Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by RPS Consulting Services to undertake an archaeological evaluation and geoarchaeological borehole survey on land within the former Anglesey Aluminium site near Holyhead, Anglesey. The works were undertaken in association with the proposed construction of a 132kV electricity substation.

The specific objective of the trench evaluation was to examine evidence for Thomas Telford's 19th-century London–Holyhead Road, the original course of which passes through the site. The specific objective of the geoarchaeological borehole survey was to investigate the palaeoenvironmental potential of an area of Tidal Flat deposits previously identified on the site. To meet these objectives, two evaluation trenches were dug to intercept the course of the road, and one borehole and three auger samples were excavated within the area of potential palaeoenvironmental significance.

No evidence of Telford's London–Holyhead road was noted within either trench. No other traces of other archaeological activity were recorded, with one trench containing little other than natural deposits and the other showing much evidence of modern (20th or 21st-century disturbance).

The sedimentary sequence recorded by the geoarchaeological work suggests a continuous coastal and near coastal environment reflecting the dynamic nature of such landscapes in response to changing land-sea relationships. The base of the sequence comprises gravelly beach and tidal flat deposits, overlain by a thick peat (0.75–2.25 m below ground level), which may have formed in a back-barrier marshland. The lower peat is overlain by a well-sorted fine sand which may represent further tidal flat deposits but that seems more likely to be of aeolian (wind-blown) origin, representing the landward encroachment of a dune-system located within Penrhos bay and which has subsequently prograded and largely deflated. The age of the deposit sequence is unknown, although the surficial marsh deposits at the top of the sequence is likely to be of a more recent date.

The lower peat deposit recorded in auger hole AUG-01.2 has a high geoarchaeological potential. The upper, peaty marsh deposit (surficial marsh) has a moderate geoarchaeological potential. The coring location that was initially proposed could not be safely accessed with a drilling rig while the Russian corer could not penetrate the finely sorted sands overlying the peat. Samples of the peat could therefore only be recovered in hand augers which have a high potential for contamination and are not suitable for assessment or scientific dating. In the event these deposits are impacted, a purposive geoarchaeological borehole should be recovered through the deposits, and a targeted program of palaeoenvironmental assessment and scientific dating undertaken on the peat deposits, with particle size analysis on the overlying finely sorted sands to determine whether these are of an aeolian origin.

The archive is currently held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology in Sheffield. The documentary and digital archive will be deposited with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW) on completion of the project. The fieldwork did not generate a finds archive.

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