

Old Oswestry Hillfort and its Landscape: Ancient Past, Uncertain Future

edited by

Tim Malim and George Nash

ARCHAEOPRESS ARCHAEOLOGY



ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD

Summertown Pavilion

18-24 Middle Way

Summertown

Oxford OX2 7LG

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978-1-78969-611-0

ISBN 978-1-78969-612-7 (e-Pdf)

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Cover: Painting of Old Oswestry Hillfort by Allannah Piesse

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Printed in England by Holywell Press, Oxford

This book is available direct from Archaeopress or from our website www.archaeopress.com

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Contributors

Kate Clarke BA

Originally from Whitchurch (Shropshire), Kate Clarke has been a resident of Oswestry for 30 years and is a founder member of the campaign HOOOH (Hands Off Old Oswestry Hillfort) and the Oswestry Heritage Gateway conservation group. She has helped organise and publicise a number of hillfort events including the hillfort hugs and seminars, Pollinators' Day, the Oswestry Heritage Bake-Off film for Heritage Open Days in 2016, and Old Oswestry WW1 Centenary Beacon in 2018.

A graduate in German and Philosophy from the University of Leeds, she has worked for most of her professional career in marketing and public relations for construction and industry, including 20 years as a freelance consultant in technical communications. Kate is the co-creator of the art project 366 T-Shirts in which collaborator Neil Phillips diarised his life on a year's worth of T-shirts. She writes an occasional blog called 'Hill-thoughts'.

Fiona Gale MA

Fiona graduated from Southampton University with a degree in Archaeology and Geography in 1975 and a quarter of a century later gained an MA in Archaeology and Heritage from Leicester University. Initially working in Hampshire as a research assistant to Sara Champion and then Martin Biddle she moved to a technician role within the Archaeology Department at Southampton University. Moving to Wales in 1985 she first worked with Clwyd Archaeology Service and then in 1996 became County Archaeologist for the new county of Denbighshire. During that time Fiona developed many archaeological projects including the first Lottery funded Landscape Partnership Scheme in Wales, the Heather and Hillforts project. She remained in the role until her retirement in 2018 since when she has become a Trustee with several archaeological Trusts as well as carrying out some Consultancy work.

Erin Lloyd Jones PhD

Erin grew up in the Ceiriog Valley, just 'over the border' from Oswestry. She volunteered at Chirk Castle as a teenager and completed her first degree in Archaeology and History from Chester College of the University of Liverpool. She held roles with the National Trust, the Heather and Hillforts Landscape Partnership Scheme, and Bangor University. Erin then moved to Cadw, the Welsh Government's historic environment service, as Lifelong Learning Manager, then Heritage Interpretation Manager, and began her role as Senior Digital and Publications Manager in 2018.

One of Erin's major career milestones was the 'Hillfort Glow' experiment, working with over 200 volunteers on ten hillforts across Wales and England. This helped raise awareness of the monuments on a local scale and gathering international interest, exploring how the monuments sit within the landscape and how the hillforts may have connected with one another long before Twitter and Facebook! Erin's Ph.D. research at Bangor University dug deeper into this concept, exploring structural and dating evidence of the 100+ hillforts in north Wales and the borders and investigating whether the view was important during site selection. Using traditional techniques paired with Geographical Information Systems, viewshed analysis, and radiocarbon dating, she started to piece together the mysterious hillfort jigsaw, discovering more about why there are so many in this area of Britain and how they are all connected.

Caroline Malim MPhil (Cantab), PGCE, BA

Caroline has over 30 years' experience as an archaeologist and has worked on major archaeological projects in Italy, Malta and Sri Lanka. She is particularly interested in cosmology, shamanism and early belief systems, and has presented papers at folklore conferences in London and Romania, as well as lecturing at Madingley Hall (University of Cambridge), University of East Anglia and Bristol University School of Continuing Education, on subjects such as Myths and Legends, Archaeological Illustration, Artefact handling and the Language of Material Culture.

Her archaeological illustrations and writing have featured in academic journals and publications by Cambridge University Press, Council for British Archaeology, Oxbow and Routledge. She studied industrial archaeology, art & design and astronomy at university, later qualifying as a secondary school teacher in world religions and history. She has a master's degree in heritage management from Cambridge and now lives in Oswestry.

Tim Malim BA, FSA, MCifA

A graduate of the Institute of archaeology, London, Tim has worked in many parts of the UK and abroad as an archaeologist during a 40-year career, including Peru and Chile, and as a consultant for the Overseas Development Agency, assisting in ground-breaking research in early iron-smelting in Sri Lanka, and advisor for the Department of Cultural and Religious Affairs for excavations at the World Heritage Site of the Cultural Triangle.

