

MEDIEVAL WATER MANAGEMENT, SOME EXPERIMENTAL ARCHAEOLOGY PART II – WHAT HAPPENED?

August 3, 2011 David Standing Archaeological Prospection, Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2011, Educationbank, Botany, cuts, Drain, Ecological succession, Ecology, Freemasonry, Meter, opposite bank, Territorial Army, Vegetation, Wales, water systems

Well, what a day!

I am aching, my hands are full of cuts & splinters and my body has practically seized up. Wading through 100's of metres of water that is over two feet deep does that to you at my age. I enjoyed it though. The experimental side of things was just that, experimental. Not all is lost though, the lessons learned are that I either get the fire brigade or Territorial Army in to supply me with a serious body of water, or, I wait until the rainy season in Wales (this could be at anytime of the year) and use the drain tracing dye then.

When the soil has been battered by relentless rain I have witnessed the water systems working in full flow. The water erodes any soil build over the dams drain outlet and literally pours straight down it. As you can see from the film, we had to spray the water directly onto the soil hoping that the tracing dye would not be filtered out. As it was the ground was that dry, and the system that long, that nothing came through. Of course, my theory of the dam and drain being of one system

could be incorrect but future experiments will prove that either way. Many thanks go to Neil of [WelshDrainage](#) who not only provided the water for the experiment but also provided the drain dye free of charge. More people running business' like that are worth their weight in gold to people like us. You can see a very short video of what we did [here](#). That has been edited right down but we will produce a more polished effort when the time is right and we have more time to organise things.



WelshDrainage. What a service in the name of experimental archaeology!

The cleaning of the possible wharf went well and it sprang up a few surprises. I had only seen it once or twice before and that was at a distance, but as I approached it I realised that it was a larger than I had previously thought.



As you can see, there was a lot of vegetation to clear

The Sisters at the Abbey had kindly invited me for lunch but after lunch at the abbey the only thing you really want to do is sleep. I had around one and half hours to get as much cleared as possible.



The size of the remaining structure really started to show just before lunch

After fish for lunch (well it was a Friday) I started clearing the remaining vegetation which thankfully was mainly ivy rather than brambles, thorns and stinging nettles. After I had cleared it all away it was possible to start getting some dimensions. Its length was just over fifteen metres with a height of one point eight metres. Interestingly the walls were constructed so they curved back into the banks at either end, probably to enable the bank to take weight and also to stop the structure being washed away. They also curved towards the bank away from the perpendicular. This feature may have been incorporated to make berthing easier. It is the direct opposite shape of a curved hull.



The structure curving away from the perpendicular

That was not all. Spending the amount of time that I had in this area gave me the opportunity to take a good look at the surrounding landscape. As you may have noticed in the above picture the bottom of the Dowlais Brook also contained surviving masonry. Not only that I had noticed that there were walls buried on the opposite bank. So I cleared all of the vegetation away to get a better view.



Directly opposite the large visible structure, more clues started to appear

I think I shall leave it at that for now. Obviously I have a lot more investigation to carry out and that is on this one structure alone. The day was a success in that I now have more information to work with. What I have suggested may change in time as more and more evidence comes to light although at least I have enabled myself to tighten my research for a comparable Cistercian structure.