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COLOUR, CUPS AND TILES - RECENT DISCOVERIES AT THE NESS OF BRODGAR

At the epicentre of Neolithic Orkney lies the Ness of Brodgar in the midst of some of the most iconic prehistoric monuments of western Europe - Maeshowe, the Ring of Brodgar and the Stones of Stenness. The site challenges the way this remarkable landscape is perceived, much as the discoveries at nearby Barnhouse did two decades ago.
Until recently, this large whaleback ridge (c. 250 x 100m) was considered to be a natural feature. However, excavation has revealed that much of the mound is artificial and comprises several phases of Neolithic activity. During its later phases, the site was dominated by a group of large stone buildings that were contained within a massive walled enclosure (c.125 x 75m). The evidence to date would suggest that the complex was primarily non-domestic and was an integral part of this rich ritual landscape.

This season, earlier phases of the site were identified with several oval structures starting to appear under, and in some cases partially incorporated into, the later phases already revealed. These may not be the earliest on site as the potential depth of archaeology points towards earlier activity below. However, all of the phases recognised so far seem to date to the Late Neolithic as indicated by a rich material assemblage dominated by Grooved Ware exhibiting both applied and incised decoration.

Prior to this season, the main structures were already impressive with regards to their scale, symmetrical architecture, art (with over 100 stones exhibiting both finely incised geometric designs and pecked motifs), and walls surviving to in excess of 1m in height. In 2010, their unusual nature was further emphasised by the discovery of evidence for tiled roofs and painted walls.

In two of the structures where floor deposits have been partially uncovered, a horizon of numerous thin stone slabs was encountered just above the occupation layers. These slabs had been trimmed into rectangular shapes just as can be seen today on some traditional stone-slated Orcadian roofs. In essence, these layers of slabs represent collapsed slated roofs. The regular nature of such a roofing system would be in stark contrast to that normally envisaged, but would seem to complement their regular architecture.

Although the use of colour was already evident in the central chamber of Structure 10, with naturally coloured red and yellow sandstone incorporated in its build, this was complemented by the discovery of several stones that had been ‘painted’ within two of the other structures. Vivid earthy colours of reds, browns and yellows were encountered that initial analyses indicate were derived from ochre or iron ores. Although some stone faces appear to have been completely covered in pigment, others showed evidence of designs paralleled by some of the incised art. ‘Paint pots’ had been previously discovered at Skara Brae but these were presumed to have been used for personal adornment. This use of colour may help to explain the many very lightly incised and ephemeral designs discovered at the Ness and elsewhere. If these designs were incised through a layer of colour, the contrast between the design and the parent rock would have been dramatically enhanced. Apparent multi-layered engravings could also be clarified if each set of engravings was ‘separated’ by a layer of paint.

In addition to the three major structures (Structures 1, 8 and 10) revealed previously (with several more indicated by geophysics), in 2010 the newly revealed Structure 12 also proved to be of the same monumental nature. In excess of 16 metres long and 10 metres wide, Structure 12 exhibited the same angular and symmetrical architecture as Structures 1 and 8 at the Ness and Structure 2 at Barnhouse. In all these buildings, stone piers were employed to create recesses along their inner wall faces. Structure 2 at Barnhouse was interpreted as being non-domestic and for the preparation of special food and the manufacture of unusual items such as maceheads. This season at the Ness, the extraordinary array of finds from the two recesses so far excavated in Structure 8 - a large whale tooth, several polished stone items, a whalebone macehead and a polished shale object - may indicate a similar function.

However, at the Ness, Structures 1, 8 and 12 would appear to be contemporary as indicated by their spatial respect for each other, similarities in architecture (including identical dimensions between sets of piers) and their north/south alignment, although this is not yet proven stratigraphically. Did these similarities also reflect a similar function for these three buildings? One possible interpretation is suggested by Colin Richards whose recent research at the two nearby stone circles indicates that they were composed of different types of sandstone from various locations across Orkney. He sees this as evidence that the standing stones represented input by different groups or communities from across the archipelago contributing to the circle construction. Could the Ness of Brodgar be interpreted in a similar way as a place where different groups, probably of related kin, constructed discrete but similar, special
‘family’ buildings? This multi-community-based theory could help to explain the wide range of decorative styles we see on the prolific Grooved Ware assemblage at the Ness.

The final major phase at the Ness is represented by Structure 10. This shows a marked departure from earlier phases in terms of its scale (at over 20 x 19m in size, with walls over 5m thick); complexity (the incorporation of standing stones, the presence of a surrounding paved passage and its alignment with Maes Howe); design (a cruciform shaped central chamber); and art.

This season, excavation concentrated on revealing the floor deposits and the refinement of the central chamber of this building. The stone ‘dresser’/altar (?) was shown to be freestanding and elaborated with pecked surface dressing to complement the use of naturally coloured sandstones. Central to the chamber, a large square stone hearth was revealed. A multi-cupped stone had been placed in the middle of the hearth along with an upturned cattle skull to perhaps commemorate its last use. It is tempting to relate these deposits within the chamber to the massive bone layer that fills the upper levels of the paved passage surrounding Structure 10. Preliminary assessment of this bone by Dr Ingrid Mainland has shown that it is predominantly cattle tibia representing perhaps hundreds of individual cattle - remnants of a final ‘decommissioning’ feast?

Once again, the discoveries in 2010 at the Ness would seem to emphasise the special nature of the site - not only the buildings, the art and the enclosing walls, but also the wide range of finds including some that indicate widespread contacts such as flint from Yorkshire and pitchstone from Arran. Although the Ness as it unfolds will provide new insights into the spiritual life of the Neolithic, the landscape in which it sits, and Neolithic society in general, it is appropriate that the site is being excavated at the same time as the Neolithic settlements at the Links of Noltland on Westray, the Braes of Habreck on Wyre, and Green on Eday. Only in the context of a range of sites will the value of the Ness discoveries be fully understood.

Excavation this year was supported by Orkney Islands Council; Orkneyjar.com; Historic Scotland; the Russell Trust; European Leader Funding; the Robert Kiln Trust; Orkney Archaeology Society; the landowners, the Taits and Carole Hoey; and numerous individuals from around the world.

