

Archaeological Assessment

GAT Project No. 2088 Report No. 812 June, 2009

Report No. 812

Prepared for

Parsons Binckerho Ltd

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Contents

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Design brief and specification
- 3. Methods and techniques
- 4. Archaeological background
- 5. The archaeology of the study area
- 6. Impact of proposed development
- 7. Conclusions
- 8. Bibliography

Figures

- 1. Location plan
- 2. Location of scheduled ancient monuments
- 3. Penrhos estate plans of Penrhos and Tre'r Gof
- 4. Tithe map of 1840
- 5. OS map of 1900

Plates

Cover. Aerial photo of site shortly after construction (courtesy of Anglesey Aluminium)

- 1. Aerial view showing north end of site (courtesy of Anglesey Aluminium)
- 2. Aerial view showing the construction of Anglesey Aluminium (courtesy of Anglesey Aluminium)
- 3. View from Trefignath Burial Chamber
- 4. View from Ty Mawr standing stone

RENEWABLE ENERGY PLANT, ANGLESEY ALUMINIUM, HOLYHEAD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT (G2088)

1. INTRODUCTION

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT) has been asked by Parsons Brinckerhoff Ltd on behalf of their clients to carry out an archaeological assessment at Anglesey Aluminium, Holyhead., in connection with a proposed renewable energy plant in the grounds of the present works. The study area, (centred on OS NGR SH 267811) is located to the north and east of the works, and bounded on the east side by the present A5 road (shown on fig 1).

2. DESIGN BRIEF AND SPECIFICATION

A detailed brief was not produced for this desk-based assessment but the design follows a format which conforms to the guidelines specified in *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-based Assessment* (Institute of Field Archaeologists, 1994, rev. 2001 and 2008). The project will be monitored by Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service (GAPS) on behalf of the Local Planning Authority.

A desk-based assessment is defined as 'a programme of assessment of the known or potential archaeological resource within a specified area or site on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater. It consists of a collation of existing written, graphic, photographic and electronic information in order to identify the likely character, extent, quality and worth of the known or potential archaeological resource in a local, regional, national or international context as appropriate' (Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-based Assessment, IFA 2008, 2).

The aims of the assessment are:

- to identify and record the cultural heritage within the defined study area;
- to evaluate the importance of what has been identified;
- to recommend ways in which impact upon the cultural heritage can be avoided or minimised.

To comply fully with the aims expressed above it can be necessary to undertake a programme of Field Evaluation following the Desktop study and Field Visit. This is because some sites cannot be assessed by desktop or field visit alone, and additional fieldwork is therefore required. This typically takes the form of geophysical survey or trial excavation, although measured survey is also a possible option. A full programme of assessment and evaluation may therefore consist of:

- Desktop study
- Field walkover
- Initial report
- Field evaluation
- Draft report
- Final report

This phase of the project concerns the first three phases only, and recommendations will be made for any field evaluation required.

3. METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

3.1 Desk top study

The desktop study comprised the consultation of maps, documents, computer records, written records and reference works that form part of the Historic Environment Record (HER), located at Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT), Bangor. The HER includes Cadw's information on listed buildings, and also holds copies of documents from the Penrhos Collection in the Bangor University Archives. The archives held by the Anglesey Record Office, Llangefni were consulted, particularly for information from the relevant tithe maps. Published and unpublished papers on the area and on relevant aspects of archaeology and history were consulted to gain a broader understanding of the study area. These included earlier archaeological assessments undertaken in advance of the sewage treatment works and in advance of development west of the railway (GAT Reports ????).

Our understanding of the archaeology of the area has been considerably increased as a result of major excavations undertaken during the construction of the A55 in 1999 and during excavations undertaken on the proposed business park in 2007.¹

3.2 Field Search

A field visit was undertaken on 17 June, when the proposed site was visited.

3.3 Report

The available information was synthesised to give a summary of the archaeological and historic background and of the assessment and recommendations, as set out below. The separate features, their evaluation and recommendations are listed separately, and a summary of the overall assessment of the area is given at the end.

