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Hen Caerwys Community Excavation, Caerwys, Flintshire

The Fifth Season

Excavation

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Introduction

The background story of Hen Caerwys, hidden away in woodland on the limestone plateau of Flintshire, features both an absorbing archaeological site and an arresting landscape that has previously attracted the attention of several interesting individuals. It has been discussed by us elsewhere, briefly in the several interim reports from past years (Silvester and Davies 2011; 2012; Silvester, Davies and Pudney 2013; Silvester, Davies, Pudney and Belford 2014) and in considerably more detail in successive entries in the web-based project diary that we maintained for most of the period between August 2011 and June 2012, and which at the time of writing is still accessible on the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust website, and which we have now converted and expanded into an article that appeared in the *Transactions of the Flintshire Historical Society* earlier in 2015 (Davies and Silvester 2015).

It is sufficient to note here that the complex that we know as Hen Caerwys, a rural site of medieval date (SJ 1386 7421) was discovered at a date prior to 1960, and was partially excavated by the Flintshire Historical Society between 1962 and 1968 when two house platforms were examined. That work was never properly published by the excavators and for many years anyone interested in the work was wholly reliant on brief notes in various journals, until the late 1970s when a Mr Tom Rogers, who had not been personally involved in the original excavations, published what had been uncovered on one of the house platforms during the previous decade. In the same year the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments in the Welsh Office (the precursor of today's Cadw) scheduled much of the complex, this coinciding (perhaps not accidentally) with abortive plans by Rogers to survey and excavate the site on a major scale.

Not until 1993 was a full survey made of the complex, hardly surprising in view of the fact that virtually all of it was covered by vegetation that must have deterred all but the most resilient and thick-skinned of investigators. Commissioned by Cadw and undertaken by the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust at the instigation of the now defunct Clwyd Archaeology Service, the plan has remained our sole guide to the extent and layout of the earthworks at Hen Caerwys and GAT's achievement in producing it, in conjunction with the landowner, is a constant source of amazement to us when working on site. In 2013 the survey was redrawn at the instigation of Cadw, and this new draft now forms the basis of our Fig. 1.

It was against this background of a site which when first excavated in the 1960s was lauded as the first known, abandoned nucleated medieval settlement in north-east Wales (and is still virtually the only one known) that Cadw and specifically their regional inspector, Will Davies, decided to run a small community excavation during the 2011 Festival of British Archaeology, to re-focus attention on this important site. The success of that trial project led to further annual seasons of work between 2012 and 2015, the last of these forming the subject of the interim report presented here.

The Site

It is not proposed to describe in any detail here the complex of earthworks that make up Hen Caerwys. Briefly, the site lies within several contiguous tracts of mature broadleaved woodland and two adjacent pasture fields, a total area of nearly 12 hectares. The house platforms lie in two discrete groups, both set into south-facing natural scarps and on the plateau above are a number of stone-banked enclosures and fields, and some trackways that

present an irregular appearance. Even if not of two or more phases these earthworks suggest a rather haphazard aggregation of new elements to an existing core. Perhaps later (though there are divergent views on this) is a substantial embanked rectangular enclosure which appears to overlie a bank of the field/enclosure system. Because of their proximity, this could be contemporary with (or at least in contemporary use with) another near square enclosure which contains the low foundations of a house (now recognised as an encroachment cottage) together with a platform set at right angles to it. These suggest a discrete complex set across the earlier fields and enclosures of the more nucleated settlement represented by the house platforms. A second similar cottage complex lies just to the south.

The site is completed by other features that have yet to be fully understood. Further north in the generally inaccessible woodlands and also in the pasture, are both small and large quarry pits, probably of various dates, and occasional lengths of isolated bank which don't immediately fit into the general pattern. What was originally thought to be a very ruined limekiln is located in the western corner of the wood and immediately south of the road that bisects the site.

The Excavations

This season's excavations continued the examination of three features or groups of features first examined in either 2013 or 2014, which for convenience are known by their trench labels. In addition a number of test pits were opened. These together with previous trenches are listed as:

Trench A. Across the bank of the large rectangular enclosure. Opened in 2011, completed in 2012.

Trench B. Placed at the lower end of what was anticipated to be the second platform examined by the Flintshire Historical Society in the mid-1960s. Opened in 2011, completed in 2012.

Trench C. Placed across the lower end of the encroachment cottage and onto the adjacent platform. Opened in 2012, completed in 2013.

Trench D. Test pit near Trench C to establish the depth of soil deposits over the natural limestone. Opened and completed in 2012.

Trench E. Across part of the platform in the western group of buildings. Opened in 2013, continued in 2014 and completed in 2015.

Trench F. Across a field bank where it intersects with the rectangular enclosure bank. Opened in 2013, continued in 2014 and 2015.

Trench G. Test pit to establish the depth of soil deposits over the natural limestone within the large rectangular enclosure. Also used for a University of Bournemouth experiment. Opened and completed in 2013.

