

# Early-Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales: Context and Function

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*ANTIQUARIAN, archaeological, topographical and place-name evidence may be used to piece together the original contexts of a significant number of early-medieval inscribed and sculptured stones in Wales and throw valuable light on their functions and on the origins and development of church sites. The differing locations of early inscribed stones are examined, including associations with prehistoric and Roman monuments as well as with cemeteries and churches, and regional differences are noted. It is suggested that, although their primary function was commemorative, some monuments also acted as symbols of landowning by secular elites. Cross-decorated stones originating c. A.D. 600 mark a change to largely anonymous grave-markers mainly associated with cemeteries and local churches, while some others are indicative of landowning by the church. Crosses and cross-slabs of the 9th to 11th centuries are clustered in and around major monasteries and regional churches. Some record the donation of land to the church while the Pillar of Eliseg functioned as a symbol of secular entitlement to land.*

Half a century ago V. E. Nash-Williams published his corpus of early-medieval inscribed stones and stone sculpture, *The Early Christian Monuments of Wales*.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the introduction he wrote that the monuments were of special interest 'as the principal material remains of the centuries that elapsed between the end of Roman occupation and the coming of the Normans'.<sup>2</sup> This statement remains as true today as it was 50 years ago — the number of definite secular settlement sites in Wales from that period, for example, is still only sixteen.<sup>3</sup> Nash-Williams saw the monuments not only as reflecting cultural exchanges and the movements of people but also as contemporary records of the conversion of Wales to Christianity and the development of the Church.<sup>4</sup> He divided the 415 monuments in his corpus into four typological and chronological groups. Group I consisted of the simple inscribed stones, 9 ogam, 104 Latin and 26 bilingual, which he dated from the 5th to the 7th centuries. Group II was made up of over 150

<sup>1</sup> V. E. Nash-Williams, *The Early Christian Monuments of Wales* (Cardiff, 1950). This replaced an earlier corpus by J. O. Westwood, *Lapidarium Walliae: the Early Inscribed and Sculptured Stones of Wales* (Oxford, 1876-9). For the inscribed stones see also, R. A. S. Macalister, *Corpus Inscriptionum Insularum Celticarum*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1945, 1949).

<sup>2</sup> Nash-Williams, op. cit. in note 1, 1.

<sup>3</sup> N. Edwards and A. Lane (eds.), *Early Medieval Settlements in Wales AD 400-1100* (Bangor and Cardiff, 1988); N. Edwards, 'Landscape and settlement in medieval Wales: an introduction', 1-11 in ed. (ed.), *Landscape and Settlement in Medieval Wales* (Oxford, 1997), 2-5.

<sup>4</sup> Nash-Williams, op. cit. in note 1, 1.

cross-decorated stones, a few with inscriptions, which he dated primarily from the 7th to the 9th centuries, while indicating the possibility that some might be later. Group III comprised over 120 more ambitious sculptured crosses and cross-slabs, some with inscriptions, which he dated from the 9th to 11th centuries. Group IV were transitional Romanesque monuments of the 11th to 13th centuries. While there are undoubtedly some problems with the definition of these groups and their dating, especially Group II, they remain a useful tool for the study of what continues to be a growing corpus. Some 119 new monuments, whole or fragmentary, have come to light since 1950: 9 inscribed stones, 50 cross-decorated stones and 60 crosses and cross-slabs.<sup>5</sup>

The archaeological context of the monuments does not seem to have been of great interest to Nash-Williams since he records it only in the briefest of terms. This may have been one factor which led John Lewis to question how far the original archaeological contexts of these stones might ever be recovered since it was clear that many had been moved in the past and had often been deposited in churches for safe-keeping.<sup>6</sup> However, if accounts of the discovery and earliest location of individual monuments are scrutinised, often a considerable amount of information can still be pieced together, especially if other archaeological, documentary, place-name and topographical evidence is brought into play. Firstly antiquarians, the most significant of which were Edward Lhuyd (1660–1709) and his associates, were often interested in recording the precise locations of stones and how they were discovered. If these are known, it is then possible to plot the subsequent movements of particular monuments in the antiquarian and archaeological literature. Secondly, during the mid-19th century many medieval churches in Wales were demolished and replaced with Victorian buildings, sometimes constructed on the old foundations, while many others were drastically restored. It was these activities which led to the discovery of large numbers of early-medieval monuments, often fragmentary, which had, until then, been built into earlier masonry, or were sometimes found beneath the church, or dug up within the graveyard, or discovered incorporated into the enclosure wall.<sup>7</sup> It is unlikely that such monuments had been brought on to the site. Thirdly, where monuments have

<sup>5</sup> A new *Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales* is being prepared under the aegis of the University of Wales Board of Celtic Studies and the National Museums & Galleries of Wales. The new work will be in three volumes. Dr Mark Redknap and John Lewis of the National Museum are responsible for Vol. 1 on the South and South-East. The present author is responsible for Vols. 2 and 3 covering the rest of Wales. A new database of the inscriptions, K. Forsyth, M. Handley, K. Lockyear (with P. Kershaw and J.-P. Wilson), *The Celtic Inscribed Stones Project*, may be found at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/cisp>

<sup>6</sup> J. M. Lewis, 'A survey of the Early Christian monuments of Dyfed, west of the Taf', 177–92 in G. C. Boon and J. M. Lewis (eds.), *Welsh Antiquity* (Cardiff, 1976), at p. 184.

<sup>7</sup> Examples include: cross-decorated stones found during the rebuilding of St Gwynndaf's Church, Llanwnda (Pembrokeshire) (Nash-Williams, op. cit. in note 1, nos. 328–32, 415), see J. O. Westwood, 'Notice of early inscribed stones found in the church of Llanwnda, Pembrokeshire', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 4th ser., xiii (1882), 104–7; J. R. Allen, 'Catalogue of the early Christian monuments in Pembrokeshire', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 5th ser., xiii (1896), 290–306, at 295–6; Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales, *Pembrokeshire* (London, 1925), 190–1; a Group I inscribed stone, Nash-Williams, op. cit. in note 1, no. 142, was found under the chancel of the church at Eglwys Gwynn (Carmarthenshire); J. F. Jones, 'Two corrections', *Carmarthenshire Antiquary*, 11 (1945–6), 42–3; three cross-decorated stones were found during grave-digging within the churchyard at Llantrisant, Llanfihangel-y-Creuddyn (Ceredigion); W. G. Thomas, 'Four stones from Ceredigion', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, cxxvi (1977), 64–8; the inscribed cross at Llanarthney (Carmarthenshire) was first recorded as built into the churchyard wall: S. Lewis, *Topographic Dictionary of Wales*, 2 vols. (London, 1833).

come to light unconnected with present church sites, the circumstances of discovery are frequently recorded and, although stones were clearly moved, often for re-use as gateposts, their size and weight mean that they are only rarely likely to have been transported very far and it is sometimes possible to discern their likely context from other evidence.<sup>8</sup>

The aim of this article is to examine examples of early inscribed stones, cross-decorated stones and freestanding crosses and cross-slabs where the original archaeological contexts of the monuments can be pieced together and used in conjunction with other evidence, such as the inscriptions, to build up a better picture of their functions. While the primary function of Nash-Williams's Group I and most Group II stones was commemorative, I will argue that a significant number of monuments in Groups I to III could have functioned at least partly as symbols of landownership, either by secular elites or by the church. I will also demonstrate that identifying the original locations of the monuments can help to identify many early cemetery and ecclesiastical sites and thereby certain trends in the broader evolution of the early medieval church in Wales.

### EARLY INSCRIBED STONES

The early inscribed stones, Latin, ogam and bilingual, may be broadly dated by their epigraphy and language from the 5th to mid-7th centuries. Their distribution is concentrated in NW. and SW. Wales with a sprinkling across the South. Ogam and bilingual inscribed stones are mainly found in the South-West in the Irish-settled areas of the early-medieval kingdom of Dyfed, with a small group in Brycheiniog and two outliers in the North. The two most common basic formulae are the Christian *hic iacit*, 'here lies', favoured on the Latin monuments and concentrated in the North-West with further examples in the South and South-West, and the religiously neutral 'of X son of Y' found on ogam and bilingual and some Latin stones concentrated in the South-West, or sometimes a combination of the two. In some instances only a name is found, usually in the genitive case 'of X'.<sup>9</sup> These formulae indicate that the inscribed stones were primarily commemorative and they are generally thought to have functioned as grave-markers, though none has ever been found in a primary context marking the head of a grave. However Mark Handley, building on Thomas Charles-Edwards's research on ogam stones in the Irish legal texts, has recently indicated that the functions of at least some inscribed stones are likely to have been more complex. He has shown that the

<sup>8</sup> A Group I inscribed stone, Nash-Williams, *op. cit.*, note 1, no. 345, first recorded in 1743 by Lewis Morris beside the road outside the home of William Lewis at Bwlch y Clawdd, Maenclochog (SN 0960 2720) is a notable exception: E. Owen, 'Lewis Morris's notes on some inscribed stones in Wales', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 5th ser., xii (1896), 129–44, at p. 134. Before 1776 it was moved 22.5 km NE. to another family home at Gellydywyll, Cenarth (SN 269 406): Anon., *Gents Mag.*, 1776, 508. In 1893 it was moved again to Cenarth churchyard (SN 0960 2720): D. H. Davies, 'Removal of Gellydywell inscribed stone to Cenarth Churchyard', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 5th ser., xi (1894), 80–2. However, the inscription links it with two other early inscribed stones, Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, nos. 313–14, from Llandêilo Fach churchyard approximately 400 m SE. of Bwlch y Clawdd, and it may originally have come from here: Macalister, *op. cit.* in note 1, nos. 433–4, 441.

<sup>9</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, 3–10; J. D. Bullock, 'Early Christian memorial formulae', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, cv (1956), 133–41; C. Thomas, *And Shall These Mute Stones Speak? Post-Roman Inscriptions in Western Britain* (Cardiff, 1994).

sparse documentary evidence from Wales, as well as Ireland, points towards the use of some inscribed stones as boundary markers and as proof of land ownership. He has also suggested that stones with names in the genitive case, generally taken to mean '[the grave] or '[the body] or '[the stone] of X', with these words understood, might also imply '[the land] of X'. Furthermore their use in this way is likely to have originated in Ireland and been brought to SW. Wales in the 5th century as a result of Irish settlement, but then came to influence the functions of stones in other parts of western Britain where initially they may have acted solely as grave-markers.<sup>10</sup> However, what can be deduced from a study of the archaeological contexts of these stones?

#### PREHISTORIC CONTEXTS

Jeremy Knight has identified six early inscribed stones associated with Bronze-age barrows, five in the uplands of Glamorgan and one in NE. Wales.<sup>11</sup> These may be exemplified by Abercar (Rhondda Cynon Taff) where two inscribed stones were discovered incorporated into farm buildings and later a Bronze-age collared urn, a pygmy cup and human remains were found under 'a large heap of stones' in front of the farmhouse.<sup>12</sup> One of the stones certainly marked a burial since the inscription incorporates the formula *in hoc tumulo* ('in this tomb').

