Penrhyn Castle Historic Landscape Assessment

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An investigative report on the landscape of the National Trust held portion of the Penrhyn Estate to highlight potential areas of interest and areas that need further investigation.

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Introduction

The Estate

Penrhyn Castle is a Normanesque castle, adjacent to the city of Bangor, sitting near the edge of the North Wales Coast with easy access to the sea. On the top of a hill surrounded by woodland the castle and the buildings that preceded it, have always held a position of power in North Wales. The castle as it currently stands, although depicting a Normanesque castle, was actually built between 1820-32 by Thomas Hopper to demonstrate the wealth that had been accumulated over the previous two centuries. The grounds around the castle were developed over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries importing trees from around the world. In 1856 the house and grounds were opened to the public and have been ever since, emphasising their purpose as a means of demonstrating the power and grandeur of the Pennant family and their ability to accommodate distinguished guests. The Penrhyn Estate as a whole (both National Trust owned land and the Penrhyn Family land) is a Grade II* registered park and garden reference number PGW (Gd)40 (GWY). The Castle is Grade I, the Chapel is Grade II, the Grand Lodge is Grade II and the Walled Garden (as opposed to the kitchen garden) is also Grade II. Penrhyn is also part of the Ogwen Valley Registered Historic Landscape, HLW (Gw) 10. This makes clear its significance as a historic landed estate and a place of particular historic interest.

Historic Landscape Analysis

This Historic Landscape survey for Penrhyn Castle has been conducted by Laura Gee BA (hons) for its owners the National Trust. This survey is to establish the known and potential historic and archaeological sites at Penrhyn Castle to provide a baseline for further investigation. It covers the development of the current estate, its history, current state and significant findings to inform management decisions concerning conservation and future development.

The Brief

The brief of this project was to provide the National Trust with a report, which outlines the known and potential archaeological/ historic sites within the National Trust held part of the estate using both desktop research and field evaluation. The scope of the project is an introductory analysis of the landscape and potential archaeological finds with the aim to inform and act as a basis for further investigation.

The demesne lands although still existing will not be covered in the report, just the NT held lands, however it must be noted that they are a key feature of the Penrhyn landscape and they make up part of its history.

To conduct this analysis an overlay of each map was created and then used to conduct the analysis, both desktop and field, however it is crucial at this point to highlight that due to the historic nature of some of the maps geospatial accuracy was hard to achieve and therefore this may affect some of the result. To achieve as accurate a representation as possible key landmarks such as the river adjacent to the estate and key roads were used to create a common element between all the maps.

Information gathered was used to create new records for input into the Historic Building Sites and Monuments Record.

Sources

A large collection of documents including estate maps, accounts and letters are held at the University of Bangor Archives, which cover the mid eighteenth century onwards. The estate maps have formed the basis of the survey to contribute and guide the field survey. This along with discussions with staff and a walk over study have greatly contributed towards this project. It is important to note that there may be other sources that are waiting to be catalogued and were therefore unavailable for analysis and that there is room in the future for further analysis.

Recommendations

- One of the key things that would contribute towards our knowledge of the Penrhyn estate and inform the public would be a greater understanding of the land before the current castle was built. Such information would contribute towards local understanding of the area in the context of other significant events across England and Wales.
- This report has underlined important areas for further investigation that could lead towards previously unknown areas of significance. Further investigation would also clear up certain uncertainties and misinterpretations of where the previous buildings existed.
- Geophysical survey techniques would be the first line in further investigation.
- The old chapel needs stabilizing to protect it from further deterioration.
- Attention is needed on the walled garden as there are serious signs of deterioration.
- Archaeological finds unearthed during gardening activities should be analysed for relevance.
- A detailed historic building analysis of early masonry in the basement of the existing castle may provide relevance to earlier structures.

Historical context of the Penrhyn Estate

This section will aim to give an overview of the history of the Penrhyn estate highlighting the key points in its history to enable us to better understand it in its present form. This will also allow us to place the maps that make up this report into context. The Penrhyn estate has been in existence in some form or another since the Middle Ages and has been seen as a valuable asset to both the Welsh and the English. The situation of the land with its proximity to the sea and its place upon the hill made it a valuable asset to any potential lord and during the time of the Welsh princes it was a highly favourable piece of land.

