

Castell Malgwyn Tinplate Works

Introduction

In March 2006, staff from the Survey Branch of RCAHMW carried out survey and analysis of the Castell Malgwyn Tinplate works (SN 214436), situated 400m south-west of Llechryd in the Cilgerran community of Pembrokeshire (Fig 1). The works operated for some 30 years and are thought to have been established in 1771 by the Penygored Company. In 1791, they were purchased by Sir Benjamin Hammet, a wealthy entrepreneur from Taunton in Somerset and a banker in the City of London, who set about creating an estate here, which overlooked the works. The estate was centred upon a house (NPRN: 21729) (the current hotel) surrounding which gardens and pleasure grounds were established, the picturesque walks of which can still be followed along the contrasting valleys of the Teifi and Morgenau (NPRN: 265113 & 265251). These are of some significance as they represent the work of one of the few Welsh professional landscapers of the period, Charles Price of Llechryd (Cadw Register of Parks and Gardens: PGW (Dy) 32 (PEM)).

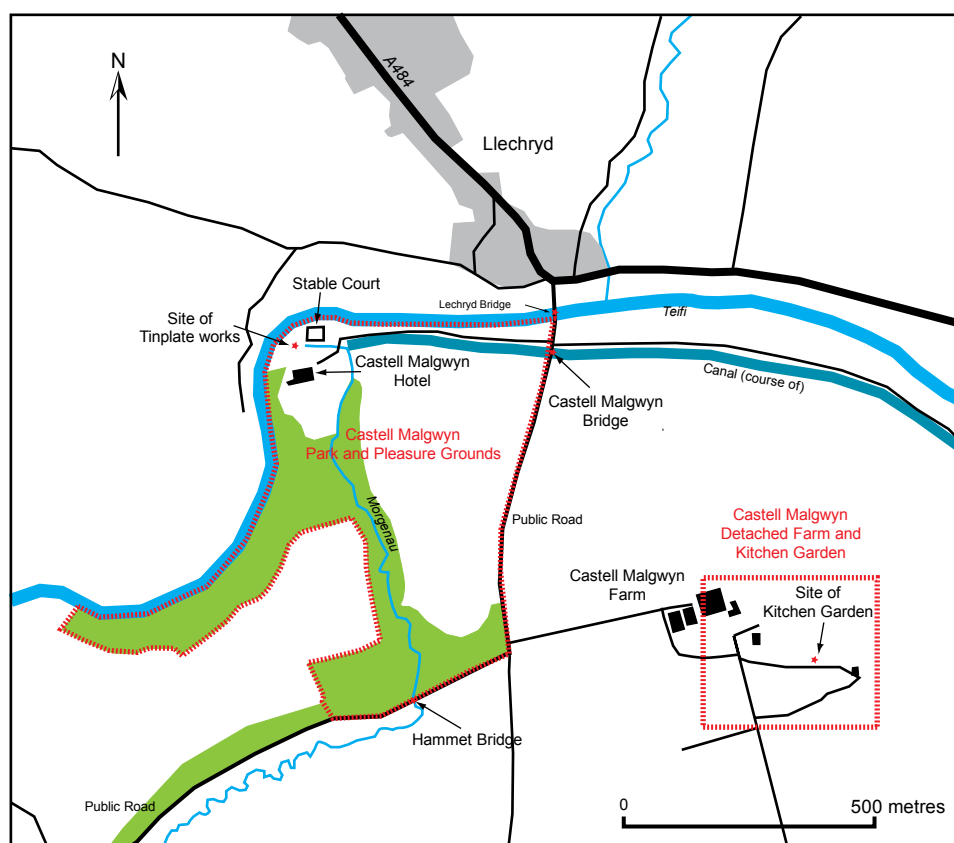


Figure 1:
Location Plan
showing the Castell
Malgwyn estate

The establishment of the estate required the diversion of the public road between Llechryd and Cilgerran, which originally passed in front of the house. In 1798 Sir Benjamin was granted permission to have a section of this road closed, and at his own expense, to build a new section skirting the estate grounds. This new road was opened in 1800 and required the construction of two new bridges. The 'Castle Malgwyn Bridge' (NPRN: 24247), is situated just south of the main Llechryd bridge across the Teifi, at the entrance gates to the hotel. This crossed the canal which brought water to power the tinplate works, and has two cast iron keystones on either side of the arch, bearing Sir Benjamin's crest of a castle and

crossed cannons, together with a construction date of 1799. The second bridge, known as 'Hammet Bridge' (NPRN: 23871), lies at the southern end of the estate and crosses the Morgenau. Here a commemorative slab details its opening on the 21st August 1800.

