

MARITIME AND COASTAL WALES

Introduction

Maritime archaeology is a comparatively recent addition to professional curatorial archaeological responsibilities and the paucity of comprehensive data from survey, excavation and historical research hampers the setting of a realistic research agenda. Nonetheless, increasing awareness of the potential of maritime archaeology to provide evidence for some of the less well explored areas of our prehistory and history, coupled with the rapidly increasing scale of coastal and off-shore development, makes it imperative that we become more responsive to the opportunities for research and understanding. The themes below offer avenues for new research.

Maritime archaeology is a specialised field and one which can be overlooked during programmes organised by a largely terrestrial team; hence its separation into its own paper. There will, however, be overlap with terrestrial period-based agendas; listed here are important questions that may be answered from a maritime perspective as well as, if not better than, from a terrestrial one.

Themes

Early Prehistoric Colonisation and Exploitation

How did the Welsh coastline alter during the early prehistoric periods?

Using geophysical survey techniques, can we predict the positions of potential early prehistoric settlement?

How were ancient coastal and marsh inter-tidal areas exploited in these periods?

What is the extent of the potential for survival of deposits containing archaeological and environmental evidence for these periods?

- The mapping of the coastline of Wales in the early prehistoric periods as it changed through time as sea levels rose requires considerable further study. As survey becomes more sophisticated, this will enhance our understanding of early prehistoric colonisation and exploitation, from the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Mesolithic/Neolithic overlap periods.

Trade and Settlement

How accurately can we establish coastal entry points for settlement during prehistoric periods?

How well do we understand the use of river supply routes to and the wharfage of medieval strategic sites such as castles and towns?

What is the potential of existing ports and harbours for preservation of early features?

- The utilisation of the Welsh shores for trade and settlement and the development of the coastal infrastructure of ports, harbours, and of coastal and estuarine navigation systems are of enormous importance. The study of the establishment of trading and supply routes across seas

and along coasts and rivers will enhance understanding of settlement and control at every period.

Welsh Ships and Boat Traditions

Is there in any sense a Welsh boat-building tradition, or is the pattern diverse, reflecting different geographical traditions or industrial requirements?

How well do we understand the diversity and development of local vessel types in Wales?

- The study of distinctive Welsh types of vessels in response to local conditions, the requirements of specific industries, and the availability of local materials and traditions, will assist in our understanding of the contribution Wales has made to the diversity of the UK boat-building industry.

Priorities

To understand the early prehistoric colonisation and exploitation of the coastline of Wales as it changed through time, by studies of the terrestrial evidence and associated submerged landscapes.

To obtain a greater appreciation of the utilisation of the Welsh shores for trade and settlement, coastal and estuarine navigation, and the development of the coastal infrastructure of ports and harbours.

The study of distinctive Welsh types of vessels in response to local conditions, the requirements of specific industries and the availability of local materials and traditions.