



# Newsletter

The Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust Limited

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Thanks to everyone who responded to the questionnaire on our newsletters sent out with the Spring number. It's gratifying to know that we are providing more or less what you want. The only comment we had on the format was that the pictures were a bit small, so this time we have tried including fewer but larger pictures.



*Meibion y Ddraig with the life of a medieval archer(NAW)*

Gower Walking Festival in June included a new walk, arranged in partnership with Swansea City Council, to look at the WWII archaeology and natural history of Mumbles Hill. This was so successful that we repeated it for National Archaeology Week, along with a sketching party at Pennard Castle. As usual, the main event for National Archaeology week was the Archaeology and Heritage Roadshow at Swansea Museum, with a mix of local societies and heritage groups, children's activities and living history. The children's activities this year included an opportunity for them to try their hand at excavating and recording a very realistic-looking skeleton complete with grave goods. We had a stand at the Cardiff Eisteddfod at the beginning of August, which we manned with the help of Cardiff Archaeological Society. Over the first weekend our children's activities were able to go one better from our usual prehistoric pottery making by hosting Matthew Jones of Aveagoceramics, who showed them how to throw a pot on the wheel.

Charina Jones has been testing the new software system that has been developed for the Welsh Archaeological Trusts to permit access to all the regional **Historic Environment Records** on line. The next step will be to make it available to all users in the Trust, followed by the launch of online access, which we hope will be some time next year. Facilities are also being upgraded in the HER for our paper records. The archive boxes that hold the further information files, familiar to anyone who has come in to consult the record, are being housed in a roller-shelf system which will allow us to make a more efficient use of space. At the same time, the **Archaeological Planning** section's archives will be moved upstairs, to create even more space for the HER.

In spite of the dreadful weather this summer, we have managed to complete most of a very full programme of events arranged by the **Heritage and Outreach** section, the exception being the Usk Show which had to be cancelled because of flooding. Fortunately the majority of events took place relatively early in the summer, when the weather wasn't so bad. Our contribution to the



*Our stand at the Eisteddfod with the potter in attendance*

Cadw-funded projects for this financial year are well under way. Fieldwork has started on the **Prehistoric and Roman** sites project, for which Sven Egloff and Edith Evans have visited some extremely well preserved settlement sites in the Brecon Beacons. Edith has also been working with Dr Eddie Owens of Swansea University on the excavation at **Church Hill** on Gower, which is our featured project in this issue. Richard Roberts and Ellie Graham have finished mapping the development of Aberdare, and are now working on **Southeast Wales Ironworks** extraction landscapes. They have been agreeably surprised that after all the work done by the Royal Commission, there are still new features to be found in the Heads of the



*A prehistoric settlement site on Cefn Car, Brecon Beacons*

Valleys area, particularly around Brynmawr. Preservation in places is very good: complete landscapes of quarries, tramroads and water features still survive in places. Interestingly, some workmen's huts are in the tradition of the platform houses more often associated with farming.

Extraction landscapes also loom large among other projects. The excavation at Ffos-y-fran continues under the supervision of Martin Tuck, and is now expected to last at least until Christmas. Further excavation in the last six months has included Ironstone Pits No 4 and the Penydarren Brickworks. There are also traces of an earlier landscape - a Bronze Age cairn has been found, with a separate cremation in its vicinity, and an area of burning around. The site was already in use before the Bronze Age, as Mesolithic flints have also turned up, including a very large scraper. These were made from high-quality flint that must have been imported from a considerable distance. There is also a sherd of prehistoric pottery, possibly from the middle of the Iron Age.

Extraction landscapes also loom large among other projects. The excavation at Ffos-y-fran

Because of our commitment to Ffos-y-fran, we have not carried out much in the way of other projects ahead of development, mainly watching briefs, but we do have one interesting project under way at **Aberdulais Falls**, the industrial site owned by the National Trust. A team led by Rowena Hart looked for the tramway showing on the 1st edition OS 25" map of the 1870s, when the site was used as a tinplate works. They found a length of rail and a stone sleeper, neither of which were *in situ*. At a lower level there was also what appeared to be part of an earlier retaining wall for the river.



*The excavation at Aberdulais Falls*

## People

Following the departure of Jim Parry, his post as Archaeological Planning Officer was advertised and the successful candidate was Cloe Gerrard, who had been working for us for three years as Assistant Project Officer. Jim's wife Jo Higgins decided to leave South Wales and go to Cornwall too, where she is now working as a free-lance archaeologist. She is currently writing up for us the excavations on Swansea Castle at the David Evans site which she carried out for us last year. We had over 30 applications for the IFA Workplace Learning

Bursary in Desk-Based Assessments: the successful candidate, Michelle Statton, has been seconded by her employers Archaeology South-East to us for six months.

