

G1025

NEW HAVEN, AMLWCH  
Pilot Archaeological Scheme  
1990

## **Introduction**

Amlwch Port was a thriving harbour and boat building centre in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There were two boat yards, pubs, mills, rows of houses and warehouses, storage bins for copper from Parys Mountain and other structures on both sides and at the end of the harbour. Most became derelict years ago, lost their roofs, and now survive as fragments of walls covered by debris and extensive undergrowth. Many of the structures are capable of being cleared, conserved, perhaps restored, and interpreted.

Anglesey Borough Council commissioned Gwynedd Archaeological Trust to do a pilot scheme of clearance and recording to investigate the potential of the site. It was agreed to keep archaeological excavation to a minimum as large scale removal of fallen debris would lead to exposures of standing masonry which would require conservation, a facility not available within the current scope of works. Work was to take place on the site of a building known as the New Haven.

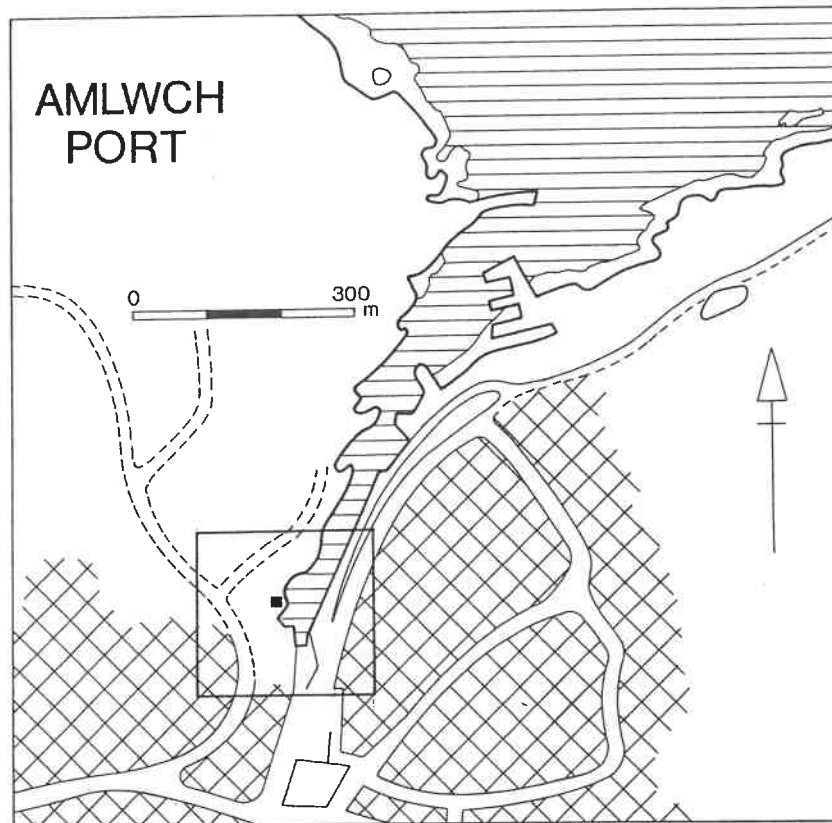
## **The New Haven**

The 1886 Ordnance Survey map shows the New Haven and indicates that it was a public house. A map of 1750 by R. Owen indicates a building on or just north of the site. There is no earlier documentary or cartographic evidence for a building on the site. It has been suggested that before becoming a public house the building was a mill of some form and local tradition indicates that it may have been a paintworks. In which case a clay mill would have been needed to process the ochre residues from the copper precipitation.

## **Location**

The site was located on a slight inlet on the west side of the harbour overlooking the extreme south end of Amlwch port. The structure had been built in the bottom of a natural 3 running south-west to north-east. The area to be investigated measured 30m long by 20 m wide forming a rough rectangular platform defined on each side by upstanding ridges of natural rock. The ground surface here sloped down fairly steeply from SW to NE towards the harbour from a height of 12.30m OD to 6.80m OD. The area was heavily overgrown with brambles, bushes and trees.

The underlying natural geology comprised rocks of Pre-Cambrian age stone which were often visible protruding from the top soil in the form of natural ridges and outcrops.



*Fig. 1. Amlwch Port. Location of the New Haven*

## **Project Strategy and Aims**

The primary goals of the project were to clear the site of the undergrowth, to define the main structural components which were to be planned, photographed and described with as little excavation as possible to reduce problems of subsequent conservation.

The second aim was to try to determine whether or not there had there was some local support.

This involved cutting two trial trenches, one in the west and one in the east across what appeared as a possible "leat" or water channel running adjacent and parallel to the north walls of the main buildings.

Because of the small amount of actual excavation undertaken and hence the tiny quantity of finds recovered, dating of the site can only be conjectural. The phasing is thus based largely on an inspection of the physical relationships and alignments of the buildings and may be subject to some modification upon more detailed investigation in the future.

