

LATER BRONZE AGE AND IRON AGE

Introduction

There is a regional variation in the amount and quality of information relating to the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age periods in Wales. Against this background underlying themes are evident and gaps present. Research themes are suggested to address the imbalance in information and understanding.

Themes

Chronology

What is the chronological framework for this period across Wales?

- A programme of radiocarbon dating of stratigraphic sequences and sealed ground surfaces should be established. Existing data should be correlated and enhanced as the programme progresses. Where possible, ceramic sequences should be established and, if possible, linked to dated sequences.

Settlement

How did hillforts function in the landscape?

- In some areas hillforts are better understood than others. The imbalance should be addressed by the use of targeted projects. Recent work at Castell Henllys illustrates the value of this approach. Non-intrusive methods such as aerial reconnaissance and topographical and geophysical survey should be used to target excavation which could answer questions about function and date. Valuable results are being achieved from initial non-intrusive surveys of defensive cropmark sites in south Ceredigion and some of the hillforts of the Clwydian Range and Llandysilio Mountain.

What was the relationship between defended and non-defended sites?

- Few Late Bronze Age settlement sites have been identified; examination of known Iron Age sites could aid this.
- Links with the preceding earlier Bronze Age should be studied

Land-use

What was the pattern of land-use and agriculture in this period?

- Few field systems are known; those that are should be studied further to date them and identify their form and exact function.
- Landscapes should be studied to identify features contemporary with known settlements and the organisation of their surrounding areas.

Ritual and burial

What was the burial practice in the later prehistoric period?

- As evidence across Wales is largely absent, we should look more closely at burial sites of the earlier periods

Natural Resources

How were natural resources exploited and utilised?

- Research into both metal-mining sites and identification of production sites is needed. Considerable amounts of time and resources are required to answer the relevant questions.

Environment

What were the environmental contexts exploited by people in the later prehistoric period like? What were the natural resources available?

- Much more environmental work should be carried out, both on site and off site to identify past landscapes.
- Sieving on sites should take place as routine and detailed analysis of material found should follow.
- There is very little reliable information available about subjects such as food production, diet and the use of organic materials.

Material Culture

What were the main artefact types of the period?

Where were they manufactured?

How did they change through time?

- In recent years artefact studies have been neglected, although they have the potential to provide important information about peoples' lifestyles and activities, for example about trade and exchange.
- The generally accepted view is that there is a lack of artefacts in this period; however, long-term excavations at Castell Henllys have shown that over time a large corpus of artefacts is amassed.
- Find spots of any new hoards or individual artefacts should be archaeologically investigated as a matter of course

Processes of Change

What does the archaeological record tell us about the interface between the Bronze Age and Iron Age periods and the Iron Age and Roman periods?

- The boundaries of the later prehistoric period are false boundaries imposed by archaeologists; they do reflect changes but changes which took place over a long period of time.
- The study of Romano-British material culture and settlement has the potential to tell us about earlier societies. Place-name evidence, language, documentary sources and myths and legends perhaps also have a role to play here.

Priorities

Settlement and Land-use in Later Prehistory

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There is a marked disparity in our understanding of settlement in this period. In some areas hillforts are well understood while in others they are not. Few undefended sites are known. We need to identify the undefended settlements and understand their relationship with defended sites. Initially efforts can be concentrated on aerial photographic and other non-intrusive survey, but this will need to be followed by targeted excavations. Little is known about the land-use surrounding settlements: the contextual landscape. Research should focus on identifying the agricultural practices and the limitations imposed on agriculture by the environment.

The Environment in Wales in Later Prehistory

The accepted understanding is that climatic deterioration in the Bronze Age led to greater pressure on agricultural land and thus defended settlements were built as a response. How much of this change was brought about by environmental factors and how much by cultural changes? A greater emphasis is needed on environmental sampling and subsequent analysis, both within sites and from bogs. In particular, samples from old ground surfaces, beneath barrows and hillfort banks for example, should be studied. We need to understand the natural environment in this period and the constraints it imposed on agricultural development.

Ritual and Burial

Almost nothing is known about ritual and burial practices in the later prehistoric period. Knowledge of these systems will help us to understand society in this period. The discovery of human bone will help us to understand the physical characteristics of the people. As a first step it is important to identify burial sites and practices. We should look closely at burial practices in the transition periods between the Bronze Age, Iron Age and the Roman period in order to help us to understand later prehistoric customs. It is important to test rigorously whether perceived gaps in our understanding of ritual and burial are real; is the information lacking or are we looking in the wrong place?