

Post-Medieval Wales to 1750

Introduction

No other period presents such comprehensive problems as this last half-millennium, because we inhabit and are obliged to develop this massive research resource. Sheer size makes it difficult to quantify for decision-makers or to make value judgments about. Yet crucial questions about what is best saved or discarded have to be asked on a daily basis. The most appropriate policies for education, scholarship, preservation and conservation of this total environment will only be achieved through carefully-formulated, cooperative action, stimulated, if not funded from central government. This will need to record, research, publish and promote the resource. Crucially, achieving these objectives will also require the retention or resuscitation of the appropriate skills to comprehensively

Research Themes

What Chronologies are best deployed in these circumstances?

Several methodologies have been tried and tested as archaeology has increasingly achieved a more credible place in investigation for historians. Here the objectives must be to: · Integrate material or excavated remains with written sources; · Establish a more reliable frame-work of architectural and landscape styles; · Accelerate dendrochronology programmes where appropriate; Investigate relatively recent sites using the same rigorous scientific techniques as are applied in earlier periods. This means, for example, adopting optical thermal luminescence dating for problem sites where stratification and cultural contexts are absent, and also employing palaeoecology to help understand vegetation, soil processes and climate change; · Putting *artifact studies* on a firmer basis, again applying the laboratory techniques long-used for investigating earlier periods.

Which types of settlement demand most attention?

There needs to be a greater investigation of deserted and living rural settlement and landscape alongside the medieval in both upland and lowland areas; ·programmes for recording all Listed Buildings should be established and completed and a new survey of all farm buildings undertaken. Help should be sought from Local Authorities to address the spirit of most UDPs, which are currently threatening to accelerate the rates of demolition and conversion of older buildings generally; All Scheduled Ancient Monuments should be surveyed and urgent attention paid to selectively scheduling more vulnerable features like cottage and farm gardens, animal pens, land boundaries and water-supplies; An exhaustive survey should be undertaken of all surviving earthwork features as these are also vulnerable to destruction from changes in land-use.

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What needs to be investigated in Villages and Towns?

Pre-industrial settlement patterns should be sought in urban areas, and all older buildings recorded and/or protected wherever criteria demand it; · Documentary and map-based studies should be addressed at nucleated settlement development after the 16th century and a study methodology urgently applied to existing housing stock. Planning policies should be promoted which respect surviving building patterns as well as rarer vernacular types;· Efforts need making to encourage regular archaeological intervention as part of the Listed Buildings Consent Procedure, as without it, a great deal of information will be lost and with it, fundamental value is added to the historic resource.

Communal institutions in villages and towns need surveying and appropriate conservation measures taking into consideration. These should include community halls, schools, hospitals, libraries, mechanics' and working men's institutes, war and other memorials, however recent in date. All are vulnerable to change and to loss without record. Public spaces like parks, urban and village commons need identifying and searching to ensure that any archaeology they hide is protected or properly recorded.

What Land-Use and Enclosure studies should be undertaken?

Studies of land-use chronicling agricultural and industrial practices on the lands lost by the Monasteries need initiating;· Fugitive palimpsest features of agricultural activity discovered in AP and documentary searches (like rig and furrow) should be mapped with GIS. Ways must be found of dating the currency of rig types regionally;

What work is needed in Estates, Parks and Gardens?

There is a need to intensify studies of all relict estates, identifying and documenting deer parks, recording all buildings, identifying horticultural and parkland features and tracing boundaries; Interdisciplinary studies of hedges and wall boundaries should be encouraged and the application of current legislation should be fully policed to maintain them as valuable bio-geographical and archaeological study resources ; Palaeoecological techniques should be used address problems of land-use as in earlier periods.

What are the problems of Religious Sites and Burial Grounds?

Churchyards, graveyards and cemeteries urgently need full architectural surveys. Many surveys have already been undertaken by genealogists, but these tend not to take stock of the architectural contribution of (sometimes crumbling) monumental features. Many graves are partly buried and remain vulnerable to graveyard clearances, if not even to normal maintenance regimes. Conservation policies for these are needed more closely involving church authorities; Existing church and chapel surveys are needed to raise public awareness and tackle the growing problems of abandonment and of re-use; As human remains are removed

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around during changes to these monuments, full forensic investigations are desirable (including DNA studies) before re-burial; · Some churches already have inventories of all vulnerable furnishings and archive materials undertaken by volunteers. More of this work is needed and the church authorities need convincing about the importance of all the material in their care as well as an understanding of the roles of the local Record Offices (to deposit documents and photographs), the potential of the Local Authorities to help maintenance and conservation programmes, and the roles of national organizations to survey and protect.

What else requires identifying, recording and conserving?

Long-term work should be focused on identifying, mapping and protecting battlefield, particularly Civil War sites, as well as places where eighteenth and nineteenth-century skirmishes of socio-economic importance took place; · the Defence of Britain Project may be usefully re-examined to facilitate greater in-depth surveys of rapidly diminishing 20th century defences to help complete programmes of protecting features of national interest. · Comprehensive surveys are also need on MoD Training areas to chart their origins, construction histories, development and contribution to warfare studies; ·

Do Parklands and Gardens have a particular call on Surveying Resources?

Wales's Register of Parklands and Gardens was completed in 2002. Very few of the sites it designates have been recorded or survey archeologically, so there is an urgent demand to address these, as well as all unprotected 'complete' garden and parklands, at the same time offering greater protection and advice on conservation measures to all remnant damaged sites and those dismembered by later habitation; Evidence for market gardening and allotments needs to be collected and inventorised;

What is known of Rural Crafts?

Expertise on rural crafts tends to be concentrated in local or national museums (particularly at St Fagans). Much needs to be done on a local basis, identifying the sites of rural craft and industry, including those set up in the 20th century which may have had a tourism remit. Details should include potteries, smithies, textile and craft workshops. · The information collected might be used educationally to encourage the continuance or resuscitation of skills, from hedge-laying and mole-catching to thatching.

Is Wales adequately staffed to address these tasks?

Central government currently a tendency to reduce specialist expertise in the areas demanded to expedite the tasks outlined above. Although government support has been lent to some training schemes aimed at raising standards in some specialist archaeological activities, greater resourcing is still needed. In particular, more permanent professional staff are needed in post to address the size and quality of Wales's post-medieval heritage resource.

Summary

It is almost impossible to address intellectual questions for a post-medieval/modern Research Agenda without first getting to grips with the size of the resource and its rate of change. Greater understanding of the problem demands: a. quantification of the resource i.e. record and survey; b. more collaborative and cooperative work promoting sustainable conservation and preservation policies; and, c. education within government, among politicians, and within the profession of archaeology itself.

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