



Bangor University

The Meillionydd Project: Characterising the double ringwork enclosures in Gwynedd

Preliminary Excavation Report



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Cover image: working shot of Trench 3, facing northeast, showing a site tour under way (photo: R. Karl). The hillforts of Tre'r Ceiri, Garn Fadryn and Garn Boduan can be seen to the northeast in the distance.

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Introduction

The research context

This excavation project is designed to explore a ‘double ringwork’ hilltop enclosure at Meillionydd, near Rhiw, in Gwynedd (Figure 1).¹ The fieldwork is related to research being carried out as part of the ‘Early Celtic Societies in North Wales’ project, which is investigating the settlements and hillforts of northwest Wales from the Late Bronze Age to the end of the Early Medieval period (c. 1150 BC – AD 1150). Despite producing the most well preserved, abundant and comprehensively surveyed settlements in Wales (Smith 2001), the archaeology of northwest Wales remains under-researched and poorly understood. Limited modern excavations have been carried out; chronologies are not well defined; sites are unproductive in terms of dateable finds; and environmental assemblages are rare. The emergence and development of monumental foci, such as the hillforts, ringworks and hilltop enclosures, remain particularly enigmatic (although see Crew 1985 for the results of extensive excavations carried out at the hillfort site of Bryn y Castell, Gwynedd).

The development of settlement monumentality in the first half of the first millennium BC represents a fundamental re-orientation of some community’s identities, beliefs and values. The monuments are frequently interpreted as representing economic intensification, when the

power bases, previously centred on the manipulation of long-distance bronze exchange networks, were re-orientated towards the control of agricultural production and the land. While important, this view has oversimplified social practice and has effectively led to a homogenised perspective of ways of life, innovation and change during this crucial period of transition.

Unusual characteristics of the north Welsh evidence are the occurrence of early phases of hillfort construction in the latter part of the Late Bronze Age (c. ninth – eighth century BC), such as The Breiddin in Powys (Musson 1991), Moel y Gaer in Clwyd (Guilbert 1975) and Castell Odo in Gwynedd (Alcock 1960). Castell Odo is an extremely important site and belongs to a poorly understood group of monuments concentrated in Anglesey and the Llŷn Peninsula, termed ‘weak double ringworks’ (RCAHMW 1964).ⁱⁱ Initial occupation at this site consists of a timber palisaded enclosed settlement associated with timber roundhouses and dark earth artefact-rich deposits, which were sealed beneath the earlier Iron Age bank.ⁱⁱⁱ The dark earth deposits may possess some parallels with contemporary dark earth occupation deposits or ephemeral midden accumulations, concentrated underneath or against the banks of hilltop enclosures in southern Britain (Waddington 2009).^{iv} The potential occurrence of this type of deposit in North Wales is a phenomenon that requires further consideration. In the Early Iron Age, the site was developed through the construction of two circular concentric stone banks which enclosed eight stone roundhouses. The double ringwork sites offer a unique and as yet largely untapped resource for creating refined chronologies and for studying the origins and development of settlement monumentality in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age transition.

Location and site description

This project is designed to explore a ‘double ringwork’ enclosure at Meillionydd, Rhiw, located at NGR SH21902905, on the south-western end of the Llŷn Peninsula in Gwynedd, northwest Wales (see Figure 1).^v The site is recorded in the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Historic Environment Record under PRN 1205. The site is located on a gently rounded hilltop, at 190m OD, with excellent views of the western tip of the Llŷn Peninsula and surrounding coast, as well as other parts of Gwynedd, such as Anglesey (Figure 2). The hilltop forms a spur projecting from the higher slopes of Mynydd Rhiw, where the Neolithic axe-factory is located, alongside two additional double ringwork enclosures which are not visible from the site, that of Conion (PRN 1207) and Castell Caeron (PRN 1234) (see Figure 1). The double ringwork enclosure of Castell Odo is clearly visible from the hilltop to the west, and the impressive stone Iron Age hillforts of Tre’r Ceiri, Garn Boduan and Garn Fadryn can be seen in the distance to the northeast.

The site was recently the focus of investigation through geophysical survey by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, which targeted an additional four double ringwork sites on the Llŷn Peninsula and two on Anglesey (Smith and Hopewell 2007).^{vi} The work has further enhanced the significance of these site types, which appear to be focussed largely on the Llŷn Peninsula and Anglesey and represent a fairly distinct regional tradition.

Meillionydd was targeted in this project due to the excellent results of the geophysical survey (Smith and Hopewell 2007). As well as confirming the presence of a circular concentric bivallate hilltop enclosure, about 105m by 85m, the survey was notable for the strength of anomalies encountered. The periphery of the internal enclosure is partly defined by a band of intense activity that includes a number of roundhouses (Figures 3 and 4). The magnetic

readings encountered appear to be associated with occupation deposits and spreads of burnt stones. This interpretation was supported by a series of test soil pits which were excavated during the survey work and demonstrated the presence of dark earth silts with burnt stones in the areas of the magnetic enhancement^{vii} (Pits 11, 16 and 17; see Figure 4; Smith and Hopewell 2007).^{viii} The necessary interpretation and dating of this site could only be provided by a subsequent programme of excavation.

Research Objectives

The project aims to test whether Meillionydd has Late Bronze Age origins and is associated with occupation deposits, similar to those recovered from Castell Odo, as well as to:

- i. gather data on the construction and phasing of the enclosure boundaries;
- ii. assess the stratigraphic relationship between the earthworks and internal deposits and structural features;
- iii. produce dateable materials and provide a chronological sequence for the site;
- iv. assess the site's potential for the production of Late Bronze Age artefact-rich deposits and ceramics.

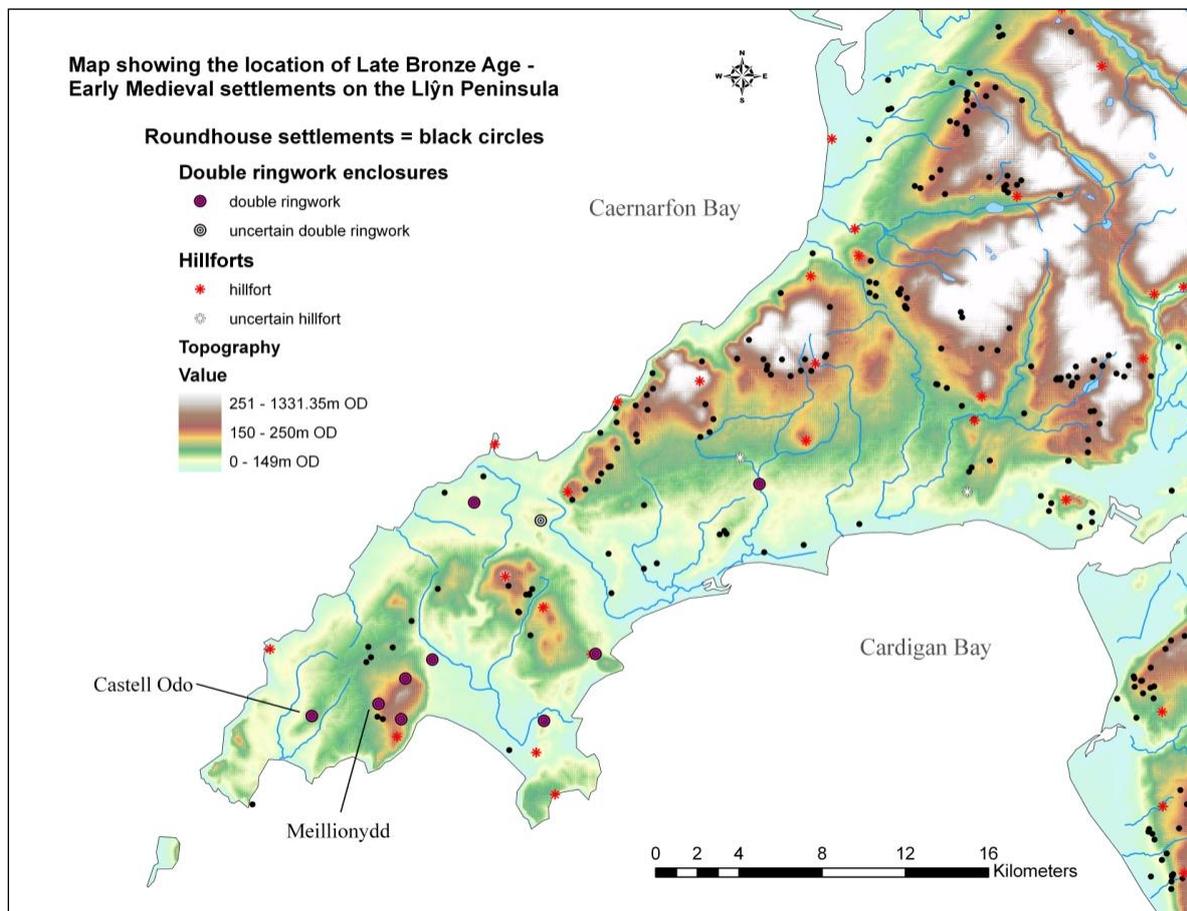


Figure 1 Map of the Llŷn Peninsula, showing the location of sites mentioned in the text as well as the location of all other later prehistoric hillfort and settlement sites (image: K. Waddington).



Figure 2 Shot of views over the western tip of the Llyn Peninsula, from the top of the hilltop enclosure at Meillionydd.

