

PLAS MAWR, PENMAENMAWR

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

REPORT NO. 215

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

PLAS MAWR, PENMAENMAWR
ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT (G1432)

prepared for Bridget Snaith Landscape Design

by A. Davidson and Dr. D.Rh. Gwyn

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1 INTRODUCTION

Bridget Snaith Landscape Design is in the process of designing a country park to be called Parc Ty Mawr on the site of the gardens and the now demolished house of Plas Mawr in Penmaenmawr. Funding for the project is being made available from the local authority but application is also being made to the Heritage Lottery Fund. Bridget Snaith Landscape Design has asked the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust to provide an assessment of the heritage assets of Plas Mawr, Penmaenmawr, and of the area surrounding it, as well as indicative costings for archaeological work towards the creation of the park.

2 METHODOLOGY

Desktop work was carried out in the Caernarfon Record Office (henceforth CRO) of the Gwynedd Archives Service, in the library of the University of Wales, Bangor (henceforth UWB), and in the Sites and Monuments Record of the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust. The site was visited on 30 July 1996 by two members of the Trust's staff and a photographic record taken. In addition, Messrs Andrew Neale, Philip Vaughan Davies and Dennis Roberts were consulted, and provided the Trust with much useful information on the area.

3 LOCATION

Plas Mawr is situated on the south side of the former main Bangor to Caernarfon road (by-passed by the expressway in recent years) at SH 713 762. The likelihood is, though this is as yet unconfirmed, that it formed part of the demesne of the older dwelling, Ty Mawr, and was carved out of it between c. 1830 and 1847. Ty Mawr itself appears to have been the original focus of an estate which became centred on the new house of Pendyffryn in c. 1810.

4 LANDSCAPE HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY.

4.1 Neolithic period

The Neolithic axe factory on the Graiglwyd, Penmaenmawr, was one of the first to be examined in the British Isles. Between 1919 and 1921 Hazzledine Warren excavated thirty-three trial trenches and identified a total of five working floors, trial trenched two of these sites, and totally excavated a large axe-flaking floor. He confirmed that axe-fabrication was not confined to Graiglwyd alone but that a complex of sites could be identified on the adjoining Garreg and Dinas Fawr outcrops above Llanfairfechan, and that axe-flaking debitage and roughouts are scattered widely throughout the two parishes of Dwygyfylchi and Llanfairfechan. It is assumed that the finishing processes of axe-fabrication would have been carried out on the lowland belt along the coast, but to date no settlement, funerary or ceremonial sites have been identified in the area.

The axe factory at Graiglwyd dates from the third millennium B.C., and within North-west Wales is possibly preceded by a smaller site at Mynydd Rhiw in the Lleyn peninsula. It was the third most productive in Britain, after the factories of Great Langdale and Scafell in the Lake District and around St Ives in Cornwall, whose products vied with each other in Neolithic markets throughout the island (Cummins, Clough 7-11). The system of working at Graiglwyd was to strike a block of suitable size from the cliff, flake it roughly to shape then work on it to straighten the edges and provide an even cross-section, by flaking the hammerstone in the

technique known in flint. Waste flakes, hammerstones and broken or unfinished hammers have been found at the sites. The roughouts were then taken down the hill to less exposed conditions for polishing, a process which might take several days.

4.2 Bronze Age

Immediately to the southeast of the Penmaenmawr outcrop lies a tight knot of ritual or ceremonial monuments with the embanked stone circle of the Druid's Circle as their centrepiece. These monuments include a ring cairn (No 278 in the Royal Commission Inventory of 1956), a stone circle (277) and an enigmatic triple row "screen" of boulders (No 280) enclosing the entrance to this secluded plateau area. The monuments lie in close proximity to a purported Bronze Age track that traverses the plateau from the Afon Ddu valley in the west to reach eastwards into the Conwy Valley. Immediately below the plateau the track bisects a small cemetery of ruined barrows of which the Cors y Carneddau tumulus (423) still remains a most impressive monument.

A second Bronze Age track skirts the southern perimeter of the plane, taking advantage of the ease of communication between the Aber, Anafon and Conwy Valleys through Bwlch y Ddeufaen. The two trackways are further conjoined by at least two north-south cross-routes.

