

# Pentre Ifan Burial Chamber, Pembrokeshire

## The Story of the First Ancient Monument in Wales

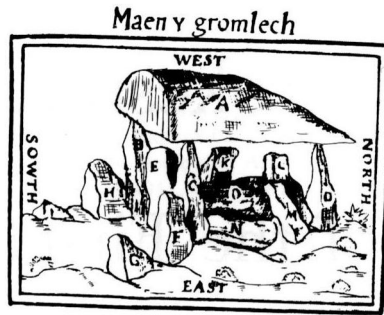
by

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*The burial chamber of Pentre Ifan is not only of the greatest historical importance but its remains have powerful sculptural and aesthetic qualities; it was the first ancient monument in Wales to come into State care, as long ago as 1884. This article sets out to show what changes this brought to the understanding of the history of the monument and the impact on its surroundings. Through extracts from the Ministry of Works files, it will be shown how successive Inspectors of Ancient Monuments from Pitt-Rivers onwards, in concert with the site's excavator, the late Professor W.F. Grimes, sought to balance the difficult decisions over restoration or conservation, access or preservation, and aesthetics or practicalities. It is hoped that this long debate will throw some light on the same dilemmas present wherever ancient monuments are opened to the public.*

### INTRODUCTION

Pentre Ifan Burial Chamber is a remarkably beautiful site. Lying on the north side of Preseli Mountains in Pembrokeshire, it lies within a patchwork of small fields and rough grazing, bounded by the distinctive Pembrokeshire hedgebanks (Welsh *clawdd*, pl. *cloddiau*). As the visitor approaches the site along the footpath, the huge but elegant capstone and its uprights form a rectangular portal through which glimpses of the sea beyond Newport and the strange rocky summit of Carningli can be seen. Walking around the site, the capstone seems to defy gravity as it is so finely balanced on its three uprights. Looking from the south, the remains of the curving façade of uprights frame the portal stone, the original entrance into the chamber.



**A** sheweth the greater stone mounted on high upon other other stones, being 3 foote thick, 9 foote broad, and 18 foote long.

**B** and **C**, two stones, that holdeth up the greater and thicker end of the greater stone towards the south.

**D**, sheweth the stone, whiche holdeth up the thinner parte of the greater stone towards the North.

**E**, a stone underneath the thicker end of the greater stone **A**, placed betwene **B** and **C** - but shorter, and toucheth not the greater stone.

**F** and **G**, two stones sett circularwise, adjoining unto **C**.

**H** and **I**, two other stones, sett one the other side, in like sort next the stone **B**.

All with seven stones, viz: **B C E F G H** and **I** doe stande together like in forme to the newe Moone under the south end of the greater stone **A**.

**K** and **L**, two stones sett one end upright under the western side of the greater stone **A** but together not the same, but **K** beinge set removed outwards, by the fall of the greater parte **O**, whiche brake from the greater stone **A**.

**M** and **N**, two stones placed one end upright under the eastern side of the greater stone **A**, to confronte **K** and **L** one the other side, but **N** is more fallen downe and lyeth flatter upon the ground.

**O**, a pece of the greater stone **A** broken off, and fallen from the western side of the same, farther the cruetmar thereof as maye appeare, and beinge of 2 foote long and 2 foote broad, and halfe a yarde thicke.

*Gromlech* *symfite* *caucerna petrarum* · *Esai* · 7 · v · 19

Fig. 1

Pentre Ifan as illustrated in George Owen's manuscript, 'Description of Penbrookshire in Generall', written in 1603. (BL Harleian Ms. 6250 f.97)

British Library

Pentre Ifan was one of the first of Wales's prehistoric sites to be illustrated and its recent history is well documented. In 1884 it was also the first Welsh monument to be scheduled and taken into guardianship by the State. Since then, its history has been unusually well documented in the Ministry of Works files. The purpose of this paper is not to discuss Pentre Ifan as a Neolithic monument: that is well done elsewhere. It is rather to trace the recent history of the site and to analyse how the treatment it has received has reflected the appreciation of the monument at different times: it is a case-history with lessons.

#### ANTIQUARIAN RECORDS OF THE SITE

The earliest record of the site was made by George Owen in his 'Description of Pembrokeshire' written in 1603.<sup>1</sup> Owen was a considerable local landowner who lived across the valley from Pentre Ifan at Henllys, Melindre. His description is on two folios and inserted between them is an annotated view in a neater hand (Fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> The site was described later in the century by Erasmus Lhuyd<sup>3</sup> and illustrated in the associated Stowe MSS.<sup>4</sup> These two descriptions were to form the basis of the entry in successive editions of Camden's *Britannia* from 1695 onwards.<sup>5</sup>

There seems to have been little interest in the site during the eighteenth century and few, if any, drawings were made until Sir Richard Colt Hoare's visit in 1793.<sup>6</sup> He described the site as on 'a rough and stony common' and made sketches. In an adjacent field he observed some more large stones suggesting a similar monument. His friend, Richard Fenton, also described the site in his *Historical Tour through Pembrokeshire* of 1811.<sup>7</sup> The most famous view of the site is by Richard Tongue of Bath, painted in 1835 and now in the possession of the Society of Antiquaries in London. This rather fanciful view implies that the site's surroundings were still open. However by 1842, when the Tithe Map of Nevern was drawn,<sup>8</sup> the site had become incorporated into three fields, with the chamber lying in an arable field called Gorllan Sampson.

