

## Tywyn to Brycrug Multi-User Path, Gwynedd

Archaeological Watching Brief



By Robert Blackburn

Report No. 1015

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#### Non-Technical Summary

A programme of Archaeological Monitoring, a Watching Brief, was carried out during the stripping of topsoil associated with the construction of a multi-use path between Tywyn and Bryncrug, Gwynedd, during January and February 2011. No significant remains or deposits were found during the work; however below ground remains of a wall probably dating to the development of the Ynysymaengwyn estate in the  $18^{th}$  century were found and photographed. Several sherds of pottery also dating to this period were recovered from the topsoil during the work along the route of the scheme.

#### 1. Introduction

This report summarises the results of an Archaeological Watching Brief undertaken by Archaeology Wales Ltd (AW) for Gwynedd Consultancy, during the groundwork's associated with the construction of a multi-use path adjacent to the A493 between Tywyn and Bryncrug, Gwynedd. The Watching Brief followed on from an earlier Desk Based Assessment by Archaeology Wales on behalf of Gwynedd Consultancy (Knight 2011), in which a number of significant ancient monuments were identified within or close to the proposed route of the multi-use path.

The course of the proposed multi-use path runs adjacent to the A493 between Tywyn and Bryncrug, Gwynedd (NGR: 259920 301840), running approximately 1.675km. It extends northeast from NGR 259491 301385 north of the modern cemetery of Tywyn to 260789, 302814 at the edge of Bryncrug village. The path follows the south side of the road and is approximately 2.5m wide. The construction works included the realignment of a short section of road adjacent to the entrance of the Ynysymaengwyn Caravan Park and the dismantling and reconstruction of a stretch of wall where the road was to be realigned, including works to existing drainage.

As a result of the potential to uncover significant archaeological remains, as identified in the DBA (Knight 2011) a three-phase mitigation strategy was recommended, this included: archaeological recording, 'strip, map and sampling' and an archaeological watching brief. It was anticipated that these strategies would be necessary at different locations along the proposed route. Ultimately, it was only possible to carry out a watching brief during the ground works as the weather conditions, in particular the heavy snow, hampered any attempts at pre-construction investigation.

The site of the proposed path lies adjacent to the A493, within the broad alluvial Dyffryn Dysynni/Dysynni Valley, a flat coastal haven and estuary, as it approaches the sea at Tywyn. The geology of the assessment area is Ordovician, the south side of the haven geomorphologically part of the Bala Cleft, a major geological fault cutting across North Wales. The haven and main valley floor lie at a height of less than 10m, the slopes rising steeply on either side to hills and ridges that range from about 200m in the south west to almost 900m at the summit of Cader Idris in the north east. The picturesque valley bears diverse evidence of human occupation and activity from the Prehistoric period to the recent past and is particularly notable for the reclaimed landscape created by pioneering agricultural improvements on the post-medieval gentry estate of Ynysymaengwyn during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The slate quarry near Abergynolwyn was connected via the Talyllyn Railway to Tywyn, running through the southern lands of the Ynysymaengwyn Estate and close to the A493.

#### 2. Historical and Archaeological Background (from Knight 2011)

The proposed footpath development lies within the Dysynni Valley Registered Landscape of Special Historic Interest (HLW Gw 17) (Cadw 2001). The Register describes the landscape as:

"This picturesque valley bears diverse evidence of human occupation and activity from the prehistoric period to the recent past. The area includes: cropmarks of hidden, possibly prehistoric settlements, Iron Age hillforts, a centre of early Christian activity, medieval earthwork and masonry defence sites, distinctive remains of a native Welsh castle probably begun by Prince Llywelyn ab Iorwerth ('the Great') around 1221, two of the finest gentry estates in Meirionnydd: Ynysmaengwyn and Peniarth, the former having had a significant impact on the landscape through extensive and pioneering agricultural improvement, land reclamation and drainage schemes during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries." (Cadw 2001)

It is characterised as been formerly dominated by open water and salt marsh, with the tidal reach of the Dysynni possibly having come close to Ynysymaengwyn Manor prior to the post-medieval reclamation work (Cadw 2001).

The Desk Based Assessment (Knight 2011) identified a number of archaeologically sensitive features within the development area, including the Croes Faen stading stone, the location of a former milestone and the location of Ynys Gate near Ysguboriau farm. The most significant site was identified in the fields immediately north-west of the route of the path, where several crop marks of possible early medieval date have been recorded.

In the wider landscape a number of sites of archaeological significance were identified, the most imposing of which is the Graig Fach-goch hillfort located on the hill to the south-east of the development area. This site was identified through aerial photography, but has never been excavated. Located to the north-east of the development area is Castell Cynfal. Located on a high promontory, southeast of Bryncrug, at an elevation of approximately 95m, this rock-cut motte and bailey was apparently established by Cadwaladr ap Gruffydd, brother of Owain Gwynedd in 1137 and destroyed in 1147.

The medieval township of Bryncrug contains a number of fine buildings including the Grade II listed Bronwylfa which is located at the southern end of the village. Close-by, in a purposebuilt stone recess in the retaining bank of the road to Rhyd-yr-onen, is a Grade II listed water lift pump. A similar structure is located to the southwest of the village on the corner of the road to Penowern farm, and Ffordd-y-felin. A Fluxgate Gradiometer survey undertaken to the east of the village in 2007 identified a possible field boundary of unknown date.