The association of inscribed stones with Bronze-age barrows can be seen as part of the more general re-use as early-medieval cemeteries of prehistoric burial, ritual and settlement sites which were still visible features in the later landscape. These associations are apparent for a number of inscribed stones in NW. Wales. The recently published excavation of the site of Capel Eithin in southern Anglesey demonstrates the association with Bronze-age burial very clearly.<sup>13</sup> The site is located on a low promontory (c. 84 m OD) with extensive views over the surrounding countryside and across the Menai Strait to Snowdonia. It was first utilised in the late Neolithic with domestic and possibly ritual activity. During the Bronze Age it became the site of a flat, cremation urn cemetery and later a stone cairn was constructed over a charcoal spread and a gold hoard was deposited nearby. The site was then abandoned and briefly reoccupied in the 2nd century A.D. with the erection of a masonry structure, possibly a Roman signal station. The Bronze-age cairn then proved an attractive focus in the early Middle Ages for a large mixed inhumation cemetery of which 99 dug and long-cist graves with a small rectangular special grave structure were excavated. The inscribed stone, though now lost, was recorded at the site by Edward Lhuyd at the end of the 17th

<sup>10</sup> M. Handley, 'The early medieval inscriptions of Western Britain: function and sociology', 339–61 in J. Hill and M. Swan (eds.), *The Community, the Family and the Saint: Patterns and Power in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, 1998), at 340–9; T. Charles-Edwards, 'Boundaries in Irish law', 83–7 in P. H. Sawyer (ed.), *Medieval Settlement* (London, 1976).

<sup>11</sup> J. K. Knight, *The End of Antiquity: Archaeology, Society and Religion AD 235–700* (Stroud, 1999), 140–1; Nash-Williams, op. cit. in note 1, nos. 40–1, 184, 197, 229, 268.

<sup>12</sup> J. O. Westwood, op. cit. in note 1, 64; C. Wilkins and J. Rhys, 'The Abercar stone', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 5th ser., III (1886), 93–6; A. Williams, 'Prehistoric and Roman pottery in the Museum of the Royal Institution of South Wales, Swansea', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, xciv (1939), 21–9, at 22–4.

<sup>13</sup> SH 4900 7270; S. I. White and G. Smith, 'A funerary and ceremonial centre at Capel Eithin, Gaerwen, Anglesey: excavations of Neolithic, Roman and early medieval features in 1980 and 1981', *Trans. Anglesey Antiq. Soc.*, (1999), 9–166.

century and drawn from his notes by his assistant William Jones. It commemorates *Devorix*, a Celtic name which Patrick Sims-Williams has translated as meaning 'divine king', and a combination of linguistic and epigraphic evidence suggests a 6th- or possibly early 7th-century date.<sup>14</sup> Therefore the context of the stone clearly suggests it was a grave-marker and the prominent location of the site could also point to its possible function proclaiming ownership of the surrounding land.

There is also evidence to suggest that Bronze-age standing stones acted as foci for early-medieval burials and that in some instances inscriptions were added to them. For example, at Llanfaelog in western Anglesey a large standing stone, almost certainly still *in situ*, is located in a prominent position beside a modern road which may follow the line of an ancient routeway.<sup>15</sup> The stone is over 2 m high and low down on the E. face is a well-defined cup-mark which suggests a later neolithic or early Bronze-age date.<sup>16</sup> When the stone was re-used in the 5th or early 6th century the vertical inscription **CVNOGVSI / HIC IACIT** ('Of Cunogusus, here he lies') was incised towards the top of the N. face so it could be seen by those approaching from the North-East. The vicinity of the stone has been disturbed by quarrying so it is doubtful whether any evidence for burials would remain. Interestingly, however, the ownership of land may also be implied. Ifor Williams suggested that **CVNOGVSI**, an Irish name, survives in the name of the neighbouring settlement of Pencaernisiog, derived from *Penconisiog*, with Conisiog meaning 'land of Conws'.<sup>17</sup>

At least two, and most probably three, inscribed stones have been discovered in a field known as *Cae Maen Hir* ('The Field of the Long Stone') at Tir Gwyn, Llannor on the Llŷn peninsula (Gwynedd). The first, inscribed **DERVORI HIC IACIT** ('Of Dervorus, here he lies'), was noted by Edward Lhuyd and copied by William Jones as 'one of three or four found under Ground (in the form of the Graves) at Lhech Gynva rywyl'.<sup>18</sup> It is now lost. The other two, inscribed vertically with **IOVENALI FILI / ETERNI HIC IACIT** ('Of Iovenalis son of Eternus, here he lies'), both Latin names, and **VENDESETLI** ('Of Vendesetl'), a British name, came to light shortly before 1833 also re-used as the sides of a cist-grave.<sup>19</sup> It may be argued that before their re-use these stones marked earlier graves on the site and there are other references to the disturbance of long-cists in the same field indicating the presence of a cemetery.<sup>20</sup> However, what is of interest here is that there are still two large prehistoric standing stones located 145 m apart in the same

<sup>14</sup> P. Sims-Williams, 'The **DEVORIGI** inscription from Capel Eithin, Llanfihangel Ysceifiog, Anglesey', 146-9, fig. 50, in White and Smith, *op. cit.* in note 13.

<sup>15</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 9. SH 3560 7460. The stone is now partially obscured by a modern roadside wall. A second example of a re-used standing stone from Anglesey is that from Llanbabo: *ibid.*, no. 6; see F. Lynch, *Prehistoric Anglesey*, 2nd ed. (Llangefni, 1991), 151, note 26.

<sup>16</sup> P. Crew, 'Cunogusi stone', *Archaeol. Wales*, xxi (1981), 20.

<sup>17</sup> I. Williams, Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales, *Anglesey* (London, 1937), cxv-cxvi; G. T. Jones and T. Roberts, *The Place-Names of Anglesey* (Anglesey and Bangor, 1996), 127.

<sup>18</sup> London, British Library, Stowe MS 1023, f. 188; Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 94. Nash-Williams wrongly records the inscription as reading **IACET** rather than **IACIT**.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, nos. 96-7; S. Lewis, *op. cit.* in note 7, Llannor; Westwood, *op. cit.* in note 1, 180-1; C. E. Breese, 'Meini hirion on Tir Gwyn Farm in the parish of Llannor', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, lxxx (1925), 385-7.

<sup>20</sup> Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales, *Caernarvonshire, Vol. III, West* (London, 1964), no. 1675.

field where they would have acted as a visible focus for the cemetery.<sup>21</sup> Although the two remaining inscribed stones are tall thin pillars and of a different stone, in their original setting they may have been intended to reflect the more massive prehistoric standing stones. The field, at 93 m OD, has the appearance of a natural amphitheatre with impressive views of mountains in almost all directions, including south-west to Carn Fadrun and Mynydd Rhiw, west to Garn Boduan and north-east towards Yr Eifl, with more distant views towards Snowdonia to the East and South-East. Again, such a location, with its panoramic views, might indicate that the inscribed stones were intended to indicate the possession of land as well as marking graves.

The prehistoric evidence at Arfryn, Bodedern in western Anglesey is enigmatic but suggests that secular, as well as ritual and burial monuments, may have acted as foci for later cemeteries and inscribed stones. Its low hilltop location (c. 50 m OD)<sup>22</sup> has commanding views over the surrounding countryside. In 1971 excavations uncovered part of an extensive early-medieval cemetery with over 100 dug and long-cist graves which focused on a grave-free area with a group of post settings, one of which was radiocarbon dated to cal. 1420–1040 B.C. (2 sigma). This feature is now being interpreted, on the basis of analogies elsewhere in NW. Wales, as a clay-walled round-hut which would still have been visible as a low curvilinear earthwork in the early Middle Ages. At the southern end of the excavation an arc of a curvilinear ditch was uncovered which is presumed to encircle the site. A radiocarbon sample from the fill dated to cal. A.D. 570–820 (2 sigma). A number of slabs were found in the ditch where they had possibly functioned as a footbridge; one of these was a re-used inscribed stone with **ERCAGNI** ('Of Ercagnus') placed vertically.<sup>23</sup> It is an Irish name incorporating the pagan deity Erc and linguistically datable to the late 5th or 6th century.<sup>24</sup>

There is also evidence to suggest that at least one Iron-age site in NW. Wales provided a focus for the erection of an early-medieval inscribed stone and associated burial. Two Anglesey antiquarians, Henry Rowlands (1655–1723) and Lewis Morris (1701–65), recorded an incomplete inscribed stone (now lost) from Capel Heilin, Trefollwyn, near Llangefni, Anglesey. The latter illustrated it showing the fragmentary vertical inscription as reading **[HIC I]ACIT / [ . . . ]SORIS**.<sup>25</sup> In 1993 the upper part of a mutilated cylindrical stone pillar with La Tène carved ornament was discovered built into a hedge bank, with an undecorated fragment of a second pillar nearby. Two curvilinear enclosures are also visible in the same field on air photographs. The La Tène decorated pillar is most likely to be indicative of an Iron-age burial site which then acted as a focus

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 1676 at SH 3441 3903 and SH 3580 3535. The precise location of the grave with the re-used inscribed stones is unknown but their secondary position is recorded as just west of the northern standing stone at SH 3438 3920.

<sup>22</sup> SH 3414 8000.

<sup>23</sup> CAR-1557 3000 ± 70 B.P.; CAR-1556 1340 ± 60 B.P. Pers. comm. J. Hedges and D. Longley; J. Hedges, forthcoming. For an interim report, which suggests that the central feature is a wooden chapel and that the stone is re-used in a long-cist grave, interpretations which are no longer acceptable, see R. B. White, 'Excavations at Arfryn, Bodedern: long-cist cemeteries and the origins of Christianity in Britain', *Trans. Anglesey Antiq. Soc.*, (1971–2), 10–45.

<sup>24</sup> White, *op. cit.* in note 23, 34–5, pl.; D. McManus, *A Guide to Ogam* (Maynooth, 1991), 107.

