

# Carn Goedog medieval house and settlement, Pembrokeshire

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*This report describes the investigation in 2011 and 2015 of two groups of relict houses on an upland common on the north flank of the Preseli hills in North Pembrokeshire. Their locations, along with medieval records, provide strong indications that these were seasonal settlements. Excavation of one sub-rectangular building (House C) produced finds that included medieval pottery and a spindle whorl with Romanesque decoration. A radiocarbon date of cal. AD 1030–1200 at 95.4% confidence from charcoal in the hearth of this building provides the earliest firm date identified as yet for hafodydd ('seasonal settlements') in Wales.*

## INTRODUCTION

A group of 14 circular and sub-rectangular houses at Carn Goedog (SN 1283 3328), Eglwysrwrw, was first recorded in 1976 and later by the Dyfed Archaeological Trust (Figs 1–2; Drewett 1983; Murphy *et al.* 2010, 53). The small settlement lies at the base of the north-facing slope of an upland common on the north flank of the Preseli hills in north Pembrokeshire, at 240m above sea level.

It is one of a number of similar sites in Preseli that are noted in a previous survey of deserted rural settlements (Sambrook 2006, 86–91). None of these Pembrokeshire sites have been excavated so, apart from several early modern cottages, dating is highly uncertain, though morphology, upland location, place names and records of seasonal pasture rights suggest that some are seasonal settlements of medieval date or earlier (Comeau forthcoming). The Carn Goedog houses, overlooking the seasonally waterlogged common pastures, provide a particularly coherent example of such sites.

The houses are mostly arranged on a natural terrace along the base of the slope, with one on a small natural terrace slightly higher up the hillslope. They can be divided into two spatially segregated groups on the basis of plan and wall structure. The nine houses to the west (A–H and J) are small, sub-rectangular structures between 3.0–5.0m across, with stone walls up to 0.5m high well bedded within soil and turf. The five huts to the east (I, K–N) are set within a partial stone-walled enclosure and consist of a circular roundhouse about 6.5m in diameter and four smaller, sub-circular and cellular structures. The walls of these buildings are formed of stones denuded of soil or turf.

The houses were initially all considered to be of potential Bronze Age origin — which may well be the case for the five sub-circular buildings (I, K–N) interpreted as a roundhouse and four ancillary buildings. The predominantly easterly orientations of their entrances (with one to the west) suggest that these houses are more likely to date to the Later Bronze Age or later in the first millennium BC or AD, though they could be Iron Age. The apparent sub-rectangular plans of the other nine were thought to indicate possible origins in either the Neolithic or the medieval period. If they were indeed found to date to the Neolithic, their close spatial relationship to the outcrop at Carn Goedog raised the possibility that they were associated with the quarrying of Stonehenge's bluestone monoliths at Carn Goedog (Bevins *et al.* 2014; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2016), being investigated as part of the 'Stones of Stonehenge' project exploring the source

