

Post Medieval Wales (1539-1750)

INTRODUCTION

The period 1539-1750 is not only of considerable interest to archaeologists and other heritage professionals but is also important in defining and understanding the forces that have shaped present-day Wales. The 1530s saw the reformation of the church, wide-ranging changes in land-ownership, and the Laws in Wales acts, which incorporated Wales into the Westminster state. The civil war is known to have had a profound impact on Wales; less is understood of the effect of the settlement of 1688. The mid-18th century saw the early phases of the economic, social and technical changes which within a further century transformed Wales into an 'industrial nation'. This period as a whole see the appearance of what is now recognised as the Welsh farmhouse, in all its varieties, and of early surviving examples of the dwellings of the rural poor, and bears witness to the growth of religious pluralism and to the revival of urban life. However, this period is perceived as lacking the emotive appeal both of the Age of the Princes and of the Industrial/Modern period, with their potential for narratives of transformation and conflict.

REVIEW OF THE LAST FIVE YEARS, WORK UNDERTAKEN

The 2007 Research Framework advocates:

- integration of material or excavated remains with written sources
- establishment of a more reliable frame-work of architectural and landscape styles
- an accelerated dendrochronology programme where appropriate
- investigation of recent sites with the same rigour as is applied to earlier sites
- a firmer basis for artefactual studies

The 2007 Research Framework identifies the challenges facing this period as:

- understanding the size of the resource and its rate of change through quantification of the resource by record and survey
- more collaborative and cooperative work promoting sustainable conservation and preservation policies

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- education within government and within the profession of archaeology itself.

Since 2005, Cadw's urban characterisation work had added to an understanding of the dynamic of Welsh towns, including many which pre-date industrialisation. This has proved an effective way of identifying both changes within the urban fabric and continuities between periods. Historic Landscape Characterisation continues to add to understanding of the wider environment.

Dendrochronological studies such as those promoted by *Dyddio Hen Dai Cymreig/Dating Old Welsh Buildings* are providing better information about the dynamics of house-building in rural areas of North Wales, though they have not overturned established ideas. *Adnabod Ardudwy* has produced interesting insights into the cultural and historical dimensions of landscape.

In addition, a number of individuals in the archaeological community are known to be pursuing their own research interests in, for instance, milling, mining, parklands etc.

Archaeological understanding of this period has been advanced by the several book-length studies published since 2005, as well as by dendrochronology. Approaches to the post-Medieval period in a British/Irish context have been informed by the studies edited by Horning, Palmer, Lyttleton, Rynne, Nevell and Walker, but as yet there has no comparable attempt to produce a similar study for Wales.

The personnel and intellectual deficit identified in 2007 is likely only to grow more challenging given present economic constraints. It is therefore considered important that the ambitions of the Research Framework be seen to be realistic and credible.

PRIORITY LIST

Perceptions and period-name

Is perception influenced by the name? The label 'Post-Medieval' was discussed at the Bangor conference. The general view was that it was unhelpful as it defined the period by what it was not, and that as with document-based historical research 'Early Modern' was preferable as a name, though some considered 'Renaissance' a possibility.

Amendments to the research questions: priorities

Chronologies

Understanding of the fundamental changes within the 15-16th century and 18th-early 19th century periods is not always helped by the division of interests and priorities amongst archaeologists into Medieval, post-Medieval and Industrial/Modern. It is considered that the transitional periods should themselves be a focus of study.

Settlement

Challenges for the immediate future are the integration of above-ground archaeology and building archaeology with the insights of architectural historians, integration of material and documentary sources, and ensuring the support of planning and conservation officers.

Markets and fairs (frequency and location), regional services – shops, courts, inns, postal services, communications, and the evidence for a professional/merchant class – all merit further study.

In terms of housing stock, the 'great rebuilding' is a key concept for this period and needs to be examined. The *Dyddio Hen Dai Cymreig/Dating Old Welsh Buildings* project has so far been confined to North Wales.

Land-use and enclosure

The mapping of landscape change – emparking, enclosure and desertion – needs to be integrated with study of evolving social/tenorial relations and other social and economic drivers. The

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identification, recording and assessment of features such as corn-mills, corn-drying kilns, *pandai*, dovecotes, fishponds and deer parks is essential to understanding the rural economy of this period.

Paleoecological studies can be integrated with knowledge of rural crafts and with documentary research.

Religious Sites and Burial Grounds

The generation up to and including the 1530s saw church-building on a significant scale; study of church archaeology and of archaeology of the reformation needs therefore not only to retain its focus on monastic dissolution as initiating change in the post-Medieval environment but also to develop strategies to overcome the late-Medieval/post-Medieval divide.

The assumption that there was little ecclesiastical new build or alteration thereafter until the 19th century should be tested against the evidence of the archaeology of churches and private chapels, including liturgical/internal arrangements, and of the archaeology of commemoration. Dendrochronology might also be applied to churches.

The potential of DNA studies of graveyards and the loss of evidence through removal of memorial stones, to which attention was drawn in 2007, is re-iterated here.

