

A Research Framework for the Archaeology of Wales: Medieval Draft Paper November 2016.

Introduction

This paper updates the research framework for the medieval period in Wales (c. AD 1070 - 1539), following the last update in 2013. The framework has developed over several stages. The medieval period was initially examined in 2001 (Davidson 2003), following which four regional frameworks were compiled, to be summarised in 2005 for all of Wales (Austin 2004). The framework was re-examined in 2009 by David Longley, and the results for the medieval period made available in 2010. An update to the 2010 paper was issued in May 2013. This update, issued in November 2016, supplements rather than replaces the earlier studies, and is accompanied by an updated bibliography for the period 2012-2016.

The Historic Environment (Wales) Act was passed in February 2016. This puts in place several significant improvements for the management and conservation of the historic environment within Wales, yet at the same time encourages a national (in terms of 'Wales') centric view. Studies inevitably have geographic boundaries, however it is noticeable that much new emerging work tends to be limited to England, with potentially biased results. It will be unfortunate if a combination of both the 2016 Act and the UK's exit from Europe encourages this trend, and leads to fewer funding opportunities.

Rural settlement and field systems

Settlement

There has been very little new work undertaken on non-defended sites of high status, though this category is complemented by defended sites which are discussed below. The primary aims are related to site identification and research, leading to enhanced synthetic studies examining wider trends.

Excavation on medieval rural settlements has been relatively rare, and so the combination of rescue excavation and community participation by DAT at St Ishmael's is to be welcomed. Results indicate a mixed agricultural base, with oats dominant, but bread wheat and barley also present, as also were legumes. Cattle formed the dominant faunal remains, with lesser evidence for sheep and pig. Fish remains indicated on-shore fishing, and the remains of fish traps close-by also suggest a source (Meek 2014).

Corn driers are one of the relatively few medieval features encountered during fieldwork. A number from north-west Wales have been dated between the 11th and 13th centuries (Kenney 2013), and their increase may be related to the increased cultivation of oats, which are often harvested under-ripe.

Field systems

There have been a number of recent publications relating to field systems, though most of the focus is on England, with scant regard for Wales. They primarily arise from two major studies – the Historic England and AHRC funded studies of field systems in Northamptonshire (e.g. Partida, Hall and Foard 2013; Hall 2014; Williamson *et al*, 2013), and the Britannia fields project led by Stephen Rippon at Exeter University (Rippon *et al* 2014). The former is very much a regressive approach, whilst the latter incorporates palaeoenvironmental and archaeological evidence to examine changes from Roman to post-Roman periods, concluding that change was less radical than previously thought, though studies have been hampered by the terminology and notion that there was an 'ending' to

Roman Britain. Essentially the latter argues for a more organic evolution into open fields, often, though not always, incorporating earlier elements, whereas studies based on regressive analysis tend to argue more for radical change in the 8th to 10th centuries, associated with the appearance of nucleated villages. Rippon is keen to identify broad regions, for which he uses the French term *pays*, identified by both physical and cultural traits, but rarely by administrative or political boundaries. Interestingly the Welsh poets used a similar word *pau* to identify a region – the source of both is Latin *pagus* (Roberts 2012). Identification of these regions, and relationships with *cantrefi* and the evolving commotal system has yet to be undertaken.

Recent studies of rural settlement have concentrated more on wider landscape context than on individual sites. For example, Comeau (2012) uses regressive analysis to take evidence from tithe maps and land tax assessments to identify a possible medieval infield/outfield system in north Pembrokeshire consisting of open fields close to the settlement, and shared pasture beyond. Kenney (2015) in a report for Cadw, identifies numerous examples of medieval fields in north-west Wales, primarily through identification of surviving ridge and furrow and strip fields preserved in later field systems. Other Welsh Archaeological Trusts have undertaken regional studies, and the upland surveys carried out by RCAHMW have also contributed, but there have been no recent archaeological studies of the evidence. The Welsh evidence points to the presence of continuously cultivated open fields divided into strips, with meadow and rough grazing communally shared either adjacent to or a short distance from the settlement, though the more anglicised areas of south Wales may have developed open fields with closer affinities to the English Midland system. In both medieval and early modern Wales cattle formed the mainstay of the economy, and Nia Powell (2007) has shown how tenant farmers located in more marginal areas were wealthier than formerly thought. Whilst much work has been undertaken previously on transhumance and the evidence provided by hendre and hafod placenames, the chronological development remains poorly understood. As with so many subjects, a combined approach using historical, environmental and archaeological evidence is required to fully understand the nature and evolution of agricultural landscapes in the medieval period.

