THE PREHISTORIC PERIOD

RESEARCH AGENDA

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Introduction

All Britain is divided into two parts – a South and a North. The South has pottery, storage pits, good preservation of animal bones, lots of archaeologists, and so lots of archaeology. The North is typified by a lack of pottery, a poverty of metalwork, stone structures with poor stratigraphy, acid soils in which bone is poorly preserved, and a poorly developed archaeology . . . Of course there are exceptions. (Collis 1996 quoted by Frodsham, 2000, 15).

Prehistory in the North West Region runs from the Upper Palaeolithic to the Late Iron Age, a time span of some 12,000 years. Despite a seeming wealth of evidence, this period remains poorly understood, with syntheses and overviews often restricted to specific periods and areas privileged by more intensive research projects (e.g. Bonsall 1989; Cowell 1991; 2000; Bradley and Edmonds 1993; Bewley 1994; Mullin 2003). Often dealt with as an adjunct to broader national syntheses, the region has seen less systematic attention than others to the south and east. Although the area was the subject of some antiquarian and independent study, many elements of the prehistoric record slip through the classification and dating schema traditionally imposed on them. This situation is slowly changing, in part because of a renewed academic interest in western Britain as a whole. However, there remains a clear need to critically evaluate the resource that we have inherited in order that this knowledge can be utilised and drawn on in the future.

The distributions of sites of the earlier periods (Palaeolithic and Mesolithic) are restricted and determined partly by circumstances of survival and partly by the specialised subsistence economies of those early societies. Sites of the later prehistoric periods are more widespread, but all site distributions are affected to a great extent by factors of visibility, and past archaeological work. In both the uplands and parts of the lowlands the formation of peat has obscured the remains of prehistoric activity, while the same effect has been achieved in large parts of the lowlands by ploughing for arable agriculture and the widespread occurrence of permanent pasture. Urban development on river plateaus and valley bottoms has presumably also obscured and truncated prehistoric remains. On the coast early sites may have been lost as a result of rises in sea level.

Site visibility is only one factor behind the generally low level of data for prehistory in the North West in contrast to areas in the south of England. Another factor has been the relative lack of modern archaeological fieldwork, preceded by a lower level of antiquarian and twentieth century research, than some other areas of the country. It is perhaps surprising that even the numerous well-preserved and visible monuments in the uplands have not generally been subject to programmes of modern archaeological excavation and radiocarbon dating, in stark contrast to areas such as Dartmoor, Northumberland or parts of Scotland. Some of the most prominent and best known prehistoric monuments of the region have received no modern work and are dated by analogy only.

The Research Framework prehistoric period covers several period divisions which contain period-specific research themes. However, there are a series of general themes that transgress the (artificial) period boundaries and are relevant for the study of all prehistoric periods.

Settlement and Landuse

The main issues relating to prehistoric settlement studies in the region are site visibility and chronology. The current distributions of prehistoric sites may indeed reflect to some degree settlement and monument densities in the past, but equally they may relate to factors of site visibility and past archaeological interest. The visibility of settlement for all prehistoric periods in the lowlands and coastal plain is poor. To some extent this is certainly due to the reduction of archaeological earthworks through ploughing in earlier times and the
current high incidence of pasture, reducing the opportunities for locating sites through programmes of survey. There is also a growing body of evidence from sites such as Manchester Airport (Ch), Brook House Farm, Bruen Stapleford (Ch) and Chester Business Park (Ch) to suggest that unenclosed settlement sites were common throughout prehistory.

To this must be added the bias represented by programmes of past fieldwork, with particular areas being repeatedly favoured over others. Certain areas have better representation of prehistoric remains than others, with the central area of Lancashire currently having the lowest density of known sites and monuments. Areas with low densities of known finds, sites and visible monuments must be evaluated with scrutiny, whenever the opportunities arise. This also includes development within urban contexts, as excavations at Carlisle have revealed well preserved evidence for prehistoric agriculture extending over a wide area beneath the later urban deposits.

The remains of later prehistoric settlement in the uplands of the region are often stone-built and have an apparent better state of preservation. However, despite extensive programmes of archaeological field survey (particularly in the Lake District), few settlement remains have been subject to modern excavation. There is a general lack of data for domestic architecture, settlement hierarchies and most importantly, chronology. The available radiocarbon chronology for all prehistoric periods is poor and there are problems with some dates that have been processed. In the Lake District, the majority of upland field survey has taken place on unenclosed fell, partly because of ease of access and partly because sites tend to be better preserved than elsewhere. However the potential of immediately adjacent enclosed land on the fell margins for the survival of prehistoric sites is also very high, and within the Lake District SMR (HER) almost the same number of earthwork sites are recorded in marginal improved land as on the open fell. Although sites in these areas are often more degraded and more difficult to identify this situation may be paralleled in other areas, such as the Pennines. This concentration of survey in the uplands is not matched within the lower lying areas, and extensive areas of ploughed land such as within the Eden Valley have seen no systematic field survey.

Although pasture does not often provide ideal conditions for the recognition of archaeological sites from the air, it is certainly the case that more archaeological aerial photography in the region would be a good starting point for identifying and characterising prehistoric settlement sites. Recent air photographic survey has demonstrated that new sites are still waiting to be discovered, such as a potential pit circle and two hengiform enclosures in Cheshire and west Lancashire (J. Collens and R. Philpott pers comm.), and within the uplands a possible causewayed enclosure in north Cumbria (Horne et al 2001) and a stone-banked enclosure at Hallin Fell (C). Areas of arable agriculture (such as the Solway Plain) have demonstrated high potential for the location of prehistoric sites, and the lack of large-scale excavation means that a substantial resource remains untapped.

A further contributor to the lack of knowledge of the complete pattern of prehistoric settlement in the region is the rise in sea level since the early post-glacial. Many settlement sites, particularly of the Palaeolithic and earlier Mesolithic, may now lie beneath the sea. Work from elsewhere suggests that timber structures and flint artefacts should be visible for recording if certain areas are surveyed at the right times and under optimum conditions. Work in the Solent has also demonstrated the high standard of results that can be obtained by ground survey and techniques such as side scan sonar for mapping underwater topography that can then be used in palaeo-landscape reconstructions. The costs and practicalities of such work are sometimes prohibitive, but in some circumstances sites can survive in good condition beneath marine deposits with excellent organic preservation.

The economic basis and landuse of many prehistoric periods is not well understood, with many unresolved questions including those of seasonality and the introduction of cereals and domestic animals. The general sequence of vegetation in the prehistoric period is known for some parts of the region, but there are some significant geographical gaps and details remains unclear throughout. The topographic diversity of the region might suggest significantly different patterns of settlement and economy at different locations.

Initiatives
There is a pressing need to publish those surveys and excavations that have not yet been placed in the public domain. These include the Lake District National Park Survey and development-related work that exists only in client reports or in Historic Environment Record (SMR) summaries.

The successful application of archaeological field survey programmes in limited areas of the uplands of the region should be extended more widely to other areas that have not yet been examined. It also needs to be directed towards areas of high potential, such as the fell-edge intakes and areas of high-grade agricultural land that are currently being ploughed.

There is a pressing need for greater scrutiny of methods and techniques in archaeological survey. Some areas still require the most basic of systematic surveys to assess the survival of archaeological remains. In other areas there is a need to move towards more intensive surveys, beyond simply acknowledging the existence of a site, and working towards building integrated interpretations of the archaeological landscape.

The wetlands of the North West appear to have seen continual activity from the Mesolithic through to the Iron Age but there is still a need to characterise the nature of the practices carried out in such areas, and if their use and/or meaning changed through time? The North West Wetlands Survey has produced an assessment of the wetland resource. This work needs to be followed with further absolute dating work and targeted investigations and analysis in the areas of greatest potential.

