
Refresh of the Research Framework for the Archaeology of Wales 2011-2016: Romano British

There was general agreement that the primacy of the of the five principal research themes was still valid, though there were suggestions of subtle alterations and additions to the research agenda for the period. It is gratifying to note that several of the WATs cited the Research Framework in their project designs in order to reinforce their funding requests to CADW. It is noteworthy that whilst many of the discoveries of this quinquennium have been the result of developer-led investigations which, by their very nature, are sporadic and not focussed upon research objectives, they often provide information which may benefit future research. At the same time pure research projects have been pursued and have added significantly to our knowledge, particularly of the Roman army's activities. The five research themes are as follows: (1) Settlement Patterns; (2) Interaction between Roman occupiers and the indigenes; (3) the Archaeology of the Campaigning years; (4) Funerary and Ritual, and (5) Technology and Industry.

(1) Settlement Patterns

It is gratifying to note that there has been a wider geographical coverage in respect of discovery and investigation over this quinquennium. In north Wales further survey and excavation at Tai Cochion on the Anglesey foreshore was completed with the excavation of two rectangular buildings: a report on this remarkable site has been submitted for publication. The settlement, founded in the early second century flourished to the mid-fourth, and was undoubtedly the main crossing point to the mainland. Its undefended character, the excavator suggests, being indicative of peaceful co-existence with the local population. The character of the settlement at Tremadog continues to tease with the discovery of roofing slate, a corn drier and third/fourth century pottery at Y Bryn, north of the long known bath-house. The settlement is clearly unusual in this part of Wales. Could it possibly be a villa? East of the Conwy the question of status also applies to the to the double-ditched rectangular enclosure near Bodelwyddan, where a possible roundhouse together with building stone and *tegulae*, indicative of a rectangular building, was associated with second/third century pottery. This discovery is all the more significant since this region has hitherto produced scant evidence of Romano-British rural settlement, other than occupation within hillforts. Could it possibly represent the upgrading of a native farm to a villa? Together with the settlement at Plas Coch it suggests the development of a more highly Romanised rural settlement in this part of north-east Wales: an analogous pattern also emerging across the border in Cheshire. In this respect one way forward which has a general applicability is a more intensive

study of the material culture from rural settlements to try and establish social structure and settlement hierarchy.

Commercially driven, developer-funded work has been the driving force behind research into settlement patterns for much of Wales, mid-Wales being no exception. In Powys traces of a long-lived settlement of pre-as well as Roman date has been found on the site of the celebrated Smithfield (Welshpool) 'burial', whilst for the first time what we might term a 'linear scheme', hitherto rare in a Welsh context, has made an important contribution to our understanding of the Romano-British countryside in southern Powys, a region where evidence for settlement still remains conspicuously absent. Here the completion of the Milford Haven to Tirley Gas Connection Pipeline has revealed evidence of settlement completely invisible on the ground. At Three Cocks a field boundary of early Roman date was discovered, with an enclosure ditch producing much second-late third/early fourth century pottery at Pen y Maes near Hay on Wye.

In west Wales there have been some interesting developments arising from the laying of the above pipeline with the discovery of a field system, ovens and other structures of late Roman date at Upper Neeston. Part-research based work has also continued. For example, at Wiston, close to but manifestly post-dating the newly discovered Roman fort, and not part of its *vicus* if such existed, geophysical survey and trial excavations revealed a palimpsest of irregular ditched enclosures of mid second –early fourth century date, a form of rural settlement hitherto unknown in this part of Pembrokeshire. Villa studies in west Wales have also been advanced in the quinquennium. As part of the community-based Tywi Afon yr Oesoedd Project archaeological evaluation comprising geophysics and small-scale excavation showed that the villa at Llys Brychan had not been mercifully entirely built-upon, was of winged-corridor type and lay within a large, rectangular enclosure akin to that at Abermagwr. By way of contrast CADW-funded excavation at Upper Newton (Wolfscastle) on the site of the possible villa identified by Fenton in the early 19th century failed to find any evidence for it. At Abermagwr the research-based project was completed. Radiocarbon dating showed that the enclosure bounding the villa was of Roman date whilst contrary to expectation there was apparently no timber precursor to the stone *domus*, or for that matter any ancillary structure to its west. Abermagwr represents the appearance of a highly developed, clearly Romanised settlement well outside the core area of villa development in Wales and as such merits a rethink about the distribution of villas in Wales as a whole. The recognition of sharply angled enclosures as a possible identifier of villa boundaries means that aerial survey with a view to identifying such cropmarks has an important contribution to make to their overall study.

