



The discovery of a 2000 year old port sheds new light on Wales' role in the Roman Empire.

CYNGOR ARCHAEOLEG BRYDEINIG
CBA Wales/Cymru
COUNCIL FOR BRITISH ARCHAEOLOGY

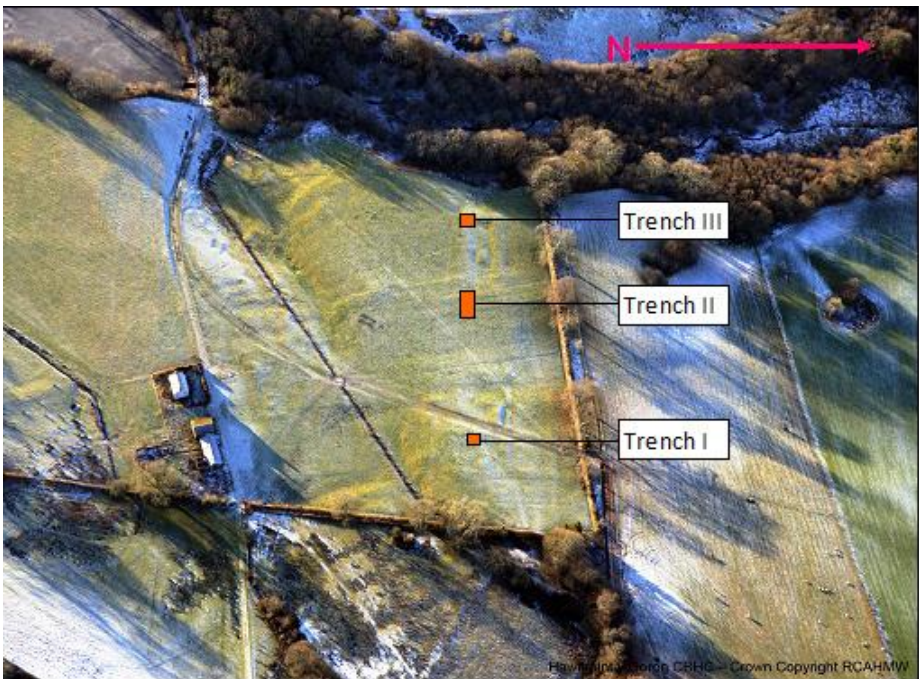
<http://www.britarch.ac.uk/cbawales/>

Newsletter 42 Autumn 2011

The Garden before The Garden

Excavations at the National Botanic Garden of Wales 2011 – Jon Dollery

The National Botanic Garden of Wales is one of the premier welsh tourist destinations as well as being the largest and youngest botanical garden within Europe. The botanic garden is also unique as it is situated within a historic parkland, the boundary of which dates back at least 400 years. The estate is located within the parish of Llanarthney which in turn lies within the Towy Valley, Carmarthenshire, Wales. At the heart of this vast estate lies the site of Middleton Hall, which today lies within the jurisdiction of *Waun Las National Nature Reserve*. The hall has a long and complex narrative, most of which contains large gaps or is incomplete due



Photograph showing the location of the trenches. © Toby Driver.



Photograph of Trench I © Jon Dollery. The cobbled surface can be seen at the top of the trench along with the circular footings for a colonnade. At the bottom of the trench can be seen the substantial rubble deposit. Both the cobbles and rubble deposit are separated by the robber trench running across the centre of the trench. It is thought that this robber trench marks the location of the exterior wall of the early mansion.

