

THE WOODLAND WALLS OF CWMBRAN.

Context and overview:

The ‘discovery’ of dry stone walls in relict woodland on the lower slopes of Mynydd Maen and the endeavours of the ‘Ancient Cwmbran’ project to unlock the mystery of why and when these walls were constructed is on going and **important**. This author has been asked to add to the understanding and evidence base which, it is hoped, will ultimately lead to a fuller understanding of the history of the area and the context of these dry stone walls.

The existence of dry stone walls needs to be understood in terms of the original intended function. This may seem an obvious and simplistic statement but, in fact, it is often given least consideration. This paper attempts to answer some of the imponderables in relation to the woodland walls. It is intentionally ‘non-academic’ in its format. This is neither a reflection on the subject nor the reader, it is instead a means of highlighting the core element in the study. People and place lies at the heart of understanding the walls (and other elements of the project) in an historical local context.

The effort, in terms of human endeavour and the demand placed on limited resources – such as oxen – to gather and transport the hundreds of tons of stone and place them into position to form a barrier was immense. The implication in economic terms, of such an undertaking, needs to be included in any evaluation or attempt at understanding the reasoning behind the construction. Put simply, such effort implies that the return expected was deemed ‘worth it’. For example, if a field was to be created by clearing stones and using them to build a boundary wall, or by bring in extra stone to create that boundary, then the accrued benefit in the form of a crop must have been just reward.

A wall performs a simple function, it ‘shuts in’ or ‘shuts out’. In its most basic use a wall encloses an area of land so that it may be protected for a specific purpose. Sometimes it may be as a field boundary to keep stock out – it was usually the case that walls kept stock out – away from valuable grain and fodder crops. Often a wall delineated property or rights, occasionally it made a statement of power or prowess. Route-ways and water courses too were often aligned by dry stone walls. Thus the first task in understanding the ‘when’ of dry stone walls is to unpick the ‘why’. Throughout the historic spectrum land-

use has been influenced by climatic variation, political turbulence, population density and agricultural evolution. In any period of history ‘land-use’ implies agriculture which in turn means ‘food production’. The methods of farming at any given period in history is, by now, well understood as is the political make-up of contemporary society. What therefore is the evidence of land-use in the study area and how does it lead to an understanding of the ‘Walls in the Woods’?

Historical Overview.

Much is known about the pre-history of the area, not least amongst the volunteers of the project. It is therefore, in my view, unnecessary to include reference or text herein which describes what is already recorded and understood (or assumed). However, I want to draw on that knowledge to put some structure into our understanding of the society for whom these field systems – for essentially that is what we are looking at – were important enough to warrant such an investment.

It is generally acknowledged that ‘farming’ in the sense of a localised endeavour to grow food, began in earnest in the period now called the ‘Bronze Age’. Field systems associated with large scale land management, which in turn implies a sophisticated social order, are to be found in areas from the West Country to East Anglia and from the islands of Scotland to the west of Wales.

Large scale land management on the scale of the Dartmoor Reaves (see: The Dartmoor Reaves. Andrew Fleming. 1988, Batsford. London) has shown how contemporary prehistoric society understood mathematics, geology, physics and agriculture – many of these relate to an understanding of stellar, lunar and solar cycles.

“Reaves tell a story of country planning on a gigantic scale: of an organisation able to parcel out tens of square miles as it pleased, and which set its rules of geometry above the practicalities of dealing with gorges and bogs.” (Rackham, O. 1986. The History of the Countryside . Dent.)

Neolithic farmers began the task of land clearance and are regarded as the forefathers of settlement and agriculture. The hunter-gatherer society of the Mesolithic and early Neolithic leaves us little in the way of historical landscapes. Flint tools, stone axe heads and, in the Neolithic period, grand edifices of dry stone built chambered tombs, indicate a society already

undertaking travel, trade and land clearance as well as signifying that a 'sense of place' had begun to be influential. The position of the chambered tombs (in particular the Cotswold / Severn type) suggests that the community which constructed individual burial sites were already well established in that particular area (the fact that Neolithic tombs sit just below the sky-line may suggest they were located not to be seen from afar but only by those living below – as is the case at Penywylod and TyIsaf in the Llangorse basin area).

The practice of positioning the later Bronze Age burial cairns on sky-line locations suggests that, firstly, the landscape was more open, hence allowing the sites to be seen from further away, which in turn, secondly, implies that the community to which those burial sites 'belonged' occupied a much greater area of land, indeed a dispersed settlement pattern.

