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BURIAL IN EARLY MEDIEVAL WALES: IDENTIFYING MULTIFUNCTIONAL CEMETERIES

Summary. *Burial grounds and secular settlements in early medieval Wales (fifth to eleventh centuries AD) are understood to have been in geographically separate locations. In contrast, it is known that in England and on the Continent during this period burial began to be integrated within settlements. Changes in burial practice also occurred in Ireland, where early medieval 'cemetery settlements' with integrated burial and non-funerary activity are a relatively recent discovery. This paper presents a reassessment of the archaeological evidence from five published early medieval Welsh cemeteries and one recently-excavated example. It will demonstrate that these Welsh cemeteries share a number of attributes with Irish cemetery settlements and will critically evaluate the significance of this for our understanding of early medieval Wales. The paper will conclude that such sites are better conceptualized as 'multifunctional cemeteries', rather than 'cemetery settlements'.*

INTRODUCTION

Across northwest Europe, social changes during the early medieval period profoundly altered the spatial relationship between the living and the dead. During the preceding Roman period, burials were situated outside the boundaries of settlements (Kjølbye-Biddle 1992, 218; Pollock 2006, 24). Excavations have revealed extra-mural cemeteries at a number of Romano-British towns, such as Winchester, Brough-on-Humber and Leicester (Kjølbye-Biddle 1992; Hunter-Mann 2000; Derrick 2009). Wales, which was under Roman political control from the late first century AD, has evidence for extra-mural burial at Caerleon, Caerwent, Carmarthen and Usk (Campbell and MacDonald 1993; Evans *et al*. 1997; Marvell *et al*. 1998; Arnold and Davies 2000, 13–24; Crane 2001).

This separation of settlement and burial gradually ceased during the early medieval period (Hadley 2007; O'Sullivan *et al*. 2008; Hamerow 2010; Sofield 2015). For instance, in England, a number of small farms, each with an integrated cemetery, were established around the former Roman town at Winchester during the fifth and sixth centuries. From the mid-seventh century, cemeteries were established inside the former town (Kjølbye-Biddle 1992, 218–21). At Gamlingay (Cambridgeshire), a fifth- to eighth-century settlement originated as a farmstead enclosed by a causewayed ditch. During this early phase, burial may have focused on prehistoric monuments to

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the south. Towards the end of the middle Saxon period (*c*.600–800 AD) the settlement shifted northwards and sometime after the mid-seventh century, within fifty metres of the new settlement, a burial ground was established in the area of earlier *grubenhäuser* (Murray and McDonald 2006).

Burial practice was also changing elsewhere in Europe. In France, after the seventh century, most settlements also contained burials, while in the southern Netherlands and northern Belgium, mid- to late seventh-century farmyard burial grounds represent a first stage in integrating the living and the dead within nucleated settlements (Theuws 1999, 343; Zadora-Rio 2003, 3). Moreover, during the past two decades in Ireland, a number of newly-discovered early medieval sites have also produced evidence for a changing spatial relationship between the living and the dead. The terms 'settlement cemetery', 'secular cemetery' or, more commonly, 'cemetery settlement' have been adopted to describe these sites, over twenty of which have now been excavated (O'Sullivan *et al*. 2008; Ó Carragáin 2009).

In contrast with the areas mentioned above, the early medieval Welsh are understood to have practised what has been described as 'the normal separation of the living and the dead' (Charles-Edwards 2014, 612). However, as this paper will demonstrate, Wales actually has a number of early medieval cemeteries with the attributes of the Irish cemetery settlement. Before presenting this evidence, it is necessary to characterize the Irish sites, and to outline the current framework for interpreting early medieval Welsh cemeteries. All radiocarbon dates quoted are calibrated at two-sigma.

CHARACTERIZING CEMETERY SETTLEMENTS

Irish cemetery settlements are characterized by a number of attributes, the most fundamental of which is that in addition to inhumation burial, there is also evidence for contemporary or periodic 'occupation, or at least non-funerary activity' (O'Sullivan *et al*. 2008, 175). Typically, this is industrial activity and/or crop-processing, rather than habitation, although a small number of cemeteries, such as Raystown (Co. Meath), were elements of larger complexes that did have a domestic component (Seaver 2016). Industrial activity at cemetery settlements was usually primary bloomsmithing; secondary metalworking for the manufacture of artefacts was rare (O'Sullivan *et al*. 2008). Burial can post-date the non-funerary activity or vice versa. For instance, at Ninch (Co. Meath), which was in use between the sixth and the tenth centuries, a series of enclosures and a seventh to eighth century cemetery post-dated a trivallate ringfort and unenclosed settlement (McConway 2010, 157). In contrast, at Cherrywood (Co. Dublin), all non-funerary evidence within an enclosure of approximately 35 m diameter post-dated the 39 inhumation burials (Ó Néill and Coughlan 2010).

The presence of at least one enclosure ditch is another feature of Irish cemetery settlements. Morphologically, sites with multiple enclosures shared close parallels with enclosed early medieval ecclesiastical sites, both in the spacing of enclosures and the location of burials within them; usually in the eastern part of the enclosed area (Ó Carragáin 2009, 330; 2014). However, a crucial difference between cemetery settlements and ecclesiastical settlements was the absence at the former of a contemporary, or even a later, church (Ó Carragáin 2014, 341). A unique exception was Ballykilmore (Co. Westmeath), where burial began in the fifth century. At this site, fifth- to seventh-century smithing hearths have been recovered, along with evidence for a church, which was established in the ninth century (Channing 2014).