<sup>25</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 25; SH 449 772.

for the inscribed stone which would also have marked a burial, probably part of a cemetery associated with Capel Heilin.<sup>26</sup> It is also worth noting that in Brittany several similar Iron-age pillars, such as Louannec, Côtes-d'Armor, and Locoal-Mendon 1, Morbihan, were themselves re-used for early-medieval inscriptions.<sup>27</sup>

Examples of connections between inscribed stones and prehistoric sites may also be identified in SW. Wales. However, the fact that these are fewer and the evidence is less well recorded does not necessarily mean that the picture is significantly different. For example, an ogam stone with a fragmentary inscription and a cross, a later addition, was discovered at Mynydd Stamber, Llanfyrnach (Pembrokeshire). It was found on an exposed hillside which rises to a height of 270 m OD and has wide views over the surrounding countryside. *Crochenau* ('pots') and evidence of burning were also found which suggest the presence of Bronze-age cremation urns on the same site.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the bilingual stone commemorating 'Avitoria daughter of Cunignus' from the church at Eglwys Gymyn (Carmarthenshire) was discovered c. 1855 during excavations in the chancel about the same time as 'earthenware sepulchral urns' (now lost) came to light embedded in the S. wall.<sup>29</sup>

The context of the inscribed stone from Penbryn (Ceredigion), is particularly interesting. The vertical inscription commemorates **CORBALENGI IACIT / ORDOVS** ('Of Corbalengus, he lies, an Ordovician'), a man with an Irish name, apparently from N. Wales, where at least some sense of the original Iron-age tribal identity of the Ordovices was still of significance in the 5th or early 6th centuries.<sup>30</sup> As the place-name suggests the stone is located on a rise (c. 110 m OD) with sea views to the West and North. Lhuyd, who was the first to mention the stone, indicated that it lay beside a small heap of stones but that until recently it had stood on top of the cairn.<sup>31</sup> About 1806 the cairn was levelled and a Roman cremation urn was found together with some coins including an *aureus* of Titus, A.D. 79–81.<sup>32</sup> It may be suggested that the cairn was probably originally a Bronze-age barrow which had subsequently been re-used for a Roman cremation after the original remains had been removed, a practice identified elsewhere in Roman Britain, for example in Somerset.<sup>33</sup> The re-use of Iron-age enclosures is also suggested. The

<sup>26</sup> N. Edwards, 'Two carved stone pillars from Trefollwyn, Anglesey,' *Archaeol. J.*, CLIV (1997), 108–17.

<sup>27</sup> W. Davies *et al.*, *The Inscriptions of Early Medieval Brittany* (Oakville CT and Aberystwyth, 2000), 137–44 and 221–9.

<sup>28</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 319; Macalister, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 439; J. Rhys, 'Three ancient inscriptions', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 6th ser., XIII, 383–90; SN 174 292.

<sup>29</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 142; G. G. T. Treherne, 'Notice of the discovery of an ogam stone at Eglwys Cynyn church', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 5th ser., VI (1889), 224–5; SN 2310 1065.

<sup>30</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 126; *pers. comm.* Patrick Sims-Williams.

<sup>31</sup> SN 2890 5137; E. Lhuyd, in W. Camden, *Camden's Britannia, newly translated into English with large Additions and Improvements. Published by Edmund Gibson* (London, 1695), 647.

<sup>32</sup> S. R. Meyrick, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Cardigan* (London, 1808), 178–9; D. H. Davies, 'Romano-British remains', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 6th ser., V (1905), 161–8, at 165–6.

<sup>33</sup> L. Grinsell, 'Somerset barrows, pt I: West and South', *Somerset Archaeol. Nat. Hist.*, cxiii, supplement (1969), 1–43; *id.*, 'Somerset barrows, pt II: North and East', *Somerset Archaeol. Nat. Hist.*, cxv, supplement (1971), 44–132.

two stones, one ogham, one bilingual, from Castle Villa Farm, Brawdy (Pembrokeshire) were found adjacent to an impressive multivallate hillfort of probably Iron-age date.<sup>34</sup> The re-use of Iron-age enclosures which acted as a focus for early-medieval burial has been noted elsewhere in the South-West at Caer Bayvil and Caerau, St Dogmaels Rural.<sup>35</sup>

These examples of the location of inscribed stones and early-medieval cemeteries on sites with visible prehistoric monuments, particularly burial and ritual sites, are sufficiently numerous to demonstrate that this is not mere coincidence. Indeed the role and significance of the inscribed stones need to be considered with this in mind. The link between the location of early-medieval cemeteries and prehistoric sites which were clearly visible in the later landscape is well known and was first noted by Charles Thomas.<sup>36</sup> More recently Richard Bradley has argued that a particular group of people might harness a ritual past in order to help to secure their own position and place it beyond challenge.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore Paul Connerton has noted, 'that whenever the social institutions for which "old" traditions were designed begin to crumble under the impact of rapid social change, a widespread and instant invention of new rituals occurs' and that this may include 'rituals that claim continuity with an appropriate historical past'.<sup>38</sup> The post-Roman period in Wales, as elsewhere in formerly Roman-occupied areas of Britain, was a time of instability and rapid change. The final end of Roman occupation left behind a power vacuum, offering opportunities for Irish settlement, including the establishment of the kingdom of Dyfed, as well as more limited settlement in Gwynedd and Brycheiniog. At the same time other new elites were establishing themselves and these may have included the settlement of people from Manaw Gododdin (in SE. Scotland) in Gwynedd. The old established elites would also have tried to cling on to power.<sup>39</sup> This period also witnessed the rapid expansion of Christianity in Wales, probably also centred on the upper echelons of society.<sup>40</sup>

It is also during this time that we see the establishment of new commemorative practices whereby members of these elites, almost entirely men, were remembered by the erection, or occasionally re-use, of prominent stone monuments carved with their names and frequently with the names of their fathers. In their choice of sites with visible prehistoric remains, including Bronze-age cairns and barrows and later neolithic or Bronze-age standing stones, often prominently placed and/or with commanding views over the surrounding countryside, these people seem to have been making a clear and visible link with the past. They were drawing their claims to the land from those who had held it in the past and in so doing were

<sup>34</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, nos. 296, 298; London, British Library Stowe MS 1023, f. 139; Stowe MS 1024, f. 52; J. R. Allen and J. O. Westwood, 'Discovery of two ogham stones at Castell Villia and four crosses at St. Edren's, Pembrokeshire', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 5th ser., 1 (1884), 46–50, at 46 and 49; Royal Commission Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales, *op. cit.* in note 7, nos. 62, 66.

<sup>35</sup> H. James, 'Excavations at Caer, Bayvil 1979', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, cxxxvi (1987), 51–76, at p. 72.

<sup>36</sup> C. Thomas, *The Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain* (Oxford, 1971), 51–8.

<sup>37</sup> R. J. Bradley, 'Time regained, the creation of continuity', *J. Brit. Archaeol. Ass.*, cxi (1987), 1–17, at p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> P. Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, 1989), 51.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas, *op. cit.* in note 9; W. Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1982), 89.

<sup>40</sup> N. Edwards, 'Identifying the archaeology of the early church in Wales and Cornwall', 49–62 in J. Blair and C. Pyrah (eds.), *Church Archaeology, Research Directions for the Future* (CBA research report, York, 1996), at p. 51.



manipulating the association in order to enhance their own position. They may have perceived them as ‘ancestors’, real or invented, who through their monuments provided physical ‘testimony’ that the land had been held since time immemorial. However, a conscious look backwards to the pre-Roman past interpreted in heroic terms is also implied. By the 9th or 10th century, when the verses of the Welsh poem *Englynion y Beddau* (‘Stanzas of the Graves’) were brought together, it is clear that prominent prehistoric monuments, such as standing stones and cairns, were explained as the graves of mythical heroes and it seems likely that at least some of these associations may go back much further, in which case it is possible that ‘ancestors’ in the mythical past were being used to legitimise the present.<sup>41</sup> It is also relevant to note that many pagan Anglo-Saxon graves and cemeteries were also sited with reference to earlier monuments, especially Bronze-age barrows. Indeed, Howard Williams has recently argued along very similar lines that the politically and militarily dominant Anglo-Saxons may likewise have placed their dead on ancient sites, ‘to legitimise claims and controls over land, resources, and other social groups’.<sup>42</sup> In this light it may be argued that the functions of the inscribed stones, which either re-use or are set against a backdrop of earlier monuments, often in prominent locations, are not merely commemorative, but also seem to act as written proof of entitlement to the surrounding land and its resources apparently since ancient times, whether these were in fact long held, or, conversely, recently acquired, by Irish settlers, for example, in the vacuum and upheaval of the sub-Roman period.

#### ROMAN CONTEXTS

In the uplands of S. Wales the careful and often conspicuous siting of inscribed stones beside Roman roads and in relation to the topography was recognised long ago by Aileen Fox. Two of these, Banwen Pyrddin, located just south of the fort at Coelbren, and Gelligaer Mountain, which is located on the probable line of the Roman road which runs north-west from the fort at Gelligaer, have already been noted as also associated with Bronze-age barrows.<sup>43</sup> The site of a third, *Maen Madoc*, Ystradfellte, located beside the Roman road north-east of Coelbren, was subsequently excavated, and the possibly original stone hole was located set into the edge of the Roman road, but no evidence was found for a burial.<sup>44</sup>

Turning to the uplands of NW. Wales, a significant number of inscribed stones, although they are not now *in situ*, may be shown to have had a similar proximity to Roman roads and forts (Fig. 1). There are also instances where stones have been sited apparently with reference to both Roman and prehistoric remains.

<sup>41</sup> T. Jones, ‘The Black Book of Carmarthen “Stanzas of the Graves”’, *Proc. Brit. Acad.*, LIII (1968), 97–137; P. Sims-Williams, ‘Clas Beuno and the four branches of the Mabinogi’, 111–27 in B. Maier and S. Zimmer (eds.), *150 Jahre ‘Mabinogion’ Deutsch-Walisische Kulturbeziehungen* (Tübingen, 2001), 111–12 and 116–22.

<sup>42</sup> H. Williams, ‘Ancient landscapes and the dead: the reuse of Prehistoric and Roman monuments as early Anglo-Saxon burial sites’, *Medieval Archaeol.*, xli (1997), 1–32, at p. 26.

<sup>43</sup> A. Fox, ‘The siting of some inscribed stones of the Dark Ages in Glamorgan and Breconshire’, *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, xciv (1939), 30–41; Nash-Williams, op. cit. in note 1, nos. 197 and 268. The first is located *in situ* at SO 1034 0340, the second was first recorded at SN 8519 0855.

<sup>44</sup> C. Fox, ‘The re-erection of Maen Madoc, Ystradfellte, Breconshire’, *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, xcvi (1940), 210–6; Nash-Williams, op. cit. in note 1, no. 73; SN 9182 1576.

