
Land adjacent to Holyhead Leisure Centre

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Report No. 511

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Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
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Holyhead Leisure Centre**

Report No. 511

Prepared for
RGR Partnership
on behalf of J M Crane

by

A. Davidson

Event PRN 54793

**Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust
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LAND ADJACENT TO HOLYHEAD LEISURE CENTRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT (G1812)

SUMMARY

An archaeological assessment was carried out in advance of proposed development on a site south of Holyhead, and adjacent to the existing Holyhead Leisure Centre. Though the surrounding area is rich in archaeological sites of all periods, no sites of archaeological interest were identified within the immediate study area. A windmill (listed as a building of Grade II status) lies adjacent and to the north of the site. The potential for the existence of buried archaeology is considered low, though there may be environmental evidence preserved in the wetter soils.*

1 INTRODUCTION

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust have been asked by RGR Partnership, on behalf of Mr J M Crane, to undertake an archaeological assessment in advance of development of land adjacent to the Holyhead Leisure Centre (SH248980198).

2 SPECIFICATION AND PROJECT DESIGN

A brief has been prepared for this project by Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service (D800) (Appendix 1). A project design was produced which conformed to the requirements of the brief, and to the guidelines specified in *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-based Assessment* (Institute of Field Archaeologists, 1994, rev. 1999). The project is being monitored by Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service.

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust's proposals for fulfilling the requirements were, briefly, as follows:

- a) *to identify and record the cultural heritage of the area to be affected;*
- b) *to evaluate the importance of what was identified (both as a cultural landscape and as the individual items which make up that landscape); and*
- c) *to recommend ways in which damage to the cultural heritage can be avoided or minimised.*

A full archaeological assessment usually comprises 6 phases:

- 1) *Desk-top study*
- 2) *Field Search*
- 3) *Interim Draft Report*
- 4) *Detailed Field Evaluation*
- 5) *Final Draft Report*
- 6) *Final Report*

This assessment has covered the work required under 1, 2 and 3. It is sometimes necessary to undertake a programme of field evaluation following the desktop assessment. This is because some sites cannot be assessed by desktop or field visit alone, and additional fieldwork is required. This typically takes the form of geophysical survey or trial excavation, although a measured survey is also an option. The present report makes recommendations for any field evaluation required.

3 METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

3.1 Desk-top Study

This involved consultation of maps, computer records, written records and reference works, which make up the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), located at Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, Bangor. Aerial

evaluation. By the end of the assessment there should be no sites remaining in this category.

3.3.2 Definition of Impact

The direct impact of the proposed development on each site was estimated. The impact is defined as *none, slight, unlikely, likely, significant, considerable or unknown* as follows:

None:

There is no construction impact on this particular site.

Slight:

This has generally been used where the impact is marginal and would not by the nature of the site cause irreversible damage to the remainder of the feature, e.g. part of a trackway or field bank.

Unlikely:

This category indicates sites that fall on the margins of the study area, but are unlikely to be directly affected.

Likely:

Sites towards the edges of the study area, which may not be directly built on, but which are likely to be damaged in some way by the construction activity.

Significant:

The partial removal of a site affecting its overall integrity. Sites falling into this category may be linear features such as roads or field boundaries where the removal of part of the feature could make overall interpretation problematic.

Considerable:

The total removal of a feature or its partial removal which would effectively destroy the remainder of the site.

Unknown:

This is used when the location of the site is unknown, but thought to be in the vicinity of the proposed development.

3.3.3 Definition of field evaluation techniques

Field evaluation is necessary to allow the reclassification of the category E sites, and to allow the evaluation of areas of land where there are no visible features, but for which there is potential for sites to exist. Two principal techniques can be used for carrying out the evaluation: geophysical survey and trial trenching.

Geophysical survey

This technique involves the use of a magnetometer, which detects variation in the earth's magnetic field caused by the presence of iron in the soil. This is usually in the form of weakly magnetised iron oxides, which tend to be concentrated in the topsoil. Features cut into the subsoil and back-filled or silted with topsoil contain greater amounts of iron and can therefore be detected with the gradiometer. Strong readings can be produced by the presence of iron objects, and also hearths or kilns.

Other forms of geophysical survey are available, of which resistivity survey is the other most commonly used. However, for rapid coverage of large areas, the magnetometer is usually considered the most cost-effective method. It is also possible to scan a large area very rapidly by walking with the magnetometer, and marking the location of any high or low readings, but not actually logging the readings for processing.

