CASTELL HENLLYS

EXCAVATIONS 1997

FIELD REPORT

by Harold Mytum

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Introduction

The 1997 season was designed to complete investigation of some areas of the site, continue in some of the more complex and long-running sequences of activity, and to begin new areas both within and beyond the fort itself. A greater emphasis in linking the archaeological excavation with the visitors' experience underlay the allocation of some 2nd year York students to dealing with public questions and interviewing selected visitors to ascertain their aspirations and queries regarding the site.

The excavation team was the largest yet used on the site, with a record number of trainees attending. This excavation remains the largest training excavation in Britain, with about 60 on site at any one time and 180 students in total. Whilst most are British, there were also students from Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, and USA.

Ken Murphy acted once again as assistant director for the site, and ensured that the day to day operations on site ran so smoothly; supervisors or assistant supervisors for each area are listed in the appropriate sections below. Pat Excell was in charge of logistics and camp site, and Becky Marchant the cooking. Faye Palmer and Steve Rowlands were responsible for finds processing, James Langthorne for flotation and environmental samples, and Dan Hull for phosphate analyses. Mike Boyton produced the draft line drawings in this report. Phil Bennett made facilities available, and all the National Park staff at Castell Henllys have been most supportive of the work. Features have appeared in the *County Echo*, *Tivyside Advertiser*, and the *Western Mail.* Funding to support the excavation by the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park is gratefully acknowledged.

The report here deals with various aspects of the site in turn, describing what has been achieved and setting each area in its chronological spatial context. The excavation had a large and well motivated work force, with the result that a considerable amount has been achieved this season. The following areas will be reported on in turn:

For each area the supervisor or assistant supervisor responsible for the area is listed in italics.

Iron Age fort

- Banks and ditches immediately east of the entrance way *(Guy Jacobsen)*
- Banks and ditches immediately west of the entrance way *(Gerry Twomey)*
- Terrace and ditch at the southern edge of the fort *(Claire Murray)*
- Terrace and ditch at the eastern edge of the fort *(Judy Axelby)*
- Western entrance *(Gerry Twomey)*
- Bank and interior area in the southern area of the fort *(Claire Murray and Bridget MacKernan)*
- Buried soils beneath the bank west of the entrance *(Gerry Twomey)*
- Outer bank and ditch, with *chevaux-de-frise (Lucy Hall and Amy Kelman)*
- Banks and ditches on the western slopes of the fort *(Simeon Pearce-Smith)*

Romano-British farmstead

- Over the Iron Age ditch *(Emma Goodwin and Rob Sweet)*
- Northern roundhouse *(Faye Palmer)*
- Trial area to the east *(Faye Palmer and Chris Penney)*
- Ditch to the west of the farmstead *(Greg Proud)*

Iron Age fort

Banks and ditches immediately east of the entrance way

The first stone phase of the gateway which included the double guard-chambers could only be constructed with the infilling of the terminal of the ditch between the inner and outer banks of the fort. This infilling had been partially examined in 1996, and some stone walling associated with this infilling had been uncovered then. Machine clearance at Easter of spoil and topsoil around and underlying the site of the visitors' viewing platform allowed further examination of the ditch, its infilling and the stone walling. It is now possible to assess how the builders of the stone guard-chambers provided support for their rubble infilling, how they defined the front of the inner rampart and how the outer bank was joined to the inner one at this phase. Moreover, we now can appreciate the nature and scale of the earlier inner and outer banks of the fort before the construction of the stone guard-chamber phase.

The early banks and ditches

The inner terminal of the ditch during its early phase has been located on its inner edge and partially excavated. Slightly east of the terminal a full section across the ditch reveals the scale of the ditch. It was U-shaped in cross-section, and measures 5.5 m across between the two banks, and has a maximum depth of 2.5 m. A section trough the inner bank at this point was completed in 1996, and can now be discussed with its external ditch. The bank is remarkably low at this point, mainly made of red clay, and has a width of c.4 m and a maximum surviving height of c.1 m. Later heightening of the bank to the east has buried the earliest clay phase of bank but the rear of it was encountered c.15 m along the northern defences, and it was fully excavated in the first trench through the northern defences excavated during the 1980s. The scale of the external ditch is much greater than would be expected from the size of the bank, and at the moment it is unclear whether the additional material removed in digging the ditch was dumped. Moreover, given the scale of the ditch, the bank seems insubstantial. This problem of relative scale of bank and ditch has yet to be resolved, but is one also with regard to the outer bank and ditch.

Beyond the early ditch lies the outer bank, which is c.3 m wide and stands to a height of less than 1 m. The ground beyond this ditch was scarped away to present to an attacker a steep and high slope running out from the ditch beyond. The ditch itself has yet to be excavated at this point, but the terminal a lttle to the west suggests a substantial U-shaped ditch. Further to the east was for at least some of its length a V-shaped ditch of slightly lesser proportions, but where the material from scarping and ditch digging was dumped at the entrance is unclear. One would have expected substantial banks to flank any timber entrance tower and gateway, rather than low banks inside substantial ditches. As this phenomenon applies to both the inner and outer ditches, there must have been a definite design scheme to create low banks, but as yet the significance of this is unclear. The pattern of banks and ditches on the western side of the entrance was always different to that on the east, and this is the case with this early phase of bank and ditch defence.

The double stone guard-chamber phase

The inner ditch on the north of the fort was partially filled in when the stone guard-chamber phase of gateway was constructed, and the inner and outer banks were heightened and joined together.

The early ditch terminal was filled with thick tipped in layers of burnt material, rubble, gravel and clay. these materials were largely dumped in from the inside of the fort to the south and the entranceway on the west. Once a certain level had been reached, a drystone wall was constructed to hold back the upper layers of dumped material and to provide a vertical face to any attacker who had crossed the outer bank and ditch and tried to approach the eastern flank of the entrance. This drystone walling also carried along the outer face of the inner rampart for a distance of 6 m (Figure 1), but does not seem to have been used as an inner revetment of the outer bank.

