

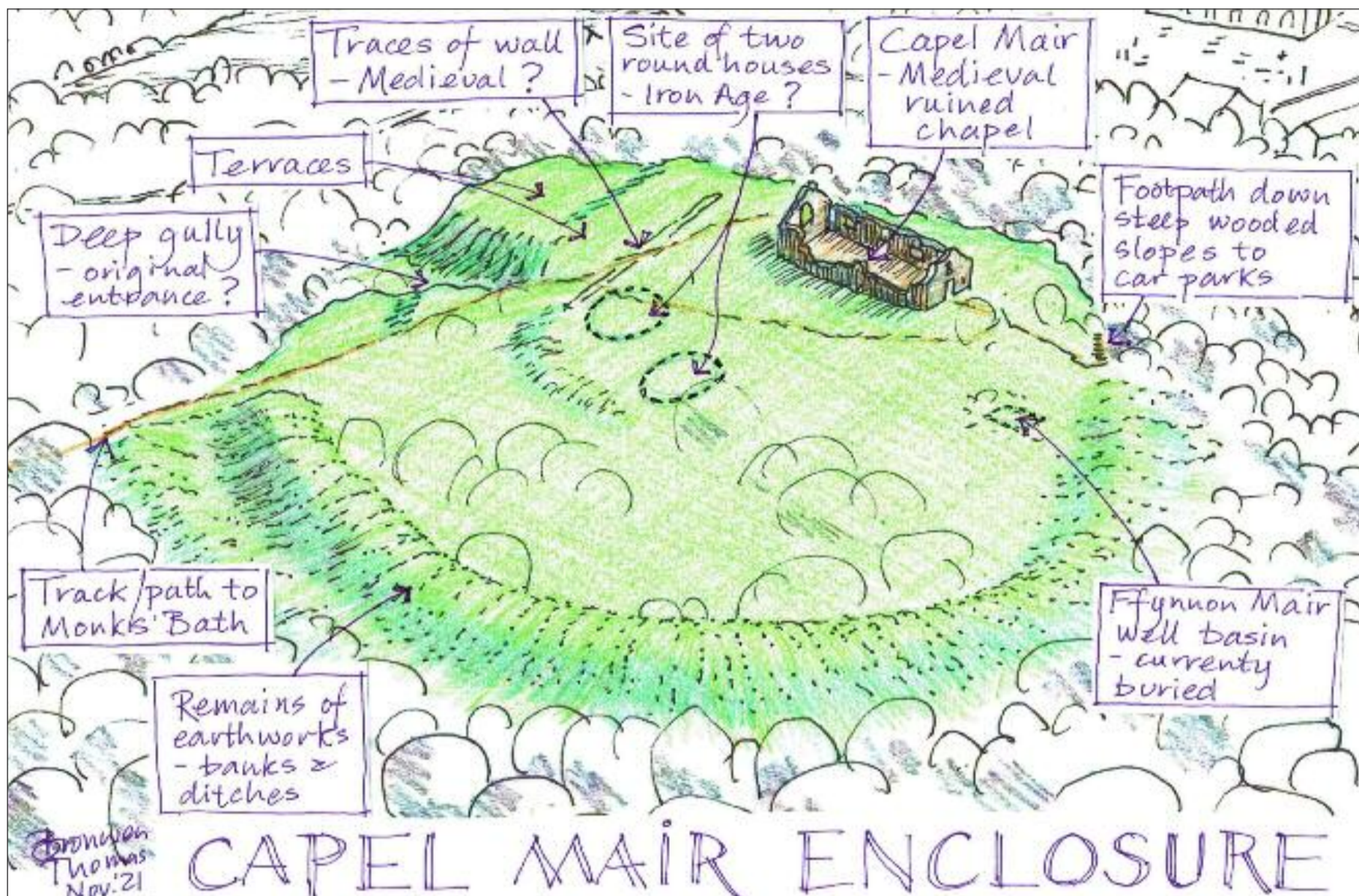
FREE
for the young
people of Neath
Port Talbot

I DIG MARGAM

**March
2022**
edition 1

the first edition of a new newspaper on archaeology
for young people in Neath Port Talbot
[published by the Friends of Margam Park]

with
11 fun
activities
inside



EXCITING NEW DISCOVERIES AT CAPEL MAIR

You can clearly see the ruins of Capel Mair (or Mary's Chapel) on the hillside above Margam Abbey while travelling west along the M4. Many of us have climbed up there for views of the whole of Margam Park, the Castle, Tata Steel and the Bristol Channel, with Devon beyond. But how many of us were aware that there was so much more up there, so much history going back thousands of years?



Recent archaeology at Capel Mair has discovered evidence of an Iron Age hillfort, complete with round-houses and ramparts, as well as a once-sacred spring, all hidden a little way below the ground. The **I DIG MARGAM Project** is all about these exciting new discoveries, and what they can tell us about how our ancestors once lived.