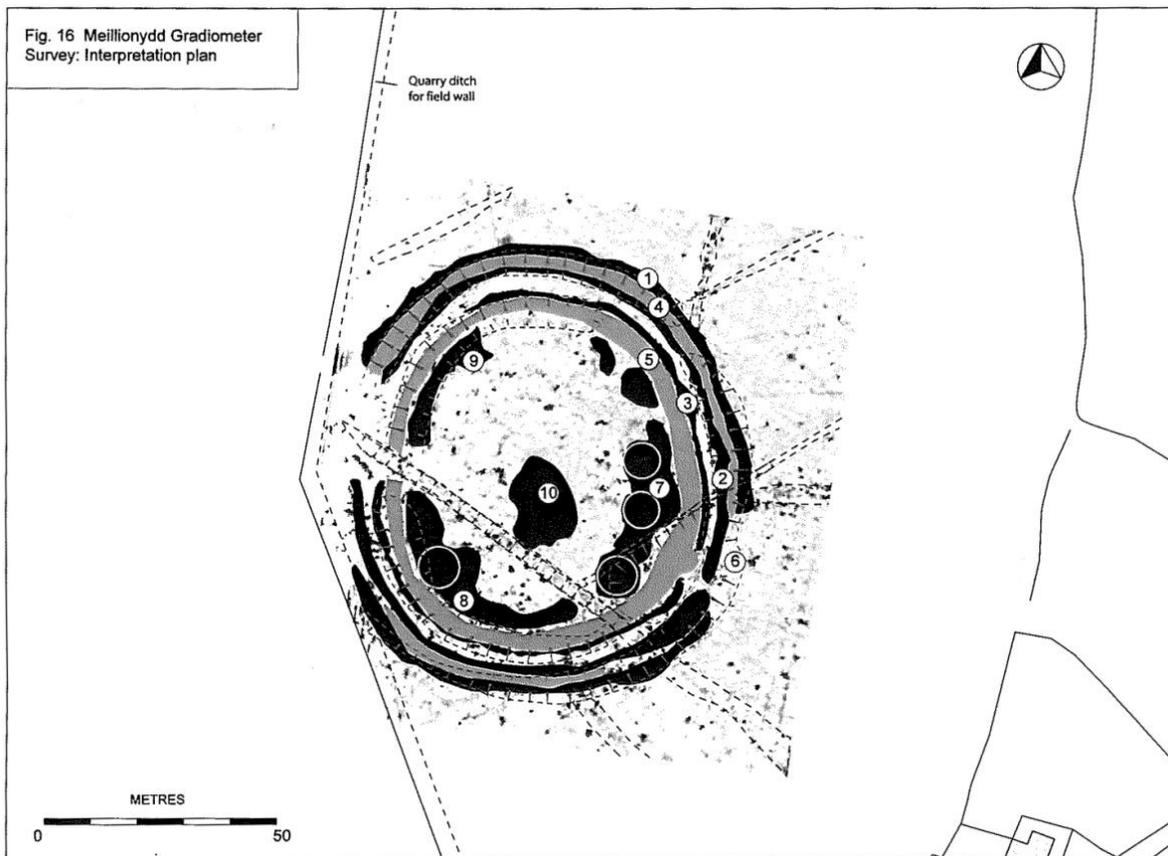


Figure 3 Interpretation plan of the geophysical survey of Meillionydd, Rhiw (Smith and Hopewell 2007, Fig. 10).

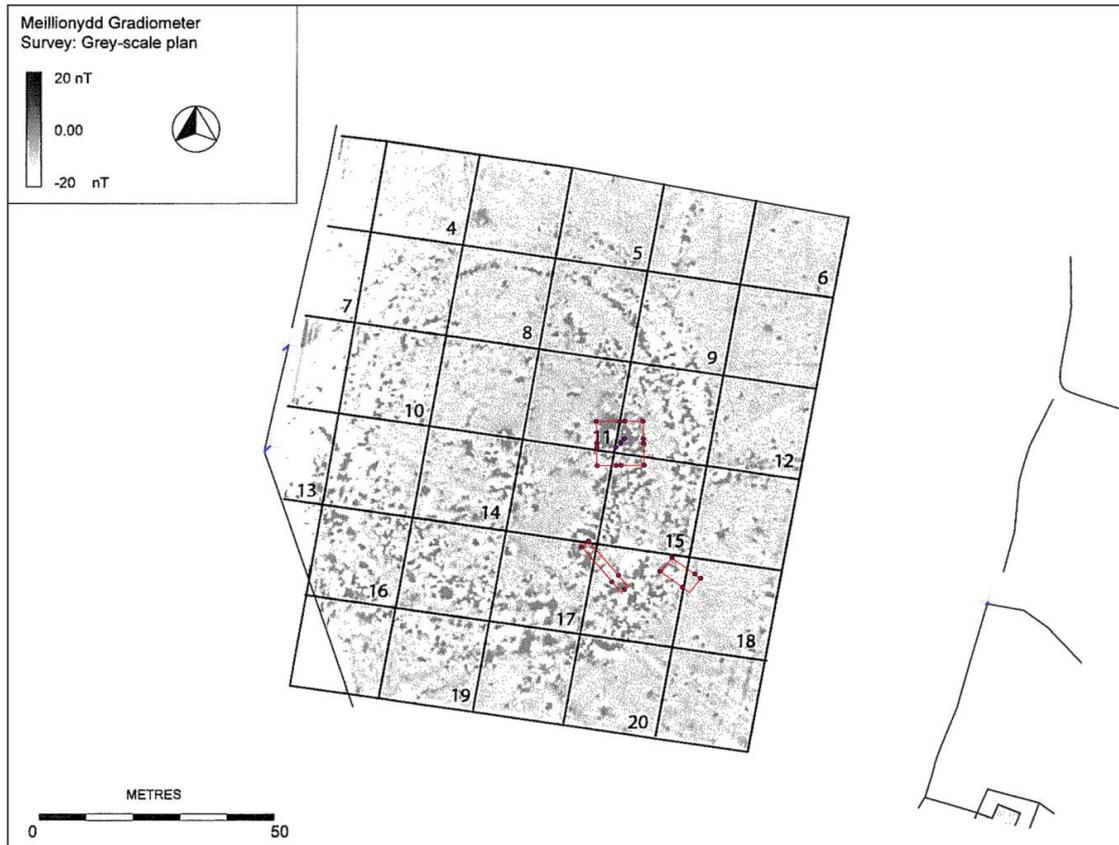


Figure 4 Geophysical survey of Meillionydd, Rhiw, showing the position of the trial trenches opened in 2010 (adapted from Smith and Hopewell 2007, Fig. 11).

Methodology

The original aims of the trial excavations were to examine three trenches in order to characterise different zones in the site (Figure 4).

1. Trench 1 was 13m by 2m and was situated over the inner ditch and bank and also over an area of magnetically enhanced soils, which appeared to coincide with the edge of a roundhouse. The main aims were to examine a narrow, long slot which would examine a range of features and would assess the stratigraphic relationships between the inner boundaries and the adjacent internal occupation deposits. Another aim was to assess the character of the magnetically enhanced soils and to identify whether they were rich in occupation deposits.
2. Trench 2 was 7.5m by 4m and aimed to investigate a slot through the terminal of the outer bank, and also through a linear anomaly, which was identified on the geophysical survey and originally interpreted as the outer ditch. This trench was situated on the south-eastern side of the enclosure and the major objectives were to examine the relationships between the outer bank and ditch, to assess whether the boundaries are contemporary with the inner boundaries, and to confirm whether an entrance to the enclosure exists here. It was hoped that the area would be productive

in entrance-marking deposits, which are occasionally found in the terminals of boundary features in later prehistory.

3. Trench 3 (10m by 10m) was opened in order to explore an area of magnetic enhancement just inside the inner bank, within the eastern part of the enclosure, and in the vicinity of another possible internal roundhouse.^{ix} It was hoped that the stratigraphic relationship between the inner bank and internal occupation deposits could be explored in this area.

Stratigraphic Reports

Trench 1

In Trench 1, the remains of the inner bank and ditch were investigated, alongside a sequence of roundhouses situated within the interior of the enclosure.^x The sequence in this trench can be split into two. The southeast end of the trench comprised of an earlier U-shaped ditch, which had been truncated through the creation of a later wide, shallow feature, interpreted here as a quarry hollow. The hollow is situated just inside the outer bank and is possibly associated with its construction. At the northwest end of the trench, the badly eroded and truncated remains of the inner bank was identified, alongside a complex of stone structures and cut features which represent a sequence of timber and stone roundhouses, situated just inside the inner bank. The sequences within these two areas will be discussed separately as unfortunately no stratigraphic relationship exists between the two zones. The trench was originally 10m by 2m, but it was extended 3m to the southeast during the excavations with the hope of exposing the east end of the quarry hollow (which remains partially unexcavated).

The sequence at the southeast end of the trench was quite complicated and it has been relatively difficult to deconstruct. The preferred interpretation is that an earlier U-shaped ditch, which possibly formed the original boundary to the site, was backfilled and later truncated by the construction of a large quarry hollow which is presumably associated with the creation of the outer bank. The other possible interpretation is that the earlier U-shaped ditch was much shallower and is actually associated with the construction of the quarry hollow, possibly being created at the same time and forming some form of structure, such as a palisade or gully. Another possible interpretation is that there is a sequence of intercutting ditches in this area. These latter interpretations appear to be unlikely and they are not the preferred interpretation of the authors. Part of the eastern end of this feature, however, currently remains unexcavated and so these interpretations are tentative. It is hoped that the entirety of the feature will be excavated in a subsequent programme of fieldwork, which should help to define the sequence in this area.

