

EDITORIAL: HOW DO WE STAND?

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The Severn Estuary Levels Research Committee is dedicated to promoting research into, and understanding of, the archaeology of the Severn Estuary Levels and their immediate surroundings. It meets these aims by arranging annual meetings, conferences and field days, and by publishing an annual collection of research papers.

As this is the twentieth number or volume of the Severn Estuary Levels Research Committee's annual journal, and the editorial torch is about to be passed on, it seems an appropriate point at which to examine how our publication stands. Who has edited the journal and where have contributors come from? What topics in and around the Severn Estuary have excited them, and do there seem to be neglected issues? How much has been written and what seems to be the overall impact of these contributions? A brief attempt is made below to explore these points, based on a bibliometric analysis of the contents of the twenty issues, including this present one, which have so far appeared.

The journal was first seen in 1990 – the year in which the Department of the Environment's *Planning Policy Guidance 16* was published – under the editorship of Dr Martin Bell (University of Wales, Lampeter) with the title *Annual Report of the Severn Estuary Levels Research Committee*. Three years later the lead title was changed to, and remained, *Archaeology in the Severn Estuary*. Continuing for a further three years, Martin's reign established a high standard of scholarship and production that subsequent editors have striven to maintain. Dr Stephen Rippon (University of Exeter) edited the journal for the next five years, his final production being the substantial volume 11, the proceedings of the first anniversary meeting, held at Abergavenny in September 2000, an attempt at an overview and to place the Severn Estuary in a

wider archaeological context. The editorship then passed to Dr Paul Davies of Bath Spa University College, who held it for four years. Paul was succeeded in 2006 by two editors working in collaboration at the University of Reading: Professor John Allen dealt with authors and referees, and Dr Alex Brown took responsibility for production. Editorial policy has always been to ensure that submissions were appropriately peer-reviewed.

A total of 150 investigators whose addresses and affiliations are known have contributed to the single or multi-authored papers published in the journal. Marginally, the largest number of contributors are academics and their postgraduate students from universities and university colleges ($n=56$). They are almost matched numerically by authors from the commercial sector, that is, from archaeological trusts, archaeological units, and individuals declaring a business ($n=50$). A smaller number of contributors ($n=22$) have come from the public service sector (museums, local authorities, NGOs). Almost equal in number, but defying easy classification, there have always been contributors publishing simply from private addresses ($n=21$), including important and welcome amateurs and others acting as paid specialists to the commercial or public sectors.

As bibliometric analysis has revealed for most fields of research and scholarship, the frequency with which names appear as authors/co-authors in *Archaeology in the Severn Estuary* follows a well-recognised, distinctive pattern (Figure 1). Most authors publish only one or two papers and very few can be described as prolific. The spread of publications per name is revealed as greatest for the academic group of investigators; a few Stakhanovites in this category lay claim to 20 or more papers. Contributors from the commercial sector exhibit a significantly narrower