The criteria used for assessing the value of features was based upon those used by the Secretary of State for Wales when considering sites for protection as scheduled ancient monuments, as set out in the Welsh Office circular 60/96.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

4.1 Topographic description

The study area is situated on Holy Island (in Welsh, Ynys Cybi), off the western coast of Anglesey, to which currently the island is joined by the Stanley Embankment, and also by the bridge at Four Mile Bridge (Pont Rhyd y Bont). Holyhead (Caer Gybi) is the principle town on Holy Island, and the proposed development lies to the south-east of the town. The study area lies to the north and east of the aluminium works, and is bounded by the works to the south and west and the current A5 road to the north and east (see fig. 1 for location). It lies some 5m above OD, and some 0.5Km from Penrhos Beach, an indented sandy bay, where prehistoric flints have been found. To the south of the works the ground rises to a ridge approximately 10m above OD, where the Neolithic chamber of Trefignath is located.

Geologically Anglesey is composed largely of Pre-Cambrian rocks, most notably the Mona Complex. These bedded rocks have undergone intense pressures leaving them deformed and folded, and volcanic events have resulted in their interbedding with lavas, ashes and tuffs. These make up much of the bedrock of Holy Island.

The bedrock under the study area is composed of pale green chlorite schists, part of the New Harbour Group of the Mona Complex. Boulder clay formerly overlay this, though this was largely removed during construction of the site. The soils would have been largely brown earths of the Rocky Gaerwen and Trisant types, the latter capable of carrying crops or pasture, and were frequently chosen for

¹ Cuttler, Davidson and Hughes, forthcoming; Kenney 2007.

settlement in the prehistoric period. The rocky Gaerwen soils are shallow with frequent rock outcrops, and farms and fields tend to be smaller on these soils than on deeper soils.

Like much of Holy Island, the topography of the study area and its environs is characterized by northeast to south-west aligned rocky ridges within intervening boggy hollows, and this landscape can still be seen south of the railway. The study area was landscaped during the construction of the aluminium works in 1969-70, when the A5 road to Holyhead was also realigned to its present route.

4.2 Archaeological and historical background

This section will examine the archaeological and historical development of the north part of Holy Island in order to place the study area in its wider context. Reference will be made to the Historic Environment Register (HER) held by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust. Sites within the HER are referred to by their primary reference number (PRN). The location of HER sites in the immediate vicinity of the study area is shown in fig. 1.

4.2.1 Prehistoric

Holy Island (Ynys Cybi) has a high density of prehistoric sites, and our understanding of the nature of these has been improved by recent excavations (see 3.1 above). Our knowledge of Neolithic occupation was previously limited to the two burial chambers at Trefignath and Trearddur (PRN 2500 and 2504), but there is now also evidence for Early Neolithic settlement in the form of a rectangular post-built structure west of Trefignath burial chamber, and other remains some 500m north again.² Also in the vicinity were found two Neolithic polished stone axes, whilst four more are known to have been found in the northern part of Holy Island. Two of the latter were from the Graiglwyd axe factory. above Penmaenmawr, found when excavating the pit for a new turntable at the locomotive sheds near Kingsland in 1926 (PRN 2507, SH 2504 8165), and one axe of unspecified stone found at Penllech Nest (PRN 2506, SH 251 816).³ The evidence suggests a relatively high density of Neolithic sites, the majority on slightly higher ground to the south, though this distribution is skewed by the location of intensive field work south of the railway.

Monuments of the Early Bronze Age are similarly densely distributed within the area. Two Bronze Age barrows were prominently situated on top of Holyhead Mountain (PRN 1760, SH 219 829), though little can be seen of them now. There are others at Garn (PRN 3804, SH 21408276) and Gorsedd Gwlwm (PRN 3798, SH 227 816), and a cemetery of three barrows at Porth Dafarch (PRN 1772-6, SH 234 801). A barrow was 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 (PRN 2009, SH 2664 7888), and a rare pairing of two stones just over 3m apart, to the west at Plas Meilw (PRN 2748, SH 227 809). Between the Ty Mawr barrow and the Ty Mawr standing stone a cemetery of Bronze Age cists, a ring ditch and an enclosure were discovered, revealing a complex ritual landscape.⁵

4.2.2 Iron Age and Roman

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 (PRN 1760, SH 219 829). A much smaller promontory fort, Dinas on the south coast of Holy Island (PRN 807, 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 close to South Stack are a group of huts (PRN 1755, SH 211 820) and a similar hut group overlie the Bronze Age barrows at Porth Dafarch (PRN 2754, SH 234 801). The excavations at Ty Mawr immediately adjacent to the

³ Lynch 1991, p. 62.