The natural subsoil consisted of an orange-yellowish gravelly sand (11 = 08) – this was cut by a number of features. The first activity in this area is possibly represented by a narrow U-shaped ditch (23) (see Figure 5). This feature appears to have been substantially truncated by a quarry hollow which contained rubble-rich fills (see below), and hence the original width and depth of the ditch is at present unknown. It is possible to speculate that it was originally at least c. 2m wide and 1m deep. The primary fill (52) was a mid orange sandy silt which contained frequent gravel inclusions and also some larger stone blocks, which lay directly on

the base of the ditch. Overlying this was a darker orangey-brown silt (51) which contained occasional rubble and fire-cracked stones. While no evidence for an associated bank was present, the character of the basal fills suggests deliberate infilling of the ditch, possibly with material from an associated bank, followed by natural silting.

The next sequence of activity in the area is represented by a wide, shallow cut, at least 5m wide and 0.70m deep, which truncates the earlier ditch and the natural in this area (Figure 5). This feature extends outside the east end of the trench, and it must terminate just before the outer bank, suggesting that its total width is approximately 6m. The slope of the cut identified on the western side was quite gentle and this terminated into a flat, wide bottom. The unusual dimensions and character of the feature suggest that it is unlikely to be the remains of a ditch/es, but is rather better interpreted as a shallow quarry hollow. Shallow quarry scoops were also identified at the nearby site of Castell Odo (see Alcock 1960), suggesting that similar construction methods were used at each site. The basal fill consisted of a sandy orange silt (161) situated at the east end of the cut. This was overlain by a light greenish grey gravelly sand (146) with relatively frequent charcoal flecks, also confined to the east end of the feature. Broadly contemporary with this fill was a dark brown gravelly silt (24), situated on the west side of the cut. These basal fills appear to represent initial silting deposits which naturally accumulated within the feature during its use, possibly partly deriving from eroded bank material which washed into the hollow. The next sequence of fills is rich in rubble deposits, which appear to derive from the destruction of the banks and roundhouses, possibly during or following the abandonment of the site. The deposits on the east side consisted of quite substantial stone blocks within an orange-brown sandy silt (143), which are broadly contemporary with an extensive slump of stony rubble and mid-brown reddish silt (158) situated on the west side of the feature. The stone blocks within 143 are much larger than those in 158 and these deposits possibly derive from the destruction or slumping of the outer bank. The rubble slump on the west (158) had evidently been deposited from the west, possibly deriving from either the slighting of the inner bank or the adjacent stone roundhouses. These deposits are overlain by a relatively compact mid-brown clayey loam with occasional stones (147), which forms the last fill of the ditch. All of the fills contained occasional charcoal flecks and burnt stones.

The area immediately to the west of the quarry hollow was relatively free from archaeological features, except for the presence of one circular, shallow cut (21), with relatively steep sides, which appears to indicate the presence of a plough-truncated posthole or pit. This feature, which was c. 0.40m in diameter and 0.15m deep, contained a sterile fill of greyish brown sandy silt (20), mottled with natural gravelly sand, and one large stone lay directly on top of this fill. The very sterile nature of the fills, which produced no evidence for charcoal or other occupation deposits, suggests that the feature may not necessarily be associated with the occupation of the enclosure, and possibly belongs to a more recent phase of activity on the site. No postholes or features were identified within the immediate vicinity suggesting that it does not form part of a structure, and therefore appears to be isolated.

The sequence in the west end of the trench was also very complicated and the evidence suggests a long and complex sequence of occupation in this area, similar to that identified in Trench 3 (see below). A number of features were found to cut through the underlying natural subsoil in this area (08 = 11). They are not all stratigraphically related and so the following discussion will summarise the various features and attempt to reconstruct a sequence of activity in the area, although it must be acknowledged that the interpretation offered is

relatively tentative and the sequence will hopefully be more fully investigated in a future programme of excavation.



Figure 5 Top; shot of the south-facing section through the north side of Trench 1 – northwest end. **Bottom;** shot of the north-facing section through the south side of Trench 1. The two sections show the sequence of rubble fills within the quarry hollows/scoops or possible ditches at the south-eastern end of Trench 1.

The first major activity in the area is represented by a shallow cut for a roundhouse platform (47), which contains a number of cut features, some of which are associated, while others may belong to an earlier phase of timber roundhouse construction (Figure 6). For instance, sitting just inside the cut were two curvilinear gullies (153 and 159). The gullies were both very shallow (up to 0.15m deep), with steep sides and a flat bottom, and both were filled with mid brown silt containing charcoal flecks (154 and 160 respectively). It is possible that they were originally much deeper and wider and have simply been truncated by the platform cut. Both the gullies appear to be contemporary and they follow a similar plan – being separated only by c. 0.12m of the natural gravel. Gully 153 was 0.20m wide and 0.70m long and extended beneath the south facing section through the north end of the trench. Gully 159 was of similar dimensions, c. 0.20m wide and 0.80m long, and was situated immediately to the south of 153. Whether they formed eavesdrip gullies to a roundhouse, or are slots for a timber roundhouse wall, is difficult to determine – they were, however, both sealed by the later stone roundhouse wall core and clearly belong to an earlier phase of occupation. The fill of gully 153 was cut by a posthole (156) which measured 0.20m in diameter and was up to 0.30m deep. This feature contained upright packing stones *in situ* and a dark greyish-brown silt (157).

Inside the area of the roundhouse terrace were four additional cut features. A wide circular cut (40) for a possible posthole, which was c. 0.60m in diameter and 0.30m deep, contained possible *in situ* packing stones and a mid brown silty fill (39). Posthole 42 was sub-circular in

shape, with steep sides and a flat bottom, measuring c. 0.20m in diameter and 0.20m deep. This feature also contained packing stones and a dark brown silty fill (41). A third posthole (44), measuring 0.30m in diameter and nearly 0.30m deep, was found within the southwest corner of the trench. This feature contained packing stones and a dark brown silt which produced fire-cracked stones and charcoal (43). A fourth posthole (144) was c. 0.40m in diameter and c. 0.20m deep, and the fill consisted of three upright packing stones and a dark grey-brown silty loam (145). This feature extended outside the east facing section of the trench. All of the features described above are densely packed together in an area measuring c. 1m by 0.80m, and while none are intercutting, the evidence suggests that not all of the features belong to the same phase of occupation.



Figure 6 Top; east-facing shot of the excavated features within the roundhouse cut in Trench 1, following the removal of the stone roundhouse wall (which is visible in the north-facing section through the south side of the trench). **Bottom;** east-facing shot of posthole 156 with *in situ* packing stones. This feature cut through an earlier gully and was sealed by the rubble core of the later stone roundhouse wall.

Three postholes were also identified in the area outside and immediately to the east of the roundhouse terrace. A shallow scoop (36), measuring c. 0.30m in diameter and 0.15m deep, contained a dark grey silty fill (35). Adjacent to this was a posthole (32), c. 0.30m in diameter and 0.25m deep, which contained three upright packing stones and a dark brown fill silty fill

(31). This latter feature was sealed by a later stone structure (29) which was contemporary with the later stone roundhouse wall (06) (see Figure 7). A third posthole (150) was likewise partially sealed by the later stone roundhouse wall (06). This feature was circular in shape, measuring c. 0.40m in diameter and up to 0.15m deep, and contained three upright packing stones and a mid-dark brown silty fill with charcoal flecks (149).

These features were surrounded by a thin brown silty occupation soil which contained frequent charcoal flecks (26). This layer was sealed beneath the later stone walls and clearly indicates an earlier occupation horizon, which the features may have cut through (although this stratigraphic relationship was not adequately defined).



Figure 7 South-facing shot of the linear arrangement of possible bank stones (30) in Trench 1, which sit within a shallow cut (10). The stone structures to the west consist of the curving wall of a stone roundhouse (06) with rubble infill of the roundhouse mostly removed, and a short stretch of possible walling (29), which appears to be contemporary.

At some point during the occupation of this area, a stone wall of a roundhouse was constructed – as described above, this sealed posthole 150 and was situated along the edge of the cut for the roundhouse terrace, on top of the earlier occupation horizon (26; see above). Only the outer facing stones of this wall were identified – it is possible that the inner facing stones were missed during the excavation of the rubble layers which were infilling the roundhouse. This outer face consisted of one to two courses of neatly laid stone angular blocks (6). The wall was curvilinear in shape, up to 0.30m wide and 0.30m thick, and it extended beyond the southern and northern sections of the trench. The internal core of the wall consisted of a mottled yellowish brown sandy silt with frequent small angular and rounded stones (46), which was relatively rich in fire-cracked stones. The outer facing stones of the roundhouse wall appeared to adjoin another single course of stones roughly aligned east-west (29), which also sat on top of the earlier occupation horizon (26). This structure was very insubstantial and consisted of three neatly laid stone slabs which possibly formed the foundation of another wall, although this is uncertain. It is possible that the structure provided a short support or buttress wall between the roundhouse and bank, or alternatively defined a small annex area behind the roundhouse.

At around the same time, the inner bank to the enclosure appears to have been created. This was constructed within a shallow foundation trench which appears to have cut through the earlier ephemeral occupation horizon (26), which the roundhouse wall was constructed onto.

