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# THE TOLL HOUSE, PENRHYNDEUDRAETH, ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

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**GAT Project no. G1963**

**Report No. 695**



**Prepared for Gwynedd County Council**

October 2007

By R.T.J. Evans



**Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd**  
**Gwynedd Archaeological Trust**

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Cover: The Toll House from the north-west

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# **THE TOLL HOUSE, PENRHYNDEUDRAETH, GWYNEDD (G1963)**

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK BASED ASSESSMENT**

### **SUMMARY**

*A desk based assessment was carried out on the Grade II listed toll house and gate pier on the north side of the lower Cob which crosses the Glaslyn estuary between Porthmadog and Penrhyndeudraeth. The building dates from around 1836, when the road was transferred from the main Cob, which was to receive the Ffestiniog Railway to the newly built lower one to the north. The toll board present on the front of the building is believed to have been transferred from an earlier tollhouse placed at the Porthmadog end of the Cob in about 1812. The layout of the structure is similar to that used by Thomas Telford in his toll houses on the Welsh mainland section of the London to Holyhead Road. Very few original internal fittings survive and the interior has all been replastered in modern times. However the building lies within a landscape of outstanding historic interest and the Cob on which it is situated was the single most important factor in the development of the town and port of Porthmadog and the surrounding area, making it a site of national importance.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT) was asked by Gwynedd County Council to carry out an archaeological desk-based assessment of the toll house and gate at Penrhyndeudraeth, Gwynedd.

### **1.1 The study area**

The toll house and remains of the gate are located at the eastern end of the Great Embankment (Cob) (NGR 25843379) on the north side of the A487 as it turns north eastwards on the Penrhyndeudraeth peninsula, opposite the Boston Lodge Railway Works, Penrhyndeudraeth, Gwynedd.

## **2 SPECIFICATION AND PROJECT DESIGN**

The project conforms to the guidelines specified in *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-based Assessment* (Institute of Field Archaeologists, 1994, rev. 2001).

## **3 METHODS AND TECHNIQUES**

### **3.1 Desk-Top Study**

The study involved the consultation of maps, computer records, written records and reference works, which make up the Historic Environment Record (HER), located at Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, Bangor. Estate maps, tithe maps and OS maps were examined at the County Record Offices in Caernarfon and Dollgellau. Secondary

sources were consulted to provide background information on the development of the cob. A full list of sources is given in section 6 at the end of this report.

## **3.2 Site Visit**

A site visit was carried out on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2007. The building was examined both internally and externally and its setting was investigated. The recording of the toll house involved digital photography and on site written descriptions including key measurements.

## **3.3 Report**

All available information was collated and assessed, and the structures allocated to the categories listed below. These are intended to give an idea of the importance of the building and the level of response likely to be required for any proposed works. Descriptions of the features and specific recommendations for mitigatory measures, as appropriate, are given in the relevant sections of the report.

The criteria used for allocating features to categories of importance are based on those used by the Secretary of State when considering ancient monuments for scheduling; these are set out in the Welsh Office Circular 60/96.

### ***3.3.1 Categories of importance***

The following categories were used to define the importance of the archaeological resource.

#### ***Category A - Sites of National Importance.***

This category includes Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Listed Buildings of grade II\* and above, as well as those sites that would meet the requirements for scheduling (ancient monuments) or listing (buildings) or both.

Sites that are scheduled or listed have legal protection, and it is recommended that all Category A sites remain preserved and protected *in situ*.

#### ***Category B - Sites of Regional Importance***

This category includes grade II Listed Buildings and sites which would not fulfil the criteria for scheduling, but which are nevertheless of particular importance within the region. Preservation *in situ* is the preferred option for Category B sites, but if damage or destruction cannot be avoided, appropriate detailed recording might be an acceptable alternative.

#### ***Category C - Sites of District or Local Importance***

These sites are not of sufficient importance to justify a recommendation for preservation if threatened, but nevertheless merit adequate recording in advance of damage or destruction.

