

Neolithic and Earlier Bronze Age

Research Framework for the Archaeology of Wales Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Review Document 2024

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1. Introduction

This review document was compiled following a panel held on the 1st of November 2024.

This research framework aims to provide a structured approach to studying the Neolithic and early Bronze Age in Wales, addressing key gaps in current knowledge and offering an agenda for future investigation.

This review builds on the substantial body of work already completed on the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age in Wales. Initial reviews were conducted in 2003, with subsequent updates in 2011 and 2017. The most recent review, compiled by Dr Amelia Pannett in 2017, provides the basis for this document, which should be seen as a 'minor refresh' of the 2017 themes. The overall structure of the 2017 review is retained, with each research theme including a brief summary, research questions, and more practical recommendations. The final section of the document focuses on 'ways of working,' which examines broader questions within both archaeological practice and the research framework process.

There was widespread agreement among panel contributors that the majority of the themes, research questions, and recommendations from the 2017 review remain valid. Several new themes have been added all of which align with recent advancements within the sector. There was also a consensus that it would be beneficial to simplify the document by consolidating more general comments into the 'ways of working' section eliminating repetition.

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2. SUMMARY OF CURRENT KNOWLEDGE

The following lists new work and discoveries in relation to the existing themes, and was compiled from published journals and following the receipt of information about site discoveries from the former Welsh Archaeological Trusts (now Heneb) and other commercial organisations and academics and discussions with the contributors listed above.

The summary of current knowledge is not an exhaustive list of newly discovered sites, and only aims to provide an overview of how work over the last 6 years has moved our understanding of the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age periods forwards.

Agriculture

Hwylfa'r Ceirw field systems, Great Orme, Gwynedd – A survey of possible Bronze Age field systems

Settlement

Bodedern, Anglesey - Bronze Age settlement

Llanfaethlu, Anglesey – 4 early Neolithic houses, a middle Neolithic pit cluster and two Grooved Ware features

Penblewin, Pembrokeshire – Neolithic and Early Bronze Age settlement and pit clusters. Four burnt mounds.

Parc Cybi, Holy Island, Anglesey - Neolithic timber building, pottery (Early to Late Neolithic) pits, possible structures, Early Bronze Age burials and possible Middle Bronze Age settlement structures.

Penmynydd, Anglesey - late Neolithic settlement evidence including 5 pits and some postholes but no well-defined structure.

Towy valley, Carmarthenshire - a significant cluster of pits containing early Neolithic pottery, struck lithics and charred corn, partly overlain by a circle of large postholes.

Towy valley, Carmarthenshire - a cluster of pits containing Grooved Ware, which was previously unknown in this part of west Wales. A further 10 sites producing Neolithic and Early Bronze Age pits and/or finds were identified on the route of the LNG pipeline through Pembrokeshire and

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Carmarthenshire. Isolated finds of pits containing early Neolithic pottery have been recorded in Cardiganshire and Gwynedd.

Travellers Rest, Carmarthenshire – Neolithic pottery below possible Bronze Age cairn

Borras Quarry, Wrexham – Neolithic and Bronze Age pits

Landscape

Pant-y-Ilan, Arthog, Meirionnydd – three new cup mark sites

Llyn Du, Llanbedr, Meirionnydd - a cup and ring mark

Camarnaint, Llanfairfechan, Conwy – a cup marked stone

Trefferwydd, Llangaffo – cup marked stone with a central cup and three concentric rings

Monuments

Llanddowror near Carmarthen – A class II henge

Caerau hillfort in Cardiff – A causewayed enclosure.

