

---

A Research Framework for the Archaeology of Wales  
Southeast Wales – Roman  
22/12/2003

A working party undertook a SWOT analysis (see Appendix) using raw data in the Regional Research Audit (Evans et al). This analysis has helped to identify our current state of knowledge and formulate future objectives and questions. Consideration has also been given as to how these topics might be pursued.

Southeast Wales has within its area both a legionary fortress and a *civitas*-capital only a short distance apart. This situation is unique in Britain and should be exploited within the Research Agenda. Both Caerleon and Caerwent are relatively free of medieval/modern occupation, which means that large areas of both sites are available for study.

On the wider scale it should be borne in mind that the geo-political bounds of the considered area were not Roman ones and research within it cannot be examined in isolation. Trans-Severn links are particularly important, but obviously the wider Roman context needs to be appreciated. Whilst in implementing a research agenda for the Romans in Southeast Wales local signatures will be reflected, there is a need to be conscious of other wider endeavors and influences, specifically the recommendations made in James and Millett (2001).

#### *Resources*

In Southeast Wales, there has been a long tradition of investigation and study of Roman remains. This is reflected in the staffing of existing institutions and continuing public interest. Whilst some antiquarian observers had started to establish patterns of settlement through observation and considered speculation and others had responded to discoveries through fieldwork, it was the development of museums and learned societies that stimulated excavations most notably at the legionary fortress at Caerleon and the *Civitas* capital at Caerwent, but also at a number of fort sites (eg Gelligaer) and *villas* (Ely and Llantwit Major). Much of this work was undertaken by staff of the National Museum of Wales. In the second half of the twentieth century the establishment of a university archaeology department at Cardiff, and the later creation of the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust added to the bodies carrying out excavations, surveys and other investigations and research. More recently the formation of an archaeology department at University of Wales, Newport has increased the academic resource within the region.

The Ancient Monument Inspectorate, now part of Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments, have overseen initiatives to allow protection through scheduling, and in some cases guardianship. The advent of developer funding has led to changes in procurement in turn increasing the range of excavating bodies working within Southeast Wales. This does not always lead to a maximisation of recovered data in broader research terms.

The Regional Sites and Monuments Record currently contains 1,119 records pertaining to various indications of Roman activity. Whilst the normal starting point for many archaeological investigations as a tool for weighting research priorities it is of only limited use, but it does provide a snapshot of the potential range of data.

Undoubtedly some remains such as those at Caerleon are of international significance. Excavations and related studies there, at Caerwent, and at certain military sites have been of more than national significance. Furthermore, there is an inherent value in the exploration and

study of Romano-British remains for other archaeological interrogations both locally and nationally.

The SMR requires enhancement (currently under review), so that it can be used readily as a research tool rather than primarily for development control as at present. It also needs to be made available to the wider community in a readily accessible form.

#### *State of Knowledge*

That the data in the Regional Sites and Monuments Record is weighted towards the major settlements and military sites may to some extent reflect past interests and endeavours. This apparent large volume of data may have given rise to false impressions about the state of knowledge leading in turn to unfortunate judgements about the need for further work. Much of our data, particularly that gathered in the second half of the twentieth century, has been derived from excavations in reaction to development threat or piecemeal surveys by different individuals and agencies. Whilst knowledge has been enhanced and understandings changed, the information base is disparate and limited by the different means of data retrieval and excavation timing, time-scale and resources. Some of these investigations may have had a 'research dimension', but this was not the driving force. Only at the Caerwent have excavations been undertaken recently (1981-1995), where has research been the prime reason for the work. Other than at Caerwent and some investigations on the Gwent Levels, our raw data set has seen little addition since the late 1980s. This may be no more than a reflection of effective planning control or other factors, but in contrast to some other parts of Britain we know very little - indeed we may not have sufficient data (or know where to look for it) to follow some avenues of inquiry. Whilst the whole of our region has not been the subject of a broad-ranging synthesis there have been works that have gone some way towards this either covering part of the county or part of the period. The county histories (Gwent in preparation) are a good example of this and there are overviews of parts of the period in some excavation reports, Usk for example, and in works designed for wider consumption and also more limited circulation such as the threat-led assessment surveys of 'South East Roman Wales' and 'Vici and roads' carried out for Cadw. Such consideration that has been given as been made in the context of discussions in excavation reports or, more recently, formed parts of limited circulation studies within the aegis of threat-led assessment works for Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments. In either case the synthesis is limited by the project or report context and purpose.