In addition to the main house and grounds, the estate also included a detached farm and kitchen garden, some 1.5 km to the south-east of the house (NPRN: 265250 & 21730). This survives in a much altered state; although its unusual formal layout is clearly shown on an 1820 estate plan (NLW: Cilgwn 73).

The Tinsplate Works

Tinsplate was first manufactured in Britain at Pontypool, with published notices of 1703 declaring the Hanbury's enterprise as 'The Pontypool Iron and Tinsplate Company' (Jenkins 1995, 24). Wales soon became a focal point for the industry and of the 16 tinsplate works in Britain at the beginning of the 19th century, 11 were in Wales, producing between them some 4,000 tons of tinsplate. Of these Castell Malgwyn was noted as being one of the largest in the 'Kingdom', second only to the works at Melingriffith in Glamorgan (NLW: MS 1760A). Indeed, when the Rev Richard Warner visited the site in 1798, he noted the contrasting scene of what he called a 'fairy region' to the '...immense works of Sir Benjamin Hammet, where all is bustle, noise and business' (1800, 338).

The exact date of establishment of the works at Castell Malgwyn is unclear, one source credits its establishment to Cornish Manufacturers in 1764-70 (Cadw: Register of Parks and Gardens; PGW (Dy)32(PEM)). Perhaps more reliable however, is Walter Davies account, following his visit to the works in c1802, where he notes that they were first established in 1771 by the Penygored Company, based upon the following inscription engraved on a now lost stone tablet at the site (NLW: MS 1760A):

Penygored Company

James Walker, Walter Lloyd, William Dormer, Griff. Howel,

and Conductors

William Gines [?], Ebenezer Atkinson,

Joseph Nickolls Planner.

Richard Bowen, and Richard Bowen Junr. Architects,

William Jones and Isaac Bates Millwrights,

Thomas Philips, Assistant,

Silvanus Nugent, Clerk
First stone laid in this building was by R.B. Sep.r 6. 1771.

Walter Lloyd was local to the area, from Coedmore near Llechryd in Cardigan and there is a strong possibility that he was directly involved in the ironworks at Coedmore Forge, situated on the opposite side of the river to the tinsplate works and which closed around 1750. This connection would provide one of the main explanations as to why the tinsplate works were specifically established here. Furthermore the name, Penygored, head of the weir, is a direct reference to the structure which crosses the river behind the stable block, currently interpreted as a series of salmon traps, but probably originally a weir and presumably the limit of the tidal river (Fig 2; NLW: Castell Malgwyn Brochure). The other members of the

Penygored Company were from further a field; James Walker was from Spitalfields in Middlesex, William Dermer was from Silverstreet near Woodstreet in London and Griffith Howell was from Thames Street in London (NLW Noyadd Trefawr MSS 1 36 1806).

The establishment of the works by the Penygored company in 1771 also ties in with a parliamentary act of 1772, giving permission for the construction of a canal to carry water from the Teifi to power the works, which at this point were said to be 'nearly perfected'. Following the Penygored Company, the works were purchased by Holiday and Daniel and subsequently in 1791 by Sir Benjamin Hammet, whose son John took ownership following his father's death in 1802 (NLW: MS 1760A). By the time of Fenton's visit to Castle Malgwyn in 1810 the works had been 'taken down' (1903, 274). To what extent the complex was dismantled is unclear, as both an 1820 map of the Castle Malgwyn Estate and the 1844 tithe map of Cilgerran show a series of buildings situated in the area where the 1844-45 stable court, built by Abel Lewes Gower now stands (NLW: Cilgwn 73 & Tithe). Fenton adds that by the removal of the works '*..the banks of this beautiful river, have reasserted their original character*' (Fenton 1903, 274) and thus it seems likely, that whilst some of the buildings may have remained, much of the other infrastructure was dismantled or in-filled soon after closure.

Walter Davies noted that the Castell Malgwyn tinplate works were:

'Situated in a good country for charcoal, which was the reason for establishing the works here. Provisions are good and plentiful in the surrounding Country. And also cheaper than in most parts of Wales, at least South Wales, and of course, wages not high' (NLW: MS 1760A)

Aside from this and the local knowledge mentioned earlier, the river Teifi, also played a crucial factor in the works location. The Teifi was used both to power the works and to transport products to and from the major seaport at Cardigan at the mouth of the river. As Fenton noted on his tour, the river is tidal at this point and would thus have made the navigation of the rocky stretches of the river further downstream much easier (1911, 275).

