

Introduction

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In common with the pre-history of Britain as a whole the background of Gower can be divided into several periods, the first of which are the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic, extending up to approximately BC 3,000.

Skeletal remains of these periods have in fact been found in Gower in Paviland Cave (Goat's Hole) situated on the south west coast, where in 1823 a headless human skeleton was found by Dean Buckland, excavator, which became known as the 'Red Lady of Paviland'. Later research, however, revealed the remains to be/of a young male and because of personal effects found,/believed to/be a warrior. Eventual radio-carbon dating of the bones indicated this person lived and died around 24000 BCE, whilst occupation at Cat-Hole (q.v.) near Pare le Breos, Parkmill, had been dated around 2,500 BCE .

The last glaciation in Britain occurred approximately 2000 to 17000 BCE and the ice must have reached to about 6 kilometres north of Paviland, so that winters must have been severe. We must assume, therefore, that the occupation of these caves at this time was seasonal.

Around 9000 BCE the climate began to improve and growth initially of willow, pine and birch, and ultimately oak and alder.

Progressing rapidly onwards, our next periods are the Neolithic and Bronze ages, up to 500 BCE.

The immigrants of *the* Neolithic Age were slightly more civilised and grew crops such as barley and kept domestic animals like cattle and goats. It is thought that these people came into the Swansea/Gower region by sea, possibly from France, on vessels constructed of a skin-covered frame. In Gower the main evidence of settlements lies in the many Megalithic monuments, the creators of which were of the tall Nordic, broad headed and dark haired race. Apparently, six out of the seven

tombs of this type in South Wales are to be found in Cower/ mainly of the multiple chamber type. The features of these tombs link directly to the Transepted Galley graves of Brittany and the Vendee region of France. It is not clear, however, if the inhabitants in all cases were interred/ as sites seem to vary from hill ridges and sides, to valley bottoms as in Pare le Breos Parkmill.

The Bronze Age is a difficult period to date exactly, but is generally thought to have commenced about 2000 – 1400 BCE, the inhabitants arriving by sea via the Swansea and Carmarthen bays. These people possibly introduced the Goidelic language into the country. The Goidelic being the Gaelic of Ireland and the Scottish Highlands.

The climatic conditions prevailing at this time became more favourable, the settlers preferring higher ground of which in the earlier period consisted mainly of forests, but later in the MIDDLE Bronze Age became heathland. Numerous cairns and barrows of this period are to be found in Gower, with ten on Rhossili Down, 12 on Llanmadoc hill and over 70 on Cefn Bryn. Settlements have also been discovered at Whiteford and Tooth cave Ilston.

Our final period before the Roman occupation is the Iron Age, where Hill forts (a Celtic hallmark) were conspicuous features on the landscape at this time, rather than the burial mounds of earlier inhabitants.

These Hill forts were thought to have been constructed by the Nordic invaders, talkers of Brythonic, ancestors of the Welsh, Cornish and Breton languages.

The construction of this type of fort was mainly of the simple type, e.g. single bank and ditch, and the fact that some forts show up to seven separate phases of construction, as the Bulwark on Llanmadoc Hill seemed to hint at unsettled conditions. It was the Roman conqueror, Frontinus, Legate in Britain AD 84-78, who subdued the Silures and Goidelic tribes of south east Wales, and probably the Dematae and Iberians of the south west. The actual Roman occupation of Britain was said to last until AD 410 and apart from a few villas at Oystermouth and a small fort at Loughor (Leucarum) no Roman towns were built in this region. The priority of South Wales as the Romans saw it was one of military control, where road and fort construction were their main objectives. The nearest fort of some importance was in fact at Neath (Nidum which controlled the routes east, west and northwards. This fort was constructed circa AD 70-80 and occupied for about 50 years. However, finds at Loughor, North East Gower, such as pottery, quern stones (stones used as millstones for grinding) and coins

of the 1st century, suggest a civilized settlement in the area. Contact between Ireland and South West Wales had always been close, Dyfed being the centre of Irish power, and, it is known that the Romans encouraged the Irish to settle in this area and Irish was spoken up to the 6th and 7th century.

Many churches in the Swansea and Gower areas have, at one time, had dedications to Irish Saints.

Before the Roman occupation the inhabitants in the south west were mainly indigenous to the area as no proof of any Saxon infiltration from across the Bristol Channel, or other means. Had been found up to the Norman conquest. So, following the decline of the Roman Empire in Britain, and gradually leaving around AD 410, the influences in this area appeared to have originated from elements of Irish, Norse and some English. Norse elements may be found in places such as Burry Holmes (Holmr being old Norse for islet) and a mixture of Norse and old English in the name Sweyn's Howse or house on Rhossili down