



Newsletter

The Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust Limited

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Welcome to our new-look newsletter, with a title bar designed by our Senior Illustrator, Paul Jones. As usual, the Heritage Management and Outreach section has been very busy over the summer with events, organised by Sue Hughes and Caroline Thomas. We did not have quite as many as we had anticipated



The mayor and mayoress of Neath Port Talbot consult the HER at the Margam show

since the Chepstow Agricultural Show was cancelled after the showground was flooded, but we did spend two days at the Margam Country Show over the August Bank Holiday weekend. Bad weather also affected the events that had been arranged for National Archaeology Week. After a successful morning, the sketching party at Port Eynon (led by Paul Huckfield and Judith Doyle) had to be abandoned in the afternoon when the rain set in. The walk around Neath Abbey had to be cancelled, and there was a poor turnout for the one arranged in collaboration with the Glamorgan Heritage Coast. However, we hope to rearrange the Neath walk for Easter next year, and to do more in partnership with the Heritage Coast in future.

We were lucky to have a dry day on 14th July for our main flagship event, the Archaeology and Heritage Roadshow at Swansea Museum, held as part of National Archaeology Week. The museum estimated that it was attended by at least 500 people (some came in the back way and avoided the counters!). As well as the usual exhibitions, finds roadshow and SMR/HER consultation, we provided guided visits to the David Evans site. We were also able to offer a wider range of children's activities: Caroline put into practice the skills she had learned at a Young Archaeologists Clubs' leaders' weekend earlier in the summer, and provided cave painting and making Viking bracelets as well as the usual prehistoric pottery. Matt Roberts, a student from the University of Plymouth, brought along his have-a-go wattle-and-daub installation, which also proved very popular. We had a different medieval re-enactment group this year. Meibion y Ddraig from Margam are a group of 14th century archers with their wives and families. They brought along their equipment although they were not able to do a practical demonstration because of the limited space! The Roman cooking display was bigger and better than ever with Ellie Graham joining Edith Evans at the stove, which was a replica Roman raised hearth borrowed from the Roman Legion Museum at Caerleon where Edith had done a display on May Bank Holiday.



Constructing a wattle-and-daub wall at the Archaeology and Heritage Roadshow

This summer has also been a busy one for our Projects Division. We have been involved in a series of large projects this summer and autumn. At the **David Evans** site, Jo Higgins is directing excavations on medieval and post-medieval Swansea. The first stage of the work revealed the outer bailey ditch of Swansea Castle and information about burgage plots outside. Work was then suspended for six weeks while services were re-routed, but was resumed in October so that the team can explore the deposits in this part of the site.

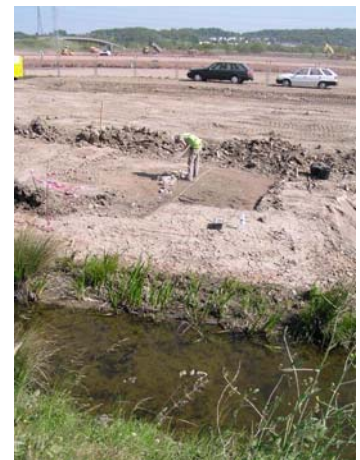


*Recording a section through the castle ditch
on the David Evans site, Swansea*

This work will continue until Christmas, and we hope to feature the site in a later newsletter when we can give you the whole story. At **Ffos-y-fran**, Merthyr Tydfil, a team led by Richard Lewis has been carrying out excavation and survey work in advance of a large redevelopment programme of an industrial landscape connected with the Dowlais Ironworks. On the other side of the Bristol Channel, Martin Tuck has been directing excavations at **Cabot Park**, Bristol, on a site with seasonal occupation of the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age. It seems that people were coming there to exploit resources that were available at particular times of the year (such as migratory birds for example). They had brought in stone from outside the Levels, and identification of this may give a clue to where they were during the rest of the year. We have been working at Cabot Park since the 1990s, making use of the wetland expertise

developed on the Gwent Levels, and each additional project allows us to fill in more of the jigsaw. Work on similar developments on the Welsh side of the Severn Estuary also continues, and an evaluation project near Magor, Monmouthshire, led by Cloe Gerrard and Richard Lewis is featured below.

