

# **DINEFWR CASTLE, CARMARTHENSHIRE**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF  
Project Record No. PRN 882

JULY 1997

**Commissioned by:**

**Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments**

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF  
AT DINEFWR CASTLE MAY AND JULY 1997**

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## **SUMMARY**

In May 1997 a watching brief took place, over five days, on limited work within the castle walls: nothing of significance was revealed or any artefacts found. A subsequent short watching brief was carried out on reconstruction work within the infill of post-medieval stairs leading up to the castle wall; again, nothing of significance was seen.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This report was prepared by P Crane, Project Officer, Archaeoleg **Cambria** Archaeology Field Operations. The fieldwork was also carried out by P Crane and the later watching brief was undertaken by A Manning of Archaeoleg **Cambria** Archaeology Field Operations. Much of the text of this report has been reprinted from the Dinefwr Castle Archaeological Excavation April 1997 report for Cadw by A Manning.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 For a few days in May and July 1997, staff from Archaeoleg CAMBRIA Archaeology were involved in the limited watching brief on two small areas within the bounds of Dinefwr Castle, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire (PRN 882) centred on NGR SN 612 218 (Fig 1). The work was required for the purposes of recording possible structural features which may have been uncovered during the present programme of conservation work being carried out at the site. The castle and its adjacent area has been designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Carms. 29).

### **1.2 Project commission**

This project was commissioned by Cadw and arranged by their Ancient Monument Inspector, Dr Sian Rees.

### **1.3 Scope of project**

This project was the response to a brief set by Dr Sian Rees of Cadw, and carried out in accordance with the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs (Institute of Field Archaeologists, 1994). It was, therefore, limited to observation of the contractors undertaking the work and rapid recording.

### **1.4 Report outline**

The scheme involved removal of an area of post-medieval deposits (site 3, figure 1), approximately 1m deep, situated to the south west of the circular keep, and covering the area from below the arch leading to the keep from the curtain wall and up to the west side of the stairway leading to the curtain wall. This area had been evaluated earlier (Manning 1997, trench B). The other area of interest was within the fill of the stairway below the steps. The west wall of this stairway had moved recently outwards and had temporary shuttering and shoring on its outer side. Due to the need for remedial action to secure this structure, part of the upper infill between the stairway walls and against the curtain wall was removed to evaluate the structure and any archaeological implications.

### **1.5 Abbreviations**

Sites recorded on the county Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) will be identified by their Primary Record Number (PRN) and located by their National Grid Reference (NGR). Any new sites discovered during the course of the project will be allocated a new PRN and identified by their NGR.

Archaeological features and contexts will be referred to using the continuous three-figure numbering system (e.g. 001) employed by Archaeoleg Cambria Archaeology Field Operations.

## 2. THE SITE

### 2.1 Location

2.1.1 Dinefwr castle is situated within the south western portion of Dinefwr park, approximately 1.25 km from Llandeilo town centre. The castle is located upon the highest point of a rocky outcrop of Red Ordovician sandstone-Llandeilo series (BGS 1994), at a height of approximately 100m OD. The castle has an imposing southern and south western aspect, with an almost sheer drop into the valley bottom below, and a commanding view of the Tywi valley. To the north and east the land slopes away with a gentler gradient, although still with good all round visibility over the surrounding countryside.

2.1.2 The northern and eastern slopes for approximately 300m from the castle are covered with dense woodland, now preserved as a wildlife reserve owned by the West Wales Naturalists' Trust. Slightly further to the north lies Newton house, a substantial mansion, on the site of the 16th century successor to the castle as the seat of the Rhys family.

### 2.2 Study Area: Historical Background

#### *Pre-12th Century*

2.2.1 The origin of the name '*Dinefwr*' is shrouded in some mystery. A number of different versions have been put forward, which includes a derivation from '*Dinas Ifor*' (Fortress of Ifor) pertaining to the 7th century figure, Ifor ab Alun, as well as a connection with the 4th century Bishop Ebur. Another source of the name may have been derived from the '*Efwr*' or cow-parsnip which grow on the slopes of the ridge (Owen 1996, Fisher 1925).