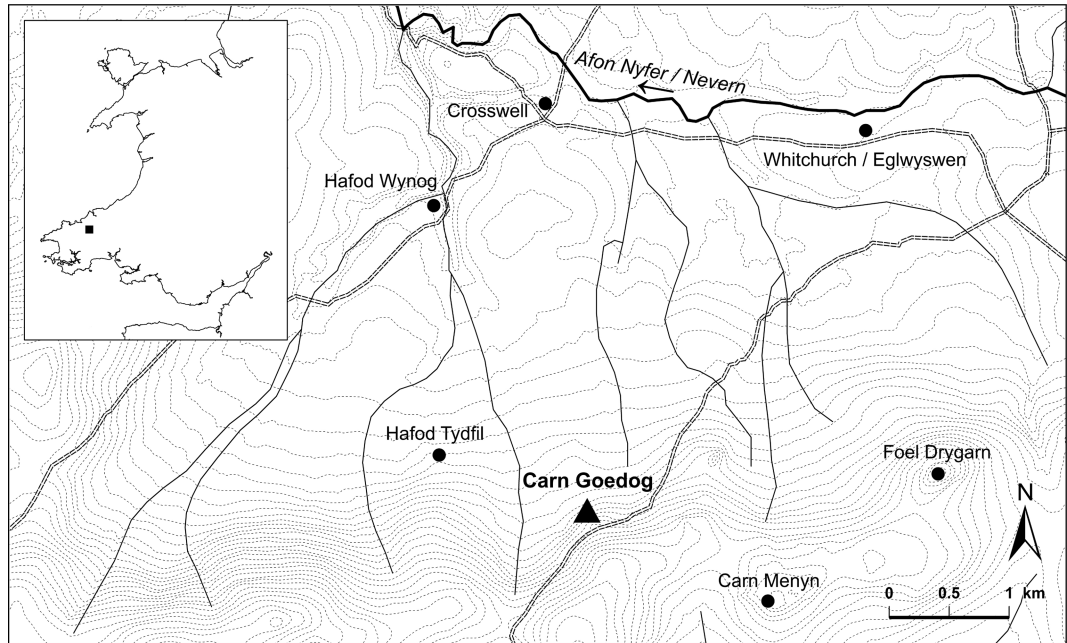


Fig. 1. The location of Carn Goedog settlement within the Preseli hills of north Pembrokeshire. The tracks shown represent the road network shown on George Owen's map, *Penbrochia Comitus*, 1602. Drawn by Rhiannon Comeau.

and context of Stonehenge's stones. As part of this project therefore, geophysical and topographic survey were carried out in 2011 followed by the excavation of one of the house platforms in 2015.

### Field survey

Investigation in 2011 commenced with a detailed earthwork and topographical survey of the entire group of 15 structures, mapping the group with an EDM survey, followed by detailed earthwork plans of each building at a scale of 1:20 (their measurements given below were made before the excavation of House C). This was accompanied by geophysical survey.

#### *Sub-rectangular houses*

*House A* is the most impressive of the sub-rectangular buildings, being 7m × 9m across, with an internal area of 4.6m × 3.6m. Its south end is terraced into the hillside and it has a central sunken area of 2.7m × 2.3m. From the relative height of its buried masonry, it is likely that this structure survives to at least 2–3 courses of walling. *House B* is 4.6m × 3.2m across. It has no internal contours that indicate its interior dimensions but positions of wall stones suggest likely dimensions of 3.8m × 2m. The apparent dimensions of *House C* prior to excavation were 5m × 4.6m across, with an internal area of 3.6m × 3m. Its south side is terraced into the hillside and the ground on its north side drops away almost as steeply. It was chosen for excavation in 2015 because it was typical of the group of sub-rectangular structures. *House D* is 5.6m × 3.6m across, with an internal area of 4.2m × 2m. Its south side is terraced into the hillside and its east wall is about 0.8m from the west wall of House G. *House E* is 4.4m × 3.8m across, with an internal area

of  $2.8\text{m} \times 1.8\text{m}$ . Its south side is slightly terraced into the hillside. In terms of its small size and position (immediately west of House F) it appears to be a subsidiary structure to House F. *House F* is  $6.4\text{m} \times 4\text{m}$  across, with an internal area of  $4.2\text{m} \times 2.6\text{m}$ . It has a central sunken area of  $2.6\text{m} \times 1.6\text{m}$ . Its south side is slightly terraced into the hillside. *House G* is  $4.8\text{m} \times 3.6\text{m}$  across, with an internal area of  $3.7\text{m} \times 2.4\text{m}$ . *House H* is sub-rectangular,  $6.6\text{m} \times 3.8\text{m}$ , with an internal area of  $4.2\text{m} \times 2.3\text{m}$ . It is the only house on the upper terrace. It is unusually long in relation to its width, in comparison with the other sub-rectangular houses. *House J* is  $5.8\text{m} \times 4.0\text{m}$  across, with an internal area of  $4\text{m} \times 3\text{m}$ . Its south end is terraced into the hillside. It is the most easterly of the sub-rectangular houses and is more denuded of turf along its wall lines than the others. It is the only one that lies east of the north-south field wall that otherwise separates the sub-rectangular houses from the sub-circular ones to the east.

