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## *Viking-age Settlement in Wales: Some Recent Advances\**

by Mark Redknap, PhD

### **Background**

'The Anglo-Danish struggle, which dominates the reigns of Alfred the Great and Edward the Elder, has held the imagination of chroniclers and historians for over a thousand years'. With this statement F. T. Wainwright opened his paper on Viking leader Ingimund's invasion, and his appraisal of Norse immigration into north-west England<sup>1</sup>: the only surviving literary record of this movement relates to the expedition of Ingimund, which began in north-west Wales on Anglesey and ended, it is thought, with the establishment of a colony in the Wirral.

The written sources for Cambro-Norse Wales record some things in detail, but are almost silent on much. We are told of the raiding and incursions, and their impact on existing centres of administration or faith, and given the geographical position of north Wales and its close sea-borne connections to the Wirral and Strathclyde, the Isle of Man and Dublin, it was inevitable that its coastal population would find some level of engagement with Scandinavians operating around the Irish Sea, following their raids on Ireland from the 790s, the movements around Ireland of Viking bands, and the eventual establishment of Dublin.

The historical framework provided by the Welsh annals and other documentary sources usually provides the framed canvas onto which the archaeological colour can start to be applied – either sketched, painted, retouched or overpainted. The first recorded presence of Vikings in the Irish Sea, according to the Annals of Ulster, was in 795, while first attack on Wales is later, in 852 (the killing of *Kyngen* by Gentiles (*Kenedloed*) recorded *Brut y Tywysogion*, Chronicle of the Princes<sup>2</sup>), and occur on north Wales and the kingdom of Gwynedd from 854 onwards (Fig. 1). Rhodri ap Merfyn (Rhodri Mawr, 844-78) led the initial resistance and was successful in slaying Orm (ON *Gormr*), leader of the *Dubh-gheinte*, in 855.<sup>3</sup> The expulsion of Rhodri Mawr to

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\* An expanded version of a lecture given to the Honourable Society at the British Academy, London, on 18 January 2005. Professor Thomas Charles-Edwards was in the Chair.

<sup>1</sup> F. T. Wainwright, 'Ingimund's invasion', *English Historical Review*, 63 (1948), 145.

<sup>2</sup> T. Jones (trans.), *Brut y Tywysogion or Chronicle of the Princes. Peniarth MS. 20 Version*, Board of Celtic Studies History and Law Series No. 11 (Cardiff, 1952).

<sup>3</sup> Noted in Ireland (*Annals of Ulster*, s.a. 855; *Chron. Scot.* s.a. 856) and at the court of Charles the Bald at Liège: the panegyric by Sedulius Scottus composed about this time about *Roricus/Ruadhri*.

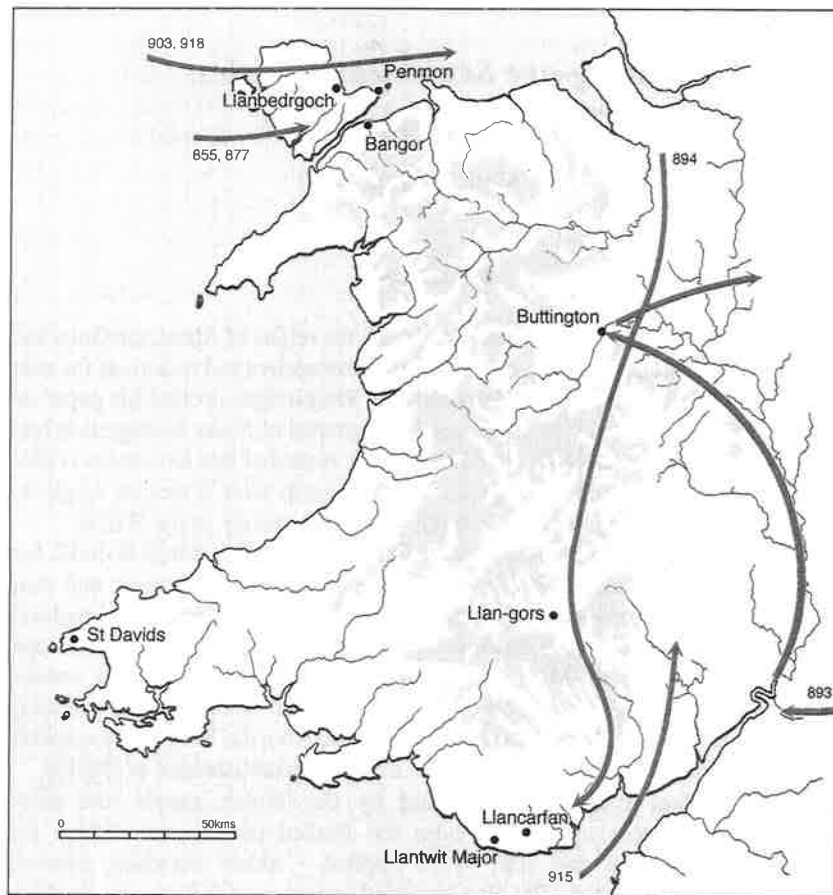


Fig. 1 Early Viking raids on Wales. (Copyright: National Museum of Wales)

Ireland in 876/7 following a defeat at the hands of the Vikings (*Dubgail*) implies a land-based force against him. David Dumville has argued for Viking hegemony over north Wales by the 870s, in the light of the Dubliners' interest there and Asser's assertion that Rhodri's sons were dependent on the Scandinavians of York.<sup>4</sup> Such interest in Anglesey is further illustrated by the exploits of Ingimund and his Norse followers, who, following their expulsion as 'foreigners' from Dublin c. 902/3, attempted to establish a base on the island.

<sup>4</sup> Paper delivered to a Conference on Viking period settlement at Cardiff, July 2001.

This event, now well-known, was recorded in the 11th-century Irish account presented in *Annals of Ireland, Three Fragments*, § 429, as well as the Welsh annals (*Annales Cambriae*),<sup>5</sup> which also record that one of Rhodri Mawr's sons, Merfyn ap Rhodri (*Mervyn vab Rodri*), was slain by 'gentiles' (s.a. 904 in *Benhinedd y Saesson*). Expelled by the Welsh king, Ingimund and band sailed east to arrive as aspirant settlers on the eastern seaboard of the Irish Sea near Chester, an event which was to mark an important stage in the development of a Viking enclave in north-west England (now generally thought to be the northern half of the Wirral peninsula).<sup>6</sup>

Intermittent raids by Vikings in the north and south, which occurred until about 919, have been described as a 'backwash' of Viking activity, as their main efforts were concentrated elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> During the reign of Rhodri's grandson, Hywel ap Cadell (Hywel Dda, 920-50), the focus of native royal power shifted southwards with the expansion of Dyfed. Policies of active co-operation with the House of Wessex may have contributed to a period of relative security and unity against the Viking threat, if the lull in the frequency of annalistic references to raids in Wales accurately reflect what actually happened. Military co-operation between the Welsh and West Saxons is illustrated by Edward the Elder's payment in ransom for Cyfeiliog, Bishop of Ergyng, captured by Vikings in 914. Such co-operation was not unprecedented, for in the summer of 893 a large English force had combined with the Welsh to defeat a Viking army led by Hástein at Buttington (probably the place near Welshpool).

From about 950, renewed attacks are recorded on the coastal lowlands, and in particular on monasteries (Fig. 2). By then, some members of the Dublin community were as much engaged in commerce as Irish politics, and it has been suggested that Scandinavians were controlling Gwynedd (or large parts of it) between about 960 and 1025. Relations between Wales and Ireland during the eleventh century were complex, with both Scandinavian settlers in Ireland (especially Dublin) and Irish having close political links with Wales.<sup>8</sup>

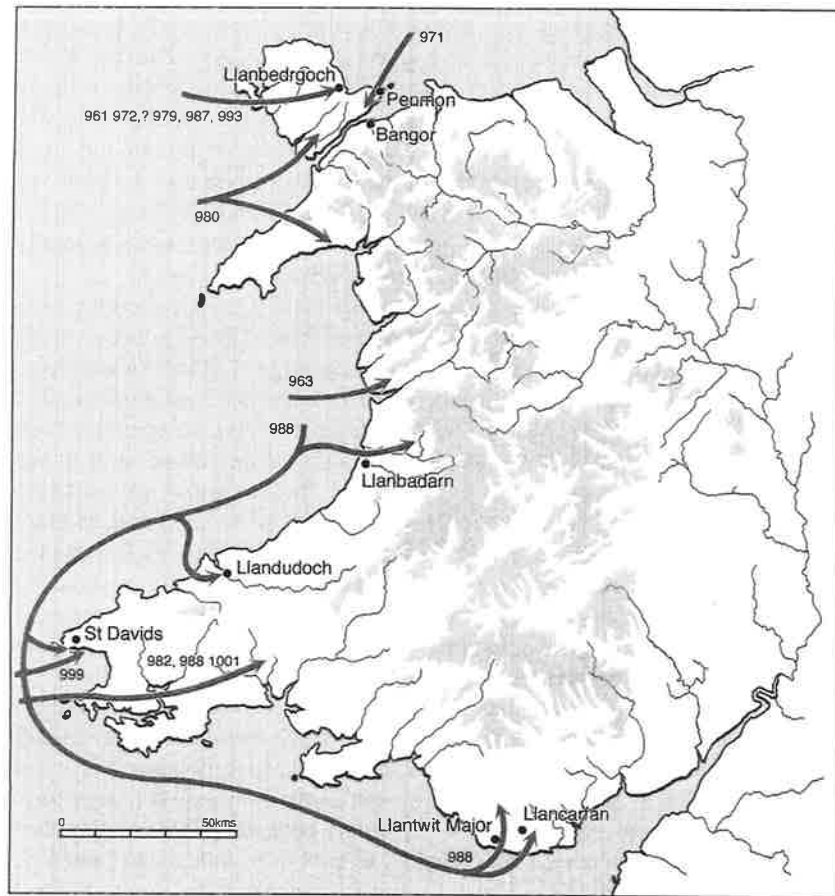
A third phase of Viking raiding is recorded in the Welsh annals during the second half of the eleventh century (Fig. 3). Gruffudd ap Llywelyn (1039-63)

<sup>5</sup> Jones note 2, 6; T. Jones (trans.), *Brenhinedd y Saesson or The Kings of the Saxons*, BM Cotton MS. Cleopatra Bv and the Black Book of Basingwerk NLW MS. 7006, Board of Celtic Studies History and Law Series No. 25 (Cardiff, 1971).

