

Council for British Archaeology

Cyngor Archaeoleg Brydeinig

Wales/Cymru



Archaeology Field School at Strata Florida (see pages 10-11)

Newsletter 65 Spring 2023

<http://www.councilforbritisharchaeologywales.wordpress.com/>



**Abbey Cwmhir
Heritage Trust**
*Ymddiriedolaeth
Trefladaeth
Abaty Cwmhir*



CBA Wales Spring Meeting

We are delighted to announce that the Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust are hosting the CBA Wales/Cymru Spring meeting on Saturday 10th June at the Philips Hall,
Abbeycwmhir, LD1 6PH.

Provisional program as follows:

10.30 arrival, refreshments

11.00 Introductions and CBA Wales/Cymru review

11.20 Mel Walters – Community and Heritage - The work of the Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust

11.50 David Austin – Abbey Cwmhir in the context of Strata Florida

12.45 Lunch – arrangements to be confirmed.

13.30 Julian Ravest – Photogrammetry – technique and insights

14.00 Julian Lovell - Post dissolution estates and an introduction to the Abbey Tour

14.30 Julian Lovell – Tour of the Abbey and its environs

16.00 Refreshments and closing statement.

16.30 Close

Further information and booking details will be available in the events area of our website <https://cbawales.org/> or by contacting the membership secretary membership@cbawales.org

For a sneaky preview go to <https://abbeycwmhir.org/>

For recent work by the Heritage Trust at Abbey Cwmhir see pages 13-19

Foreshore Fieldschool

14-15 October 2023

Lawrenny, Wales

Get practical experience surveying the foreshore *Helping Hand* wreck. Take home skills that will be useful on other archaeological sites.

Under expert guidance, learn about historic and modern survey equipment used on archaeological sites.

NAS members £150

Non-members £190

Extra £60 for two days bed and board

Scan here for more
information and
online booking



Nautical Archaeology Society



An opportunity to excavate a ring cairn in the Clwydian Range

Following the encouraging results of the excavation last summer by the Clwydian Range Archaeology Group – see CBA Wales Newsletter No. 64 (Autumn 2022) –The CRAG group hopes to continue the investigation of the probable Early Bronze Age ring cairn in 2023. The site is on farmland at Bryneglwys within the Clwydian Range AONB. **(Fig. 1)**



Fig. 1 The completed excavation of the North and South quadrants in 2022 (North is to the top right)

This summer we hope to complete the excavation of the ring cairn by opening the remaining two quadrants. The excavation work will be carried out under the guidance of Dr I. Brooks of Engineering Archaeological Services Ltd. CRAG is very grateful to the landowner for his interest and support and to the Welsh Government’s Sustainable Development Fund, which contributed to the costs. CRAG would also like to thank the professional archaeologists who visited the site and gave advice or practical assistance.

CRAG is a community archaeology group. It would be delighted to welcome anyone interested in joining this summer’s excavation at Bryneglwys. Previous experience is not necessary since one of CRAG’s key objectives is training. Work at site starts again in July/August 2023, dates to be confirmed.

CRAG contact details: e-mail: info@cragnorthwales.co.uk

Website: <https://cragnorthwales.wordpress.com>

THE EARLY MINES RESEARCH GROUP – THE ROLE OF SELF-FUNDED SPECIALISTS IN WELSH ARCHAEOLOGY – A PERSONAL VIEW

Simon Timberlake, Phil Andrews, John Pickin, Anthony Gilmour, Brenda Craddock and Emma Wager

Long-standing excavation projects and the existence of amateur, community and specialist groups with longevity on their side are not at all unique in Welsh archaeology, but a group of the same people working with and alongside each other for more than 33 years who have still not left the valley they started in are. Well, that's not quite true perhaps, the EMRG was founded in 1988 with no structure or constitution as an informal group of like-minded archaeologists and geologists dedicated to the quest of investigating the origins of metal mining in Britain through archaeological excavation, scientific work and survey – so its brief was big – but its main interest, indeed its heart and soul, was in Wales. Our common ground was the love of the places we chose to investigate, our enthusiasm for digging, our appreciation of old mines and our desire for teasing out the antiquity from these often remote, forgotten and little understood places. When we began there was very little understanding of pre-industrial metal mining in Wales. It was a deeply unfashionable subject, and not really the realm of archaeologists. To be fair, we knew very little about the subject ourselves, but we were prepared to find out one way or another, and not give up until we had.