Penrhyn Castle is thought to occupy the site of King Roderic Malwynog's palace who was said to be an eight-century King of Gwynedd or Prince of North Wales, grandson of Cadwalader the last King of the Britons. This site therefore has held great significance for over a thousands years being a valuable strong hold in North Wales. It would have been valuable in terms of its accessibility to the coast and its proximity to the Land of Mercia (North West England) for raids. After King Roderic the land became connected to the Gruffydds of the time of Henry VI. The Gruffydds are one of the first families to emerge in Wales holding what we could call a modern landholding estate. They began to emerge in the fourteenth century but it wasn't until its end after three marriage alliances, that they accumulated substantial land in northwest wales. This period in history especially in Wales is synonymous with land and power, which could be gained by alliances and war. These alliances and the exchange of land could change regularly not

URL: http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/place/25723 (accessed 09th January 2015)

¹ Black. Charles., Black's guide to England and Wales: containing plans of the principal cities, charts, maps and views and a list of hotels..., (1870).

² GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth, History of Penrhyn Castle, in Gwynedd and Caernarvonshire | Map and description, *A Vision of Britain through Time*.

only through war, but through marriage and birthrights. Primogeniture was not necessarily the norm and was not fully adopted in Wales until much later on in the Middle Ages, which meant that land would be fiercely fought over for possession and split up among family members. To keep an estate such as Penrhyn fully intact would have been vital to hold onto power.

The Gruffydd's ³are descendants from Ednyfed Fychan whose valuable services to Llewelyn the Great were rewarded with land in Anglesey and across North Wales. This demonstrates the various ways in which land could be passed around and also the way in which land was passed around within the same family over the centuries.

In the early fifteenth century a Hall House⁴ with two end wings was built for Gwilym ap Gruffydd and it is this house that is known as the medieval house and was to stand until the late eighteenth century. After the Glyndwr revolt in the fourteenth century English families moved in and became more prominent across Wales. The Gruffydd family proved successful in steering themselves through these tough times for prominent Welsh families as from 1431-1531 they held on to their estates and even added to them.⁵ Their success can be said to have begun when they allied themselves with the prominent English family the Stanley's, with Gwilym ap Gruffydd marrying Joan Stanley of Hooton.⁶ The family and their heirs continued to remain strong throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

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³ Just a note of the spelling of the name Gruffydd. Due to the years of historical writing and the change in commonality of the Welsh language the spelling of the name has developed a number of variations. This at times can become confusing as who the source is talking about becomes unclear. For the purpose of the report the name shall be spelt as Gruffydd and will endeavour to make it clear through use of date who we are discussing.

⁴ Richard Haslan, Julian Orbach, Adam Voelcher, *Pevsner Architectural Guides: Buildings of, Gwynedd*, (2009).

⁵ Dictionary of Welsh Biography: Griffith of Penrhyn http://wbo.llgc.org.uk/en/s1-GRIF-PEN-1300.html (accessed 09th January 2015).

⁶ Ibid.

By the end of the sixteenth century the estate passed to John Williams the Dean of Westminster, who descended from Robin ap Gruffydd brother of Gwiliym ap Gruffydd, and in 1641 he became the archbishop of York. John Williams' life was dominated by the English civil war playing a central role as he acted as an intermediary between the English and Welsh Royalists, and was involved in a siege at Conwy castle. This demonstrates how North Wales was very much a part of national events and not just local concerns, demonstrating that the area was by no means isolated.

In 1650 John Williams died and was buried at Llandegai church. On his death the estate passed to Gruffydd Williams his nephew and it stayed within the Williams family until 1684 when Sir Gruffydd William died without an heir and it went to the Williams family of Marl. Despite the apparent frequent change of families many were interlinked showing how all the prominent families in North Wales and their estates were connected. Between 1765 and 1785 the estate passed to Richard Pennant and it was through his acquisition of the estate that the journey began towards the estate, as we now know it.

From 1768 until 1803, before the start of the construction of the current castle a house that we know as the Wyatt house, stood on this site. This most likely came about because of the profits from the sugar plantations. During the eighteenth century there was much debate over the slave trade as the political scene across England and Wales began to shift and in 1787 William Wilberforce began to campaign for the abolition of slavery. On the 9th May 1788 Lord Penrhyn spoke in the House of Commons in defence of the slave trade and its value to the Jamaican economy and on its abolition in 1807, which he regarded as a dangerous experiment. It was this and as a result of changes in taxation on slate in 1794 that meant that business survival

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⁷ Dictionary of Welsh Biography: Griffith of Penrhyn http://wbo.llgc.org.uk/en/s1-GRIF-PEN-1300.html (accessed 09th January 2015).

⁸ Oxfordnb Richard Pennant http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21859?docPos=2 (accessed 09th January 2015).

became difficult for Lord Richard Penrhyn.⁹ He had, however, received a grant from the crown in 1784 and was therefore able to build an enclosure and the village of Llandygai.¹⁰ On his death in 1808 he was childless and therefore left £150,000 of debt to his heir, Lord Penrhyn cousin's second son, George Hay Dawkins.¹¹ The estate was mortgaged and the debt was paid off.

