

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF
PROPOSED SITES FOR BRYNCIR
SUBSTATION

REPORT NO. 297

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeoloegol Gwynedd

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

Final PRP-

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SUBSTATION (G1545)

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PREPARED FOR

ESTELL WARREN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

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By Gwynedd.

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

PROPOSED SITES FOR BRYNCIR SUBSTATION:

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF SITES 1A, 1B, 2 AND 5 (G1545)

1. INTRODUCTION

Estell Warren Landscape Architects on behalf of the National Grid Company plc has commissioned Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (Contracts Section) to carry out an archaeological assessment of five proposed alternative substation sites at Bryncir in Gwynedd, each comprising approximately 0.54 hectares.

2. ASSESSMENT BRIEF

An initial report was requested from the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust assessing the likely significance of the archaeology of the proposed sites, ranging from the Prehistoric to the Industrial period. This would be achieved by carrying out a desk-top study of each of the five areas, with limited field work.

3. METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

3.1 Desk-top study

Consultation of archival and other written records was carried out in the Caernarfon Record Office of the Gwynedd Archives Service, and the University of Wales, Bangor. The Gwynedd Archaeological Trust's Sites and Monuments Record and the National Monuments Record were also consulted, as were the standard works of reference, including relevant volume of the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments (Wales) *Inventory of Caernarvonshire*. Secondary sources, both English- and Welsh-language were consulted. Aerial photographs of the assessment area were consulted in the offices of the Countryside Council for Wales, Penrhosgarnedd, Bangor.

3.2 Site visit

The sites were viewed from public rights of way in order to obtain an idea of their aspect and topographic location.

3.3 Statutory protection and description.

Only one archaeological site within the vicinity of the proposed development has been designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument, the inscribed stone at Pen Llystyn, at SH48344541. This is unlikely to be affected.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Location and topography

The alternative proposed sites are situated in the community (formerly civil parish) of Dolbenmaen within the county of Gwynedd. The area forms a shallow valley, watered by the Afon Dwyfach, which flows from north to south, between Mynydd Cennin, which rises to 262m above OD, to the west and Craig y Garn, which rises to 363m above OD, to the east. The area effectively lies on the borders between the mountains of the Snowdon massif and the agricultural lands of Llyn and Eifionydd.

4.2 Historical background.

4.2.1 Prehistoric

The immediate vicinity of the assessment area is particularly rich in remains of the Bronze Age. A sickle, possibly of the fourth century BC, was discovered in a peat bog at Plas Llecheiddior, and a lunula (a crescent-shaped decorative or ceremonial gold item, believed to have been worn around the neck), an import from Ireland, now in the British Museum, a very uncommon find in Wales, was discovered in 1869 at Llecheiddior Uchaf. At Pen Llystyn fourteen sherds of Bronze Age funerary urns and sherds from one flat-rimmed vessel intended for domestic rather than sepulchral use were discovered. These are now in the National Museum of Wales. Mounds of burnt stone have been identified in the vicinity of Cefn Trefor, to the north-east of the assessment area and by the banks of the Dwyfach to the north of the Goat Hotel; the function and purpose of these mounds remains uncertain, but it is likely that they indicate the sites of Prehistoric cooking areas, though saunas and laundries have also been suggested. Ten urns, each located in a stone cist and laid in a straight line, were excavated in 1821 at the site of the present gravel diggings, and are believed to have fallen to pieces when they were removed.

4.2.2 Roman

In 1957 gravel-digging exposed a previously unknown Roman fort at Pen Llystyn, immediately to the north of the present village of Bryncir, which was destroyed by further digging over the following five years. Excavations carried out confirmed a first century fort of standard layout, occupying an area of 4.5 acres, with an annexe to the south, probably founded as a part of scheme of consolidation which followed the Roman victory of 78 AD., which remained occupied until the end of the century. The internal buildings included barracks, stores, workshops, a hospital and a commandant's house, built of clay walls formed around posts set upright in slots. A fortlet of the second century AD in the northern quarter of the earlier fortifications, probably established between 100 AD and 130 AD, probably as part of a systematic campaign for the reoccupation of the district. The situation of Pen Llystyn would bar communication between Llyn, with its major hill-forts, and the mountains to the east, and it was well-suited to control traffic on a north-south axis across the base of the peninsula. A road connected the fort with Segontium (Caernarfon) in the north and Tomen y Mur in the south, though its precise route once it left the fort perimeter has not been established. A temporary Roman camp is situated to the west of the Dwyfach river at SH47574535.

4.2.3 Medieval

Whilst the events of the post-Roman and early Medieval periods remain obscure, it is possible that the site of the Roman fort remained the focus of some type of settlement in that the traces of lightly palisaded enclosure in the western quadrant of the original fort were observed. At Llystyn Gwyn farm immediately to the north, an inscribed stone of the sixth century which commemorates in Latin one ICORI(x) and also gives the Irish form of his name, ICORIGAS, might suggest some continuity of occupation, and is evidence for a human presence in this period.

