

Great Archaeological Sites in Merthyr Tydfil



4. GELLIGAER COMMON EARLY CHRISTIAN MONUMENT



Running northwards from Gelligaer village over Gelligaer Common is the road that the Romans built between their forts at Gelligaer and Aberysgir near Brecon. Although it is now no more than a narrow lane, for most of its near 2,000 year history it was part of a major routeway linking Cardiff and Caerphilly with Mid Wales. The Romans loved to put up memorials to their dead alongside roads where travellers could see them and read about the people who were buried there. This custom continued beyond the end of Roman rule, even though far fewer passers-by would be literate enough to read them.

The stone pillar on Gelligaer Common (SO 1034 0340) is one of these monuments. The local sandstone of which it is made was laid down in narrow layers that often flake away when exposed to the weather, taking with them the words that were inscribed when it was first put up. Various copies were made in the past when more was visible, but unfortunately none of them make sense. We would expect the pillar to give the name of the person buried there and the name of his (or less likely, her)

father, and possibly include HIC IACET, the Latin words for 'lies here' but nothing like that can be seen. The 17th century antiquary Edward Lhuyd made it out to be REFSOIHI. In 1898 a rubbing was made of what was left the inscription, which was interpreted as [N]EFR[O]IHI[- (the letters in square brackets were more illegible than the others, so they're more of a guess). Another suggestion is TEFROIHI. However, what these efforts do tell us is the style in which the letters were carved, which was in fashion in the late 6th century AD or early 7th century.

The pillar stands on a low grass-covered bank that some people have thought is the remains of an enclosure around the grave of the person commemorated by the pillar. However, another possibility is that it is the remains of a Bronze Age ring cairn, of which there are a number nearby, reused for this new purpose.



The monument is near the junction of the Roman road (unclassified) between Gelligaer village and Fochriw with the unclassified road to Bedlinog. There is a small unsurfaced parking area a short distance along the Bedlinog road. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 160, Explorer sheet 166.

Timeline (the asterisks indicate the time-span)



You can learn more about this site, and other similar archaeological sites in Wales, by going to <https://www.archwilio.org.uk/arch/>. Please read and observe the Conditions of Use. The pillar has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 00635m, and you can search for other similar sites here too. You can contact us via social media or through the methods given at the bottom of the page. See more about sites in South Wales connected to Christianity at http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/historic_christian/pages/index.html