Crop-marks to the northwest of Bryncrug consist of a circular ditch, with the possible remains of an internal bank. The almost perfect circular plan of the ditch suggests ceremonial rather than domestic use, with its size and design suggestive of a henge monument of Neolithic date. To the south of the enclosure, further crop-marks have been noted in a field adjacent to the A493. These consist of a circle with a rectangular annexe attached. Although tentatively indicating settlement activity rather than ceremonial use, it is less certain whether these too are of prehistoric origin. The possible route of a Roman road (Brithdir to Cefn Caer) runs through Bryncrug village, although the nearest certain evidence of the road is two miles

to the southeast of Bryncrug. Therefore, evidence of settlement activity in the area predating the formation of the medieval village would not be unexpected.

The south-western edge of the study area coincides with the former south-western boundary of the Ynysymaengwyn estate land on the Turnpike Road. The Cross Faen standing stone is located on this boundary. The stone stands to a height of approximately 2.3m, leaning slightly to the south. It has no apparent markings and the upper portion is more weathered than the lower. Its date and purpose are unclear although it is thought to be prehistoric.

Another stone pillar was found in the ruins of Ynysymaengwyn manor and is now in St Cadfan's churchyard at Tywyn. The inscription on this stone dates to the eighth century and is an important early example of the Welsh language. A further standing stone was located on the eastern side of the road, its location marked on the early OS maps. It is a milestone, and is inscribed with:

#### From Town 1 Mile

The stone is thought to have originally been constructed as a sundial, as it contains a hole towards its top. According to the HER: "This ancient sundial is thought to be the prayer timepiece for the tenth Century clas (monastic community) at Tywyn of which St Cadfan's Church was the centre". It would have stood outside the church, with a peg in the hole, and the shadow would show people when a service would take place. The circles below the dial are unusual and their purpose is not known. The dial is one of only two "Irish-style" dials in Wales, the other being at Clynnog Fawr. Possible dates for its creation are between 700-1000 AD with an earlier date being more likely. At some stage, possibly in the eighteenth century, it was removed from the church and used as a milestone.

It was considered that there was a strong possibility that feature evidence may be preserved at the original milestone location.

The significant complex of crop-marks noted on the north-western side of the A493 comprises both ring ditches and rectangular features and has been provisionally interpreted as an Iron Age or Early Christian cemetery, but may include multiple phases of activity. The area is known to have been a focus for early Christian activity, with St Cadfan founding a monastery at 'Tywyn Meirionnydd' in the sixth century. It was the third most important church in North Wales, and was the mother-church of the whole of the commote of Ystum Anner. It was a principal 'clas' under an abbot in 1147 and is mentioned in 1291 as being held by a number of clergy. The exact location of this monastery is not known but a reasonable conjecture is that it may have been situated in or close to Tywyn, possibly in the area of the modern church.

At the northern end of the study area, a possible motte or tumulus of unknown date is located at Cil-y-Parc. As mentioned in the HER GAT information, nothing is visible from aerial photographs and the information source dates to 1921.

Another important feature within the wider landscape is the Talyllyn Railway, which runs south of the A493, from Rhydyronen Halt to Tywyn, and is within view of the road, which lies at an elevation of 10m. The standard gauge Aberystwyth and Welsh Coast Railway was

expanded from its base at Machynlleth and in 1863 had reached Tywyn. The industrialistWilliam McConnel decided to build a narrow gauge line from the slate quarry at Bryn Eglwys, near Abergynolwyn to Tywyn, as this was the nearest point where slate could be transferred to the standard gauge railway (Boyd 1988). Opened in 1866, the narrow gauge railway, carrying both passengers and slate, also cuts through the south estate lands of Ynysymaengwyn and therefore contextually close to the study area. Since the Talyllyn Railway was also the inspiration for Reverend W. Awdry's *Thomas the Tank Engine* books, represented as the Skarloey Railway (Potter 1990), the cultural significance of the landscape is further amplified.

#### 2.1 The Ynysymaengwyn Estate

The Ynysymaengwyn estate, which encompassed the majority of the Tywyn Bryncrug area, is one of the significant components of the historic landscape, as a prominent post-medieval gentry estate within Meirionnydd that was remarkable for its extensive and pioneering agricultural improvement schemes during the late eighteenth and early nineteeth centuries.

The entire extent of the old Turnpike Road (now the A493) between Tywyn and Bryncrug, is completely within the former estate of Ynysymaengwy, the extant entrance Lodge is approximately 1.85km northeast of Tywyn and approximately 1.03km southwest of Bryncrug. Ynysymaengwyn was a powerful late medieval estate and many of the major houses of the area held family ties with it, including: Caethle, Dolau-gwyn, Gwyddgwion, Plasyn-y-rofft (Esgairweddan), and Trefeddian.

Ynysymaengwyn played a significant role in the cultural and political life of Meirionnydd. Welsh poets, in particular, appear to have been welcomed to the manor throughout the fifteenth and eigteenth centuries. 'Sir' Arthur ap Huw, the grandson of Hywel ap Siencyn, was vicar of St Cadfan's between 1555 and 1570, and was a notable patron of the poets as well as a translator of counter-Reformation literature into Welsh. Many of the Ynysymaengwyn poems have been preserved in an important manuscript of *cywyddau* (British Library Additional MS 14866).

During the eighteenth century, the Corbet family of Ynysymaengwyn played a leading role in the Tywyn area. They were responsible for draining much of the *morfa* or salt marsh between Tywyn and the Dysynni River. An aerial photograph from 1946 has been used to estimate the original extent of the salt marsh prior to drainage. It is thought that it would have extended to within around 200m of the north-west side of the road, thereby having no effect on the proposed route of the path.