#### *Sub-circular houses*

*House I* is poorly defined by its surrounding walls but its internal area is distinctly visible as a roughly circular and level space, approximately  $6.5\text{m}$  in diameter, largely free of stones. It lies to the west of House N, close to the southern edge of the tumbled rocks at the bottom of Carn Goedog's scree slope. Its entrance is most likely to have been somewhere on the largely stone-free east side. *House K* is  $3.4\text{m} \times 3.8\text{m}$  across, with an internal area of  $2.8\text{m} \times 2.2\text{m}$ . It may possibly have an entrance in the south-east. *House L* is  $6\text{m} \times 4\text{m}$  across, with an internal area of  $3.8\text{m} \times 2\text{m}$ . It may possibly have an entrance in the south. At its north end it is joined by a  $1\text{m}$ -wide wall  $2.2\text{m}$  long, and at its south end by a wall  $1\text{m}$  wide and  $2.6\text{m}$  long that joins it with House N. *House M* is  $4.7\text{m} \times 4.6\text{m}$  across, with an internal area of about  $2.8\text{m}$  in diameter. It appears to have an entrance on its west side. *House N* is about  $4\text{m}$  in diameter, with

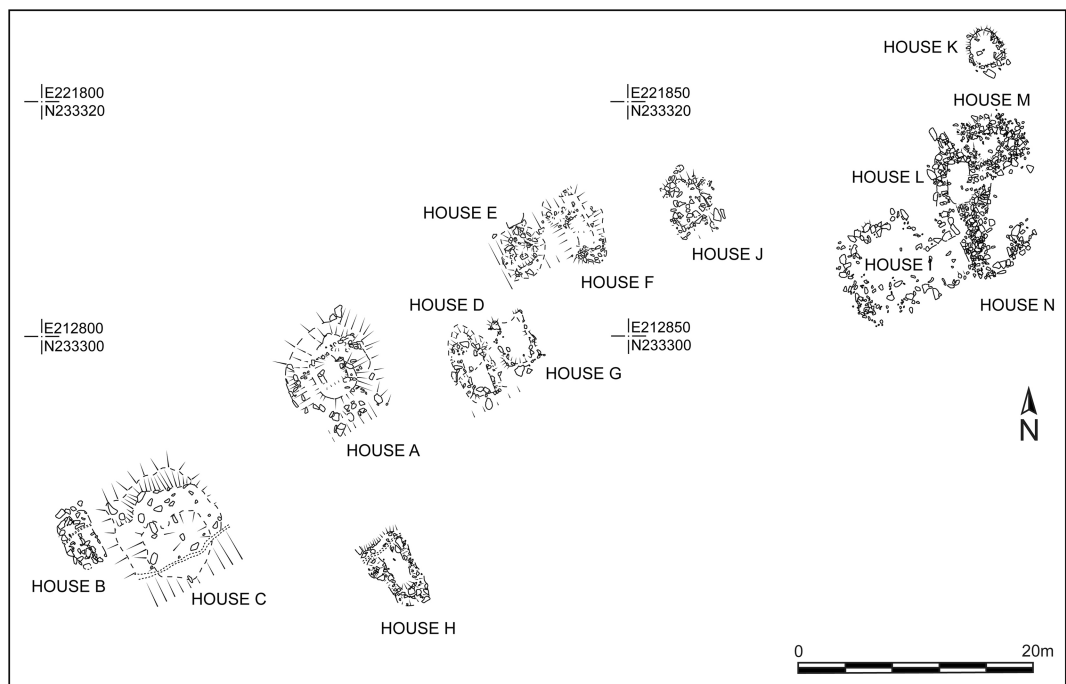


Fig. 2. House platforms at the foot of Carn Goedog. *Drawn by Irene Deluis.*

an internal area of about 2.8m. Four stones within its southeast interior are aligned to form a rectangular corner but otherwise the distribution of fallen wall stones indicates a circular building. It is free of stones in the north-east, suggesting an entrance there. A collapsed wall on its north side links it to the south wall of House L. Possible *House O* consists of five large stones in an approximate semicircle, 2.8m across, immediately outside the east of the roundhouse, House I, and west of the wall conjoining Houses L and N. It could constitute a porch area for the roundhouse but is more cautiously interpreted as a non-structural and possibly non-artificial feature.