A date in the fifth century or later for the onset of funerary activity at cemetery settlements is a final key attribute. These cemeteries were not established at locations with a tradition of funerary activity; they were not the ancestral burial grounds (*ferta)* mentioned in early medieval Irish manuscripts (O'Sullivan *et al*. 2008, 176). Radiocarbon dating shows that none pre-date the Late Iron Age/early medieval transition period of the fifth/sixth centuries; indeed they have been described as 'a fully Christian phenomenon' (O'Sullivan *et al*. 2008, 179–80; O'Brien 2020).

Burials within cemetery settlements did not differ from those within early medieval Irish cemeteries that have not produced evidence for non-funerary activity. They were predominantly oriented (west-east with the head to the west), extended, supine inhumations in either a dug grave, or a slab- or stone-lined grave. Some may have had timber linings or covers (O'Brien 2020, 58–9).

BURIAL IN EARLY MEDIEVAL WALES: THE TRADITIONAL FRAMEWORK

For fifty years, the framework for interpreting early medieval Welsh cemeteries has been based on a model proposed by Charles Thomas for the origin and development of post-Roman British cemeteries (Thomas 1971). In this model, fifth/sixth-century rural cemeteries, particularly those within circular embanked enclosures, were termed 'undeveloped' and were conceived of as 'the primary field monuments of Insular Christianity' (Thomas 1971, 50). Through the addition, after the mid-seventh century, of ecclesiastical structures, some of these burial grounds evolved to become 'developed' sites. It was considered that this sequence would be present at all parish churches located within circular churchyards in northern and western Britain, and in Ireland (Thomas 1971, 68).

The only subsequent alteration to the developmental sequence proposed by Thomas (1971) was made by Petts (2000; 2002), who suggested that *de novo* cemetery enclosure post-dated the eighth century. This suggestion is supported by the evidence from excavations at a number of early medieval cemeteries in Wales. For instance, while at Arfryn (Gwynedd), a fifth/sixth-century inhumation cemetery was established within an extant circular enclosure around a former Bronze Age settlement, circular embankments created to enclose burials at Brownslade Barrow (Pembrokeshire) and Capel Maelog (Powys) date from no earlier than the late seventh century (Britnell *et al*. 1990; Groom *et al*. 2011; Hedges *et al*. 2016).

Building on Thomas' (1971) model, James (1987, 64–6) characterized early medieval Welsh cemeteries contextually, defining four broad groups:

- sites with a tradition of prehistoric funerary activity that became a focus for early medieval burial, e.g. Trelystan (Powys) and Plas Gogerddan (Ceredigion) (Britnell *et al*. 1982; Murphy *et al*. 1992)
- cemeteries located within prehistoric settlements, e.g. Caer Bayvil, (Pembrokeshire) and Arfryn (Gwynedd) (James 1987; Hedges *et al*. 2016)
- 'developed' sites with later medieval churches or chapels present, e.g. Capel Maelog (Powys) and Whitesands Bay (Pembrokeshire) (Britnell *et al*. 1990; Murphy *et al*. 2016)
- unexcavated sites with anecdotal evidence for early medieval burial but no current evidence for earlier or later activity, e.g. Penrhyn Castle (Pembrokeshire) (James 1987, 75, no. 20).

Longley (2009, 122–4) expanded this typology, adding burials associated with former Roman settlements such as at Biglis (Vale of Glamorgan) (see Robinson 1988). Longley's (2009)

discussion of early medieval Welsh funerary practice noted burials at former secular sites in Ireland but was primarily concerned with understanding the chronology of enclosure activity and so did not discuss other evidence, although pre-ecclesiastical settlement at Capel Maelog was noted (Longley 2009, 124).

While the context of burial location varied, the mode of burial in early medieval Wales was also characterized by oriented, extended, supine inhumation in either a dug grave, or a grave that was elaborated with stone to some degree. Coffins or timber linings were sometimes used (Thomas 1971; Longley 2009). Since the Welsh conversion to Christianity began in the late-Roman period, and since artefacts are rarely found, it was once assumed that such graves were early Christian, and that they pre-dated the eighth century, after which churchyard burial was increasingly practised (Thomas 1971, 48–9; Davies 1982; Arnold and Davies 2000; Petts 2002, 44; Seaman 2014). Today however, it is widely recognized that oriented, extended, artefactually-sterile burials do not automatically signify Christianity (Zadora-Rio 2003, 2; Pollock 2006, 74; O'Brien 2009, 149; Seaman 2014, 11).

INTEGRATED BURIAL AND SETTLEMENT IN EARLY MEDIEVAL WALES

The key characteristic of the Irish cemetery settlement is evidence for contemporaneous or episodic occupation or non-funerary activity in addition to burial (O'Sullivan *et al*. 2008, 175). As we have seen, this type of activity is present in varying combinations of habitation, enclosure, metalworking and crop-processing. The existing framework for understanding and characterizing early medieval Welsh cemeteries does not include a category of sites with features characteristic of cemetery settlements. In part, this is because recognition of the Irish sites as distinct phenomena has been relatively recent (O'Sullivan *et al*. 2008, 157–8). Moreover, such sites have been considered unique to early medieval Ireland, with the contemporary Welsh understood to have maintained a separation between the living and the dead (Charles-Edwards 2014). However, a re-evaluation of the evidence has revealed a number of early medieval Welsh cemeteries with the attributes of a cemetery settlement (Fig. 1). The evidence is summarized in Table 1.