The archaeology of recusancy and of early Protestant nonconformity remains little understood.

Military/defensive

The process by which Medieval castles retained a defensive function into the 17th century and thereafter were either abandoned or became purely high-status dwellings can be further examined. Civil War sites need to be identified.

Identity; new or changing elites; the growth of a consumer economy:

The building of new houses in novel architectural styles, sometimes on virgin sites, and the availability of consumer goods (pottery, pipes, bed-linen, clocks etc) are well documented historically but require archaeological response. Artefacts from the period 1539-1750 are little understood by comparison with earlier or later periods. What is the

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evidence for influence from neighbouring major ports such as Liverpool and Bristol, or other English towns? The elite becomes Anglophone in this period; what social influences were active for this to happen, and what does the material evidence tell us? Can we see it as in any way a 'colonial' process? Is expansion or movement of population a factor?

Industry

There is abundant evidence of industrial activity in the post-medieval period but it is little understood. Continuing work on late bloomeries and early blast-furnaces emphasises the continuities with earlier periods and innovations, and the international context for further work. What appear to be early 17th colliery workings on Anglesey should be a priority for further study. Other evidence of coal-mining in this period, as it comes to light, should be studied in the context of English coal-fields which might have influenced it, just as other industries need to be considered in a broader context, including evidence of merchant capital. The mining, quarrying and early chemical industries of north-east Wales remain neglected, other than around Bersham. Sites of tanneries and of the smaller rural extractive industries used in soap and glass manufacture should be identified; evidence of woodland management in this period should be sought.

Paleoenvironmental evidence

Paleoenvironmental evidence is an under-exploited resource, rarely applied, yet with as great a potential to inform study of the urban environment as the rural in this period.

How might these priorities be addressed?

Approaches

An approach to this period needs to overcome the problems of increased specialisation within the discipline by integrating the insights of archaeologists who specialise in landscapes, buildings, paleoecology and artefacts, and by a readiness to adopt scientific techniques where possible and appropriate.

It also needs to overcome more general specialisation with academia, between archaeology and related and relevant disciplines, including documentary-based study and literary history. Material evidence and written evidence should be integrated more closely; written evidence should include both Welsh and English sources.

Encouragement to more collaborative work is vital, raising awareness of the significance of the historic environment in all its aspects within the broader community of Wales and identifying new ways of working that foster fresh perspectives. Imaginative collaboration is particularly important given the immediate challenges of the economic situation.

So is feedback from development-led work, and the use of grey literature – the cumulative evidence of myriad small projects makes a notable academic contribution.

However, there is as yet little firm intellectual basis for the study of the post-Medieval archaeology of Wales. The suggestion that a conference be held under the auspices of the RCAHMW was welcomed.

Development Control

The development control process faces distinct challenges with the archaeology of this period. Archaeologists need to be able to convince the planning authorities, members of the public and other interest groups of the archaeological significance of remains that are often still in use. This is particularly difficult in relation to extant public infrastructure such as roads, bridges, flood defences and quaysides but also creates problems where the archaeological remains are in private ownership. Inadequate knowledge of the scope and variable significance of the post-medieval resource needs addressing to support development control archaeologists in tackling these issues effectively.

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The built environments of historic urban centres are the main focus for this area of research within the development control context. Urban regeneration and smaller scale redevelopment provide the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of this period whilst the commercial context creates funding sources through developer funded projects.

Some undesignated structures and buildings can fall outside the normal planning controls and are often demolished or removed with little or no planning consent required. This is particularly common where historic areas are considered brown-field sites or where development pressures are greater. The use of article 4 directions within conservation areas can be a useful tool but outside these protected zones the production of 'local lists' helps provide a more robust mechanism for control.

Most of the recording of buildings of this period within the development process is undertaken as a condition of planning consent and enforced by the local planning authority. Although this provides opportunities for archaeological intervention it only allows for preservation 'by record'. A requirement for archaeological recording prior to the determination of planning consent can be used to better effect as part of a programme of informed conservation, providing the opportunity for the 'in situ' preservation of important archaeological fabric / remains.

STATEMENT

The period 1539-1750 in Wales is little understood from an archaeological perspective, despite its importance both in defining and enabling an understanding the forces that have shaped present-day Wales. Not only does it see important changes to Wales in terms of its religious life, and in its rural and urban building stock, but farming practices and margins of cultivation change, and Wales appears more fully to assimilate to the emergent consumer society of England and to the economy of the Atlantic world. Labelling this period as 'Post-Medieval' is unhelpful; 'Early Modern' has more to commend it.

Its challenges as a field of study are compounded by the fact that it lacks the emotive appeal of the Medieval period and of the Industrial/Modern period, and by the fact that there is as yet no clear intellectual starting point for approaches to the period. We need to give further thought to this, and

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to draw on the approaches that have been developed in England, Ireland and Scotland in particular. The suggestion that the RCAHMW host a conference on this period in the near future is particularly to be welcomed.