

Investigation of a wall found at Penparc, Penmon, Anglesey

PRN 97003



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Investigation of a wall found at Penparc, Penmôn, Anglesey (PRN 97003) SH 62342 80257

EPRN 46295 (curatorial file A1557)

Introduction

The owner of Penparc, Penmôn, Anglesey contacted Gwynedd Archaeological Trust for advice when he found what appeared to be an ancient wall in his garden (Figure 1). He had partially exposed the wall when trying to dig out a boulder that proved to form part of it. Sean Derby visited the site on 8th July 2022 and noted that the wall was at a different angle to any modern walls or any on the historic maps. There is a scheduled roundhouse settlement of Iron Age or Roman period date (PRN 2551) to the east of Penparc, so it was decided that the wall deserved further investigation as it could be ancient and related to the Iron Age or Roman activity. The wall was allocated the Primary Record Number (PRN) 97003 for inclusion in the Historic Environment Record (HER).

Methodology

Jane Kenney carried out a small investigation on 2nd August 2022, with the aid of the owner. The aim was to expose more of the wall and to excavate down to the natural deposits at either side, unless archaeological deposits were encountered. In particular the aim was to determine the width of the wall, the existence of a second face and identify any floor levels or other deposits related to the wall.

Garden soil and hillwash was removed by hand digging. The length of wall exposed was increased by removing a small area of the lawn and some stones, with permission. The excavation was limited by the small area where soil could be stored, and by minimising the damage to the garden (plate 7).

Once exposed the wall was cleaned and photographed. A plan was drawn at a scale of 1:20 and a section across the wall and related deposits was drawn at a scale of 1:10. The plan was located using a survey quality Global Positioning System (GPS) and the outline of the wall was also plotted by the GPS. A written record was also made on standard GAT context sheets. Each feature or layer has been given a context number from 01 to 07, shown in brackets in the text below.

Results

The excavation revealed a stone structure (04) aligned nearly east-west and centred on c.SH 62342 80257. This structure was made of limestone boulders up to 0.65m long (Figure 2, plates 1 to 4). The structure was 0.4m wide and stood up to 0.5m high. A length 2.5m long was exposed in the excavation. The largest of the boulders was set upright on its long edge, but most of the rest were laid flat. Smaller stones filled some gaps between these larger stones. There was no visible bonding material.

There was only a single line of stones and for most of the exposed wall there was only a single course of stones, but at the eastern end, a second course survived. The stones were aligned so that the best face was on the northern side, but both faces were irregular.

The wall (04) was laid on and slightly cut into the natural subsoil. This was mostly a firm malleable red-brown sandy clay (05), with numerous small stones. To the south of the wall was a patch of friable fine yellow-brown sand with rotted yellow-brown stone (06). This seemed to merge with (05) and is probably a variation in the natural deposits, possibly caused by the rotting of stones into sand. These natural deposits were between 0.5m and 0.3m below the present ground surface, being shallower on the south side of the wall. The presence of the sand in this area, which had been disturbed by roots and animal burrowing, made the relationship between the wall and the natural deposits unclear, but where the section (Figure 3, plate 5) was recorded there appeared to be a shallow cut [08] through (05) in which the wall was built, so it seems to have been slightly terraced into the natural deposits at this side.

Built up against the wall was a dark red-brown silty sand (03) about 0.15m deep (Figure 3, plate 5). This had occasional stones and a cattle bone was recovered from this deposit on the south side of the wall. This deposit is probably hillwash and formed the basis of the garden soil above. The garden soil had a lower layer (02), 0.18m

deep, of friable grey brown sandy silt with occasional flecks of charcoal. This was probably represents the depth to which the garden had previously been cultivated and above it was 0.1m of active topsoil (01). To the north of the wall, within the base of layer (02) was a deposit of oyster shells (07) (Figure 2). A single sherd of post-medieval pottery was also recovered from this layer. The shells represent a dump of food waste during the use of the garden and may be the edge of a larger midden deposit. Occasional sherds of post-medieval pottery were found within the garden soil (01) and (02) but were not retained.