At Parc Cybi and Wylfa Head (both Anglesey), burial took place at the location of former Iron Age and Romano-British settlements with structural evidence for habitation; indeed at Wylfa Head, some burials were located within former structures (Hudson *et al*. 2018; Kenney *et al*. 2020). In mid-Wales, at Capel Maelog (Fig. 2), evidence for domestic and agricultural activity in the form of ditches and possible roundhouse gullies was present, and was radiocarbon dated to the fourth/fifth and the sixth to ninth centuries (Britnell *et al*. 1990, 33, 82). Coffin wood from one of the earliest graves returned a date of AD 770–1040[1] (Fig. 2, no. 7). Before construction of the first phase of the church on the site, it had been necessary to fill in a north-south oriented ditch in order to support the north wall (Fig. 2, no. 8). Material from that fill was radiocarbon dated to AD 1040–1310, giving a *terminus post quem* of the mid-eleventh century for the building. Bone had survived in *c*.80% of the later burials within the church. In contrast, the absence of skeletal material in the phase-one graves, below them, was used to suggest that the area of the earliest graves was exposed to the elements for a considerable period of time before the construction of the building (Britnell *et al*. 1990,

[1] The original site chronology was based upon radiocarbon dates calibrated at 1-sigma (Britnell *et al*. 1990, 90). Dates available in Petts (2000) which are calibrated at 2-sigma have been used here.

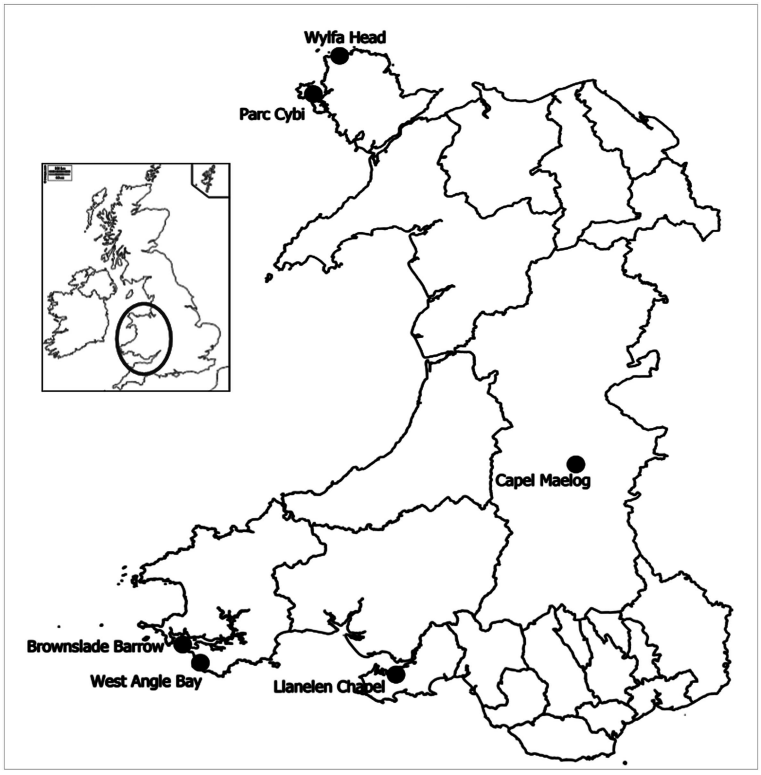

FIGURE 1
The locations of the early medieval Welsh cemeteries discussed in the text.

TABLE 1
The non-funerary evidence present at six early medieval Welsh cemeteries

	Metalworking	Crop-processing	Enclosure	Non-ecclesiastical
Brownslade Barrow	✓	✓		✓
Capel Maelog	✓	✓	✓	Late
Llanelen Chapel	✓		✓	Late
Parc Cybi	✓	✓		✓
West Angle Bay		✓	✓	?
Wylfa Head	✓	✓	✓	✓

38–9). The onset of burial at Capel Maelog must therefore be either contemporary with, or slightly post-date, non-funerary activity at the site.

At Brownslade Barrow, gullies and post holes containing dumped domestic waste pre-dated sixth- to tenth-century burials. Radiocarbon dates from the earlier features span the Iron Age (Groom *et al.* 2011, 142). However, fragments of discarded quern stones from this site have

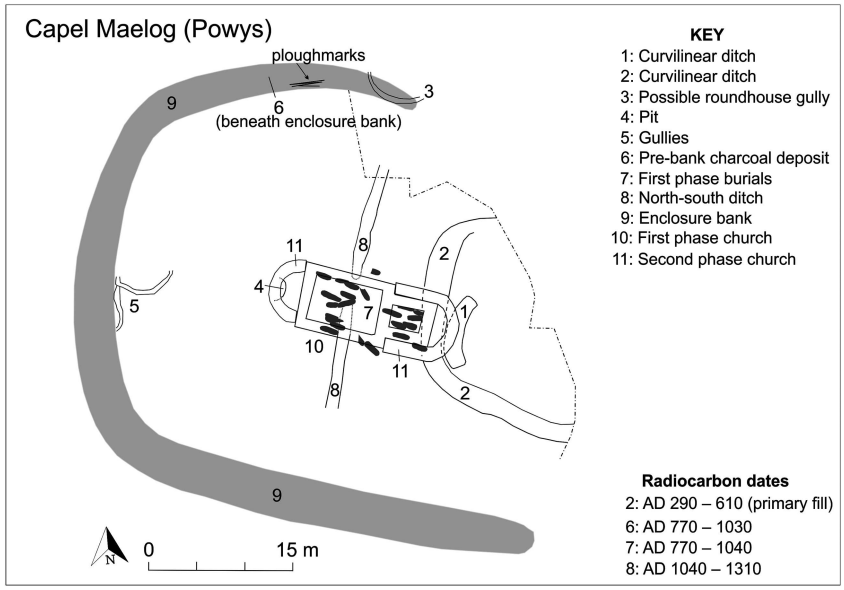

FIGURE 2
Capel Maelog (simplified, after Britnell *et al.* 1990, fig. 3).

parallels with early medieval examples from Newton Llanstadwell and South Hook (both Pembrokeshire) and Llanbedrgoch (Anglesey). Moreover, an early medieval double-sided bone comb that was found is comparable to examples from the settlement at Dinas Powys (Vale of Glamorgan) and Llanbedrgoch (Groom *et al.* 2011, 155–8). The Brownslade Barrow comb was unstratified, but since burial with grave goods was extremely rare in Wales during this period, it is unlikely to be from a disturbed burial.

