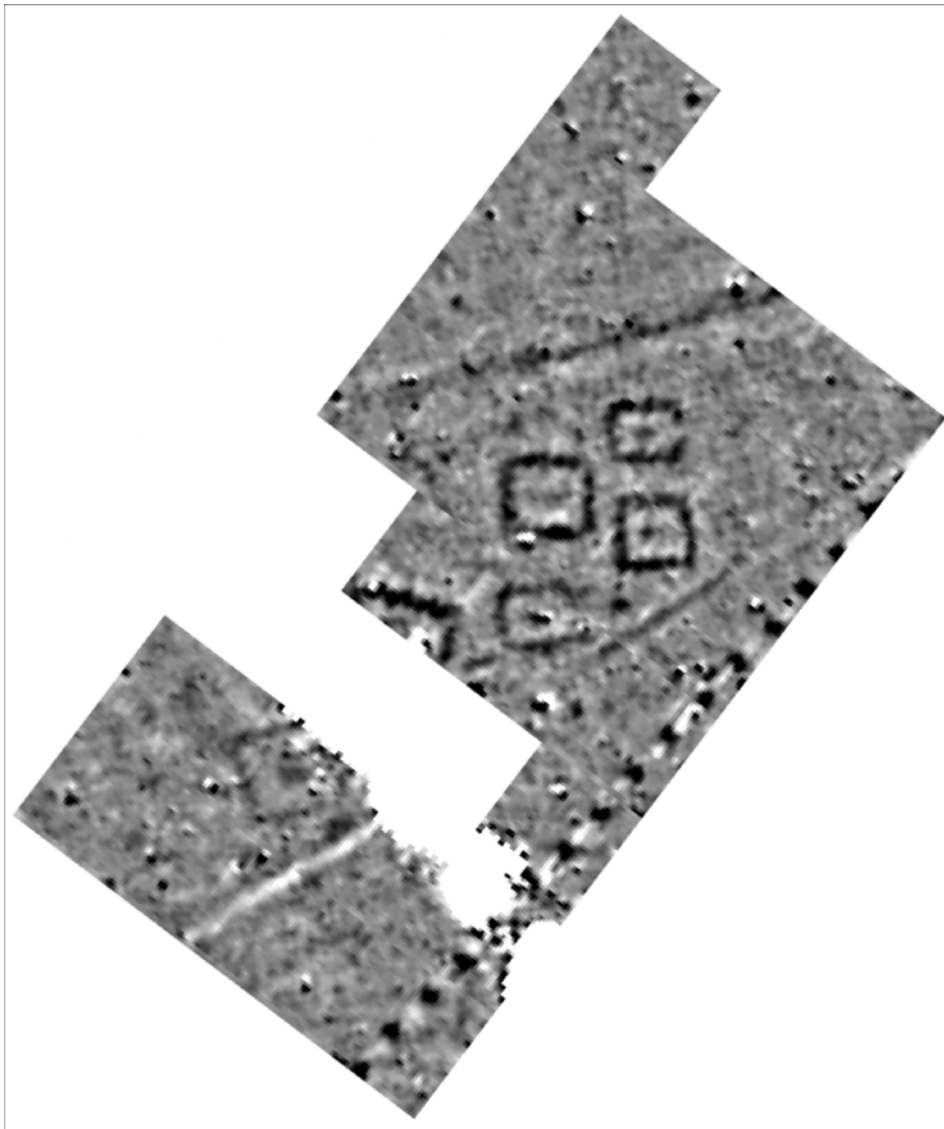


CPAT Report No 1094

Excavation and Survey at the Druid Square Barrow Cemetery, Corwen, 2010-11

INTERIM REPORT



THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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April 2011

Report for Cadw

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Cover: Geophysical survey of Druid square barrow cemetery

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Aerial reconnaissance by JKS St Joseph in 1975 revealed a small cemetery (PRN 117890) of likely early medieval date immediately to the west of the small hamlet known as Druid (a corruption of *dwyrhyd*, or two fords), itself some 3km west of the town of Corwen in south-west Denbighshire, formerly Meirionethshire (SJ 03874341). This was photographed again by RCAHMW in July 2006 (Fig. 1) when three or four square barrows were recorded, at least two of which appeared to contain a central grave. The barrows are immediately adjacent to the Roman road which was identified in the same sets of photographs as a *parchmark*.



Fig. 1 Aerial photograph of the square barrows at Druid with the north-western ditch of the Roman road immediately to the left (photo RCAHMW 2006-3975) © Crown copyright: RCAHMW.