Excavations at Rhuddgaer on Anglesey indicated a possible Roman agricultural soil, over which lay a rectangular building with field system of small walled enclosures, of Early Medieval (6th to 9th century) date, over which lay a field system of ridge and furrow, possibly associated with the granting of the land to the Cistercian Abbey of Aberconwy, forming part of the Tal y Bont grange. The medieval fields were besanded, probably in the 14th century. A new field system of irregular small fields was created in the 18th century (or slightly earlier) to be followed by a completely new layout of large rectangular fields in the 19th century.

Attention has been drawn to the survival of a medieval field system associated with the borough of Harlech. On the low plain to the north of the castle are the remains of regular strips, with a number of fieldnames indicating English influence (e.g. 'acra' for 'acre' and 'rhwd' for 'rood') and a length of 220yds, which is longer than the standard Welsh equivalent of 90yds (Davidson 2012).

Medieval parks

An omission from the framework to date has been mention of medieval parks and designed landscapes. Recent work on this subject within England includes Liddiard (2007), Fletcher (2011) and Mileson (2014). Silvester (2010) examines forests and chases in the Welsh borderland, whilst Smith (2014) provides a summary overview of recent work in Wales on medieval designed landscapes, and greater detail on the garden and park at Dolbadarn in Smith (2013). These works all highlight the considerable amount of research which still needs to be done to both identify parks and gardens and place them in their context.

Assembly sites

The identification of a possible Early Medieval assembly site at Bayvil by Rhiannon Comeau (2014) reminds us of their continued existence and function in medieval times, and though monastic centres and military structures tended to take their place, there must be many places where agreements, formal transactions or legal hearings took place. Attention was drawn by J Beverly Smith many years ago to the use of Bwlch Oerddrws on the Meirionnydd border for hearing cases of trespass, but no search has been undertaken for comparable sites.

General conclusions

This all points to the need for continued collection of raw data, its analysis, and targeted excavation of a variety of settlement types, combined with wider interdisciplinary studies to place settlements within their geographical and chronological contexts.

Key research questions include:

- The location and distribution of settlement sites
- The links between settlement type, tenure and social hierarchy
- The wider environmental context of settlements in the agricultural landscape
- The nature of the functioning agricultural landscape (including transhumance)
- The development of agricultural techniques, crops and livestock
- The nature and development of structures within settlements
- Development of field systems and relationship to tenure

Military sites

Earthwork castles

The chronological development of earth and timber castles in Wales, and their adoption by Welsh rulers remains inconsistently understood. As such the previous agenda called for a move from 'simple identification to more detailed analysis through excavation and landscape contextualisation'. This has to some extent been addressed by a few broader surveys and investigations of individual sites although time and resources are likely to preclude any multi-disciplinary studies on the scale of the RCAHMW Glamorgan Inventories of 1991 and 2000 .

Two long papers by Rachel Swallow covering Cheshire and Irish Cultural Sea Zone of north-eastern Wales (2014, 2016) have made progress from the model of gazetteer based county surveys. These papers examine the historical and broader physical contexts of a large number of monuments on either side of the present border, utilising LiDAR to good effect to analyse and illustrate their form, although detailed archaeological analyses of individual sites is beyond the scope of this work. PhD research and subsequent articles by Owain Connor and Jaqueline Veninger (both 2014) on the Norman Conquests of Monmouthshire and north Wales respectively use a GIS based approach, the former to reconstruct the landscape and administrative contexts of the early castles of the Monmouthshire whilst the latter is rooted in the theory of conflict archaeology. Whilst this offers a more holistic approach than the more archaeologically focused studies of the past it is prone to extrapolation from known facts and being base on desktop research as much as fieldwork can rather simplify the complex archaeology of the monuments and their hinterlands.