Read more about this fascinating history inside

WHAT IS ARCHAEOLOGY ?

How can we find out about the time before people knew how to write about their lives, the time we call 'prehistory'? One of the main answers lies in **ARCHAEOLOGY**.

Archaeologists explore and dig gently into the ground to learn about how people lived and what they believed in, even from the days before writing ... by finding what

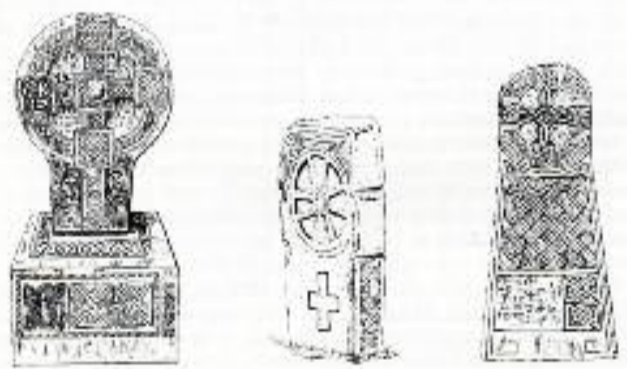
they left behind, what they had lost, what they had thrown away or hidden.

Archaeology reveals to us the things buried below our feet.



Archeologists aren't treasure hunters like you often see in films ... although they do find treasures. They are scientists, and they act like detectives, solving mysteries about the past. They look for clues, objects that people made and used, called 'artifacts'.

Archaeologists study old maps and read ancient stories. And today they have a range of new technological tools to help them, like satellite imagery (photos from space), electric probes, magnetometry, and



some of Margam's ancient stones

LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging, that shoots a laser beam at the ground).

And there are lots of different kinds of archaeologists: those that study pre-history, historical times, underwater, the environment ... even 'garbologists' who look into the rubbish that we throw away.

The work of archaeologists often disproves what previous archaeologists believed. Every day we are learning more and more.

ACTIVITY 1

Find out about history's greatest archaeological excavations in Britain and beyond. You could begin with the Tomb of Tutankamun in Egypt, Richard III's grave in Leicester or Whitesands Bay in Pembrokeshire. Imagine what it would have been like to have been at these digs!

GEOPHYSICS AT CAPEL MAIR: a kind of magic

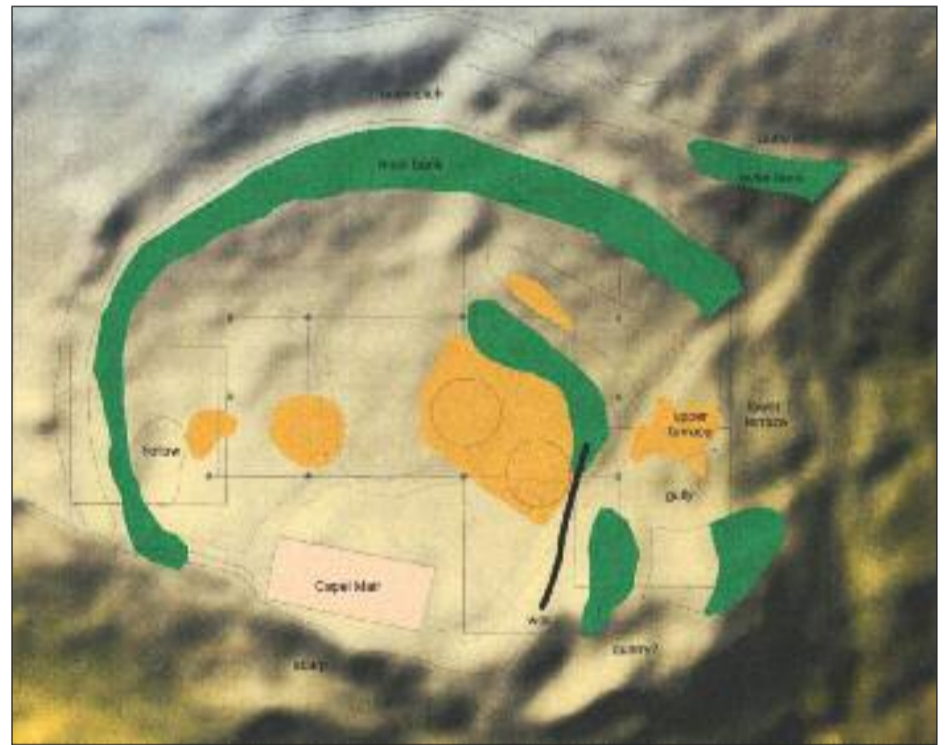
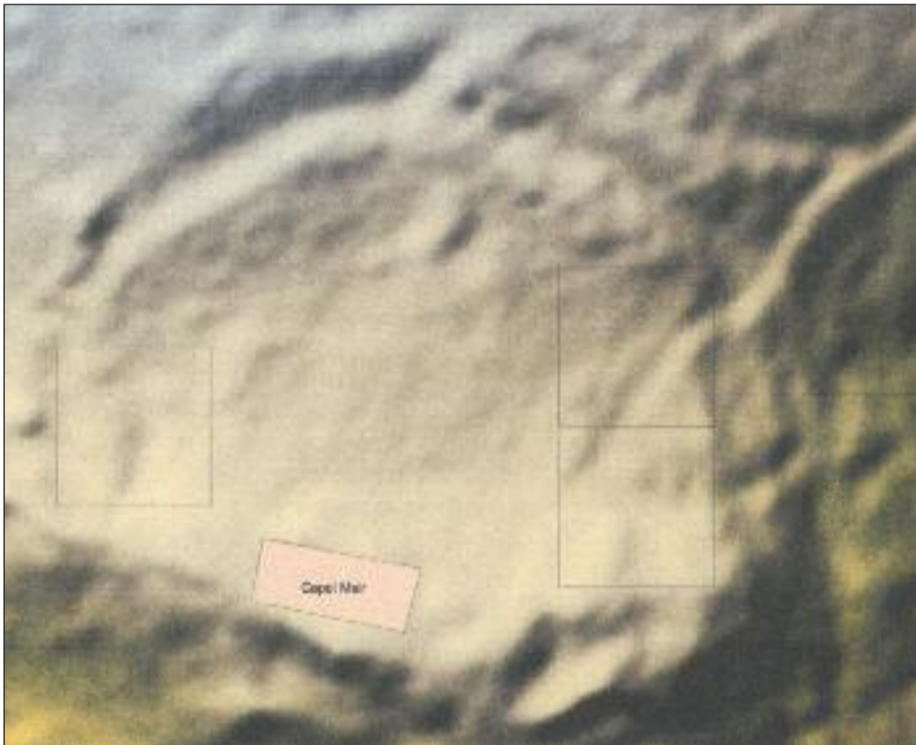
Geophysics is like a kind of X-ray of the earth. It shows you what's hidden underneath, the things you can't usually see ... like a kind of magic.

