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## Dublin Core

### Title

Lost Souls in the Sand | Eneidiau Coll yn y Tywod

### Subject

Whitesands Bay

Porthmawr

Pembrokeshire

Sir Benfro

St. Patrick's Chapel

Capel St Patrig

### Creator

Natasha de Chroustchoff

### Publisher

Ports, Past and Present Project

### Date

2023

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### Relation

<https://perma.cc/M4X8-UNCR>

## Format

Curatescape story

## Language

English

Welsh

## Coverage

51.89454597850315, -5.295963330402631

# Curatescape Story Item Type Metadata

## Lede

A series of archaeological digs from 2016 at Whitesands reveal hundreds of burials stretching back to the early history of Christianity in Wales and the medieval crossing of the Irish Sea.

## Lede (Welsh)

Cyfres o gloddiadau archeolegol yn 2016 ym Mhorthmawr yn datgelu cannoedd o gladdedigaethau, yn dyddio'n ôl i ddyddiau cynnar Cristnogaeth yng Nghymru a chroesi Môr Iwerddon yn ystod yr oesoedd canol.

## Story

Whitesands Bay (Porthmawr in Welsh) with its long sandy beach, rolling waves and stunning views, is a world-famous surfing destination, as well as a popular holiday beach. Two miles west of St David's, it has a long history as a place of arrival and departure. The sand dunes at the western end of the beach conceal evidence of human life and death dating back to the early Christian era in this part of Wales. Traditionally, it was the site of the twelfth-century St Patrick's Chapel, mentioned by historian George Owen in 1603:

*Capel Patrick [is] full west of St Davids and placed as near his country, namely Ireland, as it could well be. It is now wholly decayed.*

By implication then, Whitesands may have been St Patrick's point of embarkation when he set sail for Ireland in the fifth century, later to become its patron saint. Irish pilgrims to St David's shrine would surely have landed here too and the gently sloping beach made it a natural trading post for sea-borne goods.

As far back as 1890 a local newspaper reported human bones washed out the dunes after a storm. As this continued it became clear that the area had once been a burial ground. Boulders were placed to protect the site but rising sea levels exacerbated the erosion. In 2014 the decision was taken to excavate as a matter of urgency if the site were not to be lost for good.

Excavations have since been carried out during several summer seasons with remarkable results. To date over a hundred burials have been unearthed and it's estimated there may be over a thousand in all. Radiocarbon dating has shown that the cemetery was in use between the sixth and the twelfth centuries of the middle ages. Men, women, and children of all ages were laid to rest here, many buried in stone-lined graves called cists. "They are likely to have been a mixture of local people and sailors, traders, pilgrims and others travelling to St David's." says one of the excavation directors.

All the dead were buried lying east to west - to face the rising sun - as is customary in both Christian and pre-Christian religious practice. There were no personal possessions with the bodies but several of the children's graves were accompanied by small collections of quartz

pebbles, a tradition that has been noted in early Christian graves elsewhere (and can to be seen in Jewish cemeteries today.)

The excavated human remains are currently undergoing analysis to see what else can be learnt from them but they will eventually be re-buried in Pembrokeshire with all due respect – but not in the shifting sands of the dunes. Further excavations will continue in a race with coastal erosion. There are many more graves as well as traces of a building thought to pre-date St Patrick's chapel. The archaeological evidence unearthed at Whitesands has the potential to transform our understanding of the Christian population that lived and died in early mediaeval Pembrokeshire.

*Between 2014 and 2016 the excavations were carried by Dyfed Archaeological Trust and the University of Sheffield, with support from CADW, the Nineveh Charitable Trust and the Pembrokeshire National Park Authority. Further excavations began in 2019 as part of the EU-funded Ancient Connections Project led by Pembrokeshire County Council.*

### **Story (Welsh)**

Mae Bae Porthmawr gyda'i draeth tywodlyd hir, ei donnau a'i olygfeydd godidog yn gyrchfan syrffio byd-enwog, ac mae'n draeth gwyliau poblogaidd hefyd. Ddwy filltir i'r gorllewin o Dyddewi, mae ganddo hanes hir fel lle cyrraedd ac ymadael. Mae'r twyni tywod wrth ben gorllewinol y traeth yn celu tystiolaeth o fywyd dynol a marwolaeth sy'n dyddio'n ôl i'r oes Gristnogol gynnar yn y rhan hon o Gymru. Yn draddodiadol, bu'n safle Capel Sant Padrig o'r ddeuddegfed ganrif, y soniwyd amdano gan George Owen, hanesydd, ym 1603:

*Mae Capel Padrig [i'r] gorllewin o Dyddewi ac mae wedi cael ei osod mor agos i'w wlad, sef Iwerddon, ag y gallai fod. Mae bellach wedi dadfeilio'n llwyr.*

Yr awgrym, felly, yw mai Porthmawr oedd y man lle'r oedd Sant Padrig wedi hwylio ohono am Iwerddon yn y bumed ganrif, gan ddod yn nawddsant y wlad honno yn ddiweddarach. Heb os, byddai pererinion Gwyddelig i gysegdfa Dewi Sant wedi glanio yma hefyd, ac roedd y traeth llethrog yn ei wneud yn orsaf fasnachu naturiol ar gyfer nwyddau a gludwyd ar y môr.

Mor bell yn ôl â 1890, adroddodd papur newydd lleol am esgyrn dynol a olchwyd allan o'r twyni yn dilyn storm. Wrth i hyn barhau, daeth yn amlwg y bu'r ardal yn gladdfa ar un adeg. Gosodwyd meini mawr yno i ddiogelu'r safle ond gwelwyd lefelau'r môr a oedd yn codi yn gwaethygu'r erydu. Yn 2014, penderfynwyd cloddio yma ar fyrder neu byddai'r safle yn cael ei golli am byth.

