Later Bronze Age and Iron Age

Introduction

It is over 10 years since the first attempt to define research agenda for the Iron Age in Wales was published (Gwilt 2003; IFA Wales/Cymru 2008). Since then there has been much progress in understanding the Iron Age in Wales.

Several major studies have been published, particularly a number of summaries and analyses of settlement evidence (e.g. Pollard et al. 2006; Makepeace 2006; Driver 2013; Waddington 2013), but also some of aspects of material culture (McDonald et al. 2007). In addition, there have been some regional summaries (e.g. Howell 2006), wider-ranging studies that have partially also covered aspects of the Iron Age in Wales (e.g. Henderson 2007), and major publications contributing to a wider accessibility of the evidence-base (e.g. Cuttler et al. 2012).

Despite this, many, if not most, of the problems that were highlighted as the main issues for research in the last research agenda for the Iron Age in Wales have remained mostly unchanged. At the conference to discuss the research agenda at Bangor University in 2010, there was general agreement that the main issues identified in the previous research agenda remained critical and still mostly unresolved.This review of the Research Agenda for Wales is part of an ongoing process which began at the beginning of the century with a realisation that a research agenda, across all periods, was advantageous to the discipline. As part of the review process a paper was presented to the 2010 Bangor conference, reiterating issues within the existing Later Bronze Age and Iron Age sections of the research agenda and seeking an update through informed discussion.

In recent years a number of Iron Age research agenda have been published across England notably in the East Midlands in 2006, West Yorkshire in 2009 and Solent Thames Region in 2010.

Work areas put forward for the research agenda in Wales have their origins in the paper presented to the 2001 conference in Aberystwyth and then published in 2003 (Ed Stephen Briggs BAR 343 2003). The key themes put forward from by Gwilt centred around the themes of Chronology; Settlements Landscapes and People; Material Culture; Regionality and Processes of Change.

The conference in 2010 readdressed these themes, all of which were still considered to be relevant, with some additional discussion around Ritual and Burial, and Mineral Extraction. More broad based discussion at the 2010 conference looked at community engagement and involvement in research as well as more explicit use of the research agenda within

developer-funded archaeology. Summary of the discussion in Bangor in 2010 can be found on the website. This has directly led to the notes below which summarise areas of research key for the later Bronze Age and Iron Age in Wales.

Main issues remain the same

- Chronology
- Settlement and land use - with the environment remaining a big gap
- Ritual and burial – the problem remains that lack of data make this hard to study. There is the possibility that the study of artefact assemblages, as well as broader understanding of 'ritual' as something not necessarily separate from other areas of life in Iron Age might be productive
- Mineral extraction – including the resource extraction and utilization of natural resources. This links up with the environment remaining as a gap in knowledge as already mentioned above under settlement and land use
- Material culture – this remains understudied, more use maybe could be made of Portable Antiquites Scheme data. Is there an issue with under-reporting of small finds in Wales? The comparison of the density of reporting activity in Wales with England seems to indicate less in Wales.
- Regionality – have we moved forward sufficiently with regional studies e.g. Driver, Howell, Waddington, or is this still insufficient and we need to be even more micro-regional?
- Processes of change – little progress has been made on this subject.
- How do we use research agenda?

Chronological framework
Basics of chronology
- Dating is critical; core themes, different interests
- Should chronology be first, or intermingled with other aims? As first in the list is perceived as most important
- Chronology is the support/mechanism for all other themes- we need to know the timescale
- There is a tendency for non-archaeologists to say once dated, no further discussion needed nor elements of study, which is wrong. This can be an issue when it comes to funding

Types of chronologies
- Chronology of what? Site types, artefacts?

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- The term chronology needs to be narrowed down- chronology of... site type, land use etc...

Problems with existing chronologies

- 10% excavated sites are dated, but re-evaluation is needed as the dating is inadequate- these are opportunities to build on existing resources
- Dating has been surprising- Romano British hillforts in south Wales (Ceredigion?). We need more info as some may be wrongly dated as late prehistoric.
- By refining this, we are possibly pushing it forward it in time, creating even more gaps.
- Also need to look at the resolution of dates, do they enhance interpretation- very broad dates.
- Calibration of dates- we have to accept this although it is an irritation

Dating strategies / research design

- If chronology is key, will this lead to designed excavations/targeted trenches to find charcoal for example, rather than trying to find out the o questions. Should chronology be the first priority?

Settlement and land use

- This is very broad and needs to be refined

Hillforts

- Hillforts – should they be a separate category, or as just one type of defended enclosures?
- What is the relationship between 'hillslope' and 'lowland' defended enclosures; and hut groups / individual houses?