The next period in the history of the estate was when the castle as we now know it was designed and built by the architect Thomas Hopper for George Hay Dawkins-Pennant who was able to move in before his death in 1840. The next family to hold the estate was Douglas Pennant family and they held it until 1951 when the castle and 40,000 acres of land was passed to the National Trust.

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⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Oxfordnb Richard Pennant http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21859?docPos=2 lbid.

The Succession of Houses

Introduction

This section is designed to give a brief overview of the succession of the properties that have existed at Penrhyn.

Medieval House

The medieval house is thought to have been built in the fifteenth century¹² and was known as the Hall House because of its design as a long building containing a central hall that was multi functional. This property was to remain in probably what was an altered form until the late eighteenth century.

Wyatt House

The Wyatt House was built in the late eighteenth century and designed by Samuel Wyatt, who probably remodelled the medieval house using what is often described as yellow brick. Plans drawn up by Wyatt in the 1780's incorporated the service buildings associated with the earlier house, however it seems likely that these were swept away during the construction. Wyatt's plans show various versions of the house especially alteration with service ranges. The house itself, however, had a relatively short life, as by 1820 the building of Penrhyn Castle was underway to create a much grander home for the Pennants.

Penrhyn Castle

The present house was built between 1822 and 1838 for George Hay

Dawkins Pennant and was designed by Thomas Hopper in a Neo-Norman

style. Hopper designed the layout for the entire estate including the castle and
the gatehouse and it was designed to reflect the wealth and power of the

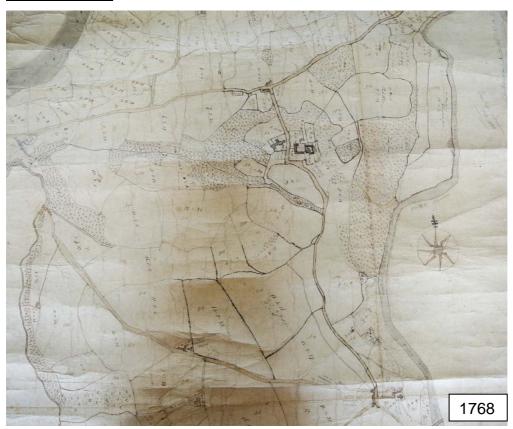
¹² Richard Haslan, Julian Orbach, Adam Voelcher, *Pevsner Architectural Guides:Buildings of Gwynedd*, (2009).

Penrhyn Estate. Since then the house is very little changed and has been in the hands of the National Trust since 1951.

Landscape development

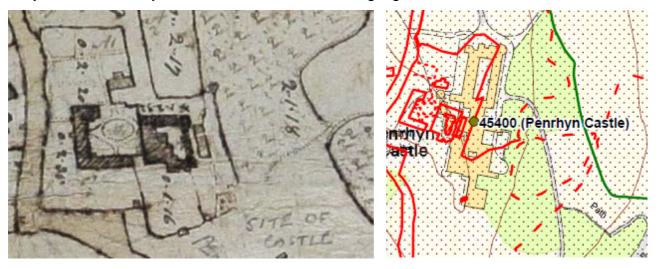
This section will contain a series of oringinal Penrhyn estate maps obtained from the Bangor Archives. These maps will demonstrate the historical landscape development dating from 1768 to the present day and the key areas of development will be highlighted. This is the key section of the report as it enables us to easily locate areas of interest and those in need of further investigation. This section will also work well with the information given in the historical context section of the report as this will visualise many of the points discussed in that section. The maps will be discussed in groups of two to provide a simple comparison and then an overview of the deveopment from 1768 will be given. The maps that will be discussed in their groups are, 1768 and 1803, 1828 and 1841, and then 1900 and 2014. Relevant map extracts are incorported in the text below, with a full map catalogue presented in appendix.

1768 and 1803

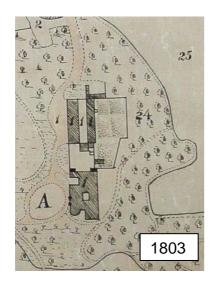


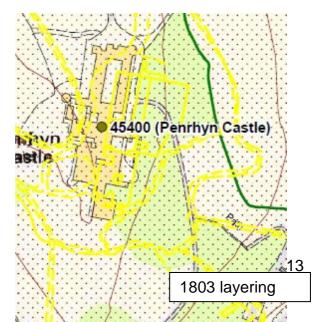
The 1768 estate maps depics several key features including the original house which has become known as the medieval house. Although the

precise date of its construction is unknown secondary sources suggest the early fifteenth century. These feature will now be highlighted and discussed.