<sup>6</sup> J. O'Donovan (ed.), *Annals of Ireland. Three-Fragments by Dubhaltach mac Firbisigh* (Dublin, 1860); Wainwright note 1, 145-69; J. Jesch, From Scandinavia to the Wirral, in P. Cavill, S. E. Harding & J. Jesch, *Wirral and its Viking Heritage*, English Place-Name Society Popular Series Volume 2 (Nottingham, 2000), 11-16.

<sup>7</sup> H. Loyn, *The Vikings in Wales*, Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture (London 1976), 21; W. Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales* (Oxford, 1990); K. Maund, *Gruffudd ap Cynan: A Collaborative Biography* (Woodbridge, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> S. Duffy, 'Ostmen, Irish and Welsh in the Eleventh Century', *Peritia*, 9 (1995), 378-96; Davies, note 7, 50-1.

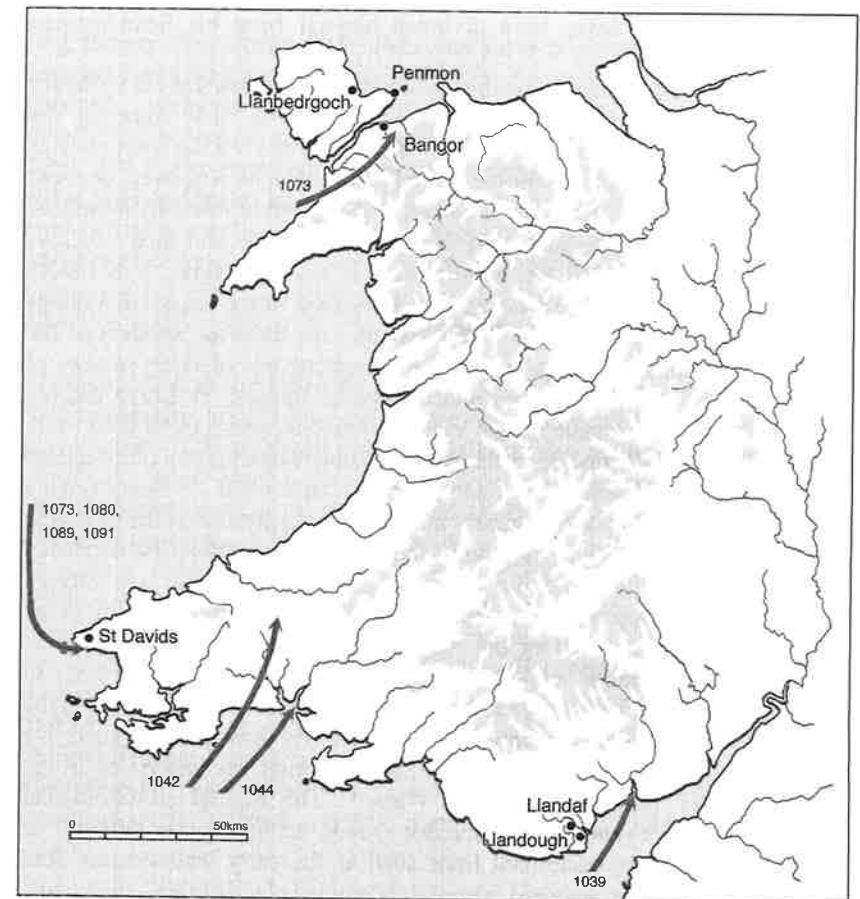


**Fig. 2** Second phase of Viking raids on Wales, based on the Welsh annals. (Copyright: National Museum of Wales)

made use of rivalries in England and the actions of the Vikings to extend his territories to most of Wales, raiding north Herefordshire in 1052, and sacking Hereford in 1055 with the help of Leofric of Mercia's son and eighteen 'pirate' ships from Ireland.<sup>9</sup>

Insight into the close political involvement between Wales and Ireland in

<sup>9</sup> G. N. Garmonsway (trans.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London, 1986), 184-86, s.a. 1055; M. Davies, 'Gruffudd ap Llywelyn. King of Wales', *The Welsh History Review*, 21 (2002), 207-48, esp. 223-5.



**Fig. 3** Later raids on Wales, based on the Welsh annals. (Copyright: National Museum of Wales)

the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries is provided by the *Life* of the king of Gwynedd, Gruffudd ap Cynan (1055-1137), a descendant of Rhodri Mawr, who had grown up among the Danish community in Dublin. He eventually succeeded in returning to Anglesey in 1098, and consolidating his hold on Gwynedd by 1115.<sup>10</sup> Gruffudd's death in 1137 was lamented by Irishmen and

<sup>10</sup> K. L. Maund (ed.), *Gruffudd ap Cynan. A Collaborative Biography* (Woodbridge, 1996); P. Russell (ed. and trans.), *Vita Griffini Filii Conani. The Medieval Latin Life of Gruffudd ap Cynan* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2005).

Danes, and he may never have divorced himself from his Scandinavian connections.<sup>11</sup>

Opportunities to adding archaeological depth to the annals and other literary sources remain elusive, for events like raids leave little trace in the archaeological record. We may wish to learn more about Viking bases such as that which Ingimund and his followers tried to establish on Anglesey, or about how many succeeded in settling and where, or the extent of mutually beneficial contact between Hiberno-Norse and Welsh through trade and their relations with local inhabitants, but the written sources say very little. It is hardly surprising that the traditional nineteenth-century view of the impact of Vikings on Wales, based heavily on the Welsh annals, cast them as 'spoilers of the country'. Subsequent scholars have made increasing use of other sources of information, such as place-names and occasional finds. J. E. Lloyd did not believe in permanent Scandinavian colonisation anywhere in Wales, while Melville Richards, whittled down the list of possible Scandinavian place-names and made a case for Norse trading stations, including Cardiff.<sup>12</sup> Henry Loyn's view that some Scandinavian speakers must have been present on the mainland of Wales in staging posts, harbours and agrarian communities depended largely, as did the work of his predecessors, on place-name and literary evidence. He proposed the temporary establishment of a Scandinavian community on at least part of the Anglesey, and also that Norse speakers established settlements which were intended to be permanent in Pembrokeshire.<sup>13</sup> In light of the lack of explicit references to settlement in the annals and other literary sources, Wendy Davies has since argued for significantly more Viking success in two areas – Anglesey and Arfon in the north-west, and Tegeingl in N.-E. Wales.<sup>14</sup> The limited archaeological evidence cited of Scandinavian includes graves thought to be 'Viking' at Talacre and Benllech, occasional finds such as the early tenth-century Red Wharf Bay silver arm-ring hoard, some Scandinavian place-names, coin hoards

<sup>11</sup> *Historia Gruffudd vab Kenan*; see D. Simon Evans, *A Medieval Prince of Wales: The Life of Gruffudd ap Cynan* (Llanerch, 1990), 153, 157.

<sup>12</sup> J. E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest* (London, 1912), 322; D. R. Paterson, 'Early Cardiff. With a short account of its street-names and surrounding place-names', *Trans. Cardiff Natur. Soc.* 54 (1921), 11-71; B. G. Charles, *Old Norse Relations with Wales* (Cardiff, 1934); M. Richards, 'Norse place-names in Wales', 51-60 in B. Ó Cuív (ed.), *Proc. First International Congress Celtic Stud., Dublin, 6-10 July, 1959* (Dublin, 1962).

<sup>13</sup> H. R. Loyn, *The Vikings in Britain* (London, 1977), 112. Most narrative sources focus on raiding activity, such as that related in the *Life of St Gwynllyw* (led by Gruffudd ap Cynan).

<sup>14</sup> Davies note 6, 52. Also D. Griffiths, 'Settlement and acculturation in the Irish Sea Region', in J. Hines, A. Lane and M. Redknapp (eds), *Land, Sea and Home. Proceedings of a Conference on Viking-period Settlement at Cardiff, July 2001*. (Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph 20), 125-38.

(e.g. Bangor, deposited c. 925), and a handful of sculptured stones which have incorporated Scandinavian motifs at Penmon, Dyserth and Whitford (mid-tenth century) – elements which appear to be 'consistent with and reinforce each other'.<sup>15</sup> The spectacular sword guard found by a diver off the Smalls reef in 1992, and finely engraved with beasts in profile in Urnes style (brass, with silver wire and niello inlay; c. 1125) is a prestige item reflecting high status contact between Ireland and Wales in the second quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, but never reached its planned destination (presumably in south Wales).

### Settlement

Topographical and place-name evidence provide source material important for any assessment of Viking-age settlement. The incidence of Norse-derived place-names in Wales is low, and they fall into two main groups. The largest group are those place-names which have been preserved for prominent coastal features used as navigational points. These formed part of a cognitive maritime landscape, and demonstrate the intimate Scandinavian knowledge of sailing routes, inlets and estuaries. Twenty one Scandinavian-style settlement place-names combined with personal names entered the English language, but it is significant that some have little linguistic relationship with the Welsh names for the same features – Bardsey remained *Ynys Enlli*, Anglesey remained *Môn*, Orme's Head remained *Penygogarth* – suggesting limited Scandinavian contact with and impact on the native population.<sup>16</sup> Fellows-Jensen has suggested that many of the settlement names in Pembrokeshire which contain a Scandinavian element seem to reflect post-Conquest arrivals from various parts of England.<sup>17</sup> The evidence for

<sup>15</sup> Davies (note 7, 52-5, 57) considers the Red Wharf Bay armlets to reflect a distinctively Scandinavian practice, and that they were unlikely to have been deposited except by Scandinavians.

<sup>16</sup> Some settlement place-names such as Womanby, Momri and Lamby may all date late in date, probably representing settlement from the Danelaw after the Norman Conquest of Wales: G. Fellows-Jensen, 'Scandinavian place-names of the Irish Sea province', in J. Graham-Campbell (ed.), *Viking Treasure from the North-West. The Cuerdale Hoard and its Context*, National Museums & Galleries of Merseyside Occasional Papers Liverpool Museum No. 5 (1992), 31-42. For an important review, see L. Abrams & D. N. Parsons, 'Place-names and the history of Scandinavian settlement in England', in J. Hines, A. Lane and M. Redknapp (eds), *Land, Sea and Home. Proceedings of a Conference on Viking-period Settlement at Cardiff, July 2001*. (Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph 20), 379-431. Places in England often had more than one name: one English, the other Scandinavian, the surviving one depending on the vagaries of record keeping: G. Fellows-Jensen, 'Scandinavian Settlement Names in Yorkshire', *Navnestudier udgivet af Institut for Navneforskning*, 11 (Copenhagen), 1972.

