

## Romano-British 2011

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### **A Review of the last five years work: 2006-2010**

The past quinquennium has been a bountiful one in respect of meeting targets embracing some of the themes of the existing Romano-British Research Agenda. These are: (1) Settlement Patterns; (2) Interaction between Roman occupiers and the indigenes; (3) the Archaeology of the Campaigning years; (4) Funerary and Ritual, and (5) Technology and Industry. New, exciting discoveries have been made, particularly resulting from the application of remote sensing techniques as well as those recorded by excavations and accidental discovery.

#### **(1) Settlement Patterns.**

Problems remain insofar as there continues to be a geographical bias in the distribution and exploration of Romano-British settlements, which is somewhat constrained to two Welsh regions, as exemplified by work at Parc Cybi (Ty Mawr) (Anglesey) and Bryn Parc Cegni (Llandegai) (Gwynedd) in the north-west and Trowbridge (St.Mellons), Undy, Ifton Manor and Rumney Great Wharf in the south-east. Some parts of Wales such as southern Powys still remain largely devoid of evidence for non-military Romano-British settlement, though the discovery of a site at Talgarth raises some expectation as do discoveries at Four Stones (Walton) and Domgay Lane (Four Crosses). The question of whether voids in the distribution pattern reflect an absence of settlement or simply a failure to detect the evidence remains. It furthermore raises the issue to what extent did pre-existing settlement patterns determine those of the Romano-British period? The Dyfed Archaeological Trust's

excavation of the rectilinear enclosure at Troedyrhiw brought to light the first example of a PRIA/Romano-British farmstead in southern Ceredigion, and a manifest type in a hitherto little explored region. Within the year the discovery of a villa at Abermagwr in north Ceredigion, initially as a result of aerial photography followed by geophysical survey, has dramatically altered our perception of the nature of Romano-British settlement in this region, as well as views concerning the distribution of villas in Wales in general. Excavations have shown that the site, situated about a kilometre from the long abandoned fort at Trawscoed, was certainly occupied in the earlier 4th century. The markedly rectangular enclosure bounding the site can be paralleled at Llys Brychan in the Towy valley, where small-scale excavations indicate a Roman date for the ditch bounding the villa, though the relationship between enclosure and villa at Abermagwr remains unclear. Toby Driver has noted comparable, sharply-angled rectangular enclosures in the Rheidol and upper Wye valleys. Could these be candidates for villa sites? Geophysical survey of their interiors may hold the answer.

In north Wales the discovery, through surface collection followed by geophysical survey, of an extensive settlement on the foreshore of the Menai Strait at Tai-cochion (Anglesey), was followed by excavations undertaken by the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust. The settlement comprising rectangular buildings with yards/paddocks fronting onto a grid of streets or lanes it has the appearance of a deserted medieval village, though the excavations reveal it to be of Romano-British date with a 2<sup>nd</sup>-earlier 3<sup>rd</sup> century *floruit*. The settlement is of a wholly novel type in the region and is putatively the ferry point to *Segontium*, and possibly even a focus for the economic exploitation of the island as a transshipment point for metals and agricultural produce. The lesson is clear; we should not be too prescriptive, or at least over-confident in our ability to determine the overall regional settlement pattern of the

Romano-British period even in a well-studied region. Its discovery raises issues such as the status of the site at Tremadoc (Gwynedd). Is this an essentially industrial site linked with the exploitation of local metal sources - the long accepted view- or could it be a high status agricultural settlement?

On the wider front the publication in due course of the CADW-sponsored *Prehistoric Defended Settlements Project* will address the issue of continuity of usage of late prehistoric settlements into the Romano-British period, thus not only bring our knowledge of this key aspect up to date but also enabling us to pin-point sites for future investigation.

As for the possibility Roman roads influencing the post-conquest settlement pattern much work has been done with substantial additions to, and a re-assessment of our knowledge of the road system as a result of the CADW sponsored *Roman Roads Project*. The recent publication of *Roman Frontiers in Wales and the Marches* (Burnham & Davies ed. 2010) contains the most up to date survey of the road system in Wales.