to the absence of historic documentation. There are some tantalizing nuggets of information that have been preserved within historic records. The **hearth tax** record of 1670 mentions a large house within the parish of Llanarthney that was taxed for having 17 hearths, undoubtedly Middleton Hall (Jones 2002). However most historical accounts that mention the hall have been written some considerable time after the demolition of the hall and are heavily influenced by local folk knowledge and most are conflicting with other accounts. If the hearth tax record is correct, then the hall would have been one of the largest houses in Carmarthenshire, it has certainly proven to be one of the most elusive. It is not known for certain who built the hall and when, however it is believed by most historians to have been built by *Henry Middleton* in 1630 who later became High Sheriff of Carmarthen in 1644 (Jones 2000). The hall passed through the Middleton family for four generations until it passed through marriage to the Gwyn's of Gwempa. Through personal debts and mortgages, the Gwyn's mounted huge debts and were forced

to sell Middleton Hall and the estate (Jones 2002). In 1789 the hall and estate were bought by William Paxton. Paxton, who could be described as both an eccentric and a visionary most certainly with extravagant tastes, built a new grand mansion (also named Middleton Hall) to the west of the old hall on a promontory which commanded panoramic views of the surrounding landscape. He transformed the landscape of the estate by creating artificial lakes and open parkland in the tradition of the romantic movement of the 18th century (Ludlow 1996).

The location of this early Middleton Hall had been known for some years prior to the excavation. A series of surveys of the area have been conducted of the site prior too and also during the establishment of the National Botanic Garden of Wales. The first survey to formally acknowledge the earthworks within the vicinity of Waun Las was a report drafted for the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust (Gallagher 1990). A brief survey of the earthworks were undertaken for the report which describes them as being complex "but are evidence of an extensive settlement there" (Gallagher 1990 p02).

With funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, a pilot project was undertaken to explore the remnants of the original Middleton Hall and possible associated garden. The primary aim of this project was to establish if there was a viable archaeological narrative which could contribute to the development of activities and attractions associated with heritage within the garden. To address this primary aim, the first objective was to identify the extent of survival of the archaeological record. Once the archaeology had been established the next phase would be to develop a research design that would drive a more long term project.

During a 10 day excavation in the summer of 2011 a total of three trenches were opened by volunteers from the National botanic Garden who were overseen by staff and students from the School of Archaeology, History and Anthropology, University of Wales, Trinity Saint David. Geophysical survey was also conducted by staff from both the University of Wales, Swansea.

From the excavation of Trench I a clear archaeological narrative has been uncovered. When the building was demolished by William Paxton at some point in the 1790's, a deliberate effort was made to reuse material, especially high status stone. While excavating, a large concentration of building rubble was discovered, however this rubble had been deliberately sorted and what was left behind was the un-recycled detritus of the building. A ditch feature was also found running north south dividing the rubble which also confirms that there was a deliberate attempt to remove and reuse high status stone. The interpretation of this feature is that it was a robber trench that was used to excavate down to the foundations of the

building to remove the valuable faced stone. In effect this feature marks the position of the exterior walls.

The excavation of Trench II has provided much information on the extent of survival of the early garden associated with Middleton Hall. A large gravel path was discovered running north south across the middle of the trench. It also was apparent that there was another path that joined the central path that ran west east along the edge of the large water feature. A small pit was also discovered in the east of the trench that was probably dug for the planting of shrubs and the layout as a whole hints at an extensive formal garden layout in the baroque style (Turner 2005). Trench III contained potentially waterlogged deposits and may have preserved organic material dating to the garden's early planting schemes.

The next step of project is to develop a research design that will not only incorporate archaeology but also encompass other areas of heritage management such as landscape research. At present, a new bid for funding is being drafted for the Heritage Lottery Fund. It is hoped that two further trenches will be excavated next year to explore much larger areas of the house and garden. It is hoped that with the opening of these two areas, more fundamental questions of the house and garden can be answered.

For more information on the excavation please visit the National Botanic Garden Website (<http://www.gardenofwales.org.uk/about-2/history-of-the-gardens/middleton-a-paradise-lost/>)

References

Baker, E., 1999 *Cultural Landscape Management, Work Placement Assignment: National Botanic Garden of Wales*. Unpubl MA work placement report, University of Wales, Lampeter.

