THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Trefor Wharf, Llangollen Canal, Clwyd ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSED RE-DEVELOPMENT SITE



CPAT Report No 43

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSED RE-DEVELOPMENT SITE

> by W G Owen & R J Silvester November 1992

Report prepared for British Waterways

The Clwyd-Powys Archeological Trust 7a Church Street Welshpool Powys SY21 7DL tel (0938) 553670, fax 552179

1 Introduction

1.1 A planning application (37/12989) by British Waterways to re-develop Trefor Wharf (SJ 271 422) which lies at the northern end of the Llangollen Canal in southern Clwyd led to a request by the Local Planning Authority, Glyndwr District Council, for an archaeological field evaluation to determine the implications of the re-development proposals.

1.2 An evaluation brief was prepared by the Clwyd Archaeology Service (part of Clywd County Council) on behalf of Glyndwr District Council, and following the submission of a suitable specification, the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust were contracted by British Waterways through their agents, Brooke and Associates of Glasgow, to conduct the study.

1.3 A two-part evaluation was required by British Waterways, Part 1 covering an assessment of that part of Trefor Wharf lying to the south of the bridge carrying New Road over the canal, Part 2 dependent on the results of the first being an assessment of the area to the north of the road bridge together with three evaluation trenches.

1.4 It is the purpose of this report to describe and analyse the features that constitute Trefor Wharf, but it should be stressed that it is not within our remit to put forward recommendations that might affect the determination of the planning application currently before Glyndwr District Council.

2 General Historical Background

2.1 Trefor Wharf (Fig 1) stretches for some 450m from the northern end of the Pont Cysyllte aqueduct, effectively forming the terminus of the former Ellesmere Canal which was renamed the Llangollen Canal after British Waterways took over responsiblity for it in 1963.

2.2 The Ellesmere Canal scheme was launched in 1791 with the aim of linking the Rivers Severn, Dee and Mersey. An Act of Parliament two years later led to its commencement under the control of the Ellesmere Canal Company. The Canal was not a single waterway, rather a system of canals radiating from Welsh Frankton in Shropshire.

2.3 One element of the scheme was a 'Western Canal' incorporating crossings of the Rivers Ceiriog and Dee, and a long tunnel near Ruabon which would serve the industrial districts west of Wrexham. Maps of the proposed system were drawn up (see cover illustration) but the original scheme was never realised. In its modified form the crossings of the two river valleys were completed and the canal was terminated on the flat northern lip of the Dee valley at Trefor, though subsequently a small feeder canal linked the Plas Kynaston ironworks into the system.

2.4 In September 1793, Thomas Telford was appointed as General Agent by the Canal Company with responsibilities as architect, engineer and surveyor under

the general supervision of the chief engineer, William Jessop.

2.5 Plans for a conventional aqueduct across the Dee a short distance to the east of the road bridge known as Pont Cysyllte were drawn up by William Turner in 1793, but Telford sought an alternative solution to what was plainly a major engineering problem and, in conjunction with Shropshire ironmasters, produced plans for a cast iron trough carried on masonry piers at high level across the Dee. After some deliberation, Jessop recommended this to the committee of the Ellesmere Canal Company (ECC).

2.6 In 1795, Matthew Davidson, who at 40 was a few years older than Telford and came from Telford's own birthplace at Langholm in Scotland, was appointed to supervise the construction of the Pont Cysyllte aqueduct. Previously he had superintended the construction of the Montford Bridge in Shropshire. The foundation stone of the aqueduct was laid on 25 July 1795 and at the end of that year, the ECC committee authorised the erection of a cottage for Davidson at the north end of the aqueduct (see below, para 3.4).

2.7 By 1800, the concept of a 'Western Canal' had been abandoned, and to provide the water for the canal terminal a feeder known as the 'Water Line' was planned, running from Llantysilio near Llangollen and entering the main canal less than one hundred metres north of the aqueduct. It was not completed until 1808.

2.8 There were delays in the construction of the Pont Cysyllte aqueduct in order to allow the completion, in 1801, of the aqueduct across the Ceiriog south of Chirk. By about Christmas 1801, the canal had been extended to the Fron Basin, just to the south of the Dee. Pont Cysyllte aqueduct itself was finally opened in 1805, ten years after its commencement.