Iron Age society, the tribal clans of the Silures for example, evolved those earlier community and social structures to a much higher order. Their defended enclosures, mostly built on high prominent hilltops, remain today as significant structures in our historic landscape. That landscape, the one which today is the subject of fascination and inquiry in the wider context of this project, continued to gather layer upon layer of man's influence. The palimpsest which resulted and which lies, often untouched and undiscovered, was described as '**Our Richest Historical Record**' by the father of Historical Landscape study, W.G. Hoskins (The Making of the English Landscape. 1955). So it is proving to be.

Twmbarlwm and after:

The dominant sky-line feature of the area (and indeed from much further afield) is the unmistakable 'cob-loaf' of the tump at the western end of the Mynydd Maen ridge which dominates the Cwmbran section of the valley of the Afon Llwyd. Now whilst it is true that much still remains to be discovered and interpretation of the enclosures thereon continues to promote debate, what is indisputable is that the 'tump' and the surrounding areas has been of importance, a site of established settlement for millennia. Those debates need not necessarily tax us here, the 'Walls in the Woods' are clearly, in some way or other, linked to settlements associated with that most evocative of historical landscape features.

The analysis herein is predicated on the acceptance of the notion that ancient communities lived, and therefore farmed, on the slopes of the hillsides now examined in the project.

The first point to make is that ‘good farmland’ continued to be utilised throughout the historic spectrum. What was productive land in the pre-historic became valued agricultural land for centuries thereafter. Thus when we examine systems associated with land-management from one period of history the likelihood is that we are, in fact, faced with features from earlier times.

It is becoming clear that many field systems and estates which are deemed to be Roman in date often overlie earlier settlements and farms associated with Celtic tribes and their farming exploits. These, in turn, are increasingly being seen to be remnants of much earlier Bronze Age field systems. The many co-axial field systems (see: ‘Early co-axial field systems on the East Anglian boulder clays’ by Tom Williamson – 1987. Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society) and reave systems contained well-built constructions in the form of ditch and bank boundaries as well as miles and miles of dry stone walls. Later societies utilised these boundaries and incorporated their own management systems within and around them. After all, it is clearly sensible to use what is there and assimilate these structures rather than remove or ignore them. Good examples are ‘modern’ hedge-banks on which shrub tree species (those normally associated with hedgerows, such as hawthorn and hazel etc.) are usually later additions to earlier banks and ditches that were built to contain and control cattle.

Similarly Early Medieval societies utilised boundaries which had existed during the centuries of Roman influence. The Roman presence in the study area is often a dominant factor in many ‘investigative’ projects, such is the fascination with this short occupation of Wales, and in particular Isca and its environs. For the purpose of this paper, Roman influence and activity, in so far as it impinged on the ‘Walls in the Woods’, is not significant and is therefore not discussed. However, the organised social structure of the Roman *civitas* has left its mark on the upland slopes of Mynydd Maen.



The conundrum of stone: *(courtesy of the Ancient Cwmbran Project)*

Why Stone Walls?

The decision to enclose land with stone walls (or indeed stone faced banks) is determined by two simple factors: hedges will not grow – an environmental issue usually associated with climate and altitude- and the availability of stone close-by.

For ancient society woodland produce, be it timber or fruit, was an important and well guarded resource, thus when hedges could be ‘grown’, they were – often the result of woodland clearance with lines of trees left in-situ and dead or recently cut brash filled in between. This resulted in natural regeneration of shrub trees in the protected corridor. No doubt sometimes small saplings were planted along the required line and protected by brash until they were sufficiently strong and high to evade stock damage. The successful growth of such hedgerows was very dependent upon a suitable climate and local environment. Altitude, and hence temperature and wind force, is a determinant as is the climatic variable dominant at the particular historical period. Variations in climate throughout history has meant that whereas hedgerows and

trees may have successfully grown at one period, at other times, when a colder or wetter climate persisted, that was not possible. At those times stone was the only option.

Many field walls utilise stone that was, of necessity, cleared from the enclosure in order to render it suitable for ploughing or hay production. Where sufficient stone for the construction of a stock-proof barrier was obtained from within the field, this was used. In some cases stone had to be brought in from elsewhere, it is fairly certain that stone was not transported any great distance for such activity. Where stone was insufficient, a simple expedient of digging a ditch either side of the line of the 'fence' (all boundaries were called fences in early documentary records) to provide soil to build a bank, which was generally faced with stone. The ditch itself was a deterrent to domestic stock attempting to cross.