The complex pattern of local administration which largely survived into the nineteenth century evolved in the Medieval period. The assessment area formed part of the Commote of Uwchdwyfor; the lands on the east of the river formed a detached portion of the parish of Penmorfa, whereas those to the west fell into the parishes of Llanfihangel y Pennant (detached) and Dolbenmaen, and the extensive parish of Clynnog was situated to the north.

To the west of the Dwyfach the land formed part of the township of Llecheiddior. A mill is recorded here as early as 1352. The lower part of the township, the part which falls in the assessment area, belonged to the church at Clynnog Fawr, but were sold of at some date, prior to the valuation of 1535. They became divided into several separate holdings, under various and changing ownerships and tenancies, including Wern, Glynllifon, Plas Hen and Corsygedol, Mostyn, Cefn Amwlch, Bryncir and Bodvel. At Derwyn Bach the old house survives, the only one from before the Modern period in the immediate area, now a storage barn, but is of typical sub-Medieval construction, of boulder rubble with massive quoins and bonding stones.

To the east of the Dwyfach the land formed an upper, detached, portion of the township of Penyfed,

whose centre lay further to the south, and from which it was separated by an arm of the township of Dolbenmaen. Its earliest recorded name, in a late fifteenth century rental, appears to be *y tir yn llystynrrun*, "the land of Llystyn Rhun", a name in which it is possible to make out the element Llystyn. The most important holding here was Llystyn Gwyn, still farmed, whose name has been derived from a compound of *llys* (palace, royal court) and *dynn* (fort), the latter probably from the ruins of Roman fort. This is recorded in 1551, and was the property of Wern estate by 1761. The other farms and holding here, become identifiable in documents of the seventeenth century onwards - Blaen y Cae and Cae Ysgubor in 1629, Ty'n y Caeau in 1789. To the east the land rose up to commons on the mountain slopes.

4.2.4 Modern and Industrial period

The pattern of land-sale and speculation which was already clear in the pre-Modern period continued to be manifest in the Modern period, when the local farms were sold and resold many times over, as the gentry families ceased to make their home in the area, and their role was taken over by a new generation of *arrivistes* whose background lay in commerce and speculation. Ty'n y Caeau, for instance, belonged to Evan Lloyd Vaughan in 1789, to Sir Thomas Lloyd Mostyn in 1800 and to Sir Williams Wynn in 1838. Melin Llecheiddior was bought by David Ellis Nanney of Gwynfryn in 1813, and appears to have been reconstructed in 1886.

Some of the land in the area came to belong to the Bryncir estate, whose centre lay at Bryncir Hall, some miles to the east. This passed by marriage to Colonel Gwilym Lloyd Wardle, whose tempestuous public career included being turned down for a commission in the regular army for dishonesty in selling horses, but who had his revenge when he was able to force the resignation of the Commander in Chief, the Duke of York, George III's younger son, over the illegal sale of commissions by the Duke's mistress, who had herself been Wardle's mistress. He was a partner with William Alexander Madocks in the woolen factory in Tremadoc, until he was discovered supplying cloth to Napoleonic France as well as to the British army.

In 1809 he sold the Bryncir estate to Captain Joseph Huddart RN in 1809, whose background lay in Lincolnshire but chose to settle in Eifionydd. Huddart, who was to become President of the Royal Society, had made great deal of money out of allegedly sharp practice at Livorno (Leghorn) in Italy when he was a consular official there. His son, Sir Joseph Huddart was an active improving landlord who invested considerable sums in the area.

The improvement of local transport facilities in the nineteenth century proved to have a profound effect on the area. John Evans's map of 1795 shows not only the old road from Arfon to Eifionydd running to the east of the present assessment area, but also a meandering lane from Garn Dolbenmaen via Glan Dwyfach, whence a further roadway led south to Criccieth, thereafter north to Tafarn Faig, a route approximating to the modern A487(T). In 1821 Sir Joseph Huddart began work on a straighter alignment from Garn Dolbenmaen via Glan Dwyfach to Tafarn Faig, and thence north on a completely new route to Llanllyfni and Pen y Groes. This not only connected the centre of his estate at Bryncir Hall, several miles to the west of the present village, with outlying lands in Pen y Groes, but also provided a better through route, and it remains in use as the trunk road. The bridge at Llecheiddior also dates from the same period, since the bond for its construction is dated 1817, though an earlier bridge appears to be marked on the Evans map of 1795. The roadside hostel at Tafarn Faig is first noted on the tithe schedule of 1844, and the present Goat Inn is also marked, though apparently only as a farm. Less welcome to the traveller was the toll-gate erected at Glan Dwyfach, at the junction of the road to Criccieth. One local historian describes how around the year 1840 a local manifestation of the Rebecca riots took place, when the gate was smashed up and the pieces thrown into the river, after which no further attempt was made to collect tolls at that point. However the 1844 tithe map clearly shows a gate at this point.

