



Book Reviews

TIMELINE: THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE SOUTH WALES GAS PIPELINE BY TIMOTHY DARVILL, ANDREW DAVID, SEREN GRIFFITHS, JONATHAN HART, HEATHER JAMES, KEN MURPHY AND JAMES RACKHAM

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Between 2005 and 2007 anyone passing through South Wales, Herefordshire or Gloucestershire could not have failed to notice the broad scar of a major gas pipeline being inserted across the country. This project, a 317 km long gas pipeline, stretched from Milford Haven in Pembrokeshire to Tirley in Gloucestershire. It was one of the longest such projects witnessed in Wales in recent years. The project represents a long, narrow, winding transect across the landscape, the route of which was carefully designed to avoid all known archaeological sites and monuments. Despite this, the subsequent watching brief and archaeological investigations were to investigate several hundred trenches and even more test pits. This resulted in rich new data being generated and many important major new sites discovered and excavated.

This book takes us on a chronological journey through the project and its key archaeological findings. It begins by explaining the background to the project, detailing the methodologies used, naming the many archaeological and other organisations involved and setting out the parameters, limitations and opportunities that such a project presented. This first chapter highlights the complexity of such a scheme, even in today's well established commercial archaeological framework. The description in this, and all future chapters, divides the pipeline into three zones following the direction of gas flow. The first area, in the west, takes a line between Milford Haven, Pembrokeshire to Aberdulais, Neath Port Talbot. The second from Felindre, Swansea to Brecon, Powys. The third takes us from Brecon to Tirley, Gloucestershire. The chapter concludes with a statement by Seren Griffiths about the radiocarbon dating and the fact that this is one of the largest datasets so far recovered from commercial archaeology in Wales that has been subject to Bayesian analysis.

Chapter 2 looks at the landscapes. Jonathan Hart describes the topography and geology through which the pipeline passes. Despite largely being a lowland route there are occasions, especially on Mynydd Myddfai, around the mid-point of the route, where the pipeline necessarily crosses an

important upland landscape, one which it transpires, produces a rich crop of new sites which are discussed in later chapters.

Chapter 3 by Andrew David starts the reader on a chronological journey. Dealing with the very limited evidence for tentative Upper Palaeolithic flintwork from possible open-air sites east of Brecon and the scattered Mesolithic finds which rather surprisingly are very few in number; just three new early Mesolithic and seven later Mesolithic sites. David is forced to conclude that there is little new that can be added to the overall picture of an understanding of these periods in Wales.

Chapter 4 by Tim Darvill is the heart of this book. With 84 new Neolithic or Bronze Age sites to get his teeth into this is the longest and the central chapter in the volume which presents a picture of the data that anyone who has heard anything about the pipeline was itching to read. Using the wealth of new radiocarbon dates available, the sites can be placed into a detailed chronological framework. There are stand-out sites amongst these, particularly the Vaynor henge, Carmarthenshire (site 503). This later Neolithic henge was on a hilltop and was found using pre-construction geophysics, but unlike other sites there was no option to re-route the pipeline leaving the only option to fully excavate this monument. The henge had a long history of construction, use and erosion. The ceremonial nature of this monument is reflected by being the centre for a regional community coming together at various times. Other linear schemes in the vicinity, such as the A477 St Clears to Red Roses road (Barber *et al.* 2019) have also brought to light an extensive cremation cemetery just to the north of the site and a further cemetery (site 222) identified during the pipeline excavations to the east all help to reinforce this monument's position in the landscape.

We then turn to a group of 11 burnt mounds and a separate wooden trough (site 506) were excavated. The dating of these monuments adds detail to an understanding of early burnt mounds from west Wales, and indeed beyond. Those studied cover a time-period soon after 2800 cal. BC and the five subsequent centuries. Further remarkable discoveries include a halberd with a surviving part of its haft from within a ring-ditch at Llwyn-Meurig, Trecastle, Powys (site 38.17; Needham 2015). The Steynton, Pembrokeshire ring ditch (site 513) with seven ceramic vessels and one possible organic container add to the picture. This chapter brings all these, and many more, sites into a framework using the new dating sequences and drawing on the parallels that can be found across Wales and western Britain in impressive style.

