Council for British Archaeology

Cyngor Archaeoleg Brydeinig

Wales/Cymru

To find out more about a new project safeguarding the rich heritage of Welsh Nonconformity, turn to page 5.

Newsletter 70 Autumn 2025

https://cbawales.org

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Engineering Archaeological Services Ltd.

GRŴP ARCHEOLEG BRYNIAU CLWYD
CLWYDIAN RANGE ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP
CRAG

A Visit to Ty'n y Wern

Clwydian Range Archaeology Group / Grŵp Archeoleg Bryniau Clwyd (CRAG/GABC) and Engineering Archaeological Services Ltd. (EAS)

In August members of CBA/CAB Wales/Cymru and Chester Archaeological Society visited Ty'n y Wern, near Bryneglwys, Denbighshire. CRAG/GABC volunteers have been surveying and excavating the site under the guidance of Dr. Ian Brooks of EAS since 2020. Dr. Brooks gave the visitors a tour of the site, summarising past and current investigations.

The visitors at Ty'n y Wern.

The site comprises three steeply sloping fields on the flanks of Llantysilio Mountain with extensive views east along the mountain ridge, northwest to Hiraethog, and west to Eryri. The first major discovery was an Early Bronze Age ring cairn on a relatively flat area excavated in 2022-23 (Newsletters 64 and 66). It proved to be one of the smallest ring cairns in Northeast Wales but contained at least five cremation deposits and seven

pottery vessels, analysed by Dr. Genevieve Tellier and Dr. Frances Lynch, the latter among the CBA/CAB visitors.

Dr. Lynch had previously noted the surprising apparent isolation of the Ty'n y Wern ring cairn: they are typically accompanied by other monuments. Subsequent geophysical surveys in 2024-25 identified between five and seven circular anomalies clustered near the Ty'n y Wern ring cairn at the end of a holloway-like route between two natural mounds. In 2024 an evaluation trench across one revealed part of a stone kerb surrounding a possible cist (Newsletter 68). This year another produced cut features aligned with the geophysical anomalies and containing chert blades.

Another trench in 2024 produced a stone with a hollowed-out circular indentation. Dr. George Nash has now confirmed this as a probable cupmarked stone, possibly a fragment of a larger stone with a more extensive design. This year two larger stones with similar indentations were found on the surface of the field. Dr. Nash's assessment of these is awaited. Remarkably, only three other cupmarked stones have been recorded in Northeast Wales, two within 4km of Ty'n y Wern.

Geophysics, evaluation trenches and cupmarked stones suggest that Ty'n y Wern hosted a significant prehistoric site. Investigations have also encompassed features more likely to have medieval or early modern origins. Prior to the 1950s the top field was moorland used for game shooting and rough pasture. However, an area of ridge and furrow points to a previous period of cultivation. Aerial photographs and geophysics show a linear feature leading down through the top field, under the modern field boundary into the middle field, and ending at a group of rectilinear features. Trenches across the linear feature in 2024 and this year have each produced evidence of a trackway. This year evaluation

The Ty'n y Wern site and its views: (a) looking West from the site; (b) from a drone looking Southeast.

trenches over the rectilinear features also hinted at possible agricultural buildings. Until 1927 the site lay in Llantysilio parish, based over the ridge near Llangollen, rather than in the much closer Bryneglwys. Prior to the Dissolution much of the land in the parish belonged to Valle Crucis Abbey. It is therefore very possible that Ty'n y Wern hosted an Abbey grange.

CRAG/GABC and EAS will continue exploring Ty'n y Wern's prehistoric and later landscapes over the next few years. They thank the landowner and CRAG/GABC members for their contributions and enthusiasm, and the following for their financial support: the Sustainable Development Fund of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley National Landscape, the Clocaenog Forest Wind Farm, Adrian Jones Associates, the Cambrian Archaeological Association, the Chester Archaeological Society, and the Community Archaeology Radiocarbon Dating Fund.

CBHC RCAHMW

Comisiwn Brenhinol
Henebion Cymru
Royal Commission on the Ancient
and Historical Monuments of Wales

Safeguarding the Heritage of Welsh Nonconformist Chapels

Susan Fielding, Senior Investigator for Historic Buildings

The Royal Commission has long championed the cause of Welsh chapels and the rich heritage of Nonconformity. Our long-running chapels recording project has sought to identify and document every chapel built in Wales, while undertaking more detailed research on those of particular architectural and historical significance. Despite this work, and the valuable contributions of partner organisations such as the National Library of Wales and Addoldai Cymru, the scale of the task, combined with the growing threats to this heritage, means that further support and strategic action are urgently needed.