The early days of the Early Mines Research Group – relaxing in the famous orange tent on the top of Copa Hill, Cwmystwyth in 1991: L to R – Phil Andrews, Simon Timberlake and Brenda Craddock (we don't look like this anymore!)

The key to all this for us was the regular publication of our findings, most of it within the pages of *Archaeology in Wales* (most of the investigated prehistoric metal mining sites in Britain do in fact lie within the Plynlimon district of the mid-Wales orefield) and over the years within a vast number of other Welsh, UK and European conference proceedings – this was the glue that kept us all together. There is a lot to be said for archaeology and a shared interest mining or other eclectic pursuits. It's a passion that turns somewhat isolated individuals into groups of lifelong friends. Yet with increasing age, the start times begin to get a little later and the packing-up times a little earlier each day, whilst in the evening the wine begins to flow much more freely. It was somewhat surprising therefore to find that with the passage of time and the gathering of knowledge we seem to have learnt to target our investigations better, or putting it another way we are convinced (or have convinced ourselves) that we are getting better results from shifting less spadefuls of earth. There may be an algorithm in this (possibly even a graph!) linking age and experience with the size of excavation area and results.



Excavating Early Bronze Age wood and tools within the prehistoric copper mine on Copa Hill in 1996

Unfortunately the trend may not always tip in our favour! Nevertheless, the gods have been with us until now. A case in point: four of us oldies managed to fully excavate a small medieval iron bloomery furnace that we found in 2021 whilst sampling a geophysics anomaly on the valley floor at Cwmystwyth. The minimalist approach to this we adopted was to cut short 0.5m wide trenches and a few testpits in order just to define the edges of

the slag pit and spreads followed by a 3m x 3m square for the furnace. It worked... we were spot on. In fact, thinking of an average field archaeologists's working day (I guess 8+ hours for most of those employed commercially) we managed to achieve all this in just 6-7 days spread over 2 weeks, carried out at our own expense and at a leisurely working rate. We were probably very lucky given that the depth to archaeology was shallow, the weather lovely, and the dig less than half a mile's pleasant walk from the cottage we were staying in. I think 20 years ago, though we would have been a lot fitter, we would probably not have been so accurate and so focused on the work. Perhaps its just that we now cherry pick the sites, looking for the easier and more glorious stuff to do, with all the hard graft and difficult stuff done. It is no coincidence perhaps that we are choosing sites on the valley floor.

I began this piece with the comment that we had barely left the valley. In fact we've worked all over Britain and many of us have also worked abroad digging prehistoric mining sites, yet it is Cwmystwyth where we started, and to Cwmystwyth that we have now returned (I remember digging alone on my first excavation of the Bronze Age mine in 1986 – camping up on Copa Hill and drinking the water from the peat bog whilst unknown to me the Chernobyl cloud passed overhead unleashing torrents of rain contaminated with Cs₁₃₇).

It takes years I think to properly understand mining sites, and this only happens if you can also chart the chronological development of the landscapes they sit in. It certainly helps to have a good grounding in geology and somebody also to collaborate with to investigate the palaeoenvironmental/ palaeo-pollution record. The latter has been essential at Cwmystwyth in helping to determine the impact of mining in the Bronze Age, during the Romano-British and Early Medieval periods, and subsequently the impact of the much larger scale and more complex extraction carried out from the 16th century onwards. Archaeological investigations carried across the 5 square miles of this mining landscape include some of the following: the excavation of a previously unknown kerb cairn/ circle at Pant Morcell within the view-shed of the prehistoric mine, the excavation of a disturbed grave at Banc Tynddol (from which the Bronze Age gold sun disc now in the National Museum was recovered), digs upon Roman as well as Early Medieval wind-blown lead smelting furnaces, on Roman charcoal-production sites, of Late Medieval – Postmedieval peat-drying platforms and hafod foundations, and that of a unique late 18th century water-powered stamp mill. And now there

is yet another Bronze Age mine for copper just a mile to the west of the first. This 'desolate' valley is really interesting.