Survey needs to be accompanied by targeted excavation. This should include both limited sampling exercises designed to obtain material for absolute dating (in order to develop an absolute chronological framework for different types of settlement) and more extensive projects to examine individual sites in exhaustive detail. Buried soils sealed beneath barrows, cairns, banks and walls offer the possibility for the recovery of palaeoenvironmental material and analyses directed towards understanding clearances and changes in vegetational patterning.

Continued air survey must be exploited for further identification of prehistoric sites. The systematic analysis of aerial photos is also required. Many sites may already be recorded on film, but as yet remain unknown within archaeological terms. Characterisation of the air photo record may also lead to significant alteration of the distribution of known sites and provide targets for geophysics and trial excavation of both settlement and monumental complexes.

It is clear that more archaeological survey of both underwater and inter-tidal zones is necessary in order to extend knowledge of the settlement pattern of much of the prehistoric period. An assessment of the intertidal resource and identification of the areas most at risk from erosion would be an appropriate start to such a study. In appropriate circumstances, and particularly where prehistoric settlement remains are well preserved, this should be accompanied by targeted excavation. Even basic distributions of preserved timbers, faunal remains and flint artefacts would help to determine the real extent of settlement for some periods.

Fieldwork techniques and targeting

The majority of investigative archaeological fieldwork that currently takes place results from development-related activity. The archaeological evaluation has become a standard tool within the planning process, and an unprecedented variety of topographic locations and different types of sites are being investigated. This has inevitably led to an increase in our knowledge of prehistory in the region. However current practice within field evaluation together with financial and other factors such as time and expertise of fieldworkers may lead to a loss of opportunities within this process.

The location of future development will also have an impact on research. Areas within the urban hinterlands, most especially in the lowlands, are likely to see the greater number of developer-funded archaeological projects in the future. The uplands are unlikely to experience similar threats, beyond visitor pressure, erosion and bioturbation from bracken rhizomes. If the span of future work is to be balanced, specific targeted research projects will be required to address the questions in areas beyond those currently under threat from development.
It is likely that both the theory and the practice of current archaeological evaluation need to be developed with particular regard to the identification and sampling of prehistoric settlements. At the planning stage the following need to be considered:

- Routine radiocarbon dating should be accepted as the norm on all prehistoric sites. This needs to target a wide variety of features and deposits, both with and without artefacts.
- Testing of the percentage target of evaluative excavation, with larger area excavations in appropriate circumstances and the use of non-invasive techniques such as geophysical survey. Sampling strategies with regard to the percentage of each feature excavated need to be flexible and relevant to the material under investigation, increasing (up to 100%) where necessary.
- Development and implementation of techniques for site-specific palaeoecological and other environmental sampling, targeting areas of high potential such as alluvial and colluvial deposits.
- Improvement of methods for dealing with extensive linear developments such as pipelines and roads, with targeted evaluation based on wider landscape assessment.
- Where feasible, allowing more time during evaluation exercises for stripped surfaces to weather so that archaeological features can be identified.
- The development of landscape studies for the investigation of prehistoric settlement potential, possibly building on Historic Landscape Characterisation data.
- Development of methods for evaluating areas of peat – building on the results of the current English Heritage-funded Upland Peat Project.

**Environment**

The historic pollen work in the region, together with research on sea level change, has provided many pointers to the character of landscape change. However, much of this analysis was carried out some time ago, and for many sites there is a lack of absolute dating and no direct linkage with archaeological contexts. Few fully radiocarbon dated palaeoenvironmental sequences exist. However, the modern pollen analyses that have taken place in the region have illustrated that received wisdom concerning the onset of Prehistoric woodland management, clearance and cultivation have been both methodologically and interpretively biased, and that the onset of agriculture took place at different times, and in a variety of ways, in different areas of the region. Pollen analytical studies concerning upland occupation are equally problematic, as previous interpretations based on pollen zonation schema could not identify changes after the zone VIIa/b transition (traditionally ascribed to the Mesolithic/Neolithic transition). Methods of pollen analysis employed before the wide availability of radiocarbon dating mean that many upland clearances dated provisionally to the Iron Age/Roman exploitation of such landscapes may actually relate to earlier periods of occupation.

Other sources of environmental information are extremely limited, and there have been few analyses of stratified material derived from excavations. As for other periods there is a general lack of faunal assemblages and few waterlogged archaeological contexts have been examined using modern scientific techniques. We have remarkably little information on subsistence economies for the entire prehistoric period, and current models are largely derived from palaeoenvironmental data and the physical remains of land clearance and division. All prehistoric sites have the potential to contain environmental information. Damp and waterlogged environments are likely to have better preservation of organic remains including artefacts, whereas soils with neutral to alkaline pH may have better survival of animal bones. There is good potential for all prehistoric sites to contain charred plant remains, with the probability increasing for Neolithic and later sites. Pottery vessels and sherds may contain fats and residues of material once stored or prepared within them.

Work in the 1960s and 1970s tended to be concentrated in areas of the greatest potential such as the Lake District but this has been followed by the North West Wetlands Survey covering the region’s lowland peat deposits. This data is extensive, but remains ‘floating’ to some degree, and more material requires radiocarbon dating. The research agenda by Middleton (1996) which highlighted the need for further paleoecological work...
in the Lancashire uplands is coming to fruition within the English Heritage Upland Peat Project being undertaken by Oxford Archaeology North. Middleton (1996) also pointed out the importance of the marine and alluvial deposits of the county for potentially preserving faunal and ecological material. The details of coastal change throughout the prehistoric period are not clearly understood.

**Initiatives**

- Further detailed environmental work is imperative in order that the results of early pollen analytical studies are revised in line with modern dating and interpretative methodologies. This should involve the reinterpretation of previous work as part of a broader programme of radiocarbon dating of existing material, as well as the sampling and close analysis of sedimentary contexts close to known prehistoric sites. Selected material from cores taken during the North West Wetlands Survey could be subject to absolute dating in line with specific research projects.

- The potential for the recovery of environmental material from excavations must be recognised at an early stage of project planning, and suitable sampling strategies must be employed from the outset. The shortage of information for the entire prehistoric period means that every avenue of analysis must be investigated. Bulk samples should be taken as routine. On sites with alkaline soils sediments should be given a high priority for the retrieval of faunal material and mollusca, including large scale coarse sieving of soils. Well preserved and unabraded pottery sherds need to be routinely analysed for residues and lipids.

**PALAEOLITHIC AND MESOLITHIC**

The presence of potentially Late Upper Palaeolithic and Early Mesolithic material has been demonstrated through work on the limestone caves around Morecambe Bay. However, the potential of this material has perhaps not been fully realised, with only partial publication and many different interpretations of both stratigraphy and the typological dating of material. These sites are potentially of national importance, but remain poorly understood. The lack of detailed publication of the excavations in the cave and rock shelter sites around Morecambe Bay represents a major gap in the study of this period and the material requires an absolute chronological framework and publication as a matter of urgency. This information then needs to be placed within its wider setting regarding the nature of the environment and climate around Morecambe Bay in the early post-glacial period.

If accessible, older archives would certainly be worthy of complete analysis and publication. If the archives and artefacts from excavations of caves and rock shelters around Morecambe Bay can be located it would potentially contain information that could be used to extend our knowledge of these sites. This could be combined with new investigation, initially targeted at any remaining undisturbed deposits on sites that have already been investigated. Likewise the largely unpublished work undertaken at Williamson’s Moss, Eskmeals and Monk Moors is potentially of regional importance. Human skeletal and lithic material from a number of cave contexts is also believed to be of later date. Radiocarbon dating of human bone in such contexts is essential to further ascertain the nature of depositional and burial traditions over the course of the Mesolithic (and the Neolithic and Bronze Age).