## **(2) Interaction between newcomers and indigenes.**

There have been significant advances in the investigation of Romano-British settlements of a great variety of types, both indigenous and 'Continental' in morphology, and in the analysis of their cultural material allowing an assessment of the differing degrees of interaction or acculturation exhibited by their inhabitants. Other forms of interaction have also been explored. For example, the publication of *Iron Age and Roman Coins in Wales* (Guest & Wells, 2007) allows the interrogation of numismatic data from a diversity of settlement and non settlement contexts against an Empire wide socio-economic background. Prominent in terms of the examination of interaction between Roman occupiers and the indigenous population, with particular reference to the Roman army and its impact, has been the geophysical data resulting from the

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completion of CADW's *Roman Forts Environs Project* and the on-going *Mapping Isca Project* undertaken by Cardiff University, together with work on the Bulmore suburb by the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust. There have been some quite spectacular results. Witness the huge leap on knowledge concerning the environs of the legionary fortress at Caerleon, particularly the western *canabae*, and the *vici* of the auxiliary forts at Caer Gai, Caerhun, Tomen-y-Mur, Bryn y gefeilliau and Pennal in north Wales and Caersws I (Llwyn y brain), Caerau (Beulah), Trawscoed, Llanio, Llandoverly, Brecon Gaer, Llandeilo and Pen y Gaer in mid- and south Wales. This work fills a void about which concern was voiced concerns two decades ago. Once explored the buildings discovered by T.Young south of the Broadway at Caerleon have the potential to radically transform our knowledge of the interrelationship between the garrison and the community at large.

Although we now have excellent and potentially very informative plans of *vici*, some 50% of auxiliary forts reveal no evidence for such, probably due to a variety of reasons rather than the inability of geophysics to detect such extra-mural activity. However, we know very little about why it is that some sites lack a vicus when evidence from the short-lived fort at Llanfor (Gwynedd) shows that a short life for a fort need not necessarily involve the absence of a *vicus*. However, their developmental sequences, building function and overall chronology are largely unknown. Are the ubiquitous courtyard buildings *mansiones* or possibly *macellae* (provision markets)?

There have been parallel geophysical surveys of *vici* elsewhere, particularly in northern England, where they appear to have a 3<sup>rd</sup> century *floruit*. Every opportunity needs to be taken to explore the Welsh *canabae* and *vici* of we are to comprehend the phenomenon, since our *vici* overwhelmingly relate to forts occupied from the Flavian to the Antonine period in contrast to those in northern England whose

occupation sequences are substantially longer. Those Welsh forts which were seemingly occupied into the later 3<sup>rd</sup> century and beyond, and which show evidence of extensive, and possibly long-lived, *vici*, as at Forden Gaer, are especially deserving of attention.

Small-scale, but valuable, work has also been undertaken on urban or quasi-urban settlements. Geophysical survey has been undertaken at Caerwent (Guest & Young) and excavations at Cowbridge (Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust) and Monmouth (Monmouth Archaeology).

### **(3) The archaeology of the early campaigning years: pre-Flavian and Flavian.**

Marching-camps and their context are fully discussed in Davies and Jones *Roman Camps in Wales & the Marches* (2006). Since the publication of this volume new marching camps have been discovered at Gwanas-fawr (Gwynedd) (Barker et al. 2007) and Gwehelog (Mon.): both products of aerial survey. The former survives largely as an earthwork and was originally considered to be a fort, though excavation proved otherwise. The latter lies just north of the Neronian legionary fortress at Usk and the camp has the distinction of being the only known example in a valley bottom location in south east Wales. It is almost certainly pre-Flavian in origin. As for more permanent sites of the pre-Flavian age the pace of discovery has been painfully slow, and excavation has been limited, with small-scale work at Cardiff, Abergavenny, Colwyn Castle, Wonastow and Monmouth. Intriguingly, LIDAR shows a rectangular enclosure of some 5-6 acres, with nicely rounded corners within the SW portion of the large fort at Clyro. It appears to be secondary, and is probably an auxiliary fort. Prof. Barri Jones' excavations at Abertanat and Clawdd Coch are also now published (Silvester 2008.)