So how does our experience as independent archaeologists compare with that of other similar groups in Wales, and are there any lessons to be learnt from this? In many ways what we do is very different from community archaeology. We are a welcoming group, of course, but ours is a pretty niche role, you could even say a nerdy one, and I think anything more than 6 people on site would be challenging to our sense of organization, mentally if not physically. More problematic for me were the applications year after year for generally small amounts of research grant money from the same societies and academic bodies – grateful that we were to receive it – yet it was a great relief when we gave that up after 20 years, instead focusing on much smaller projects that we paid for ourselves (with all the freedom that entailed). As a research group we commonly found ourselves working on scheduled ancient monuments, thus yearly applications for SMC became the norm. In fact this is not such an onerous task as it used to be, and in most cases we found Cadw inspectors both sympathetic and helpful. Over 30 years we saw many inspectors come and go, and I can imagine that our site tent perched up on the top of Copa Hill after a very long walk up was a welcome site indeed... there was always a camping chair ready for the guest, a cup of tea and a biscuit. So my advice is to keep digging to stay young, you'll only get better at what you do. And don't get involved in projects with lots of paperwork, save all your energy for writing!



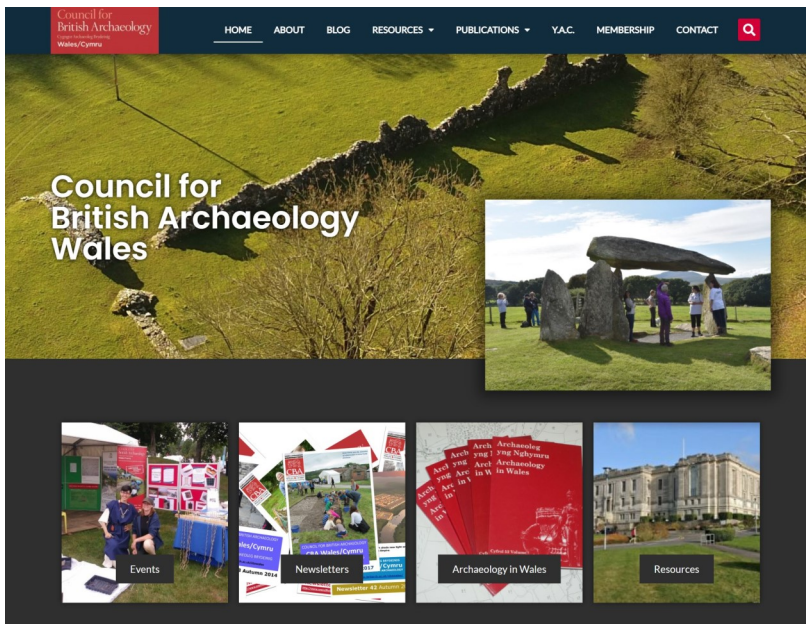
Still digging! Excavating a possible Cistercian iron smelting furnace at Penparc, Cwmystwyth in September 2022

cbawales.org: Our new website

Julian Ravest

CBA Wales is very pleased to announce the launch of our new website: cbawales.org. The website has been developed to share information about CBA Wales and its activities, and to provide an opportunity for local societies and trusts to gain attention for their own news and announcements. We welcome contributions to what we hope will grow to be a useful platform to communicate the wide and rich archaeological heritage of Wales and the lively interest of many community groups, societies and trusts.

Our resource section provides a hub for online and other archaeological resources, including full access to past issues of this Newsletter, as well as content information from past issues of the CBA Wales journal, *Archaeology in Wales*. Please explore cbawales.org and share your activities to help increase awareness of archaeology in Wales. Any contributions or feedback, including press releases, articles, videos or images for the blog should be sent to cbawaleswebsite@gmail.com.





12th June to
10th July 2023



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Archaeology Field School at Strata Florida

12th June – 10th July 2023

**1-4 week courses and digger day experiences.
Residential or non-residential.
Bursary places available.**

Strata Florida has a long and continuing history of research excavations, and the Trust now runs both university training digs and a public dig open to all. Excavate thousands of years of history and uncover the remains of the 12th century Cistercian Abbey of Strata Florida.

