

**CPAT Report No 1261**

**Tomen y Rhodwydd, De018  
Denbighshire  
Survey and Conservation 2014  
North East Wales Community Archaeology**



**THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**

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## **CONTENTS**

- 1 INTRODUCTION
  - 2 SURVEY
  - 3 CONSERVATION
  - 4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
  - 5 CONCLUSION
  - 6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
  - 7 SOURCES
- APPENDICES

## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In February 2014, the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust undertook a programme of survey, conservation and outreach activities at Tomen y Rhodwydd (Castell yr Adwy) near Llandegla, Denbighshire (SAM De 018; PRN 100932). These works were undertaken in collaboration with Coleg Cambria Llysfasi and Denbighshire County Council with the aid of volunteers from the wider local community.
- 1.2 The project was grant-aided by Cadw under the aegis of the North East Wales Community Archaeology project. This is a small pot of funding for the completion of volunteer and education-oriented, archaeology-based tasks in the former Clwyd region, ranging from conservation to fieldwork and educational events. The selection of projects for the programme is determined by a Cadw-led panel of regional historic environment professionals from Cadw (Will Davies, Fiona Grant), CPAT, Wrexham Museums Service (Steve Greuter) and Denbighshire County Council (Fiona Gale, also attending on behalf of the AONB).
- 1.3 The following established criteria enabled Tomen y Rhodwydd's inclusion within the project framework:
- Its Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) designation
  - A significant risk of deterioration to the site as an earthwork
  - The educational amenity with the possibility of training opportunities for student, community and volunteer parties
  - Its historical significance/resonance
  - Match/alternative funding (the site falls within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) for the Clwydian Range and is therefore the project is eligible for potential grant aid sustainability funding)
  - A wealth of local voluntary 'heritage' interest groups
  - Sustained legacy – the potential for further conservation/survey work. Management agreements/aid from both Cadw and AONB for the present landowner
  - Future public awareness maintained through enhanced interpretation/viewing visibility and access.
- 1.4 This was one of three projects initially agreed for the 2013-4 programme and it had originally been intended only to spend a few days on site securing landowner permissions and developing the project for a clearance, access and interpretation programme in 2014-5. The decision was made to focus on the castle when two other collaborative projects of a similar nature at Wat's Dyke Erddig (with the National Trust) and Llys Edwin, Northop (with Glyndwr University and the Clwydian Range Archaeology Group) were abandoned as Glastir funding covered the planned clearance at Erddig and excessive undergrowth prevented any work at the latter, though this will possibly be revisited in 2014-5.
- 1.5 Tomen y Rhodwydd is a motte and bailey castle located at the head of the Nant y Garth Pass, south-west of the village of Llandegla, Denbighshire at SJ 176 516, in an area of outcrops of carboniferous limestone (Figs. 2 and 3). It was part of the township of Buddugre'r within the parish of Llanarmon yn Iâl, the castle consists of an earthen mound (the motte) standing at one end of an oval enclosure (the bailey) protected by a strong bank and ditch. The site has not been excavated; nevertheless it seems likely that the motte carried a palisade round its edge and was surmounted by a strong wooden tower. The morphology of the earthworks suggests that the whole structure is essentially of one period; the motte has not been superimposed on an earlier earthwork as far as can be established from surface evidence. The site is unusual in having a substantial counterscarp bank round the outside of the motte ditch and extending a short distance outside the bailey also. This bank, however, is not neatly finished, but rather

