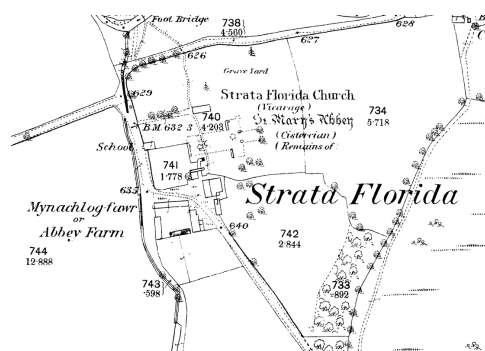
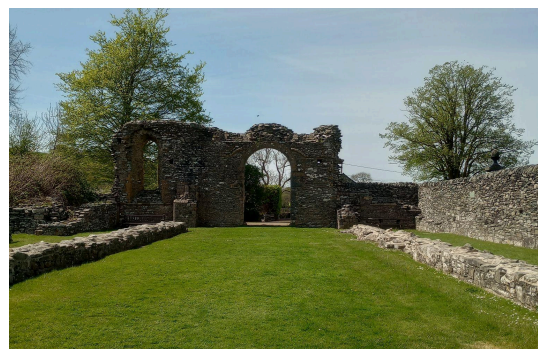


Into the Field: Field Journal



Strata Florida is, principally, a Cistercian abbey that has graced the lands near the River Teifi since 1184¹. The Cistercians or 'White Monks' were a strict denomination of christianity that believed in the teachings of St. Benedict and were devoted to a simple life of poverty². Over two weeks, we studied the Strata Florida lands, including the Woods, the 'Bumpy Field', the abbey and the Mines. This Field Journal aims to explore these areas and the archaeological research behind them. To make³ things simpler, instead of this being a day-by-day record of all that happened during our time at Strata Florida, each area is going to be covered by itself.

To begin, the abbey of Strata Florida or Abaty Ystrad Fflur, could be considered to be the heart of Strata Florida. In modern times, it is certainly the main attraction of Strata Florida as a whole. With the ruins of the Abbey being so well preserved, it is no wonder that the general public has a fascination with it. It also has a rich spiritual history, closely tied in with the Cistercian monks. Although the abbey itself was only founded in 1184, the monks had first travelled to⁴ Strata Florida from Whitland in 1164.⁵ However, as well as the obvious Cistercian influence that is prominent in Strata Florida, there is also evidence of possible earlier religious influence. For example the baptismal font in the abbey. The font could be believed to be potentially older than the rest of the abbey and therefore may not be not cistercian. This is because it is built at a different angle to the rest of the abbey which suggests that it was not built at the same time, as well as this, it does not conform to Cistercian standards for baptismal fonts which are generally near the entrance to the Church, whereas the baptismal font at Strata Florida is near the rear of the church, a stark contrast to other Cistercian churches. The placement of baptismal fonts is a central part of Christian worship and plays a key role in the religious ritual of attending church. It is placed near the front of the church so that you can be baptised upon entering the church. Pastor Rich Lusk says that "Because baptism is the means by which we enter the church, it makes good sense to keep the font there as a reminder



¹ Cadw, *Strata Florida Abbey*, <<https://cadw.gov.wales/visit/places-to-visit/strata-florida-abbey>>, (2025), accessed: 6th May 2025.

² Janet Burton, Julie Kerr, *The Cistercians in the Middle Ages*, <<https://boydellandbrewer.com/9781783271207/the-cistercians-in-the-middle-ages/>>, (2016), accessed: 6th May 2025, Description.

³ Image, Strata Florida Trust, *History*, <<https://www.strataflorida.org.uk/about.html>>, (no date), accessed: 11th May 2025.

⁴ Image, Laura Singleton, (2025).

⁵ Strata Florida Trust, *History*, <<https://www.strataflorida.org.uk/about.html>>, (no date), accessed: 11th May 2025.

of this truth.”⁶. This therefore means that the positioning of the baptismal font at Strata Florida Abbey is strange as it is near the back of the abbey instead at the front as it would be in most other churches. This shows that there might have been external factors that changed the placement of the baptismal font, such as it already having existed before the abbey was constructed. However, this is merely speculation.

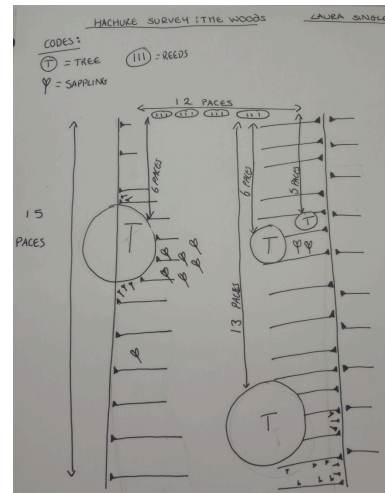


⁷After the abbey, we then moved on to examine the woods. The woods show signs of having previously been much more used than they are currently. Though the woods are mainly used for animal grazing now, there is plenty of evidence that they were early used for human migration as shown by the stone walled pathway in the image to the left. The stone walls create banks on either side of the path after centuries of moss and earth build up. As the Strata Florida Woods are in the

Upper Teifi Valley, these pathways could be of Roman origin. There are already known Roman pathways in the Teifi Valley such as an “800m long stretch of the Roman road that runs north-eastwards along the Teifi valley from Lampeter towards Llanio”⁸



Another example of a potential Roman pathway in the Strata Florida woods and ran alongside and above a river near the entrance to the woods. A hachure survey of a small part of the potential pathway is on the ⁹right. As well as the possible Roman pathways in the Strata Florida Woods, there was also a cairn near the top of the woods that doesn't appear to be recorded. Though there are other cairns in the area that are recorded and the Strata Florida trust say that “In the Glasffrwd valley Bronze Age peoples set up numerous burial cairns for their dead”¹⁰ which may suggest that this cairn also has Bronze Age origins, however without further evidence nothing can be said about how old the cairn is and



⁶ Pastor Rich Lusk, *Entering Through Baptism: A Short Note on the Placement of the Baptismal Font*, <<https://trinity-pres.net/essays/baptismalfont.pdf>>, (no date), accessed 11th May 2025.