The image on the above left is an enlargement from the orginal whereas the image on the right shows us roughly where the medieval house was in comparison to the current castle. What we can see from the image of the orginal map is that the house was a fairly substanstial development with what appears to be a courtyard. By 1803 however we can see that substantial changes have occurred, however we are not able to tell whether the 1768 dwelling has been remodeled or if the 1803 building is completely new. It is possible that the original house was remodeled and that the service areas were removed. Although this will be discussed further in other sections, on investigation of the castle basement older foundations are visible, however it is not clear to which property they belong but it is suspected that they belong to the 1803 house. Because of inaccuracies with mapping the historic maps with our current maps it is difficult to estimate whereabouts the 1803 dwelling would have sat in the landscape.









In the 1768 map we can see some outbuildings to the west of the medieval property, however, along with the rebuilding or reconstruction of the property with the Wyatt hall house these outbuildings disappear. In the 1803 map to the north of the property there appears to be another building in the shape of a horseshoe along the road going northwards, however, it is not in existence before this period or in any of the estate maps afterwards. There is also during this period a change in the driveway and approach to the property (for more see areas of significance section). Between 1768 and 1803 there seems to have been some more thought into the planning of the garden as in the 1803 map we can see an organised formation of the parkland and suggestion of planting. There is an area to the west of the property where we can see a grid like formation, which suggests formalised planning. This is what has become known as the walled flower garden (as opposed to the Kitchen Garden in the current demesne lands.)

In terms of land use in 1768 areas of land appear to be designated to others possibly for farming (see larger map in appendix). By 1803 there appears to be more formalised garden planning and planting especially closer to the property, however, there is still evidence that could suggest some of the land was used for farming or grazing. As we move through the years this falls into decline and a more formalised parkland develops, although the formalised planting moves away from the house.

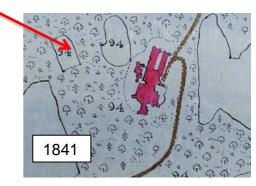
<u>1828-1841</u>





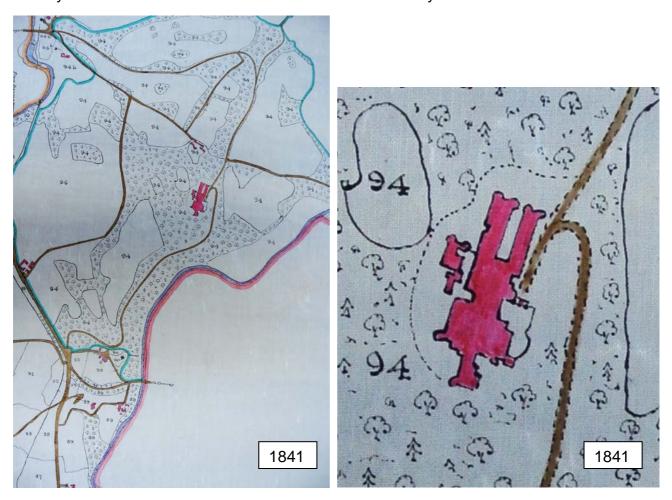
By 1828 the house on the estate is beginning to resemble what we recognise as the castle we see today although it was not yet complete. The Wyatt property is no longer in existence and you can see that there has been a deliberate attempt to completely remodel the property with a more elaborate architectural style. The layout of the grounds seems planned out and certainly more controlled than in 1768, which shows that some thought was





being put into how the estate would be experienced by its visitors. What is now known as the walled garden can be seen, with the grid like formation that suggested planned out sections.

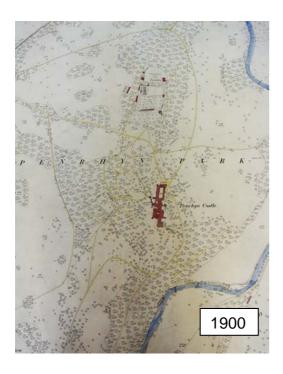
By 1841 the house appears to be complete, and the grounds more developed. The driveway to the castle is now clearly defined, with formalised planting of woodland surrounding it and is approaching from a different direction to the previous development. The estate is now fully ready for visitors of which it had many over the course of the end of the nineteenth century.

