

Figure 1. The Severn Estuary and Somerset Levels: Location of sites discussed in this report:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1 Kenn Moor | 5 Barland's Farm |
| 2 Magor Pill | 6 Caldicot Pill: Pollen site |
| 3 Somerset Levels | 7 Gore Sands and Stert Flats:
Bridgwater Bay |
| 4 Cardiff Bay <i>The 'Louisa'</i> | 8 Goldcliff |

ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE SEVERN ESTUARY 1994

by Martin Bell
(Secretary until 12.11.94)

National awareness

Discoveries in the Severn Estuary have undoubtedly made an important contribution to an increased national awareness of coastal and intertidal archaeology which has been apparent during 1994. English Heritage commissioned Reading and Southampton Universities to prepare a survey of England's Coastal Heritage (Trow 1994) which will be published in 1995. That synthesis of existing knowledge and recommendations for the future will help to put the Severn work in a wider context. Paradoxically, of course, the richest area of intertidal archaeology in Britain occurs on the Welsh side of the Severn Estuary which is not covered by the survey, but it does make significant comparative reference to Welsh work. It is to be hoped that in the future a sister survey of the Welsh coastal heritage may be prepared.

Also very welcome is the launch of a Code of Practice for Seabed Developers drawn up by the Joint Nautical Archaeological Policy Committee (1995). The Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments in Wales and the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (1995) are becoming increasingly involved in the preparation of inventories of maritime sites. It is particularly encouraging to see the English Commission sponsoring archaeological survey in Bridgewater Bay and we include an extended report on that project (p87). This is longer than we would normally publish and we do so because it illustrates the type of detailed documentation necessary if we are to make a full assessment of the archaeological potential of specific areas of coast. It also raises important

issues of methodology and safety which are of concern to all coastal archaeologists.

Planning issues

The scale of development pressures affecting the Severn Estuary continue to be a matter of great concern. Figure 2 shows the distribution of archaeological sites and some development proposals in the Gwent Levels. The pressure on this landscape has been particularly increased by the Second Severn Crossing now under construction. The largest single development proposal is the motorway bypass to the south of Newport. Clearly the Gwent Levels Historic Landscape Project (p7-19) will be a vital background to the archaeological assessment of the landscapes which will be affected. Much more problematic will be the identification of an appropriate methodology for the assessment of the archaeological potential of the buried landscape which underlies much of its route. The intertidal discoveries which are mainly due to the dedicated fieldwork of Derek Upton (Figure 3) prefigure what lies concealed below these levels.

Other smaller-scale proposals may turn out to be equally important. Pressure for industrial and commercial development exists in many areas of the Levels. The Gwent Europark development to the east of Llanwern steelworks is an example which produced the Barland's Farm Boat (p59), so far the most dramatic archaeological find from the Levels.

The committee has for some time been concerned by our relative ignorance of the archaeological potential of the area to be affected by Cardiff Bay Development. In view of

