



Din Lligwy Romano-British Settlement: Archaeological and Historical Report

ABSTRACT

Din Lligwy, located near Moelfre on the island of Anglesey, Wales, represents one of the best-preserved examples of a late Iron Age to Romano-British rural settlement in northwest Wales. Archaeological and documentary evidence reveals a thriving, adaptive community that evolved through multiple cultural and economic phases—from its Iron Age origins to its gradual decline following the Roman withdrawal from Britain around the fifth century CE. The site's material record provides valuable insight into domestic life, craftsmanship, trade, and social organization within a frontier society balancing Celtic identity with Roman influence.

1. Origins and Inhabitants

Din Lligwy was first occupied during the Iron Age by a small, agrarian community. The inhabitants formed part of a broader Celtic society, blending native customs with later Roman practices. Archaeological remains suggest that population numbers fluctuated seasonally, with extended families living in clustered roundhouses. This settlement pattern points to a semi-rural, kinship-based community that endured across centuries of political and cultural transition.

2. Architecture and Settlement Pattern

The settlement is enclosed by a substantial polygonal wall built of local Carboniferous limestone. Within it stand foundations of both roundhouses (domestic dwellings) and rectangular buildings (barns or workshops). This coexistence of traditional and Roman architectural forms illustrates the synthesis of indigenous and imported ideas—a hallmark of Romano-British adaptation. The wall's careful construction reflects both practical and symbolic functions, defining community boundaries while providing limited protection.

3. Daily Life and Subsistence

Archaeological finds reveal a mixed farming economy combining livestock rearing—particularly cattle, sheep, and pigs—with cereal cultivation. The presence of barns and enclosures indicates surplus production, storage, and livestock management. Excavated hearths, animal bones, and pottery fragments testify to domestic life, including cooking, food sharing, and toolmaking. The site's elevated position with nearby water sources ensured visibility and security, both essential for a self-sufficient rural community.

4. Crafts, Industry, and Trade

Metalworking was central to Din Lligwy's later prosperity. Excavations uncovered four iron smelting hearths, charcoal pits, slag deposits, and artefacts such as a silver ingot, bronze bracelet, and repaired pottery fragments held with iron clamps. These finds indicate both technical expertise and participation



in regional trade networks. The discovery of Roman goods—pottery, coins, and glass—suggests contact with markets and supply routes connected to the Romanized world. Cultural expression is also evidenced by a bone musical instrument, linking economic activity with ritual or artistic life.

5. Community Practices and Organization

The spatial layout of Din Lligwy reflects an organized social structure balancing domestic and productive zones. The enclosure wall served as both a boundary and a symbol of communal identity. Division between residential and economic areas mirrors patterns found in other Romano-British settlements, suggesting an awareness of order, shared responsibility, and collective defense.

6. Religion and Ritual

Although no formal shrine or temple has been identified, Din Lligwy's location near the Lligwy Burial Chamber (a Neolithic monument) and the later Capel Lligwy chapel indicates long-term spiritual continuity. This enduring sacred landscape implies reverence for ancestors and enduring ritual significance across millennia. The re-use of ancient sacred spaces was common in Romano-British contexts, merging Celtic and Christian traditions.

7. Social Change and Roman Influence

Roman occupation brought new materials and construction techniques, yet local traditions persisted. Repairs using Roman iron fittings and the appearance of rectangular buildings reflect selective adaptation rather than cultural replacement. Din Lligwy's inhabitants maintained a distinctly local identity while benefiting from Roman economic structures and technologies. This duality—adoption and resilience—is a key feature of late Romano-British rural life.

8. Wall Construction and Defensive Concerns

During the late fourth century CE, Din Lligwy's perimeter wall was reinforced to nearly 2 m in height and 1.5 m thick. Initially a livestock boundary, it likely took on defensive significance as Roman authority weakened. This development parallels patterns across coastal Britain, where communities enhanced defenses in response to insecurity and regional unrest during the empire's decline.

9. Fear of Pirate Raids and Insecurity

Though no direct evidence of violent destruction exists, contemporary accounts describe increased Irish, Pictish, and Saxon raiding along coastal Wales in the late Roman period. As imperial military protection collapsed, settlements like Din Lligwy faced growing vulnerability. Archaeological interpretation suggests that fear of such raids, compounded by economic instability, contributed to the community's decision to abandon the site.

10. Absence of Destruction Layers

Excavations reveal an orderly rather than catastrophic abandonment. There are no burn layers, weapon damage, or hurriedly deserted structures. Instead, artefacts—including metalworking debris—were left in situ, suggesting a gradual withdrawal rather than a sudden flight.



11. Regional Patterns and Interpretation

The strengthening of Din Lligwy's walls aligns with defensive measures seen across late Romano-British coastal settlements. These communities adapted to insecurity through architectural fortification and local self-sufficiency. Archaeological consensus interprets the abandonment of Din Lligwy as a product of combined pressures—economic decline, loss of administrative networks, and fear of raids—rather than direct violence.

12. Decline and Abandonment

Following the Roman military withdrawal between AD 385–400, Din Lligwy was gradually deserted. Evidence indicates minimal occupation after AD 400, marking the end of its Romano-British phase. The community's dispersal reflects broader transformations in post-Roman Britain: shifting trade patterns, political fragmentation, and the collapse of centralized authority.

13. Archaeological and Historical Conclusion

Din Lligwy stands as a vivid testament to adaptation and resilience at the edge of empire. The settlement's fusion of native and Roman elements encapsulates the hybrid nature of late Roman Britain—rural, industrious, and spiritually rooted in ancient landscapes. Its ultimate abandonment mirrors the larger story of Rome's fading influence and the birth of a new, post-imperial society in early medieval Wales.