The lack of direct contemporary documentation for the majority of earthwork sites is a fundamental issue, as is an inadequate understanding of the shifting political and administrative circumstances that necessitated or created opportunities for the foundation of castles in many areas of Wales. The dearth of reliable and balanced historical research has proven a barrier to many archaeologists attempting to contextualise or identify the origin of earthworks and in many areas of Wales and

differentiation between Norman and Welsh built castles remains difficult, particularly in the border areas where sites proliferate and landholding patterns were complex and frequently changing. In Gwynedd the correlation between castles close to Welsh centres of administration has long been recognised, but the reasons for this are still poorly understood and these relationships have been explored only in a piecemeal fashion elsewhere in Wales. This has been addressed on a regional scale in a fine series of publications by David Stephenson covering Brecknock, Teigngl and Powys (2014, 2015, 2016), which fill some significant gaps and directly explore the likely historical contexts for a number of earthwork castles.

Fieldwork is required to test or corroborate historical research but beyond minor development-led interventions this has been relatively limited since the previous research framework paper. There have however been several useful topographic surveys of individual sites and two large scale excavations which have shed considerable new light on early Welsh castles. At Hen Gastell, Llanwnda, Gwynedd Archaeological Trust have identified postholes of timber structures including a possible irregular tower on the summit of a broad, motte like hillock interpreted as an undocumented Welsh fortification on the basis of 11th to 12th century radiocarbon dates (Kenney 2013). On the other side of the Menai Strait, at Llanfair Pwllgwyngyll, Anglesey, adjacent to St Mary's church, Gwynedd Archaeological Trust excavated an enclosure identified by aerial photography. Though a pin of 10th/11th century date had been found at the church, the enclosure, from its morphology, was considered to be of probable late Prehistoric date. However, radiocarbon dating of samples suggests rather a defensive enclosure of 11th century date. Only a small part of the interior was excavated, and this did not reveal any complete structures, though postholes suggest their existence. These two sites contribute to the limited knowledge of late Viking/Norman archaeology in north-west Wales, and join the sites at Glyn and Castell Trefadog as evidence for a rise in defended settlements at this time.

Chris Caple's ongoing excavations at Nevern continue to reveal details of phased timber structures and artefacts pre-dating and in some cases contemporary with the extensive 12th century remodelling of the castle in masonry, in addition to constructional details of the motte and ramparts although the precise attribution of these to Welsh or Normans is problematic. Across the border in Herefordshire HLF funded research excavation at the Ponthendre motte and bailey, assumed to be a conquest era precursor to nearby Longtown has revealed no evidence of internal structures or occupation within its impressive earthworks, highlighting the potential transience of these monuments and the dangers of interpretation based on the forms of their earthworks alone.

The publication of the former excavations undertaken in 1963/4 by John Ellis Jones (2014) at Dolwyddelan motte provides information on the nature of the motte, with stone footings of a sub-rectangular tower, and surrounding ditch. There is no dating evidence, though the assumption is that this predated the later stone castle to the north, and therefore of 12th century date. Llywelyn was born c. 1172, and this is traditionally said to be his birth place. A study of the valley bottom, primarily examining the location of the church and roads, does not take into account the earlier castle, though a more detailed study of the castle environment is required to identify if the mound was surrounded by water (Elis-Williams, 2014).

The difficulties of investigating individual sites are highlighted by the small-scale investigations undertaken during conservation works at the motte at Ty Newydd, Llannor (Davies 2012 and Kenney 2016) close to the west end of the Llŷn peninsula. The site identified as a possible bailey was found to contain no archaeological features, and samples taken from the surrounding ditch provided no dating evidence. The suggestion was made in the final report that it might be better interpreted as a prospect mound for the garden of Ty Newydd, or at least re-used as such in later medieval/Renaissance periods.

Finally, gazetteers will always play a role as initial points of reference for the study of individual sites and areas, and the bibliographic lists of Philip Davis' monumental Gatehouse website continue to be updated and now carry links to HER and Coflein references <http://www.gatehouse-gazetteer.info/home.html>.