2.2.2 The earliest surviving written reference to the site of Dinefwr is found in the Llandaff Charters (Davies 1979) which can be somewhat unreliable in nature. In particular, one charter details the gift from the seventh century king of Dyfed, Noe ab Arthur, to the church of Llandaff, of the church and territory of Llandeilo Fawr, which contained an additional statement, in Welsh, giving details of the gift's boundaries. These were said to run along the stream *Pistyll Dewi* to *Gwaith Dinefwr* and then down to the river Tywi (Lloyd 1935).

#### *12th-15th Century*

2.2.3 Dinefwr is not mentioned again in documents until the 12th century when it is obvious that the site played an important role in Welsh politics. From the erection of the castle, probably sometime in the 12th century, until the fall of Deheubarth, the association of a prince's name with Dinefwr was synonymous with a claim to sovereignty (Owen 1996).

2.2.4 The tradition that Dinefwr had served as an ancient seat of power for the kings of Deheubarth before the 12th century and Lord Rhys is particularly strong, although unconfirmed due to the lack of physical evidence. The location of Dinefwr, close to the probable site of St. Teilo's monastery at Llandeilo, an important early religious centre from the 7th-9th century, may be significant for the site's traditional importance.

2.2.5 Giraldus Cambrensis in *'The Itinerary through Wales'*, dated to the late 12th century, related that there were three regal palaces in Wales, corresponding to the three ancient kingdoms of Wales. These were Aberffraw on Anglesey for the kingdom of Gwynedd, Pengwern (Shrewsbury) for the kingdom of Powys and Dinefwr for the kingdom of Deheubarth (Cambrensis 1908). In a similar vein, a letter from Llywelyn the Great to Henry III in September 1220, described Dinefwr as

*'A castle whose glory had already ceased, a castle which of yore possessed all the dignities of Deheubarth as the centre of the territory'* (Edwards 1935).

2.2.6 However, no mention was made of Dinefwr in *'The Mabinogion'*, a strange occurrence for a place apparently endowed with such importance, and indeed the first mention of Dinefwr in *The Chronicle of the Princes (Brut y Tywsgoyon)* (Jones 1955) was at the comparatively late date of 1163. This was the occasion when Rhys ap Gruffydd submitted to King Henry II at Pencadair and in return was allowed to keep the lordship of Cantref Mawr, and Dinefwr, as his own. This lordship became one of the cornerstones of Lord Rhys' power in South Wales and the seat of Dinefwr, the main centre of the lords of Deheubarth, until taken over by the English in 1277. It has been suggested that the ancient traditions of Dinefwr as a centre of power may have been created and popularised at the end of the 12th century, in the interest of Lord Rhys and his newly secured territory (Griffiths 1991).

#### *The Dinefwr townships of 'Old town' and 'Newtown'*

2.2.7 A number of early references allude to communities close to the castle. A reference to the vill *'Trefscoleygon'* was made in the grant of land from Edward I to Rees ap Maredudd, Lord of Dryslwyn in 1277. A later enquiry in 1318 also mentioned the *'Trefyscloeigion'* (The township of the scholars). The Royal Commission suggested that these two references referred to Llandeilo (RCAHMW 1917), although it has been shown that since the 1318 enquiry made reference to both Llandeilo Fawr and *'Trefyscloeigion'* it was very unlikely that the two townships were the same (Griffiths 1991). A survey of the Dinefwr estate in March 1280 by Edward I's surveyors noted the presence of a *'Villa de Scleygon'* with 14 tenants and an assessed rent of four marks.

2.2.8 The clearest picture of the nature and function of the Welsh medieval court comes from the laws of Hywel Dda (Jenkins 1986). The court as described in the laws was highly formal and hierarchical, separated into military, administrative and festive (Owen 1996). Since it was customary for the priests and clerks of the court to be in close attendance to the lord, it would be expected that land adjacent to the castle was given over to house this group. It was this small supporting community that formed the nucleus of the castle's township, later to be known as the 'old (or upper) town' of Dinefwr.

