



Book Reviews

REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST: ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF FRANCES LYNCH, EDS WILLIAM J. BRITNELL AND ROBERT J. SILVESTER

Cambrian Archaeological Association 2012. 520pp with figures and plates. ISBN 978-0-947846-08-4, pb, £20 and also available from

<http://www.orchardweb.co.uk/cambrians/reflectionsorderform.pdf>

For many years Frances Lynch-Llewellyn has been one of the principal archaeological scholars of Wales and the west. Although we know her chiefly as a prehistorian, in which area her contributions are rightly celebrated by Richard Bradley in this volume, Muriel Chamberlain's introduction makes clear her contribution to the overall archaeological scene in Wales, and other papers reflect her wider role as a scholar of historic buildings and a long-serving cathedral archaeologist. This handsome volume has been excellently produced by CAA, and offered at a very reasonable price, although the size (520 pages) is perhaps a little too fat for a paperback binding to be ideal. I shall concentrate here on the prehistoric offerings, which provide the largest and most coherent part of the volume. They are chiefly on Welsh topics, but include several papers from Ireland and the west of England. The quality of the contributors and their contributions reflects their dedicatee's standing in our profession.

One very striking paper is Stuart Needham's scholarly review of the Mold cape, its manufacture, material and context. He provides the suggestion that the cape had a predecessor and possibly another fellow in the Wrexham area, suggesting 'the creation of one particular society' in the Mold area, 'a thriving area in the Early Bronze Age, the seeds of its prosperity probably sown during the Neolithic'. While he emphasises the paucity of scientific studies in the sourcing of gold, the high silver content could indicate a Cornish source, as has recently been proposed for the gold on the Nebra sky disc (Esher, Borg and Pernicka 2011). In considering the Mold territory and its widespread 'exchange skeins', Needham has also recognised a negative correlation with the distribution map of axe hammers. These are otherwise widely found in north west England and north Wales, but apparently only one has ever been recognised in the Mold area itself. A curious fact to be pursued further.

Another important contribution is Henrietta Quinnell's comprehensive review of Trevisker pottery, the principal ceramic style in Cornwall and its neighbours in the Early Bronze Age and beyond. This was defined and named by Arthur ApSimon (ApSimon and Greenfield 1972), but the recovery of a much wider range of material over the last forty years, an increase in supporting radiocarbon dates, and the consistent availability of the expert petrological analyses of Dr Roger Taylor have permitted a refinement of the typology and evolution of this remarkably long-lived material. Quinnell suggests that further progress will be made through more petrological work, and the study of the relation between form and content, using lipid and other analyses. Also from Cornwall comes a useful survey of south-western barrows and cairns by Andy Jones, although it should be noted that his Fig. 1 is apparently incomplete, and for Cornwall and Devon it might be preferable to refer to maps 6.3 and 6.5 in Griffith and Quinnell 1999.

The Walton Basin in Radnorshire has been the subject of a series of important campaigns of fieldwork by Alex Gibson and others in recent years. This lowland area is susceptible to the production of cropmarks of wonderful clarity, and it has produced a remarkable complex of

ceremonial monuments in this form, many of Neolithic date, recorded by Professor St Joseph, Chris Musson, Alex Gibson and Toby Driver. Bill Britnell and Nigel Jones contribute a most valuable summary of the palisaded enclosures, cursuses, barrows, ring ditches and a causewayed enclosure, with a discussion of their scientific dating and interrelationships, as well as tentative conclusions which will be helpful in the consideration of similar monuments and complexes elsewhere in Britain.

Alex Gibson himself offers an exhaustive and very useful re-examination of Welsh henges, considering all the Welsh sites for which such a classification has been suggested. The thrust of his thinking is clear from the inverted commas in his title – ‘A Critical Review of Welsh henges’. Gibson is of course not the first to have his doubts about this term, and many have wondered whether there was really ever a Platonic idea of a 'henge' in the minds of those who set out to construct the things to which we have now given that name. However, he goes bravely further than has been ventured before, concluding not just for Wales but for all of Britain and Ireland: 'It is time to draw a halt to the compounding of confusion and to rectify the mistakes of the past. The term 'henge' is redundant and should be abandoned'. In his reading, only one small subset is admitted by Gibson as having coherent dating and form - the Class II henges. Which only leaves the question of how we describe a Class II whose corresponding Class I has disappeared.

