

Donald Insall Associates
Chartered Architects and Historic Building Consultants

Y Graigwen, Menai Bridge

Boundary Wall Repairs

Heritage and Access Statement
Submitted on behalf of Dr. & Mrs Court
August 2025



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1.0 Summary

1.1 Introduction

Donald Insall Associates has appointed by Dr & Mrs Court to assist with proposals to repair a defective section of retaining boundary wall at Y Graigwen, a Grade II listed villa in Menai Bridge. The existing retaining wall dates from 1935 and follows the layout of an earlier approach drive which was lost during works to widen the public highway.

Y Graigwen is an impressive early-nineteenth century villa of Regency design located in the town of Menai Bridge, to the south-eastern edge of the Isle of Anglesey. It is a Grade II listed building which is of special interest for its strong evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal values. The house also has special significance as it was once the home of the late William Mathias, the celebrated Welsh composer. The west wing was constructed in the 1970's to provide him with a studio for listening to music and working on his own compositions. The house and boundary wall also sit within the Menai Bridge Conservation Area.

The wall in question is constructed of rubble stonework and retains 1.3m of soil to the neighbouring property whilst also forming the edge of the approach drive to the house. It is exhibiting signs of on-going structural failure which present a health and safety risk to inhabitants either side of the boundary. A Structural Engineer has inspected the wall and recommended that it is safely dismantled and re-constructed to meet modern codes of practice for retaining walls. The proposed repairs have been designed to provide adequate structural support to the retained land, whilst preserving the appearance of the existing wall externally.

These works are considered justified by the need to mitigate the existing health and safety risk. The assessment concludes that through careful recording, a conservation approach to the design and the use of a skilled contractor, the proposals will have no adverse impact on the contribution the wall currently make to the significance of Y Graigwen and the wider Conservation Area.

2.0 Historical Background

2.1 A Brief History of the Area

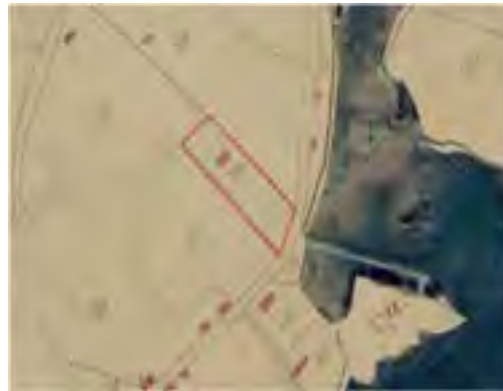
The existing house was built between 1830-40 on a rectangular strip of land fronting Cadnant Road, oriented north-west to south-east. The area was developed during the early growth of the town of Menai Bridge. The house can be first seen in the tithe map of 1846 (plot 23) although the approach drive and the area of wall in question are not visible on this map. Both plots 23 and 24 were owned by John Price Esquire, of an important local family with close links to Plas Newydd. The plot shows a detached house surrounded by a garden of 2 acres. By this time there are a number of houses laid out along Cadnant Road, including Grade II listed Bron Menai (plot 45) which were constructed during the town's initial growth period.

The town continued to grow throughout the middle of the century following the arrival of a second bridge (Britannia) in 1850, the advent of packet services between Menai and Liverpool and growth of successful businesses within the town. The bridges and packet services also brought increasing numbers of tourists who arrived to enjoy the town, its location on the Straits and its close proximity to other tourist destinations in Anglesey.

Growth slowed from the following century onwards, resulting in the strikingly strong Victorian character of the town as seen today. The pattern of immediately surrounding development changed little from the late 19th-century to the middle of the 20th-century with the exception of the gradual progress of small scale residential development. In 1935 the Council purchased a strip of land along the front of the plot to widen the road and re-built the boundary walls. The section of boundary wall to which this application relates dates from this period.