The effect of joining the inner and outer rampart would have been to make defence of the outer bank much more effective. Now defenders could use the outer bank with its palisade and if it were likely to be overrun could retreat back via the entrance complex to the inner bank and fight from there.

Banks and ditches immediately west of the entrance way

In 1996 a substantial ditch terminal was excavated, the easternmost part of a ditch that ran westwards down the hillslope (Figure 2). This has been cleaned and restudied, and can be related to a bank and ditch excavated this season on the western slopes of the fort (see separate section below). Another large ditch has, however, also been examined immediately west of the entrance way in 1997.

The large ditch is U-shaped in section and is c.6 m wide and c.2 m deep. Dug into the soft gravel subsoil on this part of the hilltop, the original material from this ditch was used to construct the massive bank which lay to the west of the entrance. The ditch seems to have been cleaned out frequently until it was deliberately filled in with large amounts of domestic debris, the tipping being undertaken not only from the inside of the fort, but also from the ditch terminal along the entrance causeway, and from outside the ditch as well. Several phases of walling and timber revetments subsequently ran across the top of the infilled ditch; these had been investigated in previous seasons.

The large ditch ran off the south-west, apparently down the slope in front of the bank which ran round the hill. Where this ditch runs is not at all clear from surface examination; it may have run just a short distance and then changed to a scarp, but it may have run round the side of the hill and is now completely filled in. How it relates to the rock-cut ditch on the south and east is also unclear, but it is just possible that it is the same ditch. Further examination of the slopes of the promontory west of the fort will be necessary to address these issues.

Figure 1

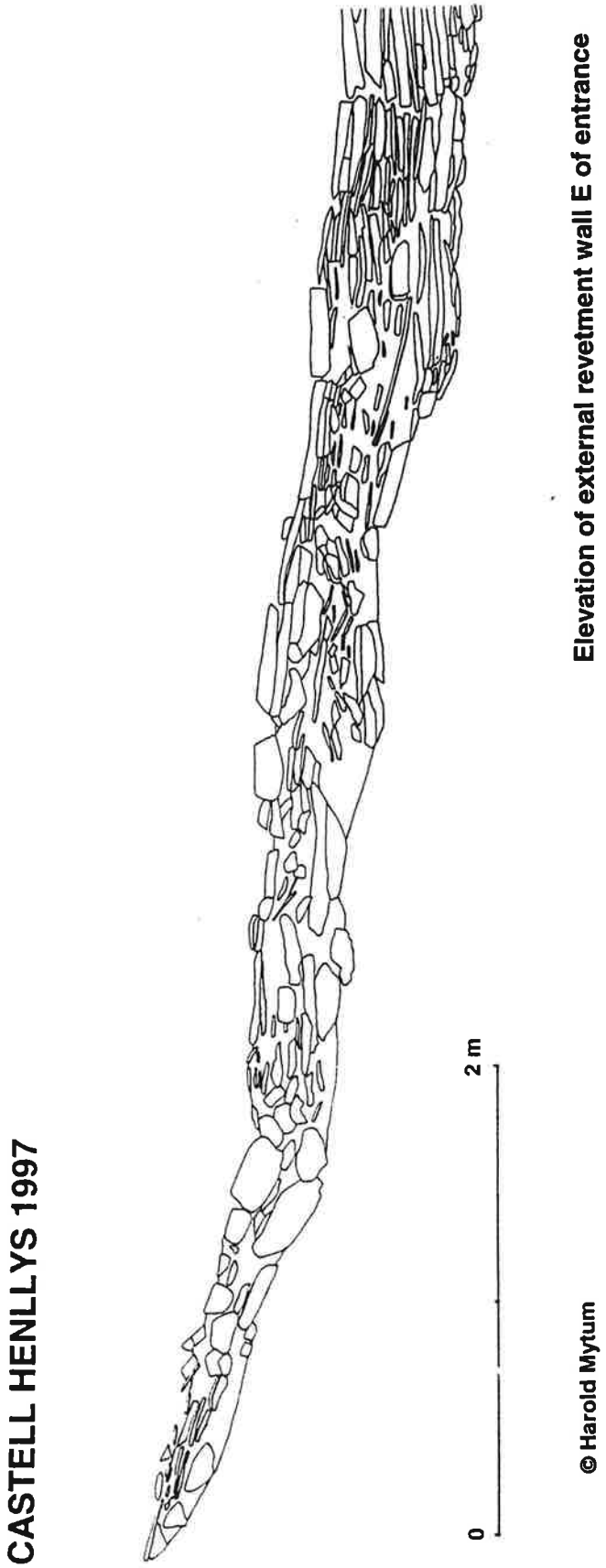

CASTELL HENLLYS 1997
Elevation of external revetment wall E of entrance
0
2 m
© Harold Mytum

Figure 2

Terrace and ditch at the southern edge of the fort

In 1996 a trial trench was opened up across the terrace on the southern edge of the fort to demonstrate the method of construction of the terrace. Instead a substantial ditch was discovered, cut out of the solid shale bedrock (Figure 3). This ditch was about 1.5 m deep, and 6.5 m wide, with a narrow ledge of bedrock left at the southernmost edge, only 6 m wide, before the steep slope down to the Nant Duad in the valley below. The ditch would have been dug at the same time as the natural hillslope had been scarped and steepened, and a bank constructed on the top of the slope. This bank is discussed below under bank and interior in the southern are of the fort.