In situations where it was not possible to grow a hedge walls had to be built. In this case stone needed to be gathered from close-by and transported to the site. Do not imagine this was a simple and quick solution, far from it. Depending on the geology of the area, a small variation in the weight of stone – that is its density – occurs, however, as a simple 'rule of thumb' a ton of stone is required for every yard of length built to a yard high. In other words, for a stock-proof wall 100 yds. long, a hundred tons of stone is required.

The method of transportation throughout history in the upland areas was a simple sled –*car llysg* (w) – drawn by a single or double oxen team. Studies of early farm transport has concluded that a half ton is a maximum load for both sled and oxen over rough ground. (see: 'Agricultural Transport in Wales'. J Geraint Jenkins. 1962. National Museum of Wales.)

Oxen were precious assets for any community and were carefully nurtured and protected from over-exertion – the normal working day was sunrise until midday. Ownership in most early societies was communal and co-operative ploughing was the normal practise. The use of these valuable draught animals for transporting stone immediately implies that the job in-hand was important to that community.

To use oxen for hauling exceptionally heavy stones shortens their life, reduces their productivity by a disproportionate amount. Therefore we must deduce that

where the stones that make up a wall are inordinately large – too large in fact for manual leverage – and have been transported to a site from some distance away, the wall under construction has more purpose than mere stock control. The investment of valuable effort on the part of human and oxen indicates a prestigious element in the finished product.



Greenmeadow Wall. (*Courtesy of D.Standing*)

The wall of major interest is the Greenmeadow Wood wall made up of extremely large blocks of stone primarily quartzite conglomerate. The use of quartz has been the subject of much discussion amongst the project staff and volunteers as to its ‘meaning’ in matters other than physical. The geological report commissioned will clearly indicate the source and type of rock that has been utilised in the building of the ‘Walls in the Woods’. I do not intend here to allude to any suggestions as to why or from where the stones utilised have been brought. It is sufficient for the purpose of this report to accept that the large quartz conglomerate blocks have been gathered and transported some distance in order to take their individual place in the wall. Whilst it may seem that to

utilise such large blocks of stone merely to enclose land is wasteful of resources, the existence of this wall suggests a number of possibilities.

The walls in both woods are indicative of field systems associated with settlements which carried out farming on the slopes of the Mynydd.

Who built the Walls ?

Understanding the manner of wall building assists in locating the build period to a specified time in history. Generally this is not accepted by archaeologists; however my studies and 20 years of restoring and re-building dry stone walls from many historic periods has convinced me that subtleties in typology – sometimes significant typological differences – clearly exists. Identifying and ascribing any particular typological style in the ‘Walls in the Woods’ must therefore be seen as my personal assessment and as such ought not to be taken as definitive or absolute. In addition, the remnant walls and the stone positioning is, in many places, insufficient to diagnose in typological terms.

However, there are other factors to be considered which can lead to an assessment of both period and use. The history of the area and the land-use analysis can suggest the likely periods in which the walls have been constructed and the purpose for which they were built.

Clues in the Landscape:

The valley of the Afon Llwyd from Pontypool downstream to Pont Hir and its confluence with the river Usk is of immense historical significance.

Unfortunately due to the industrial activities along its banks and surrounding areas and the decision of the post-war government to designate the Cwmbran area as a ‘New Town’, that significance has been oft overlooked. Even the presence of early Christian sites of some importance and the later establishment of the (increasingly ‘great’) Cistercian abbey at Llantarnam has inspired few to explore the history of the area. In that respect the ‘Ancient Cwmbran & Cistercian’ project is fulfilling a much needed task of revealing the mysteries of settlement and activity in the area to present day residents.

Early maps can reveal the amount of agricultural land that has been lost to the developments alluded to above. Indeed my maternal and paternal families were linked to long established farm enterprises with my father's family farming at Great St Dials and his cousins at Greenmeadow farms whilst my mother's maternal line farmed several of the farms between the canal at five Locks and the Mountain Air. Little of the acreage once available to these farms survives as farmland today. The coming of the French monks to Llantarnam, notwithstanding their preference for 'quiet solitude', indicates immediately that the area was recognised as very productive. In essence what occurred was a 'change of ownership' with many of the inhabitants 'ethnically cleansed'. What existed in the C12th had been well established over the preceding thousand years and more.