The Bronze Age monuments provide an interesting collection of sepulchral and ritual/ceremonial sites. However, domestic or habitation sites are singularly absent. Within the same area there are numerous unenclosed and enclosed hut groups of round houses in association with lynchet boundaries and field systems. Chronologically most are bracketed, on very slim evidence, into the succeeding Iron Age or Romano-British periods. It quite possible that some of these habitation sites may derive originally from an earlier prehistoric period.

4.3 Iron Age

The landscape of this period would have been dominated by the hillfort of Braich y Ddinas which occupied the loftiest western ridge of the Penmaen Mawr outcrop at 472 metres above OD. Unfortunately the site exists no longer and our knowledge of the fort rests on the survey work and part excavations undertaken by Hughes between 1912 and 1923 and collated in an unpublished dissertation by Crew (1982). The fort, roughly rectangular in outline, covered an area of approximately 4.86 hectares. A series of rubble built rampart walls, three on the east and south, two on the west and one on the south side afforded protection to the fort. Internally three major units could be distinguished - the inner core occupying the summit ridge, a narrow flanking corridor covering the middle ground to the east and, beyond, a wider curved outer peripheral zone. These units were again further protected by inner linking walls with the main rampart fortifications.

Within these ramparts a settlement consisting of between 100 and 170 round, oval and rectangular stone-built houses had been constructed, from which objects belonging to the succeeding Romano-British period between 100-400 A.D. were recovered. Close analogies exist between Braich y Ddinas and the other great stone rampart fort of Tre'r Ceiri in the Llyn peninsula. Both contain Bronze Age foundation cairns, are defended by rubble built defences, share evidence of intensive and possibly permanent habitation and at both sites habitation was allowed to continue contemporaneously with the Roman occupation of the surrounding countryside.

4.4 The Roman Period

The Romans appear not to have been particularly interested in exploiting the mineral or lithic resources of the Penmaenmawr upland or in establishing permanent occupation in an area of difficult terrain, poor soils, and marginal agriculture. Their principal interest was in circumventing the formidable obstacle of the Penmaenmawr headland, an ever recurring problem in all periods that have seen the development of expansive trade and travel networks, as in the Bronze Age or later in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The Roman road from *Canovium* (Caerhun) west to *Segontium* (Caernarfon) follows the same route as its Bronze Age predecessor from Ro Wen to Bwlch y Ddeufaen. Near the east end of Bwlch y Ddeufaen a Roman milestone was discovered in 1954 which is attributed to the reign of Constantine the Great (305-337 A.D.). It records a distance of five miles from *Canovium*.

From Bwlch y Ddeufaen it is uncertain whether the road continued west through the Anafon and Aber Valleys or descended directly to Llanfairfechan along the Gorddinog valley. The latter route is more likely, since three Roman milestones have been found near its likely course. Two were discovered on separate occasions in 1883, lying within a few metres of each other in a field on Rhiwgoch farm. One is dated to the reign of Hadrian (A.D. 117-138) and records a distance of eight miles from *Canovium*; the other dates from the reign of the Emperor Severus (193-211 A.D.) and does not record any set mileage since the inscription is incomplete. Finally, a third milestone was recovered from a field on Madryn Farm in 1959 on the coastal plain due west of Llanfairfechan. It carried post-Roman as well as an imperial inscription, the latter ascribing it to the reign of Postumus (258-268 A.D.). The milestones are fully discussed by Jones (1985).

Finally, two Roman coin hoards have been found in the locality. The first, consisting of approximately sixty late first- and second-century coins, was discovered in 1871 on the summit of the Graiglwyd quarry (SH 712 753). Unfortunately the whereabouts of this hoard is not presently known. The second hoard was discovered on the western flank of Penmaen above Llanfairfechan at Pinehurst (SH 689 755) and belongs to the third century. Their discovery strengthens the evidence for the continued presence of the native Romano-British population in the area throughout the main part of the Roman occupation of the area.