<sup>17</sup> A view held by Rhys and others; see Lloyd note 12, 322.

settlement is stronger in north Wales, where sculpture at Penmon and in Flintshire would appear to be a direct result of the political and cultural influence of the Hiberno-Norse world in the tenth century – locally produced variants of monuments incorporating Hiberno-Norse elements drawn from a wide range of motifs circulating around the Irish seaboard. It has been suggested that either the repeated attacks on Anglesey resulted in some limited period of Viking domination, or that the sustained contacts of Gruffudd ap Cynan and others somehow influenced the coining of the Norse name for the island by outsiders ('The Island of Ongull', possibly a Viking leader).<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the complexities involved in interpreting such place-name evidence have been particularly evident in Wales, and this is now accompanied by a growing awareness that the English evidence is equally complex. This concerns not just the dates of particular types of place-name, but how they were given and used and whether Scandinavian place-names can be equated with Scandinavian settlement (and conversely whether an absence represents an absence of Scandinavians).

Similarly, identifying settlement in Wales datable to the early medieval period, either from Cambro-Norse or earlier phases, remains fraught with problems. Of those definite sites listed in a Gazetteer published by Edwards and Lane in 1988,<sup>19</sup> only five sites definitely fell into the period under discussion. Of the small hillforts, the rocky knoll beside the River Nedd at Hen Gastell near Swansea has produced archaeological evidence of some sort of activity in the ninth century. Excavations by Gardner and Savory, and later Guilbert (unpublished) at Dinorben yielded some early medieval artefacts, though the silver ingot need not be of Viking type.<sup>20</sup> Hen Gastell has produced a late 'string-bead' of Irish type – often found in Hiberno-Norse contexts – which may be of eighth- or ninth-century date and two archaeomagnetic dates centring on the ninth century.<sup>21</sup> A small coastal promontory fort at Castell, Porth Trefadog on the Isle of Anglesey was compared by Longley with Viking promontory forts on the Isle of Man and associated with the eleventh- and twelfth-century links between the kings of Gwynedd, particularly Gruffudd ap Cynan, and the Vikings of Dublin and Man.<sup>22</sup> Rhuddlan in north Wales is generally thought to be the location of the *burh* known as *Cledemutha*

<sup>18</sup> G. T. Jones & T. Roberts, *The Place-names of Anglesey* (Bangor, 1996), 90.

<sup>19</sup> N. Edwards & A. Lane (eds), *Early Medieval Settlements in Wales AD400-1100* (Cardiff, 1988).

<sup>20</sup> W. Gardner & H. N. Savory, *Dinorben* (Cardiff, 1964), Plate XXXIV, 2; G. C. Guilbert, 'Dinorben 1977-8', *Current Archaeology* 65 (1979), 182-8.

<sup>21</sup> E. Campbell, 'The Beads', in P. F. Wilkinson, 'Excavations at Hen Gastell, Briton Ferry, West Glamorgan, 1991-92', *Med. Archaeol* 39 (1995), 1-50, esp. 18-19.

<sup>22</sup> D. Longley, 'The excavation of Castell, Porth Trefadog, a coastal promontory fort in North Wales', *Medieval Archaeology*, 35, 64-85.

established in 921 by Edward the Elder, bringing north-east Wales under direct English political control. It is unclear whether Rhuddlan at this period was a large regional centre, or a small enclave dependent on its port, border traffic and nearby estates.<sup>23</sup> Finally, a timber building at Hen Domen has been attributed to the pre-castle phase on stratigraphic grounds, and may be eleventh century in date.<sup>24</sup>

Any assessment of Scandinavian contact needs to look at all the evidence, including that provided by the discovery of coin hoards and isolated artefacts. Eleven silver hoards from Wales have come to light that are thought to have been deposited between 850 and 1030 (Fig. 4; Appendix 1). One of two hoards from Bangor, that found on the High Street, is of particular interest. It was probably deposited after c. 925, and contained five Samanid dirhams, one silver penny of Edward the Elder, five pennies of the Viking Kingdom of York, a fragment of arm-ring and a fragment of silver ingot (both hack-silver).<sup>25</sup> This mixed hoard is characteristically Scandinavian in coin composition and may represent east-west or west-east movement of bullion rather than resulting from a raid from the Isle of Man.<sup>26</sup>

The pattern of isolated finds with Scandinavian associations provides a further tier of source material. Tenth-century finds from Pembrokeshire with Hiberno-Norse associations include a 'capped' oval weight from Freshwater West, Castlemartin,<sup>27</sup> a small fragment of another capped lead weight from the vicinity of Milford Haven,<sup>28</sup> and a sword pommel of trilobe form from a site near Pembroke, Milford Haven.<sup>29</sup> Ringed pins were a form of dress fastener which developed as a result of contact between artisans between the Celtic West and sub-Roman Britain, and prototypes became very popular in Ireland.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>23</sup> H. Quinnell, M. R. Blockley & P. Berridge, *Excavations at Rhuddlan, Clwyd 1969-73. Mesolithic to Medieval*, CBA Res. Report 95 (York, 1994). For discussions about extent and function see J. Manley, 'Cledemutha: a late Saxon burh in North Wales', *Medieval Archaeology*, 31 (1987), 13-46; D. Griffiths, 'The North-West Mercian Burhs: a reappraisal', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 8 (Oxford, 1995), 75-86.

<sup>24</sup> R. Higham & P. Barker, *Hen Domen. A Timber Castle on the English-Welsh Border* (Exeter, 2000), 26-34.

<sup>25</sup> G. C. Boon, 'The Armlet Hoard', *Welsh Coin Hoards* (Cardiff, 1986), 92-7, fig. 38. See also E. Besly, 'Few and far between: mints and coins in Wales to the middle of the thirteenth century', in B. Cook and G. Williams (ed.), *Coinage and History in the North Sea World, c. AD 500-1250. Essays in Honour of Marion Archibald* (Leiden and Boston, 2006), 701-19.

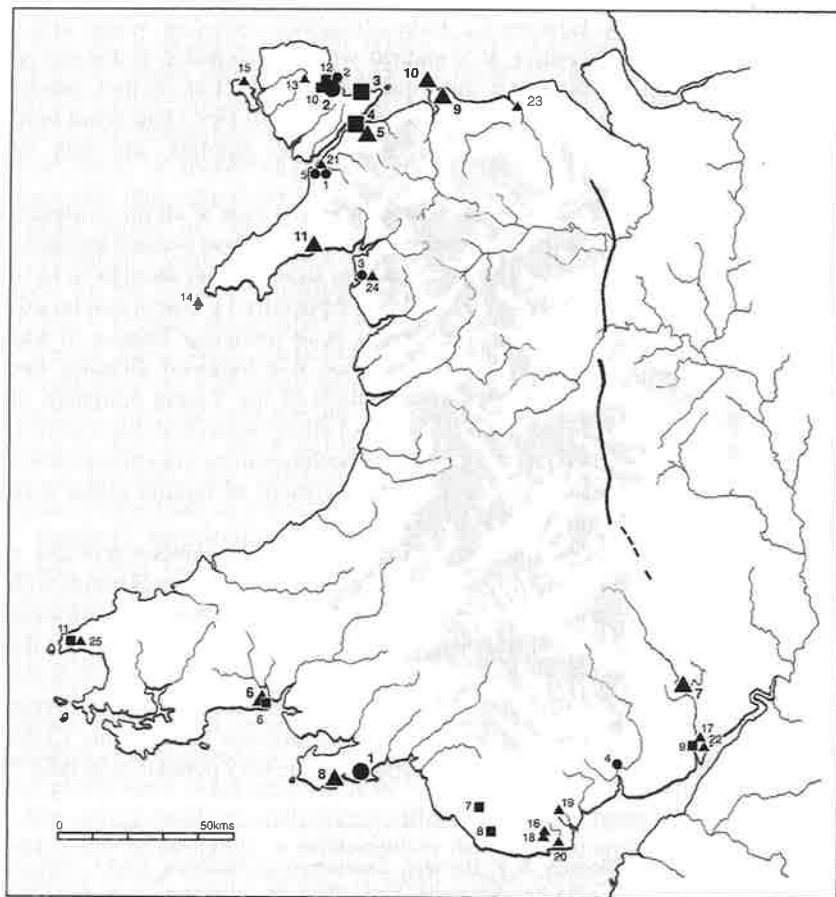
<sup>26</sup> See M. Blackburn and H. Pagan, 'A revised check-list of coin-hoards from the British Isles, c. 500-1100', *Anglo-Saxon Monetary History: Essays in Memory of M. Dolley* (Leicester, 1986), no. 106.

<sup>27</sup> W. F. Grimes, 'A leaden tablet of Scandinavian origin from south Pembrokeshire', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 85 (1930), 416-17.

<sup>28</sup> NMW acc. no. 92.12H.

<sup>29</sup> NMW acc. no. 96.17H; M. Redknap, *The Vikings in Wales* (Cardiff, 2000), 50, ill. 61 (right).

<sup>30</sup> E. C. R. Armstrong, 'Irish bronze pins of the Christian period', *Archaeologia* 72 (1921-2), 71-86.



**Fig. 4** Location of Viking-age silver hoards (large symbols) and single coin finds (small symbols), showing the line of Offa's Dyke (for key, see appendix 1). (Copyright: National Museum of Wales)

With Viking settlement in Ireland from the second half of the ninth century, some jewellery types such as the ringed pin were adopted by the Hiberno-Norse during the Viking period. The number of examples from Wales has until recently remained small, most of which are Insular ringed pins of pre-Viking date (fifth to eighth centuries) such as those from Gateholm Island<sup>31</sup> and

<sup>31</sup> NMW acc. no. 30.524/12; T. C. Lethbridge and H. E. David, 'Excavation of a house-site on Gateholm, Pembrokeshire', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 85 (1930), fig. 6.3.