Discussion

Structure (04) does appear to have been a wall of some form. The lack of a double-faced structure suggests that it was not a free-standing wall. The surviving remains could not have supported further courses on top if free-standing. It may have been a revetment wall to support deposits to the south. On this side it was slightly terraced into the slope and the face of the structure seems to have been on the north side. However, deposit (03) was seen on both sides of the structure and no evidence of other deposits built up against this revetment were found.

The possibility of this structure being a stone-filled land drain was considered but the stones are too carefully laid for that to be the case and their positions, while providing strength to a wall, would have impeded drainage. There was also no cut seen through (03) for a drain, so this interpretation is rejected.

The location of this structure under a layer of hillwash, probably deposited over a substantial period of time, suggests that it is of some antiquity. Figure 4 shows that the location of the wall does not correspond to any structure shown on the Ordnance Survey County Series maps. The wall is north-east of a stone-built garden shed, which is not shown on the modern digital mapping (plate 6). This building has clearly been in existence since at least 1889, when it was shown on the first edition County Series map. For some reason it was also missed off the second edition map but was shown on the third edition map. The shed is on the same alignment as the garden walls, i.e. west-south-west to east-north-east, while wall (04) is aligned almost east-west. This suggests that the wall was not related to either an addition to the shed or to other structures in the garden that might be expected to be aligned on the boundary walls.

The tithe map of Penmôn parish (1846) shows that Penparc was built within plot 11, called *Pen y fron bach*. This was a narrow plot with another running parallel to the south (*Pen y fron*, plot 12). These plots appear to be the enclosed remnants of a medieval open field strip system and the current boundaries of the garden of Penparc are the same as those of plot 11. This suggests that any wall on a different alignment to these boundaries dates from before the medieval period.

To the east of Penparc, across the road in the Penmôn Deerpark, are the remains of an enclosed roundhouse settlement (PRN 2551) (Figure 1). This consists of a roughly pentagonal enclosure about 28m in diameter containing two stone-built roundhouses with another two roundhouses to the south, one of which measures 13m in diameter, and shallow depressions that may represent the locations of four more roundhouses (OS 1970). There are also the remains of the boundaries of a field system within this area. The area is scheduled as part of AN044. Roundhouse settlements of this type are generally assumed to be late Iron Age or Roman period in date. It is likely that the wall (04) was related to the field system around this settlement, but no dating evidence was found during the present investigation to prove this.

It is likely that the wall, and the ancient field that it was part of, continued into the modern field west of Penparc. This field has been improved and probably stones removed from it, but it is possible that traces of the earlier field system do survive in this field. Wall (04) must also continue to the east under the garden of Penparc and further work there could expose more of it or other related structures. This should be held in mind during garden works and in the case of any possible future development here.

References

OS 1970: Ordnance Survey card SH68SW10, in Gwynedd Historic Environment Record
Ordnance Survey County Series 25 inch map Anglesey Sheet XV.06 (1889, 1900, 1919)
Tithe map for Penmôn parish in the County of Anglesey (1846), see Welsh Tithe Maps website (National Library of Wales) <https://places.library.wales/home>

Figures

Figure 1. Location of PRN 97003 with insets of site location on Anglesey and location and orientation of wall 04 in the garden of Penparc

Figure 2. Plan of wall 04 and investigation trench

Figure 3. West facing section through wall 04

Figure 4. Extracts from the OS County Series 25 inch map Anglesey Sheet XV.06 showing approximate location of PRN 97003