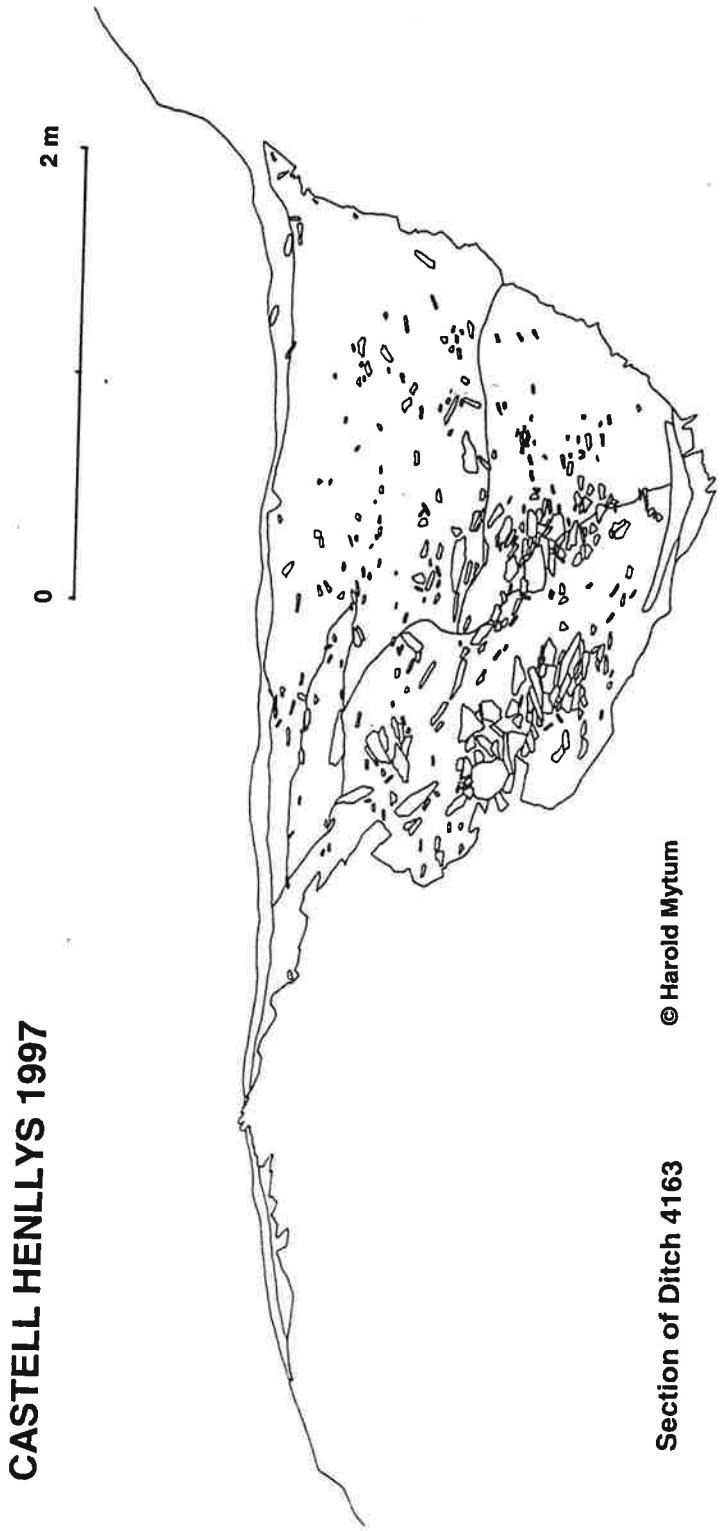
The ditch had filled up but a terrace had subsequently been made by removing the natural wash that would have accumulated against the northern, uphill slopes of the scarp. When this terracing was undertaken is unclear; it may have been during the later Iron Age, the Romano-British period, or during the Middle Ages. Whenever it was done, it would have made a very desirable strip of agricultural land around the southern and western sides of the hill. It is worth noting that this terracing was not constructed on the colder, less agriculturally effective eastern side of the hill, as demonstrated by the excavations described in the next section. Dating cutting away of deposits is particularly difficult in archaeology, but further excavation of the surface layers of the terrace may give some indication of when the terrace was being intensively used, particularly if it were manured.

Terrace and ditch at the south-eastern edge of the fort

A small area of excavation first examined in 1981 was widened and extended further to the west in 1996, and was further examined and extended downslope to the east in 1997. The excavations at the top of the slope located the palisade trench running north-south across the trench at the top of the slope, with two recuts at the southern end (Figures 4, 5). To the east, a small amount of bank survived, though most had eroded down the slope. Dark occupation layers had built up against the bank, and through these had been cut a post hole. The slope beyond the bank had been scarped to make a steep slope, and this slope ran on down into a rock-cut ditch similar to but slightly smaller than that encountered on the southern terrace. From this lower ditch fill came an iron object, badly corroded, that may be a spearhead.

The ditch is almost certainly a continuation of the one found on the southern terrace, and suggests that the fort was even more heavily defended on all sides than had previously been thought. Until this season, it was thought that no terrace or ditch had been dug on the eastern side of the fort along the natrually steep slopes. The ditch on this side. however, has been completely filled in by natural silting, and its line has not been subsequently terraced on this side. this explains why the ditch has been so difficult to locate.

Figure 3


2 m
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CASTELL HENLLYS 1997
Section of Ditch 4163
© Harold Mytum

