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significance of area between Henllys and St. Catherine's Church

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Prepared for UK Hotels

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust
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Statement identifying results of archaeological evaluation at Llanfaes and significance of area between Henllys and St. Catherine's Church

Background

A proposal for the construction of a nine-hole golf course in the fields to the north, west and east of Henllys Hall hotel was submitted by UK Hotels during 1996. In consideration of the potential significance of Llanfaes as the location of an important 'maerdref' of the Welsh princes of Gwynedd, Ynys Mon County Council imposed a condition on planning permission requiring an archaeological evaluation of the impact of the development. Gwynedd Archaeological Trust were commissioned by UK Hotels to carry out the evaluation, which was undertaken during the process of construction during the autumn of 1996.

The historical significance of Llanfaes and the archaeological potential of Henllys Hall and its immediate environs

Llanfaes is a small community on the north-east coast of Anglesey. Recent development has been sporadic and dispersed, comprising a large engineering works close to the Menai Straits shore, a country house hotel at Henllys and clusters of residential housing with no clear focus. An earlier nucleus is now represented by St. Catherine's church and the group of cottages in its immediate vicinity. Very little now survives above the surface of the ground to suggest the very considerable importance of Llanfaes in the Age of the Princes.

Llanfaes was, until the defeat of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd in 1282, the maerdref or administrative centre of the commote of Dindaethwy. By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the governance of the kingdom of Gwynedd had evolved into a system based on a network of local *foci* serving an itinerant royal court. Gwynedd was divided into administrative 'commotes' and each commote was administered, and the king's rents collected, from the commotal 'llys'. Llywelyn ap Gruffydd granted a charter to Ynys Lannog from Llanfaes in 1247 and stayed at Llanfaes in early January of 1277. Edward I stayed there in 1283 and again for three weeks in April 1295. The bond township, in which the 'llys' was located, was referred to as the maerdref, and the component parts of the complex included the royal hall and ancillary buildings of the llys, the royal demesne (*tir bwrdd*) worked by bond tenants and the settlement of the tenants, 'the maerdref', which might be close to the llys and which is generally thought to have been nucleated. During the thirteenth century Llanfaes developed an important commercial aspect, there was a ferry across the Straits, fisheries and a harbour. Maritime trade was of more than purely local importance, accounting for more than seventy percent of the total trading revenues of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd. By the late thirteenth century the town had almost certainly acquired a compact, nucleated plan, incorporating one hundred and twenty burgages extending over about ninety acres.

A friary was established at Llanfaes in around 1237 by Llywelyn ap Iorwerth in memory of his wife Joan, daughter of King John of England. It was one of the earliest Franciscan houses in England and Wales. Friaries, depending on alms for their maintenance, are invariably associated with urban nucleations and the presence of a large flourishing town at Llanfaes must have influenced the choice of location. The church of St. Catherine was the richest church on Anglesey in 1254.

Gwynedd was conquered in 1283 by Edward I of England. All lands held by Llywelyn ap Gruffydd were forfeit to the English crown and these included the maerdref of Llanfaes.

Discontent, provoked by injustices in the new administration, resulted in some destruction at Llanfaes [the town was burnt and the Friary was affected]. The king's response involved the initiation of work on a new castle and town at Beaumaris, some 1750 metres to the south. The destruction at Llanfaes was not made good. 'It made neither political nor economic sense to allow Llanfaes to prosper if the newly adjacent Beaumaris were to flourish'. A new town was laid out on former maerdref lands at Rhosyr, in the adjacent commote of Menai, to accommodate the tenants of Llanfaes, leaving Llanfaes virtually deserted. The absence of continuing development has meant that the precise location of the medieval town has been lost. The new plantation at Rhosyr became known as Newborough (*Novus Burgium*) and received its charter in 1303.