Over the past twenty-five years, our efforts have helped ensure that nonconformist chapels are better understood and appreciated as architectural icons. For over 300 years, chapels, from modest vernacular buildings in rural landscapes to grand show-front structures in towns and cities, have shaped a distinctly Welsh sense of place.

A historic photograph of Sunday School pupils outside the earlier Bethania Chapel, Maesteg, c.1900. Chapels were important centres of education, especially in ensuring the continuation of the Welsh language.

They reflect not only the religious transformation of a nation, charting the rise of Nonconformity from persecuted congregations to the dominant religious force, but also the intertwined narratives of politics, culture, education, and the Welsh language.

Today, these nationally significant buildings face unprecedented challenges. Since their peak in the early 20th century, membership in nonconformist congregations has declined more sharply than in any other Christian group in Wales. Of the 6,483 chapels currently recorded in our database, it is estimated that fewer than 1,500 remain open for worship. Hundreds have been demolished or left derelict, while many others have been converted for commercial, residential, or industrial use, with varying degrees of sensitivity and success. Alongside the loss of buildings, we are also witnessing the loss of fittings, objects, and archival materials, often crafted or curated by congregational members, as well as the intangible heritage embedded in chapel communities.

To address this crisis, the Royal Commission has been awarded a

Ebenezer Chapel, Tumble, being stripped out and readied for demolition.

Tabernacle Chapel, Haverfordwest, is a showcase for the ornate detailing and high-quality craftsmanship in wood, metal, plaster, and glass, of many chapel interiors

Development Grant of £151,833 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund's *Heritage in Need: Places of Worship* strategic initiative, which is investing a minimum of £15 million in projects with regional or national impact. Over the next 18 months, the **Capeli Cymru** Development Project will lay the groundwork for a full grant application of £1.25 million. Working collaboratively with a wide range of stakeholders including denominations, congregations, archives, museums, local authorities, Addoldai Cymru, Cadw, and community groups, we will explore in detail the challenges facing chapel heritage and develop a Delivery Phase plan for its strategic protection.

A key component of this work will be a national chapel 'census', mapping open, closed, and converted chapels, and gathering data on their sustainability and the status of nationally protected heritage assets. In addition to engaging with denominations and congregations, the project will establish networks for volunteering and crowd-sourcing, drawing on local knowledge to help document the fate of closed and repurposed chapels.

The data collected during the Development Phase will be critical in shaping strategic plans for the subsequent Delivery Phase. Priorities will include supporting chapels that remain open for worship, improving and standardising closure processes, and identifying appropriate and sympathetic new uses for redundant buildings. Public engagement and interpretation will also be central, ensuring that this heritage is accessible to all and that the most effective methods of sharing it are explored.

Chapels have long been at the heart of Welsh identity. Thanks to support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, this project will help ensure that their legacy is safeguarded today and preserved for generations to come.

If you would like to know more about the project, or get involved, please contact **Susan Fielding**, Senior Investigator for Historic Buildings at the Royal Commission: **susan.fielding@rcahmw.gov.uk**

Cover Photograph: As well as the physical buildings, documentation, and objects, chapels are home to the wealth of less tangible, but equally important, narratives of Eisteddfodau, Cymanfa Ganus, Plygains, and the sense of community and belonging. The project will assess how best to capture and record this fragile and easily lost heritage.

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ARCHAEOLOGY Wales/Cymru

Committee Vacancies

At this year's **AGM on 15th November** (*see* page 12 *for details*) the following posts will all be up for election:

- Chairman
- Secretary
- Membership Secretary
- Editor

The current holders of these positions are eligible to stand again but fresh nominations are, of course, welcome. There will also be **six committee places** up for election with only three of the existing committee members stepping down by rotation eligible to stand again.

If anyone would like to stand for any of the offices or is interested in joining the committee please get in touch with either the Chairman, Mike Greene (chair@cbawales.org), or Secretary, Evan Chapman (secretary@cbawales.org).