Ers hynny, cynhaliwyd cloddiadau yma dros sawl haf a gwelwyd canlyniadau rhyfeddol. Hyd yn hyn, datgladdwyd dros gant o gladdedigaethau ac amcangyfrifir y gallai fod dros fil yma at ei gilydd. Mae gwaith dyddio radio-carbon wedi dangos y defnyddiwyd y gladdfa rhwng chweched a deuddegfed ganrif yr oesoedd canol. Claddwyd dynion, menywod a phlant o bob oed yma, a chladdwyd nifer ohonynt mewn beddau wedi'u leinio â cherrig o'r enw cistiau. "Mae'n debygol eu bod yn gymysgedd o bobl leol a morwyr, masnachwyr, pererinion ac eraill a oedd wedi teithio i Dyddewi," dywedodd un o'r cyfarwyddwyr cloddio.

Claddwyd yr holl feirw yn wynebu'r haul yn codi – o'r dwyrain i'r gorllewin – fel sy'n arferol mewn arfer crefyddol Cristnogol a chyn-Gristnogol. Ni chladdwyd unrhyw eiddo personol gyda'r cyrff ond gwelwyd casgliadau bychain o gerrig cwarts bychain ym meddau'r plant, traddodiad a nodwyd mewn beddau Cristnogol cynnar mewn ardaloedd eraill (ac y mae modd eu gweld mewn mynwentydd Iddewig heddiw.)

Mae'r olion dynol a gloddiwyd yn cael eu dadansoddi ar hyn o bryd i weld beth arall y bydd modd ei ddsygu ohonynt, ond yn y pen draw, byddant yn cael eu claddu eto yn Sir Benfro

mewn ffordd barchus – ond nid yn nhywod y twyni sy'n symud. Bydd cloddiadau pellach yn parhau, mewn ras yn erbyn yr erydu arfordirol. Ceir nifer yn fwy o feddau, yn ogystal ag olion adeilad y credir ei fod yno cyn capel Sant Padrig. Mae gan y dystiolaeth archeolegol a gaiff ei datgladdu ym Mhorthmawr y potensial i drawsnewid ein dealltwriaeth o'r boblogaeth Gristnogol a fu'n byw ac yn marw yn Sir Benfro yn ystod yr oesoedd canol cynnar.

*Rhwng 2014 a 2016, cynhaliwyd y cloddiadau gan Ymddiriedolaeth Archeolegol Dyfed a Phrifysgol Sheffield, gyda chymorth CADW, Ymddiriedolaeth Elusennol Nineveh ac Awdurdod Parc Cenedlaethol Sir Benfro. Cychwynwyd ar gloddiadau pellach yn 2019 fel rhan o Brosiect Cysylltiadau Hynafol a ariannwyd gan UE, dan arweiniad Cyngor Sir Penfro.*

### **Factoid**

Whitesands is a few minutes' drive/bus ride from St David's and has full visitor facilities along with water sport opportunities and boat trips to view wildlife around Ramsey Island.

Mae Porthmawr ychydig funudau i ffwrdd mewn car/bws o Dyddewi ac mae'n cynnwys cyfleusterau llawn i ymwelwyr, ynghyd â chyfleoedd i fwynhau chwaraeon dŵr a theithiau mewn cwch i weld y bywyd gwylt o gwmpas Ynys Dewi.

Whitesands lies on the Pembrokeshire coast path, and with superb walks west to the small bay of Porthmelgan, St David's Head, Coetan Arthur prehistoric burial chamber and the hill of Carn Llidi with its two chambered tombs and remnants of wartime defences.

Mae Porthmawr ar lwybr arfordir Sir Benfro, a cheir llwybrau cerdded gwych i fae bychan Porthmelgan, Penmaen Dewi, siambr gladdu cynhanesyddol Coetan Arthur a bryn Carn Llidi gyda'i ddau feddrod siambrog ac olion amddiffynfeydd o adeg y rhyfel.

At the top of Whitesands carpark is a memorial to four American airmen who died when their plane crashed nearby in 1943.

Wrth ben uchaf maes parcio Porthmawr, gwelir cofeb i bedwar awyrennwr Americanaidd a fu farw pan syrthiodd eu hawyren gerllaw ym 1943.

### **Related Resources**

K Murphy, H Wilson, R Comeau & K Hemer, EXCAVATION AT ST PATRICK'S CHAPEL 2019 INTERIM REPORT, *Dyfed Archaeological Trust*, <https://www.dyfedarchaeology.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/stpatricks2019interimreport.pdf>, archived at <https://perma.cc/7AX9-SSM6>.

St Patrick's Chapel Excavation, *Ancient Connections*, 2020, <https://ancientconnections.org/2020/10/02/st-patricks-chapel-excavation/>, archived at <https://perma.cc/S2GY-UE75>.

Pembrokeshire: Hundreds of medieval bodies excavated at Whitesands Beach, *BBC Wales*, 1 July, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-57685284>, archived at <https://perma.cc/CX38-KYEC>.

Helen Rowe (Information Officer) & Daniel Hunt (Investigator – CHERISH Project), St Patrick and a story of human burial and coastal erosion, *CBHC / RCAHMW*, 17 March, 2021, <https://rcahmw.gov.uk/st-patrick-and-a-story-of-human-burial-and-coastal-erosion/>.

### **Official Website**