Early volumes of *Archaeologia Cambrensis* contain a number of references to the site and include a report of a visit by the Cambrian Archaeological Society in 1859 when six mounted horsemen were accommodated under the capstone, and a view of 1865 showing two horsemen within the chamber.<sup>9</sup> The site seems to have attracted a number of early photographers and prints showing the site before it was taken into guardianship survive in the National Monuments Record, Aberystwyth, the Carmarthenshire Record Office<sup>10</sup> and the Haverfordwest Public Library.

#### PENTRE IFAN IN STATE CARE

The Ancient Monuments Act only emerged after many years of debate and having undergone many modifications, and was given the Royal Assent on 18 August 1882. Pentre Ifan was added to the draft schedule in 1879, at the suggestion of its owner, Lord Kensington, M.P., during a Parliamentary Committee meeting.<sup>11</sup>

The first Inspector of Ancient Monuments, General Pitt Rivers, visited Pentre Ifan on 8 June 1884.<sup>12</sup> He made watercolour sketches and a plan and a section of the site and he submitted his report four days later. This still survives on the Ministry of Works files<sup>13</sup> and is given in full:

**ANCIENT MONUMENTS PROTECTION ACT 1882**  
**The Pentre Evan Cromlech**  
**Parish of Nevern, Pembrokeshire**

**MEMORANDA**

**Ancient Monuments Department**  
**Office of Works**  
**12 June 1884**

**SECRETARY**

I beg to inform you that the undermentioned owner has expressed his wish to place the monument named below under the protection of the Ancient Monuments Act

**MONUMENT** The Pentre Evan Cromlech, Parish of Nevern, Pembrokeshire.  
**OWNER** William, Baron Kensington, St. Bride's, Pembroke, and 67 Grosvenor Street, W.

**DESCRIPTION OF MONUMENT** It consists of four large upright stones surmounted by a large capstone, and on the SW end are two other upright stones which appear to have formed part of another chamber, a portion of which has been destroyed. On the ground are four other stones which may possibly have formed part of the sides of the large chamber beneath the capstone. There is no trace of a surrounding mound and it is an open question whether it has ever been covered over with a tumulus or cairn. Interior height beneath the capstone measures seven feet.

**CONDITION OF THE MONUMENT AND DAMAGE WHICH IT HAS SUSTAINED** Beyond the removal of the superincumbent tumulus and the parts of the sides of the chambers which it is conjectured may possibly have occurred in times gone by, I have not been able to ascertain that any damage has been done to it within the memory of persons living.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE MONUMENT** Four small stones with the usual mark should be placed round the monument to define the area placed under the protection of the Act. I think that this will be sufficient for Government purposes. Lord Kensington says he will place a railing round it which I think will be an advantage as many persons have scratched their names on the interior. Two lines of banks—the boundaries of fields—join and abut on the Cromlech on its S west end. Lord Kensington proposes to have them removed for a short distance from the stones so that the Cromlech may stand by itself, which will be a great improvement to the appearance of the Monument.

A. PITT RIVERS  
 Lieut. General  
 Inspector of Ancient Monuments

He added as an enclosure '1 showing 2 views, Plan and section of Pentre Evan Cromlech' (Fig. 2). On the 20 June 1884, Lord Kensington signed the formal deed of guardianship, and the deed was deposited. On the 1 July, an estimate for the four stones inscribed VR and a noticeboard to be erected at the site was requested and agreed at £3 17s 0d on 6 September 1884. Pitt Rivers sent his assistants back to the site in 1890 to take further measurements of the cromlech, from which a model was made, which survives in the Salisbury Museum.<sup>14</sup>



The earliest photograph of the site in the files (Fig. 3) shows the cromlech with the hedges cut back a little. The stones and a notice-board are in place and there is a wire fence with a rickety stile over it. On 26 July 1897, J. Beavan Bowen, J.P., wrote to complain about the dilapidated condition of the fence and that the notice-board was almost illegible. In a reply he was assured that the matter would receive attention. Mr Bowen wrote again in 1903, repeating his complaints about the fence, now completely down, and the fact that sheep sheltered under the monument and got entangled in the wire. There were problems with the gate from the road and the notice-board was almost illegible. He also revealed that he had been M.P. for Pembrokeshire when Lord Kensington resolved to put the cromlech on to the schedule of Ancient Monuments, and he had had many conversations with him on the matter. Mr F. Huntly reported in a minute that this matter had not been lost sight of over this six year period, but he had not wished to inspect the site 'to avoid the expense of a special journey'. However, he visited in November 1903 and recommended the

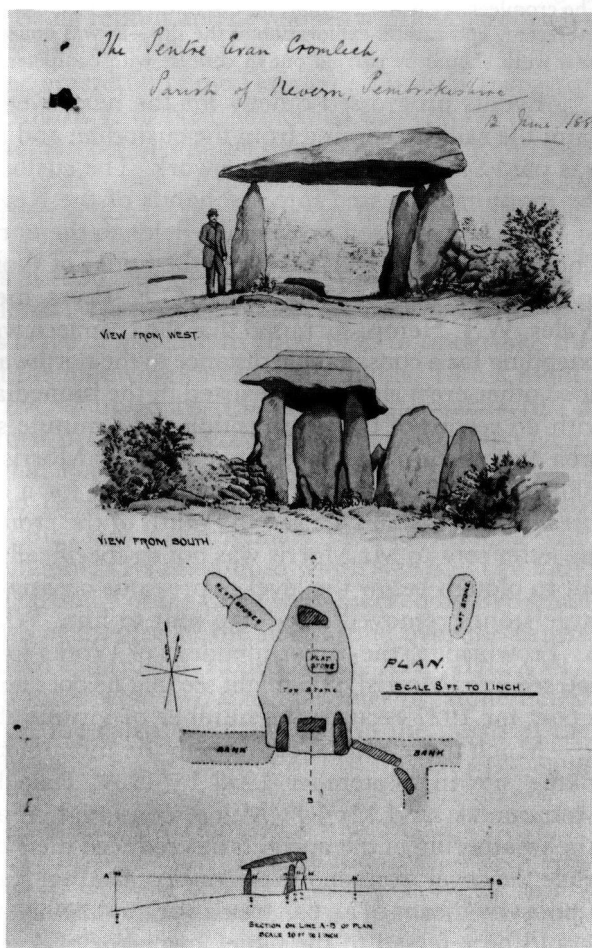


Fig. 2  
Field sketches and plan drawn by W.  
Tomkin in 1884 with Pitt-Rivers  
acting as the scale