The geography of the middle Afon Llwyd, an area of flat fertile lands either side of the river, means it would have been a 'bread-basket' of grain production, primarily wheat and barley. The society which farmed and harvested these crops would have been an enslaved society, right from the Silurian and Roman regimes and on into the early medieval systems of Welsh tenure. The higher, gently sloping land – such as around Great St. Dials and Greenmeadow and on up to the area of the Maes y Rhiw and St. Derfel, Hen Llys and Upper Cwmbran might be termed the 'Blaenau', an area of less fertile land than that of the valley bottom but nevertheless capable of sustaining communities by the growing of cereal crops such as Oats – the staple food grain of Wales until well into the late C19th (even later in the uplands of Central Wales). In addition there would have been the pasturelands, hay fields of diverse flora, areas of wood pasture where cattle and trees existed side by side and where pannage, turbary and the all important 'piscary' – the taking of eels and small fish – would have been allowed / tolerated in the 'common' grazing areas of the settlements.

Above the productive lower hillsides, where springs 'issued' forth along a defined line of geological change and where farmsteads became established to take advantage of those springs, there was an equally important landscape, that of the Mynydd. This open area was prized for its ability to sustain cattle throughout the late spring and summer months and on into September. Established areas for each community and individuals within became enshrined in common law and survived into the C20th

Even earlier than the Silures control, as mentioned above, organised society was well established – the Bronze Age farmers of the period around 2000 BC. The presence of farmers of these periods is more assumed than proven, however we can be fairly certain that the project area was heavily populated throughout pre-history.

The climatic variations from the retreat of the ice-sheets from about 10,000 BC have influenced what and where farmers were able to grow crops and pasture. The tundra type vegetation of the post ice-age gave way to oak and birch woods around 6000 BC. The hunter gatherers of the Mesolithic gradually became the first farmers of the early Neolithic who began to clear the trees which grew up to an altitude of 800m. From around 4000BC the warming climate encouraged these early farmers to clear the woodlands and begin primitive crop production and the domestication of stock. In the project area there would have been no problem cultivating land right up onto the Mynydd, with the warming effect of the Gulf Stream adding to the temperate climate.

By the time the Bronze Age farmers began establishing enclosures on the now opened up hillsides, corn and stock were common-place and, most likely, oxen (castrated young bullocks) began their millennia long burdenship in the service of mankind. However a subtle change in the climate from about 1200 BC which saw a more ‘oceanic’ type climate with cooler and wetter conditions – the beginnings of peat deposits in fact – forced farmers further down the slopes.

This is the period which saw the establishment of the vast reave systems. As yet no reaves have been discovered in Wales; thus far the West of Ireland (Newgrange), the wild, open and exposed vastness of Dartmoor and the expanses of East Anglia have been the ‘discovered’ areas. In the west of Wales some proposed Bronze Age field systems have been recorded along with systems of co-axial fields. As yet South Wales has not been examined in respect of such systems. That field systems existed in the Bronze Age is readily evidenced by their presence below the peat layers.

From the Iron Age to the end of the Roman occupation – 400BC – 400AD – climatic conditions improved to allow farming, in the form of cultivation, to again creep upwards to the edge of the Mynydd and even onto it. Thereafter and throughout the early medieval centuries the climate was very unstable with successive ‘failure’ of crops due to wet conditions and hard long winters, interspersed with occasional drought. During this period farming changed to a

system of collective effort within a society controlled by well established rules of governance.

From about 1150 AD for a century or more the warming climate promoted population growth, sustained by an increase in agricultural production. During this period seasonal upland holdings often became permanently settled and cultivation and enclosure crept ever higher into previously inhospitable countryside. The plagues of the C14th and C15th reduced significantly the population and many areas became abandoned and returned to the former natural state, or as near as it could.

The coming of the 'Little Ice Age' from about 1450 to 1850 influenced farming and inspired Agricultural improvers to employ science and man-power to overcome the shortcomings of the climate.

So how has this been recorded in the project area ?

Walls into Fields into Woods. – The Walls in the Woods.

The field systems which the dry stone walls and banks (and ditches) of the area below and adjacent to Twmbarlwm scribe in the landscape are now difficult to interpret. Clearly the encroaching estates which have consumed the former lands and farmsteads on the 'blaenau' slopes of Mynydd Maen have erased most of those systems. Nevertheless what remains is indicative of what would be expected from such an area of constant settlement.



A typical 'reave' system scribed into the landscape of Dartmoor. (Fleming. 1988. p 27)

In my view what has been discovered in the woodlands are remnants from two separate but significant periods.

