

A view from the hills: Herefordshire hillforts and regional research

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The talk presented work in progress on an Iron Age pottery chapter for inclusion in ‘The Iron Age and its hillforts in Herefordshire,’ edited by Keith Ray and to be published as part of the Herefordshire Studies in Archaeology series. The volume has three principle aims:

- to report on significant projects undertaken between 2009 and 2013 (at Credenhill, Eaton Camp and Little Doward hillforts)
- to review other projects relevant to understanding the larger later prehistoric enclosures in the county
- to contextualise these by reviewing and summarising ceramic and environmental studies resulting from these and other projects

The chapter reviews the background to Iron Age pottery studies in Herefordshire, and the wider region:

- excavations undertaken between the 1950s and early 1980s at Sutton Walls, Croft Ambrey, Midsummer Hill, Credenhill Camp, Dinedor and Poston
- the significant contributions made by David Peacock and Elaine Morris, drawing on these assemblages
- the various outcomes of the resource assessment and regional research framework for the West Midlands region, and Keith Ray’s ‘The Archaeology of Herefordshire: an exploration’ (2015)
- the significance of radiocarbon dates from Conderton Camp and Kemerton Camp, on Bredon Hill, Worcestershire

- the regionally important body of work, regrettably still unpublished, on the Beckford (Worcestershire) assemblage: the quality of the recording methodology developed by Deborah Klemperer and Helen Rees in the 1980s, and the more recent phase of work which has provided C14 dates for local and regional fabrics.

The talk reviewed results from the three more recent, small-scale studies undertaken by Herefordshire Archaeology. It discussed the challenge of interpreting these in the context of the major Herefordshire assemblages, highlighting four issues:

- the modern commercial focus and the decline of the regional pottery specialist
- the need for more scientific dating
- the need for standardised recording of fabrics, forms and decoration
- the need to better understand transitions in pottery production and use (the appearance of regional pottery industries in the MIA; changes in pottery production and use

and suggesting ways forward:

- the need to bring on a new generation of pottery specialists (e.g. a PhD revisiting the Herefordshire hillfort assemblages, using a standardised and more current methodology, in line with PCRG guidelines)
- C14 dating: its routine use for stratified groups, as done for these Herefordshire Archaeology projects, particularly where there are burnt residues on pottery; the revisiting of major hillfort assemblages, as done for Worcestershire assemblages from Conderton Camp, Beckford, Kemerton Camp and Blackstone
- enhancing the Worcestershire Ceramics Online Database with the form and decoration codes devised for Beckford, to encourage a standardised approach to recording Iron Age assemblages from the region.

The forthcoming volume will present the data from the recent Herefordshire hillfort projects and discusses the points raised above in much greater detail, providing a research framework for future Iron Age pottery studies in the region. It will hopefully go to press by the end of this year/early next.