Plates

Plate 1. Wall (04) from the east

Plate 2. Wall (04) from the west

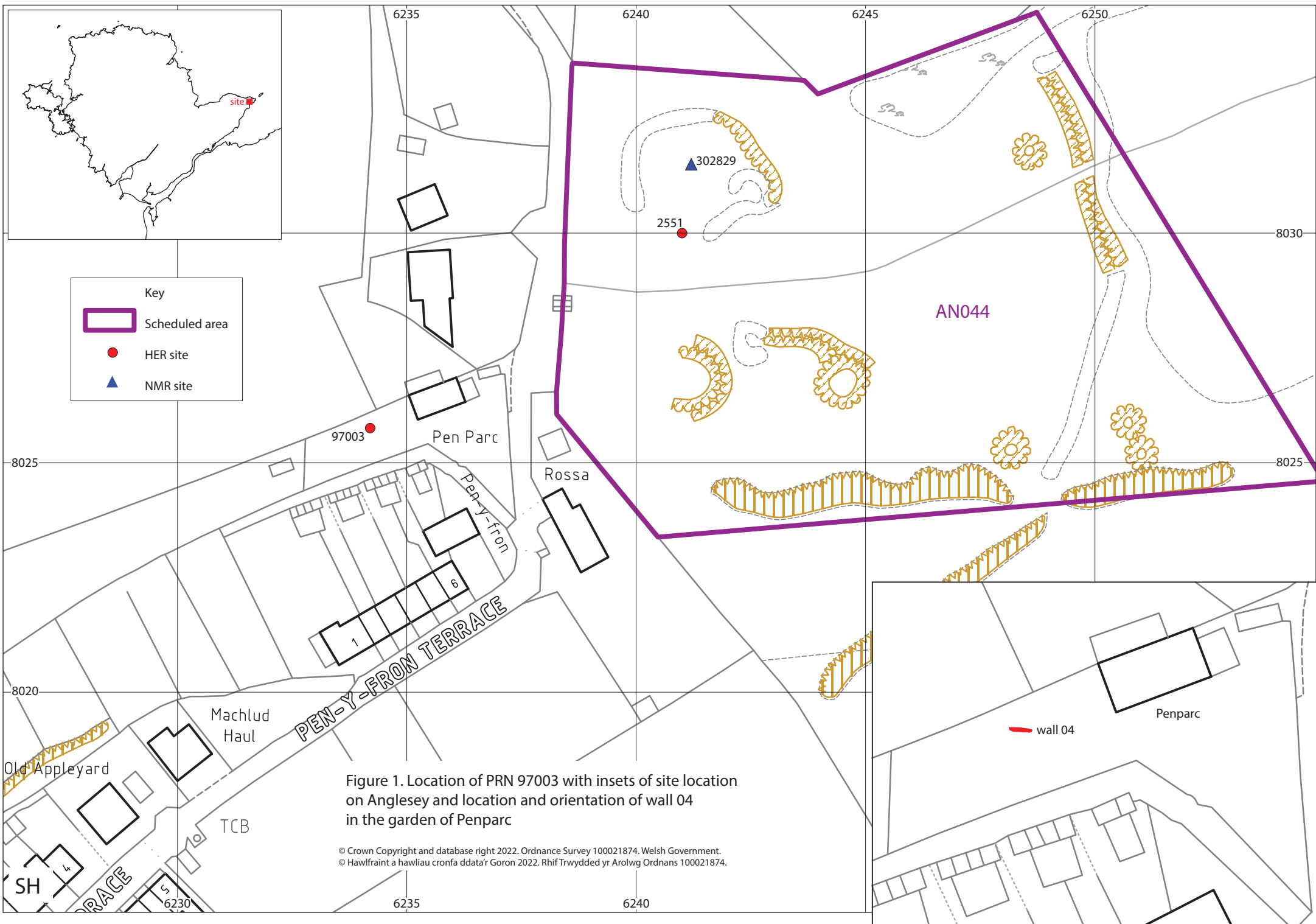
Plate 3. Wall (04) face from the south

Plate 4. Wall (04) face from the south

Plate 5. South facing section across wall (04)