And even though prehistoric people didn't read or write, the objects they left in the ground can tell us lots about how they lived and worked, fought and died.

And, at Capel Mair, the geophysics revealed a great deal.

The first image (below left) is what the LiDAR examination revealed. You can clearly see the two curved hillfort walls ('ramparts') with a ditch in between them, as well as the settlement's main entrances.

The second image (below) interpretes the first, suggesting what each of these areas might be hiding. The outer and main (inner) banking with the ditch are all clear. The two circles at the centre are thought to have been round-houses. There's the remains of an unexplained 'wall'. And there is also a mysterious space named 'hollow'.



EXCAVATIONS AT CAPEL MAIR: building on bones

Following on from what we learned from the geophysics, archaeological excavations (or 'digs') were conducted at the Capel Mair site to try to find the ancient well. Reading what had been written about its location in old documents ("north-west of the chapel"), and finding the area marked as 'hollow' on the geophysics, this seemed the best place to begin digging ... and very soon the well was found.

That's what archaeology can do! It reveals to us the layers of history that are hidden, where humans have built, literally on the bones of the past.

Originally(?) an Iron Age hillfort, possibly used for ritual purposes centred upon the sacred spring of water that rises here, then perhaps a site used by the invading Romans, the current chapel ruins show that Christianity, much later, saw this as an important place, so built their chapel, Capel Mair, up here.



Ffynnon Mair ('Mary's Well') April 2019 dig, with, at centre, the fully-excavated holy well



THE (at least) SIX AGES OF MARGAM !

Archaeologists have split time up into different periods in the life of the human race, what they call Ages. The first three of these have been given names based upon the materials that their main tools were made of. But, when looking back into the dense mists particularly of prehistoric time, it's important to realise that there was never one day or one month or one year or even one century when one Age moved onto the next. There was no one time when stone tools were abandoned for bronze, or bronze for iron, when Celts became Romans, when pagans became Christians. And, remember, the dates we use for these Ages are often disputed, and very different in different parts of the world:

1. THE STONE AGE 800,000-2500BC

I think it should be called The Stone and Bone Age, as they used animal and human bones as tools, as well as stones ... and wood, too ... so, Stone, Bone and Wood Age, perhaps

(though most of the wood evidence has decomposed). They lived in caves, mainly hunted animals and gathered their food from trees and plants, and they buried all their dead in tombs. In the New Stone Age, places like Stonehenge were built ... and we're still trying to understand why!

Stone Age axehead



2. THE BRONZE AGE 2500-800BC

Bronze is made of a combination of copper (90%) and tin (10%). This Age was the first when people were able to settle more in one place, to rear cattle and farm successfully,

increasing food production ... so life was probably, in some ways, easier. They used horses and had carts, and also chariots for war, so this, it seems, was also a time of increasing violence. In the Bronze Age, as far as we can see, only the rich were now afforded special burials.