Typology:

The most impressive of the relict walls are those utilising large conglomerate blocks. Whilst it is not yet certain, it appears as if the stone for these larger walls has been transported from outcrops several hundred yards up the slope. The manner of the placing of individual blocks and the very fact of their positioning indicates a number of factors that may assist in establishing a build period. Firstly, and most significantly in my view, is the size of the blocks. Whilst there are examples of similar excesses in the Iron Age field systems I have examined they are few and open to question as to date of build. In most cases of such large blocks being used they occur in walls associated with field systems (including reave systems) dated as Bronze Age. Secondly, the use of these conglomerate blocks was not necessary to establish a field boundary, indeed to the east of the Greenmeadow system a large ditch and bank effects the same control. Thus it can be postulated that the walls had an additional

function, that of prestige or statement of power and control. Similar walls have been found on Dartmoor and in Ireland. Lastly, it is the case that in all of my investigations the utilisation of such excessively large blocks (in so much as they are immovable by man-power alone) does not occur in walls built after the Iron Age – more accurately, post Roman. In my view what has to be considered is that these walls may constitute the remnants of a Bronze Age reave system extending across much of the slopes of Mynydd Maen and beyond.



A building closely associated with the reave wall – similar structures have been discovered in the woodlands being examined by the project. (Fleming, 1988, P86)

Apart from the typological aspects there is also evidence of the longevity of the walls. The walls do not appear to have been included in maps (although this has yet to be absolutely confirmed) which suggests that they had become surplus to requirements as far as later enclosures and field systems are concerned.

Whilst it is difficult to establish the size of any enclosures still remaining (which would assist in establishing some dating evidence by matching to contemporary ploughing practices), what seems clear is that the length of the relict conglomerate wall is greater than would be expected of any field system

associated with Romano-British or post Norman field systems. Similarly the Iron Age farmers utilised a different ploughing system – across the ridge – such as is well evidenced in the fields directly below Twmbarlwm (now lost in Forestry) running along the contour towards and beyond Llanderfel.



The early type of plough used by Iron Age farmers and, probably, earlier peoples. This particular plough has an iron share but earlier types had a stone or wooden coulter type cutter or ‘scratcher’ for that in essence is all that these ploughs did. (Fry collection)

I discount any post Norman influence for reasons that I will explain.

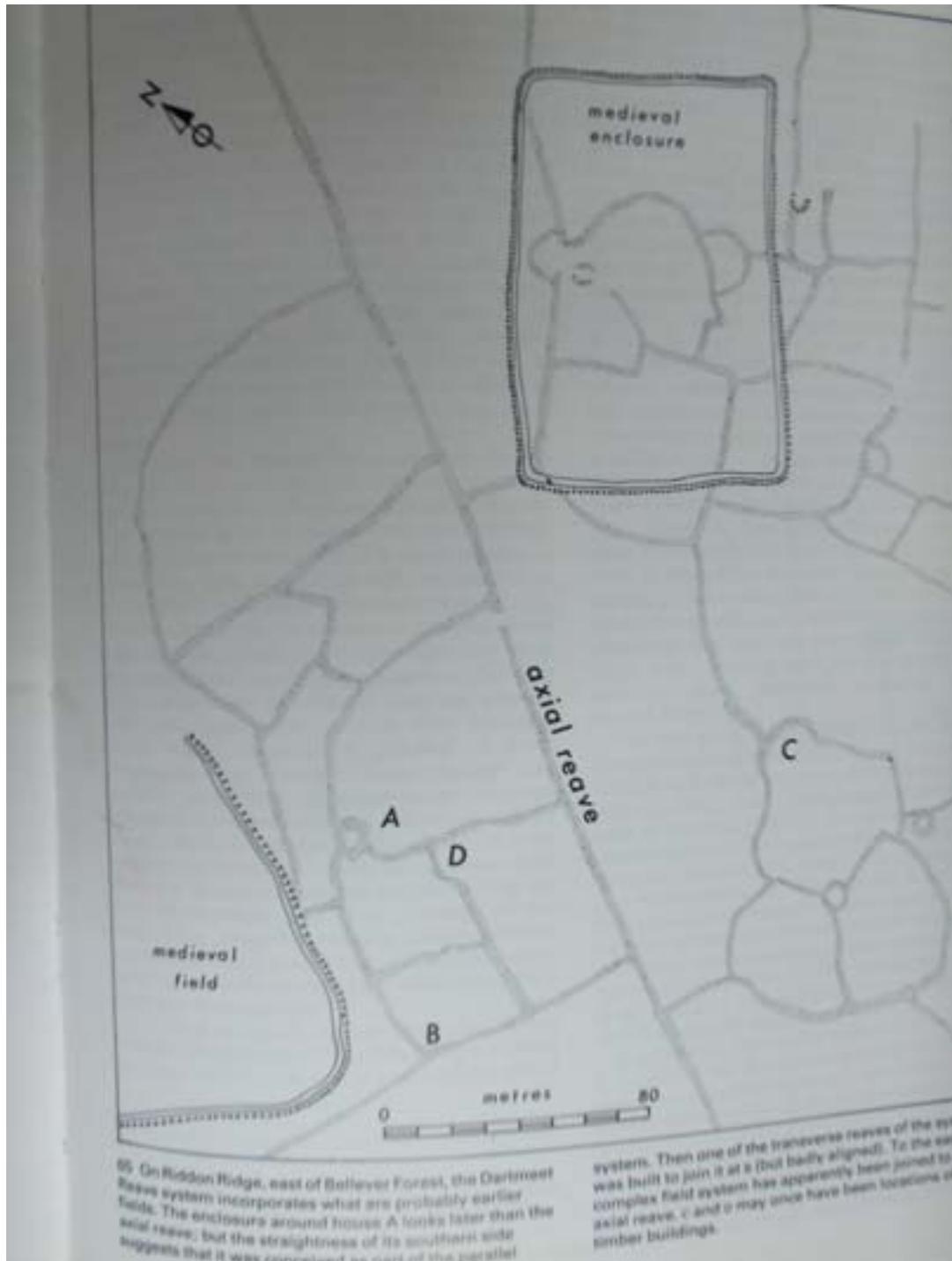
The other walls in the woods, primarily of sandstone, have a different typology and present a more difficult analysis. However it needs to be noted that in his work on the Dartmoor Reaves, Fleming has recorded very similar typology and associated features. Whilst geology has an influence on what a wall looks like – rounded cobbles look different from flat sand stones – the build method, the typology, is not affected, and hence what was being built below *Twyn Barlwm* would have been familiar to farmers throughout Britain (there appears to have been a time-line difference with European wall typology).