The foundation trench was orientated north-south and consisted of a straight, very shallow and narrow feature, c. 1.5m wide and 0.25m thick, with gently sloping sides and a flat bottom (10). The basal fill consisted of a dark reddish grey-brown silt with charcoal flecks and occasional burnt stones (45). This was c. 0.08m thick and represents natural silting within the cut feature. Overlying this was a linear arrangement of large boulder stones (30; see Figure 7). The stones were positioned very close together and are seen extending into the trench sections along the northern and southern sides of the trench. The stones appear to have demarcated a boundary and they may indicate the original line of the inner bank – possibly representing the foundation stones of the inner face of the bank. This feature, however, is quite unusual as the large boulders are not positioned close enough to be easily interpreted as a wall structure. The overlying bank deposits were very slight, consisting of a low mound of dark brown silt and rubble (27).^{xi} This was overlain by a more extensive spread of smaller stones (09), which covered context 27. The bank was very ephemeral (up to 0.40m thick) and had evidently been slighted and robbed out, and a large proportion of the material may have been deliberately redeposited over the adjacent stone roundhouse. These rubble layers were relatively rich in burnt stone, presumably creating the magnetic enhancement on the magnetometer survey. The quantities of burnt stone within the disturbed bank deposits is interesting and suggests that the residues from feasts and other events were sometimes deposited along the boundary during the occupation of the enclosure.

The occupation features associated with the roundhouse platform were all sealed by a sequence of deposits which appear to be associated with the abandonment of the stone roundhouse and the destruction of the adjacent bank. The basal deposit within the interior of the roundhouse was a dark brown silty loam with frequent charcoal flecks and burnt stone, up to 0.05m thick (148). This may represent a disturbed occupation layer which was associated with the occupation of the roundhouse, or alternatively, a silt deposit which accumulated following its abandonment. This layer was sealed by a compact rubble layer (28) which infilled the roundhouse. This consisted of a relatively sterile and loose brown sandy silt which was densely packed with large to medium angular stones, up to 0.15m thick. This appears to represent a demolition layer, with the material possibly largely consisting of wall tumble. Overlying this was another dense rubble horizon (05) which comprised mostly of large angular stones with occasional rounded stones and very frequent burnt stones. The deposits were contained within a mixed soil matrix consisting of mottled dark brown silt and yellowish sandy silt, up to c. 30m thick. This layer may have largely derived from the construction of the inner bank and is contemporary with a rubble layer (07) which spread outside the roundhouse wall to the east and was found to overlie the rubble layer 09. This layer was also very rich in large angular stones and burnt stones.

The whole sequence in the trench is covered by an extensive brown silty loam with occasional stones and gravel (22 = 142 = 162). Overlying this was the silt-loam grey-brown ploughsoil which covered the entire trench (03) and was also rich in stone.

Trench 2

Trench 2 aimed at exploring the outer bank and ditch. While the badly disturbed remains of an outer bank were identified, the outer ditch was not, and despite extending the trench 1.5m to the east during the excavations. Closer examination of the magnetometer survey suggests that this feature may actually terminate just to the south of the trench. The archaeological

deposits sitting within the northern half of the trench were removed and the natural gravels were exposed across this area (Figure 8). Unfortunately, time restrictions did not permit the total excavation of the bank and the underlying deposits within the south-western quarter of the trench and this area will be reopened during a future excavation season so that the entire sequence can be examined. As such, there are a number of questions which still remain to be answered (see below).



Figure 8 Top; shot of the south-facing section through the north side of Trench 2, showing the various contexts associated with the outer bank. The upper layer of the bank (49) is still visible in the foreground in the west, alongside the bank slump in the east (54) (photo: authors). **Bottom;** east-facing shot of the disturbed face of the bank in Trench 2 in the south-western corner of the trench. The upper layer of the bank (49) is visible behind a row of possible inner facing stones (72).

The natural gravel identified across the trench was a greenish grey sandy gravel (57). This was overlain by two different sandy gravels which were confined to the slope underlying the bank: an undulating layer of yellow sandy gravel (50) was identified in the centre of the

trench, and a reddish-orange sandy gravel (56) was identified in the western limits of the trench. Both deposits were sterile and had the appearance of the natural sandy gravels identified in the other trenches – but it is uncertain at present whether they should be interpreted as natural deposits or part of the bank make-up.^{xii} Moreover, both 57 and 50 had the appearance of having been truncated by a shallow linear cut (73), orientated north-south, and visible in the northern section of the trench (see Figure 8). It appeared to have been filled with 56, which extended out of the feature and up the hillslope to the west. Two interpretations are possible at present: the first is that layer 56 represents the natural subsoil lying on the top of the hill and partially infilling a natural geological feature; the second is that the layer is actually re-deposited natural which forms the basal layer to the bank, which may have been partially set within a shallow foundation trench (similar to that identified within Trench 1). Both interpretations are at present plausible and it is hoped that a future programme of soil micromorphological analysis will resolve this issue, alongside the completed excavation of deposits in the south-western quarter of the trench.

A series of pre-bank features were exposed, but left un-excavated for a future excavation season, and they are confined to the southwestern corner of the trench. The features cut through the reddish-orange sandy gravel layer (56), and they are partially sealed by the overlying bank deposits (55) and the basal occupation deposits which accumulated against the inner face of the bank (61). This consisted of three possible postholes (63, 65 and 69) and a single course of laid stones (66), which was curvilinear in design and orientated roughly northwest – southeast (Figure 9). Two of the infilled cut features (65 and 69) are stratigraphically earlier than the stone wall which partially overlay them, and it is possible that all three features belong to an earlier phase of occupation, possibly relating to the creation of timber roundhouses or the demarcation of an early boundary through the creation of a timber palisade. Feature 63 was circular in shape, with a diameter of c. 0.40m, although the feature partially extended into the west section of the trench, and so its total extent is unknown. This was filled with a reddish-brown silt with charcoal flecks (64). Approximately 0.40m to the south of this was another circular feature (65) of similar dimensions, which also extends beyond the western section of the trench. This feature contained an upper fill of charcoal-rich dark grey silt (65), which produced some chunks of charcoal and may imply that the timber post was burnt *in situ*. The upper fill of this feature was sampled but the feature was not completely excavated due to time restrictions. A third feature was located c. 0.90m to the southeast and this consisted of a sub-circular cut (69), c. 0.50m in diameter, with a dark grey-brown silty fill (70). This feature was also left unexcavated. Both the fills of the latter two features (65 and 69) were partially overlain by a single course of carefully laid stone slabs (69) which indicate the presence of a curvilinear wall. A stretch of c. 1.40m was exposed and the feature extends into the west and south sections of the trench, so its current extent and plan remains unknown. The feature may represent either the foundation stones of a roundhouse wall or the foundation of the inner revetment stones of the bank. The latter would imply the presence of an elaborate in-turned entrance. This feature was planned but left unexcavated and this area will be reopened and extended next year in order to confirm the nature of this structure. It is at present difficult to firmly associate the feature with the overlying bank deposits, which were aligned slightly differently, and terminated between 0.05 – 0.40m to the east. The wall was overlain by a thin deposit of dark grey-brown silty loam which was relatively rich in charcoal, ash and reddened burnt clayey material (67), and was confined to the area defined by the stones.

The outer bank of the enclosure was constructed from a simple dump of earth and stone (55, followed by 49), with possible evidence for internal facing stones in the form of large blocks

(72) situated at its north-western end (Figure 8). The basal layer consisted of a soft reddish brown sandy silt with occasional large angular and rounded stones (55). This layer was up to 0.15m thick in places. This was covered by a much more substantial deposit of mid brown silt, with frequent angular and rounded stones (49). This deposit was up to 0.30m thick in places and contained relative frequent burnt stones. The bank is situated on a natural hillslope and the builders were evidently utilising the natural hillslope to create and enhance the boundary to the settlement.



Figure 9 Top; east-facing shot of wall and unexcavated postholes (dark fills are visible) in the south-western corner of Trench 2. The features were sealed partly beneath the main body of the bank and also the later occupation deposits which accumulated in front of the bank face. **Bottom;** east-facing shot of the features following the excavation of posthole 63 and the removal of layer 67, which the stones appear to have defined.

The entire bank sequence is just under 0.50m thick, and nearly 2.40m wide, which is not very substantial. Even if the underlying orangey-red sandy gravel (56) is included within the bank sequence, the bank structure is only preserved to a thickness of 0.60m. The evidence certainly suggests that the bank had been deliberately destroyed/slighted and possibly robbed out, and that the feature has been substantially truncated by ploughing.

A series of deposits also accumulated against the inner face of the bank (72) and also over the stone structure (61). The basal layers contained charcoal and ash dumps and presumably accumulated during the occupation of the enclosure. The first layer in the sequence consisted of a mottled reddish brown loam, with frequent charcoal flecks (61). This was partially covered by a small patch of compact yellowish brown sand (60), followed by a spread of mottled dark brown ash-rich silt (58), which was greasy in texture and contained frequent charcoal flecks and reddened clay. The entire sequence here was covered by a sterile homogenous mid brown loam (48), which may have accumulated following the abandonment of the enclosure.

At some point during the occupation of the enclosure, an homogenous dark brown silty layer (50) accumulated at the west end of the trench. This layer appears to represent the build up of colluvium (up to 0.30m thick), which had washed down the slope. The layer contained fragments of charcoal and burnt stone and evidently accumulated during the occupation of the enclosure. This layer was partially overlain by a slump of bank material (54 = 53), which consisted of a brown silt with frequent to occasional stones. Overlying this and the bank deposits was the grey-brown silty loam topsoil (01).

Trench 3

Trench 3 was excavated in four quadrants, labelled 3A, 3B, 3C and 3D. The archaeology in Trench 3D was merely exposed and recorded, as time restrictions did not permit any further excavation in this area. Trench 3A and 3D were positioned along the eastern half of the trench, while Trench 3B and 3C were located along the western half of the trench. The disturbed remains of the inner stone bank were identified in Trench 3A and 3D, and at least four or possibly five phases of roundhouses were identified in the various areas.