Trial trenching

Buried archaeological deposits cannot always be detected from the surface, even with geophysics, and trial trenching allows a representative sample of the development area to be investigated. Trenches of an appropriate size can also be excavated to evaluate category E sites. These trenches typically measure between 20m and 30m long by 2m wide. The turf and topsoil is removed by mechanical excavator, and the resulting surface cleaned by hand and examined for features. Anything noted is further examined, so that the nature of any remains can be understood, and mitigation measures can be recommended.

4.2 Archaeological and Historical Background

The study area must be seen in relation to the port of Holyhead, and the rich archaeological heritage of Holy Island. The location of Holy Island within the busy western seaways linking Brittany, Cornwall, Ireland, Wales, Northern England, Scotland and the Viking countries to the east provides an international setting until post-medieval times, when its use as an official port for Ireland became of dominant importance. The port of Holyhead provided easy access in most weather, and recognition from sea was aided by the dominant mass of Mynydd y Twr, or Holyhead Mountain.

Evidence for activity from Neolithic times (*circa* 4000 BC to 2500 BC) to the present is abundant within the northern part of Holy Island. The two Neolithic tombs of Trefignath and Trearddur lie close to the study area. Four Neolithic polished stone axes have been found in the northern part of Holy Island (Lynch 1991), including two Graiglwyd axes found when excavating a hole for a turntable railway near Kingsland in 1926 (PRN 2507, SH 2504 8165), and one axe of unspecified stone found at Penllech Nest (PRN 2506, SH 251 816).

Two Bronze Age barrows were prominently situated on top of Holyhead Mountain (SH 219 829), though little can be seen of them now, and three barrows lay close to the shore at Porth Dafarch (SH 234 801), whilst others were situated at Garn (SH 211 825) and Gorsedd Gwlwm (SH 227 816). A barrow was recently discovered under the early Christian cemetery at Ty Mawr (SH 2520 8135). The Ty Mawr standing stone is one of several such stones in this part of Holy Island. There is another to the south, next to Stanley Mill (SH 2664 7888), and a rare pairing of two stones just over 3m apart, to the west at Plas Meilw (SH 227 809) (Lynch 1991).

The island has several notable Iron Age and Roman period sites. Holyhead is dominated by its mountain, to the north-west of the town. The summit is enclosed by a stone rampart wall forming the hillfort of Caer y Twr (SH 219 829). A much smaller promontory fort, Dinas on the south coast of Holy Island (SH 223 794), is probably also Iron Age. This promontory is surrounded by high cliffs and a low bank runs along the edge of the chasm, which separates it from the mainland. These forts were probably defensive refuges, and the population lived in more hospitable areas. Towards the foot of the south-western slope of Holyhead Mountain are a group of huts near another Ty Mawr (SH 211 820) and a similar hut group overlies the Bronze Age barrows at Porth Dafarch (SH 234 801). Excavation at Ty Mawr demonstrated that the stone huts belonged to the 1st millennium bc, but with some activity in the 3rd century AD, as well as earlier prehistoric and post-Roman settlement evidence. The finds from Porth Dafarch dated the huts to the Roman period (Lynch 1991, RCAHMW 1937).

A Roman fort was constructed at Holyhead towards the end of the 3rd century or later, as a naval base against Irish raiders. A Roman coin hoard was found in the area in 1710. The coins were buried in a brass vessel, and all dated to the 4th century (PRN 2503, SH 26 81).

Holy Island was of considerable importance in the early Christian period, with the *clas* site of Caer Gybi large enough to attract the attention of the Vikings in 961 (Edwards 1986, 24). The foundation of this monastic community by St Cybi is traditionally dated to the mid 6th century AD. There is an unusual concentration of early Christian sites known, or suspected, on the island. These include a cemetery of long-cist graves, dating to approximately 6th to 8th century AD, discovered during the construction of the A55 dual carriageway, to the north-west of Ty Mawr Farm. At this site the graves were located around, and cut into, the remains of a Bronze Age barrow. Another cemetery, of similar date, lies to the south-west of the study area, at Tywyn y Capel, the site of a medieval chapel on the shore of Trearddur Bay (Edwards 1986, 31). There were early Christian cist burials found at Porth Dafarch.

The development of the parochial system in the 12th century saw Holyhead church change from a *clas*, or 'mother' church to a collegiate one. Responsibility remained, however, for a number of small chapels in the area, usually with associated wells, including Capel Ulo, and Capel Gorlas. The site of Capel Ulo lies some 250m north of the study area.