2.2 A Brief Description and Chronology of the Building

The exact date of construction of the house is unknown but it was originally named 'Graig Gwen' and is first mentioned in the 1841 census. The first occupier was a Gwen Chambers, aged in her 60s, who was a widow of independent means. She leased the land from the Price family. She is recorded to have been sharing the house with two couples (lodgers) and two servants. Later names for the house also included 'Graig Wen', 'Kincora', 'Kincord' and 'Y Graigwen' (current name).



1846 Tithe map – plot highlighted in red



1889 OS Map – plot highlighted in red

The site topography is sloping along the length, down towards Cadnant Road. The house is positioned centrally on the slope, taking advantage of stunning views over the Menai Straits looking towards the mainland.

The OS map from 1889 shows a 'T' plan house with landscaping, sweeping carriage drive, attached stable block, outbuildings and footpaths in considerable detail.

Sales documents from 1925 provide a good level of detail about the property at this time. It was described as a 'Well placed detached residence' which boasted electric lighting throughout, a bathroom with hot and cold plumbing, well-wooded grounds, a garage, wash-house and coal house.



1961 OS Map – plot highlighted in red



2025 Aerial – plot highlighted in red

During the Second World War the house was empty and was requisitioned by the Local Council under powers to requisition empty properties and use them to house families that were 'inadequately housed'. Y Graigwen (named Kincora at the time) was used to house a series of such occupiers until they were placed in Council Houses elsewhere and the land returned to the owner in the 1950's. Contemporary sources describe the house as 'a palace compared to other places in the town'.

During the latter half of the 20th-century a strip of land at the rear of the property was sold to enable the development of modern houses. The house also became the home of the late William Mathias, a celebrated Welsh composer. The west wing was constructed in the 1970's to provide him with a studio for listening to music and working on his own compositions.

The house was listed at Grade II in 1997.

3.0 Site Survey Descriptions

3.1 The Building Externally

The style of architecture is late Regency/early Victorian which utilises popular architectural techniques of the time such as painted render, asymmetrical plan, canted bay windows and multi-sloped gabled roofs. This style is characterised by playfulness, elegance and fine detailing. The original building encompasses these Regency characteristics and the style is most prominent within the 3-bay primary (east) elevation. This elevation encompasses an advanced central gable with tripartite sash window, emphasised by a hood mould. The main entrance door, to the side elevation, also incorporates a finely detailed Chinoiserie-style porch with turned finial and fretted barge boards. The original fretted barge boards and roof finials to the main roofs no-longer remain in situ.

The house is largely hidden from the street thanks to its wooded setting, with the exception of during the winter months when a glimpse of the house is visible, marking one's arrival in the Conservation Area. The boundary wall in question is visible in oblique views of the house from within the Conservation Area throughout the year.

The wall dates from 1935 when alterations were undertaken by the Council to widen the highway. The stones from the original boundaries were probably re-used in its construction. It is faced in local, rubble stone with a mixture of very large and small stones and a stone-on-edge coping. It is repointed in modern, cementitious pointing. The wall dog-legs on the western edge alongside some garden steps and it abuts a rubble stone gate post with carved stone finial on the eastern edge. Immediately south of the wall is the approach drive finished in Tarmac and on the north is a lawned finish on top of the retained ground.



View of the primary elevation and main entrance door to the side



View of the section of retaining wall in question



View of the house and boundaries from the public highway. Section of wall in question highlighted in red.

3.2 Outline Condition Assessment

The wall was inspected by a Chartered Structural Engineer in April 2025 and was found to exhibit a significant bulge and extensive cracking which had worsened since the property was purchased in 2024, indicating ongoing structural failure. It was the conclusion of the Structural Engineer that the wall was at risk of localised collapse.

Given the nature of the structure and its current condition it is not possible to undertake strengthening repairs in its current state. To work on the wall without safely raking back the soil and dismantling the structure first would also present a significant health and safety hazard. It was concluded that safest solution and the solution with the most longevity was for the section of wall be deconstructed and reinstated.

