



Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust's project

Demystifying the Abbey

Di-swyno'r Abaty

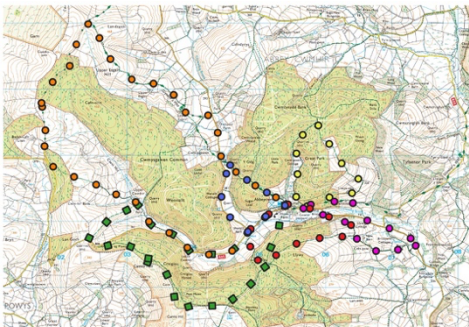
Newsletter Issue 4

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Community Heritage Walks popular with local people and visitors

A few years ago, with a grant from National Lottery and Cadw, the Trust developed waymarked walks in the vicinity of Abbey Cwmhir, and route descriptions that highlighted the points of interest. The printed walk descriptions are available in the village and the Exhibition Room at Home Farm. These are proving to be very



popular and are replaced on a regular basis especially after a holiday weekend and during the Summer. The route descriptions are also available on our website at <https://abbeycwmhir.org/category/walks/>. For the future, we hope to improve the Sugar Loaf Community Heritage Walk by re-routing it to use the new bridge over the Clywedog Brook, installed by Powys CC. This is awaiting path improvements that are part of works by NRW. Also – look out for one of our walks that is planned to be featured by Christopher Somerville in his regular piece on walking routes in The Times – probably in September.

GOLYGYDD / EDITORIAL

Mae prosiect treftadaeth gymunedol Ymddiriedolaeth Treftadaeth Abaty Cwmhir 'Datgyfrino'r Abaty' bellach yn ei bedwaredd flwyddyn. Mae ein tîm o wirfoddolwyr, ymchwilyr a'r rhai sydd â diddordeb yn ein gweithgareddau yn parhau i dyfu. Rydym wedi cyhoeddi nifer o bapurau eleni ac rydym yn meithrin ein cysylltiadau â sefydliadau eraill sydd â diddordeb mewn treftadaeth megis Cyngor Archaeoleg Brydeinig Cymru, Cymdeithas Sir Faesyfed ac Elan Links. Rydym yn parhau i elwa o weithio'n agos gyda'r Athro David Austin, sy'n ein mentora yn ein harchwiliad o'r Abaty a'i blastai, ac rydym wedi datblygu perthynas ragorol gyda Jenny Hall a Paul Sambrook o Trysor Archaeology sy'n ein cefnogi gyda goruchwyliaeth cloddio archeolegol gan gynnwys cofnodi ac archifo ein canfyddiadau. Mae Datgyfrino'r Abaty yn cyfuno'r awyr agored a'n cymunedau lleol gydag ymchwil treftadaeth; ac amaturiaid â gweithwyr proffesiynol. Gobeithiwn y byddwch yn mwynhau darllen y cylchlythyr hwn ac rydym yn eich croesawu i ymuno â ni ar-lein neu wyneb yn wyneb.

The Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust's community heritage project 'Demystifying the Abbey' is now in its fourth year. Our team of volunteers, researchers and those interested in our activities continues to grow. We have published a number of papers this year and we are building our links with other organisations interested in heritage such as The Council for British Archaeology Wales/Cymru, The Radnorshire Society and Elan Links. We continue to work closely with Prof David Austin, who is mentoring us in our exploration of the Abbey and its granges, and we have developed an excellent relationship with Jenny Hall and Paul Sambrook of Trysor Archaeology who are supporting us with archaeological excavation supervision including recording and archiving of our findings. *Demystifying the Abbey* combines the outdoors and our local communities with heritage research; and amateurs with professionals. We hope that you will enjoy reading this newsletter and we welcome you to join us on-line or in person.

Elan Links Festival of Archaeology and History

The Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust was invited to participate in the Elan links Festival of Archaeology and History over the weekend of 29th and 30th July. Despite the heavy rain, particularly on the Sunday, this didn't stop visitors coming along to find out more about the Valley's long history and the latest archaeological discoveries. Adults and children alike enjoyed watching the various historical re-enactment groups and were able to participate in the wide range of activities laid on from various periods in history stretching back to the Stone Age.

