

SEI APPENDIX 7.3

**CASTELL Y BLAIDD
LLANBADARN FYNYDD, POWYS**

BACKGROUND DATA

Description

1. Castell y Blaidd ('Wolf's Castle') lies at the southwestern end of a prominent knoll, within hilly terrain, c.3 km NE of the village of Llanbadarn Fynydd (centred on NGR 312479 279799). The site stands close to a pass leading eastwards, and to a junction of several tracks through the hills, with generally wide ranging views on all sides, apart from the E and NE (Burnham 1995). Upland streams, tributaries of the Gwenlas Brook, flow past the S and W sides of the knoll.



Oblique aerial photograph looking SE (13.10.05) © RCAHMW ¹

2. The monument comprises a horseshoe-shaped enclosure, open on the NW side, with internal dimensions of 55 m (NE-SW) x 35 m (an area of c.0.2 ha), enclosed on three sides by a single bank surviving to a height of 3 - 4 m above the base of an outer ditch; a further, outer, (counterscarp) bank is visible on the NE side. The ditch is described as "*irregular to the north, while it is not even apparent to the west [...]*" (Remfry 1996).
3. The interior is domed and the ground surface irregular, showing no signs of having been artificially levelled. The ground rises from 432 m AOD within the NW gap to 437m AOD at the SE 'toe' of the horseshoe.

¹ RCAHMW Ref. C871372.



Oblique aerial photograph looking E (not dated) © Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust ²



Oblique aerial photograph looking S (10.12.09) © RCAHMW

² CPAT ID Ref. 86C0131.

- The first detailed description of the monument was made in an inventory of ancient monuments in the county of Radnorshire, published in 1913³, which gave the following description:

A well-preserved earthwork of simple form, thrown up on a fairly circular natural mound which bears evidence of having been scarped on its south-eastern slope. It stands at an altitude of 1,423 feet [434 m], and is of horse-shoe shape. The ramparts, especially those on the south and east, are of great strength, having on the exterior a height of 20 to 24 feet [c.6 - 7 m], and on the interior of 4 to 6 feet [1.2 - 1.8 m]. From end to end the ramparts have a length of 610 feet [186 m], with a continuous ditch around them, averaging six feet in width [1.8 m] and five feet in depth [1.5 m]. The ends of the rampart are 75 feet [22.9 m] apart, and from them the ground slopes gently to the surrounding level. This earthwork occupies a strong position, commanding the Gwenlas Valley to the north and west. Locally it is known as 'Castle Tump.' On the old 1-inch Ordnance Survey sheet it is marked as 'Ancient Camp'; on the 6-inch sheet as 'Castell y Blaidd (Tumulus).' - Visited, 7th June, 1911.



OS 1-inch sheet, 1833.

- Castell y Blaidd was Scheduled as an ancient monument in 1974⁴ (RD 102). It is catalogued in both the CPAT and RCAHMW databases⁵ as a prehistoric (Iron Age) hillfort / defended enclosure.