Improved communication amongst the archaeological community could lead to a dynamic that produces partnership projects that at present cannot be delivered by a single organization. Although many parties are interested in the Roman period in Southeast Wales (Cadw, Cardiff University, GGAT, NMGW, UWCN and local societies), there have only been rare instances of productive partnerships. Sharing ideas and resources should provide the potential for a greater number of projects with a higher profile. A pan-Wales conference held on a regular basis (?triennial), would provide an opportunity not only to disseminate new information, but also to provide a stimulus for new research.

#### *Investigating and Disseminating the data*

The management of Scheduled Ancient Monuments, scheduling enhancement, and the implementation of protection 'in situ' policies in planning may lead to false notions that the untapped research resource is safe. Waterlogged sites (not only in the Severn Estuary, but also in other locales - eg Coelbren) may have vast untapped potential, but be subject to unseen, and certainly untested, decay through desiccation. Elsewhere the implementation of preservation engineering solutions, that include elements of acceptable loss - the judgment made in a research agenda vacuum, and limited excavation intervention leads to at best disparate recovery of data. Whereas for Roman sites meaningful data is best collected through open area excavation.

Continuous partial protection and/or 'nibbling' minor excavations may adversely affect the archaeological resource.

Romano-British artefact studies in Wales are under-represented in the published record. The commencement, let alone completion, of catalogues of museum collections should be a priority and could be filtered into the wider record through the Extended National Database or successor. There is a need to place greater emphasis on the study of artefacts from Wales and the use of the existing archaeological archive stored in Museums. The successful Portable Antiquities Scheme (with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund) is addressing the recording of artefacts that have been recently discovered, mainly by metal detectorists, and the dissemination of the information for future research. There have been few palaeoenvironmental and zooarchaeological studies and these have been mostly in response to particular discoveries. Whilst bone survival in some areas is a problem study of such remains that do survive should be given more weight than has previously been considered necessary.

The Research Audit for Southeast Wales draws attention to the large body of reports (grey literature) arising from developer-funded works in the past fifteen years. The assimilation of this data into the record and making it more widely available should be made a priority for enhancement funding; it would also be a comparatively easy process to develop a continuously updated resource index that included not only published works but also 'grey literature' and post-graduate thesis data. Understanding material cultures is critically important.

#### *Research Topics*

At this stage of the process we have organised our identified research topics under functional headings but recognise that there is inevitably cross-fertilisation and connection and the approach when considering pan-Wales agenda may take a wider thematic approach (for example 'Transitions and Identities' or 'Characterising Settlement and Society' cf English Heritage 1998, James & Millet 2001). Much of the work undertaken to date has been on a site-specific basis and future projects should consider the wider context and their setting in the landscape.

#### **Army/native inter-relationship**

The Roman military bases and adjacent civilian settlements (*canabae* or *vici*) form an extensive high quality physical data resource that has seen varying degrees of investigation in the past. Whilst the forts are well-protected, this is not true of the adjacent militarily controlled settlements, although a current survey for Cadw may go some way to addressing the balance. The focus of investigation has, perhaps inevitably, been coloured by colonial (imperial) views of romanisation and dominated by considerations of fort dispositions and occupation, army organization, and military material culture. A topic only passingly examined is what was the impact of the army (economic, social, political, cultural, technical - within and beyond the gates) on the native population (and vice-versa)? Connected with this would be investigation of what were the forms, extent, inception and duration of Romanisation through military influence and the physical impact of military/imperial activities? Taking post-colonial approaches can we detect discrepant responses to Roman rule – opt in, hybrid, resistant?

