

THE SEARCH FOR PLAS PENRHYN

JUDY BOURKE

Processing Services / McMaster University Library
Hamilton, ON, Canada L8S 4L6

FAILURE (21 JUNE 1990)

It sounded easy to find Bertrand Russell's house in North Wales the way Ken described it, practically next door to the strange village of Portmeirion. Simple, we would ask when we visited Portmeirion and perhaps we would be able to walk from there—except no one we asked had the foggiest notion. “Bertrand Russell?” “Is it that big house they turned into a hotel?”

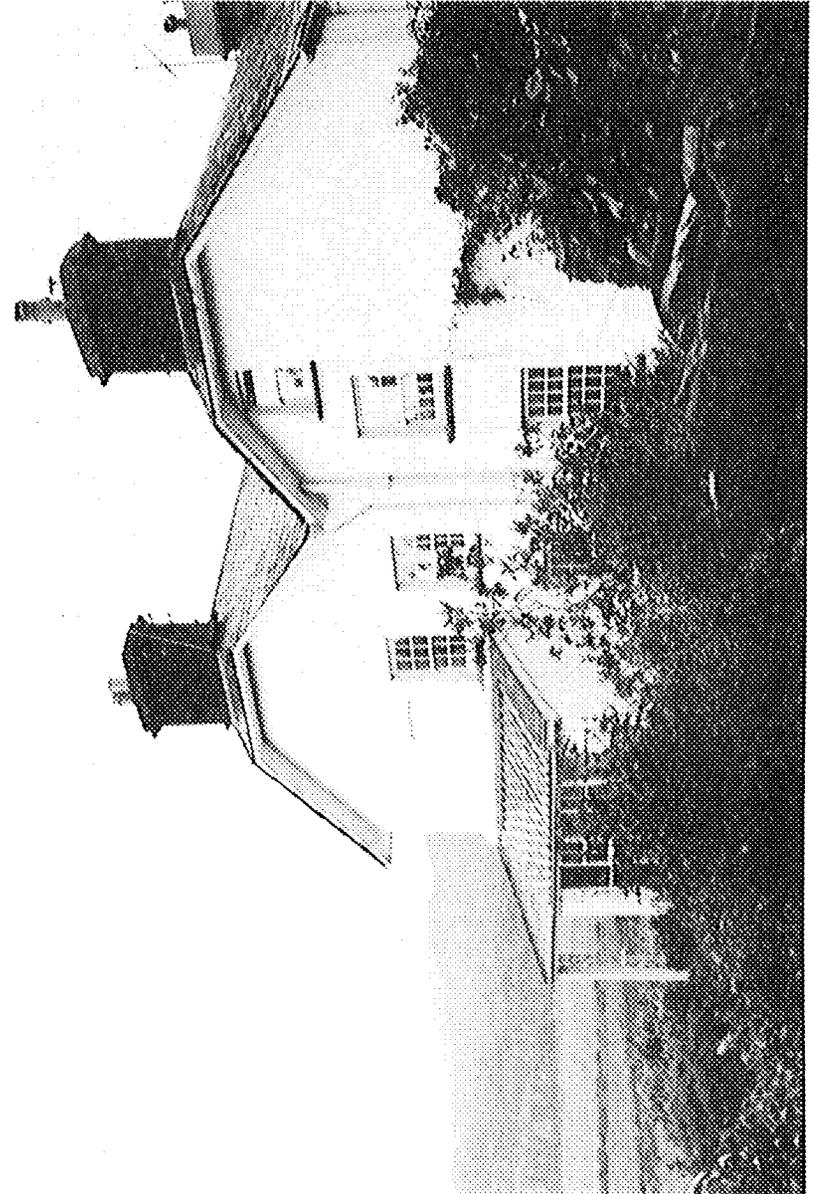
The backup plan was to drive there. “Take the first road left after the crossroad to Portmeirion in Minfordd going towards Porthmadog”, said Ken. Okay, here we go, turn left onto the main road at Minfordd. “Do you think that driveway we just passed was actually the road, Shelagh?”, I said. As nothing better presented itself, we decided that indeed was it. We would turn around and make another pass at it at the first opportunity. Unfortunately, the already narrow road suddenly contracted even further between stone walls at the toll bridge into Porthmadog. A U-turn was out of the question, and that was the end of our quest for Plas Penrhyn in 1990.