The Trust's 'stand' was set up inside the Visitor Centre, sharing our space with representatives from CPAT, and Heritage Consultants, Trysor, who helped the Trust recently run a very successful archaeological training weekend based at Cwmffwrn.

As well as providing information on the work of the Trust, its activities and the range of Community Walks centred around the village, there was also a selection of activities for children including dressing up as a medieval knight (great for that family photo opportunity!), word searches and pictures ready to colour in.

Visitors were encouraged to leave their email address so that they could be provided with information on future events.

The Archaeology Festival offered the Trust an excellent opportunity to raise its profile both within the local community but also with visitors from further afield, who were holidaying in the area and perhaps hadn't been aware of Abbeycwmhir and its history.



Did you know that placenames hold important keys to the past?

As part of the Trust's research, we are using placenames to interpret the historical meanings of many of our locations. For instance:

betws	=	chapel	dwfr,dwr	=	water	llannerch	=	clearing
bryn	=	hill	ffin	=	boundary	lleian	=	nun
bwlch	=	gap in hills	ffordd	=	road	llest	=	hut
cae	=	enclosure	ffos	=	ditch,dyke	maen	=	stone
capel	=	chapel	ffridd	=	mountain pasture	moel	=	bare hill
carneidd	=	cairn	ffynnon	=	spring	mynach(dy)	=	monk (grange)
cefn	=	ridge	gwenith	=	wheat	mynydd	=	mountain moorland
coed	=	wood	gwaun	=	moorland	pant	=	hollow, valley
cors	=	bog	haidd	=	barley	pentre	=	homestead
croes	=	cross(roads)	hafod	=	summer farmstead	rhiw	=	hill, slope
cwm	=	valley	hendre	=	winter farmstead	rhos	=	moor
diserth	=	hermitage	llaeth(dy)	=	milk(house)	rhyd	=	ford
dol	=	meadow	llan	=	parish (church)	sarn	=	causeway

Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales has much more information about Welsh placenames at <https://historicplacenames.rcahmw.gov.uk/glossary>

Cwm Biga Grange (in Hafren Forest)

A field day was arranged to visit the isolated monastic grange of Cwm Biga situated in the Hafren forest to the north west of the town of Llanidloes. The old farm nestling in the mountainside still retains a certain magic. It is said that the poet Lewys Glyn Cothi was hiding there in 1462:

*Llechu yng ngrug Cwmbuga,
llwydwydd im yr allt oedd dda
Hiding in the heather of Cwmbiga*

The dark wooded hillside was my salvation

A short introduction was given highlighting the challenges of establishing the boundaries of Cwm Biga, but stating that there exists clear evidence of transhumance, to support four hundred kine (cattle) in summer, but only thirty in winter.

The current owner took the group round the late C18 farmhouse.

The farm was a sheep grange (specialising in mutton and wool production) belonging to the monks of Abbey Cwmhir from the late C12 until the dissolution of the monasteries. In 1698 it was sold to University College Oxford becoming part of their income bearing estates. In 1906 the farm was purchased by Maurice Jones who later sold it to the Forestry



Commission in the 1930's. From 1974 the farm was in the possession of Ieuan Rees. The farm has a complete set of farm buildings including a peat store, pony stable, cow bays, pig sty and hay store. After lunch, the group visited a typical Ty Unos (clod hall). The group listened to an account by the late Ieuan Rees of how this type of house was built..."The person who wanted to build a house would arrive on a moon lit night with his friends and cut out square clods of turf. The walls would then be made with the clods, and when it was sufficiently high, the previously prepared roof was placed on top and thatched with straw and rushes. Before the sun rose, smoke had to be coming out of the chimney, and the new owner could then claim that that this was his new house. The amount of land around the house was decided by throwing an axe from the door in various directions."