As far as Cadw-supported projects are concerned, Richard Roberts and Charina Jones have finished the first stage of the **Historic Landscape Characterisation** of Llancarfan in the Vale of Glamorgan. They have now started work on the Wye Valley, where CCW has agreed to provide additional funding so that characterisation can be extended into the whole of the AONB on the Welsh side of the border. Our detailed HLC work is now being extended into medieval towns: Martin Tuck carried out a project to characterise Monmouth and plot the whereabouts of all excavations that have been carried out in the town. In their **Southeast**



*Drawing exposed features at
Cabot Park*



*A mining landscape at Garnlydan,
Blaenau Gwent*

Wales Industrial Ironworks landscapes project, which is now in its fourth year, Richard and Charina are working on the

extractive industries in an area that has been chosen to inform the work of the Heads of the Valleys initiative. Edith Evans has carried out a small project to identify which classes of prehistoric and Roman site have not yet been assessed to see whether any of them are suitable for scheduling. The results will form the basis of a project that will be carried over the next two years. She and Andrew Marvell have also been writing entries for **Roman frontiers in Wales and the Marches**, a new edition of V E Nash-Williams's classic book on the military archaeology of Wales, *The Roman frontier in Wales*, which was last updated in 1969. The

Trust is responsible not only for the entries on those forts and their surroundings that we have dug ourselves, but also for sites within our area on which nobody else had a prior claim, plus a section on communications by water.

People

With our commitments to field projects over the summer, we have had to take on quite a number of temporary staff: at the time of writing (middle of October), the Trust employs 36 people altogether. Changes in permanent staff have been limited to the SMR/HER, with the departure of Gail Higginbottom in June to take up a post as senior research fellow at Flinders University, Adelaide, back in her native Australia. She has been replaced as HER Manager by Charina Jones, who took up the position at the beginning of October. Following a degree in archaeology from Cardiff University and fieldwork experience with Cambrian Archaeological Projects, Charina started working for GGAT in 2003. Since then (apart from six months off to travel the world), she has been mainly involved in working on large

landscape-based projects with Richard Roberts, and is just completing an MSc in GIS at Glamorgan University. On a personal note, Jo Higgins and Jim Parry got married in October.

Among the Trustees, Elizabeth Walker has resigned because of pressure of work at NMW. The Trust is grateful for her kind services.

Feature: Investigating the Gwent Levels in Project Oyster at Llandeenny, Magor

Work on a new distribution park at Llandeenny, south of Magor on the Gwent Levels, has been going on for more than ten years. When outline planning permission was granted for this development in 1994, the Trust already had considerable experience with the archaeology of the Levels, starting from our work on Caldicot Castle Lake in the 1980s. This enabled us to draw up a programme of investigation that would allow us to build up an effective picture of the archaeology of the area. This is being done in stages. Stage 1 consisted of a borehole and test-pit survey over the whole area of the proposed park to draw up a detailed topographic model of the buried peats, and see which parts of the site had a high archaeological potential. Stages 2 and 3 are being carried out as individual plots are being developed where areas of high potential were identified. During Stage 2, these areas are evaluated by further test pits (2a) and then by machine-dug trenches (2b), to identify any sites. These sites are fully excavated in Stage 3a, and any further archaeology recorded in watching briefs during construction (Stage 3b).



One of the Project Oyster machine-dug trial trenches

The work which was undertaken between March and May this year was Stage 2b for Project Oyster, the construction of two huge distribution warehouses to the east of Llanwern steelworks and to the north of the Tesco warehouse where the Barlands Farm boat was discovered in a silted-up channel. Other earlier discoveries on the distribution park were evidence for peat extraction and a rectangular building dating from the Iron Age on the Wilkinson site, more peat extraction pits (these probably of Roman date) on the Lidl site which lies next door to the proposed new warehouses, and a masonry platform, probably dating from the Middle Ages, on the Westway site. Project Oyster therefore gave us the opportunity to find out more about what was happening in this area, and how it fitted in with previous discoveries.