erection of an unclimbable iron fence, 5ft high, with an iron gate for access to the stones. This would provide 'proper protection of this monument'. An estimate of £42 was provided. This was approved with the proviso that 'we must be careful not to prevent access by the public to the cromlech'. This style of iron fence seems to have been favoured for smaller guardianship sites at this time. At Kit's Coty House burial chamber in Kent, the railings caused endless problems, and a visitor who fell from the capstone in 1906 was impaled.<sup>15</sup> In Wales, similar fences survive at Lligwy Burial Chamber, Anglesey and Maen Achwyfan, Clwyd.

The imposing new iron fence and notice-boards were erected by September 1905 (Figs 4 and 5) and the cromlech was imprisoned by its locked iron gate. Mr J. Fitzgerald of the Office of Works visited the site in 1906 to inspect the monument to find the lock broken by someone trying to climb in (the key was kept at the local farm down the hill). After the railing of the site, the area of the cromlech had become covered by unsightly weeds, and he arranged to have them cut back periodically. His memorandum concluded by saying:

The cromlech is the most important in Wales, and I should hope to see, some day, the prostrate stones re-erected, and careful exploration of the site—as was done in part at Stonehenge recently. Of course such work should be carried out in concert with competent and responsible Archaeologists.

Events progressed quietly for the next twenty years with periodic requests to paint the railings coming from the custodian and key keeper, Miss A. Williams, who was paid £4 per annum for her work. The custodianship and the land surrounding the monument passed into the hands of the Revd Ben Morris in the early 1920s. In 1925, he proposed to clear the fields to the north of the cromlech of large stones. This caused alarm bells to ring at the Office of Works, where in a minute to the Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments, C.R. Peers, the Inspector of Ancient Monuments Wales, W.J. Hemp, surmised that the cromlech was just the chamber of a long cairn, extending for a considerable distance to the northwards, and that within the last century or so other erect stones had existed in the immediate neighbourhood of the cromlech with no record of their disposition. The minute suggested extending the scheduled area and reaching an agreement with Mr Morris not to clear stones within an area 100ft on each side of the monument and for a distance 300ft to the north. As an afterthought a small area to the south of the cromlech was also included. However, the letter sent to Mr Morris was not so specifically phrased, asking him to be careful not to plough below the level of previous occasions and to mark the position of any large stones removed on a map sent to him. When sending a copy of the letter to A. Trowbridge, the Superintendent of Works for Wales, Hemp added 'If or when you see him [Morris], you might see that he does not get into mischief'. The custodian's report for 1927 records the number of visitors that year as forty or thereabouts.

Much more radical changes to the monument were suggested following a visit to the site in September 1933 by C.A. Raleigh Radford, Inspector of Ancient Monuments, and Mr J.F. Milne, conservation architect. The latter observed that 'the weathering of the uprights has reduced their bearing surfaces very considerably, while the cover stone shows evidence of flaking. It appears advisable to give additional support by means of an oak framework but before any scheme is prepared the question should be referred to the Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments as the provision

of a foundation for the trestle support is a question upon which archaeological advice is necessary'. Raleigh Radford's advice went further. He was of the opinion that 'we ought not to incur even the slightest risk of a fall which would almost certainly involve damage to the capstone if nothing more'. He had concluded with Mr Milne that a wooden support within the chamber was the best solution and that he would prefer this to the re-erection of a fallen upright on the western side. Before proceeding with any remedial works, Radford insisted that an excavation should take place within the burial chamber and that this should be combined with an investigation of the area to the north, to establish the original plan of the mound. He felt one short season would show what form the wooden support should take, and subsequent seasons establish the remainder of the plan. He recommended that the design of the permanent support should be submitted to the Ancient Monuments Board for Wales 'as this is a matter upon which the Dept would be liable to incur criticism'.

Whilst this proposal was under discussion, the National Trust wrote to the Office of Works on 28 November 1935 saying that it had been suggested that they acquire a cottage near Pentre Evan Dolmen, as it was an excellent example of the old cottages of Pembrokeshire and 'to prevent its being rebuilt and developed for the visitors who come to the Dolmen'. It was further suggested that they acquire some of the land around the monument 'to preserve the amenities of the Dolmen'. The new Inspector of Ancient Monuments for Wales, B.H.St.J. O'Neil, identified this cottage as Pen Banc, 150 yards north-west of the site, almost inevitably belonging to the Revd Ben Morris, who was willing to let it remain as it was, 'if he is not put to much financial loss'. However the files record no further action on this matter by the National Trust.

Arrangements were being put in hand for the archaeological excavation to be undertaken during two short seasons in 1936 and 1937. W.F. Grimes, then Assistant Keeper of Archaeology at the National Museum of Wales, was invited to be the director, and he received two weeks leave of absence in June 1936 to undertake the work. He was offered subsistence at the following rates. '1st 3 nights, 18/6 a night, next 4 nights, 17/6 a night, nights over 7 up to 14, 15/- a night, thereafter 10/- a night and a third class monthly return ticket from Cardiff to the most convenient station for Pentre Ifan' (wherever that may have been).

