
Land to the NW of Tremadog (Llidiart Yspyty)



Archaeological watching brief 2005

GAT Project No. 1736

Report No. 607

February 2006

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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Archaeological Watching Brief: Llidiart Yspyty, Tremadog (G1736)

SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief has been undertaken in advance of the construction of a haulage road as part of the new hospital site at Llidiart Yspyty, Tremadog. The information recovered from the watching brief was limited to nineteenth century activity; viz., the construction material used for the tramway and the location of probable nineteenth century land drains at the southwestern area of the site. No further information was recovered regarding the construction of the turnpike road nor the rock cut channel. The northern elevation of the former building at the southwestern end of the site was truncated by the haulage road and a photographic record was made of the building material used.

1 INTRODUCTION

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust has been asked by the North West Wales NHS Trust to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Llidiart Yspyty, Tremadog, Gwynedd, in advance of the construction of a haulage road prior to the construction of a new hospital. The proposed development is centred on SH 557402 and the affected area is indicated on the site plan (Figure1). The development area contains remains of mid-19th century ironstone mining, with associated tramways and an early 19th century toll road.

An archaeological assessment of the site was undertaken in May 2002 (GAT Report no. 455) and updated to take into account a revised layout in February 2004 (GAT Report no. 519). Recommendations were made for evaluation and recording, which were undertaken in May and June 2004 (GAT Report no. 546). Recommendations for mitigation following the evaluation work included excavation at two sites: the remains of the Gorseddau Tramway and a Roman corn drying kiln, both located at the northeastern end of the site (GAT Report no. 568). The results of the excavation were published in GAT Report no. 626.

2 SPECIFICATION AND PROJECT DESIGN

The basic requirement was for a watching brief of the proposed area, in order to assess the impact of the proposals on the archaeological features within the area concerned. The importance and condition of known archaeological remains were to be assessed, and areas of archaeological potential identified. Measures to mitigate the effects of the construction work on the archaeological resource were to be suggested.

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust's proposals for filling these requirements were as follows:

- Watching brief
- Report

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

(Reproduced from GAT Report No. 568)

The development area lies on a strip of pasture between the spectacular cliffs of Craig y Castell and the reclaimed estuary of Traeth Mawr. This formed part of the farm of Llidiart Yspyty. A sharp break of slope forming a low cliff face in places separates the north and south parts of the site. The A487 runs below this along the south-western boundary of the site.

A detailed history of the site has been compiled in the desk-top assessment report (Hopewell and Gwyn 2004), so a summary only is included here. Finds of Mesolithic/Neolithic date were recovered during trial excavations on Y Bryn, 50m to the south of the development site in 1995 (Hopewell 1995). Bricks and human remains apparently dating from the Roman period were discovered in the vicinity of Llidiart Yspyty c. 1810 and in 1876 workmen engaged in building a drain identified further remains. Excavations carried out in 1908 revealed a Roman structure with hypocausts, interpreted as a bath-house. Pottery indicated that this was used from the 2nd to the 4th century (Breeze and Anwyl 1909). This site is now preserved under the garden of a new house by the A487 south-east of the development site.

The establishment of a church dedicated to St Beuno in Penmorfa suggests a settlement in the 7th century, but otherwise there is no evidence for the area until the late 16th century when the name Llidiart Ysptyty is first recorded. The reference suggests that there was a route across Traeth Mawr and a landing point for a ferry boat here. The name, Llidiart Ysptyty, meaning 'gateway to the hospital', may have referred to a *hospitium* under the patronage of the Knights of St John or another order, but there is no other evidence for this. The discovery of skeletons by the road in 1820, later reburied in Penmorfa church, may be connected with a *hospitium*. By the 18th century the name was applied to a farm, the farmhouse of which still stands to the north of the school. The connection of the name *castell* to this site almost certainly refers to the crags above rather than to a man-made castle or fort.

The estate of Tremadog was bought by William Alexander Madocks in 1798 and he reclaimed Traeth Mawr to increase his land holdings by building an embankment at Porthmadog. The town of Tremadog developed on the reclaimed land, and Llidiart Ysptyty was severed from the sea. In 1810 the Caernarvonshire Turnpike Trust took over and improved the old road from Llidiart Ysptyty to Penmorfa and Caernarfon. This road ran through the middle of the development site, partially along what is now a farm track. However, in 1845 the Caernarfon road was rebuilt on its present alignment.

The craggy outcrop in the southern part of the site is composed of iron stone and this was mined, possibly from 1754, but certainly by 1770. The mine was at its most productive between 1839 and about 1850, but it had closed down by 1851. The first railway from the mine to Porthmadog was constructed in 1840-41. It ran from the northern side of the mine workings, south-east past Llidiart Ysptyty House. The line was subsequently relaid, probably in 1848, to run to the base of the workings, along the southern boundary of the site, abandoning the original line. However, to reach the top of the workings a loop of line was added. In 1855-7 the railway was completely rebuilt and extended from this curved loop to the north-west to give access to the Gorseddau Slate Quarry, some 3 miles to the north. The mine site, now closed down, continued to have a function as a station and slate yard on the Gorseddau tramway. By the 1860s the quarry had also closed, and in 1872-5 the railway was regauged and adapted for a locomotive running to Cwm Pennant, but this railway saw little use and was lifted before the end of the 19th century. Evidence of Roman activity was recovered during the excavation of the project, with a Roman corn drying kiln of possible 2nd century date identified in the northeastern area of the site. (For further discussion regarding the excavation work, see GAT Report no.: 626.)