Trench 3A

In Trench 3A, the natural yellowish-orange gravel (95) was overlain by a disturbed natural which contained occasional charcoal flecks (125 = 190). This layer was exposed across some of the trench, and this was cut by a number of circular features in the eastern half of the trench, interpreted as possible postholes or shallow scoops (204; 202; 206; 200). The layer displayed evidence for trampling in the form of concretions, and possibly formed an occupation surface. The surface was quite undulating and the layer may have been truncated at some point by a shallow cut (126), which possibly created a terrace in this area.

The features cutting this layer may be interpreted as postholes. Feature 204 was c. 0.40m in diameter and 0.20m deep, and this was filled with a dark orangey-brown silt (205) which contained large stones. 202 was also 0.40m in diameter but was very shallow, with a maximum depth of 0.12m and a mid-reddish brown silty fill (203). Feature 206 was more substantial – this was c. 0.60m in diameter and about 0.23m deep with a brown silty fill which contained large stones (207). All three of these features had steep sides on one edge and gently sloping sides on the other half – their similar form may suggest they had a similar function and are contemporary. Feature 200 was a shallow scoop, c. 0.38m in diameter and 0.10m deep, with a dark brown fill (201). The four features do not form any obvious structural plan but it is clear that they belong to an early phase of building and activity in the area, prior to the construction/levelling of the bank and the later stone roundhouse, which overlay these features.

Three distinct patches of charcoal (219; 218; 220) were identified to the west of feature 206 and these may form part of an extensive ash-spread which has only been partially exposed but left unexcavated, due to time restrictions. Sealing this deposit was an extensive spread of redeposited natural yellow-orange gravel (99; possibly equivalent to 217) which covered most of the western part of the trench. This appears to represent some form of levelling deposit which provided a platform upon which a sequence of roundhouses was constructed.

Overlying this platform was a thin patchy occupation layer consisting of dark brown silty loam with frequent gravel inclusions (192), which possibly represents an occupation surface. Four possible postholes cut this layer (118; 141; 189; 198) – one (141) appears to be a posthole and may have been associated with an arc of three postholes identified in Trench 3C (132; 133; 138), which indicate the wall of a timber roundhouse, c. 8m in diameter, with a possible central hearth in Trench 3B (137; see below). The posts are equally spaced, about 0.65m apart, and the absence of a fifth post in the northeast corner of Trench 3A suggests that an entranceway was possibly present here, facing south-east. Another possibility is that the other two postholes (189 and 198) are associated with the arc in Trench 3C – this will need to be verified during a future excavation season. Posthole 141 was quite substantial – this feature is c. 0.50m in diameter although following excavation it became apparent that it had been recut at least once or twice, indicating that the post had been repaired or replaced.^{xiii} It was filled with a charcoal-rich dark grey/black silt (140). Posthole 189 was situated 0.10m to the south and this was much less substantial, with a diameter of c. 0.22m and a total depth of 0.12m – this was filled with a dark grey silt (188). Approximately 0.40m to the north was a third circular feature (118), possibly a hearth pit. This was c. 65m in diameter and up to 0.28m deep and it was filled with a dark grey brown silt with frequent charcoal flecks and stones (119). The final feature (198) was very insubstantial and may be better interpreted as a shallow scoop (although it may also be a badly truncated posthole). This was c. 0.40m in diameter and only 0.05m deep, and it was filled with an homogenous brown silt (199).

The next phases of activity in this area is represented by the construction of a stone roundhouse, c. 8m in diameter (internal diameter c. 6m), located in the west side of the trench and extending into Trenches 3B, 3C and 3D. The roundhouse wall was much better preserved in Trenches 3B and C where it was positioned with a substantial cut and therefore protected from later disturbance. The wall in Trench 3A was very badly preserved, with most of the inner and outer facing stones having been removed (see Figure 10). This consisted of a core of tightly packed rounded pebbles (191) with larger stones (127) indicating the disturbed facing stones of the wall. Following the abandonment of the structure the building was deliberately infilled with stone – this consisted of a compact layer of angular and rounded stones sitting within a dark brown sandy silt (101). This layer represents the final rubble infill of the roundhouse and is contemporary with the upper rubble fill situated in Trench 3B (107). A stone spindlewhorl (no. 14) was recovered from the bottom of this layer and is probably associated with a disturbed floor surface which went undetected during excavation.



Figure 10 West-facing shot of features in Trench 3A, showing basal deposits of the stone wall of the latest roundhouse (associated with the wall visible in the background in Trench 3B). The upper fills of the postholes associated with the earlier phase of occupation are visible to the west of the wall.

At some point during the occupation of this area, a deposit of compact stones and mottled dark grey silts and yellow sands (114), up to 0.30m thick, was accumulated to the east of the roundhouse platform. This feature contained some large stones and it extended further east outside the trench. The deposit has been interpreted as the badly disturbed remains of the inner bank to the enclosure – but it is also possible that it represents a destruction horizon associated with the levelling of roundhouses. The possible bank deposits also overlay one of the earlier postholes (204). This rubble layer was overlain by a more extensive layer of earth and smaller stones (100), which slumped over the central area of the trench and on top of the redeposited natural layer (99). This upper destruction/abandonment horizon was rich in burnt stones and is probably contemporary with the infilling of the roundhouse (layer 101; see above). These deposits presumably created the high magnetic readings identified by the magnetometer survey in this area. The overlying deposits consisted of a rubble-rich dark silty loam (98), which forms the interface layer between the archaeology and the overlying topsoil (02), which consists of a grey-brown stony loam.

Trench 3C

The first phase of activity in Trench 3C is represented by a series of postholes which cut through a yellow-orange gravel 102. This layer mostly consists of the natural gravel, but it is possible that some of the redeposited natural layer identified in Trench 3A (99 = 217) is overlying this in places. This layer was also truncated by a linear cut (105) in the southern side of the trench, aligned east-west, which appears to represent the location of another roundhouse terrace. This feature was filled with a reddish-brown silt with some large stone blocks (104) which may be the disturbed remains of a roundhouse wall, possibly contemporary with the creation of the other stone roundhouses in this area (106). This feature

was merely planned but has been left unexcavated, and the entire trench will be reopened next year so that the excavations in this area can be completed.

Six circular features (132; 196; 133; 216; 138; 194), possibly postholes, cut through layer 102. Three of the features (132; 133; 138) form an arc of a possible timber roundhouse, also identified in Trench 3A, which has a central hearth positioned within Trench 3B (Figure 11). Posthole 132 was c. 0.40m in diameter and up to 0.25m deep, with steep sides and quite a flat bottom – this was filled with a dark brown silt which contained some medium sized stones, possibly the disturbed packing stones (134). Posthole 133 was had similar dimensions and was filled with dark brown silt, which also contained packing stones (135). Posthole 138 was c. 0.30m in diameter and up to 0.17m deep, and this was filled with a dark brown silt with some stones and occasional charcoal fragments (139).

The other three circular features (196; 216; 194), possibly postholes, appear to indicate the presence of yet further timber buildings or occupation activities on the platform. 194 was 0.20m in diameter and only 0.10m deep, with a dark brown sandy silt fill with occasional stones (195). The upper part of this fill appears to have contained a whetstone (no. 16). This feature is truncated on the northeast side by a later roundhouse terrace cut (223), and the evidence suggests the feature was originally c. 0.34m in diameter with a depth of over 0.15m. Another posthole (196) was c. 0.34m in diameter and up to 0.20m deep, with a dark brown sandy silt and evidence for *in situ* packing stones (197). A possible shallow scoop (216), which was 0.25m in diameter and up to 0.07m deep, contained a mid brown fill (215) with occasional small stones, charcoal flecks and a small patch of reddened ash.



Figure 11 East-facing shot of features in Trench 3C, showing disturbed stone structures on the north side of the trench, and evidence for another roundhouse terrace on the south side of the trench. Two half-sectioned postholes are visible near the centre of the trench. They are probably associated with a third posthole (unexcavated in this picture) which lies to the east which forms an arc for an earlier timber roundhouse.

Layer 102 was also truncated by a linear cut (105) in the southern side of the trench, aligned east-west, which appears to represent the location of another roundhouse terrace. This feature was filled with a reddish-brown silt with some large stone blocks (104) which may be the disturbed remains of a roundhouse wall, which is possibly contemporary with the creation of the other roundhouse terrace cut (106) identified in the northern side of the trench. This

feature was merely planned but has been left unexcavated, and the entire trench will be reopened next year so that the excavations in this area can be completed.

The next activity in the area is represented by the creation of a shallow cut (106 = same as 112 in Trench 3B) which created a terrace within which one, or possibly two, stone roundhouses were constructed. This consisted of shallow truncation which was present along the western sides of the trench. The basal layer within this cut was a dark brown silty loam (124) which contained charcoal fragments and represents a build up of occupation deposits. Cutting this layer was a large and well preserved posthole (213) with *in situ* packing stones. The feature was 0.45m in diameter and 0.20m thick, and it was filled with upright packing stones (211), which lined the edges of the cut and found to contain a dark grey brown silt with occasional small stones (212). Overlying this was a deposit of dark grey-brown silt with large stone blocks (109) which may be interpreted as either wall tumble or the disturbed remains of a roundhouse wall (Figure 11). This context may be associated with the destruction of the later stone roundhouse, but the large stone blocks sitting within it do form an arc (in Trench 3C and 3B), suggesting that it forms the remains of a separate stone structure, which either adjoined the later roundhouse (such as an annex) or represents an earlier roundhouse wall. This area needs to be extended and investigated further in a future programme of excavation so that these issues may be resolved.