The potential for the surviving remains of Palaeolithic and Mesolithic settlement in areas that have not seen intensive fieldwork is not clear, although the distribution of isolated Palaeolithic finds in Cheshire and Merseyside suggests that this is an avenue of research worth pursuing. Later Mesolithic activity is suggested over a variety of topographic zones throughout the region, although the distribution of sites is heavily influenced by the concentration of fieldwork in particular areas and the exposure of diagnostic material. Further systematic survey in less well surveyed areas would certainly improve the validity of current distributions, and may well increase the known extent of Mesolithic activity. The recognition of Mesolithic material in other, seemingly less likely topographic locations such as the central valleys of the Lake District, indicates that fieldwork should also be directed at these areas.

There remain difficulties in dating of many sites by lithic typology and technology alone, and the nature of activity or occupation represented by artefact scatters is not clear. There is a need for further excavation of
different types of sites, and previously excavated lithic assemblages are in need of full characterisation, dating, and publication. The extensive excavations of Mesolithic sites undertaken on the west Cumbrian coast require detailed publication as a matter of urgency. There is a lack of radiocarbon dates derived from non-bulked samples from all Mesolithic sites. This is especially relevant to the chronology of flint types and closer dating of surface scatters. The potential for extending the known distribution of Mesolithic sites is known to be high in areas such as the Pennines, where peat cover has obscured remains of this period, and in the eastern Cumbrian limestone, where Mesolithic sites have been located despite the high incidence of pasture.

Initiatives

- Targeted examination of possible Palaeolithic deposits in other areas of the North West – particularly Cheshire, Merseyside and the Fylde.

- There is an urgent need to retrieve, process and publish the archives for the Morecambe Bay cave and rock shelter excavations. This is especially relevant to the material accumulated by the late Chris Salisbury.

- In the event of excavated material being unavailable or incomprehensible the targeted excavations of cave and rock shelter sites around Morecambe Bay may verify or extend the data from earlier excavations.

- Further field survey is required to provide a representative sample of material from all topographic and geological zones throughout the region. This needs to be linked to a programme of excavation targeting a range of site types.

- Need to identify well-preserved Mesolithic contexts for production of secure radiocarbon dates. This would assist with a more precise chronology for the whole Mesolithic period.

- More information than has been published may be available in archives of past excavations, in particular material from sites on the west Cumbrian coast, which needs to be brought into the public domain.

Technology, Production and Exchange

Little work has been carried out on the characterisation of Mesolithic flint and chert and the typological and chronological sequences of Mesolithic flint types are unclear. The sourcing of material is ambiguous and little scientific study has been undertaken. The implications for the movement of raw materials may also have implications for the movement of people, and long distance trade and exchange networks. There are the beginnings of a pattern emerging, whereby some lowland later Mesolithic sites with the greatest reliance on chert lie closest to the Pennines, while westwards, local boulder clay flint takes over as the dominant type. Elsewhere patterns relating to the exploitation of local sources seem evident, but there are also artefacts made from non-local material. There remain continued problems with the identification of the sources for raw materials, and whether materials were exploited at source or as glacial erratics.

Initiatives

- Inter and intra regional comparisons of the sources of Mesolithic flint and chert assemblages.

- Development of a programme of scientific analysis for characterising the sources of Mesolithic flint and chert implements.

- Targeted excavation of a range of Mesolithic sites to secure lithic assemblages from secure contexts. Typological analysis of lithic types coupled with radiocarbon dating.

- Radiocarbon dating needs to be carried out on non bulk sampled material from Mesolithic sites.

Legacy
The transition between the Mesolithic and Neolithic has been seen as one of the most important landmarks in Prehistoric Britain, as societies gradually came to increasingly rely on agriculture and domesticated species, and less on gathered and hunted food sources. The Neolithic has traditionally been associated with a more settled lifestyle, the use of pottery and distinctive lithic forms, population increase, and the first recorded monumental building. It is apparent however that the transition was not instant or total, and appears to be variable across Britain as a whole. There is a need to examine the depth and timescale of the transition, and what it really represents in archaeological terms.

There is no single project that will answer all of the problems covering the Mesolithic to Neolithic transition and characterise the changes that human societies underwent in the region during the centuries around 4000 BC. The most important single factor in future study is to view the period as one of gradual change and to map the appearance of characteristic ‘Neolithic’ aspects alongside the evidence for continuity from earlier periods. The environmental, artefactual and monumental record for the period may genuinely provide data of national significance in terms of the so-called ‘transition’ and the changes in ideas and lifestyles that are represented in the archaeological record. Survival of organic material has proved to be excellent in wetland contexts and the potential for the recovery of significant information is high.

Additionally there is reason to suggest that the western seaboard of Britain is one of the routes by which ideas and foodstuffs were transported around Britain and Ireland during this important period. Thus the North West may have a high potential for examining the specific issue of the transition from Mesolithic to Neolithic and providing evidence of extremely early ‘Neolithic’ traits, in a British context.

Initiatives

- Tighter chronological control, and the use of scientific dating techniques is essential, and will provide the foundation block for further work. This will entail the analysis and publication of numerous archives that are currently ‘static’, without funding for further work. Targeted excavation of sites with indications of Late Mesolithic and Early Neolithic material may also prove fruitful, when combined with palaeoenvironmental work and radiocarbon dating.

- Current work in the environs of the Neolithic axe production sites in the Langdale has raised the possibility of Mesolithic activity in the area (J. Quartermaine pers. comm.). Further survey, keyhole excavation, sampling and radiocarbon dating may elucidate information on the earliest exploitation of the Langdale volcanic series stone sources within these areas, and provide previously unknown information on aspects of Mesolithic material procurement.

NEOLITHIC AND BRONZE AGE

The archaeological record for the Neolithic is dominated by ceremonial and funerary monuments, flint scatters and the individual findspots of typologically distinctive artefacts such as stone axes. Despite a past emphasis on the study and survey of the larger monuments remarkably little modern work has been undertaken and crucial details such as dates of construction remain unknown. The environmental record demonstrates episodes of clearance and some cereal pollen is present, but otherwise few indicators of subsistence economy are evident, and virtually no faunal remains have received modern analysis. Recent research has begun to demonstrate extensive contacts and exchange of ideas throughout the Irish Sea Basin during the Neolithic and Bronze Age. Evidence includes the movement of polished stone axes, similarities in rock art and ritual monuments, and later bronze implements. The nature and extent of these contact is not clearly understood.

The record for the period is variable within different parts of the region, and even allowing for biases in past work and recording there may be some genuine patterns of settlement and monumental building within the current dataset, but this is far from certain. Middleton (1996) is the only up to date summary of the Neolithic and Bronze Age material from the county of Lancashire, which otherwise seems to have escaped recent academic attention.

The state of current archaeological knowledge for the region increases for the Bronze Age, although specific and close chronological control of sites and artefacts is still rare. The archaeological record for this period is dominated by funerary sites largely dated through typology and morphology, and finds of ceramics and
metalwork. Middle and Late Bronze Age structures have been excavated at several sites across the region, but these remain the exception, and many potentially Bronze Age sites remain undated.

**Settlement and Landuse**

There are few Neolithic settlement sites known and some of the most important discoveries of this date were made in antiquity (e.g. Darbishire 1874) and not subject to systematic excavation. This in turn means that with only a few sites known and excavated under modern conditions, the nature and economy of Neolithic settlement is poorly understood. A degree of continued seasonal mobility has been postulated for some areas, but whether this model can be projected across the whole region is not known. Possible Neolithic structures have been excavated at Oversley Farm (Ch) with later structures known from Arthill Heath Farm, (Ch) and Tatton Park (Ch) (Higham and Cane 1999), while a possible Neolithic structure at Cocklakes, near Carlisle, is dated by stratigraphic association only (Johnson et al in prep.). Exemplary work at Oversley Farm demonstrates the potential for the recovery of evidence relating to Neolithic (and later) structures, associated with rich artefactual and ecofactual assemblages. The discoveries from Ehenside Tarn also suggest that the ephemeral nature of some early settlement sites may have been overemphasised.