The arrival of the railway in 1866 was instrumental in the evolution of the modern village of Bryncir. The London and North Western Railway often tended to name stations in country areas after the hinterland they served rather than necessarily after any settlement near the station itself, and the village, which appears only as a straight road through fields on the various tithe maps, was a well

established settlement by 1886. The Glandwyfach Inn, now known as The Goat, and the Brynkir Arms are recorded by this date, and within a number of years a number of shopkeepers and craftsmen appear in the trade directories. The village's one chapel was constructed for the Calvinistic Methodists in 1868, and the Rev. Henry Hughes, a knowledgeable local historian and a prolific writer, served as its minister for forty-five years. The cattle mart was established as a consequence of the railway, and survived the line's closure in December 1964. Here cattle from the farms of Llyn, Eifionydd and southern Arfon were loaded onto trains for the English slaughterhouses.

4.3 Results of the desk-top survey

Site 1A.

This site is shown on the Llanfihangel y Pennant tithe map of 1838 as the property of Lord Newborough of Glynllifon and as in lease to Maurice Williams. No standing buildings or any other structures are shown here, other than field walls. The fields in the immediate area are known as Weirglodd Fawr ("large meadow") and Cors Ceffylau ("horses' fen"). The proposed development is situated near the location where a Bronze Age lunula is believed to have been discovered c. 1869 (SH47724476), though the find-spot was only identified as late as 1935, at a location where peat was formerly dug. It is also possible that any south-west to north-east road centered on the Pen Llystyn Roman fort would have crossed the river near this point.

PRN
2807

Site 1B.

This site is situated on the lands of Derwyn Bach farm. The Llanfihangel y Pennant tithe map of 1838 describes the farm as the property of John Roberts and as in lease to Owen Evans, and identifies a barn on the site of the proposed substation. The fields in the immediate area are Weirglodd Glanrafon ("riverside meadow"), Cae Gwndwn ("field of the withered hay"), Cae Beudy Bach ("field of the small cowshed") and Cae French Goch (probably an attempt by an Anglophone surveyor to render Cae Braich Goch "field of the red arm" or Cae Brech Goch "red speckled field"). A short distance to the north at SH4757 4535 is Derwyn Bach camp, a Roman temporary camp. The traces of a possible enclosure were visible on an aerial photograph held by the Countryside Council for Wales.

PRN 130

PRN 789

-NGR

Site 2.

This proposed area is divided by the Dwyfach river. On the west side the Llanfihangel y Pennant tithe map of 1839 shows the land as the property of Nanney estate and in lease Thomas Williams; to the east side the land was owned by Ormsby-Gore, by Huddart and by Robert Williams and in lease to Ellis Pritchard, David Williams and William Jones. The field to the east of the river is known as Ddol ("meadow"), and those to the west of the river also as Ddol ("meadow"), as Gors Fawr ("big fen") and as Gadlas ("hay stack" or "rick yard"). No standing buildings or other structures are shown here other than field walls. A burnt mound has been located immediately to the north of the proposed site at SH48144402, and others may, therefore, lie on the proposed site.

PRN
154

Site 5.

This site is shown on the Dolbenmaen tithe map of 1839 as the property of William Ormsby-Gore and in lease to William Jones. It is referred to as Gors ("fen", "bog"), and is marked as a turbary (a source of peat for fuel). The John Evans map of 1795 and the tithe map both show a road leading from Bryn yr Efail Uchaf on the present A487(T) across the fields to the farm of Bryn'refail Ganol, immediately to the north of the proposed substation site, thence to Bryn'refail Isaf, a course which may correspond to the present right of way across the fields. This route appears to be the old north to south road which was made redundant when the Huddart road was constructed from 1821. At Bryn'refail Ganol at SH48704304 to the north-east of the proposed site a farm building survives, though it is losing its slates and becoming dilapidated. This was perhaps a cow-shed; there may be other remains of Bryn'refail Ganol farm (SH48654295), and possible traces of enclosures are evident on an aerial photograph held by the Countryside Council for Wales.

4.4 Conclusions.

None of the proposed sites contain obvious archaeological remains. However, a gold lunula was found on or close to 1A, which suggests other remains may be present. Site 1B formerly contained a field

barn, but the archaeological significance of this cannot be assessed without additional field work. Site 2 contains no known archaeology, although the presence of a burnt mound within the immediate vicinity suggests others may exist within the area of interest, as these sites are often found in groups. Site 5 contains no known archaeology, although there is some potential for Prehistoric remains to exist under or within the peat.

It is to be concluded that, although two of the sites contain possible archaeological remains, and the other two are of potential interest, the evidence is insufficient for rejecting the use of any of the sites on archaeological grounds, providing a full evaluation is carried out prior to development.

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