Nick Card, Orkney Research Centre for Archaeology
THE 2010 ‘THUNDER RUN’

While quite probably historically accurate, Stuart Piggott’s dash from Avebury to Norwich in an MG Midget borrowed from Alexander Keiller is central to our Prehistoric Society’s founding myth. Over the weekend of 4th September 2010, society members set out to retrace Piggott’s epic 1935 journey, the ‘thunder run’, but with added value. While commemorating the ‘great coup d’état’ of Graham Clark’s ‘Young Turks’, and their successful vote 75 years ago to rename and revitalise the Prehistoric Society of East Anglia, we were also to visit five well chosen prehistoric sites en route. Furthermore, today’s Young Turks, current President Alison Sheridan, Secretary Josh Pollard and Meetings Secretary Jonathan Last, would lead our expedition; and in the tradition of Prehistoric Society field trips, we would be joined on-site by leading specialists.

To conjure the spirit of Keiller and Piggott as we gathered on the first morning at Avebury’s National Trust car park, we were greeted by four sparkling vintage MG sports cars (courtesy of the Wessex MG Car Club) and several bottles of equally sparkling wine. Following convivial toasts, Josh Pollard set the scene for thunder run 2: the personalities, politics and debate surrounding the birth of our society. Then, wandering through the stone settings of the Avebury henge, we learned of a confrontational social history and the eighteenth century fire-setting and destruction of sarsen stones recorded by William Stukeley. A re-visioning of Avebury did not end there. We heard that the pioneering archaeological and restorative work that Keiller sponsored included a partial re-sculpting of hitherto uneven henge banks: prehistoric monument meets twentieth century aesthetic! Such perfectly reasonable folies du jour would become a recurring theme of the trip.

Pausing only for an unscheduled tour of a charming housing estate, for sports cars to catch up and to wonder if the ancestral route along the Ridgeway might be swifter, our minibus arrived at White Horse Hill, Oxfordshire. After a short but energetic uphill hike, we were standing on the ramparts of Iron Age Uffington Castle hillfort with Gary Lock of Oxford University, gazing at spectacular views over the Vale of the White Horse and Stuart Piggott’s birthplace. Listening to Professor Lock discuss the Hillforts of the Ridgeway Project suggested that the more we learn about this class of monument the more enigmatic they become. In contrasting Uffington Castle with close Ridgeway neighbours, Segsbury Camp and Alfred’s Castle, any simple unifying interpretation remained elusive.

We were told that while training excavations revealed evidence of Roman activity at all three enclosures, Uffington Castle showed little or no trace of prehistoric settlement or warfare, while the giant Segsbury Camp was periodically occupied by large numbers of people and livestock - perhaps serving as a regional centre for exchange. Meanwhile, lying just south of the Ridgeway, Alfred’s (diminutive) Castle - though densely occupied in the Earlier Iron Age - may not have been a hillfort at all. Whether prehistoric activity at Uffington Castle was episodic and archaeologically invisible - as with a huge Victorian carnival reportedly held in the hillfort - or whether Iron Age people were on occasion excessively tidy or shunned typologies in archaeology text books we may never know. Pondering all this and more the group adjourned for a gourmet picnic at the adjacent iconic chalk hill-figure now, we were told, securely dated to the Late Bronze or Early Iron Age.

Leaving MGs behind but still following the Ridgeway, we headed for Whiteleaf Hill, Buckinghamshire. Again, we were met with breathtaking views and an intriguing monument. Our travelling companion, Gill Hey of Oxford Archaeology, discussed the reinvestigation of Sir Lindsay Scott’s 1930s excavation of a small earthen Early Neolithic barrow. Gill explained that two levels of interpretation were needed: understanding the methodology of a pre-war excavator (who left few field notes) and examining the nature and phasing of the prehistoric monument. With the help of local volunteers and school groups, a team from Oxford Archaeology painstakingly re-excavated Scott’s spoilheap to distinguish natural from archaeological features. Duly impressed, and contemplating that even with hindsight and today’s technology, such subtle differentiation on a much disturbed site must be as much art as science, we headed downhill for Cambridge, curry, beer and bed.

High status shiny impractical transport with intoxicant for the elite - familiar theme?
Sunday morning saw thunder run re-enactors followed by bells and heading for Wandlebury, a hillfort that seemingly dispensed with much of a hill. Our bus was met on-site by another yet more thrusting sports car (in this case not an MG) and by geo-archaeologist Charly French of the Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge. Here, unlike Uffington, training excavations had revealed evidence of dense Iron Age settlement. Postholes and pits were clustered within and extended well beyond the enclosure perimeter. Wandlebury also offered other familiar themes - putative chalk figures and a dispute between distinguished archaeologists over the interpretation of geological and archaeological features. For the record, fellow traveller Stuart Piggott and colleagues were sceptics, believing Charles Lethbridge’s ‘sleeping giants’ - the chalk cut figures of Gogmagog on the south-facing slope of the hillfort - the probable result of soil solifluction. With grateful thanks to Charly French for a truly stimulating morning, and leaving the Gogmagog debate for intellectual giants, we headed east for High Lodge, a site that provoked one of the longest running debates in archaeology.

Driving into Suffolk and past the huge American air force base at Mildenhall, we pulled into a leafy lay-by across from several overgrown brick pits. Expedition co-organiser Jonathan Last of English Heritage took up the complicated story. Here, it seemed, the conventional typological succession of the British Palaeolithic was overturned. Jonathan gallantly outlined a century of archaeological confusion and an apparently Mousterian flint industry which underlay an assemblage of distinctly Acheulian handaxes. Fortunately, recent geologically-enlightened and less typologically-determined fresh thinking by Jill Cook, Nick Aston and colleagues has finally ‘sorted out’ the 500,000 year old site to most scholars’ satisfaction.

