

CPAT Report No 1079

Causeway Lane Ring-ditch, Llanymynech, Powys

TRIAL EXCAVATION AND SURVEY



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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Report for Cadw

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cover: aerial view of the cropmark ring ditch. Photo CPAT 84-c-0193

CONTENTS

- 1 INTRODUCTION
- 2 GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY
- 3 EXCAVATION
- 4 CONCLUSIONS
- 5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
- 6 REFERENCES

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 A programme of small-scale excavation and geophysical survey was undertaken on the site of a large ring-ditch at Causeway Lane, Llanymynech, in Powys (Fig.1; SJ 25342065), in August 2010. The work was funded by Cadw as part of a study of unusually large ring-ditches in the region which was undertaken following the completion of the pan-Wales survey of prehistoric funerary and ritual monuments. Previous work included a trial excavation on the site of a 100m-diameter ring ditch at Walton Court in the Walton Basin which indicated that the monument had been constructed before 2570-2300 BC (Jones 2010). Across Britain a class of supersized ring-ditches has been recognised which appear to fall within the category of so-called ‘formative henges’, dating to the Middle Neolithic. The Clwyd-Powys area has 14 sites which are around 40m or more in diameter, including the exceptionally large example at Walton Court, all of which are known only from cropmark evidence and are considered to be under a continuing threat from ploughing. There is a distinct cluster of these sites around the Severn-Vyrnwy confluence which includes the site at Causeway Lane.

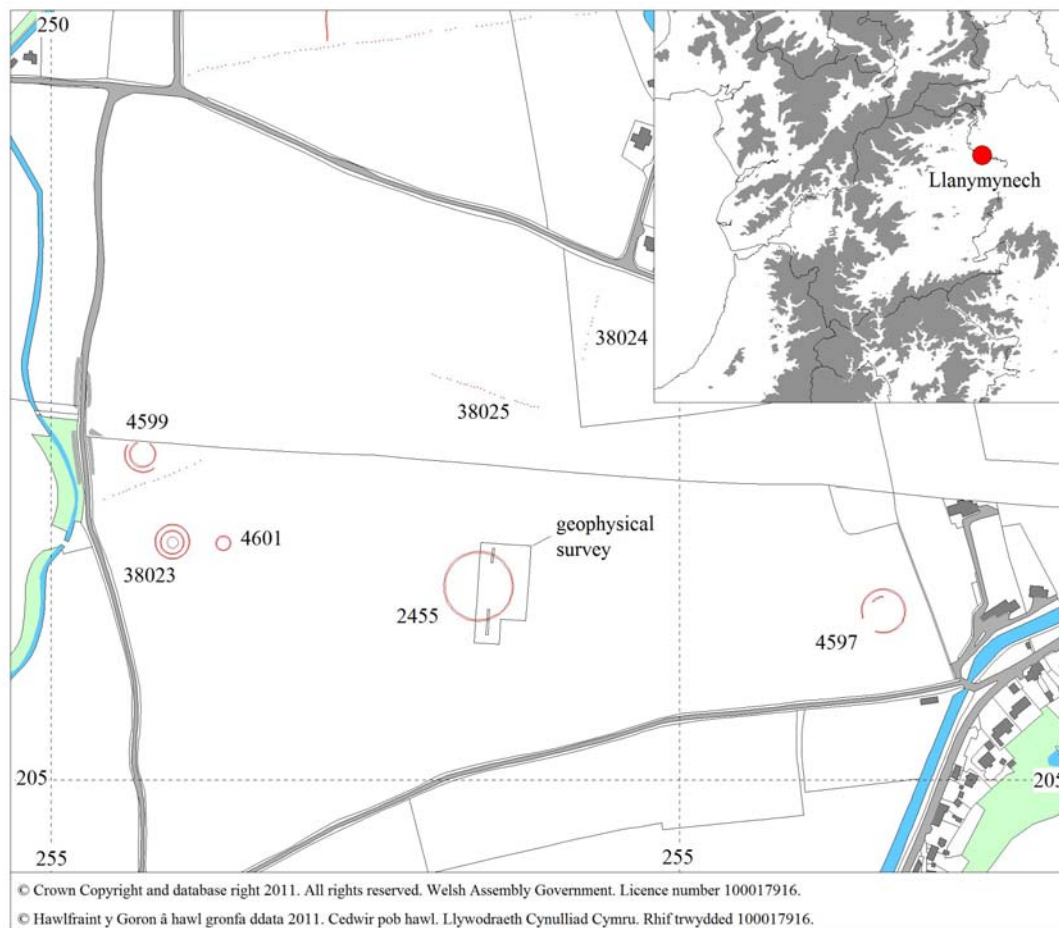


Fig. 1 Location of the Causeway Lane ring-ditch showing other cropmark sites in the immediate area

- 1.2 The site, which is around 55m in diameter, was known only as a result of cropmark evidence (Fig. 2) which had also identified four other ring ditches (PRNs 4597, 4599, 4601 and 38023) within the immediate area, as well as two pit alignments (PRNs 38024-5).



