

CPAT Report No 1122

Collfryn Ring-ditch, Guilsfield, Powys

TRIAL EXCAVATION 2011



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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I Grant

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Report for Cadw

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust

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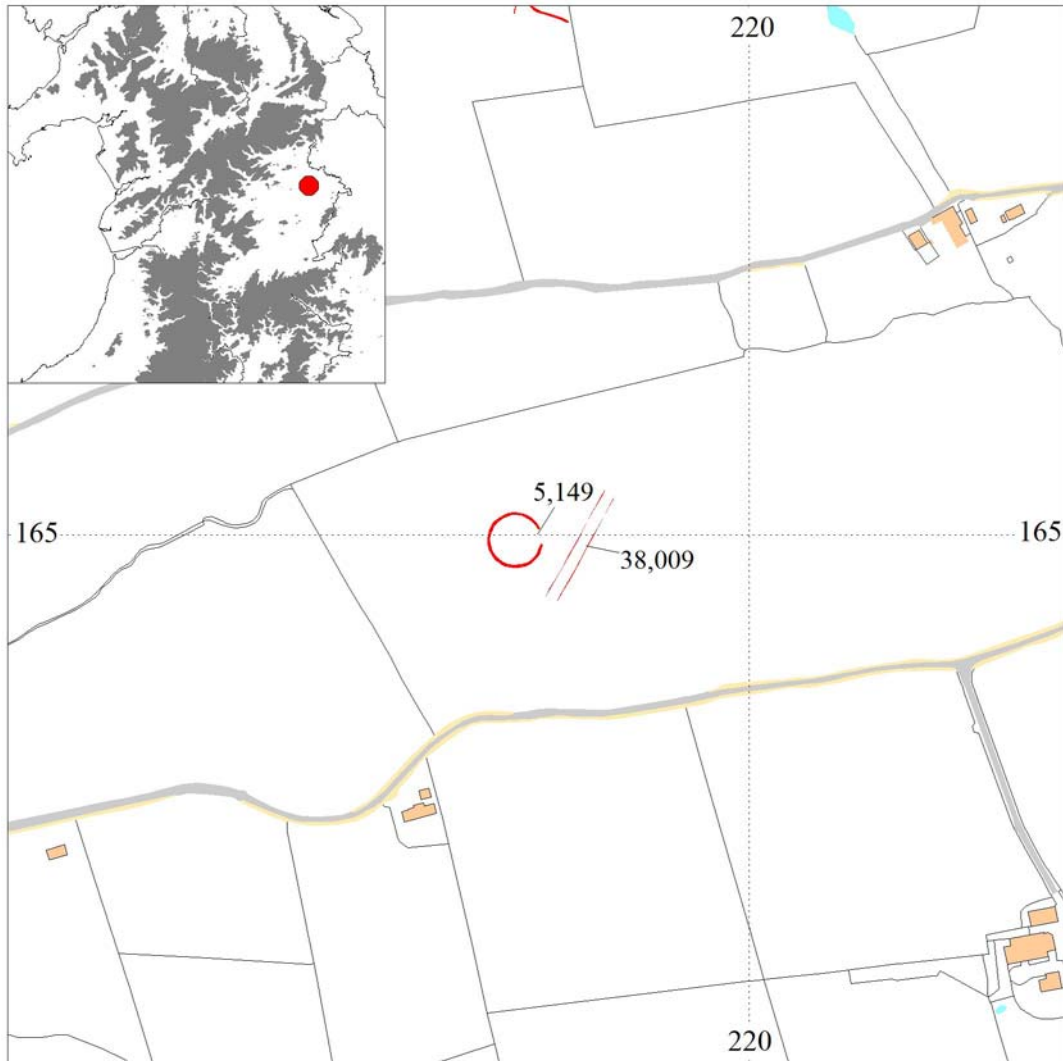
cover: View of the excavation from the south. Photo CPAT 3366-0004

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 A programme of small-scale excavation was undertaken on the site of a large ring-ditch (PRN 5149) at Collfryn, in Powys (Fig. 1; SJ 21861650), in October 2011. The site lies around 5km north of Guilsfield (SJ 21891649), in the low hills to the south-east of the River Vyrnwy at an altitude of 130m OD.