Mold Cape, made of pure gold



3. THE IRON AGE 800BC-AD43

The Iron Age was the time of the first real Welsh, the Celts (though they never called themselves this). The local Celtic tribe was called the Silures. This Age saw a great leap

forward for the human race because iron was so much stronger than bronze ... so you could make better tools, and hunt and farm more efficiently. This was the time when forts were built on hilltops, like the one at Capel Mair. The Iron Age ended with the first successful invasion of Britain by the Romans in AD43.

Bronze Age arrow heads



4. THE ROMAN AGE AD43-410

Although fighting against an army larger in number and better equipped and supplied, the Silures resisted Roman domination successfully for more than thirty-five years.

The Romans wanted Welsh gold, silver, lead, copper and iron. From AD78 on, south Wales was subject to military control from forts manned by soldiers based in Caerleon, effectively becoming part of the Roman Empire ... before they finally returned to their own problems back home in AD410.

the Roman Baths, Caerleon



5. THE MEDIEVAL AGE AD410-1500

With the Romans gone, Wales was split up into a number of warrior kingdoms. Though mostly Christian now, our version of the faith borrowed much from the Iron

Age pagan Celts who believed that their gods resided in nature ... in trees and rivers, in stones and springs. The earliest suggestion of a Welsh border came during this time, with the building of Offa's Dyke, from AD757. See also 'Not So Dark!' (p.11)

Chapter House, Margam Abbey



6. THE MODERN AGE AD1500-today

'Modern' sounds like progress, getting better, improving ... but how good a job have we done protecting our planet and its residents (human and animal) and our oceans and seas, our fields and forests over the last 500 years?

ACTIVITY 2

How good a job have we done protecting our planet? And what about the future? What do you think will get better? What will get worse? What are your greatest fears for the future? How can you help make the world a better place for coming generations?

Capel Mair above Tata Steel works



ACTIVITY 3

Pick the Age you'd most like to have lived in (or the one you are most interested in). Write a story about what life would have been like. Perhaps you can imagine that you are there, or maybe you're just observing their lives from afar. Illustrate your account ... perhaps in a cartoon strip? (And after you've completed your selected Age, you could even pick another one. You could even do all six!)

METAL/WARS

Did the Discovery of Metal lead to Warfare and Inequality?

When the skills to work copper then bronze, then much later on, iron into stronger and stronger new tools was introduced into the lives of prehistoric people, it seems that it might also have increased violence between individuals and tribes, with more effective weapons now also being able to be made.

ACTIVITY 4

Do scientific and technological discoveries always have a down side? Can you think of any other developments that had both negative and positive outcomes? Was the splitting of the atom a good or a bad thing for humanity?

RHYME AND NO REASON

Celtic Poets and Priests

Wales' reputation for making poets came mainly from the Iron Age Celtic period, when the hillfort at Capel Mair was probably first constructed.

The Romans told us that a Celtic poet had to study for as much as twelve years, and learn more than 350 poems by heart, to begin to qualify.

This was also the time of the Druids, the high priests of the Celts. We are told that Druids had to undertake twenty years of training for their jobs as lawmakers, judges and advisors to their kings. They proclaimed when it was time to plant crops, sacrifice animals (and probably humans, too), and – if you believe the hype – had the powers to predict the future, travel through time, change the weather, and even their shapes.

ACTIVITY 5

Research Welsh poets of the past, as well as those writing today. Are there any living near who could visit your school? Write a poem of your own about Iron Age Celtic Wales. Find out about Druids in Wales today.

FAKE NEWS

Were the Romans Liars?

When the Romans arrived in Britain, that was the end of 'prehistory'. They could read and write, and it was them that started to record Celtic lives. Most of what we know about our Iron Age ancestors comes from the Romans, but, remember, they were the invaders, so we need to question whether their accounts can always be relied upon.

Welsh opposition to the Romans came from the Silures here in the south, and the Ordovices in the north. Roman reports of Celtic raids and warfare (what the native people would have called 'resistance') were of savage and bloody – and sometimes naked and painted – crazies, descriptions which justified invasion and the ruthless elimination of what they saw as 'uncivilized barbarians'.

But if you look at the artworks which have survived from those days – found in many cases through the work of archaeologists – it's difficult to see the Celts in this way.



The tales which have been handed down of Celtic warriors – usually outnumbered – standing up to the Romans are paralleled today, perhaps, when our tiny modern nation (with a population of just 3.1 million) sometimes triumphs over the vastly larger-populated (54 million) English and their rugby team, particularly when the invaders cross the Severn and march onto our Millennium Stadium motherland turf!

MASSACRE!

Ethnic Cleansing in North Wales

The Romans understood well the importance of the Druids to the Celts. They were their spiritual leaders. The Druid's religious home and the centre of Celtic anti-Roman resistance was on the island of Anglesey in north Wales ... and the Romans were determined to destroy all of its temples alongside all of its priests.



Druids Inciting the Britons to Oppose the Roman Landing on Anglesey

In AD60/61, Suetonius Paulinus, the Roman governor of Britannia led an assault on the island.