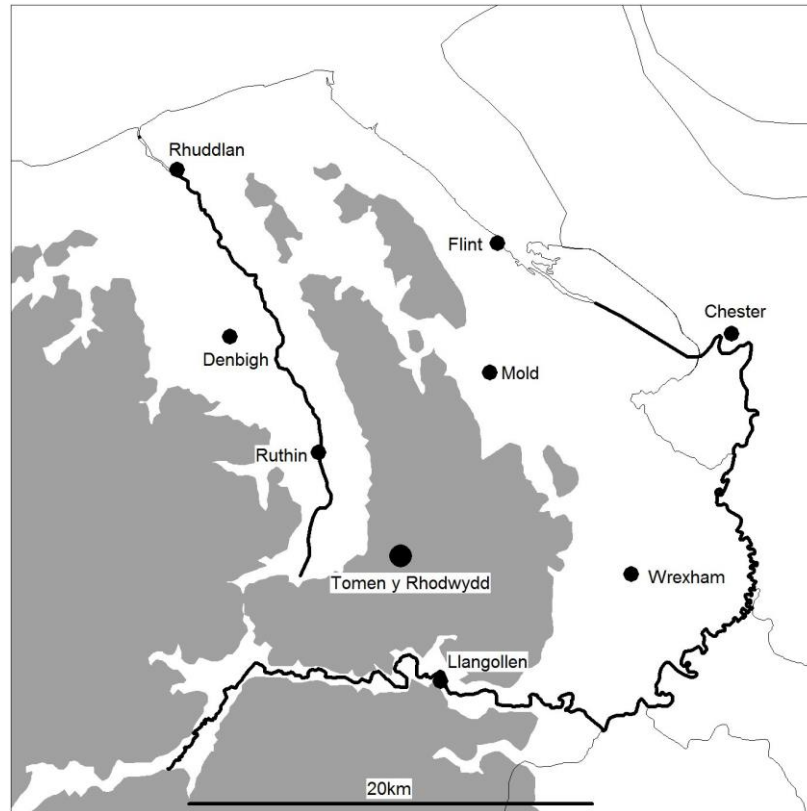
resembles a series of spoil dumps. Also uncommon is the relatively low elevation of the broad motte summit above the embanked bailey in comparison to the massive scale of the defences.

- 1.6 Cadw recognises the site as: ‘one of national importance that retains significant archaeological potential, with a strong probability of the presence of both structural evidence and intact associated deposits’. It is arguably the best known of native Welsh timber castles, aerial views of its distinctive earthworks appearing in several major textbooks on castles and Welsh history and archaeology in recent decades (Fig 1). The monument is under threat from erosion from stock and badgers – there is a large badger sett on the western side of the motte – and from its vegetation cover.



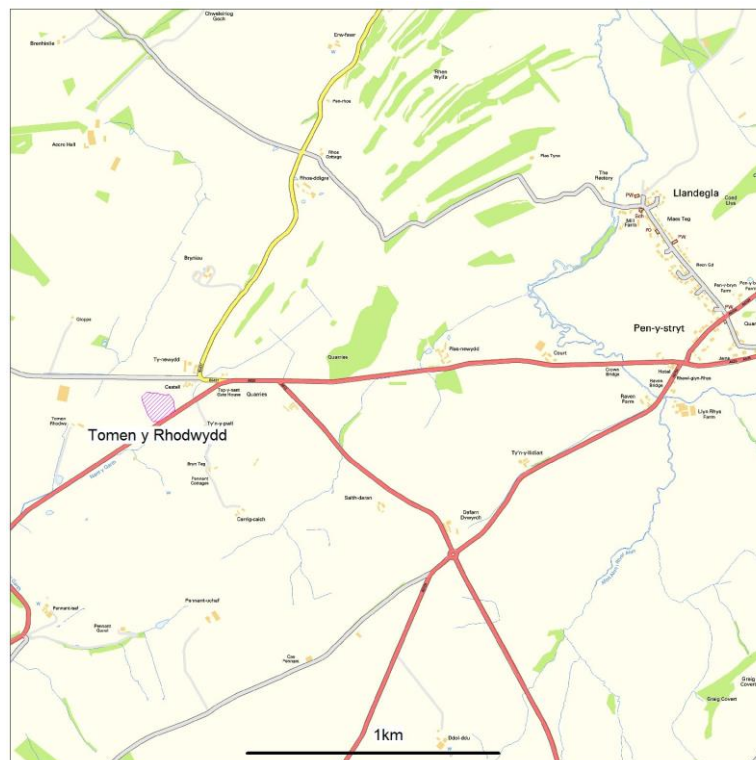
Fig 1 Tomen y Rhodwydd from the air. Photo CPAT 84-c-0278