It is only necessary to outline Grimes's findings, which have been fully published.<sup>16</sup> Excavation showed that the cairn was originally 130ft (39m) long with 90ft (27m) running north from the chamber. Its maximum width was 65ft (19.5m). Very little cairn material survived. The limits of the cairn were marked by five small upright stones with pointed tops, two at the tips of the horns, one over the centre of each long side and one at the northern end (Fig. 6, stones X, XI, XII, XIII, XVI). In addition to these surviving stones there were two irregular lines of 'stone-holes' down the eastern and western side of the cairn alongside and to the north of the chamber (Fig. 6). He concluded that these were the sites of lost uprights marking the peristalith of the cairn.

Grimes summarized the findings within the chamber as follows:

... the chamber was roughly rectangular in plan, with a slightly sunken floor. Its now open sides were originally closed—on the west by orthostats and some form of dry walling, on the east by dry walling only. To judge from what remains this walling must have been of the crudest type and little more than a rough facing to the body of the cairn enclosing the chamber'.



Fig. 3

The site soon after it was taken into Guardianship, showing the original fence

The forecourt was investigated by means of a trench running up to the middle of the portal stone. This showed that the chamber was set into a large shallow pit. Within this pit and against the portal stone was a series of pitched, packing stones set within angular rubble. Grimes removed those stones at the edge of the pit but did not disturb those large stones tightly wedged against the portal stone as he felt it was dangerous to interfere with them.

He also investigated the façade and concluded that it had only ever had two uprights on either side of the chamber. One was missing on the western side and the other was broken with the stump surviving in place. Grimes concluded that the stone of the cairn swept down behind these uprights to a point at the tip of each horn. The final point of interest was a large fallen slab on the eastern side (stone IX on Fig. 6) whose original purpose was not clear, but which may have been set upright in an adjacent socket.

During the excavations, the Revd B. Morris, the custodian and landowner, undertook to organize four labourers to help Grimes at an agreed hourly rate. In 1937, when the excavation moved outside the guardianship area, Mr Morris initially requested £30 for compensation of his loss of crop and disturbance, but later reduced





Fig. 4

The burial chamber with its new railings in 1905

this to £5 after Grimes made a special visit to bargain with him, explaining that the Ministry of Works were unable to pay the higher figure by talking 'vaguely about re-armament'.

At the end of the 1937 season Grimes began to formulate his views on consolidation and partial reconstruction. These he set out in a letter to O'Neil on 30 October 1937.

I hope myself that you will decide to take in more ground and partly restore the mound, with some kind of surface identification for the stone-holes. A low mound could mark the actual limit, with a steeper rise a few feet from the capstone, in which possibly you could conceal your supports. The way in could be as before, with the cairn as it were cut away to provide a passage to the chamber. This would be quite in keeping with the original arrangement. I believe that the forecourt and portal were never used, and that the entrance was made through the east side, where, as you will notice, there were no orthostats.

The stone-holes within the railings are marked out by means of small stones. No doubt I could arrange to tie in the spot for re-excavating the other holes if you thought that necessary. This could be done when stone XIV is examined: that seems to be an important point.

I hope I may be forgiven these suggestions which are offered in all humility. But a lengthening acquaintance with the site convinces me that it would be a pity to solve the problem with a concrete pillar, and the stones are certainly spoilt by being hedged in so closely by the railings.



Fig. 5  
A sign erected alongside the path to the  
cromlech in 1905

O'Neil's reply was more measured. He wrote on 12 November 1937:

I have not yet had a chance of formulating a definitive policy. I should, of course, like to take more ground and not have a fence at all, but whether or not I should like to replace any of the mound I have not yet decided. We know that there was one, of course, but I think that we should also remember that Pentre Ifan is the most impressive [monument] of its kind in Wales and one of the finest in Britain. Are we then justified in the cause of pure science in detracting from its outward impressiveness? A mound of any kind at that end will do this, don't you think?

In a footnote, O'Neil states that: 'We shall *have* to put in unsightly concrete supports for safety'.

Grimes replied to O'Neil's letter on the following day:

If the supports must show in any case, then it can't be helped. But I hope for all that that, if you can get the extra land you'll decide in favour of a low mound, even if it has no need to rise to capstone height. We might thus compromise between my pure (!) science and your showmanship! But you have my sympathy!

So the matter rested and Grimes and O'Neil decided not to undertake further excavations in 1938. O'Neil began to argue for extending the guardianship area. In a minute of 4 January 1938, he wrote that 'Had Pitt-Rivers known in 1884 what we now know of the shape of these tombs, more land would have been taken then'.

During 1938, three letters were received complaining that a length of railing around the chamber had been removed by Mr Morris, and used to fill a gateway. Animals were now getting into the chamber. One correspondent concluded that the railings may have been removed by an irate walker who on arriving at the chamber found the notice saying that the key had to be obtained from the house at the bottom of the hill. The A.A. sign to the site had also fallen down. Repairs were made to the railings, but the replacement of the notice board was delayed in the Ministry of Works workshop 'owing to the pressure of war work'.