Recent work at Llanfaes has begun to throw some light on the exact location of the town. Geophysical survey, undertaken in 1991 and 1993 has shown the potential of some areas of Llanfaes for producing information from this non-intrusive technique. Trial excavation confirmed the interpretation of certain pits and ditches, in association with thirteenth and fourteenth century pottery, first identified by geophysical survey between Henllys

Hall and East Lodge. Metal detecting in the area south of St. Catherine's church and south-east of Henllys Hall and archaeological recording of the construction phase of the Shell Oil pipeline which transects the area has recovered prodigious quantities of artefacts from the late twelfth to the late thirteenth century.

The place name Henllys – old or former 'llys', while not conclusive evidence in itself, is an indicator of a possible candidate in the search for Llys Llanfaes: the proximity of the church to Henllys; the probability that the maerdref settlement was more likely to be represented by a nucleated rather than dispersed settlement; the late medieval road pattern, forming a crossroads at St. Catherine's Church and the quantity of artefacts recovered from this area, together with the geophysical survey between Henllys and the church, all suggested that the proposed development occupied an area of potential archaeological significance.

The aims of the evaluation

The work was under way at the commencement of the evaluation. Soil stripping and drainage had taken place on the majority of the green. Surface examination of the work in progress, however, suggested that penetration of the subsoil was not extensive and that disturbance of the archaeological evidence – if present – was localised. Two greens, both close to Henllys Hall, remained to be excavated. The location of the ninth green, immediately in front of the hotel, in the direction of the church, was considered to be particularly sensitive.

The evaluation, therefore, adopted the following strategy.

1. The seventh green and the ninth green were observed during soil stripping to the interface of plough soil with the subsoil. A significant proportion of the total area of both greens (sixty per cent) was then cleaned by hand and any features recorded by plan and photograph.
2. The area between Henllys Hall and East Lodge was to comprise the ninth green, fourth green, fifth tee and lengths of the fifth and ninth fairways. On the basis of previous investigation at Llanfaes, this area was considered to be the most archaeologically sensitive. The ninth green was available for evaluation by surface cleaning and recording. Other installations were already in place. It was considered essential therefore that an adequate non-intrusive evaluation of a significant sample of the remaining area be undertaken to :
 - a) place the limited recording work on the ninth green in context
 - b) assess the extent to which installations already in place had caused archaeological damage
 - c) provide detailed information that might inform any archaeological management strategy for the site, should future developments such as drainage, re-siting of greens and landscaping come under consideration.

Results

Green 7

The surface of the subsoil was cleaned by hand. No archaeological features were recorded.

Green 9

The surface of the subsoil was cleaned by hand. Nine shallow, sub-circular depressions filled with brown clayey plough soil. The diameter and depths of the features are as follows

	Diameter	Depth	Interpretation
1	0.5m	0.09m	
2	0.3mx0.4m oval	0.13m	Poor definition
3	0.5m	Very shallow	Undulation in subsoil
4	0.6m	0.07m	Shallow indentation in subsoil
5	0.35m	0.07m	
6	0.26m x 0.16m oval	0.12m	
7	0.25mx 0.32m	0.12	
8	0.45 x 0.50m	0.11m	
9	0.53mx 0.55m	0.10m	

No artefacts were recovered in association with any of the features and no dating evidence of any other kind was identified. The features themselves are very shallow. They could conceivably represent the bases of timber

post-holes, truncated by ploughing. However, within the limited area available for excavation, no coherent arrangement could be adduced from their disposition. The fill is consistently clean plough soil and they are unlikely to be of archaeological significance.

Geophysical survey

Three areas were surveyed with a total extent of 2 ha. The two principal areas extended the data acquired in 1993 in the central part of the space between Henllys and the church. A major constraint on complete coverage is the ground disturbance created by the line of the Shell Oil pipeline. The survey area is also crossed by recent services.

Background to the survey area

The results of the geophysical survey required to be interpreted alongside an analysis of the developing history of Henllys Hall and its lands.

Documents

The following documents were consulted which also shed light on other features identified by the geophysical survey.