It remains true however that the largest part of the record is currently represented by flint scatters and finds of lithic material, with little evidence for wider settlement patterns, economies, or even religious practices for a substantial part for the region. Within Lancashire and the southern areas of the region flint recovered from both erosion scars in the uplands and ploughsoil contexts in the lowlands demonstrates a degree of continuation in activity from the Mesolithic, although the distribution and density of artefacts clearly demonstrates Neolithic activity. The distribution of stone axes (predominantly from the sources in the central Cumbrian fells) demonstrates trade or exchange contacts across the region. Little is understood about the nature of agriculture and the use of domesticated species in the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age in the region, or in what ways wider national themes were expressed across the topographically diverse areas of the North West. The date, nature and extent of early clearance in the Pennines and Lake District is not well understood and the palaeoenvironmental data needs greater chronological control.

The situation is only slightly improved for the Bronze Age, with several Middle and Later Bronze Age sites and structures having recently been excavated, mostly in the southern part of the region. The characterisation of settlement types of this period is poorly developed for the lowlands due to the low incidence of known sites. The majority of Neolithic and Bronze Age settlement in the southern part of the region and in the lowland areas of Lancashire and Cumbria are known from surface lithic scatters, or with a few exceptions located through aerial photography or excavation.

One settlement site has previously been excavated within the wetlands of Lancashire (Powell et al 1971), and there remains potential for discovery of further examples via fieldwalking. The strong resource for this area includes fieldwork undertaken by local amateur societies and the NWWS, museum collections of perforated stone implements and metalwork, as well as the organic preservation prevalent in lowland areas. There is also the potential for increasing the understanding of the context and nature of the deposition of metal and other artefacts within wetland contexts.

Current interpretations of the upland archaeological record and Bronze Age occupation are strongly presumptive, being based solely on information derived from the non-invasive survey of extant features. The preservation of sites within the uplands is excellent, and survey has demonstrated the rich density of monuments and sites. There are sites such as Town Bank (C) or High Park (L), where survey has identified hut platforms and field-systems which hint at emerging social complexity associated with control over land. Particular ‘types’ of field monument have, however, been assigned typological and chronological significance solely on the basis of their external morphology, while in reality settlement from this period is poorly understood, as is the relationship between settlement and religious and ceremonial activity. The organisation of upland monuments appears to incorporate a significant amount of time depth, and specific architectural forms are locally and regionally variable. Little modern excavation has taken place in such contexts, although the rich potential has been demonstrated by recent work (Hoaren and Loney 2004). Further characterisation and dating of these features is imperative in order to understand the chronology and organisation of upland occupation in the region from the Neolithic onwards. There are now considerable bodies of survey data available to be assessed and provide target areas for more detailed work.
There is an increasing body of data relating to both individual and groups of pits and ‘tree-throws’, sometimes containing rich assemblages of Neolithic material. The interpretation of these features is by no means straightforward, but the potential for structured deposition of material culture in isolated features and natural places must be acknowledged. It is accepted that the division of religion and ceremonial sites from other aspects of life and landscape that has been employed in the Research Framework may be entirely artificial, and many aspects of the archaeological record, although not monumental, may reflect religious practices. In this context it is important to recognise that even seemingly discrete or isolated features may provide significant information on Neolithic and Bronze Age activities, and must be given due regard when assessing for analysis.

Initiatives

Many of the initiatives are shared with the general themes on settlement at the start of the chapter (p. xx) although it is worth re-emphasising that the uneven distribution of known sites of Neolithic and Bronze Age date is almost certainly the result of site visibility and past archaeological work. In particular the lack of known Neolithic settlement sites in the central area of the region must be viewed as a priority to be addressed.

- Where survey has been undertaken potential sites require further targeted work and characterisation, accompanied by programmes of dating. Both lowland and upland areas with no programmes of modern survey need to be prioritised for assessment, to bring them in line with other areas.

- Approximately 20% of the Lake District National Park as a whole has seen detailed survey, and in the region of 90% of extant cairnfields have been recorded. As such, both within and outside the National Park, upland areas with relatively few known or previously recorded field monuments have seen little or no attention, and need to be assessed. In addition the arable areas in the surrounding lowland have seen remarkably little systematic field survey, although suitable conditions for fieldwalking are widespread. The Eden Valley must be seen as an area of high potential for future fieldwork.

- Outside those areas which have seen detailed survey, information remains confined to the few published sources available, largely the result of antiquarian descriptions. There are therefore significant problems with the coverage and compatibility of the different datasets generated by varied approaches to the upland record. Further surveys should be undertaken in order that fieldwork bias is not taken to represent the actual distribution of monuments at a topographic or regional scale.

- The investigation of surveyed features is also required. Close characterisation and dating of enclosed and unenclosed settlements, enclosures, and clearance, funerary and ring Cairns needs to be undertaken in order to assess the time depth implicit in the extant record of these areas. Large scale collaborative projects between National Parks, government bodies, universities and local archaeology groups have taken place in other regions, and have yielded successful and significant results. There is a need for a forum for such interested parties to meet and work together on future projects.

Ritual, Religion and Ceremony

Although parts of the region have a number of impressive and even nationally important Neolithic and Bronze Age ritual monuments, there is little knowledge of the wider context of these sites and their relationship with contemporary settlement. In part this relates to issues of site visibility raised in the section on prehistoric settlement, but it remains the case that almost no research has been carried out in this area.

In Lancashire the evidence for monumental construction appears to be less evident, although there are exceptions. The apparent lack of monuments in this area may fit in with a wider ‘non-monumental’ tradition apparent in the southern part of the region but this needs further work to determine how and why this differs from the traditions evident further north and east. It may be that there is a ‘local’ dialect in the way that Neolithic and Bronze Age religion was articulated in the North West, which may not be directly comparable to areas such as Wessex or East Anglia.

The most widely endorsed research priority for all ceremonial and funerary sites is the development of regional research programmes to examine chronological frameworks, and to link those into wider
environmental and landuse contexts, the relationship between individual monuments and monument complexes, and how that may relate to the current evidence for settlement.

Henges, stone circles and stone rows
The stone circles of the northern part of the region are well-known and have been the subject of detailed studies in the past. Burl’s (1976) interpretation of chronology and development of stone circles has for a long time been generally accepted, but in fact there is little reliable data for the chronology of these sites or their typological development. The complete lack of modern excavation on the larger stone circle sites leaves open questions of chronology, constructional techniques, function and re-use. Many of the major megalithic monuments in the region have been partly excavated by antiquarian or later researchers, but it may be that these sites will still hold potential for deriving data from modern excavation techniques.

Many religious monuments occur within wider complexes, although little is known of the spatial and chronological relationships between these features and other monuments in their environs. The air photo record has proved invaluable in reanalysing the monumental and landscape setting of sites such as Long Meg (C) (Soffe and Clare 1988) and identifying previously unknown banked and hengiform enclosures. Discoveries within the south of the region suggest the occurrence of hengiform monuments is more widespread than previously believed, although little is currently known of these sites and their identification as prehistoric in date is presumptive. The environmental contexts of major classes of monument (e.g. stone circles) are largely unknown, although preliminary work in the environs of monuments (e.g. Clare 1999; Clare et al 2001) has demonstrated the potential for further detailed environmental analysis within the vicinity of major monumental complexes.

