

CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

newsletter



Spring 2010

The Portable Antiquities Scheme

The Portable Antiquities Scheme is a voluntary scheme to record archaeological objects found by members of the public in England and Wales. Every year thousands of objects are discovered, many by detectorists but also by people just gardening or out walking. Such discoveries provide an important source of information about the past.

The five well-preserved bronze palstaves shown on the cover of our *Newsletter*, for example, which were found recently by detectorist Graham Radbone in the Nantmel area of Radnorshire, make an important addition to our knowledge about Bronze Age activity in an area where relatively little else of this period is known. The palstaves — a type of Bronze Age hafted axe — are so similar to one another that some at least were probably cast from the same mould.

The palstaves were recorded by CPAT which acts as a reporting centre for the Portable

Antiquities Scheme. The scheme is sponsored nationally by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and is administered in Wales by the National Museum Wales. Some of the other interesting finds that have been recorded by the Trust are shown on the page opposite.

"Finders keepers?"

Although participation in the Portable Antiquities Scheme is voluntary there are certain types of find — and not just those made of gold or silver — which are classed as 'Treasure' and which by law should be reported to the local coroner (see page 4). In the eyes of the law all other finds belong to the landowner rather than the finder, unless some agreement has been reached, so detectorists and others should make sure they have permission beforehand. The old saying 'finders keepers' apparently has no legal standing!



▲ Composite photo of the four faces of one of the Bronze Age palstaves recently found in the Nantmel area of Radnorshire. Detailed records are made of each of the finds over 300 years old that are reported to CPAT. These details, along with a photograph, are added to the finds database available online on the Portable Antiquities Scheme website where they can be seen.



▲ Some of the other finds recently reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme reporting centre at the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, Welshpool: worked flint blade, possibly of Neolithic date, from Mochdre, Powys; Roman trumpet brooch, and silver penny of king Coenwulf of Mercia (AD 796–821), both from Rossett, Wrexham; Iron Age or Roman bronze toggle, found at Bronington, Wrexham.

Photos for CPAT by Rod Treweek



◀ One of the Nantmel palstaves photographed shortly after it was found. The axes comes from an area where relatively few other Bronze Age finds are known and adds to our knowledge of early activity in the area.

What counts as "Treasure" ?

The following summary of what legally counts as Treasure is provided by the Portable Antiquities Scheme website:

1. Any metallic object, other than a coin, provided that at least 10 per cent by weight of metal is precious metal (that is, gold or silver) and that it is at least 300 years old when found. If the object is of prehistoric date it will be Treasure provided any part of it is precious metal.
2. Any group of two or more metallic objects of any composition of prehistoric date that come from the same find (see below)
3. All coins from the same find provided they are at least 300 years old when found (but if the coins contain less than 10 per cent of gold or silver there must be at least ten of them). Only the following groups of coins will normally be regarded as coming from the same find:
 - hoards that have been deliberately hidden
 - smaller groups of coins, such as the contents of purses, that may be dropped or lost
 - votive or ritual deposits.
4. Any object, whatever it is made of, that is found in the same place as, or had previously been together with, another object that is Treasure.
5. Any object that would previously have been treasure trove, but does not fall within the specific categories given above. Only objects that are less than 300 years old, that are made substantially of gold or silver, that have been deliberately hidden with the intention of recovery and whose owners or heirs are unknown will come into this category.

Note: An object or coin is part of the 'same find' as another object or coin if it is found in the same place as, or had previously been together with, the other object. Finds may have become scattered since they were originally deposited in the ground.



"What do I do if I find some Treasure?"

According to the Treasure Act you must report all finds of Treasure to a coroner for the district in which they are found either within 14 days after the day on which you made the discovery or within 14 days after the day on which you realized the find might be Treasure. For contact details for Coroners in England and Wales see the link given in the info box.

In the first instance you can always try contacting CPAT for further help and information.