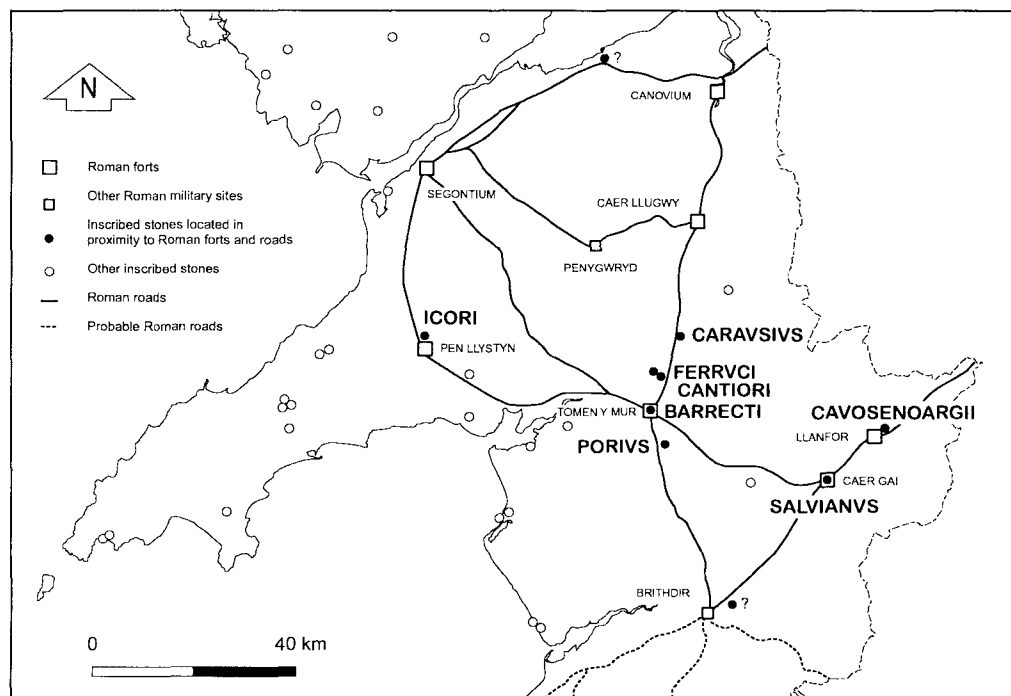


FIG. 1

Map of North-West Wales showing the relationship of some Group I inscribed stones to Roman roads and forts. *Drawn by L. A. Dutton.*

It may be argued that two stones now in Penmachno church (Gwynedd) in fact originated from two different sites along the Roman road which runs south from the fort at Caer Llugwy near Betws-y-Coed to that at Tomen-y-Mur near Ffestiniog. Nash-Williams wrongly ascribed the stone with a cross and chi-rho hook and below a horizontal inscription commemorating **CARAVSIVS / HIC IACIT / IN HOC CON/GERIES LA/PIDVM** ('Carausius, here he lies, in this heap of stones') as coming from Penmachno churchyard.<sup>45</sup> In fact a local 19th-century antiquarian Richard Williams, known as Wmffre Dafydd, recorded that it was found with two graves beside the Roman road at Rhiw Bach slate quarry.<sup>46</sup> This is located 6.5 km south-west of Penmachno near the summit of the pass at Bwlch-Carreg-y-Frán between Cwm Penmachno and Cwm Teigl at a height of over 400 m OD.<sup>47</sup>

Some 3.75 km further south-west along the Roman road on lower ground at 300 m OD was the site known as *Beddau Gwyr Ardudwy* ('The Graves of the Men of Ardudwy'). Two inscribed stones have been recorded from this site. The first, now lost, was reported to Edward Lhuyd in 1694 by J. E. Jones of Rhuthun as having

<sup>45</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 101.

<sup>46</sup> Dolgellau Record Office, *Traethawd Wmffre Dafydd*, 6.

<sup>47</sup> SH 741 461.

been brought from the site of *Beddau Gwŷr Arduwŷy* and built into the church wall at Ffestiniog. The inscription read **FERRVCI HIC IACIT** ('Of Ferrucus, here he lies').<sup>48</sup> The second, now at Penmachno, was recorded as coming from *Beddau Gwŷr Arduwŷy* by Richard Williams.<sup>49</sup> It is inscribed vertically downwards on two adjacent faces of the stone and commemorates **CANTIORI HIC IACIT / [V]ENEDOTIS CIVE FVIT / [C]ONSOBRINO // MA[G]LI MAGISTRATI** ('Of Cantiorix, here he lies. He was a citizen of Venedos and cousin of Maglos the *magistratus*'). Venedos is the earliest Celtic term for the Welsh kingdom of Gwynedd which must already have been in existence when this stone was erected some time before the middle of the 6th century. *Magistratus* is the title of a Roman office.<sup>50</sup> The name *Beddau Gwŷr Arduwŷy* ('the Graves of the Men of Arduwŷy') surely suggests a heroic origin but the original nature of the site is enigmatic and today only the Roman road is still visible. The other upstanding remains had been more-or-less destroyed by around 1870 and a succession of earlier antiquarian descriptions of the site is confusing. However, they include several references to likely long-cist graves marked by upright stones, suggesting a cemetery, as well as cairns, stones and other remains, which are thought to have included burial monuments of prehistoric date.<sup>51</sup>

It can be shown that the inscribed stone known as *Bedd Porius* ('the Grave of Porius'), now in the National Museum and Gallery Cardiff, was originally sited near the Roman road some 8 km south-south-east of the fort at Tomen-y-Mur. It is inscribed horizontally but some of the letters appear to have been mutilated. Colin Gresham has plausibly read the inscription as **PORIVS / HIC IN TVMVLO IACIT / HOMO [XR]IANVS FVIT** ('Porius, here in the tomb he lies. He was a ?Christian man').<sup>52</sup> Lhuyd recorded the location of the stone as in a field called *Maes y Bedh* (= *Maes y Bedd*, 'Field of the Grave') two fields away from a still extant standing stone known as *Llech Idris*. This field gives its name to a building marked on the 1901 25-in. Ordnance Survey map and a cast of the inscribed stone now stands at 260 m OD in the centre of the adjacent field which fits Lhuyd's description of the location. The SW. end of the field abuts the line of the Roman road. Colin Gresham has suggested that it stood at the point where an ancient E.-W. route crossed the Roman road.<sup>53</sup>

At least three inscribed stones have been found in close proximity to Roman forts. One of these, the only bilingual stone in NW. Wales, commemorates **ICORI FILIVS / POTENTI/NI** ('Icorix, the son of Potentinus'). Unusually for a

<sup>48</sup> R. H. Morris (ed.), *Parochialia of Edward Lhuyd* (Archaeol. Cambrensis supp., 3 vols., 1909-11), iii, 108; Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 277.

<sup>49</sup> *Traethawd*, *op. cit.* in note 46, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 103; Davies, *op. cit.* in note 39, 90-2.

<sup>51</sup> SH 7236 4274. The evidence is summarised by E. G. Bowen and C. A. Gresham, *History of Merioneth*, 1 (Dolgellau, 1967), 281-2. Recent excavations in the vicinity uncovered a section of Roman road and investigated one of several small mounds noted in the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales, *Merioneth* (London, 1921), 28; it was identified as a peat stack: D. Longley, 'Archaeological survey and excavation near Ffestiniog and Gellilydan', *J. Merioneth Hist. Record Soc.*, xii, 3 (1996), 211-20.

<sup>52</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 289; C. A. Gresham, 'Bedd Porius', *Bull. Board Celtic Stud.*, xxxii (1985), 386-92.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 389, pl. I. The cast stands at SH 7329 3137. The building called Maes-y-Bedd formerly stood at SH 7326 3140.

bilingual stone the Latin inscription is horizontal and the ogam, which reads **ICORIGAS** ('Of Icorix'), is on the right angle rather than the left.<sup>54</sup> It was found in 1901 at Llystygwyn Farm, Bryncir (Gwynedd) in the foundations of the gateway to a field 200 m east of the line of the Roman road running north to the fort at Caernarfon (*Segontium*) and only 300 m north-north-east of Penllystyn fort.<sup>55</sup> The latter was excavated prior to destruction by quarrying and it was found that the fort had been constructed c. A.D. 80 but abandoned shortly afterwards. A fortlet was then built over part of the site, probably in the early to mid-2nd century, and fragments of a later palisaded enclosure of unknown date were also uncovered.<sup>56</sup>

Similarly, a lost stone was recorded c. 1660 by the antiquarian Robert Vaughan of Hengwrt (1592–1666) in his *Survey of Merioneth*. The precise reading is unclear but it appears to commemorate Salvianus and to include both the *hic iacit* and 'X son of Y' formulae.<sup>57</sup> Vaughan indicates that the stone had been dug up at the fort of Caer Gai, located at the SW. end of Lake Bala, which was occupied in the late 1st and early 2nd century.<sup>58</sup> Various anomalous features have been recorded in the vicinity of the fort, including part of a possible outer curvilinear enclosure, now destroyed. Bones were reportedly dug up in a field known as Cae Cappel [*sic*] immediately south-east of the fort so it is possible that the inscribed stone originally came from there, though no traces of graves have come to light in a recent magnetometer survey of the area.<sup>59</sup>

The location of the inscribed stone commemorating **CAVOSENIAGII** is particularly interesting because it may be suggested that the original siting of the stone may be related to a complex landscape of both prehistoric and Roman monuments. The stone was also first noted by Robert Vaughan built into the church at Llanfor which is located at the opposite end of Lake Bala on the fertile land between the Dee and Tryweryn.<sup>60</sup> A programme of aerial photography and a recent geophysical survey 300 m south-west of the church revealed a number of prehistoric monuments, including Bronze-age barrows, a possible Bronze-age cremation cemetery and a pit alignment overlain by Roman military remains,

<sup>54</sup> Nash-Williams, op. cit. in note 1, no. 84.

<sup>55</sup> SH 4828 4529; Anon., 'Inscribed stone at Llystygwyn [*sic*], Caernarvonshire', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 6th ser., vii (1903), 288; J. Rhys, 'Epigraphic notes', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 6th ser., vii, (1907), 66–102, at 96–102; Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales, *Caernarvonshire, Vol. II: Central* (London, 1960), no. 1016; E. Wadclowe, *The Roman Roads of North Wales* (Ruthin, 1999), 223–6.

<sup>56</sup> A. H. A. Hogg, 'Pen Llystyn: a Roman fort and other remains', *Archaeol. J.*, cxxv (1968), 101–91; Edwards and Lane, op. cit. in note 3, 102–4.

<sup>57</sup> Nash-Williams, op. cit. in note 1, no. 283. Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales MS. 472 is considered the most accurate copy of Vaughan's survey. This gives **IC IACIT SALVIANVS BVRSOCAVI FILIVS CVPITIAN**. A drawing by Vaughan in N. L. W. Peniarth MS. 232, 132–3, shows the inscription in two lines and suggests the stone was fragmentary and only the first 5 letters of *Bursocavi* are given before the break. The L in *Salvianus* is not shown. A horizontal stroke at the end of *Cupitiani* might be a horizontal I giving *Cupitiani*. The letters F, L and I of *filius* are not clear but the reading seems likely with the LI possibly conjoined. See E. D. Jones, 'Camden, Vaughan, and Lhuyd, and Merionethshire', *J. Merioneth Hist. Rec. Soc.*, ii, 3 (1955), 209–27, at 225 and 227. The reading in R. Vaughan, 'Merionethshire', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 2nd ser., i (1850), 204 is not regarded as accurate.

