

GLYNRHONWY SLATE QUARRY  
LLANBERIS  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT



Report No. 338

Prepared for

Gwynedd County Council

June, 1999

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd  
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

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### **ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT AND WATCHING BRIEF (G1587)**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Gwynedd County Council has commissioned Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (Contracts Section) to carry out a preliminary archaeological assessment and watching brief in connection with a Planning Application of three areas of the former Glynrhonwy Slate Quarries where tipped waste is being landscaped.

#### **2. ASSESSMENT BRIEF**

An initial report was requested from the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust assessing the importance of all the archaeological remains, ranging from the Prehistoric to the Industrial period, which was to be followed by a watching brief of the areas where permission has been granted to landscape the tips. The importance and condition of known archaeological remains were to be assessed and new sites identified.

#### **3. METHODS AND TECHNIQUES**

##### **3.1 Desk-top study**

A preliminary consultation of written records was carried out in the Caernarfon Record Office of the Gwynedd Archives Service. The Gwynedd Archaeological Trust's Sites and Monuments Record was also consulted, as were appropriate archive sources and Alun Richards *Gazeteer of the Welsh Slate Industry*.

##### **3.2 Field Search**

Field visits were undertaken by Trust staff in January and February 1999. Features identified were marked on the current 1/10,000 ordnance survey map and on the 1889 25" County Series.

The desk-top study and fieldwork were undertaken by Dr D Gwyn, and the report compiled by Dr D Gwyn and Andrew Davidson.

#### **4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **4.1 Location**

The Glynrhonwy group of slate quarries is situated on the north-east facing slopes of the Cefn Du ridge, above Llyn Padarn in the community (formerly civil parish) of Llanberis at grid ref: SH 570 610 within the county of Gwynedd. It is one of the major sites of the Peris slate district, extracting the rock from pits on the hillside slopes. Its workings and tips dominate the western side of the valley.

##### **4.2 Historical background.**

###### **4.2.1 Pre-modern**

Evidence of prehistoric settlement is to be found in the four Bronze Age palstaves found near the lake, possibly on the site of the quarry, one of which is now in the National Museum of Wales. The date of the discovery and the precise location are unknown.

Later Prehistoric settlement is evident from the hut circles of late Iron Age or Romano-British date to the north of the quarry site above Cwm y Glo, but within the Historical period there is scant evidence for human society in the area other than the Medieval settlement at Nant peris, the original Llan Beris, and the castle of Dolbadarn. It is only when the area became a magnet for artists and climbers, from the late eighteenth century onwards, that the village of Llanberis came into being. Painters who came to the area include William Turner and Paul Sandby.

###### **4.2.2 Modern and Industrial period**

Though the Glynrhonwy quarries never reached the scale of the neighbouring Dinorwic quarries, employing 150 men in 1883 compared to Dinorwic's 2710, they operated on a significant scale. They were probably exploited

directly by their landowner, Lord Newborough of Glynllifon, from the late eighteenth century, but were hampered by poor communications. A road of sorts was available along the valley floor before 1806, and other roads higher up the hillside gave the quarry access to the turnpike at Cwm y Glo from about 1815, but it was only with the coming-of-age of the second Lord Newborough in 1823 that the quarry was worked on any scale, when John Hughes Pen y Groes was put in charge. This energetic and capable individual installed railways and machinery, and upgraded the road from the quarry to Penllyn. The arrival of the branch line railway to Llanberis in 1869 gave a boost to the operations, and around the same time an extensive steam-powered slate mill was constructed near the transhipment point on the railway, on the shores of Llyn Padarn. A further mill was built in the quarry in perhaps the 1880s. Though the quarries went through several changes of lessee, operations continued to 1915, with a further period of partial reworking from 1922 to 1930.

Industrial conflicts within the Glynrhonwy quarries were instrumental in the establishment of the North Wales Quarrymen's Union in 1874.

After the quarry closed, part of the site was taken over by the Ministry of Supply in 1940 for bomb storage. This involved the creation of a substantial store in the lower pit. Their occupation lasted until 1961.

#### **4.3 Archaeology of the quarry area.**

Existing surveys by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, including *Gwynedd Slate Quarrying Landscapes* (1994) have identified Glynrhonwy as an outstanding industrial landscape; Glynrhonwy forms part of an area defined as a Landscape of Exceptional Historic Interest in the recent report published by the Countryside Council for Wales, Cadw and Icomos UK (International Council on Monuments and Sites) for its 'evidence of land use and settlement from the prehistoric period onwards, superimposed by recent and outstanding remains of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries slate industry.'

Examination of the three sites where disturbance was taking place revealed only a fragment of a compressor and a possible foundation for a mill. These were recorded photographically.

#### **4.4 Details of watching brief**

The three level platforms which form the subject of the assessment were in process of creation at the time of visit. These are identified on Drawing No. 586/TA/1 (Gwynedd County Council), where they are labelled **Plot 3**, **Plots 5-6** and **Plot 7**.

**Plot 3.** There are no known archaeological remains in this area.

**Plots 5-6.** A feature identified as part of the foundation of the late nineteenth century slate mill and a cylinder, possibly part of a compressor, were noted here. These were photographed *in situ*. The foundations have now been covered over.

**Plot 7.** No archaeology was visible in this area, although an incline formerly passed through this area, initially constructed to carry slate down to the mill or to the road, latterly used to raise waste for tipping. A water-wheel is also believed to have been situated in this area.

### **5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is probable from desk-top analysis that earlier quarry features have been buried by tipping of slate rubble. In view of the strong probability of buried features being uncovered as a consequence of the removal of slate waste, an archaeological watching brief should be maintained as work progresses over the area of the present permission.

### **6.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY**

#### **6.1 Archive sources:**

##### *6.1.i: Caernarfon Record Office*

Newborough estate papers – quarry accounts and plans, specifications for building the Clegyr road, 1825-6.  
X/Plans/R/1

6.1.ii: *University of Wales, Bangor:*  
Bangor mss.

6.1.iii: *Private possession*  
Extracts from diary entries describing construction of roads to Glynrhonwy quarry.

#### 6.2 Ordnance survey:

2"-1 mile survey of 1818-1821  
1"-1 mile survey of 1839-1841  
25" XVI. 8 (1889)  
1/10,000: SH 56 SE

#### 6.3 Visual sources:

National Museum of Wales, water colour 82.631/19 (Glynrhonwy quarry, 1834).

#### 6.4 Unpublished sources:

D. Dylan Pritchard: *The Slate Industry of North Wales: A Study of the Changes in Economic Organisation from 1780 to the Present Day* (M.A., University of Wales, 1935).  
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#### 6.5 Published sources:

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