After working for Cambridge University and English Heritage as part of the Fenland Survey in the 1980s, he set up and directed the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council in the 1990s and was a course director at Cambridge University's extra-mural department, Madingley Hall. Currently, he is head of the heritage team at SLR Consulting, a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London and Chairman of the Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers. He has excavated a wide range of sites, and his main research interests include British prehistory and the Anglo-Saxons, with specialist knowledge of the fens, wetland archaeology and its preservation, ancient routeways, and Anglo-Saxon dykes. He has published eight books and over 50 other articles, and is a resident of Oswestry, having moved to Shropshire in 2002.

David Matthews MA, PG Cert (Archaeology)

David graduated from Aberystwyth University with a degree in Geography in 1991 and later gained an MA in Landscape, Heritage and Society from University College Chester in 2001 and subsequently completed a Postgraduate Certificate in Landscape Archaeology with Leicester University in 2006.

After his first degree he worked for various teams and Services with Cheshire County Council including Environmental Planning, Public Rights of Way and Transport Coordination. Since 1999 he has worked as a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) / Mapping Officer initially with Cheshire County Council but latterly with Cheshire East Council and Cheshire West and Chester Council where he has specialised, amongst other things, in historic air photographs and historic mapping and worked with the County Council's Archaeology team between 2005 and 2008. David continues to undertake his own hillfort based research and has published various papers regarding hillfort intervisibility and historic applications of air photography.

George Nash DPhil. MCifA

George is an Associate Professor at Geosciences Centre of Coimbra University ITM (Earth and Memory Institute), Polytechnic Institute of Tomar (IPT), Portugal, as well as working for SLR Consulting, an environmental planning consultancy based in the UK. His academic specialisms include the study of prehistoric and contemporary art, prehistoric architecture, mortuary practices, and buildings. In 2014 he was part of a successful HLF bid to excavate two sections of the practice trenching at Walney Island, Cumbria. For SLR Consulting, George has undertaken a number of projects for BAE Systems and the MoD including building assessments at six former Royal Ordnance Factories, the World War II Tank Factory at Manston Road, Leeds, and more recently, at former RAF Abingdon (now the British Army's Dalton Barracks, west of Oxford). Since 2012, George has been an active member of the protest group HOOOH and has made an extensive study of the practice trenches in and around the hillfort.

Neil Phillips

An Oswestrian by birth and resident of the town for most of his life, Neil Phillips' connection with Old Oswestry began with his interest as a boy in the hillfort ponds and their thriving population of newts and frogs. He is a founder member of the campaign HOOOH (Hands Off Old Oswestry Hillfort) and the Oswestry Heritage Gateway conservation group, coordinating volunteers' work on landscape management in liaison with English Heritage.

Alongside a 30-year career in IT operations and management within telecoms, Neil has carved out a creative niche as a musician, conceptual artist and events producer. In partnership with Oswestry Town Council, he stages several annual 'Music in the Park' events, which earned a community award from the Oswestry Civic Society in 2018. In 2012, Neil undertook a year-long art installation - 366tshirts.co.uk - sharing his view of the world via daily slogans on a T-shirt. His musical output includes concept albums, Appendectomy and Supermarket.

John Swogger BA

John Swogger did his BA at Liverpool University and has worked since graduating thirty years ago as a freelance archaeological illustrator. He has extensive field experience in Anatolia, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. He was site illustrator for the Çatalhöyük Research Project for many years and has since worked on excavation projects run by Liverpool University, University College London and the University of Oregon. He now specialises in making comics about archaeology, history, and heritage for a diverse range of clients such as CADW, the Museum of London, the government of the Republic of Palau, the General Organisation of Antiquities and Museums in Yemen, the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nations and the United Nations Development Programme. He is an active member of the archaeological and heritage community in Oswestry and the Borderlands, producing numerous illustrations and comics for the Oswestry Castle Community Research Project, the St. Oswald's Festival, and HOOOH.

Andrew Tullo

The late Andrew Tullo FRCS (1951-2017) was a prominent board member of the Cambrian Heritage Railway and a retired ophthalmologist of national and international renown who worked at the Manchester Eye Hospital before becoming an Honorary Senior Lecturer in Ophthalmology at the University of Manchester in 1995, and later, as professor at the University of Manchester's Institute of Science and Technology. Andrew had always had a keen interest in industrial archaeology and history, spending most of his free time researching the industrial development of Oswestry. Apart from his endeavours with the Cambrian Heritage Trust, one of the lasting contributions to Oswestry and its people was his tireless work in developing the *Community Orchard* which stands proud on the western side of the Cambrian Railway, north of the town and in full view of the hillfort. This project indelibly stamps Andrew's presence on such a powerful historic landscape.