In south-east Wales some of the trenches dug in the 19th century across the villa site at Chapel Tump/Whitewall Brake were reopened by Leicester University under the auspices of Project Nightingale and provided some useful information about this little known site. Geophysical survey was also undertaken at the Five Mile Lane villa. Otherwise, although development-led excavations, more concentrated in this part of Wales than anywhere else (for example at Undy, Undy Playing Field and Church Farm, Caldicot) has led to significant contributions to our knowledge, it has not always been relevant to those topics that the Research Agenda has singled out for particular attention. However, the scale of some of these developments has at times been able to lead to excavations on a scale that allows a more nuanced understanding. For example at DARA St.Athan where the full extent of a pre-Roman farmstead enclosure and its attendant hawthorn/blackthorn-hedged field system, abandoned and then re-occupied in the late second/early third century, was excavated.

It is worthwhile drawing attention to the recent incorporation of Welsh data into the database collected by the Rural Settlement in Roman Britain Project, an analysis of 'grey literature' run jointly by Cotswold Archaeology, Reading University and York University and held by the Archaeology Data Service in the form of an interactive map (archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/romangl/map.html). The project, to quote 'has not included all investigations....but has limited its scope to those which yielded plan, chronology and quantified finds data susceptible to characterisation and synthesis,' thus omits a large number of Welsh (and English) sites, including long known villas such as Croes Carn Einion. It thus has a limited applicability in Wales, because of the low numbers of developer- funded excavations in contrast to England, and the relative scarcity of finds on those Welsh sites that have been excavated; nevertheless, the recent publication of the results in hard-copy form - Smith, A., Allen, M., Brindle, T. and Fulford, M. *New Visions of the Countryside of Roman Britain. Vol. 1: The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain*, Britannia Monograph 19, 2016- and the interactive map will undoubtedly serve as most useful comparative research tools.

One suggestion from a member of the working group in respect of a research priority insofar as settlement pattern is concerned encompasses the late Roman/early medieval transition: to quote, 'Continuity or change in settlement pattern and styles as Roman influence waned, and in particular during the interface with the immediate post-Roman period should be a major research priority.' There are many settlements where the cessation of the deposition of datable artefacts such as pottery and coins has been assumed to indicate the end of occupation by the early fifth century, but where occupation may well have continued. The dating of the later phases of

such sites using modern C14 dating should be viewed as a priority by both Romanists and early medievalists.

The economic base of settlement archaeology also requires more environmental sampling especially in those areas where it is poorly represented. Only when sufficient archaeobotanical and palaeozoological material has been gathered will it be possible to determine whether the Roman period saw the adoption of new agricultural practices embracing botanical and animal species.

(2) Interaction between newcomers and indigenes

The opportunity for further investigation of one aspect of this theme, namely the interaction between the Roman army, its camp followers and the native population has continued wherever possible. Some of the most dramatic results have been seen at Caerleon under the auspices of the Caerleon Research Committee's research framework for the fortress and its environs. This has successfully brought together bodies interested on specific areas of research as advocated in earlier Research Review papers. Geophysical survey and trial excavations undertaken by Cardiff University and the Institute of Archaeology UCL discovered and explored a monumental complex of stone buildings, hitherto unparalleled in a British context, to the west of the fortress and between the Broadway and the river Usk. The most impressive was a gigantic courtyard building, the largest of two such structures, together with a basilica-like aisled building, smaller courtyards, bathhouses as well as warehouses near the river. The large courtyard building, intriguingly, appears to be broadly co-eval with the foundation of the fortress. The excavators suggest that administrative functions (perhaps even of the newly conquered Silures) may lie within the orbit of this building (or buildings) although their precise functions may only begin to be clarified when large-scale research-based excavations are undertaken in the future. The Caerleon Research Committee is also beginning to shift its focus from the fortress and its immediate environs to the wider hinterland of the Usk valley in order to try and identify what long-term impact the garrison base might have had. Allsopp's work on the zooarchaeological evidence from the fortress and Brown's on the ecology of the region illustrate part of how this interdisciplinary approach may be adopted. Brown's pollen sequences (all too rare in lowland south-east Wales) from Wentwood is suggestive of extensive woodland clearance with evidence for arable and pastoral activity in the earlier Roman period, followed by woodland regeneration in the third/fifth century.

