

ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE SEVERN ESTUARY 2008

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This was another busy year for the SELRC with a summer fieldtrip, autumn conference and the production of our annual report *Archaeology in the Severn Estuary*. The fieldtrip, on June 22nd, focused on the remarkable landscape of Brean Down in Somerset where the guides, Martin Bell and myself, were privileged to be joined by Arthur ApSimon and Desmond Donovan who carried out so much of the pioneering work on both the Pleistocene and Holocene sequence in the sandcliff, and the archaeology of Brean Down itself. In considering landscapes from the Ice age through to the 19th century, this fieldtrip probably had the longest timeframe of any we have held! The conference, on the 1st November, had a particularly packed programme with a broad range of papers that embraced recent research and discoveries around the estuary (Romano-British iron industry around the Estuary), updates on ongoing projects (such as the conservation of the Newport Ship, the Rapid Coastal Zone Assessment, and archaeological evaluation along the route of the proposed new route for the M4), and a consideration of heritage management issues by Ed Wilson of the Environment Agency. We also had two distinguished guests from outside the region: Garry Momber of the Hampshire and Wight Archaeological Trust, who spoke about Mesolithic habitation and inundation of the western Solent, and Oliver Rackham of Corpus Christi College at the University of Cambridge who talked about the historic woodlands of south-east Wales. To end the afternoon, Emma Tetlow and Scott Timpany took us further afield with their reports on work in the west of Wales and in Ireland. The conference was followed by the AGM at which two key officers of the SELRC passed on their responsibilities: Paul Driscoll has taken over from Claire Robinson as Secretary, and Scott Timpany has replaced Vanessa Straker as Publications Officer. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Claire and Vanessa for all

their hard work over the past few years.

The latest volume of *Archaeology in the Severn Estuary* contained an advert for the now impressive list of Council for British Archaeology Research Reports that deal with the Severn Estuary, the most recent of which is the publication of Martin Bell's *Prehistoric Coastal Communities: The Mesolithic of Western Britain*, a book that provides ground-breaking new evidence about prehistoric life in Britain, focusing on the little studied communities of the South West and Wales. It is worth reflecting on this series of major reports. The first was my own *Gwent Levels: The Evolution of a Wetland Landscape* back in 1996, and that was followed by *Excavations at Caldicot: Bronze Age Palaeochannels in the Nedern Valley* (1997, by Nigel Nayling and Astrid Caseldine), *The Magor Pill Medieval Wreck* (1998, by Nigel Nayling), *Prehistoric Intertidal Archaeology in the Welsh Severn Estuary* (2000, by Martin Bell, Astrid Caseldine and Heike Neumann), *The Barland's Farm Romano-Celtic Boat* (2004, by Nigel Nayling and Sean McGrail), and *Landscape Community and Colonisation: The North Somerset Levels during the 1st to 2nd centuries AD* (2006, by Stephen Rippon). These volumes cover a remarkable time frame from prehistory through to the present day, cover both the English and Welsh sides of the estuary, and report on archaeological survey and excavation, palaeoenvironmental studies, and the analysis of maps and written documents. Along with the large number of journal articles that have been published over the years, we can be very proud of what has been achieved since the SELRC was established.

