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PRELIMINARY REPORT ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF OUTLYING ENCLOSURE AT 'CAER', CAPEL GLASCOED, LLANDDEINIOLEN, CAERNARFON, SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENT C149

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd

NO. 165

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Prepared for Cadw, Welsh Historic Monuments

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Report No. 165 Project No. 1334

1.SUMMARY

Excavation was undertaken of a cross-section through a field boundary, concentric with and outside a defended enclosure, known as Caer, Capel Glascoed, NGR SH 54776440. Four phases of boundary were revealed, including that still extant, and a build-up of almost a metre of plough soil was recorded in the upslope lynchet. No artefactual dating evidence was found but the earliest boundary, consisting of a revetted bank, sealed a deep brown soil with a natural profile unaffected by human activity. The boundary was never more substantial than a normal field wall and not in any way defensive as the 3m wide wall of Caer appears to have been. The outer boundary appears to have been built at the time of the first agricultural exploitation of the area. This is likely to have been at least as early as the intensive Romano-British occupation of the area, as shown by the number of enclosed hut groups of that period, and possibly even earlier. As the boundary is topographically related to Caer it is suggested that the site could have begun as a 'concentric circle enclosure' sometime in the first millennium BC with the outer stock? enclosure around an inner, settlement enclosure. Better dating may become possible with the completion of proposed radiocarbon dating, soil and pollen analysis.

The work was undertaken by the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust and funded by Cadw, Welsh Historic Monuments.

2. DESCRIPTION OF EXCAVATION

An area of boundary was chosen which would not involve moving any of the visible, more massive boulders or hedge (Fig. 1, Plates 1 and 2). A trench 3m long and 1.20m wide was excavated and this revealed four phases of boundary construction, including that still extant (Fig. 2).

Phase IV was the existing wall, about 0.80m high. This consisted of a number of massive

sub-rounded boulders interspersed with somewhat smaller material. The wall had been added to in places with even smaller clearance stones but none of these are visible in the section. Although containing massive stones this wall was founded on a quite narrow and insubstantial footing (Fig. 3, <3>) set on the top of a terrace (Plate 3). Numerous loose, medium-sized stones <22> lay on the downslope face of the terrace, a mixture of tumble and casually dumped clearance stones.

Phase III remained only as a bank of small angular stones $\langle 4 \rangle$, some 0.30m high, interspersed with a small amount of dark, friable loam. The stones were rather too small and angular to derive from field clearance and were taken to be deliberately introduced wall core of which no facing survived, presumably robbed out. Downslope from the terrace was a distinct layer of stone, some 20-30cm down in the ploughsoil (Fig. 2 $\langle 5 \rangle$). This was evidently tumble from the Phase III wall because it consisted largely of small angular stones similar to those of $\langle 4 \rangle$, (Fig. 3, Plate 4).

Phase IIa. Below the small angular stones of $\langle 4 \rangle$ lay a dark, relatively stone-free horizon $\langle 21 \rangle$ taken to be a humic layer developed during a period of dis-use of the boundary.

Phase II. Below layer 21 was an approximately level layer of scattered sub-rounded stones <8> and <10>, 12-30cm long, considerably larger than those in <4>. These were scatter or tumble from a wall defined on the east by a clear line of stones <9> and on the west by another, less defined line <11> (Plates 5 and 6). The stones of this boundary, apart from being larger and more rounded than those in wall <4>, were distinctive because they had a creamy yellow cortication whereas the stones above had clean, fresh surfaces.

Phase I. This consisted of a low bank <12> of yellow-brown clay-loam with one area of greyer, more clayey material and containing scattered stones similar in size, shape and colour to those of <8> and <10> above. The bank was revetted on the downhill side by a line of stones <13> (Plate 7). Beyond this was a small ditch <17> which was clearly the source

for the bank material which was similar to the subsoil into which the ditch was cut. Within the top of the upper fill <15> of the ditch was a layer of stones <23> similar to, and probably tumble from, the wall of Phase II (Plate 8). In the surface of the bank was a scatter of distinct pieces of charcoal up to c. 20mm long.

Phase 0. The bank overlay a red-brown buried soil <14> (Plate 8). This seemed to have been truncated with the only possible area of turf line, <18>, being below the revetting stones <13> and for about 1m to the east. The surface of <14> to the east of <18>produced some large pieces of charcoal up to 50mm long. It was evident that there had been animal disturbance of the buried soil and bank (but by small mammals, not by rabbits) which casts some doubt on the context of the charcoal. However, some of it was apparently in undisturbed areas of the bank and the absence of similar charcoal from anywhere higher in the excavated contexts suggests that the charcoal does relate to the same period as the bank.

The Lynchet. Uphill of the various phases of boundary c. 0.90m of ploughsoil had accumulated. Near the surface this was dark brown with many small stone fragments but became gradually redder and less stony with depth. The phases were not distinguishable in the lynchet profile as all were merged apart from the one distinct horizon of larger stones <8> from phase II, possibly marking a break in the sequence and a period of abandonment. Otherwise, any turf lines which may have developed during shorter periods of dis-use could be expected to have been mixed and erased by cultivation.

