

Welsh Archaeology Research Agenda 2016

Later Prehistory

Recent Research

Work has taken place in all parts of Wales which have added information to the later prehistoric period. In some instances this is work currently taking place and at other times it took place some time ago but has recently been published. Work has tended to concentrate on settlement sites, although in the south west there is some evidence of ritual sites and work has been undertaken to assess burial evidence in the Iron Age.

In the north east of Wales excavations have taken place at three scheduled hillfort/enclosure sites. Rachel Pope is excavating at Penycloddiau hillfort, an ongoing student training project which is examining the character of the rampart and a house platform. At Moel y Gaer Bodfari Gary Lock is looking at the much smaller hillfort and similarly identifying the character of the ramparts, a house site and more recently a possible entranceway. At Moel Fodig a much smaller farmstead enclosure Ray Karl identified roundhouses and evidence of the enclosing banks. Further enclosure sites within the Clwydian Range and Corwen area have been partially examined. Artefact evidence is sparse, although at Moel Fodig late Bronze Age pottery was located and at Fron Newydd there is Roman pottery present. On the limestone plateau in Flintshire the area scheduled as Hen Caerwys has been re-examined following work on medieval houses in the 1960s. There are a number of enclosures in the area, one of which has recently been dated to the late Iron Age/early Roman period following work by Dr Caroline Pudney. This increased focus on Iron Age sites in the area has meant that one C14 date has been possible, for most of these sites it is early days but a single date on animal bone wedged within a wall enclosing a roundhouse within Moel y Gaer Bodfari gives a date of ADD.

Ray Karl has also excavated in the north west of Wales, particularly at Meillionydd on the Llyn Peninsular. This site starts its life as an unenclosed late Bronze Age settlement in about 800BC, Twelve different phases have been identified which see it become enclosed about half way through its life. Further geophysical survey has been undertaken at Castell Odo a site excavated by Leslie Alcock in the 1950s suggesting that this site is of a similar character, although less complex than Meillionydd. Further work has also been undertaken by the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust building on work undertaken during the Cadw funded pan-Wales Defended Enclosures project.

Across the south of Wales and into Herefordshire the construction of a pipeline has increased our understanding of this later prehistoric period. The design work associated with the pipeline avoided much previously known archaeology. Particularly in the eastern sections there are a number of large hillforts, these were all avoided by the pipeline. Despite the policy of avoiding known archaeology a number of previously unknown sites, of which many date to this period, both enclosed and more surprisingly, unenclosed settlement sites. This work has also identified a cremation burial and a possible ritual site where a horse skull, part of a quernstone alongside early Roman pottery had been carefully deposited. Ken Murphy has produced summaries of the pipeline work and has just published an article on the later Prehistoric period in Pembrokeshire.

Oliver Davies is about to publish a review on burials within Wales. He has identified over 100 instances of human remains dating to the later Prehistoric across Wales. This is still a small number but does begin to change the image of Wales containing no later Prehistoric burials. Davis has also carried out work in the south east of Wales notably at Caerau hillfort in Cardiff. As well as producing

a palaeobotanical assemblage and evidence of structures within the fort, it has been an exemplary project demonstrating community involvement.

How does this work tie in with the Research Framework?

The previous iteration of the research agenda identified a number of key areas on which work should be focussed. Building Chronologies was key, settlement evidence, Palaeobotanical evidence, Social change and social processes, climate change and the impact on resource utilisation were identified as important. Looking at the Research Agenda priorities the project work which has been taking place ties in very closely. There has been an emphasis on settlement archaeology and very closely linked to this the aim to build chronologies. Increasingly palaeobotanical evidence is being collected and studied. Caerau has produced a sizeable assemblage for future study but also extensive sampling is taking place at Moel y Gaer Bodfari and Penycloddiau, with 100% sampling strategy in some contexts. Much of this information will be available in the future. Whilst the questions within the Research Agenda have been addressed, and there is more information available now than when we started the Research Agenda process in 1999 it is too early to say that we have answered the questions. Perhaps we can never be certain that we have completely answered the questions, perhaps the only area where we might be confident of doing this is with dating, however this would depend on a very large number of C14 dates being obtained, and suitable analysis being carried out on them.

Amendments to the Research Agenda Questions for the Later Prehistoric period

Rather than amendments perhaps the questions should be refined and augmented. Chronology remains key to understanding the period and C14 dating in the Iron Age is notoriously difficult. What happens where, when. Excavations at Caerau, Penycloddiau, Moel y Gaer and Meillionydd give the potential for extensive dating and analysis of these dates will allow for refining their accuracy. It is important that finance is made available for this important work. Extensive palaeobotanical sampling has taken place at Caerau and Penycloddiau and the study of these samples should be undertaken in good time, in both these cases there is the possibility of student training forming part of the analysis. Potential skills gaps for this type of work in the future should be addressed nationally. More excavation on both enclosed and unenclosed settlements will give the potential for further evidence both of settlement type and social processes.

Where has the Research Agenda been used in justifying research and gaining grant aid

The Research Agenda is continually being used as part of the justification and planning process for both excavation and grant applications. In north east Wales the HLF funded Heather and Hillforts project which cited the Research Agenda in the application process has led to further research excavations in the area, particularly at Penycloddiau and Moel y Gaer, but also the work by Raimund Karl in the Dee Valley. Work on the pipeline in the south of Wales came about as a result of the planning/development processes, whereby the main aim was to avoid previously known archaeology of all periods. However as a consequence of the work a number of unenclosed Iron Age sites have come to light and information has fed into the archaeological record. Whilst developer funded excavation ties back into the planning processes, development control archaeologists are aware of the aims within the research agenda and implement its aims where possible. The Atlantic shore project atlas project will be a resource which draws together known information about hillforts and will go some way to answering the question 'where', if not when. It is to be hoped that this resource is updated as time goes on.