Penywyrlod, Powys - A chambered tomb

Garn Turne, Pembrokeshire – A chambered tomb

St Lythans, Glamorgan – A chambered tomb

Trefael, Pembrokeshire – Cup marked stone possibly originating as a portal dolmen

Perthi Duon, Anglesey – A portal dolmen

Goldslan Cave, Vale of Glamorgan – Late Neolithic human remains, pottery and lithics within a pit outside the entrance

Hindwell, Radnorshire – Cursus monument

Walton, Radnorshire – Palisaded enclosure

Cerrig Bwlch y Fedw, Denbighshire – Stone circle

Llwyn-Meurig, Carmarthenshire – Chalcolithic ring ditch containing copper halberd

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Vaynor Henge, Carmarthenshire – Substantial Neolithic henge with recut ditch.

Four crosses, Montgomeryshire – Bronze Age ring ditch

Bryn Gwyn Stones, Anglesey - Standing stones that had once formed part of a stone circle

Steynton, Pembrokeshire – Bronze Age ring ditch

A497 road scheme, Gwynedd – Bronze Age circular ditched enclosure containing a small round cairn

Pan-y-Butler, Cardiganshire - Two Bronze Age round barrows

Nantcwnlle, Cardiganshire - a round barrow that had been the focus for activity from the early Neolithic through to the end of the Early Bronze Age.

Fan Foel, Carmarthenshire – Bronze Age round barrow

Pentrehobin, Flintshire – Bronze Age ring ditch

Ffairfach, Carmarthenshire – 5 Bronze Age ring ditches

The Pillar of Eliseg, Denbighshire – Bronze Age cairn

Bedd Morris Standing Stone, Pembrokeshire – Bronze Age dates from stone socket

Nantcwnlle, Ceredigion – Bronze Age round barrow

Llanfyrnach, Pembrokeshire – Possible pond barrows

Tinkinswood, Glamorgan - Undated round barrow

Travellers Rest, Carmarthenshire – Possible Bronze Age cairn

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3. SETTLEMENT

Summary

The concept of Neolithic settlement can be problematic, with a focus on identifying 'houses' and other structural remains to explain how and where people lived.

In reality, evidence for domestic activity can be far more ephemeral, often constituting clusters of postholes and/or stakeholes, clusters of pits, individual pits, hearths or simply spreads of material culture. Evidence for domestic activity can also be identified in apparently 'ritual' deposits – pits containing structured deposition, for example. It is likely that evidence for Neolithic domestic activity is being overlooked because it often does not conform to preconceptions or is considered too ephemeral to be of significance. Settlement should, therefore, be understood as being represented by a range of features including pits, trenches, postholes, stakeholes, hearths, artefact scatters, all of which could contain significant evidence relating to Neolithic domestic activity.

2024 Review Comment

General feeling amongst contributors was that this theme was well served by the previous review. New questions mostly plugged perceived gaps. Changes included, moving several questions to recommendations as they were more operational. Many of the recommendations were moved to 'ways of working' to avoid repetition throughout the document.

Existing research questions and recommendations retained from the previous review are in black with new questions and recommendations in green.

Research Questions

- What did everyday life in the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age look like and how could this influence the types of settlements we are likely to find?
- Is the apparent bias towards early Neolithic 'houses' in north Wales reflective of a regional tradition or is it a result of modern land development patterns or better archaeological recognition?
- Are we focused too much on 'houses' and the idea of settled occupation? What other forms of settlement were practiced and how do we recognize them?

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- Why do we find so little settlement evidence for the later Neolithic and Early Bronze Age? Is the lack of settlement in these periods reflective of the nature of the archaeological resource or are we simply not recognizing it during excavation?
- How does evidence for settlement fit into patterns of land use and are there clear regional variations?
- What form of settlement was occurring in the uplands and do surviving field systems have a Neolithic or Early Bronze Age origin?
- Does Neolithic settlement reflect any of the characteristics of Mesolithic settlement?
- Is there evidence of transient communities in the Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age? Do settlements give a good indication of sedentary communities?
- Do burnt mounds help us to understand settlement in the Early Bronze Age?
- To what extent do changing forms of building play into changes in material culture, society, or population?
- Can ritual/non-domestic activity be identified within settlements?
- Are changes in climate or land use a factor in changing settlement patterns?
- To what extent are changes in settlement type the result of migration?