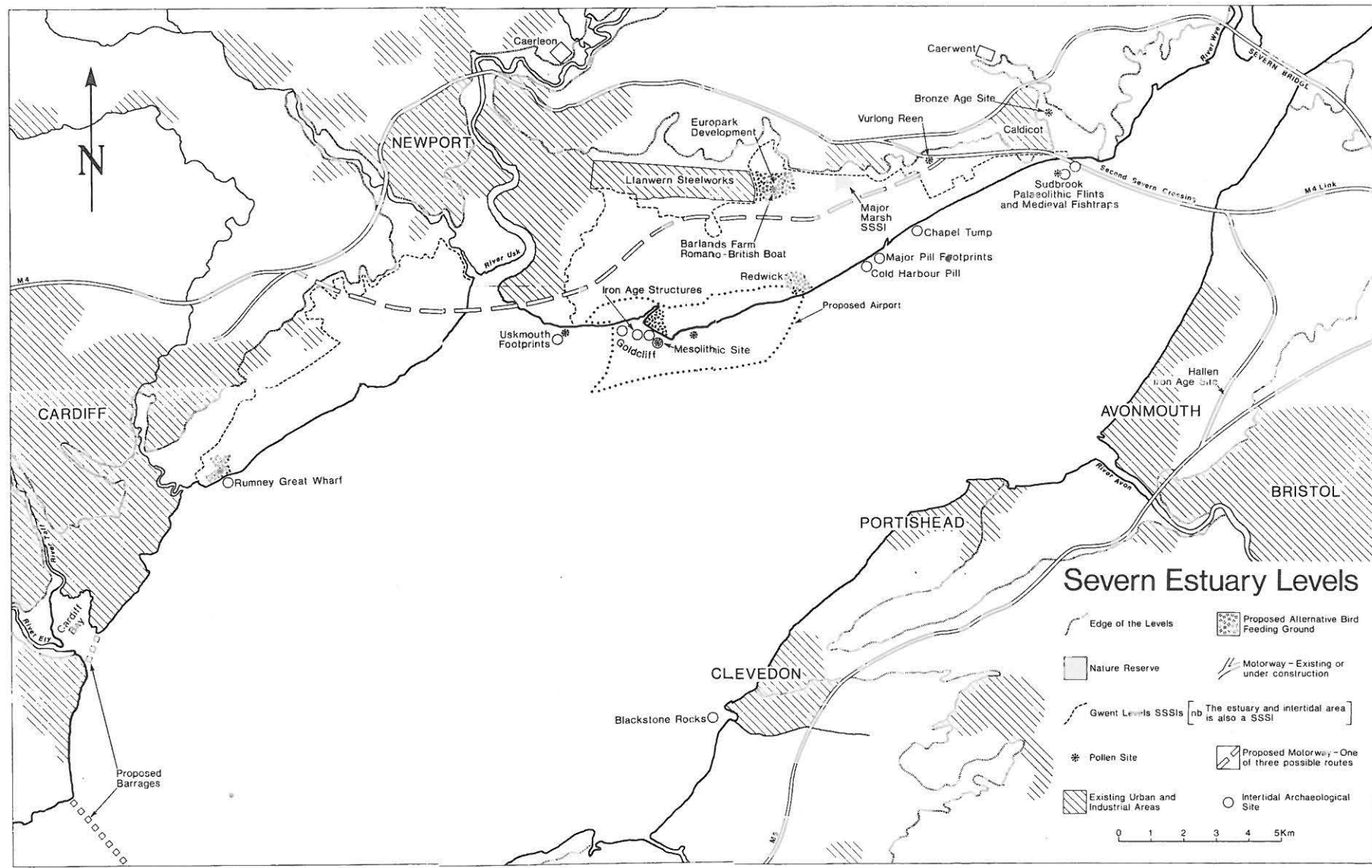


Figure 2. The Severn Estuary Levels: showing development trends and key archaeological sites in South Wales.



Figure 3. Derek Upton (standing), finder of many of the Severn Estuary sites, at the Goldcliff excavation 1994.

the scale of development now underway, and proposed, there is a clear need for survey and archaeological appraisal of the whole area. A start has thankfully now been made on one site which has been identified, the remains of a nineteenth century barque (p53), recorded by the National Museum of Wales.

As regards other development proposals, which, in previous years, had caused considerable concern in terms of their archaeological implications, there is perhaps some reduction in the pressure, or at least relaxation of timetables. The last annual report (Bell 1993b, p99) drew attention to proposals to create lagoons providing Alternative Bird Feeding

Grounds at various locations behind the seawall including Redwick and Goldcliff. These were mitigatory measures designed to help compensate for the loss of bird feeding grounds in Cardiff Bay. Here again, little has been heard of these proposals in 1994 and they may not now go ahead. Indeed archaeological concerns relating to the Goldcliff site have been considerably strengthened by the discovery in this area of a Romano-British landsurface and evidence of drainage ditches about 80cm below the present surface (p137).

