

Later Bronze Age and Iron Age

Key Sites

Northwest Wales – Later Bronze Age and Early Iron Age

DEFENCE

Castell Odo hill-top enclosure, Aberdaron, Llŷn.

Multi-phase hill-top enclosure, possibly initially open, then with two phases of enclosure banks, suggesting a new defensive function, the defences of which were, in a final phase, neglected again. Radiocarbon dating suggests the occupation may have begun early in the first millennium BC, continuing into the middle of the first millennium BC. Alcock 1960.

Meillionydd hill-top enclosure, Llŷn.

A multi-phase, bivallate hill-top enclosure. The enclosure is significantly ploughed down and was first identified from aerial photographs. Several seasons of excavations, still ongoing, have shown that it had been occupied over a long period with changes to the defences and repeated re-building of houses. Despite a lack of datable artefactual evidence, radiocarbon dates show occupation between about 800 to 200 cal BC. Waddington and Karl, 2010, 2011, 2015 and 2016.

Carrog hill-top enclosure, Llanfechell, Anglesey.

A univallate defensive hill-top enclosure, excavated in 2010. An Early Neolithic activity area, probably an open camp site had previously occupied the hill top. Radiocarbon dates suggest that the main enclosure was constructed in the 8th century BC. A multiplicity of post-holes suggests a single large central roundhouse, succeeded by other, probably smaller structures. Smith et al 2014.

Parc Bryn Cegin, Llandygai, Gwynedd

A ring groove roundhouse was excavated with an adjacent ancillary structure and possibly a later granary. The house was dated to fifth to sixth centuries BC. Kenney 2008a and b

RELIGIOUS, RITUAL AND FUNERARY

Bodnithoedd ring ditches, Bottwnog, Llŷn.

Barrow cemetery of at least seven small barrows remaining only as ring ditches. Evaluation excavation suggested that the ring ditches were the remains of small mounds over inhumation burials. There was no dating evidence but by comparison believed to be Later Bronze Age. Ward and Smith 2001, 46-54.

Capel Eithin, Gaerwen, Anglesey.

Late urned cremations s placed within an Early Bronze Age cremation urn cemetery. White and Smith 1999.

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INDUSTRIAL

Cors-y-Bodwrog Hoard, Llynfaes, Anglesey.

Late Bronze Age metalworkers hoard found in peat during farm ditching. Savory 1974.

Pentrwyn, Great Orme, Llandudno, Conwy.

Small copper smelting site found eroding from an exposed scarp face. Rescue excavations in 1998 and 2011 showed two probable small smelting pits and copper smelting residues associated with three radiocarbon dates of the Late Bronze Age, between c. 1000 and 800 cal BC. The analysis of residues, part of an ongoing research project by R. Alan Williams, linked the smelting to the Great Orme copper ores and will contribute to a better understanding of the contribution of such ores to Bronze Age metalwork in Britain.

Key Sites

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Parc Cybi, Holyhead, Anglesey

A complex stone walled roundhouse settlement was excavated with four main houses, not all occupied at the same time. A wall ran through the settlement dividing it in two and directing visitors over a cobbled surface and paved pathway to the impressive porch of the largest roundhouse. There were other smaller roundhouses and to the south a large building that was probably a stone-built roundhouse with orthostats forming the inner face but the wall had been entirely robbed out leaving only the holes to support the orthostats. Several granaries were scattered around the settlement and one stone granary pillar was found reused in a roundhouse wall. This site has not yet been dated but has a very high potential for providing a good sequence of dates from stratigraphically related contexts.

Kenney et al 2011

Parc Bryn Cegin, Llandygai near Bangor, Gwynedd

An extensive enclosed roundhouse settlement was excavated. There were two joined enclosures containing clay-walled roundhouses with a possible industrial area between. The roundhouses dated to the late Iron Age and into the early Roman period, with the industrial activity dating earlier than the main settlement. Glass bead production seemed to have been taking place in one of the houses and a hoard of beads ready for sale to the Romans was found nearby. A Roman seal-box was also found in the drain of one of the houses.

Kenney 2008a and b

Caer Seion, Conwy

A large hillfort with a small fort or 'citadel' at one end. Excavated in 1951-2 and evaluation trenches were dug in 2008. The latter produced dates to suggest the main fort was in use by sometime between 600 and

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400 BC and that the small fort was built possibly soon after 410 to 360 BC.

Griffiths and Hogg 1956, Smith 2012

Braich y Dinas, Penmaenmawr

A very large and prominent hillfort, destroyed by quarrying in the 20th century. Four stone walls formed a series of enclosures on the summit and on the east side of the hill. It contained over 90, possibly as many as 150 round houses. Excavation showed occupation during the 2nd-4th centuries AD and may well have been extended during this period after starting life as a smaller Iron Age hillfort.

Hughes 1915

Pendinas, Tregarth, Gwynedd

A small hillfort surrounded by an immense wall. Small-scale excavations in 1976 revealed stone facing to the rampart and a vitrified rubble core. A radiocarbon date suggested a construction date of second to first centuries BC.