Recommendations

There was a consensus amongst the panel and the conference participants that the developer-funded system is not currently adequate or flexible enough to facilitate the discovery of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age settlement sites, or to enable sufficient excavation when they are discovered. The use of small evaluation trenches was highlighted as insufficient when sampling possible early prehistoric sites, and the need for open-area excavation was emphasized. The panel and conference concluded that the main recommendations in relation to Neolithic and Early Bronze Age settlement are:

- It is vital that we appreciate that any evidence for Neolithic or Early Bronze Age settlement is extremely important and needs adequate investigation. This should be recognized within the planning sector and reflected in DC decisions.
- Geophysical survey is not well suited to detecting often ephemeral Neolithic or Early Bronze Age settlement. A better indication of

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potential may be nearby findspots, other prehistoric archaeological features or areas which would have been well suited habitation.

- The adoption of novel or new ideas scientific techniques to help understand burnt mounds is suggested e.g. lipid analysis.
- Areas around isolated finds should be better investigated.
- What can paleo-environmental evidence reveal about settlement practices, particularly on sites where there is little or no material culture?
- An analysis of data relating to clusters of artefact scatters held in the HERs could help to identify potential new settlement areas.

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4. MONUMENTS

There was a general feeling amongst the conference participants that the focus was too much on early Neolithic monuments and not enough on later Neolithic/Early Bronze Age monuments and multi-period monuments. The study of later Neolithic monuments should be a focus for future research.

2024 Review Comment

There was a general feeling among participants that the view expressed at the previous conference in 2017, that later Neolithic and Early Bronze Age monuments were neglected, still largely holds true. The panel agreed that our understanding of earlier Neolithic burial monuments remains relatively strong compared to those from the later Neolithic and Early Bronze Age. However, it was also noted that studies on earlier Neolithic monuments have not progressed significantly in recent years, with most recent work focusing on the re-synthesis of previous findings and much of our current understanding based on excavations from the early 20th Century. Modern excavations of well-preserved earlier Neolithic burial monuments would be extremely valuable, allowing for the application of new techniques and approaches.

Existing research questions and recommendations retained from the previous review are in black with new questions and recommendations in green.

Research Questions

- There was a general feeling amongst the conference participants that the focus was too much on early Neolithic monuments and not enough on later Neolithic/Early Bronze Age monuments and multi-period monuments. The study of later Neolithic monuments should be a focus for future research.
- Can we move beyond form and landscape setting of funerary monuments to consider the nature of the burial rites involved?
- Is it possible to gain greater chronological resolution in relation to changes in burial practice across key periods (e.g. Early/middle Neolithic transition, emergence of late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age single grave traditions)?
- What forms do monuments in the middle and later Neolithic take?

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- What do changes in monuments and burials reveal about belief systems?
- Why are there so few late Neolithic monuments recorded in south Wales?
- What do Early Bronze Age burials/monuments tell you about the structure of society?
- What do early Neolithic burials tell us about kinship?
- Does the concept of 'monument histories' assist us in better understanding Neolithic monuments?
- To what extent can we detect alignment within later Neolithic monuments?
- Are changes in monument type associated with migrations of people?
- To what extent can we detect ancestor burials within Early Bronze Age cemeteries?
- Why are monuments built where they are?
- How do new communities adopt and enhance new monuments?
- Do the construction methods of monuments change between regions?
- Can Neolithic pits be considered a monument? How does our understanding of structured deposition in pits help us to understand belief systems?
- Can burnt mounds ever be considered monuments?

Recommendations

- New dating techniques such as OSL dating present significant opportunity to be understand the chronologies of monuments currently.
- All burial deposits should be subject to full excavation, sampling, and analysis.
- More scientific possibilities should be pursued. A total approach to the adoption of scientific techniques should be encouraged.