Today very little survives of the Castell Malgwyn works, with the core of the complex situated adjacent to the Teifi, to the north of the hotel, in the area around the stable court (Fig 2). This area is defined by a 4m high, slab-built **retaining wall (1)** which runs south-west for some 140m, from **bridge 1**, to a pair of **furnaces** (Fig 3). The only marked feature along this wall is a 15m stretch of near vertical rock face, at the northern end of which there is a return in the retaining wall leading to a rectangular area, **a**, 3.2m by 1.8m, which has a rectangular, 0.27m square opening with slab lintel in its back wall. The function of this feature is unclear.

Despite the lack of surviving structural evidence, it is possible to build a relatively accurate picture of how the works may have looked and operated, based on a number of contemporary accounts. Whilst the art of manufacturing tinned plate has undergone many changes since it was first practiced in the Bavarian region of Europe during the 14th century, the basic procedure of flattening an iron (or later steel) base into sheet form, following which a coating



Figure 3:
*Retaining Wall
(1) which defines
the eastern
boundary of the
works (RCAHMMW:
2006_113_001)*

of tin is applied, has remained the same. In essence the Castell Malgwyn works are likely to have been divided into two main departments, the mill and the tin-house, and it is here that the majority of the 350 employees recorded in 1802 would have worked (NLW: MS1760A). The mill would have comprised of the furnace and rolling machinery, where iron bars were heated and converted to sheet form via a series of rolling mills powered from water off the Teifi, which was brought to the works via the canal. Following this, the 'backplate' or untinned sheets were 'pickled', 'annealed' and then cold rolled. Once this was complete the sheets would be ready for an application of tin in the tin-house. Other buildings such as stores for raw materials, warehouses and offices would also have been located on the site and some 200m further downstream, is a quay where the barges would have docked.

In his account of Castell Malgwyn, Walter Davies writes that pig iron was brought to the works from Carmarthen, Glamorgan and Monmouthshire, where it was subsequently forged into a more malleable wrought/bar iron (NLW: MS1760A). Charcoal would have been used to fuel this process, with the works ideally situated to exploit an apparently abundant local supply. It is interesting to note that whilst coke was also being used at this time and was seen as being particularly beneficial to the iron industry, it was not so to the tinplate industry, as iron produced in a coke smelting furnace had a high sulphur content, which in the early days adversely affected the quality of the finished tinplate. Charcoal was thus an essential fuel which reduced the level of the sulphur, with the term 'charcoal' tinplate often used to distinguish between the best quality tinplate from the 'coke' or standard quality tinplate (Donovan 1805; Jenkins 1995, 66, 69).

There were two forges documented at the Castell Malgwyn works, and at this period two different types were in use. The 'finery' and 'chafery', comprised open hearths, fuelled by charcoal with bellows behind. Here, the pig iron would first be placed behind the fire of

the 'Finery' where it softened to form a lump, after which it was beaten into a thick short square. It was then put in the 'Chafery' where it was heated until red hot and subsequently hammered into bars. The downside to this process was that the iron, due to its direct contact with the furnace fuel, become contaminated through its absorption of impurities from within the charcoal and thus was not of a quality ideally suited to the needs of the tinsplate workers. Thus by the end of the 18th century the 'reverberatory furnace' was increasingly used, which separated the fuel from the iron and thus increasingly meant that mineral fuel could be used in place of the more expensive charcoal (Jenkins 1995, 67). There was obviously no scope in switching from charcoal to coal at Castell Malgwyn as the costs involved in importing coal to the site would have been prohibitive. Davies does note that coal was brought in from Neath, Swansea and Llanelli, but in what quantity and for exactly what use is unclear (NLW: MS1760A). The increasing use of coal in tinsplate production is however likely to have been the primary reason for the demise of the works at Castell Malgwyn during a period when the industry was flourishing, with new works established next to the coal fields of South Wales, which become a world centre of the Industry.

