

How the West was Won

earliest farmers in mid Wales



“The people who inhabit this land are making some big statements. Here in Wales we have discovered one of the largest timber constructions anywhere in Europe from that age.” Huw Edwards, BBC's *The Story of Wales*



earliest farmers

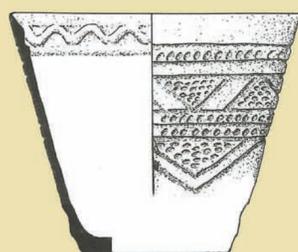
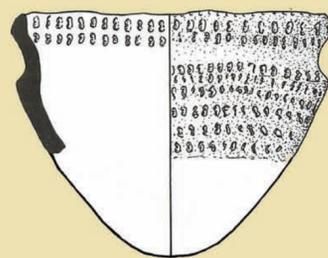
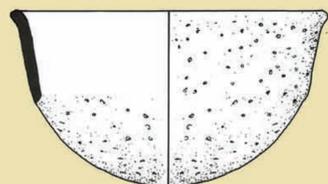
In the first episode of the recent BBC Wales series *The Story of Wales* Huw Edwards was seen walking through oak woodland as the posts of the Hindwell Neolithic palisaded enclosure sprang magically into view (see cover illustration).

Excavations by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust have shown that the palisade, with posts perhaps over 4 metres high, was built in about 2800 BC with little more than stone tools and human effort. It covered an area of about 34 hectares, making it by far the largest enclosure of this kind known in Britain. Even more remarkably, however, recent work by the Trust has shown that the site formed just part of an extensive complex of earth and timber enclosures that were built in the Walton basin, just to the east of New Radnor, throughout the Neolithic period, between about 3800 and 2500 BC.

These enclosures were being built during the period when farming was first introduced in Wales — when the raising of domesticated animals and the growing of cereal crops was taking over from a way of life that depended solely upon hunting, fishing and gathering wild fruits and plants.



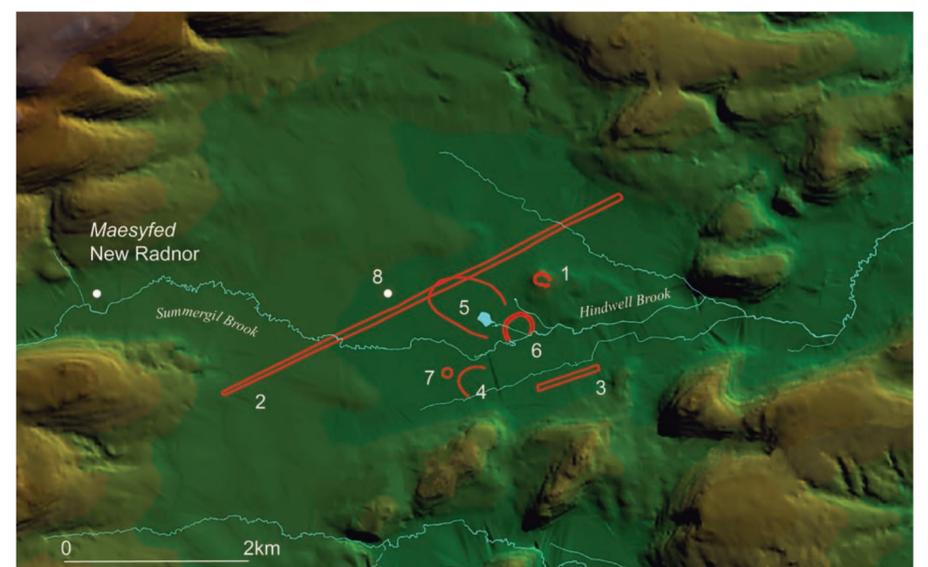
Little is now visible of the remarkable complex of Neolithic enclosures in the Walton basin. The Four Stones stone circle shown here may be later in date, and possibly belongs to the early Bronze Age.



Neolithic pots of these types were used for cooking and food storage. **Top** Earlier Neolithic plain round-bottomed bowl. **Centre** Middle Neolithic Mortlake Ware with impressed decoration, possibly imitating basketry. **Bottom** Late Neolithic Grooved Ware, with impressed and incised decoration.

tribal gatherings

In parts of Wales small farming communities are known to have built chambered tombs in which to bury their dead during the Neolithic period. Here in mid Wales a new and dramatic picture is emerging that is transforming our ideas about what society was like at this time. Thousands of tonnes of earth and timber were moved during the construction of a sequence of massive monuments which radically affected the environment. It clearly involved the coming together of hundreds if not thousands of people, at least at certain times of the year. We have still to learn what the monuments were for, but the way they cluster around the springs at the source of the Hindwell Brook hints at a religious cult focused upon sources of water. The sequence of monument types possibly reflects changing beliefs or ceremonial activities that were taking place throughout the Neolithic period.



Above The complex of Neolithic enclosures in the Walton basin. **1** Womaston causewayed enclosure. **2** Hindwell cursus. **3** Walton cursus. **4** Walton palisaded enclosure. **5** Hindwell palisaded enclosure. **6** Hindwell double-palisaded enclosure. **7** Walton Court ring-ditch. **8** Four Stones stone circle, possibly of Bronze Age date.

Flint arrowheads were used both for hunting and warfare in the Neolithic period. **Left** Earlier Neolithic leaf-shaped arrowhead. **Centre** Later Neolithic chisel arrowhead. **Right** Oblique arrowhead.