<sup>58</sup> V. E. Nash-Williams, *The Roman Frontier of Wales*, 2nd ed. (Cardiff, 1969), 54–6; SH 878 315.

<sup>59</sup> W. Hughes, 'Llanuwchllyn', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 5th ser., vii (1885), 186; D. R. Thomas, 'The Roman station at Caergai', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 5th ser., vii (1885), 196–204, at p. 201, plan opp. p. 204; pers. comm. David Hopewell, Gwynedd Archaeological Trust.

<sup>60</sup> SH 9383 3670; Nash-Williams, op. cit. in note 1, no. 282; Jones, op. cit. in note 57, 225.

including an early fort and *vicus*, two temporary camps and a supply base.<sup>61</sup> Near the church was another site, now destroyed, heroically named *Pabell Llywarch Hen*, which has been identified as a stone circle.<sup>62</sup>

Another lost stone noted from the Roman fort at Tomen-y-Mur may provide a fourth example. The inscription was recorded as reading **D(is) M(anibus) BARRECTI(?) CARANTEI(?)**. This is the only example from Britain of a likely post-Roman inscription with the common pagan Roman formula *Dis Manibus* ('to the gods of the underworld').<sup>63</sup>

In contrast, in SW. Wales little connection can be made between Roman sites and the locations of inscribed stones simply because there is comparatively little archaeological evidence of an official Roman presence. However there is one likely exception. Recent research has revealed the line of a Roman road heading west from the town of *Moridunum* (Carmarthen) which passes only 200 m north of Castell Dwyran church.<sup>64</sup> This is where the bilingual stone with the encircled cross inscribed in Latin **MEMORIA / VOTEPORIGIS / PROTICTORIS** ('The memorial / tomb of Voteporix the Protector'), and ogam **VOTECORIGAS** ('Of Votecorix'), was first recorded c. 1880 as forming part of a stile in the churchyard boundary.<sup>65</sup> On linguistic grounds it is now questionable whether the inscription commemorates Vortepor, the mid-6th-century tyrant of Irish descent who ruled the Demetae and was castigated by Gildas.<sup>66</sup> However, the title *protector*, originally associated with a member of the elite Roman imperial bodyguard, clearly underlines the status of the man commemorated,<sup>67</sup> and is surely relevant to the likely original siting of the stone with reference to the Roman road and those who passed along it.

What, then, is the significance of locating inscribed stones beside Roman roads? Aileen Fox plausibly explained the link as an extension of the custom of Roman roadside burial.<sup>68</sup> However the reasons behind this and the conspicuous siting of the stones, sometimes in remote upland locations, need more explanation. It may be argued that the continuing custom of roadside burial was part of a common memory of the Roman past and its customs which, after almost 350 years of Roman colonial rule, would have survived for some generations after its demise, and could have been particularly important for those who linked themselves, or sought to link themselves, most closely with that Roman past. In this context the

<sup>61</sup> D. R. Wilson, 'Air-reconnaissance of Roman Wales 1969-88', 10-18 in B. C. Burnham and J. L. Davies (eds.), *Conquest, Co-existence and Change: Recent Work in Roman Wales, Trivium*, xxv, at 10-11; P. and S. Crew, 'Geophysical survey at Llanfor, Merioneth, 1997', *Archaeol. Wales*, xxxvii (1997), 13-20.

<sup>62</sup> Bowen and Gresham, op. cit. in note 51, 283 identified the site of *Pabell Llywarch Hen* at SH 9042 3662. However more recent research has suggested it was at SH 938 366, 100 m south of the church: National Archaeological Record Card (OS, 1973).

<sup>63</sup> Nash-Williams, op. cit. in note 1, no. 285; Westwood, op. cit. in note 1, 156-7, pl. LXXVIII, 4. The fort is at SH 707 388.

<sup>64</sup> N. Page, 'A Roman road west of Carmarthen: a new avenue of research', *Institute of Field Archaeologists Yearbook and Directory of Members* (2000), 23-4.

<sup>65</sup> Nash-Williams, op. cit. in note 1, no. 138; J. Rhys, 'Epigraphic notes', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 5th ser., xiii (1896), 98-125, at 108-10, SN 1440 1819.

<sup>66</sup> P. Sims-Williams, 'Dating the transition to Neo-Brittonic: phonology and history, 400-600', 217-61 in A. Bammesberger and A. Wollmann (eds.), *Britain 400-600: Language and History* (Heidelberg, 1990), at p. 226.

<sup>67</sup> T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), 168.

<sup>68</sup> Fox, op. cit. in note 43, 37-8.

wording of the Cantiorix inscription from the remote site of *Beddau Gwyr Arduwcy* is particularly interesting. This establishes the identity of Cantiorix as both */c/onsobrino Ma/g/li magistrati*, 'a cousin of Maglos the magistrate', a Roman office which makes a clear link with the Roman past, whether real or assumed, and as */V/enedotis cive*, 'a citizen of Gwynedd' which indicates his place in the new order. Similarly, the stone from Castell Dwyran names *Voleporigis Protectoris*, a man of Irish descent, but his title also harps back to the Roman past. To the literate traveller passing by such stones would have functioned primarily as memorials but their often prominent locations suggest that they might also have indicated land ownership and/or marked boundaries. The original location of the Carausius stone, for example, could suggest siting with reference to natural boundaries which may also have acted as the bounds of land ownership. The presence of prehistoric monuments could have brought added kudos.

The reasons for siting stones at or near Roman forts are more difficult to discern. It is important to note that all the forts discussed above were occupied in the earlier part of the Roman period, though there was almost certainly continuing native settlement in the vicinity. Reoccupation of formerly prestigious, defensive sites in strategic positions in the post-Roman period may well have been attractive to local leaders for practical as well as symbolic reasons but at present the archaeological evidence for such activity, apart from the inscribed stones, is tantalising at best. In the case of Llanfor the significance of the prehistoric ritual landscape could well have been a more important factor than the later, short-lived Roman military presence.

#### INSCRIBED STONES AND CHURCHES

Most of the inscribed stones discussed so far are not associated with churches. Instead, although some may have marked isolated burials, it may be argued that most were located in what were probably kin cemeteries which could well have included the graves of both pagans and Christians. These cemeteries, however, never developed into church sites but were subsequently abandoned, possibly during the 7th and 8th centuries, in favour of others which did. Many of the latter ultimately evolved into parish churches, but some only acquired the status of dependent chapels and a proportion of these later fell out of use. The best evidenced ecclesiastical foundations are those with a monastic nomenclature which, from the 6th century onwards, grew into important regional churches which, together with diocesan bishops, were responsible for pastoral care through a gradually expanding and evolving network of local churches.<sup>69</sup> In NW. Wales around 40% of inscribed stones are associated with church sites. However in the South-West the percentage is much higher at almost 70% which may hint at the earlier establishment of a pattern of pastoral care in this area centring on the kingdom of Dyfed compared with the kingdom of Gwynedd. Surprisingly few inscribed stones are associated with known monastic sites. In the North-West the lost stone recorded by Lhuyd from Tywyn is the only definite example, whereas in

<sup>69</sup> Thomas, *op. cit.* in note 36, 67–8; Edwards, *op. cit.* in note 40, 51, 58, fig. 3.2; H. Pryce, 'Pastoral care in early medieval Wales', 48–61 in J. Blair and R. Sharpe (eds.), *Pastoral Care before the Parish* (Leicester, 1992).

the South-West there are five examples: two from Nevern, and one each from Caldey Island, Llandeilo Fawr and Llanddewibrefi.<sup>70</sup>

It is inevitable that a proportion of the inscribed stones must have been lost. Nevertheless, where they have been found on church sites, they signal that these foundations almost certainly have their origins in the 5th to 7th centuries as places of burial which subsequently developed into local churches. Almost no archaeological investigation has been carried out in order to test this hypothesis. However at Llangian on the Llŷn Peninsula (Gwynedd) there is some independent corroboration. A stone with a vertical inscription commemorating **MELI MEDICI / FILI MARTINI / IACIT** ('Of Melus the doctor, the son of Martinus, [here] he lies') was first noted in the churchyard by Edward Lhuyd and copied by William Jones.<sup>71</sup> During repairs to the S. side of the curvilinear churchyard enclosure, a radiocarbon sample was obtained from charcoal at the base of stratified deposits which gave a date of cal. A.D. 430–670 (2 sigma).<sup>72</sup> At Llangadwaladr in SW. Anglesey the stone itself, again first noted by Lhuyd as built into the fabric of the church, gives an indication of date for the site, since it commemorates King Cadfan of Gwynedd who is historically attested and died c. 625.<sup>73</sup>

### CROSS-DECORATED STONES

Nash-Williams's Group II, cross-decorated stones, infrequently with accompanying inscriptions, are characteristic of Ireland, Scotland, the Isle of Man and Wales. As Charles Thomas has suggested, in Scotland they may be associated with the spread of Irish monasticism<sup>74</sup> and their mainly western distribution in Wales, with a particular concentration in the northern part of the kingdom of Dyfed, also clearly indicates the continuing importance of contacts across the Irish Sea.<sup>75</sup> Dating is extremely difficult because of their simplicity and we are dependent upon typology and art-historical comparison with the addition of epigraphy and language if there are inscriptions. The discovery of a fragmentary cross of arcs in the fill of a mid- to late 7th-century grave at Whithorn (Dumfries and Galloway) indicates that they were in use by then<sup>76</sup> and 7th-century documentary sources by Muirchú, Tírechán and Adomnán, all demonstrate their existence and the more general importance of the cross symbol by this time.<sup>77</sup> Nash-Williams saw cross-decorated stones as characteristic of the 7th to 9th centuries, but also said that they

<sup>70</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, nos. 286, 353–4, 301 (1st phase), 153, 115.

<sup>71</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 92; Stowe MS 1023, *op. cit.* in note 34, f. 86. It stands at SH 2955 2895.

<sup>72</sup> SWA-15 1460 ± 60 B.P.; M. Ward, 'Llangian, Llangian church', *Archaeol. Wales*, xxxiv (1994), 60.

<sup>73</sup> SH 3830 6925; Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 13; Lhuyd, in *Camden's Wales, being the Welsh Chapters taken from Edward Gibson's Revised and Enlarged Edition of William Camden's Britannia (1722)* (Cardiff, 1984), 82; *Annales Cambriae*, ed. and trans. J. Morris, *British History and the Welsh Annals* (London, Chichester, 1980), 46 and 86; P. C. Bartrum (ed.), *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts* (Cardiff, 1966), 9; *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, ed. and trans. R. Bromwich, *The Welsh Triads* (Cardiff, 1978), 290.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas, *op. cit.* in note 36, 124–5, fig. 60.

<sup>75</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, fig. 4.

<sup>76</sup> D. Craig, 'The sculptured stones', 433–41 in P. Hill, *Whithorn and St Ninian: The Excavation of a Monastic Town 1981–91* (Stroud, 1997), at p. 439, no. 16.

