

Painscastle Local Interest Group visit to Fforest Farm, Hundred House Thursday June 26th 2025

Present: Jessie Hutchings, Mo Lloyd, John Price, Margaret Price, Elsa Harflett, Bronwen Jenkins, Helen Barnett, Mollie Moore, Janet Russell, Evelyn Bally, Victor & Cherry Williams, James Davies, Gareth Jones, Rob Woodford, Gary Jones, Sylvia Illingsworth, Joan Lloyd, Celia Jones, Anne Goodwin, Jennifer Lewis, Peter Batten, Prys Eckley, Rob Davies, Leonie Wightman, Richard Harris, Roy Lloyd, Lisa Lloyd, Joan Hughes, Jackie Symcock, Donna Price

The group met at the Fforest Fields campsite near Hundred House where Mo Lloyd introduced the guide for the evening Jessie Hutchings, who grew up at Fforest Farm and is now one of the team running the family campsite. The campsite was started by her father and mother, George and Kate Barstow in the 1980s, and now her brother and her have joined the team.

Jessie began by distributing a map of the area to everyone, which showed how the Roman fort, and medieval castle is set in the landscape. She pointed out that there are very few written records, but it must have been a busy place both during the Roman period and later when the area was taken over by the Normans, then retaken by the Welsh, this happened many times on this gateway into Wales. The map had been made in order to give people an idea of the landscape, as they realised many of their campers didn't know how to read an Ordnance Survey map. Because there is very little written evidence she hoped the walk would be viewed as a conversation within the landscape, where ideas and discussions were welcome to help tell the story.

The first stop was alongside a lake where she pointed out that this whole area would have been an ancient lake many millions of years ago, and ancient fossils have been found of very early lifeforms. It lies between Aberedw hill and slopes down to the Colwyn brook, in the distance she pointed out Castle Bank, Gilwern Hill as well as Carneddau Hill near Builth. Llansantffraed-in-Elfael is a village to the north, this is another interesting place. The church is dedicated to St Brigid who was an Irish saint. There is reputed to have been a nunnery there. The boundary of the parish is the stream. The group moved along the drive past the buildings which were put up for the WarAg during World War II. There are currently proposals to put 18, 200m turbines on Aberedw Hill, 19 on Gilwern side and 33 on Radnor Forest with pylons crossing through the lake and campsite.



This picture from the Coflein website illustrates the extent of the Roman Fort.

After crossing the road which would have been in existence as a track for thousands of years, the group could see the position of the Roman Fort on the brow of the hill, and the path of the Colwyn which wound through a boggy area at the bottom where there are Curlew. It is believed there was a mill on the Colwyn and the area probably was a special place in the gateway to Wales. The Roman Fort is believed to be pre-Flavian, a very early fort of the first century AD. Jessie said they had found a commemorative medal or coin from the roman period. It is believed it was an auxiliary camp, where soldiers would have been working towards Roman citizenship, but there seems to be no written documentation. There is a faint line in the field to mark the beginning of the fort which is set on a knoll between the Colwyn and the Edw rivers. These could well have been much deeper in earlier times, so this would have provided a well protected site, with a route over Aberedw hill to the Wye. There appears to have been an enclosure along the route over the hill, which may well have been used by the drovers, indicating a long history of usage. There is also a small motte, although there are some suggestions it was a hunting lodge, or even a burial chamber, it is difficult to find now as it is within the wood, was this a look out or signalling post? The group entered the fort through the west entrance which was a gateway through the ditch and bank of the fort. The fort would probably have had links with the forts in Radnor Valley and Llandrindod. There would have been four entrances to the fort, the south entrance, now the main drive could well have been the main entrance. The fort covered a big area. Looking back Jessie remarked on the dingles which are calved out on the side of Aberedw hill. With the aid of LIDAR it appears there are ancient field systems visible and they have been cut through, which suggests the dingles may have been formed in relatively recent times possibly during the medieval wet period of the 14th century.



Fforest Farm now covers most of the area of the original Norman motte, the fort has been reused as the baileys which surround the motte

The original Norman castle was the mound at Glan Edw probably built about 1096, it would have been built quite quickly, and would have had a wooden keep on the motte. This one here would be a later castle, it had a deep moat which probably never held water but would have been a horribly boggy smelly ditch with a steep bank, topped by a palisade to provide good protection from invaders. There are records, that in the thirteenth century the palisading on Colwyn castle had to be renewed every three years. Probably De Braose built this replacement

castle after 1196, when the earlier castle at Glan Edw was destroyed by the Lord Rhys as he rampaged through the area. The castle changed hands between the Normans and the Welsh several times and was later rebuilt by the Mortimers. It appears to have been abandoned by 1397 and was demolished by the 1600s probably when the house was built using much of the remaining stone. Probably the castle stone was taken to help build many of the houses in the local area. The local stone is mudstone which is not a good building stone. There are no records of the early inhabitants of the house, there is some poetry from the Welsh poets about the Lord of Colwyn, being a very nice guy, who always gave drink and happiness. In the early twentieth century it was owned by the Boughrood Charity and the family after renting it briefly, bought it in 1950. It was very marshy when it was bought, the fields are very old. It probably would have been fairly wooded in the valley, there is a view of the original castle and views across a wide area in all directions, so keeping watch over the Edw valley which would have been an ancient passage to the Wye. The ridge on Aberedw hill is very good for paragliding and the family had a paragliding school at one time. Was there something here before the Romans? Jessie feels there probably was, as there was so much activity in the Radnor Valley and this area seems a good secure spot for a group to live. There are bronze age burials near to the village and a stone circle at the Fedw not far away. The castle had two baileys one on the west side and one to the southeast of the motte. There have been no results from the geo-phys surveys, but they were quite a while ago. There was a ford over the stream, towards Cregrina and there was a well down there and that was where a Roman coin was found. The farm drive is probably one of the more important entrances to the fort, the south gate. The barn is old, it is a cruck barn, the house is now lived in by Jessie's brother.

The group crossed the road to go along the bridleway, there seems to be some hidden structures in the field alongside but nothing definite shows up. There are no written records of the fort and only a small amount of pottery has been found, so it is difficult to know how many soldiers occupied it and for how long. There has been no sign of a vicus showing up in any survey. Another field on the other side of the track likely translates as Martha's Field, could that be Matilda's field, with connotations of Matilda de Braose who married a Mortimer. The field provides a wonderful view of the site of the fort and the castle. The walk to return to the campsite continued alongside the stream where we looked up towards the side of the hill which had been an oak wood this was felled and then replanted with larch after the war. The family have been gradually felling the larch and replacing them with broadleaf trees.

We finished back at the campsite with a cup of tea and discussion on the local landscape and the inhabitants over thousands of years. Grateful thanks to Jessie for a wonderful evening of views, history, ideas and theories which could lead to more exploration and discoveries. Also thanks to John Price for the video recording of the evening.