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Portable Antiquities Scheme
www.finds.org.uk/

Portable Antiquities Scheme in CPAT area
www.cpat.org.uk/services/portable/portable.htm

Portable Antiquities Scheme in Wales
www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/rhagor/research/archaeology/1471/

Treasure Act
www.finds.org.uk/treasure/treasure_summary.php

Coroners in England and Wales
www.finds.org.uk/treasure/coroners.php

Finders keepers, losers weepers?
For a magazine article about the law on chance finds see:
news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/8129534.stm?FORM=ZZNR3

Are you sitting comfortably ... Roman style?

Roman finds from the Trust's excavation of a high-status Roman building complex at Pentre Farm Flint in the 1970s were recently deposited with Flintshire Museum Service. Amongst the finds was a sandstone bench support in the form of an animal leg with a clawed foot (shown in the photo to the right with Flintshire's Head of Heritage Services, Debbie Seymour).



Stone benches have only rarely been found on Roman sites in Britain, but a complete bench or *subsellium* of similar date is known from the women's baths in the Roman town of Herculaneum (see photo above left). A similar backless seat or bench is also depicted on this mosaic of theatrical characters from the Villa del Cicerone at Pompeii, a town which like Herculaneum was destroyed by the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79.



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O'Leary, T J, Blockley, K, & Musson, C R, 1989. *Pentre Farm, Flint, 1976-81: an Official Building in the Roman Lead Mining District, BAR, British Series 217.*

'Veni, Vidi, Vici ...'

Following military campaigns in Anatolia in 47 BC Julius Caesar is said to have uttered the memorable words '*Veni, vidi, vici*' ('I came, I saw, I conquered'). '*Vici*' has a second meaning in Latin, being the plural of *vicus*, a word denoting the kind of small provincial settlement that sprang up close to a number of the larger Roman forts in Wales, housing

tradesmen and artisans who supplied goods and services to the Roman army.

These often short-lived garrison towns were generally set up along the main roads leading out of a fort. Houses, shops and workshops within the *vici* were usually built of timber and clay which have often left many fewer visible traces than the forts



▲ Air photo showing the defences of the Brecon Gaer Roman fort seen from the south-east, partly overlain by the more recent farm and farm buildings to the right.

◀ Trial excavations to the east of the fort in 2009 combined with geophysical survey are helping to define the extent of the civilian settlement or '*vicus*' attached to the fort.



▲ Geophysical survey in progress looking for the *vicus* around the Roman fort at Brecon Gaer.

◀ Plan of the Roman fort at Brecon Gaer showing the areas where geophysical survey has been undertaken.

themselves which were protected by multiple ditches and by large banks which were sometimes faced in stone.

With funding from Cadw the Trust recently began a project which aims to define the extent of these civilian settlements around the Roman forts in our area. *Vici* that we know of so far include those attached to the Roman forts at Caersws, Forden Gaer, Castell Collen, Caerau, Hindwell, Brecon Gaer, and Pen-y-Gaer.

In the case of recent work at Brecon Gaer, geophysical survey helped to define the

extent of the Roman *vicus* around part of the fort but due to soil conditions the flattish area to the east of the fort appeared surprisingly blank. Small-scale trial excavations have shown that, as expected, the Roman settlement did in fact continue into this area.

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Geophysical survey and trial excavation near Brecon Gaer in 2009 was funded by Cadw. For further information see CPAT Annual Review 2009–2010 pages 60–64, available at www.cpat.org.uk/cpat/review/review.htm

For a virtual reality reconstruction of the Caersws *vicus* visit 'The Romans in Mid Wales' available on our website at www.cpat.org.uk/outreach/exrimw/exrimw.htm

► *Reconstruction of the Caersws Roman fort and vicus, showing how the civilian settlement was set out on a grid of streets and lanes leading off the main roads to the south and east of the fort. The image is taken from 'The Romans in Mid Wales' virtual reality model.*



► *One of the trial trenches being dug to the east of the Roman fort at Brecon Gaer, with some of the finds of Roman pottery and glass that were recovered. The results of this work are helping to define the extent of civilian settlement that was attached to at least the northern and eastern sides of the Roman fort.*



Prehistoric avenues of research . . .