The later stone roundhouse wall was c. 1m wide, and consisted of a core of dark brown silt, with large inner and outer facing stones (117). This terminated approximately 1m in front of the northeast corner of the trench, suggesting the presence of an entranceway which faced south-west. The exposed natural in the area of the suggested entrance was weathered and contained concretions, suggesting that it formed an occupation surface associated with the building. This was also apparent in the area immediately in front of the entrance, suggesting a consistent flow of people and animals. The roundhouse was filled with a compact layer of small to medium sized rounded and angular stones, contained within a dark brown-reddish silt (116; same as 107 in 3B and 101 in 3A). This layer was rich in burnt and fire-cracked stones.

The overlying deposits consisted of a rubble- and gravel-rich dark silty loam (98), which forms the interface layer between the archaeology and the overlying topsoil (02), which consisted of a grey brown stony silt, rich in burnt stones.

Trench 3B

The basal layer in this trench consisted of the natural orange-yellowish gravel (95). The earliest activity is represented by the creation of a large hearth pit (222), which forms the central hearth of the early timber roundhouse identified in Trenches 3A and C (see above). This large scoop was curvilinear in shape, c. 1.20m by 1.60m, and up to 0.25m deep, and the feature was sealed by the overlying stone wall of the later roundhouse (see Figure 12). The basal fill consisted of a dark brown-black silt with frequent charcoal flecks (137). Partially overlying this fill, in the centre of the feature, was a circular patch of compact reddish-orange clay (136), which was 0.05m thick, and represents the remains of an *in situ* hearth. This contained fragments of burnt or cremated bone (probably animal bone; small find no. 26).



Figure 12 Top; east-facing shot of the inner facing of the third roundhouse wall, which seals the central hearth of the earlier timber roundhouse. **Centre;** south-facing shot of the upper filling of the central hearth pit associated with the timber roundhouse, which was shown to be sealed by the later roundhouse wall, following its removal (the inner and outer facing stones and wall core are visible in the section). **Bottom;** south-facing post-excavation shot of the hearth pit.

The next phase of activity in this area is represented by the creation of a substantial cut (112) in the hillside on the western side of the trench which created a flat terrace for a building. The basal fill within this terrace was a dark brown silty loam (124) which contained charcoal fragments and represents a build up of occupation deposits (also identified in Trench 3C). This was overlain by a curvilinear arc of large stone blocks (113; same as 109 in Trench 3C) – this either represents wall tumble from the collapsed stone wall of the later roundhouse (121; 97), the remains of a small annex, or the remains of an earlier roundhouse.

These deposits appear to have been truncated by a second cut (223) for the later stone roundhouse, within which a substantial stone wall was created (Figure 13). This structure was exceptionally well preserved in this area, presumably due to its position inside the terrace cut, which protected the wall from any later disturbance. The roundhouse building was created from a thick stone-faced wall (inner facing 97; outer facing 121; same as 117 in Trench 3C and 191=127 in Trench 3A) with an earth or turf core consisting of a mid-brown silt with occasional stones (120). The inner facing stones (97) were preserved to a height of 1.25m and consisted of three courses of neatly laid stones, some of which were over 1m wide. The outer facing stones (121) were much less substantial and consisted of only two courses, being constructed on a slightly higher level.



Figure 13 East-facing shot of the possible earlier stone wall (foreground) which was truncated by the latest stone roundhouse wall in Trench 3B.

At some point during the occupation of this building, a large stone-lined pit (122) was constructed, just inside the wall in the northeast side of the trench. This feature was circular in shape, with a diameter of c. 1.50m and a depth of c. 0.65m. The sides and base of the cut had been neatly lined with medium sized flat stone slabs (210) – the function of this feature is at present uncertain, but it may have functioned as a storage pit (Figure 14). The fills consisted of a light brown gravel which contained some stones – either collapsed lining stones or rubble infill (209), followed by a compact gravel-rich brown silt (193), also with some large stones. Within the centre of this rubble infill, and sitting within the upper limits of the fill, was a large stone (no. 22). This is slightly faceted on one side and may have been utilised as a saddle quern.

The occupation floor within the roundhouse comprised of a soft dark brown/black silt (110), which c. 0.10m – 0.20m thick (there is no stratigraphic relationship between the pit and the floor surface 110). The upper limits of this layer produced some flat stone slabs which may represent wall collapse following the abandonment of this structure. Partially overlying this layer was a slump of redeposited natural yellowish-orange gravel (111) which also overlay the upper fill of the stone-lined pit (221).

The next phase of activity is represented by the abandonment and deliberate destruction of the building, which was infilled with stone rubble. In the interior of the house, this consisted of a mottled sandy light brown silt with frequent stone slabs and fire-cracked stones (108). This appears to consist of a mixture of wall tumble but also a compact layer of burnt and unburnt stones, which appears to have been deliberately deposited within the abandoned structure. This horizon is probably contemporary with the wall tumble which accumulated to the west of the roundhouse, which consisted of a dark brown silt with large stones (123). Overlying the sequence in this area was another extensive spread of rubble and burnt stones which completely infilled the building and covered the roundhouse walls. The layer within the building consisted of a compact stone layer which was very rich in burnt and fire-cracked stones, contained within a dark brown-grey silt (107). A similar deposit (96) also spread over the the roundhouse walls and wall tumble in the west. The overlying layers consisted of a ploughsoil interface layer of dark grey silt which contained rubble and gravel (98) and the overlying topsoil (04) which consists of a grey-brown stony silt which also produced burnt stones.



Figure 14 West-facing shot of the stone-lined pit in Trench 3B, with upper fills removed (part of the earlier hearth pit is visible in the south-west).

Trench 3D

The archaeology in this area was merely exposed and planned, but left unexcavated for a future season of fieldwork. The exposed layers consisted of a compact spread of densely packed stone rubble (128) which appears to represent the uppermost rubble infill of the stone roundhouse (same as 116 in 3C; 107 in 3B and 101 in 3A). This layer contained frequent burnt and fire-cracked stones. The layer forms an arc which represents the outer side of the roundhouse wall. This structure appears to have cut through a layer of yellowish brown silt

which was relatively stone free (129). Immediately to the east of this is another layer of compact stone rubble, with large stone blocks (130), which is roughly aligned north-south. This context may be associated with the inner bank. In the north-eastern corner of the trench was a orange-brown clayey loam with occasional stones (131). This was overlain by the grey-brown silty and stony topsoil (02).



Figure 15 South-facing shot of archaeological deposits exposed but left unexcavated in Trench 3D.

Finds

A number of stone artefacts were recovered from the site, including a possible quernstone, as well as a collection of stone hammers, pounders, grinders, polishing/smoothing stones and two Iron Age spindlewhorls (Table 1). One of the hammerstones was crafted from Mynydd Rhiw stone, which had potentially been extracted from the area where the Neolithic axe factory is located, and several other struck pieces were recovered from the site. Due to the absence of dateable artefacts (the Iron Age in this region is aceramic and so datable pottery fragments are rarely recovered from sites), it is difficult at present to suggest a date for the enclosure, other than to confirm that it belongs to a tradition of monumental settlements which belong to the Iron Age period at least (although a Late Bronze Age date for early occupation on the site is quite possible). A large number of good quality charcoal samples were recovered from secure archaeological contexts and provide the possibility for the production of calibrated radiocarbon dates, which will hopefully shed some light on the chronological sequence of this settlement.

Small find number	Trench	Context	Category	Description
1	2	1	iron	shank fragment, modern?
2	1	3	iron	plough fragment, modern
3	2	1	iron	gauge, modern
4	1	7	stone	foreign smoothed pebble, possible gaming counter?

Small find number	Trench	Context	Category	Description
5	1	7	stone	possible smoothing stone
6	3A	101	stone	grinding stone
7	3A	101	stone	possible whetstone
8	2	52	stone	drilled object fragment
9	3B	107	stone	possible grinding stone
10	3B	108	stone	hammerstone
11	3A	100	stone	Mynydd Rhiw core, with utilised edge
12	2	55	stone	hammerstone
13	3A	100	stone	foreign stone, black and glassy
14	3A	101	stone	spindlewhorl, complete
15	3A	100	stone	hammerstone
16	3C	195	stone	abrading stone
17	3B	110	stone	small colourful rounded pebble - possible gaming counter?
18	3B	110	stone	charcoal sample near roundhouse wall
19	3B	110	stone	small colourful rounded pebble - possible gaming counter?
20	3B	110	stone	spindlewhorl, perforation not complete
21	1	96	stone	hammerstone
22	3B	193	stone	possible whetstone
23	1	46	stone	hammerstone
24	2	54	stone	abrading stone
25	2	67	fired clay?	Hollow object, possible bead or worm cast?
26	3B	136	bone	burnt bone, small fragments
27	1	3	stone	polisher
28	1	7	stone	Mynydd Rhiw core, reused?
29	3B	Unstratified, possibly 108?	stone	smoother or grinder
30	3A	99	stone	polisher or smoother
31	3B	112	clay?	burnt lump
32	3	Unstratified, spoil heap	stone	Mynydd Rhiw stone, unworked (natural)
33	3A	101	stone	Mynydd Rhiw stone, worked or shaped
34	3B	4	stone	hammerstone
35	3C	98	stone	hammerstone
36	3C	98	stone	hammerstone
37	3C	4	flint	burnt struck flint, or frost shattered?
38	1	3	stone	faceted, possibly utilised.