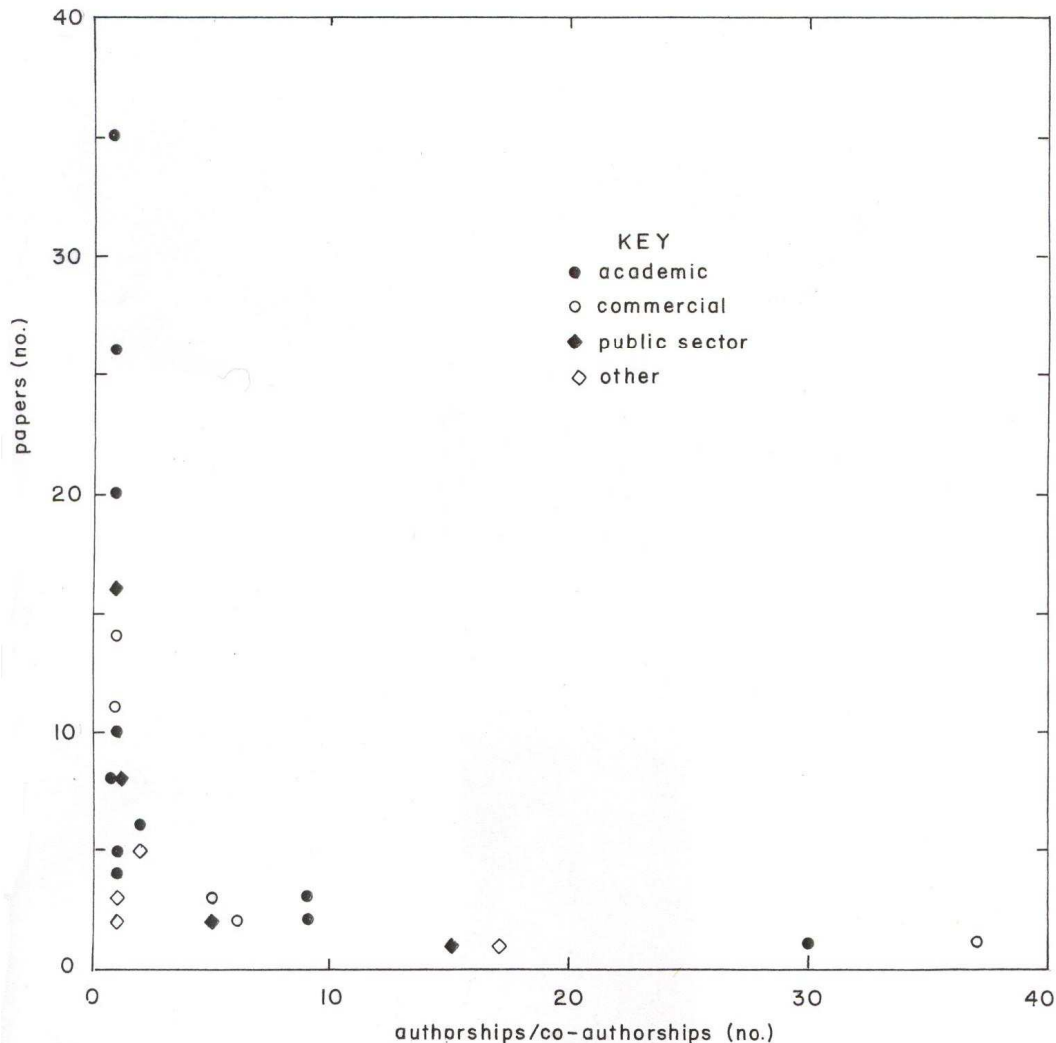


Figure 1. Number of papers as a function of authorships/co-authorships.

and more compressed range, the largest number of contributions per author/co-author being 14. A publication record of one paper per author/co-author seems typical of the other categories of contributor.

The number of contributors to *Archaeology in the Severn Estuary* has varied considerably and erratically from year to year, at an average of 18.2 authorships/co-authorships per volume over the twenty-year period (Figure 2). The academic sector has contributed a total of 193 authors/co-authors (av. 9.65 per volume), the commercial group 89 (av. 4.45 per volume), the public service element 49 (av. 2.45 per volume), and the remainder 32 (av. 1.60 per volume). It is interesting to see that, although roughly equal in the number of names, academic investigators have contributed more than twice as many authorships/co-authorships as the commercial

group. In terms of the number of contributors, *Archaeology in the Severn Estuary* matured rapidly, with a total of 27 contributors of all kinds, the second highest value, by the fourth issue. Thereafter the total ranges erratically, but nonetheless shows a gradual, underlying downward drift, apparently reflecting a tendency for the number of papers accepted for publication to decrease while, increasingly, long papers began to appear.

The richness of the archaeological and environmental resource presented by the Severn Estuary Levels and its immediate surroundings has led contributors to *Archaeology in the Severn Estuary* to write on a huge diversity of subjects. It is impossible to classify these in a simple way without introducing a degree of arbitrariness and subjectivity. Many papers concerned primarily with activity/occupation sites can be confidently