Caerwent, Monmouthshire.<sup>32</sup> A ringed pin of Irish type found on Norton Beach in Swansea Bay has a pin-head of looped type and is probably of late ninth- or early tenth-century date.<sup>33</sup> Further isolated examples dating to the ninth and tenth centuries had been reported from Caerwent and Portskewett in Monmouthshire and Llanfair Pwllgwyngyll on the Isle of Anglesey, though these all belong to different classes of ringed pin.<sup>34</sup> The Caerwent example is a Hiberno-Norse multiple-knob ringed pin similar to unprovenanced examples from Ireland and ninth-century parallels from Sogn and Tårnes, Norway.<sup>35</sup> The flattened lower shaft and ring of the Portskewett example, found on the foreshore of the Severn Estuary, are decorated with finely incised lines.<sup>36</sup> The Llanfair Pwllgwyngyll pin, though missing its ring, has a large polyhedral head of cubical form decorated with a step pattern on the shaft which finds close parallels from the excavations in Dublin, such as several from Fishamble Street, one from a mid-tenth-century context and another dated to the second quarter of the tenth century.<sup>37</sup> This form has a wide distribution, findspots including a Norse grave at Tjørnuvík, Faroe Islands.<sup>38</sup> A ringed pin from Pen-Arthur Farm near St Davids is closest in form to the commonest class of tenth-century ringed pins from Llanbedrgeoch on Anglesey (see below), which can also be paralleled by examples from Chester.<sup>39</sup>

A fragmentary silver penny of Eadred (946–55) from St Davids Head was found at the top of the beach at Whitesands Bay, and was presumed to have fallen from an eroded cliff.<sup>40</sup> Anglo-Saxon coins from Wales are scarce, and

<sup>32</sup> Newport Museum and Art Gallery acc. no. 84.123, 84.124; J. K. Knight, 'Late Roman and post-Roman Caerwent; some evidence from metalwork', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 145 (1996), fig. 7, 4-5.

<sup>33</sup> M. Redknap, 'An early medieval ringed pin and a medieval brooch from Swansea Bay', *Morgannwg* 44 (2000), 136-40, fig. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Knight note 31, fig. 7 no. 7; C. Fox, 'An Irish bronze pin from Anglesey', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 95 (1940), 248.

<sup>35</sup> Newport Museum & Art Gallery D2.250; for parallels see Armstrong note 29, plate XIII, fig. 2, 3-6; J. Petersen, 'British Antiquities of the Viking Period, found in Norway' in H. Shetelig (ed.), *Viking Antiquities in Great Britain and Ireland, Part V* (Oslo, 1940), 202-3, nos 14 and 14, figs 164-5.

<sup>36</sup> Newport Museum & Art Gallery 92.16; Redknap note 28, 82. For one example with a similar ring, see: T. Fanning, *Viking Age Ringed Pins from Dublin. Medieval Dublin Excavations 1962-81 Ser. B, vol. 4* (Dublin, 1994), DRP 14, dated to 'pre-935'.

<sup>37</sup> Fanning note 36, figs 50, 51 (Dublin ringed pin 116 and 124 respectively).

<sup>38</sup> S. Dahl, 'The Norse settlement of the Faroe Islands', *Medieval Archaeology* 14 (1970), fig. 23.

<sup>39</sup> E.g. G. Lloyd-Morgan, 'The artefacts', in S. Ward and others, *Excavations at Chester. Saxon Occupation within the Roman Fortress. Sites excavated 1971-1981*, Archaeological Service Excavation and Survey Report no. 7 (Chester, 1991), fig. 4.6.

<sup>40</sup> Found by Ms A. Lewis and A.W. Bartlett in 1985; M. A. S. Blackburn and M. J. Bonser, 'Single finds of Anglo-Saxon and Norman Coins - 2', *British Numismatic Journal*, 55 (1985) 55-78, esp. 68.

the findspot of this coin from north-west England on a beach facing the southern tip of Ireland was seen to support the argument that many of these coins were the product of Viking contact. The closest coin hoard within the distribution from St Davids to Caerwent in the east is that from Laugharne of about 60 reform pennies of Eadgar, deposited c. 975.<sup>41</sup> The known distribution of Hiberno-Norse ringed pins similarly mirrors trade routes in the Irish Sea and North Atlantic areas, while the geographical position of St Davids exposed it to sea-borne contacts, both hostile and friendly. In this context, the recent discovery of corn drying kilns associated with radiocarbon dates in the eighth to tenth centuries at Newton, Llanstadwell, establishes Viking-age industrial/agricultural activity (such as the cultivation of oats, wheat and barley) in the vicinity of Milford Haven, presumably relating to local settlement in this part of Pembrokeshire.<sup>42</sup>

One breakthrough in understanding high-status settlement in south Wales has been the excavation of the crannog (artificial island) on *Llyn Syfaddan/Llan-gors* Lake, near Brecon.<sup>43</sup> Documentary evidence in the form of two Llandaff charters and an entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle have provided an historical context for this site, so far without parallel in Wales, indicating that it was a royal *llys* and house of the ruling dynasty of Brycheiniog during the late ninth and early tenth centuries. Dendrochronological dating has now established that much of the timber used in the construction of the palisades was summer felled between the years 889 and 893.<sup>44</sup> Royal status is suggested by many of the items recovered, and the crannog forms an important short-lived time capsule of early medieval society, lasting from c. 890 until its destruction at the hands of a Mercian army in 916.

The economic and political homeland of the kingdom of Gwynedd lay on the Isle of Anglesey (Fig. 5). With Dublin situated only 56 nautical miles (105 km) to the west, Anglesey was located a comfortable sailing distance from Scandinavian settlements in Ireland, and those to the north and east. It was therefore beneficially situated in terms of sailing routes and maritime trade, but one consequence was that it became an early target for numerous raids

<sup>41</sup> D. W. Dykes, *Anglo-Saxon Coins in the National Museum of Wales* (Cardiff), 27.

<sup>42</sup> P. Crane, 'Excavations at Newton, Llanstadwell, Pembrokeshire', *Archaeology in Wales* 44 (2004), 3-32.

<sup>43</sup> First published in E. N. Dumbleton, 'On a crannog, or stockaded island, in Llangorse Lake, Brecon', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 4 (1870), 192-8. The more recent investigations took place during the summers of 1989-93 as a programme directed by Dr Alan Lane and Dr Ewan Campbell of the School of History and Archaeology, Cardiff University, and the author with a team from Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales.

<sup>44</sup> Dating by the Dendrochronology Laboratory of the University of Sheffield: M. Redknap and A. Lane, 'The early medieval crannog at Llangorse, Powys: an interim statement on the 1989-93 seasons', *Int. J. Nautical Archaeol.*, 23 (1994), 189-205.

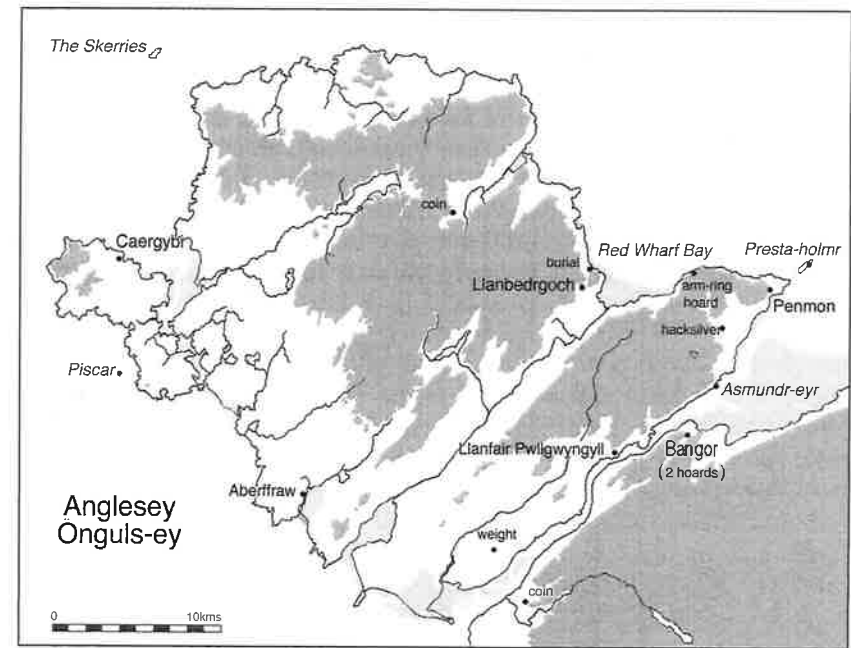


Fig. 5 Anglesey: Viking-age findspots. (Copyright: National Museum of Wales)

from 855, and earlier unrecorded landfalls are possible. The discovery between about 1887 and 1894 of five complete silver arm-rings on the south side of Red Wharf Bay, is of particular significance to this period.<sup>45</sup> They are remarkable for their condition (very little sign of wear) and completeness, and are similar in date to the Cuerdale hoard from the River Ribble, thought to have been buried about 905 (shortly after Viking leader Ingimund's expulsion from Anglesey). A recently discovered hoard of complete but flattened silver arm-rings, deposited in a lead container in the banks of the river Gowy, is of similar date, and presumably represents related activity in the Chester area.<sup>46</sup>

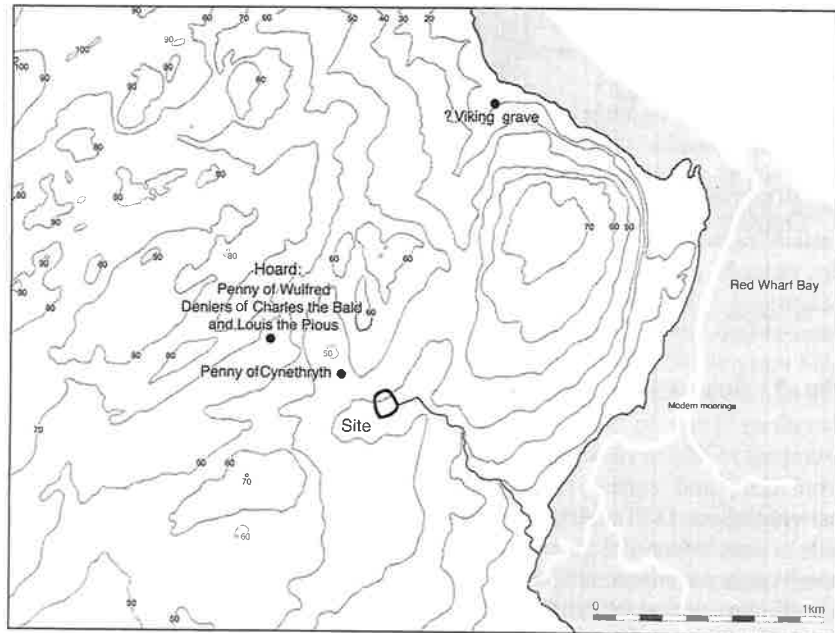
<sup>45</sup> E. Neil Baynes, 'Five armlets of the Viking period', *Ant. J.* (1928), 359-60; Boon note, 99-102. Such 'Class 1' hoards can be viewed in social rather than economic terms alone, as they conferred status on patrons, donors or recipients: J. Sheehan, 'Social and economic integration in Viking-age Ireland: the evidence of the hoards', in J. Hines, A. Lane and M. Redknap (eds), *Land, Sea and Home. Proceedings of a Conference on Viking-period Settlement at Cardiff, July 2001*. (Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph 20), 177-88.