### **Geophysical survey**

Geophysical survey was conducted in September 2011. Fluxgate magnetometer survey was carried out using a Bartington 601 fluxgate gradiometer over 20m × 20m grids with readings taken at 0.25m intervals along traverses spaced 1m apart, at a resolution of 0.1nT. Earth resistance survey was conducted using a Geonics RM15 resistance meter and a PA5 electrode frame in the twin-electrode configuration, with a mobile probe spacing of 0.5m. Grids were 20m × 20m and readings taken at 1m intervals with a 1m traverse. The results of the geophysical survey are inconclusive, the uneven ground and extant stones making survey in this area challenging. The fluxgate magnetometer results do not show evidence for hearths or other burning activity, whilst it is difficult to determine whether regions of magnetic disturbance in the area of the houses are associated with anthropogenic activity or a reflection of the surrounding geology. The earth resistance results do indicate a range of high-resistance anomalies in some of the areas associated with the houses surveyed though these may solely be responses to the features that can already be seen on the ground.

## EXCAVATION OF HOUSE C

In September 2015 a trench 8m × 6m was excavated within and around House C to characterize the structure and ascertain its period of construction (Fig. 3). Turf was removed by hand and the surface below was excavated to the base of the topsoil. Eleven contexts were recorded, both inside and outside the structure. Only the southernmost part of the house's interior was excavated to ascertain the occupation sequence within the house. Finally, the trench was backfilled and re-turfed.

### **Building structure**

House C is a sub-rectangular building with maximum dimensions of 6.2m × 4.4m across. Its northern end is apsidal and its southern end broadly rectangular. Its walls are 0.8–1m thick, enclosing an internal space of 4.5m × 2.2m. Opposed doorways, each about 0.5m wide are positioned along the long walls, not in the centre of the house but slightly closer to its southern end. The west doorway is not well defined and could potentially be a later entrance formed after the house fell into ruin.

The walls (006) are formed of irregular-shaped, weathered dolerite boulders surviving to no more than a single course. Tumbled stones indicate that the walls once stood higher but presumably were little more than footings for predominantly turf-built walls. Large stones on the north side of the potential cross-passage could be the remains of an east-west internal division separating off the northern half of the house; however, they could be tumbled stones or part of a structure built after the house's main period of use.

The house is set on a level terrace formed by a cutting (007) into the hillslope at the south end. This cut was only fully discernible in the eastern part of the south side, since it was largely obscured by large natural boulders outside the south-west corner. The north end of the house, sitting at a greater height than its exterior, may have been levelled up by material dug out of the south end.