2.2.9 Within 20 years of the castle falling into English administration, the community was already undergoing significant development. It seems likely that the community was swollen, within this period, by an influx of immigrants. Due to this expansion, a second related site, later known as Newton (or lower town), grew up further down the castle hill, probably where the present mid 17th century 'Dinefwr castle' mansion is situated. The decision to expand the community around the castle appears to have been taken, on behalf of Edward I, by the Justiciar of South Wales, Walter de Pederton. The introduction of a revised rental agreement in 1302-3 enables the ethnic make-up of the twin towns to be closely observed, with the 'old town' tenants being exclusively Welsh and those of the 'new town' almost exclusively of English or other immigrant extraction (Griffiths 1991).

2.2.10 In 1298 the New town contained 26 burgages, rented at the usual rate of 1s. each. This had risen to 35 burgages (all but two with rights to commons and out-lands) by 1302. This rose to 44 burgages by 1306. The town was constituted a free borough in 1363, consisting of 46 burgages with the charter inspected and confirmed in 1394 (Richard 1935). The relationship between the church's tenants at Llandeilo and the King's tenants at Dinefwr seems to have been fairly cordial, although not without occasional friction (Rees 1975).

2.2.11 In 1403 Hugh de Waterton reported that the towns of Llandeilo Fawr and Newtown had been burnt during a three day siege by Owain Glyndwr and a force of 8240 men (anon 1851, Davies 1995). Although both townships recovered, the township at Dinefwr was apparently in terminal decline and by the early 16th century had largely disappeared, the land being absorbed into the Dinefwr estate.

#### *Post-medieval period*

2.2.12 In 1532 a survey of the lands of the recently disgraced Rhys ap Gruffydd reported that 'The mansion of Newton stands within the town of Newton', the mansion having been built either by Sir Rhys ap Thomas or his grandson and successor Sir Rhys ap Gruffydd. The ownership of the castle and estate remained with the Crown until 1615 when it was sold to a Richard Budd. The estate was later sold to the Rice family in 1635 and remained in their possession until the middle of this century (Jones 1987).

## **2.3 Archaeological Background**

### *General*

2.3.1 Despite the relative importance of Dinefwr castle, and in contrast to many of its contemporaries, the site has never been the focus of a large-scale planned programme of archaeological excavation. In the absence of any conclusive proof from excavation, the site of Dinefwr and the original builder of Dinefwr castle has been, and still is, the subject of a great deal of speculation.

2.3.2 The 'Gwaith' or entrenchment mentioned in the Llandaff charter has been taken to refer to the large outer ditch enclosing part of the outer ward, approximately 60m to the south east (PRN 880). It has been suggested that this outer ditch is more characteristic of a late prehistoric hill-fort than a Medieval feature (Austin 1984), although a number of sources have disagreed with this interpretation and see no evidence for any earlier structures or earthworks within the study area (Griffiths 1991). A number of scattered prehistoric finds and barrows are located in the vicinity of Llandeilo, but none have been firmly identified and recorded within the bounds of Dinefwr park.

2.3.3 The earliest finds located in the immediate area of the castle site, sometime around 1800, were of Roman origin. A hoard of 1st century Roman silver denarii in a earthenware vessel were found 800m to the north east, on the site of the Newton house kitchen garden (PRN 869) (Fenton 1917) and were exhibited in 1854-5 (Allen 1855). Again in the same period, levelling of the churchyard at Llandyfeisant church, 1100m to the north east, allegedly produced evidence for the footings of a Roman temple (PRN 7367) (Rees 1873), although the remains may have related to a more domestic type of structure.