One of the exciting things about archaeology is the chance discoveries which throw a new light on the history of a particular area. This is the case of a previously unknown early prehistoric monument that recently came to light near Berriew, first spotted from the air by pilot Rob Jones just after taking off from the Mid Wales Airport.

The site belongs to a type of monument known as a *cursus*. They were first called this after the Roman word for an athletics course, but they are now known to be very much older in date. They are amongst the oldest monumental structures in Britain and appear to have had a ritual function, perhaps involving ceremonial processions. They take the form of a pair of parallel ditches, usually closed off at each end, and running across the countryside for distances of from several hundred metres up to many kilometres.

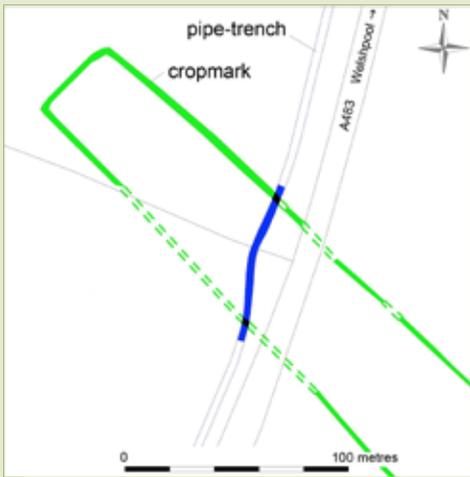


The Berriew *cursus* is about 300 metres long and 40 metres wide, with ditches up to 2–3 metres across and about half a metre deep. It seems to form part of the important complex of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments which includes the Maen Beuno standing stone and the Dyffryn Lane henge monument and stone circle

► *Air photo showing the north-west end of the Berriew Neolithic *cursus* as it appeared as a cropmark in a field of corn in June 2009.*

▲ *With funding from Severn Trent Water there was the opportunity to dig sections across the *cursus* ditches shortly after its discovery, during the construction of a pipeline. Cadw subsequently provided funding for a geophysical survey to hunt for the south-east end of the *cursus*.*





which featured in our Spring 2007 *Newsletter*.

Charcoal in the secondary filling of the northern ditch has produced radiocarbon dates which fall within the range 3960–3470 cal. BC in the earlier Neolithic, which is similar to dates that have been obtained for two other Welsh cursus monuments at Hindwell and Sarn-y-bryn-caled.

The orientation of at least some of these enigmatic monuments seems to be significant. The Sarn-y-bryn-caled cursus south of Welshpool seems to deliberately point either to the Breiddin hill or perhaps to the point where the river Severn enters the upper Severn valley. The newly-discovered Berriew cursus seems to point to the Camlad valley, the second historically-important access route into the upper Severn. The Walton Green cursus (see below) also points to an important access route.

▲ *Plan of the Berriew cursus, which runs below the line of the main road between Welshpool and Newtown.*



▲ *Reconstruction of the Walton Green cursus from the Walton Basin virtual reality model developed by Radnorshire Museum and CPAT. The virtual reality model — which accurately depicts the topography of the basin and the surrounding hills — suggests that the cursus was deliberately aligned on the narrow ‘entrance gap’ between Burfa Bank and Herrock Hill which gives access to the Walton Basin from the east.*

► *Distribution of the possible and more certain Neolithic cursus monuments which are known around the margins of upland Wales. No doubt other similar sites still await discovery — especially from aerial photography.*



▲ *Air photo of the Sarn-y-bryn-caled cursus just to the south of Welshpool showing up as two dark parallel lines running across two fields. This cursus is about 370 metres long and 12 metres wide. A section dug across the ditches showed that these were about 2 metres across and over a metre deep. Charcoal from the ditch was dated to about 3800–3600 cal. BC.*

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For more details of the Trust's current Cadw-funded project on cursus monuments see: www.cpat.org.uk/projects/longer/cursus/cursus.htm

For the Dyffryn Lane henge see the Spring 2007 *Newsletter*, available online at: www.cpat.org.uk/news/newslets.htm

Visit the Walton Basin virtual reality model at www.cpat.org/vr/llandod/

Neanderthals of the Elwy Valley!