### *Category D - Minor and Damaged Sites*

These are sites, which are of minor importance, or are so badly damaged that too little remains to justify their inclusion in a higher category. For these sites rapid recording either in advance or during destruction, should be sufficient.

### *Category E - Sites needing further investigation*

Sites, the importance of which is as yet undetermined and which will require further work before they can be allocated to categories A-D, are temporarily placed in this category, with specific recommendations for further evaluation. By the end of the assessment there should be no sites remaining in this category.

## **4 RESULTS**

### **4.1 Context**

The building is listed Grade II (Rec. No. 5235), listed on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1991, with the Cob itself listed Grade II\* (Rec. No. 5234). It lies within the 'Outstanding' Aberglaslyn Landscape of Historic Interest [Ref. HLW (GW) 7], and within the Glaslyn Marshes and Pont Croesor Site of Special Scientific Interest [CCW Ref. 724]. It is recorded on the Gwynedd Historic Environment record (PRN 12,747).

### **4.2 Description of Building**

#### *Exterior*

The toll house consists of a single storey three bay rubble built building with slate roof and wide eaves. The central bay is gabled, and projects forward at both the front and rear of the building, thus creating a cruciform plan with the two side bays. There are rubble chimney stacks. The front, southern, side has a central entrance with attached toll-board to the left (figs. 1,2). The outer bays have concrete mullioned windows, which are replacements, and the western gable end has been rendered. The outer bays have high plinths continuing across the blank rear of the building. Three of the four chimney pots are tall ceramic examples and may be original to the building. Scarring on the eastern end gable suggests that there was once a lean-to structure against this wall of the building. A north-south toilet extension constructed of stone with tongue and groove panel lining was added to the rear of the building to the east of the rear kitchen room in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A tall round topped gate pier (fig. 3), survives to the right of the entrance, which probably formed part of the pedestrian gate across the embankment. No trace survives of the equivalent gate pier on the south-east side of the road.

#### *Interior*

The central door opens into a large hall, the door and frame being modern replacements. This room has small viewing windows to the right and the left of the doorway creating a small porch area surrounding it. The hall had a slate slab floor, although this has been partially replaced by concrete. On the western side the hall

chimney block has been bricked and plastered up, with no surviving grate or hearth features. To the rear of the western and eastern walls two doors lead to a room on either side of the hall, which probably served as the living room and bedroom for the gate keeper. Both rooms have chimney breasts that back on to the hall. The eastern doorway also leads to a back kitchen and later lavatory extension. All the rooms have been greatly modernised and replastered, with all fireplace evidence removed. Concrete mullions have replaced the original probably slate ones. The only surviving early internal features are the panelled casement doors, with probably original 19<sup>th</sup> century door knobs and locks (fig. 4) and a 19<sup>th</sup> century coat hanger in the alcove to the western room (fig. 5). In the eastern room there is a large safe which may be late 19<sup>th</sup> century in date.

Photographs of the building taken in the 1920s show the building much as it is today (Gwynedd Archives XS/1853/60/274+6), however the original window mullions and an earlier doorway are present.<sup>1</sup>

### **4.3 Historical Background**

During the early Post-Medieval period the area north of Traeth Mawr was largely in the hands of the Price family of Rhiwlas, who had been actively engaged in a programme of estate expansion since the late 16th century (Gresham 1973). By the 17th century the land on the south side of Traeth Mawr was in the hands of a cadet branch of the Anwyl family of Parc, based at Plas Newydd. Large estates continued to dominate the area well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the lands of the Anwyls of Plas Newydd passing into the hands of the Mostyn estate, and the purchase of the Penmorfa estate, including the house of Tan-yr-Allt and lands bordering the Glaslyn estuary, from the Rhiwlas estate by W A Madocks in 1798.

