

A Research Framework for the Archaeology of Wales Southwest Wales – Post Medieval 22/12/2003

Introduction

The remit of this assessment is much broader than comfortably permits of a balanced overview of all relevant component topics. So the topics dealt with here are select. Generally speaking, the period covers both architecture and archaeology from 1600 to the present day and includes connected industrial features. Although the presentation of this text complies with the general template suggested by the steering group, it has been found necessary to subdivide some of the topics. Although the organisation of topics within this overview follows the general pattern set out in the accompanying bibliography, it departs significantly in places for reasons of style and completeness.

Settlements

Dyfed is an area of diverse settlement-types. In the more lowland areas there can be densely distributed and in fact height above sea level is a major governing factor for settlement distribution. In common with the rest of Wales, literally tens of thousands of place-names survive. These are best recorded on estate maps, Tithe Award and large-scale OS Maps. Their survival on current maps indicates the former existence of individual homes or farmsteads. Today a handful of towns of up to 20,000 inhabitants (Aberystwyth, Cardigan Carmarthen, Haverfordwest, Llanelli, Pembroke and Tenby) testify to continuing commercial, communal and even industrial success.

Existing knowledge: Strengths

The Tithe Award and OS maps, particularly the pre-grid 25-in series (usually 2 editions c 1880 and c 1900), but for some urban areas there have been 3 or 4 [c 1915-20 and later]), provide useful testimony to the development of settlement patterns and the evolution of holdings. Interests up to press have included usually only partial studies of individual building types (Davies; Smith 1976/88), and a start has been made on examining lower status settlements in the uplands and higher status settlements (largely through historic garden study [Lloyd 1986]) in the lowlands. A debate has begun on the origin of nucleated settlements (Kissock 1993), and there are some interesting studies on the influence of industry on industrial towns, particularly Pembroke Dock and Milford Haven.

Existing Knowledge: Weaknesses

Excavations on settlement sites of all types are few and far between. And indeed, at present it can still be difficult to distinguish between low status post-medieval settlement sites and earlier sites. Tro'r Dillwyn was unusual, if not unique as an upland stading research project (Benson and Crane 1998), in common with James Barfoot's unpublished 17th-18th century farm site lying immediately outside the Ceredigion boundary, which provide insights into a social stratum close to

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subsistence level. Many similar sites are known. For example in the Hafod area in Cwm Ystwyth alone there are perhaps half a dozen well-preserved medieval to post-medieval earthworks still lacking detailed or contextual survey (for example Lan Fawr – which disappears after the Blake Map in Cumberland's Attempt to Describe Hafod in 1796), or which do not yet enjoy statutory protection (listed on END; Briggs 1998).

Although there has long been interest in medieval and post medieval pottery (for e.g. Knight 1970) hardly a single conventional working or abandoned farm site has been examined archaeologically for that resource. Most of the post-medieval pottery so far known from north Dyfed is unpublished and comes from dumps that belonged to Plas Penglais, Aberystwyth (in the Ceredigion Museum). It was accessed from beneath the garden of a detached house in Cae Melin. The writer's own house, Llwyn Deiniol, Llanddeiniol, has produced some post-medieval pottery stratified in the surface of a pitched stone animal standing of probably c 1800.

Of higher status sites, Aberglasney is published (Blockley 2002; Briggs 1999); Henllys isn't, and at present little protection is afforded the archaeological resource known to exist around most of the buildings otherwise listed for their historical or architectural importance (Briggs 1999; Howells 2003).

Another problem is constant attrition of the resource. Most mud-walled cottages and many small agricultural houses are currently under threat of demolition or enlargement, usually without any record at all. Furthermore, current Planning Law tends to favour demolition of mud walled houses because of inflexible constraints relating to environmental health (Davies 1991).