1. Ordnance Survey First Edition 1:2500 map, 1911.

This shows the area between Henllys and East Lodge as tree-covered park land. The area is traversed by a track on the present line linking Henllys and the cross roads west of the church at East Lodge. A footpath crosses directly across the centre of the field in a north west - south easterly straight line on a route followed almost exactly by the Shell Oil pipeline which was inserted in the early 1970s. This path joined the Llanfaes - Llansadwrn road at its northern limit and intercepted another well-defined track mapped as cutting south - west from a point close to East Lodge to join the eastern access road to Henllys forty metres east of West Lodge.

2. Tithe apportionment map, Llanfaes Parish. Scale 8 chains to 1 inch, 1847.

This map shows the same axial route leading from Henllys to the crossroads west of the church. The field north of the track is identified in the accompanying schedule as Cae Yr Efail - 'the Smithy Field'. The track is bounded on the south side by a hedge, or fence, which is met, mid way along its length, by a field boundary joining it from the south.

Most significantly, Henllys Hall is shown as it stood before the rebuilding work of the mid nineteenth century and without the range of buildings on the northern side of the current junction with the East Lodge track (see plan).

3. Survey of Henllys Demesne. 1830

This map shows the axial route from Henllys to the cross roads west of the church (East Lodge had yet to be built) in much the same way as the Tithe Apportionment Map of 1847. The scale is sufficient, however, to show that the track swings slightly to the south of the present line. The older and more recent routes converge at the crossroads where East Lodge was to be built. The southern edge of the track is delimited by a hedge or fence (as shown in 1847). However, in addition to the field boundary, which was mapped in 1847 as joining this line, the hedges of two fields acquired around sixty years earlier from the Bulkeley Estate are shown as still standing. The accompanying schedule identified the following fields (see plan):

- Cae'r Efail (the Smithy Field), to the north of the track. A house and smithy is identified on the corner of the crossroads near the church.
- Cae'r Front (the field in front of the house), south of the track and, as the name implies, immediately in front of Henllys house, on the east side.
- Waen (Meadow), south of the track and east of Cae'r Front.

The two fields formerly attached to Pen y Wal and forming part of the Bulkeley estate are described, uninformatively, as 'fields near Henllys'. The footpath identified on the OS 1:2500 map of 1911 is marked and was clearly in use at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Henllys Hall itself is planned as it stood before the mid-nineteenth century rebuilding (see plan). The axis of the supporting ranges is at ninety degrees to the later arrangement and, together with the layout of adjacent plots and

fields, is important evidence for the post-Medieval form of the house as a possible successor to the 'llys' at Llanfaes.

4. Plan: showing a proposed deviation of Henllys Lon, south of Henllys. 1786.

This plan maps a proposal, which was subsequently put in place, to divert Henllys Lon from Beaumaris to Henllys, at a point four hundred metres south of the house. Traffic from Beaumaris to Llanfaes was clearly taking a route through the curtilage of Henllys house to reach the village. Some may have taken the direct route across the fields of Henllys, following a way perpetuated by the later footpaths. The proposal involved the creation of a new road across land at the junction of Henllys and Baron Hill estates. The same process may be seen in sketched overwriting on surveys of lands held by Pen y Wal and The Bull's Head made in 1776. The creation of the new road must have involved some give and take and the re-arrangement of property boundaries. The Henllys estate gained the two 'fields near Henllys' and Waen Y Bull and Cae'r Coed at this time.

The pattern in the landscape

Fields

The patterning of fields in the present landscape is a creation of the early years of the nineteenth century. Fields are large and the boundaries are generally straight, a product of the amalgamation and straightening of earlier, smaller and irregular plots. As an example, in the area between Llanfaes Church and Beaumaris, bounded in the west by Henllys and Henllys Lon, on the east by the Straits, there are now thirteen fields, plots and allotment gardens. At the end of the eighteenth century there were fifty-two fields in an area of 100 ha.