White 1992

Tre'r Ceiri, Llanaelhaearn, Gwynedd

A well-preserved hillfort on the most easterly of the three peaks of Yr Eifl. The fort comprises a stone rampart enclosing a large area and containing the foundations of about 150 huts. The fort has had several excavations in the first half of the 20th century. In recent years it has been the subject of a long term conservation project, resulting in the stabilisation and consolidation of the rampart walls and many of the huts.

Hopewell 1993; Hopewell, forthcoming.

Bryn y Castell, Ffestiniog, Gwynedd

The hillfort of Bryn y Castell was totally excavated from 1979-1985. The defences consist of a stone rampart enclosing the small summit of the hill. Some stake-built roundhouses were identified and a stone roundhouse later converted to a snail shell-shaped floor plan. Large quantities of smithing debris were recovered from this building. The main activity of the site was metal-working and there was also a building outside the defences that was a smithy. The site was occupied from towards the end of the first millennium BC until the mid-1st century AD.

Crew 1984, Crew 1986

Bryn Eryr, Llansadwrn, Anglesey

The site started with a clay-walled roundhouse in a palisaded enclosure. Another roundhouse was added and the settlement was surrounded by a rectangular ditch and banked enclosure. The enclosure also contained other small structures, probably granaries. When the enclosure was abandoned and starting to erode a stone built roundhouse was built inside it dating to the Romano-British period.

Longley 1998

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Llandygai Industrial Estate, Llandygai near Bangor, Gwynedd

A large timber roundhouse built inside Henge A with another smaller roundhouse and four-post and two post-structures. The eroded bank and ditch of the henge presumably used as a ready-made enclosure.

Lynch and Musson 2004

Erw Wen and Moel y Gerddi, near Harlech, Gwynedd

Two enclosed roundhouses excavated in the 1980s. Both sites had a central timber roundhouse replaced on precisely the same location by a stone roundhouse.

Kelly 1988

Graeanog and Cefn Graeanog, Clynog, Gwynedd

The total excavation of these sites was undertaken in advance of a gravel quarrying in the late 1970s. Cefn Graeanog had three separate phases of settlement spanning the Middle Iron Age to the late Romano-British period. The first settlement phase being a stone-walled roundhouse, followed by a curvilinear-walled enclosure with two roundhouses, then a much larger rectangular stone enclosure used in the Roman period with three roundhouses.

Graeanog was a small homestead broadly contemporary with the later phases of Cefn Graeanog. It had five occupation phases which lasted from the fourth to second centuries cal. BC to the third and fourth centuries cal. AD, with a final period of occupation in the sixth to the ninth centuries. It started with unenclosed stone-built roundhouses, which were levelled before a roundhouse and rectangular building of the Roman period were built, then it was reoccupied in the early medieval period.

Fasham et al 1998

Ty Mawr, Holyhead Mountain, Holyhead, Anglesey

This hut circle settlement was first investigated by W.O. Stanley between 1862 and 1868. Modern excavations were carried out by Christopher Smith in 1978-82. The circular huts and rectangular workshops/ancillary buildings are not the remains of a single settlement but a series of farmsteads of various dates.

Smith 1987

Bush Farm, Y Felinheli, Gwynedd

The site was dug in advance of road-building, and had four phases of activity, most of which took place in the second century AD, but this was pre-dated by a clay-walled roundhouse probably of late Iron Age date.

Longley et al 1998

Llyn Cerrig Bach, Llanfair-yn-Neubwll, Anglesey

Votive deposit in small lake near RAF Valley discovered in 1943. Almost two hundred pieces of equipment, including weapons and elements of horse harnesses and chariots. Also two slave-gang chains and blacksmiths' tools and bar iron. Deposition probably took place from 3rd century BC until the Roman invasion.

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Fox 1946; Lynch, Aldhouse-Green and Davies 2000, 214

Crawcwellt, Trawsfynydd, Gwynedd

This upland later Iron Age scattered roundhouse settlement is associated with curvilinear field enclosures. It was excavated by Peter Crew in the 1980s and 1990s. Three main areas of the settlement were examined: Platform A contained a sequence of stake-walled roundhouses and an adjoining curvilinear enclosure; Area J contained stake-walled roundhouses, followed by two stone roundhouses with an adjoining oval enclosure; and Area H contained a small stone roundhouse. At least nine stake-walled roundhouses were also identified. The settlement contained extensive evidence for iron-working, in the form of smelting and smithing furnaces in the roundhouses, spreads of iron-working debris and external slag dumps.

Crew 1989, Crew 1998

Rhiwgoch, Harlech, Gwynedd

The largely robbed out remains of a stone-walled roundhouse were excavated in advance of the expansion of the water treatment works. The building had a thick stone wall, complex internal drains, a substantial porch and internal postholes defining an internal entrance structure. There was also a small yard outside where burnt stone had been produced probably during cooking. Radiocarbon dating demonstrated that the roundhouse was built just prior to Roman penetration of the area and continued in use into the second century AD.

Kenney 2012, Kenney 2013