Table 1 List of small finds recovered from the excavations at Meillionydd.

Conclusions

The excavations were extremely successful and confirmed the results of the geophysical surveys undertaken by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, demonstrating the presence of a circular double ringwork enclosure, constructed from stone and earth banks, which appear to have been accompanied by quarry hollows/scoops. The intensity of occupation within the internal areas examined reveal a long and complex sequence of occupation on the site, as well as timber and later stone roundhouse phases – this is a pattern which have been established on other circular / ringditch enclosed settlements in Gwynedd and probably spans most of the first millennium BC (Alcock 1960; Kelly 1988; Ward and Smith 2001). Based on the evidence from other sites in the area, the early timber phase of occupation may belong to the ninth – seventh centuries BC. The later stone roundhouses and banks were possibly created in the sixth – fifth centuries BC, and occupation may have continued in to the later Iron Age period, possibly the second or first century BC. Radiocarbon dates from charcoal samples taken from these features may help to further define these chronologies, which are at present rather tentative. The practice of continually occupying this monumental enclosure, over a long period, certainly reflects the importance of this place to contemporary communities. Furthermore, repeatedly rebuilding roundhouses on the same spot implies a desire to maintain an ongoing link with the past, further helping to create a special sense of place and history.

At present, no evidence for an early timber palisade and associated artefact-rich deposit, similar to that identified at Castell Odo, has been identified. Future work will aim to investigate other boundary zones within the enclosure in order to establish whether such an early sequence exists on this site. The sequences and chronologies at Meillionydd are at present rather undefined and more work is required (see below). Short summaries of the results from each trench are provided below:

Trench 1

The sequence of roundhouses at the north-western end of Trench 1 consisted of a complex of cut features and stone structures, indicating one or two timber structures which were followed by the construction of a stone-walled roundhouse. This multi-phase sequence is indicated by the density of occupation features which were identified within the area, alongside the presence of intercutting features. Following the abandonment of the stone roundhouse, the building had been deliberately infilled with rubble, which probably derived from the destruction of the adjacent stone bank. This may reflect the presence of an elaborate closing rite.

The inner bank was situated to the east of this occupation zone and was partially set within a shallow linear trench which contained an alignment of deliberately placed large boulders. A single posthole was identified in the central area of the trench – but given the narrow width of the trench (which was 2m wide), it is impossible at present to determine whether the feature originally formed part of a palisade structure or building.

The sequence at the south-east end of the trench was also very complex and has been difficult to interpret. The evidence suggests that the settlement was first enclosed by a narrow flat-bottomed ditch. The entire area was later re-organised through the creation of a shallow, wide flat-bottomed quarry hollow, located immediately in front of the outer bank. This feature cut through the fills of the earlier ditch and it may be associated with the construction of the outer

bank. The digging and re-cutting of ditches was a relatively common practice in the Iron Age period, demonstrating the importance of continually redefining and renegotiating settlement boundaries. The rubble fills of the quarry hollow suggest that it was deliberately back-filled, possibly during the abandonment of the site when the roundhouses and bank structures were destroyed.

Trench 2

In trench 2, the outer bank of the enclosure was investigated. This was found to be constructed from a simple dump of earth and stone, which contained some burnt stones, and possible evidence for internal facing stones were identified at the north-western end of this feature. Once again, this structure had been badly disturbed and truncated. Stone rubble was found infilling the quarry hollow in the adjacent Trench 1, suggesting that the bank had been slighted or at least had slumped in to the feature during a later phase of occupation or during a post-abandonment phase of activity. Interestingly, the banks either side of the entranceway at Castell Odo were also deliberately slighted towards the end of the occupation, possibly reflecting the presence of a similar practice.

Some interesting features were identified just in front of the bank in the south-western corner of the trench – these features were exposed but left unexcavated. They consist of three postholes and a curvilinear arrangement of well-laid stones, which may either be associated with the bank or possibly represent the existence of pre-bank occupation structures.

Trench 3

A sequence of timber and stone roundhouses were identified in Trench 3 (see Figure 16). An early timber roundhouse is represented by an arc of postholes which appear to have defined a circular building, c. 8m in diameter, which was associated with a central hearth. A number of other postholes were identified within Trench 3A and 3C, and may indicate the presence of yet further timber buildings in this area, suggesting the presence of multiple phases of occupation.

At least one, or possibly two, stone roundhouses were constructed in the area, and situated within a hollow identified along the north-western side of Trenches 3B and 3C. The hollow had evidently been dug in to the hillslope to create a flat platform or terrace, into which the building/s had been constructed. The stone wall of the latest roundhouse was exceptionally well preserved along the north-western side of the building in Trench 3B, presumably due to its position inside the terrace cut, which had protected the wall from any later disturbance. The building was created from a thick stone-faced wall with an earth or turf core, with an entranceway in the southwest. The stone-facing on the inside of the building was exceptionally well constructed, and this structure partially sealed the central hearth of the earlier timber roundhouse. The building contained a large stone-lined pit. Two stone spindlewhorls were also recovered from disturbed occupation/abandonment deposits within this roundhouse. One of the objects was only partially finished, suggesting that artefact-creation was occasionally undertaken on the site. Following abandonment, the roundhouse had been deliberately infilled with a thick layer of rubble, similar to the stone roundhouse in Trench 1. It seems likely that this material derived from the destruction of the adjacent inner bank, which may have been partially exposed in Trench 3A, and consisted of a compact spread of earth and rubble.

Another cut for a roundhouse wall was identified along the southern side of Trench 3C, indicating the presence of yet another roundhouse in this area. This feature was left unexcavated for a future season.

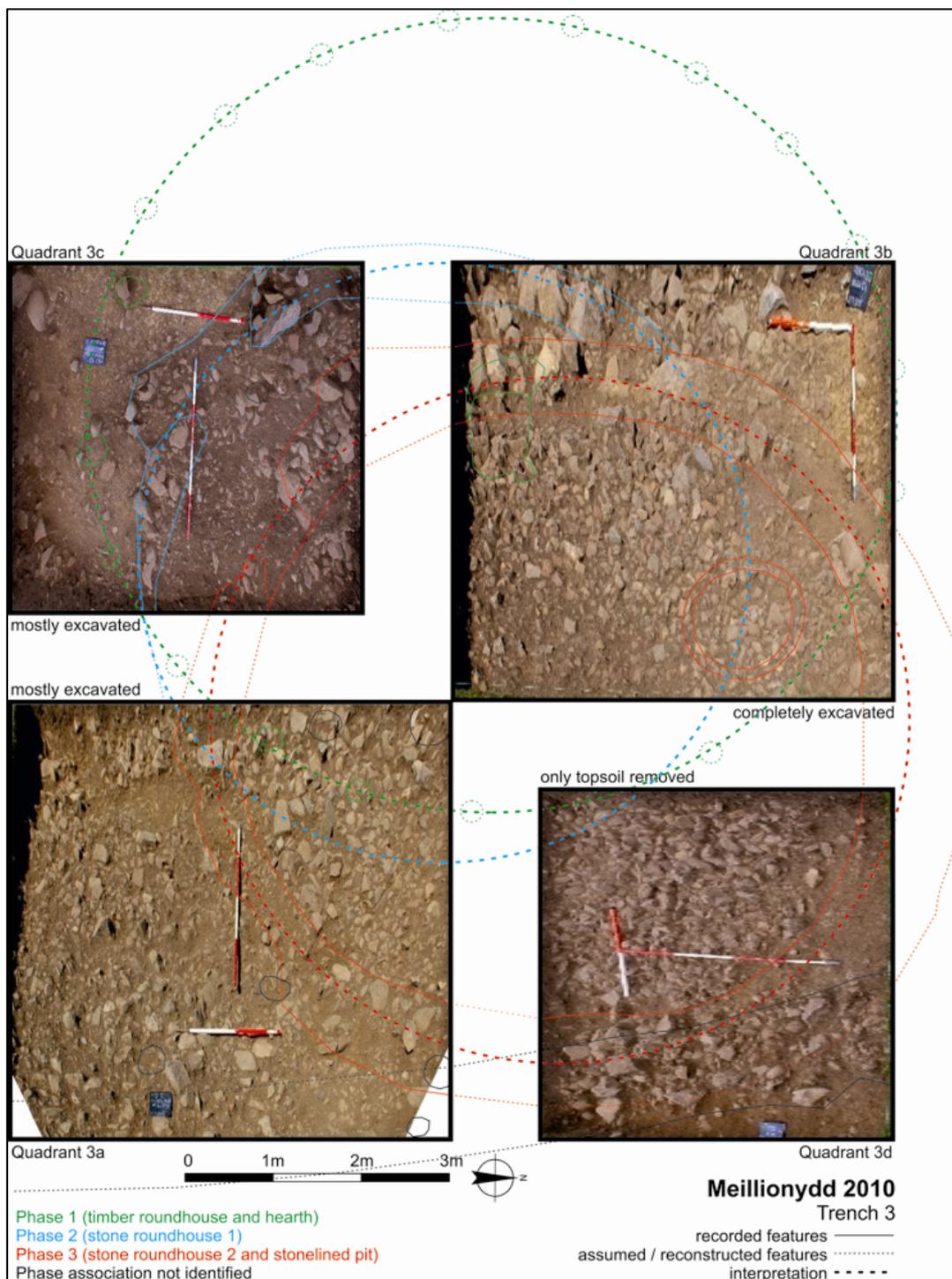


Figure 16 Suggested plan of the sequence of timber and stone roundhouses in Trench 3 (image: R. Karl).