If there is any single major weakness in settlement studies for this period, it lies in a poor comprehension of surviving vernacular farms, the sites of which have suffered continuing attrition through European or British agricultural grants. The yards of many or most have acquired concrete aprons, some probably still covering pitched animal standings or decorative pebbled drains and paths. Little is understood of their chronologies, and although a diapered example comparable to the Aberglasney example said to be 16th century is known at Laques (Carms) - still in use, and probably late 18th century at the earliest (END s.v. Laques) - there appear to be no current research programmes to record this diminishing resource.

With the exception of Suggett's publication on properties designed by John Nash (Suggett 1995), there are so far few studies of polite architecture, and some 'consultant's reports' seen by the writer play loose and fast with the remotest possibilities about connections between some of the better-known names and local landlord builders or estate designers. There are currently few obvious studies of later architects and their works, though it seems likely that a number of uncoordinated researchers are currently following up Victorian and Edwardian buildings. The surveys of gardens and estate nuclei produced for the Gardens Register by Cadw and RCAHMW have not in the main employed exacting survey or consistent research techniques for record purposes (Cadw 2002), and the archaeological resource of post-medieval estates remains a relatively unrecognised and often quite unprotected resource.

Many workers' houses remain, though studies of them in Dyfed seem to have been more incidental than intentional. By now most have been visually vandalised by the 'improvement' of double-glazing (often LA grant-aided). It is a curious fact that some of the best-preserved workers' housing (Lowe 1977) is still to be found around abandoned industrial workings in rural areas, though tragic that part-demolition was permitted of important workers' barracks like those which

graced the roadside by Cwm Ystwyth. There are few published studies of any 20^t house types in Dyfed. Greg Stevenson has mentioned the odd seaside art deco house. A good example recently came onto the market in Borth. But whereas the history of the housing estate has been started, there seem yet to be no architectural studies of them, and it is difficult to see any will to preserve surviving exemplars of the type or to record their interiors as older inhabitants die. This may in fact identify the differences in approach between what the national recording agencies consider to be important architecturally, and what may be of future social value for educational and museum work.

In summary, because they tend still be inhabited, post-medieval settlements ought to be considered to be among the archaeological and architectural resource currently under greatest threat. Only a limited number of sites are protected and even fewer are well documented, surveyed or recorded.

Research Opportunities

The opportunities to record and research buildings are almost as diverse as the types of habitation feature themselves. However, given the unremitting rate of attrition of the resource, it is important that national bodies - Cadw and RCAHMW now take a much closer interest in monitoring change. And such change comes not only through planning applications from the general public, but is also often stimulated or supported by imaginative grants for land or building improvement (ERDF, HLF, Objective One, etc). All resource assistance from such quarters needs more closely monitoring with a view jointly to offering more prescriptive advice on managing the conservation importance; preserving the historical value of the resource; maintaining a more comprehensive record and underwriting all complementary research that may seem necessary during the process.

RCAHMW's involvement in looking at some farm buildings with Archaeology Cambria in Dyfed through Tir Gofal is an important step in this regard, but there have been and probably will continue to be other areas of central or local government developmental funding where initiatives for research could be seized to great advantage. It is vital that local authorities be involved in any proposed monitoring processes, and in this regard; it would be even more advantageous if all three component counties could be persuaded to appoint, or to restore the posts of Conservation Officers within their Planning Departments.

Land-use and Enclosure

The Uplands of Dyfed remain an important unused research resource, the in-depth survey and analysis of which is likely to help towards explaining the fascinating phenomena of Hafotai (Davies (Elwyn) 1978), and in this regard it will be interesting to hear more of Terry James's work on the Doethie.

It is believed that much of the present-day agricultural field pattern was well established by 1600, though medieval elements probably show through in many places, and it has to be asked how far English dominion or landscape patterns are traceable (Davies, (Margaret) 1973; Howells 1971; Sambrook 2000a). If differences were at one time visible in earlier regional land-use patterns, few, if any are now readily distinguishable. The process of later agricultural enclosure (and drainage) is well-documented, and generations of maps enable a better appreciation of the process over the past 250 years. Changing regimes of plant and animal husbandry are less well understood, however. These may anyway also closely relate to settlement types. The degree of upland occupation and the ways

in which the uplands were used remain important but tend to remain open questions.