Key research questions include:

- The reasons for location – are they associated with existing focal points?
- The extent to which they were built by Welsh lords following the early Norman incursions
- The local and regional historical contexts for the founding and abandonment of undocumented timber castles
- Their subsequent administrative, military or domestic role
- Their impact on the wider landscape, and the creation of planted settlements and planned landscapes
- The nature of the construction of their earthworks and associated structural remains
- Their relationship to broader settlement patterns such as villages, town, ecclesiastical sites, mills, field systems and fishponds.

Masonry castles

The last decade has seen a continuing move away from the traditional military and architectural typology based approach to castle studies and a move towards a more holistic overview of their form, function, landscape context and in many cases the nuanced symbolism of their sites and structures. There is however still a need to better understand elements of the form, date and patronage of many Welsh castles as the basic building blocks of such research. Thus general works have covered several aspects of masonry castles, notably a detailed overview of sites in the north-east from the 2015 Castle Studies Group Conference, the portcullis and polygonal towers (Kenyon et al. 2015, Guy 2015 and Hollwey 2016). John Goodall's theories on the dissemination of architectural forms amongst the medieval elite (2010) is echoed in John Wiles' study of towers in south-west Wales (2014) which suggests that their physical form stems from a largely hierarchical exchange of ideas between the crown, major marcher lords and their followers. Paul R Davis' 'Forgotten Castles of Wales' provides an interesting counterpoint to traditional historical and typological commentaries by using lesser known examples to illustrate the development of both Norman and Welsh masonry castles. This also provides an alternative to the much recited examples in the main texts and acknowledges the sheer variety of design discernable across the country.

The last five years have seen several significant pieces of fieldwork and research at individual monuments. The excavations at Nevern by Chris Caple continue to provide a wealth of information on early Norman and Welsh masonry castles, both in the remarkable number of structures revealed and the complexity of their development over little more than a century of occupation. Significant material culture has been retrieved from the different phases of the site, including what is likely to become the largest assemblage of 12th century pottery recovered in the region and possible quarrying tools from waterlogged deposits in the inner ditch. This archaeological complexity presents an interpretative challenge, especially in ascribing phased structures and deposits to documented periods of Norman or Welsh occupation but when completed these excavations should eventually complement Dryslwyn as a standard reference work of relevance beyond Wales.

Three books of the last five years have dealt with long term programmes of research. Neil Ludlow's landmark volume on Carmarthen Castle (2014) demonstrates what can be achieved by drawing together multiple strands of evidence from decades of piecemeal excavations, recording and a thorough re-evaluation of historical sources and the structures themselves. In addition to providing a

comprehensive overview of the layout and development of the monument and its political and administrative context as a long standing royal castle it explores many different avenues of castle studies from the development of specific architectural features to complex (but now lost) late-medieval domestic arrangements comparable to the royal castles elsewhere. In Herefordshire English Heritage have published the results of their limited excavations at the Mortimers' Wigmore Castle (Ratkai 2015) which identified a massive 9m of stratigraphy within its bailey and sets out a sequence of development for one of the most important castles in Wales and the Marches. Thirdly, Ron Shoemsmith's study of Goodrich Castle (2015) contains much of relevance, especially in the later 13th century masonry defences of the Valences which bear close comparison with the Edwardian castles of north Wales and the works of south Walian magnates such as the Clares.

Two pieces of work at Holt Castle have enabled further exploration of the themes set out in the Edwardian Castles conference of 2007. Several years of excavation by Steve Greuter as part of a conservation and access scheme have helped to clarify aspects of its layout even though the material culture retrieved dated almost exclusively to the Civil War and later. This work was augmented by a pioneering study by Rick Turner and Chris Jones-Jenkins which compared the surviving masonry, excavation results, and fine range of early documentary, pictorial and cartographic evidence to produce an ambitious navigable 3D reconstruction, demonstrating the complex and palatial accommodation of this once great castle and the potential of this method elsewhere (2016). The manipulated landscapes of navigable water ways, parks, gardens and warrens associated with high-status late medieval castles have still received relatively little publication in Wales although several articles have explored both English and Welsh examples (Smith 2013, Smith and Lodge 2014).