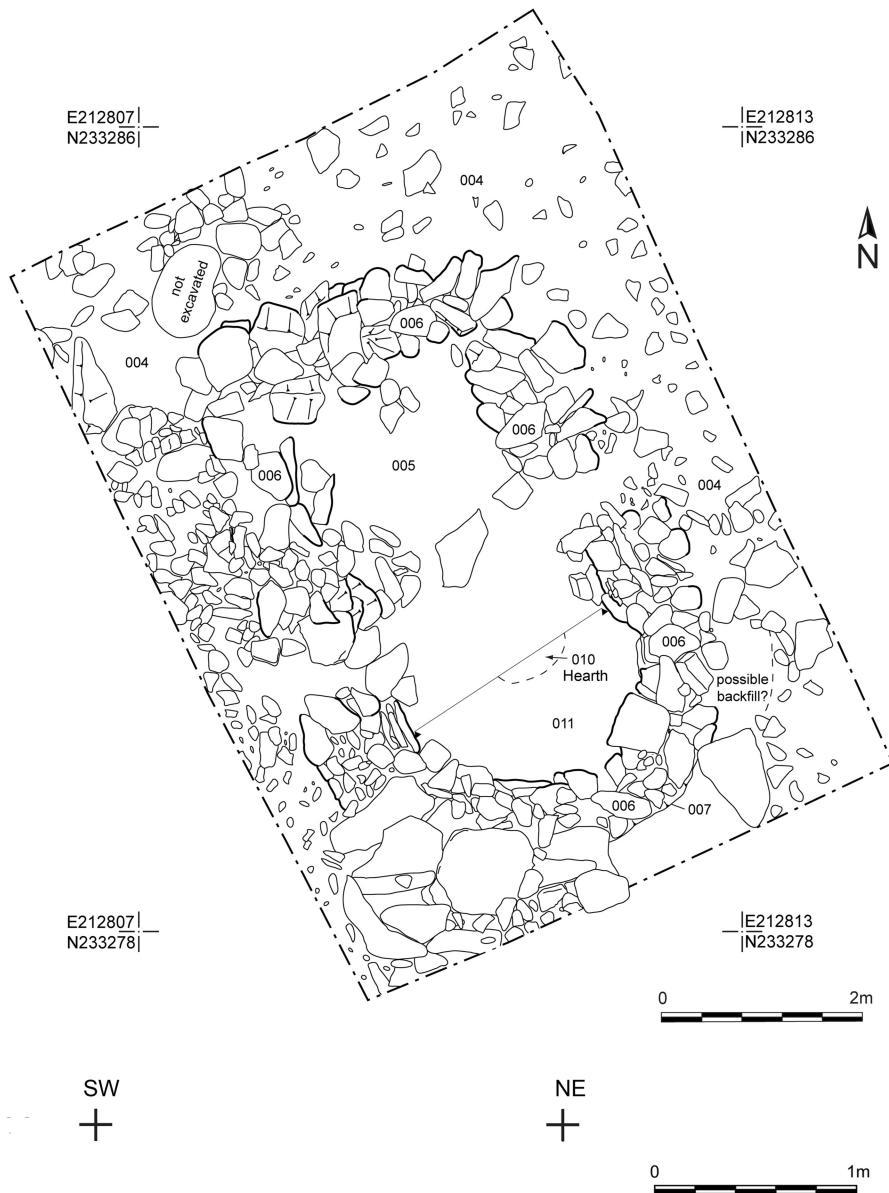


Fig. 3. Plan of House C with section through its lower fill. *Drawn by Irene Deluis.*

### Floor and interior sequence

The house floor was examined only in its southern part where it was a level surface formed of the underlying bedrock and subsoil (011). Other than the bedrock, there was no trace of a floor surface, and no features were cut into this surface. The only trace of a habitation deposit was a 0.05m-thick layer of grey-brown clay silt (009) with carbonised wood flecks, surrounding the southern edge of a 0.75m-diameter by



0.05m thick deposit of hearth ash (010) (Figs 3–4). This unbounded hearth, bisected by the section line, was presumably positioned within the centre of the southern half of the house. Layer 009 did not form a compacted occupation surface and had no clear interfaces with the hearth, the surface (011) below it, or the fill layer (008) above. No artefacts were found within the excavated part of the house interior but a sample of carbonised hazel (*Corylus avellana*) roundwood from among more than 500 pieces of wood charcoal around the outer edge of the hearth (009) was radiocarbon-dated to cal. AD 1030–1200 at 95.4% confidence (SUERC-68382;  $917 \pm 34$  BP).<sup>1</sup>

The occupation deposits were covered by a layer of grey-light brown clay silt (008) mottled with iron staining, up to 0.1m thick. Small stones and carbonised wood flecks were increasingly common towards the base of this layer. It is interpreted as a soil forming after the building's abandonment. Layer 008 was covered by a soft, friable mid-orange-brown silt (005) to a depth of up to 0.2m, interpreted as hill wash accumulating within the ruined building.

#### Area outside the house

The bedrock and subsoil (004) outside the northern two-thirds of the house was covered by a 0.05m-thick deposit of soft, friable grey silt (003) with orange mottling and carbonised wood flecks. This layer contained nine sherds of medieval pottery (Fig. 6) and a small highly polished stone (SF2). Layer 003 was covered by a 0.05m-thick layer of friable grey silt (002) that lay directly below the topsoil (001). A mudstone spindle whorl (Fig. 5, SF1) was found in layer 002.



Fig. 4. House C at the end of excavation, viewed from the south (the scale is 1.2m long with 0.2m gradations). *Photograph: Duncan Schlee.*



Fig. 5. Decorated mudstone spindle whorl (SF1) from layer 002 outside House C.  
*Photograph: Ken Walton. Drawing by Irene Deluis.*

## FINDS

### Stone

- SF1 Mudstone spindle whorl, 41mm diameter × 8mm thick with a 9mm-wide drilled hole (Fig. 5). One face is decorated with incised lines 0.5–1mm in a zig-zag pattern interspersed with radiating lines. The other face is decorated with much finer lines to form a roughly incised tendril with a leaf at the top. It appears to be broadly Romanesque or later, dating to the twelfth or thirteenth century (Nancy Edwards pers. comm.). From context 002, outside House C.
- SF2 Highly polished black pebble, 15mm across (not illustrated). This could be described as a ‘worry stone’, polished by continual holding in the hand. From context 003, outside House C.