- 1.2 The cemetery lies on a low promontory to the south of the Afon Alwen, a tributary of the River Dee, at an elevation of about 170m OD (Fig. 2). The location is notable for its excellent view over the flood plain, which is about 30m lower in elevation, and beyond along the Dee valley. To the west, the ground rises fairly gently up to 300m OD, reaching this level at a distance of about 3km from the site.
- 1.3 This report details a programme of investigation carried out by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust during 2010-11 as part of a scheduling enhancement programme which examined a number of potential early medieval cemeteries in mid and north-east Wales funded by Cadw (Jones and Hankinson 2011).

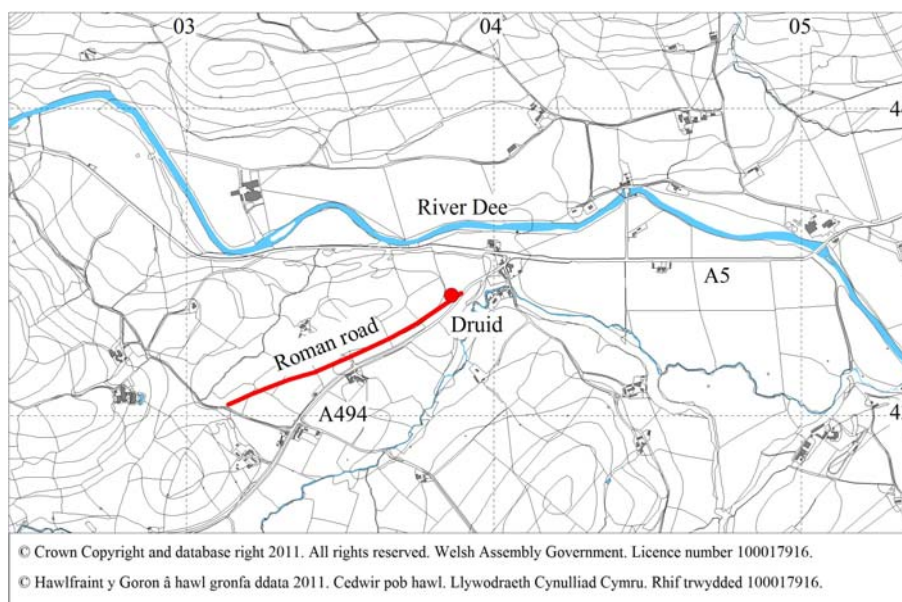


Fig. 2 Location of the Druid square barrow cemetery

2 GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY

- 2.1 A magnetometer survey was conducted in September 2010 in the hope of identifying further elements of the cemetery which were not apparent as cropmarks, and previously reported on by Jones and Hankinson (2011). In order to identify clearly features such as central graves, or potentially unenclosed burials it was decided that the survey would be carried out using 10m by 10m grids, with an interval between traverses of 0.5m. The sampling rate was such that readings were taken every 0.25m, providing a total of 800 readings per 100m² grid.
- 2.2 The geophysics results are presented in greyscale format (Fig. 3), together with an interpretation drawing (Fig. 4). The greyscale plot produces a plan view of the survey and allows subtle changes in the data to be displayed. Trace plots have been eschewed because they appear to add little to the overall impression and understanding of the sites surveyed. It would, however, be possible to produce such plots from the archived data if these were required at any stage in the future.
- 2.3 The survey successfully identified six square barrows (features 1-6), all of which were aligned approximately east/west, each with evidence for a central burial. Two further magnetic anomalies (features 9 and 10) may represent individual, unenclosed burials. Numbers in brackets refer to individual features identified in Fig. 4.
- 2.4 The square barrows varied in size with the smallest (1), centred at SJ 03880 43416, measuring 6.2m east/west by 5.1m north/south, with a central pit measuring 2.0m east/west by 0.8m wide. There is a possible entrance on the eastern side, although this is not certain. Immediately to the south and with an intervening gap of only 2m is a slightly larger barrow (2), at SJ 03881 43408. This measures 6.5m east/west by 6.3m north/south, with a central pit measuring 2.5m east/west by 1.2m wide, but no indication of an entrance. The third barrow (3) lies at 03872 43410, within 1.5m of the west edges of barrows 1 and 2, and from the regularity of the overall layout these three features may be broadly contemporary. It measures 7.6m east/west by 6.8m north/south and has a central pit, 2.6m east/west by 1.1m, and again no obvious entrance. A fourth barrow (4) may also be part of this group, although it is rather more irregular in shape. It lies at SJ 03871 43401, just over 3m south of the edge of barrow 3 and measures 6.8m east/west by 5.6m

north/south with a central pit 2.3m east/west by 1.0m wide. The enclosing ditch is slightly curved at the eastern end which also appears to have a small entrance gap. It is also interesting that the central pit seems to coincide with a ferrous object detected by the magnetometer survey which could be within the grave or might be a stray object in the topsoil.

