

# Barclodiad y Gawres new megalithic art

As part of ongoing research, the authors discuss the recent megalithic rock art discovery at the Barclodiad y Gawres Neolithic passage grave in Anglesey, North Wales (NGR SH 3289 7072). The discovery forms part of a much wider research agenda - the Anglesey Rock art Project (ARAP) which up until April 2006 had made four significant rock art discoveries in Anglesey (Nash *et al.* 2005). In terms of rock art assemblages elsewhere in the world, the Welsh discoveries can be considered relatively insignificant. However, prior to the Anglesey discoveries, only around 45 sites were known in Wales and of these, 35% of these associated with Neolithic burial monuments (Darvill & Wainwright 2003; Sharkey 2004, Nash *et al.* 2005; Nash 2006). The rock art from the majority of these sites comprise mainly single and multiple cupules (cupmarks) that are either arranged haphazardly or in linear patterns.

Barclodiad y Gawres is located on an exposed peninsula on the western side of the island and was excavated between 1952 and 1953 by Terrence Powell and Glyn Daniel (Figure 1). It is one of three highly decorated passage grave monuments in England and Wales that date to the Late Neolithic (c. 2,500 cal. BC) and the megalithic art from this site is regarded as an outstanding example (Lynch 1970, 40). The other two monuments, Bryn Celli Ddu in Anglesey and the destroyed Calderstones monument in Liverpool possess similar motifs to Barclodiad y Gawres and were probably constructed and in use at the same time. The rock art from the three monuments have been recorded and received

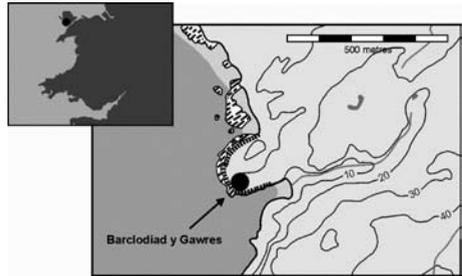


Figure 1. Location of Barclodiad y Gawres (Image: A. George)

comment (Forde-Johnson 1956; Lynch 1967 & Shee-Twohig 1981).

## The discovery of the rock art panel

The site, comprising a circular mound with passage and chamber has, until the recent discovery within its architecture five stones that have been pecked with geometric art. The pecked art includes concentric circles, chevrons, cupmarks, lozenges, serpentine motifs and spirals which are carved on strategically placed uprights within the inner passage and chamber areas. The art from one stone, forming the northern upright of the eastern chamber went unrecorded during the 1952-3 excavation but has since been discovered in 2001 by Maggie and Keith Davidson who subsequently placed an image of the decoration on the Internet but largely went unnoticed by the academic world.

In February 2006 a team from the University of Bristol recorded the stone using a variety

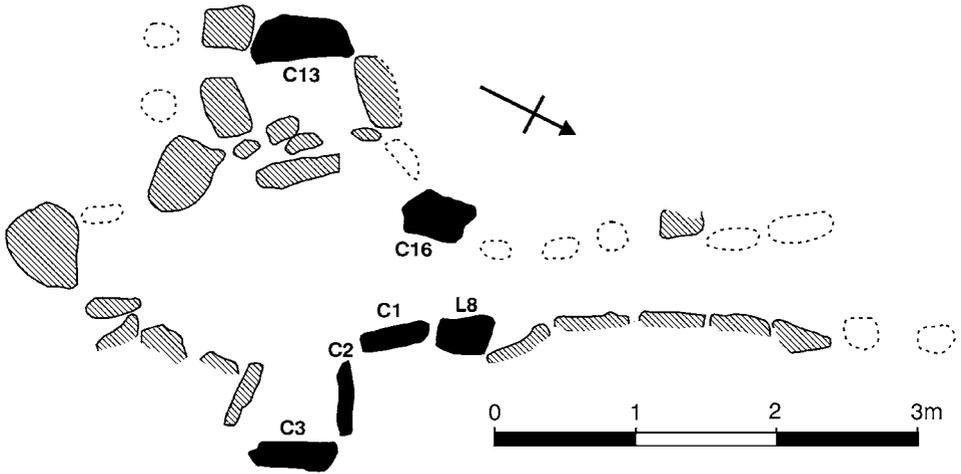


Figure 2. Plan of the passage and chamber areas showing decorated stones (in black). On the southern face of Stone C2 is the newly discovered rock art.

of techniques including digital photography and tracing on acetate (Figure 2). The results from this fieldwork not only acknowledged the discovery in 2001 but also revealed that two other chamber uprights, located between the south and western chambers had been severely damaged as a result of recent vandalism. The discovery and the vandalism were duly reported to CADW on March 9th 2006.

Recording of the new carving began on the 7th March 2006 and followed reconnoitres by the same team in September 2004 and February 2006. The pecked lines, although not as clearly defined as those on other stones, can be identified as a series of lines forming a geometric chevron pattern. The fine pecking technique used had ironically assisted in concealing this art until very recently. Following a detailed study of the monument it was revealed that the original excavation team had missed this and several other stones that contained prehistoric rock art. Other stones highlighted by the survey team included the stones within the western chamber each possessing several cupmarks (Stones 20 and 21). A single cupmark was also recorded on the north-eastern corner of the capstone that covers the southern chamber.

The newly discovered decorated stone, referred to in Powell and Daniel's excavation volume as Stone 7 (Shee-Twohig's classification: Stone C2) forms the northern wall of the eastern chamber and is hidden away from any current natural light source. It is only the passage, the central gallery and the southern chamber that are illuminated by natural light. However this was probably not the case during the Neolithic. The constricting passage, strategically set door and threshold stones, plus periodic blocking would have restricted the natural light from the inner passage and chamber areas. The 1953 Excavation revealed a hearth within the central chamber area and this would have probably provided the necessary light source in order that the decorated stones could be seen and 'read'. Today the eastern and western chambers can only be seen by artificial light and it is probably this factor that has kept the rock art of this and other stones hidden.