- 1.7 The castle was probably built by Owain ap Gruffydd ap Cynan (Owain Gwynedd) who, after becoming king (later prince) of Gwynedd in 1137, continued the expansionist policies of his house at the expense of Ranulf of Chester and Madog ap Maredudd of Powys. He annexed Mold and Ystrad Alun in 1146 and Tegeingl in 1149. In order to secure these acquisitions he subsequently annexed the *cwmwd* (commote) of Iâl (Yale) in Powys, and constructed Tomen y Rhodwydd in order to control access into Dyffryn Clwyd and the passage of the upper valley towards Mold. This occupation was short-lived, however. In 1157 Iorwerth Goch ap Maredudd, Madog ap Maredudd’s brother, took the castle and burnt it, restoring the authority of Powys over Iâl (Pratt 1979).
- 1.8 It is not known whether Tomen y Rhodwydd was rebuilt after its destruction in 1157. A reference in the Pipe Rolls for 1212-13 records ‘iron mallets for breaking the rocks in the ditch of the castle of Yale’; however, this may be a reference to the royal *llys*, Tomen Y Faerdre, in Llanarmon 3 miles to the north (*ibid*). The antiquary John Leland, writing in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, noted that the castle (then referred to as Castell Cefn Du) was in use as a sheepfold.



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Fig. 2. The location of Tomen y Rhodwydd within north-east Wales



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Fig. 3. The location of Tomen y Rhodwydd.

## 2 SURVEY

- 2.1 Whilst arguably the best known of Welsh timber castles owing to the widespread publication of aerial photographs of the earthworks, and its prominent location overlooking the present A525, prior to the current project Tomen y Rhodwydd had not been subject to an archaeological survey, other than by the Ordnance Survey in 1963. The objectives of this project were therefore to provide an accurate topographical plan which outlined the extent of the site and noted its present condition, the scale of erosion, vegetation coverage and other issues. In addition, a longitudinal profile across the monument was mapped (see Fig. 6) together with the location of what has been considered to be a previous archaeological excavation test pit (of which there is no known record within the regional Historic Environment Record).
- 2.2 Over a period of three days volunteers and students from Coleg Cambria (Llysfasi) were instructed in the use of total station digital surveying using a Leica TC500 in conjunction with Penmap survey software. The data was later processed using proprietary software, with the resulting illustrations being produced by Nigel Jones using Mapinfo and Adobe Illustrator. Initially students and volunteers were encouraged to form working groups to undertake hand-drawn plans highlighting topographical contours and other relevant detail. This enabled the participants to identify the type of issues addressed through site heritage management as well as identifying archaeological information previously unrecorded.



Fig. 4. Digital surveying with students from Coleg Cambria (Llysfasi)  
Photo CPAT 3779.0095



Fig. 5. Volunteers surveying the recently uncovered outer defences.  
Photo CPAT 3791-0165



