

A DRAFT RESEARCH AGENDA FOR THE NEOLITHIC AND EARLY BRONZE AGE OF WALES

1 - The study of later Mesolithic –Earlier Neolithic transitions

Did farming substitute or supplement the economy of later Mesolithic communities?

What was the environmental context for transition?

- Reassessment of lithics assemblages (e.g. 'flint working floors') especially those with recorded Mesolithic and Neolithic artefacts
- Examination of locations with mixed date assemblages (e.g. cave sites) including sub-surface investigation linked with comprehensive dating programme and palaeoenvironmental sampling
- Examination of submerged forests and coastal wetlands that may have deposits spanning this crucial period for forager-farming transition – linked to dendrochronology programme
- Use of isotope analysis and C14 dating

2 - The introduction, character and development of agricultural practices

How significant was arable farming during the earlier Neolithic?

Were non-intensive farming practices (with long fallow agriculture) added to activities already being undertaken by Mesolithic groups?

Were early Neolithic populations of SW Wales essentially pastoralists?

What is the evidence for the co-existence of different socio-economic groups?

Do we see a change in farming practice during late 3rd M early 2nd M with more intensive farming and shorter fallow periods?

What was the attitude toward land ownership? Was there a change in concept from one of right of access to land (by essentially mobile communities) to one of ownership and family tenure (by essentially settled communities)?

- Essential to undertake comprehensive palynological and other palaeoenvironmental. Sampling programmes from all excavated Neo and EBA sites and other programmes of archaeological work.
- Examination of buried land surfaces beneath funerary and ritual monuments. Also under later prehistoric earthworks and enclosure banks.
- The application of new scientific techniques such as lipid analysis. A potential dataset exists in museum collections and other archives.
- Examination of known field systems (with regard to date and nature) and prospection (through aerial photographs etc) for others.

3 – The identification of settlement

Why is the settlement evidence at variance with the data from Ireland and the continent?

Was the earlier Neolithic landscape and settlement characterized by its mobility?

Was there a change to more permanent settlement during the later Neolithic/earlier Bronze Age?

- Early sites are rarely found using existing fieldwork strategies. This may in part reflect the nature of early settlement in which permanent places were rare/special. There is a need to test this by more innovative locational strategies – e.g. greater use of remote sensing (phosphate surveys, magnetic susceptibility surveys) and perhaps closer investigation of apparent blank zones in areas of known activity (e.g. during topsoil stripping of developments).
- There is a need for better training for field staff in likely nature of artefacts and features.
- Review of known artefact distributions as established by lithics surveys to examine pattering and landscape zones, followed by targeted fieldwalking transects to provide reliable quantitative comparanda and to define spatial extent of clusters.
- Reassessment of the locations of known artefact scatters, using targeted and close interval remote sensing techniques.

4 - The study of how different landscape zones were exploited from the 5th to the 2nd millennium BC

Were earlier Neolithic farmers essentially confined to lowland environments as suggested by distribution of chambered tombs?

Was there only a move into the uplands following population pressures during later Neolithic?

Were there more complex arrangements with different responses to different landscape zones?

Was there greater agricultural diversification during the later Neolithic?

What is the evidence for seasonal variations in the exploitation of upland zones?

- Consolidation of existing landscape evidence to examine different zones through time
- Development of survey and fieldwork techniques to undertake comparative mapping of different landscape zones

5 - The development, role and use of ceremonial and funerary monuments and their environs

What can monuments tell us about the nature of society?

What was the relationship between different monuments and between monuments and the wider landscape?

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What can the immediate environs tell us about the development, role and use of monuments? – this is particularly pertinent in the light of an ongoing threat to the non-visible elements of monument complexes.

- The development of terrain modelling, examining visual relationships between individual and groups of monuments and between monuments and their topographic settings.
- Analysis of the use of space to consider monument complexes from the literal and figurative viewpoint of users.
- Identification of landscapes that were re-used or avoided (due to the 'historical knowledge of past communities') though an examination of monument complexes with evidence for multi-period use.
- Fieldwork should include examination of the spaces between individual monuments and monument complexes and not simply focus on the monuments themselves.
- Site archives need to be assessed so that the integrity of the data can be evaluated. Any unpublished excavation archives need to be studied and brought to publication.
- Dating – the examination of existing archives and/or archaeological intervention to obtain dating material for intra-site sequences. The development of new techniques (e.g. the dating of cremations) and a review of existing C14 dating and key sequences using modern calibration techniques (e.g. Bayesian algorithms) may allow a developed absolute chronology to be constructed from archive material.

6 - Industrial processes and access to resources and trade connections

Where were the stone axe production sites/quarries (if formal quarries existed)?

Was the exploitation of quarries for stone axe production formalised or ritualised with working restricted to certain groups and times or was it more casual with people making axes whenever they needed them?

Did this change during the EBA – both for stone and metal ores?

Is the evidence for the exploitation of metal ores confined to north Ceredigion?

What were the mechanisms for dispersal? Was the raw material or finished products formally traded (by merchant class) or passed hand to hand by neighbours?

Was there a seaborne trade?

What was the nature of the contact with the east (flint, axes and pottery) and with the west (styles of tomb architecture)? Was there a change in emphasis during the later Neolithic?

What is the evidence for routeways across mountains or coast?

- Systematic programme of fieldwork and rock outcrop characterisation linked to existing petrographic data is needed to identify stone axe production sites.
- Improved provenancing of Bronze Age metal artefacts linked to geochemical fingerprinting of Welsh ore deposits – as a means to identify sources of raw material.

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- Review of excavated evidence for metal ore processing.
- Review of evidence for marine/estuarine exploitation

7 - The distribution and context of material culture deposition

What can we understand about the nature and use of material culture through its depositional context?

What was the nature of Neolithic stone axe and BA metalwork deposition?

- Re-assessment of distribution and context of artefact locations – both hoards and individual finds
- Examination of the context of deposition of artefacts within sites

8 - Other possible strategic goals relating to Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age

- Re-assessment of existing archives – examining potential for further analysis (e.g. microwear, radiocarbon dating, lipid and other residue analysis etc). As first stage the development to a comprehensive review of all major excavated sites.
- Examination of threatened wetland sites
- The need to integrate research programmes with agri-environment schemes – e.g. to protect vulnerable sites from ploughing
- Identification of rich period landscapes for future study, evaluation and protection
- Continued maintenance and enhancement of the SMRs/HERs to reflect fieldwork undertaken by field workers and the development and enhancement of the SMRs/HERs as a tool that can be queried by researchers, and to which they can contribute.
- Maintain and develop links between those active in research through meetings/email newsgroup.

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