

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Llandrillo-yn-Rhos Fish Weir
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

CPAT Report No 220

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Report for Cadw/Welsh Historic Monuments

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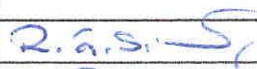

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The fish weir (PRN 34278) lies on the beach at Llandrillo-yn-Rhos (SH84508025), close to the low water mark (fig. 1). Although the feature has been mapped by the Ordnance Survey as a tidal pond, it was first recorded as an archaeological site during the field survey for the Coastal Survey project in June 1996 (Jones 1997). As the scope of that project was limited to rapid recording of archaeological features, one of the recommendations of the report was for a detailed EDM survey to be undertaken of the fish weir. This was subsequently undertaken with funding from Cadw:Welsh Historic Monuments.

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Fishing weirs, or *goradau*, appear to be a common feature of the North Wales coast, particularly along the Menai Straits, but to date that at Llandrillo-yn-Rhos appears to form the eastern limit of their distribution.
- 2.2 The word *goradau* is derived from *cored* (plural *coredau*), meaning weir or dam. It is used in a charter of Edward I to record two fish-traps as Coret Aber Saint and Coret Gwrvai (Jones 1983, 27). There is some variety in the construction and plan of stone fish weirs, but all are located within the intertidal zone. The simplest form consists of a crescent-shape constructed to trap the ebb tide. Larger and more elaborate weirs have well-defined side walls with boulder or rubble infill. They generally extend from the shore with a roughly straight side curving near the low water mark to form a crescent or horseshoe-shaped trap. Several examples, including Gorad Ddu which is perhaps the best preserved, have a well-defined sluice or netted outlet in the apex of the curve (Jones 1983, 32).
- 2.3 The Aberlleiniog fish weir provides a close parallel for the weir at Llandrillo-yn-Rhos, being roughly the same form extending for 600m from the shore with a width of 400m. This weir has walls 2.9m thick with wooden stakes of 0.1m diameter located off-centre 0.2m from one side-stone and 1.4m from the other. It has been suggested that the Aberlleiniog weir may be more than just a fish trap, possibly forming a spatting area for oysters (Jones 1983, 33).
- 2.4 The Rhos Fynach fish weir (PRN 100501), which lies c. 600m to the north, is already well recorded. The weir was surveyed in detail by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, showing it to consist of a raised bank of closely set and compacted rounded stones, with alignments of timbers set between 0.5 and 0.75m apart. The plan is rather elaborate for a fish weir, with an uneven A-shape extending 425m from the high water mark. At the apex is a deliberate narrow channel 0.7m wide, presumably a sluice for netting the fish. Following examination of some of the timbers it is now thought that the most likely date of construction is between 1450 and 1670 AD (Flook 1995, 3-4). The location of two substantial fish weirs in this area may suggest a connection with the Cistercian monastery (PRN 100503) recorded at Llandrillo, the site of which is unknown.

3 THE SURVEY (fig. 2)

- 3.1 The detailed survey was conducted on 4th March 1997 using a Wild TC500 EDM with Penmap survey software. All levels were related to Ordnance Datum and the survey accurately tied to known points on modern maps. Some difficulties were encountered during the survey due to the location at the extreme limit of low water, allowing only a short period each day when the main section of the weir was visible. As a result the seaward side of the weir was not fully recorded, but sufficient data were compiled to allow a plan to be produced.
- 3.2 The basic construction of the weir is that of a curving bank composed of rounded pebbles, average size 0.20m to 0.30m across, reinforced with timber posts between 0.18m and 0.25m in diameter. The main bank, which is up to 12.40m wide and 0.50m high, extends for 260m from close to the shore to the low water mark, a maximum of 330m from high water mark. At this point the bank turns sharply to the east to run along the low water mark in a slight curve for 170m. This section of the bank has suffered most from sea erosion but survives to 10m wide and 0.5m high. At the western end the bank curves inland through c. 310° to form a 'horn' 86m in length, with a further arm extending towards the shore for 38m.

- 3.3 A total of 10 timbers were identified during the survey although the original number is likely to be significantly greater since many have either been lost or eroded to a level below the top of the banks. Three small timbers survive at the shoreward end of the main bank, spaced at c. 0.85m intervals. A series of seven more substantial timbers survives near the seaward end, spaced at between 2.75m and 6.08m, although the larger gap is probably due to the loss of an intermediate post. The surviving timbers are all along the outer side of the main eastern bank, which may suggest that this was reinforced to withstand the prevailing wind and waves.
- 3.4 There was no clear indication of the existence of a sluice along the seaward side, although the nature of the tides prevented a close examination of this section.