Preface

Old Oswestry – 80 years on

Tim Malim and George Nash

In 1939 and 1940 William Jones Varley and Brian O’Neil excavated seven trenches across the ramparts at Old Oswestry, at a time when the monument’s ramparts were still covered by trees on its slopes, although the plateau had always been used as pasture. Their investigations have been the only intrusive studies undertaken of this enigmatic earthwork, and the results were not published until 1996, 20 years after Varley’s death in 1976. A geophysical survey of the interior was conducted in the 1970s by Arnold Aspinall, but the interpretation of the collected data has never been tested by excavation. Between 2007 and 2011 a campaign of research under the leadership of Margaret Worthington and Heather Hidden was conducted by a local group (Old Oswestry Landscape Archaeological Project (OOLAP)) which field-walked the landscape surrounding the hillfort and synthesised evidence for its historic development during the prehistoric and Roman periods. In 2008 Maggie Rowlands led a successful project with European funding to improve the management and visitor experience at the monument, whilst English Heritage published a survey of the earthworks in 2010 (Smith 2010) and produced a Conservation Management Plan (Reid and Mariott 2010). Despite these initiatives, and considering the importance of this hillfort, it is surprising that no intrusive investigation has been undertaken within it since 1940, and what little importance has been given generally to its hinterland by professional archaeologists and academics, and various heritage agencies. Perversely this has resulted in a greater threat to the conservation of this impressive monument in its setting, than at any time previously in its long and varied history.



Excavations at Old Oswestry in 1939-40 (Courtesy of the Shropshire Archives)

After 80 years since Varley and O'Neil's campaign was undertaken, it seems an appropriate moment for this book to celebrate their achievements by applying fresh thought to the hillfort and its context, and to stimulate further study and debate for the next generation and beyond.

There has been a renewal of interest in researching hillforts within the northern Marches over the past 20 years, with management programmes and investigations such as "Heather and Hillforts" (Denbighshire) and the Sandstone Ridge (Cheshire) grant-aided local government schemes, and university excavations at Penycloddiau (Liverpool University) and Moelygaer (Bodfari) (Oxford), as well as tree clearance, survey and excavation at Nesscliffe in Shropshire (Shropshire Council and Oxford University). To add Old Oswestry to this list would be a significant achievement.

This volume draws together a diverse range of authors and specialist interests that present new information and interpretation for the hillfort and its immediate and wider setting. It includes an initial part to set the scene during the Iron Age in the northern Marches, to place Old Oswestry within a landscape of similar monuments, and to explore some of the potential implications for socio-political structure during the period. The second part discusses in more detail Old Oswestry itself, its physical appearance, its concept, its myths, as well as new discoveries and its place within ancient tribal boundaries. The final part of the book examines more of the historic development of the surrounding landscape and the later use of the hillfort for WW1 training on trench warfare, as well as the new threats to that landscape from development within the setting of the hillfort, and what could be lost as opposed to how much that could be gained from better conservation and management of our historic environment.

Why include discussion on the wider setting of the hillfort? The allocation of housing as part of Shropshire's local plan consultation (SAMDev) and public inquiry in 2013-15, and subsequent planning history, has led to the development of a sophisticated local and national campaign defending the hillfort as a scheduled monument from inappropriate development within its setting. Although heritage professionals associated with the HOOOH campaign had attempted to increase protection for the hillfort to include its immediate hinterlands, by making an application to the Department for Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) to extend the scheduling area to 250m from the current five-metre exclusion zone beyond the ramparts, this was refused. This was significant as it would have incorporated a former World War I practice trench area which would be under severe threat should planning approval be given to develop housing. In addition, an application was made by HOOOH to designate some of the Oldport Farm complex as listed buildings (standing c.100 east of the outer rampart) as these met the criteria for statutory protection due to their pre-1700 date (Historic England's website states "*The general principles are that all buildings built before 1700 which survive in anything like their original condition are likely to be listed, as are most buildings built between 1700 and 1850*"), but this was also refused.