While the region boasts some of the most impressive stone circle sites in the country, large-scale research excavation on these sites is unlikely in the near future, and indeed recent excavations at stone circles and other high-profile prehistoric monuments have courted controversy and protest. Bewley’s (1993) excavation at Plasketlands (C) remains the only published account of a recent excavation of a palisaded Neolithic enclosure or monumental structure within the region, although the publication of the site at Carlisle Airport could add considerably to this record. Added to this is the fact that past excavation at the larger ‘open’ stone circle sites has not always proved productive. Targeted small-scale excavation may elucidate chronological aspects of activity but short of excavating beneath the circle stones, absolute construction dates are unlikely to be forthcoming. This said, the sequence of activity within stone circle sites may span a considerable length of time, and excavation of internal features may identify activity from the Middle Neolithic into the Bronze Age, and shed considerable light on prehistoric monument use and reuse (e.g. Bradley 2000). Indeed it has been presumed that activity within the circle interiors post-dates the construction of the circle itself, whereas this may not always be the case. The smaller stone circle sites may vary considerably in construction and use from the larger open circles, and offer greater potential for investigation.

Initiatives

• The distribution of megalithic monuments is currently concentrated in the north of the region. If this distribution really were genuine, then there is a need to identify what alternatives are evident elsewhere. If this distribution is due to differential survival and site visibility, then further survey and utilisation of various techniques are required.

• The closer characterisation and clarification of sequences of individual sites and wider monumental complexes is imperative in order to bring understandings of such features in line with other areas of the British Isles. Such programmes should be undertaken through detailed archival research and air photo transcription alongside targeted field survey, geophysical survey and small scale excavation. This could be undertaken in conjunction with targeted environmental work within the close environs of stone circle sites.

• The excavations at Carlisle Airport represent the most recent excavation of a potentially Neolithic ceremonial site, with apparent multiple phasing of some complexity. The full analysis and publication of this archive must be viewed as a priority. The ongoing assessment of the Carlisle archives needs to place equal emphasis on prehistoric material from the city environs, as that from large-scale excavations undertaken within the city.
There are also numerous potential ‘sites’ of circles documented in antiquity but no longer extant. These sites, if identified, may offer an opportunity for non-invasive techniques such as geophysics and excavation of structural features such as stone holes, without the risk of destructive and potentially contentious action at better known sites.

Conservation strategies need to recognise the importance of monument groupings or complexes, no matter how ‘poor’ individual sites might be, as much as targeting individual structures as ‘good examples of their kind’. Equally recognition that activity may have taken place beyond the immediate environs of a site requires the area of management to be drawn widely and in the case of monument complexes to encompass the areas between sites.

Enclosures

Little is known of some of the larger enclosures in the North West, and indeed, it may be erroneous to place some of them within the Ritual and Religion section or even the Neolithic or Bronze Age section of the Research Framework text. The location (e.g. Long Meg) and the morphology (e.g. Summer Hill) of some sites strongly suggest a Neolithic date, while others remain more elusive and may be considerably later. There is an apparent lack of causewayed enclosures in the North West but there may be alternative Early Neolithic monuments similar to Gardoms Edge in Derbyshire. The upland enclosure at Green How (C) is a possible exception, with the appearance of both a discontinuous bank and ditch, and recent finds of Neolithic flintwork, the accolade of causewayed enclosure may be best suited to this site.

A number of likely and probably Neolithic enclosures have been identified in recent years, but none have been sampled through excavation and there is therefore no detail on date or function of these sites. The Long Meg enclosure in particular appears to pre-date the stone circle, and is potentially an extremely important Early Neolithic site.

Initiatives

Desktop studies, air photo transcription, walkover surveys, fieldwalking and geophysical survey could all provide further information on the larger enclosures of the North West. Ultimately some form of intrusive fieldwork and sampling is required to characterise and date these enclosure sites throughout the region. Dating of even a few sites has the potential to transform our understanding of Early Neolithic activity in the region, and provide details of specific regional site characteristics.

Burial

Neolithic long cairns and other traditions

Human remains dating from the period remain rare on a regional level, and those known are largely represented by cremated material. Few prehistoric funerary sites have been excavated under modern conditions and we currently have little understanding for Neolithic burial practices. It is clear that Neolithic funerary monuments and deposits are underrepresented for a large part of the region, although the alternative to deposition of human remains within cairns and tombs is not certain. Dated material beneath Early Bronze Age cairns might suggest some form of curation of human bone, but the recorded instances are not yet numerous. Numerous cave deposits may contain burials from this period, but so far remain undated. The recovery of such material is less likely during development work, but cannot be ruled out, especially during the construction of linear schemes such as pipelines. In this respect particular attention should be given to the presence of disarticulated human remains in ‘non-mortuary’ contexts.

Allowing for the inconsistencies of identification, the distribution of Neolithic funerary monuments would again appear to favour the north of the region. If this distribution is indeed genuine then there is a need to characterise what alternative funerary traditions are evident elsewhere. The Pikestones and an associated tomb on Anglezarke Moor (L) are anomalous purportedly ‘Cotswold Severn’ tombs but, like the Bridestones (Ch), lie well outside the distribution of such tombs.

There are current problems of morphological identification and terminology with regards to Neolithic cairns. Over twenty potential long cairns have been identified in Cumbria, although only a small number have seen
poorly recorded excavation in the nineteenth century. None have seen modern characterisation or excavation. Such features have been identified solely by their external morphology and at present it is impossible to distinguish between classic long cairns, linear stone clearance cairns, localised funerary cairn variants and natural features.

Initiatives

- The upstanding earthworks and potential anomalies on aerial photographs require critical appraisal and characterisation. The closer targeted survey and evaluation of such features is imperative to establish the presence and chronology of Neolithic long and round cairns in the region, and their relationship to better understand Neolithic traditions of the western seaboard and other areas of northern England.

- Disarticulated human bone (even in potentially residual contexts) and unaccompanied burials require routine radiocarbon dating. The material from cave excavations also requires dating as a priority.

- The excavation or re-excavation of a long barrow, cairn or tomb must be viewed as a priority. For sites such as the Bridestones (Ch) or Raiset Pike (C) many questions relating to constructional sequence and chronology remain and even minor investigations may recover dateable material and aid further interpretation.

- Material from antiquarian and earlier archaeological excavations may be present within museum collections and worthy of modern analysis. This requires an audit of material currently held within such collections, but the potential may be high if the correct material can be recovered.

Round barrows, ringcairns and Bronze Age funerary traditions

Many round funerary monuments and ringcairns survive extant within the region, most especially in the uplands. The vast majority of such features, traditionally ascribed to the Bronze Age, have been identified solely on the basis of their external morphology, as well as the common (and often indirect) association with cairnfields. Where excavation has taken place the majority of it was by antiquarians or under conditions far from acceptable by today’s standards. Formal publications of these investigations are a rarity.

The excavations at Oddendale (C) (Turnbull and Walsh 1997), Hardendale Nab (C) (Williams and Howard-Davis forthcoming) and Borwick (L) (Olivier 1988) demonstrate both the complexity and duration of deposition and construction at northern funerary monuments, but also the amount of information retrievable through modern excavation and dating techniques. Extremely little investigation of upland examples has taken place and much of the excavated evidence currently available is restricted to antiquarian sources. Whilst many of these are suggestive of complexity, their chronology cannot be reliably established. Likewise, investigation of round barrows in the southern part of the region was largely undertaken by antiquarians, and more recent excavations have only rarely been published (Mullin 2003, 13). Without secure dating evidence for the majority of features, and uncertainties concerning previous understandings of architectural form, burial traditions and typological material culture dating schema a considerable resource remains largely unknown.

For the larger part of the region there is little evidence of Bronze Age funerary traditions. Recent work has demonstrated traditions of deposition of funerary urns in natural features (Wild 2003) and so-called ‘flat’ cemeteries with little or no above-ground evidence may be widespread.