Plate 6. Trench with garden shed beyond, from the south-south-east

Plate 7. Trench within the garden, from the north-east



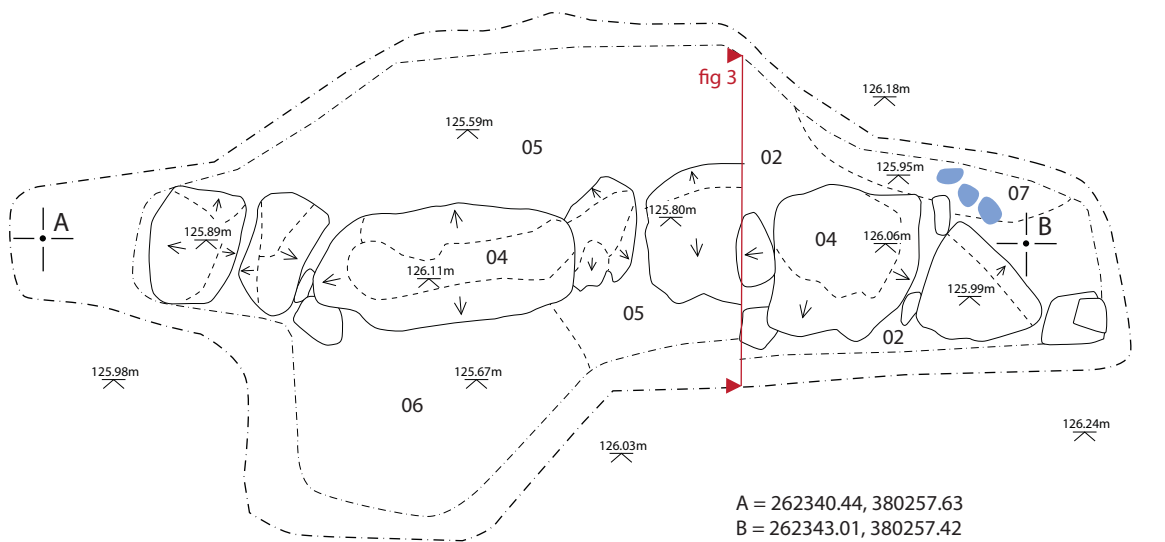