Building on Waste: The Story of Brymbo's Charging Walls

Ross Cook, ArchaeoDomus

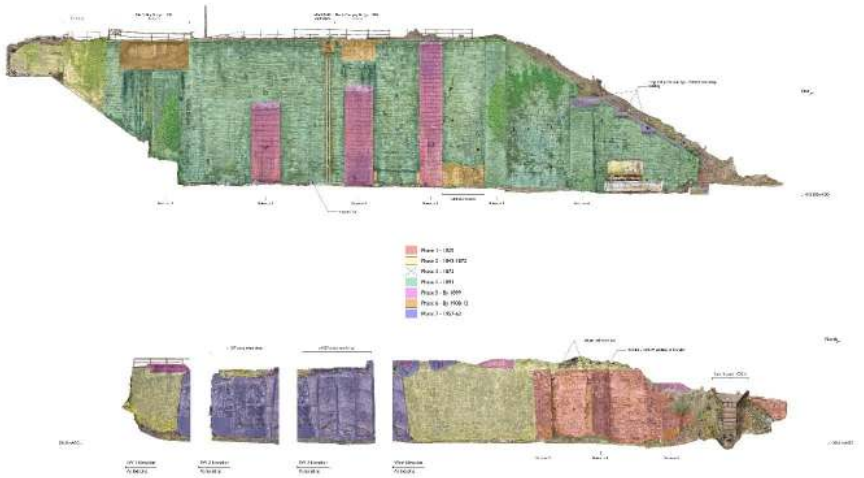
At first glance, the massive sandstone walls at Brymbo may seem like simple retaining structures – functional backdrops to an industrial past. But recent research, as part of a Level 3 historic buildings record, funded by Cadw, has revealed that these charging walls are much more than that. They are, in fact, a physical record of 200 years of industrial innovation, growth, and adaptation, telling the story of how Brymbo evolved from John Wilkinson's pioneering ironworks of the 1790s into a major steelmaking plant of the 20th century.

The charging walls take their name from the process of 'charging' the blast furnaces with raw materials – iron ore, coke, and limestone. The walls supported the charging bridges to provide access to the top of the furnaces, where these materials were then tipped into its 'throat'.

Research has shown that the development of the charging walls was not

part of a single masterplan, but rather the result of piecemeal responses to waste management, expansion, and technological change. Crucially, the upper working levels at the site emerged less through deliberate design than as the by-product of two forces: the huge amounts of waste produced by collieries and blast furnaces, and the constant need to expand the works. Together, these shaped the site into multiple tiers, enabling the construction of furnaces, coke plants, ore bins, and railways on new ground literally built from industrial waste.

The study drew on a combination of early maps, photographs, and the surviving fabric of the walls themselves. Estate plans from 1798, 1808, and 1812 helped set Wilkinson's original works into the landscape, while 19th century photographs traced later changes, particularly to the north wall. Though documents rarely mention the charging walls directly, they provided crucial context for understanding how each phase of expansion reshaped Brymbo.



Perhaps surprisingly, none of the charging walls we see today date from Wilkinson's time (1792–1808), despite his expansion across the north of of the site to accommodate a second furnace. Continuous redevelopment

meant that these earlier structures were replaced as the works expanded and its needs changed. A key moment came in 1818, when the Thompson brothers leased the site. They demolished Wilkinson's original No. 1 blast furnace, replacing it with the remaining furnace, also called No. 1, and constructed a substantial charging wall along the western side of the works. Such intensive landscaping marked the first step in creating a large upper level at the site, providing improved storage and transport routes for coke, ore, and flux, while also managing the ever-growing waste heaps.

Over the following decades, the charging walls were repeatedly extended and adapted. Around 1850, the western wall was extended south and curved to meet the site's southern bank, accommodating new railway lines and tipping platforms. Meanwhile, to the north, waste tipped from collieries and furnaces created new ground for further expansion. Here, a succession of furnaces and associated structures were built, culminating in the construction of the north charging wall for No. 4 furnace in 1893.

This wall was the most ambitious of all: a massive snecked sandstone structure retaining decades' worth of waste. Its sheer size and craftsmanship reflected the confidence of the Brymbo Steel Company, but even this proved vulnerable to the weight of material behind it, soon requiring three enormous brick buttresses to prevent collapse.