We offer an accessible and inclusive training programme, including a wide variety of archaeological excavation and survey techniques, from understanding how to correctly use a trowel to the collection of geophysical data for archaeological mapping. We offer a mixture of residential courses and day courses, and we welcome people of all ages, those with no prior archaeological experience as well as those wanting to build upon previous skills.

Ours aims to be the most inclusive archaeology school in the UK. We work with wellbeing and mental health support partners to deliver onsite support to participants. Our mission is to share Strata Florida's unique history, archaeology, heritage and links to Welsh culture with as diverse an audience as possible, including members of the public, students, volunteers and others.

For more information and prices: [Archaeology Field School\(strataflorida.org.uk\)](https://strataflorida.org.uk)
To book contact us at info@strataflorida.org.uk





The CBA Festival of Archaeology incorporates hundreds of in-person and virtual events delivered by community groups, heritage organisations, universities, commercial units, and more.

It promotes involvement in archaeology through flagship days such as “A Day in Archaeology” and “Youth Day” and allows individuals to get involved from wherever they are, all year round, through our wide range of downloadable resources. Through the Festival, the CBA helps over half a million people to participate in archaeology, explore stories of place, and connect with the environment around them.

The theme for the 2023 festival is Archaeology and Creativity: celebrating the creative process at the heart of archaeology and exploring the creative practices that we use to bring to life the material we uncover and the stories of the places and people around us.

If you want to find out more about how you can get involved in the Festival of Archaeology contact the team at festival@archaeologyuk.org.

Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust: Community Engagement

Julian Lovell, Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust

Recent events, mainly the Covid epidemic, caused the Abbey Cwmhir Trust to examine the way in which it engaged with the public in a more varied and direct way. The rise of the Zoom link and the opportunity to directly reach a much larger audience interested in landscape history and archaeology has enabled the Trust to undertake events which have made a major contribution to well-being and Covid recovery. This development has coincided with the opportunity to join the Sacred Landscapes project, funded by the AHRC. The landscape history and archaeology of two upland monastic houses, Strata Florida and Cwmhir, have provided a comparative with lowland monasteries situated in the Witham valley to the south-east of Lincoln. Through a range of new projects the Trust has contributed to research at a high level, in turn enhancing the publication of academic papers at both local and national level.

A rolling programme of events aimed at public engagement has been devised. The Trust has been fortunate to win grant support to stage events but a continued effort is needed to maintain the momentum. Grants for this project were secured from Local Giving in partnership with the Postcode Community Trust. This latter grant funded much of the excavation equipment. As part of the ongoing project, WCVA grants funded further training opportunities. The opportunity to take part in an archaeological excavation always proves attractive, with more applicants than places. Practical demonstrations and a chance for 'have-a-go' geophysics, to hear about the mechanics of photogrammetry through drone work and come to grips with

farming of the past through an understanding of field botany have all proved popular. At a more basic level walkovers or field-walking, can tell the newcomer what to look for in the landscape, needing only a good pair of eyes and a good pair of boots!

Field-walking: Gwern-y-go 13
Grange



Community Archaeology in the Upper Cwmhir valley

The Trust has been very fortunate in finding a location with suitable sites for introductory archaeological work. The owners are very co-operative and keen to help, a major advantage when arranging community engagement events. To date the focus has been on Llanerch-dirion and Cwm Ffwrn farmsteads, both of which were abandoned as a result of enclosure in the mid-nineteenth century. The landscape is a complex one with many layers of usage to unravel, ranging from the period of pre-history, through the monastic era and down to modern times. It is, of course, a microcosm of the wider contextual landscape. A major advantage from the point of view of the landscape historian is that it has largely escaped intensive modern cultivation, bringing rich rewards to the photogrammetric survey and much at ground level for the field walker.

The Upper Cwmhir valley contains the remains of four farmsteads known as Upper Cwmhir, 310m. OD, Gelenyn, 360m. OD, Llanerch-dirion, also 360m. OD and Cwm Ffwrn, 380m.OD, plus an encroachment settlement. The earliest of these locations is likely to date back to monastic times. 19th Century estate practice was for each one to have the usual cultivation fields, in area ranging from about thirty six acres for Llanerch-dirion, which was the smallest steading, to Cwm Ffwrn at fifty five acres, plus an assigned sheep run for each of them. An early 19th Century estate survey by Layton Cooke (1822) and estate sale documents appear to support this arrangement. Of the four farmsteads named, only Upper Cwmhir shows substantial standing remains, representing a small upland farmhouse c.1800.