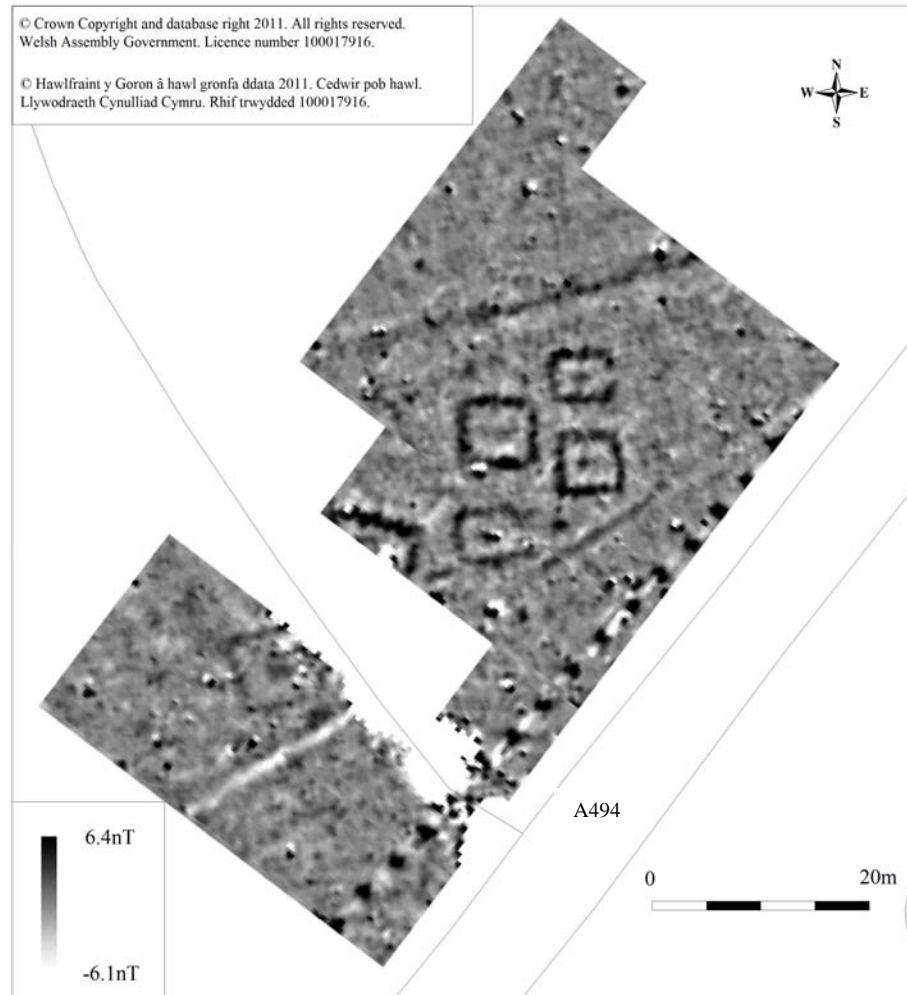


Fig. 3 Greyscale plot of the survey at Druid

- 2.5 The other two square barrows were not identified in full but clearly display different alignments from the others within the cemetery. Barrow 5 is partly masked by a large hedge and associated fencing, but can be seen to follow a west-north-west/east-south-east alignment centred at SJ 03860 43400, measuring 9.0m in that direction and at least 5.3m north-north-east/south-south-west. A near-central pit 2.8m west-north-west/east-south-east and at least 1.6m wide can be discerned in the interior. The remaining barrow (6) lies on the south-west side of the aforementioned hedge at SJ 03852 43389 and measures 8.3m east-north-east/west-south-west by 7.9m north-north-west/south-south-east. There is no obvious entrance, although a near-central pit 3.1m east-north-east/west-south-west by 1.8m wide is clearly visible.