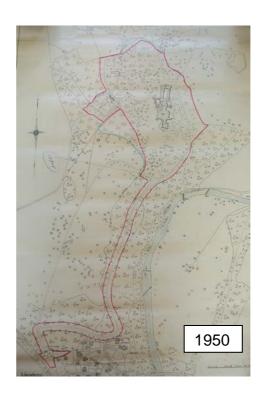


1900-1950

Between 1900-1950 very little in terms of land development has changed. In 1900 we can see a large network of pathways and also listed is the waterworks system. The trees appeared to have been substantially thinned over the years to maintain the parkland. World War Two took its toll and the

garden fell from its high status.¹³ This was an issue that affected many great estates across the whole of Britain. Although this doesn't explain the overcrowded nature of the planting that we see in the 1900 map we do see that when the National Trust inherited part of the estate in 1951 (the area which we see outlined in red in the 1950 map) many changes took place. These included new planting and new paths with the aim not being to change the character of the garden but to bring it back to its earlier condition. In recent years more focus has been put on thinning the trees that surround the driveway and creating clear pathways throughout the garden.





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¹³ Penrhyn Castle. Conwy, Gwynedd and Isle of Anglesey. Register of landscapes, parks and Garden of special historic interest in Wales. Cadw 1998.

Areas of significance

This section will give an analytical overview of the key areas of significance within the Penrhyn estate.

The Gatehouse

The lodge and gatehouse a grade II listed building appear to have been built at the beginning of the nineteenth century as is seen on an 1828 estate map along with the exterior wall surrounding the parklands. Although not designed by the architect of the Castle, Thomas Hopper, it has clearly been heavily influenced by his style and he was probably involved in part of the process as the gatehouse sets up the entire estate and the experience of visiting it. Everything about the construction of the newly styled estate was to be an experience, to show off the wealth of the Douglas Pennant family in physical form. Therefore the gatehouse, its look and character would have been of extreme importance.

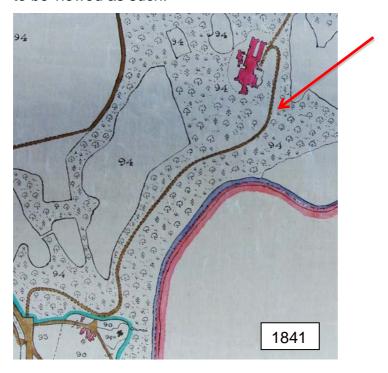




Current Drive

The current drive is a clearly defined feature that was instigated when the current castle was built to create a long dramatic entrance to the castle further adding to the visitor's experience. The drive goes through now dense woodland and then opens up with a view across the park and to the castle. It is likely that the woodland was not originally as dense as there are records of

trees being thinned, however, it was clearly designed as a woodland park and to be viewed as such.



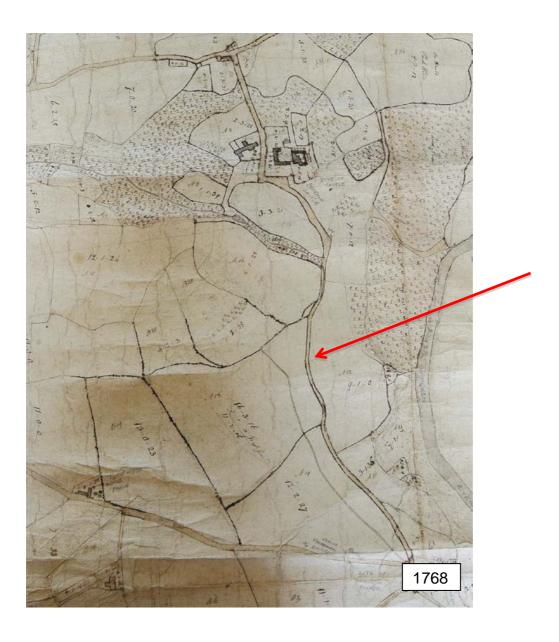
The 1803 Drive

The original drive into the Penrhyn estate approached the property from the South West of the current property and was in use definitely from 1803 but is not depicted on an 1841 estate map, which would lead us to believe that once the Castle had finished its construction in 1835 the current drive was the main entrance. The route of the old drive is still visible today and is used as a path down to the edge of the estate alongside the walled gardens with evidence of cobbled surface. The extent of the drive can be seen on the 1803 estate map and its full extent lies outside National Trust lands. The eastern extent of the drive approaching the house has been lost, however, from investigating the maps it would be plausible to assume a similar grand approach to the Wyatt house or the so called medieval house of the eighteenth century. Further investigation into this approach and perhaps a degree of reinstating would be beneficial, as it would highlight the development of the estate.



The 1768 Drive

It would appear that the 1768 drive begins at a similar point as the current drive, although it follows a different path, the approach is coming from the village as it does now. However because of the dramatic change in the surrounding landscape around the drive it is difficult to determine the exact path of the 1768 drive. What we can determine however is that by 1803 this is no longer shown as the main drive, as we have seen from the previous discussion the approach had moved further west.