Existing knowledge: Strengths

A great deal is known from printed sources about agricultural methods and the process of land enclosure since George Owen of Henllys's day (c 1600). Some field patterns are now preserved by Rural Conservation Orders (for e.g. Llanon), so it might be argued that field types are now better appreciated in countryside management quarters. Good historical research has been done on the evolution of enclosure and drainage at Hafod (some published) and Castlemartin (by A. J. Parkinson, mostly unpublished). More generally the work of Brian (B.E.) Howells has done much to improve an understanding of the process of agriculture, particularly in the 17th and 18th century.

Existing Knowledge Weaknesses

Much of the research so far undertaken on enclosure remains unpublished. Although GAT has begun a pilot study nationally, there are still no general surveys of field boundary or hedge types and no published summaries could be traced for this essay which are yet documented by excavation or palynology. So, for e.g., when Llangwryfon windfarm was built in 1991, a number of supposedly 17th century field banks were swept away without survey or soil study.

No thorough studies have been undertaken to tie published accounts of 20th century land-use to field patterns, to erosion, or to the potential of soils for hosting plant macrofossils, some of which may have suffered or be suffering from overenthusiastic applications of agricultural chemicals. In this regard claims made about the importance of some 20th century land-use (e.g. by Sir George Stapledon at Pwllpeiran) is not yet documented through botanical surveys.

The value of palaeoecological studies to recent agricultural change and its relationship to climate has hardly yet been realised for this period (Butler 1984; Castledine 1990; 2003; Rees 1997). Yet, the odd analysis of estate accounts apart, and in spite of odd references to late eighteenth-century tourists' accounts of the area - both printed and MS - it would probably be true to say that we know less about vegetational changes over the past three and a half centuries (Linnard 2000) than we do for some aspects of change during Later Prehistory.

Research Opportunities

There are almost endless opportunities for field observation, for work on local documents, and for publication. For the uplands, there is a clear need for GPS and EDM surveying surviving far more man-made and even some apparently natural features on the larger scale, rather than by simply recording them through brief word descriptions. The ongoing absence of any credible cultural or chronological contexts for most man-made (mainly earthwork) features currently being recorded from upland landscapes is a problem which needs urgently addressing by large-scale excavation and palynological sampling. Similarly, a sampling programme from abandoned lowland fields and their boundaries might yield interesting dividends and help complement our understanding of post-medieval enclosure and land-use.

Religious Sites and Burial Grounds

A. Places of Worship

There were probably in excess of 300 parish churches in this area – the CA audit gives 278 survivors, whilst the 833 chapels audited is again probably an underestimate, since many are already lost.

Existing knowledge: Strengths

There is great strength in the numbers of surviving buildings, a great many of which have been rebuilt or remodelled during their lifetimes, though most particularly during the past 250 years. Southwest Wales is reasonably well-endowed with both earlier parish churches as well some of the more innovative nineteenth century constructions. However, there seem to be few important 18th century church buildings recognized among this resource. Because they usually contain such comprehensive collections of monuments memorials; so because so many examples survive in wood, stone, metal and glass, of local and even more international craft skills, Churches are invariably the communal treasure and record houses for local populations and regional craft types. Many better-known places of worship already have printed guides or histories. Some national resources have been made available to help maintain local churches, and generally-speaking they attract interest from both local communities and visiting tourists.

Existing Knowledge: Weaknesses

Much Church fabric (and to a lesser degree that of Chapels) is vulnerable to the depredations of parochial maintenance or dilapidation and until recently the study of post-medieval churches has not been particularly fashionable outside art-history circles. Although there have been marked changes in sympathies to styles of church architecture, Victorian and 20th century work probably still has fewer followers than does medieval. It could be argued that there is a marked lack of sympathy for 18th century wall memorials, family tombs and other post-medieval furnishings, which are all expensive to upkeep and conserve.