The place of stone castles within the Welsh administrative system requires further exploration, particularly outside of Gwynedd where it is clear that they did not necessarily replace the commotal llys and maerdref as centres of governance but complemented them as lavish occasional residences, fortresses and status symbols. Several fresh regional historical studies noted above will help to facilitate this by providing firmer historical contexts for some of these monuments. Two such papers focusing on Ewloe and the unidentified castle of Coleshill have helped to untangle a knot of much cited but misinterpreted documentary references (Brodie 2015, Stephenson 2015), highlighting the complex range of political and social factors that may have influenced the form and siting of these Welsh castles. At Carndochan, Gwynedd Archaeological Trust have been undertaking limited conservation-led trenching for Cadw and the Snowdonia National Park (David Hopwell, *pers comm*) revealing this undocumented 13th century castle of the Princes of Gwynedd to be both more complex and better preserved than previously assumed, if poor in terms of artefacts, again demonstrating a disparity between surface indications and the information provided by excavation.

Key research questions include:

- The administrative role of the castle
- The military role of the castle
- The relationship of stone castles with summer grazing pastures and upland estates.
- The cultural and economic impact of castle buildings programmes, in particular those of Edward I
- The architectural development of native stone castles
- The dating of individual masonry castles and their architectural features.
- Architectural affinities between high status stone castles and the evidence this provides for a dissemination of ideas and designs amongst patrons and craftsmen.
- The relationship of stone castles to designed landscapes of parks, gardens, fishponds, warrens and forests.

Urban studies

There has been little new published work in relation to medieval urban settlements in the last 4-5 years. In Bangor excavations during refurbishment of the Afon Adda culvert revealed burnt deposits on the north side of the river of c. 1120 date, possibly associated with the construction of the Romanesque cathedral built by Bishop David. Dendrochronological dating of substantial timbers on the opposite side of the river discovered in earlier excavations indicate considerable activity at that time. An enamelled decorative plaque, of French manufacture (part of the west arm of a cross) of mid-13th century date was found at a higher level associated with later burning. The excavator suggests this may denote evidence for destruction during the Glyndwr revolt c. 1401 (Smith, G., 2014). Works associated with the former Bishop's Palace revealed stone foundations beneath a paved courtyard, whilst recording inside the building identified the presence of preserved decorative timbers of late medieval date, and associated with the 16th century building. Unpublished work at Conwy undertaken by Welsh Water revealed well-preserved urban deposits on the east side of the borough.

Key research questions include:

- The identification of areas of high archaeological potential by carrying out deposit modelling within medieval boroughs and urban settlements
- The identification and architectural development of medieval town buildings. Many are preserved behind later Georgian or Victorian facades, and have yet to be identified.
- The location and evidence of environmental archaeology
- The development of town plans
- Interaction between town and rural hinterland

The medieval house

Our knowledge of houses and their development has benefited from the dedicated work undertaken by the North-west Wales Dendrochronology Project, and publication of the results in Suggett and Dunn (2014). The results have shed new light on the hall-house, and in particular recognition of the single-bay peasant hall houses. The development of the Snowdonian house in the 1520's, a combination of the medieval hall and tower house, was possibly influenced by Gwydir, an unusual tower house built c. 1510, which may also have influenced the development of the unit system, another distinctive feature of the architecture of Snowdonia (Suggett and Dunn 2014). Social and economic events, including the change from partible inheritance to primogeniture, the ending of bond tenure, legal changes allowing the sale and purchase of land and the opening up of the land market following the dissolution of the monasteries all contribute to a period of change at the end of the medieval period, into the Renaissance.

The Church

There have been few contributions covering all of Wales, though Allen (2016) looks at church orientation, and considers it in relation to natural features, whilst the second edition of the Powys Pevsner volume (Scourfield and Haslam 2013) completes the coverage of Wales in the larger format series. A new catalogue of stained glass in Wales is welcome, supplementing Mostyn Lewis's work of the 1970's (Crampin 2014).

A number of individual churches have received specific attention, including the Priory Church at Abergavenney (Nash 2015) and the study of the west front at Tintern (Morris *et al* 2015). The latter

suggests the possibility of patronage by Roger Bigod, Lord of Chepstow, and similarities between work at the castle and the abbey could indicate they were carried out by the same master mason. Detailed work of this nature, the drawing of profiles, and identifying schools of sculpture, is of particular importance at both parish church and monastic levels, but it is rare for resources to be found for this detailed level of work.