The 20th century brought further changes, though on a smaller scale. The commissioning of No. 5 furnace in 1908 required an opening to be cut into the northern wall for its charging bridge. Later, in the 1950s, new concrete and steel additions were made against the west wall to handle scrap for the cupola furnaces. These were the last significant modifications before the works' closure in 1992.

Today, the charging walls remain some of the most powerful reminders of

Brymbo's industrial past. Unlike furnaces or workshops, which were demolished or rebuilt, these walls preserve a continuous story of expansion, adaptation, and resilience – they stand as silent witnesses to nearly two centuries of industrial change and are, quite literally, the foundations upon which Brymbo's iron and steel industry was built. Far from being just walls, the charging walls of Brymbo are storytellers. They represent an extraordinary topographical record – monuments to ingenuity, industry, and the transformative power of waste. Their layers of masonry and brickwork capture an overarching picture of the site's evolution, from Wilkinson's early furnace to the steelworks of the 20th century. In their endurance, they remain guardians of an industrial landscape that shaped both local communities and Britain's wider industrial story.

Stori Brymbo will be open to visitors from Spring 2026 and will tell the story of 300 million years of history, from when the fossils and coals were formed though to the industrial revolution and present day. The project has been generously funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Dates for Your Diary

Further details at **www.cbawales.org**

ARCHAEOLOGY Wales/Cymru

CBA Cymru/Wales AGM

Saturday 15 November 2025

You are warmly invited to attend our first fully online AGM, with guest speaker.

Field Day

The Woollen Industry of Dolgellau

Saturday 11 October 2025

Comisiwn Brenhinol
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and Historical Monuments of Wales

Place Names in Eryri and Further Afield

James January-McCann, Place Names Officer

We're used to the fact that many of our place names in Wales are centuries old, and that they provide information about the landscape and the history of the immediate area that can be of great use to historians, archaeologists and conservationists. Undoubtedly the best known example of this is the discovery of Llys Rhosyr coming about as a result of the landowner mentioning that one of his fields was called *Cae Llys*, and perhaps the archaeologists might try digging there. The trick is finding out what the local place names are, and making them easily available for researchers, as well as the general public.

The List of Historic Place Names of Wales was established in 2016 to do precisely this, and over the last year we've extended our work to include regular workshops collecting minor place names directly from the public, starting in Eryri National Park. We've so far held fifteen of these workshops all across the park, with another three planned for September, and collected over 6,000 names, to add to the more than 700,000 in the List as a whole. These run the gamut from field and house names, to the names of individual river pools, crossroads, cliffs and sheepfolds, all collected from local people whose families have been in the area for generations. In many cases they have also brought in historical documents and maps, enabling us to trace the local place names back through the centuries. The best example of this was the owner of Hafod y Porth near

Beddgelert, who was able to provide us with the name of the farm in 1276, when his family received the land from Llywelyn ap Gruffydd!

These workshops have been so successful that they've given rise to a number of spin off projects in other areas. We held two workshops last year in Ynys Môn in partnership with the North Wales Wildlife Trust, and collected 900 names. We're going back again at the end of the month, to Brynteg and Pentraeth. Our successful partnership with Eryri National Park has also acted as a pilot project for the other national parks to establish similar projects in their areas. We're currently in the early stages of getting the project off the ground in Bannau Brycheiniog; we've held meeting with senior Park staff and the Park's various partner organisations, and next month we're addressing the wardens. Local wardens are an essential part of the process as they know the area and the community intimately, and have the necessary local connections to be able to persuade people to come to the sessions and contribute names, and to know precisely which members of the local community will have the best knowledge. We've also made initial contact with Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, who are also very interested in running a project.

Perhaps the most exciting development of all however, is that individual communities across Wales are also seizing the opportunity to contribute their place name knowledge to the List, in areas without the organised backing of a national park. We're holding a workshop in Penbryn in Ceredigion in September, in Hay on Wye later in the year, and are currently exploring the possibility of holding another in Cilgerran in Pembrokeshire. We're very aware that the generation who lived closely on the land is growing older, and that if we don't collect these types of names soon, increasingly they'll be lost forever.