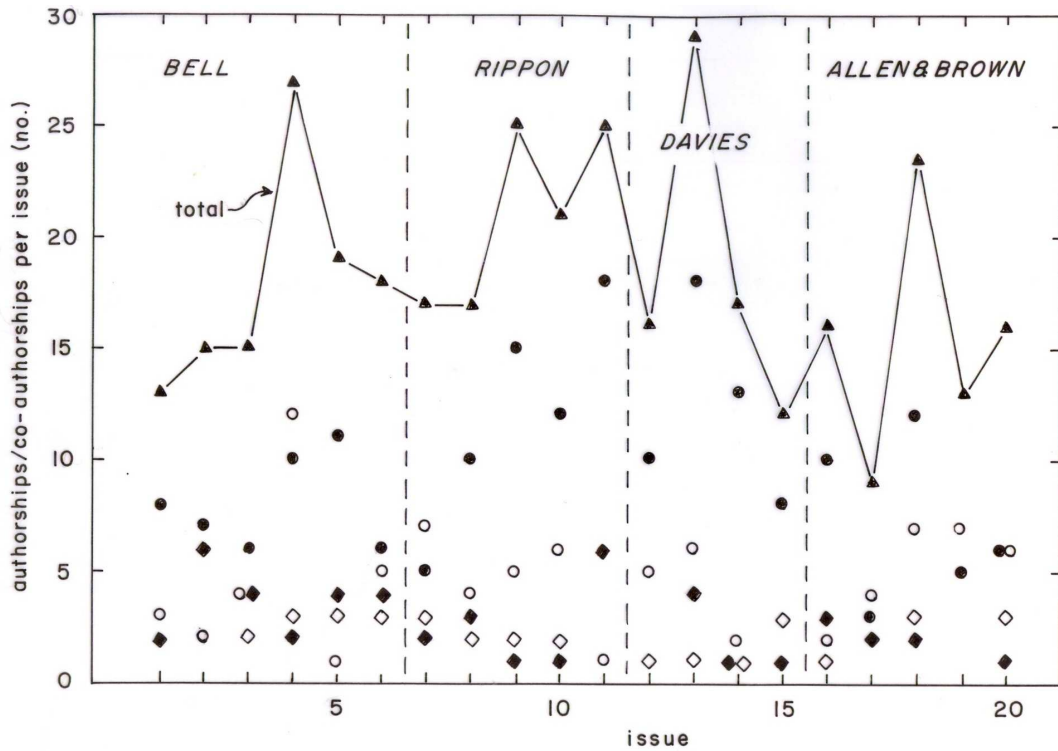


Figure 2. Number of authorships/co-authorships per issue by the origin of the contributor.

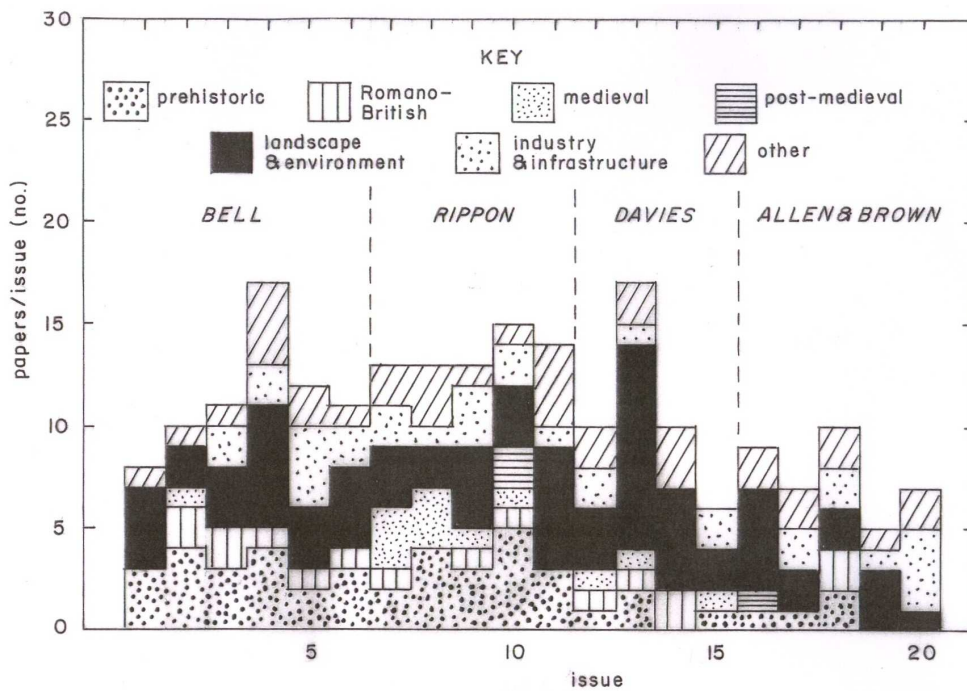


Figure 3. Number of papers per issue by subject.

assigned to a period – prehistoric, Romano-British, medieval, post-medieval – on account of their singularity or emphasis of content. A significant, thematic group addresses questions of

landscape, sea-level change, and the lithostratigraphy-biostratigraphy (environment) of the Holocene sequence that buries, contains or supports archaeological remains on the Levels.