It has been suggested that a similar project be undertaken in respect of the legionary fortress at Chester which has the added benefit of a cross-border dimension. The socio-economic impact which the long-held

fortress must have had upon north Wales must have been considerable. An inter-disciplinary approach initially focusing upon the Romano-British archaeology of the Dee valley and the coastal strip as far west as the Conwy, would be an excellent starter.

In mid-Wales geophysical survey, test-pitting and small scale excavations have continued at several *vici* attached to the forts in this region. At Caerau (Beulah) a courtyard building (putatively a *mansio*) has been identified whilst test-pitting has further defined the extent of the *vicus* to the north-east and north-west of the fort, whilst test-pitting has had similar success to the east, north-east and south-east of the fort at Castell Collen. At Brecon Gaer test-pitting to the north, south and especially to the east of the fort revealed ample traces of an extensive *vicus*, especially on level ground to the east where earlier geophysical survey had been entirely unproductive; a salutary lesson not to be overly reliant upon the technique. The recent publication of this work, coupled with that of metal detector finds, throws fresh light on what is a much more extensive settlement of late first –early third century date than was hitherto envisaged. Finally, at Cwmdru excavations to the south of the fort revealed a complex of timber and stone buildings; occupation continuing to the mid-second century. Overall this cost effective research programme has some further way to run with considerable potential for the investigation of the environs of sites such as Clyro and the newly discovered forts at Cefn-Brynich, Wiston and Tirabad. However, despite its manifold successes the elucidation of interaction is some way off owing to the limited nature of any intrusive investigation (i.e. large-scale excavation). The principal outcome of this programme has been enhanced mapping, providing useful information for future research as well as the management of the heritage.

It has been demonstrated that some auxiliary forts in south Wales were, following abandonment in the second century, apparently re-occupied, albeit perhaps for a short period or periods, in the later third/fourth centuries: Neath for example. It remains to be determined whether any forts sited on arterial roads in north Wales –Caerhun being the classic example- were similarly treated, and if so, then why. Three mid-fourth century coins from Baillie Reynolds excavations from Caerhun are tantalising evidence of contemporary activity.

One aspect of interaction which has concerned several correspondents is the potential impact of the Roman conquest on those communities who may still have utilised hillforts, or at least strongly defended settlements; whether that impact was harsh or benign. For example, what is implied by the construction of well over a 100 small cells and the building of

additional defences at Tre'r Ceiri within the Roman period? This is clearly an avenue for future research.

(3) The Archaeology of the early campaigning years: pre-Flavian and Flavian

The quinquennium has been a bountiful one in respect of new discoveries. For the first time a marching camp, albeit a very small one, of presumably pre-Flavian date has been discovered in the lowland of Gwent at Killcrow Hill, a mile or so east of Caerwent. The full dimensions of the pre-Flavian marching-camp at Llancayo Farm, to the north of the Neronian fortress at Usk, have been established at 20.2ha making it one of the largest in Wales. Davis and Driver have noted that it overlies a Bronze Age barrow cemetery whilst the building of a stone Romano-Celtic temple within may possibly point to the building of the camp on the site of a pre Roman cult focus. Now that a pre-Flavian fort has been discovered at Cefn-Brynich as a result of the interrogation of PAS reported finds followed by aerial photography we may anticipate the discovery of camps of similar size further upstream, perhaps in the vicinity of that fort or in the region between Cefn-Brynich and its contemporary at Abergavenny. Here is an incentive for further aerial photography and LiDAR searches. With one new discovery an earlier camp site has to be discounted, geophysical survey casting doubt on the existence of that at Hindwell Farm II. Roman field –ovens dug into the Hindwell Farm II barrow are considered to be associated with the Hindwell Farm I camp. Geophysical survey has demonstrated the existence of field-ovens within the corner of the camp at Caerau, Beulah, whilst the field ovens discovered to the east of the fort at Caernarfon (more likely to relate to a marching-camp than a construction-camp as suggested in the report on these discoveries) have produced C14 dates indicating their use in the Flavian period. The search for, excavation and obtaining C14 dates from field-ovens within Welsh marching-camps should become a priority since it is now feasible to distinguish between those founded in the pre-Flavian era and those of Flavian, or later, date. Demonstrating the re-use of camps may also be possible through C14 dating, as has been shown at the extensively excavated marching-camp at Kintore in Scotland.