## **Summary of Archaeological Investigation**

The archaeological conclusions about the development of the structures are preliminary. More extensive excavation is required to establish a firm structural sequence. A track along the south of the building may have been in existence from the beginning, but the path outside the yard is unlikely to have come into being before the yard was built. The paths are considered under Phase III of the detailed archaeological report.

### *Phase I*

The first building on the site was a rectangular stone structure apparently terraced into the natural gully. An internal partition divided the building into two halves with an access between. The east half was originally of three floors, a cellar with small window, a ground floor with at least one window and possibly a hearth, and an upper floor. The west end had just ground and first floors with no cellar. A water channel was constructed on the north side and various retaining walls were built on three sides.

### *Phase II*

The building was extended to the west and steps were constructed into the water channel. A yard was defined by a drystone wall at the west of the site.

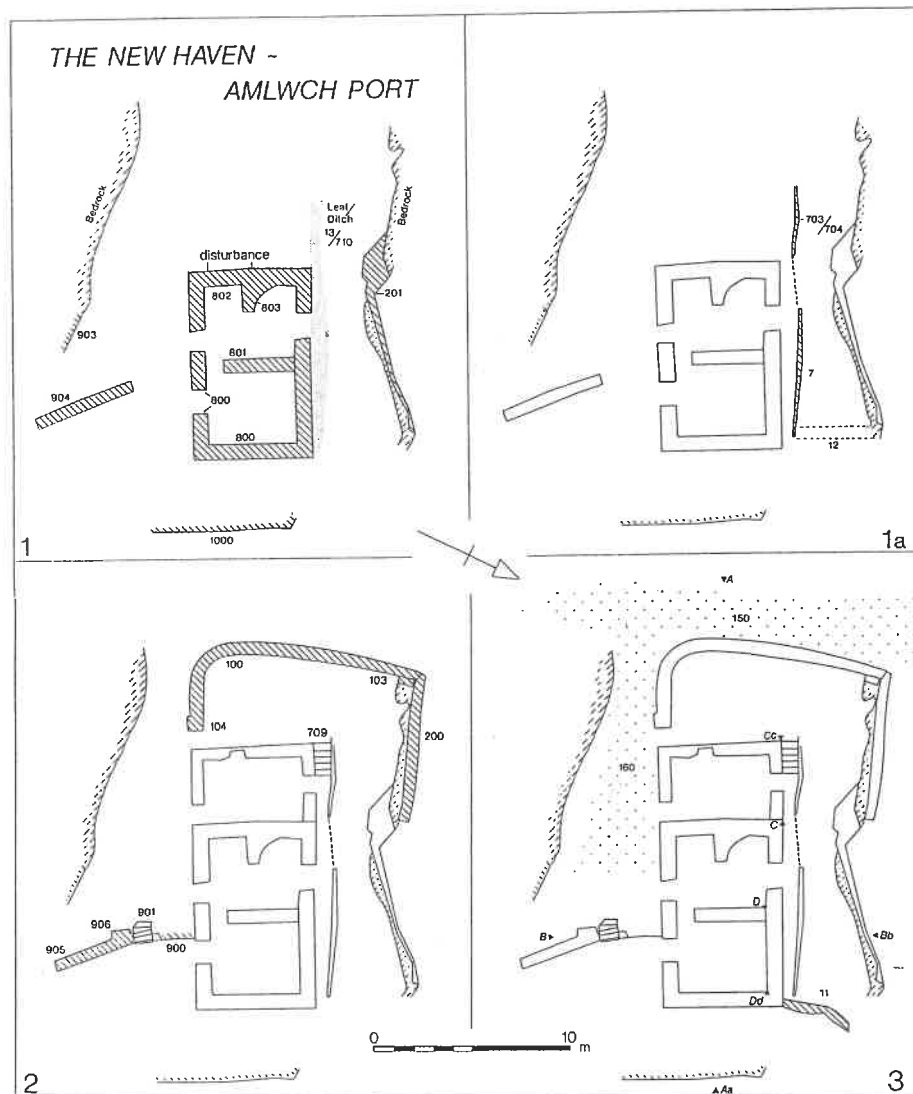


Fig. 2 Amlwch, New Haven. The Phases of Building

### Phase III

Various alterations were made to the retaining walls and a new wall was built across the mouth of the channel.