Non-funerary activity pre-dated burial at Llanelen Chapel (Vale of Glamorgan) where occupation surfaces contained grain, carbonized wood and calcined bone, and a number of cut features. Three of the phase-one burials cut an occupation surface, demonstrating that the onset of burial post-dated that activity (Schlesinger *et al.* 1996, 114). There are no radiocarbon dates, but the discovery of sixth-century glass in a layer that sealed a possible phase-one grave gives a tentative *terminus ante quem* for the onset of burial (Schlesinger *et al.* 1996, 112 and 127). However, these and fragments of sixth/seventh-century imported Continental and Mediterranean glass were not considered sufficient to distinguish between secular or ecclesiastical use of the site (Schlesinger *et al.* 1996, 17).

At Parc Cybi, the cemetery of 23 undated stone-lined graves, already noted, was associated with widespread evidence for metalworking and crop-processing (Fig. 3). Dates obtained from six corn-drying kilns on the site span the early fifth to the mid-seventh centuries (Kenney *et al.* 2020). However the burials were interpreted as Roman because third to sixth century radiocarbon dates were obtained for metalworking activity that appeared to have disturbed a grave (Kenney *et al.* 2020, 206, and 756 for radiocarbon date). The dates that were obtained came from young wood and suggested metalworking that was either contemporary with, or slightly post-dated, funerary activity (Kenney 2020 pers. comm.). It is regrettable that no radiocarbon dates could be obtained from human remains at this site because the

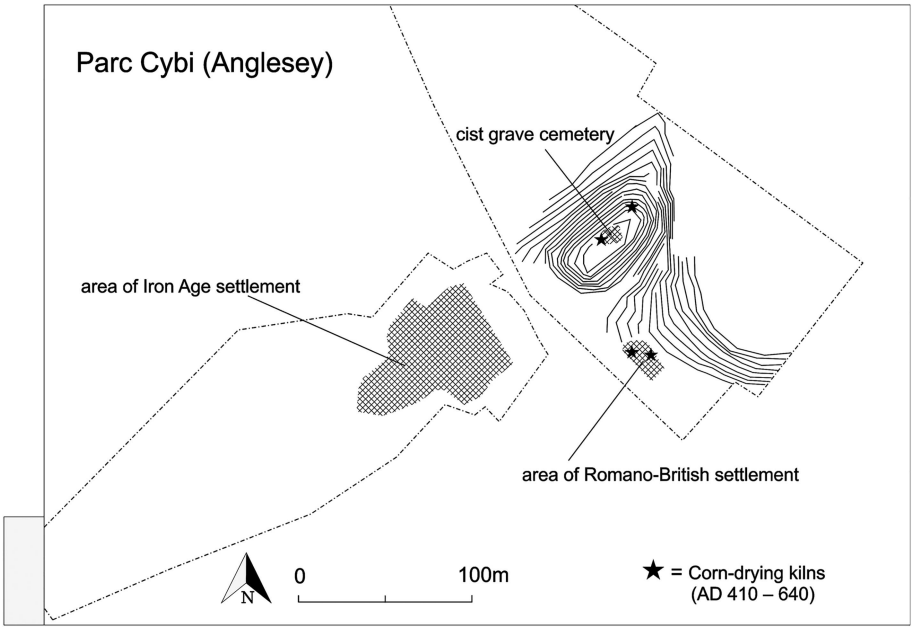

FIGURE 3
Key features at Parc Cybi (simplified, after Kenney *et al*. 2011, fig. 3).

interpretation of the cemetery as Roman, and the disturbed feature as a grave, is open to question. It is possible that the feature is not a disturbed grave, but a stone box related to the metalworking activity, for which there are parallels in early medieval contexts elsewhere in Wales (Kenney *et al*. 2020, 207).

The site at Llanelen Chapel produced evidence for metalworking during all phases. This included evidence for smelting and smithing during phase one, when there was also evidence for burial (Schlesinger *et al*. 1996, 141–2). Evidence for metalworking was also present across the northern and eastern areas of excavation at Capel Maelog (Britnell *et al*. 1990, 41). This comprised furnace lining, smithing slag, fuel ash slag, ironworking slags and a crucible fragment. No analysis of this material was undertaken (pers. comm. Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust 2019).

A hearth or corn-dryer was found within sixth- to seventh-century rectilinear enclosures surrounding a seventh- to twelfth-century cemetery at West Angle Bay (Pembrokeshire) (Fig. 4). Radiocarbon dates obtained from the hearth/corn-dryer span the early seventh to the mid-eighth centuries (Groom *et al*. 2011, 169–71). Analysis of plant macrofossils present in other cut features on the site revealed that cereals including oat and barley were being processed nearby (Groom *et al*. 2011, 179–80). The precise chronology for West Angle Bay remains uncertain; the burial activity may be contemporary with other activity at the site, but is unlikely to pre-date it (Groom *et al*. 2011, 194).