The Great Embankment, known locally as the Cob, 1463 metres long and 6.4 metres high above the water, created an artificial landscape when William Madocks built across the mouth of the Glaslyn estuary to prevent the ingress of the tide. At the same time an embankment was being built at Malltraeth at the mouth of the Afon Cefni in Anglesey, although this had been much longer in construction (Gwyn 2006, 175-6). The Cob, a much more substantial work, was constructed between 1808 and 1811, along with a new connecting road to the Penrhyndeudraeth peninsula (Beazley 1967, 138). One of the major distinctive elements of the resulting landscape is a large tract of very flat agricultural land reclaimed from the saltmarshes. Whilst agricultural improvement had been a significant aim of the scheme, it also provided a safe passage across the estuary which had previously been a serious obstacle to travel, and it was hoped that this might form part of Madocks' scheme to create a viable route to Ireland via the harbour at Porthdinllaen (Beazley 1967, 135). Formerly people had been obliged to cross the sands of Traeth mawr, and follow a line from near Y Bryn on the north-west side of the estuary to a point just north of the village of Minffordd on the south-east side of it (Gwynedd Archives Z/DBQ). Tolls were originally collected for passage along the new embanked road from the Porthmadog end. It is thought that the toll board (fig. 2) may date from this period and have been moved from an earlier toll-house at the Porthmadog end of the Cob. An illustration of this first toll-house appeared in *Country Life* magazine on 19<sup>th</sup> January 1995. No toll house is shown on

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately it was not possible to obtain a copy of these photographs for this report for copyright reasons.

an 1824 map of Traeth Mawr (Gwynedd Archives X/BJC/20, fig. 6) or the enclosure award of the same year (Gwynedd Archives X/BJC/7), so its location cannot be accurately ascertained.

In 1825 an amendment to the Harbour and Traeth Mawr Act was passed to adjust the embankment tolls, and shortly after this time Madocks encouraged his agent John Williams to 'begin the toll house up the Traeth' (Gwynedd Archives XD8/2/211), although there is no evidence as to whether a tollhouse was built at this time. Madocks died in 1828, but in 1836 a lower cob was added to the embankment to the north to carry the road while the new Ffestiniog Railway was taken across the old embankment. The present tollhouse is likely to date from around this time (Boyd 1975, 17), and is shown on the 1842 tithe map for Llanfihangel y Traethau (Gwynedd Archives, Dolgellau) (Fig. 7) as the property of Eliza Anna Madocks, William's daughter who then owned the Tremadoc estate (fig.8). It was built on land that had been part of Penrhyn Isa farm, and is shown on Tremadoc estate maps of the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (XBJC/Maps/11). It is shown in its present form, including the rear toilet extension, on the Ordnance Survey 25 inch map of 1917 (fig. 9).

In 1864 the Porthmadog and Beaver Pool Turnpike Trust was set up to oversee the building and maintenance of the road between the Boston Lodge turnpike and the road junction at the Oakley Arms. This was finally abolished in 1886 (Hopewell 2006, 15). Tolls across the Cob were collected by descendants of the Madocks family until 1978 when the Rebecca Trust, formed by local trustees, bought the Cob and Tollhouse. The Cob was finally freed from toll in March 2003 when the rights were bought by the Welsh Assembly Government.

Census returns between 1861 and 1901 show that the tollhouse was occupied by a number of different families, the largest recorded being of seven people. In 1891 the gatekeepers were two spinster sisters in their 50s, Mary and Ann Roberts (NA RG 12/4644). Earlier occupants had occupations such as blacksmith or agricultural labourer in addition to their role as gatekeepers.

The toll house comes late in the history of road toll collection. The main period of turnpike expansion was between 1750 and 1790, with the last trusts being set up around 1835. However the house is well built and the design of the Penrhyndeudraeth building is one that was already well established. On Thomas Telford's Holyhead road the design used for the toll houses on the mainland, a cross-shaped plan with the toll room and porch at the front, kitchen at the rear and two bedrooms in the side bays, is remarkably similar to the Penrhyndeudraeth toll house (Quartermaine *et al.* 2003, 38-39). The Holyhead road toll houses, built by George Edgecomb in 1829 and 1830 (*ibid.* 150), could possibly have provided inspiration for the design for the Penrhyndeudraeth one. Early toll houses were sometimes flimsy affairs (Moore-Colyer 2001, 134), but Telford had insisted that tollhouses should provide good quality accommodation in order to attract honest toll keepers, and the Madocks estate is likely to have held similar views.