⁷ Image, Laura Singleton, (2025).

⁸ Coflein, *Roman Road, LLanfair Clydogau*, <<https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/309950>> (2021), accessed: 14th May 2025.

⁹ Image, Laura Singleton, (2025).

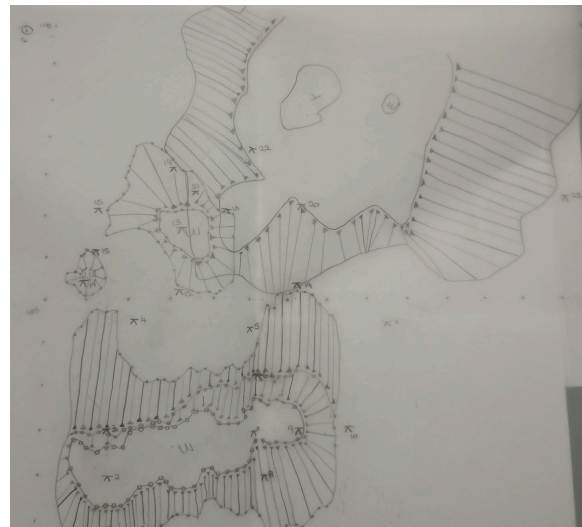
¹⁰ Strata Florida Trust, *History*, <<https://www.strataflorida.org.uk/about.html>>, (no date), accessed: 14th May 2025.

whether it truly is a Bronze Age Cairn or whether it is merely a disposal heap of stones, maybe from the building of the Roman Pathways. Our studying of the woods, while interesting, was significantly hindered by the stifling heat during the days we were there and I am sure that had the weather been more forgiving, more information than we managed to obtain about the complexities of the woods would have made itself known.



Despite the still blistering heat, we then moved onto the “Bumpy Field”; the nickname given to the field is rather apt as it is curiously exceptionally bumpy, with many strange mounds littering the ground. We spent a long time in the ¹¹Bumpy Field while we learnt how to accurately map out a hachure drawing using precise measurements and tools such as dumpy levels. The dumpy levels were at first difficult to understand, and while I still don’t think that I fully understand how to use them, they are exceptionally efficient at measuring the heights of the various mounds

in the field. We spent many days mapping out the area surrounding a central tree in the field where many of the mounds seemed to form. This allowed us to create a precise and well-formed ¹²map of the area that we surveyed. While I can’t begin to say why the field may be as strangely formed as it is, I can guess at reasons to explain the vast amount of mounds in the field. In the present day, the field is quite often used as a sheep grazing field which may have caused significant disturbance to the ground which could have led to the mounds forming. Another idea might be that it could have been an earlier grave site such as the one in St. Mary’s Churchyard also in Strata Florida that is said to hold the body of Dafydd ap Gwilym ¹³. However, the field doesn’t have any of the properties of the cemetery at St. Mary’s, there are no marshy areas, barring the reeds which are on the other side of the field. And while there are ant hills as there were in the churchyard, they are not stationed up against headstones. So while there is a small possibility that the mounds may be caused by graves, it is unlikely. A more likely explanation is that the mounds are made up of waste material, probably from previous archaeological excavations in the area, or by the restorations of St. Mary’s



¹¹ Image, Soli-Anne Green, (2025).

¹² Image, Laura Singleton, (2025).

¹³ National Church Trust, *Strata Florida St Mary*, <<https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/church/st-mary-strata-florida>> (2025), accessed: 14th May 2025.

Church nearby, The church was rebuilt in 1815 and was restored in 1875 and 1914 and as such waste material from the building and subsequent restorations of the church may have been dumped in the field and have since turned into the mounds we now see.¹⁴

The final place that we visited was the Mines, just outside of Strata Florida. I didn't have the pleasure of spending much time at the Mines and the time that I did spend there was hindered by illness and so my observations about the Mines might be more limited compared to the other areas that we visited. The area seemed to have a rich history and had many interesting features, such as the house at the bottom of the mines and the many spoil heaps



¹⁵surrounding the area. In particular, I found a small stone tunnel that I thought was interesting and later learned to be an adit. Which is a small tunnel in the side of a mountain in order to allow for "working,



ventilating or removing water from a mine."¹⁶. As I didn't have enough time to truly take in the mines, this was the most interesting thing that I managed to find during my time there.

To conclude, the abbey, woods, bumpy field and mines of Strata Florida each have their own rich histories from strange baptismal fonts that have no explanation, to potential roman pathways. The lands of Strata Florida will continue to be an area of interest to archaeologists for many years and the current investigations have only skimmed the surface of the potential that these lands hold. It was an honour to be involved with this exploration of the lands and I hope to be able to continue to study the area and discover more that the place has to offer.

¹⁴ Coflein, *St Mary's Church, Strata Florida*, <<https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/418299/#:~:text=The%20church%20was%20rebuilt%20in,to%20the%20designs%20of%20G.T.>> (2021), accessed: 14th May 2025.

¹⁵ Image, Iwa Lewis, (2025).

¹⁶ Britannica, *Adit*, <<https://www.britannica.com/technology/adit>>, (2024), accessed: 14th May 2024.

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