

## **TOWARDS A STRATEGY**

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The research strategy was developed through discussion by archaeologists who elected to be involved, mostly from within Wales, but including some from other UK countries. They examined issues period by period within each of the four regions defined by the territories of the Welsh Archaeological Trusts. In addition, two themes of national importance, namely environmental and maritime, were considered. The whole process was truly inclusive and all sectors, including public, educational and voluntary bodies, and a number of individuals, were represented.

From the analysis of the issues it emerged that the understanding of Wales as elsewhere in Britain during its earliest periods, from the Palaeolithic to the Early Bronze Age, is inhibited by the lack of both site and climatic evidence for the nature of colonisation, recolonisation and settlement. Put simply, more needs to be known about the extent of the settled landscape and the continuity of the settlement. Indeed, the lack of knowledge is so deep that it prevents the adequate interpretation and understanding of the monuments which do survive. The consensus which emerged from discussion is that a key to solving this problem lies in developing more research in both environmental and maritime sectors, while remote survey will undoubtedly continue to discover sites with potential for investigation. Detailed site investigation must be regarded as integral and, as part of this work, carefully targeted excavation is inescapable.

For the later prehistoric period there is a better awareness of settlement patterns, derived in part from the survival of hillforts, but this is not balanced by sufficient knowledge of land-use and in particular of how resources were exploited to sustain the society. This patchy understanding of the period inhibits the ability to characterise the interaction between the Roman occupiers and the indigenous population. Again, remote survey methods and use of environmental evidence, including samples from old ground surfaces, are seen to have a high priority.

Much of the nature of Roman occupation in Wales, including the early campaign years, has yet to be established. It is fundamental that the relationship between the colonisers and the colonised is understood, so it is considered that a great deal could be achieved by the detailed investigation of high-status sites where there is potential for material remains. At the same time effort must continue to be directed at retrieving evidence for funerary and ritual practices, about which virtually nothing is known.

The archaeology of the Early Medieval Period in Wales is virtually invisible, with only a handful of settlement sites and a score of cemeteries being discovered over the past quarter of a century. An interdisciplinary effort is required to collate and assess information in existing sources, and to validate it on the ground by fieldwork, including excavation, in order to achieve some characterisation of sites against known types. Concurrently, artefacts, human remains and environmental evidence from known sites of the period, and multi-period sites, must be reworked, to begin to give some understanding of settlement patterns, land-use and site hierarchy.

For the later medieval period and beyond it is recognised that an increasing profusion of both documentary sources and above-ground remains add dimensions to research so that disciplines other than those of the archaeologist must be engaged. The archaeological research agenda becomes complementary rather than holistic. Nevertheless, and despite intensive and extensive work, there is still much to be understood during this period about upland settlement and land-use in both upland and valley environments, ownership, communications and the relative impact of economic and climatic factors. In particular, the emergence of industry during this period requires to be identified and assessed.

Moving into the recognised period of industrialisation, Wales arguably presents unique opportunities, as the first nation so far known to have the majority of its people engaged in industry or living in urban communities. Recent studies have shown the potential of examining, in a worldwide context, the innovations in processes and transportation, human migration, and the fabric of the settlements, including the houses of industrialist and worker, the chapels and the institutes.

During the industrial period, and interactively with these often pioneering developments, large parts of Wales remained deeply rural. In the countryside dispersed settlements retained a high level of self-sufficiency, and small towns continued to function in a more traditional manner. There is an urgent need to study and to understand this end of the settlement spectrum.

Environmental studies emerge time and again as critical factors in forming an understanding of where and how Wales was settled, particularly with regard to influences such as the impact of climate change. It is work which must be considered as integral with other archaeological activities. The continued enhancement of palaeoenvironmental databases is an essential requirement, and full advantage must be taken to retrieve material when chance opportunities present themselves, for example in areas containing waterlogged deposits, and certainly during planned archaeological investigations.

Maritime archaeology is the least exploited archaeological resource in Wales. An understanding of the changes to the coastline over time and the use of the estuaries and the sea for food and transport are fundamental to an understanding of the settlement and exploitation of a substantial proportion of the Welsh land mass over many centuries up to recent times. There is much to be done to plot wrecks and to identify and interpret submerged landscapes. A particular challenge is the identification of and collaboration with other stakeholders.

Flowing from an examination of these issues, it is possible to suggest groups of themes with different orders of significance. In the first group are themes which, irrespective of area or period, are of an enabling or infrastructure nature; in the second, themes which have an 'international' dimension, and last, but not least, there is a group of a more 'domestic' nature. In terms of priority all three groups have their own strengths and weaknesses, and priority is a matter for assessment within each group rather than among the groups. However it is clear that one potential use for grouping will be to assist the process of identifying collaborators and other stakeholders in particular areas of research, including sources of funding.

In the first group three themes emerge very clearly. They are environmental studies, remote sensing (including aerial, geophysical and ground radar survey) and information management (including relational and interdisciplinary databases). Importantly, the fundamental and unique requirement for this group is long-term and sustained support, as it requires continuous capital investment and reinvestment.

The second group includes research in a number of areas where modern administrative boundaries have limited relevance, and the context is a far broader canvas than Wales or indeed UK. The prime candidates for this category are the whole of the prehistoric period and the process of industrialisation, together with maritime archaeology. A particularly important characteristic of this group is the continued potential for the research in and about Wales to 'add value'. The nature and pace of research activity is likely to be project-oriented and is likely to derive benefit by responding to cross-sectoral and 'international' initiatives.

In the third group, with its more 'domestic' orientation, there is at least one theme of some immediacy, if not urgency. It is the Early Medieval Period. Here knowledge is sparse indeed, yet this is a period of iconic significance in the context of Welsh culture and nationhood. Its continuity from the Roman occupation of Wales, a theme with affinities to the issues identified in the second group, is also a matter of some concern. By way of contrast, the imperative in the later medieval period and beyond, with its increasing volume of documents, is for the archaeological effort continuously to interact with other related disciplines being actively studied in Wales, notably history and geography, if a balanced understanding of landscape and settlement patterns is to be achieved. From the later medieval period onwards that understanding is vital if archaeology is to make an effective contribution to modern-day development processes.

## **Notes to Chapters**

### *Palaeolithic/Mesolithic*

Strategic research themes for the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods have been developed nationally in the document *Research Frameworks for the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic of Britain and Ireland* prepared by the Working Party for the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic Annual Day Meeting and the Council of the Prehistoric Society in 1999. Aspects of these are developed for a Welsh agenda:

### *Industrial*

Strategic research themes for the Industrial period have been developed for Britain and will be published in the Association for Industrial Archaeology's *Industrial Archaeology Review* in 2005.