4.5 Medieval period

The intensity of settlement and exploitation of the Penmaenmawr outcrop and its adjoining upland tract was one of the most characteristic features of the prehistoric period and does not seem to be repeated during any of the historic periods. Direct archaeological evidence for post-Roman and Early Medieval settlement is scant but may include a number of long houses, platform houses and, more infrequently, houses with associated outbuildings, that are widely and singly dispersed throughout the area. The thirteenth century *Record of Carnarvon* records eight free *gafaelion* (holdings) in the townships of Bodfaeo and Dwygyfylchi and a further eight in the township of Llanfair (*Record of Carnarvon* 13, 15).

Upland land use in the Medieval period may be associated with the seasonal movement of stock from the lowlands in winter to the higher pastures in summer. It is therefore reasonable to question whether the long houses were permanently occupied all through the year or were used as summer *hafotai* for those attending the grazing of cattle and goats and processing their resultant milk supplies. Transhumance as a mode of economic existence had virtually disappeared by the end of the eighteenth century as new farming practices involving the shepherding of flocks were being introduced. Extensive sheep walks may have been introduced into the Conwy valley to the east in the thirteenth century by the Cistercian monks from Maenan Abbey (Hays). The break up of their tenurial rights from the fifteenth century onwards led to the complex processes of upland enclosure and consolidation of land by the gentry, processes that facilitated the introduction of an extensive sheep farming economy throughout the mountains of Gwynedd.

4.6 Late Medieval to 1800

4.6.1 Agriculture

This period sees the re-establishment of more intensive strategies of exploitation in the Penmaenmawr uplands. They involve sheep farming, peat extraction and quarrying and renewed attempts are made to secure more permanent and less arduous routes to cross this difficult expanse of land.

From the sixteenth century onwards a process of enclosure and appropriation of common land in the hands of the Crown was set in motion within the upland zone. By the mid nineteenth century the most prominent land-owning families in the district were the Assheton-Smiths of Faenol, the Williams-Wynns of Wynnstay, the Mostyns of Gloddaeth, the Bulkeleys of Beaumaris and the Smiths of Pendyffryn as successors to the Coetmors. It is believed that the enclosure of common land into partitions on the west front of Pen Penmaen, as denoted in the Tithe Map of 1847, can be ascribed to the Williams-Wynn family in whose hands the land had been from 1680 until 1803.

4.6.2 Peat-cutting

As well as a pastoral economy, there is also evidence for peat-extraction, represented by one of the best-preserved peat houses in north-west Wales, whose earliest parts date from c. 1700 (RCAHMW lxxviii) and the pronounced sledge-way that descends along the north east face of the Graiglwyd.

4.6.3 Communications

However, the fame of Penmaenmawr, such as it was, was as an obstacle to traffic, and various routes have attempted to cross it, either across the summit or at the sea-shore. Proposals were made for its improvement during the Lord-Lieutenancy of the Duke of Ormond in 1703-7. Improvements were put in hand in 1720, and between 1769 and 1772 Sylvester built a road round the headlands with sums of money voted by the London and Dublin parliaments.

4.6.4 Community

The construction of Sylvester's road may have had the effect of causing one of the major landholdings in the area to change hands. Lewis Morris' map of 1748 show only three dwellings, Graiglwyd, "Brymor" and Ty Mawr (Morris, plate 2). In the late eighteenth or early years of the nineteenth century, George Thomas Smith, bought the Ty Mawr estate off the last member of the local branch of the Coetmor family, a naval surgeon (pers. comm., Dennis Roberts) but rather than live in Ty Mawr itself, constructed a new house called Pendyffryn on the estate but nearly two miles away as a residence for himself, and earned the praise of Edmund Hyde Hall for having given "a polish and a social look to a tract that was heretofore sufficiently desolate" (Hyde Hall 84). Smith may have spent little enough time in the area; he had been a partner in the West of England Bank, which failed in 1793, and then took a commission in the army, and published sources thereafter speak of him as living in Ireland or the Lake District. However, he was a local JP from 1814, and may have settled in the area after the death of his daughter in 1806 (CRO XQS 1814 83, *Dictionary of National Biography* entry for Elizabeth Smith). The Land Tax Assessments survive for 1792-7, when Elizabeth Jones of Ty Mawr was assessed for £1 10s, and from 1810, when George Smith is described as resident and proprietor, suggesting that he was still living there while the finishing touches were being put to Pendyffryn.