Although much has been catalogued by voluntary groups, Churches remain largely untapped and unappreciated historical treasure-houses where the local or national value of some church furniture and fabric has for too long remained unrecognised and unrecorded. In spite of the great strides which have been made in recent years between the Church authorities and archaeologists, the strength of historical expertise on the ground for monitoring change still appears to be inadequate. This could probably be helped improve by better communications between Diocesan Advisory Committees and those progressing operations affecting church fabric on the ground.

The potential for archaeology in and around church buildings and in churchyards is still not being fully appreciated.

Research Opportunities

These ought to be achieved through closer ties with the local Diocesan Advisory Committee; through individual contact with local clergy and with the diminishing number of communicants in the Established Church. Dyfed Family History Society (and cognate groups) has done much to foster interest in Chapel and chapelyard fabric. Those institutions possessing data on chapels might more fully integrate that resource.

B. Graveyards, Churchyards and Cemeteries

Most Churches and chapels were enclosed to cater for burials, particularly after about 1780 (prior to that the practice was to bury within the building).

Existing knowledge: Strengths

Virtually every parish church is surrounded by gravestones, which amount to a directory of its former inhabitants, often through inscriptions conveying much otherwise unknown or unpublished information. Some of these gravestone types have been described in print (for e.g. by Chater and Mytum). Literally thousands of stones exist. Depending on the types of stone used, these may also make up fine local sculpture, craft masonry or art galleries.

Existing Knowledge: Weaknesses

Church and chapel yards are vulnerable through (oft) ill-considered 'improvement' schemes, some of which can decimate or even destroy the evidence for some vernacular grave types. Stone slab gravestones are the obvious and often upstanding impediments to brush-cutting gear. But pebble graves are easily defaced, and wall graves are particularly vulnerable to collapse and loss when binding lime mortars degrade. Of equal concern, there may be scant respect for iron-railed family grave enclosures. Though a number of chapel yards have been fully described in local surveys for genealogical purposes, few church yards have been surveyed in detail to any usable standard, and many are increasingly at risk from damage by maintenance activities.

Research Opportunities

There is an urgent need to set in motion a comprehensive national recording scheme for gravestones in burial grounds of all types.

Non-Settlement Sites

Into this category come public buildings and monuments; air, road and rail transport, industrial installations (those not mentioned below under raw materials) defence establishments, parklands and gardens.

Existing knowledge: Strengths

For some built structures, original architect's plans still exist. Some buildings are at least apparently protected through the Listing system within the Planning System. Conservation Area status also protect important groups of buildings, particularly urban residential quarters. About 20 percent of the known larger Parklands and Gardens are listed by Cadw on its Register (2002), and the END and NMR archive at RCAHMW include many graphic and written details of the historic environment, which might be made available on the net (possibly through SWISH).

Some public buildings and private installations attract strong popular interest, particular enthusiasm currently being shown for railways, twentieth century defence sites, with television presentations on some historic gardens. The Defence of Britain Project resulted in the deposition of a database at RCAHMW, together with a number of original surveys. A wide diversity of post-medieval

buildings and some landscapes can readily lend themselves to conservation or preservation through re-use for housing, offices, industry or leisure.

Existing Knowledge: Weaknesses

Only a limited part of this primary buildings resource has been systematically audited by archaeologists or architect-historians, and there remains an ambivalence about priorities in some quarters – particularly among funding agents, not all of whom appear to be given advice of consistent quality about historical authenticity or importance respecting some types of site – particularly with respect to some historic gardens. Unfortunately, research on the historic environment needs to be better coordinated and related to national conservation or preservation policy and practice. The last decade has seen some unfortunate examples where important vulnerable landscapes have been unnecessarily exposed to visitor promotion. In these difficulties, local and national government may not always set the best example, having sometimes been dismissive or over-authoritative and dogmatic about relative values of certain types of industrial plant or buildings when recommending conversion to new uses. Detailed recording of the built environment is insufficiently well resourced nationally to keep abreast of today's governmental aspirations for developmental changes which are rapidly eroding the resource. More central direction is needed for effectively monitoring changes to Listed Buildings and on other designated features, as well as more effective building and landscape recording practices are urgently demanded.