### Pottery

Twelve sherds of unglazed medieval pottery (150g) were found, including base sherds and a handle. They represent a minimum of two vessels, of a fabric akin to Dyfed gravel-tempered ware (cf. Papazian and Campbell 1992, 56–8),<sup>2</sup> and include two base sherds (Fig. 6, 1–2), including one from a thumbled convex base, and a slashed jug handle (Fig. 6, 3). They are likely to date to the late twelfth to thirteenth century but could be as late as the early 16th century. From contexts 001, 002 and 003 outside the area of House C.

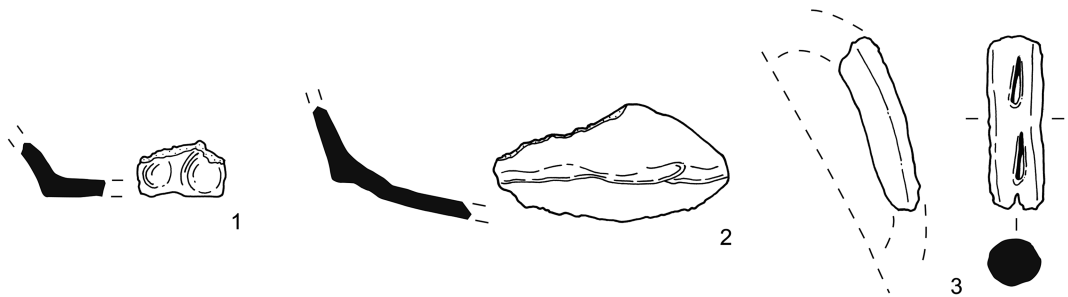


Fig. 6. Sherds of medieval pottery from contexts outside House C (1. context 002; 2. context 003; 3. context 001). *Drawn by Irene Deluis.*

## DISCUSSION

Radiocarbon and ceramic dating evidence suggests that House C dates to the mid eleventh to early thirteenth century AD. All the finds come from layers immediately outside the house and are presumably the remains of refuse discarded from its interior. The most remarkable artefact is a decorated mudstone spindle whorl. The crudely incised decoration on one of its faces contrasts with a finely incised but roughly executed leaf and tendril motif on the other. This motif is interesting as an example of informal Romanesque graffiti, to be compared with the more elite, sepulchral carvings of the period (cf. Gresham 1968).

Similarities in the form of the neighbouring buildings suggest that Houses A–B and D–J are also likely to be of eleventh- to twelfth-century date. The group appear to represent *hafodydd*, seasonally-occupied houses associated with exploitation of the upland pastures. The sub-circular houses are undated but the more denuded appearance of their stone walls suggests that they are of greater antiquity and probably of pre-medieval date. Remains of field walls forming a north-south coaxial pattern leading northwards onto the lower ground north of Carn Goedog could be associated with either or both of these settlement clusters.

Similar groups of single-celled houses (variously described as ‘platform houses’ and ‘long huts’) are recorded elsewhere in many upland locations in Wales (Roberts 2006b, 172–5, 207) and commonly assumed to be of medieval or early post-medieval date, though few have been excavated and even fewer are dated. Like House C, entrances are usually on the long sides and these sometimes appear to be associated with suggestions of internal partitions (Leighton 2012, 120; Locock 2006, 45; Silvester 2006, 34). The alignment of the Carn Goedog houses at right-angles to the slope, is typical of medieval examples (Roberts 2006b, 177). Their lengths, between 4–7m, are typical of many such sites in central Wales, though much larger examples exist, like those at Gelligaer in Glamorgan which are dated to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century (Fox 1939, 173; Silvester 2006, 34). The radiocarbon date from the hearth in House C (cal. AD 1030–1200 at 95.4% confidence) must be seen in this context: apart from Gelligaer, where dating depends on pottery, the only other early dated site is Ynys Ettws in Gwynedd where a radiocarbon date from a pit in the floor indicates possible occupation during cal. AD 1040–1390 at 95.4% confidence and cal. AD 1120–1310 at 85.9% confidence<sup>3</sup> (Caseldine 2006, 146; Leighton 2012, 127; Silvester 2010, 153–4).

