

Northwest Wales – Early Prehistoric
22/12/2003

NEOLITHIC

Burial Sites

Strengths

1. Visible, with high information potential without excavation
2. Reasonable proportion excavation, some within last 50 years
3. All sites protected

Weaknesses

4. All are heavily disturbed
5. Poor survival of bone because of soil conditions
6. Environmental contexts have changed, difficult to reconstruct
7. Theoretical work difficult to underpin with genuine evidence

Bias

8. Emphasis on morphological analysis

Consensus / Comment

Most people agree that 1-5 are true

9. Environmental study can be seen as a way forward
 - a. As a source of primary information from OGS etc
 - b. As key to understanding motivation for location etc
10. The value of theoretical work is judged variably
11. Geophysical work (as in Roman fort project) is a possible way of extending information beyond the visible stone components
This is also relevant to Ceremonial sites.

Ceremonial Sites

Strengths

1. Normally large; visible on APs

Weaknesses

2. Poor earthwork survival
3. Excavation results unhelpful (few finds etc)

Bias

4. Tendency to use distant /'foreign' site for interpretation

Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age

Consensus / Comment

There was not much comment directly on this section

5. The change from tombs to circles was seen as indicative of a major transition period
6. Transition periods are always important

Settlement

Strengths

1. Region where substantial houses may be expected, recognisable
2. Pollen analysis available as guide to agricultural activity

Weaknesses

3. Sites unlikely to have been enclosed; fieldwork identification difficult
4. Few examples; location prediction difficult
5. Discovery will be incidental; excavation prob. ill-prepared
6. Needs large-scale stripping for recognition

Bias

7. Only sites close to other features (tombs etc) likely to be found

Consensus / Comment (Neolithic settlement)

8. The transition Mesolithic / Neolithic should be studied, esp. in coastal areas
9. Point 3 is debatable. Some hope CWC-type enclosures will be recognised (on hilltops / by APs)
10. The need to search for settlement is widely recognised.
11. Extensive geophysics and even large scale stripping are advocated
12. Link with burials and clues from a close study of pollen sequences may guide the search
13. Any possibility of a wetland site should be followed up.

Artefacts

Strengths

1. Use of stone; survival and discovery rate likely to be high
2. Numbers quite high; distributions meaningful
3. Flint rare; most flint found will be significant
4. Igneous rock identifiable and traceable; analysis of tools and pottery worthwhile
5. Much analysis has been done

Weaknesses

6. Little arable in region; fieldwalking and amateur collection rare / unproductive
7. Individual chance finds rather than assemblages

Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age

Bias

8. Only stone and flint survives; no wetland domestic site known to show full range of artefacts

Consensus / Comment

Points 1-8 were agreed

9. Many people saw the 'flints scatters' project as a hopeful way of finding settlement and making greater use of this unconsidered resource.
10. The prospect of scientific analysis (provenancing and use identifications) is seen as a way of developing beyond typologies.

BRONZE AGE

Burial and Ceremonial Sites

Strengths

1. Stone architecture allows recognition of design variation
2. Quite high proportion of the various types excavated
3. Cremated bone now available for C14 dating

Weakness

4. Many are disturbed
5. Less distinctive sites may have been ignored
6. Poor survival of unburnt bone
7. Relatively few artefacts from graves
8. Ceremonial sites difficult to interpret even when excavated

Bias

9. Upland survival
10. Excavation emphasis on more exotic variations

Consensus / Comment

11. Differing opinions on the quantity and quality of excavations and interest expressed in work on old excavation reports reflects the lack of a corpus of barrows in Wales.
12. C14 from cremations could provide a firm chronology if a consistent programme was set up.
13. Wales is a good area to analyse the concept of the 'ritual landscape'.

Settlement

Strengths

1. Pollen analysis available
2. Buried land surfaces available
3. Burnt mounds and cairnfields are recognisable in fieldwork
4. Field systems are extensive in uplands and available for more detailed analysis

Weaknesses

5. Analysis of upland field systems has not been done in sufficient detail
6. Cairnfield excavation difficult to interpret and date

Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age

7. Proven houses in lowlands are slight and wooden; upland equivalents might also be wood, rather than stone, so difficult to recognise
8. No firm dating evidence

Bias

9. Assumption rather than proof of date in most discussions

Consensus / Comment

10. Chronology is recognised by everyone as a major problem.
11. NW Wales stone field systems are recognised as a major resource not yet adequately studied.
12. There is a need for more detailed, wall by wall, studies as on Bodmin and at Roystone Grange.
13. Intensive small-scale, valley by valley landscape surveys advocated.
14. APs should be used to identify lowland field systems.
15. Flint scatters are also relevant to Bronze Age settlement

Artefacts

Strengths

1. Burial pottery common and susceptible to stylistic, provenance / manufacture and poss. lipids etc analysis
2. Corpora of Beakers, Food Vessels and Pigmy Cups exist
3. Metal resources and mines known
4. Large-scale implement analysis undertaken
5. Corpus of metal implements under way

Weaknesses

6. Domestic pottery rare (probably same as burial, but difficult to prove)
7. Metal processing sites not known

Bias

8. Typological analysis
9. Danger of sweeping conclusions from small database.

Consensus / Comment

10. Need to finalise corpora to allow interpretation to develop from a firm base.
11. Few people commented on metalwork

Paper prepared by Frances Lynch.