4.7 Modern Period 1800-1996

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries at Penmaenmawr are marked by three major developments, the revival of *quarrying*, the improvement of *communications*, and the growth of a *community* where previously there had been only farmland and bare rock, partly to house the quarrymen and their families and partly in an attempt, not entirely successful, to develop the area as a holiday resort.

4.7.1 Quarrying

The hardness and durability of the rock at Graiglwyd and Penmaenmawr attracted capital investment in the nineteenth century just as it attracted the interest of the Neolithic axe-makers four thousand years before.

Quarrying in the modern period came to be focussed at three sites. The most easterly is Graiglwyd, the central is the Penmaen East Quarry, which swallowed up the neighbouring Pendinas workings, and which are still operational, and the third is the Penmaen West Quarry. Other smaller workings have been opened at Briachlwyd, Bonc Jolly and Tyddyn Drycin.

Before organised quarrying began in the early decades of the nineteenth century, it became the custom for coasters to pick up cobbles from the foreshore for use as ballast. These were coming to have a commercial value as paving stone. This led to informal local partnerships working selected boulders from the hillside as building stone and into squared setts, rectangular blocks which could be used as road paving, which would be taken by horse and sled to the foreshore. In 1830 Dennis Brundrit and Philip Whiteway, both of Runcorn, obtained a lease from the Bulkeley family of the Graiglwyd area and at the same time began work on the crown land, where they developed what came to be the Penmaen East Quarry. These were connected by 3' gauge railway inclines, working on the counterbalance principle, whereby loaded wagons pulled up the embankment on an adjacent track, to landing stages on the shore; the tithe map shows a single incline leading from Penmaen East Quarry to the shore. A third landing stage further to the east served the Penmaen West Quarry, opened probably in 1840, but the coming of the railway in 1845-8 obliged Brundrit and Whiteway to discontinue shipment from here, and they instead constructed a railway around the bluff of Penmaenmawr to connect the quarry to the jetty that served Penmaen East Quarry.

The Graiglwyd quarry was opened in 1834 by Thomas Brassey and John Tomkinson, when they obtained a lease from George Thomas Smith of the Pendyffryn estate to quarry above Ty Mawr and from the Brynmor estate to work Graiglwyd. They surrendered their interest in it in 1840, having constructed a run of four consecutive inclines to carry the material down to their own landing stage. The site was then taken over by Richard Kneeshaw, J.T. Raynes and William Lupton, Liverpool merchants who were already active in the limestone quarries at Llanddulas, and who owned a fleet of coasters. In 1858 the two undertakings produced a total of 134,080 tons.

In the 1870s work in the Graiglwyd quarry slackened, and on 1 January 1878 the Darbshire family of Pendyffryn took over, with the thirty-four year old Charles H. Darbshire as manager, and William A Darbshire and Dr S.D. Darbshire as partners. Charles had trained as a civil engineer and had worked on the Mt Cenis tunnel in Switzerland, as well as in the slate quarry which his brother William managed, Pen yr Orsedd in Dyffryn Nantlle. He reinstated the railway system, which the previous tenants had removed, installed a crushing plant and opened additional sett banks, though initially he was unable to use the Graiglwyd jetty because of leasehold problems, and output had to be taken away by rail.

Charles Darbshire's management opened a new chapter in the quarries' history, in particular his decision to install a crushing machine built between 1888 and 1889, which enabled the Graiglwyd quarry to diversify into the production of railway ballast (Davies 46-7)

In 1911 the two quarry companies amalgamated with each other and with the Welsh Granite Company, proprietors of the Trefor Quarries on Llyn to form the Penmaenmawr and Welsh Granite Company, with Hugh Darbshire, Charles's second son, at Graiglwyd. This led in time to an intensive programme of modernisation begun after the first world war, intensified after a visit by Hugh Darbshire to the USA in 1930. Sett-making was discontinued in this period (Davies 56-62).

Further modifications have been undertaken since, and continue under the present management of ARC Northern. The landmarks after the second world war have been the gradual replacement of the quarry's internal rail network by conveyor belts from the 1950s to 1966, the abandonment of sea traffic from 1955 and the installation of further and more sophisticated crushing machinery at Fox Bank, the nucleus of present quarrying (Davies 61-3, info. ex Bryn Waldron Esq., ARC Northern).