The landscape of the Middle Ages was characterised by large open fields, subdivided into strips, and by closes and meadowland. The small enclosed fields of the eighteenth century reflect, on occasion, the curvature of open fields, subdivided into strips. This is particularly evident east and north-east of Llanfaes and south and east of Henllys. The open fields were worked in common (there is a reference to the 'common fields', in 1325, between the town of Beaumaris and the Friary) and during the age of the Princes the demesne land of the maerdref of Llanfaes was among the most productive on Anglesey. Seven hundred and eighty acres were farmed. There were also meadows: three and a half acres of meadow are described in 1305 as being 'under the Court of Llanfaes'; a garden and the significant resource of Coed Cadw or the 'Wood of Llanfaes'. As a basis of comparison, in 1847, the parish of Llanfaes was reckoned to have five hundred and twenty acres under arable, six hundred and seventy acres as meadow and pasture and fifty acres of wood and waste.

Interpretation

The principal archaeological feature is a track, or rather succession of tracks, which cut a sinuous path across the area from west to east. The most recent of these tracks is identifiable on the ground as the turf covered metalled surface which forms the direct route from Henllys to the East Lodge still in use and identified on current large scale maps. This is a replacement of, or continuous development from, a route of some antiquity which may have been in use for centuries and may have been the principal route way linking the llys and town of Llanfaes.

In the western area a service pipe-trench cuts a straight line across the area from south west to north east. Other linear features appear to represent the delineation of boundaries. There are no clear indications of house plots. In the eastern part of the western area a strong curvilinear anomaly running generally north-south can be identified with the boundary between Cae'r Front and Waen on the south side of the Henllys - East Lodge track. This boundary is mapped in 1830 but may be older. Field boundaries with a curve tending towards a reversed S, as this one does, often reflect the pattern of the ox-ploughed ridges of former open fields.

The eastern survey area presents more complex information. The track marked on the OS 1:2500 map of 1911 is clearly seen cutting across the eastern corner of the survey area. This track continues from a point near East Lodge to a point sixty metres east of West Lodge.

The western part of the eastern area is crossed by a series of intersecting and conjoining boundary features. One, at least, may be associated with the boundary between the two 'fields near Henllys' which abut the Henllys - East Lodge track on its south side. Others appear to have curvilinearity on a general north-west - south-east alignment and may represent agricultural features pre-dating the establishment of the track. Other components have a rectilinearity suggestive of house plots. Stronger, isolated anomalies have been interpreted as hearths or pits, strengthening this interpretation. In 1992 two trenches were excavated in this area to assess the nature of the anomalies. One trench, 9m by 1m, identified two shallow ditches or slots 0.8m wide and 6m apart. One of

the ditches was 0.3m deep. A second excavation trench identified a small pit 1.1m wide and 0.6m deep from which four medieval pot sherds were recovered.

Discussion

Certain elements of the maerdref can be located with confidence. These include:

1. The Ferry

The ferry appears always to have been based at the 'ferry man-warth' now known as the Green, Beaumaris. This piece of land, lay at the southern boundary of Llanfaes township rather than the hamlet of Cerrigygyddel on which Beaumaris was established.

2. The Friary

In 1237 Joan, wife of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, and daughter of King John of England, died at Aber. She was buried in a consecrated enclosure on the shore at Llanfaes where Llywelyn established a Franciscan House in her memory. The friary was suppressed in 1538. The Bulkeley family acquired a lease on the property and work proceeded on its demolition. The land passed to Elis Wynne and then to the Whyte family who built the first secular house 'Fryars' in 1623. With much destroyed, the nave of the Friary church survived as a barn a little to the south of the new house until 1860. The ruins were drawn by Moses Griffith at the end of the eighteenth century. A record of the land transfer to Elis Wynne in 1563; the survival of the church, in ruins, as a barn until 1860 and assessment excavation by the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust in 1991 allow the location and extent of the Friary precinct to be plotted with some confidence (see map).

The archaeological assessment in 1991 was able to demonstrate that the southern perimeter of the Friary was fronted by a road which led from the coast to St. Catherine's church. The present road lies some sixty metres south. The occasion of the re-alignment coincided with a similar re-routing of a road at Henllys and for similar reasons, the enhancement of privacy. At Fryars this was achieved by establishing a screen of trees between the new road and the house. The excavation was also able to establish that the old road may have been of some antiquity. It was re-surfaced and provided with new flanking drains on a number of occasions.