In Ireland, the chronological relationship between cemetery enclosure and burial varies (O'Sullivan *et al*. 2008, 178; Ó Carragáin 2009, 340; Williams 2010, 36). In Wales, no evidence of an enclosure has been found at either Brownslade Barrow or Parc Cybi. However, an embanked, sub-circular cemetery enclosure at West Angle Bay is located within the aforementioned rectilinear enclosure (Fig. 4). The sub-circular enclosure post-dates the first burials on the site, which were

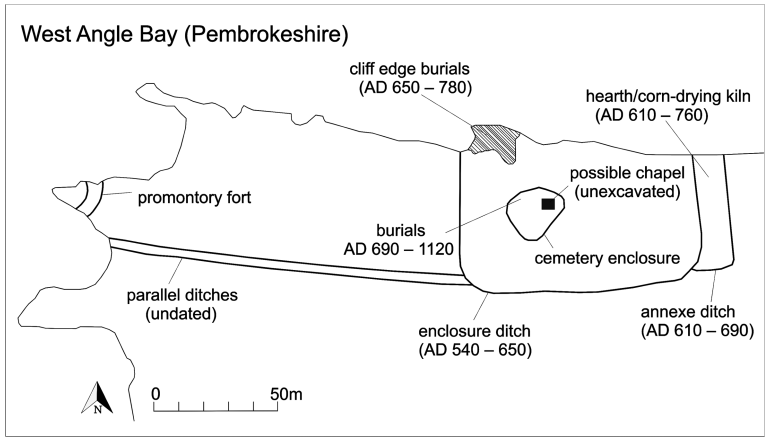

FIGURE 4
Burials and enclosures at West Angle Bay (simplified, after Groom *et al.* 2011, fig. 14).

located outside it, but within the rectilinear enclosure (Groom *et al.* 2011, 171–3). At Llanelen Chapel, the location and alignment of some phase-one graves shows that they post-date the creation of an enclosure bank and ditch, while at Wylfa Head, the majority of graves were within the interior of a former Romano-British settlement enclosure (Hudson *et al.* 2018).

It has been noted that at Irish cemetery settlements, burials were often located in the eastern part of the enclosed area, and that the creation of additional enclosures appeared, in some instances, to be related to expansion of the cemetery (Ó Carragáin 2009; 2014). In Wales, the earliest burials at Capel Maelog were located to the west of, and outside, a curvilinear ditch that was radiocarbon dated to AD 290–610 (see Fig. 2, no. 9). These features, and the majority of all later burials, were located within the central and eastern parts of an area enclosed by a bank, with a *terminus post quem* of AD 770–1030 (Britnell *et al.* 1990; Petts 2000, appendix 3). Thus, while the chronological relationship between funerary and domestic/agricultural activity at Capel Maelog is not fully understood, the spatial arrangement of features is reminiscent of that seen in Ireland. Burials at Llanelen Chapel and at Wylfa Head were also located in the south-eastern part of the enclosed area.

In Ireland, only the cemetery settlement at Ballykilmore (Co. Westmeath) had an associated ecclesiastical building; a structure which post-dated the onset of burial at the site by at least two hundred years (Channing 2014). In comparison, three of the Welsh sites under consideration have known, or potential, ecclesiastical activity. At Capel Maelog, this post-dated the non-ecclesiastical settlement and, almost certainly, the first phases of burial and enclosure. At West Angle Bay, it is possible that an oriented, rectangular structure revealed by geophysical survey is a former chapel (see Fig. 4), but the spatial and chronological relationship between this feature, the burials, and other associated activity on the site is not known (Groom *et al.* 2011, 169). Finally, at Llanelen Chapel, it was suggested that there was evidence for a timber predecessor to a later, stone-built chapel on the site (Schlesinger *et al.* 1996, 112–13). However, there is reason to doubt this interpretation, which was based on comparison with evidence from Ardwall Isle and Ardnadam (both Scotland), and on Church Island (southwest Ireland) (Schlesinger *et al.* 1996, 112). Comparison of those posited structures with the evidence from Llanelen Chapel reveals that the latter feature lacks the distinctive corner posts present at both Ardwall Isle and Ardnadam (Fig. 5) (O'Kelly 1958; Thomas 1967; Rennie 1984).

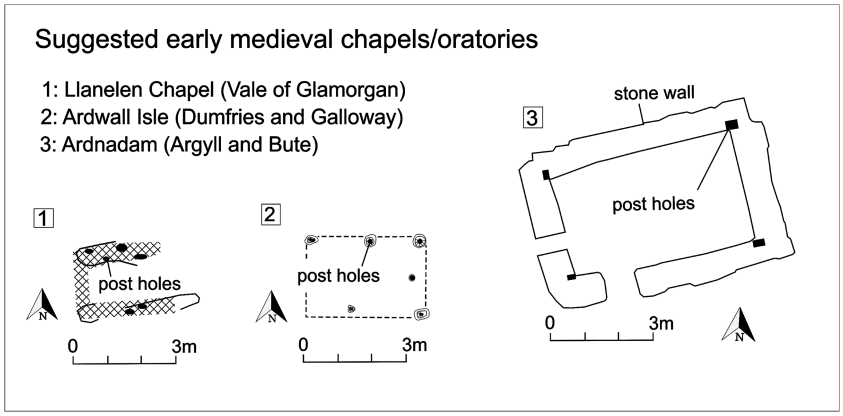

FIGURE 5
Comparison of features at Ardnadam, Ardwall Isle and Llanelen Chapel (after Thomas 1967; Rennie 1984; Schlesinger *et al*. 1996).

Morphologically, the post-hole feature at Llanelen Chapel is most closely paralleled by an early feature on Church Island, reinterpreted by Hayden (2013, 7) as a stone- and sod-walled oratory with posts set in narrow trenches along its internal walls. However, the spatial arrangement of the Llanelen Chapel post holes is not convincing, and their position within a feature interpreted as a beam slot is problematic for interpretation of the latter. Moreover, a curvilinear feature associated with the northern group of post holes was omitted from the discussion; on the published plan, this feature is almost entirely obscured by shading indicating the position of the proposed rectangular chapel (Fig. 6).[2] A full reinterpretation of the phase one features is beyond the scope of the current paper, but on the basis of available evidence, the identification of an early medieval ecclesiastical site with a timber chapel, or even an oratory, is open to question. An alternative interpretation is that in phase one, Llanelen Chapel was a secular, enclosed site, with integrated burial. As already noted, this early phase of activity can be shown to pre-date the sixth century.