The early Flavian period, into which we must now place the large fort at Llanfor, has experienced something of a re-appraisal with geophysics and excavation at Llandovery and Llandeilo demonstrating that in each instance the primary fort was very large, in excess of 8.5 acres and, like Llanfor, probably designed to hold a large composite garrison, a mix of cavalry and infantry. Geophysical survey at Llwyn y brain (Caersws 1) suggest that this large fort may also fall into this category. Geophysical survey at Caerleon has produced some spectacular results, whilst the plans of the auxiliary forts at Tomen y Mur, Bryn y gefeilliau, Caer Gai, Caersws 1, Pen-llwyn, Trawscoed, Caergwanaf and the fortlets at Erglodd and Waun Ddu have also been either clarified or revealed for the first time. Small-scale excavations have been undertaken at Monmouth and Abergavenny whilst large-scale work s at Caerleon is currently exploring a complex of structures, including a large stone courtyard building; possibly used for storage.

The publication of Burnham & Davies (ed.) *Roman Frontiers in Wales and the Marches* (2010) places much of this work as, well as that undertaken across the border, into context.

In this respect I would like to draw attention to recent excavations at Credenhill (Here.) which shows clear evidence, as at Brandon Camp in the same County, of the hill-fort having been used as a base by Roman soldiers in the pre-Flavian period. Hitherto the only possible example of such activity in Wales has been Sudbrook Camp Mon.). The possibility that other late prehistoric earthworks in Wales may also have been utilised as garrison posts or supply bases in the pre-Flavian or early Flavian period is something that requires consideration.

#### **(4) Funerary and Ritual.**

The landmark here must surely be the publication of Pollock's *The Evolution and Role of Burial Practice in Roman Wales* (2006) which

presents a major step forward in the study. Cremation burials of Roman date have been discovered at Bulmore and Abernant Farm near Caerleon, also at Undy and Church Farm, Caldicot (Mon.) and near Carmarthen, whilst inhumations are also a component of the Abernant Farm cemetery. The site of the Welshpool 'Hoard' has also been re-examined and may prove to be a high-status burial.

As for ritual, the discovery of ceramic altar bases, altar tables and sacrificial remains at Bulmore is a significant discovery. However, no major advance in knowledge of cult practices in this high-status context is likely until geophysical survey of the western *canabae* at Caerleon has successfully isolated the temples of Mithras, Diana and Jupiter Dolichenus which are epigraphically attested and are probably located in this part of the *canabae*.

#### **(5) Technology and Industry.**

The discovery of lead-silver smelting furnaces and smelting residues of late 1<sup>st</sup>/early 2<sup>nd</sup> century date on the margin of Borth Bog at Llancynfelin in north Ceredigion has opened a new window on Romano-British mineral exploitation, long suspected but not proven in this part of mid-Wales (Dyfed Archaeological Trust & Birmingham University). Similarly T. Young's discovery of large-scale iron smelting close to the site of the short-lived Flavian fort at Caergwanaf illustrates another important facet of Romano-British industry. More pottery kilns have been discovered in the vicinity of Caerleon at Bulmore and Celtic Manor.

#### **Priority List and additions**

The above five priorities are still valid. In respect of (5) it has been urged that particular attention be paid to commodities which were made outside of, and were reaching Wales in the Romano-British period. I have a particular sympathy here, since I suggested that there should be a sharper focus on the

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artefactual evidence from all types of sites, which is not only applicable to this theme, but also to that of interaction.

I would also like to make a case for heightening the profile of environmental research because of its relevance to themes (1), (2), (3) and (5). Though the amount of environmental data has increased significantly the Welsh evidence is still comparatively limited when compared with some parts of Britain. For example, it is quite astonishing that very little is known about the supply of cereals to a major site such as Caerleon, and, despite our perennially wet climate, we still have no studies of waterlogged deposits comparable to those at *Vindolanda* or Carlisle. Wet-sieving of late Roman deposits currently being excavated at Caerleon may go some way to redressing the former. Comparative data in respect of food supplies and consumption patterns of urban and villa-type settlements is also presently unavailable. We would like answers to such questions as 'Were soldiers and civilians provisioned in a different way?' or 'To what extent were *vicani* engaged in agriculture?'

Over-arching questions concerning changes to the agricultural regime are still beyond our grasp; sometimes because we simply lack the basic evidence such as a dearth of animal bone assemblages. Questions such as 'Was selective breeding of animals practised?' are presently unanswerable, but we should be able to make some headway with a question such as 'Did different social groups have access to particular types of food, particularly meat?' at least in those areas where alkaline soils are dominant and settlement diversity is evidenced.

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