PENTRE IFAN: THE SITE AS EXCAVATED

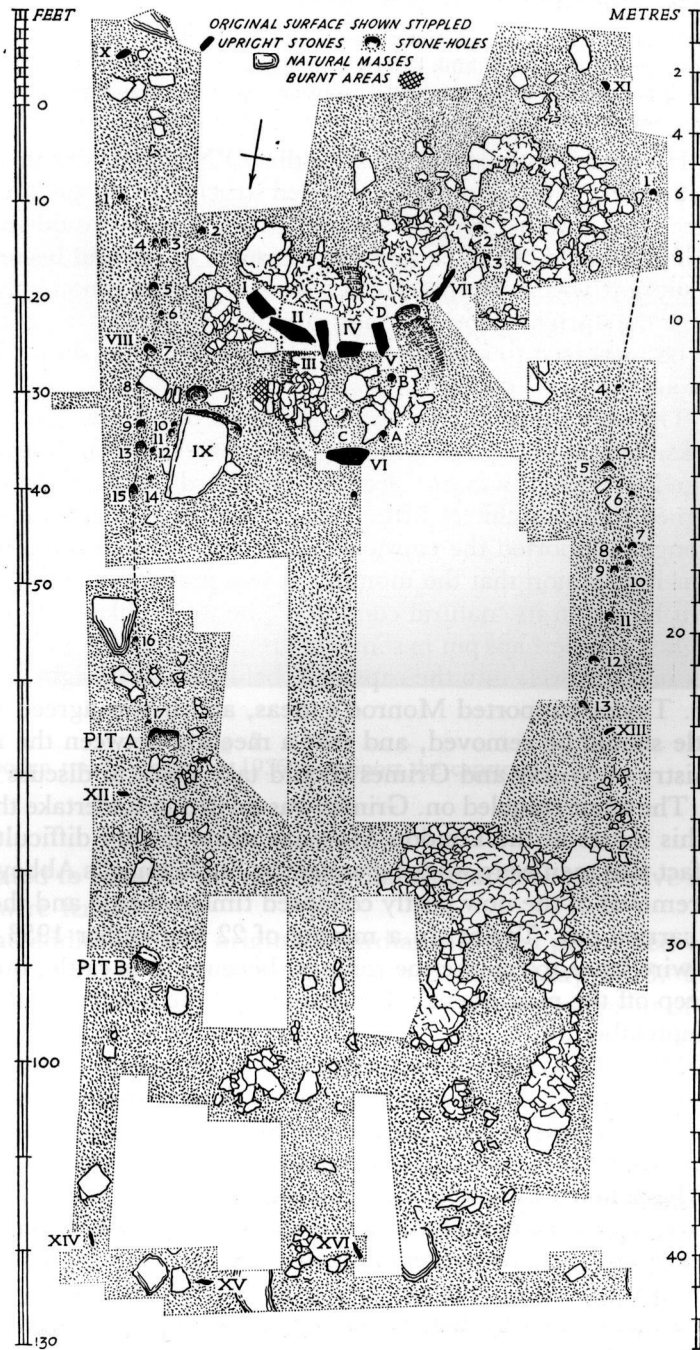


Fig. 6  
 Plan of the excavations  
 undertaken by W.F.  
 Grimes in 1936-7  
 (from *Arch. Camb.*,  
 1948)

The wooden trestle remained in place throughout the war and the rest of the 1940s (Fig. 7). It was Grimes who raised the matter of the trestle with Dr Arnold Taylor, Inspector of Ancient Monuments. In a letter dated 24 August 1949 he wrote:

As to the present condition of Pentre-Ifan, I quite agree that the inserted structure isn't doing any work at present—but actually I think I'm right in saying that it was never really meant to! As I understand it, it was put there in order to take the capstone if for some reason the stone supports failed. At present it's an eyesore and if there is any movement I can't believe it would be strong enough to arrest it.

His letter continued, suggesting that O'Neil had been thinking of replacing what was intended to be a temporary wooden structure with something similar in concrete. Grimes said that he would resist that strongly, as it would spoil the appearance: he felt that it would be better were the capstone to fall and become a picturesque ruin. If a support was to be inserted, Grimes suggested a non-corrosive metal frame set against the upright stones. He also complained that his suggestion that the scheduled area be increased to include the whole monument as shown by excavation had not been adopted.

This letter prompted a reconsideration of the situation within the Ministry of Works. A minute from L. Monroe, the conservation architect, to Dr Arnold Taylor pointed out that it was not clear that Radford had actually approved the structure designed by the architect Milne. He also reported that due to shrinkage the trestle no longer supported the capstone which was now securely resting on its uprights. It was his opinion that the monument was perfectly safe but before recommending that it be left in its 'natural condition', he would like to investigate the base of the uprights, and perhaps put in some concrete packing. He also suggested inserting some short metal dowels into the capstone, behind each upright, to stop any tendency to slide. Taylor supported Monroe's ideas, and it was agreed that the now decaying trestle should be removed, and that a meeting between the relevant officers of the Ministry of Works and Grimes should take place to discuss any future treatment.

The affair rumbled on. Grimes was invited to undertake the necessary excavation but his duties at the London Museum made it very difficult to get away. Despite the fact that men were working at nearby St Dogmael's Abbey and Cilgerran Castle, the removal of the now partly collapsed timber trestle and the decayed railings was not carried out. Taylor, in a minute of 22 September 1953, recommended a post and wire fence to replace the railings, because 'it is cattle, not visitors that we need to keep off the monument'. The remains of the timber trestle were finally removed in September 1954.

Mr G.D. Gillies of Sanderstead, Surrey, wrote on 26 July 1955 to complain about the 'very rusty, decrepit, old iron railings' around the monument, saying that it 'is monstrously out-of-place at the Stone Age Monument . . . Usually the taste of the Ministry in such matters is good but on this occasion it cannot be denied that they have failed miserably . . . Having stood for over 3000 years it is unlikely that it can come to any harm for lack of a fence which would effectively bar cattle or horses but does not of course prevent humans from approaching the monument'. Mr Gillies' letter arrived while negotiations with Mr Morris were in hand, to extend the guardianship area to that recommended by Grimes following his excavations. Mr Gillies continued to press his point that the site should be unfenced while discussions



Fig. 7

The wooden trestle erected in 1936 to support the capstone

within the Ministry related to whether the new guardianship area should have new railings or a post and wire fence.