4 METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

The watching brief was undertaken on various days between the 14th of April and the 13th of June 2005. The aim of the watching brief was to monitor the construction of the c.25.0m wide haulage road that ran in a curvilinear fashion from the A487 into the area designated for the new hospital (Figure 1). It was expected that the road would cut through the site of a late nineteenth century building identified on an 1889 Ordnance Survey Map, a rock-cut channel associated with the quarry workings, the remains of an early 19th century turnpike road superseded by the A487 and the remains of the mid-19th century Gorseddau Tramway also associated with the quarry workings. It was not expected that the road would impinge on any of the archaeology associated with the Roman corn drying kiln, located at the northeastern area of the development site (Figure 1; see GAT Report no.: 626). The groundworks were undertaken by Whitley's Construction Ltd. and were undertaken using a 13-tonne 360° tracked excavator and a 6-tonne tracked blading machine, which were both used in tandem to strip the haulage road.

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

The watching brief focused on five main areas: the location of a building shown on the First Edition 25" Map (1889); a rock cut channel; the turnpike road; and the Gorseddau tramway (see Figure 1). The building, the turnpike road and the tramway had all been evaluated and recorded during the evaluation phase (GAT Report 546), but it was hoped that the haulage road would provide further information on these areas.

Location of building shown on 1889 OS Map (Figure 1)

The location of the building had been investigated during the evaluation of the site in June 2004 (GAT Report no. 546), with little recumbent evidence for the structure, save for the remains of a northern elevation partially terraced into the hillside. The construction of the road included removing part of this elevation. The elevation had already been examined in plan as part of the excavation phase (Report No.: 626), but the area was heavily overgrown making it difficult to investigate the south facing side (Plate 1). Particular attention was paid during the watching brief as to the building material used, the height of the elevation, the evidence for bonding material and the evidence for a foundation cut. The watching brief revealed that only the foundation course had survived and that it was constructed using large blocks of sub-angular stone with no evidence of bonding material. A foundation cut was not visible however but this could have been due to the limited visibility caused by the toothed bucket of the machine and the overgrowth that made close inspection difficult. No datable artefacts were recovered but the building was known to date from the late 19th century.

Rock-cut channel: (Figure 1)

The rock-cut channel was thought to be part of the iron mining operations of the mid-nineteenth century, channelling water down the slope. It was not fully understood how the channel related to the building as the channel appeared to run towards it. The evaluation phase did not reveal a satisfactory relationship as the channel began to dissipate as it reached the building appearing to level out several metres to the east (Figure 1) and it was hoped that the watching brief would elucidate the relationship further. The haulage road did not reveal any further evidence, however, but a stone capped drain was identified running southwards from the channel as it began to level off, suggesting that the channel may have fed into this rather than into the building. This could only have been confirmed if the building had survived to a greater extent, so a definitive answer was not forthcoming.

The Turnpike Road: (Figure 1)

The turnpike road was examined during the 2004 evaluation (GAT Report no. 546) and was found to exist as a simple terrace into the hillside, with a revetment wall running westwards along the southern side of the road (Figure 1). The haulage road only cut across the turnpike to the immediate north of the rock cut channel with the remainder of the haulage road running c.20m to the north of the turnpike road (Figure 1). It was hoped the watching brief would reveal greater information about the technology used in the construction of the road, e.g., the type of road surface, but no further information was revealed at the point where it was breached.

The Gorseddau Tramway: (Figure 1)

The area of greatest potential was the tramway as it was going to be breached across the point where it survived as a pronounced camber shortly before entering a cutting in the rock to the east (Figure 1). It was hoped this breach would provide some insight into the construction process used. The camber was exposed as a section 1.30m high comprising a sequence of layers built up from the natural (Plate 2). The primary layer was a compressed mix of shale and clay-silt, c.0.60m thick, followed by a distinct band of shale, c.0.25m thick, followed by a thicker deposit of gravel and stone. Finally, above this deposit of stone, was a c.0.10m thick layer of stone, which was identified as the layer onto which the sleepers may have been placed (Plate 3). There was no evidence for the sleepers themselves. The section appeared to reveal a single sequence of construction.

The only other area of activity was at the southern end of project within the marshland (see Figure 1). A north to south aligned culvert was discovered at the eastern end of the haulage road. It was cut into boulder clay, constructed from locally sourced stone with a nineteenth century ceramic pipe running through the centre and it was assumed, from its direction, that it was used to drain excess water off the hillside into what is now a marshland (Plate 4). A very ephemeral stone-built feature of similar width was also identified at the northern end of the marshland towards the base of the slope, c.10.0m east of the culvert. It was only partially extant, c.15.0m long and was aligned east to west, cutting the boulder clay (Plate 5). The function of the feature was unclear but it was suspected to be either the foundation course of a stone-lined culvert or the foundation course of a field boundary wall. An inspection of the First and Second Edition Ordnance Survey Map (1889) did not show any walls or buildings in the area and it was suspected to be a truncated culvert.