One critical aspect of such a study is to realize that contact is not simply restricted to the gates of forts. The army carried out many functions at different locales. Whilst *canabae* and *vici* are obviously starting points evidence of civilian/military interaction will be found within forts and civil settlements and elsewhere. In a geographic area where the historic sources would suggest active resistance from, and subsequent defeat (?elimination of) the late pre-Roman Iron Age military formed from the high class elite. What were the cultural influences from the new civil

leadership? Were these people ex-military, or native opportunists, do we even have sufficient information to start to make a reasonable analysis?

### Landuse

Whilst some attempts have been made to define landuse, these have been either too broadbrush or limited in scope. However, if we can achieve some understanding of how land was owned, managed and used, this may in turn inform political, military, socio-economic and cultural narratives.

We have only a limited understanding of how land was apportioned after the conquest. How much remained in indigenous hands? Clearly there is continuity at some sites, but control of some parts will also have passed initially to imperial authorities with some subsequent handover to civil authorities. Whilst it may be difficult without epigraphic evidence to determine the extent of the *civitas silurum* or *territorium* of the fortress at Caerleon, the extents of landholding in the Gwent Levels, which offer a resource that is not commonly found, and indeed the manner of reclamation, may be explored? Can we detect estates?

Caerleon/Bulmore/Caerwent offer the best opportunity for a high profile project investigating the inter relationship of these two important sites and their hinterlands. The intention would be to define a block of land and identify the full range of sites (morphology, chronology, function, status etc) within the study area. Mapping the Roman landscape would lead to a greater understanding of the relationship between the two sites and the legionary *territorium/civitas Silurum*. Filling in the gaps around these two sites should be a priority, in order to answer questions about economy and cultural interaction.

### Communications & Trade

The imposition of a new set of communications and more frequent long-distant contact must have impacted on indigenous culture. Physical change such as roads and towns impose marks on the landscape and long-distance riverine/maritime access open out new possibilities for cultural interchange. The nature and role of maritime movement has often been overlooked and data for the road system and ports and landing places is generally poor.

The long southern boundary of our area, and its alluvial margin offers an opportunity to explore and recover evidence for waterborne trade and contacts. Communication need not be restricted to physical manifestations and it would be worthwhile to try and detect evidence of for human/social (imperial, military, political, educative etc) exchanges?

Finally can we detect patterns to trading in relation to both imports and exports, although the former may be the easier to define? Are there different signatures (in terms of range of artefacts) for different types (in form, function or status) of sites or even between sites of the same type? Can we detect macro- or micro-economies at work? What's being manufactured/produced and where is it going?

### Environs

Exploring the relationship of sites to their environs produces better contexts for achieving understanding of function and change. Study of the periphery can sometimes be more informative than that of the core. Effort in the past has tended to be site specific. However, for interrogations to be meaningful data sets need to be robust and meaningful exploration may be limited to examining the relationships of key sites to their environs. Exploration may be particularly fruitful at both Caerleon and Caerwent (at the latter we know little about its relationship with the immediate hinterland), but also Coelbren, Gelligaer, and Cowbridge.

---

### **Small towns**

Our evidence for and from small towns remains limited. Whilst some exploration has occurred at Great Bulmore, Cowbridge, Monmouth and Usk, our knowledge of other probable sites Abergavenny, Cardiff, Chepstow is scant. Here we have little knowledge further than the general area of potential settlement.

At all these places better understanding of the forces that stimulated development (and collapse) is needed. Connected with this we need to understand further morphology, relationship to the major centres or military sites, and relationship to sources of production both agri-environmental and industrial?