Trench H. Across part of a longitudinal platform in the western group of buildings. Opened in 2013 and completed in 2014.

Trench J. Test pit – one of three – to west of Trench E, opened in 2014.

Trench K. Test pit – one of three – to west of Trench E and also west of Trench J, opened in 2014.

Trench L. Test pit – to east of Trench E, opened in 2014.

Trench M. Test pit - to east of Trench E and also east of Trench L, opened in 2014.

Trench N. Test pit – one of three – to west of Trench E and to south of Trench J, opened in 2014.

Trench O. Clearance of features set above and to the north of the house under examination in Trench E, opened in 2014.

Trench P. Test pit – in large rectangular enclosure, towards northern side, opened in 2014.

Trench Q. Test pit – in large rectangular enclosure, south of Trench P, opened in 2014.

Trench R. Test pit – in large rectangular enclosure, south of Trench Q, opened in 2014.

Trench S. Test pit – in large rectangular enclosure, south of Trench R, opened in 2014.

Trench T. Test pit – in large rectangular enclosure, south of Trench S, opened in 2014.

Trench U. Structure originally thought to be a limekiln, then perhaps an ice-house. Clearance and excavation commenced in 2014 and was completed in 2015.

Trench V. Test pit – in large rectangular enclosure, south of Trench T, opened in 2014.

Trench AA. Test pit - in cottage (C) enclosure, opened in 2015.

Trench AB. Test pit - in cottage (C) enclosure, opened in 2015.

Trench AC. Test pit - in cottage (C) enclosure, opened in 2015.

Trench AD. Test pit - in cottage (C) enclosure, opened in 2015.

Trench AE. Test pit - in cottage (C) enclosure, opened in 2015.

Trench AF. Test pit - in cottage (C) enclosure, opened in 2015.

Trench AG. Test pit - in cottage (C) enclosure, opened in 2015.

Trench AH. Test pit - in large rectangular enclosure, NE of trench G, opened in 2015.

The excavations ran from Monday 15 June to Saturday 27 June inclusive. As in previous years the team consisted of supervisory staff (Will Davies from Cadw, Caroline Pudney formerly Cadw but now of the University of Chester, and Bob Silvester and Ian Grant from CPAT), Hen Caerwys regulars who have worked on the site in previous years, new community volunteers, and students from the University of Chester. Numbers on site varied from day to day (see below).

Mike Owens, a member of the Owens family of Caerwys Hall who own the site, and whose enthusiasm and interest in Hen Caerwys have been hugely significant in driving these excavations forward over several years, visited the site on a daily basis and joined in the work in trenches U and AH.

Fig 1. Plan of the earthworks at Hen Caerwys (in green) with trenches, shown diagrammatically, in red. The earthworks plan is the result of a reconfiguration of the original 1993 plan undertaken by CPAT with Cadw funding in February 2013, but does not differentiate between banked features such as walls and boundaries and cut features such as quarries and mine shafts. Because of their small sizes test pits have not been shown.

Trench E

Work in Trench E concluded the partial excavation of the westernmost of the line of platform buildings in Coed Gerddi-Gleision. This achieved the aims of defining its extent, construction and sampling the internal and external deposits exposed in 2013 and 2014. The trench was extended for the full length of the eastern half of the structure in order to establish its full dimensions and the form of the end walls. The northern end of the excavation was expanded further onto the higher ground above the hood of the platform to join with the 2014 trench (Trench O) over a shallow quarry and to investigate several substantial blocks of undressed limestone at the edge of this feature which superficially appeared to be aligned with the eastern wall of the building below. The southern end of the trench was extended over the lower wall of the platform onto the possible track running past the group to the south. Two narrow external trenches were opened to identify the outer faces of the long walls of the building, to explore external ground surfaces and the possibility that further domestic debris had been deposited outside of the eastern wall, in addition to the limited assemblage of bones retrieved from a 2014 test pit, which had been widened to establish the outer face of the east wall just above the possible door threshold uncovered in 2013. The eastern external trench ran

the entire length of the outer wall face from its uphill junction with the bedrock, incorporating the western half of the expanded test pit, and to the ruined southern wall, where a tree prevented further work. The western trench was an extension of a small 2014 trench which had failed to identify an outer face towards the upper end of the west wall.

The building measured 11.7m long (N-S) by 3.9m wide internally and was defined by stone walls of unsorted, uncoursed limestone rubble, incorporating at random a number of large boulders up to 1m long. Where both faces were exposed the walls ranged between 0.6-0.7m thick on the east and 0.8m on the south. The northern wall (TE28) survived to a height of approximately 1m above the internal level of the platform, the long walls (TE4 & 5) surviving to a maximum of 0.5m to the west and 0.7m towards the upper end of the east, both diminishing in height and preservation towards the lower end of the platform where the southern wall (TE25) survived to a mere 0.3m or so above its rubble footing. The walls were of different construction, the east (TE5) and south (TE25) being freestanding with clearly defined faces whilst the western wall (TE4) seems instead to have comprised a mass of rubble of a comparable thickness to the eastern wall laid into a terrace cut into the natural clay (TE18). No outer face to the west wall was identified in the external trench although it is possible that one may formerly have existed at a higher level, the well-preserved inner face effectively acting as a revetment.

