

Romano-British Workshop: 16th September 2010

Report by the Chair of the session: Dr J L Davies

The discussive section was attended by 12 persons. It is somewhat disappointing to record the absence from the Conference of a number of individuals whose expertise lies within the field of Romano-British studies. This undoubtedly led to a somewhat diminished discussion of the themes and the targets set by the Research Framework over the past quinquennium, though the discussion remained lively and well focused throughout. Indeed, the session was notable for the level of agreement reached in respect of the five themes, all of which were regarded as just as significant and relevant to-day as they were five years ago.

The five themes were as follows:

1. Settlement Patterns, together with work on the Roman road system in respect of the possible influence upon settlement patterns as a whole. Insofar as the roads element is concerned everyone agreed that the CADW sponsored *Roman Roads Project* had delivered. A synopsis of the results would appear in the forthcoming *Roman Frontiers in Wales and the Marches*. It was felt that a full report was deserving of publication. All agreed that the geographical bias in respect of the settlement pattern required remedying. This was especially so in NE Wales mid-Wales and the southern Marches. The significant roles of aerial photography and geophysical survey as cost effective research tools in remedying this problem was accepted, though little real headway could be made without selective excavation upon enclosures of LPRIA/RB type. The Chair emphasized the necessity of keeping an open mind in respect of settlement type and overall distribution following the discovery of the villa at Abermagwr (Ceredigion) and the extensive coastal settlement at Tai-cochion (Anglesey).

2. Interaction between newcomers and indigenes. Discussion was almost entirely focused upon those settlements linked to military establishments, namely *canabae* and *vici*. All present acknowledged the fact that the CADW sponsored *Roman Forts Environs Project* had produced some quite spectacular results and was hailed as an unqualified success. The significance of on-going geophysical survey in the *canabae* at Caerleon as part of the *Mapping Isca* project engendered considerable discussion, especially in relation to the discovery of hitherto unparalleled buildings to the west of the fortress. It was acknowledged that even small-scale developer-funded excavations have the potential to substantially enhance our knowledge of the environs of Roman military settlements, as at Caersws and Bulmore and that every opportunity be
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taken to investigate these in the future. The Chair led discussion towards other aspects of interaction such as the role of coinage and utilitarian commodities on settlements of diverse types.

3. The archaeology of the early campaigning years: pre-Flavian and Flavian. The Chair began by announcing that the publication of *Roman Frontiers in Wales and the Marches* was expected before the close of the year and that this together with the already published *Roman Camps in Wales & the Marches* would set the agenda for future research. The dearth of demonstrably pre-Flavian camps and military sites was a problem that could not be easily resolved, though the recent discovery of the cropmark a camp on the floor of the Usk valley, close to the fortress at Usk indicated that aerial photography had a vital role as a research tool in this respect. It was pointed out that test-pitting and excavations of forts of Flavian date, as at Brecon Gaer and Neath, had the potential to unlock the problem of the missing pre-Flavian forts. The Chair raised the possibility that further examples of large early Flavian forts of the kind discovered at Dynefor Park (Llandeilo) and Llandovery might be discovered beneath, or close to known Flavian forts and that the military deployment of the period was much more complex than hitherto thought. The significant contribution of the programme research excavations at Caerleon both to our knowledge of the initial planning of the fortress, as well as its late Roman history, was discussed.

4. Funerary and Ritual.

All present were aware of the singular lack of information concerning Romano-British ritual practices in Wales when compared with England. How might Welsh ritual sites be manifest in the archaeological record given the sparsity of evidence for temples? Discussion revolved around ritual deposits in wells, pits and the significance of holy wells in a medieval context. It was felt that research focussed on the last named might prove fruitful.

The possibility of applying geophysical survey to locate cemeteries in the vicinity of military sites and urban centres was discussed. The so-called stone 'watch-tower' to the east of Caerleon was considered to be a funerary monument.

5. Technology and industry

It was felt that this remained a somewhat neglected and specialised field of research, lying within the domain of a few individuals. A more integrated approach was required, spanning the Anglo-Welsh border insofar as metallurgy was concerned. A focus upon the study of commodities manufactured within and without Wales, and their

distribution linked to site types, might well prove highly beneficial. This was regarded as an important approach for the study of social and economic interaction as well as familiarising students with a wide range of artefactual evidence.

The Chair broached the topic of environmental research and its significance, pointing to lacunae in the body of evidence for Wales as a whole. A focus upon sites situated in geologically or pedologically favoured areas (for example, on limestone if the recovery of bone is deemed desirable) might prove rewarding. Sampling strategies for the recovery of environmental data at Caerleon was under way and regarded as long overdue and most welcome.

A topic raised spanning all aspects of the study of the Romano-British period in Wales was that of the future role of the amateur. The discussion became somewhat diffuse though it was by all agreed that the contribution of the amateur remained important, whether as part of a County or local society or on an individual basis.

Research Frameworks outside Wales

See West Midlands regional Research Framework for Archaeology at www.iaa.bham.ac.uk/research/projects/wmrrfa/index.shtml

Also: James, S. & Millett, M. (Eds.) *Britons and Romans: advancing an archaeological agenda*, CBA Research Report 125, 2001.