² Kenney 2007, p 74

⁴ Lynch, 1991, p. 152, p. 155. ⁵ Kenney 2007, 74-5.

study area on the opposite side of the railway, revealed settlements of round houses dating from the late prehistoric through the Roman period.⁶

4.2.3 Roman to medieval

A Roman fort was constructed at Holyhead towards the end of the third century or later, as a naval base against Irish raiders. The fort is strategically located on the Irish seaboard, having good harbour facilities sheltered from the prevailing wind, and is the closest mainland harbour to Dublin. One side of the fort lay open to the harbour. A watch-tower was built to compliment the fort on top of the adjacent mountain. A Roman coin hoard was found in the area in 1710, the exact location not known. The coins were buried in a brass vessel, and all dated to the fourth century (PRN 2503, SH 26 81). To the north of the aluminium works, on the shore of Penrhos Beach, Stanley (1868) recorded a 'Danish fort'. The site (PRN 2509) is now under the main road, and all traces of it have been destroyed, so it is not known whether the fort was Iron Age, Roman or actually attributable to the Vikings.

Holy Island was of considerable importance in the early Christian period. The Life of St Cybi (written c1200) records that the Roman fortress of Caer Gybi was conveyed to 'God and St Cybi' by King Maelgwn in the 6th century. Within the fort enclosure lie two churches; the smaller is called *Capel y* Bedd or Eglwys y Bedd, a name used at least since the 16th century (Owen 1890, 330). It was rebuilt in the 14th century, but earlier footings are visible below the west wall (Gruffydd 1992, 76-7). It was was also traditionally known as Capel Llan y Gwyddyl, emphasizing an Irish connection, and in 18thcentury sources is often associated, not with Cybi, but with the grave of Sirigi, the Irish leader slain by Maelgwn's father, Cadwallon. A stone coffin was discovered when the chancel was demolished and other stone-lined graves were found just outside the walls of the fort. 10 These could certainly be interpreted as extended cist inhumations, a type of grave typical of the 6th to 7th century AD, and the stone coffin under the chancel might be compared to primary graves found at similar ecclesiastical sites. 11 The earliest reference to the church is when Holyhead was Vikings in 961. 12 A silver penny of King Edward the Martyr dated 975-8 was found inside the fort by the north-west corner during works in 1952, 13 though whether this denotes activity by raiders or traders, or is a reflection of money collected or controlled by the church cannot be ascertained. 14 The present church of St Cybi was rebuilt c1480-1520 with the exception of the chancel, which, though partly rebuilt, retains elements of a 13thcentury church. By this time Holyhead had become collegiate with a provost and 12 canons forming the chapter. The patronage of the canonries was based in kindred groups descended from Llywarch ap Bran and Hwfa ap Cynddelw, who flourished in the first part of the 12th century. 15

There is an unusual concentration of possible and confirmed early Christian sites on the island. These include a cemetery of long-cist graves, dating to approximately the sixth to the eighth 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, was discovered during excavations for Parc Cybi, closer to the Aluminium works, and a third lies to the south-west at Tywyn y Capel, the site of an early medieval cemetery and medieval chapel on the shore of Trearddur Bay. ¹⁶

Medieval settlements have not been identified within the immediate vicinity, but are likely to have existed at Penrhos, Llanfawr and Tre'r Go. The latter was an important settlement, originating in medieval times. In the 16th century it was inhabited by the Gwyn family (also Gwynne or Wynn). John Gwyn of Tre'rgo was the High Sheriff of Anglesey in 1543 and 1555. The farm was joined to the

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⁶ Kenney 2007, 75-6

⁷ F. Lynch, 'The celtic Iron Age and the Roman occupation', in M. Richards, *An Atlas of Anglesey* (Llangefni, 1972), p 24.