Fig. 2 Aerial view of the Causeway Lane ring-ditch. Photo CPAT 84-c-0192

2 GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY

- 2.1 As a prelude to the excavation a magnetometer survey was undertaken in order to confirm the location of the ring ditch and identify any potential internal features. A total of 0.28ha was surveyed, covering the eastern side of the ring-ditch (Fig. 3). The results though were rather disappointing owing to the underlying river gravels providing little magnetic contrast with the fill of the ring ditch. The partial ditch circuit was tentatively identified in the survey, however, and this was used as a guide to position the excavation trenches. There was no suggestion of any internal features, although in the circumstances this can not be taken to indicate an absence of archaeological features.

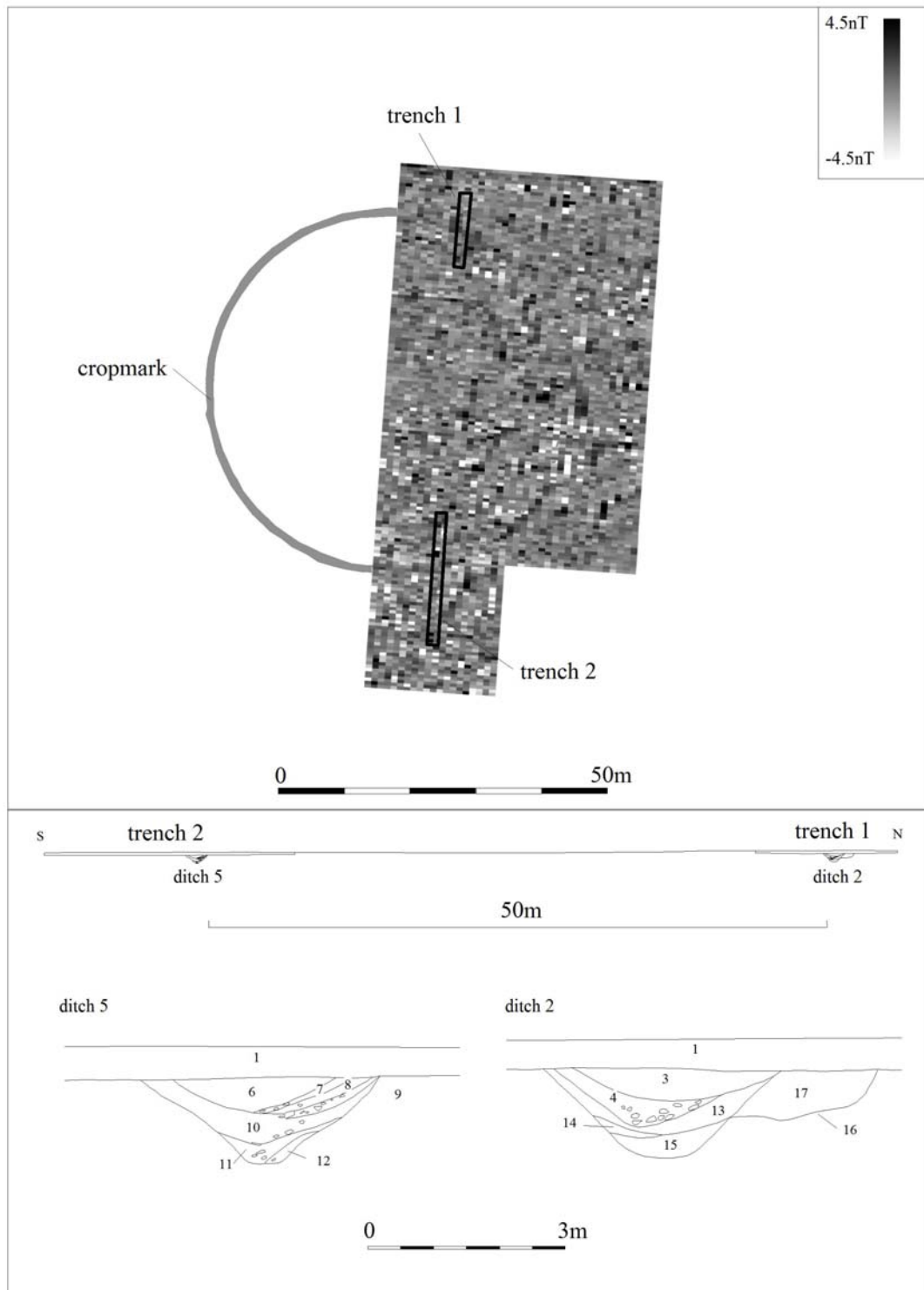


Fig 3 Plan of the Causeway Lane ring-ditch showing the position of the geophysical survey, the excavation trenches, and the two ditch sections.

