

A470 CARDIFF TO GLAN CONWY
TRUNK ROAD

TY NANT TO
NORTH OF MAENTWROG ROAD STATION
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

REPORT NO. 58
GAT 1121

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Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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I. INTRODUCTION

The County Council is proposing to straighten approximately 1.25 kilometres of the A470 and adapt the intersection with the A487.

In its initial response to these proposals, Gwynedd Archaeological Trust recommended that Stages 1, 2 and 3 of the Gwynedd Sites and Monuments Record's model Programme of Archaeological Work for Road Schemes, following Cadw revised procedures governing the archaeological response to the trunk road programme in Wales, be undertaken to fulfil the requirements of an Archaeological Assessment in this instance. This was to have involved desk-top, field search and geophysical survey, leading to the production of a report which could be included in the County Council's Impact Assessment Statement.

This original proposal was rejected, and a scaled-down Stage 1 assessment consisting of desk-top study, field search and a report was agreed. In the absence of a specific agreed project design for this work, the Cadw revised procedures have been followed:

3.3 All archaeological assessments will involve a detailed evaluation of the relevant information within the Sites and Monuments Record, a study of relevant aerial photographic collections and easily available documentary sources, walking the whole route, plotting or surveying all crop mark or earthwork sites affected by the route and undertaking field pick-ups on located sites where relevant.

It appears that the scheme will in fact proceed as designed, so no suggestions as to modifications of the proposals, which would normally be considered, have been made.

II. SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The stretch of road in question lies between 1 km and 2 km north-west of the Roman fort and associated complex of sites at Tomen-y-Mur (centred on SH70603860). This is a major archaeological landscape, involving groups of burial mounds, both prehistoric and Roman; a Roman fort; practice camps; kilns; an amphitheatre; roads and tracks; and a later, Medieval, motte. Although this complex is not directly affected by the current proposals, it is clear that there is a good chance of further sites connected with it being found anywhere in the immediate area. In particular, the Roman road linking the fort at Tomen-y-Mur with that at Segontium (Caernarfon) must be crossed by the A470 somewhere.

The motte (castle mound) is mentioned in the Mabinogion, was in use in 1090, and was said to have been used by Edward I in the course of his conquest of Wales. The Roman road may well have remained in use throughout this period, but the exact line is now not certainly known.

Several 17th-century buildings flank the route, including Melin Tyn y Nant (see gazetteer of sites), Tyddyn Du and Cynfal Fawr. All of these are firmly dated by inscriptions on the buildings; Cynfal Fawr may in part date from the 16th century. Both of the last two have historical associations, the former with Archdeacon Edmund Prys, author of the metrical version of the Psalter in Welsh, and the latter with Morgan Llwyd o Wynedd (1619-1659), the mystic, preacher and writer, who was born there.

The road itself (A470) appears on the manuscript map drawn at two inches to the mile, dated 1819, which was made for the first edition of the Ordnance Survey one inch to the mile map. As far as one can see at this scale, it follows the same route as today. It is interesting to note that, although the road must be almost 200 years old and may in fact be considerably older, it nevertheless cuts through the holdings shown on the 1842 tithe map, dividing all of them into two and in no case forming a boundary itself. This was also noticed in the field, enclosure boundaries often continuing either side of the road, and suggests that the field pattern in the

area is of considerable antiquity.

Next to the 17th-century mill, Melin Tyn y Nant, itself altered in the 19th century, is a corn-drying kiln dated 1799; and the former station building at Maentwrog Road Station dates to the first half of the 19th century. Thus a historical sequence from prehistory to the present day can be demonstrated for the area, making it of considerable interest.

III. METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

Desk-top Study

Consultation of maps, computer records, written records and reference works, which make up the SMR, was undertaken at the Trust. Records in the library and the archives of the University College of North Wales, Bangor, and in the county archives at Dolgellau, were also consulted. These included early Ordnance Survey maps, tithe maps and schedules (see bibliography). The Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales was consulted by telephone, both for further information about recorded sites and to establish whether there was relevant air photograph coverage.

Field Search

This was undertaken on 15th July by two members of Trust staff together with a student on Work Experience. As no corridor of interest had been identified but the new route had been notified, the existing road was walked in both directions and a visual inspection was made of areas to be affected. Detailed inspections were made of sites which appeared to merit them. Photographs (black and white where appropriate; colour slides) were taken where possible of sites of interest, and also of some larger areas along the route. Where the new route is to diverge significantly from the old, the new route was walked, but not where regular ploughing had clearly been undertaken to the extent that no traces visible on the surface could remain.