None of the potential sites were either in or near existing scheduled areas but nevertheless the Trust appointed Dr. Jemma Bezant as supervising archaeologist for the project. Jemma was already working with the Abbey Cwmhir Trust as part of the Sacred Landscapes project and so a good working relationship had been established. The Trust offered a high standard of instruction to the participants in order to learn new skills and to encourage a lasting interest in archaeology. A wide range of ages was represented, the youngest being a teenager with an interest of pursuing a career in archaeology, the oldest an octogenarian.

Some care was needed in the selection of a site for the first community archaeology activity. It had to be accessible, manageable and ideally be able to promise some quick success. The map which accompanied the Layton

Cooke Report indicated the potential for a small house and a beast house at Llanerch-dirion. Field walking and photogrammetric survey revealed the presence of some low circular earthen banks and the site owners had previously found what appeared to be laid cobbles when a farm track was constructed some years ago. It was felt there was sufficient interest to be found at the site to justify further investigation.

In the hope of confirming the presence of something interesting for the participants, it was decided to conduct a geophysical survey of the part of the site to search for the base of the beast house. This was potentially difficult because of the presence of tree routes and bracken. The survey was carried out by Ian Brooks and showed a potential building base beneath the bracken and undergrowth. A close examination of the surface before revealed the presence some embedded blocks of stone, possibly a revetment, which would serve as a starting point.

After the site had been marked out, some of the overburden of bracken and grass tussocks were removed and work began. The large stones were revealed, clearly set out in an orderly fashion and edged with deliberately placed flat stones. It would appear that our confidence in the site was justified. There followed a pathway of flat stones set into the clay which underlays the site. A gap was then found where the stones had been removed, a common problem in an area where hard building stone is in short supply.

The next stage of the excavation showed stones which were set on edge into the clay, forming the floor of the construction. In Radnorshire the 'passage' by the big stones is known as the soke, in other words a drain and the vertical stones as pitching, making the floor of the beast house.



*Work in progress:
Llanerch-dirion*

Some very careful work along the edge of the soke and floor revealed a drain construction of small flat stones, set to make a small tunnel. It was tested and it still worked. Supported by some documentary evidence, the beast house dates from the mid to late eighteenth century. During the course of the two-day event the group revealed the extent of the beast house floor. However, no wall footings were evident suggesting that the building was of a timber construction. A closer examination of the verges of the paved area showed evidence of post holes at intervals around the flooring. These were left undisturbed with a view to revisiting the site at a later date



*The soke,
passage and
revetment*

This engagement event took place during a difficult time for many people as the effects of the Covid pandemic took its toll. It was viewed by the Trust as a well-being initiative as part of the national Covid recovery strategy and in this, it was successful. Feedback from the members of the course was very positive and certainly encouraged us to proceed with other related events. Another spin-off has been the formation of a regular archaeology activity in the Cwmhir valley. This too has proved to be an excellent Covid recovery activity and more is planned over the next year.

Cwm Ffwrn is located at a height of 380m., the greatest elevation of the Upper Cwmhir Farmsteads and a different character to those at lower elevations. As with the others, it is built into a ledge or platform at right angles to the slope. There is also an adjacent parallel platform, presently with little to show at ground level, which may have carried a byre. There are some signs of revetment and a few stones appear to have been laid methodically

on the surface of the platform but interrupted drainage requires attention before work can commence here. The team are hoping to explore this as part of the present season's activity.

As with Llanerch-dirion, Cwm Ffwrn ceased to function as a farmstead in the 1860s as a result of the enclosure of the sheepwalks. There is evidence from the Census returns that the house continued to be occupied domestically but the land was apportioned to Gelynen and Upper Cwmhir. It appears to have been abandoned completely after 1881.



