

Later Bronze Age and Iron Age

Summary of comments on Late Bronze Age/Iron Age Research Agenda

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Introduction

Comments have so far been received from Ken Murphy, Frances Lynch, Rachel Pope, Raimund Karl and Adam Gwillt and have been incorporated below. The original paper produced below can be found at

<http://www.archaeoleg.org.uk/pdf/bronzeandiron/September%204th%202004%20Later%20Bronze%20Age%20and%20Iron%20Age%20-.pdf>

In general the view was that the original paper was still relevant, and that the Research Agenda has been used to justify work, although perhaps it has not been the sole motivator. The point was made that the Research Agenda are used to help justify funding but that it is not so easy to incorporate them into rescue work 'I think we need to identify and promote case studies and pilot schemes towards establishing and demonstrating best practice, to show how our research agenda will, increasingly, and on a daily basis, influence the work of curatorial and field archaeologists. How can research funding applications be dovetailed within medium term trust/developer funded practice?' The point was made that the themes in the Research Agenda were 'familiar to most workers and its main role was to provide external/objective support to applicants for grants. It has also been used by Cadw as a checklist for their broad monument type surveys...giving them some political protection.' There was a call from all to synthesise and analyse the 'grey literature' which 'scarcely impacts on academics and teachers'. This should be integrated into the mainstream by well designed databases. The web access to the HER via www.archwilio.org.uk may partly help this although it will not produce the synthesis. Two pertinent comments, 'We have more information than we understand' and 'However much information is added you've still got the same problems'. Perhaps reiterating the point that it is not the information so much as the way we frame the questions that seek

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the information both at the pre and post excavation stage. Linked to this is a need to integrate research questions with revealed evidences through greater collaboration at all levels but particularly between Trusts and Academics, 'promoting the linkage between aspiration and operation...helping to ensure the Research Agenda gains influence in decision making over funding and archaeology has real bite.'

Themes as existing

- **Chronology**

It was felt that this should remain a key, perhaps overriding aim. C14 dating should be routine where suitable materials survive. Of the 750 roundhouses excavated only 10% are dated and often relying on only one date. Work is being undertaken by NMW and a web accessible database of C14 dates from Wales is available (CHECK ADDRESS), further work should take place on building ceramic sequences and dating Celtic art. There should be a targeted dating programme.

- **Settlement and Landuse**

There is now an online database of all excavated roundhouses, noting 187 sites up to 2005 clustering in the NW and south coast. This theme should remain as a major research priority. Work has taken place, notably the Iron Age Defended Enclosures project, a Cadw threat related project which has led to geophysical survey followed by excavation in Dyfed. The bibliography summarises some of this work. We need to 'Understand how sites work in the landscape, permanent/seasonal, understand the social role of hillforts, understand the chronology of hillforts. We cannot understand social organisation without resolving questions of land use first.' Some work has taken place on a limited scale within the Heather and Hillforts project. But there is a need for targeted excavation of type sites for dating purposes as well as longer term nation landscape projects.

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- **Ritual and Burial**

Iron Age mortuary evidence requires synthesis and we need to be aware of structured deposition in settlement contexts eg Karl, Moel y Gaer Llanbedr 2009? Much information has been gained relating to the Bronze Age through the Funeral and Ritual Monuments pan Wales project which has led to some excavation such as Pant y Butler round barrows.

- **Natural Resources**

There was a suggestion that perhaps this theme had limited value.

- **The Environment of Wales**

This should be a major research priority in order to aid understanding of settlement context and social organisation. Palaeobotanical study should be routine where suitable deposits survive. There is a lack of faunal remains; exceptions to this are sites like Llanmaes where there has been an assemblage of 70,000 faunal remains.

- **Material Culture**

Need to move towards an understanding of exchange via social networks. Important work is ongoing relating to artefact studies and we need to build on this. Information coming to light through the Portable Antiquities Scheme needs to be properly understood. There is a need for a resolution of a dated ceramic sequence and metalwork sequence.

- **Processes of Change/Social Change**

The importance of 800 BC as a major episode of social change, problems with 'finding' the Early Iron Age. Need to characterise the nature of settlement and population change and increase after 400 BC, also look at the survival of roundhouses beyond 400 AD.

Sites such as Llanmaes and Brecon Gaer are beginning to produce material which helps develop an understanding of these transition periods, this needs to be extended and built on.

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The ideas above build on and add to the existing Research Agenda paper which was put together in 2004. Suggestions have been made that there should be key doctoral and post-doctoral study which links across the academic, Museum, Cadw and Trusts sectors to achieve these aspirations. This sits alongside a desire to ensure that curatorial archaeologists enforce higher research standards whilst recognising the constraints which exist within the DC process.

Fiona Gale, August 2010