Fig 2. The north-east corner of the building.

The form of the northern wall at the hood of the terrace was something of a surprise. Rather than being cut into or laid against the bedrock as had been expected, it took the form of a solidly built revetment (TE28) still standing 1m high, holding back an area of gravelly orange clay (TE29) in the angle formed between the building and the vertical face of the limestone outcrop. From the junction of the bedrock and the east wall this space increased to 1.1m wide north to south from the face of the wall to the bedrock at the western limit of the excavation, presumably increasing further as the outcrop diverged further from the platform to the north-west. At this point the bedrock rose a further 0.8m above the present wall head. It is possible that the clay fill fulfilled a function in sealing the upper end of the building from ground water running through the limestone, which seems to have been a problem in the first house excavated by the Flintshire Historical Society. The north-east corner of the building rested on a seemingly worked slab of bedrock, which cut across the internal angle and could possibly have supported a timber post. To the south of this, the northern section of the eastern wall was revealed to be based on a lower surface of the outcrop rather than deliberately laid slabs as previously assumed.

Fig 3. Looking down on the excavated building from the north.

The southern, downhill end of building was relatively poorly preserved, the section of the eastern wall below the probable doorway TE12/14 being reduced to a course or so of its core. This was almost impossible to distinguish from the underlying rubble slabs of its footings and the platform itself (TE30), as was the case with the last remains of the long wall in this area of the Trench B house excavated in 2011-12. More survived of the southern wall (TE28), of which the eastern half was excavated and had been badly disturbed by the roots of a tree at its south-east corner. It still stood to a height of approximately 0.3m externally above its slab foundation, defined at the south-eastern corner by a very large boulder spanning the thickness of the wall, which was visible on the surface at the start of excavation. The wall was still partly bonded by a sandy yellow / orange clay, a similar material forming a levelling layer below its lowest courses (TE33), which were again difficult to distinguish from the rubble platform

(TE30) itself, further clay having apparently washed from the walls onto its surface and into the lower rubble. The external face of the southern wall had slumped outwards to the south into a hollow filled with rubble within a similar sandy yellow-brown clay (TE32) to that inside the building. It was clear that the platform ended with the outer face of the southern wall, which stood directly on the edge of the possible east-west track running past the buildings, the southern limit of which lay beyond the excavation. Above the upper end of the platform the shallow topsoil mulch and rubble were stripped down to the bedrock, which began to level out over 2m above the floor of the building. The short row of uncut boulders (TE31) against the edge of the small quarry explored in 2014 was shown to have no structural qualities and probably represented unused material dragged from the quarry; a similar fallen slab rested on the upper rubble fill of the platform at the level of the northern wall head (TE28).

The east wall (TE5) had a well preserved external face of irregularly sized undressed rubble, surviving up to 0.6m in height and between 0.5 and 0.6m thick. The eastern external trench further defined the junction of the wall with a vertical fall in the bed bedrock, the re-entrant angle formed between the wall and the face of the outcrop extending to the south-east containing a modest quantity of mixed animal bone at the base of the lowest rubble deposit (TE20). Both this and the bottom course of the wall rested on the stiff, mottled red-orange clay deposit (TE21) identified as natural elsewhere, on and adjacent to the platform. The external clay ground surface sloped gently downhill interrupted by a shallow gully (TE36) just above the possible doorway to the building. This measured 0.4m wide by 0.15m deep, running almost at a right angle from the east wall for 1.8m and beyond the excavation and filled with the same lower rubble (TE20) present throughout the trench.

The internal stratigraphy explored in 2013-4 comprised successive layers of rubble associated with the inward collapse or possibly deliberate destruction of the walls. The main rubble contexts were of similar form throughout the trench but of considerably greater depth at the hood of the platform where the walls could only fall inwards. Below this, the upper end of the platform contrasted with the lower, where the rubble directly overlay the bedrock (TE6,8), which had possibly been adapted as a crude paved floor through the packing of thin slabs of limestone to level out irregularities in the limestone pavement. Over much of the northern half of the platform the rubble overlay a shallow layer of compact dark brown, organic rich clay with charcoal flecks (TE15), containing several discrete areas of charcoal, burnt clay and burnt limestone (TE13). The surface of this deposit contained a modest quantity of small animal bones and was set aside until 2015 for excavation as part of a possible floor or domestic debris.