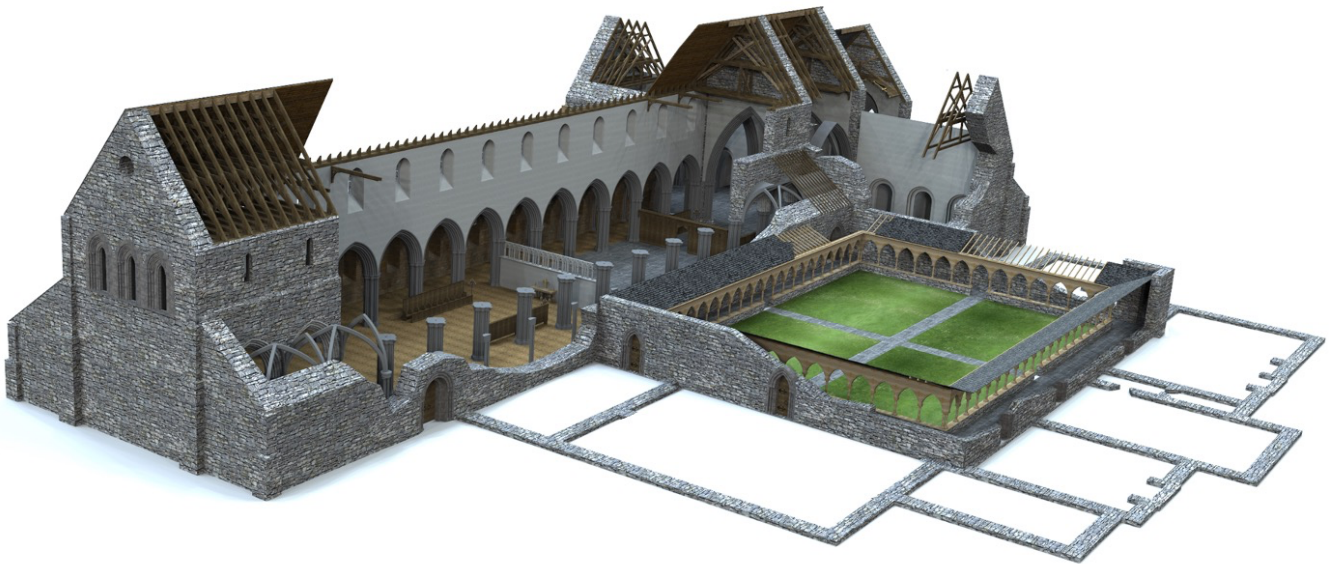
The group then drove up onto the Pumlimon massif to view the upland grange lands and to gain a much clearer insight into the topography of the area and how it might have looked pre the planting of the Hafren forest. Many of the group then began to understand that unlike the lowland granges, strict boundaries would have been difficult to insert and maintain.

Some of the group later visited the remains of a neolithic long cairn above the south bank of the Afon Biga. The cairn is free of trees but densely overgrown with grasses, moss and other vegetation.

We are extremely grateful to the current owners of Cwm Biga for a most informative tour and to NRW for allowing us vehicle access to the upland reaches.

Speculative 3D digital model of Cwmhir Abbey

The Trust is extremely grateful for the time and expertise of John Brandrick (www.milldrawings.co.uk), who spent many hours constructing this visualisation of Cwmhir Abbey, as it might have been. We are also very grateful to Dr David Robinson, who kindly gave us advice on the possible construction of the abbey.



The Cistercian abbey at Cwmhir was established under the patronage of Cadwallon ap Madog in 1176, as a daughter house of Whitland. It is thought that during his patronage the first abbey (or at least the East End) was constructed, and it is shown in this visualisation as having a Bernadine style, similar to Strata Florida.

However, the region of Maelienydd (between the rivers Wye and Severn) was heavily contested by Welsh Princes and Norman Marcher Lords, and by 1200 the patronage of the abbey had changed to Roger Mortimer, Lord of Wigmore. As there is architectural evidence that the current nave was built between 1200 - 1230, some scholars argue that it is most likely that Roger Mortimer had the ambition and wealth to sponsor such a scale of church (the largest Cistercian nave in Europe at that time), whilst others argue that it might have been Llewelyn ap Iorwerth, who gained some ascendancy in Maelienydd when Roger Mortimer died in 1214. What is known is that the abbey was described as 'scrumptious' by Roger of Wendover in 1231.

Only the nave of the Abbey buildings remain, although evidence of the location of the cloisters comes from parchmarks evident in dry Summers. The other buildings - monks dormitory, refectory and lay brothers accommodation – have disappeared but would have been built around the cloister on the south side of the church, as indicated by the foundations on the computer visualisation.