⁸ Wade Evans 1944, 234-51

⁹ Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica X, 1783, 8; Pennant 1781, 277

¹⁰ Llwyd 1833, 205

¹¹ Edwards 2002, 230-5

¹² Jones 1952, 8

¹³ Dolley and Knight 1970, 80-1

¹⁴ Edwards and Lane 1992, 8; Redknap 2000, 61-4

¹⁵ Palmer 1886, 177-83; Carr 1982, 278

¹⁶ Edwards, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

Penrhos estate at the end of the 17th century, when John Owen inherited Tre'rgo from his grandmother, who had married an Owen. The house was converted to labourers' dwellings, and farm buildings, but was still occupied in 1947 (Williams 1947). The farm appears on the 1769 and 1817 estate maps in much the same location as today, but with the spelling Treyrgof, Tre'r Gof, or Tre'go, as well as Tre'rgo (township of the smith). The fields are somewhat random in layout in 1769, but by 1817 achieve the more formalised pattern that was to continue largely unchanged. Some of the fields become amalgamated after this date, and some boundaries. In 1845 there was a track running north to the east side of the farm, by 1853 this had moved to the west side, though it later moved back to the east. The western track can be seen as a cropmark or earthwork on the aerial photographs.

Penrhos estate was in the hands of the Owen family from at least the late 16th century, when the first house at Penrhos was built. The estate flourished following marriage with the Stanley family of Alderley in 1763 (see below), after which the family were the dominating influence in the area until the mid-20th century. The origins of Llanfawr are obscure, though it quickly becomes part of the Penrhos holding, and remains in the hands of the Stanley family even after the sale of Penrhos.

4.2.4 Modern period

The Modern period is characterised by the development of Holyhead as a point of departure for Ireland and by the developments of land transport links, a number of which pass near the study area, to give access to the harbour.¹⁷

The use of the harbour at Holyhead is already apparent in the reign of Elizabeth I, when it became the departure point for the Royal Mail to Ireland. During the Commonwealth, the town was garrisoned, and regular packet boats sailed to Ireland. The passage of the Act of Union with Ireland in 1800-01 made Holyhead the principal port for Ireland, which in turn led to clamour from Irish MPs now obliged to sit in Westminster, about the state of the roads. The road from the Menai ferries to Holyhead had been turnpiked in 1765 and much improved, ¹⁸ but transport was still difficult until Telford built the new London to Holyhead road (the A5). The Stanley Embankment carries the road over the Afon Lasinwen, the tidal strait between Holy Island and Anglesey, replacing the ferries and fords. The embankment was designed by Thomas Telford, and built by Dargan, who subsequently made his name as the greatest of the railway contractors in Ireland. Work started in 1822 and it was opened in 1823, the final stage in the link between London and Holyhead. ¹⁹ In addition John Rennie designed a new harbour at Holyhead to accompany the road, whilst later in the century the longest breakwater in the country was built to protect he outer harbour to designs by James Meadows Rendel.

In 1848 the Chester and Holyhead Railway was opened on an alignment which now forms the south-western boundary of the study area. The engineer was Robert Stephenson. The railway subsequently became part of the London and North Western Railway and its successors, the London Midland and Scottish and British Railways.

These developments were facilitated by the Stanley family of Penrhos, owners of most of the land within which the proposed developments falls, as well as much land elsewhere in Holyhead and in Anglesey. Most of the land in the study area was owned by the old Penrhos family, who stabilised their surname to Owen in the early 16th century. The original house at Penrhos was said to have been built during the reign of Henry VIII. In 1763 Margaret Owen, the heiress to Hugh Owen, married John Stanley and the Penrhos Estate passed to the Stanleys of Alderley. WO Stanley was a noted antiquarian, and the Penrhos estate maps provide valuable historical evidence. In the 19th century the population of Holyhead grew significantly, in part to accommodate the workforce who worked on the construction of the inner harbour, the breakwater and the railway. Urban development, however, still lay well to the west of Penrhos, and the study area was located within fields and parkland largely associated with the estate. The house at Penrhos was heavily vandalised during war requisition, and sold by the Stanley family in 1946. It was never occupied again, and allowed to fall into complete ruin.

¹⁷ D. Lloyd Hughes and D.M. Williams, *Holyhead: The Story of a Port* (privately published, 1981), *passim*.

¹⁸ H. Ramage, *Portrait of an Island* (Llangefni, 1987), p. 38.