Research Opportunities

Existing governmental policies need invoking to monitor all developmental changes affecting the historic environment. Such changes should be better acknowledged and more fully explored to take advantage of all research opportunities and research potential, employing more thorough historical documentation, archaeological excavation and structural analysis. The enthusiasm of all relevant public interest and amenity groups needs better harnessing through partnerships between the Trusts, Museums, RCAHMW and Cadw.

Use of Natural Resources

A large number of surviving features survive to testify to a former dependence on natural resources. These range from the relics of fishing, trapping and (more rarely) hunting industries, through agricultural and industrial processing to industrial production. They include harbours, ship-building, large numbers of quarry, coal and metal mine, together with processing sites and watermills. The presence and siting of most tend to testify that environmental determinism was the prime governing factor in natural exploitation patterns until the coming of the railways.

Existing knowledge: Strengths

There is today great enthusiasm for looking at industrial landscapes, particularly mines and quarries, hence a heightened public awareness, a glut of publications and consequent increased visitor pressure. There are many published descriptions and surveys of mines (e.g. Frongoch), though fewer excavations of more recent mining enterprises.

Existing Knowledge: Weaknesses

Although in recent years industrial archaeology has given an impression that it has adopted all the well-established techniques of mainstream archaeology, it could be argued that this has not always been fully achieved in some field and documentary research. Some excavations were not undertaken employing the precise methodologies currently expected on pre-Medieval site (e.g. Esgair Hir Palmer 1983). Some studies have been interpretation led, sometimes employing idiosyncratic methodologies to justify dating – for example by assuming that the more primitive-looking features are the oldest. Features and activity at sites like Copa Hill (Timberlake passim) and Dolaucothi (Burnham 1990; 1997) tend not to be linked to or tested against historical testimony. However, radiocarbon can have an ambivalent role in mining studies since charcoal has been calibrated from contexts, which would not otherwise be acceptable in (for e.g) settlement or burial studies (Briggs 2003). Alternative complementary laboratory inquiry is clearly needed.

Where some mineral products are concerned, there is a tendency to attach importance to exploitation exclusively on the organised commercial or industrial scale. This attention comes at the expense of ignoring widespread domestic demands and processes. So the extraction of peat and timber for fuels or building materials is relatively poorly understood, as seen in the low number of peat cuttings recorded in the present assessment. We currently possess virtually no studies of peat exploitation patterns; no 'control' excavations done on domestic or industrial sites (including charcoal in building lime) to assess the integrity of that radiocarbon which may have been recently collected to date industrial process and habitation sites of this period – and indeed some of the charcoal from Tro'r Derllwyn is thought to have been from peat burning.

From the point of view of conservation and preservation, there is still an unfortunate tendency to justify erasing industrial landscapes and infilling mines and quarries because of pollution threats and potential physical danger to the public. Not all need be justified.

Research Opportunities

More excavations, and excavations to exacting standards are needed in advance of future mine reclamation schemes, to ascertain more consistent and reliable dating and recording methodologies. Future GIS vertical AP mapping programmes can identify some, though not all peat cuttings.

Industrial processing plants continue to be abandoned on a grand scale, and the great majority, which are of types unlisted here, need to be addressed by a comprehensive recording and research programme, or vital historic resources will be continue to be ignored and lost.

Artefacts

Although useful to distinguish between artefacts made in Dyfed during this period, and artefacts used there, at present, outside the furnishings of churches and larger houses, the quantitative tally is not great as compared to parts of Britain where urban excavations have yielded seemingly endless materials. A great number of products have been manufactured in Dyfed over the past two centuries.