Abbeycwmhir hosts Council for British Archaeology Wales/Cymru Spring Meeting

CBA Wales/Cymru held their Spring 2023 meeting at Philips Hall, Abbeycwmhir on 10th June.

The day included talks and a tour of the Abbey remains by Julian Lovell.

Talks:



Mel Walters – Community and Heritage - The work of the Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust

David Austin – Abbey Cwmhir in the context of Strata Florida

Julian Ravest – Photogrammetry – technique and insights

Julian Lovell - Post dissolution estates and an introduction to the Abbey Tour

Recent Publications

During the period various papers have been submitted to a range of journals based upon our research. These are:

Lovell, J. **The Hidden History and Heritage of Abbey Cwmhir** *Radnorshire Society Transactions* 2021

Lovell, J. **The Encroachment Settlements of New Well** *Radnorshire Society Field Group Newsletter* 2022

Austin, D., and Ravest, J. **Recent work on the precinct of Abbey Cwmhir** *Radnorshire Arch. Cam.* 2022

Pardoe, V., and Walters, M. **Drone surveying over the Upper Afon Dulas: early results** *Radnorshire Society Field Group Newsletter* 2021

Bezant, J., Lovell, J., Ravest, J., Walters, M., Olivant, P. **Survey of an upland landscape on the Golon Grange of Abbey Cwmhir, Radnorshire** *Archaeology in Wales* v 61 2021

Coward, R. **Old Carvings from Cwmhir Abbey and catalogue of Capital Decorations** *Radnorshire Society Transactions* 2022

We were featured in *CBA Wales/Cymru Newsletter* No 63 Spring 2023.

We were featured in the national magazine *Current Archaeology* in January 2022.

Archaeological Fieldwork Research Group

The Trust continues to provide opportunities for community involvement in hands-on archaeology and landscape history. This takes the form of on-going group activity and longer week-end sessions which are led by an experienced and well-qualified field archaeologist. These events have continued to be very popular and in demand. The rolling programme of events is aimed at public engagement as well as providing for our own membership. The opportunity to take part in hands-on activity has proved popular with more applicants than places on the courses. At a basic level, walkovers or field-walking can tell the newcomer what to look for in the landscape, needing only a good pair of eyes and a good pair of boots. The Trust has been fortunate in obtaining grant support to further these activities.

Community Archaeology: Upper Cwmhir Valley

The Trust has been very fortunate in finding a location in the local area which has provided ample opportunity for fieldwork and investigation. Disturbance has been minimal resulting in the survival of features frequently lost elsewhere. Four farmsteads which were the subject of amalgamation at enclosure in the 1860's have maintained a presence and the Trust has been able to 'bring them back to life' as we learn more about the structures of the farmsteads and the lives of those who lived there.