The contrasting surfaces were separated by a ridge in the bedrock running roughly across the centre of the platform and in line with the possible door in the east wall. Occupying a central position on this line and excavated in 2013 were a pair of probable rock-cut stake holes (TE10, 11) at the southern limit of the darker deposit TE15, tentatively interpreted as a possible partition between two different areas of activity. At this point the east wall had collapsed inwards and terminated in a gap approximately 1.3m wide interpreted as a doorway. The inner, northern side of this coincided with a further possible rock-cut stake hole (TE12), the putative threshold of the doorway comprising a well-defined surface of densely packed and compacted small rubble slabs (TE14). The width of this (1.3m) indicated that of the possible doorway, the southern rebate of which had collapsed. A relatively clean fan-like deposit of fine, orange brown silty clay and gravel below the rubble and against the sides of the building (TE7) is interpreted as bonding material washed from the walls themselves during the initial piecemeal stages of decay. Under this was the natural sandy or gravelly orange clay

(TE18/21/34), levelled out to form the surface of the platform and supporting the footings of the walls.

The extended trench of 2015 was excavated to the bottom of the internal rubble collapse, re-exposing the surfaces uncovered in 2013-4 and the whole area cleaned and recorded. The depth of rubble and the contrasting underlying clay and compacted limestone surfaces at the opposing ends of the building corresponded with the respective deposits recorded in previous seasons. The removal of over 1m of rubble immediately within northern wall of the building revealed that the darker possible floor deposit TE15 came to an abrupt halt approximately 0.7m from the northern wall face (TE28), the initial collapse lying upon a clean, sandy, orange-brown clay (TE34) and indicating this initially promising layer to be later than the primary collapse of the building. Cleaning, followed by sampling of approximately 50% of this material revealed it to be less than 0.1m deep, the patches of burnt clay and charcoal being resolved as a series of shallow and poorly defined lenses within it. Bulk samples were retrieved from three areas of these deposits and will be processed for possible environmental and dating evidence.

The dark material overlay a mottled, orange-brown gravelly clay (TE18/21) observed throughout the northern half of the building and continuing under both long walls into the external trenches. Interpreted as a natural soil, terraced and levelled to form the surface of the platform and the footings of most of the walls (with the exception of the bedrock-founded north-east corner) this clay undulated and varied in depth with the underlying bedrock which protruded through it at the north-western corner of the excavation. The cleaner sandy, orange-brown clay under the northern wall is likely to represent the same levelling process.

At the southern end of the building the rubble (TE24) was no more than 0.3m in depth and overlay a more compact layer of larger limestone slabs within a fine, yellow-orange sandy clay (TE32), the upper surface of which contained a small amount of bone and a handful of post medieval metal and ceramic finds. This is interpreted as the initial clay wash from and inward collapse of the walls, albeit disturbed by the roots the adjacent coppiced tree on the south-east corner of the building. Closely echoing the sequence identified at the lower end of the platform house in Trench B in 2011-2, this lay on top of but was difficult to distinguish from the shattered and possibly modified bedrock (TE6/8) forming the surface of the platform.

Initial thoughts

Whilst the general form of the building and its platform were similar to those excavated by the Flintshire Historical Society in the 1960s, with the exception of the possible stake holes (TE10, 11 & 12) and door threshold (TE14) the interior of the building revealed a marked lack of internal features, contrasting starkly with the apparent post holes, hearth and drainage gullies reported by Leach and Pennant Williams on their House A. It is possible either that the roof was supported by single span timbers resting on wall plates or that any internal posts stood on pad-stones, which were not unidentifiable within the mass of limestone rubble, the only possible seating being on the projecting slab of bedrock at the north-east corner. Similarly, the finds-rich internal 'occupation' deposits described in House A were entirely absent from the Trench E house, the potential floor surface TE15 post-dating the initial collapse of the building. This is tentatively interpreted as the product of a brief episode of re-use, perhaps as a shelter or animal fold within the ruins, as implied by the limited areas of burning and small quantity of bones and post medieval finds on its upper surface. Bulk

samples were retrieved from this and a decision will be made on if and how these are processed at a later date.

Whilst the few pottery sherds retrieved from below the rubble in 2013-4 are of broadly comparable late or early post-medieval date to the few surviving pieces from the 1960s excavations, no other diagnostic finds were retrieved from a convincing early context. The lack of internal finds can perhaps be explained as the product of regular cleaning, the caches of animal bone from the external eastern trench and a small dump of cockle shells outside the western wall possibly representing dumping relating to the use of the building. It is highly unlikely that later stock trampling or weathering will have removed in their entirety the kinds of deposit described by Leach and Pennant Williams. The possible function of the building and a full sequence of activity will be discussed in the final report.