Chapel

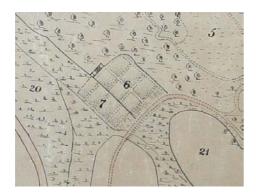
The chapel ruin in the garden is a grade II listed feature and has been created as a feature and is not in its original location, however, it is possible that a 1768 estate map depicting the medieval house shows the original location. In the current castle's chapel there is some panelling that may have come from the original chapel although it is possible that it was brought from elsewhere.



The old chapel ruin now stands with no interior features or roof. The ruin has stone facing and medieval stone tracery around the window attached to brick skin and also some concrete supporting one of the windows. The chapel remains one of Penrhyn's biggest mysteries and certainly needs further analysis, as there are so many factors that we're unsure of. For instance, when was the chapel moved to its current location? We know that during the interim period between the medieval house and the current castle that Samuel Wyatt designed a new house that may have redeveloped much that was already there. Therefore when the chapel was moved isn't easy to tell. From plans drawn up by Wyatt it's seems that it was intended to be incorporated in his designs. However, it is not seen in an 1803 map so it was probably moved during the construction of the Wyatt house. The chapel needs significant repairs to prevent further damage.

Walled Garden (Flower Garden as opposed to the Kitchen garden)

The walled flower garden is a grade II listed feature and is a key part of the Penrhyn Park and its landscape. Dating from the early nineteenth century it can clearly be seen on an 1803 estate map, however, the extent to which it was a fully formed walled garden is unclear. What is clear though is that this section of the garden has been planned out in a formal structure since 1803, which demonstrates that even before the current castle was built and the estate remodelled there was clear development in the layout of the estate. On some of the estate maps of the nineteenth century there is evidence of buildings around the exterior of the walled garden, which are no longer in existence, however, there is still some evidence of this in the form of an archway at ground level, which needs further investigation as it may relate to the use of glass houses in this area. At the bottom of the walled garden is a bog area, however, talking to some of the gardeners it seems to have once been a water garden where the water was controlled. The build of wall varies considerably with some areas needing immediate attention to prevent further damage.



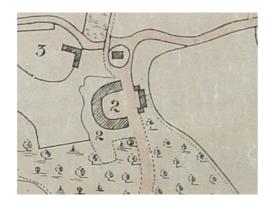
Medieval Structure

To the west of Penrhyn castle is an area of disturbed ground consisting of shallow scoops, which seems consistent with a structure seen on a 1768 estate map. Although it is unclear what this structure is the parching of grass would suggest stone or brick foundations measuring roughly 12m x 12m. The structure relates in some way to the medieval house as in 1803 estate map it is no longer in existence which leads us to believe that under the construction of the Wyatt house there was extensive land development and changes to the structure of the park. Further investigation of this area would undoubtedly lead to a greater understanding of the estate and its history.



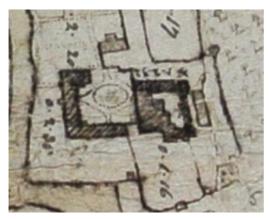
Early nineteenth century structure

To the north of Penrhyn Castle there is another area of slightly disturbed ground on the border of National Trust ownership, which is consistent with a structure that is in existence between 1803 – 1828. The structure depicted on the 1803 estate map is in the shape of a horseshoe on the edge of the top road although its function is unclear and it is not in existence by 1828. Further investigation is suggested.



Possible sight of the medieval building range

To the southwest of Penrhyn Castle is the potential site of the medieval house. The exact start date of this house is unknown which therefore throws the term medieval into question; however, on a 1768 estate map we know that there was a house on this site. Although there is little evidence on the surface to demonstrate the site of the pre-nineteenth century house aerial photos acquired from the National Monuments Record for Wales do show extensive parching on the land. Some of this could be a garden feature but there are the possibilities that some may be stone or brick foundations. There has been a recent find of a possible medieval date in a flower bed that may relate to earlier buildings. Stone footings in the basement of the current castle also may relate to earlier buildings. Therefore further investigation is undoubtedly needed in this area to add and improve upon our knowledge of the history of the Penrhyn Estate.





Discussion

This report has highlighted that there are areas of potential archaeological significance that require further investigation. In terms of historical context we have found that it is possible that Penrhyn Castle occupies the site of an eighth century King of Gwynedd's palace. This demonstrates that further investigation, both historical and archaeological, is required to understand this fully. We have also found that the land in general remained in the Gruffydd family throughout the Middle Ages although national events, marriages and issues over inheritance often affected how the land changed hands and how much remained intact. We know that events such as the English Civil War had an impact on North Wales with a siege at Conwy Castle, which the owner of Penrhyn estate at the time was involved in. This demonstrates that further historical investigation would provide further context to the history of the castle and its lands as we can see that there is a long and vibrant history that pre-dates the present castle.