Davies notes that there were three rolling mills at Castell Malgwyn, which converted the bars of wrought iron into sheet form. Up until the 17th century 'helves' or tilt hammers, relying on water as their power source, were the only available means of obtaining a relatively flat and thin sheet of iron, but inevitably produced sheets of uneven thickness and poor surface quality. Such a problem was overcome by passing the heated iron bars through a pair of polished cast iron rollers which improved the flatness of the sheets and reduced production costs by both speeding up the manufacturing process and improving the surface quality of the product (Jenkins 1995, 76). This technique was initiated in Britain by the Hanbury family at their Pontypool works between 1680 and 1720 and whilst at first it was just for the production of 'backplate', it was not long before the rolling method was used for tinsplate manufacture, again first introduced at the Pontypool works. Edward LLwyd describes the process at Pontypool in 1697 and it seems likely that the process carried out at Castell Malgwyn would have been similar:

'They cut their iron bars into pieces about two feet long and, heating them glowing hot, place them between these rollers, not across, but their ends lying the same way as the ends of the rollers. The rollers (moved with water power) draw out these bars to such thin plates that their breadth (about 4 inches) becomes their length, being extended to about four feet. What was previously the length of the plate (two feet) becomes the breadth' (Edwards 1995, 13, Jenkins 1995, 24 & 80).

In essence, the iron was withdrawn from the furnace using a pair of tongs and was then 'boshed' in cold water to remove scale and dirt, before being passed through the rollers. The gap between the rollers was adjusted by the 'rollerman' to produce specific thicknesses, with the iron sheet passed through a number of times depending on the required gauge and length. Often the sheet was 'doubled', folded in two, and thus the end result was that sheets often adhered to each other and required separation before 'pickling', a job most often carried out by women employees (Jenkins 1995, 91-93).

Water was the earliest source of power utilised by the tinsplate manufacturers, and at Castell Malgwyn this was from the river Teifi and to a lesser extent the Morgenau. The difference in ground and water levels, combined with the fact that the river was still tidal at this point, would have made it difficult to control water flow and rate directly from the river at the point of the works. Thus, a canal was built, beyond the weir some 1.5km upstream, the construction of which and its use throughout the lifespan of the works was passed by an act of parliament in 1772. Although the term 'canal' is used here and in a number of documentary sources, there is no indication that the waterway was ever intended to be navigable and was for water-supply purposes only. The canal crossed an area known as 'The Great Meadow', which was part of the Glebe lands of the Rectory and Church of Manordeifi and is described as being 90 yards and 2 feet in length by 16 yards 2 feet 4 inches in width. The act stated that the owners of the tinsplate works were responsible for the maintenance and repair of the canal and in compensation for use of the churches land, would pay the Rector of Manordeifi £2 10s per year, which was made in two payments one on the 25th March and the other on the 29th September (NLW Noyadd Trefawr MSS 1 36 1806).



Figure 4:
Bridge 1
(RCAHMMW:
2006_102_001)

The canal is no longer in use and has been substantially infilled and ploughed over, however it is still possible to trace the majority of its course in earthwork form, with the line becoming much clearer at the point where the Morgenau once fed into it. Here two bridges, 13m apart, cross the canal. **Bridge 1**, is the larger of the two, some 18m wide and carries the drive up to the house. It is constructed of dressed stone slabs with the soldiers trimmed to an even height and edged with a projecting drip course (Fig 4). It appears to have been constructed in three parts, with three parallel arches each 6.1m wide with a span of 11m metres. It is not clear whether this represents later widening of, presumably the centre arch, or if it is a quirk of the construction technique. **Bridge 2** is downstream of the first and measures 3.2m wide with a span of 11m and is constructed of coursed stone slabs with a soldiered slab



Figure 5:
*Bridge 2 with the
 Stable Court in
 the background*
 (RCAHMW:
 2006_103_001)

arch of varying height (Fig 5). The exact construction date and explanation for why these two bridges are so close together is unclear. Both pre-date the 1844-45 stable block, as they are shown on the Estate plan of 1820. It would appear however, that one was built at the same time as the canal, as the act of parliament notes that the Penygored Company had 'erected a bridge over the same cut or canal for use and conveniency of themselves and their heirs and assigns'. As a section of public road between Llechryd and Cilgerran would have needed to cross the canal around this point, one of these bridges, most likely **bridge 1** probably served this purpose. It may be that the central span was the original parish road which was subsequently widened on either side when the structure was adapted to take the drive of the house. The 1820 estate plan also shows a direct link with **bridge 2** and what was originally a weir and possibly a second crossing point across the Teifi. It would appear that by this period **bridge 1** served as the main approach and drive to the house, whilst the track leading from **bridge 2** appears to serve the service quarters of the house (NLW: Cilgwn 73).