<sup>46</sup> N. Herepath, *in litt.*



### The excavations at Llanbedrgoch

Our knowledge of ninth- and tenth-century Wales has improved considerably over the last two decades as a result of the systematic recording of metal-detected finds.<sup>47</sup> One notable concentration of early medieval finds on Anglesey came to light by metal detecting between 1989 and 1992. The regular reporting of coins and lead weights of Viking type from three different fields at Glyn, Llanbedrgoch, resulted in a fuller investigation of their context by the National Museum, leading to the quite unexpected discovery of an enclosed Viking-age settlement (Fig. 6).<sup>48</sup>



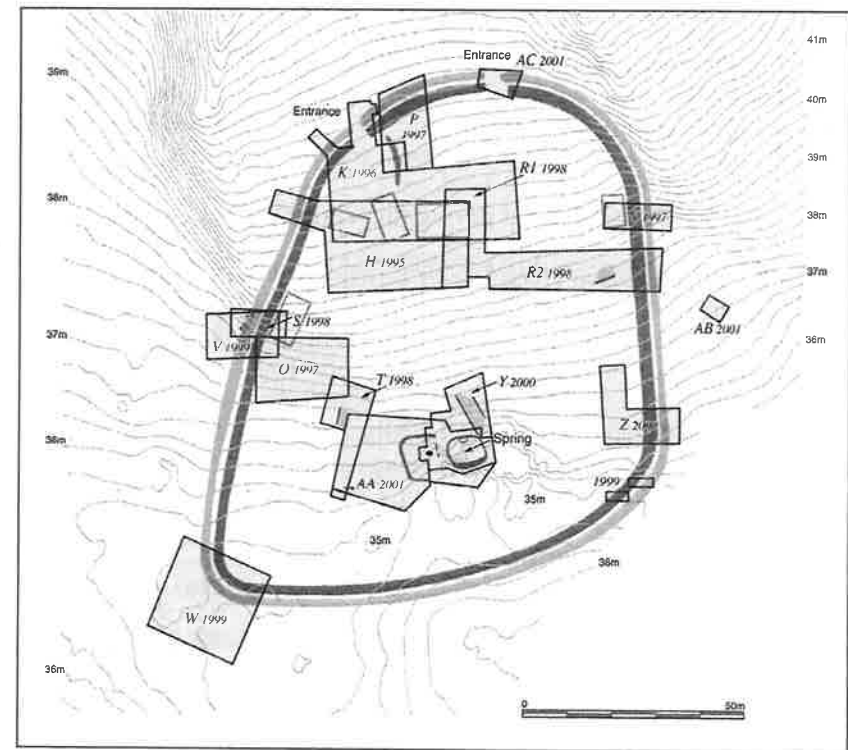
**Fig. 6** The location of Llanbedrgoch and other find-spots in relation to Red Wharf Bay. (Copyright: National Museum of Wales)

<sup>47</sup> Similar improvements are reported from England, for example K. Ulmschneider, 'Settlement, economy, and the 'productive' site: Middle Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire A.D. 650-780', *Medieval Archaeol.* 44 (2000), 53-79.

<sup>48</sup> Following the pilot investigation (1994), there were five main areas of excavation within the enclosure, conducted between 1995 and 2001. Aerial photography in 1995 revealed the full extent of the enclosure, which extended into a field to the south, and this was subsequently confirmed by geophysical survey and excavation (for interim reports, see M. Redknap, 'Llanbedrgoch', *Archaeol. Wales* 34 (1994), 58-60; *ibid.* 35 (1995), 58-9; *ibid.* 36 (1996), 81-2; *ibid.* 37 (1997), 94-96; *ibid.* 'Further Work at Glyn, Llanbedrgoch, Anglesey', *Archaeol. Wales* 39 (1999), 56-61; *ibid.* 40 (2000), 104-107; *ibid.* 41 (2001), 144-47.

This site is situated on gently rising south-facing ground on well-drained carboniferous limestone, near to the modern sea-side resort of Benllech and only some 900m from the broad sandy beach of Red Wharf Bay (which formed a natural landing place for bands such as those led by Ingimund).

The large body of data associated with the remains of this site have brought a new dimension to the archaeology of early medieval Wales. The excavated evidence provides tangible evidence of a place on Anglesey which chronologically straddles the period of Ingimund's attempted colonisation, but enables us to move beyond the chronicles and characterise in considerable detail a settlement and its related activities at this time. The original intention of the project was to establish the archaeological context for the metalwork discovered up to 1994, and its wider significance in terms of Irish Sea mariculture. The excavations have now established a wider time depth, through a combination of radiocarbon dating and relative sequencing, coupled to associations with datable artefacts (Fig. 7). The framework for the site's chronology and development begins with Mesolithic, Neolithic and early



**Fig. 7** Glyn, Llanbedrgoch, showing the 1994-2001 areas of excavation.

Bronze Age activity, albeit very different in nature to that of the early medieval period. The size and extent of the early medieval settlement is now known, and preliminary analysis suggests that it was well-established by about AD 600, when the main activity appears to have been farming. This site during this phase encompassed an area about 80m across, and was enclosed by a ditch measuring 1.7-2m wide and 0.6-1.4m deep (depending on whether it was rock-cut or not; Fig. 8). It would appear from radiocarbon dates obtained so far that an earlier ditch, which possibly enclosed a modest area around some buildings (radiocarbon date for upper fill cal. A.D. 90-560),<sup>49</sup> was replaced during the sixth or seventh century by another ditch (radiocarbon date for lower fill cal. A.D. 540-770),<sup>50</sup> recut in parts, which enclosed a larger D-shaped area of about 1 ha.

Two entrances have been located and excavated, which survived as undug causeways across the fosse between a gap in a bank of upcast. One section of bank has produced a radiocarbon date of cal. A.D. 615-875.<sup>51</sup> Within this pre-Viking-age enclosure there were at least two different forms of wooden structure: at least one small round-house (which produced a radiocarbon date of cal. A.D. 680-885)<sup>52</sup> and a large rectangular hall (producing radiocarbon dates of cal. A.D. 435-680, cal. A.D. 575-670 and cal. A.D. 620-800)<sup>53</sup>. During this phase dumping of midden material starts within the enclosure at the bottom of the slope on the west side: the lower deposits of this dark earth have produced a wide, early date range of cal. A.D. 130-605.<sup>54</sup> This activity appears to have continued into the late tenth century.

### The settlement during the Viking period

Just as the excavations at Dinas Powys between 1954 and 1958 heralded a period of optimism in the archaeology of Wales between the 5<sup>th</sup> and early 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, the site at Glyn, Llanbedrgoch, now provides a Welsh type-site as a counterpart to the rich Viking-age settlements in Ireland. In particular, it is helping to answer that thorny, oft-asked question regarding the relationship between native Welsh and Vikings: whether the latter settled, were marginalised, intermarried, and became integrated within local society.

During the ninth century, the enclosure boundary at Llanbedrgoch was rebuilt as a defensive stone structure, and at about the same time a certain

<sup>49</sup> Beta-123194, 1720±100 BP. All radiocarbon dates cited in this paper are calibrated to 2 sigma.

<sup>50</sup> Beta-123200, 1410±70 BP.

<sup>51</sup> Beta-138878, 1320±70 BP.

<sup>52</sup> Beta-113392, 1250±40 BP.

<sup>53</sup> Beta-113386, 1470±70 BP; Beta-113390, 1430±40 BP; Beta-113402, 1240±60 BP.

<sup>54</sup> Beta-123193, 1680±100 BP.

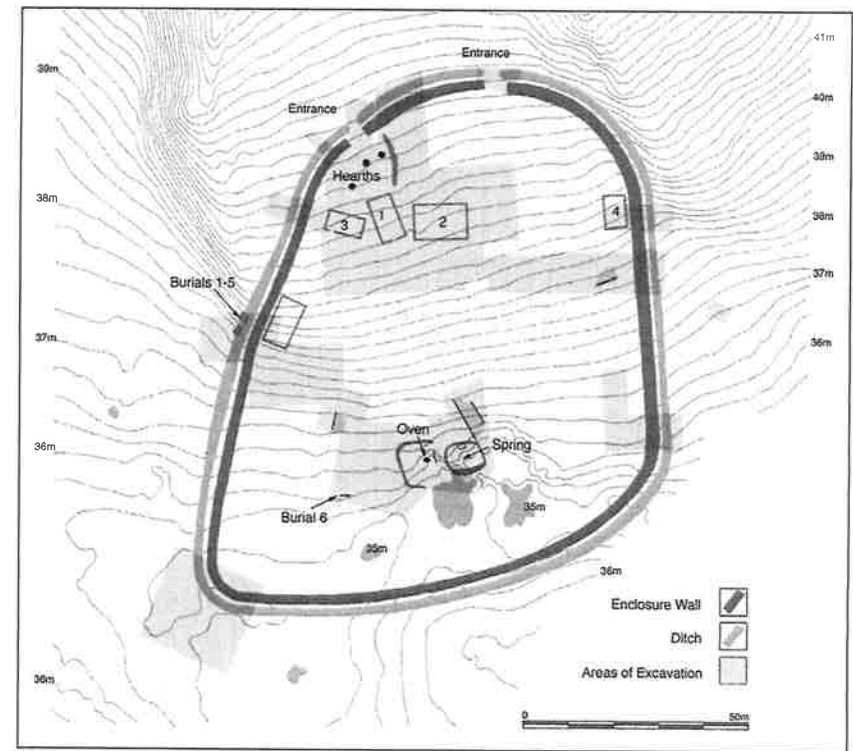


Fig. 8 Interpretive plan of Llanbedrgoch during the late ninth and first half of the tenth century. (Copyright: National Museum of Wales)

amount of rebuilding within the enclosure appears to have taken place. Its stone wall was an impressive 2.2-2.3m wide, and constructed along the inside edge of the earlier enclosure ditch, to encircle the site (Fig. 9). Most of this wall has been obliterated by later robbing and farming, but sections of the lower courses were found to have survived in the southern half of the site. It is reasonable to suggest that its original height is unlikely to have been less than its width, and possibly more, and if so, it would have had sufficient width to carry a wall walk. A *terminus post quem* for its construction is provided by a radiocarbon date from soil sealed beneath it which may be the remains of an earlier earthen bank (cal. A.D. 615-690; cal. A.D. 615-875).<sup>55</sup> A radiocarbon date for the collapse of the wall, obtained from a rubble layer which overlay

<sup>55</sup> Beta-138885, 1380±40 BP; Beta-138878, 1320±70 BP.