Figure 4

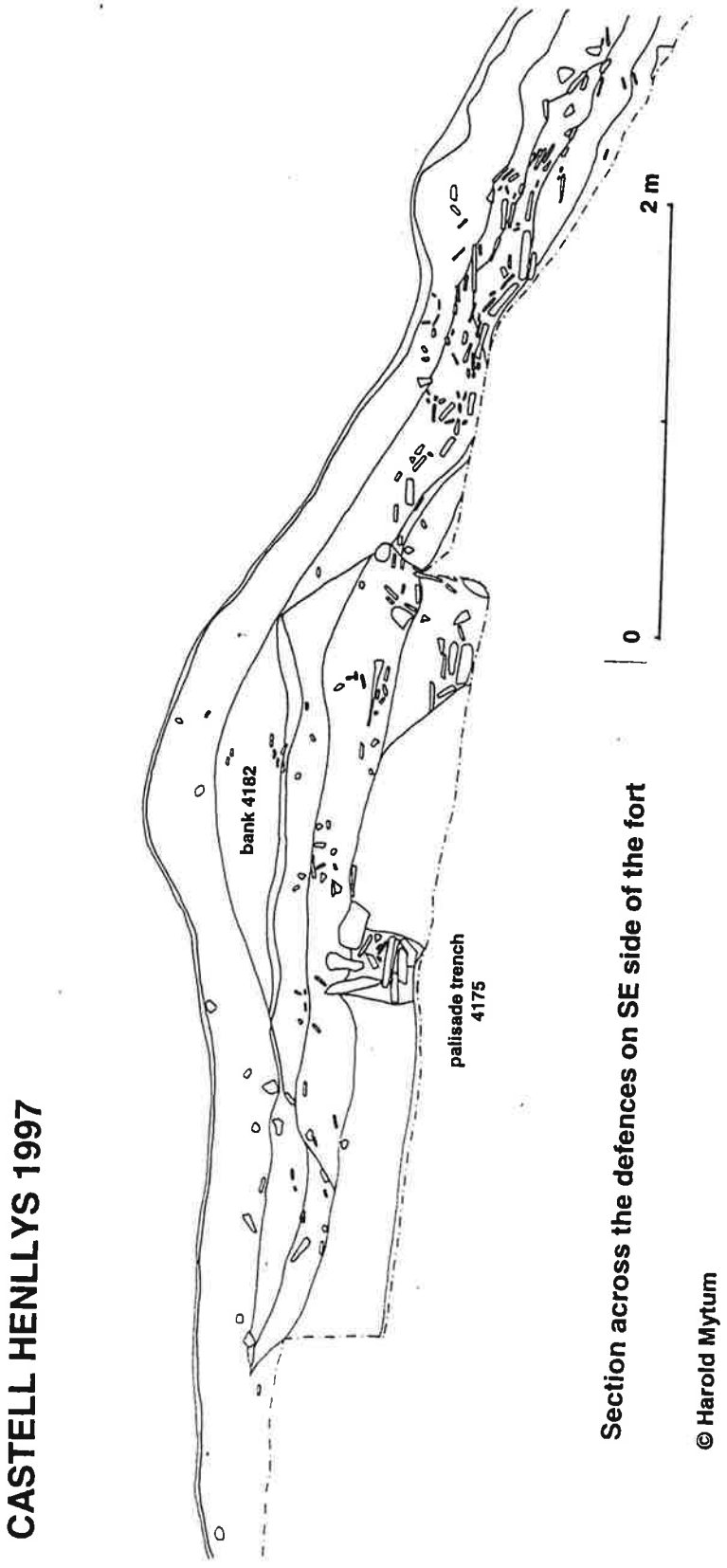
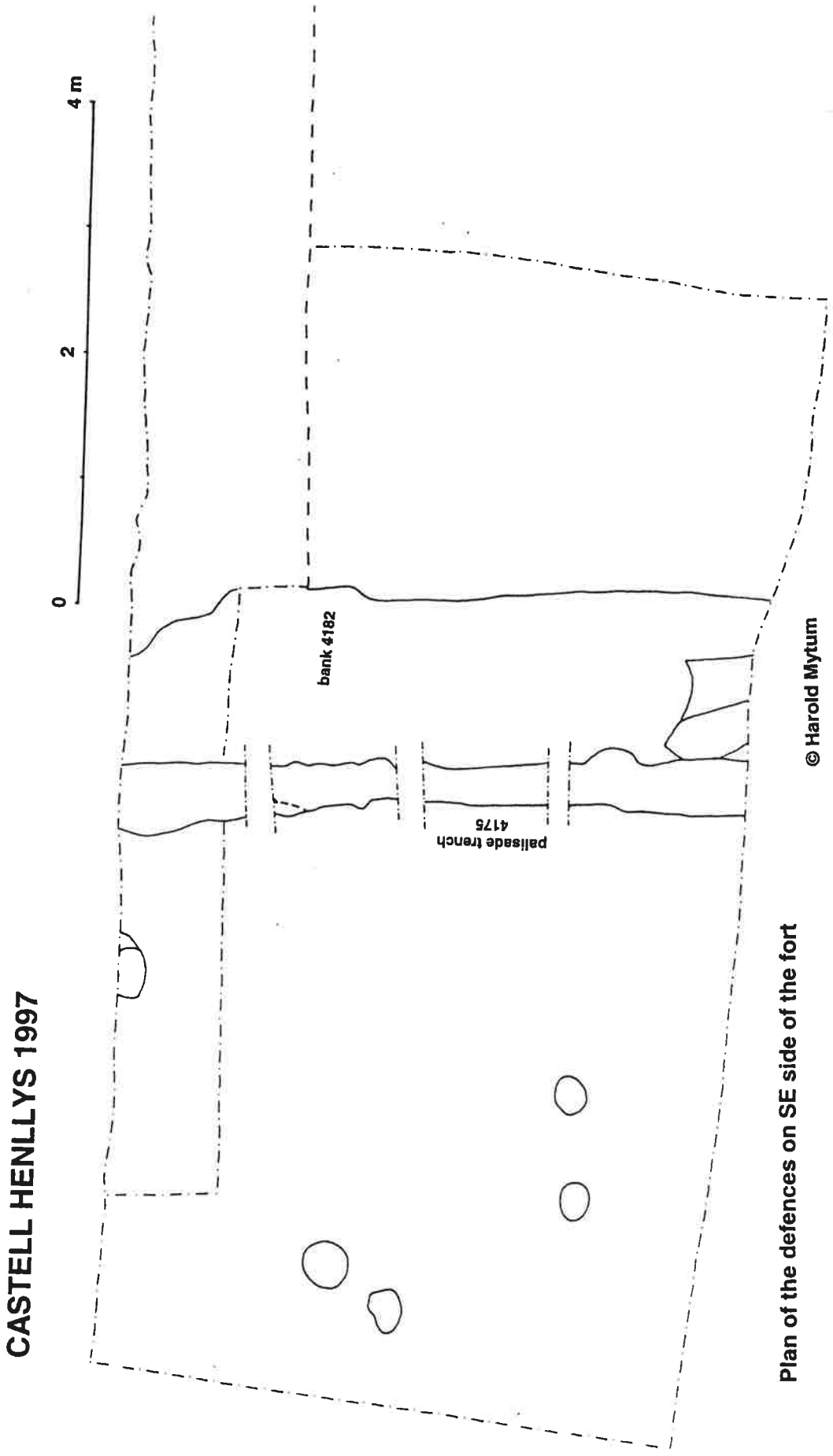