Trench F

Trench F was initially opened in 2013 to investigate the intersection between the corner of the main enclosure bank and a linear bank running roughly north to south. In 2013 we were able to establish the construction method of the north-south linear bank and revealed the outer edge of the main enclosure. It appeared that the bank was of an earlier date than the enclosure, although no firm dating material had been found that could place either of these features within any specific period. Therefore in 2014 the objectives were to reveal and investigate the full width of the enclosure bank and to recover any dating evidence for the features. A relatively large quantity of animal bone was recovered from within the make-up of the enclosure wall. The working hypothesis was that the enclosure was formed by a wall rather than a bank since the construction consisted of two clear faces (one inner and one outer), and a rubble core. The subsequent collapse of the wall into the enclosure thus gave the appearance of a bank.

The prime objective for 2015 was to remove the final layers of the collapsed wall and reveal and excavate any other surviving layers which may predate the enclosure. There was for example, potential that traces of the north-south linear bank may still survive, running beneath the wall and into the enclosure. Another possibility was the presence of a buried soil which could then provide some datable material. The main focus of the excavations therefore lay within the north-west corner of the 2014 trench, in a sondage measuring 2m x 4m. Excavations did not reveal the natural bedrock (034) in all areas of the trench but instead exposed stratigraphy made up of a number of unexpected features.

Phase 1: The gully
The earliest feature exposed was a vertical sided but stepped, flat-bottomed, curvilinear cut or gully (032), running off under the section edge on a roughly east-west axis.

The feature was cut into the natural bedrock and as excavated, measured <0.80m in length, 0.60m in width and <0.72m deep. It had a single fill (033), made up of firmly packed angular stones (10-20cm), within a dark yellow-brown, sandy silt. An environmental sample of the fill (033) was collected (50%) and while no obvious datable material or finds were recovered some charcoal flecks were present. The way in which the stones had filled the cut appeared as though they had been deliberately placed giving the impression that they were either holding something like a stake in place or that feature had been purposefully backfilled. However, no clear stake-holes were observed on excavation and it is therefore likely that the gully was backfilled in order to lay the metalled surface (035), which was found to seal the feature.

Fig 4. The gully after excavation.

Phase 2: The metalled surface
The metalled surface (035) was made up of mixed rounded and angular ironstone, limestone and a blue/grey stone of uncertain composition and ranging in size from 0.03m to 0.15m.

Between the rather crudely packed stones was friable, mid-light brown silt. The compaction of the surface varied and was overcut in places where it was particularly loose. The variations in the arrangement and packing of the stones suggested that the surface may have been patched on various occasions during its use. The surface remains unexcavated although as just stated, was overcut in places, especially in the north-west corner where the context was

much more mixed as a result of root disturbance. This area was therefore given a specific context number (026) so as to keep the finds separate; these included small fragments of animal bone and teeth, burnt or fire-cracked stone and some fragments of metal slag.

Fig 5. The metalled surface constituting phase 2.

Phase 3: Wall and associated feature

The metalled surface was directly overlain by a linear structure that has been interpreted as a wall (028), which remains unexcavated. The wall was oriented roughly north-south (not quite on the same axis as 'gully' (032) and physically situated just within the western limit of the trench, to south of the earlier gully. With only one course surviving and only one proper face and part of the core visible within the trench, the full nature of construction was difficult to establish. The stones had clearly been faced on eastern side and possibly also on the north, suggesting this was the terminus. If any further faces exist, they lie beyond the limit of excavation. The surviving course was clay bonded, and thus quite unlike most of the other stone-built structures on the site, including the north-south bank and enclosure wall within this trench, which were both of drystone construction. The bonding had possibly leached out of the wall and combined with accumulated material to form small a deposit of silty clay (030), which did not spread much beyond 20cm from the wall and which physically overlay the metalled surface (035). It appeared as though it may contain some organic remains and a 10 litre sample of the silty clay was kept for processing and analysis.

Feature (031) was situated directly to the north of the wall, possible abutting it, but this relationship is currently undefined. It is possible that both features form part of the same structure; however, this is difficult to establish with such small amounts visible within the trench and with both this feature and wall (028) remaining unexcavated. The exposed parts of feature (031) consisted of large stones of similar size to the wall stones but several of these had been placed on-end and at a slanting angle. At present the function of this feature is uncertain although if the wall section is a terminus, together these structures could relate to a

timber sill beam which no longer survives but such an interpretation remains conjecture for the time being.

Fig 6. The linear structure, perhaps a wall, in Trench F.

Phase 4: north-south linear bank

A layer of large flat stones (027) of similar proportion to those within the wall was revealed at the same height and abutting both the wall (028) and feature (031). These had clearly been deliberately laid to create a flat surface since they were very unlike any other rubble layer previously seen in this part of the trench and thus did not appear to be tumble/collapse from the enclosure wall. The layer filled the majority of the sondage but in plan it had a curved north-west edge. In this area therefore, it did not physically overlie the metalled surface. This distinct line roughly corresponded to the line of the linear gully (032), buried beneath and is likely the result of rooting in the north-west corner of the trench which considerably disturbed the stratigraphy in this area. Owing to the similar make up of this layer and the stones within wall (028), it is possible that this layer was made up of stones from the wall, which was deliberately dismantled for this purpose since many of the stones in layer (027) also seemed to have been faced.