### Detailed Archaeological Results

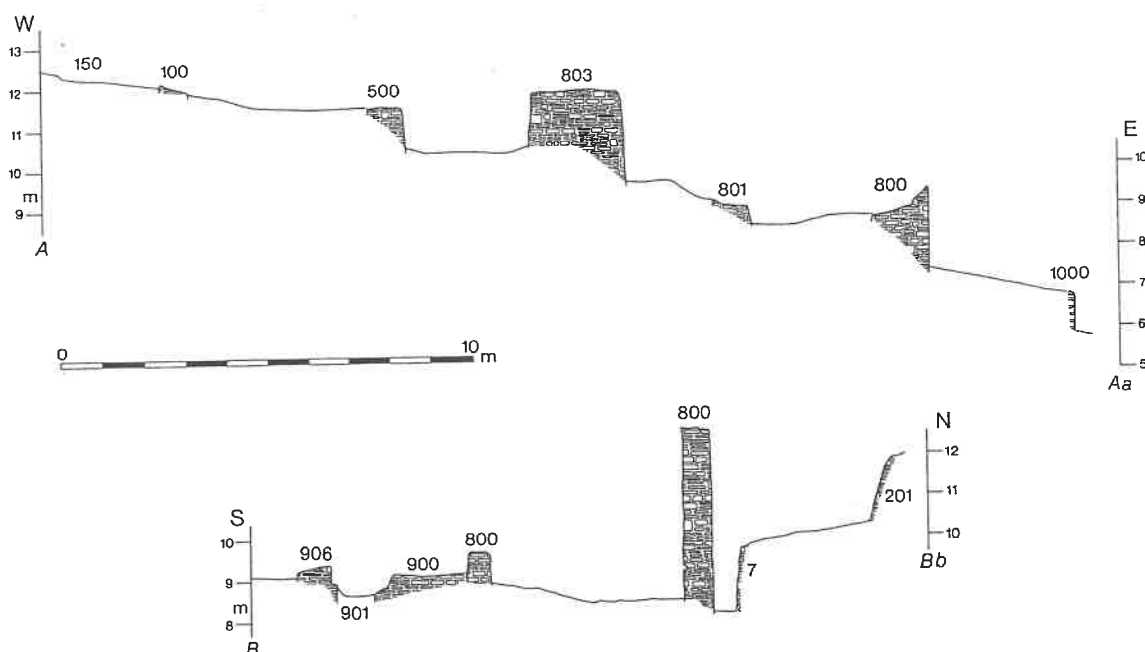
*Phase I - the main building, ditch cut and early revetments.*

The earliest phase of activity on the site involved the construction of a large stone building 800/802 and the reveting of the site on the north, south and east sides.

800/802 comprised a large rectangular stone structure measuring 9.5m long by 6m wide. The building was aligned SW to NE at the NE end of the site 3.5m from the cliff edge overlooking the harbour.

The foundations, as seen in the E trial trench for the leat, consisted of local angular flagstones laid horizontally and presenting a very rough irregular surface.

The upper exterior walls were constructed from local flagstones and slabs laid horizontally and mortared, presenting a flat finished face inside and out. The walls are 0.75m thick and the inside retains patches of plaster while the outside is rendered. The tops of the walls are broken and so survive to various heights. The E half of the building (800) has retained a greater proportion of its height with a maximum of 6.5m for the east wall immediately above the harbour. The W half (802) survives to 2.25m.



*Fig. 3. Amlwch, New Haven. Profiles across the building*

The building has two entrance ways both located about one third of the way along the S and N walls (from the west) and measuring about 1m wide. These two apertures appear to sever the two halves of the building, so that there is no visible physical connection between them.

Adjacent to the S entrance, 802 is 0.65m high above the ground with a very flat surface for a length of 1.5m. At this point the wall rises vertically with a finished corner and flat finished edge to a height of 1.35m where it becomes irregular and broken. The rising vertical outer edge shows signs of infilling with small flagstones and the conclusion is that this was the site of a window. A corresponding aperture about halfway along the S wall of 800 1.2m wide may also be the site of a window.

The W face of 802 shows two areas of disturbance of the stonework. The first is located about 1.0m from the south end of the wall and comprises a band rising from the ground surface to the top of the wall widening from 0.70m to 1.0m. The second is located opposite 803 (see below) and again comprises a band widening from 1.0m at ground level to 2.0m at the top of the wall. Wall

802 bows out noticeably at this point. The use of smaller flagstones and slabs and a generally more gappy appearance defines these two areas.

The top of the wall has been capped with mortar.

On the E wall of 800 there is a surviving window at outside ground level, approx. 7.51m OD, rectangular in shape and measuring 0.40m wide and approx. 0.60m tall.

The main central area of this wall has been destroyed leaving a vaguely rectangular hole about 2m wide widening to about 3m wide at the top of the wall. At the top there is a finished edge running down vertically from the top N end of the void for an estimated distance of approximately 1.75m. The "finished" part of this edge pierces the wall only to a depth of about half its thickness and it then becomes irregular and broken matching the rest of the wall

It may be that the reason that this part of the wall has been destroyed is that it was weakened by structural features i.e. holes for windows, or perhaps a chimney. The top partially finished edge can then be interpreted as an upper storey fireplace or flue joining the main chimney.

The north wall displays a horizontal line of very roughly circular holes averaging 0.100 - 0.140m in diameter running the length of its S face at a height of 9.20m OD. These holes do not completely pierce the wall and are spaced 0.45m apart. They appear to continue along the face of the east wall and have been interpreted as sockets for floor joists. There appear to be similar sockets in the upper part of the wall inner faces though the evidence here is more fragmentary.