By the end of the nineteenth century the complex of quarries at Penmaenmawr formed one of the largest stone-working sites in the United Kingdom, and it continues to work on a significant scale, though with a much-reduced labour-force. There are extensive remains from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on site, including sett-makers' huts, the bases of crushing plant, incline formations and their distinctive drumhouses (locally *brêcs*, brakehouses). Three of the quarries steam locomotives, survive, all Caernarfon-built vertical boiler types, *Penmaen*, *Watkin* and *Llanfair* (Bradley 353-6). All these, combined with the variety of workers' housing that survives at the foot of the quarry and in the vicinity of Plas Mawr (see below), make the area an outstanding example of an historical industrial landscape.

4.7.2 Communications

Though the construction of Sylvester's road in the eighteenth century lessened the perils of travel through Penmaenmawr, the road was further upgraded by Telford between 1815 and 1830. The road tunnels through the Penmaenmawr headland, opened by Hore-Belisha in 1936, represent the first major investment in road building in the area since Telford's time.

The Chester and Holyhead Railway received its Act of Parliament on 4 July 1844 and was opened as far as Bangor in 1848. The contractors for the Penmaenmawr section were Messrs Warton and Warden. The C&HR was vested in the London and North Western Railway in 1859, becoming part of the London Midland and Scottish Railway Company's network in 1923 and British Railways in 1948 (Bradley 79).

Though the scale of engineering on the Penmaenmawr section do not compare with the Britannia and Conwy tubular bridges, it includes one major piece of work, an open viaduct of thirteen arches, constructed after heavy seas destroyed the original embankment in the presence of the engineer, Robert Stephenson (Sivewright 19). Storm damage continued to affect the railway throughout the nineteenth century; an express goods came to grief here in 1899, though the only fatalities to passengers occurred on this stretch when the up Irish Mail hit a light engine at Penmaenmawr station in 1950 (Hitches M, 29, 31).

4.7.3 Community

The community of Penmaenmawr is almost entirely a creation of the Victorian age, and reflects the development of the quarrying industry, but also the attempts to develop it as a tourist resort.

The tithe map of 1847 shows a row of seven houses alongside the Bangor to Conwy road, as well as Ty Mawr itself and one more farmhouse, but no other dwellings in the area between the Graiglwyd and Penmaen East inclines and jetties. In 1839 the owner of the Brynmor estate built four cottages at Pen y Cae, and four at Penmaenan, followed two years later by three rows of four cottages at Pencoed, known as Taicoed isaf, - canol and -uchaf. These were traditional *crog-lofftydd* structures, built on sloping wasteland. The Graiglwyd Company built "New York Cottages" around the same time, and Plas Mawr itself was used to accommodate several families, as was Plas Celyn. Brundrit and Company built six cottages at Penmaen-isaf in the late 1840s and the six cottages of Crimea Terrace and the twenty-one of Garizim Terrace in the following decade (Davies 40).

From 1882 C.H. Darbishire began to sell off land that had formed part of the Plas Mawr holdings for building plots. He built the fifteen "Bell Cottages" between 1878 and 1888. Another spate of house-construction took place between 1897-9. The Darbishes built the thirty-nine houses of Erasmus Street, the thirty-four houses of David Street, and the six larger dwellings of St David's Terrace. Slightly later came Lower St David's Terrace and Edward Street, comprising ten houses. The Brundrit company built the thirty-one houses of Water Street and later eleven cottages of Upper Water Street (Davies 44).

The area in the immediate vicinity of Plas Mawr therefore shows a wide variety of workers' housing, ranging from the very simple early buildings, exemplified by New York Cottages, to

standard two-up and two-down buildings at David Street and Erasmus Street, and the attractive range of buildings at St David's Terrace for staff employees. The immediate area also forms an excellent example of the way in which a paternalist employer provided recreational facilities and social infrastructure for his employees. The Calvinistic Methodist, Wesleyan and Baptist chapels and the Anglican church were all erected by the side of the road nearby, as was the school, dated 1875 and the range of shops which commemorates Queen Victoria's jubilee in 1887. The Hewan Hall appears to have been converted into a Masonic Hall, and the drill hall has been demolished, but the area nevertheless constitutes an excellent example of a planned industrial landscape.