To determine landscape development and aid with field research, geospatial imagery was used. Through this we can demonstrate that the area to the west of the castle holds potential archaeological significance, as it is possible that remains of the previous properties lie there. We can certainly see from the map progressions that further planning went into the landscape as they developed into pleasure grounds. Through the map comparisons we can see not only how the property has developed but also the grounds. You can see how the approach has changed to maximise the effect of the property and highlight its grandeur and dominance.

In terms of areas of significance there are many sites that deserve attention. The succession of the drives is perhaps a key feature change, aside from the houses. The earliest approach comes from the direction of the village of Llandegai as does the current drive however they both follow different routes. For a period during the early 19th Century the drive approached from the west and is still visible and partly used as a pathway today. The reason for the change in approach is likely to be to maximise the impact of the castle, however, further investigation into the western approach may produce insightful information and possible archaeological interest. The chapel ruin in

the garden has been highlighted as a feature that needs significant repairs to prevent further damage. Although it is not conclusive, evidence suggests that the chapel may have been part of previous dwellings and moved to its current location with the construction of the present castle. It is also possible that wooden panelling in the current chapel inside the castle is from the original chapel, however this is not conclusive. There are also various outbuildings that are no longer in existence but if investigated could tell us much about the history of the land and its various functions. These outbuildings could relate to the Wyatt house or the medieval hall house that stood on the land for many years pre-late eighteenth century. Archaeological investigation into these areas is therefore necessary to tell us more about the historic landscape of Penrhyn.

Penrhyn Castle is a house that was made to be seen and has a significant heritage. The site of the castle has a longer history than has perhaps been focused on previously. The houses and buildings that occupied this land before the castle potentially had equal stature as the current house. Furthermore archaeological sites discovered on, what is now the industrial estate nearby, demonstrate that there has been human occupation in this area for thousands of years. In 1870 Black wrote his principle guide to England and Wales where he mentions the historic nature of the site on which Penrhyn castle had been built. 14 This demonstrates that even centuries after, the land's heritage still had an impact on how it was viewed. Thus adding to the estate's prestige. The current castle and the design of the extensive parkland estate are all designed to represent, in physical form, the wealth and power of the Pennant family. To fully grasp the history of the current estate and its landscape development further investigation must be carried out to add to our understanding of the area's heritage and significance.

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¹⁴ Black. Charles., Black's guide to England and Wales: containing plans of the principal cities, charts, maps and views and a list of hotels..., (1870).

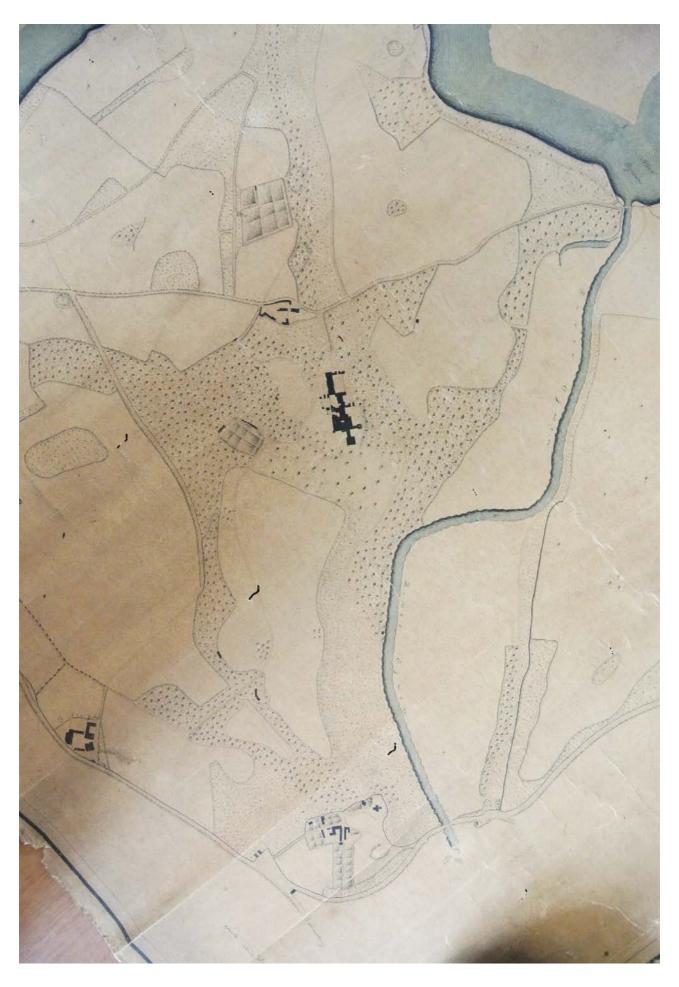
Appendix 1 – Map Catalogue (These sources are deposited in the archive of Bangor University, North Wales, Bangor.)