Defended enclosures / enclosed hillslope and lowland settlement

- The Cadw funded Defended Enclosures project is a year off publication. The project has inspired lots of 'spin offs' for instance geophysical surveys in Ceredigion. Using this work as a basis, we now need to do the clarification
- Has this work highlighted things to look at in the future?
- Also we need to look to what happens outside the enclosures which links to the Palaeoenvironmental theme.

Houses / architecture

- Houses that have been looked at- do they highlight structural variations that are regional?
- If we look at the north of Wales, there are fewer but larger dots on the map, but are the houses within them the same?

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- Does this represent the same thing socially and culturally? Dramatic explosion of number of houses in the landscape. Changes in land use, or relationship to place - domestic. Is durability important at this point in time? Mobility versus permanence etc? Do we understand this process?
- Domestic space- changes in the way that this has been perceived. Has there simply just been a change in perception of the meaning of 'domestic space'?
- Easy to fall back to simple explanations. There is a changing value of the 'house'; it is not purely practical any more.
- There are a lack of artefacts, bone etc, but we do have architecture, we also have three dimensions, including floors, drains etc so we can do more with this information.
- Houses - can we work out how they are used internally? Gwynedd Archaeological Trust have indentified different types in Gwynedd hut groups

The wider landscape
- What do we know about the wider landscape, field systems, land use patterns?
- As stated above, this partly links to the Palaeoenvironmental theme
- What about communication / transport routes within the wider landscape?
- How were natural resources utilized?
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Environmental data issues
- How have the environmental remains been archived? Museums are under pressure to refine their collections. Although no funding to re-examine now, there may be in future but this may be too late.
- Due to Wales' lack of material culture for this period, we need to rely more heavily on the palaeoenvironmental material

Ritual and burial
- For the framework we need to be more particular about what we call it and how we describe it

Natural places as ritual spaces
- Ritual use of natural places?
- Watery depositions etc. – this is the 'traditional' assumption to a certain extent, but is it predominant or should we look for organised ritual space?

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Re-use of earlier sites

- This period shows use of pre-existing prehistoric monuments. Lots that have been excavated reveal later burials but easily destroyed by ploughing as closer to surface
- Large numbers of late Bronze Age burials unassociated with other activity. Found/understood by systematic dating
- Do ritual and burial go together in the period we're talking about? Material culture plays a role. Funerary ritual?
- Are these combined in an Iron Age context? Ritual can be token deposits
- Return of interest to megalithic tools and standing stones seems to happen in the Iron Age, a return to recognised 'religious' sites
- Also henge monument reuse in Bronze Age

Ritual in settlement contexts

- Hillfort monumentality. Domestic and ritual- a distinction?
- Many hillfort were built that contained barrows- is there a reason, or is the site simply good for both for different reasons?
- Other ritual activity in settlement contexts? Including 'ritual' organisation of space?
- Is there shift from separately 'created ritual spaces' from earlier periods into 'settlements as ritual spaces' in Later Bronze Age/Iron Age?

Mineral extraction /Utilization of natural resources
This is linked with land use and material culture

Patterns of resource utilization?

- Politics of area show the distribution- reference to Cheshire wining over Nantwich for salt etc. Study of sources of imported goods is important, but difficult. Can we ever get to the politics that lie behind the shifts?
- Is the resource utilization linked to economic, political or religious drivers?

What kinds of natural resources are being used?

- Should we look at Iron as a new resource?
- We need to expand the use of natural resources beyond rocks and minerals. Fishing, agriculture, timber management etc. all tied in. On the palaeoenvironmental side looking at how the landscape and vegetation have been exploited.

Methods of utilization/extraction

- How much do we know about extraction?
- Llanymynych has zinc extraction and a hillfort

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- This raises issues of trade- sea trade routes. Iron Age comes to the fore
- Practicalities of extraction and working
- In south Wales, the presence belongs to the Romans- the location of a Roman fort, but is this linked to a late prehistoric site?

Climate change / changes of resource utilization

- Climate change in the late Bronze Age. Hillforts on fringes (Hiraethog). It has been thought that something happened to make living off the land too tough in the winter and has remained so ever since.
- This is being challenged. So much of our understanding relies on little archaeology to support it. Climate change is happening, but people adapt. Regional settings - look at how people inhabited it. There is a choice between resilience or abandonment which leads to a complex history.
- A later case study- upland farm abandonment was not driven by climate change but a series of events that made the resilience more difficult such as economic- an event in time e.g. rent goes up, loss of sons in war, black death etc so resilience to climate change is harder because of an event. An event against a climatic event trend- both work together.

Material culture

As we keep the finds (whether it be charred seeds or a metal crown), we need readdressing what we have found. The collection policies are being restricted as pressure on space/funding increases

Portable Antiquities Scheme and Historic Environment Records- are we using them correctly?