The workforce at the quarry came from a variety of areas. Many came from the farms in the hinterland of Penmaenmawr, from as far away as Penmachno (Davies 51). Some had gained their experience of quarrying at Pen yr Orsedd (Davies 43). The Scotsman John Templeton was the first manager for the Kneeshaw partnership

The improvement in the road, completed in 1830, and the coming of the railway in 1848 prompted a parallel but unrelated development, the attempts to promote Penmaenmawr as a holiday resort, making use of its long sandy beach. These were mainly focussed on the eastern part of the present town, and reflects the contemporary developments at Llandudno, on Lord Mostyn's estate, and at Llanfairfechan, where the Platt family of Oldham were instrumental in creating a resort.

Penmaenmawr lay in the parishes of Dwygyfylchi and Llanfairfechan, and the expansion of the community in the nineteenth century is reflected in the creation of a Penmaenmawr and Dwygyfylchi Board of Health in 1866 and a Penmaenmawr Local Board in 1890. Penmaenmawr Urban District Council was established in the wake of the second Local Government Act of 1894 (Bassett and Davies 184-9).

5 PLAS MAWR

5.1 Historical Summary

Though the farm of Ty Mawr is the older settlement, in that it is shown on Lewis Morris' map of 1748, Plas Mawr was in existence by 1847, when it is shown as a separate dwelling named Plas Ty Mawr on the Dwygyfylchi tithe map in the Caernarfon Record Office. The owner was then George Thomas Smith, and the tenant Thomas Williams, who also occupied Ty Mawr. The immediate holdings around Plas Ty Mawr, more or less corresponding to the present garden, were Berllan and Perllan Isa, "Orchard" and "Lower Orchard".

Some slight alteration to the garden boundary took place between then and 1887, when the first 25" ordnance survey was carried out (Caernarfonshire IV 14), but the present garden perimeters can for the most part be traced on the 1847 map.

The house itself underwent some changes. The tithe map shows a building orientated east-west with a projecting L-shaped wing on the south-east corner. Photographs from the Darbishire family albums confirm the 1887 ordnance survey, and show a building on the same alignment, but with a substantial two storey extension to the east side, with a bow window and a conservatory. The western part of the structure appears in its origin to be a two-storey dwelling, to which a larger two-storey house with an attic floor has been added some time between 1847 and the late 1890s. The Smith family is said to have built Plas Mawr as a speculative venture (ex info. Richard Peckham), which suggests a date after 1830 and the completion of the Telford Road and definitely before 1847 for the original structure, and between 1847 and 1887 for the additional building, perhaps after the arrival of the Darbishes in 1854. No building plans or other documentation survives in the Darbishire papers at the CRO nor at UWB, and no more definite dates can as yet be ascribed to these structures.

The 1887 map also reveals a lodge building in the north-eastern extremity of the grounds, and a pattern of circuitous walks through a wooded garden. An artificial lake is shown to the east of the house.

The corresponding map of 1913 shows these features still in place, though with the addition of a lawn between the house and the road, and further structures alongside the southern perimeter, which has encroached onto the field at this point. It also shows Col. Darbishire's garden railway, constructed c. 1905, a 2' line, approximately 200 yards long in a simple end-to-end arrangement. This was dismantled in 1921, when the family made its home at Trefor. Its one locomotive, *Redstone*, was based on the design of the Caernarfon-built vertical boiler locomotives in the quarry. It was named after its builder, Thomas Redstone, whom Ivor E. Davies describes as "a skilled fitter and a clever engineer", was appointed at a wage of 7s a day, and remained at work until 1921 (Davies 47). The locomotive is still in existence, on the Brecon Mountain Railway (Bradley 169-170). Railways of this sort, though never particularly common, were a popular amusement in the grounds of noblemen and industrialists from the 1890s onwards (pers. comm. Andrew Neale).

5.2 Archaeological description

The perimeter wall of Plas Mawr remains intact, constructed of the Penmaenmawr stone from the quarry. The lodge building has been demolished but the paths shown on the 1913 ordnance survey remain, and may be followed with no difficulty. The lawn between the house and the road has been covered with rubble, possibly resulting from the demolition of the house, though the upper part of a set of steps leading from the main longitudinal driveway down on to it may be seen, as may a corresponding set of steps leading up to the site of the house on the south side of the driveway.

