

Post Medieval Wales (1539-1750)

INTRODUCTION

The period 1539-1750 is not only of considerable interest to archaeologists and other heritage professionals but is also important in defining and understanding the forces that have shaped present-day Wales. The 1530s saw the reformation of the church, wide-ranging changes in land-ownership, and the Laws in Wales acts, which incorporated Wales into the Westminster state. The civil war is known to have had a profound impact on Wales; less is understood of the effect of the settlement of 1688. The mid-18th century saw the early phases of the economic, social and technical changes which within a further century transformed Wales into an 'industrial nation'. This period as a whole see the appearance of what is now recognised as the Welsh farmhouse, in all its varieties, and of early surviving examples of the dwellings of the rural poor, and bears witness to the growth of religious pluralism and to the revival of urban life. However, this period has been felt to lack the emotive appeal both of the Age of the Princes and of the Industrial/Modern period, with their potential for narratives of transformation and conflict.

RELEVANT RECENT RESEARCH 2005-2010

In a Welsh context, the following research publications are noted:

- Peter Crew: *Ironworking in Merioneth from Prehistory to the 18th Century* (2009).
- David Gwyn: *Gwynedd: Inheriting a Revolution: The Archaeology of Industrialisation in north-west Wales* (Phillimore, 2006).
- Richard Haslam, Julian Orbach, Adam Voelcker: *The Buildings of Wales: Gwynedd* (Yale, 2009).
- Thomas Lloyd, Julian Orbach and Robert Scourfield: *The Buildings of Wales: Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion* (Yale, 2006).
- Richard Suggett: *Houses and History in the March of Wales: Radnorshire 1400-1800* (RCAHMW: 2005)

Cadw's urban characterisation work is adding to an understanding of the dynamic of Welsh towns, including many which pre-date industrialisation. This has proved an effective way of identifying both changes within the urban fabric and continuities between periods. This process has already increased understanding of the urban dimension of Welsh life in this period. Historic Landscape Characterisation continues to add to understanding of the wider environment.

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The *Dyddio Hen Dai Cymreig/Dating Old Welsh Buildings* dendrochronology studies have greatly increased understanding of building dynamic in rural areas of North Wales since 2007. *Adnabod Ardudwy* has produced some interesting insights into the cultural and historical dimensions of landscape.

In addition, a number of individuals in the archaeological community are known to be pursuing their own research interests in, for instance, milling, mining, parklands etc.

The study of post-Medieval archaeology in Britain and Ireland has benefited from a number of recent studies. These include:

- Audrey Horning and Marilyn Palmer (eds): *Crossing Paths or Sharing Tracks? Future Directions in the archaeological study of post-1550 Britain and Ireland* (Boydell and Brewer 2009)
- James Lyttleton and Colin Rynne: *Plantation Ireland: Settlement and Material Culture c. 1550-c.1700* (Four Courts, 2009)

Mention should also be made in this context of the *Tameside* series written by Dr John Walker and Dr Michael Nevell which has specifically addressed continuities and change in the rural/industrial landscape on the periphery of Manchester from the Medieval to the Industrial/Modern period.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK PRIORITIES

Themes

Dr Stephen Briggs in the 2007 Research Framework specifically considers:

- chronologies
- settlement
- land-use and enclosure
- estates, parks and gardens
- religious sites and burial grounds.

Methodology

The 2007 Research Framework advocates:

- integration of material or excavated remains with written sources
- establishment of a more reliable frame-work of architectural and landscape styles
- an accelerated dendrochronology programme where appropriate
- investigation of recent sites with the same rigour as is applied to earlier sites
- a firmer basis for artefactual studies

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The 2007 Research Framework identifies the challenges facing this period as:

- understanding the size of the resource and its rate of change through quantification of the resource by record and survey
- more collaborative and cooperative work promoting sustainable conservation and preservation policies
- education within government and within the profession of archaeology itself.

RECENT LITERATURE

Publications

The following publications have been identified:

C. Stephen Briggs: 'Peat Charcoal and Archaeological Dating in Post-Medieval Wales', *Archaeology in Wales* **45** (2005), 85.