Excavation 2023

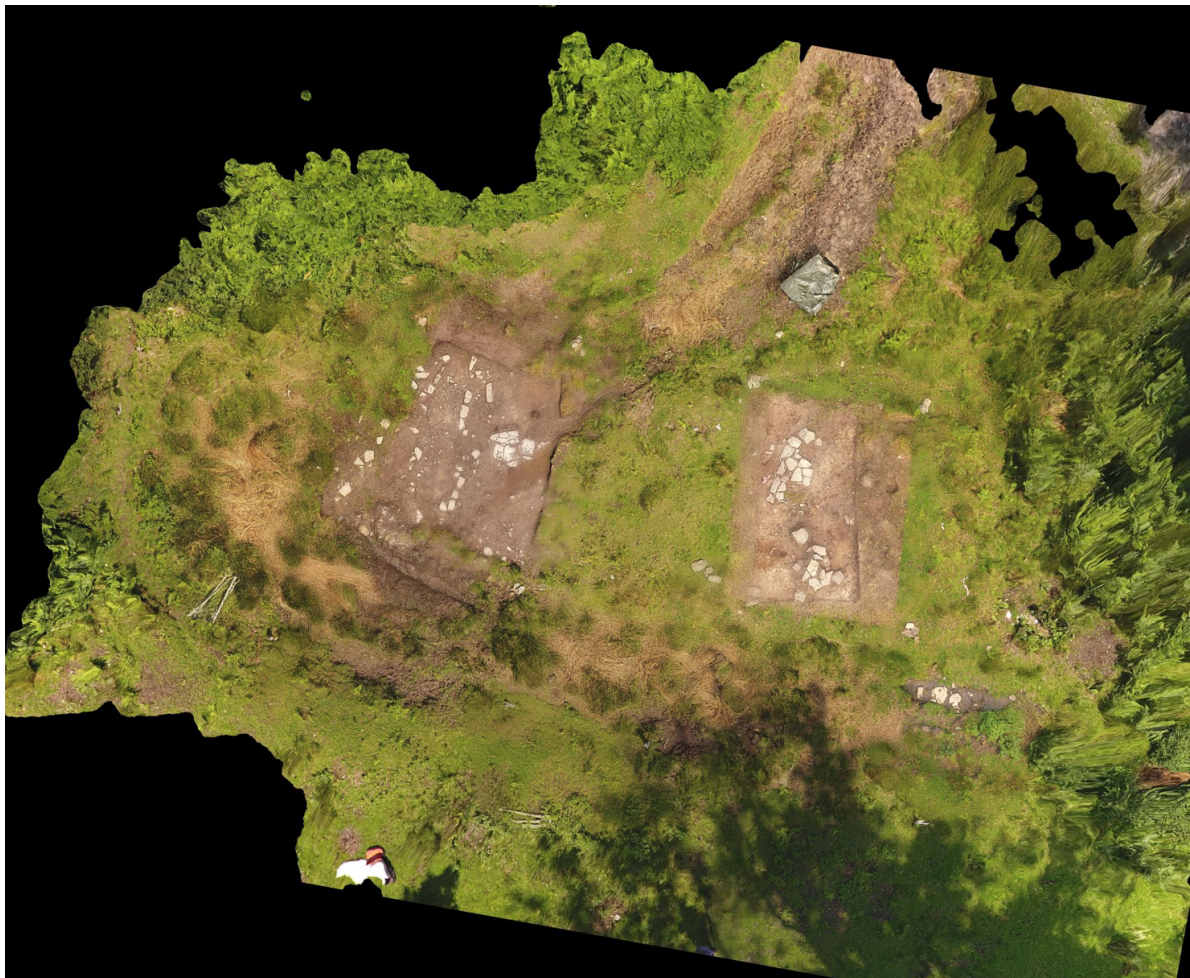
The research team continued to work at Cwm Ffwrn during the winter and early summer, completing the excavation of the site and our understanding of it (see below).



Attention has since turned to the adjacent site where there appeared to be the presence of a traditional Welsh house platform which would almost certainly pre-date the house site already completed. It is difficult to date house platforms accurately because they have been in use from the 13th Century right up to the early 1800's.

It was decided to make this site the focus of the 2023 public engagement event. The Trust was very fortunate in securing the services of Paul Sambrook and Jenny Hall of Trysor Archaeology, supported by Jenny's partner Martin, to lead the event. It was decided to excavate the site by working in shallow layers, taking time to examine the surface for potential finds. The lithography of the layer was also carefully studied for signs of early flooring, most likely packed earth or clay. Participants were also taught the value of the orderly recording of the site and associated material. An initial level has been located but the site will need considerable further careful work which will take place next summer.

The presence of a number of potential house platforms and havodau/llestau sites in the area adds interest to the context of Cwm Ffwrn. In the past the uplands of mid-Wales were much more heavily populated than they are today. As well as basic economics and the increase in population, this reflects the climate change which occurred in medieval times. The climate warmed around the period of the Norman conquest, enabling colonisation of the uplands, supporting the general increase in population numbers at that time. 0.5C of a degree in average temperatures could add 20 days to the growing season. We are looking forward to continuing this project next season.



New 3D models at Home Farm Exhibition Room

Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust was awarded a grant by Cadw, to enhance the displays at the Home Farm Exhibition Room at Abbeycwmhir. These enhancements have included 3D models of Capitals and other stone artefacts that originated at Cwmhir Abbey. We are most grateful to the landowners and St Idloes Church, Llanidloes for allowing us to scan these objects and create the models.