The newly discovered decoration on the northern slab of the eastern chamber comprises a series of vertical and horizontally pecked lines that form a chevron (Figure 3). These lines, located on the inward face converge towards the centre of the stone

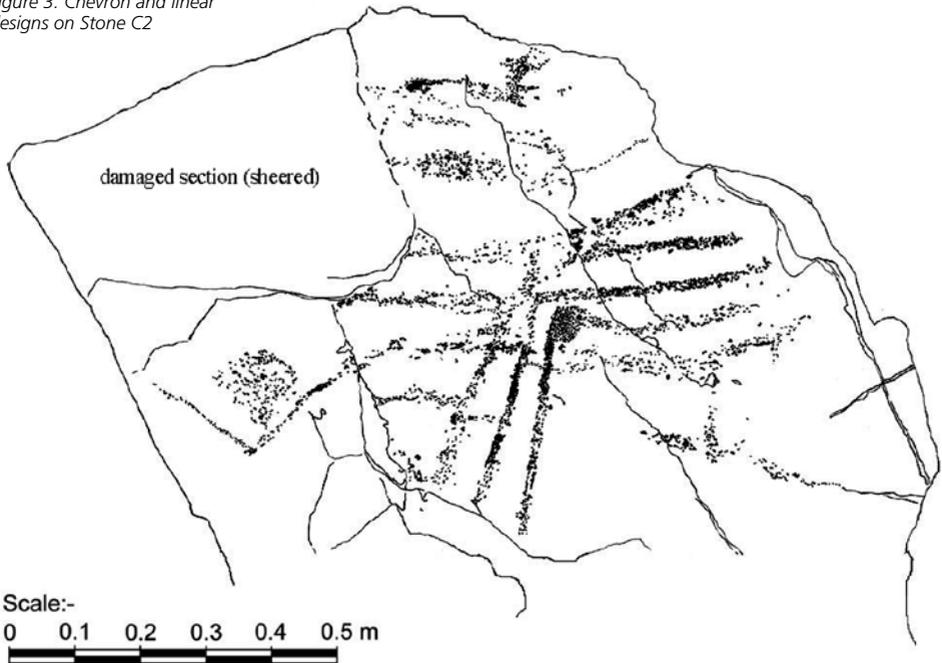


Stone C2



Plate 1. Recording images on Stone C2 using acetate  
(Photo: G. H. Nash)

Figure 3. Chevron and linear designs on Stone C2



and merge into a lightly pecked disc section, measuring around 4cm in diameter. The pecked chevron extends to the western edge of the stone, onto the side face. Centrally placed on the side face is the lower section of a single lozenge measuring around 22cm x 19cm. Apart from the chevron design there appears to be another phase of carving on the northern face of the stone. The horizontal lines that construct the chevron appear to have been either extended or the chevron has been superimposed by a later design comprising of a series of four horizontal lines. The designs appear to be the result of two phases of artistic endeavour and were probably executed by an individual artist or group of artists returning to the site, probably the same person who pecked the other stones within this monument.

#### **Discussion: Art that is seen but not seen**

The newly discovered stone has received wide publicity and has been briefly described by Nash *et al.* (2005). The design is not replicated anywhere else within the monument, however, the light pecking technique is used on all decorated stones. Partly based on the excavation report by Powell & Daniel (1956) the decorated stones including the newly discovered Stone No. 2 appear to be *in situ*. The design coding can be considered angular in style, a style that is frequent within the Boyne Valley monuments of Knowth and Newgrange. Included within the angular design classification are chevrons, lines, lozenges, triangles and zigzags. These designs are also found on uprights within Barclodiad y Gawres. Similar angular styles are also found in the chamber at Fournocks, County Meath (Eogan 1986, 153). It is conceivable that the concept and ideology behind the angular style, important to the builders and users of the Irish passage grave tradition was transmitted and used by people at Barclodiad y Gawres.

The stone is hidden away from any natural light source, whilst the passage, the central gallery and the southern chamber are partially illuminated by natural light. However this was probably not the case during the Ne-

olithic. The constricting passage that extend further than today's plan plus strategically set door and threshold stones as well as periodic blocking would have further restricted the natural light. Today, as during the Neolithic, the eastern and western chambers can only be seen by an artificial light source and it is probably this factor that has kept hidden the secrets of the art on the stone.

The stones that form the eastern chamber along with the decorated stones from this monument show that the way the dead were interred was paramount. Symbolically, the dead, who would have embarked on a number of journeys prior to being finally deposited in the chambers, would have 'seen' the art on these chamber uprights. Each stone, located within the inner passage and central gallery areas could have only been seen and fully read by people using these areas of the monument. Accompanying grave goods such as pottery, flint and beads – retrieved from the excavation – suggest that the chamber was merely a respite before embarking on their final journey. The rock art appears to have been deliberately positioned in order that only certain individuals could see it and so that the complete design of each stone could be exposed; fire from a hearth located within the chamber area or torches would have been the only means of illumination. The activity undertaken within the chamber area would have been a mystery to the people standing outside in the façade area of monument and the secret ritual acts played within the chamber area shared only with the dead. The rock art including the recently discovered pecked art in the eastern chamber would have formed an essential ingredient to the ritual performance and the way the dead were treated around 5,000 years ago.

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## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Cadw for assistance with access to this monument. The authors would also like to thank the following for their help with the discovery and recording of the rock art within Barclodiad y Gawres: Carol Brookes, Debbie Hudson and Ann Smith. Thanks to Abby George for undertaking the artwork. All mistakes of course are the author's responsibility.

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