There was a distinct area (025) associated with this layer which physically overlay the wall and associated feature. Here the stones were lying more upright and on-edge than they were in the rest of the context. It is currently uncertain whether these formed part of the bank make-up or were instead associated with the layers of tumble above.

To the south the flat stone layer continued beneath the enclosure wall and was found to be same as layer (011), which was revealed in 2014. Both these layers form part of the north-south bank, which was now proven to extend to the north of the line of the enclosure wall.

Fig 7. The large flat stones forming a surface in Trench F.

Phase 5: The enclosure bank

The enclosure wall was constructed on top of the north-south bank however, the level at which this happened requires consideration. It is possible that it was at the level of context (027), however, overlying this was a thick layer of small stones (029), upon which the inner facing stones of the enclosure was set. This layer of small stones could have formed a foundation or bedding for the enclosure wall or alternatively could have formed the upper layers of the north-south bank. Unfortunately, during excavation it was difficult to establish the difference but it is likely that a mixture of the two interpretations is the most appropriate. The layer of stones was probably used initially as construction material for the north-south bank but was then re-used and modified in order to create a flat surface upon which the enclosure wall could be constructed. A number of animal bone fragments and burnt or fire-cracked stones were recovered from the stone layer. Some of the animal bone has been identified as having potential for radio-carbon dating.

The construction of the enclosure bank was established in 2014.[1]

[1] See CPAT Report No. 1290 for details

Phase 6: Collapse
This year we removed the final layers of collapse and accumulation associated with the decay of the enclosure wall. These layers had physically sealed the north-south bank (027), wall (028), feature (031) and the metalled surface (035). The earliest evidence of this phase of collapse/decay consisted of a mixed layer (020), of collapsed material and accumulated silt. The layer composed approximately >50% mid orange-brown compact silt and <50% limestone measuring <15cm. This was directly overlain in the area next to the enclosure wall by very loose yellow-orange sandy silt (024). This sandy-silt had inclusions (c.10%) of small, angular stones. This directly abutted the lowest construction layer of the enclosure (029) and was overlain by the upper layers of collapse as excavated in 2014 and 2013.

Overview of Trench F
The 2015 excavations revealed a number of phases that predate the enclosure and proved that traces of the north-south bank did still survive beneath the enclosure wall and into the enclosure itself. Previous working interpretations have placed the north-south bank within the prehistoric period (Bronze Age?) due to some flint tools found within its make-up. The overlying enclosure had therefore been situated within later prehistory, especially considering the similarity in construction to other Iron Age defended sites. However, one of the earliest hypotheses placed the enclosure within the medieval period or possibly even later based upon its landscape relationship with the platform houses and post-medieval cottage on the common land. The discovery of the stratigraphy in 2015 surely puts into question a later prehistoric date for the enclosure. The wall (028) appears to be by far the best-built structure within this part of the site, in that the stones have been faced and bonded with clay, which is in contrast to the drystone character of the north-south bank and the enclosure wall. The wall discovered this year is also associated with a metalled surface (035), which in turn seals a rock-cut gully (032). This type of wall construction and surface are not commonly known in prehistoric contexts within Flintshire and a Roman date for these would not be surprising. As such, a date for the enclosure somewhere in historic period is perhaps the most likely at this stage. The flint recovered within the north-south bank in 2013 may therefore be residual. The radiocarbon dates from the make-up of the enclosure wall are forthcoming and this will hopefully allow us to put the stratigraphy and phasing more firmly within in a chronological context.

Trench U

Trench U (though strictly speaking less a trench, more an area containing related features) is located more than 200m to the west of what has been the main focus of the excavations (see Fig. 1) and though close to the road that bisects the scheduled area, it lies well away from existing permissive paths through the woodlands of what is known to the Ordnance Survey as Coed Gerddi-gleision, at approximately SJ 1360 7415.

Prior to its examination the main feature showed as an embanked circular structure rising above the general ground level as this appeared on the east, its interior seemingly choked by collapsed limestone rubble. Leading into it was what can be described as a stone-lined channel with some capstones in place which in turn provided a paved entrance through the wall of the structure into the interior. A large larch had taken root in the rubble on the south side of the 'pit' and smaller saplings were also bedded into the feature and around its rim (see Fig

Fig 8. The 'pit' in Trench U prior to examination. Part of the entrance is just visible at the bottom of the photo.

