

Dinas Powys Notes

Dinas Powys Castle

[Dinas Powys Castle](#) (ST 15284 71653) The ruins of the medieval castle are surrounded by thick vegetation. A succession of invaders inhabited over the centuries. Few castles can trace their remains back to Iron Age, Roman, Dark Age, Saxon and Norman fortifications better than Dinas Powys. The walls are still quite substantial, as is the area it covers, with remains of stone walls traceable with care through the thick undergrowth and woodland. Access to the castle grounds can be found via Lettons Way.

1100's ~ The Norman de Somery family make Dinas Powys their principle seat to secure their lands in South Wales.

1190's ~ A high defensible courtyard wall is built as an addition to the stone keep and deep ditches, replacing the timber pallisades.

1194 ~ Dudley Castle in Staffordshire becomes the principle seat of the Somery family, resulting in no further work or repairs being made to the castle.

1222 ~ King Henry III orders the castle to be handed over to Gilbert de Clare, who had already made an attempt to take it from the Earl of Pembroke by force.

1322 ~ The castle's importance declines when the de Sumery male line comes to an end. The castle passes to the Sutton's who in turn later sell the castle to Sir Matthew Cradock.

1400's ~ The end to the Welsh uprising under Owain Glyndwr further reduces the need for a fortified site at Dinas Powys.

1536 ~ A survey records the castle as "al in ruine".



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Above: the south-eastern entrance to the castle into the bailey has been robbed of its dressed stone blocks



Dinas Powys Castle is a ruinous medieval fortress crowning a small and isolated steep-sided hill. It was the centre for a wealthy lordship. The castle is first recorded in about 1200 and was 'al in ruine' by the early sixteenth century. Thirteenth to fifteenth century coins have been found at the site. The castle consists of a near rectangular walled court about 68m north-west to south-east by 32m. The wall is 2.0m wide and in places survives to its battlements. There was a wide arched entrance facing the main approach from the south-east and a narrower postern with a pointed arch in the north-east wall. Masonry and timber buildings, including a great lordly hall, once lined the walls. At the north-west end there are slight remains of a great rectangular tower, some 18m by 13m, attached to the outside of the enclosure wall. A small counterscarped outwork, apparently earlier than the enclosure, lies beyond the tower.

It is thought that the tower is earlier than the enclosure and it was probably built in the twelfth century. The enclosure may be late twelfth century, although the form of the postern hints at a thirteenth century date. Source: RCAHMW Glamorgan Inventory III.1a *The Earlier Castles* (1991), 307-314.

Cwm George Iron Age Fort (ST 14747 72324) Although it can be hard to make out, this is one of Wales' best-preserved Iron Age fort sites and potentially one of the most important in Europe. Dinas Powys hill fort lies on the top of a ridge between the river valley and a gorge called Cwm George. It is thought to have been built in 450 BC and is said to be the richest, best preserved and most fully excavated early medieval, non-religious settlement in Wales, as well as being the most important in Europe for this period. A wealth of artefacts has also been discovered at the site, including a rare Saxon horn goblet. The rich finds, impressive size and large number of animal bones all point towards this being the residence of someone very important. It might even have been a court of the kings of Glamorgan, as the site lies at the power seat of Wales. Spears and swords were also found at the hill fort, indicating it was a highly defended site.



Selection of artefacts, clockwise from top right: Phocaeen red slipware; fragment of lead mould die; copper-alloy mount; millefiori glass rod; crucible; Atlantic and Anglo-Saxon tradition glass (© Amgueddfa Cymru National Museum Wales) (figure by Mark Lodwick).

There is a smashing online video about the fort:-

[A Date With Time - YouTube video transcript CC](#)

this is a fairly steep hill rising to 70 metres above sea level and partly surrounded by trees and this is one of the most important ancient hill forts in South Wales, this is Dina's Palace.

Dinah's Powys is a large village about five miles west of Cardiff here in this aerial photograph from 1947 we can see the hill fort in the top right at a time when the plateau of the fort was clear of trees unlike today close up we can see these deep ditches and banks around the hilltop

A typical of a prehistoric hill fort in Britain hill forts were mostly made in the Iron Age between 700 BC to the time of the Roman invasion in the 1st century AD and archaeologists have indeed found an aged pottery here but Dinas Powys is a bit different from most hill forts most of the artifacts found here and most of the ditch bank building seems to be from the 5th to the 7th centuries AD, the early medieval period this was after the Romans had left this area and well after the end of the Iron Age to the south where we've just come from there are four ditches and banks and then the ground slopes are we're more gradually of course one of the ditches is a raised area and that's called the causeway.

Beyond that there are two more ditches and banks but they haven't yet been dated reliably and they don't have an obvious defensive roll. To the north there are no ditches and banks at all but just a hill going down very steeply To the West there is a single bank and ditch and then the hill slopes down fairly steeply from there and to the east again a single earth bank there and in the end goes down fairly

steeply from there as well the whole site and this is the centre of the site the whole site is about half a hectare in size it's about the size of a football pitch. it's quite small for a hill fort for ancient hill forts like this. Most archaeologists believe that the ditches and banks were built for defensive purposes but if so it isn't clear exactly how they worked perhaps they slowed down attackers or acted as a deterrent

Archaeologists dug here extensively in the late 1950s and they found dozens of post holes around the edge of the site at the top inside that top bank

It's believed those post holes would have held wooden pillars and those pillars would have formed a kind of palisade this could have given added defense or deterrence to the fort but there's more evidence which builds a picture of the people who lived here and why they may have needed to protect themselves.