Existing knowledge: Strengths

There is a strong interest in ceramics of this period and Wales has its own Post Medieval Pottery Research Group. Church Bells, Church Plate, Clocks and certain types of furniture have been surveyed and researched to varying standards. If archives are to be included here, the Archive Service should here be congratulated on its sterling work in the teeth of long-term indifference by local government.

Existing Knowledge: Weaknesses

No petrographic work has so far been done on the post-medieval pottery from SW Wales, and even if it were, there is yet little understanding of the clays which could have been exploited in the area as alternatives to the N Devon resources. Although so many products have been and continue to be made here (oil-related materials, textiles and clothing, factory and craft pottery, tinsplate, wrought iron, etc), neither the National nor local Museums appear to have collected series of them either for record or display.

Research Opportunities

The material study of artefacts is an expanding and open field suitable for university laboratory, home-based specialists who possess polarising microscopes. The Small Finds Scheme as currently operating in the National Museum of Wales is producing many reports of 'new' finds. At the local level, more schoolchildren need encouraging to seek, recognise and study artefacts (preferably without metal detectors). Museums need encouraging to adopt collecting policies for products while they are still being made, or which are still in circulation, and it is important to that all agree which agency records manufacturing processes for posterity.

Processes of Change

SW Wales has been quite well served by research into the processes of change during this period, though more in the sense of social than environmental impact. Future research into the process of landscape change could better be served by more detailed palynology. One problem here is that less seems to be known of changing vegetation patterns in some areas over the past 400 years than it is for the Neolithic. Furthermore, there is a relatively poor appreciation of the potential of (for e.g.) pond sediments to host plant macro and microfossils and small animal bones. The loss of the pond sediments at Aberglasney, pond cleaning at Middleton (one which may have had medieval origins), and the cleansing of a pond at Hafod at this moment are sad testament to our failure to enlighten funding agents and land managers.

A better understanding of industrial and even of agricultural change is most likely to be achieved through precise correlations or part-matches between manuscript or printed documentation and the archaeological resource.

Research Priorities

There has been only limited time to audit what is in Dyfed a massive resource, though one which is probably representative of many areas of Britain. In doing this, a major drawback has been the impossibility of being able examine in their entirety either Cadw and the Commission's extensive holdings, on the one hand,

and integrate them or compare them with the lists drawn up by Cambria Archaeology:

With the aid of colleagues, I have drawn up a limited **bibliography** (including relevant archive material) about relevant monument/ building/ landscape forms or types. This is vital in order to acquire some sense of balance about those areas which have attracted more or less interest, investigation and resource.

Although we have also added names and both completed and ongoing projects to the **list of past and existing researchers**, one suspects that this is still greatly wanting. One already feels that some of those who are burrowing away privately will eventually produce the lasting scholarly works we are here corporately striving to define.

As an understanding of recent past is greatly enhanced by its surviving buildings and landscapes, it is now vital that we make more effort to open more debate about all **conservation and preservation** aspects of the diminishing resource; that we collect views on rarity and **recording requirements** particularly to be able to relate features to potential designations, and to inform grant-aiding and researching policies.

Already, some research priorities can be identified. Professional archaeologists and their managers must now prescribe and if necessary campaign for massive recording programmes aimed at churches, their furnishings and graveyards; at workers' housing, vernacular farms, public buildings and utilities, monuments and military installations, where these are still wanting. Furthermore, social prejudice should not be permitted to inhibit the long overdue demand for work on estate nuclei, including if possible, NMR photography of some of Wales's finest houses and historic gardens. Political expediency should not be permitted to encourage more losses of industrial plant or commercial premises without closer monitoring and research. And our hold on landscape survey programmes should be extended from the uplands to cover the eroding lowlands.

A welcome early departure would be that through the NAW, Cadw and the Commission initiates a systematic survey of all SAMs, LBs and all other designated sites to the highest standards.

Whatever the outcome of current Reviews and management analyses, it must now be clear that our expertise and enthusiasm urgently need to be harnessed, along with those archives which testify to work already resident in our several institutions. Our immediate priority must be to pool wits and will to implement the research strategy we have corporately formulated.

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