³ The Royal Commission 1913; No. 241

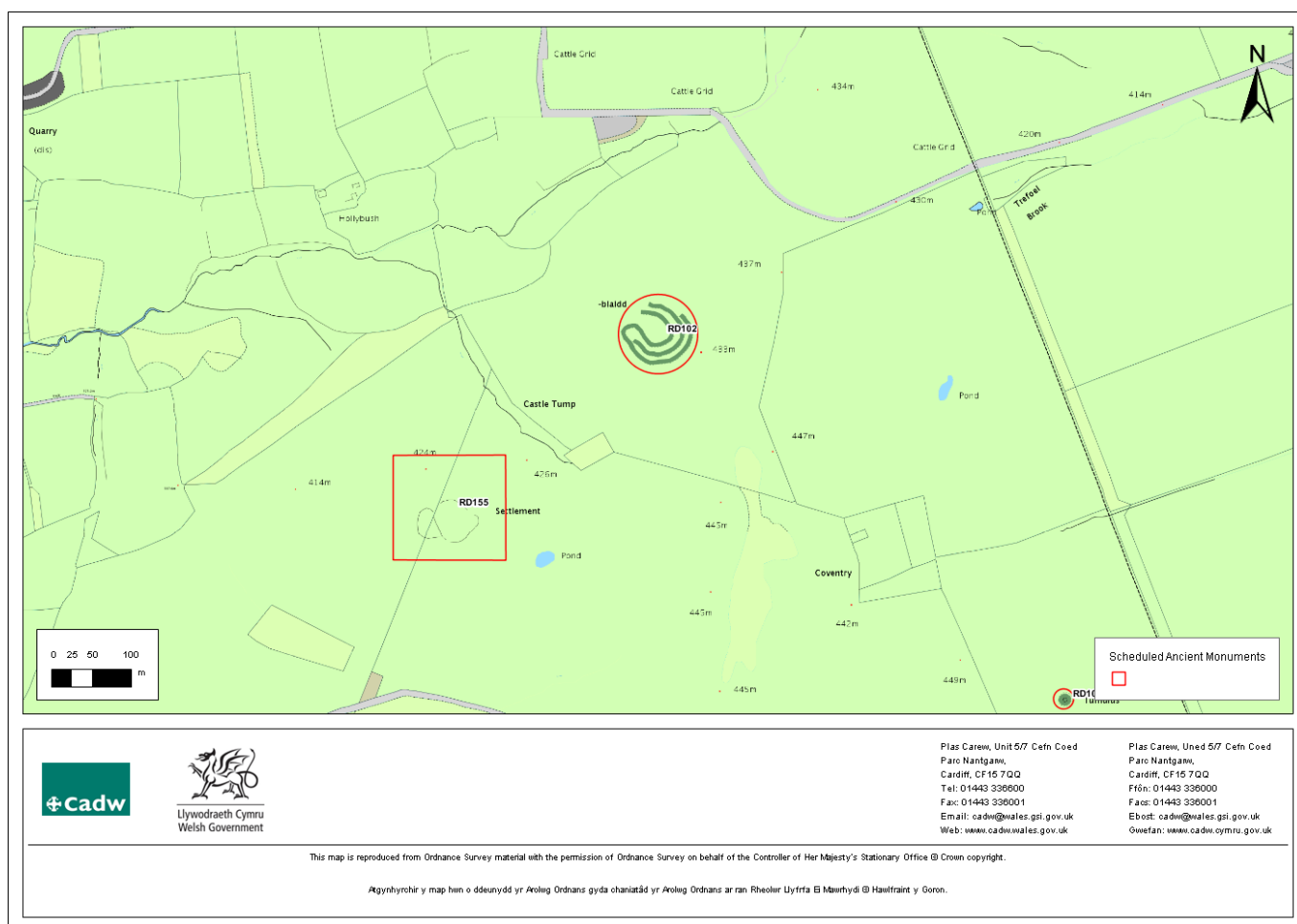
⁴ Clwyd-Powys Regional Historic Environment Record (HER) PRN 1098 (accessed via Archwilio database online).

⁵ Archwilio and Coflein, respectively.

6. The CADW scheduling text states:

The monument comprises the remains of an earthwork/stone-built enclosure. The date or precise nature of the enclosure is unknown, but it is likely to be later prehistoric or medieval and is located on a natural, small hill. The enclosure is defended by a horse-shoe shaped bank, ditch and counter-scarp. On the north-west side the defences are very slight but there the ground falls away steeply.

The monument is of national importance for its potential to enhance our knowledge of later prehistoric defensive organisation and settlement. The site forms an important element within the wider later prehistoric context and within the surrounding landscape. The site is well preserved and retains considerable archaeological potential. There is a strong probability of the presence of evidence relating to chronology, building techniques and functional detail.



Scheduling maplet © CADW

7. The scheduling maplet shows both Castell y Blaidd and the low earthworks of what are thought to represent building platforms of a former settlement 285 m to the SW, on the opposite side of the stream valley (RD 155). The relationship, if any, between the two monuments is completely unknown.