### **Rural sites and economy**

As the recent discovery at Ford Farm, nr Undy shows, there are still high-class sites to be discovered. More particularly none have been subject to modern excavation using the gamut of scientific analysis now available. Most past excavation has focused on the principal structures (the core), and we have less idea about the extent of landholding and activities within it (the periphery). Traditional views of the Romans providing a civilising influence occurring (or not) through hierarchical diffusion have prevailed.

In overall terms we still know little about the organisation of the countryside and less so for areas to the east and west of the Vale of Glamorgan. How did sites develop? What was the extent of LPRIA-Roman continuity? Is there cultural resistance in rural communities? Was there post-Roman continuity? Why is there an apparent collapse in some parts of the rural economy in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century.

At present we cannot develop meaningful models. There is a clear case for the survey of 'Farmsteads' and potential sites (object scatters), and for a modern site-type excavation. The opportunity for this to occur as a result of re-development is low and therefore public or grant-resourcing would be needed. Here we may note that any sites in Gwent Levels have a high palaeo-environmental potential. Perhaps less easily we also need to explore the relationship between the upland and lowland zones. Are the uplands really deserted, is there evidence for transhumance?

### **Humans**

We have some literary, epigraphic and archaeological evidence, but otherwise know relatively little about the people who inhabited Southeast Wales for much of the Roman period. We can pose some questions, even if there is no ready route to answering them? What was the ethnic make-up (and change)? Can we assess changes in populace and social/ethnic groups? What was its condition/make-up (at any period)? Are there gender/age/class regional biases/patterns? What drives and/or dictates different consumption (foodstuffs/clothes/tools/household etc) patterns?

### **Religious practice**

Our knowledge of specific religious practice in Roman Southeast Wales is limited.

Apart from the temple at Caerwent, no religious centres have been excavated, evidence is restricted to chance finds and epigraphy. Evidence for burial practice is better with a recent cemetery excavation at Caerleon and, as yet unpublished, excavations of late/sub-Roman cemeteries at ATE and Llandough, but many may yet need to be located and identified and excavated. Local soil conditions may in some parts of the region affect survival of human remains.

We can pose some questions. Is there cultural resistance in rural communities with continuation of LPRIA religious practice? Can we detect evolved Romano-Celtic religious practice as opposed to imposed Roman or continuing (resisting) native forms? Can we clarify the relationship between late Roman settlements, evolving Christian centres and late Roman/early medieval cemeteries? These will not be answered by a single intervention and might be best examined through a multi-period project, which looked at changes in religious practice and belief over time. It is a project that potentially has a wide popular appeal.

#### *Evidence Collection and Examination*

We conclude by offering some thoughts as to the various approaches that might be adopted in answering the questions posed.

New evidence does need to be collected through select research excavations. This is critical in considering rural sites, *vici*, small towns, cemeteries, romano-celtic temples, barracks, production points (eg kilns and metal goods manufacture).

New data can also be gained through long-term field-walking programmes over potential sites (but this is limited by agricultural practice, the predominance of pastoralism and the lack of well-organised or supported amateur archaeological sites), and monitoring of coastal erosion in the intertidal-zone, and re-en maintenance on the Gwent Levels. We also consider that there should be dedicated programmes of aerial photography (limited potential), and geophysics at key sites. Mapping of Roman Southeast Wales would allow settlement diversity and density to be explored. Excavation, evaluations or watching-briefs required through implementation of planning guidance should be informed by this assessment and should inform other studies through better data diffusion, even if results may only form random sampling.

Existing evidence should be re-examined. This can be achieved through long-term field-walking programmes (limited by agricultural practice) and remote sensing surveys at known sites. A synthesis of developer-funded archaeological results (particularly minor investigations) from 1990- should be produced. Likewise a list of relevant theses should be collated. Finally material culture collections (predominantly) in Museum archives should be reviewed for potential.

#### *References*

English Heritage 1998 *Exploring our past 1998*

James, S & Millet, M (eds) 2001 'Britons and Romans: advancing an archaeological agenda' *Counc Brit Archaeol Res Rep* 125.