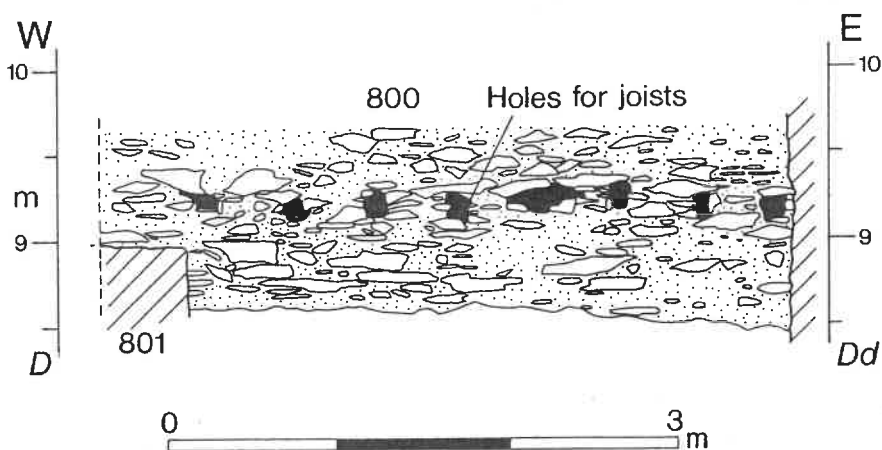


Fig. 4. Amlwch, New Haven. Details of holes for floor joists in wall 800.

Butting the inner face of the N wall of 800 at right angles and 1.0m E of the N entrance way is 801/804. This feature is 3.5m long and 0.70m wide surviving to a height of 0.45m above the rubble infill of the building and about 0.20m below the floor joist socket holes in 800. It comprises local flagstones arranged horizontally and mortared presenting a finished flat face to the east. The west face is obscured by rubble.

At a point 1.3m from its S end, the W edge of 801 can no longer be traced as it appears to extend under the rubble. It would seem then from the limited excavation undertaken that 801 may cease to be a wall at this point and possibly becomes a surface (804) extending W towards 802. No joint could be defined between 801 and 804 and for the moment they are assumed to be of the same build.

This feature forms the fourth side of a room or cellar below the level of the lower suspended floor joist sockets. This makes sense of the small window low down on the E wall of 800 (see above) and it explains the gap at the S end of 801 as this may be the site of steps into the cellar.

The cellar is at present full of collapsed stonework and dumps of rubble, so that more detail is not possible here.

Opposite the point where 801 becomes 804 there is a triangular stone structure protruding from the E face of 802. This feature extends 1.5m towards the E and is 0.50m thick at this end and 1.75m thick where it meets 802 and the same height as 802 at this point, 2.0m. The south face of 803 is at right angles to 802 but the north face is at 45 degrees.

The structure comprises local flagstones and slabs laid horizontally. A large irregular gap, maximum width 0.20m, runs vertically up the S face of 803 in the corner where it joins 802. At the base of this gap it is possible to see underneath 803, a bricked arch descending inside the wall.

On the north face of 803 the 45 degree stonework seems to be only the top few courses and the lower part of the wall may be at right angles to 802 though this is presently heavily obscured by rubble. It may be that the top is a later addition to 803.

The top of 803 is mortar capped but this material shows signs of subsidence and there are various voids in evidence.

The bricked arch below 803 and the voids visible in the top of it may indicate that 803 is in fact an internal chimney with the 45 degree stonework and the brick arch representing fireplaces in different rooms partitioned by 803. The disturbance on the west face of 802 may therefore represent where an external chimney originally ran serving 800 or perhaps a fireplace in 500, though one might question whether it is likely that there would be two fireplaces in such a small room.

A further possible explanation is that the alignment of 803 with the band of disturbance on the W face of 802 (above), and the gap running up the joint between 803 and 802 means that 803 is an addition to 802. Perhaps 803 represents the division of what had been one room into two and provides a fireplace for each.

Further stretching the point, the alignment of 803 with the beginning of the possible floor surface 804 may mean that these features are contemporary additions to 800/802. However, the fact that 801/804 butts 800 may be only a constructional detail and may not mean that it is a later addition. Further work is necessary here.



A cut for a ditch, 13, was identified immediately adjacent to the N face of the N wall of 800 and running SW to NE parallel to it. Feature 13 measures 0.50m wide and 0.60m deep with a more or less flat bottom. The fill comprised a mid to light grey silty medium fine sand containing moderate small local flagstones, and one piece of broken brick.

This feature was investigated only in the E trial trench for a length of 3m. However, to the SW the W trial trench appeared to pick up the same feature (710) measuring 0.58m wide and 0.40m deep with a flat bottom, cut into the natural bedrock. This had as its fill a golden brown sandy silt containing moderate flecks and small fragments of white as well as grey mortar making a very gravelly fill.

A series of revetments were also constructed to stabilise the site on the S, 903, and 904; E, 1000; and N, 201.

Revetment 903 survives as a stub of wall 2.20m long E - W and 0.90m high; the width was obscured. It comprises local flagstones and slabs very closely laid with flat faces to the N making a very fine finished surface. Two large purple slag lumps were used in the base measuring 0.30 - 0.50m by 0.15 - 0.20m. Revetment 903 butts the natural stone ridge on the south side of the site. This feature probably represents a boundary wall.