¹⁹ Quatermaine, Trinder and Turner, 2003

²⁰ Ramage 1972, 1987, Richards 1940

A large number of defensive works were constructed in 1940-41 to resist the invasion of Britain. Pillboxes were an important component of these defences, and more than 18,000 were built during 1940 (Brown *et al* 1995). In the Second World War Holyhead was strategically important, as it was on the route both to Ireland and to the port of Liverpool. Pillboxes, arranged in a rough line across the island, defended the middle of Holy Island and the Inland Sea, preventing enemy troop movement on Holy Island and defending the approaches to Holyhead. The line starts at the south-western end at Trearddur Bay. Behind the Trearddur Bay Hotel (SH 2519 7931) are two circular-plan pillboxes (grade II listed, 20079). Another is set in the grounds of Trearddur House (SH 2546 7934, grade II listed, 20080). Closer to the study area one (SH 2721 8029) is situated to cover the south side of the Stanley Embankment, and the other (SH 2707 7991, PRN 7213) is a little further south, overlooking the Inland Sea. ²¹

Development within the later 20th century was related to the growth of the harbour both as a ferry terminal and as a container port, and to the establishment of the Anglesey Aluminium works, built between 1969 and 1970. This 125,000 tonne per annum smelter is one of the largest suppliers of aluminium in the UK, and the works now dominate the immediate landscape. The works are also linked by an underground conveyor to a jetty in the harbour, via a 132kv power line to the power station at Wylfa, and with Llyn Alaw for a water supply. In order to construct the works the line of the A5 (Telford's Holyhead road) was re-aligned to a curving route around the works, cutting through the former grounds of Penrhos house. Remains of the original route of Telford's road can still be seen to the north and south of the works. The former grounds around Penrhos house were converted into a country park for public access.

5. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE STUDY AREA

5.1 Statutory designations

There are no statutory designated sites within the study area. There are a number of scheduled ancient monuments within the north part of Holy Island (see fig 2), of which two are inter-visible with the proposed plant, and the impact upon these is discussed in 6.2 below. There are several listed buildings north of the proposed plant within the complex which makes up the Penrhos home farm (shown on fig 1). These are largely shielded from the site by trees and separated from it by the present A5 road. There will be no direct impact upon any scheduled ancient monument or upon any listed building.

5.2 The archaeology of the proposed development area

The tithe map of Holyhead parish (fig. 4), compiled in 1840 by William Williams, a local surveyor, shows the study area was then part of four farms, namely Penrhos home farm, Tre'r Gof, Penrhos Bradwen and Glanygors. Interestingly, despite the dominance of the Stanley family, the last two were in different ownership. Lord Newborough of Glynllifon owned Glan y Gors, and the Rev'd John Owen Jones owned Penrhos Bradwen. The farmhouses and farm buildings of Penrhos Bradwen and Glan y Gors were demolished to allow construction of the Aluminium works in 1969. The field names are given in the schedule which accompanies the tithe map, but none are indicative of the presence of relict archaeological sites. Earlier estate maps for Penrhos and Tre'r Gof (fig 3) show the field layout was generally established by 1769, though numerous fields were amalgamated over the years.

No relict archaeology and no archaeological finds are recorded within the boundary of the study area. The Historic Environment Record (HER) locates a Roman coin hoard (PRN 2503) just west of the area, but the exact location of the original find is not known. The desk-based study has identified the location of Penrhos Bradwen and Glan y Gors farmsteads as formerly lying on the boundary of the area, but these were completely removed during the construction of the works. The line of Telford's former Holyhead road (PRN 16081) ran through the site, and traces are visible at the north-west end of the grounds of Anglesey Aluminium (site 19 on fig. 1) but this lies outside the area of the proposed new plant.

The proposed location of the new renewable energy plant lies north-east of the existing works, in an area which was cleared as part of the original site works in 1969-70. At that time all top soil, sub soil

²¹ Harding 2001

and glacial till was removed, and the rock surface was leveled to create a construction platform in anticipation of expansion of the works. The expansion of the works did not take place, and the area has been used for storage since its creation. There is no potential for buried archaeology on the site.

6. IMPACT OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

6.1 Direct impact

There will be no direct impact upon any heritage assets.

6.2 Indirect impact

The final layout and form of the proposed renewable energy plant has yet to be clearly defined. The proposals will, however, result in substantial new buildings and an additional new chimney, slightly shorter in height than the existing one. These new works will be visible from three Scheduled Ancient Monuments, namely Trefignath Burial Chamber (SAM No. A11; PRN 2504) to the south-west, Ty Mawr Standing Stone (SAM No. A12; PRN 2501) to the west, and Holyhead hillfort and Roman signal station on the top of Holyhead Mountain further to the west (SAM No. A19; PRN 1760).