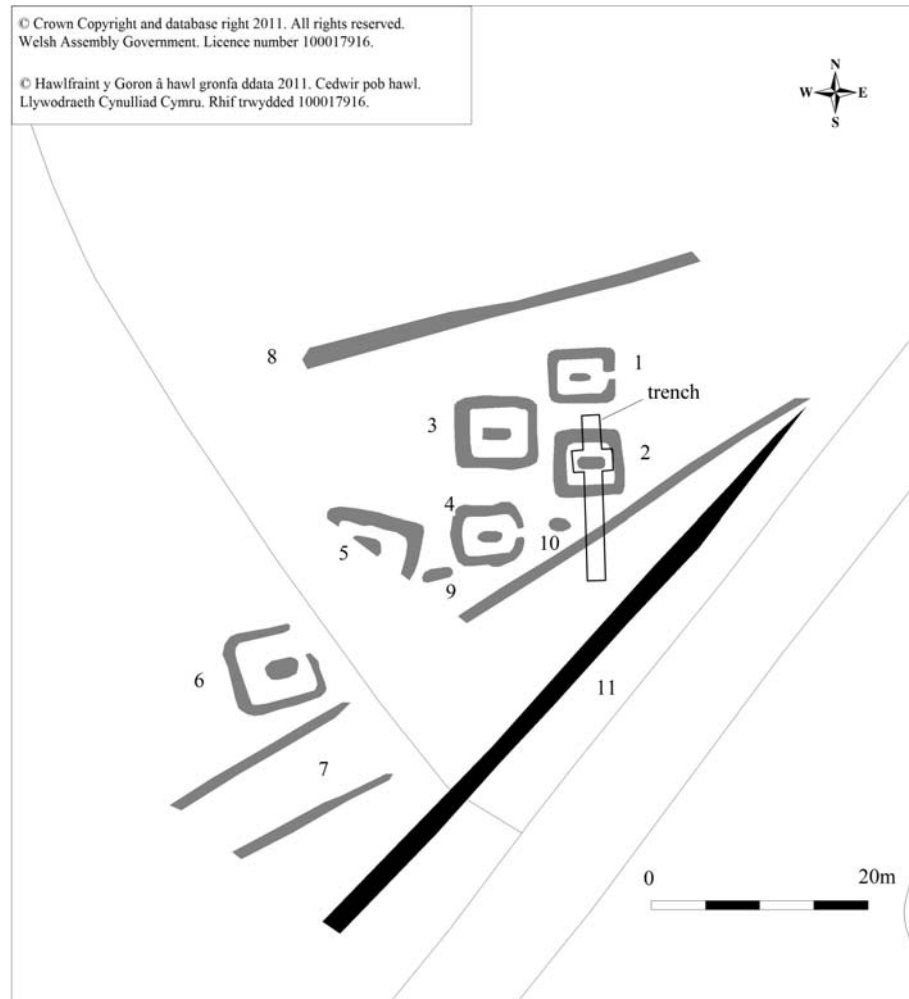


Fig. 4 Interpretation of the magnetometer survey at Druid

- 2.6 The survey also revealed two possible unenclosed burials close to the Roman road and either side of barrow 4. The western feature (9) lies at SJ 03866 43397 and is aligned east-north-east/west-south-west, measuring 2.9m long by 1.1m wide. The other possible grave (10) was perhaps rather less certain, measuring 2.0m east/west by 1.2m wide, located at 03878 43402. It is possible that other unenclosed burials exist within the area but were not easily identified by means of magnetometry.
- 2.7 The Roman road (7) was clearly visible in the survey results, particularly in the south-western area where both side ditches could be discerned. The survey indicates that each ditch is approximately 1.0m wide and define the edges of a carriageway some 6.0m in overall width.
- 2.8 The survey also revealed two linear features of which one (11) is fairly modern and represents some form of service (water pipe etc) which utilises a gateway through the hedge that bisects the cemetery. A ditch (8) to the north of the square barrows extended for at least 37.5m east-north-east/west-south-west and up to 1.7m in width. Its date, function and relationship with the cemetery are uncertain.

3 EXCAVATION

- 3.1 A small-scale trial excavation was undertaken at Druid in March 2011 following a request to Cadw for contingency funding. The excavation consisted of a single trench positioned to investigate one of the square barrows and part of the Roman road (Fig. 4). The trench, which was 15.2m long and 1.6m wide, was initially excavated by machine, removing between 0.18m and 0.34m of topsoil (01), a dark brown silt clay, and former ploughsoil (02), a mid brown silty clay. An interface of firm compressed pea grits marked the horizon between the two deposits. The central area of the barrow was subject to a hand-excavated extension, measuring 2.1m by 1m, on either side of the trench in order to expose the full extent of the central burial (Fig. 8).