Initiatives

- Further understanding of the Bronze Age funerary record would be considerably enhanced by the formation of regional typology and chronology of ceramic sequences. An assessment and catalogue of existing material must therefore be viewed as a priority.

- The close characterisation of both round funerary monuments and ringcairns in the variety of contexts in which these occur is imperative if we are to understand the chronology and changing character of burial and depositional traditions in the region. This could be undertaken through programmes of
detailed archival research where recorded excavations have taken place, alongside targeted survey, geophysical survey and small scale excavation to obtain material for closer dating of such features.

- Natural features and fissures within bedrock must be investigated thoroughly when encountered.

**Burnt Mounds**

The majority of the burnt mound sites known within the region are within Cumbria. There are numerous burnt mounds from both Shropshire and Staffordshire but only one so far recorded from Cheshire, and one from Lancashire. This is a low number compared to other parts of the country, and the current regional distribution is unlikely to reflect that of the past. There is also a lack of excavation, dating and palaeoenvironmental studies on burnt mound sites within the region, and so little detailed knowledge of the activities or practices being undertaken at burnt mounds or their relationship to other contemporary sites. Work undertaken elsewhere would suggest that they are a long-lived class of monument, which have at times proved difficult to interpret. This said, recent work in Cumbria indicates that the potential in the north of the region at least is as high as other areas such as the Yorkshire Dales (Hodgson forthcoming), and well preserved sites may contain considerable information regarding research questions.

**Initiatives**

- Further work is required on the identification and survey of burnt mound sites. As they are distinctive and easily identifiable to the trained eye they are potentially identifiable through non-intrusive survey.
- There is a need for analysis of the context of burnt mounds in relation to contemporary settlement and other sites.
- There is a need for targeted survey, excavation, radiocarbon dating and palaeoenvironmental analysis.

**Technology, Production, Trade and Exchange**

The study of both production and exchange has been the focus of significant research for some artefacts, such as stone axes (Bradley and Edmonds 1993), but the range and the material covered by these studies is uneven. While acknowledging that many transactions and exchanges may have been only one part of a complex system of social and political relationships, which also involved many items or commodities not visible to the archaeological eye, the visible elements of exchange are numerous and widespread. There is a need to assess the evidence for the production and exchange of goods and ideas within and beyond the regional boundaries, and to investigate how these networks operated, and how they may have changed over time.

**Polished Stone Implements**

While significant work has been undertaken during the last fifty years many problems remain regarding the production and distribution of polished stone tools. There are, as yet, outcrops of material exploited in prehistory which have not been identified, particularly in the Cumbrian Fells. The approximate geological location of these sources is known, and targeted survey has the potential to locate additional quarrying sites, where the material possesses the properties of conchoidal fracture that result in distinctive waste material. Further insights may also be gained by an extension of the more detailed trace element characterisation of outcrops (see Cummins in Claris & Quartermaine 1989).

The date range for the Group VI source is a good starting point but it is not absolute, and it may easily extend in either direction. Continual erosion on many sites in the fells may offer further opportunities for pinhole excavation and the retrieval of datable material. There is also a need to prioritise the dating of other archaeological contexts in which axes and related forms, or even pieces of worked tuff, have been recovered. This would establish a check on the date range for the use of raw materials, and provide an opportunity to identify whether there is any temporal variability in the spread of implements across the region. A strong case can also be made for closer investigation of the chronology of those monuments with which axes have known associations, most notably henges and stone circles, but also other putatively early enclosures beginning to be identified in the region.
The legacy of Clare Fell's work is invaluable. However, the variability she did so much to identify raises some fascinating and potentially important questions. Is there any significant change in the morphology of axes over time? Are there spatial patterns of variability that reflect different or changing traditions across the region? Are the details of stone axe morphologies picked up in other materials like flint? When so many examples have clearly been extensively reworked, this will not be easy to address, but it does deserve attention. The distinctiveness of Cumbrian Clubs certainly requires explanation. Are we looking at a widely recognised and persistent acknowledgement of form, or the product of a spatially and historically more restricted way of working? An answer here would open up some fascinating insights into the organisation and significance of working, and of the axe itself.

The move from stone axe production to metal consumption is likely to have had profound long-term consequences on patterns of both production and consumption. This may even have led to a shift in orientation of power within the region. We currently have little information on how the decline in polished stone tool manufacture affected everyday life. Socketed and shafthole axes of likely Later Neolithic and Early Bronze Age date occur in comparable numbers to Group VI axes in Cumbria, and illustrate similar distributional tendencies. Such finds however have seen little attention and their significance is poorly understood.

Finally, work needs to develop at a more basic level. At present, almost all discussions emphasise the axe above all other things, so much so that the use of the raw materials is usually seen as synonymous with these forms. It is however clear that tuffs, for example, were used in other ways, and that even axes themselves were re-worked to create useable flakes and blanks. What forms this took and how far attitudes to the stone changed through time would be valuable to know.

**Initiatives**

- Further extensive and intensive survey is required to locate additional stone sources, through identification of the distinctive waste material. This could be combined with detailed trace element characterisation of outcrops (Claris and Quartermaine 1989) and more detailed technological characterisation (what was being made and how). This has proved useful thus far and should be conducted more intensively across a wide range of outcrops.

- At the known sources further monitoring of erosion and identification of working areas is required. In relation to this work, further opportunities for dating at the source and at other sources, should be taken as a priority as and when they arise. Source studies would also benefit from taking seriously the problem of erratics, though this issue is probably best addressed through the more careful examination of waste and worked implements found away from the source.

- There is also a need to prioritise the dating of other archaeological contexts in which axes and related forms, or even pieces of worked tuff, have been recovered. This would establish a check on the date range for the use of raw materials, and provide an opportunity to identify whether there is any temporal variability in the spread of implements across the region.

- The assemblage of roughout forms from across known worked outcrops requires closer analysis, making particular use of existing provenanced collections. There are also extensive numbers of rough outs and blades within museums and private collections. While many do not have contextual information, detailed morphological and technological analysis could still be undertaken. Socketed and shafthole axes in museum collections are in need of raw material and morphological characterisation, as well as closer dating.

**Lithics**

Although the lithic resource is considerable, interpretations of the evidence rely heavily on their assessment in relation to assemblages and technology from other regions of Britain, where the character, use and availability of raw materials is very different. The small size and limited availability of lithic raw materials in the region means that the use of chronological and technological distinctions based on assemblages from southern and eastern England is untenable. Furthermore the typological forms on which these have often been based are in reality very poorly understood.
Work needs to be done on local sequences and materials and how these changed over time. Narrow blade technology is not necessarily a chronological indicator for early material when local lithic resources are of poor quality. There is a need for an assessment of all well provenanced, dated material. Little is known of the chronology of Later Mesolithic to Bronze Age lithic assemblages in the region, and Neolithic assemblages cannot as yet be identified with certainty. There may be single period scatters within previously collected surface lithic assemblages. Little of this material however has seen metric characterisation, or assessment of reduction technology. Hundreds of lithic scatters have been identified on the western and southern coastal regions of Cumbria, and on the eastern limestone uplands. However the majority of such scatters have been derived from methodologically insecure contexts. This has resulted in false distributions and densities of material at site, landscape and regional scales. In addition, raw material characterisation of the available lithic resource may illustrate aspects of the long-distance exchange of raw materials, possibly related to the circulation of other goods and products.

**Initiatives**

- At the most basic level there is a need for characterisation of sources, and close dating of typologies.
- As the majority of lithic scatters are derived from coastal assemblages and erosion scars, and often contain material of mixed date, the identification and excavation of stratigraphically secure and scientifically datable material in association with lithic assemblages is imperative.
- Methodologically secure transect based programmes of surface survey of ploughzone scatters are important to establish the presence, absence and chronology of lithic assemblages in a variety of topographical zones.
- A number of unpublished excavations and fieldwalking programmes have taken place. The characterisation and publication of this material is important for the understanding of technology, chronology and landscape use in the region.
- The close analysis of museum collections has the potential to clarify technological distinctions between Later Mesolithic/Early Neolithic technologies and those of the Later Neolithic/Early Bronze Age.