The opposition to the SAMDev allocation process was led by campaign group Hands Off Old Oswestry Hillfort (HOOOH) and included press releases, a variety of artistic initiatives, biological and ecological surveys, conservation volunteers, four seminars and four hillfort hug events, when hundreds of people turned out in often very poor weather to form a protective ring around the top of the ramparts, and form a heart shape at the western entrance so aerial imagery could be used as publicity for the campaign. The interest stimulated national press and TV coverage, and several celebrities lent their support to the campaign, such as Griff Rhys-Jones, as well as a very significant number of academics. An 8000-signature petition was handed to Shropshire Council, hundreds of written objections were submitted to the local plan consultation, and verbal representations were made by HOOOH at council meetings and the public inquiry, which resulted in two potential development sites closest to the hillfort being dropped, even though the largest was allocated but on condition that the master-plan design would fulfil a series of criteria set by Historic England.

Since allocation for development in 2015, a renewed campaign began to emerge due to the fact the land had been sold to a developer. The planning application for the proposed development included 117 houses that would be located c.390m south-east of the hillfort's outer rampart. Over 200 objections were lodged with Shropshire Council, including some from leading heritage professionals and media personalities such as Professors Michael Wood and Mary Beard.

Let us hope that future generations will find this book an inspiration to help safeguard the hillfort and its rich heritage hinterland for the benefit of future generations.

Part 1 Setting the scene

Chapter 1

The prehistoric Marches – warfare or continuity?

David J. Matthews

Summary

Various authors have portrayed the prehistoric Marches as a disputed border and war zone. This essay briefly discusses some of the archaeological evidence from hillforts, smaller settlements and Bronze Age funerary evidence. Rather than lending itself to interpretations that stress dispute and warfare, the evidence suggests stability and a strong sense of the continuity of daily life.

Key words/phrases: boundary, continuity, frontier, Marches, military, warfare

Introduction

During the first millennium BC increased demand for fewer resources, possibly the result of a changing environment or social factors or both are thought to have led to a period of ‘aggression, unrest, uncertainty and tension’ and the emergence of a hillfort based society after about 650BC is thought to be the response to these conflicts (Darvill 1995, 133, see also Lynch et al, 2000, 150 and Miles, 2006, 94) (Figure 1). Such uncertainty is thought by some to have created quite a fluid situation whereby Iron Age tribal areas may have changed within the lifetime of one ruler (Hodder 1989, 31). As such it has been suggested that the territories of chiefdoms would have inflated and deflated in a ‘lung-like fashion’ as a result of the politicking and warring of tribes (Dodgshon 1987, 135). Evidence of tribal conflict is also thought to be represented by burnt ramparts that precede rebuilding at some hillfort sites (Darvill 1995, 136). The sense that we are dealing with a war like Iron Age society in the Marches was similarly expressed by Webster in his assessment of the largest Shropshire hillforts: ‘The people who constructed these defences and actually lived here must have placed security above everything else’ (Webster 1975, 10).

Defence and control

This grim war-like interpretation continued at the entrance to Old Oswestry hillfort where the former English Heritage plaque (now replaced) noted: ‘Throughout their development, these defences were designed as protection against neighbouring warlike tribes’. The idea that the ramparts at Old Oswestry formed a primarily defensive purpose and that the hillfort was jostling with other large neighbouring hillfort sites for supremacy was similarly expressed: ‘With its multiple ramparts it ranks amongst the largest of the forts within the territory of the Cornovii and rivals the Wrekin in its claim to be the focus of power in their Iron Age territory’, (Rowley, 2001, 42).

Similarly, political unrest during the Iron Age in the southern Marches has more recently been suggested, based on the concentration of hillforts and the size of the largest hillforts in Herefordshire which are thought to represent ‘a zone whose agricultural productivity was sufficient to enable an investment in large works, but whose terrain made the survival of independent and mutually antagonistic political groupings more possible than in the eastern lowlands’ (Ray, 2015, 139).¹

Over a thousand years later and following the Norman Conquest the borderland between Wales and England became known as the Welsh Marches. The term was used to distinguish the lands both legally and politically from English land in Norman hands and Welsh land in Welsh hands. Given the war-like interpretation of the role of hillforts and Iron Age society in the Marches, it is perhaps not too surprising that various authors have suggested that the medieval situation in the Marches had prehistoric origins. Rowley, for example notes that, ‘The official recognition of this separate character of the Marches confirmed a geographical and historical reality that had been apparent from at least the time of the prehistoric hillforts, which indicate that the Marches formed a border region as early as the Iron Age’ (Rowley, 2001, 9). Similarly, other authors attempted to interpret the organisation of late prehistoric society in the Marches by using ‘medieval parallels’ and suggested that because the medieval Marches is characterised by military installations spread along what was a border that the concentration of hillforts in the same area could indicate boundary zones between alien Celtic societies that represented a warring zone between ‘proto-Welsh tribes and the proto-Midlanders’ (Dyer, 1992, 42). Others have deemed the territorial structure of the Marches and associated boundaries to have fluctuated ‘from one boundary to another’ since pre-Roman times (Higham, 1993, 30-31) and it has similarly been noted that the

¹ Also expressed earlier by Stanford (1972)



Figure 1. An interpretation of Iron Age Conflict at St Catherine’s Hill, Winchester. Source: South Downs National Park Authority

area from the mouth of the Mersey to the mouth of the Severn ‘has been a frontier zone for more than 4,000 years’ (Hooke, 2006, 9).