3 The Historical Development of Trefor Wharf

3.1 The historical development of the area just to the north of the aqueduct is most effectively witnessed by a series of detailed late 18th and 19thcentury maps. In general contemporary written records appear less useful in determining a useful chronology for the canal-side features.

3.2 Much has been written in readily accessible sources on the background to the Pont Cysyllte aqueduct together with its construction and need not be repeated here. It has been classed as 'one of the great engineering achievements of all time' (L.T.C.Rolt), more than 300m in length, the trough set nearly 39m above the River Dee, and with an artificial earthwork of massive proportions raised on the south side to form the approach. William Hazeldine's Plas Kynaston ironworks just to the north-east were probably in operation by 1799 and in 1802 secured the contract for the aqueduct. The total cost as given in Telford's autobiography was $\pounds 47,018$ of which $\pounds 8570$ went on the embankment, $\pounds 21,162$ on the masonry of the aqueduct and $\pounds 17284$ on the ironwork. 3.3 The canal development north of the Dee was established in an open agricultural landscape. The earliest ECC map of 1793 depicts the proposed line of the 'Western Canal', adjacent to the road ascending from the road bridge known as Pont Cysyllte. No houses existed on this side of the Dee, but the road system including New Road leading to Trevor-isaf was already present (Note 1). A similar picture is provided by a second map deposited in September 1795.

3.4 The construction of the superintendent's dwelling on the northern side of the aqueduct was authorised by the committee on 21 December 1795. They ordered that ".. a small house shall be erected at the north end of the aqueduct in a corner of a field which will be cut off by the canal and which house will afterwards answer for the residence of a clerk or lock-keeper and that the Company's Inspector of the Aqueduct shall have the use of the same during the carrying out of that work".

3.5 On 25 December Telford wrote to Davidson: "The committee have ordered that the house at Pontcysylte shall be built on the place which was pointed out and that the Inspector of the Works there shall have the use of it during the erection of the Aqueduct. You will, therefore, proceed with all convenient dispatch, the first thing will be to get out the foundations and [levelling], next should be the stone, lime and sand, as well as timber....".

3.6 Though the idea of the 'Western Canal' was abandoned in 1800, the extension of the canal across the Dee provided a stimulus to local industry. New collieries were opened at Plas Kynaston and in the vicinity of Ruabon, and in 1801 the construction of a tramway was authorised to connect the new mines to the basin at the Trefor terminal. The double line ran initially as far as the Plas Madoc colliery and again it was the Plas Kynaston ironworks that supplied the material.

3.7 In 1803 new plans were drawn up to create the 'Water Line' from Llantysilio, a small canal to run from the Plas Kynaston complex into the Trefor basin, and to extend the tramway (or rail road as it was known) to Ruabon Brook. An Act was put before Parliament in the following year. Several copies of the plan were prepared, differing slightly in their detail and also in their scales (Fig.2 is the British Waterways Museum copy). Nevertheless they are in agreement in showing virtually no structures between the northern end of the aqueduct and the New Road bridge, except for the house that was later to be known as Scotch Hall. The copy in Clwyd Record Office also depicts houses beside the road, lower down the valley side towards the Pont Cysyllte road bridge.

3.8 By 1805 the tramway was able to provide coal for the official opening of the aqueduct. Three years later, contractors were sought to extend it northwards to Ruabon Brook, and during the early part of the century the plan of the basin was also modified and developed. Consideration of this area, however, falls within Part 2 of the evaluation.

3.9 The 1838 Tithe survey offers the next cartographic depiction of the area. By this time, the facilities at Trefor Wharf had expanded considerably. The twin dry docks on the east side of the canal had been constructed, as had the small stone cottage (now known as Dock Cottage) a few metres to the northeast. On the opposite side of the canal Scotch Hall was named and another building had been erected just to the east. South of Scotch Hall was an Lshaped range of buildings (?now the Anglo-Welsh shop) owned by the Ruabon and Llangollen Turnpike Trust.