Despite having died out over over 36,000 thousand years ago the Neanderthals still command a surprising amount of attention in the media.

Neanderthals were short and stocky, and often dubbed as being low-browed both literally and metaphorically. Modern humans shared a common ancestor with Neanderthals, but did not evolve from them.

However, recent discoveries from two caves in south-east Spain — Cueva de los Aviones and Cueva Antón — are beginning

to throw quite a different light on our distant ancestral cousins.

These finds, dating to about 50,000 years ago, included perforated and coloured cockle shells and an oyster shell and a scallop shell covered with red and yellow pigments. These suggest that the Neanderthals living in the two caves adorned themselves with necklaces and painted their bodies and faces.

The interesting point from the local perspective is that traces of



Science Photo Library



◀ *Pontnewydd Cave, where the remains of Neanderthal Man have been found, lies in the Elwy valley in Denbighshire, in the woodland near the cliff towards the middle of this air photo. The cave is on private land and is not normally accessible to the public.*

Neanderthals — the oldest human remains known from Wales — were found at Pontnewydd Cave in the Elwy valley in Denbighshire during excavations by Professor Stephen Aldhouse Green for the National Museum Wales between 1978–1995. These included remains of children and adults together with stone tools and food waste.

The stone tools consist of handaxes and Levallois flakes, mainly made of volcanic rocks found near the cave. Some of the artefacts are burnt, suggesting the regular use of fire. The human remains are of an early form of Neanderthal. They consist of teeth, jaw fragments and part of a vertebra, from several individuals, primarily children.

The Neanderthal finds from Pontnewydd have been dated to about 230,000 years ago but there is still some uncertainty about how they came to be there. Are they the remains of burials within the cave? Or do they represent finds washed into the cave from somewhere else at the end of the last Ice Age?

These questions remain unanswered, but it is likely that the cave which lies above a small river valley would have been an ideal place for shelter in what seems to have been a cool climate. It was also a good location for spotting game in the valley below, which would have been a natural watering place. The surrounding landscape seems to have been open steppe, grazed by horse and even rhinoceros.



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Lower Elwy Valley historic landscape
www.cpat.org.uk/projects/longer/histland/elwy/elwy.htm

Finds in the National Museum Wales
www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/rhagor/article/1968/

Neanderthals in Wales
Ice Age hunters: neanderthals and early modern hunters in Wales, by S. Green and E. Walker (National Museum Wales, 1991)

Pontnewydd Cave excavations
Pontnewydd Cave: a lower Palaeolithic hominid site in Wales: the first report, by H. S. Green (National Museum Wales, 1984)

Tŷ-draw, Llanarmon Mynydd Mawr — the history of 'the house yonder'

The recent publication in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* of building survey and excavation of Tŷ-draw near Llanarmon Mynydd Mawr, in the foothills of the Berwyn Mountains, goes to show much can be learnt by careful detective work on single derelict barn!