<sup>77</sup> A. Hamlin, 'Crosses in early Ireland: the evidence from written sources', 138–40 in M. Ryan (ed.), *Ireland and Insular Art A.D. 500–1200* (Dublin, 1987).

could have continued in some areas up to the end of the period.<sup>78</sup> Their continuation beyond the 9th century, and probably up until the advent of the Romanesque, is, however, more extensive than Nash-Williams realised. But what do the contexts of these stones reveal about their functions and about the evolution of early Christian sites?

Charles Thomas saw the majority of cross-decorated stones as grave-markers; these may have stood upright at the head of a grave, possibly sometimes paired with one at the foot, recumbent over a grave, or even included in the grave fill.<sup>79</sup> In Wales the contexts and form of the majority of cross-decorated stones strongly suggests that they functioned as upright grave-markers, and a few, such as a tall square-sectioned pillar from Llanddewibrefi (Ceredigion) inscribed **CENLISINI B[enedica]T D[eu]S** ('Of Cenlisinus, may God bless [him]'), are carved with the names of those commemorated.<sup>80</sup> It is important to stress, however, that none has ever been found in *direct* association with a grave.

In Wales remarkably few cross-decorated stones have been found on the same sites as early inscribed stones.<sup>81</sup> However there is some evidence to suggest a continuing but occasional association between prehistoric sites and early medieval cemeteries with cross-decorated stones. At Llechgynfarwy in central Anglesey a standing stone, which gives its name to the parish, was formerly located in a field approximately 150 m north-east of the church and is shown on Lewis Morris's map of c. 1723. In 1695 both the standing stone and long-cist graves 'within a stone's cast' of it were noted by Lhuyd and in 1926 long-cist graves were found in the road south-west of the churchyard.<sup>82</sup> Around 1978 a fragmentary cross-decorated stone with an incised, linear Latin ring-cross with an upward-pointing arc at the base of the stem, a form which might suggest a 7th- or 8th-century date, was found lying in the hedge c. 150 m south-west of the church.<sup>83</sup> This is most likely part of a grave-marker associated with the long-cist cemetery.

In the South-West the majority of the 66 cross-decorated stones (if more complex monuments at St Dogmaels are omitted) are found to the north of Preseli with a concentration in the vicinity of the Gwaun Valley. Approximately 55% are clearly associated with present parish church sites which immediately suggests the early medieval origins of these and that they represent foundations perhaps made from the 7th century onwards. Occasionally this is backed up by other evidence. For example, at Llanychlwydog in the Gwaun Valley there are four cross-decorated stones, three pillars and a slab: one with a linear Latin cross on each broad face, one with a ring, the other with bars set at right-angles across the cross-arms; and two with outline crosses, one in false relief. The two which survive to their original height are both approximately 1.3 m tall, including the part set into the ground. Their form and size suggest that they functioned as upright grave-markers and this

<sup>78</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, 19–20.

<sup>79</sup> Thomas, *op. cit.* in note 36, 112–14.

<sup>80</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 125.

<sup>81</sup> Lewis, *op. cit.* in note 6, 185.

<sup>82</sup> White, *op. cit.* in note 24, 29–30; D. W. Wiliam, *Brashuniaau Lewis Morris o Eglwys, Tai a Phentrefi ym Môn* (Anglesey, 1999), fig. 21; Anon., 'Graves near Llechgynfarwy Church', *Trans. Anglesey Antiq. Soc.*, (1928), 96; E. N. Baynes, 'Some stone-lined graves at Llanrhuddlad', *Trans. Anglesey Antiq. Soc.*, (1935), 189–91, at 190–1.

<sup>83</sup> It is now built into the conservatory wall at Maen Hir, SH 3810 8120.



is reinforced by the fact that when excavations were carried out in the churchyard long-cist graves were found, one of which was radiocarbon dated to cal. A.D. 747-1067 (2 sigma).<sup>84</sup>

At least a further 18% of cross-decorated stones are associated with sites where there is sufficient evidence to suggest an early cemetery and occasionally a church, which was subsequently abandoned. For example, at Llanwnwr Farm, Llanwnda, near Strumble Head, there are two stone pillars 1.73 m and 1.5 m tall with incised linear Latin crosses, one with a ring, the other with bars set at right-angles across the ends of the cross-arms.<sup>85</sup> Again it may be argued that they most probably functioned as grave-markers: long-cist graves were uncovered in the farmyard in the 19th century.<sup>86</sup> The farm, as the *llan* name suggests, was formerly the site of a chapel which was dependent upon St Gwyndaf's Church, Llanwnda, a site of some regional importance, which also has a collection of several pieces of sculpture.<sup>87</sup> Therefore almost 75% of cross-decorated stones in the South-West are associated with known churches or cemeteries and their distribution is clearly focussed on small local sites with comparatively few from the major monasteries. The association of a church or abandoned site with a single farm is comparatively common.

There are, however, indications that some cross-decorated stones fulfilled other functions and this is sometimes corroborated by inscriptions. Firstly, it may be suggested that some of the larger and more elaborate examples acted as a focus within or on the edge of a cemetery, a visible symbol of holy ground, and, if there was no church building, a focus for worship. The pillar from Cilrhedyn Farm, Llanychaer, in the Gwaun Valley could well have functioned in this way.<sup>88</sup> Although it was first mentioned in use as a lintel over the fireplace at the farm, it was reported as originally from a field 200 m to the West known as *Parc y Mynwent* ('Cemetery Field').<sup>89</sup> It is a quadrangular pillar 1.52 m tall and, unlike the cross-decorated stones discussed so far, it is carved with large, Latin incised crosses of different types on three of the vertical faces and, uniquely, a fourth equal-arm cross on the top of the monument. The fourth vertical face is incised with a simple representation of the Crucifixion. Christ is shown as an erect figure wearing a knee-length tunic, a type which might date the pillar to the 8th or 9th centuries.

Secondly, it may be demonstrated that cross-decorated stones were also set up to record the donation of land to the church. A clear example of this was found at Llanllŷr in Ceredigion, a site which later became a Cistercian nunnery. It is an incomplete pillar standing 1.41 m above the modern ground surface. The two surviving decorated faces are incised with linear Latin ring-crosses. The main face

<sup>84</sup> SN 012 344; Nash-Williams, op. cit. in note 1, nos. 338-41; K. Murphy, 'Excavations at Llanychlwydog Church, Dyfed', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, cxxxvi (1987), 77-93.

<sup>85</sup> SM 8955 4045; Nash-Williams, op. cit. in note 1, no. 326. The second was first noted by the author in 1998.

<sup>86</sup> James, op. cit. in note 35, 72; Anon., 'Fishguard meeting report', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 4th ser., xiv (1883), 333-48, at p. 344.

<sup>87</sup> B. G. Charles, *The Place-names of Pembrokeshire* (Aberystwyth, 1992), 249 and 252-3; Nash-Williams, op. cit. in note 1, nos. 328-34, 415.

<sup>88</sup> Nash-Williams, op. cit. in note 1, no. 337. The monument is now in the churchyard at Llanychaer, SM 9915 3455.

<sup>89</sup> Cilrhedyn Isaf Farm = SM 9996 3495; E. Laws and H. Owen (eds.), *An Archaeological Survey of Pembrokeshire 1896-1907* (Tenby, 1908), 20.12-13.

also has an inscription: **TESQUITUS DITOC / MADOMNUACO / AON FILIUS ASA / ITGEN DEDIT**, 'The small waste plot of Ditoc (which) Aon, son of Asa Itgen, gave to Madomnauc', which confirms the donation of land to a saint(?) with an Irish name. The inscription is in half-uncial letters suggesting a date before 800.<sup>90</sup> It may be compared with another pillar recording the donation of land to the church at Kilnasaggart, Co. Armagh, where the obit of the donor is recorded in the annals as c. 716.<sup>91</sup>

Thirdly, it is probable that some cross-carved stones marked the extent of church land and were therefore located on proprietorial boundaries. A good candidate for this is the large, irregular boulder at Capel Colman (Pembrokeshire) which is set into a field bank on the W. side of a lane about 180 m south of the church.<sup>92</sup> It is incised on one broad face with a double cross of arcs set within a double circle and on the other with a linear Latin cross with a triangular top and bars set at right-angles across the horizontal cross-arms. There is an additional, lightly-incised, small graffito cross on one of the narrow faces. It is one of a group of similar monuments with crosses of arcs, some with chi-rho hooks, found mainly in western Ireland, SW. Scotland and the Isle of Man. In particular, the location of the Capel Colman boulder may be closely compared with that of the Skeith stone, which Ross Trench-Jellicoe has recently identified as a 7th-century, wayside boundary marker to the church at Kilrenny (Fife).<sup>93</sup> The 'Peter' stone, first recorded 1.07 km south of the monastery at Whithorn, is likely to be a further example.<sup>94</sup>

Lastly, there is evidence to suggest that some cross-decorated stones in Wales were positioned along routeways where they could have functioned as wayside praying stations. There is a good example on upland at 360 m OD to the West of the Conwy valley near Maen-y-Bardd, Rowen (Conwy). Here a small, linear, equal-armed cross within a circle, now very worn, has been incised on a large boulder which is located *in situ* set into the bank on the N. side of the Roman road which runs between *Segontium* (Caernarfon) and *Kanovium* (Caerhun) and at this point appears to follow an earlier routeway marked by standing stones. The location of the boulder on the edge of the road suggests it is unlikely to have functioned as a grave-marker since there is no room for a burial.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>90</sup> SN 542 560; Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 124; I am grateful to Patrick Sims-Williams for his new reading of this inscription; M. Handley, "'Hisperic Latin'" in early medieval Wales: the epigraphic culture of Llanllŷr and Llanddewi-brefi', 26–36 in K. Forsyth and J. Higgitt (eds.), *Roman, Runes and Ogham: Proceedings of the Medieval Epigraphy Conference* (Stamford, 2001).

<sup>91</sup> Macalister, *op. cit.* in note 1, II, no. 946; W. Davies, 'The Latin charter-tradition in western Britain, Brittany and Ireland in the early mediaeval period', 258–80 in D. Whitlock, R. McKitterick and D. Dumville (eds.), *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1982), at p. 261.

<sup>92</sup> SN 2163 3823. First recorded in this location in 1859, see Westwood, *op. cit.* in note 1, 120–1; Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 302.

<sup>93</sup> R. Trench-Jellicoe, 'The Skeith stone, Upper Kilrenny, Fife, in its context', *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*, cxxviii (1998), 495–513.

<sup>94</sup> D. Craig, 'The provenance of early inscriptions in Galloway', 616–17, in Hill, *op. cit.* in note 76. For a more general discussion of ecclesiastical property boundaries with crosses and the territorialisation of protection, see W. Davies, "'Protected space'" in Britain and Ireland in the middle ages', 1–19 in B. E. Crawford (ed.), *Scotland in Dark Age Britain* (St Andrews, 1996), 4–7.