K Davies: 'Secular wall paintings in the Welsh Marches, in R Gowing and R Pender (eds): *All manner of murals: the history, techniques and conservation of secular wall paintings* (London: Archetype Publications, in association with English Heritage and the Institute of Conservation, 2007), 23-32

G Evans: 'Clay tobacco pipes collected by Mr. Gwyn Rees of Wrinstone Farm, nr Wenvoe, Vale of Glamorgan', *Society for Clay Pipe Research Newsletter* **70** (2006), 41-45.

M Gaimster: 'Post-medieval fieldwork in Britain, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands in 2007', *Post-Medieval Archaeology* **42** (2007) 341-411 [espec 410-11].

GGAT Evaluation: *The Pines, Whitchurch* Cardiff (2007).

GGAT: *Watching Brief 13-14 Mill Street, Newport* (2008).

D Higgins: 'A possible seventeenth century clay pipe kiln from Buckley, Clwyd', *Society for Clay Pipe Research Newsletter* **69** (2006), 38-40.

R V Hughes: 'The limestone quarries of north-east Montgomeryshire and the borders', *Montgomeryshire Collections* **95** (2007), 85-102

J Kissock and R Johnston: 'Sheephouses and sheepcotes – a study of the post-medieval landscape of Cefn Drum, Gower', *Studia Celtica* **41** (2007), 1-23.

L A Leigh: 'Yr Hen Danerdy: the Old Tannery. A history of the leather industry in Machynlleth 1610-1900', *Montgomeryshire Collections* **95** (2007), 103-10

H Mytum: 'Popular attitudes to memory, the body, and social identity: the rise of external commemoration in Britain, Ireland and New England', *Post-Medieval Archaeology* **40** (2006), 96-110.

N Page: 'A survey of the charcoal-fuelled ironworking industries of Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire', *Post-Medieval Archaeology* **41** (2007), 180-99.

M Ponsford: 'Post-medieval fieldwork in Britain and Northern Ireland in 2005', *Post-Medieval Archaeology* **40** (2006), 316-410 [Wales: pp408-10].

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- M Ponsford: "Post-medieval fieldwork in Britain and Northern Ireland in 2006", *Post-Medieval Archaeology* **41** (2007), 318-416 [espec 411-416].
- R Silvester and J Alfrey: 'Vaynor: a landscape and its buildings in the Severn Valley' in J Finch and K Giles (eds): *Estate landscapes: design, improvement and power in the post-medieval landscape* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), 39-55.
- A R Skellern, S K Haslett and S P Open: 'The potential area affected by the 1607 flood event in the Severn Estuary, UK: a preliminary investigation', *Archaeology in the Severn Estuary* **18** (2007), 59-65.
- B Taylor: 'Penllergare mill rediscovered', *Gower* **58** (2007), 19-22
- Simon Timberlake: 'The Excavation of An 18th Century Lead Stamping Mill on the Nant Yr Onnen, Cwmystwth, Ceredigion', *Archaeology in Wales* **47** (2007)

Electronic publications

Susan Fielding: *Denbigh Town Hall* (RCAHMW, 2008)

Unpublished material

Unpublished reports are not included here. They mostly consist of watching briefs and assessments only relevant to the period in that they identified a small amount of post-Medieval pottery.

AMENDMENTS TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS: PRIORITIES

Recent context

It is evident that the study of post-Medieval building stock in Wales has been advanced by the several book-length studies published since 2005, as well as by dendrochronology, and that Crew and Gwyn have both considered the longer history of industry on a regional basis. Approaches to the post-Medieval period in a British/Irish context have been informed by the studies edited by Horning and Palmer, Lyttleton and Rynne as well as by the *Tameside* series, but as yet there has no comparable attempt to produce a similar study for Wales.

The personnel and intellectual deficit identified in 2007 is likely only to grow worse given present economic constraints. It is therefore considered important that the ambitions of the Research Framework be seen to be realistic and credible.

In the light of the foregoing, the following themes are re-evaluated. Additional themes are considered separately below.

Chronologies

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Understanding of the fundamental changes within the 15-16th century and 18th-early 19th century periods is not always helped by the division of interests and priorities amongst archaeologists into Medieval, post-Medieval and Industrial/Modern. It is considered that the transitional periods should themselves be a focus of study.