This is the record of (the Roman!) Tacitus: *"On the shore stood the opposing army with its dense array of armed warriors, while between the ranks dashed women, in black attire like the Furies, with hair dishevelled, waving brands. All around, the Druids, lifting up their hands to heaven, and pouring forth dreadful imprecations, scared our soldiers by the unfamiliar sight, so that, as if their limbs were paralysed, they stood motionless, and exposed to wounds."*

What followed, however, was a savage act of cultural genocide which today would have been condemned as a war crime by the International Criminal Court in The Hague, a crime against humanity.



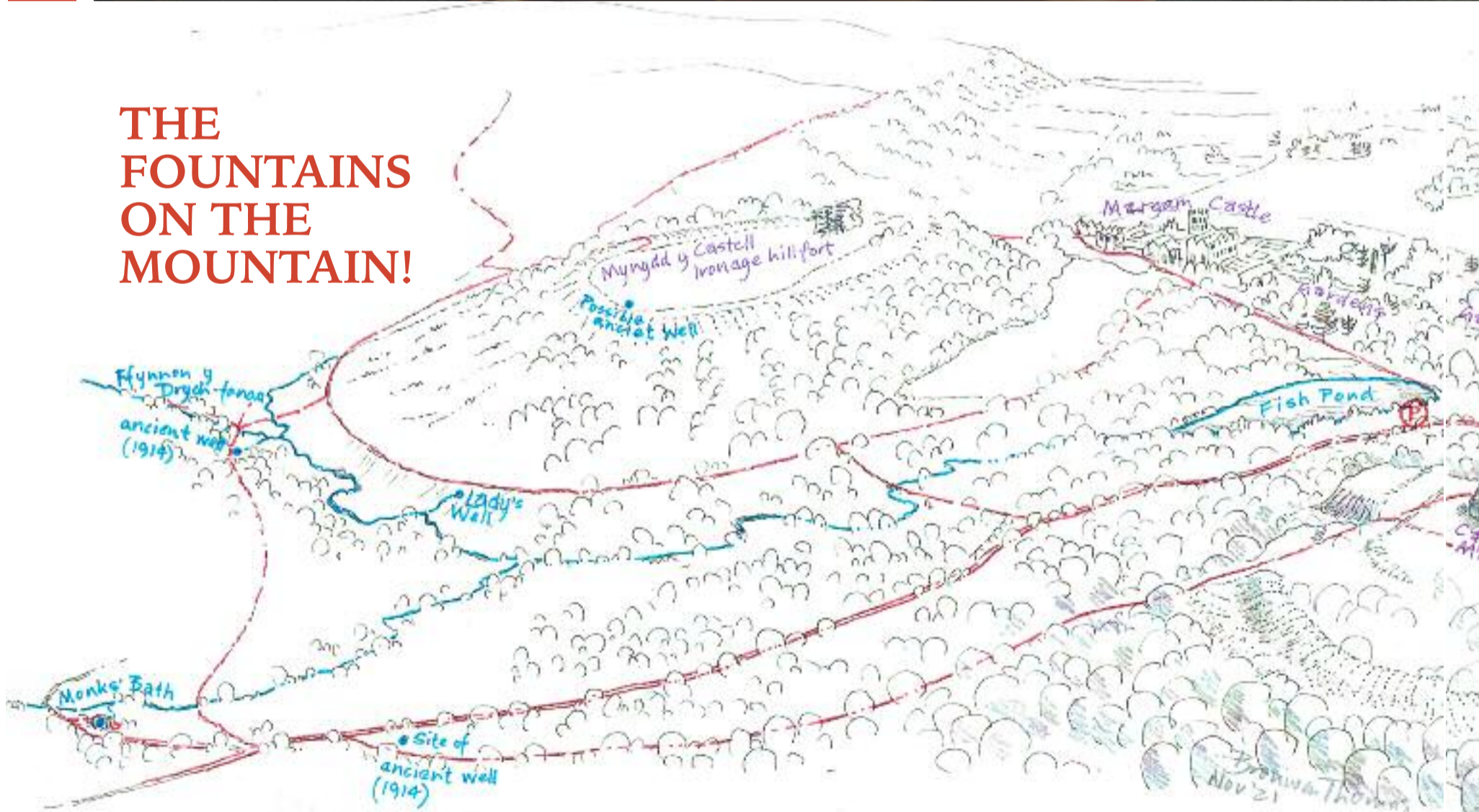
after the massacre

EVERYONE'S ASKING ... "WHAT'S C

When thinking about what the future might hold for Capel Mair, there are issues – some positive, some negative – that we will need to consider. There's the current state of the ruined chapel, often treated as the climbing frame of a medieval adventure playground. There's the regular misuse of the whole site for parties and raves, causing damage to the building, noise disturbance for neighbours, not to mention the mounds of litter always left behind. And, most significantly, there's what the geophysical evidence and the excavations have revealed: the well and the chapel sitting within an important Celtic Iron Age hillfort, offering a wide new range of possibilities for education, creativity and more archaeological explorations.