The raven was the Corbet family emblem and appears on the wall of the entrance lodge. Unrelated to this Corbet family, the industrialist John Corbett of Chateau Impney, Droitwich, bought Ynysymaengwyn in 1878. In later years, following Roger John Corbett's death (1863-1942) his sister Mary (d. 1951) eventually gave the estate to the council but since it was unable to fund the necessary repairs, the mansion was used for fire-fighting practice and army training and soon had to be demolished. The mansion, associated structures and gardens are now incorporated in a caravan and camping park.

#### 3. Aims

In accordance with IfA's *Standards and guidance for an archaeological watching brief*, the purpose of a watching brief is:

- to allow, within the resources available, the preservation by record of archaeological deposits, the presence and nature of which could not be established (or established with sufficient accuracy) in advance of development or other potentially disruptive works.
- to provide an opportunity, if needed, for the watching archaeologist to signal to all interested parties, before the destruction of the material in question, that an archaeological find has been made for which the resources allocated to the watching brief itself are not sufficient to support treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard
- A watching brief is not intended to reduce the requirement for excavation or preservation of known or inferred deposits, and it is intended to guide, not replace, any requirement for contingent excavation or preservation of possible deposits.
- The objective of a watching brief is to establish and make available information about the archaeological resource existing on a site.

#### 4. Methodology

The watching brief was conducted in two phases over the course of approximately five weeks. The excavation of the footpath route was carried out by a mechanical digger using a 2 metre wide ditching bucket. A dumper truck was used for soil removal at all times, in accordance with the MAFF "Guide to Good Practice For Handling Soils" (document April 2000, sheet 1).

In the event that archaeological features, finds or deposits were uncovered, work was stopped in the area of the exposed remains, in order that the supervising archaeologist could clean and identify the extent and nature of the remains and for rapid excavation and recording to take place. All archaeological deposits identified were mapped, cleaned, recorded and fully excavated. The developer provided a safe working area and sufficient time to record and excavate all potential features. Full excavation of identified features was not be compromised by the construction programme. Any recording work deemed necessary of newly exposed features and deposits during the watching brief was to be undertaken in three formats:

*i) Photographic record* - Photographs were appropriated in digital TIFF format to a minimum 10 mega-pixel resolution.

*ii) Drawn record* - Site drawings, plans and sections, were produced where necessary at scales of 1:10, 1:20 or 1:50 on drafting film. Finished drawings have been related to Ordnance Survey datum and published boundaries where appropriate.

*iii) Written record* - Written records were produced using a continuous numbering sequence for all contexts.

An environmental sampling and processing strategy was in place should the archaeological deposits warrant it. However, in this instance it was not felt that the deposits encountered required sampling.

Any archaeological features identified were tied in locationally to the OS survey grid and fixed local topographic boundaries.

All works were undertaken in accordance with both the IfA's *Standards and guidance: for an archaeological Watching Brief*, and current Health and Safety legislation.

#### 5. Results

The footpath was built on the south-eastern side of the road. The groundworks were carried out predominantly on the grass verge that runs alongside the road but extended into the adjacent fields in some sections.

#### Section 1 (see Figures 2 and 3)

Located at the south west end of the road scheme, this section incorporated linkages 0 to 180 metres, and corresponded to the boundaries of a large potato field which at the time of excavation was not under crop (Photos 1-3). The excavation trench followed the line of the grass verge parallel to the modern road, and measured approximately 2.50m wide by 0.15m deep but this varied in places. The topsoil was composed of a soft, mid brown clayey silt containing small roots. Below this was a greyish brown, silty sand containing large angular stone fragments. This was interpreted as being reinstated ground following the construction of the earlier road. Towards the north-eastern end of this section, an undisturbed lower subsoil was visible consisting of a mid brown, friable, clay silt, containing frequent small stones approximately 1-3cm diameter. Four fragments of pottery were recovered from the topsoil which were provisionally dated to the nineteenth century (not retained). No significant structures or deposits were seen during the course of the excavation of this section.

#### Section 2

This section incorporates linkages 180m to 310m, and corresponds to an undulating field under pasture at the time of excavation (Photos 4-7). At the north east end of the section, there was a low lying boggy area that was holding water. The excavation trench followed the line of the grass verge and measured approximately 2.50m wide by 0.15m deep, although this was variable in places. In this section the machine cut sideways into a rise in the ground surface in order to create room for the width of the path way, consequently a deeper section was seen which revealed the underlying natural gravel. The natural was composed of an orangey brown sandy gravel, containing medium to large rounded cobbles. The section which was actually cut at an angle of 45 degrees, was approximately 1.70m deep, comprising 0.70m of a clayey silt topsoil, overlying 2 bands of natural gravel which was approximately 1m thick. A fragment of pottery provisionally dated to the nineteenth century was recovered from the subsoil (not retained).

#### Section 3

This section incorporates linkages 310m to 480m, and corresponds to a relatively flat field which was under pasture at the time of excavation (Photos 8-10). The trench followed the line of the grass verge and was approximately 2.60m wide by 0.30m deep. The subsoil was composed of a brown clayey silt, containing occasional small stones. Fragments of pottery provisionally dated to the nineteenth century were recovered from the subsoil (not retained).