## **5 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

The toll house was probably built around 1836 and was certainly in existence by 1842. Externally it maintains a significant amount of its original fabric, including



three of the four chimney pots. The mullioned windows have however been renewed in concrete. The slate toll board to the west of the entrance doorway has possibly been re-positioned from an earlier tollhouse at the western end of the cob and dates from about 1811. It is somewhat damaged and every effort should be made to preserve it *in situ*.

The interior of the building has been greatly modernised with the only internal fittings of note being two panelled doors that are probably contemporary with the building of the tollhouse, and a coat hanger in the alcove to the western room which is probably a later 19<sup>th</sup> century addition to the building.

The setting of the building on the lower cob is of great significance since the embankment on which was the road whose tolls were collected was probably the single most important factor in the development of the town and port of Porthmadog and the surrounding area. Madock's plan had originally contained three related elements: the enclosure of the Traeth Mawr in order to increase his agricultural holding, the creation of a planned urban settlement at Tremadog, and the development of the area's industrial, mineral and transport potential (Hopewell 2006). However the building of the embankment across Traeth Mawr transformed a rural backwater enabling the development of the town and port of Porthmadog, thereby creating an industrial, urban and maritime community (Gwyn 2006, 178).

The importance of the whole landscape is recognised by its inclusion on the Register of Landscapes of Outstanding Historic Interest in Wales. It is of international importance and includes the cob, the harbour of Porthmadog and all that remains of Madock's landscape, the Festiniog Railway, and the later Cambrian Railway. This landscape merges into the town of Porthmadog and village of Penmorfa, and includes Tremadog and Tan yr Allt.

As a Grade II listed building with the interior much altered, the tollhouse should be categorised as a category B site of regional importance that should be preserved *in situ*. However the location of the building on the Cob, a Grade II\* structure and within an outstanding landscape of historic interest means that as an integral part of that landscape it should be considered of category A importance.

## **6 REFERENCES**

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## **6.2 Cartographic and unpublished references in Gwynedd Sites and Monuments Record, Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon and Dollgellau, and The Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments for Wales, Aberystwyth.**

Census returns for Llanfihangel y Traethau 1841-1891 (National Archives, seen at [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com))

Census return for Penrhyndeudraeth 1901 (National Archives, seen at [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com))

Hopewell, D. 2006. *A487 Porthmadog/Tremadog Bypass. Cultural Heritage Stage 3 Technical Report*. Unpublished GAT Report for Halcrow Ltd.

Letter from William Madocks to John Williams dated 10 July 1824 (Gwynedd Archives XD 8/2/211)

Map of Traeth Mawr, 1775 Penmaen Ucha Estate Papers (Gwynedd Archives Z/DBQ)

Map of Traeth Mawr 1824 (Gwynedd Archives X/BJC/20)

Map of the Tremadoc Estate 1888 (Gwynedd Archives XBJC/Maps/11)

Ordnance Survey 1920. *6 inch sheet SH 11 SW*

Ordnance Survey 1917. *25 inch sheet XI.13 Merioneth*

Photographs of Toll Gate in the Solomon Andrews Collection (Gwynedd Archives XS/1853/60/274)

RCAHM(W) 1997. Photo survey comprising 4 black and white prints (Ref: C10129)

Tithe Maps for the parish of Ynyscynhaearn and Llanfihangel y Traethau (Gwynedd Archives).



Fig. 1 General View of Toll-house from the south (Scale 2m with 50cm divisions)



Fig. 2. Detail of 1812 Toll Board



Fig. 3 Gate Pier



Fig. 4. Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Door Knob and Lock





Fig. 5. 19<sup>th</sup> century Coat Hanger



Fig. 6 Traeth Mawr and Traeth Bach at Low Water 1821-4 (Gwynedd Archives XBJC/Maps/20). No toll house is shown.

