

Endings and New Beginnings – Cadbury Day 18th October 2014

First, a very big THANK YOU to everyone who brought cake! I could not even make an impression on it despite several attempts. Second and more important is our acknowledgement of the hard work by the SSARG Committee and members in preparing and hosting the day. Thank you for your enthusiasm and dedication. The presentations were varied and fascinating, chock-full of new information, research and hypotheses. There was almost too much to absorb.

While the theme of the conference was the end of Roman Britain and the new beginnings of 'Saxon' (to use Ann Cole's shorthand), the message that came across was about continuity. The presentations demonstrated how we are able to interpret this continuity in archaeology, toponymy and landscape studies. James Gerrard set the scene with his hypothesis on the emergence of ethnic identities in the centuries following the withdrawal of Rome from Britain. Gerrard concluded the conference with a pertinent question which no one could readily answer. 'Here we are - researching the same theme using a multiplicity of techniques, how can we exchange information?' The Cadbury Day conferences achieved this to an extent, so perhaps these papers should be brought together for publishing.

Fiona Fleming has tackled the theme of continuity in broad trends in her PhD on 'Continuity and Regionality from Roman to the Early Medieval'. This study is part of the Fields of Britannia project (University of Exeter). As a spatial analysis of records of settlement taken from archaeological and historical sources, the study was intended to compare trends in settlement from the fifth to the 11th centuries in Norfolk, Kent and Somerset.

Very broadly, her conclusions for Somerset agreed with Peter Leach's observation that Roman occupation was sparse to the west of the River Parrett and denser to the east. OK. There was a subsequent contraction of settlement and then an expansion in the 10th and 11th centuries. OK again. Continuity of settlement was a feature of the better-drained lowland soils and valleys while low, wet, acid soils were abandoned in favour of higher ground. These less favourable locations were reoccupied towards the end of the period. I must say my initial reaction was 'So what? Does that actually tell us anything new?' But, in fact, these rather diffuse conclusions can give a general framework within which we can interpret site-specific evidence.

One such site is the spectacular Druce Farm villa in the Piddle Valley in Dorset, where the East Dorset Antiquarian Society members have been excavating for three years. On the theme of continuity, Lilian Ladle presented evidence for built structures, certainly from 1st century to 6th century AD. A sequence of floor surfaces and foundations were uncovered, suggesting buildings of quality attracting continued investment in extension and decoration. In its heyday, the site boasted Ilchester school mosaics and exotic slate roofing. Expensive foods were served from unusual and beautiful accoutrements shipped from the continent: the occupants literate, wealthy and perhaps aristocratic.

From the 5th century, the emphasis changed as worlds contracted. While the occupants still valued their living arrangements, they no longer applied outdated specialist skills. Fifth century mosaic repairs were utilitarian rather than artistic. Continental imports no longer

arrived. Instead, functional local domestic pottery was in use, very different from fine, silky Gaulish ware found in earlier contexts. If Fleming's results are applied, the dry chalk downs of Dorset still afforded agricultural opportunities. However we await the results of radio carbon dating to confirm whether the villa was in use right up until the occupants moved further down the valley to the present site of the Saxon-founded manor of Higher Waterston, or deserted the site completely, leaving the ruins to the barn owls.

Who were the villa inhabitants, continuing everyday life despite the withdrawal of Roman patronage? The 'Saxons' did not manage to obtain a foothold in Dorset until the later 7th century (Eagles 2001, p222). James Gerrard argued a model for the new order as a social and political adaptation of the old structure of power.

By the 4th century AD, the militias were controlling the Emperor's civil administration using violence and fear, advertised by empirical imagery and military uniform: the belt of office and the crossbow brooch. The military control over the humilitares, the humble and poor, was complete and ruthless. The civilian provincial elite, honestiores, were not allowed to express their status with military force or paraphernalia, but instead exhibited their power as the reverse side of Roman society, by cultural superiority. They acquired and displayed their cultural affinity with the Empire through their dress, house décor and exotic, imported 'stuff', as interpreted at Druce Villa. They pursued the ideal of paideia, educated, cultured and honest; they exerted their patronage of the humilitares by publicly exhibiting their lifestyle.

In the absence of Roman finance, law, taste and imports, both military and civilian classes lost their raison d'être, but gained a kind of freedom. Gerrard argued that the civilian elite, while denied a military role, had maintained private armies of retainers, ostensibly for hunting. In the absence of imposed control, the elite dropped the outdated cultural façade asserting their authority through a quasi-military identity adopting military costume and equipment. Local aristocrats evolved, by force, as rulers of small tribal worlds, justifying their position by presenting distinct tribal identities.

John Davey touched on how this change in emphasis can be identified in the landscape, referring to his work in the South Cadbury environs and with the Tintinhull and Region Landscape Archaeology Project. Rectilinear land divisions, routeways and dispersed settlements, analysed by map regression, could indicate the pattern of prehistoric land division maintained throughout the Roman and medieval period. Gerrard suggested a more egalitarian society prevailed which could be demonstrated in Davey's research on field boundaries. He hypothesised that following the collapse of traditional society, material culture had disappeared, leaving little opportunity for grand displays of power and group identity. However, the need to preserve a rural economy required maintenance of the agricultural landscape, and ditch clearing was an essential activity in which all members of society could cooperate for mutual benefit, a continuing legacy within the landscape. Davey suggested that field patterns indicate a concentration on cattle rearing - moving herds around the landscape.

