The CAER Heritage Project

Revealing the Hidden History of Caerau and Ely
I am really pleased to provide a Forward to this account of the work of the CAER Heritage Project.

Ely and Caerau are great places - really strong communities which deal every day with both adversity and success. This booklet highlights another excellent reason to visit the area. The hillfort is a genuinely important part of the history of South Wales, brought back to new life by the combined efforts of Cardiff University, local organisations and residents.

As you’ll see in the pages which follow, young people from the area have been right at the heart of what has taken place. As they have discovered more about what history and archaeology can reveal, I am sure that it has uncovered things in themselves as well – and especially a wish to carry on learning in the future.

Many congratulations to all those who have been involved in this hugely successful venture. I hope this very readable booklet will bring the hillfort to life for many others, and inspire them to visit this remarkable site for themselves.

Mark Drakeford, AM for Cardiff West
The CAER Heritage Project

Archaeologists from Cardiff University have teamed up with Ely and Caerau Communities First, local residents and the local schools to start the Caerau And Ely Rediscovering (CAER) Heritage Project. The aim of the project is to explore the history and archaeology of Caerau and Ely from prehistory through to the modern day, helping to connect communities with their heritage in order to create a heightened sense of place and develop educational opportunities.

Throughout the year we’ve been running all sorts of activities, many focussed around the magnificent Caerau Iron Age hillfort – read on to find out more about them and the archaeology of Caerau and Ely…

“We in Communities First are very excited by the CAER Heritage Project. Ely & Caerau is an exciting and vibrant place with a long and fascinating history (longer and more fascinating than we’d thought, as it turns out!) We are inspired by the story of a people who built a community together thousands of years ago, and we hope to continue that task of community building in the shadow of their Caerau home.”

Dave Horton
Caerau and Ely Communities First
Did you know that the beautiful church of St Mary’s is not the only thing to make Caerau Hill so special? The church itself is actually standing within one of the largest and best preserved Iron Age hillforts in South Wales and next to a medieval ringwork or castle.

Tinkinswood chambered tomb built (c. 3700 BC)

Ely Bronze hoard deposited (c. 800 BC)

Caerau hillfort constructed (c. 600 BC)

Romans conquer South Wales

NEOLITHIC (STONE AGE)

BRONZE AGE

IRON AGE

ROMAN

4000 BC

2200 BC

700 BC

AD 74
Caerau hillfort is one of the largest and best preserved in South Wales. Hillforts are large defended settlements, fortified by massive banks and ditches (ramparts), and built more than 2,000 years ago in the Iron Age. Today the ramparts of Caerau hillfort are hidden beneath trees, but it was once a stronghold of the powerful Silurian tribe who inhabited this part of Wales before the arrival of the Romans.

Further processing of the LiDAR data results in a ‘bare-earth’ digital terrain model, with houses and trees stripped away, which brings the hillfort to life by revealing the magnificent sculpted ramparts and ditches.

This is a really special place and full of a rich history that this project is just beginning to reveal.
Working with Local Schools

Much of the first year of the CAER Heritage Project has been working with young people – particularly three local schools: Glyn Derw, Fitzalan and Mary Immaculate. The pupils have helped us discover how people lived in Caerau in the Iron Age and the more recent past!

Geophysics

The pupils helped us explore the interior of the hillfort using geophysics. This allows us to see underneath the modern ground surface. The survey revealed the boundaries and houses of the ancient occupants of this place.
Pottery

Iron Age people had to make their own pots for cooking in and eating out of. Using clay, they would have made ‘coil’ pots by rolling the clay into tubes and coiling them round a round base – the pupils had a go at this too with fantastic results!
Creating Art

Many Iron Age artefacts found by archaeologists have intricate designs and patterns – these were symbols of power and ritual and even perhaps symbols of tribes and communities. Inspired by Iron Age artefacts they had seen at the National Museum, St Fagans, the pupils designed their own tribal symbols and created them on a massive scale within the hillfort. The symbols were made using tree bark so that they were bio-degradable.
Churchyard detectives