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Fig. 1 Location of the Collfryn ring-ditch

- 1.2 The work was funded by Cadw as part of a study of unusually large ring-ditches in the region which was undertaken following the completion of the pan-Wales survey of prehistoric funerary and ritual monuments. Previous work included a trial excavation on the site of a 100m-diameter ring ditch at Walton Court in the Walton Basin which indicated that the monument had been constructed before 2570-2300 BC (Jones 2010).
- 1.3 Across Britain a class of supersized ring-ditches has been recognised which appear to fall within the category of so-called ‘formative henges’, dating to the Middle Neolithic. The Clwyd-Powys area has 14 sites which are around 40m or more in diameter, including the exceptionally large example at Walton Court, all of which are known only from cropmark evidence and are

considered to be under a continuing threat from ploughing. There is a distinct cluster of these sites around the Severn-Vyrnwy confluence which includes the site at Collfryn.



Fig. 2 Cropmarks visible in 1987 define the ring ditch. Photo CPAT 87-7-13

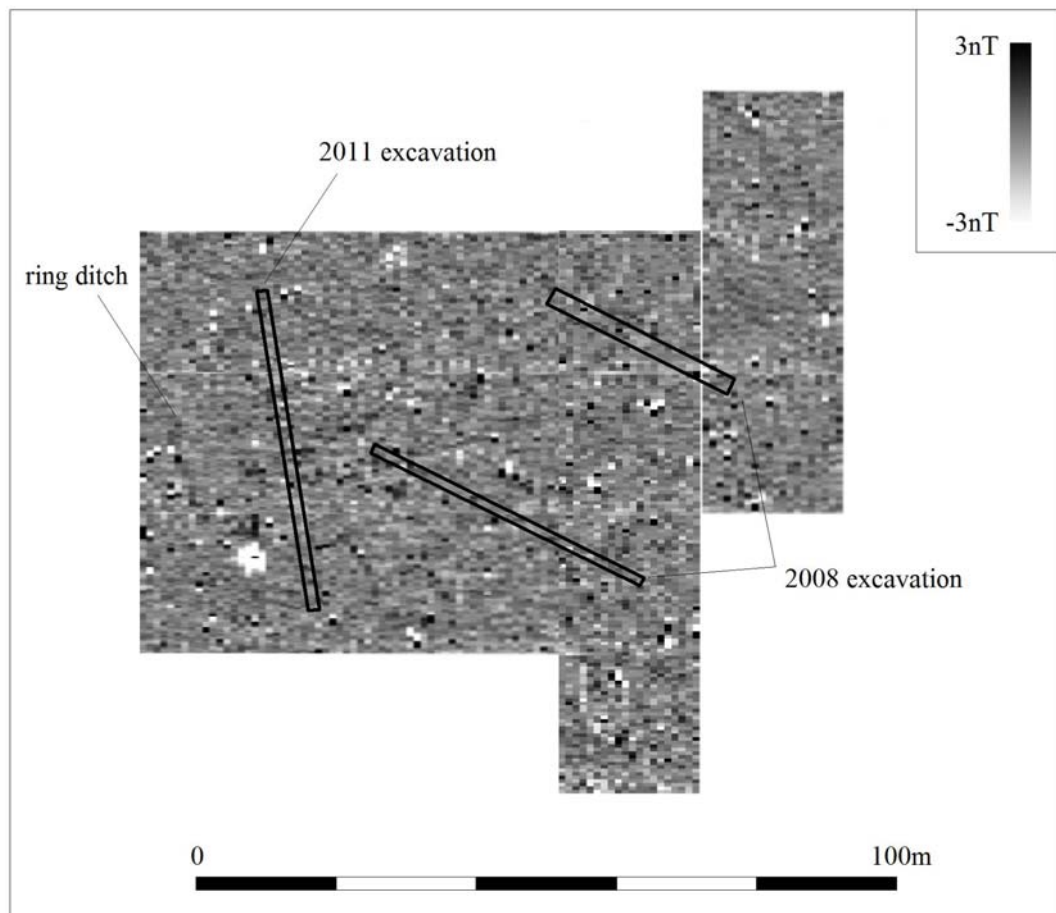


Fig. 3 The 2008 geophysical survey with the trench locations

Geophysical Survey

- 1.4 The site was previously investigated in 2008 as part of a project to investigate a potential cursus (PRN 38009), identified as two parallel ditches showing as cropmarks. Although trial excavations determined that the cropmarks were part of a system of field drains, one trench did identify a section of the ring-ditch on the south-east side, although this was not excavated (Jones 2009). The area was also subject to a magnetometer survey which identified the ring-ditch (Fig. 3).