CASTELL HENLLYS 1997
bank 4182
palisade trench 4175
0
2 m
Section across the defences on SE side of the fort
© Harold Mytum

Figure 5


CASTELL HENLLYS 1997
Plan of the defences on SE side of the fort
© Harold Mytum
4 m
2
0
bank 4182
palisade trench 4175

Western entrance

Further cleaning during Easter 1997 when soil conditions were perfect for examining the steep surfaces at this part of the site failed to locate any post holes to support the frame of a gate to be expected at the western entrance. In order to demonstrate that no such gate had existed on this site, some further excavation took place during the summer of 1997. This revealed the buried soils beneath the bank terminals, and further cleaning of the entrance passage located some slight remains of very early boundary markers round the promontory.

A shallow palisade trench was located, with possible impressions of the posts within it, was traced on the southern part of the trench. In addition, a line of small stake holes, curved in plan, was found just outside and downhill of the palisade trench (Figure 6). These features are important as evidence for early phases of the site prior to the construction of the boundary bank, as both ran under the buried soil preserved beneath the later bank. The fact that these slight features survived further emphasis that more substantial post holes of a later gate would have survived on this slope, and so makes the western entrance even more anomalous if defence were seen as the overwhelming priority for the fort dwellers unless other defences lay downslope of this entrance between the banks.

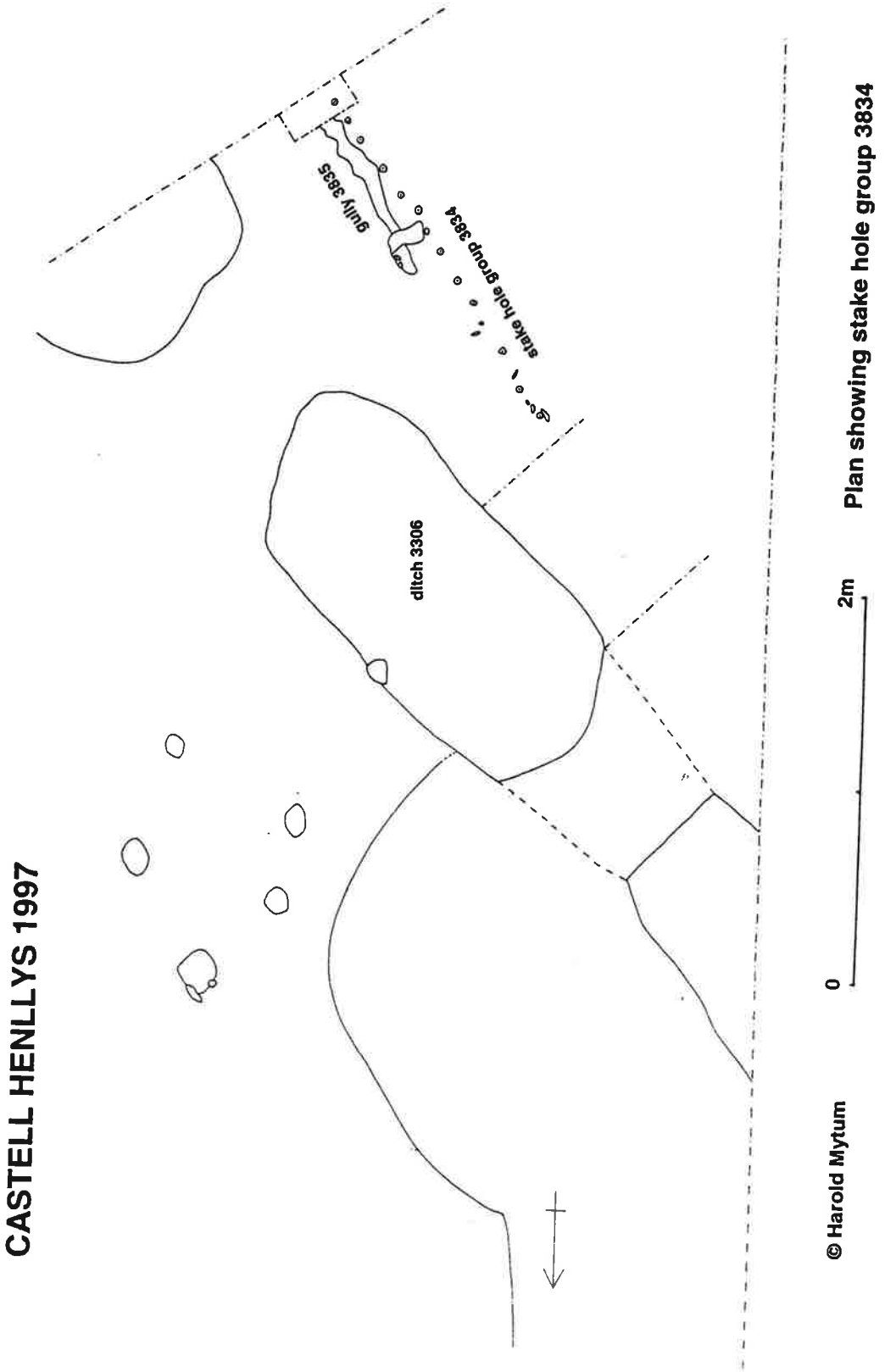
Bank and interior area in the southern area of the fort

The area immediately east of the public access to the southern area of the fort was cleared of a large spoil heap in Easter 1997, and excavation began on the area in the summer. The remains of the 18th/19th century field bank, and its shallow ditches on either side, were first cleared away, and the surface below was cleaned. The deposits beneath were of Iron Age date, and a decorated bichrome yellow bead was found there, as was a sherd of Iron Age pottery. They had built up against the rear of the perimeter bank which had been excavated in earlier seasons to the west of the public access route. In this area had been found a smithing hearth and the debris associated with it. Some evidence of this craftworking is already becoming clear in the newly opened area, with fragments of iron objects and slag recovered..

