

## **RESEARCH AGENDA FOR WALES: MARITIME AND COASTAL ARCHAEOLOGY**

Maritime archaeology is a comparatively recent addition to professional archaeological responsibilities and thus the paucity of comprehensive record, survey and excavation, competent practitioners or appropriate funding hampers the setting of realistic research agenda. The agenda suggested below, therefore, includes priorities for rectification of these weaknesses in methodology, and legislative and development control as well as recommending strategic or national research topics. It seeks to build on the knowledge base acquired through current or recent studies as well as effective utilisation of opportunities afforded by development.

### Priority Areas for Research:

- **Submerged Prehistoric Land Surfaces: Mapping of Mesolithic Coastline of Wales and Key Littoral Sites**

Increasing offshore development leads to insidious reduction in undeveloped areas, as shorelines are affected by cable routes, marinas, new housing schemes, increased demand for deep water channels for harbours. Developer funding should be accessed to enhance our knowledge systematically, but a larger scale research project designed to map a theoretical line and to test this with excavation when opportunity presents itself would assist. This might lead on from the Trusts' recent project on early prehistoric settlement,

- **Study of Historic Ports and Harbours in Wales**

The recent study of Holyhead harbour undertaken as part of harbour redevelopment shows how rewarding intensive studies of this type may be. Current Trusts' projects are developing this study with work, for example in SE Wales at Newport. This should be continued to cover all historic ports and harbours in Wales.

- **Study of Estuaries as major access points for shipping and settlement**

The work of the Severn Levels Research Group has demonstrated the archaeological potential of the ever changing dynamic tidal estuaries. We might seek to extend the work undertaken during the Cadw funded Coastal Survey of Wales to more intensive studies of selected estuaries - The Dee and Milford Haven at the larger scale and the smaller Dyfi, and Taf/Cywin might be considered.

- **Welsh Lakes**

Studies of lakes in Scotland and Ireland demonstrate the potential of lakes for understanding of prehistoric and later settlement and exploitation. There has been some intensive site based work - such as at Llangors, Llyn Cerrig Bach and Llyn Fawr and Llyn Padarn and Peris but lacustrine archaeology of Wales may be considered under studied. An initial feasibility study designed to survey and explore the use of these inland waters might be productive.

- **Historic Bridging Points and Wharfage**

The recent discovery of a well preserved medieval masonry wharf at Skenfrith in the riverside silts adjacent to the castle and of ancient bridges at Caldicot and Chepstow adds another dimension to our understanding of how settlement worked with its hinterland. Such discoveries are probably always going to be

chance finds, but opportunities during development in likely positions should be grasped.

- Survey of Maritime Hazards

Some areas off the Welsh coasts are well known as historic hazards to shipping. Some of these, such as Sarn Pardrig in Cardigan Bay, are shallow sand banks or reefs where wrecks are numerous but often reasonably well preserved. Areas such as these would repay intensive survey, utilising the enthusiasm of sub aqua groups and local divers, and the NAS to obtain data on historic wreck sites and enhance our poor record of off shore wreck.

- Study of Welsh cargo vessels

The cost of excavation, lifting, conservation and display of ship remains means that projects will be very selective and it is usually only in rescue situations when embarking on such exercises is justifiable – eg Magor Pill (erosion), Llyn Padarn and Peris vessels, the Newport ship, and Barland's Farm (development). Synthesis of the material gained is another problem. Studies of particularity of Welsh craft designed for specific environments or industries might be a useful supplement to maritime studies.

- Technical Advances demonstrated in known wrecks

Post medieval wrecks offshore and in coastal and intertidal zones are numerous and their study and assessment of importance is embryonic. Local knowledge of hulks and more accessible wrecks abounds, however. Known wrecks should be subject to a rapid survey to assess their importance insofar as they add to knowledge of technical advances made within shipping.

### Priorities for Funding

To achieve progress within maritime and coastal archaeology, however, the following must be addressed:

- Enhancement of Maritime Database in NMR and Trusts' SMR and better organisation of maritime development control;
- Completion of excavation reports of historic wrecks in Wales;
- Continuation of diver training and NAS work, and increase in involvement of sub aqua clubs, volunteers and universities;
- Raising of awareness of potential of off-shore development. Currently there is considerable current off shore wind farm development coast, aggregate dredging, oil and gas exploitation Bay), research into tidal energy projects, development of harbours and ports, marinas and housing.
- Synthesis of information from developer funded projects
- Outreach of information to amateurs, divers and general public.

*Paper prepared by Sian Rees (Cadw), September 2004*