The purchase of the additional and original guardianship area proceeded very slowly, despite promises of rapid completion, and lasted until May 1958. This inevitably postponed plans for Grimes' return to the site and the replacement of the railings. Grimes noted in a letter of 16 November 1956, commenting on proposals to concrete the footings, that the removal of the timber trestle and its concrete supports had led to the removal of an original stone which gave some support to the north side of the portal stone. Grimes feared that other damage might have been done during the removal of these structures. Arrangements were eventually made for Grimes to undertake some small-scale excavation and supervise the agreed plan of restoration at the site in September 1958. This was to raise the original shape of the mound by a foot or so, put stones into the holes discovered during excavation running down either side of the cairn, and consider the re-erection of the fallen orthostat on the west side of the chamber and the large stone (IX on Grimes's plan) to the east of the chamber.

Grimes recognized that some of his ideas on restoration, particularly the re-erection of fallen stones were 'not in keeping with normal policy'. He also favoured mending the broken orthostat on the west side of the façade and marking the adjacent socket with a modern stone. He favoured the idea that the 'postholes' be filled with 'small, roughly dressed blocks of igneous rock, sufficiently squared up to be obvious modern replacements, but not too painfully so'. Craster's view, by then Inspector of Ancient Monuments for Wales, was more cautious: 'Generally I am not in favour of doing anything which would radically alter the appearance the monument has borne since George Owen's day.'

In the fortnight Grimes had available in September, considerable progress was made. He was relieved to rediscover that the stone propping up the inner face of the portal had survived, and this stone was bedded in concrete. On the outside the filling was removed down to the undisturbed and tightly-wedged packing-stones, which he recorded in plan and section. Here too a concrete slab was inserted across the full width of the portal and keyed on the underside by the projecting tops of the packing stones. Sheets of paper were inserted between the concrete and stones to aid future removal.

Grimes concluded, in a letter of 23 September 1958, that:

I should add that the construction of the portal as a whole seems so solid that the addition of concrete was almost unnecessary. The packing of the side stones and of the portal itself was very tight, with a certain amount of interlocking, and I feel more convinced than ever that the portal stone, once in place, was never moved.

He recorded the construction of the dry-stone walling to each side of the chamber and how this involved the lifting and replacement of the fallen orthostat. Its original hole and the side of the modern stump put into the façade retained their concrete fill put in after the excavation of 1936-7.

Grimes lifted and examined beneath the fallen stone IX, and concluded that its present position was artificial having probably been felled by the undermining of the hole in which it originally stood. He had managed to rediscover the position of most of the 'post-holes' but had not had time to 'set up the new pillars'. These he suggested should be set into concrete placed within the original holes. Finally, whilst cutting back the western field-bank they found a three-foot high standing-stone apparently in its original position.

He also raised with Craster the possibility of moving the kissing-gate at the entrance a little to the south so that it did not obstruct first impressions for 'from this point of view the situation is almost as bad as it was before with the tall railings'.

The present form of the monument evolved over the next few months. Grimes was unhappy with the original form of the mound and its edges were softened. The marker stones were inserted and the original stones marking the tips of the horns re-excavated. Grimes made a final visit in April 1959 when the only matter outstanding seemed to be to redraft the guidebook.<sup>17</sup> The finds of the original excavation were deposited in the National Museum of Wales.

The modifications to the monument and its presentation were well received though some slight management problems arose from the new arrangements. In 1962, the dry-stone walling around the chamber was collapsing and the gravel fill was becoming



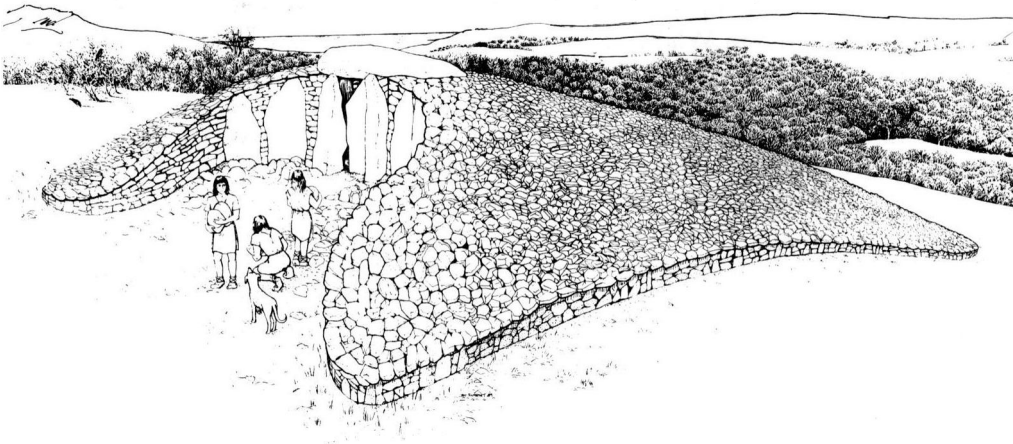


Fig. 8

A reconstruction drawing of the Pentre Ifan burial chamber  
(Jane Durrant, 1989, for CADW: Welsh Historic Monuments)

dispersed, problems which have remained until today, even though the heels of the dry stones have been set in mortar. Signposting and the sale of the guide for this remote site remained a problem, the former being much improved.

