

# Great Archaeological Sites in Merthyr Tydfil



## 5. CAE BURDYDD MOTTE, VAYNOR



On the lip of the Taff Fechan gorge stands the earthen mound known as Cae Burdydd (SO 0474 1020). Although it has sometimes been interpreted as a Bronze Age barrow, most archaeologists think it is a motte, the mound on which the keep of an earth and timber castle would have been built in the 11th or 12th century. Pont Sarn, which crosses the gorge a few hundred yards to the west, would have been on the main route north between Cardiff and Brecon, perhaps going back to Roman times, especially since the straight footpath that passes the motte continues as part of the road that runs eastwards to Pont Sarn.

The motte has traces of a ditch running round its base, where it was needed to strengthen the defences on the opposite side to the gorge. Such earthworks made it more difficult for attackers to capture the keep, which was the castle's command centre, even if they got past the outer defences into the bailey. It would also have made it more difficult to set the keep on fire.

There is no written information about Cae Burdydd motte, and it has never been excavated. From its form, we deduce that it was constructed in the Middle Ages

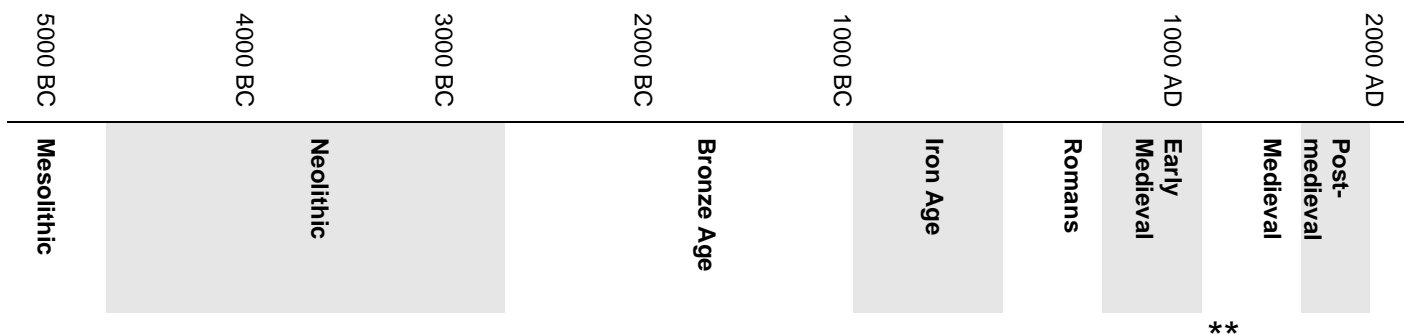
relatively soon after the Normans began to conquer, either by one of the incoming Normans or more likely by a Welsh lord who felt the need to make his presence felt by building in the same style. From its position on the north side of the gorge, the builder must have intended it to control Pont Sarn and defend lands on this side from attacks coming from the south.

We don't know how long it was occupied for, but the geopolitical situation had changed by the end of the 13th century when Gilbert de Clare had finally conquered the northern tip of Glamorgan started to build himself a new state-of-the-art stone castle on Morlais Hill on the opposite side of the gorge. Rubble now obscures all the upstanding walls of Morlais with only the vaulted undercroft of the south keep showing anything of its former appearance. Time has dealt rather better with Cae Burdydd.



Park outside Vaynor Church (SO 0489 1031, CF48 2TT) and take the footpath that leads west past the old churchyard. The motte is on the left of the path, just before it rejoins the road. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 160, Explorer Series Outdoor Leisure sheet 12.

**Timeline** (the asterisks indicate the time-span)



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