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5. HUMAN REMAINS

Finds of human remains of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age date are rare in Wales although it should not be assumed that poor preservation of remains is an inevitability. The significance of any human bones of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age date cannot be underestimated, and recovery and analysis of remains should be maximised.

2024 Review Comment

The feeling among participants was that this section was relatively sparse compared to other themes, partly due to the scarcity of well-preserved archaeological remains in Wales. New suggestions are a reflection on advances in scientific techniques, with a 'total' approach to post-excavation work encouraged.

Existing research questions and recommendations retained from the previous review are in black with new questions and recommendations in green.

Research Questions

- What do human remains tell us about diet and lifestyle of the populations and how they changed through time?
- Can regional variation in diet be identified in the human remains assemblages?
- Is the use of caves for human burials fully recognized by either archaeologists or cavers and are resources of material being missed because of a lack of co-operation between the two disciplines?
- How common is evidence of trauma in Neolithic and Early Bronze Age human remains?
- How are human remains treated after death in the Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age?
- What can we understand about kinship, ancestry and mobility through human remains?
- Do new techniques such as aDNA, isotopic analysis present new questions and answers?
- How frequently do we see evidence of pathologies in human remains?

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Recommendations

- A set of 'Best Practice' guidelines for the recovery of early prehistoric human remains in Wales should be developed and protocols imposed through DC.
- Any site where human remains of Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date are recovered should be considered to be extremely significant. Full excavation, sampling and analysis of features containing human remains should be carried out.
- The significance of assemblages of human remains should be highlighted to individuals who may encounter them, such as cavers, to ensure that all finds are reported and treated properly.
- In order to maximise the information that the resource can provide full analysis (C14 and isotope) of all human bones should be carried out.

Reassessment of human bones stored in museum collections could reveal significant new information about the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age periods.

- A 'total' approach to the study of human remains in post-excavation is essential in the study of any prehistoric human remains.
- Use of all current appropriate scientific techniques, and the adoption of new and novel avenues of research should be widely encouraged.
- Retention of human bones is essential to enable future research.

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6. RAW MATERIAL EXTRACTION AND USE

2024 Review Comment

Our understanding of raw material extraction and use in Wales remains relatively poor, despite the region being known source of several raw materials during the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age. Greater detail is required on the exact location of these raw material sources, and the wider pattern of their distribution both within and outside of Wales.

Existing research questions and recommendations retained from the previous review are in black with new questions in green.

Research Questions

- Where did people acquire flint, chert, quartzite etc for knapping? Are specific areas of the coast good for the collection of beach flint and what are the sources for other, non-flint lithic resources? Is flint being imported from outside Wales?
- What role did Wales play in the development of copper working in the period around 2400BC?
- Can we refine our understanding of the distribution and movement of 3rd millennium metalwork within Wales?
- Can we refine our knowledge about the sources and distribution of late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age mace heads and axes across Wales?
- What was the social context for access to and exchange of materials within the Welsh landscape?
- How frequently can we detect evidence of long-distance trade? Does it mark a minority of cases?
- Does material matter beyond a purely functional perspective?
- Do extraction techniques change over time?
- Do extraction sites have significance beyond their function?
- How widely can we detect the trade of Welsh axe sources? Are the traditional axe sources an accurate reflection on what is going on?
- Where does copper, gold and tin within the archaeological record come from?
- IS there evidence for Early Bronze Age gold mining in Wales?
- Is local production beyond axes most common?

Recommendations

- Metallurgical analysis of 3rd millennium metalwork should be carried out as standard when they are recovered through excavation.