On-going work at St Gredifael's, Penmynydd suggests construction c. 1380 by the influential Tudor family, descendants of Ednyfed ap Fychan, whilst patronage by other members of the family may also be identified through monuments and by two series of distinct window tracery (James 2015, 279).

Church Monuments

The last four years have seen the emergence of a number of significant studies on church monuments. Adams study of the Tree Jesse at Abergavenney is extremely detailed. Gittos and Gittos look closely at Gresham's study of medieval stone monuments in north Wales, and both add to his catalogue, and provide new and revised dating and interpretation for a significant number. These include a revised dating of the grave cover in Beaumaris church, usually associated with Joan, wife of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, and natural daughter of King John. Their dating to the 14th century on the basis of both clothing and decorative style would indicate it commemorated a later individual.

Madeleine Gray (2011, 2012, 2014) looks in detail at a number of late medieval church monuments, placing them in their wider context, which provides a much firmer base for future studies.

There are still gaps in our knowledge of raw data, and the completion and maintenance of databases for medieval wall paintings, tomb carvings and medieval stone carving in storage are all necessary for the comprehensive study of these features.

Key research questions include:

- The development of church plans, particularly in the early period
- The development of window tracery and mouldings
- The development of ecclesiastical carpentry
- Patronage
- The identification of work by specific craftsmen and schools of work

Monasteries and friaries

Work by Janet Burton and Karen Stöber under the auspices of the Monastic Wales research project (www.monasticwales.org) has provided an update on current thinking, particularly in their edited volume (2013). Austin in that volume stresses the landscape approach, a theme developed in a particular context by Standing (2016) at Llantarnam. David Williams (2014) looks at the final stages of the Cistercians in a UK context. In an earlier article Williams had examined the evidence for grange chapels, of which there are surprisingly few. At Quirt, part of the Tal y Bont Cistercian grange on Anglesey belonging to Aberconwy Abbey, there has always reputedly been a chapel at the east end of the farmhouse. Recent work during renovations there has identified a medieval building which could be interpreted as a nave and chancel (Robert Evans (GAT), *pers comm*).

There has been little work undertaken in relation to Welsh Friaries within the past five years. There is a distinct lacunae in our knowledge relating to the role and impact of Friaries within Wales, particularly in relation to urban development, but also the high regard in which they were held, represented both in terms of significant burials and remembrance in wills. The alabaster tomb in St

Gredifael's church, Penmynydd is said to have originally been placed in Llanfaes Friary, and moved to the church at the Reformation. The tomb is thought to be the effigy of Goronwy ap Tudur and his wife, which, given Goronwy's antecedents were founders of the Dominican Friary in Bangor, and many of them buried there, raises interesting questions regarding patronage in families.

Several authors have recently pointed out the relationship between Early Medieval monasteries associated with the eremitical *celi du* and the adoption of the same monasteries into the Augustinian order. However the process and impact of this is poorly understood, and further excavation on these sites is required to establish both chronology and nature of change.

A significant number of monasteries are identifiable only by small remnants of masonry. Examples include Ynys Enlli, Aberconwy, Maenan, and there is no clear understanding of the nature of their remains. Recent work at all three of the above have revealed tantalising clues, but insufficient evidence to be able to interpret the findings. However, all reveal that significant remains are preserved in both urban and rural settings of which we currently have little understanding.

Key research questions include:

- Location and development of monasteries, priories and friaries and identifying their archaeological potential
- Location and development of granges, in particular the buildings, but also the nature of field systems and agricultural development
- The architectural development of monasteries, priories and friaries (building on the work undertaken by Robinson (2006) for Cistercian sites)
- The impact of monasteries on the wider landscape, in terms of both cultural and economic development

Industry

Very little new work has appeared relating to medieval industry, though at least two of the Welsh Archaeological Trusts have carried out surveys of mills in their areas, but these studies have yet to be fully analysed and published, though the data has been incorporated into the regions historic environment records.

Key research questions include:

- Locating key industrial sites of all types
- Technological advances

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