Another fear for the monument re-emerged in 1968, when Mr W.L. Thomas of Clynderwen, Pembrokeshire, wrote to the Ministry of Works. He was of the opinion that the capstone was very gradually slewing and that ultimately it might fall. He feared that weather conditions causing expansion and contraction, earth tremors and ever-increasing man-made disturbances as well as the comparatively recent excavations were possible contributory factors. He asked if accurate measurements recording this potential movement could be made. At a site meeting, he received assurances from the Inspector of Ancient Monuments and the Conservation Architect about the stability of the capstone, but his fears were not allayed. Various methods of making these accurate measurements were discussed, including hanging plumb bobs from the capstone or using an optical plumb for the same purpose. Eventually it was decided to mount two 'Demec' studs, one on the outer face of the eastern upright and one on the outer face of the adjacent façade upright. The distance between them was measured to an accuracy of one millimetre over a two-year period and no variation was found.

Just over twenty years later, Mr Thomas encouraged a friend to write again on his behalf. Having revisited the site, and knowing it for over forty years, he remained convinced that the capstone was still moving. This has prompted CADW to consider an alternative method of measurement in which an accurate comparison of the diagonals within the chamber are to be made. Still the capstone stands securely, as it has done for so many years.

Other matters have arisen over the past two decades. In 1974, Frances Lynch published a note on a cup-and-ring stone from Anglesey.<sup>18</sup> This was the first cup-and-ring stone found in Wales 'except for a single example on the portal at Pentre Ifan, Pembrokeshire'. This is explained in a footnote: 'I am grateful to Prof. Leslie Alcock for telling me of the discovery of the single cup-mark surrounded by a ring on the foot of the portal stone at Pentre Ifan. Such a thing is very unusual, but, in view of the Newgrange evidence, not entirely inexplicable.'

The author has made a close examination of the portal stone at Pentre Ifan, but failed to find any evidence of this carved decoration. However, this reference has led to Pentre Ifan being included in the recently published list of Neolithic sites with carved decoration in Britain.<sup>19</sup>

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The purpose of telling the story of Pentre Ifan at some length is more than just to record the individual decisions and actions taken by inspectors of ancient monuments and conservation architects in whose temporary care it has been placed. There are lessons to be learned, particularly for any new inspector eager to make his mark, such as the present author. The importance of this story is its highlighting of two major issues which arise whenever any archaeological monument is taken into guardianship and opened to the public.

The first issue is to balance the desire to restore a monument to its perceived original form with the wish to maintain it as close as possible to how it was found. The desire to restore prehistoric monuments in particular arises out of discovering more about them archaeologically. The original form of Pentre Ifan was not clear to anyone up to and including General Pitt Rivers. He surmised that the stones of the façade may have represented the remains of a second chamber and he felt it was an open question whether on the evidence of the site, that there was ever a barrow or cairn covering the site. The first suggestion that part of the site be reconstructed was made by J. Fitzgerald in 1906, who, inspired by recent work at Stonehenge, wished to see the fallen stones re-erected. It was not until W.J. Hemp wrote in 1925 to the then Chief Inspector, C.R. Peers, that the true form of the monument was suggested. He correctly identified it as being the chamber of a long cairn extending some distance to the north. Hemp's ideas were confirmed by Grimes's excavations in 1936 and 1937. Filled with enthusiasm by his new discoveries, Grimes's original ideas for reconstruction were very grand. The then Inspector, B.H. St J. O'Neil, took a much calmer view.

Through their lively correspondence, their plans for the site developed. However, the war intervened and the wooden trestle remained in place. It was Grimes who re-opened the debate and eventually pressed it home to a conclusion. Almost inevitably there was a new inspector of ancient monuments at the Ministry of Works, Arnold Taylor, who was to be succeeded by O.E. Craster before the reconstruction was completed. Throughout this tale, it is the involvement of Professor W.F. Grimes over a twenty-three year period, that gave a consistency and purpose to the work at Pentre



Ifan. His ideas for the restoration and presentation of the monument were to be tempered and modified over this period, probably through debate with the four eminent archaeologists who held office as the relevant inspector during this time. Grimes worked without fee, and at considerable inconvenience to himself when he had moved to the London Museum.

By 1958, when Grimes returned to the site, the trestle and the railings had been removed. The restoration scheme he proposed, he recognized as being not in 'keeping with normal policy', and Craster pressed for his not doing anything which would radically alter 'the appearance the monument has borne since George Owen's day'. So a compromise was reached with the balance strongly conservative. The only elements that jar are the rather uniform stones set within the 'post-holes' found by Grimes. These form uneven lines which, if marking the boundaries of the first phase of the cairn<sup>20</sup> were never intended to be seen. They now appear rather trivial and might be removed or truncated.

It is interesting to compare what happened at Pentre Ifan with the fates of two of the other key prehistoric monuments of Wales, Bryn Celli Ddu and Bardoddiad-y-Gawres. Both are passage graves, though the former overlies an earlier henge and stone circle, and both were largely reconstructed and re-interpreted following excavation. In the case of Bryn Celli Ddu the excavations of 1928-9 were undertaken by W.J. Hemp.<sup>21</sup>

The solution at this site was similar to that first proposed by Grimes at Pentre Ifan. The cover-stones of the passage were reset, and those that were damaged replaced. Additional strength was given by concrete supports and the whole was covered by an earth mound made of soil excavated from the henge ditch. The mound was smaller than the original so that the remains of the earlier stone-circle and henge would be seen, but the chamber and passage were made waterproof and the concrete supports hidden. T.G.E. Powell and Glyn Daniel excavated at Bardoddiad-y-Gawres in 1952-3.<sup>22</sup> It was the discovery of a number of carved stones and the side chambers that seems to have prompted the desire to provide a protection over the site in the manner of the original cairn. The experience of visiting a passage grave is heightened by stooping to clamber along the passage into the chamber beyond. Having reconstructed the site this far, the temptation is to go further. This has led to controversial recent reconstructions, further afield at Newgrange, Ireland, and Gavriinis, Brittany.

