

(Some notes on a Conference held at the University of Wales, College of Cardiff (UWCC) on December 16th 1988.)

This conference took place under the chairmanship of Professor Keith Branigan, and in the part-time presence of a Minister of State of the Welsh Office. The first scientific address came from Dr. Mark Pollard, the SERC representative in Cardiff, who put in an eloquent plea for another contract worker to be placed in the University by CADW (Welsh for English Heritage), specialising in geophysical survey and/or metallurgy. He was not in favour of freelance workers and, as he put it, cottage industry. Dr Quintin Dresser (of UWCC strongly supported by CADW) gave an account of radiocarbon dating; he operates the Cardiff laboratory. David Watkinson, who holds a CADW contract in UWCC dealing with conservation, gave an account of the teaching of this subject at Cardiff and his activities as a whole. Metallurgy was discussed in more detail by Peter Crew (Snowdonia National Park) who wished to educate field archaeologists to take more interest in the subject and to make a more rational collection of slag samples. Carl Hever gave an account of the latest one-man geo-surveying implements and begged for their wider use. He also showed a photograph of Professor Atkinson's prototype instrument dating from the days BC (in Wales that means Before CADW).

Biology then took over. Dr John Evans gave an account of mollusc work, both marine and terrestrial. Uniquely, he did not put in a plea for more money. Lunch then intervened. The recent merger has done nothing for the catering departments of either University College Cardiff or University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology. We were offered some lukewarm structures looking remarkably like one of Bone Jones' favourite topics of study, although they perhaps tasted better. Martin Bell (St David's University College, Lampeter) then described in his usual lucid manner the study of plant remains in Wales. Apparently some neolithic muesli has been discovered in Aberystwyth. As the nearest full-time professional archaeozoologist is situated at Oxford, I was called upon to speak on the study of non-human bones in Wales. As an amateur, not to mention a cottage industry, I felt free to ignore my brief and requested that animal bones be taken seriously as part of the agricultural if not industrial scene, and not just as the remains of the Sunday dinner of one of the more fortunate members of society. Since a request for a full-time archaeozoologist would be unrealistic in a place with such extensive acid soils as there are in Wales, I recommended that the subject should be in the charge of someone familiar with local conditions and previous work. That would seem to be one of the numerous tasks of Astrid Caseldine (Lampeter), who has recently been appointed by CADW to consolidate biological studies. I also suggested that an archive of all Welsh site reports, published or otherwise, and any data available on animal husbandry of the past, should be assembled, translating from the Welsh where necessary.

Dr Clifford Price then gave an account of the Ancient Monuments Laboratory, using their favourite pie diagrams to illustrate the proportions of various activities and finance. He implied that more money was in fact being spent than the diagrams indicated. It would appear that AML staff cannot be accepted into the Scientific Civil Service for political reasons, and that they cannot receive additional finance from development funds for bureaucratic ones. Bill Britnell, Director of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust,

then gave what he termed a consumer's viewpoint. He suggested in-service training for excavators in order that they should know what and how many samples to take in a given situation. This viewpoint was endorsed from the floor. The final speaker was Richard Avent of CADW. He complained that CADW was expected to fund everything out of very little and got blamed for everything regardless. He then added that the Welsh Office had actually produced some more money. Unfortunately someone asked how much, and it transpired that a £5000 cut in funds had been graciously restored. There must be a Welsh word for this. It was certainly of no assistance to the hard-pressed museum conservators, of whom there are currently 2.5 for the whole Principality.

The highly successful organisation and pleasant atmosphere of the conference were in no small part due to the enthusiasm and energy of its organiser Kate Hunter, (Conservation, UWCC). However, to be serious, the situation for environmental archaeology in Wales is far from splendid. Development money is not going to do much for us, except perhaps in limited parts of Glamorgan and Gwent. One bright spark, however: conservators have increased by about 27%; the Newport Museum has just appointed its own, as I was informed afterwards.

We have an environmental problem of potentially immense proportions, a second Severn Bridge having been sanctioned and the Severn littoral on the Welsh bank is absolutely stiff with well-preserved artefacts. How on earth, or perhaps in this context on mud, are we going to cope?

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