The burial chamber is the closest monument (approximately 1km from the proposed plant). The new plant will be visible from the chamber, and its construction will result in increased visual intrusion into views from the monument. However, the proposed plant lies on the far side of the existing works from the burial chamber, and views north and east from the chamber, which lies above and overlooks the works, are already severely compromised by the A55, railway and existing works. This reduces the visual impact of the proposed plant, though it is important that the final design takes into account the impact upon the views from this site.

The standing stone lies 1.4km west of the proposed plant. However, as with the burial chamber, the A55, railway and existing works all lie between the stone and the proposed plant, and the additional impact will be minor.

The fort on Holyhead mountain is considerably more distant (approximately 5km), though the present works are easily visible from the summit plateau, and the proposed plant will certainly be clearly visible also. Here, though, because of the increased distance, the impact will be less, and as with views from the burial chamber, the impact will be lessened by the presence of the existing works.

With views from all these sites the most dominating new feature on the skyline will be the additional chimney, and it will be necessary to taken into account the changes to the skyline from each of these sites so that the best arrangement is found.

7. CONCLUSIONS

There is a high density of heritage sites within the northern part of Holy Island, denoting near continuous occupation from at least 4,500 BC to the present. Recent archaeological excavations in the area have revealed well-preserved archaeological sites of prehistoric and Roman date, and upstanding monuments and buildings of historical significance survive from late prehistoric to modern times.

The earliest archive record of the proposed development area shows it to have been agricultural land, divided between four farms, with part of it forming the home farm of Penrhos estate. In 1969-70 the present aluminium works were built, and this necessitated the removal of all existing farm houses, farm buildings and field boundaries from the study area. The leveling of the site removed the potential for the survival of any archaeology within the study area.

There will be indirect impact upon the heritage environment by visual intrusion into views from three scheduled ancient monuments, though it is recognized that these views are already compromised by the existing works.

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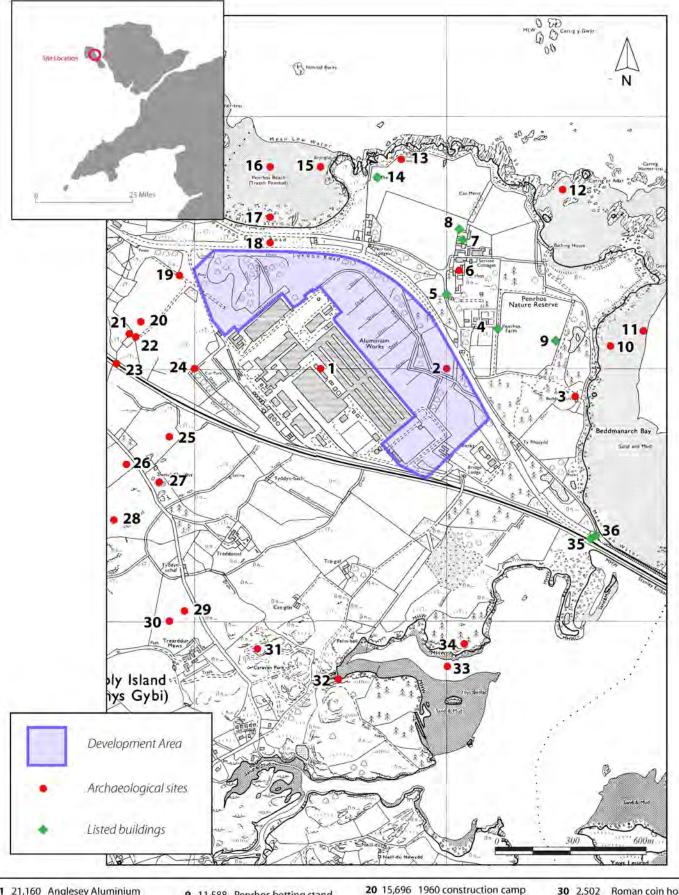
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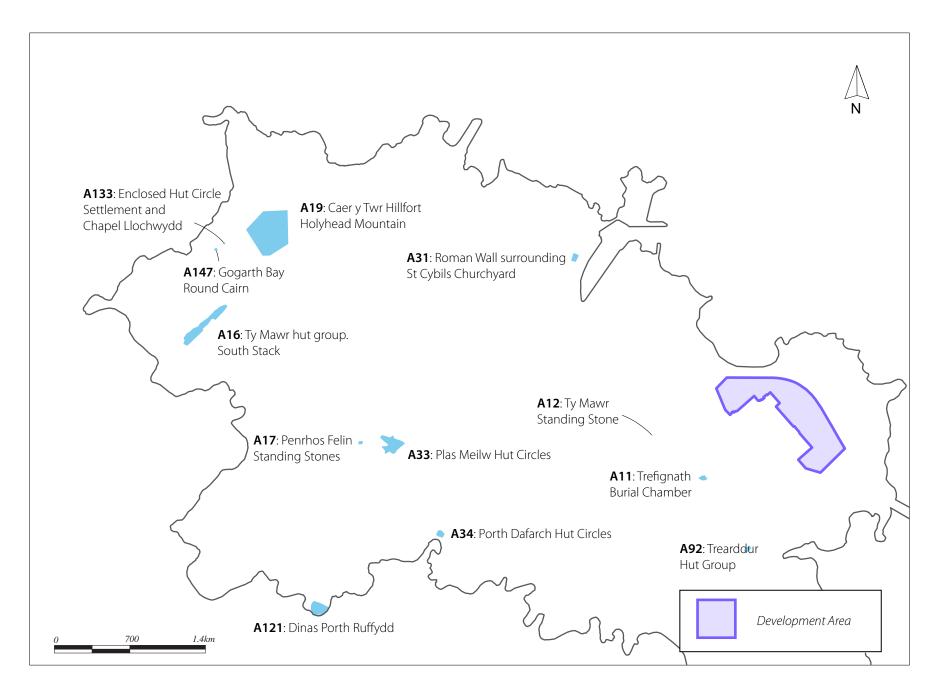