Conditions during the field search were poor; heavy and continuous rain affected visibility slightly and photography significantly. It was in practice impossible to take photographs under overhanging trees or in other dark locations, and it is expected that features will be difficult to pick out on the photographs which were taken.

IV. SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Several sites of interest were noted and are numbered in the following lists and on the map (Fig. 1) from west to east.

There are two sites of major importance which will be affected by the proposals, both near the western end of the improvement and both already known. Apart from these, features noted were mostly old field boundaries. Although these are probably of considerable antiquity (see above) and are interesting in themselves, being linear features which meet the road end-on damage to them will be limited.

The track, 6, and associated stretch of walling, 5, run parallel to the road and will probably be completely destroyed. It is therefore essential to establish their status before work begins, and take appropriate steps to record them at the required level if they are of interest.

The place-name study carried out as part of the desk-top research was unsatisfactory, as no maps could be located which gave the field names. The tithe map of 1842 gave only the names of the holdings, and none of these appeared to be significant.

The RCAHMW advised us that they had no aerial photographs showing anything of interest. There was insufficient time to consult other air photograph libraries.

V. GAZETTER OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

The sites identified were allocated to categories as follows:

Category A

Preservation *in situ*. Sites of such importance that it is recommended that they remain preserved and protected *in situ*.

Category B

Detailed recording. Sites for which preservation *in situ* is the preferred option, but detailed recording (either by full excavation or standing building analysis and controlled dismantling) might be an acceptable alternative if damage or destruction cannot be avoided.

Category C

Recording by photograph and description. An adequate record can be achieved by written description and photograph, and possible survey by Electronic Distance Measuring equipment, if damage is inevitable.

Category D

Watching brief sites - the presence of which is suspected (e.g. from place-name evidence) but where nothing can be seen on the ground.

Category E

Sites needing further investigation, the importance or nature of which are as yet undetermined, and which will require further work before they can be allocated to categories A to C.

1. Melin Tyn-y-Nant SH69023906 Category A

Derelict watermill (dated 1610) and corn-drying kiln (dated 1799). These buildings are in very poor, and deteriorating, condition and appear to be subject to ongoing damage, but are nevertheless important. Their importance is increased by their group value (the two buildings together, river culvert, remains of leat leading to overshot waterwheel, etc.) and by the secure dating. While the buildings themselves may not have to be demolished to accommodate the new road junction, there seems likely to be damage to the river culvert and the trees along it, which will adversely affect the group value and the setting of the buildings. The kiln building will also be much nearer to the road than at present which, given its fragile condition, raises the question of possible damage from traffic vibration.

2. Old field wall SH69033907 Category C

This field boundary will be breached south of the present road. It is currently extremely overgrown on this side and therefore could not be closely inspected, but like most field boundaries on the route it crosses the road (and therefore almost certainly predates it, meaning that it must be at least 200 years old). On the north of the present road it can be clearly seen as an old stone wall.

3. Embanked stone wall, possible route of Roman road SH69043908 Category B

An ancient embanked stone wall, very well constructed and preserved. It appears only to the north of the present road, but as the field to the south has been well ploughed it is likely that the boundary did continue across it, and has been removed. Substantial trees growing on the wall indicate its age. On the west of the wall is a flat area marked on old maps as a track, and this seems the most likely route for the Roman road to Segontium from Tomen-y-Mur, which must be crossed by the A470 somewhere in this area. Unfortunately time was not available to question the farmer as to possible Roman finds from the ploughed field, which might have been illuminating.

4. **Old stone wall SH69043909 Category C**

Another good field boundary, already cut through by both road and railway.

5. **Short wall SH69074002 Category E**

A short stretch of wall, apparently in isolation but aligned with trackway 6. It has fair-sized trees growing out of it and is near a stream. There is a patch of tarmac to the south-west. It could possibly be connected with an attempt to dam the stream into a pool, but is probably associated with the track (6).

6. **Trackway SH69084003 Category E**

Track or old road running almost parallel with the present road. This was followed as far as the slate fence, 7, then lost in thick growth of juncus. A hard surface could be felt underfoot and there was some evidence of parching despite the fact that the weather had been wet for some time. It was not possible to ascertain whether the surface was old tarmac (indicating an earlier course of the road: it had clearly been fairly recently straightened here) or hard core such as might be used on a field track. The patch of tarmac south-west of wall 5 might indicate the former, though this might just have been put down by the farmer to prevent rutting in a wet hollow.