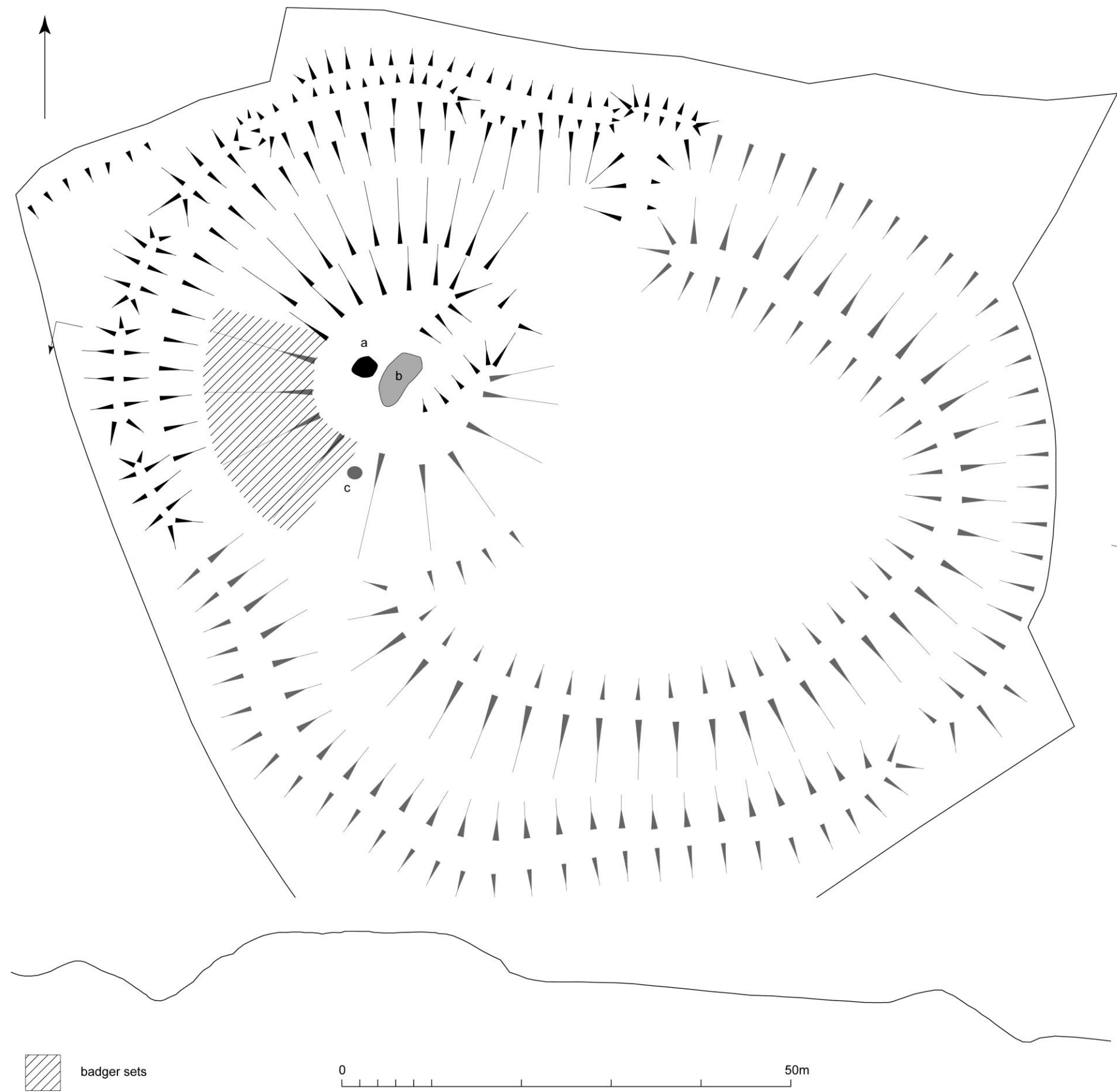


Fig. 6 The results of the 2014 survey of Tomen y Rhodwydd (in black), with the remaining earthworks based on Ordnance Survey mapping (in grey). a – disturbance, b – spoil, c – tree stump.

 badger sets

0 50m

### 3 CONSERVATION

- 3.1 Prior to the commencement of the fieldwork, an area was identified by Cadw for priority vegetation clearance. The outer defensive earthworks to the north and west of the motte were covered in gorse and hawthorn, all of which was encouraging the spread of the rabbit population and potentially too the active badger sett located on the west face of the motte.
- 3.2 Acting under advice from Denbighshire County Council's ecologist, a badger license was sought from NRW (Appendix 5) in order to work in the area adjacent to the badger set, the conditions of the license providing further working guidance which helped to avoid causing any disturbance.
- 3.3 Over a period of five working days a total of 25 volunteers and students (see Appendix 3 for list of participants) helped to clear the area by hand. All of the removed vegetation was burnt on site, within the scheduled area, on raised platforms. All root material was treated to prevent regrowth by a senior member of staff from Coleg Cambria.



Fig. 7 Vegetation clearance on the outer defences.  
Photo CPAT 3791-0094

- 3.4 In addition to the outer bank and ditch clearance, a group of mature hawthorn trees on the eastern side of the motte were removed with the aid of students qualified in the use of chainsaws.
- 3.5 Overall, the visibility of the site was greatly improved, particularly from the public highway to the north. In addition to this, a circular walk was opened up, thus allowing the public to traverse the perimeter of the site for the first time. From an archaeological perspective the work on the outer defences helped to re-define the various phases and evolution of the monument. The removal of the trees on the east side of the motte allowed the survey team to gather the data necessary to create an overall profile across the monument, from east to west.