On-line talks available on our website

We are very grateful to the many people who have kindly delivered talks for us. A list of the 2022/23 talks available on our website is given here:

Prof Janet Burton: *Constructed Pasts And Shared Identities: The Cistercian Order*

Prof Huw Pryce: *Llywelyn Ap Gruffudd, Prince Of Wales: His Rise And Fall*

Ross Cook: *Histories in Homes: The development of the house from medieval to modern*

Sorcha Lewis: *Through the generations: a story of High Nature Value traditional farming systems; connecting history, community and biodiversity through time*

Home Farm House

Over the last few years the Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust has been fortunate enough to be a partner in the AHRC Sacred Landscapes project. The project research compares two upland monastic houses, in this case Cwmhir and Strata Florida with lowlands monastic locations in the Witham Valley, to the south-east of Lincoln. This has brought huge benefits to the Trust, including some generous financial support. As a result of this the Trust was able to commission a very thorough-going historical survey of the Home Farm house, formerly known as the Abbey Farm. This was carried out by building archaeologist Ross Cook. The results exceeded expectation.



The position of the house, close to the abbey remains, posed the question of whether it might have formed part of the abbey gatehouse and almonry. The building was also known to have an interesting cellar.

The results of the survey were excellent, sufficient early material remaining to throw light on the house history. It was disappointing to find that the house was not of the monastic period but exciting to discover that it dated from about 1560, at the point that the grange of Gollon was sold to William Fowler, the then provost of Shrewsbury. Perhaps by this time the monastic buildings were too depleted to function and a new-build was required. It provides an excellent date line. The overall plan is T-shaped, typical of the period.

The house has mysteries of its own, one of which is a report from the Civil War which recounts a skirmish at Abbey Cwmhir in which 'Mr. Fowler's house was severely damaged' as the garrison there was roundly defeated. The survey revealed that the roof timbers were, for some reason, severely weathered. This would lend support to the theory that the house was indeed damaged during the Civil War. The survey also revealed restoration work in the early 19th Century, at a time when the Fowler family were trying to sell the remains of their once extensive estate. In 1822 Thomas Wilson, who was interested in purchasing many of the properties, commissioned a report by Layton Cooke, a well-known land agent and surveyor. He declared the estate to be ill-maintained and requiring much attention. Clearly not true in the case of the Abbey Farm and it is also a matter of record that a number of farmhouses had been rebuilt at that time. The estate was still being actively managed at that time. It was clearly in Wilson's interest for Cooke to mark down the estate.

The survey of the Home Farm house has furthered our understanding of the post-monastic Fowler estate. It has also shed some light on the arrangements immediately following the dissolution of the abbey. What you fail to find can be as useful as a more positive result. We now have a very comprehensive knowledge of the building and a clearer understanding of the wider post-monastic scene.

Future Activities for your diary

Archaeological field surveying at Cwm Ffwrn Farm – Mondays 9.30 – 12.30 (email Julian at jlo.theabbey@gmail.com if you intend to attend)

Heritage Research Discussion Group Zoom – normally Second Monday of each month
7.30pm

If you would like to join this discussion group, please contact Mel at history.cwmhirabbey@gmail.com

Heritage Tour of Cwmhir Abbey and Opening of New Exhibition - Saturday 7th October
2.00pm

The heritage tour at 2.00pm will be followed at 3.30 pm by the official opening of the new displays in the Exhibition Room by Will Davies of Cadw. The public are invited to join us and there will be light refreshments. If you plan to attend, please contact Jackie at cwmhirabbey@gmail.com so that we can cater appropriately.

Series of on-line talks include:

Dr David Stephenson: *Piety and Peril: medieval monastic foundation and consequent violence*
- Thursday 28th September 7.30pm

Prof Marged Haycock: *Creature comforts in medieval mid Wales* – Thursday 2nd November
7.30pm

Prof Maddy Grey: *Pilgrimage in Wales - then and now* – Thursday 7th December 7.30pm

Llywelyn Memorial Service - Sunday 10th December 1.00pm

For further information about our activities and events please visit our website www.abbeycwmhir.org or contact history.cwmhirabbey@gmail.com.