DISCUSSION

As with Irish cemetery settlements, all of the Welsh sites discussed above have produced one or more forms of evidence for non-funerary activity, including metalworking and/or crop-processing, in addition to burial. In this respect, they are similar to the Irish sites, and also to a late and post-Roman cemetery at Cannington (Somerset) which produced considerable evidence for 'craft and industrial activity' (Rahtz *et al*. 2000, 398).

Wide variation was evident in the dates obtained for the onset and cessation of use of the Welsh cemeteries. Prehistoric and Romano-British activity was present at Parc Cybi and Wylfa Head, whilst at Capel Maelog, ecclesiastical activity and possibly burial continued into the early sixteenth century (Britnell *et al*. 1990). Parallels with Ireland were also evident in the fact that

[2] The corn-drying kiln shown in Fig. 6 is undated, but is likely to be of high or late-medieval date (Comeau and Burrow forthcoming, gazetteer no. 46.1)

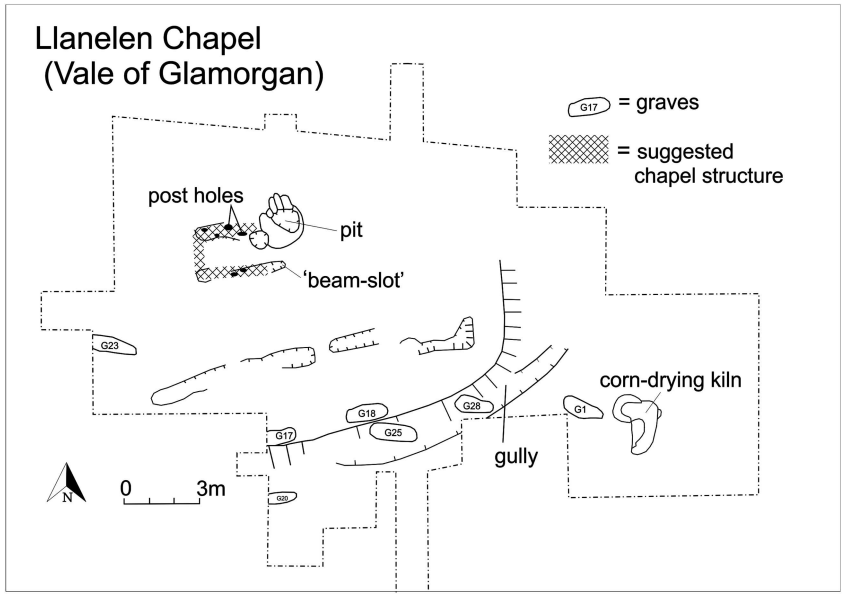

FIGURE 6
Excavated pre-church features at Llanelen Chapel (simplified, after Schlesinger *et al.* 1996, ill. 3).

with the possible exception of Parc Cybi, no funerary activity at these Welsh sites pre-dated the early medieval period.

Until now, it was considered that early medieval cemetery settlements were 'a distinctively Irish type' (Charles-Edwards 2014, 612). The evidence reviewed here demonstrates that this was not the case; there are at least six early medieval Welsh burial grounds that have qualities in common with Irish cemetery settlements. In order to assess the significance of this for our understanding of early medieval Wales, it is useful to evaluate it in relation to topics that frame current research (see Edwards, Davies and Hemer 2017).

The rise of Christianity

Christianity was introduced to Wales during the late Roman period (Davies 1982, 171). However, although now understood as a gradual, dynamic and reflexive process rather than a rapid linear event, identifying the chronology and process of conversion in Wales remains an issue (Seaman 2014; Edwards, Davies and Hemer 2017). While the integration of burial with secular early medieval settlement may support the argument that conversion, particularly in rural areas, was a lengthy process, the contrast with previous funerary practice might equally represent the expression of new beliefs (Zadora-Rio 2003, 7; Ó Carragáin 2014). In Ireland at present there is no scholarly consensus concerning the religious identity of the deceased within early medieval cemeteries. Before the late seventh/early eighth centuries, in both Britain and Ireland, burial could express social or political factors rather than simply reflecting religious affiliation (Hadley 2000, 153; O'Brien 2009, 149). Fifth- and sixth-century Irish cemeteries may contain the burials of both

Christians and non-Christians and these cannot necessarily be distinguished archaeologically (O'Brien 2009, 149).

In considering the religious context of burial at the Welsh sites discussed here, it is important to note that the majority of Iron Age inhumations from Wales were found within or close to settlements, and also that a small number of inhumations are known from Roman period settlements in the south-east (Robinson 1988; Pollock 2006, 14; Davis 2018, 67). This suggests the continuation of an existing tradition. That is not the case in Ireland, where the majority of Late Iron Age inhumations were associated with earlier funerary monuments (McGarry 2008). Irish cemetery settlements therefore represent a break with tradition and are considered 'a fully Christian phenomenon' (O'Sullivan *et al*. 2008, 178) which demonstrates 'the immediate and radical impact that [Christianity] had on people's understanding of how their world should be ordered' (Ó Carragáin 2009, 346). This may not be the case in Wales, where research has identified that there was limited adoption of Roman funerary rites and that deep-rooted indigenous practices continued during the Romano-British period, particularly in rural areas (Pollock 2006, 98). The evidence suggests that one of these may have been a tradition linking burial and settlement which should not, therefore, be seen as indicative of Christianity. This was first appreciated by Heather James (1992) who, having excavated early medieval graves within a former Iron Age settlement at Caer, Bayvil (Pembrokeshire) noted that 'the study of cemetery enclosures cannot be divorced from settlement archaeology in general' (James 1987; 1992, 95).