There is a distinct contrast between west and east Britain in expressions of ethnic affinity visible in the burial record. Somewhere around the Bokerley Dyke, east Dorset, the 'bling'

stops. Clare Randall drew our attention to a number of western cemeteries, dating from the fifth to the seventh centuries with very similar traits and few, if any, grave goods. Cannington and Poundbury are two well-known larger ones, but she told us about her analysis of skeletal remains from a small site at Worth Matravers, Dorset. This appeared to be a family burial ground, evidenced from inherited tooth and bone non-metric traits. There was an under-representation of men: discussion suggested men were drowned (one had been buried with a stone anchor for a pillow), enslaved or buried elsewhere. Since this trend was also witnessed at Tolpuddle Ball and Cannington it does not appear to be unusual for the period. The graves were orientated eastish/westish, but as the Cannington report (Rahtz et al, 2000) concluded, this cannot be interpreted as Christian burial. Gerrard initiated some discussion on whether the humilitares had ever really converted to Christianity, and the orientation seen here was a continuity of tradition, not an expression of religious belief.

It appears that the western communities had no desire to overtly express a new ethnicity in their appearance and the messages of the grave. Gerrard suggests that instead they adopted an identity from the past, moving back to and refortifying hill forts, raising inscribed stones over their dead and trading luxury goods from the Mediterranean. The archaeological evidence for reoccupation and status of hill forts is also evidenced by the number of coins of this period found at such sites, for example, Hod Hill.

Patterns and continuity of trade was the theme of Michael Costen's presentation. Using numismatic evidence, he is beginning to research trading patterns and market sites from AD 600 to 900 across Devon, Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire. The former two areas are almost totally devoid of early coins, but there is a concentration of early 8th century coins in Dorset and particularly around Dorchester, Maiden Castle and Weymouth. This area was in control of the King and attracted trade through Weymouth and inland to the King's toll centre. Minster sites – Wareham and Twyneham - also attracted trade upstream and into the Dorset and Wiltshire chalk downlands. Silver Frisian coins imply continental merchants worked along the coast from Hamwic, Hengistbury and Wareham and directly to Dorchester through Weymouth. Costen suggested the chalk downland, right up to the Mercian border, produced wool for export.

No doubt the Frisian influence was felt in more spheres than trade. This period was one of high mobility; the furnished burials of the east suggest that the incoming continental culture was soon dominant. However, ethnicity is mutable, transformed by social relationships and movement between groups (Lucy 2005, p97). Isotopic evidence is now suggesting that the message from the grave cannot be taken at face value (Lucy 2005, p106). While there was population movement from the continent, the nature and degree of this movement, and how this resulted in a 'Saxon' culture is debatable. Gerrard suggested, by analogy, that Hengist, Horsa and the continental diaspora are creation myths, fact explained by fiction to justify the power and position of the Saxons. Instead, we could consider a steady trickle of peoples from Scandinavia and the eastern seaboard of the North Sea. The Gallic Chronicles state that Britain fell to the lordship of the Saxons (Alcock 1973, p106). What we do not know is who these 'Saxons' were. As Gerrard said, 'Saxon' is a name, 'the knife wearers', given to an ethnic group by another group. It could have been a stereotypical description, perhaps of a people who, in England, had become more 'Saxon' than their proposed origins.

At any rate, the Anglo-Saxon language dominated, and Ann Cole used the evidence of this language to discuss how place-names can identify continuity of use of Roman road systems. Saxon movement had different focuses from earlier routeways and only some existing roads would have been useful. Saxon routes brought travellers from the east to the south coast ports and across to the Viking coast onwards to Dublin. The presence of existing roads is acknowledged in place-names; such as 'Stratton' and 'Stratford', but there are other less obvious clues. For example, as water was a major consideration for travellers, streams, ponds and springs close to roads were advertised: *iwell*, *funta*, *mere*. Functional places were also identified, for example: *draeg*: a place where help with pulling was available. There were also natural landscape features which acted as signposts: *orr* was a particular shaped hill. Using such place-names Cole has identified those Roman roads utilised in the 'Saxon' period. This was the most delightful, and possibly my favourite, lecture of the day; and requires a read of her BAR.

Despite the diverse range of content, research methods and presentations, the whole of this Cadbury Day was more than the sum of its parts. We were immersed in a rapidly changing landscape and nation with evidence for a continuity of localised communities struggling to achieve identity without the direct influence of Romanitas: pragmatic people who concentrated on the basics of life, but were by no means, uncivilised, isolated or without aspirations. Increasing archaeological evidence and research gives us the opportunity to debate and rethink our concept of this enigmatic period.

Gill Vickery

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