2 EXCAVATION

- 2.1 The trial excavation consisted of a single trench, 46m in length and 1.5m wide, aligned approximately north/south. The trench extended across the full diameter of the ring-ditch to provide an opportunity to investigate the encircling ditch in two sections. The modern ploughsoil (1) was removed by machine onto the surface of the natural subsoil, which consisted here of variable stony clay. Numbers in brackets in the following text refer to individual context records in the site archive.

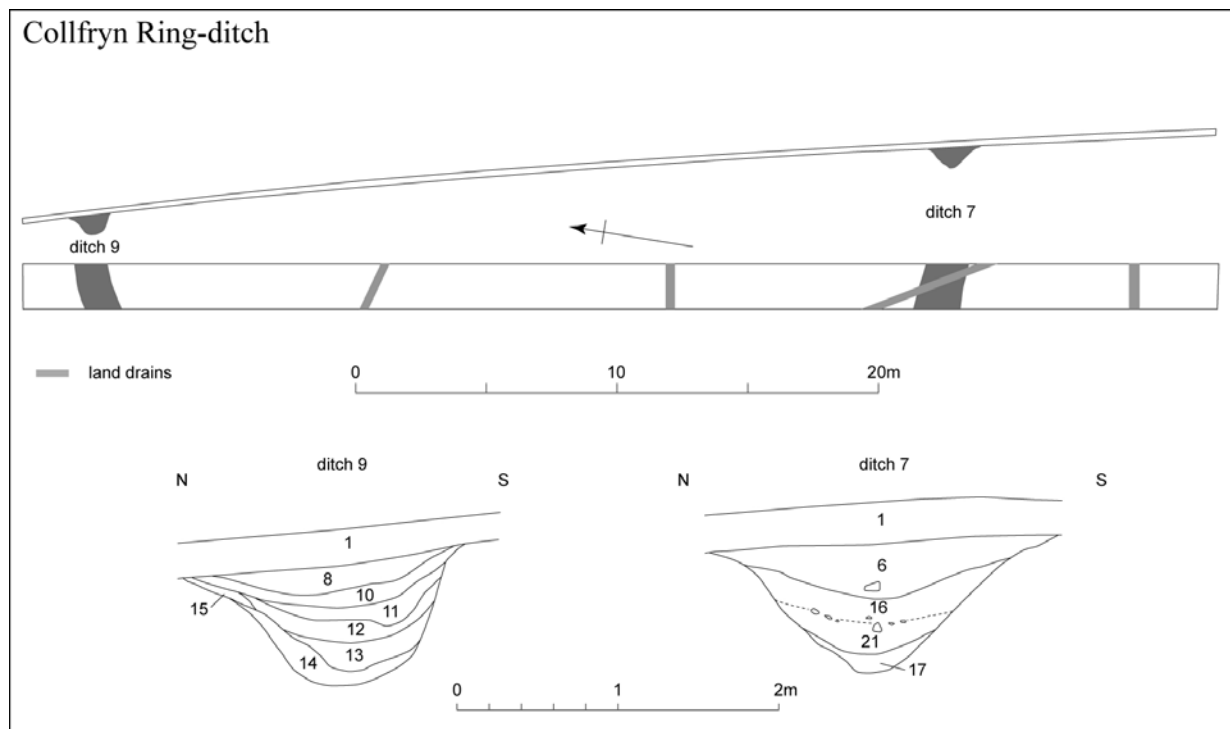


Fig. 4 Excavation plan and sections

- 2.2 Initial cleaning of the trench revealed that the undisturbed natural subsoil was quite variable throughout, with the colour of the clay varying from yellow to wide bands of deep pink-red which traversed the hillslope east to west. The linear banding of the subsoil hampered the identification of archaeological features. Nonetheless, two sections of the ring-ditch were identified, approximately 31m apart, one at either end of the trench (Fig. 4, 7 and 9). The angle of the ditches indicated that the trench had been positioned slightly to the west of the centre.
- 2.3 On the southern side of the ring-ditch the excavations demonstrated that the ditch was 1.8m wide and 0.8m deep, with concave sides, narrowing to a rounded base 0.2m wide (Fig. 5). The basal fill (17) consisted of a firm, yellow silty clay 0.12m thick, which was sealed by a layer of firm,