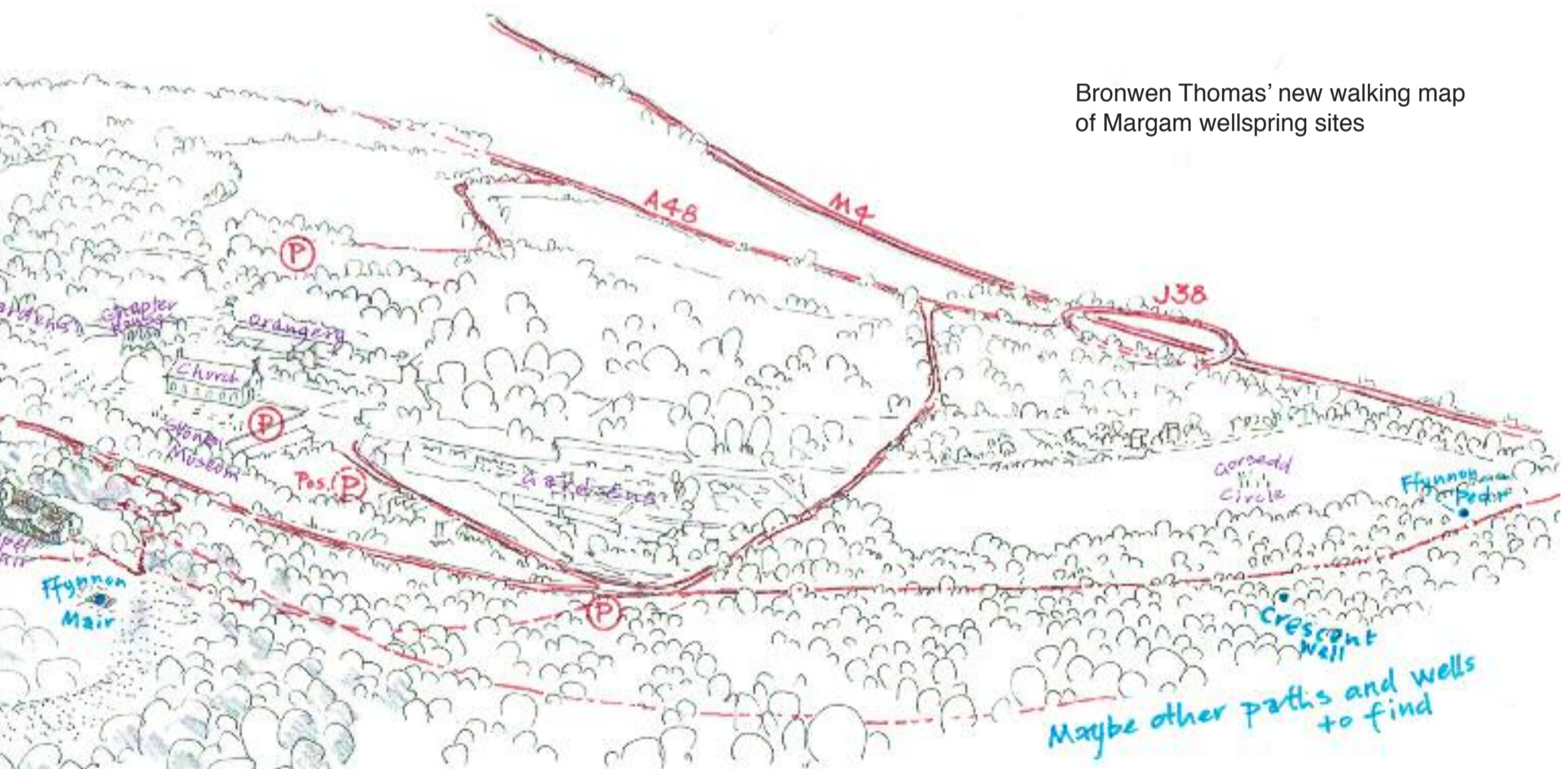


THE FOUNTAINS ON THE MOUNTAIN!



GOING ON UP AT CAPEL MAIR ?”

The Friends of Margam Park would like to see the safe and sustainable reviving of the holy well up at Capel Mair; even, perhaps, the creative ‘re-enclosure’ of the whole Iron Age hillfort, though we fully understand the issues that would be involved. And, as well as Ffynnon Mair (‘our fountain on the mountain’) there are at least eight other wellspring sites throughout the Park. The Friends are planning to develop an exciting new **Wellsprings Walk** (see the map, below) to link the sites. And we also want to establish a **Centre for Young People’s Archaeology** within Margam Park, as part of our **I DIG MARGAM Project**, all underpinned by a wide range of inspiring workshops and very special events for both adults and young people.