Although a grateful Palaeolithic enthusiast, I have to admit there was not much to see at High Lodge. Not so with our final stop and as several of our party remarked, ‘they’re saving the best till last!’ Our bus arrived at an impressive moonscape of large pits far more extensive than one imagined, and the encyclopaedic Frances Healy of Cardiff University and Pete Topping of English Heritage - two people you would most welcome as guides to Grimes Graves - were on hand to greet us. And here was the last salutary lesson from the historiography of archaeology: not to privilege any treasured, pre-conceived narrative over evidence in the ground. Easier said than done in any age, but as our guides recalled, Reginald Smith, pre-First World War director of the British Museum, envisioned Palaeolithic miners in Norfolk despite evidence of a Neolithic groundstone axe and Holocene fauna at primary prehistoric mining levels – and counter-intuitively these deep shafts with complex side galleries seem to be among the earliest. The argument about Grimes Graves rumbled on until Young Turks Grahame Clark and Stuart Piggott became founder members of the Prehistoric Society and the old guard of the East Anglian Society eventually fell silent. As a fitting climax to our commemoration, thunder runners descended into pit 1 to see Neolithic mine workings at first hand, our only concern, in the unlikely event of pit collapse, that the combined learning of our assembled tour guides would be lost and Neolithic studies set back a generation, or more.

Our thanks go to English Heritage for waiving entrance fees to Grimes Graves, Wessex MG Car Club, to our expert guides and tour organisers for their generosity and kindness and especially to Josh Pollard for his customary erudition and unfailing good humour through two days of tireless, skilful driving. We never quite reached Norwich, though we allegedly saw nine counties in two privileged, thought-provoking days.

Greg Bailey
DEREK SIMPSON AND THE LAUNDERS LANE ARCHIVE

Alex Gibson in PAST 65 (page 7) mentioned Launders Lane, one of the late Derek Simpson’s unpublished sites. Fortuitously, this excavation and five others in the same area of the east London borough of Havering are soon to be published as part of an Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund (ALSF) Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) project entitled Archaeological landscapes of east London: six multi-period sites excavated in advance of gravel quarrying in the London Borough of Havering. This MOLA monograph will publish six multi-period (but predominantly prehistoric) sites excavated between 1963 and 1997 in advance of gravel extraction (for full details see www.museumoflondonarchaeology.org.uk).

Launders Lane was the first of these excavations: the fieldwork was directed by the late Derek Simpson and Isobel Smith on behalf of the Ministry of Public Building and Works. This site had been discovered as a series of cropmarks in 1957 by J. K. St Joseph during a photographic aerial survey of the area. These cropmarks were incorrectly interpreted as a Late Iron Age farmstead consisting of a ditched enclosure with a large round house inside. Instead, excavation proved that the cropmarks were actually a medieval manorial enclosure with a Neolithic ring ditch (internal diameter of just over 15m) inside. Excavation of the ring ditch revealed a large amount of Early Neolithic (c. 3600-3300 BC) pottery and flint work (including knapping debris). Within the ring ditch was a central pit containing Beaker pottery (c. 2400-1700 BC), implying that the monument remained in use for over a millennium.

Intriguingly, the western circuit of the ring ditch was found to have cut through an earlier, but otherwise undated, steep-sided pit. This pit was one of several undated features located in the immediate vicinity of the ring ditch. Interestingly, the Stanwell Cursus at Perry Oaks, Hillingdon, was also pre-dated by a number of pits and postholes probably of Later Mesolithic date (Framework Archaeology, 2006, Landscape evolution in the Middle Thames Valley: Heathrow Terminal 3 Excavation. Volume 1, Perry Oaks. Framework Archaeol Monogr Ser 1). The presence of these undated pits and a number of Mesolithic flints (mostly recovered from the topsoil), including a finely-worked flaked adze, implies that the site was already privileged in some way – possibly following an earlier episode of woodland clearance during the Mesolithic. A second nearby, smaller Neolithic ring ditch was also partly excavated at the same time. The late Derek Simpson did a great deal of the basic post-excavation work and arranged for many of the finds to be drawn; now we have built on his legacy to bring his work to fruition.

Bruce Watson, Museum of London Archaeology

BIRMINGHAM’S EARLIEST INHABITANTS? A NEWLY DISCOVERED PALAEOLITHIC AXE FROM SUTTON COLDFIELD

The sprawling conurbation that constitutes the UK’s second city and is home to over a million people is not immediately synonymous with Palaeolithic archaeology. While archaeological remains from later prehistory such as Bronze Age burnt mounds are well recorded, evidence for occupation from earlier prehistory is relatively unusual although not entirely unknown, and a range of chance finds during development work are gradually combining to fill the gaps in what is known of the earliest colonisation of the region. One such find is a large bi-facial Palaeolithic handaxe discovered in 2006 during building works in the centre of Sutton Coldfield to the north of Birmingham: it was brought to the attention of Drs Martin Smith and Andy Howard at the Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity at the University of Birmingham by one of their enthusiastic students. The handaxe, which is made from flint, measured 168.5mm by 118mm and weighed 763g. Its characteristic elongated D-shaped flat butt and broad tip indicate that it conforms to the bout coupé type. This form is peculiar to Britain, appearing surprisingly during the Late Middle Palaeolithic when Levallais techniques were otherwise the norm.

The Sutton Coldfield handaxe (max. length: 168.5mm; max. width: 118mm; max. depth at base: 44mm; weight: 763g)

This find represents an important new entry to Birmingham’s Historic Environment Record and adds to three other handaxes recovered from the conurbation, all of which were similar chance finds. However, the Sutton Coldfield axe is the largest example to be found in the region and, unlike other handaxes from the area, it is notable for its pristine condition with edges still razor sharp. A section of cortex left in situ at the base fits the thumb extremely comfortably when the axe is held in the right hand with corresponding implications for the handedness of its maker.
The axe remains the finest example the present authors have seen and the apparent ‘freshness’ of this find initially prompted our suspicions that it might be a modern reproduction. Therefore, the present authors arranged to meet with the workmen who described finding the axe lying on an undisturbed sandy layer approximately 3m below the current ground level as they dug down adjacent to the foundations of an Edwardian house. Although the footings had been filled in by the time of our visit, consultation of the local British Geological Survey memoir and 1:50,000 map (Sheet 168, Birmingham) suggested that the find was from sediments either relating to deposits classified as ‘Head’ or ‘Glaciofluvial’ sands and gravels. It is unlikely that such an artefact would remain in such pristine condition if it had been reworked by periglacial processes, which opens up the tantalising possibility that the artefact may well have been preserved in situ on a Middle Palaeolithic land surface lying beneath the centre of Sutton Coldfield.