3. The Church

St Catherine's is a nineteenth century rebuild of the medieval church on the same site. It is one of two Catherine dedications in Gwynedd, the other being Criccieth which also has an association with Llywelyn ap Gruffydd.

Other key components have not yet been identified securely on the ground. They are important but remain at risk. They include:

1. The Llys

The Llys was the nucleus of the township of Llanfaes. It was the administrative centre of the commote and the residence of the Prince and his entourage when he visited that part of the kingdom. It was maintained in his absence by the labour and food rents of his tenants under the supervision of the Prince's resident officials. Some indication of the range of buildings appropriate to a llys may be found in 'the Laws'. This evidence is supported at other maerdrefi by extents and surveys undertaken by English surveyors in the period following the Conquest in 1283 which refer to building works owed by tenants. Such surveys indicate that the llys might be enclosed although it is unlikely to have been fortified. The evidence of documents has recently been dramatically extended by excavations at Rhosyr in the commote of Dindaethwy. Unfortunately the relevant documents relating to Llanfaes lack this level of detail. By 1352, the year of the second great extent of the royal lands of Gwynedd, Llanfaes had long since been depopulated and the majority of its tenants re-located at Newborough in the south-west of the island. There are no references to the building works required at the maerdref, as there were at other Anglesey maerdrefi, and the only acknowledgement of its former importance is the labour services owed by the tenants of Dinsilwy Rys in making the watercourse and ditch at the mill of Llanfaes. The earlier extent of 1294 contains far more useful information on the agricultural and commercial life of Llanfaes but is silent on the buildings of the llys.

The place name Henllys - 'the old, or former, llys' is very suggestive but must not be accepted uncritically. The name, however, does not appear to be an antiquarian back-formation. While Hamptons were holding land in the area as early as 1414, the first recorded occurrence of 'Henllys' can be found in a release of 20th January 1584 by William Hampton of 'Henllys' concerning a messuage in Rotten Row. By the 1630s the full extent of Hampton lands in the parish of Llanfaes becomes clear. They run from Tyddyn y Gwynt to Bodgylched and include

tenements near the King's Wood, Henllys Mill and the demesne lands of Henllys itself. The lands at Tyddyn y Gwynt include Cae'r Odyn (the kiln field) and Cae y Colomendy (the dovecot field). It would seem that the Hamptons had acquired a significant portion of the former township of Llanfaes and its hamlet of Bodgylched.

The llys of Llanfaes might be expected to be on a more or less direct line of communication with other commotal centres on the island. In addition to administrative circuits the obligations of tenants are often expressed in terms of carriage of materials. This was the case for the tenants of Dinsilwy Rys who 'carry for the lord from Llanfaes as far as Caernarfon or Penrhos or Conwy or anywhere the lord may require with a man and a horse hired at 2d. daily'.

There are two immediately obvious approaches to Henllys. One along Henllys Lon from Beaumaris, past West Lodge to approach Henllys at its south-east corner. The other is the old established track through the fields from East Lodge. Closer examination of the earliest detailed plan of the complex (1830), however, suggests other possibilities. Firstly, the paddocks and gardens of early nineteenth century Henllys seem to be constrained within a subrectangular curtilage on the same axial alignment as the house. Secondly, a track leads south west from this presumed curtilage from the mid point of its south side. That is, approximately opposite the track to East Lodge. This track no longer exists but could be traced in 1830 into Cae Glas Uchaf, where it is identified as 'the old road'. Examination of eighteenth century surveys in the properties to the south and west of Henllys reveal a relict portion of this 'old road' in a field two hundred metres to the south. This line may be traced in field boundaries on the early maps to a sharp angled junction with the Llansadwrn/Beaumaris road at Coed Du near Bodgylched. The road may then be traced almost continuously across southern Anglesey to Rhosyr. Could this 'ghost' road be corroboration of the former significance of Henllys? Any such significance was brought to an end by the demise of the llys and the eclipse of Llanfaes by Beaumaris. In support of this hypothesis, an argument can be made, in the alignment and re-alignment of Henllys Lon, for seeing an original route from the ferry swing, via relict stretches of track and continuous field boundaries, to converge on the same southern approach to Henllys.