3.10 The publication of the 1st edition of the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 plan in 1880, following survey work probably in the 1870s, illustrates the continued development of the wharf area. The more northerly of the dry docks had been covered over, and a southern extension (now demolished) to Dock Cottage almost touched the dock building. The brick workshop to the south of this complex had also been erected. West of the canal the buildings appeared much the same as forty years earlier, but a network of rail lines to facilitate the loading of barges were also depicted (Fig.3).

3.11 Subsequent developments during the later years of the 19th century and the 20th century tended to be minor in nature: additions to Dock Cottage and Scotch Hall, the demolition of extensions to Dock Cottage and what is now the Anglo-Welsh shop, the creation of a gateway through the boundary wall south of the Anglo-Welsh shop and the contemporary removal of an adjacent lifting bridge over the feeder canal from Llantysilio. Many of these are witnessed by plans in the Canal Company arcives housed in the Shropshire Record Office. Finally, we should remark on the conversion of Scotch Hall to the Telford Inn, an event which apparently occurred only in the last decade or so.

4 Structures on Trefor Wharf, South of the New Road Bridge (Fig 4)

4.1 Scotch Hall

4.1.1 Though outside the terms of reference of this study, Scotch Hall reuires attention because of its potentially pivotal role in the development of Pont Cysyllte and Trefor Wharf. It not remained the property of the Shropshire Union Canal Company into the 20th century, but more importantly was the only building to have been constructed on Trefor Wharf by 1803.

4.1.2 The building has not been studied in detail during this survey, but is plainly well-constructed with ashlar quoins and a hipped roof and, on the basis of architectural style, has been attributed to the late 18th century. Modifications to its form are largely late 19th century or 20th century in origin.

4.1.3 A few metres to the south-east is a long low building with a hipped roof, originally single-storied, but now with a first floor inserted. It was built sometime between 1803 and 1838, and underwent modification in 1897 when it was known as The Agent's Office. Its design as shown in the plans of 1897 might suggest that it had functioned for the Canal Company in that capacity since its erection, and the Tithe survey of 1838 refers to offices associated with Scotch Hall.

4.2 The Anglo-Welsh Shop

4.2.1 Cartographic sources indicate that there was a dwelling, with outbuildings to the north, on this site by 1838, when it was described as a cottage owned by the local turnpike trust. Curiously, it seems likely that this land was original part of the Canal Company purchase. By 1903, the dwelling had been converted into a stable, presumably as an adjunct to Scotch Hall and the outbuildings demolished. There is, in the Canal Company archives in the Shropshire Record Office, an undated plan and elevation of 'The Old Toll House at Pontcysyllte'. This shows a building 4.6m by 4.9m, considerably smaller than the present shop. Though it is not possible to distinguish a smaller predecessor within the fabric of the shop, an association does seem likely.

4.2.2 The building, currently in use as a retail shop and boat-hire centre, is located immediately adjacent to into the dock complex perimeter wall. It has seen considerable modification during its short history.

4.2.3 It is a multi-phased structure, 8.2m long and 9.2m wide, with a doublepitched corrugated iron roof and an overall height of 5.8m. The first building phase, which is in a roughly-dressed yellow sandstone, is continuous on the southern side to wall-plate level. The other three sides are modified with later additions in various types of brick and dressed stone. Aspects of this phasing are summarised below.

4.2.4 The north-western gable of the building is incorporated into the 2.52mhigh dock perimeter wall which is clearly visible running in a continuous south-west/north-east line, with the upper courses of the building's structural wall above it (Fig 5). Into this wall at a height of 0.7m above the present road surface and in an off-centre position , a wooden door was inserted either at the time that the house was constructed or later. Its function would appear to have been as an access to a second-storey loft. Immediately above the upper lintel of this door and extending to the ridge of the roof, the wall is made up of 14 courses of blue brick, a feature repeated in the upper levels of the opposite end wall suggesting that, at some time subsequent to the date of construction, the original half-hipped roof was dismantled and replaced with the present double-pitched roof.