The official use of Holyhead as a port increased in the reign of Elizabeth I, when it became the departure point for the Royal Mail to Ireland. During Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth Holyhead was garrisoned, and regular packet boats sailed to Ireland (Hughes and Williams 1981). The port subsequently grew until, by the early 19th century, it was the principle port for Ireland.

During the 17th century the road across Anglesey to Holyhead was probably just a rough track, but the forerunner to the present bridge at Four Mile Bridge already joined Holy Island to Anglesey by 1578 (Hughes and Williams 1981). One of the earliest maps of Anglesey, published by Speed in 1630, marks Pont-Rhydbont (the bridge at

into town. This ribbon development was extended during the second part of the 20th century when houses were constructed along the west side of the road and into the north-east part of the study area. The adjoining leisure centre was constructed in the late 1970's, though the golf course to the south dates from the early years of the 20th century.

4.5 General recommendations

There are no known sites of archaeological interest within the study area. The area was common ground in the 19th century, and is likely to have been so from medieval times.

The potential for the preservation of prehistoric remains underground is low, though Late Bronze Age burnt mounds, a site often found on low-lying wetter ground are a possibility. Though environmental evidence may be preserved within waterlogged parts of the site, it is likely that disturbance during the construction of the adjacent leisure centre will have lessened the potential to be gained from this source.

It is recommended that care is taken with the design to ensure visual impact upon the Grade II* listed windmill is minimised.