This argument, if accepted, implies not only a significance for the site of Henllys but also an antiquity, pre-dating the development of Beaumaris.

2. The town

During the thirteenth century Llanfaes developed as an important trading town. The labour services and agricultural works of the maerdref tenants were commuted, in part, for money payments. The status of Llanfaes as the commotal administrative centre, the particularly restrictive tenure, 'tir cyfrif', on the maerdref and the tendency towards the nucleation of holdings that this tenure promotes, the coastal port and the ferry – all these were conducive to commerce and made commutation possible.

It has been estimated that the revenue from trade accruing at Llanfaes accounted for seventy per cent of the total revenue for Gwynedd as a whole under Llywelyn ap Gruffydd. Its fairs and markets flourished. Shoemakers, clothiers, bakers and butchers plied their trade. Three thousand gallons of ale were brewed each year. Llanfaes was the main centre for the import of wine in Gwynedd; eighty ships were estimated to have called at the port in 1294. The herring fishery, at its peak, landed three hundred and sixty thousand fish a year.

Llanfaes never recovered from the Madog revolt of 1294. Beaumaris castle was begun in 1295 and the town of Beaumaris inherited the role of Llanfaes as a major commercial centre. Llanfaes itself was depopulated. A few burgesses moved to Beaumaris but most were re-settled in the commote of Menai on the former maerdref of Rhosyr – at Edward's 'New Borough'.

By 1302 the bake house had been demolished although, remarkably the Prince's prison was still at Llanfaes in 1304-5 – although it is not clear to what extent it was in regular use. The Leper house (Clafdy) was unoccupied in 1408-9 but again it is unclear how temporary this circumstance was. The Church remained, although its wealth and its parishioners, had gone. The Friary remained until its suppression in 1538. The mill was still leased in 1254, but at a significantly reduced rent.

The new tenants of Newborough were compensated for the land they had lost at Llanfaes and it is this indicator which allows us to calculate that the tenements at Llanfaes numbered one hundred and twenty, extending over ninety acres. This, by any estimation is a sizeable town. In seeking its location there are few clues.

There are references to a 'waste plot in the market place' in 1301 and to 'several burgages and two crofts next to the court'.

The antiquity of the road running inland from the Friary has been shown by excavation to be at least contemporary with the Friary in origin. It runs towards St. Catherine's church and joins the road from Henllys. Four roads converge at this point without forming a regular crossroads. Rather the impression is one of organic growth around pre-existing obstacles. The road junction close to the church at Llanfaes must be considered a potential candidate for the identification of maerdref tenements.

Conclusions and recommendations

The maerdref of Llanfaes is an invaluable archaeological resource comprising many of the components of a communal centre of the Welsh Princes in a landscape extending over many hundred acres. These components include: the llys, the church, a friary, a ferry, fisheries, a leper house, a mill and an extensive community of bond tenants that developed a commercial function unparalleled in Gwynedd before the Edwardian conquest. While the location of some of these components have been identified and while some damage has taken place through the process of time and change, the town itself was depopulated at the end of the thirteenth century and has not suffered the destructive processes which accompany continuous urban development.

The town, therefore, remains a time capsule. If located it would provide a unique opportunity to study the process of transition from traditional maerdref to proto-town in a Welsh context. The indications, on the basis of current evidence suggest that the cross-roads near St. Catherine's church represent one possible focus for the proto-urban community. This interpretation is based on:

1. The possibility that Henllys represents the site of the llys.
2. The convergence of routes of some antiquity at St. Catherine's church.
3. The wealth of artefactual material, pottery and metalwork from fields immediately to the south of the church
4. The geophysical evidence for possible house plots towards the eastern end of the track from Henllys to East Lodge.

In this connection it should be noted that the total extent of the area occupied by house plots of the maerdref of Llanfaes is anticipated to be in the order of ninety acres.

Survey of Family Homes, 1830