**Fig. 9** The defensive wall on the west side of the enclosure at Glyn, Llanbedrgoch, excavated in 1999. (Copyright: National Museum of Wales)

burials and ditch fill and lapped against its front face, is cal. A.D. 970-1225.<sup>56</sup> The proposed date of construction in the second half of the ninth century, in the time of Rhodri Mawr (844-78) or his sons, raises the possibility of a royal hand in the work, in response to both domestic concerns and Viking pressures, coinciding with the onset of Viking raids on north Wales from the 850s. The site was vulnerable from the sea, and its position along the sea-road between Dublin and north-west England/York made it both a stepping stone for merchants and travellers and a potential target for raiders.

One important feature excavated in 2000 and 2001 within the enclosure was a large slab-lined sub-rectangular pool or reservoir (approximately 4.7m

<sup>56</sup> Beta-138874, 960+/-70 BP.



**Fig. 10** The sub-rectangular, stone-lined early medieval spring reservoir at Llanbedrgoch (top left). (Copyright: National Museum of Wales)

by 4m), which once served a spring emanating from the limestone at one of the lowest points within the enclosure (Fig. 10). Lenses of grey silt and sand within the pool contained large quantities of animal bone, as well as a number of diagnostic early medieval artefacts, including the end of a silver ingot (hack-silver), a copper-alloy pin with wrythen-decorated globular head, ironwork and a punch-decorated folded strip of tin. Two simple dry-stone steps had been carefully constructed at the northern side of the pool and would have provided easy access to the water. A radiocarbon date of cal. A.D. 670-880<sup>57</sup> from the lower silts suggests construction of the pool during the pre-Viking phase, while a silver penny of Edmund (939-46) from the upper silt indicates that it remained open well into the tenth century.

Just to the north of the pool were located the remains of a paved road, 3m wide, constructed of limestone slabs and smaller stones between raised stone kerbs. While only a short section survived, an extension of the alignment

<sup>57</sup> Beta-150712, 1260+/-40 BP.

suggests a direct link between the pool and Building 1, situated about 50m to the north. Similar areas of limestone paving discovered in 1998 may also represent arterial routes off this main axis, rather than paved levels within buildings, as originally thought.<sup>58</sup>

The remains of at least five late ninth-/tenth-century buildings have been found, three of which utilised the sill-beam method of construction. Building 1 was about 10.5 m by 5 m (internal dimensions), and its principal features were a sunken floor and narrow, low walls of limestone blocks forming a revetment and a ground-level foundation sill to support a timber superstructure (Fig. 11).<sup>59</sup> Raised areas of ground arranged along the walls around three sides of a sub-rectangular hearth suggest the position of low benches or wooden platforms. The hearth was defined by small upright kerb stones, and showed evidence of long use. The radiocarbon date obtained from the hearth ash and associated deposits (cal. A.D. 780-980)<sup>60</sup> has been refined

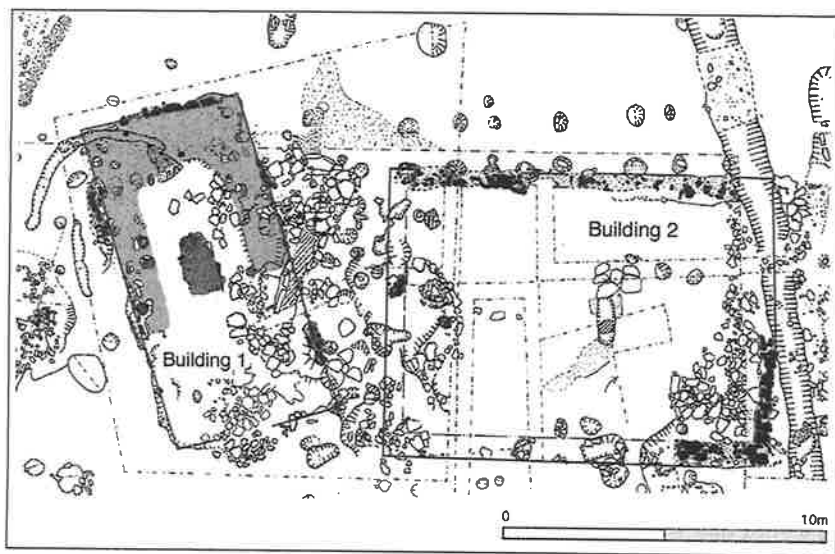


Fig. 11 Multi-period plan of the central area of the 1995-96 excavations at Glyn, Llanbedrgoch, showing details of buildings 1 and 2. (Copyright: National Museum of Wales)

<sup>58</sup> See M. Redknap, 'Further Work at Glyn, Llanbedrgoch, Anglesey', *Archaeology in Wales* 39 (1999), 56-61, esp. 58.

<sup>59</sup> The width (0.2-0.34 m) is too narrow to support a masonry wall, and no mortar has been found.

<sup>60</sup> Beta:101535, 1170+/-40 BP.



Fig. 12 Burials 3-5 (in foreground, with burial 2 beyond) at Glyn, Llanbedrgoch, showing the enclosure wall (top left). (Copyright: National Museum of Wales)

by an archaeomagnetic date of its fired clay of A.D. 890-970 (at the 95% confidence level).<sup>61</sup> The floor of the southern half of the building was flagged while a stone-lined and capped drain kept the interior dry.

An adjacent structure, Building 2, was also rectangular and sunken-floored, but larger (7.5 x 11m internal dimensions). Its walls used the foundation bed technique: a low bedding of stone rubble set within a shallow foundation trench to support a course of dry stone walling, which possibly carried a wooden sill-beam.<sup>62</sup> Charcoal recovered from the lower layer over the sunken floor has given a radiocarbon date range of cal. A.D. 705-1035, and the upper layer has provided a date of cal. A.D. 785-1020.<sup>63</sup>

Little remained of Building 3 except flagging and its sunken floor, whose black earth fill produced a fine decorated tenth-century copper-alloy buckle. One of the post-holes, which may be associated with this structure, provided a date of cal. A.D. 785-985.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Undertaken by The Clark Laboratory in 1997; measurement reference CL-15/2.

<sup>62</sup> Possibly for a grooved baseplate to hold vertical staves, as at Pudding Lane, London, building 3: V. Horsman, C. Milne and G. Milne, 'Building and Street Development near Billingsgate and Cheapside'. *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London: I* (London, 1988), 39-42.

<sup>63</sup> Beta-90542, 1130+/-80BP; Beta-1120+/-60 BP.

<sup>64</sup> Beta-113398, 1160+/-40 BP.

The south-west corner of another rectangular building was found to have been constructed parallel to the inside of the enclosure wall on the western side of the site. Apart from a few courses of limestone dry stone walling, nothing survives of the plan, interior, floors or purpose of this building (no. 5), but radiocarbon dates from the layers that the preserved corner had subsided into provide a useful *terminus post quem* of cal. A.D. 685-885 (layer 642; Beta-123211, 1240+/-40BP) and cal. A.D. 690-990 (layer 653; Beta-123201, 1190+/-60BP). A metre-wide gap had been left between the enclosure wall and the back wall of this building, pointing to planned access around the inside of the perimeter. A short length of dry stone wall in a similar position on the east side of the enclosure may be all that remains of a similar structure (Building 4).

There was at least one further construction phase within the enclosure, involving the erection of a large rectangular building, with a slightly raised central hearth, over the site of Building 1. A layer associated with the north wall of this hall has provided a radiocarbon date of cal. A.D. 790-1040.<sup>65</sup>

### Burials

In 1998 and 1999, the skeletons of five individuals were found on the west of the site, buried in the upper fill of the ditch immediately outside the defensive wall. All skeletons were aligned north-south (heads to either north or south) rather than west-east (the Christian custom, the 13<sup>th</sup>-century explanation being that the buried would be 'readier to see Christ come out of the east at the Doom'). The Llanbedrgoch burials were laid in shallow graves cut into the upper ditch fill, roughly parallel to the enclosure wall. Three of the bodies had been individually interred, but there was one double burial in which an adult male (approximate age 23-35 years old) had been thrown directly on top of a child (approximate age 10-15 years old). To judge from the unusual positions of the adult male's arms, his wrists may have been tied behind his back; analysis of the skull indicates that he may have suffered a blow to the left eye with a sharp object. Another older adult male (35-45 years old) appears to have been placed head face down, turned to left, body slightly twisted, and he may have had his wrists fastened in front of his body.

The circumstances of burial and lack of Christian orientation have led to speculation that these individuals were victims of raiding. Burials 3 (cal. A.D. 790-990) and 4 (radiocarbon dated to cal. A.D. 960-1040) were exactly contemporary, for they were placed in the ground at the same time.<sup>66</sup> Questions concerning the identity of these individuals have highlighted the problems of distinguishing 'native' from 'immigrant' elements within a highly fluid period (in terms of cultural, political or territorial allegiances), an issue

<sup>65</sup> Beta-90537, 1090+/-70 BP.

<sup>66</sup> Beta-15714, 1140+/-40 BP; Beta-150715, 1030+/-40 BP.

at the heart of any attempt to interpret the material culture from such sites. Some of the anatomical evidence appears as the time of writing to point to the bodies being of indigenous rather than Hiberno-Norse biological ancestry. All five skulls show a number of similar features, which include horizontal eye fissures, supra-orbital notches (above the eyes), ambiguous nasal guttering, square jaws and adherent ears (no lobes) and a wide flattened nasal spine. Some of these features suggest a genetic relationship between the skulls, either familial or because the individuals originate from a small gene pool.