#### Section 4

This section incorporates linkages 480m to 730m, and corresponds to a large relatively flat field that was under pasture at the time of excavation (Photos 11-14). At this point the trench diverged from the line of the grass verge adjacent to the modern road, and into the field (Fig 3a). The trench measured approximately 2.50m wide by 0.15m deep, and the subsoil was composed of a mid brown soft clayey silt, containing occasional small stones. At the northern end of this section an area of Japanese Knot weed which was removed by machine (Photos 15-18). To ensure that this vegetation did not return, a trench was excavated to a depth of approximately 1m by approximately 15m long. This work showed the subsoil to be approximately 0.70m thick, composed of a reddish brown clayey silt, containing occasional medium stones. Below this was a dark brown clayey silt. During the excavation of this area, a wall was revealed, running parallel with the present road. The wall was three courses high below ground level, standing to a height of 0.80m by 0.60m wide and exposed for a length of 15m. It was built of rounded blocks and cobbles which on average measured 0.30m by 0.20m, there was evidence of a light grey sandy mortar still adhering to the blocks. A foundation trench for the wall was visible, which cut through the subsoil. The cut was at least 0.80m wide and dug to a depth of 0.80m. This wall is probably of eighteenth or nineteenth century date, and may form part of a boundary associated with the Ynysmaengwyn Estate of which there upstanding remains still visible along other stretches of the road scheme (Photo 28). However, this interpretation is tentative as no dating evidence was recovered from the wall or wall cut. In addition, the wall lies on the opposite side of the road from the park boundary of the Ynysmaengwyn Estate, and so may simply be a field wall.

A service trench was excavated parallel to the line of the pathway at the north east end of this section (Fig 3b). This trench measured approximately 50m long by 1.20m wide by 0.50 deep, and revealed a subsoil composed of a dark brown clayey silt, with natural gravels visible towards the base (Photo 14).

#### Section 5

This section incorporates linkages 730m to 920m, and corresponds to the contractors compound which was erected during the course of the road scheme (Photos 19-21). During this section, following the removal of an existing pathway running parallel to the modern road, it was decided to use the existing hardcore as a base for the new multi used path. During this phase no subsoil was disturbed.

No evidence of any structural remains were revealed in sections 4 or 5, despite indications of a small building on the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition OS Map.

#### Section 6

This section incorporates linkages 920m to 1040m and corresponds to the Farm complex running alongside the line of the modern road (Photos 22-23). Here the present road was widened to accommodate the path along the southern edge. The road surface was pecked to a depth of 0.40m to provide the base for the path, no subsoil was removed during this section.

To accommodate the realignment/widening of the road, the present eighteenth century wall along the whole of this section along the North West side of the modern road was demolished and rebuilt, using as much of the original materials as possible (Photo 22). The demolition phase was not monitored.

#### Section 7

This section incorporates linkages 1040m to 1240m (Photos 24-26). Here the line of the path diverged into a large field currently under pasture (fig 3b). The trench measured approximately 2.50m wide by 0.15m deep, the subsoil was reddish brown clayey silt, containing occasional small stones. A small fragment of nineteenth century pottery was recovered from the subsoil (not retained).

A constructed culvert lay at the intersection of sections 7 and 8, taking the stream underneath the present modern road (Photo 27) At this point the ground works also cut through a banked field boundary. This was orientated north-east/south-west, following the line of the road and later wall. It probably dates to the enclosure of the fields and may have comprised a hedge bank boundary that pre-dated the construction of the boundary wall in the eighteenth or nineteenth century (Photo 28).

A large long narrow, rough hewn, stone was also identified. It was found lying on its side and measured 2.43m in length by 0.42m wide at its widest point. The provenance, use or date of this stone was unknown, however it shared similarities to the Croes Faen standing stone, located at the southwestern end of the scheme

#### Section 8

This section incorporated linkages 1240m to 1540m, and corresponds to a large undulating field currently under pasture (Photos 29-31). The trench measured approximately 2.50m wide by 0.15m deep, and continued the line of the path of the previous section which was within the field boundary. The subsoil was a soft, mid brown clayey silt, containing common amounts of small stones. No finds or artefacts were recovered from this field.

#### Section 9

This section incorporates linkages 1540m to 1680m, and was the last section of the scheme (Photos 32-34). It corresponds to a large undulating field currently under pasture. The trench continued the line of the path of sections 7 and 8, measuring approximately 2.50m wide by 0.15m deep. The subsoil was mid brown, soft clayey silt, containing common amounts of small stones. Several fragments of pottery provisionally dated to the nineteenth century were recovered from the subsoil (not retained).

#### 6. Conclusion

During the course of groundwork's associated with the road widening scheme at Tywyn, Gwynedd during January/February 2011, no significant archaeological remains or deposits were discovered. Despite being in close proximity to several important archaeological sites, no significant remains were found relating to any period, a fact which may have been influenced by the shallow nature of the excavation trench which was rarely below 0.15m depth. The construction of the modern road during the sixties, may well have removed any traces of settlement remains in the immediate area.

A probable eighteenth century Estate or field boundary wall was identified in section 4, together with an earlier banked boundary in section 7. These boundaries could not be conclusively dated but are probably associated with the enclosure of fields in the post-medieval period and the development of the Ynysmaengwyn estate in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

#### 7. Acknowledgements

Thanks to Jones Brothers for their co-operation during the watching Brief, and Julie Barr, the Environmental Consultant, for providing assistance with the taking of some of the photographs.