Of the house itself nothing survives above floor level, and its site is largely covered with a vigorous growth of trees, but it is evident as a raised platform approximately 1m high. The site of the foundations is visible at a number of points. The remains of a patterned floor of encaustic tiles survive opposite the steps up from the driveway, suggesting that this might have been the entrance hallway.

The outbuildings have also been demolished, but the site of the ornamental water is clear, though now dry. The course of the garden railway is apparent.

6 PERSONALITIES ASSOCIATED WITH PLAS MAWR.

6.1 Major-general Sir Charles Felix Smith

George Thomas Smith's son, Sir Charles Felix Smith KCB of the Royal Engineers, saw service in Ireland, the West Indies, Syria and Gibraltar, and was thanked by both houses of Parliament for his distinguished conduct in 1844. He died childless in 1858. Pendyffryn, including the houses of Plas Mawr and Ty Mawr, formed one of his extensive dispersed estates; he was normally resident in England (*Dictionary of National Biography*, entry for Sir Charles Felix Smith).

6.2 Elizabeth Smith

Elizabeth Smith, 1776-1806, George Thomas Smith's daughter, was a noted orientalist and comparative linguist. At the age of eighteen she embarked on the study of Persian and Arabic. On her way to Sligo to meet up with her father, she bought an Irish grammar at Armagh, and began the study of the Celtic languages, to which she added Hebrew, and embarked on a comparative study of Chinese and African dialects. She settled with her family at Ballitore in County Kildare, removing in 1801 to Coniston, where she died, worn out by her studies, in 1806 (*Dictionary of National Biography*, entry for Elizabeth Smith). It is important to stress that though her family resided at Penmaenmawr and owned the site of what became Plas

Mawr, there is as yet no evidence that Elizabeth lived in the area.

6.3 The Darbishire family

Samuel Darbishire 1796-1876 was Secretary to the Chester and Holyhead Railway, opened as far as Penmaenmawr in 1848; he chose to make his home at Pendyffryn, of which estate Parc Mawr formed a part, in 1854 (UWB Bangor MS 25617, 25623). A Lancashire man, a Unitarian in religion and a Liberal in his politics, he shared the same allegiances as Samuel Holland, the Blaenau Ffestiniog quarry owner, another English entrepreneur who had seen North-west Wales as a land of opportunity. The Unitarian tradition emphasised open-mindedness and tolerance, as well as a sense of civic responsibility, exemplified most famously in Joseph and Neville Chamberlain, and the Darbishires, like Holland, were indefatigable members of many local committees and trusts. They are in many respects typical of the second generation of entrepreneurs in Caernarfonshire and Merioneth, middle-class Englishmen like the Mathews, the Greaves, the Robinsons, rather than the lordly plutocrats who held sway at Glynllifon, Vaenol and Penrhyn Castle.

Of Samuel's sons, William A Darbishire was involved in Pen yr Orsedd slate quarry in Dyffryn Nantlle from 1859 (Bradley 366); Charles H. Darbishire, 1844-1929, trained as a railway engineer, working for a while on the Mt Cenis tunnel project, then joined his brother at Pen yr Orsedd before assuming the position of manager at Graiglwyd Quarry. C.H. Darbishire was a keen Territorial, and held the rank of Colonel. He built a drill hall at Penmaenmawr and commanded the 3rd Battalion Royal Welsh Fusiliers (Davies 55). In 1914 the seventy-year old Colonel disguised himself as a young man and enlisted as a private, and had actually got as far as India before his imposture was discovered, and he was shipped home (Williams 328, UWB Bangor 25623). He was clearly very gregarious and fond of children and had a genuine affection and respect for his men, though he was doubtless quite capable of playing the authoritarian when he felt the need. A memorial poem by Cynan (UWB Bangor 25623) imagines a conversation between the Colonel and St Peter on the former's death in which the Colonel is aghast to learn that he is expected to enjoy eternity quietly, and concludes with a compromise whereby he is allowed to harrow hell on behalf of the kingdom of heaven with a band of Welsh quarrymen. Certainly he was respected by his men, and on the whole liked by them. Quarrymen in North Wales traditionally distrusted paternalism, and their is evidence that he was regarded as a hard bargainer who could sometimes take up a cavalier position in negotiations with them (Davies 70).

