

An Atlas of Hillforts in Britain and Ireland

This project is a joint venture between the School of History, Classics, and Archaeology at the University of Edinburgh and the School of Archaeology, University of Oxford funded through the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The project will be co-supervised by Professor Ian Ralston (University of Edinburgh) and Professor Gary Lock (University of Oxford). The project is for four years starting on September 1st 2012.

The project team will be based in Edinburgh (Strat Halliday for 3 years full-time, plus AN Other for 9 months full-time specifically to do the whole of Ireland), and in Oxford (Dr Ian Brown for 3 years full-time and Dr Paula Levick 3.5 years half-time). Edinburgh will be responsible for collecting data for Scotland and all of Ireland, Oxford for England and Wales.

The following is taken from the application:

Project summary

Hillforts are the most impressive field legacy from the Iron Age across many areas of England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Eire. Although precision is not possible, it is likely that there are over 4000 in Ireland and Britain. Any academic or popular account of later prehistory from c. 1000 BC has to include a discussion of hillforts as the dominant monument type: their forms and architecture, possible functions, relationships with their setting and archaeological surroundings. Over recent years within Iron Age studies the importance of 'regionalisation' has emerged again as an important theme and one which requires information and data to be available at both the local level and at regional and inter-regional scales. There is no integrated system that will provide this information for hillforts, although a wide variety of sources exist in digital and paper form. These sources however are diverse, often difficult to access, and hard to integrate to produce wider interpretations and new research questions, since all previous syntheses have generally been at 'national' (i.e. Ireland, England) scales. Furthermore, most of the ways in which these sites are usually described are based on upstanding examples, but it is now essential to incorporate many ploughed-down remains, only visible as cropmarks, into understandings of these sites.

This project will create an online interactive database that will include standardised information on all hillforts in the UK and Eire and enable interrogation and analysis at a range of scales from an individual hillfort to the whole collection. The database will be linked to Google Earth/Maps so that the locations of hillforts can be seen within their landscape contexts. At the close of the project, the data file will be available for re-use in a variety of software. The information held will be a compilation of all existing sources, re-structured to provide maximum achievable consistency and the ability to search all hillforts, evaluating and comparing them on meaningful characteristics such as number and configuration of ramparts, ditches and entrances. Evaluation, analysis and interpretation will take place at local, regional and inter-regional scales and the outcomes will be a paper atlas of hillforts, where cartographic presentation will be matched by succinct analytical texts. These will include extensive discussion on the structuring of

the data, including consideration of what is and is not a hillfort and why, together with the interpretation of analyses and patterns established at the different scales and visualised through a series of maps and plans. The results will feed significantly into discussions of regionality and how hillforts fit with other data and interpretations. This work will be mirrored by a critical re-assessment of the dating evidence for these sites, including isotopic and other scientific determinations, numismatic and artefactual data, and documentary sources: these monuments are used in both the first millennia BC and AD, and evaluation of the chronological range of these sites at a variety of scales will allow closer readings of patterns through time, to match the spatial focus highlighted above. The analysis of this set of sites across the whole of Britain and Ireland - something not previously-attempted - will generate new configurations of information on similarities and differences amongst sites that will challenge prevailing views.

Hillforts are of great interest to a large range of audiences, sometimes just for their intrinsic archaeological value but often as part of wider landscape, historical and environmental interests. Further to encourage the breadth of this participation, the database will be configured as a hillfort-wiki, capable of accepting user-generated content so that additional text and images can be attached to any hillfort, separately from the core data generated by the project.

Project aims:

The objective is to develop and apply a standardised recording system for hillforts, presently a distinctly disparate category of site, across England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Eire, which will enable research into scales of regionalisation during later prehistory based on this important monument form. This will involve the consideration of a range of site types (primarily founded on their forms of enclosure, but including other discriminant criteria) and the development of informed thresholds regarding the suitability of individual sites for inclusion. Importantly, while categorization to date had been founded on the forms of surviving upstanding sites, normally in topographically-elevated locations, but also e.g. in coastal promontory settings, the scheme that will be devised will consciously embrace sites now lacking any visibility in ground perspective within the arable zone of destruction where sites have generally been reduced to cropmarks.

The priority tasks are:

1. To determine and implement a set of workable descriptors which will act as meaningful search criteria on which to base evaluation, analysis and interpretation of individual sites and groups of sites with defined shared characteristics.
2. To build an interactive online database that links attribute data to Google Earth/Maps and enables the addition of user generated content as well as external comment.
3. To provide the data from the database in a neutral form that can be imported into any software for re-use.
4. To access as wide a range as possible of digital and paper resources that can furnish information on hillforts, from national and local repositories including accessing national and local Sites and

Monuments Records/Historic Environment Records across Britain and Ireland. To reformulate the data gathered according to the agreed criteria and enter it into the database.

5. Selectively to ground-truth the data by examining a representative selection of sites across Britain and Ireland to calibrate whether the devised criteria correlate satisfactorily with actual monuments in the landscape.
6. To perform analyses into the characteristics of hillforts at a variety of scales, local, regional, national and international. These will generate a series of maps and plans, together with patterns and trends that will form a solid platform for future research.
7. To publish the results of the research as a paper atlas, including cartographic presentation of the data matched by essays in which series of sites are described, evaluated and interpreted, and where avenues for potential further research are proposed.
8. To increase academic and public access to standardised information about hillforts as justified by their importance as ancient monuments and landscape features in the present, in addition to key sources of information from which to interpret later prehistory.
9. To enable people from all sectors to contribute to the understanding and appreciation of hillforts through the managed addition of their own information and interpretations of these sites including text and images.
10. To support a PhD candidate in using selective type and/or regional suites of hillfort information to demonstrate how this data can be used to enable better formulations of landscape setting from which to interpret the later prehistory of Britain and Ireland. To support a further PhD studentship focused on the critical review of available dating evidence for the construction, use and abandonment of hill-forts, to include isotopic, dendrochronological, artefactual, numismatic and historical evidence, and to address issues of periodization and continuous / episodic use of hill-forts at a regional scale for selected areas of Britain and Ireland. This chronological study will need to range across the first millennia BC and AD and, on occasion, beyond this range.
11. To publicise the existence and utility of this resource.