#### 8. Bibliography

Knight, D. 2011. Tywyn to Bryncrug multi-user path, Gwynedd: Archaeological Desk Based Assessment. Archaeology Wales report 1002

MAFF- Guide to Good Practise For Handling Soils (April 2000, sheet 1)

Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1983

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**APPENDIX I - FIGURES** 

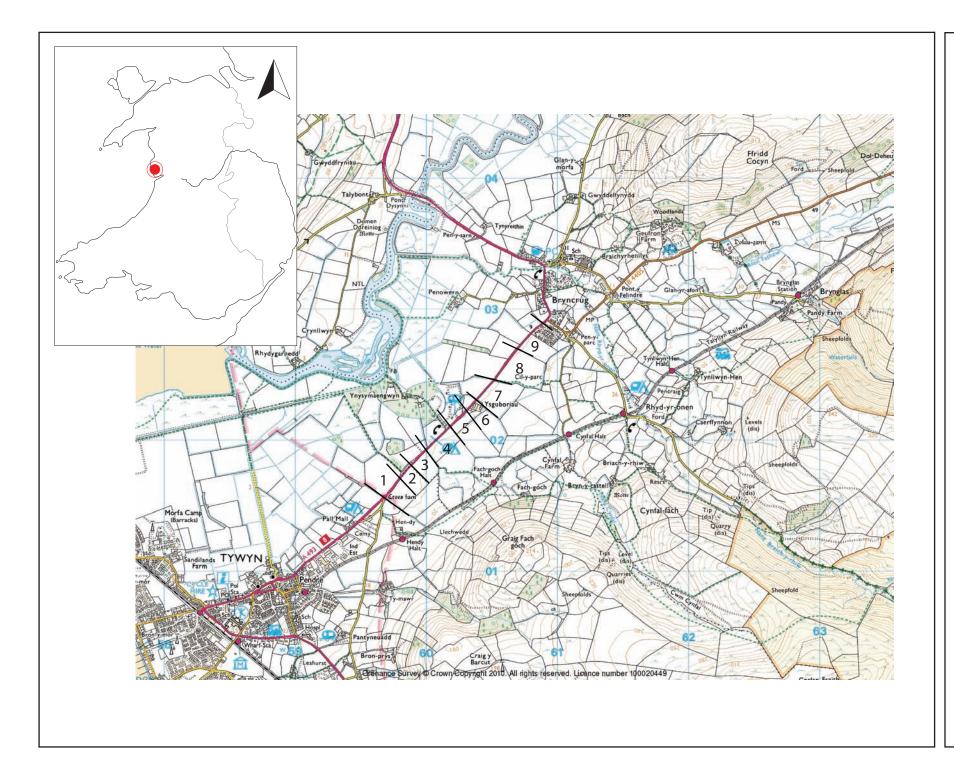
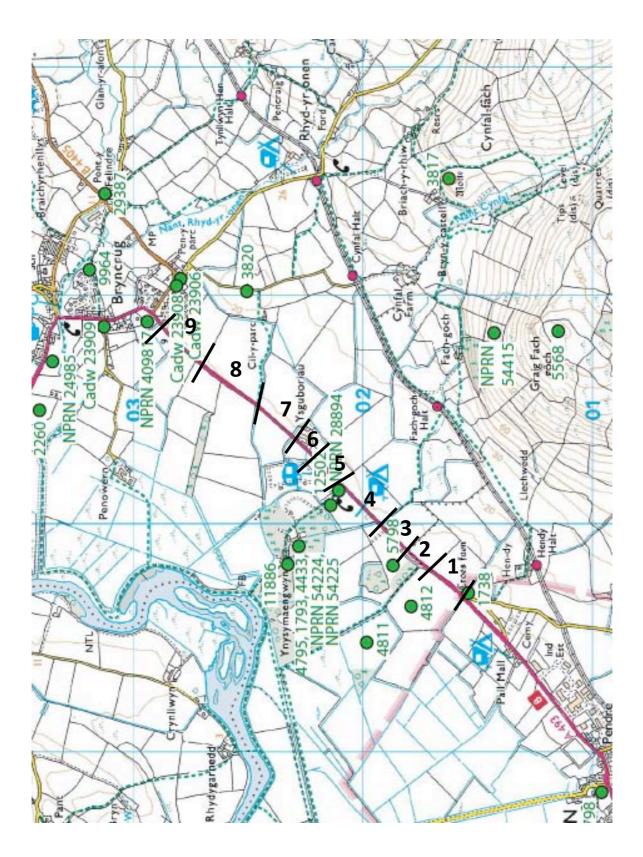
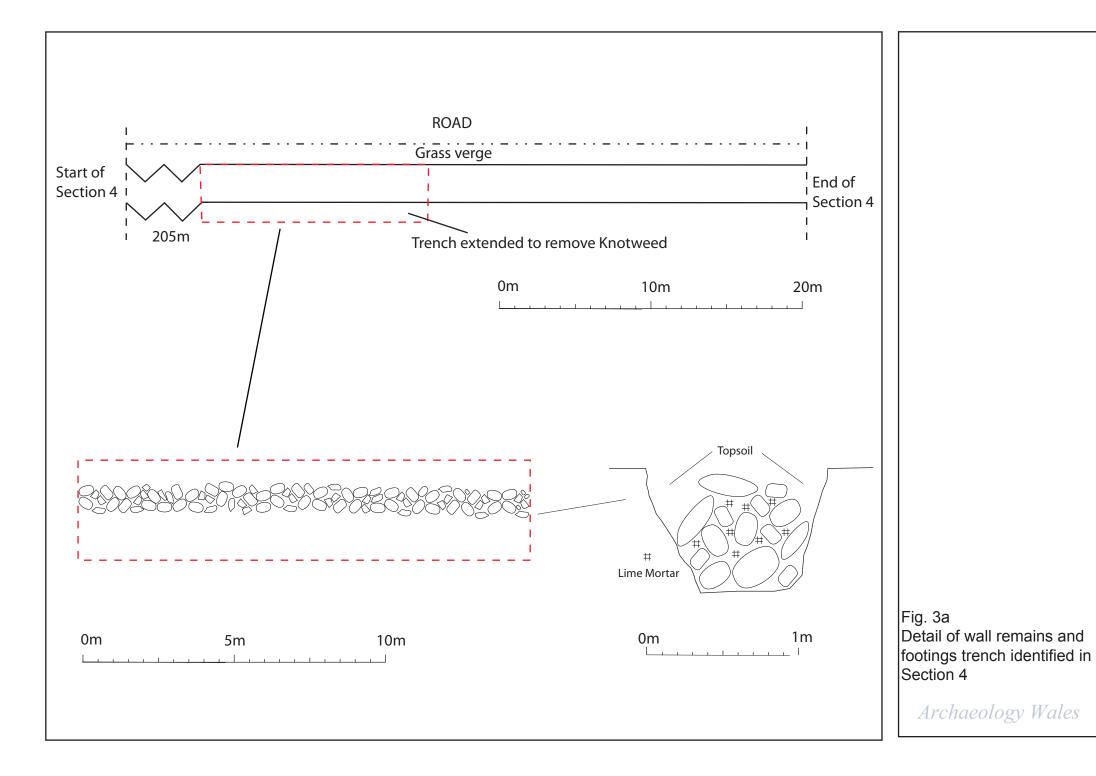