It is possible to trace what appears to be a terminal of the canal on the ground today some 35m beyond the stable block at **b**, although there is a suggestion on the 1820 estate map that it may have continued further, ending approximately in line with the rear of the house (ibid). From the south-west corner of the stable block, running up to **b**, the remains of a second **retaining wall (2)**, some 1.2m high, and constructed of large coursed blocks, mark the northern bank of the canal (Fig 6).



Figure 6:
*Remains of
retaining wall
2 (RCAHMW:
2006_108_001)*

Some 8m along **retaining wall (2)** from the corner of the stable block is a **culvert** 26m in length, which currently feeds water from the Morgenau into the Teifi. The intake and outtake consist of a double arched portal, most clearly seen on the outtake side (Fig 7).



Figure 7:
*Outtake of the
culvert (RCAHMW:
2006_109_002)*

This has stepped cutwaters extending 1m in front of the face of the portal and is constructed of coursed stone slabs, with segmental arches, 1.5m wide, the soldiers of which are formed of slabs on edge. The culvert is curved in plan and constructed of a brick vault on stone slab side walls. There are two possible functions for this structure, the most likely is that it

functioned as an outflow for the canal water and the other is that it served as a leat to convey water to one or more of the water wheels which powered the three rolling mills. Wheel design fell into three basic categories at this period, over-shot, under-shot and breast, each one suiting the physical conditions of locality and layout of a works best, with the breast type the most favoured by tinplate makers (Jenkins 1995, 84). It is difficult to ascertain the type used at Castell Malgwyn although considering the topography of the site, the breast design seems the most likely. It is however interesting to note that there is a change in level between the canal and the Teifi, which is apparent when listening to the sound of water flowing through the **culvert** which indicates there is a waterfall at some point along its course. The most likely explanation for this is that it was concerned with the removal of water from the site, as it would have been essential to have a difference in level between the water feeding the complex and that of the outflow area, due to the tidal nature of the Teifi, otherwise when the tide rose, water would have flowed back into the works.

Because the works have been comprehensively demolished with the site landscaped and in-part, built-over, the layout of the buildings can only be surmised. The re-heating furnaces and the rolling mills seem likely to have been at the upper end of the site, presumably where the stable block now stands. Further down may have been the pickling and annealing sheds. Here, once the iron had been through the rolling process, the 'backplate' would have been 'pickled' in a mild acidic solution to remove the film of iron oxide that had accumulated on the surface during rolling and thus make the tinning process more even, and affording more protection against corrosion (Edwards 1995, 14). At this period the process was carried out without any mechanical aids, with the pickler and his assistants using tongs, to immerse the individual sheets into a vat of solution for a given period, following which the plates were washed in water to remove the acid. This black pickling operation preceded the black annealing stage of the process during which sheets were subjected to a heat 'soaking' to remove all moisture, soften the backplate and release the stresses introduced during rolling. Here the sheets were stacked to a height of three or four feet on a shallow cast iron bed-plate and placed into a furnace. The reverberatory furnace was then sealed off and fired by coal to the temperature required, maintained at that temperature for a specific period and then allowed to cool, before being unloaded when cold. The sheets were then individually passed through three sets of cold rolling mills, which would improve the quality and properties of the sheet prior to tinning. Following the cold rolling the sheets were then annealed for a second time, although the furnace temperature and annealing time was shorter for this process than with the black annealing. After cooling, the sheets were subjected to a second pickling to release any traces of oxidation from the surface. The sheets were then ready for the application of a tin coating (Jenkins 1995, 101-108).

This final process would have occurred in the tin house, a separate building to the mill and which at Castell Malgwyn can be suggested to have been located at the southern end of the complex, near to the site of the **furnaces**. On a visit to the tinplate works in Carmarthon in 1804, Donovan notes that following pickling the plates were first 'scoured thoroughly with bran, so as to be quite bright and polished to enable the tin to adhere' (Donovan 1805). At the period the Castell Malgwyn works operated, before the advent of mechanised tin pots,

great reliance was placed on the judgement of the tinner to determine the correct thickness (weight) of the tin coating (Jenkins 1995, 15). The Rev. Richard Warner describes well the tinning process following his visit to the Ynysygerwen works near Neath in 1798:

‘The plates are plunged vertically into a pot containing melted tin, the surface of which is covered with pitch, suet or some fatty substance to prevent the calcinations of the tin, and to make the surface of the iron more inclined to receive its coating. By this immersion the tin immediately unites itself to the plates, and they are taken out completely tinned’ (Warner 1800).