Col. Darbishire lived at Plas Mawr until 1921, until the family moved to Trefor, in the Llyn peninsula (Bradley 367), where their descendants continue to live to this day.

Col. Darbishire's son Hugh ("Hughie") enjoyed collecting family photographs and pasting them in a series of albums, which form an important source for the gardens at Plas Mawr and the life the inhabitants led. These reflect the preoccupations of an Edwardian public-schoolboy and later a Cambridge undergraduate - photographs of sports groups when he was at Shrewsbury, picnics and bathing in North Wales, amateur dramatics, foreign travel. He was clearly self-confident enough to paste into one of the albums a newspaper account of an undergraduate prank in which he was hauled before the Shrewsbury bench for desecrating a statue of Hercules, though in what manner the paper does not record (UWB Bangor 25619).

6.4 William Ewart Gladstone

The town's most famous visitor was undoubtedly W.E. Gladstone, a determined and enthusiastic sea-bather, who made his first visit in 1855, where, in the words of his most recent biographer, "he rented a variety of substantial seaside houses for about a month in the late summers of that and several subsequent years." Where these were, unfortunately, is not noted, but there is evidence that he enjoyed some distinguished company; in 1861 he was accompanied on one of his sea-bathes by two Bishops, Wilberforce of Oxford ("Soapy Sam", Huxley's opponent in the debate on evolution) and Thompson of Gloucester: Dean Lidell of Christ-Church had a holiday home not far away (Jenkins 181, 242-3).

Local tradition is entirely correct in connecting Gladstone with Parc Mawr; whether or not he stayed there, a photograph exists of Mr and Mrs Gladstone sitting outside the house in, perhaps, the 1890s with Colonel Darbishire (UWB Bangor 25629), and the Darbishires and Gladstone corresponded (UWB Bangor 25700).

7 SUMMARY

This project has examined the bibliographic and archival sources for the cultural heritage of Plas Mawr and the area surrounding it and the field evidence for the area in the immediate vicinity of Plas Mawr.

7.1 Neolithic period

The axe factories of Neolithic Britain form one of the most important sources for the study of early man; that at Graiglwyd was the third largest in the island, and important archaeological remains associated with the manufacturing processes survive here. Its significance has been recognised by the recent government-funding of excavation and recording projects and continuing research by the UWB.

7.2 Bronze age

Close to the Neolithic quarrying area lies an important cluster of Bronze Age ceremonial and ritual sites, which have been scheduled as monuments of national importance.

7.3 Modern period

The study also established that the group of buildings and structures from the modern period of which Plas Mawr forms part (the houses between the Bell Yard and the road, the ecclesiastical buildings and the community infrastructure put in place by the Darbishire family), exemplifies the growth and development of a nineteenth-century quarrying community. This area was not included within the North Arllechwedd designated historic landscape (*Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in Wales* Cadw 1995, HLW [Gw] 12) but might appropriately be included. It constitutes an excellent industrial landscape, as significant as those of the local slate quarrying communities, whose importance has been recognised by their inclusion elsewhere in the register. Though the house and gardens at Plas Mawr can be paralleled many times over in North-west Wales, their archaeological and historical significance is increased by their proximity to the community that their owners helped to create.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

The wealth of archaeological and historical evidence from Penmaenmawr allows for the inclusion of an educational element within the proposed country park. This could include information on:

- 8.1 The geological background
- 8.2 The development of the Neolithic axe-factories
- 8.3 The development of the modern Penmaenmawr quarries
- 8.4 The development of Penmaenmawr as an industrial community
- 8.5 The house and gardens at Plas Mawr
- 8.6 Personalities connected with 8.4 and 8.5.
- 8.7 The wider archaeological background

The foundations and garden remains constitute the most obvious visible assets of the site; limited excavation and clearance followed by consolidation would result in a clear appreciation

of the remains. Information boards could then be used to explain the relationship between the house and the surrounding archaeology. Education packs could be created to aid the use of the park by schools.

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