Every name collected is recorded in the List of Historic Place Names,

where due to the List's statutory function in Welsh law, they will be preserved in perpetuity. The preservation and promotion aspects of our work are therefore well in hand, all that remains now is the necessary field work to ensure that Wales' rich place name heritage is recorded before it is lost.

Pembrokeshire Archaeology Day

8 November 2025, Pembrokeshire College, Haverfordwest, SA61 1SZ

Hosted by the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority

- ☑ Range of speakers covering recent excavations and projects from around Pembrokeshire
- ☑ Exhibition with information from community groups and organisations involved in the area's heritage and archaeology

For more information and to book your place, visit
https://events.pembrokeshirecoast.wales/#eventcalendar_115%7C24019

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Cropmark discoveries from the 2025 drought

Toby Driver, CBHC/RCAHMW, Aberystwyth (toby.driver@rcahmw.gov.uk)

Wales experienced its hottest summer on record in 2025, beating previous average temperatures for 1995, (Sue Charles, BBC Wales News 1st Sept 2025) which followed the driest spring for more than 50 years. These long drought conditions, which are becoming ever more common, provided excellent opportunities for cropmark aerial reconnaissance from May through to August. However, while the east of Wales stayed very dry, the land west of a general line from Bridgend to Newtown and Rhyl remained damp with few cropmarks until the drought began to penetrate later in August.

The Royal Commission carried out nearly 30 hours of aerial reconnaissance across Wales between early May and late August recording cropmarks as they emerged, whilst also photographing a range of targets for Cadw and other partners. Weekly drought readings from the Met Office between April and August showing crop stress (Soil Moisture Deficit), help us direct our limited flight time more accurately towards areas of most severe drought.

The soils and early cropping regime of Monmouthshire have always posed a challenge to aerial archaeologists, with cropmark discoveries remaining elusive and sporadic. In 2025, following discussions with Mark Lewis at the Roman Legion Museum and fieldwork with Kate Churchill of Churchill Archaeology, we targeted certain areas of the county in the drought with unexpectedly good results. A number of new rectangular enclosures of

Iron Age or Romano-British type were recorded around Tredunnock, Llangybi, Trellech and Raglan to Monmouth, along with other discoveries extending west along the Usk valley towards Brecon and north to Hay on Wye. We also carried out useful sorties over better-flown landscapes in eastern Powys and north-east Wales, seeing some discoveries along Offa's Dyke, although cloud and strong winds across central Wales on very hot days scuppered several flights.

There were some long flights at the height of the drought to make sure all regions had been thoroughly checked; on 19th May 2025 we took in targets from Haverfordwest to Strata Florida, Welshpool, Wrexham and Prestatyn, while a three-hour flight on the 11th August included drought surveys from Castlemartin Range and Llandovery in the west to Monmouth and Caerleon in the east. New site records are being updated this winter; search for '2025 drought' in www.coflein.gov.uk to see what has been discovered.

Figure 1: Two discoveries in Monmouthshire from 2nd July 2025. (left) Chapel Wood south Iron Age or Romano-British defended enclosure, Raglan; (right) Prehistoric hilltop defended enclosure at Little Bourne Wood, Mitchel Troy (Left: AP_2025_1942, NPRN 801544, right: AP_2025_1933, NPRN 801543 © Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

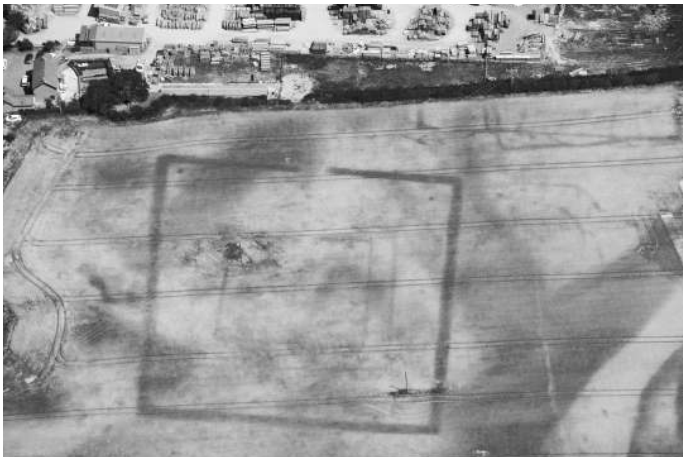


Figure 2: A previously recorded site showing impressively well this summer: the likely Romano-British temenos enclosure at Broad Heath, Presteigne, 10th July 2025 (AP_2025_2460, NPRN 308868. © Crown Copyright: RCAHMW).