In 2001 a sixth extended inhumation was discovered in a different area of the site, within the enclosure. Unlike the other burials, this one had been properly laid out with an east-west orientation (the head at the east end), and buried within the black-earth of a midden which had gradually accumulated inside the enclosure (Fig. 13). This 'reversed' position for the body is not without later medieval parallels, and diverse explanations have been suggested for such cases, from simple lack of geographical determinants to a lack of controlling tradition and custom (most likely here), and more fancifully penance or punishment (disorientation on Resurrection on the Day of Judgement).<sup>67</sup> This deliberate funerary context raises the possibility that further Christian burials may await discovery in the unexcavated south-west quadrant of the site. However, geophysical surveying and the close inspection of a modern drainage ditch cutting through this part of the enclosure have so far failed to detect further evidence of burials or associated buildings such as



Fig. 13 'Reversed' burial 6 at Glyn, Llanbedrgoch. (Copyright: National Museum of Wales)

<sup>67</sup> R. Gilchrist and B. Sloane, *Requiem. The Medieval Monastic Cemetery in Britain* (London, 2005), 153.

a private chapel or timber church. The proximity of the spring to the burial with Christian orientation raises an intriguing possibility that the pool could have been used for baptism, though this remains speculative.

The cessation of occupation is most clearly demonstrated by the creation of a series of small parallel ditches which cut through Building 2. The radiocarbon dates from the fills of these ditches are cal. A.D. 895-1265 and (upper ditch fill) cal. A.D. 880-1265, and correspond with that obtained from a layer containing rubble collapse from the wall.<sup>68</sup> Subsequent agricultural activity and later medieval stone robbing eventually removed all obvious surface traces of the former settlement.

### Llanbedrgoch's material culture and its affinities

The excavation of approximately 34% of the site has produced a rich artefact assemblage. Some of the datable ninth- and tenth-century artefacts demonstrate that during this period north-west Wales shared many ornamental tastes with other regions of early-medieval western Britain around the Irish Sea coastline and that there was considerable cross-fertilisation and cultural assimilation of fashions. The site appears to have attracted both merchants, indicated by coin use – a Kufic dirham fragment and two tenth-century silver pennies, one of Eadred, Eadwig or Eadgar (946-75); the other of Edmund (939-45) – hack-silver, lead scale-weights, glass beads, an imported Chester Ware jar, all typically seen as indicators of trade, and craftsmen (such as weavers, bronze-casters, blacksmiths, antler/bone workers, silversmiths and leather workers).

Some objects, such as nine fragments of hack-silver, are diagnostic components of Hiberno-Norse economic activity in the Irish Sea area. Two are pieces of early tenth-century broad-band arm-rings similar to those found at Red Wharf Bay and within the Bangor hoard, while there is one very small fragment of spiral- or 'Permian' arm-ring, similar to those from the 'Co. Dublin' hoard deposited c. 935. The degree of fragmentation of this silver and the presence on ingots of nicks which are thought to represent a characteristic Scandinavian method of testing for plated forgeries and assessing fineness, point to its use in commercial transactions on the site in the first half of the tenth century.<sup>69</sup>

Visually unspectacular but archaeologically important evidence for silver and bronze casting on the site takes the form of droplets of silver and copper alloy and of waste sprues of copper alloy derived from the casting and production of objects. Workshop activities are indicated by semi-manufactured items such as some small copper-alloy and silver ingots

<sup>68</sup> Beta-101526, 960±90 BP; Beta-90545, 980±100 BP. The intercepts for these samples are 1030 and 1035 respectively.

<sup>69</sup> J. Graham-Campbell, *The Viking-age Gold and Silver of Scotland (AD 850-1100)* (Edinburgh, 1995), 33.

displaying small depressions, from being struck by small hammers. One product of particular significance in the context of Hiberno-Scandinavian manufacture is a fragment of a lead trial piece bearing stamped decoration on one side, which has the form of a broad-band arm-ring of Hiberno-Scandinavian type. While most penannular arm-rings of this type are considered to be of Hiberno-Norse origin, and an important product of silversmiths in Ireland, some may have been made on Anglesey (a by-product of ingot casting perhaps being the waste droplets).

The association of the hack-silver on the site with commercial activity is supported by over 19 lead weights of diverse form (discoïd, conical, truncated sphere, square and capped) and size, the largest assemblage to be recorded so far from a Welsh site. Two weights had been capped with recycled ninth-century Insular metalwork in the manner of the weights from Balladoole, Kilmainham/Islandbridge and Kiloran Bay. While the weights do not appear to correlate with the Scandinavian or Dublin units postulated by Kruse,<sup>70</sup> three are close in weight to the standard unit of weight, 26.6g (close to the Roman or Carolingian ounce) used in Ireland and northern England, and represented by weights from market contexts at Viking Dublin and York. The east-west direction of some of this trade is confirmed by a rim sherd of Chester Ware from an upper midden deposit. This is not surprising, for the site lies along the Chester to Dublin trade route.<sup>71</sup> Close parallels for certain artefacts such as buckles, strap ends and strap slides can be found in both Dublin and Viking York, reinforcing Llanbedrgoch's participation in the economic axis established between these two mercantile centres.

In addition to the above-mentioned evidence for artefact manufacture, antler-tine tips and brow-ridge off-cuts found within Building 2 indicate the production of other objects to meet local needs. A semi-forged bar end of iron, together with other fragments of forge waste, reveal the presence of a smithy producing the tools indispensable to daily life, including a fragment of a saw, a hammer head and small socketed and tanged chisels. Some of the tools are associated with specialist commodity production, such as iron awls and toothed socketed tools for leather working. The latter are identical to examples from a number of early-medieval sites in Ireland and England, including Dublin, Lagore, Whithorn and York.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>70</sup> S. E. Kruse, 'Ingots and weight units in Viking Age silver hoards', *World Archaeol.* 20 (1988), 285-301, esp. 290-1.

<sup>71</sup> From a jar comparable to those attributed to Chester Phase IV (10th century): J. A. Axworthy Rutter, 'The Pottery', in D. J. P. Mason, *Excavations at Chester. 26-42 Lower Bridge Street 1974-6. The Dark Age and Saxon Periods*, (Chester, 1985), Fig. 23, no.8.

<sup>72</sup> Called weaving tensioners at Whithorn: A. Nicholson, 'The Iron', in P. Hill, *Whithorn & St Ninian. The Excavation of a Monastic Town 1984-91* (Stroud, 1997), 425, fig. 10.102, nos 63.2,3,6; H. O'N. Hencken, 'Lagore Crannog: an Irish royal residence of the 7th to 10th centuries AD', *Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad.* 53c (1950), 1-248, esp. 120.

Some personal objects provide a glimpse of the taste of the community on Anglesey at this time, such as a copper-alloy belt buckle decorated in the Scandinavian Borre ring-chain motif, the most commonly recognised ornament of the early tenth century. At least eleven parts of copper-alloy ringed pins with plain or decorated heads, are paralleled by tenth-century examples from Chester, Dublin, Meols and York, and the Viking graves at Balladoole and Ballateare on Man. Further examples from Wales (see above) amplify the extent of their distribution and local adoption within areas of Scandinavian influence.

While the appearance of new artefact-types in a region is sometimes taken to indicate the arrival of new peoples, it is dangerous to draw simple conclusions equating peoples with objects: often they are associated with objects of native manufacture and rarely occur in an undiluted form. It would be premature to ascribe a Scandinavian identity to the settlement in its tenth-century form on this basis. The boss from an oval brooch of double-shelled variety (most characteristic of the Middle Viking Age) found during the excavation should also be interpreted with caution, since the means by which this item might have reached the site are numerous.<sup>73</sup> Such brooches are thought to have declined in fashion during the tenth century, and while it is not possible to establish the ethnic identity of the wearer, it does provide contributory evidence beside the other artefacts mentioned above, of the existence of a new 'Cambro-Norse' identity on Anglesey arising from contact with other areas around the Irish seaboard and the journeys of traders. At issue with such finds is the need to distinguish (if possible) the extent to which they represent cultural assimilation – whether 'foreign' owners have moved in, or whether they represent 'down-the-line' or 'silent partner' trade or exchange (diffusion of objects alone), or whether they have been used by recipients correctly in terms of symbolic meaning, and whether new Scandinavian elements have been integrated within existing native tastes (as in the case of stone sculpture). Similarly, while some of the buildings excavated share some characteristics with those from other parts of the Scandinavian world (Fig. 14), these affinities are no stronger than those operating in England at this time, and the differences favour a native tradition of construction.

Among over 2,000 iron objects, are two categories of clenched nail: the smaller from items such as chests, doors or shutters, and a larger group which is identical to the Viking boat fastenings from Dublin and Balladoole, Isle of Man (suggesting the limited salvage of hull materials rather than ship repair).

<sup>73</sup> T. Capelle, *Der Metallschmuck von Haithabu. Ausgrabungen in Haithabu*, 5 (Neumunster, 1968), 68-9; for wider dating from the late 9th to the late 10th centuries, I. Jansson, *Ovala Spännbucklor*. Archaeological Series Uppsala – University Institute of Archaeology, 7 (Uppsala, 1985), 226-7.