The origin and development of ecclesiastical sites

In Ireland, with the exception of Ballykilmore, Charles Thomas' 'developed' cemeteries (Thomas 1971, 51) are unknown and his linear evolutionary model for the origin and development of later ecclesiastical sites within circular churchyards has been questioned (Thomas 1971, 67–8; Ó Carragáin 2009, 344; Channing 2014). However, the Welsh evidence presented here broadly supports Thomas' model, albeit with the refined chronology for cemetery enclosure suggested by Petts (2000). Capel Maelog is an enclosed cemetery with later ecclesiastical structures, and this paper reinterprets Llanelen Chapel as having a similar origin and development. Furthermore, the geophysical evidence points to a later chapel within the sub-circular cemetery enclosure at West Angle Bay. At Brownslade Barrow and Parc Cybi – both of which are unenclosed and have been extensively excavated – there is no evidence for a later church or chapel.

This new evidence is potentially of great importance for our understanding of the nature of early Irish and Welsh churches and the relationship between religious and secular authority. It suggests that the social and landscape context of ecclesiastical foundation differed between the two countries despite evidence for a 'shared understanding of the spatial expression of early medieval communal interaction and authority' (Comeau 2014, 270). Ongoing excavations at St Patrick's Chapel, Pembrokeshire have the potential to further test Thomas' model in Wales; this is a site with evidence for metalworking and other craft activities, in addition to well-preserved seventh- to tenth-century burials and a later medieval chapel (Murphy *et al*. 2016).

Landscapes of assembly

Gleeson and Ó Carragáin (2016) consider that some cemetery settlements may have functioned as seasonally occupied locales within landscapes of assembly, rather than as permanent

settlements. They interpret sites such as Corbally (Co. Kildare) as burial grounds around the margin of royal land that were a focus for non-funerary activity during assemblies (Coyne and Lynch 2010; Gleeson and Ó Carragáin 2016, 90–6). Moreover, in England, a correlation exists between some early medieval cemeteries and assembly sites that are recorded in the Domesday survey (Reynolds 2018, 133). In this regard, it is worth noting the recent identification of a landscape of assembly in south-west Wales (Comeau 2020). Among the components of that landscape are two Iron Age settlements that became the focus for early medieval burial. Neither is fully excavated, so whether contemporary non-funerary activity is present is not known (James 1987; Murphy and Murphy 2015). Comeau's work demonstrates the value of detailed interdisciplinary investigation, and her findings suggest that structures of secular governance in early medieval Wales were comparable with those in contemporary Ireland and elsewhere in northern Europe (Comeau 2014; 2020; Gleeson 2018; Reynolds 2018). In the context of the present discussion, such research shows how early medieval cemeteries and their environs might repay investigation aimed at identifying further landscapes of assembly in Wales.

The nature of settlement

Gleeson and Ó Carragáin (2016, 93) note that their assembly-site interpretation is not appropriate for every Irish cemetery with non-funerary evidence. Indeed, some enclosed Irish cemeteries were elements of larger complexes 'designed primarily for habitation' (Ó Carragáin 2009, 345). There is currently no evidence for this in Wales. However, at sites that did not see seasonal use, if the absence of contemporary dwellings is real, and not the result of later agricultural activity, then it is likely that the settlements of the living community were nearby. In Ireland, this is attested at Carrowkeel (Co. Galway) where an early medieval settlement was located one kilometre from a seventh- to fifteenth-century cemetery that produced a large faunal assemblage including horse, cattle, sheep and pig, but no evidence for metalworking or structures, and little crop-processing evidence (Wilkins and Lalonde 2009, 5, 17 and 98 respectively).

Settlement close to a cemetery is also evidenced in fifth- and sixth-century Anglo-Saxon contexts. For example, the settlement at West Heslerton (North Yorkshire) was 450 metres from a contemporary cemetery (Montgomery *et al*. 2005, 125) while at Flixton (Waveney Valley, Suffolk) a cemetery and settlement were 600 metres apart (Boulton and Walton Rogers 2012, 87). In the published discussion of Brownslade Barrow and West Angle Bay, Neil Ludlow noted a bivallate coastal promontory fort located 200 metres west of the West Angle Bay cemetery (Fig. 4), as well as a possible association between an early medieval cemetery at Longoar Bay and another coastal promontory fort (Groom *et al*. 2011, 194). It is therefore of interest that Bulliber Camp, an unexcavated multivallate hill-top site, lies 600 metres south of the cemetery at Brownslade Barrow (Fig. 7). A piece of Roman or early medieval pottery from Bulliber Camp is listed on the regional HER (PRN 550). Four hundred metres to the east is a less well-defended triangular enclosure known as Warmans Hill (Fig. 7), which is also unexcavated, but shares morphological parallels with early medieval enclosures at Dinas Powys (Seaman and Lane 2018) and Glanfred (Jones, Williams and Williams 2017). If Bulliber Camp and Warman's Hill were to contain broadly contemporary settlement deposits, an association with the cemetery at Brownslade could not be proved. However, as has been noted for the settlements at Carrowkeel, West Heslerton and Flixton, they are located close enough to the cemetery to make their association plausible within broader polyfocal patterns of settlement in the landscape (Wilkins and Lalonde 2009; Hamerow 2010, 72 and e.g. Blair 2018).