Revetment 1000 is a linear stone structure running N-S along the E face of the cliff overlooking the harbour immediately in front of 800. It is 7m long, with an estimated height of 1.5m and an unclear width once again obscured. It was constructed with large polygonal blocks and slabs, laid to present a flat face to the E, though the result is somewhat irregular and gappy. The feature serves as a Revetment of the cliff face to the E of 800.

Revetment 904 is a linear stone structure running SE - NW for a distance of 5.20m and apparently stopping 2m. short of the S wall of 800. It was constructed of large local flagstones and slabs laid horizontally to present a flat face to the NE, the SE end is 1.0m thick and butts the natural bedrock of the cliff face. The SW face is obscured by the terrace for which it serves as a revetment.

Revetment 201 is a linear stone structure running SW to NE along the N limit of the site butting the natural stone ridge. Built in three sections, a short one at each end, it is 9m long overall, 0.50m wide (maximum) and 1.25m high (maximum). It comprises local slabs and flagstones laid vertically with some secondary mortaring evident.

The style of the stonework mirrors that used for the harbour walls with which it may therefore be contemporary.

#### *PHASE Ib - reveting of the ditch*

The next phase of activity on the site involved changes to the ditch feature 13/710 as recorded in the two trial trenches

A dry stone wall, 12, was constructed aligned N to S running from the NE corner of 800 towards the natural upstanding bedrock bordering the site to the N. This feature was seen only in section but measured 1.20m wide and 1.15m high and was constructed with local angular flagstones and polygonal blocks. A

gap was left between 12 and 800 measuring 0.80m at the top and 0.50m at the bottom corresponding to the dimensions of ditch cut 13.

On the N side of this gap on the W face of 12, a linear stone structure was added running NE-SW along the edge of cut 13 parallel to 800. It comprised local flagstones and slabs laid horizontally and mortared leaving a flat finished surface facing the S which had been rendered. It measured 5.4m long from the NE appearing to end opposite the N entrance way into 800. (The feature was not excavated here). It was 1.0m high and sloped slightly outwards away from 800 and was butted onto 12. The fill 4 in the top of cut 13 may correspond to this change as it contains moderate to frequent flecks and small fragments of white mortar in a mid to dark grey slightly clayey sandy silt.

A similar feature was uncovered in the trial trench to the W. Feature 704 was a linear stone structure of similar construction to 7, 0.30m high running along the N edge of cut 710 and running towards the NE parallel to 800.

*Phase II - the annex to 800, adaptation of the culvert, enclosure of the W side of the site.*

In phase II, the main activity was the construction of a large stone structure 6m long N-S and 4m wide butting onto the W face of 802. Structure 500 comprises three walls 0.60m thick surviving to a maximum height of 1.75m and constructed with local flagstones and slabs and mortared. The inside and outside faces showed signs of having been rendered. The outside face of the W wall had a thick skim of what appeared to be modern concrete.

There is a notch 0.75m wide and 0.40m deep in the inner face of the W wall about one third of the distance along the wall's length from the S, which presumably served as a fireplace.

Entrance into the structure was gained on the S side by way of a gap 1.0m wide between 500 and 800. On the N side was another entrance way with a gap piercing the wall halfway along its length.

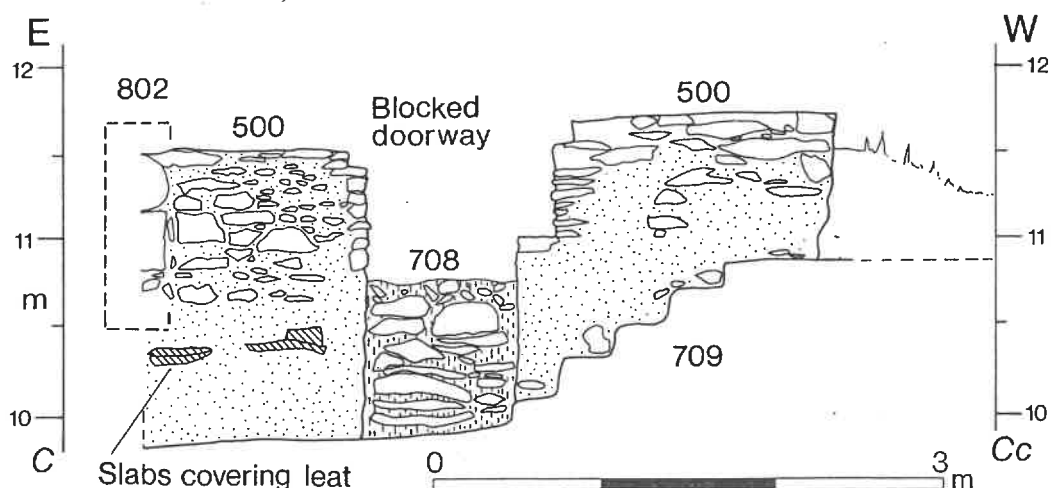


Fig. 5. Amlwch, New Haven. Details of blocked door in structure 500 and steps on north side.