4.2.5 The south-west wall shows at least two phases of modification. Located in an approximately central position is the existing doorway, 2.0m high and 1.0m wide. This superceded an earlier doorway in the same position which was 0.2m lower in height and slightly wider as indicated by recesses cut into the stonework on each side. On both sides of the doorway at a height of 1.5m above the present ground surface two window-spaces were at some time blocked with stone. It is difficult to determine the original dimensions of these or whether they contained window frames. Nor is it possible to attribute them to a particular phase of construction. The three upper windows, on the other hand, appear to be associated with the initial phase of construction whilst the existing window in the lower storey was evidently inserted at a later date, perhaps contemporaneously with the doorway set into the north-east end wall. Against the south-east wall at the western corner there is evidence of a former lean-to roof which sloped at an angle of 14 degrees.

4.2.6 The north-east wall shows considerable evidence of reconstruction, to the extent that none of its fabric can with any degree of certainty be associated with the original stonework of the other three sides of the building (Fig 6). The lower storey is constructed of three different types of brick into which have been set a window and two doors of modern design. The east corner, however, contains an irregular sequence of dressed stone quoins and brick up to roof-plate level. The second-storey wall face is constructed, again, of three brick types and roughly dressed sandstone into which are set a window of modern design close to the east corner and a larger, dormer window of recent design, surrounded by a segmental stone arch of dressed sandstone blocks similar to the quoins at the east corner. Above this, to the ridge of the dormer roof, are four courses of roughly dressed stone. The window is not centrally placed in this wall but is approximately 0.4m off-centre. Internally, the presence of four hinge-bolts set into the dressed stone arch suggests that the arch surrounded a double-door later replaced by a window.

4.2.7 To the west of this window and in a position corresponding to that of the original, upper-storey window on the south-east wall is an area of modern brick 1.1m long and 0.7m wide, probably representing the former position of a similar window. This area of brickwork is surrounded on three sides by stonework that is continuous with that in the south-western wall of the house and is, therefore, probably original. Somewhat speculatively, it might be proposed that on this north-western side there were originally three upperstorey windows corresponding to those on south-eastern side, but that during subsequent phases of modification all traces of two of these were obliterated whilst the third one was bricked in. The segmental stone arch may thus not be original but may have been introduced from elsewhere perhaps at the same time that the doorway was inserted at the same level into the south-west wall.

4.3 Dock Cottage

4.3.1 Dock Cottage was constructed sometime between 1803 and 1838 on ECC land. An association with the adjacent dry docks seems most likely, and it is reasonable to assume that they were constructed at much the same time. In 1838, the building was described as a Beer shop and Smithy and was linked in the tithe assessment to the graving docks, the occupier living in one of the cottages to the north of the New Road bridge. Early in the 20th century, at the time that the brick extension was planned at the rear, it was described as the dock foreman's cottage.

4.3.2 The building was originally a one and a half storey, stone-built cottage, 8.4m in length, 4.1m wide and with an overall height of 5.4m. Some time before 1880, an extension was added to the south-east wall, blocking off an original window. This extension extended the full width of the original cottage wall and its height of 4.3m to ridge level is clearly seen in the

differential weathering of the stone. On the north-west side, another stonebuilt extension was made, later slightly modified. In 1902 the roofline of the original building was raised by approximately 1.1m, four windows inserted in the south-west wall and a two-storey extension built on to the the northeast side. This phase is evident on all sides of the building where there is a clear transition between the original sandstone and secondary brickwork both externally and in the existing roofspace (Fig 7).

4.3.3 The position of the original doorway to the cottage is unclear. Clearly, it was not centrally placed in the south-west facing wall as this was the position internally of the 1.4m wide chimney-breast. Again, there is no evidence of a doorway in the south-east wall, the central position there being occupied by the former windowspace referred to above and internally there is no clear evidence for it in the remaining north-east and north-west walls.

4.3.4 In the case of this isolated building, no archaeological relationship between it and other structures in the wharf complex can be determined.

4.4. The Dry Docks

4.4.1 Like Dock Cottage these were created sometime between 1803 and 1838, and it has been suggested that they may be part of the original concept for the wharf dating to around 1805. The more northerly dock was enclosed sometime between 1838 and 1880, and there were plans in 1903, not put into practice, for a similar structure over the south dock.