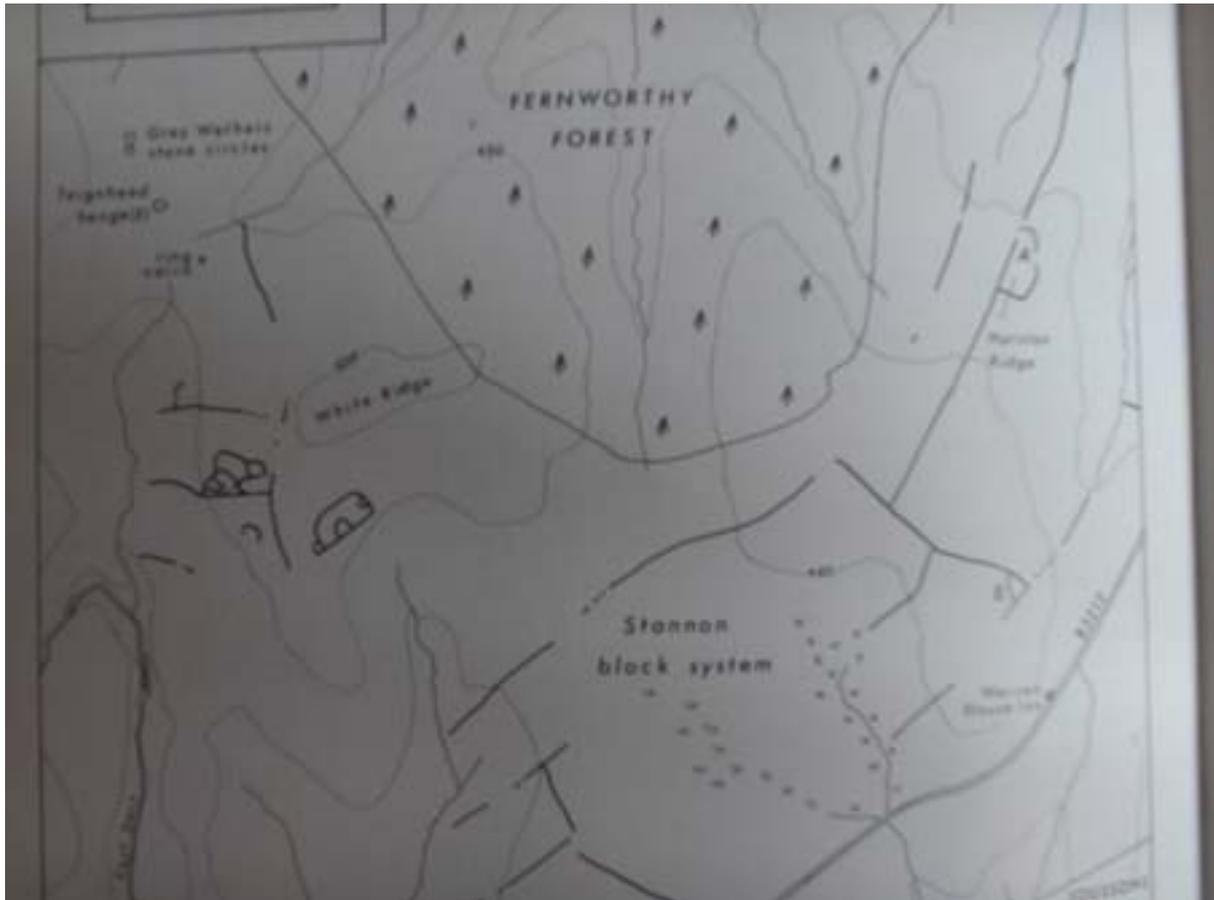
The kind of incoherent typology which is found in walls utilising field clearance stone, here on Dartmoor (Fleming 1988. P83) is familiar to volunteers working on the 'Walls in the Woods'.