<sup>95</sup> SH 7362 7162. F. Lynch, 'Cross-incised stone, near Maen y Bardd, Rowen, Caernarvonshire', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, cxxvi (1977), 71–3.

Cross-decorated stones may also have been set up along pilgrim routes. At Pistyll on the Llŷn peninsula (Gwynedd), a boulder with a similar cross, now set into a wall south of the road, but formerly in the adjacent field, could have been a marker on the pilgrim route to Bardsey Island.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, *Maen Mesur-y-Dorth* (lit. 'Measure-the-Loaf Stone'), Llanrhian (Pembrokeshire), a rough, uneven boulder incised with an outline Latin cross with a ring and small round depressions in the centre and the interspaces, a monument first mentioned in 1592, is located immediately south of the road on the pilgrim route to St David's.<sup>97</sup>

Therefore, with the advent of cross-decorated stones around the 7th century, we can detect a gradual change of focus. The early inscribed stones commemorated high-ranking members of society, who, as I argued earlier, needed to proclaim their position and their entitlement to land. In contrast the great majority of cross-decorated stones, which functioned as upright grave-markers, are located on local church and cemetery sites, and are anonymous; they are clearly not indicative of secular land-holding. Instead these cemeteries, with their simple, cross-decorated grave-markers, proclaim holy ground and represent the community of the Christian dead. Lengthy commemorative inscriptions are exceptional as, for example, the Idnert stone at Llanddewibrefi (Ceredigion) which records a killing when the monastery was plundered.<sup>98</sup> It may be argued, however, that some cross-decorated stones are more overtly linked with landownership by the church, either by confirming the donation of land, or by marking out church land and its boundaries.

### SCULPTURED CROSSES AND CROSS-SLABS

The distribution of Nash-Williams's Group III, sculptured crosses and cross-slabs, demonstrates that the majority were clustered on important monastic sites and other major churches, many of which are mentioned in the documentary sources.<sup>99</sup> In this they may be compared with the distribution of broadly contemporary freestanding crosses in Ireland rather than with their distribution in northern England where the earlier Anglo-Saxon crosses are almost entirely confined to monastic sites while monuments of the 10th century onwards have a much wider distribution reflecting a broader pattern of lay patronage of the newly converted Viking settlers. Most of the Welsh monuments belong to distinctive regional or sometimes very localised groups. Only three can be dated with any certainty by inscriptions naming figures identifiable in the documentary sources: the Pillar of Eliseg is approximately datable to the second quarter of the 9th century;<sup>100</sup> the cross at Llantwit Major naming Hywel ap Rhys, king of Glywysing,

<sup>96</sup> Current location: SH 3196 4181. Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 98; Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales, *op. cit.* in note 19, no. 1720; E. Owen, 'Stones with crosses on them in Caernarvonshire', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 5th ser., xiii (1896), 167-72, at 169-70.

<sup>97</sup> SM 8384 3065. Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 325; Charles, *op. cit.* in note 87, I, 236-7.

<sup>98</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 116; C. Thomas, 'The Llanddewi-Brefi "Idnert" stone', *Peritia*, x (1996), 136-83.

<sup>99</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, fig. 8; compare with Davies, *op. cit.* in note 39, fig. 49.

<sup>100</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 182.

is datable to the later 9th century;<sup>101</sup> and the cross-slab at St David's commemorating the sons of Bishop Abraham may be dated to the late 11th or early 12th centuries.<sup>102</sup> These go some way to providing a chronological framework and it is likely that the vast majority were carved between the 9th and the end of the 11th century, though typological, epigraphic, linguistic and art-historical comparisons again play a major role in dating. However, what can we learn about their functions from a study of their contexts and inscriptions?

The monuments at the important monastery of Llantwit Major (Vale of Glamorgan) when first recorded were standing or lying in different parts of the churchyard or were found built into the fabric of the church.<sup>103</sup> An examination of the inscriptions on three of the crosses (together with inscribed crosses elsewhere) suggests that they were erected by kings, their families and perhaps other important lay patrons together with significant churchmen, notably abbots associated with the monastery, either for the benefit of their own souls or those of other named individuals, either living, or dead. The cross which Hywel erected to the memory of his father Rhys has already been mentioned while a second names Illtud, the founding saint of the monastery, and King Samson.<sup>104</sup> The third was set up by Abbot Samson but also names Ithel the king indicating a close alliance between the monastery and the local dynasty of Glywysing.<sup>105</sup> Although the language and wording are different, the inscriptions on the last are similar in purpose to those on the later 9th- and early 10th-century Irish crosses, such as the Cross of Scriptures at Clonmacnoise, where a similar relationship between church and king is also sometimes implied.<sup>106</sup>

If we examine the contexts of some crosses from other sites we can begin to piece together their different locations and functions. Some were clustered around the present church and churchyard, where they originally acted as foci within the ecclesiastical enclosure. Some were sited on monastic land signifying ownership by and sometimes donation to a particular foundation while others were located with reference to monastic boundaries indicating the extent of ecclesiastical land and its privileges.

The 11th-century crosses with inscriptions associated with Merthyr Mawr (Bridgend), which has a large collection of other sculpture, are particularly instructive when considered together with the locations in which they were first

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 220.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 382; N. Edwards, 'Monuments in a landscape: the early medieval sculpture of St David's', 55–79 in H. Hamerow and A. MacGregor (eds.), *Image and Power in the Archaeology of Early Britain: Essays in Honour of Rosemary Cramp* (Oxford, 2001), at p. 69. C. A. R. Radford (followed by Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 303) read the inscription on the Carew cross as naming Marcdudd ab Edwin, king of Deheubarth, which led him to date it to 1033–5, see C. A. R. Radford, 'The inscription on the Carew cross', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, c (1949), 253–5. However, Radford's reading of the inscription is not convincing and therefore the close dating of the monument must be set aside. Nash-Williams's original reading is more likely to be correct, see V. E. Nash-Williams, 'Some early Welsh crosses and cross-slabs', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, xciv (1939), 1–20, at 11–15.

<sup>103</sup> Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales, *Glamorgan Vol. I, Part III, The Early Christian Period* (Cardiff, 1976), nos. 912, 932–3 and 953–4.

<sup>104</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, nos. 220 and 222.

<sup>105</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 223.

<sup>106</sup> F. Henry, 'Around an inscription: the Cross of the Scriptures at Clonmacnoise', *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, cx (1980), 36–46; P. Harbison, 'Regal (and other) patronage in Irish inscriptions of the pre-Norman period', *Ulster J. Archaeol.*, lviii (1999), 43–54.

noted. Lhuyd (copied by William Jones) recorded the first as standing on the bank of the Ogmore River at Merthyr Mawr which is approximately 100 m east-south-east of the church. The inscription tells us that it was set up by [Co]nbelan for his soul, for Saint Glywys(?), Nerttan and for his brothers and his father and that Sciloc was the sculptor.<sup>107</sup> Lhuyd also noted a monument over 7 ft high as standing in a field called *Kaer Groes* ('Cross Field') 0.6 km north-north-west of the church.<sup>108</sup> A fragment of a third was found in 1929 built into the base of a 19th-century lime-kiln at Ogmore Castle 0.3 km south-west of the church, though presumably it had been brought from somewhere nearby for re-use as building material.<sup>109</sup> The inscription on the first is similar to those at Llantwit Major, but the inscriptions on the other two are significant because they indicate that they were set up to record the donation of land to Merthyr Mawr and, as Wendy Davies has shown, the wording on each reflects phraseology employed in the Celtic charter tradition as evidenced in Wales, for example, in the Lichfield *marginalia* and *Liber Landavensis*. The inscription on the second is fragmentary: it begins with a preamble similar to those found in some charters: **I NOMINE DI PAT/RIS ET FILI SPERITUS SANTI** ('In the name of God the Father and of the Son (and) of the Holy Spirit') followed by several illegible lines before the words **IN GRE/FIUM . IN PRO/PRIUM . USQ; / IN DIEM . IUDICI** ('in writing, in perpetuity until the Day of Judgement'). *Graphium* (literally 'writing') is used to refer to a charter and is found in the Welsh charter material mainly of the 8th to the mid-12th centuries and the concluding phrase is also characteristic.<sup>110</sup> An incomplete inscription (one of two) on the third reads: . . . ] **EST [ . . . ] / QUOD DE[ . . . ] / ARTHMAIL / AGRUM DO / ET GLIGUIS / ET NERTAT / ET FILI EP(?)I(?)**, which may be partially reconstructed to read, 'May it be known (= *sciendum*/ *est*) that Arthmail gave (= *de/dit*) the land/estate (*agrum*) to God and Glywys and Nertat and to Fili ?the bishop'. *Sciendum est* is a form of notification used in the charters and *ager*, meaning the 'land' or 'estate' being transferred, is commonly found, mainly in the earlier charter material.<sup>111</sup> The first two beneficiaries appear to be the same as those named on the first cross and include St Glywys, presumably a saint associated with Merthyr Mawr. It may therefore be argued that these crosses were originally set up on the land being donated to the church at Merthyr Mawr in order to record the transaction and to signify the ecclesiastical ownership of the land.

In the North, few crosses have inscriptions, but it is still possible to suggest that their location may provide a clue to function. For example, four crosses, the two surviving examples of which are 10th-century, have been noted from Penmon

<sup>107</sup> SS 8850 7751; Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 239; Stowe MS 1024, *op. cit.* in note 33, f. 41; Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales, *op. cit.* in note 103, no. 927.

<sup>108</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 240; Stowe MS 1024, *op. cit.* in note 34, f. 20 1; Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales, *op. cit.* in note 103, no. 928; SS 8801 7867.

<sup>109</sup> SS 8817 7698; Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 255; Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales, *op. cit.* in note 103, no. 926.

<sup>110</sup> W. Davies, *The Llandaff Charters* (Aberystwyth, 1979), 6; *cad.*, *op. cit.* in note 91, 268–70.

<sup>111</sup> W. Davies, *op. cit.* in note 110; *cad.*, *An Early Welsh Microcosm. Studies in the Llandaff Charters* (London, 1978), 40–2; *cad.*, 'Roman settlements and post-Roman estates in south-east Wales', 153–73 in P. J. Casey (ed.), *The End of Roman Britain* (BAR, Brit. ser., 71, 1979), 156–8.