There have been a number of exciting new discoveries in mid-Wales. The recognition of fort of some 2.3ha occupying a central position within the 10.4ha Neronian fort at Clyro has already figured in the last Research Review, though the relationship remains untested. A new pre-Flavian fort has been discovered at Cefn-Brynich Farm in the Usk valley as a result of aerial survey following the discovery a substantial quantity of so-called Claudian copies by a metal detectorist. The fort platform, faintly

visible on LiDAR encompasses an area of some 5.5ha, whilst a search of LIDAR images has located what appears to be a fort of about 1.6ha on the bank of the Wye at Glasbury. Cumulatively these three discoveries suggest the existence of an early Roman communication route, if not a road, linking the Wye and Usk valleys, between Clyro and Cefn-Brynich with Glasbury as a possible intermediate post. Moreover the discovery of Cefn-Brynich begs the question of how far west along the Usk valley military operations which included the building of forts may have extended in the pre-Flavian era. A search of LiDAR data has revealed what appears to be a complex of Roman military sites at Caerau, Tirabad to the south of the road linking the forts at Llandovery and Caerau, Beulah and about a mile east of the fortlet at Abererbwll. The possible sequence could take the form of either a marching-camp followed by a fort or two successive forts. Whatever the precise sequence an origin pre-dating the road and the forts at Llandovery and Caerau, Beulah is certain and must either represent pre Flavian or very early Flavian operations in this locality. This discovery should also act as a catalyst for a search for sites which predate the establishment of the Roman road system in other parts of Wales. Further north in the borderland geophysical survey and excavation have elucidated more of the plan of the *vicus* at Hindwell Farm, demonstrating that the enigmatic curving ditches represent an outwork of the pre-Flavian fort rather than a defence of the *vicus*.

In west Wales the discovery and excavation of an early Flavian fort at Wiston was a bonus in respect of the long search for a suspected fort west of Carmarthen. Its occupation was of short duration, ending by c.AD 100 at the latest; a trapezoidal enclosure, putatively a farmstead of mid-second/third century date, being built within the abandoned fort enclosure. It is now certain that an intermediate fort awaits discovery between Wiston and Carmarthen. It has been suggested that the discovery of Wiston should act as a catalyst for intensive aerial reconnaissance in order to determine whether other forts are to be found in west Wales, perhaps at Roch/St/ Brides Bay or to the north near Cardigan. Aerial photography by RCAHMW has also located what is either a fortlet or practice-camp at Penlan, near Strata Florida in Ceredigion.

In north Wales the search for pre-Flavian military sites continues though evidence for Paullinus' short-lived operations on Anglesey and the adjoining mainland remains elusive. Here, recurrent aerial reconnaissance is a high priority in the area between Penmaenmawr and Bangor as well as further west towards Caernarfon. Remarkably geophysical survey of a long known cropmark enclosure at Cemlyn Bay on the north-west coast of the island has revealed the classic plan of a Roman fortlet. Although unexcavated pottery found on the site suggest it is of Flavian date. Its

position, overlooking a sheltered bay, suggests that it may have had a strong connection with maritime activity whose character must remain speculative (an Irish link or a copper exporting role?) at present. Although far removed in time, and again on the north coast of the island, investigation of the long suspected stone watchtower at Parc Bryn yr Eglwys produced some undiagnostic Roman potsherds which strongly suggest that the badly robbed structure was indeed a watchtower akin to that of late fourth century date crowning Holyhead Mountain. Research into the late Roman coastal defence system (or systems) clearly has some way to go, and not only in the north. For example, what explanation may be offered for late Roman coinage at Swansea and Pembroke castles?