Hillforts: alternative functions

However, Cunliffe reminded us long ago that we should remember that, ‘the act of enclosure does not necessarily imply defence: aggressive connotations derive entirely from our use of the word ‘hill-fort’’ (Cunliffe, 1976, 346). It has also been pointed out that there is very little evidence to suggest that hillforts ever witnessed large-scale battles (Pryor, 2004, 353). Referring to the role of hillforts Peter Woodward has also noted that; ‘we’re too hung up on military ideas,’ and has suggested that the burning of gateways such as at Maiden Castle, Dorset, may have been symbolic rather than representing evidence of the fort being breached (Woodward as cited by Watson A. 2006, 14). Similarly, slighted ramparts at other hillforts, such as at Eddisbury hillfort in Cheshire, which were also subsequently built over with round houses are thought equally to simply reflect a growing population rather than inter-group warfare (Matthews K., 2002, 34). Such questioning of the archaeological evidence is

now bringing the role of the hillfort as a religious and political centre rather than as defensive stronghold to the fore (Watson A., 2006, 14). It has also been suggested that hillfort appearance may equally reflect their occupants literally showing off rather than being a reflection of a warring society. For example, it has been queried whether the ramparts at Old Oswestry hillfort actually represent ‘prehistoric psychological warfare or an ostentatious statement of self-esteem’ (Watson M., 2002, 31). It has also been noted, regarding hillfort ramparts that not all such defences are necessarily practical (Pollard, 2003, 56). For example, the elaborate entrances and multivalate defences at Maiden Castle, Dorset, are also thought to have served no defensive purpose (Bowden 1987, 77). Similarly at Old Oswestry the flanking banks of the main entrance do not extend across the ends of all the ramparts, thus leaving open spaces between the inner ramparts. This is thought to indicate that the arrangement was not primarily for defence (Smith, 2010, 40). Similarly at Pen Y Corddyn hillfort in north Wales, Gardner has pointed out that a commanding little hill to the south west of the hillfort would have been far more suitable as a military stronghold (Gardner as cited by Davies, 1929, 33). The interpretation of the

concentration of Herefordshire's hillforts noted above as representing mutually antagonistic political groupings (Ray, 2015, 139) doesn't tally with the interpretation from archaeological investigation at Credehill Camp and Croft Ambrey where the impression is one similar to that for Danebury i.e. of rigorous order imposed over a considerable period of time (Cunliffe, 1976, 347). Croft Ambrey is also thought to have served as a focus for the surrounding farms for grain storage and as a gathering point (Hooke, 2006, 33). Whilst antagonistic political groupings and high levels of organisation are not necessarily mutually exclusive, evidence of the latter detracts from the level and frequency of the former. This also seems to reflect the archaeological evidence in Herefordshire and Monmouthshire which is thought to suggest social and economic cohesion rather than conflict on any significant scale (Children and Nash, 2001). A different interpretation of the concentration of numbers of hillforts in the Marches is also provided by Hooke, who has argued that in pastoral upland regions that hillforts may have acted as nodal points from which valley resources could be controlled and integrated with upland grazing and that such a scenario helps to explain the frequency with which hillforts appear in hilly regions (Hooke, 2006, 32).

Excavation evidence from hillfort gateways at Moel Hirradug and Dinorben (Denbighshire) has also shown that they were placed to the left of their predecessors allowing old entrances to remain in use until the new entrances were complete (Gale 1991, 88). This would hardly suggest the most appropriate course of action if warfare was common in the Marches. The reality of life in the prehistoric west midlands and the idea that warfare wasn't common has also been expressed by Hooke who notes that *'While trade played a major role in the region's economy, warfare or cattle raiding may have on occasions involved the younger males', everyday life for most undoubtedly revolved around the farming year* (Hooke, 2006, 33). It has also been argued that the nature of 'warfare' in Iron Age south-east Wales and the central Marches amounted to little more than petty tit-for-tat rivalry, exhibitionism and posturing (Children and Nash, 2001, 12-14). *'There was no need to defend against large scale organised assault as warfare was largely symbolic at this time, never amounting to more than limited skirmishing, and more often than not involving nothing more aggressive than threatening gestures and verbal abuse'* (Children and Nash, 2001, 20).