Martin Locock has joined the Board of Trustees. Martin was a Projects Manager with us for many years before moving to the National Library of Wales to take charge of producing an on-line catalogue of archives throughout Wales and the NLW's project to digitise a range of Welsh journals.

### **Excavations at Church Hill, Penmaen, Gower**

A new departure for us this year was a small research excavation and survey project in partnership with Swansea University and the Royal Institution of South Wales. We hoped to introduce a dozen students in Ancient History, Classics and Egyptology to archaeological techniques, and also involve the public through the Royal Institution of South Wales. The site we wanted to investigate was a small enclosure in Penmaen parish, recently scheduled by Cadw. This has always been assumed to be a church site, because of the name, and because Early-medieval churches are often found in circular enclosures. However, a local resident Helen Grove had found considerable amounts of Roman pottery and tile in the enclosure, extending for an area of about the same size to the south. One of the purposes of the excavation was to discover the relationship between the Roman site and the enclosure. There were three possibilities: the Roman site might have developed from a pre-existing Iron Age enclosure, the enclosure might be an Early-medieval addition to the Roman site, or the enclosure might be much later and have no relationship with the Roman site apart from being in the same place. We also wanted to see the extent to which the track that ran right across the site had damaged the archaeology underneath. The aim of the survey programme was to produce a new plan of the site in 3D.

Although the brambles and saplings that formed part of the undergrowth had been cleared in the spring before the nesting season, we still had to do quite a bit of clearance to get rid of this year's new growth - nettles and more brambles! After that we were able to lay out two trenches. We had intended to put a 30x2m trench through the bank into the enclosure, and a second trench 20x2m in the area to the south, but the location of standing trees and tree stumps made this impossible - we could just squeeze a 19x2m trench in the area outside the enclosure, but the trench across the bank had to be limited to 10m. Following consultation with Cadw, we dug a second 10x2m trench in the interior.

The bank was about 4m wide and survived up to 0.7m high. The main part was constructed from large rubble blocks on the outer side of the bank laid as a facing to a rubble core, and a line of regularly placed rubble blocks down the centre. Approximately 2.5m to the south there was a probable foundation up to 1m wide, also built of large rubble blocks. Between these two features was a loose packing of rubble and earth fill together with larger blocks from the wall. At the southern, outer foot of these bank deposits was a rubbish deposit, but there was not enough time to work out how it was related to the bank - it may perhaps be the fill of an outer ditch. Whatever it was, the fill included large amounts of oyster shell - we collected enough to fill a bin-bag, and quite a lot of animal bone including an intriguing looking fang. We hope to find out more about them at the post-excavation stage. One thing that was clear was that



*The section through the bank*

the enclosure must have post-dated Roman settlement on the site, since the bank contained Roman pottery and tile. The case for an Early-medieval ecclesiastical site seems to be quite strong.

The results from the trench inside the enclosure were disappointing, with only a couple of bits of rather scrappy cobbled surface not extending for the whole length of the trench. There was also some rubble which could possibly be part of a wall, but if so it will have been very damaged. The trench outside the enclosure produced a wall, which lay almost on the line of the trackway across the site, 2m from the eastern end of the trench. Only one course survived above the foundation, with a good face on the west side but not the east. To its west there was a layer of rubble overlying a cobbled surface, but we didn't have enough time to do much further investigation here. Instead, we concentrated on the area to the east. The rubble on this side overlay a deposit which contained industrial waste, and in turn overlay a layer of clay that had been burned *in situ*. Our original idea was that there may have been a pit here, as the deposits ran up against the wall foundation. We found no evidence of a cut on the other three sides, so if there is a pit here it must extend beyond the limits of the trench in all directions. The alternative would be that the foundation trench of the wall was cut through the rubble but did not leave any clear traces as it was backfilled by the same rubble.



*Removing topsoil from the trench in the interior. The survey team is at work beyond the spoil heap*

We found a great deal of brick and tile, and some Roman pottery, much of it of relatively early date. Most of the tile came from outside the enclosure, but animal bone was more frequent in the trench across the bank, and this trench also produced enough oyster shells to fill a sack from the rubbish deposit outside the bank. Now the students have returned to Swansea with the new term, we have started to catalogue the finds.



*The Roman wall outside the enclosure*

One of the things we had hoped to do was to have some volunteers from the wider community. This was being organised through the Royal Institution of South Wales, but unfortunately, although a number of people expressed an interest before the dig began, only a couple of people actually turned up on site. This may have been partly because of the bad weather we had during the second half of the excavation.

We hope to get Cadw to agree to a second season next year, to find out whether there really is an external ditch, and more about the Roman building.