Fig. 5 The excavated square barrow viewed from the north-east, with the ditch alongside the Roman road at the far left. Photo CPAT 3267-0103

The Square Barrow

- 3.2 The ditch surrounding the square barrow was investigated in two sections, on the north and south sides, which were separated by 3.8m between the inner edges. The ditch had been cut into the undisturbed natural subsoil (05), a loose greyish brown sand, silt and river gravel with occasional medium sized river rounded stones.
- 3.3 On the northern side the ditch (17) was 1.16m wide and 0.45m deep, with concave sides, a rounded base and a slight step along the inner (southern) edge (Fig. 6). The basal fill (16) and a secondary (15) fill consisted of fine gravel and pebbles in a matrix of orange, gritty silt, presumably representing the initial weathering of the ditch sides and the erosion of mound material. Later infilling consisted of three deposits with a combined thickness of 0.37m: a pale grey silt (14); a band of stone debris in an orange clay silt matrix (13); and a dark brown clay silt (12). The nature of these deposits suggests a period of cultivation, gradually eroding the mound material into the surrounding ditch.
- 3.4 The section of ditch (22) on the southern side of the barrow proved to be of similar width, although slightly shallower, with a depth of 0.37m. However, the profile was different, with a terraced step on the outer edge (Fig. 7). The pattern of deposition within the ditch was characterised by similar basal fills (21 and 20) to the northern section, representing the early

phases of weathering, which were subsequently sealed by deposits (18 and 19) likely to have been derived from ploughed-down mound material.



Fig. 6 The ditch (17) on the north side of the square barrow viewed from the east.
Photo CPAT 3267-0039

- 3.5 The artefacts recovered from the later phase of silting from both ditches included clay pipe stems, bottle glass, iron nails, sherds of cream-ware, local earthenware, Buckley ware and other black glazed fine-wares. These indicate that the ploughing and subsequent levelling and infilling of the earthworks is likely to date from the late 18th to early 19th centuries.



Fig. 7 The ditch (22) on the south side of the square barrow, viewed from the east.
Photo CPAT 3267-0045