8. It has indeed been commonly suggested that, instead of a prehistoric hillfort, this defensive enclosure may in fact represent an unfinished Medieval castle, possibly built by the Mortimer family in the early 13th century during the struggles between the Welsh and the

English (Norman) Marcher lords, on a site abandoned before completion in favour of Tinboeth, c.5 km to the SW, on the E bank of the River Ithon (Burnham 1995; Remfry 1996). Writing on the subject of Medieval castles in Radnorshire, Paul Martin Remfry ⁶, considered Castell y Blaidd to be:

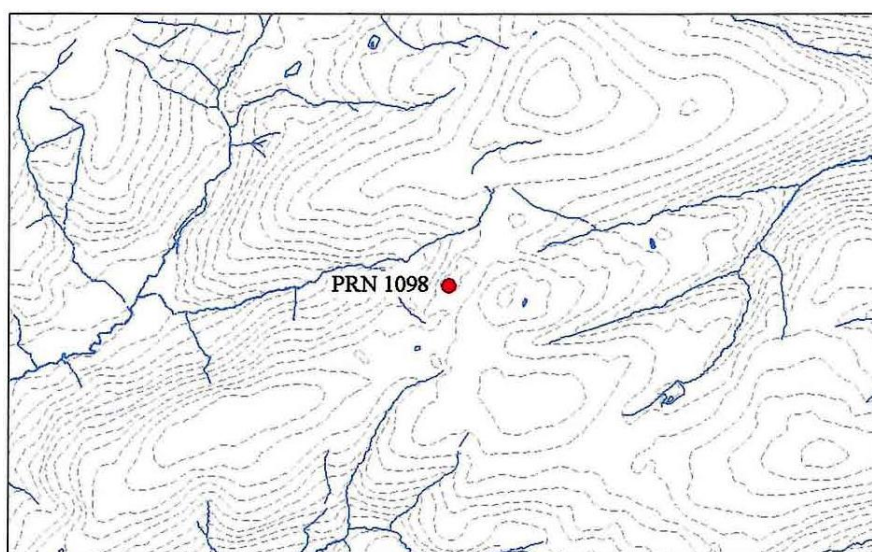
[...] a most debatable site and is included in this [his] survey because of its 'Castell' name. I am of the opinion that it is an early thirteenth century castle that was abandoned, incomplete, for the better site at Tinboeth, another high lying ringwork, commanding the upper reaches of the River Eithon. Tinboeth is clearly visible just over a mile away to the south-west.

9. Tinboeth, possibly built on the site of a prehistoric hillfort, was documented as one of the castles (*Dynbaud*) of Roger Mortimer ⁷ in 1282; there is no documentary evidence for its actual construction. It was surrendered to King Edward II in 1322, following an unsuccessful revolt by Marcher lords led by Roger Mortimer (3rd Baron Mortimer).
10. A possible Medieval origin for Castell y Blaidd was also considered in the course of a recent survey of defended enclosures in Radnorshire, commissioned by CADW and conducted by the Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust (Silvester & Hankinson 2006). The conclusions were as follows:

In its siting Castell y Blaidd (PRN 1098) would readily fall into the Iron Age hill-top fort category but because of its strange horseshoe shape appearance, the wide gap admittedly above the steepest natural slope, other possible origins have been suggested for it. Castell y Blaidd is thus included here in the list of authentic sites but the attribution remains to be confirm[ed].

[...]

