

July Jaunt

Seven members of the Landscape History Group set off for Pembrokeshire early in July, on a glorious summer's day. Their first stop was Castell Henllys, a reconstructed Iron Age Hillfort in the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park.



(L to R Mark and Isobel Wardley, Elsa Harflett, Jill Willey, Jackie Hankey, and Barry Capsey)

Following a lengthy excavation of the site some 20 years back, it was decided to construct roundhouses using materials of the time; and they were sited using exactly the same postholes found during the excavation. Currently there are three large roundhouses and a



granary on the site.

The banks and ditches, including an original section of stone wall from the Iron Age, can be found around the site, and at the entrance there is a band of *Chevaux de Fris* that was discovered under a later earthen bank. *Chevaux de Fris* is a bed of half buried stones used as a defence against horses, men, and even wheeled vehicles like chariots. The band of

stones would seriously slow down attackers at the point they came into reach of slingshot. A pile of two thousand hand-size stones had been found to the side of the entrance.

After seeing how the Iron Age farmers lived, and a light lunch the group travelled a short distance to St. Brynach's church in Nevern. St. Brynach, a friend of St. David, founded a church on this site next to the river Nanhyfer below a Celtic stronghold, and he is reputed to have died around 570 AD. This was 'The Age of the Saints' 1st - 6th centuries AD, *before* St. Augustine's arrival from Rome in 597. Other than the Norman tower, the present church is late perpendicular so presumably built 1425-1525. A beautifully kept village church, in what appears to have been originally a small circular churchyard with a short avenue of ancient yew trees. One of these trees is known as 'the bleeding tree' as it continuously exudes a red sap, and has been doing so for maybe many hundreds of years, but at least 70 years to



Terry's knowledge.

Amongst other interesting monuments there are two stones with Roman dedications in both Latin and Ogham script – the latter being a rare Irish alphabet from 5th - 6th C AD. Also, in the churchyard is the 13 foot Great Cross, created around the 10th C - probably the finest carved Celtic cross in Wales. Its top piece is a 'wheel cross'; but the whole cross is covered with intricate typical Celtic patterns.



And if all this wasn't enough, the party then ascended the wooded hill behind the church to seek out Nevern Castle; the only site on the jaunt not visited before by Terry Couzens, the Group Leader. They discovered amazing earthworks in the woodland – at least two incredibly deep bank-and-ditch ramparts, like a rainforest rich in abundant ferns and other woodland plants, and then the site opened out into a clearing with a high motte to one side.



The motte was crowned with the base of a stone tower.

Beyond this motte was another deep ditch, but a stone and earthen bank did run from the side of the base of the motte out to the platform of another tower situated high above the church and village. This was an unusually complex and well defended site compared with most border Norman motte and baileys, but most likely the site was originally a Celtic Welsh stronghold long before the Normans arrived.

Within a 3.5 kilometre distance in rural Pembrokeshire we had encountered the farmers of the Iron Age, the Celtic Christians of Wales, and the imposition of the Norman Lords and all back home before dinner.



One of only two mounting blocks in Pembrokeshire

By T. Couzens - Group Leader