The ground around the feature is far from even, largely because of the level of industrial activity that has occurred. Immediately to the east of the pit is a shallow quarry, while beyond its northern rim the ground drops into another more extensive area of quarrying, its configuration more difficult to appreciate because of the dense ground vegetation. To the south only a few metres separates the feature from a boundary fence that edges a pasture field. Such is the scale of the industrial activity that it is difficult to distinguish the natural level of the ground from the man-made cuttings and the upcast from these. Our impression, and it can be no more than that, is that the original ground surface dropped gently from north to south, but there may have been a slightly more marked slope, perhaps even a limestone outcrop though of no great height, where the eastern quarry had been created.

In 2014, the pit itself was not investigated, but the channel leading into it was partially excavated where the deposits had been exposed by the removal of the capstone at some point in the past. Fig 9 provides an impression of the form of this channel, prior to excavation, the figure in the yellow high-visibility jacket crouching in the channel and peering beneath an in-situ capstone. This year much of the channel was cleared of debris, the capstones fully exposed where they were still in place, the area immediately to the east of what appeared to be the end of the channel was cleaned in the search for any extension, and some rubble clearance occurred both inside and outside the pit.

The pit. Rubble collapse hinders a full appreciation of the form of the pit. The embankment is likely to obscure a wall that rises almost to the surface of the bank as currently seen: this though is presumption rather than proven fact. Even before any rubble was cleared, it was evident from one or two exposures that coursed drystone masonry rose almost to the top of the embankment, but no attempt was made to follow these upwards, and the embankment was left in an undisturbed condition. Nevertheless it can confidently be suggested that the internal diameter at the mouth of the pit is in the order of 5.6m and not the 12.5m inadvertently recorded in the interim report of last year.

Fig 9. The pit and its associated channel as it appeared in February 2012. The individual in the high visibility jacket is kneeling in the infilled channel.

It was from the sides adjacent to the channel entrance that rubble was removed. This confirmed that drystone walling continued down into the pit to create a conical chamber with a vertical depth in excess of the *** to which the rubble was cleared. The limestone rubble from which the inner face was fashioned was largely unweathered and in the areas exposed showed no signs of heat discolouration, other than in one very small area where reddening could have been due to a different factor. The wall face thus created was markedly poorer in its appearance than that of the outer face and also of the walling of the channel (see below), but it is unclear whether this was in part a result of having to build an inward-sloping wall.

The clearance of collapsed rubble against the inner wall face of the pit exposed a deposit of fine grey silt, ash-like in colour though not in consistency. A bulk sample of this material was taken in the anticipation that its analysis might tell us more of its origin. Its thickness remains an unknown though it did appear to lap up the side of the wall rather than being a level deposit across the interior, and equally it is not possible to determine whether it coats the base of the chamber or lies on top of other deposits.

The thickness of the wall around the chamber – 1.4m - was already apparent from the wall face on the south side of the entrance (see Fig 00). What cannot be established is whether this was maintained for the entire perimeter; the north face was too disturbed by tree roots for accurate measurement. Only a short section of the outer wall face was encountered because, unexpectedly a second outer wall face was encountered to the south of the entrance and was exposed for a distance of about 2.7m. Its curve was such that it almost certainly mirrored that of the first wall; outer face to outer wall face measured around 0.6m. Rubble filled the space

between the two faces, the second wall being only one stone thick, but in the small area examined it was not possible to determine whether this was original wall core or material that had collapsed into the cavity between the two faces.

The entrance The entrance gap narrowed slightly to 0.7m as it ran into the interior, though whether this was deliberate cannot be known. It was paved with thick limestone slabs up to 800mm by 600mm which as already noted were also the capstones for the channel beneath. Beyond the point where the flooring emerged from between the wall terminals, at least two paving slabs had been displaced, though one of these was subsequently encountered in the fill of the channel beneath. However, there were then two further paving slabs, but more irregular in form and at 1.8m from the outer wall face the slab floor stopped, approximately in line with what appeared to be the termination of the channel beneath, although the capstones were not lifted to confirm that this was the case.

Fig 9. The channel after excavation, with a paving slab in place above.

The channel. Below the paved floor was a channel about 1.1m deep, some of which was cleared of its fill in 2014, as described in last year's interim report (Silvester *et al* 2014, 13-15). The base of the channel was fashioned from the limestone bedrock to give a gently ascending floor as

it passed beneath the paved entrance from the edge of the pit through the pit's wall, then rising in a step and finally sloping sharply upwards as the paving came to an end, indicating that paving was only put in place where the channel existed beneath it. The sides of the channel were composed of well-laid unmortared blocks of limestone rubble, providing good walling for the capstones/paving to rest on. Care had to be taken in clearing out the channel, with safety beneath the in-situ capstones being a priority, but enough of the deposits were removed to demonstrate that the channel did open out into the pit.

