when Pont Afanc was constructed in the 18th or early 19th century, prior to which the main route probably followed the west side of the river.

Pont yr Afanc (Bridge of the beaver) is the nearest historic feature to the development area, a listed building, Grade II, of post-medieval date. The area is of general interest for the place name Afanc, which provides a possibly late record of the presence of the beaver, which survived in Wales into the medieval period when it was hunted to extinction for its fur.

The buildings around the development scheme are all of 19th century date, the earliest and most notable being Coed Celyn House, 200m to the north, of mid-19th century date, the house and entrance features being listed buildings, Grade II. Beaver Cottage and Fairy Glen House were built between about 1870-1890 and Coed Celyn, adjoining Beaver Cottage, between 1890 and 1900.

The road at this point is bordered by woodland on the west side, the trees of which are protected by Tree Preservation Orders.

The presence of early soil horizons

Potential: Medium

Beaver Cottage is terraced into the rock of the steep hillside, as is the road. The hill-slope continues down slope to the west, towards the river. In front of Beaver Cottage there is a yard and it is likely that the whole area from the road edge was excavated to create a terrace on which to build the cottage. There will therefore be only rock beneath recent horizons and structures. Further to the south, Coed Celyn farmhouse is set into a much deeper terrace, further back from the road and a narrow area of the original hillside survives just up slope from the road. The NEWTRA geological description mentions that there are drift deposits on some of the site and this probably refers to this strip, where some deposits pre-dating the road and 19th century buildings could survive, albeit in a very small area.

The presence of archaeological or historic features

Potential: Low

There are no known archaeological or historic features within the area affected by construction. The nearest is the bridge Pont yr Afanc, a Grade II listed structure.

The wall that is to be replaced is of post-medieval type, built of quarried slate. It is of neater construction than the nearby roadside walls and the indications are that it was constructed at the same time as Beaver Cottage itself, shown by map evidence to date to between 1870-1890. The adjoining property, Coed Celyn, was shown to be slightly later, of 1870-1900 and there is a corresponding difference in the character of the retaining wall in front of each property.

With regard to the general archaeological potential, rivers were attractive for early prehistoric activity for their food resources and areas close to them suitable for temporary settlement would have a high potential for remains of activity. Such areas would be fairly level, well-drained areas, perhaps with good viewpoints over the valley, such as knolls or promontories. However, the natural hillside here, before the terracing in of the road and houses was of a significant slope and such slopes have low potential for prehistoric settlement or other activity and are unlikely to occur in the narrow strip of surviving natural slope here.

The quality of survival of such features

None expected

The presence of associated environmental evidence

None expected

Summary

The retaining wall at Beaver Cottage will be replaced with local materials to retain its character and the wall is not in itself of particular historic value. The proposed work therefore needs no more mitigation than the photographic record already made.

Part of the area affected by the proposed construction has medium potential for survival of early surfaces but the nature of the topography indicates that this is of low potential for the presence of archaeological features. A full environmental assessment is therefore not deemed necessary. However, there are several different schemes being considered, one of which would encroach into the protected woodland at the west side of the road. This undisturbed area would have greater potential for archaeological remains and any impact would require mitigation so a fuller environmental assessment would be necessary should this scheme be adopted.

6. HEULFRYN AND BRYN TAWEL, DOLWYDDELAN, CONWY (SH73925253) (Fig. 4)

General environmental and historical description

The retaining wall to be replaced is about 20m in length and revets the raised front gardens of two houses, which are situated up slope from the A470 road. The wall has a maximum height of about

1.75m and is constructed of local slate of dry stone laid slabs with occasional blocks, pierced in two places by gateways and steps providing access from the road to the houses.

The road here runs along the medium sloping valley side and is terraced into the slope. The houses above the road are also built on a terrace cut onto the slope. The valley side is formed by the slope of a hill, Foel Gynnud, which rises to 220m OD. The hill slopes down fairly evenly until it reaches the road, at a height of c. 140m OD and continues to the flood plain of the valley floor, down slope from the road.

