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Book Reviews



A CORRIDOR THROUGH TIME: THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE A55 ANGLESEY ROAD SCHEME. Edited by Richard Cuttler, Andrew Davidson and Gwilym Hughes. Pp. xvi and 296, Illus 145. Oxbow Books, 2012. Price: £35.00. ISBN 978 184217 243 4.

This book records the main results of excavations undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology and Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT), mostly between January and July 1999, on a transect of twenty-five miles of central Anglesey. This route cut through long-established agricultural land and it is not surprising that all the sites investigated had been extremely badly damaged in the past, so that remains were tenuous and very difficult to interpret in detail and stratigraphy was virtually non-existent.

The main discoveries were three late prehistoric/Romano-British farm settlements, Cefn Du, Cefn Cwmwd (the richest of them, with a history stretching into the seventh century AD with some notable finds) and Melin y Plas. The first two were excavated by Birmingham, the last by GAT who also excavated the Early Christian cemetery at Tŷ Mawr, near Holyhead. The latter site is now more fully contextualized by the Trust's very extensive excavations adjacent to it on the site of a new business park, Parc Cybi, where more satisfactory conditions of excavation prevailed. Another major product of the work was the recording of forty-two burnt mounds, increasing the number known on the island from four to forty-six, and providing an instructive series of radiocarbon dates, but little new in terms understanding their role. Neolithic and Bronze Age remains were limited to various pits with pottery, mainly consisting of Impressed Wares which were not generously illustrated, some unhelpful radiocarbon dates, and the last traces of a small Early Bronze Age cremation cemetery, found unexpectedly at Cefn Cwmwd, which nevertheless contained interesting grave-goods.

The book is divided into three sections: the excavation accounts, site by site but with the burnt mounds treated as a group; the finds discussed by specialists in independent magisterial essays, followed by a discussion of the environmental evidence and other analytical work; and finally, a concluding commentary summarizing the new evidence in the light of Anglesey's already-known archaeology. This last section is itself divided into three: 'Neolithic and early Bronze Age', 'Iron Age and Romano-British', and 'Early Middle Ages'. The section dealing with earlier prehistory has little to add and in places (pp. 246–47) takes scant notice of the views of the excavators and finds specialists. The discussion of the later prehistoric hut settlements stresses the variety of house architecture revealed and the evidence of Post-Roman continuity. But because of the extreme damage to the sites, the evidence here is much less compelling than that at other, previously excavated, sites on the island, such as Bryn Eryr. This is followed by a study of the

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island's agriculture which makes good use of the environmental work carried out for this project. The section on early medieval Anglesey is hung upon the cemetery at Tŷ Mawr and is an impressively wide-ranging study of the cemeteries and power structures of the island from AD 400–1100.

I reviewed this book before it was published and I fear I may be responsible for the long delay in its appearance. At that time I said it needed rigorous editing and I fear it still does. There is a sad lack of integration between the excavation accounts and the finds essays (page references would help the reader). There is no uniformity of use of context numbers, finds numbers, or scales for sections and plans. Some of the features, such as the ring ditch at Tŷ Mawr and the multiple pits (S1) at Cefn Cwmwd, are open to debate and variance of view is acceptable and inevitable, but if you want to check the fairness of my comment look at the Bronze Age cemetery at Cefn Cwmwd, the most straightforward of the sites. The reader who may wish to work with the evidence in this book will find this hard. Readers may not be conscious of the work of a good editor, but they will certainly notice the absence of one.

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