SUCCESS! (10 JULY 1993)

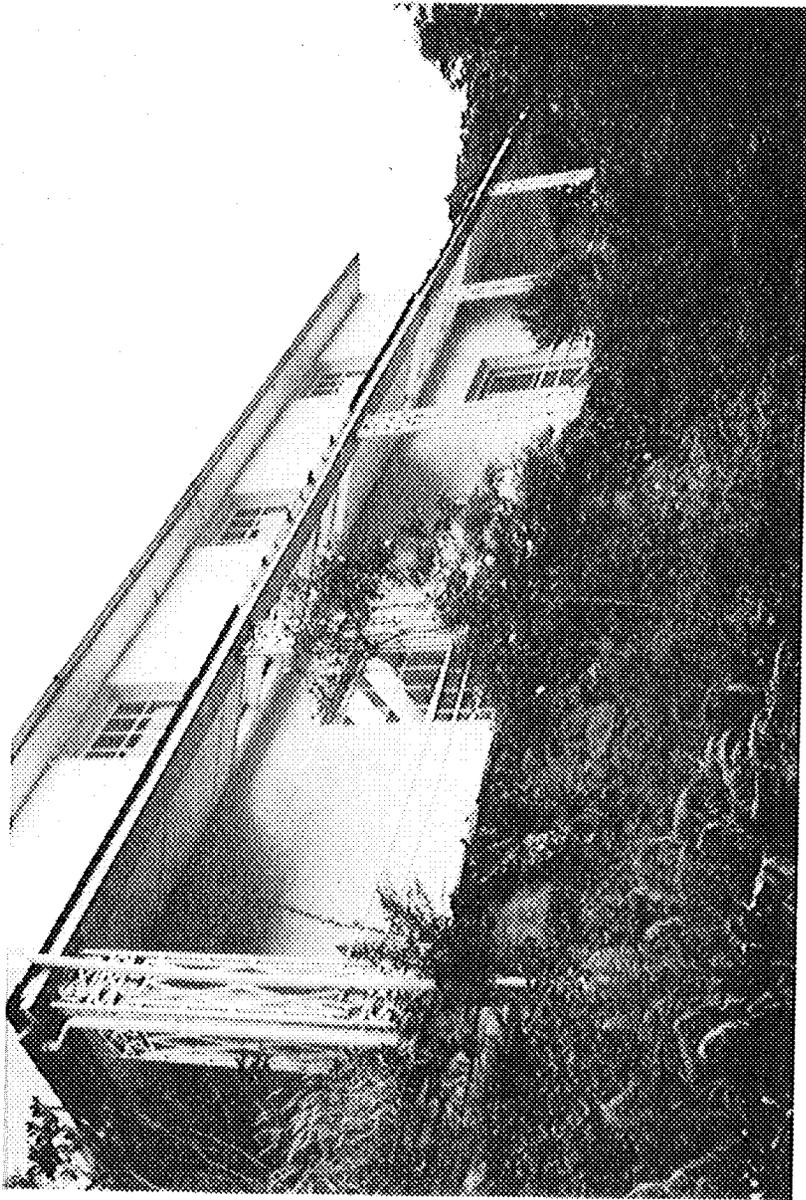
Three years later, my sister and I are again staying at Plas Tan-y-Bwlch in North Wales to assist with the dig at the Iron Age site of Crawcwellt (but that's another story). It is late afternoon and raining as we set out on the Porthmadog road from Maentwrog to have another look for Plas Penrhyn. I have forgotten just where the “driveway” is and begin looking for it in Penrhyndeudraeth (Penrhyn D.D. to the locals) before remembering that it is at Minfordd. Minfordd is much smaller

than I remember, and there is no parking space on the shoulder of the road. It is still raining, so Shelagh sportingly offers to stay with the car parked across a church driveway.