Figure 2. Plan of wall 04 and investigation trench

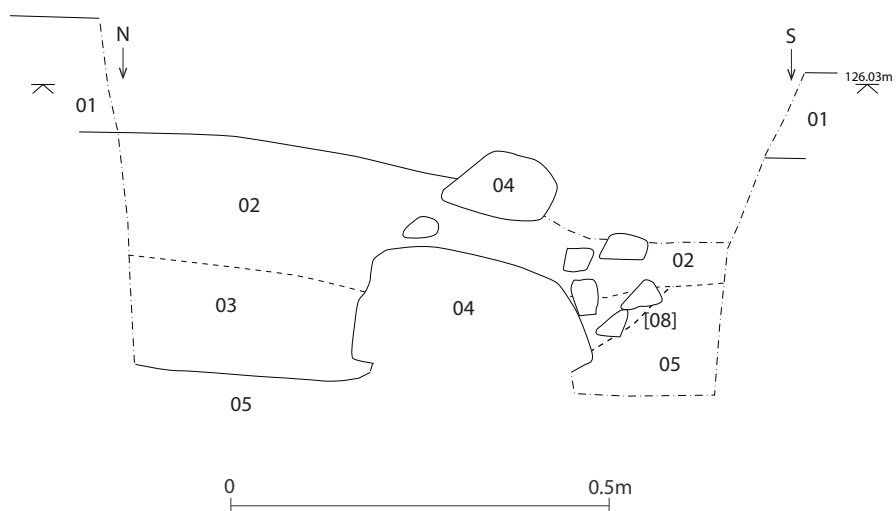
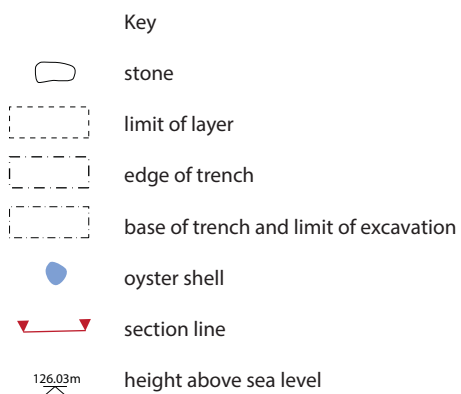
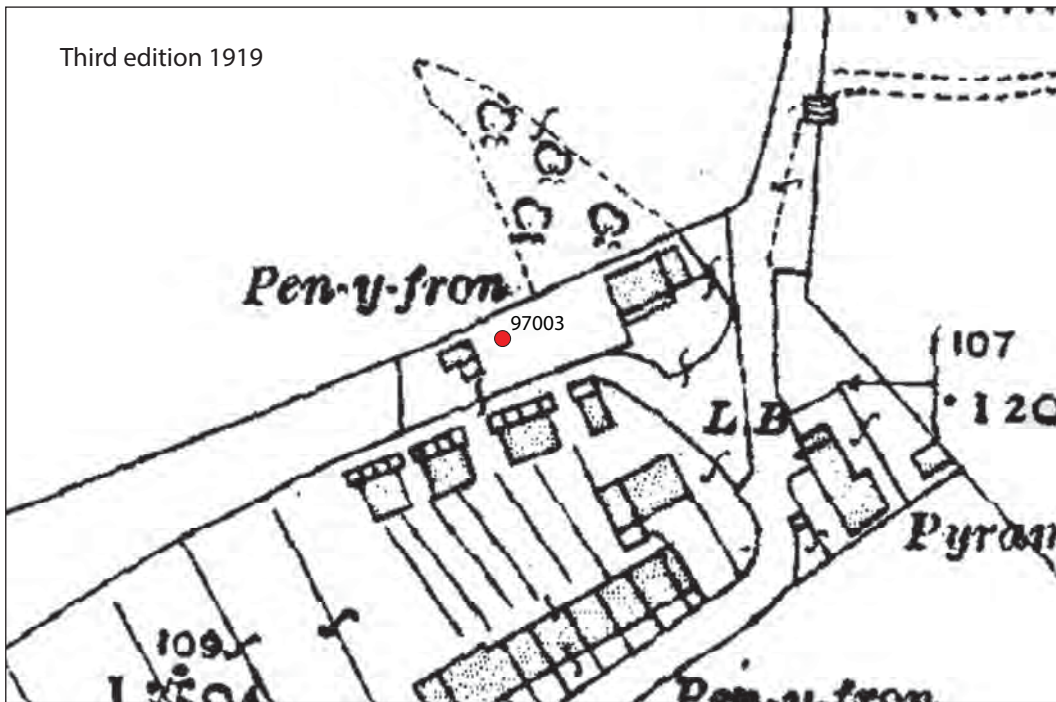
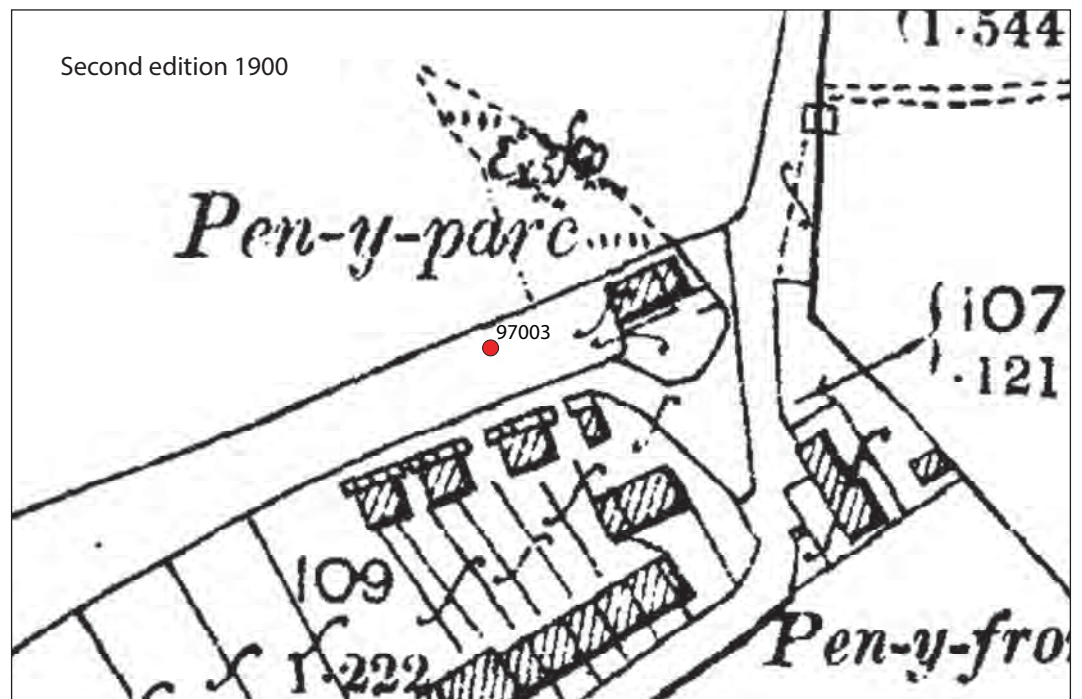