The existing wall supports approximately 1.35m of retained soil. It does not currently feature any drainage holes and is pointed in cementitious mortar which will be preventing moisture escaping from behind the wall. The thickness of the wall or the nature or depth of any foundations is unknown.



Side-on view of the wall looking East



Detailed view of an area of cracking

4.0 Assessment of Significance

4.1 Summary

Y Graigwen is listed at Grade II, which makes it of 'special interest' and within a category that makes up approximately 91% of the total number of listed buildings in Wales (Cadw, 2018). It is this 'special interest' which gives the building regional significance.

The building and its setting hold high levels of evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value which all contribute to a high level of significance overall. The boundary wall contributes significantly to the setting of the house and thereby how it is experienced, specifically on the approach.

Whilst the existing wall itself holds limited evidential or historical value it is of moderate aesthetic and communal value.

4.2 Evidential Value

The evidential value present in the wall relates primarily to the potential it yields to reveal additional information which is currently encapsulated within the structure and below ground. Whilst the stones could have been salvaged from an earlier wall the construction and ground surrounding it date from a scheme of road-widening in the 1930's its potential for evidential value is limited.

4.3 Historical Value

The existing wall is not contemporary with the main house, although it mimics the layout of the original approach drive as seen on the OS map from 1889. It holds historic value in relation to the prosperity of Menai Bridge and infrastructure developments to support the local area, but this historic value is limited.

4.3 Aesthetic Value

The wall holds moderate aesthetic value as a result of its design, materials and its character which is simple but at the same time elegant (the gate post finial) and sits well with the architectural language of the house.

Its appearance contributes significantly to the setting within which the house is appreciated, particularly in views when approaching the house from the east. Its pleasing appearance also contributes to the overall character of the Conservation Area, and this is linked to its communal value.

The current condition of the wall and risk of collapse threaten these aesthetic values.

4.4 Communal Value

The wall is visible along the Cadnant Road and contributes positively to the character of the local street scene and ‘Sense of Place’ within Menai Bridge. This is an important communal value.

The current condition of the wall and risk of collapse threaten these communal values.

5.0 Description of the Proposals

5.1 Description of the Proposals

The design seeks to address inherent flaws within the existing structure and provide a retaining wall which adheres to modern building standards (BRE Good Building Guide 27), thereby offering improved longevity and peace of mind for the owners when compared with reconstructing the wall like-for-like.

The design features a stepped blockwork wall on a wide concrete footing to the inner face of the wall which will perform the structural function of retaining the higher ground level. It is proposed that the existing stonework is re-used to form the outer leaf of the retaining wall and replicate the external appearance of the existing wall. The proposed outer leaf will be constructed using existing stones in their previous coursing pattern and existing coping stones. It shall match the height of the existing wall (1.35m) and be set out so that the position of the outer leaf matches the existing location.

The existing pointing mortar is cementitious. It is proposed that this is cleaned off the salvaged stones and that they are re-bedded and pointed in a lime-based mortar which matches the existing in colour, to maintain a cohesive appearance whilst preventing accelerated decay of the existing stones. The design also includes the use of 50mm diameter weep holes at low level at 600mm centres. These will allow ground water to move easily through the wall from the retained soil and prevent water accumulating at the rear of the structure. These holes shall be formed with grey plastic pipe which is cut-short from the outer face of the wall to limit the impact of their appearance. There shall be 5no. weep holes in total along the 3.5m section of wall to be reconstructed.

5.2 Access Statement

On completion of the works pedestrian and vehicular access to the site and building will remain as existing.