Endeavours to align and plot various walls in the Geenmeadow and Thornhill woodlands has been difficult, not least because of the regeneration of mixed broadleaf woodland. Whilst it has proved impossible to find rectilinear field patterns this of itself is not in any way suggestive of an absence of a structured

field system. One of the characteristics of both co-axial and parallel reave systems is the occurrence of 'misshapen' fields within these systems, sometimes utilising one or more of the 'straight' reave walls.



pic A



Pic. B (above) and Pic A (previous page) are good examples of how our view of 'what field systems should look like' needs to be broadened to accommodate the almost non-sensical patterns found in these systems on Dartmoor. (Fleming 1988, p38 –pic B, and p101 pic A)

I have drawn attention to the work of Andrew Fleming because it is regarded as one of the leading studies into Bronze Age field systems, there are others, indeed Dr. Jonathan Kissock at Univ. of Newport has made intensive studies of co-axial field systems in Pembrokeshire, and several other eminent Landscape Archaeologists have examined systems in other areas of Britain. Whilst there is still much to do before a definitive assessment can be made on the 'Walls in the Woods' which may lead to them being ascribed as such a system; in my view an open minded study may well lead to such a discovery. Briefly my reasons for so stating are this:

1. There is every reason to suppose that the landscape of the Mynydd Maen area has been climatically and environmentally conducive to settlement and farming throughout history.

2. Therefore the question should be ‘why **haven’t** such early organised and planned systems been discovered ? It is illogical, given all other archaeological evidence, that large scale Bronze Age settlements, hence farmers, did not occupy this area. It is, after all, the most prominent hillside along the Bristol Channel.
3. There are no other (proven) examples of such large blocks of stone being moved and utilised in the post Roman period(s)
4. Why are there significant finds, including Cairns, assigned to the period if no large settlement existed close-by ?

In essence, we should proceed in a ‘positively discriminating’ manner, with a mind-set of “lets find the evidence and prove the existence”, rather than the so often employed “there is no evidence”.

Absence of Evidence is not Evidence of Absence.



Clearly the trees came after the walls ! Here again the typology, the quality of the build, indicates an early build date. (Fry collection)

Other Historic Influences:

The land in question clearly remained as productive farmland throughout the pre-Roman and Roman periods. It is likely, given the structured way that Roman society – particularly in areas of continued military activity – operated and accommodated or assimilated native settlement, especially farming, that the area of the slopes of Mynydd Maen remained in ‘native occupation’. The primary concern, especially given the fortress size of Isca, was grain production. Stock rearing to supply this military market may well have been on a small scale ‘semi-subsistence’ level and the farms of the ‘blaenau’ would have been involved in this activity. Roman ‘Villa’ (Estate) organisation was divided between the rich profitable lands – most probably ruled over by a full-blooded Roman, though in the latter years of the occupation trusted and ‘Romanised’ locals probably ‘made-good’ and acquired such estates – and the less productive upper land. Such land would have been organised as an ‘upland vill’ and have

been controlled by an eminent (and by now, trusted) native – most likely a former senior clan member who had willingly thrown in his lot with the victors.