**Ceramics**

The study of prehistoric ceramics is not simply a study of methods of technology and production, but can offer insights into religion, trade, diet and agricultural practices. Ceramics have traditionally been relied upon as chronological indicators to date sites and features, although there is little in the way of a regional chronology at present. Pottery vessels may also reflect religious practices and affiliations, indicating the movement and adoption of ideas and belief systems, as well as regional variation and innovation.

There is no prehistoric pottery typology or fabric sequence for the region, or even a bare summary of the existing resource. While there is an extensive archive of prehistoric ceramics existing in the region, and more will be recovered in the future, the database of the Later Prehistoric Pottery Survey project shows relatively little Late Bronze Age (to Late Iron Age) pottery recorded within the region. Even the distinction between Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age pottery is poorly understood. This may be more a matter of recording and publication than a reflection of the true situation, but demonstrates the impoverished state of prehistoric pottery studies in the North West. There are few published Neolithic and Bronze Age (and Iron Age) stratified pottery assemblages.

Additionally, little scientific work on prehistoric ceramics has been undertaken and source, use and potential routes of movement are not known. Only a few examples of thin section analysis have currently been undertaken within the region (e.g. Cherry, J. and Cherry 1992; Ellis 1993), although the results have proved promising. Lipid analysis at Oversley Farm (Ch) also proved successful and suggested the use and contents of some vessels, and potentially differential use between different styles of vessel (Garner Undated).

**Initiatives**
Prehistoric pottery typologies are still poorly understood, and reliant on chronologies and parallels from outside the region. The priority must be for more absolute dates, both from existing archives and by further scientific dating of contexts where prehistoric pottery types are securely stratified (particularly on developer-funded projects).

Fabric analysis, thin section analysis and sourcing of all prehistoric ceramics is required. This could incorporate the re-analysis of existing material in museum collections. In areas where faunal assemblages are not evident, analysis for lipids needs to be more widely applied for evidence of vessel use and consumption.

**Metalwork**

Despite the fact that the Bronze Age (and Iron Age) were named after developments in metallurgy, we know almost nothing about how or where these metals were mined and processed, or how the raw material and finished metal artefacts themselves were distributed. Although the evidence is slim there are hints at distinct traditions of metal working in parts of the region, such as the presence of a distinctive sword type in Cumbria (Needham 1982). The complete absence of certain types of metalwork, such as swords from south Lancashire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Cheshire is also noteworthy, and axes are the dominant artefact recovered from these areas.

The region contains numerous sources of copper but as yet the only evidence for Bronze Age copper mining comes from Alderley Edge (Ch), and the date of this mining does not fit with the items known to be made with metal from that source. Excavation at Alderley Edge has revealed some of the earliest evidence for Bronze Age copper mining in Britain. This demonstrates the relatively high potential for survival of earlier workings, even in areas where later extraction was extensive. The presence of stone hammers in Cumbria, although not numerous, also strongly suggests Bronze Age copper extraction in this area, but the evidence on the ground is as yet unknown. The single find of an Early Bronze Age ceramic tube within a grave at Ewanrigg (C) and a stone spearhead mould from Croglin (C) also offers potential evidence of metalworking taking place within the region during that period (Bewley 1992). The only comprehensive evidence for metalworking is the Late Bronze Age material from Beeston Castle (Ellis 1993). A great deal more work needs to be undertaken on the circulation of the metal ore from Alderley Edge, and the composition of bronze objects in the North West generally. Analysis of trace element and lead isotope compositions are still in their infancy, but these have the potential to provide information on the approximate date and provenance of artefacts (Ponting forthcoming). The region plays host to a number of 'exotic' artefacts from as far afield as Northern France and the Netherlands. The mechanism behind the movement of these goods, and also those from Ireland, Scotland and southern Britain, into the North West is not known but presumably some form of exchange was ongoing. Analysis of these artefacts is the first step towards an understanding of trade, exchange and interaction in the Bronze Age but the range of these exchange networks might suggest the possibility of copper extraction in the region.

**Initiatives**

- There is a need for analysis of the Bronze Age metalwork at a regional level. Particular patterns are evident that do not fit with national trends or follow modern political boundaries.

- Trace element and lead isotope analysis needs to be far more widely applied to artefacts to address patterns of extraction, production and distribution at a regional scale.

- While extensive surveys within the uplands have been already been undertaken, the potential for the identification of prehistoric mine workings should not be ruled out, and indeed could be actively sought. The identification of smelting sites may not be resolved by predictive modelling, but the national importance of the discovery of such a site needs to be realised from the outset. Assessment and mapping of all finds of stone hammers combined with trace element analysis of artefacts may well identify specific locations worthy of intensive survey and investigation.
• The reduction in peat cutting and extraction has limited the opportunities for the regular discovery of prehistoric material generally. The most common form of retrieval of copper alloy Bronze Age artefacts within the future is likely to be by metal detector. The collation of this information will require the continued liaison between the metal detecting fraternity and the Portable Antiquities Scheme Finds Liaison Officers. In particular the potential for keyhole excavation should be borne in mind for hoards or where there is the possibility of determining the context of deposition.

Legacy

The early centuries of the first millennium BC that mark the transition between the Bronze and Iron Ages remain particularly understudied and poorly understood. The Iron Age has often traditionally been studied as a precursor to the Roman period, rather than as a product of the Bronze Age, but detailed study of the period is fraught with difficulties. The artefacts (metalwork and pottery) and funerary practices represented within the Late Bronze Age archaeological record seemingly all but disappear by the Early Iron Age, and recognition of the period in the archaeological record has thus been thwarted. Middleton (1996, 54) noted an apparent decline in settlement in Lancashire during the Late Bronze Age, but this may in fact be related to site visibility and the reduction in the use of flint. Sites excavated at Beeston Castle (Ch), Brook House Farm, Bruen Stapleford (Ch) demonstrate continuity of occupation, although only identified through radiocarbon dating. At Irby (M) and Oversley Farm (Ch) there is evidence of activity during this transitional period, but less evidence for permanent occupation.

Even allowing for the artificial nature of archaeological period boundaries there is a visible change in the archaeological record at this time, and there is a need to examine this transitional phase between the Bronze and Iron Ages. The British Iron Age research agenda states that the discovery of Later Bronze Age and Early Iron Age sites should be viewed as more important from a research perspective than Later Iron Age sites (Haselgrove et al 2001, 26). More specifically there is a need to question what may be the causes of the discontinuities (if any) between the Bronze Age and the Iron Age.

IRON AGE

The traditional view of Late Iron Age societies in the north West is one of material poverty and little social hierarchy, with little work undertaken on Iron Age sites and little understanding of the period. But this view in itself is derived largely from models and reconstructions of Iron Age society from southern Britain. Recent work has begun to challenge this view, and place new discoveries within a regional, northern context.

Settlement and Landuse

Developer-funded excavation has begun to reveal Iron Age settlement sites in the southern areas of the region, and significant work has been undertaken over recent years. There is still, however, a shortage of evidence for Iron Age settlement of all classes or types within the North West, and a shortage of data relating to subsistence economics. While the number of new discoveries remains small this does demonstrates the potential for further discoveries, and that the density of settlement for the period may have been previously underestimated (see Nevell 1999; 2001). Further development is likely to expand on this picture, provided that suitable sampling strategies are utilised and archaeologists exploit the full range of scientific techniques (most especially absolute dating) at their disposal.