4.4.2 Measured from their north-eastern end to their points of exit into the canal, both dry docks are 28.7m long, 4.8m wide and 1.8m in depth (Fig 8). Water control from the canal is by means of wooden stop planks and both are drained from their eastern ends, controlled by wooden drop-valves on chains, the water passing into a stone-lined ditch 0.7m wide and 0.8m deep which runs parallel to and outside the eastern perimeter wall and debouches into the Dee. Stone steps give access to the dock bases at their eastern ends.

4.4.3 The original cast iron pillars and the wooden beams of the building over the northern dock survive. The former were erected on both sides of this dock by removing single large stones from the edges of both docks, the resulting gaps being infilled with concrete and made up where necessary with brick. Cast iron base-plates, each 47cm x 47cm square, were fixed into the concrete on to which at 2.75m intervals a pair of cast-iron upright I-girders, 2.1m high and 0.13m wide, were bolted vertically and shackled together at their upper ends. Each pair of pillars supported a 6.0m long timber beam which formed the roof span of the building over the dock, and which supported the roof and roof timbers.

4.4.4 A 4.0m wide extension to this building was carried out along its northwestern side at a later date.

4.4.5 Access for boats into the dry docks from the canal and foot access

across the dock entrances is controlled by means of a wooden swing-bridge, 7.2m in length and 1.0m wide, which is pivoted centrally.

4.5 The Brick Workshop

4.5.1 First shown on the plan of 1880, this building is constructed of bricks which together with the mortar, point to a mid to late 19th-century date.

4.5.2 It lies to the south of the dry docks and is aligned on a southwest/north-east axis, has a single storey, and shows two phases of construction. An initial structure, 8.05m long, 5.4m wide and with an overall height of 5.1m, was built of red brick and a later extension of blue brick, 4.65long and 5.40m wide and of the same height, was added on to the southeastern end There is an arched doorway at the north-western end, two arched windows on the south-west side and a timber roof.

4.5.3 A double-cauldron pitch boiler, 1.80m in length, 0.8m wide and with a brick-supported, mono-pitched roof of corrugated iron sheets, is located 1.6m east of the northern corner of the workshop. This was fired at its south eastern end and the brick-built chimney survives. This structure was plainly associated with boat construction and repair work carried out in the adjacent dry docks.

<u>4.6 The Western Boundary Wall</u>

4.6.1 It has not been possible to put a date either on this wall or its subsequent heightening. However, the fact that the Anglo-Welsh shop has been built on the wall would point to an early date, and it is reasonable to assume that in its original form it was constructed soon after Trefor Wharf began to be developed.

4.7 The New Road Bridge (Bridge 28)

4.7.1 This must have been built before 1805, probably before 1803, to carrying the pre-existing road over the newly dug canal.

4.7.2 It is a triple-arched, stone-built structure, spanning the canal at a point adjacent to Scotch Hall. The western arch is brick-lined and is 3.67m wide at its base whilst its maximum height is 3.0m. Previously, there was access through the parapet to the canal enbankment from a point at the south-western corner of the bridge by means of steps or a stairway. Traces of these remain on the bridge stonework whilst a wrought iron arch survives above.

4.7.3 Two metres from ths south-eastern corner of this arch is a single wellset stone, 0.3m square at its base and 0.33m high. Its age and function are obscure.

4.7.4 The canal arch is 4.9m wide at its base with a maximum height of 2.26m.

4.7.5 The towpath arch at the eastern end of the bridge is stone-lined and is 2.15m wide at its base and has a maximum height of 2.05m.

4.8 Road Bridge over Feeder Canal (Bridge 31)

4.8.1 This was constructed between 1803 and 1808.

4.8.2 This bridge at the south-western end of the wharf complex carries the A483 road from Trefor across the Dee valley to Froncysyllte. It is stone-built with stone ashlars coping the parapets as in Bridge 28. The sandstone structural stones of the abutments appear to be a continuation of the western perimeter wall of the dock complex and may, therefore, be contemporary with it. The canal arch is 4.85m wide at its base and its maximum height is 2.35m.