Fig. 8 View of the outer defences, after conservation.  
Photo CPAT 3791-0219

## 4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 4.1 Education is integral to the first of seven core strategic values in the Trust's 2013 to 2018 strategic plan, reflecting CPAT's long-standing and continuing commitment to education and engagement of the public in archaeology and heritage. A related key value is to enjoy the work that we do, and share that enjoyment as widely as possible in a creative, flexible and innovative way. During the time spent at Tomen y Rhodwydd, over 100 people took part in a series of local activities and events including an archaeology open day, historical re-enactment, school visits and talks. A breakdown of numbers can be found in Appendix 3.



Fig. 9. A visit to the site from Ysgol Pentrecelyn, February 2014. Photo CPAT 3779-0172

- 4.2 Several local primary schools were invited to visit the site, emphasizing to teachers that a visit to a heritage site can provide a starting point for a variety of subjects and topics in the school curriculum (Corbishley 2011). The staff and pupils of the local Dyffryn Iâl Primary School visited the site while conservation works were in progress. This was part of an organized day of activities in which the pupils were given the opportunity to have firsthand experience of the practice of archaeology and thereby learn to appreciate the variety of skills that goes into the collection and investigation of archaeological data.
- 4.3 The activities included an introduction to archaeology, a site visit and an outdoor learning experience where students explored motte-and-bailey castles, their design, construction and everyday life with hands-on activities. Their learning experience was supported and enhanced by educational material produced by the Trust (Appendix 1). Furthermore, a volunteer from the Cwmwd Iâl society (a Welsh re-enactment group regularly engaged by Cadw to portray the people living in Wales in the 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century) supported the community archaeologist during the workshop.

- 4.4 Through observation, children learnt about the meaning and significance of Scheduled Ancient Monuments, management issues and the commitment of landowners in looking after the local heritage. These activities allowed them to draw conclusions about the past and pinpoint differences between present and past. Most importantly, by visiting the site and asking questions of the archaeologists and the landowner, the pupils gained an understanding of the fragility of the archaeological record and this made them aware of their roles as potential wardens of the past.



Fig. 19. Local residents and members of Denbighshire Young Archaeologists Club are given a guided tour by an archaeologist from Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust. Photo CPAT 3779-0137

- 4.5 The event received a positive feedback from teachers and students who had the chance to explore new teaching and learning resources. When teachers were asked if the event met their expectations, they offered the following answer:

*“The children, and staff, had a great time. We thoroughly enjoyed the experience. The children were very enthusiastic about the trip. One child has been to the library (after the visit) to find a book about Motte and bailey Castles, says it all! Luckily we had an email from Viviana (CPAT community archaeologist). It was lovely to see the passion for keeping our heritage. Keep emailing schools, this is an experience all children should have.”* (Dyffryn Iâl Primary School teacher)

- 4.6 The educational activities developed at Tomen y Rhodwydd created new links with local schools and established the foundations for future educational activities associated with the site and the local landscape. Pentrecelyn primary school will visit the site in April and more opportunities will be explored to involve different groups in the area.

- 4.7 A site open day was organized during the weekend to inform the wider public about the historical and archaeological significance of the site, as well as presenting the results of the conservation and recording work conducted at Tomen y Rhodwydd. The event was promoted by various organizations, such as Denbighshire County Council and Cadw, through traditional communication channels and the employment of social media. CPAT produced a poster to promote the event that was distributed in strategic community centres (Appendix 2). Local schools also supported the initiative by distributing flyers to staff members, pupils and families.