Nautical Archaeology Society

The Revival of Nautical Archaeology

In the Spring edition of the CBA newsletter (no.69), we were delighted to announce that the Nautical Archaeology Society were re-launching their quarterly in-house publication *Nautical Archaeology.* So far there have been 3 editions, with the Autumn copy currently being compiled ready for their **annual conference** which this year is being held at **Portsmouth University** over the weekend of **15th – 16th November 2025**.

To date, in the new editions of *Nautical Archaeology*, there have been several articles with a Welsh connection:

Winter 2025

Paddling into the Past: Kayak-based archaeological prospection on the upper Severn and its tributaries (by Dr Nigel Baker)

This article outlines the potential for using a kayak to reach and discover long-lost archaeological remains in otherwise out-of-the-way waterway locations, investigating paleochannels from a paddler's eye-level.

Spring 2025

Restoring faces from the past (by Susannah Hart)

In 1885 the wooden schooner *Marion* was caught in a storm and wrecked on the beach near Criccieth. The captain managed to salvage the vessel's figurehead. This article recounts the story of the wrecking, and the recent restoration of the figurehead.

Cannon (from a protected wreck site?) for sale on eBay (by Ian Cundy)

A cannon, reportedly from a site in Cardigan Bay close to Barmouth, was recently advertised on the eBay online auction site. As the sale of maritime artefacts, particularly from protected sites could be illegal, this article demonstrates how vigilant we need to be in order to protect our maritime heritage.

A new research project on Llandudno's North Shore, North Wales: Submerged forest, prehistoric timber remains, and worked wood (by Debbie Wareham, Ships' Timbers)

This article outlines the early results from a project aiming to produce a palaeoenvironmental reconstruction of Llandudno's North Shore, including investigation of a prehistoric submerged forest and worked timber remains found on the foreshore.

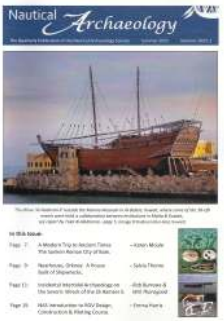
From Scuba Diver to Professional Diver via Archaeology (by Simon Adey-Davies)

Simon recounts his personal story from being a student at Bangor University through to making his way as a commercial diver, while maintaining an enthusiastic focus on maritime archaeology.

Summer 2025

Incidental Intertidal Archaeology on the Severn: Wreck of the SS Ramses II (Rob Burrows & Will Thorogood)

Rob & Will, members of the Severn Area Rescue Association (SARA), recount how one of their regular training exercises has allowed them to investigate the remains of the Egyptian steamship Ramses II that went aground on a sandbank and was lost in 1951.



Members of the Nautical Archaeology Society can access articles online. Hard copies of the quarterlies are also available to purchase through the NAS on-line shop:

https://www.nauticalarchaeologysociety.org/shop

Membership Update

We still have a few members who pay by standing order direct to CBA Wales rather than through CBA UK who are underpaying. I would be grateful if those members could check their standing orders to make sure that they update them to the correct payment rate. The new rates are as follows:

- ☑ **Ordinary membership £15**
- ☑ **Joint/Family membership £20**
- ☑ **Institutional Membership £25**
- ☑ **Student membership £5 (digital copy only of Archaeology in Wales)**

A direct payment method via the website is now up and running at **https://cbawales.org/membership/**

Members might choose to renew using this method, but would need to remember to cancel their standing order to avoid paying twice.

Any queries please contact the Membership Secretary at **membership@cbawales.org**

Maintaining our membership is important to allow CBA to continue its work and in particular meet the printing costs of Archaeology in Wales.

Would you like to receive this newsletter and other CBA Wales mailings by email? Please contact the Membership Secretary with your current email address, at **membership@cbawales.org**

Newsletter

We welcome items up to 600 words in length, with up to 3 illustrations, for inclusion in the newsletter! Please send your contributions to Emma Wager, at **newsletter@cbawales.org**

Archaeology in Wales

Items for inclusion in the journal should be sent to **aiw@cbawales.org**

ARCHAEOLOGY Wales/Cymru