

## Book Review IV:

*Bronze Age Settlement in the Welsh Marches* by John Halsted.

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**by G M Muskett and J J Woodcock**

The evidence of Bronze Age settlement in Britain is elusive, reflected by the dearth of published research in this area. Halsted's book, which derives from his MPhil dissertation, is an attempt to rectify the previous bias towards evidence from funerary contexts by discussing Bronze Age settlement patterns between *c.*2500 and 750 BC in the Welsh Marches region. Indeed, one of the weaknesses of this work is that the initial impression is of reading an academic thesis with minimal adaptation to a book in terms of its format and style. Accordingly, the language remains a little uncompromising, with the use of some jargon, which is somewhat uncomfortable for a book which may be picked up and read by the interested amateur.

The book is divided into six chapters. Following the normal format of an academic thesis, the first chapter presents a review of previous scholarship in this field and outlines the methodology used in the study. Three chapters assembling evidence for settlement in the Early, Middle and Late Bronze Ages follow a short description of the physical environment of the Welsh Marches. Halsted's interpretation of the evidence forms the sixth and final chapter.

The text is generally clearly laid out, and accompanied by a good range of illustrations. However, the distribution maps appear cluttered and would be of more interest to the general reader if they contained at least a minimum of modern reference points. Although it is not customary to index an academic thesis, its absence makes the book difficult to use as a reference work by other scholars.

The book contains a good deal of seemingly up-to-date evidence, which the author has gathered together in a new and interesting format. Indeed, until now, much of this information will have been available but dispersed. It must be questioned, however, whether the author's use of references and evidence from sites in the south of England is entirely relevant. Given that there was no 'united nation' in this period, this type of comparison could be misleading.

As the author admits, he is tackling a difficult topic. Structural evidence of Bronze Age settlement is difficult to identify and many such sites have, indeed, been discovered more

often by chance than strategy, such as the work undertaken by Dan Garner, then of Gifford and Partners, in the area of the second runway at Manchester Airport, mentioned by the author. The extent to which it is possible to extrapolate from the funerary monuments, the discoveries of bronze objects, whether stray finds or 'ritual depositions' and other surface evidence such as scatters of pottery and flint and 'burnt mounds' to the location and presence of settlement is always going to be a subject on which there will be both agreement and disagreement.

Overall, we found this work both interesting and thought provoking, although would question whether the evidence justifies the conclusions which are reached.