*Cwm Ffwrn Farmstead:
Work begins*

At first the site looked unpromising, with a few lines of barely visible stones breaking the surface, hardly surprising in an area where there is a shortage of building stone. The team's enthusiasm was tested to the full as the excavation proceeded and it became apparent that there was still quite a depth of buried walling to reveal. A quantity of loose stone remained within the confines of the outside walls suggesting that the building had been deliberately collapsed inwards, possibly to prevent re-occupation by squatters, a serious problem in 19th century Radnorshire. The footprint of the building is slightly larger than the neighbouring farmstead of Gelynen (8.7m by 5.4m as a comparative), being 8.76m long by 6.26m wide. It is characterised by an internal division making two separate rooms. There is also a suggestion of a further division of the smaller chamber which may have served as a dairy.

This investigation turned into a longer-term project, with a regular weekly sessions and the team working on well into the autumn as weather permitted. Frustration was felt by everyone when the onset of some serious

winter weather finally halted activity. When that point was reached much of the investigation was complete and the team was able to make an assessment of the remains. As already suggested the house at ground floor level consisted of two chambers, the larger of which was the focus of the main entrance and contained a brick-built fireplace and fire pit. An iron fire basket was still in place, almost certainly made by the estate blacksmith. Among the finds was a large pot hook and a fragment of a cast iron cooking pot. The walls were lime plastered up to a thickness of $\frac{3}{4}$ inch but this thickness was far from uniform. Marks on the wall opposite the door indicate the presence of a stairway to an upper floor/loft, reaching to a height of eight and a half feet.

The smaller chamber is divided by approximately half to give a small, inner room which formed a dairy. Signs of a water outlet or drain were present and there was a small window to the long wall elevation. In this area the walls were also lime plastered but the dividing wall was lath and plaster. Plaster debris was present with the parallel impress of the laths but the laths themselves had rotted away.

A good proportion of the original flagstone flooring remained in situ and had been used in all the rooms. The Layton Cooke report mentions flagstone flooring sourced from a quarry at Llanfihangel-nant-melin, about 12 miles distant. The threshold stone remained as well a good 'doorstep' in the only external doorway which was 42 inches in width. Pin holes were present in threshold and an internal doorway still boasted a cast-iron pin. The purpose of these was to fix the door jambs.



*Cwm Ffwrn Farmstead:
Entrance Threshold*

The spoil from the work was carefully removed and examined but the number of finds was unexpectedly small. A variety of small pottery shards, dating from the mid to late 19th century were discovered from the inside of the building with others from a possible midden, close to the main entrance. These were all cleaned, photographed and recorded. Larger finds were also in short supply, with five opening window brackets and the circular metal retaining ring from the centre of a wooden cartwheel being the principle artefacts.



Cwm Ffwrn: Metal finds

The lack of any further finds suggests that the building was systematically decommissioned with a view to salvaging as much as possible, such as slates and timber structures, window frames and glass whilst at the same time making the building unusable for the reasons stated earlier.

Encouraged by the success of this venture the Trust has decided to promote a similar event in the current year. It is also looking at the possibility of engaging with a wider range of participants such as those with specific additional needs, fulfilling an aim to make the history of the landscape available to more people whose well-being are not catered for in this area. Meanwhile, the Abbey Cwmhir Trust team will be exploring and recording new locations in this historic landscape. The public engagement events also feed new discoveries into a well-established research programme from which has come a number of published papers.

Images: Julian Lovell, Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust

New CBA Wales email addresses

Alongside the creation of the new website, the opportunity has been taken to provide a new set of email addresses for communication with our officers. These are:

chair@cbawales.org

secretary@cbawales.org

treasurer@cbawales.org

membership@cbawales.org

aiw@cbawales.org

newsletter@cbawales.org

If you are receiving this newsletter by post, you either do not have or have not given us your most recent e-mail address. Given the recent increase in online archaeological activity, if you would now like to provide us with an e-mail address which you are happy for us to use for CBA Wales mailings, please contact the Membership Secretary: membership@cbawales.org

Newsletter Editor

Items for inclusion in the newsletter should be sent to:

Nikki Vousden: newsletter@cbawales.org

Or by post to

Nikki Vousden

1 Bro Tawela

Silian, Lampeter,

Ceredigion. SA48 8AT.

Archaeology in Wales

Items for inclusion in the journal should be sent to:

aiw@cbawales.org

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Wales/Cymru