Figure 2. Areas of Scheduled Ancient Monuments and development location



Figure 3a. Tre'r Gos (UWB Penrhos II 772 dated 1769)

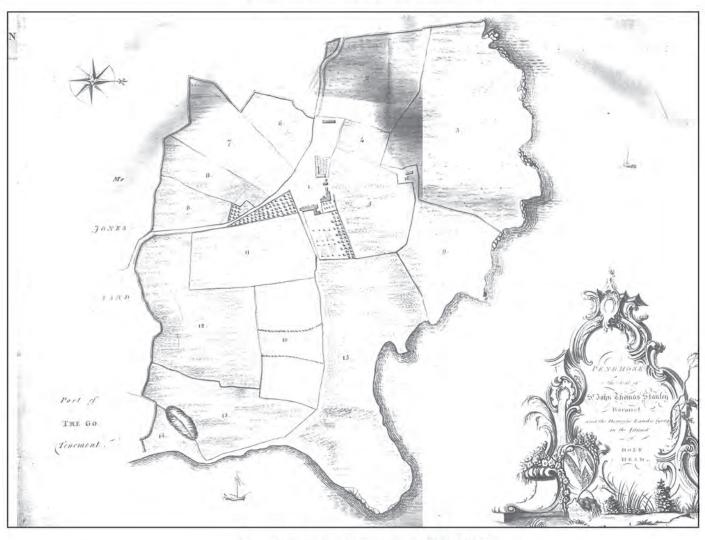


Figure 3b. Penrhos (UWB Penrhos II 772 dated 1769)