3 EXCAVATION

- 3.1 The trial excavation comprised two trenches, each 1.5m wide, positioned to investigate the ring-ditch at opposing points on the north and south sides. The modern ploughsoil (1) was removed by machine onto the surface of the natural subsoil, which consisted here of river gravels with patches of silty clay. Numbers in brackets in the following text refer to individual context records in the site archive.

Trench 1

- 3.2 Trench 1, which was 11.5m in length, was positioned on the northern side of the ring-ditch, revealing a shallow ditch (2) 1.8m wide and up to 0.68m deep, with sloping sides and a rounded base. The primary fill (15) consisted of a pale yellow-brown clay silt up to 0.18m thick, which was sealed by a deposit of grey-brown clay silt (14) against the inner edge of the ditch, probably representing an initial period of stabilisation. These fills were sealed beneath a deposit of yellow-brown clay silt (13) which extended across the full width of the ditch. The upper fills consisted of a yellow-brown clay silt (4), which contained a notable quantity of small stones and had been principally derived from the inner side of the ditch, lying beneath a brown clay silt (3).
- 3.3 The outer, northern edge of the ditch had cut through an earlier pit (16) which was at least 1m across and extended beyond the limits of the excavation to the west. The pit was filled by an accumulation of orange-brown clay silt with charcoal flecking (17).



Fig. 4 The ring ditch in Trench 1 during excavation. Photo CPAT 3150-0016

- 3.4 No cultural material was forthcoming from either feature, although bulk soils samples were taken from the basal ditch fill (15) and the fill of the pit (17); these have the potential for providing palaeoenvironmental evidence as well as material suitable for radiocarbon dating.



Fig. 5 East-facing section of the ring ditch and pit 16 in Trench 1. Photo CPAT 3150-0045

Trench 2

- 3.5 The second trench was located on the southern side of the ring-ditch and measured 20m in length. The removal of the ploughsoil exposed the ditch (5) which was of similar size and profile to that in Trench 1, measuring 1.8m wide and up to 0.64m deep. The primary fill consisted of a compact gravely silt (12) against the inner edge of the ditch, sealed by a pale yellow-brown clay silt (11) which contained small flecks of charcoal and occasional small stones, together representing a period of initial stabilisation. This appears to have been followed by a period of gradual silting, indicated by a uniform deposit of yellow-brown silty clay (10) up to 0.22m thick.
- 3.6 Later infilling of the ditch was initially formed by a sequence of three deposits against the inner edge of the ditch, comprising a layer of stony, silty clay (9), a relatively stone-free silty clay (8) and a deposit of small stones in a clay silt matrix (7). The upper fill consisted of a pale brown clay silt (6) up to 0.24m thick.
- 3.7 As with the ditch section in Trench 1 no cultural material was recovered, although a bulk soil sample was taken from the basal ditch fill (11); as with the samples from Trench 1 this has the potential for providing palaeoenvironmental evidence as well as material suitable for radiocarbon dating.



Fig. 6 East-facing section of the ring ditch in Trench 2. Photo CPAT 3150-0044

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The trial excavations and geophysical survey have confirmed the presence of an unusually large ring-ditch around 55m in diameter defined by a single ditch 1.8m wide and around 0.7m deep. Although there was no surviving evidence for the position of the accompanying bank the sequence of infilling observed in both ditch sections suggests strongly that this lay on the interior.
- 4.2 The interior of the ring-ditch remains relatively untested as neither trench extended more than 7m from the inner edge of the ditch. Although it had been hoped that the geophysics might reveal evidence for internal features the subsoil in this area was not particularly conducive to magnetometry and the results were inconclusive.
- 4.3 The large diameter of the ring-ditch, together with the relatively narrow ditch, appear to place the site into a category of burial and/or ritual monuments of which other examples have been recognised in the area of the Severn/Vyrnwy confluence, as well as in the Walton Basin in Radnorshire. Excavations in 2009 investigated the largest currently known ring-ditch at Walton Court Farm in the Walton Basin, confirming the presence of a ring-ditch around 100m in diameter with a single ditch 2m wide and 1.4m deep. Radiocarbon dating from hazel charcoal near the base of the ditch has provided a date of 2570-2300 cal. BC (Jones 2010). It is to be hoped that radiocarbon dates will also be forthcoming from the Causeway Lane ring-ditch to provide comparative evidence.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 5.1 The writer would like to thank the following: Wendy Owen and Richard Hankinson for assisting with the excavation and survey; Adelaide Edwards for assisting with the geophysical survey; Mr

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6 REFERENCES

Jones, N W, 2010. *Walton Court Farm Ring Ditch. Trial Excavation and survey 2009-10*. CPAT Report No. 1025.