greyish yellow clay (21) 0.2m thick, both deposits presumably resulting from the initial weathering of the ditch sides. The accumulation of a band of small stones at the interface between layers 21 and 16, a firm grey-yellow silt clay 0.2m thick, suggests a period of stabilisation (Fig. 4). The uppermost ditch fill (6) consisted of a firm, dark grey-brown silty clay 0.34m thick, which is likely to be redeposited bank material, although there was no evidence to indicate whether the bank was internal or external. The upper fills had been cut by a field drain (5), orientated north-west to south-east.



Fig. 5. West-facing section of ditch 7. Photo CPAT 3366-0008

- 2.4 On the northern side of the ring-ditch the ditch (9) was of similar dimensions (1.7m and 0.75m deep), although the profile and depositional sequence was rather different. The ditch had steep, concave sides which narrowed to a slightly broader rounded base (Fig. 6). The basal fill (14) consisted of a firm, mottled yellow-brown silty clay 0.10m thick, similar to fill 17 in the other ditch section (7). Deposits of iron pan within the fill suggest periods of waterlogging. On the outer edge of the ditch, there was evidence for redeposited bank material in the form of a 5mm-thick layer of reddish-pink/brown silty clay (15). The secondary fills (13 and 12) were composed of bluish-grey silty clays with a combined thickness of 0.3m, both containing small fragments of charcoal, samples of which were retained for further analysis. The upper ditch fills (8, 10 and 11) had a combined thickness 0.36m and showed only slight variations in their yellowish-brown colouring, although context 11 contained a lens of sub-angular and rounded stones, while context 10 was characterised by numerous grits and small stones.
- 2.5 The silting pattern of the ditch, and in particular contexts 14 and 15, suggests the presence of an external bank, material from which had been incorporated into the initial silting through natural weathering, and later formed the upper fills as a result of plough action.
- 2.6 No cultural material was forthcoming from the ditches, although bulk soil samples were taken from the basal fill (17) in ditch 7 and two ditch fills (11 and 13) in ditch 9; all of these contain charcoal inclusions and have the potential for providing palaeoenvironmental evidence as well as material suitable for radiocarbon dating.



Fig. 6. West-facing section of ditch 9. Photo CPAT 3366-0006

3 CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 The trial excavations and earlier geophysical survey have confirmed the presence of an unusually large ring-ditch around 36m in diameter defined by a single, narrow ditch, 1.8m wide and around 0.8m deep. The ditch would have produced a relatively small amount of material from which to construct a central mound or surrounding bank. Although there was no surviving bank material the sequence of infilling on the northern side of the ring-ditch suggests that there may have been a bank around the external perimeter of the monument.
- 3.2 No potentially contemporary features were identified in the interior of the ring-ditch and the location of the trench was such that the central point was not investigated. Given the lack of evidence for mound material re-deposited within the ditch, it therefore remains to be determined whether the ring-ditch functioned as a burial monument (possibly with a low-lying central mound), or perhaps had a more ritual function.
- 3.3 The large diameter of the ring-ditch appears to place the site into a category of burial and/or ritual monuments of which other examples have been recognised in the area of the Severn/Vyrnwy confluence, as well as in the Walton Basin in Radnorshire. Excavations in 2009 investigated the largest currently known ring-ditch at Walton Court Farm in the Walton Basin, confirming the presence of a ring-ditch around 100m in diameter with a single ditch 2m wide and 1.4m deep. Radiocarbon dating from hazel charcoal near the base of the ditch provided a date of 2570-2300 cal. BC (Jones 2010) and it is to be hoped that radiocarbon dates will also be forthcoming from the Collfryn ring-ditch to provide comparative evidence.

4 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 4.1 The writer would like to thank the following: Nigel Jones, Wendy Owen and Sophie Watson for assisting with the excavation and survey; Mr Tudor Corbett for allowing access to the site; and Cadw for funding the excavation.

5 REFERENCES

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