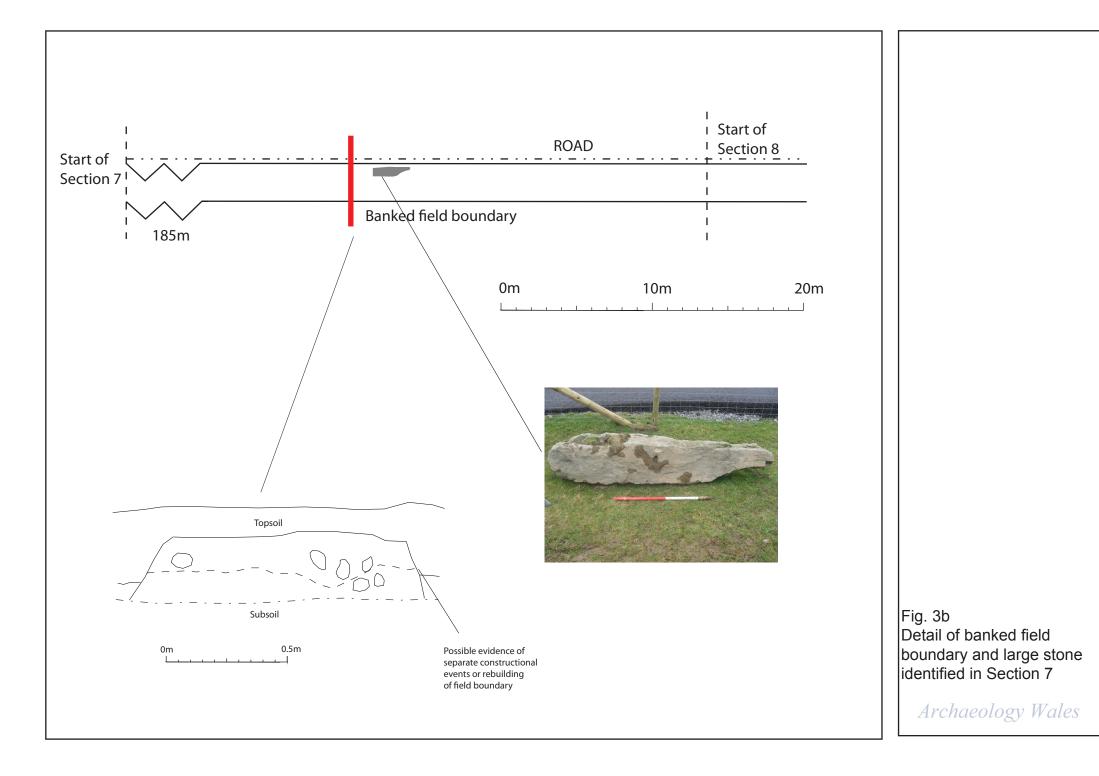
Fig. 1 Location of path showing the different sections within the construction area

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*Figure 2*: Location of archaeological sites recorded on the HER.