The basal fill of the channel was a gleyed silty clay which contained occasional fragments of coal, mortar and lime, and overlying this was a similar deposit though one with rather more lumps of limestone in it. At one point a collapsed capstone separated this material from what was above, a deliberate dump of rubbish probably of 20th-century date that included pottery and china, glass, tin and animal bone. In 2014, a thick band of mortar was encountered in the more easterly part of the channel (away from the pit). This showed at a relatively low level in the build up of deposits within the channel, and was evidently localised because it did not show as a continuous layer further west towards the pit, but its significance cannot be determined, though a temporal relationship to the mortar found on the surface elsewhere (for which see below) seems probable.

Beyond the paving. Clearance over the outer capstones was extended over an area of about 8m². Initially, this was done to determine whether further slabs had become covered and thus not visible on the surface, but there absence was confirmed for a further 2.5m. However, disturbed ground did appear to be present and voids in the limestone rubble were also exposed so the deposits were tested in a sondage in line with the capped channel, but no more than 1m by 1m in size. A natural limestone face was encountered, angular and with sharp arrises to the faces, indicative of very limited exposure. The sondage was filled with large blocks of limestone best described as being dumped in to fill the hole, with large voids or air pockets between. Some blocks neared 800mm long, but only one was removed, sufficient to demonstrate that the material was not compacted and that the hole was potentially at least 0.9m deep and perhaps rather more. For health and safety reasons no further excavation was undertaken. Adhering to and between the limestone rubble on and just beneath the surface were patches of mortar which bonded some of the rubble together.

The most logical explanation for the feature is that this was a quarry, perhaps an extension of the visible quarry immediately to the east. That it had been backfilled with large blocks of fresh limestone and then consolidated with mortar suggests that the hole was an obstacle, presumably to the paved approach to the pit so it had been filled up to create a stable surface.

Elsewhere in the clearance area, a thin spread of mortar were encountered sporadically, just below the ground surface. This appeared to be continuous close to the outer wall face where the ground was cleared. We are inclined to the view that this thin skin was the residue from mixing mortar whose primary purpose was in the consolidation of the stone the filled the quarry.

Conclusions. Does any of this take us closer to determining the function of this feature? Over the weeks on site, various interpretations have been proposed: mine-shaft; saw pit, limekiln, corn-drying kiln and ice house, and this list is unlikely to be exhaustive. The first three of these can, for one reason or another, be dismissed. But we need to do more research into comparable features elsewhere before we commit to a particular interpretation.

Fig 10. The pit at the end of the excavation.

The Test Pits

As noted above in the section on past excavations, we examined a cottage in 2012-3 (Trench C) which sat in its own enclosure to the east of the large rectangular enclosure that was under investigation in Trench F. One of the surprises of the section across the cottage was the discovery of a few Romano-British pottery sherds, from which it was inferred that there was probably activity of that period in the vicinity. Test-pitting within the cottage enclosure offered a feasible approach to identifying more Roman material and confirming that there was Roman activity nearby, and with a requirement to provide suitable sondages for Caerwys primary school to learn a little about field archaeology (see below), the enclosure seemed an appropriate venue.

Seven test pits, averaging 1m by 1m in size were set out near the cottage and were started by the pupils and later completed by the community volunteers. Material was very sparse. Only one test-pit produced any pottery, a single sherd of post-medieval origin. More might have been expected, particularly if the enclosure had been utilised for garden and plots associated with the cottage which were regularly manured. Evidently this was not the case.

A further test-pit was excavated in the large rectangular enclosure, close to where the Bournemouth experiment occurred in Trench G in 2013. This confirmed the greater depth of soil encountered in the southern sector of the rectangular enclosure in 2013, and that there was a larger amount of cultural debris – pottery, coal, (?) burnt stone and a bronze spiral ring – than in other test-pits dug in the enclosure.

Finds

As in recent seasons 2015 proved not to be a productive year in terms of artefacts. What was recovered has yet to be processed, so only a few preliminary remarks can be made on the basis of on-site observations. Animal bone was by far the most prevalent material, appearing as casually dumped rubbish in both Trenches E and F. Unlike last year Trench F did not yield any flints and pottery from Trench E was evident only from its absence; indeed a cursory examination of the finds register suggests that not a single sherd was recovered from E. It did however produce a solitary whetstone. Most prolific was the rubbish deposit in the channel leading into the pit in Trench U, but as noted above this material was almost certainly dumped in there in the 20th century.

Community involvement

As in previous years this has proved an extremely rewarding project. Hen Caerwys attracted a slightly lower number of community volunteers than in 2014 with the number dropping back from 24 to 22, the same as in 2013. Excluding core staff the average number across the entire thirteen days was 6.6 and as in 2014 we were delighted to welcome back quite a number of old friends, at least ten having worked at Hen Caerwys during an earlier season.

The continuing involvement of the local primary school, Ysgol yr Esgob, with Hen Caerwys led to another day in the field on Thursday 25 June for around thirty pupils. The highlight for them was certainly the excavation of the test pits in the afternoon, but the whole day followed a similar course to that in 2014 and was detailed in last year's interim report.

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