

Notes from Local Interest Group 28th July 2016

Present: Maureen Lloyd (ML), Richard Martin, Roy and Avryl Lloyd, Ginny Guy, Grace Davies, Joan Lloyd, Wendy and Dainis Ozols, Mollie and Geoff Moore, Margaret and John Price (JP Hay), John Price (Rhosgoch), Richard Harris, Erika Cunningham and Lois Morgan.

Apologies: Adrian Chambers, Christine Rose, Pauline & Peter Spode

After meeting in Painscastle, we travelled by car to Garth Farm, Llandeilo Graban. ML welcomed everyone and thanked Lois Morgan for allowing us to park our cars in her yard. From here, we walked up Garth Hill to see the various sites at the top. On the way up, we had a good view of the Bachawy valley below and The Ciliau. ML also pointed out the area of the hill where the bracken had been sprayed in 2013. This area is now almost devoid of bracken and so the enterprise has been very successful. It is now covered in foxgloves and ML explained that these plants always re-establish themselves very quickly following spraying.

At the top of the hill, our first stop was at the Gun. Here JP (Hay) told us the story of how it came to be located here. (More information about the gun can be found on the Painscastle and Rhosgoch Community Website - <http://www.painscastle-rhosgoch.co.uk>)

JP told us that the gun had been purchased by a Mrs Lionel Trafford, whose family had lived at The Skreen, just below Garth Hill. The War Office had put an advertisement in a newspaper offering the German field howitzer gun for sale after WW1 and Mrs Trafford bought it in order to commemorate the end of the war, as well as the loss of her brother, 2nd Lt John Williams Vaughan, who died at the Somme in 1916, as well as other local men also killed during WW1. The gun was delivered to Erwood station and there it remained, in a field, for some time whilst a decision was made about where to put it. Apparently, the men of Erwood decided that they should have the gun and so, one evening, they got together and pulled the gun to Erwood Common. Several days later, the men of Llandeilo Graban arrived in the early morning with four horses (with their hooves muffled by hessian "socks") and took the gun back to what they saw as its rightful place in their parish. They had to take it back across the river Wye and then pull it up the steep slope to Garth Farm. When they got it there, they removed and hid one of the wheels to ensure that it could not be "stolen" back. A few days later, they took it up to Twyn-y-Garth and positioned it at the top of the hill, overlooking Erwood.

Over the years, the gun became badly weathered by the elements and it was in a sorry state by the end of the 20th century. The people of Llandeilo Graban and Painscastle decided that their Millennium project would be the restoration of the gun. It was sent to the army in Tidworth, where the necessary work was completed by the 6th Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. On Saturday, 7th October 1999, the gun was once again taken up Twyn-y-Garth, this time on a trailer pulled up the steep part of the slope by a tractor and followed by around 200 local people. Once the procession reached the flatter part of the hill, the tractor was unhitched and a carthorse, called Jon-Major, took over. Eventually, the gun was returned to its concrete plinth. Fittingly, the final bit of concrete was laid by Mrs Trafford's nephew, David Vaughan, and his daughter Kitty.

From the gun, we walked slightly downhill and to the east until we came to some earthworks. ML explained that for many years this was described as an Iron Age fort, but more recent analysis by Paul Remfry has resulted in its reclassification as a castle. It is believed to date from 1208-1210; it is probable that it had been abandoned by 1215 and it may not have been occupied at all. The site

consists of a sub-circular enclosure, c. 30 metres in diameter. There is a 1.5 m deep ditch between the two parallel ridges forming the ring shape. To the east of the circle there is what appears to be an "entrance". Remfry believes that the castle was in the form of ring motte with bailey. Adjacent to the circular enclosure (the motte according to Remfry), to the south, is a rectangular shaped section, the bailey. There is nothing left of the castle as this was probably a wooden structure. This site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) and therefore protected by law. Members of the group tried to follow the two ridges around in a circle but found the going quite difficult because the bracken was quite high and thick.

After a short break, during which we enjoyed ML's absolutely delicious Welsh cakes and amazing views of the Begwns, we then walked on through the bracken to two "mounds" to the east. These are also SAMs and are thought to be burial chambers. One of them was used as a shelter by the Home Guard during WW2. The first is roughly 10 m in diameter and 0.7 m in height. This has a central "crater" and Ginny Guy postulated that this had probably been caused by exploratory excavations, possibly during Victorian times. The second mound is 10.5 m in diameter and 1.1 m high. We managed to make it back down the hill before it got dark and everyone had enjoyed the bracing walk.

Once again, we had experienced a very interesting field trip and thanks must go to Maureen Lloyd for the hard work she puts into preparing these visits (and on this evening for providing the delicious refreshments).