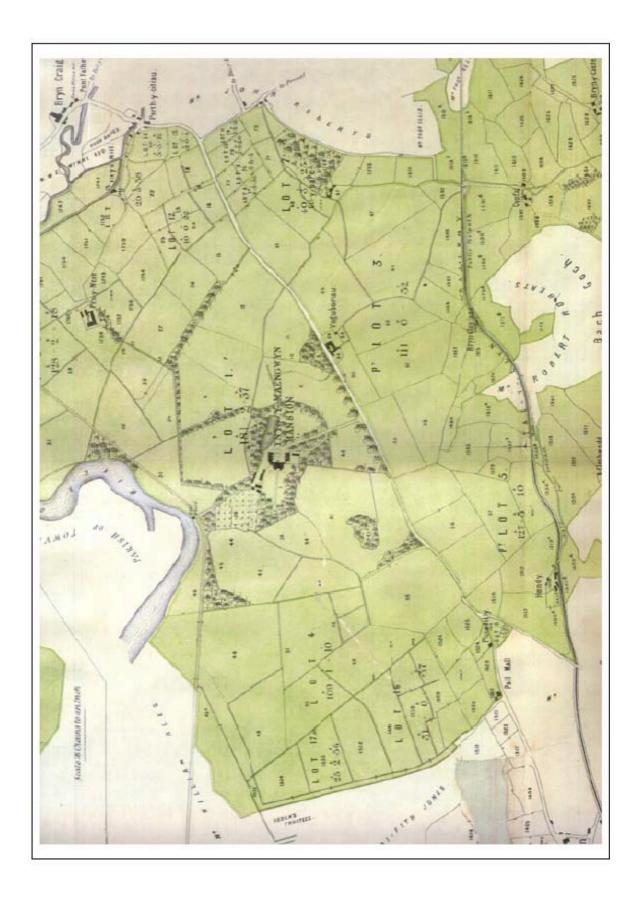
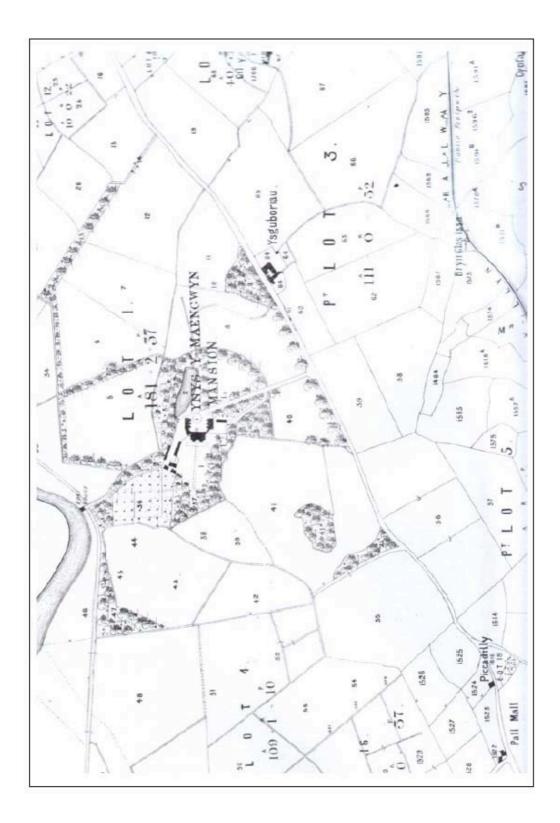


Figure 4 Detailed Ynyssmaengwn estate map with lots (Eddison and Taylor 1878)



*Figure 5* Detail of Ynysymaengwyn estate map (Eddison and Taylor 1878)

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> **APPENDIX II: PHOTO PLATES**