Although just a single object, the Sutton handaxe adds to a gradually emerging picture of the occupation of the West Midlands during the Lower and Middle Palaeolithic outlined by Alex Lang and the late Professor David Keen in PPS 71. Furthermore, recently documented new discoveries in the wider region, particularly those made from quartzite, including examples from Waverley Wood, the Middle Trent, and in Leicestershire and Rutland, as well as the reappraisal of existing museum collections through funding from the ALSF, demonstrate a hitherto unrealised density of occupation and activity. The Sutton Coldfield handaxe highlights the potential for many more discoveries across the West Midlands region, even from what are now heavily urbanized areas.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Victoria Dixon for recognising the axe as a prehistoric find and ensuring that it was brought to wider attention.

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A NOTE FROM THE NEW PRESIDENT

At the 2010 AGM, the Presidency of the Society passed from Professor Clive Ruggles to Dr Alison Sheridan, of National Museums Scotland

It is an immense privilege to be taking up the Prehistoric Society reins during this, its 75th anniversary year, and my task over my term of office will be to ensure that the Society continues to flourish. When, in February 1935, Stuart Piggott and his fellow Young Turks forced through the vote to transform the Prehistoric Society of East Anglia to the Prehistoric Society, they set out its aim as promoting the study of prehistory worldwide, with membership open to all.

This aim continues to be fulfilled admirably, and current membership stands at around 1500, from over 40 countries. The Proceedings, expertly edited by Dr Julie Gardiner, continue to present the results of important research; PAST, masterminded by Dr Jo Brück, keeps members abreast of latest developments; and the recently-established Prehistoric Society Research Papers series goes from strength to strength, thanks to Herculean efforts from Dr Mike Allen. The lectures, study tours, conferences and research weekends remain a popular way of keeping members and others in touch with what’s new in prehistoric...
archaeology, both here and abroad, and the awards and grants recognise and promote excellence in prehistoric research. The Society is especially keen to foster a passion for the past among students of archaeology, and Dr Alex Lang has been beavering away, bringing 21st century ways of communicating to our venerable Society. And in line with the Society’s commitment to operating at an international level, I am delighted, nay ravie, to announce that we are twinning with our sister organisation across the Channel, the Société Préhistorique Française. One of our first acts will be to co-host a conference on Neolithic cross-Channel links in Bournemouth next May (6th-8th), called ‘Hands across the Water’, which examines communities on either side of the Channel during the fifth and fourth millennia, and the issue of cross-Channel links. See the flier and watch the website for updates.

The 75th anniversary celebrations have been huge fun so far, with the re-creation of Stuart Piggott’s ‘Thunder Run’ in September featuring a feast both of archaeology and of classic cars (see report by Greg Bailey in this edition). At the time of writing, we are looking forward to the sell-out Sara Champion Debate (20th October), between heavyweight Professors Clive Gamble and Tim Champion, on ‘This House believes that the study of the Stone Ages has contributed more to our knowledge of the human condition than study of the Metal Ages’.

The Council is open to suggestions as to how the Society can best continue to serve the membership and to go forward into its next 75 years. Comments can be sent to the President directly on a.sheridan@nms.ac.uk or at the Department of Archaeology, National Museums Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh EH1 1JF or to Tessa Machling (prehistoric@ucl.ac.uk).

Alison Sheridan


This year saw one of the most successful of our new format AGM/Europa lecture/day conference meetings so far. It unashamedly reflected some of the many enthusiasms of our new President, Alison Sheridan, and although the title is a reference to the pan-European Projet Jade with which she has been so closely associated, the scope of the day was much wider, and covered practically everything one could consider about the sourcing, use and trade of prestige axes in the Neolithic.

2010 saw the final stage of Projet Jade, a research programme led by our Europa Prize winner, Dr Pierre Pétrequin of CNRS, the progenitor and coordinator of the project. More than 80% of all known axes of Alpine rock in Europe have been studied and non-destructively analysed by members of the project team, with stunning results. For example, three axes from widely spaced findspots in Germany were found to have originated from the same jadeite source, high on Monte Viso in Italy, as an axe found in Pitreavie near Dunfermline. These highly valued prestige objects were derived from rocks in high ‘special’ places, worked with intense labour, spread throughout Europe, never used for chopping wood, and sometimes reworked into other objects, presumably to spread their magic more
widely. Some unfortunate axes have, however, had their status diminished in the course of this project: the spectroradiometric analysis has unmasked some previously revered specimens as recent incomers from places like New Zealand!

Dr Pétrequin’s fieldwork in the high southern Alps in North Italy, with his wife Anne-Marie and other collaborators, makes clear the difficulty of accessing the rock sources, the care with which particular sources were sought out, and even the way that axes of lighter-coloured jadeite tended to travel to Brittany and Britain, while axes of darker-coloured Alpine rocks (mostly eclogite and omphacitite) were favoured further south. In his Europa lecture, he was able to tell us that although the Alpine axes studied in the present project are often stray finds or otherwise unprovenanced, the development of a typology now allows dates to be proposed. Alpine axes are seldom found in settlement contexts and, except in Morbihan, seldom in funerary ones. Some axes are found more than 1700km from their source but, from their peak of popularity in the fifth millennium, by the middle of the third millennium BC they contracted to distribution in the more local area. Dr Pétrequin suggested that the Golfe du Morbihan might have been a focal point for the reworking and redistribution of the axes in the fifth millennium.