Portable Antiquities Scheme utilization

- Portable Antiquities Scheme – we have many bronze artefacts but they are not used enough. Where finds are returned the finder/landowner and not to a collection it makes returning to re-examine harder.
- Cataloguing also important- good training for students, making connections
- There is a lot to be gained by looking at material culture. We need to know how it relates.

Where is material culture being kept?

- Is there an easily accessible database to know what is held in archive and where it is? We know it exists but we don't know where it is. This includes research- need archives accessible by everybody
- Have we got relevant museums to take relevant finds? Are museums used to seeing all things as useful, compared to pottery?

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Finds specialists –gap of knowledge / lack of skilled workforce?

- Training courses should be available for museum curators to show how important they are. More archaeologists to communicate with museums

Processes of change / social change/ regionality

Basics

- Population movement linked to material culture changes. What bodies are in place?
- Shifts in material culture practicalities. Development of iron. How are exchange networks established over time? Changes in dwelling practices. New forms of material culture manipulated- making opportunities for people – does this lead to social changes?

Chronology of changes

- Are there significant changes from Later Bronze Age to Early Iron Age, or not?
- When does change generally seem to happen? At period boundaries, or more during periods / sub-period boundaries? Can we actually talk of Early Mid and Late Iron Age in Wales at all?
- Should we expect 'significant' change to happen across Wales at roughly the same times (see regionality issue), or are we facing a much more localised pattern of change? See issue with change from wood to stone roundhouse and palisade and ditch to (stone-faced or stone) bank and ditch enclosure – does that happen at roughly the same time, or at vastly different times in different places?
- Are we still in the Iron Age in the Roman period? Are Roman specialists looking back and are we looking forward? Social change- is it reflected in the archaeology? No change seen on Anglesey
- Why social change can come about at a later stage. Big issues are very difficult to grasp. Why are these people suddenly looking to use 'roman' things when they could have carried on using the things they had.

Changes in trade and exchange networks

- Talk about coinage- increased finds, linked to maritime trade? Another dimension- external exchange?
- Can we see changes to trade networks – or do we lack the finds to say anything sensible about this?

Social change

- Do we see relevant and significant social change during Iron Age? Is there a tendency of smaller to bigger communities? And if yes, at what levels and in which kind of evidence do we see that? Does hillfort

expansion and multi-vallation demonstrate increase in community size, or only increased competition between communities?

- How do we imagine community structures, and do we think / have evidence for that they remained reasonably similar throughout Iron Age, or that they changed significantly. Are all communities following a 'household' model as proposed by Hill, or do we have 'households' in some periods and more communal models in others?
- What evidence do we have for meaningful community interaction? Do we think that kinship, marriage alliances, fosterage, trade and commerce / gift exchange across communities play significant roles, or are we talking about self-sufficiency by and large?
- When do regional entities like the Silures, Demetae, Venedoti etc. emerge? – is this a response to 'Roman' advance, or do we have pre-existing 'regional' communities? And for either, do we have any evidence?

Past use of research agenda / recommendation for future use
Influence on how we write it, then how we use it.

How have people used it? Mostly it appears be to back up funding applications, but their research relates back to the framework.

- Framework influences project work that we do
- Research aims - you can fit anything you like under the agenda headings. During excavation, will go on to site and get as much info as possible then during write up will then refer back to agenda for writing the report and relate back to the points.
- Important also to use the points before the research and keep it in mind.
- Developers can ask an archaeologist to priorities so framework is helpful to refer to so it's written in black and white. General overview of site, developer control. If you have to prioritise, you can do, you can aim to get all of the relevant info to then look at off-site post excavation.

Concluding remarks

The main areas requiring research remain constant despite additional work over the last 10 years. This is hardly surprising, as further research leads to refined questions, but still questions. Much like Gwilt's paper of 2003, this is not a prescriptive, nor exhaustive, 'list' of areas that research should focus on, but rather it provides a framework to build upon. Issues around the synthesis of data are still relevant and through this there is the scope to look at sites in a regional and maybe micro-

regional scale. In this way locally specific architectural traditions may be elucidated.

As already highlighted use and dissemination of results within the Historic Environment Records and Portable Antiquities Scheme data should be a fundamental starting point for projects. More use should be made of the data within both these datasets when designing projects, and thought should be given at the outset as to how information is fed back.

Increasingly there will be gaps in the expertise of museum curators relating to the material culture of this period, the artefacts. This needs to be addressed with training, both within Universities and within the Museum and Trust/Local Authority Curatorial staff.

With the continued popularity of community involvement in archaeology, research projects and developer funded archaeology projects should look to engage with the public to disseminate their results in their local communities. Examples of best practice exist, notably at Moel y Gaer Bodfari, Melionydd and Penycloddiau hillfort.

This current iteration of the Research Agenda should seek to influence grant awarding bodies in their behaviour.