The stump of a tree in situ

Nine of the fifteen trenches dug contained peat. This occurred at two levels, both laid down as part of what is known as the Middle Wentlooge Formation. The lower peat, which has been dated elsewhere in the vicinity to the end of the 5th millennium BC, was formed in wet woodland (carr) of alder, ash and birch. Tree stumps and brushwood were discovered preserved *in situ*, giving us a picture of the original woodland with fallen twigs and small branches on the ground between the trees. Above, a band

of blue-grey silt could clearly be seen in at least one trench. This suggests that the end of the woodland came relatively quickly when it was drowned by rising sea levels. The upper peat bed was very thick (up to 2m on average) and dominated by phragmites reeds, a plant typical of saltmarshes. The thickness of this deposit indicates that the saltmarsh lasted for a long time, and radiocarbon dates obtained from other sites where it has been found indicate that this was during the Bronze Age. It was finally brought to an end when it was flooded by the sea, as represented by the overlying deposits of blue-grey clay. In one trench, a palaeochannel in the clay marked a watercourse, and stone had been dumped in it to consolidate the fill before a stone structure was laid on top.

Six of the trenches excavated contained stone features. When stone appears in excavations on the Levels, this immediately shows that there has been human activity, since stone does not occur here naturally. At least two of these trenches seem to have been cut into the same feature, which consisted of a closely packed deposit of sandstone and conglomerate rubble running northeast to southwest, 3m wide with straight, neatly constructed edges. We think that this may be part of a road, and it is possible that the

same feature might have continued into the other trenches to the northeast. We cannot be certain about this, however, since where the stone deposits occur in the other four trenches they do not line up precisely, although they are on the same general alignment and at a similar depth. Stones have been robbed out of all these trenches too, so it is not clear whether the features in the northeastern trenches originally looked exactly the same.



Stone feature with neatly made edges, probably a Roman road



Brushwood laid to stop the stone feature from sinking into the peat below

Two of these other trenches seem to have two periods of stone structure, with a period of abandonment between represented by a build-up of clean blue-grey silty clay of the type laid down in the inter-tidal zone. In one of them, the lower stone features were associated with Roman pottery, so it is possible that we are dealing here with the remains of a Roman road associated in some way with the Barlands Farm boat and the creek in which it had been deposited. However, the road is also on the same alignment as a medieval platform or slipway found by Martin Tuck on the Westway site to the southwest of Project Oyster, and it may have been leading there. In the other trench, the bottom of the lower stones was intermixed with brushwood, which seems to have been laid to prevent them from sinking down into the peat below. The brushwood, which had been secured in place by eight small roundwood pegs, had been laid at random, and consisted of alder, oak, wood of the willow and poplar family, and another species which was probably hawthorn. It is unlikely that it had been brought far, so it gives us an insight into what trees and bushes were growing in the vicinity. Five individual pieces of brushwood had characteristics usually associated with wood obtained from trees that have been deliberately managed by coppicing to provide a supply of rods for purposes such as wattlework, but it is also possible that they may have come from trees that had been felled by beavers.

The other notable discovery was the complete skeleton of a cow, probably between four and six years old, found when one of the trenches had to be widened out so that the team could work safely at the bottom. There was a piece of modern bottle glass close to it, so it may have been a modern cow buried where it had died. However, it is possible that the glass was intrusive: the skeleton was at a similar depth to the Roman features, and complete cow burials of Roman date were found in 1998 at Nash on the Levels a few miles to the east. It is closer in size to the larger Iron Age cattle than Roman examples.

Otherwise there were very few finds. The Roman pottery mentioned above was all local, and could have come from as few as two jars. Some timbers that were found embedded in peat in one of the trenches could have come from a building, but this is not certain, and if they did, the building will have lain outside the excavated area.



Complete skeleton of a cow