Bronwen Thomas’ new walking map of Margam wellspring sites

ACTIVITY 6

How can we protect our important historical sites ... at the same time as making our heritage open to all? Do you have any answers? And if so, how can they be applied at the Capel Mair site? Try to research how other people at other important sites have solved this problem? Write some notes below, then share and discuss them in class, or with your friends.



"I would love to do the I DIG MARGAM."

"Thank you for your time spent with Year 6. The children have been inspired by your knowledge and are eager to take parents and family to visit Capel Mair."

"The Ages are really cool."

"It was amazing."

"learning more about the people in the olden days, and what they did"

LOCAL SCHOOLS EXPLORE THE LONG HISTORY OF CAPEL MAIR

Neath Port Talbot pupils from Coed Hirwaun Primary and Cwm Brombil Comprehensive were the first to participate in the **I DIG MARGAM** Project. Each programme of three half-day sessions offered an introduction to prehistory, plus to the coming of the Romans, with an outline of the work of the archaeologist (including Stone, Bronze and Iron Age items – excavated and in reproduction – for the young people to handle), followed by an introduction to the medieval history of Margam Abbey and of Capel Mair. Then came the visit to the Capel Mair site itself, with individual copies of the aerial photographs and geophysical plans for each participant to help locate the possible sites of the well, the round houses and the ramparts.

The third 'creative' workshop session, back in the classroom, responded to what had been discovered, and began the process of imaging what the site might have looked like through its many manifestations, as well as what it could become for new generations into the future. (Some of the young people's comments on the **I DIG MARGAM Project** surround this article.)

Following the school sessions, we have now also begun to deliver tailored workshops and guided tours of the Capel Mair site and the Margam well-springs for adults.

If you, your school, college or organisation would like to get involved in the **I DIG MARGAM Project**, see the back page.



"It is more than an enjoyable experience ... it is humorous, fun and so much more!"

"The Iron Age fort at Capel Mair – I had no idea!"

"I loved everything about it."

"... overall it could not be better."

digging up history ... seeing what's underground"

"I hope we do this until the year ends ..."



ACTIVITY 7

Circle one of the artifacts below and write two accounts of it: one by the person who first used it, perhaps lost it or buried it; and one by the archaeologist who dug it up and tries to explain and to date it. Archaeologists don't always know everything ... so the two accounts might be very different!



ACTIVITY 8

WORDSEARCH

some useful words
... and their meanings

S		G	D	O	X	L	M	B	N	J
K	P	R	E	H	I	S	T	O	R	Y
W	E	L	L	S	P	R	I	N	G	S
M	E	D	I	E	V	A	L	G	G	L
E	E	D		M	E	N	S	S	P	E
X	A	R	T	I	F	A	C	T	G	N
C	V	U	O	R	A	R	E	O	G	B
A	F	I	R	O	Y	C	L	N	E	H
V	B	D	C	N	E	H	N	E	O	R
A	B	D	O		K	A	O		P	A
T	R	O	M	A	N	E	P	A	H	M
I	O	O	M	G		O	I	G	Y	P
O	N	E	T	E		L	H	E	S	A
N	Z		G	O	T	O	R	P	I	R
H	E	R	I	T	A	G	E	K	C	T
	L	R	G	Q	U	Y		G	S	S
O	T	H	I	L	L	F	O	R	T	J

ARCHAEOLOGY: the study of human activity through what we've left behind (see p.2)

ARTIFACT: an object made by human hands, often found in an excavation

BRONZE AGE: 2500-800BC (see p.4)

CELT: Northern European Iron Age people (see p.4)

DRUID: Iron Age priest (see p.5)

EXCAVATION: an archaeological dig (see p.3)

GEOPHYSICS: a non-invasive way of exploring what's below the earth (see p.3)

HERITAGE: things, places and ideas handed down from the past that we consider important to protect

HILLFORT: Iron Age (and other) settlement

PREHISTORY: the time before writing

IRON AGE: 800BC-AD43 (see p.4)

RAMPARTS: high banks of earth and stone built around a hillfort, for protection

ROMAN: the Romans invaded Britain first in 55BC, then successfully in AD43, only leaving in AD410 (see p.4)

STONE AGE: 800,000-2500BC (see p.4)

TORC: a Celtic neck ring

WELLSPRINGS: a new compound word to describe both pagan sacred springs and Christian holy wells

LAYER UPON LAYER



Over its thousands of years of existence, the Capel Mair site has regularly changed ... from an Iron Age Celtic hillfort to an early Christian chapel, and on to what's left up there, today.

ACTIVITY 9

Make four different drawings of the Capel Mair site – as an Iron Age hillfort, as a medieval chapel, as it is today, and what it might look like in the future. Perhaps you could sketch your ideas in the boxes (right), then make your finished drawings on four separate sheets?



IRON AGE

MEDIEVAL

TODAY

IN THE FUTURE?

NOT SO DARK!