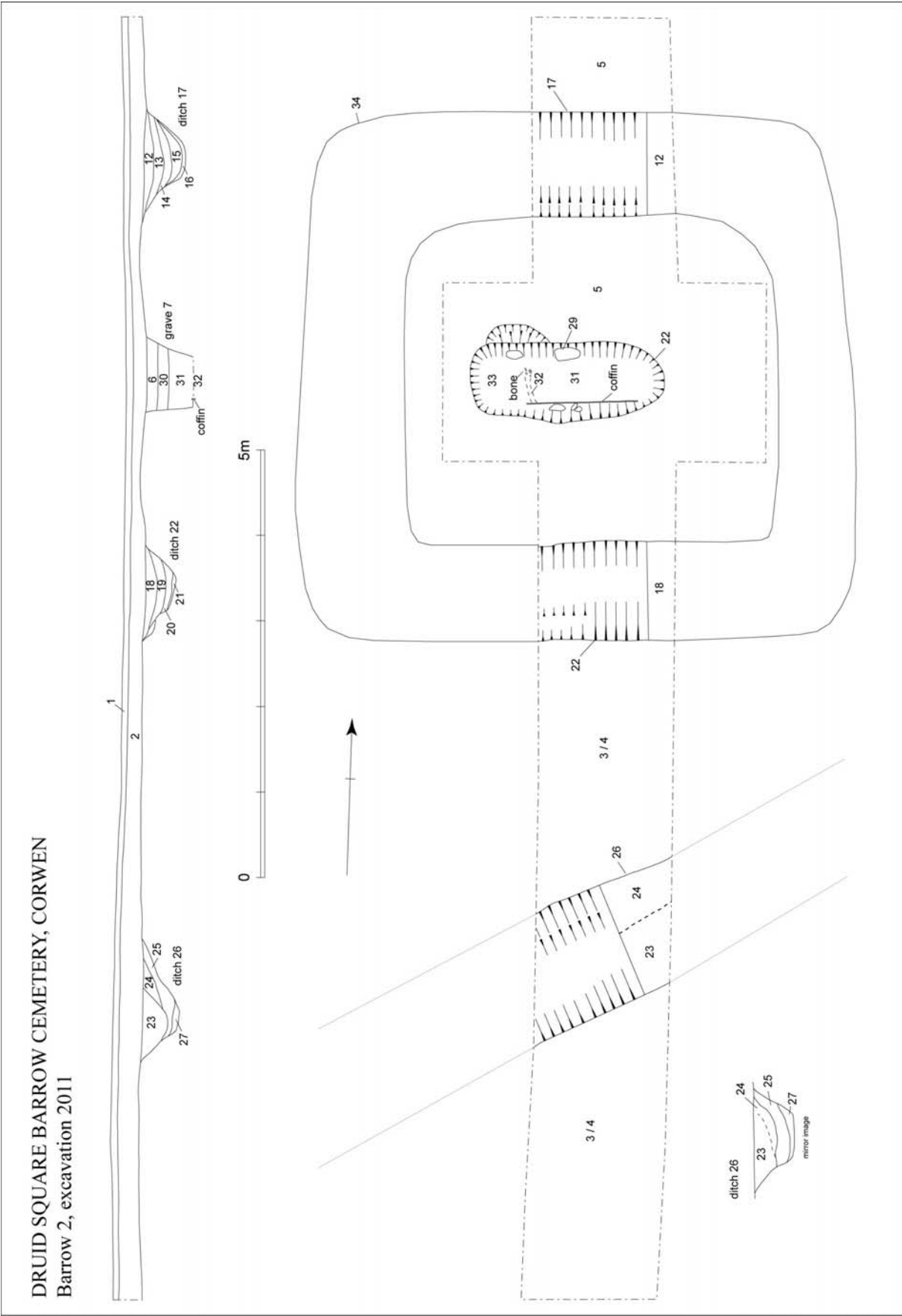


Fig. 8 Plan and east-facing section of the excavation.

- 3.6 Occupying a central position within the barrow was a grave (07) which had been cut into the natural subsoil (Fig. 8). The grave, which was aligned east/west, was rounded at either end with near vertical sides, and measured 2.3m by 0.95m and at least 0.75m in depth. A shallow semi-circular depression located at the north-west corner of the grave is assumed to be contemporary with the excavation of the grave, although its function is unknown. Along the southern edge of the grave, at a depth of 0.5m, the remains of a wooden coffin were identified, consisting of a dark, thin lens of charred material (28), extending for around 1.3m (Fig. 10). Although this material did not survive elsewhere within the grave, the outline of the coffin was suggested by the position of a number of larger packing stones (29) which had presumably come to rest against the coffin during backfilling, suggesting a coffin around 1.9m long and up to 0.5m wide (Fig. 9). The vestigial traces of skeletal remains were identified towards the western end of the grave, comprising degraded bone mixed with a fine greasy brown silt (32) at a depth of around 0.75m. No further excavation was undertaken below this level and the base of the grave remains unexcavated, including a deposit of orange, gravelly silt (33) at the western end.



Fig. 9 The central grave viewed from the east, showing the larger stones (29) preserving the outline of the coffin. Photo CPAT 3267-0062

- 3.7 The upper part of the grave was filled by a deposit of orange brown gritty silt and rounded stones (31), 0.4m thick, and a similar but finer deposit (30) above it, both of which had evidently slumped into the collapsed coffin. The uppermost fill (06), a dark brown clay silt 0.15m in depth, contained small iron nails and a globule of clear, melted glass, suggesting later disturbance once the mound had been removed by the plough. No other significant features were recorded within the interior of the barrow.



Fig. 10 The central grave during excavation showing the charred remains of the coffin along the far side. Photo CPAT 3267-0109

The Roman road

- 3.8 At a point around 3.5m to the south of the square barrow, and aligned north-east to south-west, the excavation identified a ditch (26) which had previously been identified by the geophysical survey along the north-western side of the Roman road between Chester and Caer Gai (RR66a) (Fig 11). The ditch had been cut into the natural subsoil (04), which at this point consisted of a mottled orange-brown clay silt mixed with river gravels and numerous large stones. This somewhat plough-disturbed natural subsoil overlay the finer sand and gravels (05) located further north within the trench.
- 3.9 The ditch was around 1.2m wide and 0.48m deep with concave sides and a fairly flat base. The basal fill (27) consisted of a 0.1m-thick deposit of pea grit and gravel with occasional lumps of pinkish clay, in a matrix of fine, olive grey, silt, which is likely to have eroded from the ditch sides. This was sealed by a layer of river-rounded cobbles, 0.15m thick, within a matrix of firm, reddish, clay silt (25) with occasional charcoal flecking. Perhaps significantly, this appeared to have been deposited from the outer edge of the ditch and may not, therefore, have been derived from the makeup of the Roman road, although there was no evidence to suggest its derivation. The stony deposit was sealed by a fine, gritty, ochre clay silt (24), which had also been deposited from the outer edge of the ditch. The upper fill (23) consisted of a very fine, compacted, pale cream silt. The only artefacts recovered from the ditch consisted of a fragment of a retouched, prehistoric flint blade from context 24, and a few sherds of 18th-century pottery from the uppermost fill (23). It was apparent that all trace of the road surface itself had been removed by ploughing.