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- All finds of lithics should be collected during excavation and then given to a specialist to determine what is worked – the conference raised the problem that archaeologists from outside Wales do not recognize the significance of flint finds as they are not used to working in an area dominated by beach flint.
- Petrological analysis of stone axes and maces heads should be carried out as standard when they are recovered through excavation.
- periodic reviews of materials being reported to PAS and the HERs should be carried out to identify clusters and patterning across landscapes – *the panel highlighted the hugely significant but often underrated role the PAS plays, with 40% of all recorded chalcolithic sites in Wales identified through the PAS.*
- There is immense potential for extending our knowledge of the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age periods by reviewing materials held in museum collections.
- Archives and artefacts should be brought together to allow future study.
- Raw material extraction and use is an excellent candidate for PhDs topics. Particularly those using museum collections and PAS finds.
- Use of XRF analysis offer significant opportunity in the understanding of artefacts, particularly when used in conjunction with other techniques.

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7. MATERIAL CULTURE

Material culture studies remain an underdeveloped area. Currently, we have very few specialists with a deep understanding of either regional trends or national patterns, many of which are reaching the end of their careers. To address this, we need to develop PhD programmes that focus on material culture, we also need current specialists to pass on their knowledge to future generations. We must also actively involve undergraduate students in the field and encourage the idea that material culture studies should not be a vocation practiced by a select few, but rather is an integral part of studying the archaeological record.

Importantly, we must also create pathways within Wales for individuals to build careers in material culture studies. These pathways should include the traditional pathways such as the museum sector and independent specialists, but also include better integration into the wider archaeological sector.

Existing research questions and recommendations retained from the previous review are in black with new questions in green.

Research Questions

- Do developments in material culture relate to migrations or the developments of innovative ideas, beliefs and cosmologies?
- How do the traditions of the Mesolithic, Neolithic, and Early Bronze Age differ from one another?
- In terms of spatial organization, how was the process from raw material procurement to deposition structured across the landscape of Wales?
- What role does use wear and residue analysis play in enhancing our understanding of stone tool usage during the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age?
- What were the reasons behind the deposition of stone tools in the ground during the Neolithic period, and how did these practices unfold?
- To what extent do we have a clear understanding of axe head production and distribution from preferred sources, and can we show that axes held significant value during the Neolithic?
- How significant was the introduction of perforated stone tools in the later Neolithic, and what impact did this innovation have?

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- How can we broaden our understanding of material culture using PAS and individual finds within the historic environment record?
- Why are some geographical areas so over/underrepresented in terms of material culture? Are these distributions correct or the result of archaeological bias?

Recommendations

- Material culture studies should focus on current weaknesses, such as our lack of understanding of Neolithic pottery.
- Assemblages of material culture from excavations in the 1950s and 1960s have not been assessed and hold enormous potential for further study.
- Archives and artefacts should be brought together to allow future study.
- We must develop PhDs and encourage undergraduate studies in material culture.
- PAS and individual finds are especially important and can be used to diversify our understanding of material culture. Projects looking at the distribution of individual finds are encouraged.
- We need to lean into the 'black holes' within our understanding. Projects looking at deficits in understanding, even if ultimately unfruitful should be prioritized.

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8. REGIONALITY AND CONNECTIONS

Summary

Whilst recognizing that there is regional diversity within Wales, it was considered significant to establish connectivity between regions and with the rest of the UK.

2024 Review Comment

Regionality and connections remained an important theme for contributors. There was a desire was to see discussions of archaeological discoveries in Wales more often framed in a wider context. This should include both wider North-Western Europe and closer spheres of influence within the British Isles. Discussion should explore wherever possible both comparative differences as well as similarities.

Existing research questions and recommendations retained from the previous review are in black with new questions in green.

Research Questions

- What aspects of the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age are specific to Wales and are there areas of research that only fieldwork in Wales could address?
- Is the assumption that there was contact between the west of Wales and Ireland throughout the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age borne out by the evidence?
- Can regional trends be identified in the evidence and are they real or a reflection of fieldwork (i.e. are houses unique to north Wales and causewayed enclosures unique to south Wales)?
- Is there an East/West divide in Wales and does this tie into connections outside the country (i.e. Is the east of Wales more connected to England and the west to Ireland)?
- How wide is the distribution of Welsh axes (stone and copper) throughout the UK?
- Can we detect ways of progressing through a landscape?
- Can we detect evidence of sea-based movement?
- Is there evidence of regular travel?