(a monastery associated with St Sciriol) and its environs in SE. Anglesey. The locations of these were recorded by Lhuyd and copied by William Jones. Two, one of which is now lost, were found near the church, one built into the fabric of the later monastic buildings, the other re-used as the 'post gate' to the South-West of the church. A third was recorded as standing 'a bow shot' (410 m) to the West of the monastery. This site was excavated in 1976 when the cross was moved into the church and it was found that it had been located at the junction of two ancient field terraces where it could have been marking a boundary. The fourth, a plain cross also now lost, was noted as standing near Bryn Mawr about 1 km west of Penmon, which would locate it on or near the old parish boundary, which might suggest that it delimited the boundary of church land.<sup>112</sup>

A similar pattern may be suggested at Dyserth (Denbighshire), a probable monastic site, originally associated with St Cwyfan. Two crosses were found at the church. One is first mentioned by Lhuyd as standing south of the church and he also indicates that it may have functioned as a cross denoting sanctuary (Welsh: *noddfa*).<sup>113</sup> The second, a cross-base, was discovered during 19th-century church restoration.<sup>114</sup> Two other crosses were originally located at some distance from the site. The first, known as *Maen Achweyfan*, originally *Maen Machweyfan* ('the stone of Cwyfan's field'), is almost certainly still *in situ* and is located 7.3 km east of Dyserth, in a field on the parish boundary between Dyserth and Whitford. It is unclear whether the land held by Dyserth was coterminous with the later parish. If it was, the cross may have stood on the boundary. In any case the name of the cross strongly implies ownership of the land on which it stood. The other, a very similar monument, a fragment of which has recently been identified in the Grosvenor Museum, Chester, was recorded by Lhuyd at Meliden, the parish north of Dyserth. Although its precise location is unknown, it too may have marked church land.<sup>115</sup>

The Pillar of Eliseg is also worth reconsidering for the light which its context and inscription may be able to shed on its function. I would like to suggest that this monument was set up retrospectively to commemorate an event but principally as a means of recording land ownership. The now fragmentary pillar, which gives its name to the Cistercian foundation of Valle Crucis near which it stands, is located 9.5 km west of Offa's Dyke in the narrow valley of the Nant Eglwyseg, a tributary of the Dee (Denbighshire).<sup>116</sup> It stands on a prominent mound and appears to command the valley. This mound was opened prior to the re-erection of the monument in 1779, but accounts are very sketchy and all that can be said is that a skeleton in a cist was unearthed and that 'a large piece of silver coin found in the coffin' was also reported.<sup>117</sup> The Royal Commission suggested that the grave of

<sup>112</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, nos. 37–8; Stowe MS 1023, *op. cit.* in note 34, f. 97 and 99; C. Smith, 'The cross in Penmon Deer Park', *Trans. Anglesey Antiq. Soc.* (1980), 101–10; N. Edwards, 'Viking-influenced sculpture in North Wales, its ornament and context', *Church Archaeol.*, III (1999), 5–16, at p. 7. The Deer Park Cross was located at SH 6262 8083. Bryn Mawr is at SH 6193 8005.

<sup>113</sup> SJ 0555 7970; Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 185; Stowe MS 1023, *op. cit.* in note 34, f. 158; Morris, *op. cit.* in note 48, I, 52.

<sup>114</sup> Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 186; Westwood, *op. cit.* in note 1, 209.

<sup>115</sup> SJ 1295 7862; Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 190; Stowe MS 1023, *op. cit.* in note 34, f. 152; Edwards, *op. cit.* in note 112, 7–8, figs. 8–9.

<sup>116</sup> SJ 2026 4452; Nash-Williams, *op. cit.* in note 1, no. 182.

<sup>117</sup> E. Davies, *The Prehistoric and Roman Remains of Denbighshire* (Cardiff, 1929), 364–6.

Eliseg had been discovered<sup>118</sup> but, unless the existence of a silver coin (if that is what it was) associated with the grave can be substantiated, this is unlikely since the burial rite would be unique for the 8th century when inhumations without grave goods were the norm and churchyard burial was becoming so; nor does the inscription necessarily imply that the pillar marked a grave. Instead the appearance of the mound suggests that it is a Bronze-age barrow and that we are witnessing another, later example, of the re-use of a prehistoric monument.

The pillar and its inscription were first recorded by Lhuyd in 1696.<sup>119</sup> At that time the pillar was said to be 12 ft tall; it is now (excluding the base) just over 8 ft (2.42 m). The lower part of the inscription has therefore been lost since Lhuyd's day and, although the area where the rest of the inscription was carved is still visible and a few fragmentary letters can still tentatively be picked out, we are totally dependent upon Lhuyd's transcription, parts of which are unclear and which also includes several gaps which Lhuyd was unable to read. In spite of this Lhuyd's transcript cannot simply be dismissed — his records of inscriptions which do survive are usually remarkably good — but clearly there are major problems; Nash-Williams's rendering has some mistakes and other slightly different interpretations have also been put forward.<sup>120</sup> However sufficient can be understood from Lhuyd's transcript to work out the main concerns of the inscription. First, it names Cyngen (Concenn) and gives his genealogical relationship to Eliseg. Secondly, it states that Cyngen set up the stone to his great-grandfather Eliseg. The sense of the third part is that it was Eliseg who united the inheritance of Powys . . . by force . . . from the power of the English . . . There are then several incomplete lines before what appears to be the mythical origins of the genealogy of Powys headed by the Roman usurper Magnus Maximus. It then records that Conmarch **PINXIT HOC CHIROGRAPHIUM** 'inscribed (lit. painted) this charter/deed (lit. writing)' at the command of Cyngen. Finally, it asks for a blessing on Cyngen, his family and the land of Powys until the Day of Judgement.

This inscription therefore celebrates retrospectively Eliseg's regaining of territory from the English around the middle of the 8th century (in the period prior to the construction of Offa's Dyke),<sup>121</sup> the fact that the whole kingdom is still held by Cyngen and his family and will be for ever, with possibly the idea that it has been held since the time of Magnus Maximus. The word *chirographium* in the sense of a 'deed' or 'charter' was widely used in early-medieval Europe and it may be argued that its use here also refers to land holding, though in a political rather than a proprietary sense.<sup>122</sup> Therefore the pillar seems to have been set up as a record of continuing political ownership on the land regained. Its likely prominent location on a barrow may simply have been chosen to emphasise this but it might also be seen as a symbolic link further back into the prehistoric past. Cyngen died in Rome

<sup>118</sup> Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments Wales, *Denbighshire* (London, 1914), no. 567.

<sup>119</sup> London, British Library, Harleian MS 3780, ff. 94–5; E. Owen (ed.), *Catalogue of the MSS relating to Wales in the British Museum* (London, 1900), 410; J. Rhys, 'All around the Wrekin', *F Cymmrodor*, XXI (1908), 1–62, at 40–1.

<sup>120</sup> D. Howlett, *Cambro-Latin Compositions* (Dublin, 1998), 27–32.

<sup>121</sup> D. Hill, 'Offa's Dyke: pattern and purpose', *Antiq. J.*, LXXX (2000), 195–206, at 202–5.

<sup>122</sup> W. Davies, 'Charter-writing and its uses in early medieval Celtic societies', 99–112 in H. Pryce (ed.), *Literacy in Early Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge, 1998), 103–4, n. 29.

c. 854 so the pillar must have been set up prior to this.<sup>123</sup> Originally the height of the monument would have been impressive. The round shaft is part of a cross and its form may be compared with 9th-century round-shafted crosses in Anglo-Saxon England. It has been suggested that many of these could have been re-used Roman columns and this is also a likely explanation for the Pillar of Eliseg.<sup>124</sup> If so, future identification of its geology may help to elucidate its origin since there is no major Roman site nearby.

In the above discussion I have argued that in the 9th to 11th centuries large, freestanding sculptured crosses and cross-slabs were clustered in and around major ecclesiastical sites where they acted as foci, visible symbols of power and protection, and reminders of the patronage of kings, churchmen and other important individuals. Although the inscription on the late 11th- or early 12th-century cross-slab from St David's makes it clear that it was a grave-marker, in general the wording of the inscriptions on the earlier monuments does not directly refer to their use in this way. Some monuments, however, were located further away where it has been suggested that some indicate ecclesiastical land ownership and record the donation of land to the church while others mark boundaries and thereby indicate the extent of rights and privileges. The inscription on the Pillar of Eliseg has a secular function in commemorating an event and in signifying continuing political rights to the land.

### CONCLUSION

In this article I have shown that it is often still possible, using antiquarian and other evidence, to piece together the original contexts of early-medieval inscribed and sculptured stones in Wales. The inscriptions demonstrate that the primary function of the Group I inscribed stones of the 5th to 7th centuries was commemorative and that they marked the graves of the more important members of early medieval Welsh society, almost entirely men. Furthermore, the locations of some of these monuments support the evidence of the documentary source material and suggest that these may also have functioned as symbols of proprietary land ownership and possibly as boundary markers. There is a different pattern of location in NW. Wales in the kingdom of Gwynedd compared with the South-West dominated by the kingdom of Dyfed. In the North-West, which seems to have some similarities with the uplands of Glamorgan, a significant number of inscribed stones were originally associated with prehistoric monuments, such as barrows and standing stones, and most were prominently sited, often with wide views of the surrounding landscape. Others were set up beside Roman roads or in the vicinity of Roman forts. Some appear to have been located with reference to both prehistoric and Roman remains. These locations may have been chosen in order to proclaim proprietary rights and I have argued that the link with the past was deliberate so as to enhance that claim to the land. In the North-West only 40% of

<sup>123</sup> *Annales Cambriae*, op. cit. in note 73, s. a. 854.

<sup>124</sup> J. D. Bu'lock, 'Vortigern and the Pillar of Eliseg', *Antiquity*, xxxiv (1960), 49-53, at 51-2; pers. comm. Phillip Sidebottom.



the inscribed stones are associated with modern church sites and where they are found on these they suggest that these sites have their origins in the 5th to 7th centuries. In contrast, in the South-West, although a small number of stones are clearly associated with prehistoric sites, only one can be identified which was probably located with reference to a Roman road. Indeed, in this area some 70% of the inscribed stones are associated with church sites which could suggest that a pattern of pastoral care was established earlier in this area than in the North-West. Few stones in either area are connected with major monastic sites.

With the introduction of the Group II cross-decorated stones, perhaps by the early 7th century, we see a change in focus. These are found predominantly in the West of Wales with a particular concentration in the northern part of Dyfed, a distribution which seems to reflect Christian contacts around and across the Irish Sea. Few are found on the same sites as the Group I stones. Their locations suggest that the majority functioned as largely anonymous, upright grave-markers which were often grouped on local church and cemetery sites. These were not indicative of secular landholding but marked holy ground and were visible signs of the presence of the Christian dead. However, it is also likely that some cross-decorated stones indicated the ownership of land by the church more overtly by the marking and demarcation of ecclesiastical sites and land; others were set up along routeways.

In contrast, the Group III crosses and cross-slabs of the 9th to 11th centuries are associated with major monasteries and regional churches. They acted as symbols of power and protection and those with inscriptions indicate that many were also set up to signify royal and ecclesiastical patronage. Most were clustered in and around these ecclesiastical sites, but it has been argued that some may have been set up to mark the boundaries of church land, while others were erected specifically to record the donation of land to the church.

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