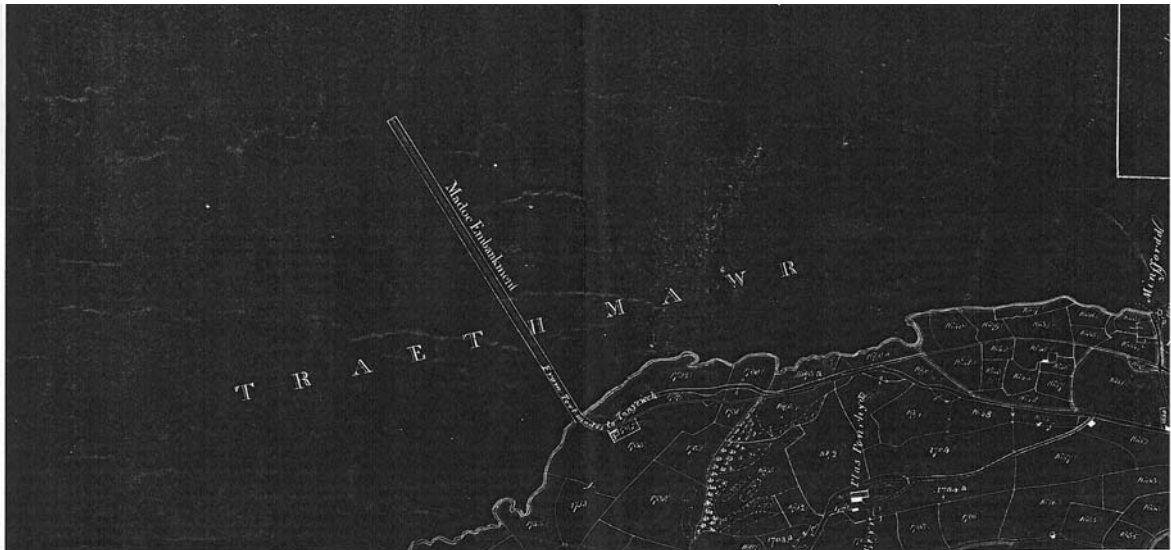


Fig. 7. 1842 Tithe Map of Llanfihangel y Traethau showing Tollhouse (Gwynedd Archives)