3. DISCUSSION

No artefactual evidence was found apart from post-medieval pottery and iron work relating to Phase IV. The soil sealed by the bank of phase I was deep, red-brown earth quite different to the present day dark brown soils. Although awaiting specialist analysis it appears that the buried soil is a natural, undisturbed, brown earth forest soil implying that the bank represents the primary clearance of the ground following the post-glacial vegetation climax. The absence of the turf line uphill of the boundary suggests that contemporary cultivation took place, truncating the soil profile. If it was primary clearance of forest then the presence of large pieces of charcoal could be explained. Despite the lack of artefactual evidence then there is still the possibility of radiocarbon dating and of pollen analysis of the buried soil which may allow some broad comparative environmental dating. It is fortunate that here there is available some good comparative evidence from a nearby site of similar altitude and topography. This is the pollen analysis of a deep, radiocarbon-dated core from the silts of Llyn Cororion (Watkins, 1990), only 6.5km away at Glasinfryn, between Bangor and Bethesda. This study indicated that major forest clearance for agriculture started from about 1000 BC.

If the earliest boundary at Caer was part of primary clearance then it does imply at least a Romano-British period date considering the evidence of intensive settlement in the locality then, with the hillfort of Dinas Dinorwic and at least five known hut groups within a kilometre. These settlements were probably exploiting the relatively good soils of this area. It would therefore be surprising if earlier clearance and cultivation had not taken place so a pre-Romano-British date for the Phase I boundary might be expected. The Llyn Cororion core shows evidence of cultivation peaking in about the 8th century AD which must mark some change in patterns but which, on present evidence, lies after the abandonment of the hut circle settlements which produce dates consistently within the period of Roman occupation.

In terms of topographic layout, the Caer outer boundary evidently pre-dates the existing semi-rectilinear system of field boundaries. This is likely to have resulted from agricultural improvements carried out by the larger estates in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Some estates produced detailed surveys which show evidence of the pre-existing field systems. Unfortunately, although the farms to either side of Pen-y-gaer (Coch Hir and Cae Dicwm) belonged to the Vaynol estate which has good records, Pen-y gaer belonged to the Coed Helen estate which has poor records and no early surveys. It is possible that the Vaynol surveys may produce relevant information but would require further research. A sub-circular enclosure was shown at Caer on the Tithe Map of 1842 (Fig. 4) but although this was much larger than the Caer inner enclosure it is not obviously the outer enclosure either since it is shown as distinct

from the property boundary whereas it should merge with it, when compared to the present day boundaries (Fig. 1).

The Caer enclosure itself has never been excavated so its date is unknown. Its apparently defensive construction sets it apart from the various sub-circular enclosed hut circle settlements in the area although its sub-rectangular shape can be compared to some enclosed hut circle settlements of Romano-British date such as Din Lligwy, Anglesey (RCAHM Class IVa). Some enclosed hut groups do have very wide enclosure walls despite being in non-defensive topographic positions. A local parallel is the 2nd-4th century settlement of Caermynydd, with an oval enclosure wall 2.5m wide. It cannot be certain, therefore, that Caer is defensive. It is also lacking the banked or walled hut circles typical of those sites. However, one side of the massive enclosure wall has been completely robbed out and if the enclosure was re-used as a stock pen, for instance, it could well be that internal structures were cleared. The inner enclosure originally contained the traces of two rectangular buildings (RCAHM, 1960, 175, 177) which may or may not have been contemporary with the enclosure. If they were, then a Romano-British date could still be true since rectangular buildings occur at for example Din Lligwy and Hafoty Wernlas (i), Llanwnda.

The excavated evidence suggests that the Caer outer boundary is of at least Romano-British date and probably earlier with the implication that Caer itself may have earlier origins. This would not be surprising since most radiocarbon dating evidence from hut circle settlements in Gwynedd suggests origins in the later first millennium BC (Johnstone, 1989) and some, Erw Wen and Moel y Gerddi, even earlier (Kelly, 1988). Caer may have begun life as a 'simple' non-defensive, hut circle settlement consisting of a main central enclosure with a less substantial outer enclosure (diameter c. 100m). This may have been just stock enclosure or even just an outlying boundary to *exclude* stock. This type of layout can be compared to the somewhat smaller outer enclosures of the concentric enclosed hut settlements of Hafoty Wernlas (iii), Llanwnda (RCAHM, 1960, 228), diameter c. 75m, and of Llyn-du Bach, Llanllyfni (RCAHM, 1960, 211-12), diameter c. 70m (Fig. 1).

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ARCHIVE SUMMARY

Context sheets: 23

Sample sheets: 4

Photographs Mono: 35

Col trans: 35

Drawings: Plans: 5

Sections: 1

SPECIALIST REPORTS

1. Radiocarbon dating, awaited, September 1995.

2. Soil analysis, awaited, after July 1995.

3. Fossil soil pollen analysis, awaited, after July 1995.



fig.1 Location of excavation trench and comparative site plans



fig.2 North facing section.



phase IV



phase II



fig.3 Phase plans



fig.4 Extract from Llanddeiniolen Tithe Map, 1842.



1. Caer outer boundary, before excavation.



2. Caer outer boundary, before excavation, showing height of positive lynchet.



3. Caer outer boundary, Phase IV, footings of modern wall.



4. Caer outer boundary. Phase IV. footings on top of rubble of Phase III wall and tumble from Phase III wall in foreground.



5. Caer outer boundary, Phase II wall after removal of tumble from upslope.



 Caer outer boundary, Phase II wall on top of bank of Phase I, from downslope. Revetting face of Phase I showing at front of bank.



7. Caer outer boundary, Phase I bank and revetting face from downslope before excavation of ditch.



8. Caer outer boundary, after excavation of Phase I bank and ditch to subsoil surface. Revetting face seft in situ.