

## ANNUAL REPORT: UK PENYCLODDIAU 2017 FIELD SCHOOL

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*IFR student Tiffany alongside UK students and Supervisor Morgan (IFR student, 2014)*

### **Background**

Located in the UK, this year's University of Liverpool Archaeology Field School took place between July 16th-August 12<sup>th</sup> 2017. This was the sixth season of excavations at Penycloddiau hillfort, Flintshire (North Wales) by the Department of Archaeology, Classics, and Egyptology, at the University of Liverpool. The department at Liverpool ranks in the UK's Top 5 archaeology departments for international research (REF2014, RAE 2008) – coming top in the UK for staff research outputs in the UK Government's 2014 Research Excellence Framework.

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

At 21 hectares, Penycloddiau hillfort is one of the largest pre-Roman Iron Age sites in the UK. Previous work suggests that similar large contour enclosures may be a very early type (c. 1000-600 BC) – as such, our excavations aim to help date the origins of the hillfort in western Britain, recognising that this monument type represents the first steps towards the formation of society.

Our excavation consists of two large open-area trenches – excavated in plan, and recorded in both single-context plan and in section, according to the British single context method:

Area 1: 36 m x 8 m across the hillfort earthworks: quarry scoop, inner rampart, ditch, outer bank

Area 3: 12 m x 12 m over a prehistoric house platform

### ***Research accomplishments***

Having previously excavated the hillfort ditch to natural, and 100% sampled the house floor.

Our 2017 research aims were to:

- Excavate the quarry scoop, rampart and berm, and counterscarp bank to natural (Area 1)
- Excavate the house platform to natural, record and backfill (Area 3)

We achieved full excavation of three of the four areas (quarry scoop, counterscarp bank, house).

The quarry scoop revealed a burnt fence around the quarry cut, and confirmed a lack of further structural evidence. The counterscarp bank revealed no structural integrity (demonstrating that it had never been a built feature) and the ‘palisade’ identified in 2016 was confirmed as an artefact of the angle of deposits. Instead, we identified two distinct phases of ditch clearance activity: one associated with the initial cutting of the ditch, and another with the re-cut. We also recovered a small mortar from the ditch clearance, and sampled the buried land surface.

Meanwhile, excavation of the hillfort’s inner rampart proceeded. This revealed a layer of stone and earth construction beneath the lime capping. This in turn lay above a stone core, with the rampart faces built in slim, stone box-rampart style, each containing an earthen fill. Downslope, the berm area revealed the potential for a relatively deep stratified sequence, including a linear feature with charcoal – potentially a Bronze Age precursor to the Iron Age rampart. The rampart and berm will see completion in a final, 2018 season (with a much reduced 14 x 8 m Area 1).

On the house platform, structural features were excavated – including an arc of timber wall-slot at the rear of the platform, and two very large entrance postholes (c. 0.40 m wide/deep) for a southern-facing entrance (which may suggest Bronze Age occupation). A full section through the platform construction was also achieved. It would seem now that the house platform has two distinct phases of occupation – and this year’s post-ex will focus on bringing together the full, excavated sequence into phase, and identifying appropriate contexts for radiocarbon dating.

Elsewhere, we also completed the geophysical survey of the 19 hectare interior, and photogrammetric recording of the trench.

Our 2018 season will see the completion of excavations at Penycloddiau – in completing excavation of the hillfort rampart, and the pre-rampart sequence.

### ***Student contributions/involvement in research***

We have now trained thirty-seven IFR students on the Penycloddiau excavations, and really value their contribution, both to the project but also to enhancing the learning environment for our Liverpool students. We even had our first IFR wedding of two former students this month!

This season, our students were able to take part in the excavation of exclusively prehistoric archaeological deposits. Our students are very much at the trowel-edge, working alongside their supervisors both to elucidate and record the stratigraphic sequence. Supervisors are trained to teach via a hands-on, in-the-trench method – with the emphasis very much on team effort. In their first two weeks of training, students were involved in the excavation of all areas.

This year, following their general on-site and off-site training, our IFR students were tasked with performing the role of site assistants, and four of our students successfully assisted supervisors in excavation and training on the house platform, and the rampart and berm. All students also took part in the processing of environmental samples, and heavy residue analysis in the lab.

In addition, students took part in our program of heritage communication – giving site tours to visitors and guests, a big contribution towards helping the project to sustain what have become strong links with our project partners, and with the local community. This is now bearing fruit, as one local village is currently organizing a fundraiser to fund a radiocarbon date.

### ***Dissemination***

A web report will soon be live on the University of Liverpool's departmental blog and project webpages; and a comprehensive, open access interim report – documenting this year's excavations in detail – will also be available in advance of the 2018 season. The project has a relatively strong social media presence, with over 1300 likes on Facebook (where our favorite photographs of the season will soon be uploaded) and over 300 followers on Twitter.

This season's excavation results will be discussed with UK experts at the Hillforts Study Group meeting in November (University of Oxford), and requests for local archaeology society talks will soon be forthcoming. Collaboration with county archaeologist, Fiona Gale, and archaeological cartoonist John Swogger (Çatalhöyük) will see dissemination of results to the wider community.

Final project dissemination will see publication as a monograph alongside the excavations at Bodfari, with Prof. Gary Lock (University of Oxford).