Fig. 11 South-west facing section through Roman ditch. Photo CPAT 3267-0080

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The combination of aerial reconnaissance and geophysical survey has revealed a small cemetery consisting of at least six square barrows and two possible unenclosed graves lying immediately alongside the Roman road between Chester and Caer Gai (RR66a). The road clearly influenced the siting of the cemetery, and may therefore have still been in use at this time. However, none of the constituent features within the cemetery respect the alignment of the road, but are aligned east to west. The size and distribution of the barrows suggests two or more phases of interment, with an eastern group of three or four barrows being of similar size and orientation. The two western barrows are both larger and have differing alignments. At this stage the extent of the cemetery cannot be determined with certainty, although the distribution of the burials suggests that this is a small, distinct group.
- 4.2 The excavation investigated square barrow 2 (Fig. 4), which the geophysical survey had identified as measuring 6.5m east/west by 6.3m north/south, with no obvious entrance. The surrounding ditch was 1.16m wide and up to 0.45m deep with a silting profile which indicated an initial period of weathering after which the ditch appears to have remained stable for a considerable period. The upper fills indicate a period of intensive ploughing during the 18/19th centuries, suggesting that both the barrow and the surrounding ditch survived as earthworks until relatively recently.
- 4.3 The barrow contained a single grave occupying a central position. This was rounded at either end and measured 2.3m east/west by 0.95m north/south and at least 0.75m in depth. Towards the base of the grave the excavation identified the remains of a wooden coffin, surviving as an outline of charred wood along the southern edge, within which there were vestigial traces of skeletal remains, although these were insufficient to allow any further analysis. The outline of the coffin was suggested elsewhere by the position of larger stones within the grave fill, which had presumably come to rest against the coffin during backfilling.

- 4.4 There are clear parallels between the cemetery at Druid and that at Tandderwen, to the east of Denbigh, which was excavated by CPAT in 1985-88 (Brassil *et al.* 1991). This contained nine square barrows, eight of which enclosed single graves, while one enclosed three graves. The cemetery also included 28 unenclosed graves (Fig. 14). Twenty one of the graves preserved some remains of a wooden coffin and radiocarbon dates produced for two of those which were within square barrows, at the 68% level of probability, were calibrated to AD 560-655 and AD 886-1012. It was not possible to determine the age of the timber at felling, however, or which part of the tree had been used so that the dates only provide an indication of date for the burials.

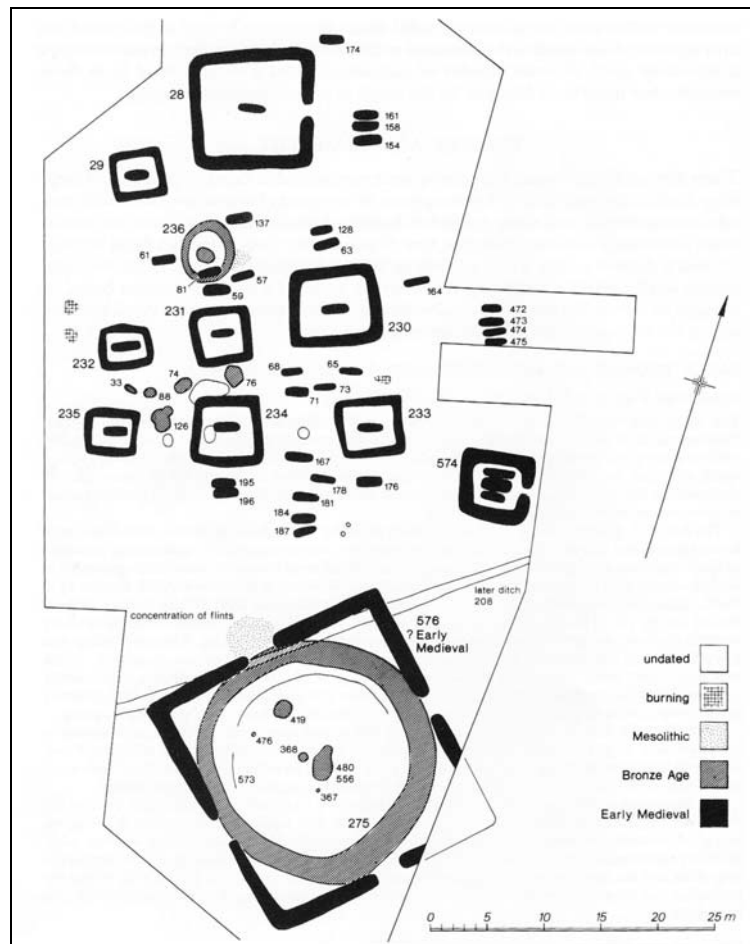


Fig. 14 The early medieval cemetery at Tandderwen, after Brassil *et al.* 1991

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 5.1 The writers would like to thank their colleague Wendy Owen for her assistance during the project, together with the following: Mr Blair for allowing access for the survey and excavation; volunteers Mr Dan Jones and Mrs Anne Jones for their assistance with the survey, and Chris Addison, Mette Byager and Sarah Peverly for their assistance with the excavation; Cadw for funding the investigations.