2.3.4 A number of Roman inscriptions, many now missing, have also been located around Dinefwr and Llandeilo (Lhwyd 1858, Westwood 1876), although at least one of the inscriptions, found incorporated into the Dinefwr park wall, has been shown to have originated well outside the area (Rees 1854 James 1991). The coin hoard, building and inscriptions have been used from at least the early 19th century as the basis for the claim of the existence of a Roman military fort on or near the site of Dinefwr castle (eg. Fenton 1917).

2.3.5 Based on historical events and inferences from 12th century writings, a number of historians have credited the site of Dinefwr castle with a series of fortifications from the 9th century onward, linked with the lords of Deheubarth (Davies 1858, Samuel 1868). However, this period in the history of the site remains poorly understood.

### *The Castle*

2.3.6 The site of Dinefwr has been proposed as the possible site for a range of fortifications dating from the late Iron Age and through the Roman and Dark Age periods. Traditionally, the site has been identified as the ancient seat of power for the kings of Deheubarth from the 9th century and is therefore of immense importance in Welsh history. In the 12th century, the castle and estate became one of the cornerstones of Rhys ap Gruffudd' (the Lord Rhys) power in South Wales and recorded seat of the lords of Deheubarth, until it came under English administration in 1277.

2.3.7 It has been suggested that one of the possible builders of the stone castle was in fact a Norman, the Earl Gilbert de Clare (Armitage 1912). Although this was refuted (Fisher 1925), mainly due to a wrong assumption that Dinefwr could be equated with the site of Dinweiler, it has been accepted that the plan of the castle could possibly reflect a previous motte and bailey design, with the motte having been lowered to form the present smaller inner ward.



2.3.8 One of the most likely builders of the original stone castle remains Lord Rhys, sometime in the mid to late 12th century. Rhys is held to be one of the first Welsh leaders to fortify sites in stone. An example of this is Cardigan castle, which he re-fortified in stone in 1171, after he had previously captured and demolished it (Griffiths 1990).

2.3.9 After many years of neglect the castle was taken into the guardianship of the Secretary of State for Wales in February 1983, and is at present undergoing a programme of consolidation that will lead to the castle being opened to the public in 1997.

2.3.10 In the previous archaeological evaluation of the area of this project, a trench was excavated between the circular keep, the south western curtain wall and the 'picturesque' period stairway (Manning 1997, Trench B). This located a narrow wall or finger pier encased within a series of consecutive rubble tips used to build up the ground level in that area. This wall/pier was found to be sitting on rubble material comparable with a post-medieval date and the feature that was possibly either related to the 17th/18th century arched walkway or a slightly earlier predecessor. The conclusion was that excavation of the adjacent area down approximately 1 metre, would be unlikely to encounter archaeological features other than post-medieval makeup deposits.

### **3. SUMMARY OF WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS**

#### **3.1 Area 3 (figure 1).**

3.1.1 This area was excavated down by a contractor's mini digger, with the soil removed by a small dumper truck and deposited the soil outside the curtain wall. The soil was then loaded by a JCB-size machine into a lorry and carted from the castle: the location for the re-depositing of this soil was not made known to us.

3.1.2 The soil was excavated in such a manner, and partly under wet conditions, that detailed observation was not possible. A periodic watching brief was undertaken as requested by Cadw. This entailed calling up to the site on at least a daily basis, and when excavation of the possibly more archaeological parts were taking place.

3.1.3 No detailed stratification could be seen. The layers removed appeared to be as those recorded by the archaeological evaluation. No finds were seen other than a glass bottle base, probably 18th or 19th century (deposited back on site) and a silvered copper alloy round-headed pin.

3.1.4 There were no structures within the soils excavated.

3.1.5 Excavation of the soil against the curtain wall was halted and a batter of soil left. This action was taken because the repointing of the curtain wall appears to have taken place down to the level at which this excavation started. Below this repointing, it was apparent that consolidation of the lower wall or face-work would be desirable as excavation of the soil against the wall was undertaken, as the facing of the wall above was judged likely otherwise to collapse.

3.1.6 The removal of the soil in this area did reveal three small putlog holes in the east stairway wall (area 4 context 4003, see below).

