

Neolithic and Early Bronze Age

Early Bronze Age and Neolithic Workshop 16/09/2010

Attendees

Steve Burrow – Chair - NMGW
Gwilym Hughes - Cadw
Louise Austin – Dyfed Archaeological Trust
Louise Barker – Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales
Ian Brooks – Engineering Archaeological Services
Astrid Caseldine – School of Archaeology History and Anthropology, University of Wales Trinity St David
Neil Fairburn – Land and Marine Project Engineering Ltd
Fiona Gale – Denbighshire County Council
Polly Groom – Cadw
Susan Hughes – Dyfed Archaeological Trust
Robert Johnston – University of Sheffield
Jane Kenney – Gwynedd Archaeological Trust
Emily La Trobe-Bateman – Gwynedd Archaeological Trust
Frances Lynch
David Maynard – Landsker Archaeology Ltd
Marian Page – Dyfed Archaeological Trust
Amelia Pannett – Cambrian Archaeological Projects
Hannah Phillips – Bangor University
Sian Rees – Cadw
John Roberts – Snowdonia National Parks Authority
Kate Roberts – Cadw
Rosemary Roberts – Bangor University
Gary Robinson – School of History, Welsh History and Archaeology, University of Bangor
Jeff Spencer – Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust
Adele Thackray – Cadw
Terence Williams

Why make the EBA/LBA distinction? Is this distinction still appropriate?

FG: Good argument for retaining the separation based on the evidence of the monuments. Believes that there is still a distinction between the evidence for the EBA and LBA

However, it was observed that in England the research agenda is moving towards a pan prehistory framework.

TW: Asked why we did not define a distinct Chalcolithic in Wales.

Why do we need a research framework for this period?

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JR: believes it is needed to make the argument for finance and resources. The Research Framework helps to justify funding opportunities.

LA: argues that the framework allows us to focus on particular issues that we need to find answers to – i.e. it helps to channel resources

EB: it helps to argue to the defence of specialist techniques – e.g. dating, which can be expensive.

Chronology

SB: Chronology is seen as a clear priority for many respondents.

LA: This is true not just for this period.

JK: agrees that chronology is key to understanding the past.

FL: However, observes that the teaching of history has moved away from chronological framework towards understanding processes

RJ: Suggests we move away period labels towards the century definitions e.g. 21 century BC etc

Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic transition

SB: Is this still a central theme - does it deserve its own space?

FL: Yes, because of the significance of the economic change.

SB: But why not a more general transitions theme – the study of transitions in general JR: Perhaps this is special because we know too little about it.

RJ: It also seems so critical – even for modern society.

FG: Also important because we see such a major landscape change.

SB: Significant because it cuts across so many other themes.

RJ: In Scotland now seen as a key population change.

SB: If it is still key what can we do to move forward the agenda?

AP: Need more information from pollen studies and other specialist disciplines.

JK: agrees focus on scientific techniques – including DNA and isotope analysis.

AC: More dating needed on charred cereals

GH: Need to identify sites with both Mesolithic and Neolithic components – eg evidence from cave sites

AP: some evidence of both periods from tomb sites

SB: But still problem of time gap at these sites

AP: programmes of fieldwalking around chambered tomb sites might contribute to an understanding of changing land use.

FL: At Carreg Samson – meso material in vicinity of cairn.

Agricultural Practices

SB: Again is this a viable theme?

TW: Yes, agriculture is core to the period. But why no evidence for Neolithic ploughing?

FL: There is some evidence from buried soils under monuments for ard marks –e.g. South Street, Wiltshire.

TW: Would be important to know when ploughing first introduced.

SR: Prestatyn has produced some evidence

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Regional or national agenda?

TW: Central question is – why a separate Welsh agenda and not part of a national agenda?