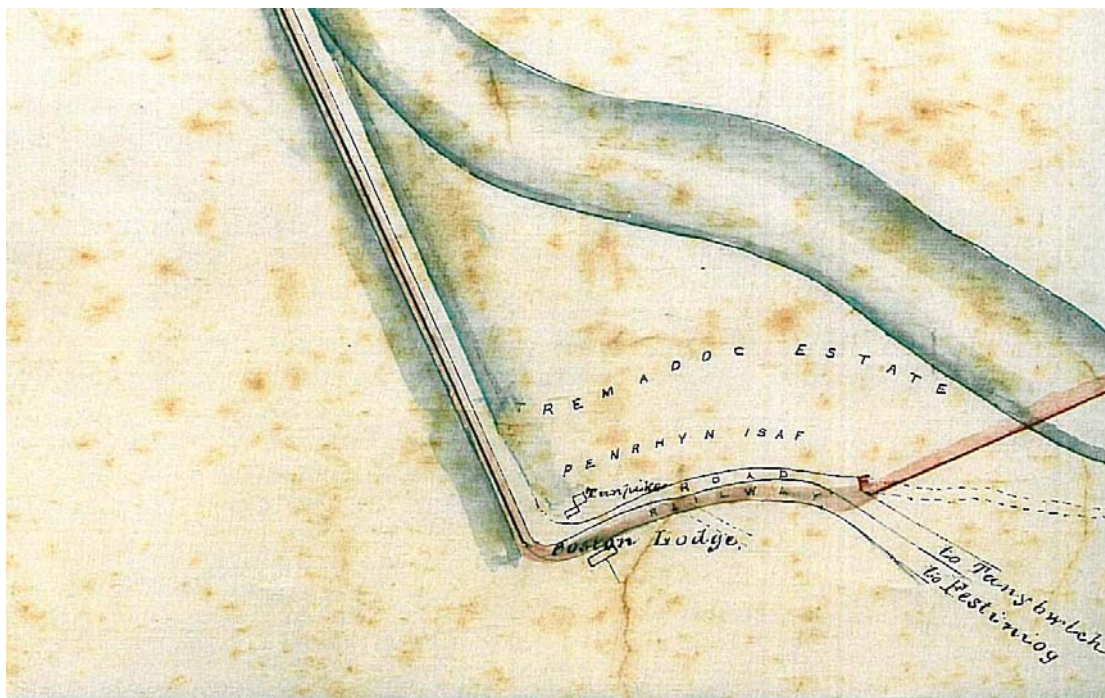


Fig. 8. Extract from Tremadoc Estate Map 1888 (traced from an 1871 map) showing tollhouse (Gwynedd Archives XBJC/Maps/11)

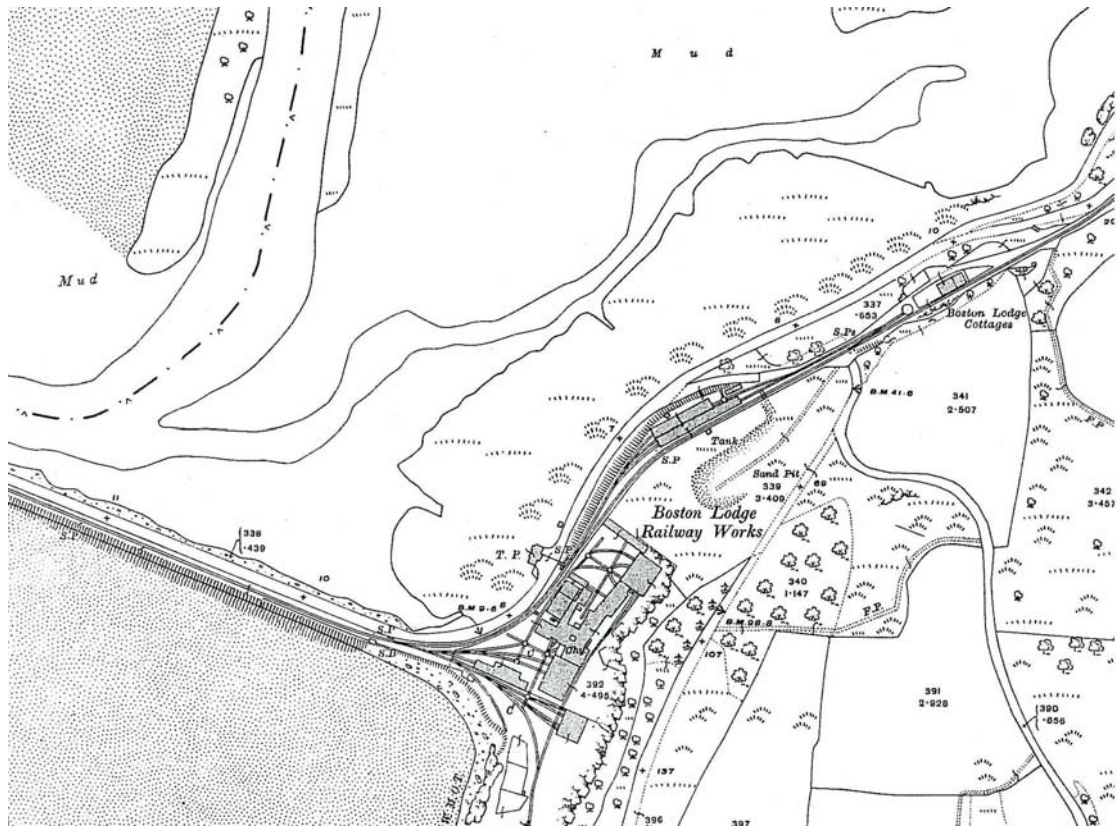


Fig. 9. Ordnance Survey 25 inch 1917 edition Sheet XI.13 Meirioneth showing Toll House with addition of lavatory extension.