These estate structures outlived the Roman occupation to become the backbone of rural society in what we now call the Romano-British period. However, disputes between locals, ever more incursions by Irish invaders, raids by Vikings and from the Angles in the East ultimately led to a turbulent set of centuries. Added to that was the increasing influence of the early Christian church and another ‘Roman’ control in the form of the Roman Catholic Church.

The effect of the early Church (in particular the desire on the part of local rulers to bestow wealth and lands) was in the form of the establishment of small monastic settlements. These were often isolated in poor areas but all had benefactors, many of whom, like Brychan, sent their sons and daughters for ‘tutoring’. The influence of these monasteries grew and along with the changing nature of the Welsh dynasties, the landscape began to take on a new appearance.

Whilst the field systems and farming methods of the rich Romanised areas probably saw little change, the uplands became significantly different. The local Kings operated a system akin to slavery, whereby their better lands, such as around the valley bottom, were farmed on their behalf by ‘bonded’ farmers who had some land of their own on which to subsist, but whose main activity and role in life was to provide a labour force (and, in times of trouble, an army) for the King’s farms.

The freemen occupied less profitable land, in Wales that meant higher land; in the Cwmbran area that meant the slopes of Mynydd Maen.



A'hafod' in the Welsh uplands, which ultimately became a full-time farm and was rebuilt in stone, last occupied in the 1860s (Fry collection)

These upland farmers relied on small enclosures to grow oats and some barley and kept a small number of cattle and dairy cows. In order to 'save' their limited land they had access to the mynydd, the open grazings of the mountain. In summer cattle were taken up to summer 'shielings', allocated parcels of land on which a rough dwelling of low stone walls, cruck timber frames and 'ling' roofing were built. Here, throughout the summer months, several members of the family would live, the cattle corralled nearby, and a *lluest*, a summer dairy, would be operated. Come Autumn the herds and the folk returned to the home farm. This system of 'transhumance' continued well into the later medieval period and often these summer dwellings, *hafods*, became permanently settled by one or other of the sons of the farm to which this parcel *-rhesfa-* 'belonged'.



An unrecorded 'hafod' in a remote valley in the Black Mountains at the source of the Rhiangoll river. Nearby is the cattle corral (see pic. Below)



The home farm, the *hendre* (*hen dref* old settlement), was the stone, well built farmstead, often of the 'long house' style, although it is now realised that the 'roundhouse' survived well into the early medieval period.

In the project area these relics of early Welsh land tenure are yet to be unlocked. The written Laws of Hywel Dda are an excellent source of information on exactly how these settlements – *Tref*- were organised and structured. The earlier Roman estates were superseded by 'multiple estates' of specified size – 11 trefs in the lowland and 9 in the uplands – and these Welsh estates survived well into the Norman period especially in the 'Welshries'.

The dispersed settlement pattern (as opposed to the nucleated villages introduced by the Normans) of the 'Welshries' were merely an extension of those early Medieval estates. The local King / ruler had his court – *Llys*- with an attached farm (looked after and worked by 'bonded' slaves) whilst the freemen farmed those less favoured areas.

All of these systems can often be unlocked by analysis of field systems, by examination of field names, by interpretation of Welsh place-names and by studying the landscape.

In my view the potential of the project area for uncovering such Welsh structures is immense – what is *Henlllys* if not a relic of this time ? – and therein may lie a further understanding of the ‘Walls in the Woods’.

It is evident that some of the ‘smaller’ dry stone walls ‘overlie’ the earlier structures and may well therefore relate to this period of Welsh tenure. Clearly the climatic conditions dictated walls over hedges whereas later centuries supported the latter. The coming of the Normans, more importantly the arrival of the Cistercians in the area, would have influenced agriculture in limited ways. The introduction of managed sheep flocks on the mynydd with small granges and ‘sheepcotes’ on the Blaenau has been catalogued at a number of monastic sites. (see Fleming & Baxter. 2008) The main grain growing areas were clearly in the areas along the river plain (where earlier dynasties had carried out the same farming regime). The landscape between was little changed by the activities of the Monks and therefore little or no changes to these Blaenau field systems are likely to have been made.

It seems to me, therefore, that we are faced with walled fields (or relict field systems) of the Early Medieval / post Roman era. Certainly in terms of typology the ‘Walls in the Woods’ match others from that period that I have recorded.

This report is prepared by Stuart Fry M.A. for and on behalf of the Ancient Cwmbrian and Cistercian Project. No part of it may be used or distributed without the express permission of the Ancient Cwmbrian and Cistercian project. The views expressed are solely those of the author and are not to be interpreted or ascribed in any other manner.

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