Figure 3. West facing section through wall 04

Third edition 1919



Second edition 1900



First edition 1889

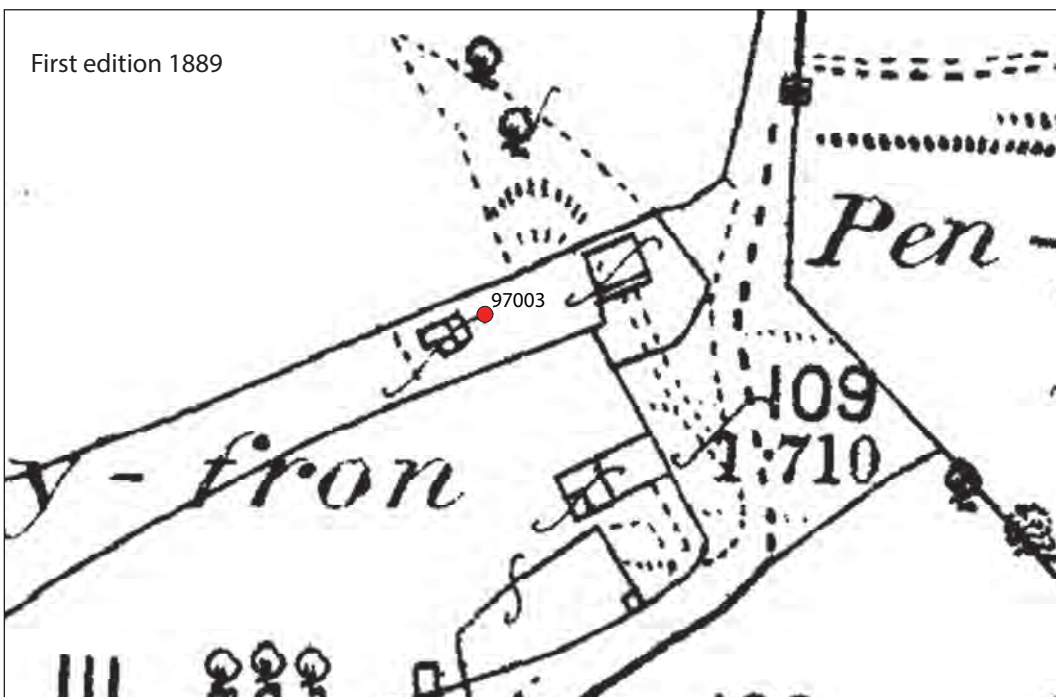


Figure 4. Extracts from the OS County Series 25 inch map Anglesey Sheet XV.06 showing approximate location of PRN 97003



Plate 1 (above left). Wall (04) from the east

Plate 2 (above). Wall (04) from the west



Plate 3 (left). Wall (04) face from the south

Plate 4 (right). Wall (04) face from the south





Plate 5. South facing section across wall (04)



Plate 6. Trench with garden shed beyond, from the south-south-east



Plate 7. Trench within the garden, from the north-east



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