A distinct new level in the build-up of debris has just been reached and cleaned at the end of the season which probably is the surface associated with the accumulated craft activity debris. The already excavated assemblage of material has been examined by Peter Crew (Snowdonia National Park) who is one of Europe's leading experts on Iron Age ironworking, and he considers this to be one of the finest collections of smithing material from Britain for this period. the material to be obtained during 1998 will be of special importance.

The excavations have also revealed a few post holes, four of which are with substantial shale packing represent a four-post granary constructed late in the sequence of occupation, significantly after the iron smithing period. this four-post structure fits in the pattern of all other found on the site, on the north and west on the site's perimeter. This discovery emphasises the peripheral nature of the four-post granaries in the latest period of use of the hillfort in the Iron Age; other such structures may exist elsewhere beneath the tree-covered late bank which surrounds the site.

Figure 6


CASTELL HENLLYS 1997
gully 3835
stake hole Group 3834
ditch 3306
Plan showing stake hole group 3834
0
2m
© Harold Mytum

Soil phosphate analysis of the various levels that have been excavated has show unusually high levels in the deposits in this area, suggesting that human or animal excrement had been dumped in the area. This may have been part of the layers which built up after the iron smithing phase, and there may have been substantial middens along the perimeter of the site in the later Iron Age which would periodically have been partially cleared and spread on the fields where the crops were grown.

Buried soils beneath the bank west of the entrance

The buried soil preserved at the iron Age ground level beneath the inner western bank was exposed over a considerable area. Whilst cleaning up this surface at Easter 1996, some flint flakes were recovered. Sampling of buried soils then began in a systematic way during the summer 1996 season, with a grid of 1 m squares. Further work in 1997 demonstrated the depth to which flints had been worked by animals and roots in this soil in the thousands of years before being buried under the bank, so excavation took place to a greater depth, to the base of the buried subsoil.

The material in each square was excavated and then carefully sieved; the larger material was then sorted and the flint material was recovered. A range of broken blades, cores, fragmentary scrapers, an arrowhead and some waste flakes have been identified. Though small in quantity the material is sufficient to suggest a temporary stopping off point on the promontory used intermittently during the late Neolithic and the Bronze Age, perhaps from around 4,000 to 2,000 B.C..

Another important discovery during the sieving was that of some fragmentary Bronze Age pottery recovered form the buried soil. The pieces are too small for a secure typological identification but their fabric is similar to that found in cordoned urns which were used in funerary contexts. Only a few sherds of pottery have been recovered but the very spread of such material and its broken state shows that the burial, if there had been one, had already been long disturbed by the time the Iron Age fort was built. This suggests that any barrow that may have been on the promontory had been spread and disturbed by other activity before the hillfort, suggesting some agricultural activity over some time.

Outer bank and ditch, with *chevaux-de-frise*

A small amount of work has begun on the eastern end of the outer bank beneath which the *chevaux-de-frise* is preserved. The surface was machined off at Easter, and more detailed cleaning and planning has begun this summer. Already the tops of many of the *chevaux-de-frise* stones are visible, and will be further studied in 1998.

At the western end of the bank, a new area was stripped at Easter and considerable efforts have been put into this during the summer. The natural geology and the layers of wash off the eroded bank have been difficult to differentiate and interpret in this area, so progress has been relatively slow. By the end of the season, however, the picture is beginning to emerge.

The end of the *chevaux-de-frise* has been identified, and several large stones lying downslope may have been eroded parts that were washed down as the bank which covered them eroded away. Further work needs to be undertaken on the top of the bank at the western end as it seems that the stones extend north beyond the very clear front edge of the *chevaux-de-frise* which can be seen along the length to the east. this northward extension may suggest more than one period of construction but more likely represents an out-turned end to the *chevaux-de-frise* adjacent to the routeway into the fort.

The ditch associated with the bank which covered the *chevaux-de-frise* has now been located, and would seem to turn and come round the end of the bank. it may be mirrored on the other side by a similar feature associated with one of the banks that runs down the western slopes of the hill.

After the ditch was filled in by natural silting, a metalled road surface was laid across part of it. this can be linked with other patches of metalling which survive to the south. These various patches all support the hypothesis that a metalled roadway led up to and through the entrance. This was probably replaced many times, but only small fragments that have sunk into the surface of the subsoil or earlier features survive. This is an important indication of the sophisticated management of the entrance, not only at the main gate, but in the approach to it, over a distance of about 40 m.