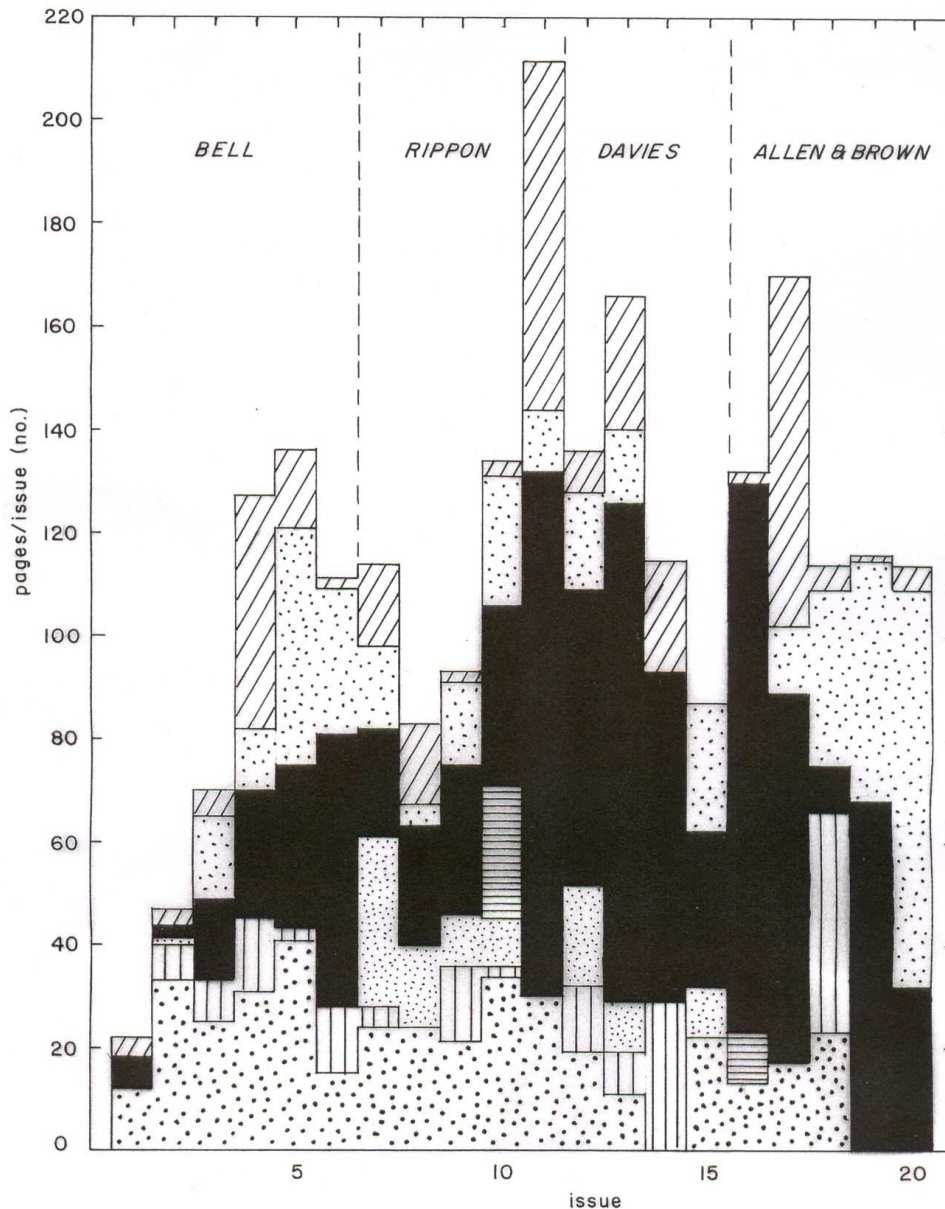


Figure 4. Number of printed pages per issue by subject. For key see figure 3.