7. **Slate fence SH69084003 Category C**

This boundary was again cut by the present road, but the slate fence remained only to the south - a modern post and wire fence marked the line on the north. The slate fence itself is in good condition, apart from the fact that it leans to the east, and is probably of no great age, but is interesting in that the slabs are extremely large - like gravestones, rather than the usual tall, slim shape. They are well weathered so it is possible that the fence is actually older than it looks and has been repaired. It is continuous to quite some distance from the road.

8. **Embanked stone wall SH70014004 Category C**

Old, grassed-over embanked wall north of road, in poor condition. It meets the road at an acute angle and the end is already under the embankment for the present road. This wall falls within the 'area of interest' but is just east of the proposed improvements and should therefore be unaffected.

VI. **ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES BY CATEGORY**

Category A - Preservation in situ

1. Felin Tyn-y-Nant

Category B - Detailed Recording

3. Wall/Possible Roman road

Category C - Recording by Photograph and Description

2. Old stone wall
4. Old stone wall
7. Slate fence
8. Old embanked wall

Category D - Watching Brief Sites

No individual sites identified so far, but see Proposal f below.

Category E - Sites needing further investigation

- 5. Short stone wall
- 6. Trackway

VII. PROPOSALS FOR MITIGATORY MEASURES AND FURTHER WORK

Remaining Assessment Work - before road scheme begins

- a. Geophysical survey should be undertaken, at least in the area of the suspected Roman road (including in the ploughed field south of the road), but preferably also in other areas which will be cut across by the new road where no visible remains were seen.
- b. If any features are located as a result of geophysical survey, it will be necessary for limited trial trenching to be undertaken in order to ascertain the nature, extent, date and importance of such features. In the case of the Roman road, a trench would be required suitable for thorough horizontal and vertical recording (e.g. perhaps 5 m x 1 m). Definite proposals for such work can be put forward when the results of the geophysical survey are available.
- c. An attempt should be made to establish the status of the wall remnant and trackway, sites 5 and 6. If this is the old road, records of the previous road-widening work which has clearly been carried out here might contain the relevant information. If not, a trial trench across the track might be necessary to establish its nature. Following this, work appropriate to the category to which the track and wall are assigned will be required.
- d. As our understanding is that the scheme will go ahead as designed, no attempt has been made to include possible alterations to the route in the mitigatory measures recommended. There is no doubt, however, that to safeguard the kiln building at Melin Tyn-y-Nant, a slight alteration to the junction with the A487 would be required, taking in a little more of the south-east corner and a little less of the north-west.

In any case, consideration should be given to the possible effect of traffic vibration of the fragile buildings of this site. It may be necessary to undertake some stabilisation works as the buildings are of unmortared stone and are in poor repair.

Other work to be undertaken before work on the road scheme begins

- e. A photographic and descriptive record should be made of all Category C sites. This would also apply to any elements of the mill complex (No 1, Category A) which are to be damaged or destroyed. Depending on the level of damage, more detailed recording might also be required here.

During work on the road scheme

- f. A watching brief will need to be carried out where the works affect identified sites, and also where the route crosses new areas where nothing has so far been found. In practice, as the length of road to be straightened is so short, this would mean a watching brief on all work which will disturb the ground surface. Time should be allowed in the project design for necessary work arising from the discovery of new sites during the watching brief.

- g. Photographic and possibly drawn sections will need to be made of all walls (and any other features subsequently discovered) when they are breached by the works. This should not take long nor hinder the work. Much more detailed recording will be required of the Roman road, should this be found at this stage, and if this has not been adequately recorded by the time work starts, a time allowance should be built in for work to this most important site.
- h. In the event of damage or perceived danger to any of the mill buildings (site 1, Category A) during the works, measured drawing and other detailed recording of elevations may be required.

Note: No indication was given on the maps supplied to the Trust of any areas to be used for ancillary works, e.g. dumping of materials, parking and turning of large vehicles, storage etc. Experience has shown that such areas may suffer damage as great as that to the areas directly affected by the road improvement, and, depending where they are, further work may be needed to land thus affected. From our inspection of the route, the mill complex would seem a likely choice for such a site, but, despite the damage that has already occurred there, our advice would be that this should be avoided at all costs.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

Although the length of road to be improved is so short, it crosses a landscape with much historical interest. If the recommendations made above are adopted, damage to this valuable landscape should be limited and recording adequate, increasing the sum of our knowledge at not too great a cost to the heritage.

A fairly small archaeological input should be enough to safeguard the interests of the history and archaeology of the area, and there is the potential for a major discovery, if the line of the Roman road is located.

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