The road is a historic route through the valley, possibly continuing the line of the Roman road between the forts of Caerhun, Conwy and Tomen y Mur, Trawsfynydd, the route later becoming a turnpike road.

The settlement of Dolwyddelan - The meadow of (Saint) Gwyddelan - has medieval origins but there was another closer area of settlement at Pentre Felin 200m west of the construction area. This was at the foot of a small valley and was based around several water mills there, shown on the Ordnance Survey 1st edition 1 inch map of the early to mid 19th century. The function of the mills is remembered in the name of the valley side – Allt Singrug – The hillside of the winnowing. At this time Heulfryn, Bryn Tawel and the chapel adjoining had not been built. However, they had been built by the time of the Ordnance Survey 1st edition 6 inch map of 1891. By this time settlement in the area had expanded with the development of a large slate quarry, Prince Llywelyn Quarry, about half a mile to the east.

The presence of early soil horizons

Potential: Low

The cutting of the road terrace and of the terrace for the houses has removed most of the original hill slope here. In the narrow strip that remains between the house and road terraces, construction of the revetment wall is also likely to have disturbed the ground. There is still a low possibility of some survival of buried horizons predating the construction of the two houses.

The presence of archaeological or historic features

Potential: Low

There is only one recorded historic feature within the area of the scheme, this is the line of the Roman road. This has not been proved by physical evidence and such remains are frequently obliterated by later road building. Such evidence as there is comes from areas where the post-Medieval road took a different route from the earlier road. Nevertheless, there is always a possibility that later road surfacing will have been laid over earlier surfaces, or diverged locally, leaving some areas of early surfaces intact.

The revetment wall itself must date to the time of construction of the houses Heulfryn and Bryn Tawel, shown by map evidence to be between 1870-1890 or slightly earlier. The use of the slate would accord with the development of the Prince Llywelyn slate quarry nearby. The association between the houses and the wall is also confirmed by the absence of such a wall further to the east, beyond the property boundaries.

There are sometimes minor features close to the lines of early roads, relating to transport, such as minor quarrying for road construction, droving enclosures, smithying, Observation of the ground here suggests that the hill-slope was unaltered before the construction of the two houses and chapel.

Prior to the construction of the two houses and the chapel this was an open hillside with a significant slope. Such a slope would not be attractive to early prehistoric settlement and later prehistoric settlement could be expected to be situated on higher ground above the immediate valley sides.

Overall, then there is low potential for the presence of archaeological features.

The quality of survival of such features

Low, due to later disturbance.

The presence of associated environmental evidence

None expected

Summary

Surface observation suggests that the area of proposed construction has low potential for survival of soil horizons of archaeological value and low potential for the presence of archaeological features. The wall itself is shown to be of late 19th century date and requiring no mitigation other than the photographic record already made. The proximity to the probable line of a Roman road and the possibility of buried remains suggests that some mitigation, in the form of a watching brief would be appropriate but that a full environmental assessment would not be required with respect to archaeological remains.

7. SOURCES CONSULTED

Cadw Listed Buildings records.

CARN Online Core Archaeological Records Index, Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for Wales.

Gwynedd Historic Environment Record, Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, Bangor.

Ordnance Survey 1st edition 1 inch, 6 inch and 25 inch maps, where available.



NEWTRA Retaining Wall Strengthening Programme Fig. 1 Pont Eyrarth, road improvement area, from the north, December 2004. 2m scale



NEWTRA Retaining Wall Strengthening Programme Fig. 2 Ty'n Twll Isaf, Glan Conwy, road improvement area, from the west, December 2004. 2m scale



NEWTRA Retaining Wall Strengthening Programme Fig. 3 Beaver Cottage, Betws y Coed, road improvement area, from the north-west, December 2004. 2m scale



NEWTRA Retaining Wall Strengthening Programme Fig. 4 Heulfryn and Bryn Tawel, Dolwyddelan, road improvement area, from the south-west, December 2004. 2m scale



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