Papers that deal with industry, such as iron-making, fishing and salt-making, and with infrastructure, such as ports and shipping, form another important, thematic set, but one in which the nature of the activity is here taken to be more important than the period. The final category of papers is a miscellany of items, including techniques of general applicability, a very few articles that cannot be classed as other than multi-period, and editorials, reports of field meeting and conferences, and Secretary's reports.

Bearing some similarity to the total for authorship (Figure 2), the total number of articles published per volume varies between five and 17,

a considerable, roughly three-fold range, at an average of 10.9 submissions per issue. Figure 3 illustrates the changing fortunes of the different subjects and themes recognized above. Although the samples are small, a number of patterns are clearly present. Interest in the prehistoric archaeology of the area was substantial and fairly steady up to volume 10, but thereafter has waned considerably. Similarly, interest in Romano-British occupation in the area has also tended to decline, with papers becoming generally fewer and more intermittent. Medieval activity, invariably of the later period, has provoked little and infrequent interest, and no papers have come forward for several years. Post-medieval

archaeology on the Severn Estuary Levels has received scant attention and is represented by just three papers in the whole 20-year period of this survey. On the other hand, the subject of environment and landscape, as much of concern to commercial as to academic investigators, has flourished for many years, and only in the last four or five has shown evidence of a decline of support. Interest in the other thematic topic, infrastructure and industry, has been sustained, albeit at a comparatively low level and in an unbalanced way. The main weakening, therefore, has been in period-related studies.

It is interesting to compare from Figure 4 the number of pages and the size of papers written on the subjects listed above with the number of papers published (Figure 3). In many respects, contributors to *Archaeology in the Severn Estuary* have been remarkably consistent in the scale of their writings, without excessive editorial intervention having been provoked. The average number of printed pages – part pages counted as whole pages – for articles on the prehistoric, Romano-British, medieval and post-medieval periods is 8.98, 9.88, 9.00 and 12.0 respectively. The numbers of pages on prehistoric, medieval and post-medieval archaeology vary in much the same way as the numbers of papers; the same is true of papers concerned with industry and infrastructure, at an average length of 12.2 pages. Some long papers late on in the run of volumes somewhat distort the pattern for the Romano-British-period. The lion's share of pages, however, has gone to environmental and landscape studies, a fairly clear, underlying upward trend being evident over the 20-year run. The average size of a paper on this topic is 11.9 pages, much the same as for papers on the subjects already mentioned. The final category, a miscellany, is distorted from time to time by long articles that individually defy classification other than as reviews or multi-period items.

No simple interpretation presents itself for the trends and levels of interest noted above. Does the decline in period-related studies, most of which sprang from the discoveries made in the 1980s and early 1990s by, amongst others, Derek Upton, mean that this rich vein has, for the present, been largely worked out? Or have investigators increasingly turned to vehicles of publication other than *Archaeology in the Severn*

Estuary? Contributions on the environment and landscape, coming mainly from the commercial sector, have remained fairly steady in number until recent years, but have tended gradually to increase in individual size. Do these patterns suggest a decline in developer-related activity on the Severn Estuary Levels but an increasing interest on the part of the commercial sector in seeing their work published in a more accessible form? Contributions on industry and infrastructure seem under-represented and can best be described as sporadic with a heavy bias toward fishing, despite the fact that the salt and freshwater Severn has been a highway for trade and travel for millennia, and especially from medieval times to the mid twentieth century. There seem to be untapped opportunities here to combine work on the material commodities and infrastructure of trade and industry more generally along with, for recent centuries, documentary studies.

Archaeology in the Severn Estuary contains many papers of the first importance on the Severn Estuary Levels, but it is not the only vehicle of publication to which investigators have turned. From the mid 1980s onward significant papers have appeared in peer-reviewed county and national journals, and there is also the exceptional sequence of eight lengthy monographs dealing in detail largely with specific sites or artefacts, one brought out by English Heritage and the remainder by the Council for British Archaeology, with financial help from Cadw, the research councils and charities. It is no exaggeration to say that these three broad means of publication have brought the archaeology and environments of the Severn Estuary Levels emphatically not just to national but also to international attention. A strong base has been created for further advances.