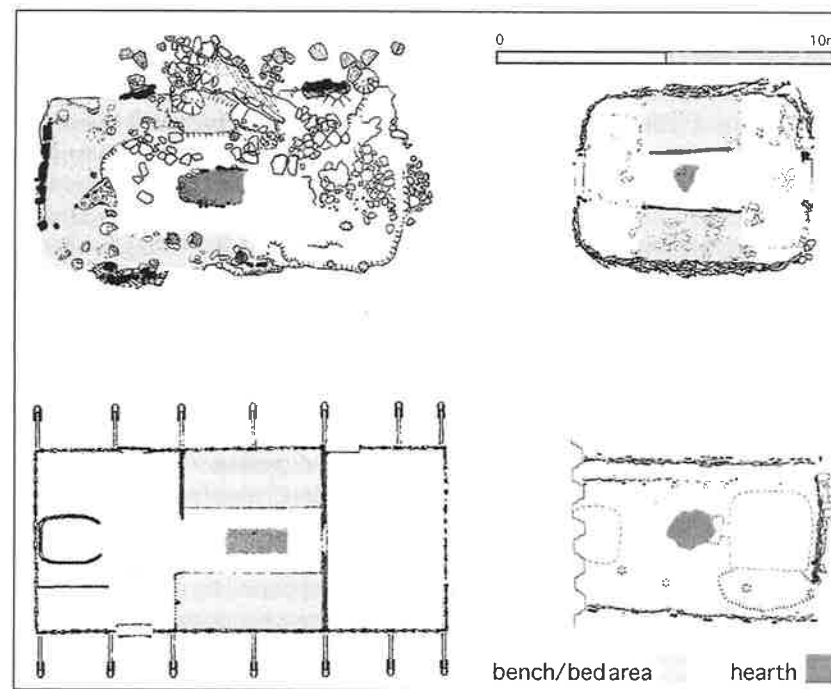


Fig. 14 Comparison of building 1, Glyn, Llanbedrgoch, with house plans from Viking Dublin (top right), Anglo-Scandinavian York (bottom right), and Scandinavian Hedeby (bottom left). (Copyright: National Museum of Wales)

There are 51 knife blades as well as iron buckles and strap-ends which have close parallels at Whithorn and at York.<sup>74</sup>

Llanbedrgoch lies in a sheltered spot, close to the sea and to routes from the sheltered havens and beaching sites, and was able to take full advantage of its seaboard location as a multi-functional centre within an Irish Sea milieu. Llanbedrgoch's economic wealth appears to have combined farming with market place functions. The artefactual evidence can be said to support the hypothesis that it was the site of a pre-Viking *caput* or estate centre during the eighth and ninth centuries, though there is little direct evidence yet that it operated as a commercial or trading site of extra-regional significance. During the late ninth and early tenth centuries the site's potential as a trading post and

<sup>74</sup> For example, a silver inlaid buckle is paralleled at Whithorn: P. Hill note 72, Fig. 1099, no. 44.13.

central place appears to have developed and intensified with the opening up of maritime commerce at a time when trading places of differing kinds were being developed around the Irish Sea. Indeed, the fortifications and hacksilver at Llanbedrgoch hint at a fiscal and administrative role, perhaps toll collection, as well as trade: a centre to which the population would have made renders and which profited from its strategic position, guarding and controlling access to the interior of the island from the important landing place on the west side of Red Wharf Bay. Such a function is supported by the strength of the enclosure wall: its careful construction (and that of the interior) during the ninth century must have reflected the prosperity of the settlement, and the existence of secular wealth as a target for raiders.

The evidence for trade during the early tenth century suggests that the site must have been recognised as a contained staging post of mutual benefit to its lord and the Vikings, immediately before and during an upsurge in the importance of Chester as a port in the reign of Æthelstan (924-39), and in particular in trade with Ireland and the Dublin-Man-Chester run.<sup>75</sup> The ringed pins found at Llanbedrgoch, Meols, Chester and York, which are either Dublin products or inspired by them, provide a significant archaeological connection with Ireland during the tenth century, and this is supported by other categories of find. There is no evidence that Llanbedrgoch represents the setting up *de novo* of a temporary or permanent staging post on fortified or fortifiable ground, within Loyn's concept of 'first stage' settlement.<sup>76</sup> This development may have had its origins in informal contact prior to the land-taking attempts of Ingimund and his successors.

Control of activity within the settlement during the ninth and early tenth century surely resided with a powerful land-owning, ruling elite, implying that it probably sat at the secular apex of a regional hierarchy of settlement. The warrior status of its elite is reflected by a fine pendant whetstone found within the enclosure. Its ferrule takes the form of a conical helmet with nose guard, and it probably served both to sharpen a fine sword blade and act a symbol of power and authority. Perhaps the fortification of the site in the ninth century was undertaken with royal encouragement (as an aristocratic *maenol*)? Was it the astute defence of such settlements, in combination with offensive strategies, that contributed to the initial success of Rhodri Mawr and his sons in repelling initial Viking raids? The ongoing programme of post-excavation analysis continues to enhance our understanding of Llanbedrgoch's position within the hierarchy of Viking-period settlement around the Irish Sea: a

<sup>75</sup> See M. Valante, 'Dublin's economic relations with hinterland and periphery in the later Viking age', in S. Duffy (ed.), *Medieval Dublin I* (Dublin, 2000), 69-83; C. Doherty 1980, 'Exchange and trade in early medieval Ireland', *J. Roy. Soc. Ant. Ir.* 110 (1980), 67-91.

<sup>76</sup> H. Loyn, *Society and Peoples: Studies in the History of England and Wales, c. 600-1200* (London, 1992), 218.

possible aristocratic estate centre, or *caput*, for the land of a secular lord (*maenol*), a key element in royal regional administration.

The site ultimately failed to develop into 'proto-urban' status – this was to happen at Llanfaes during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, under royal encouragement and the benefits of commutation of food renders to money payments. One cause for the demise of Llanbedrgoch may be bound up with the fate of the five individuals and their extra-mural disposal during the tenth century. The Isle of Man had developed as a significant Viking power base and control point in the middle of the Irish Sea, from which they could extend their ambitions to north Wales and Anglesey. Viking sacking and take-over of the site during the second half of the tenth century, albeit for a short period, may have occurred. Indeed, much of the rubble which overlay the skeletons must represent a collapse of the enclosure wall, pointing to a terminal event or series of events which resulted in severe structural decay. During the second half of the tenth century, regular raiding and tribute taking implied that the Scandinavians were the dominant political power in the region. This suggests that in the 970s and 980s, the Man-based sons of Harald were effectively controlling Gwynedd, and may have had bases on Anglesey in the 980s. Magnus Haraldsson and his brother Guthröth made efforts to gain political control of Anglesey, which they raided in 971 (ravaging Penmon), 980 and 987 when, according to the annals, Guthröth seized as many as 2,000 men from Anglesey.<sup>77</sup> Llanbedrgoch may have produced archaeological evidence for military activity of this sort, and for a Viking presence capable of ranging across the Irish Sea and taking tribute. The precise circumstances of the Llanbedrgoch deaths may never be known, but they may have been the victims of Vikings searching for wealth, perhaps in the form of hostages or slaves, at a time when the Man Vikings were heavily involved in attempts to gain control of Anglesey.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, slave raiding continued well into the twelfth century, as illustrated by Gruffudd ap Cynan's sons who raided Meirionydd in 1121 and 'carried off all the people of the land and all their chattels with them into Llŷn'.<sup>79</sup> The demise of the site may also have an economic basis – corresponding with the apparent decline in Chester-linked trade in the late tenth century.

In conclusion, the archaeology of Llanbedrgoch sheds new light on the nature of Viking contact with north Wales, illuminating both what is and what is not mentioned in the Welsh annals. Its archaeology, spanning the reigns of

<sup>77</sup> According to the Chronicle of the Princes, 970/2 'was the year of Christ when Godfrey, son of Harold, ravaged Anglesey; and through great cunning he subdued the whole island'; Davies note 4, 57.

<sup>78</sup> The strategic importance of Anglesey to the trading network is reflected in Magnus Barelegs' wish to establish hegemony over the 'Irish Sea Province' in the late eleventh century.

<sup>79</sup> *Brut y Tywysogyon* or *Chronicle of the Princes* 109, sa. 1121.



Rhodri Mawr and Hywel Dda, splendidly illustrates through its material culture the complex nature of early medieval Welsh society – a world quite different from many written descriptions – and the diverse maritime connections and overseas influences surging around the Irish Sea at this time.

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#### Appendix 1

*Summary list of silver hoards and single coin finds found in Wales*  
(= Key to Fig. 4; based on Besly, note 24)

##### Hoard

*c. 795-895 (large dots)*

1. Minchin Hole, Gower, Swansea. Deposited c. 850 (Swansea Museum).
2. Llanbedrgoch, Isle of Anglesey. Deposited c. 850 (National Museum Wales, Cardiff).

*c. 895-965 (large squares)*

3. Red Wharf Bay silver armlets, Isle of Anglesey. Deposited by c. 905 (National Museum Wales, Cardiff).
4. Bangor 'Midland Bank', High St, Gwynedd. Deposited c. 925 or shortly after (Bangor Museum & Art Gallery, Bangor; loaned to National Museum Wales, Cardiff).

*c. 965-1066 (large triangles)*

5. Bangor 'Senior Vicar's Garden', Gwynedd. Deposited c. 965? (missing).
6. Laugharne, Carmarthenshire. Deposited c. 975 (private collection).
7. Monmouth (near), Monmouthshire. Deposited c. 997. (missing)
8. Penrice, Gower, Swansea. Deposited c. 1008 (location unknown).
9. Bryn Maelgwyn, Conwy. Deposited c. 1024 (National Museum Wales, Cardiff).
10. Pant-yr-eglwys, nr. Llandudno, Conwy. Deposited c.1023 (National Museum Wales, Cardiff).
11. Drwsdangoed, Gwynedd. Deposited c. 1030? (location unknown).

##### Single coin finds

*c. 795-895 (small dots)*

1. Segontium (Eanred, 810-41)
  2. Llanbedrgoch (Cynethryth c. 787-92); Wigmund (c. 837-54)
  3. Harlech area (Berhtwulf, 840-52)
  4. Caerleon (Burgred, 852-74)
  5. Caernarfon (Pepin II, 839-52)
- c. 895-965 (small squares)*
6. Laugharne (Athelstan, 924-39)
  7. Colwinston (Athelstan, 924-39)
  8. Monknash (Athelstan, 924-39)
  9. Caerwent (Edmund, 939-46)
  10. Llanbedrgoch (Edmund, 939-46)
  11. St Davids (Eadred, 946-55)
  12. Llanbedrgoch (Eadred, 955-9)

*c. 965-1066 (small triangles)*

13. Rhos Fawr, Anglesey (Eadgar, 959-75)
14. Bardsey Island (Eadgar, 959-75)
15. Caer Gybi, Holyhead (Edward the Martyr, 975-8)
16. Llancarfan (Æthelræd II, 978-1016)
17. Caerwent (Æthelræd II, 978-1016)
18. Llancarfan (Æthelræd II, 978-1016)
19. St Lythans (Æthelræd II, 978-1016)
20. Sully Moors (Æthelræd II, 978-1016)
21. Caernarfon (Cnut, 1016-35)
22. Caerwent (Harthacnut, 1040-2)
23. Rhuddlan (Edward the Confessor, 1042-66)
24. Harlech area (Edward the Confessor, 1042-66)
25. St Davids (Harold, 1066)