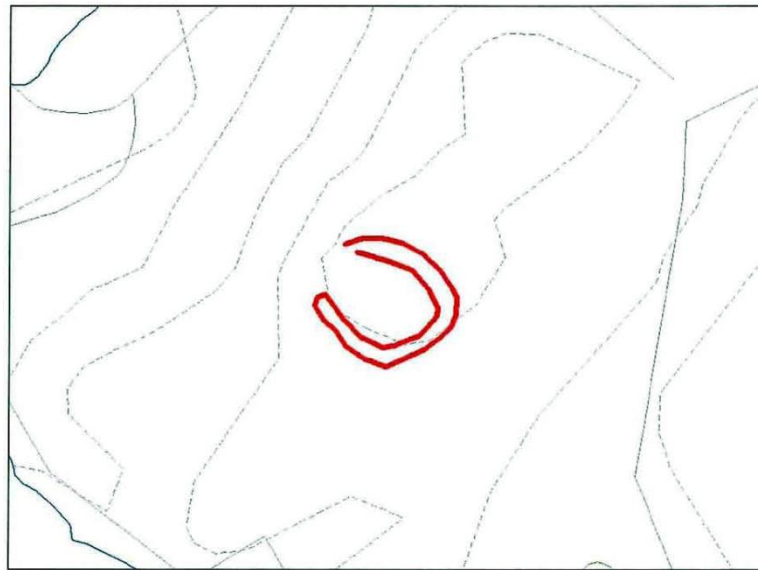
Some doubts have been expressed as to whether this is indeed a prehistoric enclosure; a later, early medieval or medieval date has been mooted in the past, because of the curious morphology of the earthwork. The jury is out.



PRN 1098 site location (Silvester & Hankinson 2006)

⁶ Remfry 1996:101.

⁷ First Baron Mortimer 1231-82.



PRN 1098 groundplan (Silvester & Hankinson 2006)

Discussion

11. From the structural remains alone it is impossible to determine the function of Castell y Blaidd - whether a prehistoric (Iron Age) hillfort or a Medieval castle. The dimensions of the enclosure and the rampart lie within the expected range of both types of monument. It is even possible that here, as at nearby Tinboeth, a prehistoric hillfort could have been converted (or could have been in the process of being converted) to a Medieval earth-and-timber or earth-and-stone castle.
12. There are no contemporary outworks on neighbouring hills of either period which might give a clue as to date. This includes the similar hillock just to the northwest, which could not possibly have been left undefended had this site had a 'serious' military function.
13. The uneven and undulating interior may suggest a Medieval castle site left unfinished and abandoned before the internal 'living space' was levelled but such irregular pitted ground might equally be found within an Iron Age hillfort.
14. There is no contemporary documentation for the construction of a castle at Castell y Blaidd, but this does not rule out a Medieval date, because, equally, there is none for its putative successor, Tinboeth. Of the 15 castles known to have been built in the area (the Medieval cantref of Maelienydd) in the period 1070 - 1285, only 11 are mentioned in the (often scant) historical records, which rely on a mixture of royal documents, monastic chronicles (Wigmore Abbey), Welsh chronicles, Mortimer genealogies, and various land grants (Remfry 1996).
15. The interpretation by Remfry (1996) of Castell y Blaidd as a Medieval castle site appears to rely on it having been left unfinished, in favour of an alternative built nearby by the Mortimers in a completely different strategic position. The wide (21 m) gap on the NW side of the enclosure, the irregularity of the ditch on the N and its apparent absence on the W, may suggest that the earthwork was indeed unfinished. It is also possible (although an

uncommon solution to a defensive problem) that the ground on the NW side was considered sufficiently steep to provide an adequate defence.

16. The 'curious morphology' of the horseshoe-shaped earthwork which has led others to infer a Medieval castle could conceivably be the result of subsequent agricultural activity or enemy action which has eroded and damaged the earthworks (and then somehow 'reinstated' the natural hillslope without leaving a trace) at these points (Burnham 1995; Remfry 1996). If this is the case, and the earthwork once a complete oval enclosure, there is still nothing to differentiate prehistoric from Medieval earthworks on morphology alone.
17. On present evidence the two interpretations seem equally plausible.

References

- Burnham, H.B. 1995. *A Guide to Ancient and Historic Wales: Clwyd and Powys* HMSO:London.
- Remfry, P.M. 1996. *A Guide to Castles in Radnorshire* Monuments in the Landscape Volume 3. Logaston Press: Woonton Almeley, Herefordshire.
- The Royal Commission, 1913. *An Inventory of The Ancient Monuments in Wales and Monmouthshire III - County of Radnor* Conducted by The Royal Commission on The Ancient and Historical Monuments and Constructions in Wales and Monmouthshire HMSO: London.
- Silvester, R & Hankinson, R. 2006. *Defended Enclosures in Radnorshire: Project Report* The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT Report No. 781): Welshpool.