Settlement

Challenges for the immediate future are the integration of above-ground archaeology and building archaeology with the insights of architectural historians, integration of material and documentary sources, and ensuring the support of planning and conservation officers.

Markets and fairs (frequency and location), regional services – shops, courts, inns, postal services, communications, and the evidence for a professional/merchant class – all merit further study.

Dendrochronological studies since 2007 have greatly increased understanding of building dynamic in rural areas but the *Dyddio Hen Dai Cymreig/Dating Old Welsh Buildings* project has so far been confined to North Wales.

Land-use and enclosure

Priorities remain those identified in 2007. The mapping of landscape change and the study of high-status dwellings and their gardens and parks needs to be integrated with study of evolving social/tenurial relations. Identification, Recording and assessment of features such as corn-mills, corn-drying kilns, *pandai*, dovecotes, fishponds and deer parks is essential to understanding the rural economy of this period. Deserted rural settlements need examining in greater detail – the reasons and chronology of desertion (climate, social, tenurial, technological etc) remain little understood. Palaeoecological studies can be integrated with knowledge of rural crafts and with documentary research.

Parks, gardens and horticulture

The study of landscapes created for recreational and aesthetic reasons has not been progressed. The study of historic horticulture remains neglected.

Religious Sites and Burial Grounds

It is accepted that the generation up to and including the 1530s saw church-building on a significant scale; study of church archaeology and of archaeology of the reformation needs therefore not only to retain its focus on monastic dissolution as initiating change in the post-Medieval environment

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but also to develop strategies to overcome the late-Medieval/post-Medieval divide.

The frequent assumption that there was little ecclesiastical new build or alteration thereafter until the 19th century should be tested against the evidence of the archaeology of churches and private chapels, including liturgical/internal arrangements, and of the archaeology of commemoration. Dendrochronology might also be applied to churches.

The potential of DNA studies of graveyards and the loss of evidence through removal of memorial stones, to which attention was drawn in 2007, is reiterated here.

The archaeology of recusancy and of early Protestant nonconformity remains little understood.

Military/defensive

The process by which the Medieval castle retained a defensive function into the 17th century and thereafter were either abandoned or became purely high-status dwellings. Civil War sites need to be identified.

Additional themes

The following themes which could not be considered in 2007 are discussed here:

Industry

There is abundant evidence of industrial activity in the post-medieval period but it is little understood. Continuing work on late bloomeries and early blast-furnaces emphasises the continuities with earlier periods and innovations, and the international context for further work. What appear to be early 17th colliery workings on Anglesey should be a priority for further study. Other evidence of coal-mining in this period, as it comes to light, should be studied in the context of English coal-fields which might have influenced it, just as other industries need to be considered in a broader context, including evidence of merchant capital. The mining, quarrying and early chemical industries of north-east Wales remain neglected, other than around Bersham. Sites of tanneries and of the smaller rural extractive industries used in soap and glass manufacture should be identified; evidence of woodland management in this period should be sought.

Cultural material

Artefacts from the period 1539-1750 are little understood by comparison with earlier or later periods.

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Palaeoenvironmental evidence

Palaeoenvironmental evidence is an under-exploited resource, rarely applied, yet with as great a potential to inform study of the urban environment as the rural in this period.

HOW MIGHT THESE PRIORITIES BE ADDRESSED?

Methodologies

- Material evidence and written evidence should be integrated more closely; written evidence should include both Welsh and English sources.
- Rigorous scientific techniques should be used where possible and appropriate.
- Palaeoecology is an under-used tool.
- The study of cultural material should be put on a firmer basis.

Conclusions

This paper endorses the importance of quantifying the resource, as identified in 2007 by Dr Stephen Briggs. Encouragement to more collaborative work is vital, raising awareness of the significance of the historic environment in all its aspects within the broader community of Wales and identifying new ways of working that foster fresh perspectives. Imaginative collaboration is particularly important given the immediate challenges of the economic situation.

There is as yet little firm intellectual basis for the study of the post-Medieval archaeology of Wales.

WHERE HAS THE RESEARCH FRAMEWORK BEEN USED?

It is not clear that the research framework has so far been used to justifying research or funding or in the planning process.