

ANNUAL REPORT: UK- PENYCLODDIAU 2014 FIELD SCHOOL

Director(s): Dr. Rachel Pope, University of Liverpool
Co-Director(s): Richard G. Mason, University of Liverpool



Our 2014 IFR cohort; students excavating Penycloddiu hillfort's inner rampart

Introduction

Located in the UK, the 2014 University of Liverpool Archaeology Field School took place between July 21st and August 15th. This year saw the third season of a five-year programme of excavation and survey at Penycloddiu hillfort, Flintshire, North Wales (2012-2016), by the Department of Archaeology, Classics, and Egyptology, at the University of Liverpool. The Liverpool department currently ranks within the UK Top 5 for Archaeology teaching (Guardian 2015, 2013, 2012). A total of sixty-one undergraduate students and ten staff members participated this season, including six students from the Institute of Field Research (IFR). Also participating were three returning IFR students from our 2013 season (a further two of our 2013 IFR students had requested to return with us, but sadly we had to decline due to a lack of space).

The University of Liverpool is working in partnership with Cadw (Welsh Assembly Government) Denbighshire County Council, and neighbouring University of Oxford excavations at Bodfari hillfort. Our investigations aim to characterise the chronology and function of the Clwydian contour forts, via targeted excavation at the previously un-investigated site of Penycloddiu; and update current understanding of the nature/chronology of later prehistoric settlement in North Wales, in line with the current research frameworks both for Wales and the UK.

Research Results

At 21 hectares, Penycloddiu hillfort is one of the largest pre-Roman Iron Age sites in the UK. Previous work suggests that similar large contour enclosures may be an early hillfort type, extending back even into the Late Bronze Age period. As a result, our excavations aim to help date the very origins of the hillfort – and social agglomeration – in western Britain and Europe.

In our third season of excavation at Penycloddiu, work commenced with the re-opening and extension of Area 1 – located north of the hillfort's eastern entrance – where a presumed

modern farm track had cut through both inner and outer earthworks. We also opened a new trench, Area 3, over a prehistoric house platform to the south-west of the main trench.

Our 2014 research aims were to:

- Extend Area 1, to investigate the potential for prehistoric features in the quarry scoop.
- Finish removal of all late deposits, from both areas.
- Characterise the nature of the house platform, and obtain material for C-14 dating.

With all modern damage to the monument recorded in previous seasons, students worked hard to excavate the numerous episodes of rampart collapse, gradually exposing the surviving *in situ* structure of the hillfort rampart. Excavation confirmed that the wall discovered along the crest of the inner rampart is a late addition to the monument, most likely during the Medieval period, when it seems Penycloddiau was re-enclosed – perhaps as a deer park enclosure – prior to later post-Medieval agricultural use (cattle then sheep) during the 17th/18th century.

During this season, students made exceptional progress exposing the upper courses of the inner rampart internal revetment wall, to a surviving 1 m height so far. We are now confident that the inner rampart comprises a large-block facing to the front, with a smaller-stone rear revetment, and a stone core, capped by a lime mortar-like deposit. Having removed more collapse from the front revetment, the tantalising ‘double skinned’ appearance in 2013 is now much less convincing, and we are now confident that we may have a single phase of rampart construction.

In Area 3, the student cohort removed post-occupation accumulation and two interior deposits, one with a good proportion of charcoal, to expose a small number of small-diameter cut features in the centre of the platform, into a potential floor deposit. Features relating to construction – as recorded in 2014 – consisted only of the scarp and bank. We currently believe the platform may have held an organic ring-bank structure, with a gap between the scarp and bank in the east currently the most likely candidate for an entrance.

The project has also achieved palaeo-environmental cores from a bog c. 1.6 miles south-east of Penycloddiau, at 450 m above sea level, which will see analysis this coming year.

Next season we will continue with excavation of the potential floor/occupation deposits in Area 3 and obtain a section through the bank material, to further understand structure construction. In Area 1, we will finish removing early collapse deposits from the inner rampart, which should then allow us finally to excavate the ditch between the inner rampart and outer rampart/counterscarp bank, and continue with our geophysical survey of the 18 ha interior.

Our 2014 results will be disseminated within the region in talks to local societies, beginning this month with an invitation to speak to the Chester Archaeology Society. A web report will soon be available on the University webpages, along with our 50-page downloadable interim report.