#### **3.2 Area 4 (figure 1)**

3.2.1 This area is situated between the stairway walls (4002 west and 4003 east) and involved excavation down over 2 metres against the curtain wall. Excavation was undertaken by the contractor and quickly excavated by pick and shovel.

3.2.2 The earliest features were the curtain wall (4001) and the original bonded entrance arch (4008). The wall and arch continued below and to the west side of the excavation area, with the wall also continuing to the east. There were two small voids on the interior of the curtain wall, which appear to be lost stones rather than putlog holes. There was an area of inner face collapse near the base of the excavation.

3.2.3 The arch (4008) was blocked (4009), probably at the same time as the present smaller entrance, outside the excavation area and to the west, was constructed within this blocking. This blocking was of roughly faced stones with mortar.

3.2.4 Both of the stairway walls (4002 and 4003) butt against the curtain wall, and in the case of the western stairway wall also against the arch (4008) and the blocking

(4009). Neither of these walls are tied into the curtain wall and associated features – probably partly of the reason for the later movement.

3.2.5 Both upper parts of the stairway walls appeared to be of later build, rebuild or repair. From the exterior face of the eastern stairway wall it would appear that this could be contemporary with the re-facing of the curtain wall to the east and adjacent to area 3. The lower part of the wall has moved around 100mm away from the curtain wall, whereas the upper part was against it. There were three small putlog holes, all at about the same level, in the outer face of the upper wall; these appear to be for construction, not a roof.

3.2.6 The lower part of the stairway possibly dates to the period when the gazebo was constructed on the keep, c. 1700-1720.

3.2.7 Filling the area between the stairway walls was a layer of grey brown sandy loam with a lot of small stones and rubble (4006). Capping this layer was a thick layer of mortar and stones (4005), which possibly bonded with the eastern stairway wall (4003). However this material probably sheared away from the upper part of the western stairway wall (4002) as it moved. This thick mortar and stone layer formed the base for the steps of flat stones (4004).

3.2.8 Some of the upper stone steps (4004) had already been removed prior to the watching brief and there appeared to be a recent fill or layer (4007) against the west wall. This probably filled the void as the west wall (4002) lent westward.

3.2.9 At the conclusion of the May watching brief a meeting was held with Cadw, where we recommended that the inner face of the curtain wall, arch and blocking be drawn, prior to consolidation. This apparently will be undertaken when the upper part of the stairway wall or walls have been reduced before rebuilding.

### **3.3 July Watching Brief**

3.3.1 Again this was an intermittent watching brief, visiting the site on three occasions as the stairway wall and infill were reduced prior to consolidation. The western stairway wall (4002) was removed down to the level of the offset plinth.

3.3.2 The mortar and stone layer (4005) was recorded to a depth of up to 2 metres.

3.3.3 No artefacts were found and only a page of notes with sketches were made.

## **4. CONCLUSIONS**

4.1 It would appear that area 3 did not contain anything of archaeological significance. Area 4 also contained little of note. This watching brief was therefore an adequate response for this project.

## **APPENDIX ONE: DETAILED RECORDS OF WATCHING BRIEF**

### *Record Numbers used*

Area 3  
Context 3001

Area 4  
Context 4001-4009

Areas 3 and 4  
Photographic 4101-4113

## **APPENDIX TWO: CATALOGUE OF WATCHING BRIEF ARCHIVE**

The project archive has been indexed and catalogued according to National Monument Record (NMR) categories and contains the following:

- A. Copy of final report.
- B. Site records, including context record sheets and site notebook.
- D. Site photographs - catalogue, colour slide and B/W contact sheets.
- G. List of references, including primary and secondary sources.
- I. Archive report and draft copies of final report.
- M. Miscellaneous correspondence.

There is no material in categories C, E, F, H, K, J, L and N.

The archive is currently held by Archaeoleg **Cambria** Archaeology Field Operations, Llandeilo, Dyfed under PRN 882. This archive will be handed over to Cadw.

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