5. SOURCES

OS Maps

25" County Series Anglesey XI.6 surveyed 1900 and 1924

6" County Series Anglesey Sheets X NE and XI NW surveyed 1887 revised 1926

OS 1:10,000 map sheet SH 28 SW surveyed 1967-73, revised 1977

Aerial Photographs

National Archaeological Record, Aberystwyth

Countryside Council for Wales collection

Manuscript Sources

Anglesey Record Office, Llangefni

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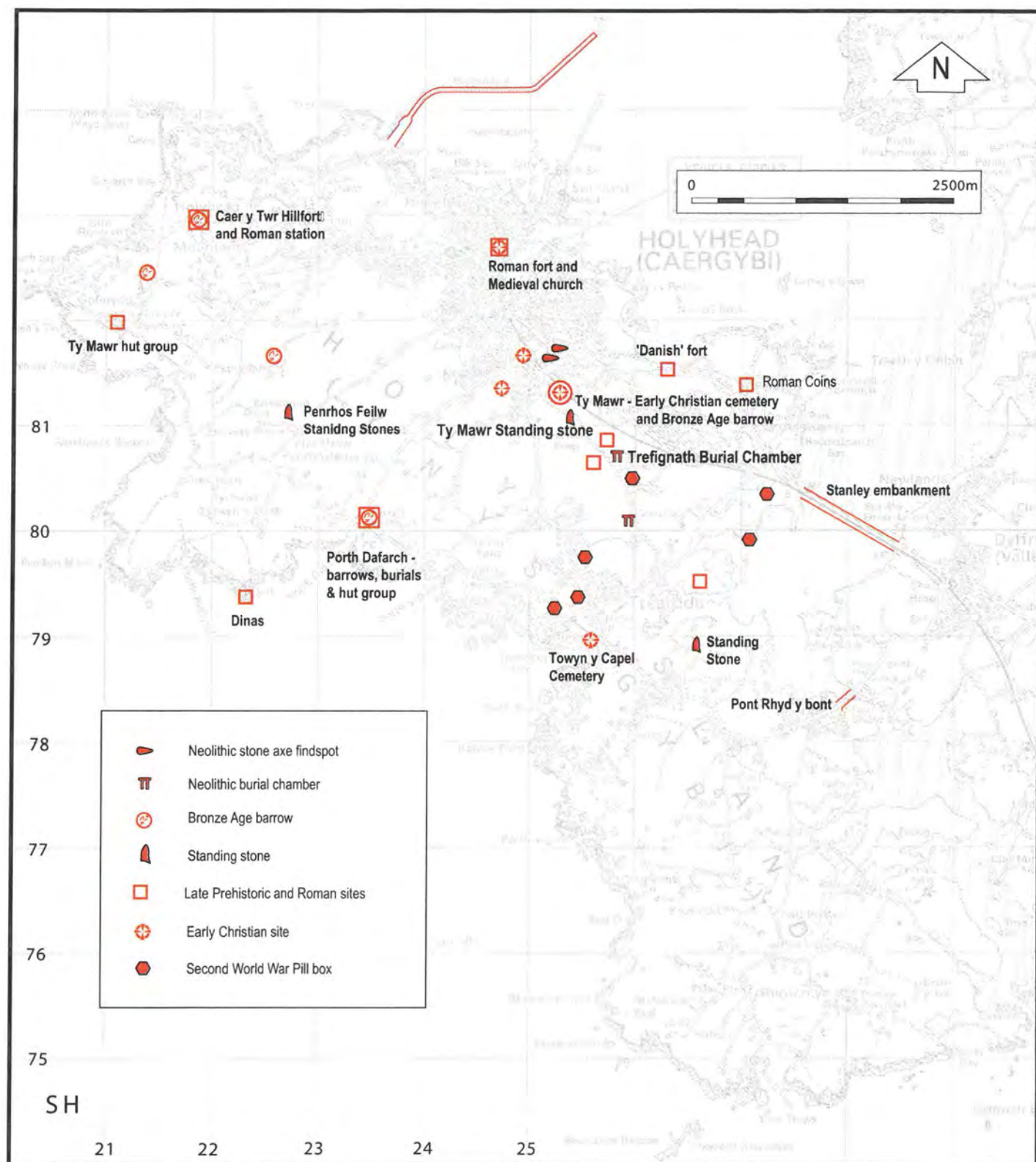