Jones, F., 2002 *Treasury of Historic Carmarthenshire: The Dyfed Collection Vol VI*. Brawdy Books: Pembrokeshire.

Gallagher, C., 1990 *Middleton, Dyfed: Historic Landscape Assessment – Proposed Botanic Garden and Country Park*. Debois Landscape Survey Group.

Ludlow, N. D., 2000 'Initial assessment of the archaeological implications of the proposed Botanic Gardens'. Dyfed Archaeological Trust project record 31018.

Turner, T. 2005 *Garden History: Philosophy and Design 2000BC – 2000AD*. Taylor & Francis.

An ancient stone in Wales has crashed to the ground after standing for more than 4,000 years as an important landmark. The famous standing stone at Bedd Morris, on Newport mountain (Pembrokeshire), was snapped, toppling over and crushing a nearby fence.

Archaeologist Professor Geoffrey Wainwright, an expert who has worked on several sites in the Preselis, plans to play an active

**Ancient Welsh
standing stone
crashes to the
ground...**

Rangers Concerned

Park Authority Ranger (North) Richard Vaughan also commented: "A car was driven up an old trackway below the Iron Age fort of Carn Ffoi on Carn Ingli mountain and abandoned. The sump broke and a 200m black slick of oil contaminated a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

"The black BMW was left on a bridleway, and is popular access route for locals and visitors alike.

"I've also had to clean up a popular parking site on Dinas mountain covered in empty bottles and smashed glass on the surrounding rocky area. There are grazing animals in the immediate area, and potential for harm to walkers."

Off-roading on protected areas on the Preseli Hills, Dinas and Newport Mountain is always an issue, ranging from small motorbikes and off-road vehicles. There has also been household and garden rubbish dumped, from single bags up to a lorry load.

The Rangers have also noticed an increase in the dumping of hazardous waste, including asbestos.

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority copyright



Stone at Bedd Morris, between Pontfaen and Newport. (photo Pembrokeshire Coast National Park).

role in getting the stone reinstated. He said: "It's a tragedy, the stone has snapped and it's a real mess. It's an important landscape feature and an important archaeological site and it must be put back as soon as possible." He added: "Hopefully the stone should go back up and no-one will ever know the difference.

It is believed the two metre high, Bronze Age stone was hit by a vehicle travelling on the Cwm Gwaun to Newport road.

Newport mayor Byron James was shocked by the incident and said he was looking into the matter.

An Authority spokesman said: "Bedd Morris is a scheduled ancient monument thought to date from the Bronze Age. It now marks the parish boundary between Newport and Pontfaen. About five years ago, after a traffic collision, Cadw and the Park Authority's archaeologist carried out successful consolidation work on Bedd Morris and it has continued to stand strong ever since."

Strata Florida Heritage Landscape Tourism Project

Martin Locock has been appointed as Senior Project Officer at University of Wales Trinity Saint David to manage the **Strata Florida Heritage Landscape Tourism Project**.

The project has been funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development under the funding stream Axis 3: Improving rural life and economy, measure 323 Conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage. Activities will include the **Wales National Dig 2012** at Strata Florida, the creation of footpath and woodland heritage trails, and promotion of the area as a destination. Martin will be working with businesses, schools and the community to embed the research programme in the local economy. Contact m.locock@tsd.ac.uk for more details.

Community Archaeology in Wales

CBA Wales are delighted to announce that a further 5 community archaeology training placements have been announced for Wales in 2012-13.

This builds on the current placements already in place and is a coup for employment in the Wales sector.

The placements will be at Cadw, Dyfed Archaeological Trust, Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust, Gwynedd Archaeological Trust and RCAHMW. Further details will be made available on the CBA national website in due course www.britarch.ac.uk/

Items for inclusion in the next newsletter should be sent to:

Dr Jemma Bezant

Department of Archaeology, History and Anthropology

University of Wales, Trinity Saint David, Lampeter

SA48 7ED j.bezant@tsd.ac.uk