Opposite this entrance the culvert 704 was adapted with the original cut 710 widened at this point to 0.73m and a new retaining wall 703 inserted to hold a series of 6 flagstone steps descending 1.0m down from SW to NE. The remainder of the culvert to the NE remained open. The void was "sounded" to a length 2.6m towards the NE but it was capped with large flat mortared flagstones wedged between 500 N wall and the remnant of 704 leaving a roughly rectangular void 0.40m - 0.45m high and 0.58m wide.

Lying within 704 and on top of one of the capping stones was a layer 60mm thick of compacted angular gravel in a matrix of cream to orangey fine powder with the consistency of lime. The layer formed a rough triangular shape 0.50m by 0.50m . It appeared to have accreted to the inside face of 704 above its present height as if it had been fluid and flowing at some point.

On the W side of 500 a further wall, 100, was constructed running from opposite the S corner of 500 towards the W (parallel to the alignment of 500) for a distance of 3m then curving to run towards the N for 9.5m to meet wall 200. Wall 100 is of dry stone construction using local flagstones and slabs aligned horizontally with flat faces outwards forming a structure 0.60-0.70m wide with an average height of 0.10-0.50m. The S end of 100 from opposite 500 seems to have a second tier above foundation level which, though integral with 100, appears as a different constructional phase, 101. This segment of the wall survives 1.5m high.

In the N, where 100 meets 200, is a rectangular structure, 103, 0.70m long S to N and 0.40m wide set in the right angle formed by the meeting of the two walls. It stands to a height of 0.50m and is constructed of local stone slabs with some signs of secondary mortaring. This may be interpreted as a buttress. Some 6m to the S of this point there is a gap of 2m in 100, containing a spread of loose stones providing an entranceway into the yard, 102.

Also, opposite the S corner of 500 there is a gap of 1m between 500 and 100. The ground here is natural bedrock and the stone has been carved to form a step down towards the S.

On the W side of this entrance way, there is a rectangular feature, 104, measuring 0.30m N-S by 0.70m E-W and 1.0m high. It butts 100 and has a similar construction to it, but with some evidence of mortar rendering. Probably this too represents a buttress.

Wall 200 extends from where it meets 100 in the W towards the E for a distance of 8.0m. It is a dry stone wall using local flagstones and some waste bricks for infilling and is built against the natural stone outcrop. Some secondary mortar rendering is evident in places. Wall 200 is 0.50m thick and with a maximum height of 0.15m on the N side and 0.90m on the S side. It possibly represents a boundary wall.

The final change in the site evident at this time was in the SE corner where the revetment wall 904 was overlain by two new walls 905 and 900.

In the S, 905 is a linear structure comprising local flagstones. It is 0.60m thick and 1.0m high and sits on top of the earlier wall 904 but is on a slightly different alignment, set back by 100-115mm from 904's S end E face. It stands above the present ground surface and is rendered on both faces.

The N end of 905 incorporates what appears to be an integral buttress 0.95m by 0.80-0.95m by 1.0m tall. The W face of this feature shows a butt joint but the E face is integral so it is assumed that the evidence on the W face is a construction feature.

In the N, 900 butts the S wall of 800 and runs to the S for a length of 2.90m to overlie the S end of 904. It is constructed of local flagstones lying horizontally with a flat face to the east. The W face is obscured by the hillside. The wall survives to a height of 1.10m.

Feature 900 is truncated on the top at its S end where four flagstone steps, 901, 0.80-0.90m wide descend down to the ground surface to the E below the terrace. These are interpreted as being integral with 900 and certainly with 900 blocking the previous gap between 800 and 904, some form of access to the area below the terrace would have had to have been incorporated into the new changes.

### *Phase III - access roads, new revetment at east end of culvert.*

Running N - S across the whole width of the site and butting the W face of 100, was a rough linear surface, 150, about 2.10m wide. This feature comprised slag lumps in a gravel matrix and sloped down from N - S following the ground slope. This appeared to be a metalled track or alley leading from the present footbridge near the site of the millwheel, up to "Turkey Shore".

Between the upstanding ridge of natural stone on the S limit of the site and the E walls of 100/101, 500 and 800/802 was a flat "alleyway", 160, running SW - NE towards the harbour. The area slopes down moderately with the gradient of the ground here and is approximately 2.0m wide and 16.0m long.

Though 160 exhibits no obvious sign of metalling (unexcavated), its dimensions, character and location indicate that this represents an access way to the site and perhaps to the harbour front at this point for traffic from the N to S track 150.

The above conclusion is perhaps strengthened when it is noted that the distance between steps 901 and the S wall of 800 is 2.0m which is the notional width of the putative alleyway 160. This also corresponds to the gap which seems to have existed between the N end of the earlier revetting wall 904 and the S wall of 800 in phase I. This may indicate that this access way to the harbour area was in existence in some form quite early on in the development of the site.