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Recommendations

- Comparative studies of Welsh sites and artefacts and those along the Atlantic fringe should be encouraged. Discussion within this context is always preferable where possible.
We need to identify ways to make inter/intra-regional comparison easier. Currently different recording systems and research priorities often make this difficult. This may include aligning ourselves with wider patterns of research to ensure Wales is not left behind.
- We need to encourage talking about Wales in context as part of the wider discussion of the development of NW Europe. Currently notions of the 'Welsh' Neolithic tend to dominate, this should be actively discouraged.

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9. THE COAST

Summary

The coastline of Wales is 1400km long and being dramatically changed as a result of weather, development, and other impacts. It was felt that the coast should be considered as a resource in itself.

2024 Review Comment

Contributors recognized the inherent strength of the coast as a key resource in understanding Wales, particularly given that only one side of Wales has a land border. It was also recognized that climate change, and coastal erosion are making the coast an increasingly prominent part of archaeological discourse in the coming years.

Existing research questions and recommendations retained from the previous review are in black with new questions in green.

Research Questions

- The coastline of Wales is 1400km long and being dramatically changed as a result of weather, development, and other impacts. It was felt that the coast should be considered as a resource in itself.
- Is the potential of the coastal zone to provide information about the exploitation of landscapes in the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age periods being realised?
- Do we fully understand the impact sea level change had on the coastline of Wales during the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age?
- How well do we understand the resources of Neolithic and Bronze Age coastal resource?
- What can we learn from the estuaries of Wales? How well understood is this resource?
- Is the threat posed by coastal erosion being properly exploited to increase our understanding of the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age?
- Where is the Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age coast?
- Can we make better use of geological studies to understand landscape change?
- What can we learn from the sub-merged landscapes of Wales? Do offshore renewable developments offer the opportunity to better understand this resource?
- Is the concept of 'seascape' useful?

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Recommendations:

- The strength of the Welsh coastal resource should be recognised and championed.
- Greater provision should be made to allow comprehensive investigations of sites exposed by coastal erosion.
- Provision for geoarchaeological studies should be made within archaeological planning conditions. This should be an integral part of the initial project design rather than after the discovery of significant deposits.
- The HER's should be updated to include areas likely/known to include significant deposits to allow for DC advice to recognise the strength of this record.
- Case studies to help people understand how to better utilize the coastal resource of Wales should be made available in future reviews.

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10. LANDSCAPES

Summary

This theme is an addition to the 2024 review. It aims to be more balanced in our recognition of landscapes from the Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age. If coasts are recognized as a key resource, so too should other landscapes. It also acknowledges that a 'landscape approach' to archaeological research should always be undertaken.

As a 'minor review,' this we have included this additional theme, future reviews may wish to pursue a more wide-ranging rethink of this area.

Research Questions

- What is the relationship between upland and lowland communities?
- Do people move between landscapes? How prevalent are transient landscapes?
- Do we have evidence of seasonal occupation?
- Is there any evidence of territoriality during the Neolithic or earlier Bronze Age?
- Do we have evidence of different communities interacting in the Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age?
- How did new migrations and communities affect the way landscapes were used?
- Do we have evidence of mobile communities during this period?
- Is Bronze Age enclosure a sign of wider societal or climatic change?
- What is the agent of landscape change? Do people play an active role in this?
- Was there ever a blanket forest? How nuanced is our understanding of the pre-Neolithic landscape, and how did people affect it?
- Are clearings important places in the Neolithic?
- What subsistence strategies were employed in different landscapes?
- Do we have evidence of trade or exchange between different landscapes?
- To what extent does geography affect the way people move through landscapes?
- Is the concept of ritual landscapes useful for understanding the Neolithic and Bronze Age?