In contrast, the upstanding evidence in the uplands has received little recent attention. Enclosed ‘Romano-British’ round house settlements are numerous in the north of the region and some are in fact likely to date from the Iron Age. However few have been excavated or produced radiocarbon dates. The current project in Matterdale (Hoaen and Loney 2003; 2004) is clearly demonstrating the potential of modern excavation techniques combined with scientific dating to identify the complexity of occupation on upland sites, but also that Iron Age phases are well represented. This project remains the exception.

Issues of the lack of material culture and ceramics are often blamed for this situation but equally the longevity of types of particular sites and house styles has meant many features cannot be assigned an Iron Age date on morphological grounds alone. What is needed is the excavation of sites using a suite of scientific and artefactual analyses that are appropriate to the data and research questions. Although seemingly individual
structures survive in the uplands, there is in general a perceived lack of visibility of smaller enclosed and unenclosed Iron Age settlements for most of the region.

There are few ‘hillforts’ in the region and only a limited number of these have been examined through excavation or dated using radiocarbon techniques. Radiocarbon dates from Beeston Castle in Cheshire indicate that this was Late Bronze Age in origin and this could well be the case elsewhere in the region including the hillforts of the Ribble Valley and Cumbria. Equally, the chronology of such sites is unclear although the small amount of radio-carbon dates from the southern half of the region might suggest that many if not all hillforts were abandoned before the end of the first millennium BC. The issue of ‘hillforts’ is not confined to the Iron Age. Many of the potential hillfort/large enclosure sites may be multi-period, with or without Iron Age phases of occupation (LUAU 1999). The potential for Iron Age occupation however remains high, and ephemeral and possibly aceramic phases within enclosed hilltop sites may actually hold important details on differential settlement use and hierarchy.

The emphasis on locating settlement sites has led to only little attempt to place them in a wider context of landscape use and division. With increased amounts of data such an approach should be possible in several areas of the region. There is a lack of broader evidence for prehistoric land division, or few dates for features where they do exist. There appear to be potential pre-Roman field systems to the south of Chester (Matthews 2002b), but we are currently lacking dating evidence. Likewise in Cumbria field systems associated with cairn fields and round houses have potential Iron Age phases but remain largely undated. It might be expected that different areas of the region demonstrate different systems of land division and enclosure according to agricultural preferences.

Initiatives

Most of the issues regarding Iron Age settlement are presented within the Agricultural Communities theme above (p xx).

- A reassessment of old archives of Romano-British but also potentially Iron Age sites is required. In particular finds of metalwork need to be located and revisited for modern analysis.

- Additionally there is a need for a re-assessment of hillfort excavation archives in the light of modern research in order to locate artefactual material and establish the chronological depth of these sites.

Ritual, Religion and ceremony

There is a general lack of visibility of Iron Age religious practices or burial, bar hints at deliberate deposition of artefacts and human bodies in wetland contexts. With only one cemetery excavation dated to the Iron Age, it is currently unknown if burial practices predominantly involved cremation, excarnation, inhumation, or a combination of all of these. Continuity in some practices from the Late Bronze Age is often presumed, but there is as yet little evidence. It is also noteworthy how few burials from cave contexts are postulated to date from the Iron Age, despite the presence of Bronze Age and Romano-British material, and the critical shortage of radiocarbon dates for most of this material.

Burials recently excavated in Cumbria are the first within the region to be scientifically dated to the Iron Age (OA North 2004). These crouched inhumations buried without grave goods may easily have been mistaken for Bronze Age internments without absolute dating. It is acknowledged that the poor preservation of bone in the region’s acid soils may prevent regular recovery of both human and animal remains, but this makes it all the more imperative that such material is treated as a priority, when the opportunity arises. Material within pits may represent special depositional practices rather than simply rubbish.

Initiatives

- The lack of recorded Iron Age burials within the region is in some ways self perpetuating, with remains often presumed to be of other dates because there are ‘no known Iron Age burials’. There may be a significant amount of undated material already excavated and stored in archives that requires reassessment and dating.
• A wider literature search may reveal a more common reuse of earlier monuments during the Iron Age than previously acknowledged. This would fall in line with Barrett (1999a; 1999b) and others understanding of the reorganisation of the prehistoric landscape during the first millennium BC.

Technology, Production, Trade Exchange and Interaction

There is a comparative lack of artefactual evidence from which traditionally the discussion on technology, production, trade and exchange has stemmed. Despite the traditional nomenclature there is little evidence for the production or use of iron artefacts for most of the period. The one exception is the inland salt industry of Cheshire, where there is evidence for two production sites, and widespread distribution of the ceramics associated with salt storage. Consequently it is unclear how any of the natural resources of the region were controlled, or whether they were open for communal exploitation, or by whom they were exploited.

The distribution of Cheshire Very Coarse Pottery (VCP) may elaborate on ways in which exchange and interaction may be visible. The early Iron Age distribution pattern shows a local network in Cheshire and north-east Wales but the later distribution pattern (Middle and Late Iron Age) shows that Cheshire salt was exchanged throughout north Wales, the north Midlands, and the Marches. The Iron Age salt production sites are largely unknown but recent work has recovered evidence beneath Romano-British sites, and it is likely that other evidence will be brought to light in a similar manner. The evidence for the production and distribution of salt is currently confined to the south if the region. If the products from the inland industry are not travelling to the north, then there is the potential for localised coastal manufacture in the northern part of the region.

The greater element of production was almost certainly agricultural, but there is little evidence for artefact production (pottery and metalwork), and little evidence for metal ore exploitation on a national scale (Ponting forthcoming). The iron ore deposits and the extensive woodland within the region would have offered excellent facilities for iron production. It is possible that many working sites have been destroyed by later extractive activity, but the location of smelting sites, probably located away from the extractive workings themselves, may well survive and await discovery. Likewise studies of copper and lead ores have often considered exploitation during the Bronze Age and the Romano-British and later periods, largely leaving aside the Iron Age. The issues remain the same as those for the earlier periods (above) but Iron Age exploitation of copper, lead and iron ores must also be taken into account when studying early industry.

The existing finds base is being added to by the Portable Antiquities Scheme and at least in the southern part of the region in the last ten years a number of objects have come to light (including bull’s head escutcheons and celtic coins) which hint at wider patterns of social exchange and interaction. In regard to this the enigmatic coastal site at Meols could be viewed as one of the series of late prehistoric and Romano-British emporia, or trading sites, known from the English Channel and the Irish Sea, with strong trading links with the Iron Age tribes of Brittany and later the western Mediterranean (Matthews 2002a). Meols potentially had a unique role in the region as a facilitator of international trade throughout the period.

Initiatives

• Many points relevant to this section are covered within the Early Industries initiatives above (P xx).

• Iron Age metalwork remains rare at a regional scale, and iron objects are believed to be uncommon, but there is no up-to-date corpus of Iron Age artefacts for the region. Existing archives require revisiting with a view to evaluating the known extent of Iron Age material culture. The forthcoming publication of Meols and the finds on the PAS database would also help considerably towards this study.

• The scarcity of ceramic and metal containers has led to the suggestion of the widespread use of organic containers. Despite their presumed abundance, no such artefacts have yet been recovered from the region. Waterlogged contexts must be viewed as potentially preserving such items and investigated accordingly with extreme scrutiny.

Legacy
It has been pointed that whilst much of the North West was environmentally and agriculturally marginal during the first millennium BC does not mean that the societies within that area were themselves marginal (Nevell 2004). Thus, a low level of archaeologically visible material culture as occurs in the Iron Age in the North West does not necessarily equate with an impoverished society and need not imply the same trends in the following period. Almost certainly the settlement patterns, landscape use, and social structures developed in this period continued into the Romano-British period and even issues of artefact use and mineral exploitation recur in this region later on.

References


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