On the north side of the site, a linear stone structure 11, was added as a refacing of the E side of 12. This comprised, in the main, local angular flagstones and polygonal stones, laid horizontally and mortared, with some infilling with bricks, cement blocks and several large pieces of purple slag 0.15-0.20m. A very rough jumbled construction but a more or less flat face is presented to the E. Feature 11 butts 800 and the natural bedrock to the N and appears to sit on a shelf formed in the E face of 12 bowing outwards to the E noticeably.

Its lower S corner is pierced by a roughly rectangular shaped hole 0.45m high 0.35m wide at the top and 0.28m wide at the bottom which corresponds to the channel formed by revetment 7 and the N wall of 800. The makeshift construction method and materials would suggest that this is a very late addition and may have been intended to reinforce the subsiding face of 12.

### *Phase III - destruction and abandonment*

Aside from the obvious rubble and collapse filling the buildings evidence for abandonment of activity on the site was uncovered in the excavation of the trial trenches across the water channel to the north of 800, defined by 7, and also in the stairwell into 500 (700 et al). The top fills contained by the revetment 7 comprised a lower band 0.19m thick comprising a light to mid

brown slightly clayey sandy silt containing frequent fragments of slate roofing tile lying horizontally across the layer and sloping down gently SW-NE. The top fill lying above this is a band 0.90m thick virtually levelling the channel with the ground surface. This fill comprised a mid brown slightly sandy clayey silt containing moderate large local flagstones and polygonals, one red/brown brick fragment and occasional to moderate coarse grit. The layer was very loose and with many voids. This presumably represents the collapse of the buildings and the backfilling of the channel. The whole site was then sealed by modern turf and undergrowth.

### **Summary**

The earliest activity on the site involved construction of revetments along the S and N, reinforcing the natural barrier of the upstanding stone ridges, of revetments for the E face of the cliff overlooking the harbour and for the terrace in the SE corner also overlooking the harbour and construction of the large main building of two storeys and cellar. The low window on the E side perhaps supporting the idea that this is a full cellar rather than just a crawl space below the suspended floor. There is no indication as of yet as to how access was gained to the upper storey.

Within this building are suggestions of internal divisions, possibly representing several differing functions, though whether these divisions were contemporary with the construction of the building or later modifications representing later changes of use is conjectural. Certainly the cellar now seems to occupy only the E half of the building and at least one of the floors to the W may have been stone.

The "circular" stonework adjacent to the N side entrance way in the main building, at the moment seems best interpreted as the mantle of a fireplace set into the wall or corner of the wall that divides the W half of the building into two. However, other hypotheses may be proved by further excavation such as a spiral staircase to reach the upper storey, or even the housing for the millstones for the conjectured mill building.



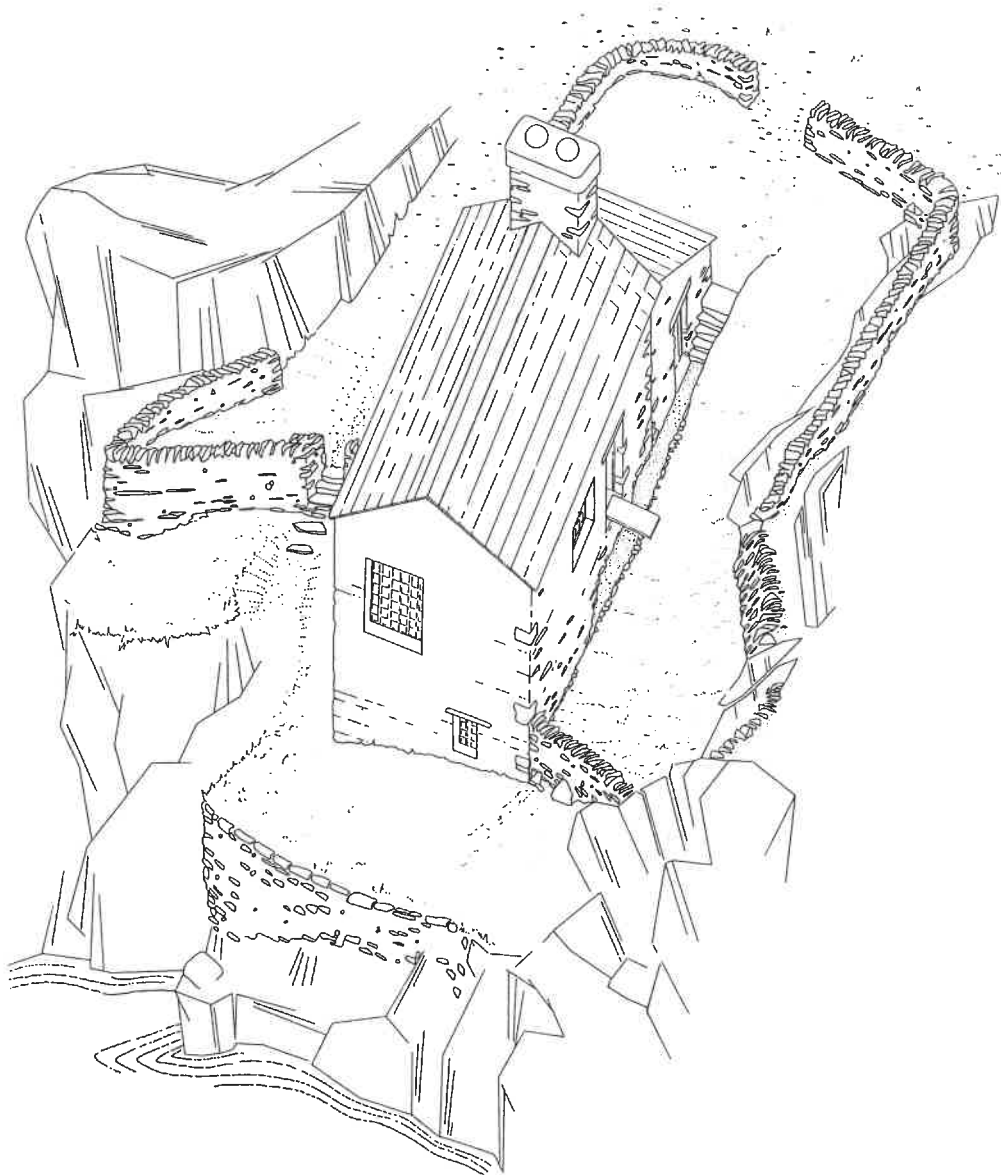
*Fig. 6. Amlwch, New Haven. Perspective drawing of how the New Haven may have looked in the first phase*