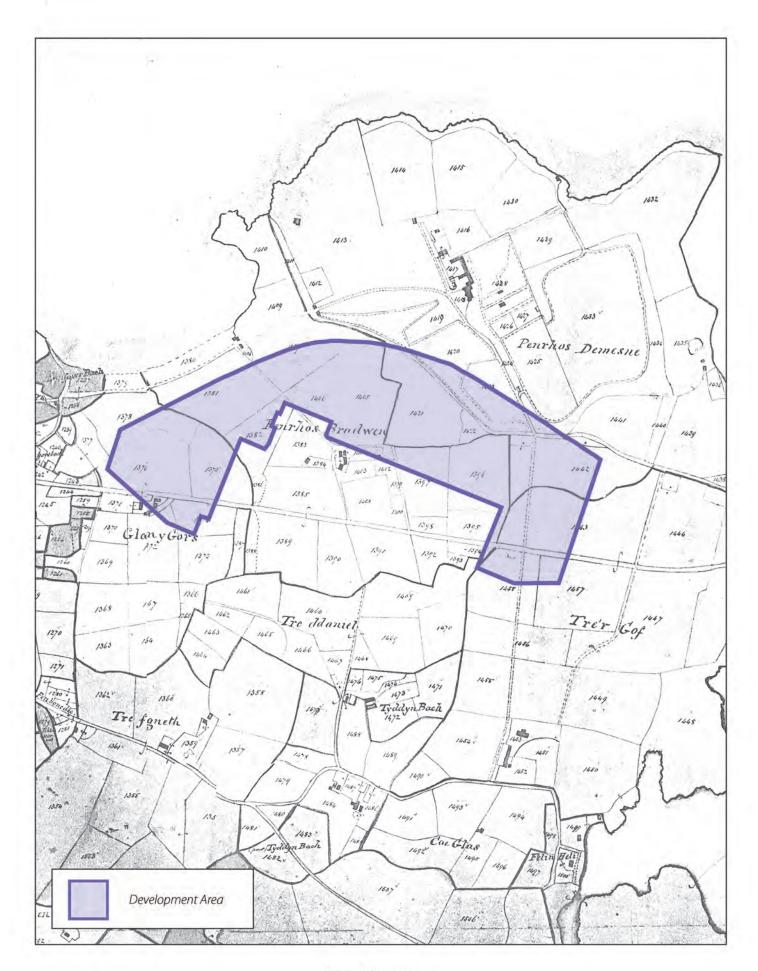


Figure 4. Tithe Map

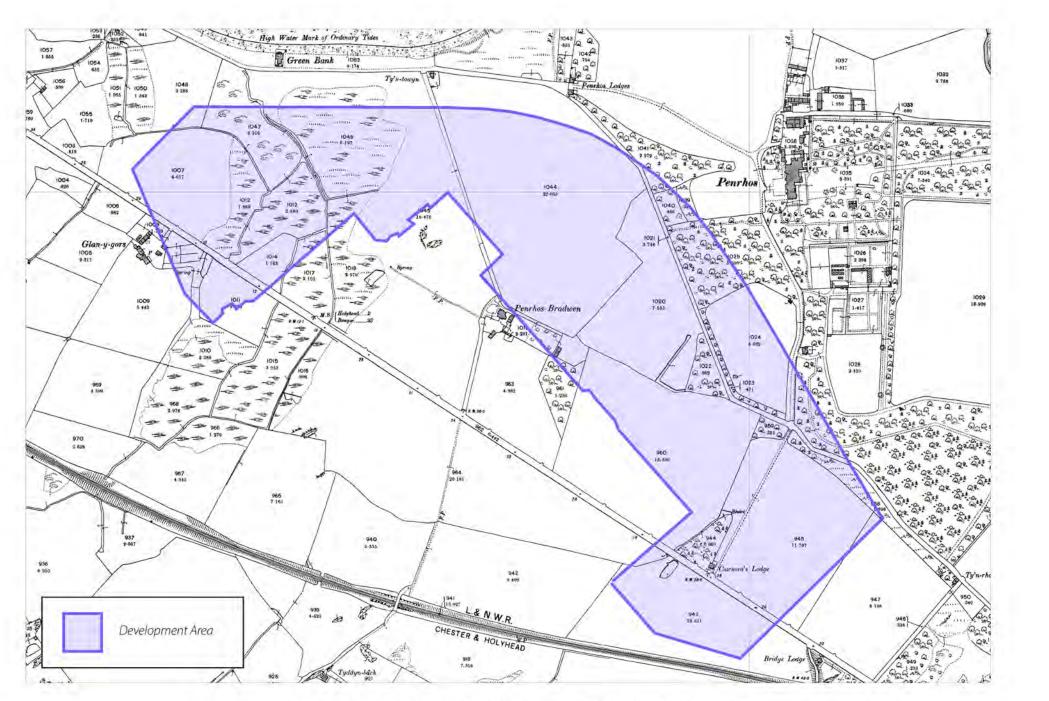


Figure 5. Ordnance Survey Second Edition County Series. X.2-8 & XI.10-12. 1900 (Scale 1:25,000)



Plate 1. Aerial view showing north end of the site. (Courtesy of Anglesey Aluminium)



Plate 2. Aerial view showing the construction of Anglesey Aluminium. (Courtesy of Anglesey Aluminium)



Plate 3. View from Trefignath Burial Chamber



Plate 4. View from Ty Mawr standing stone



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GWYNEDD ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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