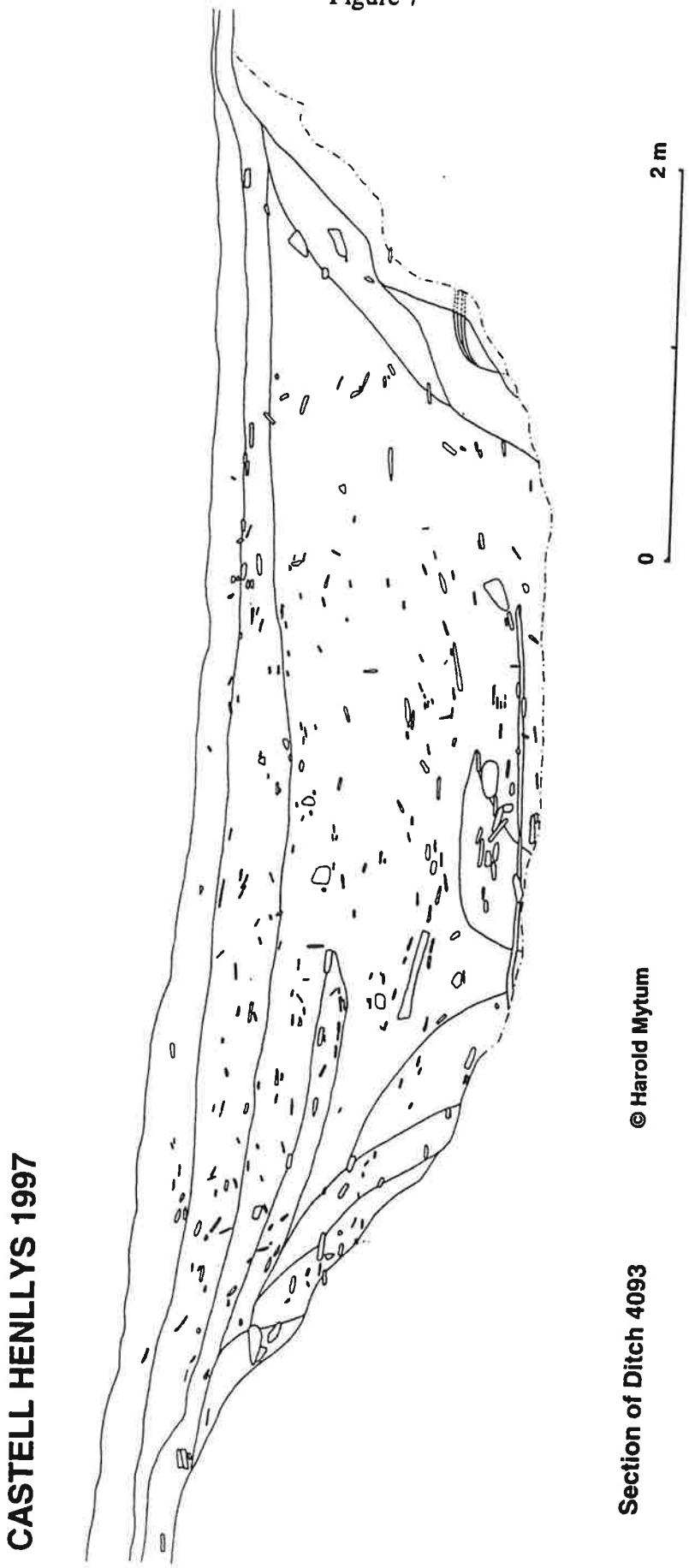
Banks and ditches on the western slopes of the fort

Survey has located two banks which run down the western slopes of the promontory beyond the main entrance. One of these has been excavated in two locations this summer, and the other will be examined during 1998.

A long trench was opened up by machine at Easter well down the slope from the fort, not far from the public path that leads past the spring. excavation of the southernmost bank and its associated ditch to the north has been a major task of the season. The ditch, V-shaped in profile, measured c.6 m across at the top, and c.2 m deep (Figure 7, drawn before the bottom of the ditch was reached). The lowest levels of fill indicated silting from the sides of the ditch, but most of the material was infill that had slowly accumulated from downhill soil movement over a very long period. This suggests that, however long the ditch was maintained, it was then a very visible feature in the landscape for centuries afterwards. A fragment of 19th century pottery came from a considerable depth, suggesting that much of the infilling happened relatively recently, probably once the field containing the Romano-British farmstead was ploughed.

The bank on the southern side of the ditch survives only to a height of c.1 m, but would seem to have been c.7 m wide. It is made up from a series of layers of gravel, capped at the rear of the bank with clay deposits. As the upper geological deposits through which the ditch is cut are gravel, with clay below, this would be as expected if the material from the ditch were thrown up to directly make the bank. It may be, however, that the clay was also deliberately used to form a more solid top and rear capping for the bank as the gravel would have been

Figure 7


CASTELL HENLLYS 1997
Section of Ditch 4093
© Harold Mytum
0
2 m

relatively unstable on its own. Moreover, a vertical discontinuity in the way in which the gravel lay could represent timber lacing within the rampart to give it additional support during and soon after construction.

No clear buried soil could be identified under the bank, which is unlike all other banks examined on the site. The upper part of the subsoil, a characteristic orange colour, was identified immediately beneath the earliest gravel and clay layers. This may suggest that on the steep natural slope of the western side of the hill there was little or no developed soil levels when the bank was constructed. The alternative is that the turf was removed from the area of the bank, and perhaps the ditch also, and saved to cover the bank with turf once completed. this could help to explain the very limited amount of infilling in the bottom of the ditch from the sides and bank.

Romano-British farmstead

Over the Iron Age ditch

In previous seasons a rich and complex sequence of buildings have been excavated from the zone previously occupied by the external ditch of the northern defences of the fort. This season the lowest levels of the sequence were examined, including a further phase of roundhouse, and below this a whole series of post holes and stake holes indicating a period of use with various structures of unknown shape or function.

At the eastern end of the exacavtion trench a large hollow excavated in the Roman period was excavated, and an opporunity taken to continue to a deeper level so that the Iron Age ditch could be sectioned at this point (Figure 8). It proved to be V-shaped, originally 2.5 m deep and at least 3 m across. The ditch fill has yet to be examined to the west of this area, but this will be necessary in 1998 to ascertain if at all possible the date of the infilling of the ditch beneath the roundhouses.