The ditch cut parallel to the N wall of the main building would seem to be a later addition in that the rough unfinished foundations of the main building are revealed by it whereas any where else the stonework has been revealed it has been "finished".

The ditch itself, in the NE at least, has been cut through a very loose layer of what appears to be top soil. The thickness of this layer (0.50m) and its lack of compaction seem curious.

Underlying this is a layer of very loose clean shale gravel which is very similar to beach shale. If this layer is natural it may

indicate that water at one time flowed over this area in some quantity. It may therefore be possible that there was in fact a natural water channel through here before the area was developed.



*Fig. 7. Amlwch, New Haven. Perspective drawing of how the New Haven may have appeared in its final period of use*

This might also serve to explain the "Cornish" vertical reveting which defines the N limit of the site. This is similar to the stonework used to revet much of the harbour and seems out of place here serving merely as a boundary or garden wall. It may be that the original water course was, in the main, eventually diverted and the area levelled with loose topsoil and stones when the main building was constructed. The remaining natural

drainage of the site was accommodated by the digging of the ditch through this loose dumped layer.

The space between the N end of the terrace revetment and the main building may be an accessway to the harbour front and may indicate the existence of rudimentary trackways preceding the present metalled alleys.

Eventually, a revetment was built between the N wall of the main building and the natural ridge in the N at the base of the bank of loose top soil leaving a gap for the ditch to empty into the harbour. The ditch cut was enclosed with the building of a revetment along its N edge sitting on the loose top soil layer. It would seem logical that the function of these constructions was to revet dumps of material which were used to level the area up to its present height.

A one storey stone extension was added to the E wall of the earlier main building and dry stone walls built to enclose the W yard. The culverted ditch was broken into at its SW end and stone steps inserted to serve an entrance way on the N side of the building. The remainder of the culvert to the NE was capped but appears to have remained open, perhaps to serve as a handy drain for disposing of wastes from the building.

It would appear that the extended building had at least two phases of activity with the first incorporating the use of the stone steps and entrance on the N and the second commencing with the building of a blocking wall across the entrance and the culvert being filled in.

It would seem likely that the building was at least for part of its life a habitation on the evidence of the fireplace, and the application of a modern concrete to the outside face of the W "weather" wall may indicate that it was occupied until quite recent times.

## **Conclusions**

The form of the investigations has often necessarily led to the creation of more questions than it has answered being basically restricted to recording the visible remains. Particularly, the limited excavation of the potential leat has failed to prove the existence of a water driven mill on the site but equally it has not been able to completely rule out the possibility. Only excavation of the entire length of the culvert/channel and of the interior of the building can hope to answer that point.

Also, understanding the evolution of the fabric and uses of the buildings can only be guesswork until systematic excavation of the destruction and occupation layers is possible. Even so, the complexity and quantity of information uncovered or hinted at has been startling.



The pilot project has indicated the complex structural sequence of just one of the derelict buildings surrounding Amlwch port. The visual impression has been enhanced by the clearance and limited excavation works of the pilot scheme.

A long-term programme of clearance, excavation, conservation, partial restoration, utilisation and presentation of the 18th and 19th century remains of Amlwch port would not only provide a rare opportunity to investigate a port and all its ancillary features but also considerably improve the environment of the port area and thus be of considerable amenity value for the community and may even provide the scope for additional employment.

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

April 1990