6 REFERENCES

Brassil, K S, Owen, W G, and Britnell, W J, 1991. Prehistoric and Early Medieval Cemeteries at Tandderwen, near Denbigh, Clwyd. *Archaeological Journal* 149, 46-97.

Jones, N W and Hankinson, R, 2011. *Early Medieval Cemeteries in Mid and North-east Wales: Project Report*. CPAT Report 1071.

APPENDIX 1**SITE ARCHIVE**

113 digital photographs, CPAT Film No 3267

Photographic catalogue

34 context record forms

1 A1 drawings

4 A4 drawings

Contexts register

Drawings register

Samples register

Finds register

Contexts Register

Context	Type	Comment
01	Deposit	Topsoil, dark brown silty clay.
02	Deposit	Remnant ploughsoil (below 01) mid brown stoney, clay silt & gravels
03	Deposit	Mottled orange brown sand silt & rounded stones. (below 02). Ploughed disturbed natural mixed with possible mound debris.
04	Deposit	Natural subsoil. Mottled orange brown clay silt, river gravels and large rounded stones.
05	Deposit	Natural subsoil (below 04). Grey brown sand, gravel and silt.
06	Fill	Uppermost fill of grave cut (07). Dark brown silty clay. Below 02
07	Cut	Central burial grave cut. Cuts natural subsoil (05)
08	Fill	Fill of cut 09 – stone-hole. Below 02
09	Cut	Stone-hole
10	Fill	Fill of cut 11 – stone-hole. Below 02
11	Cut	Stone-hole
12	Fill	Uppermost fill of north section of barrow ditch (17). Dark brown silt. Below 02
13	Fill	Band of rounded stones and mid orange silt. Below 12, fill of 17
14	Fill	Mix of orange clay silts and grey river gravels. Below 13, fill of 17
15	Fill	Band of rounded stones. Below 14, fill of 17
16	Fill	Pale grey grit. Basal fill of ditch cut 17
17	Cut	Northern section through square barrow ditch. Cuts natural subsoil (05)
18	Fill	Uppermost fill of south section of barrow ditch (22). Dark brown silt. Below 02
19	Fill	Orange brown silty clay with large rounded stones. Below 18, fill of 22
20	Fill	Homogenous orange brown silty clay. Below 19, fill of 22
21	Fill	Pale olive grey pea-grits and river gravels. Basal fill of ditch cut 22
22	Cut	Southern section through square barrow ditch. Cuts natural subsoil (05)
23	Fill	Pale cream sandy silt, compacted. Uppermost fill of Roman road-side ditch cut (26). Below 02
24	Fill	Ochre brown silty clay and pebbles. Below (but merged with..) fill 23
25	Fill	Reddish ochre brown silty clay and cobbles. Below 24, fill of 26
26	Cut	Roman road-side ditch, cut through natural subsoil (04)
27	Fill	Pale olive grey pea-grits and river gravels. Basal fill of ditch cut 26
28	Structure	Black charred material, remains of coffin along southern quadrant of central burial (07)
29	Fill	Irregular shaped rounded stones, backfill/packing material around the

		coffin (28). Below 30
30	Fill	Orange brown silty gravel. Grave fill, below fill 06. Fill of cut 07
31	Fill	Orange brown silty gravel and rounded stones. Grave fill, below fill 30. Fill of cut 07
32	Fill	Vestigial traces of skeletal remains within a matrix of fine greasy-brown silt. Below 31, fill of cut 07
33	Fill	Probable basal fill of grave, perhaps within (above) the coffin remains 28. A greasy orange silty gravel. Below 32, fill of cut 07
34	Structure	Square Barrow, incorporating enclosure ditch (17,22) and central burial (07).

Samples Register

Sample No.	Context	No	Comments
001	20	30 L	Soil sample from secondary fill of the southern section of the mortuary ditch.
002	21	1 bag	Charcoal sample (small wallet of) from the basal fill of the southern section of the mortuary ditch.
003	15	30 L	Soil sample from secondary fill of the northern section of the mortuary ditch.
004	23/24	10 L	Soil sample from the upper fill (s) of the Roman roadside ditch.
005	25	10 L	Soil sample from the secondary fill of the Roman roadside ditch.
006	30	20 L	Soil sample from the upper/mid fill of the central burial.
007	31	20 L	Soil sample from the lower/mid fill of the central burial.
008	31	1 bag	Charcoal sample (small wallet of) from the base of the central burial fill (31)
009	32	1 bag	Sample of degraded bone and soil matrix from the central grave (below 31)
010	28	1 bag	Charcoal sample/charred fragments of central grave coffin

Finds Register

Context	No	Comments