Other than small scale work at Monmouth the most significant results of research in south-east Wales have come from the continuing geophysical survey followed by sampling strategy undertaken by Cardiff University and UCL Institute of Archaeology at Caerleon. The discovery of stone barracks in the Priory Field (Insula I), three granaries in Insula III, a store building built around a courtyard in Insula IV, another courtyard building in Insula XVII as well as further details of the first cohort's barracks (first trenched in the 1950s) are major contributions to the elucidation of the fortress' plan, with some stone elements being primary structures. The Caerleon Research Committee has provided an impetus for the publication of past excavations: the 1981 excavations at the south corner have been published on-line whilst work is proceeding on publishing the pottery from the NMW's excavations in the 1950s; part of the results of this initiative having already appeared (Webster 2013).

(4) Funerary and Ritual

There has been little fresh news to report on research into funerary practices in Wales since the publication of K. J. Pollock *The Evolution and Role of Burial Practices in Roman Wales* in 2006. This in part is due to the difficulty of identifying cemeteries let alone isolated burials. Geophysics has not proved rewarding in this respect, unless the anomalies have specific characteristics which are readily identifiable as of funerary character such as square barrows. The search is further complicated by the poor preservation, or total disappearance of bone in the acidic soils prevalent over much of Wales. Whether a concentration of research upon the limestone regions might prove more rewarding is open to question.

With one exception the search for evidence of the funerary customs of the indigenes as opposed to that of the Roman army and its dependents still remains obstinately negative. The exception is the site of the Smithfield, Welshpool deposit found in 1959, reported upon by G.C. Boon and re-excavated by CPAT in 2010. The excavators conclude that it may have

been a cenotaph rather than a formal high-status native burial. Developer-funded work located a single inhumation, assumed to be a roadside burial at Pentre Bridge, Flint, whilst CPAT have recently published a most unusual high status burial said to have been found in the vicinity of the fort of Brecon Gaer in the 1990s. The grave group, palpably from a cemetery, comprised a Celtic-style mirror, miniature terrets, a toilet set and a lamp. In south-east Wales the publication of the cremation cemetery at the Coed site, Ultra Pontem, Caerleon, excavated in 1992 and 1997, marks a significant addition to our knowledge of burial rite and differential cemetery location surrounding the legionary fortress.

Given the remarkable data concerning ethnicity, diet etc. which has emerged from the isotopic analysis of human remains elsewhere in Britain - the skeletal remains of Roman date from London being among the best known examples though the investigation of early medieval remains from south-west Wales are equally instructive- then it is high time that a similar programme be undertaken on the better preserved inhumations from Wales with a view to addressing similar issues.

Religious or cult sites of this period still prove to be extremely elusive. One possible explanation is that we are failing to recognise what these sites look like. Given the wide divergence of site types elsewhere in Britain this is not surprising. Some multiperiod sites, as for example Parc Cybi (Ang.) and Trostrey (Mon.) which are characterised by demonstrably ritual/funerary activity in the Neolithic/Early Bronze Age and then again in the Early Medieval period, with the intervening Iron Age and Roman period activity being interpreted as settlement, but could these sites actually have had a ritual significance throughout? In this respect it may well be worthwhile re-examining artefact assemblages from multiperiod sites to see whether their signature suggests anything other than settlement. Other areas where we might look for cult sites are those places from which there are significant quantities of metal detector finds associated with watery locations: for example the marshy areas around the headwaters of the River Thaw or St. Donats, both in Glamorgan, and where there is a square enclosure near a spring at the latter.

Again, insofar as known ritual sites are concerned it is regrettable that, despite assurances to the contrary, the Llancayo/Gwehelog Fawr temple near Usk was damaged by the construction of a solar farm. This site is particularly interesting insofar as if the hypothesis that the stone temple succeeds a pre-Roman cult focus is correct then the construction of the marching-camp on the site hints at a complex relationship between the native population and the Roman invader. The terracotta altars discovered at Ultra Pontem (Caerleon) are now known to have Mithraic

parallels and may hint at the location of the mithraeum already known from epigraphic evidence at a road junction associated with a cemetery.

In north Wales at Llwydfaen in the Conwy valley the small, stone-built rectangular, apsidal-ended building has produced a C14 date securely within the middle Roman period for an internal partition. Taken together with excavated Roman coins and pottery it appears to confirm the building as a temple and not as a medieval church. A report on this site is eagerly awaited.