Chapter 5 by Ken Murphy moves us into the Iron Age. As is stated in the deliberate attempt to avoid known monuments the pipeline was routed away from all hillforts but in doing this new lower lying settlements were revealed. An impressive new defended hilltop enclosure at Conkland Hill, Pembrokeshire (site 508) was revealed as well as several unenclosed settlements, including

roundhouses at Pen-y-Crug at Yscir, Powys (site 51.07) located below the hillfort of the same name.

In Chapter 6 we move into the Roman period where Heather James highlights and describes the few sites recovered. Again, in avoiding known monuments, it is those ephemeral traces that are thrown up in this work and an important discovery of part of a previously unknown Roman road near Brecon Gaer, Powys (site 110) may pre-date this important fort. Crop-processing ovens in the area indicate a wider span of Roman engagement than had been thought. New connections can be made between the sites revealed by the pipeline, such as the ironworking sites near Winter's Cross Herefordshire (site 430) to previously known activity, such as the Roman extraction of iron ores in the Forest of Dean.

Heather James continues the presentation from the end of Roman Britain into the early medieval period where more crop-drying ovens provide new evidence for this activity and some continuity of habits across the landscape. These important new sites have shed new light on agricultural practices and link in with the excellent literature review James presents that connect to the environmental analysis and dating programmes to add important new data to understand this period.

Chapter 8 looks at the medieval and later period taking a long sweep of time from AD 1000 – 1900. Most evidence apparently comes from the western end of this pipeline and Ken Murphy utilises the historic photography of the area to detail some of the changes. The strip and field systems thrown up by this work help reinforce the interpretation of these periods. The key site being evidence for charcoal burning and saw-pits/wood working sites within Canastan Wood, Pembrokeshire (Sites 269, 517 and 518). This chapter ends by looking at brick kilns near Abermarlais, Carmarthenshire (site 28.23).

Chapter 9 focuses solely on the environmental evidence that the pipeline has generated. There was an opportunity for major analysis of bulk samples and sediment cores throughout the length of the pipeline and the sequences, along with the radiocarbon dating programme have enabled James Rackham to generate an impressive reconstruction of the landscapes the people inhabited at known times. These, and an appendix summarising the main pollen zones, provide a detailed picture of the environmental changes and place them within their wider landscapes of Wales.

The concluding Chapter 10 by Jonathan Hart reminds us of the highlights that this pipeline has uncovered and draws together a brief synthesis of all that has been presented before.

This short, but beautifully presented, book has highlighted and brought together what was no doubt a major complex infrastructure project in a clear and accessible way. The book is clearly

aimed at a general audience, rather than at a specialist readership and most technical terms are addressed in the text. Between the chapters there are some clearly presented two-page summaries that detail seven key sites, with newly commissioned reconstruction drawings, bringing several of the sites back to life. There are ample illustrations, mainly photographs showing people working, rather than the traditional archaeological site photographs. But there are none of the tables or statistics, no summary of the radiocarbon dates which I would have liked to have seen. Such would have enabled this book to fulfill a dual function of providing a summary of the key findings to both the general and a professional readership. It is only to be hoped that it will succeed in reaching the audience for whom it is aimed. So, having embarked on an expectation that this book would present these important new data one is left feeling that it will remain necessary to turn to the no doubt thousands of pages in, we are told, 123 online archive reports arising from this project to obtain the detail. That said, the key findings of this work are presented here in this beautifully illustrated and well-presented outcome of a significant and major piece of work.

References

- Barber, A., Hardy, A. and Mudd, A. 2019. *The Prehistoric Archaeology of the A477 St Clears to Red Roses Road Improvement Scheme 2012*. Cotswold Archaeology Monograph 12. Cirencester: Cotswold Archaeology
- Needham, S. 2015. A hafted halberd excavated at Trecastell, Powys: from undercurrent to uptake – the emergence and contextualization of halberds in Wales and north-west Europe. *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 81, 1–42

Elizabeth A. Walker

Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales

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