Archaeologists found imported glass and Mediterranean vessels here from around a fifth century to about 700 AD there was large containers were brought from the eastern Mediterranean and from North Africa with very possibly oils and wine and there was more evidence of feasting including thousands of animal bone fragments which were found here also there was evidence of the manufacture of jewelry including fragments of crucibles for the making of for the shaping of precious metals including very possibly copper alloys, silver and gold and certainly evidence for the manufacture of iron.

So you can see that there was quite a well established trading focus here with very likely quite a wealthy establishment who were based here there are other signs of people living here including to dry stone buildings some hearths or fireplaces and a grave so most of the evidence points to occupation between about the fifth and seventh centuries AD and fairly strong trading relationships in order to bring those valuables from overseas, perhaps a smallish well-connected group of people who were hanging onto their wealth and their trading relationships after the Romans left the area so you could understand why they may have needed to protect themselves in their possessions.

In fact the Anglo-Saxons didn't come here in the early fifth century the locals were left alone so here at Dinas Powys we can see the transition as the Roman Empire ended and the indigenous Romano-British people defined a new life a new identity for themselves the people who lived here may not have been typical of the time but the evidence they've left us gives us a rare glimpse into their life the everyday life of a well-connected group of people right after the Roman colonists left Britain

Some other useful links about the hill fort:

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/antiquity/article/new-chronology-for-the-welsh-hillfort-of-dinas-powys/A2CF4608F2872218DBA2836C0138DD1B>

<https://penarthramblers.wordpress.com/walk-reports/july-2013/a-site-visit-and-lecture-on-the-dinas-powys-hill-fort-by-dr-andy-seaman-on-5-july-organised-by-geraint/>

Cwm George (ST 14585 72107) Cwm George is a glacial valley created by melt waters from the last Ice Age. The woodland is lined with beech and sycamore trees, and there is colour all year round. On hot summer days, this ancient, semi-natural woodland provides some welcome respite from the sun with its canopy of leaves. The woodland is abundant with wildlife, from the rare hazel dormouse to the common kestrel. Many moths, which rely entirely on the small-leaved lime that grows here, inhabit the wood. It is one of the few places in the south of the county where this species occurs naturally.

Michaelston-le-Pitt Church (ST 15191 72982) St Michael's Church is a Grade I listed church. The Ranegh family probably built it; the earliest records of it date to the Taxation of Norwich in 1254, where it was referred to as St Michael de Renny. The church has many items that date to medieval times, including a baptismal font that was lost at the Battle of St Fagan's and later discovered in a local field. It also has the only triple-decker pulpit found in the Vale of Glamorgan. It is most famous for its sporting graves, including its sporting vicar, Rev. Henry Holmes Stewart, a team member who won the FA Cup in 1873, the same year he was ordained. And also William Brain, a footballer and cricketer who was the first man ever to perform the hat trick of taking three wickets off consecutive balls.

Cwrt yr Ala House and Estate (ST 14510 73182) The name comes from the Court of Raleigh, as relatives of the famous Elizabethan adventurer Sir Walter Raleigh supposedly owned it. Simon de Raleigh was the Sheriff of Glamorgan from 1299 to 1304. After the Civil War, it was bought by Colonel Philip Jones, a counsellor to Cromwell and the man responsible for organising Cromwell's funeral. The current house was built in 1939-40 for Sir Herbert Merret, chair of the mining and industrial company Powell Duffryn. At the end of the Second World War, it was the largest coal company in the world. The house was redesigned in the 1930s by Sir Percy Thomas in the classical Georgian style. Sir Percy Thomas' other creations include the Temple of Peace in Cardiff's Cathays Park and the Swansea Guildhall. [Today Cardiff-based entrepreneur Emma Vidler owns it, and the grounds include holiday rental properties.](#)

Salmon Leaps (ST 14478 73114) This section is called Salmon Leaps – a series of cascades created by weirs on the lower reaches of Wrinstone Brook. It's possible to see a salmon in the Autumn, although, in reality, this is very rare. Especially as a couple of herons have made the area their home.

Dinas Powys Golf Club (ST 15118 71450) The club opened in May 1914 on land that was previously the 38-acre Highwalls Farm, owned by the Cwrt-yr-Ala estate. Advice on the layout was received from Willie Park Jnr, the Open Champion in 1887 and 1889, who travelled from his home in Musselborough, Scotland. Harry Prosser from Barry was employed as the Club's first professional groundsman and,

perhaps more than Willie Park, was the driving force behind the laying out of the new (initially) nine-hole course

Dinas is the Welsh for City, and it was once much bigger and busier than it is now. Today it's a charming large village with a combination of long-stay locals and capital city commuters. You're less than five miles from the centre of Cardiff here. Once an agricultural village, Dinas Powys boomed in the 1880s with the coal revolution which brought people and wealth to the area. On the wall of the Three Horseshoes is a plaque to poet Thomas Essile David (1820-1891), who was born in the pub. He is described as 'a True Son of Wales'.

Refs

[Derek Brockway's Weatherman Walking trip to the area](#)