The Europa lecture was preceded by other speakers, the majority of them Projet Jade collaborators, who provided a marvellous summary of what is known about prestige axes in Neolithic Europe. Serge Cassen outlined the contexts of the Morbihan finds and then Yvan Pailier reviewed the contrasting forms and uses of jadeite, fibrolite and dolerite axes in Brittany. While fibrolite is readily available in local outcrops and does not require mountainneering, the local forms, especially the large green fibrolite axes, may refer to Alpine originals. This was followed by Françoise Bostyn and Hélène Collet, who discussed the sources and forms of flint axe heads in France and the way their distribution appears to mirror the boundaries of Michelsburg and Chasséen ceramic material. Gabriel Cooney presented Lutz Klassen’s paper on the relationship of the fifth and fourth millennium jade axes with copper ones from the east. Their distributions are almost mutually exclusive but by the middle of the third millennium BC, copper copies of Alpine axes are found in Denmark, indicating very long survival and curation of the originals.

Following this, Frances Healy reviewed the results of the excavations at Grimes Graves, emphasising that once again the deep mines, as with Continental examples, were not necessary to obtain perfectly decent flint for axe manufacture. The exploitation of the deep mines appears to start in the earlier third millennium: could this represent an assertion or exaggeration of traditional ‘flint’ values in the face of disconcerting ‘metal’ ideas coming in from overseas? Alison Sheridan presented a paper with Gabriel Cooney and Yvan Pailier reviewing the sourcing and manufacture of the Alpine axes, emphasising the 1000 hours of labour need to produce a jadeite axe, and the indications that not all stages of manufacture were carried out in the same place. Although these great axes are clearly not for practical use, an example apparently found in a log boat near Glasgow suggests that it had been set in a haft before the ends on either side of the hafting were polished. The source of the jadeite axes high in the Alps may have influenced the exploitation of other local sources in difficult places or magic mountains, such as Langdale or Tievebulliagh. The last contribution came from Alasdair Whittle and Frances Healy, relating the timing of the spread of prestige Continental axes to Britain and the local manufacture of early flint axes (which precede stone ones) to that of the spread of the earliest Neolithic enclosures, the subject of their recent research project. They argued that the surge in the introduction and circulation of prestige axes coincides with the main phase of causewayed enclosure construction, and it falls away before the end of this phase, c. 3500-3400 BC.

The whole day was held in the rather wonderful if labyrinthine surroundings of the Chemistry Department at Cardiff University - an organisation surely to be cherished in its own right in these difficult days. It was excellently organised, with special convoys to guide people from the entrance hall to the remote lecture theatre we occupied. The entrance hall also provided a fine location for the final event of the day: a friendly wine reception which allowed the large audience to catch up on news and digest the day. Although the AGM will be formally reported elsewhere, particular mention must be made of a few high points: the presentation of the Europa Prize itself to Dr Pétrequin; the presentation of the R. M. Baguley Award to Lekky Shepherd on behalf of her husband, the late and much missed Ian Shepherd, for his paper on V-perforated buttons in the last Proceedings; and finally the presentation of a most magnificent newly-made axe to Alison. This had been made by entirely traditional methods by a specialist axe producer in New Guinea and, because one is not supposed to handle such sacred axes directly, it was presented in what we can only suppose was the equally traditional wrapping of a woolly sock. It was a super day, and this was a great way to thank our new President for organising it.

Frances Griffith and Eileen Wilkes
THE R. M. BAGUELEY AWARD

The R. M. Bagueley Award, a fine engraved goblet, is presented for the best contribution to the Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society on the basis of a ballot held by the Council. Following a unanimous vote, the award for volume 75, 2009, was made posthumously to Ian Shepherd for his article on ‘The V-bored buttons of Great Britain and Ireland’, and was presented to Alexandra Shepherd on Ian’s behalf.

UPCOMING SOCIETY CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

Hands across the water: the archaeology of the cross-channel Neolithic
School of Applied Sciences, Bournemouth University, Bournemouth, Dorset, Friday 6-Sunday 8 May 2011
A major international conference organised by the Prehistoric Society and Bournemouth University Archaeology Group in association with the Société Préhistorique Française and the Neolithic Studies Group

Archaeological work on both sides of the English Channel/La Manche in recent years has started to throw new light on the origins and development of early farming communities in the region during the fifth and fourth millennia BC, and on the issue of cross-channel contact. Consideration will be given to artefacts, burial monuments, enclosures and ceremonial sites from the coastlands of southern Britain and northern France. What are the similarities and differences? How do the dates compare? Can we see the source of ideas taken up in Britain amongst the continental material? What were the processes and social practices that promoted or restricted cross-channel contacts? And how do recent discoveries impact on available models for explaining and understanding the Neolithic of the Channel coastlands? The conference aims to pool knowledge from archaeologists working on both sides of the Channel, exposing new discoveries and the results of recent research to new audiences. Further details and booking arrangements will be available via the Society’s website in the early autumn www.prehistoric society.org.

Timothy Darvill & Alison Sheridan

Later Iron Age ceramics and settlement in south west Britain
Joint meeting of Devon Archaeological Society and the Prehistoric Society, main Council Chamber, County Hall, Exeter, Devon, Wednesday 26 January 2011
Wine reception at 7.30pm followed by lecture at 8pm by Henrietta Quinnell, Archaeological Consultant and Honorary Research Fellow, University of Exeter

Middle Iron Age South Western Decorated Ware is visually the most attractive of later prehistoric ceramics, but most published work only refers to its chronology, sources and development in very broad outline. It has been regularly linked to the adoption of enclosed settlements (Cornish rounds) and multiple enclosure hillforts. Over the last decade, work in Cornwall and Devon has provided a large number of new radiocarbon determinations. These, allied to studies of stratified deposits, especially at Trevelgue cliff castle near Newquay, have provided more detailed chronology and an insight into stylistic variations. Some decorative styles/forms are more likely to occur in ‘structured deposits’ than others. The date for general adoption of this ceramic style can now be placed at c. 300 BC rather than c. 400 BC, with consequent implications for the study of settlements. Petrological work by Roger Taylor has built on Professor Peacock’s seminal study in the 1960s and confirmed that Lizard gabbroic clays were used almost universally in Cornwall. In Devon, a wide range of clays were used, and a very probable source for Peacock’s Group 5 has been located in Exeter’s Ludwell Valley.