Fig. 11. Students from Ysgol Dyffryn Llandegla investigating the earthworks of the castle.  
Photo CPAT 3791-0069

- 4.8 The event aimed to inform and create a dialogue with local residents represented by a diverse socio-economic profile incorporating farm-workers and local businesses as well as families, retired people and amateur groups and individuals (Appendix 3). The day offered a variety of activities including site-guided tours lead by a CPAT Project Archaeologist, 12<sup>th</sup>-century re-enactment performances by Cwmwd Iâl, displays, finds handling and children's craft activities.
- 4.9 The open day received positive feedbacks (Appendix 4) with over 80 people attending the event. Visitors had the opportunity to approach professionals from CPAT, Cadw and Denbighshire County Council and ask questions about the management of the historic landscape whilst learning more about their local heritage. Furthermore, the open day was an excellent opportunity for the landowner to meet with the local community and to share his experience as the owner of a Scheduled Ancient Monument and to create a venue to nurture community spirit. Visitors left positive comments that encourage future community and educational initiatives.

## **5 AFTER THOUGHTS AND THE FUTURE**

- 5.1 The project at Tomen y Rhodwydd combined archaeological survey and analysis, heritage conservation and community outreach. This provided a more detailed picture of the extent and condition of the monument, and has resulted in a baseline survey which will inform future research and heritage management activity on the site. Conservation work reduced vegetation cover – thus limiting root damage and inhibiting potential future erosion issues from rabbits and badgers.
- 5.2 The majority of Welsh Scheduled Ancient Monuments lie on agricultural land, the communities that own, work on and around these monuments being vital partners in the management of the archaeological resource. This project was particularly successful in engaging with the local agricultural community, whether through the very efficient workforce of Llysfasi students and volunteers and through attendance at the school events and open days.
- 5.3 The community outreach element of the project enabled over 100 people to access the site and participate in archaeological and conservation work. Participants were drawn from a wide demographic range, and the level of interest generated suggests that further community-based archaeological projects will be sustainable in future years.
- 5.4 Subject to the availability of funding and landowner agreement a second phase of work at Tomen y Rhodwydd is planned for 2014-5. With relevant permissions in place this will entail the completion of the clearance and topographical survey works across the site, with a final objective of a low-key access scheme and some on site interpretation, for which the archaeological work will generate information. CPAT and Cadw are in discussion with the Clwydian range AONB over possible match funding for these works.
- 5.5 The North East Wales Community Archaeology panel are scheduled to meet in May to agree on a programme for 2014-5 and to continue to develop a short-list of opportunities and priority conservation projects which are appropriate for community participation, volunteers and education activities. These will be selected according to the assessment criteria set out in Appendix 6. It is envisaged that at least one of these projects will be developed commenced during the coming year in addition to Tomen y Rhodwydd
- 5.6 Since the 2013-4 programme, the panel will be expanded to include Sophie Fish from Flintshire Museums, ensuring the representation of all of the local authorities within the area.

## 6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 6.1 The survey and conservation fieldwork was coordinated by Ian Grant. The community engagement programme (school visits and open day) was coordinated by Viviana Culshaw with the assistance of Ian Grant. Post-excavation assessment and reporting has been undertaken by Ian Grant, Paul Belford and Viviana Culshaw. Nigel Jones assisted with the survey illustrations.

CPAT would like to thank Will Davies, Fiona Grant and Kate Roberts (Cadw); Fiona Gale (Denbighshire County Archaeologist); Kathleen Carroll and Sian Laws (Natural Environment and Agriculture Team), Elizabeth Webster, Biodiversity Officer (Denbighshire Countryside Services) and Nick Critchley (AONB Sustainable Development Officer) for their support during the project. Anne Jones (Cwmwd Iâl re-enactment society) assisted with the school visits and we would like to extend our thanks to the members of her society for both their arena and static displays on the Open Day. Thanks are also due to Phil Venables (Coleg Cambria – Llysfasi) for coordinating the student volunteers and also to our core team of field volunteers from numerous local interest groups. Finally we would like to thank the landowner, Mr Ieuan Williams, for his continuing support and interest in the project and permission to undertake the initial site work.

## 7 SOURCES

### Published Sources

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## Appendix 1

### Tomen-Y-Rhodwydd

This is a fine and rare example of a Welsh built motte and bailey castle, believed to be the 'castle in lall' built by Owain Gwynedd in 1149, when he annexed that area of Powys in the course of extending the boundaries of Gwynedd.

The castle survived until 1157 when it was burnt by Iorwerth Goch and the territory re-integrated with Powys.