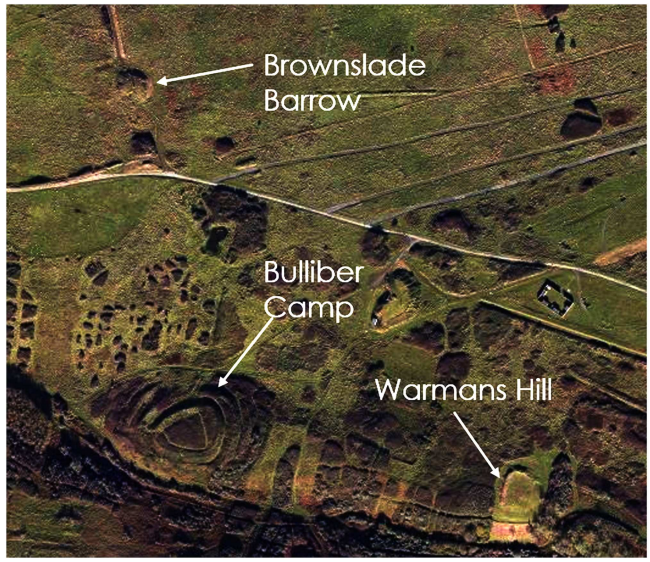

FIGURE 7
Annotated aerial view showing the locations of Brownslade Barrow, Bulliber Camp and Warmans Hill (Bing mapping).

Interpreting the integration of life and death during the early medieval period

Several other interpretations of non-funerary activity at early medieval burial grounds exist, in addition to those noted above. A more than brief appraisal of these ideas is beyond the scope of this paper. One suggestion is that these sites were considered appropriate liminal locations, removed from habitation areas, where dirty and dangerous processes involving fire could be safely undertaken (Hamerow 2002; Stout and Stout 2008, 77). A second theory is that mortuary space and living space became more closely linked during this period in order to create or to reinforce ancestral links to land, while a third proposal is that these sites were locales where conceptually, people, cereals, and metal ores were transformed (Theuws 1999, 344–5; Williams 2010; Maldonado 2016, 244).

Each of these suggestions is plausible, and they need not be mutually exclusive, but evidence for regional variation cautions against seeking an overarching interpretation. For instance, while Theuws (1999) has made a strong case for the creation and substantiation of land ownership through burial within farmsteads in seventh-century Merovingian contexts, Elizabeth O'Brien (2009, 143; 2020, 66) has convincingly argued that the same process was achieved through burial at *ferta*, rather than cemetery settlements, in early medieval Ireland. In Wales, the location of fifth- to seventh-century inscribed stones at prehistoric funerary sites may be evidence for the latter practice, but none has been found marking an in-situ burial and there is regional variation in their context; the majority of those located on prehistoric sites are found in Gwynedd, while in Dyfed, the majority are associated with early ecclesiastical sites (Edwards 2001, 39).

The debate surrounding the association between burial and transformative, sometimes dangerous, processes is equally complex. For some, there is a straightforward logic to the location of activities involving fire away from the domestic sphere (Hamerow 2002; Stout and

Stout 2008, 77). But this does not explain why, for a number of communities, the cemetery was an appropriate location for such processes and *vice versa*. In an attempt to provide an explanation, Williams (2010) has proposed that in Ireland, a conceptual link between transformative processes involving fire (particularly metalworking), birth and death, and fertility and regeneration was formed during the Iron Age and is represented at the early medieval cemetery settlements. This is a welcome contribution to the discussion. However, cremation, itself a transformative process involving fire, is the only archaeologically visible indigenous funerary rite of the Irish Iron Age (O'Brien 2020), and the argument for continuity is weakened by a lack of evidence for metalworking and other activities at cremation burial/pyre sites (see McGarry 2008). Irish early medieval cemetery settlements represent a complete break with past funerary practices.

Terminology

The Welsh Archaeological Research Framework identifies ongoing difficulty in recognizing and characterizing early medieval settlement (Edwards, Davies and Hemer 2017, 6–7). The identification of cemetery settlements in Wales is therefore of some significance. However, the nature of the 'settlement' that is represented remains open to debate. Although the term 'cemetery settlement' has gained broad acceptance in Ireland, wide variation in the nature of the evidence means that it cannot be used uncritically (O' Sullivan 2008, 181; Baker 2010, 1; Gleeson and Ó Carragáin 2016, 93). As already noted, non-funerary activity at these sites typically comprises artefacts, food refuse, industrial material and corn-drying kilns, but not structural evidence for habitation. While it is possible that at some sites later ploughing has destroyed cut features indicative of structural evidence, the fact remains that characterizing them in terms of settlement is problematic (O'Sullivan *et al*. 2008, 180; O'Brien 2020, 98). In Ireland, in addition to discussion of cultural and religious context, there has been a parallel debate about terminology. This is ongoing, and involves prioritizing word order (cemetery settlement vs. settlement/secular cemetery) based on variation in the evidence for habitation, and the lack of ecclesiastical evidence (e.g. Ó Carragáin 2009; O'Brien 2020). As a contribution to the debate, here the term 'multifunctional cemetery' is proposed as an alternative. Whilst it is recognized that this down-plays the 'settlement' evidence, it seems better suited to describe the growing number of sites which may never have seen domestic occupation, but which were the focus for a range of industrial and other activities in addition to burial.

CONCLUSION

Comparison of early medieval Welsh cemeteries with examples from Ireland has identified a number of Welsh sites where a range of non-funerary activities took place in addition to burial. This is of significance because it allows us to situate early medieval Wales firmly within the context of social changes occurring throughout northwest Europe in the post-Roman period, when the integration of burial and secular activity profoundly altered the spatial relationship between the living and the dead. The evidence from Wales raises issues that remain to be explored concerning early medieval Welsh funerary practices, the context, origin and evolution of ecclesiastical sites in Wales, the nature of early medieval Welsh society, and the conceptual status of burial and other transformative processes in Wales during the period. Moreover, it is clear that in both Ireland and Wales, this type of multifunctional site does not fit within traditional interpretative frameworks that

have tended to consider funerary practices in isolation. Rigid classificatory terms for archaeological sites, such as 'funerary', 'domestic' and 'industrial' mask the emerging nuances of early medieval life. Identification of the multifunctional nature of some early medieval Welsh cemeteries should provide new means by which to explore existing research topics and bring us closer to the hitherto less visible contemporary population.

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