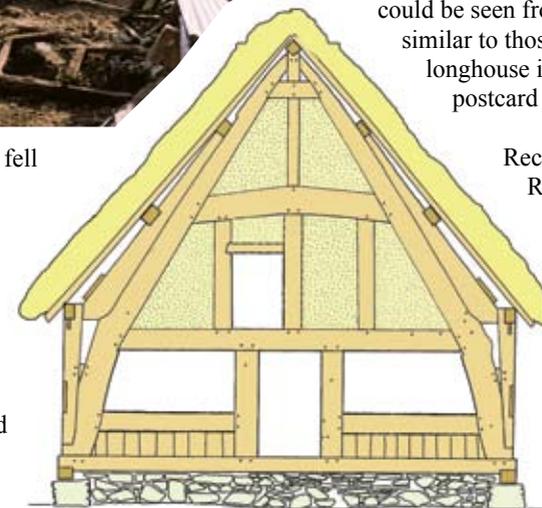
In the 1950s the stone barn at Tŷ-draw was found to encapsulate the remains of a medieval cruck-built hallhouse, the high status of the original building being shown by the decorative woodwork including the flower boss shown alongside. A detailed survey of the surviving timberwork at that time by Peter Smith and Douglas Hague of the Royal Commission revealed a number of apparent anomalies which they could only explain by assuming that the house had been left unfinished due to the upheaval caused by the Owain Glyndŵr rebellion in about 1400.



▲ Tŷ-draw in February 2002 after some of the original crucks had fallen or been removed. The open cruck which is visible in the photo is decorated with the flower boss shown above. It originally stood at the middle of a two-bay hall above an open hearth.



The barn gradually fell into decay and was more or less on its last legs in 2000 when plans for its restoration were drawn up by the by architect Graham Moss. This provided the opportunity for further building recording and excavation, carried out between 2000–2005.



Recent research by Richard Suggett of the Royal Commission has shown that the house was built by Hywel ap Rhys of Mynydd Mawr, a descendant of local *uchelwyr* — a important class of Welsh landowners.

This has resulted in a radical reappraisal of the history and significance of the building and has shown that features which had suggested that the building might be unfinished can now be seen to be characteristic of a distinctive group of later fifteenth and earlier sixteenth-century hallhouse-longhouses in the Welsh borderlands.

Tŷ-draw, which had a central two-bayed cruck-framed hall with an open fire in the middle of the floor, is slightly later than originally thought, having been built with timber felled between 1477 and 1480. About twenty houses of this kind have now been dated by tree-ring dating in the borderland area in recent years, which mostly date

to between 1450–1525. Tŷ-draw is one a distinctive group of hallhouses in which the bay below the hall acted as a byre, excavation having revealed a pattern of stake-built partitions for holding animals. Open panels were left in the partition wall along the line of the cross-passage (shown partly collapsed in the photo to the left and in the reconstruction drawing below) through which animals could be seen from the central hall, similar to those shown in the Breton longhouse illustrated in the old postcard below.



A combination of field survey, excavation and documentary research tells us something about the landscape in which the Tŷ-draw late medieval cruck-built hallhouse was built. Excavation has shown that the house was built on top of an earlier strip field. The



strip field found below the house belonged to a complex field system, shown at the centre of this map of the southern slopes of Mynydd Mawr drawn in the 1750s. The field pattern seems to owe its origin to a medieval *gafael* ('holding'), represented by the fields coloured red, yellow and dark green on the map, that became fragmented by inheritance during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries — the fields shown in yellow being those that once belonging to Tŷ-draw.

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To learn more about Tŷ-draw see 'Tŷ-draw, Llanarmon Mynydd Mawr, Powys — a late medieval cruck-framed hallhouse-longhouse', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 157 (2008), 157–202

For more information about hallhouses in the Welsh borderland see Richard Suggett's *Houses & History in the March of Wales: Radnorshire 1400–1800* (Aberystwyth: RCAHMW, 2005)

The Trust is grateful to various landowners for permission to carry out the projects described in this Newsletter. Funding or help has been provided by these organisations:



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government



www.finds.org.uk



Download: this and earlier editions of the *Newsletter* can be downloaded from www.cpat.org.uk/news/newslets/newslets.htm

Front cover: Bronze Age palstaves found near Nantmel, Powys (*photos* for CPAT by Rod Trevasuk)

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