The 'Castle of lall' is mentioned again in a document of 1212 when it was repaired at King John's expense, although the site referred to was probably the motte at nearby Llanarmon, the administrative centre of the territory.

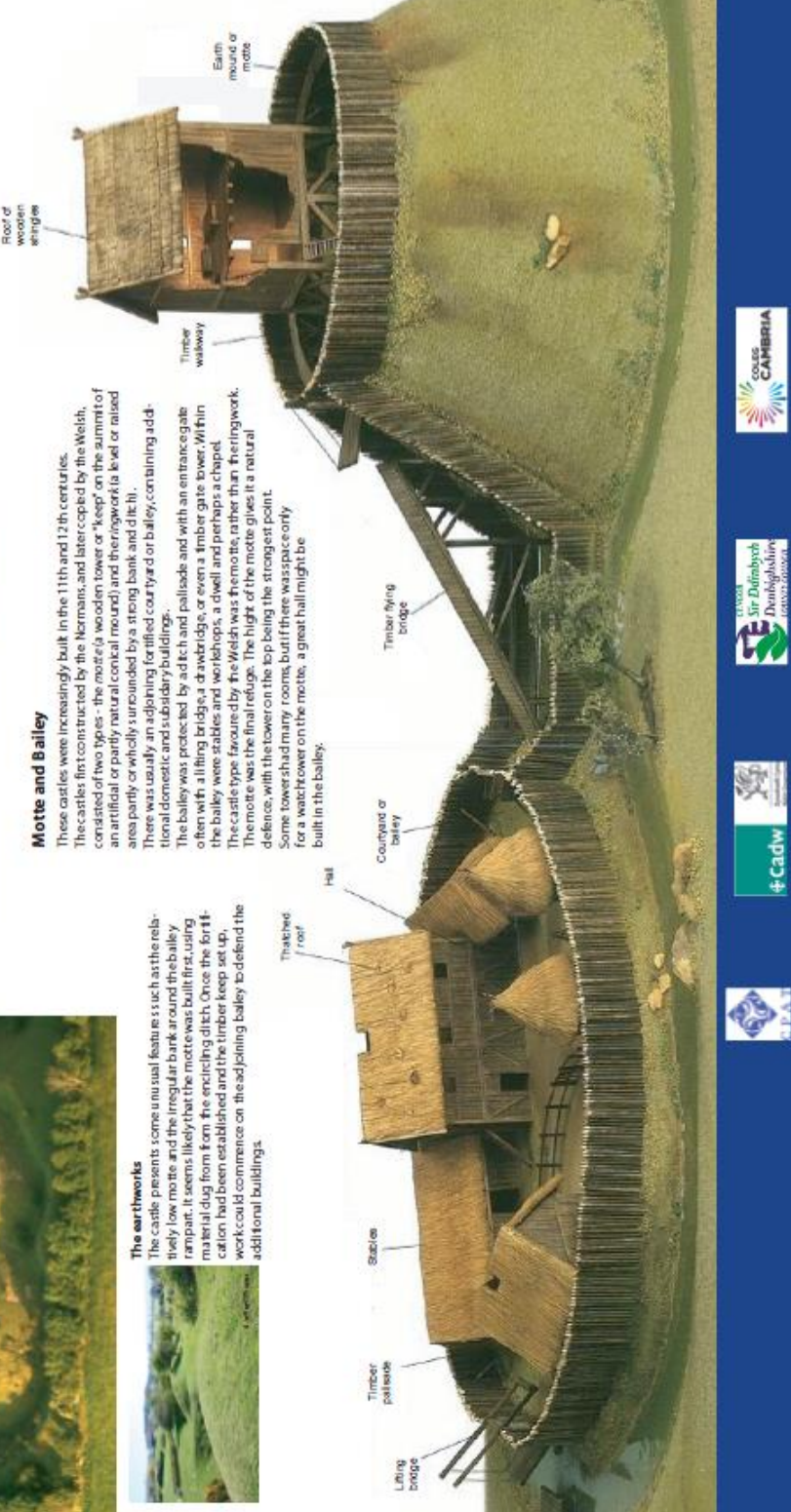



### Motte and Bailey

These castles were increasingly built in the 11th and 12th centuries. The castles first constructed by the Normans, and later copied by the Welsh, consisted of two types - the motte (a wooden tower or 'keep' on the summit of an artificial or partly natural conical mound) and the ringwork (a level or raised area partly or wholly surrounded by a strong bank and ditch). There was usually an adjoining fortified courtyard or bailey, containing additional domestic and subsidiary buildings.