The Early Medieval Period – which began when the Romans eventually left in AD410 – is sometimes called ‘The Dark Ages’. That’s strange as lots of important things happened. There were Angle and Saxon invasions, and Viking and Norman attacks; Alfred the Great fought off the Vikings and burnt the cakes; King Offa built his dyke, and King Canute tried to show that you couldn’t turn back time; William the Conqueror took the English crown at the Battle of Hastings; the ‘Domesday Book’ and the ‘Magna Carta’ were created; there were Crusades, and a ‘Black Death’; 1500 ‘rebels’ were executed after the ‘Peasants’ Revolt’; Joan of Arc saw visions, led a rebellion and was burned at the stake; the Hundred Years War lasted for 116!; Christianity spread widely; the people of Wales began to emerge as a distinct nation; and Christopher Columbus ‘discovered’ lots of countries that had been inhabited for centuries ... so a pretty eventful period, and not really ‘dark’ at all!

ACTIVITY 10

How many of the list of some of the things that happened in the so-called ‘Dark Ages’ have you heard of? Pick three that you didn’t know, and find out all you can about them.

DESTRUCTION!

The Crimes of Henry VIII

Margam Abbey was established by French Cistercian monks in 1147, soon becoming the largest and wealthiest abbey in Wales. Believed to sit on the site of a much older place of worship, this was probably a centre of early Celtic Christianity, that deep root of the new faith which combined the Celts’ regard for nature with the radical teachings of the new faith.



Capel Mair was constructed by the monks much later, in 1470, for local people who weren’t allowed back then to worship in the Abbey (it was strictly for monks and rich people, only!)

Perched on its dominating hillside position, easily visible to travellers and pilgrims, with today its fine views of the Abbey/church, the Castle and the whole Park below, the chapel is now a roofless ruin.

But why are both the Abbey and the Chapel in ruins. It’s all Henry VIII’s fault! He broke links with Rome and the Catholic Church, making himself the sole leader, and banning Catholicism.

As well as beheading two of his six wives and divorcing three of the others, Henry was responsible (between 1536-41) for churches and



abbeys being burned and dismantled, their paintings destroyed, their sculptures smashed, their precious metals melted down, and their jewels stolen, all as part of the so-called ‘Dissolution of the Monasteries’.

It has been estimated that less than five percent of the church buildings, paintings, sculptures and other precious objects survived Henry’s reign of destruction.

HUNG, DRAWN & QUARTERED

The Joint Martyrs

Margam Abbey was ‘dissolved’ in 1537, though secret Catholic services continued to be conducted up at Capel Mair, and elsewhere. The fates of two Welsh-speaking priests illustrate the brutal nature of the times.

Philip Evans and John Lloyd were known as ‘the joint martyrs’ after

being captured, held together in Cardiff prison, and hung, drawn and quartered on the same day in 1679 ... then made saints together in 1970.

It is thought that St Philip preached at Capel Mair, and it is likely that the valley, Cwm Philip, that lies between Capel Mair and Mynydd-y-Castell, is named after him.

stained glass window commemorating St Philip Evans, at Stonyhurst College, Lancashire

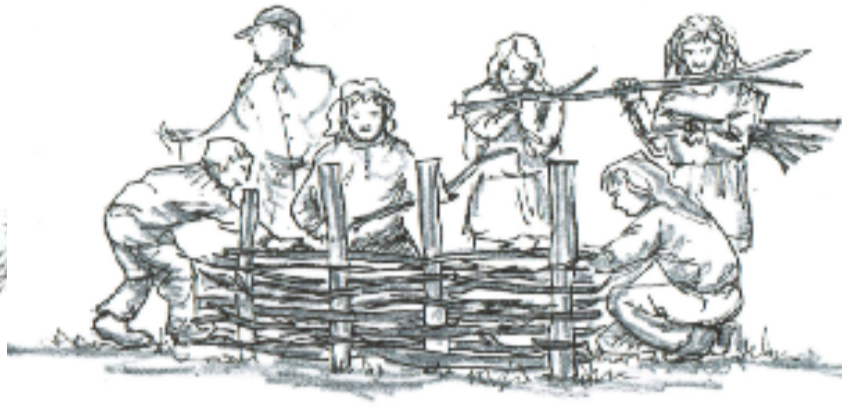


ACTIVITY 11

Take a walk up Cwm Philip. Imagine what life would have been like for Catholics in the late sixteenth century.

SO ... WHY NOT GET INVOLVED IN

I MARGAM ?



Learn more about the pre-history and the history of Wales and the world, and especially of the Capel Mair site and the many other riches of Margam Park.

Help us protect the Capel Mair Iron Age hillfort site.

Get involved in **I DIG MARGAM** archaeological excavations, at Capel Mair and elsewhere.

Become an **I DIG MARGAM** 'Well Guardian' to help protect the once-sacred wellspring sites of Margam Park.

Get involved in **I DIG MARGAM** creative work – poetry and story writing, theatre, music, video, photography, art – based upon the many exciting tales of Capel Mair and the Park.



To get involved, please contact:
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