Donovan adds that ‘the quantity of grease, prepared from linseed-oil and suet is constantly kept floating on the surface of the tin, and renewed as it evaporated off, which gives an excessively nauseous stench’ (1805).

Diderot’s account of the process in the mid 18th century is also similar, adding that the cauldron of tin, which had been previously melted in a furnace was supported on masonry, under which a stove fuelled by wood (or charcoal) kept the tin fluid and at the proper heat (for when it was not hot enough it would not stick to the iron and when it was too hot the coating was thin and unequal) and over which was the chimney stack, through which the fumes generated by the tinning process were emitted to the atmosphere. He adds that at first the sheets were all dipped together, and were divided when immersed. Following this each sheet was removed individually and separately dipped in a separate chamber within the cauldron, separated from the main area by a plate of iron. Once this was completed the sheets were placed to drain upon parallel bars of iron. Diderot adds that girls then took the sheets from the drainer and checked them for completion, either returning them to be re-tinned if the tin had not taken or those that had were then rubbed with sawdust and moss to get the grease off (1750).

There were however significant changes to the process at the beginning of the 19th century during the final years of the Castell Malgwyn works, although it is not known if these were introduced here. These are detailed in a report by Dr Pococke, Bishop of County Meath in Ireland, following his visit to Wales in 1818. Pococke mentions a full battery of 6 tinning pots with the plates first placed in a pot of hot grease, then into a pot of molten tin, before being transferred into a third pot which had two compartments and known as the ‘wash pot’. In the first compartment the plates were given a second coating of tin and upon removal were brushed on both sides with a hemp brush before being dipped in the second compartment, presumably the wash area. From here the sheet went to another grease pot, the temperature of which was set high enough to allow superfluous tin to run off. From the grease pot the plate was removed to the cooling pot and then on to a ‘list’ pot, which was a shallow pot of molten tin into which the plate was dipped for a few moments before being taken out and struck sharply with a stick which caused the ‘list’ or the bead of solid tin along the lower edge of the plate to fall away (Cartwright 1888).

At Castell Malgwyn it can be suggested that the pair of **furnaces** at the southern end of the complex may well be associated with the tinning process, possibly functioning as a furnace



Figure 8:
Tinning furnaces
(RCAHMMW:
2006_110_002)

to melt the tin (Fig 8). The furnaces are set into **retaining wall (3)** which runs at right angles to **retaining wall (1)**. The east kiln is the larger of the two, 1.6m wide by 1.85m deep with a segmental arch and at the rear of the opening in the roof, a small flue, which is square in section at the bottom, but becomes rounded and brick-lined towards the top and is topped with a slate slab, with a hole approximately the diameter of the flue through it.

Walter Davies notes that the Castell Malgwyn works were capable of making 2000 boxes of tinplate per annum, with the boxes sent to Bristol, Birmingham and London where the tinplates were used in the manufacture of domestic articles (NLW: MS1760A). There would obviously have been warehouses on site to store the finished product, ready for it to be loaded onto barges and taken down to Cardigan for distribution. A series of low slab built walls to the south of the **furnaces** at **c** and **d**, now utilised by a later glasshouse and maintenance area, may well mark the remains of earlier buildings associated with the works, possibly those for storing the finished tinplate, and a large levelled terrace at **e**, m by m excavated



Figure 9:
The Quay
(RCAHMMW:
2006_111_001)

into the hill-slope may also have been a storage area. These are close to the **quay** which is situated 150m further down stream. The quay is marked by a revetment wall constructed of coursed slabs, some 1.5m above the winter water level (Fig 9). There is also a section of apron quay which is presently just

below winter water level and running parallel to the main bank and quay wall (Fig 10). This arrangement is likely to have allowed flat bottom barges to rest on a level bottom against the quay, even when the tide fell below the level required to float them. Adjacent to the quay and river bank is the towing path, now part of the riverside walk, which in places is supported by a revetment wall some 1.6m high.



Figure 10:
Section of apron
quay below
the water line
(RCAHMW:
2006_111_003)

Methodology

The survey and field investigations were carried out by Louise Barker and Dave Percival using conventional graphical methods based upon Ordnance Survey control. The final scaled plans were produced in AutoCAD.

The report was researched and written by Louise Barker and was commented upon by Dave Percival.

The site archive has been deposited in RCAHMW's National Monument Record, to where applications for copyright should be made.

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