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- Do we have evidence of persistent places in the archaeological record?
- Large parts of Wales have little Neolithic or earlier Bronze Age remains. Is this due to archaeological bias?
- What opportunities do linear infrastructure schemes present when studying landscapes? How can we best utilize these opportunities?
- Why is it so difficult to detect later Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age settlements/occupation?

Recommendations

- A 'landscape approach' should be adopted wherever possible.
- The cumulative value of large infrastructure schemes should be considered within DC decisions. Understanding how archaeological remains are distributed across landscapes should be recognised within publication reports.
- Development led schemes should be brought to full publication.
- There is enormous potential to expand environmental and geo-archaeological investigations as a part of larger development projects.

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11. CHRONOLOGY

Summary

This theme is an addition to the 2024 review, though it is referenced in earlier reviews. The previous review noted an over-emphasis on transitions, particularly between the Mesolithic and Neolithic.

However, the 2024 panel felt that developing a more comprehensive chronology for the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age should be considered a priority. To achieve this, greater granularity within our data is needed, along with improved regional and inter-regional comparisons, all underpinned by a more thorough approach to scientific dating techniques.

Research Questions:

- How well do we understand the relationship between changing material culture and the archaeological record?
- How well do we understand the earliest Neolithic archaeological features/sites? Where do these features occur?
- How do changes in the archaeological record represent migrations and interactions? How does this affect material culture?
- How can we use scientific analysis to better understand chronologies?
- Can Bayesian analysis offer greater resolution to our understanding of the Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age?
- Can we recognise a Chalcolithic period in Wales?
- When does the 'Beaker' period start in Wales?
- How do architecture, settlement patterns, and monuments change through time?
- Can we better understand the histories of monuments and settlements?

Recommendations:

- All features, even lone pits thought to be prehistoric, require C14 dating.
- Bayesian analysis should be incorporated into project briefs. It should be used both to better understand spot dating and to inform more comprehensive dating schemes. Where necessary, outside expertise should be enlisted.
- The importance of material culture recovered from well-stratified deposits, subjected to a program of absolute dating, should not be underestimated. This information should be made publicly available for broader synthesis.
- The production of gazetteers within journals is to be encouraged.

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12. IDENTITY, SOCIETY AND BELIEF

Summary

This theme is an addition to the 2024 review. The contributors felt that previous frameworks did not adequately address the 'people' in the archaeological record. This theme aims to suggest the types of questions we should be asking when encountering archaeological remains and material culture, and at least attempt to ask: Why?

Research Questions:

- Are monuments an expression of group identity in the Neolithic?
- Can we detect individualism in the Early Bronze Age.
- What can settlements tell us about the organization of society, and does this change over time?
- Does the introduction of new material culture reflect changing ideas and belief systems?
- What can we learn from alignments within Neolithic monuments?
- What makes a 'space' a 'place'? Why are some places considered important?
- Can materials have significance beyond their physical properties?
- What do material culture, structured deposition, and hoarding practices reveal about identity, society, and beliefs?
- What can we infer about the ontologies and cosmologies of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age people from material culture and archaeological remains?
- Can we detect societal structure, and how does it change over time?
- Can evidence of kin-based social organization be extrapolated from human remains?
- What was the population of Wales during the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age? How did it change over time?
- How well does changing material culture reflect shifting ideas and beliefs?
- How important was the introduction of metals?
- Is there evidence of widespread organization or communication?
- Why did people respect 'ancestor' burials?
- Why were already ancient remains incorporated into new monuments?
- What does material culture tell us about identity?

Recommendations:

- How do the above questions tie into the discourse of wider NW Europe?

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- There is great opportunity within to explore questions of kinship, societal structure and the introduction of new ideas through aDNA.
- Excavation of well-preserved monuments under modern conditions is to be encouraged.
- Bringing archives and museum collections together and the re-analysis of older archives may provide significant opportunities.

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