BARRY RAFTERY

We are sorry to have to report that Barry Raftery, Emeritus Professor of Archaeology at University College Dublin, has died after a long illness. Barry was one of the founding members of WARP, the Wetland Archaeology Research Project, in the mid-1980s, and the first modern Irish archaeologist to tackle the major wetland peatbogs of central Ireland. His work at Corlea, on a massive Iron Age trackway, led to important developments in the conservation of wood, the preservation of structural remains, the presentation of results through the Corlea Visitor Centre, and the recognition that Irish peatlands deserve major attention within the wider archaeological community.

Barry collaborated with Bryony Coles through their universities, Dublin and Exeter, with European Social Fund support, to promote post-graduate training in wetland archaeology. This combined work came to involve Dutch and Danish archaeologists in collaborative and fruitful training and research.
Barry’s attendance at conferences at Silkeborg in Denmark and Gainesville in Florida, and his frequent visits to the Somerset Levels, led on to the 1998 WARP conference in Dublin, a major event. His own research resulted in a fine series of publications on the Irish wetlands. His visit to the wetlands of Japan with Akira Matsui was profitable to the development of wetland archaeology in both countries.

In addition to his work on wetland archaeology, Barry was an authority on the Irish Iron Age and his publications include *A Catalogue of Irish Iron Age Antiquities* (1983), *La Tene in Ireland: Problems of Origin, Development and Chronology* (1984) and his landmark publication, *Pagan Celtic Ireland* (1994). His excavation of the critically important hillfort site of Rathgall, Co. Wicklow, is currently in the final stages of preparation for publication. Barry’s work on the Irish Iron Age was always set in its wider European context and he had a wide network of colleagues and friends across Europe. He played a major role in the international Celtic exhibition in Venice in the early 1990s and was an editor of the large volume on *The Celts* (1991) that resulted from this event.

In his leadership role at a national and international level, Barry played a key role in the funding and development of archaeological research. He was a member of Council for the Prehistoric Society from 1981 to 1984 and made a major contribution to the Prehistoric Society’s hugely successful week-long study tour to Ireland in 1980, including jointly compiling a comprehensive handbook and leading site tours to Rathgall and other hillforts. He was on the Directorate of the Discovery Programme in Ireland, along with John Coles, and this encouraged the emergence of wetland research projects, such as that at Loch Kinale. Throughout his long career, Barry lectured widely in Europe and helped in the development of wetland archaeology in many countries. Members of his field and laboratory team are now working to promote wetland studies, and we of the Wetland Archaeology Research Project acknowledge the enormous contribution made by our good friend and colleague, Barry Raftery.

*John and Bryony Coles, August 24 2010*

**THE STONEHENGE PEOPLE PROJECT: ASSESSING THE HUMAN REMAINS FROM THE STONEHENGE LANDSCAPE 3700-1600 BC**

The 2005 Stonehenge World Heritage Site: an archaeological research framework highlighted a lack of current knowledge about the human remains excavated from and around Stonehenge. Partly as a response to this, the Stonehenge People Project (SPP) was recently commissioned by English Heritage. The aims were to locate, catalogue and osteologically assess the extant human remains from the area.

The assessment was limited to remains from the Stonehenge landscape, an area defined in the research framework as a 135 km² plot, the southwest corner of which is at SU 405000 138000 and the northwest corner at SU 420000 147000. Chronologically, the assessment was limited to remains dating to 3700-1600 BC. Numerous museums and organisations were contacted to establish where relevant remains were held.

Approximately 300 separate deposits of human bone were assessed by the SPP, ranging from single bone fragments to complete burials and cremations. Contextual data relating to the remains were examined and the condition and completeness of the bone was recorded. Some of this material came from antiquarian excavations and hence was poorly provenanced, compromising its research value. However, there were approximately three standard boxes (approximately 500 x 220 x 220mm) of disarticulated material along with 116 articulated full or partial skeletons and 103 cremation deposits for which provenance was secure or (in a minority of cases) could likely be ascertained following work with the paper archive. Much of the bone was found to require processing (washing, drying and marking for inhumations; sieving and sorting for cremated bone) before any osteological analytical work could be done. The condition of the unburnt bone was generally good, with little surface erosion.

*PAST 11*
Current theories are increasingly viewing the primary use of Stonehenge as funerary. The human remains identified by the SPP form an important resource for increasing our knowledge of the use of the monument and the surrounding landscape.


Stefanie Vincent and Simon Mays, English Heritage

**A REASSESSMENT OF THE IMPORTANCE OF VESPASIAN’S CAMP IN THE STONEHENGE LANDSCAPE**

The Stonehenge landscape is one of the most famous prehistoric ritual landscapes in the world, with recent research highlighting how important the River Avon was for connecting various monuments and sites. Results from small-scale fieldwork by the Open University between 2005 and 2010 at Vespasian’s Camp, previously primarily classified as an Early-Middle Iron Age hillfort, add more detail to the idea of this ‘connecting’ landscape and suggest that a significant new part of it has been discovered. The use of the site in earlier prehistoric periods and after the Iron Age has been steadfastly under-researched. This is odd, as even a cursory glance at the OS map suggests that this substantial hill was in a potentially highly significant position topographically in the Salisbury Plain landscape.

Our results provide evidence for earlier prehistoric use of the site and point to a longer occupation of the hillfort in the Iron Age possibly continuing into the Romano-British period. The site is situated 1.8 km from both Stonehenge and Durrington Walls. It overlooks the Avenue, Bluestonehenge and King Barrow Ridge on its western flanks, and the River Avon on its eastern and southern sides.

The initial aim of the investigation was to gauge the extent of Charles Bridgeman’s eighteenth century landscaping of the Camp. Assumptions about the extent of it have contributed to the lack of research at the Camp as it has been a dominant view that the site’s early archaeology had been largely destroyed by it. Our research into eighteenth century records for the site revealed that though Bridgeman’s 1738 plans for the camp and the adjoining park and gardens were extensive, only certain sections of them were fully carried out and overall it was apparent that the landscaping was less intrusive than had been previously assumed.