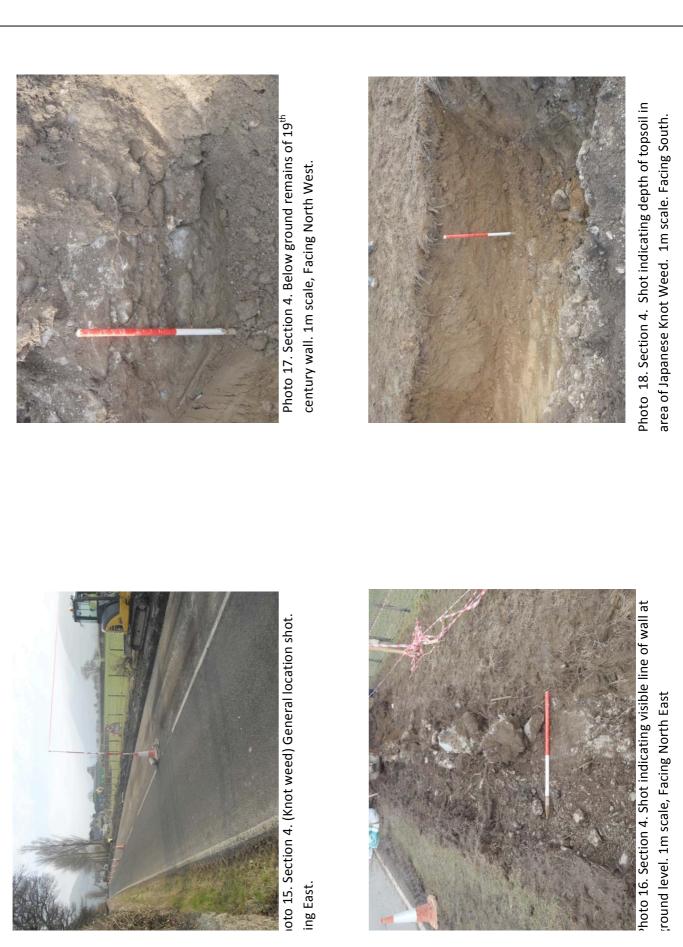




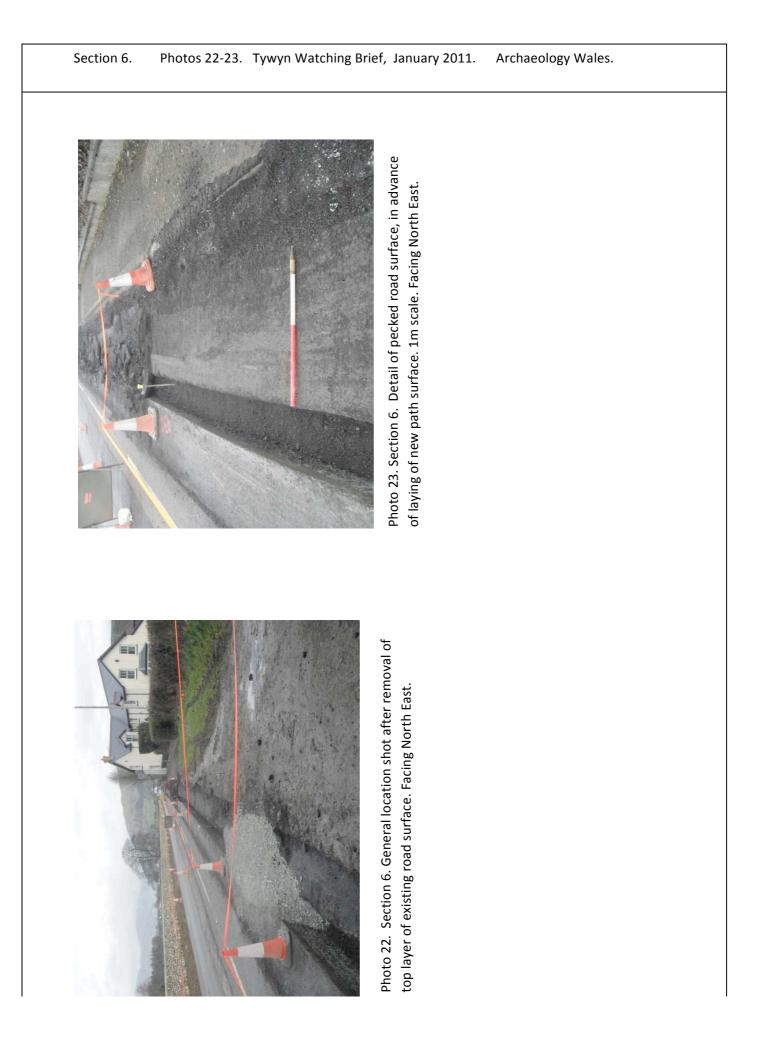




topsoil. 1m scale, Facing South.









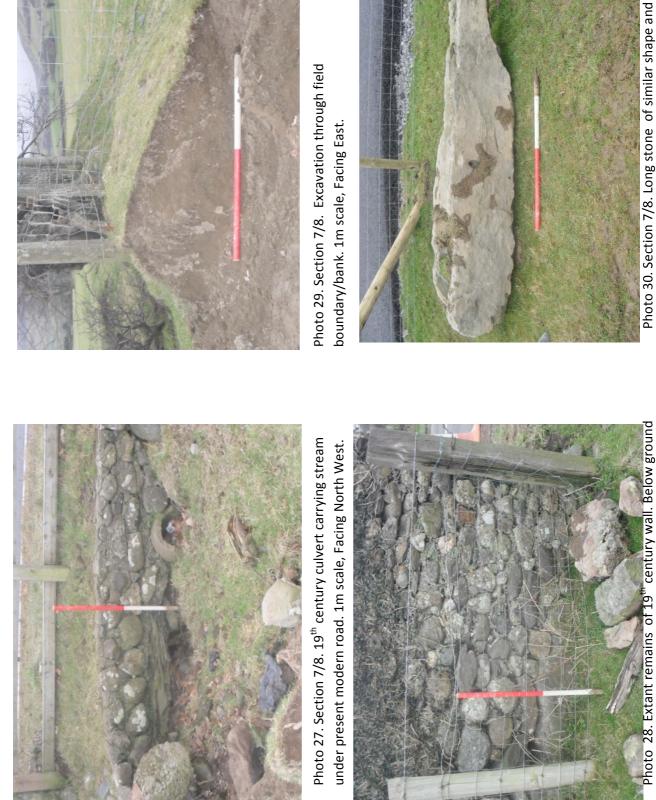
Photos 24-26. Tywyn Watching Brief,

Section 7.



2011. Archaeology Wales.

Photo 25. Section 7. Shot showing detail and depth of topsoil. 1m scale, Facing South.



remains seen in section 4. 1m scale. Facing North West.

Section 7/8.

Photos 27-30. Tywyn Watching Brief, January 2011.

Archaeology Wales.





Photo 36. Section 9. Shot showing detail and depth of topsoil. 1m scale, Facing South East.

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## **APPENDIX III: FINDS REGISTER**

Section	Context	No/Description	Spot Date
1	Topsoil	3 x fragments of print ware/stoneware	19 <sup>th</sup> century
2	Topsoil	1 x frag of stoneware pottery	19 <sup>th</sup> century
3	Topsoil	2 x fragments of stoneware/china pottery	18/19 <sup>th</sup> century
4	Topsoil	4 x fragments of print ware/china pottery	19 <sup>th</sup> century
5	_	_	_
6	_	-	_
7	_	_	_
8	_	-	_
9	Topsoil	4 x fragments of stoneware pottery	18/19 <sup>th</sup> century
	Topsoil	15 x fragments of print ware/china pottery	18/19 <sup>th</sup> century

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## **APPENDIX IV: ARCHIVE COVER SHEET**

#### **ARCHIVE COVER SHEET**

A493 between Tywyn and Bryncrug ARCHIVE DESTINATION – RCAHMW Archives. Site Name: **Tywyn**, **Gwynedd** Site Code: PRN: NPRN : SAM: Other Ref No: AW Report No. 1002 NGR: Site Type: Various Project Type: Watching Brief Project Officer: Robert Blackburn Project Dates: December 2010to February 2011 Categories Present: N/A Location of Original Archive: Archaeology Wales Location of duplicate Archives: RCAHMW Number of Finds Boxes: Location of Finds: N/A Museum Reference: Not assigned Copyright: AW Restrictions to

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