There has also been little activity during the year in relation to the proposed Severnside Airport which, it was proposed would occupy the area with the greatest concentration of intertidal archaeology in the British Isles in the Goldcliff (p115) and Redwick areas. Future revival of these plans must clearly be the subject of very detailed archaeological evaluation.

International Contacts

During August 1994 the committee was privileged to show some of its activities to two distinguished archaeologists from Landesdenkmalamt Baden-Württemberg: Dr H. Schlichtherle and Dr B. Dieckmann. Their exchange visit was organised by Rick Turner on behalf of Cadw and provided a very welcome opportunity to establish wider contacts. The committee also benefited from a visit by Mette Iversen of Viborg Stiftsmuseum, Denmark.

Some explanation should perhaps be offered for the inclusion in this report of a paper on a non-Severn Estuary topic: Aidan O'Sullivan's account of Irish estuarine wetlands. This is included because of its comparative importance for those working in the Severn and because his interest in intertidal archaeology partly evolved from contact with SELRC members. He gave an early progress report on his survey at the Annual Meeting in 1992.

Sites of considerable interest have now emerged and further accounts of this important Irish work are in Grogan *et al.* (1993) and O'Sullivan (1995a and b).

Bibliographies and publications

One of the most important tasks of the committee is to encourage dialogue and cooperation between the considerable diversity of individuals and organisations with an interest in the archaeology of the Severn Estuary. Last year we instituted a bibliography prepared by our member John Brett of the year's archaeological and environmental publications. Many of the items are in the references at the end of the report where they are distinguished by an asterisk at the end of the reference. Others particularly of an environmental nature are listed in the 1994 bibliography which follows the references. A further bibliography, which is likely to be useful to members, is the fourth edition of A. Holbrook's (1994) *The Severn Barrage: a bibliography 1904-1994*. This contains comprehensive references to proposals for the barrage and the many consultants' reports and surveys, for instance those commissioned in recent years by the Energy Technology Support Unit at Harwell.

Two important publications relating to the estuary should in particular be noted. The final report on the Rumney Great Wharf excavation of 1992 appeared in *Britannia* (Fulford *et al.* 1994) and an interim report on the Barland's Farm boat appeared in *Antiquity* (Nayling *et al.* 1994).

Obituaries

Sadly two people died during the year who have made important contributions to the archaeology of the Estuary and its surroundings. George Boon died on 31.8.94 and an obituary appeared in *British Archaeological News* (Manning 1994). Arising from his work at Caerleon, Boon (1980) published a

paper on the Gwent Levels which has proved a very influential source for all subsequent work. Professor Michael Jarrett died in November. He was a distinguished Romanist, a member of the Steering Committee and a good friend and colleague to Welsh archaeologists.

Meetings

Two field meetings were held during the year. On 23.8.94 a meeting was held on the Gwent Levels. In the morning Dr S. Rippon led a walk which outlined some aspects of the Gwent Levels Historic Landscape Project (p7). In the afternoon Dr M. Bell organised a tour of the Goldcliff Project (p115). The second field meeting was organised by Dr Rippon on 17.9.94 at the Kenn Moor excavation (p21). The Steering Committee met at the National Museum on 25.5.94. The Annual Meeting was held in the Newport Centre, Gwent on 12.11.94. The local organiser was Bob Trett of Newport Museum. In addition to progress reports on projects in the estuary, which are included in this annual report, our activities were placed in a wider context with two important papers from other wetland projects: Dr David Tomalin outlined the Wootton Quarr project on the Isle of Wight and Robert van de Noort spoke about the Humber Wetlands Project (Van de Noort and Davies 1993). At the Annual meeting the Committee Chair Dr Aldhouse-Green retired from office and Professor John Allen was elected in his place. The secretary Dr M. Bell also retired and was replaced by Nigel Nayling.

Activities arranged for 1995 include a field visit arranged by Dr Rippon to the Kenn Moor excavation on 24.9.95 and the Annual Meeting which will be held at Bristol on 18.11.95 with Vanessa Straker as local secretary.

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