![Vespasian's Camp and environs, showing features discussed in the text. Contours in metres.](image-url)
We were then able to plan excavation targets. We particularly wished to establish the nature of the pond feature (located at A on map) to the northeast of the Camp and to investigate a field to its west (B), as both areas lie outside of the landscaping plans and the Scheduled Monument area. We also wanted to reassess the dating of the site. Since 2005, 14 test pits in and around the pond feature have been dug and a further 5 pits dug in the field directly to its west. A geophysical survey of both areas was conducted in 2009 and field walking surveys were carried out along the western ramparts and in the southeast and southwest areas of the camp.

Our work at the pond feature revealed conclusively that it is in fact a natural spring (Hoare, pers. comm.) and is the largest of a number of springs in the immediate area. Work in early 2010 revealed that this spring is also thermal, with probes showing consistent readings of 10ºc across the spring area despite the outside temperature being -10ºc.

The excavations in the spring resulted in the retrieval of over 900 flint tools and worked flints ranging from the Early Mesolithic to Early Bronze Age periods. Over 700 of these were found in three different layers within one 2m x 2m trench, where they had been seemingly deliberately mixed together in an act or acts suggestive of a ritual related to a need to connect back to ancestors. The latest flints in the assemblage dated to the Early Bronze Age, providing a possible date for deposition and potentially placing the spring as a place of ritual at the same time as Stonehenge and Durrington Walls (Field, Bowden, McOmish, pers. comm.). In light of Parker Pearson’s attention to the ways various binary oppositions were set up in the area – life/death, wood/stone, etc. – perhaps the spring represented a further one, wet/dry, at this time?

A broken Middle Bronze Age dagger was found in the spring, refashioned from a rapier and engraved with a chevron. This dagger only had one rivet hole and is likely to have had a ceremonial function (Barrowclough, pers. comm.). A likely Middle Bronze Age chisel fragment was also found in the spring, suggesting a ritual function to the site during this period. Further, a lead object, likely to be a Romano-British curse (Hurst, pers. comm.), was discovered. Another significant find from one of the smaller springs close to the site was a 5th century Anglo-Saxon disc brooch (Chester-Kadwell, pers. comm.) and a small number of medieval artefacts have also been found at the spring. Overall our finds point to an undiscovered part of the Stonehenge ritual landscape which provides evidence of the deliberate deposition of items into water during the Bronze Age and possibly later.

Geophysics, field survey and excavation work in a field to the west of the spring since 2009 have revealed that though much of it was covered by an unrecorded chalk dump from the A303 road re-widening in the area in the 1960s, its eastern edge preserves early Celtic field systems whose origins may lie in the Bronze Age (Field, McOmish and Bowden, pers. comm.s). A 3m x 3m trench in this area may have picked up part of a Celtic field including 1 metre rich agricultural soil containing abraded Middle Iron Age pottery and some Early Bronze Age flintwork. Some likely hollow ways and trackways were also discovered in this area, the north eastern corner of which leads down to the spring.

Observations in the southeast part of the Camp have also resulted in potentially significant discoveries. This area abuts the present Stonehenge road and here we discovered a previously unrecorded Bronze Age barrow (E) close to another possible barrow (F) on the other side of the road (though unrecorded, both are evident on Dury and Andrews 1773 map of the area). A hollow way (G) discovered in the southeast corner appears to be following a trajectory between both barrows and lies parallel to the Stonehenge road.
Interestingly, the Iron Age ramparts on the Vespasian’s Camp side of the road do not appear to extend as far as the barrow there. It may be that the ramparts respected the position of both barrows and that the gap between them could have provided an entry point across this part of the Camp in the Iron Age (the ramparts in the south-west corner of the site indicate that any routeway there would have been cut off or controlled by the Camp). It is also possible that there was a pre-Iron Age context to this route as it follows the most topographically desirable crossing point on the hill, potentially connecting a major ancient fording point (H) on the Avon in one direction with the Avenue and Salisbury Plain in the other. Indeed, the Stonehenge road, known to be a very early route way connecting Amesbury with the Salisbury Plain, may have been situated here for similar reasons of topographical advantage. Conclusions are necessarily tentative at this stage, but it is possible that a significant ancient routeway through the landscape has been discovered.

Since 2007, field surveys of the western ramparts of the Camp have led to the finding of over 50 sherds of Iron Age pottery, which extend the range of the Iron Age occupation of the site from the Early Iron Age through to 50BC (Mepham, pers. comm.). This result suggests that the hillfort may have been the fulcrum of the landscape for most of the Iron Age.

In conclusion, during our 10 long weekend field seasons, funded on average with £700 per year, and assisted by enthusiastic and skilful Open University AA309 students as well as experts, local residents and the custodian of the site, all of whom have given their time and expertise freely, we have found evidence which starts to extend and develop existing knowledge about Vespasian’s Camp. In our view, this evidence indicates that the site was a highly important place in a significant topographical position in the Salisbury Plain landscape from at least the Early Bronze Age onwards.

Acknowledgements
We are extremely grateful to Sir Edward and Lady Antrobus for so generously giving us regular access to Vespasian’s Camp, which is such a magical place. We also wish to acknowledge our gratitude to the Open University, Amesbury Town Council, the Qinetiq group (Amesbury) and Wolfson College, Cambridge, for providing funding for this project. For space reasons I don’t have the opportunity to thank the many academics, archaeologists and other specialists for their contributions to our work in person. You all know who you are and I will be expressing our thanks to you personally. DJ.

David Jacques (Open University), Tom Phillips (Oxford Archaeology East) & Mike Clarke (Custodian of Vespasian’s Camp)

**RUN OF PPS**

Kent Archaeological Society would like to dispose of a spare run of volumes of *PPS*. This comprises volumes 1 (1935) to 58 (1992), with the exception of volumes 8, 9, 15, 24, 41, 42 and 50 which are missing. All of the volumes are complete as published and in good condition. They are for sale as a set at a price to be negotiated. For further information, please contact Dr. F. H. Panton CBE, Hon. Librarian KAS, Grove End, Tunstall, Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 8DY; tel. 01795472218; email grovend@gmail.com.