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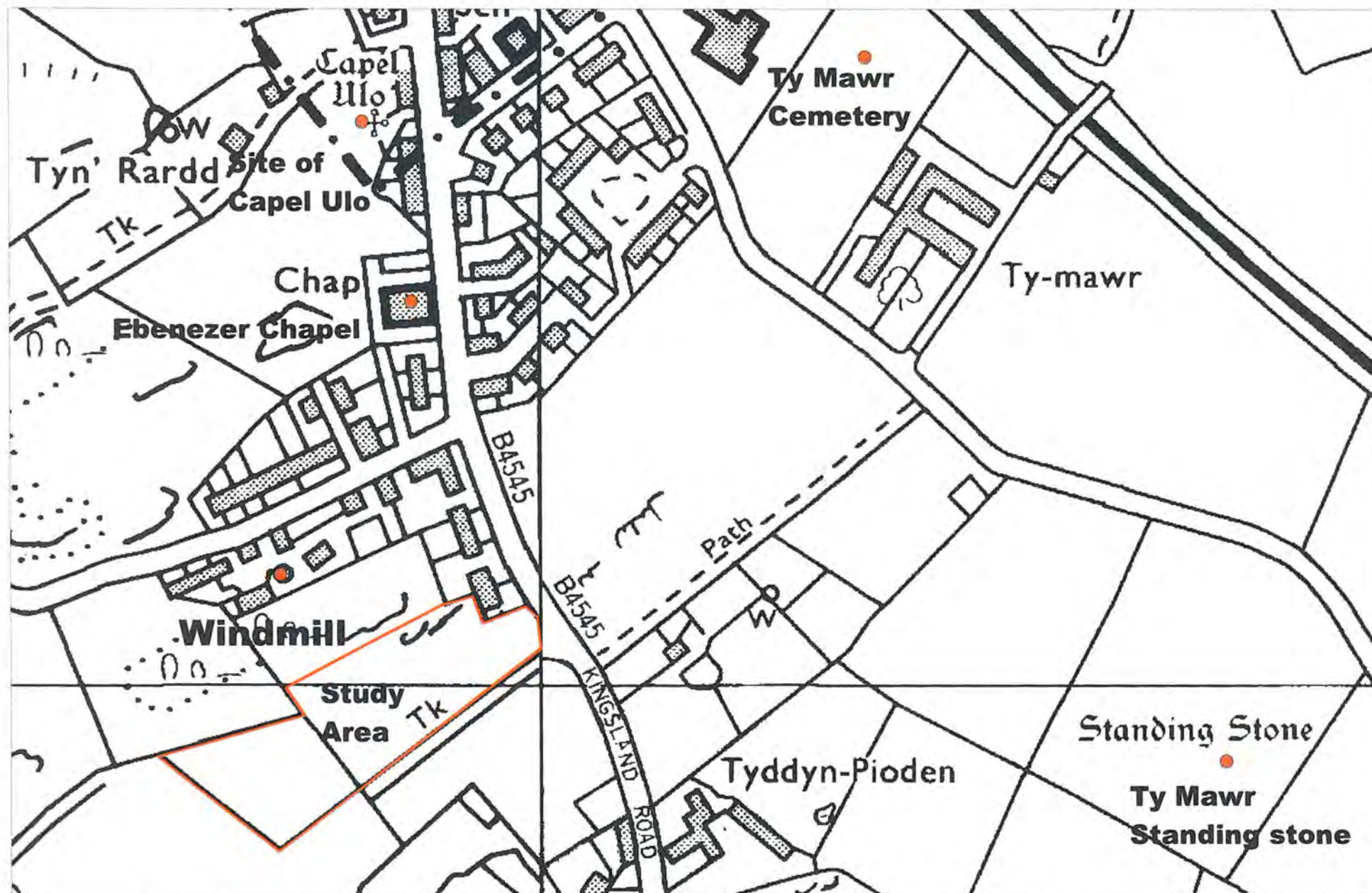
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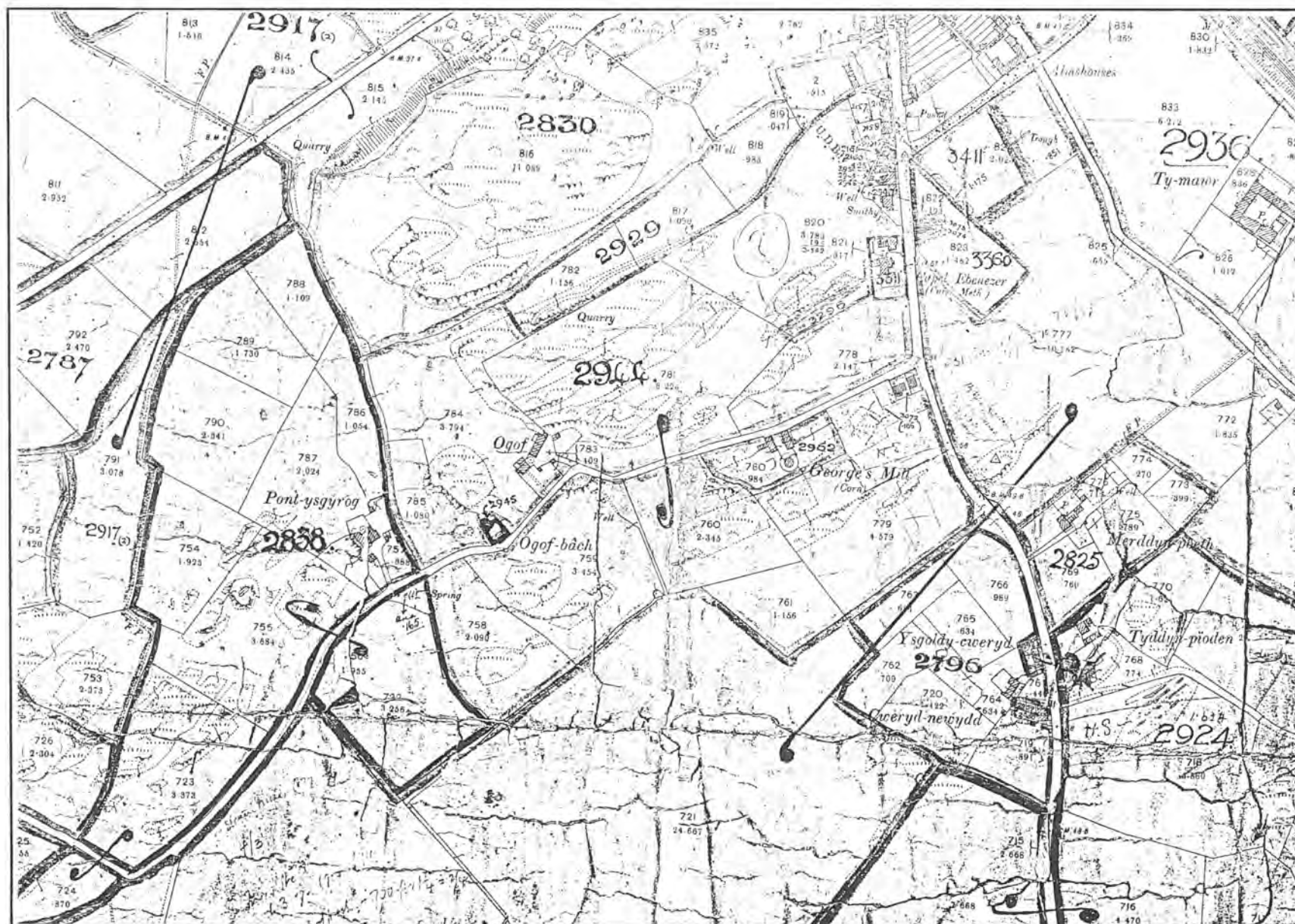


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Location of sites in general proximity to study area.



Map of Study Area and surrounding archaeology



25" Ordnance Survey County Series XI.6 (surveyed 1900)