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The Llandrillo-yn-Rhos fish weir is a large and reasonably well preserved example of a type of site for which numerous examples survive further westwards along the North Wales coast. Given the size of the structure and the proximity of the Rhos Fynach weir, it seems surprising that it remained unidentified until the rapid Coastal Survey of 1996.
- 4.2 The fish weir has clearly suffered from sea erosion over the centuries, a situation which is unlikely to change. Erosion is particularly affecting the seaward bank, which remains submerged at all but the lowest tides. The relation of the weir to the low water mark might suggest that when it was constructed the sea level was somewhat lower than at present since today, under normal tides, the weir forms a lagoon for only a very short period before being engulfed once more. Alternatively, this may support the hypothesis that its function was more related to oyster cultivation.
- 4.3 The dating of the weir remains unknown, and it was not possible to retrieve any timber samples for dating during the present survey. However, it would seem most likely that there is a chronological relationship between this and the Rhos Fynach weir, which has been dated to 1450 to 1670 AD, both structures possibly being associated with the nearby Cistercian monastery.
- 4.4 The location of a major slipway close to the fish weir is a cause for some concern as some boats are launched from the beach across the weir, possibly leading to some damage.

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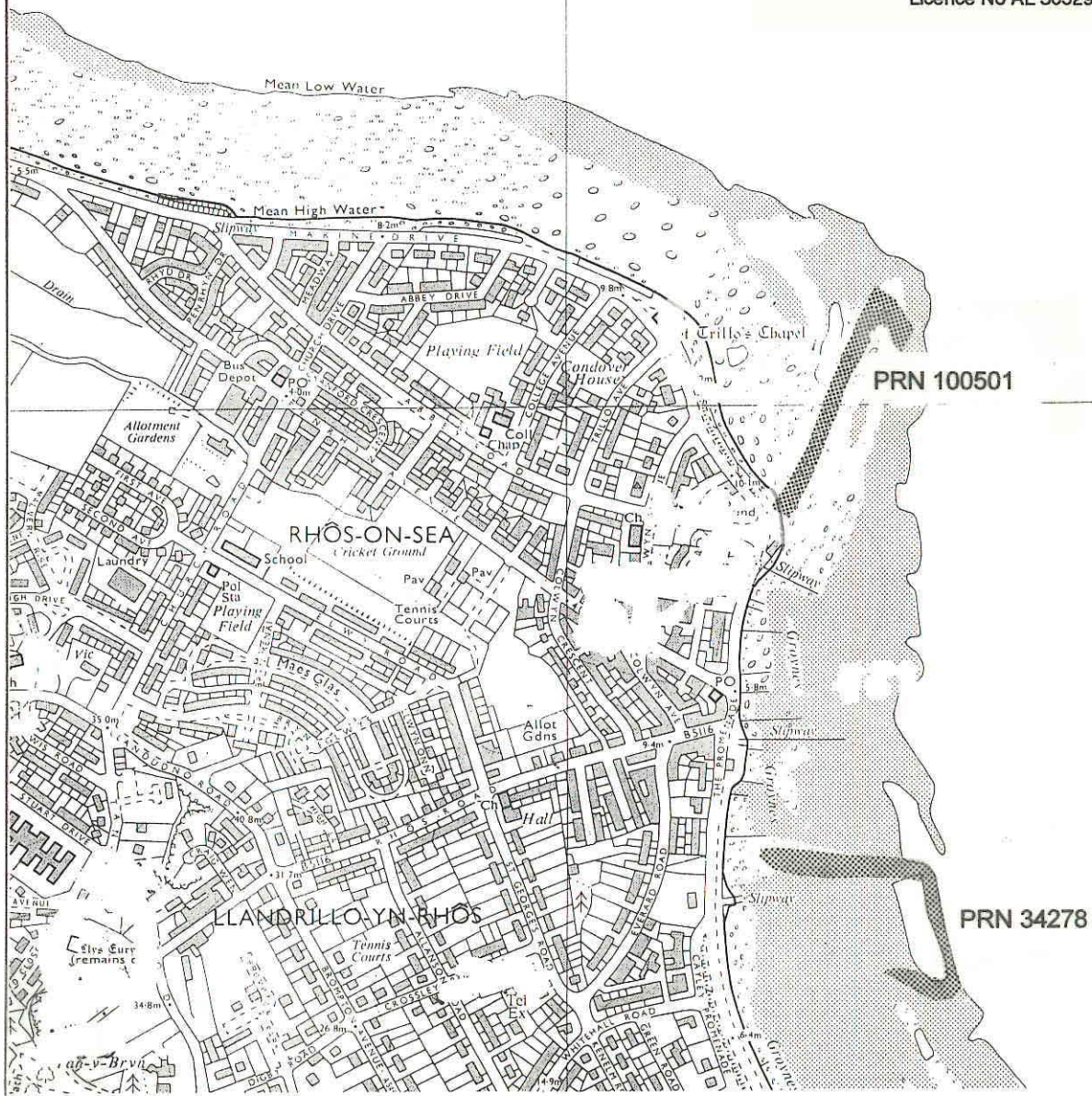


Fig. 1 Location. Scale 1:10,000

Llandrillo-yn-Rhôs

FISH WIER PRN 34278