(5) Technology and Industry

There has been virtually no development in this area since the publication of the original research framework document. Despite the fact that the mineral resources of the principality ranked among the *pretium victoriae* of the conquest there has been little advance in our knowledge of the extractive processes and the distribution of the end products. The exception is north Ceredigion where analysis of lead from the villa at Abermagwr confirms its local origin; a welcome addition to the evidence for the exploitation and distribution of this area's ore-bodies in the Roman period hitherto obtained from analysis of lead from the fort at Trawscoed and the discovery of the ore-smelting furnaces on the margin of Borth Bog at Erglodd, Llangynfelin. Clearly there is scope here for the analysis of lead objects from other sites, and especially those in museum collections, in order to identify metallurgical signatures from different ores with a view to identifying prospective extraction sites. If such can be achieved then we may be able to look for evidence of the associated mining settlements -beyond those known in north-east Wales- and determine whether the army was a prime agent in the extractive process. There is also further scope for fieldwork on Halkyn Mountain, Parys Mountain and the Great Orme particular in order to determine whether evidence of Roman mining can be identified in what are admittedly extensively disturbed landscapes.

Although pottery is commonly found in this period and some Welsh production sites have been identified -frequently in a military context- the thin-sectioning of ceramics of putatively Welsh origin in existing museum collections may offer a pathway to the identification of other pottery production centres. The same may apply to brick and tile; especially those found in non-military contexts.

The movement of other raw materials -particularly building materials- and new technologies requires further research with a view to determining the balance between the movement of materials and of craftsmen, together with their impact upon native economies.

Research in the following areas has been identified as a priority:

Settlement patterns

Investigation of social structure and settlement hierarchy through the examination of finds assemblages.

Landscape-wide studies to search for Roman period fieldscapes and evidence for transhumance.

Investigation of the agricultural base of settlements through fully thought-out programmes of environmental sampling during excavation.

Interaction between newcomers and indigenes

Consideration of Wales and the Marches as the 'western frontier' of Britain, looking at how Chester and Caerleon work together to exercise control over the whole area and the relationship of civilian settlement to forts within this area. This should include the examination of forts previously considered to have been abandoned in the 2nd century to see whether any were re-occupied.

Investigation of sources of supplies to forts and fortresses through fully thought-out programmes of environmental sampling during excavation.

The Archaeology of the early campaigning years: pre-Flavian and Flavian

Further air reconnaissance, with Penmaenmae to Bangor as a particular priority.

The use of finds reported through the PAS scheme on an attempt to identify new sites of the campaigning period.

Funerary and Ritual

An emphasis upon population studies through the isotopic analysis of human remains, where these are sufficiently well preserved, and through a systematic analysis of funerary inscriptions (particularly in the large collection in the Grosvenor Museum, Chester).

Given that structural evidence for religious sites is exceedingly slim a programme of research based upon artefact studies should be initiated in an attempt to determine whether a non secular 'signature' can be identified in the Roman-period assemblages from multi-period sites where ritual activity is proven for earlier and later periods. Can ritual sites be

identified from collections of metal detector finds (e.g. Llys Awel, Abergele).

Examination of areas around Roman military sites for evidence of cult sites and cemeteries.

Technology and Industry

Analysis of metalwork from museum collections to identify metallurgical signatures for different ores.

Identification of evidence for Roman period mining on extraction sites with known prehistoric and later mining activity, and the identification of military control at extraction sites where Roman activity is known.

Thin-sectioning of ceramics and brick/tile from museum collections with the aim of identifying production centres.

An analysis of the balance between the transport of raw materials and the movement of craftsmen for building projects, including a search for craftsmen's personal marks in collections of building material from earlier excavations, and an evaluation of the impact of new building techniques on the native economy.

General

More radiocarbon dates are needed, particularly for the late Roman period.

More regional excavation is needed to obtain a more holistic view.

Re-evaluation of museum collections and their original documentation, in order to ensure that all information is being used, not just what was considered worth publishing at the time that they were excavated.

Two critical phases have been identified in particular: (a) the 1st century invasion period; and (b) the Late Roman period, with particular reference to whether the lack of surviving artefacts in the 4th century is really indicative of abandonment, or merely signifies withdrawal from the market economy.

More attentions should be paid to environmental sampling.

Dr. J.L. Davies, with comments from Dr Edith Evans