Unfortunately, no dark earth artefact-rich deposits, similar to that identified at Castell Odo, were recovered in the trenches, as had originally been hypothesised. Nevertheless, the frequency of burnt stones in the abandonment horizons in Trenches 1 and 3 is interesting.

These deposits indicate the presence of burning activities on the site which may have been associated with its abandonment. Another interpretation is that the stones derive from cooking and food consumption activities, suggesting a structured practice involving the disposal of 'refuse'. These residues may have been deliberately deposited within the abandoned roundhouses, or they may have initially been accumulated on top of the banks (during occupation; as demonstrated in Trench 2), with the boundaries later being levelled and the stones deposited within the adjacent roundhouses. The accumulation of burnt stones within the boundary space may have performed in a variety of ways, enhancing the boundary through the deposition of colourful stones, but also providing a mnemonic device, possibly serving to remind people of previous conspicuous feasts and performances which were held within the enclosure.

Future work

A second programme of fieldwork is planned for July 2011. The overall objectives are to continue to gather data on the construction and phasing of the enclosure boundaries and to produce dateable materials in order to provide a chronological sequence for these monuments in Gwynedd. The proposed work aims to reopen and extend the trenches opened on the south-eastern and eastern side of the enclosure (Trenches 1, 2 and 3), so that the excavations of all archaeological deposits and features may be completed, enabling the sequences to be fully explored and understood (see Figure 17). One new area on the western side of the site (Trench 4) will also be explored in order to characterise the sequence of boundary construction in this area and to assess whether artefact-rich deposits were accumulated here. This work will provide the necessary information required to reconstruct the sequence of construction and occupation at the site, providing additional information for further understanding the dynamics of this transitional period in North-west Wales.

1. Trench 1 will be extended by c. 9m to the southeast, in order to excavate the remainder of the quarry hollow/ditch sequence and to assess its relationship with the outer bank. It is hoped that this extension trench will also identify whether an outer ditch was constructed to the southeast of the outer bank. The north-western end of the trench will also be reopened and extended to expose a new area (6m by 6m). This will expose a larger area of the inner bank and adjacent roundhouse complex so that the sequence in this area may be fully investigated and better understood.
2. The south-western corner of Trench 2 will be partially reopened and extended to expose a new area (5m by 5m), so that the earlier occupation features identified beneath the bank may be investigated.
3. Trench 3 will be reopened so that the excavations of this area can be completed, enabling the sequence of roundhouses and possible bank deposits to be fully investigated and reconstructed.
4. Trench 4 (15m by 3m) will be positioned on the western side of the enclosure and will examine a long narrow slot through the inner and outer boundaries.

The three-week excavation season will take place between Saturday 2 July and Saturday 23 July 2011 and the team will include four archaeology student volunteers from Bangor

University and five archaeology students from Cardiff University, who will all be trained in excavation, survey and recording skills.

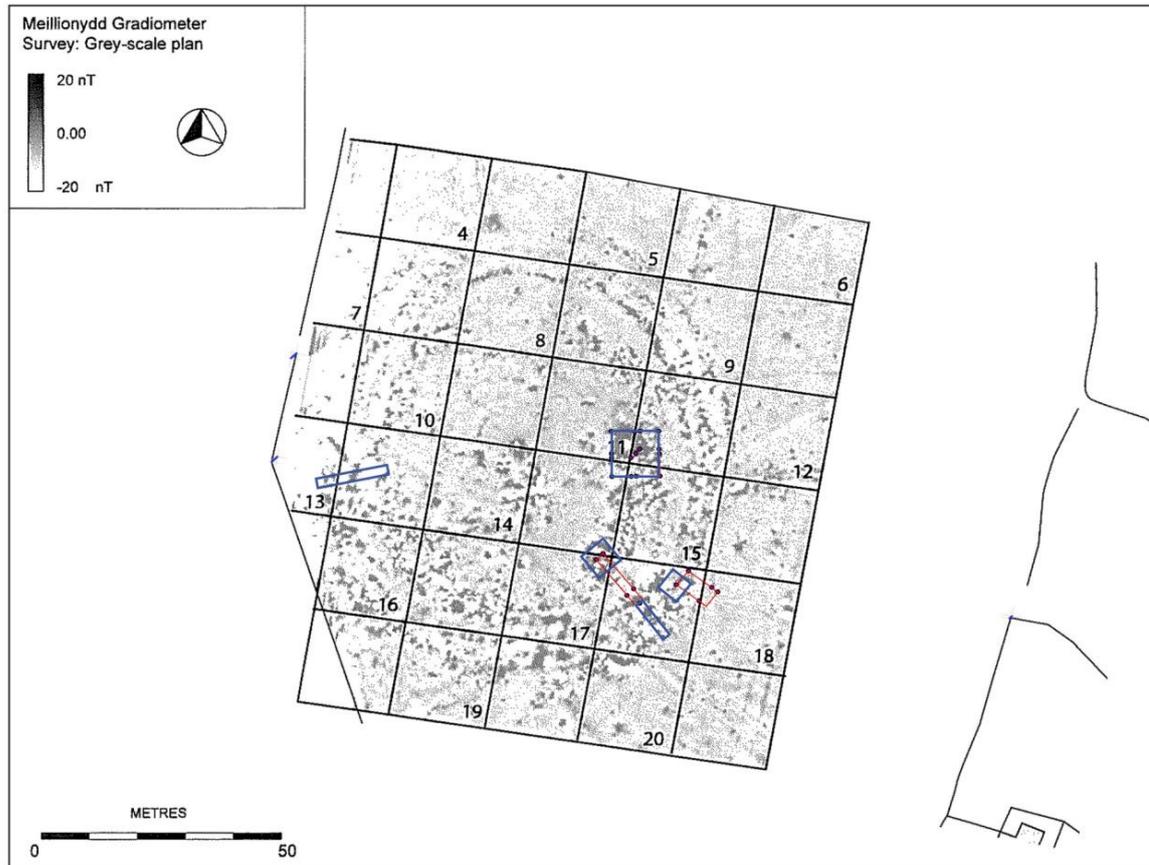


Figure 17 Geophysical survey of Meillionydd, Rhiw, showing the position of the trial trenches opened in 2010 (red) and trenches to be opened in 2011 (blue) (adapted from Smith and Hopewell 2007, Figure 10).

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ⁱ Double ringworks are focussed upon low hilltops and consist of circular concentric double ramparts with internal roundhouses. The enclosures have parallels with the artefact-rich Late Bronze Age ringwork enclosures of eastern England, such as Mucking North Ring and Springfield Lyons.

ⁱⁱ To date, only one site has been explored through excavation, that of Castell Odo (Alcock 1960). The majority of these sites have been badly affected by ploughing, and their upstanding remains are quite slight.

ⁱⁱⁱ This multi-phase site originated in the Late Bronze Age/Earliest Iron Age transition (c. 800-600 BC) as a settlement of two roundhouses (Phase I), enclosed by a timber palisade and associated with a dark earth soil accumulation which was sealed beneath the Phase II external bank and produced pottery, animal bones and artefacts. Provisional radiocarbon dates places this early occupation in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age transition (c. ninth to seventh centuries cal. BC; Kelly 1988, 145). In the earlier Iron Age, the site was enhanced through the construction of two circular concentric stone banks (Phases II and III) which enclosed eight stone roundhouses (Alcock 1960, 90-98).

^{iv} Such as Balksbury Camp, Winklebury and Meon Hill in Hampshire (Waddington 2009).

^v Double ringworks are focussed upon low hilltops and consist of circular concentric double ramparts with internal roundhouses. The enclosures have parallels with the artefact-rich Late Bronze Age ringwork enclosures of eastern England, such as Mucking North Ring and Springfield Lyons.

^{vi} Furthermore, the curvilinear shapes of the enclosures are similar to other dated sites on the Llŷn and suggest that some may even belong to the end of the second millennium BC (Smith and Hopewell 2007).

^{vii} The test soil pits sought to examine the topsoil depths across this heavily ploughed site (Smith and Hopewell 2007).

^{viii} Furthermore, the curvilinear shapes of the enclosures are similar to other dated sites on the Llŷn and suggest that some may even belong to the end of the second millennium BC (Smith and Hopewell 2007).

^{ix} The adjacent test pit (Pit 11) revealed a dark brown gravelly silt with much burnt stone, suggesting that *in situ* occupation dark earth occupation deposits are located here as well.

^x The original interpretation plan of the geophysical survey had suggested that the inner bank covered the main part of the trench, with a ditch at the south-east end and a roundhouse at the northwest end. Excavation demonstrated that the spatial distribution of these features was a little different, with the area originally interpreted as the bank actually corresponding with a relatively blank zone which was relatively free from archaeological features (e.g. see Figure 3 for the original interpretation plan, created prior to excavation). The band of magnetic enhancement, originally thought to be situated on the inside of the inner bank, actually proved to be part of the disturbed and ploughed-out bank deposits which partially infilled the internal roundhouse in this area.

^{xi} While no clear evidence for the outer face of the bank was identified, two parallel large stones (163) were observed in the northern and southern sections of the trench, following the excavation of rubble deposits in this area. It may be significant that both the stones are situated exactly equal distances (c. 0.55m) from their possible adjacent counterparts (30).

^{xii} Layer 56 for example is confined to the area underneath the bank, whereas layer 50 is confined to the area underneath the later bank slump deposits.

^{xiii} This possibly lends further support to the interpretation that this post formed part of an entranceway or porch to the roundhouse.