6.0 Commentary on the Proposals

6.1 Heritage Impact Assessment

Item	Proposed Work	Objective	Significance of Affected Fabric	Assessing Beneficial Impact	Assessing Adverse Impact	Proposed Mitigation
1	Deconstruction of 3.5m section of defective retaining wall and replacement with new retaining wall built to modern standards, faced in existing stonework.	To mitigate the existing health & safety hazards posed by the defective structure.	<p>The existing wall itself holds moderate aesthetic and communal value.</p> <p>The boundary wall contributes significantly to the setting of the house and thereby how it is experienced, specifically on the approach.</p>	Avoiding unrecorded loss of the boundary wall through collapse and maintaining the existing aesthetic and communal values of the wall, which is of benefit to the heritage asset and its setting.	Potential risk of damage to the existing aesthetic and communal values if the detailing and construction of the proposed stonework facing does not accurately match the existing.	<p>Ensure a Conservation Accredited Architect provides a specification for dismantling the existing wall, storage of the material and re-construction of the stone facing to ensure its form and appearance matches the existing as closely as possible.</p> <p>Ensure the walls are accurately recorded prior to dismantling.</p> <p>Use of a contractor with relevant conservation experience.</p>
2	Replacement of existing cementitious pointing mortar in colour-matched lime mortar.	Allowing the mortar joints to perform a 'sacrificial function' in terms of moisture management and preventing accelerated decay of the existing stones.	<p>The existing wall itself holds moderate aesthetic and communal value.</p> <p>The boundary wall contributes significantly to the setting of the house and thereby how it is experienced, specifically on the approach.</p>	Improved longevity of original fabric.	Potential risk of damage to the existing aesthetic and communal values if the mortar does not closely match the mortar to the remaining sections of wall.	<p>Ensure a Conservation Accredited Architect provides a specification for a lime-based mortar which matches the existing in appearance as closely as possible.</p> <p>Ensure mortar trials take place on site before final specification of mortar is confirmed.</p>

						Use of a contractor with relevant conservation experience.
3	Inclusion of 5no. 50mm diameter weep holes at low level along the length of the re-built wall.	Allowing moisture to move easily through the wall from the retained soil and prevent water accumulating at the rear of the structure, which could lead to future structural failure.	The existing wall itself holds moderate aesthetic and communal value. The boundary wall contributes significantly to the setting of the house and thereby how it is experienced, specifically on the approach.	Improved longevity of the wall.	Potential risk of damage to the existing aesthetic values if the weepholes have a distracting visual impact.	Ensure a Conservation Accredited Architect provides a specification for construction of the weepholes which ensures their appearance is as discrete as possible. Avoid the use of proprietary plastic weepholes which sit flush or proud to the face of the stonework with grilles or plastic mesh. Use of a contractor with relevant conservation experience.

6.2 Justification of the Proposals

The proposals are justified by the clear need of the owners to address the health and safety risks posed by the existing wall and ensure longevity of the repairs.

6.3 Conclusion

Y Graigwen is listed at Grade II, which makes it of 'special interest' and within a category that makes up approximately 91% of the total number of listed buildings in Wales (Cadw, 2018). It is this 'special interest' which gives the building regional significance. The building and its setting hold high levels of evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value which all contribute to a high level of significance overall. The boundary wall contributes significantly to the setting of the house and thereby how it is

experienced, specifically on the approach.

The defective section of boundary wall was inspected by a Chartered Structural Engineer in April 2025 and was found to be at risk of localised collapse. The proposals have been designed provide a retaining wall which adheres to modern building standards (BRE Good Building Guide 27), which will offer improved longevity and peace of mind for the owners, whilst replicating the external appearance of the wall as far as possible, and thereby protecting its heritage values.

The proposals are considered justified due to the clear need to address the health and safety risks posed by the existing wall and ensure longevity of the repairs.

An assessment of the heritage impact has been undertaken, and it is has shown that the benefits to the existing heritage values represented outweigh the potential adverse impacts. The assessment has also suggested mitigation measures to help eliminate or reduce these potential adverse impacts as far as possible. In addition, by ensuring the boundary wall remains in a good state of repair for years to come will be of benefit to the heritage asset and the wider Conservation Area as it helps to ensure the house remains a safe and desirable property to occupy. It is considered that the significance of Y Graigwen and its setting will have been protected and preserved as a result of the proposals.

Appendix I - Statutory List Description

Appendix II – Photosheets



Views of the main house



Views of the retaining wall