**MARVELS AT MARDEN HENGE**

This summer saw excavations at one of the largest henges in Britain: Marden. It is located in the heart of the Vale of Pewsey in Wiltshire and lies on Greensand between the two more famous chalk sites of Stonehenge and Avebury. The work is the culmination of a two-year multi-disciplinary project comprising staff from English Heritage, and follows the investigations of Richard Colt Hoare and colleagues at the site in the early 19th century and subsequently those of Geoffrey Wainwright and colleagues in the late 1960s.

Unlike Stonehenge and Avebury, Marden does not have any surviving stone settings; however, it did have a large conical mound, said to be the second largest in Wiltshire after Silbury Hill. Now demolished, it was known as the Hatfield Barrow, and some estimates put it at as much as 15m high. Another notable feature within the henge is the Southern Circle, an earthwork set hard against the southern boundary. This, we now know from the recent work, is a smaller but extremely well-preserved ‘inner’ henge.

The new survey
The recent multidisciplinary survey (which included topographic, aerial and geophysical surveys) has introduced a considerable amount of fresh evidence, clarified certain points and provided the basic data for new interpretations. Detail of the henge enclosure has revealed a new entrance in the southeast and questioned one that had been proposed in the east. The main henge structure itself is now considered to be a series of separate but conjoined lengths of earthwork rather than a monument of formal plan. Although very little of the mound is now discernible at the surface, the ditch of the Hatfield Barrow was located by all surveys and accurately positioned within the enclosure. In plan, the Southern Circle matches the Hatfield Barrow for overall size and its surviving earthwork is probably one of the more dramatic features on site, resembling in some ways an amphitheatre.
The recent excavations
This year we targeted three areas for excavation: the location of the Hatfield Barrow, the southeast henge entranceway and ditch end, and the bank of the Southern Circle.

The Hatfield Barrow
The location of the Hatfield Barrow was confirmed by excavation of a trench placed from its centre to the lip of its surrounding ditch. Dateable remains were recovered from the remnants of the mound itself (approximately 0.15m of mound material was preserved towards the centre), and a posthole cut through this material, hinting that, like Silbury Hill, the Hatfield Barrow was formed of a number of phases. Features (possibly tree-throw pits) were recorded below the mound, as were patches of burnt material, which should provide good radiocarbon age estimates.

The southeast entrance and ditch end
A section was excavated through the henge ditch next to the newly identified south-east entrance, revealing the ditch to be 2m deep. Good organic preservation was recorded from the lower fills, and a number of large animal bones and pieces of antler had been preserved, albeit in a very soft and fragile state.

This trench also exposed a small section of the southeast entranceway, revealing a thick deposit of gravel sitting within a shallow cut. This may well be a similar feature to the gravel roadway recorded at Durrington Walls, which led from the henge down to the River Avon; the feature at Marden is certainly orientated towards the Avon on a southeasterly alignment.

The inner henge bank and building
The most remarkable part of the whole excavation, however, was in the southern part of the monument on the bank of the newly identified inner henge. Here excavations revealed the chalk surface of an extraordinarily well-preserved Neolithic building. The central part of the surface was sunken into the ground by about 20cms, and this sunken area
measured approximately 3m x 4m. The sunken area is utterly dominated by a large hearth, which was surrounded by a feature - presumably the location for some sort of fireguard.

Close to the chalk surface were spreads of organic-rich midden debris, which incorporated three elegant bone pins or needles and a bone awl, as well as flint flakes. In one area was an assemblage of bones from several pigs - some bones were clearly articulated, suggesting that for the large part they were deposited in a single episode and presumably represent feasting debris.

Two exquisitely crafted ripple-flaked oblique flint arrowheads were also recovered from this trench, but with broken tips and one missing barb each. However, if an intriguing broken fragment of flint from another part of the site is correctly interpreted, these arrowheads may have once sported grossly elongated barbs on one side. This long and narrow surface-flaked 'barb' fragment closely matches the character and width of the stubs on the arrowheads - so much so that it almost refits with one of them. Such an overstated feature places the artefact well beyond the realms of practicality, and must have been the ultimate show-off item. As far as we know, nothing similar exists in Britain - and even the barbs on elaborate continental barbed-and-tanged arrowheads are small by comparison. We lay a challenge here at the feet of all flint knappers out there to try to recreate a similar arrowhead and barb.

The pottery
Prehistoric pottery was recovered from across the site, and apart from a couple of possibly later prehistoric sherds in late contexts, the assemblage is composed entirely of Grooved Ware in the Durrington Walls sub-style. The pottery from the midden debris is of particular interest since there appears to be an unusually large number of sherds with decoration on their inner surfaces. One vessel, for instance, has finely executed incised pendant-filled triangles, while another has a complex scheme of horizontal or vertical incised lines filled with transverse or diagonal lines between reserved bands.

A lug handle with two small holes top and bottom is quite unlike the horizontally pierced lugs noted within the sub-style, and is possibly unique and anthropomorphic – the holes look like eyes and nostrils and are probably too small to accommodate a cord for suspension. Further still, several sherds have a thin surface coating, possibly a slip.

Although Wainwright's assemblage is similar to the pottery from this year’s excavations, reflecting commonalities of potting tradition and style, the material (particularly that from the inner henge bank) appears to be different, perhaps specialised, and might hint at functional or chronological variation across this huge site. This and other research questions will be addressed in a forthcoming programme of assessment and analysis.

Future work and implications
Only one quarter of the internal surface of the building was exposed during this season of work and the possibility remains that the location of furniture and other internal building elements may be evident from the unexcavated area. Another season of work would elucidate this. Equally only a very small portion of the midden debris was excavated. Any further work will also include trial trenching outside the henge along any possible route between the southeastern entrance and the River Avon to confirm the suggestion that a metalled road exists between the two.

The structure on the bank of the inner henge is undoubtedly one of the best preserved Neolithic buildings in Britain outside Orkney, but its purpose remains to be explained, while its location on top of a henge bank now questions the very nature of such earthwork banks and the degree to which similar structures might be incorporated both at this site and elsewhere.

Jim Leary, David Field and Michael Russell