It’s not just the lives of the Iron Age inhabitants of Caerau and Ely that we’ve discovered more about. Helped by historical and archival experts from Cardiff University and the Glamorgan Archives, some pupils from Glyn Derw School undertook a project exploring the lives of people who lived in Caerau and Ely during the 19th and 20th centuries. The pupils recorded the gravestone inscriptions at St Mary’s Church, and then researched the names and lives of the individuals buried in the churchyard at the Glamorgan Archives. This allowed them to find out more about life in Victorian and Edwardian Caerau and Ely.
Time Team

In April 2012 we invited archaeologists from Channel 4 show Time Team to help us explore the hillfort. The team spent three days working at the site with local people, helping to reveal Caerau's archaeological heritage. The discoveries so far have been extraordinary – we’ve found the houses and enclosures of the prehistoric inhabitants of this magnificent hillfort, as well as the remains of pots they made and the quernstones they used for grinding grain to make flour. The discoveries are helping us put together a story of 1,200 years of occupation at Caerau from the Bronze Age (1000 BC) to Roman times (AD 200).

“Time Team were delighted to work with the community of Caerau and the CAER Heritage Project during our excavations at the hill-fort. An important place for hundreds of years and full of incredible history, we hope the research and study of this place continues to captivate and inspire for generations to come. To be a small part of helping people better understand this site was both a privilege and thrill for all involved!”

Sian Price
Time Team
Adult Learners

It’s not just young people who’ve been involved in the project. In June 2012 the Cardiff University Centre for Lifelong Learning delivered a free Adult Learners course on the Archaeology of Caerau and Ely through the Live Local, Learn Local scheme. Local people got involved in discovering more about the fascinating archaeology and history on their doorstep.

“…This is a brilliant project for us as a school and a university to be involved in. It enables us to communicate directly with the communities we should be serving, and it gives all of the students who take part, both undergraduate and postgraduate, a wealth of useful and socially transformative experience to work with and to take away with them as a legacy of their time at university. We are very proud to be involved.”

Terry Threadgold
Head of SHARE (School of History, Archaeology & Religion), Cardiff University
Exhibitions

Inspired by all the work and discoveries at Caerau hillfort, pupils from Glyn Derw, Fitzalan and Mary Immaculate Schools have produced some fantastic displays about people in the Iron Age – the houses they lived in, the things they used and the food they ate. From August to November 2012 some of these have been on exhibition at National Museum Wales, St Fagans.

In February 2013 the displays will be on show at the Cardiff Story Museum – come and visit and see what we’ve done so far.

“Hosting the schools involved in the Caerau project and displaying their work has been a great pleasure for us. The project has given us fresh ways of engaging with audiences on our doorstep and has helped to foster relationships which we hope will continue and grow in the coming years.”

Steve Burrow
National Museum Wales
The Future
There are lots more chances to get involved and lots more activities planned for 2013. To keep up-to-date with events follow us on Twitter (@CAERHeritage) and like us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/CAERHeritageProject).

To get involved, contact the CAER Heritage Project Team – caer@cardiff.ac.uk – or check out our website – www.caerheritageproject.com
Acknowledgements

The CAER Heritage Project activities and events would not have been possible without the support of a great many organisations and individuals. Since 2011 the project has been funded by the AHRC and Cardiff University. Particular thanks should be given to Dave Horton of Ely and Caerau Communities First without whose support the project would not have been possible. Dr Tim Young deserves special mention for leading the geophysical surveys of Caerau hillfort. The artistic and creative help and inspiration from Paul Evans was invaluable. Our thanks are also extended to the staff of Cadw, the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, Glamorgan Archives and the National Museum Wales who have given so much of their time to help. Finally, we could not have achieved any of this without the enthusiasm and support of all the volunteers, students and local budding archaeologists who have made this year so enjoyable.

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