The sight of the great capstones of the cromlechs is often more powerful than the collapsed remains of a passage grave. In this case, the solution to the dilemma of restoring or maintaining the site is best achieved by graphical reconstruction. This can be vivid, incorporate all the evidence, do no permanent damage and be changed or improved at little cost. This has now been tried at Pentre Ifan (Fig. 8). In the future, technology may provide us with different forms of image which excite and inform the visitor while leaving the monument to stand in its own right.

A second and more difficult dilemma arises when a site is taken into state care. The facilities required for the care and maintenance of the monument and how it is presented to the public, inevitably affect the setting and appreciation of the monument. For a Welsh prehistoric monument, Pentre Ifan has a long-documented

and well-illustrated history, extending back to 1603. It is also unusually well-documented since coming into guardianship in 1884. So many of our guardianship monuments have inadequate central records, and it is clear that in many cases the initial consolidation of a site was left to the masons and their superintendent who worked on the site. Yet for a site whose history probably extends over 3,500 years, we only have representations of it over the last tenth of its life and we have been actively trying to protect it for less than three per cent of that time.

The core of the monument remains largely unchanged since Owen's day. What is so impressive is the almost miraculous carriage of the Concorde-like capstone on its three supports. This provides a framework for the varied but rather barren landscape in which it sits. Its original setting may have been rather different, for as Grimes points out, the site lies below the tree-line and scrub woodland has developed over some abandoned fields to the north-west. The original approach must have been towards the curving façade and portal stone of the monument. Whether a heightened visual effect was achieved by cutting a swathe through the trees, or by an avenue or other setting of stones or posts is not known. The structure of the chamber would have been hidden within a cairn of stones.

Between Owen's day and our own time and probably in the early nineteenth century, the hillside on which Pentre Ifan stands was enclosed. This changes our appreciation of the site, as it is now approached down a straight path lined on one side by a ragged hedgebank with the rectangular framework of the chamber at the end. This is also nearly always the view drawn by artists and taken by photographers. It is the sculptural and aesthetic qualities of the site which strike the visitor, not its historical interest. In Pentre Ifan's case it is the recorded image of the site that is more important than its original form.

Given that, it is remarkable how much has gone on over the past one hundred years to compromise that appearance. The setting changes when the need to demarcate the area of guardianship arises. At first this was achieved very simply by the erection of four marker stones and a basic wire fence. The Act of 1882 did not require public access to be given to sites placed into guardianship, nor did its successor in 1934. However there had been a long tradition of visiting Pentre Ifan and Lord Kensington clearly intended it to continue. In 1892, he put the farm on which it stood up for auction, and the particulars not only excluded the area in guardianship, but stipulated that a right of way be maintained to the cromlech.<sup>23</sup> Complaints led to the replacement of the tumbledown wire fence with a ferocious set of iron railings with access to the site through a locked gate. The guardianship area was so small that the railings dominated all views of the site and the locked gate frustrated many visitors not prepared to walk up and down the hill to fetch the key. The railings were to remain for fifty-three years. An even greater intrusion arose from the fear that the capstone was in imminent danger of falling. Newcomers to the site cannot fail to be impressed by the finely-balanced capstone and some of the fears were prompted by a desire to improve public safety. The introduction of the huge wooden trestle in 1936 was intended to give the capstone support, but at the expense of any visual sense of the site. It is a relief that despite discussing the replacement of the wooden trestle by a concrete pier or light metal framework, neither of these options was taken. In the

end, additional stability was gained by concreting the bases of the upright stones. Unfortunately, this has introduced a foreign material on to the site, which even though hidden has probably damaged the pitched stone packing of the portal stone on which it was laid. In Grimes's view the need for any additional support was unproven, given its great age, and he was prepared to accept the slight risk of the fall of the capstone rather than compromise the site in any way.

The decision to erect the trestle was hastily arrived at, probably resulting from a single visit by the inspector and architect. While it did lead to the excavation and better understanding of the site, it remained in position for eighteen years. Soon after its erection it ceased to have any function, but what was so quickly erected took a long time to remove.

The extension of the guardianship area in 1958 has led to a return to a wire fence, which looks far less obtrusive. The kissing gate at the entrance remains a problem because of its axial position, and its creation of a worn area within the grass. This gate is not necessary and may be removed.

Notice-boards were first erected at the site in 1884. They have been in different styles and lasted for different lengths of time (Fig. 5). The purpose of the signs has changed from warning of the special status of the site towards informing and interpreting the site to the visitor. Pitt-Rivers was worried about graffiti and the notices warned about defacing the monument. However their prominent position has often spoilt the setting of the cromlech and they have been removed to a point outside the guardianship area.

In summary, the site has been in care for 106 years. For exactly half that time, it was surrounded by railings which completely compromised its setting and hindered public access. For a sixth of the time, a wooden trestle filled the burial chamber making the site of little or no interest to visitors. The thoughtless erection of signs and gates have presented their own problems.

With all the great archaeological sites in Wales and across Britain, the watchword must be 'care'. Care should be taken fully to understand and record the monument, and care should be taken to record what actions have been taken after the site has been taken into guardianship. Care is needed in considering the balance between reconstruction and retaining the monument as found, and making all changes to the site easily reversible if opinions or knowledge change. Finally, great care needs to be taken over the surroundings of monuments so that their beauty and sense of place are not unnecessarily compromised by the trappings of guardianship.

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