Furthermore, it has also been pointed out that the best time for fort construction would be during times of peace and according to the dictates of the farming calendar. On this basis a construction time for a hillfort of two years has been suggested (Dyer 1992, 49). Again, this estimate detracts from notions which stress the warlike nature of Iron Age society or the completely defensive

nature of hillforts and instead serve to emphasise that trade and farming were more important priorities. Several examples of hillforts which are overlooked by higher ground in the Marches are known, including Bradley, Eddisbury and Kelsborrow Castle in Cheshire, Moel y Gaer-Ruthin, Moel y Gaer – Llantisillio and Dinas Melyn Y Wig in Denbighshire, Nordy Bank, Castle Hill, Pontesbury Hill Camp in Shropshire and Bache Camp in Herefordshire. Likewise, Myarth and Penffawyddrg in the Usk Valley are also both overlooked by higher ground (Thomas 2000, 37).

The case for continuity

Descriptions of the Iron Age, such as that by Darvill above are typified by descriptions of stark and sudden change thought to have heralded the era. Such interpretations however detract from the equally important and no less relevant slow pace of change which links the Iron Age to a prehistoric long durée. The gradual economic and technical changes thought to have begun during the eighth century BC for example, were characterised as long ago as 1974 by what has been termed, *'A broad cultural continuum, ... firmly rooted in the second millennium'* (Cunliffe 1974, 10-11). Regarding the situation in the Marches during the second millennium it was noted as long ago as 1980 that *'there are hints of a greater stability among Bronze Age communities than previously expected* (Stanford, 1980, p.xv). In the same vein it has also been noted that the area about Chester remained *'socially stable for an immensely long time, resisting the incursion of Roman cultural practices... retaining its coherence for more than a millennium'* (Matthews K., 2002, 34).

Various sites also provide evidence of continuity. The Collfryn hillslope enclosure in northern Powys has revealed Iron Age occupation and internal divisions dating to the second and fourth centuries AD (Manley 1991, 109). The excavation of Iron Age farmsteads within the Wroxeter hinterland is also thought to suggest continuity rather than disruption (Ellis *et al.* 1994, 109). Likewise, the Roman civilian settlement at Prestatyn was also preceded by Iron Age settlement (Gale 1991, 92). The Iron Age / Romano British site of Irby also indicates clear evidence of continuity from prehistory through to the Roman period (Philpott and Adams 2010). Many of the sites that came into being in the last two centuries BC in Herefordshire similarly continued well into the Roman period and have been described as, *'a domestic and cultural status quo that survived the turbulence of the Roman invasion'* (Ray, 2015, 156). Other lowland farmsteads, such as Weeping Cross (Shropshire) demonstrate even longer millennia spanning continuity and have revealed virtually continuous occupation from Neolithic to sub-Roman times, although intermittent occupation can not be ruled out (Webster 1975, 14).

Many hillforts show signs of use in earlier times too. Bronze Age earthworks and signs of occupation evidence, for example, have been recorded in Shropshire at various hillfort sites including; The Lawley, Earls Hill, Norton Camp, Llanymynech, Bodbury Ring and The Wrekin. Neolithic occupation has also been indicated at Old Oswestry, the Roveries Pontesford Hill Camp and Coxall Knoll (*Pers. Comm.* Shropshire HBSMR, for the Roveries see also Dorling and Wigley 2012, 30). It has also been suggested that the Burgs hillfort was initially established in the Late Bronze Age and continued in use during the Iron Age (White & Wigley, 2010, 5) Similarly, Moel Y Gaer – Rhosesmor (Guilbert, 1975), Moel Hiraddug (Britnell, 1991, 55) and Fridd Faldwyn in Montgomery also show signs of Neolithic use. Neolithic structural evidence has also been recorded at Beeston Castle in Cheshire where hollows and postholes containing Grimston-style pottery of Early Neolithic date have been recorded (Garner 2012, 16). Regarding the hillforts of the Mid Cheshire Ridge attention has also recently been drawn to the distribution of Early Neolithic leaf-shaped arrowheads and ‘the regularity with which they are found on or close to the hillfort sites’ (Garner, 2012, 15).