*Paper prepared by* Professor M Aldhouse-Green, Mr RJ Brewer, Dr EM Evans, Dr P Guest, Professor WH Manning, Mr AG Marvell (Co-ordinator), Mr R Trett, Dr PV Webster.

APPENDIX – SWOT ANALYSIS

|           | Military  |   | Military/<br>Civilian<br>Interface  | Civilian<br>(Urban)   | Civilian (Rural)   | Industrial/<br>Trade   | Religious/<br>Funerary  | General  |
|-----------|---|---|---|---|--|--|---|--|
|           | 55-200  | 200+  |   |   |  |  |   |  |
| Strengths | Extensive resource, well protected.<br><br>High quality physical data resource<br><br>International impacts | Identified and protected resource, particularly at coastal sites in late third/early fourth centuries | Some Canabae at Caerleon well-investigated and published<br><br>Bulmore satellite settlement (for Caerleon) investigated<br><br>Relationship of Caerleon to landscape | Principal settlement (Caerwent), long studied and well-protected<br><br>Potential resource at small towns/ roadside settlements (particularly Bulmore, Cowbridge, Monmouth) | Some Villas well-established and protected<br><br>Sites in Gwent Levels have high palaeo-environmental resource<br><br>Excavation opportunities in countryside easier (and less expensive) | A few production sites known and some excavation, but only limited scientific analyses carried out<br><br>Pottery and high-status objects distance trade well-established<br><br>Maritime supply physically attested | Religious?<br>Some temples known<br>Recent cemetery excavations at Caerleon<br><br>Also late/sub-Roman cemeteries at ATE and Llandough (both unpublished) | Expertise locally available in Universities, Museums, Trust and Societies<br><br>Long tradition of well-published investigation;<br><br>Archives maintained by national/local museums in area. |

|                   | <b>Military<br/>55-200</b>   | <b>Military<br/>200+</b>   | <b>Military/<br/>Civilian<br/>Interface</b>  | <b>Civilian<br/>(Urban)</b>   | <b>Civilian (Rural)</b>   | <b>Industrial/<br/>Trade</b>   | <b>Religious/<br/>Funerary</b>   | <b>General</b>  |
|-------------------|--|--|--|---|---|--|--|---|
| <b>Weaknesses</b> | <p>Little detailed excavations or other investigation at marching or practice camps</p> <p>Extent of military occupation (re-occupation) in mid- late-second century not well understood</p> | <p>Form and extent of later activity less well understood than for earlier period</p> <p>Little evidence for army in late urban contexts?</p> <p>Outside Caerleon/ Bulmore no cemetery excavations</p> | <p>Extent and form of <i>vici</i>, activities in <i>vici</i></p> <p>Extent of military/imperial involvement with mineral extraction (nature and form of the same) or building projects</p> <p>Little evidence for army in late urban contexts?</p> <p>Is there a true civilian/military divide at the walls/gates? Would further excavation resolve this?</p> <p>Relationship of soldiers with families (legal or otherwise)</p> | <p>Relationship to rural settlement poorly defined</p> <p>Some rural settlement poorly protected</p> <p><i>Territorium</i> forms and extents weakly defined</p> <p>Character, extent and dating of early urbanisation – ?</p> <p>Do some <i>vici</i> develop into towns</p> <p>Form/history of small town development, economy (and related issues) and collapse/decay poorly established</p> | <p>Limited recent excavation. No review of exiting data or capture of new data in context of alternate views of Romanisation</p> <p>Extent of settlement to west of Vale of Glamorgan poorly defined given extent of chance finds.</p> <p>Insufficient evidence to develop meaningful models</p> <p>Is there cultural resistance in rural communities with continuation of LPRIA practice</p> | <p>Relationship of mineral extraction sources to production centres poorly understood</p> <p>Few local pottery supply sources recently examined</p> <p>In general all artifact classes would benefit from further analysis on regional basis</p> | <p>Excluding examples above lack of excavation of military or civilian cemetery – or other religious sites. Soil conditions may be a restricting factor.</p> <p>Is there cultural resistance in rural communities with continuation of LPRIA religious practice?</p> | <p>No significant investigations in past 15 years.</p> <p>Excepting some popular works, no recent overall synthesis</p> <p>Earlier work generally lacked significant palaeoenvironmental dimension</p> <p>Nature of trade/ economy military/ civil links at local/ national level needs better definition</p> |