6 CONCLUSION

The watching brief revealed evidence for two probable nineteenth century drains that ran into what is now marshland. The third feature identified in the same area had been heavily truncated but was thought to be another field drain or possibly the foundation course of a field boundary wall. The breach through the Gorseddau tramway was very revealing and proved that the tramway was constructed using locally sourced material, particularly shale and stone. A photographic record was made of the remains of the building at the southwestern area of the site. The other known archaeological sites located within the path of the haulage road: the turnpike road and the rock-cut channel, did not reveal any further information than had already been recorded during the evaluation phase.

7 REFERENCES AND OTHER SOURCES CONSULTED

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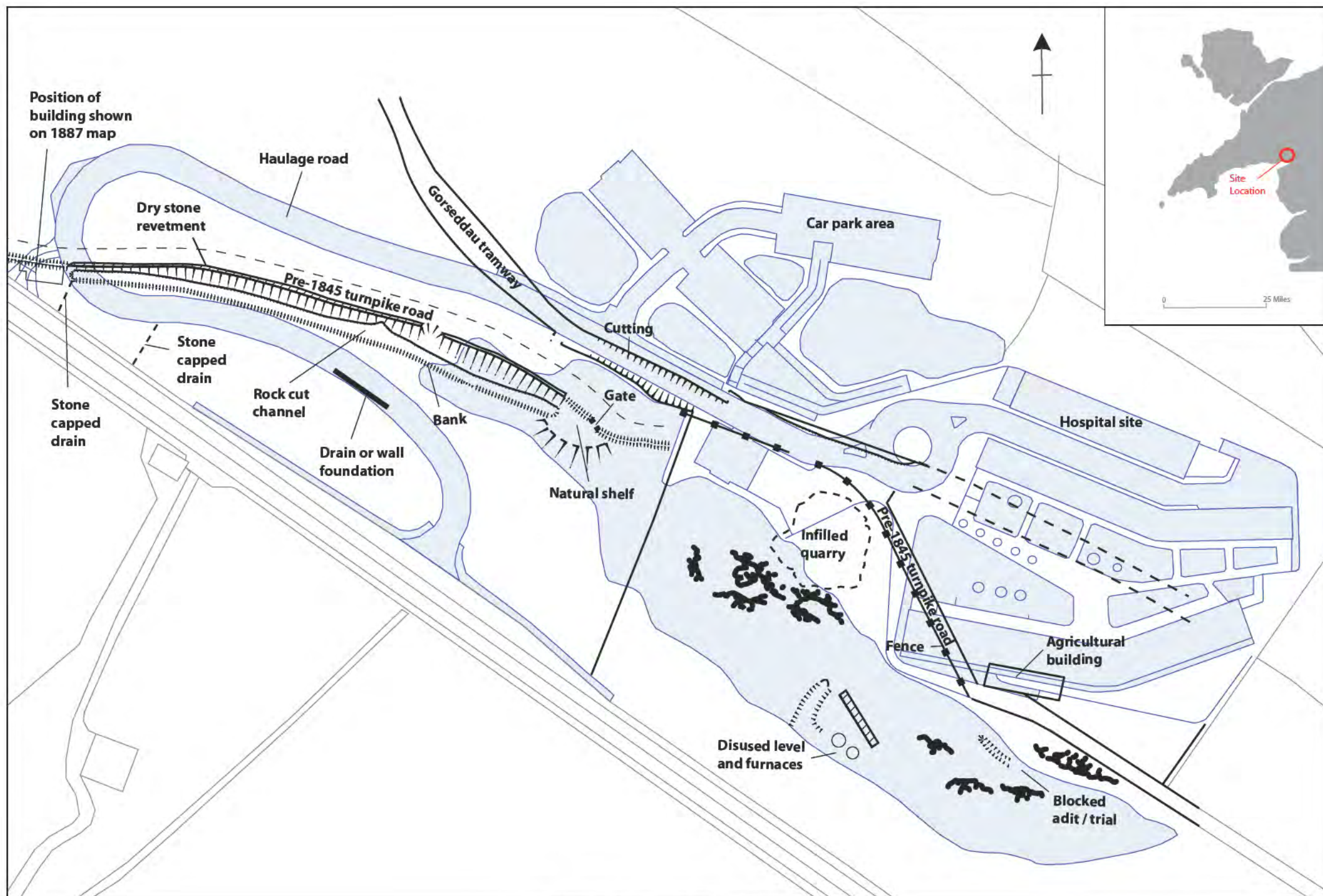


Figure 1. Location Plan (Scale 1:2,500)



Plate 1: Removal of Suspected North-Facing Elevation



Plate 2: Section through Tramway



Plate 3: Close-up of Section through Tramway



Plate 4: View of Culvert Facing South



Plate 5: View looking Southwest of Marshland (Note dark line in centre locating suspected foundation course of culvert or wall)