The bailey was protected by a ditch and palisade and with an entrance gate often with a lifting bridge, a drawbridge, or even a timber gate tower. Within the bailey were stables and workshops, a dwell and perhaps a chapel. The castle type favoured by the Welsh was the motte, rather than the ringwork. The motte was the final refuge. The height of the motte gives it a natural defence, with the tower on the top being the strongest point. Some towers had many rooms, but if there was space only for a watchtower on the motte, a great hall might be built in the bailey.

**The earthworks**  
The castle presents some unusual features such as the relatively low motte and the irregular bank around the bailey rampart. It seems likely that the motte was built first using material dug from the enclosing ditch. Once the fortification had been established and the timber keep set up, work could commence on the adjoining bailey to defend the additional buildings.



Roof of wooden structure

Timber walkway

Earth mounds or motte

Timber flying bridge

Courtyard or bailey





Hall

Thatched roof

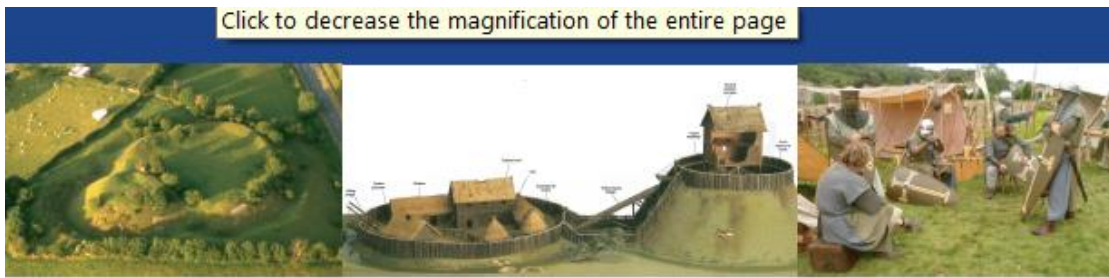
Stables

Timber palisade

Lifting bridge

## Appendix 2



# Tomen-Y-Rhodwydd Motte and Bailey Castle Open day *a great day out for all the family*

*Saturday, February 22nd 2014  
11am to 4pm*

- Site guided tour (every hour)

- Cwmwd Ial Re-enactment

- Displays and finds

- Kids activities: design a medieval shield and dressing up

For further information please contact  
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### Appendix 3

GROUP	Participated in Fieldwork	Participated in Open Day/School Visits
Cadw		1
CPAT	2	3
Denbighshire County Council		2
Cwmwd Ial Re-enactment Society	1	15
Clwydian Range Archaeology Group	4	
Caer Alyn Archaeology History Project	2	
Corwen Archaeology Group		5
Conservation Society Llanarmon		2
Coleg Cambria Llysfasi	18	
Llandegla Parish Council		5
Old Oswestry Landscape and Archaeology Project - OOLAP	2	
Oswestry & Border History & Archaeology Group - OBHAG	2	
St Asaph Archaeology Society	4	
Ymddriedoath Garth Celyn Trust		2
Ysgol Dyffryn Ial		20+
Ysgol Pentrecelyn		15+
Chester University		2
Young Farmers Club – YFC	5	
Denbighshire Young Archaeologists Club – YAC		10
Other visitors		45

### Appendix 4

*“The site looks fab (fabulous) now it has been cleared a little. Amazing opportunity to learn some local history and get a feel how it would have been back in 1100s. Really helpful staff and volunteers here today. Thank you!” (L. Roberts, local)*

*“Thank you for allowing us to learn more about our Welsh Culture and Heritage” (R. Muia (Coleg Cambria and local resident))*

*“Fantastic work, great to see such an important site being looked after” (S. Peverly)*

### Appendix 5