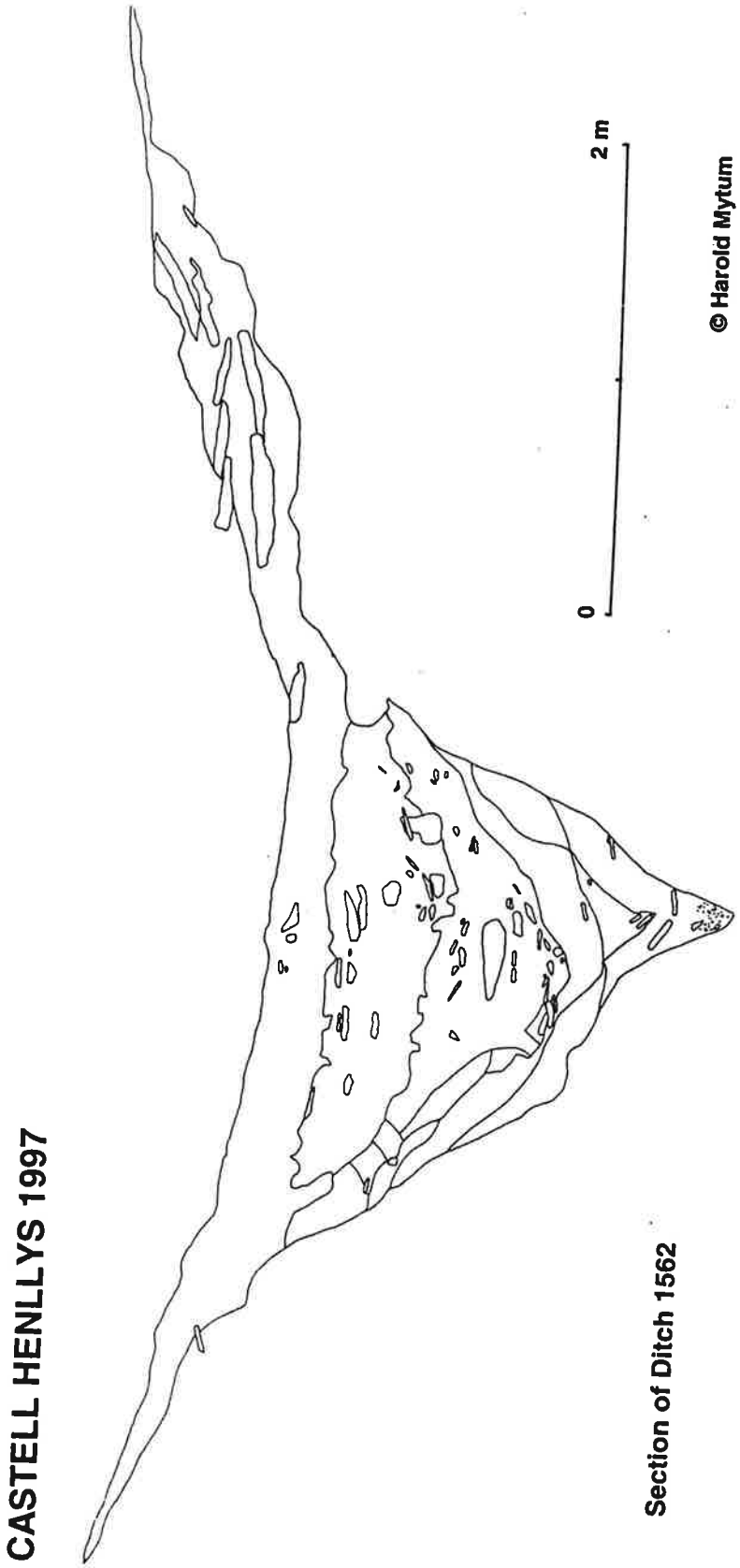
Northern roundhouse

The roundhouse partially excavated in 1981 and 1982 was further examined, as part lay to the north in the area now stripped to allow further examination of the *chevaux-de-frise*. From surface cleaning it would seem that the eavesdrip gully of the house would have run up onto the bank and has since been ploughed away. Nothing was found within the roundhouse, and the work this season can explain this. the original level of the floor would probably have been 0.2 m above the surviving level, as part of the *chevaux-de-frise* stones survive within the area of the house, yet would not have been interfering with the inhabitants so must have been buried below the floor. This indicates that the whole house floor would have been significantly higher than the surviving levels, suggesting severe plough damage in this part of the site. it is worth noting that the largest area void of archaeological features on the Romano-British farmstead is immediately adjacent and to the east of the roundhouse eavesdrip gully, and so this apparently blank area may not have been so in the Roman period but has merely been denuded of its archaeology through relatively recent agricultural activity.

Trial area to the east

A new area of the Romano-British farmstead area was opened in 1997, with the topsoil being cleared by machine at Easter, and detailed cleaning and feature excavation taking place in the summer. The trench lay between the trial trenches opened and just cleaned up in 1981 which revealed deposits along their length. The area contained a number of archaeological features, all of Roman date, but no great density of structural evidence or any intensity of finds. The whole trench has been finished apart from a narrow strip to the south which contains some well preserved stratigraphy overlying the Iron Age ditch, including a cobbled surface. This will be examined when the existing area is extended to the south to reveal the full width of the ditch and deposits protected by wash off the Iron Age bank.

Figure 8


CASTELL HENLLYS 1997
Section of Ditch 1562
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2 m
© Harold Mytum

In the rest of the area, several internal boundary ditches were excavated, and part of a roundhouse, with a fragment of Roman quern used as packing, was found at the northern edge of the trench. The rest of this house may be investigated in 1998.

Ditch to the west of the farmstead

A segment of ditch was excavated during the 1980s north of the entrance, running in a roughly north-south direction. The full extent of this ditch was at that time unknown. A section across the ditch which defined the western edge of the Romano-British farmstead also showed another ditch running at right angles, and this also was not at this stage understood. Examination in perfect soil conditions during Easter 1997 of the exposed subsoil between these two sightings of ditches found the line of a ditch which showed that these two segments were in fact part of the same ditch which ran initially east-west across the northern edge of the entrance to the Iron Age fort, in effect blocking off access to it, and then north from there roughly parallel with the already established ditch demarcating the edge of the farmstead.

From study of the sequence of the ditches, it is clear that the newly discovered ditch belongs within the Roman period, as the ditches both before and after it were of Roman date. It is now clear that the layout of the Romano-British farmstead underwent more fundamental changes in its extent and layout than had previously been thought. As more of the features, both buildings and ditches, are dated by study of the pottery found within them, it may be possible to describe in some detail the ways in which the farmstead evolved, and the social and economic implications of this.