|                      | <b>Military<br/>55-200</b>   | <b>Military<br/>200+</b>   | <b>Military/<br/>Civilian<br/>Interface</b>   | <b>Civilian<br/>(Urban)</b>  | <b>Civilian (Rural)</b>   | <b>Industrial/<br/>Trade</b>                    | <b>Religious/<br/>Funerary</b>   | <b>General</b> |
|----------------------|--|--|---|--|---|---|--|----------------|
| <b>Opportunities</b> | <p>High quality data easily available and capable of withstanding multiple lines of enquiry</p> <p>Activity can be linked to historical events</p> <p>Investigation at marching/practice camps could be carried out at relatively low-cost (note – mostly scheduled)</p> | <p><i>Vici</i> under review (current Cadw Threat Led Assessment project)</p> <p>geophysics/ evaluation proposed</p> <p>Review or re-use existing artefact data</p> | <p>Large-scale excavations (Developer-funded) in response to urban renewal; piecemeal or small-scale excavation may have less value</p> | <p>Villas – some scheduled – ?would adjacent land surveys (physical and remote) reveal anything – value of geophysics shown in recent Cadw Threat Led Assessment</p> <p>‘Farmsteads’ and potential sites (object scatters) could be surveyed/tested - new type site excavation needed</p> <p>Work could focus on issues of PRIA/Roman and Roman/ Early Medieval transition</p> | <p>Multi-range investigations at industrial sites (eg Machen – quality geophysics and metal-detectorist returns)– scientific analysis of materials in archive</p> <p>Any new kiln sites and adjacent areas should be considered for excavation</p> <p>Existing pottery archives could be continuing subject of study and new scientific analysis</p> <p>Further ‘maritime’ and other well-preserved remains are likely to survive in Levels</p> | <p>Cemeteries should be excavated, if found</p> | <p>However preferable large-scale excavation limited at known sites without de-scheduling (or a more relaxed approach to SMCs); piecemeal possible at some sites (not necessarily always a satisfactory approach)</p> <p>Archives available for review – useful for artefact studies</p> |                |

|                | <b>Military<br/>55-200</b>   | <b>Military<br/>200+</b>  | <b>Military/<br/>Civilian<br/>Interface</b> | <b>Civilian<br/>(Urban)</b>   | <b>Civilian (Rural)</b>  | <b>Industrial/<br/>Trade</b>  | <b>Religious/<br/>Funerary</b>   |
|----------------|--|---|---|---|--|---|--|
| <b>Threats</b> | <p>Piecemeal and mainly small-scale development at forts and fortresses (excepting Coelbren), agriculture/forestry at other sites.</p> <p>Reluctance by Cadw to support investigations at Roman military sites since 1994 Welsh Office Select Affairs Committee review</p> | <p>Vici – mainly urban encroachment</p> <p>Mineral exploitation</p> | (see general)                               | <p>Likelihood of developer-funding opportunity low</p> <p>Public or grant resourcing needed</p> <p>Imperfectly understood baseline data</p> <p>Reasons for apparent collapse of rural economy in 4<sup>th</sup> century not clear</p> | No developer resourcing for major studies, best met through post-graduate and other research | <p>?lack of data – poor bone-preserving soils in some areas</p> <p>No developer resourcing for major studies, public funding for research limited</p> | <p>Cost deterrent for large scale works</p> <p>Knowledge base may become more fragmented</p> <p>Lack of co-ordination between different excavators, work specifications/ designs tend to be concerned with individual sites at the expense of wider context. Data extraction, study and interpretation may accordingly be impaired</p> |