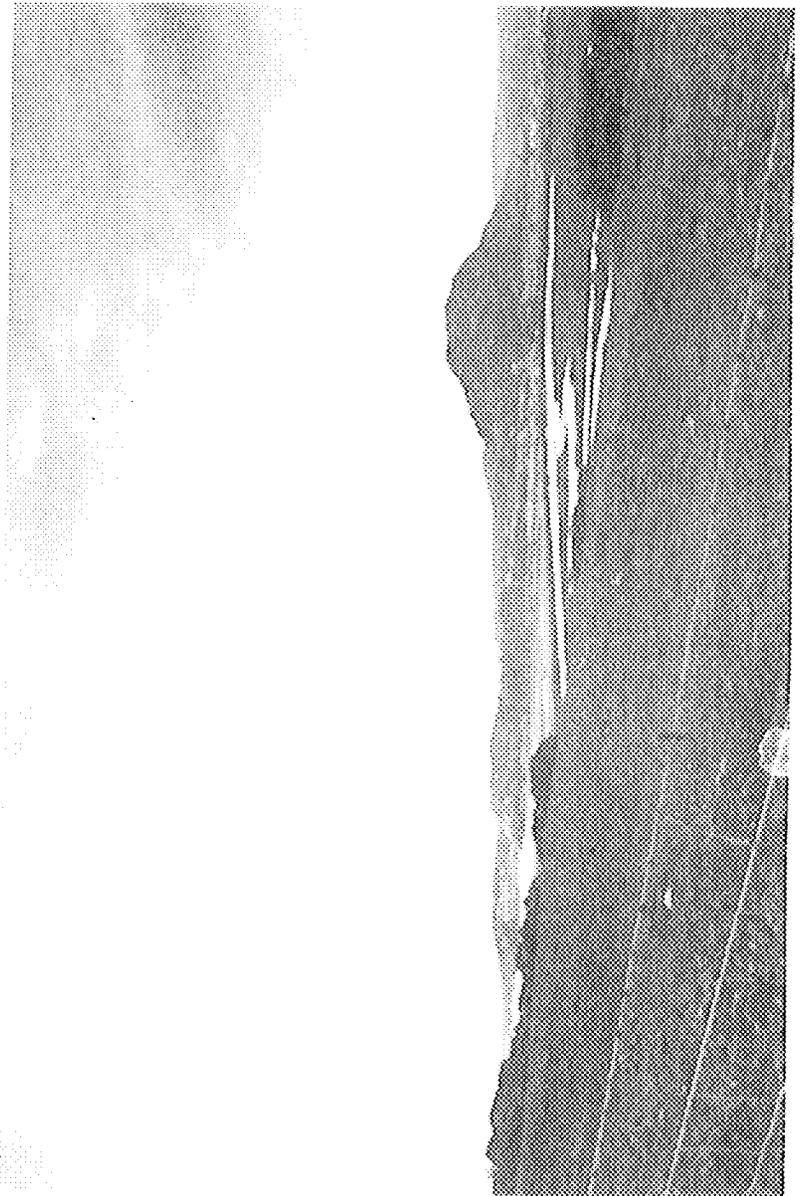
I dash across the road and start running up the laneway angling sharply off and up from it. Trees arch overhead and when I slow down to catch my breath there are good smells of green growth and the sea. Then, to the right, magically the view clears over Porthmadog and the estuary glows with light from the westering sun slipping below the clouds. I forget about trying to hurry and begin to enjoy the walk. I see a couple of houses, one is a distinct possibility, but I am not sure and continue further past a farm until the laneway splits and deteriorates into two tracks. I decide that if it is further I am not going to see it and return the way I came. I am almost positive the big white house is the one. It looks rather uncared for and it is hard to see much of it for all the trees, but I can glimpse the corner of a verandah facing the estuary. The laneway divides the house from its garages and outbuildings; there is no garden on this side. I am beginning to take pictures when a young man appears out of the back door. I politely ask him if this was Bertrand Russell's house, but he seems reluctant to commit himself at first until I have explained myself more; then he allows that it was. Apparently the place is being used as an art school, and he is a sculpture student. As a final magnanimous gesture, he invites me to go around to the front to take photographs, but the grass is knee deep and the shrubbery so close that good shots are impossible. I hurry back to the car, guilty to have been gone so long, but no matter, the sun is shining, Shelagh has had a nice nap, we don't have a parking ticket, and I have found Plas Penrhyn.



Plas Penrhyn from the west



Plas Penrhyn from the hillside on the north



Plas Penrhyn's northwestern outlook: Glaslyn Estuary and Tremadog Bay