The majority of the prehistoric studies here consider either excavated evidence or artefact groups. But two adjacent survey papers struck me as representing the opposite ends of the spectrum of how field survey is conducted today. The first is a paper by Toby Driver and others offering an interim account of a current survey by RCAHMW of Skomer - a most interesting island off the Pembrokeshire (south west Wales) coast which had previously been examined for some years by the late John Evans. This is a modern survey - its participants employed by the sponsoring body - with funding provided for specialist air photography by Driver as well as purpose-flown LiDAR coverage; the latest electronic survey instruments and so on. Work only commenced in 2009, and thus at the time of the publication this is very much an interim account. The results of the survey so far are good, they expand and refine Evans' plans, and include the recording, in very good low light conditions, of previously unrecognised sites. The other survey, reported in the paper by Peter Crew, Graeme Guilbert and David Roe, is that of Craig Rhiwarth, an enormous hillfort in Montgomeryshire, with a wide range of stone structures in its interior (190 features are described and mapped). In stark contrast to the other, this survey began in 1974, and has been carried out, with extremely limited excavation, over a long subsequent period of intermittent visits and continued engagement and reflection. Craig Rhiwarth is the highest and the second largest hillfort in Wales, and the survey was carried out using plane table, tapes, and a self-reducing alidade. (Use of a plane table was regarded with scorn by the late Bob Hogg when he visited: he felt a chain would have been better.) It must be said that the resulting plan is splendid. The hillfort is really huge and the sheer hard work in just getting equipment up there and carrying out the survey is very striking, particularly when one considers that almost no funding was involved and the majority of the work was carried out voluntarily, with the help of Frances Lynch and some of her students. Neither this nor Skomer is a 'right survey' or a 'wrong survey'. Both have achieved excellent results, and add significantly to a baseline understanding of their subjects - even if both ultimately conclude that proper dating is immensely difficult without future substantial excavation. One can only feel envy for the resources available for the Skomer survey, and the energy that initiated it. But it is interesting to observe the two ends of the spectrum in such close proximity, and to wonder for how much longer we shall see dedicated, thoughtful work of the Craig Rhiwarth variety - and indeed, for how much longer it will even be possible to make these results through publication.

Stephen Briggs writes on Meini Gwyr, Chris Musson and Mick Sharp contribute some stunning photographs (beautifully reproduced), George Eogan, Elizabeth Shee Twohig and Ken Williams discuss Irish passage tombs; and we have Newgrange pottery, Mendip barrows, socketed axes, burnt mounds, and the Tal-y-llyn hoard. And that is before we even get to the Roman, the Dark Ages, the churches and the buildings. This is a splendid volume in which there must be something to interest every British or Irish prehistorian.

References

ApSimon, A M, and Greenfield, E, 1972. The excavation of the Bronze Age and Iron Age settlement at Trevisker Round, St Eval, Cornwall, *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* **38**, 302-81

Esher, A, Borg, G, and Pernicka, E, 2011. Provenance of the gold of the Early Bronze Age Nebra Sky Disc, central Germany: geochemical characterisation of natural gold from Cornwall, *European Journal of Mineralogy*, **23**, no 6, 895-910

Griffith, F M, and Quinnell, H, 1999. Barrows and Ceremonial Sites in the Neolithic and Earlier Bronze Age. In R, Kain and W, Ravenhill, (eds), *Historical Atlas of South-West England*, 55-61. University of Exeter Press, Exeter

Frances Griffith
Exeter, Devon

Review submitted: February 2013

The views expressed in this review are not necessarily those of the Society or the Reviews Editor