FL: As you get more evidence you can see regionalisation. Traditionally, everywhere has been compared to Wessex - but now recognised that there are many regional variations

GH: There always has to be a recognition of the wider picture. There is a need for a specific Wales agenda but also recognising that this often cross regional boundaries

GR: Agrees –including the western seaboard and the Irish Sea.

JK: Agrees that there is often more in common between Wales and the west than there is with England

JR: Also has to be a pragmatic recognition of current political scene.

SR: Institutions in Wales need to build our best research agendas elsewhere

SB: In some areas (e.g. tombs) Wales leads way in some aspects and others follow.

FL: West Midlands/eastern Wales boundary was seen as a bit of a desert – but new discoveries

FG: We should always be aware of other agendas elsewhere

RJ: Interregional ideas could be targeted at changing social and technological frameworks

Settlement

JK: Settlement is not just houses but also evidence that is less glamorous. eg neol pottery from little groups of pits and postholes. People probably did not live in substantial houses

GH: The argument for 'strip and record' methodologies 5 years ago has provided the evidence for neol features at a number of sites.

JK: Certainly developed funded work has changed our picture.

EB: Also demonstrated that it is not necessarily expensive from the developers perspective. But needs good skills set to undertake work

SB: What about EBA settlements?

RJ: Asks what is the nature of the activity associated with the material from pits.

GH: we need to understand more about depositional practices.

NF: And we need some more dates from these features

SB: Believes we should be linking themes together? Eg settlement, agriculture, and exploitation of landscape.

GH: Disappointed that the framework has never really developed a coherent realistic strategy with SMART targets

Funerary and ceremonial monuments

JR: Can we make a distinction of monuments from everything else?

FL: Still a need to know the typologies of monuments.

JR: But we also need to know how they work in this broader landscape context.

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Need the killer questions. eg. What is the landscape context of specific group of monuments.

SB: We now have some questions addressed. But what are the key themes/questions we now need to answer – eg environmental questions?

SR: Opportunity of PFRS has been to look at relationships between clusters of monuments - again very much landscape context.

JR: The agenda provides opportunity to collaborate to address issues and sources of funding.

AP: Need for the fragments of information to be pulled together.

LA: Agrees the need for more synthesis

Industrial ____ and raw materials

SB: Raw materials of Wales are unique – is a strong case for defining a 'Welsh personality'

IB: But there are also questions about other raw materials - e.g. flint – where is it coming from?

SB: So there is still mileage in understanding what materials we have?

TW: Question of large amount of lithic debitage – e.g. from stone quarries. Never really examined. There must be potential for new analysis.

EB: Gap relating to geological understanding – e.g. in Gwynedd

FL: Analysis of pottery – e.g. David Jenkins – dependant on nature of geology/rocks

EB: It would be good to have research focus on this.

RJ: Wales also has a key international profile from copper mines. But we know little about the procedures of ore extraction and there is potential for understanding more.

Also smelting sites and processes.

NF: However, Irish EBA smelting sites – very difficult to tell apart

SB: Is there an environmental angle – e.g. re deforestation

AC: Agree that evidence can be detected.

GR: Some work is being done on this - through looking at pollen in Conwy Valley at time of Great Orme

FL: Also pollution studies could assist in this analysis (metal pollution)

Material Culture

SB: Has not greatly feature in the research agenda up to now.

AP: lithics in particular overlooked

SB: Is material culture a theme in its own right or does it need to be integrated into other themes e.g. settlement?

FL: Artefact studies tend to be farmed out to specialists. Often lack of understanding stratigraphic context.

GH: Yes they do undervalue their place in the agenda and yes they do need to be reintegration into the other themes. Also new techniques/analysis of artefacts – developing all the time. Very much a cross-theme issue.

Synthesis needed

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JK: Need synthesis – who is going to do it?

GH: Need universities to engage – through collaborations – eg the Roman Frontiers volume bringing together recent fieldwork.

RT: Thames Valley volumes also perhaps a good model. Has taken advantage of collaborative funding – academic and EA funding.