Penrhyn Estate map 1841





Penrhyn Estate map 1803



Penrhyn Estate map 1768

Appendix 2 – Aerial Photographs

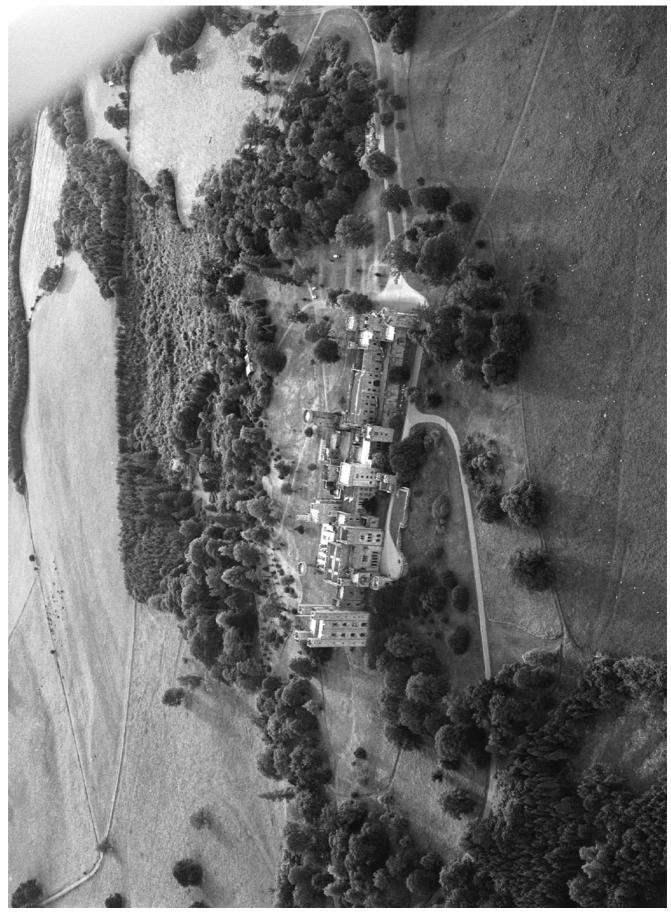


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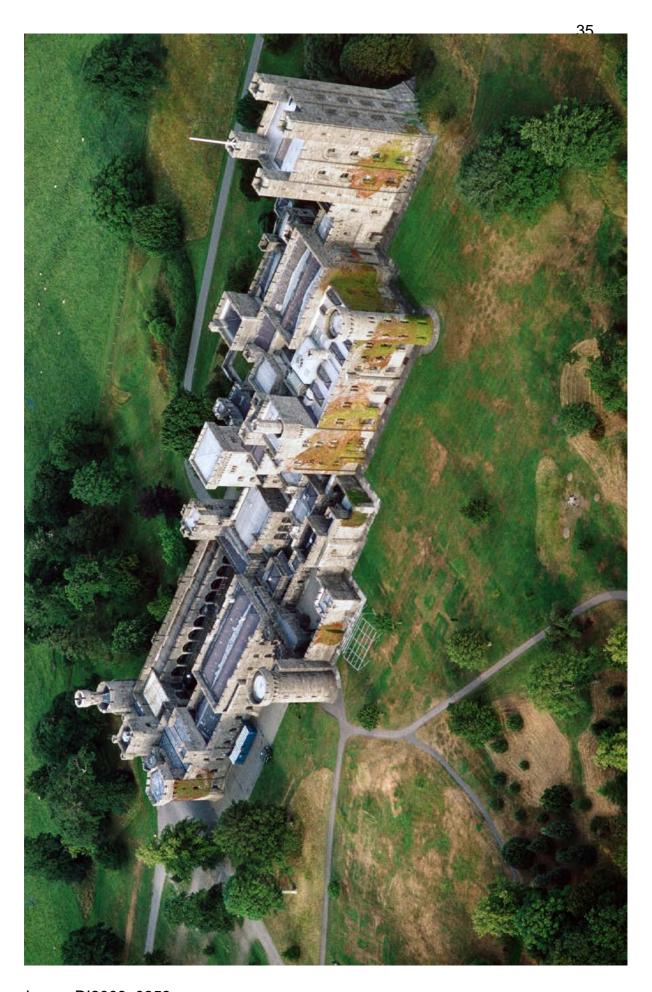


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Appendix 3 – Samuel Wyatt plans (source unknown, but appear to contain plans for possible reconstructions of the medieval house at Penrhyn, earliest date 1782)