These upland structures are generally thought to be linked to the use of seasonal pasturage, although interpretation of evidence for the seasonal or permanent occupation of excavated dwellings is contested (Silvester 2006, 33–4). It is these seasonal pastures that are referred to as the ‘hafod’ in medieval sources; the term transfers to dwellings from the sixteenth century onwards (Davies 1980, 3–7; Sambrook 2006, 95–9). Thirteenth-century Welsh laws use the term ‘haf ty’ (‘summer house’) for the dwellings on the *hafod*, and their relatively insubstantial nature can be seen in the low compensation values attached to them (Davies 1980: 7; Jenkins 1990, 190, 353). The same law code indicates that it was expected practice for the bondsmen and animals of farming settlements to relocate to seasonal pastures from the beginning of May until the harvest was in (Jenkins 1990, 40, 236).

The location itself is also characteristic of *hafodydd*, and is typified elsewhere in south Wales as ‘along a track running diagonally up a slope, in a sheltered position below the summit area’ (Locock 2006, 45). The track next to the Carn Goedog dwellings (Fig. 1) is shown on George Owen’s map of Pembrokeshire of 1602 in which it links the farmland of Whitchurch to the north with the parishes of Mynachlogddu and Maenclochog on the southern flanks of the Preseli hills.<sup>3</sup>

As a building type, House C can thus be seen as typical of many undated upland structures, and its dating and occupation evidence are therefore valuable. The hints of gendered occupation provided by the spindle whorl are particularly interesting since the social composition of seasonal occupation could, in



principle, range from whole families (the interpretation often surmised from medieval Welsh law) to the teenage boys mentioned locally *c.* 1600 and the hired herdsmen of medieval Dartmoor (Fox 2012, 49ff; Miles 1994, 44–5; Ward 1997, 104–6;). In early modern northern Britain and Ireland, summer herds were usually accompanied by dairymaids helped by male herdsmen; diminutive dwellings on Bodmin Moor (around 3.5 × 2m internally, slightly smaller than Carn Goedog House C) suggest similar patterns for early medieval Cornwall (Fox 1996, 12–13; Herring 1996, 39).

The question of whether the structure was seasonally or permanently occupied has to be assessed from excavated evidence, site morphology and historical records, since there is little in the site's excavated evidence to indicate an annual, seasonal pattern of occupation. The presence of pottery cannot in itself be taken as an indicator of permanent occupation, since the site lies on the edge of what appears to have been a well-used medieval track and is less than an hour's walk from areas of permanent settlement. The site's setting and medieval records suggest seasonal land usage: it is an area of common land where seasonal pasture rights are still exercised by farms around the common edge. These rights are thought to derive from a mid-thirteenth-century charter, which confirms the earlier privileges of an aristocratic Welsh kin-group who held much of the arable land to the north in the medieval period (Jones 1979, 28; Owen 1862, 48). Carn Goedog lies within the area defined by the thirteenth-century charter, and its habitations were presumably occupied by these aristocrats' bondsmen or tenants, who might be expected to have followed the seasonal practices specified in contemporary Welsh law. The late sixteenth-century records of *hafod* place-names for nearby permanently occupied farmsteads at Hafod Wynog in 1598 and Hafod Tydfil in 1585 (Fig. 1) — the latter an enclosed island of fields amidst the moors to the north-west of the site — chart later changes in farming practices which see the enclosure of some areas of seasonal pasture for all-year farms (Charles 1992, 105). Other undated enclosures can be identified on the moorland to the north and north-east of the site in areas that are now waterlogged and, whilst these may be prehistoric, it is possible that these may also represent intensified exploitation in benign climatic intervals during the medieval period.

The excavation has demonstrated the good potential that more extensive excavation of such buildings, and the areas between them, have to yield significant data on transhumant practices and material culture in the medieval period.

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#### NOTES

1. Calibrated using OxCal. 4.3.2 and rounded to nearest 10 years.
2. The ceramic petrography studied by Rob Ixer indicates that one sherd has strong affinities with Dyfed gravel-tempered ware.

3. Beta-12671: 780±70 BP (Caseldine 2006, 146), calibrated using OxCal 4.3. 2, and rounded to nearest 10 years.
4. National Library of Wales, Map Collection 2843260, George Owen, *Penbrochiae Comitatus demetiae regionis descriptio* 1602.

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