The distribution of Bronze Age metalwork within the immediate hinterland of the hillforts in the former county of Clwyd has also been shown to display a

degree of clustering (see Figure 2). At the time of the study 14/47 (27.6%) Middle Bronze Age finds were found within the First Nearest Neighbour Hinterlands (A geometrical expression of the theoretical or abstract zone of interaction of each hillfort, Newcombe 1970). By the Late Bronze Age, the proportion of metalwork finds found within the nearest neighbour hinterlands in Clwyd had increased, with 14 / 31 Late Bronze Age finds, or 45%, having been found within the nearest neighbour hinterlands (Matthews D. 1990). These figures suggest both the greater nodality of certain hills and hillforts and draw attention to the potential Late Bronze Age and Middle Bronze Age beginnings of some of the hillforts in the immediate area. Whilst not signs of continuity per se the concentration of the metalwork finds within the First Nearest Neighbour Hinterlands may at least be interpreted as hinting at a possible degree of continuity back into the Middle / Late Bronze Age. This fits with suggestions that hillfort development may have been a late Bronze Age response to social and ritual requirements whereby hillforts can be seen as part of a continuum, so that they took on the functions previously provided by Neolithic causewayed enclosures whose overtones were ceremonial rather than defensive (Hill 1995, 108-9).

Unlike the communal burial customs of the Neolithic, Bronze Age burial mounds are more individualistic.

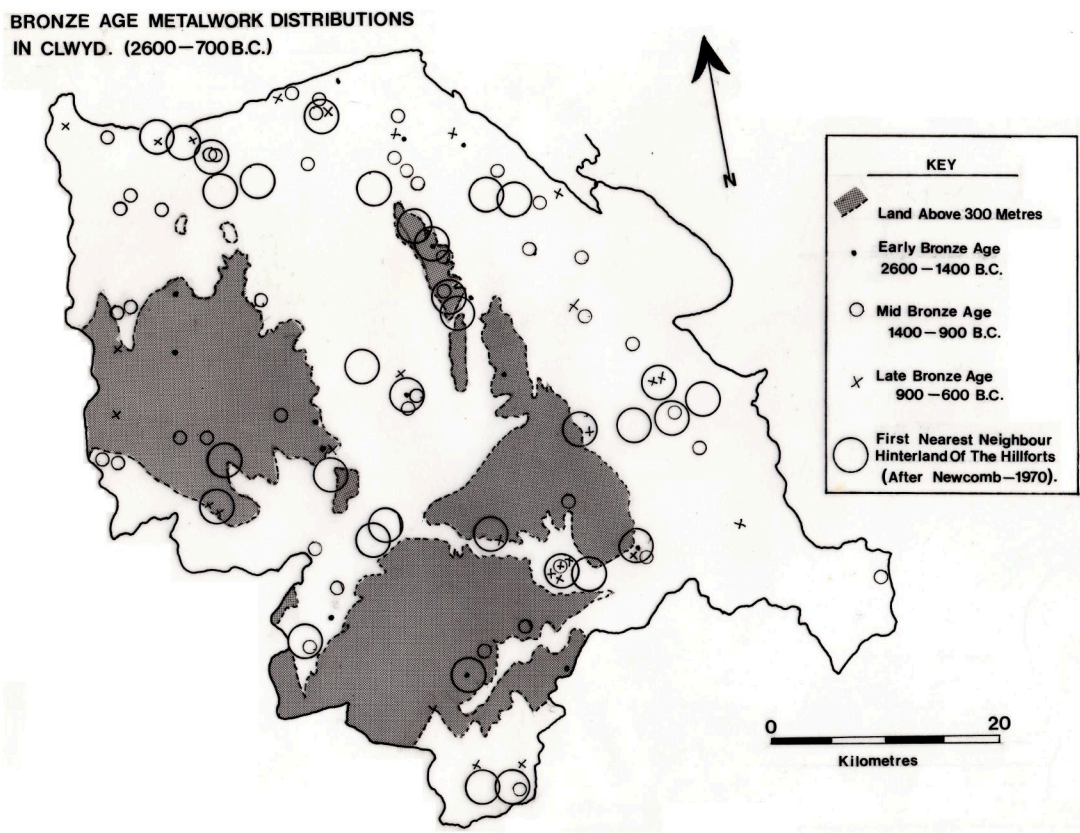


Figure 2. Bronze Age Metalwork Distributions in Clwyd (2600 - 600 B.C.) Source: Matthews D. 1990, 7



Plate 1. A place of meaning - Bronze Age burial mound within Moel y Gaer hillfort (Rhosesmor), looking west, indicates the veneration of Bronze Age ancestors (photo: author).