4.9 Foot Bridge

4.9.1 Foot access across the canal is provided by a bridge which has a span of 15.10m supported by stone abutments at either end, 2.57m in height. The concrete beam span support is clearly of recent date but it is uncertain whether or not the stone abutments predate this significantly. Indeed, it is quite possible that the bridge is a single-phase structure.

4.10 Perimeter Wall

4.10.1 From Road Bridge 31 to a point adjacent to the south-west corner of Stone House there is a length of sandstone walling capped by triangularsection coping slabs. On its western (road) side this wall is 1.38m in height whilst on the eastern side its overall height is 2.10m. Beyond the north-west corner of Stone House, the wall has been raised by a height of 0.9m and this runs continuously as a two-phased wall up to the present entrance of Scotch Hall. The later phase consists of larger sized stone, again with triangularsection coping slabs.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Pont Cysyllte aqueduct is of unquestionable importance both in terms of the development of civil engineering and in the history of the canal system in this county. This is recognised in its classification as a Grade I listed building and as a scheduled ancient monument. Trefor Wharf forms an integral part of the landscape associated with the aqueduct, one that originated and developed during and soon after the construction of the aqueduct, though periodic alterations and additions have occurred to the structures on the wharf throughout its two hundred-year history.

5.2 On the basis of the documentary evidence the house occupied by Matthew

Davidson must have been constructed early in 1796 and almost certainly his son, John, was born there in January 1797. On the basis of early cartography, coupled with the comment that its location will be "... in the corner of a field which will be cut off by the canal...", the only candidate for this building is Scotch Hall, and we may speculate that the name, current in 1838, was a reminder of the origin of its first inhabitant.

5.3 The two other dwellings on the southern wharf, Dock Cottage and the Stone House, could have been constructed by the time that Pont Cysyllte aqueduct was opened in 1805, though neither was there in 1803. Certainly both were in existence by 1838. Both are unexceptional stone buildings with some minor features of architectural interest, but both have seen substantial modifications to their form, the use of brick detracting from the overall appearance.

5.4 The date of the dry docks is also unknown, though it has been suggested that they could have been excavated around 1805. They represent an integral and attractive element of Trefor wharf, despite the erection of the building over the northern dock.

Notes

1. The maps deposited by the Ellesmere Canal Company with the clerk to the court of Denbighshire Quarter Sessions are in general quite small-scale (between 20 chains = 1" [1:15,840] and 10 chains = 1" [1:7920]), but the level of detail is quite high. Buildings and field boundaries in the vicinity of the canal are normally shown and it is on the basis of the presence or absence of such features that some of the deductions in section **** are presented. While there is always a danger in arguing from negative evidence, it is felt that these maps are sufficiently reliable to allow a reasonable level of confidence.

Archive

In addition to the measured drawings reproduced in this report, the site archive resulting from fieldwork includes:

Anglo-Welsh Shop: south-west elevation (part) 1:50 : south-east elevation 1:50 Dock Cottage: north-west elevation 1:50 Dry Docks: plan of typical pillar foundation (detail) 1:10

Workshop: north-east elevation 1:50 : pitch boiler (sketch drawing)

Photographic Record of all elements of Trefor Wharf south, on black and white and colour film

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Miscellaneous Sources

<u>An Act to enable the Company and Proprietors of the Ellesmere Canal to make a</u> <u>railway from Ruabon Brook to the Ellesmere Canal.....</u> 29 June 1804 (British Waterways Museum, Gloucester) Correspondence of Matthew Davidson (Telford Collection, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Library)

Notes on Matthew Davidson and family (Telford Collection, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Library)

<u>Oration</u> <u>delivered</u> <u>at</u> <u>Pontcysyllte</u> <u>Aqueduct</u> <u>on</u> <u>its</u> <u>first</u> <u>opening</u>. November 26 1805 (copy at British Waterways Museum, Gloucester)

Order Book of the Ellesmere Canal Committee for 1795 (Microfilm copy of Public Record Office original in Telford Collection, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Library)

<u>Shrewsbury Chronicle</u>, 19 February 1808 (Telford Collection, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Library)





The Anglo-Welsh Shop: north-east side (1:50) Fig 6

Fig 7 Dock Cottage: south-west side (1:50)