Many however indicate re-use over lengthy periods of time, often with several burials in a single mound. Burial mounds at Clocaenog, (Denbighshire), and Llong, (Flintshire), have secondary cremation burials that were simply dug into the existing mound (Lynch, 1991, 71). Other Bronze Age burial mounds such as that at Church Lawton, (Cheshire), saw a later phase of enlargement and secondary burials (Longley 1987). Likewise, the primary use of one of the mounds that form part of the Seven Lows barrow cemetery at Delamere (Cheshire) included four large pits that produced small sherds of collared urn vessels and cremated bone fragments. A secondary use of the central platform of the barrow included four cremation urns (Garner, 2012, 23). Similarly, at Ffridd y Garreg Wen near Holywell the burial mound was enlarged for each additional burial and later burials are also present at Henllan, Denbighshire and Ysgwennant, a few miles west of Oswestry in Powys (Lynch, 1991, 71). At Stapleton near Presteigne (Herefordshire) a burial monument that was initially built towards the end of the Neolithic period was later re-used during the Bronze Age when pyre debris deposits formed the fill of a pit dug into one of the terminals of the 'henge' ditch. Here, a radiocarbon date with a probability range of 1530 to 1380BC was obtained from a lower pyre deposit and one of 900 to 740BC from upper pyre deposits. The significance of the site and the date range was summed up; *'In this way, a site where gatherings and rituals had taken place probably around 2600BC had been remembered as a place for veneration, and was perhaps even periodically visited and entered for over 1,200 years before becoming a site where the remains of funerary could suitably be deposited'* (Ray, 2015, 101).

Bronze Age Barrows and Bronze Age funerary evidence are often also found within hillforts, and form some of the strongest evidence suggesting a potential link

between hillfort sites and more ancient landscapes of the second millennium BC. Titterstone Clee, for example, which is one of the largest hillforts in southern Shropshire, was seen as *'a place of meaning'* for the Bronze Age communities before its use as a hillfort during the Iron Age, as is illustrated by the existence of two ring cairns on the western summit of the hilltop (Watson M., 2002, 33), thought to be of probable Early Bronze Age date (Dorling and Wigley, 2012, 30). In addition to Titterstone Clee, other Bronze Age burial mounds, some of which are still extant within the boundaries of hillforts and throughout the hillfort dominated zone that runs through the Marches are known at Moel y Gaer (Rhosesmor) (Plate 1), Moel Fenlli, Penycloddiau (Clwydian Hills), The Wrekin (Shropshire), Brandon Camp (Herefordshire, Dorling and Wigley, 2012, 24 and Ray, 2015, 97), Newcastle Hill (north Cotswolds) and Pilsdon Pen (Dorset). Two possible Bronze Age round barrows have also been identified at Little Doward hillfort in Herefordshire (Dorling and Wigley, 2012, 44) Archaeological remains of funerary material were previously also found during excavation at Beeston Castle in Cheshire (Ellis 1993, 18).

Conclusions

Whilst this subject merits a more comprehensive study it is clear from this brief discussion that the archaeological evidence from within and around the hillforts and smaller enclosures, and the older Bronze Age funerary evidence from the Marches, suggest a good degree of continuity and the veneration of Bronze Age ancestors during the Iron Age. Importantly this hints at a political geography that seems more undisturbed and more stable than a political geography that was subject to considerable change. Such evidence questions the interpretation

of the Marches and its concentration of hillforts as representing a warring border zone in the Iron Age or in the preceding Bronze Age. Evidence for communication, trading, highway infrastructure and the level of social organisation discussed in Chapter 3 further detract from notions of the Marches being an unstable disputed border, or the idea that the Marches represents a warfare zone during later prehistory.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Tim Malim and Dr George Nash for the opportunity to contribute to this volume and for various papers that they both kindly forwarded to me relevant to this paper. Chris Lickley – Ranger with the South Downs National Park Authority kindly provided Figure 1 herein showing the Iron Age gateway at St Catherine’s hillfort, Winchester, under attack. Thanks are also due to the artist who painted the image for the South Downs National Park Authority. Giles Carey, Historic Environment Records Officer, Shropshire Council, kindly forwarded various archaeological papers regarding Shropshire and Herefordshire. Rob Edwards and Moya Watson from the Archaeological Planning Advisory Service at Cheshire West and Chester Council were a great help on many occasions providing access to various papers and books held by the team. My family and friends and especially my partner, Gill Brown, all helped to make this work possible. I thank them all for their support and encouragement. Any errors and omissions are my own.

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